

Basil and Basilissa at Ancyra: Local Legends, Hagiography, and Cult

Aude Busine

THE AIM of this paper is to investigate the links between hagiography on the one hand and cult on the ground on the other, by addressing the questions of the historicity of martyrdom narratives and of their creation and development through time. It will focus on the cases of two Galatian saints who initially had nothing in common: Basil of Ancyra, an iconic martyr of Emperor Julian, and Basilissa, a little-known young woman supposed to have been killed under Decius. In the ongoing debates about Julian's implication in the persecution of Christians, scholars have discussed at length the reliability of Basil's *Passion* as a historical source. Surprisingly, scholarship has so far never considered to what extent the narratives regarding Basil's life and sufferings came to support the development of a local cult devoted to the Ancyrene martyr. Hagiography will be here analysed in an etiological perspective, aiming to understand when, how, and why these stories were constituted over time. We shall first argue that these martyrdom narratives prove to be fictitious, and that, consequently, Basil's and Basilissa's cults cannot have originally developed as the result of the commemoration of genuine local martyrs buried *in situ*. I will then suggest that their worship appears to have first developed in Ancyra as the prolongation of a local traditional cult. I will finally attempt to reconstruct the manner in which hagiographers many years later elaborated the stories of these saints who had never existed.

Basil of Ancyra: from bishop to martyr

While Basilissa is an obscure figure, Basil of Ancyra is a well-known martyr who, according to an undated and anonymous

Passion (BHG 242),¹ was interrogated and cruelly condemned to death by Emperor Julian himself in the metropolis of Galatia. Basil's martyrdom was first recorded between 440 and 450, in the *Church History* of Sozomen,² which reports that he was a zealous presbyter of the Church of Ancyra who had been prevented under Constantius II from celebrating worship because he opposed the partisans of the Arian bishop Eudoxius; and that under Julian Basil was arrested and referred to the governor of the province because of his proselytism. Sozomen adds that Basil's heroic resistance to the tortures earned him the crown of martyrs.³ Scholars unanimously consider Sozomen's account as

¹ *Passio Basilii*, ed. Daniel van Papenbroeck, *AASS Mart.* III (Paris 1865) pp. *12–*15 (*Vat.gr.* 655, saec. XVI). *Emend.* Mihail Krascheninnikov, *Joannis Hagiopolitae De passione sancti Basilii, presbyteri Ancyran, narratio* (Tartu 1907) 23–24 (*Vat.gr.* 1667, saec. X–XI). Basil's martyrdom is the subject of a later text attributed to John the Hagiopelita (BHG 243), edited by Krascheninnikov at 1–12 (*Vat.gr.* 1667).

² On the date see Peter Van Nuffelen, *Un héritage de paix et de piété. Étude sur les histoires ecclésiastiques de Socrate et de Sozomène* (Leuven 2004) 59–61.

³ Sozom. *HE* 5.11.9–11: ὁ δὲ Βασίλειος σπουδαῖος περὶ τὸ δόγμα γεγωνῶς, ἐφ' ὅσον μὲν ἦρχε Κωνσταντίος, τοῖς τὰ Ἀρείου φρονουῖσιν ἀντέπραττε· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ψήφω τῶν ἀμφὶ τὸν Εὐδόξιον ἐκωλύθη ἐκκλησιάζειν. ἐπεὶ δὲ Ἰουλιανὸς μόνος τὴν ἀρχὴν διεῖπεν, ὁ Βασίλειος περιῶν τοὺς Χριστιανούς δημοσίᾳ καὶ περιφανῶς προὔτρεπετο τῶν οἰκείων ἔχεσθαι δογματῶν καὶ μὴ τοῖς Ἑλλήνων θύμασι καὶ σπονδαῖς μαινεσθαι, ἀντ' οὐδενὸς δὲ ἠγεῖσθαι τὰς γινομένας εἰς αὐτοὺς παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως τιμάς, προσκαίρους ταῦτα ἀποφαίνων ἐπὶ μισθῷ διηνεκοῦς ἀπωλείας. ταῦτα δὲ σπουδάζων ἐν ὑπονοίᾳ τε καὶ μίσει παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλληνισταῖς ὧν, δημοσίᾳ θύοντας ἰδὼν ἔστη, καὶ μέγα ἀνοιμῶξας ἠΰξατο μηδένα Χριστιανῶν τῆς τοιαύτης πειραθῆναι πλάνης. ἐκ τούτου δὲ συλληφθεὶς παρεδόθη τῷ ἡγουμένῳ τοῦ ἔθνους· καὶ πολλὰς βασάνους ὑπομείνας παρὰ πάντα τὸν ἀγῶνα ἀνδρείως τὴν μαρτυρίαν δῆνυσε. “Basil had long manifested great zeal in defense of the faith, and opposed the Arians during the reign of Constantius; hence the partisans of Eudoxius had prohibited him from holding public assemblies. On the accession of Julian, however, he traveled hither and there, publicly and openly exhorting the Christians to cleave to their own doctrines, and to refrain from defiling themselves with pagan sacrifices and libations. He urged them to account as nothing the honors which the emperor might bestow upon them, such honors being but of short duration, and leading to eternal infamy. His

reliable evidence and Basil is deemed to be an historical martyr, regardless of the scholars' opinions about the participation of the Emperor Julian in his persecution.⁴ As a consequence, it is held that Basil the priest should not be confused with the homonymous and contemporary bishop of Ancyra, who played an important part in the theological controversies of the time.⁵ This spokesperson of the homoeousian party (moderate Arians) appears several times in Socrates' and Sozomen's accounts of the councils and subsequent excommunications that marked the fourth century.⁶ The bishop of Ancyra was removed twice from

zeal had already rendered him an object of suspicion and of hatred to the pagans, when one day he chanced to pass by and see them offering sacrifice. He sighed deeply, and uttered a prayer to the effect that no Christian might be suffered to fall into similar delusion. He was seized on the spot, and conveyed to the governor of the province. Many tortures were inflicted on him; and in the manly endurance of this anguish he received the crown of martyrdom" (transl. C. D. Hartranft).

⁴ In his pioneering study on the martyrs of Julian, B. de Gaiffier considered as accurate all martyrdom stories preserved in fourth- and fifth-century sources, including the Church Histories: "*Sub Iuliano Apostata dans le Martyrologe romain*," *AnalBoll* 54 (1956) 5–49 (11 on Basil). Hans C. Teitler, *The Last Pagan Emperor. Julian the Apostate and the War against Christianity* (Oxford 2017) 71–72, less confident and more skeptical, merely underlines the silence of Sozomen's colleagues about this event.

