

Matters (Un-)Becoming: Conversions in Epiphanius of Salamis

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In this essay, I reconsider early Christian conversion through the writings of Epiphanius of Salamis (d. 404 C.E.). Far from the notion of conversion as an interior movement of soul (familiar from Augustine, A.D. Nock, and William James), Epiphanius shows us a variety of conversions—from lay to clergy, from orthodox to heretic, and from Jew to Christian—in the social and cultural context of empire. Epiphanius can help us reconsider late-ancient conversion not as the internal reorientation to a “new life,” but instead the exteriorized management of status and difference. As Epiphanius crafts conversion as the site of masterful intervention, he also conjures the failure of control, the blurring of boundaries, and collapse of frontiers that haunts the imperial Christian imagination.

IN his treatise *On Weights and Measures*, Epiphanius, the fourth-century bishop of Salamis,¹ recounts a trio of noteworthy tales of religious concern concerning Aquila, Symmachus, and Theodotion, each credited with translating the Hebrew Bible into Greek after the promulgation of the Septuagint.² Aquila, stationed in the ruins of Jerusalem by a leprous

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¹Epiphanius is often referred to as Epiphanius “of Salamis,” although technically the city of Salamis had been destroyed by natural disaster and rebuilt as Constantia before Epiphanius’s elevation to its episcopacy. The city was still apparently called “Salamis” at times: Epiphanius’s younger contemporary Jerome refers to him as *Cypri Salaminae episcopus (de viris illustribus 114; vita Hilarionis prologus; epistula [ep.] 108.6)*; likewise the Greek historian Sozomen calls him Salami Σαλαμίνος τῆς Κύπρου ἐπίσκοπος (Sozomen, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.32; 8.14). The persistence of “Salamis” as a designation may be due to its appearance in Acts 13:5.

²The entire treatise survives in Syriac (*Epiphanius’ Treatise on Weights and Measures: The Syriac Version*, ed. James Elmer Dean, *Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations* 11 [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935]), with significant fragments of the original Greek (E. Moutsoulas, “Τὸ Περὶ μέτρων καὶ σταθμῶν ἔργον Ἐπιφανίου τοῦ Σαλαμίνοϋ Θεολογία, 44

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Emperor Hadrian, was so impressed by the Christian disciples there that he was baptized as a Christian.³ Unable to give up his love of astrology (ἀστρονομία), however, he was ultimately excommunicated; he cursed Christianity and was circumcised as a Jew (προσηλυτεύει καὶ περιτέμνεται Ἰουδαίως). Twice-converted, Aquila learned Hebrew (he was already Hadrian's Greek translator) and executed a "perverse" (*mepaltah*) translation of the Hebrew Bible.⁴ Symmachus, one of the "wise men" (σοφῶν) of the Samaritans, felt spurned by his people; to satisfy his "lust for power," he converted to Judaism, "circumcised a second time." (Assuming his audience will be "surprised" to hear this, Epiphanius patiently explains that second circumcisions are routine in Samaritan-Jewish cross-conversion as are, he notes, operations to undo circumcision altogether.⁵) To spite his former fellow Samaritans, we learn, Symmachus executed an additionally

[1973]: 157–98),” as well as selections in Georgian (*Les versions géorgiennes d'Épiphane de Chypre, Traité des poids et de mesures*, ed. Michel van Esbroeck, CSCO 460–461 [Leuven: Peeters, 1984]) and Armenian (*The Armenian Texts of Epiphanius of Salamis "De Mensuris et Pondibus"*, ed. Michael Stone and Roberta Ervine, CSCO 583 [Leuven: Peeters, 2000]). I will cite primarily from the Greek and Syriac versions (using Dean's chapter numbers, English pages, and Syriac folio page numbers, with the lines of Moutsoulas's Greek in parentheses). On the interrelation of the texts, see Stone and Ervine, eds., *Armenian Texts*, 1–5.

