

**A Contemporary View of Ancient Factions:
A Reappraisal**

by

Anthony Lawrence Villa Bryk

**A thesis presented for the B.A. degree
with Honors in
The Department of Classical Studies
University of Michigan
Spring 2012**

“Ab educatore, ne in circo spectator Prasianus aut Venetianus neve parmularius aut scutarius fierem, ut labores sustinerem, paucis indigerem, ipse operi manus admoverem, rerum alienarum non essem curiosus nec facile delationem admitterem.”

“From my governor, to be neither of the green nor of the blue party at the games in the Circus, nor a partizan either of the Parmularius or the Scutarius at the gladiators' fights; from him too I learned endurance of labour, and to want little, and to work with my own hands, and not to meddle with other people's affairs, and not to be ready to listen to slander.”

-Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 1.5

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Professor David S. Potter for his wisdom, guidance, and patience. Professor Potter spent a great deal of time with me on this thesis and was truly committed to helping me succeed. I could not have written this analysis without his generous mentoring, and I am deeply grateful to him.

I would also like to thank Professor Netta Berlin for her cheerful guidance throughout this entire thesis process. Particularly, I found her careful editing of my first chapter immensely helpful. Also, Professor Sara Ahbel-Rappe's *Pagans and Christians* seminar was essential to my foundational understanding of this subject. I also thank her for being a second reader on this paper and for suggesting valuable revisions.

I want to thank Ivy Olivia Ulrey for understanding that work on this thesis would take time away from our time together. Her encouragement during this process meant a great deal. Finally, I thank family members Lawrence J. and Nancy E. Villa Bryk, Maria Bryk, John K. Villa, and John J. and M. Jean Villa for their love, support, and unwavering faith in all I do.

ABSTRACT

I will reassess the scholarship relating to the motivations for the increasingly frequent and destructive riots spearheaded by the circus factions between the 5th and 7th centuries CE in the Eastern Roman Empire. My analysis offers a dynamic model that includes many of the models that have been advanced by contemporary historians to explain this phenomenon. While these long-standing models characterize a portion of these riots, none of them adequately account for all of the evidence that challenges their rigid absolutism. To more fully explain this riotous behavior, this thesis analyzes these models in light of newly translated primary sources that provide evidence of an important influence systematically denied by previous historians: theological controversy.

Before examining these primary sources, the development and the social, cultural, and political importance of the circus factions from the early Roman Empire up to the 6th and 7th centuries CE in Byzantium will be discussed. Next, the intrinsically religious nature of the Byzantine world of the later Roman Empire will be explicated through analysis of hagiographic sources. This analysis reinforces the notion that religion permeated every strata of urban and rural society. The fourth and final chapter examines the evidence, concluding that these riots were, in part, theologically motivated.

The final chapter examines the works of the chroniclers, Byzantine historians who chronologically recorded major events that shaped their world between the 6th and the 8th centuries CE. These chronicles provide invaluable primary evidence for several factional riots that occurred from the reign of Justin I to Heraclius the Younger. After examining several of these chronicles, my analysis advances a strong *correlative* relationship between theological controversy and factional rioting in this period; moreover, it suggests that it is not implausible to hold that theological controversy played a *causal* role in factional rioting.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Chapter One	
Re-evaluating Contemporary Characterizations of The Ancient Faction Riots.....	1
Chapter Two	
Origins of The Circus Factions: Evolution and Adaptation.....	20
Chapter Three	
The Significance of the Holy Man: A Survey of Hagiographic Sources.....	35
Chapter Four	
The Chroniclers: Primary Evidence for Religious Riots	
from Justin I to Heraclius.....	56
Conclusion.....	88
Bibliography.....	92

CHAPTER ONE

Re-evaluating Contemporary Characterizations of The Ancient Faction Riots

“Whoever sets himself to base his political thinking on a re-examination of the working of human nature, must begin by trying to overcome his own tendency to exaggerate the intellectuality of mankind.”

Graham Wallas, *Human Nature in Politics* (1908)

This quotation, from Eric Hobsbawm’s essay “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914” captures how turn-of-the-century political thought was turned on its head when faced with mass suffrage. Politically mobilized by “religion, class consciousness, and nationalism, or at least xenophobia,”¹ the masses challenged the legitimacy of new regimes through political recognition, however disparate their competing interests were. One would be mistaken to characterize this collectivization with a cohesive ideology among individual members, despite the emergence of a political democracy. It was, in fact, quite the opposite: What these nationalistic tendencies suggested was the need for new, unifying traditions such as “civic religion.”²

The issues presented in the rise of social democracies mirror those of other nascent political movements that struggled with a plurality of social, economic, and religious identities unified behind one political banner. As Hobsbawm suggests, the solutions are specific to the circumstances at issue—in this case, turn-of-the-century

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, “Mass-Producing Traditions: Europe, 1870-1914,” *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) 267.

² E. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 269.

fledgling regimes coping with political democracy, broadening suffrage, and national identity. However, rather than offering a “perfect” solution, Hobsbawm writes that no single political theory is capable of accounting for all of the human factors in trying to understand this volatile time in European history. This is not admission of the impossibility of writing history more generally, but an informed opinion on the difficulty of doing so.

Discussing the difficulty in accounting for various human motivations using singular political theories is essential when trying to understand the ancient world. A millennium and a half previous to the rise of nationalism, the function of the hippodrome and the popularity of chariot races in Byzantium have many parallels to this time in Western history. After the elimination of gladiatorial combat and a decline in other institutions (aside from the Church), chariot races became essential to the people of Byzantium because, in addition to entertainment, they were places in which the populace could collectively make its will known. The Hippodrome of Constantinople harbored the exceedingly popular public spectacles sponsored by the emperor and would give rise to the infamous circus factions. These factions (particularly the Green and Blue factions) facilitated the public spectacles by maintaining stables, taking care of the horses, training racers, and securing dancers.³ Representing opposing teams of chariot racers, these two groups dominated the sporting culture both inside and outside the arena. Although there were other colors (Gold, Red, White, and Purple) these were of little political

³ Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens in Rome and Byzantium*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976) 6-23.

consequence.⁴ Appearing much like a guild of entertainers, these factions were chronicled many times, but in very specific and violent contexts: riots. The factions' organized disturbances varied and included everything from profanity to violence. In these ways, the factions became effective at communicating the will of the people—ranging from the need for bread to the release of prisoners—and moving the emperor to action. What the emperor “heard” and acted upon varied greatly, at times bending to the will of the factions, and at other times killing tens of thousands of citizens. It is our job as historians to sort through the evidence to better understand why emperors acted the way they did, and how this reflected on the factions as a political, economic, social, and even religious institution.

Modern scholars have schematized these factions to fit their personal political, social, or economic theories. In the words of Charles Beard, “The historian who writes history, therefore, consciously or unconsciously performs an act of faith, for certainty as to order and movement is denied to him by knowledge of the actuality with which he is concerned.”⁵ This statement captures the state of the scholarship concerning these factions, which has been slowly inching away from a post-World War II objectivist concentration on verifiable facts and toward more relative interpretations supplied by ancient authors.⁶ Accepting archaeological evidence and rejecting ancient church

⁴ A. Cameron, *Factions*, 45-73.

⁵ Charles A. Beard, “Written History as an Act of Faith,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 39 no. 2 (January 1934): 226-227. 21 November 2011 http://www.historians.org/info/aha_history/cabeard.htm.

⁶ David S. Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (London: Routledge, 1999) 126-130.

historians, modern historians such as Alan Cameron have defined the discussion for the second half of the 20th century and only recently have been challenged by authors such as Michael Whitby.

In his paper “The Violence of the Circus Factions,” Michael Whitby discusses the difficulties in portraying the factions. Focusing on the connection between the factions’ proclivity for violence and the toleration offered by imperial authority, Whitby offers a possible explanation for this correlation: Prominent figures supported these riotous groups, and vice versa, resulting in top-down toleration for their violence. Political leaders gained the factions’ support by showing support for them. In the course of Whitby’s discussion, several modern characterizations of the ancient factions are examined and evaluated based on *his* political theory behind this relationship. Indeed, his examination will be the ideal platform for discussing the merits of related historical analyses set forth by other authors, as Whitby examines a variety of contemporary views of the factions. Moreover, it is my intention to discern the arguments’ strengths from their weaknesses and draw on the former in my discussion.

Whitby begins his paper with a quote from the *Chronicon Pachale* that presents the Emperor Justinian’s distinctly negative view toward the factions and the violence they created in Constantinople. Offering a possible explanation for this view, Whitby weighs the validity of Alan Cameron’s characterization of the ruffians as *mere* “soccer hooligans.” However, Whitby argues that this description does not fit into the “larger context,” or a “broader social understanding” of these factions. Indeed, it would be ill advised to view these factions in terms of modern phenomenon. Before discussing the

relevant historical details of the factions that merit this broader understanding, the origins of club soccer fan culture ought to be examined.

One might look at the roots of club soccer and its fan culture to see the incompatibility of Cameron's comparison. Hobsbawm details the socio-economic roots of football, which originated in the 1870s and 1880s in England, observing that "the nature of football culture at this period—before it had penetrated the urban and industrial cultures of other countries—is not yet well understood. Its socio-economic structure is less obscure."⁷ However, despite this lack of understanding, football clearly permeated many boundaries other sporting cultures could not. It was first introduced as a "character-building sport by the public-school middle classes"⁸ but steadily gained support under the proletarian banner as they championed the rapidly professionalizing game. Football's proletarian origins distinguish it from those of "aristocratic...control," such as horse racing. Moreover, Hobsbawm suggests that what differentiates football from other sports is its "supporters' culture." Football culture sprang from the very socio-economic class that popularized the sport and made it its own. In contrast, horse racers had to be wealthy to support horses, and the audience was comprised of a variety of classes with no experience racing. Thus, football supporters and clubs commonly known as "hooligans" are historically a more homogenized socio-economic group than supporters of other sports. In light of the modern and unique nature of soccer sports culture, perhaps now it is

⁷ E. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 288.

⁸ E. Hobsbawm, *The Invention of Tradition*, 289.

more easily understood why this comparison works for small, hooligan-like factional fights but is inadequate to fully explain the factions' violent tendencies.

The factions facilitated sporting culture through a variety of organizational functions. Specifically, the factions voiced the opinions of the crowd via organized chanting. Although many of the chants had to do with the outcome of a race, sometimes they included praise for the emperor, or were politically oriented cheers and jeers.⁹ In this way, the culture of chariot racing was also invaluable for making known a multitude of popular opinions, particularly due to the fact that in the hippodrome the crowd had the undivided attention of the emperor. This fact was made especially apparent to those in charge in times of general unrest. Some historians have explored the importance of the role of the populace during chariot races; Whitby credits Charlotte Rouche with filling the need for a "broader social understanding" in her discussion of the factions' role in influencing acclamation of political leaders through their ability to organize chanting. But what might account for the factions' escalating frequency in voicing their opinions through chanting and riots in the 5th and 6th centuries CE?

Liebeschuetz attempts to explain this phenomenon as resulting from the factions' social role in urban society. Liebeschuetz contends that the factions bridged the gap between the local leaders and the majority of the population. Moreover, Liebeschuetz suggests that this shift in local leadership gave rise to unnamed—and thus unaccountable—men to whom the riotous populace could not have aired their grievances.

⁹ David S. Potter, "Performance, Power and Justice in the High Empire," *Roman Theater and Society*, ed. William J. Slater (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996) 132-141.

This is evidenced in the apparent shift from council members (*curiae*) in the Theodosian code (ca. early 5th c. CE) to “local notables,” chosen from “local bishops, clergy and principal landowners” in the Justinianic Code (ca. 6th c. CE).¹⁰ However, Whitby flatly rejects this view and asserts that the decline of the *curiae*—associated instead with the tax reforms under Anastasius—does not coincide with the mid 5th c. CE chronology of the rising factional violence. Whitby’s explanation seems to have overlooked evidence that might have given rise to the tax reforms of Anastasius. First and foremost, by the time of Anastasius’ tax reform, there is ample evidence to suggest that “local” leaders, such as wealthy landowners, clergy, and bishops, were gradually infiltrating local *curiae*. This reply relies on the idea that the tax reforms of Anastasius evidence the changes in local governments, taking the form of a reply to the changes taking place, rather than the tax reforms giving rise to an otherwise unnatural state of affairs.

As regional institutions changed, urban populations looked toward a more stable patron of the spectacle: the emperor. Moreover, the rise of the circus factions is associated with the changing infrastructure that facilitated the production of public spectacles.¹¹ Also, it is difficult to deny the fact that these factions’ organized chanting served a populace on the brink of rioting. As we will see, there are many reasons why an increase in riots occurred, even if the *Curiae vs. Local Notables* model is merely a plausible explanation by itself. However, all of these changes would suggest major

¹⁰ Michael Whitby, “The Violence of the Circus Factions,” *Organised Crime in Antiquity*, ed. Keith Hopwood (London: Duckworth, 1999) 229-251.

¹¹ David S. Potter, “Cities in the Eastern Roman Empire from Constantine to Heraclius.” *Archaeology and the Cities of Late Antiquity in Asia Minor*, ed. Ortwin Dally and Christopher John Ratte (Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2011) 248.

organizational shifts in the local governments of the Eastern Roman Empire between the 4th and 6th c. CE.

Following his rejection of the changing of the local leaders, Whitby next focuses on determining the likelihood that these riots did, in fact, reflect the will of a majority of the populace. Whitby denies this, and alternatively asserts that the riots were generated by “causal opportunism and looting by the desperately poor.”¹² While this characterization is likely true for any riot to some extent, it cannot entirely account for the marked increase of mass participation in this period. Alternatively, Liebeschuetz provides a much more cohesive explanation for this solidarity between the factions and a large part of the population. Liebeschuetz elaborates on the famous Nika Riot, which includes one of the best examples of this solidarity between the population of Byzantium and the factions. After Justinian called the army into the city—at a time when opportunistic participation would seem unwise—the violence escalated, resulting in a new emperor being proclaimed with the explicit support of “important senators, and the passive support, at least, of part of the imperial guard.” Liebeschuetz infers from examples such as this that even when a majority did not take part in the riots, these “violent activists had the passive support of a large part of the population.”¹³

Whitby criticizes Alan Cameron’s usage of Procopius’ *Secret History* to account for the motivations of the population. Procopius characterizes the Nika Riot as

¹² J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 233.

¹³ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, 252.

destructive and pointless, and Whitby asserts that ancient sources like this exhibit a distinctly unsympathetic “upper-class bias.” Moreover, Cameron overlooks other ancient sources, such as the *Chronicle* of John Malalas, which provide extensive history of this period of time. As previously discussed, mid-20th century objectivists like Cameron generally downplayed the importance of ancient authors, such as church historians, in part because they offered relativist accounts of past events.¹⁴ However, recently, Malalas’ *Chronicle* has received extensive scholarly studies by the “Australian Malalas translation project,”¹⁵ which revived this text with new notes and research. Despite the issues Whitby lists regarding *The Secret History*, he concedes that Procopius’ work helps to characterize an emperor’s interest in supporting a particular faction (“Justinian’s manipulation of factional support”).¹⁶ Indeed, Whitby discredits Procopius’ biased portrayal of the lower classes, while using the high-style ancient historian’s work for its more objective history. Relying on an ancient text for notably reliable information makes Whitby’s argument more persuasive than Cameron’s.

Whitby discusses Emmanuel Le Roy Laderie’s detailed history of the disturbances of Romans in the Rhone valley in 1580. Well-documented incidents such as these are excellent examples of class division that led to violence in popular annual celebrations. The Mardi Gras festivities were an opportunity for unwinding and a celebration without violence. Generally, Mardi Gras blurred the line of class division. However, due to religious controversy between the Calvinists and the Catholics,

¹⁴ D. S. Potter, *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian*, 126.

¹⁶ M. Whitby, “The Violence of the Circus Factions,” 234.

alongside an agricultural crisis associated with high taxes, the festival resulted in public violence in 1580. The resulting popular unrest was described by Judge Antoine Guerin (the man to blame for many of the problems), whose unsympathetic and upper-class focused account varied from a variety of other literary sources about the same event. This account contrasts with the lower-class sympathizer Piedmont, a second eyewitness to the massacre resulting from the uprising. This event, over a thousand years after the events that are the focus of this paper, reflected how an ordinary festival could turn into something violent. Liebeschuetz details how these riotous events in the Rhone were quite similar to the Nika Riot, in which “riots were not started by individuals with clear political objectives, but in times of political tension...[were] more likely to lead to an explosion.”¹⁷ Much like the “hooligan model” set forth by Cameron small bouts of factional violence was typical in times of chariot races. However, when the population of Byzantium was already on the brink of rioting, it is not hard to imagine how the Hippodrome could be a proverbial powder keg, needing only the spark of some factional violence to ignite.

