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Athens Journal of History

Published by the Athens Institute for Education and Research (ATINER)

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- Dr. Steven Oberhelman, Vice President of International Programs, ATINER & Professor of Classics, Holder of the George Sumey Jr Endowed Professorship of Liberal Arts, and Associate Dean, Texas A&M University, USA.

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The current issue is the second of the ninth volume of the *Athens Journal of History (AJHIS)*, published by the [History Unit](#) of ATINER.

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
ATINER



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The [History Unit](#) of ATINER, will hold its **21st Annual International Conference on History & Archaeology: From Ancient to Modern, 29-31 May & 1 June 2023, Athens, Greece** sponsored by the [Athens Journal of History](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together scholars and students of all areas of history, archaeology and other related disciplines. You may participate as a stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair of a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2023/FORM-HIS.doc>).

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- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
- Delphi Visit
- Ancient Corinth and Cape Sounion

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Athens Institute for Education and Research

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- Submission of Paper: 1 May 2023

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Decius & Valerian, Novatian & Cyprian: Persecution and Schism in the Making of a Catholic Christianity - Part I

*By Joseph M. Bryant**

To be presented is a two-phased historical-sociological study of “turning points” (Part I) and altered “trajectories” (Part II). In the mid-third century, two successive persecutions of Christians would be unleashed by the emperors Decius and Valerian. Those coercive efforts at suppressing the offending “superstitio” were empire-wide in scale, unprecedented in planned efficiency. Under Decius, a universally mandated requirement to offer sacrifices to the gods was backed by monitoring commissions and compliance certificates that featured confirmations of accomplishment and, most ominously, sworn, signed, and notarized declarations of lifelong religious orthopraxy. Great numbers of Christians complied with those directives—either by offering the demonic sacrifices outright or by securing fraudulent certificates attesting to having done so—actions that voided, through idolatrous trespass, the “celestial promise” of eternal life that had been gifted in the baptismal rite of spiritual rebirth. Efforts at resolving the ensuing crisis of mass apostasy split the mainstream Church into competing factions of disciplinary hardliners who resisted, and pragmatic reformers who endorsed the readmission of apostates. Drawing upon Schismogenesis and Sect-Church theories, I examine the course of this schism—doctrinally and demographically—to show how the socially induced and expedited trend towards penitential lenity, as adopted by the majority Catholic variant, facilitated the triumph of Christianity in the Roman Empire. The persecution and the schism it provoked carried greater world-historical significance than has hitherto been realized.

PART I: TURNING POINT

Introduction:

Imperial Crises and the Growing Threat of Christianity

In the turbulent history that passed between the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 CE and the ascension of Constantine in 306 CE, the Roman empire would undergo a series of fundamental alterations in its structural organization and in its cultural framings of reality. Two developmental trends, complexly interlinked, would decisively propel and shape the course of events and the fashioning of new arrangements and sensibilities.

A deepening crisis in the affairs of empire constituted the larger dynamic, which manifested most alarmingly in the Roman state’s growing incapacity to defend its extended borders and maintain stable internal governance. Mutinies

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and rebellions within the legionary ranks issued in a spate of usurpations, as contenders for the imperial crown rose and fell in murderous succession, their clashing armies draining resources from frontiers increasingly exposed to barbarian plundering and territorial encroachments by a resurgent Persian power. Escalating military demands placed debilitating strains on the treasury, for which the standard expediency—coinage debasement—came at the cost of inflationary pressures and disruptions in the commercial and craft sectors. The ravages of war and the burdens of taxation combined to batter the agricultural supports of the entire social order, setting off implosional processes of rural dislocation and distress in harder-pressed regions that would register in the dual guise of rising social banditry and declining population. Surveying the ruin as it appeared in its incipient stages, one well-placed participant discerned the onset of a catastrophic reversal, likening its course to a corrosive descent “from a kingdom of gold to one of iron and rust.”¹

The second developmental trend centers on the improving fortunes of the Christian Church, an illegal, quasi-secretive cult association that would find in the disorder of the times a greater receptiveness for its peculiar message of imminent world-destruction and alluring offer of selective deliverance from the impending doom.² Promises of welfare support, spiritual empowerment, and eternal

1. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 71.36 (c.230). For related *testimonia* on what Gibbon famously styled the “confusion and calamity” of the times, see Géza Alföldy, “The Crisis of the Third Century as Seen by Contemporaries,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 15 (1974): 89-111. More comprehensively, A. K. Bowman, Peter Garnsey, and Averil Cameron (Eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History, XII: The Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193-337* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). An archaeologically compelling analysis—documenting marked declines in seaborne trade, metal extraction, brick and stone construction, and overall agricultural output due to population losses, site abandonment, and cooling, drier climes—is Willem Jongman, “Gibbon Was Right,” in *Crises and the Roman Empire*, edited by O. Hekster et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 183-199, a volume replete with valuable contributions. Simon Cleary, *The Roman West, AD 200-500: An Archaeological Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), shows that destabilizing “trajectories of change”—military, political, economic, cultural—were already underway in the late second century. Kyle Harper’s “Pandemics and Passages to Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 28 (2015): 223-260, offers an incisive account of the massive death tolls that resulted from repeated outbreaks of pestilence across the empire in this period. Revisionist murmurings against any notion of a “systemic crisis” undervalue the reliability of contemporary testimony and underestimate the extent to which sectorial disturbances and regional crises will reverberate throughout any complex social system.

2. Conveyed most tellingly in Minucius Felix’s apologetical dialogue *Octavius* (c.230), which sets forth the “Roman view” of Christianity for purposes of refutation: “They threaten the whole world and the universe and its stars with conflagration ... And not content with this insane idea (*furiosa opinione*), ... they avow they will be born anew after death from the cinders and ash ... Under this delusion they promise to themselves, as the virtuous, a life of eternal bliss after death; but for all others, whom they deem unjust,

salvation—bestowable upon those willing to renounce the idolatrous traditions of their ancestors and commit to the one true God, the one true *religio*—likewise commanded greater appeal. A marginal movement in terms of membership numbers—and beset periodically by sectarian fissuring that multiplied interior lines of division and dispute—the numerous cellular congregations across the empire were entering a growth phase in recruitment, which now extended to include proselytizing successes among the wealthy and educated, whose material and cultural resources would contribute appreciably to enhanced organizational performance.³ An effective command structure had achieved primacy in the office of the monarchical bishop, ruling through a hierarchical *ministerium* of presbyters and deacons, under which functioned various lesser offices, ranging from deaconesses and exorcists to porters and gravediggers. The capabilities of the Church in empire-wide coordination had developed significantly from the earliest days, when epistolary communication and occasional visitation had sufficed to bind local communities to a shared project of missionary evangelization. From the latter half of the second century onwards, major issues of dogma,

punishment everlasting” (11.1-5). Included in the Christian author’s defence of his faith is a surprisingly incautious denunciation of Rome’s empire as a violent exercise in grand larceny, founded upon and sustained by an ongoing series of “unpunished sacrileges” and “the spoils of audacity” (*inpune sacrilegi; audaciae praeda*, 25.1-7). Celsus’s *True Doctrine* (c.177) had earlier registered hostile awareness of the Christian teaching of an eschatological “conflagration” or ἐκπύρωσις, accusing the deluded renegades of impiously turning God into a “cook” keen on setting the world ablaze and sparing only those faithful to Christ (quoted in Origen, *Contra Celsum*, c.248, 5.14: ὁ θεὸς ὥσπερ μάγειρος ἐπενέγκη τὸ πῦρ; and, with closer doctrinal accuracy, the Christian god as “fire-bearing torturer”; 4.13: τὸν θεὸν δίκην βασιανιστοῦ πῦρ φέροντα καταβαίνειν).

3. Disagreements over rites, doctrine, and scriptural interpretation resulted in a profusion of thought-currents and splinter movements across the shifting spectrum of early Christianity. Alarmed by the ferment, proponents of an emerging “proto-orthodoxy” were roused into developing a more coherent exposition of their own evolving beliefs and practices, a boundary-setting process that eventuated in the formulation of a discursive contrast pitting the “true faith” of a consolidating “Universal” Church against the myriad “heresies” and “schisms” that sought its diabolical subversion. For specific cases, we are largely dependent on heresiologists such as Irenaeus, *On the Detection and Overthrow of the False Gnosis* (c.190), who opposes some twenty different heterodox groups; Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* (c.230), who expands the catalogue to just under thirty heretical schools; and the much later Epiphanius, whose *Panarion* or ‘Medicine Chest’ (c.375) supplies orthodox “antidotes” for the “poisons” of sixty Christian heresies. Many of those dissenting associations would prove transient or register scant social impact; but larger movements such as Marcionism and Montanism—each ascetically inclined and staunchly opposed to penitential leniency—remained formidable rivals of the mainstream Church well into the imperial Christian era. Jacques Berlinerblau, “Toward a Sociology of Heresy, Orthodoxy, and Doxa.” *History of Religions* 40 (2001): 327-351, offers informed exegeses of the major social science contributions, ranging from Simmel and Gramsci to Coser and Bourdieu.

liturgical practice, and discipline would be subject to conciliar decisions by the high clergy, convening periodically at regional synods under metropolitans of increasing power and authority.⁴ If the *militia Christi*—as devotees of their crucified Messiah provocatively styled themselves—remained an “army” of modest muster, they could now daringly venture boasts of membership growth and ubiquitous presence.⁵

By mid-century, these opposing trends—an empire reeling from external onslaughts and internal disarray, an expansionary Church braced by recruitment gains and upgrades in organizational capacity—would intersect violently in the form of two state-sponsored persecutions, the first under the emperor Decius (249-51 CE), the second initiated by Valerian (257-60 CE). Both efforts were empire-wide in scope; both were unprecedented in targeting efficiency and punitive severity. Under the terrorizing impress of concerted imperial repression,

4. Comprehensively detailed in Karl Hefele's *A History of the Councils of the Church: To the Close of the Council of Nicea, A.D. 325* (London: T. & T. Clark, 1871).

5. Exemplified by Tertullian's brazen declaration: “We are of yesterday, yet we have filled all that belongs to you, your cities, tenements, fortresses, towns, ... military camps, municipal councils, palace, senate, forum; all that remains to you alone are your temples,” *Apologeticus* 37.2 (c.197). More striking still are the seditious implications of a preceding boast, that should Christ's followers ever stand forth as “open enemies” of Rome, they would—as “a people spread the whole world over”—vastly outnumber any of the empire's most formidable regional opponents: the Moors, Germanic Marcomanni, and the Parthians. Discounting the swagger, scholarly estimates generally limit the Christian share of the population to under 2% for this period: Keith Hopkins, “Christian Number and its Implications,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 6 (1998): 185-226; Ramsay MacMullen, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity, A.D. 200-400* (Society of Biblical Literature, 2009), an important but contested downscaling reassessment. Thomas Robinson's *Who Were the First Christians?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), brings the demographics into much clearer view. The longstanding assumption that Christian growth pre-Constantine was predominantly urban in social catchment is shown to yield “impossible numbers” when mathematical projections are carried out on the widely-credited computations of Hopkins, MacMullen, and Rodney Stark. Considering that up to 90% of the empire's estimated 60 million people was rurally based, any growth/ constituency model predicated upon a largely “urban Christianity” will encounter intractable problems reaching the standard projections of 5 to 6 million Christians on the eve of Constantine's conversion. Robinson explains: “[I]f the empire was 10% urban ... and Christians, at 10% of the empire, were themselves largely urban, Christians would have made up nearly the entire population of all urban areas by the year 300” (p. 18). Opening the calculus to include rural membership offers a more plausible path towards the conventionally accepted parametric ranges on numbers and percentages, as even minimal recruitment gains in the countryside would have added some 2 million members to the fold pre-Constantine, given the massive preponderance of the rural population. In support of his quantitative modelling, Robinson presents textual, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence confirming the presence of rural Christians across the empire, dating from apostolic times and multiplying substantially over the turbulent third century.

the Christian Church would buckle and fissure, as efforts to address the unanticipated crisis of mass apostasy within its ranks would split the movement into contending factions. In the struggle over Christian identity and authority that ensued, a reorganized Catholic mainstream would emerge triumphant, its prospects for continued growth markedly enhanced by the more moderate stance on membership requirements it had been forced to adopt in response to the dual exigencies of imperial persecution and schismatic rivalry with disciplinary hardliners.⁶

The Decian Persecution and the *Pax Deorum*

In the spring of 249, Gaius Messius Quintus Decius, accomplished military commander, statesman, and senior senator, was acclaimed *imperator* by the mutinous Danubian legions he had been sent to subdue. Following an autumn victory over the similarly disgruntled troops of Philippus Arabus, the unpopular reigning emperor, Decius marched on Rome where he would quickly secure senatorial endorsement for his program of imperial renewal. Signalling grand intentions at the outset, the new ruler added the glorious name of Trajan to his official nomenclature, pointedly invoking the popular legacy of the great conqueror and *Optimus Princeps*.⁷

Experienced in governance, seasoned in war, Decius promptly set about restoring communication lines and frontier defences against the mounting

6. Extrapolating from parametric estimates and literary indicators, Hopkins deduces that Christian expansion pre-Constantine experienced two distinct surges: “an increase of about one million Christians in the first half of the third century”; and “five million new Christians in the second half” (“Christian Number,” p. 221). With direct bearing on themes I will expand upon, Hopkins proposes that “the persecutions or contemporary conditions (civil wars, barbarian invasions, rampant inflation, repeated plagues, urban decline), or their combination, encouraged an unprecedented growth in the numbers of Christians,” whilst also prompting “a battle royal among Christians themselves, between traditional rigorists who wanted to maintain the old ways of the devoted small community, and the laxists, who wanted growth in numbers, even if that meant sacrificing moral standards” (p. 223; my own reading of this struggle will emphasize pastoral and theological concerns, not overt recruitment objectives). Benjamin Harnett, working from Hopkins’ estimates in conjunction with recalculated data on the adoption of the codex form, makes a convincing case that surging membership gains will have functioned as a “pressuring” factor in the Decian persecution; see Appendix 2: Christian Population, “Diffusion of the Codex,” *Classical Antiquity* 36 (2017): 183-235. Jan Bremmer’s *The Rise of Christianity Through the Eyes of Gibbon, Harnack, and Rodney Stark* (Groningen: Barkhuis, 2010) provides a judicious overview.

7. Salient particulars of Decius’ career and brief regnum are surveyed in F. S. Salisbury and H. Mattingly, “The Reign of Trajan Decius,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 14 (1924): 1-23, and A. R. Birley, “Decius Reconsidered.” In *Les empereurs illyriens*, edited by E. Frézouls and H. Jouffroy (Strasbourg: Civi Romaine, 1998), 57-80.

barbarian menace. Roads and bridges were rebuilt across the vast, vulnerable empire—from Britain to the Euphrates, the Balkans to North Africa—and strategic garrisons were strengthened with reinforcements. Issues of troop morale were addressed with deliberative urgency, as attested by newly minted coinage extolling “the spirit” of the frontier legions and inscriptional acclamation of the emperor’s successes as *REPARATOR DISCIPLINAE MILITARIS*.

A concerted ideological campaign to revive confidence in empire complemented efforts to re-establish military preparedness. Imperial themes were celebrated in a special coinage issue, the *Divi antoniniani*, selectively commemorating deified emperors of the past. Coins bearing Decius’ own likeness carried depictions of traditional virtues and ideals, ranging from the political-military symbols of *Fides*, *Victoria*, and the ubiquitous Roman Eagle, to images of prosperity and social justice conveyed by *Abundantia*, *Liberitas*, *Aequitas*, and *Liberalitas*. The young Caesars, Herennius and Hostilian, are commonly paired with Mercury and Mars the Defender; the Augusta herself appears with Vesta, Juno Regina, and the sanctifying feminine symbols *Pudicitia* and *Fecunditas*. A traditionalist iconography was utilized even more extensively in the Greek-speaking east, where mints at Alexandria, Ephesus, Antioch, Edessa, and elsewhere produced a range of issues aligning members of the royal family with exalted deities of the Olympian pantheon, including Zeus, Poseidon, Apollo, Athena, Ares, Dionysus, Artemis, Demeter, and Herakles, along with popular Hellenistic divinities such as Tyche, Serapis, Isis, Cybele, Asklepios and Hygieia.⁸ Decius also sponsored the renewal of civic cult practices, to judge from inscriptions publicizing his involvement in the renovation and commissioning of temples and statues, one of which accords him the august title *RESTITUTOR SACRORUM*, ‘restorer of the sacred’.

The Decian cultural program countenanced far more, however, than a hallowing of public spaces with traditionalist symbols and monuments of piety and patriotism. The unprecedented succession of military defeats and natural

8. Ramped up coinage production and stylistic innovations under Decius have been documented for various cities in Asia Minor and Mesopotamia, highlighted by Karel Castelin’s *The Coinage of Rhessaena in Mesopotamia* (American Numismatic Society, 1946). For Palestine, see the contributions of Leo Kadman, who cogently proposes that the rapid production and diversity of coin-types issued at Caesarea Maritima attest to “advanced detailed planning,” with the entire series keyed to the Decian program of “reviving the old forms of religion,” *The Coins of Caesarea Maritima* (New York: Schocken, 1957), 71-77. Lee Levine, “Some Observations on the Coins of Caesarea Maritima,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 22 (1972): 131-40, likewise emphasizes the “extraordinary output” of new representational types under Decius, featuring both pantheon expansion and conspicuous altar symbolism. Erika Manders, in her informative *Coining Images of Power* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), questions whether Decius pursued any such “religious policy,” but her data-set—*Roman Imperial Coinage*, vols. IV-V—does not incorporate the fuller range of numismatic evidence available for mints beyond Rome and Milan.

calamities that had befallen the empire over the past half-century called for rectifying measures of corresponding scope, seeing as they augured nothing less than a rending of the *pax deorum* that had sustained Rome's imperial advance from its legendary founding. To that cosmological urgency—of reclaiming the favour of the protecting divinities—Decius would implement his most radical and historically momentous policy.

Early in the winter of 249, the soldier-emperor issued a directive to the governors of every province, mandating sacrificial offerings and veneration for the ancestral deities. This act of compulsory *religio* was to be carried out in public by all of the empire's inhabitants at their local temples and shrines.⁹ Entailing far more than a traditional *supplicatio*, to which the Romans customarily resorted on occasions of great triumphs or in times of national peril, Decius' edict came with an astonishing set of stipulations. Not only were the requested *sacrificia* obligatory rather than voluntary, but special commissions were established to schedule, superintend, and enforce the decreed ceremonial, starting in larger cities but soon radiating outwards even to remote villages. Census and tax rolls provided controls over identity, and those dutifully performing the required exercise in *reverentia*—as individuals or as families—would present for signature two matching certificates attesting to their devotional loyalty; one copy was returned to the sacrificant, the other was numbered by local officials for archival filing.¹⁰

Procedurally elaborate and invasive in design, the Decian sacrifice order raises pressing questions of motive and objectives. Two opposing lines of interpretation have informed discussions to date. What might be called “maximalist” readings privilege the harrowing reports preserved in our Christian sources, and ascribe to Decius a determined resolve to check, and ultimately

9. Jews, in established recognition of their venerable monotheism, enjoyed exemption. Some Christians, seeking “immunity” from the hazards of forced idolatry, were turning to the synagogues for this very reason (*Martyrium Pionii* 13.1: desertion to Judaism condemned as an “unpardonable sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit”). On Jewish-Christian relations in Smyrna, as convulsed by the Decian edict, see Walter Ameling, “The Christian *lapsi* in Smyrna, 250 A.D. (*Martyrium Pionii* 12-14),” *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008): 133-160.

10. Skepticism regarding the Roman state's capacity to implement a universal sacrifice order should abate in light of Paul Schubert's “On the Form and Content of the Certificates of Pagan Sacrifice,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 106 (2016): 172-198. Detailing the close working relations between scribes who produced documents and officials who administered policies, Schubert shows how the Decian *libelli* exhibit much the same format as other “memoranda” documents (ὑπομνήματα), through which individuals routinely filed petitions with state officials. The administrative apparatus that registered and regularly taxed the population, Schubert concludes, could easily have been adapted for implementing Decius' “extraordinary procedure” (p. 189). For a vivid reconstruction of how the mandated sacrifices might have been carried out, perceptively attentive to both scene-setting and ceremonial, see Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 207-209.

destroy, the deleterious advance of a deeply offensive *superstitio*.¹¹ Reconstructions of a “minimalist” persuasion discount these same testimonials as rhetorically inflated compositions, and recast the usurper-emperor as a traditionalist anxious to secure divine backing at the onset of his reign. That significant numbers of Christians refused to comply with the decree, and were thereupon subjected to torture, incarceration, property confiscations, and judicial executions, is seen as an “incidental” occurrence rather than planned outcome. A range of hybrid interpretations between these antithetical framings can also be found, assigning a variable mixture of aims and priorities to the emperor; yet others insist the edict’s universal scope and daunting oversight requirements tell against any deliberate targeting of a still marginal Christian population.¹²

11. Discovery of a papyrus “sacrifice certificate” in 1893 was widely taken to confirm the consensus view of Church historians—established since the time of Mosheim and Neander—that the emperor’s policy was eliminationist in objective: “Decius determined to destroy absolutely the strange religion. Every Christian, humble or exalted, was to be persecuted until death or apostasy resulted,” R. Beattie, “The Certificate of an Apostasy During the Persecution of Decius,” *Biblical World* 8 (1896): 295; “[T]he repressive spirit of the military religionist rose strong within him, and he decreed that Christianity should be exterminated,” John Gregg, *The Decian Persecution* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood, 1897), 52-53.

12. Prominent scholars interpreting the edict as anti-Christian include Andreas Alföldi, “Zu den Christenverfolgungen in der Mitte des 3. Jahrhunderts,” *Klio* 31 (1938): 323-347; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, “Why were the Early Christians Persecuted?” *Past and Present* 26 (1963): 6-38; and T. D. Barnes, “Legislation Against the Christians,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968): 32-50. Norman Baynes was among the first to propose the persecution was a “collateral” consequence, in “The Great Persecution,” *Cambridge Ancient History, Volume XII: The Imperial Crisis and Recovery*, edited by S. A. Cook, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 646-677. That notion now underpins the reigning consensus, articulated most notably by W. H. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967); James Rives, “The Decree of Decius and the Religion of Empire,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 135-154; David Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, A.D. 180-395* (London: Routledge, 2004); and Graeme Clarke, “Third-century Christianity,” *CAH XII: Crisis of Empire, A.D. 193-337* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 589-671, each of whom variously downplay persecutorial intent and place primacy on the “religious rally” thesis. For Bruno Bleckmann, “Zu den Motiven der Christenverfolgung des Decius,” the sacrifice order was fundamentally about securing a “Loyalitätsdemonstration” for a new regime desperate for legitimacy; see his essay in *Deleto paene imperio Romano*, edited by John E. Gerhardt, and Hartmann (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2006), 57-71. Marie-Françoise Baslez, in her synthesizing *Les persécutions dans l’Antiquité: Victimes, héros, martyrs* (Paris: Fayard, 2007), insists the edict was not intended as a “test d’identification des chrétiens,” but became so inadvertently through defiant non-compliance. The view that a universal sacrifice to nab a few Christians would have been “impossibly clumsy” to implement was initially broached by Hugh Last, “Review of The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. XII,” *American Journal of Philology* 61 (1940): 81-89; a supposition more fully taken up by Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York:

Through sociological assessment of the innovative features of the decree—its *compulsory component*, *inquisitorial function*, *monitoring requirement*, and *documentary controls*—I hope to establish that any proposal that would restrict this extraordinary measure to a celebratory or legitimizing function, of honouring a new emperor and the gods of empire, errantly underplays the coercive logic informing the directive. Correspondingly underappreciated is the fact that the governing operations of the Roman state—far from being inattentive to matters of surveillance or the consequences of policy—were sustained and guided by an accumulating body of rulings, records, and informational reports that constituted its bureaucratically preserved “institutional memory.” This was not an imperial power unfamiliar with the suppression of foreign rites or deviant cult groups (from the Bacchanalia crisis of 186 BCE onwards); and prior persecutions of the Christians will have received archival mention appropriate to the seriousness with which crimes of political disloyalty and religious impiety were treated. A decisively relevant datum in this regard is the lost Book VII of Ulpian’s *De officio proconsulis* (c.215), which included a digest of imperial *rescripta* laying out established procedures and punishments for dealing with the Christian problem. Composed under Caracalla as a manual for the instruction of governors on their legal responsibilities and authority, a working familiarity with the famed jurist’s text would have been acquired by Decius during his two tenures as *legatus propraetor*, the first served in Moesia Inferior (c.231-34), the second in Hispania Tarraconensis (c.236-38).¹³

The interests and intentions of states are usually discernible from the legislation they enact, and though an integral text of the Decian edict has yet to surface, its provisions and manner of implementation are broadly recoverable. Christian accounts of the wending course of the persecution contain much

Knopf, 1987), who projects a “bureaucratic nightmare” had certification been required of all inhabitants, and concludes only “suspect Christians” were targeted (pp. 454-458). This view is endorsed by Beard, North, and Price in their influential *Religions of Rome: Volume 2, A Sourcebook*: “The edict of persecution probably demanded that all inhabitants of the empire should sacrifice—but it is unlikely (given the administrative burden) that certificates would have been issued to those not under suspicion of being Christian” (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 165). An extreme minimalist account is offered by Reinhard Selinger, *The Mid-Third Century Persecutions of Decius and Valerian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2004), who can find in the Decian edict no innovation, either in policy or practice.

13. Denunciatory mention of the anti-Christian legislation in Ulpian’s handbook is made by Lactantius, *Divine Institutes* 5.11.18-19 (c.310). Birley, “Decius Reconsidered,” 75-76, alertly suggests the emperor’s policies may have been influenced by earlier contacts with the senator-historian Cassius Dio, who served as governor in Pannonia (c.226-28) at a time when Decius held military commands in the region. Dio’s contemporaneous *Roman History* breathes a conservative spirit, the famous speech by Maecenas pointedly urging Augustus to enforce religious conformity, κατὰ τὰ πάτρια, and impose repressive measures against those introducing “alien practices” and “innovations in matters divine,” the known fonts of conspiracies and disturbances of public order (52.36.1-2).

information, direct and indirect, and more revelatory still are the “compliance certificates” individuals submitted for notarization upon completion of the sacrifices. Nearly fifty such *libelli* have been retrieved from the preserving sands of Egypt, all composed on papyrus leaf in standardized petitionary form. Local scribes will have produced a majority of the documents, but handwriting diversity even within the same village indicates literate individuals could, and did, submit their own affidavits, as drawn to the specifications listed in the emperor’s publicly posted edict.

Each complete *libellus* features six ordered sections: (1) a petitionary address to the commissioners; (2) a statement of personal identity; (3) a declaration that terms of the edict have been fulfilled and overseen by monitoring officials; (4) a request for certification; (5) signed attestations by the officials; (6) a dating of the ceremony. The following *libellus* is representative:

To those appointed to oversee the sacrifices. From Aurelius Alexander of the village of Theadelphia. I have always and continually sacrificed to the gods, and now in your presence and in accordance with the orders given, I have sacrificed, poured a libation, and eaten of the consecrated offering. I request your certification below. Prosperity to you. [1st Hand]

We, Aurelius Serenus and Aurelius Hermas, saw you sacrificing. [2nd Hand]

Year one of the Emperor Caesar Gaius Messius Quintus Traianus Decius Pius Felix Augustus, Pauni 27 [= June 21, 250].¹⁴ [1st Hand]

Scholarly attention to date has focused all but exclusively on the requirement to sacrifice; yet the decisive testatory clause of the *libellus* assuredly lies elsewhere. For what is most remarkable, not to say astounding, is the novel provision whereby *all citizens and subjects of the empire are required to affirm a lifelong and unwavering religious orthopraxy*. Each surviving certificate is stipulatively centered not on the immediacy of forced ritual compliance, but on the establishment of prior consistency in traditional worship—a redundant requirement, surely, and a most “curious” interest for a ruling authority to pursue in a world overwhelmingly polytheistic in practice and outlook. The telling declaration, reproduced repeatedly with only minor variations, is rendered by locutions such as the following:

“I have always sacrificed to the gods without interruption ...,”
 (ἀεί θύων τοῖς θεοῖς διετέλεσα)
 – as written for an aged villager (*libellus* #1)

14. This is *libellus* #15 of the forty-one certificates presented in the original Greek and translated by John Knipfing, “The Libelli of the Decian Persecution,” *Harvard Theological Review* 16 (1923): 345-390. Here as elsewhere I have slightly modified standard translations for greater literalness at certain points. Five additional *libelli* have since come to light, conveniently available in Selinger, *Mid-Third Century Persecutions*.

