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Early Christian Generic Hybridity: The *Martyrdom of Pionius* and Tragedy

A dissertation presented

by

Sarah Griffis

to

The Committee on the Study of Religion

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the subject of

The New Testament and Early Christianity

Harvard University

Cambridge, Massachusetts

September 2020

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Dissertation Advisor: Karen King Sarah Griffis

Abstract: Early Christian Generic Hybridity:
***The Martyrdom of Pionius* and Tragedy**

Early Christian martyr literature was composed in an ancient Mediterranean world in which a variety of literary and performance genres abounded across porous group boundaries. Noting this cultural vibrancy, a number of scholars have emphasized that martyr texts exhibit generic hybridity. This dissertation proposes that the genre of tragedy is a previously overlooked but prominent cultural element that contributed to this generic hybridity, and is thus an important key to understanding martyr texts' narrative features.

This dissertation begins to substantiate the hypothesis that appreciating tragedy's role in the generic hybridity of martyrdom literature can open up new directions of literary analysis for this corpus through a case study of a third-century CE Christian martyr text from Asia Minor, the *Martyrdom of Pionius*. Building on previous scholarship that explores themes and rhetoric in this text, the dissertation employs literary analysis to illustrate that certain features of the literary genre of tragedy operate also in *MPionius*. First, I demonstrate that it is plausible that early Christians would have been acquainted with the features of tragedies by showing tragedy's cultural prominence throughout the early Christian period and Christian thinkers' familiarity with the genre. Second, I show that three features identified by Aristotle as the core of tragedy—suffering, recognition, and reversal—also structure *MPionius*. Finally, I show that, like Aeschylus's tragic trilogy the *Oresteia*, popular throughout antiquity and the only extant tragedy which stages a trial, *MPionius* brings its action to a denouement with the tragic device of a *deus ex machina*.

In revealing the importance of tragic generic features to understanding Christian martyr literature, this research shows that, far from being incompatible with Christianity, generic features of tragedy actually helped to structure some of Christianity's stories. This case study of *MPionius* shows that authors of martyr stories could draw on audience familiarity with tragic plot structural features in order to make their own distinctively Christian claims. *MPionius* draws on suffering, recognition, and reversal in order to define a specifically Christian model of piety and to persuade its audience that death leads to life, rather than the audience expectation that life ends in death. Similarly, in its denouement, the author of *MPionius* draws on conventions of the genre of tragedy by dramatizing the intervention of divine authority in the events of the narrative. Specifically, through a *deus ex machina*, *MPionius* stages the triumph of a Christian vision of justice over the Roman judicial procedure that condemns Pionius to death.

In its redeployment of generic features from the prominent genre of tragedy, the *Martyrdom of Pionius* showcases early Christian participation in broader Greco-Roman literary practices. While future research will be required to establish that this insight holds for other martyr texts, the operation of generic features of tragedy in *MPionius* provides suggestive evidence that tragedy is a critical part of the cultural context that informs this distinctively Christian yet ultimately hybrid genre of martyr literature. As such, the case study presented in this dissertation opens up a fruitful new direction for the literary analysis of martyr texts.

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Introduction

Early Christian martyr literature was composed in an ancient Mediterranean world in which a variety of literary and performance genres abounded across porous group boundaries. Noting this cultural vibrancy, a number of scholars have emphasized that martyr texts exhibit generic hybridity. This dissertation proposes that the genre of tragedy is a previously overlooked but prominent cultural element that contributed to this generic hybridity, and is thus an important key to understanding martyr texts' narrative features.

This dissertation begins to substantiate the hypothesis that appreciating tragedy's role in the generic hybridity of martyrdom literature can open up new directions of literary analysis for this corpus through a case study of a third-century CE Christian martyr text from Asia Minor, the *Martyrdom of Pionius*. Building on previous scholarship that explores themes and rhetoric in this text, the dissertation employs literary analysis to illustrate that certain features of the literary genre of tragedy operate also in *MPionius*. First, I demonstrate that it is plausible that early Christians would have been acquainted with the features of tragedies by showing tragedy's cultural prominence throughout the early Christian period as well as Christian thinkers' familiarity with the genre. Second, I show that three features identified by Aristotle as the core of tragedy—suffering, recognition, and reversal—also structure *MPionius*. Finally, I show that, like Aeschylus' tragic trilogy the *Oresteia*, popular throughout antiquity and the only extant play that stages a court case, *MPionius* brings its action to a denouement with the tragic device of a *deus ex machina*.

MPionius is an optimal site on which to explore this hypothesis. As I will show below, this text has been consistently judged on the basis of both internal and external evidence to have

been in circulation near the date the text itself provides for its composition: the mid-third century. Its relatively secure dating thus provides a firm basis from which to explore the pervasive reach of tragedy's generic features in this time period. In its redeployment of features from the prominent genre of tragedy, the *Martyrdom of Pionius* showcases early Christian participation in broader Greco-Roman literary practices. While future research will be required to establish that this insight holds for other martyr texts, the operation of generic features of tragedy in *MPionius* provides suggestive evidence that the genre of tragedy is a critical part of the cultural context that informs this distinctively Christian yet ultimately hybrid genre of martyr literature. As such, the case study presented in this dissertation opens up a fruitful new direction for literary analysis of martyr texts.

I begin this Introduction by documenting a history of scholarship that analyzes martyr texts in their historical context. One approach to the study of martyr literature is the study of the history of the martyrs. This approach is characterized by a desire to correspond the events recorded in martyr texts to events in history, and by doing so, to evaluate the reliability of martyr accounts. In this approach, martyr texts are used as historical evidence. Another approach attends to the origins of the terminology of "martyr" and "martyrdom," and uses martyr literature to construct an historically accurate timeline, again attempting to correspond these texts to historical reality. A third approach has explored the literary composition of martyr texts to discern the origin of a particular text or of martyr texts as a corpus. In doing so, martyr texts are presented as flowing from literary antecedents.

As I will explain in more detail below, my approach differs from all of these. I neither lodge an argument regarding the historical reliability of *MPionius*; nor define the origins and

meaning of the terminology of martyrdom; nor present any particular tragedy as an explicit antecedent of *MPionius*. Instead, my approach is literary analysis, which makes it possible to analyze generic features of the text and to illustrate how features of the literary genre of tragedy operate within *MPionius*. By "martyr literature," I refer to what Éric Rebillard calls "stand-alone narratives,"[1] that is, literary wholes situated within a specific cultural context.[2] I highlight points of generic resonance between tragedies and *MPionius* because they are historically plausible points of contact, and because I believe that historical context can illuminate a text by suggesting to us ways that a contemporaneous audience may have experienced it. Despite my methodological divergence from previous studies, insofar as the other approaches I will review acknowledge the cultural embeddedness of martyr texts, they all yield results pertinent to this project's exploration of the generic hybridity of *MPionius*.

Accordingly, in the first major section below, I will discuss these scholarly currents in more detail, as well as offer a more fine-grained discussion of how the present study relates to them. Following this, in the second major section below I will introduce the text of *MPionius*, including its treatment in scholarship, its date, and its manuscript history. Finally, I will conclude this Introduction by reiterating what distinguishes my approach from that of previous commentators and offering an overview of the chapters to come.

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[1] Éric Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives about the Ancient Martyrs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 21. I am convinced by the utility of Rebillard's delimitation of martyr texts on this criterion of "stand-alone text" for its grounding in history without requiring texts to be historically accurate documents. By grounding in history, I mean that there is evidence for martyr texts circulating as texts—rather than as components in a homily, or detail in a history—in antiquity.

[2] For example, I include in the category of martyr literature texts such as *MPionius*, the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, and the *Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*, while I exclude texts that discuss martyrdom or cite martyr stories within the span of a larger text, such as Origen's *Exhortation to Martyrdom* and the short descriptions of martyrs' stories in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*.

History of Scholarship

The scholarship on martyr texts can be helpfully distinguished into three categories. A first approach asserts that martyr texts are a class of their own. An alternative school of thought has emphasized, to the contrary, that martyr texts exhibit features that are not entirely unique, but shared with other Greco-Roman literary traditions. This approach includes two distinct lines of research. One compares martyr texts to Jewish texts, and another sees in martyr literature themes and features shared with many genres of the Greco-Roman world: the theme of noble death, for example. Throughout the overview that follows, I will draw particular attention to how these scholars relate martyr texts to ideas about the phenomenon of martyrdom itself, and the implications this has for how they think about these texts' genre.

Martyr Texts as Historical Documents

The position that martyr texts represent a unique genre emerged from a period of scholarship at the beginning of the twentieth century when the origins of martyr literature came under intense scrutiny.[3] At this early stage, two key studies judged that martyrdom, as an historical phenomenon, was unique to Christianity, and that this unique phenomenon in turn birthed a new corpus of literature that documented it: Hippolyte Delehaye's *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* and Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen's *Die Idee des Martyriums*

[3] In her article on the state of the field, Candida Moss lists "The Origins of Martyrdom" as most prominent in the early twentieth century, yet a continuing current in research on martyrdom ("Current Trends in the Study of Early Christian Martyrdom," *Bulletin for the Study of Religion* 41.3 [2012]: 22-29). Attesting to the continued importance of "origins" in the study of martyrdom, a recent proposal to widen the canon of martyr narratives beyond criteria traditionally determined for inclusion scopes its study to speak to "early Christian studies' particular interest in origins" (David J. DeVore, "Opening the Canon of Martyr Narratives: Pre-Decian Martyrdom Discourse and the Hypomnēmata of Hegesippus," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 27.4 [2019]: 579-610). In service of this disciplinary interest, his argument that a non-canonical text (in this case, Hegesippus' fragments) should enter the canon of martyr texts is posed as especially persuasive since that text engages in multiple topics that pre-Decian (that is: earliest) martyr texts engage.

in der alten Kirche.[4] As Delehaye's title indicates, he was concerned to use genre as a tool to classify martyr stories. I will return to literary genre below. Here, however, I emphasize that these early texts lay the groundwork for the position that martyrdom was unique to Christianity on two grounds: the concept "martyrdom" was new, and the terminology related to martyrdom took on a new, technical meaning reflective of this new concept. Reflecting this new phenomenon, martyr texts also constituted a new genre of literature.

While scholars of this position acknowledge earlier, parallel figures to the martyr, foremost among which is Socrates, they hold that it was the situation of Christians under persecution that led to the unique phenomenon of martyrdom.[5] Glen Bowersock, placing himself in a lineage with Delehaye and Campenhausen, argues strongly for Christian martyrdom's unique quality:

> Martyrdom was not something that the ancient world had seen from the beginning. What we can observe in the second, third, and fourth centuries of our era is something entirely new. Of course, in earlier ages principled and courageous persons, such as Socrates at Athens or the three Jews in the fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar, had provided glorious examples of resistance to tyrannical authority and painful suffering before unjust judges. But never before had such courage been absorbed into a conceptual system of posthumous recognition and anticipated reward, nor had the very word martyrdom existed as the name for this system. Martyrdom, as we understand it, was conceived and devised in response to complex social, religious, and political pressures, and the date and the circumstances of its making are still the subject of lively debate.[6]

Martyrdom, to Bowersock, denotes dying for a cause at the hands of a persecuting authority. This definition of martyrdom is key to identifying martyrdom as a unique Christian phenomenon.

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[4] Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* (Brussels: Bureaux de la Société des Bollandistes, 1921); Hans Freiherr von Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums in der alten Kirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1936).

[5] Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums*, 1-20.

[6] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 5.

Bowersock follows in the footsteps of Campenhausen, who saw martyrdom "as a distinctive feature of this new religious group."[7] Thus, to these scholars, martyrdom was unique because of its unique historical circumstances, coming into being while Christianity formed as a distinct phenomenon within the Greco-Roman world and in response to an antagonistic authority that persecuted Christians alone.

These arguments for martyrdom's uniqueness to Christianity also rely on terminological data. The close connection between unique concept and unique term-usage is evident in Bowersock's treatment of martyrdom's origins. He turns immediately from his assertion that martyrdom "is something new" to the term "martyr" itself, arguing that, just like the concept, the term came to assume unique, specific meaning in the second century CE: to die for a cause.[8] Candida Moss underscores this mutual reinforcement of concept and term: "The task of locating the origin of martyrdom often hinges on scholarly definitions of 'martyr' and 'martyrdom' and the extent to which these definitions rest upon semantic or conceptual foundations."[9] The term *martys*, as virtually all treatments of the origins of martyr literature emphasize, appears throughout a long history of Greek usage.[10] Thus, the term was not restricted to Christian use. Rather, those scholars who argue martyrdom is unique to Christianity claim both a singular set of historical circumstances and a newly technical meaning of the term *martys* that coincides with those historical circumstances.

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[7] Candida Moss, *The Other Christs: Imitating Jesus in Ancient Christian Ideologies of Martyrdom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9, commenting on Campenhausen, *Die Idee des Martyriums,* especially Chapter One.

[8] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 5.

[9] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 10.

[10] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies, and Traditions* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012), 2; Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 5 are representative of scholarly portrayals of the trajectory from early usage of the term to mean a general "witness" to a specific, second-century CE use.

This argument for Christian uniqueness garnered strong support in linguistic examinations of the term *martys*. Multiple German scholars contributed to this base of evidence, foremost among whom was Norbert Brox.[11] Brox provided a history of the term and its origins, highlighting its role in legal terminology, where *martys* is translated as "witness" or "proof."[12] He concluded that *martys* only became a *terminus technicus* with its appearance in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.[13] What is more, it is with the appearance of *martys* in the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* "that martyrdom is born."[14] In this way philological work on the term reinforced the earlier work of Campenhausen and Delehaye that asserted the uniqueness of the concept of martyrdom to early Christians.

To summarize this perspective, those who claim that martyrdom is an early Christian phenomenon uniquely, and thus so too are the narratives that report them, stake their claim on the term *martys* coming to take on a distinct meaning. While the term had a long history of use in Greek, these scholars see early Christian martyrdom as a uniquely Christian concept, and see martyr narratives using *martys* in a new way. As this suggests, this line of thinking draws a line from a unique usage of *martys* to a unique genre associated with it. Thus, from this perspective,

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[11] Norbert Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer: Untersuchungen zu frühchristlichen Zeugnis-Terminologie* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1961); Theofried Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980); Hermann Strathman, "Martus, etc.," pages 4.447-520 in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1939). Gerd Buschmann does this linguistic work specifically in the context of examining the *Martyrdom of Polycarp: Das Martyrium of Polycarp* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1998).

[12] Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer*, 17-18 as introductory material; 196 for the legal terminology in the martyr's confession; throughout for a catalog of references in the New Testament, Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and multiple martyr texts.

[13] Brox, *Zeuge und Märtyrer*, 227; Bowersock's emphasis at *Martyrdom and Rome*, 13-14.

[14] Moss' phrasing: *The Other Christs*, 9.

both martyrdom as an historical phenomenon and martyr literature were totally new, originating *sui generis* from a unique historical situation: Christian persecution under a governing authority.

This approach conflates martyrdom as a phenomenon with martyr literature as well as with philological usage. Moss succinctly points out the conceptual limits of tying origins to philology. She notes that "the difficulty with this approach was that it equated the origins of martyrdom with a linguistic shift that was varied, graduated, and irregular."[15] That is, the association of concept with terminology is not perfectly neat and tidy; the absence of a precise term does not necessarily indicate the absence of shared ideas. Other scholars have agreed on this point, and argue that ideas and values expressed within texts that report martyrdoms share features with other texts that circulated in the broader Greco-Roman world. Research in this vein thus turns away from an emphasis on Christian uniqueness and instead contextualizes martyr literature within the broader ancient Mediterranean world. I turn now to these perspectives.

Martyr Texts and Jewish Texts

Approaches to martyr literature that emphasize historical context can be divided into two camps, the first of which is an influential body of work arguing that Christian martyr stories share narrative similarities with stories that document the suffering of the Jewish people.[16] These studies, too, as noted above, consider as points of comparison with martyr texts figures who experience righteous death and unjust suffering. Like Socrates, these Jewish figures and Jewish

[15] Moss, "Current Trends," 23; see also Moss, *The Other Christs*, 10.

[16] Advocates of this perspective sometimes consider Christian knowledge of the Hebrew Bible/Septuagint broadly, but more often consider the specific texts of Job, Daniel, 2 and 4 Maccabees, and, sometimes, the writings of Philo and Josephus.

texts put on display models of moral behavior that shared features with figures in Christian martyr texts.

William Frend's was the earliest strongly influential research arguing that martyr texts shared conventions with Jewish texts from antiquity.[17] Like the approach discussed above of the origins of martyrdom grounded in Christian uniqueness, this approach sometimes conflated the phenomenon of martyrdom and the corpus of martyr literature, and usually posited a model of Jewish texts as antecedents to later Christian texts, two methodological impulses that in this dissertation I push against. Frend proposed a definition of the "idea of martyrdom," specifically as it originated in a Jewish context: martyrdom is "personal witness to the truth of the Law against the forces of heathenism, involving the suffering and even death of the witness."[18] This idea of martyrdom grew specifically from the suffering of Jews during the Maccabean revolt, and the texts which documented this suffering served as models for later Christian martyr literature. Frend was joined by Theofried Baumeister, who argued that Christian martyr texts were tied to Jewish texts, although not solely.[19] Rather, he considered Jewish texts to be one cultural element that informed martyr literature among others—some of these others included "heroic death," for example, which I will consider below,[20] as well as distinctively Christian contributions culled

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[17] William H.C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church: A Study of a Conflict from the Maccabees to Donatus* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1965). He was not the first to propose similarities with Jewish texts; he builds on work by Ernst Lohmeyer, "Die Idee des Martyriums im Judentum und Urchristentum," *Zeitschrift für Systematische Theologie* 5 (1928): 232-249 and Wilhelm Bousset and Hugo Gressman, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1926), but his updated treatment became so influential that a later scholar could use the convenient shorthand "the Frend-Bowersock debate," which I discuss more below.

[18] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 44.

[19] Indeed, Jewish ideas cannot be considered in isolation from other ideas that circulated widely in antiquity such as heroic death: "Umwelt entstammenden Ideen zu einem großen Teil über das hellenistische Judentum an das Christentum vermittelt wurden" (Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des* Martyriums, 5).

[20] Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, 13.

from the New Testament.[21] In the first section of his *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, he identifies the intertestamental background of the New Testament as crucial historical context for the formation of Christian martyr literature.[22] The body of evidence he marshals is notable: unlike historians like Bowersock, Baumeister sees texts of the Hebrew Bible and apocryphal Jewish texts as literary models that Christians would have known and that influenced the construction of martyrdom as a concept and its presentation in literary texts.

It is, in particular, the book of Daniel and stories of the Maccabean martyrs that Baumeister and others who follow in this tradition of thought consider integral to the construction of Christian martyr literature.[23] Jan Willem van Henten's study, which argues that Jewish heroes' deaths for their beliefs and their people formed the concept of martyrdom in early Christianity, is a representative example of this approach.[24] Van Henten especially emphasizes the stories of the Maccabees as antecedents of martyr literature.[25] He points to the fact that these stories depict Jewish figures remaining loyal to their identity and heritage in the face of antagonistic governmental authority, undergoing gruesome torture yet standing firm. Their

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[21] One example is Jesus' call for his disciples to be ready to renounce the self out of loyalty (Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, 137; chapters 2 and 3 of *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums* record specific New Testament influences on martyr texts). See Bowersock's discussion of Baumeister in *Martyrdom and Rome*, 26-27. Baumeister's is a hybrid model that overlaps several of the categories I separate here for convenience's sake.

[22] Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, 13-66.

[23] Baumeister, *Die Anfänge der Theologie des Martyriums*, 13-22; 38-50.

[24] Jan Willem van Henten, *Die Enstehung der jüdischen Martyrologie* (Leiden: Brill, 1989).

[25] So too Bousset and Gressmann argue that 2 and 4 Maccabees in particular participated in reframing the Jewish religion as a religion of martyrdom (*Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter*, 9-17). This is the focus too of work by David A. deSilva, who reinforces the Maccabeean influence on martyr literature and argues for its influence specifically on the *Martyrdom of Pionius* ("An Example of How to Die Nobly for Religion: The Influence of 4 Maccabees on Origen's *Exhortatio ad Martyrium*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17.3 (2009): 337-356; especially 355 for the mention of Pionius).

suffering and willingness to die thus informed Christians' resistance to authority under persecution, and their stories served as models for figures in Christian martyr literature.

The research exploring similarities between Jewish stories of suffering and Christian martyr literature that I have canvassed to this point looks for narrative and figural similarities between the two kinds of stories, and is thus more textually-based than the search for Christian martyrdom's origins. Although this research is more receptive to texts' literary strategies and parallels than other approaches that evaluate the texts on the basis of their perceived correspondence to historical events, it also poses Jewish literary antecedents as flowing to later Christian texts. This is problematic because it necessitates a model of tradition and influence in one direction, which fails to take into account the fact that Jewish and Christian texts co-existed, rather than flourishing one after another in linear fashion. Nevertheless, this approach is crucial for my study because it recognizes that, rather than being literarily unique, stories of martyrs share narrative similarities with other texts of antiquity—an insight on which my argument also builds.

This brings me to the work of Daniel Boyarin, who takes up key positions that I follow in the current project. Boyarin took a fresh approach to debates about the Jewish origins of martyr literature by bringing in scholarship on the so-called "parting of the ways" of Christians from Jews. He expands on this research, which flourished from about the 1980s, to demonstrate that contra both Frend and Bowersock, martyrdom cannot be definitively proven to originate in *either* a Christian or a Jewish context. The reason for this is that there was no such rigid distinction

between Christianity and Judaism during the time period when martyr literature was being written.[26]

Boyarin uses evidence that Christians and Jews were not distinct groups in the second through fourth centuries to propose that we dispense with the either-or framing of the debate. Boyarin agrees, with those who see parallels between Christian martyr texts and 2 and 4 Maccabees, that Christian martyr texts were drawing heavily on "the earliest Jewish rudimentary martyrologies."[27] In addition, he agrees that other specific features of martyrdom grew from "the Christian milieu" in the third and fourth centuries, in response to persecution under Decius and the Great Persecution.[28] Since these events featured persecutions of Christians specifically, ideas and texts about martyrdom continued to transform primarily *among* Christians—and then those developments in turn informed the development of Jewish texts.[29] In this way, Boyarin's model refuses the premise that martyr texts are either Christian *or* Jewish.

His model points a way forward because, as he explains, it "allows for a complicated, nuanced, historical account of how Jewish, Greek, and Roman cultural elements became creatively combined into late antique martyrology." This vision of complex interactions among

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[26] Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998); for the "Frend-Bowersock debate," as he sets it up for an easy heuristic schema, 127-130. He articulates specifically his point of agreement with Bowersock at 94-95, though in differentiating his position, demonstrates that *both* Frend and Bowersock consider Christianity and Judaism distinct essences and, moreover, that even Frend's view of Jewish origins employs a supersessionist framework (*Dying for God*, 31, 128). A representative example is Frend's statement that "There is no doubt that if one considers martyrdom in terms of witness to God's almighty works, and the martyr as His agent, Christians looked back almost exclusively to Jewish prototypes…Yet, for all this, martyrdom in Judaism remained something of a *Hamlet* without the prince" (*Martyrdom and Persecution*, 67-68).

[27] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117.

[28] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117.

[29] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117-118. Lucy Grig's study, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004), is an excellent example of post-Boyarin research that takes seriously the unclarity surrounding Jewish-Christian relations in antiquity; see 10 for her programmatic statement: "The history of early Christianity can no longer be divorced from its Jewish roots and this is no less the case with martyrdom than with any other aspect."

various contemporary cultural elements precludes any tidy account of how this literature came about. Boyarin continues: "We must think of circulating and recirculating motifs, themes, and religious ideas in the making of martyrdom, a recirculation between Christians and Jews that allows for no simple litany of origins and influence."[30] In this passage, Boyarin articulates one of the central methodological convictions that informs this dissertation: that recirculating cultural motifs can be discerned in martyr texts, and that these shared features should be taken to demonstrate shared cultural ideas and literary practices, rather than influence or origins.

Once we take this perspective, it becomes possible to approach martyr texts from the standpoint of broader cultural interchange—and interchange not among Jews and Christians alone. Given that martyr literature continued to evolve in the third century in Christian circles, Boyarin notes, "martyrology naturally transformed and evolved in that century" by adapting specific "cultural elements from within the worlds of the martyrs and martyrologists, in particular tragic and gladiatorial motifs."[31] Boyarin thus pushes toward viewing martyr literature as texts that drew from multiple sources across the world of antiquity in which Jews and Christians were not fully distinct groups, and moreover, in which those involved in this messy Jewish-Christian-Greek-Roman nexus were active participants in a broader world—one that included, Boyarin identifies, tragedy as a prominent genre or, as he puts it, a prominent cultural element. It is to this broader cultural world I now turn.

Martyr Texts in a Greco-Roman Context

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[30] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 118.

[31] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117.

Many scholars have identified ideas in Christian martyr texts that also appear in texts in the broader Greco-Roman world—the world, of course, in which early Christianity developed. Foremost among this group are studies that emphasize that Christian martyr literature participated in a world in which deeply ingrained ideas about "noble death," and texts that diffuse such ideas, circulated widely.[32]

We have just seen that a large number of scholars consider Jewish models of suffering influential to the formation of Christian martyr texts. Accordingly, Jewish texts are considered one source of ancient Mediterranean ideas about noble death. Like Baumeister before him, who sees Jewish ideas of valiant suffering as reflective of cultural values in the Hellenistic world, David Seeley and others identify Maccabean literature as participating in this philosophically informed attitude toward death. The "noble death," according to Seeley's schema, includes a cluster of five features: obedience; overcoming physical vulnerability; a military setting; the suffering being beneficial for others; and sacrificial metaphors.[33]

Other scholars in this tradition hold less to a cluster of defined features and instead emphasize the broad context of Hellenistic and Roman philosophy that informed ideas of noble

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[32] Foundational texts on this topic include David Seeley, *The Noble Death: Graeco-Roman Martyrology and Paul's Concept of Salvation* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990); Arthur Droge and James Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom Among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1992). See the relevant discussions in Ulrich Eigler, "Exitus illustrium vivorum," pages 344-345 in *Der neue Pauly* 4 (Leiden: Brill, 1998) and Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Genre of the Passion Narrative," *Studia Theologica* 47 (1993): 3-28, especially 12ff. Beyond these studies already cast under the topic "noble death," the questions of what was worth dying for and what one gained by doing so were ancient ones, going back to Homer at least. I thank Simon Goldhill for broadening my attention to this topic, especially by turning me to texts that explore it within the Iliad (most importantly, James Redfield's *Nature and Culture in the Iliad: The Tragedy of Hector* [Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994] and Michael Lynn George's *Epos: Word, Narrative and the Iliad* [London: Macmillan, 1988]). Redfield and George note that these questions related to death's value and reward are questions posed in stories about heroes, versus stories about gods; such stories are stories about *kleos* at the same time as they confer that *kleos* through the telling of the story (Redfield, *Nature and Culture in the Iliad*, 31-32, 34-35; George, *Epos*, 153-229). For Redfield, it is purification that a worthwhile death can achieve (*Nature and Culture in the Iliad*, 160-223); for George, the possible reward is a recompense that is made possible only through the narrative creating the opportunity for recurrence (*Epos*, 167-169; 215-216 for succinct statements).

[33] Seeley, *The Noble Death*, 13.

death. The philosophies espoused by both Epictetus and Seneca are well-documented as being reflective of and informing attitudes toward death and suffering in the Roman world.[34] Such perspectives endorsed ambivalence toward death and control of the body and emotions.[35] These ideas themselves were formed by a long history of literary texts and philosophies in the ancient world. Herbert Musurillo traces the concept of noble death to Aristotle and Plato.[36]

It is important to note that ideas about dying nobly were not merely philosophical experiments; Stephanie Cobb has shown that the Roman values of honor, strength, and reason that were on display in spectacles, contests, and literary descriptions of noble behavior in battle were embraced by Christians, and even "at the very core of Christian identity."[37] In addition to the figure of the athlete or competitor who could die in a noble fashion were warrior figures, who could choose model forms of death in battle.[38] In all of these situations, willing death in the face of defeat was considered a noble, appropriate choice, and one worthy of emulation. As Paul

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[34] Seeley, *The Noble Death*, 15; James Romm (ed. and trans.), *How to Die: An Ancient Guide to the End of Life. Seneca, Lucius Annaeus, approximately 4 B.C.-65 A.D.* (Princeton, NU: Princeton University Press, 2018) on Seneca specifically; Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismo Dunderberg (eds.), *Stoicism in Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010); David Aune, "Mastery of the Passions: Philo, 4 Maccabees and Earliest Christianity," pages 125-158 in *Hellenization Revisited: Shaping a Christian Response within the Greco-Roman World*, edited by Wendy E. Hellemann (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994).

[35] Paul Middleton, "Noble Death or Death Cult? Pagan Criticism of Early Christian Martyrdom," pages 205-228 in *People Under Power: Early Jewish and Christian Responses to the Roman Empire*, edited by Outi Lehtipuu and Michael Labahn (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015), at 216 reflects on the correspondence of these ideals with martyrs' deaths.

[36] Herbert Musurillo, *Acts of the Pagan Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 237; Droge and Tabor, *A Noble Death*, take a *longue durée* approach, locating ideas of noble death within and throughout Greek and Roman philosophies from Homer through the Roman imperial period.

[37] Stephanie Cobb, *Dying to Be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 2. Specifically, these were classed as masculine values, and in her argument that Christians embraced these Roman values, she locates Christian martyr texts' rhetoric of martyrs as masculine.

[38] "The most glorious form of Noble Death was that achieved heroically in battle for the homeland" (Middleton, "Noble Death or Death Cult?" 217). Middleton cites Euripides as providing the prime examples for this most glorious form of death; as noted above, Redfield and George remind us that valuing most highly deaths on the battlefield stems from a tradition of Homeric epics conferring *kleos* on their heroes by enshrining their stories.

Middleton puts it, "Noble death was essentially a means of restoring honor or asserting control over one's life where that was threatened."[39]

Key figures emerge as exceptionally influential models of dying nobly. Moss identifies a few: "The iconic figures of Achilles and Socrates…and the tragic deaths of Euripidean heroes and heroines exerted great influence on the formation of ideas about self-sacrifice and noble death."[40] Indeed, Socrates is acknowledged in virtually every treatment of noble death as the prototype of a just sufferer.[41] Multiple figures from tragedies are also well-attested as exemplary sufferers: Iphigenia, Polyxena, and Antigone, for example.[42] Thus, martyr texts were composed within a world populated with preferences for how to die optimally, and with figures who served as noble, well-respected examples of such deaths.

These models' exemplary deaths are especially significant considering that the very basis of classical education in antiquity was the *paradeigma* or *exemplum*, the presentation of precedents that aimed to persuade a reader or audience. Such presentation of historical or mythical figures as a means of persuasion, aiming to convince readers to emulate the figure who

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[39] Middleton, "Noble Death or Death Cult?" 218. Middleton does not ultimately agree that Christian martyrdom looks like traditional models of noble death, even though, he says, Christians invoked the tradition. They differ because Christians have no "fatherland" for which to fight, they are too eager to die, and because of the degree of bodily harm recorded in martyr stories.

[40] Moss, "Current Trends," 23.

[41] Werner Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1961), 29; Middleton, "Noble Death or Death Cult?" 216; George Hanfmann, "Socrates and Christ," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 60 (1951): 205-223; Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom,* 33; Seeley, *The Noble Death*, 15-16; Droge and Tabor devote a whole chapter to the topic of Socrates as exemplary in *A Noble Death*, 17-51, for just a sampling. Adela Yarbro Collins traces Christian use of Socrates as an example of noble death in comparison to Jesus as well as martyrs to the second century ("From Noble Death to Crucified Messiah," *New Testament Studies* 40 [1994]: 481-503, at 483).

[42] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 29-32; Lefkowitz, *Women in Greek Myth*, 153-167.

serves as a moral guide, was a prominent feature of ancient rhetoric.[43] In Greek, the core texts of education from which such exemplary figures were taken were those attributed to Homer.[44] Figures from these Homeric texts were presented as models of heroic behavior, both teaching audiences what constituted heroism and exhorting them to imitate.

In the Roman period, Homer retained his classic status, but new models of exemplary, heroic behavior became available as well. During this period, *exempla* of soldiers and citizens who sacrificed or suffered for the Empire provided a strongly propagandistic model of what it meant to be a hero, and how heroic behavior should be judged.[45] An additional model of heroism on public display in the Roman period was the gladiator. Gladiators appear also in some martyr texts, reflecting contemporaneous judgments of what constituted heroic behavior worthy of emulation—judgments rooted in the broader Greco-Roman world, showing martyr literature reflects contemporaneous values.[46] *Exempla* of gladiators served as educational models of behavior, legible to composers and readers of martyr literature and reflected in their texts. They

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[43] Kathleen Coleman, "Mythological Figures as Spokespersons in Statius' Silvae," pages 67-80 in *Im Spiegel des Mythos, Bilderwelt und Lebenswelt; Symposium, Rom 19.-20. Februar 1998*, edited by Francisco De Angelis and Susanne Muth (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1999); M.B. Roller, "Exemplarity in Roman Culture: The Cases of Horatius Cocles and Cloelia," *Classical Philology* 99.1 (2004): 1-56; Frank Bücher, *Verargumentierte Geschichte: Exempla Romana im politischen Diskurs der späten römischen Republik* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 2006); Damian Pierzak, "References to Historical Figures as a Means of Persuasion in Ancient Rhetoric: A Research Methodology Applicable to Cicero," *Scripta Classica* 15 (2018): 13-35. This thesis is asserted by modern scholars but based in ancient discussion of the *paradeigma* or *exemplum* going all the way back to Aristotle (*Rhetoric* 1.2.1356b). Examples of such ancient views include the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.62 and Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 5.11; Cicero, *De Inventione* 1.49.

[44] For exemplarity in Homer's texts, Malcolm Willcock's "Mythological *Paradeigma* in the Iliad" (*Classical Quarterly* 14.2 [1964]: 141-154) is a *locus classicus*. I will discuss ancient education further in the next chapter.

[45] Paul Middleton discusses the role of heroic sacrifice in the Roman period as providing a model of behavior for martyrs to emulate in "Noble Death or Death Cult," especially at 217-218. Middleton highlights Horace's phrase "dulce et decorum est pro patria mori" as a shorthand for this heroic quality of willingness to die for the city (*Carmen saeculare* 3.2.13).

[46] Examples include the *Letter to the Churches of Lyons and Vienne* 1.42; 2.6-8 and *Martyrdom of Fructuosus* 6.1, in addition to *MPionius*' post-mortem description of Pionius as a glorious athlete.

are thus a crucial "circulating cultural element" of the Greco-Roman world in which martyr texts were formulated.[47]

It is in these cultural ideals and stories about noble death and suffering, both Jewish and non-Jewish, that scholars find literary parallels for Christian martyr narratives. These scholars focus attention on the texts themselves and their shared features, rather than accurate historical description. They rely on concepts within the texts as well as the generic features and themes of the stories themselves. As I have indicated in passing above, the present project is similarly interested in identifying circulating cultural elements and related audience expectations that were widely shared in the ancient Mediterranean and thus relevant to our understanding of martyr texts.

Literary Models and Generic Hybridity

The research discussed above evinces a trend toward comparisons of themes and imagery between martyr texts and other contemporaneous texts. These studies are, to varying degrees, interested in generic similarities between martyr literature and other contemporaneous texts, but not exclusively so; they also are interested in similar "formulas" and themes that contemporaneous texts exhibit, without necessarily claiming that those features belong to a specific genre.[48] In identifying a range of texts that exhibit literary resonance with Christian martyr literature, these studies place martyr texts within an historical context in which those

[47] I draw on the language of Boyarin, who lists specifically gladiators and the genre of tragedy as examples of elements that can begin to be explored when one takes the dialectical approach that he proposes (*Dying for God*, 117-118).

[48] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 45 on formulas, specifically those in romance; Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117 and Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 30-32 for themes.

stories developed, and in which they would have been culturally intelligible to the audiences who received them. Thus, this attention to narrative features of martyr texts focuses attention on texts, rather than the historicity of the events they describe.

Despite this relatively greater emphasis on texts as literary works, early examples of this approach still focused on the degree of accuracy with which martyr texts reported their events. Indeed, the earliest generic classifications of martyr texts were formulated on the principle of historicity. The crucial influential school on this topic, the Bollandists, classified martyr texts into groups according to their likely correspondence to historical reality. A lengthy history of research on martyr texts conducted by this school classified martyr texts into three categories: *acta*, *passio*, and *vita.* The *acta* were thought to convey a martyr's trial and execution; the *passio*, as with the passion narratives of the New Testament, relayed a martyr's last days and death; and the *vitae* were classed as the lives and works of saints.[49] A related delineation was Delehaye's classification of martyr texts. Delehaye separated *les passions historiques* from *les panégyriques* and *les passions épiques*,[50] the first two of which were considered authentic—that is, historically reliable evidence—and the latter fictional. These scholars' modernist differentiation of fact versus fiction determined what literary models they considered relevant for each of the categories they distinguished: authentic models for authentic texts, and the same for fictive texts. For example, for authentically historical (factual) models, literary antecedents were found in official court-reporting documents (*commentarii*), while for the fictional category, other fictional

[49] Walter Ameling, *Märtyrer und Märtyrerakten* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2002); Gary Bisbee, *Pre-Decian Acts of Martyrs and Comentarii* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1988). Michal Beth Dinkler succinctly summarizes a history of classifying martyr texts in her "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives: A Proposal," pages 314-336 in *Sibyls, Scriptures, and Scrolls* vol. 1, edited by Joel Baden, Hindy Najman, and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

[50] Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*. Delehaye treats les passions historiques from 15-131; les panégyriques from 133-169, and épiques from 177-258.

texts, particularly the genre of Greek romance, were considered the relevant literary antecedents.[51] Compared with the first tradition of scholarship described at the beginning of this section, this is a more subtle case in which ideas about persecution as an historical phenomenon inform ideas about the literary form and features of martyr narratives, but the connection is still evident—here in the association of different genres with different judgments of historicity.

A growing interest in genre studies, especially after the linguistic turn, has resulted in a reassessment of these traditional categories of martyr literature. Many scholars have set aside the idea that martyr narratives belong to one or another category graded by degree of historicity. This methodological turn has obviated the need to define martyr literature as either historical documents or fiction. The result is an increase in examining martyr texts with an eye to their literary similarities with other texts, considering such similarities sites of cultural interaction; and in asking what these texts evince historically, other than accurate correspondence to events. These examinations are increasingly treating martyr texts as complex documents that exhibit contextually formulated generic hybridity.[52] As a consequence of such research, Michal Beth Dinkler notes, "many have demonstrated that early Christian martyrdom accounts can hardly be considered a new literary 'species' given their rich intertextual dynamics."[53]

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[51] For the division into categories and comments on their antecedents, see especially Musurillo's *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, lii-liii. Delehaye's further categorization of fictional martyr texts into various types of romances can be found in *Les Passions*, 171-226. Bowersock's argument for martyr texts' relationship with fiction is even stronger: he suggests that the martyr *acta* in fact replaced fiction/novels, since "the decline of historical fiction in the Roman Empire (the Greek novels in particular) coincided quite precisely with the rise of Martyr Acts" (*Martyrdom and Rome*, 24).

[52] Michelle Borg and Graeme Miles (eds.), *Approaches to Genre in the Ancient World* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2013); Helen Rhee, *Early Christian Literature: Christ and Culture in the Second and Third Centuries* (New York: Routledge, 2005). See too John Frow's *Genre* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), which re-articulates a theory of genre post-Derrida, and views texts as participating in a multitude of genres that activate meaning.

[53] Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives," 321.

Treatments of generic dependence of martyrdom literature on other generic forms often include romance novels,[54] *bios*,[55] the so-called acts of the pagan martyrs,[56] and the New Testament gospels.[57] Identifying such genres is important because, if martyr texts can be shown to share features with previously existing genres or otherwise classified texts, then those models can inform us about the literary-historical context in which martyr texts were written and intelligible to their audiences. I will add, in the course of this study, the genre of tragedy to the pool of contemporaneous literature that played a role in forming the literary-historical context in which martyr texts were composed and read, since it is reasonable to think that audience expectations might also have been shaped by the genre of tragedy. Such shaping would condition and prime readers to recognize tragic resonance in interpreting martyr literature.

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[54] Romances are especially emphasized as influences upon martyr texts since they bear such close resemblance to the apocryphal acts of the apostles, which are "the closest literary analogues" to martyr accounts (Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 46). See also Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London; New York: Routledge, 1995), for the influence of romance novels on martyr literature (41-76).

[55] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, on the debate surrounding the genre of *bios* (45).

[56] Also called the Acta Alexandrinorum; see Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Pagan Martyrs: Acta Alexandrinorum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954); Collins, "The Genre of the Passion Narrative," 12. Musurillo notes that the influence of these "pagan" martyr texts on Christian martyr texts was slight, and also connects the "former martyr accounts to the novel, court documents, and the genre of mime (*Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, vi, 247). Importantly, Musurillo differentiates the martyrs from mimes because, he says, martyrs are not frivolous; rather, they display "a tragic σπουδή" (*Acts of the Pagan Martyrs*, 248). Moss also refers to a separate group of texts in the Hellenistic period as influential: death narratives collected together and called the *exitus illustrium virorum* (Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 45; Collins, "The Genre of the Passion Narrative," 13; Alessandro Ronconi, "Exitus illustrium virorum," *Studi italiani di filologia classica* 17 [1940]: 3-32).

[57] Bowersock sees the gospels as an influence on martyr texts only at a remove: "the Gospels provided a powerful stimulus to the production of pagan historical fiction. In turn, with the passage of time, the production and popularity of that fiction itself provided an equally powerful stimulus to the composition and dissemination of the Martyr Acts." He notes that "secular fiction" in this way played a "mediating role" between gospels and martyr texts (*Martyrdom and Rome*, 26). Other treatments of the New Testament's depictions of Jesus' death as influencing martyr stories include Moss, *The Other Christs*; Michael W. Holmes, "The Martyrdom of Polycarp and the New Testament Passion Narratives," pages 407-732 in *Trajectories through the New Testament and Apostolic Fathers*, edited by Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

Instead of identifying discrete genres that contributed to the formation of martyr texts, Dinkler proposes an "idealized cognitive model" of martyr texts using prototype theory.[58] Acknowledging that "genres constrain and enable perceptual possibilities by evoking certain readerly expectations," she posits a model "that would have variously influenced *both the writers of these accounts and the expectations and perceptions of their implied readers*."[59] Her model is flexible, acknowledging that variation occurs across martyr texts, while paying attention to meaningful similarities—specifically, shared narrativity and attention to themes, such as the martyrs' agency and God's will, and the extent to which these two forces conflict.[60] While Dinkler's goal of identifying an idealized cognitive model of martyr literature is different from my own, I follow Dinkler in her insistence that texts both respond to previous textual models as well as shape those to follow by conditioning readers' and hearers' horizons of expectations concerning generic features.

The *Martyrdom of Pionius*

Historical Authenticity

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[58] See especially 324-325 in "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives" for Dinkler's explanation of prototype theory, which suggests that humans form idealized cognitive models upon reviewing evidence, and then formulating opinions on how highly typical one piece of evidence is of a category. Thus, the model assumes variance: comparative pieces of evidence that belong to the same category will not have every feature in common, but can be judged as more or less highly typical of a given genre on the basis of their quantitative and qualitative similarities with one another. For another superb treatment of genre that engages prototype theory, see Carol Newsom, "Spying Out the Land: A Report from Genology," pages 437-450 in *Seeking out the Wisdom of the Ancients: Essays Offered to Honor Michael V. Fox on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday*, edited by Ronald L. Troxel, Kelvin G. Frieble, and Dennis R. Magary (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), which uses this perspective to analyze the genre of apocalypse.

[59] Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives," 326-327; emphasis mine.

[60] Her analysis of themes is, of course, far more in depth than I can detail here. Her concluding observations appear succinctly at 335 in "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives," but for her treatment of narrative similarities and the theme of volition, see 327-335.

With this literature review in place, I turn now to discuss the text that forms the centerpiece of this case study. As noted above, this dissertation explores resonance between the genre of tragedy and martyr texts through a case study of one specific text: the *Martyrdom of Pionius*. Due to its simultaneous evaluation as early and important, yet an understudied text, and its relatively secure situation in the third century, *MPionius* is an optimal site for such an exploration.

MPionius has long been appraised as one of the most important martyr texts,[61] one of the earliest martyr texts,[62] and, to those who make such judgments, an authentic or historically reliable martyr text.[63] By "important," I mean that scholars have judged the text to be one of the earliest martyr texts that can be securely dated, assigned provenance, and attested as circulating, and thus informative about early Christian constructions of both the role of martyrs and the corpus of martyr literature. While traditionally "authenticity" has been ascribed to the text either partly or totally,[64] more recent scholarly opinion pushes toward evaluating more and more of the

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[61] Such is Bowersock's evaluation in *Martyrdom and Rome*, 27; similarly, Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 468, 472.

[62] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 85-86, alongside those of Polycarp and Perpetua; see also Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 460-461, 472; Timothy Barnes, "Pre-Decian 'Acta Martyrum,'" *Journal of Theological Studies* 19.2 (1968): 509-531; and, more recently, Louis Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios, prêtre de Smyrne* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1994), 1-10.

[63] Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xii, mentions both its historical and fictional elements; Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 47-50; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 460-461; Reinhard Selinger, *The Mid-Third Century Persecutions of Decius and Valerian* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 21; Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2001), 25, who obviously has Lane Fox in mind; Jan Den Boeft and Jan Bremmer, "Notinculae Martyrologicae III: Some Observations on the Martyria of Polycarp and Pionius," *Vigiliae Christianae* 39 (1985): 110-130, 124-125; Walter Ameling, "The Christian Lapsi in Smyrna, 250 A.D. (Martyrium Pionii 12-14)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 62.2 (2008): 133-160, at 136 for its special value as a unique representative of the third century in crisis; and Anton Hilhorst, "The Punishment of the Dead Sea: Martyrdom of Pionius 4.20 and its Precedents in Ben Sira and Africanus," pages 117-129 in *Sodom's Sin: Genesis 18-19 and its Interpretation*, edited by Ed Noort and Eibert Tigchelaar (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 124.

[64] For example, the lack of some portions in Latin and Armenian versional evidence has led scholars to believe that the second speech is not original to the text, and scholars have long doubted the prologue and epilogue's authenticity; see more below.

text as a blend of references to historical events and narrative technique. Early proponents of the text's genuine correspondence to historical events include Bowersock, who sees in the text a "recognizably imperial context."[65] Robin Lane Fox agrees, noting that the text should be judged as authentic on the basis of how closely it corresponds to historians' knowledge of third century Smyrna.[66] Both authors appeal to the text's "accurate" depiction of legal procedure under the Roman Empire, in addition to the *adversos Iudaeos* rhetoric that they identify as fitting a second- to third-century context.[67] The text has also been judged as authentic on internal grounds, because of its multiple uses of the first-person perspective, which have led many scholars to believe the text was written by Pionius himself, and thus, as eyewitness account, that it is more likely to be historically accurate.[68] Finally, the epigrapher Louis Roberts' enthusiasm for the text led to a successful search for onomastic corroboration in inscriptions for characters mentioned within *MPionius*.[69] The combination of *MPionius*' authentic presentation of third-century Smyrnean life, its "accurate" depiction of court procedure, its narrative perspective, and its coincidence with supporting epigraphic evidence have bolstered its reputation as authentic.

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[65] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 23-30.

[66] Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 316; 419-491.

[67] Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution*, 316; Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios,* 3-9, 49-54; Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 28-30; Stephen Gero, "Jewish Polemic in the Martyrium Pionii and a 'Jesus' Passage from the Talmud (*Journal of Jewish Studies* 29.2 [1978]: 164-168, although he considers only one speech; Judith Lieu, *Image and Reality: The Jews in the World of the Christians in the Second Century* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 92. This group has taken the speeches to be indicative of Jewish-Christian tension in third century Asia Minor.

[68] Anton Hilhorst reevaluates in "'He left us this writing': Did He? Revisiting the Statement in *Martyrdom of Pionius* 1.2," pages 103-121 in *Martyrdom and Persecution in Late Antique Christianity*. Festschrift Boudewijn Dehandschutter, edited by Johan Leemans (Leuven: Peeters, 2010). Manlio Simonetti was an early proponent of the first person not signaling authenticity but being rhetorically designed to do so (*Studi agiografici* [Rome: A. Signorelli, 1955], 9-51, especially 9).

[69] Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios*; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 10 acknowledges Robert's seminal contribution and cites his work throughout; Grig, *Making Martyrs*, 24.

More recent work challenges *MPionius*' longstanding place as wholly authentic. Elizabeth Gibson, for example, argues that the lengthy speeches are not original to the document.[70] Its speeches have long been recognized to contain vehemently anti-Jewish rhetoric, but Gibson argues instead that the rhetoric is the product of intra-Christian polemic against Christians who visited synagogues, added to the base document's court report at a later time.[71] Still, despite its portions of added text, Gibson, like others, judges the text to be authentic in the aggregate. She is particularly persuaded by the correspondence between material records and the text, noting that the names mentioned within *MPionius* have all been discovered in epigraphic evidence from Smyrna and dated to the same period.[72] Lucy Grig is less persuaded of the text's overall authenticity, calling into question even its traditionally most authentic hallmark, the court proceedings. She finds *MPionius* to be a "long and tendentious text," "bearing no resemblance to a court record, revealing clearly the existence of different recensions which reflect Church debates on Judaising tendencies and the problem of sacrifice."[73] More recent treatments, then, are less sure of the text's authenticity as a whole, although some core portion of the document is thought, by most, to reflect third-century Smyrnean life.

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[70] Elizabeth Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic: The Case of the 'Martyrdom of Pionius,'" *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9.3 (2001): 339-358. For an earlier view of the speeches' lending credence to a third century date for the text, Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxviii.

