

THE VENERATION OF THE MACCABEAN BROTHERS IN
FOURTH CENTURY ANTIOCH: RELIGIOUS COMPETITION,
MARTYRDOM, AND INNOVATION

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Fata habent libelli – this far more applies to traditions that preserve memory and thereby establish identity. The influences that assert themselves over the course of centuries are complex, as are the various interests that may become interwoven with them. Both the history of the different Maccabean books and the tradition of the Maccabees themselves illustrate this complexity in an exemplary manner. The extraordinary influence that the accounts of the warriors and martyrs for faith have exerted over the course of two millennia obscures the fact that partly irreconcilable, mutually distant historical episodes and points of reference form their basis and that diverging elements and originally independent narratives have either been merged or tied together. It is this extremely complex process of narrative intertwining, which even modern historical criticism can scarcely unravel, and it is this richness of facets that has contributed decisively to the persistent fascination with and continued reshaping of the Maccabean story. Moreover, it is this process that has given the history of a conflict between Jews true to their faith and their profane rulers such a tremendous potential for re-interpretation.

The strand of Maccabean tradition that will be analyzed here, namely, the veneration of the Maccabean martyrs in late antique Syrian Antioch, results from a threefold process of usurpation and re-interpretation. Firstly, the designation of the seven brothers and their mother as Maccabees, who one after the other suffer terrible martyrdoms at the hands of the tyrant Antiochus IV Epiphanes in emulation of the venerable Eleazar, lacks any foundation: there is no indication that they were kin with the Hasmonean or Maccabean family. The designation is owed to the literary placement of the account of the seven youths' unshakeable faith in the larger context of the revolt against Seleucid rule initiated by Mattathias and his clan, the Maccabees, or, the Hasmonean house. For the first time, this placement is historically documented in the First Book of Maccabees. Later on, however,

the relationship between the mother and her seven sons and the Has-moneans take on an entirely new literary and theological form in the Second and Fourth Books of the Maccabees.

Secondly, the admission of the account of the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother into the Second Book of Maccabees – the episode is not mentioned in the first book¹ – is nothing other but a literary usurpation. For it appears certain that the book's literary basis, a lost five-volume work of historiography from the pen of a certain Jason of Cyrene epitomized at some point before the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by Titus in 70 C.E., did not contain the account.² It seems, rather, that the seventh chapter in which it has been preserved – the chapter that would eventually constitute the fame of 2 Maccabees – is a post-Jasonic addition, as are many other sections of the second half of the book. The account is, for instance, based on an original Hebrew text; it is also characterized by a belief in resurrection difficult to reconcile with either the revolt's earlier date or theological program (as expressed in 1 Macc and 2 Macc 1–6).³

The episodes of the martyrdom of Eleazar and that of the seven brothers and their mother in 2 Maccabees are thus grounded in entirely different traditions, the origins of which can only be identified in detail in a hypothetical manner.⁴ In any event, the later Christian

¹ The author of 1 Macc can hardly have been familiar with the episode, since he would probably not have failed to incorporate it. See Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom. The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 103–106; Christian Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch. Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit*, vol. 1: *Historische und legendarische Erzählungen* (Gütersloh: Verlags-haus Gerd Mohn, 1979), 171.

² On the question of dating, see Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch*, 169–177 (very concise); Harold W. Attridge, “2 Maccabees,” in: *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Michael E. Stone (Assen-Philadelphia: Van Gorcum-Fortress Press, 1984), 176–183; Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as Saviours of the Jewish People. A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees*, vol. 57, Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 50–56; and most recently Raphaëlle Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées: de l'histoire juive au culte chrétien. Les homélies de Grégoire de Nazianze et de Jean Chrysostome*, vol. 80, Supplements of Vigiliae Christianae (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 50–54 (each work treats the older literature extensively).

³ See the succinct and excellent descriptions in Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch*, 173–175, who documents further layers of editing. A recent detailed treatment in English is Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees, Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature* (Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2008).

⁴ As compared to 1 Macc the rendition of Eleazar's martyrdom in 2 Macc reveals considerable modifications; here, an older version, presumably going back to Jason, has been merged with a more recent version. See Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch*, 173 (with reference to P. Katz).

tradition transferred the book's title to the brothers and, as a sign of the extraordinary value it placed on this specific episode, "ennobled" large parts of the Maccabean corpus by accepting it into the canon. The Maccabean tradition found its way into both the Christian reception and Christian biblical manuscripts, – for instance the important codices Sinaiticus (4th c.) and Alexandrinus (5th c.) – in the shape it took in 4 Maccabees: a "philosophical" version of the martyrologies, which may have been composed in the middle of the first century C.E. and which took the form of a wisdom text or diatribe.⁵ Marked by a fusion of Greek rhetoric and popular philosophy, this text underlines the rule of reason over both the affects and the strengths of Jewish faith. It thus offers a remarkable bridge between Judaism and Hellenism. In its geographic origins, it doubtless belongs to the Diaspora. Alexandria and, most notably, Antioch have been repeatedly proposed as the most likely environs for the anonymous Jewish author.⁶ If Antioch is indeed the proper location, then, in light of the later intensive veneration of the Maccabean brothers in the area, the text may even have contributed essentially to the local cult's emergence.

The question of where, precisely, the version of the seven brothers' martyrdom material to the Christian tradition originated is of relevance because of its possible connection to the third usurpation manifest in the Maccabean context: all of the Maccabean books explicitly or implicitly place the martyrdoms – initially only Eleazar's martyrdom, but later also that of the brothers and mother – in the sole historically relevant context, namely that of the Maccabean revolt and here the taking of Jerusalem by Antiochus IV in 168 B.C.E. Nevertheless, in Late Antiquity, we suddenly find the Syrian city of Antioch harboring a burial-place and site of veneration for the latter group of martyrs. From Syria and Antioch, the Maccabean veneration within

⁵ On the question of dating see the summary by Hans-Josef Klauck, *4. Makkabäerbuch. Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit III 6* (Gütersloh: Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1989), 668f. (668: "die ernsthaft diskutierten Vorschläge konzentrieren sich auf den Zeitraum von ca. 30 n. Chr.–120 n. Chr.") and Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*, 50–55. It has to be noted that some researchers even consider it possible that the text emerged under Trajan or Hadrian. On the question of the character and genre of the text see Klauck, *4. Makkabäerbuch*, 659f.; van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs*, 60–67.

⁶ On this question see Joachim Jeremias, *Heiligengräber in Jesu Umwelt* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), 19; Margaret Schatkin, "The Maccabean Martyrs," *Vigiliae Christianae* 28 (1974): 97–113, 98; Klauck, *4. Makkabäerbuch*, 667 (Antioch as "wahrscheinlich die beste Lösung").

the Christian imperial Church progresses from the fourth century onwards. Thus, in 388, Ambrosius, Bishop of Milan, can already describe the celebration of the festival of the Maccabees as an established custom, at least in the eastern part of the empire. Possibly as early as shortly after 350, a Syrian martyrology offers August 1 as the brothers' commemoration day.⁷ Rabbinic Judaism in turn, though it maintained the memory of the martyrdom of the seven brothers and their mother, radically divested it of its original historical context and named neither a locus nor a persecuting monarch for the event.⁸ There is likewise no mention of a subsequent veneration of the Maccabean martyrs, let alone of a series of rituals in their honor fixed to a particular place or day of commemoration.

The Antiochian tradition of a local tomb for the Maccabean brothers is first identifiable in mid-fourth century sources. Putting aside later Arabic tradition, it is exclusively Christian authors who attest to both a Jewish place of veneration – perhaps even a synagogue atop the tomb – and the intensive veneration of the place by Antiochian Christians. At an unknown time and in equally unknown circumstances, the site would become the property of the metropolitan Church; it appears to have been transformed into a basilica around 400 C.E.⁹

These surprising findings in addition to the local religious relations and circumstances they point to, pose many problems – hardly any of

⁷ Ep. 74, 16 (CSEL 82/3, 64 Zelzer) = ep. 40, 17 (PL 16, col. 1107). Ambrose here refers to a festival of the Maccabees in Callinicum on the Euphrates. Against the background of the argumentative intention of the letter to Emperor Theodosius – following the burning of the synod in Callinicum by the local bishop and a Christian mob – it is not certain whether Ambrose is generalizing.