“I have always sacrificed to the gods continually throughout my life ...,”

(ἀεὶ μὲν θύουσα τοῖς θεοῖς διετέλεσα τὸν βίον)

– so declares a priestess of the crocodile god Petesouchos (#3)

“I have always sacrificed and poured libations to the gods continuously...,”

(ἀεὶ μὲν θύων καὶ σπένδων τοῖς θεοῖς διετέλεσα)

– attests a man from Oxyrhynchus (#4)

“I have always sacrificed to the gods and fulfilled my obligations to them ...,”

(ἀεὶ τοῖς θεοῖς θύουσα καὶ ἐπιτελοῦσα)

– a mother’s testimony, her young children accompanying (#30)

“It has always been my custom to offer sacrifice, pour libations, and worship the gods...,”

(ἀεὶ μὲν θύειν καὶ σπένδειν καὶ σέβειν θεοῖς εἰθισμένος)

– written on behalf of a declared illiterate (#33)

Appraised collectively, the formulaic consistency and precise phraseology of the Decian *libelli* bear the unmistakable impress of a bureaucratic directive, and thus point directly to the motivations behind the decree. For if, as minimalists propose, the imperial agenda had countenanced little more than a traditional *supplicatio*, a solicitation of divine support for a new regime in troubled times, why is the certification language so decidedly inquisitorial and compulsory, rather than celebratory or propitiatory? And if enhanced civic loyalty was intended, what purpose could have been served by securing and archiving millions of legally binding pledges from across the empire, all attesting that those dutifully participating on the present compulsory occasion had “always” and “continually” offered venerative sacrifices in the past? In their insistent fusing of the *interrogational* with the *performative*—an incongruent, even offensive coupling, had the principal function been celebratory—the Decian *libelli* confirm the edict was drafted so as to feature a “retrospective reach” in matters of religious observance, and to draw from each sacrificant a sworn and written declaration of unfailing devotion to the ancestral divinities.¹⁵ It was not, in other words, a desperate need for a unifying, one-time act of sacrifice that had called forth this

15. For a large majority of the *libelli*, the determinative linguistic formulation is a hendiadic coupling of the adverb ἀεὶ with the infinitive διατέλειν, the first signifying ongoing regularity of action or incessancy over extended duration, the second implying fulfillment of tasks undertaken. Latin certificates will have featured similar parlance: e.g., *semper et continue* or *semper constans*, etc. Inquisitorial phrasing of the congressional hearings staged by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in the 1930s and 40s provides an apt modern parallel: “Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist Party?” Note, too, that when consular governor Pliny informs Trajan of his “Christian troubles” in Bithynia-Pontus (112 CE), he specifically reports dismissing charges against those who “denied they were, or had ever been Christians,” while executing non-citizens who obstinately refused to recant—actions the emperor endorses in his reply (*Epistles* 10.96; 10.97).

massively intrusive action by the Roman state; but, rather, a pressing concern to expose, pressure, and discipline religious deviants, whose unchecked abominations and superstitious novelties were deemed responsible for the manifest fraying of the *pax deorum*. By calling upon the citizenry to affirm a pious orthopraxy of longstanding commitment—and not simply a mandated display of momentary compliance—Decius was mobilizing both state and populace to a specific end: the coercive intimidation, and detection, of those elements in the social order who were alienating the gods through perverse refusal of their customary worship. As for the subversives in question—so perceptively targeted by the decree’s probing anterior interest—they were already widely notorious, and consisted of “atheists” who had abandoned their ancestral traditions to join the criminal Christian cult, a conspiracy of deranged blasphemers of the gods and traitors to empire.¹⁶

For self-declared Christians, or those so accused, juridical precedent had long established that opportunity would be granted to either renounce or disprove involvement with the illegal *superstitio*. As Christian teachings were known to feature a demonizing denunciation of polytheistic belief and observance, a supplicating offer of sacrifice to the gods, conducted before a presiding magistrate, served as the standard arbitrating procedure.¹⁷ In combining this “sacrifice test” with a mandatory avowal of lifelong orthopraxy—and extending it to the population at large—Decius and his advisors will have surely anticipated

16. Persecutorial intent is further indicated by the fact that some Christians—including those with certificates and those who had sacrificed—were subjected to second arrests, as incisively documented by Graeme Clarke, “Double-Trials in the Persecution of Decius,” *Historia* 22 (1973): 650-663. See, for example, the letter of bishop Caldonius to Cyprian, metropolitan of the African Church, reporting that several of his lapsed flock had recently redeemed their salvation by bravely affirming Christ when “tested a second time” (Cyprian, *Epistle* 24.1: *iterato temptati*; similarly in Rome, *Ep.* 8.3). Feigned as well as actual acts of conformity provided no immunity, and suspected Christians remained vulnerable to secondary delations and arrests.

17. A “force them to sacrifice” procedure had already entered the repertoire of populist intimidation tactics, as bishop Dionysius relates concerning a major anti-Christian riot in Alexandria that erupted a year prior to Decius’ ascendancy (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.41, c.325). For the juridical principles and procedures deployed against Christians, G.E.M. de Ste. Croix’s essays remain fundamental, collected conveniently in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). See also James Rives’s insightful overview, “The Persecution of Christians and Ideas of Community in the Roman Empire,” in *Politiche religiose nel mondo antico e tardoantico* (Bari: Edipuglia, 2011), 199-217. Donald Kyle’s *Spectacles of Death in Ancient Rome* contains much value on the violent intensity of popular and official hostility towards Christians, as evidenced by degrading executions in the arena on charges of sacrilege and treason, the maltreatment of their corporeal remains, and outright incinerations or disposals at sea—calculated cruelties that purposefully mocked the preaching of bodily resurrection and frustrated devotional appendency for martyr relics (London: Routledge, 2001), 242-264.

the difficulties such a dual “oath & sacrifice” dictate would pose for Christians, whose membership in their own cult remained conditional upon confessional loyalty to Christ and principled avoidance of all idolatrous conventions.¹⁸ The edict’s binding requirement to obtain notarized certificates could be expected to induce defections from the less committed, while driving militant recusants into the open via flight or through defiant gestures of voluntary martyrdom—a response pattern familiar from earlier state-church encounters. In contrast to the sporadic and localized persecutorial efforts of the past, Decius’ innovative and menacing device of certification furnished officials with enforcement controls of comprehensive sweep, to which an anxious citizenry—now called upon to participate collectively in a sacred obligation to regain divine patronage—would provide the requisite local surveillance.¹⁹

18. The required sworn statement of abiding fealty to the ancestral gods was all but certainly devised to place Christians in direct contravention of the redemptive declaration they had uttered at the time of their sanctifying rebirth: “Could a servant of God stand there, speak and renounce Christ, when he had already renounced the Devil and the world?” (*Stare illic potuit Dei servus, et loqui et renuntiare Christo, qui jam diabolo renuntiaverat et saeculo?*). Thus Cyprian, *De lapsis* 8, categorically invoking the formulaic abjuration of “Satan and all his works” featured in the baptismal rite: “Upon entering the water, we make profession of the Christian faith ... bearing witness with our mouth that we have renounced the Devil, his pomp, and his angels” (Tertullian, *On the Spectacles* 4, c.200; Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 21, c.215). Christians who obtained certificates through bribes or forgery—circumventing thereby the edict’s injunction to testify and sacrifice publicly—were nonetheless categorized as apostates, seeing as the wording of the *libellus* constituted “a confession of denial, the testimony of a Christian who rejects what he had been” (Cyprian, *De lapsis* 27.1; also the view of Novatian, *Ep.* 30.3.1). The Pliny-Trajan correspondence had already established that a formal renunciation or refutation of Christian affiliation required, as one of several corroborating proofs, a recited “invocation of the gods” (*deos appellarent; supplicando dis nostris*, 10.96; 10.97).

19. But why, minimalist scholars have pointedly asked, were Christians neither specifically mentioned in the *libelli*, nor simply attacked directly? Beyond slighting the seasoned practicality of Roman statecraft, this query fails to consider the downside of commencing with measures liable to inciting vigilantism. Past practice, moreover, confirmed the efficacy of “sacrifice tests” in achieving sought-for renunciations. In the midst of a roiling military crisis, Decius’ anti-Christian strategy will have been cognizant that punitive sanctions would be easier to implement following clear demonstrations of sacrilegious treason by members of the offending *superstitio*. And how feasible would any “direct” assault have been? Prominent clerics were locally known, but given the reliance of state authorities on security information provided by private citizens acting as *delatores* and *accusatores* (Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), a mass strike against a “furtive, light-shunning” cult-movement did not present enticing options (*Octavius* 8.3, c.230). Decius’ mandated notarization of avowed lifelong orthopraxy and witnessed sacrificial performance—both entirely unproblematic for the vast polytheist majority—not only effectively “exposed” the non-compliant to public view and traceable identity, it rendered continuing membership a far more hazardous choice.

The persecution opened with targeted policing operations calculated to bring dread and disorder to the communities of Christ, as several high clerics were arrested prior to public scheduling of the oath-swearing sacrifices. The bishop of Rome was promptly tried and either beheaded or succumbed under torture, the martyrdoms of his episcopal peers at Antioch, Pamphylia, and Jerusalem soon to follow; others, including the bishops of Carthage, Alexandria, and Neo-Caesarea, evaded capture through hurried departures. Concerned locals assisted by clamoring for the apprehension of Christians of known prominence or involvement, sometimes to the point of hauling suspected “atheists” before the authorities by force. As administrative implementation of the edict took hold across the provinces, heroically resistant bishops, presbyters, deacons, and lesser clergy were imprisoned and tortured; a great many more eluded arrest through flight or concealment. Defiant members of the laity, women and children included, were also rounded up and subjected to carceral punishments, pending scheduled trials before provincial governors. Decius will have drawn yet greater reassurance from incoming reports that vast numbers of Christians were complying with the edict and returning to “ancestral custom,” the sacrosanct *mos maiorum*. In a few instances, congregants were summoned and led up to the smoking altars by their own bishops, cheered on by approving crowds.²⁰

How history might have transpired had the “blasphemous serpent” and “forerunner of Antichrist” been granted a longer tenure is open to speculation, for Decius and his eldest son were slain in battle during a Balkan campaign against invading Goths in the summer of 251. A horrific plague gripping the empire carried off his younger son, and renewed political disorders and urgent military challenges—barbarian and Sassanian—would momentarily displace the Christian problem to a concern of secondary importance.²¹

20. Cyprian, *Ep.* 55.11, a case in Italy; 59.10, in Africa Proconsularis. Also in Smyrna, where bishop Euktemon encourages others to offer sacrifice, with resisters “searched for” and “dragged in” by a temple warden and his men, *Martyrium Pionii* 3.1; 4.13; 15.2; 18.13. Pagan vigilantism: Cyprian, *Epp.* 6.4; 14.1; 40.1, “stones and flames”; 56.1; Dionysius of Alexandria *ap.* Eusebius, *HE* 6.41.1-8: Christians compelled to sacrifice and recite impieties, homes ransacked, murderous stonings and burnings; 6.41.14-15: confessors paraded through the city on camels, assaulted by jeering onlookers, burnings in quicklime and beheadings. Agitated crowds acted similarly in the persecution that had erupted in Gaul c.177, with Christians brutally battered on the streets before being hauled off for summary trials and staged executions in the local amphitheatre (all vividly memorialized in a circular epistle preserved by Eusebius, *HE* 5.1). Tertullian attests that hostile mobs frequently assail Christians with stones and fire, their “Bacchanalian frenzy” extending even to cemeteries, where remains of the faithful are savagely disinterred and violated (*Apologeticus* 37.2, c.197).

21. Christian invective against the persecuting emperor was drawn irresistibly to the luridly potent symbolism of John’s Apocalypse, its “great dragon” destined to wage war against “those keeping the testimony of Jesus,” and Rome herself, the vile Whore of Babylon, “drunk from the blood of the saints” she had cruelly martyred (Rev.12.3-17;17.3). For Decius as *anguem maiorem* and *metatorem antichristi*, see the letter from a Carthaginian

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Christian leaders who experienced this violent “sweep of the dragon’s tail” were anxiously forthright in describing the devastation wrought upon their communities.²² From across the empire, all surviving testimony indicates great numbers of Christians—some in frantic eagerness, others in anguished trepidation—made their way to the temples and offered sacrifices to the gods they had denounced as demons upon their conversion to Christ. Some avoided the horror of the polluting deed by sending slaves or kin as proxies; others plied local officials with bribes to procure signatures on covertly submitted affidavits of sacrifice. A brisk production in forged *libelli* appears to have developed as well, to judge from the scale of the penitential problem that would soon throw the churches into protracted chaos and factional conflict. Many from the clerical ranks opted for discretion over confrontation, their flights to safety abetted by clandestine networks of co-believers operating across rural areas and within the secretive havens of larger cities. Martyrdoms were surprisingly few.

confessor, preserved in Cyprian, *Ep.* 22.1. The *Martyrium Pionii* has its eponymous martyr make tearful allusion to John’s text by speaking of “the stars of heaven” that are being “dragged down to earth by the dragon’s tail,” clear reference to the many who were apostatizing under Decius’ demonic edict (τοὺς ἀστέρας τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ὑπὸ τῆς οὐράς τοῦ δράκοντος εἰς τὴν γῆν σεσυρμένους, 12.2-3, c.250).

22. Regional synopses as well as wider assessments are presented in clerical communiqués. The African metropolitan reported to his episcopal peers: “this hostile tempest has overthrown the greater part of our laity ... and has swept up in its deadly course even a portion of the clergy,” Cyprian, *Ep.* 14.1; cf. *Ep.* 10.4: “[O]ur Mother the Church mourns the downfall and death of very many”; *Ep.* 11.8: only a “scant few stand resolutely” amidst “slaughtered heaps” of the fallen and a “trembling remnant” beset by fear; *Ep.* 19.2: the crisis extends *totius orbis*. Letters from Rome describe the local situation and circulate news received from elsewhere: “the occurrence of this great crime has been widespread ... everywhere lie the ruins of those overthrown,” *Ep.* 30.5.3-4; cf. *Ep.* 31.6: “so grievous a transgression ... has spread incredible devastation almost the whole world over.” Metropolitan Dionysius reports from Egypt that “all cowered in dread” at the edict’s posting, and briefly recounts proceedings at Alexandria. As presiding officials “called out names,” throngs of Christians came forward to offer the mandated sacrifices, cheered on to their “spiritual deaths” by mocking banter from the assembled pagan multitude. Flight was common, while many of those arrested and imprisoned would deny their faith under torture. Of these “blessed pillars of the Lord” who resisted, Dionysius provides the names and heroic actions of eighteen men and women who were burned in quicklime, beheaded, or otherwise slain to win their crowns of martyrdom (in Eusebius, *HE* 6.41.9-23). Other regions known to have been convulsed by the persecution include Spain, Gaul, Italy, Sicily, Palestine, Asia Minor, Syria, Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Arabia (Cyprian, *Epp.* 67, 68, 30; Eusebius, *HE* 6.39; 6.46; 7.5).

Analysis of the fallout from the Decian sacrifice order cannot properly proceed without precursory assessment of the prevailing “minimalist” consensus, leveraged as it is on the sweeping premise that Christian sources vastly overstate and rhetorically dramatize the extent to which believers were subject to popular hostility and state repression.²³ Curiously, this assertive “default skepticism” has taken hold despite its unexplained and unjustified contravention of the long-established hermeneutical procedures of *Quellenkritik*, according to which the “sifting” of rhetoric, ideology, and myth-making from descriptive reportage and corollary informational disclosure must be carried out meticulously, not only on a case-by-case basis but through encompassing syntheses as well.

Due to the vastness of the empire and the limited scope of record-keeping, the numbers of Christians imprisoned, tortured, and executed will never be known, not even approximately. There is more than sufficient evidence, however, to deduce that the scale of persecutorial torments—corporeal and mental—was anything but negligible.²⁴ Projective modern sensibilities and reigning academic fashions have combined, unhelpfully, to blunt recognition of the extent to which membership in an illegal and widely-reviled cult association generated its own distinctive “experiential structure,” one permeated by what Geoffrey de Ste. Croix memorably characterized as “the atmosphere of constant menace” within which Christians negotiated their daily existence (*Christian Persecution*, p. 68).

Consider, for example, the psychologically harrowing implications of Tertullian’s startling disclosure that entire church communities labored under “tributary bondage” to extortionists and military-police, yielding up “protection fees” as precarious surety against arrest or prosecution (*De Fuga* 13.5; 12.11, c.215). Christians were subjected to private shakedowns as well, preyed upon by informers, soldiers, and corrupt officials making the rounds for their customary “guilt-money” indemnities—transactions an outraged Tertullian denounces as a

23. Corke-Webster’s “The Roman Persecutions,” *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2020), provides an instructive overview. While in agreement with those questioning whether Decius’ sacrifice edict was an anti-Christian measure, Corke-Webster voices concern over the trending imbalance in the historiography, which has been marked by a pronounced drift towards “minimalism” and growing hesitancy about the degree to which the state sought to repress the Christian faith. The resulting one-sidedness, he cautions, has obscured “both the reality of Christian suffering, and the real reasons for it” (p. 47).

24. As to “death toll” testimony, we are unlikely to come across anything more credible than a statement attributed, either directly or derivatively, to Christianity’s preeminent intellectual critic, the Neoplatonist Porphyry. After commenting on the executions of the apostles Peter and Paul, the philosopher makes pointed reference to “the myriads, the innumerable others” who were “consumed by fire or put to death by other punishments” (μυρίοι, quoted in Makarios Magnes, *Apokritikos* IV.4, c.300?). Porphyry’s broad estimate, let it be noted, predates the far deadlier Great Persecution (303-313 CE), and it passes without challenge by the Christian Makarios.

“selling-out” of Christ “under the folds of a tunic” (12.5). Similar hazards were encountered across the empire. Justin Martyr decries the readiness of Roman officials—acting under demonic sway—to execute Christians on the scheming accusations of rapacious informers (*Second Apology* 1.2; 12.3-4; 14.2, c.154). Melito of Sardis reports on new decrees that allow extortionists free reign to plunder the “pious of God,” whilst yet other communicants undergo punishments and judicial murders (*To Antoninus*, c.170; in Eusebius, *HE* 4.26.5-6,). Athenagoras calls upon Marcus Aurelius to extend his celebrated benevolence to Christians, against whom an enraged populace “wages war” and who suffer “dispossession” and “slaughter” through the intrigues of covetous informers (*Plea for the Christians* 1.2-4, c.178). Hippolytus tells of recurring raids on houses of worship, with those apprehended forcibly compelled to venerate the accursed demons or risk imprisonment on capital charges (*Commentary on Daniel* 1.20-22, c.220). A pervasive sense of beleaguerment is likewise attested to by Tertullian: “Daily we are besieged, daily betrayed; in our gatherings and assemblies we are oft taken by surprise” (*Apologeticus* 7.4: *obsidemur ... prodimur ... opprimimur*).

If these and similar claims regarding anti-Christian repression were confined to writings of the purported victims, a measured skepticism might be warranted. But such is not the case. Corroborative testimony is amply preserved in the least impugnable of our sources, i.e., in texts authored by the pagan opposition, by those hostile to the subversive new cult. Indeed, Christians had gained notoriety for their defiant ἀφοβία in the face of torture and death already in the time of the Stoic Epictetus, who attributes their irrational bravery to habitual conditioning (ὕπὸ ἔθους, *Discourses* 4.11.6, c.108). Lucian of Samosata is likewise struck by the bizarre readiness of Christians to deliver themselves up for arrest and their open “scorn for death,” derangements he attributes to their credulous belief in “pending immortality” (καταφρονοῦσιν τοῦ θανάτου; ἀθάνατοι ἔσεσθαι, *Death of Peregrinus* 13.13, c.165). Marcus Aurelius, the “fourth” of the persecuting emperors according to Christian tradition, registers similar disapproval of the “unarmed militancy” with which Christians obstinately embrace their fatal punishments (ψιλήν παράταξιν, *Meditations* 11.4, c.175). Galen, after faulting Christians for dogmatism and superstition, nonetheless expresses admiration for aspects of their moral conduct, including a “fearlessness of death” that “we witness in them every day” (quoted in Uṣaybi’ah’s *History of Physicians*). The precarity of Christian existence is also extensively detailed by Celsus, who expressly states that Christ’s deluded followers are routinely executed for profaning the deities and seditious disloyalty to state and society: “you are bound, led to punishment, and fastened to the stake, whilst your demon—or Son of God, as you call him—takes no vengeance”; the gods “punish severely those who revile them, and every blasphemer must either flee and hide or be apprehended and slain”; “even when your transgressions escape detection, still you will be sought out, captured, and punished with death” (quoted in Origen, *Contra Celsum*: 8.39, 41, 69; also 7.40; 8.38, 43, 49, 54, 65).

Another contributing factor in the genesis and maintenance of that “atmosphere of constant menace” was the prominence of public executions in the Roman penal system. The perils of Christian membership were repeatedly advertised to the citizenry from early on—and “spectacularly” so—through the elaborate rituals of punitive violence that were staged inside the blood-drenched amphitheatres of the empire. The macabre revelry of lexical abuse baying spectators heaped upon condemned Christians is revealing in itself, as those stalwart victims of cruelty were derisively dubbed “half-axels” and “firebrands,” gruesome nominalizations, respectively, of the stakes to which they were bound and the kindling of their agonizing incineration (*sarmenticios et semaxios appelletis*, Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 50.3, c.197).²⁵

Minimalist scholars, in denying persecutorial intent to Decius’ sacrifice edict, tendentially dismiss or downplay the coercive aspects of its implementation—some to the point of proposing that most Christians were either enthusiastic in their participation or untroubled by the prospects of committing idolatrous trespass.²⁶ The historical record, however, contains no attestations by any Christians that they complied with the sacrifice order because they shared its aims, believed in its efficacy, or failed to understand that pouring libations and consuming flesh consecrated to the gods might be incompatible with their devotion to Christ. What we do have, however, is a considerable body of evidence

25. On the sanguinary fates of Christians in the arenas, see Kathleen Coleman’s classic study, “Fatal Charades: Roman Executions Staged as Mythological Enactments,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 (1990): 44-73. That the “punitive terrors” of the Roman state entered deeply into the making of Christian subjects is the compelling conclusion of Brent Shaw’s luminous investigation, “Judicial Nightmares and Christian Memory,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003): 533-563.

26. Allen Brent, *Cyprian and Roman Carthage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), speculates most Christians still shared the “metaphysical views” of the wider pagan society, and were thus no less anxious over the crisis conditions besetting the empire than their fellow citizens; taking part in Decius’ apotropaic *supplicatio* was accordingly embraced as both a “patriotic duty” and an efficacious means to reclaim divine favour (pp. 6-8, 226-29, 250). Éric Rebillard, *Christians and Their Many Identities in Late Antiquity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2012), insists Christians were neither targeted nor pressured by the state, and that the majorities who complied with the sacrifice order did so willingly and without awareness their participation jeopardized continuing Church membership. Most Christians, he theorizes, practiced a “situational selection of identities,” resulting in only “intermittent” involvement in Church life and a “low level of Christian groupness” overall. When called upon to venerate the gods, the majority of Christians simply chose to “deactivate their Christianness” in deference to their civic membership in the imperial commonwealth (pp. 7-8, 49-55, 60). Rives’s “Decree of Decius”, widely credited with establishing the “unintended persecution” thesis, is notably cautious on the issue: “[I]t is possible ... [but there is] no compelling reason to see his decree as primarily an anti-Christian measure” (pp. 141-42); “Decius’ decision to require some kind of certification may in fact have simply been a whim” (p. 151).

—including clerical correspondence, scriptural commentaries, patristic treatises (prohibitions on idolatry and exhortations to martyrdom most notably), and sundry commemorative texts recounting the trials, tribulations, and triumphs of Christian martyrs—that communicates the motivational matrix for apostasy in vivifying detail and telling consistency. For the recurrent refrain across all these genres, unsurprisingly, is that Christians lapse into idolatry and apostasy primarily through fear: fear of being identified as Christian; fear of losing public office or status; fear of property confiscations; fear of imprisonment or exile; of torture; of condemnation to mines, arenas, brothels; and, ultimately, fear of judicial execution.

A brief sampling: “the double-minded, whenever they hear of persecution, become idolaters through cowardice” (*Shepherd of Hermas*, Sim. 9.21.3); timid brethren fearful that large and regularly scheduled assemblies will attract hostile surveillance (Tertullian, *De Fuga* 3.4, c.212); anxiously consenting to demon-invoking oaths, blessings, and signed contracts from fear of detection (*On Idolatry* 21-23, c.212); “weakness of the flesh” when confronting “the heavy sword, uplifted cross, ferocity of the beasts, the supreme punishment of fire, and all the ingenious torments of the executioner” (*To the Martyrs* 4.2, c.197); eminent and office-holding Christians, succumbing to fear, rush forward to offer idolatrous sacrifices (Dionysius, in Eusebius *HE* 6.41.11); threats of exile, torture, and proprietary loss will not “terrorize” stalwart believers who are “prepared to endure imprisonment, armed to accept death” (Cyprian, *De lapsis* 2); valiant Christian women, cast into the mythic roles of Danaids and Dirce, willing to suffer the depraved indignities and horrific tortures of the amphitheatre (*I Clement* 6, c.96); wives and maidens delivered over for brothel service—*ad lenonem* rather than *ad leonem*—a punitive degradation targeting the cult’s elevated norms of chastity and monogamic continence (Tertullian, *Apologeticus* 50.12-13).

Even allowing for a degree of “threat magnification” by Christian authors, the fears and terrors identified were scarcely imaginary, given the very real dangers that attended active involvement in a non-licit organization suspected of civic disloyalty and gross impiety. Indeed, as we have seen, all surviving pagan testimony—from Epictetus and Lucian to Celsus and Porphyry—establishes unambiguously that Christians were ever liable to sudden visitations of repressive violence. As a consequence of neglecting this evidential concordance between “persecutor” and “persecuted,” revisionist minimalism cannot but present a portrait of Christian self-understanding and agency that is woefully lacking in social-psychological awareness and plausibility. For if, as minimalists speculatively propose, the majority of Christians were only tenuously committed to their membership, or so obligingly accepting of the metaphysical views of their pagan contemporaries—notwithstanding the altogether different eschatology imbibed during years of doctrinal instruction as catechumens (Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 17-20)—why, one wonders, would such non-committal and

open-minded people risk converting to a stigmatized cult movement that carried even the slightest possibilities of dispossession, torture, and execution?

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After an intense opening phase to the persecution, enforcement began to slacken during its second year of operation, as a beleaguered Roman state turned with urgency to the escalating military threats that would presently claim the emperor's life. Discretionary local amnesties appear to have been granted, with significant numbers of imprisoned confessors gaining unexpected release. Scheduled trials and repeat arrests continued sporadically, but the evident downturn in policing vigilance encouraged many exiles and fugitives to venture their returns. Resurfacing clerics, reclaiming a sometimes contested authority, set about the task of rebuilding shattered congregations and initiated plans for the reconvening of regional councils to address the manifold crisis.

According to the covenantal terms of the Christian salvation promise, the miraculous cleansing and spiritual empowerment of the baptismal "washing of rebirth" required continued preservation for its salvific efficacy; any return to "sin's dominion" risked the loss of what had been divinely gifted.²⁷ Lesser

27. "How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" (Romans 6.2). "Whosoever is born of God does not commit sin" (1 John 3.8-10). "For if we go on sinning willfully after having received knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains any sacrifice offering for our sins, but only a terrifying prospect of judgment and raging fire" (Hebrews 10.26-31). There are also nearly two dozen New Testament "Vice Lists" that comprise an extensive cataloguing of failings, the more serious of which—avarice, idolatry, fornication, murder, fraud—are explicitly stated to risk forfeiture of one's "inheritance in the kingdom of God" (e.g., 1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Ephesians 5.3-5). Such stringent stipulations—articulated originally within the context of prophesied expectations of imminent eschatological deliverance—proved increasingly difficult to sustain as Christians found their earthly "sojourn" lengthening. To restore hope and forestall defections from those beset by doubt and despair, a remedial pardon for sins committed after baptism would be needed. That reform was first communicated in an influential apocalyptic text, *The Shepherd of Hermas* (c.95-120), which announced a divinely-granted "last chance" remission for backsliding Christians (Mandate 4.3). No future sins could be forgiven, and heartfelt contrition must commence immediately, in the brief time remaining before Christ's return. A few generalizing passages might seem to suggest a plenary atonement, but the Black Mountain allegory expressly excludes "apostates, blasphemers of the Lord, and betrayers of God's servants," offenses for which "there is no repentance, but only death" (Similitude 9.19.1). Over ensuing decades, this emergency "grace period" arrangement would be superseded by a clerically-administered sacrament that provided restorative cleansing for believers who had failed to keep their baptismal seal intact. Limited to single-use accessibility, this "second repentance" (*paenitentia secunda*, μετάνοια δευτέρα) required demonstrable evidence of remorse, as manifested by open confession, tearful lamentations, sackcloth and ashes, fasting, almsgiving, and prayer (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 2.13,

failings of character or inter-personal conduct were atonable through acts of charity, prayer, and fasting, but the restorative adequacy of these measures did not extend to iniquities deemed offensive against God. In the Christian moral economy, no transgression carried greater opprobrium, or more lethal consequences, than apostasy. To deny Christ, in whatever circumstance or manner, was to reaffirm Satan; and by so doing the traitorous blasphemer forfeited membership in the community of God's elect, and therewith all prospects for salvation in the heavenly life to come.²⁸

The gradual advance of Christianity over its first two centuries appears to have been but lightly impacted by disciplinary expulsions and incidental cases of voluntary exodus. The Decian calamity, however, was no localized problem involving a few wayward or discontented individuals, but a coercively induced mass apostasy that ravaged and split entire congregations across the empire. Confronted by idolatrous betrayals on a scale that called into question the

c.200; Tertullian, *On Penitence* 7-10, c.204). Clerical discretion and differences in local custom will have influenced the implementation of the new sacrament—as indicated, for example, by the reported disagreement over chastity between the laxist Dionysius of Corinth and the rigorist Pinytos of Knossos, c.170 (Eusebius, *HE* 4.23). It is unlikely graver sins were conventionally pardoned at this time, however, for the penitential crises to come would erupt precisely over that issue.