The majority of Whitby’s analysis of the support of emperors and other notables (Zeno, Anastasius, Justinian I and II, etc.) by the factions relies mainly on John Malalas. Under the reign of Theodosius II, the Greens’ assigned seating arrangement was changed within the Hippodrome. This seating rearrangement gave them a more favorable vantage point in relation to the emperor; thus, this was an issue of blatant favoritism. However, the resulting problems could be explained by a variety of factors. First, there is a possibility that the previous seating arrangement prevented rioting by physically

¹⁷ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, 256.

separating the factions. This might explain why riots became more common after the change because factional supporters were more likely to come into contact with factional rivals. Alternatively, Whitby theorizes that emperors favored one faction over another for their political benefit, and this favoritism was the cause of factional tension. However, it is clear that emperors would not have taken these riots lightly: There is a variety of evidence to suggest emperors chose a favorite faction to *prevent* riots. A notable example, which Whitby offers, is the favor shown to a supportive Blue faction previous to and during the Nika Riot. Leading men of the factions were pardoned from punishment in exchange for their faction's support for the emperor. This favoritism would suggest a political relationship between the emperor and these factional leaders. However, this relationship broke down during a bread riot when a visiting Persian embassy witnessed the Blues' chants against the emperor in 556 CE.¹⁸ The emperor was furious and punished the Blues. The "invented traditions" referenced in the introductory quotation by Wallas is, in this discussion, Theodosius' rearrangement of the seating scheme. This new seating plan gave preferential treatment for faction leaders, but did not eliminate causes for riotous behavior. Instead, rearranging seats provided an opportunity for these factions to carry out factional violence, while legal exemption for leading members increased the factions' disregard for order because they were angry about going hungry. Moreover—as will be discussed in detail later—the factions and their leaders clearly felt it was important to voice the grievances of hungry citizens despite the fact that they faced punishment for doing so.

¹⁸ M. Whitby, "The Violence of the Circus Factions," 243.

Whitby asserts that there is a direct relationship between the unprecedented increase in riots spearheaded by a particular faction and an emperor's favoritism for that faction. This is reflected in Empire-wide legislation changing the seating arrangements. Whether this theory adequately accounts for a variety of other factors is questionable. First and foremost, it is clear from the evidence that the Greens did not identify this new "ceremonial" position with favor but with disgust. Whitby acknowledges that it was only after the "protocursor had explained that that the new arrangements were meant as an honor that the Greens acquiesced."¹⁹ Theodosius' symbolic gesture was received reluctantly by the faction that had received the honor, and it would seem that Theodosius II might have "overestimated the intellectuality" of these factions (to paraphrase Wallas). Perhaps these sorts of favors were ambiguous and had little influence on the Greens' attitude toward the emperor.

Additionally, Whitby offers that the shifts in seating arrangements occurred during the prefecture of Cyrus (ca. 439-441 CE), attested in John Malalas' *Chronicle*. The first major riot that Whitby attributes to such a change is in 445 CE; however, he admits that there is no documented reason for the riot. Moreover, Whitby explains that this seating arrangement cannot explain the increase in riots over the next 170 years. However, Whitby seems to be missing the point when he says that these riots were caused by the increasingly regularized support of the emperor. Small hooligan-like factional fights generally broke out whenever the factions had the opportunity, and the seating change most likely worked against whatever riot control the previous arrangement had ensured. However, as previously discussed, these strictly factional fights

¹⁹ M. Whitby, "The Violence of the Circus Factions," 238.

would break out into full-blown riots in times of general public unrest. Furthermore, it is obvious when this was *not* the case. For example, Emperor Marcian favored the Blues for popular support (ca. 451 CE) in exchange for “indulgences,” and there is ample evidence to attribute the resulting riots to the factions alone.²⁰ In this case, the Greens rioted after Marcian beheaded their benefactor Chrysaphius, and the Greens were subsequently banned from holding “official or administrative posts for three years.”²¹ Thus, there is little reason to assume that these sorts of fights would have snowballed into riots concerning misgovernment, for example, if not for general unrest among the rest of the population. However, what this trend does suggest is the growing importance of factions as useful political support for emperors, including those emperors whose influence within the city might have been tenuous.

I would like to stress the difference between marked factional tensions, such as those that result from the favor of an emperor, and widespread riots spearheaded by the factions. Undoubtedly, factional warring would lead to an increase in fights at any chariot race. However, the multi-day riots, which appear far more political than factional, defy these simplistic explanations. In general, these riots can be explained by the demands of the factions, such as in the Nika Riot when two condemned criminals survived their collapsing gallows. The criminals, one a Green and the other a Blue, found favor in both factions. Indeed, it was common for factions to chant for the freeing of such-and-such faction leader or supporter, and they were (understandably) upset if their demands were not met. However, these types of events provided an opportunity for general political

²⁰ M. Whitby, “The Violence of the Circus Factions,” 241.

²¹ Malalas 368.13-17.

unrest among those with influence to take effect. Those with influence did in fact take advantage of this factional outrage by supporting the disturbances in order to cause the emperor distress: The factions found support in several senators who resented Justinian for a variety of reasons (namely, high taxes and anti-nobility sentiments). There were clearly other tensions running high at the time of the Nika Riot, with the factions clamoring for the dismissal of the prefect John the Cappadocian, who was responsible for these undesirable taxes, and the quaestor Tribonian, who had re-written the law code much to their dismay. It would seem that this riot snowballed for a variety of political reasons.

But what about *religious* tensions that resulted in factional rioting? Whitby seems to avoid this issue, even when conceding “instead of segregating entertainment violence from these other forms it is more profitable to set it in this wider social context.”²² However, the author is quick to observe the interconnection between “urban violence” and “ecclesiastical controversy,” while ignoring the connection between factional rioting and similar issues. Drawing upon the rise of the bishop and the increased ecclesiastical controversy between the 5th and 6th centuries, Whitby notes a connection between episcopal influence over the Church and the increasing secular influence over the factions. This would seem a fair comparison, if the secular and the religious were entirely separate, and the members of the factions did not belong to a specific church themselves.

This strict separation of ecclesiastical violence and factional violence can be found in nearly all of Whitby’s contemporaries, who find that factional issues are inherently

²² M. Whitby, “The Violence of the Circus Factions,” 241.

secular, and different from those riots supported by the Church. However, the elevated factional and religious rioting taking place between the mid 5th c. through the early 7th c. CE does not reflect this strict separation. The weighty doctrinal issues resulting from the Council of Ephesus and the Council of Chalcedon had many bishops—whose secular power was only increasing in the later Roman Empire—and their parishioners up in arms.²³ With the convergence of religious leaders and their doctrines with secular administration, it is hard to imagine that their influence did not spill over onto the secular arena. After all, nearly everyone in the cities was Christian. Consider the following from John F. Haldon's *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: Transition of a Culture*:

Their symbolic universe—their 'thought world'—was by definition a 'religious' one, in which human experience and perception of their world, both secular and spiritual, had necessarily to be expressed through this religious vocabulary. Politics are thus always 'religious' and religion is always 'political,' however implicit this may be.²⁴

It is hard to imagine that the secular and the religious spheres of influence remained completely separate, especially in times of doctrinal controversy.

There seems to be a confluence of issues here: first, a shift away from the curial mode of local governments, with increasing influence for local notables; second, increasingly frequent partisanship between powerful men (i.e., the emperor) and the factions, which necessarily fanned the flames of the factional rivalry; third, the rise of doctrinal issues in the time period, coupled with the rise of episcopal power on the

²³ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, 137-68.

²⁴ John F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: Transition of a Culture*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) 25.

secular stage. While this last point was an issue that led to general unrest and violence, can it be attributed to the factions in particular? While Liebeschuetz promotes Cameron's model of the factions having no consistent "religious bias or allegiance," he asserts that "[n]o doubt each faction as a rule simply proclaimed itself orthodox, leaving it to individuals to define for themselves what was orthodox and what was heresy."²⁵ This is an interesting argument. If there was an increase in doctrinal controversy, and each party viewed *themselves* as orthodox, this might bring about an increase in fighting between the two factions; however, leaving the issue to "individuals" might have been a palatable way to avoid this issue entirely. Upon reflection, this explanation does not adequately account for how essential it was to have a cohesive identity between the members of a faction. For example, how could a man sit silently if he was a Monophysite amidst his fellow Blues—all Chalcedonian—who loved to beat up Monophysites? Or, what if half of the Greens were Chalcedonian and the other half were Monophysite? Such a division would pose a serious problem for a faction, because, as Liebeschuetz admits, most religious violence happened between Christians.²⁶

Interestingly, Liebeschuetz admits "it would be extremely surprising if ecclesiastical parties had renounced all attempts to enroll one or the other factions on their side."²⁷ This seems intuitively in the Church's interest so for many reasons. The process of acclamation was far removed from the bishops' sphere of influence, although

²⁵ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, 215.

²⁶ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, 258.

²⁷ J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, 258.

once an emperor was in charge, the bishops' influence was greatly affected by the emperor's religious preferences. Hence, as bishops' influence increased, their members would have done well to acclaim sympathetic emperors—all the more reason to avoid voicing one's religious preferences as a prospective emperor.

Additionally, Liebeschuetz notes the factions' jointly held hatred for Jews, Sarmatians and even Syrians (at Antioch); they were notoriously xenophobic. Aside from being distinct cultural groups, these groups are distinctly non-Christian. This suggests the role religious beliefs had in distinguishing cultural groups, complicating the issue further because in the ancient world cultural identity was synonymous with religious identity. For instance, "Jews" belonged to a particular religious faith and cultural group. Thus, it is difficult to assert that factional violence was purely the product of xenophobia, without taking into account the religious prejudices involved.

It is clear that the religious identity of emperors was becoming increasingly important, and was even a major issue for Justinian *renovatio imperii* that included "the establishment of Chalcedonian orthodoxy and religious unity throughout the empire."²⁸ However, Cameron asserts that the "traditional view" of the Greens as Monophysite would conflict with their continued support of Chalcedonian emperors, such as Phocas and Heraclius.²⁹ He does admit that the Greens "eventually desert both emperors." Thus, it would seem appropriate to separate the religious identity of an emperor who wished to strengthen his political position from that of a man looking for acclamation. After all,

²⁸ J. F. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, 17.

²⁹ A. Cameron, *Factions*, 126-156.

what man would expound his politically divisive religious views before he became emperor? Julian waited until he was declared Augustus to call attention to his paganism; Constantine waited long after becoming caesar to openly promote Christianity. Why would a man on his way to the top risk everything for his religious preferences?

A discussion comprised of these purely plausible counter arguments will only go so far, and the present discussion will benefit greatly from looking into more concrete examples of theological influence on emperorship between the 5th and 7th centuries CE in the Eastern Roman Empire. Indeed, examining the ancient texts Cameron did not have the opportunity to when writing his *Circus Factions* is a privilege time has provided for the modern scholar. For, as previously discussed, sources such as John Malalas' *Chronicle* have become far more credible than when Cameron was writing. Cameron states that there is not "one scrap of ancient evidence" in favor of a religious divide. Perhaps there are more than a few helpings for more recent scholars.

Modern scholars of ancient Byzantium are hesitant to suggest the religious preferences of the factions, specifically those that could explain the cause for certain riots. While their explanations of the changing political, social, and economic situation in the eastern Roman Empire are compelling, it would be irresponsible not to give the chroniclers' works a second chance given their revival in the past few decades. With this in mind, I will detail the features of the Roman cities that could explain the increasing rioting between the reigns of Theodosius II and Heraclius. This exploration will include pertinent and changing features of the economic and social environment for the common person in this time; a discussion of the rise of the holy man in the East; the reasons for the

changing civic structure coupled with the growing importance of the circus factions; and the doctrinal issues in the 5th CE century and beyond. All of these ideas will have a particular focus on the chroniclers, with the intention of exposing the historical reality behind the religious tensions that contributed to the increasingly violent and frequent faction riots in this period.

CHAPTER TWO

Origins of The Circus Factions: Evolution and Adaptation

The importance of public entertainment in the Mediterranean cannot be overstated. According to the sixth section of the Chronography of 354 CE (the “Calendar of Filocalus”) Rome celebrated 176 festival days (*feriae*), which largely honored the gods.³⁰ These *feriae* were the equivalent of state holidays, the majority of which were celebrated with public games (*ludi*): 102 days of theatrical shows (*ludi scaenici*), 64 of chariot races in the Circus (*ludi circensus*).³¹ The rest were gladiatorial games (*munera*), and wild beast hunts (*venationes*); however, the *munera* were traditionally associated with aristocratic funeral games. But, where did this cultural obsession originate? The material record gives us many clues to answer this question.

Archaeological evidence points to the Roman Circus as the first building from which all other gaming facilities sprung. Whether the day called for two- or four-horse chariot races, wild beast hunts, or gladiatorial displays, the Roman Circus was the earliest entertainment complex for the nascent Roman people. Dating back to the 6th c. BCE, Livy credits the Elder Tarquin (616-578 BCE) with the construction of the Circus: “Then, for the first time the place was designated for the Circus which is now called ‘Maximus’.”³² Despite the Circus’ antiquity, the races that took place in the Regal period

³⁰ John H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing*, (Berkeley: University of California, 1986) 1.

³¹ David S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*, (University of Michigan Press, 1999) 206.

³² J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 5, 64-5.

(753-509/8 BCE) were bareback and not chariot races.³³ Regardless, the construction of the Circus reflected a highly organized and motivated society that craved such spectacles even earlier in its history than the evidence suggests.

During the Roman Republic (509/8-44/27 BCE), the Roman Circus was not the imperial circus depicted in movies such as “Ben-Hur.” The monumental and canonical form of the racetracks that attend these depictions of a Roman-style racetrack (i.e., the Circus Maximus; the Roman circus at Jerusalem) post-dated the development of amphitheaters and theaters. Evolving over the course of the early Empire—perhaps around the time of Caesar or Augustus—the size and shape of Circus Maximus was changed many times between the 2nd and 4th centuries CE³⁴ and renovated little after that. In this era of political dynamism, the Circus’ design and size depended on the needs of a changing imperial administration as well as the growing population of Rome. The elder Pliny tells us that one of Julius Caesar’s building projects included modifying the Circus to seat a *quarter of a million* spectators; under Trajan, the younger Pliny reports this figure increased by only five thousand. Although this is a modest increase, the latter figure reflects the development of premium seating—the equivalent of modern “box seats”—that gave the spectator the best view of the games as well as the emperor.³⁵ These monumental structures reflected the emperors’ need to be seen by large numbers of citizens as much as his commitment to accommodating the growing numbers of

³³ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 17.

³⁴ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 4-5.

³⁵ Harold Arthur Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1972) 186.

spectators.

While the history of the Roman Circus pre- and post-dates the Republic, the sport truly became “Roman” within five centuries. Republican Rome celebrated several *feriae*. Livy writes that the oldest one, the *ludi Romani*, was introduced by the Etruscan king Tarquinius Superbus in honor of the gods (Jupiter, Juno, and Minerva) and the inauguration of the Temple of Jupiter on the Capital Hill.³⁶ In the following years, the *ludi* became longer and more varied, honoring events, men, gods, or all three.³⁷ There was the *ludi plebei* (honoring Jupiter), *Apollinares* (Apollo), *Megalenses* (Cybele), *Cereales* (Ceres), and *Florales* (Flora). However, the honor the games paid to the gods, solely, would be short-lived.³⁸ The dynamic political scene that ended the Republican period would produce the dictators of the 1st c. BCE. These powerful men would become the object of admiration in the *ludi*, giving the honors previously bestowed to the gods in name only (if that!).

In the late Republic, the games became particularly useful for political posturing by increasingly powerful men. Changing pageantry when advantageous, dictators like Pompey were allowed to wear triumphal décor in the Circus. The titles of the *ludi* alone reflect the changing political realities in the last century of the Republic. Sulla introduced the *ludi victoriae Sullanae*, celebrating his victory over the Italians and the goddess Victoria in 81/80 BCE. Following the assassination of Julius Caesar (ca. 44 BCE), Marcus Brutus attempted to win the goodwill of Rome by sponsoring the *ludi*

³⁶ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 208.

³⁷ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 208.

³⁸ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 206.

Apollinares, held annually (July 6-13). In response, the young Octavian sponsored the *ludi victoriae Caesaris* in the same month (July 20-28), which coincided with the *feria Venus Genetrix* (the patron deity of the late Caesar's *gens*). Octavian's political manipulation of the *ludi* culminated in the deification of Caesar, pointing to a comet known as *Sidus Illium* ("Julian Star") or *Caesaris astrum* ("Caesar's Comet") as proof of his divinity. In the words of Suetonius, "a comet shone for seven successive days, rising about the eleventh hour, and was believed to be the soul of Caesar."³⁹ Just as Mercedes-Benz owns the Superdome and brands it with a monumental three-pointed star, or Allstate sponsored the 2012 Sugar Bowl in order to dominate the advertising time and space, these were not merely selfless acts of goodwill. By the later reign of Augustus, practices celebrating his own accomplishments were par for the course (such as commemorating his victory after the battle of Actium with quadrennial games).⁴⁰ These kinds of games spread particularly early in the provinces due to such events' traditional connection with religious events, which correlate here with the rise of the imperial cult.

