

Abstract

For early Christians, martyrs were the moral models par excellence. Hundreds were venerated and remembered in hagiographic narratives told and retold throughout the centuries. The martyrdom of the three-year-old Cyricus and his mother Julitta, killed in Anatolia in the early 4th century, is exemplary. While varying stories are told about many saints, Cyricus and Julitta's competing narratives are unusual in that there are two versions of their martyrdom with almost no overlap in their plot. In Version 1, Cyricus is the protagonist, engaging the governor in clever arguments and enduring extensive torture along with Julitta. The climax of the narrative comes when the martyrs are led to a cauldron boiling with tar. Julitta is frightened and shrinks from the cauldron, until Cyricus prays and God removes the fear from her, allowing her to enter the cauldron. This version was condemned as apocryphal in several Greek sources. In Version 2, which is first found in a letter written specifically to condemn Version 1, the governor holds Cyricus on his lap and does not include him in the torture. When he sees his mother being beaten, Cyricus bites and kicks the governor, who is enraged and throws the infant down the stairs to his death. Julitta is tortured further and is eventually beheaded.

This project examines the attitudes towards children found in these versions in the larger context of early Christian debates over the nature and characteristics of children. Children's moral autonomy was a contentious issue for early Christians, as can be seen in writings on infant baptism, Christian parenting, and the Holy Innocents. Two general strands of thinking emerge from these writings. In one conception, children are seen as generally innocent, inclined towards moral behavior, and capable of religious participation and choice. These characteristics make them models of behavior for adults. In the other, children are either neutral or sinful, incapable of becoming moral agents on their own, and must be formed into good Christians by their parents. This difference of opinion informs the topoi in the martyrdoms of children, which present a range of attitudes towards the moral autonomy of children reflecting the ongoing debates. In some martyrdoms, like those of Agnes and Talyā' of Cyrrhus, children can articulate Christian doctrine, choose to be martyrs, and endure torture without help from an adult. In other martyrdoms, influenced by the story of the mother with seven sons in 2 and 4 Maccabees, mothers encourage their children to endure martyrdom without hesitation and are praised for raising martyrs.

A close reading of the texts of both versions of the Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta shows that Cyricus's moral autonomy was a central concern for both texts, despite their plot differences. I conclude that the portrayal of children and mother-child relationships in Version 1 was a major factor in why it was condemned as apocryphal. In the context of the contemporary debates over children and how other martyrdoms engaged with these debates, Version 1 simply went too far in presenting children as moral agents. Version 2 was written specifically to replace Version 1 and to assert the attitude that children are not independent moral agents and are merely as good or bad as their parents molded them to be.

**'Do not uproot the tree and save its fruit':
the Moral Autonomy of Children in Versions
of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta***

Joss Childs

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO *THE MARTYRDOM OF CYRICUS AND JULITTA*

There was a woman in the city of Iconium and her name was Julitta. From her youth, she adhered to the fear of God and she was strong in her faith and her mind was stirred with the love of Christ.

—*The Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta*¹

To many early Christians, to die for Christ was to die like Christ. By “imitat[ing] the suffering of [their] God,”² martyrs became objects of imitation themselves and models of ideal Christian behavior. To restrict who and what could be a martyr, therefore, was to define who could be a full participant in Christianity and how Christian ought to behave. These issues become particularly apparent when the martyr, whether a woman, a slave, or, as this thesis explores, a child, is not granted full personhood and autonomy by their contemporary culture.

The veneration of the toddler Cyricus and his mother Julitta, martyred during the early 4th century³ in Anatolia, is found throughout the early Christian world. Their story seems to have been somewhat contentious from the beginning and is recorded in two vastly different versions, with different plots, themes, and protagonists. In the early 5th century, Pope Zosimus (d. 418 CE) wrote to Theodore (c. 350-428 CE), a Greek writer from Mopsuestia in the region where the martyrdom took place, asking him to look for a reliable account of these martyrs. It seems that there was something that made the story found in the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta*, which I will refer to as ‘Version 1,’ unacceptable to Theodore. The narrative that Theodore allegedly

¹ Translation my own. Paul Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*, Vol. 3 (Paris: 1892), 254.

² Candida Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2012): 55.

³ Different manuscripts date the event to either the persecutions of Diocletian (r. 284-305) or Maximinus (r. 308-313) (Vitagrazia Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus (Gädlä Qirqos) in North Ethiopia Elements of Devotion and of Manuscripts Tradition,” in *Veneration of Saints in Christian Ethiopia: Proceedings of the International Workshop Saints in Christian Ethiopia: Literary Sources and Veneration, Hamburg, April 28–29, 2012*, ed. Nosnitsin Denis (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2015), note 2).

recorded,⁴ which I will refer to as ‘Version 2’ in this thesis, focuses on Julitta, unlike the story found in Version 1, which is centered on Cyricus. Less than a century after Theodore’s letter, a decree attributed to Pope Gelasius (d. 496 CE) listed the account of Cyricus and Julitta as an example of a martyr narrative “not read in the holy Roman church, because the names of those who wrote are not properly known and separate from unbelievers and idiots or [the accounts] are thought less attached to the order of events than they should have been.”⁵ This *Decretum Gelasianum*, dated to 495 CE, sought to standardize the content and order of the Christian Bible and proscribe works that, like the *Martyrdom*, “appear to have been composed by heretics.”⁶ A later text, the *Constitutiones ecclesiasticae*, also condemned the *Martyrdom*.⁷ Given Theodore’s condemnation of Version 1, it seems that these documents were also aimed at banning Version 1.

Despite the disputes around the story, the cult of Cyricus and Julitta continued to thrive, as indicated by the numerous place names, artistic depictions, and manuscripts commemorating the martyrs, which can be found across the Christian world in late antiquity and the early medieval period.⁸ Today, a number of churches dedicated to Cyricus and Julitta remain throughout Europe, particularly in France and Italy. France’s veneration of Cyr, as Cyricus is known there, includes a legend of Charlemagne dreaming about encountering the young saint naked in the woods. Cyricus saves him from a wild boar after the emperor promises to give him clothes, which a bishop later interpreted to mean that Charlemagne should repair the roof of the

⁴ Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus,” 165, note 32.

⁵ Roger Pearse, trans., “The ‘Decretum Gelasianum De Libris Recipiendis Et Non Recipiendis,’” The Tertullian Project, last modified December 2, 2000, http://www.tertullian.org/decretum_eng.htm.

⁶ Pearse, trans., “The ‘Decretum Gelasianum.’”

⁷ Nikolaos Kälviäinen, “‘Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts Have Been Falsified from the Beginning’. Some Preliminary Remarks on the Censorship and Fortunes of the Demonic Episode in the Greek Passion of St. Marina (BHG 1165–1167c),” in *Translation and Transmission: Collection of Articles*, ed. Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila and Ilkka Lindsted (Münster, Germany: Ugarit-Verlag, 2019), 112.

⁸ David Farmer, “Cyricus (Cyriacus, Quiriac, Quiricus, Cyr) and Julitta,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-415>.

Cathédrale Saint-Cyr-et-Sainte-Julitte in Nevers, France.⁹ They also receive significant veneration in Georgia, where an annual festival, Kvirikoba, celebrates Cyricus.¹⁰ Ethiopia has a vast literary tradition of posthumous miracles, hymns, and poems devoted to Qirqos, as he is known there.¹¹

While the saints are widely revered across geographic and church boundaries, the story of their martyrdom varies significantly by location. Shifting beliefs about children and mothers and norms of hagiography influenced which version of the martyrs' story gained prominence in a given region. The stories of Cyricus and Julitta, as depicted in art, translations and retellings of the Version 1 and 2 texts, martyrologies and menologies,¹² and various other sources, generally follow one of two versions: Version 1, which is generally followed by the Church of the East¹³ and the miaphysite churches,¹⁴ and Version 2, which is generally followed by the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches.

⁹ Farmer, "Cyricus."

¹⁰ N.V. Gerasimenko, "Кирик И Иулитта," in *Orthodox Encyclopedia* (Церковно-научный центр, 1998-2020), last modified October 15, 2018, <https://www.pravenc.ru/text/1840247.html>.

¹¹ Pisani, "Passio of St Cyricus," 178.

¹² Martyrologies and menologies are books that record short accounts of saints' lives in the calendar order of their feast days.

¹³ The Church of the East today is divided into the Assyrian Church of the East and the Ancient Church of the East. Version 1 is also found in the Chaldean Catholic Church, which arose in the 15th century, when a portion of the Church of the East came into communion with the Roman Catholic Church (Sebastian P. Brock and James F. Coakley, "Chaldean Catholic Church," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Chaldean-Catholic-Church>). They continue to use the East Syriac liturgy and are strongly connected to broader Syriac literary traditions, including Syriac hagiography (Sebastian P. Brock, "Liturgy," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Liturgy>). CCM 00398 and CCM 00003 are two Chaldean manuscripts containing Version 1 of the martyrdom (see Table 1 for more information on these manuscripts).

¹⁴ Today, the miaphysite churches, also called the Oriental Orthodox Churches, are a communion of autocephalous churches including the Syriac Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Coptic Orthodox Church, the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, and the Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Churches. All these churches have Eastern Catholic counterparts. Like the Church of the East and the Chaldean Catholic Church, these Eastern Catholic counterparts may retain Version 1, but I have only found evidence of this for the Chaldean Church.

This thesis aims to contextualize and analyze the stories of Cyricus and Julitta, based on a range of sources and comparing the major versions. I will situate their stories in the contemporaneous cultural and theological debates and beliefs around children and child martyrs, describe the major versions and their development, and analyze the attitudes towards and behavior modeled for children in the different versions. Based on this, I suggest a connection between these differing attitudes and the development of these versions and conclude that it is Version 1's portrayal of children that made it a problematic text and prompted the creation of Version 2. My theoretical framework is drawn from scholarship on the martyrdoms, specifically that which deals with the masculinization of unmASCULINE subjects—women, old men, slaves, and children.

In Chapter 1, I will review prior scholarship on the martyrs, summarize both versions, describe the development of the texts of both versions, and briefly explore the artistic sources depicting these saints and their relationship to the two versions. I turn to the larger cultural and theological context in Chapter 2, examining the attitudes towards the autonomy of children in early Christianity through the lens of the Holy Innocents, infant baptism, and the moral relationship between children and adults. Chapter 3 applies the context of these attitudes to narratives of child martyrs, discussing topoi and trends in these texts and how they relate to different cultural beliefs about children. Finally, I closely read both versions of Cyricus and Julitta's story in the context of the genre of child martyrdoms and wide-spread understandings of children, complicate the perceived development of these narratives through non-literary evidence of the cults of these saints, and reach some conclusions on the ways both versions depict the moral autonomy of children and how this relates to the creation and distribution of these texts.

Review of Literature

The stories of Cyricus and Julitta are found in two major variations, which have been translated into a dozen languages and represented in icons, altarpieces, and stained glass. They have been venerated in England, Ethiopia, western China, and everywhere in between, spanning the 5th to the 21st centuries. This vast, complicated web of stories, which crosses linguistic, cultural, chronological, and disciplinary lines, presents inherent difficulties to scholars studying these saints.

Modern study of the *Martyrdom of St. Cyricus and Julitta* began in 1701 with the publication of *Acta Sanctorum Junii*, volume 3. Papebroch, the editor, considered the *Martyrdom* to be apocryphal and focused mostly on the location of the saints' relics and a letter of Bishop Theodore of Mopsuestia, which allegedly records an alternate oral tradition about Cyricus and Julitta.¹⁵ He included one of the two known Latin translations of the *Martyrdom*, describing it as "Ex MS. Monasterii Bodecensis in Westphalia."¹⁶ Papebroch unfortunately provided no more information on the origin and condition of this manuscript, which has not been found by any subsequent researchers.¹⁷ Typical of early *Acta Sanctorum* entries, this entry also does not cover the martyrdom outside of the Latin and Greek traditions.¹⁸

Almost two centuries later, Gulielmus van Hooff edited and translated into Latin an 11th century manuscript of the *Acta Sincera Graece* in 1882. In a short introduction, he discussed its possible connection to Theodore's letter and the reasons for its composition, ultimately

¹⁵ Daniel Papebroch et. al., *Acta sanctorum quotquot toto orbe coluntur: vel a catholicis scriptoribus celebrantur, ex latinis et graecis, aliarumque gentium antiquis monumentis, Junii tomus quartus, sanctos a die XVI ad XX colendos complexus* (Parisiis: Victor Palmé, 1867), 15-37.

¹⁶ Ibid., 24.

¹⁷ Pisani, "Passio of St Cyricus," 165.

¹⁸ "Restoration," Société des Bollandistes, last modified May 20, 2018, <https://www.bollandistes.org/history/restoration/>.

concluding that it represents an earlier independent version of the same story.¹⁹ Like Theodore's letter, the *Acta Sincera Graeca* preserves an account of the saints that differs greatly from the *Martyrdom*.

In 1887, August Dillmann published an article on the *Martyrdom* and the *Martyrdom of George*, which was another hagiographic text condemned in the *Decretum Gelasianum*²⁰ and the *Constitutiones ecclesiasticae*.²¹ He compared the text of a Syriac manuscript from a collection in Berlin,²² an Arabic manuscript from the Bodleian Library,²³ and the Latin text copied by Papebroch. He included German translations of several long passages, including the prayer of Cyricus, and discussed the structure and possible origins of the text. He paid particular attention to its possible Gnostic origins, especially of the prayer.²⁴ Paul Bedjan included the Syriac text of the *Martyrdom* in volume III of *Acta Martyrum et Sanctorum*.²⁵ This was copied from a manuscript written in 1881 by the scribe 'Īsa bar Isaiaħ²⁶ in Alqosh.²⁷

The focus on the prayer of Cyricus dominated discussions of the *Martyrdom* in the first half of the 20th century. Stocks argued in 1910 that the prayer originated as part of the *Alexander Romance*.²⁸ Greßmann rejected this conclusion in his 1921 article, where he proposes that the

¹⁹ Gulielmus van Hooff, "Sanctorum Cyrici et Julittae. *Acta Graeca Sincera*, nunc primum edita," *Analecta Bollandiana* 1 (1882): 192–208.

²⁰ Dillmann, "Über die apokryphen," 339.

²¹ Kälviäinen, "Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts," 112.

²² Sachau 222, Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, 234v-247r.

²³ Bodleian Hunt. Donat. 32, 95v-110r.

²⁴ Dillmann, "Über die apokryphen," 346-349.

²⁵ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 254-283.

²⁶ Bedjan relied on Sachau 222, the same manuscript that Dillmann used. The colophon is found on f. 570v.

²⁷ A predominantly Chaldean village north of Mosul, Iraq (Alessandro Mengozzi, "Alqosh," in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Alqosh>).

²⁸ H. Stocks, "Ein Alexanderbrief in Acta Cyriaci et Julittae," *Zeitschrift Für Kirchengeschichte*, vol. 31 (1910): 172-213.

prayer is a superficially Christianized Jewish text.²⁹ Crum, who first identified the Coptic fragment of the prayer in a 1943 review, saw a Gnostic origin, in line with Dillmann's interpretation.³⁰ In 1965, Hussian edited and published the Coptic fragments noticed by Crum, along with other fragments which may contain parts of the narrative of the *Martyrdom* in Coptic. She challenged Greßmann's hypothesis of a Jewish origin based on several clarifications offered by the Coptic text, but doesn't discuss the prayer's origin in much depth.³¹

Recent works on the *Martyrdom* and the saints have focused less on the origin of the prayer of Cyricus and more on the texts of previously unstudied manuscripts and traditions. In 1999, Jessop discussed a 7th century mural cycle depicting the *Martyrdom*, opening a previously unexplored avenue of research on the saints: their artistic representations.³² This approach continued into the 2000s, with two works discussing a twelfth-century altar-frontal or antependium from Durro, Spain depicting the saints. Krysta Black's thesis in 2007 places the antependium in the context of Reconquista, providing valuable insight into how the *Martyrdom* gained new significance over time.³³ Maria Laura Palumbo discusses this same antependium in her 2008 article, where she convincingly argues that the adult-sized figure being tortured into the altar-frontal is Cyricus, rather than Julitta, as previous descriptions had assumed. While Palumbo's discussion of the portrayals of the saints in medieval European art is invaluable in understanding how the story developed past late antiquity, her European focus leads to some

²⁹ Hugo Greßmann, "Das Gebet Des Kyriakos," *Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 20, no. 1 (1921): 24, 30.

³⁰ W. E. Crum, "Review of *Coptic Texts in the University of Michigan Collection*," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 44, no. 173/174 (1943): 122-28.

³¹ Elinor M. Hussian, "The Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta in Coptic," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 4 (1965): 81, 83.

³² Lesley Jessop, "Pictorial Cycles of Non-Biblical Saints: The Seventh- and Eighth-Century Mural Cycles in Rome and Contexts for Their Use," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 67 (1999): 236-255.

³³ Krysta L. Black, "Saints, Saracens, and the Reconquest: Re-Imagining Martyrdom in the Antependium of Durro" (Master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2007), <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/dissertations/w95051577>.

unfortunate errors. She correctly identifies that there are two strands of the stories of the saints, but claims that “we can define one strand as ‘Greek’ because it prevails in the Greek and Eastern manuscripts found by the Bollandists and one as ‘Western’, because it predominates in the European versions of their *Passio*.³⁴ This assertion can only be maintained if one overlooks the evidence in languages other than Latin and Greek, which almost exclusively feature the so-called ‘Western’ version, and the fact that the ‘Western’ strand was actively suppressed and modified in the Latin church. While this oversight is unfortunate, her analysis of the artistic tradition surrounding the saints is mostly untouched by the error.

In 2009, Alisa Terpelyuk published the most extensive discussion of the *Martyrdom* to date. She provided a critical text and Russian translation for Vatican Syriac 161 manuscript, which represents an early stage in the development of the Syriac text. She compared the Vatican text with later Syriac manuscripts and came to some preliminary conclusions about the development of the *Martyrdom*.³⁵ Hunter and Sims-Williams both discussed manuscript fragments of the *Martyrdom* from Turfan (Xinjiang, China). The former examined Syriac fragments, which she believes provide evidence of a potential East Syriac recension of the *Martyrdom*,³⁶ while the latter edits and translates the only known Sogdian translation of the *Martyrdom*.³⁷ Vitagrazia Pisani’s work centers on the Ethiopian tradition of the *Martyrdom* and

³⁴ Maria Laura Palumbo, “L’enigma di Durro. Aggiunte all’iconografia di San Quirico e Santa Giulitta nell’ambito della pittura romanica catalana,” *Materia* 6-7 (2008): 25.

³⁵ Alisa Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs and Yōlītī (Cyriacus & Julitta). Critical text, Russian translation from Syriac, and research by Alisa A. Terpelyuk* (Moscow: Institute for Oriental and Classical Studies, Russian State University for the Humanities, 2009).

³⁶ Erica C.D Hunter, “Syr HT 140: Commemorating Mar Cyriacus and Julitta,” in *More Modoque : Die Wurzeln Der Europäischen Kultur Und Deren Rezeption Im Orient Und Okzident : Festschrift Für Miklós Maróth Zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Pál Fodor (Budapest: Forschungszentrum für Humanwissenschaften der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013), 225-233.

³⁷ Nicholas Sims-Williams, “A Sogdian Fragment of the Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta” in *More Modoque : Die Wurzeln Der Europäischen Kultur Und Deren Rezeption Im Orient Und Okzident : Festschrift Für Miklós Maróth Zum Siebzigsten Geburtstag*, ed. Pál Fodor (Budapest: Forschungszentrum für Humanwissenschaften der Ungarischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2013), 225-233.

the saints. She provided a critical edition and Italian translation of the Ethiopic version in her 2013 dissertation.³⁸ Her 2015 article on the saints is primarily focused on devotion to them in Ethiopia, but she also provides a thorough overview of the *Martyrdom*, the names of the saints, and their commemoration date in various languages and churches.³⁹ Nikolaos Kälviäinen, writing for the *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity* database, provided the first description of the Greek version of the *Martyrdom* and an overview of the saints' early cult,⁴⁰ as well as an analysis of the provenance and content of Theodore's letter and the *Acta Graeca Sincera*.⁴¹

Beyond these new avenues of investigation into the *Martyrdom* itself, the *Martyrdom* has frequently been used as a source for research on children in early Christianity, a field which has seen dramatic growth in the last two decades. Cornelia Horn has discussed Cyricus multiple times: in "Children and Violence in Syriac Sources," where she compares Cyricus to another child martyr, Mar Talyā⁴², and in "Children as Pilgrims and the Cult of the Holy Children in the Early Syrian Tradition," which covers the pilgrimage sites and relics of Cyricus.⁴³ Similarly, Anna Rogozhina, in her thesis on the *Martyrdom of St Philotheus of Antioch*, compares the portrayal of this child martyr and Cyricus.⁴⁴ In *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and Their Cults in Medieval Europe*, Wasyliv extensively discusses Cyricus, drawing on the

³⁸ Vitagrazia Pisani, "Il culto di San Qirqos nell'Etiopia storica: analisi storico-filologica, con edizione critica della "Passio" (Gäldä Qirqos)" (Ph.D. diss., Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale," 2013).

³⁹ Pisani, "Passio of St Cyricus," (2015), 161-167.

⁴⁰ Kälviäinen, "E06118."

⁴¹ Nikolaos Kälviäinen, "E06121," *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity Database*, last modified January 1, 2021, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E06121>.

⁴² Cornelia B. Horn, "Children and Violence in Syriac Sources: *The Martyrdom of Mar Talyā*' of Cyrrhus in the Light of Literary and Theological Implications," *Parole de l'Orient* 31 (2006): 323-326.

⁴³ Cornelia B. Horn, "Children As Pilgrims and the Cult of the Holy Children in the Early Syriac Tradition," *Aram Periodical* 19 (2007): 460-462.

⁴⁴ Anna Rogozhina, "'And from his side came blood and milk': The Martyrdom of St Philotheus of Antioch in Coptic Egypt" (PhD diss., University of Oxford, 2015), 241.

version found in Theodore's letter and the *Acta Sincera Graeca* rather than the *Martyrdom*.⁴⁵

Kälviäinen discussed the development of the versions in an article on the censorship of the *Passion of St. Marina*.⁴⁶

Many scholars have dealt with the complexity of the narratives of Cyricus and Julitta by narrowing their focus to a specific manuscript, literary tradition, or work of art. This approach tends to concentrate research strictly on the content of the work, leaving room for only limited background context and preliminary commentary and analysis. Terpelyuk and Pisani, who wrote the most extensive modern works on these saints, both use this strategy. The results are the same for both: detailed discussion of the content of the martyrdoms and their manuscript tradition, but only surface level analysis of content. Work that focuses on analysis of the text has also been hampered by the complexity of the stories. When authors like Horn and Wasyliw have used Cyricus and Julitta in their larger discussions of child martyrs, they have relied on one version of the story and one language. This specificity, which is understandable, given that Cyricus and Julitta are just one example in their larger projects, unfortunately leaves their analysis incomplete, reflecting only one small aspect of the larger context of the stories.

This thesis, like earlier scholarship, has been impeded by the sheer variety of sources for the story of Cyricus and Julitta. It is biased towards sources in languages I know; namely, Syriac, Latin, and Greek. Translations of the Syriac text, which I draw from Bedjan and Terpeluk's editions, the Latin text of Version 1, which comes from the *Acta Sanctorum* edition, and the letter of Theodore, also from the *Acta Sanctorum*, are all my own. All other translated sources are the work of other translators, unless otherwise specified. Whenever possible, I have

⁴⁵ Patricia Healy Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic: Child Saints and Their Cults in Medieval Europe* (New York: P. Lang, 2008): 20-22.

⁴⁶ Kälviäinen, "Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts," 109-113, 116-117, 122.

attempted to consider and compare the texts I have read to those in other languages that I can partially access through secondary sources. Thus, I will discuss the fragmentary Coptic and Sogdian versions, which have both been translated, and the Ethiopic and Arabic versions, which are known through descriptions and partial translations. Unfortunately, all I know about the Armenian, Georgian, and Slavic versions is that they exist; there has been, to my knowledge, no scholarship discussing them in any depth, nor translations into languages I know. This thesis will also be primarily reliant on written sources. I have little experience with art history and the scholarship discussing artistic depictions of Cyrus and Julitta has been focused on specific works. I have included artistic sources when I am aware of a relevant work, but generally as a supplement to the written evidence.

Version 1: Cyrus as a conscious Christian martyr

Version 1 is found in Latin, Ethiopic, Syriac, Arabic,⁴⁷ Coptic,⁴⁸ Greek,⁴⁹ and Sogdian⁵⁰ manuscripts. It survived in medieval Europe in artwork,⁵¹ hymns,⁵² and rewritings that attempted to excise the “absurd filth” of the *Passio*, as Hucbald, author of one of these

⁴⁷ Pisani, “Passio of St Cyrus,” 193. Pisani also mentions Armenian and Georgian translations of the *Martyrdom* and Terpelyuk mentions a Slavic translation. Unfortunately, I have not been able to access these versions and no additional scholarly work has been done on them.

⁴⁸ While the Coptic text has only survived in a very fragmented form, the portions that remain strongly suggest that it followed Version 1. The most complete part of the Coptic text is the prayer of Cyrus. This prayer is only found in some manuscripts that follow Version 1. Besides the prayer, the only other Coptic texts are a few very fragmentary papyri. While this has only been tentatively linked to Cyrus and Julitta, the aspects that point to that identification also point to Version 1. Namely, the dialogue is between a governor and a young child, following Version 1’s exclusion of Julitta from the conversation, and it refers to the governor accusing “the child of wickedness in uttering unheard of mysteries” and something happening to his hand (Husselman, “The Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta in Coptic,” 86), which parallel events in Version 1 texts (Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 278, 279).

⁴⁹ Kälviäinen, “E06118.”

⁵⁰ Sogdian was a language spoken in Central Asia and Western China, where the Syriac-using Church of the East had a strong presence. The Sogdian text only survives in a single fragment, but this passage clearly follows a Version 1 Syriac text, which it was likely translated from (Sims-Williams, “A Sogdian Fragment,” 237).

⁵¹ Palumbo, “L’enigma Di Durro,” 19-37.

⁵² Marta Szada, “E05282,” *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity Database*, last modified September 1, 2020, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E05282>.

rewritings, put it.⁵³ The central events of the martyrdom (the discussion with the governor, the torture, their stay in prison, etc.) remain relatively consistent across the languages. This basic story is as follows:

In Iconium,⁵⁴ during the persecution of the Christians, there was a woman of noble birth named Julitta who was a Christian from a young age. Frightened⁵⁵ by news of the persecutions by the governor Alexander, she fled with her 2 ¾ year old son, Cyricus,⁵⁶ to Tarsus in Cilicia.

There,⁵⁷ she is eventually accused of blaspheming against the gods by the nobles of the city and captured without Cyricus. She is brought before Alexander, who questions her and orders her to sacrifice to the gods. She refuses and asks that a three-year-old child be brought before them, so that they can ask him if he believes it is right to worship the Christian God or many gods. All the people of the city hide their children when Alexander sends his guards to fetch a child, so the only one left is Cyricus, who is brought before the judge. Cyricus declares himself to be a Christian and mocks the judge, even after being beaten. The judge then sends Cyricus away and has Julitta brought back, telling her that the child chose his gods. She asks to hear this from the child in person and praises God for allowing her to witness her son be martyred when Cyricus is brought forth. A voice from heaven tells her that Cyricus will be more exalted than her and will assist her through the martyrdom.

⁵³ Gerasimenko, “Кирик И Иулитта.” There are also a few martyrologies from medieval Europe that seem to follow Version 1.