28. There were self-identified Christians—typically styled Gnostics—who rejected the necessity of confessing Christ publicly and its corresponding obligation to martyrdom. In the *Testimony of Truth* (c.190), those professing that a martyr's death brings "perfection" and "assured salvation" are derided for their ignorance in "not knowing where they are going nor who Christ is," and for the blasphemy of believing "the Father desires human sacrifices" (31.22-34.10; in Tertullian's less reserved language: the heretics "reproach us with having a murderer for our God," *Scorpiace* 7.1, c.212). In the *Gnostic Apocalypse of Peter* (c.180), a docetic Christology underpins criticism of those professing to be God's appointed "bishops" and "deacons," but who in actuality are "messengers of evil" who "oppress their brothers" by encouraging them to embrace sacrificial deaths in vain belief that "salvation comes through this" (77.25-80.20). Dissenting views on confession and martyrdom also find combative mention in mainstream rebuttals. Irenaeus, extolling the loving readiness of the Church to send a "multitude of martyrs" on to the Father, charges Gnostic heretics with perversely rejecting the necessity of bearing witness and of pouring contempt on those slain for confessing Christ (*Adversus haereses* 4.33.9; 3.18.5, c.180). Clement of Alexandria categorically dismisses all objections to confession and martyrdom as "sophisms of cowardice" that betoken "an impious and cowardly love of life." Even believers whose conduct falls short of the holy requirements will redeem their salvation, he insists, by "not denying Him when being tortured to death" (*Stromata* 4.4, δειλίας σοφίσματα; 4.9). According to Origen, the Elkesaite sectarians likewise regarded public confession of Christ a matter of indifference, and urged those of sound mind to "deny with the mouth, but not in their heart" whenever threatened (Eusebius, *HE* 6.38.1). Orthodox opposition to dissembling, however, did not grant license to "rushing after death" through militant provocations; persecutions were to be faithfully endured, not recklessly courted (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 4.4,10).

organizational viability of the Christian movement and the credibility of its core teachings, Church leaders found their options fatefully polarized. Should traditional norms and disciplinary practices be upheld, in strict conformity with God's enduringly revealed word? Or should exigencies of the moment take precedence, in recognition that the redemptive mission of the Church permits tactical adjustments in the escalating cosmic struggle?

Instances of clerical misconduct and divisions within the lay ranks posed additional complications. Steadfast confessors could be found everywhere who had endured incarceration, horrendous tortures, and confiscatory banishments to affirm their devotion to Christ. A great many others ventured so-called *privatae confessiones* by refusing to appear before the superintending officials. As episcopal testimony concedes, however, the ranks of these *stantes*, the "standing faithful," were overwhelmed by the greater numbers of lapsed or "fallen" brethren who had denied their Saviour, whether by offering the abominable sacrifices outright or through faithlessly procuring the impious certificates attesting to compliance. As throngs of these *lapsi* now clamored for forgiveness and reinstatement, it became evident that if Christ's broken and demoralized militias were to regain their spirit for renewed battle, the deadly sin of apostasy would require a more compassionate understanding than either tradition or scripture appeared to allow.

If the magnitude of the Decian crisis was unprecedented, the pastoral implications raised familiar issues. Decades earlier, Christians had clashed over a related principle, occasioned by the fact that many recent converts and less zealous members were failing to abide by their baptismal purity commitments. Two reformist metropolitans, Agrippinus of Carthage (fl. 215) and Callistus of Rome (fl. 220), would address this demoralizing predicament by separately authorizing a reconfiguration of the established penitential distinction between sins pardonable and those irremissible.²⁹ These latter "sins unto death" (*peccata mortalia*, ἁμαρτία πρὸς θάνατον) were held to terminate the perpetrator's prospect for salvation,

29. A distinction drawn from scripture: on the "everlasting" and "unforgiveable sin" against the Holy Spirit (Mark 3.29, Matt. 12.31-32, Luke 12.10); the "sin unto death" that cannot be rescinded through intercession (1 John 5.16); the so-called Apostolic Decree, mandating abstention from idolatry, fornication, and murder (Acts 15.22-29). Influential precedents: "if a man sins against God, who can intercede for him?" (1 Samuel 2:25); "He that sacrifices unto the gods ... shall be utterly destroyed" (Exodus 20.22). Disputes and divisions over these and related matters—gradations of sin, rules for expulsion, the extent of priestly powers of absolution, recidivism problems—were inevitable, the sacred texts providing no integral, unified penitential program, but only scattered and reiterated appeals to both sinlessness and repentance, divine mercy and righteous punishment. Polemical exchanges between disciplinary moderates and hardliners will accordingly oscillate within the confines of selective exegesis. For key texts and commentary, Oscar Watkins, *A History of Penance, Vol. I* (New York: Longmans Green & Co., 1920). See also Jeffrey Siker, *Jesus, Sin, and Perfection in Early Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), especially Chapter 3, "A Taxonomy of Sin."

their soul-damning commission provoking an aggrieved departure of the indwelling Holy Spirit that had been gifted during baptism. Though fornication and adultery had long ranked alongside apostasy and murder in the *peccata mortalia* category, Agrippinus and Callistus now ruled that sacerdotal absolution could be extended to those carnal offenses, conditional upon suitable displays of repentance and atonement. Moderates everywhere embraced the new policy, but traditionalists either refused or resisted its implementation—even to the point of an open split in the Roman church, where conservative elements were led into schism by the learned presbyter Hippolytus (c.170-235), who denounced his laxist rival Callistus as a corrupting abettor of sins against Christ.³⁰

In shifting the focus from licentious desire to issues of idolatry and apostasy, the empire-wide persecution launched by Decius struck at the very core of Christian identity. For here the Redeemer had spoken not in parables, but in categorical speech: “Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before my Father in heaven; whosoever shall deny Me, him will I also deny” (Matt. 10.32-3). Indeed, the parallel scripture in Luke expressly links the obligation of “bearing witness to Christ” to trials of persecution, whether held in the “synagogues” or before “the rulers and authorities” (12.8-11). In the wake of the mass apostasy brought on by the Decian “oath & sacrifice” edict, the ecclesiological quandary permitted no evasion. Would the Church continue to self-identify as a community whose sanctified members “stand firm” against the Satanic foe, ever

30. Hippolytus reports Callistus trawled the scriptures for proof-texts and images he could adapt to justify his nefarious reforms. Shrewd reinterpretations of the Parable of the Tares (Matt. 13:24-30, 37-43) and the symbol of Noah’s Ark proved particularly influential. Against the Lord’s own explanation—that the “field” represents the world, Christ’s “wheat” shall be gathered come Judgement Day, and Satan’s “tares” cast into a fiery furnace—Callistus ingeniously takes the field to symbolize the Church, wherein “the tares grow alongside the wheat” till world’s end. A similar “inclusionary” exegesis is offered for the Ark, traditionally taken as an emblem of the Church as a “vessel of salvation” for those “sealed” safely inside by the purifying waters of baptism (1 Peter 3.20-22; Tertullian, *On Baptism* 8.3-5). Callistus emphasizes instead the Ark’s conveyance of all manner of animals “clean and unclean,” a signification, he insists, of the Church’s obligation to provide shelter for those “pure and impure” alike. The popular appeal of these indulgent accommodations is bitterly conceded by Hippolytus himself, who bemoans the multiplication of Callistus’ deluded followers, as “crowds stream into his *didaskaleion* ... gathering in throngs for the sake of pleasures Christ did not permit” (*Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 9.12.20-24, c.230). Tertullian, giving vent to rigorist concerns in the African churches, likewise condemns the new reconciling measures as an assault on chastity and purity—decrees “fit for posting on the doors of brothels”—and ridicules the inconsistency of granting absolution to adulterers and fornicators while continuing to uphold the scriptural ban on murderers and idolaters (*De pudicitia* 1.6; 5.10-15; 12.11; 19.25, c.218). Surveying the scene from Egypt and Palestine, Origen voices similar apprehension over rampant penitential leniency and the arrogation of priestly powers not countenanced by scripture, even to the point of remitting “sins unto death” (*De oratione* 28.9-10, c.234).

faithful to their baptismal pledge? Or did the widening crisis now necessitate replenishment of Christ's ravaged army, through the demoralizing and polluting readmission of known apostates?

The action-sequence that would propel the course of this transformative episode can be reconstructed from the pastoral pamphleteering and epistolary correspondence that survives, much of it conveying information of evocatively textured specificity.³¹ Explanatory comprehension of the unfolding dynamic must be keyed to its developing phases:

- (1) initial shock, collapse, and disorientation, as the Decian edict induces widespread apostasy and disrupts effective governance in the churches through targeted arrests and ensuing clerical flight;
- (2) crisis management, as Church leaders begin the process of negotiating policy responses to address the many-sided problems of shattered communities and ministerial misconduct;
- (3) the crystallization of factional alignments—laxist, moderate, rigorist—that will contend openly for control over Christian identity and ecclesiastical authority; and
- (4) the outbreak of full schismatic rupture, pitting puritan traditionalists against a consolidating majority increasingly inclined towards disciplinary clemency and a wider deployment of sacramental means of group preservation.

The tension-filled passage from the onset of persecution to the eruption of schism was driven by two overriding concerns: an *organizational imperative* of restoring to communion the majorities that had apostatized; and a *discursive requirement* of appearing to do so within the legitimizing bounds set by tradition and scripture. Difficulties arose from the start. Large numbers of those who had procured fraudulent certificates of sacrifice, the so-called *libellatici*, pressed for immediate readmission, citing in mitigation their adroit avoidance of the pollutions of idolatry. Imprisoned confessors, in their exalted status as martyrs-to-be, were soon utilizing their anticipated intercessory powers with God to grant *libelli pacis* to those making appeal, all but forcing the bishops to offer merciful pardons to the lapsed. In several notorious instances, letters of indulgence were extended to

31. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* books VI and VII, surveys the Decian and Valerian persecutions and reproduces key texts from the period, including correspondence of the influential Dionysius, bishop of Alexandria. The voluminous writings of Cyprian of Carthage provide a fascinating bedrock of alert observation and interested polemic. In addition to his major treatises on the crisis, *De lapsis* and *De ecclesiae catholicae unitate*, a collection of 82 letters consisting of “real time” engagements survives, the majority either written by or to Cyprian during his time of concealment. The entire corpus receives luminously detailed exegesis in Graeme Clarke’s indispensable four-volume set of annotated translations, *The Letters of St. Cyprian* (New York: Newman Press, 1984-89). A few *Acta Martyrum* and several treatises authored by the “anti-pope” Novatian convey invaluable supplemental information.

sacrificati who had openly apostatized. As panic and disorder spread, various confessor groups began issuing blanket reconciliations for all those expressing remorse, while clerics who had remained at their stations—either inclining towards leniency themselves or yielding to popular pressures—responded by readmitting to communion all who had fallen.³² Traditionalists will straightaway decry the “false mercies” of these deceptive practices, which not only leave the “wounds of the dying” untreated, but expose God’s faithful to the “lethal contagion” of those who had but recently served at the Devil’s altars, their contaminating breath still reeking of “the death-bearing foods of idols.”³³

From their places of concealment, the preeminent bishops attempted to reassert disciplinary controls through envoys and letters; compromised by their own unseemly retreat from the fray, their counsels met mixed reception. Illustrative is the predicament Dionysius of Alexandria confronted, as he recounts in an imploring missive to his colleague, Fabius of Antioch. Across all Egypt, he laments, churches have been “torn asunder” by imprisonments, banishments, and martyrdoms for the heroic few, widespread flight and apostasies from the fainthearted many. The fugitive metropolitan proceeds to the attending scandal. In his absence, and without authority, his own confessor-martyrs are pushing through laxist accommodations for the *sacrificati*, restoring them as penitents eligible to share in congregational feasting and prayers. Wary of Fabius’ traditionalist leanings, Dionysius registers his cautious approval by invoking Ezekiel 18.23, on God’s preference for the repentance rather than the deaths of

32. Cyprian, *Ep.* 15.4: entire households pardoned; *Ep.* 20.2: “no distinctions drawn, no examinations of cases ... thousands of *libelli pacis* issued daily”; *Ep.* 27.1-3: raucous lapsi demanding full restoration, confessors bestowing great numbers of reconciling certificates; *De lapsis* 16: reckless confessors “pardoning sins at random” (*remittendis passim*). Though the practice of seeking intercession from confessor-martyrs was of longstanding, bishops strove to subordinate its discretionary pliancy to episcopal oversight and ratification. Opposition to known abuses was voiced most forcefully by hardliners such as Tertullian, who complains adulterers and fornicators flock to the prisons and mines to receive absolution for sins only God can remit. What next, he queries, martyrs granting pardons to murderers, idolaters, apostates? (*De pudicitia* 22.1-3, 11-15). He was apparently unaware, or preferred not to notice, that Christians who had lapsed during the persecutions in Gaul under Marcus Aurelius had already received reconciliation from the confessor-martyrs, who in compassionate love for their fallen brethren “released all and bound none” (ἐλευον ἅπαντας, ἐδέσμευον δὲ οὐδένα, Eusebius, *HE* 5.2.5-8).

33. Cyprian, *De lapsis* 15: *contagia funesta, mortiferos idolorum cibos*; 14-17 *passim*, a blistering anti-laxist indictment: “Contrary to the rigor of the Gospel, contrary to the law of the Lord and God ... a reckless communion has been allowed, an empty and false peace that is dangerous to those granting it and of no benefit to those receiving it” (15.2); “Let no one be deceived ... Only the Lord can grant mercy. Sins committed against Him can be pardoned by Him alone who bore our sins and who suffered for us, whom God delivered up for our sins” (*Nemo se fallat, nemo se decipiat. Solus Dominus misereri potest ...*, 17.1).

sinners.³⁴ Cyprian will encounter yet greater challenges in the African churches, where localized alliances between imprisoned confessors and laxist clerics has resulted in a collapse of all penitential order and the polluting readmission of apostates to the sacrosanct table of the Eucharist.³⁵ In Rome the situation appeared less fractious, as the incarcerated confessors stood united with the managing presbyters against any premature restoration of the lapsed. Even here, however, paralyzing uncertainties prevented the election of a bishop to succeed the martyred Fabian, leaving all policy determinations unsettled (*Ep.* 8.1).

Miasmic apprehensions ran high throughout the ancient Mediterranean world, and markedly so among Christians, for whom any contact with the demonically-infested culture of polytheism would call forth a panic of apotropaic utterances, gestures and execrations to ward off the polluting dangers.³⁶ In an atmosphere charged with such baleful dread, any proposal to readmit idolatrous apostates into communion with the faithful would provoke visceral revulsion, welling up from assiduously conditioned habits of mind and body. The advocates of clemency, to achieve their aims, would not only need to relocate the most heinous of the *aeterna peccata* within the ambit of sacerdotal powers of reconciliation, but do so on the basis of justifications responsive to the ingrained pollution anxieties of their traumatized congregations.

During the intense opening phase of the persecution, moderates and traditionalists stood united against the conduct of laxist confessors and clerics, who were readmitting the lapsed to communion without regard to scripture or proper episcopal oversight. To contain these contaminating breaches, the Carthaginian and Roman sees issued interim rulings that sought to stabilize practices on the following principles: (i) *sacrificati* and *libellatici* are alike guilty of apostasy, the former having denied Christ openly, the latter having done so inwardly; (ii) apostasy, as a “sin against God,” lay beyond priestly powers of absolution; (iii) penance is to be enjoined on the fallen in the hope heartfelt contrition might revive their zeal for a battle still raging or, failing that, induce *divina misericordia* in the Judgement to come; (iv) demonstrated repentance will merit Eucharistic consolation for those whose death is imminent; and (v)

34. Quoted in Eusebius, *HE* 6.42.5; similar letters on penitential policy, specifying “degrees of failure” among the lapsed, τάξεις παραπτώματων, were sent to bishops in Upper Egypt, Laodicea, Armenia, and elsewhere, *HE* 6.46.

35. *Epp.* 15.1-2,4; 16.3; 17.2; 18.1-2; 19.2.3; 20.2.

36. Hippolytus, *Apostolic Tradition* 37 (c.215): making the sign of the cross as “a shield against the Devil”; warding off the Adversary by spitting and insufflation; also Tertullian, *Scorpiace* 1.3 (c.212): “tracing the sign and adjuring and treading the beast underfoot”; *On Idolatry* 11.7 (c.212): spitting upon and blowing out smoldering altars. The proclivity persisted: the “apostate” emperor Julian notes that the “impious Galileans” routinely “hiss at demons and mark their foreheads with the cross,” *Epistle* 19 (c.362).

martyrdom, the all-cleansing “baptism of blood,” remains available for those eager to reclaim their lost salvation.³⁷

These provisional guidelines, pragmatically attuned to the urgency of the crisis and the demands of tradition, proved unworkable. The sheer magnitude of the disaster was such that Church leaders who adopted a principled stance against leniency found themselves outflanked by laxist clerics and the apostate majorities who were rallying behind claims that God’s privileged advocates—the confessor-martyrs—had already sanctified their full restoration. In the regional synods that resumed convening over the spring and summer of 251, these social realities would decisively constrain the conciliar discussions that ensued and the accommodative resolutions that prevailed.

The African churches were first to hold congress, a reduced but adequate number of clerics managing to assemble in Carthage in late April. After much charged debate over the competing claims of scripture, custom, and reason, an effective majority coalesced around the legalistic principle that the varying grades and circumstances of apostasy required corresponding penitential distinctions. Those who had lapsed through the ruse of bogus certificates were adjudged to have committed a lesser offense. Censurable for lack of faith, their avowed intention—to avoid fatal ingestion of demonic offerings—rendered their misconduct pardonable. On condition the “pollution of conscience” thereby incurred had since been cleansed by repentant gestures of humbling affliction, these *libellatici* were pronounced eligible for immediate restoration. As for those who had offered the accursed sacrifices, theirs was a defilement of both flesh and spirit; terms of lifelong penance were deemed necessary to yield the required *satisfactio*. Even here, however, Church leaders acknowledged many of the fallen had succumbed only after excruciating rounds of torture, as methodically inflicted through the barbarous Roman pentad of *flagella*, *fustes*, *equuleus*, *ungula*, and *flamma*.³⁸ Professed empathies would inform policy choices in due course, but the assembled bishops were as yet unwilling to move beyond assurances that all death-bed reconciliations of the penitent would be supported by intercessory blessings for the heavenly trials to come.³⁹

37. Cyprian, *Epp.* 18.1-2; 19.2.1; 20.2-3; 27.4; Roman clergy, *Epp.* 8.2.3, 3.1; 30.3.1-2, 6.2, 8.1; 36.3.3. In Egypt, Dionysius was already following a more committed laxist course, to the point of granting a full “blotting out of the sin” through bestowal of the Viaticum (in Eusebius, *HE* 6.44: τῆς ἁμαρτίας ἐξαλειφθείσης).

38. *De lapsis* 13: a gruesome account of confessors contending bravely against lash, cudgels, rack, claw, and flame; Roman presbyters reporting on bodies “mangled, racked, and butchered” by fiendishly cruel instruments of torture (*extorto et excruciato et excarnificato*, *Ep.* 31.3). See also Eusebius’ account of the horrific torments suffered by Origen during his incarceration in Caesarea Maritima, *HE* 6.39.5.

39. All circumspectly conveyed by Cyprian in *Ep.* 55, especially 6.1-2; 13; 14.2: *conscientiam pollutam*; 15; 17.3; 29.

In their cautious endorsement of leniency within restraints, these synodal rulings disclose the shifting social pressures in play. It is of telling significance that Cyprian, his immense authority as metropolitan notwithstanding, failed to garner support for the rigorist compact he had negotiated earlier with the presbyters of Rome: *libellatici* and *sacrificati* alike guilty of apostasy, and no “loosing” by God’s earthly servants is permissible for this most transgressive of mortal sins. The extent to which Cyprian affirmed those traditionalist positions during conclave is unrecoverable from the summary reports, but the new direction he charted in its aftermath is unmistakable. Having yielded to the tide of conciliatory opinion, the Carthaginian bishop will henceforth extol the new consensus for its “healthy moderation” and commit his office unreservedly to the sacred trust of “restoring the many to salvation.”⁴⁰

As the African synod drew to a close, its hard-won achievements were abruptly superseded by news the Roman church was verging on schism, precipitated by a papal succession crisis. The consecration of Cornelius, a hitherto unmentioned presbyter, provoked the immediate counter-election of Novatian, the gifted presbyter-theologian who had been exercising ecclesiastical guidance in the year since pope Fabian’s early martyrdom. Novatian’s envoys, pressing for an open investigation, laid damning charges that the elevation of Cornelius was both procedurally fraudulent and sacrilegious, owing to his earlier procurement of a certificate of sacrifice. Two Italian bishops who had participated in Cornelius’ divisive ordination arrived shortly thereafter, denouncing Novatian as a maniacal usurper (*Epp.* 44.1-2; 45.1.2). With the possibility that a *libellaticus* had been raised to the throne of Peter, presumably at the behest of importuning *lapsi*, the situation was manifestly dire. For if the counter-election signified nothing more than an act of personal aggrandizement, as Cornelius’ representatives alleged, why were the Roman confessors—presbyters and deacons among them—so enthusiastic and active in their support of Novatian?

Situated within the ongoing crisis of mass apostasy, the Roman succession dispute quickly erupted into a wider struggle pitting traditionalists against reformers throughout the extended network of Christian churches. Letters of justification were dispatched by the rival popes, setting off an intense round of propagandistic charges and ideological positioning. Opinion would split along

40. *Ep.* 55.6.1, 11.3: *salubri moderatione; restituta multorum salus*. Cyprian acknowledges the new policy of reconciliation encountered vociferous resistance even within his own congregation, as fierce objections were raised against restoring anyone “contaminated” by sacrifices and adulteries. It was less by persuasion, he attests, than through extortion that he secured reinstatements for such grievous offenders (*Ep.* 59.15.3). More telling still is Cyprian’s remarkable admission that his own undue leniency has given “just cause” for the anxieties of his flock: “I remit everything, and there is much I overlook in my zeal and pledge to gather together our fraternity. Even sins committed against God I do not investigate in the full judgement of religion. In remitting more sins than I ought, I myself come near to sinning” (16.2: *Remitto omnia ...*).

existing fault-lines, with laxist and rigorist factions vying for the moderates whose backing typically decided local balances of power. Excommunicated by an Italian synod hastily convened by Cornelius later that summer, Novatian and his partisans respond by launching a full-scale campaign to rally support for the rigorist cause. Standing forth as “defenders of ecclesiastical doctrine” and “vindicators of the Gospel,” the Novatianists—working through teams of emissaries and written communications—quickly establish ties of solidarity with like-minded clerics and laity across the empire. To ensure the efficacy of sacramental ministrations, congregations being led by bishops who had failed to stand faithfully during the Decian persecution would receive replacements, consecrated by Novatian himself.⁴¹

Out of these coordinated actions, a self-proclaimed “Holy Church of the Pure” will attain rapid institutional consolidation, its ranks filled by all the many traditionalists who could find no warrant—scriptural or customary—for continued communion with known idolaters and apostates. By elevating the cause of “purity” in their very title, the Καθαροὶ resoundingly announce their principled opposition to the laxist progression underway within the “Universal” Catholic Church, whose leaders they assail as abettors of the most sacrilegious sins against God. Novatian’s rallying call to revive and defend the *ecclesia pura* Christ and His Apostles had mandated—a Church free from the contaminating presence of fornicators, adulterers, and apostates—struck a deeply resonant chord.⁴²

41. Cyprian’s report on the crisis betrays unmistakeable alarm beneath the outrage: “Against the unity of the Catholic Church, he [Novatian] is attempting to fashion a *humanam Ecclesiam*, and is sending forth throughout numerous cities his own *novos Apostolos*, establishing foundations for arrangements of his own devising. And notwithstanding that in each of the cities and through all the provinces there are bishops already ordained, venerable in age, sound in faith, tested in trial, and proscribed in persecution, he yet dares to create *pseudo-episcopi* above these men. As if he could straddle the entire globe with his new, perverse venture, or tear asunder the connecting bonds of the Church’s body, simply by sowing his seeds of discord, not knowing that schismatics are always fervid at the outset, but are unable to add to what they have unlawfully begun,” *Ep.* 55.24.1-3. For a glimpse into the “epistolary war,” see Cornelius’ missive to Cyprian, relating that numerous letters—filled with Novatian’s “calumnies and slanders”—have been sent everywhere, sparking “divisions and disturbances in nearly all the churches,” *Ep.* 49.1.4. It is in Cornelius’ letter to Fabius of Antioch that Novatian is ridiculed for posing as a defender of Church doctrine and vindicator of the true teachings of the Gospel: ὁ τῆς ἐκκλησιαστικῆς ἐπιστήμης ὑπερασπιστής; ὁ ἐκδικητὴς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου (quoted in Eusebius, *HE* 6.43.8,11).

42. The Katharoi moved quickly to rescind earlier concessions that had extended sacerdotal powers of remission to the sins of adultery and fornication. In *De bono pudicitiae*, Novatian reaffirms that those guilty of “vices of the flesh” forfeit their heavenly inheritance, as these are among the unpardonable sins that “bring death to the soul” (*vitia carnis*, 6.4-6; *animam interficiat*, 14.1, c.253). For Novatian’s understanding of the true Church as a holy

Cyprian's pragmatic embrace of "measured leniency" at the African synod left him little choice but to endorse Cornelius. His own episcopacy still under siege by laxist partisans, any continuing alliance with disciplinary hardliners would jeopardize the emerging Catholic consensus.⁴³ The party of moderation courted grave risks, however, in overturning traditional stipulations regarding the mandatory and permanent excommunication of apostates. By appearing to place expediency above sacred principle, the reformers exposed themselves to charges of abusing the scriptural requirement for purity within the Church, and of corrupting Christ's "virginal bride" through the polluting readmission of those who had sacrilegiously renounced their Saviour. And did these scandalous indulgences not strip from heroic martyrs and confessors the full measure of their glory, and make open mockery of the sacred obligation to bear witness?

Pressed on those very points by one of his own African bishops—absent, like many others, from the recent synod—Cyprian responds with a lengthy, carefully guarded circular. He acknowledges having opposed the reconciliation of apostates during the persecution, but insists his prior actions do not condemn his apparent reversal now. As metropolitan, his paramount responsibility lay with exhorting the fallen to redeem their lost salvation, an outcome rendered certain only through bearing witness and martyrdom. But now, with Decius slain and persecution abating, he can openly endorse the compassionate views of his colleagues, that terms for clemency should be made less stringent. And if, as his critics charge, he presently shows greater forbearance than tradition warrants, he does so for the loving purpose of "healing the wounds" of the fallen, expressly rationalizing this turn to leniency as a "necessary submission to the urgencies of the times" (*necessitati temporum succubuisse*, *Ep.* 55.7.2). As for those cruel renegades who bar the door of repentance, is it not manifest they have enrolled in the Devil's camp, the *castra diaboli*, and become complicit thereby in the callous murder of their abandoned brethren? In refusing to distinguish between those who sacrificed and those who merely obtained certificates, the pitiless Novatian

body, *incompactam et inviolatam*, perpetually sustained and guided by a Holy Spirit that "brings about our sanctification" and "trains our bodies towards immortality," see *De trinitate* 29.16-17: *sanctitatis effector ... corpora nostra ad immortalitatem proficere* (c.256).

43. A full year after accepting a report clearing Cornelius of the charge of having procured a certificate (*Ep.* 55.10.2: *nulla illum libelli*), Cyprian found himself greatly troubled by news Cornelius had entered discussions with laxist bishops newly arrived from Africa, keen on winning Roman support (*Ep.* 59.2,14). He censures Cornelius for minimizing their grave "offenses against God" and warns that the pope's vacillating conduct offers yet greater scope for Novatian's abusive attacks (13.4;18.1). The difficulty in Cyprian's *via media* policy is disclosed by the uncomfortable fact that in rebuking Cornelius, he is reliant upon rigorist proof-texts such as Exodus 22.20 (idolaters shall not live) and Matthew 10.33 (Christ denies those who deny Him), as well as traditionalist "contagion" alarms that the readmission of heinous sinners risks contaminating "the entire flock with the infection of their clinging evil" (12.2,15.2).

reveals himself a devotee not of Christ and the Gospel, but of the Stoics and their perverse “all sins are equal” paradox (*omnia peccata paria esse*, 55.16.1). Hardened in *inclementia* and *acerbia*, this raving schismatic fails to perceive that the lapsed, however grievous their wounds, can be “revived unto faith” through the purgative cures of penitence (55.17.1).⁴⁴ In the battle against Satan, the Church must deploy her restorative powers of absolution to maximal extent: “No one,” Cyprian roundly affirms, “is to be denied the fruits of penance and the hope of reconciliation.” As the Church stands in appointed service of the Lord’s redemptive compassion, it follows that “reconciliation may be granted through His priests, bestowable to all who mournfully implore and call upon His mercy.”⁴⁵

With this new discourse of moderation, Catholic pastoral reasoning has broken through the limiting encumbrances of tradition and scripture, clearing a path for future disciplinary adjustments as circumstances might demand. In the spring of 253, the African synod will lift its sentence of lifelong penance for the *sacrificati* and grant amnesty to all. Justifying this abrupt reversal, Cyprian alludes to having received “divine communications” warning of renewed persecution. For the apocalyptic contest fast approaching, the attending bishops were agreed that every willing soldier among the lapsed should be restored to communion, to ensure adequate muster for the Lord’s harried army. Against the traditional view that the redeeming glories of martyrdom offer sufficient inspiration for those fallen from grace—an injunction he himself had repeatedly employed—Cyprian now counters by vesting the potency for heroic accomplishment in the ecclesiastical *sacramentum* itself, rather than in the hearts of believers. “One cannot be fit for martyrdom,” he declares, “if the Church has not furnished the armament for

44. Only months prior, when still in concord with Novatian, Cyprian had written uncompromisingly that the *sacrificati* had immolated themselves upon Satan’s altars, “cremating their faith to ash in the fatal fires,” *De lapsis* 8. In another turnabout, Cyprian now strives to allay the “contamination anxieties” his own earlier rhetoric had incited, quoting scriptural affirmations that the sins of the guilty do not pass to the innocent (*Ep.* 55.27, citing Ezek.12 and Deut.24). He will thereafter limit the hazards of contagion to clerical offenders, and to schismatics and heretics above all (*Epp.* 65.3.2; 67.2-3; 69.9.2).