⁵ See Hanns C. Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer: der Osten bis zum Ende der Homöischen Reichskirche* (Tübingen 1988) 149–150; Francesco Scorza Barcellona, "Martiri e confessori dell'età di Giuliano l'Apostata: dalla storia alla leggenda," in F. E. Consolide (ed.), *Pagani e cristiani da Giuliano l'Apostata al sacco di Roma* (Soveria Manelli 1995) 53–83, at 69; Guy Sabbah et al., *Sozomène. Histoire Ecclésiastique. Livres V–VI* (Paris 2005) 145 n.1; Federico Fatti, *Giuliano a Cesarea. La politica ecclesiastica del principe apostata* (Rome 2009) 115 n.57. For the career and work of Basil the bishop, suffice it here to cite Raymond Janin, "42. Basile, évêque d'Ancyre," *DHGE* 6 (1932) 1104–1107; Clive Foss, "Late Antique and Byzantine Ankara," *DOP* 31 (1977) 27–87, at 37–38; Manlio Simonetti, "Basile d'Ancyre," *Dictionnaire encyclopédique du christianisme ancien* 1 (Paris 1990) 348–349.

⁶ Socr. *HE* 2.30–40, Sozom. *HE* 4.6–22: succession of councils (Sirmium, Nicomedia, Seleucia, Rimini, etc.) and opposition between moderate and uncompromising Arians. On fourth-century theological controversies in general

his seat because of his fierce opposition to the uncompromising Arians, notably against the anomoean Eudoxius.⁷ The last mention of Basil the bishop is a letter (when he was in exile) dating under Jovian,⁸ the successor of Julian, which excludes identification of the bishop and the priest allegedly martyred a few years earlier.

However, the nature and provenance of the data provided by the Church historian about Basil martyr have never been properly exploited,⁹ notably because this issue was overshadowed by the vivid discussion between David Woods and Hans Teitler about the authenticity of the *Passion* (BHG 242).¹⁰ This text, similar in form and content to sixth-century hagiographical works, provides an expanded version of Sozomen, relating Basil's struggle against Eudoxius' partisans (§2), his opposition to idolatry under Julian (3–4), and his arrest and martyrdom (5–20). The most divergent element, and not the least, between the two sources is that the hagiographer stages Julian himself in the story. The *Passion* describes Julian's concern when he was informed of the insubordination of Basil (9), the Emperor's arrival

see Richard P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318–381* (London/New York 2005 [1988]).

⁷ Socr. *HE* 1.36, Sozom. *HE* 2.33: first excommunication of bishop Marcellus in Ancyra, replaced by Basil; Socr. 2.23, Sozom. 3.24: first excommunication of Basil, return of Marcellus; Socr. *HE* 2.26, 2.29, Sozom. *HE* 4.2: second excommunication of Marcellus, second return of Basil; Socr. 2.42, Sozom. 4.24–25: second excommunication and exile of Basil, replaced by Athanasius of Ancyra. See Foss, *DOP* 31 (1977) 37–38.

⁸ Socr. *HE* 3.25, Sozom. *HE* 4.4.

⁹ Cf. the question mark facing this passage in Van Nuffelen's very useful table of the sources used by Sozomen: *Un héritage* 486.

¹⁰ David Woods, "The Martyrdom of the Priest Basil of Ancyra", *VigChr* 46 (1992) 31–39 and (1997) 276 n.25, followed by Scorza Barcellona, in *Pagani e cristiani* 69–71. *Contra*, Hans C. Teitler, "History and Hagiography. The *Passio* of Basil of Ancyra as a Historical Source," *VigChr* 50 (1996) 73–80, "Avenging Julian. Violence against Christians during the Years 361–363," in A. C. Geljon et al. (eds.), *Violence in Antiquity. Victims and Perpetrators* (Leiden 2014) 76–89, at 84–86, and *The Last Pagan Emperor* 71–76.

in Ancyra, and his involvement in the saint's torture (13–17). In this version of the story, no less than seven characters are involved; they are all given names, including the governor of the province, Satorninos, who in Sozomen was not mentioned by name (see below). The *Passion* also expands Sozomen's sober account, notably by producing dialogues between Basil and his persecutors and by describing at length the tortures he had to suffer: Basil was put to the rack and flayed (7, 12); then, after he threw his skin flaps into Julian's face (16), he was cut more deeply until his entrails could be examined (17), and finally pierced by incandescent iron pikes (19–20).

Yet, following the assumption of the Bollandists and Ruinart, the *Acta* have often been considered as genuine and composed shortly after the events;¹¹ and some circumstantial details mentioned only in the *Passion* have been used for documentary purposes. For example, the day proposed by the hagiographer (§20) for Basil's demise, 28 or 29 June,¹² has allowed some historians to trace more precisely the timing of Julian's stay in Ancyra,¹³ where, according to Ammianus, the emperor stopped over during his journey from Constantinople to Antioch, between May and July of 362.¹⁴ The various names and titles produced by the hagiographer have also been used in attempts to complete

¹¹ For example, Sabine Baring-Gould, *The Lives of the Saints* III (London 1897) 407: "the Greek *Acta* are genuine, and were written by a contemporary".

¹² See van Papenbroeck, *ASS Mart. III* p. *15, μηνὶ Ἰουνίῳ, εἰκάδι ἐννάτη (*Vat.gr.* 655); Krascheninnikov, *Joannis Hagiolitae De passione* x, μηνὶ τῷ αὐτῷ (scil. Ἰουνίῳ) κη' (*Vat.gr.* 1667). Cf. P. Th. Ruinart, *Acta primorum martyrum sincera et selecta* (Paris 1689) 514, *mensis Junii die vigesima octava*.

¹³ E.g. Foss, *DOP* 31 (1977) 39 n.40 (29 June); Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 31–32 n.10 (28 June); Hans-Ulrich Wiemer, *Libanios und Julian: Studien zum Verhältnis von Rhetorik und Politik im vierten Jahrhundert n. Chr* (Munich 1995) 108 (28 June).

¹⁴ *Amm. Marc.* 22.9.8. See Jan den Boeft, Jan W. Drijvers, Daniël den Hengst, and Hans C. Teitler, *Philological and Historical Commentary on Ammianus Marcellinus XXII* (Groningen 1995) 148–183 (Julian's journey from Constantinople to Antioch), esp. 165–166 (Julian's stay in Ancyra).

or revise the prosopography of Julian's entourage.¹⁵ In 1992, Woods tried more or less successfully to match six characters staged in the *Passion* with historical persons who lived in Julian's time, namely Satorninos the governor who arrested Basil (§5–8); Felix, a quidam who warned the rebel priest (8); Helpidios and Pegasios, sent by Julian to settle the case; Asclepios who joined them on their way to Ancyra (9–12); and Frumentinus, the *comes* who tortured and executed Basil (15–20). Be that as it may, the fact that the *Passion* might contain some historical names still does not suffice to demonstrate that these people actually played a part in Julian's journey through Asia Minor and intervened in Basil's martyrdom: as noted by Teitler, the injection of historical names is indeed a common characteristic of non-historical martyrologies.¹⁶

The most questionable element is the contrast with Sozomen's claim that the persecution of Basil had been perpetrated against the will of the emperor (παρὰ γνώμην τῷ βασιλεῖ ἀπέβη, *HE* 5.11.12). It is hard to understand why the Church historian would have concealed the responsibility of Julian in the case if a detailed report of his personal involvement could be found in the *Passion*. For, like other Church historians, Sozomen deplored the difficulty of denouncing the virulence of Julian's policy against Christians, precisely because the emperor was so crafty that he dissembled his attacks on them and himself avoided making martyrs.¹⁷ In fact, picturing Julian as a cruel persecutor is a

¹⁵ E.g. Timothy D. Barnes, "Another Forty Missing Persons (A.D. 260–395)," *Phoenix* 28 (1974) 224–233, at 229 (about Pegasios see below).