[71] Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," contra Robert, 62 for first speech, 82 for second; see for comparison Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 471. She was not the first; Simonetti earlier considered the first speech not original to the text (*Studio agiografici*, 18). A different opinion can be found in Hilhorst, who claimed the rhetoric was aimed to persuade non-Christians and non-Jews to convert to Christianity ("L'Ancien Testament dans la polémic du martyr Pionius," *Augustinianum* 22 [1982]: 91-96).

[72] Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 345-346, thus relying heavily on Robert's evidence in *Le martyre de Pionios*. This trend is important to note: while scholars pre-Robert's study judged *MPionius* as authentic based on evidence internal to the text, the trend after Robert is to view its content as increasingly inauthentic, yet at the same time, to accept the document as a whole as authentic to a third-century context due to corroborating material evidence, no matter the degree of embroidery in the text (Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxix).

[73] Grig, *Making Martyrs*, 24.

These scholars' criteria of evaluation deserve deeper discussion. Grig focuses on the text's rhetoric, noting that its constructions of controversy need not be pigeonholed into a debate over fact or fiction. Rather, the issue of authenticity itself is of little note to Grig, who instead reads the text's rhetoric as evidence of Jewish-Christian controversy and debates over sacrifice at the time of *MPionius*' composition. Importantly, this hermeneutic of suspicion does not preclude the text's historical situation in the third century—that is, there is compelling evidence that the text circulated in the third and fourth centuries, but this evidence need not require or depend on the text's events corresponding to historical reality, which cannot be proved.

Conversely, scholars such as Bowersock, Lane Fox, and Robert evaluate the text for its authenticity on the criterion of correspondence to what scholars think life was like on the ground in Smyrna at the time of the text's composition. While material culture can certainly pair with literary evidence to inform us about life in antiquity, the correspondence of names mentioned within a text with names on inscriptions—a major cache of evidence Robert uses to claim authenticity for *MPionius*—does not prove the text's correspondence with historical reality. Nor does the text's vivid description of third-century Smyrnean life prove that it reflects historical events of the third century with accuracy. Indeed, to claim so is circular reasoning—reasoning, moreover, which ignores the fact that one motivation for painting such a vivid picture of Smyrnean life is precisely to create the illusion that the text reports reality.[74] Ultimately, this line of argument asserts more from the evidence than is possible. In this dissertation I am not interested in treating *MPionius* as an historical document in the sense of mining it for

[74] That is, the minute details which allude to historical realia in texts—details about personalities or places, for example—are a literary device used to create the *illusion* of historical reality, rather than historically accurate details. That this literary construction was established as a means of producing the illusion of reality, rather than reporting it, was explored already by Roland Barthes in his essay "The Reality Effect," reprinted in *The Rustle of Language* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

information about historical events. Rather, I am interested in the text as a literary document whose generic conventions can be situated within the third- to fourth-centuries, the time period during which the text began to be circulated.

Gibson wrote, in 2001, that *MPionius* had "long played second fiddle to the better-known martyrdom account from Smyrna, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*."[75] Even given these recent reevaluations of the text's authenticity and Robert's enthusiasm for Pionius,[76] the sentiment remains true twenty years later. *MPionius* is most frequently invoked for its reference to Socrates as a model of noble death,[77] though it is also referred to as an example of the court-reporting sub-genre that appears within some martyr texts, lending them an air of authenticity.[78] Following in the wake of scholars like Grig, the path is open to explore *MPionius* as a literary document that employs historically contextual, legible strategies and pursues persuasive objectives. I follow Grig in eschewing the search for authenticity and instead working toward placing martyr texts within a network of literary culture.

Manuscripts and Dating

Three reasons for scholarly inattention to *MPionius*, Gibson points out, are relatively minor dating controversies and the late publication of a Greek text, as well as *MPionius*'

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[75] Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 340; Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios,* 1, 9 acknowledged the same, taking the observation as motivation for his research.

[76] Robert became attracted to the text in the 1960s and died before publishing his research, which was completed and published by Bowersock and Christopher P. Jones in 1994.

[77] *MPionius* 17.2-3; see discussion in Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 8-9; Nicole Kelley, "Philosophy as Training for Death: Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercises," *Church History* 75.4 (2006): 723-747; L. Arik Greenberg, *"My Share of God's Reward": Exploring the Roles and Formulations of the Afterlife in Early Christian Martyrdom* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 67.

[78] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 95; Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxviii-xxix.

overshadowing by the earlier Smyrean martyr text, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*.[79] Musurillo, author of a classic compendium of martyr texts, dates *MPionius* to the end of the third century, although admitting the difficulty of deciding.[80] Moss agrees with a third-century date,[81] contra the earlier opinion of Grégoire that placed the text in the fourth century, due to concerns about material evidence for the text and discrepancies surrounding dating the event of Pionius' martyrdom.[82] These dating debates are clearly relatively minute; all of these scholars agree that the text was composed and then first circulated between the third and fourth century.

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[79] Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 341.

[80] Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxix. His texts are chosen on the criterion of historicity: *MPionius*, like the others in his collection, are judged to be authentic, as well as important and instructive. Éric Rebillard's compendium, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, published in 2017, is a welcome addition to the genre of martyr compendia (other very recently published compendia include Pierre Maraval, *Actes et passions des martyrs chrétiens des premiers siècles* [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2010] and Hans Reinhard Seeliger and Wolfgang Wischmeyer, *Märtyrerliteratur: Herausgegeben, übersetzt, kommentiert und eingeleitet* [Berlin: de Gruyter, 2015]), although Musurillo's remains, for now, the standard edition by force of habit. In contrast to Musurillo, Rebillard explicitly rejects the principle of authenticity as a criterion for inclusion, with the caveat that "The rejection of the notion of authenticity does not amount to a claim that no extant text could possibly have been written at the time of the martyrdom or close to it" (*Greek and Latin Narratives*, 21). Instead of relying on notions of authenticity, his criteria of inclusion are as follows: texts in Greek and Latin; texts about martyrs who were executed before 260 CE; and stand-alone narratives for which there exists "external attention to the existence of a narrative about a martyr or a group of martyrs" (*Greek and Latin Narratives*, 21). He relies on Eusebius and Augustine for this external attestation.

[81] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 73. Here Moss is more concerned with the dating of Polycarp, the earlier martyr from Smyrna. Her dating of Polycarp, nevertheless, impacts the dating of Pionius, since both his martyrdom and the text that reports it come historically later than those of Polycarp. A Pionius is mentioned in the epilogue of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* as the editor of the text; this has often been considered the same Pionius as the one in the text on which I focus (see Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 65; Stephanie Cobb, "Polycarp's Cup: Imitatio in the Martyrdom of Polycarp," *Journal of Religious History* 38.2 [2014]: 224-240; Moss, "On the Dating of Polycarp: Rethinking the Place of the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* in the History of Christianity," *Early Christianity* 1 [2010]: 539-574). For more on the third-century date, especially a redaction around 260-280: Otto Zwierlein, *Die Urfassungen Der Martyr Polycarpi et Pionii und das Corpus Polycarpianum*, Band I: Editiones criticae (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014), 49 and Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs*, 26-27. Timothy Barnes wrote before Robert's epigraphic work established a foundation for a third-century date and argued that even if all material within the text that provided a date explicitly were proven to be interpolated (i.e. the prologue and epilogue), the text itself still argues for a third century date ("Pre-Decian 'Acta Martyrum,'" 529; Bart Ehrman follows his and Musurillo's lead in *Forgery and Counter-Forgery: The Use of Literary Deceit in Early Christian Polemics* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 504).

[82] Henri Grégoire, Paul Orgels, and Jacques Moreau, "Les martyres de Pionios et de Polycarpe," *Académie Royale de Belgique, Bulletin de la classe des lettres et des sciences morales et politiques* 47 (1961): 72-83.

Eusebius knew Pionius as a hero of Smyrna, and mentions him at the end of his account of Polycarp's death.[83] A major point of controversy around the dating of *MPionius* is that Eusebius places Pionius' martyrdom during the reign of Marcus Aurelius in 156-165 CE.[84] Most scholars consider this to be a mistake and accept the date that the prologue and epilogue to *MPionius* themselves provide: that the martyrdom took place during the persecution of Decius around 250 CE.[85] At any rate, Eusebius knew the story in the fourth century. A major turning of the tide in prevailing scholarly consensus of the later (250 CE) date came with the discovery of the cache of material (epigraphic) evidence noted above[86] that placed the events in the narrative in a likely third-century Smyrnean context.

Despite the state of the manuscript evidence, scholars largely maintain a third-century context for the martyr text. Two Latin translations of *MPionius*, dated to roughly the eleventh century, remained the most widely available accounts of the text until 1896, when the Greek text was finally published upon discovery in a twelfth century manuscript.[87] This discovery bolstered the opinion that the text was authentic, for the Greek manuscript aligned closely with the story that Eusebius tells about Pionius, and, more importantly, its antiquity was confirmed when it was

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[83] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.14.47.

[84] An extremely succinct overview of these issues can be found in Mauricio Saavedra Monroy, *The Church of Smyrna: History and Theology of a Primitive Christian Community* (Frankfurt; New York: Peter Lang, 2015), 29.

[85] *MPionius* 2.1; 23.1.

[86] Page 24.

[87] The *editio princeps* of the Greek text is Oscar von Gebhardt's "Das Martyrdom des heiligen Pionius" in *Archiv für slavische Philologie* 18.1-2 (1896): 156-71. The most succinct treatment of the Latin versions is Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 341-342, especially fn 4. These Latin texts can be found in *Acta Sanctorum;* Ruinart's *Acta primorum martyrum sincera eta selecta* published only the shorter manuscript (185-198).

discovered that a fifth-century Armenian translation very closely followed the Greek text.[88] Known since before Eusebius and attested throughout antiquity in Latin, Armenian, and Slavonic translations,[89] the story of Pionius remained popular throughout the medieval period,[90] its perceived authenticity never wholly dismissed. Given the state of the evidence, it is unlikely that we will know precisely when the text was first committed to writing, nor, as I have maintained, is its historical correspondence to events a matter of interest in this project.

I take the opinion of scholars that the text belongs to the third or, at the latest, fourth century as well as its under-studied status as motivation to explore the literary and performative culture in which *MPionius* would likely have been composed and read. While most attention to *MPionius* uses it as a secondary support to themes that are prominent in better-known texts, or merely discusses its authenticity, I instead situate *MPionius* as a literary text of the third or fourth century, within a thriving literary and performative culture for which we have ample evidence. In

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[88] The Armenian version and a German translation can be found in Pater Moses Srapian, "Das Martyrdom des hl. Pionios. aus dem Altarmenischen übersetzt," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 28 (1914): 376-405. See especially Zwierlein's critical edition, *Die Urfassungen Der Martyr Polycarpi et Pionii*, which includes three of four Armenian manuscripts (no edition includes all of them). On Zwierlein's text, which is a back-translation to Greek from the Armenian, see Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 48, who disapproves of the project altogether.

[89] On the Slavonic evidence: Louis Robert reports that the manuscript was discovered in 1823 in a monastery in Poland (*Le martyre de Pionios*, 12). Its edition is Īordan Zaimov and Mario Capaldo, *Suprasūlski ili Retkov sbornik*, 2 vols. (Sofia: Īzd-vo na Būlgarskata akademiia na naukite, 1982-1983) and a French translation is included in Robert's volume as an appendix (*Le martyre de Pionios,* 123-136). Zwierlein's critical edition excludes from its stemma chart a second Slavonic version from the sixteenth century, which Robert includes in his list of evidence, though noting that "Cette version n'est connue, semble-t-il, que par une longue note jointe par R. Abicht á l'article où Oscar von Gebhardt publia l'*editio princeps* du texte grec" (Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios,* 12). An edition of it, however, was published three years after Robert wrote this, in Eckhard Weiher, S.O. Šmidt, A.I. Škurko, *Die grosses Lesemenäen des Metropolitan Makarij*, vol. 2 (of 7), Monumenta lingual Slavicae dialect veteris 39-45 (Freiburg: Weiher, 1997-2013), 689-699.

[90] Ruinart, *Acta primorum martyrum sincera eta selecta.*

doing so, I contribute to scholarly knowledge of this martyr text which, though judged to be so important, has garnered only one modern scholarly monograph.[91]

MPionius and Literary Genre

The genre and literary parallels of *MPionius* have, like the text in general, been less explored than those of other martyr texts. Still, when the topics are addressed, stylistic features of the text buttress scholarly opinions of its situation in third-century Smyrna. Bowersock and Frend, for example, note that the text is deeply and explicitly embedded within larger antique culture: its speeches attempt to persuade the Smyrneans by appealing to their love of Homer, and the Jews by invoking Moses.[92] These invocations of heroes speak to the period's rhetorical use of *exempla*, which I discussed above, and set the stage for portraying Pionius as *exemplum*. Indeed, it is this obvious cultural embeddedness that has motivated these scholars to argue for the text's authenticity, reasoning that this rich cultural interchange reflects the situation on the ground in third century Smyrna. What is compelling about this cultural embeddedness for my purposes is that appealing to *exempla* is evidence of martyr literature's use of legible cultural elements that can be historically adduced—one of which, I will show, was the genre of tragedy.

In analyzing *MPionius* in terms of genre and literary influence, scholars have emphasized the presence of generic features related to fiction. Musurillo detects that "a certain atmosphere of the Hellenistic novel pervades the piece."[93] Bowersock agrees, noting that all the martyr acts,

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[91] Robert's *Le martyre de Pionios*, although Schwartz's *De Pionio et Polycarpo* was the first detailed exploration of the text (while still subordinating it to Polycarp).

[92] *MPionius* 4.2-24; 12.3-14.16; 17.2-3. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 47-48; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 474-478; see conversations too in Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 347-352; Gero, "Jewish Polemic in the Martyrium Pionii."

[93] Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxix.

including Pionius', combine "fictional elaboration with historical substance," just as the New Testament gospels do.[94] He notes a closer correspondence to "secular fiction in Greek" than to the gospel narratives,[95] although Gibson suggests both imitation of Christ and of Polycarp as literary models.[96] Bowersock identifies the text as comprising writings from Pionius himself, eyewitness accounts, and transcripts of court proceedings, following in the impulse to see martyr acts as containing within themselves multiple genres.[97]

The Approach of this Dissertation

As indicated at various points above, this project follows in the footsteps of scholars such as Michal Beth Dinkler, Stephanie Cobb, and Daniel Boyarin, among others, who argue that multiple genres can be identified within martyr literature. I agree with these scholars' assessments that martyr texts evince clear generic hybridity, making use of motifs, themes, and genres that have historically been indexed to only one identity-group, whether Christian, Jewish, or the catch-all "Greco-Roman." Accordingly, in the argument that follows, I interpret *MPionius* as a generically hybrid literary text that drew on contemporaneous cultural resources in order to be intelligible and persuasive. Some of these resources included the Jewish Maccabean genre,[98]

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[94] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 26.

[95] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 26.

[96] Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 346; Moss too on imitatio Polycarpi in *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 73-75; for Robert's observations of its mimetic features, *Le martyre de Pionios*, 50, 120.

[97] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 27; Delehaye, *Les passions des martyrs*, 21-59; see also Maria Mara and Eduard Schwartz, who divide the text into sections and argue that each of the sections must be studied individually to determine authenticity (Maria Mara, "Dalla 'Passio Pionii' un cristianesimo differenziato a Smirne," pages 173-181 in *Atti del X Simposio di Efeso su S. Giovanni Apostolo*, edited by Luigi Padovese [Roma: Instituto Francescano di Spiritualità, Pontificio Antoniano, 2005], 125; Eduard Schwartz, *De Pionio et Polycarpo* [Göttingen: Officina Academica Dieterichiana Typis Expressit W.F. Kaestner, 1905]). Thus from an early time scholars attest to the generic hybridity detailed in Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyr Narratives."

[98] Labeled as such in Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives," 321.

the Hebrew Bible, and contemporaneous views on and *exempla* of noble death; another, as I propose in this dissertation, is the genre of tragedy.

It is important to clarify that I am not arguing that *MPionius* is a tragedy, nor that readers and composers would solely have the genre of tragedy in mind as *the* formative genre for martyr literature. As the work canvassed above has demonstrated, texts like *MPionius* developed in a context with multiple genres that were not mutually exclusive.[99] Early Christian composers and hearers of martyr texts were situated within cultural contexts whose identity boundaries were fluid—certainly more fluid than many of the studies discussed above suggest. Moreover, within this culture readers and hearers were conditioned by contemporaneous literatures and performances, which they brought to their reading and interpretation of emerging martyr literature. With this in mind, my goal is simply to highlight that the literary and performative genre of tragedy formed one part of this broader context. What I am proposing is that just as conventions in Jewish, Christian, and more widely, shared Greco-Roman genres of literature contributed to the writing and interpretation of a martyr narrative, so does the genre of tragedy, since it helped form the same literary and performative culture as these others. Thus, when I say that the *Martyrdom of Pionius* exhibits features from the genre of tragedy, I attribute this to the fact that the genre of tragedy was one among many recirculating cultural elements relevant for our understanding of the composition and readership of martyr texts.

I noted above that I take the idea of a circulating cultural element from Boyarin, and that this is related to the idea, found for example in work by Stephanie Cobb, that we can leverage our understanding of such cultural elements to articulate likely audience expectations, which can

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[99] See Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyr Narratives," especially at 318-321.

in turn inform our interpretation of martyr texts. Let me now sketch in a bit more detail how the argument to come follows and builds upon these moves. Boyarin models an approach that views martyr texts' composition and development as a dialectic, formed by Jewish and other available models and themes, and honed by later Christian[100] audiences, in an ongoing exchange.[101] This is possible, Boyarin argues, because "The 'invention' of martyrdom, far from being evidence for Christian influence on Judaism or the opposite, is most plausibly read as evidence for the close contact and the impossibility of drawing sharp and absolute distinctions between these communities or their discourses throughout this period."[102] Furthermore, because such distinctions are impossible to draw, we must think, instead of influence, of "circulating and recirculating motifs, themes, and religious ideas."[103] What Cobb's analysis brings to this is an emphasis on what this means for readers or audiences who received these texts. I follow Cobb in

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[100] My use of the language of "Jewish" and "Christian" here imitates the language Boyarin uses at *Dying for God*, 117-118. When he does use this language, he does so to denote that at some point later than the time period about which he is writing, these groups were in fact viewed as separate. He refers to the Maccabean literature as some of the "earliest Jewish" sources, for example, and he proposes that the persecutions of the third century CE were of Christians specifically, and so martyr accounts "evolved in that century primarily within Christian circles" (117).

[101] See especially Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117-118 for his chronologically-informed model that takes into account "parting of the ways" scholarship and notes that once we are considering the third century CE and later, an intra-Christian formulation of martyr texts used its surrounding culture, which explicitly, he notes, includes tragedy—and then those themes could help narrate Jewish texts in turn. Moss' research supports his findings: "There is something artificial and misleading about dividing Jewish ideas from Greek and Roman ideas. Subject groupings and side-headings reinforce traditional divisions where cross-pollination and permeability should exist. The influence of Greek thought on Jewish art, literature, architecture, and life is well-documented, even in first-century Palestine. Moreover, the composition of Jewish literature during the Hellenistic period owes much to the ideas, language, and stylistic forms of Greek literature. The similarities between these Jewish and Greek texts and their mutual influence will be readily apparent" (*Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 26). Cobb echoes these sentiments, inspired too by Boyarin, in her *Dying to be Men*: "Christians were not insulated from Roman ways of thinking and ways of life; rather, most parts of ancient life—such as festivals, games, and the theater—were part of what Markus labels 'that vast shared territory' of Christians and pagans" (13, quoting Markus' *The End of Ancient Christianity*). Castelli calls this vast territory a shared "useable past" (*Martyrdom and Memory*, 8-31) and Grig too frames her study around this "dynamic interchange," noting that "the early Church did not create martyrdom in a hermetically sealed religious vacuum" (*Making Martyrs*, 11).

[102] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117.

[103] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 118.

considering the side of the reader by emphasizing the fact that audiences were primed to receive the variegated resonances that Boyarin insists formulated the composition of a martyr text.[104]

Both Cobb and Boyarin claim that by recontextualizing martyr literature within a more culturally fluid and complex literary and social world of the Roman Mediterranean, we can appreciate new dimensions of these texts. The present project capitalizes on the promise of such an approach by suggesting that, just as Cobb and Boyarin position contemporaneous views on suffering and Jewish-Christian blurred identity boundaries as circulating elements which informed this literature, so we can glean new insights about martyr texts by considering them in light of another aspect of their literary and performance context, namely, the genre of tragedy.

In this way, I move toward the perspective of a dialectical relationship, like Boyarin and Cobb have in mind, as they envision composers, readers, and hearers of martyr literature using a range of material to understand these texts. As I will document in coming chapters, Jo-Ann Brant will take this same approach when she considers the genre of tragedy to activate for ancient readers the *Gospel of John*, and Gilbert Bilezikian will do the same to claim tragic resonance for the *Gospel of Mark*. These studies gives us good reason to think that, in Adela Yarbro Collins' words, between Christian literature and the genre of tragedy, there are crucial "points of contact"[105] to be considered.

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[104] I am thinking specifically here of Cobb's *Divine Deliverance: Pain and Painlessness in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017): "Ancient readers would have interpreted these [martyr] narratives not as documentary versus literary texts but through the lens of recognized contemporary genres such as commentarius, epistle, apology, and biography (e.g. exitus illustrium vivorum), though most martyr texts also include subgenera such as reports of dreams and visions or apocalyptic elements." She goes on: "What does an author gain by presenting a martyr story as if it is derived from court records? … Authors choose one genre over another because the subject matter demands a certain form or because a specific form elicits a desired response from the audience" (34-40; she is specifically addressing audiences' conditioning to receive texts about pain; see 46 for a summary of the use of narrative convention to read pain: "Martyr narratives replace the audience's preliminary expectation—that of pain—with a new reading that asserts painlessness. The narrative descriptions of torture lead audiences past superficial observations to deeper, spiritual insights").

[105] Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 92.

There are, of course, potential pitfalls in making the argument of this dissertation, that martyr texts rely on and capitalize on wide cultural knowledge of the genre of tragedy. To say that *MPionius* exhibits some of what Collins calls "points of contact" is not to say that every single feature of the text fits a tragic mold—nor is perfect correspondence required in order to claim the genre of tragedy shares features with martyr texts. Indeed, as Margaret Mitchell points out in her coverage of Dennis MacDonald's argument that the New Testament gospels were influenced by the works of Homer, although this may be an historically warranted inquiry, conclusions like MacDonald's raise suspicion when the mold seems to fit too perfectly.[106] Collins too warns against overfitting the tragic mold when she remarks that the *Gospel of Mark* was not necessarily a tragedy, but rather written in a tragic mode.[107] Mitchell also warns that it is possible for a reading like MacDonald's to project the image that the composer of the gospels—or, in my case, *MPionius*—had the genre of tragedy in mind purposefully and crafted the text to look like the envisioned model, intentionally.[108] The perspective I take in this dissertation is that authorial intention is never recoverable, nor is it a worthwhile goal to attempt to uncover it, since texts proliferate their meaning to readers who come variously equipped for their interpretation.

That is why in this dissertation I neither attribute tragic resonance to authorial intent, nor insist that the genre of tragedy is the single illuminating lens for martyr texts. I highlight points of tragic generic convention because they are, I will show, historically plausible points of contact, and because recognizing them as such helps make sense of *MPionus*'s narrative features.

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[106] MacDonald, she argues, makes any possible feature within the gospels the result of a Homeric influence. Margaret Mitchell, "Homer in the New Testament?" *Journal of Religion* 83.2 (2003): 244-260, especially 255.

[107] Collins, *Mark*, 91, who lauds Richard Burridge for emphasizing that the *Gospel of Mark* was not, for all its similarities, a tragedy, contra Bilezikian, who "went too far," in her estimation. Jeff Jay will disagree with Collins in his later text on the *Gospel of Mark*; more in Chapter Two.

[108] Mitchell, "Homer in the New Testament?" 250-252.

Offering up this possibility, historically grounded in the cultural world of the text, is especially attractive in the case of *MPionius*, whose themes and structure have been far less studied than other martyr texts, but whose dating is relatively secure, and thus its cultural context retrievable.

Thus I offer a reading of *MPionius* that takes full advantage of one of the prominent and widely-available literary and performance models of its historical milieu: the genre of tragedy. In so doing I argue that the genre of tragedy was a part of the repertoire which conditioned readers and composers of early Christian literature, and that some of tragedy's generic plot structural features also proved fitting structures for telling a story about martyrdom. As Mitchell observes:

> Abandoning the dichotomous approach [of MacDonald] would also open the way for what is most needed and what promises to be most productive: a study of how early Christian authors incorporated—sometimes integrating, sometimes merely juxtaposing—a range of cultural references, fragments, artifacts, and concepts into their writing, and, further, investigation of what that process and result mean for the rhetorical construction, historical makeup, and readerly possibilities of their presumed audiences.[109]

What I offer, then, is an exploration sanctioned even by those, like Mitchell, who have expressed suspicion of previous efforts in a similar vein.

Chapter Outline

Chapter One

I show that tragedy was a contemporaneous literary and performative genre that thrived when martyr stories were being composed and read. Moreover, as we will see, the composers and audiences of martyr literature were participants in a culture in which the genre of tragedy was ubiquitous. This evidence supports placing *MPionius* within a literary and performance

[109] Mitchell, "Homer in the New Testament?" 256.

context in which the genre of tragedy was prominent, and thus demonstrates the historical plausibility of viewing tragedy as a generic intertext for *MPionius*.

Scholars have begun to place early Christian texts such as the New Testament gospels and Pauline letters within a performance culture that included the genre of tragedy, but the same move has not been extended to martyr literature. Despite this gap—as I will show in the first body chapter of the dissertation—glimmers of the genre of tragedy peek out among the scholarly arguments for martyr texts' literary resonances canvassed above. Tragic figures informed ideas of noble suffering and served as behavioral models to imitate; the genre of Greek tragedy was even seen as an influence on Jewish literature—including Maccabean literature and texts of the Hebrew Bible; and the genre of tragedy has even been identified as a literary influence on the New Testament gospels, themselves considered models for martyr texts. In this way, the genre of tragedy can be envisioned as an influence in a trickle-down manner, influencing texts and ideas that informed the creation of martyr texts.

Yet there is an even more striking phenomenon to consider than this indirect influence. The genre of tragedy influenced martyr texts directly, too, I argue, because tragedy helped constitute the literary and performative context in which martyr texts themselves were composed and read.[110] That is why, after having established the *status quaestionis* concerning the *Martyrdom of Pionius* in the Introduction, in Chapter One I place the text in the literary and performance context of the third-to-fourth centuries CE.

Chapter Two

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[110] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*; Cobb, *Dying to be Men*; Perkins, *The Suffering Self*; Boyarin, *Dying for God*.

Chapter Two demonstrates that the narrative of *MPionius* employs plot-structural features of the genre of tragedy as understood by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. The use of Aristotle's *Poetics* to demonstrate narrative coincidence with tragedies is both popular and controversial in modern scholarship. While acknowledging the methodological difficulty of this choice, I consider several of the *Poetics*' features within the narrative of *MPionius*, focusing on what Aristotle calls the threefold "soul of tragedy"[111]: recognition, reversal, and suffering. Through analysis of these plot-structural features, and in the context of the literary and performative world I describe in Chapter One, I suggest that ancient readers or hearers would have been primed to anticipate these features.

MPionius capitalizes on these readerly expectations. Two recognitions of Pionius, the first of which foreshadows the second, follow interrogations designed to reveal his identity. In this text identity means something specific: Pionius is either a criminal, or a model of piety. Through its recognitions, the text presents Pionius as physiognomically sound and an *exemplum* of proper piety. Such recognition coincides with a reversal of his fate. Seemingly, the interrogations and confessions move Pionius from life to an ultimate death sentence, but the effect of the recognition is to show that this move is in fact a move from death to (eternal) life. By showcasing the proper model of behavior that effects this reversal, Pionius puts on display a model of *paideia* for others to emulate, becoming a new, Christian *exemplum*. Here we see Aristotle's analysis of tragic features exemplified in Pionius' presumed suffering, recognition of his true identity, and reversal of his ultimate fate.

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[111] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450a38-39.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three continues to emphasize how *MPionius* seems to respond to the same cultural expectations shaped by and shared with the genre of tragedy. In this chapter I analyze the denouement of *MPionius* as coinciding with conventions from the genre of tragedy by comparing it to the denouement of Aeschylus' trilogy the *Oresteia*. While it would have been possible to draw on Aristotle's famous discussion of denouement to analyze this part of *MPionius*, I want to avoid giving the impression that *MPionius* only resonates with an Aristotelian model of tragedy. The *Oresteia*, the only fully extant tragic trilogy from the classical period, remained popular throughout antiquity, and its use of the technique of *deus ex machina* to resolve the play's conflicts was well-known.[112] Like the *Oresteia*, *MPionius* brings its drama to a close using the *deus ex machina*. This plot device offered a culturally intelligible and powerful end to a drama, because it dramatized the intervention of divine authority over the events within the narrative. I suggest that cultural recognition of this device works to activate its audience's knowledge of a prominent cultural form, only to vary the theme at the end, staging the triumph of a specifically Christian vision of justice. In both Chapters Two and Three, then, my reading of *MPionius* shows how this martyr text plays on cultural expectations related to the genre of tragedy while also turning them to its own narrative and theological ends.

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[112] See Patricia Easterling, "Agamemnon for the Ancients," pages 23-36 in *Agamemnon in Performance: 458 BC to AD 2004*, edited by Fiona Macintosh, Pantelis Michelakis, Edith Hall, and Oliver Taplin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), who traces the *Oresteia*'s survival throughout antiquity; see especially 29 for the argument that *Christus patiens*, which I will discuss in Chapter Two, took lines from the *Agamemnon* as its model; 34 for visual evidence that refers to the *Libation Bearers* and *Eumenides*. Sebastiana Nervegna notes the *Eumenides*' popularity in the Hellenistic period and its revived popularity in the Roman period due to Ennius' adaptation ("Aeschylus in the Hellenistic Period," pages 109-128 in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus*, edited by Rebecca Futo Kennedy [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017], especially 120-121); more in Chapter Three.

Conclusion

In the Conclusion, I provide suggestive evidence that my argument that the genre of tragedy impacted the composition and reading of the *Martyrdom of Pionius* might apply to other martyr literature as well. I also identify future directions for the study of tragic resonance in martyr texts and the implications of associating martyrdom with the genre of tragedy.

Chapter One:
Tragedy and Early Christianity

In this chapter I establish that tragedies were in circulation in the period in which *MPionius* was composed, and that it is therefore plausible that familiarity with generic features of tragedies meant that audiences had expectations *MPionius* could exploit to convey its own message. Importantly, this does not make *MPionius* generically a tragedy, but rather helps modern readers who largely lack such expectations see where *MPionius* used and manipulated generic conventions to make its perspective more persuasive, in terms of cultural intelligibility.

I will first show that tragedies featured prominently in ancient educational curricula, forming a base of knowledge widely accessible during the time period when *MPionius* was composed and read. Second, I will describe the history of tragedies' performance into the Roman period. Building on this evidence for the genre of tragedy as a prominent cultural element in antiquity, I then discuss research demonstrating that texts of the New Testament share features with tragedies. Finally, I provide textual evidence for antique thinkers, Christian and non-Christian alike, who refer to or otherwise engage the genre of tragedy well into late antiquity. I show that on the basis of tragedies' historical coincidence with martyr stories, it is plausible to claim that this genre and martyr stories might share generic features.

Educational curriculum

That the genre of tragedy was alive and well in the first few centuries CE is not just an inference from the vast number of allusions to tragedies and tragedians, some of which I will survey below. Knowledge of tragedies was actually systematized through educational curricula

in antiquity. Raffaella Cribiore makes tragedies' role in ancient education especially clear. While her focus is third-century BCE to fourth-century CE Greek education in Egypt, Cribiore argues that her study in fact describes educational practices around the Mediterranean through this period.[113] During this time, what she calls a "minimal cultural package" was taught at the first stage of education, reaching the largest number of pupils. This early stage included some Homer, Euripides, and gnomic sayings by Isocrates.[114] At the second stage, those who continued to pursue an education read far more tragedies than the few they encountered at the first stage: "Tragedy was an area in which ancient readers manifested strong preferences."[115] While pupils read a range of tragedians, Euripides was most favored, reflecting a general trend in antiquity.[116]

At the third stage of education, the pool of students was the smallest and focused on rhetoric. At this advanced stage, exercises of impersonation drew from the genre of tragedy, requiring students to compose speeches from the standpoint of a known tragic character—characters from the Medea were especially popular choices to impersonate.[117] Thus, at every stage of education, tragedies figured heavily, both from a repository standpoint, as students learned sayings, stories, and plots; and from a composition perspective, since advanced students

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[113] Raffaella Cribiore, *Gynmastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 1-2 for this methodological claim.

[114] Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 178-179.

[115] Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 198.

[116] His most popularly-read text in schools was the *Phoenissae* (Cribiore, "The Grammarian's Choice: The Popularity of Euripides' Phoenissae in Hellenistic and Roman Education," pages 241-259 in *Education in Greek and Roman Antiquity*, edited by Yun Lee Too [Leiden: Brill, 2001]). Cribiore determined its status as most popular because it was used at every stage of education, we have the largest number of fragments from this play, and it was quoted most widely. On Euripides' rise to becoming most popular among the "big three" tragedians, see 244 in "The Grammarian's Choice" and 14 in Donald Mastronarde, "Text and Transmission," pages 11-26 in *A Companion to Euripides*, edited by Laura K. McClure (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 2017).

[117] Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind*, 226; see too Eric Csapo and William Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 2 for citing speeches from tragedies.

were expected to be so thoroughly acquainted with tragic characters that they could speak from their point of view.

Acquaintance with tragedies at any of these stages of education ensured familiarity with figures who served as *exempla*, as I mentioned in the Introduction. Another way people in antiquity could gain familiarity was through performances of tragedies, which continued into the first few centuries CE, at the same time as educational curricula ensured continued familiarity with the genre as well.

The Birth and "Death" of Tragedy

The thesis that the genre of Greek tragedy continued to be well-known in antiquity has not always been scholarly consensus. In fact, until relatively recently, the genre was considered to have diminished after its flourishing in the fifth century BCE. Research on reception of classical tragedy has challenged this idea, however; the genre's reach past the fifth century is an area of exciting new research. In this section I provide a history of Greek tragedy and its purported demise, and then provide counter-evidence showing the genre of tragedy flourished post-fifth century.

Greek drama was performed competitively in civic-religious festivals,[118] most famously in the City Dionysia, in classical Athens.[119] Competitors in tragic contests were chosen before the start of the festival to stage a tragic trilogy plus a satyr play.[120] The three most famous tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, composed plays in the fifth century BCE.[121] From this classical period forward, Greek tragedy constituted an intelligible genre. Its intelligibility was due not only to the internal contents of tragedies becoming increasingly well-known over time; the context of drama as a performative contest also contributed to its cultural familiarity. What I

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[118] When I mention civic-religious festivals, it is crucial to note that religion was not separate from political context; in fact, classical Greek tragedy was an explicitly politically-informed and -responsive genre whose context of origin was the classical *polis*. Far more could be said about historical-political dramas such as Aeschylus' *Persians* and the political context of tragedy, but that precise topic is not my focus here. Peter Rhodes' summary in "Nothing to Do with Democracy: Athenian Drama and the Polis" (*Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 [2003]: 104-119) is a helpful start since it summarizes debate over the nature of the *polis* in which tragedy originated (his treatment focuses particularly on the *democratic* nature of the fifth century democratic *polis*), but see too Simon Goldhill's "The Great Dionysia and Civic Ideology," pages 97-129 in *Nothing to do with Dionysus? Athenian Drama in its Social Context*, edited by J. Winkler and Froma Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), the more recent "Civic Ideology and the Problem of Difference: The Politics of Aeschylean Tragedy, Once Again," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000): 34-56, and a different position in Jasper Griffin, "The Social Function of Attic Tragedy," *Classical Quarterly* 48.1 (1998): 39-61. I remain very interested in the theoretical question of the degree to which it is possible to consider the *longue durée* of the genre of Greek tragedy, both as a cache of performances and as texts, given the genre's extremely specific context of origin. But in this dissertation, I focus on the continued use and evolution of the genre of tragedy in the vein of the flourishing discipline of classical reception. Courtney Friesen addresses the question of the ongoing political significance of the genre of tragedy past the fifth century in *Reading Dionysus: Euripides' Bacchae and the Cultural Contestations of Greeks, Jews, Romans, and Christians* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 30-39; so too Anna Lamari (*Reperforming Greek Tragedy: Theater, Politics, and Cultural Mobility in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries BC* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017], especially 59-94) and Johanna Hanink ("'Why 386 BC?' Lost Empire, Old Tragedy and Reperformance in the Era of the Corinthian War," *Trends in Classics* 7.2 [2015]: 277-296) for the Hellenistic period and fourth century, respectively.

[119] Tragic drama predates comedy, the latter of which dates from 486 BCE (Cartledge, "'Deep Plays,'" 22; Patricia Easterling, "A Show for Dionysus," pages 36-53 in *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy,* here 37). The first tragic competition took place in Athens in 534 BCE (Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 107; 120 for the source, the "Parian Marble"). For a very detailed account of the procession and festival of the City Dionysia, see Arthur Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 57-101; Easterling, "Tragedy and Ritual," pages 7-24 in *Theater and Society in the Classical World*, edited by Ruth Scodel (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993). Csapo-Slater emphasize that the festivals themselves were not unique to Athens; however, what was originally unique to the Athenian festival was the 3-4 day period devoted to dramatic competitions (*The Context of Ancient Drama*, 107).

[120] Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 211-227 in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*; here, 212.

[121] For reference, Aeschylus' life spanned from 525-456 BCE; Sophocles' 496-406 BCE, and Euripides' 480-406 BCE. These three provided the 32 still-extant tragic plays. The three were already placed together into a canon by Aristophanes (446-386 BCE), whose comedy *Frogs* placed the tragedians in competition with one another in a contest judged in Hades.

mean by this is that tragedies' institutional categorization by genre indicates expectations existed about what features, themes, stories, and structures constituted tragedies, such that they could be meaningfully compared and evaluated.

While each trilogy of tragedies was initially composed for a singular performance in a competition the dramatic form spread as plays became familiar. As Eric Csapo and William Slater point out, "book circulation cannot fully account for the survival of 5th-c. drama"; rather, the genre of tragedy became widely known and spread through oral tradition and performance.[122] By the early fifth century, in addition to new, single-use plays' continued performance, "revised" plays were performed at the Dionysia as well as the Lenaea.[123] Records also attest re-performance at smaller festivals of the rural Dionysia.[124] The genre of tragedy spread further, too: already in the fifth century, the genre was an "export hit," with an especial love of Aeschylus in Sicily and Euripides in Macedonia.[125]

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[122] Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 2-3.

[123] Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 3-4; Pickard-Cambridge, *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 25-42 for detail on the Lenaea. After Aeschylus' death, Athenians voted to allow his plays to be reproduced at major festivals (Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays? Theatrical Revivals of 'Old' Greek Drama in Antiquity," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 162 [2007]: 14-42; here 15).

[124] Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 121-131; Lamari, *Reperforming Greek Tragedy*, especially at 42-43.

[125] Ingo Gildenhard and Martin Revermann, *Beyond the Fifth Century: Interactions with Greek Tragedy from the Fourth Century BCE to the Middle Ages* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2010), 7 for this quotation. See, for example, Johanna Hanink's "The Classical Tragedians, from Athenian Idols to Wandering Poets," pages 39-67 in Gildenhard-Revermann, *Beyond the Fifth Century*; Johanna Hanink, "Literary Politics and the Euripidean Vita," *Cambridge Classical Journal* 54 (2008): 115-135; Anna Lamari, *Reperforming Greek Tragedy*, 17-58. Peter Bing notes that the fourth and third centuries BCE—slightly later than my focus here—saw a flourishing of interest in the lives of the classical poets, and that this interest coincided with the rise of the bios-genre ("The Bios-Tradition and Poets' Lives in Hellenistic Poetry," pages 619-631 in *Nomodeiktes. Greek Studies in Honor of Martin Oswald*, edited by Ralph Rosen and Joseph Farrell [Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1993]). For more on the vitae of the classical poets and their popularity outside of Athens, see especially Richard Hunter and Ian Rutherford, *Wandering Poets in Ancient Greek Culture: Travel, Locality and Pan-Hellenism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

These classical tragedies would continue to fascinate long past their initial performance. In 386 BCE, "old tragedies" were reproduced at the City Dionysia.[126] This simultaneously new and old category is significant in the history of the genre of tragedy's reception, for it signifies that a widely-acknowledged repertoire of tragedies was beginning to form.[127] Clearly, even at a remove of time from their original performance, classical tragedies remained a staple, and they maintained this status via performances. This changed when, around 330 BCE, Lycurgus passed a law requiring the preparation of an official text that actors were to consult and adhere to when performing "old tragedy" at Attic festivals.[128] In doing so, Lycurgus hoped to "curb the degeneration" of the three most famous tragedians.[129] Lycurgus' order of an official text indicates two expectations: both some degree of tragedies' standardized—or at least expected—content at this time, as well as recognition that without committing performances to a written format, they would continue to be vulnerable to change.

The official text ordered by Lycurgus plays an important role in the historical imagination of tragedy's transition from a performative genre to a written one. It was these official texts commissioned by Lycurgus that were thought to be ancestors of the manuscripts that classicists

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[126] On the topic broadly, Easterling, "A Show for Dionysus"; Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays?" for succinct description of the evidence for this, the *Fasti* in Athens (especially at 15). Pickard-Cambridge in *The Dramatic Festivals of Athens* argued that this mention of old drama indicates a full competition for these old dramas, but that is uncertain. An excellent, more recent discussion by Hanink suggests that the introduction of re-stagings at this date was meant to inspire Athenians, after the Corinthian War, by reminding them of their classical past ("'Why 386 BC?'").

[127] Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 212-213. This date has been called a "watershed moment" (Vayos Liapis and Antonis Petrides [eds.], *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century: A Survey from 400 BC to ca. AD 400* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019], 25), and the "most important date" for tragedy's reception (Hanink, "'Why 386 BC?'" 277-278; Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 213).

[128] The bibliography on this date is vast; see most recently Johanna Hanink, *Lycurgan Athens and the Making of Classical Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014). The event was reported in pseudo-Plutarch's *Vitae decem oratorum* at 841f.

[129] Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 4.

have used to form modern editions of tragedies. This idea stems from antique lore: Galen reports that Ptolemy stole these "official" texts and brought them to the Museum of Alexandria, where Hellenistic scholars produced authoritative versions, which in turn became the standard editions used in antiquity.[130] Tragedies, then, expanded past their original, single-performance agonistic context, quickly becoming a fixture of local festivals in Greece and abroad, in both classical and new plays, and then ultimately circulating in written texts by the fourth century.

Various "deaths" of the genre of tragedy have been posited. One reason it was thought to have "died" is an issue of evidence. From inscriptions that record competitions, it is clear that new tragedies continued to be written past the classical period, but there is very little direct evidence from fourth century and Hellenistic plays with which to gauge classical tragedies' continued existence.[131] Although the pool of evidence is small, recent attention to the genre of tragedy in the Hellenistic period has flourished. I will discuss the genre of Hellenistic tragedy below; here it is sufficient to note that there is evidence, despite earlier claims of its death, that the genre of tragedy continued on and survived as performances in theater as well as in texts.[132]

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[130] Galen, *Commentary of the Epidemics of Hippocrates* 2.4; Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Drama*, 5 and Hanink, "Scholars and Scholarship on Tragedy," pages 324-349 in *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century* on this lore.

[131] An exception is, in the fourth century, pseudo-Euripides' *Rhesus*; the dating has been controversial due to its disputed authorship, but most recently the fourth century date has been reaffirmed (Nikos Manousakis and Efstathios Stamatos, "Devising Rhesus: A Strange 'Collaboration' Between Aeschylus and Euripides," *Digital Scholarship in the Humanities* 33.2 [2018]: 347-361, which takes into account multiple recent monographs and commentaries on the text). Most of the evidence for tragedies in the Hellenistic period is fragmentary; see Agnieszka Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy: Texts, Translations, and a Critical Survey* (London; New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014); Bruno Snell and Richard Kannicht, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (TrGF adespota). Volume 2, *Fragmenta adespota: testimony volumini 1 addenda, indices ad volumina 1 et 2* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981). See too Georgia Xanthakis-Karamanos for the papyri, in "A Survey of the Main Papyrus Texts of Post-Classical Tragedy," pages 1034-1048 in *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses Berlin, 13.-19.8. 1995,* edited by Bärbel Kramer, Wolfgang Luppe, Herwig Maehler, and Günter Poethke (Stuttgart: B.G. Teubner, 1997).

[132] Evia Sistakou, *Tragic Failures: Alexandrian Responses to Tragedy and the Tragic* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2016); see also below for discussion on Hellenistic tragedies.

One argument for the genre's decline circulated already in the second century CE in a text attributed to Lucian, whom scholars have interpreted as saying that the composition of tragedies had come to an end.[133] Another ancient view of decline is expressed by Libanius' *On Behalf of Dancers*, a third century CE text that claims not the end of tragedies as a corpus, but the end of tragic poets. According to Libanius, this loss of the best (that is: classical) tragedians did not result in tragedies' end, but, rather, meant that tragedies became reconstituted in different forms.[134] Modern scholars echo the sentiment that the genre of tragedy ended when it took on other forms. Sebastiana Nervegna sees this "old view" of tragedies losing their structure as the pervasive argument for the genre of tragedy's demise from the late nineteenth century forward.[135] As she mentions, and I will show, material and textual evidence suggests otherwise.

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[133] Lucian, *Encomium of Demosthenes* 27; see Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays?" 21—Nervegna rejects that this text reports the decline of drama; such had been the previous, dominant opinion (as in Christopher P. Jones, "Greek Drama in the Roman Empire," pages 39-52 in *Theater and Society in the Classical World*). But before the second century, too, remarks about the decline of tragedies circulated—Aristophanes, for example, can be viewed as an early proponent of the idea that they had come to an end. I highlight Lucian here since I am interested in the first three centuries CE especially. The crucial line in Lucian's text is τὸ μὲν ποιῆσαι κωμῳδίας ἢ τραγῳδίας ἐκλέλειπται; see too Orestis Karavas, *Lucien et la tragédie* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005) for full treatment (especially at 137-170) and, more generally, for a comparison between Lucian and Greek tragedies. I am especially interested in this comparison since Lucian has frequently been considered for its parallels with martyr literature, particularly his *Death of Peregrinus*. See the especially rich treatment by Jan Bremmer, "Peregrinus' Christian Career," pages 729-747 in *Maidens, Magic and Martyrs in Early Christianity: Collected Essays* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017).

[134] Libanius*, On Behalf of the Dancers* 112 (Margaret Molly, *Libanius and the Dancers* [Hildesheim; New York: Olms-Weidmann, 1996], 173): ἕως μὲν οὖν ἤνθει τὸ τῶν τραγῳδιοποιῶν ἔθνος, κοινοὶ διδάσκαλοι τοῖς δήμοις εἰς τὰ θέατρα παρῄεσαν· ἐπειδὴ δὲ οἱ μὲν ἀπέσβησαν, τῆς δὲ ἐν μουσείοις παιδεύσεως ὅσον εὐδαιμονέστερου ἐκοινώνησε, τὸ πολὺ δὲ ἐστέρητο, θεῶν τις ἐλεήσας τὴν τῶν πολλῶν ἀπαιδευσίαν ἀντεισήγαγε τὴν ὄρχησιν διδαχήν τινα τοῖς πλήθεσι παλαιῶν πράξεων, καὶ νῦν ὁ χρυσοχόος πρὸς τὸν ἐκ τῶν διδασκαλείων οὐ κακῶς διαλέξεται περὶ τῆς οἰκίας Πριάμου καὶ Λαΐου. "So while the race of tragic poets was flourishing, they came into theatres as universal teachers for the people; but when they were extinguished, and only the more prosperous had a share of instruction in the liberal arts, while the majority had been deprived, one of the gods took pity on the lack of education of the populace and introduced instead the dance as a form of instruction for the masses in the deeds of the ancients. And now a goldsmith will converse not badly with someone from the schools about the houses of Priam and Laius."

[135] Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays?" 14; the reference is to Ludwig Friedländer's *Darstellungen aus der Sittengeschichte Roms* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1881). But even Georgia Xanthakis-Karamanos, whose work arguably ushered in the recent spate of reception studies, still reinforced a strong model of postclassical tragedies as utterly disintegrated in form; see her *Studies in Fourth Century Tragedy* (Athens: Akademia Athenon, 1980) and discussion in Liapis-Petrides, *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century*, 4.

A better-known assertion of the death of the genre of tragedy was proposed by George Steiner in the mid-twentieth century.[136] According to Steiner, the genre of classical tragedy was utterly unique, a phenomenon situated in fifth-century *polis* life in Athens and there alone, so singular that it yielded no imitations that came close enough to be called tragedies. A crucial corpus of evidence Steiner invokes to argue for the genre's singularity is the Hebrew Bible. He states, unequivocally, that "Tragedy is alien to the Judaic sense of the world."[137] This point is of particular importance to his thesis because, he notes, "The book of Job is always cited as an instance of tragic vision."[138] From his perspective, if even the texts that most frequently are likened to tragedies can be discounted as belonging to the genre of tragedy, it can be persuasively argued that the genre has no derivatives. A related argument posited that the genre of tragedy died because it is incompatible with Christianity.[139] Contrary to these arguments, the recently flourishing field of classical reception paints a revised picture.

The "Afterlife" of Tragedies and Their Reception

The Fourth Century and Hellenistic Period

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[136] See George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (New York: Knopf, 1961) and the discussion of Steiner in Miriam Leonard, *Tragic Modernities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 2. Steiner's evaluation has been shown by Leonard as well as by Simon Goldhill to be be intertwined with theories of "the tragic" that stem from German idealism more than from ancient tragedies (see "Generalizing about Tragedy," Chapter Six in *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Goldhill and Leonard are required reading on the topic, along with Joshua Billings' *Genealogy of the Tragic: Greek Tragedy and German Philosophy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[137] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 4.