⁸ Julian Oberman, "The Sepulchre of the Maccabean Martyrs," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931): 250–265, 252f.; Robert Doran, "The Martyr: A Synoptic of the Mother and Her Seven Sons," in *Figures in Ancient Judaism: Ideal Profiles and Paradigm*, ed. John Joseph Collins and George W.E. Nickelsburg, vol. 12, Septuagint and Cognate Studies (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980), 183–221, with reference to the evidence in the tractates and the Midrashim (bGit 57b; Ekha R on 1.16⁹; PesR 43; SER 30, 151 etc.; then also *Sefer Yosippon*). The martyrdom is occasionally even dated to the time of the revolt against Rome – under Vespasian and Trajan or Hadrian. See also Klauck, 4. *Makkabäerbuch*, 656f. On the Jewish veneration of the Maccabees see also Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places. The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 49ff., 322ff.

⁹ Lothar Triebel, "Die angebliche Synagoge der makkabäischen Märtyrer in Antiochia am Orontes," *Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum* 9 (2006): 464–495, provides the most detailed discussion of all the evidence with many helpful references. However, his article suffers from a one-sided focus (grounded in the history of research) on the question of the existence of a Maccabean martyrs' synagogue in Antioch.

them can be solved definitely. But regardless of the disparate and one-sided transmission of this information and because of the first-time and singular veneration of Jewish martyrs by Christians at this locus, Antioch, and its appropriation by the Christian Church, the historian is called on to consider the conditions under which such a remarkable spiritual and religio-political development could have taken place: a development whose impact would extend into the Latin West and the Modern Age.

What must remain unexplained above all is the context for the establishment of an Antioch-based Jewish tradition of a burial site of the Maccabean brothers. A concrete basis for such a localized tradition, apart from the name of the “Antiochus city” itself (which was, however, founded by Seleucus I Nicator in 300 B.C.E.) and the fact that it also served as capital for the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, can only be found in a late source, the *Chronicle* of John Malalas completed after 565 C.E. In this text, which is as imaginative as it is historically questionable, Palestinian Jews call on Antiochus Epiphanes in Antioch and, by complaining about their ruler Ptolemy, prompt the Seleucid’s Egyptian expedition. However, Antiochus later turned against Jerusalem, conquered the city and took the high priest Eleazar and “the Maccabees” back to Antioch where they suffered their martyrdom. According to Malalas, a gravesite for the seven brothers (no more references to Eleazar are made) was only established years later allegedly through none other than Judas Maccabeus, this initiative being described as one of his key accomplishments besides the restoration of the Jerusalem Temple.¹⁰

Because of its confused historical intermingling, this account of the tomb’s origins can easily be identified as a later fabrication, which may have suffered additional damage through the Byzantine chronicler’s own personal misunderstandings. In its core, it reflects the fact, also attested to elsewhere, that the tomb was located in direct proximity to a synagogue “in the so-called Kerateion” – the latter apparently being a southern district of Antioch.¹¹

¹⁰ Joh. Malal., Chron. 8, 24 (p. 207 Z. 10f., Dindorf).

¹¹ Carl H. Kraeling, “The Jewish Community at Antioch,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51 (1932): 130–160, 140f.; Glanville Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria from Seleucus to the Arab Conquest* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 544 and note 179. In order to solve the problem of the breach of taboo committed by a burial within the city’s bounds (permissible in the case of heroes), it has been alternatively suggested that the martyrs’ shrine was located in Daphne either alongside of or within

The beginnings of the Jewish veneration of the Maccabean brothers in Antioch can hardly be determined. The extraordinary significance of precisely this city for Hellenistic Jewry is reflected in the fact that, according to later rabbinic tradition, the lake of Antioch, located 14 kilometers northeast of the city, was considered one of the seven lakes surrounding the Land of Israel.¹² Since the city's Seleucid founding, its Jewish community was highly privileged and may have constituted the most populous Jewish community in the Diaspora well into Roman times and Late Antiquity. It continued to flourish there largely unmolested. Its fate under Antiochus IV Epiphanes, however, is undocumented and allows only for speculation.¹³ It is possible that the Jews of Antioch were even able to profit from the Temple's plundering in 168 B.C.E., for cultic vessels that had been seized there are reported to have been subsequently donated by a Seleucid monarch and displayed in the city's synagogue.¹⁴

Nevertheless, under Roman rule in 40 C.E., and then again during the Jewish Revolt of 66–70 C.E., pogrom-like raids broke out against the Jews in Antioch.¹⁵ Whether this experience of persecution has had an influence on the development of local Maccabees-centered traditions, for instance, the composition of the Fourth Book of Maccabees or the establishment of a *memoria* of any kind, must remain unanswered.¹⁶ What needs to be underlined is the marked presence, during the Principate, of a Jewish population in the city, which may have amounted to several tens of thousands of people and which was even

the synagogue of Matrona. The problem of the shrine's location will not be discussed any further as it has only marginal relevance for my main arguments.

¹² Alexander Kohut, "Lakes of the Holy Land," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 4 (1892): 692–696, with sources and discussion.

¹³ See for example Downey, *A History of Antioch*, 108–111.

¹⁴ At least Joseph., *Bell. Jud.* 7, 44 states the latter. See Downey, *A History of Antioch*, 109 n. 106.

¹⁵ In their course (documented in detail) it was first demanded of Titus that the Jews be driven from the city, then that their communal privileges be done away with by the citizens' council and the senate. See Joseph., *Bell. Jud.* 2, 18, 5; 7, 3, 2–4 and 5,2. See also Joh. Malal., *Chron.* 10,45 (p. 260f., Dindorf). On the anti-Jewish pogrom of 70 A.D. see esp. Downey, *A History of Antioch*, 205f., 586f. There is no evidence of any further anti-Jewish riots in Antioch during the ensuing period and well into Late Antiquity.

¹⁶ The composition of 4 Macc in Antioch around the middle of the first century would be consistent with this assumption. It could offer an explanation for the (evidently fictional) grave inscription for the victims of the martyrdom offered by the author at the end of the book.

represented in the city council.¹⁷ In any case, the possible beginnings, character, and shape of a Jewish site of Maccabean veneration at this time remain wholly unclear; the same applies to the role it may have played within the Jewish community of Antioch and beyond. Whether or not Christians had any knowledge of the Syrian metropolis as a relevant location in the third century, when the Maccabean brothers had come to be likewise recognized by Christians as forerunners and models for the experience of persecution and had begun to gain high esteem in church circles, remains all the more unclear. The earliest references in patristic literature for both Christian interest in the Maccabean brothers and the appreciation of their martyrdom, namely in Origen and Cyprian, offer no indication of such knowledge – just as the Maccabean books with which those authors were familiar furnish no corresponding (Syrian) locale.¹⁸

Fourth century Antioch thus was the point of origin for an astonishing, indeed unique development: a Jewish site for the veneration of genuinely Jewish martyrs, the Maccabean brothers, receives extraordinary veneration among the Christians of Antioch and beyond. Having

¹⁷ In passing, Joh. Malal., *Chron.* 12, 16 (p. 290, Dindorf) mentions a certain Asabinus as a member of the *Boule* for 190 C.E. (he may have been the founder of a like-named synagogue). On the history of Jews in the Roman Empire see Wayne A. Meeks and Robert L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era. Society of Biblical Literature*, vol. 13, Sources for Biblical Studies, (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1978), 2–6; Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews. Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century*, vol. 4, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: University of California Press, 1983), 34–65; Johannes Hahn, “Die jüdische Gemeinde im spätantiken Antiochia,” in *Jüdische Gemeinden und Organisationsformen von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart*, ed. Robert Jütte and Abraham P. Kustermann, vol. 2, Aschkenas Beihefte (Vienna-Cologne-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 1996), 53–85; Johannes Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt. Studien zu den Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Christen, Heiden und Juden im Osten des Römischen Reiches (von Konstantin bis Theodosius II.)*, vol. 8, Klio-Beihefte (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2004), 139–145. Kraeling, *The Jewish Community at Antioch*, 136 estimates the city’s Jewish community under Augustus at 45,000 and in the fourth century at 65,000 persons. The latter figure is probably an upper limit; cf. Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*, 8 and Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 140. In any case, all estimates must remain mere speculation.

