THE CONTEST OVER PLACE AND SPACE
A Comparative Study of Three Episodes of Religious Violence, 363-418 CE

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INTRODUCTION

This study examines and compares several episodes of religious violence that occurred in the period between the mid 4th to the early 5th centuries. It attempts to provide answers to the following questions: How can we compare different episodes of religious violence? What were the main contributing factors, and who were the chief actors? Is it possible to ascribe specific factors to different types of religious violence, e.g., was there any distinct character to Christian-pagan violence that distinguished it from Christian-Jewish violence, or from intra-Christian sectarian violence?

Before entering a full-fledged discussion centered on the phenomenon of religious violence, a definition of the heavily metaphorized concept of “violence” will be useful. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, violence is a behavior involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill someone or something. The use of physical force in itself is not sufficient to the definition since a large portion of human interactions include the use of physical force (a handshake; a hug). It is therefore important to speak of intention when assessing a behavior as “violent.” This OED definition helps to create conceptual boundaries by which certain meanings are included and others excluded.

A good example for a meaning often excluded from what is popularly perceived as violence, and yet included by the OED definition, is a distinction often made between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” violence. In western liberal

democracies, violence is frequently denounced not as a categorical concept, but as a form of contentious politics: political disputes should be settled by democratic elections, not by means of physical force. The same people who condemn violence as a form of contentious politics, claiming it has a destabilizing effect on democracy, may well approve of violence used by the state, such as police or military forces. The latter “legitimate” and legal type of violence is as crucial to the stability of a liberal democratic regime as is the condemnation of “illegitimate” violence. This paper, however, will not distinguish between different types of violence based on such a moral assessment. Violence will rather be considered categorically, as a behavior including physical force intended to damage, hurt or kill, be it legally and morally approved or not.  

How does verbal violence, or violent rhetoric, affect and effect physical violence? The place of rhetoric, and more specifically of invective, in the late antique world has been widely discussed. There are numerous cases in which no such causal relation seems to exist between [hateful] words and [violent] deeds, but then there are other cases where the opposite seems to hold true. It should however be stressed that whether such a connection exists or not, and however venomous speech can become, violence as defined here includes only the use of physical force, to the exclusion of speech, words and ideas.

As to the objects, the “victims” of violent behavior, the OED includes “things,” not only living beings, within its definition. Doing so avoids limiting the

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2 On “legitimate” violence during late antiquity see Drake, H. A. (ed.). *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*. Adershot: Ashgate, 2006. 4-6, with footnotes; see also part II in same book (ibid, 85-176)


4 E.g., the different impact Chrysostom’s anti-Jewish preaching had on his Christian flock and the (untypical) devastating impact Severus’ preaching had on his flock.
criteria in determining what constitutes a target of violence (“someone” and “something” includes, in effect, anything). It follows then that the criteria defining violent behavior are method (physical force) and intended effect (hurting, damaging or killing). Nevertheless, what should be considered is that the intentioned ends specified for the use of physical force – hurting, killing and damaging – are very much interrelated to the conditions and experience of living beings. Only living beings can be killed, things do not hurt, and “damage” (whether to persons or to things) presupposes a concept of “wholeness” or “completeness.” In fact, using force against objects is very much a normal human experience: we stand, sit and press on objects, and we continuously utilize them for our own benefit. Violence against things can only be understood indirectly: is violence used against things revered by people (hence the meaning of “destruction”) and is the intended result of such destructive behavior mentally appreciated by people, and not experienced as a direct physical damage (e.g. physical pain). In this respect, the conceptual premise for this paper differs from the one presented by the OED. Violent behavior is not limited only in its intentional scope; it also includes a limited scope of targets, which are bound to living beings. Cases of violence against people, in brief, will be my primary focus here.

Violence, then, has been defined as a behavior which includes the use of physical force (and as such, excludes rhetorical violence, but includes “legitimate” violence) involving an intention to hurt, damage, or kill, that targets people (and not their property or revered objects). But the purpose of this paper, as stated before, is to examine a specific form of violence – religious violence – as a human behavioral phenomenon. I will not simply describe these violent episodes, those moments in which intentional physical force was used against religious “others.” I will also explore the way these social behaviors “work,” the various factors and circumstances
contributing to their emergence. Rhetoric, legal legitimacy and destructive actions taken against objects will all be shown to play important roles as components in the complex mechanism of religious violence; but in themselves they should not be considered as “violence” per se.\(^5\) Perhaps they provide necessary conditions, but they by themselves cannot be regarded as sufficient.

History offers numerous examples of violent behavior, and the question follows, how do they (and do they) relate to each other? Is it possible to trace similar patterns between small domestic violence and the huge collective violence of wars?\(^6\) Can similarities be found along a public and state sponsored execution of a condemned criminal, on the one hand, and street gang wars, on the other? What is common to both a violent demonstration of political opposition and to a private act of suicide?

There are indeed certain variables according to which different types of violence can be organized. Brent Shaw suggests a simple linear spectrum of types of violence.\(^7\) At the one end is full-blown war: a conflict conducted with the full resources of a state which, if victorious, will result in the conservation of its existence or even in the extension of its existing territorial and demographic resources. At the other end are highly localized and episodic “fits” or mini-events of violence in which the participants have as their targets individuals or small pieces of property whose harm or elimination will serve not only to achieve the aggressors’ personal aims but

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\(^5\) In this I differ from Michelle Salzman who makes a radical distinction between violence against people and violence against property and does not draw a causal line between the two, leading to the conclusion that it was always the pagans who instigated violence during our period, despite the fact that Christian bishops were consciously and tactically creating acute provocations by publicly sabotaging religious “objects”. See Salzman, Michele Renne. “Rethinking Pagan-Christian Violence.” *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*. Ed. Drake, H. A. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006. 265-85.


\(^7\) Shaw, Brent D. *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 31
also to confirm the norms of their society. The variables according to which Shaw arranges these types of violence along his linear spectrum include magnitude (how many people are affected by it?), organization (is it a spontaneous or a well-planned attack?), supply (what and how many supplies – weapons, manpower, transportation, etc. – are needed to effect such violence?), continuity (for how long did the violence last?) and purpose. But even when such variables are articulated, their degree of difference is so great “that in many ways they only share the instrumentalities of force and harm.”

In other words, an attempt to find common patterns and “mechanisms” between different types of violence might restrict one to define commonalities in a way not very different than the minimal definition provided by the OED.

If the entire spectrum of violence shares no more than the instrumentalities of force and harm, a different method might yield a more substantial outcome. By narrowing the discussion to a specific type of violence – religious violence – I hope to show that the major bulk of episodes of religious violence do fall into a narrower, more specific, part of the linear spectrum; and that similar levels of goals, supply, organization, continuity, etc. are indeed characteristic of this type of violence. What I hope to show is that much more can be said about violence than simply its instrumentalities of force and harm, when the contesting sides using violence do so because an extreme polarization between “us” and “them” was formed on the basis of a religious identity (e.g. “we” Christians vs. “those” pagans and Jews).

I propose to conduct a comparative study of the following three episodes of religious violence which took place in different parts of the Roman Empire between the years 363-418 CE:

8 Ibid.
(1) Violent riots in Alexandria which culminated in the destruction of the Serapeum in 392,⁹ a case of Christian-pagan violence.
(2) The destruction of the synagogue in Minorca, followed by the forced conversion of the Minorcan Jews in 418, a case of Christian-Jewish violence.
(3) A series of violent takeovers of basilicas in North Africa in 363, a case of intra-Christian sectarian violence.

All three cases are specific instances of Christian violence.¹⁰ During our period, the imperial court had already converted to Christianity and as a result, “orthodox” Christian bishops enjoyed the cooperation of the Roman state in executing their religious agenda. The pagan Julian’s reign (361-363) was an important though brief exception, but his religious policy was a reaction to his predecessors’ endorsement of orthodox Christianity, which is precisely why the above case-study number 3, which occurred during Julian’s reign, is an instance of non-orthodox Christian violence.

In comparing these episodes I propose to trace both their similarities and their differences in the ways in which religious violence was manifested. The similar factors and actors (chapter 2) will serve to indicate some general traits of religious violence, while the differences (chapter 3) will explore those traits specific to each type. Some of the dissimilarities may be a result of local peculiarities, irrespective of the type of religious violence under consideration. Others, however, will serve to

⁹ Dating of the event among scholars has ranged from the year 389 to 397 CE. See Hahn, Johannes. “The Conversion of the Cult Statues: The Destruction of the Serapeum in 392 A.D. And the Transformation of Alexandria into a ‘Christ Loving City’.” From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity. Eds. Hahn, J., S.E. Emmel and Ulrich Gotter. Leiden: Brill, 2008. 340 n. 16; in support of dating the event to 392 see Hahn, Johannes. “‘Vetustus Error Extinctus Est’: Wann Wurde Das Sarapeion Von Alexandria Zerstört?” Historia 55.3 (2006): 368-83; also, according to Socartes, the riots developed as a response to a partial destruction of the Serapeum, but all the principal authors agree that the riot culminated in a total destruction of the Serapeum.
¹⁰ In the sense that they were all instigated by Christians.
indicate factors specific to the particular type of violence exemplified in the relevant episode. In what remains of this chapter I will present the chief primary sources for our investigation.

* *

The destruction of the great Serapis shrine in 392, during the rule of Theodosius I (379-395), was seen by Christians and pagan contemporaries alike as an epochal event. We have five detailed accounts for the course and details of the destruction of the Serapeum. Rufinus (a contemporary), Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret (all of whom wrote a half-century later) are all church historians in the tradition of Eusebius. That is, all four chronicled and interpreted events as evidence of God’s historical plan for the ‘orthodox’ Christian church. Eunapius, by contrast, was a pagan contemporary of the event. As a chronicler of the decline of late antique Hellenism, however, he was not far away from the Christian writers: the latter wrote of Christian triumph, the former wrote of pagan decline.

In reconstructing the events that led up to the destruction of the Serapeum, I follow Johannes Hahn, who regards the account provided by Socrates as more reliable despite its later date of composition. According to Socrates, the turbulence that arose followed immediately after Christians cleaned out a Mithraeum and exposed its sacred artifacts to contempt, and after they destroyed the Serapeum. Enraged pagans

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12 Hahn, *Conversion*, 339
13 See especially ibid., 345-50
14 In this he differs from Rufinus, according to whom the starting point for the escalation of this particular religious conflict was the removal of an old Mithraeum by the Alexandrian bishop, who did so with imperial consent. The bishop then provocatively exposed the cult utensils (but did not destroy the Serapeum at this point) and as a result the enraged pagans reacted violently, killing and wounding many Christians. A major component in Rufinus’ account, which sets it apart from the one provided by
then plotted a violent response to this desecration, which resulted in an open street battle that left many injured and some dead. Fear of a harsh imperial response led some pagans to quit Alexandria and find refuge in various cities.

Hahn demonstrates that Rufinus’ version of events mixes historical theology and hagiography, and concludes that “unbounded exaggeration, contradiction, and implausible elements dominate the account.” Socrates’ description, which Hahn admits “is not without contradictions of its own,” is preferred due to two principal considerations. Firstly, Socrates is able to name and to cite as witnesses two high-profile participants in the pagan revolt: Helladius and Ammonius, grammarians who had been his teachers in his youth, and who had subsequently fled Alexandria for Constantinople. This fact vouches for the authenticity of some of the information that Socrates provides.

Also, whereas Rufinus regards the emperor as the main force behind the whole affair, and refrains from mentioning the bishop Theophilus’ name and role, Socrates regards Theophilus as the principal force. Socrates’ depiction is further supported by two pagan writers: Zosimus, who declared Theophilus the initiator and person most...
responsible, and Eunapius, who despite his ardent opposition to Theodosius I, mentions only the participation of imperial officials Evagrius and Romanus, indicating that both functionaries participated on their own behalf. Rufinus, it seems, attempted to absolve the Christians of responsibility for the destruction and turmoil in Alexandria by assigning responsibility to the emperor, which further undermines his integrity as a historical source. In sum, following Hahn, I will prefer the narrative presented by Socrates; but the alternative narratives, especially that written by Rufinus, will be considered too on different occasions throughout this paper.

Severus of Minorca’s Letter on the Conversion of the Jews, or the Epistula Severi, is an encyclical addressed to other unspecified bishops. It describes the coerced conversion of the socially and politically prominent Jewish community on the island of Minorca in February, 418. Bishop Severus attributes his success to the powerful presence of St. Stephen the Proto-martyr whose relics, recently discovered in Palestine, were beginning to arrive in the West. According to Severus, the arrival of Stephen’s relics, which occurred in 416, touched off a storm of Christian fervor in Minorca. The previously cordial relations between Jews and Christians deteriorated into an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and distrust. The local Jews, fearing violence, Severus charges, began to stockpile weapons in their synagogue and to encourage themselves by recalling the example of an alternative and no less famous martyr story

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22 Zosimus, New History 5.23.3
23 Eunapius, Lives of the Sophists 6.11 (423 in Loeb ed.)
24 Evidence suggests that in later years Theophilus tried to distance himself publicly from responsibility to the events of 392. Also, the second rescript reported to have been decreed by the emperor is highly improbable. See Hahn, Conversion, 347 n. 38; 350; Socrates, unlike Rufinus, was willing to put more of the blame on Theophilus because he was contrasting the “crude” conduct of the Alexandrian church with his own, more “gentle” and “Christian-spirited” Constantinopolitan church, see Irshai, Oded. “Christian Historiographers’ Reflections on Jewish–Christian Violence in Fifth Century Alexandria.” Poetics of Power: Jews, Christians, and the Roman Empire. Eds. Dohrman, N. B. and A. Yoshiko Reed. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012. forthcoming.
25 Letter of Severus 1.2; 8.2; 9.4; 31.1
known from the Jewish past, that of the Maccabees. Tensions reached a breaking point in February 418, when Bishop Severus marched Christian congregations from both ends of the island to challenge the Jews’ leaders to a public debate. The synagogue leaders refused to take part in a debate but agreed to let the Bishop inspect their synagogue for weapons. The inspection never took place. As Christians and Jews made their way towards the synagogue, a stone-throwing riot broke out, during which the Christian crowd seized the synagogue, removed its silver and sacred scrolls and burned the building to the ground. For the following eight days this large Christian population, composed of two urban communities, waged a campaign of intimidation against the demoralized Jewish community, until they added 540 new converts to Severus’ church.

The Epistula Severi is not a hagiographical work in the traditional sense. It is fundamentally an anti-Jewish narrative that was circulated by Severus together with a tract (now lost) containing arguments against Jews for use in public debate. It is the only piece of evidence we have of the forced conversion of the Minorca Jews, but we do know the letter was read aloud in Uzalis, a North African town, sometime around 419-425, to an enthusiastic congregation, who broke out in applause once they heard of the “miraculous” conversions. Another piece of evidence validating the authenticity of the epistula is a letter sent in 419 by one Consentius to Augustine, in which he mentions his role in shaping Severus’ account. Consentius uses this

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28 On the date of this event cf. Shaw, 437 n. 117, who argues for an early date, c. 419, and Fredriksen, Augustine, 361-62, who argues for a later date, c. 425.
29 Evodius, The Miracles of Saint Stephen 1.2
30 Augustine, Letters *12
incident to make the case that the church should use coercion, particularly against heretics,\textsuperscript{31} because coercion works: Severus’ encyclical was part of his proof.

The final instance I will examine includes not one, but several, episodes of intra-Christian sectarian violence which took place in 363, during the short but memorable reign of the pagan Emperor Julian (361-363).\textsuperscript{32} Not long after Julian’s ascent to power, he received a petition from exiled dissident African bishops to be allowed to return to their home dioceses. Julian agreed. He knew that the almost certain result would be intense internal conflict within the Christian communities of Africa. And so the dissident bishops were successful in obtaining an imperial rescript conceding freedom of worship to their coreligionists, the return of their banished clergy, and the restitution of the basilicas and other property that had been seized by their Catholic enemies. This is the context that led to the violent events described by Optatus, the Catholic bishop of Milevis, in his \textit{Against Parmenian}, which was a piece in the running war of polemical tractates between the two churches.\textsuperscript{33} Julian’s decree reversed (or reverted) ownership of those basilicas previously seized by Catholics after the state-sponsored anti-dissident persecution of 347.\textsuperscript{34}

Some Catholics bowed to the imperial order without engaging in physical violence, but others, who had been in possession of their basilicas for the better part of a generation, resisted. In such instances a typical pattern emerged. Dissidents would try and regain control over their confiscated property. If they met opposition and the takeover failed, they would contest the issue in the local courts. With Julian’s decree in their one hand and proof of ownership in the other, they would try to gain a

\textsuperscript{31} Augustine, \textit{Letters} *11: Augustine by this point did not need to be persuaded of this, since he had been coercing dissidents for years by then.
\textsuperscript{32} See Shaw, 146-59
\textsuperscript{33} On the modern titles given to this composition, see Shaw, 148 n. 7
\textsuperscript{34} See next chapter, pp. 33-34, for more information on the persecution of 347.
decision in their favor. Even if they succeeded legally, however, it was still up to them to enforce the decision. At this point, the need to acquire a force of strong men would arise: only in this way could they drive out the current occupants and assert ownership of their former property. This is the circumstance that stood behind Optatus’ accusations against the dissidents: “You turned many men into exiles from their dioceses when you invaded their basilicas with hired gangs.”

Optatus opened his work, a polemic written in response to a verbal attack made by Parmenian, the dissident bishop of Carthage, with the problem of betrayal, which both sides saw as the fundamental cause of the division between the two churches: each saw the other side as “traitors.” Then, in his second book, Optatus advanced to debate over the use of violence. The two sets of violent incidents were, in all likelihood, collected from cases that had been brought by Catholics before the local municipal judicial authorities in the hope of relief. The first episodes he narrates occurred in small towns at the southern border of the Roman province of Mauritania Sitifensis. The only other incident of violence described in similar detail took place in Tipasa, also in Mauretania Caesariensis, but further to the west. There the dissidents were said to have invaded the Catholic-controlled basilicas with rage, causing great destruction and using violence against Catholic men, women and infants. Optatus’ compendium of sectarian clashes provides our third case study of intra-Christian violence for this paper.