[138] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, 4.

[139] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: or, Hellenism and Pessimism*, translated by Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; originally published in 1884); Jeff Jay, *The Tragic in Mark: A Literary-Historical Interpretation* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 3-11; Francesca Aran Murphy, *The Comedy of Revelation: Paradise Lost and Regained in Biblical Narrative* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

During the Hellenistic period, re-performances of old tragedies continued. "Old tragedy," at this time, refers to tragedies by Euripides or other classical tragedians; third-century BCE *Didaskalia* inscriptions from the south slope of Athens record this category.[140] By 300 BCE, tragedies were performed locally, and this practice continued, as Oliver Taplin documents, for over 600 years.[141] Wall paintings at Pompeii and Herculaneum evince the practice, depicting subjects from tragedies and masks.[142] There is ample evidence that re-performances of old tragedies thrived during this time, and their coexistence with plays by new tragedians is a subject of recent scholarly fascination.[143]

In addition, vital textual evidence attests both Hellenistic and classical tragedies in the Hellenistic period. The *Exagoge* of Ezekiel tells a story from the Hebrew Bible: the Israelites' exodus from Egypt. The play is written in the first-person voice and narrated by Moses, and God gets a speaking role as a character. The play in its extant form spans 269 lines, with many

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[140] Nervegna, "Staging Scenes or Plays?" 19 reports that tragedies by Euripides and a Philemon were performed at this time; see also Csapo-Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, 41 and Dina Peppas-Delmousou, "Le théâtre attique dans le monde hellénistique," pages 62-68 in *Πρακτικά του η Διεθνούς συνεδρίου Ελληνικής και Λατινικής Επιγραφικής* (Athens: Ministry of Culture and Sciences, 1984).

[141] Oliver Taplin, "The Pictorial Record," pages 69-90 in *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*; even more interestingly and comprehensively, Taplin, *Pots and Plays: Interactions Between Tragedy and Greek Vase-Painting of the Fourth Century B.C.* (Los Angeles, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2007). Taplin uses visual evidence to paint an image of tragedies' prominence past the fifth century, and here it should be noted explicitly that scholars who study the reception of tragedies are working with multiple bodies of evidence and employ multiple methodologies: some record the reception of tragedies by using evidence for tragic *performances*; others use *textual* evidence; Taplin uses *visual* imagery. To summarize each method separately would be an enjoyable but separate task; in the brief history that I provide here, I take into account multiple of these methods, for my aim is to demonstrate, from the wealth of these methods, the ubiquity of tragedies and the point that knowledge of tragedies could be gained via multiple formats.

[142] Taplin, "The Pictorial Record," 69; for more on wall paintings depicting scenes from tragedies, see below.

[143] As evidenced by the spate of new volumes by Kotlińska-Toma (*Hellenistic Tragedy*), Lamari (*Reperforming Greek Tragedy*), and Eric Csapo et al. (*Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century BC* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014]). As Kotlińska-Toma points out, Hellenistic tragedies and their performance constitute an area of recent scholarly interest, following on an earlier interest in Hellenistic theater more generally, which attended to actors and to architectural changes to the theater over time (*Hellenistic Tragedy*, preface for the recent interest in Hellenistic tragedy; 4-7 for changes to the genre of tragedy between the classical and Hellenistic periods).

lacunae. Still, it is the most extensive of any Hellenistic tragedy, as well as the only surviving example of Jewish drama in Greek.[144]

Howard Jacobson remarks that the "Euripidean nature of the prologue is evident," noting that the story exhibits remarkable similarity to a large number of Euripides' plays, most strikingly the *Ion*;[145] Pierluigi Lanfranchi sees Aeschylus' *Persians* as the *Exagoge*'s closest parallel.[146] The plot begins with Moses narrating his mother hiding him in a basket, setting up for Moses' later recognition and reversal of fortune—all features of tragic plot structure as defined and described by Aristotle.[147] Fear and pity, the two so-called "tragic emotions" that Aristotle notes tragedies induce in their audience, are invoked explicitly. The story also includes themes of sacrifice and a messenger, also typical of tragedies. In these ways, the *Exagoge* casts its Hebrew Bible story in the form of the genre of tragedy.

The play's date has historically been relatively insecure, although scholars in recent years have reached agreement on a date sometime in the second century BCE. Jacobson dates the play to the second half of the second century BCE[148] for two reasons. First, he compares the use of scriptural passages in the *Exagoge* to those in the Septuagint, noting that its passages accord with second-century records. Second, he notes that the historian Polyhistor, who knew the *Exagoge*,

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[144] Crucial bibliography are Howard Jacobson's *The Exagoge of Ezekiel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) and a welcome updated study, Pierluigi Lanfranchi's *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2006). Kotlińska-Toma (*Hellenistic Tragedy*) covers the text in detail as well, and both she and Lanfranchi publish all extant fragments of the play in their respective volumes.

[145] Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 69-70; see also his introductory section, "The *Exagoge* and fifth-century tragedy," where he notes that the resemblance between the *Exagoge* and Ezekiel "is only natural since of the fifth-century tragedians Euripides was easily the most popular in the Hellenistic age," but he argues in addition for both Sophoclean and Aeschylean influence on the play (25).

[146] Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique*, 10 and "The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," 125-146 in *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century*; here 135-136.

[147] The disguise is described in line 16; more on recognition and reversal in Chapter Two.

[148] Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 5-13.

was active in Rome until the 140s/130s BCE.[149] Lanfranchi, however, dates the play between the mid-third and mid-first century BCE.[150] Agnieszka Kotlińska-Toma is happy to accept a second century date without qualification.[151] This second-century date places the *Exagoge* within a context of written and performed tragedies.

This certainly constitutes evidence for the continued existence of the genre of tragedy in the Hellenistic period. What is more important for the purposes of this dissertation is that this Jewish tragedy did not disappear from the historical record: multiple papyri attest its use centuries after its first circulation,[152] and early Christians knew of it. It is, after all, the historian Eusebius who provides all extant fragments of the text, in his *Praeperatio Evangelica*,[153] and Clement of Alexandria quotes its prologue.[154] This means that the play did not merely linger in the second century as a vestige of the past, but continued to extend tragedies' legacy into the Hellenistic period and well beyond it, known by Christians and non-Christians alike. This is not

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[149] Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 6; Jacobson, "Eusebius, Polyhistor, and Ezekiel," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 15.1 (2005): 75-77.

[150] Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique*, 7-13.

[151] Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy*, 221. She includes in her evaluation the opinion of J. Allen that the depiction of the Egyptians in the play points to a second-century date because it reveals a specific post-Maccabean Revolt sentiment ("Ezekiel the Tragedian on the Despoliation of Egypt," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 17.1 [2007]: 3-19).

[152] For the papyri, see Snell, *Tragicorum Graecorum fragmenta* (TrGF) Volume 1, *Didascaliae tragicae, catalogi tragicorum et tragoediarum, testimonia et fragmenta tragicorum minorum, editio correctior et addendis aucta* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1986). Until quite recently, the fragments were known from papyri that recorded Clement's works and Polyhistor's *Concerning the Jews*. Recently, a cache of finds from Oxyrhynchus provided manuscript evidence independent of Christian sources: P.Oxy. 5348, dated to the third or fourth century CE.

[153] Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica* 9; Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, "Ezekiel's Influence," at 36; Lanfranchi, *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique*, 73-99 and "The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," 130-131.

[154] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.23.155: "On Moses' education we shall have supporting evidence from Ezekiel the Jewish tragic poet in the play entitled Exodus, when he wrote the following passage for the character of Moses" (translation by John Ferguson, *Stromateis: Books One to Three* [Fathers of the Church 85; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1991]; this serves as introduction to the prologue that follows). Clement and Eusebius refer to Ezekiel as a writer of tragedies (plural), although no records exist for other plays attributed to him.

to say that classical tragedies continued on looking and sounding precisely like they did in the fifth century BCE Athenian *polis*.[155] Rather, the example of the *Exagoge* and Christian interaction with it bear witness to a continuing legacy of the genre of tragedy that evolved yet retained certain identifiably classical features.

What other evidence attests interaction between the Hebrew Bible and tragedies?[156] Steiner's strong stance notwithstanding, scholars have argued for possible connections between tragedies and the Book of Job for over a century. Some, as Jacobson reports, see Job influenced by Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*.[157] The most extreme position is that of Moses Hadas, who claims the genre of tragedy influenced not just Job and 4 Maccabees, but that "every work of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament has expressions from or allusions to

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[155] Note the arguments over whether the *Exagoge* would be identifiable as a tragedy, which Lanfranchi vehemently defends; the points of contention are the nonexistence of a messenger speech and ongoing debate about the degree to which the chorus existed in Hellenistic tragedies (Lanfranchi *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel le Tragique*, 18-21 and "The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," 132-134; Kotlińska-Toma, *Hellenistic Tragedy*, 225-230; Simon Hornblower, "Hellenistic Tragedy and Satyr-Drama; Lycophron's *Alexandra*," pages 90-124 in *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century*, 114 for a strong argument that Lycophron's fourth-century *Alexandra* was recognizably a tragedy).

[156] The topic is too vast to be exhausted in the space of this dissertation. For my purposes, it is sufficient to note that the Hebrew Bible went through an incredibly lengthy period of canonization; the Torah as we know it was not established firmly until (at the earliest) the second century BCE—a period in which Greek tragedies continue to be performed, and when the Jewish tragedy *Exagoge* was likely composed and circulated (Shaye Cohen, *From the Maccabees to Mishnah* [Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1987], 183). Others postulate a later date for canonization of the Hebrew Scriptures; Timothy Lim proposes the first century CE (*The Formation of the Jewish Canon* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013], see especially chapters 1-3).

[157] Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 28 fn 39.

tragedy which the reader was obviously expected to recognize."[158] One scholar devotes an entire book to Job as a Greek tragedy, noting literary parallels and positing historical influence.[159]

It is not just modern scholars who note similarities; people in antiquity, especially Christians, thought Job looked a little too much like a tragedy. Theodore of Mopsuestia, in the fifth century CE, argued for the exclusion of Job from the scriptural canon on the grounds that it was clearly an imitation of a Greek tragedy, and thus fiction.[160] Here we see in antiquity a classificatory principle that Delehaye would employ many centuries later, cordoning all "fictional" genres off from other possible genres on the criterion of historicity. On this model, tragedies are fictional, and so, despite any number of strong parallels, tragedies are restricted from being considered similar to scriptural texts, since scripture is not fiction. Even the argument to exclude Job shows both Christian familiarity with the genre of tragedy and recognition of uncomfortable resonances.

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[158] Moses Hadas, *Hellenistic Culture: Fusion and Diffusion* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 130. Sam K. Williams is a strong voice in agreement with Hadas; he argues that Euripides is the nearest literary parallel to 4 Maccabees, for example (*Jesus' Death as Saving Event: The Background and Origin of a Concept* [Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1975], 153-161).

[159] Horace Myer Kallen, *The Book of Job as a Greek Tragedy: Restored with an Introductory Essay on the Original Form and Philosophic Meaning of Job* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918). But he is not alone, of course; a more recent appraisal by Ariel Hirschfeld traces a history of scholarly consideration of Job as a tragedy, especially noting that historically the method for analysis has been comparison of Job with Aristotle's *Poetics*. He ultimately concludes Job must be considered a tragedy, especially because Job mimics tragedies' portrayal of the relationship between human and divine ("Is the Book of Job a Tragedy?" pages 9-36 in *The Book of Job: Aesthetics, Ethics, Hermeneutics,* edited by Leora Batnitzky [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2015]; see especially 15). See too Ben Quash, "Four Biblical Characters: In Search of a Tragedy," pages 15-34 in *Christian Theology and Tragedy: Theologians, Tragic Literature and Tragic Theory,* edited by Kevin Taylor and Giles Waller (Farnham, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), which examines three Hebrew Bible characters and one from the New Testament; and W. Lee Humphreys, *The Tragic Vision and the Hebrew Tradition* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985).

[160] Jo-Ann Brant, *Dialogue and Drama: Elements of Greek Tragedy in the Fourth Gospel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 12. The text of Theodore can be found in Dimitri Zaharopoulos, *Theodore of Mopsuestia on the Bible: A Study of His Old Testament Exegesis* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989), 47.

Along with Job, the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham in the Hebrew Bible[161] is considered by some scholars to be influenced or co-constituted by the genre of Greek tragedy in the Hellenistic period.[162] This scriptural episode has also been identified as a "critical inter-text" for martyr literature.[163] This dual identification of the *aqqedah* as similar to both tragedies and martyr texts is an example of what I alluded to earlier as indirect resonance: a similarity with martyr literature is first shown to be similar to the genre of tragedy. This trickle-down similarity, though, does not mean that the potential overtones of the genre of tragedy are negligible, lost or absorbed fully into the earlier corpus. As Easterling notes,

> Tragedy and the tragic transformed but never disappeared from Greek/Latin usage. Certain stories and stylistic range could be identified as belonging to this domain. The ability to recognize such signals was no doubt one of the identifying features of Greco-Roman culture; the presence of tragedians among the canonical 'best authors' is further proof that tragedy went on being important.[164]

I agree with Easterling: whether they appear in texts that are labeled tragedies or not, features characteristic of tragedies continued to inform texts and to be recognizable throughout antiquity. The ubiquity of tragedies throughout the ancient world meant that audiences gained facility with conventions of the genre of tragedy and were able to recognize its signals even when they showed up in other writings.

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[161] Genesis 22.

[162] It is easy to get a sense of just how entrenched is the comparison between this biblical episode and tragedies in the tired tone of an article that revisits the topic: Jennifer Wallace, "Tragic Sacrifice and Faith: Abraham and Agamemnon Again," pages 35-52 in Taylor and Waller, *Christian Theology and Tragedy*. See Karin Hedner Zetterholm, "Isaac and Jesus: A Rabbinic Reappropriation of a 'Christian' Motif?", who documents a debate that has tracked influence in two directions: not just Isaac as a model for Jesus, which is the majority opinion, but Jesus as a model for Isaac (*Journal of Jewish Studies* 67.1 [2016]: 102-120).

[163] Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 66. Monika Pesthy-Simon in *Isaac, Iphigenea, Ignatius: Martyrdom and Human Sacrifice*, agrees, seeing both Isaac and the mythical and tragic figure Iphigenia as prefigures of the martyr; her thesis is that all of these figures function as human sacrifices (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2017).

[164] Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 212.

Tragedies in the Roman Period

The genre of Greek tragedy continued to be intelligible in the Roman period.[165] Roman dramatists of the third, second, and first centuries BCE used Aeschylus' plays,[166] for example, and Livius Andronicus produced a translation of a Greek tragedy for the first time in 240 BCE.[167] In the second century, Lucian records with surprise that he sees an "illiterate" reading a copy of Euripides' *Bacchae,* simultaneously remarking on tragedies' continued existence, their availability in texts, and their popularity and accessibility beyond an elite audience.[168] Greek tragedies continued to be performed in agonistic festivals in the Roman period, sometimes in

[165] A classic introduction is Christopher P. Jones, "Greek Drama in the Roman Empire"; see also Paul Veyne, ΔΙΑΣΚΕΥΑΙ: le théâtre grec sous l'empire (Dion de Pruse, XXXII, 94), *Revue des Études Grecques* 102.487 (1989): 339-345; Liapis-Petrides' *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century* is devoted to the topic, versus a compendium like Gildenhard-Revermann's *Beyond the Fifth Century*, which considers, in addition, *Roman* tragedy and even modern forms, like Shakespearean tragedy. From the perspective of a *longue durée* of Greek theater's intertwining with Greece's political history, see *Greek Theatre Between Antiquity and Independence: A History of Reinvention from the Third Century BC to 1830* (edited by Walter Puchner; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), which notes that, "thanks to the conservative policy of preserving the Classical past, the outstanding texts of ancient theatre were saved from oblivion" (19).

[166] Jacobson, *The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 27; more importantly, Gesine Manuwald, *Roman Republican Theater* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[167] Michael von Albrecht, *A History of Roman Literature. Volume 1: Livius Andronicus to Boethius* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 51-52 for a brief orientation; Denis Feeney's *Beyond Greek: The Beginnings of Latin Literature* is an excellent recent treatment in more detail (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

[168] Lucian, *Adversus indoctum et libros multos ementem* 19. See discussion in Courtney Friesen, "Paulus Tragicus: Staging Apostolic Diversity in First Corinthians," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 134.4 (2015): 813-832, here 818.

both new and old categories.[169] In addition to the continued presence of Greek tragedies, a distinct corpus of Roman tragedies also developed.[170]

Let us begin with the work of Seneca. Recall from the Introduction that scholars of Christianity have widely agreed that Stoic philosophy, including that of Seneca, influenced Christian (and broader Greco-Roman) ideas about noble death. Seneca and Christians were in agreement on major issues concerning virtue, and the easy relationship of Christians with Seneca is clear from records of Christians' interaction with the Roman author. Tertullian, for example, referred to him warmly as "our Seneca,"[171] and a pseudepigraphical correspondence between Paul and Seneca shows Christians presenting Paul as a philosopher on par with the great Seneca, thus legitimizing Paul by portraying him as a partner in *paideia* with the philosopher.[172]

Studies of Stoic influence on Christianity readily embrace Seneca the philosopher as compatible with Christianity. It is less frequently acknowledged in these same studies, though,

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[169] Some of our best evidence for tragedies being performed during the Roman period comes from inscriptions. Csapo-Slater provide inscriptional evidence for the festival of the Muses in Boeotia, which indicates new tragedies were being written and performed in the second century CE (*The Context of Ancient Drama*, 192). In Asia Minor around roughly the same time, evidence for a local festival in Oenoanda indicates the same (Stephen Mitchell, "Festivals, Games, and Civic Life in Asia Minor," *Journal of Roman Studies* 80 [1990]: 183-193 for historical context for the inscription published by Michael Wörrle in *Stadt und Fest in Kaiserzeitlichen Kleinasien. Studien zu einer Agonistischen Stiftung aus Oenoanda*. [Munich: Beck, 1988]). Note the Asia Minor context of the latter inscription, important for the present study's focus on *MPionius*. For excellent summaries in chart form of the extant epigraphic evidence, see Brigitte le Guen, "Les fêtes du théâtre grec à l' époque hellénistique," *Revue des Études Grecque* 123 (2011): 495-520 and "Beyond Athens: The Expansion of Greek Tragedy from the Fourth Century Onwards," pages 149-179 in *Greek Tragedy After the Fifth Century.*

[170] See Anthony J. Boyle, *An Introduction to Roman Tragedy* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006); Mario Erasmo, *Roman Tragedy: Theatre to Theatricality* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2004); Jürgen Blänsdorf (ed.), *Theater und Gesellschaft im Imperium Romanum* (Tübingen: Francke, 1990).

[171] *Ad Jovinian* 1.49; *de Anima* 20.

[172] Cornelia Römer, "The Correspondence between Seneca and Paul," pages 46-52 in *New Testament Apocrypha*, vol. 2: *Writings Related to the Apostles: Apocalypses and Related Subjects*, edited by W. Schneemelcher and R.M. Wilson (revised edition; Cambridge: Clark & Co., 1992). See the helpful discussion of this correspondence in Laura Nasrallah, *Archaeology and the Letters of Paul* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 246-247.

that Seneca wrote tragedies.[173] This is an interesting point: though scholars have easily acknowledged the saturation of Christianity with current philosophical concepts, the co-occurrence of the genre of tragedy is less unexplored—despite the suggestive fact that an oft-cited philosophical influence on Christianity also wrote tragedies!

Scholars have debated the extent to which classical tragedies influenced Roman tragedies. A recent compendium makes the case that it was Republican tragedies, rather than classical, that influenced imperial tragedies.[174] R.J. Tarrant offers a different perspective, arguing that Senecan drama more closely resembles Latin writers of the Augustan period, but the basic *structure* of Senecan tragedies is shared with classical drama. In addition to this structural coincidence, all Augustan tragedies refer to plots for which a fifth century tragedy exists as a precedent.[175] Yet another perspective holds that Senecan tragedies overlap considerably with the performance genre of pantomime,[176] a genre related to tragedy which I will discuss below. Kotlińska-Toma has argued convincingly and most recently that classical and Hellenistic

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[173] Heiko Jürgens documents, though, that it is in fact Latin Christians who attest to the longevity of Senecan tragedies: *Pompa Diaboli: die Lateinische Kirchenväter und das antique Theater* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1972), 56-65, 237-245.

[174] George Harrison, *Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2015), as early as ix-x and throughout; see similarly the earlier work of Albrecht Dihle, "Seneca und die Aufführungspraxis der römischen Tragödie," *Antike und Abendland* 29.1 (1983): 162-171; although again, see Manuwald, who notes the classical influence on and exportation to Republican tragedy (*Roman Republican Theater*, 16-22).

[175] R.J. Tarrant, "Senecan Drama and its Antecedents," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978): 213-263.

[176] Bernhard Zimmerman, "Seneca and Pantomime," pages 218-226 in *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, edited by Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). See too Alessandra Zanobi, "Seneca and Pantomime," 269-288 in *Beyond the Fifth Century*, especially at 269-270.

tragedies influenced Roman tragedies; she argues that tragedies' form does not have to remain identical for influence to be detected.[177]

Pantomime, a dramatic form that developed in the Roman period, stemmed directly from the genre of tragedy, and remained fundamentally entwined with it. Pantomime "is a continuation of ancient tragedy, as suggested by the title rhythmic tragic dancing."[178] This reference to pantomime appears on honorific inscriptions in Delphi.[179] A pantomime was performed by a single actor, often at dinner parties.[180] Male actors played female roles, and while there was dancing and music, pantomime included no words. We know from Lucian's *de Saltatione* that tragedies and pantomime shared themes: "The themes of tragedy and the dance are common to both, and there is no difference between those of the one and those of the other, except that the themes of the dance are more varied and more unhackneyed and they contain countless μεταβολὰς."[181]

I mentioned that pantomime remained entwined with the generic form from which it evolved. This recognizable connection is important: pantomime remained connected to the genre

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[177] Most clearly at *Hellenistic Tragedy*, xii: "We know that tragedy not only continued to be staged in the Greek world for another four centuries, but also experienced a period of unprecedented popularity, with countless performances, and even underwent some significant changes. Hellenistic tragedy influenced the birth of Roman tragedy as well as the development of other theatrical forms (e.g. comedies and mime) and literature (Greek romance)."

[178] Ruth Webb, *Demons and Dancers: Performance in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 2. See also Edith Hall, "Pantomime: Visualising Myth in the Roman Empire," pages 431-473 in *Performance in Greek and Roman Theatre,* edited by George Harrison and Vayos Liapis (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Zanobi, "Seneca and Pantomime," 269-288; Edith Hall and Rosie Wyles (eds.), *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*. Interest in and work on pantomime has been particularly prominent in the last fifteen years.

[179] Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 53; Hall, "Pantomime: Visualising Myth in the Roman Empire," 454; 457 for pantomime's origins. The term is τραγικῆς ἐρρύθμου κινήσεως ὑποκριτής, found in a second or third century CE inscription affixed to the statue of a pantomime dancer.

[180] Christopher P. Jones, "Dinner Theater," pages 185-198 in *Dining in a Classical Context*, edited by William Slater (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1991), and Hall-Wyles, *New Directions in Ancient Pantomime*, 116.

[181] Lucian, *de Saltatione* 31; Αἱ δὲ ὑποθέσεις κοιναὶ ἀμφοτέροις, καὶ οὐδέν τι διακεκριμέναι τῶν τραγικῶν αἱ ὀρχηστικαί, πλὴν ὅτι ποικιλώτεραι αὗται καὶ πολυμαθέστεραι καὶ μυρίας μεταβολὰς ἔχουσαι.

of tragedy by appealing to its audience's cultural knowledge. As Webb notes, "With a few well-chosen words, a rhetorician could evoke an image in the listener's mind and make her feel as if she were present at the scene described, but, to be effective, this required a high degree of common culture shared between speaker and audience."[182] This point is crucial: pantomime was a nonverbal medium. How then was it that this mode of drama was referred to specifically as a tragedy, when no words were used to convey such a link? Audiences must have known the genre of tragedy well enough to recognize it even in a nonverbal mode.[183]

Aeschylus and the Eumenides in Antiquity

Here I want to discuss the reception in antiquity of a specific play. In Chapter Three I will show that Aeschylus' *Eumenides* can fruitfully be compared to *MPionius* for its clear shared themes, preoccupation with legal trials, and its staging the triumph of a divinely sanctioned system of justice. Such a comparison helps us to see that *MPionius* also ends its play with a *deus ex machina*. But there is an additional historical argument to be made as well: *Eumenides* remained popular throughout antiquity and it is possible that it continued to be an operative cultural referent during the time of *MPionius*' composition. In this section I provide historical warrant for *Eumenides*' familiarity to ancient readers and composers.

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[182] Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 88-89.

[183] See Webb, *Demons and Dancers*, 88-89, where Webb also makes the point that it is not only elites who would have understood the signification of pantomime as a tragic medium. This is important to my point of cultural ubiquity: that the genre of tragedy, not just in written but in performative and educational contexts, was widespread and formulated part of the horizon of expectations in antiquity, including the period when martyr texts were being composed and read. And, importantly, this was not an elite medium alone, meaning that it is possible that the detection of resonance between tragedies and other forms was not restricted to a few learned persons, but to a very general ancient public. For more on this, see below, especially concerning *paideia*.

Aeschylus has a reputation for being the least Aristotelian tragedian, an idea informed by the fact that the *Poetics* refers to Aeschylus fewer times than it does to Sophocles and Euripides.[184] It mentions the *Oresteia* only once, specifically *Libation Bearers*, as an example of recognition through reasoning.[185] Others in antiquity reinforce the impression of Aeschylus' relative unpopularity: Quintilian, for example, considers him less impressive than Sophocles and Euripides.[186]

However, just because Aeschylus was considered less ideal a standard of excellent tragedies does not mean that his works were unknown—in fact, this evaluation was based both on previous estimations of Aeschylus' inferiority that were inherited, as well as continued comparison of Aeschylus with other tragedians—requiring that Aeschylus be well-known enough to compare with others. Sebastiana Nervegna notes that scholarship on Aeschylean plays continued throughout the Hellenistic and Roman periods, indicating his works remained current.[187] Even if he was less popular than Sophocles and Euripides, he simultaneously held the status of "father of tragedy"—even to Quintilian, who liked Aeschylus less than the other two.[188]

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[184] Johanna Hanink lists the following references in the *Poetics*: five to Aeschylean plays, twelve to those of Sophocles, twenty to those of Euripides (*Lycurgan Athens and the Making of Classical Tragedy*, 205).

[185] Aristotle, *Poetics* 16.1455a4-6. Aristotle does also mention Aeschylus in the *Rhetoric*, *History of Animals*, and *Nicomachean Ethics*; see Dana LaCourse Munteanu, "Aristotle's Reception of Aeschylus: Reserved Without Malice," pages 88-108 in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus*, edited by Rebecca Futo Kennedy (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), here 103-104.

[186] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratia* 10.1.66-7.

[187] Sebastiana Nervegna, "Aeschylus in the Hellenistic Period," pages 109-128 in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus*, edited by Rebecca Futo Kennedy (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), here 116-119.

[188] Nervegna, "Aeschylus in the Hellenistic Period," 110; see also Nervegna, "Performing Classics: The Tragic Canon in the Fourth Century and Beyond," pages 157-188 in *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.*, edited by Eric Csapo et al. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 187.

Thus, Aeschylus not only remained known, but remained highly esteemed, at least for being the earliest tragedian.

Noting the difference in estimation between Aeschylus and those poets more frequently mentioned in the *Poetics* brings me to a methodological move of this dissertation. I will show in Chapter Two that using the *Poetics* to identify the genre of tragedy in the *longue durée* is rightly controversial, even if dominant. One possible criticism of using the *Poetics* alone to identify likeness between tragedies and *MPionius* is that this method merely reveals resemblance between a (very old) theory of the genre of tragedy and *MPionius*. By comparing *MPionius* with a text by the "least Aristotelian" tragedian and thus comparing *MPionius* to one of the "actual dramas,"[189] I utilize a mixed method to demonstrate the plausibility that features associated with the genre of tragedy also appear in *MPionius*.

This method is grounded, still, in a history of reception. In the Hellenistic period, the most likely of all the Aeschylean plays to be staged would have been the *Eumenides* and the *Edonians*[190]—that is, even among the three plays in the *Oresteia*, the *Eumenides* was popular. In the Roman period, there is substantial evidence that Aeschylus continued to be well known, even if less liked. Cicero noted that Roman tragedians such as Ennius, Pacuvius, and Accius followed Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.[191] Lucan, Josephus, Philo, and Plutarch referred frequently

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[189] I noted in Chapter Two that the *Poetics* and its formulation of tragic plot is the most frequent means of establishing likeness with tragedy; George Parsenios in "No Longer in the World" rejects this method, as I mentioned in Chapter Two, preferring to compare the gospel of John to "actual dramas" (2). The practice of using both plays and the *Poetics* has been a feature of the most recent and compelling work on tragedy's likeness to other texts.

[190] Nervegna, "Aeschylus in the Hellenistic Period," 119-120.

[191] Cicero, *Academica* 1, 3.

to Aeschylus, not merely by name, but also by engaging substantively with his plots.[192] George Harrison notes that these writers inverted well-known plots by Aeschylus, relying on their audiences to pick up on signals that alerted them both to identify the Aeschylean tragedy, and to the fact that the plot was altered: "Inversions work only if one can assume that readers are conversant with the original text."[193] Moreover, Aeschylus' popularity increased in the Greek east during the movement known as the Second Sophistic.[194] The point thus stands: whether people in antiquity preferred him or not, they knew Aeschylus. His popularity waxed and waned, and was at a relatively high point in the period in which I place *MPionius*'s composition and readership.

The *Eumenides* itself held a privileged status. Nervegna traces its persistence into the Roman period via evidence from vases: "The two or three plays by Aeschylus that entered Roman tragedy also crop up on our vases from South Italy, *Eumenides*, *Edonians* and (possibly) *Ransom of Hector* or *Phrygians*."[195] Nervgena also documents a history of scenes from the *Eumenides* painted on walls into the third century.[196] In addition to material evidence, "*Eumenides* is one of the Greek plays that had a new lease on life on Roman stages, via Ennius' adaptation. In Ennius' *Eumenides*, too, Orestes killed his mother to avenge his father and was put

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[192] George W. Harrison, "Aeschylus in the Roman Empire," pages 129-178 in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), here 136.

[193] Harrison, "Aeschylus in the Roman Empire," 136. His point is similar to the rhetorical effect of the cento that I discuss starting at page 84.

[194] Harrison, "Aeschylus in the Roman Empire," 143.

[195] Nervegna, "Performing Classics," 178; see 179-183 for images.

[196] Nervegna, "Aeschylus in the Hellenistic Period," 120.

on a trial before the Areopagus council."[197] Ennius' play remains only in fragments, although scholars think they reveal an adherence to Aeschylus' play.[198] The *Eumenides* lived on past the classical period, well-known in the Hellenistic and into the Roman period via a variety of media, and so well-loved that it was reprised by Ennius, whose re-performance increased its popularity and visibility.

Early Christianity and Tragic Reception

We are by now far from the classical period in which the genre of tragedy first gained its fame. Yet, by the time early Christians were formulating martyr texts—in the first few centuries CE—the genre of tragedy was alive and available in a variety of formats, even though this does not mean that all tragedies looked alike, nor that these contemporaneous forms of tragedies and pantomime looked exactly like fifth century tragedies. In this section, I change direction slightly. With this historical context established, the question arises: with tragedies so accessible in the cultural air, so to speak, is there evidence that Christians actually made use of their features?

The evidence canvassed so far has provided an indirect answer to this question in that many of the materials that scholars have identified as sharing features with martyr texts themselves shared features with tragedies (Jewish literature like 2 and 4 Maccabees, Daniel and Job; romance novels; figures and stories that make up the noble death tradition). In what follows,

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[197] Nervegna, "Aeschylus in the Hellenistic Period," 121. Robin Mitchell-Boyask also notes that in addition to Ennius' adaptation, "Cicero may have had either Ennius or Aeschylus in mind when he wrote in *Pro Milone* (8) of an Orestes who was 'acquitted by the vote of one who was not merely a goddess, but a goddess pre-eminent for wisdom'" and that Vergil's *Aeneid* may also cite the *Eumenides*' account of Orestes (*Aeschylus: Eumenides* [London; New York: Bloomsbury/Duckworth, 2009], 114). Adriana Brook makes the case for Aeschylean influence on Cicero more strongly than Mitchell-Boyask in "Cicero's Use of Aeschylus' Oresteia in the Pro Milone."

[198] Nervegna, "Performing Classics," 180; A.J. Podlecki, *Aeschylus Eumenides* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1989), 24. See also Csapo, *Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century*, 180. The standard reference for Ennius' fragments is H.D. Jocelyn's *The Tragedies of Ennius: The Fragments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

I push my argument further by discussing recent scholarship demonstrating that features associated with tragedies also appear in Christian texts.

Tragedies and the Gospels

Perhaps the clearest indication that tragedies remained intelligible within a cultural world that included Christians is that resonance with the genre of tragedy has been detected in the most foundational Christian texts: those of the New Testament. A long history of exegesis on the *Gospel of Mark* claimed correspondence between tragedies and the gospel, and given the text's reputation as delivering the darkest passion narrative among the four canonical gospels, perhaps this is no surprise.[199] Gilbert Bilezikian's 1977 study points out that while previous scholars have compared the genre of tragedy to the *Gospel of Mark*, the comparisons have been quickly dismissed, often because they were shallow, at the level of shared motifs.[200] He aims to build on the impressionistic pairing of the genre of tragedy with the *Gospel of Mark* by offering concrete points of coincidence between the two. He notes, for example, that the *Gospel of Mark*'s Jesus shares qualities with tragic heroes, and that the gospel ends with a *deus ex machina*.[201] Bilezikian

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[199] Stephen Smith comments that "it is the Gospel of Mark whose structure has been found to conform more closely than any other biblical work to dramatic literature," explaining the flood of scholarship on the *Gospel of Mark* and the genre of tragedy ("A Divine Tragedy: Some Observations on the Dramatic Structure of Mark's Gospel," *Novum Testamentum* 37.3 [1995]: 209-231, at 209).

[200] Gilbert Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel: A Comparison of the Gospel of Mark and Greek Tragedy* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977), 18-19. The late 1970s saw a flourishing of attention to the *Gospel of Mark* as a tragedy, even if this was not when the topic was first addressed. Bilezikian's study is often cited as the best treatment of the topic (see Smith, who calls it "the only readily accessible systematic study of the subject" in "A Divine Tragedy," 109), but he stands in a lineage going back to Ernst Burch's 1931 study "Tragic Action in the Second Gospel: A Study in the Narrative of Mark" (*Journal of Religion* 11.3 [1931]: 346-358). A succinct history from Burch forward, especially including the flourishing of work in the 1970s, can be found in Smith's fn 3 in "A Divine Tragedy," but Jay's *The Tragic in Mark* is the most recent text on the topic and carries the narrative forward from the time of Smith's writing in 1995.

[201] Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*, 134-135.

argues that the *Gospel of Mark* resembles the genre of Greek tragedy,[202] but he does not claim that the gospel is itself an example of a Greek tragedy. His explanation is sophisticated and takes seriously Christianity's embeddedness in a cultural milieu in which tragedies figured prominently: to him, the *Gospel of Mark* was not a new creation; nor was it the result of purposefully imitating an existing model. Instead, "It is conceivable that the Gospel form could be the product of the skillful combination of elements as disparate as the evangelical narrative on the one hand, and, on the other, compatible literary devices borrowed piecemeal from an established classical tradition—specifically that of Greek tragedy."[203] His method is to compare the *Gospel of Mark* to the genre of tragedy using Aristotle's *Poetics* and its description of tragedies—a frequent methodological impulse.[204]

More recently, Jeff Jay has argued that the *Gospel of Mark* bears marks of the genre of tragedy, and that the *Gospel of Mark* was written "in a tragic mode."[205] Jay's work differs from Bilezikian's in that Jay's means of comparison, which he calls "mode,"[206] includes a blend of thematic and formal features. He includes Aristotelian categories long used to identify and describe tragedies, such as reversal and recognition, but adds other features to his typology of mode as well: presence of the divine, for example. Moreover, he notes that tragedies cannot be so schematically detected as applying Aristotelian categories to Christian texts. He rightly points out that presence of a reversal does not itself signal that a text is a tragedy, but, rather, a reversal,

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[202] He claims genre as his means of comparison in *The Liberated Gospel*, 139.

[203] Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*, 20.

[204] For Bilezikian's use of the *Poetics*, see *The Liberated Gospel*, 51.

[205] Jeff Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 12-15.

[206] His clearest description of mode appears at *The Tragic in Mark*, 79-106.

in tandem with a package of other features, helps build a case for a text exhibiting a "tragic flavor."[207]

The *Gospel of Mark*, Jay argues, is one of these texts: it is written in the tragic mode, and recognizably so, since the cultural world in which the *Gospel of Mark* formed and circulated was itself informed by and included the genre of tragedy, which in turn means its readership would recognize its tragic signals. Recent work on materiality, book culture, and the origins of New Testament texts has trended toward pushing the date of the *Gospel of Mark* later than the previously-held position of a mid- to late-first century date.[208] Whether an earlier or a later date, the first through third centuries saw a wealth of venues through which one came to know tragedies, as I showed above. The *Gospel of Mark* was developing during the first century, when old tragedies, new tragedies, pantomime, tragic imagery, and written tragedies proliferated.

Even more frequently likened to the genre of tragedy is the *Gospel of John*. Already in 1921 F.R.M. Hitchcock argued that the gospel was a drama;[209] this was his main line of argument, although he did not make explicit that he was arguing for the *Gospel of John* as *tragic* drama. Using Aristotle's *Poetics*, albeit in a way that mainly considers plot as a coherent story

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[207] See especially Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 71 fn 147.

[208] This push toward a later date has been a major focus in recent years, and is directly related to the relatively recent turn toward materiality in the field of early Christian studies. Crucial ground-laying work is that by Brent Nongbri (first, "The Use and Abuse of P52: Papyrological Pitfalls in the Dating of the Fourth Gospel [*Harvard Theological Review* 98.1 (2005): 23-48], followed by *God's Library: The Archaeology of the Earliest Christian Manuscripts* [New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018]). Special effort has been exerted on the *Gospel of Mark,* especially influential because of its status as the earliest-written gospel. Such recent work advocates a much later date for the *Gospel of Mark*, though not a firm one at all, since, this work argues, the gospels were *hypomnēmata* and thus open to additions over time. For this position, see especially Matthew Larsen's *Gospels Before the Book* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018); for an emphasis on materiality in the construction of this argument, see Matthew Larsen and Mark Letteney, "Christians and the Codex: Generic Materiality and the Early Gospel Traditions," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 27.3 (2019): 383-415.

[209] F.R.M Hitchcock, "Is the Fourth Gospel a Drama?" *Theology* 7.42 (1923): 307-317; reprinted in *The Gospel of John as Literature: An Anthology of Twentieth-Century Perspectives*, edited by Mark Stibbe (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 15-24.

with beginning, middle, and end,[210] he presented the *Gospel of John* as a dramatic text in the cast of the genre of tragedy. David Rhoads in more recent years has reiterated the dramatic quality of New Testament texts, especially the *Gospel of John*, and argued that they are meant to be performed.[211]

Jo-Ann Brant builds on these studies of the *Gospel of John* as drama, emphasizing the prolific work done on the topic.[212] She goes so far as to say that by the time of her writing, "speaking of John as drama is by now a habit for scholars."[213] She argues that the *Gospel of John* is not just drama, but drama in a very specific cast: the genre of tragedy. The composer of the *Gospel of John* was both consciously and unconsciously formed by their cultural and literary context and attuned to audience expectations. Since this was the case, Brant argues, the composer formed a text in line with these expectations: "By placing Jesus within the literary conventions of a Greek tragedy, the author of the fourth gospel sets him in relief against the tragic hero and as a result generates a theology that is sharply at odds with that of the tragedies."[214]

Recall from the Introduction Michal Beth Dinkler's assertion that genre relies on reader-response. Her approach claims that texts' formation bears the marks of a specific literary world

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[210] Hitchcock, "Is the Fourth Gospel a Drama?" 15-16 for his method that mixes Aristotle and Horace; his model of "drama" mimics the rising action-falling action model of plot that he takes away from Aristotle—see 16.

[211] He argues this for particularly the *Gospel of John*, as well as for the gospels in general. He also does more than just make the argument; he stages performances of New Testament texts. See his "Performance Criticism: An Emerging Methodology in Second Testament Studies: Part I" and "Part II," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of the Bible and Culture* 36.3 (2006): 118-133 and 36.4 (2006): 164-184, respectively.

[212] Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, 4; she draws on the work of Mark Stibbe, who sees Jesus' trial and execution in John as influenced by the *Bacchae* (*John as Storyteller: Narrative Criticism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 130-147)—although what is more interesting than Stibbe's observation is that he points out that Origen, in his second-century *Contra Celsum*, already drew this parallel between Jesus' death and the *Bacchae* (*John as Storyteller*, 131-132).

[213] Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, 4.

[214] Brant, *Dialogue and Drama*, 260.

by both responding to and further forming audience expectations.[215] Brant's study aligns with this approach, arguing that audiences would be primed both to recognize the convention of the tragic hero, and to notice when this familiar pattern was altered. Thus the *Gospel of John* relies upon the genre of tragedy and its audience's facility with it.

Other studies too note the genre of tragedy's formative influence on the *Gospel of John*. Kasper Bro Larsen homes in specifically on the convention of tragic recognition. Bro Larsen sees recognition in virtually every other pericope of the *Gospel of John*, and notes that it is a dramatic convention that the *Gospel of John* takes up purposely.[216] George Parsenios' study, like Brant's, focuses more on thematic associations with tragedies, rather than plot structural components such as reversal or recognition.[217] He notes that the death of Jesus in the *Gospel of John* mimics the emotive effect and processual character of deaths in multiple tragedies, and, like Brant, emphasizes that the composer of the *Gospel of John* played with their audience's knowledge of tragedies. Given audiences' familiarity with tragedies, Parsenios makes a convincing case that readers would recognize parallels with tragic deaths in the passion narrative of the *Gospel of John*, noting a subversion of the genre when Jesus is not on the threshold between death and life, but life and glorification.[218] In this way, Parsenios argues, the *Gospel of John* relied on its audience to liken the text to tragedies, and to know the genre of tragedy so well

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[215] Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyrdom Narratives," 335-336 particularly makes this case strongly; Cobb reflects similar ideas in *Divine Deliverance*, 31-62.

[216] Kasper Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger: Recognition Scenes in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2008); see especially 55-56 on recognition as a type-scene in antiquity.

[217] George Parsenios, "'No Longer in the World' (John 17:11): The Transformation of the Tragic in the Fourth Gospel," *Harvard Theological Review* 98.1 (2005): 1-21.

[218] Parsenios, "'No Longer in the World,'" 17-19.

they were able to note divergence from the tragic pattern and to form meaning out of its resurrection story in direct relation to tragedies.

Interestingly, studies of resonance between the genre of tragedy and the *Gospel of Luke* and the *Acts of the Apostles (Acts)* tend to rely less on Aristotelian categories of plot structure for their comparison and more on thematic and character parallels. Key studies liken prison-escape plots in *Acts* to those in multiple Greek tragedies, especially the *Bacchae*;[219] natural disasters and storms in *Acts* with those in the *Bacchae*;[220] modes of writing history in tragedies and *Acts*;[221] and *Acts*' portrayal of the figures of Jesus and Dionysus.[222] Of special note is a comparison of *Acts* with the whole plot of one Greek tragedy. David Litwa argues that *Acts* is a purposeful emulation of Sophocles' *Philoctetes*.[223] He defends this argument by demonstrating that Paul would have known not just the story of Philoctetes, but his story through tragedies by all three of the famous tragedians, whose plays were available at the time. Thus these authors, whether they argue for the presence of tragic features described in Aristotle's *Poetics* or compared to plots of tragedies contemporaneous with their text of focus, all argue that the genre of tragedy shares

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[219] John Weaver, *Plots of Epiphany: Prison-Escape in Acts of the Apostles* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004). See too Friesen's discussion of prison-escape in both the *Bacchae* and Acts in *Reading Dionysus*, 219 and Chapter 14 as a whole for deeper treatment.

[220] Richard Seaford, "Thunder, Lightning, and Earthquakes in the Bacchae and the Acts of the Apostles," pages 139-151 in *What is a God? Studies in the Nature of Greek Divinity*, edited by A. B. Lloyd (London: Duckworth, 1997).

[221] DooHee Lee, *Luke-Acts and "Tragic History": Communicating Gospel with the World* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015).

[222] John Moles, "Jesus and Dionysius in the Acts of the Apostles and Early Christianity," *Hermathena* 180 (2006): 65-104. Note the exceptionally frequent comparisons with the *Bacchae* in particular; Friesen, *Reading Dionysus* is the most comprehensive text on this topic.

[223] M. David Litwa, "Paul the 'god' in Acts 28: A Comparison with Philoctetes," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 136.3 (2017): 707-726. Litwa's posited reference is notable, since most of the textual comparisons offered so far have been mostly from Euripides, and then Aeschylus.

features with Christian stories and that audiences were primed to identify signals denoting the genre of tragedy.

Pauline Letters

A number of recent studies document tragic resonance in the Pauline letters in the New Testament. These studies have a basis in, for example, Stanley Stowers' convincing argument years ago that the lament in Romans 7:7-25 was influenced by a monologue from Euripides' *Medea*.[224] Nicholas Elder builds on Stowers' study, providing a more detailed account of what precisely comprises the tragic resonance between Romans and *Medea*.[225] According to Elder, Eve's speech provokes fear and pity, and induces in readers a cathartic release. Moreover, *hamartia* was the cause of Eve's misfortune, which Elder notes is "perfectly in line with Aristotle's conception of the ideal tragic figure."[226]

Courtney Friesen interprets the theater mentioned in 1 Corinthians 4:9 as a specific reference to drama, diverging from scholarly opinions that consider it a general reference to spectacle in the Roman period.[227] He argues that ancient audiences were meant to think of

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[224] Stanley Stowers, "Romans 7.7-25 as a Speech-in-Character (προσωποποιια)," pages 180-202 in *Paul in His Hellenistic Context*, edited by Troels Engberg-Petersen (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995).

[225] Nicholas Elder, "'Wretch I Am!' Eve's Tragic Speech-in-Character in Romans 7:7-25," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137.3 (2018): 743-763.

[226] Elder, "'Wretch I Am!'" 763; see also Lanfranchi, "The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," 132 on *hamartia* as a recognizable feature of tragedies past the classical period.

[227] The verse reads, "For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, as though sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to mortals" (NRSV). θέατρον is the word rendered, in English translations, "spectacle," while Friesen argues it should be taken literally, as "theater."

Euripides' *Bacchae* and Sophocles' *Oedipus* cycle when they heard this reference to the theater.[228]

Recent work on the *carmen Christi* of Philippians 2:6-11 argues that this passage contains intertextual references to Euripides' *Bacchae* and that the *carmen Christi* subverts features of Euripides' Dionysus.[229] Benjamin Cover supports this thesis by demonstrating that in the first century CE the *Bacchae* remained in circulation, both read and performed.[230] Cover, like Friesen, argues that contemporaneous audiences would be primed to receive and to recognize "echoes"[231] of Euripides.[232] Just as Paul's interpretation of Jesus' death shows that Paul was "a man of his time," deeply formed by cultural ideas of what constituted noble death,[233] these studies show Paul thoroughly enculturated literarily, as well.

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[228] Friesen, "Paulus Tragicus," 813-832.

[229] The new studies I focus on here are not the first to detect Euripidean tones in the *carmen Christi*; see Ulrich B. Müller, *Der Brief des Paulus an die Philipper* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1993), 93-95; Samuel Vollenweider, "Die Metamorphose des Gottessohns: Zum epiphanieln Motivfeld in Phil 2, 6-8," pages 285-306 in *Horizonte neutestamentlicher Christologie: Studien zu Paulus und zur frühchristlichen Theologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

[230] Benjamin Michael Cover, "The Death of Tragedy: The Form of God in Euripides' Bacchae and Paul's Carmen Christi," *Harvard Theological Review* 111.1 (2018): 66-89; see especially 67 for strong evidence for the *Bacchae*'s continued relevance and use: "According to Plutarch, the Kings of Parthia and Armenia had even learned Greek for this purpose, and Artavasdes the Armenian is even said to have composed tragedies, orations, and histories in Greek." Thorough evidence for the *Bacchae*'s popularity and formative influence throughout antiquity is documented in Friesen's *Reading Dionysus*; for its influence on Christianity specifically, see Francesco Masa, *Tra la vigna e la croce: Dioniso nei discorsi letterari e figurativi cristiani (II-IV s.)* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2014).

[231] Cover, "The Death of Tragedy," 67.

[232] Cover ultimately makes the case for the "death of tragedy" in the *carmen Christi* only from an Aristotelian standpoint, since he does not see the text coinciding with the "Aristotelian sense of a tragic end" ("The Death of Tragedy," 87). Thus, while certain echoes of the genre of tragedy were important for audiences to recognize, they ought to recognize the subversion of those familiar features, too. It is from this standpoint that Cover argues that "Paul is not only a tragic but also a comic thinker" (69). Compare Cover's perspective to the depictions of Christian martyrs in the mime format, above. These parallels demonstrate that it is not the genre of tragedy alone that served to constitute a cultural repertoire in which martyr literature was situated.

[233] Seeley, *The Noble Death*, 16 uses this phrase to describe Paul, noting that his views of death were formed by contemporaneous influences (as discussed in the Introduction).