45. *Ep.* 55.27.3: *Quod legentes scilicet et tenentes neminem putamus a fructu satisfactionis et spe pacis arcendum; 29.1: Quod si invenimus a poenitentia agenda neminem debere prohiberi, et deprecantibus atque exorantibus Domini misericordiam, secundum quod ille misericors et pius est, per sacerdotes ejus pacem posse concedi, admittendus est plangentium gemitus, et poenitentiae fructus dolentibus non negandus.* Here, too, Cyprian abandons a position formerly affirmed categorically in his catechismal treatise: “There can be no remission in the Church for one who has sinned against God” (*Non posse in ecclesia remitti ei qui in deum deliquerit, Testimonies* 3.28, c.249). In support of this traditionalist principle, Cyprian references several of the scriptural passages the Katharoi would subsequently invoke when condemning the new Catholic practice of granting absolution to those repenting of mortal sins: Matt.12.30-32; Mark 3.28-29; and 1 Sam. 2.25. Cynical motives ought not be assumed: casuistry commonly lies at the crossroads of principle and predicament.

battle; that mind will falter which has not been roused and set afire by reception of the Eucharist.”⁴⁶

In Rome, Cornelius and his successor Lucius will oversee similarly accommodative reforms for the Italian churches (*Ep.* 68.5), following the same laxist course Dionysius had been charting for Egypt. By summer’s end in 253, the Catholic policy of clemency for the penitent *lapsi* will secure widespread confirmation in the Eastern churches, when a grand synod convening in Antioch rules against what are brazenly styled the “aberrant innovations” of Novatian!⁴⁷ Propelled by the concussive shocks of persecution and schism, a new trajectory for Christianity was now underway.

To be continued in Part II.

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46. Synodal letter to Cornelius, *Ep.* 57.4.2: *esse non potest ad martyrium, qui ab Ecclesia non armatur ad praelium: et mens deficit, quam non recepta Eucharistia erigit et accendit*.

47. Dionysius’ account is selectively preserved in Eusebius, *HE* 7.4. But the text discloses Novatian had attracted powerful supporters in the East, not least Fabius of Antioch. It was only following the deaths of several traditionalist leaders—and the passage of their sees into more moderate hands—that the tide turned decisively against the alleged “νεωτεροποιία” of the Katharoi. For the pivotal episcopal turnovers, compare the earlier and later lists reported at *HE* 6.46 and 7.5, where Dionysius also claims, rather optimistically, that the churches of Cilicia, Syria, Arabia, Mesopotamia, Pontus, Bithynia, and elsewhere, “formerly split asunder,” have all now joyfully returned to “concord and brotherly love” (ἀγαλλιῶνται πάντες πανταχοῦ τῇ ὁμονοίᾳ καὶ φιλαδελφίᾳ).

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Decius & Valerian, Novatian & Cyprian: Persecution and Schism in the Making of a Catholic Christianity - Part II

*By Joseph M. Bryant**

In Part I of this study, the Decian Persecution and the crisis of mass apostasy it provoked within mainstream Christianity was identified as a “turning point” moment in the history of the ancient Hellenistic-Roman world. A negotiated decision by moderate and pragmatic bishops to overturn the established ban on the pardoning of apostates incited a major schismatic rupture, as disciplinary hardliners and traditionalists promptly formed an oppositional communion dedicated to full compliance with the purity requirements contained in scripture. Here, in Part II, we will show how Catholics and Katharoi were caught up in a “schismogenic” process of bilateral transformation, their identities adaptively refashioned over the course of intense polemical struggle that had the decisive effect of accelerating and deepening the Catholic embrace of penitential lenity. Thus fortified by a new pastoral-disciplinary regime that restored grievous sinners to sanctity and brought the prospects of eternal salvation within reach of those less capable of sustained zeal and holiness, the Church/Orthodox Church would experience significant membership growth in ensuing decades, setting the stage for the fateful compact with Empire that lay in its future.

PART II: TRAJECTORY

Schismogenesis and the Valerian Persecution

As discussed in Part I, the “hostile tempest” of the Decian persecution left demoralizing ruin in its wake. Churches everywhere were in crisis—and in mourning—over the failure of so many of the faithful to stand resolutely against the emperor’s subtly coercive edict, which had mandated officially monitored sacrifices to the gods, but also sworn, signed, and archived attestations of lifelong religious orthopraxy. The rebuilding process would necessarily prove divisive, for the obligation to “confess Christ” carried scriptural warrant, and the offense committed was the mortal sin of idolatry.

Following the rounds of synodal conclaves that ratified the contentious policy of extending penitential absolution to remorseful apostates, and the accompanying excommunications of Novatian and his hardline supporters who condemned the new measures as violations of tradition and scripture, the partitioning of the mainstream Church into moderate and rigorist factions

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proceeded apace across “all the provinces and cities” of the empire (Cyprian, *Epistle* 55.24.2).

As the separating communities maneuver for legitimacy and organizational effectiveness, each camp will assail its adversary on those points of disagreement that had precipitated the breach, a form of focalized disputation that would elevate those issues into the distinguishing identity-markers of the competing Catholic and Katharist Churches. This “schismogenic” dynamic—a recasting of group identities out of the contested sundering of an original unity—would follow a dialectical course Marshall Sahlins has aptly styled “deviation amplification,” whereby each side valorizes its own positions through intensifying deprecation of the practices affirmed by the other.¹

The majority faction, self-identifying as “the sacrosanct Catholic Church, a regal priesthood, a consecrated multitude, a people chosen for inheritance, the great Church, the Bride adorned for the Lord God,” will invoke divine mercy and charitable reconciliation as the overriding principles of pastoral care.² The

1. Gregory Bateson, “Culture Contact and Schismogenesis,” *Man* 35 (1935): 178-183, introduced the concept to account for the socio-cultural dynamics of intra-group differentiation and separation. Insightful applications by Marshall Sahlins, *Culture in Practice* (Cambridge: Zone Books, 2000) and *Apologies to Thucydides* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), emphasize the “polarizing inversion” that occurs as the issues in dispute are contrastively elaborated over an escalating cycle of critique and counter-critique. Each of the separating groups is thereby progressively reconstituted as a contravening “anti-type” of its rival, their emerging identities anchored on a series of correlated antagonisms. A “schismogenic” schism thus entails a bilateral transformation of the seceding constituencies, which are carried to new self-understandings and adaptive arrangements over the course of their conflict. By imparting a “dialectical drive” to historical process, schismogenesis can also accelerate the pace of social change by forcing a more rapid modification of beliefs and practices than would otherwise occur, owing to pressing needs of the contending factions to rally support and justify their respective stances in the dispute. With organizational rupture, the sharpening of differences and the crystallization of reworked identities attain aroused urgency, unhindered by the more tolerant accommodations that had sustained co-existence during prior unity. The Catholic-Katharist schism manifests the pattern to a striking degree.

2. *Didascalia Apostolorum* 9.2.26: *catholica sacrosancta ecclesia, regale sacerdotum, multitudo sancta, plebs adoptata, ecclesia magna, sponsa exornata domino Deo*. This ecclesiological handbook—a pseudepigraphical “Catholic Teaching” authored by the Twelve Apostles for purposes of “confirming the faithful” against heresies to come (23.6.12)—is a much-redacted compilation of Syrian origin, dating from the third-century. As penitential issues loom large in several chapters, the possibility of anti-Novatianist interpolations has been raised, by Harnack and Bardenhewer most notably. The issue remains unsettled, but hostile references to the unnamed “opponents of leniency” bear marked semblance to the cluster of negative descriptors commonly deployed against the Katharoi. Those refusing the reconciliation of penitents are similarly condemned as “brother-hating” (*odiunt fratres*), “hard of heart and without mercy” (*duro corde et sine misericordia*), and ever keen to “expel those who have sinned, as though no repentance remained for them” (*expellere eos qui*

minority traditionalists, affirming their membership in “the Pure Church of God,” “the Holy Church of God of the Novatians,” will insist upon the abiding purity of God’s elect and the irremissibility of the *peccata aeterna*.³ The “healthy moderation” and “gentle justice” affirmed in Catholic discourse is rescinded by Katharist demands for upholding the “severity of evangelical discipline” and “banishing the wicked” from the assembly of saints, the *sanctorum coetum*.

Denunciations and recriminations are correspondingly formulated in counterpoint. Catholics are scorned as “the flattering champions and indulgent patrons of vice,” irresponsibly “converting the censures of the heavenly Scriptures into advocacy for their own crimes.” The Katharoi are denounced for their “brother-hating and most inhumane opinion” and castigated as rabid proponents of an “ingenious and novel cruelty” that would “slay the wounded by removing their hope of salvation, by denying the Father’s mercy and rejecting their brother’s repentance.” Catholics are guilty of “irreligious laxity” and “mistaken compassion”; Katharoi incur damning reproach as “destroyers of charity” and “murderers of penance.” Catholics have profanely overturned the “ancient faith” and “evangelical discipline” through their corrupting reforms, and become thereby unprincipled “prevaricators of the Gospel.” The Katharoi, having fashioned an “illicit priesthood” and raised a “counterfeit altar,” are “deserters and fugitives” from the true Church, “renegades against the peace and unity of Christ.” By readmitting adulterers, fornicators, and even apostates to full communion at the Lord’s banquet, the Catholics bring shame and deadly

peccaverunt, tamquam non relinquatur illis penitentia), 6.2.14-15. More clearly targeted denunciations follow. The faithful are warned that those “coveting primacy” and who “dare to make schism” are re-enacting the sacrilege of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, whose rebellion against Moses incurred divine retribution and consignment to hell’s eternal fires. Those schismatics, too, had “gloried in righteousness” as “puritans and sticklers for holiness.” Professing their own “purity” and of “ministering to God more zealously,” theirs was in actuality an ungodly “ministry of transgression” (23.6.1-3). When those connotative recriminations are set alongside repeated counsel that bishops should “rebuke, chastise, and restore,” and judge with “gentleness and mercy” so that the weak might “redeem their salvation through repentance,” their “multitude of sins” notwithstanding (7.2.20-21; 6.2.12-15), the evidence is strongly suggestive of redactional responses to the Decian calamity and its schismatic aftershocks. Translations from the Syriac and Latin are by R. H. Connelly, *Didascalia Apostolorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929). For a learned attempt to identify and date the multiple strands comprising the text’s compositional history, see Alistair Stewart-Sykes’ annotated English translation, *The Didascalia apostolorum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009).

3. As proudly proclaimed on Novatianist funerary inscriptions: τῆς καθαρᾶς Θεοῦ ἐκκλησίας; τῆς ἀγείας καθαρᾶς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησείας; τῆς ἀγίας τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐκκλησίας τῶν Καθαρῶν; τῆς τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀγίας ἐκκλησίας τῶν Ναυατῶν, all conveniently presented in W. M. Calder, “The Epigraphy of the Anatolian Heresies,” chapter 5 in *Anatolian Studies Presented to Sir William Ramsay*, edited by W. Buckler and W. Calder (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1923), 83, 82, 76, 75.

contagion to the “virgin bride” of Christ. In callously refusing to extend the “healing medicines of penance” to their wounded brethren, the Katharoi are “rebels against the saving sacrifice of Christ” and duly marked for damnation as partisans of the “brother-hating heresy of Cain.”⁴

With both communities subscribing to the exclusivist principle of “one faith, one baptism,” the dispute over penitential standards quickly widened to encompass other ecclesiastical functions and capabilities. Stakes were raised dramatically when the contending factions—each self-identifying as the “true Church”—hastened towards a reciprocal “neutralization of the Spirit” by denying the efficacy of sacerdotal ministrations carried out by their competitor.

Upholding the traditionalist belief that one remains among God’s elect only through the continued indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, Novatian will rule that lapsed clerics are incapable of bestowing sacramental grace. The unholy restoration of apostates, moreover, spreads their sinful pestilence throughout the congregation, resulting in a comprehensive loss of the Spirit’s salvific presence; all oblations and penitential rites are rendered void thereby. Novatianist bishops were accordingly enjoined to adopt an “immunizing” policy when receiving disaffected or anxious Catholics into the Katharist fold, insuring their purity and salvation through the protective administration of a “second” but now genuinely holy baptism.

The Catholic leadership will assert its own sanctifying monopoly, denying to Novatianist clerics any capacity to possess or dispense the powers of the Spirit on the ground that schism is a “collective apostasy” from the true Church, the *Ecclesia Mater*. Cyprian’s rhetorically potent formula for the crystallizing Catholic consensus, *salus extra ecclesiam non est*, is functionally braced by the principle that the “priesthood of God” can be found only where the apostolic line of ordination remains unbroken.⁵ All ministrations by “schismatic” clerics are thus incapable

4. These phrases of principled avowal and reciprocating invective are drawn from the following texts. Cyprian: *salubri moderatione; mitis justitia* (Epp. 55.6; 54.3); Novatian: *severitatem evangelicae disciplinae; improbo foras expuit* (Ep. 30.4; *De trinitate* 29.19); Novatian: *vitiorum assertores blandi et indulgentes patroni ... censuram Scripturarum coelestium in advocationem criminum convertunt* (*De spectaculis* 1.3); Dionysius: τῇ μισαδέλφῳ καὶ ἀπανθρωποτάτῃ γνώμῃ (in Eusebius, *HE* 6.43.2); Anon.: *sed ingeniosa ac nova crudelitate sauciatum potius occideret, alimendo spem salutis, denegando misericordiam patris, respuendo poenitentiam fratris* (*Ad Novatianum* 1); Novatian: *profana facilitate, misericordiam falsam* (Ep. 30.3); Cyprian: *perditor charitatis, interfector poenitentiae* (Ep. 60.3); Novatian: *antiqua fides, disciplinae evangelicae; praevaricatores Evangelii* (Ep. 30.2, 4); Cyprian: *inlicita sacerdotia, falsa altaria; contra pacem adque unitatem Christi rebelles* (Ep. 69.1, 8), *desertoribus et profugis* (Ep. 51.1); Dionysius: ἰδοῦθαι καὶ θεορπεύειν τοῖς τῆς μετανοίας (*HE* 6.43.2); Cyprian: *adversus sacrificium Christi rebellis* (*De unitate* 17); Anon.: *Cainam haeresim* (*Ad Novatianum* 13).

5. “Outside the Church there is no salvation,” Ep. 73.21. Apostolic succession: the Church is founded upon an unbroken chain of ordained bishops, Ep. 33.1: *Ecclesia super episcopos constituitur, successionum episcoporum ordinatio*; Christ grants authority to the bishops who succeed His apostles through vicarious ordination, Ep. 66.4: *qui Apostolis*

of bestowing grace, for the powers they malignantly command are demonic, not divine, the master they serve is not Christ but Satan.⁶

These fractious disturbances within the Christian “polity” are unlikely to have escaped the notice of Roman officials, whose responsibilities for safeguarding the public order against subversive associations ranked high on the list of surveillance priorities.⁷ The Decian fallout will have drawn particularly close monitoring, given the immense logistical effort that had been made to break the offending

vicaria ordinatione succedunt. Firmilian of Cappadocia, on the power to forgive sins passing from the apostles to the ordained bishops who succeed them, *Ep.* 75.16: *episcopis qui eis ordinatione vicaria successerunt.*

6. Cyprian, *De unitate* 3: heresies and schisms are the Devil’s work: *Haereses invenit et schismata, quibus subverteret fidem, veritatem corrumpere, scinderet unitatem.* A sizeable number of Catholic bishops, chiefly in the eastern provinces and north Africa, will affirm the practice of “rebaptism” for all returning heretics and schismatics—some demanding exorcisms prior—but there was opposition. During the Roman papacy of Stephen (254–57), Catholic congregations everywhere were thrown into disarray, as the imperious pontiff insisted a penitential “laying on of hands” suffices for the reconciliation of those already baptized. Cyprian, Firmilian, Dionysius, and other leading bishops roundly condemn this dictate, which Stephen defiantly answers by threatening excommunication for any cleric who perversely forces upon believers a needless “secondary washing.” Cyprian, responding, will push the monopolizing logic of his ecclesiology to the full, decrying all baptisms “outside” the true Church as consisting of waters *adultera et profana*, regardless of whether the name of Christ is invoked (*Ep.* 73.1.2; 4.2). With Stephen’s passing, the tempest over rebaptism subsided, as extensive mediation efforts led by Dionysius reaffirmed the discretionary authority of local custom to settle both general policy and individual cases (Eusebius, *HE* 7.6–7,9). The controversy did, however, result in a clearer articulation and wider endorsement of the principle that heretics and schismatics should be readmitted under different procedures: the former requiring a valid (re)baptism for the gifting of the Spirit within the true Church; the latter requiring an episcopal imposition of hands *in paenitentiam* for the renewal of the Spirit. Such was the agreement conveyed in the encyclical correspondence between Dionysius and Sixtus II, wherein the Alexandrian and Roman metropolitans likewise concur that the chief markers of heresy are twofold: a failure to invoke Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the baptismal rite (as mandated by Matthew 28.19); and the espousal of beliefs that blaspheme the Creator God or lessen the divinity of Christ. This important epistolary exchange—the rulings of which will attain canonical status at the Council of Arles in 314 and reaffirmation at the Council of Constantinople in 381—is presented in F. C. Conybeare, “Dionysius of Alexandria, Newly Discovered Letters to the Popes Stephen and Xystus,” *English Historical Review* 25 (1910): 111–114. For further details on the rebaptism crisis, see J. Patout Burns, *Cyprian the Bishop* (London: Routledge, 2002). Still unsurpassed is the monumental study by the one-time Archbishop of Canterbury, Edward Benson, *Cyprian: His Life, His Times, His Work* (New York: MacMillan, 1897).

7. On state intelligence capabilities and practices, as primarily concentrated in the specialized staffs of provincial governors, see N. J. Austin and N. B. Rankov, *Exploratio: Military and Political Intelligence in the Roman World* (London: Routledge, 1995).

superstitio. During the brief, chaotic reign of Gallus, arrests and trials continued, as did carceral martyrdoms and clerical banishments. But with plague still raging and military setbacks mounting—Shapur’s devastating campaigns in the east yielding much plunder and huge territorial gains in Syria—the Christians were effectively left to their own divisive pursuits. Gallus’ assassination by mutinous troops paved the way for the respected Valerian to assume power in September 253, and he, along with his son and co-emperor Gallienus, immediately set about restoring order and security.

To stem the crisis of collapsing frontiers, Gallienus was charged with overseeing operations against barbarians raiding along the Rhine and Danube, while Valerian directed his legions against Scythians, Goths, and Persians in the east. After years of desperate, inconclusive fighting across the empire’s porous borders, the persecution of Christians was abruptly renewed in the summer of 257. Having served alongside Decius and of similar career experience, Valerian’s dedication to the Roman order was equally resolute. Under looming threat of imperial disaster, the suppression of Christianity will have presented itself as a necessary task and sacred obligation.⁸ Nor would operational confidence have been lacking, seeing as the Decian precedent had already demonstrated the state’s formidable capacity to create apostates. Indeed, that “panoptic” policing effort—requiring both present compliance and attestations of retrospective orthodoxy—only fell short due to the unanticipated flexibility displayed by prominent leaders of the *superstitio*, who deflected the full force of the persecutorial blow by restoring to membership those who had so grievously transgressed. Valerian’s redesigned anti-Christian strategy—intended, surely, as an importuning gesture of fidelity to the gods—would prove lessons had been learned.

Where Decius employed notarized acts of public sacrifice to pressure Christians into mass defections, Valerian struck at the organizational basis of the deviant cult directly. His first edict conveyed two peremptory commands: clerics refusing participation in the traditional rites are to be banished, and all Christian assemblies and cemeterial gatherings prohibited on threat of capital punishment (Eusebius, *HE* 7.11). Dionysius, Cyprian, and scores of other defiant bishops—Catholic as well as Novatianist—were arrested and exiled. Lesser clerics and lay followers who proved obstreperous were dispatched *ad metallum* or promptly executed. A full-scale assault commenced the following summer, guided by directives of uncompromising severity: (i) summary executions for all higher clergy refusing to offer sacrifice to the gods; (ii) senators, equestrians, and high-rank officials found participating in the illegal cult to suffer immediate loss of status and property, and execution upon refusal to renounce membership; (iii)

8. For a perceptive account of Valerian’s religious politics, see Christopher Haas, “Imperial Religious Policy and Valerian’s Persecution of the Church,” *Church History* 52 (1983): 133-144. More fully, Patrick Joseph Healy, *The Valerian Persecution* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Company, 1905).

women devotees of noble status to be dispossessed of property and exiled; (iv) Christians among the freedmen and slaves of Caesar's household shall be stripped of possessions and consigned to forced labour on imperial estates.⁹

The objectives behind these measures are discernible from the targets chosen. As the adherents of Christ were known to derive overwhelmingly from the poorer and servile classes, a "dual decapitation," depriving the faithful of their elected leaders and most prosperous patrons, would paralyze congregational functioning. Though the number of Christian *senatores* and *egregii viri* is likely to have been exceedingly small at this time, converts from the propertied strata had been gaining alarming momentum, and notoriously so among the ranks of aristocratic matrons.¹⁰ Valerian's coercive *mandatum* was thus clearly designed to reverse and forestall future betrayal by members of the elite, whilst also sundering the Christian masses from the patronage supports that sustained their celebrated welfare operations. As for the punitive relegation of Christians among the *Caesariani*, a purging from palace staff of those capable of disrupting efforts to suppress the atheistic cult was an obvious necessity.

Within days of the second decree's issuance, the Roman pope Sixtus II and several of his deacons were apprehended and executed for violating the assembly ban. Other leading clerics—including the implacable foes Cyprian and Novatian—would meet similar fates, as martyrdoms from across the empire accumulated rapidly.¹¹ Out of the artful tangle of preserved memory and expansive legend that constitutes the Christian martyrological tradition, it is difficult to gauge the intensity of the persecution as it progressed over the remaining two years of Valerian's reign. But even allowing for a measure of pious padding in the various regional and local accounts, there is little reason to doubt considerable numbers of Christians perished for their faith. Of apostasies there is, tellingly, scant mention, a

9. Cyprian, *Ep.* 80.1, hastily composed upon news that phase two of Valerian's persecution had begun in the Roman capital.

10. A development confirmed by Callistus' innovative "co-habitation" policy of permitting high status women to enter monogamous *contubernium* with servile or humble brethren (c.220). Condemned by traditionalists as an inducement to fornication and abortion, the pope's dispensation astutely evaded the legal penalties of status degradation and property loss that attended marriages of unequal status. The details are scornfully reported in Hippolytus, *Refutatio Omnium Haeresium* 9.12.24 (c.230).

11. The official Roman attitude towards Christianity is succinctly captured in the charges proconsul Maximus levelled against a non-compliant Cyprian: "You have long persisted in your sacrilegious opinions (*sacrilega mente*), and with many others you have attached yourself to a nefarious conspiracy; you have set yourself up as an enemy of the Roman gods and our sacred ordinances (*inimicum diis Romanis et sacris religionibus*)."
Cyprian's brevilouquent reply to the sentence of beheading is no less demonstrative: *Deo gratias*, "Thanks be to God" (*Acta Proconsularia Sancti Cypriani*, 4.1).

likely indication of stiffening resolve by those who had passed through the Decian ordeal.¹²

Despite its strategic and tactical cogency, Valerian's attempted "top-down" dismantling would implode abruptly, and for a contingency similar to that which had diverted Decius' undertaking. While attempting to relieve Edessa from Persian siege in the summer of 260, Valerian's plague-ravaged legions were routed by Shapur's forces, the emperor himself carted off into humiliating bondage. Gallienus, his own position beset by mutinies and continued barbarian incursions, moved quickly to terminate a persecution that had encountered surprisingly stout resistance. Imperial edicts and subsequent letters to the leading bishops would grant Christians legal permission to resume their activities "without molestation," and officials were instructed to expedite the return of all properties confiscated (Eusebius, *HE* 7.13). Decades would pass before the next, and last, empire-wide persecution would be attempted.

Aftermath: Puritan Marginalization and the Catholic Ascendancy

The Decian and Valerian persecutions were pivotal episodes in the developmental trajectory of the Christian faith and the fate of Rome's empire. As set within the standard narrative—pitting a resiliently surging sub-cultural movement against a flagging imperial power—these successive "contests" are commonly thought to register the shifting strengths of the contending parties. Closer examination of the processes involved must qualify any presumptive teleology, however, for the contingencies that played into the imperial failures were not inconsequential, and the Christianity that emerged from the struggle was not the same that had entered.

In the wake of the mass apostasies induced by the Decian persecution, the mainline Church underwent a sociologically momentous bifurcation, as the penitential dispute between traditionalists and pragmatists led to a schismogenic formation of two antagonistic communities, each keyed to significantly different conceptions of Christian identity and ecclesiological purpose. Most crucially, the separation of Katharoi from Catholic was accompanied by a major realignment within the ranks of the faithful, as the rival organizations appealed to fundamentally distinct constituencies.¹³

12. Attributable perhaps to the circulation of letters and preaching texts such as Cyprian's *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, which exalt the glories of imitating Christ's self-sacrifice while also warning, on the basis of abundant scriptural condemnations, that "God does not easily pardon idolaters" (*non facile ignoscere Deum idololatriis*, 5.4, c.257)).

13. Sect-Church theory explicates the developmental histories of New Religious Movements in reference to changes in membership composition, which vary as a joint function of: (a) the social and psychological diversity of the available "convert pool," and (b) the changing socio-historical contexts in which conversions occur. New cults or sects

Though a quantifiable demography of the *schisma* is beyond recovery, surviving sources leave little doubt as to its historic scale: clerical testimony from across the empire is uniformly grim in reporting that vast numbers of believers fell into apostasy. Cognizant that a permanent loss of these lapsed multitudes would jeopardize the mission of the Church, Catholic leaders negotiated their way to a penitential policy of compassionately inclusive reconciliation, overturning scriptural rulings and established norms on the irremissibility of mortal sins in the process. Moderate and laxist elements would henceforth function as the stabilizing base—and overriding pastoral concern—of a reconstituted Catholic Christianity. In opposing those accommodating reforms, Novatian secured the backing of committed puritans and traditionalists whose elevated zeal imparted to Katharist churches the advantages of intensified solidarity and disciplined resolve.¹⁴

typically emerge in tension with established traditions and prevailing social hierarchies; their recruitment base is thus initially tilted towards the religiously discontented and the socially disadvantaged. In “conversionist” movements, promised rewards are usually contingent upon heightened forms of religiosity, featuring strict demands on normative-ethical conduct and intensive in-group bonding. The attainment of organizational durability through institutionalization—rituals, scriptures, clerical governance—facilitates membership growth that reaches into the middling-to-higher strata, whose worldly preoccupations and pragmatic moderation place strains on the originating ideals of purity and zealous commitment. Ensuing pastoral problems necessitate reforms that expedite the transition from a “Sect” form of religious life, wherein holiness is to be personally manifested in the lives of its spiritually empowered members, to a “Church” form, wherein holiness is objectively vested in a sacramental cultus administered by priests and recurrently dispensed to saints and sinners alike. Hence the succession of accommodating penitential reforms discussed in Part I: from the “grace period” repentance announced by Hermas for post-baptismal sins already committed, to the institutionalized single-use sacramental remission of the *paenitentia secunda*; from the contested granting of absolution for the mortal sins of fornication and adultery, to the schism-inducing decision that even idolaters and apostates are eligible for ecclesiastical reconciliation (see notes 27, 29 & 30). The Novatianist movement, viewed sociologically, represents a defensive reaffirmation of the sectarian ethos against the advance of a “universal” Church committed to the pastoral priority of restoring the wayward and fallen to salvation.

14. The Sect-to-Church process gains in clarifying specificity when conjoined with Diffusion of Innovation theory, which utilizes the S-curve “cumulative distribution function” to account for how, why, and at what rates new ideas, technologies, or cultural trends are adopted and spread. The basic pattern consists of a multi-phased succession featuring five distinctive social types: “innovators” (seekers, enthusiasts); “early adapters” (risk-taking pioneers, social marginals); “early majority” (converts of higher standing, as deviance stigmas diminish); “late majority” (trend-following moderates and conservatives); and “laggards” (hesitant traditionalists, establishment elites). Particularly germane to the Catholic-Katharoi conflict is a key finding in Richard Bulliet’s seminal *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), which convincingly establishes that the eruption of factional disputes within Islam—over issues of law,

Even on the certainty that a substantial majority of Christians remained within the Catholic fold, the rigorist dissenters attracted a following sufficient to unsettle the larger Church, her own congregations still afflicted by the pervading scandal of idolatrous trespass and now convulsed by a reproachful exodus of so many of the most resolute and dedicated recruits in Christ's army. The vehemence of Catholic alarm over Novatian's early successes—the schismatic label receiving swift amplification through envenomed charges of heresy—confirms that a self-sustaining base of support had been attained, as does the fact that the Holy Church of the Katharoi would prove viable for centuries to come, despite continuing Catholic polemic and occasional repression. Equally significant is the fact that Novatianism's appeal—in marked contrast to several other historically important Christian sects and schisms—was not restricted to select regions or enclosed ethnic and linguistic affiliations, but replicated the aspiring universalism of its Catholic derivation. Inscriptional and literary evidence confirms the wide distribution of Katharist congregations across the empire—in Spain, Gaul, Italy, Africa, Asia Minor, Syria, Cyprus, Mesopotamia, Arabia, Armenia, Egypt, even Scythia—while megacities such as Rome, Alexandria, and Constantinople would require multiple puritan churches to serve the needs of their numerous communicants.¹⁵ These are, admittedly, faded and fragmentary indicators, but their reinforcing concordance is suggestive that Novatianist membership levels—at the time of effective separation—are likely to have reached into the 20 to 30 percent range.¹⁶

theology, norms of piety—were strongly correlated with the growing demographic ascendancy of the “early and late majority” converts, who differed from and clashed with the more zealous “innovator” and “early adapter” types of the founding and preceding slower growth periods. Penitential disputes within early Christianity appear to register analogous socio-demographic shifts in its membership ranks.