⁵⁴ Modern day Konya in central Turkey.

⁵⁵ The introduction in the Arabic and Vatican Syriac 161 versions gives a different reason for her fleeing.

⁵⁶ This saint’s name has been Romanized in a number of ways, including the incorrect Cyriacus, which is from a different Greek name. Following the Romanization used by the Bollandists, I will refer to him as Cyricus throughout this thesis. See Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus,” 168-169 for more information on the name.

⁵⁷ This is where the extended introduction, which gives more information about Julitta’s background and motivations, found in Vatican Syriac 161 and the Arabic manuscripts, ends. After this, these manuscripts follow the general structure and events of Version 1.

They are then tortured by rubbing salt and vinegar into their wounds and being pierced with hot spikes. When the spikes are cooled by God's command, the judge gives up for the day and has them chained in prison. Cyricus prays and sings psalms through the night. Satan appears at midnight, pretending to be a messenger of God to tell him to obey Alexander. Cyricus sees through the ruse and rebukes him. Satan threatens to sway the governor so that he will not martyr them and to cause Julitta to falter and become afraid, before disappearing. The two saints pray through the night and are brought before the judge in the morning.

The governor has altered his demands, asking that they merely praise the gods and burn incense before an altar, rather than sacrifice. Cyricus asks God to destroy the altar and the idols, and God sends an angel to complete this task. The judge calls for a blacksmith to make iron instruments of torture, but Satan prevents him from being able to issue the orders. Cyricus, instead, tells the blacksmith what to make, which astonishes him. Cyricus and Julitta are held in prison for forty days as the tools are made. During this time, Cyricus prays and converts many people in prison.

Once the instruments are complete, the governor has the saints brought out again. He has burning coals placed on their heads, but the flames are extinguished and are replaced with shining crowns. The dungeon is opened by God, and Cyricus's converts rush out, proclaiming their faith. Enraged, the judge has all of them beheaded. Following this, he has spikes put through the bodies of Cyricus and Julitta and mocks their God. An angel takes the spikes out of the saints and drives it into the governor's neck. Cyricus heals him, but the governor praises his own gods instead of Jesus. After a few more torments, the torturers try to saw Cyricus and Julitta into pieces but are unable to. Cyricus tells them to use wooden saws instead, which works, and the pieces of their bodies are fried in pans and fed to dogs. The judge tells Demetrius, his

centurion, about the events. A large crowd of 1,100 people led by Eusebius, a *scholasticus*,⁵⁸ arrive at the court.⁵⁹

Jesus restores the martyrs to life and tells them to confront the judge. Julitta, as a chaste woman, struggles to move through the crowds before the governor's seat, but Cyricus leads her forward. The crowd is amazed and confess their faith. The judge refuses to believe they in fact have been resurrected and demands proof. Through Cyricus's prayer, the judge's sandals are transformed into a bull and a goat. Believing the animals to be some sort of false image, he says that he will believe in their God if the animals can be slaughtered and fed to the crowd. Like Jesus' feeding of the 5,000, several baskets of meat remain after the people are satisfied.

Alexander still does not believe and orders a doctor to cut out Cyricus's tongue, who continues to speak through the Holy Spirit. The judge again reduces his demand of the saints, asking that they only eat sacrificial meat and drink libation wine. When they refuse, he has them force-fed, which he claims as a victory. Cyricus asserts that since they were forced, it does not count as a sin.

Next, the judge has a large cauldron filled with various things and brought to a boil. He also has the crowd of 1,100 brought to watch the mother and son's death. Julitta is frightened by the sight of the cauldron, so Cyricus attempts to comfort her, reminding her of the previous times God has saved him and of similar biblical events. When this fails to sway his mother, he prays on her behalf. The Holy Spirit descends on her, casting out Satan, and Julitta is emboldened. They go into the cauldron, praying, and are not harmed.

⁵⁸ A role in the Roman legal system. *Lewis & Short*, s.v. "scholasticus."

⁵⁹ The identity of the crowd and who leads them is confusing, especially in Vatican Syriac 161, where Eusebius is only mentioned once, without any context (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 79). This may be explained by Terpelyuk's theory that this manuscript is a compilation of several source texts, whose inconsistencies were smoothed over in later versions (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 25).

At this point, Cyricus prays again. In the Latin text and Vatican Syriac 161, his prayer is brief, followed by Satan's appearance. In the Arabic, Ethiopic, Coptic, and later Syriac manuscripts, his 'prayer' is in fact a long vision, much in the style of the Apocalypse of John.⁶⁰ While the prayer is fascinating, it will not be dealt with further in this thesis, as it stands outside of the main narrative of the martyrdom and is likely a pre-existing text inserted into the martyrdom to add a mystical element and fill in some narrative gaps.⁶¹

After this, Satan appears. He recites a list of his Old Testament crimes and bewails the fact that he has been bested by a three-year-old child. Cyricus prays and the water from the cauldron is sprinkled over the crowd, baptizing the converts and killing some of the torturers. He also sprinkles water over the judge's arm, which is stripped of its skin. After Cyricus heals him, the judge rejoices, praising Christ along with other gods, which the child scolds him for.

The governor attempts one last torture with a large stone, but they are again saved by an angel. Giving up, he orders their beheading. Jesus descends with a chorus of angels to the site of the execution. Cyricus prays that his body will not be left on earth, that prayers addressed to him be fulfilled, that demons be cast out in his name, and that an account of his acts be written. Jesus promises that all this will be fulfilled. After he returns to heaven, Cyricus and Julitta are finally martyred.

Version 2: Cyricus as a child victim

Compared to Version 1, Version 2 is short, simple, and restrained. The longest Version 2 accounts are found in the letter of Theodore, described above, and in an 11th century Greek

⁶⁰ Attilio Mastrocicque, *From Jewish Magic to Gnosticism* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2005), 18.

⁶¹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 31. For further discussion of the prayer, see Dillmann, "Über die apokryphen," 45-348, Stocks, "Ein Alexanderbrief," Greßmann, "Das Gebet," and Hesselman, "The Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta in Coptic," 81-83.

manuscript, known as the *Acta Graeca Sincera*. It is unclear if the *Acta Graeca* is based on the letter or written independently, but following the same story.⁶² The letter has been translated into Latin, Slavic, and Georgian.⁶³ This version is also widely found in medieval martyrologies, menologies, and other liturgical books from the Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches,⁶⁴ including *The Golden Legend*.⁶⁵ Today, it continues to be the most common version in these churches.⁶⁶ It is found in many European depictions of the martyrs, especially more modern ones. The story is as follows:

Julitta, a noble woman of Iconium, fled the persecution of the Christians with her son and two servants. She hid in Seleucia and then Tarsus, where she was recognized and brought before the governor Alexander. Frightened, her servants ran away. Julitta is questioned by the judge, but she will only answer, “I am a Christian.” Alexander has Cyricus taken from her and holds the child on his lap. He has Julitta beaten, which she endures without relenting. Seeing his mother being hurt, Cyricus cries and tries to go to her. Alexander holds onto him and attempts to soothe him, but Cyricus strikes at his face, scratching him, and shouts that, “I am a Christian, too!” Infuriated, the judge throws the child down the stairs. He hits his head on the edge of the stairs and dies. Julitta, seeing this, rejoices, praising God for allowing her to see her child achieve martyrdom before her. After some more torture,⁶⁷ Julitta is beheaded. The governor has the

⁶² Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus,” 165.

⁶³ Gerasimenco, “Кирик И Иулитта.”

⁶⁴ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 351.

⁶⁵ William Granger Ryan, trans., “Saint Quiricus and His Mother Saint Julitta,” in *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2012), 323-324.

⁶⁶ “Saint Cyriacus of Iconium,” catholicssaints.info, last modified June 23, 2020, <https://catholicssaints.info/saint-cyriacus-of-iconium/>.

“Martyr Cyricus (Quiricus) and his mother, Julitta, of Tarsus,” OCA.org, <https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2020/07/15/102041-martyr-cyricus-quiricus-and-his-mother-julitta-of-tarsus>.

⁶⁷ The specifics of her torments vary between sources.

bodies of the saints dismembered and thrown away outside of the city, but their remains were secretly, either by Julitta's servants⁶⁸ or by angels.⁶⁹

Besides these two major narratives, there remains one last important element that doesn't fit into this categorization neatly: the extended introduction found in the Vatican Syriac 161 and several Arabic Garshuni⁷⁰ manuscripts.⁷¹ While these texts generally follow the events of Version 1, the introduction presents a dramatically different portrayal of Julitta than her portrayal in Version 1 generally and in these manuscripts after the introduction.

The introduction in the Bedjan text, which is representative of most Version 1 Syriac manuscripts, is as follows:

There was in those days persecution against the Christians and against those who were believers in the name of our Lord, Jesus Christ. There was a woman in the city of Iconium and her name was Julitta. From her youth, she adhered to the fear of God and she was strong in her faith and her mind was stirred with Christ's love. And when she heard about the threats of the judge and the persecution he'd established on the servants of Christ, the woman was troubled and, because of her fear, she fled and went to the city of Tarsus, in Cilicia, and there she stayed.⁷²

While the version found in Vatican Syriac 161 follows the same basic events, Julitta's background is discussed in greater depth and her motivations are changed:

⁶⁸ Alban Butler, *The Lives of the Saints* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1866), <https://www.bartleby.com/210/6/161.html>.

⁶⁹ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

⁷⁰ Arabic written with the Syriac script.

⁷¹ See Table 1. Out of the eight Arabic manuscripts examined, only two have the shorter introduction (SMMJ 00199 B and SOAH 00002).

⁷² Translation by own. Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 254.

In the city of Iconium, there was a certain blessed woman, whose name was Julitta.

She was highborn, from the family of the rulers of all Iconium and from the *genus*⁷³ of Thekla,⁷⁴ whom the apostle Paul converted, after he came into the city of Iconium, who was engaged to Thamyris. And this Julitta had been very God-fearing since she was a child and was in great distress, since she was not willing to have a husband, because she was very chaste and very much-loved revering God. She gave alms and she fasted and prayed all day, so that she adhered to the tradition [passed down] from the Holy Apostles and from faithful Sophia, the mother of those three virgins, Pistis, Elpis, and Agape, who were martyred in the days of Emperor Hadrian in the city of Rome⁷⁵ and received the crown of their victory. As [it happened] for [Sophia], so also [it happened] for the holy Julitta. She had a son whose name was Cyricus, but the father of the holy boy died and left him when he was not yet weaned. The mother of the blessed child was constantly meditating on lesson of the Holy Scriptures and just as [they prayed] in the accounts of the struggles of the blessed Thekla and Sophia and of her daughters, she would pray and say, “Our Lord Jesus Christ, let me, Your weak and inadequate handmaiden, [undergo] this struggle of confessing the faith and let me receive the crown of victory along with all the holy martyrs.”

⁷³ *κατιά*, from the Greek γένος, which can mean ‘race, offspring, family, sort/kind’ (*Liddell & Scott*, s.v. ‘γένος’) in Greek as in Syriac (*Brock and Kiraz*, s.v. ‘*κατιά*’).

⁷⁴ A well-known saint, who broke off her engagement to a man named Thamyris to follow the apostle Paul after hearing him preach on the virtues of virginity. Like Julitta, Thekla was a noble woman from Iconium (David Farmer, “Thecla (Tecla) of Iconium,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Princeton, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), <https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780199596607.001.0001/acref-9780199596607-e-1511>).

⁷⁵ Sophia and her daughters, who were twelve, ten, and seven at the time of their martyrdom, were widely venerated throughout the early Christian world (John Murphy, “Sts. Faith, Hope & Charity,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 5 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1909), <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/05766a.htm>).

But after a little time, the governor Alexander came to the city of Iconium, after receiving a decree from the king [granting him] authority over all the cities, [and said] “If we find a person who believes in Christ, we will change their faith with all oppressions and tortures [and] torment them and afterwards, they will receive the punishment of the sword.” Then, they accused holy Julitta before Alexander and he ordered the *quaestionarius*,⁷⁶ standing before him, to set out with great haste and make her come before him. And when they followed the faithful Julitta, those who had been sent against her did not find her, because she heard that she had been accused and deliberated in her mind on account of her son, Cyriacus, who was very young, and she said things such as this: “If I go and am crowned and leave my son behind me, because of his youth, he will fall into the hands of the impious and while he is a child, they will teach him according to their sins and there will be an evil fate for him, like them. And what gain is there, [if] I draw near and I come to [eternal] life and my son goes to perdition? But I will wait a little while longer until the boy is older and the Lord, whom I have faith in, will deem us worthy of a portion together of the martyrdom of the saints.”

Julitta thought about these things and she went and took her son along with the people of her house and fled before the wicked Alexander and went down to Tarsus, in Cilicia and the holy Julitta came and stayed in the church, which was built on the house of the Apostle Paul and dwelled there chastely and in a holy manner.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ ‘Torturer, executioner’, Lewis & Short, s.v. ‘quaestionarius’.

⁷⁷ Translation my own. Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 41-45.

The Arabic text of the introduction discussed by Dillmann is much the same, with one significant difference: it states that “this holy Julitta was engaged to a man, Tûmârûs.⁷⁸ She was godly from childhood until she reached the age of marriage. When she reached this age, she did not want to marry, but she was forced to marry through abuse and beatings, against her will.”⁷⁹

Development and distribution of the two versions of the narrative

Neither the distinction between the two versions nor their assignment to certain geographic, linguistic, or theological areas is absolute. Where and when these ambiguities arise give us valuable information on how and why these versions developed. No translation of Version 2 seems to have made its way into Syriac, Arabic, or Ge’ez. However, the extended introduction seems to have a similar function to Version 2; that is, to valorize Julitta and reduce Cyrus’s role as an independent, powerful child. This overlap in function will be discussed in chapter four. In Catholic and Eastern Orthodox areas, traces of Version 1 lingered long after it was condemned for those churches. A direct Latin translation of the *Martyrdom* can be found in two manuscripts: one described by Papebroch, whose date and origin are unknown, and one in

⁷⁸ Tûmârûs is clearly a version of Thamyris, the name of the man Thecla was engaged to. Unfortunately, since I don’t know Arabic, I must rely on Dillmann’s translation. I am unsure if the error in naming Tûmârûs/Thamyris as Julitta’s fiancé originated in the translation into Arabic or the translation into German. Dillmann himself seemed to think that this attribution was an intentional choice to more closely link the two saints (Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 350), but comparison with the Syriac text makes it clear that Thekla is the one engaged to Thamyris: the clause introducing the engagement begins with “-ܬ ,ܗ”, “she who”, just as the clause discussing her relationship to Paul begins. Grammatically, this construction usually points to an antecedent that comes before it (Nöldeke §236) and contextually, the first “-ܬ ,ܗ” must refer to Thecla, as Julitta has no personal connection with Paul, and it would be unusual to use an identical construction to refer to two different people. Furthermore, the next sentence, which discusses Julitta’s pious childhood, begins as follows: “**ܘ**ܠܵܐ **ܟ**ܵܐ ,**ܗ**ܵܐ”, “and she, this Julitta”. The **ܘ** “and” separates the clauses, while the use of “**ܘ**ܠܵܐ **ܟ**ܵܐ”, “this Julitta” makes it doubly clear that the “,**ܗ**ܵܐ”, “she” refers to a different antecedent than the previous use of the pronoun. While it is impossible to determine for certain where in the chain of translation this mistake occurred without reading the manuscript, the Syriac version casts significant doubt on Dillmann’s interpretation.

⁷⁹ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 349.

the library of the University of Bologna, dated to the 13th century.⁸⁰ Several medieval authors writing in Latin used the core events of Version 1, but attempted to rewrite them so the ‘apocryphal’ elements were excised.⁸¹ Three Greek manuscripts of the *Martyrdom* are known to survive.⁸² Its survival as a narrative and influence on the veneration of these saints is also indicated by artistic and epigraphic evidence. The stories of the saints as they exist now are the result of centuries of revision, interpolation, and translation. The manuscripts and artwork that survive are pieces of a larger puzzle of oral traditions, literary influences, and shifting beliefs that the stories evolved in. While much of this has been lost, close examinations of the remaining evidence can allow us to unravel some of the history of how these texts developed.

Looking at any text of Version 1, the reader is left with a disjointed narrative that seems to be assembled from several different sources. As has been observed since Dillmann first examined it, the text consists of several distinct episodes that seem to reflect different origins; namely, the introduction found in Vatican Syriac 161 and several Arabic manuscripts, the dialogue with the judge and the torture and death of the saints, and the prayer of Cyricus.⁸³ This patchwork nature is a common feature of Christian martyrdoms dating after the late fourth century when large-scale Roman persecution ceased. Hagiography developed from (alleged) eyewitness accounts to a complex literary genre that crossed linguistic, geographic, and theological lines,⁸⁴ in which imitating or copying earlier works was seen more as tribute to

⁸⁰ Henri Quentin, *Les martyrologes historiques du Moyen-Âge: étude sur la formation du martyrologue romain* (Paris: J. Gabalda & C^{ie}, 1908), 154-155.

⁸¹ Gerasimenko, “Кирик И Иулита.”

⁸² Kälviäinen, “E06118.”

⁸³ The material dealing with the 430 prisoners converted by Cyricus may also be a later introduction or reflect another source used in the writing of the text (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 34). Given that this episode isn’t particularly relevant to this thesis, I will leave the task of teasing out its origin to a future scholar.

⁸⁴ Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Hagiography,” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Hagiography>.

earlier writers than plagiarism.⁸⁵ It also served to present the saint as the “type” of earlier holy figures, both biblical and otherwise. Just as exegetical authors found mimetic echoes between the Old and New Testaments,⁸⁶ narratives of saints mirrored earlier hagiography and scripture, presenting a model of emulation for their audiences.⁸⁷ Material from other works could also be introduced into a story to complete it, whether by a recensionist to cover over a confusing part of the manuscript or by an original author to fill in some portion of the saint’s life that they were ignorant about.⁸⁸ Hints at these different motivations can be found throughout the manuscripts of Version 1.

The core of the story is the dialogue with the judge, the torture of the saints, and their execution. This is the central narrative that the other elements are added to or taken away from. While the events and their order remain very consistent across manuscripts and languages, details, like what heated instrument the saints were tortured with⁸⁹ and how many baskets of meat remained,⁹⁰ vary. While the surviving Greek texts⁹¹ are not the earliest known manuscripts,⁹² evidence in the Syriac versions point to a Greek origin.

⁸⁵ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead Do Such Great Things?: Saints and Worshippers from the Martyrs to the Reformation* (Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 520-521.

⁸⁶ Thomas Kollampparambil, *Jacob of Serugh: Select Festal Homilies* (Rome, Italy: Centre for Indian and Inter-religious Studies, 1997), 22.

⁸⁷ Paul M. Blowers, ed., “Biblical Narrative, Hagiography, and Moral Mimesis,” in *Moral Formation and the Virtuous Life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2019), 99-101.

⁸⁸ Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 521.

⁸⁹ *clavos* ‘nails’ in Latin (Papebroch, *Acta sanctorum*, 24), vs. *κλαύσα* ὄγκινος ‘hooks’ (from the Greek ὄγκινος) in Vat.Syr.161 (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 56), vs. *κλαύσα* ‘spikes’ (Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 260).

⁹⁰ In the Bodleian Arabic text, four (Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 343); in the Papebroch Latin, five (Papebroch, *Acta sanctorum*, 26); in Vatican Syriac 161, sixteen from the goat and four from the bull (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 77), and ten and four respectively in the Bedjan Syric (Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 271).

⁹¹ They are dated to the 12th-13th, 14th, and 17th centuries. Kälviäinen, “Cult of Saints, E06118.”

⁹² Those would be Vatican Syriac 161 (late 9th-early 10th cent. based on Terpelyuk’s paleographic analysis) and BnF syr. 236 (1194). See table 1 for dates of the known manuscripts.

One indication of this Greek origin lies in the names: Cyricus, Julitta, Alexander, Eusebius, and Demetrius are all originally Greek.⁹³ Given the influence of Greek on Syriac language and culture,⁹⁴ this does not exclude the possibility of a Syriac origin, but certainly lessens the likelihood. Cyricus is particularly interesting: the name is rendered into ܩܘܪܝܩ, ⁹⁵ ܩܘܪܝܼܩ, and ܩܘܼܴܸܩ. ⁹⁶ The first two, both pronounced *quryāqus*, are all based on the nominative Κυριακός,⁹⁷ while the last, *quryāqā*, either represents the Greek vocative⁹⁸ or a Syriacized version of the name.⁹⁹ This diversity of transliterations could be due to different scribes and translators independently trying to render a Greek original rather than following a Syriac text.

Beyond the names, the text is littered with Greek words. Some of them are common in Syriac and do not particularly point to a translated text, such as *ἀγών*/ἀγών ‘contest, struggle’ and *ἡγεμόν*/ἡγεμόν ‘governor’,¹⁰⁰ while others are more unusual. Vatican Syriac 161, the earliest known Syriac manuscript, has a particularly large number. Even excluding the names of gods, places, and people, which are uniformly Greek, there are at least sixteen different Greek

⁹³ Pisani, “*Passio of St Cyricus*,” (2015), 168–169; *Liddell & Scott*, s.v. ‘ἀλέξανδρος’, ‘εὐσεβής’, ‘Δημήτριος’.

⁹⁴ Harvey, "Hagiography."

⁹⁵ Dillmann, "Über die apokryphen," 339.

⁹⁶ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 14.

⁹⁷ The variations are due to Syriac's difficulty in accurately representing Greek vowels (Nöldeke §42-49). When unvocalized, ܩܪܝܩܘܣ, the most common version, could be also be pronounced *qryqus*, which would reflect Κήρυκος or Κήρικος, the name found in the Greek and Latin sources (Pisani, "Passio of St Cyrus," 2015, 168-169). Most Syriac manuscripts are unvocalized, especially early manuscripts, or semi-vocalized to help distinguish between homographs (George Kiraz, *The New Syriac Primer*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013), 36). Later manuscripts that use this spelling frequently vocalize the yudh to ensure it is read as *qryāqus*, as seen in Sacchau 222, the manuscript Bedjan bases his edition on. Given that Κυριακός is a more common name than Κήρυκος (Pisani, "Passio of St Cyrus," 2015, 169, note 62), it is unsurprising that scribes would incorrectly clarify the saint's name in this way.

⁹⁸ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 15.

99 Nöldeke §25.

borrowings used once or more in this manuscript. These include **ኩፋክኬ**, an unusual variant of **ኩፋክኬ**/προθεσμία ‘fixed period of time’,¹⁰¹ and **ቁፃታቻ**, an otherwise unknown word that most likely comes from ἑκατόνταρχος ‘centurion.’¹⁰² The inclusion of these words may point to a Greek origin, with the Syriac translator choosing to transliterate some more technical terms, rather than find a less precise Syriac word.¹⁰³ Beyond the vocabulary, Greek grammar also left its mark on the Syriac. Terpelyuk notes two places where this influence can be felt. Throughout the text, subject-predicate sentences are common, as in the frequently used phrase **ወደረሰ** “the governor said to her.” This construction, common in Greek, is less common in Syriac, which prefers predicate-subject sentences. While neither language has a fixed word order, the frequent use of a more characteristically Greek order in a Syriac text points to a translation.¹⁰⁴ The other instance comes from the phrase **ኩፋክኬ እና መሆኑ** “for it is also true.” While the conjunction “ና” can be used to mean ‘also’, it is rare for it to take this position and be used following **ኩፋክኬ**. On the other hand, “γάρ καὶ” is a very common phrase in Greek.¹⁰⁵ Given this evidence, it is reasonable to base some further conclusions about the development of the text on the assumption of a Greek origin.

From the Greek, the text was likely translated into Syriac and Latin. The Latin text, which lacks later additions found in the Syriac, may be particularly close to the Greek source.

¹⁰¹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 65. Margoliouth, s.v. ‘*κακοθεία*’ and ‘*κακοδημία*’.

¹⁰² Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 73, note 131.

¹⁰³ These particularly unusual words are not found in the other Syriac manuscripts. As Terpelyuk noted, determining what the relationship is between the text found in the Vatican manuscript and the text of the other Syriac manuscripts, which tend to share more with each other than with the Vatican text, will require a detailed examination and comparison of all the manuscripts, which lies outside the scope of this thesis (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 13). Regardless of the relationship between the texts, the evidence provided by the Vatican manuscript still stands.

¹⁰⁴ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Oūryāqūs*, 47.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 56.

Given general trends of how hagiography moved between languages, the Syriac text was likely the basis for the Arabic¹⁰⁶ and Sogdian translations.¹⁰⁷ The Ge'ez text in turn was likely based on the Arabic one.¹⁰⁸ The Coptic text, other than the prayer, is far too fragmentary to make any conclusions about, though it can be noted that translated hagiography tended to make its way into Coptic directly from Greek, rather than through Syriac.¹⁰⁹

While the core text of the *Martyrdom* most likely originated in Greek, the extended introduction found in Vatican Syriac 161 and several Arabic manuscripts appears to have been written independently in Syriac and added on later. The clearest indication of this lies in the fact that the introduction is not present in any of the Greek or Latin manuscripts. Beyond this, Terpelyuk notes an interesting correlation between the Syriac text of the introduction and a Syriac text of the *Acts of Thekla*. In both texts, the word ‘Iconium’ has been transliterated in two ways: ‘ܩܘܪcqur’ and ‘ܩܘܪaqur.’¹¹⁰ While this is far from definitive evidence, the coincidence of both texts transliterating Iconium in two different ways that are identical to each other may indicate that the author composed the introduction with the Syriac *Acts of Thekla* as an inspiration or source. The text of the introduction states that Julitta “prayed just as in the accounts of the struggles of the blessed Thekla and Sophia and of her daughters.”¹¹¹ Julitta’s subsequent prayer seems to reflect this statement, as it contains strong echoes of the prayer of Pistis, one daughter of Sophia, before her execution.

¹⁰⁶ Sebastian P. Brock, “Greek, Syriac translations from,” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage: Electronic Edition* (Piscataway, New Jersey: Gorgias Press, 2011; online ed. Beth Mardutho, 2018), <https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Greek-Syriac-translations-from>.

¹⁰⁷ Sims-Williams, “A Sogdian Fragment,” 237.

¹⁰⁸ Aaron Michael Butts and Simcha Gross, *The History of the ‘Slave of Christ’: From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2017), 41.

¹⁰⁹ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 35.

¹¹⁰ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 16.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 43.

Julitta	Pistis
<p>Our Lord Jesus Christ, let me, Your weak and inadequate handmaiden, [undergo] this conflict of confessing the faith and let me receive the crown of victory along with all the holy martyrs.¹¹²</p>	<p>Glory be to Thee, O Lord Jesus the Christ, that Thou hast deemed Thy little handmaiden worthy to withstand in the conflict of the noble ones...Remember me also, O Lord, Thine afflicted and sinful handmaiden, and receive my soul into Thy presence because I have confessed Thy cross.¹¹³</p>

Parallel words and ideas between the prayers of Julitta and Pistis

Later, Elpis, another daughter, asks that God let her “receive my crown of victory”

(،مَهْوَنَةَ حَلَّلَتْ مَهْرَبَنَةَ)،¹¹⁴ nearly identical to part of Julitta’s prayer (،مَهْوَنَةَ حَلَّلَتْ مَهْرَبَنَةَ). While it is by no means a perfect copy and much of this is formulaic language, the numerous parallels may point to the use of the martyrdom of Sophia and her daughters as a source for the extended introduction. While the *Acts of Thekla* do not contain a similar prayer, Thekla, like Julitta and

¹¹² Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 43.