¹⁸ Origen., *Exhort. ad mart.* 23ff. (p. 3ff., Koetschau); Cyprian., *Fort.* (p. 337ff., Hartel); Cyprian., *Ep.* 58,6; Lucif. *Cagl.*, *De non parc. in deum delinqu.* (PL 13, col. 958); *Martyr. Carth.*, sub Aug. 1 (p. 5, Lietzmann, 1911); *Martyr. Syr.*, sub Aug. 1 (p. 13, Lietzmann, 1911). See also Mariano Rampolla del Tindaro, “Martyre et sépulture des Macchabées,” *Revue de l’art chrétien* 48 (1899): 290–305, 377–392, 457–465, see 290–292; William H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church. A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 20f.

been forced to deal with the challenge this poses, the local Christian Church appropriates the site in unknown circumstances sometime after 350 C.E., at the latest shortly before 400 C.E., and transforms this popular site of pilgrimage into a basilica at approximately the same time.¹⁹

This unprecedented appropriation of Jewish martyrs as Christian figures of identification, in particular in the context of the processes of religious transformation and Christianity's triumphal march in the fourth century, calls for an explanation. However, contemporary explanations of or comments on the phenomenon are missing. Merely the fact of popular Christian veneration of these martyrs can be gathered from a number of sermons by John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and other representatives of the Church. These Christian sources offer no information on previous *commonly practiced* veneration by the two religious groups, no details about the cultic site's transition to administrative control and ownership by Antioch's Church, about possible conflicts with Jewish groups in the city in the run-up to the transition or in its direct context, or about the attitude then adopted towards Jews wishing to continue their veneration. Therefore, it is only possible to explain the apparently rapid increase in the veneration of the Maccabean brothers in Antioch – also by members of the Christian community – over the course of the fourth century, and to reconstruct the constellations of both local religious life and religio-political conflict that enlighten this influential dynamic of religious change, through close scrutiny of the specific circumstances of religious life within the city.

Before turning to this topic, we should note several points regarding the veneration of Old Testament saints in Christian church circles. From very early on, representatives of Jewish salvation history were

¹⁹ Augustin., Sermon 300, 6 (PL 38, col. 1379). Further reports, none of them helping to clarify the question of dating, in Schatkin, *The Maccabean Martyrs*, 104. Leonard V. Rutgers, "The Importance of Scripture in the Conflict of Jews and Christians: The Example of Antioch," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers et al. (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 287–303, offers the radical thesis that the Maccabees cult in Antioch did not emerge from a Jewish site of veneration but was a Christian invention; the thesis – which I will not address here in detail – seems to ignore a series of basic facts or to formulate faulty interpretations. In this respect it should be noted that John Malalas, although a sixth century author, had access to sometimes excellent local sources, evidently through a city chronicle. See most recently Wolfgang Liebeschuetz, "Malalas on Antioch," in *Antioche de Syrie. Histoire, images et traces de la ville antique*, vol. 5, TOPOI Suppléments, ed. Bernadette Cabouret, Pierre-Louis Gatier and Catherine Saliou (Lyon: De Boccard, 2004), 143–153.

venerated within the Church. Alongside the patriarchs and various prophets,²⁰ the veneration primarily centered on those Old Testament protagonists, who appeared to anticipate Christian ideas of physical torment, mortal danger, and miraculous, divinely inspired deliverance in an exceptional manner. Daniel, Isaac, the three youths in the furnace, but also Noah and Jonah represented this type of proto-martyr for just that reason; their stories formed a motif depicted more often than almost any other in Early Christian art.²¹ In the context of the incipient martyrs' veneration – a phenomenon of particular relevance for the fourth century – Antioch played a major role. The discovery of the Holy Land through Helena Augusta and Constantine, its rapid development by the erection of church buildings, – for example at the oak of Abraham in Mamre – the voyages of simple Christians as pilgrims to Palestine, and the emerging cult of relics led to a new and intensive interest in both the religious history of Israel and the range of protagonists within that history. Moreover, it strengthened the conviction among Christians of having entered into the tradition of the *one* divinely chosen people.²²

The use of parts of the Torah or Old Testament in Christian worship coincided with a specific Christian perception: their selection spotlighted the significance of the Old Testament as a prophetic text, which contained pre-figurations of Christ.²³ In this broad context, both

²⁰ Here, too, distinct points of emphasis are manifest insofar as individual prophets were foregrounded, because Christians tied them to aspects of resurrection: "Some saints, notably Enoch and Elujah, rid themselves of the current 'materialized life,' which is 'with the flesh,' to reenter paradise. In the resurrection, the body will be stripped of its 'earthy dwelling' of a fleshly body and be 're clothed' in a 'heavenly dwelling' of the 'light' and 'luminous' body that was Adam's original garb"; Richard A. Layton, *Didymus the Blind and His Circle in Late-Antique Alexandria: Virtue and Narrative in Biblical Scholarship* (Urbana-Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 107.

²¹ Among many discussions, see Graydon F. Snyder, *Ante pacem. Archaeological Evidence of Church Life before Constantine* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1985, 2003); Robin M. Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Reiner Sörries, *Daniel in der Löwengrube. Zur Gesetzmäßigkeit frühchristlicher Ikonographie* (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2005).

²² The development of the reception of Moses in the fourth century, as discernible from the *Vita Moysis* by Gregory of Nyssa (Grégoire de Nyse: La vie de Moïse, ed. Jean Daniélou, vol. 1, *Sources Chrétiennes* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955]), is exemplary in this context: In his practiced virtue and spiritual vocation, Moses is molded into the archetype of a contemporary Church leader. See Andreas Sterk, *Renouncing the World Yet Leading the Church. The Monk-Bishop in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge/Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004), 110–117.

²³ Gerhard Rouwhorst, "The Reading of Scripture in Early Christian Liturgy," in *What Athens has to Do with Jerusalem. Essays on Classical, Jewish and Early Christian*

the veneration of the Jewish Maccabean brothers – who were associated with expressions of the belief in resurrection – and its powerful expansion throughout the Christian world during the fourth century turn out to be far less surprising than initially thought. In reality, the widespread scholarly overestimation of the expansion of the veneration of the Maccabean brothers within the Church probably resulted, to a significant degree, from the veneration of the like-named heroes of the Jewish liberation-struggle with the Seleucids.

How was it possible that in the fourth century Christians in Antioch became fascinated with the tradition of the martyrdom of the Maccabean brothers, even to the extent of venerating them in large numbers in a shrine in the city's predominantly Jewish southern quarter? How did this location eventually get adopted by the Church?

This key question can only be answered in the context of the city's general religious situation at the time. Since the reign of Diocletian, Antioch, besides Constantinople, had been the most important administrative center in the Late Eastern Roman Empire (and thus the seat of the praetorian prefect of the *dioecesis Oriens* as well as of other imperial political and military authorities). In the fourth century, it experienced both an extraordinary economic boom and, doubtless, a significant increase in population. A wide range of religious groups flourished in this communicative juncture near the Roman Empire's eastern border, a location characterized by polyethnicity and high social mobility. In the 320's, the notorious Antiochian schism broke out, which split the local Church first into two, then into three groups (alongside many smaller "sects") that struggled for the control of the Christian infrastructure with alternating success. This schism subsequently damaged the Church's public image and paralyzed its authority and influence in the city; the schism would only be overcome in 414/15 C.E.²⁴ One of its effects was that non-Christian communities,

Art and Archaeology in Honor of G. Foerster, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers, vol. 1, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 305–333, esp. 325–329. on third century readings and textual selection during the prayer service. Antioch's ecclesiastical space offers Rouwhorst important material for his findings.

