JONATHAN STUTZ

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Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
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Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity

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Crowd Violence and Religious-Political Discourses in Late Antiquity

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Carona, Switzerland, Easter 2024

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Abbreviations

AB	*Analecta Bollandiana*
BAAL	*Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture Libanaises*
BGU	*Ägyptische Urkunden aus dem Staatlichen Museum zu Berlin: Griechische Urkunden*, Berlin: Staatliche Museen, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, 1892–.
BSFE	*Bulletin de la Société Française d'Égyptologie*
ByZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CCL	Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CFHB	Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae
CRAI	*Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*, Vienna.
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
GRBS	*Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*
IRT	*The Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania,* eds. J. M. Reynolds and J. B. Ward Perkins, Rome: British School, 1952.
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JLA	*Journal of Late Antiquity*
JRS	*The Journal of Roman Studies*
JTS	*The Journal of Theological Studies*
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LF	*A Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church anterior to the division of the East and West*, transl. by members of the English Church, Oxford: Parker, 1881.
NHC	*Nag Hammadi Codices: The Coptic Gnostic Library: A Complete Edition of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, ed. James M. Robinson, 5 vols., Leiden: Brill, 2000.
NPNF	*A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church,* eds. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Edinburgh: Clark, 1886–1900.
PG	*Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Graeca,* ed. Jacques Paul Migne, Paris: Imprimerie Catholique, 1857–1866.
PLRE	*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, eds. Arnold Jones, John Robert Martindale *et. al.*, 3 vols., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971–1992.
PO	*Patrologia Orientalis*, eds. René Graffin, François Nau *et. al.*, Paris: Firmin-Didot/Brepols, 1904–.
RIC	*The Roman Imperial Coinage*, eds. Harold Mattingly *et al.*, 10 vols., London: Spink, 1923–1994.
SC	Sources chrétiennes
STAC	Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
TTH	Translated Texts for Historians
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament

ZAC	*Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*
ZNTW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZThK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*

1. How to Write about Riots

On that day how heavy was the gloom! How bright the calm of the present! That was the day when that fearful tribunal was set in the city, and shook the hearts of all, and made the day to seem no better than night; not because the beams of the sun were extinguished, but because that despondency and fear darkened your eyes. Wherefore, that we may reap the more pleasure, I wish to relate a few of the circumstances which then occurred; for I perceive that a narrative of these things will be serviceable to you, and to all who shall come afterwards.[1]

These lines, from the beginning of John Chrysostom's thirteenth homily on the Riot of the Statues, are quite suitable for introducing the subject of the present study: the phenomenon of crowd violence and its representations within the religious and political discourses of the fourth century. Referring to the tribunal that was set up after the disorders that had led to the toppling of imperial statues, this homily shares a characteristic with many other texts reporting on violent incidents, namely that of linking traumatic events of the past with a specific rhetorical function that in turn underwrites a specific theological or moral message.

Among the more destructive crises that affected the life of an ancient or late antique city, riots certainly figure quite prominently, seconding only to natural catastrophes or war. As a manifestation of collective violence, riots deserve to be analyzed as a phenomenon in its own right. This, however, is far from being an obvious task. Other than individual acts of coercion, be they criminal or not, crowd violence did, in fact, defy exact legal definition. As Jill Harries has pointed out, "riots were not a matter of litigation between opposing parties but of policing and the preservation of public order", being therefore almost completely omitted from the criminal section of the Theodosian Code.[2] As Harries therefore concluded, riots and their consequences can be seen as a crisis

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[1] Iohannes Chrysostomus, *De statuis* XIII, 1, ed. Migne, *PG* 49, 136–137: Κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ταύτην τὸ φοβερὸν ἐκεῖνο γέγονεν ἐν τῇ πόλει δικαστήριον, καὶ τὰς καρδίας ἁπάντων διέσεισε, καὶ νυκτὸς οὐδὲν ἄμεινον διακεῖσθαι ἐποίησε τὴν ἡμέραν, οὐ τῆς ἀκτῖνος σβεσθείσης, ἀλλὰ τῆς ἀθυμίας καὶ τοῦ φόβου πηρωσάντων ὑμῶν τοὺς ὀφθαλμούς. ἵν' οὖν καὶ ἡμεῖς πλείονα καρπωσώμεθα τὴν ἡδονὴν, μικρὰ τῶν τότε συμβάντων διηγήσασθαι βούλομαι. Transl. P. Schaff, *NPNF[1],* vol. 9 (Edinburgh: Clark, 1889), 426.

