# What Did Theodosius Know and Ambrose Conceal? Another Look at the Callinicum Episode (388 CE)

Much scholarly effort has been devoted to exploring the tensions between Christians and pagans as the former strove to establish their control over the public arena. Much less, however, has focused on the polemics and violence that newly empowered Christians directed toward other Christians, and toward Jews.[[1]](#endnote-1) These incidents must be taken together: understanding pagan–Christian and intra-Christian violence cannot be separated from analysis of brawls between Christians and Jews.[[2]](#endnote-2) Before 400 CE, anti-Jewish violence prevailed in neither half of the empire.[[3]](#endnote-3) Belligerent rhetoric was not matched by violent actions.[[4]](#endnote-4) We must also note the clear discrepancy between reports of violent Christian seizures or destruction of pagan or Jewish holy sites and the lack of an archaeological record of such episodes on the ground. Outbursts of violence between these religious rivals since Rome became Christian may have occurred, but these have left scant traces in the historical records—and, consequently, in modern scholarship. In actual fact, some such incidents did indeed have a major impact and a high profile in the public sphere, due not least to their later deployment by extremely influential public figures.

In the annals of the study of *religious* *violence* in Late Antiquity, the destruction of the synagogue in Callinicum[[5]](#endnote-5) usually receives pride of place—though mostly for the wrong reasons. This episode represents for many scholars a significant inflection point in the history of religious violence in the Theodosian period.[[6]](#endnote-6)

A clear view of Callinicum’s social impact may elude us, though certain inferences about its legal ramifications may be drawn. In this regard, the destruction of the synagogue at Callinicum by a Christian mob, mobilized by episcopal incitement, demands attention. How, then, are we to understand the Callinicum affair?[[7]](#endnote-7)

Our sole (if indirect) witness to the event, which he linked over the course of two epistles to a report of an attack on a Valentinian church, is Ambrose of Milan.[[8]](#endnote-8) Ambrose became enmeshed in a chain reaction to these incidents, becoming—according to his account and his lengthy accompanying discussion—one of the two prominent protagonists historically linked to this episode. A further historical indication of the effects of the event may be the law promulgated by Theodosius I in 393, protecting synagogues from malicious acts.[[9]](#endnote-9) That this law was promulgated five years after the incident in Callinicum, however, militates at first sight against linking the two events, but, on further thought the time that elapsed between the Callinicum event and the promulgation of the law in 393 CE could also be attributed to the emperor’s effort to ward off possible public sentiments accusing him of siding with the Jews.

Callinicum is also important for the insight it gives us into the contest for authority between *imperium* *et sacerdotium*. Scholars have tended to accept Ambrose’s account of his contest with Theodosius at face value, despite its invisibility in contemporary sources.[[10]](#endnote-10) This absence of contemporary reports suggests that the incident might have been quite minor, but that Ambrose retrospectively inflated its (and his own) importance to serve his own agenda. Ambrose’s epistles are, to repeat, our sole source of information for these two violent episode(s). Since they came down to us via his epistle collection, they are in fact products of a later, post-Theodosian, redaction by the bishop, even though their initial composition may have occurred closer to the events that they purport to describe.[[11]](#endnote-11) One is inclined to agree with Neil McLynn’s meticulous analysis, that the final account tendered by Ambrose was considerably enhanced with hindsight and rhetoric.[[12]](#endnote-12)

Like McLynn, we also agree that Ambrose used the Callinicum affair as a pretext for the promotion of a more covert agenda: as well as the promotion of his own prestige and authority over internal ecclesiastical affairs, this concerned the regulation of the position of priests and the curial rank, and his general demand that priests be consulted on issues relating to *causa religiosa.* Yet, given McLynn’s conclusion that Ambrose wrote his initial complaint knowing that Theodosius rescinded the punitive orders in his initial rescript to the *comes Orientis*, we found ourselves intrigued by the sheer amount of space that the Callinicum incident occupied in that epistle, which in our reckoning goes beyond, though does not contradict, the idea that it served as a pretext.[[13]](#endnote-13) The space which Ambrose devoted to this episode in the course of his quite entangled “dialogue” with the emperor led us to think that there was more than meets the eye regarding the actual episode, and that, in fact, there a whole hidden layer which called for further probing.

Hence, we wish to argue that, lurking behind all the Callinicum “pretext,” there is a layer of concealed issues, well known to both Ambrose and to the emperor, but which the bishop went out of his way to suppress in the interests of his own impact on his public readership and on posterity. Given the fact that Ambrose’s epistles divulge only the very bare facts of the incident(s)—Callinicum being mentioned only once and in passing in the course of the letter to the emperor (14), and the conflation of the two incidents with the Jews and the Valentinians—it is not surprising that most of the scholarly discussions were and still are focused on his rhetoric. Moreover, the *communis opinio* has it that the Jews mentioned by Ambrose in his other writings were not real living Jews, and thus those figuring in his letters served as tools in a rhetorical, polemical drama.[[14]](#endnote-14) We, on the contrary, suspect that Ambrose’s vitriolic attack on “the Jews” does reflect present realities, more than has been assumed thus far.[[15]](#endnote-15) As will become apparent in the course of our paper, the circumstances surrounding the Callinicum incident flashed out the tension between Ambrose and Emperor Theodosius which was fueled by conflicting agendas concerning public order advocated by both, the potentate and prelate.

The full force of Ambrose’s epistle to Theodosius becomes apparent once its structure is exposed. The letter ought to be divided into two separate and near-equal units: 1–17 (the injustice visited upon the church) and 18–33 (the impiety of the Jews and their supporters). The first part was clearly penned and formulated by a legal mind befitting Ambrose’s earlier educational formation and career.[[16]](#endnote-16) In this context, Ambrose demands from the emperor *libertas—*freedom, in its political form as a desirable virtue in an emperor who refrains, as an *optimus princeps*, from abusing his unlimited power and allows his subjects to speak openly.[[17]](#endnote-17) In this context, biblical exempla of prophetic rebukes to kings also came in handy: Ambrose walked a path well trodden by other fellow bishops such as Hilary of Poitiers, and by contemporary orators such as Libanius.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Indeed, in our view, Ambrose’s convoluted line of argument and his excessive use of rhetorical devices such as *antistasis*,[[19]](#endnote-19) as well as other methods typical of an accomplished rhetorician and former pagan official, contributed a great deal to creating a facade which was meant to blur the real characteristics of the event in the far Roman East in the service of much greater issues. Thus, the textual juncture we wish to explore is the axis between “fact and fiction” which Ambrose so relentlessly tried either to distort or to conceal from his readers.

A good place to begin our exploration of Ambrose’s rhetorical deceits is his claim that the recent violent precedent was actually set by the Jews in the days of Julian, when they putatively burned down a set of basilicas in different locations in the eastern part of the Roman state. “The Church was not avenged, but the synagogue will be?” (*Ecclesia non vindicata est*, *vindicabitur synagoga?*). While Ambrose claims that justice must be carried out here according to the *ius gentium*, the set of violent incidents in the days of the Emperor Julian involving the Jews is fraudulent and presented in a distorted manner.[[20]](#endnote-20)

What about more concrete issues regarding the Callinicum incident, such as the time and place? The former is certainly a rather minor detail, and most scholars who have addressed the issue of the exchanges between Ambrose and Theodosius I have defined only the probable chronological boundaries in which the open exchange between the bishop and the emperor might have taken place. This was to be determined by an assessment of the time of arrival of the news from the east. Many scholars ignored the need to determine a rather more precise date, remaining content with dating the event(s) vaguely to 388 CE.[[21]](#endnote-21) Others have come up with various other dates. Those vary between the immediate aftermath of Maximus’s defeat to sometime during the subsequent months, that is between the end of August 388 and possibly extending to the end of November of the same year, the month in which Chromatius, Bishop of Aquileia, was most probably consecrated in the presence of Ambrose, following the death of Valerian on 26 November.[[22]](#endnote-22) A more precise dating aims to place the composition of the letter by Ambrose during the latter part of the month of November and during December of 388.[[23]](#endnote-23) Given the accepted assumption that Ambrose wrote his letter when he knew that the emperor had already rescinded his initial order that the *comes Orientis* punish Callinicum’s bishop by demanding that he rebuild the synagogue from his own pocket, and that he punish the monks involved in the clash with the Valentinians, the actual event(s) must have taken place some weeks earlier.[[24]](#endnote-24) For, according to recent new assessments which model Roman connectivity in the spheres of political and military movements, as well as information networks, and based on a thorough assessment of the available routes, costs, and speed of movement during winter or summer, the information traveling from Callinicum to Aquileia or Milan (where the emperor resided during the late summer and early autumn), would have taken five or more weeks via courier,[[25]](#endnote-25) and in the case at hand slightly more still, when we allow for some sort of local investigation.[[26]](#endnote-26) Moreover, and just for the record, if we allow for up to another full five-plus additional weeks, following Theodosius’s second order to the *comes Orientis* andprior to Ambrose’s penning his letter in its initial version, then the event(s) in Callinicum and near Antioch (involving the Valentinians) were by that point somewhat “distant” incidents. Certainly, contrary to what Ambrose might have wished to convey by the heated and tense tone of his attack on the emperor, and given the real time that had lapsed between the inception of the event and its later phases, the whole matter was already destined to be recast into its polemical, rhetorical form.

There was, however, yet more to it. The geographical distance from Milan played into the hands of Ambrose, and while writing to the emperor he capitalized on it. “If you are moved to anger by the burning of even the most worthless buildings—for what else could there be in such an *obscure fortified settlement*(*in tam ignobili castro*)—do you not remember, emperor, how many mansions of prefects have been burned in Rome, without anyone exacting punishment?”[[27]](#endnote-27) This harping on the contrast between center and periphery definitely sounded impressive. As a small garrison town (*castra*) on the edge of the Roman frontier, a distant and peripheral point in the Roman *orbis terrarum*, Callinicum was placed in sharp contrast to Rome as the epicenter of that very same universe.