³That Aquila was a Christian before he was a Jew seems unique to Epiphanius's account: Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 3.21.1 refers to both Aquila and Theodotion simply as "Jewish proselytes" (θεοδοτιῶν ὁ Εφέσιος καὶ Ἀκύλας ὁ Ποντικός ἀμφοτέρω Ἰουδαῖοι προσήλυτοι). Ancient sources on the lives of the "Three" were collected by Henry Swete, *An Introduction to the Old Testament in Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1900), 31–35 (on Aquila), 42–44 (Theodotion), 49–51 (Symmachus); on more recent theories of their identities, see Sidney Jellicoe, *The Septuagint and Modern Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 77–99; on a comparison of Jewish and Christian sources on Aquila specifically, see Jenny R. Labendz, "Aquila's Bible Translation in Late Antiquity: Jewish and Christian Perspectives," *Harvard Theological Review* 102 (2009): 353–88; on Epiphanius, see Labendz, "Aquila's Bible Translation in Late Antiquity," 381–83.

⁴Epiphanius, *De mensuris et pondibus* 13–15 (Dean, *Treatise*, 29–32 [English], 54a–55b [Syriac]; Moutsoulas, lines 360–424). Aquila appears in rabbinic literature, as well, where his translation is tied more directly to rabbinic resistance to Greek (presumably, Christian use of the Septuagint). On the figure of Aquila in Christian and rabbinic tradition, see Naomi Seidman, *Faithful Renderings: Jewish-Christian Difference and the Politics of Translation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 73–114 and Labendz, "Aquila's Bible," 354–70.

⁵Reinhard Pummer, *Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 92 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002), notes that Epiphanius's ascription of a second circumcision to Samaritans becoming Jews (and vice versa) "is the only such account in ancient literature" (135) and, after considering rabbinic discussions of Samaritan proselytes to Judaism, suggests Epiphanius "may have fabricated this 'information'" (137). Epiphanius is often cited here as evidence for the continued practice of epispasm, surgery to mask male circumcision: see Robert G. Hall, "Epispasm and the Dating of Ancient Jewish Writings," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 2 (1988): 71–86.

“perverse” (διαστροφήν; *potlah*) biblical translation.⁶ Finally Theodotion: originally a follower of Marcion, “the heresiarch of Sinope,” Theodotion also “grew angry” (at what we are not told) and “turned aside to Judaism and was circumcised and learned the language of the Hebrews and their writings.” More influenced than the other two by the Septuagint, Theodotion produced a translation not notably “perverse” to orthodox sensibilities, but doubtless unwelcome as such among his former Marcionite co-religionists.⁷

In multiple ways these conversion narratives evoke boundaries and borders. First, Epiphanius asks us to imagine the translators articulating the religious margins of late antiquity, between paganism, Judaism, heresy, and even the more exotic Samaritanism: orthodox Christianity is no one’s final religious destination, but is rather framed by these marginal beliefs.⁸ Geographical borders also shape these stories, from Pontus in the north to Egypt in the south, and the liminal and multiply named space of Palestine/Judaea (and Jerusalem/Aelia) out of which the multiple Greek translations of the Bible emerge.⁹ Finally, textual boundaries, as heterodox and “perverse” as the translators’ works are found to be, end up collected together into the uniform columns of Origen’s *Hexapla*: safely, even usefully, contained for orthodox Christian delectation.¹⁰ Borders multiply, boundaries collide, but Epiphanius never loses control of his matter.

In recent years, students of early Christianity and late antiquity more generally have made fruitful use of the concept of boundaries and borders, in order to dislodge the monological self-presentation of our ancient sources.¹¹ To think in terms of borders is to imagine the point at which the “self” and “other” touch, merge, and even change places. Borders must be asserted, put into place, and so ancient attention to borders signals, ironically, an acute

⁶Epiphanius, *De mensuris et pondibus* 16 (Dean, *Epiphanius*, 32–33 [English], 55c–55d [Syriac]; Moutsoulas, lines 429–48). Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.17 calls Symmachus an “Ebionite.”

⁷Epiphanius, *De mensuris et pondibus* 17 (Dean, *Epiphanius*, 33 [English], 55d–56a [Syriac]; Moutsoulas, lines 450–56).