¹⁶ Teitler, *VigChr* 50 (1996) 77 (abundantly quoting Hippolyte Delehaye, *Les Passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires* [Brussels 1921]), and *The Last Pagan Emperor* 75–76. Cf. Foss, *DOP* 31 (1977) 40 n.43: "The association of two known men with Basil does not, of course, prove that anything else in the *vita* is true."

¹⁷ See Robert J. Penella, "Julian the Persecutor in Fifth Century Church Historians," *AncW* 24 (1993) 31–43; Van Nuffelen, *Un héritage* 364–378; Mar Marcos, "'He forced with gentleness'. Emperor Julian's Attitude to Religious Coercion," *AntTard* 17 (2009) 191–204; Teitler, in *Violence in Antiquity* 76–84.

feature which appears profusely only much later in fictitious martyrdom stories.¹⁸ This evolution over time in the depiction of Julian, from moderate and calculating to irritable and violent, supports the view that the *Passion* was written after Sozomen, and not the other way round. As shown by Teitler,¹⁹ many suspicious features, both in form and substance, plead against the *Passion's* reliability: like other fictitious hagiographies, the text contains unknown events, and approximate datings as well as bogus titles (see below). There is then every reason to see in this piece a late concoction elaborated from the short account of Sozomen, and to admit that the only historical background of this fanciful work is derived from the earlier sources consulted by the hagiographer.²⁰

This leads to the neglected question of the nature of the data available to Sozomen when he wrote about Basil, some eighty years after the alleged events. In my opinion, Sozomen's passage is far from being an accurate report of true facts, rather it represents a step in the constitution of a martyrial legend circulating in fifth-century Ancyra. Basil's story ends a review of martyrs under Julian's reign, some of whom were already named in Socrates' *Church History*,²¹ while others, including two martyrs of Ancyra, Busiris and our Basil,²² are mentioned here for the first

¹⁸ See Stefano Trovato, "Un antieroe dai molti volti. Giuliano a Bisanzio come Apostata, scrittore, imperatore e in una particolare interpretazione 'ratzingeriana' dello storico Sozomeno," *Incontri di filologia classica* 10 (2010/1) 1–28.

¹⁹ *VigChr* 50 (1996) 73–80; in *Violence in Antiquity* 84–86; *The Last Pagan Emperor* 71–76.

²⁰ The other Julianic martyrs recorded in the ecclesiastical histories also became heroes in later fictitious martyrologies, see Gaiffier, *AnalBoll* 54 (1956) 5–49.

²¹ Socr. *HE* 3.2–3, Sozom. *HE* 5.7.1–9 (George of Alexandria); Socr. 3.15, Sozom. 5.11.1–3 (Macedonius, Theodulus, Tatianus); Socr. 3.19.1–10, Sozom. 5.20.2–4 (Theodorus of Antioch).

²² Sozom. *HE* 5.11.8–11 (nine distinct martyrs and a group of anonymous virgins). A convenient comparative table is provided by Scorza Barcellona, in *Pagani e cristiani* 56. See also Penella, *AncW* 24 (1993) 38–39.

time. Through the accumulation of isolated stories about events that occurred at different periods, Sozomen aimed to show that, even though it is hard to incriminate Julian of direct persecutions, many atrocities were committed under his rule.²³ On several occasions the author suggests that his information drew on oral traditions,²⁴ including in Basil's case, where he refers to a legend or rumor (λόγος).²⁵ These stories should therefore be studied for what they are, fifth-century local legends.

In this regard, the case of Eupsychios of Caesarea, related by Sozomen just before that of Basil, is indicative. Ignoring the reasons of his persecution, the Church historian makes the conjecture (συμβάλλω "I conjecture") that this newly-married Cappadocian must have perished because of Julian's anger over the destruction of the temple of Tyche at Caesarea (5.11.7–8). Interestingly, we have in this case fourth-century mentions of annual celebrations in honour of a Eupsychios in the metropolis of Cappadocia, on 7 September.²⁶ There is no clue, however, that Eupsychios was regarded as a martyr of Julian before the mid-fifth century.²⁷ Some traditions place him rather as a martyr

²³ Sozom. *HE* 5.11.12: καὶ τὰ μὲν ὧδε, εἰ καὶ παρὰ γνώμην τῷ βασιλεῖ ἀπέβη, οὐκ ἀγεννεῖς οὐδὲ ὀλίγους μάρτυρας καὶ ἐπὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ ἡγεμονίας ἀπέδειξε γεγενῆσθαι· σαφηνείας δὲ χάριν συναγαγὼν πάντας ὁμοῦ διεξῆλθον, εἰ καὶ διάφορος ἦν ὁ καιρὸς τῆς ἐκάστου μαρτυρίας. "Even if these cruelties were perpetrated contrary to the will of the emperor, yet they serve to prove that his reign was signalized by martyrs neither ignoble nor few. For the sake of clearness, I have related all these occurrences collectively, although the martyrdoms really occurred at different periods."

²⁴ *HE* 5.11.4 φασί ("they say," about Busiris); 5.11.7 λόγος [ἐστὶ] ("there is a story," about Eupsychios and Basil). On Sozomen's equivocal use of references to oral tradition see Van Nuffelen, *Un héritage* 245–247 (with references).

²⁵ For this Herodotean sense of λόγος see LSJ 1058; Franco Montanari, *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden/Boston 2015) 1249.

²⁶ Bas. *Ep.* 100, 142, 200; Greg. Naz. *Ep.* 58.7. See Sophie Métivier, *La Cappadoce (IVe–VIe siècle). Une histoire provinciale de l'Empire romain d'Orient* (Paris 2005) 310–311.

²⁷ Pace Fatti, *Giuliano a Cesarea* 101–147. See Teitler, in *Violence in Antiquity* 87–89, and *The Last Pagan Emperor* 91–94: "even if there was a martyr by the

under Hadrian.²⁸ Incidentally, the celebration of the saint's death in early September is not compatible with the chronology of Julian's eastward journey in 362, as he had arrived in Antioch two months earlier. The local saint's identity as a martyr of the Apostate was likely forged several decades later, when people needed to tell the story of this unknown character, whose death was henceforth linked to the destruction of a local pagan temple under Julian.²⁹

Basil's case can be analysed as the result of a similar process, telling the history of a saint worshipped at the time in Ancyra who needed to be the hero of a martyrdom story. The first part of Basil's martyrdom is described in a manner which is in all respects identical to what Socrates and Sozomen tell of the historical bishop Basil of Ancyra: both men have in common their name, the seat where they took their office, their opposition to Eudoxius, and, as a consequence, the fact that they were prevented from celebrating worship. I am convinced that the same person, a prominent Churchman who was very popular in his city, lies at the origin of the production, in different contexts, of two contemporary and homonymous members of the clergy of Ancyra: in fourth-century official sources, notably letters and acts of councils, and in earlier Christian writers, Sozomen found factual data about the role of the historical moderate Arian bishop in the dogmatic conflicts. As for the oral tradition, it provided the same author with what Ancyrenes remembered later of their local hero, who had been so popular in his city that his excommunication sparked a riot (Socr. *HE* 2.23, Sozom. *HE* 3.24). His memory was still alive in the fifth century, and the church dedicated to him in Ancyra by the bishop (Sozom. *HE*

name of Euppsychius during Julian's reign, the emperor himself cannot be blamed for his death" (93).