[2] J. Harries, "Violence, Victims and the Legal Tradition in Late Antiquity", in *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices*, eds. H. A. Drake *et al.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 85–102, here 89.

of the relationship between ruler and people, being in other words a phenomenon that is highly political in nature. While concerns for the public safety permeated the way the emperors and their officials administered the provinces of the empire, as well as the communication between the ruler and his subjects, public protests could give voice to the demands of certain segments of the population, as is exemplified in the very Riot of the Statues, which started as a protest against new tax levies. As in the historical reality, so also in the literary representations that were contemporaneous with such events, riots were considered a marker of this communication crisis. This is also true for those incidents that one wishes to term as religious riots, in which supporters of two competing religious groups were pitted against each other. As the examples that I intend to discuss in this book show, these incidents are not divorced from the interaction of the monarch with the respective communities, both by virtue of his duty as supervisor and guardian in matters of religion and because of his active involvement in many of the religious conflicts of the fourth century. The working hypothesis underpinning the following study – that of conceiving of collective violence as a literary and rhetorical event – is closely connected to the political relevance of the art of eloquence in the world of Late Antiquity. As the individual events discussed in the book will show, it was the ambivalent nature of violence itself that made it open for different definitions and interpretations which in turn were ultimately critical for the relevant political or ecclesiastical policies in times of crisis.

In order to specify this aspect and to define the hermeneutical premises of this study, it is necessary to first take a closer look at the main research interests that have been tied to the phenomenon of crowd violence in Late Antiquity and, from here, to expose the methodology that I would like to apply. As a particular expression of collective violence, riots have attracted the interest of scholars of different stripes, including historians specializing in different periods and geographical areas.[3] In the case of antique and late antique Rome, scholarly research has contributed a full host of studies on the variegated aspects behind this phenomenon, focusing on the specific socio-economic background,[4] on the

[3] In order to mention three contributions from the field of social and ethnic studies: P. Brass, *Theft of an Idol: Text and Context in the Representation of Collective Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); D. Horowitz, *The Deadly Ethnic Riot* (Berkeley: University of California University Press, 2001), and J. L. Abu-Lughod, *Race, Space, and Riots in Chicago, New York, and Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). Much helpful for the understanding of modern forms of collective violence is also C. Tilly, *Contentious Performances* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and its focus on collective action as a source for systemic change. For a groundbreaking study on urban revolts in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria, see A. Elbendary, *Crowds and Sultans: Urban Protests in Late Medieval Egypt and Syria* (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2015); on religious riots during the protestant reformation, see N. Z. Davis, "The Rites of Violence: Religious Riot in Sixteenth-Century France", *Past & Present* 59 (1973), 51–91.

[4] See H. P. Kohns, *Versorgungskrisen und Hungerrevolten im spätantiken Rom*, Antiquitas

role of circus factions and theater claques,[5] or on the security maintenance in Rome and the provinces of the Roman Empire[6]. Consequently, in the course of the last decades a number of misconceptions on the causes and nature of riots could have been dismissed, as some of them were supported by the classism entailed by their ancient sources themselves.[7] Picking up on sociological theories of "collective behavior", scholars such as Paul Vanderbroeck have defied the commonly held notion of crowd violence being driven by blind irrationality, insisting instead that it should also be placed on a spectrum of recognizable behavior that entails, for example, the stage of marches, the chanting of slogans, or the selected targeting of objects or monuments.[8] Riots thus followed and still follow definite scripts, which in fact contributed to a definition of those limits within which, paradoxically, collective violence could be seen as acceptable: "Within certain limits, the crowd had a right to riot".[9] This also means, as a corollary, that violent actions that infringed on such limits were met with the utmost severity of the authorities. Such was the case of the toppling of the imperial portraits during the aforementioned Riot of the Statues, at least in the way this act of vandalism was perceived by the imperial court. In most cases,