The New Testament gospels, the *Acts of the Apostles*, and multiple letters of Paul have all been judged to share literary feature with the genre of tragedy. And this should come as no surprise, given the historical evidence adduced above for tragedies' continued presence in antiquity. These studies enrich our understanding of Christianity's interaction with the broader performative and literary world in which it arose, and in which it formed its own texts, anticipated its readers' needs, and aimed to persuade. They provide a counterpoint to a long-held view, summarized by a recent text, that "there must be some sort of inherent antagonism or opposition between Christian and tragic 'worldviews.'"[234] On the contrary, the genre of tragedy and Christianity "share at the very least areas of profound mutual concern."[235]

Tragedy and Paideia

By now it should be clear that, far from claims that the genre of tragedy died after the classical period, it continued to exist throughout antiquity, including the first few centuries CE when Christianity and its texts were developing. Moreover, the cultural prominence of tragedies went beyond availability and general popularity. A host of recent work in early Christian studies has shown the genre of tragedy shares resonance with early Christian texts.

Having shown this, I would like to add one more cache of data to the documentation of the genre of tragedy's presence through antiquity: specific references to the genre and to tragedies by both Christian and non-Christian thinkers in the first through fourth centuries CE. In doing so, I document a history of participation in cultural *paideia*. Whether in the context of an

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[234] Taylor-Waller, *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 1, presented as the counter-position to the one they take in their volume.

[235] Taylor-Waller, *Christian Theology and Tragedy*, 1.

educational curriculum or by invoking tragedies to make philosophical or theological points, these examples evince deep knowledge of the genre of tragedy, leaving no doubt that it helped form the context in which early Christian literature—including martyr texts—developed.

Rhetoricians

It is no wonder that the genre of tragedy played such a central role in education, as I showed above, for Latin rhetoricians prescribed continued use of tragedies—both contemporaneous forms as well as older, revered classical forms. Horace, in his *Ars Poetica*, discusses the continued use of Greek models in Latin literature, expressing preferences about which conventions to keep and which to improve upon.[236] To be preserved, he notes, are Greek tragedies' modes of characterization, and he additionally prefers that authors include and use traditional material contained in those Greek tragedies: their mythologies and familiar plotlines.[237] Less privileged is the use of a *deus ex machina*; he joins his predecessor Aristotle in preferring it be used sparingly.[238] Horace acknowledges new forms of poetic art popular in his time while simultaneously linking them with the prominent genre of Greek tragedy and prescribing tragedies' continued use and legibility. Quintilian agrees with Horace, recommending his students learn storytelling skills by becoming learned in the three Athenian tragedians.[239]

These rhetoricians carry on a tradition discernible in works by their predecessors, who used tragedies frequently to illustrate arguments. The *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for example,

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[236] His *Ars Poetica* was written in 19 BCE; to put this text in the context pertinent to this dissertation, at the time of his writing multiple forms of tragedies circulate: Greek, Roman, pantomime.

[237] *Ars Poetica* 119-127.

[238] *Ars Poetica* 189-192.

[239] *Institutio Oratoria* 10.1.66-68.

contains numerous citations of tragedies, as do Cicero's *de Inventione* and *de Oratore*.[240] While Cicero provides us with the greatest number of quotations from Republican tragedians, he also shows knowledge of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.[241] But it is illustrative of *Greek* tragedy's continued influence in this time period that the richest cache of quotations from Greek tragedians is provided by Plutarch, writing in the first and beginning of the second centuries.[242] The overlap in time of writers referring to both Greek and Roman tragedies illustrates the variety of tragedies and tragedians intelligible during this time period.

Ancient Theologians, Historians, and Satirists

This fixity of the genre of tragedy within the educational setting of antiquity meant that everyone at even the rudimentary levels of education, Christian or not,[243] gained facility with tragedies. I document a survey of engagement with tragedies here. I proceed in chronological order, providing representative but by no means exhaustive examples of thinkers engaging

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[240] Gildenhard-Reveramann, "Introduction," 9 in *Beyond the Fifth Century* for the general point; see for specific examples the following: *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 1.9, 1.15, 1.16; 2.19, 2.22; 2.25; 3.21; 4.1, 4.4, 4.12, 4.15, 4.34. In this text the author uses the figures of Orestes, Ajax, and Medea as rhetorical props in demonstrating how to formulate convincing arguments. *De Inventione* 1.8.11, 1.13.18, 1.14, 1.22.31, 1.49; in this text too the case of Orestes is considered with marked frequency. *De Oratore* 1.28, 1.34, 1.59; 2.17, 2.326.

[241] See Adriana Brook's "Cicero's Use of Aeschylus' Oresteia in the Pro Milone," which argues that Cicero would have both used and expected his audience to know Greek tragedies (*Ramus* 45.1 [2016]: 45-73); and Leofranc Holford-Strevens, "Sophocles at Rome," pages 219-259 in *Sophocles Revisited: Essays Presented to Sir Hugh Lloyd-Jones*, edited by Jasper Griffin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), at 227-232 for Cicero's knowledge of all three tragedians, especially Sophocles and Euripides. A helpful introduction is Petra Schierl's "Roman Tragedy —Ciceronian Tragedy? Cicero's Influence on Our Perception of Republican Tragedy," pages 45-62 in *Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy*.

[242] Harrison, *Brill's Companion to Roman Tragedy*, xi.

[243] Christos Simelidis, writing about the reception of the genre of tragedy from the fourth century through the Byzantine period, puts it clearly: "The growth of the Christian Church had no impact on the school curriculum, as far as classical texts are concerned" ("Aeschylus in Byzantium," pages 179-202 in *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Aeschylus*, edited by Rebecca Futo Kennedy [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017], at 179).

substantively with the genre of tragedy. Such a chronological scope indicates the continued place, over centuries, of tragedies within an established cultural repertoire.

The first-century BCE to first-century CE Jewish thinker Philo provides rich evidence for the genre of tragedy's continued relevance into the Roman period. Philo shows knowledge of classical tragedians: in his *On the Eternity of the World* and *Every Good Man is Free*, he cites Aeschylus and Euripides.[244] His references to the genre of tragedy indicate in what format he knew it: he tells us, for example, that "all the wars of Greeks and barbarians between themselves or against each other" are familiar topics of the tragic stage,[245] and lists actors of tragedies.[246] More interesting in the context of this dissertation, Philo refers to the Polyxena depicted by Euripides in a discussion about dying nobly, holding her up as an *exemplum* of noble behavior.[247] Philo thus demonstrates knowledge not just of specific tragedians and characters in their plays, but performances and actors of tragedies.

The Christian Tatian shows the standard preference for Euripides in later antiquity, quoting Euripides multiple times and identifying him as a figure who passed down poetry all the way from Heraclitus.[248] In Tatian's imagination Euripides occupied the prominent role of bearing

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[244] *On the Eternity of the World* 6.30 for Euripides; 9.49 for Aeschylus. *Every Good Man is Free* 15 for an extensive quotation from Euripides' *Heracles* (Euripides is referred to by name); 17.116 for quotation of Euripides' *Hecuba*, citing Polyxena as an example of an admirable willing death; 20.141 for quotation of Euripides' *Auge*; he also quotes a tragedian named Ion at 19.134 and cites a fragment of Euripides at 20.146 and possibly 21.152. *Every Good Man is Free* 20.143 for citation of Aeschylus by name, although the quotation is uncertain. The absence of Sophocles is representative of his last-place status in popularity at this time period, although David Litwa provides compelling evidence for the continued popularity of Sophocles up to the first and second centuries CE at least ("Paul the 'god' in Acts 28," especially at 708). In addition to these explicit invocations of tragedians and plays by Philo, he also refers more generally to tragedies and their subject matter as depicted onstage at *Embassy to Gaius* 105 and *Rewards and Punishments* 23.136.

[245] *On the Decalogue* 153.

[246] *Embassy to Gaius* 105.

[247] *Every Good Man is Free* 17.116.

[248] For Heraclitus, *Address to the Greeks* 3; for quotation of Euripides, 24; for quotation of an unknown tragedian, 8.

Greek heritage through the ages, an important reference point in an address to a Greek audience that aims to ensure Christianity stands within a lineage passed down through centuries via important personae.

Recall too, from above, the satirist Lucian, who wrote the *Death of Peregrinus*—a text likened to Christian martyr stories—explicitly in the manner of a tragedy.[249] Lucian and other writers of the Roman period are prime examples of authors who, as Easterling says, "use the imagery of the theatre, including tragedy, to express views of human experience that they could expect readers to recognise and share. This intense penetration of the language and literature of antiquity gave tragedy a special imaginative status that did not ultimately depend upon performance traditions for its survival."[250] To be sure, performance traditions of tragedies continued to exist in the first few centuries CE, but Easterling's note on readerly intelligibility indicates familiarity with tragedies continued through other means as well—such as, with Lucian, incorporating tragic elements into his storytelling and in education.

Another writer who displays this tendency is Apuleius, who, in his *Metamorphoses*, tells a story about a stepmother "turning covetous eyes to her stepson."[251] Apuleius directs his reader to be aware of the type of story she engages: "know that you are reading a tragedy."[252] The story recalls Phaedra and her love for Hippolytus, the subject of tragedies by both Euripides and Seneca. By explicitly reaching out to readers' knowledge of tragedies, Lucian and Apuleius

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[249] Lucian, *Death of Peregrinus* 3.

[250] Easterling, "From Repertoire to Canon," 226, specifically with regard to Lucian, Heliodorus, Diodorus, and Plutarch, who all incorporate the genre of tragedy into their distinct genres of essay, novel, and history. Her next sentence has been an inspiration for the present project: "The task of capturing in detail the reverberations of tragedy in later antiquity is one of the most interesting challenges for contemporary critics."

[251] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.2.

[252] Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 10.2: Iam ergo, lector optime, scito te tragoediam, non fabulam, legere et a socco ad cothurnum ascendere: tragedy is juxtaposed with *fabula*.

indicate to us what they expect their audiences to know, reinforcing for us a sense of tragedies' ubiquity and intelligibility during the first few centuries CE and beyond.

Clement quotes Sophocles and Euripides in multiple texts, as well as refers to plays by tragedians, sometimes by name, and at other times by vaguely referring to "the tragedian" as a way of glossing one of the three classical tragedians. In his *Paedagogus*, for example, Clement quotes Sophocles' *Oedipus at Colonus.*[253] In the same text he quotes "the tragedian" Euripides' *Orestes.*[254] He also provides an odd aside that depends upon widespread knowledge of tragic imagery for the point to land when he says that one ought to close their mouth while exhaling, lest they resemble a tragic mask.[255] Elsewhere Clement tries to convince his Greek audience—using tragedies as a crucial point of leverage—that Christianity only improves upon the worldview non-Christians hold, a view represented in tragedies.[256] Thus to Clement, knowledge of and reference to tragedies signals proper training in cultural *paideia*, and allows him to lodge arguments that are accessible and inviting to his audience.

Philostratus provides humorous evidence for tragedies' ubiquity in the third century. Describing Apollonius of Tyana's visit to Spain, he notes that some there are not Hellenized, and this is revealed by the fact that they have never seen a tragedy.[257] To Philostratus, writing in the third century about events in the first century, these Spaniards were outliers, worthy of note for

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[253] *Paedagogus* 2.8.72 refers to Sophocles by name and quotes line 83 of *Oedipus at Colonus*, important attestation to Sophocles given that most of the examples I have so far presented refer to Aeschylus and Euripides.

[254] *Paedagogus* 3.41 quotes lines 588-590 of Euripides' *Orestes*.

[255] *Paedagogus* 2.7.60.

[256] Clement, *Exhortation to the Greeks* 7: εἰ γὰρ καὶ τὰ μάλιστα ἐναύσματά τινα τοῦ λόγου τοῦ θείου λαβόντες Ἕλληνες ὀλίγα ἄττα τῆς ἀληθείας ἐφθέγξαντο, προσμαρτυροῦσι μὲν τὴν δύναμιν αὐτῆς οὐκ ἀποκεκρυμμένην, σφᾶς δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐλέγχουσιν ἀσθενεῖς, οὐκ ἐφικόμενοι τοῦ τέλους.

[257] Philostratus, *Vita Apolonii* 5.5-5.8; see relevant discussion in Nervegna, "Staging Scenes as Plays?" 14.

their unlearned lack of exposure to tragedies. In the third to fourth centuries CE, Eusebius similarly anticipates and draws on his audiences' acquaintance with tragedies, using this cultural knowledge as a way to describe the darkness the reader will soon encounter in his story of Herod and his crimes: for this story, Eusebius reports, is "darker than in any tragic drama."[258]

As these examples attest, in the centuries leading up to martyr texts' composition, the genre of tragedy remained a cultural referent, both to performances that took place onstage and to literature that was available in written texts and educational curricula. In fact, references to tragedies in writings of antiquity extend beyond this period. The bishop Asterius compares the martyr Euphemia to the tragic Medea, specifically commenting on the latter's ability to evoke pity and anger simultaneously.[259] The context of the discussion is significant: this comparison takes place within a fourth-century CE sermon. Important for the focus of this project, Asterius refers to Euphemia's martyrdom as a tragedy and even goes so far as to allude to her story effecting the tragic feature of catharsis, too.

This comparison of a martyr to a tragic sufferer is crucial: for one thing, contrary to those who argue that Aristotle's categories of the genre of tragedy—which include pity, fear, and catharsis—are not exportable to other historical contexts than that of the text of the *Poetics*, Asterius lets us know that some of these features were recognizably tragic conventions still in the fourth century CE. More importantly, he puts a Christian martyr story within that framework of the genre of tragedy. As Elizabeth Castelli puts it, "When Asterius compares her emotional rage

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[258] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.8.4: οὐδὲ οἷόν τε νῦν καταλέγειν, τραγικὴν ἅπασαν δραματουργίαν ἐπισκιαζούσης τῆς περὶ τούτων ὑποθέσεως, ἣν εἰς πλάτος ἐν ταῖς κατ᾽ αὐτὸν ἱστορίαις ὁ Ἰώσηπος διελήλυθεν.

[259] Asterius' *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, translated by Elizabeth Castelli; pages 463-468 in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, edited by Richard Valantasis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); see also the discussion by Castelli in *Martyrdom and Memory*, 130-131.

to that of Medea on the verge of murdering her children, he calls up a canonical scene from the mythological and theatrical heritage of Greek culture and positions Euphemia in paradoxical relation to the tragic tradition."[260] The genre of tragedy, for Asterius, is the one that most corresponds with Euphemia's story of martyrdom and gives it its cultural legibility.

I want to end this section with a tragic dramatization of the passion of Christ, a cento entitled *Christus patiens*. A "patchwork" genre that knits together sections of disparate text(s) in order to create a new text, the cento relies on the very intelligibility that I have been arguing conditions readers who are habituated to a specific historical and cultural context.[261] In this case, the cento reports the suffering and death of Christ by weaving together lines from Euripidean and Aeschylean tragedies—and what is more, it does so "in the verse form of Greek tragedies": iambic trimeters.[262]

Christus patiens tells the story of Jesus' so-called "passion," death, and resurrection, using a combination of the poet's own lines, lines from Euripidean plays, which comprise roughly a third of the text,[263] and lines from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*.[264] Courtney Friesen claims that using features from the genre of tragedy to tell Jesus' story would have made intuitive sense:

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[260] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 131.

[261] This description of the cento and a helpful characterization of the form and its inherent exegetical nature is from Karla Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus: Rewriting Euripides in the Byzantine Cento *Christus Patiens*," pages 140-160 in idem, *The Baptized Muse: Early Christian Poetry as Cultural Authority* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), at 141-144.

[262] Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 144.

[263] Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 144.

[264] A list of the references that are "clearly modelled on" verses from *Agamemnon* can be found in Easterling, "Agamemnon for the Ancients," 29 fn 22. Easterling takes this use of Aeschylus as a counter to the impression that perhaps Aeschylus received comparably less attention than Euripides because his work did not recommend itself for gnomic restating the way Euripides' does. See also Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 144-145, who also notes that it is possible more tragedies are used for the cento than modern scholars can detect on the basis of surviving evidence.

"A natural point of contact with Greek tragedy exists in the passion of Christ," because of shared thematic elements wherein "the divine hero conflicts with a tyrant and is slaughtered in a context of sacrificial ritual."[265] Multiple plays of Euripides are used to construct the text, most frequently *Medea*, *Bacchae*, *Hippolytus*, *Orestes*, *Troades*, *Hecuba*, and *Phoenissae*. The fourth-century play *Rhesus* appears as well, and single lines from several more Euripidean tragedies appear. For the modern scholar, detecting Euripides throughout takes no sleuthing; the text reports that it tells its tale in the manner of Euripides.[266]

This cache of source material is not a casual choice. Karla Pollmann emphasizes that the tension between those texts taken as source material for a cento and the new text that utilizes that material to its own ends "must be recognized by the readers in order to appreciate the specific quality of a cento."[267] In order to recognize this tension, readers or hearers needed to recognize the original texts:

> It is important to note that only canonical texts that were recognized as authoritative are used for the composition of centos, as only these were considered worthy of the effort to interpret them. Moreover, only those canonical texts would have been familiar enough to the readers to allow them to recognize the centonic technique.[268]

We can infer, then, that at the time of *Christus patiens*' composition, these texts by Euripides and Aeschylus must have been well-known, such that their reconstitution to tell the story of Jesus would have been intelligible to its audience.

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[265] Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, 38.

[266] Line 3: κατ' Εὐριπίδην.

[267] Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 143.

[268] Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 144.

That time of composition is a thorny issue. The cento was first dated to the fourth century, because manuscripts attributed it to Gregory of Nazianzus and the cento form enjoyed popularity in the fourth and fifth centuries CE.[269] While some still maintain this date, the dominant opinion now is that the text is a product of the eleventh century at the earliest, on both internal and external evidence.[270] It is striking that both dates can be defended vehemently, and that, for both dates, deep knowledge of Euripides at the level of citing lines from plays is no obstacle to defending their theory. To put this another way, it seems as likely that scholars in the fourth or fifth century might have had access to knowledge that would enable them to knit together stories from tragedies as it is that eleventh- or twelfth-century monastics could. This speaks volumes about the reception of the genre of tragedy through the centuries.

The cento had an inherently "interpretative-exegetical objective."[271] As such, it relied on readers to perform multiple operations: to discern the source of the original text in the cento, to read and interpret the new text it presents, and to relate the two to one another dialectically, such that the retold story gets its meaning from the contours of its reconstitution. Even if the text is indeed Byzantine, as the most recent, persuasive research suggests, what this story about Jesus in the style of a tragedy suggests is that even up to the Byzantine period, the genre of tragedy remained well-known, including to Christians, and constituted a highly legible component of cultural *paideia*. This node of cultural capital was used to make theological points, to demonstrate authority, and even proved suitable for telling the central Christian narrative.

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[269] These took the form of Homeric and Vergilian centos that retold biblical stories (Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 144-145).

[270] Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 148 for her evaluation that the text dates to the eleventh or twelfth century. Internal evidence includes lexical items not well-attested before the eleventh century; external evidence includes its murky manuscript history.

[271] Pollmann, "Jesus Christ and Dionysus," 141.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have first provided evidence that educational curricula in antiquity set a firm foundation for wide knowledge of tragedies throughout antiquity. I then provided a brief history of the genre of tragedy, drawing from research in classical reception. This discipline has overthrown the outdated opinion that the genre of tragedy died, showing instead that it thrived well past the classical period. Even classical tragedies themselves lived on, as tragedians' beloved plays took on canonical status. But new tragedies continued to be written and performed as well, in the Hellenistic period and the Roman Empire. Furthermore, valuable textual evidence tells us that tragedies were intelligible past the classical period: Ezekiel's *Exagoge*, for example, and, many argue, texts in the Hebrew Bible show that the genre of tragedy remained an important part of both composers' and readers' repertoire. In the Roman period, tragedies also continued on in new performance genres, like pantomime.

In the third part of this chapter, I summarized research that shows it is more than reasonable to assume the genre of tragedy was well-known even to Christians, since numerous studies document tragic resonance with foundational Christian texts: the New Testament gospels, *Acts*, and the Pauline letters. These studies use tools like Aristotle's *Poetics,* comparisons of themes and characters in tragedies, and comparison with plots of plays like the *Bacchae* and *Philoctetes* to demonstrate the ubiquity of tragedies and their resonance with Christian texts.

Third and finally, I have collated voices in antiquity that refer explicitly to tragedies. I showed not only that a range of thinkers up to the sixth century were familiar with tragedies and their themes and stories, but also that this knowledge was systematized. Acquaintance with

tragedies, in other words, was not a happenstance; knowledge of tragedies was cultural capital, part of participating in and demonstrating *paideia*. On the basis of this evidence, it is plausible that familiarity with the generic features of tragedies meant that audiences had expectations that *MPionius* could anticipate its readers having. In the process, I have set the stage for examination of generic features of tragedy within a specific text: the Christian martyr text known as *MPionius*.

Chapter Two:
Recognition, Reversal, and Suffering in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

I just argued that the ubiquity of tragedies throughout antiquity means the genre helped constitute the formative context in which Christian texts such as the *Martyrdom of Pionius* were composed and read. Accessible via performances and texts, tragedies were also a core part of educational curricula and the subject of visual imagery, decorating sarcophagi,[272] theater reliefs,[273] and walls of houses.[274] That is, in this third and fourth century context, people encountered tragedies in a number of ways: aurally, orally, visually.

Identifying tragedies as part of the cultural repertoire that informed the writing and reading of martyr literature can help us see features that are known to us as tragic features, but that also animate martyr texts. There is every reason to think that an audience's cultural familiarity with characteristic features of tragedies would prime them to be attentive to similar features when they were encountered in martyr literature. In this chapter I discuss three such signals: the plot-structure features of reversal, recognition, and suffering.

These three are important plot-structure features of tragedies as understood by Aristotle in his fourth-century BCE text the *Poetics.* In this chapter I demonstrate that the *Martyrdom of*

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[272] Mary Ann Sisto, "Scene di ispirazione tragica, forme vascolari, contesti tombali," pages 135-46 in *Teatro greco postclassico e teatro latino: teorie e prassi drammatica: atti del convegno internazionale, Roma 16-18 ottobre 2001*, edited by Antonio Martina (Roma: Università degli studi Roma Tre, Dipartimento di studi sul mondo antico, 2003).

[273] For the Theater of Dionysus in Athens, see *The Pronomos Vase and its Context*, edited by Oliver Taplin and Rosie Wyles (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 85 and John Richard Green, "On Seeing and Depicting the Theatre in Classical Athens," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 32.1 (1991): 15-50; more broadly, John Richard Green, *Theatre in Ancient Greek Society* (London: Routledge, 1994).

[274] See David Balch's "Paul's Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal 3:1) in Light of Paintings and Sculptures of Suffering and Death in Pompeian and Roman Houses," pages 84-109 in *Early Christian Families in Context: An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, edited by David Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003) and "The Suffering of Isis/Io and Paul's Portrait of Christ Crucified (Gal 3:1): Frescoes in Pompeian and Roman Houses and in the Temple of Isis in Pompeii," *Journal of Religion* 83.1 (2003): 24-55; for the depiction of tragic scenes in the terrace houses of Ephesus, see Norbert Zimmermann and Sabine Ladstätter's *Wall Painting in Ephesos from the Hellenistic to the Byzantine Period* (Istanbul: Ege Yayınları, 2011).

Pionius unfolds by making use of these same features. Specifically, *MPionius* uses imagery of physical change to signal audience recognition of Pionius as an *exemplum* of proper Christian piety. Ultimately, the moments of recognition lead toward a dramatic reversal in which death is re-interpreted as life.

By employing these structural features shared with tragedies, *MPionius* capitalizes on expectations of ancient audiences already attuned to these plot structures. Recognition, reversal, and suffering, well known to ancient audiences as a plot-package through tragedies, in *MPionius* combine to issue in a new form of *paideia*, and to show the efficacy of this *paideia* in reversing the martyr's trajectory, taking the martyr not from life to death, but the opposite. By showing how these plot-structural features of *MPionius* draw on familiar features from the genre of tragedy and then turn them to its own ends, this chapter forwards the most comprehensive argument of this dissertation, which is that the genre of tragedy should be considered an important historical element that informed the context in which martyr texts were composed and received.

Aristotle and the *Poetics*

Written in the fourth-century BCE, Aristotle's *Poetics* theorizes the origin and form of Greek tragedy.[275] The text has been considered a valuable reflection on the genre of tragedy due to its temporal proximity to classical tragedies and its status as the earliest work of literary criticism on the genre.[276] While it considers multiple classical tragedies in order to demonstrate its theoretical points, the *Poetics* is not strictly a text about classical tragedy; it refers also to tragedians and tragedies of the fourth century.[277] The text is both descriptive and prescriptive: while it analyzes tragedies' function on the basis of descriptive evidence for the contents and form of a wide range of tragic plays, it is well-known for its strong opinions on what features and subjects make the best tragedies.[278]

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[275] Aristotle sets out to do so for comedy as well, but that portion of the text is lost. In their recently published critical edition, Leonardo Tarán and Dimitri Gutas suggest the change in book form from roll to codex may be the cause for the loss of the second portion (*Aristotle Poetics*, translated and edited by Leonardo Tarán and Dimitri Gutas [Leiden: Brill, 2012], 33). The text and translation of the *Poetics* that I provide is from Stephen Halliwell (Loeb Classical Library 199; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995). The literature on the *Poetics* is extensive. See, most influentially, Gerald Else's *Aristotle's Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1957); Donald W. Lucas' commentary *Aristotle: "Poetics"* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968); Elizabeth Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures: Aristotle on Plot and Emotion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); the collection *Essays on Aristotle's Poetics*, edited by Amélie Oksenberg Rorty (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), remains oft-quoted even though not a systematic study; Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), reprinted from the London: Duckworth, 1986 edition and including an up-to-date (in 1998) review of literature; Martha Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001; reprinted from 1986).

[276] Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 8.

[277] Some of Aristotle's contemporaries mentioned in the *Poetics* include Theodectes, Astydamas, Carcinus, Polyidus, and Dicaeogenes. See Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 328, who considers these writers' names as a tool in dating the *Poetics*; Agnieszka Kotlińska-Toma does the same in *Hellenistic Tragedy*, 16 and 59.

[278] For example, Aristotle separates tragedies into simple and complex plots, far preferring the latter, which makes use of recognitions and reversals (*Poetics* 1452a12-1453a39); he also prefers that recognition and reversal happen simultaneously (*Poetics* 1452a33-34). Along with showing preference for certain features and structures of tragedies, the *Poetics* champions specific plays above others. It refers most frequently to Euripides' *Iphigenia among the Taurians* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus* to demonstrate features it discusses (Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 40 for a list of all the *Poetics*' mentions of these two plays, fn 58). For the tendency to class as tragedy only what Aristotle calls the best tragedy, thus dismissing the descriptive nature of the *Poetics*, see Chapter 1 (especially at 3) in Henry Ansgar Kelly, *Ideas and Forms of Tragedy from Aristotle to the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Methodological Considerations

The methodological choice to use Aristotle's *Poetics* to determine whether a text is or resembles a tragedy is a controversial one. First, its fourth-century BCE date, considered illuminating for its proximity to classical tragedies, has rightly been questioned as a useful tool for evaluating texts composed centuries later. In addition to its early date is its uncertain history of use. Unlike other Aristotelian texts, the *Poetics* seems not to have been widely used in antiquity, enjoying a revival of interest only in the Renaissance period, following its translation from Greek in the thirteenth century.[279] Based on these two factors, scholars have questioned the extent to which ancient audiences later than the Hellenistic period could have had the *Poetics* in mind when composing or considering tragedies.

The drawbacks to using Aristotle to evaluate a text's relationship to the genre of tragedy are clear. Yet at the same time, in any comparison, an identifiable set of comparands is required, and Aristotle's categories have the advantage that, while prescriptive, they are also descriptive: they describe a wide range of features contained in the tragedies which Aristotle surveyed, both classical and fourth century. Describing such a wide array of texts shows Aristotle acknowledges variability of form. Moreover, the fact that classical tragedies did continue to exist throughout

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[279] Tarán-Gutas, "Introduction" to *Aristotle Poetics* and Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 286-323 provide the most direct and succinct information on the topic. Halliwell notes that the text was not well known in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, although he identifies a few possible ancient references to it (those references are listed in *Aristotle's Poetics*, 290 fn 7; he is more skeptical about the possibility than others). It was preserved, he says, through the literary culture of Byzantium through two Greek manuscripts, then translated into Latin, English, and Dutch in the Renaissance period (291-293). Tarán-Gutas nuance the historical picture by pointing out that there is evidence in antiquity for use of the *Poetics*, but "neither the orthodox Aristotelians nor the Neoplatonic commentators exhibit any interest in the core of the *Poetics*, Aristotle's theory of Tragedy and Epic. Even the fragmentary evidence provided by literary and rhetorical authors shows no real interest in Aristotle's views but is limited to using the *Poetics* as a source for references to poets and to their procedures" (35). See Pelagia Goulimari, "Aristotle and Tragedy: from Poetics to Postcolonial Tragedy," pages 25-48 in *Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2015) at 33-34 for an extremely cursory, but convenient, description of precisely which components of the text became the focus when the *Poetics* "became canonical": the "Aristotelian unities" of time and place, for example, at the expense of focus on the tragic emotions (33; see too for this topic Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 287).

antiquity in performance and texts, including some of the very plays Aristotle cited, using his schema is warranted for heuristic purposes; it is possible to view the very features Aristotle described as "tragic" within the very plays in which he identified them. Thus the plays' continued existence and use grant Aristotle's theorization of them continued relevance.[280]

But there is another reason we might still consider the *Poetics*' categories not just a convenient, but a worthy heuristic—namely, that elements discussed in the *Poetics* continued to be recognizable, even centuries later, as "tragic" features. I mentioned in Chapter One that the fourth-century bishop Asterius likened the story of a Christian martyr, Euphemia, to that of the tragic figure Medea, specifically because the two similarly evoke pity and anger in their audiences.[281] Moreover, Euphemia's story causes a catharsis in its audience: "seeing it for oneself will have a salutary effect."[282] These features—the "tragic emotions" that a plot evokes,

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[280] This is not to say that the classical tragedies Aristotle discusses in the fourth century are identical to the first stagings of classical plays in the fifth; nor is it to say that even the same tragedies discussed by Aristotle that remain extant today and were in use throughout antiquity are all identical to one another. Csapo-Slater remind us that texts undergo their most drastic alteration from an "original" form in their first 100 years (*The Context of Ancient Drama*, 1)—this is roughly the time difference between fifth century stagings and Aristotle's writing of the *Poetics*, and even then it is necessary to take into account the drastic change that had to occur through the process of standardizing into written form a staged and then re-staged play. After the point of composition, texts continued to exist in written form, and basic knowledge of textual criticism cautions against assuming perfect textual stability. In this dissertation I present a strong case for tragedies' continued presence throughout antiquity, as well as for correspondence, to some degree, between the contents and forms of classical plays and their iterations up to the present day. While I am convinced of this, I hold simultaneously that this correspondence has never been exact. Yet it is significant that there exists a "paper trail," so to speak, of descriptions and quotations of tragedies throughout antiquity, some of which we still possess.

[281] Asterius' *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*; see also the discussion by Castelli in *Martyrdom and Memory*, 128-131 for general discussion; 130, 131 for the point here. She notes: "When Asterius compares her emotional range to that of Medea on the verge of murdering her children, he calls up a canonical scene from the mythological and theatrical heritage of Greek culture and positions Euphemia in paradoxical relation to the tragic tradition" (131).

[282] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 132, commenting on Asterius, *Ekphrasis*, 11.3.3.

and the effect of a tragic catharsis—are features mentioned by Aristotle in the *Poetics* as defining features of tragedies.[283]

I do not mean to suggest that Asterius' allusion or reference to such features in the fourth century CE necessitates his intimate knowledge of the *Poetics*. Rather, it is possible that features Aristotle identified as tragic in the fourth century BCE were still recognizable as "tragic" features centuries later because of the continued presence of tragedies in late antique culture, which preserved them. The continued presence of tragedies meant that their features could continue to be described, and clearly, to Asterius, categories introduced by Aristotle in the fourth century BCE were still suitably descriptive categories for describing the *Medea* known to him in the fourth century CE—and for describing a Christian martyr story.

Those scholars who draw on Aristotelian categories to detect resonance with tragedies do so from this standpoint.[284] Most recently, in his work on the tragic qualities of the *Gospel of Mark*, Jeff Jay has mounted a persuasive case that categories from the *Poetics* can be used to detect tragic features in some New Testament texts, just as they are used to detect the genre of tragedy in texts of non-Christian genres, such as histories, biographies, and novels. As I noted in Chapter One, Jay eschews the use of "genre" and speaks instead of tragic "mode" in the *Gospel*

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[283] I noted the emotions of pity and fear briefly above; for catharsis, *Poetics* 1449b24-28. Analysis of these topics is outside the scope of this dissertation; an excellent treatment of the relationship of catharsis to the tragic emotions is Belfiore's *Tragic Pleasures;* Chapter Eight is especially illuminating for the *Poetics* and Chapter Nine treats catharsis in Aristotle's corpus more broadly, which offers far more material for analysis than the *Poetics*.

[284] See, among others, Brant, *Dialogue and Drama,* especially 42-70, where she surveys recognition, reversal, and *pathos;* Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*, 50-55 (most succinct: 51; at 139 he calls his a "genre approach"); Hitchcock, "Is the Fourth Gospel a Drama?" 15-16; Martin Hengel, *Studies in the Gospel of Mark*, translated by John Bowden (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1985). Parsenios, "No Longer in the World," rejects the use of Aristotle's *Poetics* as a means of viewing the *Gospel of John* as a tragedy, lamenting the fact that this method is the one most frequently practiced, and as an alternative relies "on actual dramas" (2 fn 4; on the juxtaposition of methods—Aristotle alone versus use of dramas—see too Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 20; also 21 fn 53 for his approval of Brant's *Dialogue and Drama* for being an unusual example of the use of both methods). Jacobson and Lanfranchi use fifth century tragedies as *comparanda* to the *Exagoge*, rather than Aristotelian criteria (*The Exagoge of Ezekiel*, 23-28; *L'Exagoge d'Ezéchiel la Tragique*, 18-21), though both also at times resort to Aristotelian categories in addition. See Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 20-22 on the prevalence of this general methodological practice.

of Mark. Indeed, Jay includes all three features I will foreground below under tragic "mode."[285] Scholars like Kasper Bro Larsen and Pierluigi Lanfranchi have this point in mind when they suggest ancient audiences would have recalled the genre of tragedy upon a text's mention of *hamartia*, another feature of tragedy named by the *Poetics*.[286] Scholars who focus on Roman tragedies, too, often find use in retaining Aristotelian categories to describe both the features and function of those tragedies.[287] And the approach is warranted—Horace, for example, discusses the pitfalls of using the *deus ex machina* in tragedies, disapproving of it, as did Aristotle before him.[288] The fact that Horace can rely on his audience's knowledge of tragic features that are also described in the *Poetics* is strong impetus for considering such features in tragedies without having to posit in addition a chain of unbroken knowledge of the *Poetics*. The presence of features that Aristotle identifies as constitutive of the genre of tragedy within both later tragedies

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[285] Recognition, reversal, and the emotions that the two in tandem evoke are all included in Jay's typology of "mode" (for recognition, 88; reversal, 80-83; emotions, 92-93, though he includes more emotions than pity and fear—anger, for example, he argues is central). In addition to the features in his typology that overlap with Aristotelian categories, he includes revenge, lamentation, and the supernatural (under this heading he includes the *deus ex machina*, on which see next chapter).

[286] Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 172; Lanfranchi, "The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," 132. Other examples could be proffered too. Lucian's *de Saltatione,* for example, remarks that upon seeing a pantomime performed, "you will become better in character through familiarity with such a spectacle, when you see the assembly detesting misdeeds, weeping over victims of injustice" (73). Such didactic and affective resonances stirred by the performance of a pantomime—"danced tragedy"—recall the function of the tragic emotions and catharsis described in the *Poetics*. This is not to say that Lucian must be aware of Aristotle's *Poetics* and its concepts of catharsis and pity/fear, but, rather, that tragedies retained the function of "learning through suffering" that Lucian describes; Aristotle need not be in the mind of the composer of this text for that to be the case.

[287] One excellent example is Gregory Staley's analysis of Seneca's tragedies using Aristotle's categories; he focuses especially on catharsis: *Seneca and the Idea of Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially 66-72; 4-5 for his argument that Seneca knew and had in mind the *Poetics*.

[288] Horace, *Ars Poetica* 189-192: Neve minor neu sit quinto productior actu fabula quae posci volt et spectata reponi. nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus inciderit, nec quarta loqui persona laboret. See Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 288-290 for the relationship between Horace and Aristotle. Horace was not alone; others in antiquity complained about the *deus ex machina* ending as well: Plutarch in *Life of Themistocles* 10.1 and 32.3, and *Life of Lysander* 24.1-2; and Polybius, *Histories* 3.48.8. Lucian may refer to the device as well in his story about Peregrinus, and at any rate Jay likens the death of Peregrinus to a play ending *ex machina* (*The Tragic in Mark*, 101). For all the complaints about the device, it was highly visible and recognizable as an element of tragedies, no less because of the popularity of Euripides, the tragic poet who uses the device most frequently. See next chapter for more detail.

and later discussions of tragedies thus present solid warrant to consider the *Poetics*' categories as an heuristic device.

My approach in what follows is to appeal to the descriptive side of Aristotle's *Poetics*. I do not use Aristotle as a historically determinative template in which to fit the genre of tragedy—there is no evidence of him being used this way in late antiquity—but as an heuristic guide that provides categories to structure my analysis of *MPionius*. Specifically, I argue that the features that to Aristotle comprise the "soul of tragedy"—reversal, recognition, and suffering—also organize the plot of *MPionius*.

Tragic Plot Structure: Reversal, Recognition, and Suffering

With these methodological considerations in place, let me turn to the features the *Poetics* privileges as central to the genre of Greek tragedy: reversal[289], recognition[290], and suffering.

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[289] For the concept of *peripeteia*, see Elizabeth Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures*, especially at 141-153, and her earlier, slightly simpler "ΠΕΡΙΠΕΤΕΙΑ as Discontinuous Action: Aristotle 'Poetics' 11.1452a22-29" (*Classical Philology* 83 [1988]: 183-194); Martha Nussbaum's *Fragility of Goodness*; Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, especially 212-213; both Halliwell and Belfiore engage especially with I. M. Glanville's "Note on ΠΕΡΙΠΕΤΕΙΑ," *Classical Quarterly* 41.3-4 (1947): 73-78. Crucial voices within the debate over whether *peripeteia* constitutes a reversal of intention or expectation are Johannes Vahlen, *Beiträge zu Aristoteles' Poetik* (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1914), especially at 34-35; Frank L. Lucas, *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Hogarth, 1928), 91-97; and Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, especially 131-139.

[290] On the topic of recognition as an identifiable literary device throughout antiquity as well as beyond, the crucial study is still Terence Cave's *Recognitions: A Study in Poetics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988). A compendium that explores the cognitive component of recognition is the intriguing *Recognition and Modes of Knowledge: Anagnorisis from Antiquity to Contemporary Theory*, edited by Teresa Russo (Edmonton, Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 2013). Some scholars hold that Aristotle's notion of *hamartia* can only be understood within the context of its relationship to recognition: see Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 385, as well as Ho Kim, "Aristotle's 'Hamartia Reconsidered," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 105 (2010): 33-52, rooted in Else's study. Simon Bennett's "Recognition in Greek Tragedy: Psychoanalytic on Aristotelian Perspectives," pages 109-127 in *Freud and Forbidden Knowledge*, edited by Peter Rudnytsky and Ellen Spitz (New York: New York University Press, 1994) touches on the relationship between recognition and self-recognition at 110-118. For ancient audiences' expectations of the motif of recognition as an integral part of theatrical experience, see Martin Revermann's "The Competence of Theatre Audiences in Fifth and Fourth Century Athens," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 126 (2006): 99-124 and Marco de Martinis, "Dramaturgy of the Spectator," *The Drama Review* 31.2 (1987): 100-114. These latter two studies are especially interesting in the light of Cave's observation that unlike reversal, recognition remained heavily under-theorized up to the point of his writing, the "least respectable term in Aristotelian poetics," despite its ubiquity (see *Recognitions*, 3-4 and 39), and even "embarrassing" (Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 31, drawing directly on Cave, *Recognitions*, 1).

These three features fall under the heading "plot," which joins other formal elements of tragedies: spectacle, character, diction, song, and thought.[291] These other features, though, pale in comparison to plot, which remains, for Aristotle, the core of the genre of tragedy.[292] Its primacy is clear in the description Aristotle offers for plot, which he calls *mythos*: it is, as he says, the "soul of tragedy,"[293] and this "soul" is comprised of reversal, recognition, and suffering.[294] This combination of features so constitutes a tragedy that Aristotle remarks that "without action there could not be a tragedy, but there could be without characterization."[295] The "action" of the play is its movement via recognition and reversal, so central that characters are subordinate to the movements of plot.

The first plot component discussed is reversal (*peripeteia*), an exact opposite to the actions that are being performed.[296] This swing of events, Aristotle notes, must be governed still by what is probable or necessary. He details these stipulations by describing "necessary and

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[291] *Poetics* 1450a8-10.

[292] *Poetics* 1450a22-23; at 1450b Aristotle ranks plot and characterization relative to one another; characterization ranks second: ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἷον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας, δεύτερον δὲ τὰ ἤθη.

[293] *Poetics* 1450a38-39: ἀρχὴ μὲν οὖν καὶ οἷον ψυχὴ ὁ μῦθος τῆς τραγῳδίας.

[294] *Poetics* 1452b9-10.

[295] *Poetics* 1450a24-25: ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγῳδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἠθῶν γένοιτ᾽ ἄν. See especially 83-110 in Belfiore, *Tragic Pleasures*. While Belfiore's text as a whole addresses the affective components of tragedies, the chapter just cited pairs plot and characterization, emphasizing that it is because of how Aristotle defines tragedy—as mimesis of *action*, rather than persons—that plot ultimately supersedes character in significance. Belfiore points out that Aristotle's argument directly responds to Plato's attacks on tragedies as ethically bankrupt. Halliwell's chapter "Action and Character" is essential reading on the topic (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 138-167). Halliwell upholds Aristotle's unequivocal avowal that plot is more important than character, noting that tragedies' entire aim is to portray a character actively entangled in the processes of life. Tragedies deal with "the essential fabric of life," rather than "the static portrayal of human character divorced from the active processes of life" (157).

[296] *Poetics* 1452a22-24: Ἔστι δὲ περιπέτεια μὲν ἡ εἰς τὸ ἐναντίον τῶν πραττομένων μεταβολὴ καθάπερ εἴρηται, καὶ τοῦτο δὲ ὥσπερ λέγομεν κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς ἢ ἀναγκαῖον.

probable" development as that which emerges "from the very structure of the plot,"[297] again emphasizing that a tragedy's plot is of prime importance. Stephen Halliwell clarifies what exactly is opposed: in a reversal, he says, "the outcome of events is the opposite of what is expected by those involved actively in them (and also, in a sense, by the audience)."[298] Halliwell illuminates Aristotle's claim that *peripeteia* constitutes a "complete swing in the direction of events" by drawing attention to audience expectation—both the in-text audience and the text's readership.

Recognition (*anagnorisis*), the *Poetics* relates, is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, leading to friendship or to enmity, and involving matters which bear on prosperity or adversity."[299] That is, a character's gained knowledge has a part to play in their circumstances going forward, since the recognition relates to their "prosperity or adversity" (εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν): bad or good fortune is the outcome of a recognition.[300] Multiple forms of recognition are attested.[301] The "least artistic," Aristotle notes, are recognitions through tokens.[302] A range of devices might be considered tokens: Aristotle distinguishes between congenital markings, such

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[297] *Poetics* 1452a19-21: ταῦτα δὲ δεῖ γίνεσθαι ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τοῦ μύθου, ὥστε ἐκ τῶν προγεγενημένων συμβαίνειν ἢ ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἢ κατὰ τὸ εἰκὸς γίγνεσθαι ταῦτα· διαφέρει γὰρ πολὺ τὸ γίγνεσθαι τάδε διὰ τάδε ἢ μετὰ τάδε.

[298] Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 212; the reference is to *Poetics* 1452a22-24.

[299] *Poetics* 1452a30-32: ἀναγνώρισις δέ, ὥσπερ καὶ τοὔνομα σημαίνει, ἐξ ἀγνοίας εἰς γνῶσιν μεταβολή, ἢ εἰς φιλίαν ἢ ἔχθραν, τῶν πρὸς εὐτυχίαν ἢ δυστυχίαν ὡρισμένων.

[300] *Poetics* 1452a33.

[301] *Poetics* 1454b20-1455a20.

[302] *Poetics* 1454b20-21: εἴδη δὲ ἀναγνωρίσεως, πρώτη μὲν ἡ ἀτεχνοτάτη καὶ ᾗ πλείστῃ χρῶνται δι᾽ ἀπορίαν, ἡ διὰ τῶν σημείων.

as scars,[303] and objects, such as a piece of jewelry. While noting that tokens provide the least artistic mode of recognition, Aristotle notes that there are better and worse ways to include the device. In keeping with his preference for complex plots, he prefers those recognitions via token that coincide with reversals.[304] A step up from tokens are recognitions that occur through the effort of the poet. Aristotle considers these also "inartistic," since they follow less from the plot than from the mind of the poet.[305]

A third kind of recognition occurs through memory, when "the sight of something brings awareness" that had previously eluded the character.[306] A fourth is that through reasoning, when characters infer their fate on the basis of what happens to other characters. An example Aristotle uses is Orestes, who infers that his fate is to be sacrificed, since his sister was too.[307] This form of recognition, Aristotle asserts, is second-best. The "best of all" should come as no surprise: it is "recognition ensuing from the events themselves, where the emotional impact comes from a probable sequence."[308] In this superior mode of recognition, events of the plot govern recognition, like when, in Euripides' *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, Aristotle judges it probable

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[303] Odysseus' scar as a token of recognition would become perhaps the most famous instance of recognition over time, in antiquity and up to the present—in spite of Aristotle's liking recognition by tokens least. In antiquity, Gregory of Nyssa used the recognition scene of Odysseus' scar as a literary device to aid in the construction of Macrina's saintliness in his *Life of Macrina*: Georgia Frank, "Macrina's Scar: Homeric Allusion and Heroic Identity in Gregory of Nyssa's Life of Macrina" (*Journal of Early Christian Studies* 8.4 [2000]: 511-530). In recent scholarship, the first chapter of Erich Auerbach's seminal text *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (first published in 1946) is titled "Odysseus' Scar," and the scar is also a central image in Cave's *Recognitions*, which itself gestures to Auerbach (5, 23).

[304] *Poetics* 1454b26-30: ἔστιν δὲ καὶ τούτοις χρῆσθαι ἢ βέλτιον ἢ χεῖρον, οἷον Ὀδυσσεὺς διὰ τῆς οὐλῆς ἄλλως ἀνεγνωρίσθη ὑπὸ τῆς τροφοῦ καὶ ἄλλως ὑπὸ τῶν συβοτῶν· εἰσὶ γὰρ αἱ μὲν πίστεως ἕνεκα ἀτεχνότεραι, καὶ αἱ τοιαῦται πᾶσαι, αἱ δὲ ἐκ περιπετείας, ὥσπερ ἡ ἐν τοῖς Νίπτροις, βελτίους.

[305] *Poetics* 1454b30-31: δεύτεραι δὲ αἱ πεποιημέναι ὑπὸ τοῦ ποιητοῦ, διὸ ἄτεχνοι.

[306] *Poetics* 1455a1-2: ἡ τρίτη διὰ μνήμης, τῷ αἰσθέσθαι τι ἰδόντα.

[307] *Poetics* 1455a7-9: εἰκὸς γὰρ ἔφη τὸν Ὀρέστην συλλογίσασθαι ὅτι ἥ τ᾽ ἀδελφὴ ἐτύθη καὶ αὐτῷ συμβαίνει θύεσθαι.

[308] *Poetics* 1455a15-19: πασῶν δὲ βελτίστη ἀναγνώρισις ἡ ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν πραγμάτων, τῆς ἐκπλήξεως γιγνομένης δι᾽ εἰκότων, οἷον ἐν τῷ Σοφοκλέους Οἰδίποδι καὶ τῇ Ἰφιγενείᾳ·

that Iphigenia should want to entrust the letter that facilitates her and Orestes' mutual recognition.

A brief note on what it is that is recognized, and by whom. Sometimes recognition concerns a character's identity that is at stake: a classic example is Agave's recognition of her son in the *Bacchae*, which I will discuss below. Sometimes the recognition is less of identity, and more that a character realizes that they have failed to apprehend key features of another character they already know—like when Iphigenia realizes the person with whom she has been interacting in *IT* is not merely a co-conspirator but her brother. This recognition adds crucial data about a character. These recognitions, when they occur alongside reversals, overturn the fortunes of the characters and, when doing so, the expectations of characters within the drama, the audience, or both.[309]

In the *Poetics*, far more space is devoted to explaining reversal and recognition than to suffering. Aristotle defines suffering simply as "a destructive or painful action, such as public deaths, physical agony, woundings, and other such things."[310] This suffering is often a byproduct of recognitions and reversals that take place within a tragedy, since changes in a character's fortune and knowledge often induce suffering.

Narratively speaking, these three plot devices—reversal, recognition, and suffering, the former two of which Halliwell groups together under the umbrella category of *metabolai,* change

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[309] There is no programmatic statement in the *Poetics* about who experiences reversal or a recognition; Halliwell maintains that the audience *or* characters within a play, or both, could have their expectations overturned, and is adamant about the stance because of its coincidence with Aristotle's own view (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 212 fn 15). Gerald Else, Halliwell notes, goes too far when he restricts expectations to those of the audience. Perhaps the fact that precisely who experiences the plot structural features is unemphasized reflects that it is the plot components themselves—the features of reversal, recognition, and suffering—that are most crucial, and that are requisite to code a text as resonant with the genre of tragedy.