⁸This quartet—hellenism, Judaism, Samaritanism, heresy—recalls the formative quartet of “mother heresies” in Epiphanius’s *Panarion* (barbarism, hellenism, Scythism, Judaism). It is equally true, as Tessa Rajak notes, “each of the ‘Three’ is assigned a role on the margins of Jewry” (*Translation and Survival: The Greek Bible and the Ancient Jewish Diaspora* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009], 310).

⁹On the role of geography in Epiphanius’s *Panarion*, see Young Richard Kim, “The Imagined Worlds of Epiphanius of Cyprus,” PhD Dissertation (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2006), 27–99.

¹⁰Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2008), 85–132; Epiphanius’s “polemical” envisioning of the order of the columns (to preserve the primacy of the Septuagint, at the center) is discussed on pages 92–94.

¹¹Judith Lieu, “‘Impregnable Ramparts and Walls of Iron’: Boundary and Identity in ‘Judaism’ and ‘Christianity,’” *New Testament Studies* 48 (2002): 297–313.

awareness of the porousness of identity and community: “Borders themselves,” Daniel Boyarin has written, “are not given but constructed by power to mask hybridity, to occlude and disown it.”¹² Borders produce, and elide, difference and distinction. Roman borders—or, more properly, *limites*, or frontiers: sites of material and cultural exchange—were primarily sites for the exercise of control, where the authoritative logic of empire was most visibly, and anxiously, at work.

When we situate rhetorics of conversion in these borderlands, therefore, we begin to rework our assumptions about the nature of religious transformation.¹³ Just as the border is about the often uneasy management of social, cultural, and religious contact, so late ancient conversion must be viewed as an exteriorized discourse of identity subject to structures of power and knowledge.¹⁴ Such an exteriorized understanding of conversion stands in contrast to our typical understanding of (Western, Christian) conversion as the interior reorientation of the individual soul. We can trace the irreducible individuality and interiority of religious transformation, postulated by Arthur Darby Nock and William James,¹⁵ to that master of interior introspection, Augustine.¹⁶ But

¹²Daniel Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 15.

¹³“Borderlands” theory emphasizes the porosity and hybridity of cultural identities, and emerges from studies of Latino/a and Chicano/a culture on the U.S.-Mexican Border, see Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1987). It has been picked up recently by students of late antiquity, such as the Ancient Borderlands Research Focus Group (<http://www.ihc.ucsb.edu/research/borderlands.html>, accessed June 5, 2011).

¹⁴So Zeba Cook, *Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche 130 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004), resists the “siren song of psychologism” (4) by reframing ancient conversion—specifically that of the apostle Paul—in the social context of patron-client relations. Cook, like many contemporary Pauline scholars, draws inspiration from Kirster Stendahl, “Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West,” *Harvard Theological Review* 56 (1963): 199–215.

¹⁵The highly individualized framework of A. D. Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933), remains highly influential (even when Nock himself is not cited). Nock, in turn, was greatly influenced by the psychological theories of religious formation of William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longman & Green, 1902). On the influence that both Nock and James still hold over interpretations of conversion in antiquity, see Peter Brown, “Conversion and Christianization in Late Antiquity: The Case of Augustine,” in *The Past Before Us: The Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity*, eds. Carole Straw and Richard Lim (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 103–17. That Nock and his fellow ancient historians were drawn to a historical view of the high Roman Empire as a period of individual alienation (thus requiring a Jamesian psychologizing interpretation) has been carefully analyzed by Nicola Denzey, “‘Enslavement to Fate,’ ‘Cosmic Pessimism,’ and Other Explorations of the Late Roman Psyche: A Brief History of a Historiographical Trend,” *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 33 (2004): 277–99.