²⁸ See François Halkin, "La Passion inédite de Saint Euppsychius," *Le Muséon* 97 (1984) 197–206.

²⁹ On narratives of temple destruction, associated with a prominent local saint, see Aude Busine, "From Stones to Myth. Temple Destruction and Civic Identities in the Late Antique Roman East," *JLA* 6 (2013) 325–346, with bibliography.

4.13) was probably still standing and identified as such. At the time, he was remembered as an opponent of the Arian Eudoxius, who had been condemned once and for all, while overlooking Basil's own adhesion to another heretical (moderate) tendency. The chronology of the death of the prominent bishop (under Jovian at the earliest) was by then fuzzy enough to allow the story that he had been martyred in Ancyra a few years before the actual date. Sozomen's passage about Basil martyr was thus shaped through the mixing of a historical kernel and later additions, based on an approximate knowledge of the life of a historical bishop together with the frequent habit of linking the death of a local saint to the persecution of Julian.³⁰

Christianizing the King and the Queen gods of Ancyra

Hitherto, the traditional confidence in Sozomen has allowed a simple explanation of the origin of the cult of Basil of Ancyra together with a clear terminus post quem: this cult would have developed subsequent to the death of a historical fourth-century martyr. However, if we consider the story of this local martyr not as history but as a legend incompatible with true facts and circulated in fifth-century Ancyra, it appears that the origin of Basil's cult can no longer be explained by referring to what was professed about this fabled saint. I argue here that, in the Ancyrene context, making the historical Churchman a fake martyr of Julian contributed to explaining *a posteriori* an old local cult for which Christians had no satisfying explanation. To this end, we will leave aside the stories of the martyr, which will be analysed in the final part of the paper, and focus on the worship of Basil in Ancyra.

The most conclusive evidence about the existence of Basil's cult is the late *Synaxarium* of Constantinople, which records the celebration on 22 March of the martyrdom of Basil as the priest of the Church of Ancyra (ἄθλησις τοῦ ἁγίου ἱερομάρτυρος Βασιλείου πρεσβυτέρου τῆς Ἀγκυρανῶν ἐκκλησίας), and then

³⁰ See Gaiffier, *AnalBoll* 54 (1956) 5–49, and below.

summarizes the *Passion*.³¹ It should be noted that, as for Eusebius, the date of the feast is not consistent with the story of the personal involvement of Julian in the killing of Basil, as the emperor passed through Asia Minor between May and July 362 and so could not have been in Ancyra in March. So far, no attempt has been made to understand why Basil of Ancyra was worshipped on this particular day.³² However, it is possible to understand the relevance of the sacred calendar if it is examined in the local religious context. On 22 March, the *Synaxarium* also lists, among others, the martyrdom of another Galatian martyr named Basilissa, feasted together with Callinica (τῆ αὐτῆ ἡμέρᾳ ἄθλησις τῶν ἁγίων μαρτύρων Καλλινίκης καὶ Βασιλίσσης).³³ If no *Passion* describing Basilissa's sufferings and demise has been preserved, a short passage of the *Menologion* relates that she lived in Galatia under Decius (ἐπὶ τῆς βασιλείας Δεκίου ἐκ τῆς χώρας Γαλατίας). Being rich, she donated money to a man called Callinicos (*sic*) in order to support Christians who had been imprisoned.³⁴ She was arrested, brought to the governor (παρεδόθη τῷ ἄρχοντι), i.e. in the metropolis, interrogated in vain, heavily tortured (διαφόροις βασάνοις), and finally beheaded (370B–C).

³¹ *Synax. Const.* 22 March, 1. The feast of Basil of Ancyra is again recorded on 2 January; as shown by Delehay, this dating results from confusion with the feast of Basil the Great: *AnalBoll* 27 (1908) 423, followed by Joseph-Marie Sauget, "Basilio, sacerdote di Ancira," *Bibliotheca Sanctorum, Prima Appendice* (Rome 1987) 143.

³² Scholars confine themselves to noting this inconsistency, e.g. Émile Bréhier, "8. Basile," *DHGE* 6 (1932) 1074–1075; Sauget, *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 143. Van Papenbroeck hypothesized that 22 March could correspond to the *elevatio* or *translatio* of the saints: *AASS Mart.* III 380.

³³ *Synax. Const.* 22 March. Cf. Irmgard Hutter, "Das Oxforder 'Bildmenologion'," in M. Hinterberger et al. (eds.), *Byzantinische Sprachkunst. Studien zur byzantinischen Literatur gewidmet Wolfram Hörandner* (Berlin 2007) 143–180, at 175. On Callinice/Callinicos see Placide Bazoche, "Callinico e Basilissa," *Bibliotheca Sanctorum* 3 (1963) 677.

³⁴ *Menol.*, PG 117.370B: πλουσία δὲ οὖσα ἡ Βασιλίσσα, ἐδίδου χρήματα τῷ Καλλινίκῳ, ἀπέρχεσθαι εἰς τὰς φυλακάς, καὶ παρέχειν τοῖς ἀποκλείστοις Χριστιανοῖς πρὸς διατροφήν. In the *Matyrologium Romanum* (22 March) they are said to have been tortured by Hadrian: *AASS Mart.* III 376.

While Basil's and Basilissa's lives and martyrdoms are narrated separately and at different periods, it is significant that the two saints share the place where they are said to have perished and the day they were feasted each year. That Basil and Basilissa were worshipped together in Christian Ancyra takes on a new meaning if we consider, as I would like to show, their cult as the prolongation of a much older one devoted to a pair of homonymous gods. This assumption is actually supported by non-Christian epigraphic evidence that records such a traditional cult, which might subsequently have been interpreted as a Christian one. Several inscriptions of the second century A.D. attest the worship of two local deities referred to as "the King and the Queen," *Basileus* and *Basilissa*. One of the inscriptions, now lost, is a dedication "to [the listening gods], Queen and King," [θεοὺς ἐπι]κόοις Βασιλίσση καὶ Βασιλεῖ (*I.Ankara* 202). Another is a votive inscription offered by Iulius Amyntianus as "a gift to the King and Queen," Ἰ(ούλιος) Ἀμυντιανὸς Βασ(ιλεῖ) καὶ Βασιλίσση δῶρον (204).³⁵ The third says that "Asclepius, son of Niketes, priest, built for the King and the Queen a sacred precinct with votive offerings and an enclosure, from his own resources," Ἀσκληπιὸς Νεικίτου ἱερεὺς Βασιλεῖ καὶ Βασιλίσση τὸν σηκὸν σὺν ἀναθήμασι καὶ περιβόλῳ ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων ἐποίησεν (203).