[310] *Poetics* 1452b11-13: πάθος δέ ἐστι πρᾶξις φθαρτικὴ ἢ ὀδυνηρά, οἷον οἵ τε ἐν τῷ φανερῷ θάνατοι καὶ αἱ περιωδυνίαι καὶ τρώσεις καὶ ὅσα τοιαῦτα.

or transformation[311]—structure the events of a plot. The three in their interweaving evoke "tragic emotions" of pity and fear. The *Poetics* traces the development of tragic emotions through these plot components, noting that "what is fearful and pitiable can result from spectacle, but also from the actual structure of events, which is the higher priority and the aim of a superior poet."[312] When the capable poet combines these plot structural features effectively, the tragic emotions are produced naturally. And they arise from the inter-working of these definitively tragic plot features: "a joint recognition and reversal will yield either pity or fear, just the type of actions of which tragedy is taken to be a mimesis."[313] Tragedies' ethical and affective complexity thus resides in the reversal-recognition-suffering package, which functions most effectively when the features are related to one another in terms of plot development.[314] Together they form the crux of the narrative, ultimately structuring and giving significance to everything else that occurs:

> …the crucial constituents of the complex plot are to produce no emptily sensational effect, no mere *coup de théâtre*, but the culmination of the comprehensible design of the action. The moment or process of recognition and reversal represents the turning-point of the tragedy, the juncture at which ignorance has knowledge revealed to it, or at which action is confronted by its own unintended outcome. At the same time it is an integral part of the unity and order which the audience or reader perceives in the plot structure (and hence in the causation of the action), and in which, through sympathetic understanding, its emotions are rationally engaged.[315]

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[311] Halliwell sees *metabolai* as the umbrella category under which stand reversal and recognition, since the category denotes change and transformation. Halliwell argues that the idea of change of fortune in the *Poetics* is necessarily related not just to the tragic emotions, but to the concept *hamartia* (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 183 and especially 206-212). A complementary, superb coverage of the more general category of transformations, which will include recognitions and reversal, can be found in Cave's *Recognitions*, 30.

[312] *Poetics* 1452b1-3: Ἔστιν μὲν οὖν τὸ φοβερὸν καὶ ἐλεεινὸν ἐκ τῆς ὄψεως γίνεσθαι, ἔστιν δὲ καὶ ἐξ αὐτῆς τῆς συστάσεως τῶν πραγμάτων, ὅπερ ἐστὶ πρότερον καὶ ποιητοῦ ἀμείνονος.

[313] *Poetics* 1452a37-39: ἀλλ᾽ ἡ μάλιστα τοῦ μύθου καὶ ἡ μάλιστα τῆς πράξεως ἡ εἰρημένη ἐστίν· ἡ γὰρ τοιαύτη ἀναγνώρισις καὶ περιπέτεια ἢ ἔλεον ἕξει ἢ φόβον, οἵων πράξεων ἡ τραγῳδία μίμησις ὑπόκειται·

[314] This is what Aristotle means when he says the best kind of tragedy is one where reversal and recognition occur in combination with one another: καλλίστη δὲ ἀναγνώρισις, ὅταν ἅμα περιπετείᾳ γένηται, οἷον ἔχει ἡ ἐν τῷ Οἰδίποδι (*Poetics* 1452a32-33).

[315] Halliwell, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 213.

Recognition, reversal, and suffering are thus not incidental features of a plot; they define and shape an identifiably tragic narrative.

Although these plot structural features are classic signals of Greek tragedies, they do not appear exclusively in tragedies. This is visible in the *Poetics*, which provides as examples of recognition episodes from epic, especially Homer's *Odyssey*, which is itself a text about recognition and reversal.[316] Bro Larsen acknowledges the point when he identifies recognition as a type-scene in antiquity, helping to comprise the plots of both Greek romance and stories in the Hebrew Bible, even as it does the plots of Seneca's and classical tragedies.[317] Recognition and reversal, along with suffering, then, are not restricted only to appearing in tragedies.

This does not mean, however, that these plot-structuring features do not remain recognizably "tragic." Indeed, Michal Beth Dinkler's description of an idealized cognitive model, first discussed in the Introduction, provides a helpful way of thinking about how genre expectations are formed: not on the basis of perfect correspondence with an idealized model, but rather from an undefinable arrival at a critical mass that enables readers to match a text to a genre. On Dinkler's argument, such models come with the expectation of variation, and without the expectation that generic features only appear in at most one form.[318] In other words, just because features occur in other genres does not mean they are not also recognizably tragic,

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[316] *Poetics* 1454b19-30. The *Poetics* does not separate these examples from epic from those from tragedies; rather, in this larger section of the *Poetics*, which explicitly theorizes *tragedies*, examples from multiple genres appear.

[317] Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 55-56. He notes that "recognition appeared most frequently in the narrative and dramatic literature of the ancient, Mediterranean world" (55).

[318] Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyr Narratives," especially 325; see Introduction for more detail.

especially when they appear in combination with one another, and with other features that appear in tragedies.[319]

It should be noted that I am not the first to propose that these tragic features are also discernible in Christian texts. The motif of questioning and then learning who a character is—which is relevant to *MPionius*—has led many scholars to identify recognition scenes in the New Testament gospels, as I discussed in Chapter One, and further, to link such scenes to the genre of tragedy. Recent research to this effect has focused on the *Gospel of Mark* and *Gospel of John*. Adela Yarbro Collins succinctly analyzes the *Gospel of Mark* through the lens of plot structure devices of tragedies described in the *Poetics*, noting that recognition in the *Gospel of Mark* is rhetorically and narratively set up by questioning Jesus' identity throughout the gospel,[320] so frequent that it can described as the "Markan misunderstanding motif."[321] This frequent inquiry into Jesus' identity sets the stage for the dramatic device of recognition. Literary-historical research on the *Gospel of John* has led scholars to claim tragic recognition structures this gospel,

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[319] Jeff Jay argues that audiences in antiquity would have unmistakably identified recognition and reversal as tragic features, especially in combination, and moreover that reversal is "one of the most important and consistently attested elements of the tragic modulation in Hellenistic, Greco-Roman, and early Jewish narratives" (*The Tragic in Mark*, 81 and 185). As I have noted elsewhere, Bro Larsen argues that recognition scenes, while present in other generic models, would have resonated as tragic to ancient audiences, especially in combination with other features like *hamartia* (*Recognizing the Stranger,* 55-56); Lanfranchi agrees with him that the theme of *hamartia* would have alerted ancient audiences to recognize a text as one written in a tragic "key" ("The *Exagōgē* of Ezekiel the Tragedian," 132; the metaphor of recognizing a tragic key is Jay's, akin to Easterling's "signals" of the genre of tragedy that an ancient audience had the tools to identify ["From Repertoire to Canon," 212]). Halliwell puts it most succinctly, noting, about the plot-structure components of tragedies, that "their connection with the observable practice of surviving tragedy, and epic, is unproblematic" (*Aristotle's Poetics*, 212).

[320] Collins, *Mark*, 92 for the most succinct treatment, although others treat recognition in Mark in far more detail; for the same passage that she acknowledges here as recognition, see Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 190-192 and Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*, 100-102.

[321] An excellent recent treatment is Michal Beth Dinkler's "Suffering, Misunderstanding, and Suffering Misunderstanding: The Markan Misunderstanding Motif as a Form of Jesus' Suffering," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38.3 (2016): 316-338; Collins alludes to the motif at *Mark: A Commentary*, 192.

too.[322] Just as in Greek tragedies, when a character's identity is hidden from some identified audience, structural recognitions play the role of imparting knowledge of a character's identity.[323]

Also in Greek tragedies, moments of recognition speed a character's suffering and downfall, linking recognition to reversal. Two examples from tragedies illustrate the point. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, a play which centralizes the theme of identity and recognition,[324] the question "who are you" is a precursor to both a statement of identity and a reversal linked to the recognition that follows. In this play Dionysus travels to Thebes in disguise and communicates with Thebes' king, Pentheus, who is incensed at those in his kingdom who celebrate Dionysus in frenzied rites. Ironic because Dionysus himself is in disguise, Dionysus chastises Pentheus for his failure at recognition: "you do not know what your life is or what you are doing or who you are (ὅστις εἶ.)."[325] As if to underscore the point, he disguises Pentheus in order to bring him to Mount Cithaeron to view the devotees. The chorus portend the women receiving Pentheus, remarking on his transformation: "who is this (Τίς ὅδ')? Who gave birth to him?"[326] The group

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[322] Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 175-180; Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 75.

[323] Carly Daniel-Hughes and Maia Kotrosits allude to exactly this setting for recognition, even calling this imparting of knowledge regarding a character's identity a "recognition"—thus describing the phenomenon I name here, even if they do not index recognition to tragic plot structure like I do here ("Tertullian of Carthage and the Fantasy Life of Power: On Martyrs, Christians, and Other Attachments to Juridical Scenes," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 28.1 [2020]: 1-31; here at 12-13). From a different perspective—that of literary theory—Frank Kermode sees such recognitions as reflective of the lifelikeness that the piece of literature in which the recognitions occur strives to emulate. By doing so the narrative both points out the contingency of "the human situation" and seeks to overcome it by divulging information to the reader (*The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000], especially at 144-145).

[324] Friesen, *Reading Dionysus*, 113.

[325] *Bacchae* 506. οὐκ οἶσθ' ὅ τι ζῇς, οὐδ' ὃ δρᾷς, οὐδ' ὅστις εἶ. Text and translation David Kovacs (Loeb Classical Library 495; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003).

[326] *Bacchae* 985-987. Τίς ὅδ' ὀρειδρόμων μαστὴρ Καδμειᾶν ἐς ὄρος ἐς ὄρος ἔμολ' ἔμολεν, ὦ βάκχαι; τίς ἄρα νιν ἔτεκεν;

of maenads rip apart Pentheus' body for his irreverence to Dionysus, despite Pentheus' attempt at a recognition, which only speeds his demise. He reveals himself to his mother (Ἐγώ τοι, μῆτερ, εἰμί), Agave, as she attacks, asking for pity because he has sinned.[327] This first (failed) recognition speeds Pentheus' suffering; it is followed by Agave's recognition that it is her own son whom she has killed. Unable to recognize him while in her frenzy, her finally successful recognition of her son leads to her suffering.

A second tragedy, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, also links recognition to suffering and a reversal. The prophet Tiresias predicts the recognition that Oedipus will experience, and the suffering (οὐδ' ἡσθήσεται) to which it will lead,[328] while Oedipus' identity is hidden from himself for a lengthy portion of the play. Various speakers play out the theme of identity: the chorus asks, "who are you (τίς ὅντιν')?"[329] and Iocaste remarks, "may you never find out who you are (ὦ δύσποτμ', εἴθε μήποτε γνοίης ὃς εἶ)."[330] Anticipating the suffering that will attend Oedipus' recognition of who he is, a shepherd warns, "if you are who he says you are, know that you are born to misery."[331] At lines 1183-1185 the recognition scene takes place, as Oedipus finally learns that he is his father's killer and his mother's spouse.[332] His suffering at the recognition is punctuated by his cries, and finally by his removal of his eyes.

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[327] *Bacchae* 1118-1121. Ἐγώ τοι, μῆτερ, εἰμί, παῖς σέθεν Πενθεύς, ὃν ἔτεκες ἐν δόμοις Ἐχίονος· οἴκτιρε δ' ὦ μῆτέρ με μηδὲ ταῖς ἐμαῖς ἁμαρτίαισι παῖδα σὸν κατακτάνῃς.

[328] *Oedipus Tyrannus* 452-456. ξένος λόγῳ μέτοικος· εἶτα δ' ἐγγενὴς φανήσεται Θηβαῖος, οὐδ' ἡσθήσεται τῇ ξυμφορᾷ· τυφλὸς γὰρ ἐκ δεδορκότος καὶ πτωχὸς ἀντὶ πλουσίου ξένην ἔπι σκήπτρῳ προδεικνὺς γαῖαν ἐμπορεύσεται. Text and translation Hugh Lloyd-Jones (Loeb Classical Library 20; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[329] *Oedipus Tyrannus* 463. τίς ὅντιν' ἁ θεσπιέπεια Δελφὶς ἥδε πέτρα ἄρρητ' ἀρρήτων τελέσαντα φοινίαισι χερσίν;

[330] *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1068.

[331] *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1180-1181. εἰ γὰρ αὐτὸς εἶ ὅν φησιν οὗτος, ἴσθι δύσποτμος γεγώς.

[332] *Oedipus Tyrannus* 1182-1185. ἰοὺ ἰού· τὰ πάντ' ἂν ἐξήκοι σαφῆ. ὦ φῶς, τελευταῖόν σε προσβλέψαιμι νῦν, ὅστις πέφασμαι φύς τ' ἀφ' ὧν οὐ χρῆν, ξὺν οἷς τ'οὐ χρῆν ὁμιλῶν, οὕς τέ μ' οὐκ ἔδει κτανών.

Collins similarly connects recognition to reversal in the New Testament by comparing its stories to tragedies. She notes that the frequent query in the *Gospel of Mark* regarding who Jesus is leads to Peter discovering that Jesus is the Messiah. This recognition "coincides with a reversal in the action, because Jesus' response is the prediction of his own suffering and death."[333] That is, the recognition scene Collins identifies at *Mark* 8:27 directly bears on the reversal of fortune of the tragic hero, working to structure the plot of the passion narrative and putting on display similarities between *Mark* and tragic plot structure.

Collins identifies one key recognition and one reversal in the texts she likens to tragedies.[334] Jay instead identifies both recognition and reversal as recurring motifs in *Mark*, in agreement with Bro Larsen, who sees the *Gospel of John* as populated with multiple recognition scenes.[335] To insist on one recognition or reversal alone, Jay notes, is "difficult to maintain" and "overly reliant on Aristotelian poetics."[336] Moreover, the overly rigid position that there is one reversal keeps scholars from seeing tragic reversal in, for example, *Mark*'s story of John the Baptist.[337] More importantly, though, his position that texts written in a tragic mode employ multiple recognitions and reversals is important for his larger argument, since the frequent appearance of these motifs conveys a sense of contingency,[338] which signals to readers tragic

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[333] Collins, *Mark: A Commentary*, 92.

[334] Collins is not alone in identifying a single recognition and reversal; this is a standard practice. For the *Gospel of Mark*, Bilezikian (*The Liberated Gospel*, 51-106) and Stephen Smith ("A Divine Tragedy," 212-218) also identify one key reversal, at 8:27-31.

[335] Bro Larsen, *Recognizing the Stranger*, 173.

[336] Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 185.

[337] Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 205-230; his is the first treatment of tragic resonance in the gospels that considers plot-structural elements outside of the story of Jesus, and instead as more broadly structuring the *Gospel of Mark* and, in their ubiquity, giving the whole text the air of a tragic "mode."

[338] Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*,185-190 most clearly. For more on the relationship between reversals and inexorability, 81.

modulation. This promising research on tragic plot structures in the New Testament gospels provides a suggestive foundation from which, as I will propose in what follows, we can discern the same features animating *MPionius*. Like Jay, I note more than one recognition.

Summary of the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

In order to make a convincing case that reversal, suffering, and recognition organize *MPionius*' narrative, a sense of the whole narrative is necessary. Here I provide a summary with exegesis of *MPionius*, although I do not to pretend to treat each topic exhaustively. Instead, I hope to attend sufficiently to the movement of the text and its scholarly treatment, while zooming in afterward for fuller treatment of the episodes that can be interpreted as reversal, recognition, and suffering.

Before homing in on discrete moments of reversal, recognition, and suffering in the text, then, let me offer a structural proposal for conceptualizing Pionius' narrative.[339] Following this structural proposal, I survey central organizing themes of the text. The narrative is organized around a pattern that recurs three times: an arrest; a speech, followed by attempts at persuasion; and an interrogation or trial.

Prologue 1
First Sequence: 2-9
    Arrest 2-3
    Speech 4-7
    Interrogation 8-9
Second Sequence: 10-19

[339] My proposal for a pattern of three sequences differs slightly from the structural proposal offered by Jan den Boeft and Jan Bremmer. They divide *MPionius* into two parts, which are "built up quite similarly": they see the text divided into two halves, each of which ends with an official interrogation. Before each hearing, they note, appear a long speech and attempts to persuade the martyrs to change their course of action. While Boeft and Bremmer's division of the text ends at 19.1's trial, mine instead includes the whole text, identifying a series of repetitions through 20.7, bookended by a prologue and epilogue. Boeft and Bremmer, "Notinculae Martyrologicae III," 120.

Arrest 10-11
Speech 12-14
Interrogation (15-18) and official trial (19)
Third Sequence: 20-21
Pionius is burnt 20.1
Short final statement 20
Final Interrogation 20.7
Epilogue 22-23

Prologue: Pionius' story opens with a mimetic frame, exhorting the reader or hearer to call to mind memories of holy people.[340] This frame presents the martyr as someone to be imitated, specifically for their innocence and faith,[341] and offers specific directives for imitation. It is not the figure of the martyr alone who inspires, though; the story of the martyr has the ability to strengthen people. Hearing martyr narratives is pedagogical work: as the "apostle exhorts us,"[342] the act of remembering through hearing or reading the narrative "strengthens those who want to imitate better models."[343] This mimetic frame has been treated most fully for its implications for discerning the text's authorship. This is because at the end of the prologue, the text reports that Pionius "left this writing for our admonition."[344] This phrase, in combination with the prologue's use of the first person, has spurred a lineage of viewing *MPionius* as an autobiographical account by Pionius.[345] No doubt this longstanding idea has lent weight to *MPionius*' perceived historicity,

[340] *MPionius* 1. Unless otherwise noted, I use text and translations from Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*.

[341] *MPionius* 1.1.

[342] *MPionius* 1.1.

[343] *MPionius* 1.2. In this way the prologue insists that the text is a "guide for the living," not just an account of the martyr's death (Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 93).

[344] *MPionius* 1.2.

[345] Delehaye, *Les passions*, 30-33; Boeft and Bremmer, "Notinculae Martyrologicae III," 123; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 470-471; Louis Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios*, 49.

a perception which remains to the present day, even if in altered form, but faith in *MPionius* as a firsthand account penned by Pionius is for the most part an outdated position.[346]

First Sequence: Pionius and his companions are taken from home with chains around their necks (2-3), then brought to the agora where Pionius gives his first speech (4-7) and answers for the first time questions about who he is and what god he serves (8-9).

The text opens its narrative by providing context for its events: the martyrdom to be reported takes place on a "great Sabbath,"[347] during the persecution of Decius.[348] In addition, the text details the narratival context. Pionius, we are told, fore-knew he and his companions will be arrested the next day.[349] In preparation, he puts chains around all of their necks.[350] The text explains: "He did this for those who would arrest him, so that no one might suspect that they were taken to eat sacrificial meat as others had done, but so that everyone might know that they had decided to be led directly to prison."[351] Pionius uses his foreknowledge to preempt misinterpretation of his arrest, placing chains around their necks in order to resolve any

[346] Anton Hilhorst, "'He left us this writing': Did He?" is the most thorough and recent examination of the issue and representative of current scholarly opinion; Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 49-50 presents an alternative reading of the passage at 1.2 and succinctly summarizes the last ten years of scholarship on the question. Only a couple of years earlier than Hilhorst's article, Castelli could write that "scholars agree almost unanimously that this martyrdom represents a remarkable occasion of self-writing by this early Christian witness" (*Martyrdom and Memory*, 92-93, here 93).

[347] *MPionius* 2.1; also at 3.6 for "great Sabbath." The significant studies are Willy Rordorf, "Zum Problem des Großen Sabbats im Polykarp- und Pioniosmartyrium," pages 245-249 in *Pietas: Festschrift für Bernhard Kötting*, edited by Ernst Dussmann and K. Suso Frank (Münster: Aschendorff, 1980); Timothy Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 373-378 in response to Rordorf; and Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 486-487.

[348] *MPionius* 2.1.

[349] *MPionius* 2.2. Rebillard offers that this knowledge comes to Pionius in a vision (*Greek and Latin Narratives*, 53 fn 6); he draws on earlier work by Boeft and Bremmer, "Notinculae Martyrologicae III," especially 115. Judith Lieu connects the "divine must" indicated by δεῖ to the *Gospel of John*'s passion predictions (*Image and Reality*, 62).

[350] *MPionius* 2.3. The motif of chains is picked up again at 6.2-3.

[351] *MPionius* 2.4.

ambiguity regarding whether they had agreed to eat forbidden foods. To the contrary, the voluntary donning of chains was to symbolize his and his companions' agency.

Pionius' prediction comes to pass the next day, when Polemon the *neokoros* enters the scene, reminding the group that the emperor has given an edict to sacrifice to the gods.[352] Pionius' response sets up the tension in the plot between Roman emperor and Christian God, and between whose commands should be obeyed: "We know God's commandments, in which he orders us to adore him alone."[353] The *neokoros* promises punishment, setting the commands of empire and God against each other and shaping the events that transpire throughout the narrative.

When the entire group refuses to sacrifice, Polemon leads them to the agora, where a crowd of "Greeks, Jews, and women" are assembled.[354] Once in the agora, facing its crowd, Pionius delivers the first of two major speeches.[355] Assuming the position of an orator,[356] Pionius appeals to Greeks and Jews in turn. Addressing the Greeks, he names Homer as an authoritative figure and quotes his *Odyssey*.[357] To the Jews, he invokes Moses and quotes from Jewish scriptures,[358] using both traditions to bolster his argument that no one in the audience ought to

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[352] *MPionius* 3.2.

[353] *MPionius* 3.3.

[354] *MPionius* 3.6. Louis Robert suggests that the text's invocation of the agora as well as the Nemeseion is a strategy for demonstrating the text's authenticity. His argument is, as always, grounded in the archaeology of the ancient city of Smyrna (*Le Martyre de Pionios*, 65-66).

[355] The first: *MPionius* 4.2-6.4; the second: 12.3-14.16; and a third, much shorter, which I call instead a "statement," occurs at Pionius' death (20.5-21.4).

[356] *MPionius* 4.2. Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 89 and Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 94 see this posture as embodying masculine ideals; Callie Callon builds on Cobb's work and notes Pionius' ideal comportment, designed to be persuasive to the in-text audience (*Reading Bodies: Physiognomy as a Strategy of Persuasion in Early Christian Discourse* [New York: T&T Clark, 2019], 125).

[357] *MPionius* 4.2, 4.4. He refers to them thus: "you who boast of Smyrna's beauty and who glory in Homer" (4.2).

[358] *MPionius* 4.2, 4.5; on the topic generally, see Anton Hilhorst, "L'Ancien Testament dans la polémique du martyr Pionius."

judge the Christians who have been brought before them, since both traditions' authorities urge not to mock or punish one's enemy.[359] Going a step further, Pionius remarks that they—although at this point of the argument, he seems to direct his remarks to the Jews alone—also should not judge because they are guilty of severe transgressions themselves.[360]

Excellent recent attention has been given to its two lengthy speeches. The vitriolic rhetoric of both speeches lodges accusations against the Jews in the audience: this first speech accuses Jews of murder,[361] wrongful prosecution,[362] and idol worship;[363] the second accuses Jews of leading Christians to commit the "irrevocable sin" of synagogue worship and spreading lies about the truth of Jesus' resurrection.[364] The longstanding, dominant interpretation of this rhetoric was that *MPionius* is a fiercely anti-Jewish text.[365] More recent work by Elizabeth Gibson, however, re-interprets the rhetoric of *MPionius* as referring not to Jews, but to Christians

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[359] *MPionius* 4.4-4.6.

[360] *MPionius* 4.8-4.16.

[361] At *MPionius* 4.9 for murder generally, then 4.11 accuses the Jews of human sacrifice; 13.2 accuses the addressees of murdering Christ.

[362] *MPionius* 4.9.

[363] Generally, at *MPionius* 4.9 and 4.11; also 4.11 for the imagery of the golden calf, and again at 4.24.

[364] *MPionius* 13.1; this second speech goes on to accuse the Jews of lying when they say that a spirit can be raised from the dead (14.1-15; the reference is to the so-called witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28).

[365] Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, xxviii is representative. A more detailed summary of how this standard opinion has been questioned can be found in Shelly Matthews, *Perfect Martyr: The Stoning of Stephen and the Construction of Christian Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 8-9. For the standard opinion, though, crucial work on the topic of anti-Jewish polemic include Paula Fredriksen and Oded Irshai, "Christian Anti-Judaism: Polemics and Policies," pages 977-1034 in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, edited by William Horbury and John Sturdy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Ora Limor and Guy G. Stroumsa (eds.), *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics Between Christians and Jews* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996); Andrew Jacobs, "The Lion and the Lamb: Reconsidering Jewish-Christian Relations in Antiquity," pages 95-118 in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Annette Yoshiko Reed and Adam Becker (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007). These works trace dominant strands in a history of scholarship on anti-Jewish polemic, especially as this topic coincides with research on the "parting of the ways" in antiquity. Simply put, the degree to which Christians and Jews were considered separate entities in antiquity impacts the degree to which anti-Jewish polemic can be interpreted as intra-Christian polemic. On this topic see Judith Lieu's *Image and Reality* and Daniel Boyarin's *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

who are, instead of being willing to undergo martyrdom, escaping punishment by posing as Jews attending synagogue.[366] That is, she claims the rhetoric reflects intra-Christian conflict that invokes and relies upon anti-Jewish sentiment for its impact.[367]

These arguments articulate a set of transgressions for which those responsible will be punished. This speech continues the topic of judgment, which will recur throughout the text. Judgment "is at hand for the world," Pionius tells his audience, and through a series of biblical examples and topographical imagery, he describes a judgment that will answer these sins.[368] One example to illustrate this maxim is the land of Judaea itself, Pionius says, which bears witness—the legal terminology here is significant, and is the Greek term translated into English as "martyr"—to "the sins that its inhabitants committed" through its dry land and lack of water. Even the Dead Sea is undeniable evidence, Pionius points out, in a jab that it is difficult not to see as humorous: the Dead Sea is so salty that it "cannot hold a human body," an unnatural occurrence that displays God's anger.[369] Judgment looms: "we bear witness to you of the coming

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[366] Elizabeth Leigh Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 339-358.

[367] I point this out to highlight that this rhetoric has been a focus in scholarly treatment of the text. Taking a position on the rhetoric of the text as anti-Jewish or intra-Christian does not affect the argument of the present dissertation, although Jo-Ann Brant has argued that the rhetoric reflects *neither* of these two positions; instead, it showcases Christian engagement in a rhetorical practice called "flyting," an exchange of insults meant to display wit and learning. Brant argues that engaging in this practice would have signaled to ancient audiences participation in generic conventions of tragedy (*Dialogue and Drama*, 178).

[368] *MPionius* 4.17-4.23.

[369] *MPionius* 4.20. The text provides multiple other examples invoking the land as proof: Aetna, Sicily, Lydia, Lycia, the islands. It also lists the phenomena of floods and volcanoes as examples of justice playing out in nature, recalling ideas of Noah and the flood that have long been considered a response to wrong action; cf. *Interpretations of the Flood*, edited by Florentino García Martínez and Gerard P. Luttikhuizen (Leiden: Brill, 1998). It was not a foreign notion that physical landscape put on display the give-and-take of action and consequence. This relationship plays out on the land just as it does with individuals in the course of their lives. See Boeft and Bremmer, "Notiunculae Martyrologicae III," 115-117.

judgment of fire, by God and through his word, Christ."[370] His proof for this judgment to come is that these examples from nature demonstrate that judgment has already followed wrongdoing.

The audience responds to Pionius' speech first with silence,[371] and then, when Pionius continues to press on, with compassion. Perhaps they pity him: as I pointed out above, pity is one of the so-called tragic emotions that a tragic plot should evoke. Polemon and others entreat him: "Believe us, Pionius, that we love you, and that you deserve to live for many reasons, because of your character and your gentleness. It is good to live and look upon this light."[372] Pionius agrees with them that life is good, but begins to hint at the reversal that will occur later in the text: "I too say that it is good to live, but that life we yearn for is greater. Yes for the light, but the true light."[373] Polemon then tries to bargain with the Christians: if they will not sacrifice, perhaps they will at least visit the Nemeseion?[374] Ultimately, all attempts at persuasion fail, and the first interrogation ensues.

This first interrogation follows an order that will recur twice more. First, the group is ordered to sacrifice.[375] When they refuse they are asked a series of questions: "what is your name?" "Are you a Christian?" "Of which church?"[376] Pionius, Sabina, and Asclepiades are all interrogated in this manner, and respond with identical answers. Most frequently attended to in scholarship on this procedure of investigation has been the "I am a Christian" response to these

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[370] *MPionius* 4.24, first introduced at 4.17, before the proofs: "for judgment is at hand for the world; of this we have been made certain in many ways."

[371] *MPionius* 5.1.

[372] *MPionius* 5.3.

[373] *MPionius* 5.4.

[374] *MPionius* 7.2.

[375] *MPionius* 8.2-4.

[376] *MPionius* 9.1-9.

interrogations. Scholars have identified this formula as a formal confession in a legal trial.[377] This confession functions to reveal the identity of the person being questioned, attempting to perform the ostensible goal of the judicial system, to extract truth. Following these questions, the group is led to prison, and en route the crowd remarks upon a change in Pionius' appearance.[378]

Second Sequence: Pionius and his companions are imprisoned (10-11) and Pionius gives his second lengthy speech (12-14), after which he is taken again to the agora and interrogated (15-18, then the official trial at 19).

The group is thrown into an overflowing jail,[379] where they receive visitors of multiple agendas: some continue to try to persuade them to sacrifice, just as after Pionius' first speech;[380] others, identified by scholars as *lapsi*,[381] have given in to such exhortation. This crowd is ambivalent compared to the first: while following the first speech, those who attempt to persuade Pionius are certain that to live is a good in itself, this group is in emotional anguish because they have attempted to live well, but their attempts to do so have been thwarted.[382] A lengthy speech

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[377] Thus invoking the topic of the charges brought against Christians. Representative sources include Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 93; Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 84-89 for a solid treatment of the formula in short compass; Bisbee, *Pre-Decian Acts*, 45-47; Judith Lieu, "'I am a Christian': Martyrdom and the Beginning of 'Christian Identity,'" pages 223-243 in *Neither Jew Nor Greek*, edited by Judith Lieu (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2002). Compare this language with the "I am" sayings of Jesus in the *Gospel of John*, which Brant and others identify as forensic language, too (*Dialogue and Drama*, 140).

[378] *MPionius* 10.2.

[379] *MPionius* 11.

[380] *MPionius* 12.1. The text identifies those trying to persuade him as πολλοὶ τῶν ἐθνῶν.

[381] *MPionius* 12.2; Rebillard identifies them as such (*Greek and Latin Narratives*, 65 fn 56), relying on earlier work by Walter Ameling in "The Christian Lapsi in Smyrna." Ameling thinks the target of this speech is only the *lapsi*; this opinion is contrary to that of Robert and Gibson, who divide the speech and consider it to be addressed to two groups: 12.3-12.16 to the *lapsi* and 13.1-14.16 to Christians who are being taken in by Jews (Robert, *Le martyre de Pionios,* 77 and 81; Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 352).

[382] *MPionius* 12.2.

follows in response to their questions where they have failed to uphold proper Christian piety, in two parts.

First, Pionius responds to those who lament their failed attempt to live well with a barrage of scriptural references to support the thesis that it is ultimately inevitable to lapse in some way: all have sinned.[383] This is a curious argument: according to Pionius' account, no one is exempt from sinning, including himself. In taking this interpretive position, I agree with L. Arik Greenberg, who sees this admission of sin as at odds with the frequent portrayal of martyrs as innocent of sin.[384] While even within this text Pionius is called blameless,[385] it is undeniable that he simultaneously takes the position that all—including himself—are guilty of wrongdoing.

Pionius then switches topic drastically, turning from his position that all have sinned, to a discussion of the Jews and the dangers they pose. His discussion proceeds on two counts: first, Jews' invitations to the synagogue, and then their idea that it is possible to draw up a spirit from the dead. To the first point, Gibson has in my opinion argued convincingly for intra-Christian

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[383] *MPionius* 12.3-12.16; most strongly at 12.13-14: "But let none suppose, little children, that it is the Lord who has become powerless—it is us… your sins have made a separation between my God and you."

[384] L. Arik Greenberg, *My Share of God's Reward*, 177 for an unusually rich treatment of *MPionius*. On this speech, Greenberg says: "In this text, Pionius complains that humans (Jews and Christians alike) are sinners, including himself in this category (12:14-15), a principle similar to that of the brother in 2 Maccabees claiming to have sinned along with the Nation of Israel—a hyperbolic statement only explainable by extreme humility and supreme self-denigration." He continues on: "In 22:1, Pionius is spoken of as being 'innocent, blameless, and incorruptible,' a notion more in line with other martyrdoms that depict the martyr as a purely righteous sufferer. The idea of the martyr claiming to be a sinner, as a function of the martyr's usual humility, is nevertheless a rarity that resonates with that of 2 Maccabees." His attention to the topic is the most serious consideration of Pionius' statement that all are guilty, even himself, but I suggest that this position is not "only explainable" by humble hyperbole, but could be another signal to an ancient audience of tragic resonance, since tragedies included, often, *hamartia*.

[385] *MPionius* 22.1.

conflict as the impetus for the vitriolic rhetoric of this speech.[386] The second topic is more curious. Pionius charges the Jews with saying that they—the Jews—performed necromancy to bring Christ back from the dead.[387] This claim presents a problem, because it is only if Jesus was merely a human who died as a criminal that his spirit could be conjured. Pionius invokes the "belly-myther" of Endor to deny the possibility of necromancy, calls the rumor a lie, and adduces as evidence that the attempt at necromancy in the Endor episode also failed.[388]

Following the lengthy prison speech is a scene change. Polemon and a crowd return to the prison to detain Pionius and his companions, then bring them back to the agora.[389] The physical coercion and torture so characteristically associated with martyr literature and judicial process is central at this point, as a group of *diogmitai* nearly choke Pionius and throw him on the ground before the altar.[390] Urged yet again to sacrifice, Pionius' responses become stronger: he chastises an orator, Rufinus, for trying to persuade him, stating that not even Socrates

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[386] *MPionius* 13.1-9; Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 352-354 contra Hilhorst, "The Christian Lapsi in Smyrna." It should be noted that Gibson makes the same argument for the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, too: "The Jews and Christians in the Martyrdom of Polycarp: Entangled or Parted Ways?" pages 145-158 in *The Ways That Never Parted: Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, edited by Adam Becker and Annette Yoshiko Reed (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), 158. See Cobb's note on the argument in *Dying to be Men*, 167 fn 86, which takes the stance that whatever the "original" audience of the speeches was, the "derogatory rhetoric…serves as a tool in the creation of Christian identities"—thus pointing away from the utility of pinpointing the original audience and toward the work that the rhetoric of the speech performs.

[387] *MPionius* 13.8, taken up again and sustained through 14. A major translation controversy has attended this statement. Musurillo's translation implies that it was Christ who performed necromancy; Gero was the first to correct this translation, and Rebillard's translation reflects his work (Stephen Gero, "Jewish Polemic in the Martyrium Pionii," 164-168; Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 69). Precisely who the third-person plural actors are who are portrayed as raising Christ by necromancy is unclear and does not ultimately affect the present argument.

[388] *MPionius* 14, especially 14.14; the most helpful text on this episode is Rowan Greer and Margaret Mitchell, *The "Belly-Myther" of Endor: Interpretations of I Kingdoms 28 in the Early Church* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007).

[389] *MPionius* 15.1-7.

[390] *MPionius* 15.1-6.

experienced such agony at the hands of the Athenians,[391] and requests that a fire be lit so that he and his companions can climb upon it.[392] Yet again hopelessly obstinate, the group is sent back to prison.[393]

Finally Pionius is given an official trial when a proconsul arrives in Smyrna.[394] I differentiate this trial as "official" in contradistinction to the others that take place in the text because the text itself does so. The text depicts this trial as following proper judicial procedure through Pionius' remark: "It is the rule that those who have been thrown into prison await for the proconsul."[395] It is the proconsul's facilitation of an interrogation that makes it official, he notes, and so he challenges them: "Why do you take his role upon yourselves?"[396] The proconsul does indeed arrive to Smyrna, and interrogates Pionius. The text presents the interrogation as a record of official proceedings.[397] The interrogation follows the procedure earlier in the narrative: Pionius is asked his name, sect, the nature of that sect.[398] Given multiple opportunities to yield to the proconsul's demands to sacrifice, Pionius refuses and rebuts the proconsul's accusation that he is eager for death, arguing instead that it is life he speeds toward.[399]

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[391] *MPionius* 17.1-4. This reference is interesting given my focus: Pionius himself here draws attention to classical Greek models.

[392] *MPionius* 18.2.

[393] *MPionius* 18.10.

[394] *MPionius* 19.1.

[395] *MPionius* 15.3.

[396] *MPionius* 15.3.

[397] *MPionius* 19.1-2; Rebillard too notes the presentation of this interrogation as an excerpt from official proceedings (*Greek and Latin Narratives*, 75 fn 103). The text refers to the official proceedings thus: γενομένων ὑπομνημάτων τῶν ὑποτεταγμένων. The other two references to interrogation occur at 8.2: "Polemon started his interrogation" (Τότε ἐπερωτᾷ ὁ νεωκόρος Πολέμων λέγων) and 9.1: "he interrogated him on the record" (Εἶτα ἐπηρώτησεν ἐγγράφως).

[398] *MPionius* 19.2-9.

[399] *MPionius* 20.4-5.

Third Sequence: Pionius is hanged (20.1), gives his final—this time, short—statement (20.1-6), and receives a death sentence after his final questioning (20.7). He dies, seemingly peacefully (21.1-9).

The proconsul offers his verdict: "As Pionius confesses himself to be a Christian, we have commanded that he be burnt alive."[400] Pionius enters the arena, undresses willingly, and experiences a moment of recognition when he sees that his body, despite the torture he has endured, is in good shape.[401] A "public slave" begins to nail him to a cross, but gives him one last chance to opt out of punishment, again following Pionius' programmatic statements with attempts to persuade him to change course. Pionius' response reads almost humorously: "I felt that they [the nails] are in place."[402] The nails remain, the fire is lit, and Pionius, looking joyful and breathing peacefully, dies.[403]

Epilogue: The final scene of Pionius' death and post-mortem appearance steps outside of this pattern and calls an end to the drama (22-23).

The end of the text, like the beginning's mimetic prologue, frames its events. This epilogue reports that Pionius was "unblemished, blameless, and uncorrupted" in life and that in death he "passed through the narrow gate," looking like an athlete.[404] This ending epitomizes the

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[400] *MPionius* 20.7.

[401] On this, more below; *MPionius* 21.1-2.

[402] *MPionius* 21.3-4; the language of public slave, which Musurillo renders "public executioner," is δημόσιος. See too Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 88, for the humorous undertones in this episode.

[403] *MPionius* 20.9.

[404] *MPionius* 21.1-4.

fulfillment and embodiment of the reversal that Pionius has forecasted throughout the narrative: a total reversal, from death to life. Even his body shows this radical reversal has taken place, because, although he is dead, he looks more vigorous and lively than ever.

Theme of *dike*

The topic of whether the law and punishment are just is an undercurrent to *MPionius*. Pionius' first speech introduces the topic. Pionius claims that he and his companions are righteous, yet treated unjustly for their obedience to God.[405] Given the injustice of Christians' treatment, Pionius promises that divine "judgment is at hand for the world."[406] In the second sequence of text, Pionius accuses *all* of guilt: first those governing officials who wrongly persecute Christians; then Christians who have lapsed, and, finally, he notes that all have committed wrongdoing that warrants judgment.[407] He accuses his persecutors of violating their own system of justice, chastising them by urging them to "honor justice" and to "follow your laws."[408] As these dialogues unfold, they are juxtaposed against legal interrogations which culminate in Pionius' death sentence. In its dialogues, speeches, and trials, *MPionius* places justice as a central theme.

Theme of the tragic bind: Emperor or God

[405] *MPionius* 4.8.

[406] *MPionius* 4.17.

[407] *MPionius* 12.13-12.16.

[408] *MPionius* 16.6.

It is especially in the Roman officials' exhortations to sacrifice that we see the tragic bind in which Pionius is placed, for these exchanges show the text setting up the emperor and his demands in opposition to God and his demands. "You know very well the emperor's edict that commands you to sacrifice to the gods," the neokoros confronts Pionius, who responds, "We know God's commandments, in which he orders us to adore him alone."[409] Despite the fact that Pionius is an imperial subject and thus legally constrained to the laws of the empire, he consistently prioritizes a separate point of identity which, he asserts, precludes his acting as a proper Roman subject. Because the two are so at odds, he can answer Polemon's order "Sacrifice, Pionius," with simply, "I am a Christian."[410] An explicit causal connection is clear when Pionius is asked, "Why don't you people sacrifice?" Pionius' friends answer, "Because we are Christians."[411] Again the proconsul tells Pionius, "Sacrifice." Pionius answers, "No, for it is God to whom I pray."[412] Despite his being both Roman and Christian, he cannot satisfactorily adhere to the demands of both and remain unharmed: either he will die violently at the hands of the Romans for exemplifying proper Christian behavior, or he will be on the wrong side of the judgment that he consistently forecasts throughout the text; he is constrained to choose.

Theme of agency

The imagery of the chains, introduced as early as 2.3, signals a theme that runs through many martyr texts: human agency under constraint. Stephanie Cobb rightly acknowledges that

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[409] *MPionius* 3.2-3; the same sentiment is presented to Pionius at 4.1.

[410] *MPionius* 8.2.

[411] *MPionius* 16.2.

[412] *MPionius* 19.9.

this theme occurs within martyr texts to hold tension between the punishments martyrs endure seemingly unjustly, and their willingness, even eagerness, to undergo such punishments.[413] The theme of agency also animates Greek tragedies—perhaps, in combination with the plot structural features I attend to here, an additional cue to the audience that the story of Pionius is told by means of tragic features or in a "tragic mode."[414] That is, the text pays close attention to Pionius' ability to choose between two competing systems of justice that structure his tragic bind.

Pionius' first speech pulls forward this thread of agency. He claims, for example, to assent freely to his execution rather than to disobey his teacher.[415] He is mocked for his response, both for his claim to serve only God, and for wearing the chains. Again he defends his wearing chains, and what they signify:

> We wear these chains so that, as we pass through your city, we may not be suspected of coming forward to eat sacrificial meat, so that you may learn that we request not to be questioned, but that, having made our mind, we walk not to the Nemeseion, but to prison, and so that unlike the others you may not seize us and lead us off by force, but leave us be because of the chains we wear.[416]

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[413] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 69-70; at 75-76 she rightly combines the theme in *MPionius* of agency with the theme of persuasion, both of which explore constraints on the martyr's ability to choose. On the topic of agency and choice in martyr literature, see Karen King, "Willing to Die for God: Individualization and Instrumental Agency in Ancient Christian Martyr Literature," pages 342-386 in *The Individual in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, edited by Jörg Rüpke (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Dinkler, "Genre Analysis and Early Christian Martyr Narratives," 332-334, who identifies constrained agency as one component of an idealized cognitive model of martyr literature. Outside the scope of this dissertation is a related matter, the concept of so-called voluntary martyrdom. For a succinct analysis of the debate and the scholarly problems, see Candida Moss, "The Discourse of Voluntary Martyrdom: Ancient and Modern," *Church History* 81.3 (2012): 531-551.

[414] On mode, again, Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 79-105, but for a shorter treatment in an earlier work that also likens the *Gospel of Mark* to the genre of tragedy and attributes the likeness to mode, Collins, *Mark*, 91-93. The point is that a range of features are typically associated with tragedies; their plot structural features are some, but also included are certain themes and even language (on language, an excellent treatment is Simon Goldhill's "The Language of Tragedy: Rhetoric and Communication," pages 127-150 in *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*). Like Jay, and like Easterling, I propose that ancient audiences who knew tragedies would be able to identify tragic resonances in other texts, too.

[415] *MPionius* 4.7.

[416] *MPionius* 6.3.

As if this response were not clear enough, when the crowd appeals to Pionius to reconsider, he answers again, reinforcing his sense of agency: "This is our decision."[417]

Along with the chains, repeated attempts at persuasion flag agency as an animating theme of the text, since the attempts show Pionius constantly having to choose his side. Polemon first exhorts Pionius to obey at 7.3, but Pionius stands firm: "You have been ordered either to persuade or to punish. You do not persuade, so punish."[418] In the second sequence of text, a crowd comes to visit Pionius in prison with the express purpose of persuading Pionius to sacrifice.[419] Once again he turns the tables, emphasizing his own agency. After refusing to sacrifice, he accepts the consequences, and demands to take those too on willingly: "don't use force. Light the fire, and we will climb up on it of our own accord."[420]

The last sequence of text, although short, alludes multiple times to Pionius' agency. When he is asked a final time to change his mind, he answers, simply, "No." He undresses "willingly," and takes himself to the arena "eagerly."[421] The official who nails him to his cross offers one last time to allow him to recant, in which case the nails will be removed. In a casual show of agency, his response is thus: "I felt that they are in place."[422]

Tragic Plot Structure in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

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[417] *MPionius* 6.4.

[418] *MPionius* 8.1.

[419] *MPionius* 12.1.

[420] *MPionius* 18.2.

[421] *MPionius* 20.4; 21.1.

[422] *MPionius* 21.4.

With this summary of *MPionius* in place, I will show how the plot-structural features that comprise the "soul" of tragedy, according to Aristotle, also structure *MPionius.* Suffering, recognition, and reversal[423] unfold the plot of the text, speaking intelligibly to an ancient audience whose context for reading and interpreting texts included tragedies.

Suffering in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

It may seem rudimentary to point to suffering as a theme of martyr literature, but this theme's mode of operation has recently been treated with more nuance. A basic starting point to the study of martyr texts, as Bowersock states, is that "the earliest martyrs suffered torture and death at the hands of Roman officials who were determined to enforce the traditional worship of the Roman emperors."[424] More recently, Judith Perkins sees in this theme of the reported torture of Christian heroes a "representational revolution."[425] Christian martyr texts could accomplish such a revolution because while

> Traditionally injuring other people, killing them, provided a method of establishing dominance, of establishing in explicit terms a winner and a loser. Bruises, wounds, broken bodies, provided unassailable, palpable evidence of realized power. But Christian discourse reverses this equation and thus redefines some of the most basic signifiers in any culture—the body, pain, and death. Moreover, these radical redefinitions function to create politically subversive texts. The representation of Blandina, Perpetua, Polycarp, and the other martyrs triumphing over Roman proconsuls and governors plays out a drama that explicitly calls into question Roman authority.[426]

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[423] Above in my description of the *Poetics*, I kept reversal and recognition in the same order in which Aristotle first introduces them. Their order, though, is not of crucial importance; Aristotle too does not consistently treat them in the same order throughout the entirety of the *Poetics*, nor is it indicated anywhere that these components only do their tragic work when they appear in a specific order. Here when I analyze *MPionius*, I will treat suffering first, and then recognition, because I see the text using the motif of recognition to work up to reversal—as do many of the examples that Aristotle provides (*Oedipus* is perhaps the best example, and a favorite of Aristotle).

[424] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 4.

[425] Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 17.

[426] Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, 115.

Christian martyrs traded on the notion that pain and suffering demonstrated dominance, since it is this very pain and suffering that delivered the Christian to triumph. In this way, the martyrs used pain and suffering to write a narrative of triumph instead of defeat.

Very recently, however, Stephanie Cobb has challenged this thesis. She agrees with Bowersock and Perkins that depictions of pain and suffering are obviously central to martyr narratives, but she argues that they are just that—depictions.[427] Beneath their surface-level staging of torture, "the texts' own machinations radically undermine what they have previously led the audience to believe: the body that should be in pain is not."[428] That is, departing from the standard view that martyr texts centralize the experience of suffering, Cobb instead argues persuasively that what martyr texts are actually doing in their scenes of bodily suffering is centralizing that the martyr's body in fact *does not* suffer. Readers are supposed to expect suffering, only to be faced with refusal that the martyr is suffering. Thus, while Perkins argues that overcoming suffering deals a death blow to displays of Roman authority, Cobb argues that God protecting the martyrs from suffering is what refutes that authority. In order to stage this readerly intervention, "the careful description of injury is a necessary component to the subsequent rejection of pain."[429]

Cobb's thesis that martyr texts display suffering only to negate that it even occurs is well-supported by *MPionius*. In the episode in which one of the officials strikes Pionius on the head, Pionius at first is silent, and then, the text reports, it is not Pionius who suffers, but the official:

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[427] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 49.

[428] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 50.

[429] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 154.

"the hands and the sides of the one who struck him became so swollen that he could scarcely breath[e]."[430] Likewise, when Pionius burns to death, the text subverts reader expectations of what being burned to death is like by substituting an image of athletic vigor. The text cues the reader to "imagine what a burned body looks like; they might visualize charred flesh or a form that is no longer recognizably human."[431] But instead of focusing on that image, "The text substitutes the listener's mental image of charred flesh with one of youth and beauty."[432] Despite burning to death, Pionius miraculously retains the hair on his face and chin, his features remained undistorted, and his image recalls that of an athlete.[433]

Cobb argues that texts' negating the experience of suffering "lead[s] audiences past superficial observations to deeper, spiritual insights."[434] When the soldier hits Pionius and is himself wounded, this transference promises the audience divine protection. When Pionius dies presumably violently but instead is depicted as both peaceful and undisturbed in his appearance, the text makes death a reward.[435] Cobb makes this argument on the basis of genre expectations and anticipated reader response, noting that martyr texts relied on an audience's pervasive ideas of suffering in order to overturn them.[436] This is what she means when she notes that martyr texts used well-known conventions in order to turn them to their own ends.

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[430] *MPionius* 18.11; Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 75. Cobb's reading of this episode is at *Divine Deliverance*, 106.

[431] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 83.

[432] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 83.

[433] *MPionius* 22.2-3.

[434] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 46.

[435] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 19.

[436] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, Chapter Two, "Text and Audience: Activating and Obstructing Expectations" details her approach; see especially pages 46-49 for a succinct description of how she uses the notion of "audience expectation" in combination with a focus on narrative technique.