¹⁶Paula Fredriksen, “Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self,” *Journal of Theological Studies* n.s. 37 (1986): 3–34, esp. 26–33, following closely on Stendahl, “Paul.” In a later piece, Fredriksen calls for the “retirement” of the term

there are surprisingly few introspective narratives of religious conversion in antiquity: moments at which a subject invites us to witness his, or her, movement from one religious life to another.¹⁷ More often, we read *about* religious transformation: narratives of conversion form part of the larger discursive social and religious fabric of late antiquity. More helpful than Augustine's evocation of the inner movements of the soul may be modern theorist Gauri Viswanathan's insights into the role of conversion as a colonial discourse. For Viswanathan, conversion appears in the rhetoric of empire when the "state" desires to visibly grapple with, and masterfully overcome, the problems of identity and difference within its borders: "If conversion precipitates breaches within the fold, it also sets in motion a dynamic social process that confers a new power and role on the state."¹⁸ Viswanathan's insights, originally directed to the modern period, bear fruit when projected into other cultural and political contexts. In other periods during which the interests of the state overlap with those of religious institutions—the late Roman Empire, for instance—we can see that to talk about *conversion* is also to think about personhood and power.¹⁹

Epiphanius is a useful figure through whom we can approach the late ancient Christian construction of conversion. Most famous for his massive *Panarion*, or *Medicine-Chest Against Heresies*, a heresiological treatise based on previous sources, personal experience, and downright fabrication, Epiphanius was a towering figure of late fourth-century Christianity. It is true that modern scholars find Epiphanius, at best, a distasteful figure:

"conversion" in studies of Paul: "Mandatory Retirement: Ideas in the Study of Christian Origins Whose Time to Go Has Come," *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 35 (2006): 231–46.

¹⁷The exceptions are notable precisely for their rarity, particularly in comparison with the way in which modern people frame their introspective conversion narratives. On some of the more "classic" first-person narratives of conversion, see Laura Nasrallah's discussion of Justin Martyr and Tatian, "The Rhetoric of Conversion and the Construction of Experience: The Case of Justin Martyr," *Studia Patristica* 40 (2006): 467–74. The modern tendency to frame conversion as an entirely interiorized movement of the self was tackled sociologically by Rodney Stark and John Lofland, "Becoming a World-Saver: A Theory of Conversion to a Deviant Perspective," *American Sociological Review* 30 (1965): 863–74; for overview and critique, see Lorne L. Dawson, "Who Joins New Religious Movements and Why: Twenty Years of Research and What Have We Learned?" in *Cults and New Religious Movements: A Reader*, ed. Lorne L. Dawson (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 116–30; originally published in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses* 25 (1996): 141–61.

¹⁸Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 17.

¹⁹Recent studies of "conversion," particularly in the ancient world, have certainly tried to dislodge Augustine's internalizing viewpoint: see, particularly, the two collections of essays by Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton: *Conversion in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: Seeing and Believing* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2003) and *Conversion: Old Worlds and New* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2003).

narrow-minded, inflammatory, prone to extreme and violent rhetoric, the father of heresiology whose lurid accounts of heretics can be used only with the greatest care as a source of historical information.²⁰ As a controversialist he was seemingly ubiquitous in the last third of the fourth century, condemning bishops (both John of Jerusalem and John Chrysostom of Constantinople), attacking monks, and even ripping down the curtain of a church that he found religiously offensive.²¹ Yet in his own time, Epiphanius was perceived quite differently. His influence across the Mediterranean world, from Rome to Constantinople, is undeniable, and remarkable for a Palestinian monk who rose to become the bishop of a small city on the island of Cyprus. He served as an ascetic counselor and theological advisor to numerous Christian luminaries,²² and soon after his death was eulogized as a miracle-working saint.²³ I do not suggest we revise our modern opinion of Epiphanius—he was, to be sure, a difficult and harsh figure—but rather recognize that he speaks more representatively of his time and place than he is often given credit for.

I argue that Epiphanius can help us reconsider late ancient conversion, not as the internal reorientation to a “new life,” but instead the exteriorized management of status and difference.²⁴ That is, Epiphanius allows us to

²⁰For a useful summary of historians’ reactions to Epiphanius (almost uniformly negative), see Jon Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism in Early Christianity: Epiphanius of Cyprus and the Legacy of Origen*, Patristic Monograph Series 13 (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1988), 26–27.