¹¹³ Agnes Smith Lewis, trans., *Select Narratives of Holy Women from the Syro-Antiochene or Sinai Palimpsest As Written Above the Old Syriac Gospels by John the Stylite, of Beth-Mari-Qanūn in A.D. 778* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 177. The Syriac text is from page ۲۱ to page ۲۲.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 178. Syriac text on page ۲۱.

Sophia's daughters, refers to herself multiple times as a handmaiden (ܟܼܻܻܻ) of God.¹¹⁵ Given the multiple indications that the extended introduction relied to some extent on other Syriac texts, it is reasonable to conclude that the introduction was composed in Syriac, rather than Greek.

The so-called ‘prayer of Cyricus’ has been the subject of intense academic interest and debate since Dillmann brought it to the attention of European scholars in 1887. Dillmann believed that the prayer was original to the martyrdom, but subsequent scholarship has shown this to be unlikely.¹¹⁶ Rather, the prayer seems to have been an independent Greek work that was incorporated into the text of the martyrdom, possibly to explain why the governor says that Cyricus is revealing mysteries.¹¹⁷ Tracing how the prayer was incorporated into the text is complicated and ultimately outside the scope of this thesis.

The final issue about the core text of the martyrdom that we should explore comes from Cornelia Horn’s article “Children and Violence in Syriac Sources: the *Martyrdom of Mar Ṭalyā’ of Cyrrhus* in the Light of Literary and Theological Implications.”¹¹⁸ In it, she tentatively traces some connections between the accounts of Cyricus and of Ṭalyā’, a less well known child martyr. As she notes, both saints were two or three years old, both are cut into three pieces and subsequently resurrected, both survive entering a burning container,¹¹⁹ and both are persecuted

¹¹⁵ William Wright, trans., *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1871), 131, 135-135, 140, and 143.

¹¹⁶ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 28.

¹¹⁷ Greßmann, “Das Gebet,” 28.

¹¹⁸ Cornelia B. Horn, “Children and Violence,” 309-326.

¹¹⁹ In Ṭalyā’, a “furnace” (Horn, “Children and Violence,” 318), in *Cyricus*, a ܟܼܻܻܻ ‘cauldron’ (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 81). It should also be noted that both texts explicitly compare the saint’s experience to the Three Youths sent into the furnace in Daniel 3:19-30.

by a governor named Alexander.¹²⁰ No manuscripts of *Talyā'* are available to me at this time, but I will note a few further parallels between the two martyrdoms based on Horn's description.

- *Talyā'*/~~Ἄγιος~~ is both the name of the saint, given to him by the Holy Spirit,¹²¹ and the Syriac word for ‘child, youth’, a term frequently used to refer to Cyricus.
- In both, the governor assumes that the child learned to mock the gods and follow Christianity from an adult and questions him about this.¹²²
- Both saints destroy idols through their prayers.¹²³
- Both are tempted by the governor with the promise of inheriting wealth,¹²⁴ but ultimately prefer the inheritance of Christ.¹²⁵
- Crowds are converted by witnessing their actions.¹²⁶
- Both are welcomed into the kingdom of God by “a choir of heavenly powers” near the end of the martyrdom.¹²⁷

It should be emphasized that many of these parallels, like the death and resurrection of the saint and the conversion of the crowd, are typical features of ‘epic passions’¹²⁸ and one must be careful to not conflate similarity with interdependence. Furthermore, these elements are generally present in the Latin text of Cyricus, which is unlikely to have been influenced by an obscure Syriac martyrdom. While it's impossible to make any firm conclusions without reading

¹²⁰ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 323.

¹²¹ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 316-317.

¹²² Horn, “Children and Violence,” 315-316; Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 257.

¹²³ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 317; Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 263.

¹²⁴ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 320; Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 257.

¹²⁵ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 321; Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 274.

¹²⁶ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 218; Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 269.

¹²⁷ Specifically, Cyricus is surrounded by a band of angels. Horn, “Children and Violence,” 320-321; Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 280-282.

¹²⁸ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 33-34.

the *Martyrdom of Mar Ṭalyā'* myself, I believe these similarities are more likely to be the result of a shared genre than direct influence.

This generic similarity points to one other important textual detail. In the earliest Syriac manuscript, Vatican Syriac 161, the governor addresses the saints mostly in the singular, while in the Latin and later Syriac manuscripts, he addresses them in the plural.¹²⁹ Ṭalyā', like Philotheus,¹³⁰ Agnes,¹³¹ and many others, represents a sub-genre of the epic passion: the independent child martyr. This topic will be discussed in more depth in the Chapter 3. For now, it will suffice to say that these passions frequently stress the fact that the martyr, unlike a typical child, was enabled by God to contend with questioning and torture alone. The *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* is built on many of the topoi of this sub-genre, but Julitta's role unsettles the expected narrative. Whether the translator of the text preserved in Vatican Syriac 161 literally based their translation on a pre-existing Syriac text like the *Martyrdom of Mar Ṭalyā'* or not, the influence of the genre's conventions on the language of the text can be seen in the exclusion of Julitta from most of the governor's addresses.

The story of one manuscript can demonstrate how the different versions of the martyrdom were reworked and woven together. Bodleian Hunt. Donat. 32 is an Arabic Garshuni manuscript of the martyrdom dated to 1549 CE¹³² described by Dillmann. It seems to have come from the Syriac recension seen in Vatican Syriac 161, given that it includes the extended introduction and shares certain details, like having the governor call on Serapis.¹³³ Vatican Syriac 161, unlike the other Syriac recensions, does not include the prayer of Cyricus. Hunt.

¹²⁹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 26.

¹³⁰ See Rogozhina, “And from his side.”

¹³¹ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 343.

¹³² Robert Payne Smith, *Codices syriacos, carshunicos, mendaeos, complectens* (Oxonii: E. Typographeo Clarendoniano, 1864), 476–481

¹³³ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 344; Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 93.

Donat. 32, by contrast, includes the prayer, albeit in a shortened form.¹³⁴ The *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* did not develop in a straight line, or even in two straight lines. Instead, it is the result of many different scribes throughout the centuries freely combining and revising different manuscripts, creating a patchwork story, whose seams are barely hidden by later clarifications.

The development of Version 2 is simultaneously much simpler and much more frustrating to track than Version 1. Version 1, unlike Version 2, is known through the derivatives of a single source text. It has been translated, edited, and added on to dozens of times, but the core structure and content is preserved throughout. By contrast, Version 2 traveled and evolved detached from a specific text. Although the two longest renditions of Version 2 are both in Greek, they may be independent versions of the same story.¹³⁵ The versions in the *Golden Legend* and other medieval European texts are usually shorter and vary slightly in the tortures involved.

Visual depictions of Cyricus and Julitta

Without the (relatively) clear manuscript tradition of Version 1, the best sources documenting the evolution of Version 2 lie in art. A large-scale survey of depictions of the saints is necessary to fully trace the development of Version 2 in art, which lies outside the scope of this thesis. Furthermore, many pieces of art I've found depicting the saints have no available information about their provenance.¹³⁶ In the following section, I will discuss several pieces

¹³⁴ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 346.

¹³⁵ van Hooff, “Sanctorum Cyrici et Julittae,” 192-193.

¹³⁶ As one example, consider [this icon](#), which combines Versions 1 and 2. It can be found on several online stores that sell reproductions of icons. Unfortunately, none of them were able to provide any definite information on its origin except that it was likely painted in the 19th century (Legacy Icons Customer Support, email, October 13,

whose provenance is known. This selection is likely not representative of the larger trends I've observed when considering all depictions of the saints, including those without provenance. Most depictions of these saints come from anonymous icons, whose date and place of origin are unknown. No scholarship has been done on most of these pieces. While I will not use these pieces as a major source of evidence, I will make a few observations, which may provide directions for future research. Out of the 102 artistic depictions of these saints that I could access digitally, I could identify the version depicted in 45 of them. Out of those 45 works, 34 depicted Version 2, six depicted Version 1, and five depicted a mixture of both versions. All but one of the mixed depictions primarily followed Version 1. Anonymous icons make up the majority of these works. Almost all the depictions of the saints I was able to find were from Europe. This collection is incomplete and likely non-representative and should not be used as the basis for conclusions. However, it may gesture towards some general trends in how the narratives of Cyricus and Julitta have been treated in European art. These trends will hopefully demonstrate that the provenanced art of these saints does not necessarily reflect the larger picture.

The best known depiction of Cyricus and Julitta likely is in a mural cycle from the Theodotus Chapel of the church of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, dated to 741-752 C.E.¹³⁷ It follows Version 1 in most parts of the plot (fig. 4), but ends with Cyricus being dashed against the steps, as in Version 2 (fig. 5).¹³⁸ Cyricus is the center of the narrative, with most of the inscriptions describing their torture only mentioning him¹³⁹ and his death marking the end of the mural cycle.¹⁴⁰ Cyricus's size changes from image to image: in the frying pan, he comes up to

2020). Without further information on its provenance, I can't conclude anything about the evolution of the versions based on this fascinating work.

¹³⁷ Jessop, "Pictorial Cycles," 236.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 247-249.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 245-247.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 249.

his mother's waist (fig. 4), during the torture with nails, he appears to be an adult (fig. 5),¹⁴¹ and at his death, he is small enough to be thrown one-handed by an adult (fig. 5).

This variability in size can also be seen in an antependium from 12th century Catalonia (fig. 1). It portrays Cyricus being sawed in pieces, struck through with spikes, stabbed, and boiled with Julitta in a cauldron, following the tortures seen in Version 1.¹⁴² Only one figure undergoes the three former torments. This figure, who is as tall as the adult torturers, has frequently been assumed to be Julitta. Palumbo, however, noted that Julitta's hair is covered in the central image and in the cauldron, while the tortured figure has no such covering. This, along with the fact that Cyricus is the protagonist of Version 1, which this depicts, points to him being the tortured figure, following a well-documented artistic convention of portraying holy children as older than their actual age.¹⁴³

Interestingly, three of the other well-provenanced works are also altarpieces from Spain. In one 16th century altarpiece from Sant Quirze d'Arbúcies in Catalonia (fig. 2), Version 2 is depicted in the upper left panel, while the other three panels dealing with Cyricus and Julitta follow Version 1.¹⁴⁴ A third Spanish altarpiece was painted by Pere Garcia de Benavarri around 1456 in Catalonia (fig. 9).¹⁴⁵ It entirely follows Version 1 and is firmly centered on Cyricus, who appears quite mature, particularly in the middle panel, where he looks like a miniature adult. In the Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción in Villasila de Valdavia, the 17th century altarpiece

¹⁴¹ Jessop, "Pictorial Cycles," 247.

¹⁴² Palumbo, "L'enigma di Durro," 19.

¹⁴³ Ibid., 29.

¹⁴⁴ "Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita," Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, <https://www.museunacional.cat/en/colleccio/altarpiece-saint-cyricus-and-saint-julitta/anonim-catalunya/015785-cjt>.

¹⁴⁵ "Aquest dissabte es presenta el llibre "El Retaule Gòtic de Sant Quirze i Santa Julita," Ajuntament de Sant Quirze del Vallès, October 23, 2013,

http://www.santquirzevalles.cat/DetailNoticia/_CR1bHNtBU9DLTRiyiCrCY16hWwSp8pFRXOPPJGsDh8A.

follows Version 2 (fig. 11).¹⁴⁶ This is a more childish Cyricus, who is led around by the hand by Julitta.

Outside of Catalonia, L'église Saint-Cyr d'Issoudun in Issoudun, France, preserves both versions in a different way: its older stained glass, which was installed around 1470, mostly follows Version 1 (fig. 6), but two panes on the bottom left depict Version 2 (fig. 7). The newer glass, dating to 1868, follows Version 2 entirely (fig. 8).¹⁴⁷ In the older glass, Cyricus comes up to Julitta's waist and is an active participant in the events. Cyricus in the newer stained glass looks like an infant and is held by his mother or the judge in all of the images. Stained glass in the church of Saint-Cyr-Sainte-Julitte in Villejuif, France, installed in 1898, also follows Version 2 (fig. 10).¹⁴⁸ This Cyricus appears infantile, like the newer Issoudun glass. An anonymous icon from Kargopol, Russia, dated to the later 18th century, follows Version 1 (fig. 3).¹⁴⁹ This Cyricus comes up to his mother's chest in some panels.

If one were to exclusively look at the literary sources of Version 1 and 2 in Europe, it would be reasonable to conclude that Version 2 had successfully replaced 1. After all, there are 37 known manuscripts of Theodore's letter,¹⁵⁰ compared to three known Greek¹⁵¹ and one Latin¹⁵² manuscripts of Version 1. Beyond Theodore's letter, the *Acta Graeca Sincera* and the

¹⁴⁶ "Iglesia de Nuestra Señora de la Asunción," Lista Roja del Patrimonio, last modified October 26, 2019, <https://listarojapatrimonio.org/ficha/iglesia-nuestra-señora-la-asuncion/>.

¹⁴⁷ Geneste Olivier, "Issoudun : église Saint-Cyr, verrières" (Inventaire du patrimoine Centre-Val de Loire: 2009), <https://patrimoine.regioncentre.fr/gertrude-diffusion/dossier/issoudun-eglise-saint-cyr-verrieres/7661f47d-3eab-4548-8d55-e271268b5e3e>.

¹⁴⁸ Xavier de Massary, "6 verrières à personnages : Laissez venir à moi les petits enfants, la Mort de saint Joseph, l'Institution de l'Eucharistie, le Martyre de saint Cyr et de sainte Julitte, l'Annonciation, la Présentation au Temple (baies 5 à 8, 11, 22)," Ministère français de la Culture, last modified July 11, 2019, <https://www.pop.culture.gouv.fr/notice/palissy/IM94000995>.

¹⁴⁹ "Русский Север: Выставка в Государственном историческом музее," Мой виртуальный музей, February 16, 2019, <https://www.myvirtualmuseum.ru/text/moscow/gim/russiannorth.htm>.

¹⁵⁰ Kälviäinen, "E06121."

¹⁵¹ Kälviäinen, "E06118."

¹⁵² Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 24-28.

Golden Legend both also preserve Version 2, with the *Golden Legend* alone surviving in almost one thousand Latin manuscripts.¹⁵³ Despite this, the artistic evidence points to a more complex history. The structure and content of Version 2 as found in artwork are highly malleable. There is no single thread that runs through all the depictions; instead, they are connected by a web of images and events that can be arranged and prioritized as the artist chooses. Artists freely incorporated elements of Versions 1 and 2 into a single work, despite the dramatic differences in plot and theme between the versions. Furthermore, artwork following Version 1 exclusively can be found as late as the later 18th century.¹⁵⁴

Conclusion

The narratives around Cyricus and Julitta were created through centuries of revision, synthesis, and censorship. Most scholars have concluded that these efforts were a result of Version 1's excessively miraculous content,¹⁵⁵ and as part of a larger trend of rewriting Greek hagiography with "a more standardized and disciplined approach."¹⁵⁶ However, this trend began in the late 8th century CE, several centuries after Theodore's letter was written.¹⁵⁷ Kälviäinen suggests that "perhaps both [the *Passion* of Cyricus and Julitta and the *Passion* of St. George]...were recomposed very early on, well before the rise of the wider phenomenon of reworking..., due to their extremely aberrant nature, which had rendered them unpalatable already to audiences in Late Antiquity and led to them being especially singled out for condemnation in both the *Gelasian Decree* and the *Constitutiones ecclesiasticae?*"¹⁵⁸ While this

¹⁵³ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, xi.

¹⁵⁴ "Русский Север: Выставка в Государственном историческом музее."

¹⁵⁵ Pisani, "Passio of St Cyricus," 164 and Kälviäinen, "Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts," 111.

¹⁵⁶ Kälviäinen, "Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts," 108.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 108, 117.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 117, note 46.

conclusion may be sustainable with St. George, who contends with the entirely fictional King Dadianus of Persia, accompanied by upwards of seventy equally fictional kings,¹⁵⁹ and is killed and resurrected at least three times,¹⁶⁰ the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* does not fit this hypothesis so neatly. While different manuscripts disagree if they were martyred under Diocletian or his co-emperor Maximian,¹⁶¹ both emperors are real figures and other historical details are relatively accurate. The level of torture endured by the martyrs and the miracles they accomplish may seem excessive to a reader now, but none of it is outside the generic conventions of ‘epic passions.’¹⁶² Most epic passions, however, were not the target of early condemnation and censorship. In order to understand why the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* underwent such an unusual evolution, we must first consider the larger cultural and religious understandings of children that produced these texts.

¹⁵⁹ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 354.

¹⁶⁰ Kälviäinen, “Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts,” 114.

¹⁶¹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 7.

¹⁶² Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 33-34.

CHAPTER 2

CHILDREN IN LATE ANTIQUITY AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY

If animals are good to think with, human children must be even better.

—Sarah Iles Johnston¹⁶³

A child in late antiquity was a liminal being. They were no longer infants, unable to speak and thus to reason, but not yet rational adults.¹⁶⁴ Similarly, their developing bodies, while no longer totally dependent on their parents, were still weak and unformed. These weak bodies made children nearer to death than most: conservative estimates put the child and infant mortality rate in the Roman empire at 35%.¹⁶⁵ Close to death, they were “beings on the threshold of another world,”¹⁶⁶ both particularly able to act as foci for divine communication and particularly vulnerable to magic and demons, many of whom were thought to specifically target children.¹⁶⁷

The boundary between a child and an adult was blurry. The movement from the social and physical state of ‘child’ to ‘adult’ was shaped by culture, class, and gender. For a girl, the social state was dependent on the physical state: once she underwent puberty, her social role, along with her physical role, changed from ‘child’ to ‘married (or marriable) woman.’ Sources vary on the exact age that this happened, but it almost always fell between twelve and fourteen.¹⁶⁸ While a boy was also considered legally able to marry after puberty, around thirteen or fourteen,¹⁶⁹ it was more common for him to do so in his late teens or early twenties. It was

¹⁶³ Sarah Iles Johnston, quoted by Ra’anan Boustan and Kimberly Stratton, “Children And Violence,” 307.

¹⁶⁴ Odd Magne Bakke, *When Children Became People: The Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 104-105.

¹⁶⁵ Maria E. Doerfler, *Jephthah’s Daughter, Sarah’s Son: The Death of Children in Late Antiquity* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2019), 2.

¹⁶⁶ Reidar Aasgaard, “Children in Antiquity and Early Christianity: Research History and Central Issues,” *Familia* 33 (2006): 31.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Cornelia Horn and John W. Martens, “*Let the Little Children Come to Me*”: *Childhood and Children in Early Christianity* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2009), 18.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 13, 15.

around this same age that he would end his education and move fully into the social role of an adult, beginning his career, whether in politics, the military, or some other vocation.¹⁷⁰ The exact age this would happen varied by culture: Jewish boys were expected to marry at eighteen and continue their education for a couple more years before beginning their careers. Greek boys began participating in politics and the military around sixteen or seventeen, marking their entry into adulthood. The age gap between Roman husbands and wives was particularly wide, with men frequently marrying in their late twenties.¹⁷¹ The period of time when youth was legally relevant was similarly long in Roman law, where people under 25 are seen as needing extra legal protection due to their youth and, thus, inexperience.¹⁷²

The life path described above mostly applies to wealthy, freeborn families. The majority of non-elite children, regardless of gender, would begin work, whether as apprentices or just helping their families, around the age of seven.¹⁷³ Epigraphic evidence from the Roman world suggests that lower class people generally married earlier.¹⁷⁴ This disparity may be due to the particularly long period, focused on education, between entering public life and marrying for upper class Roman men. Enslaved children seem to have begun work around five years old.¹⁷⁵ Legally excluded from many of the markers of adulthood, like marriage and entrance into politics, and frequently discussed with infantilizing language, it is difficult to say when and how slaves would have marked their entrance into adulthood.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children*, 14, 17.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁷² Margarita Sánchez Romero and Rosa M^a Cid López, eds., *Motherhood and Infancies in the Mediterranean in Antiquity* (Oxford; Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2018) 200.

¹⁷³ Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity: The Rise of Christianity and the Endurance of Tradition*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 26.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁷⁵ Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children*, 25-26.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 37-38.

The lives and treatment of elite children, like Cyricus, are comparatively well documented. Schooling generally began around seven years old for both boys and girls.¹⁷⁷ Prior to that, many children were primarily reared by nurses.¹⁷⁸ Even for the wealthy, this was a dangerous and uncertain time for children: most parents would experience at some point the death of at least one of their children, probably under the age of ten.¹⁷⁹ That the death of a child was a common experience did not make it an easy one for parents. Epitaphs, poems, and letters all attest to parents' grief and their difficulty overcoming it.¹⁸⁰ For the children of wealthy families who survived, this period seems to have been spent in play¹⁸¹ and the informal beginnings of education, especially moral education.¹⁸² Writers encouraged fathers to physically punish their children (particularly their sons) only sporadically, lest being treated like a slave lead them to behave like one.¹⁸³

Children were perceived as being like "wax tablets," in Plato's words, whose adult selves were shaped by what they encountered.¹⁸⁴ For boys, this formlessness, as well as children's lack of emotional control, was perilously feminine. It was the obligation of their parents—particularly their fathers—to ensure that their bodies and minds were properly molded into those of men.¹⁸⁵ While there was an added worry for boys, the perceived malleability of children meant that parents were responsible for their moral formation, regardless of gender. Although they were seen as lacking reason, it was still crucial that they be instructed in virtuous behavior from a very

¹⁷⁷ Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children*, 24.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. 22.

¹⁷⁹ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 28.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 36-37.

¹⁸¹ Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children*, 24.

¹⁸² Odd Magne Bakke, "Upbringing of Children in the Early Church: the Responsibility of Parents, Goal and Methods," *Studia Theologica* 60 (2006): 147.

¹⁸³ Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 33-34.

¹⁸⁴ Bakke, "Upbringing of Children," 146.

¹⁸⁵ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 10-12.

young age, so that their minds were shaped along those lines. If a child fell into bad behavior after being instructed in morality, their parents were not at fault. The impact of nurture obliged a parent to correctly instruct their children, but nature ensured they weren't responsible for their misdeeds.¹⁸⁶

While advice on childrearing was generally directed to fathers, it was frequently mothers who were the most formative figures in their children's early lives.¹⁸⁷ Roman mothers were usually in charge of their children's education before age seven, whether teaching them directly or hiring a tutor, and they were often portrayed as the parent who instilled traditional values into their young children.¹⁸⁸ Classical Greek writings do not deal with mothers' influence on their children much directly, but the centrality of mothers in young children's lives is made clear in artistic depictions.¹⁸⁹ Later Hellenistic sources portray mothers as having an educational role similar to that found in Roman sources.¹⁹⁰ Children might be under the legal control of their fathers, but the day-to-day motions of their early lives were controlled by their mothers.

Arising from these cultural and social contexts, as well as core religious assertions of Christianity, early Christian theological approaches to children, as discussed throughout the rest of this chapter, were not uniform, simple, or internally consistent. These theologies and debates fundamentally shaped how Christian texts, including the hagiographical narratives of Cyricus and Julitta, depicted children, their parents, and their moral autonomy.

¹⁸⁶ Bakke, "Upbringing of Children in the Early Church," 147.

¹⁸⁷ Ville Vuolanto, "The Construction of Elite Childhood and Youth in Fourth- and Fifth Century Antioch," in *Children and Family in Late Antiquity: Life, Death and Interaction*, ed. Christian Laes, Katarina Mustakallio, and Ville Vuolanto (Walpole, MA: Leuven, 2015): 322.

¹⁸⁸ Romero and López, *Motherhood and Infancies*, 201-202.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 142.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 165-166.

Christianity and Children

Christianity's impact on the material conditions of children remains a hotly debated question. Opinions range from Christianity being a radical and positive influence to it perpetuating the same practices as the earlier cultures it originated from.¹⁹¹ There are certain areas, like their opposition to the exposure of infants and pederasty, where early Christian beliefs were (or at least were asserted by writers to be) different from the Greco-Roman world around them.¹⁹² In other areas, life seemed to be much the same for children, whether Christian or not. As Ville Vuolanto explored, late antique autobiographical accounts of childhood, which are invariably written by elite men, share a number of characteristics across religious and geographic lines. Most importantly to this thesis, the role of mothers in the moral and intellectual formation of their children is centered in these sources, in continuity with earlier attitudes.¹⁹³ It is, of course, difficult to determine how much apologetic literature and memoirs reflect the actual lives of children. Regardless of their factual basis, these works speak to early Christian beliefs about children and parents, which both retained and modified pre-Christian attitudes in complex ways.

Theological Discussions of Children

Children, especially their suffering and death, raised a number of theological issues for early Christian thinkers. Some of these issues are fundamental questions in Christianity about the nature of humanity and its relationship with God—are people fundamentally sinful? Do they need to be guided into virtue or can they achieve it through the Spirit alone? What makes a

¹⁹¹ Aasgard, “Children in Antiquity,” 35-36.

¹⁹² Horn and Martens, *Let the Little Children*, 222.

¹⁹³ Vuolanto, “The Construction of Elite Childhood,” 321-322.

person morally autonomous? If children are innocent, why do they suffer? Others address more practical pastoral concerns—when should people be baptized? How should grief be addressed? What are the responsibilities of a Christian parent? The relationship between moral autonomy and child martyrs—the central issue of this thesis—is addressed only indirectly or briefly outside the martyrdoms themselves. Luckily, discussions by early Christian writers over infant baptism, the Holy Innocents, and the relationship between adults and children reveal the various attitudes towards children that shape their martyrdoms.

In Matthew 2:16, Herod has all the male children under the age of two in Bethlehem put to death in his attempt to kill the infant Jesus. These children, known as the Holy Innocents, were venerated as protomartyrs from the late second century onwards and their cult was immensely popular.¹⁹⁴ There were, however, fundamental issues in describing them as martyrs. A martyr's "clear and unambiguous verbal confession of her faith and intent" to die for Christ, without coercion, hesitation, or ulterior motives, was an essential element of what defined a Christian martyr.¹⁹⁵ While martyrdoms often stretched the bounds of plausibility in the ability of very young children to make cogent confessions of faith, the age of the Holy Innocents made it impossible for them to verbally choose their fates. The explanation, therefore, of what made them martyrs had to be sought elsewhere.

Some writers attributed a non-verbal moral autonomy to the Innocents, reshaping their concept of infancy's lack of reason to fit their understanding of martyrdom. Writing in Latin, Tertullian (155-220 CE) and Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397 CE) both portrayed the Innocents as consciously choosing to undergo martyrdom, molding their cries into confessions, while Peter Chrysologus (c. 380-450 CE) applies the common imagery of a martyr as a soldier of Christ to

¹⁹⁴ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 30.

¹⁹⁵ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 181.

the Innocent.¹⁹⁶ This approach was not generally accepted, however. Asserting that the Innocents show that “infancy [is not] without sensibility,” as Tertullian did, ran in the face of deeply embedded cultural beliefs that linked speech with reason.¹⁹⁷ It also undermined one fundamental aspect of the Holy Innocents—their innocence. The development of speech was linked to both the capacity for reason and the capacity for sin. Prior to this, infants were at least morally neutral, if not emphatically innocent.¹⁹⁸ It is this state of innocence that gave the story its particular pathos, different from other martyrs, and many writers emphasized this instead of their supposed confession of faith. The Innocents are portrayed as physically helpless and harmless, still held and nursed by their mothers. They are unable to understand the suffering they undergo, smiling and laughing at their executioners.¹⁹⁹ The emotional core of the story is their utter, pure innocence.

Given their lack of sin and reason, why did God allow the Holy Innocents to suffer? Through this question, the early Christian theologians confronted the larger problem of theodicy and attempted to make sense of the suffering and pain visited on so many children in late antiquity. The high child mortality rates of the age meant that parents’ grief for their children was a common subject of discussion and worry for early Christian writers. Concern over the power of grief predates Christianity. Like other strong emotions, unrestrained grief showed a dangerous and womanish lack of control, particularly in the view of Stoics.²⁰⁰ For Christian writers, this could cause or reveal a lack of faith, as grief led parents to question the goodness of

¹⁹⁶ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 181-182.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 182.