But was Callinicum indeed so unimportant? It seems not. The bishop’s subtle rhetorical presentation obscures the weakness of his point. Although Ambrose might not have been well informed, even when granted his good contacts within imperial circles, his claim concerning the obscurity of the Osrhoene garrison town was a gross underestimation in light of the reality that was known all too well by the emperor, who was above all an accomplished general. Nicephorium/Callinicum—better known from the Abbasid period as a-Raqqa and situated on the river Balīkh, a small tributary of the Euphrates (*in vicinia Euphratis*, *Nicephorion*)—was most probably founded in the Seleucid era (under Seleukos Nikator (301–281 BCE). It served in the days of Emperor Julian on his final expedition against the Persians as a reliable stronghold in very close proximity to the Sassanian–Roman border.[[28]](#endnote-28) But Callinicum, alongside two other eastern towns, also served as an important trade center between Persia and Rome, so much so that by 408/409 CE the Roman emperors Honorius and Theodosius II promulgated the following law:

Merchants subject both to our empire as well as to the king of the Persians should not hold period markets (*nundinae*) beyond those places in which it was agreed upon by us at the time of the treaty (298 CE) with the aforementioned nation. Lest the secrets of a foreign kingdom be found out (*ne alieni regni*, *quod non convenit*, *scrutentur arcana*). Therefore no one hereafter subject to our empire should dare to set out beyond Nisibis, Callinicum, and Artaxatafor the sake of buying and selling merchandise (*species*), nor should he think of exchanging merchandise with a Persian except in the cities mentioned (*Nullus igitur posthac imperio nostro subjectus ultra Nisibin Callinicum et Artaxata emendi sive vendendi species*).[[29]](#endnote-29)

The legislation of 408 CE referred to an initial treaty from Diocletian’s days that concerned only the town of Nisibis but, as seen here, was extended to include Callinicum as well. Moreover, the law cited above, albeit promulgated twenty years after the episode discussed here, no doubt attests to Callinicum’s well-established mercantile prestige and status, coupled with its regional military importance.[[30]](#endnote-30) Callinicum, in brief, was no obscure backwater, but an important nerve center along the boundary spine between Persia and Rome.

In order to understand the importance of Callinicum alongside the other two cities mentioned in the law, one has to note the wider picture of the trade and security concerns in the region. Unlike other sections of the Roman–Persian border (mainly along the Euphrates), which consisted of fortified posts (such as Dura-Europos in the third century and others), the region in northeast Syria better known as Mesopotamia and Osrhoene was defended by a concentration of well-defined posts governing the open plains of the Syrian steppe to the east and southeast of Beroea. This situation presented an even more difficult challenge to both superpowers, Rome and Persia, requiring special efforts in monitoring movements of groups and individuals in this area.[[31]](#endnote-31) Accordingly, following the defeat of Julian in the summer of 363, Nisibis was ceded to the Persians, and Callinicum was the only one of the three mentioned centers of trade to remain within Roman borders, thus, as later proved to be the case, meriting its pivotal status.[[32]](#endnote-32) Overall, it should be emphasized that the entire area surrounding Callinicum underwent a major development during late Roman rule, proof of its strategic position close to the Roman front with Persia and along the trade routes which reached their apex in the fifth and sixth centuries. This state of affairs was known all too well to Theodosius I. Ambrose’s slighting remark about Callinicum’s obscurity registers as somewhere between unfounded and ridiculous.[[33]](#endnote-33)

Let us now turn our attention to the other explicit motive behind this frontier legislation, which was aimed not only at regulating economic activity, but also at curbing the free flow of information liable to be passed on in such bustling commercial meeting points in this frontier zone. These places provided opportunity for information, sometimes sensitive, to be easily passed between parties from either side of the border. The effort to check this potential flow of information without impairing the mercantile activity that drew merchants to it from as far afield as the western regions of the empire was most probably easier to effect by the presence of an army garrison.[[34]](#endnote-34) If we add to this mix insinuations concerning the potential or actual treachery of the Jews (discussed below in more detail), the violent act against the Jewish community might have become a cause for concern.

Where were the Jews in all this? What was their role and place in the context described above? It is quite difficult to determine the makeup of the local Jewish community, let alone its size, but we may assume that members of that community had their share in the local mercantile activity.[[35]](#endnote-35)

In this social, political, and military context, a few questions remain open. Nowhere in his letter to the emperor does Ambrose hint at what might have triggered the local Christians’ violent attack on Callinicum’s synagogue. Was there any provocation on the part of the Jews besides the distant, unrelated precedent of violent anti-Christian outbursts led by Jews in the days of Julian, conjured up by Ambrose to justify his demands upon the emperor? Clearly, from his own tacit admission, Ambrose was not privy to the details of the incident; or, conversely, he opted to conceal whatever did not suit his agenda. If we are to follow the guidelines suggested by Johannes Hahn, religious issues alone cannot provide a viable explanation for these outbursts, since conflicts with violent outcomes were invariably mingled with other issues.[[36]](#endnote-36) What then triggered the Callinicum event? Could we, for the sake of argument, given the nature of the town’s probable social makeup as a trade center, contemplate the possibility that competition with the local Jewish merchants only intensified standing religious grudges and resentments? When and how such grievances might turn into extreme intolerance and later violence in the local context is not easy to answer.[[37]](#endnote-37)

On further thought, however, we might after all be in some sort of position to clear up some of the fog shrouding the Callinicum event. If another incident involving the destruction of a synagogue in another remote location in the same region close to the Sassanian territory is something to go by in the way of filling in the gaps, we would like to draw attention to an anecdote found in the Vita of Sergius by John of Ephesus. According to the tradition, Sergius led his disciples into an ongoing conflict ca. 520 CE with the Jewish community of Kalesh, a small village in the territory of Amida. It is our contention that this story, recently analyzed by Fergus Millar, could shed some light on the pieces missing from the enigmatic puzzle that is the Callinicum incident, and more so on the shared atmosphere in which these strained extra-communal relations developed. A short extract from the Vita will suffice. The narrative begins with Sergius’s wishes to begin a life as a recluse:

But, before doing this, because there were *many Jews* in that village and they went about with great freedom (*prhsyʾ=parrhesia*), he carried on a continuous contest (ܬܟܬܘܫܐ ܐܡܝܢܐ) against them, and every day he used to contend against them as with slayers of God … and he used to upbraid Christians who had dealings with them (=the Jews) in the way of taking and giving. And one day he led about twenty of their (Simeon’s and his) disciples by night, and took fire, and went and burnt their great synagogue-house (house of Shabbat), with their book (ܣܦܪ݀ܝܗܘܢ), their trumpets (ܘܫܝܦܘܪ݀ܝܗܘܢ) and all their furniture (ܘܟܘܠܗܿܬܫܡܫܬܗܘܢ).[[38]](#endnote-38) But these men when they saw that all their hope had been cut off through the burning of their books and all of their furniture, lamented bitterly, and because they were settled in the territory of the church of Amida (ܘܡܛܘܠܠ ܕܒܬܘܬܒܘܬܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܕܐܡܿܕ ܝܿܬܒܝܢ ܗܘܘ) and used to pay many contributions to the members of the church … *all the members of the church became their supporters*, threatening the blessed Sergius … But the zealous man, when these men [=the Jews] had gone into the church of the city to prefer an accusation, while the fire was still in their synagogue, collected all his master’s disciples with him and *all the others from the village*,and took water and went and put out the fire; and they cleared all the soil; and they collected stones and within three days built a small martyr’s chapel in that place.[[39]](#endnote-39)

Ignoring the gap in time between the two incidents, and allowing for omissions and different priorities of presentation by John of Ephesus writing in Constantinople a generation or so after the actual events, there might yet be some important similarities with the Callinicum episode.[[40]](#endnote-40) Bearing in mind the differences between Kalesh (a small remote village in the northeastern edge of the Roman Empire close to the Tigris river) and Callinicum (which maintained its centrality during the sixth century), some unique similarities indicate a common ground between the two incidents, for it is our contention that the basic social conditions remained the same.[[41]](#endnote-41)

Let us begin by addressing the clear dissimilarities between the two incidents in these nearby locations, most prominently concerning the manner in which the two incidents evolved. Thus, while in Callinicum the Roman authorities took some formal action, no doubt following some investigation into the matter, the authorities were nowhere to be seen in the course of the ongoing violent encounter between the band of zealot recluses and the Jews of Kalesh. Conversely, while in the course of the Callinicum episode, there was no report of any public or grassroots action in support of the local Jews, in Kalesh, we do observe an open protest by local Christians in support of their Jewish neighbors.[[42]](#endnote-42)