²¹Epiphanius’s account of tearing down the curtain bearing an image “of Christ or one of his saints” led to his concatenation with other patristic sources as an authority for the iconoclasts in the eighth and ninth centuries: see Pierre Maraval, “Épiphanie, ‘Docteur des Iconoclastes,’” in *Nicée II, 787–1987: Douzes siècles d’images religieuses*, eds. F. Boespflug and N. Lissky (Paris: Cerf, 1987), 51–62; Kenneth Parry, *Depicting the Word: Byzantine Iconophile Thought of the Eighth and Ninth Centuries*, The Medieval Mediterranean 12 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 149–51; and István Bugár, “Epiphanius of Salamis as a Monastic Author? The so-called *Testimonium Epiphani* in the Context of Fourth-Century Spiritual Trends,” *Studia Patristica* 42 (2006): 73–81. Apart from some fragments, Epiphanius’s letters are mostly preserved in Latin translations by Jerome (on the account of the curtain, see Jerome, *ep.* 51.9, where Epiphanius explains his desire to replace the curtain). I cite Jerome’s letters from the critical edition of the *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum* (vols. 54–56); translations are my own.

²²Jerome, *ep.* 108.6.1, recounts Epiphanius’s influence on the Roman matron Paula, who encountered the Cypriote bishop in Rome and was inspired to embrace a life of monasticism, and who continued to turn to Epiphanius for counsel throughout her life (as in Jerome, *ep.* 108.7.2, 21.2–3). The preface of the *Ancoratus*, a theological treatise written in the early 370s, shows that the work was written following the request of other clergy for Epiphanius’s doctrinal insights. Similarly, the *Panarion* was composed at the request of foreign clergy.

²³See Claudia Rapp, “The *Vita* of Epiphanius of Salamis: An Historical and Literary Study,” 2 vols. (D.Phil. Thesis, Oxford University, 1991).

²⁴Eugene V. Gallagher, “Conversion and Community in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Religion* 73 (1993): 1–15, provides a useful critique of the overly individual view of religion taken by Nock from James, and seeks to place the emphasis instead on community: “By emphasizing the connections between conversion and community life, I want to reintegrate the personal and institutional dimensions of conversion that James and Nock have kept separated” (3).

think more *imperially* about the ways in which people became and unbecame in the late ancient Christian world. My use of *imperial* in this context is, to be sure, a bit broad. Epiphanius himself did not directly serve in the administration of the Roman Empire, nor has he left any writings that explicitly defend the workings of the Empire or its increasing entanglement with ecclesiastical institutions.²⁵ I nonetheless claim that Epiphanius gives us insight into the imperial nature of the Christian church of the late fourth century by the way he views the world. Epiphanius's Christian world is imperial insofar as it assumes a position of superiority and totality, an ability to comprehend the world absolutely and represent it totally. Epiphanius does not question empire; he exists in and through it.²⁶

Epiphanius also allows us to think more *expansively* about what we typically consider "conversion." Much of Epiphanius's narratives of religious status change, like the stories of the biblical translators I presented above, occur in geographical and cultural frontier zones of empire, sites in which the political, cultural, and religious power of empire is most manifest and most under scrutiny.²⁷ The imperial frontier zone imagines border crossings as *loci* of danger but also mastery. Here, empire becomes potent and visible (because also only partially present and contested). In the frontier zone, a variety of types of religious border crossing become relevant: points at which religious status is challenged, transformed, and managed by a masterful hand. In what follows, I explore three different types of "becoming," each of which will give us some purchase on comprehending the frontiers of Christian personhood. First, changes in status within Christian hierarchies (from priest to lay, and back again) illustrate the ways in which frontiers function as unstable zones of authoritative control. Next, in the conversion from orthodox to heretical Christian we see the erratic role of empire in Christian community. Finally,

²⁵Although his discussions of Constantine and other "orthodox" emperors are typically sympathetic and even laudatory, more significant, I think, is their unquestioned omnipresence in, for instance, the fabric of the Panarion. See now Young Richard Kim, "Bad Heretics Corrupt Good Emperors: Ecclesiastical Authority and the Rhetoric of Heresy in the Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis," *Studia Patristica* 47 (2010): 161–66.