¹⁹⁸ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 104-105. Augustine and others like him, whose views are explored later in the chapter, attempted to disconnect these developments, seeing children as able to sin before they were able to reason and speak. This reevaluation of children’s innocence, however, did not prevent them from continuing to promote the Innocents’ cult (Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 31).

¹⁹⁹ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 33.

²⁰⁰ L. Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008) 62-63.

God. Explorations of the Holy Innocents sought to give an answer to that questioning, as well as comfort the grieving parents. The Innocents were martyrs not through their active choice, but through their purity and the gift of God.

Some explanations focused on the potential evil the Innocents could have committed as adults. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407 CE) suggested that “the very fact of God’s permitting the Holy Innocents to die was proof that they would not have amounted to anything much had they been permitted to live.” This reshapes their death to be a blessing, as it prevents them from the eternal punishment they would have suffered if they had lived and sinned.²⁰¹ Other explanations focus less on their future evil and more on their certain purity. By dying, they remained in an Edenic state of sinlessness, granting them access to Paradise without having to endure the trials of the world. Their purity is so great, in fact, that they stood before even committed ascetics, for they had achieved without effort what ascetics struggled long years for.²⁰² The special virtue of the Innocents could be extended to ordinary dead children as well: Paulinus of Nola (c. 354-431 CE), writing to parents whose eight-year-old child had died, said “[your son] is in Paradise with the children of Bethlehem, whom the wicked Herod struck down out of jealousy, and he is playing in a scented glade, weaving garlands as rewards for the martyrs’ glory.”²⁰³ This gives an explanation of why a just God would let children die, and, equally importantly, it brings comfort to grieving parents, giving them concrete images of children, as helpless and innocent as their own, enjoying the fruits of Paradise. The situational reshaping of the category of martyr to accommodate the Holy Innocents on account of their purity and unjust death is not frequently found in other martyrdoms of children, which, as explored later in this chapter, go to great

²⁰¹ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 189.

²⁰² Ibid., 196-197.

²⁰³ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 33.

lengths to demonstrate that the martyr confessed their faith with complete understanding. They do, however, resemble the Holy Innocents in their focus on the vulnerability and helplessness of youthful bodies and the particular purity of children, using the emotional impact of those images while avoiding the uncomfortable questions of autonomy they bring with them.

Infant Baptism

The debates over infant baptism challenged established beliefs and practices surrounding children in the early Church. The practice of baptising infants seems to have originated quite early in church history: Tertullian and *The Apostolic Tradition* (developed between the mid 2nd-mid 4th centuries and attributed to Hippolytus)²⁰⁴ both attest to its existence. These two early sources reveal how quickly debate arose over the practice. Tertullian opposed it, asking “why should the innocent period of life...hasten to the ‘remission of sins?’”²⁰⁵ He assumes that infants do not sin as a matter of fact basic enough that it doesn’t warrant further discussion, like most pre-Augustine writers. He further emphasizes that children must be educated so that they understand what it means be Christian before they should be baptised. While his discussions of the result of Adam’s fall on humans imply a belief in something like original sin, he does not explore the implications of that belief on infant baptism.²⁰⁶ The baptismal liturgy found in *The Apostolic Tradition* generally assumes that an adult is being baptised but includes provisions²⁰⁷ for “those who are not able to speak for themselves.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ W. Travis McMaken, “Baptism and Infant Baptism from the New Testament through Barth,” in *The Sign of the Gospel: Toward an Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism after Karl Barth* (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2013): 11.

²⁰⁵ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 69.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 69-70.

²⁰⁷ McMaken, “Baptism and Infant Baptism,” 15.

²⁰⁸ Henry Fiskå Hägg, “Aspects of childhood in second- and third-century Christianity: the case of Clement of Alexandria,” in *Childhood in History: Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Reidar Aasgaard, Cornelia B. Horn, and Oana Maria Cojocaru (Routledge: New York, 2018): 134.

Writing in Greek, Origen (c. 184-253 CE) defends infant baptism based on the idea that being born passed a defilement onto the child.²⁰⁹ This defilement was not the same as original sin and he generally portrayed children as free of sin.²¹⁰ This concept of defilement rather than sin is continued in a letter by Cyprian (a Latin writer from Carthage, c. 210-258 CE), summarizing the opinion of a council of African bishops that met and discussed the issue in 253 CE. He argued in favor of immediate baptism against a bishop, Fideus, who believed baptism should be delayed at least eight days after birth both as an analogy for circumcision and because of his disgust at touching a newborn infant.²¹¹ Cyprian, departing from the common view that children are in the process of becoming people, portrays infants as full, completed human beings, created by God and possessing the “same religious and spiritual needs as do all other persons,” including baptism.²¹² Like Tertullian and Origen, he assumes that infants have committed no sins of their own volition. But how do these three beliefs, that baptism is the remission of sins, infants have not sinned, and infants, as full human beings, must take part in baptism, coexist? Cyprian somewhat reframes baptism to suit this. Infants have not committed any sin, but they have “contracted the contagion of the first death” from Adam’s fall, which baptism removes from them.²¹³ The seeds of Augustine’s doctrine of original sin can be seen in this belief, but it differs dramatically in what it concludes about the nature of children. Cyprian sees Adam’s impact as a physical rather than moral one. The infant, born in flesh, is contaminated by mortality rather than a shared guilt.²¹⁴ Thus an infant, born into new life through baptism, is a genuinely innocent and

²⁰⁹ Hägg, “Aspects of childhood,” 134.

²¹⁰ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 65.

²¹¹ Ibid., 70.

²¹² Inta Ivanovska, “Baptized Infants and Pagan Rituals: Cyprian versus Augustine,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 47-48.

²¹³ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 72.

²¹⁴ Ivanovska, “Baptized Infants and Pagan Rituals,” 48-49.

pure being. He is thus able to conclude that “in a sense, [in kissing] a human being recently formed and newly born we are kissing those hands of God,” which had created the infant.²¹⁵

The next few centuries saw continued debate over the nature of infants, the fate of infants who died, and the role of baptism in all this. These discussions, which are strongly influenced by theological interpretations of the impact of Adam’s fall, saw a split between Greek and Syriac writers on one hand, and Latin writers on the other. Greek²¹⁶ and Syriac²¹⁷ writers in the period consistently saw death as the consequence of Adam’s fall. This understanding meant that infants could still be seen as innocent. Given the innocence of infants, these writers spilled less ink over the issue of infant baptism and their afterlives, since it could be assumed that God would not punish the sinless.²¹⁸ This is not to say that Eastern authors were entirely unconcerned with these issues. In Cappadocia, Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335-395 CE) wrote an entire treatise on the death of infants, which dealt mostly with the problem of theodicy. In it, he hit upon a new difficulty: if infants haven’t had the opportunity to do good or evil, can they receive the same reward as those who have struggled to live a moral life? He ultimately concluded that infants, who should be classed as neither good nor evil, will have the opportunity after death to grow to know God and eventually “receive the full reward.”²¹⁹ The baptismal status of infants and the matter of Adam’s fall are both irrelevant in his arguments.

Gregory of Nazianzus (also from Cappadocia, c. 329-390 CE) argued that it is good for a dying infant to be sanctified through baptism but didn’t seem to argue that the child will be

²¹⁵ Ivanovska, “Baptized Infants and Pagan Rituals,” 47.

²¹⁶ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 81.

²¹⁷ Ute Possekel, “Aho Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem*. Gorgias Dissertations, Near Eastern Studies 1. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002. Pp. 480 + xxii. Paper, \$65.00,” *Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies* 6.1 (2003), <https://hugoye.bethmardutho.org/article/hv6n1prpossekel>.

²¹⁸ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 73.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 73-76.

punished if they die before baptism. Furthermore, he encouraged parents of healthy children to delay baptism until they are three, so that “they are able to listen and to answer something about the mystery.”²²⁰ John Chrysostom, who wrote extensively about the rearing and nature of children, supported infant baptism but explicitly denied that infants had sinned. Instead, he argued that baptism grants a number of gifts beyond forgiveness, which parents should give their children through baptism. He followed the consensus among Greek and Syriac writers that Adam’s fall led to mortality, which allows for the belief that infants are born without sin.²²¹

It is only with the argument in the early 5th century between Augustine of Hippo (354 – 430 CE) and the Pelagians that a theological challenge to the innocence of infants was proposed. The Pelagian stance contended that Adam’s fall influenced all of humanity in that it passed on an example of sin, rejecting the concept of the transmission of original sin onto all people. This was based in a strong belief in free will and that one must make a choice in order to sin. Infants, lacking reason, are born without sin and cannot sin until they gain the ability to choose to do so. If one accepts the concept of original sin, they contended, one accepts that God is unjust, since that would mean that God condemned unbaptized infants to hell because of something outside their control.²²²

Augustine’s understanding of the impact of Adam’s fall on infants went beyond what authors like Cyprian and Origen had asserted. Infants were not just tainted by death through Adam, they were guilty of his sin. On account of this sin, “they are held captive under the power of the devil” and are in danger of eternal damnation.²²³ It is only through baptism that they can

²²⁰ Everett Ferguson, “Exhortations to Baptism in the Cappadocians,” in *The Early Church at Work and Worship, Vol II: Volume 2: Catechesis, Baptism, Eschatology, and Martyrdom* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2014): 105.

²²¹ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 80.

²²² Ibid., 98-99.

²²³ Ibid., 99-100.

be saved. Thus, Christian parents have an obligation to sponsor their child's baptism. It is through their faith, rather than that of the child, who is incapable of understanding or consenting to it, that their child is redeemed.²²⁴ In his view, it is the Pelagians who present an unjust God, for their beliefs imply that God inflicts suffering on sinless children, who don't deserve it.²²⁵ His understanding of the personal sins of infants is complicated. On one hand, he declared that "it will not take a great effort to refute those who say the little ones are baptized in order to be forgiven the personal sin which they have contracted in this life," since they lack the capacity for reason needed to choose sinful acts.²²⁶ This assertion is, on the other hand, undermined by how he portrayed infants elsewhere. Infants, like the rest of humanity, are sinful by nature in his view, only differentiated by their physical inability to hurt others. He portrayed babies as greedy for milk, jealous when other infants are fed, wrathful when denied,²²⁷ and resistant to the grace of God when they fuss during baptism.²²⁸ Since they lack speech, it is impossible to scold infants for this behavior, but these sins anticipate and are on par with those of adults.²²⁹ In Augustine's view, if infants are free of personal sin, it's not through lack of trying but through their physical weakness.

The idea that unbaptized infants deserved the suffering they underwent in the living world and in hell was difficult for many people to accept. Even Augustine struggled with it—in a letter to Jerome (c. 342-420 CE), he asked, "What kind of justice is it that so many thousands of souls should be damned because they departed from their bodies by death in infancy, without the grace of the Christian sacrament...when He [God] certainly knew that each one of them by no

²²⁴ Ivanovska, "Baptized Infants and Pagan Rituals," 62-63.

²²⁵ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 100.

²²⁶ Ivanovska, "Baptized Infants and Pagan Rituals," 67.

²²⁷ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 91.

²²⁸ Ivanovska, "Baptized Infants and Pagan Rituals," 63.

²²⁹ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 90.

fault of its own would leave the body without the baptism of Christ?"²³⁰ In a later sermon, he said "I cannot find a satisfactory and worthy explanation" to this question.²³¹ He consistently saw children as less accountable for their sins than adults and criticized parents and other adults for harshly punishing children for behavior that the adults engage in as well.²³² Nonetheless, he ultimately maintained his belief in the doctrine of original sin and the damnation of unbaptized infants, declaring it to be a mystery of God beyond his ability to understand.²³³ Greek and Syriac writers had less difficulty with the issue, since they barely participated in the Pelagian controversy. Only one Greek author, to our knowledge, directly dealt with it—Theodore of Mopsuestia wrote a mostly-lost treatise (preserved partially in Greek and Syriac) against the Augustinian position, arguing for the importance of free will in sin.²³⁴ Outside Augustine's sphere of influence, the interpretation that Adam's fall resulted in death, rather than original sin, maintained dominance, as did the assumption of infants' innocence.

The Moral Status of Adults and Children

While the topic of the moral relationship between adults and children is less explicitly addressed than the Holy Innocents and infant baptism, it is the issue that most clearly reveals the different ways that children as theological subjects were imagined. The early Christian writers who dealt the most extensively with parenting were John Chrysostom in *De Inani Gloria*, a treatise on the subject, and Jerome, in a letter to his supporter Laeta on how to bring up her

²³⁰ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 102.

²³¹ Ibid., 102.

²³² Aasgaard, Reidar, "Childhood in 400 CE: Jerome, John Chrysostom, and Augustin on children and their formation," in *Childhood in History: Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Reidar Aasgaard, Cornelia B. Horn, and Oana Maria Cojocaru (New York, NY: Routledge, 2018): 166.

²³³ Ibid., 102.

²³⁴ Nestor Kavvadas, "An Eastern View: Theodore of Mopsuestia's Against the Defenders of Original Sin," in *Grace for Grace*, ed. Hwang Alexander Y., Matz Brian J., and Casiday Augustine (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2014), 271-272.

daughter Paula.²³⁵ Both authors emphasized the moral obligation of parents to raise their children as Christians and protect them from negative influences. Chrysostom was particularly forceful, saying, “The greatest sin of all, the absolute height of wickedness is to neglects one’s children...To sharpen a sword, take it in hand, and plunge it into the very throat of one’s child is not so terrible as to destroy and corrupt their souls.”²³⁶ For him, a person’s salvation is dependent on both their own actions and the “the virtue of those for whom we are responsible.”²³⁷ To aid parents in this task, he developed the metaphor of the child as a city, whose senses are gates through which “thoughts are corrupted or rightly guided.”²³⁸ He explained what each sense must be kept from and exposed to, from avoiding perfume to the order in which children should read stories from the Bible.²³⁹ Besides the child as a city, his other favored metaphor for parenting was that of the sculpture. Parents are like artists, working day by day to polish the positive qualities and rub out flaws from the raw material of their child’s soul. Through this process, they uncover and increase the weak image of God the child is born with.²⁴⁰ Chrysostom, as mentioned earlier, believed children were born without sins, but this sinlessness didn’t protect them for long. Children were innocent, but more importantly, they were formless and thus vulnerable. Without their parents’ constant moral supervision, they would become sinful as a result of the negative influences of the world.

Jerome’s letter shares many core beliefs with Chrysostom. Writing to a mother who dedicated her daughter to a life of virginity and asceticism before her birth, his advice advocated

²³⁵ Aasgaard, “Children in 400 CE,” 157-158.

²³⁶ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 165.

²³⁷ Ibid., 166.

²³⁸ Aasgaard, “Children in 400 CE,” 168.

²³⁹ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 194.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 168-169.

for even stricter control than Chrysostom, possibly due to the child's special status.²⁴¹ He told Laeta to carefully direct Paula's life. From her clothing (dark and plain) to her food (herbs and wheaten bread) to the times when she prays, he laid out every detail of her life.²⁴² She is to be isolated from the world, never permitted to spend time with non-Christians or men from early childhood on and only occasionally allowed in public with her mother.²⁴³ He compared her to a temple, which must be kept pure from the pollution of the world. If Paula is defended and purified through isolation and ascetic practice, she will be made an ideal holy virgin.²⁴⁴

Neither author gives much consideration to the statue or the temple's volition in these matters. For both of them, children are physically and morally shaped by their parents. Their actions are a reflection of their parents, who receive the results of those actions, both good and bad. They are not morally autonomous beings, but extensions of their parents' morality, still being made into full people by them. Given what is at stake for the parents—their own salvation and the salvation of their child—it is vital that they devote themselves to the task of sculpting a Christian adult out of the formless soul of a child.

While Augustine seems to have ultimately advocated for a similar style of parenting, his understanding of the moral relationship between adults and children differs somewhat from those discussed earlier. Unlike Jerome and Chrysostom, Augustine's discussion of children and adults doesn't come from a work directly dealing with parenting. Rather, it must be gleaned from his *Confessions*, which include the autobiographical story of his childhood, and several other small works.²⁴⁵ All three authors agreed that children are created in the image of God and thus have an

²⁴¹ Aasgaard, "Children in 400 CE," 165.

²⁴² Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 185-186.

²⁴³ Ibid., 184-185.

²⁴⁴ Aasgaard, "Children in 400 CE," 167.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 158.

equal share in humanity as adults. This shared nature, however, is used in radically different ways by the authors. For Jerome and Chrysostom, childhood is the process of uncovering that image, of shaping a child into an adult.²⁴⁶ For Augustine, children are moral agents from birth, able to sin just like adults. Unlike the passively molded children of the former writers, children, according to Augustine, are active participants in the world, whose sins are different from adults only in that their lack of reason makes them less accountable.²⁴⁷ This led him to criticize the harsh physical punishment he received as a child at the hands of adults who committed the same sins as him, but with more responsibility.²⁴⁸ At the same time, he believed that parents have an obligation to raise their children as good Christians²⁴⁹ and that physical punishment is an essential part of that process.²⁵⁰ Augustine is ultimately left in a strange place: while he sees it as hypocritical for adults to beat children for sins they are guilty of, he also stands by the necessity of correcting misbehavior and disobedience in children with harsh discipline.²⁵¹ While he depicted children as having more agency in their moral lives than Chrysostom and Jerome, his portrayal of the relationship between parents and children did not challenge their belief that children must be made into moral beings through the discipline of their parents.

This model of children as morally formed by adults is not the only understanding found in early Christian writers. A number of them presented children, particularly infants, as moral examples for adults. Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215 CE) is perhaps the most committed

²⁴⁶ Aasgaard, “Children in 400 CE,” 167170.

²⁴⁷ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 90.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 200.

²⁴⁹ Aasgaard, “Children in 400 CE,” 165-166.

²⁵⁰ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 200.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 200-201. It is worth noting that Augustine’s strongest exhortations to fathers to physically punish their children, such as “a father shows kindness by beating, by beating his son shows him mercy,” are specifically in relation to teenage boys who failed to behave as responsible heirs. While he is not explicit about it, he seems to imply that younger children can be disciplined less harshly. Regardless, he assumes that parents can and should discipline their children into good behavior and mainly denounces the beatings he received as a child on the basis of hypocrisy, while still believing he had deserved punishment.

advocate of this view. Throughout his writings, he often emphasized that children are characterized by “gentleness...and simplicity of mind...and innocence,” which he viewed as the qualities most favored by God.²⁵² It is these qualities, along with their obedience and indifference to status and wealth, that Christian adults should embody.²⁵³ He developed the metaphor of Christians as the children of God beyond describing a relationship to implying a range of qualities and behaviors.²⁵⁴ He attempted to undermine the common contemporary association between children and a lack of reason, which would imply that Christians, as children of God, are foolish,²⁵⁵ emphasizing instead the link between the Greek words for child ($\piοις$) and “training ($\piαιδεία$) and discipline ($\piαιδαγωγία$).”²⁵⁶ Believers are like children not in their lack of knowledge, but in their continual pursuit of wisdom.

This positive moral status of children can also be seen in his statements about the spiritual equality of all humans. In chapter eight of the fourth book of his *Stromata*, which deals with martyrdom, he stated that “it is possible for any person who lives according to our customs to pursue wisdom ($\phiιλοσοφεῖν$) without schooling, whether they might be a barbarian...or a slave or an elder or a child or a woman. For temperance is shared in common for all humans that prefer it for themselves. And it has been acknowledged by us that each sort ($\gammaένος$) has the same nature and the same virtue.”²⁵⁷ Clement affirms the capacity of these disadvantaged groups for

²⁵² Hägg, “Aspects of childhood,” 130.

²⁵³ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 60-61.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 60.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 61.

²⁵⁶ Clement of Alexandria, “The Paedagogus (Book I)” in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2., trans. William Wilson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02091.htm>.

²⁵⁷ Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata: Book IV,” 4.8.58.3-4.8.59.1. Translation my own.

intelligence and self-control, seeing them as fully human as a free adult citizen man.²⁵⁸ Later, he stated that:

... the free, though threatened with death at a tyrant's hands, ... will by no means abandon piety; nor will the wife who dwells with a wicked husband, or the son if he has a bad father, or the slave if he has a bad master, ever fail in holding nobly to virtue. But as it is noble for a man to die for virtue, and for liberty, and for himself, so also is it for a woman. For this is not peculiar to the nature of males, but to the nature of the good. Accordingly, both the old man, the young, and the slave will live faithfully, and if need be die... So we know that both children, and women, and slaves have often, against their fathers', and masters', and husbands' will, reached the highest degree of excellence.²⁵⁹

This goes far beyond Augustine's view that children are morally autonomous enough to sin: to Clement, children are capable of achieving the greatest virtue *even if their parents are not virtuous*. These are not the passive statues of John Chrysostom or the temples of Jerome. Through Christianity, according to Clement, children are capable of independently becoming moral beings.

While Clement developed this view of children as moral models for adults the most extensively, he was not the only writer to do so. Origen also presented children as positive examples for adults because of their lack of desires, especially sexual ones.²⁶⁰ Unlike Clement,

²⁵⁸ Of course, this shared humanity only goes so far. He focuses much of this chapter, as well as chapter 19, on the basic shared nature of men and women, but is sure to reaffirm that "as there is difference as respects the peculiar construction of the body, [women are] destined for child-bearing and housekeeping" and thus "women are therefore to philosophize equally with men, though the males are preferable at everything, unless they have become effeminate." While he is not explicit about this, this seems to imply a preference for adults over children as well.

²⁵⁹ Clement of Alexandria, "The Paedagogus (Book I)."

²⁶⁰ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 63-64.

he specified a limit for when desire develops in children and they, presumably, stop being role models. He associated the acquisition of desire with that of reason (which is in turn associated with the ability to speak), around three or four years old.²⁶¹ A number of Syriac writers also appeal to this idea. In the *Book of Steps* (mid to late 4th century), the anonymous author stated, paraphrasing and interpreting Matthew 18:3, that “unless you become like these children again, you will not be as you were before you sinned, in that purity in which I created your father (Adam) before he transgressed my commands.”²⁶² Children are, as the author saw them, without desire or shame and are unable to quarrel or judge others, and therefore must be imitated. This author also acknowledged that children are not perfect and advised readers to avoid children’s immature behavior.²⁶³ In his homily, “On Children Who Pass Away,” Jacob of Serugh (c. 451-521 CE) expounded on the virtue of children. He celebrated their death, since it means that they reached paradise without sinning or having to struggle to avoid sin.²⁶⁴ He presented them as at least on par with adult ascetics, who devote their entire life to virtuous labor. After all, in striving for virtue, the ascetic “either conquers or fails to conquer...and if he conquers, he becomes like a child who did not sully himself.”²⁶⁵ He did not find issue with the problem Gregory of Nyssa hit upon regarding if children, who had done nothing, deserved paradise. To Jacob, it is their innocence, like the prelapsarian Adam and Eve, that makes them deserve their reward. There is no higher spiritual achievement than to be like a child.

²⁶¹ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 65.

²⁶² Alison Salvesen, “Without shame or desire: the pronouncements of Jesus on children and the kingdom, and early Syriac attitudes to childhood,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 59.3 (2006): 316.

²⁶³ Ibid., 317-318.

²⁶⁴ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 195.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., 196.

Conclusion

The breadth of views on children can be seen in how different patristic writers interpreted Jesus's pronouncement to his followers that "unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven."²⁶⁶ According to Augustine, "it was only the small stature of a child that you mentioned with approval as a symbol of humanity, O Lord our king, when you declared that of such is the kingdom of heaven."²⁶⁷ For him, the only thing worth imitating in a child was their physical incapability of hurting another. On the other end of the spectrum, Clement wrote that "those words are not a figure of speech for some kind of rebirth, but recommend the simplicity of childhood for our imitation."²⁶⁸ He made it clear that adult Christians should embody certain characteristics of actual children. The theological role of children was uncertain in early Christianity. Depending on time, place, and author, they could be presented as morally autonomous or molded by their parents' morality, purely innocent or born sinful. This unstable status and the debates surrounding these issues were reflected in the tropes of child martyrdoms generally and in the different stories of Cyricus and Julitta in particular.

²⁶⁶ Matt 18:3 (RSV).

²⁶⁷ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 94.

²⁶⁸ Hägg, "Aspects of childhood," 129.

CHAPTER 3

CHILDREN, MOTHERS, AND MARTYRDOM

But as it is noble for a man to die for virtue...so also is it for a woman. For this is not peculiar to the nature of males, but to the nature of the good. Accordingly, both the old man, the young, and the slave will live faithfully, and, if need be, die.

—Clement of Alexandria²⁶⁹

Cyricus is far from the only child martyr found in early Christian hagiography. In both Version 1 and Version 2, his story features the same topoi and core themes as a number of other martyrdoms, which record the torture and death of children in the name of Christ. Like the larger theological debates over the moral nature and capacity of children seen in the last chapter, the martyrdoms of children do not depict children in a single way and reflect the contentious, unsettled status of children in the differing trends in their martyr narratives.

Martyrdoms as Literary Objects

The historicity and extent of the Roman persecutions of early Christians is a debate best left to others.²⁷⁰ Regardless, texts recording and valorizing Christians dying for their faith emerged as early as the mid second century CE.²⁷¹ Over the centuries, thousands of accounts of martyrs were written in dozens of languages, ranging from those “based almost word-for-word on the exchanges between the Roman magistrate and the martyr in the courtroom...[to] purely legendary and fantastical Passions.”²⁷² Attempting to understand where each account falls on this spectrum and unpack their value as records of historical events is a difficult and crucial task,

²⁶⁹ Clement of Alexandria, “The Stromata: Book IV,” in *Ante Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2*, trans. William Wilson, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/02104.htm>.

²⁷⁰ See “The Roman Persecutions” in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Christian Martyrdom*, ed. Paul Middleton (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020), 33-47, for a recent evaluation of the evidence.

²⁷¹ Peter Gemeinhardt and Johan Leemans, eds., *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity: History and Discourse, Tradition and Religious Identity* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, Inc., 2012), 1.

²⁷² Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 504-505.

which continues to challenge scholars.²⁷³ The different stories of Cyricus and Julitta are strong examples of this very problem, with relatively mundane and highly elaborate versions emerging from around the same time and location, telling entirely different accounts of the same saints. This thesis is focused on the stories as literary objects, which reflect the cultural and generic milieu they were produced in and aim to influence their audience in specific ways. Thus, I will make no claims about the historicity of either version. Whether or not the events described in these texts literally happened, the ways their authors choose to frame, structure, and describe them are a result of their goals and biases, revealing underlying tensions and cultural assumptions.

The aim of martyrdoms seems obvious—to celebrate the acts of martyrs and encourage readers to behave similarly if faced with persecution. However, martyrdoms, including the earliest texts, went beyond this, striving to define the behavior and identity of a Christian. This began as constructing the individual and their community in contrast and opposition to the non-Christian societies they lived in.²⁷⁴ However, the majority of martyrdoms were written after the persecutions had ceased, in periods when Christianity was the dominant religion in its societies, including the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta*.²⁷⁵ These works, addressed to audiences that would almost certainly never face persecution for their Christianity, function on a number of levels: they inspire respect and awe for God and the saints through depicting their miracles,²⁷⁶ they advance the author's theological stances through the martyrs' speeches,²⁷⁷ they promote the

²⁷³ Gemeinhardt and Leemans, *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity*, 4.

²⁷⁴ Gail P.C. Streete, "Tough Mothers and Female Contenders: Perpetua and Felicitas," in *Redeemed Bodies: Women Martyrs in Early Christianity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 49.