²⁴ Manlio Simonetti, *La crisi ariana nel iv secolo* (Roma: Istituto Patristico Augustinianum, 1975), 360–373; Hanns Christof Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer. Der Osten bis zum Ende der homöischen Reichskirche*, vol. 73, *Beiträge zur historischen Theologie* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1988), esp. 66–81. 232ff.; Franz Dünzl, "Die Absetzung des Bischofs Meletius von Antiochien 361 n. C.," *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 43 (2000): 71–93.

too, were able to obtain a considerable public profile or strongly assert their religious identities. However, this was less the case for paganism and its cults – these would experience a decline in the fourth century that even the emperor Julian's (361–363 C.E.) efforts at restoration could not reverse – than for Judaism. Despite the policies of Christianization promoted by the Late Roman state, Antioch's Jewry could now distinguish itself on the local religious market place and exert considerable appeal.

This fact has long remained unrecognized, because its most important documentation – a series of eight Sunday sermons (now misleadingly known as the *Adversus Iudaeos*) on the occasion of the forthcoming cycle of Jewish high holidays, delivered by John Chrysostom against Judaizing Christians in the late summer and autumn of 386 or 387 C.E., when he was a young deacon in the Syrian city – has long been understood as clear-cut proof of the Christian community's disassociation from the Jews.²⁵ The sermons undoubtedly articulate an open, sometimes agitated, and in certain instances hate-filled rejection of Jewish festivals and practices, thus attesting to a vehement, even aggressive rejection of Jewish communal life by Antioch's Christian clergy. But at the same time the preacher's admonitions, insults and warnings regarding participation in the Jewish holidays attest a vivid Christian-Jewish coexistence in Antioch going far beyond peaceful neighborliness.²⁶ Many Christians had, in fact, lost awareness of the basic dissimilitude of both the Jewish and Christian faiths and the symbolic dimension of each religion's practices. Judaizing tendencies had emerged in the majority of Antioch's Christian populace, challenging the Church's identity and doctrine.²⁷ What needs to be stressed here is that this "Judaizing" was not limited to aspects of direct religious practice such as participating in Chanukah or the Rosh Hashanah (i.e. the New Year's festival), but pervaded many areas of life. Christians preferred to affirm business relations through oath-taking in the

²⁵ See Hahn, *Die jüdische Gemeinde im spätantiken Antiochia*; *idem*, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 143–145.

²⁶ On peaceful coexistence between pagans and Christians in Antioch, see *ibid.*, 121, 130ff.

²⁷ Homil. 1, 1 adv. Jud. (PG 48, col. 844f.); *ibid.* 3, 5 (PG 48, col. 869); *ibid.* 6, 6 (PG 48, col. 913); *ibid.* 8, 4 (PG 48, col. 933f.); Homil. 1, 7 in Galat. (PG 61, col. 623). See also esp. Homil. 3 adv. Jud., dedicated to the controversial Easter date; on the background see Wolfgang Huber, *Passa und Ostern. Untersuchungen zur Osterfeier der alten Kirche*, vol. 35, Beihefte der Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969), 61–69.

synagogue, a location considered more effective than other venues. In cases of illness, they called on Jewish doctors or used magical potions and amulets manufactured by Jews. Incubation, namely, the process of staying overnight for the sake of healing, before the Torah arc in the synagogue at Daphne, Antioch's famous summer resort, was a common practice among both Christians and Jews.²⁸

In this manner, the general religious and social institutions and practices of the city's Jewry exerted an enormous appeal for Antioch's Christians. From the perspective of the local church hierarchy, this had become an unmistakable threat to the inner cohesion and identity of the Christian community. As Chrysostom indicates, not only did Christians prefer Jewish feasts and fasts, but they also had themselves circumcised according to Jewish rite.²⁹ It is obvious that in such a context of urban everyday life, in which the majority of the Christian population would closely interact with their Jewish neighbors despite the eloquent attacks of the young cleric, the cult of the Maccabean brothers would have been encountered and would have sparked great interest. Their veneration would have spread among Antioch's Christians along with the respect for, and soon enough, cultic interest and participation in, the religious customs of their Jewish "brothers in faith". After all, the martyrs had emerged from the glorious history of their shared home-city Antioch!

It is highly probable that the popular veneration of the Maccabean brothers by local Christians has initially been met with deep mistrust and vehement rejection on the part of Antioch's clergy. However,

²⁸ Oath taking in the synagogue: Homil. 1, 3 adv. Jud. (PG 48, col. 847f.); help from Jewish doctors and Jewish magic: Homil. 8, 6f. adv. Jud. (PG 48, col. 936f.); incubation in the Daphne synagogue: Homil. 1, 6 adv. Jud. (PG 48, col. 852). On the great influence of Jewish magic see Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 83ff., with the discussion of a third or fourth century Jewish handbook of magic (*ibid.*, 85f.) and Marcel Simon, *Verus Israel. A Study of the Relations Between Christians and Jews in the Roman Empire (135–425)* (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 1986), 339ff.; Peter Schäfer, "Jewish Magical Literature in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 41 (1990): 75–91.

²⁹ Attendance of Jewish festivals: Homil. 1, 1 adv. Jud. (PG 48, col. 844), *passim*; participation in Jewish fasting: Homil. 1, 4 adv. Jud. (PG 48, col. 849). *passim*; circumcision: *ibid.*, 2, 2 (PG 48, col. 858f.); *ibid.*, 8, 5 (PG 48, col. 935). On the phenomenon of "Judaizing" see the concise article by Vincent Déroche, "Judaizantes," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 2001), 19: 130–142, esp. 137ff. (with literature).

there is no extant evidence of such a reaction.³⁰ The Maccabean cult and shrine in Antioch seem to have been neutralized through appropriation and theological reinterpretation like other practices in their religious environs alien to the Christian tradition, in particular paganism. There is no doubt that the Church's appropriation of the martyrs' graves in the fourth century marked a sharp and much-observed caesura in Antioch's history.

Unfortunately it is entirely unclear when and how control of the shrine was transferred from the Jews to the local Church. The earliest definite documentation of Christian possession of the site can be found in a number of sermons by Chrysostom for the annual festival of the martyrs, being delivered at some point between 386 and 398 C.E.³¹ In 391 C.E. or later, Augustine speaks of the Christian basilica of the Maccabees, but neither he nor later authors provide any chronological information.³² Since no documentation exists for the restitution of the site to its previous Jewish owners during the reign of Julian the Apostate and since indications of multiple changes of ownership are also lacking, an earlier Christian appropriation of the graves is unlikely.

Independent of these ultimately irresolvable questions, it has to be noted that in the late fourth century, the religious situation in Antioch was characterized by an extraordinary attraction to Judaism shared by many Christians. The Christian clergy reacted to this perceived threat

³⁰ But for individual critical positions and statements regarding the veneration of the Maccabees outside of Antioch in Late Antiquity see Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*, 154ff.

³¹ On these sermons – together with the corresponding position of Gregory of Nazianzus – see Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*. On questions of dating, *ibid.*, 55–61.