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6 (Bonn: Habelt, 1961); P. Erdkamp, "'A Starving Mob has no Respect'. Urban Markets and Food Riots in the Roman Word, 100 B.C.–400 A.D.", in *The Transformation of Economic Life under the Roman Empire: Proceedings of the Second Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Roman Empire, 27 BC–AD 406); Nottingham, July 4–7, 2001*, eds. L. de Blois and J. Rich, Impact of Empire 2 (Amsterdam: Gieben, 2002), 93–115, and P. Van Nuffelen, "Dürre Wahrheiten. Zwei Quellen des Berichts von Socrates Scholasticus über die Versorgungskrise in Antiochien 362/3", *Philologus – Zeitschrift für antike Literatur und ihre Rezeption* 147 (2003), 352–356.

5 On Circus factions, see A. Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), on theatre claques, see P. Browning, "The Riot of A.D. 387 in Antioch: The Role of the Theatrical Claques in the Later Empire", *The Journal of Roman Studies* 42 (1952), 13–20.

6 See especially T. Yavetz, *Plebs and Princeps* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); P. J. Vanderbroeck, *Popular Leadership and Collective Behavior in the Late Roman Republic. ca. 80 – 50 B.C.*, Dutch monographs on ancient history and archaeology 3 (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1987); W. Nippel, *Public Order in Ancient Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); B. Kelly, "Riot Control and Imperial Ideology in the Roman Empire", *Phoenix* 61 (2007), 150–176; C. Wolff, *Les brigands en Orient sous le Haut-empire romain*, Collection de l'École française de Rome 308 (Rome: École française de Rome, 2003); C. Brélaz, *La sécurité publique en Asie Mineure sous le Principat (Ier–IIIème s. ap. J.-C.): institutions municipales et institutions impériales dans l'Orient romain,* Schweizerische Beiträge zur Altertumswissenschaft 32 (Basel: Schwabe, 2005). See also H. Ménard, *Maintenir l'ordre à Rome (IIe–IVe siècles ap. J.-C.)* (Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 2004), and C. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire. Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

7 See on this T. Yavetz, "Vitellius and the 'Fickleness of the Mob'", *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 18 (1969), 557–569.

8 See Vanderbroeck, *Popular Leadership*, 10–13, and G. S. Aldrete, "Riots", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome*, ed. P. Erdkamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 425–440 here, 431–433.

9 Harries, "Legal Tradition", 89.

however, the attack against specific objects, such as the house of the governor, could also be seen as displaying a sense of restraint on the part of the rioters, "deliberately substituting a lesser act of violence (attacking or destroying an object) for a greater one (attacking or killing a person)".[10]

Other questions related to the study of riots, however, are still a matter of debate. This is especially the case with the question as to why "ordinarily law-abiding bystanders going about their daily lives abruptly and voluntarily transform themselves into violent rioters on the spur of the moment".[11] Gregory Aldrete offered a tentative answer by pointing out some of the factors that increased the chances that a set of pre-existent tensions would degenerate into violence. These include a provocative act or incident, the initiative of a core group of rioters leading the protest, the presence of a sufficient number of bystanders willing to join the riot, and the ability to gather in a large public space. In order for the core group of rioters to succeed in luring the bystanders into the riots, it was fundamental to find the proper way of manipulating the crowd by stirring up emotions and by directing it into collective actions through common verbal and non-verbal expressions.[12]

At the same time, it has been cautioned against the attempt to make sense of the behavior of the crowd exclusively by means of materialistic factors such as issues related to taxes or shortage of grain. As Peter van Nuffelen has pointed out, such explanations fail to recognize the pivotal role played by the moral expectations that bound the crowds to their political and religious leaders and vice versa, such as the obligation to secure justice, the expectation that the governors would be willing to accept the petitions of the people, and the overall desire to re-establish the communication with the emperor in times of crisis. These observations could therefore allow for a "virtue-based" model of crowd behavior that is in fact also helpful for the understanding of the texts reporting on ancient riots.[13] In certain instances, the moral subtext is made explicit in the narrative itself. This is the case when the writer presents a riot as a vignette revealing the failed rule of an emperor or the failed administration of a governor. Tacitus, for example, accuses Nero of having stirred up the claques of the theater against each other, resulting with the disorders gaining intensity so fast that the emperor had no other choice than to occupy the theater with his soldiers.[14] Another famous episode that stood representative for the failed rule of

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[10] Aldrete, "Riots", 432.