²⁷⁵ Middleton ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion*, 154-155.

²⁷⁶ Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 510.

²⁷⁷ Gemeinhardt and Leemans, *Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity*, 5.

cult of the saint, and they provide the audience with entertainment through a religious medium.²⁷⁸

The aspect this thesis focuses the most on, however, is how martyrdoms model behavior for the audience. While they would not undergo martyrdom, members of the audience would endure other hardships. Martyrdoms demonstrated how Christians ought to behave, particularly in times of crisis. They also modeled how specific portions of the audience should fulfill their social roles. Martyrdoms and other hagiographic works were frequently read aloud in church during celebrations of saints. The audience of martyrdoms was thus often not just literate monastics and priests but would include women and children from various backgrounds.²⁷⁹ The martyrdoms of women and children often explicitly or implicitly encouraged their audience to imitate the martyrs in enduring “the quotidian woes of married and family life”²⁸⁰ just as their predecessors endured torture and execution.

Theorizing the Martyrdoms of Children

Various scholars have proposed categories or subgenres of martyr narratives, based on perceived historicity, literary form and style, and/or identity of the martyr.²⁸¹ This chapter will focus on the last framework, examining the martyrdoms of children as a subgenre, whose specific topoi distinguish them from the martyrdoms of adults, reflect contemporary attitudes towards children, and advance their didactic goals. This approach is indebted to the ongoing scholarship on the martyrdoms of women, which have been dealt with in far greater depth than

²⁷⁸ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 5.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 266.

²⁸⁰ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 136.

²⁸¹ Middleton ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion*, 164-166.

child martyrs. I am relying in particular on the “compulsory masculinisation thesis”²⁸² and critiques of the same. This thesis argues that early Christian martyrdoms “constructed and promoted a specific identity...centered on the performance of masculinity”²⁸³ in contrast to their less masculine persecutors. To maintain this, martyrs “on the lower end of the continuum of masculinity—old men, young men, women, and slaves”²⁸⁴ were masculinized by the narrative tools of the martyrdoms, leaving the ambiguity of a “manly woman” unresolved. Recent critiques of this approach have focused on this ambiguity, pointing out how the female identity of these “manly women” martyrs is underlined in and entwined with masculinising narratives. The intention of these martyrdoms, therefore, is not to show how Christianity transforms the female martyr into “a Roman man, but that Christianity must be true because of the scandal... [of a] female body that transcends its gender while remaining, necessarily and paradoxically, coextensive with it.”²⁸⁵ Through this coincidence of opposites, the martyr imitates Christ, whose experience of “dishonor, filth, and flesh...was necessary for faith and restoration.”²⁸⁶

While Stephanie Cobb includes youth as one target of masculinization in martyrdoms and Luis Salés examines the intersecting dynamics of gender and age in the martyrdom of Febronia of Nisibis,²⁸⁷ a full examination of how this thesis and its criticism can be applied to the martyrdoms of children has not yet, to my knowledge, been undertaken. Children, like women, are ‘unmen’, constructed as an ‘Other’ to the free adult male *vir*.²⁸⁸ This shared status can

²⁸² Luis Salés, “Queerly Christified Bodies: Women Martyrs, Christification, and the Compulsory Masculinisation Thesis,” in *The Journal of Early Christian History* (forthcoming, 2021), 1.

²⁸³ Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 62.

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 61.

²⁸⁵ Salés, “Queerly Christified Bodies,” 12.

²⁸⁶ Charlotte Radler, “The Dirty Physician: Necessary Dishonor and Fleshly Solidarity in Tertullian’s Writings,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 63, no. 4 (2009): 365.

²⁸⁷ Salés, “Queerly Christified Bodies,” 17-18.

²⁸⁸ Jonathan Walters, “Invading the Roman Body: Manliness and Impenetrability in Roman Thought,” in *Roman Sexualities*, ed. Judith P. Hallett and Marilyn B. Skinner (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997): 32.

sometimes obscure the differences in how ‘woman’ and ‘child’ are defined. Children were not only below men, they were also below adult women and, in some situations, adult slaves.

Freeborn male children existed in a particularly ambiguous position, given that, unlike women, girls, and slaves, they had the potential to become a *vir*. This potential, however, was not certain. There was continual anxiety that “the male body [could] collapse back into a state of primary undifferentiation,” if male children were not properly molded into adult men.²⁸⁹ It was the responsibility of all the adults in the child’s life to keep him from feminizing influences and discipline him when his behavior deviated from what was expected. In particular, the paedogogus was a slave who brought upper-class boys to school, stayed with them during the lessons, and ensured they returned home safely. It was his responsibility to guard their wards from corrupting forces and to inflict corporal punishment on him if deemed necessary. Thus, most free, land-owning adult Roman men, who “[looked] at the world from a position of unchallenged dominance,”²⁹⁰ reached that status only after undergoing a period of dependence on and discipline from his father, mother, wetnurse, and paedogogus. To be a child was not necessarily the permanent state of subjugation that was being a woman. It was, however, a state that was permitted precious little autonomy, even for male children in relation to adult women.

While there is significant overlap in how martyrdoms depict women and children, the martyrdoms of children cannot be neatly subsumed into the compulsory masculinisation thesis or its critiques. Like many women martyrs, a number of child martyrs imitate Christ through the coincidence of opposites. The opposites hinge on two of the cultural assumptions about the nature of children explored in the previous chapter; namely, that children are incapable of rational speech and children are physically and morally dependent on their parents. Their mature

²⁸⁹ Brown, *The Body and Society*, 11.

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 9.

speeches, capacity to endure torture, and independence from their parents is contrasted with mentions of their physical youth and reactions and statements of onlookers, who give voice to cultural assumptions about children. This coexistence of youth and behavior seen as antithetical to youth lies at the core of these martyrdoms, both equating the children to Jesus and demonstrating the power of God, through which they are able to accomplish that which is assumed to be impossible.

This is not, however, the only role children play in martyrdoms. Frequently, the coincidence of opposites in the child martyr is of secondary importance to that of their mother, who simultaneously loves and sacrifices her child. These child martyrs function as extensions of their mothers, who encourage them through torture and death and receive rewards equivalent to martyrs, whether or not they die. While narratives that focus on the mother use similar strategies to contrast the child's youth and maturity, their maturity is portrayed less as a miraculous triumph over the assumed irrationality and dependency of children and more as the result of ideal Christian motherhood, which raises children in such perfect faith that they overcome their nature. Unlike martyr mothers like Perpetua and Felicitas, who overcome the assumed weakness of motherhood through their willingness to leave behind their children in their commitment to martyrdom,²⁹¹ these mothers of martyrs achieve sanctity through their maternal love, which prioritizes the spiritual success of their children above all else.

Topoi of Child Martyrs

In their martyrdoms, children are as able to make complex theological arguments, recite scripture, and endure torture as adults, to the astonishment of judges and onlookers. The *puer*

²⁹¹ Streete, "Tough Mothers and Female Contenders," 65-66.

senex (elderly child) topos, where a child demonstrates the wisdom and maturity of an elder, highlights the exceptional nature of the child through their precocious ability to reason. This topos has precursors in Roman literature, where children are praised for their mature conduct and the biographies of remarkable people report their early wisdom as an omen of their future greatness.²⁹² Christian hagiography, especially Syriac hagiography, frequently includes long accounts of a holy person's childhood, where their pious and ascetic behavior predicts their later sanctity.²⁹³

In the martyrdoms of children, this maturity is primarily demonstrated through their capacity for eloquent speech. The capacity for speech and reason were closely connected in early Christian thought, as in Late Antique cultures more generally.²⁹⁴ In both Greek (*λόγος*)²⁹⁵ and Syriac (ܐܼܠܼܾ),²⁹⁶ one word refers to both speech and reason. The lack of these intertwined abilities is one of the core cultural assumptions about children, which complicates the child martyrs' legitimate status. As Augustine said, “it is not the suffering but the cause” that sets martyrs apart from other violent deaths.²⁹⁷ For these children to be martyrs, they “had to embrace [their] death consciously, making a clear and unambiguous verbal confession of [their] faith and intent.”²⁹⁸ Could children, who lacked the capacity for *λόγος*, truly be martyrs?

Roman prosecutors echoed similar concerns, since Roman law allowed for lesser punishments and pardons on account of youth. In one early example, Pliny the Younger wrote to

²⁹² Teresa C. Carp, "'Puer Senex' in Roman and Medieval Thought," *Latomus* 39, no. 3 (1980): 736-39.

²⁹³ Cornelia B. Horn, "Children in Oriental Christian and Greek hagiography from the early Byzantine world (ca. 400-800 CE)" in *Childhood in History: Perceptions of Children in the Ancient and Medieval Worlds*, ed. Reidar Aasgaard, Cornelia B. Horn, and Oana Maria Cojocaru (Routledge: New York, 2018): 181.

²⁹⁴ Maria E. Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 182.

²⁹⁵ Liddell & Scott, s.v. λόγος.

²⁹⁶ Margoliouth, s.v.

²⁹⁷ Robert Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 184.

²⁹⁸ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 181.

Trajan in 112 CE to ask if he, as a governor, ought to prosecute very young Christians as severely as older ones.²⁹⁹ This reluctance is seen in many child martyrdoms, where judges frequently impose lighter sentences on children, decline to persecute them along with their families, and implore them to renounce their faith.³⁰⁰ Even if the children could speak well, this did not necessarily prove their capacity for *independent* choice. After all, a child was assumed to be like a “wax tablet,” to borrow Plato’s phrase.³⁰¹ They could not be considered wholly responsible for their actions, which were shaped by their parents and education rather than their personal moral beliefs. This attitude is seen in a number of child martyrdoms, where the interrogator, astonished by the child’s eloquence, asks them who taught them to speak like this, unable to imagine that a child could behave like this on their own.³⁰² The content and form of the child martyrs’ speech are used preemptively to defend the legitimacy of the martyrdom against cultural assumptions that would hold the categories of ‘child’ and ‘martyr’ as inherently incompatible.

The capacity for complex, organized speech is a near-ubiquitous feature of the martyrdoms of children,³⁰³ from the three-year-old Talyā³⁰⁴ to the fifteen-year-old Philotheus.³⁰⁵ To give one example from the Version 1 Syriac *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta*, when the governor declares that he will live if he submits, Cyricus responds, “This life of yours is the cause of death, but that death, which you declare we will die, is eternal life. Moreover, that

²⁹⁹ Pliny, “Letters 10.96-10.97,” trans. James J. O’Donnell, accessed 7 October 2020, <https://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/pliny.html>.

³⁰⁰ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 21-23.

³⁰¹ Odd Magne Bakke, “Upbringing of Children,” 146.

³⁰² See Barulas (Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, trans. H. J. Thomson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 275), Talyā (Horn, “Children and Violence,” 315-316), and Cyricus in the Syriac martyrdom (Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 257).

³⁰³ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 17. The version of Cyricus found in *The Golden Legend*, who cries, bites, and repeats what his mother says, is a rare exception (Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324).

³⁰⁴ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 316-317.

³⁰⁵ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 337-338.

which the prophet³⁰⁶ said is true, ‘Woe to those who make the sweet bitter and the bitter sweet!’³⁰⁷ There are none of the expected markers of a three-year-old’s speech in this clever turn of phrase: he can quote scripture, utilize chiasmus, and advance Christian doctrine with as much sophistication as any adult martyr. Indeed, other than explicit references to his age, there is nothing in any of Cyricus’s speech throughout the martyrdom that would reveal that he is a small child. His confession of faith is equally eloquent: “I confess and give praise to You, God of heaven, and venerate You with all my soul and all my faith...and I praise Your greatness and exalt Your glorious divinity, because You have deemed me worthy to be condemned in this world and not receive sufferings in the world to come.”³⁰⁸

By giving children the ability to explain their choice to die clearly, these texts avoid the worry that someone without speech and reason cannot be a true martyr. They deal with the issue of children being unduly influenced by adults by appealing to the power of God. Cyricus³⁰⁹ and Talyā³¹⁰ both attribute their wisdom to the Holy Spirit rather than their parents. Talyā’s case is particularly noteworthy: he states that his name, ~~ܒܲܪ~~, which means ‘child’ in Syriac,³¹¹ was given to him by the Holy Spirit.³¹² Even though his parents are Christians, Talyā still defines himself first and foremost as a child of God. He is dependent on and loyal to God, rather than his mortal parents, and, in turn, God educates, encourages, and even names him. Barulas³¹³ is less direct in his connection, saying he learned to confess Christ from his mother, who was

³⁰⁶ Isaiah 5:20.

³⁰⁷ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 56.

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 51-52.

³⁰⁹ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 258.

³¹⁰ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 316-317.

³¹¹ Margoliouth, s.v. ~~ܒܲܪ~~.

³¹² Horn, “Children and Violence,” 317.

³¹³ Barulas is the name later given to the unnamed child martyred in *Peristephanon X*. For ease of discussion, I will refer to him as Barulas from now on (Butler, *The Lives of Saints*, <https://www.bartleby.com/210/11/182.html>).

“instructed by the Spirit.”³¹⁴ Christina of Tyre³¹⁵ and Philotheus,³¹⁶ raised by pagan parents, became Christian through the direct instruction of the Holy Spirit rather than any mortal teacher. These texts explicitly connect the wisdom and eloquence of child martyrs to God’s influence, which explains their unusual behavior and makes it clear they are not simply acting on their parents’ instructions.

This maturity extends beyond their speech. Outside of the lack of λόγος and the dependency on adults, children were frequently assumed to be physically and morally weak, prone to fearfulness and changeability.³¹⁷ Their capacity to endure torture without faltering, which they share with most martyrs, is treated as particularly exceptional in children because of their assumed innate weakness. Along with their steadfastness, child martyrs are regularly described with the same stock metaphors as adult martyrs. Both Agnes, a twelve-year-old,³¹⁸ and Christina of Tyre, eleven,³¹⁹ describe themselves as a “bride of Christ,” while Ṭalyā,³²⁰ Sophia’s daughters,³²¹ and Philotheus³²² are portrayed as “athletes” and “soldiers of Christ,” common topoi in martyrdoms of adults. This is sometimes contrasted with the childish behavior of the judge: he reacts with anger to the martyr’s taunts,³²³ he is tricked by the martyr,³²⁴ and he loses his ability to speak.³²⁵ By portraying children as speaking and behaving like adults, these

³¹⁴ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 275.

³¹⁵ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 386.

³¹⁶ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 326-327.

³¹⁷ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 81-82.

³¹⁸ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 343.

³¹⁹ “St. Christina of Tyre, Martyr,” Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America, <http://ww1.antiochian.org/node/19011>.

³²⁰ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 320.

³²¹ Lewis, trans., *Select Narratives*, 170.

³²² Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 344.

³²³ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 263.

³²⁴ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 317.

³²⁵ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 341 and Horn, “Children and Violence in Syriac Sources,” 322.

martyrdoms establish them as legitimate martyrs and demonstrate the power of God through the reversal of the ‘natural’ hierarchy between adults and children.

Despite their *puer senex* (elderly child) speech and behavior, these martyrdoms never lose sight of the true age of the children through references to their physical youth and the reactions of the spectators. This begins with the first words their interrogators say to them. They are addressed as “beautiful girls” (بَنِيَّةٍ، بَنِيَّةٍ، بَنِيَّةٍ)،³²⁶ “little boy” (*pusio*),³²⁷ and “dear child” (بَنِيَّةٍ، بَنِيَّةٍ، بَنِيَّةٍ)³²⁸ by those who will soon torture them. Frequently, the interrogators are initially most concerned with learning which adult taught the children to proclaim themselves to be Christian and to mock idols, as happens to Cyricus,³²⁹ Barulas,³³⁰ and Talyā.³³¹ Many of the persecutors seem uncomfortable with inflicting punishment on a child. The judge is at first reluctant to hurt Barulas, since “it was not fitting that the law should lay violent hands on such innocent and tender years.”³³² Irenê, the youngest protagonist in the *Martyrdom of Saints Agapê, Irenê, and Chionê at Saloniki*, is put in prison with other young Christian women while the older women were burned alive, in hopes that she would recant.³³³ The governor Maximian implores Eulalia, a “fierce little girl” (*torva puellula*),³³⁴ to consider the grief she will cause her family and the earthly delights she will not experience by “dying in the bloom of youth.”³³⁵ In some group martyrdoms, a child, initially excluded from torture or execution because of their youth, is

³²⁷ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 274.

³²⁸ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 257.

³²⁹ Ibid., 258.

³³⁰ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 275.

³³¹ Horn, "Children and Violence," 316.

³³² Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 275.

³³³ Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christians*

Herbert M.
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eventually punished after they insist that they are Christian and should be included with their elders.³³⁶ The sentences for these children are frequently reduced from execution to beatings and imprisonment.³³⁷

In a number of these martyrdoms, the persecutor positions himself as a father figure to the child martyr. In *The Golden Legend*'s Version 2 account of Cyricus and Julitta, the governor holds Cyricus on his lap and “tried to calm him with kisses and other endearments” while his mother is beaten.³³⁸ Diocletian refers to Philotheus multiple times as his son, kisses his head,³³⁹ and begs him to sacrifice to the idols “since I love you more than your parents [loved you].”³⁴⁰ Hadrian tells the daughters of Sophia to “be persuaded by me, as by a father, and sacrifice to our lords, the gods.”³⁴¹ Similarly, many of the persecutors offer to adopt the child or give them a great inheritance if they will renounce their faith. Hadrian offers to immediately adopt Sophia’s daughters if they sacrifice.³⁴² Diocletian says he will treat the fourteen-year-old Pancras, whose father recently died, as his own son.³⁴³ The governor repeatedly promises that Talyā will inherit his kingdom if he submits.³⁴⁴ Cyricus is offered gold, silver, and that he “will be second to the king.”³⁴⁵ Diocletian announces he will make Philotheus a patrician if he will sacrifice.³⁴⁶

Other observers emphasize the youthfulness of the martyrs. When Philotheus saves the general Romanus from demonic possession, he declares that “This boy, who is not yet fifteen

³³⁶ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 21.

³³⁷ Ibid., 21.

³³⁸ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

³³⁹ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 342.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 348.

³⁴¹ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 172.

³⁴² Ibid., 172.

³⁴³ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 311.

³⁴⁴ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 320.

³⁴⁵ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 257.

³⁴⁶ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 348.

years old,” can perform more powerful miracles than any other Christians he has seen.³⁴⁷ When the crowd “saw the tender age and the beauty of [Pistis, Sophia’s daughter,] who received these tortures...they all wailed” and declared, “These maidens have been judged iniquitously. The punishments of the Emperor are bitter, and his commandments are unjust.”³⁴⁸ The blacksmith commissioned by Alexander to create torture instruments for Cyricus in the Syriac martyrdom is amazed when the three-year-old describes the torture instruments he ought to make and says, “Never have I heard knowledge such as this, not from the young and not from the old. It is impossible for me to make tools and torture devices such as this child described to me.”³⁴⁹ In the same martyrdom, a crowd of prisoners converts after they see that Cyricus is able to pray continuously, despite his young age.³⁵⁰ Even those inflicting torture on a child martyr are moved by their youth: “The menacing cheeks of the men who were lashing [Barulas] were wet with tears, for the drops flowed unbidden over their lips amid their savage growling, and there were no dry eyes even among the recorders and the ring of people and the chief men standing there.”³⁵¹ The focus on the youth of the martyr is not always so positive: when Sabina holds onto Pionius’s clothing as they are led to jail in the *Martyrdom of Pionius the Presbyter and his Companions*, the crowd mocks her, jeering at “how terrified she is that she may be weaned!”³⁵²

The youthfulness of these martyrs is further emphasized in descriptions of their physical embodiments. A five-year-old among the Martyrs of Najran makes a confession of faith “in his lisping voice.”³⁵³ Various authors portray soldiers as struggling to find a

³⁴⁷ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 345.

³⁴⁸ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 174.

³⁴⁹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 64.

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

³⁵¹ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 277.

³⁵² Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 137.

³⁵³ Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 22.

place to stab the Holy Innocents because their bodies were too small.³⁵⁴ Barulas's torturers are said to be "cutting his tender back with cruel strokes which were to draw from it more milk than blood,"³⁵⁵ graphically illustrating the fact that he is "a little one not long weaned."³⁵⁶ The image of milk replacing or mixing with blood as a sign of youth is found in several martyrdoms. When Philotheus is stabbed by two soldiers with spears, "from his sides came water and blood and milk."³⁵⁷ This depicts Philotheus in the image of Christ on the cross, when "one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water,"³⁵⁸ while also emphasizing his special status as a child martyr. When the breasts of Pistis, Sophia's twelve-year-old daughter, are cut off, the wounds "flowed with milk instead of with blood."³⁵⁹ This also happens to Christina of Tyre.³⁶⁰ This sexualized violence against a girl who is barely old enough to be married, even by Roman law, is countered by an expression of her youth and her dependence on her mother. While Barulas conceivably could still have been breastfeeding, Pistis, Christina, and Philotheus were all much too old for that. Rather, the shocking mixture of milk and blood reminds the audience of their assumed physical weakness and dependence, and of the power of God that is shown through their ability to endure, despite their youth.

³⁵⁴ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 186.

³⁵⁵ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 277.

³⁵⁶Ibid., 273.

³⁵⁷ Rogozhina, "'And from his side,'" 349.

³⁵⁸ John 19:34 (RSV).

³⁵⁹ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 173.

³⁶⁰ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 388.

The Independent Child Martyr

A further factor in these martyrdoms is the role of the parent. The presence, absence, and actions of parents in the martyrdoms of children dramatically shape their themes and intended audience. Following Cornelia Horn's proposal, these martyrdoms can be usefully categorized based on the role of the child's parents: those where the parents are not present for their child's death, those where a parent inflicts the martyrdom on their own child, and those where a parent supports the child through the martyrdom.³⁶¹ The reasons for the absence of parents vary widely. In the case of Eulalia, her mother attempts to hide her in the countryside to keep her safe from the persecutions, which her daughter circumvents by running away.³⁶² Philotheus's pagan parents convert and die before he is even arrested.³⁶³ The governor has Talyā's parents killed in an attempt to make him renounce his faith.³⁶⁴ Sometimes the parents are entirely absent: Prudentius's poem on Agnes never explains where the parents of this "young girl in her earliest years" are while she is exposed in a brothel and killed.³⁶⁵ While the exact way these children end up alone varies, there are certain through lines among them. The focus of the martyrdom is wholly on an individual, extraordinary child, who endures torture and wittily answers interrogators without hesitation or assistance. They are able to function as complete moral beings without their parents and defy all expectations their persecutors have for children.

This focus is only amplified in martyrdoms where the parents carry out the martyrdoms themselves. There is significant diversity in these stories as well, ranging from *The Children of*

³⁶¹ Cornelia B. Horn, "Raising Martyrs and Ascetics: A Diachronic Comparison of Educational Role-Models for Early Christian Children," in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix, (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009): 296-298.

³⁶² Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 145-147.

³⁶³ Rogozhina, "'And from his side,'" 29.

³⁶⁴ Horn, "Children and Violence in Syriac Sources," 319.

³⁶⁵ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 339.

Kola, where nine boys convert so they can spend more time with their Christian playmates and are stoned to death by their parents,³⁶⁶ to Christina of Tyre, who is converted by the Holy Spirit at eleven and melts her father's idols, after which he has her tortured and eventually executed.³⁶⁷ The focus of these martyrdoms is usually on how children are able to overcome the apparently natural hierarchy between children and parents through their Christian faith. When Christina's father begs her to recant, appealing to her on the basis of their familial relationship, she responds by saying she is no longer his daughter and is now a daughter of God.³⁶⁸ As Clement said, "Nor will...the son if he has a bad father...ever fail in holding nobly to virtue" and "children...have often, against their fathers'...will, reached the highest degree of excellence."³⁶⁹ Children in these martyrdoms directly challenge the assumption that children owe their parents loyalty and obedience. They contended with the very real legal power parents (particularly fathers) had over their children: *patria potestas* ("fatherly power") gave the *paterfamilias* (the head of Roman household) almost unlimited legal power over the affairs of his children, grandchildren, and wife.³⁷⁰ While abuses of this power were frowned on socially,³⁷¹ the fact remained that this power was ingrained in Roman beliefs about parent-child relationships. To defy *patria potestas* was to reject a cornerstone of Roman social life. Of course, these martyrs were not wholly rejecting the hierarchical, obligatory relationship between parent and child. Instead, they transferred *patria potestas* from their biological father to their spiritual Father. As children of

³⁶⁶ Cornelia B. Horn, "The Lives and Literary Roles of Children in Advancing Conversion to Christianity: Hagiography from the Caucasus in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Church History* 76, no. 2 (2007): 279–81.

³⁶⁷ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 186–188.

³⁶⁸ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 25.

³⁶⁹ Clement of Alexandria, "The Stromata: Book IV."

³⁷⁰ Geoffrey Nathan, *The Family in Late Antiquity*, 17.

³⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

God, they owed God the same complete obedience and loyalty they had owed their mortal father.³⁷²

In another upheaval of this hierarchy, a number of child martyrs led their non-Christian parents to become Christian, reversing the assumption that parents mold their children's moral and religious beliefs. 'Abdā da-Mšihā's father is converted to Christianity and healed of his illness after he prays for mercy at the place where he killed his son.³⁷³ Abai's father also converts after martyring his son and wife.³⁷⁴ After Behnam and Sarah are killed by their father, their mother prays to her children to cure his demonic possession. Behnam appears to her and instructs his mother to bring his father to their teacher, a monk. Once he is cured, their father converts and builds a monastery for the monk.³⁷⁵ Philotheus's parents convert after they are killed by the ox they worship as a god and resurrected by their son.³⁷⁶ The conversion of Adurhormizd, the father of Anahid, is less directly caused by his child, but his path to it begins with his daughter's refusal to give up her faith after she converts in secret.³⁷⁷ The ability of the child to surpass the parent is seen in some cases where the parents are also Christian. Origen's mother famously hid her teenage son's clothes to prevent him from joining his father, who had been imprisoned as a Christian.³⁷⁸ Eulalia's mother, who had raised her as a Christian, tried to hide her daughter from the persecutions.³⁷⁹ When Febronia, who is repeatedly portrayed as a child, despite being

³⁷² Henny Fiskå Hägg, "Aspects of childhood," 129-130.

³⁷³ Butts and Gross, *The History of the 'Slave of Christ'*, 12.

³⁷⁴ Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent et al., "Abai," in *Qadishe: A Guide to the Syriac Saints*, last modified August 17, 2016, accessed 25 December 2020, <http://syriaca.org/person/1093>.

³⁷⁵ Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, "Christian Legend in Medieval Iraq: Siblings, Sacrifice, and Sanctity in *Behnam and Sarah*," in *The Garb of Being: Embodiment and the Pursuit of Holiness in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Georgia Frank, Susan R. Holman, and Andrew S. Jacobs (New York: Fordham University Press, 2020): 193-194.

³⁷⁶ Rogozhina, "'And from his side,'" 332.

³⁷⁷ Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1987), 84-85.

³⁷⁸ Horn, "Raising Martyrs and Ascetics," 297-298.

³⁷⁹ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 145-147.

twenty,³⁸⁰ is tortured, it is her mother-figure Thomais who faints, rather than the martyr herself.³⁸¹ Children are thus not only capable of defying their parents, but of guiding them, upending the expected relationship.