I maintain Cobb's thesis, which lends support to a reading of *MPionius*'s narrative features as resonant with tragic generic conventions. Cobb's effective demonstration of the martyr's impermeability uses the trope of suffering to alternative, Christian ends. She points out, too, that the text accomplishes this feat by playing on reader expectations that are not met. This simultaneous anticipation and generative redirection of audience expectations is precisely the work that tragic reversal performs. Thus, the presentation of suffering, itself a prominent structural component of tragedies, is a staging of a reversal in line with audience expectations that were conditioned by familiarity with tragedies. In addition to suffering, two other plot components of tragedies structure *MPionius*. Recognition and reversal, also well known to ancient audiences through tragedies, in *MPionius* combine to issue a new *exemplum* of piety, and show its efficacy in reversing the martyr's trajectory, taking the martyr not from life to death, but the opposite. In this way *MPionius* delivers the plot structural features of recognition, reversal, and suffering intelligibly to an ancient audience, yet turns this tragic core to its own purposes.

Recognition in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

Within the plot structure presented above, I identify two recognition scenes: a first, foreshadowing recognition at 10.2, and a second at 21.2. I will discuss them in turn. Both recognition scenes occur after interrogations in which the identity of the martyr is questioned. The recognitions appear in connection with prose that answers the question of the martyr's identity.

By identity I mean something specific. What is at issue is whether Pionius is a trustworthy speaker about what it means to be a Christian and to live an exemplary life. Indeed,

Pionius' recognitions and reversals will work to equate these two. What is revealed through doing so is that despite appearances, Pionius is a credible witness to justice and virtue—even in death—and offers a model of *paideia* to emulate. In doing so *MPionius* participated in the project of redefining noble deportment, ultimately holding up the martyr as its own *exemplum*.

Because the text uses the motif of recognition to showcase a new *paideia*, it might be seen as even more recognizably tragic in its signals. It is, after all, subordination of character to action that distinguishes tragedy as a genre, according to Aristotle. In the *Poetics* he asserts that tragedy "is mimesis not of persons but of action and life," and he is so adamant about the primacy of action that he states, "without action there could be no tragedy, but without characters there could be."[437] Although, as I will detail below, the text certainly demonstrates Pionius' moral uprightness and masculinity, his traits are not the overarching point of the text. Rather the action, as it unfolds through his arrests, trial, speeches, and execution, supports the text's portrayal of Pionius as an *exemplum*: he is the vehicle for the action of the text.

Foreshadowing Recognition

The first interrogation by Polemon proceeds in two steps. It begins with a command issued by Polemon to sacrifice: "Obey us, Pionius."[438] Pionius asserts his agency by rejecting Polemon's attempts to persuade him, and simultaneously chastises Polemon for failing to abide by his own orders. "You have been ordered either to persuade or to punish," Pionius reminds the

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[437] *Poetics* 1450a15-25. ἡ γὰρ τραγῳδία μίμησίς ἐστιν οὐκ ἀνθρώπων ἀλλὰ πράξεως καὶ βίου, καὶ εὐδαιμονία καὶ κακοδαιμονία ἐν πράξει ἐστίν, καὶ τὸ τέλος πρᾶξίς τις ἐστίν, οὐ ποιότης· εἰσὶν δὲ κατὰ μὲν τὰ ἤθη ποιοί τινες, κατὰ δὲ τὰς πράξεις εὐδαίμονες ἢ τοὐναντίον. οὔκουν ὅπως τὰ ἤθη μιμήσωνται πράττουσιν, ἀλλὰ τὰ ἤθη συμπεριλαμβάνουσιν διὰ τὰς πράξεις· ὥστε τὰ πράγματα καὶ ὁ μῦθος τέλος τῆς τραγῳδίας, τὸ δὲ τέλος μέγιστον ἁπάντων. ἔτι ἄνευ μὲν πράξεως οὐκ ἂν γένοιτο τραγῳδία, ἄνευ δὲ ἠθῶν γένοιτ᾽ ἄν·

[438] *MPionius* 8.1.

official, and follows up: "You do not persuade, so punish."[439] After these preliminaries, the text reports that Polemon "started his interrogation."[440] The interrogation proceeds much like the preliminary questioning. Polemon demands Pionius sacrifice, and in response to these commands, Pionius merely answers: "I am a Christian," considering this response's implicature a sufficient refusal.[441] Polemon goes on to ask whom Pionius worships: "What sort of god do you worship?" Pionius' answer is lengthy: "The almighty God, who created heaven and earth and everything in these and all of us, who provides us with all things in abundance, whom we know through Christ, his Word."[442] Polemon seems to discern in Pionius' answer room for compromise, for he responds to Pionius with a request: "Then at least sacrifice to the emperor."[443] But Pionius stands firm, asserting the impossibility of reconciling the two competing demands on his loyalty: "I do not sacrifice to a man, for I am a Christian."[444]

The interrogation then proceeds in its second step, as the text reports that Polemon "interrogated him on the record," and to underscore the point, emphasizes that a "secretary was writing everything down."[445] Although Polemon questioned Pionius' identity in both preliminary questioning and the interrogation that took place just previous to this "on the record"

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[439] *MPionius* 8.1. The Greek text reflects the semantic play on words that a change in voice occasions: Polemon commands Pionius thus: Πείσθητι. Pionius refuses, using the same terminology: Κεκέλευσαι ἢ πείθειν ἢ κολάζειν. Οὐ πείθεις· κόλαζε.

[440] *MPionius* 8.2. Τότε ἐπερωτᾷ ὁ νεωκόρος Πολέμων.

[441] *MPionius* 8.2. Χριστιανός εἰμι.

[442] *MPionius* 8.3. Τὸν θεὸν τὸν παντοκράτορα τὸν ποιήσαντα τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐν αὐτοις καὶ πάντας ἡμᾶς, ὃς παρέχει ἡμῖν πάντα πλουσίως, ὃν ἐγνώκαμεν διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ Χριστοῦ.

[443] *MPionius* 8.4. Ἐπίθυσον οὖν κἂν τῷ αὐτοκράτορι.

[444] *MPionius* 8.4. Ἐγὼ ἀνθρώπῳ οὐκ ἐπιθύω· χριστιανὸς γάρ εἰμι.

[445] *MPionius* 9.1. Εἶτα ἐπηρώτησεν ἐγγράφως λέγων αὐτῷ· Τίς λέγῃ; γράφοντος τοῦ νοταρίου πάντα.

interrogation, he repeats the step here: "What is your name?"[446] Pionius answers, and Polemon asks a series of questions: "Are you a Christian?" "Of which church (ἐκκλησία)?"[447] Pionius answers "Yes" to the first, and characterizes his church as "the universal church, for there is no other church with Christ."[448] Polemon then asks Pionius, Sabina, and Asclepiades each their name, whether they are Christians, and to what group they belong.[449] Their assertions of Christian identity reflect the answer Pionius gave to Polemon when commanded to sacrifice, and reinforce the implication that to be a Christian is simultaneously to preclude the possibility of yielding to Polemon's commands to sacrifice.

This statement of identity, offered even before the preliminary interrogation[450] and sustained throughout it, plays a crucial role in the plot of *MPionius* because what is being contested in the trial is the identity of the martyr—an identity as a criminal, or as a model of piety[451]—and the trial is designed to reveal such an identity. Recent work on the preoccupation with trial scenes in antiquity underscores the function of these scenes within a context of ambiguous judicial procedure. Carly Daniel-Hughes and Maia Kotrosits point out that "Trial narratives, petitions (or participation in Roman bureaucracy more generally), confessions to the gods, and images of omnipresent Roman emperors negotiated the promise of power to disambiguate the ambiguous: to arbitrate questions of right and wrong, to offer a sense of

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[446] *MPionius* 9.1.

[447] *MPionius* 9.2.

[448] *MPionius* 9.2. Τῆς καθολικῆς· οὔτε γάρ ἐστιν ἄλλη παρὰ τῷ Χριστῷ.

[449] *MPionius* 9.1-9; the final question to Asclepiades asks, instead of the group to which he belongs, whom he worships (9.8-9).

[450] For the first time, at 7.5; it is Sabina who first claims the identity: "For we are Christians, and whosoever trusts in God will laugh in joy for ever."

[451] *MPionius* rhetorically poses exactly these questions at 5.16.

reparation or fairness, as well as (not insignificantly) to see and tell you who you 'really' are."[452] Such trial scenes attempt to resolve this ambiguity by staging "a fantasy in which Roman-style trials reveal truth and the workings of justice," and one way they do so is through "recognition and the revelation of the real and true identity of the protagonist."[453]

Scholars have long noted that *verbal* confession is both an important moment in martyr texts and that it functions as a recognition, in the sense that the confession reveals the martyr's identity. In this way they have noted verbal confession as a pivotal change. Paul Middleton, for example, goes so far as to say that, "on a literary level, it is this confession that forms the climax of each one of the *Acts*, since the action revolves around the challenge to either utter or recant these words. The moment of confession or denial is the fulcrum on which everything else depends."[454] It functions as this fulcrum because "a good confession and death led to life"[455]: that is, confession of a specific identity reverses the martyr's fortune; this is the climax of action in the martyr story, hinging on a recognition of identity that leads to reversal. This is what I will see, when I turn to the issue of reversal below, in Pionius' shift of fortune when he is sentenced to death as a result of his recognition as a Christian *exemplum*. The text connects the verbal confession explicitly to a reversal of fortune. Pionius remarks to this effect: "You have been ordered either to persuade or to punish. You do not persuade, so punish."[456] Pionius connects

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[452] Daniel-Hughes and Kotrosits, "Tertullian of Carthage and the Fantasy Life of Power," 16.

[453] Daniel-Hughes and Kotrosits, "Tertullian of Carthage and the Fantasy Life of Power," 12-13.

[454] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 85. Judith Lieu agrees: "the determinative moment is not the death, however extended or graphic, nor even the preceding torture; rather it is the declaration χριστιανός εἰμι, *Christiana sum*, although this is no less the moment the choice is made for death…" ("'I am a Christian,'" 213). So too Grig calls the courtroom scenes of martyr acts the climax of the narrative (*Making Martyrs*, 39); see her development of this thought in her chapter "Courtroom Dramas."

[455] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 86-87.

[456] *MPionius* 8.1.

upholding a Christian identity to a change in fortune, recognizing that since he resists persuasion, he faces punishment. By asserting this identity, Pionius forecasts punishments that the in-text future holds for him: torture and public death.

While the verbal component of the martyr's confession has long been recognized as a fulcrum of the text, I would like to emphasize that this scene also involves a corresponding recognition through changes in Pionius' physical appearance. As noted above, visible cues are one way Aristotle notes tragic recognitions can occur. Aristotle's category of tokens and visible changes provides examples not intended to be exhaustive: a scar, for example, or objects like jewelry.[457] Here, too, a visible cue induces "recognition" in the full tragic sense, that is, a shift from ignorance to knowledge—in this case, on the part of the in-text audience—that forms a pivotal moment in the plot.

It is in this setting of an interrogation designed to reveal the truth of the martyr's identity that the first recognition scene in *MPionius* occurs. As Pionius and his company are led to prison, a crowd follows them. Immediately the crowd experiences a recognition: "He was always pale, but now how fiery his face is!"[458] The crowd thus witnesses a change in Pionius' appearance, and they further index this change to his behavior: "Such παιδεία in such circumstances!"[459] They thus remark on his continued assertion that he is choosing his fate. While others did yield to commands to sacrifice, Pionius remarks of himself, "Each one makes his own choice."[460] The

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[457] *Poetics* 1454b20-21. While Aristotle does not include changes in physical appearance, his list does not claim to be exhaustive. I include notable physical changes under the heading of physical tokens and objects that lead to a recognition.

[458] *MPionius* 10.2: Πῶς ἀεὶ χλωρὸς νῦν πυρρὸν ἔχει τὸ πρόσωπον;

[459] *MPionius* 10.7. Ω τοσαύτη παιδεία καὶ οὕτως εστίν;

[460] *MPionius* 10.6. Ἕκαστος ἰδίαν ἔχει προαίρεσιν.

fact that the crowd forms an explicit connection between appearance and characterization, as well as the placement of this passage within the context of a trial aimed at discerning the identity of Pionius and his friends, are both significant. These contextual bookends draw attention to how effectively the changes in Pionius' appearance have induced a recognition on the part of the in-text audience. Importantly, this recognition of Pionius is indexed to his identity as an example of proper, Christian *paideia*. As such, the recognition directs the audience's focus: when the text stages interrogations that ask who the martyrs are, what is at issue is what it means to take on the identity of a Christian.

Earlier scholarship on this martyr text takes little note of the change to Pionius' physical appearance. Glen Bowersock, for example, remarks that Pionius "turns ruddy with joy" about the prospect of martyrdom, because he is so eager to die.[461] So too Louis Robert, with whom Bowersock is so often in agreement: "Cet homme, d'ordinaire pâle, se montre littéralement ardent par l'accès du sang qui lei colors les joues."[462] Both take Pionius' physical change to signal an oft-remarked quality of the martyr: willingness, even eagerness, to die.

The more recent trend to discern what texts evoke to readers within a delimited historical context attends more closely to such literary devices as changes of appearance and crowd response. Accordingly, recent research has noted the significance of Pionius' physical description as a cipher for his character: this has been the impulse of scholars who invoke the topic of physiognomy to interpret this passage in *MPionius*. In doing so they counter the earlier remark of Robert that "Le mot πυρρὸς, 'rouge,' 'jaune-rouge,' est bien rare comme èpithète d'un visage."[463]

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[461] Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome*, 60.

[462] Robert, *Le Martyre de Pionios*, 71-72.

[463] Robert, *Le Martyre de Pionios*, 72.

Not so, as it turns out: Éric Rebillard, for example, offers that "A fiery face indicates shame in the ancient physiognomy tradition…or betrays a rogue."[464] He draws on the Pseudo-Aristotelian work *Physiognomics*, culling external evidence mostly for negative character traits—contra Robert and Bowersock's view that his change of appearance signals joy or enthusiasm.

Recent work by Callie Callon enriches possibilities for interpreting this image. Her findings help explain the contradictory views documented above: "In ancient physiognomic thought, ruddy cheeks could have both positive and negative connotations."[465] She documents a series of examples: Jerome, for example, associates ruddiness of the whole face with drunkenness, while Adamantius sees red cheeks as a symbol of bashfulness.[466] Callon also expertly catalogs expectations of positive or negative associations of redness along gender lines: the same blush that Adamantius mentions as indicative of bashfulness was widely remarked upon as a desirable trait in women especially, since it signaled their shyness, which in turn indicated their virginity and chastity.[467]

Not only does ruddiness evoke multiple possible readings of character, but so does paleness[468]—the same pallor the crowd first witnesses in Pionius when they note that he has

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[464] Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 63.

[465] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 68. The multivalence of a fiery complexion has a long history, as Callon points out; a notable example is Moses' fiery face, described in Exodus 34:29-35. The text reads: "When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tables of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. And when Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him." Early Jewish traditions understood this text to say that Moses' face glowed brighter than the sun and the moon (Heinz Schreckenberg and Kurt Schubert, *Jewish Historiography and Iconography in Early and Medieval Christianity* [Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992], xv, including Exodus translation). Because of linguistic variability attending the term for "shone," this passage has alternatively rendered the rays emanating from Moses' face as "horns"—a reading that has a long history of attestation (Schreckenberg and Schubert, *Jewish Historiography and Iconography*, xvi).

[466] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 68.

[467] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 68.

[468] *MPionius* 10.2; the term is χλωρὸς.

changed can be multiply interpreted.[469] Pale skin was seen as a positive characterization of the ideal Christian, both male and female, and "Basil praises this [pale skin] as a physical indication of control over the body and its desires."[470] At the same time, a pale, sallow complexion could denote lifelessness, a body deprived of nutrients.[471] In their multivalence, these readings of character based on appearance attest a belief in antiquity that it was possible to derive information about a person's moral state from their physical appearance.[472] More interestingly, Callon's argument is that "physiognomic thought played an important role in the art of persuasion in the ancient world."[473] In short, physiognomic thought propounded the theory that one's character could be determined from appearance, and it is in ascribing traits to a character through physiognomic description that texts aimed to persuade their audience.

Building on Callon's point that physiognomy performs a characterization that aids persuasion, I propose that the role of characterization in persuasion is also an important component of tragic recognition as it operates in *MPionius*. Persuasion is certainly the context in which the change of appearance to Pionius' countenance occurs. Following his lengthy speech to the Jews and Greeks, in which he invokes both groups' respective revered texts,[474] Pionius faces attempts to persuade him to sacrifice, and then is asked a series of questions whose effect is to identity himself as a Christian, whereby that description alone answers the question of whether

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[469] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 126.

[470] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 106 for female characterization; 95, 96 for male.

[471] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 58, 96.

[472] Callon notes that physiognomy was especially popular at three specific time periods: from the third to the first centuries BCE; the second century CE, a time of peak popularity; and the fourth century CE, at which time there was a revival of interest in the practice (*Reading Bodies*, 11).

[473] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 4.

[474] *MPionius* 4.2-24.

he will sacrifice, and in doing so, to define a proper Christian *paideia*. Just as the crowd attempts to persuade him, Pionius attempts to persuade them to his side, both through rhetoric—his highly stylized speeches—and his shift in appearance, a demonstration of character to the in-text audience which, Callon's research suggests, would render him more persuasive to them.

While giving his speech, Pionius takes on idealized masculine traits, as Cobb has shown, resolutely upholding his ability to choose under duress, and mimicking the stance of an orator.[475] But it is not just his status as male and educated philosopher that this pericope highlights: "As noted before, pallor and ruddy cheeks could have negative connotations. However, here the pallor could be indicative of his philosophical character. Given that Pionius has just been resolutely attesting his status as a Christian, likely this ruddiness is indicative of the passionate nature with which he spoke and thus is a positive indication of his conviction regarding his position."[476] By drawing attention to the text's emphasis on Pionius' coloring, Callon expands on the insights of Bowersock and Robert. Pionius is impassioned, indeed, but what this passion signals to his audience is his strength and stability of character, even if the text relies on coding him as masculine to achieve those ends. The text lends credibility to Callon's reading, since it is only after the crowd notes Pionius' change in appearance,[477] from pale to ruddy, that they also see fit to compliment his behavior, noting his *paideia* in even these circumstances: "And others said: 'Such discipline [παιδεία] in such circumstances!'"[478] In this way, as Callon argues, the

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[475] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 72-75.

[476] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 126.

[477] So Bro Larsen: "the token is in itself mute and does not convey the necessary information, unless it is coded by a subnarrative that connects the token with a specific individual" (*Recognizing the Stranger,* 67). To Bro Larsen, the very open-endedness that Collon analyzes as expressive of physiognomy is a standard tool of recognition.

[478] *MPionius* 10.7.

text's revelation of Pionius' character through "physiognomic ideals that attest to bravery, nobility, and good character" contributes to a persuasive program that encourages Christians to emulate his behavior.[479]

We can better appreciate the text's interest in showcasing Pionius as an *exemplum* to emulate by focusing on a philological feature of this moment in the text. The crowd expresses astonishment at Pionius' παιδεία in his circumstances, alerted to his show of such παιδεία by a change in his countenance. The term παιδεία here has been a matter of translational disagreement and dissatisfaction, reflected in varying attempts to capture the term's meaning. Herbert Musurillo's text, which has long been the standard translation, renders παιδεία "chastistement."[480] The suggestion makes for inelegant reading, since it is actually difficult to isolate a moment of chastisement in the text that could serve as παιδεία's referent. Noticing that Musurillo's translation obscures the meaning of the text, Louis Robert suggested a shift, translating the term as "discipline."[481]

Rendering παιδεία "discipline" is certainly closer to the text's meaning than "chastisement," but it is possible to provide a more accurate rendering, which simultaneously more accurately reflects the meaning of the larger text, since it highlights the mode of "identity" the text is invested in exploring through Pionius. Building on seeing the "discipline" that Pionius portrays as a display of the masculine behavioral ideals that are Cobb's and Callon's focus, I suggest leaving παιδεία untranslated. In addition to displaying a particular mode of behavior that

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[479] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 116.

[480] Musurillo, *Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 148-149.

[481] Robert, *Le Martyre de Pionios*, 38, 74. Lane Fox suggested "education" and considered the significance of the topic of *paideia* at this time period for Christians, thus arriving closely at the reading that I offer here (*Pagans and Christians*, 477).

is in alignment with other societal ideals, and thus showing discipline by adhering to those ideals, what Pionius puts on display to his audience is his *own* παιδεία: the performance of the martyr is a style of education that he performs. *MPionius* participated in the project of redefining who a hero is, ultimately holding up the martyr as its own *exemplum*. This makes broader notions of Roman behavioral ideals less the focus than the specific model that Pionius broadcasts to those paying attention to him: proper training/παιδεία in practicing a definitively Christian piety.

The case for transliteration instead of translation, in support of viewing the invocation of *paideia* here as a reference to a program of behavior that models virtue, can be strengthened by considering the date of *MPionius*, which I have placed in the mid-third-to-fourth century. The fourth century was in fact a time of high anxiety about *paideia*, as a newly state-sanctioned Christianity negotiated its new relationship with the dominant Greco-Roman culture.[482] It was this century in particular in which thinkers, both Christian and not, "discussed the validity of myths and stories about pagan gods." Voices like Gregory of Nazianzus joined in the debates, and the ultimate outcome was that Christians "cherished pagan literature and myths" for no other reason than that they were theirs, too: "Traditional *paideia* was a shared possession of both

[482] An especially helpful resource on the topic is *Literature and Society in the Fourth Century AD: Performing Paideia, Constructing the Present, Presenting the Self,* edited by Peter Van Nuffelen and Lieve van Hoof (Leiden: Brill, 2014), but the topic of Christianity and broader cultural ideals of *paideia* is vast. Werner Jaeger's text is still classic (*Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*). Studies of Christianity's relationship to Greco-Roman *paideia* rely on research on *paideia* as a central point of identity in the Greco-Roman world. As Jason Zurawski and Gabriele Boccaccini put it, "philosophers and rhetors of the Hellenistic and Roman periods understood paideia as a—maybe even the—defining characteristic of social and cultural identity" (*Second Temple Jewish "Paideia" in Context* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017]. 4). Given the centrality of *paideia* as a feature of identity, crucial background reading to any study of Christian conceptions of *paideia* is work on the Second Sophistic. Two excellent texts on the topic include Simon Goldhill's *Being Greek Under Rome: Cultural Identity, the Second Sophistic and the Development of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001) and Tim Whitmarsh's *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire: The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Christians and pagans."[483] Among these contests over how to relate Christianity to a tradition of classical *paideia*, what Pionius puts on display is not "discipline," as Rebillard's (improved) translation reads; rather, the text claims that Pionius' performance is what *paideia should* be, showcasing a new style of education.

We can then deepen our appreciation of physiognomy as a demonstration of character if we understand this scene, as I propose, in terms of the tragic plot structural device of recognition. Callon is certainly correct to point out that Pionius' change of appearance signals his stable, brave character—its display of exemplary *paideia*, which, as I have suggested, does not cite Roman ideals of bravery and masculinity so much as model proper training. I would add, moreover, that it is significant, structurally speaking, that this performance of character occurs in the context of an interrogation in which Pionius' identity is under investigation. Pionius answers verbally, "I am a Christian," and his appearance answers for him too: his physiognomy shows him to be an *exemplum*, a model of behavior worth emulating. The audience is directed to attach this model to what it means to be a Christian. That is, his words as well as his appearance attest to who he is, and it is their combination that induces recognition on the part of the in-text audience.

I suggest that the text crafts this in-text audience's recognition of Pionius to signal to the audience outside of the text—that is, a readerly audience, or an audience hearing or seeing the martyrdom performed liturgically—that Pionius' attempts to persuade the audience of his contrary views of his identity as someone to emulate are beginning to succeed. In crafting this

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[483] Quotations are from Raffaella Cribiore, "Why Did Christians Compete with Pagans for Greek Paideia?" pages 359-372 in *Pedagogy in Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity*, edited by Matthew Goff and Emma Wasserman (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature Press, 2017), 371-372. Cribiore's article focuses specifically on the fourth century.

rhetorical success within the text, the text is thus doing the work its frame reports as the side effect of traversing the martyr narrative: recall, as I noted in the summary above, that a major goal of the text is strengthening those who want to imitate the martyr.[484] The in-text recognition forwards the formative aims for the extra-textual audience that are articulated in the text's own prologue and epilogue.

To conclude, this first recognition occurs when, following an interrogation that is designed to reveal his identity, the crowd witnesses Pionius' change of appearance. The recognition occurs on the part of the crowd, who recognize Pionius not as a criminal or as someone rushing to death, but as someone of stable character, an *exemplum* worth imitating; and who speaks authoritatively about a definitively Christian piety. Perhaps this demonstration of what it really means to be a Christian is portrayed as all the more necessary since the text mentions multiple times those Christians who have *failed* to align with this ideal model. By characterizing Pionius positively, through physical characteristics that indicate his moral character, the text showcases successful persuasion *within* the text, and models this persuasion for the audience *outside* of the text. In this way, *MPionius*' deployment of this plot-structural feature plays with the uneven distribution of knowledge that recognitions exploit.

Second Recognition

The second recognition scene in *MPionius*, which the first foreshadows, occurs at 21.2. This recognition scene too follows an interrogation, this one lengthier and portrayed as more formal, since a proconsul, Quintilianus, has traveled to Smyrna with the express purpose of

[484] *MPionius* 1.

trying Pionius.[485] His arrival is necessary, the text tells us, for the events to unfold as we predict, toward punishment. Already at 10.4 the text anticipates the "official" interrogation by Quintilianus: "And someone shouted: 'If they don't sacrifice, let them be punished.' Polemon said: 'But we don't have the fasces that give us authority.'"[486] Quintilianus, who does in fact have such authority, proceeds as did the earlier interrogation conducted by Polemon. He asks Pionius' name, his sect (θρησκείαν), and the nature of his group.[487] This time, Quintilianus asks about Pionius' status among the group: "You are their teacher?"[488] Pionius answers affirmatively, "Yes, I taught them," clarifying that he is not a teacher of foolishness, as Quintilianus suggests, but a teacher of piety.[489]

The text builds upon the image of Pionius as a model of *paideia* introduced in what I called the foreshadowing recognition, this time explicitly calling him a διδάσκαλος. After he answers questions, Pionius is commanded to sacrifice. This time, when he refuses, he is sentenced to death by burning. Just as when the text emphasizes the accordance of this trial with proper judiciary procedure by emphasizing Quintilianus' status, the outcome of the trial is also portrayed as formal, noting that Pionius' sentence was "read from a tablet in Latin": "As Pionius confesses himself to be a Christian, we have commanded that he be burnt alive."[490]

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[485] *MPionius* 19.2; at 15.3 Pionius remarks: "It is the rule that those who have been thrown into prison await for the proconsul."

[486] *MPionius* 10.4. Ἀλλ' αἱ ῥάβδοι ἡμᾶς οὐ προάγουσιν ἵνα ἐξουσίαν ἔχομεν.

[487] *MPionius* 19.2-8.

[488] *MPionius* 19.6.

[489] *MPionius* 19.7. The distinction is drawn thus: Ἐπηρώτησε· Τῆς μωρίας διδάσκαλος ἦς; Ἀπεκρίθη· Τῆς θεοσεβείας.

[490] *MPionius* 20.7. Καὶ ἀπὸ πινακίδος ἀνεγνώσθη Ῥωμαϊστί· Πιόνιον ἑαυτὸν ὁμολογήσαντα εἶναι Χριστιανὸν ζῶντα καῆναι προσετάξαμεν.

It is following this formal trial and its corresponding questions regarding Pionius' identity that another recognition occurs. In response to his sentence, Pionius agreeably and eagerly goes to the arena to be immolated.[491] He undresses willingly in preparation, and then, "as he observed that his own body was sound and in good shape, he was filled with a great joy, looked to heaven, and thanked God for keeping him thus."[492] As Callon notes, "despite (or perhaps because of) suffering torture, [Pionius'] body is dignified, a positive physiognomic trait. Second, prior to giving himself over, he makes the pious gesture of the upward gaze. And finally, he 'allows' the soldier to put in the nails. Pionius is portrayed as masculinly [sic] controlling the situation and… brings about his death of his own volition."[493] Callon points to the ideal characterization signaled by physiognomic description, showing the martyr to be a model of masculine control and mastery of both his volition and comportment.

This moment of Pionius' observation of his body, following his formal interrogation, constitutes the second recognition scene in *MPionius*. The crowd's initial recognition of Pionius as an *exemplum* of *paideia* foreshadows this bodily recognition. Throughout the text, Pionius has known and reported to his audience that he will reinterpret life, by resignifying the status of death as life. As early as his first speech, he sets the stage for such a dramatic reversal of expectations. When the crowd appeals to Pionius after this speech, exclaiming, "Believe us, Pionius, that we love you, and that you deserve to live for many reasons, because of your character and your gentleness. It is good to live and look upon this light," Pionius counters their

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[491] *MPionius* 21.1.

[492] *MPionius* 21.2: Εἶτα κατανοήσας τὸ ἀγνὸν καὶ εὔσχημον τοῦ σώματος ἑαυτοῦ πολλῆς ἐπλήσθη χαρᾶς, ἀναβλέψας δὲ εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ εὐχαριστήσας τῷ τοιοῦτον αὐτὸν διατηρήσαντι θεῷ…

[493] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 126.

appeals concisely: "I took say that it is good to live, but that life we yearn for is greater. Yes for the light, but the true light."[494] Similarly after his second speech, those who "were pious and had led a good life" visit Pionius in prison, aggrieved because, despite having lived thus, they have failed to reap the rewards of good life.[495] Pionius in turn declares that these attempts are doomed to failure. Instead he sets up his own model of *paideia* as a way to live virtuously and piously.

These two discussions on the good life foreshadow the clearest articulation yet of what comprises it. When Pionius refuses to recant his faith, Quintilianus continues to press, appealing, yet again, to the inherent goodness of living: "Many others have sacrificed, and they live, and they are of sound mind."[496] When Pionius still refuses, Quintilianus asks: "Why are you eager for death?"[497] Pionius' answer redefines what Quintilianus sees as punishment: Pionius claims that he is eager "not for death, but for life."[498] His recognition of his body at this moment catalyzes reversal, and it also signals to the readerly—versus the in-text—audience that his reversal of the logic of death and life is coming to pass. He sees, while hanging on the cross, that his body is in good shape,[499] manifesting the reversal that will culminate at his physical death. Cobb rightly notes that at this self-recognition, "the moment of disrobing results in an epiphany about the true nature of the body": alive, even in death.[500]

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[494] *MPionius* 5.3-4.

[495] *MPionius* 12.2.

[496] *MPionius* 20.3.

[497] *MPionius* 20.5.

[498] *MPionius* 20.5.

[499] *MPionius* 21.2; Musurillo's translation reads, "realizing the holiness and dignity of his own body" for κατανοήσας τὸ ἁγνὸν καὶ εὔσχημον τοῦ σώματος ἑαυτοῦ (*Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, 162-163).

[500] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 184 fn 14; she compares this epiphany to Perpetua's fourth vision (*Passion of Perpetua and Felicitas*, 10.7). Perpetua's martyrdom is Cobb's text of closest focus, in both *Divine Deliverance* and *Dying to Be Men*.

The two scenes of recognition in *MPionius* are structurally located immediately after scenes of interrogation, in which the martyr is asked in multiple ways, "who are you?" As others have noted, recognition scenes impart knowledge to some demarcated audience, playing with the uneven distribution of knowledge that texts rhetorically set up. They reveal identity features of characters, especially those that have a bearing on the characters' change of fortune.[501] Moreover, these recognition scenes, relying as they do on physiognomic convention, worked to persuade audiences—in *MPionius*, that Pionius is, despite the legal situation in which he finds himself, not a criminal, but a model of moral behavior for audiences within and outside of the text to emulate. We should trust him, on the basis of his physiognomic characterization as noble and possessing privileged knowledge, that his view of what constitutes proper piety is not only true, but so true that it persuades even such disbelieving audiences as the in-text audience—an audience of varied makeup (Greeks and Jews), and thus not predisposed to be in agreement with Pionius. Both recognitions facilitate the text's stated goal of presenting Pionius as heroic *exemplum*.

Reversal in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

Above I noted that the *Poetics* praises recognitions and reversals that happen simultaneously with one another, or because of one another.[502] Like in the *Bacchae* and *Oedipus*, which I discussed above, and as Collins' brief analysis of the *Gospel of Mark* succinctly demonstrates, we can view the response to the imparted knowledge of Pionius' character as a reversal of fortune. In the *Gospel of Mark*, the discovery of Jesus' identity is what effects his

[501] To return to an Aristotelian idea, these characterizations still are subordinate to action, since they follow on the action itself: there would be no occasion for the audience to follow Pionius and glimpse his changed visage if the events of the narrative did not lead the characters to act.

[502] Aristotle, *Poetics* 1452a32-33.

fate, his reversal of fortune. Collins explains how: "in 8:27, he [Jesus] asks the disciples who people say that he is. This question leads to Peter's discovery that he is the Messiah. This discovery coincides with a reversal in the action, because Jesus' response is the prediction of his own suffering and death."[503] This is certainly the way that identity is explored in *MPionius*: through interrogation, his claims to an identity that is in contrast with a person who can yield to the demands to sacrifice are ultimately what lead to his death. In both *Mark* and *MPionius*, the disciples discover what it means to be messiah or martyr, respectively: suffering and death. In this way, the recognitions of Pionius' true nature coincide with his shift in fortune from life to death, because his Christian identity accrues to itself fitting punishment. These recognitions lead to a reversal of fortune in that once alive, which the in-text audience claims is a good in itself,[504] Pionius foregoes when his fortune turns and he is killed.

Cobb has shown that martyr texts use their knowledge of audience expectations of pain in order to subvert those expectations, as I have shown above.[505] I would like to propose that in this reversal at the end of the text, *MPionius* similarly plays with its audience's expectations. Knowing ancient audiences expect the interplay of recognition and a reversal of fortune, the text guides readers along via these expectations only to change the terms. A standard reversal of fortune might bring about the character's downfall in a movement from life to a recognition that yields the character's death, as has led scholars to identify tragic recognition in the *Gospel of Mark*.[506] *MPionius*, however, follows that same trajectory only to reframe his movement toward

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[503] Collins, *Mark*, 92.

[504] *MPionius* 5.3, 12.2, 20.5.

[505] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, throughout, but for a succinct statement, 82-83.

[506] More examples of this trajectory include Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannus*, and Euripides' *Hippolytus*; an example from Roman tragedy is Seneca's *Thyestes*.

death as a reversal of fortune for the better: a drastic reinterpretation of "bad fortune" and "good fortune." And this reversal trades on the expectations of the in-text crowd, which have featured so heavily throughout the narrative. Ari Bryen's articulation is helpful: in *MPionius*, "the 'action'…hinges on the reversal of expectations in cases of suspicious or marginal figures in the community."[507] These figures consistently define the good life as, first and foremost, the act of *living*, asking Pionius to change course so that he can take part in it. Ultimately, then, *MPionius* plays into audience expectations for a reversal that flows from the recognition scenes, only to reverse expectations for the reversal itself.

This reversal in the status of life and death builds throughout the text and culminates in one spectacular[508] scene at the end of the text, at 22. Let me trace the way the preceding plot leads to this defining reversal. In the schema I proposed above, I noted three instantiations of a pattern: an arrest, a speech and its resulting attempts at persuasion (including two lengthy speeches), and then an interrogation and, more formally, a trial. In the first of these sequences, the crowd attempts to talk Pionius out of his position, appealing to him with arguments about the inherent goodness of life: "It is good to live and look upon this light."[509] In his response he agrees with them, but reinterprets life: "I too say that it is good to live, but that life we yearn for is greater. Yes for the light, but the true light. Yes, indeed, those things are all good, and we do not shun them because we want to die or because we hate God's works, but because of the

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[507] Ari Bryen, "Martyrdom, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Procedure," *Classical Antiquity* 33.2 (2014): 243-280, at 255.

[508] The phrasing is from Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World*, 29. By emphasizing the spectacle of this scene, Darling Young argues that ancient audiences would have either experienced or imagined this martyr text as a performance. That is, given the culture of performance in which martyr texts like *MPionius* were composed and read, the spectacle that texts record functioned as a performance cue to ancient audiences. Her text is interested in martyr texts as liturgical dramas.

[509] *MPionius* 5.3: Καλόν ἐστι τὸ ζῆν καὶ τὸ φῶς τοῦτο βλέπειν.

superiority of other great goods we disdain those that trap us."[510] Early on, Pionius sets the stage for a dramatic reversal.

In the second instantiation of this pattern, Pionius gives a speech in prison, again facing down those who want to persuade him to sacrifice, and attempting to persuade them in turn[511] that his view of life is the better one. As in the first pattern, the conversation turns to how one should live.[512] This audience is less assured than the first one; they weep because their attempts at living well have been thwarted, because despite their best efforts and pious way of living, they have been "dragged off by force to sacrifice."[513] Thus, this group too does not have an accurate grasp on what it is to live piously: they have tried to do so, but their attempts have failed.

In the third sequence, this time after the trial, Pionius faces his third sustained attempt by others to persuade him. This time, it is the proconsul who seeks to dissuade him from his course of action through appeals to the value of living: "Many others have sacrificed, and they live, and they are of sound mind…After the interrogation, think about it and change your mind."[514] When Pionius refuses, the proconsul asks: "Why are you eager for death?"[515] Pionius responds, "Not for death, but for life."[516] This pattern of three rebuttals to propositions of what it is to live well structures the narrative and points toward a culminating image, a reversal, that cashes in on the sustained discussion of what it means to enact piety.

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[510] *MPionius* 5.4-5.5.

[511] *MPionius* 12.1 for those trying to persuade him; 12.2-15ff for his attempts to persuade.

[512] *MPionius* 12.2.

[513] *MPionius* 12.2.

[514] *MPionius* 20.3.

[515] *MPionius* 20.5.

[516] *MPionius* 20.5.

Once more before dying, Pionius predicts a reversal of death and life. Given one last chance to remove the nails, Pionius retorts, "I felt that they are in place."[517] After a pause, he adds, "For this reason, I am eager to awake all the more quickly," and the text adds that, by this, Pionius was "revealing the resurrection of the dead."[518] With these comments, Pionius highlights the force of the reversal under depiction: what is about to happen, he presents as having already happened, and the death that awaits is actually an awakening. With this provocative narrative gesture to the audience outside of the text and its presumed knowledge of the theological concept of resurrection of the dead, Pionius dies on a cross—and through doing so, the audience can infer, he awakens.

The final image of the text brings the pattern of discussion about the reversal of life and death to its fruition. After death, despite being both hung and set on fire, "his body was similar to that of a decorated athlete in his prime. For his ears were not distorted, his hair was still on the top of his head, and his chin was decorated as if covered with his first beard. A marvelous grace shone on his face again, so that the Christians were strengthened in their faith and the unbelievers returned dismayed and with fearful consciences."[519] The text is explicit about Pionius' success reversing life and death. This physical description of Pionius' body, it says, is a signal of the reversal that has taken place: "his crown was signaled through his body also."[520] What specifically his body symbolizes is that, "after his victory in the great contest, he passed

[517] *MPionius* 21.4.

[518] *MPionius* 21.4.

[519] *MPionius* 22.4.

[520] *MPionius* 22.2.

through the narrow gate to the broad and great light."[521] Narratively coming full circle, to return to the "true light"[522] Pionius referred to the first time he responded to his audience's attempt to dissuade him from his course of action, this portion of the text assures the audience that the reversal forecasted at the beginning of the text took place successfully: death truly is life; in dying, Pionius now actually lives, and he does so more fully than when he was physically alive.

With this account of the text's major structuring reversal in place, let me specify how understanding this as a reversal in the tragic sense enriches our appreciation of the narrative dynamics of *MPionius*. Unlike the episodes I identify as recognition scenes above, the resignification of death as life has generated much scholarly attention.

Perhaps one reason for this is that the final scene showcases obvious visual resonances with the death of Polycarp in his martyr text, which itself imitates the death of Christ. Polycarp and Pionius both hang aloft at the end of their narratives, physically dead but also triumphant.[523] The reference to a "resurrection of the dead"[524] reaches out to readers who have theological tools to identify the reference. Those with knowledge would likely also link Pionius' death to that of Jesus.[525] Middleton acknowledges this link to the death and resurrection of Jesus, noting that deaths that recall the death of Jesus would have been interpreted to readers as "participation in

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[521] *MPionius* 22.1.

[522] *MPionius* 5.4.

[523] The text also refers to Polycarp by name at *MPionius* 2.1—it is both implicitly and explicitly connected with the earlier Smyrnean martyr story.

[524] *MPionius* 21.4.

[525] L. Arik Greenberg makes the point strongly: "Here [in *MPionius*], we see not only said reversal of conventional ideology, but a rare reference to resurrection in the martyr's future. It is unclear, the exact relationship of resurrection to the immortality of the soul in this text, but what is clear is that the two are present in the author's mind" (*My Share of God's Reward*, 176). See also Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 128, who connects this invocation of resurrection to other martyr texts, such as the *Martyrdom of Fructuosus*.

Christ's victory."[526] The imagery of the cross in connection with gestures to the death of Jesus makes this connection particularly powerful: "So well did this imagery of life and death work, that martyrs could be said to be born at the point of death."[527]

The imagery of Pionius at his death has also been fruitfully analyzed in physiognomic terms. As Cobb notes, Pionius' body in death is an undefeated body, despite its total defeat, in biological terms.[528] Callon expands on the physical resonance of Pionius' death, noting that his appearance "reflects his self-control and comportment."[529] Rich details convey the victorious nature of Pionius: "The non-distorted ears and orderly hair likely imply mastery of the body even in death and a physiognomic concern for well-ordered presentation of the body. The luminosity that conveys divine favor or presence is restored to the face."[530] Jan Kozlowski adds more texture to this analysis when he notes a resonance between Pionius' post-mortem appearance and the description of Commodus after death, reported by Herodian. The comparison helps us to see parallels between Pionius' body and that of a warrior in battle.[531] The physical depiction of Pionius after his death symbolizes the reversal that has taken place: a reversal of fortune, but not from life to death; instead, from death to life. In this reversal, Pionius is portrayed as a glorious athlete, victorious as he passes through the narrow gate and wears a crown.[532]

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[526] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 80; so too Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World*, 29.

[527] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 95.

[528] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 85.

[529] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 126.

[530] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 126-7.

[531] Jan Kozlowski, "The Portrait of Commodus in Herodian's History (1,7,5-6) as the Source of Pionius' post mortem Description in Martyrium Pionii (22,2-4)," *Vigiliae Christianae* 62 (2008): 35-42.

[532] *MPionius* 22.1-2.

This scene has been explicitly described as a reversal. Greenberg refers to a "reversal of conventional ideology,"[533] for example, and Middleton notes, "When the writer observes, 'the dead were restored to life through the living' a remarkable transformation has occurred. Each category used to understand life has been reversed. Death equals life; life equals death. Death equals victory; life constitutes defeat and failure."[534] As I showed above for recognition, then, scholars have also identified the scenes I highlight here as reversal, although they do not mean it in the plot-structural sense that I do.

Scholars interested in the social reality of martyrdom and the role martyrdom played in identity construction are interested in this "reversal of conventional ideology" for its impact on Christian relationships with governing authorities, especially in future centuries as Christians continued to construct their identities on the model of the martyr, the ideal Christian. Elizabeth Castelli, for example, remarks that "By reinterpreting suffering as salvation, Christian theorists interrupted the circuit of power created by Roman judicial structures and articulated a competing theory of power."[535] In this way the conceptual transformation that takes place in these narratives is an act of resistance, a way to counter power that was being exerted upon Christians in the historical context of persecution. It can also offer a theological interpretation, a spiritual reading of powerlessness that interprets powerlessness as an asset.[536]

Adding to these rich interpretations, I emphasize that we can understand the re-signification of the martyr's death as life as a "reversal" in yet another sense—in the sense of a

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[533] Greenberg, *My Share of God's Reward*, 176.

[534] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 95.

[535] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 48.

[536] As is the case in Dorothy Lee-Pollard, "Powerlessness as Power: A Key Emphasis in the Gospel of Mark," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 40.2 (1987): 173-188.

recognizably tragic plot device to which ancient audiences would likely be attuned, which they might expect to coincide with recognition, and which they would understand to structure the entirety of the narrative. If we view the text of *MPionius* with an eye to the directives that the narrative seeks to impart, the in-text reversal is not just a counter to opposing authorities. While I acknowledge this important social-ideological work, the reversal also does important literary work. Pionius' self-recognition as healthy in his torture, about to awaken to life as he goes to his death, plays upon in order to reverse its audience's expectations about tragic reversals of fortune.

On this reading, the reversal of "death to life" is not merely a "language reversal,"[537] nor only an act of political resistance,[538] but also a reversal in the very status of life and death. Middleton picks up on the significance of this narrative construction: "The life and, most importantly, death of each individual Christian was therefore cast as having cosmic significance."[539] Middleton's language of "cosmic significance" helpfully emphasizes the way this narrative reversal takes up but also goes beyond the political. Moss notes that the reference to a "narrow gate" reinforces this cosmic message, recalling the reader to the gospels of Matthew and Luke, which use this description to characterize salvation.[540] This cosmic reversal of the status of Pionius' death thus plays upon an audience's expectations about tragic reversal. It redirects attention away from mere reversals of fortune or politics, to suggest that the martyr's death effects a reversal on a much larger scale and, by so doing, completes its articulation of a Christian *exemplum* of piety.

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[537] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 95.

[538] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 48.

[539] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 96.

[540] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 127, 128. The references are to Matthew 7:13-21 and Luke 13:23-27.

Conclusion

Suffering, two recognition scenes, at 10.2 and at 21.2, and a reversal at 22, structure the plot of *MPionius*. The presentation of suffering in the text is itself a tragic generic convention, but in addition, I demonstrate by drawing on Cobb's research, the text stages a reversal of audience expectations of suffering. This reversal of audience expectation is a self-conscious manipulation of generic conventions of tragedies that an ancient audience would recognize, and is deployed to make a distinctly Christian point: that martyrs do not suffer at all, despite their torment. The recognitions immediately follow interrogations that seek to discover Pionius' identity, and thus participate in the project of revealing Pionius' character, supporting the "I am a Christian" oaths with corroborating physiognomic imagery. In seeking to identify Pionius, the text aims to showcase in Pionius a model of *paideia* for others to emulate, and equates these models of behavior with what it means to be a Christian. The recognitions in the text work toward a reversal of Pionius' fortune, since they lead to his ultimate death in the text. But ultimately the text reverses readerly expectations of the trajectory of Pionius' fortune. While in tragedies, the trajectory from good fortune to bad is to be expected, and often aligns with a trajectory from life to death,[541] *MPionius* reinterprets this trajectory such that Pionius' fortune

[541] Often, but not always, and this is a more modern expectation and generalization than a description of the cache of tragedies available. Many Euripidean tragedies end happily, for example; there is more to the genre of tragedy in formal terms than a shift from happy to sad circumstances. Even Aristotle was happy to acknowledge this fact; one of his two most cited plays, Euripides' *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*, does not follow this stereotypical trajectory from luck to misfortune (so too Euripides' *Helen* and Sophocles' *Oedipus Colonus*). Even classical tragedies do not follow one perfect model of Greek tragedy; at all stages works that are recognizable as tragedies vary in their adherence to any one model of tragedies, whether that model is Aristotle's or a specific play held up as particularly representative (see Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 265-266). Tragedy is a flexible genre; martyr texts such as *MPionius*, I argue, worked with this flexibility.

runs in the opposite direction: from bad fortune to good fortune, from death to life—at the same time as, in biological terms, he is portrayed as passing from life to death.

The episodes I have identified as recognitions and reversal appear in some scholarly treatments, most recently for the rich visuality of character as indicative of idealized gender or behavioral expression, befitting an ancient focus on physiognomy. By adding to this research, the interpretation I have offered presents these physical details engaged in a plot-structural project, in which recognition and reversal work in tandem to reveal Pionius as an *exemplum* not only to the in-text but also to an extra-textual audience. These recognitions lead to a change of fortune that ultimately reverses the trajectory of reversal itself: rather than leading him from life to death, the recognition scenes ultimately bring Pionius from death to life.

I have shown that *MPionius* employs plot-structural features from the genre of tragedy as understood by Aristotle in his *Poetics*. In doing so, the structure of the *Martyrdom of Pionius* takes full advantage of the genre's cultural intelligibility among ancient audiences, which I detailed in Chapter One. Based on this evidence, we can expect that readers and hearers would be primed to anticipate the way *MPionius*' recognitions and reversals structure the story. With their expectations of a change of fate engaged, this audience would be primed to receive the way the text interprets death as life in a *peripeteia* that resituates the martyr's death within a cosmic frame. It is to this cosmic frame—and the alternative regime of justice it institutes—that we turn next.

Chapter Three:
Denouement in the *Martyrdom of Pionius*

We have just seen that recognitions, reversals, and suffering structure the plot of the *Martyrdom of Pionius*, just as these plot components also, in their combination, structure plots of tragedies. Indeed, the combination of these three features is so characteristic of the genre of tragedy that Aristotle calls it the "soul of tragedy."[542] Just as *MPionius* can be analyzed through the lens of tragic plot structure, a well-known plot device used to bring some tragedies to their denouement also works to effect a "tragic" end in *MPionius*: the *deus ex machina*.

This tragic stage-device, when used as a technical solution in drama, featured a god emerging on a crane-like machine called a *mechane*, signaling a denouement to the drama—specifically, a denouement that is controlled or sanctioned by a divine figure. Through divine control, the forces of chance and contingency become less strongly operative. The end that is accomplished through a divine figure *ex machina* has, as its goal, the establishing of dikē, of an order. In this way, analyzing the ending of *MPionius* as a denouement via *deus ex machina* shows that the text dramatizes the intervention of divine authority over the events contained within the narrative.