As explained by French and Mitchell, it was a common gesture in this period to attribute to figures of the Anatolian pantheon the quality or status of secular rulers. This was a way to express their divine authority. Calling local gods *basileus* and *basilissa* is paralleled in Roman Asia Minor (so for example the god Mên frequently called *basileus* and *tyrannos* and the Mother Goddess sometimes *basileia*). In Ancyra, these gods were obviously so familiar that there was no need to address them with additional names.³⁶

³⁵ On the identity of Amyntianus as possibly the brother of Ancyra's most famous citizen C. Iulius Severus, see D. French and S. Mitchell *ad loc.*

³⁶ French and Mitchell, *I.Ankara* p.395, with bibliography and examples; "It is fruitless and unhelpful to try and identify them with better known figures in the Anatolian pantheon."

Interestingly, the three inscriptions can unambiguously be read, in a Christian context, as manifestations of a martyr cult devoted to homonymous saints. The qualification of the cult's recipients as "listening" (ἐπήκοος) (if rightly restored) and the mention of a votive offering (δῶρον) had no specically heathen connotation and could therefore be understood in the perspective of a Christian cult. The third case is even more interesting, as σηκός, referring to the gods' sanctuary,³⁷ could also be used to denote the tomb of martyrs.³⁸ These twofold meanings could lead to a Christian interpretation of a former traditional cult.³⁹ We can reasonably suggest that Christian Ancyrenes also worshipped their *basileus* and *basilissa* thanks to their transformation into valorous martyrs. Their grave, the central element of a martyr cult, could still be traced and identified as such, at least in an inscription. Significantly, the gods' initial common celebration has been preserved and integrated into Christian liturgy, as Basil's and Basilissa's feasts both occurred on 22 March in martyrologies.

Over time, the legends of Basil and Basilissa martyrs of Ancyra developed parallel to the gradual establishment of their cult. The proliferation of saints' cults—about seventy persons are said through time to have been martyred in Galatia—entailed the implementation of proper places of worship together with the organisation of liturgical manifestations.⁴⁰ Among them, the reading of martyrdom stories on the anniversary of the saint

³⁷ On the sense of σηκός in epigraphic evidence see French and Mitchell, *I.Ankara* p.395.

³⁸ See Lampe, *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* s.v. σηκός 2b.

³⁹ Other examples of Christian readings of classical inscriptions in Hippolyte Delehay, *Les légendes hagiographiques* (Brussels 1905, 1927³) 77–78. See e.g. the early example of a Roman dedication to Semo Sancus (*ILS* 3474, *Simoni Sanco deo Fidio*) interpreted as testimony to a cult to Simon Magus (Justin Mart. *Apol.* 1.26, *Simoni deo Sancto*).

⁴⁰ See S. Destephen's list of the different cult places devoted to saints in Galatia, "Martyrs locaux et cultes civiques en Asie mineure," in J.-P. Caillet et al. (eds.), *Des dieux civiques aux saints patrons (iv^e–vii^e siècle)* (Paris 2015) 59–116, at 101–102.

provided the attendees with examples of Christian virtues at the same time as re-enacting the sacrifice of Christ. This need for exemplary stories led to the creation of fictitious texts.⁴¹ This is how the memory of Ancyra's prominent bishop was conflated with the divine Basil(eus) who was buried and venerated in the city. At the time, the best way to explain the death of an exemplary fourth-century Christian was certainly to claim that he died a martyr under Julian, especially in Galatia, which has more than half the sum of Julianic martyrs.⁴² Like Euppsychios in Cappadocia, the story depicting Basil as an outstanding Churchman opposed to Arians and subsequently persecuted for his struggle against paganism, has thus no connection with the local origin of the cult. So far as we know, the Queen goddess in Ancyra knew a similar fate: while honoured the same day as Basil, Basilissa was also turned into a martyr killed in the metropolis of Galatia under another iconic persecutor, Emperor Decius.

That said, it is hard to reconstruct the steps of the transformation of a traditional divine couple into homonymous Christian saints. It could have resulted from a long process, supposing that Ancyrenes, whether pagans or Christians, never stopped venerating their *basileus* and *basilissa*. One could also envisage an *inventio*, after the discovery of old inscriptions recording notably the place of their burial, offerings, and dedications. Or it could be the consequence of a deliberate adoption of popular pagan figures by ecclesiastical authorities. Be that as it may, hagiographical narratives were developed afterwards to provide the recipients of an old popular cult with a Christian identity.

The making of martyrdom stories

Once it is acknowledged that Basil and Basilissa were substituted for the King and the Queen gods in Ancyra, it remains

⁴¹ See Delehaye, *Les légendes hagiographiques* and *Les Passions des martyrs*; T. D. Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography and Roman History* (Tübingen 2010) 151–155; Aude Busine, “The Dux and the Nun. Hagiography and the Cult of Artemios and Febronia in Constantinople,” *DOP* 72 (2018) 93–111.

⁴² See Destephen, in *Des dieux civiques* 60 n.4.

to understand how and why their martyrdom stories were built. As seen in the example of the healing cult devoted to Artemius and Febronia in Constantinople,⁴³ two saints united in a single cult could indeed become the heroes of separate *Passions*, without any apparent link. The data in Basilissa's case are too scanty to explain the manner in which christianizing her cult led to the creation of a fiction associating her to another martyr named Callinica or Callinicos and staging them as tortured and beheaded under Decius. On the other hand, the very detailed *Passion* of Basil offers a convenient test case to analyse the ways in which hagiography was elaborated in practice.

We have seen that Sozomen's *Church History* served as the main frame of the *Passion*, i.e. the saint's opposition to Eudoxius, only briefly mentioned in §2, his fight against idols under Julian, and his subsequent arrest and martyrdom. Other hagiographical legends were similarly extrapolated from a single passage by a Church historian, such as the stories of the monk Isaak, Marcellus of Apamea, and Artemius of Antioch.⁴⁴ Basil's hagiographer distorted the original scenario by assigning to the Emperor an active role in the play and depicting him as the typical blood-thirsty persecutor. This is an example of the broader process labelled as "julianisation des légendes,"⁴⁵ according to which more than forty martyrs were attributed to the Apostate from the fifth century onwards up to modern times.⁴⁶

Then, in order to make Sozomen's short account congruent with the literary canons of martyrdom literature, the author resorted to clichés paralleled in many similar texts labelled by Hippolyte Delehaye as "passions épiques,"⁴⁷ such as the length of interrogations, the insensitivity of the hero facing inhumane tortures, his miraculous recoveries, as well as the multiplication

⁴³ See now Busine, *DOP* 72 (2018) 93–111.

⁴⁴ See Barnes, *Early Christian Hagiography* 242–246; Busine, *JLA* 6 (2013) 325–346 and *DOP* 72 (2018) 93–111.