³² Joh. Chrys., Homil. 1–3 de Maccabeis (PG 50, col. 617–628), esp. 1,1 (col. 617). Augustin., Sermon. 300, 6 (PL 38, col. 1379). Further sources in Schatkin, “The Maccabean Martyrs,” 104. The predominant hypothesis that the change was instituted under Valens (364–378) or owing to the efforts of bishop Flavian (381–404) is scholarly speculation, see Marcel Simon, “La polémique anti-juive de Saint Jean Chrysostome et le mouvement judaïsant d’Antioche,” *Annuaire de l’Institut de Philologie et d’Histoire Orientales* 4 (1936): 403–421 (= *Mélanges F. Cumont*), 414: “peut-être sous l’empereur arien Valens, peut-être sous le patriarcat de Flavien”; Rampolla, *Martyre et sépulture des Macchabées*, 387; cf. Pierre Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d’Orient. Histoire et géographie. Des origines à la conquête arabe* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1985), 341 note 96. On the question of whether burial places and sites of veneration of the Maccabees were located in a synagogue or connected with a synagogue in any way, see my short discussion (rejecting the possibility) in Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 182–184. On this question in detail most recently Triebel, *Die angebliche Synagoge der makabäischen Märtyrer*; see above, n. 9.

with regular, albeit not very successful, delimiting efforts and the formulation of a more pronounced Christian identity. Only a few decades later, such efforts, with the help of state institutions and increasingly strict anti-Jewish legislation, would aim at the repression of the flourishing, respected, and influential Antiochian Jewry and its public practice of religion. This process would culminate in the destruction of local synagogues and the far-reaching social marginalization of a community whose religion was still officially considered *licita*.³³ The appropriation of the Maccabean graves under unknown circumstances could have represented a first step in this marginalization and could have involved illegal acts and/or the use of violence. In any case, it occurred in a situation of vivid religious competition in Antioch and involved the Jews' removal from a locus of veneration that had been their very own. We may consider the Church's acceptance and subsequent propagation of the veneration as both a religious innovation and, retrospectively, a seminal and astonishingly successful Christian usurpation of a non-Christian martyr cult. It did not take place out of free will, but rather as a consequence of the popular Christian veneration of the Maccabean brothers and, as indicated, as an organized ecclesiastical reaction to a massive threat of increasing "Judaization" of Christian believers through an eminently successful fourth century eastern Jewry.³⁴

But we need to take note of additional specific conditions of the religious situation in Antioch that contributed to what still may, on the face of it, seem like a surprising development. Reviewing the history of the local Church in the fourth century, it becomes clear that the identity of Christians in the Syrian metropolis was closely tied to the

³³ Klaus Dieter Reichardt, "Die Judengesetzgebung im Codex Theodosianus," *Kairos* 20 (1978): 16–39, 19ff., 28ff.; Alfredo Mordechai Rabello, "The Legal Condition of the Jews in the Roman Empire," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt II* 13 (1980), 662–762, 695ff.; *The Jews in the Roman Imperial Legislation*, ed. Amnon Linder (Detroit/Mich.-Jerusalem: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 78–86 and *passim*.

³⁴ In this respect, concerning various late antique cities in the east, see Angelos Chaniotis, "The Jews of Aphrodisias: New Evidence and Old Problems," *Scripta Classica Israelica* 21 (2002): 209–242; *idem*, "Zwischen Konfrontation und Interaktion: Christen, Juden und Heiden im spätantiken Aphrodisias," in *Patchwork. Dimensionen multikultureller Gesellschaften*, ed. Andreas Ackermann and Klaus E. Müller (Bielefeld: transcript-verlag, 2002), 83–127; John S. Crawford, "Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in Late-Antique Sardis," in *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue*, ed. Steven Fine (London-New York: Routledge, 1999), 190–200; and in general Igino Grego, *La reazione ai Giudeo-Cristiani nel IV secolo* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1976); Déroche, "Iudaizantes," *passim*.

experience of persecution and martyrdom. Christian tradition – and not only that of the metropolis itself – attributes a substantial series of martyrdoms to Antioch, starting with that of the eminent bishop Ignatius, said to have already taken place in 116 C.E.³⁵ Antioch's bishop, Cyril (ca. 279/80–303 C.E.), himself fell victim to Diocletian's persecution of Christians in the city; but we do not have a clear picture of the extent of the persecutions there.³⁶ In any case, the enforcement of the anti-Christian edicts in the city seems to have been personally directed or at least sometimes supervised by the Emperor Galerius, the notorious persecutor of Christians.³⁷

However, for Antioch's Christians, this historical experience would remain omnipresent in a manner outreaching the persecutory trauma fundamental for the identity of the Late Antique Church in the Imperium Romanum in general. To understand this, we need to first of all consider the unusual physical circumstances in which the community's life unfolded: despite the extraordinary upsurge of Christianity within the city and although the majority of the population of Antioch had already converted to Christianity by Julian's reign, the local Church's infrastructure did not keep up with this powerful demographic trend. Only two churches had been available for prayer services until the end of the fourth century. As a result, most services had to be held in the numerous martyrs' chapels outside the city walls. John Chrysostom thus regularly preached in the *martyria* located in the *suburbium*, as had been the case in the time of persecution. These localities, together with the *memoria* and spiritual identity preserved there (and repeatedly mentioned in Chrysostom's

³⁵ For an overview see the article by Johannes Kollwitz, "Antiochia am Orontes," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950), 1: 461–469, here 465ff.; Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les origines du culte des martyrs*, vol. 20, *Subsidia Hagiographica* (Bruxelles: Société des Bollandistes, 1933), 192ff.

³⁶ According to Eusebius one of the presbyters, Lucius, became a victim of the persecution. The church historian also emphasizes the martyrdom of two pairs of sisters and reports elsewhere in more detail – undoubtedly on the basis of documents from his own church, which, for example, contained two precise dates (17/20 November 303) on the course of the martyrdom and a reference to the presence of "the emperor" (i.e. Galerius) – on the fate of the deacon Romanus of Caesarea, who, finding himself in Antioch by coincidence, had to die there at the outbreak of the persecution. Euseb., *Hist. Eccl.* 8.12.2ff. and 13.1; *Mart. Pal.* 2. However, Eusebius did not possess the information necessary for a detailed report on the events in Antioch; and the other extant sources do not allow the reconstruction of systematic actions against the local Christian population.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

sermons), represented important reference points for both the community's everyday life and its religious awareness.³⁸

But even after the Constantinian epochal turn, concrete experiences of persecution would define the churchly existence of Antioch's Christians for many decades. The Antiochian schism not only split the local Church into Arians and Nicæans, but also split, for generations, the latter group into two large bitterly feuding discipleships of competing bishops. Throughout the schism's course, various congregations were repeatedly driven out, sometimes violently, from the city's churches and *martyria* in alternating constellations. The victims often had to assemble illegally for years, frequently under the open sky on the bank of the Orontes. They were also frequently threatened by soldiers, mobilized – with help from the imperial apparatus within the city – by the bishop whose creed was currently being recognized by the state. These forces were sent against both the dissenting Christians and fellow clerics who stubbornly refused to grant him communion.³⁹ In this manner, over many years in varying degrees of intensity, the adherence to one's own sense of faith in the face of continual threat and violence and the consciousness of oppression by empire and emperor remained fixed elements of Christian existence in Antioch.

But *martyria* and martyrs would also play a prominent role in the competition with paganism, the religious force still dominating the city's public life. The nephew of Emperor Constantius, Gallus (351–354 C.E.), made himself a name as an enthusiastic promoter of Christianity.⁴⁰ He thus set himself the goal of “freeing” the city's cultic

³⁸ Johannes Chrysostomos Baur, *Der heilige Johannes Chrysostomus und seine Zeit I–II* (Munich: Max Hueber Verlag, 1929/30), 24–27 and 164f. with both a compilation of the material and the days of the church year on which prayer services were held in honour of these martyrs and their martyrdom. See also Walther Eltester, “Die Kirchen Antiochias im IV. Jh.,” *Zeitschrift für Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 36 (1937): 251–286, here 271f. 278ff. and Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinages d'Orient*, 337–342. On the situation regarding the church-building infrastructure in the fourth century see Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 148–151 (with literature); for the sixth century onward see Hugh N. Kennedy, “Antioch: from Byzantium to Islam and Back Again,” in *The City in Late Antiquity*, ed. John Rich (London: Routledge, 1992), 181–198, here 185ff.

³⁹ On this aspect, with sources and additional literature, see Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 157–160.