[11] Aldrete, "Riots", 435.

[12] See Aldrete, "Riots", 435–436.

[13] See P. Van Nuffelen, "A Wise Madness. A Virtue-Based Model for Crowd Behavior in Late Antiquity", in *Reconceiving Religious Conflict. New Views from the Formative Centuries of Christianity*, eds. W. Mayer and C. L. de Wet, Routledge Studies in the Early Christian World (London: Routledge, 2020), 234–258, here 239–243.

[14] See Tacitus, *Annales* 13.25, ed. K. Wellesley (Leipzig: Teubner, 1986), here 54–55; transl.

an emperor is that presented by the historian Procopius when relating about the Nike Riot:

> So as Justinian fanned the flames and openly agitated the Blues, the entire Roman Empire shook from side to side as if it had been hit by an earthquake or a flood, or as if each of its cities had been captured by an enemy army. All things in all places convulsed and nothing was left standing. In the confusion that ensued, the laws were toppled to the ground and social order collapsed.[15]

Beyond the necessity of addressing hermeneutical issues related to ancient sources on crowd violence, historians working on pre-modern history also have to remain aware of the ideological problems entailed by the study of a phenomenon that should not be aligned too easily with modern riots. Such a procedure involves the risk of clinging to ideas that may have a "heuristic value" for the study of modern societies, but which may be more problematic with respect to antiquity, such as, for example, the notion of collective action as a force that promotes social and political improvement.[16] In the world of Late Antiquity, the ultimate instance of political change remained the emperor and his ability to achieve purpose through representation, delegation, and military power.

This is not to say, however, that the street remained a mere passive element of imperial politics. Quite on the contrary, the urban population also had an active role in the projection of imperial power. An important contribution that takes this insight into account was recently offered in Noel Lenski's *Constantine and the Cities*, which, although not specifically addressing the issue of crowd violence, still supplies us with a valuable hermeneutical approach for the understanding of this phenomenon. Picking up on modern communication and reception theories, Lenski builds his study on Constantine's religious and political policies on the premise that the success with which such policies were able to project imperial power was also dependent on the way they were decoded by their recipients. According to the context, imperial edicts needed to be formu-

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J. C. Yardley, *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), here 283.

[15] Procopius, *Hist. arc.* 7.6–7, ed. J. Haury, *Procopii Caesariensis opera omnia. Vol. 3: Historia quae dicitur arcana* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1963), 43–44: Τότε οὖν τοὺς Βενέτους αὐτοῦ ῥιπίζοντός τε καὶ διαφανῶς ἐρεθίζοντος ἅπασα κατ᾽ ἄκρας ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ ἐκινήθη ὥσπερ σεισμοῦ ἢ κατακλυσμοῦ ἐπιπεσόντος ἢ πόλεως ἑκάστης πρὸς τῶν πολεμίων ἁλούσης. πάντα γὰρ ἐν ἅπασι ξυνεταράχθη καὶ οὐδὲν ἐφ᾽ ἑαυτοῦ τὸ λοιπὸν ἔμεινεν, ἀλλ᾽ οἵ τε νόμοι καὶ ὁ τῆς πολιτείας κόσμος ξυγχύσεως ἐπιγενομένης ἐς πᾶν τοὐναντίον ἐχώρησαν. Transl. A. Kaldellis, *Prokopios. The Secret History. With Related Texts* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2010), 32. On the Nika Riot, see G. Greatrex, "The Nika Riot. A Reappraisal", *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 117 (1997), 60–86, and R. Pfeilschifter, *Der Kaiser und Konstantinopel. Kommunikation und Konfliktaustrag in einer spätantiken Metropole*, Millennium Studien 44 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), 178–210. For a different assessment on the role of the emperor, see M. Meier, "Die Inszenierung einer Katastrophe: Justinian und der Nika-Aufstand", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 142 (2003), 273–300.

[16] As pointed out by Van Nuffelen, "A Wise Madness", 236.

lated in such a way as to allow only one specific interpretation, while in other situations they could also encourage different readings. In a context in which Christianity was still far from being the dominant religion, this last possibility proved particularly helpful for the application of religious policies, which in many ways had to mediate between pagans and Christians.