In this chapter, I demonstrate that the final scene of *MPionius* culminates the theme of justice at work throughout the entire text. *MPionius* utilizes the tragic device of the *deus ex machina* to bring its narrative to a close, and, in so doing, claims that God's justice has been operating all along and will ultimately prevail. I argue that the *deus ex machina* operates narratively as it does in tragedies. One specific tragedy in particular will help to illuminate this

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[542] *Poetics* 1450a38-39, as we have just seen in the previous chapter: Aristotle calls μῦθος the soul of tragedy and defines μῦθος as comprised of suffering, recognition, and reversal (1452b9-10).

claim: Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, the final installment of his tragic trilogy the *Oresteia*. Because it is the only Greek tragedy to stage a court scene, *Eumenides* can be fruitfully compared with *MPionius* for their focus on justice and judicial procedure through the staging of court scenes—although the staging of *MPionius* takes place in a Roman colonial context,[543] rather than the context of the fifth-century BCE classical *polis*. Despite their different political contexts, what is important for my purposes is that a narrative model existed that was available for use and informed the cultural repertoire of composers and readers of martyr literature, and with which *MPionius* shares generic features.

By demonstrating that *MPionius*' plot is structured by features characteristic of the genre of tragedy and that its ending is effected by the tragic device of the *deus ex machina*, I again forward the most comprehensive argument of this dissertation: that the genre of tragedy shared features with *MPionius*. Importantly, as I have noted elsewhere, such literary resonance across genres need not be intentional, nor is it necessary to characterize it as conscious or unconscious. Rather, tragedies, well-known throughout the time period in which martyr texts were being

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[543] On judicial procedure during the Roman Empire, Ari Bryen, "Martyrdom, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Procedure"; Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) and Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986) are excellent introductory resources on the topic. See also Olivia Robinson, *Penal Practice and Penal Policy in Ancient Rome* (London; New York: Routledge, 2007), especially at 111 for attention to penal policy in *MPionius* specifically. Brent Shaw considers Roman judicial procedure in a Christian context broadly in "Judicial Nightmares and Christian Memory," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 11 (2003): 533-563, beginning to flesh out the terror inflicted on Christians by an arbitrary system of justice and how this manifested in texts through which Christians could imagine other possibilities; in this way his work anticipates the more recent treatment by Carly Daniel-Hughes and Maia Kotrosits. For coverage of Roman judicial procedure from a Jewish perspective, there is an especially rich bibliography; see Fotini Hadjittofi and Hagith Sivan, "Staging Rachel: Rabbinic Midrash, Theatrical Mime, and Christian Martyrdom in Late Antiquity, *Harvard Theological Review* 113.3 (2020): 299-333 (forthcoming) on the topic in general and especially 310-311 fn 23 for required reading. Saul Lieberman's study is still classic: "Roman Legal Institutions in Early Rabbinics and in the Acta Martyrum," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 35.1 (1944): 1-57; see especially his presentation of third-century rabbis discussing the trial of a criminal at 24-32. More recently, and crucial reading on *both* Jewish and Christian depictions of legal trials, is Meira Kensky's superb *Trying Man, Trying God: The Divine Courtroom in Early Jewish and Christian Literature* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

composed and read, played a central role in the repertoire of literary and performative possibilities accessible to people in antiquity.

I compare the *Eumenides* with *MPionius* as a representative example of the type of work the *deus ex machina* does, bringing a plot to a structural end through inserting a god into the affairs of humans and both explaining and authorizing the events of the narrative from a divine perspective; and by linking the extra-textual future with events before and within the plot. In both the *Eumenides* and in *MPionius*, the *deus ex machina* plays these roles and ushers in a form of dikē sanctioned by gods/God.

I proceed first by describing tragic denouement via *deus ex machina* and giving an account of ancient attitudes toward the device. I then set the stage for an examination of the *deus ex machina* in *MPionius* by detailing justice as a central theme in the text, arcing toward my analysis of Pionius' glorious appearance at the end of the text as imitating Christ, and kept in the good shape of an athlete by God, who functions as the text's *deus ex machina*. I then examine Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, a tragedy famous for both its preoccupation with justice and for its *deus ex machina*, as a comparandum, as it too turns a mundane legal procedure into a narrative pattern of cosmic proportions by inserting a divine figure to intervene in narrative events.

Deus ex machina **and Tragic Denouement**

Aristotle's *Poetics* discusses the device of the *deus ex machina* within the context of Aristotle's maxim that tragedies' characters and structure of events "should always seek

necessity or probability."[544] Such a maxim holds not only for features within a drama, but for denouements to dramas as well:

> Clearly the denouements of plots should issue from the plot as such, and not from a *deus ex machina* as in *Medea* and the scene of departure in the *Iliad*. The *deus ex machina* should be employed for events outside the drama—preceding events beyond human knowledge, or subsequent events requiring prediction and announcement; for we ascribe to the gods the capacity to see all things.[545]

Aristotle's description considers the *deus ex machina* a device firmly planted within the plot-world of the drama, since it both reflects and extends the significant role that gods always already play within the plots of tragedies.

In addition to its role within plots, which I will return to momentarily, the *deus ex machina* is typically defined in its more technical role, as a piece of stagecraft. The device featured a god[546] suspended over the stage by means of a crane: this is the literal meaning of the phrase "*theos apo mechanes*."[547] Scholars are divided on the topic of precisely when the mechanical apparatus of the *mechane* was invented. The use of the *deus ex machina* is far more frequently associated with the plays of Euripides than with those of the other two famous classical tragedians, Sophocles and Aeschylus, although some also emphasize its use by

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[544] *Poetics* 1454a33-35.

[545] *Poetics* 1454b1-5: φανερὸν οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰς λύσεις τῶν μύθων ἐξ αὐτοῦ δεῖ τοῦ μύθου συμβαίνειν, καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Μηδείᾳ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἰλιάδι τὰ περὶ τὸν ἀπόπλουν. ἀλλὰ μηχανῇ χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, ἢ ὅσα πρὸ τοῦ γέγονεν ἃ οὐχ οἷόν τε ἄνθρωπον εἰδέναι, ἢ ὅσα ὕστερον, ἃ δεῖται προαγορεύσεως καὶ ἀγγελίας· ἅπαντα γὰρ ἀποδίδομεν τοῖς θεοῖς ὁρᾶν.

[546] Francis Dunn notes that the figure *ex machina* was not always a god; he identifies two more categories of figures who take on the role: "demonic epiphanies" and, more rarely, humans (*Tragedy's End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama* [New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996], 40-41); he forms these categories on the basis of Euripides' plays alone. By broadening the category beyond just gods *ex machina*, Dunn is, even for the plays of Euripides, which he will go on to argue is the only group that should be expected to adhere to such a strict, technical definition, extending the meaning of "*deus ex machina*" beyond stagecraft.

[547] Oliver Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus: The Dramatic Use of Exits and Entrances in Greek Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 184.

Sophocles.[548] Because of this, it is in the works of Euripides that the device is most frequently explored,[549] although in these treatments too scholars show skepticism concerning the degree to which it is possible to delimit the use of the *deus ex machina* on the criterion of a technical mechanism. Such skepticism is wise given that one of the examples frequently held up as representative of how the *deus ex machina* functions is from Aeschylus' *Eumenides*: a case where it is not clear if a mechanical apparatus was in use, but where the appearance of divine figures is crucial to the play's denouement.[550]

A prime example of this productive skepticism over linking denouement *ex machina* to technical stage-machinery appears in the work of Francis Dunn, whose text *Tragedy's End: Closure and Innovation in Euripidean Drama* explores a range of endings in the plays of Euripides. Even while defining "*deus ex machina*" technically, Dunn notes: "We might reasonably limit use of the term to divine entrances that make use of this stage property, but for many plays the surviving text does not indicate whether or not it was used."[551] We simply do not

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[548] Nine plays of Euripides are usually cited as ending via a *deus ex machina*: *Andromache*, *Hippolytus*, *Suppliants*, *Electra*, *Helen*, *Ion*, *Orestes*, *Bacchae*, and *Iphigenia Among the Taurians*. For Sophocles, the main play under consideration is the *Philoctetes*.

[549] Thus Euripides is Dunn's focus (*Tragedy's End*), although Dunn considers the device more broadly; earlier treatments than his include, most significantly, two doctoral dissertations: Andreas Spira's "Untersuchungen zum Deus ex machina bei Sophokles und Euripides" (Frankfurt, 1960) and Wieland Schmidt's "Der Deus ex machina bei Euripides" (Tübingen, 1964).

[550] Taplin, *The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 453. Dunn agrees that skepticism is warranted: "It is often assumed that use of the μηχανή is a Euripidean innovation, but it was probably used for the entrance of Okeanos in *Prometheus* and may have been used in Aeschylus' lost *Psychostasia*…Use of the crane for Athena's entrance in *Eumenides* cannot be excluded" (*Tragedy's End*, 27 fn 4). Also: "neither Aeschylus nor Sophocles makes much use of the device. The closest thing to a *deus* in the surviving plays of Aeschylus is the entrance of Athena in *Eumenides*: the goddess enters near the end of the trilogy to decide the case of Orestes and resolve the conflict between Apollo and the Furies" (Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 37).

[551] Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 28.

know when the device first became operable in the fifth century;[552] at any rate, the plays themselves do not tell us, and it is left to critics to decide whether the device was used, from the context of the plays' cues[553] at the entrances and exits of their characters.

Dunn goes further than mere skepticism, noting that the technical definition of the *deus ex machina* should only be used in reference to the plays of Euripides; for Aeschylus and Sophocles, scholars ought to be more flexible in applying the term.[554] To put it another way, scholars like Dunn view that it is not only possible, but both historically warranted and interpretively generative to examine plot endings as denouements *ex machina* even if it cannot be chronologically proven that the *mechane* was operative in that play's denouement. This is because even if the *mechane* was not yet invented, endings *ex machina* are still discernible, plot-structurally speaking. Such endings were standard fare stemming back to Homer, regardless of trivial co-incidence with technical machinery of the stage. Gods playing a role in closure was a standard feature from the *Iliad* onwards; what is crucial is that these divine figures provided moral and narrative intervention and authority, with or without a crane.

Given these limitations concerning dating, Dunn and others begin to point the way to a broader conceptualization of the *deus ex machina*: regardless of its date of origin, it is fruitful to

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[552] Taplin conveys uncertainty on the matter (*The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 444); Jeff Jay suggests that it is more likely a fourth century device, although he is less concerned about the distinction between "literal and figurative" use of the *mechane* (*The Tragic in Mark*, 102-103 for dating; 100 for literal versus figurative use). Dominant scholarly opinion in recent decades accepts the fifth-century existence and use of the crane, contrary to the earlier perspective of Pickard-Cambridge, who placed it, at the earliest, in the fourth century (*The Dramatic Festivals of Athens*, 54). Donald Mastronarde, in his excellent reappraisal of scholarship on the crane and classical stagecraft, emphasizes that sufficient evidence demonstrates its use in the fifth century, although it is unclear how early in that century ("Actors on High: The Skene Roof, the Crane, and the Gods in Attic Drama," *Classical Antiquity* 9.2 [1990]: 247-294, especially at 269-270).

[553] Such is Mastronarde's evaluation, when he ultimately concludes that archaeological evidence and visual depictions on vases do not offer much certainty on the matter, and thus we must make do with inferences from the texts ("Actors on High," 252-253).

[554] Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 27.

consider not merely the mechanical function, but the narrative function of the divine figure's insertion into the action of the drama. When we consider the *deus ex machina* in this narrative way, Dunn notes, we can see that the divine figure operating *ex machina* functions to bring the drama of a play to an *efficacious* close due to the *authority* of the privileged *deus*.[555] These two features—efficacy and authority—are the hallmark of a denouement via *deus ex machina*, a denouement which authorizes the end of a play.

Not only does the *deus ex machina* authorize the play's ending, but it offers an explanation of the end. By offering an explanation, "the god's privileged knowledge can resolve remaining doubts and render events of the play intelligible."[556] Often, such explanations do not merely explain the events of the drama which the *deus* ends; such explanations also link planes of time, connecting the events in the narrative to events in the past and to come in the future.[557] In this way the *deus ex machina* extends the plot of the drama, linking it to events that take place in the world outside of the text: "the *deus* in a sense writes or narrates a sequel to the plot."[558] Jeff Jay takes up this idea when he notes that "the gods *ex machina* are knowledgeable of the future that is in store for each of the key mortal protagonists, and so prophecy is an integral component of what these gods have to divulge."[559] The topic of the gods' intertwining in human lives returns us to Aristotle, who, though he prefers a denouement that issues from the plot itself

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[555] Both features are the topic under discussion throughout his Chapter Three; for a succinct statement of their inter-working see *Tragedy's End*, 29-30.

[556] Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 34.

[557] Aristotle already alludes to this temporal dialectic, as I have begun to show, when he remarks that the *deus ex machina* is used in dramatic situations which cite "preceding and subsequent events beyond human knowledge," and also that "There should be nothing irrational in the events; if there is, it should lie outside the play" (*Poetics* 1454a-1454b).

[558] Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 29.

[559] Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 103-104.

to one ending *ex machina*,[560] simultaneously acknowledges that when a play issue statements on events outside the drama, a denouement via *deus ex machina* ought to be used instead of such an ending,[561] since the gods see more than mortals do.

The specific type of resolution that the *deus ex machina* offers, then, is an explanation of the play's events and those events' relationship to past- and future-oriented action that extends beyond the limits of the plot. Even more specifically, a characteristic of such divine intervention is not merely that it explains, but, according to Dunn, that the intervention functions "to create or to restore order."[562] This tragic denouement offers an authoritative, efficacious end to the action of a play that extends that action indefinitely.

Attitudes toward the deus ex machina

From the earliest extant reflections on the genre of tragedy, the *deus ex machina* has been criticized. Recall, from above,[563] Aristotle's preference for a "rational" ending. Horace advised composers to steer clear of the device in crafting plays' endings, although, in a caveat similar to Aristotle's, he does acknowledge that there will be moments in which only an explanation via *deus ex machina* will do, since some situations are only explainable from a divine perspective. In his prescriptions for composing a tragedy, he writes, "And let no god intervene, unless a knot

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[560] *Poetics* 1454a37-1454b2: φανερὸν οὖν ὅτι καὶ τὰς λύσεις τῶν μύθων ἐξ αὐτοῦ δεῖ τοῦ μύθου συμβαίνειν, καὶ μὴ ὥσπερ ἐν τῇ Μηδείᾳ ἀπὸ μηχανῆς καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἰλιάδι τὰ περὶ τὸν ἀπόπλουν.

[561] *Poetics* 1454b2-6: ἀλλὰ μηχανῇ χρηστέον ἐπὶ τὰ ἔξω τοῦ δράματος, ἢ ὅσα πρὸ τοῦ γέγονεν ἃ οὐχ οἷόν τε ἄνθρωπον εἰδέναι, ἢ ὅσα ὕστερον, ἃ δεῖται προαγορεύσεως καὶ ἀγγελίας· ἅπαντα γὰρ ἀποδίδομεν τοῖς θεοῖς ὁρᾶν.

[562] Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 36. Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood indicates the same when she notes that "the *apo mechanes* deities were not for the tragic characters empty or ironic gestures of closure, or indeed literary creations of any kind, but seriously perceived deities issuing serious orders, guidance, prophecies" (*Tragedy and Athenian Religion* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2003], 8).

[563] Pages 97-98.

come worthy of such a deliverer."[564] For Horace as well as Aristotle—and echoed by modern scholars such as Dunn, Jay, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood—this divine perspective allows the narrative linking of separate planes of time, which is injected into the play to implement an order to its events, promising justice and interpreting the narrative from the perspective of a future only the divine can see.

Modern scholars have in large part inherited ancient disregard for the *deus ex machina* exhibited in Horace, Aristotle, and others.[565] But modern and ancient critics alike know the device well, whether they dislike it or not. Mastronarde notes that

> …within the conventional world of the tragic performance, the audience will have known and accepted the convention and not have been struck by any such sense of awkwardness or absurdity, even though the same audience could enjoy a laugh at the convention in the context of comic parody.[566]

Kevin Taylor makes the same point, but about modern critics. Like their ancient predecessors, some modern critics have debated whether tragedies ought to contain the *deus ex machina*, instead of acknowledging and interpreting the fact that they do: "Some critics debate whether authentic tragedy should feature a *deus ex machina*. It's an odd argument given that it was common enough in Greek tragedy."[567]

It is fruitful to distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive treatments of the device. As Jay notes, "critiques of the *machina* do not take us very far in interpreting its significance in

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[564] Horace, *Ars Poetica*, 191-192: nec deus intersit, nisi dignus vindice nodus inciderit… Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb Classical Library 194 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1926).

[565] Such others include Antiphanes (fragment 191.13-17 in Theodor Kock's *Comicorum Atticorum fragmenta*, volume 2 [Leipzig: Teubner, 1884]), Polybius (*Histories* 3.48.8), and Plutarch (*Themistocles* 10.1, 32.3; *Lysander* 25.1-2).

[566] Mastronarde, "Actors on High," 271.

[567] Kevin Taylor, *Christ the Tragedy of God: A Theological Exploration of Tragedy* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 46.

the dramas wherein it is employed."[568] Whether an ancient or modern critic prefers the use of this ending, it was and remains well-known. Moreover, it is not merely recognizable, but acknowledged to accomplish specific goals and to inflect the play in which it features with a sense of divine control. Just as in tragedies, in *MPionius* denouement via *deus ex machina* brings the narrative to an efficacious, divinely authorized end, connecting the events within the text to a forecasted future and staging the triumph of a divine order of justice.

A brief note is necessary here on the *deus ex machina* as a specifically tragic device. I have been referring to this device as a tragic one, and as a signal within a drama that would alert readers or hearers to tragic resonance in the narrative they received. It is in discussions about the genre of tragedy, after all, that Aristotle's and Horace's comments on and examples of the device appear. This point is worth noting because there is sometimes a tendency in modern scholarship to consider divine intervention in the plots of dramas as indicative of the genre of *comedy* as opposed to that of tragedy, and to see divine resolution as un-tragic in nature.

Simply put and to the contrary, divine action within a play is a *hallmark* of the genre of tragedy, not an anomaly. Kevin Taylor says, of this tendency within scholarship on early Christianity to see the *deus ex machina* as un-tragic, that "there are many tragedies with divine restorations, and tragedy curiously invented the *deus ex machina* in the first place."[569] Like the plot-structural feature of recognition, this device was not restricted to the genre of tragedy

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[568] Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 101.

[569] Taylor, *Christ the Tragedy of God*, 46. He gets even more specific about the tendency I describe here: "A common pattern is to assume that monotheism promises a victorious resolution, therefore it cannot be properly tragic. It's an ironic pattern given the restoration of a *deus ex machina* was itself born with Greek tragedy; *the deus ex machina validates Christian tragedy as being thoroughly authentic*" (*Christ the Tragedy of God*, 46; emphasis mine). He sees the presence within a text of a *deus ex machina* alone as sufficient for an ancient audience to have recognized resonance with tragedies.

alone,[570] but, as we know from both critics and plays, the device was recognizable as frequently occurring in tragedies. Thus, because it has historically been a feature denoting the genre of tragedy, the presence of the *deus ex machina* within *MPionius* would have recalled tragedies, as does the presence of co-occurring plot-structural features of suffering, recognition, and reversal. What is more, the presence of this form of denouement commonly associated with the genre of tragedy *in combination with* those plot-structural features argues even more strongly for the text providing its readers with tragic signals.

Dikē as a Central Theme in *MPionius*

As discussed in Chapter Two, the theme of justice in the *Martyrdom of Pionius* unfolds consistently throughout the text.[571] In the first sequence within the recurring pattern of arrest, speech, and trial, the theme of justice is first introduced within Pionius' speech to the crowd in the agora. The topic of this initial speech is the unjust arrest and persecution of Pionius and his friends. Having been brought before the agora, Pionius exhorts those in attendance to "listen to

[570] Unlike the feature of recognition, though, the device is not so frequently featured in texts of multiple genres in antiquity; its travel to other genres is more a modern than ancient occurrence. Dunn suggests that the device's movement from tragedies, specifically those of Euripides, occurred through tragedies' more modern, western manifestations: "…the disruptive *deus* serves to expose this incompleteness [of plot], and as I shall argue in the final chapters, this disruption goes deeper, challenging not just the aesthetic unity of the play, but the privileged role of tragedy as a literary and cultural model. The god on the machine is the most spectacular agent of this subversion, and I conclude by noting that this Euripidean invention may have performed its job too well: *in the Western dramatic tradition, the deus is rarely found, and then not in tragedy but in comedy*, where it again performs a subversive role" (*Tragedy's End*, 42; emphasis mine). That is, Dunn notes that the association of the *deus ex machina* with comedy is the result of modern genre conventions. On the topic of comic adaptations of the *deus*, Dunn goes on to locate "the earliest surviving comic deus" in Plautus' second-century BCE *Amphitryon*—which is, crucially, "the only extant Roman comedy based on a plot from tragedy" (*Tragedy's End*, 43).

[571] As a reminder of the schema by which I organize the text, I identify a pattern of three recurring sequences: an arrest (*MPionius* 2-3, 10-11, and 20.1); a speech followed by attempts to persuade Pionius from his intended course of action (*MPionius* 4-7, 12-14, and 20); and an interrogation or trial (*MPionius* 8-9, 15-18, 19, 20.7). I will identify the final death scene and post-mortem appearance of Pionius outside of this pattern, calling an end to the drama via *deus ex machina*.

me as I make my case to you briefly."[572] Pionius appeals to the teachings of Homer and of Moses to argue that his audience should not rejoice in the treatment of the Christians—regardless of whether their punishment is just or unjust.[573] Even if they were guilty, Pionius asserts, both the Greeks' and the Jews' revered teachers counsel not to boast over a fallen enemy. But their gloating is all the more out of place, given that the Christians are actually innocent: "For even if we are their enemies, as they say, nevertheless we are still men who have been treated unjustly (ἀδικηθέντες)."[574] From the beginning of the text, then, *MPionius* is concerned with the theme of justice, impressing the prominence of this theme through its dialogue and vocabulary.

That is, the prominence of the theme of justice, as these passages begin to indicate, is not only apparent through the interrogations and trials in the text. In addition, the theme of justice plays out through dialogues and the prose of the text. As Stephanie Cobb puts it,

> The author of the *Martyrdom of Pionius* indicts the Jews for treating their enemies, in this case the Christians, unjustly. The injustice of their treatment is compounded by the litany of rhetorical questions Pionius poses: "To whom have we been unjust? Whom have we murdered? Whom did we persecute? Whom did we compel to become an idolater?" The reader recognizes that the Christians had not done any of these things. Whereas the Jews treated the Christians unjustly, Pionius insists that the Christians never reacted in kind.[575]

Christians are thus portrayed as innocent in comparison to the rhetorically constructed Jews in the audience. Their innocence and unjust treatment are further underscored with yet another rhetorical question:

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[572] *MPionius* 4.2: ἀκούσατέ μου ὀλίγα προσδιαλεγομένου ὑμῖν.

[573] *MPionius* 4.2-4.6. Homer, Pionius asserts, "advises that it is not right to boast over those who die"; Rebillard cites *Odyssey* 22.412 as the source (*Greek and Latin Narratives*, 55 fn 16). For the Jews, Pionius relies on commands by Moses issued in Exodus 23:5 and Deuteronomy 44:4, but he also cites the words of Solomon from Proverbs 24:17 as authoritative ("If your enemy falls, do not exult, and when he stumbles do not rejoice").

[574] *MPionius* 4.8: Εἰ γὰρ καὶ εχθροὶ αὐτῶν ἐσμεν, ὥς φασιν, ἀλλὰ ἄνθρωποι, ἔτι ἀδικηθέντες.

[575] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 71-72; she quotes *MPionius* 4.9.

> How then do you want us to suffer these things, as just men (δικαίους) or unjust men (ἀδίκους)? If as unjust men, how then do you also not suffer like us, since you have been proved to be unjust by your very deeds? But if as just men, what sort of hope do you have when just men are suffering? For if a just man is hardly saved, where will the impious and sinful man appear?[576]

Pionius proceeds to entertain both options: if, he says, the Christians are judged to be unjust, then the audience condemns itself, since they are guilty of the same crimes of which they accuse the Christians.[577] If they judge the Christians to be just, then the act of condemning just people itself makes the accusers unjust.[578]

By rhetorically entertaining multiple possible scenarios, all of which end in the condemnation of their accusers, the text thus "builds group cohesion by constructing a 'community of the righteous.'"[579] That is, the text is concerned to construct parameters by which groups can be demarcated as just or unjust, and, through that demarcation, to paint Christians as innocent, through a series of trials, speeches, and interrogations. Moreover, since the text continually depicts the Christians as unjustly accused, the text claims that that the notion of justice used in the trial is flawed. That is, *MPionius* is not content merely to charge its accusers with wrongful punishment; the text in addition will promise a future in which the identified wrongs will be made right.

This concentration on justice is motivated by the tragic bind that I identified in Chapter Two. It is in this context that the text appeals to its audience to consider whether the Christians

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[576] *MPionius* 4.16: Πῶς οὖν θέλετε ταῦτα πάσχειν ἡμᾶς, ὡς *δικαίους* ἢ ὡς *ἀδίκους*; Εἰ μὲν ὡς *ἀδίκους*, πῶς οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς αὐτοῖς τοῖς ἔργοις *ἄδικοι* ἐλεγχόμενοι τὰ αὐτὰ πείσεσθε; Εἰ δὲ ὡς *δικαίους*, τῶν *δικαίων* πασχόντων ποίαν ὑμεῖς ἐλπίδα ἔχετε; Εἰ γὰρ ὁ *δίκαιος* μόλις σώζεται, ὁ ἀσεβὴς καὶ ἁμαρτωλὸς ποῦ φανεῖται; (Emphasis on justice-terminology my own.)

[577] *MPionius* 4.16.

[578] *MPionius* 4.16.

[579] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 88.

are guilty or not, for this very speech is framed by recognition that the Christians are legally guilty of violating an edict: "You know very well the emperor's edict that commands you to sacrifice to the gods," the neokoros confronts Pionius, who responds "We know God's commandments, in which he orders us to adore him alone."[580] In this way, the text presents Pionius and his companions as legally guilty.

Despite the fact that Pionius is an imperial subject and thus legally constrained to the laws of the Roman Empire, he consistently prioritizes a separate point of identity which, he asserts, precludes his acting as a proper Roman subject in this situation. Because the two are so at odds, he can answer Polemon's order, "Sacrifice, Pionius," with simply, "I am a Christian."[581] An explicit causal connection appears when Pionius is asked, "Why don't you people sacrifice?" Pionius' friends answer, "Because we are Christians.'"[582] Again the proconsul tells Pionius, "Sacrifice." Pionius answers, "No, for it is God to whom I pray."[583] Despite the fact that he is both Roman and Christian, he cannot satisfactorily adhere to the demands of both and remain unharmed.

Directly after Pionius entertains multiple rhetorical scenarios, he promises: "For judgment is at hand for the world; of this we have been made certain in many ways."[584] The text goes to great lengths, as I will show, to juxtapose guilt sanctioned by Roman legal procedure with a truer sense of justice, and to demonstrate that imperial edict is not a sufficient guide to

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[580] *MPionius* 3.2-3; the same sentiment is presented to Pionius at 4.1.

[581] *MPionius* 8.2.

[582] *MPionius* 16.2.

[583] *MPionius* 19.9.

[584] *MPionius* 4.17: Κρίσις γὰρ τῷ κόσμῳ ἐπίκειται, περὶ ἧς πεπληροφορήμεθα διὰ πολλῶν.

justice. Instead, the text uses proofs from the past to promise a future in which a proper judgment will occur. The assurance that this proper judgment will occur is that God's justice has already been operating.

The proofs that Pionius adduces as evidence that judgment is at hand for the world may seem, at first glance, strange, but they serve as examples to illuminate the model of justice that *MPionius* will put on display consistently throughout the entirety of the text, as I will show: an exacting economy of wrongs that in the past left a trace, and then were corrected by God, signaling that God is in control in the past, the present, and the future. The examples with which he begins to flesh out this system of justice are geographical:

> I went abroad and traveled around all the land of Judaea, and on crossing the river Jordan I saw a land that still now bears witness to God's anger against it because of the sins that its inhabitants committed; they killed foreigners, chased them away, and used violence against them. I saw smoke still now risking and a land burnt to ash by fire, bereft of all its produce and of all water.[585]

These sins—*hamartiai*—Pionius reports, always leave a residue, and sometimes these consequences take on physical form. A burnt landscape, for example, acts as evidence that *hamartia*—and justice—has occurred. He goes on to list other geographical features that are indicative of *hamartia*: the land of Lydia, also burnt;[586] volcanic islands; even the Dead Sea bears witness to *hamartia* having occurred, since it cannot "sustain any form of life" and because it

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[585] *MPionius* 4.18-4.19. Ἐγὼ μὲν καὶ ἀποδημήσας καὶ ἅπασαν τὴν Ἰουδαίαν περιελθὼν γῆν περάσας τε τὸν Ἰορδάνην ἐθεασάμην γῆν ἕως τοῦ νῦν μαρτυροῦσαν τὴν ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ γενομένην αὐτῇ ὀργήν, δι' ἃς ἐποίουν οἱ κατοικοῦντες αὐτὴν ἁμαρτίας, ξενοκτονοῦντες, ξενηλατοῦντες, βιαζόμενοι. Εἶδον καπνὸν ἐξ αὐτῆς ἕως τοῦ νῦν ἀναβαίνοντα καὶ γῆν πυρὶ τετεφρωμένην, ἄμοιρον παντὸς καρποῦ καὶ πάσης ὑγρᾶς οὐσίας.

[586] *MPionius* 4.21.

"cannot hold a human body."[587] The judgments are specifically tied to the *hamartiai* committed, which call out for proper judgment and punishment, standing in their physicality as evidence that wrong has occurred—and been punished.

Pionius provides other examples of topography serving as proof or witness of the consequences for *hamartia*. These include the "gushing fire" of Aetna, Sicily, Lycia, and the Aegean islands, whose volcanic eruptions are geological representations and proof of the consequences of human action. Such proofs are "set forth as an example (ὑπόδειγμα) for impious men."[588] Pionius helpfully adds that for readers for whom volcanic activity is "outside of your experience," the example of hot water surging from the ground is sufficiently instructive.[589] Within this long speech and through his litany of examples that elucidate a system of justice through examples from nature, Pionius explains suffering by linking the present circumstances to past *hamartiai*.

All of these examples are adduced in the service of one overarching aim: "(T)his is why we bear witness to you of the coming judgment of fire, by God and through his word, Christ."[590] From the beginning of the text, the theme of justice is introduced as a central topic of concern,

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[587] *MPionius* 4.20. *MPionius* is not the first text to discuss the Dead Sea's saltiness and its inability to receive a human as a physical reality with a deeper meaning; the topic was pursued from Aristotle. Literary evidence as early as the third century BCE attests the idea that the Dead Sea became salty in order to punish the Sodomites. Anton Hilhorst argues that *MPionius* adds a unique twist to that story, claiming that this text issues the new idea that the Dead Sea now refuses to admit humans into its body because it wishes not to be punished *again* ("The Punishment of the Dead Sea"), since it recalls that previous punishment of the Sodomites. Interestingly, Hilhorst notes that *MPionius*' references to and descriptions of the Dead Sea "recall the formulations of the classical authors" (for example, Diodorus the Sicilian) more closely than they do references to it within the Hebrew Bible or New Testament ("The Punishment of the Dead Sea," 127), strengthening both his and my argument that *MPionius* is a text that constantly used and cited its own literary context for intelligibility.

[588] *MPionius* 4.21.

[589] *MPionius* 4.22.

[590] *MPionius* 4.24: Διὸ δὴ μαρτυρόμεθα ὑμῖν περὶ τῆς μελλούσης διὰ πυρὸς γίνεσθαι κρίσεως ὑπὸ θεοῦ διὰ τοῦ λόγου αὐτοῦ τοῦ Χριστοῦ.

and orients the reader toward a system of justice that responds to these *hamartiai* and balance the scales of justice—a system of justice in stark opposition to that currently operating under the Roman Empire. These examples prove that God is not absent but present now, which then moves the narrative to a cosmic perspective.

The promise of judgment "at hand for the world" is juxtaposed with the first interrogation that occurs, right after this initial speech. This informal interrogation proceeds in two parts, first as the *neokoros* interviews Pionius with a list of questions: his name, whether he is a Christian, and of what church he is a part.[591] After this initial, cursory interview, Polemon interrogates Pionius "on the record,"[592] his series of questions more detailed, and directed too to Pionus' companions, Sabina and Asclepiades. This interrogation ultimately leads to their imprisonment.[593] This formal interrogation at the hands of an imperial authority portrays the Christians, who have been rhetorically constructed by the narrator as innocent and thus wrongfully pursued, as the victims of a corrupt system of justice. This corrupt system of justice punishes those who have just been portrayed as righteous by the narrator—and as righteous especially in contradistinction to those who hold formal positions of authority.

In this first sequence of the text, then, *MPionius* introduces the central theme of justice which will recur throughout the narrative, and juxtaposes two competing systems of justice. One is responsible for the accusation and punishment of the Christians, whom the text goes to great pains to portray as righteous, especially in comparison to the in-text audience of Jews and ambiguous others. The other is one that both operates now and in which a future judgment is

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[591] *MPionius* 8.1-8.4.

[592] *MPionius* 9.1: Εἶτα ἐπηρώτησεν ἐγγράφως λέγων αὐτῷ…

[593] *MPionius* 10.1.

assured, promised through the surety of legal terminology—"we bear witness to you of the coming judgment of fire, by God and through Christ"[594]—and in which the wrongs to be corrected leave their mark as proofs of the need for judgment.

In the second sequence, this pattern repeats itself: in a new speech, Pionius continues his topic of a judgment to come that is necessary because of past wrongdoing,[595] and here again he paints his accusers as guilty, this time because they are violators of their own model of justice. In this way Pionius alleges that the currently operating system of justice stands in need of correction; even its own adherents violate it. This second speech takes place within the prison to which Pionius and his friends are sent following the first interrogation, and following on the first recognition scene (at 10.2) that occurs in tandem with that first interrogation.

In this second lengthy speech, as I introduced in Chapter Two, Pionius puts forth the idea that all have sinned, that everyone is in need of a future regime of justice that will right the wrongs committed by all.[596] Because every person can be judged guilty relative to the many criteria he uses, the judgment to come in the future is necessary not only for Roman authorities who wrongly accuse the Christians. Even as the non-Christians within the text are painted as guilty, so too are Christians:

> (Y)our sins have made a separation between my God and you. For we did wrong, and some of us were arrogant; we acted lawlessly, stinging and accusing each other; we destroyed each other. Our justice ought to have been much more abundant than that of the scribes and Pharisees.[597]

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[594] *MPionius* 4.24.

[595] *MPionius* 5.2 accuses the audience of adoring "the golden image."

[596] *MPionius* 12.13-12.16.

[597] *MPionius* 12.14-12.16: Ἀλλὰ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα ὑμῶν διϊστῶσιν ἀνὰ μέσον ἐμοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ ὑμῶν. Ἠδικήσαμεν γάρ, ἔνιοι δὲ καὶ καταφρονήσαντες ἠνομήσαμεν ἀλλήλους δάκνοντες καὶ ἀλλήλους καταιτιώμενοι ὑπὸ ἀλλήλων ἀνηλώθημεν. Ἔδει δὲ ἡμῶν τὴν δικαιοσύνην περισσεύειν μᾶλλον πλέον τῶν γραμματέων καὶ Φαρισαίων.

Christians have failed to live up to their own standards; they are guilty of violating their own model of justice, just as the Jews and Romans are.

Fitting the tenor of the rest of the text, both the Jews and the Romans are portrayed as guilty of the same model of justice—God's. The Jews who have invited Christians to the synagogue are described as "rulers of Sodom and people of Gomorrha whose hands are covered with blood."[598] Even more seriously, Pionius accuses the Jews of killing prophets generally and Jesus specifically, portraying the Christians as just in contradistinction to the Jews: "We did not kill prophets; we did not surrender and crucify Christ."[599] Just as before, Pionius shows those who are complicit in the Christians' punishment to be guilty, and by doing so shows justice unfairly administered.

Following his second speech, Pionius returns to the topic of justice, this time with the Romans officials as his target. After retrieving the Christians from prison, the Roman officials drag them to the altar at the Nemeseion, commanding them to sacrifice and inquiring into their reason for refusing to do so.[600] Instead of leaving off with the questioning, the officials mock and laugh at Pionius when they hear his answers to their questions. In response to their mockery, Pionius chastises them, and he does so by charging them with violating their own code of justice: "Revere piety, honor justice, recognize those of the same nature, and follow your laws."[601] Once again Pionius turns the officials' bouts of questioning to the larger frame of justice, at every turn

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[598] *MPionius* 13.2. Μὴ γίνεσθε ἅμα αὐτοῖς ἄρχοντες Σοδόμων καὶ λαὸς Γομόρρας, ὧν αἱ χεῖρες αἵματος πλήρεις.

[599] *MPionius* 13.2.

[600] *MPionius* 15.1.

[601] *MPionius* 16.6.

rhetorically constructing a "community of righteous" in contradistinction to other groups who are guilty by comparison and arguing for his accusers' guilt through his legal rhetoric.[602]

Within that frame of justice, Pionius charges his accusers themselves of guilt: "You punish us because we are disobedient, and you yourselves disobey; you have been ordered to punish, not to use force."[603] As Cobb points out, "the author does not explicitly call into question the justice of the laws, but he does condemn those who do not follow them."[604] While not explicit, though, charging the Romans with breaking their own laws continues to emphasize the theme of justice throughout the text and the need for a system of justice that actually achieves its aim and promotes proper piety.

Also within this second sequence of the structure I have proposed for *MPionius*, this narrative exploration of justice is juxtaposed against the formal trial that occurs at the end of the text.[605] Unlike the other interrogations and interviews that have taken place so far, this final trial scene is a formal trial, conducted by the proconsul Quintilianus. Great care is taken within the text to depict this trial as following proper Roman judicial procedure, and as doing so in contradistinction to the other interrogations that appear throughout the text. Pionius remarks when he is first taken from prison by local officials, "It is the rule that those who have been thrown into prison await for the proconsul."[606] He challenges their actions, noting their violation of their own rules: "Why do you take his role upon yourselves?"[607] His argument at first

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[602] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 101 on Pionius taking on the speech and disposition of a lawyer.

[603] *MPionius* 16.6.

[604] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 72.

[605] *MPionius* 19-20.

[606] *MPionius* 15.3.

[607] *MPionius* 15.3.

convinces the officials that he is correct about the need to adhere to protocol by not staging a trial until the proconsul's arrival, since they leave—but they return very quickly, with the crowd in attendance, and forcibly seize the Christians, this time insisting that their actions are well within the law. They seem to grasp at straws to defend their authority: "But if you refuse, I am the magistrate in charge."[608] Force proves decisive, and the group is brought before the altar of the Nemeseion, but they still do not receive their formal trial.

The trial occurs three days later, when the proconsul arrives to Smyrna. The portion of the text portrayed as the "official court proceedings"[609] first stages an interrogation, as Pionius is asked his name, whether he sacrifices, and to identify his cult. The proconsul, like the crowd who responds to Pionius' speech, responds compassionately, urging Pionius multiple times to reconsider his choice. It is, of course, this final trial which commits the final unjust act—that is, unjust according to the rules of God that Pionius reports throughout, even while just according to Roman judicial procedure—condemning Pionius to death by fire and in the midst of doing so, staging multiple scenes of torture.

The theme of justice recurs throughout *MPionius*. The emphasis on justice is unmistakable as a central organizing concern: the text refers to and emphasizes proper judicial procedure, stages multiple interrogations and a trial, and, in addition, attends to the theme of justice not merely in terms of its staging of judicial procedure, but through its speeches and dialogues in which Pionius remarks on who is guilty and who is just. Even more significantly, the text forecasts a judgment that will account for injustices that leave their mark. It gets its proof

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[608] *MPionius* 15.5.

[609] *MPionius* 19.1-20.7.

for this future judgment from evidence, geological and otherwise, that a divine system of justice is in fact already in operation.

Language of Witnessing in MPionius

I want to pay special, although brief, attention here to the language of witnessing and justice that occurs throughout *MPionius.* The etymology of the word "martyr," as is now well-documented,[610] indicates a witness or a proof held up in legal court and thus conjures the sphere of the ancient law court. The repetition of vocabulary relating both to abstract notions of justice/ injustice and to the act of witnessing emphasizes linguistically the attention to judicial procedure and forensic truth that is a main organizing concern of *MPionius*.

Thus the very language of the text grounds its narrative in a legal sphere, just as do the text's stagings of interrogations and trials—obviously explicitly judicial in nature—as well as its agonistic exchanges and speeches that query what constitutes justice, through rhetorical questioning and attempts at persuasion. These rhetorical devices and narrative threads constantly return the reader to the broader notion of dikē that the text centralizes in pitting two competing systems of justice against one another: one under Rome, and one arbitrated by God.

This grounding in language of the notion of justice thus infuses the text from the most basic level, that of language, with the world of the ancient law court and ancient ideas of dikē. By infusing the text with this language and institutional imaginary, I suggest that the linguistic backbone of martyr texts itself forms a link with tragic conventions. Specific influences upon the

[610] As I noted in the Introduction, a range of German philologists in the twentieth century explored this topic within a larger trend of tracing the origins of Christian martyrdom. These scholars' approach was to trace the terminology itself, and this move led them to a long history of legal terminology. It then became their task to distinguish between uses of legal terminology that were uniquely Christian and related to persecution, and those that were more technically forensic. The most illustrative example of this approach is Brox's *Zeuge und Märtyrer.*

"verbal texture" of tragedies can easily be identified: the language of Homer, for example, supplied turns of phrase that already in antiquity gave tragedies a reputation for using overblown language.[611] This Homeric cache "provided a resource of normative images of the world and ways to relate to the world."[612]

Three additional areas of influence informed the language of tragedy, as Simon Goldhill documents: ritual and the world of religion, the world of the democratic law court, and the art of rhetoric. One of the case studies in language that Goldhill chooses to demonstrate these points is the *Oresteia*, whose "obsessive" use of dikē-language has long been documented and to which I will return below.[613] The play takes up this language in order to question its very meaning.

The language of martyr literature is similarly indebted to these three areas of influence—religion, law courts, and rhetoric—that Goldhill identifies as formative for tragedy, but within the contemporaneous context of the Roman Empire. In addition to these influences upon martyr literature's language, though, language characteristic of the genre of tragedy, which, as I have shown, was by the time of martyr literature's composition and reading a mainstay, by itself "provided a resource of normative images" and language, just as Homer did for classical tragedy.[614] Martyr literature and tragedy share some of this language: witnessing terminology, for example. But they also share images and plot devices, too; one of these was the *deus ex machina*, to which I now turn.

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[611] Goldhill provides accounts of this ancient view in *Sophocles and the Language of Tragedy*, 138-146 and again in "The Language of Tragedy," at 127-130 (pages 127-150 in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, edited by Patricia Easterling).

[612] Goldhill, "The Language of Tragedy," 129.

[613] Goldhill, "The Language of Tragedy," 137.

[614] Goldhill, "The Language of Tragedy," 129.

Deus ex machina in *MPionius*

So far in the present chapter, I have attended to the first two sequences of action in *MPionius* for their treatments of the central theme of justice. Here I want to consider a visual and dramatic function of the third sequence, which brings the narrative to an end via the tragic feature of the *deus ex machina*. I argue that this *deus ex machina* calls an end to the narrative using the body of the martyr as the ultimate proof of the sentiment introduced already in the beginning of the text: "we bear witness to you of the coming judgment."[615] This *deus ex machina* calls an end to the narrative as well as to the text's thematic focus on justice, staging the triumph of a distinctly Christian form of justice over and against the model of justice at work throughout the text, that of the Roman empire. First I will attend to how the final scene culminates the theme of justice at work throughout the text, and finally I will show how the figure of Pionius on the cross at the end of the narrative signals that God, as *deus ex machina*, signals the triumph of a Christian form of justice by keeping Pionius's body in good shape as an athlete and imitator of Christ.

At the end of the narrative, Pionius is both nailed to a cross and immolated.[616] The reversal that I discussed in Chapter Two, when Pionius recognizes that his fate has reversed and his "sound" body "in good shape"[617] is moving him from death to life, coincides with the final scenes of torture in the text, juxtaposing this sound body with his movement toward physical death. As Pionius looks upward in a gesture of giving thanks to God, a soldier drives nails into

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[615] *MPionius* 4.24.

[616] *MPionius* 21.2-9.

[617] *MPionius* 21.2.

his body to attach him to a cross.[618] A public enslaved person asks him, once again, to change his mind once he is nailed on, promising removal of the nails if he agrees.[619] And for a final time, Pionius refuses the chance to recant, this time, after "thinking briefly,"[620] connecting his refusal to remove the nails with his reversal: "For this reason, I am eager to awake more quickly," he says.[621] The narrator connects this sentiment explicitly to the reversal of Pionius' circumstances, noting that through his thoughtful phrase, Pionius is "revealing the resurrection of the dead."[622] By refusing to remove the nails, Pionius thus pushes himself further toward death, at the same time as doing so reveals this resurrection of the dead, the movement from death to life.

When Pionius refuses to be persuaded to change his mind this final time, his fate is sealed: the public officials in attendance "set him upright on a cross" next to a presbyter named Metrodorus, not previously mentioned in the text.[623] They elevate Pionius up into the air on his cross alongside Metrodorus, so that both of them face east, Pionius to the right of Metrodorus.[624] The two of them hang on crosses while the officials gather wood. As they pile this wood in a circle surrounding Pionius' cross, Pionius closes his eyes. Despite the fact that the fire has not yet been lit, the physical reality of being nailed to the cross and raised convinces the audience in

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[618] *MPionius* 21.2: ἥπλωσεν ἑαυτὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ ξύλου καὶ παρέδωκε τῷ στρατιώτῃ πεῖραι τοὺς ἥλους.

[619] *MPionius* 21.3.

[620] *MPionius* 21.4: Καὶ συννοήσας ὀλίγον…

[621] *MPionius* 21.4: Διὰ τοῦτο σπεύδω ἵνα θᾶττον ἐγερθῶ…

[622] *MPionius* 21.4: Δηλῶν τὴν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀνάσταστιν.

[623] *MPionius* 21.5: Ἀνώρθωσαν οὖν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ ξύλου, καὶ λοιπὸν μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ πρεσβύτερον τινα Μητρόδωρον τῆς αἱρέσεως τῶν Μαρκιωνιστῶν.

[624] *MPionius* 21.6.

attendance that Pionius' eyes closing signals his death. But he surprises them: "he was secretly praying,"[625] the text reports, and when he is finished, he opens his eyes.

Pionius finishes praying as the flames, lit during his moments of prayer, rise up toward his body. As the flames move upward to consume his body, the text reassures us that his body once again conveys a message about his fate: "with a joyful face," we are told, he requests, "Lord, receive my soul."[626] These final words mimic the last words of Jesus in the Gospel of Luke,[627] adding verbal resonance to the visual resonance of hanging on the cross that might together aid audiences in reading and seeing Pionius in *imitatio Christi*. This is his last act: after this final exhortation, he breathes one last breath, finally consumed. The text goes to great lengths to ensure the reader that this violent death is not what it appears. Despite being hung and burned, Pionius' death has a purpose, because the "Father" to whom Pionius entrusts his spirit at the end "has promised to protect all blood and every soul that is unjustly condemned."[628] Pionius' body, at this point consumed with flames that speed a death ascertained by his crucifixion, stands aloft over the crowd.

The text's early examples of how the land shows signs of injustice properly punished thus serve as a preamble to this most provocative image of the role of the witness that serves to testify to future judgment. The martyr himself puts that vision of justice on display through his body, and he names the future orientation of that justice. Pionius is clear about this when he says,

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[625] *MPionius* 21.8.

[626] *MPionius* 21.9: Ἤδη δὲ τῆς φλογὸς αἰρομένης γεγηθότι προσώπῳ τελευταῖον εἰπὼν τὸ ἀμὴν καὶ λέξας· Κύριε, δέξαι μου τὴν ψυχήν…

[627] Luke 23:46: καὶ φωνήσας φωνῇ μεγάλῃ ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἶπεν· Πάτερ, εἰς χεῖράς σου παρατίθεμαι τὸ πνεῦμά μου. τοῦτο δὲ εἰπὼν ἐξέπνευσεν.

[628] *MPionius* 21.9.

before introducing these examples, "we bear witness to you of the coming judgment of fire, by God and through his word, Christ."[629] The topographical signs of *hamartia* are an analogue for the martyr, who bears witness to an act of justice that responds to and balances out the *hamartiai* that caused scorches on the earth. In this martyr text, Pionius is sentenced to death by burning, aligning him with the scorched evidence of *hamartia* that occurred in the past and had consequences for the future. But, importantly, Pionius' body is not scorched; God's protection of him is evidence that God's justice is currently in operation. Cobb notes the visual effect of the imagery of Pionius' body to ancient audiences: "As the account is narrated, the audience may imagine what a burned body looks like; they might visualize charred flesh or a form that is no longer recognizably human."[630] Cobb also shows that this portrayal of the martyr burning is undermined by his postmortem appearance, which shows Pionius protected by God. Not only does the martyr's body stand as a witness to the need for and promise of proper justice, just as did the scorched earth earlier in the text, but, in a drastic reversal, the same body becomes a promise of judgment and resurrection. God's already operating system of justice rights the wrongs of which burned landmarks serve as reminders, and its ability to do so is symbolized in Pionius' "physiognomically unimpeachable" post-mortem appearance.[631]

Pionius' body hangs on a cross over the crowd gloriously, like "a decorated athlete in its prime."[632] The text clearly seeks to impress upon readers that this report of Pionius' appearance

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[629] *MPionius* 4.24.

[630] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 83.

[631] Callon, *Reading Bodies*, 126.