Over time these games honoring *specific* events and emperors took on more generic titles to fit the changing politics of Rome.⁴¹ This is evidenced with the inscriptions of the late 1st c. CE, such as under Domitian (ca. 81-96 CE), when these festivals were put on for "the emperor" and highly successful (and self-promoting) provincial officials. Provincials funded festivals in honor of the emperor, hoping to be

³⁹ Suet., *Jul.*, 80

⁴⁰ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 276-8.

⁴¹ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 278.

noticed and advanced by the appreciative emperor. The functions of these festivals continued to change in the 2nd and 3rd c. CE, mirroring the evolving constituents of the imperial political scene. Among them were Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE), both the product of provincial families and the emperor Hadrian (117-131 CE), who was “particularly appreciative of the adulatory expressions of his subjects.”⁴² The *games* themselves changed to suit the needs of their benefactors, just as the *architecture* evolved under the empire.

By the time emperors were in power, aristocratic provincials purchased their prestige. But, when did this practice begin? The origins and change of this practice, just as the facilities and purpose of the games, find their roots in the early Republic. Owning horses, both then as now, was a sign of prestige. In the early years of Rome, when the Greeks and Etruscans still held sway over the fledgling city-state, aristocrats who owned horses accrued *laus et gloria* (fame and glory) by racing them. Even in the imperial period, aristocrats displayed the names of their chariot-driving ancestors. Notably, this included the emperors descended from a branch of the Claudian family known as “Quadrigarius” (named after the four-horse chariot, which is called a *quadriaga*) that included all of the emperors from Tiberius to Nero.⁴³ However, such a title reflecting ties to chariot races are obscured by their antiquity. The horse-owning aristocracy’s changing priorities had shed this practice of racing long ago. In fact, there is a significant drop-off in evidence that aristocrats won “gold crowns” after the 5th c. BCE.⁴⁴

⁴² D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 279-80.

⁴³ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 185.

⁴⁴ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 292.

Breeding horses, training racers, and operating the spectacles were costly tasks, in both labor and coin. Pooling their resources, ordinary freedmen, slaves, and lowly citizens invested in racing stables (referred to as *factiones*) in order to provide these public spectacles due to the increasing demand. Correlating with the drop-off in aristocratic victories, these organized *factiones* appear as early as the mid-4th c. BCE. Evidence for the factions in this period is far from scarce. Livy explains that the starting gates (*carceres*) appeared in 429 BCE, evidence that there were four teams corresponding with twelve starting gates.⁴⁵ Probably appearing at Olympia (as the Kleoitas who invented them lived there) in the early 5th c. BCE, the idea of starting gates quickly spread to Rome although Roman gates would differ considerably. The factions had an interest in ensuring fairness, and while the Greek staggered the starting times of gates to compensate for the advantage given to the inside gate, the Romans staggered them in space (much like a modern track).⁴⁶ In forcing the horses to cover the same amount of ground, these gates did just that. From public betting to the private interests of faction owners, the stakes were high for many individuals.⁴⁷

The stables that had appeared in the mid 4th c. BCE resembled the highly organized *factiones* (“factions”) that would dominate the Roman circuses by the 1st c. BCE, and indeed for centuries to come. These factions were known as the Blues, Greens,

⁴⁵ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 187; D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 237; J.H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 137.

⁴⁶ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 187.

⁴⁷ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 18.

the Reds, and the Whites. Corresponding to the colors worn by their charioteers in the arena, these colors were the ancient equivalent to the names of modern sports teams.

Our best evidence for the organizational structure of the *factiones* comes from an inscription, dating to the reign of Domitian,⁴⁸ concerning the distribution of oil. Providing horses, charioteers' assistants to the charioteers, doctors, messengers, and even operators of the starting gate mechanisms, the *factiones* were self-contained, professional organizations.⁴⁹ Despite their professional nature, the masters of the stables (*dominis factionis*) in this early period were still citizens of high rank. One such master, Titus Ateius Capito (identified in the inscription as the master of the “the association of the four-horse chariot racing (*familia quadrigaria*)...of the red color”) was one such high-ranking citizen. Perhaps he was related to the 1st c. BCE jurist C. Ateius Captio, who drafted legislation “limiting participation of citizens of senatorial and equestrian rank in scenic and amphitheatric entertainments.”⁵⁰ It is worth noting that the omission of circus entertainments suggests the importance equestrians played in organizing such events, whether due to the antiquity of the *ludi circensus*,⁵¹ the tradition such men had in organizing these games, or both. In this case, Titus Ateius Capito was leading a particular stable “of the reds,” likely one of many stables that provided horses for the Red faction.

The connection between the *domini* and equestrians would change in the 3rd c. CE. The popularity of the circus produced champions, the equivalent of modern day star

⁴⁸ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, Entertainment*, 293.

⁴⁹ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 185.

⁵⁰ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, Entertainment*, 294.

⁵¹ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, Entertainment*, 206.

athletes. These champions changed factions throughout their career. Diocles, the 2nd c. CE charioteer from Portugal was just such a champion. Winning thousands of races and over 35 million HS in prize money, his wealth rivaled that of the ultra-rich aristocracy.⁵² While Diocles' superstardom was the exception and not the rule, he was undoubtedly the product of a period in chariot racing that worshipped charioteers, showering them in adulation and riches.

By the late 3rd c. CE, the *domini* were no longer of equestrian rank but were now retired charioteers.⁵³ This sort of management was commonplace for other guilds (synods) of pantomimes and athletes.⁵⁴ It is difficult to see why the imperial government had an interest in controlling the factions via *domini* of equestrian rank previously; however, it has been suggested that this change was due to the imperial government's concerted effort to separate those of high social rank from the organization of public entertainment. Alternatively, this phenomenon may have arisen from a confluence of factors. The most obvious factor may have been the wealth of charioteers in the period. Next, as mentioned above, the fame that charioteers acquired undoubtedly bought them additional prestige and social mobility. Interestingly, just after the reign of Aurelian (270-5 CE), an emperor of humble origin, we have two of the first ex-charioteer *domini*. Perhaps this was intentional, or perhaps the *domini*—much like the emperors of this period—were the product of a less autocratic social environment.⁵⁵ Changing with the

⁵² D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 298-300.

⁵³ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 185.

⁵⁴ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 264-5.

⁵⁵ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 185.

times, the circus factions in the west were the product of a variety of social, political, and economic factors within the Roman Empire.

The spread of the Roman Empire not only brought foreign wealth back to Italy, but also brought imperial government and Roman culture to the east. The Greeks were racing chariots when the Romans were a twinkle in Aeneas' eye; however, the Greeks had private (non-professional) riders, only a few permanent structures, and no set number of participants.⁵⁶ Thus, the origin and evolution of Roman-style hippodromes and circus factions in the East are closely connected with the spread of the Roman Empire.

The development of the circus factions in the East did not occur overnight. There is no evidence that the cities in the East had anything resembling circus factions during the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE; rather, the origins of the circus factions began after the capital-centered building programs of the tetrarchs.⁵⁷ Establishing their own cities of prominence, the tetrarchs defined future emperors' political, as well as physical, relationship with chariot races. Whether building their own or remodeling preexisting structures (as in Trier, Antioch, and Constantinople), the presence of both an emperor and a monumental permanent structure made the future of chariot races clear: They were here to stay.

The building of circuses exploded in the early 4th c. CE: Diocletian dedicated one at Nicomedia (ca. 304 CE); the circus of Maxentius near Rome (ca. 306-312 CE); the circus at Trier was finished by Constantine (ca. 310 CE); the circus at Sirmium built by

⁵⁶ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 10-1.

⁵⁷ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 635.

Licinius (ca. 312/13 CE); Constantine finished Septimius Severus' work at Constantinople (ca. 324-330 CE); while the circuses at the capitols of Thessaloniki and Milan were also built within this general time frame.⁵⁸ The development of these alternative capitols was most likely a contributing factor behind the introduction of the factions in the East.

Funding such events was extremely costly for civic benefactors as both populations and venues grew. This was reflected in the scarcity of benefactors in the late 3rd and early 4th c. CE.⁵⁹ The motivation for investing the capital, time, and effort necessary for building and operating stables existed only where there was consistent demand—and payment—for the games. Interestingly, the first mention of the factions in Alexandria is found in receipts for barley in Karanis. These receipts were transported to the horse breeder (*hippotrophos*) at Alexandria and signed by Hephaestion, the director or leader of the Blue faction (*factionarius*) (ca. 315 CE).⁶⁰ The receipt of payment, dated five years later, was issued in accordance with the prefect's office. This suggests that imperial levies were exacted on villages such as Karanis, which would provide for the factions at a subsidized rate by the imperial treasury.

Alexandrians had a long tradition of chariot racing stretching back many centuries.⁶¹ Perhaps due to the existing infrastructure—including the hippodrome known as the Lageion, dating back to the Ptolemaic period—the factions in Alexandria

⁵⁸ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 579-638.

⁵⁹ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 539.

⁶⁰ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 511.

⁶¹ J. H. Humphrey, *Roman Circuses*, 512.

flourished. It is notable, however, that these sorts of subsidies do not make it into the Theodosian Code, suggesting, perhaps, their temporary nature. We hear of the *factionarius* from this very same Code—issued from Gaul⁶²—in 371 CE:

1. Emperors Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian Augustuses to Ampelius, Prefect of the City. We decree that provender from the fiscal storehouses shall be furnished to the Palmatian and Hermogenian horses, when they have been weakened by their lot as contestants in the chariot races, either through the uncertainty of the race or by their number of years or by some others cause; but We do not deny to the directors of the factions the customary permission to sell horses of Spanish blood.⁶³

At Constantinople, the factions date to around the mid to late 4th c. CE (ca. Constantine's completion of the Hippodrome).⁶⁴ At Antioch, the factions date to around the mid-5th c. CE, and it is around this time that they spread quickly throughout the East.

While the factions' organization largely evolved in the West, their shows were as they had always been: convenient, efficient, and consistent. People came to the stadium to see the same show they had enjoyed previously and expected to see their favorite charioteer or their favorite team. The four factions were so ingrained that by the 1st c. CE, the Emperor Domitian's introduction of a fifth and sixth faction (the Purples and the Golds) would not outlast his reign.⁶⁵ The races involved pairs of charioteers, and although this was not true at all times throughout the empire, the Reds were generally

⁶² Clyde Pharr et al, *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*, (NY: The Greenwood Press, 1969) 436.

⁶³ *C. Th.*, 15.10.1.

⁶⁴ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 185.

⁶⁵ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 293.

paired with Greens and the Whites were generally paired with the Blues.⁶⁶ While the Whites and the Reds produced notable champions over the years, these colors were destined to take a backseat to the Greens' and Blues' superior winning record. There is evidence that this superiority was reflected in the fan culture as early as the 1st c. CE, as Marcus Aurelius mentions in his *Meditations* that he was thankful to be a partisan neither of the Blues nor the Greens. Indeed, it took a stoic philosopher just as Marcus Aurelius to resist the bipartisanship that permeated every strata of Roman society by this time period.

Inscriptions that preserve the winning records of successful charioteers will aid in placing this into context. Publius Aelius Calpurnianus Gutta recorded his own winning record on an inscription. Winning 1,127 times, we have the corresponding colors for 1,117 of them: 92 for the Whites; 78 for the Reds; 583 for the Blues; 364 for the Greens. Diocles preserved his own winning record for posterity, winning 1462 races altogether: 216 for the Greens; 205 for the Blues; 81 for the Whites; and (presumably, he must have won) 960 for the Reds.⁶⁷ Between the late 1st and early 2nd c. CE, there appears to be a consistent tally in the multiple 100's for both the Blues and the Greens between these two racers.

Diocles' huge number of wins for the Red faction is notable. The Red and White factions were undoubtedly quite popular in their heyday. Moreover, Calpurnianus' inscription is our only example of a victory for the Reds in a race for teams of four

⁶⁷ D. S. Potter, *Life, Death, and Entertainment*, 296.

⁶⁷ Fik Meijer, *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire*, trans. Liz Waters (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 2010) 89-90.

(*certamina quaternarum*).⁶⁸ This is important because—from what we understand about the starting gates and the four-horse chariots—there was not enough space in the starting gates for more than two factions to have been racing four chariots at one time.⁶⁹ Thus, this is evidence for the Reds taking center stage and (in this case) winning, although Calpurnianus seemingly was the only Red to do. This sheds some light on the Red factions' preeminence in the mid 2nd c. CE. Alternately, it would be easy to point to the stardom a charioteer could win no matter what faction he was racing for.

Perhaps the best evidence for the factions' influence was the extreme behavior exhibited by their adoring fans. In the early years of racing at Rome, a grieving fan threw himself on the funeral pyre of a charioteer of the Reds, who had tragically died in the arena.⁷⁰ Whether due to the loss of a beloved charioteer, a Red, or both, the fanatical fan-culture did not respond to such a loss quietly. This extreme of chariot racing fan-culture might raise eyebrows today; however, for the factions' supporters in the ancient world, this was life—and death—as a partisan.

Accidents were not uncommon in this sport, evidenced by various epigrams of fallen charioteers: “Marcus Aurelius Polyneices, born a slave, lived 29 years...He won 739; for Reds 655, for the Greens 55, for the Blues 12, for the Whites 17,” and another, “Marcus Aurelius Mollicius Tatianus, born a slave, lived 20 years...He won 125 palms; for the Reds 89, for the Greens 24, for the Blues 5, for the Whites 7.”⁷¹ These and other

⁶⁸ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 203.

⁶⁹ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 203.

⁷⁰ David S. Potter, *The Victors Crown*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011) 225.

⁷¹ H. A. Harris, *Sport in Greece and Rome*, 207.

epigrams tell us that many charioteers were born slaves—most likely to slaves who worked in the stables—and died young. This was a dangerous sport, and chariot racers died relatively often. Consider the following anecdote: When Nero was a boy, he was chatting with his friends about the death of a charioteer—a Green—who had been dragged by his team. The boys should have been working, and their teacher asked what they were discussing. Nero replied that they were talking about how the dead Hector has been dragged around Troy behind Achilles' chariot.⁷²

By the 6th c. CE, the historian Procopius wrote in his *Wars*: “In every city the population has been divided for a long time in the Blue and Green factions.”⁷³ By this period, the Blues and Greens were considered the “major” factions, the Whites and Red the “minor.” Emperors were not only partisans to a faction, but—with only one exception—they consistently chose between the major factions while discouraging such behavior of local officials. In the Theodosian Code, Judges (*judices*) were discouraged from various activities concerning the spectacles (*De Spectaculis*):

1. Emperors Valentinian, Valens, and Gratian Augustuses to Probus, Praetorian Prefect:

The production of spectacles by magistrates and civil priests, which much be required of them either in their municipalities, or at any rate in those which antiquity has chosen, shall not be under the control of the judges; for very often while the judges strive for popular applause at the heavy expense of others, they order to be transferred to another city those spectacles which skillful diligence prepared in the proper place. But the production of spectacles shall be under the control of those persons at whose outlay and expenses they must be furnished.

⁷² Suet., *Nero*, 22.

⁷³ John G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 45.

2. Emperors Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius Augustuses to Rufinus, Praetorian Prefect:

No judge whatever shall take time to attend theatrical plays, contests in the circus, or the chase of wild beasts except only on the anniversaries of the day when We were born or of the day when We assumed the scepter of the Empire. On those days they may appear at the celebration only before midday, but they shall refrain from returning to the spectacle after their meal. All judges, moreover, as well as private persons, shall know that no prize whatever of gold shall be given at the spectacle; for the right to give such prizes is permitted only to consuls.

3. Emperors Honorius and Theodosius Augustuses to Anthemius, Praetorian Prefect:

No judge shall attempt to take from one municipality to another town, or from one province to another, any chariot horses or citizen charioteers, lest, while such judges intemperately court the popular plaudits, they many exhaust the resources of the municipalities and interfere with the festivals which must be held in all the towns. If any person should violate this order, he shall be held liable to the punishment[,], which overtakes violators of the laws.⁷⁴

Emperors needed to regulate the crowd-pleasing conduct of local politicians as power could change quickly if the factions favored some wealthy benefactor, especially after a pleasing display in the circus. More significantly, such flagrant pandering led to the need for the factions, as *judices* could bleed local administrations dry by abusing public funds.

Partisanship permeated nearly every organizational structure in the East by this period. John of Ephesus (ca. 6th c. CE) called the prospective hippodrome at Antioch “the Church of Satan.”⁷⁵ In the words of Norman Baynes: “Byzantine civilization could... be described as honoring two heroes—the Christian holy man and the triumphant charioteer.”⁷⁶ This era will be the focus of this paper: one of saints, demons, and factions.

⁷⁴ *C Th*, 15.4.1-3.

⁷⁵ J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 45.

⁷⁶ J. G. Gager, *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, 44.