In some cases, however, the collective reading could also occur in terms contrary to the meaning encoded by the monarch, thus paving the way for expressions of dissent through public protest or even riots, as the examples discussed in this book will show.[17] Such considerations will also prove helpful for the present book's methodological approach. In fact, although the relationship between ruler and ruled was expressed through a set of different communicative practices, I would like to direct the reader's attention in particular to rhetoric's pivotal role as a traditional means of interacting with imperial power, a role which I will expand upon below.[18]

Another field of scholarly interest tied to the study of late antique riots is related to the study of religious conflicts. This aspect has attracted attention from different perspectives as well, and has produced an impressive amount of literature. For the sake of brevity, I would like to divide these contributions into two distinct groups.[19] A first set of studies is especially characterized by the intent to explain well known examples of religious violence, such as the destruction of pagan temples, by referring to the specific economic, ethnic and cultural tensions that were active in the background. Especially important contributions in this respect have been offered by Edward Watts and Johannes Hahn, whose rigorous studies of incidents of communal violence in the context of pagan-Christian relations (but also in that of inner Christian relations) reached significant conclusions for the scholarly debate on the Christianization of the Roman Empire.[20]

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[17] See N. E. Lenski, *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics*, Empire and After (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 7–8.

[18] See on this A. Omissi, "Rhetoric and Power. How Imperial Panegyric Allowed Civilian Elites to Access Power in the Fourth Century", in *Leadership, Ideology and Crowds in the Roman Empire of the Fourth Century AD*, eds. Erika Manders and Daniëlle Slootjes, Heidelberger althistorische Beiträge und epigraphische Studien 62 (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2020), 35–48.

[19] This categorization does not include those contributions that presented religious violence as a cultural and anthropological category in its own right, such as T. Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity. Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam,* Divinations: rereading late ancient religion (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); B. Shaw, *Sacred Violence: African Christians and Sectarian Hatred in the Age of Augustine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), and M. Gaddis, *There is no Crime for those who have Christ: Religious Violence in the Christian Roman Empire,* The transformation of the classical heritage 39 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). In any case, I will relate to these studies where the context requires to.

[20] Exemplary for this kind of inquiry are especially E. J. Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities*, The transforma-

At the same time, such an approach may again risk overlooking the crowd's ability to express judgements that go beyond the realm of utilitarianism. It is therefore also helpful to mention a second group of studies that focused more closely on the nature of popular participation in the doctrinal controversies of late antique Christianity, a phenomenon that has been thoroughly analyzed by Timothy Gregory and Ramsay MacMullen.[21] Most recently, when arguing against the idea of a mere passive involvement of ordinary Christians in the theological disputes, Michel-Yves Perrin's *Civitas Confusionis* has also convincingly pointed out the extent to which ecclesiastical leaders contributed to the formation of an "heresiological ethos" among early Christians who were thus supplied, for example through catechetical homilies, with the means to fend off foreign teachings and engage in debates with members of competing communities.[22] This insight will also contribute for a better understanding of those sources discussed in the different chapters of this monograph.

A fundamental hermeneutical problem that I would like to address in this book is the alleged divide between the historical event and its literary representation, since in past scholarship on (religious) violence this dichotomy has encouraged approaches that either took the literary sources at face value or dismissed their historical value altogether. Furthermore, in those cases where historians claim to have been able to uncover something of the actual sequence of events beneath the polemical or apologetic layers of their sources, the relationship between event and representation is still considered problematic, as it distinguishes between those parts of the narrative that are historically useful and those that are not. For this reason, recent scholarship has rightfully called attention to the historical value of literary representations themselves, pointing out that ancient narratives of violence have a lot to say about the perception and definition of violence in a given historical and cultural context, about the limits of accepted violence, and its social and cultural function. Most notably, this approach has been at the center of a conference that gathered contributions

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tion of the classical heritage 46 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), and J. 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 8 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004).

[21] See T. E. Gregory, *Vox populi: Popular Opinion and Violence in the Religious Controversies of the Fifth Century A.D.* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1979); R. MacMullen, "The Historical Role of the Masses in Late Antiquity", in *Changes in the Roman Empire. Essays in the Ordinary,* ed. R. MacMullen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 250–276, and *idem*, *The Second Church: Popular Christianity A.D. 200–400,* Writings from the Greco-Roman world 1 (Atlanta: Soc. of Biblical Literature, 2009).