The possible similarities are quite suggestive. In the first place, in searching for a probable cause for the Callinicum Christian onslaught, one could perhaps extrapolate that the “defiant” (according to Sergius) self-confidence (the *parrhesia* behavior) of the Kalesh Jews reflected a trait attributed to the Jews in some of the early fifth-century incidents which took place in the Syrian orbit, as well as mentioned in some imperial laws.[[43]](#endnote-43) In this way, local commercial competition between the communities in Callinicum might similarly have triggered feelings of animosity and, compounded with common Christian hatred *adversus Iudaeos*, thus spiraled into violence. A very similar atmosphere might have been triggered by “some wrong done to God, or by an insult to the Church,” which Ambrose suggested had led to the Callinicum bishop’s instigation of his attack.[[44]](#endnote-44) The later claim by Paulinus, Ambrose’s biographer, that the Jews “reviled some Christian monks” (*propterea quod Judaei vel Valentiniani insultarent monachis Christianis*)[[45]](#endnote-45) seems more of an afterthought, particularly since it is linked to the incident with the Valentinians who, as we know from Ambrose himself, blocked a procession of monks on the festival of the Maccabean Martyrs. In this context, we encounter what seems to us to be yet another one of Ambrose’s exaggerations in the service of his agenda, describing the procession in memory of the Maccabees as an “ancient custom.”[[46]](#endnote-46) The core of the matter was not the actual veracity of such a provocation, but the pretext used by alleged negative sentiments encountered by the local Christians. This is what is meant by vitriolic utterances reaching the public arena. An additional point of similarity between the two incidents, in Kalesh and in Callinicum, lies in the similar sense of a zealous mission which drove Sergius and his comrades to engage in a sustained attack on the Kalesh Jewish synagogue, burning down the edifice and everything it housed (furniture, books/Law Scrolls and Trumpets/Shofar). This zealotry can be envisaged in the Callinicum attack too. In his epistle to Theodosius, Ambrose refers to property of the Jews being reclaimed, to which Ambrose responds that the possessions of the Jews were consumed by the fire: “What could a synagogue in a remote fortified settlement … possess, when all there is in the place is inconsiderable, and nothing of value and little in quantity? Of what then could the **fire** have robbed the treacherous Jews?”There might nevertheless have been some plundering here too.[[47]](#endnote-47) One thing, though, should be stressed: it is time to put to rest the unfounded assertion made in several modern scholarly studies that the Callinicum synagogue was converted into a church.[[48]](#endnote-48) For in none of the contemporary sources on the Callinicum affair, that is Ambrose’s epistles as well as the account by Paulinus, Ambrose’s biographer, is there any mention of this particular outcome. All Ambrose refers to is the burning of the synagogue by an agitated mob, never its displacement and conversion into a church.

Moreover, Ambrose entreats Theodosius not to grant the Jews a triumph of any sort, in other words the rebuilding of the burnt-down synagogue and the return of its burnt or plundered “offerings” (*donaria*,whatever was meant by this). Fulfilling that demand would have meant in the eyes of Ambrose a glorious victory for the Jews, whereas the visible ruins of the synagogue would have symbolized the Christians’ subjugation of the Jews, if not their humiliation. A converted synagogue would not have conveyed the notion of Christianity’s supremacy, like the actual remains of the burnt-down synagogue would. Indeed, the circumstances leading to the converted synagogue would in time have vanished from local collective memory.[[49]](#endnote-49) Finally, accepting the current *communis opinio* discarding the veracity of the confiscation and conversion of the “Hasmonean” synagogue in Antioch, discussed above, the notion of converting synagogues to Christian places of worship became a phenomenon, albeit perhaps a not very widespread one, not before the second decade of the fifth century.[[50]](#endnote-50) Ambrose’s belligerent attitude,[[51]](#endnote-51) enhanced by a strong sense of camaraderie with his Callinicum counterpart and perhaps fueled by his own admiring envy of the latter’s action, sets the tone, which could be further explained by another look at the distant Kalesh incident. Like in Sergius’s later “hate crime” in Kalesh, marked by its concerted and sustained effort to rid the public arena of Jewish presence, Ambrose’s more significant goal was to cleanse the public domain of the presence of Jews and heretics. This would explain his opening remarks, which portray the situation of Callinicum’s bishop, thanks to the emperor’s initial ruling, as a choice between becoming a martyror anapostate.[[52]](#endnote-52) Ambrose contended that he himself wished to be in a similar position, facing martyrdom: “You (emperor) have a culprit who is on the spot, one who admits the charge. I declare that I burnt the synagogue, or at any rate that I instructed them that there should be no building where Christ was denied.”What was Ambrose referring to here? In light of what follows, the meaning of his statement becomes even more complicated: “If I am faced with the further question of why I have not burnt the synagogue here (Milan? or Aquileia?), [I reply that] since it had already caught fire by an act of God, my participation was not required.” These extremely vague statements are a matter for speculation.[[53]](#endnote-53) It is difficult to envisage, even for the sake of argument, Ambrose bragging about his own involvement in the destruction of the Callinicum synagogue. However, his own admission of involvement in one way or another, whether instigating, assisting, or condoning such actions closer to home, Milan, or Aquileia, should not be dismissed lightly. The latter possibility seems to carry more weight, although it remains quite vague.[[54]](#endnote-54) It still remains quite probable to see in all this an extension of Ambrose’s vicious rhetoric in an effort to gain public support.

It is time to turn our gaze to the second protagonist in this unfolding textual or real drama: The emperor, as portrayed by Ambrose. Ambrose implicitly censures the emperor for “seemingly exceeding territorial boundaries” by ruling from the far west on an issue that was supposedly then under the jurisdiction of his son Arcadius, resident in Constantinople.[[55]](#endnote-55) But what, in the first place, was Ambrose’s own standing in this ecclesiastical incident thousands of miles from his own diocese? Was Ambrose induced, even in good faith, to pose his incisive question in light of the novel administrative changes that were slowly taking place? For in those very same years the administrative demarcation line between East and West was being drawn up with Theodosius’s own profound involvement. In fact, the layout of the eastern provinces and the dividing lines between East and West were establishedprior to the emperor’s death in 395.[[56]](#endnote-56) Circumstances on the ground, however, were such that Theodosius’s presence in the west in those very years (387–391) was crucial for the well-being of the empire. Thus Ambrose’s claim would have aroused ire and contempt within imperial circles. Theodosius’s presence in Italy (especially in Milan) was to protect and mentor the child Emperor Valentinian II, who was urged by Ambrose himself to request Theodosius’s guidance in handling the earlier crisis of the Altar of Victory in Rome (384). Come 387, following Magnus Maximus’s invasion of Italy, Theodosius took command of an army and moved into Italy in order to check Maximus’s aspirations and activities, by setting up headquarters in Milan in 388 and rallying support from leading pagan dignitaries such as Symmachus.[[57]](#endnote-57) In doing so, Theodosius also sought the high opinion and loyalty of the troops, whose fealty was often swayed by shows of effective military might.[[58]](#endnote-58)

There remains yet another enigmatic component in the unfolding Callinicum episode. It concerns the rather swift response of Theodosius to the complaint and query sent to him by the *comes Orientis* as to how to deal with the culprits involved in torching the synagogue, an action that was followed by a no less swift rescinding of that very same order. Was the move by the emperor to fine the bishop and punish his accomplices carried out solely on the grounds of upholding public order (*ratio disciplinae/disciplinae publicae*)? The earliest law protecting synagogues was enacted only in 393 (CTh XVI 8. 7, 29 September). Back in 388, the only legal definition under which Theodosius might have taken action against the rioters in Callinicum was indeed the *ratio disciplinae*.[[59]](#endnote-59) Were there other reasons involved?[[60]](#endnote-60) We would like to postulate that Theodosius was actually also acting according to the spirit of the ideal monarch, as presented to him by earlier and contemporary rhetoricians such as Themistius, who entreated Theodosius as early as January 381 not only to guard his subjects and defend them against their enemies, but also to establish an atmosphere of social harmony.[[61]](#endnote-61)

We would like to draw attention to an additional possible consideration that might have been involved here regarding the Jews, beyond the mundane issue of “public order.” The proposed element might also be part of the fermenting local atmosphere toward the Jews. Given the sensitive location of Callinicum, described above in detail, especially concerning the possible free flow of sensitive information carried by merchants from either side of the Roman–Persian border (as indicated in the Roman law), monitoring and checking this potential situation was of utmost importance. In that context, we would like to highlight some prevalent rumors concerning the shaky loyalty of the Jews in border towns or zones, particularly in times of political distress. This imputed trait of the Jews was founded on and propagated by their negative presentation as betrayers of Jesus in the New Testament gospels. However, on the Roman–Persian front, it was already by the fifth century being fed by official imperial sentiments and later “vindicated” by anecdotal material.[[62]](#endnote-62)

Thus, for instance, the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* describes the Persian siege of Tella which took place during of the Roman–Persian war of 502/3. The chronicler describes the local Jews as digging a tunnel underneath the synagogue tower situated near the city wall to assist the Persians’ penetrating the city. The plot, once exposed, led to a major massacre of the city’s Jews.[[63]](#endnote-63)

Although such rumors, to the best of our knowledge, were still absent from the fourth-century landscape, we still wish to argue that the following anecdotes, albeit coming from over a century later, might yet be relevant. For these insinuations concerning the Jews did not enter the public arena *ex nihilo*; they represented the climax of a slow and steady erosion of the image of the Jews, going back among others to Ambrose’s own vitriol against them. Thus, in the course of his epistle to his sister Marcellina, he hammers home this notion about the Jews, time and again harping on the absence of genuine love among the Jews, who lack *fides* and who are essentially treacherous.[[64]](#endnote-64)

Given the unique situation in conflict zones and with Jewish-Babylonian communities across the border, feelings of that kind might have been running high among local Romans and Christians. The Roman provinces of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia were quite extensively inhabited at least from the time of the Callinicum episode, and most probably earlier on too, by Jews culturally adapted to their environment.[[65]](#endnote-65) So much so, that it has been claimed that they interacted with and influenced the local brand of Syrian Christianity.[[66]](#endnote-66) Theodosius, we thus claim, was most probably well aware of this potential situation. Hence, apart from securing public order, he acted upon a further belief that it would be in the service of the empire to pacify the local Jewish community or even “preempt” dissident Jewish feelings in the aftermath of the violent attack. This consideration would have been strategically important given the only very recent (387) treaty between Theodosius and Shapor III over Armenia, made following a diplomatic initiative, and all while encountering trouble on the western front.[[67]](#endnote-67)

Summing up our conjectures, the encounter between the monarch and the bishop, sharing the same Nicene faith, yields the following picture. While the emperor succeeded toward the end of summer 388 in triumphing over his arch competitor Maximus, he received the disturbing news from the eastern edge of the empire. Aware of the possible repercussions for that sensitive region and guided by the necessity to be seen to exercise the rule of public order, he found himself at loggerheads with a bishop who was pursuing an entirely different agenda, one governed by strong animosity against all those external to his Nicene camp and intent on cleansing the public arena from present and potential enemies. At that given moment, these protagonists represented two separate worlds, in which Callinicum with its own local rival ethnic and sectarian feuds fell prey to an alien struggle.[[68]](#endnote-68)