15. Textual notices for Novatianist “presence” are collected in Adolf von Harnack's classic *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1924), Appendix I, Book IV: 928-933. For epigraphical and other indicators, see Stephen Mitchell, *Anatolia: Land, Men, and Gods in Asia Minor, Volume II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993: 96-108). Vera Hirschmann's *Die Kirche der Reinen* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015) provides a synthesizing survey; but see the critical review essay by Paul Mattei, *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 21, no. 2 (2017): 422-429.

16. Considering that gross exaggerations of the extent of the apostasy crisis would have discredited rather than enhanced the standing of bishops responsible for congregational oversight, their concurring testimony—that disastrously large numbers of Christians had apostatized—is eminently credible. From Cyprian's lament that “the greatest number of our brethren betrayed their faith” to Roman communiqués on “the great transgression spreading incredible devastation almost the whole world over,” the picture that emerges is one of calamitous disarray and division (*De lapsis* 4; *Ep.* 31.6.2). The wrenching penitential crisis that followed, with Novatianist “pseudo-bishops” appointed “in all the provinces and cities,” confirms how shattering the first empire-wide persecution proved to be (*Ep.* 55.24). In the flickering light of such reports, an overall

There is an anchor point to this conjecture. The historian Sozomenos reports that the Novatians, alone among the major heresies and sects, “were numerous from the beginning, and have remained so” (πολλοί τε ἦσαν ἐξ ἀρχῆς, καὶ διέμειναν).¹⁷ This emphatic identification of a “steady-state” affiliation pattern—

apostasy rate in the range of 40% is readily conceivable. As for the likely ratio of “laxist,” “moderate,” and “rigorist” dispositions prior to schism, the extensively utilized and confirmed Gaussian Normal Distribution model—a bell-shaped curve wherein a large majority of probabilities cluster mid-range in sloping descent from the apex, the remainder tapering off symmetrically toward either extreme—provides instructive guidance. Given the conspicuous activity of laxist and rigorist adherents at the start of the crisis, an approximate 25:50:25 distribution pattern is more convincing sociologically than estimates that would reduce either proclivity to inconsequential numbers. Novatian’s allies and emissaries—to reach our proposed 20-30% projection—will have needed to win over the rigorously inclined by massive margins, while offsetting recruitment shortfalls in their natural base by drawing in 5-10% of those moderates still committed to traditional moral-penitential principles. The much larger laxist-moderate alliance, correspondingly, will have coalesced quickly following conciliar rulings that granted compassionate terms of readmission to the lapsed, easily attaining a 70-80% projection. To vet these inferences, alternative distribution scenarios were considered, hypothetically raising and lowering the estimated Novatianist share. Moves in either direction are unconvincing. Posit an initial Novatianist constituency under 20%, under 15%, or under 10%, and it becomes increasingly difficult to account for: (a) the gravity of early Catholic concern and its intensive polemical recurrence for centuries to come; and (b) the continuing viability of the Katharist Church and its capacity to long sustain an empire-wide representation. Raising the Novatianist share beyond an upper limit of 30% is yet more problematic, however, as a comparable equivalency in membership numbers would have resulted in a significantly weakened Catholic/Orthodox variant, and quite possibly a commanding reassertion of the traditionalist-rigorist orientation—neither of which transpired.

17. *HE* 2.32.5 (c.445), a chronically overlooked passage. Its testimony is secured by two considerations. Unlike Sokrates Scholastikos, upon whom he relies for much of his material, Sozomenos has never been suspected of Novatianist sympathies. He invariably ranks the Katharoi among the heresies, and adds negative spin when adapting anecdotes original to Sokrates. After quoting Constantine’s famous rebuke of the Novatianist patriarch in attendance at the Council of Nicaea (325)—“Place a ladder, Acesius, and ascend alone unto heaven”—Sozomenos appends a mocking gibe that the overweening sectarians “imagined themselves free from sin” (*HE* 1.22). More revealing still, Sozomenos tendentiously trims Acesius’ fuller account to Constantine on the causes of schism to render the Novatianist position more extreme than it actually was. In Sokrates, Acesius explains that while the Katharoi deny absolution for “sins unto death,” they concur grave sinners “should be exhorted to repentance,” but only on hope that “God, not priests, might grant remission” (*HE* 1.10, c.438). Sozomenos’s hostile disposition thus renders his “numerous then, numerous now” observation all the more credible, particularly as this crucial detail is absent from Sokrates’ pro-Novatianist history. Additional sources have thus clearly been consulted for this information, lending support to Sozomenos’s claim of having examined all writings relevant to the struggles of the Catholic Church against heretics and schismatics (*HE* 1.1.16). Peter van Nuffelen, *Un héritage de paix et de piété. Étude*

extending over the course of nearly two centuries of Novatianist history—is both revelatory and convincing. Sociologically considered, the geographic spread and temporal longevity of the rigorist movement is unlikely to have been sustained by dramatic membership gains in the aftermath of the initial breach, owing to the competitive retention and recruitment advantages enjoyed by its more powerful and inclusive adversary. The Catholic Church not only commanded a larger initial following and substantially greater material resources, it could appeal to a much wider pool of potential converts on the basis of a charitable disciplinary pragmatism that immeasurably raised the salvation hopes for those less capable of abiding in protracted holiness. Breakaway minority movements, moreover, are notably vulnerable during the opening phases of a split, when early membership losses can quickly escalate to panic thresholds that trigger so-called “defection cascades.” The consolidation of the earliest Katharist congregations, in other words, must have approximated the sect’s maximal growth prospects, whilst also entailing sufficiently robust numbers to account for the durably tenacious history that followed.¹⁸

Schematic delineations of the “unitary before” and “schismatic after” are offered in Figures 1 and 2, respectively:

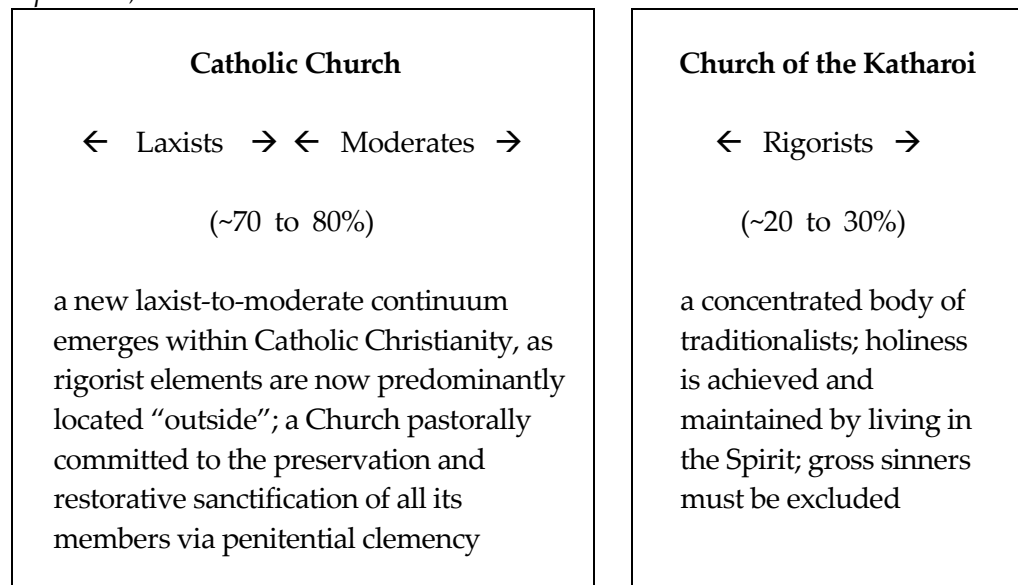
Figure 1. *Latent Factional Dispositions within the Church, Prior to Decian Persecution, c.250 CE*

Laxists	Moderates	Rigorists
(~20 to 25%)	← (~50 to 60%) →	(~20 to 25%)
tolerant, forgiving, and merciful in penitential discipline	traditionalism favoured; open to pragmatic reforms whenever justified by clerical advocacy	upholders of tradition; purity demands held to be binding; strictness in discipline

sur les histoires ecclésiastiques de Socrate et Sozomène (Löwen: Peeters, 2004), offers a richly informative comparative study.

18. When confronting shortfalls in the availability of quantifiable data for pre-modern epochs, historians can either echo the muted silences of their sources, or seek “parameters of the possible” by extrapolating from known sets of qualitative indicators. Given that real history does proceed, inexorably, in accordance with differences in scale and the weight of numbers, the “range-finding” option surely holds more promise than skirting the implications of demography altogether.

Figure 2. *Factional Constituencies within the Two Churches, Following Schismogenic Separation, c.260 CE*



The sociological implications of this transformative realignment are readily identified. Where laxist, moderate, and rigorist adherents had formerly counterbalanced and restrained one another within an integrated organization, the mainline Church would proceed, post-Decius, along bisected paths. The Catholic/Orthodox variant, driven polemically towards an inclusive affirmation of forgiveness and compassionate forbearance, will move to a new equilibrium centered on a laxist-moderate alliance. The Katharoi, rallying to affirm and uphold the evangelical call to purity, will anchor their faith in the unbending zeal of committed traditionalists. By thus separating and segregating these socially distinct constituencies, the schismogenic process will expeditiously reorder the “field of action” within Christianity, affording each camp the latitude to pursue policies solicitous of the needs and understandings of its own carrier group.¹⁹

19. A discerning awareness of this dialectical process is evidenced by Augustine, who affirms that the Catholic Church has been progressively “vindicated” through her “battles with heretics” (*ex haereticis asserta est Catholica*), acknowledging candidly that many “hidden truths” in scripture were first “opened” owing to disturbances caused by heretical criticisms: “Was the Trinity perfectly treated of, before the Arians railed against? Was repentance perfectly practiced, before the Novatians opposed?” (*numquid perfecte de poenitentia tractatum est, antequam obsisterent Novatiani?*, *On the Psalms* LV.21, c.418). In his catechetical manual on Christian piety, the *Enchiridion*, Augustine will offer another inventive twist to the developed Catholic polemic against rigorists, insisting that it is precisely those who deny the power of the Church to forgive sins that are “guilty of the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit” (*reus est illo irremissibili peccato in Spiritum Sanctum*, 83, c.420).

No longer impeded by the intimidating “interior” presence of rigorists and disciplinary hardliners, Catholic Christianity is free to progressively attune its salvific program to incorporate and retain ever larger numbers of converts, which it accomplishes through pragmatic tolerance and a facilitating expansion in its sacramental means of bestowing absolution and grace to wayward members. In this reformed conception of Christianity, the formalistic criterion of unity—now carrying the authoritarian cast of perpetual loyalty to bishops of Catholic lineage—will take precedence over the substantive requirement of living in spiritual compliance with the baptismal pledge. Henceforth, even the most heroic manifestations of the faith are to be subordinated to questions of ecclesiastical affiliation, as Cyprian and his colleagues will rule that heretics and schismatics who “suffer for the Name” can earn no saving purification thereby. In the very act of separating from God’s ordained bishops, salvation is forfeit, as there can be no workings of the Holy Spirit *extra Ecclesiam*: no genuine baptisms, no healing penances, no authentic prayers, no partaking of heavenly food, nor even the inspired miracle of redemptive baptisms by blood.²⁰ Considering that the Catholic leadership had only recently decided, contentiously and divisively, to extend absolution to all the many idolatrous apostates who had declined to affirm their Saviour, this unabashed “political” usurpation of the blessings of martyrdom will have been greeted with confident derision inside Novatianist congregations.²¹

Compelled by the difficulties of defending policy innovations against the proscriptions of convention and scripture, Catholic leaders were led to reframe the discourse on sin by bringing it under the aegis of their increasingly dominant principle of institutional primacy. By claiming that the workings of the Spirit are confined to the mediating functions of a Church established in and through its apostolic episcopate, any act of defiance or rebellion against that holy order necessarily constitutes an offense of gravest magnitude. The most grievous of sins, therefore, is no longer apostasy, but schism, an act that shatters the sacred unity of the Church and fatally separates its deluded followers from the saving operations of the Spirit. In a rhetorically astute effort to counter Novatianist censure of the “patrons of indulgence” who transgress the Lord’s command by granting absolution to adulterers and apostates, Cyprian and his allies will shift the discrediting opprobrium by assimilating those hitherto unpardonable offenses

20. A verdict chillingly rendered in *De unitate* 14: “Although they burn when given over to flames and fire, or lay down their lives when thrown to the beasts, the crown of faith will not be theirs, only punishment for perfidy; no glorious exit in religious valor, only the destruction of desperation. Such persons can be slain; they cannot be crowned” (*Occidi talis potest, coronari non potest*).

21. The Novatianist riposte on this matter has not survived the partisan hazards of textual preservation, but its central line of argument doubtless affirmed Tertullian’s earlier rigorist insistence that the “true Church” is an *ecclesia spiritus*, filled with *spiritualem hominem*, and not simply a gathering of *numerus episcoporum* (*De pudicitia* 21.16, c.218).

with schism. For what is a “rending of the Church” if not a collective form of apostasy? Indeed, schism must be accounted a sin far greater than any individual failing of idolatry, seeing as it entails—so Dionysius and Cyprian will emphasize—the fall of many (*HE* 6.45.1; *De unitate* 19). Firmilian of Cappadocia will define the schismatic as “an apostate from the communion of ecclesiastical unity,” and condemns their iniquitous gatherings as “adulterous and whorish unions” incapable of begetting children of God (*Ep.* 75.24.2; 14.2). In the anonymous tract *Ad Novatianum*, the leader of the Katharoi is vilified as “an apostate from the family of God,” a raving antichrist who champions the fratricidal *Cainam haeresim* (14; 13).²² Cyprian will push this trope of semantic obfuscation with unwavering conviction. Schismatics are repeatedly denounced as “apostates” and “heretics” who split the Church and steal away her innocent children to eternal ruin, faithlessly abandoning Christ’s “chaste bride” for the corrupting allures of “adulterous unions” outside the one sacrosanct *domus Dei*. With unity his regulative principle—*unitatis sacramentum*, he affirms—Cyprian goes so far as to declare schism an offense far more destructively encompassing than idolatrous apostasy, and that it alone is an irremissible sin, a *culpa inextinguibilis* beyond the redeeming powers of either penance or martyrdom.²³

22. Authorship remains uncertain—with Sixtus II the leading candidate—but internal evidence establishes a setting in the wake of the named *Deciana persecutio*, shortly after the first persecuting decree of Valerian (*Ad Novatianum* 6, c.255). This text, the earliest salvo in a disputation that will run for centuries, lays out several key points in the Catholic line that will reappear in later anti-Katharist writings. Penitent apostates are deserving of clemency, the author insists, because they fell “not from volition,” but through the Devil’s raging attack (1). In denying penance for the lapsed, the Novatians usurp God’s exclusive right to vengeance and judgement (7; 12). Christ’s Lost Sheep and Lost Coin parables confirm that the “recovery” of sinners through repentance is Heaven’s plan and preference (15). As to the rigorist proof-text, Matt.10.32-33, on the divergent consequences of confessing and denying Christ “before men,” an audacious reinterpretation is ventured. Against the plain meaning of the Lord’s words, the author insists the “testifying moment” signifies not an earthly now, but the “future time” when all will be summoned before “Christ’s tribunal” in Final Judgement (8: *futuri temporis ... tribunali christi*). Whom shall the Saviour then deny, he asks, if not the heretics and schismatics who have betrayed His name?

23. *De unitate* 6.1-3: *Adulterari non potest sponsa Christi, incorrupta est et pudica. ... Quisquis ab Ecclesia segregatus adulterae jungitur; 7.1: unitatis sacramentum; 14.2: Inextinguibilis et gravis culpa discordiae nec passione purgatur; 19.12: Postremo lapsus martyrium postmodum consecutus potest regni promissa percipere; ille si extra Ecclesiam fuerit occisus ad Ecclesiae non potest praemia pervenire.* See also the extended discussions in *Epp.* 55, 69, 71, especially 72.2: “What greater offense can there be ... than to have rebelled against Christ ... to have scattered His Church?” In the *Didascalia* the crime of heresy is also categorized as an eternally unpardonable sin, for in twisting the words of scripture (Matt. 12.31-32), heretics simultaneously traduce the Catholic Church and commit “blasphemy against the Holy

The effectiveness of this Catholic counter-critique in reviving the faith and solidarity of their dispirited congregations can be presumed. Great numbers of the lapsed will have welcomed any opportunity to discharge or displace residual feelings of shame and guilt through a self-affirming castigation of those who had stood more resolutely in the recent trials of fidelity. It was reassuring, no doubt, to be told Novatianist clerics were “priests of the Devil,” ministering over the “communions of the dead” that comprised their god-forsaken and uncharitable following.²⁴ But negative campaigning against the schismatic “other” carries its own limitations, and if pursued incessantly, risks exposing the compensatory and defensive motives that drive the intensified hostility. Herein resides the social-psychological import of the Valerian persecution.

Under Decius, the coercive instrumentalities of public monitoring and certification had proven effective in forcing apostasies and fomenting organizational turmoil. Valerian’s more direct assault sought to break the offending *superstitio* by depriving the laity of their leaders and patrons, through targeted arrests, banishments, and executions for the recalcitrant. This policy too achieved a measure of success, but not in the creation of yet more apostates or schisms. Valerian’s legacy lies rather in the making of martyrs, and those of Catholic/Orthodox adherence most notably.

The celebrated martyrdoms of Sixtus II and Cyprian shone brightest in this “second contest,” but less prominent clerics from across the empire also claimed heavenly crowns, in spirited defiance of Valerian’s orders. Though the persecution struck Katharist communities as well—Novatian himself among the victims—the comprehensive targeting of clerics had the inadvertent consequence of enabling the Catholic majority to reclaim lost glory, and thereby lessen the force of ongoing censure of prior timidity. During the preceding struggle, Cyprian had speciously claimed Satan’s molestations were confined to Christians of the true Church. Schismatics, he jeered, were but “lightly touched” by persecution, for the Adversary “does not look to subvert those he has already made his own” (*Ep.* 60.3). As the toll of Catholic martyrs mounted under Valerian’s onslaught, this invidious rhetoric could now be pitched with greater confidence. Indeed, the reassertion of Catholic heroism would receive immediate polemical vindication in a text written early in 259, the *Passio Sanctorum Montani et Lucii*, which chronicles

Spirit,” which the Church possesses and serves as its appointed “receptacle” (25.6.14: *susceptorium*).

24. These denunciations—*antistes diaboli, mortuis communicemus*—were voiced by Caecilius of Bilita and Felix of Bagai, as recorded in the minutes of the Seventh Council of Carthage, held under Cyprian’s leadership in 256. The entire transcript is filled with choice rallying slogans and curt polemical abuse, perhaps best exemplified by the following from Rogatianus of Nova: “Christ established the Church, the devil heresy. How can the synagogue of Satan possess the baptism of Christ? (*Ecclesiam Christus instituit, Haeresim diabolus. Quomodo potest habere baptismum Christi synagoga Satanae?*), Concilia Carthaginensia – Acta, VII: *Sententiae Episcoporum LXXXVII, De Haereticis Baptizandis* [1070C]).

the imprisonment and martyrdoms of several Carthaginian clerics and lay supporters. In an impassioned appeal to mend the ruptured bonds of unity, one of the condemned confessors calls upon the arrogant schismatics to forswear their uncharitable heresy and “acknowledge the truth of the Church,” which is once again finding glorious affirmation through the “abundance of her martyrs,” her *copia martyrum*!²⁵

*

The social destinies of the two competing Churches would mirror their opposing stances on the issue that triggered the schism, as the majority Catholics continued to widen their embrace of the penitent and tolerant, while the dissenting Katharoi remained zealously intent upon strict compliance with the holiness vows of the baptismal redemption. The possibilities for future expansion lay clearly with the inclusionary variant, its growing moderation and pragmatism progressively setting the stage for an unanticipated but eventual compact between Church and State, to be brokered under the first Christian emperor.²⁶

25. *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, edited and translated by Herbert Musurillo (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), text 15.14: *haeticorum superbiam et improbam contumaciam; intelligenter ecclesiae veritatem*. Dionysius likewise reports numerous martyrs from Egypt: “men and women, young and old, maidens and matrons, soldiers and civilians, of every race and age, some from scourging and fire, others the sword” (*HE* 7.11.20; 25: mutilations and chained imprisonments). Cyprian provides a similarly grim picture for the African Church (*Epp.* 76-79).

26. As celebrated by a prominent participant: “If the highest end of the virtues looks to the advancement of the greatest number, then moderation is the loveliest of all. ... It is, moreover, the only virtue ... that has led to the propagation of the Church, by imitating the benevolence of Heaven and aspiring to the redemption of all” (*Si virtutum finis ille est maximus, qui plurimorum spectat profectum, moderatio prope omnium pulcherrima ... Denique sola est, quae Domini quaesitam sanguine Ecclesiam propagaverit, imitatrix beneficii coelestis, et redemptionis universorum*, Ambrose, *On Repentance* I.1, c.390). Pacian of Barcelona makes a coinciding claim to triumphant expansion the “clinching argument” in his disputatious colloquy with Sympronian, a Novatianist bishop. The Catholic Church, Pacian exults, is “the full body, a firm communion, now diffused throughout the whole world,” whereas Novatians are but “a small and insolent portion,” separated from the *Domus magna* “so rich in the diversity of all its vessels” (*Ad Sympronianum* III.4; 26, c.380). Pressing this “Great Church” argument further, Pacian challenges his rival to calculate the immense number of “Catholic flocks” and count upon his fingers “the swarms of our people” who are “spread the world over and fill entire regions” (*catholicos greges, nostrae plebis examina, toto orbe diffusa sunt cunctis plena regionibus*). Compared to the “surging overflow” of Catholics, is it not manifest Novatians are as “eaves-drippings in great fountains, droplets immersed in an ocean?” (*Nonne ut stillicidia, fontibus magnis? Nonne, ut ab oceano quaedam gutta, sorberis?*, III.25.3). For the fragmentary empirical evidence—onomastic data for Egypt, inscriptions for Asia Minor—indicative of substantial membership growth after the

Yet despite achieving greater worldly ascendancy, the Catholic conscience would remain haunted by the Novatianist presence for centuries to come. The taunting rebuke that Catholics were *Capitolini*—i.e., successors of the Decian apostates who had rushed forward to offer demonic sacrifices to Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva, the triad of Roman deities venerated in the main temple complex of many cities—carried far too much discrediting truth for easy dismissal. Hence the repeated engagements Catholic leaders felt constrained to undertake against their unsettling competitor.

Reticus of Autun will produce a “great volume” *Against Novatian* (c.330). The philosophically-trained astronomer Eusebius, bishop of Emesa, continues the offensive with a major tome *Against Jews, Gentiles, and Novatians* (c.350). The poet-theologian Ephrem the Syrian includes the pitiless sect in his popular *madrashe* or “teaching songs” series, *Against Heresies*, aligning them with other schismatics who broke with the sacred order of apostolic succession, perverted divine truth with poisonous doctrines, and impiously named their flocks after human founders (*Hymn* 22, c.360). In his influential heresiological treatise, Epiphanius of Cyprus devotes a detailed chapter to refuting Novatianist arguments against the penitential clemency of the Holy Church, which will “accept repentance always” in faithful assurance that God the Benefactor “does not withhold the reward from those who labour in penance” (*Panarion* 59.2.6-7; 6.2, 7.6, c.375). Pacian of Barcelona composes a lengthy epistolary defence of the Catholic Church against Katharist criticisms, insisting God’s spirit-reviving gifts to the baptized—the “medicines” of confession and penitence—shall be needed and utilized until such time as “the serpent retires from this world” (*Ad Sympronianum* I.9).²⁷ Philastrius

Decian and Valerian persecutions, see the cogent analysis in Mitchell, *Anatolia* (pp. 57-64), who concludes: “Even if we accept low figures for the number of Christians in 300 ... the increase in numbers in the middle and later third century was enormous” (p. 63).

27. Pacian’s exchange with the Novatianist bishop contains much informational value, but two features merit notice here. The high-status Pacian—his son a court chamberlain to Theodosius and *praefectus praetorio* under Honorius—indirectly confirms Novatian’s martyrdom, contrary to Catholic denials. The Katharist leader “suffered ... and was slain,” Pacian concedes, but insists the arch-schismatic could not have been “crowned,” seeing as he perished “outside the peace and concord of the Church” (*passus est aliquid Novatianus, etiam si occisus, non tamen coronatu, extra Ecclesiae pacem, extra concordiam, Ad Sympronianum* II.7). There appears to have been no reciprocal Novatianist denial of martyr status for slain Catholics or other Christian sectaries—unsurprising perhaps, given Novatian’s insistence that “the entire sacred mystery of the faith resides in confessing the name of Christ” (*totum fidei sacramentum in confessione Christ nominis ... digestum, Ep.* 30.3.1). More significantly, Pacian’s lengthiest epistle was written in direct counterpoint to a “proposition-packed” *tractatus Novatianorum* sent to him by Sympronian—a fortuitous circumstance that permits a remarkably full reconstruction of Novatianist ecclesiology. The formulary of Katharist self-representation is particularly noteworthy: “The Church is a people born anew of water and the Holy Spirit, free from denying the Name of Christ, the temple and house of God, the pillar and ground of truth, a Holy

of Brescia, in his *Catalogue of Heresies* (c.385), castigates the Novatians for disavowing God's truth that "penance allows the fallen to rise again" and denying Christ's "goodness and compassion" (82).²⁸ In *Contra Novatianum*, the anonymous Roman cleric known as "Ambrosiaster" assembles a battery of Old and New Testament verses to confute those "enemies of Christ" who would restrict God's mercy and disallow the salvation that is reclaimable through confession and penitence (*Quaestiones veteris et novi testamenti*, 102, c.385). Ambrose will write two books *On Repentance* (c.390), dedicated to a comprehensive repudiation of Katharist objections to the pardoning of mortal sins and a rousing Catholic affirmation that "God has promised His mercy to all, and grants license to His priests to release and forgive without exception."²⁹

Novatian's ghost similarly flits in and about in various orations and homilies of the great fourth-century eastern hierarchs, Gregory Nazianzen and John Chrysostom, each of whom will further articulate the Catholic/Orthodox

Virgin of chastest feelings, the bride of Christ from his bones and flesh, having neither spot nor wrinkle, upholding the laws of the Gospel entire" (*Ecclesiam esse populum ex aqua et Spiritu sancto renovatum, sine negatione nominis Christi, templum et domum Dei, columnam et stabilimentum veritatis, virginem sanctam castissimis sensibus, sponsam Christi ex ossibus ejus et carne, non habentem maculam neque rugam, integra evangeliorum jura servantem*, III.2). This confident declamatory bundle, with its principled emphasis on renovation by the Spirit, faithfulness in confessing Christ, stability in truth, commitment to an immaculate purity, and dedication in full to the teachings of scripture, differs fundamentally from the catchphrases featured in the Catholic *Didascalia*, which allocates greater import to select institutional considerations, such as their "regal priesthood" and the "greatness and sanctity" of their Church (note 2, above).

28. Philastrius also offers a rare, revelatory glimpse into the "operational level" of the schismogenic conflict. Many Catholic congregations, he reports, refrained from including readings of Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews in their services, or did so only occasionally, owing to Novatianist appropriation of this text in support of penitential rigorism. Like other defenders of Catholic practice, Philastrius charges the Katharoi with misinterpreting the key verses (6.4-6 and 10.26), which, he strains to establish, only ban the repetition of baptism, not the granting of absolution for post-baptismal transgressions: *Epistola rebaptizatores excludit, non baptismum paenitentiae abnegat* (*Diversarum Hereseon Liber* 88, 89).

29. *De paenitentia*, I.3: *qui misericordiam suam promisit omnibus, et relaxandi licentiam sacerdotibus suis sine ulla exceptione concessit*. Proficient in polemic, the bishop of Milan fashions a damning association for the Katharoi by likening them to the adversaries of Christ who plotted to kill the risen Lazarus. For just as those wicked men opposed the life-restoring miracle of Christ's divine bounty, so do the Novatianists now murderously conspire against His Church, cruelly refusing the mercies whereby "the dead are restored to life" through "lenient forgiveness of their sins" (*mortuos in Ecclesia reviviscere; peccatorum indulta venia resuscitari*, II.59). Ambrose also advances the paradoxical argument—which he places in the Devil's mouth—that fallen Christians who return to the Church following genuine repentance strike the greatest blow against him, and bring yet greater glory to Jesus by exposing the destitution of "earthly feasting" in comparison to the "eternal joys" of heaven (I.26).

penitential position through principled censure of the uncompromising harshness and presumptive immodesty of the Katharoi.

As Archbishop of Constantinople, Gregory would include a memorable rebuke of the Novatians on the occasion of an Epiphany oration in 381, delivered before his congregation and select catechumens awaiting their baptismal "Illumination." Taunting the rigorists as the "new Pharisees" who are "pure in title but not in purpose" (καθαρὲ τὴν προσηγορίαν, οὐ τὴν προαίρεσιν), Gregory faults the hardline schismatics for mercilessly violating biblical commands on reconciling the penitent and for "setting laws beyond humanity's reach" (νομοθετῶν ὑπὲρ ἄνθρωπον). Katharist pretensions to purity are scornfully derided, with the sect's founder personally ridiculed for his "bitter condemnation of fornication, as though he were not of flesh and body" (ὡς ἄσαρκος καὶ ἀσώματος). Gregory closes his excoriation by imploring the renegades to abandon their μισανθρωπία and rejoin the swelling ranks of the Catholic faithful: "Come, stand with us, with humanity" (Δεῦρο, στήτε μεθ' ἡμῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων).³⁰

Chrysostom will undertake similarly extensive labours—pastoral and exegetical—to defend and reinforce the Catholic program of compassionate clemency. In a sermon *Against the Katharoi*, the Archbishop derides as delusional their vainglorious boasting of "purity," given the improbability of remaining sinless "even for a single day" against the myriad passions, temptations, and entanglements of this fallen world.³¹ A truly Christian life, he insists, must be lived in perpetual contrition, reckoning up offenses daily and expiating them through confession, almsgiving, and prayer, and by forgiving all wrongs against us. Neither those "freighted down with sins" nor those who have fallen into the "depths of wickedness" need despair, for these potent "medicines of repentance" remain ever accessible to those seeking forgiveness. Chrysostom will also reiterate the Catholic charge that rigorists speciously misinterpret scripture, twisting the words that prohibit remissions through "second baptisms" as if they mandated restrictions against penitential modes of spiritual renewal.³² More consequential still, where Novatian had sternly undercut the appeal of penitence, pronouncing it "a shameful testimony to sins committed" (*In Praise of Purity* 13.4), Chrysostom will elevate its practice and importance to unprecedented heights: "Repentance raises up the fallen soul ... drives away death ... restores health to the wounded ... is our mother of salvation ... a persecution for the Devil ... lifts us from earth to heaven ... makes one a communicant with God ... surpasses the angelic powers ... dissolves the bonds of sins ... is the medicine that enables us to

30. *Oration XXXIX, On the Holy Lights*: 18-19.