In all of these, the core theme remains the same: through faith in the Christian God, these children are able to surpass cultural expectations and reach virtue equal to adults. Their accomplishments are all the more impressive because they “overcame the weakness of [their] age,” as Jerome said of Agnes.³⁸² While children likely were a part of the intended audience of martyrdom narratives,³⁸³ they were by no means the only target. Similar to how Clement presented the virtues of children as a model for adults,³⁸⁴ child martyrs function as powerful ideals for adults. Since children have achieved such things, adults have no excuse for not living a Christian life. As Augustine asks, “Are you going to say that you are not the equal of children, of young girls...or of faithful women such as St. Victoria?”³⁸⁵ By contrasting the emotional and vocal maturity of child martyrs with their physical youth and how they are perceived by others, these martyrdoms emphasize that these are both children and martyrs, “a child in years, but...old in [their] mind.”³⁸⁶ It is the coexistence of these two roles assumed to be incompatible—the martyr, who makes the rational and independent choice to die for their faith, and the child, incapable of reason and dependent on the parents—that is central to this strand of martyrdoms, where children become martyrs without adult assistance.

³⁸⁰ Salés, “Queerly Christified Bodies,” 17-18.

³⁸¹ Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 166.

³⁸² Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 18.

³⁸³ Horn, “Children and Violence,” 319.

³⁸⁴ Hägg, “Aspects of childhood,” 129-130.

³⁸⁵ Patrick M. Clark and Annie Hounsolou, “The Spirituality Of Martyrdom In St. Augustine,” in *The Spirituality of Martyrdom . . . to the Limits of Love* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 132-133.

³⁸⁶ Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 18.

The Maccabean Model

A number of martyrdoms featuring children diverge significantly from the format described above. In these, the mother of the child or children is present at the martyrdom itself. She encourages her child or children to endure torture, reminding them of the reward they will receive, and celebrates their death. She herself may be tortured and killed, but her death is of secondary importance to her witnessing the death of her child. The plot and motifs of this category are much more uniform than other child martyrdoms, owing to the single source they are all modeled on: the story of the mother of seven sons, found both in 2 and 4 Maccabees.

2 and 4 Maccabees both deal with the persecution of Jews under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, with the former written as a didactic historical account and the latter as a sermon, arguing that, “devout reason is sovereign over the emotions”³⁸⁷ through the examples of martyrs.³⁸⁸ Both of them recount the story of a woman with seven sons, who are brought before the king and ordered to eat pork. They refuse and are tortured and executed one by one, as their mother encourages them to endure and remain faithful. After her youngest son is dead, she too dies.³⁸⁹ Both books also include the martyrdom of an old man named Eleazar.³⁹⁰ These stories, particularly the mother and her sons, influenced early Christian understandings of martyrdom, both on their own and as models for later accounts of martyrs. This is particularly true in the Syriac traditions, where Shmuni, as the mother is known in Syriac, is the saint referenced the most in the Hudrā, the East Syriac hymnary, and to whom the second greatest number of

³⁸⁷ 4 Macc 1:1 (RSV).

³⁸⁸ Crawford Howell Toy, George A. Barton, Joseph Jacobs, and Israel Abrahams, “Maccabees, Book of,” in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, <http://jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10237-maccabees-books-of>.

³⁸⁹ According to 4 Maccabees, she throws herself onto a fire “so that no one might touch her body” (4 Macc 17:1 (RSV)), while 2 Maccabees only records that “Last of all, the mother died, after her sons” (2 Macc 7:41 (RSV)).

³⁹⁰ 2 Macc 6:18-31 (RSV), 4 Macc 5-7 (RSV).

churches are dedicated, after St. George.³⁹¹ They were also widely revered in the Greek-speaking church.³⁹²

While the exact ages of the sons are not specified and 4 Maccabees notes that “some [were] unmarried, others married and without offspring,”³⁹³ a number of the topoi found in Christian martyrdoms of children are also present in this story. All of the sons clearly and rationally defend their decision to die for their faith, down to “the sixth, a mere boy,”³⁹⁴ who declares, “religious knowledge, O tyrant, is invincible.”³⁹⁵ In contrast to their mature speech, the text continually emphasizes their youth. Even the eldest of them is referred to as “the noble youth,”³⁹⁶ “the courageous youth,”³⁹⁷ and “the saintly youth.”³⁹⁸ The king, like so many later persecutors in Christian martyrdoms, is moved by the age of the youngest boy and tries to persuade him with offers of wealth and power, which the boy rejects:

... he felt strong compassion for this child when he saw that he was already in fetters. He summoned him to come nearer and tried to console him, saying, "You see the result of your brothers' stupidity, for they died in torments because of their disobedience. You too, if you do not obey, will be miserably tortured and die before your time, but if you yield to persuasion you will be my friend and a leader in the government of the kingdom."³⁹⁹

³⁹¹ Sebastian Brock, “Eleazar, Shmuni and Her Seven Sons in Syriac Tradition,” in *La memoire des persecutions: autor des livres des Maccabees* (Paris: Peeters, 2014): 329.

³⁹² Witold Witakowski, “Mart(y) Shmuni, the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs, in Syriac Tradition,” in *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992: University of Cambridge, Faculty of Divinity, 30 August-2 September 1992*, ed. René Lavenant (Rome: Pontificio Instituto orientale, 1994): 159.

³⁹³ 4 Macc 16:9 (RSV).

³⁹⁴ 4 Macc 11:13 (RSV).

³⁹⁵ 4 Macc 11:21 (RSV).

³⁹⁶ 4 Macc 9:13 (RSV).

³⁹⁷ 4 Macc 9:21 (RSV).

³⁹⁸ 4 Macc 9:25 (RSV).

³⁹⁹ 4 Macc 12:2-5 (RSV).

The sons also compare themselves⁴⁰⁰ to the three youths sent into the furnace by Nebuchadnezzar for refusing to worship an idol,⁴⁰¹ an allusion also seen in the stories of Talyā⁴⁰² and Sophia's daughters.⁴⁰³ The introduction to the seven youths in 4 Maccabees succinctly lays out one of the core themes found in later Christian child martyrdoms: “[E]ven the very young, by following a philosophy in accordance with devout reason, have prevailed over the most painful instruments of torture.”⁴⁰⁴

It is the relationship between mother and children, however, that is the most directly imitated in Christian martyrdoms. Felicitas and Symphorosa are the two clearest examples, with both women exhorting their respective seven sons to martyrdom. Other accounts are not quite as similar but take clear inspiration from the Maccabean mother. Sophia and her three daughters, Pistis, Elpis, and Agape, are one prominent example. Like the Maccabean narrative, Sophia watches her daughters as they are tortured and killed, from oldest to youngest, and encourages them through it. Like Shmuni, Sophia's death is only briefly mentioned and is of secondary importance to the act of witnessing the martyrdoms of her children.⁴⁰⁵ In both accounts, the siblings encourage each other in similar ways, appealing to the physical and educational bonds between them. As Pistis is tortured, she calls out to her sisters, saying, “Daughters of the same womb, beloved of a faithful mother!...Be strong...in witnessing for our Redeemer. For we have been brought up in the doctrine, and one mother has given birth to us all...we have sucked the same milk from [her] sacred breasts. And we have learned wisdom and the discipline of God.”⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰⁰ 4 Macc 13:9 (RSV).

⁴⁰¹ Daniel 3:13-30.

⁴⁰² Horn, “Children and Violence,” 318.

⁴⁰³ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 182.

⁴⁰⁴ 4 Macc 8:1 (RSV).

⁴⁰⁵ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 184.

⁴⁰⁶ Ibid., 175-176.

The imagery of breastfeeding and childbirth, which persists throughout the speeches of all the sisters and Sophia herself, emphasizes the youth of the girls and their dependence on their mother for physical and spiritual nourishment. 4 Maccabees explains how brotherly love motivated the sons to encourage each other: “In the mother’s womb...each of the brothers dwelt the same length of time and was shaped during the same period of time; and growing from the same blood and through the same life, they were brought to the light of day...they drank milk from the same fountains...and they grow stronger from this common nurture and daily companionship, and from both general education and our discipline in the law of God.”⁴⁰⁷ Pistis’s sisters emphasize that they share a mother and education with their sister who went before them, which means they will endure just as she did.⁴⁰⁸ Likewise, the sons refer back to the example of their brothers, with the third brother saying, “Do you not know that the same father begot me and those who died, and the same mother bore me, and that I was brought up on the same teachings? I do not renounce the noble kinship that binds me to my brothers.”⁴⁰⁹

Sophia’s and Shmuni’s speeches to their children emphasize similar themes. Sophia says to Pistis, “I gave thee birth, my daughter, and thou wast reared upon the milk of my breasts; and I endured many distresses for thy sake. Go joyfully on the everlasting road. Go, and see the heavenly light, and prepare a bright place for thy mother, and remember her who bare thee, O my daughter!”⁴¹⁰ Shmuni addresses her youngest son thus:

My son, have pity on me. I carried you nine months in my womb, and nursed you for three years, and have reared you and brought you up to this point in your life, and have taken care of you. I beseech you, my child, to look at the heaven and the

⁴⁰⁷ 4 Macc 13:19-22 (RSV).

⁴⁰⁸ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 177-178 and 180.

⁴⁰⁹ 4 Macc 10:2-3 (RSV).

⁴¹⁰ Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 176-177.

earth and see everything that is in them, and recognize that God did not make them out of things that existed. Thus also mankind comes into being. Do not fear this butcher, but prove worthy of your brothers. Accept death, so that in God's mercy I may get you back again with your brothers.⁴¹¹

Both narratives make it clear that the mothers will receive a reward in heaven based more on their encouragement and sacrifice of their children than on their own deaths: Sophia says, "I pray for this, that I may offer three virgin crowns an offering to the Lord; and may be remembered by my daughters in the kingdom of heaven,"⁴¹² while 4 Maccabees declares that, "The moon in heaven, with the stars, does not stand so august as you, who, after lighting the way of your star-like seven sons to piety, stand in honor before God and are firmly set in heaven with them."⁴¹³ From specific motifs to general themes, the story of Sophia and her daughters is clearly drawn from that of Shmuni and her sons.

The influence of the Maccabean mother extends far beyond Sophia. The structure, themes, and motifs found in the original texts are imitated widely, both directly and indirectly. Barulas's mother reminds her son that, "I have told you too of that famous and notable contest carried on by the seven sons of one mother,"⁴¹⁴ as she encourages him to withstand torture. She also says, "How your life began within me, that nothingness from which your body grew, I know not; only He who quickened you, He who is your creator, knows,"⁴¹⁵ mirroring the Maccabean mother's declaration that, "I do not know how you came into being in my womb. It was not I who gave you life and breath, nor I who set in order the elements within each of you."⁴¹⁶ The

⁴¹¹ 2 Macc 7:27-29 (RSV).

⁴¹² Lewis, *Select Narratives*, 183.

⁴¹³ 4 Macc 17:5 (RSV).

⁴¹⁴ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 179.

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁴¹⁶ 2 Macc 7:22 (RSV).

mother of the adult Marian “rejoiced like the mother of the Maccabees, congratulating not only Marian but also herself that she had borne such a son. In the body of her son she embraced the glory of her own womb; again and again with religious devotion she pressed her lips to the wounds of his neck.”⁴¹⁷ The imitations of the Maccabean mother spawned imitations of their own. The extended introduction found in the Vatican Syriac 161 manuscript of the *Martyrdom of Cyrus and Julitta* says that Julitta lived “according to the [apostolic] tradition,...[learned] from faithful Sophia, the mother of the three virgins, Pistis, Elpis, and Agape,”⁴¹⁸ while the story of St. Bassa and her sons mirrors Sophia’s almost exactly, down to her children’s names: Theognis, Agapitus, and Pistus.⁴¹⁹

Numerous martyrdoms showed the influence of the Maccabean mother without referencing it directly. Barulas, explaining who taught him to confess Christ, said that, “Instructed by the Spirit [my mother] drew from the Father that wherewith to feed me in my very infancy, and I in drinking as a babe the milk from the twin founts of her breasts drank in also the belief in Christ,”⁴²⁰ similar to the seven sons’ descriptions of their shared education and breastfeeding.⁴²¹ As in 4 Maccabees,⁴²² Barulas’s mother compares her son to Isaac,⁴²³ with her as Abraham, willingly sacrificing her son at God’s command.⁴²⁴ Barulas’s mother, like Shmuni

⁴¹⁷ Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 213.

⁴¹⁸ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 42.

⁴¹⁹ Wasyliw, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 23.

⁴²⁰ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 275.

⁴²¹ This connection between breastfeeding and receiving knowledge, which was also seen with Sophia's daughters, can be found outside of child martyrdoms. Clement interprets 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 to mean "just as nurses nourish new-born children with milk, so also I (Paul) have nourished you with Christ the Logos who in milk" (Hägg, "Aspects of childhood," 130). Jacob of Serugh, in his *Memrō on John the Evangelist, The Disciple whom Jesus Loved*, portrays John resting on Jesus's chest at the Last Supper (John 13:23-25) as John, an infant, drinking milk,

which represents the mystery/symbol/sacrament (رسّتَك), from Christ, a nursing mother (Jacob of Serugh, “جَلَدَ مَبْنَىٰ: مَلِحَيَةٌ وَرَسْتَك” in *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug*, vol. 2, ed. Paul Bedjan and Sebastian Brock (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006); 714).

Sebastian Block (Fiscala
422) Macc 14:20 (RSV)

⁴²³ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 279.

Prudentius, *Prud*

and Sophia, expects glory in heaven on account of her son, asking him to “remember your mother [in heaven], changing from son to patron.”⁴²⁵ She also does not outwardly grieve at her son’s death, just like the Maccabean mother.⁴²⁶ Instead, she sings a psalm and presses her son’s decapitated head “to her fond breast.”⁴²⁷ The mother of St. Justus of Beauvais reacts to his death similarly, praising God and asking Justus to pray for her.⁴²⁸ In the account from *The Golden Legend*, Julitta is equally happy to witness her son’s martyrdom, “joyfully [giving] thanks to God that her son had gone before her to the kingdom of heaven.”⁴²⁹ Ruhm, one of the martyrs of Najran, contrasts the “pains and groans” and “anguish and sorrow” of bearing and burying children with the “blessed state” of leading her granddaughters to be martyred.⁴³⁰ Her willingness to witness the deaths of the children in her care is so great that, having been forced to drink her granddaughters’ blood, she only says that it tastes “like a pure spotless offering.”⁴³¹

The model of the Maccabean mother and her sons is even used to frame martyrdoms that do not feature a mother and her young, biological child. As noted before, Marian is an adult man when he is martyred, which does not prevent the text from explicitly describing his mother as being like the Maccabean mother.⁴³² In *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, Blandina, a slave woman, is persecuted alongside the fifteen-year-old Ponticus. While they are not related, the text describes Blandina as his mother, who “[sends him] before her victorious to the king”⁴³³ and encourages him to undergo martyrdom.⁴³⁴ The case of Febronia, who, at twenty, would

⁴²⁵ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 285.

⁴²⁶ 4 Macc 15:20 (RSV).

⁴²⁷ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 285.

⁴²⁸ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 23.

⁴²⁹ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

⁴³⁰ Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 112-113.

⁴³¹ Ibid., 114.

⁴³² Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 213.

⁴³³ As Cobb notes, the text refers to ‘children’ in the plural, despite Ponticus being the only youth present, strengthening Blandina’s connection to the Maccabean mother with her seven sons (Cobb, *Dying to Be Men*, 115).

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 114-115.

certainly not be seen as a child, and Thomais and Bryene, the nuns who raised her, shows the extent to which the Maccabean model's narrative power can be co-opted outside of its original form. Bryene, speaking to Febronia before her arrest, calls her "my daughter," which Thomais does as well,⁴³⁵ and implores her to "not disgrace Bryene's old age, [to] not do anything that will render profitless the work of your spiritual mother."⁴³⁶ She further encourages her with the example of previous martyrs, "the wrestlers who went before you...not just men, but...women and children as well."⁴³⁷ She particularly calls on the example of the twelve-year-old Eutropia, who remained still as she was shot by arrows in "complete obedience to her mother's command."⁴³⁸

While the accounts in 2 and 4 Maccabees emphasize how astonishing it is that both young men and a mother are all able to endure what they do, the Christian interpretations and imitations of Shmuni and her sons focus far more on the experiences and model of the mother than her children. Many Christian writers, addressing an audience who would likely never face a traditional martyrdom, turned the Maccabean mother into the ideal for mothers in their daily life.⁴³⁹ Like Shmuni, Christian mothers were responsible for the moral and religious formation of their children, whom mothers must raise so that they "prefer the honor of heaven and...begin to despise the world."⁴⁴⁰ This, interestingly, contradicts the original texts, where Shmuni says that her now-dead husband educated their sons in religious matters.⁴⁴¹ Drawing on their own cultural assumptions about the role of mothers in spiritual formation,⁴⁴² these Christian authors rewrote

⁴³⁵ Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women*, 159.

⁴³⁶ Ibid., 159-160.

⁴³⁷ Ibid. 160.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 160-161.

⁴³⁹ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 134.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁴¹ 4 Macc 18:9-19 (RSV).

⁴⁴² Vuolanto, "The Construction of Elite Childhood," 322.

Shmuni to be both an educator and an encourager. She becomes the ideal mother, whose love for both God and her children was so great that she could overcome “the tyranny of nature,” which would compel her to protect her children from physical harm, and understand that she must first protect them from spiritual harm.⁴⁴³ As John Chrysostom said in a homily on the Maccabean mother, “Giving birth is not the defining characteristic of a mother, for that is a matter of nature; instead, a mother’s defining feature is raising [her child], for that is a matter of choice.”⁴⁴⁴ Shmuni provided a model for early Christian writers of ideal motherhood, which prioritized raising children for spiritual, rather than worldly, success.

The Maccabean mother was used as an example of virtuous behavior for ordinary married women in all areas of their life, not just in child-rearing. Her calm, steadfast faith in the face of unbearable trials provided an example for women enduring their own trials, both great and small. Through her actions, she “prepare[d] a place [in heaven] for all women in the station of marriage.”⁴⁴⁵ In light of concerns from early writers like Tertullian that children and marriage could prevent Christians from living a pious life, particularly in the case of martyrdom,⁴⁴⁶ the Maccabean mother provided a powerful counterexample, achieving the highest honor through her children and providing an ideal for ordinary women to imitate. Through her example, the everyday troubles of a mother and wife were recast as preparation for and imitation of Shmuni’s struggles.⁴⁴⁷

The Maccabean mother and the later martyrdoms that imitated her were particularly important in modeling the proper response to the death of a child. As discussed in the previous

⁴⁴³ Carole Monica C. Burnett, “Mother-Child Bonding in the Greek and Latin Fathers of the Church,” in *Children in Late Ancient Christianity*, ed. Cornelia B. Horn and Robert R. Phenix (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009): 83-85.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 83.

⁴⁴⁵ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 136.

⁴⁴⁶ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 261.

⁴⁴⁷ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 136.

chapter, parents' reactions to the death of their children were a matter of concern for a number of early Christian writers, who worried that grief could lead parents to excessive expressions of mourning and questioning God.⁴⁴⁸ Writers sometimes sought to deal with this grief by offering parents comfort, as in the portrayals of the Holy Innocents at peace in heaven. In other cases, like the Maccabean mother and her imitators, writers set forth models of appropriate behavior for grieving parents.⁴⁴⁹ They emphasized how she simultaneously suffered internally, according to her maternal nature, while remaining resolved outwardly and encouraging her children through torture and death for the sake of their souls.⁴⁵⁰ She is steadfast in her faith without losing her affection for her children, providing a model of pious behavior for grieving parents, particularly mothers.

Unlike the martyrdoms of unaccompanied children, which model pious behavior for adults and children alike, martyrdoms based on the Maccabean mother are specifically aimed at constructing an ideal Christian motherhood. The responses of the mothers to the violence against their children are prioritized over the reactions of the children themselves. These mothers have raised their children to be martyrs and Christians, sculpting them into the perfect offerings to God. The importance of the mother's role in shaping her children into martyrs is such that the children are sometimes even portrayed as less than perfect martyrs. Barulas cries out for water as he is beaten, prompting his mother to scold him, declaring, "This is not what I promised God the child of my body would be, this is not the hope of glory for which I bore you, that you should be able to retreat before death!"⁴⁵¹ Through her admonishments, he regains his courage and

⁴⁴⁸ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 31.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 137-139.

⁴⁵⁰ Burnett, "Mother-Child Bonding," 85.

⁴⁵¹ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 277.

“laugh[s] at the sounding switch and the pain of the blows.”⁴⁵² The focus of the martyrdom is not on Barulas’s achievement. Instead, it is on his mother’s ability to educate him as a Christian, watch as he is tortured without grief, which the judge assumes will cause her to “suffer a sharper penalty than if the bloody claws plucked at her frame,”⁴⁵³ and encourage him to martyrdom. Her emotional strength and endurance are idealized characteristics of a Christian motherhood, which is able to overcome maternal instinct to protect the physical wellbeing of her child and prioritize his success as a martyr.

Conclusion

The focus on molding children into moral beings and the belief that the actions of children reflecting on their parents falls in line with the understanding of children and adults found in the writings of Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine, as discussed in the previous chapter. By contrast, those martyrdoms centered on unaccompanied children, with their emphasis on the capacity of children to reach rationality and virtue purely through God, falls more in line with the way Clement of Alexandria discussed children. This is not to claim there was a strict division between these different attitudes towards children—Augustine and Jerome both wrote in praise of Agnes, very much an independent child martyr,⁴⁵⁴ while Jacob of Serugh, whose writing on the death of children fell more in line with Clement, wrote two memrē specifically on Shmuni and her sons.⁴⁵⁵ Rather, the range of ways martyrdoms portrayed children reflects the contemporary uncertainty surrounding them. Whether following Augustine’s assertion that children were born sinners or Clement’s that they could be models for adults, the moral nature

⁴⁵² Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 281.

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 275.

⁴⁵⁴ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 18.

⁴⁵⁵ Witakowski, “Mart(y) Shmuni,” 158-159.

and autonomy of children attracted interest and debate in early Christianity. The martyrdoms of children, where three-year-olds argue with kings and mothers scold their children for crying as they're tortured, play out these debates. Competing interests—establishing children as legitimate martyrs, emphasizing God's power by noting the coincidence of opposites in the concept of a child martyr, valorizing a model of Christian motherhood—can contend even between different narratives of the same saints, as will be seen in the case of Cyricus and Julitta.

CHAPTER 4

CHILDREN IN *CYRICUS AND JULITTA*

My Lord, You do not wish to destroy the field and bless the seed, but bless the field and its seed, so that, from them both, You bring praise to Yourself. Do not, my Lord, uproot the tree and save its fruits, but protect the tree and its fruits, and our enemy will not boast about us and evil will not snatch me away, like lambs from Your flock.

—*The Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta*⁴⁵⁶

Cyricus and Julitta are remembered in two dramatically different stories, as reviewed in Chapter 1. Through a close reading of both versions in light of the larger cultural and theological uncertainty surrounding children and their moral autonomy seen in chapter two and the topoi of the martyrdoms of children discussed in the last chapter, it becomes clear that both versions reflect different early Christian attitudes towards children, while also representing interesting outliers in the larger subgenre of child martyrs. Version 1 presents a complete reversal of the expected parent-child relationship, with Cyricus guiding and supporting his mother, while Version 2 takes a different route and presents Cyricus as an utterly normal child, with none of the eloquence seen in most child martyrs. The distinction between these two versions and the history of their spread as seen in the manuscript record is complicated by closely reading the extended introduction found in Vatican Syriac 161 and several Arabic manuscripts and examining the epigraphic and artistic evidence related to these saints, which all point to the unsettling and unsettled nature of these texts.

Children in Version 1

Version 1 continually emphasizes the reversal of expectations in the relationship between

⁴⁵⁶ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 84.

Cyricus and Julitta and in Cyricus's behavior. These expectations are established by both Julitta and Alexander, the governor. In her initial confrontation with Alexander, Julitta tells him, "If you wish for me to [sacrifice to idols], send your soldiers to the streets of the city and fetch a boy who is only three-years-old, who will say who the Lord is...if the boy is corrupted and, in his simplicity, he says that [your] gods exist, you and all your family may worship them."⁴⁵⁷ This statement seems to imply two different characteristics of children. This first is that their simplicity may grant them some special access to precocious religious knowledge. This idea can be seen throughout ancient Mediterranean religions in general⁴⁵⁸ and in the martyrdom of Barulas in particular, which also features a child being brought forward to declare if the Christian god or the pagan gods are real.⁴⁵⁹ The second characteristic of children implied in Julitta's challenge is that this same simplicity (~~simplicitas~~) can make them foolish and easily led astray. In both assumptions, children are viewed as fundamentally naive—for good and for ill. The governor echoes this assumption in his initial conversation with Cyricus, which he begins by saying, "Hello to you, dear boy!"⁴⁶⁰ Believing that he will be able to coax the three-year-old into agreeing with him, Alexander begins in a friendly manner, unlike with Julitta, who he almost immediately threatens with torture.

Beyond Cyricus's assumed ignorance-innocence, Julitta initially positions herself in the model of the Maccabean mother, praising God for allowing her to witness her child's death and praying that Cyricus will be granted the crown of martyrdom. Upon seeing that her son has been brought before the judge, "she praised God and said, 'I thank you, most merciful God, that You

⁴⁵⁷ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 256.

⁴⁵⁸ Aasgaard, "Children in Antiquity," 31.

⁴⁵⁹ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 274.

⁴⁶⁰ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 257.

deem me worthy to see my son in this struggle”⁴⁶¹ and asked God to “allow this son of my womb to receive the imperishable crown...[so that he]...will know that You are the true God, and there are no other [gods] besides You.”⁴⁶² This prayer, which echoes those of Sophia and Shmuni examined in the last chapter, presents Cyricus as a reflection of Julitta’s piety. Witnessing her son’s martyrdom is a reward granted to Julitta, rather than an achievement of Cyricus on his own.

This common narrative is disrupted immediately by a voice from heaven, who tells Julitta,

Be strong, Julitta, because of this son that you bore. He is greater than you and by far, for he will be great in the kingdom of heaven. You will be frightened and made to quake by the torments that you will soon behold, but your son will restore you to the knowledge of the truth and take away the disgrace from you.⁴⁶³

In contrast to Julitta’s assumption that Cyricus must be led to the knowledge of truth and the Christian God, the voice proclaims that it is Julitta who must be led to this knowledge—and by her own son.

Following this exchange and a brief conversation with Cyricus where he affirms his Christian faith,⁴⁶⁴ Julitta disappears from much of the narrative. She is mentioned as undergoing the same torments as her son, but it is Cyricus who is addressed by the governor, recites psalms in prison, and denounces Satan when he appears to try to trick the boy. Furthermore, Satan threatens Cyricus by saying that he will “enter your mother’s heart and lead her astray from the

⁴⁶¹ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 259.

⁴⁶² Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 53-54.

⁴⁶³ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 259.

⁴⁶⁴ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 259 and Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 54.

righteous path.”⁴⁶⁵ Reversing the expectations found in martyrdoms following the Maccabean mother’s model, Cyricus must protect his mother from spiritual harm, rather than the other way around. The expected hierarchy between mother and child is again overturned in Julitta’s next relevant appearance. After the saints are resurrected from their first death, they go before Alexander again, “but it was difficult for Julitta, as a chaste and holy woman, to go before [the governor’s] chair, because a crowd was gathered there.”⁴⁶⁶ Then Cyricus “said to his mother, ‘My mother, let me go there. When the boy stood there, he took on strength from the Holy Spirit and burst through the people. He took his mother by her hand and stood her before the judge’s seat.’”⁴⁶⁷ Like a mother taking her child through a busy market, Cyricus leads his mother by the hand and protects her from the crowd, taking on the role a mother is expected to play.