CHAPTER THREE

The Significance of The Holy Man: A Survey of Hagiographic Sources

The following discussion will explore the changing theological dialogue through hagiographies from the 3rd to the 6th centuries CE. This analysis of hagiographic sources will focus on the evolution of Christian attitudes toward urban society, popular culture, and entertainment over these three centuries, while providing necessary context for the following chapter (set in the 6th and early 7th centuries CE). These changes are partially explained by political, social, and geographic differences between the saints' lives, the most pivotal event being the Council of Chalcedon (ca. 451 CE). Throughout this discussion, Peter Brown's assertions about holy men in the later Roman Empire will be detailed, reviewed, and evaluated. Finally, the analysis will challenge Brown's assertions that the theological controversy that sprang from this Council did nothing to hinder the "cohesion" of the empire.

Hagiographies promote the idea that the Christian saint could neither be tempted by earthly desires, nor deterred by mortal threats. The saint was superior to the emperor and mightier than any army, a notion reflected in many hagiographies. Jerome writes in his hagiography of St. Hilarion, "Anthony, like a hero, was winning many victories while he himself had not yet started on his military career."⁷⁷ The word "hero" used here reinforces the idea that, among rural Christians, these holy men seemed heaven sent.

⁷⁷Carolinne White, *Early Christian Lives*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1998) 90.

They were not so different from the “hero” of pagan mythology, instilling wonder and awe wherever they went. Admittedly, hagiographies do not provide a great deal of reliable, factual information; however, they do make clear the popular view that saints were the victorious soldiers of God, wielding the temporal power they commanded during their lives.

St. Antony came from a wealthy Egyptian family and was part of the land-owning aristocracy (b. 251, d. 356 CE). St. Hilarion (b. 291, d. 371 CE) came from a similar background and trained as a speaker in Alexandria, but “what was even more impressive than this was the fact that because of his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ he took no pleasure in the madness of the circus.”⁷⁸ It is no secret that saints rejected the pleasures of this world—including popular entertainment—a testament to their faith. In fact, many religious treatises were ideologically opposed to the arena. Take, for instance, that demons threatened Hilarion; the demons afflicting him are portrayed uniquely as performers from the circus: “All of a sudden, in the moonlight, he saw a chariot with neighing horse rushing over him...often naked women would appear to him when he lay resting...when he sang the psalms [a] gladiatorial show appeared before him...a rider jumped on his back.”⁷⁹ Educated in Alexandria in the early 4th c. CE, there is no doubt Hilarion was constantly bombarded with circus fan culture, the roar of the stadium, the crowds going to and from the games. Finding this traditional form of entertainment demonic, Jerome’s account vividly points to the games as the antithesis of the Christian saint.

⁷⁸ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* (tr. White), 90.

⁷⁹ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* (tr. White), 92.

As discussed earlier, the circus was a time-honored tradition of Alexandria. Jerome gives us a glimpse into the anti-establishment ideology in this time and place (ca. late 3rd to mid 4th c. CE). Hilarion railed against the circus every opportunity he could: “A charioteer from Gaza was struck in his chariot by a demon and was so completely paralyzed...he was brought to Hilarion...He was told he could not be healed until he believed in Jesus Christ and gave up his previous profession.”⁸⁰ Surprisingly, Hilarion helped “Italicus, a Christian citizen of [Majuma] [who] kept horses to race in the Circus against a...man who worshipped the idol Marnas,” giving him holy water to sprinkle over his horses, charioteers and the racing gates, and the “pagans were shouting, ‘Marnas has been beaten by Christ!’”⁸¹ This hagiography portrays the notion that, when confronted with the lesser of two evils, saints took sides even concerning chariot races. Jerome reports that this act converted many pagans, thus Hilarion had every reason to help Italicus win in the Circus. A sensationalized account, to be sure; however, when push came to shove, the circus was just another arena for Christianity to triumph over pagans.

Jerome’s account of St. Hilarion’s life is filled with a deeply ingrained aversion to conforming to traditional power structures, including both the games and imperial decrees generally. When visiting St. Antony’s cell, the Saint’s followers revealed to Hilarion Antony’s burial wishes: “the reason why it was kept secret...was to prevent Pergamius, the wealthiest man in those parts, from moving the saint’s body to his estate

⁸⁰ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* (tr. White), 96.

⁸¹ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* (tr. White), 98-99.

and building a martyr's shrine."⁸² This is a more understandable aversion as compared with Hilarion's complete rejection of the emperor's wishes, whomever he was. Fleeing from Gaza due to Julian's decree for their execution, Hilarion "rejected the idea" of returning to his monastery even after the Christian Jovian took the throne.⁸³ Instead, Hilarion sought a life of anonymity so that he could walk about unrecognized and live in peace.

The life of Hilarion gives modern hagiographers a glimpse into the monasticism of Egypt, known to many as the cradle of these practices.⁸⁴ This kind of saint, or "holy man," is distinct from that of later Eastern Byzantine monks, desiring to live a wholly solitary life, entirely devoid of contact from urban society. Peter Brown draws out this distinction between Syrian and Egyptian monks, the former being interconnected with society while the latter remained secluded. I would suggest that this distinction is plausible, but not in every case from every time period, from every author. Consider *The Life of Malchus*, which, like *The Life of Hilarion*, was written by Jerome, and the saint lived in the same time period.

Jerome's *Life of Malchus* reflects the societal expectations (b. early 4th c., d. 390 CE) of young, working class men in 4th century Syria. Malchus was expected to marry and tenant farm—continuing the way of life of his parents—but avoided these duties by fleeing to the desert, preferring the life of a monk. Malchus ultimately joined a monastery

⁸² Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* (tr. White), 107.

⁸³ Jerome, *Life of St. Hilarion* (tr. White), 108-9.

⁸⁴ Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* Vol. 61 (1971): 83.

and, ironically, took on some of the duties he tried to escape and became a farmer. Malchus, wishing to go back to society, recollects this decision with regret: “I won a most miserable victory over my mentor, for I believed that he was more concerned for his own comfort than for my welfare...’ The sheep that leaves the sheep-fold immediately shows itself to the wolf’s jaws.”⁸⁵ The “Ishmaelites” subsequently captured St. Malchus after leaving the proverbial sheepfold of the Syrian monastery.

Jerome’s *Life of Malchus* further reflects how slavery—for a devout Christian—was preferable to life in secular society: “I enjoyed my captivity and gave thanks to God for his judgment because I had discovered in the desert the monk whom I had been about to lose in my own country.”⁸⁶ However, Malchus’ jubilation was short-lived. The story is recounted ruefully (above), because Malchus would eventually be wed to a woman due to his previous lust to rejoin society: “...perhaps I am suffering all this because I was homesick.”⁸⁷ Indeed, for the Christian saint, all evils stemmed from society, whether a citizen or a slave. Undeniably, Jerome’s narrative is schematized to connote a pro-chastity message, a motivation that must be taken into consideration when discussing any of his works. Regardless of the actual message Jerome is trying to promote, the rural vs. urban life dichotomy becomes quite evident in this narrative. Here, Malchus reflects on how his desire to return to the city doomed him to the evils emanating from urbanized society—something avoided entirely by the lack of desire promoted by the life of a rural monk.

⁸⁵ Jerome, *Life of St. Malchus* (tr. White), 122-3.

⁸⁶ Jerome, *Life of St. Malchus* (tr. White), 124.

⁸⁷ Jerome, *Life of St. Malchus* (tr. White), 122-3

The *Life of St. Simeon the Stylite* (b. 389, d. 459 CE) reflects the changing attitudes of Syrian Christian ascetics to urban society in the 5th c. CE. Simeon was born an illiterate shepherd boy in Syria near Cilicia.⁸⁸ Simeon viewed the holy life as incompatible with that of the monastic life and refused to conform to the habits of his fellow monks.⁸⁹ Simeon sought to become closer to God through bodily mortification and confined himself to multiple small enclosures, once by fastening a rope to his torso, another time by burying himself under his cell, multiple times in caves, finally in an enclosure in Priest Daniel's field.⁹⁰ Traveling to villages and healing the paralyzed, the possessed and the sick, Simeon healed everyone from rapists to children to priests—without distinction. Moreover, the imagery of the demons attacking Simeon, which included dragons, serpents, wolves and leopards, neither fit into a sociological schema nor denote some deeper political, social, or theological meaning. Interestingly, Simeon had two visions of the prophet Elijah who appeared to him in “a flaming chariot with fiery horses and flaming wheels” and even in clothes “like white snow.”⁹¹ Could this be an allusion to the Whites? This connotation would be highly dubious. Rather, the imagery seems devoid of any social or cultural connotation, but rather a biblical allusion. The message Elijah delivered—promoting a life unmoved by wealth or power—was entirely divorced from the “fearsome” and “glorious” chariot in which he arrived and departed. In fact, Simeon's hagiography makes quite clear that the Saint cared little for denouncing

⁸⁸ Robert Doran, Theodoret, and Antonius, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992) 103.

⁸⁹ *The Syriac Life* (tr. Doran), 112.

⁹⁰ *The Syriac Life* (tr. Doran), 112-5, 118.

⁹¹ *The Syriac Life* (tr. Doran), 126-7.

pleasures and sinners, or avoiding pain and death. Instead, Simeon's *Life* is largely neutral to the realities of urban life.

The enclosures chosen by Simeon after his time as a monk exposed him to the crowds who were curious about such heavenly devotion. Because of this, Simeon moved his solitary life atop a pillar. Simeon stood on a 40 cubit high column for nearly 37 years, praying, settling disputes and curing the sick from his heavenly precipice. Truly separated from society, the stylites are an excellent example of how a Christian ascetic could completely renounce organized urban life and imperial administration, and yet hold so much sway over those who lived in and under it. Simeon was rejected by many of his contemporaries, “especially his fellow monastics.”⁹² Initially, Simeon's gruesome display of bodily mortification commanded respect within the supplicating crowds, but was “frowned upon” by ecclesiastical authorities.⁹³ Later in life, Simeon received much attention from his detractors, as well as from imperial officials:

Simeon...lovingly and pleasantly dismissed everyone [beseeching him to descend from the pillar to have his wound healed]—the holy bishops, the clergy...even Christian emperors and lovers of Christ...Theodosius and his sisters...to them he wrote what was suitable, honorable, correct and fitting...⁹⁴

This respectful relationship with religious and imperial authorities mirrors an evolving relationship between the holy man and imperial officials. Like Hilarion, Simeon did not

⁹² Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, 8.

⁹³ Elizabeth A. S. Dawes and Norman Hepburn Baynes, *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies* (London: Mowbrays, 1977) 3-4.

⁹⁴ *The Syriac Life* (tr. Doran), 132.

act on the wishes of the emperor or pursue earthly distinction; unlike Hilarion, Simeon gave them their due respect.

Despite their initial rejection, by the time of Simeon's death these "authorities" recognized his status as a true holy man: Seven bishops were included in his funeral procession, transporting his remains to the city under the guard of imperial troops in order to secure the sacred relics for the city of Antioch alone. While these ascetics were an alternative to organized religion in life, in death their remains elevated the prestige of these organized elements of Christianity. There were others who transcended the power structures of the temporal world in this time period through similar ascetic methods. St. Daniel the Stylite (b. 409, d. 493 CE) sought a similarly ascetic life and drew much attention from local and foreign crowds for nearly 33 years.

Half a century after Daniel's death, St. Theodore of Sykeon (b. early-mid 5th d. 613 CE) was born the bastard son of a high-class prostitute and a messenger of Justinian. Eleusius, a disciple of the Saint, wrote Theodore's *Life* (sometime after 641 CE), which is considered one of the best primary sources for the emperor Heraclius' reign (ca. 610-641 CE). Theodore's father, Cosmas, was a well-known man, "...who became popular in the Hippodrome in the corps of those who performed acrobatic feats on camels, [and] was appointed to carry out the Emperor's orders."⁹⁵ Mary, Theodore's mother, had a foreshadowing dream and related it to the public entertainer, who responded: "perchance God will watch over you and give you a son who will be deemed worthy to become a bishop."

⁹⁵ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 88.

These facts about St. Theodore's life have two significant implications for the present discussion. First, the fact that his father enjoyed social mobility and imperial favor on account of his popularity in the Hippodrome indicates the political significance of notoriety in public entertainment. This seems likely, as Justinian's wife, Theodora, was the daughter of a bear keeper (of a circus faction). Second, Eleusius found no conflict in alleging (a) the religious orientation of the prostitute and the performer as Christian and (b) the origins of the Saint from such a questionable union. Saints were holy regardless of socio-economic origins; however, hagiographies are not known to include facts that add no conflict or relevant detail *and* are unflattering. The fact that Theodore's mother was a prostitute is highly relevant to his upbringing; however the details of his father are ultimately inconsequential to the religious and theatric component of his hagiography. That is, unless the latter detail is either (a) true or (b) flattering. I am inclined toward the belief that people who heard this story knew who Cosmas was, since Eleusius included his name. Moreover, Cosmas must have been Christian in order for people to take this hagiography seriously. Mary's foreshadowing dream has classic elements indicative of *ex post facto* embellishment of hagiographies, but the underlying realities were likely common knowledge. Thus, regardless of which one (whether true or flattering) explains this extraneous detail, the aforementioned analysis remains largely plausible. Moreover, this fact showcases the everyday reality that those who mattered to the people mattered to the emperor, regardless of nobility. Later, I will detail the extent of the prospective "flattering" implications of this anecdote.

Theodore's *Life*, set in Galatia, showcases the relations between urban and rural, spiritual and imperial power structures in the mid 6th to early 7th c. CE. A common theme

of hagiographies is that spiritual power came from a rejection of urban life and hierarchical power. After he was carried half-dead from a cave after being hidden for two years while a teenager—riddled with sores and parasites—Theodore was showered with praises by the Bishop of Anastasioupolis: “Behold, God deems you worthy to be granted, one after the other, the orders in the hierarchy of the Church...and may the Lord our God...deem you worthy hereafter to be clothed with the office of bishop and entrusted with the care of a flock.”⁹⁶ Later, Theodore chained himself to heavy weights within a metal cage to aid his bodily mortification, cementing his rejection of this world’s pleasures.

Theodore did not desire a place in the Church’s hierarchy. Such stations were, at that time, worldly. Theodore would neglect the duties the Bishop would heap on him, and the Saint would send his “fellow-worker, Philoumenus...to be ordained priest and abbot of the monastery so that Theodore might be freed from the cares and toils of the office.”⁹⁷ Theodore attempted to abdicate the duties heaped on him by the clergy, landowners, and Archbishop of Ancyra (Paul) after the death of this Bishop. Theodore was forcibly removed from his cave to become bishop. Eleusius recounts the worldly prestige the city was granted by having such a blessed man as Theodore as Bishop: “[The city of Anastasius] rose to fame not from its fortifications and the embellishment of imperial gifts: not from the size of its population or from the exceeding wealth and power of its

⁹⁶ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 101.

⁹⁷ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 117.

prosperous inhabitation, but rather...it was enriched by such deeds of [Theodore,] the inspired man.”⁹⁸

Theodore did not remain bishop for long: “He decide[d] not to return to his own country but to spend his life in one of the monasteries in Jerusalem...since he had been absorbed in the cares and administration of his bishopric, he had fallen away from the monastic standard.”⁹⁹ Theodore returned to his administrative duties soon after, much to his dismay. His duties included tending the church’s land, which Theodore “...used to entrust the administration and the governance of the properties belonging to the church to men of the city and injustice was done to the peasants.”¹⁰⁰ These and other administrative duties were a bother to Theodore, but were carried out with success due to his “virtue.” The landowners, clergy, and Paul the Archbishop (“the blessed metropolitan”) repeatedly prevented his attempted resignation. Theodore had recourse: Supplicate the emperor. After sending the Emperor Maurice and the patriarch of Constantinople Kyriakos a letter concerning his dismay with this situation, they gave their consent to Theodore’s entreaty. Thus, through *imperial* influence, the heavenly monk was freed from his bonds to the Church (but retained his rank, by wearing the bishop’s “Omophorion”).¹⁰¹

These favors would not be forgotten. Maurice and Kyriakos called Theodore to Constantinople to “give them his blessing.” Thus being “compelled” to travel to the

⁹⁸ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 129-30.

⁹⁹ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 132.

¹⁰⁰ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 139.

¹⁰¹ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 142.

imperial city, Theodore met the Emperor, the Patriarch and the Senate and “pronounc[ed] a suitable blessing in each case.” These were not mere pleasantries, but public blessings only a holy man could give, contributing greatly to the Emperor’s pious appearance. Dining with these and other important men, the Emperor bestowed power over and independence from neighboring bishoprics to Theodore’s monastery.¹⁰² An emperor had much to gain from having a good relationship with a holy man like Theodore that included public blessings and official correspondence. Indeed, Theodore had merely wanted the Emperor to dissolve his bishopric duties, a part of organized religion the Emperor had a say in. Moreover, the Emperor could offer official power for the holy man who would, in turn, bless his imperial administration, heaping honors on Theodore’s obscure monastery.