⁴⁵ Albert Dufourcq, *Étude sur les Gesta martyrum romains* (Paris 1900) 242.

⁴⁶ See Gaiffier, *AnalBoll* 54 (1956) 5–49.

⁴⁷ Delehaye, *Les Passions des martyrs* 236–315.

of characters staged in the affair. In this context, Basil's hagiographer sprinkled his fiction with concrete details, such as the mention of local deities and the names and titles of seven protagonists, which allowed him to create an approximate historical backdrop. If this late fiction cannot be used as a source for fourth-century events, it remains to seek the historical information available to the author when he had to extrapolate from a few lines of Sozomen to build up the story of a popular martyr.

As is paralleled in other cases, the hagiographer must have had in his library, besides Sozomen, other ecclesiastical histories, such as those of Philostorgius, Socrates, and Theodoret. He could easily have picked out from these several names of persons who played a role in Julian's times, and produced them as plausible companions to the emperor. In this way, Felix, who tried to persuade Basil to worship the traditional gods (§8), could have been inspired by the *comes sacrarum largitionum* of the same name whom Julian had appointed to that office by March 362 and who is said to have apostatized in order to please the Emperor.⁴⁸ Similarly, Helpidios, one of the two men sent to Ancyra by Julian shortly after he had learned of Basil's defiance (9), might have been inspired by the sacrilegious *comes rei privatae*, who also quit Christianity and participated in the desecration of the Great Church in Antioch late in 362 together with Felix.⁴⁹ Woods was possibly right in linking these homonymous characters, but these matchings cannot be used to claim the accuracy of the content of the *Passion*; they only reflect the hagiographer's knowledge of the Church historians as well as his tendency to recycle real names in a new and fanciful story.

⁴⁸ *Cod. Theod.* 9.42.5, 11.39.5; Thdt. *HE* 3.12; Philost. *HE* 7.10. See *PLRE* I 332 Felix 3; Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 33–34; Annick Martin et al., *Théodoret de Cyr, Histoire ecclésiastique* II (Paris 2009) 134 n.1; Bruno Bleckmann et al., *Philostorge. Histoire ecclésiastique* (Paris 2013) 412 n.1.

⁴⁹ Thdt. *HE* 3.12; Philost. *HE* 7.10. See Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 33–34; Martin et al., *Théodoret* 134 n.2; Bleckmann et al., *Philostorge* 413 n.2. *PRLE* I 415 Helpidius 6, mentions only his activity as a possible proconsul of Asia in 364.

Next, some characters put in the story seem to have been inspired by the urban landscape of Christian Ancyra. As everywhere else in the Late Empire, the metropolis of Galatia must still have been littered with older inscriptions, many witnessing the pagan past of the city. Recent scholarship has shown that some characters of several hagiographical fictions come from old names freely borrowed from inscriptions still visible at the time when Christian legends began to develop.⁵⁰ Often, these names were recycled in a new fiction regardless of patent anachronisms. I argue that the presence of several persons participating in Basil's martyrdom appears to be the result of a similar process. The most conclusive case is Asclepios, priest of Asclepios (§9: *τινα Ἀσκληπιὸν ὀνόματι, ἱερέα τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ*), whom Heli-pidios and Pegasios, the pair of imperial envoys, are said to have met on the road to Nicomedia. Woods is not convincing when he identifies him as a man with another name, Asclepiades, the Cynic philosopher who was accused of causing the burning of the temple of Apollo at Daphne in October 362.⁵¹ There is in fact an easier way to explain why a late fiction produced in Ancyra staged a pagan priest named Asclepios in connection to the cult of Asclepios. An early-third-century inscription (*IAnkara* 99, now lost) mentions the sacred games in honour of the god, the great isopythian Asclepieia (8–9, *τῶν ἱερῶν ἀγῶνων τῶν μεγάλων Ἀσκληπιείων ἰσ[ο]πυθίων*), and two supervisors bearing the same theophoric name, Flavius Asclepios and Aurelius Asclepios (17–18, *ἐπιμελουμένων Φλ. Ἀσκληπιοῦ κὲ Αὐρ. Ἀσκληπιοῦ*). If we admit that the *Passion* recycled names regardless of their date, we can reasonably suppose that the hagiographer integrated into his story an Asclepios, who could

⁵⁰ See Peter J. Thonemann, "Abercius of Hierapolis: Christianisation and Social Memory in Late Antique Asia Minor," in B. Dignas et al. (eds.), *Historical and Religious Memory in the Ancient World* (Oxford 2012) 257–282, and "The Martyrdom of Ariadne of Prynnessos and an Inscription from Perge," *Chiron* 45 (2015) 151–170; Busine, *JLA* 6 (2013) 325–346.

⁵¹ Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 34. On Asclepiades' responsibility for burning the temple see Amm. Marc. 22.13.3.

still be read by Christian Ancyrenes as one linked to the cult and sacred games held in honour of the god Asclepios.

In a similar vein, we can propose an alternative explanation to the borrowing of the name Pegasios, the man who was sent by Julian to Ancyra together with Helpidios (§9–12). This Pegasios has been identified with the ex-bishop of Ilion, a newly chosen pagan priest when Julian came to power.⁵² In the absence of any external evidence, claiming that this turncoat also joined Julian during his trip through Asia Minor and went to Ancyra remains mere conjecture. Let us confine ourselves to pointing out that, like Asclepios, the name of this protagonist might also derive from non-Christian epigraphical material still visible in Ancyra. In a funerary inscription of the late second or early third century (*I.Ankara* 276), a certain Peithō honours the memory of her husband Pegasos: Πειθὼ Πηγῶσῳ μνήμης χάριν τῷ ἰδίῳ ἀνδρὶ· χαίροις παρ[οδεῖτ]α, “Peitho for Pegasos, in memory, for her own husband. May you be of good cheer, O passer-by!” Finding a pagan Pegasos in Ancyra is likely to be more than a coincidence and can explain, in my opinion, the presence of a such a character in the hagiographical fiction.

Let us come to the principal item in Woods’ argument, the governor of the province to whom Basil supposedly surrendered and who played an active role in the persecution of the saint (§5–8). In the *Passio* this dignitary is named eight times as Σατορνῖνος;⁵³ he is also qualified thirteen times as ἡγεμῶν,⁵⁴ while Sozomen denotes him as ἡγούμενος τοῦ ἔθνους, a more formal synonym attested in official documents, notably in inscriptions.⁵⁵

⁵² Barnes, *Phoenix* 28 (1974) 229; followed by Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 34; Sylvain Destephen, *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire III* (Paris 2008) 783–785 Pegasios 1.

⁵³ *Passio Basilii* §5 (4 times, only once together with his title), §6 (3), §12 (1).

⁵⁴ *Passio Basilii* §5 (3 times); §6 (1); §7 (2); §8 (1); §9 (1); § 11 (1); §12 (4).

⁵⁵ See Hugh J. Mason, *Greek Terms for Roman Institutions* (Toronto 1974) 52, 40, with examples.