35 Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 2.17 (Shaw, 150)
36 Shaw, 149-50
37 Ibid., 153
38 Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 2.18.1-2 (Shaw, 153-54)
39 Ibid., 2.18.3-5 (Shaw, 155-56)
All three episodes of religious violence are in many ways very different from each other. They occurred in different places, from Alexandria in the east, to Africa and Minorca, the “most forsaken of all lands,”40 in the west. They involved different populations, some speaking Greek or Coptic, others Latin or Punic; some were Catholic Christians, others African Christian dissidents, others Jews or pagans. The local economic, social, political, topographic, even climatic circumstances varied by locality too. Yet it is my contention that generalizations can and should be made. This process of generalization will provide a sharper picture of the dynamics specific to each case. But before doing, these events must first be contextualized, the nature of relations between their different religious communities described. This is the purpose of the following chapter.

40 Letter of Severus 2.5
-Chapter 1-

COMMUNITY, IDENTITY AND VIOLENCE

To begin answering questions about violence demands a prior orientation in the social, political and geographic context of the individual episodes of violence themselves. This chapter, accordingly, provides that orientation for the Roman Empire during the fourth to early fifth centuries. Strong links connect religious or (especially when speaking of violence directed against or initiated by Jews)\textsuperscript{41} ethno-religious communities, the ongoing and dynamic process of the formation and maintenance of their identities, and the violence that ensued from time to time between such communities. In the complex of intra-communal socializing, violence often served to create, reaffirm and clarify borders between communities. And it always took place in public place and space that served as privileged loci for this highly contentious form of communication.

I. RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES

The late antiquity world was filled with gods, a supernatural multitude who lived in the heavens and on earth who interacted with their worshippers. Humans and gods “ate” together; proper ritual would satisfy the gods, and gods got angry if mistakes

were made.\textsuperscript{42} Ancients practiced what Peter Brown calls “the supernatural compartmentalizing of the universe.”\textsuperscript{43} The highest divine powers inhabited the upper reaches of a vast universe and communicated their benevolence to human beings, placed on an earth that lay at the very lowest parts of the universe, through a multitude of intermediary lower spirits who were open to human requests for aid and comfort, and had the power to avenge and harm if ignored or offended. This collective representation was shared by everyone – Christians of various types, Jews and pagans alike. The multitudes of intermediary lower spirits, the \textit{daemones}, were real beings in the eyes of bishops, but while pagans considered them their companions and protectors, who could sometimes be destructive, if angry or offended, for bishops they had an evil nature; they were dangerous enemies.\textsuperscript{44} Bishops expected those believers seeking aid and comfort to avoid demons and to restrict their attentions on God, through Christ. But this high expectation was contrary to the commonsense religious mindset of most contemporaries, who saw no contradiction in “mixing” different methods, approaching the benevolent powers through the variety of medias that were known to work (magic, astrology, amulets, divination, and so on). The direct outcome of such a mental representation of the universe was the blurring of boundaries between the four-fold division of humanity (Christians, Jews, pagans and heretics) advocated by bishops: if placing a lead curse tablet in the sacred springs of Sulis Minerva at Bath was thought to be as potent as was evoking the name of Jesus to

\textsuperscript{42} Fredriksen, \textit{Augustine}, 6


remove ailments – why avoid the one and cling to the other? Why not adhere to both, thereby maximizing one's connections with the divine?

Archaeological evidence supports this picture. A Jewish inscribed block from fourth-century Aphrodisias in Caria (Asia Minor) lists 52 names under the heading “and such as are *theoseb(e)is* (=God-fearers),” the first 9 of whom have the status-designation “city councilor” and many of the others have their occupations described. These were all pagans (or perhaps Christians) of high status who attended the local Jewish synagogue sometime during the fourth century (perhaps between 311 and 379). Evidence of amicable relations and fluid boundaries are abundant. Jews and pagans of Milan were said to have mourned the death of Bishop Ambrose. Christians and pagans (and one can safely guess that Jews too) ate, drank and danced together in cult banquets and they were all sharing identical funerary customs that served as the foundation of what is known as the cult of the martyrs. John Chrysostom showed discontent with the way “a people remote from us in their tongue [Syriac] but not in their faith,” speaking of the rural Christian population drawn to celebrate the martyrs, had “danced throughout the whole city.” They were celebrating, sniffed John, like pagans. This was all right for them, but not for his regular urban audience. But amicable inter-communal relations were characteristic of the elite as well: John himself studied rhetoric from the renown pagan scholar

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47 Ibid.
48 Paulinus, The Life of Saint Ambrose 48.3
49 MacMullen, Ramsay. Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997; Brown, Christianization, 661
50 Chrysostom, Homilies on the Statues 19.1 my brackets
Libanius. Christians attended law classes in Beirut and lectures on (pagan) philosophy in Alexandria delivered by Hypatia. Socrates, a church historian of special importance to this paper, studied under Helladius and Ammonius, two grammarians and priests of pagan cult who fled Alexandria after taking an active part in the violence of 392. And the governing class, although increasingly Christian, still adhered to a culture that owed little or nothing to Christianity.

Definitions were far from static. Paganism, for example, is notoriously difficult to define since classic civic culture was intertwined with soliciting the gods to a point of synonymy. Everything “civic” was also “religious”, and was therefore, in the fourth century, suspect as “pagan.” Jews and Christians went to the theatre and circus and celebrated the Kalends and other pan-Roman or local festivities, where pagan cultic rites were enacted and the names of pagan divinities invoked. Bishops tirelessly – and fruitlessly – attempted to prevent their flocks from attending such spectacles and celebrations.

The meaning of being Christian changed from the time of Constantine’s conversion to the age of Augustine. When, in 392, Augustine was faced, as a priest at Hippo, by a delegation of Catholics who regarded their funerary customs and their cult of the martyrs as wholly Christian traditions, he gave them a historical explanation of the situation in which that they found themselves. After the

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51 Wilken, 5; and possibly also the son of the contemporary Jewish patriarch Gamlil V studied rhetoric under Libanius, see sources and discussion in Stern, Menahem. Greek and Latin Authors on Jews and Judaism. Vol. 2. 3 vols. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1974-1984. 596
52 MacMullen, 6
53 Socrates, HE 5.16
54 Brown, Christianization, 651-52
56 MacMullen, 36-42
57 Brown, Christianization, 662; Augustine, Letters 29.8-9; on Augustine’s theological representation of the “sixth age”, the Tempora Christiana, and its application to Augustine’s own contemporary
conversion of Constantine, he said, “crowds of the heathen” entered the church. They could not bear to give up the “reveling and drunkenness with which they had been accustomed to celebrate the feasts of the idols.” What generations of Christians had considered perfectly normal and customary was now deemed “pagan” by Augustine. Boundaries were fluid, and bishops were constantly attempting to shape, redefine, control and patrol them.

The cult of the martyrs, which demonstrates the fluidity between Christian and pagan beliefs and rituals, indicates the same fluidity between Catholics and their sectarian rivals. The African Christian dissidents had suffered spells of persecution from the Christian emperors. There was little doubt, even in the minds of their harshest critics, that the dissidents had suffered bodily punishment, imprisonment, confiscation of property, fines, and other penalties, in the hands of the (Christian) Roman state. Considering the fact that for Christian believers “the blood sacrifice of their noble men and women was the foundation of Christian truth,” the dissidents had an advantage over Catholics during these “Christian times.” They alone were producing more martyrs. For the Catholics, state-driven persecutions were a thing of the past, ending with the Great Persecution under Diocletian. Dissidents, however, had their own chronology and list of persecutors that was not yet finished. The result was that dissidents were engaged in the worship of martyrs, who, in the eyes of an Augustine, were no better than state-executed criminals. The prevailing idea was that mere suffering ennobled people to some degree, while Augustine argued that suffering alone did not make a martyr. It was the cause that defined martyrdom, not

challenges, see Markus, R. A. *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970. 22-44 (chapter 2)
58 Aug. Letters 29.8-9
59 Shaw, 614; these persecutions (317 and 347) will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter, pp. 33-34.
60 Shaw, 587
the fact of suffering.61 The newly arrived relics of St. Stephen thus had an important role in Africa. They set a prestigious and international Catholic alternative to the local worship of local martyrs.62

But in Minorca, these relics served a different purpose: instilling religious zeal against the Jews. In his Epistula, Severus wrote that whenever Jews tried to settle in Jamona, they were prevented by sickness, driven out by death or even struck down by thunderbolts.63 Severus names this divine “favor” bestowed upon Jamona along with other more natural advantages: the absence of harmful animals, an abundance of edible beasts, and plentiful vipers and scorpions that had lost their ability to do harm.64 Magona, in contrast, “seethed with so great a multitude of Jews, as if with vipers and scorpions, that Christ’s church was being wounded by them daily.”65 The verb “wounded” (morderetur) indicated not physical but metaphysical harm. Despite the invective against Jews as vipers and scorpions, Severus makes clear that Jewish-Christian relations in Magona had been amicable, which Severus considered a problem. He speaks of the “obligation of greeting one another,” their “old habit of easy acquaintance,” and the “sinful appearance of long-standing affection.”66 In fact, inter-communal socializing between Jews and Christians had been so comfortable and intimate that it took him almost 18 months of anti-Jewish preaching to get the Christians to act against the Jews.67 Magona’s Jews were not only well-integrated socially; they were the dominant group in the town.68 What Severus’ choice of words

61 Ibid., 613
62 Ibid., 618-19
63 Letter of Severus 3.1-2
64 Ibid., 3.3-4
65 Ibid., 3.6
66 Ibid., 5.1
67 Bradbury, 23-25
68 This will later be discussed in length; for now see Letter of Severus 6.1-3; 19.6
indicates is that, in his view, Jewish social prestige had a negative effect upon the religious life of Magona’s Christians.\textsuperscript{69}

In what way was Severus’ Christian flock “wounded daily” by Magona’s Jews? Evidence from other provinces reveals the kind of practices Christians might have adopted in imitation or admiration of their Jewish neighbors. The antiquity and sanctity of Jewish customs made a profound impression on many Christians, who, after all, were acquainted with the history of ancient Israel, immersed themselves in the stories of its patriarchs and prophets, knew psalms by heart, and listened to readings from the holy Jewish book every time they entered a church.\textsuperscript{70} Perhaps the amicable relations between Jews and Christians in Minorca were not all that different from in Antioch. Chrysostom’s \textit{Discourses against Judaizing Christians},\textsuperscript{71} a collection of eight discourses delivered to his Antiochene congregation between 386-387, reveal not only John’s skill as a rhetor, his mastery of the \textit{psogos}, but also the amiable relations between local Jews and Christians. Jews in Antioch enjoyed a prestige that drew non-Jews to take part in a wide range of Jewish practices: Christians were attending Jewish synagogues on the Sabbath and the high holy days,\textsuperscript{72} they went to hear the trumpets (i.e. \textit{Rosh Ha-Shana}),\textsuperscript{73} fasted on \textit{Yom Kippur},\textsuperscript{74} joined in “pitching tents” (i.e. erecting \textit{sukkot}),\textsuperscript{75} and were taking oaths in synagogues.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{69} Bradbury, 39-40
\textsuperscript{71} The original Greek is \textit{Kata Ioudaion}.
\textsuperscript{72} Chrysostom, \textit{Discourses} 1.5; 8.8
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid. 1.5
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid. 1.2
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid. 7.1
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. 1.3
Church canons of the period reveal the sorts of issues that troubled church authorities: Jews and Christians were apparently marrying each other, eating and “committing adultery” with each other; Christians were resting on the Sabbath and working on Sundays, accepting gifts from Jews on their festivals and eating unleavened bread at Passover. The Jewish calendar continued to influence Christian communal celebrations. These are very likely to have been the sort of “wounds” that Christians “suffered,” inflicted by the proximate Jews. Were prominent Jews in Magona inspiring Christians to imitate Jewish religious practices? That may have seemed natural to those who embraced them, but a bishop would regard things differently.

John strongly opposed the “Jewish” habits of his Christian audience and in so doing he displayed a commitment to a world of sharply demarcated communities – much as did Severus, Theophilus, Optatus, Augustine and the vast majority of bishops. He reproached his audience with the following: “Are you a Christian? Why, then, the zeal for Jewish practices? Are you a Jew? Why, then, are you making trouble for the church? ... Why are you mixing what cannot be mixed?”

John, Severus and other voices of the imperial church sought clear boundaries between Christians, on the one hand, and Jews, heretics and pagans, on the other. If Christians were joining Jews in their celebrations, they were undermining the autonomy and exclusivity of Christianity, and therefore, the exclusive authority of Christian bishops. Humanity, bishops insisted, divided into these four religious groups: Christians, Jews, heretics

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77 Council of Elvira, Canons 16, 50, 78, respectively; See Hefele, 212-64
78 Council of Laudicea, Canons 29, 37, 38, respectively; Hefele, 1015-19.
79 Fredriksen & Irshai, 1005-06, and n. 90
80 See ibid., 1005-06, for more examples and references to primary sources.
81 Chrysostom, Discourses 4.3
and pagans. These four groups, they insisted, were clearly distinct. “Grey zones” or overlapping constituencies were inadmissible.

Boundaries between religious groups during our period were fluid, and inter-communal relations – often amicable. People of all religions interacted with each other. They mingled, celebrated together and shared religious practices. Moreover, despite Christian “triumph,” despite the fact the emperor was now Christian, and despite the fact legislation used wild diatribes against non-Christians, pagans, heretics and Jews were still socially prominent in Roman populations. Jews could be found to serve as curial leaders in Minorca and pagans served as curial leaders throughout the African provinces almost exclusively. African Christian dissidents, too, were a majority among Africa’s Christian population and clergy, and from written polemics between Catholics and dissidents it is clear that their bishops were as educated as were their Catholic rivals. In more ways than one, the two Churches were mirror images of each other. Bishops spoke the language of a socially divided world, but the historical record (including the complaints of these same bishops) presents us with a socially fluid world.

II. FITS OF VIOLENCE

Sometimes violence erupted. Religious violence was not an ongoing, common and defining aspect of normal inter-communal relations. It was rather episodic, sudden

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82 Fluid, but not always amicable; as often the case between schismatic groups, who share a similar history and similar beliefs and customs, inter-communal relations between dissidents and Catholics in Africa were tense, with each side cultivating memories of violence inflicted by the other.

83 Shaw, 195-206; MacMullen, 5-6

84 Shaw, 6; an indication of the dissident’s superior number of bishops, even as late as 411, after declared heretics, is also demonstrated by their larger number of bishops. See Shaw, 569-73
and short.\textsuperscript{85} Violence was manifested in “fits and bits.”\textsuperscript{86} It had a “spasmodic” appearance.\textsuperscript{87} It is no surprise that all three “fits” of violence examined in this paper happened when they did. Julian’s short reign (361-363) destabilized the Catholic state-sponsorship, forcing Catholics to cope with a sudden loss of political privileges; and it is during this time that the African dissidents gained the upper hand. But Julian’s reign was short-lived and untypical. The major bulk of religious violence, as we will shortly see, took place during and after the reign of Theodosius I (379-395),\textsuperscript{88} whose dominion signals an important benchmark in the history of late antique religious coercion.\textsuperscript{89}

In other words, religious violence, however much it appears as a factor in local micro-politics, was deeply rooted in large-scale imperial politics. And the way the imperial state managed civil matters, whether effectively or not, was by legislation.\textsuperscript{90} A close examination of the penultimate section of the \textit{Codex Theodosianus}, entitled “Pagans, Sacrifices, and Temples,” reveals that only in 399, for the first time, a law decreed the destruction of temples “in the country district,” i.e. not urban temples: the law makes sure to stipulate that “they shall be torn down without disturbance or

\textsuperscript{85} Cf. the annual violent celebration that took place in the remote African city of Caesarea; unlike religious violence, the \textit{caterva} was not a “spasmodic” outburst of violence, but rather a traditional annual festival in which the entire city consciously and willingly divided into two groups and engaged in collective violence. See Shaw, 18-28

\textsuperscript{86} MacMullen, 13; speaks predominantly of anti-pagan violence, but the nature of the major episodes of collective religious violence as a whole, or so goes my argument, had such an appearance.

\textsuperscript{87} Brown, \textit{Christianization}, 634; 648

\textsuperscript{88} This is also true of intra-Christian sectarian violence. During the Theodosian era Manichees were declared heretics and later, during the early 5\textsuperscript{th} century, the Roman state declared “Donatism” a heresy as well.

\textsuperscript{89} Why did Theodosius’ reign see a rise in religious violence? There are many opinions. Drake speaks of the polarizing effect Julian’s reign had on Christian-pagan relations and on the need to reaffirm religious boundaries as a result of the absorption of large numbers of pagans during the 4\textsuperscript{th} century, see Drake, H. A. \textit{Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance}. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002. 423-36. In contrast, MacMullen, 22, and especially Shaw, 496-508, persuasively point to the religious identity of the senatorial aristocracy (and to a lesser degree, the curial elite) as a key factor. These were the people in charge of enforcement, and as long as they remained pagan, they had little interest in enforcing anti-pagan and anti-heretic laws. Theodosius’s personality might have also been a factor, as hinted, for instance, by Shaw, 223 n. 101.

\textsuperscript{90} Shaw, 223
tumult.” But this language differed from the anti-pagan legislation during the period which concerns us – that of Theodosius I (379-395) – during which the Serapeum was destroyed.

Most scholars agree that the law Theophilus referred to in order to justify his aggressive deeds was *CTh* 16.10.11. The specific content of the law is of special interest to us (which was perhaps not so much the case for Theophilus himself): it forbids any person from performing sacrifice or entering temples and shrines, under the threat of punishment. In other cases the law specified that idols should be “taken down,” and this only “under the direction of the office staff after an investigation has been held,” but the buildings were to “remain unimpaired.” And the same was prescribed for the public celebration of traditional festivals: they could still take place, but now any specifically pagan cultic aspects of the celebration, especially blood sacrifice, had to be removed. The tactic was the same: the surgical removal of what Christian bishops viewed as specifically objectionable religious elements from the larger and originally pagan cultural artifact. “Whatever their religious agenda,” writes Brent Shaw, “the emperors were good secular politicians. They were not

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91 *CTh* 16.10.16; Then in 407/8 (*CTh* 16.10.19) it was ordered that income from taxes originally allocated to temples be diverted to imperial military needs and that cult statues in temples and shrines be “torn”; but it is not clear if the law permits the destruction of altars alone or also of temples. In any case, the desired treatment of temples seems to be vindication for public use; in 435 (*CTh* 16.10.25) a law clearly stipulated the destruction of temples and shrines, “if even now any remain entire.”