[632] *MPionius* 22.2.

is an eyewitness account: it is to "we who were present"[633] that Pionius' body hangs victoriously above. Standing aloft "after the fire was put out," his body miraculously exudes youth and vigor: "his ears were not distorted, his hair was still on the top of his head, and his chin was decorated as if covered with his first beard."[634] His face is illuminated[635] and it is this glowing countenance that works to effect a change in his audience: "A marvelous grace shone on his face again, so that the Christians were strengthened in their faith and the unbelievers returned dismayed and with fearful consciences."[636] That is, Pionius' presence as he hangs aloft returns the text to its mimetic frame, as his presence alone is sufficient to do the work that the prologue and epilogue claim the text will ultimately do, both encouraging those who wish to emulate the martyr and discouraging and frightening those who show faulty judgment.[637]

Pionius' image reinforces the message that the judgment to come points to some sort of a resurrection of the dead. For it is after his death that the audience is told Pionius obtains "victory in the great contest," and that he "passed through the narrow gate to the broad and great light."[638] This resurrection is glossed as a "crown" that is "signaled through his body also" when he appears as a victorious athlete despite his tortures.[639] Thus, the text assures, through Pionius' glorious appearance, a glorious future and a victorious end brought about through Pionius' illuminated, elevated figure.

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[633] *MPionius* 22.2.

[634] *MPionius* 22.3.

[635] *MPionius* 22.4: Ἐπέλαμπε δὲ καὶ τὸ πρόσωπον αὐτοῦ…

[636] *MPionius* 22.4.

[637] *MPionius* 1; 22.4.

[638] *MPionius* 22.1.

[639] *MPionius* 22.2.

Pioniuis' physical image, as discussed in Chapter Two, as a physical representation of the reversal in the text from death to life, shows Pionius embodying this system of justice in his crowned, athletic appearance. As Cobb puts it, "The author of the *Martyrdom of Pionius* contrasts temporal crowns received in this world to those crowns that symbolize immortality. Indeed, the author of this martyrology states that Pionius' crown was revealed in his dead—but undefeated—body."[640] Life in death, then, is what Pionius' body symbolizes; his body foreshadows a resurrection of the dead that is promised even as it promises that God's justice operates currently.

Although it is not specified precisely *when* this future-oriented justice will be accomplished, the martyr's body is a promise that it will come. Arik Greenberg maintains that its timing is ultimately unclear, while Outi Lehtipuu reads the text as promising an immediate resurrection after Pionius' death.[641] We are on safe grounds claiming that the text promises resurrection, since the text uses such language explicitly.[642] Importantly, though, Stephanie Cobb maintains that even if the text did not contain explicit language of resurrection, we could still know that the topic was intended to be read into the text: "Even when explicit claims to resurrection are lacking, the descriptions of the martyrs suggest the texts are contributing to this discourse. Often the martyr's body is described as being transformed into a glorified, resurrected form."[643]

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[640] Cobb, *Dying to be Men*, 58.

[641] Greenberg, *My Share of God's Reward*, 176; Outi Lehtipuu, *Debates Over the Resurrection of the Dead: Constructing Early Christian Identity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 166 fn 37.

[642] *MPionius* 21.4.

[643] Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 129.

Cobb points out that such depictions of the body complicate the image of when the body's resurrection will occur; there is "slippage between the 'then' and the 'now'" in *MPionius* as the text both promises resurrection and shows the martyr's body glorified. This point is crucial, for it impacts when readers and hearers could infer the future orientation of resurrection and justice that the text anticipates. Is it the future from the perspective of the reader, a coming resurrection that, at any time of the reader's traversal of the text, is still yet to come? Or is it the future from the perspective of the text itself, such that by the end of the text, with Pionius' glorious appearance, that future has come, and Pionius achieves this resurrection? I argue that the text holds both of these readings as possible. Precisely which is ambiguous from the text itself, although scholars have often interpreted the text to refer to a far-off future resurrection—that is, future from the perspective of the text's reader.

Middleton connects this image and reversal to a regime change, noting the cosmic nature of the justice instituted by Pionius on the cross. As his text *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity* documents, "The struggle of the Christians was set in the midst of a cosmic arena, where they engaged in combat against Satan and his legions, and won the victor's crown by holding to their confession and dying well."[644] Martyrs clearly possessed "a radical conviction of the part they were playing in the cosmic scheme of things,"[645] envisioning their actions as pushing forward into the future and its promised, improved justice system. The justice that Pionius alludes to all throughout the text and that he embodies in his death is forecasted for the future, a "judgment to come," and to a cosmic level, "the resurrection of the

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[644] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 93.

[645] Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, 94.

dead." The text thus institutes a particularly Christian system of justice: a future one, characterized as a judgment and a resurrection, ensured by the proof that it is already operating.

Moss reinforces the interpretation Middleton offers. She cites *MPionius* among the martyr texts which stage "an eschatological judgment scene of cosmic proportions." In this final scene in *MPionius*, which promises future judgment meted out by God, "Eschatological judgment serves as the setting for the delivery of punishment; earthly injustices will be overturned, and the wicked will be brought low."[646] In this way the god from the machine at the end of *MPionius* promises a feature that signals tragedy and often appears with the *deus ex machina*: a divinely sanctioned end.[647]

These readings of the text see the resurrection to come in a future from the perspective of the reader, a cosmic reversal of justice, when God's system of justice will overtake earthly systems. But given that time within the span of the text is different from time for the reader, I think the text balances two functions of Pionius' role as witness. As witness to the current justice system, he acts also as a prophet of the future judgement. At the same time, though, Pionius' own judgment is not future; rather, it occurs immediately at his death, enacted in the entrance of Pionius to heaven and signified through the state of his body.[648] By balancing both of these

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[646] Moss, *The Other Christs*, 142-144.

[647] Jeff Jay connects the trope of competing justice to revenge in his characterization of the *deus ex machina*, and notes that the *deus* as an agent of revenge is a common feature of texts written in a tragic mode, "where the restoration of both cosmic and political equity is of utmost importance": "After all, the tragic world is one where justice and hence retribution hold sway" (*The Tragic in Mark*, 193). In another formulation, he notes that "Revenge against the tyrant and the impious are particular versions of a retribution-theme that is everywhere in the tragedies" (*The Tragic in Mark*, 84, see fn 22 for a list of examples and 85 for his treatment specifically of the *Eumenides* as ending a cycle of retribution in the *Oresteia*—he, like Dunn, counts the *Eumenides* among his examples of the *deus ex machina* in tragedies).

[648] Moss does note this in insisting that Pionius' resurrection is immediate upon his death (*The Other Christs*, 127); in this way she also has both perspectives in mind: both a far-future divine regime of justice and a future from the perspective of the text that is achieved by the end of it, when Pionius' resurrection is implied.

complementary statements of Pionius' role as witness, *MPionius* shows that God's regime is currently operating for those who can perceive it: Pionius is a witness to that truth.

Above, by analyzing the text, I have described how God functions as a *deus ex machina* in dramatizing the intervention of divine authority over events in the narrative. I also briefly remarked on the resonance of Pionius with the figure of Christ, both in their parallel appearances at the end of their lives, and even in their parallel final words. Here I want to draw these two points together more clearly. While some treatments of Christ, whom Pionius mimics, consider him a *deus ex machina*,[649] here I argue that God acts as the *deus ex machina* who keeps Pionius in sound and good shape. Pionius himself is figured as an athlete and imitator of Christ.

A lengthy scholarship has documented the imitation of Christ in martyr literature. The *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, for example, claims explicitly to be a martyrdom on the model of Jesus,[650] going so far as to include a character named Herod who persecutes Polycarp,[651] and promising to those whose betrayal results in Polycarp's arrest "the punishment of Judas himself."[652] Candida Moss documents such imitation in detail, going further than the usual rote list of parallels between accounts of Jesus' death and deaths of martyrs to trace how this

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[649] Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*, 133; Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 199.

[650] As early in the text as *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 1.1: "For almost all the events leading up to it occurred so that the Lord might set again for us an example of martyrdom according to the gospel"; translation from Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 91; see too *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17, which calls martyrs "imitators of the Lord."

[651] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 6.2.

[652] *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 6.2.

imitation helped audiences of martyr texts understand martyrdom as a phenomenon as well as to shape their eschatological vision.[653]

Some scholars have connected specifically the image of martyrs in the moment of their execution to imitation of Jesus, arguing that these depictions of martyrs' deaths function as visual citations of Jesus' death. The martyr in *MPionius*, like Christ, hangs from an object in the air: for both of them, a cross. Pionius' physical form on the hanging cross signals an end to the story, resolving the narrative. In the *Letter to the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, Blandina's death bears striking resemblance to that of Jesus on the cross, connecting the two via their shared posture:

> As for Blandina, she was hung on a stake and exposed as bait for the beasts that were thrown upon her. She looked like she was hung on a cross, and through her fervent prayer, she instilled a great zeal in the combatants. For in their contest they saw through their sister, even with their bodily eyes, the one who was crucified for them in order to persuade those who believe in him that all who suffer for Christ's glory will have communion with the living God.[654]

Candida Moss captures the dramatic quality of Blandina's citation of Jesus, noting that the imitation of Christ in this moment is narratively portrayed as so strong that there is an elision of identity between the two figures: "Blandina herself disappears, and in her physical form only Christ is apparent. The transformative quality of her imitation of the crucifixion is so strong that she vanishes; her identity is transformed into and subsumed by that of Christ."[655] It is through this physical posture, as her figure is raised on a cross to hang above the audience, that an optical

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[653] Candida Moss, *The Other Christs*; for a programmatic statement of the import of imitation: "martyrs were Christly imitators. This basic premise leads us to consider the relationship between the significance of the death of a martyr and the significance of the death of Christ. If the death of the martyr is modeled on the death of Christ, surely the *meanings* of their deaths are also related? In theological, as well as biblical, accounts of salvation history, the death of Christ is the critical salvific moment…The martyr acts offer one avenue of exploration into ancient views of the saving death of Christ" (76).

[654] *Letter to the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, 5.1.41; translation from Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 163.

[655] Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom*, 113.

illusion transforms her into Christ in the sight of observers, to the extent that her image elicits a zealous response from those standing by.

Thecla, whom Elizabeth Castelli treats as a "protomartyr," also cites the posture of Jesus on the cross in her death scene in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*.[656] When Thecla refuses to marry, effectively turning from her family and from gendered expectations in order to live the life of an apostle, ascetic, and martyr, she is condemned to die by being burned. At the scene of her burning, "she makes the sign of the cross; here, her whole body takes on the form of the cross as she extends her arms."[657] Thecla's body is intended to recall the figure of Jesus visually as well as narratively, Castelli points out. *Visually*, "Her body becomes the cross itself, simultaneously a visual imitation or reenactment of the crucifixion and a textual moment whereby the martyr's body itself becomes the legible message."[658] This message, in my view, takes on the *narrative* function of the *deus ex machina* in that it "assures the ascendancy of the supernatural."[659] Just like the *deus* in tragedies and *MPionius* assures divine control of the intra-narrative events and authorizes them, so too in Thecla's story, using the divine figure as sanction, "her physical liberation from the flames is then mapped onto a divine ethical plan of retribution and reward, further linking her to a mode of apocalyptic sensibility whereby the tables of persecution are

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[656] Here I concentrate on two examples, those of Blandina and Thecla. More could be proffered, most especially the *Martyrdom of Fructuosus* for Fructuosus' assuming the posture of Christ-on-cross: "They [Fructuosus and two companions] were like Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael, so that the holy trinity was fulfilled in them too. Indeed, to each as they stood in the fire of this world, the father was present, but the son also relieved them and the Holy Spirit walked in the midst of the fire. When the bands that tied their hands had been burned away, Fructuosus, remembering the divine prayer and his usual custom, knelt down joyful. With the assurance of resurrection, adopting the posture of the trophy of the Lord, he prayed to God" (*Martyrdom of Fructuosus* 4; Rebillard, *Greek and Latin Narratives*, 263). A similar account is provided by Eusebius of the Egyptian martyrs in Phoenicia; see Moss' treatment of the episode in *The Other Christs*, 62-63.

[657] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 153, referring to *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 12.51-59.

[658] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 153.

[659] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 153.

turned, the wicked punished, and the righteous vindicated."[660] In this way, Thecla's image in her death scene recalls that of Jesus.

Some scholars have interpreted this imitation of Christ as a *deus ex machina*. Gilbert Bilezikian, for example, long ago called the crucifixion of Jesus in the *Gospel of Mark* a *deus ex machina*.[661] Bilezikian was an early proponent of this view; other scholars have since followed and elaborated on the idea.[662] Jeff Jay notes that the *deus ex machina* in *Mark*, located at 16:1-18, intervenes for the benefit of Jesus' disciples, and that in doing so, "the delivery of this message, divulging as it does the reality of resurrection as well as instructions charting the course of the future, functions much like the *deus ex machina*."[663] He notes that this *deus* directly cites the resurrection of the dead and points forward to eschatological judgment, orienting the reader to the future and highlighting the function of the god to convey divine information, the latter points being exactly those features that help Jay and other scholars to identify the *deus ex machina* in both tragedies and in Mark.

I also see these features present in *MPionius*, but I interpret them slightly differently. While the *Martyrdom of Pionius* brings its narrative to a close via the tragic device of the *deus ex machina*, it is God who acts as the *deus*, while Pionius is portrayed as an athlete and imitator of Christ. In imitating Christ, Pionius himself is not the *deus*; rather, he visually cites the image of

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[660] Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory*, 153.

[661] Bilezikian, *The Liberated Gospel*, 133.

[662] I note Bilezikian here because his view on the topic was more influential than other treatments, but it was not singular. Benoît Standaert's *L'Evangile selon Marc: composition et genre littéraire* (Brussels: Zeven-Kerken, 1978) made the same claim. Adela Yarbro Collins in her commentary on the *Gospel of Mark* accepts and carries forward the theory that *Mark* employs a *deus ex machina*, and Smith's "Divine Tragedy," briefly discussed in Chapter One, also lists the *deus* as one of the features from the genre of tragedy that organize Mark. The idea that Jesus functions as a tragic *deus ex machina* is thus by now relatively uncontroversial.

[663] Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 199.

Christ on the cross, and in doing so, he returns the reader to the real *deus*: God, who resurrects Christ and, in this text, Pionius. In a technical sense, the *deus ex machina* functions simply, to bring the narrative to a close.[664] In another sense, the device offers a very specific type of ending: a fate controlled by an omnipotent god, which is the circumstance under which the device appears in tragedies. *MPionius* stages such an ending through visually citing the death of Jesus on the cross. Even more importantly, *MPionius* uses the *deus ex machina* to signal a divinely ordered end: it promises a regime of justice to come in the future which will correct the wrongs documented throughout the narrative and which is assured by its demonstration that this system of justice already operates.

Thus, *MPionius* brings its narrative to an end by capitalizing on both the visual and plot-structural functions of the *deus ex machina*, at the same time as it indicates a more final, extra-textual *deus ex machina* in the presumed final judgment by God, hinted at throughout the narrative and foreshadowed in the image of the martyr on the cross in combination with the promise of a resurrection from the dead.[665] The *deus ex machina* in this text thus "Christianizes" the plot by pointing the reader back to the death and resurrection of Christ, who is resurrected by God, the *deus ex machina*. This is what Kevin Taylor means when he states, of Jesus' resurrection in the New Testament gospels, that "The resurrection is a *deus ex machina* in the classical sense, but it is not the final act, the last divine appearance onstage where all things are made new. This true and final pattern, hoped for yet still beyond comprehension, is God's final

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[664] In this way the device functions to close the action in the absence of explicit stage directions: "The *machina* in this regard is analogous to the curtain of our modern stages or, with a glance at the history of drama, that little word sometimes found at the end of the Shakespearean tragedies, *finis*" (Jay, *The Tragic in Mark*, 105; see also 200).

[665] *MPionius* 21.2-4.

apocalypse, the last *deus ex machina*."[666] In this way the text utilizes the *deus ex machina* to end its plot, but plays with the feature's function of linking planes of time by using the *deus* to foreshadow yet another.

The text is heavily weighted at the end of its action; the denouement takes on extraordinary interpretive significance for the events which occurred before it within the text, as well as for the extra-textual future. Oliver Nicholson emphasizes that this end is the entire point of the text, and bears the significance of the entire narrative: "Even contemporary passions which go beyond court records and give fuller and more interesting information about the martyrs and those who persecuted them—the visions of Perpetua, the arrest of Pionius—generally concentrate on the final act of what must in most cases have been a substantial and complex drama."[667] By staging a trial between two competing regimes of justice and promising an end via the *deus ex machina*, *MPionius* utilizes features of Greek tragedies. The example of one Greek tragedy will put on display these parallels of tragic convention.

The *Eumenides*: Justice and *deus ex machina*

The *Eumenides* is the final play of the only remaining tragic trilogy from the classical period, the *Oresteia*. The trilogy follows a cycle of inter-familial killings going back to ancestors Thyestes and Atreus.[668] The action begins in the *Agamemnon*, with reference to the sacrifice of

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[666] Taylor, C*hrist the Tragedy of God*, 48.

[667] Oliver Nicholson, "Preparation for Martyrdom in the Early Church," pages 61-90 in *The Great Persecution: The Proceedings of the Fifth Patristic Conference, Maynooth, 2003*, edited by Dr. Vincent Twomey and Mark Humphries (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009), 63.

[668] For references to this back-story within the trilogy itself, see *Agamemnon* 1191-1193; 1502-1503; 1582-1585; and 1590-1599.

Iphigenia by her father Agamemnon in exchange for safe passage en route to Troy.[669] Iphigenia's mother Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon as well as the prophetess Cassandra, whom Agamemnon has taken as spoils of war, upon his arrival home from the Trojan war, having conspired with Thyestes' son Aegisthus to avenge Iphigenia's murder.

Clytemnestra's murder of her husband, seemingly justified as retribution for her husband's unjust killing, itself enacts a need for retribution: Clytemnestra and Agamemnon's son, Orestes, is commanded by Apollo to kill his mother for revenge.[670] Orestes' mental anguish plays a central role in the second play of the trilogy, the *Libation Bearers*. He laments multiple times the double bind in which he finds himself, both ordered by a god to kill his mother in order to exact revenge, and sure that his doing so will enact the need for further violence and perpetuate the cycle of killings.[671] The conundrum is amply demonstrated in an exchange with his mother. Orestes defends his murder of her as just: "It is not I that will kill you; you will have killed yourself." Clytemnestra counters with a promise of revenge: "Take care! Beware your mother's wrathful hounds!" He defends himself thus: "But how am I to escape my father's, if I fail to do this?"[672]

How can both divine demands be operative? Just as *MPionius* asks how it can be possible both to obey the governing authorities and to obey the Christian god, this play too questions how to adjudicate between two competing, legitimate demands which promise corresponding and

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[669] *Agamemnon* 184-257 for the full episode, reported as a frame story to the action of the play.

[670] The command is first alluded in *Libation Bearers* 269-170; Orestes holds as surety that the "mighty oracle of Loxias" will not betray him; see too 354-359 and 1029-1030.

[671] *Libation Bearers* 380-385; 405-409.

[672] The exchange occurs within the stichomythic conversation between Orestes and Clytemnestra at *Libation Bearers* 908-930 (here 923-925).

conflicting consequences. Ultimately Orestes is fortified to act by his sister Electra and kills both his mother and Aegisthus.[673] Though he has heeded the demands of Apollo, he ends the play anything but calm and satisfied: in a seemingly mad fit, he flees the stage, crying out as he experiences and describes visions of the Erinyes pursuing him to avenge his matricide.[674]

The *Eumenides*, the final play in the trilogy, forms a narrative and thematic close to the series of killings which the trilogy centralizes. The beginning of the play picks up where *Libation Bearers* left off: Orestes is chased by the Erinyes from the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi to Athens. Apollo, from the beginning of the play, promises to intercede on Orestes' behalf, "for it was I who induced you to kill the woman who was your mother."[675] The ghost or spirit (εἴδωλον) of Clytemnestra then provokes the Furies to wake up and to avenge her: she claims just as much right to intercession as Orestes, yet "none of the divinities is wrathful on my behalf."[676] From its beginning scenes, then, the play foregrounds the central organizing theme of justice, through not only the elaborate trial scene that will later bring the play to its close, but also through its earlier dialogues as well. This theme is introduced explicitly as well: "Who will say these things are just?"[677] It becomes the task of the play to answer this question,[678] just as is the case in

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[673] *Libation Bearers* 930-971; Orestes announces the death of the "twin tyrants" at 973-974.

[674] The visions begin at *Libation Bearers* 1048 and continue to the end of the play, particularly vivid at 1058, when he notes their eyes dripping with fluid.

[675] *Eumenides* 84: καὶ γὰρ κτανεῖν σ' ἔπεισα μητρῷον δέμας. Simon Goldhill traces the complexity surrounding the various agents at work in Orestes' misfortune. Zeus is one causal agent, for example (*Eumenides* 17-19), and he is both supported by Apollo, Hermes, and Zeus, and opposed by the Erinyes (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative: The Oresteia* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984], 209). Already the beginning the text, by drawing out these alliances, "develops the basis and nature of Apollo's continuing support for Orestes, in vocabulary which once more marks the social, religious, sexual terminology in which the oppositions of the trial will be constituted."

[676] *Eumenides* 101.

[677] *Eumenides* 154: τί τῶνδ' ἐρεῖ τις δικαίως ἔχειν;

[678] As Goldhill notes: "It will be precisely the saying what is just which will constitute the resolution of the trial scene" (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 216).

MPionius, which already at its beginning asks the question, "how will we suffer this, as just or unjust?"[679]

Clytemnestra goes even further in her query of what constitutes justice, accusing "the younger gods" of "exercising total power, beyond what justice allows."[680] Apollo too is guilty of wrong, since he "violates the laws of the gods by honoring what is mortal" by taking Orestes' side.[681] Finally rousing to defend Clytemnestra, the chorus of Furies also questions Apollo, asking him: "Were you not responsible"?[682] From the beginning, then, the *Eumenides* stages a competition between legitimate claims to justice. Competing regimes of justice operate simultaneously by their own rules, but the play's task is to stage a thorough operation of judicial procedure whose objective is to determine which will prevail.

Once in Athens, Orestes seeks sanctuary at the temple of Athena.[683] He comes, he says, under Apollo's instructions, and reports that he will await a final judgment (τέλος δίκης).[684] He bases his arguments for asylum on the leverage he holds as the king of Argos, putting on display not just that his punishment is a matter of a battle of the gods, or a philosophical question of to

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[679] *MPionius* 4.16.

[680] *Eumenides* 162-163.

[681] *Eumenides* 171.

[682] *Eumenides* 198-200: ἄξαξ Ἄπολλον, ἀντάκουσαν ἐν μέρει. Αὐτος σὺ τούτων οὐ μεταίτιος πέλῃ, ἀλλ' εἷς τὸ πᾶν ἔπραξας ὢν παναίτιος.

[683] Taplin comments on the obviousness of scenes' locations to Athenians viewing the play. He notes that from 253 the scene of the action is set near the *palaion bretas* of Athena: "For the Athenian audience its whereabouts needed no explanation: it was inside a temple in the Acropolis, near or on the spot where the Erechtheum was later built. The trial, on the other hand, is not set on the Acropolis, let alone inside Athena's temple, it is on the Areopagus and in the open air" (*The Stagecraft of Aeschylus*, 390).

[684] *Eumenides* 243: αὐτοῦ φυλάσσων ἀναμενῶ τέλος δίκης. Goldhill captures the "meaningful ambiguity" in the phrase: "here it is a τέλος that with δίκη also suggests a fulfilment, initiation, a rite, as well as the threatening implications of 'death as a punishment', 'death from legal proceedings'…the ambiguity is (in) τέλος itself. For *dike*, too, is what the Erinues have sought as *telos*, and how Apollo has justified the action, and it is the law-court to follow. Waiting for the *telos* consisting in, coming from, *dike* is therefore richly ambiguous" (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 224).

what degree someone can be judged guilty if acting in obedience. In addition, his appeal to the political interest of Athens indicates the importance of contemporaneous politics at the time of the play's staging.[685]

The chorus of Furies follows him to Athens, undercutting Orestes' appeal to Apollo and then to Athena. According to them, it is they who practice "straight justice" (εὐθυδίκαιοι), and, convinced as they are that they represent the party in need of defense, they present themselves as "upright witnesses" (μάρτυρες ὀρθαὶ)[686] to Clytemnestra's cause, already utilizing the forensic vocabulary that will ultimately have its technical place in the murder trial.

The goddess Athena appears after line 396, via a notoriously ambiguous entry. Upon her entry she conducts the *anakrisis*: the "pre-judgment," asking who the two parties are and the topic at hand—standard procedure before the actual trial.[687] Like Orestes has already done, the chorus here appeal to Athena to provide the final authority on what is just (εὐθεῖαν δίκην).[688] After she agrees to take on this role, she turns to Orestes, asking who he is and requesting that he

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[685] As Edith Hall puts it, "The core question of whether or not he should be punished for committing murder is thus complicated from the outset. His guilt or innocence is not just a moral, theological, or even judicial matter: it is pertinent to international relations and diplomacy as well…Aeschylus is already showing that the judgment and punishment of alleged criminals—and indeed asylum seekers—are impossible to disentangle from the wider social and political contexts of their actions" ("Peaceful Conflict Resolution and its Discontents in Aeschylus' Eumenides," *Common Knowledge* 21.2 [2015]: 253-263; here 258).

[686] *Eumenides* 312 and 318 for these phrases; the longer speech from the chorus runs: εὐθυδίκαιοι δ' οἰόμεθ' εἶναι· τὸν μὲν καθαρὰς χεῖρας προνέμοντ' οὔτις ἐφέρπει μῆνις ἀφ' ἡμῶν, ἀσινὴς δ' αἰῶνα διοιχνεῖ· ὅστις δ' ἀλιτὼν ὥσπερ ὅδ' ἀνὴρ χεῖρας φονίας ἐπικρύπτει, μάρτυρες ὀρθαὶ τοῖσι θανοῦσιν παραγιγνόμεναι πράκτορες αἵματος αὐτῷ τελέως ἐφάνημεν.

[687] *Eumenides* 426-435; see Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 234-235. For more background to the *anakrisis*, see the succinct article by David Cyrus Mirhady, "The Oath-Challenge in Athens," *Classical Quarterly* 41.1 (1991): 78-83; for a more recent and thorough treatment, two sources are especially instructive: Michael Gagarin's "Litigants' Oaths in Athenian Law," pages 39-47 in *Horkos: The Oath in Greek Society*, edited by Alan Sommerstein and Judith Fletcher (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013); and Christos Kremmydas, "Anakrisis and the Framing of Strategies of Argumentation in Athenian Public Trials," pages 110-131 in *Use and Abuse of Law in the Athenian Courts*, edited by Chris Carey, Ifigeneia Giannadaki, and Brenda Griffith-Williams (Leiden: Brill, 2018). For a more thorough treatment of the oath in the *Oresteia*, Judith Fletcher's "Horkos in the Oresteia" is useful and focuses specifically on the *anakrisis* at 106-107 (pages 102-112 in *Horkos: The Oath in Greek Society*).

[688] *Eumenides* 433-435. They command her thus at 433: κρῖνε δ' εὐθεῖαν δίκην.

defend himself of the charges. Upon hearing the details, Athena responds that the matter is too great for her to consider alone—that is, democracy frames justice.

Given the enormity of the task at hand, Athena takes two actions. First, she asks both Orestes and the chorus to collect testimonies (τεκμήρια) and proofs (μαρτύριά).[689] Second, she assembles a panel of Athenians to hear the formal trial. The chorus is in an uproar over her unpredicted reconfiguration of the trial: "Now comes the overthrow of ordained laws, if the injurious cause of this slayer is going to prevail."[690] Just as in *MPionius*, when those who are administering justice appear to violate their own laws and Pionius chastises them by exhorting them to "Revere piety, honor justice, recognize those of the same nature, and follow your laws," the chorus appeals to Athena to "respect the altar of justice."[691]

A more important parallel with *MPionius* is that "the problematic definition of δίκη" is "central to the trial."[692] That is, it is not just one or another singular party being judged as in the right in contradistinction to their opposition. Rather, the very notion of what constitutes justice is at stake in the trials of both *MPionius* and the *Eumenides*. It is Goldhill who has most effectively captured the meta-significance of the terminology and theme of δίκη in the *Eumenides*: "The shifting of δίκη continues the problem of definition from the *Choephoroi*, with both sides of the

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[689] *Eumenides* 470-489 for the larger speech in which she requests these proofs (at 485); at 470 she determines the matter to be "too great" for either mortal or herself to judge.

[690] *Eumenides* 490-565 for the entire lengthy speech; the quoted lines are 490-493. Again Goldhill's attention to the language of the text illuminates its larger meaning. The rendering of lines 490-491 as "overthrow of new laws," Goldhill reminds the reader, is the result of a lengthy history of criticism on the text, which has struggled to define the meaning here as an objective or qualitative genitive—the difference between "Now there will be an overthrowing of new laws" and "overthrow consisting of new laws." Instead of falling on one side or another, Goldhill finds meaning in the text's linguistic ambiguity: "it marks the interplay between the chorus' acceptance of the process of law, their submission to the trial, and their refusal to accept the decision of the court (unless they win!), an interplay which constitutes the dynamics of the latter part of the play, namely, their threats to Athens after the decision in law" (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 240).

[691] *MPionius* 16.6; *Eumenides* 539: Βωμὸν αἴδεσαι Δίκας.

[692] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 216.

clash of language claiming δίκη and both sides claiming the justice of their view of δίκη. *Dike* remains a term of and for appropriation."[693] The text plays on this central and abstract question of δίκη, juxtaposing it at every turn with individual *dikai*: court cases.[694] *MPionius* plays these various meanings of δίκη against one another as well, using δίκη-language and rhetorical questions to ask whether the martyrs suffer as just or unjust people—with the larger implication being that it could be either, depending on which regime of justice (δίκη) is at play.

The trial staged within the *Eumenides* constitutes the first "'courtroom drama' in theater history."[695] Athena assembles jurors and, just when she is about to call the trial to begin, Apollo arrives with a rhetorical flourish: "I have come to bear witness" (καὶ μαρτυρήσων ἦλθον) for Orestes, he announces, since he bears responsibility for Orestes' actions.[696] The Erinyes stand for themselves, opposite Orestes' representation by Apollo. Athena turns to the chorus first, and they present a series of questions to Orestes: whether he killed his mother, how he did it, and who persuaded him to do so.[697]

Upon answering the Furies' questions, Orestes appeals to Apollo to testify (μαρτύρησον) on his behalf—not whether he committed matricide, but, both he and Apollo repeat multiple

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[693] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 223.

[694] "δίκης has the implications (of course?) not only of 'Justice' (Lloyd-Jones' capitalisation) but also of the punishment they seek—and of the court-case to come" (Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 226).

[695] Hall, "Peaceful Conflict Resolution and Its Discontents," 257, drawing from the play at 682, when Athena refers to the proceedings as the "first trial for bloodshed": κλύοιτ' ἂν ἤδη θεσμόν, Ἀττικὸς λεώς, πρώτας δίκας κρίνοντες αἵματος χυτοῦ (*Eumenides* 681-682).

[696] *Eumenides* 576-581; he takes responsibility at 579-581: "I bear the responsibility (αἰτίαν δ' ἔχω) for the killing of this man's mother." The sentiment is repeated at 594 (μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι) and 609 (ἤδη σὺ μαρτύρησον). The *martys*-language functions alongside Apollo's label as a ξύνδικος, a "public advocate," in the same speech, both of which are "terms that are the technical terms of the Athenian court" (Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 246).

[697] *Eumenides* 585-594.

times, whether the deed was done justly (δίκῃ, δικαίως).[698] Among the range of justifications that Apollo provides, one that he returns to repeatedly is that he received his oracle that Orestes ought to kill his mother from Zeus himself.[699] And in explaining the validity of Zeus' demand, Apollo presents the argument that killing a father is just not the same as killing a mother, because the relationship with the father is based on a blood tie not shared with a mother.

A seemingly curious argument, Goldhill and others have offered clarity. As early as line 84, the play anticipates the arguments for the unique validity of the paternal blood line when Apollo sends Hermes as a guard for Orestes in his flight to Athens. Sending Hermes forth, Apollo refers to him as "my own blood brother, begotten of the same father."[700] Pointedly referring to Hermes as "absolute kin" on the basis of their sharing a father, though not a mother, this reference places Apollo, Zeus, and Hermes on Orestes' side.[701] He thus builds from the outset an argument that a mother is not blood kin to her children, but a father is—and it is Athena who is uniquely poised to make this argument, for she stands as "witness to the fact that a father can give birth without a mother."[702] Thus a central argument runs throughout the play that functions to make it a worse crime to kill a father than a mother. This argument proves decisive:

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[698] *Eumenides* 609-621.

[699] *Eumenides* 621-622; he expands at 625-632.

[700] *Eumenides* 89 σὺ δ', αὐτάδελφον αἷμα καὶ κοινοῦ πατρὸς.

[701] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 213. Zeus' role in meting out justice in the *Eumenides* has been a topic of lively scholarly conversation—too much conversation, Rebecca Futo Kennedy opines, and she turns her focus instead to the role of Athena in connection with justice (*Athena's Justice: Athena, Athens and the Concept of Justice in Greek Tragedy* [New York: Peter Lang, 2009]). Thus her coverage takes a different angle to the topic and source of justice in the *Eumenides* (as well as other plays which centralize Athena), contrary to those who see Athena as merely an instrument through which Zeus achieves his justice. Representative examples of the instrumentalizing position include Hugh Lloyd-Jones, *The Justice of Zeus* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1971) and R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 68 (1948): 130-147.

[702] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 252; see Athena's statement on the topic at 738.

"It is enough to challenge the connection between mother and son,"[703] and Athena asserts after the argument has been made that "enough has been said."[704] The Furies and Orestes both correspondingly assert that they have concluded their arguments.[705]

As each of the jurors casts his vote, the chorus and Apollo "in turn exhort, threaten and promise the voters."[706] The chorus, for example, threaten danger to the city if they are dishonored, and Apollo promises the wrath of both himself and Zeus, the latter of whom was a partner in demanding Orestes' matricide, he reminds them.[707] The court ultimately casts equal votes, but Athena casts her ballot last, and in Orestes' favor.[708] Thus Orestes is acquitted.

This end to the trial is not the end of the play, however. The chorus of the Erinyes is livid, appalled at this overthrowing of the previous system of justice, totally re-determining what it means to administer proper justice. Athena takes multiple angles to assuaging their concerns, offering both a home for them in Athens with protections,[709] as well as reasoned argumentation defending Orestes' acquittal. She attempts to reason with them that they ought not complain about the decision, because within the trial clear evidence (λαμπρὰ μαρτύρια) was provided, and the witness (ὁ μαρτυρῶν) who testified before the court was the one who gave Orestes the

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[703] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 252.

[704] *Eumenides* 675.

[705] *Eumenides* 676-680.

[706] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 255.

[707] *Eumenides* 713-716; the two parties' threats continue to 733.

[708] *Eumenides* 734-5; the verdict is announced at 752-753. The votes were equal, which resulted in acquittal.

[709] *Eumenides* 805; they accept at 916.

oracle.[710] She hinges her argument on clear evidence: it is the proper witness who ultimately wins the case for an upheaval of the operative system of justice.

This play has long been viewed as a staging of a shift in the apparatus of justice: as the Erinyes transform to Eumenides at the end, this current of scholarship runs, so too is there a shift from a faulty system of justice wherein revenge is a requirement and simultaneously always fails to achieve its end, to a more civilized, democratic procedure of trial by law.[711] The *Eumenides* thus stages a transformation from one judicial system to another.

But many have also questioned the degree to which this shift of justice really "works" in terms of bringing violent bloodshed to an end. Goldhill rightly describes the end of the play and its legal outcome as a "culmination…but not *telos*" since "the Erinues threaten to set the process of reciprocal revenge moving again by wrecking the land whose elders have been a cause of their rejection in the trial."[712] From a different perspective of restorative justice, Eric Dugdale and Loramy Gerstbauer arrive at a similar conclusion, noting that the matricide trial on the Areopagus "does not, however, bring resolution to the seemingly interminable cycle of violence. Indeed, after Athena announces the court's verdict acquitting Orestes, violence looks set to reach new levels in its intensity and scope, with the Furies threatening to unleash their rage against the

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[710] Goldhill, ever attentive to the intricacies of language in the text, calls these λαμπρὰ μαρτύρια "clear shining testimonies," which "marks the connection between the witness as one who sees and that which is both clear to sight and gives light, shines as a value in discourse" (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 263)

[711] Rebecca Futo Kennedy, *Athena's Justice*, 35-37 reflects this trend even as she comments on it. I discussed the political context of classical tragedy in Chapter One; on the topic, Goldhill's position is now classic, as I show there. For a very brief discussion of this context as it relates to the trial in the *Eumenides*, see *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 267. Goldhill also provides a succinct description of this traditional interpretation of the *Eumenides*, which he calls a "commonplace of Aeschylean criticism": "that the *Oresteia* indicates a move from ancient vendetta to modern legal justice, and that thus Aeschylus is to be read as a progressive humanist" (279-280). See also Alan Sommerstein's *Aeschylean Tragedy* (London: Duckworth, 2010), 183-189, which describes the action of the *Oresteia* as staging a transition from retribution to reason and persuasion.

[712] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 261.

entire land of Athens."[713] Like the ending of *MPionius*, and as the *deus ex machina* as a device poses, the question of whether the shift in justice achieves its aims is both impossible to avoid and to answer, for it reaches beyond the events of the narrative. The *deus* gestures toward a future that extends the events of the text forward indefinitely, making the question of whether its presumed future saw the ends to which the *deus* gestured as always open to interpretation.

Whether the staged upheaval of judicial apparatus succeeds or not, the play itself stages such a transition. But precisely of what this transition consists has also been a topic of debate among scholars. That the play stages a transferral of justice to the machinery of the democratic law court is an undeniable message, and it is this that scholars have in mind when they note that the *deus ex machina* often performs an etiological function, in this case explaining the origins of the democratic law court.[714] This position is clearly interested in tragedy being intertwined with its contemporaneous political context, of which it was a part and on which it commented.

But a more compelling and recent scholarly conversation has focused on crucial commentary on gender relationships that play out over the cycle of revenge throughout the entire trilogy of the *Oresteia*—not just through a cycle of revenge that alternates male and female actors, but also in staging a competition between female-associated Furies and Orestes,

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[713] Eric Dugdale and Loramy Gerstbauer, "Forms of Justice in Aeschylus' *Eumenides*," *Polis* 34.2 (2017): 226-250; here 228. These modern scholars are not alone, of course; as early as the plays of Euripides, there was skepticism over the trial's efficacy. *Iphigenia among the Taurians*, for example, referred back to the *Eumenides*, at least commenting on the openness of its ending, on which Goldhill insists, and at most accusing it of failing to achieve its ends: "the aition for acquittal with even votes takes us back to the very different version enacted by Aeschylus, and to this play's repeated reminders that the end of the story in *Eumenides* was not really the end: the trial at Athens did not appease the Furies, Orestes had to go back to Apollo, and the god prescribed another trial of atonement" (Dunn, *Tragedy's End*, 63, emphasis original).

[714] On the etiological and etymological function the trial performs, Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 253-254. Colin W. McLeod's "Politics and the Oresteia," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982): 124-144 is a classic interpretation of the "origin myth" of the homicide trial on the Areopagus, and Froma Zeitlin briefly attends to the play's preoccupation with "firsts" in "Dynamics of Misogyny in the *Oresteia*" (*Arethusa* 11 [1978]: 149-184) at 162-163. A helpful, concise orientation to the court of the Areopagus that situates it within the fifth-century reforms of Ephialtes can be found in Kennedy's *Athena's Justice*, 22-27; she also helpfully summarizes scholarly trends in treating the foundation of the Areopagus court at 26-27.

represented by Apollo. This scholarly conversation notices that it is not just competing groups of gods who are in conflict throughout the plays; in addition, "Because the *Oresteia*'s cycle of revenge alternates murders by a member of one sex against another and culminates in a clash between Apollo and the Furies, the problem of revenge is inseparable from gender hierarchies."[715] Attention to competing regimes of justice as they relate to competing genders is grounded in the work of R. P. Winnington-Ingram,[716] Froma Zeitlin,[717] and others; such treatments lay the groundwork for the interpretation that "the law court will replace the vendetta, but only by mastering the female."[718]

Simon Goldhill's analysis of the *Oresteia* builds on this crucial work and provides unprecedented detail in its explanation of just how the trilogy stages this mastery of the female through the larger "double bind" that occasions its action. One way he does this is to show how Athena's crucial last vote that serves to acquit Orestes is linked to her androgyny throughout the text. This androgyny is in fact essential to resolving the crisis of the plot: "As the narrative has been structured around the polarized opposition of genders, so the narrative's ending depends on a figure who does not easily fit into such an opposition."[719] Only such an ambiguous figure can

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[715] Mitchell-Boyask, *Aeschylus: Eumenides*, 116.

[716] R.P. Winnington-Ingram, "Clytemnestra and the Vote of Athena"; Mitchell-Boyask rightly calls his work "decades ahead of its time" (*Aeschylus: Eumenides*, 116).

[717] Her article "The Dynamics of Misogyny" was a landmark study on gender relationships in the *Oresteia*. I highlight these recent scholars for their prominence in current scholarly conversation, but their attention to gender was not unprecedented; the earlier work by Johann Jakob Bachofen was especially influential in the late nineteenth century (*Myth, Religion, and Mother Right* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967], originally published in 1861).

[718] Mitchell-Boyask, *Aeschylus: Eumenides*, 116; he relies heavily here on the work of Goldhill.

[719] Goldhill, *Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 40; his entire treatment of the trilogy, from the beginning, traces the thread of gender relationships throughout the plays. See especially his introduction to the topic at 9-12 and the first programmatic statement at 30: "The narrative maintains a strong tension between the sexes, as it does between the generations, in the reversals of revenge."

end the "seemingly endless pattern of revenge and reversal" that is "also a pattern of male-female opposition."[720] In this way gender is necessarily woven into the double bind whose conflicting demands result in a series of revenge killings.

In the present chapter, I compare the trial scene and its staging of a transformation in the operating system of justice with a similar staging in *MPionius*. What I propose is not a one-to-one correspondence between the two. Rather, I see their trials and transferrals of judicial apparatus as fruitfully comparable and suggestive that, whether or not the *Eumenides* used a technical *mechane*, both it and *MPionius* use the *deus ex machina* to end the action of their drama and to showcase the divine sanction of the regime of justice that is to follow the future of the in-text action, thereby propelling the events of the narrative forward indefinitely and connecting the future with the in-text past.[721]

The *Eumenides* is an important comparandum to *MPionius* because it is the only extant play which stages a court case, and it takes the language of justice to a scene of broader significance, formulating a social-political solution. Both the *Eumenides* and *MPionius* are alike in staging a denouement via *deus ex machina* in order to bring their dramas to a close and to usher in an apparatus of justice that is not only superior to that which functioned previously, but is sanctioned by the divine. In *MPionius*, God functions as the *deus ex machina* who effects Pionius' reversal, bringing him from life to death. Pionius himself functions as an athlete and imitator of Christ, who demonstrates that God's justice has already been operating.

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[720] Goldhill, *Aeschylus: The Oresteia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 38.

[721] The theme recurs throughout the *Oresteia*, as Golhill points out. Already in the *Agamemnon*, "The chorus' struggle to link past, present, and future in a coherent narrative (of cause and effect) constructs, then, a complex dialectic of control and indeterminacy (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 32)." This preoccupation with linking planes of time is traceable in the very language of the text: "so apparent assurance of statement drifts towards the uncertainties of the optative mood, into vagueness, hopes and fear as expressions of the linking of past, present, and future (*Language, Sexuality, Narrative*, 33).

Conclusion

With its recurring interrogations and trial and its frequent evaluations of different groups as either just or unjust, the *Martyrdom of Pionius* emphasizes the theme of justice throughout its narrative. That is, the whole text is constructed in a judicial idiom, not merely in the portions of text that depict judicial procedure, but in its speeches as well, which use rhetorical questions and other means to show that the Roman system of justice that is operative is corrupt, that it does not in fact work to accomplish justice at all, since Pionius can be legally guilty of committing an infraction against the law, yet morally blameless.

Using this judicial idiom, *MPionius* stages the triumph of a system of justice that is distinctly Christian, characterized by Christ's death and resurrection of the dead. The martyr's body is offered as a decisive proof/witness, an argument (*martys*) in itself that shows this form of judgment is clearly already in operation and will ultimately prevail. That is, *MPionius* is a text about competing regimes of justice.[722] The figure of Pionius' body on the cross at the end of the text visually cites Christ's death, returning the reader to the real *deus* who resurrects Christ and the martyr. Unlike other scholars who see Christ himself as a *deus ex machina*, I see God as the *deus ex machina*, who brings the narrative to a plot structural end by intervening in its events, signaling divine intervention. Moreover, comparison with the *Eumenides* helps us to see that like that tragedy, *MPionius* turns a mundane legal procedure into a narrative pattern of cosmic proportions.

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[722] Kensky gets at precisely this point when she says of texts that foreground trials, "placing the legal system front and center before the reader invites the reader to make judgments on the process itself, judging whether or not it is capable of reaching a just verdict. The explicitly evaluative and judicial context draws the reader into the process as a judge" (*Trying Man, Trying God*, 10).

To compare *MPionius* to the *Eumenides* and to see them sharing tragic conventions does not mean that *MPionius* would be considered a tragedy. Nor does it mean that *MPionius* and the *Eumenides* exhibit exact correspondence. Rather than arguing for a one-to-one correspondence between the two texts or for deliberate imitation, my comparison of them shows that it is plausible that ancient audiences drew from available cultural resources, whether knowingly or not, to formulate stories and to read them. Composing a story is a complex operation which requires composers to choose from existing cultural elements—both to infuse their texts with meaning and enable readers and hearers to interpret them optimally. The genre of tragedy was one of these circulating elements, and it offered well-known, culturally prestigious structural and thematic features to composers and audiences of texts throughout antiquity. I argue that this background is a major key to understanding the narrative features of *MPionius*. By seeing the end of the play as a *deus ex machina*, ancient audiences would understand that a divine figure—in this case, the God whom Christians worship—intervenes in the events of the narrative and offers a superior form of justice to that of Roman judicial procedure.

Conclusion

This dissertation asks: how do texts activate readers or hearers within a delimited historical context? As historians, what tools are required to discern such historically situated activation, and how does acknowledging it challenge assumptions, sometimes concretized over a long history of interpretation, about how Christian narrative models communicate their messages?

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that the *Martyrdom of Pionius* shares conventions with plot elements characteristic of the genre of tragedy. I also argued that the genre's prominence and ubiquity throughout antiquity meant that ancient audiences could have received these conventions as tragic signals. I have argued for this thesis through a case study of one martyr story, the *Martyrdom of Pionius*. To do so, I draw on previous work that demonstrates that Christians were not an isolated group in antiquity; to the contrary, Christian texts were formulated within a cultural milieu in which ideas were shared among groups whose identities are being shown to be porous. This work has opened up pathways to considering literary models that show similarities with Christian martyr literature that have not previously been entertained. Boyarin anticipated such when he suggested that the porousness of identity between Jews and Christians in antiquity suggests we ought to consider other influences upon martyr literature, too: gladiator motifs as well as tragedy, for example.[723]

Much work in martyrdom studies in the last twenty to thirty years has attended to the ways in which martyr literature, responsive to its own historical contexts, then in turn played a role as an element in the formation of a distinctive Christian identity. At the same time, and in

[723] Boyarin, *Dying for God*, 117.

another discipline, that of the reception of the classics, scholars have demonstrated the continued presence and influence of the genre of tragedy far past the classical period, and argued for its decisive impact on forms of literature with which it remained contemporaneous. While some of this work on reception is making its way into early Christian studies, particularly via studies on the New Testament gospels, scholars of martyr literature tend to argue for generic parallels with Jewish texts and texts that explore Greco-Roman ideals of the noble sufferer, and sometimes note parallels with genres like romance. This means that the interdisciplinary work that has resulted in research on tragic conventions in the New Testament gospels has not yet come to martyr literature.

I have attempted to capitalize upon the increasing openness, which I document in the Introduction, toward detecting wider literary and cultural signals within martyr literature. To do so, I have made an historical argument for tragedies' ubiquity at the time of the writing and reading or hearing of *MPionius*, as well as identified generic textual features associated with tragedies within this Christian martyr text. Given the undeniable cultural prominence of the genre of tragedy through the third and fourth centuries, and *MPionius*' use of suffering, recognition, reversal, and a denouement via *deus ex machina* that stages the triumph of a specifically Christian regime of justice, I have argued that *MPionius* utilizes features that were, to an ancient audience, recognizably features of tragedies, too. Thus, in its plot, themes, and visual resonance, *MPionius* gave signals to its audience to detect tragic resonance. Given that multiple features associated with the genre of tragedy were present in just this one text, I argue this tragic resonance would be clear. I have thus added texture to the pluriform context of the rich intertextuality of martyr literature, texture that Boyarin admits and Cobb takes as her point of

entry to the study of painlessness in martyr texts.[724] The results of this case study suggest that it would be useful to analyze other martyr literature to investigate how widespread and formative the use of elements from the genre of tragedy might have been.

In making this argument, I do not mean to supplant all other approaches to *MPionius*. The benefit of the approach that I take here is that it is a lens with historical warrant, as I have demonstrated, and one that has not before been brought to bear on martyr literature. Bringing it to *MPionius* thus constitutes a scholarly contribution in two primary ways. First is the consideration of the possible impact and resonance of Greek tragedies on martyr literature. This consideration is a timely one, given the recent explosion of scholarship on the reception and afterlife of the genre of tragedy, as well as the recent trend in early Christian studies to consider the genre of tragedy as a formative part of the cultural context in which Christian texts, particularly those of the New Testament, were written. Second, given that *MPionius* has long been known as the text "quietly put aside"[725] in favor of other, more popular texts, especially the other Smyrnean martyr text, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, *MPionius* is ripe for analysis. Such analysis is particularly fitting given recent efforts by scholars such as Dinkler to consider the generic features of martyr literature and in what ways these generic features resonated broadly; and it brings the recently flourishing discipline of genre reception studies into the domain of ancient martyr literature.

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[724] I have in mind here Boyarin, *Dying for God*, especially at 117-118 and Cobb, *Divine Deliverance*, 34-40, as discussed above in the Introduction.

[725] Gibson, "Jewish Antagonism or Christian Polemic," 343.

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