31. *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, PG 63.491-94 (c.400).

32. See the creative exegesis in *Homilies on Hebrews*, IX.5-8, addressing the seemingly insurmountable obstacles posed by apostolic verse 6.4-6: "For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened ... if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance" (c.404).

pass from mortality to immortality" (*On Repentance*).³³ The ecclesiological corollary to this remarkably expansive characterization will find memorable expression in the third of his nine *Homilies on Repentance*: "Have you sinned? Then enter the Church and wipe away your sin. ... [A]s often as you sin, repent your sin. ... Come then, repent, for here there is a hospital, not a courtroom, not a place where punishment for sins is exacted, but where forgiveness of sins is granted" (ιατρεῖον ... οὐ δικαστήριον, οὐκ εὐθύνας ἀμαρτημάτων ἀπαιτοῦν, ἀλλὰ συγχώρησιν ἀμαρτημάτων παρέχον).³⁴

This polemical discourse would long continue. Jerome will yoke the Katharoi with the heretical Montanists as inveterate opponents of penitential compassion, alike damnable for their hardened refusal to pardon sins against the Holy Spirit and, purportedly, even lesser offenses.³⁵ Vincent of Lerins, in his *Commonitorium* against heresies (c.440), will denounce "the most cruel" Novatian for his blasphemous depiction of a "cruel God" who prefers the deaths of sinners to their spiritual restoration and redemption (24.62). Even as late as the dawn of the seventh century, the puritan challenge still rankled and disturbed, as indicated by the apparent need for six books *Against the Novatians* (c.605), authored by Eulogius, Patriarch of Alexandria.

Nor was Catholic aggression confined to textual warfare. Exploiting the new working alliance with a Christian-led imperial state, several of the more combative prelates took advantage of anti-heresy legislation to launch persecutions that resulted in property confiscations and the closure or demolition of Novatianist churches.³⁶ Notable instances would occur in Rome under the direction of

33. Περὶ μετανοίας, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, PG 60.765-68.

34. Λόγος περὶ μετανοίας, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca*, PG 49.297-98.

35. In *Against Jovinianus*, Jerome attempts to "neutralize" the rigorist reading of Hebrews 6.4-6 by quoting verses 9-10, on God's justice in rewarding those who show love for his Name and charitable care for his Saints (II.3, c.393). In his epistolary treatise *To Pammachius, Against John of Jerusalem*, Jerome denounces the Novatians for their inhumanity towards the fallen and their impossible demands for perfectionism given the pervasiveness of sin in everyday life: *Facessat itaque Novatus errantibus non manus porrigens... Quotidie peccamus omnes et in aliquo labimur*, 2.1, c.398 (see also *Epistles* 41, 42, 77).

36. The Katharoi were placed in perpetual jeopardy—and endured periodic harm—through a series of laws that imposed punitive restraints upon "every sect inimical to the Catholics," as well as specific rulings targeting them by name (*Codex Theodosianus* 16.5.64). In the opening entry of the Code's *De Haereticis* section, all heretical and schismatic sects are excluded from the many privileges and benefactions Constantine gifted the Church, including: state-financed construction of basilicas, baptisteries, and martyr shrines; land grants, grain subsidies, and monetary subventions for operational and charitable purposes; tax immunities; clerical exemption from compulsory public services; juridical powers for bishops in civil cases, etc. Imperial patronage on such a scale raised the status and material benefits of Church membership considerably, widening its appeal to potential converts, pagan and sectarian. Persecutorial measures, in turn, rendered membership in the "perfidious heresies" and "sectarian monstrosities" more difficult to

Innocent I (c.410) and Celestinus (c.425), and in Alexandria under Cyril's dictates (c.412). Leontius of Ancyra had earlier deprived the Novatians of their churches throughout Galatia (c.400), citing in justification their "cruel opposition" to penance and God's mercy. Chrysostom carried out similar actions across Ionia and Lydia (c.402), but his threats to forcibly suppress "heretical preaching" in the imperial capital appear to have been frustrated by senatorial backing for the popular Katharist patriarch, Sisinnius.³⁷

Conclusion

In sociological hindsight, polemical and repressive measures against the Novatianist sectarians may appear misguided, as puritan causes tend to be self-limiting, their base of appeal inherently restricted to those distinctively fervent minorities drawn to what Max Weber called "heroic" or "virtuoso" religiosity. The Church of the Katharoi would long endure; it could not appreciably expand. Yet the contest between the two rivalrous churches was never really about recruitment gains. At issue was the very meaning of Christian identity and ecclesiological purpose, and wherein resided God's salvific grace and Holy Spirit. The lasting socio-historical significance of this schismatic rupture lies precisely here. For in working out a pastoral and theological rationale for the restoration of the Decian lapsed, the Catholic Church had adventitiously hit upon a world-winning formula that would permit a far-reaching reorganization of the Christian

sustain. These included periodic bans on assemblies, prohibitions against "fraudulent mysteries," property seizures, expulsions for heretical preaching, ineligibility for high civic and military offices, legal disabilities in bequeathing or inheriting property, and even threats of execution (CTh 16.5.4, 6, 11-12, 14-15, 19-20, 29, 40, 42, 48, 51, 59-60, 63-65). Particularly damaging to Novatianist proselytizing efforts were interdictions on the recruitment of Catholics by any of the "diverse and perfidious" sects, punishable by fines, forfeiture of testamentary rights, and exile: "Let none be abducted through the crime of rebaptism, nor shall any attempt be made to pollute those who have been initiated into the rites of the Orthodox with the mire of profaned religions and the filth of heretics" (*Nullus rebaptizandi scelus adripiat nec eos, qui orthodoxorum ritu fuerint initiati, caeno profanatarum religionum haereticorumque sordibus polluere moliatur*, 16.6.6; also 16.5.5: rebaptism condemned as a rescindment of the gifted "eternal redemption" in exchange for "renewed death," *reparata morte*).

37. These incidents are reported by Sokrates (HE 7.9, 11; 7.7; 6.11, 19, 22), who also notes that Catholics and Katharoi—owing to their shared Nicene "homooousion" orthodoxy regarding the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were alike persecuted during periods of Arian ascendancy. On one notorious occasion, in 356, Arian bishops obtained Constantius' permission to deploy imperial troops against Novatianist communities across several provinces and cities, unleashing a rampage of repressive violence that included church demolitions, mass slaughter, imprisonments, and forcible rebaptisms under torture (HE 2.38).

experience, its sustaining axis no longer turning on “living in the Spirit,” but in providing restorative access to it.³⁸

Turning point and trajectory? Absent the dialectical sequence of social and cultural transformations that flowed into—and through—the commanding actions of Decius and Valerian, Novatian and Cyprian, the arrival of a Constantinian moment might well have missed its fateful juncture.³⁹

38. The enduring Catholic-Katharist opposition—and its underlying basis in socially distinct ecclesiologies—is well captured in a telling anecdote from Sokrates. Sisinnius, he reports, authored a book against Chrysostom, faulting the Archbishop for having colluded with recidivist sinning in one of his sermons. Chrysostom’s offense? To have extended the following open-ended invitation to habitual backsliders: “Come, enter, though you may have repented a thousand times before” (Χιλιάκις μετανοήσας εἰσελθε, *HE* 6.21). To appreciate the immense distance the Great Church had travelled—in thought, attitude, and practice—we need only recall Clement of Alexandria’s sharp-edged observation from two centuries earlier, that Christians who repent repeatedly differ in no way from unbelievers, other than in their awareness they are committing sins (αἱ δὲ συνεχεῖς καὶ ἐπάλληλοι ἐπὶ τοῖς ἁμαρτήμασι μετάνοιαι οὐδὲν τῶν καθάπαξ μὴ πεπιστευκότων διαφέρουσιν ἢ μόνῳ τῷ συναίσθησθαι ὅτι ἁμαρτάνουσι, *Stromata* 2.13, c.200).

39. The analytical utility of the “turning point” and “trajectory” concepts is insightfully explored by Andrew Abbott in chapter 8 of his *Time Matters: On Theory and Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001). See also Randall Collins, “Turning Points, Bottlenecks, and the Fallacies of Counter-Factual History,” *Sociological Forum* 22 (2007): 247-269. As to the importance of the “timing” of the first imperial conversion, I have argued elsewhere that Christianity’s fate would have been significantly altered by the arrival of a “later” Constantine (see Bryant, “Ashoka and Constantine: On Mega-Actors and the Politics of Empires and Religions,” in *States and Nations, Power and Civility*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019). Beyond the immense material benefactions and preferential policies the first Christian emperor bestowed upon the Catholic/Orthodox Church (see note 36), Constantine was also the driving force in terminating, by the year 313, the “Great Persecution” of Christians that had been launched by the emperor Diocletian a decade earlier. The timeliness of those interventions is indicated by the fact that the religion to which he converted was still very much a peripheral, minority movement, comprising no more than an estimated 10% of the empire’s population, with even less representation inside the army and high officialdom, the two dominant institutions of power. Over the course of an unusually lengthy reign (303-37), Constantine would initiate a radical reversal in state policy—from persecution to patronage—that would gradually but inexorably transform the Roman-Hellenistic world into a Christian empire. Had that revolutionary empowerment been appreciably delayed, it is entirely conceivable that Christianity might have long remained a socially marginal cult, holding on in heroic fortitude at least up to that cataclysmic time when surging inflows of “pagan” warrior tribes would bring about the fall of a still “un-Christianized” Roman empire, and on that basis usher in a new epoch of civilizational transformation.

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Briseis in the Chora? The Mother's Role in the Marriage Documents from Greco-Roman Egypt

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The presence of the mother in some marriage contracts in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt raises the question of whether her presence implies that she has recovered a role that she had played in historical periods prior to the formation of the polis or whether, on the contrary, it is a characteristic of this period and, if the latter, the point is whether it is a revival of an ancient Greek institution, or rather an influence of local law. It is also possible that the disappearance of the regulations of the polis in the Greek emigration led women to develop their activities with greater freedom and that the presence of the mother in marriage contracts simply reflected her new role in Hellenistic society, regardless of whether there was a historical precedent for doing so.

"Fact is not truth, but a poet who willfully defies fact cannot achieve truth."
Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*

Introduction

I shall deal with a topic that has already attracted the attention of the German scholar Walter Erdmann many years ago. Since that time, however, this matter has been virtually ignored by the scholarship, with a few exceptions that have not dealt with the problem in depth. From two of the then known Hellenistic and Roman marriage contracts (P.Eleph. 1 =JPap. 18 and P.Oxy X 1270), Erdmann¹ concluded that the mother, unlike in classical Athens, played a significant part in the marriage contracts, nothing short of performing the delivery of the bride. This could happen, according to the documents, in the company of her husband or even on her own.

As we shall see, Erdmann aimed to relate the presence of mothers in marriage contracts to the survival of Greek law, specifically prior to the constitution of the polis. For this purpose, he resorts to two verses from the *Iliad* (XIX 290-291), which in the end, however, he himself considers insufficient to support his own thesis.

In my view, this topic at least should be revisited in light of new documents and especially of how scholarship has evolved since then. This concerns the nature of Hellenistic and Roman law in Egypt, the role of women in such a context and the possibility that this intervention of the mother in marriage contracts reflects practices in the Greek world prior to the Hellenistic era.

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1. Walter Erdmann, "Die Rolle der Mutter bei der Verheiratung der Tochter nach griechischem Recht," *Zeitschrift der Savignys Stiftung (Rom. Abt.)* 59 (1939): 544-546.

Insofar as the above-mentioned documents are not usually discussed in the context of the role of the mother in Greek culture in general, and despite the fact that the literature on them is very vast, I think that some aspects of the problem can still be clarified. Moreover, Erdmann's article is relatively old, and even though it has been repeatedly cited, however I have not yet come across any truly well-founded criticism. For example, in his recent and interesting book on dowry and marriage arrangements, Uri Yiftach-Firanko still appears to generally accept Erdmann's hypothesis without further discussion. On the other hand, some of the factors that this scholar considers could in my opinion lead to some new insights.²

The topic we are dealing with here requires the treatment of different periods, which does not always help to make it easier to explain and develop. However, in my view the subject itself requires this complex approach, which forces us to travel back in time from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt through classical Athens to archaic Greece. I shall endeavour to correctly differentiate between these periods and explain the different contexts with which we are working.

The structure of this paper is as follows: I shall analyse the different mentions of the mother in the two documents cited by Erdmann. Then I shall discuss Erdmann's idea that the *Iliad* verses he cites may have to do with the active role of the mother in the ἔκδοσις of the daughter in the pre-polis period. To address the first question, we shall explain the differences between the Attic marriage as transmitted through the sources (mainly the orators) and the reality found in the documents of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. As far as the Homeric poems are concerned, I shall refer to Vernant's studies on marriage in the Archaic Period, in an aristocratic context in which the wife represents her husband's authority or sovereignty and where, moreover, the status of the married woman and concubine is very ambiguous in several cases.

The Documents:

The ἐγγύησις Disappears, but in Many Cases, the ἔκδοσις is Preserved

With regard to documents, in those days the research still aimed to find in Hellenistic marriage contracts the same realities as those in marriage according to Attic law. We know that in this legal system, a legitimate marriage was contracted by means of two procedures, the ἐγγύησις (not merely betrothal, but a requirement for validity³) and the ἔκδοσις, the giving of the wife to the husband by her father

2. Uri Yiftach-Firanko, *Marriage and Marital Arrangements. A History of the Greek Marriage Document in Egypt* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2003), 48-52.

3. Alick R. W. Harrison, *The Law of Athens I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 9-12; Douglas M. MacDowell, *The Law in Classical Athens* (Ithaca (NY): Cornell University Press, 1978), 84; Carlos Sánchez-Moreno Ellart, "Marriage (Greece and Rome)," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient History* (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 4317-4318.

or his *κύριος*. In Attic law we have many examples of *ἐγγύησις* as the power of the bride's father or *κύριος*. Significantly, the role of the bride was absolutely passive. Only her father and the husband-to-be expressed their will. Plato's text in *The Laws* (774e) where he empowers not exactly the mother, but the relatives on the mother's side to perform the *ἐγγύησις* is considered not to reflect the Athenian reality⁴. In classical Athens, on the other hand, *ἐγγύησις* was an inexcusable requirement in that, without it, marriage did not produce legitimate children who could become citizens (cf. e.g. Isaeus III. *de Pyrrhi hereditate* 39).

Although there is majority consensus regarding the non-existence of *ἐγγύησις* in the documents of the Graeco-Roman Egypt⁵, the initial approach, in Erdmann's time was still very much influenced by Attic law and therefore considered that some presence of *ἐγγύησις* -which he considers a 'national feature'- could be found in the documents of this period. However, as indicated above, not the slightest evidence of *ἐγγύησις* can be found in the documents.

Hans-Julius Wolff⁶ and Joseph Méléze-Modrzejewski⁷ are perhaps the two authors who have been best able to explain how the difference in contexts has affected the evolution of certain features concerning Greek marriage as a consequence of Greek emigration to Egypt. The controversial point is whether the re-adaptation of the institutions of the polis to an environment as different as Egypt, where the Greek settlers had lost the original context of their social life, also involved a revival of pre-polis institutions. Also important, of course, is whether this evolution can be explained without reference to the original Greek context, i.e., prior to the polis, or to external influences. In our case we can secondarily admit that Greek origins might also have played some role, but what is most significant is the disappearance of the polis as a social framework.⁸

4. Plato, *leges* 774e: ἐγγύην δὲ εἶναι κυρίαν πατρὸς μὲν πρῶτον, δευτέραν πάππου, τρίτην δὲ ἀδελφῶν ὁμοπατρίων, ἐὰν δὲ μηδὲ εἷς ἢ τούτων, τὴν πρὸς μητρὸς μετὰ τοῦτο εἶναι κυρίαν ὡσαύτως.

5. Yiftach-Firanko, (*Marriage and Marital Arrangements* 53, n. 54) is right where P.Cairo.Masp. I67092, ll.9-10 is concerned, since it is a late (553 AD) and ambiguous document: καὶ ὄρκον ἀποθέσθαι ἡμοῖ τῇ εἰρημένῃ Εἰρήνῃ ὅτι λαμβάνω ἡ [σ]ε εἰς γυναῖκα{ν}. As regards P.Ent. 23, vid. Hans-Julius Wolff, *Written and Unwritten Marriages in Hellenistic and Postclassical Roman Law* (Haverford: Philological Monographs of the American Philological Association XL, 1939) 24-25 n. 86, and Edoardo Volterra "Intorno a P. Ent. 23," *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 15 (1965): 21-28.

1. 6. Hans-Julius Wolff, "Die Grundlagen des griechischen Eherechts," *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis / Revue d'histoire du droit* 20 (1952): 1-181.

2. 7. Joseph [Méléze-] Modrzejewski, "La structure juridique du mariage grec," in Edda Bresciani (Ed.) *Scritti in onore di Orsolina Montevicchi* (Bologna, 1981), 261-263, in Panayotis Dimakis (Ed.) *Symposion 1979*, Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte. Ägina, 3.-7. September 1979, 7-72 (Cologne/Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1983), 39-71.

8. Yiftach-Firanko, "Law in Graeco-Roman Egypt," in Roger S. Bagnall (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Papyrology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 541-560., esp. 543: "A

As widely known, when speaking of Hellenistic and specifically Ptolemaic law, two tendencies normally coexist: either to consider the institutions which in this law differ from Athenian law as ancient features of Greek law (of a common fund of Greek law, to be precise) which resurface, or to relate them to the environment in which the Greek immigrants found themselves. Often, and this is a defining aspect of Ptolemaic law, an institution that cannot easily be explained as the result of an evolution within a system is attributed to an alien influence.

Sometimes, the social and economic changes involved in the establishment and development of new communities may be supported by contact with other cultures already in the territory. At other times, changes in the socio-economic environment simply force the disappearance of certain institutions or their re-adaptation to new functions. In our case, we start from the institutions of the polis and the decisive role of citizenship and its transmission, the latter undoubtedly linked to marriage and specifically to *ἐγγύησις*. Greek autonomous poleis excepted, citizenship as such becomes less important in the Hellenistic kingdoms and specifically in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt. Given the importance that *ἐγγύησις* had in the polis environment to guarantee the transmission of citizenship, for obvious reasons this clause disappeared from the documentation of this period.⁹

In Attic marriages, it was also essential the act of *ἐκδοσις*, the "handing over" of the bride. In Classical Greece also *ἐκδοσις* typically took place between two men, the bride's father (or her *κύριος*) and, on the other hand, her prospective husband. The institution of *ἐκδοσις*, to sum up, meant the shifting of the legal power over the bride from her previous father or *κύριος* to her prospective husband.¹⁰

Unlike *ἐγγύησις*, however, the handing over of the bride, is preserved in many documents, but it is in this procedure that we see the novelty where, in some cases the bride's mother plays an active part in this procedure, sometimes in the company of her husband and sometimes on her own. The casuistry is diverse, ranging from cases where the mother appears alone giving the bride away (P.Oxy II 372; P.Vind. Bosw 5; P.Oxy LIV 3370; P.Herv. 69; P.Cair.Preis. 2+3; P.Oxy LIV 3770) to cases where both parents give their daughter in marriage (BGU IV 1100;

whole range of institutions that are common in many Greek poleis—the engysis as the act that creates the marriage, the daughter as heir, the various procedures connected with her marriage, and all the institutions and acts connected with the subunits of the polis (in Athens: deme, tribe, and phratry)—leave no trace in Greek papyri from Egypt (the autonomous poleis to some extent excepted)".

9. Of course, *ἐγγύησις* may have been preserved as a social rite in some cases, but, deprived of the great importance it had had. Otherwise, it would not be logical for it to disappear from the documents.

10. Wolff, "Eherecht und Familienverfassung in Athen," *Traditio* 2 (1944): 43-95, esp. 47; Modrzejewski, "La structure juridique du mariage grec," 49-51.

P.Oxy XLIX 3491; BGU IV 1105).¹¹ Also, the bride was able to give herself in marriage (P.Giss. 2;¹² P.Oxy XLIX 3500; P.Dura 30), in the so-called *autoekdosis*. There are cases where it is the grandmother who participates in the giving of the bride (P.Oxy III 496).¹³

Accordingly, it should come as no surprise that, contrary to Erdmann, in the two documents we are about to discuss, *ἐγγύησις* is completely absent¹⁴, while *ἐκδοσις* is preserved to some degree. We say that the *ἐκδοσις* has been preserved to some extent because in the Egyptian context there is no reference to the bride being given in order to raise legitimate children, nor is the function of the father or paternal next of kin in the role of *κύριος* preserved at all.¹⁵ It is most probably a Panhellenic institution, although in the Egyptian context its original meaning has been weakened.¹⁶

In both cases, we shall cite only the fragments that affect the *ἐκδοσις* performed solely by the mother or with her intervention. Our first document, P.Eleph. 1, is very famous. This is considered the oldest Greek document of the Hellenistic period, since the reign with which it is dated is still that of Alexander IV, the son of Alexander the Great. This document, unsurprisingly, has been profusely discussed and commented upon by scholarship.¹⁷

11. The documents cited are not only marriage contracts, but also dowry receipts or petitions in which the mother's role in the bride's delivery is noted, vid. Yiftach-Firanko, *Marriage and Marital Arrangements*, 43-44.

12. P. Giss 2, ll.7-13 Olympias gives herself in marriage with her father acting as her own *κύριος*: Ὀλυ[μ]πιάς Διονυσίου Μα[κ]έτα μετὰ κυρίου τοῦ ἑαυτῆς πατρὸς Διονυσίου Μακεδόνης τῆς δευτέ-|ρας ἱππαρχίας ἑκατονταρούρου Ἀνταίῳ Ἀθηναίῳ τῶν | Κινέου τῆς δευ-τέρ[α]ς ἱππαρχίας ἑκατοντ[α]ρούρωι [εἶναι] γυναῖκα γαμετήν.

13. P. Oxy III 496 (=M.Chr. 287), ll.4-7. The interesting aspect of this document is that at the beginning only the father is named, and later the grandmother claims to have participated in the bride's delivery: καὶ ἡ | [τῆς] γαμουμένης μάμμη Θαῖς Σαραπίωνος μη[τ]ρὸς Ἡρακλ[ο]ύ[το]ς ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς | π[ό]λεως μετὰ κυρίου τοῦ ἑαυτῆς[ς] μὲν. ἐτέρου υἱοῦ τοῦ δὲ ἐκδότου γνησίου ἀδελφοῦ | Σαραπίωνος [Σα]ραπί[ω]νος [ό]μολογεῖ ἐν ἀγυ[ῖ] τῇ αὐτῇ ἐγδοῦναι τὴν Θαίδα.

14. Wolff, "Grundlagen," 169: *ἐγγύησις* is totally absent from the documentation of this period.

15. Modrzejewski, "La structure juridique du mariage grec," 63; Yiftach-Firanko, "Judaean Desert Marriage Documents and Ekdosis," in Ranon Katzoff, and David Schappas (Eds.), *Law in the Documents of the Judaean Desert* (Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2005), 67-84, esp. 69-71.

16. Modrzejewski, "La structure juridique du mariage grec," 48.

17. Many are the problems raised by this document. We shall not deal here with the controversial question of whether the formulary corresponds to the island of Cos, the place of origin of the bride and groom, but that does not necessarily prove that it reproduces an earlier form. On this problem, vid. Claire Préaux, "Le statut de la femme à l'époque hellénistique, principalement en Égypte," in *Recueils de la Société Jean Bodin pour l'histoire comparative des institutions* XI (Brussels: Éditions de la Librairie Encyclopédique, 1959), 127-175, esp. 147-150.

P.Eleph. 1(=P.Meyer 18=Mitt. 283=Sel. Pap. 1)

Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου βασιλεύοντος ἔτει ἐβδόμῳ, Πτολεμαίου
σατραπεύοντος ἔτει τεσσαρε-
σκαίδεκάτῳ μηνὸς Δίου. συγγραφὴ συνοικισίας Ἡρακλείδου καὶ Δημητρίας.
λαμβάνει Ἡρακλείδης
Δημητρίαν Κώϊαν γυναῖκα γνησίαν παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς Λεπτίνου Κώϊου καὶ τῆς
μητρὸς Φιλωτίδος ἐλεύθερος

"In the reign of Alexander, son of Alexander, in the seventh year, in the satrapship of Ptolemy, in the fourteenth year, in the month Dios. Marriage contract of Herakleides and Demetria. Herakleides (the Temnitian) takes as his lawful wife Demetria the Koan, a free man a free woman, from her father Leptines, Koan, and her mother Philotis, (Demetria).¹⁸"

A key element in this discussion is provided by Yiftach-Firanko in his recent work on marriage contracts: the relationship between the role played by the mother in the ἔκδοσις in this document and an interesting testament, P.Petr² I.25 (226-225 BC).

P.Petr² I.25 25-28:

ἐγδόσθω δ[ὲ Ἄρτε-]
μιδώ[ρα τὰς θυ]γατέρας Τετ[. .] καὶ Νικοῦν, διδοῦσα φερνὴν ἐκάστη ἣν ἂν
[αὐτῇ] /
φαίνη[ται ἀπὸ τῶ]ν ὑπαρχόν[των.] ἐὰν δέ [τ]ι πάθῃ [Ἄρ]τεμιδώρα πρὸ τοῦ
ἐ[γδεδόσθαι] / τὰς θυ[γατέρας]

This will, badly preserved, is a significant example of the role of the mother in the ἔκδοσις, insofar as the testator foresees for two minor daughters that in the future their mother may give them away in marriage (πρὸ τοῦ ἐ[γδεδόσθαι] / τὰς θυ[γατέρας]) and grant them their dowry. The important indication here it is that the mother was not in fact named as her daughter's guardian in the will, but the simple application of what was happening in Egypt at the time. Some thirty years have passed between P.Eleph 1 and P.Petr² I.25.¹⁹

The case of the other document is that of a mother giving her daughter in marriage and acting on her own, without the intervention of the κύριος, but with

18. Translation by Arthur S. Hunt & Campbell C. Edgar, *Select Papyri. Private Documents I* (Cambridge -Mass.- Harvard University Press) 1.

19. Yiftach-Firanko (*Marriage and Marital Arrangements*, 43 and n. 12) is right that the mother's role does not depend on her being named as guardian in that will. The link between the mother's role in a future ἔκδοσις and her possible role as guardian is argued by Anne-Marie Verilhac, and Claude Vial, *Le mariage grec du VI^e siècle av. JC à l' époque d' Auguste* (Athens-Paris: Bulletin de Correspondance Hellénique Suppl. 32, 1998), 261.

the assistance of a *συνεστώς*, which was quite normal in the period subsequent to the *Constitutio Antoniniana*.²⁰

In P.Oxy X 1273, the bride, Aurelia Tausiris, is given in marriage by her mother Aurelia Thaesis; her *pherne* –we are not concerned on that point in detail now– is described as being composed of jewellery and clothing, to which monetary value is ascribed as a way to secure it in the case of divorce.

We are dealing with a late Roman document (AD 260), since it dates from after the *Constitutio Antoniniana*. P.Oxy X 1273, which, like most of those drawn up in this part of Egypt, is particularly conservative in its wording and consequently takes up the *ἐκδοσις* formula once again.

ἀγαθῇ τύχῃ. ἐξέδετο Αὐρηλία Θαῖσις Εὐδαίμωνος μητρὸς Ἡρα-
 ῖδος ἀπ' Ὀξύρυγχων πόλεως μετὰ συνεστῶτος Αὐρηλίου Θεώνος
 τοῦ καὶ Νεπωτιανοῦ καὶ ὡς χρημα(τίζει) τὴν ἑαυτῆς θυγατέραν Αὐρηλίαν
 Ταυσεῖριν πρὸς γάμον ἀνδρὶ Αὐρηλίῳ Ἀρσινόῳ Τρύφωνος μητρὸς Δη-
 ὤμητριάς ἀπὸ τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως

"For good fortune Aurelia Thaësis daughter of Eudaemon and Heäis, of Oxyrhynchus, acting with the assistance of a *συνεστώς*, Aurelius Theon also known as Nepotianus and however is styled, has given her daughter Aurelia Tausiris in marriage to the husband Aurelius Arsinoitis, son of Tryphon and Demetria, of the mentioned city."²¹

For reasons that Erdmann does not explain, he attributes this second document to the influence of Egyptian law and therefore does not take it into account in his thesis. It cannot be said, at least at first glance, that there is any evidence of an Egyptian legal background. In fact, the demotic documents published by Lüddekens²² or Pestman (and the documents published so far, to the best of my knowledge), do not contain a situation comparable to that of a mother giving her daughter in marriage. Perhaps this is based on the fact that Egyptian women originally had fewer limitations in legal transactions, but today we know of other cases that prove what the editors, Grenfell and Hunt say, which is that we are dealing with a typically Greek contract. It also may have weighed on Erdmann's judgement that we are commenting upon a document from after

20. Ludwig Mitteis, *Grundzüge* II.1 Leipzig (Teubner) 1912 (repr. Hildesheim, Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung) 252: "Seit dem dritten Jahrh. n. C. tritt statt des κύριος öfter ein *συνεστώς* auf. Er erscheint öfter, wenngleich nicht immer, dort, wo eine Frau kraft ihres *Jus liberorum* keinen κύριος braucht. Vielleicht ist in solchen Fällen die Gewohnheit einen männlichen Beistand zuzuziehen, der Grund für die Zuziehung eines *συνεστώς* gewesen und dann der Ausdruck gelegentlich für den echten κύριος verwendet worden". Cf. e.g., P.Oxy VI 912.