92 Hahn, *Conversion*, 340; Hahn himself finds it hard to draw a direct causal relation between the law and the events leading to the destruction, due to the limited sanctions decreed by the law. He does, however, believe it may serve as a *terminus post quem* (p. 343), indicating some sort of relation, and then (p. 349) thinks it plausible that Theophilus referred to the law, although “the actual wording of these decrees was hardly of interest” to him. This perfectly matches the point of over-interpretation and over-enforcement made by Shaw, e.g. in the Calama riot (Shaw, 251-59).

93 *CTh* 16.10.18

94 Ibid. 16.10.19

95 Shaw, 226
willing to countenance the disruption of joyous celebrations… Wishing to avoid social disruption, what they sought was a workable middle ground.»96

But over-interpretation and over-enforcement of such laws sometimes led to a more destructive outcome. This is apparent from the laws themselves, which, anticipating over-zealous applications (undoubtedly due to past experience), specifically state that “no man by the benefit of Our sanctions shall attempt to destroy temples which are empty of illicit things.”97 Actions going beyond what the law prescribed are apparent from the sheer number of temple or shrine desecrations recorded by contemporaries.98 Cynegius, Praetorian Prefect of the East, did not confine himself to implementing Theodosius’s official policy, but according to Libanius, used his position to sponsor extra-legal attacks on pagans and their temples throughout the East.99 In c. 386, one bishop Marcellis of Apamea destroyed the temple of Zeus.100 Later, around 405, John Chrysostom began to lend moral and financial support to Christian monks sent to Phoenicia and nearby regions to destroy temples and shrines, who encountered considerable opposition from local pagans.101

But what has all this physical force used against sacred objects or performances to do with violence against people? If legislation could be over-interpreted to support the destruction of a physical edifice, could it also be interpreted

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96 Shaw, 226; see also in Markus, R. A. The End of Ancient Christianity. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990. 107-23 (chapter 8)
97 CTh 16.10.18; see also ibid. 16.10.15
99 Libanius, Oration 49.3; Fowden, 63, entitles Cynegius’ policy with the adjective “extra-legal”, a point further enhanced in Libenius’ Pro Templis (Oration 30), in which he appeals Theodosius to respond to the destruction of temples by monks and fanatic officials. Libanius knew all too well this was not an official policy.
100 Theodoret, HE 5.21

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to include people as targets of violent conduct? The fact is that violence against people did ensue, and when it was “big” inter-communal religious violence, involving two contending groups of substantial size, it was almost always a by-product or a direct result of a zealous and belligerent enforcement of a law that had been over-interpreted. The law established a neutralizing policy of allowing for public (thus originally pagan) space and ritual divested of conspicuous religious elements. When it was enforced, pagans sometimes responded violently to what was for them an unprecedented attack on their revered civil and religious age-old tradition.102

Such was the case in Calama, North Africa, in June 408, when Possidius, taking advantage of “most recent laws”103 issued by the emperors – measures that banned religious and ritual elements from public ceremonials and parades connected with traditional cult – tried to stop the First of June celebrations altogether. Those in the procession reacted by stoning the local church, and clashes between Christians and pagans ensued.104 Similarly, in Val di Non, Italy, in May 397, three priests who were attempting to dissuade recent converts from taking part in a public purification ritual were attacked and killed by irate pagans in response.105 In another case – Sufes, North Africa, in 399 – Christians destroyed a cult statue of the municipal deity, Hercules,106 perhaps emboldened by recent legislation ordering the removal of cult statues from temples. Pagans reacted in what turned out as an especially bloody riot,

102 See e.g. the connection between CTh 16.10.11 and the Alexandrian riot in 392, which will be discussed in length; CTh 16.10.19 and the Calama riot in 408 (Shaw, 253 n. 199); CTh 16.10.16 and Chrysostom’s monks who were sent to destroy shrines in Phoenicia (Theodoret, HE 5.29 mentions the monks were equipped with edicts; Fowden, 75-76 suggests this particular statute); violent riots at Madauros in the early 390s (Shaw, 235-39), at Sufes in 399 (Shaw, 249-51), and at Carthage in 401 (Shaw, 230), are all, according to Shaw’s reconstruction, examples of anti-pagan laws that were over-interpreted and over-enforced.
103 Presumably CTh 16.10.19; see Shaw, 253 n. 199
104 Shaw, 251-9; cf. Salzman, 275-76; reconstructions of the Calama violence are based on Augustine’s Letters 90; 91; 103
105 Salzman, 267-73; Shaw, 248-49; see Shaw, 248 n. 184 for primary sources.
106 Augustine, Letters 50; Salzman, 274-75; Shaw, 249-51
leaving some sixty Christians dead, according to Augustine’s account. And, then, of course, there is the destruction of the Serapeum in Alexandria in 392, accompanied by a violent pagan response leaving many Christians dead, which will be further examined in this paper. This is how legislation against public religious pagan elements evolved into intra-communal religious violence against people. This is also where the semantic difference between violence against objects, or property, and violence against people, dissolves: the phenomenon of religious violence involved cause-and-effect relations with physical force used against sacred objects and rituals, which deteriorated into direct inter-personal violence.¹⁰⁷

Judaism during late antiquity, unlike paganism and heresy, was never outlawed. One can even find a Church Father who otherwise favored state-sponsored religious coercion against heretics, providing a theological justification for the continued existence of Jews in the Christian empire. Augustine proclaimed that any Christian monarch attempting to force the Jews to give up their Law would fall under the sevenfold curse by which God long ago had protected Cain.¹⁰⁸ The essentials of the legal status of Jews and Jewish communities during the period in which the violence took place on Minorca remained in fact the same as they had been since Constantine, and indeed long before.¹⁰⁹ Violence against Jews – or pagans for that matter – was never legally approved. The legal status of Jewish and pagan buildings is another issue, however.

Pagan temples and shrines were to be neutralized of any religious aspect – altars and cult statues were to be removed. But synagogues enjoyed a different legal

¹⁰⁷ Salzman thinks otherwise: Christians were using violence against property; the marginalized pagans were using violence against people, out of desperation. See Salzman, 283-85.
¹⁰⁸ Fredriksen, Augustine, 275; Augustine, Against Faustus 12.13
¹⁰⁹ Millar, Jews of the Diaspora, 4
A new context for imperial rulings relating to Jews is apparent in some of the pronouncements from the reigns of Arcadius (395–408) and of Theodosius II (408–50), namely an increased likelihood of communal violence and abuse, initiated by either Christians or Jews. One example comes from Arcadius’ reign, in the form of a letter to the Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum, sent on 17 June 397, telling him to inform provincial governors that Jews must not be assaulted, and that their synagogues must be left in peace. In 420, a letter in the name of Emperor Theodosius was sent to Praetorian Prefect of Illyricum to say that no one shall be oppressed for being a Jew, on the excuse of any religious pretext, and that synagogues and Jewish homes shall not be burned down or damaged. The Emperor balances this admonition with an order that such provisions must not lead to Jews becoming insolent, or committing anti-Christian acts. A comparable balance is maintained in a ruling of 423 addressed to the Praetorian Prefect of Oriens: synagogues may not be seized or set on fire; if they have been, or if synagogues have been taken for the benefit of churches, or even dedicated as churches (and if this has happened very recently), new buildings shall be provided; as regards to objects dedicated in synagogues, if they have been taken they must be restored, or the price given in lieu. But then the order follows that no new synagogues shall be built, and that existing ones shall remain in their present form.

The repeated promulgation of laws defending synagogues can only be understood as a response to repeated attacks. Synagogues were being burnt, robbed

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110 See Fredriksen & Irshai, 1001 and n. 79, for a full list of statutes protective of Jews and synagogues.
112 CTh 16.8.12
113 Ibid. 16.8.21
114 Ibid. 16.8.25
and converted into churches despite imperial opposition. This impression is confirmed by other sources.\textsuperscript{115} Two instances of synagogue conversions (or replacements) into churches are attested from the first half of the fourth century. A hagiographical text, the passio of the Mauretanian martyr St. Salsa of Tipasa, notes that the local pagan shrine destroyed by Salsa became first a synagogue, and then a Christian church.\textsuperscript{116} Another hagiographical text, The Vita of Innocentius, first bishop of the Italian town of Dertona, records how the Jews were expelled from their district of the town when they refused to submit to Christian baptism: the Christian congregation led by their bishop pulled down the synagogue and replaced it with a church.\textsuperscript{117} It is most likely that by a similar forceful act the synagogue in Antioch, which marked the tomb of the seven Maccabaean brothers, passed into Christian hands during the second half of the fourth century.\textsuperscript{118} In 414 Bishop Rabbula of Edessa turned the local synagogue into the church of St. Stephen, the same saint who, according to Severus, heated up the complacency of Minorca’s Christians to the point of destroying yet another synagogue, four years later and further west.\textsuperscript{119}

Instances of destruction, unrelated to an erection of an alternative church, are also well attested. The most conspicuous of all is the synagogue at Callinicum, which was a small but important military post in the eastern defenses of the empire, as well as a center of frontier trade.\textsuperscript{120} The Christian population of the town, prompted by the

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\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Passio S. Salsae}, 3
\textsuperscript{117} \textit{Acta Sanctorum}, II, 483
\textsuperscript{118} Simon, 225; 474 n. 108
\textsuperscript{119} \textit{Chronicle of Edessa} 51; this is no coincidence, as I hope to show in the next chapter.
\textsuperscript{120} We know of the affair from Ambrose, \textit{Letters} 40; see important and novel interpretation of the following events in Milan by McLynn, Neil B. \textit{Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital}. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. 298-315
local bishop, set fire to the synagogue in 388. The civil authorities informed Theodosius, who sent a rescript laying on the bishop the obligation to compensate the Jewish community and to rebuild the synagogue at his own expense. He further ordered that those who had set fire to the building should be punished. Ambrose, the powerful bishop of Milan, once acquainted with this decree, decided to intervene. He sent a letter to Emperor Theodosius in which he argued against Theodosius’ decision: if the bishop of Callinicum paid the proposed penalty, he would betray his faith, since taking responsibility for the construction of a synagogue was a clear breach of a Christian’s duty to abhor Jewish rites.\textsuperscript{121} But the alternative option must have made more of an impression on Theodosius: the bishop might refuse to comply with the order and unrepentantly claim full responsibility for the arson, forcing the state to punish him with capital punishment and thus make him a martyr.\textsuperscript{122} The emperor then cancelled the fine imposed on the bishop of Callinicum. This success encouraged Ambrose to make a more ambitious demand that not only the penalty but also the criminal punishments be dropped. This time the emperor ignored him. Knowing he would soon see Theodosius at church, Ambrose delivered a long sermon\textsuperscript{123} which he concluded by dramatically inviting the emperor, in front of his entire Christian congregation, to grant mercy to the “sinners.” Theodosius exchanged some remarks with Ambrose, confronting his arguments, but finally agreed to abandon the whole affair.\textsuperscript{124}

\textsuperscript{121} Ambrose, \textit{Letters} 40.6
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid. 40.7
\textsuperscript{123} Which he presented in a letter to his sister, see ibid. 41
\textsuperscript{124} Unlike the traditional narration of this confrontation, McLynn clarifies that “it is unlikely to have appeared so [as a humiliation of the emperor] to the spectators.” (p. 307); according to him, this intercession served only to give greater publicity to Theodosius’ gesture of benevolence, and by putting the emperor on the spot, Ambrose had lost much of his credit with Theodosius until the Thessalonica affair in 390. In McLynn’s words: “the loser in this unhappy affair was Ambrose” (p. 308)
That same year the usurper Maximinus attempted to force the Christians in Rome to rebuild a synagogue they had set on fire.\textsuperscript{125} In Palestine, at the beginning of the fifth century a certain Barasauma, assisted by monks, is said to have destroyed numerous synagogues, sometimes finishing off his work by massacring Jews.\textsuperscript{126} And in 414, in perhaps the clearest incident of persecution of Jews during our period, Bishop Cyril of Alexandria confiscated both the communal and private property of the Jews, in particular synagogues.\textsuperscript{127}

Unlike pagan temples, Jewish synagogues were protected by imperial law. And yet the post-Theodosian era saw a growth in the sheer volume of ethno-religious violence directed at Jews. Two aspects of violence against Jews should be emphasized. The first is that the state was an active player. Even if it was not as proactive a player as in the case of anti-pagan legislation, its more passive role as a third party mediator, or legislator unable to carry through on its word, was decisive. One should also bear in mind that the law from 423, issued by Theodosius II, made formal what was a \textit{de facto} reality: if synagogues had already been dedicated as churches, they were not to be restored to the Jews; instead, new buildings were to be provided.\textsuperscript{128} This was not insignificant legal information for a bishop who wished to destroy or convert a synagogue. He knew such actions were illegal, but he also knew that if he succeeded, they could not be overturned; his community would perhaps be forced to pay for a new Jewish building (if he did not enjoy the patronage of an

\textsuperscript{125} Ambrose, \textit{Letters} 40
\textsuperscript{126} See Simon, 474 n. 112
\textsuperscript{127} Socrates, \textit{HE} 7.13
\textsuperscript{128} \textit{CTh} 16.8.25
Ambrose), but he could maintain the powerful symbolic appearance of a local Christian triumph over Judaism.\textsuperscript{129}

The second point is that just like their anti-pagan religious violence, Christians’ violence against Jews was directly connected to public places that served as clear identity markers. Violence against Jewish people was directly linked to violence against Jewish place and space: such was the case in Minorca, such was the case in Alexandria, and if reliable, such also seems to have been the case with Barasauma.

The episodes of intra-Christian sectarian violence examined in this paper were part and parcel of a uniquely African schism rooted in an edict issued by Emperor Diocletian in 303, mandating the demolition of Christian churches with the confiscation and burning of the scriptures.\textsuperscript{130} Some bishops, including the bishop of Carthage, were accused of having collaborated with the imperial persecutors by a party from the territory of Numidia. This party installed a rival bishop in Carthage, Majorinus, who was shortly replaced by Donatus, after whom Catholics labeled the schismatic church “Donatist.”\textsuperscript{131} The dissidents, to be sure, considered themselves just as “catholic,” or universal, as their opponents; the Catholics, however, wished to convey the idea that while they were direct followers of Jesus, their opponents were following the obscure Donatus.\textsuperscript{132} The dissidents denounced all who maintained communion with the Catholics as \textit{traditores} (“handers-over”) – that is, traitors who surrendered sacred books to their persecutors – and the once united apparatus of

\textsuperscript{129} See Brown, \textit{Christianization}, 642: “the triumph of the church expressed itself spasmodically in the destruction or appropriation of synagogues.”
\textsuperscript{131} Edwards, xiv-xv
\textsuperscript{132} Shaw, 5-6
Catholic Christendom in Africa split into two schismatic networks that remained intact and mutually belligerent until after the Vandal invasion in 429.\textsuperscript{133}

Constantine, who relied on “orthodox” bishops as his political powerbase, was pressed to intervene in this African Christian schism in an attempt to impose unity. He favored Caecilian, the Catholic bishop of Carthage.\textsuperscript{134} In doing so he determined the imperial court’s policy toward the African schism for over a century, up until the Roman state lost control of Africa in 429 (with the exception of Julian’s short but memorable reign); from then on the state officially recognized the “Catholic” side as belonging to the orthodox and universal state-sponsored Church, and deemed the “Donatists” as the schismatic and unorthodox dissenting group. Official recognition, however, did not necessarily denote state sponsored coercion. The Roman state normally avoided using coercive means against African dissidents, who were by no means a minority among African Christians; but occasionally it turned to violence in a failed attempt to achieve unity among the Christian community in Africa. And when it did use force, it made a memorable impression.

In 317 Constantine unleashed for a time the coercive machinery of the state in an attempt to bring an end to Christian dissent in Africa.\textsuperscript{135} He did so by deploying a tactic that would be used again approximately thirty years later: using money and other sorts of benefactions as rewards to those who were willing to forgo their attachment to the dissident cause and join the Catholic Church, and using force for those who refused.\textsuperscript{136} But he failed. In 321 Constantine wrote to the bishops of Africa saying that the only thing left to do was to wait patiently, and he forbade the

\textsuperscript{133} On the role of betrayal in the Catholic-dissident conflict, see Shaw, 66-106 (chapter 2)
\textsuperscript{134} Drake, Bishops, 212-21
\textsuperscript{135} Shaw, 187-94; Drake, Bishops, 221
continued use of violence. The precise nature of this “persecution” is not clear. A piece of legislation from the period calls for the imprisonment of dissidents who produced controversial literature. Some dissident bishops were arrested, others consumed by “the jaws of the traitors.” A number of violent episodes must have resembled the normal pattern of imperial anti-dissident sectarian violence in Africa: private efforts of Catholic bishops to legally repossess a basilica went wrong and soldiers moved in “to restore order,” which resulted in bloodshed.

One particular case of special interest is the state sponsored violence which occurred in 347, when two imperial emissaries, Paul and Macarius, were charged with bringing about the unification of the dissident and Catholic churches in Africa. They came “armed with carrots and sticks,” inducements of money on the one hand, the threat of violence on the other. But things spun out of control and the result was a massacre (of Bagai) and a great number of dissident martyr stories. Without entering the particulars of the events that took place that year, which the dissidents saw as a brutish persecution, one outcome is of special importance to what follows. Dissident bishops were exiled and their basilicas, in towns and villages alike, were seized and occupied by the Catholics in 347 and in the years shortly after. These dissident bishops exiled in 347 were the same ones whom Julian, years later, permitted to return to their home dioceses to repossess their confiscated basilicas – the premise for much of the religious violence of 363.