[22] M.-Y. Perrin, *Civitas Confusionis. De la participation des fidèles aux controverses doctrinales dans l'Antiquité tardive (début IIIe s.–c. 430)* (Paris: Nuvis, 2017). For North Africa, see also J. C. Magalhães de Oliveira, *Potestas populi. Participation populaire et action collective dans les villes de l'Afrique romaine tardive (vers 300–430 apr. J.-C.)*, Bibliothèque de l'antiquité tardive 24 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012).

from well-known researchers on Late Antiquity, which were eventually published under the programmatic title *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*.[23] As Martin Zimmermann comments in his concluding analysis of the publication, accounts and depictions of violence fulfilled a well-defined ideological function; the representations of wars against the barbarians, for example, reassured Romans "of their own place in the world",[24] and incidents of sectarian violence affecting the life of the Roman Empire were "depicted according to literary and iconographic narrative patterns" that were designed to solicit specific emotional responses among the readers.[25] In any case, the shift of focus from violent events themselves to the representation of violence also offers the advantage of allowing one to circumvent some major difficulties in any attempt to theorize violence, an endeavor in which we must be content with a very broad definition.[26] If approached from the perspective of literary or visual representations, the different manifestations of (collective) violence will be of relevance insofar as they have been perceived and represented as such in front of an audience that ought to be enabled to interpret specific actions as contemptible.

In this present study, I would like to pick up on these considerations, foregrounding, however, those literary representations that originated in and were linked to the rhetorical practices (real or imagined) that accompanied a riot, suggesting that incidents of collective violence must be read not only as a "literary phenomenon" but also as a "rhetoric phenomenon". Admittedly, the hermeneutical premises entailed by this idea present some consistent similarities with the approach opted for by Martin Zimmermann, since it asks about the specific functions of *representations* of violence. At the same time, however, the approach chosen for this study will also place emphasis on the *performative* quality of these literary representations, a characteristic that is inherently tied

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[23] Based on papers presented at the fifth biennial conference on Shifting Frontiers in Late Antiquity, held at the Univ. of California, Santa Barbara, March 20–23, 2003.

[24] M. Zimmermann, "Violence in Late Antiquity Reconsidered", in *Violence in Late Antiquity. Perceptions and Practices*, eds. H. A. Drake *et al.* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 343–357, here 344–345. On this, see also the very useful overview of previous literature on violence in *idem*, "Zur Deutung von Gewaltdarstellungen", in *Extreme Formen von Gewalt in Bild und Text des Altertums*, ed. M. Zimmermann, 2nd edition (München: utzverlag, 2022), 7–46.

[25] Zimmermann, "Violence reconsidered", 355. Literature on visual representations of violence is immense, see on this the bibliographical essay in S. S. Lusnia, "Representations of War and Violence in Ancient Rome", in *The Cambridge World History of Violence. Vol. 1: The Prehistoric and Ancient Worlds*, eds. G. G. Fagan *et al.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 654–683, here 682–683.

[26] The debate on the feasibility of such a definition has in recent years surfaced within the fields of social studies, on which see in particular M. Eisner, "The Uses of Violence: An Examination of some Cross-Cutting Issues", *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 3 (2009), 40–59, and J. Kilby, "Theorizing Violence", *European Journal of Social Theory* 16 (2013), 261–272.

to their rhetorical quality. With this I mean that representations of violence are intended to achieve a specific purpose among the audience in a specific rhetorical context, which is defined by the orator's intent to engage the audience with the events that are being related and to solicit a specific response. Hence I read the concept of "performativity" not only with a view to the different forms of oral execution in the act of speaking, but also as the ability of ancient rhetoric to structure and change the reality perceived by the audience, including its ability to influence "the public persona of the citizen in all walks of life", an aspect which in recent decades has been a focus of scholarly contributions on the subject.[27]