Long after Maurice’s assassination, Theodore would remain the target of imperial figures courting his holy favor. The usurper Phocas’ nephew Domniziolus would ask for advice, returning the favor with money given to the poor and “would prostrate himself before [Theodore].”¹⁰³ The patriarch Thomas, and after him Sergius, entreated Theodore for advice. Moreover, Phocas is painted as bloodthirsty, unworthy of Theodore’s prayer for his reign but only for his health. Theodore boldly forced the “inhuman consul Bonosus” to bow his head in respect: “Thus the virtue of the righteous knows how to

¹⁰² *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 145.

¹⁰³ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 169.

correct the violent and the savage, and by persuasion makes them yield to those who practice it.”¹⁰⁴

Shedding tears for the rural folk alone, St. Theodore of Sykeon much preferred to help his “flock” than emperors and generals. Theodore was ever ready to pray to God concerning simple problems of the country folk, settling issues of: land-related infighting, swarms of locusts, beetles, hailstorms, and droughts; haunted sarcophagi and unearthed (but cursed!) stones; possessed animals and slaves; paralysis and dumbness. Theodore was a miracle worker who preferred seclusion and eschewed temporal honors; however, his ability to work easily with imperial officials evidences that the station of the “holy man” was no longer *entirely* ideologically opposed to Christian emperors. Moreover, stories from Theodore’s *Life* reflect just how different the life of a rural monk and the urban bishop were, practically and theologically: Saints were not created in churches like the bishops were, but through prayer and spiritual retreat in caves and monasteries, as well as through the power derived from the regard of their rural flock. Bishops focused on urban administration and managing the lands of the church, while the monk was the field worker who actually got things done. A bishop—just as an emperor—had much to gain by having a saint on his side, but not from *being* one; the Saint was better off in his cell than in his church, at least in his own mind.

The Galatian *Life of Theodore of Sykeon*, as well as the Syrian *Life of Simeon Stylites* shed much light on historian Peter Brown’s characterization of Eastern holy men in the later Roman Empire: “The ferocious independence, the flamboyant ascetic

¹⁰⁴ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 175-80.

practices, the rapid rise and fall of reputations, and the constant symbiosis with the life of the surrounding villages—these were distinctively Syrian features that were welcomed in Byzantine society.”¹⁰⁵ Theodore was not Syrian, but his life reflected the distinctly Syrian practices welcomed by Byzantine society. Both Theodore and Simeon were practically the patrons of villages, judging land disputes and mediating issues between the village people as well as on behalf of the village (as a whole) and external forces (e.g., a passing army, urban land owner, etc).¹⁰⁶ There are many instances of Theodore mediating potentially violent clashes between rural folk concerning the disturbance of boundary stones, pagan sarcophagi, and land disputes. The mediation between outside forces certainly was a focus of the Saint, for example Theodore’s intimate interactions with the Emperor and his Patriarch—a powerful and captive audience to the holy man. One must remember that the monks and ascetics (“holy men”) were not elected like bishops: they were self-ostracized and self-mutilated. These qualities gave them rural notoriety and relevance, with flocks of villages in the East eager to supplicate their extra-societal power. Impartial in matters of material worth and knowledgeable in matters of salvation, holy men—and holy men alone—could give the rural farmer true peace of mind.¹⁰⁷ Holy men were the epitome of the intangibly holy “others” that transcended urban society: no church could contain them; no imperial title could intimidate them.

Theodore’s life can be seen as a median between monastic life and the ascetic life. Other Eastern ascetics filled such a niche as “holy man,” which the monastic Theodore

¹⁰⁵ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 82.

¹⁰⁶ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 85.

¹⁰⁷ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 91-4.

actively sought (by contrast). Moving from monks to ascetics, the current discussion turns to an examination of their urban parallel: the Christian Bishop. The holy man in the Eastern, later Roman, Empire would work the opposite side of the fence: Rejecting organized, urban life entirely, his preeminence among the villagers would eventually demand the attention of the Emperor himself. In this way, holy men operated outside of the organized structures of both the imperial administration and the Church, while seemingly dealing with both. In a way, the holy man's business in the 6th and 7th CE centuries was to deal with the administration of the villages, but in an entirely anti-urban capacity, Theodore forbade the use of the licentious Roman bath, while prescribing the use of specific hot baths to cure physical ailments.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the multifarious functionality of the holy man not only included a healer of souls, but also a doctor of physical bodies.

Peter Brown attempts to characterize the holy man with a dichotomy: "For the farmers in Syria, he brought leadership; for the townsmen, the objectivity of a stranger; for innumerable individuals, an oasis of certainty in the conflicting aims and traditions of the world."¹⁰⁹ Brown characterizes the holy man (between the 4th and 6th centuries CE) as a compromise between the rising social importance of the bishop and the social death of the pagan oracle, somewhere between a "teacher" and an "oracle." Brown asserts that the holy man provided leadership in spiritual certainty, giving Christians what they sought: peace of mind. I agree with this analysis in part, as the landowners and clergy surely felt secure with a holy man directing the affairs of a village. However, this analysis leaves out the crucial difference between bishops and *true* holy men: Holy men were not subject

¹⁰⁸ *St. Theodore Sykeon* (tr. Dawes and Baynes), 178, 181-3.

¹⁰⁹ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 99.

to imperial authority the way that bishops were and were not renowned because of their rank in the clergy but because of their divine “otherness.” These men, *holy men*, were so *untouchable* that they could operate outside of organized society, while their status as the *unknowable* stranger gave way to a religious station of undefined influence. The rural farmers viewed them as a direct conduit to the divine, offering much more than a sense of organization and ritual maintenance but living a life that gave the common people access to the *truly* good life.

The holy man in the time of Theodore may be viewed as part and parcel of an alternative power structure unique to rural society. Operating outside of urban society and the imperial administration, men like Theodore both clashed and collaborated with the urban world, but only when necessary. It must be made clear that this position of the holy man—the unflinching monk, the superhuman ascetic—in the later Eastern Roman Empire was a product of a variety of influences that culminated in this time and place. Monasticism arose in Egypt, which had a “true desert,” unlike Syria’s more temperate deserts.¹¹⁰ This environmental difference made a nomadic ascetic life easier in Syria, enabling an ascetic independence from monastic brotherhoods while still being accessible to traveling crowds. This necessarily allowed for Syrian holy men to steer clear of temptation of urban daily life, while allowing greater flexibility in methods of seclusion—such as the stylites who could (albeit, miraculously) brave the elements above a pillar for several decades. Surely, monks who grew up in bustling metropolises, like St. Hilarion did in Alexandria, must have had to deal with the circus—a huge part of culture and daily life in the city. Introduced previously, the messenger of the Justinian himself,

¹¹⁰ P. Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," 83.

Cosmas—Theodore’s father—was promoted because of his popularity in the Hippodrome. Indeed, this fact shows the social mobility that popularity in the Hippodrome provided, through imperial favor of course. The social mobility afforded by this notoriety must be considered one distinct realm of power that the emperor necessarily had to acknowledge; however, this power structure was so removed from the life of a rural saint that Theodore’s only tie to the world of entertainment was the father he never met. What this information *does* intimate is that there was no incompatibility of the circus and the Church *generally*, except when pagans were involved (re: Hilarion). I favor this line of reasoning, although it follows solely from what the text omits. It is no secret that Christians were deeply divided in this time over theological issues; however, barring specific details, I am inclined to accept that the Church tacitly accepted chariot races.

This might explain why the absence in Theodore’s *Life* of any interaction with the Hippodrome was most likely a product of his surroundings. Like Hilarion, if Theodore lived in the city Theodore, might have mediated issues concerning chariot races. There is an issue with this line of reasoning, however. At this time the local hippodrome would not have been a home to pagans, but urban Christians, a group that even St. Hilarion had no problem with helping. But in the late 6th c. CE, the Church was rife with controversy, requiring collaboration between bishops and emperors to keep the peace. Men elected to a bishopric, who were additionally renowned as holy men, would certainly aid their efficacy as bishop, regardless of his specific administrative duties. But this begs the question: What were these duties? Perhaps Theodore of Sykeon *did* deal with the affairs of chariot races as part of his administrative tasks in his time as Bishop of

Anastasioupolis. This fact might not have been noteworthy to Eleusius the monastic biographer, who saw little importance in these and other unenviable tasks the bishopric required. It may be the case that dealing with the local hippodrome was merely another distasteful reality of urban life that made being a bishop undesirable for the holy man; however, nothing remarkably distinct from urban life *generally* explains why this administrative capacity of the bishop went without note in the hagiography. The point remains: The undesirable administrative duties of the bishop were entirely omitted from the *Life* of St. Theodore. Theodore certainly found that these “tasks” were beneath his holy dignity, whatever they might have been.

Theodore’s *Life* showcases the evolving attitudes holy men had toward the Circus. This chapter has traced holy men who have progressively been moving farther away from capitals and cities, into villages and pastures, and finally a mixture of both: from Hilarion in Alexandria, to Malchus in a village, the stylites on pillars and Theodore who lived in cities, villages, and his rural monastery (which he preferred!). The attitudes that are attributed to them in their respective *Life*’s are illuminating. Hilarion rejected the Circus quite explicitly; Malchus regretted his attachment to urban society, although omitted the games; the stylites rejected the world of man in its entirety (living *in* the world but not *of* the world). What is most interesting is that, around the stylite, the complete rejection of the organized world of man harkens the opposite response: celebrity status from the masses. Simeon received supplication from Persian nobility, and Easterners who “had to travel 13 months to reach his enclosure,”¹¹¹ and even a pilgrimage—made official by the

¹¹¹ *The Syriac Life* (tr. Doran), 161-3.

emperor—in his honor. Theodore’s *Life* is set in this world that worshipped holy men, which necessitated the Saint to deal with insatiable clergy and bishops, emperors, and patriarchs. Rather than revile the realities of the world of man, Theodore—with all of his humility—oversaw urban life when forced, partaking in the monastic life when possible. Rather than rail against the Circus, pagans or heresy, Theodore was content with insulting heretical emperors: something that, at this time, was not only possible, but effective. The Circus was not the cause of the evil he targeted, but rather the entertainment of the people he held so dear. Thus, it is not surprising that his *Life* deals little in this world of chariots belittled by the holy man’s ability to influence powerful men (e.g., military policy, etc).

There is one additional issue concerning the *Life* of Theodore that has not been mentioned. When one considers that facts about his father coupled with the emperors he favored, St. Theodore’s selective favor of emperors appears less than objective. Peter Brown would deny that this political inclination has any religious basis:

It has been said that the Council of Chalcedon divided the Empire irreparably; that it rendered inevitable loss of the eastern provinces to Islam in the seventh century. This view is so lofty that it misses the quality of life if the sixth-century eastern Empire entirely. The exact opposite was the case. Despite the explosive nature of the issues... [and despite the] ecclesiastic traditions of whole provinces [being] mobilized on both sides, the Empire remained united.¹¹²

The supporting evidence cited is that (a) men continued to pay their taxes, and (b) “men prayed for the success of the emperor whatever their shade of theological opinion.” These pieces of evidence would appear to support his ideas, but for the present facts of

¹¹² Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150-750* (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971) 145.

Theodore's *Life*. Despite the anecdotal nature of the hagiography, Theodore's *Life* reflects a "theological tradition...mobilized" by theological controversy.

Justinian reinstated the theology promoted in the Council of Chalcedon; moreover, Justinian's employment of Theodore's father, Cosmas, reflects the desire to tie the Saint to the Chalcedonian emperor. Maurice, the emperor with whom Theodore had an excellent rapport, was decidedly Chalcedonian. His usurper was Phocas, a Chalcedonian emperor who was disliked by St. Theodore and was *refused* a prayer for success *to his face* (above). While Theodore said that this was because Phocas had blood on his hands, what emperor did not? Perhaps there was something else about Phocas. When one considers what great lengths the Saint went to publically bless Justinian—an emperor worthy of his prayer—one may more easily see why (a) this "theological tradition" had significant *political* effects aside from tax collection and (b) *holy* men in fact did selectively pray for emperors' success. Justinian, Maurice, and Phocas are all considered "Chalcedonian." These titles, however, obscure the emperor's true opinions and beliefs; rather, these were titles given in hindsight based on the policies they ended up endorsing that, in general, was the result of other political influences. As we shall see in the following chapter, Justinian would unsuccessfully tow the pro-Monophysite line; Maurice would undertake no theological debates whatsoever, most likely a tacit Chalcedonian; Phocas was alleged to have killed many—even a bishop—on account of their Monophysitism. Perhaps Theodore rejected Phocas because he really did have blood on his hands and not because of Theodore's theological belief; however, this blood was the blood of Christians, arguably spilt on account of Phocas' theological intolerance. This suggests that the Emperor Phocas did not hesitate to violently assert his theological

beliefs. Moreover, his eight-year reign marked the height of documented factional rioting outside of the racetracks in which the factions' riots so frequently erupted. Could there be a connection between Phocas' theologically inspired violence and this increased rioting of the factions? The final chapter will explore this possibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Chroniclers: Primary Evidence for Religious Riots from Justin I to Heraclius

Writing in the late 7th c. CE, John of Nikiu chronicled the events from the Dawn of Time (i.e., Adam and Eve) to the more contemporary—and disastrous—usurpation of Phocas and the subsequent Muslim conquests of the Eastern Roman Empire. However, for the Christians of the Eastern Roman Empire, there was hope: holy men remained a source of guidance and hope. Just as Theodore of Sykeon’s *Life* reflected the changing imperial administration through officials asking him for blessings, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu* reflects the opposite perspective: those of the officials who entreated such holy men. In this instance, the perspective was of those revolting against Phocas, who descended from usurped Emperor Maurice’s administration. Heraclius, the future emperor, was once Maurice’s general. Heraclius’ brother, Gregory, has a son, Nicetas. While Bonosus was plotting how to take the City of Alexandria, Nicetas consulted Theophilus the Confessor—or the Stylite—who,

was endowed with the spirit of prophecy. This old man lived thirty years on top of the pillar. Now Nicetas used to visit him frequently ...Nicetas went to him and besought him and said: ‘Who will be victor in the war?’ ...And the holy man said to Nicetas: ‘Thou shalt conquer Bonosus and overthrow the Empire of Phocas, and Heraclius will become emperor this year.’¹¹³

John of Nikiu presents one of the most theologically radical chronicles preserved for posterity. An adamant Monophysite, John of Nikiu’s *Chronicle* will be the latest work

¹¹³ J. H. Zotenberg and R. H. Charles, *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, (London: Pub. for the Text and Translation Society by William & Norgate, 1916) 108.1-4.

discussed in this chapter; however, this passage (above) provides us with a glimpse at the similarities between John of Nikiu's *Chronicle* and the hagiographies discussed previously. There are differences, too; other chroniclers' works are less radical, such as that of John Malalas. There is relatively little debate over where and when he wrote his *Chronicle*: Malalas' narrative was continuously written throughout his stay in Antioch as *comes Orientis*. After this period—around the early to mid 530's CE—Malalas stopped writing for nearly thirty years when he moved from Antioch to Constantinople (around Book 18). A second edition was made in 565 CE—after the apocalyptic fears of his contemporaries were assuaged—giving him ample time to transition from the Arab conquered lands, or perhaps spurred by his position of *comes Orientis* abolished by Justinian (ca. 535 CE). Malalas' work was well-received by his contemporaries, and as a consequence all of the following chroniclers' works reflect Malalas' chronology and historiography. For this reason, his *Chronicle* will be the first discussed in this chapter. Admittedly, modern scholars contend that, “we should not turn to Malalas for an accurate and authentic record of historical events.” Despite this, “the later books, especially [17] and [18]” are generally considered to be the “exception” to this proscription.¹¹⁴ For this reason especially, Book 18 of Malalas' *Chronicle* will consequently be the focus of the present discussion, although the end of Book 17 will be used to detail the transition from Justin to Justinian.

John Malalas' *Chronicle* leaves much unexplained, allowing a certain degree of objectivity of his accounts of relatively complex events that unfolded in his time. Under

¹¹⁴Elizabeth Jeffreys, Brian Croke, and Roger Scott, *Studies in John Malalas*, (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1990) 339-40.

the reign of “the most sacred Justin,” (ca. 518 CE), Malalas sets the stage of theological controversy for Justin’s nephew Justinian, who ascended just nine years after Justin’s coronation. Notably, in the second year of his reign (ca. 521 CE), “the patriarch of Antioch...died... [and] Euphrasios of Jerusalem was appointed in his place. He carried out a great persecution of those now as orthodox, and put many to death.”¹¹⁵ Here, the term “orthodox” is highly contextual. Malalas holds little of his theological opinions back although he does not put forward value judgments. What he meant is that they were Monophysites: concerned with the single, incorruptible nature of Jesus Christ. Within this context, we may understand the riots that started in Antioch: “At that time the Blue faction rioted in all the cities and threw the cities into confusion...[T]hey killed with their swords all the Greens they encountered.” This rioting was allowed for nearly five years, until it was finally quelled in Byzantium, to which it had spread.¹¹⁶ This passage makes two things clear. First, Justin favored the Blue faction. Second, the theological beliefs and actions of certain patriarchs in influential cities could influence Empire-wide rioting. It is notable that the Emperor looked the other way as long as he did: was it really a matter of hooliganism? There would be little reason to allow such arbitrary destruction to take place; rather, theological beliefs must have played a part not only in the beginnings of the riot, but in Justin’s continued support of rioting against such persecution.