137 Edwards, 196-97 (Appendix 9)
138 CTh 9.34.1
139 Shaw, 191
140 Such was the episode of violence which took place in Sicilibba according to a reconstruction by Shaw, 191-92
141 Ibid., 162-71
142 Ibid., 163
143 Ibid., 149-53
These two state-sponsored violent persecutions, 317 and 347, are important because of their defining significance for dissidents during the episodes of violence in 363. However, these were instances of government “big” violence, not the spasmodic unofficial “fits” that characterized the bulk of these two communities’ interactions during the period. The large-scale state-sponsored violence in North Africa was directed firstly and chiefly against Christian dissidents, and not against Jews or pagans. But these two episodes of violence, those of 317 and 347, differed from the 363 episodes of violence known to us from Optatus’ polemic. The latter were legal disputes over property ownership. They typically involved constant appeals to local municipal courts, and enforcement – which could also tend to violence – was private.

What can be said about religious violence thus far? That the Roman state always played a role, even if implicit, even if not quite intentional – by means of legislation, by deciding which religious group was legitimate and which was not, by enforcing or abstaining from enforcement, even by mediating. That bishops were major actors; Severus of Minorca, Cyril and Theophilus of Alexandria, Rabbula of Edessa, Ambrose of Milan, Marcellus of Apamea, the dissident bishops of Tipasa, Zabi, Flumen Piscium and Lemellef – all served as proactive instigators of violence. And finally, that collective religious violence took place around clear, visible and

144 This observation is supported by Brown’s general observation that “religious coercion on a large scale was mainly practiced by Christians on other Christians” (Brown, *Christianization*, 642).
145 The anti-pagan government moves in Carthage in 399 were much later than the anti-dissident moves, and are indicative of later post-Theodosian legislation. Moreover, the temples were not actually destroyed (despite Augustine’s hyperbole and aggressive language), and, unlike 317 or 347, the imperial officials were not permitted to do anything more than to remove the cult statues from the temples; see Shaw, 226-28
146 Although legal disputes over property were also an integral part, and direct outcome, of the two state-lead persecutions of dissidents that took place prior to Julian’s reign, the major violence in these state persecutions followed their own pattern.
public identity markers: synagogues, temples, shrines, cult statues, parades. The location was always the same: public space and public place.

In order to understand why such locations were chosen as the major target of religious violence, it is useful to see how contemporaries interpreted such violence. What is clear from the sources is that the violent takeover of public place and space was perceived in a highly symbolic manner as an act of triumph. True to the style of classical rhetors, the language of battle, conquest, and victory, is used in all our primary sources. Theophilus “destroyed the Serapeum” and then, as if a victorious general parading the streets of Rome after a glorious triumph over the enemy, “had the phalli of Priapus carried through the midst of the forum” like spoils of war.147 Optatus does not describe church takeovers by dissident Christians in Africa as a legal dispute, but as the attacks of “deranged men” who “came in rage, tearing at the limbs of the Church… horrific in slaughter, deliberately compelling the Sons of Peace to war.”148 Severus narrates his letter in terms of “war” between two “armies,”149 the Christians being the victors.150

Common to all of these episodes of religious violence is their effort to dominate public topography, to secure visibility or to prevail over and to dominate notionally shared space and place.151 By using public space and place as the location of their religious forceful conduct, bishops created a highly public visual spectacle in which a tangible, physical, confrontation would emerge between “Christianity,” represented by the bishop and his Christian flock or agents of violence, and

147 Socrates, HE 5.16
148 Optatus, Contra Parm. 2.17
149 Letter of Severus 9.1
150 Ibid. 14
“paganism,” “heresy” or “Judaism” represented by a corresponding physical identity marker: a temple, shrine, festive parade,\textsuperscript{152} dissident basilica,\textsuperscript{153} or a synagogue. What was achieved by such conduct was religious polarization: there was no room for any religious “grey zones” when religious conflict was animated to denote two, and only two, religions “at war” with each other.\textsuperscript{154}

Furthermore, considering the fact that heaven and earth were all intertwined in the common mental representation of the universe, success in controlling public space and place would indicate that the divinities formerly represented in or by these places and spaces had suffered a humiliating blow. In a period of amiable inter-communal socializing, which blurred the boundaries between religious communities, bishops found ways to establish, clarify, and patrol these boundaries: they used public space and place as a highly-visible setting, and violence as a spectacle of an epoch-making battle between Christian truth and non-Christian error.

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Religious violence during our period can therefore be described as a “spasmodic” contest over public space and public place. Bishops, unhappy with fluid religious boundaries and often amiable inter-religious relations, capitalized on and often instigated highly contentious and violent public spectacles. They did so in order to draw sharp religious boundaries and to create physical symbols of Christian triumph. Another actor mentioned in this chapter was the Roman state, which never permitted


\textsuperscript{153} For modern intra-Christian violence in Jerusalem and Bethlehem, typically taking place in Christian churches, see n. 221 in this paper.

\textsuperscript{154} Severus’ account completely ignores the pagan population, which must have existed in Minorca. See Bradbury, 29
the use of physical violence against Jews, pagans, or (under Julian) against Catholic Christians; but always played a role in religious violence through legislation, enforcement, mediation, etc. But precisely how were these actors involved in religious violence, and to what extent? How did they interact? What other forces were in the work? In what follows, three episodes of religious violence from Africa, Alexandria and Minorca, will be presented in detail and compared in an attempt to clarify the ways in which violence was instigated, enacted and concluded.
The intra-Christian sectarian violence in Africa, the Christian-pagan violence in Alexandria, and the Christian-Jewish violence that occurred in the island of Minorca, all have something in common. They all represent forms of religious violence in the mid-fourth to early-fifth centuries that were collective acts of aggression. The previous chapter explored the “spasmodic” aspects of such violence during this period, its abrupt appearance, often within a context of amiable social inter-communal relations (North Africa being the obvious exception), and the significance of its geographical location. More can be said. When compared, these three episodes of violence display common traits. These commonalities form patterns that further enhance our understanding of the nature, or qualities, of the phenomenon.

Three common players and one common factor will be examined in this chapter: bishops, who served as initiators of these highly contentious displays of power; “violence specialists,” chosen and mobilized in similar ways across these three cases; the state, which played a critical role; and the tendency of the contesting communities to form new “memories” of abuse through the current enactment of religious violence, or to construe violence on the basis of these preexisting “memories.”
I. THE GAME OF BISHOPS

Within less than one century, Christian bishops managed to elevate their status, from being targets-of-choice in an empire-wide persecution sponsored by the Roman state to becoming dominant and influential power players of imperial politics. When, in 303, Diocletian decided to enact a new and specifically anti-Christian policy after almost twelve years of domestic peace, he surprised not only his Christian subjects but also his pagan ones. The former risked imprisonment, torture and death if they failed to obey imperial edicts coercing religious conformity; many of the latter, disgusted by the violence, themselves risked imprisonment and loss of property by providing shelter to Christian fugitives. One result of the persecution was an increase in pagan sympathy toward Christians. Another result, a political one, according to an analysis provided by H. A. Drake, was Constantine’s decision to convert to Christianity in 312.

According to Drake, Constantine, one of four contenders for sole power in the civil war that followed Diocletian’s retirement, decided to ally himself with the Christian god in order to amplify his popular support vis-à-vis his rival contenders. By so doing he acquired a new political constituency with a strong urban presence. His policy sought to create a cultically non-specific monotheistic coalition of Christians, pagans and Jews alike. He was seeking a domestic policy of unity, unlike his predecessor Diocletian, who had left the empire in a state of social civil war. But in

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156 Rives, 15-17
157 Drake, Bishops, 149-50
159 See Drake, Lambs into Lions, 22. Jews, as members of Constantine’s monotheistic coalition, are not discussed in Drake’s analysis, see Fredriksen, Paula. “Lambs into Lions.” The New Republic June 18 2001: 35-38.
order to gain Christian support, Constantine had to make some concessions, the main one being a prohibition of pagan public blood sacrifice, which had become to Christians a symbol of persecution and a source of demonic contamination. By eliminating public blood sacrifice, Constantine created what could be construed as a religiously neutral public space.\footnote{Drake, Bishops, 205; Brown, Christianization, 644-45}

Constantine had much to gain from forming a coalition with Christian bishops, who were distributed throughout the cities of the empire and who maintained strong links with each other. Bishops enjoyed a strong urban power base: congregations with whom they were in constant contact and for whom, as dispensers of charity, they served as important patrons. And they had substantial administrative experience, thus serving as an important potential resource for Constantine, in that they could provide an alternative reservoir of administrative talent against the traditional and corrupt mechanisms of imperial governance.\footnote{Drake, Bishops, 321-50}

But it was precisely these advantages that made bishops ideal coalition partners for Constantine that also changed the rules of the political game. Their own power base was independent of the emperor, so they were not accountable to him.\footnote{Ibid., 468} The privileges Constantine bestowed upon his new partners only served to enhance their power. They managed to get the emperor to use his power to enforce internal cohesion among Christians, in hope of obliterating their internal rivals,\footnote{I.e. the 317 persecution against the African Christian dissidents discussed in the previous chapter.} and within decades they gained enough power to extend a policy of coercion towards pagans, who were originally members of Constantine’s wider coalition. All three of our case studies illustrate the bishops’ role as proactive political players, who made constant

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efforts to shape imperial policy through a great deal of imploring and tactical strategizing.

Rufinus, the first to narrate the destruction of the Serapeum, never once mentions Theophilus by name, nor gives his title as bishop of Alexandria. He clearly subordinates the role of “the bishop who had charge of the church at that time” to that played by the emperor, who granted the bishop the ancient basilica where a Mithraeum was then discovered, and who later ordered the destruction of the Serapeum. The Mithraeum, “discovered” accidently, triggered the pagans’ violent behavior. In Rufinus’ telling, Theophilus’ role, though secondary, was substantial: he asked for the basilica, which indicates not only his proactive efforts to receive such a grant, but also his role as the executor of an imperial decree.

Socrates, the more reliable source, also ascribes to the emperor an important role (it is he who issues the order to demolish the pagan temples in Alexandria); but Theophilus, whose name and title Socrates does give, appears as the principle force. According to Socrates, Theophilus “seized the opportunity” of having an imperial rescript in hand and “exerted himself to the utmost to expose the pagan mysteries to contempt.” He then destroyed the Serapeum, publicly caricatured the rights of the Mithraeum, and carried the phalli of Priapus through the midst of the forum “lest at a future time the heathens should deny that they had ever worshipped such gods.” Publicly reducing pagan religion to the single symbol of the phallus was clearly offensive: so much is clear from Ammonius the grammarian, who

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164 Rufinus, HE, 11.22
165 Rufinus, unlike Socrates, does not use the term Mithraeum, but undoubtedly means just that when he speaks in contempt of “some hidden grottoes and underground chambers.” (HE, 11.22).
166 Hahn, Conversion, 348-49; also see Irshai, Christian Historiographers’ Reflections, who accepts Hahn’s evaluation, but ascribes Socrates’ hostile depiction of Theophilus to the rivalry between Alexandria and Constantinople over Christian hegemony.
167 Socrates, HE, 5.16
168 Ibid.
according to Socrates was accustomed to say that “the religion of the Gentiles was grossly abused in that that single statue [of the phallus] was not also molten, but preserved, in order to render that religion ridiculous.”  Theophilus was later assisted by the imperial officials in expanding his aggressive anti-pagan policies; the “muscle” was imperial, but it was Theophilus’ application of it that brought about the drastic result.

The prime role given to Theophilus in Socrates’ account is further supported by another contemporary source. An illustrated Alexandrian “world chronicle” that appeared during the episcopate of Theophilus or shortly thereafter presents him as standing on the apex of the Serapeum overlooking its destruction, which it clearly depicts as his victory. This image coheres with Socrates’ depiction. Theophilus should be regarded as the instigator of violence in Alexandria: he used provocative speech and gestures against pagan sancta in order to reaffirm religious boundaries and to create social polarization. In so doing, he hoped to realize his aggressive policy of topographic domination. He succeeded perhaps more than even he himself expected. It was through his provocations that Theophilus polarized the two communities, enticing the pagans to violent action; and it was this bloody response, perhaps only sporadic and conceived merely to defend cultic objects, that provided

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169 Ibid. my brackets
170 It is also supported by the pagan historians who wrote about the affair. Zosimus declares that “Theophilus was the first who had initiated the attack upon the temples and our ancestors’ longstanding sacred rites.” (New History 5.23.3). Eunapius (Lives of the Sophists 6.11), who was otherwise an ardent opponent of Emperor Theodosius, does not even mention the latter in his account, but stresses the participation of the imperial officials Evagrius and Romanus, who are mentioned both by name and rank. It is clear therefore that Eunapius believed that both imperial functionaries had participated on their own initiative without direct orders from the emperor; see Hahn, Conversion, 349
172 On the construction obsession of Theophilus (which Haas labels “lithomania”) see Haas, Christopher. Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. 206-12, and especially 207 n. 58
the desired excuse for a massive and comprehensive campaign against the material basis of Alexandrian paganism.\textsuperscript{173}

Rufinus, it is true, points to Emperor Theodosius as the main political actor in this violent episode, and in doing so may have followed Theophilus’ own official presentation of events.\textsuperscript{174} Bishop Severus of Minorca, by contrast, emphasized the agency of St. Stephen. The saint, his letter implies, was the fundamental cause of the violence that erupted in Minorca early in 418. After the relics had arrived, the Christians’ “complacency heated up… at one moment zeal for the faith would fire our hearts; at another moment, the hope of saving a multitude would spur us on. In the end, even the obligation of greeting one another was suddenly broken off.”\textsuperscript{175} Severus uses the passive tense in order to emphasize the role of Stephen the proto-martyr, or his own lack of responsibility. Instead of the former easy acquaintance between Jews and Christians, theological debates “were waged” (in the passive voice: “pugnae… gerebantur”) against the Jews.\textsuperscript{176} A close inspection of the chronology, nonetheless, shows that the assault was not a sudden response to the martyr’s presence, and that Severus’ homiletical campaign against the Jews had been in progress for over a year before the final march on Magona in February 418.\textsuperscript{177}

During this period, Severus, a new-comer\textsuperscript{178} unaccustomed to the island’s comfortable inter-religious community and its Jews’ socio-political prominence, preached against such amiable relations, reminding his flock of the identity of those who martyred their newly arrived saint.\textsuperscript{179} His sermons must have contained the same

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\item\textsuperscript{173} Hahn, \textit{Conversion}, 349
\item\textsuperscript{174} Ibid., 350
\item\textsuperscript{175} \textit{Letter of Severus} 4.4-5.1
\item\textsuperscript{176} Ibid. 5.2
\item\textsuperscript{177} Bradbury, 23-25
\item\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Letter of Severus} 4.1
\item\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Acts}, 6-7
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kind of invective apparent in the letter itself,\textsuperscript{180} and the same kind of polemic that Christians in Minorca would have used when they waged theological “battles” against the Jews over the Law.\textsuperscript{181} They were simply repeating the same arguments preached to them; the same arguments that most probably appeared in the missing tract that Severus attached to his letter.\textsuperscript{182} One also cannot ignore Severus’ own testimony: it was he who dispatched clerics to announce his arrival in Magona,\textsuperscript{183} who negotiated the terms of their joint public “meeting,”\textsuperscript{184} who publicly argued against the Jews\textsuperscript{185} and who joyfully received them as converts to his church.\textsuperscript{186} In brief, Severus orchestrated the whole affair. What Minorca shows is that the bishop, by means of intensive preaching that included invective speech and polemic, used his position of leadership to rigidify the formerly fluid religious/social boundaries and to create a highly contentious and polarized social situation which resulted in collective violence.

The African episode of intra-Christian sectarian violence was no different. Optatus pin-points those who were responsible for the religious violence that emerged during the reign of Julian: “it was almost at this time that your madness [dissident bishops] returned to Africa… You came as deranged men… deliberately compelling the Sons of Peace into war.”\textsuperscript{187} These “deranged” bishops came armed with an imperial edict ordering the restitution of their basilicas and other properties formerly seized by their Catholic enemies.\textsuperscript{188} To be sure, Christian bishops in Africa made constant use of sermons to create a strong sense of identity opposed to that of their

\textsuperscript{180} Letter of Severus 3.5-7; Shaw, 304
\textsuperscript{181} Letter of Severus 5.2
\textsuperscript{182} Ibid. 8.1
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid. 12.3
\textsuperscript{184} Ibid. 12.3-7
\textsuperscript{185} Ibid. 12.8-13
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. 17.1-2, 20.3
\textsuperscript{187} Optatus, \textit{Contra Parm.} 2.17 my brackets (Shaw, 150)
\textsuperscript{188} Shaw, 149-52
sectarian enemies. But by reclaiming their property, dissident bishops made use of the agonistic nature of legal procedure to rigidify the religious boundaries between Catholics and their dissident competitors. Legal disputes over property ownership presented the two contesting sides in overtly dichotomist terms and could have one of two results: only one of the two contending sides could gain ownership over the property. Once a decision was made, enforcement was not assigned to a state agent, but left to the bishops, who hired violent gangs. Dissident bishops, in other words, instigated local violence, which intensified the already existing religious polarization between the two local Christian communities.

It is a sociological truism that where there is collective violence there are political entrepreneurs who specialize in creating or increasing social polarization between contesting groups. Our three study cases all indicate that during this period between 363 and 418, religious violence was initiated and controlled by a new and singular breed of political entrepreneurs – the bishops, who used various methods to create highly contentious public spectacles that offended and enraged their religious opponents. These spectacles polarized local communities to an extreme. Any middle ground, where one could find members of the two groups forming and sustaining social bonds, was eradicated, and religious boundaries became the principal defining criterion of social interaction. As political entrepreneurs, bishops actively created the tense social conditions needed for the instigation of religious violence. But as leading political players, these bishops also specialized in creating political coalitions by forming ties with several distinct groups and organizing joint actions on behalf of such coalitions.