²⁶See my discussion of the term "imperial" in *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, Divinations (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004), 11–12.

²⁷The concept of a "frontier zone" has been deployed in the history of religions by David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996), 20–26: "I define a frontier as a zone of contact, rather than a line, a border, or a boundary. By this definition, a frontier is a region of intercultural relations between intrusive and indigenous people. Those cultural relations, however, are also power relations. A frontier zone opens with the contact between two or more previously distinct societies and remains open as long as power relations are unstable and contested, with no one group or coalition able to establish dominance. A frontier zone closes when a single political authority succeeds in establishing its hegemony over the area" (20–21). See also Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 13–14, 202–9.

by looking at the change from Jew to Christian we see how the particularly “Christian” notion of religious boundary can collapse in on itself, as identity in the borderlands becomes totalizing.

I. BECOMING A LEADER: ASCETICS AND PRIESTS

In two very different episodes, Epiphanius describes changes of religious status within the Christian hierarchy. In a letter to Bishop John of Jerusalem, translated into Latin and preserved by his ally Jerome, Epiphanius tells the story of an irregular ordination. Through contact over the years, Epiphanius had become aware that a certain monastery in John’s episcopal jurisdiction had no one to minister the sacraments: the two priests already resident there, it seemed, “were unwilling to offer the sacrifices permitted to their rank” (*ep.* 51.1.3). A third potential priestly candidate, who had so far eluded ordination, serendipitously presented himself before Epiphanius with other monks wishing to settle a grievance. As Epiphanius tells it:

I ordered him to be seized by several deacons, and that his mouth be held (lest, perhaps in his desire to be freed, he curse us in Christ’s name). So first I ordained him as deacon, setting the fear of God before him, and forcing him to minister. Vigorously indeed he objected, shouting that he was not worthy, and protesting that this heavy burden was beyond his abilities. Scarcely therefore I overcame him, and I was able to persuade him with biblical witnesses, and with the laying out of God’s commandments. And when he had ministered the holy sacrifices, once more with great difficulty I shut his mouth and ordained him presbyter. (*ep.* 51.1.5–6)

Epiphanius’s victim here is Paulinian, Jerome’s brother, inhabitant of Jerome’s monastery in Bethlehem, some miles from Jerusalem. Paulinian’s is not the only forcible clerical ordination we hear tell of during this period, and later: forcible (or, at least, coercive) ordination becomes something of a trope in hagiographic literature, part of the growing *mythos* of the saintly “monk-bishop.”²⁸ Epiphanius’s account is one of the few narratives of forcible

²⁸Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 37 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 141–47, discusses the political and rhetorical effects of monks protesting their ordination. Peter Norton, *Episcopal Elections, 250–600: Hierarchy and Popular Will in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Classical Monographs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 191–96, provides a brief catalogue of forced, or coerced, ordinations, mostly from hagiography and mostly to the episcopacy. Epiphanius himself alludes to the threat of forced ordination in the long narrative Count Joseph, which I discuss below. In his later years, to avoid ordination by the local Arians after his wife’s death (and lapsing into heresy), Joseph took a second wife (*Pan.* 30.5.8).

ordination from the hand of one of the direct participants,²⁹ and is striking for its matter-of-factness.³⁰ We have no sense in this account that Epiphanius finds his own behavior unusual or extreme.