Instances of factional rioting that cannot be attributed to hooliganism will be the focus of this chapter. As previously discussed, Michael Whitby has suggested that the

¹¹⁵ John Malalas, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, (Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986) 17.1, 17.11-2.

¹¹⁶ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 17.12.

rioting of the factions that happened outside of the circuses can be explained by the favoritism emperors employed to gain the support of the factions; however, this secular model cannot fully explain the many correlations between theological conflict and factional rioting between the reigns of Justin I and Heraclius. Through examining the chroniclers' work, this chapter will sort through the primary sources that detail these riots and (a) outline these correlations that (b) support the plausibility that these theological conflicts played a causational role in more than one empire-wide factional riot.

Incorporating what historians have said about the riots discussed below while including analysis of sources that have been largely ignored by these historians, my analysis promotes a dynamic model for these riots. My model will not focus on the analysis of any specific riot, or concentrate on a well documented political, social, or cultural factors that appear to explain many of these riots. Rather, my analysis will read more like a discussion in an attempt to sort through the previously unexamined evidence that supports the correlative and causational relation between theological controversy and these faction riots. Moreover, my analysis will include—not preclude—the models that have been advanced by contemporary historians who have tried to explain the increasingly violent and frequent factional riots in the 6th and 7th centuries CE.

John of Nikiu describes the same situation in more detail. Perhaps due to his more ardent beliefs, his account reflects his religious bias on historical events. When Justin ascended the throne, he “sent and recalled Vitalian who had been the enemy of the emperor Anasasius, and appointed him master of the forces. [Justin] changed the orthodox faith of the emperor Anasasius...[and] communion with the Chalcedonians was

restored.”¹¹⁷ Severus, the patriarch of Antioch, fled because he feared being murdered (evidently a Monophysite) and Paul the Chalcedonian was appointed patriarch in his place. Severus had “composed a treatise full of wisdom and the fear of God...this teaching prevails to the present day among the Egyptian monks.” This line of text clearly reflects John of Nikiu’s relatively unabashed Monophysite sympathies.¹¹⁸

Once Paul died of natural causes, and Severus was put to death, the reactionary Euphrasios made his mark by violently opposing Severus’ beliefs that had spread under more lenient patriarch Paul:

...many of the orthodox were put to death on account of the faith which [Euphrasios] taught. And he stirred up civil war throughout the Roman Empire, and there was much shedding of blood. And in the city of Antioch there were great tumults during five years. And no one could speak owing to the faith of [Justin].¹¹⁹

After Justin’s partisan efforts to stem the rioting were made evident: all the soldiers and the people assembled together in Byzantium and disowned their allegiance to the emperor. And they besought God saying: ‘Give us a good emperor like Anasasius or else remove the emperor Justin whom though hast given us.’...[Justin] was grieved when he heard these words. However, he sought to gain the affection of the people, as he feared lest the wise should admonish him according to the laws of this world.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 90.5.

¹¹⁸ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 90.13-4.

¹¹⁹ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 90.7-15.

¹²⁰ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 90.20-3.

John of Nikiu's account paints Justin's partisan politics as unanimously derided by the populace. The civil war, which was the produce of decisive actions taken on account of theological matters in the city of Antioch, quickly spread to the rest of the Empire. It ought to be noted that this civil war carried on for five years due to Justin's neglect to punish the Blues who were joined by Justinian: "Justinian [Justin's brother's son] helped... pillage and murder among the various nations."¹²¹ John of Nikiu characterizes the factions as an organized, theologically partisan force that Justin and Justinian strongly supported. Notably, the pillaging and murdering of the Green faction by the Blues was not spurred on by a particularly contentious chariot race, but rather the appointment and actions of a radically Chalcedonian Antiochan bishop.

Upon the ascension of Justinian, John Malalas writes: "After the reign of Justin, the most sacred Justinian... was magnanimous and Christian. He favored the Blue Faction."¹²² A supporter of Justinian, Malalas was probably influenced by their shared "orthodoxy," a theological view that greatly influenced the partisan politics of the Eastern Roman Empire. In this case, the information he chose to *include* reflects his anti-Chalcedonian sympathies:

Rescripts were sent to the cities saying those who did not take communion in the holy churches should be sent into exile, for they were excusing themselves by citing the Council of Chalcedon... a riot broke out in Antioch, and burst into the bishop's residence, throwing stones and chanting insults.¹²³

¹²¹ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 90.16.

¹²² Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.1.

¹²³ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al). 18.64.

Moreover, John Malalas recounts Justinian's "edict concerning the orthodox faith and against heretics" following a devastating Antiochan earthquake, which were followed by anti-Chalcedonian rioting.¹²⁴ It would appear that typical events, coupled with unfavorable results, lead to rioting *on account of theology*, which further led to theological inquiry and rescript. While this rioting was the concern of cities, we will examine whether the games reflect similar developments.

Interestingly, rioting between the factions and local theological disputes go hand in hand. When Pope Vigilius visited and was "puffed up"¹²⁵ by Justinian's kindness, he promptly excommunicated Menas, the Bishop of Constantinople. This occurred in February only to be reconciled by June, but the factions were hard at work: "In that indiction...in the same year [547 CE] on the 11th of May, while the City's Birthday chariot-races were taking place...a riot occurred between both factions...and there was a heavy death toll."¹²⁶ Again, a few years later in 550 CE, "In the month of January when there was erased from the holy diptychs the name of Menas, the archbishop, and the name of Vigilius, the pope of Rome." Following this, "In the month of April a faction riot occurred in the hippodrome when no races were being held. There were many deaths on both sides."¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.78.

¹²⁵ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.98; Cyril A. Mango, Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997) 327.

¹²⁶ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.99.

¹²⁷ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.107-8.

The evidence is unanalyzed and any theological connection that can be drawn would be strictly correlative; however, these latter riots were not *merely* a matter of “hooliganism.” The former took place during the races, although the race was clearly not the only issue running through the crowd’s mind: The races were symbolically important—yes—but there was significant theological turmoil as well. Moreover, even if it was acknowledged that granting this riot (in 547 CE) was only concerned with the races on that day, what about the influences of the riot in 550 CE? Much is left unexplained; however, the lack of certainty does not bar inquiry.

One of the Emperor Justinian’s efforts to achieve theological compromise was highly contentious and was considered heretical by many bishops. To be sure, it would be irresponsible to ignore this fact when trying to understand the causes for the increased rioting under his reign. Specifically, this controversy is referenced by the anonymous, pro-Justinian author of the *Chronicon Paschale*, who included Justinian’s “Three Chapters’ controversy” resulted from the Fifth Oecumenical Council held in Constantinople in May 553 CE.¹²⁸ The essence of this “controversy” was an attempt to unite Monophysites while maintaining the orthodoxy of the Council of Chalcedon (ca. 451 CE) by selecting parts of the Council to denounce. This effort was supposed to be supported by bishops prior to the Fifth Council of Constantinople but the efforts failed. As a result, we know only snippets of the controversy, which is treated in the *Chronicon Paschale* to “reflect the author’s interest in attempts to move away from the Council of

¹²⁸ Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale*, (Liverpool University Press, 1989) pp.636-84; nn. 381-2.

Chalcedon in search of a harmonizing formula.”¹²⁹ In fact, the *Chronicon Paschale* offers a glimpse into a controversy so significant that even the most politically and theologically savvy emperor would almost certainly fail to reconcile opposing sides. In the end, the emperor had to accept the verdict of the Council: Christ had two, distinct natures.

Here, it should be noted that the *Chronicon Paschale* and John Malalas’ *Chronicle* reflect the anti-Chalcedonian policies of Justinian, while John of Nikiu denounces Justinian for supporting the Chalcedonian faith. John of Nikiu’s *Chronicle* reflects the negative opinions late 7th century Egyptians had about Justinian. Their opinion takes a rather consequentialist stance toward his theological compromise, either ignorant of his reasons for doctrinal compromise or entirely indifferent. Justinian would—in all actuality— support the Chalcedonian faith, but not because he liked it: Justinian compromised based on the desires of the influential bishops who attended the Fifth Oecumenical Council of Constantinople. Writing nearly a century after Malalas, John of Nikiu had no sympathy for Justinian; rather, he openly denounced the consequences of his theological compromise and thus the Emperor himself, labeling him “Chalcedonian.”

This chapter will not analyze these sources concerning the famous “Nika Riot” of 532 CE. Although it is widely accepted that this riot started from purely secular sources of discontent, there are curious issues indirectly related to religion and the emperor associated with this riot that have not been carefully examined by historians such as Alan

¹²⁹ *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby, and Whitby), 134; M. Whitby, and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, nn. 268, 373, 383.

Cameron.¹³⁰ The event occurred due to the failed hanging, and the refusal to acquit some faction members; however, in an effort to stop any further rioting the emperor appeared “bare headed” in the Hippodrome, “carrying the Holy Gospels.”¹³¹ Making an oath to forgive the rioting and granting what the crowd wished, his efforts were met with mixed chanting: some chanting “Augustus Justinian, *tu vincas*,” but others, “you are forsworn, ass.”¹³² The main point of this fiasco is that, in times of turmoil, an emperor may get a few supporters if he paraded around as pro-Christian, but appear non-partisan. Justinian’s brandishing of the Gospel failed, paling in comparison to the original attempt by Anastasias that succeeded almost twenty years earlier in his “*coup de theatre*” in 512 CE.¹³³

There were many calamities and many riots under Justinian: Secular life in general was tough for the easterners in this period of time. Sometimes, the poor rioted due to the “debasement of coinage;” at other times it was a matter of bread in which “[the crowd] chanted against the emperor during the City’s anniversary when a Persian ambassador was watching the races with the emperor...some of the prominent members of the Blue faction were arrested and punished.”¹³⁴ There were frequent riots within distinct populations periodically, specifically the Samaritans. One was alleged to have started after a Christian won a race against a Samaritan and a Jew; however, the second,

¹³⁰ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.72; M. Whitby, M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 358.

¹³¹ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.72; M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 358.

¹³² *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), pp. 623-4.

¹³³ M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 358.

¹³⁴ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.117, 18.121.

which was instigated by the Samaritans and Jews of Caesarea in Palestine, was described in an interesting way by Malalas: “After uniting together *like Blue-Green faction members* they attacked the Christians of the city and killed many of them. They attacked and plundered the churches *of the orthodox.*”¹³⁵ (emphasis added)

This passage would intimate that their activity was group-oriented, and not faction oriented, although reminiscent of the factions; this much is obvious. But what does it say about *faction riots* in general? Rioting in general must be distinct from faction-like rioting. Moreover, if this was not in a hooligan-like fashion (i.e., not concerning games), in what ways could their riots appear to be like “faction members”? These are questions that I cannot answer with full confidence, but it is clear that, like opposing factions (the Blues and the Greens), the Jews and Samaritans represent distinct populations of non-Christians. Joining together, presumably in a premeditated or corroborative fashion, they resembled the riots familiar to the Constantinopolitan riots Malalas must have witnessed time and time again. The final part concerning the “churches of the orthodox” raises further questions: did they *intentionally* target *only* the orthodox churches, or were these *incidentally* the only churches plundered? It is safe to say that their activities were similar to those of the factions (i.e., organized rioting)—even in the absence of chariot races—and they targeted Christians generally, although the churches looted happened to be “orthodox.”

The following riot is recounted in *The Chronicle of Theophanes The Confessor*, who alleges Malalas to be his source although we do not have a credible translation for

¹³⁵ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.35, 18.119.

Malalas himself between paragraphs 129 and 133.¹³⁶ We could substitute Malalas for Theophanes, who wrote his *Chronicle* in the mid to late 7th c. CE (d. 818 CE).

Theophanes' *Chronicle* is considered by many to be one of the most important sources of Byzantine history in the period from 602-813 CE. Theophanes' *Chronicle* is a continuation of George Synkellos' work (literally "cell-mate"). Both men were anti-iconoclast monks who operated near to Constantinople, although there is some debate about Theophanes' "orbit" between Constantinople and Bithynia.¹³⁷ Regardless, Theophanes' *Chronicle* is an extraordinary supplement to John Malalas' work, and as a consequence, Theophanes' work will be heavily utilized in this chapter.

After the typical rioting in the stands, accompanied by various chants ("Burn here, burn there, not a Green anywhere!"; 'Set alight, set alight! Not a Blue in sight.'"),¹³⁸ both of the factions sought sanctuary in churches. Interestingly, the Blues went to the Church of Mother of God at Blachernai and the Greens went to the Church of St. Euphemia at Chalcedon.¹³⁹ The Greens were punished after being evicted from the church. As noted previously, Justinian was decidedly anti-Chalcedonian and pro-Blue. The Church of St. Euphemia was a Chalcedonian church; the Blues fled to a church with prestige second only to that of the Hagia Sophia, which was near the emperor's residence and was being renovated by Justinian. One can only assume the church was favored by

¹³⁶ Jeffreys, Jeffreys and Scott, *Mal.*, n. 129.

¹³⁷ Mango, Scott, and Greatrex, *Theoph.*, 1i.

¹³⁸ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 236.

¹³⁹ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 236.

Justinian for reasons of faith (i.e., the church was influenced by the theological beliefs of the emperor). All of this underlies the fact that each faction went to churches of distinct theological traditions, one of which was in line with Justinian's beliefs and other was not (the latter of which was punished).

After this, Malalas records a variety of hooligan-like riots that culminated in arson and looting.¹⁴⁰ In 563 CE, the transition of power from Justinian to Justin II was prefaced with riots arising from the Greens and Blues interfering with the castration of a convicted rapist (of the Green faction). This marks the end of Malalas' account (ca. 564/5 CE).

The ascension of Justin II is barely mentioned by Malalas or in the *Chronicon Paschale*, with most years of his reign left empty in the latter. Interestingly, Justin II is entirely omitted from John of Nikiu. Theophanes gives some detail as to why this was so. A reign that lasted thirteen years, the emperorship of Justin II saw no serious rioting that was instigated by the factions: "...When the chariot races were being held and quarreling was breaking out among the factions, the emperor sent proclamations to each of the factions, saying to the Blues, 'The emperor Justinian is dead and gone from among you,' and to the Greens, 'The emperor Justinian still lives among you.' When the factions heard this, they became quiet and quarreled no longer."¹⁴¹

This passage gives credence to Michael Whitby's assertion concerning the indulgence of the emperor: If no faction can expect exemption from punishment, interest in rioting dwindles. Despite this conclusion, other influences are also absent as no

¹⁴⁰ Mal., *Chron.* (tr. Scott et al), 18.135-8.

¹⁴¹ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 243.

doctrinal issues are recorded by the chroniclers in this period. The same was true for Tiberius, the successor of Justin II. Even John of Nikiu comments on Tiberius' impartiality in matters of theology:

Now this emperor never permitted any persecution throughout his reign. And he presented many gifts to all his subjects, and he built many edifices in honor of the martyrs and houses in which the monks could pursue their religious exercises, and pulpits and covenants for the virgins.¹⁴²

Chariot races occurred as usual. Why would there not be the occasional outbreak of irrational hooliganism? Much is left unanalyzed by the chroniclers. To be sure, the omission of hooligan riots from these chronicles does not have a causal relationship with the absence of doctrinal issues, despite the chronicles mentioning very little of the latter as well. However, the omission of both such events is noteworthy, and, arguably, this omission is indicative of the influence doctrinal issues had the proverbial powder kegs that were the circus factions.

Tiberius' rule ended just shy of four years in 580/1 CE, and Maurice ascended the throne. Maurice had a theologically stagnant reign, the omission of any issues are omitted along with any factional rioting in *all three* chronicles (*The Chronicle of John the Bishop of Nikiu*, *Chronicon Paschale* and *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*). There were many battles with barbarians (the Avars, the Persians) in this time. This was a time of war; generals were among the most influential of men and money—not theology—was

¹⁴² *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 94.21.

what oiled the machines of war. John of Nikiu describes Maurice as being “very avaricious,” while Theophanes alleges Maurice to have “had the disease of avarice.”¹⁴³

The rioting in this period was largely due to decreases in pay or increases in taxes, and not in matters of theological doctrine as the soldiers just wanted to get paid. A 25% reduction in pay led to a revolt, which could only be quieted by “oaths and gifts” in 586/7 CE.¹⁴⁴ In 595/6 CE, the general Peter was hailed “Caesar” after he compromised Maurice’s orders to give the soldiers “one third of their pay in gold, one third in arms, and the remaining third in all kinds of clothing.”¹⁴⁵

While Theophanes focuses his *Chronicle* on the details of battles with the Persians, Moors, and Avars, John of Nikiu recounts anecdotes that supplement the otherwise theologically barren work of the late 6th c. CE. After capturing Chosroes, King of Persia, Maurice debated whether he ought to conduct a campaign to the east and attempt to reinstate the captured King:

the emperor Maurice betook himself to John, patriarch of the city of Constantinople, in order to deliberate with him. And this same John was an ascetic and ate no (animal) food whatever, and drank no wine, but supported himself sufficiently on the produce of the field and green vegetables. And there came together to him all the magistrates and officers in order to deliberate with him regarding Chosroes... And John cried aloud to them... ‘This man who has murdered his father cannot benefit the Empire. Nay it is Christ, our

¹⁴³ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 95.1; *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), pp. 260, 286-287.