189 Shaw, 409-40 (chapter 9)
190 Tilly, 34-35
Bishops could not rely on their local power base alone to guarantee effectiveness. They created and sustained networks of bishops, influential landlords and imperial court members, through which they could obtain their political goals. Both Rufinus’ and Socrates’ accounts begin with an order decreed by the emperor for the benefit of the bishop, which most scholars identify as a piece of legislation from Codex Theodosianus that, due to the discrepancy between the relatively benign wording of the law and the zealous enforcement, must have been over-interpreted and over-enforced by Theophilus. Such legislation was typically the result of intense lobbying on behalf of the bishops.

The imperial court in late antiquity functioned according to a system of petition and response. Anti-pagan legislation was the result of Christian lobbying at court, a process that involved large financial resources, connections among high ranking personnel and the constant deployment of bishops to court. Theophilus did not work alone. The existence of an imperial decree addressed to the local imperial officials, Evagrius and Romanus, testifies to the existence of an entire network of bishops, influential landlords and imperial court members who assisted Theophilus in obtaining an imperial decree that could provide him with the premise for further action against public pagan religion.

A similar political process was enacted by African Christian dissidents. After Julian’s edict of toleration permitted eastern bishops of non-orthodox denominations to return from exile to their home dioceses, the dissident African bishops petitioned

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191 Shaw, 518-19
192 CTh 16.10.11; what supports the identification of this law with the violent affair is the fact that it is addressed to Evagrius, the praefectus Augustalis, and Romanus, the comes Aegypti, with both playing an important role in the historical accounts that narrate the destruction of the Serapeum.
Julian to allow them the same relief. This petition was the result of a joint effort of
many dissident bishops who had maintained strong connections and who petitioned as
a united group. Their political network, undoubtedly similar to that used by
Theophilus, also got their petition delivered to the emperor, the highest member of the
Roman state hierarchy.\textsuperscript{195} The dissident bishops known to Optatus could violently
reclaim their former properties after returning from exile only thanks to a political
network which they had cunningly orchestrated in order to obtain their long-desired
objective: return to Africa and restoration of their former status.

As far as we know, similar attempts to gain imperial approval for or partial
recognition of his actions were never made by Bishop Severus of Minorca. He did not
need to, because unlike the Alexandrian Theophilus, bishop of one of the biggest and
wealthiest cities in the Roman Empire, Severus’s see was a remote and somewhat
obscure island. Far from the imperial view, he did not fear an imperial response.
Moreover, he worked against local imperial magistrates because they were Jews: he
could hardly expect imperial support for his attack on local government. However,
even without the need to lobby the imperial court, Severus’ connections with an
influential network of bishops had a role in the development of the entire violent
episode. To begin with, the letter itself, although addressed to the Christians of the
entire world, indicates that Severus showed particular interest in his fellow bishops, as
is apparent from the frequent allusions to “your blessedness.”\textsuperscript{196}

But the arrival of the relics of St. Stephan at the island is in itself a telling
affair.\textsuperscript{197} They were discovered in 415 in Palestine, far to the east from the Balearic
Islands. Orosius, a Spanish priest who was dispatched by Augustine to Palestine to

\textsuperscript{195}Augustine, Answer to Letters of Petilian 2.97.224 (Shaw 152 n. 16)
\textsuperscript{196} Letter of Severus 1.2; 8.2; 9.4; 13.1
\textsuperscript{197} Bradbury, 16-25
learn from Jerome, was there when the relics were discovered. He later took some of the relics to North Africa and then sailed with the rest to Minorca on his way to Spain, but was deterred by the ongoing warfare in the Iberian Peninsula and decided to return back to North Africa. On his way back he stopped by Minorca and deposited some of Stephens’ relics in the local Christian church just outside of Magona. In other words, although not himself part of this well-developed and influential pan-Mediterranean network of Catholic bishops who maintained strong inter-personal connections, Severus was able via this network to acquire Stephen’s relics. Perhaps the outcome of Severus’ constant preaching against the Jews would not have been any different had the local Magona church not enjoyed the presence of the saint. But the presence of these specific relics, those of Stephen whose stoning by his fellow Jews was preserved in Christian scriptures (Acts 6-7), made Stephen into the new patron of the island, and provided Severus both with an opportunity and with an effective tool by which to provoke the zealousness of his flock.

In their capacity as political entrepreneurs, bishops specialized not only in creating and intensifying social strife between religious communities, but also in making use of international political networks and coalitions which they could then utilize for their own local ends. Yet the process of connecting between distinct groups or networks and then mobilizing them into action was also performed on a more local level, one that had a direct impact on the deployment of violence. Bishops had to somehow form connections that provided them with the “muscle” needed to realize their plans; and they also needed somehow to mobilize these agents of violence into action. This was no easy task since the contesting sides belonged to the same local social fabric and were acquainted with each other to varying degrees. The bishops,
then, had an additional task to the one discussed so far – the task of forming and managing a connection with specialists of violence.\textsuperscript{198}

II. \hspace{1em} THE VIOLENCE SPECIALIST

Undermining the amiable nature of social relations between religious communities in Minorca did not impress local Jews, who continued to enjoy the patronage and protection of Theodorus, the wealthiest landlord on Minorca and former \textit{defensor civitatis}, the highest imperial magistrate on the island.\textsuperscript{199} When the Christians took advantage of Theodorus’ absence from the island to frighten the Jews to participate in a highly contentious religious debate, Theodorus rushed back home, and used his authority to stabilize the situation.\textsuperscript{200} What Severus needed in order to confront Theodorus’ political authority was a numeric advantage: more manpower and more muscle. He achieved this goal by gathering a large throng of Christians from the neighboring town of Jamona (a number “greater than was thought to reside in that town\textsuperscript{201}”) and marching them the thirty-mile journey to Magona.\textsuperscript{202} Once this combined group arrived, they outnumbered the Jews, who could no longer evade the Christians’ attempts to convene a public and highly contentious debate.

By importing large numbers of Christians from Jamona, Severus had achieved more than just numerical advantage. He now enjoyed the benefit of having at his disposal a large throng of \textit{Jamona} Christians; the same Jamona, situated some thirty miles west from Magona, that enjoyed the divine quality of being “Judenrein.”\textsuperscript{203}

\textsuperscript{198} Tilly, 34-41
\textsuperscript{199} Letter of Severus 6.1-3
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid. 7.2
\textsuperscript{201} Ibid. 12.1
\textsuperscript{202} Ibid. 12.2
\textsuperscript{203} Ibid. 3.1
Jamona’s Christians in consequence did not have the close associations with Jews that Magona’s Christians did. It was Magona’s church, Severus claimed, that was being “wounded” daily by the multitude of Jews; and it was there that Jewish-Christian relations were most friendly. Severus thus bypassed the binding force of amicable social ties in Magona by importing this foreign element.

This same strategy is evident in African intra-Christian episodes of violence. When Catholic bishops and their communities refused to heed Julian’s decree, dissident bishops had to hire private enforcers to do the job: “You [dissident bishops] turned many men into exiles… when you invaded their basilicas with hired gangs.”

These “hired gangs” were known as circumcellions, itinerant groups of harvesters, who performed other kinds of seasonal work as well. But sectarian battles created a need for private enforcers, which turned some circumcellions into hired thugs. Some of them became strongly associated with sectarian violence and developed a militant religious group identity: they named themselves agonistici (=fighters). Bishops had to rely on non-local muscle in order to facilitate escalating violence, and for this purpose, the circumcellions were ideal agents. They were, in large part, strong, young and male, and had no personal relations with those against whom they were hired to fight.

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204 *Letter of Severus* 3.6, 5.1
205 Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 2.17 (Shaw, 150) my brackets
206 Shaw, 631-50
207 Violence, in general, is strongly associated with young males (see Tilly, 1; and Shaw, 243-47); cf. Israeli policy during periods of security unrest which bans Muslim men under the age of 40 from entering Temple Mount, see e.g.: Jewish Press News Briefs. “Arab Men Under 40 Barred from the Temple Mount Tomorrow.” *Jewish Press News*, 15 Nov. 2012. Web. 21 Nov. 2012; Young males (students of philosophy) were also clearly involved in the Alexandrian violence, but women could occasionally be found among the circumcellions (Shaw 651-54). Interestingly, in Minorca women are said to have been involved in violence (*Letter of Severus* 13.3), and are dominant throughout Severus’ narrative. Severus, however, seems to be more prescriptive than descriptive, see Kraemer, Ross S. “Jewish Women’s Resistance to Christianity in the Early Fifth Century: The Account of Severus, Bishop of Minorca.” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17.4 (2009): 635-65
As in Minorca and in Africa, so also in Alexandria. While it is true that members of the Alexandrian pagan community, enraged by the systematic and public humiliation of their sacred objects, violently ambushed Alexandrian Christians, Socrates carefully specifies whom Theophilus used to enforce his policy: “This disturbance having been terminated, the governor of Alexandria and the commander-in-chief of the troops in Egypt assisted Theophilus in demolishing the heathen temples.”208 Inter-communal relations in Alexandria, extremely polarized after Theophilus’ provocation, could account for how violence ensued despite any specific mention of foreign “muscle.” Nonetheless, based on information provided by Eunapius, we know that large numbers of eager students were drawn to Alexandria from many cities of the empire, flocking around popular teachers whose fame had spread throughout the Mediterranean world.209 These eager young, male, and foreign students were very likely involved in the vengeful attacks led by their teachers, the Alexandrian philosophers.210 And when, after these bloody events, he continued his destructive policy against pagan sites, Theophilus relied on military personnel, who were not local Alexandrians and were therefore alien to the local inter-communal social fabric. Not unlike Severus and the dissident African bishops, Theophilus knew all too well that for local violence, foreign specialists were preferred.

There remains a practical question of organization: how does one successfully mobilize agents of violence into efficient action? Collective violence demands coordination among violence specialists and an effective outcome requires some centralizing technique that can mobilize and then organize violent acts. To guide and thus control the feelings and actions of large numbers of ordinary people requires

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208 Socrates, *HE* 5.16
210 Haas, 164-65
forms of authoritative communication other than the written letter, a pastoral tract or even the living message of a sermon. Military commanders, such as those who put their Alexandrian troops at Theophilus’ disposal, knew this very well, as is attested in a work written by Vegetius during the first half of the fifth century:

The first thing the soldiers are to be taught is the military step, which can only be acquired by constant practice of marching quick and together. Nor is anything of more consequence either on the march or in the line than that they should keep their ranks with the greatest exactness. For troops who march in an irregular and disorderly manner are always in great danger of being defeated.211

The military step was the highly organized, uniform, steady and rhythmic walking forward used by the Alexandrian troops, allowing them to act effectively and in a disciplined way under the strict supervision of their commanders who worked in accordance with Theophilus. The commanders regulated and directed marching by dictating the rhythmic beat created by the simultaneous stomping of the troops’ feet, and perhaps by using verbal chants that further assisted the troops to keep in line. It was precisely this coordination that made them valuable agents of violence.

But knowledge of efficient systems of mobilization to violence was not exclusive to the military. Bishops also knew how to mobilize and to direct their own “troops” into action. They used songs, hymns and chants to achieve this goal. The singing of hymns was an integral part of every significant step of the process that led to the burning of Magona’s synagogue and the forced conversion of the local Jews.212 In the first confrontation, which ended in a round of stone-throwing, both sides engaged in singing Psalm 9.6-7: “Memory of them has perished with a crash, but the Lord remains forever.”213 That both sides could sing the song together might be

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211 Vegetius, *Epitoma rei militaris*, book 1
212 See Shaw, 473-74
interpreted as a sign of social harmony,[214] but the whole situation suggests that each side, well aware of the harsh meaning of the psalm, was eager to out-sing the other. The burning of the synagogue itself was followed by the Christians’ singing hymns.[215] And later, when Jews and Christians gathered at the site of the destruction, the Christians chanted “Theodorus, believe in Christ!” by so doing instilling panic in the Jews who ran in fear – a significant turning point in the narrative.[216] A day before returning back to Jamona, after a failed attempt to convert an obstinate Jewish woman, the Christian attackers sang hymns once more.[217] Hymns and chants were used over and over again and proved to be a very effective tool in instilling group cohesion and coordinating group action.

Chanting was also a major mobilizing technique of African intra-Christian violence.[218] The dissidents had their own distinctive chant, which they repeated rhythmically, loudly and in unison. When Augustine, in an anti-dissident sermon, referred to his sectarian rivals as deranged madmen, he added: “all Christian men fear their shout of ‘Deo Laudes’ [‘=praise be to God’].”[219] The reason Catholics feared this cry was because it was associated with acts of violence. Augustine recalls how the dissident “acts of brigandage” – their legal and violent re-appropriation of property – were accompanied with loud shouts in unison: “When you made your entry into this hometown of ours, shouting out in unison ‘Laudes Deo!’ Praise to the Lord! Among their other songs, men whose voices blare out like trumpets of battle…”[220] The agonistici used chants in order to express their shared militant religious identity, to

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[215] Letter of Severus 14
[216] Ibid. 16.4-9
[217] Ibid. 27.5
[218] Shaw, 469-75
[219] Augustine, *Sermo.* 313E.6 (Shaw, 470 n. 101)
[220] Augustine, *Letters* 108.5.14 (Shaw, 471 n. 103)
frighten their Catholic enemies, and to coordinate their violent attack in an effective manner that could result with the desired outcome: gaining control over the disputed property.

Three things can be said about agents of religious violence in Africa, Alexandria and Minorca. First, they worked under the direct or indirect orders of bishops. Second, they were foreign social elements, free from considerations of the local inter-communal social fabric. Third, they used songs, hymns, chants, shouts and rhythmic bodily gestures (e.g. marching), as an extremely effective tool for mobilizing, binding and coordinating the group.

III. THE STATE

That religious violence was most often planned and directed to a certain degree by the bishops can also be demonstrated by their constant consideration of the law. Some bishops worked within its confines, others stretched its limits, but they were all constantly aware of its existence and power (or, in some cases, lack of power). This is

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222 See Shaw 441-75 for more on chants, hymns and other mobilizing techniques; also cf. recent lynch in Jerusalem, in which eyewitnesses reported that young males were chanting loudly “death to the Arabs” and sang the words “a Jew is a soul, an Arab is a son of a – “ while chasing four Arab youths: Hasson, Nir. “In suspected Jerusalem lynching, dozens of Jewish youths attack 3 Palestinians.” Haaretz, 17 Aug. 2012. Web. 22 Nov. 2012.
one important way in which the Christian Roman state contributed to and shaped religious violence.

At first blush, Severus’s actions can be regarded as a counter-argument to this hypothesis: his Christian flock burnt down a synagogue *despite* the law.223 And even if one argues that the initiative to burn down a synagogue was not exactly his – rather, he claims, he lost control of his people and at the crucial moment when tension erupted into violence he could only “protest in vain”224 – there is no doubt that he approved its result: Severus saw no problem with coerced conversions, and he took pains to broadcast the entire episode.225 All this cannot be denied, but a close inspection of the text shows that despite his unlawful deeds, Severus was well aware of long-standing social precedents and laws that protected the Jews from some of the requirements he had posed to them and damage he had inflicted upon them.

When Severus and his flock arrived in Magona, he sent for the Jews, who refused his invitation announcing that it was the Sabbath.226 Scott Bradbury interprets this Jewish announcement as a legal claim: “the Jews rely on a long-standing law, renewed in 412 by Honorius and Theodosius, affirming that Jews cannot be compelled to engage in public or private business on the Sabbath.”227 But a direct appeal to Roman law is not apparent in the text, from which one gets the impression that the Jews were invoking their religious *custom* (the Sabbath), which had become an age-old social precedent throughout the Greco-Roman diaspora. Peter Brown also refers to a specific legal felony which Severus allegedly invoked when he accused the

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223 *CTh* 16.8.12; 16.8.21; 16.8.25
224 *Letter of Severus* 13.6
225 See, for instance, the words Severus puts in the mouth of Meletius, brother of Theodorus: “hatred against our religion has increased to such an extent among all people on this island that whoever does not abandon his fatherland will be unable to retain his fathers’ faith.” (*Letter of Severus* 18.19)
226 Ibid. 12.4
227 Bradbury, 125 n. 12; the law referred to by Bradbury is *CTh* 16.8.20
Jews of stocking stones and other types of arms in their synagogue: “Their preparations to defend the synagogue were deemed to constitute an act of *latrocinium*, an illegal resort to force.” But even if we reasonably assume that, contrary to what Bradbury and Brown suggest, Severus did not have such detailed knowledge of the specifics of Roman law, a substantial case can still be made in favor of his concern to create an appearance of a lawful conduct: the Jews, in this imputed scenario, were the aggressors. Severus, further, was concerned to emphasize that none of his people had engaged in theft or pillage, that no Christians (except for one “greedy slave”) intended to steal, that the synagogue had somehow just burned down, and that the silver valuables were returned to the Jews. Brent Shaw goes one step further: “the purpose of Severus’ encyclical letter was not just to vaunt the achievements of the bishop and his martyr, but also to signal to imperial authorities that nothing grossly illegal or threatening to the imperial order had happened.”

As we have already seen, Theophilus of Alexandria referred to an imperial order when he proceeded to publicly expose pagan mysteries to contempt and destroy the Serapeum. Indeed, the imperial decree did not permit such behavior; nonetheless, it is of utmost importance that Theophilus referred to the statute as the basis for his actions. With an imperial rescript in hand, Theophilus could thus mobilize his urban mobs to action with greater ease, since his demands were perceived by them as supported and legitimized by the highest ranking authorities of the Roman state.

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229 Letter of Severus 13.8-10
230 Ibid. 13.13
231 Ibid.
232 Shaw, 786
233 CTh 16.10.11
So likewise when the dissident Church in Africa was restored to legitimate status by Julian’s decree issued early in the year 362. This meant that exiled dissident leaders could now return to Africa and repossess their former seats and church property. Moreover, the Roman state was very much involved in African sectarian disputes through the local and provincial courts. These were perceived by both of the contesting sides as a neutral arbitrator because the town elites and senatorial aristocracy who served as judges were pagans, thus, outside of the immediate fight. Whether by an imperial decree or a verdict of a local court, African bishops were constantly considering the legality of their planned actions.