⁴⁰ Gallus cultivated close contacts with the city's leading clerics and personally intervened in the Arian controversy in Antioch; Sozom., *Hist. Eccl.* 3,15; cf. Philostorg., *Hist. Eccl.* 3,15ff., esp. 27f. In this regard see Downey, *A History of Antioch*, 363; Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer*, 137f.

center in Daphne with its famous temple of Apollo and other such sanctuaries “from pagan superstition.”⁴¹ To this end, Gallus transferred the bones of the martyred Antiochian bishop Babylas, buried in the cemetery at the Daphnean Gate, to a specially built chapel in the Apollonian temple area near the Castalian Spring.⁴²

This breathtaking procedure, namely, the erection of a *martyrion* in the *temenos* of the temple of Apollo, did not have any previous or contemporary parallel. It signified an unheard of violation of the holy area of Daphne and an unprecedented attack on the city’s pagan infrastructure. More significantly, in its exorcist intention – the famous prophetic force of the Castalian Spring was reported to have disappeared immediately – it was a stunning innovation. It was, in essence, a spiritual purification and aggressive sacral appropriation of a pagan cultic space. The Church created a henceforth Christian locus of veneration. In Antioch as elsewhere, Babylas had until then been an obscure and practically forgotten martyr; his “history” still needed to be shaped and written. Soon he would emerge as an important element of the Antiochian Church’s festival calendar.⁴³ The transfer of this martyr’s relics to a new place of veneration for spiritual reasons, as practiced by Gallus in Antioch, represented the first identifiable such translation and marked the structural inception of a lively trade in relics. It constituted an auspicious new instrument for establishing sacral Christian spaces as would soon become demonstrated in other locations. It indicated, above all, that with its increased self-confidence, the Church no longer hesitated to take over and sacrally reinterpret a competing cult in order to strengthen the Christian community and its public spiritual

⁴¹ Sozom., H.E. 5.19.12. Cf. Joh. Chrys., De S. Babyla c. Iulian. 76ff. (XIV) (PG 50, col. 554).

⁴² The chief source here is Amm. 14.1.1ff. Joh. Chrys., De S. Babyla c. Iulian. 67ff. (XII) (PG 50, col. 551ff.); Sozom., Hist. Eccl. 5.19.12f. In Joh. Chrys., De S. hieromart. Babyla 8 (III) (PG 50, col. 532) the structure is expressly described as a *martyrium*. As a result of the legendary tradition, the historical role of bishop Babylas and the precise circumstances of his martyrdom have been distorted beyond recognition. See Margaret A. Schatkin, *Saint John Chrysostom Apologist*, vol. 73, Fathers of the Church (Washington/D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1984), 46ff. and the discussion, 15f. in Margaret A. Schatkin’s edition of *De Babyla contra Iulianum et gentiles*, vol. 362, Sources Chrétiennes (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1990).

⁴³ The church (not so much a *martyrium*) begun on the right bank of the Orontes in 379/380 C.E. would then be dedicated to the martyr Babylas; it is the only antique sacral structure in Antioch that has been verified through the American excavations (the dated mosaic inscription is now on display in the foyer of Princeton University Museum); see the summary in Downey, *A History of Antioch*, 415ff.

identity, and to promote Christianization. With its many lines of conflict, religious competition in Antioch prepared the groundwork for such remarkable sacral innovations and usurpations. In the following years and decades their exemplary character and practicability would often become apparent in the cities outside of the Syrian metropolis where those conflicts would be monitored and made public.

All of the so far analyzed developments in the religious life of Antioch – aptly characterized as a “religious market place” – unexpectedly culminated in the conflicts and altercations between pagans, Christians, and Jews under the rule of Julian, who tried to realize his religio-political program of restoring paganism during a seven month stay in Antioch. Much suggests that his actions in the metropolis played a decisive role for the fate of the Maccabean graves and, most importantly, for the reception of the martyrs’ veneration in Late Antique Christianity. Julian the “Apostate,” whose efforts at reviving the pagan cult and marginalizing the Christian faith were, in retrospective, hardly more than a historical episode without any consequences, was perceived as a deadly danger by the Late Antique Church far beyond the fourth century. Partly demonized in the Late tradition as an incarnation of the Antichrist, contemporary representatives of the Church considered Julian to be a relentless persecutor of Christians, a second Antiochus who personally undertook the process of seducing or forcing Christians to relinquish their faith, one by one.

In this context it is irrelevant, whether or not this perspective does justice to Julian’s program: he was well aware of the propagandistic impact of martyrdom and tried to avoid it at all costs.⁴⁴ This is evident in the emperor’s most spectacular confrontation with the Antiochian Christians, the restoration of the Apollo cult and Daphne’s Castalian Spring through purification of the *temenos*, an act that resulted from his taking the moderate measure of allowing the Christian community to return the relics of Babylas to their old location in the cemetery outside of the city rather than simply having them destroyed. This new translation of relics was staged by the Antiochian Church as a triumphant procession with countless participants. And yet, at the same

⁴⁴ Julian., *Misop.* 361A; *idem*, Ep. 60 (Bidez; 380A–B). Cf. Sozom., *Hist. Eccl.* 5.4.6f. and 5.11.12.

time, it was staged as a protest march against the emperor, with psalms being chanted against both him and pagan idol worship.⁴⁵

The main contribution of the hagiographic tradition in this respect was to highlight the regime of the pagan emperor and his persecutory raging in numerous accounts of martyrdom, with Antioch as the staging ground. Several of the participants in the triumphal return of the relics, members of the clergy and simple believers, but also soldiers close to the emperor, were said to have later fallen victim to his fury and become martyrs. However, it is revealing that the majority of the hagiographic texts can only present confessors but not martyrs, i.e. individuals actually killed in the putative persecutions. Upon closer scrutiny, the historical substance of the seemingly impressive density of contemporary reports and later traditions turns out to be strikingly thin and problematic.⁴⁶ Contrary to the description of Christian chroniclers, the Antiochian Christians in fact experienced no persecution under Julian.⁴⁷ But the Christian view that the emperor began his exterminatory campaign against Christianity in Antioch and that thousands of Antiochian Christians became martyrs, was directly taken up by the Late Antique Church and became an immovable cornerstone in its historical self-understanding.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ For a detailed description of the procession see Joh. Chrys., *De S. Babyla c. Julian.* 90 (XVI) (PG 50, col. 558); Sozom., *Hist. Eccl.* 4.19.18f. and *Artemii passio* 55 (p. 233, Kotter = GCS Philostorgius, p. 92, Bidez and Hansen). The ceremonial transfer of the Babylas relics is said to have even brought hostile camps in Antioch's church together in shared resistance to the pagan emperor (see Sozom., *Hist. Eccl.* 6.4).

⁴⁶ See the detailed analysis of these cases in Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*, 173–177. The explanation offered by the church historian Theodoret (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.17.8) for the absence of consummated martyrdom under Julian is illuminating here: he perceives the emperor's particular infamy in the trial against a group of Christian soldiers to lie in his robbing them of a well-earned and longed for martyrdom by pardoning them under the gallows. Similarly already in Greg. Naz., *Or.* 4 (c. Julian.), 83f.

⁴⁷ Nevertheless this idea has been presented in the scholarly literature unremittingly and in an uncritical succession of Christian propaganda; see, e.g., Downey, *A History of Antioch*, 397; José Miguel Alonso-Nuñez, "The Emperor Julian's Misopogon and the Conflict between Christianity and Paganism," *Ancient Society* 10 (1979): 311–324. On the complex of problems pertaining to the image of Julian as persecutor of Christians and to the martyrdoms attributed to him see also (with reservations) Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer*, 114ff. (with a discussion of many putative martyrdoms under Julian generated within the Homoean tradition) 152ff., and Robert J. Penella, "Julian the Persecutor in Fifth Century Church Historians," *Ancient World* 24 (1993): 31–43.

⁴⁸ See among other works, from the Antiochian perspective, Joh. Chrys., *De S. hieromart. Babyla* 3 (II) (p. 298 Z. 17ff., Grillet and Guinot = PG 50, col. 530): "But

From the contemporary Christian perspective, Julian's policies of oppression of the Church and deliberate polarization of religious relationships in the cities for the sake of marginalizing Christianity, were by no means limited to promoting Christian-pagan conflict alone. Rather, Church representatives found Julian's promotion of Judaism a far more grave and threatening matter; here once again, Antioch turns out to be the focal point of the debate, with the veneration of the Maccabees thus being in the crosshairs of the later Christian reaction.