¹⁴⁴ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 261.

¹⁴⁵ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 274.

true God, who will war on our behalf at all times against all the nations that attack us. And as for this man who has not been faithful to his father, how will he be faithful to the Roman Empire.’ But the emperor Maurice did not accept this advice.¹⁴⁶

The mention of Maurice disregarding the advice of a holy man bodes poorly for his campaign. After a successful campaign and installment of Chosroes, the Magi attempted to poison the Roman army after giving them food. The plot was discovered and the Persians were defeated yet again, however “all the Romans hated the emperor Maurice because of the calamities which had befallen in his days.”¹⁴⁷

In addition to explaining the rioting in this period as due to greed, the effect of John of Nikiu’s work is that those who were greedy are Chalcedonian, while the orthodox were entirely blameless. John of Nikiu considers himself orthodox and sympathizes for the struggles of Egyptians on account of their shared Monophysite beliefs. John of Nikiu’s disposition on matters of theology bolsters the analysis of the revolts he describes. John of Nikiu describes a revolt in which four governors revolted in Egypt and, in their greed, “attacked the Blue faction.” Meanwhile John the prefect of Alexandria was blamed for appointing them; however, the revolt happened without his knowledge, and “the faithful who loved Christ fought on his behalf because of his good conduct.”¹⁴⁸ Regrouping elsewhere in Egypt, “many people” including “the Blue and Green

¹⁴⁶ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 96.10-3.

¹⁴⁷ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 96.15-9.

¹⁴⁸ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 97.17.

Factions...took counsel with Eulogius, [the] Chalcedonian patriarch in the city of Alexandria” and “wanted to appoint a prefect in room of John.”¹⁴⁹

John would muster a force and put down the greed-driven, Chalcedonian supported revolt. Despite the anecdote being omitted from Theophanes and *Chronicon Paschale* (most likely due to being historically inconsequential), the story is far from meaningless for the present discussion. Rather, the perspective of the author does show through in matters of who is “good” and who is “bad,” partially distorting epistemological truths but partially illuminating the pragmatic realities of this Egyptian world. In this way, we must carefully consider his analysis, especially when John of Nikiu labels somebody a “Chalcedonian.” Taking this into account, a theme emerges in regard to the theological preferences of the factions: in times of turmoil, the Blues and Greens will group together and turn to whomever holds power, regardless of their doctrinal preferences. In this case, the factions thought John was against them and were misled by the patriarch they consulted who *just happened* to be Chalcedonian. While these passages seems to intimate doctrinal-homogeneity, in actuality, the bishop beseeched by the factions was most likely given the epithet “Chalcedonian” to suggest that he was a “bad guy” in John of Nikiu’s eyes.

Following the reign of the Emperor Maurice the Eastern Roman Empire was embroiled in civil war. Phocas, likely a general in the Roman army, usurped the throne in 602 CE for most of the next eight years. In this period, relations with the Persians significantly regressed and the empire bordered on collapse. Heraclius, a powerful

¹⁴⁹ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 97.11-2.

strategos in N. Africa, found support from those who disliked Phocas and eventually ascended the throne in 610 CE. This volatile period in Eastern Roman history highlights just how instrumental organized organizations of young men can be in times of political turnover (i.e. the factions). In this period of time there is increased rioting from the factions as well as more imperial reliance on the factions' support in a variety of instances. Moreover, the Chalcedonian Emperor Phocas—whose imperial legitimacy was highly suspect—killed many clergymen, including important Monophysite bishops. This analysis suggests that the underlying religiosity of the factions was a well-established fact, which the previously politically conscious or politically secure emperors were keen to avoid. Below, I will detail what I believe to be the reasons for the factions' increased activity in this time. My discussion will explicate the correlative nature between these events and the factions' increased activity; moreover, this analysis will provide a framework that supports the plausibility of the notion that violence sparked by theological views played a causational role in the rioting of the factions.

In the year 601/2 CE Phocas led the Roman army against the emperor, usurped Maurice's throne. Again, Theophanes quotes the words of Peter, his general, insulting Maurice: “ ‘...Avarice leads to nothing good, but is the mother of all evils. Since the emperor is sick with avarice, he is the cause of the greatest evils to the Romans.’”¹⁵⁰ This unrest gave way to unstable affairs within the city of Constantinople. The factions neglected their charge of “guarding the walls” and began to riot, the Greens setting fire to the “House of a Constantine surnamed Lardos,” an act of arson permitted by the

¹⁵⁰ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), pp. 286-287.

tumultuous situation in Constantinople. Maurice fled while Germanus (father-in-law to Maurice's son, Theodosius) "made overtures to Sergius, demarch of the Green faction, to enlist his support to make him emperor..."¹⁵¹

The plot thickened as the Greens asserted that, "Germanus would never break from his support of the Blues," and supported Phocas. The usurper gathered the Senate and the people at the Hebdomon, where the patriarch Kyriakos "demanded an assurance from the usurper regarding the orthodox faith." The patriarch did not get this "assurance," the Greens supported the usurper, and as a consequence Phocas was "proclaim[ed]...in the church of John the Baptist."¹⁵² The factions were faced with uncertainty, and, as a result, the factions were:

...at strife with each other over the position of their precincts. The usurper sent out his fellow rebel, Alexander, to calm the factions. Alexander came to blows with Kosmas, demarch of the Blues whom he shoved and insulted. The Blues out of annoyance began chanting 'Go away and learn the protocol. Maurice is not dead.'¹⁵³

Following this chanting of the annoyed Blues, Phocas set out to kill Maurice and his family: perhaps due to interpreting these "squabbles" as indirect support for Maurice.¹⁵⁴

These passages are extremely important to the present discussion because they shed light on the political importance of the factions when the political legitimacy of a

¹⁵¹ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 289.

¹⁵² *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 289; *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), p. 693.

¹⁵³ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 289.

¹⁵⁴ M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 402.

usurping emperor was in doubt. In Germanus' case, even with the support of the Blues, the ill will of the Greens was enough to preclude his rebellious efforts. Moreover, Phocas only sought to kill Maurice once he received unfavorable chanting from the Blues—who were responding to his hostile associate—that he perhaps over analyzed as support for Maurice. But a man in Phocas' position could not take chances, especially when it came to the factions.

Both *Theophanes* and *Chronicon Paschale* record the events of the short reign and the revolt against Phocas in relatively few words. A few interesting pieces of information they include will first be highlighted, and then this analysis will move on to John of Nikiu's more detailed sequence of events.

Phocas was in a precarious position militarily. Chosroes was the adopted son of Maurice, who had installed him in Persia. Furious at the usurpation, or perhaps jumping at the opportunity to attack Romans with no legitimate treaty, Chosroes devastated multiple Roman armies and hugely burdened Phocas' reign. In an attempt to oust Phocas, Constantia—Maurice's widow—was put into the Great Church, perhaps to make her a “rallying point” for disaffection.¹⁵⁵ The Greens thwarted this attempt by gathering at the *kochlias* (Archimedes Screw) and “reviled Constantia,” forcing Germanus to attempt to bribe the demarch of the Greens with a talent of gold.¹⁵⁶ Alas, his attempt failed, but Phocas was prevented from outright killing the women; the patriarch of Constantinople,

¹⁵⁵ *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby, p. 695; M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 406.

¹⁵⁶ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 293.

Kyriakos, made the usurper promise to do them no harm. Phocas remained honest to the (“orthodox”) bishop and the women were sent to a monastery along with Germanus and Philippicus (another conspirator). The holy man strikes again as the Emperor was pushed toward mercy.

Interestingly, after this event there was a faction riot—known as the riot of ‘the Greens under Crucis’—included in the *Chronicon Paschale*. While the cause of this riot is unknown, it was sufficiently “notorious” as to be referenced by Jacob the Jew (or the ‘Recently Baptized’) “in his ‘career’ of anti-Christian hooliganism.”¹⁵⁷ However, this does give credence to Whitby’s contention that, if a faction is favored, then it is more likely to riot. Alan Cameron’s *Factions* talks about the Emperor Justin II and, despite the lack of factional fighting under his reign, he persecuted Monophysites.¹⁵⁸

Theophanes provides a rather sensational introduction of Heraclius. Priscus, a patrician, married Phocas’ daughter Domentzia (in 606/7 CE). Celebrating their wedding, Phocas “commanded that chariot races be held. The demarchs of the two factions set up in the *tetrakiones* the *laurata* of Priscus and Domentzia along with the imperial ones.”¹⁵⁹ Needless to say, Phocas was outraged and threatened the demarchs—forced to stand stark naked in the *stama*—with beheading. There was a simple explanation, as it was an aesthetic choice of the decorators, and “the crowds went on shouting that these men should be treated mercifully” and Phocas gave in; however, the damage was done and

¹⁵⁷ *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), p. 695; Cameron, *Factions*, 282.

¹⁵⁸ A. Cameron, *Factions*, 127.

¹⁵⁹ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 294.

Priscus, who feared Phocas' intemperance would fall on his head throughout the order, "harbored anger and did not deal honestly with Phocas."¹⁶⁰ Following this event, Phocas mutilated and killed many people, which led to Priscus sending a letter to Heraclius, *strategos* of Africa, to attack Phocas.¹⁶¹ As a result of this intervention, grain ships did not set sail for Constantinople, and the revolt in Alexandria began in 608/9 CE. Thus, Heraclius is painted as the hero, ready to save the day.

There were many changes in patriarchs around this time, which was matched with an increase in rioting and the overthrow of Phocas. In 606 CE, Kyriakos the patriarch of Constantinople died and was replaced by Thomas. In 609 or 610 CE (depending on which chronology is consulted) Thomas died and was replaced by Sergius. In 609 CE the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch was killed. But who killed the Patriarch of Antioch? *Chronicon Paschale* recounts the murder was at the hands of Bonosus' soldiers (as it "was announced...had been killed by soldiers"),¹⁶² while Theophanes records it was from the riotous behavior of the Jewish population.¹⁶³ Theophanes reports that Bonosus, Phocas' general, was sent to quell the riot. We know from the text of Jacob the Jew that Bonosus appeared in Antioch when advancing toward Heraclius: "When Bonosus

¹⁶⁰ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 294.

¹⁶¹ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 295; *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), pp. 699-700.

¹⁶² *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), pp. 699-700.

¹⁶³ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), pp. 296-297; Mango, Scott and Greatrex 427, n. 3; *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), pp. 699-700.

massacred the Greens at Antioch, I was at Antioch, and, as a Blue and partisan of the emperor, I beat the Christians well, calling them Greens and traitors.”¹⁶⁴

Perhaps (a) the Antiochan Jews (who were allegedly being forced to become baptized) started an anti-Christian riot in which (b) the patriarch was killed by the Monophysite Greens or (c) the soldiers who were sent to quell the Greens’ rioting killed or facilitated the murder of the Monophysite Patriarch Anastasius. In fact, (a) coupled with (c) seems most plausible concerning Anastasius’ less than positive relation with the Chalcedonian Phocas. Theophanes’ account of the Green faction in Constantinople following Bonosus’ policing show the extent of their dismay with what had transpired in Antioch: “Phocas held chariot races and the Greens reviled him, saying ‘Once again you have drunk from the cup! Once again you have lost your mind!’”¹⁶⁵ The Greens were then maimed and dismembered, to which the Greens responded by riots and arson citywide; subsequently, Phocas was so angry that he “ordered that the Green should be barred from public office.” Given this account I feel it safe to assume that the Greens were upset at the Emperor. John of Nikiu’s account will shed light on this matter, but the present analysis begs the question: caused the Greens to riot. It is my contention that this riot was sparked by theological violence, perhaps between Phocas and the Patriarch of Antioch. I present reasons why I believe that the emperor killed the Patriarch of Antioch due to matters for theology and this sparked an empire-wide backlash spearheaded by the Green against Phocas. I would suggest that this denotes a *causational* relationship

¹⁶⁴ Mango, Scott and Greatrex, *Mal.*, 427, n. 3; *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, 1.40 (tr. D. S. Potter); M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 420.

¹⁶⁵ *Theoph.* (tr. Mango, Scott and Greatrex), p. 296.

between theological controversy and rioting; however, if one were to deny the certainty of this causal relationship, such a claim in no way diminishes the validity of a *correlative* relationship between these riots and theological issues. Indeed, the Patriarch was killed for some reason, and the Greens rioted in Antioch, and while the Greens in Constantinople hurled invective at Phocas. Perhaps Phocas did not prevent this murder, or perhaps he facilitated it. The fact remains that an empire-wide riot was sparked by the death of an influential Monophysite.

Neither the patriarch Anastasius' strong Monophysite beliefs nor Phocas' pro-Chalcedonian are stressed at any other time by either chronicler. What is most intriguing about the absence of *any* explicit theological or doctrinal lobbying by Phocas outside those clearly suggested here—in this religiously oriented riot, the details of which are obscured tremendously—is that Phocas' beliefs were *not* shared by the chroniclers. It was not difficult to denounce an emperor who committed atrocities, was killed in infamy, and was held to have damaged the Eastern Roman Empire irreparably. Perhaps to openly denounce his theological beliefs would be a discredit to their seemingly objective history (as the chronicles were anti-Chalcedonian). What does seem consistent is the Greens' denouncement of Phocas after Bonosus killed them and/or after the death of the patriarch of Antioch. Whether the latter was done at the hands of Bonosus' men is speculative. Do the Greens turn due to Phocas' brutal ending of their riot in which they killed the Monophysite patriarch? Or, alternatively, do the Greens turn due to the emperor's killing of the Monophysite patriarch? Either one seems plausible. Either answer gives credence to the notion that theological controversy was a decisive factor in the riots and consequently the favor imparted by a faction upon an emperor (and vice versa).

This marked the end of Phocas' influential reign. After this riot, both *Theophanes* and *Chronicon Paschale* recorded a decisive victory of Heraclius and followed with Phocas' brutal dismemberment. It goes without saying that these chronicles leave much to the imagination. Perhaps John the Bishop of Nikiu will shed light on the matter, with his unabashed theological partisanship.

Unlike the accusations of "avarice" that pepper Maurice in *Theophanes* and the *Chronicon Paschale*, John of Nikiu adds a twist to the invective: "Now [the people of Constantinople] were wont to call Maurice a heathen and a magician, and a person undeserving of the imperial throne...And the inhabitants of Constantinople were all of one mind, and cried out saying: 'Let us have a Christian emperor in this city.'"¹⁶⁶ This anecdote provides an excellent preface to the following account, in which political and religious invectives were identical in the eyes of the populace. The message is clear: If you are a heathen, no one is on your side in Constantinople. However, despite John of Nikiu's seemingly objective account of the chants of the populace, his history has been heavily edited to reflect the victory of orthodoxy and the defeat of the diophysites. But the question remains whether he, like the other chroniclers, omits the details of Phocas' reign that obscure the religious tensions that ran high? Fortunately for the historian, John of Nikiu's opinions shines through in nearly every passage.

However, to see this, we must first examine the other chronicles that reflect seemingly similar development of events already talked about to compare John of Nikiu's

¹⁶⁶ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 102.9-12.

distinctive style. John gives us an alternative account of the riot instigated by Antiochan Jews, the subsequent slaughter of the Greens and the patriarch in Antioch:

...great terror prevailed over the clergy of the east... no province was allowed to appoint a patriarch or any other ecclesiastical dignitary without [Phocas'] authorization. And the Orientals assembled in the great city of Antioch. When the troops heard of these doings they were enraged, and set out on horseback and...they slew many people in the church (and continued to slaughter) till they had filled all the edifices with blood.¹⁶⁷

Interestingly, John of Nikiu avoids talking about (a) Anastasius and (b) the Jews in Antioch altogether. The previous account corroborates with the *Chronicon Paschale* nicely (i.e., the soldiers killed the patriarch), while the following account seemingly corresponds to Bonosus' march toward Heraclius and subsequent stop in Egypt to put down the rebellion, including the slaughter of the factions:

...the officers of the [Merada in Egypt] and a large body of men revolted against [Phocas]...when Phocas heard he was very wroth and sent a very malignantly tempered general, named Bonosus...And he gave him full authority over the officers...of Antioch...Some of them he strangled, others he burnt, and others he gave to wild beasts. And those who belonged to the factions he delivered to the sword...Upon the monks and covenants of nun he perpetrated barbarities.¹⁶⁸

Whether these two accounts, together, give a more accurate picture of the events that transpired in Egypt is questionable. Perhaps John of Nikiu was trying to reconcile the

¹⁶⁷ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 104.1-3.