While African dissident bishops conducted their sectarian battles within the confines of the law, Theophilus stretched its limits by reinterpretation and over-interpretation, and Severus was working against its instructions. They were all, however, fully aware of the authority of the law and did their utmost to provide their actions with an appearance of legality. But the state was involved in religious violence beyond mere invocation. There was a much more systematic and structural way through which the Roman state shaped the fundamental pattern discussed above, allowing bishops a large degree of autonomy in promoting a policy of forceful demolition or appropriation of property that belonged to religious minorities.

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234 Shaw, 150
235 Shaw, 501 (senatorial elite); 507 (African town elites); cf. recent intra-communal religious violence between two ultra-Orthodox sects in Jerusalem, where a heated and ongoing dispute over property brought the two contending sides, one of which is outspokenly and ideologically anti-Zionist, to press charges and sue each other in the secular Israeli court system, which are perceived as a neutral arbitrator in this matter: Eitinger, Yair. “Violence between ultra-Orthodox sects rocks Jerusalem neighborhood.” Haaretz, 28 Oct. 2011. Web. 27 Nov. 2012.
236 Cf. the following discussion which deals with the discrepancy between formal legislation by the imperial court and its (partial, to say the least) enforcement by state officials to Tilly, 41-53. Tilly stresses the importance of governmental capacity, which he defines as “the extent to which governmental agents control resources, activities and populations within the government’s territory,” to the character and intensity of collective violence. His discussion focuses on modern states; the “high capacity governments” Tilly gives as an example, could not have existed in the pre-modern late-antique world with which this paper deals. But the correlation he suggests between the capacity of a regime to
The Roman state was organized by three principal levels of decision-making. Each of these had its own structures of operation and its own agenda. At the top stood the emperor and his court, which tended to be re-active, responding to pressures and petitions coming from the outside. And so, in order to influence imperial policy, bishops intensively lobbied the imperial court. The state was sometimes willing to respond with legislation, but was much less inclined to use military force to settle domestic issues. The violent rhetoric of imperial decrees, which most people would hear read aloud and usually by an interested party (say a local bishop), was meant to draw an emotional response, which was as important a part of the performance of reading these decrees aloud as was their strict bureaucratic content.

Actual enforcement was left to locals, such as those at the second principal level of governance: the provincial governors. Civil governors, however, held office for only a very short term, no more than a year or two. The governor’s main task was to maintain peace and order; but since his term of office was so short, he avoided acting in a manner that would cause unwanted disturbances, especially ones that could threaten the regular flow of tribute or that might raise questions at court about his competence to govern. What this meant in terms of religious violence, is that provincial governors had very little to no interest at all in enforcing laws that had the potential to escalate into episodes of violence.

control and enforce its policy to the emergence of collective violence is of great insight and significance to this paper.
237 Shaw, 496-508
238 Ibid., 497-98
239 Ibid., 539-42
240 Ibid., 499
Things were not different with the urban elites, who served as the third level of governance.\textsuperscript{241} Lowest in this hierarchy, they were the face of Roman administration that most inhabitants of most communities throughout the Roman Empire confronted. Each town had a council that was responsible for two critical functions of imperial administration: maintaining civic order and managing tribute/taxes. Apart from the fact that local elites were elected to annual terms of office, and were interested in maintaining a status quo that would allow a smooth term of office, many of them were members of a traditional pagan ruling elite who shared little with the Christians. This was especially true in Africa, where local elites were overwhelmingly pagan, uninterested in becoming involved in Christian affairs. Local elites had neither the inclination nor the interest in executing imperial sanctions.

When bishops wanted to promote their agendas, they had to somehow maneuver these three passive levels of decision-making, all of which tended to avoid implementing any controversial policy. Lobbying the court, as already discussed, was one tactic. But since legislation did not guarantee enforcement, bishops had either to rely on finding their own muscle, or to get state authorities to intervene by using means of provocation that destabilized public peace.

Our case studies illustrate this. Theophilus might have enjoyed the tacit approval of imperial officials when he exposed the Mithraeum and destroyed the Serapeum;\textsuperscript{242} but after the violence ended and pagan participants fled the city, Socrates specifically mentions the active support of the imperial officials, which indicates that, unlike in Africa, they were not pagan: “thus this disturbance having been terminated, the governor of Alexandria, and the commander-in-chief of the

\textsuperscript{241} Ibid., 505-08
\textsuperscript{242} They are not mentioned by Socrates until after violence erupted, but Theophilus may well have even enjoyed their explicit approval to begin with, due to their prominent role in the whole affair. Sozomen and Eunapius both mention them by full name and rank.
troops in Egypt, assisted Theophilus in demolishing the heathen temples.” The local imperial officials, who are mentioned by name in many of the accounts, must have reached the conclusion that actively supporting the initiatives of Theophilus, the powerful and ambitious Alexandrian bishop, rather than actively opposing him, or turning a blind eye as they had done before, could prevent further turmoil, and could perhaps also give them access to some of the substantial wealth confiscated from the temples. Theophilus had proved his readiness to utilize his substantial local power base to provoke the pagan population despite lacking full imperial approval. The local imperial officials, who would not have managed to obtain an equally strong local powerbase during their short term, were forced to recognize Theophilus’ advantage after the bloody pagan riot erupted, and decided to support his efforts. Theophilus, who by razing the Serapeum gained not only a triumphant Christianization of Alexandrian landscape, but also control over significant financial resources, could make sure to make this partnership worth their while.

Over and above the important role of the state as arbitrator in intra-Christian sectarian violence throughout Africa, it sometimes played a direct role in religious violence. Soldiers would occasionally join actively in African Christian sectarian battles. Although it was up to dissident bishops to hire private rough men to enforce the law, the state would sometimes send troops to the disputes in case violence spun out of control. Such was the case in the town of Idicra, sixteen miles southwest of Optatus’ diocese in Milevis: Urbanus of Forma and Felix of Idicra came to this city… two firebrands burning with envy and bitterness… helped by the favor and fury of some government officials, and with Athenius the

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243 Socrates, *HE* 5.16
244 Hahn, *Conversion*, 355, and see n. 67 on same page
245 Shaw, 156
provincial governor present with his military units, the numerous members of the Catholic community were expelled from their seats amidst panic and bloodshed…  

Enforcement was private, but since the basilica was situated in a large and important coastal city, the state officials were present to supervise the use of force in executing the court orders, and to make sure that things did not get out of hand. The Roman state might have left bishops with the task of enforcement, but if it felt that its own interests were at stake it made sure to mobilize its own men of violence whose mere existence in the disputed scene had a substantial effect. It was a threatening presence that could easily turn into bloodshed considering the deadly tools they had at their disposal: circumcellions swung clubs, but soldiers had swords, and they knew how to use them.

As in so many other ways, Minorca presents us with unique circumstances. In Alexandria and Idicra state officials were involved as third parties, but in Minorca the leaders of the Jewish community were also influential members of the curial and imperial elite. In other words, religious violence in Minorca was also a civil, or political, “putsch” – a sudden attempt to overthrow, or dramatically reform, the local government. Caecilianus, a prominent Jew, second only to Theodorus in the synagogue hierarchy, currently served as defensor, an imperial title, and would have been the highest ranking state official on the island. Caecilianus, Theodorus (who did not hold an official civilian title anymore but who was a prominent patron of Jews and Christians alike), and other prominent Jews who served as curial officials, were in an awkward and delicate situation. They did not want to show their powerlessness as state officials and they could not tolerate the continued, albeit recent, violent tension

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246 Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 2.18 (Shaw, 155)  
247 *Letter of Severus* 6.3 (Theodorus); 24.2 (Meletius’ father-in-law); 19.6 (Caecilianus); and see Bradbury, 32-39  
248 *Letter of Severus* 19.6-8
between the two religious communities. Furthermore, as distinguished members of the ethno-religious Jewish community, Caecilianus, and especially Theodorus, were personally under attack. Theodorus had to provide his fellow Jews with the security and loyalty they expected from their *pater pateron* while somehow satisfying Christian sentiments. The Jewish leadership had to act both as state brokers and as the representatives of the smaller contending party, and they had no state power broker to whom they could appeal: they *were* the state powerbrokers.

“The face of the state was everywhere in these disputes,”\(^{249}\) writes Brent Shaw on African Christian sectarian violence, and his words can be extended to late Roman religious violence in general. The state was present when its imperial court issued laws or when its officials lent an active hand; it was there when it served as a mediator or when it supervised violent procedures; and sometimes its representatives even became directly involved in religious violence. Be that as it may, understanding the mechanisms of religious violence necessitates an understanding of the fine features of the face of the state.

IV. MEMORY AND REPLICATION

Religious violence has symbolic power; it was the pith of religious experience. The most powerful collective religious “memories” – the deliberate recollection of some past episode, whether real or imagined – included symbols of violence. Whether as a persecuted religious minority or as a triumphant and powerful state religious community, Christians contemplated and construed their past in terms of violence: violent martyrdoms or violent triumph. The deliberate process of evoking, retelling

\(^{249}\) Shaw, 160
and re-imagining memories of religious violence over and over again meant that violence was not only "a thing of the past," but a living symbolic presence that, under certain circumstances, could or even should be reenacted. Violence, then, had a special quality of being perceived as a reenactment of a previous violent prototype, and of setting a symbolic precedent for future reenactments of violence.

The destruction of the Serapeum became a symbol of Christian triumph, as the abundance of references to it in contemporary sources attest.\textsuperscript{250} Ecclesiastical historians presented it as such in their works; pagan writers considered it a pagan defeat.\textsuperscript{251} The Alexandrian chronicle illustrated the episode with Theophilus standing triumphantly on the apex of the building, further attesting to the symbolic importance of this violent episode, through which religious violence was communicated – and legitimated – as religious triumph.\textsuperscript{252}

The consequences of this triumph of violence were immediately felt. The destruction of the Serapeum, followed by the violent pagan reaction, led in turn to a systematic destruction of pagan temples.\textsuperscript{253} Theophilus appears to have been involved in the demise of temples and the substitution for them of churches at Canobus and at a village called Menuthis, among, it may be assumed, many others.\textsuperscript{254} But other Egyptian bishops followed suit. Rufinus mentions "the persistence of several bishops" which resulted in the razing of shrines throughout the cities, settlements, villages and countryside in Egypt.\textsuperscript{255} Rufinus might have been exaggerating the extent of the destruction, but he clearly indicates a chain effect: Theophilus’ precedent, when he

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Hahn, Conversion, 337-39
\item The principal sources are Rufinus, \textit{HE} 11.22f.; Socrates, \textit{HE} 5.16f.; Sozomen, \textit{HE} 7.15; Theodoret, \textit{HE} 5.22; Eunapius, \textit{Lives of the Sophists} 6.11 (421-3 in Loeb ed.)
\item Bauer & Strzygowski, \textit{Eine Alexandrinische Weltchronik}, pl. 6 verso
\item Hahn, Conversion, 352-55; Socrates, \textit{HE} 5.16; Rufinus, \textit{HE} 11.26-28
\item On Canobus: Rufinus, \textit{HE} 11.26; Eunapius, \textit{Lives of the Sophists} 6.11 (421 in Loeb ed.); Fowden, 70; On Menuthis, see ibid. 70 n. 3
\item Rufinus, \textit{HE} 11.28
\end{enumerate}
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destroyed the greatest of Egyptian temples, inspired other bishops to reenact his triumphant violence in their own smaller, humbler localities.

Africa was no different.\textsuperscript{256} When Optatus assembled cases that had been brought by Catholics before the local municipal judicial authorities, and then carefully turned them into a polemic narrative against the dissidents, he was consciously creating a memory of persecution. Augustine based his historical knowledge almost exclusively on Optatus’ writings.\textsuperscript{257} Such memories fueled Catholic anti-dissident resentments. Whatever property was reclaimed by dissident bishops would later be reclaimed in turn by Catholic bishops, who would once again hire a gang of rough men to facilitate the restoration of what they perceived as their property, which had been violently and wrongly seized by their Christian rivals. These events mirrored other enactments of religious violence: whatever violence was used by one contesting side was construed on the basis of violence inflicted in past times by the other. Dissident bishops themselves also based their claims on carefully cultivated memories of violence: when they used violence to reclaim their basilicas, they came “burning with envy and bitterness.”\textsuperscript{258} They were bitter because the injustices and persecution of 347 was still very much a living reality for them; it was then that they were forced to exile, and it was then that their basilicas were taken.\textsuperscript{259} Now justice was being done. A violent takeover was a just response to a former violent takeover. Both Christian communities had deep and resentful memories of violence being used against them, according to which they shaped their response when the legal and political atmosphere enabled them to respond. Memories of past violence generated real violence in the present that intensified and reached a climax when Catholics tried

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{256} On the function memory played in the sectarian conflicts in Africa see Shaw, 146-94 (chapter 4)
\item\textsuperscript{257} Ibid., 147, and see n. 5 on same page.
\item\textsuperscript{258} Optatus, \textit{Contra Parm.} 2.17 (Shaw, 155)
\item\textsuperscript{259} On the persecution of 347: Shaw, 162-67
\end{itemize}
to impose a total solution to their century-long schism: not local episodes of violence led by individual bishops, but a coordinated pan-African campaign that included the highly specialized violent agency of the state. Eventually, in 411, the Catholics went one step further: they managed, at last, to persuade the emperor to send an imperial emissary to issue a final decision against the dissidents, hoping that this would lead to a state-led persecution. But even this state coercion would fail in bringing dissident Christians to join the Orthodox Church.

Severus’ totalizing policy did not fail. Without appealing to the state-controlled coercive tools he managed to bring about a total and comprehensive conversion of the entire Jewish community in Minorca. The majority of Christians and Jews, it seems, had no memories of a violent past, but Severus took advantage of his new acquisition – St. Stephen’s relics – to create such memories of violence through which he could further his goals. St. Stephen was an ideal saint for this purpose because unlike most martyrs, who were victims of pagan persecution, St. Stephen the first martyr of the Church, was stoned by (his fellow) Jews. Now all that was left for Severus was to convince his flock that a line should be drawn between those “Jews” who stoned Stephen and their own very real Jewish Minorcan neighbors. The fact that this took him more than a year shows it was not an easy task.

However, it was not only the historical Stephen who presented Severus with a new memory of violence. Stephen had had a second, post-mortem, life. The discovery of his relics was accompanied with a spurt of anti-Jewish violence. Such was the case in Jerusalem, where Bishop John used the newly discovered relics to assert his

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260 On the events leading to, and the proceedings of, the conference of 411, see Shaw, 544-86
261 On the ineffectiveness of the conference, see Shaw, 802-06
262 Acts, 6-7
263 Bradbury, 23-25
authority over Judaeo-Christian groups in the city; and in the same year bishop Rabbula of Edessa is said to have petitioned the emperor for the right to convert a synagogue into a church dedicated to St. Stephen. What should also be emphasized is that Severus’ letter was in itself an attempt to stylize religious violence as a symbol of Christian triumph. He had hoped that by disseminating the letter among bishops he could promote his “success” story and advocate the use of coercive means for religious goals.

“Real” religious violence was used and legitimated by an appeal to symbols and memories of past violence, whether real or imagined. The realization and reenactment of these symbols and memories created new symbols and episodes that reaffirmed the place of violence as an epitome of Christian triumph. And it was this conservation of violent ideals that led its perpetrators to seek “total” and all-encompassing success when they did turn to actual violence.

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Four different factors in religious violence, common to all three case studies, were examined in this chapter. First, religious violence, regardless of its specific type, was always instigated by bishops. Against friendly inter-communal relations, bishops used rhetorical violence and highly provocative gestures to create social strife and religious polarization between religious communities. These provocations were not spontaneous but rather well planned. Bishops constantly engineered new methods to establish and affirm their own personal authority and power. They formed solid, stable, and wide-flung networks and so gained political and legal advantages to

264 Brown, Christianization, 648
265 Chronicle of Edessa, 51
266 Bradbury, 57; Letter of Severus 31.2
further enhance their position vis-à-vis local religious enemies. Sometimes, as our case studies have shown, these machinations summoned an enraged response.

Second, bishops had access to, and had to form relations with, various available types of specialists of violence to realize their plans. These agents, characteristically, were outsiders to the contesting communities: they were non-local soldiers, itinerant hired gangs, or people from other localities. Moreover, in order to forge these collectivities into a coherent and unified fighting force, similar techniques – rhythmic marching, chanting, singing – were all effectively deployed.

Third, violence was modulated by the imperium. The state was always involved in some degree, whether to legislate, to enforce, to mediate, to supervise, or to punish. Bishops always were at pains to consider how the state would respond to their actions – a question not only of legality but also of political feasibility.

Fourth and finally, all of these events offered opportunities for the interplay of symbolic acts and memory (or “memory”). Religious violence always seemed to resonate with “deeper” memories or symbolic acts by which it was legitimized and validated. These “remembered” violent events created and sustained more memories and symbols of violence that religious leaders could evoke and orchestrate as they saw fit. Religious violence, narrativized and thus interpreted and remembered, offered models of behavior as well as paradigms by which to build community identity in successive generations. The past, thus conjured, generated new episodes of religious violence, and thus had a “contagious” and totalizing effect.
Much unites our three case studies of violence. Much also distinguishes them one from the other. Their differences are a result of the individual circumstances crucial to the evolution of these episodes of collective violence that were specifically local. But the specific religious identity of the opponents – Christian (whether orthodox or, in North Africa, also dissident), pagans or Jews – also influenced how violence was instigated and molded. Though hard-and-fast distinctions between non-religious and specifically religious circumstances are elusive, we can identify three specific aspects of violence that distinguishes local outbursts which are a result of differing religious identities: (1) the way in which unique types of religious violence were shaped by the legal status specific to each religious group; (2) different reactions to religious violence, e.g. conversion, flight, legal action; (3) different ritualistic treatments of the contested religious edifices.

I. LEGAL STATUS

Bishops had a great impact on Roman imperial laws pertaining to religious matters. Not only was their invective towards religious opponents often incorporated as the official “voice” of the state, but their perception of a four-fold division of society – orthodox, heretic, pagan, Jew – was also repeated. As can be seen in Codex Theodosianus, the law did not concern itself with the differences between the cult of

\[267\] Brown, Christianization, 639-40; Shaw, 539-42; Wilken, 50-52
Isis, Attis or Cybele, nor did it consider the theological or social differences between Donatists, Arians, or Pelagians; rather, it spoke of pagans, heretics and Jews. But though it spoke of all three in negative terms, it spoke of them differently. I suggest that it was the differences in the legal status of each religious ‘opponent’ that accounted for some of the differences in the ways that religious violence against them was managed and manifest.

Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria, a well-connected and powerful bishop of a major metropolis, could not have been ignorant of the new anti-pagan laws issued by the imperial court of Theodosius. Four anti-pagan laws documented in *Codex Theodosianus* were legislated by the emperor prior to issuing the law upon which Theophilus legitimized his anti-pagan activity.268 With full knowledge of the anti-pagan trend of court legislation, Theophilus decided to lobby for a rescript that would be addressed specifically to the local imperial officials in Alexandria (and his political allies), Romanus, the *comes Aygepti*, and Evagrius, the *Praefectus Augustalis*.269 What he stood to gain from such lobbying – an expensive effort involving intense political wheeling and dealing – cannot be overestimated.270 To begin with, Theophilus could harness the imperial prestige and authority invested in the new decree to further the goal he preached for: clear religious boundaries and clear Christian local hegemony. If lumpen Christians by and large were not impressed by his constant contrasting of those who revered pagan religion, an imperial law would perhaps convince them otherwise. Such a decree would increase tension between Christians and pagans and polarize them, a critical first step which was essential to what would come later – the triumph of the Alexandrian Church, and of its bishop,

268 *CTh* 16.10.7-10  
269 Ibid, 16.10.11; the law addressed Evagrius and Romanus and both officials are mentioned by both Christian and pagan writers as close associates of Bishop Theophilus.  
270 On lobbying as a costly affair: Shaw, 518-19
Theophilus. Furthermore, the new imperial initiative gave Theophilus a much needed legal foundation for the anti-pagan policy he wished to advance. If he played his cards well, optimally deploying his local power base (the monks), he could take advantage of the powerful coercive powers of the state as well to advance his own agenda.

This is precisely what happened. Rescript in hand, Theophilus went to work. The law only restricted pagans from performing sacrifices publicly, from revering the shrines, and from entering the temples and shrines; but Theophilus interpreted it more broadly: if pagans were in any case forbidden from entering temples and shrines, then wasn’t the existence of such buildings itself superfluous? His muscular over-interpretation allowed Theophilus to realize his much-desired religious policy by investing with imperial prestige and authority, without which his actions would not gain the legitimization he needed. He took highly provocative measures to create a charged atmosphere that polarized Christians and pagans in a city notorious for its ethno-religious tensions. Once violence ensued it was a matter of “public peace” – a violent riot might disrupt the smooth collection of state revenues – which prompted local imperial officials to fall into line with Theophilus.

This “top down” model – first gaining an imperial rescript, then working at the local level with provincial imperial representatives and private enforcement – also applies to the North African episode of violence. When the emperor Julian advanced his policy of pagan restoration, Christian dissident bishops finally got the opportunity

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271 “No person shall be granted the right to perform sacrifices; no person shall go around the temples; no person shall revere the shrines” (CTh 16.10.11)
272 According to Rufinus there was also a demographic excuse; the bishop asked the emperor for the basilica “so that the growth of the houses of prayer might keep pace with the growing number of the faithful.” (Rufinus, HE 11.22)
273 “The Alexandrian public is more delighted with tumult than any other people: and if at any time it should find a pretext, breaks forth into the most intolerable excesses; for it never ceases from its turbulence without bloodshed.” (Socrates, HE 7.13)
274 Their Christian identity and the considerable wealth that could be gained by confiscating the Serapeum’s wealth must have been important considerations too; Hahn, Conversion, 355 and see n. 67 on same page.
they were hoping for over a decade and a half. The interests of the two converged. Julian wanted to weaken the Catholic Christian coalition that had gained so much power under his predecessors, and he knew that by allowing dissident bishops to return to their home dioceses and reclaim their former properties he would create massive intra-Christian sectarian conflict and unrest. For the dissidents, it was a win-win situation: humiliate their Catholic competitors, and restore their own power and prestige. In contrast to the Alexandrian case, these African episodes of violence were, from a legal point of view, fully legitimate. The dissidents were forcefully appropriating what was theirs by law. But only with an imperial rescript in hand could they return to their local dioceses and reclaim what was once theirs, sometimes even enjoying the assistance of imperial troops.

The Christian-Jewish episode of violence that took place on Minorca, however, shows that the imperial court did not always provide the opening gambit in the local instigation, or escalation, of religious violence. Bishop Severus could not use the same political tactics as the Alexandrian and African bishops had because his opponents were not pagans or schismatics, but the local first men of the island, whose communal institutions and property were formally protected by imperial law. Unlike Theophilus, who as the Alexandrian patriarch was under constant scrutiny from imperial players, Severus had the freedom that his island’s remoteness and lack of importance ensured. His local powerbase alone, once stirred up by incessant anti-Jewish preaching, could be relied on to act. Eventually, with substantial numbers of Christians at his disposal, he forced the Jewish leaders to yield. Severus might have originally resisted the idea of destroying the synagogue in order to compel Jewish

275 See e.g. CTh 16.8.9; 16.8.12; 16.8.20
276 Letter of Severus 16.16ff.
conversion: perhaps events really did spin out of his control. Alternatively, though, it can be argued that he planned the violent outcome of the encounter and that his Christian flock acted with his approval. But in any case, Roman law was not on his side.

That the imperial and curial hierarchy in Minorca was Jewish was undoubtedly a unique factor in the whole affair, which affected and effected the ways in which the intra-religious violence was expressed. The top-down model, in which lobbying the imperial court and then soliciting local enforcement, whether popular or official, could not apply here. Severus had to find an alternative tactic. His model was “bottom-up,” first problematizing if not insisting upon religious boundaries between Christians and Jews in Minorca, and then mobilizing the local Christian flock to confront the Jews, who called for Theodorus, the island’s patronus and head man, to interfere on their behalf.

II. IMMEDIATE IMPACT

One striking difference between the three case studies examined in this paper is the varying responses of the warring parties. In Alexandria, the pagan leaders who led the vengeful attack on the Christians fled Alexandria and settled elsewhere; the Jews of Minorca are all reported to have converted to Christianity; and in Africa, the common response was for the contesting parties to appeal endlessly to the civil courts in what were fundamentally property disputes.

277 *Letter of Severus* 13.6; also see Fredriksen, *Augustine*, 357-63
278 See Shaw, 436-37
279 According to both Socrates (*HE* 5.17) and Rufinus (*HE* 11.24) many pagans embraced Christianity as a result of the destruction of the Serapeum. These, however, were not the pagans directly involved in the violence.
The reasons for these differences are manifold. The sheer numbers of people involved must have been a crucial factor. Severus achieved what he did through numerical advantage: he had much more muscle at his disposal, and this clearly made an impression on Theodorus and the Jewish community. Previously, Theodorus had used his authority to calm potential Christian aggression, but once Severus amassed manpower, Theodorus’ authority did not suffice, and he was faced with two options, conversion or exile, and exile was not an easy choice for Theodorus, whose considerable wealth was in land. While the Alexandrian affair does not provide us with enough data to determine the numbers of the contestants (though, given the size of the city, these may have been considerable), Catholics and dissidents in Africa seem to have shared a demographic balance of power. Neither of the two churches managed to gain a substantial demographic advantage over the other, even in those rare occasions where the state used coercive measures in an attempt to change this equation. The constancy of their respective numbers was reflected in the repetitive pattern of the constant pull-and-tug war between the two sides.

Weather and geography also had a crucial effect on the outcome of religious violence. The entire community of Jews in Minorca converted after many had escaped Magona to the surrounding vicinity. Some who contemplated an escape knew they had to continue hiding until “an appropriate moment” to emigrate.

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280 Letter of Severus 7.1-2
281 Not only quantity should be taken into account; the pagans involved in violence were young elite males, some of whom were probably trained for military or guards service, cf. Shaw, 243-47. This can explain the discrepancy between Christian and pagan casualties; according to Rufinus, HE 11.22: “Our side [=the Christian side] far outweighed the other in numbers and strength, but was less savage due to the mild character of our [=Christian] religion.” But Socrates attributes the large number of Christian casualties to pagan tactics. According to him, pagans ambushed Christians “at a preconcerted signal.” (HE 5.16)
282 One indication of this demographic balance can be seen in the similar numbers of Catholic and dissident bishops that assembled in Carthage in 411 (with a slight advantage to the dissidents); see Shaw, 569-73; 807-11
283 Letter of Severus 16.9
284 Ibid. 18.19
abroad, but eventually found themselves back in Magona. This makes perfect sense due to the fact that the whole affair took place in early February, when weather conditions did not allow safe-sea passage. And since Minorca was an island there was nowhere else to run too.

The identity of the religious opponent, however, did influence the response to and the immediate aftermath of religious violence. It was the way the religious contestants were organized as groups, and the internal hierarchies that they sustained as Jews, Christians or pagans, that had a decisive impact on their response to violence. While it is true that Jews in Minorca could not respond to violence by fleeing the island due to climatic and geographic conditions, this explanation does not explain why the entire community, some 540 Jews, all capitulated to the demand that they convert. It was the way the Jewish community was organized and the way it was internally structured that, together with other unique characteristics, shaped its response to the Christian campaign. Throughout the Roman diaspora – and as indicated by Severus’ letter, Minorca was no exception in this respect – Jews were organized as a community into local and quasi-self-governing institutions. Synagogues were legally recognized as formal Jewish institutions, and their religious leaders could enjoy legal immunity from all obligations to the city council.

These Jewish community centers, including their physical structures, were protected from seizure by imperial law, which repeatedly reaffirmed the ancient legal privileges given to the Jews. Christian imperial rule notwithstanding, Jews were still recognized as a legitimate religious community and were permitted to perform their

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285 Ibid. 31.1; two episodes of Christian-pagan violence in Madauros (Shaw, 235-43) and Calama (Shaw, 251-59) in Africa took place in the summer, with midsummer heat and the gathering of young men for harvest serving as contributing factors; In Alexandria (see discussion in Hahn, Vetustus), as in Minorca, violence took place in the winter.
286 Fredriksen, Augustine, 20-21
287 See e.g. CTh 16.8.2; 16.8.13
traditional customs during the early fifth century.\footnote{288} Whence, then, the “thoroughly dirty business”\footnote{289} that took place in Minorca? A reconstruction of the dramatic conversion narrated by Severus reveals what were the decisive forces at work. Severus roiled his Christian flock to aggression. When the Christians from Jamona arrived at Magona, Theodorus, the island’s “big man,” lost control over the situation and failed to maintain order in the island. As patron to both Christians and Jews, he was expected to demonstrate his authority and offer a solution to the highly tense and violent inter-communal relations. His status as “big man” was threatened, even undermined. This is precisely the point made in the letter when after the synagogue was burnt down, Theodorus was advised by Reuben, the first Jew to convert: “What do you fear, Lord Theodorus? If you truly wish to be safe and honored and wealthy, believe in Christ, just as I too have believed.”\footnote{290} Rueben (or Severus) knew all too well what considerations mattered to the Jewish patronus. At danger were Theodorus’ prestige and wealth, and by “believing in Christ” he could secure both. He would still keep his substantial wealth and the authority and honor that accompanied it.\footnote{291}

But Theodorus was not only patronus of the island; he held a high office within his community. As pater pateron and doctor legis he had a further set of responsibilities toward his own Jewish flock, whose support he wished to retain despite converting.\footnote{292} He thus agreed to convert but had his own demands: “allow me first to address my people.”\footnote{293} Now he had the task of persuading his fellow Jews that their conversion was also the right thing to do. He was the learned religious authority within his community and together with other prominent Jewish figures who shared

\footnote{288} See ibid. 16.8.20 renewed in 412
\footnote{289} Brown, Cult, 104
\footnote{290} Letter of Severus 16.14
\footnote{291} Theodorus was forced to choose between exile and conversion. Since wealth in late antiquity was land-based, Theodorus’ exile would mean losing his wealth.
\footnote{292} Letter of Severus 6.2
\footnote{293} Ibid. 16.16
his views he addressed an assembly of Jews and called them to join the Church in unison, as a community. Once the Jewish notables were agreed about the steps to be taken, Jewish commoners could not rely any more on their newly-converted leaders to use their authority to defend their religious affiliation. Theodorus, their former doctor legis, could provide them with a theological platform to rationalize the move and with the continued threat of Christian violence that had already resulted in the destruction of the local synagogue, together with physical conditions that made escape an unlikely solution, Jews were left with no other satisfactory option. The fact Jews were organized in close knit communities that enjoyed legal recognition and included a formal hierarchy, was decisive. The extant and totality of the Jewish response to Christian violence was the measure of the way that they were internally organized as a community.

Christian communities in principle were structured similarly, beneath their bishops. The bishop decided how to distribute the significant largesse that the church often had in its disposal. He was the one who performed the sacraments, who delivered sermons, who dispensed charity, and who represented the community before secular authorities. It is therefore not surprising that when dissident bishops marched with their private enforcers on disputed basilicas, they found Catholic bishops with their parishioners barricaded within. The small towns of Zabi, Flumen Piscium and Lemellef, shared a single structure. Tipasa, which may have had more than one basilica, followed the same pattern. The entire community was involved: “the numerous members of the Catholic community were expelled from their seats [=churches] amidst panic and bloodshed. Men were wounded, married women were

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294 Ibid. 19.8
295 See Peter Brown’s new book, Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD. Princton: Princeton University Press, 2012; see also Shaw, 368-74
violated, infants were killed…”  

Men, married women, and children – the Christian community responded in unison under the direction of their bishop, their undisputed leading authority. But since the dissident-Catholic contest in Africa was primarily a legal dispute over property, in which rough men were hired to legitimately enforce a legal decision, the real “battle” between the two contesting Christian groups most often took place in court.  

Pagans, however, were not organized hierarchically in local communities under a single leader in the way that synagogues or churches represent. Nor was there a widely recognized religious hierarchy of pagan leadership similar to that of the bishops or archisynagogoi. Even during the early empire, the one designated as High Priest of Alexandria and Egypt did not fulfill this leadership role, since he was primarily a civil bureaucrat concerned with the regulation and taxation of temple properties throughout Egypt. His sole religious function appears to have been in connection with the imperial cult. Since traditional cults were an integral part of the Roman civil sphere, they did not constitute distinct religious communities independent of civil state apparatus. And so, when the Roman state became Christian, no uniform pagan community existed. Besides having no single institutional framework, pagans in Alexandria were scattered among a multitude of cults and religious sects. Adherence to these subgroups was not mutually exclusive: one could participate in any number of religious cults.

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296 Optatus, *Contra Parm.* 2.18 (Shaw, 155)
297 Roman African inhabitants during late antiquity developed a deep interest in and commitment to legal culture, which also must have contributed to the legal nature of sectarian conflict; see Shaw, 508-17.
298 Haas, 130-38
299 Ibid., 130-31
300 Ibid., 131
Pagans in Alexandria also ranged across a broad spectrum of social positions and cultural orientations. This is an important factor when considering the violence that ensued in 392, for as Christopher Haas writes: “there appears to be little common ground between the highly educated philosophers who taught in Alexandria’s lecture halls and the fellahin from the countryside who sought seasonal employment along the city’s wharves.”

The pagan leaders during the violence were teachers of philosophy: Helladius and Ammonius, according to Socrates, or Olympus according to Rufinus. Teachers of philosophy as a rule adhered to traditional cult; Helladius and Ammonius were even said to be priests of pagan cult. While they had their followers – the many students that came to hear their lectures – they did not function as official leaders of the pagans in Alexandria, nor would the fellahin from the countryside have regarded them as such. Consequently, this episode of violence was not inter-communal in the same total and all-encompassing sense as were those in Minorca and in Africa. In Alexandria, only a certain small faction of the pagan “community” reacted violently to Christian provocation – the pagan teachers of philosophy and their students – and it was they, and not the entire pagan urban population, who feared a vengeful Christian response.

With the extent of the bloodshed revealed, pagans who had been directly involved feared a response from state officials, whose close affiliation with Theophilus and direct involvement in the destruction of pagan temples indicates they were Christians. They fled the scene. “Some fled in one direction, some in another, and many, quitting Alexandria, dispersed themselves in various cities.”

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301 Ibid.
302 Socrates, HE 5.16; Rufinus, HE 11.22
303 “Helladius was said to the priest of Jupiter, and Ammonius of Simius” (Socrates, HE 5.16)
304 Ibid.
of philosophy, these men could find new work and a new home in many of the other cities of the empire.305

The distinct structures of these different religious communities – or their absence – influenced the response to and outcome of their respective incidents of religious violence. Jews and Christians were organized in close communities with clear hierarchies. In consequence, they responded as a community, under the direction of their leaders. Such was the case in Minorca, where 540 Jews converted as a community under the direct influence of Theodorus and other prominent Jews. Similarly, the Catholic Christians in Africa, men and women alike, responded as a community, under the leadership of their bishops, barricading themselves in the disputed basilicas. It was the bishops’ ability to efficiently mobilize their flock that often turned the sectarian battles in Africa to a war of numbers, in which the side that had more “muscle” would gain control over the disputed property. Pagans, however, who were not organized in this way, responded differently. Only a fraction of pagans – teachers of philosophy and their students – were involved in the violent events and it was them, and not the entire pagan population that were in need of a solution to the sensitive situation in which they found themselves after they turned to violence. They did not flee Alexandria as a group (“some fled in one direction, some in another”), but rather each found a destination that best suited him. Fleeing Alexandria was made easier since as teachers of philosophy, they could make use of the “international” nature of the elite education, and secure a position in one of the many other teaching centers of the Empire.