As already noted by prosopographers,⁵⁶ a Saturninos could not have been the governor of Galatia under Julian, as other evidence already provides two other names for the years 362 and 363.⁵⁷ According to Woods,⁵⁸ the Saturninos of Basil's *Passion* was the famous *praefectus praetorio Orientis* Saturninius Secundus Salutius, who was appointed to that office by Julian late in 361 and held it until 365.⁵⁹ This man is depicted in ecclesiastical histories under the sole name Saloustios, prefect (ὑπάρχος), as a temperate protagonist in the persecutions against the Christians in Antioch.⁶⁰ Woods' main argument is that Saturninius' presence in Ancyra during Julian's reign is precisely attested, as the praetorian prefect made there a dedication in honour of "Emperor Julian, lord of the whole earth," *domino totius orbis Iuliano Augusto ... Saturninius Secundus v(ir) c(larissimus) [praef(ectus)] praet(orio)*.⁶¹ Urging that ἡγεμών "is so vague a word as to be nearly meaningless," Woods used the inscription as the main proof of the *Passion*'s reliability.⁶²

Besides the fact that *praefectus praetorio* is commonly translated by ἑπαρχος or ὑπάρχος,⁶³ including in the Church histories, and

⁵⁶ *PRLE* I 805 Saturninus 4, carefully suggesting that he may possibly have been *vicarius Ponticae*.

⁵⁷ *PLRE* I 7 Acacius 8 and I 583 Maximus 19.

⁵⁸ Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 32, followed by Wiemer, *Libanios und Julian* 108 n.122; Fatti, *Giuliano a Cesarea* 77 n.117. This equation had already been proposed by Foss, *DOP* 31 (1977) 40.

⁵⁹ *PLRE* I 814–816 Secundus 3. See now S. Olszaniec, *Prosopographical Studies on the Court Elite in the Roman Empire (4th century A.D.)* (Torún 2013) 356–372, with the diverse names in epigraphy and literary sources.

⁶⁰ Socr. *HE* 3.19.3–6 Σαλουστίω τῷ ἐπάρχῳ; Sozom. *HE* 5.20.1 Σαλούστιος δὲ ὁ τὴν ὑπαρχὸν ἐξουσίαν; Thdt. *HE* 3.11.1 Σαλούστιος δὲ ὑπάρχος.

⁶¹ *CIL* III 247 = *ILS* 754 = Stefano Conti, *Die Inschriften Kaiser Julians* (Stuttgart 2004) no. 20.1–2, 10–12. The inscription was probably on the base of a statue of Julian. The stone was reused in the wall of the city and was still visible in the 17th century.

⁶² Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 32, asserting that the *Passio* could even be used as a reliable account for our knowledge of the temper of the historical prefect.

⁶³ On ἡγεμών / ἡγούμενος / *praeses*, see Mason, *Greek Terms* 40, 52, 136.

that ἡγεμών regularly corresponds to *praeses* or *legatus Augusti pro praetore*,⁶⁴ I think that we should regard the problem differently, and rather admit that the hagiographer tried to give a plausible name for the anonymous ἡγούμενος τοῦ ἔθνους mentioned in his source, Sozomen: given his vague knowledge of the history of the fourth century, he picked the name of a person who had never been governor in this period. If we renounce the idea that this character is historical, it remains to understand why naming Basil's tormentor *Satorninos hegemon* (and not, as we would expect, ὑπαρχος) made sense to the hagiographer's audience. One inscription (*I.Ankara* 36), found in the city-wall of Ankyra and now standing in the Roman baths, witnesses that there had been in Ancyra a man with the identical name and title: a very neat and legible inscription, probably on a statue base, says "To Good Fortune! The metropolis of Ancyra (honoured) Julius Satorninos *hegemon*," ἀγαθῆι τύχηι ἡ μητρόπολις Ἰούλιον Σατορνεῖνον τὸν ἡγεμόνα.

The honorand is in all likelihood the Julius Satorninos who held the governorship in Galatia in the years 130–136 and who is honored on local coins for his benefactions (obv. Antinous | rev. Ἰουλιος Σατορνῖνος Ἄγκυρανοῖς, the god Mên).⁶⁵ Be that as it may, whether still standing in its original location or reused in the city wall, the stone clearly provided Late Antique Christians with the name and title of a prominent pagan *hegemon*. This man therefore could plausibly have been made to play a role as governor in Basil's martyrdom, eventually inspired by the famous and exemplary *Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, where the

⁶⁴ On ἔπαρχος / ὑπαρχος / *praefectus*, see Mason, *Greek Terms* 45, 95, 138–140, 155.

⁶⁵ See French and Mitchell, *I.Ankara* pp.189–190 (with previous bibliography), rejecting the older identification of this officer with C. Julius Saturninus (*PIR*² I 547). For the coins see Melih Arslan, *The Coins of Galatian Kingdom and the Roman Coinage of Ancyra in Galatia* (Ankara 2004) 203 no. 83, pl. 54; 237 no. B18, pl. 35. With the inscription, the city would have reciprocated the favour by erecting for the governor a statue in recognition of his benefactions.

genuine governor interrogating the martyrs is named Saturninus.⁶⁶

Finally, Woods' certainly less convincing case is the officer who is said to have been charged by Julian to put Basil to death (§15–20). He is usually referred to in modern scholarship as Frumentinus, following the Latin translation of the Bollandists, even though the manuscript used in the *Acta Sanctorum* (*Vat.gr.* 665, saec. XVI) gives two different names: Φρουβέτιμος (§15) and Φρουβεντίμος (§19).⁶⁷ The *Passion* depicts this person seven times as *comes* (κόμης),⁶⁸ one of these as κόμης κουταρίων, translated, after restitution of a sigma, as *comes scutariorum*.⁶⁹ This case is tricky because, on the one hand, other evidence does not record the existence of any official named Frumentinus during the reign of Julian; on the other hand, an office of *comes scutariorum* is not attested. Woods proposed to identify Frumentinus as an officer bearing another title and another name, viz. Dagalifus *comes domesticorum* in 362–363.⁷⁰ Five years later, he revised his proposal and held that Frumentinus should be identified as the missing *tribunus scutariorum* for the years 362–363.⁷¹

None of these proposals has been followed by historians. Is it possible to venture further and look for a better candidate with the same name and title and linked to the metropolis of Galatia? In the older manuscript of the *Passion* of Basil published in 1908 by Krascheninnikov (*Vat.gr.* 1667, saec. IX–X), the name of the

⁶⁶ See Herbert Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford 1972) 86–89. A Greek translation of the Acts circulated in the East, see Joseph A. Robinson, *The Passion of S. Perpetua* (Cambridge 1891) 113–116.

⁶⁷ The *Synaxarium* names the *comes* Φραβέντιος: *Synax. Const.* 22 March: τῷ κόμητι Φραβεντίῳ.

⁶⁸ *Passio Basilii* §15 (1 time), §17 (2), §18 (3), §20 (1).

⁶⁹ In §15: *AASS Mart.* III p. *15.