The context of Epiphanius's account must explain, in part, his *sang-froid*. In this letter, Epiphanius is (ostensibly) responding to accusations that he had improperly ordained Paulinian within Bishop John's jurisdiction without John's consent. In a broader sense, the story is about who exerts control over the boundaries of Christian selfhood. Mostly obviously, the sloppy ecclesiastical boundary of clergy and laity is managed and corrected by Epiphanius: for years, he reports, the monks of the monastery had been complaining about their clerical deficiency. In an act of charity, Epiphanius had forcibly escorted Paulinian—twice—across clerical borders to correct this deficiency.³¹ Other boundaries and borders are implicated here, as well. Epiphanius suggests that the monastery by its nature exists outside of episcopal authority, a free-floating island of sanctity that defies its own geography; he further notes that his "action concerned a monastery whose inmates were foreigners in no way subject to [John's] provincial jurisdiction" (*ep.* 51.1.3). Besides, Epiphanius chides, why should John be so precious about episcopal borders? In the "large and ranging" province of Cyprus, Epiphanius is grateful if other bishops ordain priests he has "been unable to capture" himself (*ep.* 51.2.1). It is, somewhat paradoxically, a sign of control and mastery to allow others to intrude on these boundaries. Finally, John's overly conscientious attention to his own boundaries bespeaks an ironic loss of *self*-control: in pressing his case, John has "allowed [his] anger to overcome [him] and [his] indignation to get the

²⁹Augustine of Hippo is another direct witness, on two counts: in a much later sermon, he recounts how he was more or less conscripted into the priesthood while visiting Hippo (*sermo* 355.2; his ordination took place in 391, this sermon was probably delivered toward the end of his life in the 420s); and in a thoroughly apologetic letter, Augustine narrates the narrowly averted forcible ordination of Pinian, husband of Melania the Younger, during their stay in North Africa following the sack of Rome: *ep.* 126 (written to Albina, Melania's mother; he also discusses the event in *ep.* 125 to his friend and episcopal colleague Alypius). On these twin events, see Kate Cooper, "Poverty, Obligation, and Inheritance: Roman Heiresses and the Varieties of Senatorial Christianity in Fifth-Century Rome," *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900*, eds. Kate Cooper and Julia Hillner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 165–89, at 165–67.

³⁰Although Epiphanius and other contemporary sources do not discuss the circumstance of his own ordination, his hagiography (from, perhaps, the late fifth century) presents Epiphanius's ordination to the priesthood as similarly forced and violent: *Vita Epiphanius* 60 (text in Rapp, "Vita of Epiphanius," 2:126–28).

³¹There is no sense in his letter about the amount of time that passed between Paulinian's diaconate and presbyterate: he notes that "I ordained one of the brothers deacon, and *after he had ministered as such*, admitted him to the priesthood" (*ep.* 51.1.3, emphasis added). Presumably the gap could have been as short as a single service, during which Paulinian was "convinced" to take up his diaconal duties.

better of [him]" (*ep.* 51.2.5). Epiphanius, by contrast, as he forced Paulinian across the borders of ecclesiastical hierarchy, is masterful and orderly.³²

Control over clerical and geographic boundaries structure another story of religious status transformation that Epiphanius tells in the fortieth chapter of his *Panarion*, on the "archontics." (Like many of Epiphanius's eighty heresies, the "archontics" are otherwise unattested among ancient Christians.) Here the subject is a monk named Peter, who lived in Palestine near Epiphanius's own home turf:

He had belonged to many sects in his early youth but during Aetius's episcopate he was accused and convicted of being a Gnostic, and was then deposed from the presbyterate—at some time he had been made a presbyter. After his conviction he was banished by Aetius and went to live in Arabia.³³ (*Pan.* 40.1.5)

We might consider this a simple reversal of the story of Paulinian: a man is stripped of his presbyterate, forced by a masterful bishop back across a clerical boundary he had illegitimately transgressed. Once again, appropriate control of Christian frontiers is exerted. But the story does not end there. A generation after his deposition (Aetius of Lydda was dead by the 340s), Peter returned to Epiphanius's neighborhood as an old man, although "secretly still carrying this poison within him." Apparently living as a monk in Epiphanius's own monastery,³⁴ Peter began to "whisper" his heresy until "he was exposed for what he was and anathematized and refuted by my poor self" (*Pan.* 40.1.6). Epiphanius seems to refer here to a monastic expulsion since, as an abbot, he does not (yet) possess the power of excommunication. Forced once more across an internal ecclesiastical boundary, the ex-priest

³²Furthermore, in order to escape censure, it seems Paulinian took up "official" residence in Cyprus soon after: so Jerome, *Contra Joannem Hierosolymitanum* 41: "you see that he is with his own bishop, that he has returned to Cyprus, that he comes to visit us occasionally (*interdum*), not as one of yours, but another's (*alienum*), indeed, belonging to the one who ordained him."