21. Translation by Bernard P. Grenfell, and Arthur S. Hunt, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* X (London, 1914).

22. In general, on the status of women in pharaonic Egypt, vid. Erich Lüddekens, *Ägyptische Eheverträge* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz Verlag, 1960), 5-12.

AD 212 and that those who appear in it are *Aurelii*, but this does not lead us to think that we are dealing with Egyptian law.

Erdmann wondered why in P.Eleph. 1, and in some others, the mother played an active role in the ἐκδοσις. Erdmann's approach is interesting because he is not overly radical in his assertions. He is critical, for example, of theories such as those of Bachofen and the maternal *potestas*, and for this reason he is not in favour of manipulating the facts to adapt them to a previous theory. On the other hand, Erdmann refers to Bachofen's work on several occasions and acknowledges some cases proposed by this author in which the role of women could be relevant.²³ Although he rejects Bachofen's main thesis, he refers to him several times.

Materna Potestas?

Before discussing Erdmann's hypothesis, it is worth referring to Raphael Taubenschlag's explanation, because he believes that we are dealing with an institution specific to Hellenistic Egypt, but rooted in the oriental tradition of the Egyptian law. Taubenschlag, in fact, does not mention Bachofen's theories, and his thesis is not based on them, but rather (according to our own interpretation, since he is not clear about this point) on a supposedly oriental tradition that would be present in Egyptian culture and that would have influenced the Greek settlers.²⁴ It should be noted that this scholar was of the opinion that Ptolemaic law was a kind of blend of the Greek and Egyptian traditions, something that has now been called into question by most scholarship.²⁵

Within the peculiar working of Taubenschlag's method, his argumentation is as brilliant as it is ambiguous, because –apart from the thesis that Greek law was mixed with Egyptian law– he does not give a direct reason why he believes that there is a family power of what he calls *materna potestas*.

Taubenschlag limits himself to citing, with his usual mastery of the sources, various documents in which we can see how the mother not only can give her daughter in marriage, a power reserved to the father or the κύριος in Attic law, as is well known, but she is also allowed to decide on areas of power usually related to the powers of the *pater familias*, ranging from the exhibition of children to guardianship. To cite a few examples we shall refer to marriage documents where

23. For example, Walter Erdmann, *Die Ehe im alten Griechenland* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1934), 119, by commenting Meleager's story (Hom. *Il* IX 567-572.) he critically takes resort to Bachofen's theories.

24. Raphael Taubenschlag, "Die *materna potestas* im gräko-ägyptischen Recht," *Zeitschrift der Savigny Stiftung (Rom. Abt.)* 49 (1929): 115-128.

25. Sandra Luisa Lippert, *Einführung in die altägyptische Rechtsgeschichte* (Berlin: Lit-Verlag, 2008), 27.

the mother appears alone or together with her husband (BGU IV 1100; 1105), but Taubenschlag also points to cases (and this is more interesting) where the bride is given herself in marriage (*autoekdosis*), in a significant case with her father acting as κύριος (P.Giess. 2; P.Freib. III 29, l.6).

In order to argue his thesis, also according to his methodological approach, Taubenschlag cites sources from the Greek and Roman world as well as sources from other cultural spheres. Therefore, we do not know whether his position is clearly to defend that this characteristic of the mother's power is based on contact with the Egyptian tradition or whether it reproduces an ancient element of Greek culture prior to the polis. One case he mentions is interesting, although in our opinion it is not a good element of comparison to explain the documents in question. It is a Greek papyrus, but from the Byzantine period (6th century), P.Lond. V 1710, l. 12, where the mother acquires by "purchase" the bride for her son, a case of which Taubenschlag finds parallels in Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian law.²⁶ As stated above, the documents on which Taubenschlag bases his thesis belong to very different cultural spheres and, in my opinion, some of them come from times too distant to draw such conclusions.

As pointed out above, a further obstacle to Taubenschlag's thesis is that the Egyptian social milieu lacks the model that the first Greek immigrants to Egypt might have followed. A brief examination of the demotic documents does not suggest that the role played by the mother in the Ptolemaic marriage contracts in Greek is similar to the picture we find in the demotic texts. The aim of both kinds of documents was to guarantee the prospective husband's duty to maintain his wife and their future offspring. It is true that in the demotic material, the woman plays a relevant role, as it is she herself who agrees on the economic conditions of the marriage with her future husband, but the mother as such does not play any part in them.²⁷

In any case, the notion of the *mater familias* was strongly and rightly criticised by Arangio-Ruiz, who defines the power of the mother (normally a widow) not so much as a power proper of hers, but as a subsidiary and concurrent power with that of the father.²⁸ In my opinion, Arangio-Ruiz's criticism clarifies the true

26. Taubenschlag, "Die materna potestas," 120.

27. Pieter Willem Pestman, *Marriage and Matrimonial Property* (Leiden: Brill, 1961), 24-45) distinguishes between two types of marriage documents: A) Woman's document and B) Sale document. This classification can be traced back to Wilhelm Spiegelberg's old work, "Demotische Miscellen," *Recueil de travaux relatifs à la philologie et archéologie égyptienne et assyrienne* 28 (1906): 187-204. On the Demotic marriage contracts in general, vid. Lippert, *Einführung in die altägyptische Rechtsgeschichte*, 166-170 and recently, Janet H. Johnson, "Women in Demotic (Documentary) Texts," in Mariam F. Ayad (Ed.) *Women in Ancient Egypt* (Cairo: The American University of Cairo Press, 2022), 331-350, esp. 331-335.

28. Vincenzo Arangio-Ruiz, *Persone e famiglia nel diritto dei papiri* (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 1930), 45-46.

nature of the mother's function in many documents, but I believe that the case of marriage contracts is not fully explained.

Can we detect in the Theory of *Materna Potestas* an Indirect Influence of Bachofen?

This question is very difficult to answer in each individual case, but on the other hand it is a matter of fact that Johann-Jakob Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* (Stuttgart, 1861) proved to be a book as much criticised as it was widely read and not always explicitly quoted, since in a way it was in the background of what these scholars affirmed when they gave relevance to the mother in various branches of law. As widely known, this is true not only in the field of law, but also in the whole of European culture at the time and following times, as evidenced by Bachofen's influence on scholars and artists such as Rilke, Kokoschka, Frobenius, or Graves, with whose quotation not in vain we have begun this article.²⁹

The fact that at that time - the late nineteenth and early twentieth century - the question arises as to whether women played a more important part in earlier stages and were subsequently relegated may be directly or indirectly related to Bachofen's thesis. The nature of Bachofen's thesis was, however, as ambiguous as paradoxical. On the one hand he believed in the possibility that women in a primitive society would have had a more prominent role, but on the other hand he considered matriarchy as a kind of primitive stage, a previous phase of barbarism that had to be overcome by a patriarchal system. The question is whether, in the same way that this scholar regarded certain myths as the survival of that primitive stage, other scholars influenced to a greater or lesser extent by him believed that certain important roles of women could be considered as resurgences of that stage.

The impact of *Das Mutterrecht* is thus sometimes subtle and difficult to prove. I have not been able to find a single quotation from Bachofen in Taubenschlag's large work. Erdmann, as we shall see, is critical of Bachofen's theses, but in some way bears his theories in mind.

We can sum up the matter by saying that Taubenschlag seems to be more influenced by the original substratum of the Semitic population (for example, by

29. On Johann-Jakob Bachofen in general, and very briefly vid. Gerd Kleinheyer, and Jan Schröder, *Deutsche Juristen aus fünf Jahrhunderten* (Karlsruhe-Heidelberg: C.F. Müller, 1976), 319. Where is impact on the culture of his time and subsequent periods, vid. in general Hans-Jürgen Heinrichs (Ed.), *Materialien zu Bachofens 'Das Mutterrecht'* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975) and about his influence on legal scholarship, vid. Eva Cantarella, "J. J. Bachofen tra storia del diritto romano e scienze sociali," *Sociologia del Diritto* 9 (1982): 111-136.

the fact that Egyptian women were subject to far fewer restrictions than Greek women³⁰) than by such theories, so that Bachofen's maternal power. It can be stated that if there is indeed any influence of Bachofen on Taubenschlag it would be merely superficial.

Erdmann's case is much more complicated. It does not seem the most suitable option to resort to a general theory, such as Bachofen's, that matriarchal power was a reality in a much earlier historical moment and to deduce from these corollaries, certain peculiarities of later law that are related to this matriarchal power when such a starting point cannot be substantiated with sufficient evidence. Nor does it seem sensible to deduce from certain features of women's power in a cultural sphere such as the Egyptian one that something resembling *mater familias* existed there.

Although he may have implicitly taken Bachofen's theories into account in a very vague manner, Erdmann's proposed solution is based on the first of the two above-mentioned documents and reaches a conclusion that is partly acceptable and partly rejectable. It is acceptable in that for P.Eleph. 1 he does not resort to the Egyptian context to explain the role of the mother; it is rejectable because in the case of P.Oxy X 1273 he does not rely on it, since he considers this document Egyptian in nature.

It should be noted that Erdmann's thesis is part of a controversy that existed in the 1920s and 1930s about the possibility that in Attic law (and in Greek law before the polis) there was a type of marriage in which the spouses were on an equal footing. It is obvious that in Ptolemaic Egypt the structures of the polis that formed the marriage by *ἐγγύησις* and *ἐκδοσις* disappear, but it is disputable whether there are real precedents for this situation or whether it is simply the result of a natural evolution due to the changing social and political context.³¹

For Erdmann, in ancient Greek law (although he does not refer precisely to Greek law prior to the constitution of the polis, he is implicitly referring to it) the mother would have the function of giving the daughter in marriage together with the father. He makes this assertion by carefully distinguishing between those parts of the wedding ritual, which we know from various literary sources and, I

30. Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 188-189.

31. Wolff, "Marriage, Law and Family Organization in Ancient Athens," 47. The institution of *ἐγγύησις* is based on marriage by purchase and implies the submission of the wife to her husband, although in Athens a woman's ties to her own family were not entirely extinguished. Of course, the conception of marriage by purchase must be very much relativised today, vid. Rudolf Köstler, "ΕΑΝΑ, Ein Beitrag zum homerischen Eherecht," in *Homerisches Recht* (Vienna: Österreichischer Bundesverlag für Unterreicht, Wissenschaft und Kunst, 1950), 49-64.

daresay, from pottery in some specific features,³² and -on the other hand- the legal institutions.

32. On the presence of the mother in Athenian pottery from the classical period, vid. Amy C. Smith, "The Politics of Weddings at Athens: An Iconographic Assessment," *Leeds International Classical Studies* 4 (2005): 1-32, esp. 4-6. As Amy C. Smith observes, just as Athenian vases are generally associated with the symposium, the images related to wedding ceremonies are placed in the context of a genre of their own, a genre that is confined to a specific period. I have outlined (Sánchez-Moreno Ellart, s. v. 'Marriage - Greece and Rome- 4317) the value of pottery to discover some features of marriage ceremonies that are not clearly reflected in the texts, but it is always necessary to have written sources to interpret pottery drawings. These do, however, provide important information that literary sources sometimes fail to develop. Although it is necessary to refer to this material, it is hard to draw valid conclusions from it for the history of law. In other words, it cannot be concluded that the mother was involved from the point of view of the law only because she played a significant role in the ceremonies. It is a different matter whether her involvement in the ceremonies might reflect a legal participation in the past as well. However, as Smith ("The Politics of Wedding," 18-26) points out pottery in Athens also reflects the city's involvement in the private sphere. Some of the divinities depicted symbolise virtues of both the private sphere and civic life. Peytho, for example "bridges the private world of the bride to the public world of the polis" (19). The allusion to civic virtues could distort the original meaning of the ceremonies and might make it more difficult to use these images to deduce from the ritual that appears in these images the role of the mother of the bride in marriage in a pre-polis period. The images that correspond to the mother's intervention in the ceremonies are very impressive. For example, the figures depicting the bride's mother in the wedding procession carrying torches are well known, and in this case, we have also literary evidence (Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 732-734), without which, it would not be easy to define the figures' relationship to the bride. On this point, vid. John Oakley, and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens* (Madison, 1993), 26. To sum up, it is sometimes difficult the identification of the bride's mother in the Athenian pottery (Sian Lewis, *The Athenian Woman: An Iconographic Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 26; 42), but this source offers information of scenes of the maternal family, e.g. mothers preparing daughters for marriage festivals not reflected or not clearly reflected in the texts. I insist on the idea that the images on the pottery are essentially very difficult to interpret for many reasons: As Rebecca H. Sinos ("Wedding Connections in Greek and Roman Art," in Jeffrey Beneker, and Georgia Tsouvala (Eds.) *The Discourse of Marriage in the Greco-Roman World* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2020), 20-67 points out, the mystery cults elements are also present in the pottery paintings and the associations with mystery cult (Dionysian and Eleusinian figures) make interpretation even more difficult. As Sinos observes, in general, black-figure technique vase painting was mainly focused on the wedding procession, but the red-figure technique expanded the repertory to include a wider range of scenes, including those related to the mystery cults. The problem of identifying the figures and their relation to the mystery cults is dealt with in detail by Sinos, "The Ultimate Prize: An Orphic Image of Victory," in Heather L. Reid, John Serrati, and Tim Sorg (Eds.) *Conflict and Competition: Agon in Western Greece* (Sioux City (Iowa): Parnassos Press, 2020), 1-30.



Fig. 4861. — Scène de loutrophorie.

Figure 1. Red-Figure Loutrophoros by the Washing Painter

Source: Athens, National Museum 1453 = CC1225 (c.450-400 BC); Oakley/Sinos *The Wedding* 58-59 and fig. 4.

Figure 1 represents the mother of the bride with torches. A grown woman stands in front of and facing the procession of women (led by a boy playing the pipes); The woman who awaits the procession is likely the bride's mother; she holds a torch in each hand. The image is available in Maxime Collignon s. v. "Matrimonium-Γάμος," in Charles-Victor Daremberg, and Edmon Saglio (Eds.) *Dictionnaire des antiquités grecques et romaines* III.2 (Paris: Hachette, 1904), 1639-1634, esp. 1649 fig. 4861.



Figure 2. *Amphoriskos* by Heimarme Painter

Source: Berlin-Staatliche Antikensammlung 30036 (c. 430-420 BC).

Considering Figure 2, the difficulty of characterising the images in Attic pottery concerning wedding rituals is outlined by the scenes related to the mystery cults. This is why we have pointed out that this material is difficult to decipher, and even more so if we want to look for a legal scope to the presence of the mother in the ceremonies. In principle, the role of the mother seems to be linked to religious motives, and those examples in which the mystery cults appear seem to emphasise this. Any scene that shows the bride sitting in a woman's lap, unless an inscription shows it is an exceptional occasion (as is the case on this *amphoriskos* featuring Helen and Paris), portrays her in the lap of her mother. The pose echoes that of Demeter and Persephone in a statuette found at Eleusis; very likely that statuette was modelled after a scene in the pediment of the temple at Eleusis, which of course features the goddesses of that sanctuary (vid. Sinos, "The Ultimate Prize," 21-24. Helen is seated not on Leda's lap, but on Aphrodite's. If this were a normal wedding, according to the pattern seen on Athenian vases we would see the bride sitting on her mother's lap. Aphrodite's name is still partially visible above her. The image is available in Adolf Furtwaengler, and Karl Reichhold, *Griechische Vasenmalerei. Auswahl Hervorragender Vasenbilder* (Munich: F. Bruckmann, 1932).

In his book on marriage in ancient Greece Erdmann devotes a few pages to the marriage ritual.³³ The mother, for example, has a place in the ceremony together with her relatives. In some other literary sources, which we have tested, and which Erdmann does not cite this is also clear.³⁴ However, as Erdmann himself states, this does not imply a legal obligation, but simply a social fact reflected in the rite and without any real legal value in that moment. What Erdmann possibly wants to suggest is that the presence of the mother in wedding ceremonies could be a vestige of other historical periods in which she should have played a more relevant role with repercussions in the field of law, but for this it is difficult to find direct evidence.

In other words, both literary sources and pottery convey an image in which the mother plays a role closely linked to religion and very ancient traditions. However, whether this role was in the past relevant to law and whether it was a survival of a historical moment in which the mother played a more relevant role than she did in classical Athens is something difficult to deal with the sources we have.

33. Erdmann, *Die Ehe im alten Griechenland* 256-260. For information on wedding rituals throughout the Greek world, vid. Amy C. Smith, "Marriage," in *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum* (*ThesCRA*) VI (Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum Publications, 2011), 83-94. Katia Margariti, "The Greek Wedding Outside Athens and Sparta," *Études Classiques* 88 (2017): 319-335.

34. Cf. e.g., Eur. *Iph. Aul.* 607-610.

The ἔκδοσις as a Way of Unifying Formularies

However, we do not want to overlook a criticism of Erdmann's commentary on P.Eleph. 1, at least in one essential aspect: he argues against all evidence that ἐγγύησις is still present in this document. For him, it is clear that this feature remained, which he calls a "national" one, but we, on the basis of the formulas handed down to us by the sources, cannot affirm the same. It is self-evident, on the other hand, -as we have pointed out- that the ἔκδοσις-clause is explicitly maintained. Moreover, it is not possible to conclude that ἔκδοσις was essential for a legitimate marriage to exist. We know (and this feature is common to the Egyptian population³⁵) that cohabitation by itself was sufficient and that this feature can already be observed in the Greek world before the migration to Egypt. An example of this in the Ptolemaic Egypt can be seen in BGU IV 1050, where the bride simply comes together with her bridegroom.³⁶

We must, therefore, distinguish between the social reality, where ἔκδοσις was no longer a requirement for the legitimacy of marriage, as it was in Athens, and the reality of the documents, where, in contrast to ἐγγύησις, it is still present. In this sense, the presence of ἔκδοσις in the documents seems to be merely instrumental.

We shall not go into the question of whether ἔκδοσις took place in practice or not. Wolff argued that it no longer took place in practice and that the norm was cohabitation, which could already be done in the Classical period, but in such a way that citizenship rights were not transferred.³⁷ In a context outside the polis this exclusion of citizen rights becomes irrelevant, and, therefore, marriage by mere consensus and cohabitation, without formal requirements, was widespread.

In fact, the ἔκδοσις, as Méléze-Modrzejewski rightly claims, was a way of unifying the marriage formularies.³⁸ It is the main clause, which is accompanied by the dowry inventory as well as the so-called moral clauses, i.e., those referring to the conduct of the prospective spouses. These formularies remain for a long time: until the 1st century BC the use of this form is widespread; in some places, it survives until the 3rd century.

Wolff points out how what typifies Greek marriage in Egypt is the passage of the woman from the paternal home to the husband's home, and the ἔκδοσις clearly expresses this reality, although in the Hellenistic world, the disappearance of the *oikos* has greatly relativised this original framework. In other words, the disappearance of the *oikos* as conceived in Attic law renders the role of the father

35. Pestman, *Marriage and Matrimonial Property*, 50-51.

36. Cohabitation is a sign of marriage: Judith E. Grubbs, *Women and Law*, 122. On the questionable identification between the Egyptian legal tradition and the *agraphos gamos*, vid. Yiftach-Firanko, 55-56.

37. Wolff, *Written and Unwritten Marriages*, 51-58. Of the Greek origin, vid. esp. 49-50.

38. Modrzejewski, "La structure juridique du mariage grec," 68: This scholar relates *ekdosis* to the so-called *Zweckverfügung* in Greek law, according to Wolff's theory.

or *κύριος* in the delivery of the bride meaningless, and therefore the mother may be added to this function or replace the father if he is no longer alive. Even the *ἔκδοσις* can be omitted in practice, but if a marriage contract is drawn up, it appears as a style clause at least until the 3rd. BC.³⁹

Erdmann Goes Back to the So-Called 'Homeric Law': Is This an Appropriate Approach to the Problem?

Homeric law is somewhat vague, since in the Homeric poems, legal institutions from very different periods overlap. But how does Erdmann justify that *ἔκδοσις* is performed by both parents and that this is a specifically Greek feature? Erdmann refers to this very concept of Homeric law without openly mentioning it and relates P.Eleph. 1 to a passage from the *Iliad* in which Briseis speaks of her dead husband, to whom she was given by her father and mother. For Erdmann, who is not explicit about this either, we are dealing with a kind of vestige of ancient Greek law before the constitution of the polis.

Il. XIX 291-292

ἄνδρα μὲν ᾧ μ' ἔδοσαν τε πατήρ καὶ πότνια μήτηρ
εἶδον πρὸ πτόλιος δεδαιγμένον ὃξέι χαλκῷ

"I saw the husband, to whom my father and my honoured mother married me, lie there, dead, by our city wall, thorn by the sharp bronze."⁴⁰

This comparison, however, does not seem very appropriate, and not precisely because Briseis was a Trojan woman, since the poem knows no such ethnic differences.⁴¹ The Greek/barbarian distinction was coined much later: it can be dated to the 5th century AD, as a result of the struggle against Persia.⁴²

39. Wolff, *Written and Unwritten Marriages*, 17. Wolff points out that the *ἔκδοσις*-clause is only preserved in Oxyrhynchus from the 3rd century AD onwards, but the bias of the sources in this regard must be taken into account, vid Bagnall, "Archaeological Work on Hellenistic and Roman Egypt 1995-2000," *American Journal of Archaeology* 105 (2001): 227-243. Bagnall outlines that we should bear in mind that excavations in Oxyrhynchus force us to include only documents filed in the capital of the nomos. Hence the sample of the Oxyrhynchites is limited (as opposed to the sample of the Arsinoites) to the metropolis.

40. The translation is my own.

41. Nicholas Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary VI (Books 21-24)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 16: "It is very noticeable (...) how relatively slight and debatable are the differentiating marks which might distinguish the Greeks from their eastern enemies, the Trojans and their allies. The main distinction on the human level is

The comparison is, in my view, difficult to establish because the contexts are highly different, and above all, because it is widely known that the information that the Homeric poems give us about marriage belong to different periods, and these are not always easy to identify. The world of *Iliad* gives a picture of marriage in wartime, of the liaisons that arise for the benefit of the heroes and of the women abducted by them, but always, or mostly, in a confusing way.

As well known, Briseis' lament, like Andromache's (*Il.* XXII), is an example of how women war captives lamented their bitter fate.⁴³ By echoing Andromache's words, Briseis remembers that her husband died in the war, but she points out that she was given to him in marriage both by her father and mother.⁴⁴

Anyway, Erdmann is unclear in his analysis, in that he refers to the mother's role in the wedding courtship and, at the same time, points out that in some moment in the past the mother's consent was relevant, reflecting her role in wedding ceremonies.

Or put another way, Erdmann, at first sight means that the mother in the past played some role in the wedding by giving away the daughter, that her consent was required, and that in later developments (in the law of the polis, a fact he does not explicitly mention), it lost its significance.⁴⁵ The ceremony, then,

not between Greeks and foreigners, but between different levels of society, rulers and ruled".

42. Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian. Greek Self-Definition Through Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford Classical Monographs, 1989), 50. On the family in Homer, vid. Cynthia B. Patterson, *The Family in Greek History* (Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press, 1998), 44-89.

43. On the connections between Briseis and Andromache Oliver Taplin, *Homeric Soundings, The Shaping of the Iliad* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 84-86; Casey Dué, *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis* (Oxford-New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publisher Inc., 2002), 72.

44. The commentaries to which we have referred do not deal with the problem at hand. Mark W. Edwards, *The Iliad. A Commentary V* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 269-271) simply points out that the tradition that Briseis's husband was Munes, king of Lurnessos or that Achilles ever married her are questions raised only by the scholia. Regarding Marinna Coray's commentary (*Homer's Iliad Book 19. Bael. Commentary* (Berlin-Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2016), 134-136), it insists on these questions and, on the other hand explains that the title *πότνια* is conceived for goddesses and prominent women, cf. for instance *Il.* VI 429. The scholar also points out that there are parallels with the fate of Andromache and highlights the influence of Homer in his treatment of this story in Greek tragedy, vid. Dué, *The Captive Woman's Lament in Greek Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 52-55; *Homeric Variations on a Lament by Briseis*, 10-14.

45. But as can be seen, Erdmann is ambiguous: it is not clear whether he means that the mother's consent is legally binding when at the same time he says that it may be required by custom in certain contexts, cf. Erdmann, "Die Rolle der Mutter," 545: "Auch hier wird also die Mutter neben dem Vater genannt und es heißt von beiden gemeinsam, daß sie ihre Tochter einem Manne zur Frau gegeben hätten, d.h. also doch wohl nicht

would indicate a different past, to which Homer seems to allude.⁴⁶ Also, in this context, marriage as a religious ceremony is not easily distinguishable from its legal effects.

We shall not now address the problem of which epoch the Homeric poems reflect. As we have previously pointed out, it is obvious that elements from the Mycenaean period can be found in them, but also from a much later period. From an anthropological point of view, it is also an indisputable fact that if we discover some features that lead us to think of matrilocality, they coexist with many others indicating that patrilocality was the norm. Bachofen's ideas, purified of their ideological charge, have been developed in our days by some scholars, such as Kaarle Hirvonen⁴⁷ and Sarah B. Pomeroy,⁴⁸ but they do not offer inconclusive evidence to elucidate whether in Homer it can be said that the mother played a relevant role in the creation of her daughter's marriage –considered as a legal matter– or whether, on the contrary, her function was limited to rites and ceremonies, as was the case in Athens at a much later date.

To sum up, the Homeric poems are not a sufficiently reliable source, since we cannot really date the normally contradictory information they provide. The debate in this case is about whether there are any traces of matrilocality

anderes, als daß die Brautmutter der Verfügung des Vaters zumindestens zugestimmt hat, wenn auch diese Zustimmung nicht als notwendige Voraussetzung zur rechtsgültigen Eheschließung aufzufassen ist, vielmehr nur als von Brauch und Sitte bisweilen erfordert erschein".

46. On the other hand, we are dealing with a typical example of patrilocal marriage: S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (London: Random House, 1975), 23 "Marriage by capture was a variant of patrilocal marriage. For instance, Briseis was enslaved during the Trojan War and became the property of Achilles. He referred to her as his 'bedmate' but she was led to expect to celebrate a ceremony of legal marriage with him when the couple returned to Achilles' home in Greece" (Horn. *Il.* IX. 336; 9. 340-43. 663-65; XIX. 295-99). On this point, vid. Richard M. Krill, "Achilles' War Prize," *Classical Bulletin* 47 (1971): 9-94; Marco Fantuzzi, *Achilles in Love: Intertextual Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 118-120.

47. Kaarle Hirvonen, *Matriarchal Survivals and Certain Trends in Homer's Female Characters* (Helsinki: Suomalainen tiedeakatemia, 1968), 193-195. This author considers that the Homeric poems have many traces of matriarchy in the female characters, as many of the heroes' lineages began with women and established a solidarity of women according to their place of origin, and the reference figure always being their brother, and not their husband. This is not always the case, but these traces are evident and significant. Ivana Savalli, *La donna nella società della Grecia antica* (Bologna: Patron, 1983), 38-41, deals with this problem in a more nuanced way, but she attributes many elements of doubtful dating to the Mycenaean period.

48. Pomeroy, "Andromaque: un exemple méconnu de matriarcat," *Revue des Études Grecques* 88 (1975): 16-19; "A Classical Scholar Perspective on Matriarchy," in Berenice A. Carroll (Ed.) *Liberating Women's History* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1976), 217-223.

remaining in Homer, and this question has already been raised by Bachofen himself.

The Real Starting Point is Perhaps Not So Much the So-Called Homeric Law as the Social and Political Reality Prior to the Constitution of the Polis

We have already made it clear that according to scholarship, the Homeric poems do not correspond to a particular model of society, but rather to various periods of Greek history. In that sense, Erdmann's thesis is, in my opinion, superficial, because he wants to look for Greek "national" features in Homer, when in Homer we can find a fact and its opposite, e.g., matrilinearity and patrilinearity. On the other hand, however, Erdmann is right in a certain sense, because in the historical moments before the polis the social order is based more on the way aristocratic families acted with regard to their alliances, than on the political community.

In this context, Jean-Pierre Vernant's analysis is still relevant today:⁴⁹ Vernant was able to discover that alongside the marriage required by the *ἐγγύησις* to guarantee the birth of citizen children in Athens, there remained traces of other forms of marriage and cohabitation, even if they were deprived of the right of citizenship for descendants. If, as Vernant points out, the status of the married woman and the concubine in the 5th century BC can be defined as fluctuating and imprecise, the same can be affirmed, even more emphatically, in the Homeric poems, and precisely in the case of Briseis.⁵⁰

An example of this type of union in the Homeric poems can be seen in the woman who is conquered by arms. Briseis is a case of this type and, as Vernant points out, she herself, after evoking her husband, to whom she was given by her father and mother, affirms that Patroclus told her that Achilles was going to make her his lawful wife (*κουριδὴς ἀλόχου*), a term used by Agamemnon to refer to his wife Clytemnestra (*Il.* I. 114).⁵¹ Achilles himself had already used this term to refer to Briseis (*Il.* IX 336).

In other words, what by our standards or even those of a 5th century Athenian might be a concubine (*pallake*) in the conception of the Homeric heroes is close to the legitimate wife (*damar*). In this case, the role of the mother is not recorded because the cause that legitimises the marriage is having conquered Briseis by arms, but in the first case the presence of the mother in the *ἔκδοσις* may

49. Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Le mariage en Grèce archaïque," *La Parola del Passato* 28 (1973): 31-79=*Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* (Paris: Maspero, 1974), 57-82.