The one thing, however, that was perceived as the greatest possible threat to Christian identity was Julian's project – announced in Antioch and pursued from there with great energy – to restore the Jerusalem Temple, which had been lying in ruins since 70 C.E. and which had been inaccessible to Jews since the end of the Bar Kochba Revolt in 135 C.E. The emperor's plan to transfer Israel and Jerusalem – the first loci associated with the life of Jesus and his revelation, and only recently, from Constantinian times on, won and developed as Holy Land – to the Jews for settlement and appropriation could only have been interpreted as the apostate's effort to deal Christianity a mortal blow.⁴⁹ After all, the core of his undertaking was an attempt to rebuild the same Jewish Temple in Jerusalem that Jesus had declared was gone forever. The Church understood the destruction of the Temple by Titus in 70 C.E. as bearing witness to God's judgment against the Jews for the murder of the Lord and as demonstrating the replacement

he announced the intention of tearing the Galilean people [= the Christians] out from the center of the world.”

⁴⁹ For this Christian perception, it is characteristic and paradigmatic that concerning Julian's government John Chrysostom simply declares the following: “Julian was the first to try to rebuild... the temple in Jerusalem. He, the pagan, took up the interests of the Jews, in order to break the power of Christ”; Joh. Chrys. Homil. de s. Bab. 22 (PG 50, col. 568). From a Christian viewpoint the clearly dominant Julianic motives for the rebuilding of the temple, namely the integration of the Jewish God into the pantheon and hierarchy of the empire's pagan divinities – with the God of the Jews, equated by the emperor with the highest and mightiest god of creation, implicitly being addressed as one manifestation of a supreme imperial god –, were irrelevant. See the superb analysis of Hans Lewy, “Emperor Julian and the Building of the Temple”, *Zion* 6 (1940/41): 1–32 (Hebr.) = *The Jerusalem Cathedra* 3 (1983): 70–96. On the historical premises, contemporary conditions, and within a short time spectacularly failed efforts to realize Julian's plan to reestablish the temple of Jerusalem as the central sanctuary of contemporary Jewry, see in detail Johannes Hahn, “Kaiser Julian und ein dritter Tempel? Idee, Wirklichkeit, Wirkung eines gescheiterten Projekts,” in *Der Jerusalemer Tempel und seine Zerstörungen*, ed. Johannes Hahn, vol. 147, *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), 237–262.

of the Old Covenant by the New, hence the transfer of Israel's state of chosenness to the Church itself.

It is unclear whether Julian's plans for Jerusalem were formulated at his own initiative or whether they were due in large part to the encouragement of the local Jewish community.⁵⁰ Both accounts are offered in the Christian sources and in both cases intensive communication is said to have taken place.⁵¹ We need to bear in mind that the accounts were aimed at giving vivid expression to the purported imperial and Jewish hatred of Christians; their historical basis is thoroughly questionable. From a certain point in time, the involvement of Jews is indisputable, starting, at the latest, with Julian's long stay in Antioch, site of the most important Diaspora Jewish community in the empire's eastern half. There is evidence that during this period the emperor established contact with the community's representatives.⁵² The question of the first initiative, however, has to remain unanswered.

The imperial Church regarded the emperor's Jerusalem project as a deadly menace, born out of Julian's hatred against Christianity. It was precisely in Antioch and its Syrian hinterland where Julian's project was able to exert a powerful impact, as the theological persuasiveness of many Jewish ideas – not merely the attractiveness of Jewish festivals and social practices – was penetrating deeply into Christian circles there. We thus find an ecclesiastical directive whose extant version,

⁵⁰ See in greater detail *ibid.*, 245–248.

⁵¹ Thus already Joh. Chrys. Homil. 5.11 adv. Jud. (PG 48, 900), Homil. de s. Bab. 22 (PG 50, 567) and subsequently in the church historical tradition: Socr. Hist. Eccl. 3, 20; Soz. Hist. Eccl. 5, 22. See Francois Blanchetière, "Julien philhellène, philosémité, antichrétien: L'affaire du Temple de Jerusalem (363)," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 31 (1980): 61–81, and David B. Levenson, "Julian's Attempt to Rebuild the Temple. An Inventory of Ancient and Medieval Sources," in *Of Scribes and Scrolls*, ed. Harold W. Attridge (Lanham-New York-London: University Press of America, 1990), 261–279. An early sixth century strongly anti-Jewish, novelistic Julian-narrative of (Christian) Syrian provenance (perhaps from the city of Edessa) offers a detailed account of the discussions and negotiations between the emperor and Jewish representatives concerning the Temple's rebuilding. See *Julianos der Abtrünnige. Syrische Erzählungen*, ed. Johann Georg Ernst Hoffmann (Leiden: Brill, 1880), 108–116; *Julian the Apostate, Now Translated for the First Time from the Syriac Original*, ed. Hermann Gollancz (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1928), 117ff. For an eloquent précis, see Michael Adler, "The Emperor Julian and the Jews," *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 5 (1893): 591–651 = *Der Kaiser Julian und die Juden*, in *Julian Apostata*, ed. Richard Klein, vol. 509, *Wege der Forschung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 48–111, here 66ff.

⁵² On Antioch as a center of the Jewish Diaspora see Meeks and Wilken, *Jews and Christians in Antioch*; Wilken, *John Chrysostom and the Jews*, 34–59, and Hahn, *Die jüdische Gemeinde im spätantiken Antiochia, passim*.

transmitted in Syriac, can be assigned to the fourth century.⁵³ This version not only reveals a remarkably friendly attitude towards Judaism when it appeals for Jews being designated as brothers,⁵⁴ but also calls on Christians to mourn with these brothers for the Temple's destruction and to fast together with them. Jews and Judaizing Christians together looked forward eagerly to the arrival of the time in which they could enter Jerusalem and reinitiate the sacrificial service, a time when Jews would no longer convert to Christianity but Christians would become Jews.⁵⁵ In such circles, the destroyed Temple was not regarded as an argument for or demonstration of exclusively Christian salvational certainty but, on the contrary, as the symbol of an enduring, inseparable tie of the two religious groups. Knowledge of such Judaizing streams and the way they were affecting even the fixed pillars of Christian salvational truth (and various local Christian communities) explains the strikingly aggressive, indeed hate-filled, reaction of Christian authors – especially from the Syrian-Mesopotamian realm – to the Jerusalem project's initiator.

Julian's stay in Antioch and his religious policies had an impact on both Christian-Jewish relations in the city and, even more importantly, the Christian clergy's approach to local Jewry that can only be considered remarkable. The extraordinary attractiveness of Jewish communal life, the friendly and even intimate contacts between Jewish and Christian believers, and the shared convictions and practices, must have driven the city's Church – numerically strong yet multipally divided and thus weakened – into a situation that was perceived as a struggle to preserve not only its own identity but also the community's cohesion and existence. The popular veneration of the Maccabean martyrs,

⁵³ On the complex questions regarding the tradition and dating of the directive, usually designated a Syrian didascalia, see the article by Bruno Steimer, "Didascalia," in *Lexikon der antiken christlichen Literatur*, ed. Siegmer Döpp and Wilhelm Geerlings (Freiburg-Basel-Vienna: Herder, 1999), 167f.; on the text and its relevant information see A. Peter Hayman, *The Disputation of Sergius the Stylite against a Jew* (Leuven: Peeters, 1973), 425f. in more detail.

⁵⁴ Similarly moderate, if not friendly statements about contemporary Jews can be found in texts of Aphrahat written between 337 und 344/5 A.D.; see *ibid.*, 426f.; Jacob Neusner, *Aphrahat and Judaism: The Christian-Jewish Argument in Fourth-Century Iran* (Leiden: Brill, 1971).