¹⁶⁸ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 105.1-6.

differing accounts previously discussed. Curiously, there is no mention of the murder of the patriarch of Antioch, a notable Monophysite. It is tempting to accept his order of events, given that “it was announced” that troops had killed the patriarch—in the *Chronicon Paschale*—nearly a year after (ca. 609 CE) when he almost certainly was killed.¹⁶⁹ Thus, it is entirely possible for the events to have been separated: The soldiers kill the bishop; the Greens riot after. The cycle is seemingly reflected above.

To be sure, there are no hard facts to fall back on when it comes to understanding these anecdotes; however, what I am suggesting is that this differing account need not pose any problems for the present analysis. Perhaps the truth of *why* these things happened was obscured by the relatively tumultuous times the Antiochan population had been in under Phocas. Closely following this account is Phocas’ appointment of “Theodore the Chalcedonian patriarch of Alexandria.”¹⁷⁰ While I do not doubt the truth of this fact, I question the intended effects of such a statement: Was John of Nikiu trying to make Phocas appear Chalcedonian? Likely, yes.

But what should this mean for the factions? It would explain the complete absence of Phocas’ initial favoritism of the Monophysite Greens, which Phocas doubled back on only to favor the Chalcedonian Blues. The first mention of either faction by name comes after these theologically defining statements (above), when the “notables of Egypt” were rallying behind Nicetas, among them the Green Faction.¹⁷¹ Perhaps in an

¹⁶⁹ *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), n. 420.

¹⁷⁰ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 107.6.

¹⁷¹ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 107.46.

attempt to distance the Greens from Phocas altogether—a group who was instrumental at getting him installed to begin with—John of Nikiu’s omission tells much about the implications of such an association. This is not the only time in which such an omission can be found: “And taking advantage of the war between Bonosus and Nicetas, the *artisan guilds* of Egypt arose and perpetrated outrages on ‘the Blues’ and gave themselves shamelessly to pillage and murder.”¹⁷² Zotenberg gives an alternative translation for “artisan guilds”: “Greens.” To what extent this terms was meant to obscure their relation to shameless acts would be speculative to be sure, however not entirely unwarranted.

The rest of John of Nikiu’s account remains relatively consistent with the alliance of the Greens: “...Heraclius the elder sent Heraclius the younger to the city of Byzantium with ships...many people, notably the Green faction went on board with him... The Green faction and the inhabitance of...Byzantium, who were on the sea, assembled their ships and pursued the ‘Blues.’”¹⁷³ The *Chronicon Paschale* corroborates this anti-Blue sentiment. While the triumphant Heraclius celebrated in the Hippodrome, “the Blue flag was also burnt.”¹⁷⁴ Phocas’ heavy reliance on the support of the Blues is reflected in those mutilated after his fall: “The race-starter and the sergeant of the city prefect...were likewise burnt...”¹⁷⁵ *Chronicon Paschale* does not mention the involvement of the

¹⁷² *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 109.16.

¹⁷³ *John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 110.3.

¹⁷⁴ *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), p. 701.

¹⁷⁵ *Chron. Pasch.* (tr. Whitby and Whitby), p. 701.

Greens as much, perhaps in an attempt to distance Heraclius' victory (a "quasi-official version") from the "unruly factions."¹⁷⁶ The *Chronicon Paschale* has come under scrutiny for what it omits. Modern historians have suggested that an "orthodox" copyist altered the text, which resulted in the omission of multiple emperors' ties to Monophysite beliefs. This would additionally explain multiple gaps on the chronology (e.g., Anastasius' Monophysite beliefs, and the "termination" of the text in the year 630 CE).¹⁷⁷ Scholars disagree on this issue, but the fact remains that there are unexplained gaps and omissions, the cause of which might have been intentional, or perhaps accidental. Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby reject the idea that a copyist intentionally altered the text concerning the termination date of the *Chronicon Paschale* and concerning Anastasius Monophysite sympathies; however, there is no good reason to think that this intentional omission by a later copyist must extend only to the gaps in the text. Could certain facts have been smoothed over and not omitted in their entirety? Michael Whitby and Mary Whitby believe this was because of the "official" nature of the *Chronicon Paschale*, but I think the other explanation—the intentional omission of Monophysite sympathies—could equally explain the omission of the Greens' connection to Heraclius' victory. That is, if one were to admit the Greens were Monophysites, or that an orthodox copyist intentionally altered this part of the text. I find this explanation more satisfying, but perhaps the differences between other chronicles and the gaps in years were due to multiple influences and motivated parties, compounding over the years.

¹⁷⁶ M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, n. 423.

¹⁷⁷ M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chron. Pasch.*, Appendix 1

Let us turn briefly to the reasons why each chronicler might favor Heraclius, outside of his outstanding service to the Eastern Roman Empire. Heraclius was known for his attempts to reconcile Chalcedonian beliefs with Monophysite beliefs (“monotheletism”),¹⁷⁸ and this is perhaps the reason why John of Nikiu described Heraclius generously (describing him as “orthodox”¹⁷⁹) when contrasted with Phocas—a notable Chalcedonian—while denouncing his son and grandson due to their Chalcedonianism (“the great Severus, patriarch of Antioch, wrote... ‘No son of a Roman emperor will sit on the throne of his father, so long as the sect of Chalcedonians bears sway’”).¹⁸⁰ Theophanes, an anti-iconoclast (“iconodule”), depicts Heraclius as following in his own theological beliefs as well:

Taking in his hands the likeness of the Man-God—the one that was not painted by the hand, but which the Logos, who shapes and fashions everything, wrought like an image without recourse to painting, just as He experiences birth without seed—the emperor placed his trust in this image painted by God and began his endeavors.¹⁸¹

In fact, each chronicler had their reasons for attributing favor upon Heraclius due to matters of theology. There were always enemies, champions of any theological doctrine. In this case, the violent changes in government affected matters of patriarchic appointment, the predictions of holy men, and, consequently, the favor or hatred of whole

¹⁷⁸Elizabeth Jeffrys, John F. Haldon, and Robin Cormack, *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) 254-255.

¹⁷⁹*John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 115.9.

¹⁸⁰*John of Nikiu* (tr. Zotenburg), 116.6.

¹⁸¹*Theoph.* (tr. Mango et al), p. 303.

cities. Most important, during the civil war between Phocas and Heraclius, all of these factors were present, and undoubtedly influenced the political partisanship of the color-coordinated armies that were the circus factions.

The preceding discussion does not rely upon one source, one reading, or even commit itself to the analysis of any single passage. The discussion provides an opportunity to work through the issues previous unexamined while considering the theological influences that have previously not been given adequate weight in light of the not insignificant evidence in their favor. I would like to stress that no single factor—political, sports-related, or theological—can be attributed as the sole “cause” of any single riot. While hooligan riots are the most common kind of riot between Justinian and Heraclius, the discussion of the sources (above) does not warrant a sole, causational source; rather, we have seen that there may be other causes for why these might have been prevented (e.g., a non-partisan emperor; religious freedom) but—perhaps the most important piece of evidence—we have seen that seemingly inexplicable riots erupt in times of political instability and theological controversy. Next, the discussion has examined why a particular emperor might favor particular factions. This imperial favor changed frequently and no single cause for a faction’s hatred or loyalty or an emperor’s kindness or cruelty can be attributed to any one cause. However, as we have seen, the theological influences are highly relevant in determining this relationship (particularly in the mid to late period of an emperor’s reign).

The chroniclers’ works are invaluable to our understanding of the turbulent period in Byzantine, Syrian, and Egyptian life in the later Roman Empire. The chroniclers’ theological views and opinions must be carefully parsed out from their accounts to quarry

the vast amount of information they provide. This fact alone shows the theological influence that permeated nearly every aspect of life in this period: writing history; daily life of rural and urban peasants; how an emperor went about solidifying his political image; circus faction participation and “hooliganism.” Local bishops and holy men undoubtedly influenced these volatile aspects of society and culture, adding proverbial fuel to the fire as many emperors pursued doctrinal unity, and as a result schismatic activities and heretical titles were commonplace in this time period.

CONCLUSION

The previous chapters covered a variety of topics, detailed the issues, and offered analysis concerning the increasingly violent behavior of the circus factions in the Eastern Roman Empire. Holy men emerged as a force early in the history of the Eastern Empire, between the 4th and 7th centuries CE, although these influential ascetics changed their attitudes and practice over the centuries they remained a driving force in the 6th and 7th centuries CE, influencing both the daily life of the rural peasantry and imperial policies. From the death of Justin to the accession of Heraclius, irreconcilable theological views resulted in schismatic behavior and Councils in heresies and persecutions, during which multi-day factional riots were becoming more and more common. As emperors such as Justinian dabbled in doctrinal changes and theological unification, Christian Byzantium became divided even more deeply and patriarchs, generals, and holy men responded accordingly. Patriarchs oversaw local populations and held tremendous sway over their sees; generals controlled armies capable of supporting or quieting any theological rioting; holy men offered inspirational words and advice for imperial administrators in dire straits. The policies, lifestyles, and theological preferences of these influential men would ultimately shape the fate of Byzantium by the mid 7th century.

The discussion of the Christianized world of the holy man, the increasingly theologically oriented policies of the emperors and the increasing turnover of bishops provides correlations between theological events and issues that coincided with factional rioting. Indeed, a single source may offer a compelling account for the doctrinal partisanship of the emperors and the factions (a correlative relationship), while a single

chronicle may provide evidence for the theological causes for specific riots (a causal relationship). However, when coupled with the intrinsically religious world these circus factions functioned within, these and other sources provide a plausible setting for the theologically-influenced riots that embroiled the volatile world of the Eastern Roman Empire between the 5th and 7th centuries CE.

The previous chapters have also detailed the multifarious social, political and even militaristic functions the factions played between the 5th and 7th centuries CE. While the factions chanted for the health of the emperor, acclaimed local notables and cheered for their colors in the circus, the factions also played a more violent role outside the hippodromes of the East. From hooligan riots to bread riots, the factions voiced the needs, desires, and outrage of local populations. However, far from nonpolitical, the factions had their own agenda: profit from imperial support. Some emperors indulged their desire, perhaps due to a symbiotic relationship each side enjoyed, especially in times of tenuous accession or negative public opinion. These are the cultural, social, and administrative facts that set the tone for the riotous behavior of the factions.

As detailed in the first chapter, there have been many authors who either deny or decline to comment on whether the Greens were Monophysites, the Blues were Chalcedonian, or that such attributions—even if true—contributed to the riots in a significant way. Indeed, there are many scholars who are opposed to relying upon the chronicles as credible primary sources, the very same accounts that this analysis utilizes. While I agree that the theological discontent that occurred between the reigns of Justinian and Heraclius cannot be the *sole* causes of the increasing riots of factions, these

theological factors cannot be discounted. Many of the authors who wrote influential works concerning the secular nature of the factions' rioting did so before more modern scholarship on the chroniclers' work had emerged. Others, I have argued, do not give enough weight to the inherently religious world the rural peasants lived—as reflected in the hagiographies of ascetic holy men—that permeated even the emperors' courts. To ignore the intrinsically theological nature of both the emperorship and political partisanship in this period is problematic, as I have argued, given the overwhelming evidence found in numerous primary works that are discussed above.

Most critics contend that no *positive* conclusions can be drawn definitively, preferring instead to leave the discussion at the “plausibility” some texts grant to attributing theological controversy as the cause of factional rioting in this time. It is not uncommon for critics to assert that the *mere* plausibility that theological controversy influenced the riots of the factions supports their alternative conclusions about the very same riots. Again, these are venerable scholars with great ideas; however, no single idea explains all of the riots in this period, much less some of the more complex riots themselves. I contend that, although hooligan-like behavior and even imperial favor led to an increase of factional rioting, these factors are merely a few that drove local populations to the brink of civil war, patriarch to the executioner, and emperors to persecute whole sects of Christians in this time period. Undoubtedly there is a wider context, as reflected in the work of the chroniclers, to place the discontented doctrinal partisans, the increasingly violent factions and the ever-increasing turnover in emperors between the mid 6th and mid 7th centuries CE.

I have stressed that my analysis rests neither upon a single source nor to the exclusion of differing analysis over the very same sources that have been discussed above. I have set forth a dynamic model, which rests on no single piece of evidence. Michael Whitby has compelling arguments concerning the political influences of the factional rioting in this period, while Alan Cameron's "hooligan model" might adequately explain the cause for several different violent outbursts at chariot races.

There were undoubtedly multiple factors that contributed to every riot, some more obvious than others depending on the conduct, the setting, and the influential partisans of any specific riot. One thing is for certain: The chroniclers provide much information and support for the idea that the factions *did* have religious opinions that influenced their stance on imperial policies and military action. Whether every event that contributed to this evidence actually happened as described is dubious; however, the attitudes reflected by the chroniclers seem to consistently support the idea that religious beliefs influenced political partisanship, imperial persecutions and, in turn, riots from Antioch to Alexandria to Constantinople.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso, 2006.
- Beard, Charles A. "Written History as an Act of Faith." *American Historical Review* Vol. 39 no 2 (Jan 1934): 219-231. 21 November 2011
http://www.historians.org/info/aha_history/cabeard.htm.
- Brown, Peter. "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity."
The Journal of Roman Studies Vol. 61 (1971): 80-101.
- . *The World of Late Antiquity: A.D. 150-750*. NY: W.W. Norton & Co. 1989.
- Cameron, Alan. *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1999.
- Chadwick, Henry. *The Early Church*. NY: Penguin, 1993.
- Dagron, G. and Deroche, V. "Juifs et Chretiens dans L'Oreint du Viie siècle."
Traveaux et Memoires 11:17-273. Trans. D.S. Potter.
- Dawes, Elizabeth A. S., and Norman Hepburn Baynes. *Three Byzantine Saints: Contemporary Biographies*. London: Mowbrays, 1977.
- Doran, Robert, Theodoret, and Antonius. *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992.
- Gager, John G. *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Haldon, John F., *Byzantium in the Seventh Century: Transition of a Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Harris, Harold Arthur. *Sport in Greece and Rome*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1972.

Hobsbawm, E. J., and T. O. Ranger. *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridgeshire: Cambridge UP, 1983.

Humphrey, John H. *Roman Circuses: Arenas for Chariot Racing*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.

Jeffreys, Elizabeth et al. *Studies in John Malalas*. Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1990.

Jones, A.H.M. *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey Vol. I & II*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

Kaldellis, Anthony. *Prokopios: The Secret History*. Indianapolis: The Hackett Publishing Company, 2010.

Liebeschuetz, J. H. W. G. *Decline and Fall of the Roman City*. Oxford, UK.: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Le Roy Ladurie, Emmanuel. *Carnival: A People's Uprising at Romans 1579-1580*. London: Scolar, 1980.

---. *Montaillou: The Promise Land of Error*. Trans. Barbara Bray. NY: George Braziller, 1978.

Malalas, John, Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott. *The Chronicle of John Malalas*. Melbourne: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1986.

- Mango, Cyril. *Byzantium: The Empire of New Rome*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980.
- Mango, Cyril, ed. *The Oxford History of Byzantium*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Mango, Cyril A. Roger Scott, and Geoffrey Greatrex. *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor: Byzantine and Near Eastern History, AD 284-813*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997.
- Meijer, Fik. *Chariot Racing in the Roman Empire*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 2010.
- Millar, Fergus. *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief Under Theodosius II 408-450*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007.
- Pharr, Clyde et al. *The Theodosian Code and Novels and the Sirmondian Constitutions*. NY: The Greenwood Press, 1969.
- Potter, David S. "Cities in the Eastern Roman Empire from Constantine to Heraclius." *Archaeology and the Cities of Late Antiquity in Asia Minor*. Ed. Ortwin Daily and Christopher Ratte. Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum of Archaeology, 2011. 247-60.
- . *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- . "Performance, Power and Justice in the High Empire." *Roman Theater and Society*. Ed. William J. Slater. Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1996. 129-61.
- . *The Victor's Crown: A History of Ancient Sport from Homer to Byzantium*. NY: Oxford University Press, 2011.

- Potter, David S. and D. J. Mattingly. *Life, Death, and Entertainment in the Roman Empire*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999.
- Price, Richard and Michael Gaddis. *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon Vol. 1*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005.
- Wallas, Graham. *Human Nature in Politics*. London: Achibald Constable & Co, 1908.
- 13 November 2011
- <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc2.ark:/13960/t4zg6hj40> .
- Whitby, Michael. "The Violence of the Circus Factions." *Organised Crime in Antiquity*. Ed. Keith Hopwood. London: Duckworth, 1999. 229-251.
- Whitby, Michael and Mary Whitby. *Chronicon Paschale*. Liverpool: University Press, 1989.
- White, Carolinne. *Early Christian Lives*. Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1998.
- Wittow, Mark. *The Making of Byzantium, 600-1025*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Zotenberg, J. H. and R. H. Charles. *The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*. London: Pub. for the Text and Translation Society by William & Norgate, 1916.