305 The same classic curriculum known as paideia existed throughout the Roman Empire, and as a result there was a constant flow of students and teachers between different scholarly centers throughout the Mediterranean basin. Ammonius and Helladius, who took an active part in the violent events, with Helladius boasting many years later of killing nine Christian men with his own hand, could easily reestablish themselves in Constantinople, since as grammarians their skills were sought after not only in Alexandria, but in other major Roman cities as well.
III. THE AESTHETICS OF VIOLENCE

It is not merely the identity of the main perpetrators and agents of violence, the methods used to mobilize contesting groups against one another, or the unique loci of acts of aggression, that articulate late antique religious violence. The appearance of violence itself, the shapes it took and the ways in which it unfolded also gave religious violence its specific contours. Two general forms of “purification” rituals were typical. Some involved the deliberate and public destruction of the contested religious edifice and of the sacred objects within the precinct; others involved their deliberate and public seizure and appropriation. In all three of the violent episodes examined here, the distinct religious identity of each of the contesting groups shaped the differences in the ways that they ritualized violence. These differences are demonstrated by the varying combinations of rituals of destruction and appropriation of the contested edifice, on the one hand, and the sancta within, on the other.

After the violent clash in Alexandria, when Theophilus at last managed to obtain active support of the imperial troops in demolishing pagan temples, the bishop initiated the following course of action. First, the temples, among them the Serapeum (not yet utterly destroyed by Theophilus) were razed to the ground. Then the cult statues (“the images of their gods”307) were demeaned by being melted into pots and other such domestic utensils, “to distribute them for the relief of the poor.”308 But Socrates offers another telling detail: All the images were broken into pieces, except the phallus of Priapus, which was preserved and set up in a public place in order to

306 According to Socrates the Serapeum was destroyed in two phases: the first destruction was followed by the violent riot, and the second came after the violence and was executed by military troops; see Hahn, Conversion, 348
307 Socrates, HE 5.16
308 Ibid.
mock pagan religion. Also under Theophilus’ direction, once the Serapeum was razed and the cult statues shattered, according to Rufinus, a martyr’s shrine and a church were built in the same compound.

Perhaps if a Christian basilica or a Jewish synagogue and not the temple of Serapis were at stake, Theophilus would have considered appropriating the edifice rather than destroying it. But the Serapeum was one of the most famous temples of the post-Alexandrian world, and Theophilus knew that its total and deliberate destruction and its subsequent replacement/displacement by a Christian shrine would send a stronger message symbolically and politically: Christian triumph, pagan defeat, and a triumph of the Christian god over the pagan god. Moreover, apart from his strong desire to “Christianize” the Alexandrian landscape, there was a functional consideration: A pagan temple was not architecturally suitable for a church. Unlike basilicas, temples did not typically include large halls appropriate for mass assemblies – a crucial component for a church which, as a place of communal assembly, was modeled on government buildings. And finally, pagan temples were not perceived by Christians as religiously neutral: haunted by daimones, temples and altars were impure.

The actual destruction of the Serapeum and the deliberate shattering of its sacred objects were perceived as a combination of neutralizing the pagan place,

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309 Socrates, HE 5.16; according to Rufinus’ narration, when the Christians stood in front of the statue of Serapis, no one dared to harm it, fearing that the earth would split open and the sky would crash down at once. Eventually one of the soldiers, “armed with faith,” seized a double-headed axe and struck the statue. Afterwards, “the feet and other members were chopped off … and dragged…piece by piece… before the eyes of the Alexandria which had worshipped it.” (HE 11.23)

310 Rufinus, HE 11.27

311 Even devotees of Serapis declared that, in a manner characteristic of the gods of Egypt, Serapis had withdrawn to heaven, saddened that such blasphemy should have occurred in his beloved city; see Brown, Christianization, 634-35

312 Pagan cult ceremonies and sacrifices occurred outdoors under the open sky, with the temple, housing the cult figures and the treasury, as a backdrop.

313 See Tertullian, On Idolatry 1: “there is nothing which savors of opposition to God which is not assigned to demons and unclean spirits, whose property idols are.” Tertullian clarifies here that he perceives idolatry as demon worship; Tertullian also expresses his view that theatres, amphitheatres and circuses are possessed by demons and are therefore a form of idolatry, see e.g. The Shows 12: “For the amphitheatre is consecrated to deities more numerous and more barbarous than the Capitol. It is the temple of all daemons.”; See also Saradi-Mendelovici, 53-56

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purifying it, and exorcising the resident demons, as well as avenging Christian blood spilt by pagans.\textsuperscript{314}

The fate of the synagogue in Minorca was, untypically, similar.\textsuperscript{315} Although a more suitable contender for Christian appropriation due to its similar architecture as a place of assembly, it was destroyed. What should be remembered is that the measure of control Severus had over his “muscle” at this point, when the marching Christians and the Jews assembled at the synagogue, is not quite clear. The bishop himself testifies in the letter that he had lost control over his large zealous crowd who became involved in a stoning fight that ended with the torching of the synagogue.\textsuperscript{316} On the other hand, it seems quite probable that Severus actually encouraged his fellow Christians to burn the edifice.\textsuperscript{317} Severus testifies in the plural that \textit{before} torching the synagogue “we removed the sacred books so that they wouldn’t suffer harm from the Jews, but the silver we returned to them so that there would be no complaining either about us taking spoils or about them suffering losses.”\textsuperscript{318} Burning the synagogue was premeditated to a degree, either by Severus’ own order or by his passive consent.

The special attention Severus gave to the synagogue treasury was a result of his fear from legal ramifications that any reports on looting or losses could have had on himself and on the Christian community. The special care towards the sacred books, however, was a result of the specific religious identity of his rival Jews, and the unique theological relationship between Judaism and Christianity during late


\textsuperscript{315} See discussion in chapter 1 of this paper.

\textsuperscript{316} Severus writes that he “protested in vain” (13.6) when a stoning match erupted; see Fredriksen, \textit{Augustine}, 357-63

\textsuperscript{317} See Shaw, 436-37, who considers the whole affair as deliberately planned by Severus.

\textsuperscript{318} “libros… nos abstulimus” (\textit{Letter of Severus} 13.13)
antiquity. For mainstream Christians, the Jewish bible was part of Christian canon. While some bishops considered the synagogue as an impure dwelling place of demons, they could not but consider the books that were found in synagogues sacred. These were, after all, the same exact sacred texts. This distinction between the synagogue, as well as Judaism in general, and the bible upon which it was ostensibly based, had to also be made clear by Severus to many of his Christian followers who could not easily detach the sacredness of the scrolls from the sacredness of the synagogue that contained them. The scrolls were sacred, and should therefore not be consumed by fire, but they were in possession of impure people who were inflicting harm upon them by misinterpreting them. The synagogue was a dwelling place for demons, a place of gathering for a sinful people, and was therefore worthy of being put on fire. The scrolls, however, were considered sacred and were therefore treated respectfully; they were appropriated by the Christians and put in [theologically] “safe” Christian hands.

Most of the religious violence between Catholic and dissident Christians in Africa revolved around church property. Dissident Christians returning to Africa during Julian’s reign reclaimed their former basilicas. The disputed basilicas not only functioned as communal gathering places but were also perceived by the dissidents as their rightful churches. Unlike Alexandria or Minorca, in which the violence was associated with a pagan temple or Jewish synagogue, in Africa the religious edifice

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319 Severus was clearly Catholic, as indicated by his cooperation with Orosius and Consentius.
320 John Chrysostom repeats this notion many times in his eight homilies against the Jews; see e.g. Chrysostom, Discourses 1.3.3: “If, then, the Jews fail to know the Father, if they crucified the Son, if they thrust off the help of the Spirit, who should not make bold to declare plainly that the synagogue is a dwelling of demons? God is not worshipped there. Heaven forbid! From now on it remains a place of idolatry. But still some people pay it honor as a holy place.”
321 Bradbury states that the fact Severus preserves his official title in Greek (pater pateron, not pater paterum) suggests that Jews in Minorca still used Greek as their liturgical language in the synagogue.
322 This was a physical and symbolic enactment of an age old contra Iudaeos argument: the bible was sacred and of divine origin, if any theological obstacle was to be found in it, then surely it was a result of the Jews, the recipients of the bible, and not of the sacred text itself or its divine source.
was “right”: the problem was with the owners. The “wrong” Christians were in control of the “right” basilicas. Re-appropriation of the Catholic churches – which had formerly been dissident churches – was therefore the preferred model. Dissident bishops used private muscle to drive Catholics away from the contested basilicas: no one wanted them destroyed.

Yet dissidents could not ignore the fact that their basilicas had been contaminated by the presence and activities of their sectarian enemies for over a decade. Newly re-gained churches had to be ritually purged:323 Catholic bishops had made them impure by performing illegitimate sacraments.324 The re-appropriated basilica therefore typically purified, often through the destruction of an object of great symbolic value, such as the altar.325 Other ritual artifacts were sold in the market,326 and to Optatus’ apparent disgust, the dissidents made sure to wash any other instrument, covering, curtain, even the walls of the church, if they had been contaminated by Catholic use.327 These rituals were all public and provided a spectacle of humiliation by conveying the message that the previous Catholic inhabitants of the church were impure. Now that pure people were about to use the basilica, any traces of the former impure inhabitants had to be cleansed. And this notion had to be publicly broadcasted.

In sum, religious violence in Christian Roman antiquity was a public spectacle manifested as a physical battle over public place and religious space. The “winners” who managed to gain control over the (temporarily) Catholic churches in Africa, the

323 See Shaw, 171-73
324 The same logic could not easily be applied in reverse since Catholics could not deny the sanctity of the sacraments (and the auxiliary utensils) performed by dissident bishops. Dissidents believed that all sacraments performed by Catholic bishops who had cooperated with the Roman persecutors were invalid; Catholics, by contrast, believed that the validity of the sacraments did not depend upon the worthiness of the minister administering the sacraments.
325 Optatus, Contra Parm. 6.1
326 Ibid. 6.2
327 Ibid. 6.5
synagogue in Minorca, or the Serapeum in Alexandria, demonstrated their superiority through publically enacting two distinct behaviors: destruction and appropriation. These two general behaviors were enacted differently depending on the identity of the building that was part of the public landscape, on the one hand, and on the sacred objects contained inside the religious place, on the other. The way that the belligerent group perceived the buildings and the sancta within in part determined their purgative and possessive behaviors: destruction, washing, appropriation, and so on.

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Various local circumstances created and shaped religious violence. Some of these were directly or indirectly linked to the specific religious identities of the two contesting sides. The singular legal status, respectively, of Jews, pagans and dissident Christians during the period of these episodes in Minorca, Alexandria and Africa, was one factor that shaped this religious violence. African dissident Christians as well as Bishop Theophilus of Alexandria preferred to work their way legally through appeals to imperial officers down through the ranks of their local curiae in order to cloak their violent actions with the appearance of legitimacy or of imperial consent. Theophilus exploited Theodosius’ legislation directed against the normal conduct and material basis of public pagan religion to gain imperial legitimacy for his own anti-pagan policy. The exiled dissident bishops also chose to appeal Julian’s imperial court as a first step toward their often forceful retaking of Christian basilicas in Africa; dissident bishops and Julian had a common interest in humiliating Catholic bishops. But Severus, bishop of a Christian community in the remote island of Minorca did not have the same access, or the same options. To start with, he was not nearly as powerful as a Theophilus, but rather a marginal bishop, a new comer, and in his own
words “most unworthy of all mortal men,” in Minorca, “the most forsaken of all lands.” He had neither the financial resources, nor the political power, to effectively bypass the local government (which in any case was manned by Jews) and lobby the imperial court. But the legal status that Jews enjoyed in 418 was also a factor. Imperial laws repeatedly made clear that neither Jews nor their community institutions were to be harmed: unlike in the other two cases, Severus’ goal was clearly illegal. Severus was left with only one choice if he wished to confront the Jewish patrons of the island: to mobilize his local power base, his own Christian flock, against their former patrons whom he successfully re-presented as their religious enemies.

What has also been shown in this chapter is that the response to violence varied and that these varying responses were to some degree a consequence of the religious identity of the contestants. The fact that Jews and Christians were organized in close knit communities with a clear hierarchy of leadership can explain the wide scope of the violence. In Minorca the entire Jewish community, men, women and children, converted with the active encouragement of their leaders; in Africa, men, women and children are all reported to have barricaded themselves in the contested basilicas under the direct leadership of their bishops. On a more general scale, since the size of the Catholic and dissident population in Africa and the way these communities were organized was very much the same, neither of the warring sides managed to gain a clear upper hand, and the result was unending appeals to local courts. The Alexandrian episode, by contrast, did not involve a wide swathe of the pagan population because pagans were not organized as a single community and had no clear hierarchy. Members of the elite pagan population, teachers of philosophy and

328 Letter of Severus 2.6
329 Ibid. 2.5
their students, were the ones involved in the violent episode, and the former fled the city after inflicting injuries and death during the riot that erupted.

Finally, the distinct religious identity of the warring contestants influenced the ancillary behaviors accompanying this violence. The Serapeum, a prominent symbol of pagan religion, was razed to the ground and replaced by a Christian church and shrine, conveying the notion of Christian triumph by definitively altering Alexandria’s urban landscape. The cult statues were all ritualistically shattered according to biblical mandate and tradition. Similarly, the synagogue building in Minorca was also destroyed and then replaced by a church, but the sacred objects within its precincts – the scrolls of the Law, themselves part of the notional Christian patrimony – were saved through appropriation. In Africa, the Catholic basilicas were not destroyed, in this case the public landscape needed no altering; the basilica was a Christian church, but the owners were not the true and legitimate Christians. The dissidents therefore re-appropriated them, but the entire edifice was purified by performing rituals of purification that included washing the church and ritualistically shattering or selling the sacred objects found inside. Destruction or appropriation of the building and its sacred objects was very much a result of the identity of the religious opponent.

Much distinguishes our three episodes of religious violence in Africa, Alexandria and Minorca. Each episode had its own distinct traits that were a result of the individual circumstances crucial to the evolution of violence, some of which were directly related to the specific religious identity of the contesting groups. In sum, Violence was instigated, concluded and performed according to the specific communal structure (or lack of it) of the religious contenders, their legal status and
the way the contested religious buildings and sancta were perceived by the triumphant side.

CONCLUSIONS

Violence is only one, albeit highly contentious, form of communication. During the period under discussion (363-418 CE), however, members of the various religious communities throughout the empire communicated with each other through a vast range of interactions. They could be found eating and celebrating together, exchanging gifts with each other, going to the baths and serving on curiae together, and sharing similar religious customs and traditions. They were constantly “crossing” religious boundaries, which in their eyes were not meant to be barriers. The leadership of at least one of these groups, namely, the Christian bishops, could not, or at least would not, countenance this state of affairs. Boundaries, for them, should be patrolled borders, and to treat them as fluid was in some sense to violate the right order of things, and the integrity of the church. A true Christian should avoid attending synagogue, celebrating the Kalends, or revering dissident martyrs.

In all three episodes of religious violence examined in this paper, Catholic-dissident violence in Africa, Christian-pagan violence in Alexandria, and Christian-Jewish violence in Minorca, bishops were shown to have created public spectacles of violence in order to crystallize the differences between “us” (Christians) and “them” (pagans, other Christians, or Jews). Their favored medium was the public sermon, in which they used different methods of rhetoric to preach incessantly against “mixing
what cannot be mixed." But sometimes bishops consciously “took their fights outside” to the public sphere and to public places that served as clear identity markers for their religious opponents, creating an extreme provocation that polarized the religious communities to a point of physical violence. Religious violence can therefore be seen as a contest over notionally shared place and space; and bishops thus served as instigators and impresarios of religious violence.

Violence demanded prior planning. Ideally, bishops tried to draw on legal authority and imperial prestige to legitimize their actions. If possible, they lobbied the imperial court to issue a decree against their targeted opponents. Even in such cases, however, the imperial decree never permitted the use of violence against people. It took willful over-interpretation or over-enforcement of the decreed laws on behalf of the violence instigators (Alexandria), or a belligerent response to such laws (Africa), to reach this point. When the circumstances did not allow it, when the imperial court was inaccessible, disinterested, or unwilling to deteriorate the legal status of a specific religious group, bishops used a different tactic. Such was the case on Minorca, where Bishop Severus used the “bottom-up” model by first insisting on religious boundaries and then mobilizing his religious flock to confront the Jews, who called for their leader Theodorus, the island’s patronus and head man, to interfere on their behalf. The state, therefore, was always somehow involved in religious violence. It would sometimes provide bishops with partial legitimacy to use violence, in some cases it served as a broker, and in others it directly assisted one of the opposing sides, or was itself under violent attack.

Bishops not only instigated violence: they also managed it. Bishops directed agents of violence against their rivals, typically using songs, hymns, chants, shouts.

330 Chrysostom, Discourses 4.3
and rhythmic bodily gestures such as marching, as an extremely effective tool for mobilizing, binding and coordinating their violence “specialists.” Moreover, in order to guarantee an effective result, the prelates chose agents who were not members of the local inter-communal social fabric, but rather outsiders who were not deterred to use violence against people with whom they had no past and would have no future social interaction.

The specific religious identity of the opponent mattered. Communities which had a communal structure and hierarchy and formal institutions were more likely to react to violence together, as a community, under their official leadership, which resulted in a more extensive and uniform reaction (Christians and Jews). When they were not organized in one community and did not have formal institutions, like the pagans of Alexandria, violence and the reaction to violence were restricted to a fraction of those who shared a similar religious identity.

The influence that the specific religious identity had on violence is also manifest in the purifying rituals that took place. Those who succeeded in gaining control over the contested space or place demonstrated their superiority through publically enacting two distinct behaviors: destruction and appropriation. These two general behaviors were enacted differently depending on the identity of the building that was part of the public landscape, on the one hand, and on the sacred objects contained inside the religious place, on the other. The way that the buildings and the sancta within was perceived by the “victorious” group determined in part their purgative and possessive behaviors.

All these factors served to create not only violence, but also vivid and living collective “memories” of violence, that were preached repeatedly by religious leaders, written down by the educated and passed on from one generation to the next. These
episodic “fits” of violence perhaps lasted for no more than a few hours or days, but
they were repeatedly reenacted in the minds of later generations. It was through these
recollections of real or imagined past events that violence never remained a thing of
the past, but was always in danger of becoming, once more, a present reality.
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Augustine, Against Faustus


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**II. SECONDARY SOURCES**


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תוכן העניינים

مبוא

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המאמץ האלים כל הארץ הציבור
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עבודה גמר לשם כבלת תואר מוסמך

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