⁵⁵ Hieron., Comm. in Jes. 35.10 (CCL 73, 427); cf. Hieron., Comm. in Zach. 14.10f. (CCL 76a, 885) and in this regard Fergus Millar, "The Jews of the Graeco-Roman Diaspora between Paganism and Christianity, A.D. 312–438," in *The Jews among Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire*, ed. Judith Lieu, John North and Tessa Rajak (London: Routledge, 1992), 97–123, here 113f.

that cut across the boundaries between the different religious groups, and both the spiritual force and the intra-urban cohesive potential tied to the shrine, denoted only one out of many arenas for an open religious competition in which Antioch's Church appeared to face defeat even before the period of Julian's government. The successful resistance of the Antiochians in general and the city's Christians in particular to Julian's presence and political program offered the local Church a sudden chance of gaining enormous public prestige. It also afforded them the opportunity to obtain increased self-confidence and, with the "victims" of the Julianic "persecutions" as new martyrs, new instruments of propaganda in their conflict with intra-urban opponents and religious competitors: the Jews being the most prominent among the latter.

An appropriation of the Maccabean gravesite by Antioch's Church is highly probable to have taken place immediately following the abrupt end of Julian's rule. Unfortunately, there are no extant sources offering information, with regard to the veneration of the Maccabean brothers, about the ramifications of either the failure of Julian's restoration within the city or the death of the young emperor soon afterwards. Although we know about the emperor's attitudes towards the Jerusalem Temple, we have no idea in what manner Julian approached the Jewish site of veneration during his stay in Antioch. With the emperor seizing every opportunity to weaken the Church that arose, the shrine's huge popularity among Christians as well as Jews should have translated into imperial support. But this is uncertain. The Christianization of the site immediately following the death of the apostate – thereby exploiting the once again favorable religio-political power balance – would not be surprising. It would have to be understood as an expression of the Antiochian Church's newfound self-confidence vis-à-vis local Jewish competition, whose own hopes, under Julian, had only just been shattered in a spectacular manner.

As a matter of fact, there are a number of indirect suggestions that warrant such a conclusion. At the same time in nearby Asia Minor, Gregory of Nazianzus, in his sermon "On the Maccabees," propagated a direct connection with the Jewish martyrs,⁵⁶ placing them in

⁵⁶ Martha Vinson, "Gregory Nazianzen's Homily 15 and the Genesis of the Christian Cult of the Maccabean Martyrs," *Byzantion* 64 (1994): 166–192, here 166f., with a discussion of the dating of the sermon (Homil. 15).

the context of the ongoing religious conflict. The Maccabean brothers are addressed as exemplary opponents of a pagan ruler, as a Christian symbol of resistance to a devious and godless tyrant who wanted to force *hellenismós* – the key concept of the Julian restoration – on unbending martyrs for faith. In this context, Gregory establishes a link to the Temple's destruction and offers the first explicit reference to a Christian feast (*panégyris*) of the Maccabees.⁵⁷ Whether this could also be understood as a reference to a recent takeover of the Maccabean shrine by Antioch's Church is more than questionable, for the preacher would have mentioned such a fundamental religious upheaval if it had taken place.

Immediately following its usurpation by the Church, the erection of a basilica on the Jewish site of veneration and pilgrimage signaled its irrevocable occupation and exclusive veneration by Christians.⁵⁸ The procedure is reminiscent of that of Gallus in Daphne shortly after the mid-century. Gallus had undertaken an offensive appropriation of the chief sacred pagan locus in Antioch – moreover, through an exorcistic translation of relics – and thus replaced the most important rival cult of Christian religion by a new Christian site of veneration – this unfolding in a climate of mutual religious tolerance. Through this new usurpation, the local Church, standing in intense religious competition with Judaism, once again took hold of what was presumably the most influential Jewish cultic site in the city. A growing number of Christian pilgrims prayed shoulder to shoulder with Jewish and pagan worshippers and seekers of help at the site which was considered to be a locus of miracle-working.

The Christian usurpation of the Maccabean shrine was no less innovative than the translation of the relics a decade or two earlier. In the Mediterranean world, in the years and centuries that followed, various cure-promising sites of incubation with pagan origins would be

⁵⁷ The more detailed discussion of Vinson, Gregory Nazianzen's Homily 15.187 is hardly tenable (the silence of the Roman chronograph of 354 regarding the veneration of the Maccabees is irrelevant). To backdate the Christian veneration of the Maccabees to the time of Julian would be mere speculation. On the festival see Ziadé, *Les martyrs Maccabées*, 63f.

⁵⁸ Augustine's scant remarks in Sermo 300.6 (PL 38, col. 1379), *haec basilica a Christianis tenetur, a Christianis aedificata est*, suggest that the building of the church followed the appropriation of the site immediately or very soon after. His remarks also exclude the idea of a Christian appropriation and transformation of a synagogue, as asserted in the Arabic topographic tradition and by some scholars.

appropriated in a similar way and rededicated to Christian saints.⁵⁹ The fact of such Christian appropriation, whether carried out peacefully, through compulsion, or open force, needs to be understood as a consequence of the intensive everyday contacts between ordinary Jews and Christians in fourth century Antioch. This process – “Judaization” – of cultural and religious engagement between Jews and Christians was perceived as a threat by the Church hierarchy.

The rapid, sustained expansion of the veneration of the Maccabean martyrs in the imperial Church starting at the end of the fourth century – a process expediated by the installation of various cultic sites and churches dedicated to the Maccabees in other cities – exceeds and outstrips the above-analyzed local developments. A decisive precondition for the process was the flourishing cult of relics, in particular the innovative phenomenon of relic translation discussed above. This process now allowed Christians and Christian communities located elsewhere to share the beneficial and miraculous effects of the relics and experience the physical presence of the erstwhile Jewish martyrs. In this way, relics originating from Antioch were disseminated and made accessible throughout the important centers of Late Antique and Early Byzantine Christianity, a process that also promoted familiarity with and attraction toward the tradition, preserved in the Maccabean texts, of the exemplary, steadfast piety of the seven brothers and their mother, prepared for martyrdom in emulation of the venerable Eleazar.

A crucial legacy of the specifically local constellation of and debate about the Maccabean brothers needs to be mentioned here: the enormous valorization and actualization of the issue of martyrdom in fourth century Antioch, culminating in the confrontations with Julian. In post-Constantine Antioch, “martyrdoms,” like experiences of persecution in general, were not episodes from the past. The generation-long schisms within the city, but even more so the temporary presence of Julian and his emphatically pagan policies of restoration, led to Antioch’s Christians periodically experiencing illegality, state

⁵⁹ On the extremely well documented case of the incubation shrine of Isis in Menouthis (Egypt), see Sarolta A. Takács, “The Magic of Isis Replaced or: Cyril of Alexandria’s Attempt at Redirecting Religious Devotion,” *Poikila Byzantina* 13 (1994): 489–507 and Dominic Montserrat, “Pilgrimage to the Shrine of SS Cyrus and John at Menouthis in Late Antiquity,” in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 257–279 (with additional parallels).

repression, and the exertion of physical force, not to mention open religious competition. In the environment of the Syrian metropolis, and on the basis of specific historical and religious conditions, the idea of martyrdom gained extraordinary new significance and relevance for the Church: first and foremost for the city of Antioch, but at the same time – by way of the confrontation with Julian – for the imperial Church altogether.

Julian was all too familiar with the explosive potential of the martyrdom question. However, he did not only fail symbolically in the conflict over the Babylas relics in Daphne, whose removal and return, as we will recall, culminated in a Christian triumphal procession that turned out to be a unique identity-generating measure for Antioch's Church. Rather, despite Julian's strenuous exertions to prevent the Church from gaining martyrs, what emerged – at least as propagated by the later tradition – amounted to a downright martyrization of the local Christian community. Long lists of reputed martyrs came to fill the martyrologies of both the Antiochian and Syrian churches. These martyrs and their *memoria* conveyed above all one message: in Antioch alone, the Christians' struggle for survival had unfolded eye to eye with the apostate. This, in turn, was the same basic message offered by the Maccabean tradition with regard to the Seleucid Antiochus, who, for his part, had been intent on Hellenizing the chosen people. Now, it was that second Antiochus, the apostate Julian, who meant to force the true people of God to worship idols. It is against this late fourth century historical backdrop that the Jewish Maccabean brothers would gain, by leaps and bounds, respect and veneration as true proto-martyrs of Christian faith. The fact that this would emerge from the Syrian metropolis of Antioch can hardly be surprising.