Finally, as a coda to our discussion, we would like to turn our gaze to Ambrose’s “home front” in Milan, which most probably was more important to him than the events in the east, in Callinicum, as already rightly claimed by McLynn.[[69]](#endnote-69) However, this did not just concern the struggle for the privileges of Christian clerics in regards to curial rank, and possibly other matters, all of which were indeed explicit enough in the letter to Theodosius. We argue that within the highly charged encounter between Ambrose and Theodosius lay issues concerning public order as seen by the ecclesiastical circles aspiring to secure for themselves a greater civic role as leaders of the urban community.[[70]](#endnote-70) The latter served Ambrose as a convenient pretext for focusing public attention on the recent (17 June 386) local gains in power and authority. These were enhanced to a great extent, in Ambrose’s Milan, by the *inventio* (“discovery”) and later *translatio* of the remains of two martyrs, Protasius and Gervasius, to his own recently constructed and consecrated basilica. Hence, Ambrose’s great emphasis in his epistle on martyrdom (contrasted with apostasy). Ambrose, as claimed by Lucy Grig, was all too familiar with the cachet of martyrs’ remains and their high value as political currency. At that point and time following the demise of Maximus, the supporter of heretics, favorite of pagans, and protector of the Jews, the Callinicum contretemps was up for grabs, and it served Ambrose’s agenda of cleansing the public space from his competition. Thus, for the sake of self-promotion he claimed that he himself was prepared to be martyred by the emperor on this altar of religious principle.[[71]](#endnote-71) It would seem that the Callinicum episode might have served as a public statement in a more wide-ranging, local affirmation of power within Milan’s communal power struggle between Arian Goths, Ambrosian, Nicaeans, and imperial authority.