At the same time, the relevance of the performative nature of ancient rhetoric is also grounded in the inherent connection which ancient sources themselves discerned between the art of eloquence and its effectiveness in reconciling or harmonizing "the internal antagonisms that are constitutive of politics."[28] In its various contexts, in fact, the delivery of public speeches was coupled with the theme of violence as a persistent threat to the social and political order of the *polis*. It is not by chance that this connection is already clear in the traditional account of rhetoric's origin, which holds that a certain Corax formulated the first rhetorical handbook in the chaotic context of the establishment of democracy in ancient Sicily.[29]

This is not to say that ancient rhetoric was intended to level out social or political inequalities. As Joy Connolly suggests, the rhetoric of concord and civilized life to which orators resorted was meant rather to distract from the latent violence entailed in the class and gender inequalities that marked the ancient *polis*. As such, the art of eloquence was inherently coupled with a normative discourse that was grounded in moral judgement and aimed at control-

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[27] S. Goldhill, "Rhetoric and the Second Sophistic", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. E. Gunderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 228–241, here 231. On the power to condition social and political behavior see also M. Fox, "Rhetoric and Literature at Rome", in *A Companion to Roman Rhetoric*, eds. W. Dominik *et al.* (Malden [MA]: Blackwell, 2007), 369–381, here 376; M. Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); and T. Habinek, *The Politics of Latin Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998). On rhetoric and political power, see S. A. Takács, *The Construction of Authority in Ancient Rome and Byzantium: The Rhetoric of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). On the role of *paideia* as an important power broker and self-fashioning tool, see P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 35–70; and T. Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire. The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90–130. On the different forms of oral performances, see E. C. Bourbouhakis, "Rhetoric and Performance", in *The Byzantine World*, ed. P. Stephenson (London: Routledge, 2010), 175–187, here 176.

[28] J. Connolly, "The Politics of Rhetorical Education", in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. E. Gunderson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 126–141, here 127.

[29] See Connolly, "Rhetorical Education", 128.

ling the latent dynamics of subordination present within the *polis*.[30] An interesting vignette revealing the tendency to maintain the *status quo* is offered in an account of a failed revolt (allegedly caused by a lack of wine) relayed by Ammianus Marcellinus. While the troops that headed towards the mob feared an escalation, the prefect Leontius abstained from any violent action and even succeeded in calming down and dispersing the mob with the power of his words, making it easier to arrest the ringleader.[31] This scene may stand as representative of the challenge that any threat to the hierarchical order posed, not only for the authorities but for the art of eloquence itself.

In most cases, the sources at hand (apologetic literature, homilies, orations, letters) are tied to rhetorical situations that preceded or followed the event itself. In fact, individual riots were almost never divorced from a larger concatenation of events of which rhetorical performance was a constituent part. Before the crowds took to the streets, demands and protests that were fueling the tensions – as well as concerns for public security – were already being negotiated between the authorities and the subjects, as can be seen in Constantine's letters to Alexander of Alexandria in the context of the Arian conflict. In the aftermath of a riot, envoys representing the city were sent to the imperial court in order to plead for mercy. In other instances, an authoritative ecclesiastical figure such as Augustine was invoked by the town's leading citizens to intercede on their behalf. But the bishop himself could also take the initiative to address the community and call for a moral reform, as was the case with John Chrysostom in the aftermath of the Riot of the Statues. Yet in other instances, the court and the local bishop entered into a fierce conflict regarding the proper consequences that should be taken in response to the riots, such as in the case of Ambrose and Theodosius. In other words, what we learn about specific instances of communal violence is consistently mediated and delimitated by the contents that underwrite the specific rhetorical performance. According to the specific situation, the narrative could focus on the issue of collective accountability when appealing to the mercy of the emperor or place particular emphasis on the unbearable acts of violence with a view to soliciting a specific emotive response from potential allies. Moreover, within the literary context of historiographical literature, recounting past incidences of collective violence could serve a specific rhetorical purpose as they provided the readers with an interpretative lens for reading the present.

The following division of chapters will attempt to give visibility both to the specific rhetorical performances and to the discursive themes that emerge in the sources that have been selected for the present monograph. Where possible, the

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[30] See Connolly, "Rhetorical Education", 128–129.

[31] See Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae* 15.7.3–4, ed. W. Seyfarth, *Römische Geschichte*, 4 vols., Schriften und Quellen der Alten Welt 21 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1968–1986), here vol. 1, 134. See on this incident also Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, 86–87.

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