The section that deals the most extensively with this reversal comes when Alexander has Cyricus and Julitta sent into a boiling cauldron:

But Julitta, the mother of the holy Cyricus, when she saw the boiling cauldron, was frightened in her soul and shook and sought to refuse the grace, which had been prepared for her. When her son, Cyricus, saw her gloomy face, he understood in his heart and was sorrowful and said to her, “My mother, do not be frightened and do not be shaken by the flames of this cauldron. He who raised us from the frying pan before and put the wicked to shame, He will deliver us again from the flames of this cauldron...Oh my mother, the God we believe in will descend into this cauldron with us, as He descended with [those of] the house of Ananias into the furnace burning with

⁴⁶⁵ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 262.

⁴⁶⁶ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 74.

⁴⁶⁷ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 269.

fire and saved His servants who believe in Him. Now He will also save us from this cauldron. If you try to save us from these temporary torments, you will fall into the eternal fire, which does not fade away. Not so, my mother, do not be frightened by these torments of the wicked, which this judge has raised upon us with his wickedness.⁴⁶⁸

Cyricus proceeds to give several other biblical examples of God protecting the faithful. This is a perfect reversal of how the Maccabean mother⁴⁶⁹ and her imitators⁴⁷⁰ use the examples of biblical children and their parents to encourage their children to martyrdom. The martyrdom of Barulas in the *Peristephanon* is a particularly useful point of comparison: in it, the three-year-old Barulas begins to cry and asks for water as he is tortured. His mother scolds him and reminds him of the biblical stories she taught him, declaring that “this is not what I promised God the child of my body would be.”⁴⁷¹ Cyricus takes on the role of the mother, chastising his mother’s fearfulness and reminding her of the reward she will receive in heaven. Despite his attempt,

... with all these [words], holy Cyricus wasn’t able to soothe his mother.

And when he saw she was not persuaded by him, he raised his eyes to heaven and prayed and said, “Lord God, mighty and invincible, if you separate my mother, your servant, from the inheritance of your saints, then also erase me from the Book of Life, in which you have inscribed me. Lord, mighty God, help, my Lord, Your handmaiden in this struggle and do not let this woman, who, for the sake of Your name, went before me in this struggle, be deprived of the crown, which is precious to Your saints.

⁴⁶⁸ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 81-82.

⁴⁶⁹ 4 Macc. 14:20 (RSV).

⁴⁷⁰ Prudentius, *Prudentius Volume II*, 279.

⁴⁷¹ Ibid., 277.

Instead, I beseech You and Your holy name and Your greatness, that You help my mother and strengthen her and cause her to take heart, lest evil should deceive her and ensnare her, as he caused Eve to sin in Paradise. Do not let the Enemy boast about us and do not let us be destroyed. My Lord, You do not wish to destroy the field and bless the seed, but bless the field and its seed, so that, from them both, You bring praise to Yourself. Do not, my Lord, uproot the tree and save its fruits, but protect the tree and its fruits, and our enemy will not boast about us and evil will not snatch me away, like lambs from Your flock. Lord God, give my mother the spirit of knowledge.⁴⁷²

Unlike the case of Barulas and his mother, Cyricus is not able to save his mother on his own and must beseech God to save his mother. In a reverse of the expectation that many Maccabean mothers have that they will be rewarded in heaven for their children's virtue,⁴⁷³ Cyricus asks to share his mother's punishment in the afterlife if she is not saved. He implores God to help her based on her previous piety and emphasizes the fact that she faced persecution before Cyricus. His argument for why God should save Julitta follows several threads. First, he asks that she be saved so that Satan won't be able to boast about their defeat, as he can about Eve, another woman led to sin by him. He explicitly connects his fate with his mother's, portraying himself as a seed or fruit, whose existence is dependent on its field or tree. By continuing to use the first-person plural, he makes it clear that if Julitta is not saved, he will be snatched away with her. Although he's clearly morally autonomous and in fact surpasses his mother in his piety, Cyricus still links the salvation of martyred children to their mothers. Unlike Maccabean mothers like

⁴⁷² Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 83-84.

⁴⁷³ See the previous chapter for examples, including Version 2 Julitta.

Sophia, Julitta is not rewarded in heaven for her capacity to watch and encourage her child through torture. Rather, this relationship is closer to those seen in some narratives where a parent martyrs their own child, which are discussed in the previous chapter. In those martyrdoms, martyred children posthumously guide their parents to Christianity and salvation, taking the role in moral formation usually filled by a parent. Similarly, Cyricus is the moral authority in this parent-child relationship, able to parlay his piety into assistance from the Holy Spirit for his faltering mother. He takes the role of a Maccabean mother, encouraging Julitta to endure torture and turning to God for assistance when his encouragement alone is not enough. After Cyricus prays, the Holy Spirit drives Satan out of Julitta so that she is unafraid. She praises her son, saying he is “a good counselor and father to me in the kingdom of God”⁴⁷⁴ and that she is prepared to face the cauldron. The reversal in the expected mother-child relationship is made clear here: Cyricus is the teacher and parent, who is responsible for the moral formation and protection of Julitta, the student and child.

Satan appears and “takes on the appearance of an old man.”⁴⁷⁵ Despairing of his ability to lead humans into sin, he laments,

Alas for me! I am shamed and defeated by a child of three years. Alas for me! I have become laughable through the victory of a child. I don’t know what to do. My teaching is useless and my joy has fallen away. Behold! I am put to shame from all places, since I am defeated by a three-year-old child. If only it had been a young man and not an infant who doesn’t understand [the difference] between good and evil! I don’t know what to do. Should I go after the elderly? Their sight is fixed on the world to come and they will not

⁴⁷⁴ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 84.

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 91.

listen to me. It's impossible for me to go after the young people, just as I could not shake the Apostle Paul. It's impossible for me to go after children that are younger than this one. Should I go after the beasts, the animals without the capacity for speech? I know what to do: I myself will enter the heart of the governor and cut away this boy from this world.⁴⁷⁶

Satan's assumptions about children are central to his sense of shame and the cause of his failure. He, echoing the contemporary beliefs about children explored in Chapter 2, believes that Cyricus can't "understand [the difference] between good and evil"⁴⁷⁷ and associates children with animals, which cannot speak and thus cannot reason. He underestimates Cyricus throughout the martyrdom, which ultimately leads to his humiliating defeat at the hands of someone he doesn't view as fully a person. This victory emphasizes both the strength of God, through whom children can overcome evil, and the weakness and ridiculousness of Satan, who is unable to tempt and destroy a child. Satan becomes almost childish in this speech: he petulantly complains that he's been defeated and repeatedly says that he doesn't know what to do. This immaturity is contrasted with his appearance as "an old man"⁴⁷⁸ and Cyricus's calm eloquence. Although he looks like an adult, he embodies the negative qualities he attributes to children, while Cyricus, an actual child, exhibits wisdom and self-control through the power of God.

Version 1 of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* focuses to a remarkable degree on children as moral agents and ideals. Cyricus is not just capable of rationally choosing to dedicate his life and death to Christ—he's more capable of it than his mother, who raised him as a

⁴⁷⁶Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 91-92.

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid., 92.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid., 91.

Christian. Figures who underestimate Cyricus's autonomy and piety—Julitta,⁴⁷⁹ the judge,⁴⁸⁰ and Satan⁴⁸¹—are proven wrong by Cyricus's actions and the direct statements of God. This is not to say that Version 1 is preaching a complete reversal of parent-child relationships to its readers or even truly questioning cultural assumptions about children. Cyricus is clearly exceptional—"there is no human...greater than you, except John the Baptist,"⁴⁸² as Jesus tells him. It is this coincidence of opposites, of the wise martyr with the young and assumed-to-be irrational child, that reveals the power of God and is central to Cyricus's importance. While it doesn't suggest that all or most children exceed cultural assumptions for them, it does imply several beliefs about children that have commonality to Clement's writings and are quite far from Jerome and John Chrysostom. First, (exceptional?) young children are capable of virtue and reason, and of exceeding cultural expectations for them. Second, adults, including their parents, can fall short of these children and ought to emulate them in those cases. Finally, (exceptional) children are capable of such virtue and piety that they are worthy of receiving the Holy Spirit and direct aid from God. A very different view on children will emerge in Version 2, which presents a far less flattering picture of Cyricus's behavior and imposes the Maccabean model onto the narrative.

Children in Version 2

Version 2 is a somewhat unusual hagiographic narrative, since we know the name and some of the goals of the author who most likely wrote it.⁴⁸³ Hagiographic works are frequently

⁴⁷⁹ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 259.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 257.

⁴⁸¹ Ibid., 278.

⁴⁸² Ibid., 282.

⁴⁸³ Van Hooff believed that the *Acta Graeca Sincera* text represented an earlier version of Version 2, which was based on the same source as Theodore's letter, but was written separately from it. Regardless, the version constructed in Theodore's letter seems to have been better known and more central in establishing Version 2 than the *Acta Graeca Sincera*, which has only been found in one manuscript (Pisani, "Passio of St Cyricus," 164-165).

anonymous and deliberately devoid of contextualizing information.⁴⁸⁴ Particularly in the case of long dead saints and martyrs, a hagiographic text functions like a myth, “as a discourse that consistently denies originality and obscures the identity of its producers and reproducers, thereby concealing their positionality and the interests (material and other) that influence the modifications they introduce in the stories they tell.”⁴⁸⁵ Even in a text like Theodore’s letter to Zosimus, where the author is identified,⁴⁸⁶ this process of obscuring authorial interventions and presenting the narrative as “as old, traditional, time-honored, well-known, much-beloved, tested and true”⁴⁸⁷ can be seen.

Theodore’s reason for writing this account is made explicit in the letter: Zosimus, a bishop, wished “to learn about the martyrdom [of Cyricus and Julitta], being chattered about by many people.”⁴⁸⁸ He asked Theodore, as the Bishop of Mopsuestia, which was near Iconium and Tarsus, to compile an accurate account of them. The oral history of these local saints passed down in Iconium was, according to Theodore, “excessive and absurd and alien to the expectations of Christians.”⁴⁸⁹ Looking for an accurate written account was no more fruitful: the version he read, likely a Version 1 text, “could justly be called the squawking of frogs and jackdaws.”⁴⁹⁰ Furthermore, he asserts that this Version 1 text was likely “fabricated by the Manicheans, as I think, or some other heterodox heresy, mocking the great mystery of piety and

⁴⁸⁴ Bartlett, *Why Can the Dead*, 513.

⁴⁸⁵ Bruce Lincoln, *Gods and Demons, Priests and Scholars: Critical Explorations in the History of Religions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 55.

⁴⁸⁶ It is not entirely clear if Theodore’s letter or the shorter text found in *Acta Graeca Sincera* represents an earlier version of this particular narrative. It is also difficult to verify if this letter was in fact written by Theodore. However, it seems most likely that it was written contemporaneously to him in the mid to late 6th century, given certain historical details. For ease of reference, I will refer to this text as Theodore’s letter and to its author as Theodore (Kälviäinen, “E06121”).

⁴⁸⁷ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 54.

⁴⁸⁸ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 21.

⁴⁸⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibid., 21.

reckoning it to be a laughing-stock.”⁴⁹¹ Unable to find an account he considers reliable in the city itself, he begins to question the “first-ranked Isaurian⁴⁹² families,”⁴⁹³ hoping to find “an inherited oral tradition explaining the struggle of the holy martyrs.”⁴⁹⁴ He finally heard a narrative he deemed reliable from “Markianos, a Christ-loving man, a tribune and secretary for the Emperor Justinian...and Zeno, a very clever man, being himself an assistant to [Markianos] himself at that time.”⁴⁹⁵ He asserts the validity of this narrative based on a supposed direct connection to Julitta:

Since they had heard from some people of noble birth that the ever-remembered martyr Julitta, having obtained an irreproachable life, a flower blossoming from the best blood of Lyconia, had arisen from their own kinsmen, they celebrate her memory every year, doing this specially on account of their shared blood.⁴⁹⁶

Theodore has two intertwined goals in this letter: to discredit Version 1’s story and to establish his own account as accurate. Since Version 1, according to him, already has a written account and is preserved in Iconium as an oral tradition, he must somehow discredit these sources as unreliable. He does this by contrasting the story told in Iconium, which comes “παρὰ πολλοῖς” (from many people) who are never specified or named,⁴⁹⁷ with the story he promotes, which comes from specific, high-born people, whose social and political connections are made explicit. He further emphasizes Julitta’s own aristocratic origins and the continuity between her and the current Lyconian ruling class. Version 1 is implicitly cast as the narrative of the uneducated, gullible majority, taken in by an unspecified heretical plot to confuse and mock Christians, while

⁴⁹¹ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 21.

⁴⁹² The region Iconium was located in.

⁴⁹³ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 21-22.

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹⁵ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁴⁹⁷ Ibid., 21. “πολλοῖς” may be being intentionally invoked to associate Version 1 with the common people (*Liddell & Scott*, s.v. πολὺς) in contrast with the aristocratic nature of Version 2.

Version 2 is the untarnished truth, passed down without alteration through generations of Lyconian aristocratic families. By presenting it as an oral tradition, the narrative can be seen as “old, traditional, [and] time-honored,”⁴⁹⁸ while the use of specific named individuals as sources gives an impression of realism and scholarly rigor, similar to the use of alleged eyewitnesses in martyrdoms and other ancient works aiming at appearing historical,⁴⁹⁹ and to distance Theodore from the text. This latter goal is particularly important. Theodore’s aim, as he himself states, is to promote his account of these martyrs over their popular narrative. However, he cannot use his own authority to assert his version’s validity. “The *real* story” of a saint, like a myth, “belongs to all, lasts always, and pervades everywhere.”⁵⁰⁰ For Theodore to counter the popular stories of Cyrus and Julitta, he must present the narrative that he writes not as his own, but as an older, truer, more traditional version, which he had no hand in crafting.

We cannot know if Theodore’s version was in fact based on an oral tradition passed on by Julitta’s relatives. The origin of his narrative, however, is ultimately not the most interesting element of his letter. Rather, what is important is how he shapes the narrative to fulfill his aims in retelling this story. As Bruce Lincoln said about variants of myths,

Where variants differ, however, is in the innovations, modifications, omissions, and fine recalibrations they introduce to the widely known and commonly accepted version. Their own authors’ claims notwithstanding, these innovations are not regrettable lapses but the very heart of the matter. For in making such revisions, narrators actively intervene to reshape the story and, through the instrument of the story, to reshape the consciousness of those who hear and retell it. They do so,

⁴⁹⁸ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 54.

⁴⁹⁹ Middleton ed., *The Wiley Blackwell Companion*, 169.

⁵⁰⁰ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 54.

moreover, not in random, impersonal, or disinterested fashion but from a specific social locus with its own distinctive perspective, representing interests they seek to advance through these variations.⁵⁰¹

What was it about Version 1 of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* that was so objectionable it was condemned by Theodore, the *Decretum Gelasianum*, and the *Constitutiones ecclesiasticae*?

Put another way, what interests were Theodore and other writers and censors “[seeking] to advance”⁵⁰² by promoting one version over another? Dillmann⁵⁰³ and Hesselman⁵⁰⁴ both suggested that the alleged Gnostic content of the prayer of Cyricus may have played a role.

Given that the prayer is only found as a later addition in some Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic manuscripts,⁵⁰⁵ this seems unlikely to have been the core issue. The general consensus, suggested or affirmed by Dillmann,⁵⁰⁶ Hesselman,⁵⁰⁷ Pisani,⁵⁰⁸ and Kälviäinen,⁵⁰⁹ is that the core issue is the ‘excessive’ miracles present in the text. As Kälviäinen discusses, medieval Greek hagiography increasingly distanced itself from earlier works, which featured numerous miracles and complicated, fantastical plots, and rewrote these now-unacceptable texts to fit “a more standardized and disciplined approach, with more or less set rhetorical guidelines from the composition of a saint’s *Life*.⁵¹⁰ These epic passions were believed to so exaggerate the deeds of martyrs and saints that those who heard them would find them ridiculous and doubt God.⁵¹¹ This

⁵⁰¹ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 55.

⁵⁰² Ibid., 55.

⁵⁰³ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 344–348.

⁵⁰⁴ Hesselman, “The Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta in Coptic,” 80.

⁵⁰⁵ Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus,” 166.

⁵⁰⁶ Dillmann, “Über die apokryphen,” 339.

⁵⁰⁷ Hesselman, “The Martyrdom of Cyriacus and Julitta in Coptic,” 80.

⁵⁰⁸ Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus,” 162.

⁵⁰⁹ Kälviäinen, “Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts,” 111.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 108.

⁵¹¹ Ibid., 115.

fear of ridicule due to excessive miracles is certainly part of why Version 1 was deemed apocryphal and heretical—Theodore himself states that it was created by heretics or pagans in order to mock Christianity.⁵¹² However, simply asserting that Version 1 was denounced because it featured too many miracles obscures the fact that one of these miracles in particular faced specific pushback throughout Version 2: the miracle of the child-martyr.

Version 2 is not simply Version 1 with the more unbelievable miracles removed. Rather, it is an almost entirely different narrative, with a new protagonist, narrative structure, and primary theme to the earlier story. Version 1 is centered on Cyricus: he argues with Satan and the judge, is praised by God and Jesus, and leads his mother through the martyrdom. The climax of the story comes when Cyricus successfully guides his mother away from fear and into the cauldron, leading to Satan’s defeat. All that remains after that is Cyricus’s requests to Jesus on behalf of those who venerate him and the final deaths of the saints. This climax underlines the thematic heart of the martyrdom: the inversion of expectations through the power of God, shown through both the inversion of expected behavior in Cyricus and the inversion of the parent-child relationship between Cyricus and Julitta. While the inversion of expectations through the power of God is not a controversial theme on its own in martyrdoms, the specific way that Version 1 illustrates the theme is potentially problematic for an early Christian audience. As I explored in Chapters 2 and 3, the position of and attitudes towards children in Late Antiquity in general and as martyrs in particular were precarious and hotly debated. While Version 1 was about a specific and exceptional child and should not be read as advocating any sort of radically child-centered worldview, it certainly has more in common with Clement’s favorable evaluation of child as potential models of virtue and the examples of children martyred on their own, which I explored

⁵¹² Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 21.

in the last chapter, than with Augustine's understanding of the sinfulness of children or John Chrysostom's statue molded to perfection by parents.

Where it goes even further than most martyrdoms of children is how it deals with the parent-child relationship. Version 1 defies the categorization of child-martyrs based on the role of parents presented in the last chapter: Julitta is present, Christian, not instigating the martyrdom of her child, and must be rescued from faltering by her son. Cyricus protecting and guiding his mother not only inverts the Maccabean mother model—it inverts the expected parent-child relationship, which was a firmly held hierarchy across the ancient world. It is this valorization of a very young child at the expense of his mother that makes Version 1 of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* so disbelieved and disliked. As Kälviäinen notes, Theodore's letter, the *Decretum Gelasianum*, and the *Constitutiones ecclesiasticae* all seem to have condemned Version 1 significantly before the large-scale replacement of epic passions with *acta sincera* began.⁵¹³ Even in a time that allowed for experimentation and fantastical elements in hagiography, Version 1 went too far in the view of some. By examining how Version 2 distinguishes itself from Version 1, we can see that the portrayal of children and parent-child relations was what set Version 1 apart from other epic passions.

Version 2 emphasizes Cyricus's childishness, but never undermines the cultural expectations that accompany such behavior. Unlike Version 1, where Cyricus is questioned separately from his mother and astonishes the judge, Julitta enters “carrying her child in her arms,”⁵¹⁴ and she alone is interrogated. Cyricus is not held responsible for his mother’s actions and the judge has no initial plans to prosecute him alongside her. He is, after all, a child—shaped by and reflecting his mother’s morality and piety and ultimately not able to be held legally liable.

⁵¹³ Kälviäinen, “Not a Few of the Martyr Accounts,” note 46.

⁵¹⁴ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

This presumed innocence is such that the governor even holds Cyricus on his lap as Julitta is tortured, trying “to calm him with kisses and other endearments.”⁵¹⁵ While Version 1’s Cyricus is treated as criminal and adversary by the judge, this Cyricus is treated as a crying child—which he is. Cyricus, breaking from the stoic calm of most martyrs, “wept bitterly and uttered loud cries”⁵¹⁶ as he watched his mother be beaten. Instead of turning the other cheek, he “shrugged away from the ruler’s embraces, turned his head indignantly, and scratched the man’s face with his fingernails...and finally bit the governor on the shoulder.”⁵¹⁷ It is precisely this lack of control over passions that writers like Jerome, Chrysostom, and Augustine saw as the core characteristic of children: they were incapable of reason and rational speech, and thus were incapable of resisting their instincts. It is only through spiritual education by their parents that they are able to become full moral beings and avoid sin. Rather than try to portray him as wise as an adult, this version emphasizes how very young Cyricus is, referring to him as “the young and holy infant” ($\tauὸ\ θεότεκνον\ βρέφος$).⁵¹⁸ It also re-enforces the expected hierarchical parent-child relationship by emphasizing his dependence on his mother, comparing “how the nestling of a wise turtledove sings out a sound, imitating [its mother]” to Cyricus repeating Julitta’s declaration that she is a Christian.⁵¹⁹ Having Julitta carry Cyricus into the interrogation also emphasizes this dependence. This Cyricus’s holiness is closer to the holiness of the Holy Innocents than that of Version 1 Cyricus: he is holy because he was innocent and he suffered unjustly, not because he made the independent, rational choice to die in the name of Christ. Rather than undermining the topoi of the Maccabean mother model, this version embraces it, with Julitta “joyfully [giving] thanks to

⁵¹⁵ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

⁵¹⁶ Ibid., 324.

⁵¹⁷ Ibid., 324.

⁵¹⁸ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 22.

⁵¹⁹ Ibid., 22.

God that her son had gone before her to the kingdom of heaven.”⁵²⁰ Version 2 Cyricus does not undermine any of the cultural expectations for children. In fact, he plays into these expectations even more than most martyred children of Maccabean mothers, who usually still display a degree of *puer senex* behavior. In Theodore’s letter, Cyricus’s death doesn’t mark the climax of the story. Instead, Julitta’s torture continues for several more sections, until she gives a final prayer and is executed. This version turns Julitta into the protagonist: it is her speech and death that mark the climax and it is to her, “the flower blossoming from the best blood of Lyconia,”⁵²¹ that Theodore’s informants trace their ancestry.

It would have been possible for Theodore to write a version of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* that simply got rid of the most excessive miracles. It even would have been possible to write a version that retained the plot of Version 1 while deemphasizing Cyricus’s astonishing wisdom. Instead, Theodore chose to completely reshape the narrative to focus on Cyricus’s childishness, Julitta’s virtue, and Cyricus’s dependence on his mother. It is the miracle of the child-martyr and his faltering mother that Version 2 was primarily constructed to undermine, along with the other excessive miracles used to assert Cyricus’s exceptionality. In the context of contemporary debates over the nature of children and their relationship to their parents, Version 1 strayed too far from the understanding of irrational, sinful children molded into virtuous adults by their parents for a number of writers and thinkers, who attempted to replace this problematic version with their own. Despite their efforts, the evolving dialogue of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* continued, with Version 1 neither disappearing nor staying static.

⁵²⁰ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

⁵²¹ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 22.

Children in the Extended Introduction

Unlike Version 2, Version 1 successfully traveled across linguistic and church boundaries. Beginning in Greek, translations of its text moved west into Latin and east and south into Syriac, Arabic, Ethiopic, Armenian, Coptic, and Sogdian.⁵²² As it moved, the narrative continued to evolve. In particular, the Syriac tradition introduced several new elements. The added element that has attracted the most scholarly attention is the prayer of Cyricus, whose origin and contents have been the subject of a number of articles. However, there is another element added to the Syriac translation which has received comparatively little scholarly attention: the extended introduction seen in Vatican Syriac 161 and several Arabic manuscripts.

This introduction is an ambiguous text. Unlike Theodore's letter, we have no extra-textual information on its author and their aims. It seems to have been introduced fairly early on, since it is found in the oldest manuscript of this version that I know of in any language, Vatican Syriac 161,⁵²³ as well as in six Garshuni Arabic manuscripts.⁵²⁴ The introduction seems to have continued evolving, with the Arabic manuscript examined by Dillmann including the detail that Julitta "was forced to marry through abuse and beatings, against her will,"⁵²⁵ which is absent from the Syriac text. Similar to Version 2, this introduction is an attempt to re-valorize Julitta by asserting her connection to other female saints (Thekla and Sophia, a Maccabean mother) and emphasizing her status as a good mother.

The introduction functions similarly to Theodore's letter, in that it strengthens Julitta's claim to sanctity and emphasizes a more conventional mother-child relationship. Like Theodore,

⁵²² Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 5.

⁵²³ Late 9th-10th century, according to Terpelyuk's analysis (Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 11-13).

⁵²⁴ See Table 1 for a list of manuscripts.

⁵²⁵ Dillmann, "Über die apokryphen," 349. Since I do not know Arabic, my examination of the introduction is based on the Syriac text and Dillmann's description of the Arabic.

the introduction states that Julitta is “highborn, from the family of the rulers of all Iconium.”⁵²⁶ The introduction goes one step further—in addition to linking her to a respectable mortal lineage, it also grants her a spiritual lineage of female saints. She is said to be “from the *genus* of Thekla,”⁵²⁷ a famous saint, also from Iconium.⁵²⁸ The use of ~~κατα~~, from the Greek γένος, which means ‘race, offspring, family, sort/kind in Syriac⁵²⁹ as in Greek,⁵³⁰ allows for multiple understandings of Julitta’s connection to Thekla. It is ambiguous if it is meant to imply that they are from the same biological family, emphasize their shared aristocratic birth in Iconium, or present Julitta as following the ‘type’ of Thekla. Most likely, it is meant to function on multiple levels, simultaneously granting Julitta respected spiritual and mortal inheritances. Thekla, “who was engaged to Thamyris”⁵³¹ before being converted by Paul, is paralleled to Julitta, who “was not willing to have a husband, because she was very chaste.”⁵³²

This parallel is somewhat problematic, since Julitta eventually was married and had a child, in spite of her unwillingness, unlike Thekla, who was persecuted specifically because of her refusal to marry. The author sidesteps this difficulty by comparing Julitta to another female saint, who is also a widow and a mother. Julitta “adhered to the tradition [passed down]...from faithful Sophia, the mother of those three virgins, Pistis, Elpis, and Agape.”⁵³³ As discussed in Chapter 3, the martyrdom of Sophia and her daughters is one of the best known Christian martyrdoms drawing on the Maccabean mother model. By emphasizing her asceticism and piety and tracing that behavior to her imitation of another sanctified mother, the author counters

⁵²⁶ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 41.

⁵²⁷ Ibid., 41.

⁵²⁸ Farmer, “Thecla (Tecla) of Iconium.”

⁵²⁹ Brock and Kiraz, s.v. ‘~~κατα~~’.

⁵³⁰ Liddell & Scott, s.v. ‘γένος’

⁵³¹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 42.

⁵³² Ibid., 42.

⁵³³ Ibid., 42.

worries raised by writers like Tertullian that motherhood will prevent women from leading fully pious lives and embracing martyrdom.⁵³⁴ The author continues to link Julitta to these two female saints, saying that she prayed to be permitted to be a martyr, “just as the blessed Thekla and Sophia and her daughters [prayed] during the struggles of their martyrdoms.”⁵³⁵ In addition to her aristocratic birth and connection to previous saints, the introduction comments that “she gave alms and she fasted and prayed all day”⁵³⁶ and was “constantly meditating on lesson of the Holy Scriptures,”⁵³⁷ demonstrating how her noble lineage translated into pious behavior.