1. Even in one of the most recent, advanced, and up-to-date collections of studies, Wendy Mayer and Chris L. de Wet (eds.), *Reconceiving Religious Conflict: New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity* (London: Routledge, 2018), the role of the Jews as victims or perpetrators of violent activities in Late Antiquity is portrayed by means of their traditional position in the *Adversus Iudaeos* literature. Other recent overviews of the late antique phenomenon of “religious violence” such as Jan Bremmer, “Religious Violence between Greeks, Romans, Christians and Jews,” in *Violence in Ancient Christianity: Victims and Perpetrators*,ed. Albert J. Geljon and Riemer Roukema (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 26–28, have very much toned down earlier portrayals of an “all-out war” between ethno-religious groups and between them and the state-run Christian imperial power during that period. Concerning the status of Jews in this paradigm, Bremmer concludes that: “Jewish–Christian relations while hardly ideal, were far from the horrors of the middle-ages and modern times, even though it would not be long before synagogues would be turned into churches by force” (at 28). To a great extent, Bremmer bases his impression on a survey carried out by Wolfram Kinzig, “Juden und Christen in der Antike. Trennungen, Transformationen. Kontinuitäten und Annäherungen,” in *Among Jews, Gentiles and Christians in Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Studies in Honour of Professor Oskar Skarsaune on his 65th Birthday*, ed. Reidar Hvalvik and John Kaufman (Trondheim: Tapir Academic Press, 2011), 148–154, according to which between the early years of the post-Constantinian era (339 CE) and the final decades of the sixth century, only twenty episodes of “blutige Konflikte zwischen Juden und Christen” can be noted, and six of them are quite doubtful, which reduces the actual number to fourteen in all, a meager number by all accounts. While Bremmer might be right and the better part of late antiquity could or should be labeled as a rather tranquil period, especially in Roman Palestine (see too Glen W. Bowersock, “Polytheism and Monotheism in Arabia and the Three Palestines,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 51 (1997), 1–10 although that province represents a different setting in which the Jews were a substantial minority), the inference from Kinzig’s survey is still slightly misleading. For the number of incidents is far from reflecting the full reality or a definitive number, as it only reflects the incidents that left their mark in contemporary sources. Moreover, the episode at the center of the current paper, the torching of the Callinicum synagogue, would have gone unnoticed if not for Ambrose of Milan who turned it into a public event and a source of tension between bishop (Ambrose) and emperor (Theodosius I). For another very helpful assessment of the phenomena, based on the concept of competition in the ancient world, see David Engels and Peter Van Nuffelen, eds., *Religion and Competition in Antiquity* (Collection Latomus 343) (Brussels: Editions Latomus, 2014), 9–44. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. A case in question which reflected how the entangled realities of ethnic identities and the religious interests of diverse communities led into a spiral of violence is that of the Alexandrian riots of 414–415, culminating in the lynching of the renowned pagan intellectual Hypatia, while an earlier chapter of this chain of violence also involved a skirmish between the local Jews and Christians, on which see Oded Irshai, “Christian Historiographers’ Reflections on Jewish–Christian Violence in Fifth Century Alexandria,” in *Poetics of Power: Jews*, *Christians*, *and the Roman Empire*, ed. Natalie B.Dohrman andAnnette Yoshiko Reed (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), 137–153. On Hypatia’s violent demise and the depiction of that episode in contemporary Egyptian circles, see most recently the fascinating monograph by Edward J. Watts, *Hypatia: The Life and Legend of an Ancient Philosopher* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2017)*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. See the classic study by Lellia Cracco Ruggini, “Ebrei e Orientali nelľ Italia Settentrionale fra il 4. e il 6. secolo d. Cr.,” *Studia e documenta historiae et iuris* 25 (1959), 187–308, repr. in Lellia Cracco Ruggini, *Gli Ebrei in età tardoantica* (Opuscula Collecta 7) (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 2008), 186–284 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This point has been emphasized recently by Paula Fredriksen, *Augustine and the Jews: A Christian Defense of Jews and Judaism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 2010), 101. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Eastern Syria, nowadays E-Raqqa, East Syria, in close vicinity to the Persian–Sasanian border. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Since the field is suffused with literature on the subject, we shall confine ourselves to mentioning only the most influential recent monographs and collected studies: Johannes Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt: Studien zu den Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Christen, Heiden und Juden im Osten des Römischen Reiches* (von Konstantin bis Theodosius II.) (Klio Beihefte, NF 8) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2004); Michael Gaddis, *“There Is No Crime for Those Who Have Christ.” Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 39) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Harold A. Drake, ed., *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006); Brent D. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. For a catalogue of incidents in the course of which synagogues were destroyed or damaged by Christians in Late Antiquity, coupled with a set of important observations on the phenomenon, see Kinzig, “Juden,” and now also John G. Gager, “Who Did What to Whom? Physical Violence between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity,” in *A Most Reliable Witness: Essays in Honor of Ross Shepard Kraemer* (Brown Judaic Studies 358), ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey et al.(Providence: Brown University, 2015), 35–48 (and the contributions in that volume). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. One to the emperor and the other to his sister, as well as in the account of his near-contemporary biographer Paulinus of Milan, see Ambrose, *Epistulae*, *Epist*. 74 (Maur. 40) et *Epist*. 1 A (*extra collectionem*), 54–73 in *Epistulae* *liber decimus* (*CSEL* 82), ed. Michaela Zelzer (Vindobonna: Hoelder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1982). Reminiscences of the event were also preserved by Ambrose’s biographer, Paulinus of Milan, *Vita sancti Ambrosii*, *mediolanensis episcopi*, *a Paulino eius notario ad beatum Augustinum conscripta* (Patristic Studies 16), ed. Mary S. Kaniecka (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America 1928), 22–23 (referred to as Paulinus of Milan, *Life of Ambrose* in this text). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. *CTh* XVI 8. 7. Incidents include those in Rome, Aquileia (on which see more below) and Antioch (the confiscation of a synagogue dedicated to the memory of the Maccabean Martyrs and its conversion into a Martyrion?), see Johannes Hahn, “The Veneration of the Maccabean Brothers in Fourth Century Antioch: Religious Competition, Martyrdom, and Innovation,” in *Dying for the Faith*, *Killing for the Faith: Old-Testament Faith Warriors (1 and 2 Maccabees) in Historical Perspective*, ed. Gabriela Signori (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 79–123. For further discussion on this matter in conjunction with Ambrose’s epistle to Theodosius, see below. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. For the most recent appraisal of the episode, see Harold A. Drake, *A Century of Miracles: Christians, Pagans, Jews, and the Supernatural, 312–410* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017). It is submitted that this event was but a prelude to the greater showdown between Ambrose and Theodosius following the Thessaloniki massacre in 390 CE, described in great detail by Theodoret of Cyrus in *HE* V, 17. In fact, no late fourth-century writer nor for that matter any of the Christian historiographers of the fifth century, such as Rufinus of Aquileia, Socrates, or Sozomen, so much as even hint at the Callinicum episode or the confrontation between Ambrose and Theodosius on that issue. However, in later (twelfth-century) historiographic traditions, the episode in Callinicum is transferred to Constantinople and the chronology is also confused, placing it after or parallel to the imperial massacre in Thessaloniki which should most probably be dated to the year 390 CE (see Thomas M. Banchich and Eugene N. Lane, trans. and notes, *The History of Zonaras* (London: Routledge, 2012, III 18,184–185, 268). Having mentioned the latter’s silence and confusion, we would like to draw attention to yet another possible, little discussed, quite faint hint, to the saddening episode in Callinicum appeared in a 388 CE epistle of Libanius of Antioch to the Jewish Patriarch Gamaliel V, (no. 914 in Richard Foerster, ed., *Libanii Opers.* Volumen XI: *Epistulae 840–1544* (Bibliotheca Scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana) (Leipzig, 1922), XI, 61–61) in the course of which the orator in response to the Patriarch’s request from Libanius to intercede on behalf of the people (*genos* =the Jews)refers to a wrongdoing (*adikia*) carried out against them, most probably within the Syrian provincial territory. In his response, Libanius sympathizes with the “long suffering people.” Given the circumstances hinted at in the short epistle and the mention of an approaching change in the Roman governship of the Province of Syria possibly referring to Eustathius *consularis Syriae* who retired after serving only ten months in office (cf. s.v. Eustathius, 6, in Arnold H. M. Jones et al. (eds.), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*,I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 311–312)), it was Otto Seek, *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet* (Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, hrsg. Oscar von Gebhardt und Adolf Harnack, NF Bd. 1, 2 Heft) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1906), 453, who advocated the notion that the issue dealt with in the exchange between Libanius and the Jewish Patriarch Gamaliel V was no other than the Callinicum affair. In turn Seeck generated further discussion such as Moses Schwabe, “The Letters of Libanius to the Patriarch of Palestine,” *Tarbiz* 1/2 (1930), 85–110, at 93–95; 107 [Hebrew]. Indeed, Seeck’s suggestion sounds quite plausible but remains somewhat inconclusive. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. On this issue, see most recently the convincing arguments (based also on some earlier scholarly observations), by John H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “Letters of Ambrose of Milan (374–397), Books I–X,” in *Collecting Early Christian Letters—From the Apostle Paul to Late Antiquity*,ed. Neil Bronwen and Allen Pauline (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 97–112; Gérard Nauroy, “The Letter Collection of Ambrose of Milan,” in *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide*,ed. Cristiana Sogno, Bradley K. Storin, and Edward J. Watts (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 147–160; Kirsten Groß-Albenhausen, *Imperator christianissimus: Der christliche Kaiser bei Ambrosius und Johannes Chrysostomus* (Frankfurter Althistorische Beiträge 3) (Frankfurt am Main: Marthe Clauss, 1999), 99–112. The observation is based on the plausible presumption that the final paragraph or so (end of 32 and the whole of 33) carrying a threat to the emperor could not have possibly been in the original letter, see John H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, trans. and introd., *Ambrose of Milan: Political Letters and Speeches* (Translated Texts for Historians 43) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005) 111 (nn. 1–2), and was later added by Ambrose to stake out his position for posterity. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 28) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 300. Much has been written in the past century or so on the epistles of Ambrose to Theodosius and to his sister Marcellina, it must suffice to cite only a small sample of the many studies. On the letter to the emperor, see among others, Hans F. von Campenhausen, *Ambrosius von Mailand als Kirchenpolitiker* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1929), 231–233; and more recently, CraccoRuggini, *Gli Ebrei*, 167–172. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 299–300, and n. 32. His reading of paragraph 9 of the epistle somewhat ignores the opening words of Ambrose: “yet let’s (assume)” (*esto tamen*) which opens a lengthy chain of arguments hardly befitting a *fait accompli* situation, though we do admit it could well be used as a rhetorical ploy. However, the ensuing condensed attack on the chief protagonists of the event in Callinicum, namely the Jews, calls for further scrutiny. Ambrose’s letter to his sister, on the other hand, did in our view reflect the final stage of the drama. In it, Ambrose cites the emperor’s own admission that he “acted harshly” and that the whole matter (with the Bishop of Callinicum and perhaps with his accomplices too) was remedied (*sed emendatum est*); Ambrose, *Letter to His Sister Marcellina*,27. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 302, 304. It would seem that Ambrose’s venomous attitude toward the Jews and Judaism was hardly based on first-hand acquaintance with them, but was rather founded on and exacerbated by his complete animosity toward Christian heresy and heretical groups (Arians et al.) with whom he had constant clashes and heated encounters. See the observations made by Maria Doerfler, “Ambrose’s Jews: The Creation of Judaism and Heterodox Christianity in Ambrose of Milan’s ‘Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam,’” *Church History* 80, no. 4 (2011), 749–772. This might explain Ambrose’s attempt (as a sort of an innate trait) to weave together the two incidents with the Jews and the Valentinians respectively, in the course of his epistle to the emperor. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. We thus endorse and extrapolate from Lizzi-Testa’s observations on Ambrose’s contemporary Chromatius of Aquileia and his attitude toward the Jews of his own city, see her recent study, Rita Lizzi Testa, “Jews and Christians in Northern Italy: Conflicts, Violences, Conversions, and Daily Coexistence,” in *Jews and Christians in Antiquity: A Regional Perspective* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 18),ed. Pierluigi Lanfranchi and Joseph Verheyden (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 243–265 (261–265). [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 301, 302; McLynn argues that the encounter reflected in the epistle was indeed a miscalculated clash of interests and ambitions of the two protagonists. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. On the political notion of *libertas*, including the notion of *clementia* as formulated here by Ambrose, see the important insights in the now-classic study by Chaim Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome during the Late Republic and Early Principate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 150–153. For a recent, more elaborate discussion of the desirable virtues of a Roman emperor, see Carlos F. Noreña, *Imperial Ideals in the Roman West: Representation, Circulation, Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 37–100; 174–176. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Ambrose, *Letter*,14; 22 and in his sermon *Epistle to His Sister*, 2–3 and more; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 305–307. On Hilary of Poitiers and his fellow bishops from the west and their invectives against Constantius II, see the fine study by Richard Flower, *Emperors and Bishops in Late Roman Invective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013. It is important to stress that the Roman world of political ideology which made possible the notion of *libertas* so carefully and succinctly described by Wirszubski, *Libertas*, underwent remodeling and reshaping into a Christian political world-view by thinkers such as Eusebius of Caesarea and his followers. Flower, however (*Emperors and Bishops*, 21), tends to somewhat qualify the possible conclusions to be drawn from the wave of invectives by contemporaries of Hilary of Poitiers (Lucifer of Cagliaris and others) on the general balance of power between emperor and Church and sees in these invectives “rhetorical constructions created for particular polemical purposes, as stances adopted by their authors in response to unfavorable circumstances.” While Flower’s remark might be novel, highly stimulating, and reasonable on many counts, we think that Christian discourse on the Jews, slowly evolving in the fourth century, denoted a deteriorating progression of the attitude toward them from the days of Constantine to those of Theodosius (though not in all categories of imperial law). The Jews were a perennial issue occupying the Christian mind.Although the situation at Callinicum juxtaposed attacks on the Jews and the Valentinians in reality, it essentially realized in actual life an ongoing polemical trope, equating or at least drawing parallels between heretics and Jews. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Like in Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* VII (Loeb Classical Library 126), ed. Harold E. Butler (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 4.3 [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*,33. Note the comments by Liebeschuetz, 103 n. 4: “All these places (Damascus, Gaza, Ascalon, Beirut, and Alexandria) were in an area in which paganism was long strong and where there was a strong anti-Christian reaction under Julian, but one led not by Jews but by pagans,” more on that in Oded Irshai, “Jewish Violence in the Fourth Century CE—Fantasy and Reality: Behind the Scenes under the Emperors Gallus and Julian,” in *Jewish Identities in Antiquity: Studies in Memory of Menachem Stern*,ed. Lee I. Levine and Daniel R. Schwartz (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 391–416 (410–415). Moreover, a somewhat different list of locations (Bostra, Edessa, Arethusa but also Alexandria and Gaza) where Christians suffered attacks during and under the instigation of Julian’s regime can be gleaned from a contemporary of Julian’s, in Gregory Nazianzus’s 4thOration *Against Julian*, 86 (ed. Bernardi, 216–218), on which see now Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, *Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian*, *Gregory of Nazianzus and the Vision of Rome* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 49) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 355–357. It is to be emphasized that in none of those instances were Jews were mentioned as collaborators. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Groß-Albenhausen, *Imperator Christianissimus*, 100; Gérard Nauroy,, *Exégèse et création littéraire chez Ambroise de Milan: Ľexample du De Joseph patriarcha* (Collection des Études Augustiniennes, Série Antiquité 181) (Paris: Institut d’Études Augustiniennes, 2007), 346–347. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. The execution of Maximus near Aquileia should be dated to 28 August, rather than 28 July as postulated in the *Consularia Constantinopolitana* sub ann. 388 (*in miliario III ab Aquileia die V Kal. Aug.*); see now Maria Becker et al., eds., *Consularia Constantinopolitana und verwandte Quellen* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2016), 50–51 (text–translation), 139 (commentary). [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 298; Nauroy, *Exégèse*, 346–347 (ľautomne 388); Adolf Lippold, *Theodosius der Große und seine Zeit* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1968), 35 (winter 388/389, compare Liebeschuetz, *Ambrose of Milan*, 17 and 95), and again Lippold, s.v. Theodosius I, *PW*,Suppl. Bd. XIII, 1973, cols. 879–880, narrows down the possible dates of Ambrose’s letter to the emperor. He places it prior to 10 October 388, when Theodosius, who was present in Aquileia during the better parts of the months of August and September (28.8—defeat of Maximus, and 22.9—annulment by law of Maximus’s actions (*CTh* XV 14.6)), arrived in Milan. This, however, contradicts Ambrose’s own claim that news of the incident in Callinicum came to his knowledge while he was in Aquileia, when referring specifically to the initial order of the emperor sent out to the *comes Orientis* to rectify the situation (the rebuilding of the synagogue by the bishop), as in the epistle to his sister Marcellina, *Epist. extra collectionem*,1, 1 (Maur. 41) and Paulinus of Milan, *Life of Ambrose*,22. Ambrose most probably arrived in Aquileia quite soon after Theodosius’s arrival in Milan (hence a personal encounter on the matter at hand can be ruled out). Ambrose remained in Aquileia until after the consecration of Chromatius, most probably in early December 388, on which see now Robert McEachnie, *Chromatius of Aquileia and the Making of a Christian City* (London: Routledge, 2017), 47–49. The letter was composed, according to him, only after initiatives by the bishop to cancel the punitive measures went unanswered. This points to a date of composition late in 388 or early 389 CE. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. We follow on this McLynn’s plausible ordering of events (*Ambrose of Milan*, 299–300). [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. See Walter Scheidel, “The Shape of the Roman World: Modelling Imperial Connectivity,” *Journal of Roman Archeology* 27 (2014), 7–32, at 8, 17 (map). For the movement of legions at high speed between our two designated locations, one could estimate ca. 120 days (Scheidel, “Shape of the Roman World,” 24–25). For a different scale of travel time for individuals on foot or horseback, see R. W. Burgess, “The Summer of Blood: The ‘Great Massacre’ of 337 and the Promotion of the Sons of Constantine,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (2008), appendix 3, 5–51, at 49–50. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. From Ambrose’s description, *Letter to Theodosius*,18, it seems that the Roman administrator initially just sent a report without a real investigation of the incident and that in response he was ordered by the emperor to conduct one, following which he was to punish the culprits, thus (Ambrose) insinuating that the official behaved rashly. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*, 13, emphasis added; compare (at 18): “What could a synagogue in a remote fortified settlement in the back of beyond possess, when all there is in the place is inconsiderable, and nothing is of value and little in quantity? (*Quid autem habere potuit synagoga* ***in castro ultimo****, cum totum quicquid illic est non multum sit,* ***nihil pretiosum, nihil copiosum****?*).” The latter claim might resonate with a later incident (see below). Concerning the torching of mansions of prefects in Rome, Ambrose might have been referring to the house of Symachus’s father that burnt down ca. 375 CE, see Symmachus’s letters, 1.1–12 (Michele Salzman and Michael Roberts, eds. and trans., *The Letters of Symmachus: Book 1* (SBL: Atlanta, 2011), 1–34). [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. See Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia VI* (Loeb Classical Library 352), ed. and trans. William H. S. Jonesand Harris Rackham (London: Heinemann, 1989),VI 119, 1. On Julian’s expedition, Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res Gestae*, XXIII 3, 7: “and on the following day [he] arrived at Callinicum, a strong fortress, and most welcome because of its rich trade (*Callinicum munimentum robustum et commercandi optimitate gratissimum*).” Furthermore, Ammianus states that upon arrival in Callinicum, Julian observed the rites of Magna Mater since on that very same date the deity was celebrated in Rome. For the significance of this and other events near and around Callinicum which carried great symbolism for Julian, see now Alan J. Ross, *Ammianus’ Julian: Narrative and Genre in the Res Gestae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 187–189. For a more comprehensive appraisal of Callinicum’s past and its development over the ages, see Murhaf al-Khalaf and Kay Kohlmeyer, “Untersuchungen zu ar-Raqqa—Nikephorion/Callinicum,” *Damaszener Mitteilungen* 2 (1985), 133–162 (146–147) (ancient period and late antiquity). [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. *Codex Iustinianus* IV 64, 4, *The Codex of Justinian* (A New Annotated Translation with Parallel Latin & Greek Text), ed. Bruce W. Frier et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 1056 (Latin text)—1057 (trans. and notes). The latter city’s (Artaxata’s) status was uncertain during the period after Jovian’s treaty with Persia, and it seems to have changed hands between the Sasanians and the Huns, on which see the remark by John Lydus, *De magistratibus* III 52 (on the latter’s reliability, see in brief Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 191–192)). [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. It is rather surprising that Callinicum with its Jewish community, however minute, did not merit an entry (only a passing mention) in the otherwise voluminous and detailed lexicon of place names by Aharon Oppenheimer, *Babylonia Judaica in the Talmudic Period* (Wiesbaden: L. Reichert, 1983). For that matter, it is important to note that only very few scholars studying Ambrose’s vehement letter have granted Callinicum and its importance more than a brief mention. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Doug A. Lee, *Information and Frontiers: Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 54 (with further bibliography). For more on the layout of the land and the matrix of trading and travel within the wider Syrian context, see Fergus Millar, “Caravan Cities: The Roman Near East and Long-Distance Trade by Land,” in *Modus Operandi: Essays in Honour of Geoffrey Rickman* (BICS Suppl. 71), ed. Jill Harries et al. (London: Institute of Classical Studies 1998), 119–137. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Dignas and Winter, *Rome and Persia*, 195–209 (with ample bibliography). The importance of Callinicum and its surrounding area in the context of the Arabian tribal allegiances with Rome or the Sassanians was a cause for tension in the days of Justinian and after; Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 97–98 and 114–116. Note the size of the Roman force, 20,000 strong, fighting a retreating Persian army in 530 in the area of Callinicum (beyond which in the direction of Persia lay entirely uninhabited land), Procopius, *History of the Wars* I (Loeb Classical Library 48), ed. and trans. Henry B. Dewing (London: Heinemann, 1979), 18, 5, and 13–40 (the battle and its failed outcome due not least to an extended Easter fast by the troops); compare the alternative account in John Malalas, *Chronographia* (Corpus Scriptores Historiae Byzantinae 32), ed. Ludwig Dindorf (Bonn: Weber, 1831), 18, 60. For yet another example from a later age whereby Callinicum continued to be a battleground for rivaling Arab factions in the early eighth century, see *Theophilus of Edessa’s Chronicle and the Circulation of Historical Knowledge in Late Antiquity and Early Islam* (Translated Texts for Historians 57), trans., intro., and notes Robert G. Hoyland (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 223–224, 257–259. These incidents and others do not sufficiently describe the overall status and transmutations that Callinicum and the area between the Tigris and the Euphrates, or more precisely the vicinity of the Balīkh river, underwent during the late Byzantine and the early Islamic periods. Although this issue is beyond the scope of our discussion here, it is important to note that while the overall settlement patterns shifted during that period from “high density to significant decline,” Callinicum and other centers continued to be developed under the early Abbasid Caliphs. On this and other matters, see now the comprehensive survey by Michael Decker, “Frontier Settlement and Economy in the Byzantine East,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 61 (2007), 217–267. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. On the major changes which that area underwent, see the succinct description by John H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, “The Impact of the Imposition of Roman Rule on Northern Syria,” in *The Impact of the Roman Army (200 BC–AD 476): Economic*, *Social*, *Political*, *Religious and Cultural Aspects*,ed. L. de Blois et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 433–437. [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. *Expositio totius mundi et gentium* (Sources Chrétiennes 124), trans., intro., and notes Jean Rougé (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 1966), 22. See in more detail Mark W. Graham, *News and Frontier Consciousness in the Late Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), 112–115; Lee, *Information and Frontiers*, 62–63. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. Unfortunately, apart from the testimony of Ambrose, nothing prior to the Middle Ages is known of the Jewish presence in Callinicum/a-Raqqa; see Miriam Fraenkel, “‘Al-Raqqa, Namely Kalne’—A Medieval Jewish Community in Aleppo’s Environs,” *Hispania Judaica* 11 (2015), 81–91 [Hebrew]. Any information on the local Jews must be extrapolated from observations of the region. On the religious and cultural makeup of the Jews of Syria during the later Roman period, in particular those living in the eastern regions, see most recently the succinct and valuable appraisal by Fergus Millar, “Christian Emperors, Christian Church and the Jews of the Diaspora in the Greek East, 379–450,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 55 (2004), 1–24; Fergus Millar, “A Rural Jewish Community in Late Roman Mesopotamia, and the Question of a ‘Split’ Jewish Diaspora,” *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 42 (2011), 351–374. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Hahn, *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt*. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. On the latter, see Harold A. Drake, “Intolerance, Religious Violence, and Political Legitimacy in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79 (2011), 193–235, 197–199. [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. The translation here seems unsatisfactory: see Michael Sokoloff, *A Syriac Lexicon* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2009), s.v. ܬܫܡܫܬܐ (holy implements), 1674. Note also the reference in the sixth-century legendary biography of the Syrian Archimandrite Barsauma, and the description of the synagogue of Rabbat*-*Moab and its holy implements; see Andrew Palmer (ed.), *Vita Barsumae* (forthcoming), 38: 1–2; 42: 1–2. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Patrologia Orientalis XVII), ed. and trans. Ernest W. Brooks (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1923), 90–92 (emphasis added by the author; cited in part by Millar, *Empire*, 510). The story continues along the following lines: The Jews are unable to regain their synagogue, but in revenge burned down the huts in which the elder Simeon was living. The huts were then rebuilt by Sergius, and the Jews begin to build another synagogue which Sergius demolishes, Sergius then leaves the village, following which the emboldened Jews make another attempt to build a synagogue which Sergius’s followers burn down, and thus the Jews “desisted from building all the days of Sergius’s life” (at 92–93). On John of Ephesus’s first-hand knowledge of the world of the monks and recluses in the Syrian steppe, originating in his own period of residency in Callinicum and his visits to Amida, see Debie, *L’écriture*, 137. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Moreover, one should not ignore the possibility that the narrative describing Sergius’s violent activities might share literary constructs and symbolism with other accounts. Note for instance the literary trope of the three-time fallen synagogue, which may have served here as an echo of the trail of destruction of the Jerusalem Temple, including the abortive plan of Julian the “Apostate” in the spring of 363 CE. At the same time, it might have been a play on a quite well-known trope prevalent in foundation legends, see for instance Cyril A. Mango et al. (eds. and trans.), *Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 476: AM 6135—AD 642/3. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Note the observation by Beat Brenk in, “Die Umwandlung der Synagoge von Apamea in eine Kirche,” in *Tesserae: Festschrift für Josef Engemann* (Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum. Ergänzungsband 18),Münster: Aschendorff 1991,” 16–17. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. Apparently, there was a preference among the elites in the east to resolve the riots in their area without involving the Roman authorities, Kelly, “Riot,” at 166–167. [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. *CTh* XVI 8. 18 (29 May 408) on burning an “effigy” of Hamman (on the festival of Purim); Socrates, *HE* VII 16 (from ca. 414) relates an incident in Inmestar (between Chalcis and Antioch) in which a festivity of the Jews got out of hand, leading to the scourging of a Christian boy. Note the clause attached to *CTh* XVI 8. 21 (from 420), protecting the Jews and their synagogues but at the same time warning them against becoming insolent. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*,6. The bishops are normally supposed, “to restrain the crowds and to be lovers of peace, except when they are themselves roused by some wrong done to God, or by an insult to the Church (*sacerdotes enim turbarum moderatores sunt, studiosi pacis,* ***nisi cum et ipsi moventur iniuria dei aut ecclesiae contumelia***)” (emphasis added).The same could be adduced in regard to Sergius’s actions over a century later, and most probably in some other incidents of that kind, in all of which bishops found it difficult to tolerate the presence of a*noticeable* synagogue in the vicinity. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Paulinus of Milan, *Life of Ambrose*,22*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*,16. Moreover, as stated above, it is quite doubtful whether both incidents occurred in Callinicum. As for the Christian celebration of the Maccabean Martyrs and its time of inception, see the discussion by Leonard V. Rutgers, *Making Myths: Jews in Early Christian Identity Formation* (Leuven: Peeters, 2009), 26–32, on the intricate way in which the Maccabean Martyrs were first drawn into and later venerated in the collective Christian memory and liturgy. Rutgers (*Making Myths*, 26–32 and in 48), and rightly so, doubts the veracity of the tradition regarding the Antiochian synagogue (for Halachic reasons pertaining to the laws of purity). However, Rutgers’s claim (35–37) concerning the lack of popularity of the Maccabees among late antique Jews should now be dismissed in light of recent findings in Galilean synagogues, such as Huqoq and some new and substantial fragments in the contemporary Piyut (liturgical poetry), describing them as exemplary figures. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. Ambrose, *Letter* *to Theodosius*, 18. On the normative religious–cultural world of the Kalesh community, see Millar, *Empire*, 513–514. A similar and more explicit concern about plundering, or a rejection of a possible accusation about plundering synagogue property, appears thirty years later in conjunction with events leading to the conversion of the Jewish community in Minorca; see Severus of Minorca, *Epistula*, 12–13 (in Severus of Minorca, *Letter on the Conversion of the Jews* (Oxford Early Christian Texts), ed. and trans. Scott Bradbury (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 95–96). In the same vein, the zealot monk Barsauma, when torching, alongside his disciples, the Rabbat-Moab synagogue, deemed it necessary to burn all the synagogue’s possessions (furniture and holy vessels), as described in *Vita Barsumae*, 42: 1–2. We contend that lurking behind Ambrose’s statement is a concealed reference to the Callinicum synagogue/community’s possessions of furniture, books/scrolls, and in all likelihood trumpets (i.e. ram horns), all of which indicate the presence of a normative community. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. For instance, Amnon Linder, *The Jews in Roman Imperial Legislation* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 189–191, at 189; Lee I. Levine, *The Ancient Synagogue: The First Thousand Years* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 211; the source for this assertion might rest in a later historiographical conflation mentioned above and found in the chronicle of John Zonaras, *Epit. Hist.* XIII 18, 87–89. A similar story is recounted in Georgius Cedrenus, *Compendium Historiarum* (Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae 36), ed. Immanuel Bekker (Bonnae: Impensis Ed. Weberi, 1838), I, 571–572, 571 (1. 16–24), 572. For a detailed discussion concerning this conflation of episodes, see Alexander Panayotov, “The Synagogue in the Copper Market of Constantinople: A Note on the Christian Attitudes toward Jews in the Fifth Century,” in *Orientalia Christiana Periodica* 68 (2002), 319–334. This conflation might be drawn from *The Lives of Simeon Stylites* (Syriac), ed. Robert Doran (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1992), 121–124 (Doran, 189–191). See n. 50 below for more on this issue. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. As a sort of distant, though quite instructive, analogy, we could look to Christian triumphalism and supersessionism during the fourth century toward the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, which was conducted in strict affirmation of Jesus’s words: “amen dico vobis non relinquetur hic lapis super lapidem qui non destruatur” (Mt. 24, 2). It did not include building a Christian edifice over the ruins. This analogy has its flaws, but as a state of mind, it might suffice to explain contemporary attitudes toward a situation such as that encountered by Ambrose. A very similar sentiment was conveyed by the contemporary hagiographical tradition about the North African martyr, Marciana, who cried out in the presence of the Jews at Caesarea that their local synagogue ought to be burned down “with heavenly fire and will never be able to be repaired . . . and continue to lie in ruins,” *Acta Marcianae*, 4 (AASS, I: 569), cited by Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 266. As posterity teaches us, later Christians had fewer qualms about destroying and converting synagogues. [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Such as the episode of the Minorcan synagogue, ca. 418, as reported by Severus of Minorca. For a later fifth-century incident, see Panayotov, “Synagogue,” at 333. In between the two mentioned instances, we encounter a law (*CTh* XVI 8.25 from 15.2.423) promulgated by Theodosius II and addressed to Asclepiodotos (*PP Orientis*) prohibiting the indiscriminate confiscation or torching of synagogues and demanding compensation in land for confiscated synagogues. This is a firm attestation that this course of action by Christians against their neighboring Jews was becoming more prevalent. In this context, we would like to draw attention to possible evidence of the long *Nachleben* of the Callinicum episode. The Callinicum episode might have been familiar to the Antiochian monastic circle, or, more precisely, to the monastic community which gathered around St. Simeon Stylites. According to one of the hagiographical accounts of the saint’s life, written in Syriac by the members of his community following his death, we learn that he petitioned the emperor on behalf of the Christians, entreating him to cancel the demand that the Christians*return confiscated synagogues and rebuild or repair them at their own expense*(*Acta Sanctorum*, 387–389) (emphasis added). See also Dina Boero, “Symeon and the Making of the Stylite: The Construction of Sanctity in Late Antique Syria” (dissertation, University of Southern California, 2015), 65, on the veracity of Simeon’s letter. It is important to stress all this, even though the law of 423 does not mention the clauses concerning mandatory repair nor the demand that it will be paid out of the pockets of the Christians, which goes to show that this component might reflect a belated echo of the Callinicum episode. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. However, uniquely and intriguingly, we now have access to a possible portrait of Ambrose from fifth-century Milan, found in the Basilica di S. Ambrogio sacello di S. Vittore in ciel dʼoro, and assumed to be based on the authentic portrait of Ambrose passed down by his brother Satyrus. See the note by Pierre P. Courcelle, *Recherches sur Saint Ambroise: “Vies” anciennes*, *culture*, *iconographie* (Série Antiquité 52) (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1973), 155–156. If that is indeed the case, we may analyze Ambrose’s facial impressions, judging by his cunning and penetrating eyes, the presence of a sharp, determined, and almost ruthless personality*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*,7. McLlynn, 299–301. [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*, 8: “Proclamo quod ego synagogam incenderim, certe quod ego illis mandaverim, ne esset locus in quo Christus negaretur. Si obiciatur mihi cur hic non incenderim, divino iam cremari coepit iudicio, meum cessavit opus.” Please note that the very same sentiment concerning the synagogues being places where Christ is denied (*negarentur*) can be found in ample citations in sermons delivered by Ambrose’s contemporary fellow bishop and protégé, Chromatius of Aquileia, for instance, Sermon 32, 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. The initial tradition attributing the torching of the Aquileian synagogue to Ambrose emanates from an early-modern chronicle from Aquileia (by Giovanni Candido, 1521). From the description, which includes the mention of a Valentinian edifice, one gets the impression that we might be facing a conflation with the events in Callinicum/Syria. On further thought, the Aquileia incident might have some sort of early circumstantial corroboration in late fourth-century events: on the issue, see now McEachnie, *Chromatius*, 112–113. For a thorough earlier appraisal of the sources, see the now-classic paper by Cracco Ruggini, *Gli Ebrei*, 197–202. But now see a more comprehensive treatment of the issue which leaves us with substantial doubt about an actual presence of a synagogue in Aquileia, but which on the other hand tends to confirm a real and noticeable presence of Jews in that city in the days of Ambrose and Chromatius: Lizzi Testa, “Jews.” [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Ambrose, *Letter to Theodosius*, 13. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. These major shifts, devised in the years 386–394 and influenced if not orchestrated by Theodosius, manifested themselves in the famous, though problematic, administrative–military document, known as the *Notitia Dignitatum*. Much has been written on that document and the administrative changes it reflected, but much less on its value as a historical source, on which see the lucid and convincing article by Michael Kulikowski, “The ‘Notitia Dignitatum’ as a Historical Source,” *Historia* 49 (2000), 358–377. However ironic it might sound, given the newly created dividing line between eastern and western parts of the empire, Milan and Constantinople were situated equal distances from the dividing administrative zones, see Scheidel, “Shape of the Roman World,” 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. On these developments and Theodosius’s role in defending the integrity of the empire in a kingdom ruled by young and inexperienced emperors, see Meaghan A. McEvoy, *Child Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West*, *AD 367–455* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 86–95. On the barbarian invasions’ impact on Rome, see Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2005), and now, in a short and vivid description of the events following 376, see Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of the Roman Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2018), 193–195. However, not all current scholars ascribe centrality to a barbarian tidal wave in the demise of Rome in the west. In hindsight it might be plausible to claim that Ambrose was emboldened by his triumph over Symmachus in the Alter of Victory incident, see R. Chenault, “Byond Pagans and Christians: Politics and Intra-Christian Conflict in the Controversy over the Altar of Victory,” in *Pagans and Christians in Rome: Conflict, Competition and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*,ed. M. R. Salzman, M. Sághy, and R. Lizzi Testa (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 46–63. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Mark Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army in the Later Roman Empire* (London: Routledge, 2017), 20–22. See however, there, 31 n. 73, for some dissenting views on Theodosius’s competence. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. This raises the question of whether the actual, operative legal definition here was in any way linked to the clauses of “crimes against the state,” that is according to the *lex Iulia maiestatis*; for more, see Callie Williamson, “Crimes against the State,” in *The* *Oxford Handbook of Roman Law and Society*, ed. Paul du Plessis et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 339–342.Concerning the intricate legal picture of the contemporary introduction of a set of laws protecting the synagogues and their property, and the historical context in which they developed between 393 and 423 and set into the *Codex Theodosianus*, see the careful recent treatment by Shira L. Lander, *Ritual Sites and Religious Rivalries in Late Roman North Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 223–229. Although the law of 393 was the first to defend the Jewish synagogues, the Callinicum affair should not be seen as its sole trigger. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Ambrose, *Letter* *to Theodosius*, 11; 23. The comparison made by Ambrose between the torching of a synagogue and the destruction of a church, which according to him was inappropriate if not amoral at the time of his rhetorical complaint, did not yet reflect, as far as the letter of the law was concerned, the privileged status of the church. For up until 409 in the wake of the Calama (North Africa) riot, where violence broke out between pagans and Christians, incidents such as in Callinicum were punishable by old, traditional property laws, like that in the *Constitutiones Sirmondianae*,14 (=*CTh* XVI 2. 31); afterward, it became punishable under a distinct clause of public crime against the church. On the Calama riot, see Hermanowicz, *Possidius of Calama*, 156–168. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Themistius, *Politics*, *Philosophy*, *and Empire in the Fourth Century: Selected Orations of Themistius* (Translated Texts for Historians 36), trans. and intro. Peter Heatherand David Moncur (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 15 (185C), 237–238; 250–251. Themistius’s call for leadership is as follows: “But a man who steers cities and nations needs more experience of his subjects (*contra Gratianus*) or he will be forced to change frequently between the bit and the reins, and not watch closely what is ahead, but always have his attention to those in pursuit, as to when having run him close, they will cast him from the chariot board . . . For haste and fear of those in hot pursuit on his heels will not accord with his being gentle in every case” (emphasis added). For more on this, see John Vanderspoel, *Themistius and the Imperial Court: Oratory, Civic Duty, and Paideia from Constantius to Theodosius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1995), 187–216 (esp. 199–208). [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. *CTh* XVI 8. 24 (10.3.418) issued in the West by Honorius and dispatched to Flavius Palladius (*PP Italiae*), and later, in a more explicit manner, in the third *novella* issued by Theodosius II in the course of implementing a general policy toward minorities, dispatched to Florentius (*PP Orientis*) on 31 January 438; note the insights of Bradbury, *Severus*,55. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* (Translated Texts for Historians 32), ed. and trans. Frank R. Trombley and John W. Watt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 72–74. It should, however, be stressed that at the time the Jews were not the only people labeled as treacherous, for in his *Chronicle* (written ca. 518), Marcellinus Comes voiced the rumor that the city of Amida was betrayed to the Persians by its monks; see *The Chronicle of Marcellinus* (Byzantina Australiensia 7), trans. and commentary Brian Croke (Sydney: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1995), ann. 501–502,33 (text–translation), 111 (commentary, with various other traditions and the conclusion that the story about the monks should be regarded as a “subsequent invention”). The accused monks of *Mar Urtaya monastery* were probably Monophysites. P. Joshua does not mention the monks at all, and attributes the fall of Amida to negligence (*Chronicle of Marcellinus*, 60–61, and notes). The incident in Tella was cited later with similar wording but in a shortened form in the *Chronicle of Zuqnīn*, 414 (English)—415 (Syriac), and for a general impression, see Philip Wood, *“We Have No King But Christ”: Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400–585)* (Oxford Studies in Byzantium) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) (based on the innuendos emanating from the *Julian Romance*,see his recent study), 146: “This role of the Jews as an enemy within, who reveal their true nature in the context of this pagan revival.” A similar instance involving the Jews of Arles, which turns sour in due course, comes to us from the sixth-century writer Cyprianus, Bishop of Toulon and Caesarius of Arles’s biographer, who while describing the Jews as taking an active part in defense of Arles in the course of the Burgundian siege of 507/508, gives a lengthy account of a failed attempt by one of the Jewish defenders to betray the city, *Life* I, 31, in William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: Life*, *Testament*, *Letters* (Translated Texts for Historians 19) (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 24. See also William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 106–110, for a discussion of the veracity and intricacies of that episode. While a comparison between the incidents in Tella and Arles is beyond the scope of our paper, we must still add a small note of caution against the acceptance of these traditions or indeed incidents at face value, for their proximity in time and similarity in detail do denote some sort of *topos*,which requires further discussion*.* [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Ambrose, *Letter to Marcellina*, 17, 18 (*passim*). [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Most probably subjected to at least some rabbinic influence via local or itinerant rabbis traveling between Persian Babylonia and Roman Palestine. This state of affairs has been well demonstrated by Millar, *Empire*, 505–526, esp. 521–524. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. On this issue, see the recent appraisal by Gerard Rouwhorst, “Ritual Interactions between Jews and Christians East of Antioch,” in *Jews and Christians in Antiquity: A Regional Perspective* (Interdisciplinary Studies in Ancient Culture and Religion 18),ed. Pierluigi Lanfranchi and Joseph Verheyden (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 163–181 [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Roger C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds: F. Cairns, 1992), 45; Roger C. Blockley, “Subsidies and Diplomacy: Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity,” *Phoenix* 39 (1985), 62–74, 16–17. It is important to note that between the incident in Callinicum and the days of Kalesh a few more episodes of this kind might have taken place in the Syriac-speaking east. See the notes to the Tella incident in *The Chronicle of Pseudo Joshua the Stylite*,note, 343. The synagogue was evidently built hard against the fortifications; compare for instance the position of the Dura-Europos synagogue attached to the town’s wall. This would explain the Jewish leaders’ ability to act in secrecy. The Jews of cities, like urban trade guilds (*acollegi*), were often assigned a *pedatura*, that is a section of the circuit wall with its tower(s), to guard in time of siege and to keep in good repair in time of peace. On this, see Isaac, *Limits of Empire*, 363. On the Jews’ participation in the defense of a city in the west, see above n. 63. To return to Syria: an incident a decade earlier may have intensified the Syrian Jews’ feelings of insecurity under the Christian empire. On 9 July 492, during the celebration of the Olympia at Antioch, the charioteer Calliopes went with a mob to the suburb of Daphne where they burned down the synagogue, plundered its service vessels and scriptures, and killed “many people,” most of whom must have been local Jews. They then “raised the cross” on the ruins and converted the place into a Martyrion for St. Leontius. Although officials accompanied by a force of Goths were dispatched to punish the rioters, it is unlikely that the Jews recovered their building or got compensation; John Malalas, *Chronographia*, 396, lines 4–12. Thus, it would not be surprising if the Jews of Tella-Constantina had preferred Sasanian rule.Indeed, near**-**contemporary Palestinian rabbinic viewscorroboratethe latter notion of aspirations for Persian rule. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Ambrose’s success in his *parrhesia*, or open discourse and frank grievance, with the emperor over Callinicum set the tone for the future, notably in the encounter following the Thessalonica massacre, which was conducted by Ambrose in an entirely different manner, despite addressing different and harsher circumstances for Theodosius and the Church; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 315–330. However, one ought to ponder the possibility that Ambrose’s open and harsh reproach of the emperor in matters bordering on the running of the empire (not exclusively in matters of religion) had its consequence in that it might have ushered in a new and more restrictive mood regarding such matters. The case in question concerns Symmachus, one of Theodosius’ allies. For in his correspondence in the ensuing years with a set of colleagues, he exercised self-censorship. Symachus’s epistles were not centered on the axis of pagan vs. Christian (as has been argued in earlier scholarship), but guided by a strict attempt to avoid *patriae negotia*; see the illuminating study by Alan Cameron, “Were Pagans Afraid to Speak Their Minds in a Christian World? The Correspondence of Symmachus,” in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict*, *Competition*, *and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, ed. Michele R. Salzman et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 64–111. [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 302, a view reaffirmed recently by Lizzi Testa, “Jews,” 254. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Ambrose conceptualized this via the metaphor of the rod of the almond tree, as expressed in the course of the sermon he communicated to his sister, where he says: “We are all of us the body of Christ, of which God is the head . . . perhaps some people are the eyes, the prophets for instance; others the teeth” (Ambrose, *Letter to His Sister* *Marcellina*, 11). On Ambrose’s Milan as a city of conflict regarding spatial politics, see now, Christine Shepardson, *Controlling Contested Places: Late Antique Antioch and the Spatial Politics of Religious Controversy* (Berkeley: University of California Press 2014),213–226. Ambrose’s role as a cleric entailed, in his view, the promotion of the notion that there was no place for the presence of heretics and Jews in the midst of the Christians (this view linked Ambrose with the later John of Ephesus); see Susan Ashbrook-Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints* (Transformation of the Classical Heritage 18) (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990),52. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Ambrose, *Letter on the Discovery of the Relics*, *Epistula* 77 (Maur. 22)*.* See also Paulinus, *Life of Ambrose*,13–15; Augustine, *Confessions*,IX 7. 16; McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 209–219; Williams, *Ambrose*, 218–232; Grig, *Making*, 2–3 (*passim*); Shaw, *Sacred Violence*, 618–620. Finally, we wish to argue that lurking behind all this was a still bigger and more implicit struggle over primacy and prestige between Milan and Rome, and more precisely between Ambrose and Damasus. On Damasus’s efforts to secure Rome’s unique prestige based on the martyr’s cult, see Marianne Sághy, “The Bishop of Rome and the Martyrs,” in *The Bishop of Rome in Late Antiquity*,ed. Geoffrey D. Dunn (New York: Routledge, 2015), 37–55; for more on the contest between the two bishops, see Markus Löx et al., eds., *Monumenta sanctorum: Rom und Mailand als Zentrum des frühen Christentums: Märtyrerkult und Kirchenbau unter den Bischöfen Damasus und Ambrosius* (Spätantike–Frühes Christentum–Byzanz, Reihe B: Studien und Perspektiven 39) (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2013), 153–169. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)