50. Jean-Pierre Vernant, foreword to Marcel Detienne, *Les jactances d' Adonis* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), XIX.

51. Vernant, "Le mariage," 64-65.

have to do with the prestige of the maternal family, which in an aristocratic society gives her greater relevance than in democratic Athens, where women are even more relegated to private life.

According to Vernant, there are elements in the myth where in the framework of an aristocratic society, and still detached from the polis, the importance of the wife, and of the mother, is noticeably more significant than in later periods. This makes sense when the wife could be socially on the same level as the husband or even belong to a more powerful family with which the husband has established an alliance. Such are the cases of the goddess Hera (Eur. *Iph Aul.* 900) and Penelope (*Od.* II. 43). In both cases, they act as mistresses of the house and as representatives of royal power. It is a question of linking the woman to the husband's power by her function and, in Vernant's words, of perpetuating and transmitting sovereignty.⁵²

To sum up, there are some grounds for thinking that in the Homeric poems and in the period before the constitution of the polis there were models of cohabitation that were partly preserved in the polis but devoid of the most remarkable effect in such a context: the generation of legitimate children who would become citizens. Naturally, those forms of cohabitation constituted an obstacle to access to citizenship, but on the other hand, their existence may suggest earlier times when such forms would not have been disapproved of. For example, in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt –as we have already pointed out above – *autoekdosis* was well regarded, while the case we know of in classical Athens, in a Menander's play,⁵³ is that of a courtesan. The disappearance of the polis context may have led to a return to ancient forms of marriage and cohabitation, but the disappearance of the polis may also have made it easier for women of significant wealth to be included in the marriage contract once the role of the husband or *κύριος* had declined, without conjuring up any historical precedent.

52. The role of the mother in aristocratic society can be seen several times in the Homeric poems, e.g., *Od.* XIX 413-466, where Telemachus' respectful relationship with his mother's family, whom he visits, can be appreciated, vid. Évelyne Scheid-Tissinier, "Le mariage homérique et ses logiques," *Anabases* 22 (2015): 49-62, esp. 60.

53. Men. *Penkeir.* 130-131; 238-249. The same can be said of Herodotus, who links *autoekdosis* with prostitution (*Herod.* I 93), vid. Modrzejewski, "La structure juridique du mariage grec," 57.

Different Solutions, not all of them Mutually Exclusive

At this point we must consider the possibilities of explaining why the mother appears in documents from Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, sometimes alone, in a position she never occupied in the Attic *ἐκδοσις*.

- a) We can interpret this as a feature of ancient Greek law, eliminated by the law of the polis, and which reappeared when the Greeks settled in Egypt. This possibility cannot be ruled out entirely, but we lack sufficient evidence. We have cases of women self-delivering in Attic sources, specifically in Menander, for example, but these are courtesans. In the literary sources we have no examples of mothers participating in *ἐκδοσις*, other than those that can be dated to Hellenistic and Roman times (e.g., Xen. Ephes. V.1.6; Aristaen. II.8.2).
- b) We can think that the simple adaptation to Egypt of people of different Greek origins and who no longer had the law of their poleis led to a readaptation of institutions on the basis of the common background of Hellenic law, for the same reasons that institutions such as *ἐγγύησις* and *epiclerate* disappeared. This explanation is in fact compatible with the previous one, insofar as the revival of an ancient institution would seem to be brought about by the dismantling of the law of the polis that had abrogated it.
- c) We can simply assume that there was no resurgence (regardless of whether or not there was a historical background to the mother's participation in the *ἐκδοσις*) but simply readaptation. In this sense, let us recall Claude Mossé's studies,⁵⁴ in which she detailed several cases under Attic law (some of them very famous, such as the widow of Pasion, the banker, an Athenian citizen but originally a Phoenician slave) in which women with important patrimony appeared. It is normal that this *de facto* reality made its way into a society where such restrictions did not exist. The *ἐκδοσις* being the formal part of the contract and the dowry (to which we have not paid attention here) the most important part, it seems reasonable that a mother who contributes money and goods to the dowry appears giving her daughter in a marriage contract. This seems to coincide with the fact that anyone, man or woman, who has participated in the provision of the dowry, is designated as *ekdotes* or *ekdotis*, whether or not he or she took part in the act of giving the bride.⁵⁵ What is decisive is that whoever contributes financially to the daughter's

54. Claude Mossé, *La femme dans la Grèce antique* (Paris: A. Michel, 1983), 55-65.

55. Yiftach-Firanko *Marriage and Marital Arrangements*, 42.

endowment is also named in the *ἐκδοσις* clause or later, since the *ἐκδοσις* -clause has lost its former meaning. The patrimonial contribution has become the most important element and the *ἐκδοσις* as such is preserved in a way that is far removed from its original function in the polis. Marriage documents include it in connection with the dowry.

P.Oxy III 496, pointed out above, is a very significant case. Yiftach-Firanko disputes that the grandmother acts properly in giving the granddaughter in marriage, when at the beginning of the document it is the father (in the *ἐκδοσις* -clause) who performs the procedure.⁵⁶ In reality, this issue is secondary, as the grandmother claims that she has given the granddaughter away, without questioning that the father has done so. The fact that the formulary is objective, and the grandmother's intervention is subjective does not seem to us to be significant. The use of the usual formulary was modified to include the grandmother, who contributes a slave to the dowry. Such is the link between the giving of the bride and the giving of the dowry that the original function of the *ἐκδοσις* is further distorted.

In other words, in the context of Hellenistic and Roman Egypt, the bonds represented by the polis disappear and marriage became no longer a matter for the future husband and his father-in-law to decide on the daughter's consent. The regulation in question, *ἐγγύησις*, was in Athens closely related to the value placed on citizenship. To the extent that a citizen married the daughter of another citizen, the citizenship of his children was assured. All these considerations, however, became pointless in Egypt, where the Greek settlers are free to dispense with these constraints imposed by the framework of the polis.

It is at this point that we see the correspondence between the preservation of *ἐκδοσις*, but in a perhaps denaturalised form, for the father no longer acts as a symbol of the *oikos*, but –here in P.Eleph.1 is the case– as a father and sometimes joining his consent with that of the mother.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The question of whether there was a marriage before the time of the constitution of the polis, in which the woman decided for herself on the same footing as her future husband, must be related to the aristocratic society that appears in Homer, with the enormous limitations in handling this material that we have previously pointed out. In the context of Hellenic Egypt, the *ἐκδοσις* is limited to being a clause in the marriage contract, in which the main problems dealt with are of an economic nature.

⁵⁶ Yiftach-Firanko, *Marriage and Marital Arrangements*, 42 and n. 10.

⁵⁷ MacDowell, "The *oikos* in Athenian Law," *Classical Quarterly* 39 (1989): 10-21.

There is nothing to suggest that the schemas we can derive from Attic law are of any use to us in understanding this new reality. Nor do the vague references to previous periods (Homeric, Dark Age) allow us to construct a hypothesis with a sufficient basis. Erdmann himself neither makes a clear statement on the possibility that the role of the mother in the marriage contract means the revival of an earlier situation, nor does he clearly refer to the framework of the polis in order to assess this possibility.

In an environment where the limitations that the polis had set for women could no longer be applied, the question is: who actually provided the daughter's dowry or at least contributed to it? Since it was the mother who partly provided it, it is not surprising that she appears in the ἔκδοσις that the documents of this period include, but with a highly different function.

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Japanese Parliamentary Diplomacy on the Eve of the Cold War: Focusing on the Taiwan Channel

By Miyokawa Natsuko*

This study explores the diplomacy of the conservative ruling party lawmakers in Japan toward Asia on the eve of the Cold War. It shows—based on interviews and latest archival material released in Japan and Taiwan—that a structure for ending the Cold War existed in East Asia on the eve of the Cold War, which is different from the Second Cold War framework centered on the West. This research may also play a significant role in the study of the long-term governments of conservative parties and their foreign policies during the Cold War. Before the Cold War was over, the governments of Nakasone Yasuhiro and Takeshita Noboru in Japan had access to both China and Taiwan, and there were already movements within the conservative ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its factions toward a de-Cold War structure and ideology. Pro-Taiwan and pro-Korea factions in the party, which had overlapped since the formulation of the Cold War ideology, diverged. In this context, despite the timely utilization of personal relations between Taiwan and Japan since the prewar Japanese colonial period, an effective systematization of channels between the two governments that could be sustained over the long-term was not achieved.

Introduction

This study explores the diplomacy of the conservative ruling party lawmakers in Japan toward Asia on the eve of the Cold War. It shows that a structure for ending the Cold War existed in East Asia, which is different from the Second Cold War framework centered on the West.

In international political history, the 1980s are considered as the era of the Second Cold War, which ended in 1989. In Asia, the normalization of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and China in 1979 had already produced a major structural change, leading to the collapse of the Cold War structure centered on anti-Communism in the 1980s. Democratization occurred one after another in Asia in the 1980s, including in South Korea and Taiwan, which can be attributed to the emergence of regimes that were unbound by the Cold War structure but switched their bases to support by the masses. How did the Second Cold War and Asia's disestablishment affect the politics of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in Japan, which had become a "member of the West" and an Asian power? Considering the 1980s, it is beneficial to explore the political situation in Japan, which has particularly strong interactions with both the West and Asia, on the premise that this period is between the "end of the Cold War" in the West and the "collapse of the Cold War structure" in East Asia. The influence of Japanese

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politics on international politics can also be discerned.

Cold War history has been mainly discussed in the context of Europe and the U.S. Recently, however, the view that the political process in Asia had a significant impact on the dynamics of the Cold War, including Europe and the U.S., has attracted attention.¹ Simultaneously, the interrelationship between Asia's ideology, regionalism, and indigenous Asian culture and the Cold War is drawing attention.² Many Third World countries tried pursuing a path of non-alignment rather than confrontation between the Cold War camps. However, Japan and the Republic of China (Taiwan) (ROC),³ which had been firmly in the Western camp from the beginning, conversely strengthened their external strategies by exploiting the Cold War structure. The Taiwanese government was among the most anti-Communist governments during the Cold War, and the Japanese LDP was a conservative anti-Communist party that cooperated with the Western camp. Given the current need to understand the multidimensional aspects of the Cold War beyond the U.S.–Soviet framework,⁴ examining how Taiwan used the Cold War ideology of “anti-Communism,” and how it affected its relations with Japan, will provide a case study for the Cold War historical research.

The study of the history of Japan–Taiwan relations during the Cold War has made progress recently, with the disclosure of diplomatic archives in both governments.⁵ However, many scholars have viewed the Japan–Taiwan relationship as a microphenomenon, paying little attention to the international positions of Japan and Taiwan, and have not analyzed this relationship in the context of the Cold War. Additionally, the role of LDP lawmakers has not been a subject of research, whereas the Japanese foreign affairs bureaucracy has been a major actor in the development of research.

This study uses political history research methods to examine changes that cannot be captured within the existing framework. The focus of this research is on

1. Vu Tuong, and Wasana Wongsurawat (Eds.), *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). Luc Van Dongen, Stephanie Roulin, and Giles Scott-Smith (Eds.), *Transnational Anti-Communism and the Cold War: Agents, Activities, and Networks* (Springer Nature, 2014).

2. Richard H. Immerman, and Petera Goedde (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

3. Its official name is the Republic of China, and even the Republic of China had used this name. However, as the government in Taiwan was commonly called—and is still called—“Taiwan” by many countries, this article generically refers to the government in Taiwan as “Taiwan.”

4. Immerman and Goedde, *The Oxford Handbook of the Cold War*, 2013, 7.

5. Shin Kawashima, Shimizu Urara, Matsuda Yasuhiro, and Yo Eimin, *Nittai kankeishi 1945–2020* (Tokyo University Press, 2020); Urara Shimizu, *Taiwangaiko no keisei* (Nagoya University Press, 2019); Feng-Lin Chen, *Zhanhou ritai guanxishi* (Hong Kong Social Sciences Publishing, 2004); Hang Xu, *Sengo nikka Keizai gaikoushi 1950–1978* (Tokyo University Press, 2019).

the relationship between Taiwan and Japanese conservative lawmakers. The latter had replaced the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the primary and most useful contact for Taiwan after diplomatic relations between the two governments, established under the banner of the Western camp, were severed.

First, this research will examine the role of Japan–Taiwan channels in the context of the severance of diplomatic ties for each actor. Next, the administrations of Nakasone and Takeshita, who served as prime ministers of Japan on the eve of the Cold War, will be analyzed. The Nakasone administration (1982–1987) was the leading Japanese administration of the 1980s, and Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro, along with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, is recognized as a Western leader who actively embraced the Cold War ideology and its framework.⁶ The Takeshita administration (1987–1988) was the last stable government before the end of the Cold War and a milestone in Japan,⁷ known as the last government of the Showa era. Takeshita Noboru was a leader of the next generation in Japanese politics, different from previous prime ministers. What changes did this generation, which could look ahead to the post-Cold War era, produce in the LDP – the long-ruling conservative party?

Japan's LDP, founded in 1955, has been the ruling party for most of its existence. After World War II, under the Cold War structure, the LDP—it had cooperated with the West during the Cold War—continued to win elections against the Socialist Party. Due to the Cold War structure and the influence of the U.S., Japan had diplomatic relations with Taiwan, not the People's Republic of China (China) (PRC), from 1952 to 1972. For Taiwan, which sought a continental counter against the Chinese Communist Party, it was a good thing that the LDP was the ruling party, as it facilitated an alliance with Japan based on anti-Communism. However, Taiwan, with its anti-Communist banner, strengthened its connections with the most right-wing members of the LDP—a conservative party; in fact, there were members within the LDP who were pro-China and pro-Taiwan. Until the 1970s, the pro-China and pro-Taiwan members of the LDP could be distinguished relatively clearly, with the pro-Taiwan and pro-South Korea members overlapping around the anti-Communism ideology during the Cold War.⁸ However, this structure has changed since the 1980s.

6. Vu and Wongsurawat, *Dynamics of the Cold War in Asia: Ideology, Identity, and Culture*, 2009; Westad Odd Arne, "The New International History of the Cold War: Three (Possible) Paradigms," *Diplomatic History* 24, no. 4 (2000): 556.

7. The Uno administration, which succeeded Takeshita, lasted only two months.

8. In the 1970s, the governments of Taiwan and South Korea clearly distinguished between "pro-Taiwan" and "pro-South Korea" LDP members (國會議員訪華" Congressman's visit to Republic of China, 11-02-07-01-033, 中日航空(2)" Republic of China and Japan Airlines, 11-01-02-16-02-005, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taiwan); however, this distinction disappeared in the 1980s ("日本國會議員組團訪華參與七十年國慶(一)" (Japanese Diet Members Visit Republic of China for 70th National Day), 020-19 0200-0048, Academia Historica in Taiwan).

Japan–Taiwan Channels and Important Factors in the Context of Severance of Diplomatic Relations

First, this chapter will examine what kind of significance “Taiwan,” which no longer has diplomatic relations with Japan, had for the Japanese government. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan had signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship between Japan and China. For the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, maintaining good relations with China—China had implemented the reform and opening-up policy after normalization of diplomatic relations with the U.S.—became more important than relations with Taiwan. Furthermore, in the 1980s, when Japan–China–Taiwan relations were relatively stable, China–Taiwan issues were rarely raised within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. In particular, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan reduced contact with Taiwan, with the policy of immediately responding to Taiwan-related issues only when a political incident occurred.⁹

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, which had normalized diplomatic relations with China, continued to show consideration for China until Taiwan’s democratization. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan was careful to not make public its exchanges with Taiwan, while simultaneously seeking to deepen exchanges with Taiwan on the practical side.¹⁰

While the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan’s perception of Taiwan was as discussed above, the pro-Taiwan LDP members believed that there was a historical foundation to Japan’s friendship with Taiwan, whether it was under the presidency of Chiang Ching-kuo or under Lee Teng-hui after the democratization of Taiwan.¹¹ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan) (hereinafter MFA, Taiwan) also had more confidence in Japanese lawmakers than in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan.¹²

In contrast, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan), Taiwan, even during the Chiang Ching-kuo era, was hardly autonomous in its diplomatic exchanges with Japan.¹³ The respective Association for East Asian Relations in Taipei and Tokyo were not organized hierarchically—both received instructions directly from President Chiang Ching-kuo.¹⁴ It can be inferred that

9. Former Japanese diplomat Kohara Masahiro, personal communication, August 2020 and Former Japanese diplomat Ogura Kazuo, personal communication, February and June 2022.

10. Former Japanese diplomat Ogura Kazuo, personal communication, June 2022.

11. LDP lawmaker Takemi Keizou, personal communication, April 2021.

12. Former Taiwanese diplomat Chen Pengren, personal communication, March 2020; former Taiwanese diplomat Chung-Hsi Kuo, personal communication, October 2021; and LDP lawmaker Takemi Keizou, personal communication, April 2021.

13. Teng-hui Lee, and Nakajima Mineo, *Ritouki Jitsuroku* (Sankei Shimbun Publications, 2006), 63–64.

14. Former Taiwanese diplomat Chen Pengren, personal communication, March 2020.

Taiwan's diplomatic actors toward Japan were dispersed.¹⁵

The severance of the Japan–Taiwan diplomatic ties makes it difficult to establish an official relationship. The above factors, however, establish that the role of pro-Taiwan lawmakers in Japan, as in the 1980s, is more important than official diplomatic channels between the two governments.

Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro and Taiwan

Prime Minister Nakasone Yasuhiro built a personal relationship of trust with Chinese General Secretary Hu Yaobang, which led to a period of stability in Japan–China relations.¹⁶ However, the impression that Taiwan gained through its observation of Nakasone—both before and during his tenure—was not flawed.

As early as 1971, before the severance of the Japan–Taiwan diplomatic ties, the Kuomintang -- ruling party that had established a de facto dictatorship in Taiwan -- had a good impression of Nakasone. Within the Kuomintang, it was reported that Nakasone was an anti-Communist who intended to visit Taiwan to meet key government officials and anti-Communist comrades.¹⁷ The MFA, Taiwan, had predicted Nakasone's appointment as prime minister eight years earlier, during the Tanaka administration in 1974, and expected that he would take office within five years.¹⁸ Although the actual inauguration was delayed, the inauguration of Nakasone as prime minister did not surprise Taiwan. Among the LDP factions, which tended to be either pro-China or pro-Taiwan, the Nakasone faction was unique in that it embraced both the so-called pro-China and pro-Taiwan factions.¹⁹ Following the severance of diplomatic ties, a pro-Taiwan group, the Sino–Japanese Legislators' Council was formed in the LDP, and when the first large delegation visited Taiwan in 1973, many members of the Nakasone faction were

15. As any Japanese visiting Taiwan tended to place a high priority on meeting with Chang Gun Gun until his death in 1990 (former Taiwanese diplomat Chen Pengren, personal communication, March 2020), the diversity of Taiwanese factors that influenced the LDP legislators visiting Taiwan should be assumed.

16. Hattori Ryūji, "Nakasone Koyouhou Kankei to Rekishi mondai 1983–86 nen," in *Nitchu Kankeishi 1973–2012 Seiji* (eds.) Takahara Akio, and Hattori Ryūji (University of Tokyo Press, 2012).

17. 總統府 (President's endorsement), 60/0007, Kuomintang Archives.

18. "日本政情 1973-12~1974-05" (Japanese Politics 1973-12~1974-05), 11-01-02-02-01-031, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

19. As of October 1973, 19 members of the Nakasone faction participated in the Sino–Japanese Legislators' Council, 16 members were from the Japan–China Friendship Parliamentarians' Union, and four members belonged to both. This is an overwhelmingly unbiased distribution compared to other factions (Refer to "國會議員訪華" Congressman's visit to Republic of China, 11-02-07-01-033, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taiwan).

among those who participated.²⁰

In fact, when Nakasone assumed power, Taiwan placed its hopes in the new administration. This was due in part to the fact that several members of the Sino-Japanese Legislators' Council—an organization of LDP lawmakers who were pro-Taiwan—had joined the Cabinet. The Tokyo Office of the Association for East Asian Relations reported to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of China (Taiwan) that 12 of the 20 members of Nakasone's cabinet were members of the Sino-Japanese Legislators' Council. Miyazawa Kiichi, who became Minister of Finance in the new cabinet, belonged to the Kochi-kai, a faction considered pro-China, but was seen by the Taiwanese side as a Taiwan-friendly figure who had contributed to the restoration of Japan-Taiwan air routes in 1975. The Taiwanese had high hopes from him.²¹

Unlike the Kochi-kai, the Nakasone faction had no training sessions, and as can be seen from the mixture of pro-China and pro-Taiwan factions, it was a faction with no ideological unity among its members.²² A lawmaker from the Nakasone faction evaluated Nakasone as a person who transcended ideology.²³ Nakasone is recognized as a leader who actively embraced Cold War ideology and frameworks. However, in fact, the nature of the Nakasone administration and Nakasone faction, as well as Nakasone himself, led to a de-Cold War shift in LDP politics in Japan, especially in terms of foreign policy, by diminishing the Cold War tone that had been strongly held by LDP members. Taiwan also had expectations from Nakasone and his administration, partly because of their ideological affinity. In fact, Prime Minister Nakasone, the Nakasone faction, and the Nakasone cabinet were not unified in an ideological sense, but had, at best, a balanced attitude.

20. See “日本國會議員訪華團案” (Delegation of Japanese Diet Members to Republic of China), 012.2/89004, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taiwan, “國會議員訪華” (Congressman's visit to Republic of China), 11-02-07-01-033, Institute of Modern History, Academia Sinica in Taiwan.

21. “日本政情” (Japanese Politics), A303000000B/0075/001.2/0006, National Archives Administration in Taiwan.

22. Former LDP lawmaker Kouno Youhei, personal communication, March 2021.

23. Former LDP lawmaker Kouno Youhei, personal communication, March 2021 and LDP lawmaker Takemi Keizou, personal communication, April 2021.

LDP Lawmakers and Taiwan/Korea: Disappearance of the Anti-Communist Banner

During the Nakasone administration, as the problem of historical dispute worsened, the distinction between the “pro-Taiwan” and “pro-South Korea” factions became more pronounced. Within the LDP, pro-Taiwan and pro-South Korea lawmakers were deemed conservative lawmakers with the same anti-Communist views. In fact, the Japan–ROC Cooperation Committee and the Japan–ROK (Republic of Korea) Cooperation Committee, which were unofficial organizations, had formed alliances in the past. However, after the establishment of the Chun Doo-hwan administration through a coup in 1980, the people-to-people relationship between Japan and South Korea was severed,²⁴ and the pro-South Korea and pro-Taiwan factions in the LDP began to diverge. This differentiation became even more pronounced with the escalation of the history dispute during the Nakasone administration.

During the Nakasone administration, the LDP conservative members, who were originally pro-South Korea, resisted the harsh criticism of Japan from South Korea over the history dispute. The Minister of Education, Fujio Masayuki was recognized as pro-South Korea by South Korea government in the mid-1970s,²⁵ but South Korea harshly protested against Fujio’s remark that South Korea had some responsibility for Japan’s annexation of the former. Taiwan responded differently from Korea and China, defending Fujio as a good friend of Taiwan.²⁶

China, while ostensibly opposing the “two-China” movement, was promoting a peaceful unification policy with Taiwan, and, behind the scenes, sometimes asked the pro-Taiwan faction to mediate with Taiwan.²⁷ Thus, while a distinction between the pro-South Korea and pro-Taiwan factions emerged, the distinction between the pro-Taiwan and pro-China factions, which had been clarified by Taiwan and China, was blurred, resulting in the overlapping of the two.

The “Association to Honor the Legacy of Chiang Kai-shek,” founded in 1986 and initiated by Kishi Nobusuke and Nadao Hirokichi, who were pro-Taiwan, represented a significant collaboration of the pro-Taiwan and Taiwanese sides of the time. However, the association used Chiang Kai-shek as its symbol, instead of

24. Former Japanese diplomat Ogura Kazuo, personal communication, June 2022; Hidekazu Wakatsuki, *Reisen no Syuen to Nihon gaikou, Suzuki Nakasone Takeshita Seiken no Gaisei 1980–1989 nen* (Chikura Shobo, 2017).

25. “한국의 대일본 의회 안보외교 활동방안 1975” (South Korea’s Security Diplomacy Activities Plan for Japan’s Parliament 1975) 721.1JA 1975: 17992, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea.

26. “本邦歴史教科書検定問題／中国” (Japanese history textbook certification issue / China), 2018-0225, Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, “日本政情” (Japanese Politics), A303000000B/0075/001.2/0006.

27. Former LDP lawmaker Nakayama Masaaki, personal communication, August 2020.

including the word anti-Communism, which indicates that the possibility of an anti-Communism alliance had virtually disappeared. At that time, Kishi Nobusuke, Kanemaru Shin, and Fujio Masayuki, who were pro-Taiwan, were supposed to visit Taiwan upon the invitation of the Taiwanese government. However, Prime Minister Nakasone and Chief Cabinet Secretary Fujinami Takao persuaded them to cancel their visit as that would have caused diplomatic inconveniences. The pro-Taiwan members argued that it was not an official, but a personal visit; however, later, Kanemaru stepped down as an initiator. The LDP lawmakers, thus, struck a balance that was considerate of both Taiwan and China.

Prime Minister Takeshita Noboru and Taiwan

As indicated, “The Tanaka faction and its successor, the Takeshita faction, have been almost exclusively engaged in diplomacy with China.”²⁸ The Takeshita faction maintained a strong connection with China, and surprisingly, in Taiwan, it was considered an important contact point on the Japanese side.²⁹ For example, Kanemaru Shin, a “sworn friend” of Takeshita Noboru and a member of the Takeshita faction, was a powerful pro-Taiwan and pro-South Korea lawmaker, and had even visited China and North Korea.³⁰ Diplomats at the time later recognized that Kanemaru was both pro-Taiwan and pro-China.³¹

Furthermore, Takeshita Noboru and Lin Jinjing—who served as former vice president of the Association of East-Asian Relations and representative to Japan—were alumni of the Waseda University and enjoyed a personal equation during the Japanese colonial period. The MFA, Taiwan, noting the alumni relationship between Lin and Takeshita, sought to resolve the issue of Asian Development Bank participation by creating an opportunity for Yu Kuo-hwa, Minister of Finance of Taiwan, and Takeshita to negotiate with Lin as a mediator.³² Many Taiwanese of this generation, including Lin Jinjing, had personal relationships with the Japanese established during the Japanese colonial period. Lin, using his connections with Waseda graduates, built a close relationship with Obuchi Keizou, Kaifu Toshiki, and Mori Yoshiro—all of whom rose to the office of the prime minister.³³

According to a lawmaker from the Takeshita faction, there was an atmosphere

28. Miyagi Taizou, “Jimintounai habatsu to Ajia gaikou; Fukudaha Tanakaha wo cyushinni,” in *Sengo Ajia no keisei to Nihon* (Chuokoron-Shinsha, 2014).

29. Former diplomat Chen Pengren first cites Takeshita Noboru as the Japanese lawmaker who was closest to Taiwan (Former Taiwanese diplomat Chen Pengren, personal communication, March 2020).

30. 岸と金丸、対日政界工作＝親台派取り込み－中国建国70年秘史 (Jiji Press Ltd, October 5, 2019). Available at: <https://www.afpbb.com/articles/-/3248156>.

31. Former Japanese diplomat Ogura Kazuo, personal communication, February 2022.

32. Honda Yoshihiko, *Nicchutai no miezarute* (Nikkei Business Publications, 2006), 121-123.

33. Ibid, 125.

in which the Takeshita faction was welcomed in both China and Taiwan.³⁴ The Takeshita faction, successor of the Tanaka faction, had strong ties with China,³⁵ but for Taiwan, Takeshita and the Takeshita faction were regarded as important contacts on the Japanese side.³⁶ Abe Shintaro, who became the leader of the Seiwa-kai—a faction generally perceived as pro-Taiwan—served as a minister in the 1980s, and did not have close ties with Taiwan at the time. In contrast, for Taiwan, Takeshita of Keiseikai represented the “pro-Taiwan” faction.

In this way, the genealogy of factions and their foreign orientation during this period shows a cross phenomenon. This was supported, in particular, by the personal relationships among those who had spent their youth together during the period of Japanese colonization of Taiwan.

Conclusion

Even before the end of the Cold War, a movement had begun toward a de-Cold War structure and ideology within the LDP and its factions. Nakasone Yasuhiro is recognized as a leader who actively embraced the Cold War ideology and frameworks; however, in Japan, the attitude of the Nakasone administration and Nakasone faction—as well as of Nakasone himself—led to a de-Cold War shift in LDP politics, especially in terms of foreign policy, by diluting the Cold War atmosphere that LDP members had previously supported.

Both the Nakasone and Takeshita factions had pro-China as well as pro-Taiwan members, and during the Nakasone and Takeshita administrations, the cabinets had access to both China and Taiwan. Japan–China relations reached their peak in the 1980s, and Taiwan also had favorable expectations from Nakasone and Takeshita. The “pro-China” and “pro-Taiwan” factions, which had been clearly divided, began to cooperate and merge within Japanese politics, whereas the hitherto anti-Communist “pro-Taiwan” and “pro-South Korea” factions exhibited signs of growing differences. During the Takeshita administration, in particular, the ideological basis (i.e., anti-communism) of the Japan–Taiwan alliance was considerably diminished.

The deepening of Japan-Taiwan relations in the 1980s was not based on ideology, as had been the case in the past. It was based on the personal relations formed between leaders from both sides before World War II.

34. LDP lawmaker Takemi Keizou, personal communication, April 2021.

35. LDP lawmaker Takemi Keizou, personal communication, April 2021.

36. Former Taiwanese diplomat Chen Pengren, personal communication, March 2020.

Acknowledgments

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