Having established Julitta’s virtue, the introduction goes on to valorize Julitta by revising her motivations and actions when she is initially confronted with martyrdom. In the versions of Version 1 without this introduction and in Version 2, Julitta actively flees from the persecution of Christians. In Version 1, she “was troubled and, because of her fear, she fled,”⁵³⁸ while Version 2 is more ambiguous and simply states that she “[wished] to evade the persecution raging [in Iconium].”⁵³⁹ In both versions, Julitta is a somewhat unusual martyr, in that she doesn’t eagerly embrace an opportunity to receive the crown of martyrdom. Version 2, in removing fear as an explicit motive, reduces the extent to which her hesitation and flight could invalidate her status as a legitimate martyr, given the importance of martyrs choosing to embrace their deaths in setting them apart from other violent deaths,⁵⁴⁰ but the implication that she initially was frightened and chose mortal life over martyrdom remains. Only in the extended introduction is Julitta giving a motivation that excuses her hesitation:

⁵³⁴ Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 261.

⁵³⁵ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 43.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 42.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 43.

⁵³⁸ Bedjan, *Acta Martyrum*, 254.

⁵³⁹ Ryan, *The Golden Legend*, 324.

⁵⁴⁰ Doerfler, *Jephthah's Daughter*, 181.

[She] deliberated in her mind on account of her son, Cyricus, who was very young, and she said things such as this: “If I go and am crowned and leave my son behind me, because of his youth, he will fall into the hands of the impious and while he is a child, they will teach him according to their sins and there will be an evil fate for him, like them. And what gain is there, [if] I draw near and I come to [eternal] life and my son goes to perdition? But I will wait a little while longer until the boy is older and the Lord, whom I have faith in, will deem us worthy of a portion together of the martyrdom of the saints.”⁵⁴¹

In attempting to defend Julitta’s choice to flee martyrdom, this introduction inadvertently confirms worries raised by authors like Tertullian that concern for children could prevent parents from staying resolved in the face of martyrdom.⁵⁴² While his concern was more focused on the possibility that parents will deny their faith rather than fleeing, Julitta’s behavior still plays into the concern that motherhood would make a woman less capable of piety. This assumption lies beneath many martyrdoms following the Maccabean mother model—it is specifically the belief that mothers will choose the safety of their children over religious devotion that makes their choice to encourage their children through torture so astonishing. It is also found in the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, where both new mothers happily give up their infants in order to face martyrdom.⁵⁴³

This introduction’s attempt to center Julitta and assert her piety relies heavily on a conventional understanding of mother-child relationships, similar to those endorsed by writers like John Chrysostom and Jerome.⁵⁴⁴ In this understanding, children are blank slates molded by

⁵⁴¹ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 44-45.

⁵⁴² Bakke, *When Children Became People*, 261-262.

⁵⁴³ Wasyliv, *Martyrdom, Murder, and Magic*, 22.

⁵⁴⁴ Aasgaard, “Childhood in 400 CE,” 170.

those who rear them. If raised correctly by Christians, they too will become good Christians. If raised by the impious, “they will teach him according to their sins and there will be an evil fate for him, like them.”⁵⁴⁵ Texts like *Perpetua and Felicitas* avoid this worry by stating that the martyrs’ infants were given “to a sister” and Perpetua’s mother, relieving the women of the responsibility to stay alive to mold their children.⁵⁴⁶ This assumption places a strong moral obligation on parents to mold their children into moral Christians beings and to model such behavior to them. After all, “what gain is there, [if] I draw near and I come to [eternal] life and my son goes to perdition?”⁵⁴⁷ How a child turns out is a commendation or demerit for their parents, rather than something that reflects on the child alone. This also brings along the assumption that children are not morally autonomous—children, in this understanding, are passively formed by their parents and incapable of making independent choices. This underlies why the introduction and Julitta both think that Cyricus can’t accompany his mother in martyrdom “because of his youth.”⁵⁴⁸ It is very rare to see anyone other than an antagonist believing that there is an age that is too young to become a martyr in the martyrdoms of children, as was explored in Chapter 3. The Maccabean mother model (and the martyrdoms of children more generally) assumes that children can and should become martyrs, and that parents should encourage them to embrace this fate regardless of age.

This introduction isn’t straying that far from the Maccabean mother model—Julitta still hopes to be martyred with her son when “the boy is older.”⁵⁴⁹ Nevertheless, this introduction chooses to undermine certain conventions of the martyrdoms of mothers and children—that

⁵⁴⁵ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 44.

⁵⁴⁶ Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 111, 125.

⁵⁴⁷ Terpelyuk, *Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs*, 44-45.

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid., 45.

mothers will never choose protecting their children over achieving martyrdom, that the children left behind by martyrs are not a moral concern for their parents, and that children, no matter how young, can become martyrs. The understanding of mother-child relationships in the introduction is one that centers mothers as moral agents and children as passive dependents, whose wellbeing is a matter of moral concern for their mothers. This is the same understanding found in Version 2, where it led to Cyricus being portrayed as unusually immature and treated as not a threat by Alexander. In both of these articulations of the story of Cyricus and Julitta, their authors were clearly troubled by the portrayal of children and mother-child relationships found in Version 1 and attempted to resolve this discomfort by recasting Julitta as a Maccabean mother protagonist and Cyricus as dependent on her. While Version 2's revision was far more radical than the introduction, which simply added a new element without taking away anything from the core of the story, both were attempts to "actively intervene to reshape the story and, through the instrument of the story, to reshape the consciousness of those who hear and retell it."⁵⁵⁰ In trying to reshape the story to reassert a conventional understanding of children, both authors create works that are exceptional among the martyrdoms of children in how unexceptional the children are. Cyricus in both of these versions is secondary to and dependent on Julitta, whose piety is the core of the narrative.

Evolution and Veneration Beyond Manuscripts

These two versions, which aim to make the narrative of Cyricus and Julitta more acceptable to understandings of children that grant them no moral autonomy or spiritual power, were developed seemingly independently of each other, in two different languages and churches.

⁵⁵⁰ Lincoln, *Gods and Demons*, 55.

If one looks only at the manuscript evidence, both versions seem to have been relatively successful in asserting themselves in their respective churches. There are 37 known manuscripts of Theodore's letter,⁵⁵¹ compared to three known Greek⁵⁵² and one Latin⁵⁵³ manuscripts of Version 1. The extended introduction does not seem as overwhelmingly successful, but seven of the twelve Syriac and Arabic Garshuni manuscripts considered did include the extended introduction.⁵⁵⁴ Based on this manuscript evidence, Theodore's letter seems to have almost entirely eliminated Version 1 in Europe, while the extended introduction managed to significantly modify the narrative in the Syriac and Arabic traditions. This is certainly the assumption that scholars like van Hooff, Dillmann, and the Bollandists worked under, treating Version 1 as an extinct piece of apocrypha, successfully eliminated by the more reliable Version 2. Based on this evidence, one could conclude that the portrayal of Cyricus and Julitta and the numerous miracles made Version 1 as “excessive and absurd and nonsensical” to believers as Theodore had feared,⁵⁵⁵ which, combined with official condemnation, caused it to be rejected in Europe and partially outside of Europe.

Manuscripts, however, are not the only evidence of the veneration and stories of these saints available to us. Artwork reveals that Version 1's portrayal of Cyricus and Julitta persisted and thrived, even in areas where it had been explicitly denounced as apocrypha. Beyond the artistic evidence, epigraphic sources, church names, and other overlooked sources also point to this persistence, although less explicitly. The latter category of evidence deserves some further explanation. While almost all of the epigraphic evidence I will consider does not explicitly point

⁵⁵¹ Kälviäinen, “E06121.”

⁵⁵² Kälviäinen, “E06118.”

⁵⁵³ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 24-28.

⁵⁵⁴ See Table 1.

⁵⁵⁵ Papebroch, *Acta Sanctorum*, 21.

to one version over the other, some information can still possibly be gleaned from it. As discussed above, Version 2 differs from Version 1 not only in its plot but in its protagonist. Julitta is the center of veneration in Lyconia, as Theodore portrays it, and receives most of the narrative time and attention. By contrast, Version 1 firmly places Cyricus at its center, with Julitta all but disappearing from the narrative for pages at a time. In both versions, one martyr is the clear protagonist. While epigraphic evidence invoking Cyricus or Julitta on their own is not necessarily proof of the prevalence of one version, it may indicate which martyr was the center of devotion, which likely is shaped by which version is in use in that community, whether through oral tradition or written sources. Of 151 churches dedicated to one or both of these saints that I know of, 100 are dedicated to both saints, 47 to just Cyricus, and 4 to just Julitta.⁵⁵⁶ Of the 37 items that mention one or both of the saints found in the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity database, one mentions only Julitta, two mention both saints, and 34 only mention Cyricus.⁵⁵⁷ While the bias towards Cyricus in both data sources is not necessarily proof of Version 1's presence, it is clear that Theodore's aim of casting Julitta as the protagonist and the central figure in their cult was unsuccessful. Regardless of the specific narrative found in these places, people seem to have overwhelmingly focused their devotion on Cyricus more than Julitta. In terms of works that more directly indicate the survival of Version 1, we can first turn to a pair of Latin hymns dedicated to the saints from 7th century Spain. Both of them center on Cyricus and, even more notably, both explicitly follow Version 1's events and put focus on the cauldron episode.⁵⁵⁸

⁵⁵⁶ See Table 2.

⁵⁵⁷ “S00007,” *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity Database*, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=S00007>. These items mostly come from the 5th to 8th centuries and represent a range of regions and languages. There is a wide range of items, from graffiti on a basilica’s floor declaring its writer a “servant of the holy martyr Kyrikos” ([E01259](#)) to a record of a donation of vegetables to an institution dedicated to Cyricus ([E04144](#)).

⁵⁵⁸ Szada, “E05282.”

Combined with the number of churches named after just Cyricus⁵⁵⁹ and of pieces of art depicting Version 1,⁵⁶⁰ it is clear that Version 1 has remained the dominant image of these saints in Spain, particularly Catalonia,⁵⁶¹ despite the fact that the text was not included in the Spanish Passionary.⁵⁶²

While Spain is the clearest example of Version 1 thriving despite a lack of prose *acta* evidence, this same phenomenon seems to occur across Europe. As discussed in chapter 1, a number of pieces of art survive throughout Europe that depict Version 1 or a combination of both versions. These range from a well-known 8th century Roman fresco (fig. 4 and 5) to an anonymous 18th century Russian icon (fig. 3). These works do not make up the majority of artistic depictions of the saints I've examined—most don't indicate a specific version and significantly more depict Version 2 (34)⁵⁶³ than Version 1 or a mixed version (11).⁵⁶⁴ However, for a version that was proscribed by three different prominent sources, it clearly survived to a greater extent in Europe than the manuscript records would indicate.

Conclusion

Theodore seemed to worry that Version 1 would somehow lead believers away from a proper Christian faith by stretching the limits of believability. Based on how he chose to rewrite the narrative, it is clear that the depiction of children and mother-child relations was central to his discomfort with Version 1. This discomfort makes sense when placed in the larger cultural context of the time. Children and parents and the obligations between them were all subject to

⁵⁵⁹ See Table 2.

⁵⁶⁰ See figures 1, 2, and 9.

⁵⁶¹ Based on the origin of the artwork and the location of the churches, particularly in Catalonia.

⁵⁶² Szada, “E05282.”

⁵⁶³ See figures 8, 10, and 11 as examples.

⁵⁶⁴ See figures 1-7 and 9 as examples.

intense debate by early Christian writers. Their conclusions ranged from a radically new understanding of children as models of virtue to the equally new assertion of children's inherent sinfulness, to the view of children as passive beings molded by their parents, which represented a continuity with pre-Christian cultural assumptions. It is this ongoing debate that produced Version 1, which attempts to show the power of God through the coincidence of opposites in Cyricus and his relationship with Julitta. This debate also caused the disorientation that Theodore, among others, felt when confronted with this depiction of a child triumphing over and teaching his mother. To reassert a view of children closer to the beliefs expressed by Chrysostom and Jerome, Theodore wrote Version 2 and attempted to assert its legitimacy over Version 1. This discomfort is also seen in the extended introduction to certain Version 1 manuscripts, which attempts to valorize Julitta and assert a normative mother-child relationship.

While this attempt was successful in replacing Version 1 in European martyrologies, passionaries, and other (semi-)official records of martyrs and saints, it failed to eliminate Version 1 from the popular memory of Cyricus and Julitta in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. Cyricus remained the more popular of the saints, with dozens of churches, monasteries, and other institutions dedicated to him and his name frequently invoked to ask for blessing. Julitta's cult, by comparison, was far more limited. More concretely, a number of pieces of art depicting Version 1 or a combination of the versions can be found in Europe, from many different countries and times. While the contemporary debates over children clearly made some people wary of a narrative that exalts the moral autonomy and spiritual power of a child over his mother, the reverse is also true. Despite official condemnation, many people continued to tell the story of Cyricus, a remarkable child capable of miracles and eloquence, and his mother Julitta, led to the crown by her young child. In the dialogue of revisions and rewritings that creates hagiography,

Version 1 offered a narrative to its audience appealing enough that no amount of proscription and new versions could fully eliminate it from their memory, oral traditions, and veneration of Cyricus and Julitta.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Lord, our God, and Saint Kyrikos, protect the crops, O God, have mercy upon those in toil and sickness, and the contributors!

— Greek inscription recording the deposition of Cyricus’s relics⁵⁶⁵

For more than a thousand years, the story of a three-year-old and his mother being tortured and murdered in the city of Tarsus has been read in churches each year on the day they died. The audience for their stories could include a monk from the Bulayiq monastery (Xinjiang, China) in the 9th century,⁵⁶⁶ an Iconian mother holding her own three-year-old in the 5th century, the Ethiopian king Yəmrəħənnä Krəstos (who dedicated a church to Cyricus in the latter half of the twelfth century,)⁵⁶⁷ and a child in L’église Saint-Cyr d’Issoudun today. Ultimately, the texts have been used to achieve the same goals across all these audiences: to showcase the power of the Christian God, promote the veneration of Cyricus and Julitta, and “inspire the audience to imitate the saint’s lifestyle and...move them from *anamnesis* (recollection) to *mimesis* (imitation).”⁵⁶⁸

Can a three-year-old child act as a model of moral behavior for adults? This concern lies at the heart of the complicated history of censoring and revising the stories of Cyricus and Julitta. Early Christian writers contended with the issue of the moral autonomy of children as part of larger debates on martyrdom, original sin, and familial obligations during the period when the two primary versions of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* were being written, as covered in chapter two. Two divergent understandings emerged from these questions: that children were shaped into moral beings by their parents and that children functioned as models of moral

⁵⁶⁵ From a rock-cut complex in Sinasos/Mustafapasa, Turkey (6th century). Paweł Nowakowski, “E01300,” *Cult of the Saints in Late Antiquity*, last modified June 11, 2017, <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E01300>.

⁵⁶⁶ Hunter, “Syr HT 140,” 225.

⁵⁶⁷ Pisani, “Passio of St Cyricus,” 170.

⁵⁶⁸ Rogozhina, “And from his side,” 264.

behavior for adults. While these different attitudes are never directly spelled out and the same writers would appeal to both at different times, these assumptions are reflected in the martyrdoms of children, which are explored in chapter three. In some of these hagiographical texts, children emerge as powerfully independent moral actors, whose wisdom, gained through Christian piety, contrasts with their youth to reveal God's power, who has inverted the 'natural' hierarchy between children and adults. In others, children are accessories to their mother's virtue. The core of these narratives is pious motherhood, which raised martyrs and watches them die with only praise for God.

When placed in the context of early Christian debates about the nature of children and the topoi of child martyrs, it becomes clear that what separates the different versions of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* is their treatment of children. Theodore wrote Version 2 to discredit and replace Version 1, which he found absurd and unacceptable specifically because it centered on the miracle of a child martyr who can surpass even his Christian mother in virtue. It is the discomfort with this miracle that also prompted the author of the extended introduction to attempt to reframe Julitta in the model of a Maccabean mother. Regardless of the author's intent, some readers were displeased with the reversal of the expected relationship between parents and children depicted in Version 1 and sought to eliminate or modify the story to conform to an understanding of the world as built on immutable hierarchies.

Despite the complicated and contentious history of their hagiographic texts, the veneration of Cyricus and Julitta spread far beyond their native Anatolia and has continued through the centuries. Artistic and epigraphic evidence points to the continued existence of Version 1 even in areas without manuscript evidence of it. These sources also reveal a persistent focus on Cyricus in veneration and a relative disinterest in Julitta. Regardless of early Christian

debates over the nature of children, countless people, throughout the world and time, across linguistic and congregational boundaries, have found this three-year-old to be worthy of veneration, praise, and imitation.

APPENDIX



Figure 1. This 12th century altarpiece comes from Catalonia. While the figure being tortured on their own appears to be an adult and therefore Julitta, note that Julitta's hair is covered in the central image and in the cauldron, while the tortured figure has no such covering. This, along with the fact that Cyrus is the protagonist of Version 1, which this depicts, points to him being the tortured figure, following a well-documented artistic convention of portraying holy children as older than their actual age⁵⁶⁹ (“Frontal d’altar de Durro,” image courtesy of Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, <https://www.museunacional.cat/ca/colleccio/frontal-daltar-de-durro/anonim-catalunya/015809-000>).

⁵⁶⁹ Palumbo, “L’enigma Di Durro,” 29.



Figure 2. This 16th century altarpiece comes from Sant Quirze d'Arbúcies in Catalonia. Version 2 is depicted in the upper left panel, while the other three panels dealing with Cyricus and Julitta follow Version 1 (“Retaule de sant Quirze i santa Julita,” image courtesy of Museu Nacional d’Art de Catalunya, <https://www.museunacional.cat/ca/colleccio/retaul-de-sant-quirze-i-santa-julita/anom-catalunya/015785-cjt>).



Figure 3. An anonymous icon depicting Version 1 (“Русский Север: Выставка в Государственном историческом музее,” image courtesy of Мой виртуальный музей, <https://www.myvirtualmuseum.ru/text/moscow/gim/russiannorth.htm>).



Figure 4. “Where Saint Quiricus and his mother are sent into the frying pan”⁵⁷⁰ (Photo by Francesco Bini, “Età di papa zaccaria, cappella del primicerius teodoro, storie dei ss. quirico e giulitta, 741-752, 06,” image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Et%C3%A0_di_papa_zaccaria,_cappella_del_primicerius_teodoro,_storie_dei_ss._quirico_e_giulitta,_741-752,_06.jpg).

⁵⁷⁰ Jessop, “Pictorial Cycles,” 245.



Figure 5. Cyrus, portrayed as an adult, is “tortured with nails” on the left.⁵⁷¹ On the right, the saint, here shown as a child, is thrown to the ground, as in Version 2. The inscription for this episode was on the top of the fresco and is mostly destroyed (Photo by Francesco Bini, “Età di papa zaccaria, cappella del primicerius teodoro, storie dei ss. quirico e giulitta, 741-752, 10,” image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Et%C3%A0_di_papa_zaccaria,_cappella_del_primicerius_teodoro,_storie_dei_ss._quirico_e_giulitta,_741-752,_10.jpg).

⁵⁷¹ Jessop, “Pictorial Cycles,” 247.



Figure 6. 15th century stained glass from Issoudun, mostly following Version 1 (“Bleiglasfenster in der Kirche Saint-Cyr in Issoudun im Département Indre in der Region Centre (Frankreich),” image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Stained_glass_windows_of_%C3%89glise_Saint-Cyr_d%27Issoudun?uselang=fr#/media/File:Issoudun_Saint-Cyr_3946.JPG).



Figure 7. The bottom two panes of the older Issoudun stained glass. On the left, Julitta is beaten while Cyricus strikes the governor's face. On the right, Cyricus has been thrown to the ground by the governor as Julitta prays ("Issoudun Saint-Cyr 3919," image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Issoudun_Saint-Cyr_3919.JPG?uselang=fr).



Figure 8. Stained glass from Issoudun depicting Version 2, added in 1868⁵⁷² (“Bleiglasfenster in der Kirche Saint-Cyr in Issoudun im Département Indre in der Region Centre (Frankreich),” images courtesy of Wikimedia Commons,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Stained_glass_windows_of_%C3%89glise_Saint-Cyr_d%27Issoudun?uselang=fr#/media/File:Issoudun_Saint-Cyr_3928.JPG,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Stained_glass_windows_of_%C3%89glise_Saint-Cyr_d%27Issoudun?uselang=fr#/media/File:Issoudun_Saint-Cyr_3929.JPG.

⁵⁷² Geneste Olivier, “Issoudun : église Saint-Cyr, verrières,” Inventaire du patrimoine Centre-Val de Loire: 2009, <https://patrimoine.regioncentre.fr/gertrude-diffusion/dossier/issoudun-eglise-saint-cyr-verrieres/7661f47d-3eab-4548-8d55-e271268b5e3e>.



Figure 9. Altarpiece depicting Version 1 by Pere Garcia de Benavarri, a Catalonian painter, around 1456⁵⁷³ (“Retaule de Sant Quirze i Santa Julita de Pere Garcia de Benavarri (Catalonia),” image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Paintings_in_the_Museu_Dioces%C3%A0_de_Barcelona#/media/File:GarciaBenavarri_ret.stQuirze-staJulita_diocesa_3460.jpg).

⁵⁷³ “Aquest dissabte es presenta el llibre “El Retaule Gòtic de Sant Quirze i Santa Julita,” Ajuntament de Sant Quirze del Vallès, October 23, 2013, <http://www.santquirzevalles.cat/DetailNoticia/CR1bHNtBU9DLTRiyiCrCY16hWwSp8pFRXOPPJGsDh8A>.

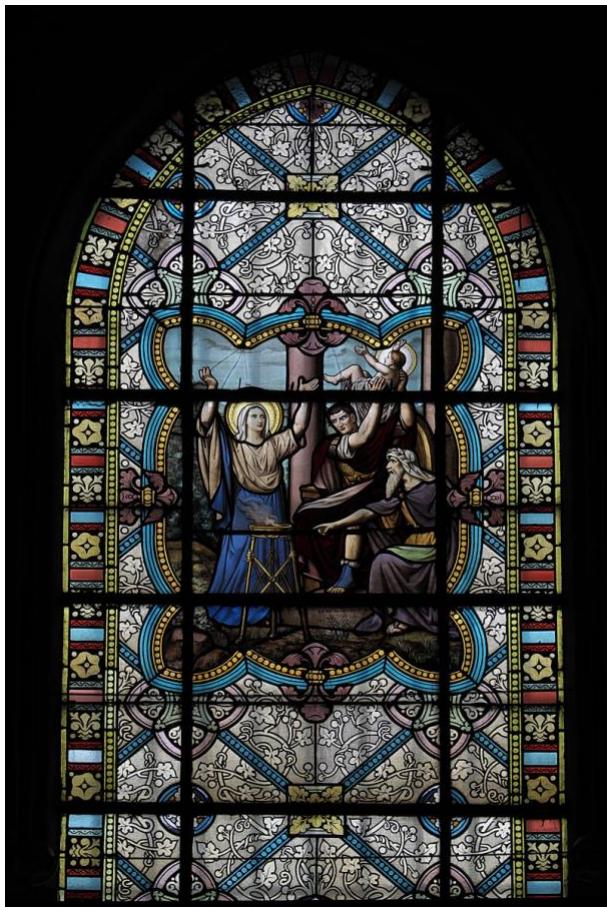


Figure 10. Stained glass depicting Version 1, from the church of Saint-Cyr-Sainte-Julitte in Villejuif, France (“6 verrières à personnages,” image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Villejuif_Saint-Cyr-Sainte-Julitte_754.jpg).



Figure 11. 17th century Spanish altarpiece depicting Version 2 (“Composición con la vida y martirio de Santa Julita y San Quirico en el Altar Mayor,” image courtesy of Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Composici%C3%B3n_Vida_y_Martirio_de_Santa_Julita_y_San_Quirico_-_Villamelendro_de_Valdavia_001.jpg).

Shelfmark	Folios	Language, script	Date (C.E.)	Extended introduction?	Digital manuscript
SMMJ 00183	181r-187v	Arabic, Serto	16 th cent.	Yes	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/135637
SOAA 00064 M	93v-108v	Arabic, Serto	17 th cent.	Yes	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/134166
CCM 00003	108v-119v	Arabic, East	19 th cent.	Yes	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/132206
SCAA SL09 30	126r-153v	Arabic, Serto	1825	Yes	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/145702
SMMJ 00248	61v-69r	Arabic, Serto	1475	Yes	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/501313
Vatican Syriac 161	181r-190r	Syriac, mixed ⁵⁷⁴	Late 9 th - early 10 th cent.	Yes	https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MS_S_Vat.sir.161
SMMJ 00199 B	252v-254v	Arabic, Serto	1734	No	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/501309
SOAH 00002	208v-226r	Arabic, Serto	1824-1825	No	https://w3id.org/vhmml/readingRoom/view/502613
BnF syr. 236	301r-328r	Syriac, East	1194	No	https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b53115223f/f611.item.r=Syriaque
Sachau 222	234v-247r	Syriac, East	1881	No	http://resolver.staatsbibliothek.de/

⁵⁷⁴ Manuscript has characteristics of both Estrangelo and East Syriac, which is common in early manuscripts like this (Terpelyuk, Martyrdom of Mār Qūryāqūs, 11-13). 480-505

					berlin.de/SBB 00007495000 00000
Beinecke Syriac MS 5	Page 60-103	Syriac, East	1888	No	https://brbl-dl.library.yale.edu/vufind/Record/3556449
Bodleian Hunt. Donat. 32	95v-110r	Arabic, Serto	1549	Yes	— ⁵⁷⁵
Coislinianus gr. 121	128r-132r	Greek, minuscule	14 th cent.	No	https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b110001561/f275.item#

Table 1. Manuscripts of the *Martyrdom of Cyricus and Julitta* consulted for this thesis.

⁵⁷⁵ My thanks to the Bodleian Library, who kindly provided me with the section pertaining to the martyrdom from this currently un-digitized manuscript. The information about the date of the manuscript is based on Smith's description (Smith, *Codices syriacos*, 476-481).

	Cyricus	Julitta	Both
Bulgaria	-	-	1
France	30	4	60
Italy	9	-	25
Russia	-	-	3
Spain	6	-	1
Switzerland	-	-	3
United Kingdom	-	-	5
Greece	-	-	1
Georgia	-	-	1
Slovenia	1	-	-
Ethiopia	1	-	-
Total	47	4	100

Table 2. Number of churches dedicated to just Cyricus, just Julitta, or both, by country. Information is drawn from the Wikimedia Commons categories [Saint Julietta churches](#), [Saint Quiricus churches](#), and [Saints Quiricus and Julietta churches](#). While this sample is clearly incomplete and somewhat problematic, it will hopefully provide an indication of some general trends.

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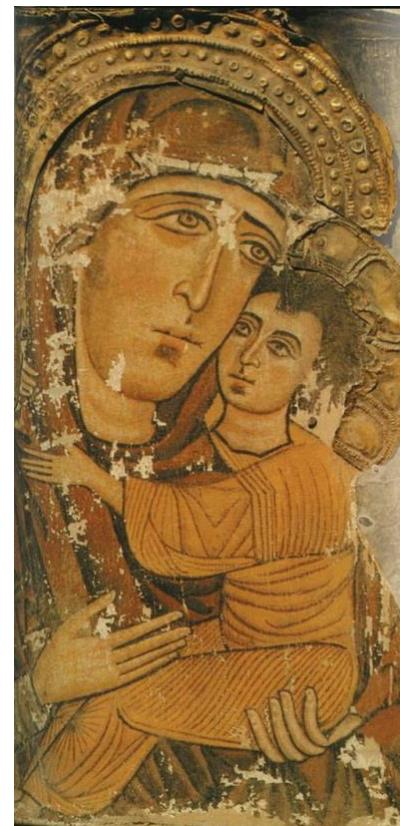


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