⁷⁰ Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 35–36, *contra*, Teitler, *VigChr* 50 (1996) 77.

⁷¹ David Woods, “Ammianus and Some *Tribuni Scholarum Palatinarum* c. A.D. 353–64,” *CQ* 47 (1997) 269–291, at 276–277; *contra*, Jonathan Barlow and Peter Brennan, “*Tribuni Scholarum Palatinarum* c. A.D. 353–64: Ammianus Marcellinus and the *Notitia Dignitatum*,” *CQ* 51 (2001) 237–254, at 244.

comes in both §15 and 19 is Φρουμέντιος.⁷² So far as I know, the only Froumentios *comes* is found in a letter of Nilus of Ancyra addressed to an otherwise unknown man.⁷³ Even if the historicity of the purported addressees of Nilus' *Letters* is open to suspicion,⁷⁴ we can at the very least state that, provided that we look for the right name, there existed in the entourage of an Ancyrene author (either Nilus or his sixth-century editor) a man who may possibly have inspired the figure of Basil's torturer in the same way as did the inscriptions.

All in all, the protagonists staged in the *Passion* were produced for the need of the narrative as a way to extend the scenes of interrogation and torture, as well as to highlight Julian's own involvement. To this end, the hagiographer resorted to several sources: some of the characters were taken from the classical Church Histories, others from epigraphic records probably still visible at the time, and one might have been inspired by a fifth- or sixth-century officer. Recycling those names was a way to make the story of Basil's martyrdom as found in Sozomen comply with the literary canons of fictitious hagiography. Old names were given a new role to play in order to construct the history of a major event, the death of a popular martyr.

In order to complete the scenery of his fiction, Basil's hagiographer also refers to the religious life of pagan Ancyra. First, the *Passion* relates that when Julian arrived in the city, he was

⁷² Krascheninnikov, *Joannis Hagiogelitae De passione* v–x, xii, 23–24. The name is quite rare in the fourth-century evidence but more common in the following centuries.

⁷³ Nilus Ancyra. *Ep.* 2.27 (PG 79.212), ΦΡΟΥΜΕΝΤΙΩΙ ΚΟΜΗΤΙ. See *PLRE* II 487 Frumentius.

⁷⁴ The corpus contains authentic letters as well as later additions made in the sixth century by Nilus' editor reportedly based in Ancyra, see Alan Cameron, "The Authenticity of the Letters of St Nilus of Ancyra," *GRBS* 17 (1976) 181–196, followed by John R. Martindale, *PLRE* II xxxvi. Therefore, some addressees might be genuine contemporaries of Nilus, i.e. early fifth century, some contemporaries of the sixth-century forger, and others straightforward fabricated characters.

welcomed by people carrying a statue of the goddess Hecate (§13, τὸ εἶδωλον τῆς Ἑκάτης). Never mentioned in literary or epigraphic evidence, the cult of Hecate in Ancyra is attested by several civic coins representing the statue of the triple-bodied goddess.⁷⁵ A statuette of such a triple Hecate, now in the Louvre, was brought from Ancyra in the nineteenth century.⁷⁶ Similar representations of the goddess in Ancyra could have inspired the hagiographer who wanted to depict pagan religious practices at Julian's time.

Second, the *Passion* relates that it was to the temple of Asclepius (§16, εἰς τὸν ναὸν τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ) that Julian brought Basil when he thought that the saint had decided to renounce Christianity. According to Woods, this mention corroborates what we know about Julian's special devotion to Asclepius, adding that "the Acta record the only occasion of which we are aware when Julian gave expression to this devotion in a concrete manner."⁷⁷ In my opinion, the few words of the late *Passion* cannot tell us anything about Julian's personal religion. It rather reflects the pagan religious landscape of Ancyra such as it could be reconstructed by a Late Antique Christian author. I have mentioned that people could see old inscriptions referring to the sacred games held in honour of Asclepius. These *agones*, the *Asclepieia Sotereia*, are also advertized on third-century coins minted in the metropolis.⁷⁸

Whether still standing or already in ruins, the temple of the god was likely to be identifiable as such in the Late Antique city, and could therefore be dramatized in an episode of Basil's torture. Thus, references both to the procession in honour of Hecate and to Asclepius' temple contributed to create a fantasised image of the pagan city.

⁷⁵ Arslan, *The Coins of Galatian Kingdom* 223 no. 180, pl. 15; 244 no. B55, pl. 42.

⁷⁶ Étienne Michon, "Groupes de la triple Hécate au Musée du Louvre," *MÉFR* 12 (1892) 407–424.

⁷⁷ Woods, *VigChr* 46 (1992) 34–35.

⁷⁸ E.g. Arslan, *The Coins of Galatian Kingdom* 218 no. 153 pl. 47; 250 nos. B85, B86, pl. 25.

To conclude, I have argued that Basil's and Basilissa's cult in Ancyra did not originate from the funerary commemoration of genuine martyrs, as might be inferred from fictitious hagiographical stories of their death. Rather, their common worship appears to be the result of the christianization of an older traditional cult devoted to a pair of homonymous deities, Basileus and Basilissa. In addition to the dedicatees' names, Christians took up their mutual feast in sacred calendars as well as, possibly, their place of worship, attested in epigraphical evidence as a *sekos*, which could denote both a traditional sanctuary and the tomb of martyrs.

Through time, the need arose to associate the pair of local divine figures with the Christian past of the city. While useless as reliable accounts of the history of persecutions, hagiographical narratives can be viewed as a mirror of the religious and cultural environment of Byzantine Ancyra. Basil's fanciful *Passion*, dating possibly from the sixth century, should be seen as the result of the evolution of a martyr cult which required the fixing of a legend. As attested by Sozomen's short account, the legend of Basil martyr was gradually constituted as early as the course of the fifth century, through the mixing of the memory of a prominent fourth-century bishop and the canonisation of Julian as the persecutor *par excellence*. As regards Basilissa, her less-known story was similarly developed in association with another local martyr, executed in Ancyra under Decius.

This etiological analysis of hagiographical sources has also allowed us to study how Basil's hagiographer produced his fiction: he extrapolated it from a short account of Sozomen and subsequently enhanced it by the integration of several elements borrowed not only from his own literary knowledge, but also from the urban landscape in which his audience lived, whether inscriptions, statues, or ruins. Thus, this study reveals the functions fulfilled by hagiography in society: on the one hand, relating the deeds of unknown saints contributed to the development of a local martyr cult; on the other, those stories provided

to Christian Ancyrenes a coherence with the pagan heritage still constituent of their urban landscape.⁷⁹

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Université Libre de Bruxelles
50 av. F. Roosevelt - CP 133/01
B-1050 Bruxelles, Belgium
abusine@ulb.ac.be

⁷⁹ This article is derived from a seminar I gave in Oxford in May 2017 in the Cults of Saints project (<http://cultofsaints.history.ox.ac.uk/>). I wish to thank Eftymios Rizos for the invitation and for the fruitful discussions. I am also grateful to Sylvain Destephen, who generously shared unpublished research, as well as to Jean-Marie Sansterre, for his reading and comments.