³³Aetius should not be confused with the "Anomoioan" heretic condemned by Epiphanius in *Pan.* 76; this elder Aetius was bishop of Diospolis (Lydda/Lod) in the early fourth century, and a signatory at the Council of Nicaea. I cite from the critical edition of the *Panarion* in the Grieschichen christlichen Schriften series (3 vols.) edited by Karl Holl and revised by Jürgen Drummer. Translations of the *Panarion* are slightly modified from Frank Williams, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 36 and 63 (Leiden: Brill, 1994 and 2009).

³⁴Epiphanius's narrative is a bit confused in this section, but he seems to be telling a story of his own time as an abbot in Palestine, incorporating a small, local occasion of monastic heresy into the fabric of his heresiology. At the beginning of the chapter, he describes Peter (the heretic) living "in a certain cave" as a monk, drawing many admirers (*Pan.* 40.1.4), so it might seem he is merely living near Epiphanius's monastery when rebuked by Epiphanius; but it is only after Epiphanius's rebuke that Peter "took up residence in the cave" (*Pan.* 40.1.7), presumably continuing and intensifying a (false) monastic life begun under Epiphanius's leadership.

now becomes an ex-monk. Where the first religious status change failed to do its job, we might think, the second will be more successful.

Yet this narrative ultimately lacks the fully confident mastery of Epiphanius's ordination of Paulinian. For Peter—ex-priest, ex-monk—merely moves into a nearby cave, where he becomes a famous hermit and “gathers many.” He has, seemingly, lost none of his ecclesiastical status and remains a teacher and minister. From his deceptive anchoritic cave (in a sheepskin that makes him, according to Epiphanius, a real “wolf in sheep’s clothing”) Peter passes his heretical teachings to one Eutactus, who will go on to “sow his tare” in Armenia: the failure to enforce internal ecclesiastical boundaries is echoed by porous geographic boundaries. If the story of Paulinian is one of control of hierarchical boundaries, the story of Peter is about the loss of containment that threatens even the most well-managed frontier zone.

II. BECOMING A HERETIC

In many ways, Epiphanius's master-work, the *Panarion*, is a study both in the porous frontiers of religious identity and in Epiphanius's own role as the manager of those anxious frontiers. Of all the boundaries crossed by Christians, that threshold between orthodoxy and heresy looms largest in Epiphanius's imagination throughout his corpus. In some respects, this is because of the totalizing view of the Christian universe that Epiphanius cultivates throughout his writings: in a totalized scheme in which there is no “outside,” the multifarious differences within stand in precipitously high relief.³⁵ Just as the movement across status lines within Christianity spoke to issues of hierarchy and control, the movement of Christians from orthodoxy into heresy likewise articulates the lack of containment within that orthodox totality. Viswanathan notes that “conversion unsettles the boundaries by which selfhood, citizenship, nation-hood, and community are defined, exposing these as permeable borders.”³⁶ To pass from orthodoxy to heresy, for Epiphanius, is to make visible one of the myriad of fault lines fracturing the façade of Christian community. It is also, in a way, to provide an opportunity for a masterful Christian heresiologist to map and control those faults.

Certainly we witness several Christians passing from truth to error in the pages of the *Panarion*. Valentinus, before launching into gnostic error,

³⁵See Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews*, 44–55; Jeremy Schott, “Heresiology as Universal History in Epiphanius's *Panarion*,” *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 10 (2006): 546–563; and Kim, “Imagined Worlds,” *passim*.

³⁶Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, 16.

“abandons the faith” (*Pan.* 31.7.2). Theodotus, after lapsing during persecution, invents a heresy to cover his shame (*Pan.* 54.1.3–7). Bardesan was originally a member of “God’s holy church,” even risking martyrdom, before he “fell in with the Valentinians” (*Pan.* 56.2.1). Hieracas “was Christian . . . but did not persevere in the Christian way of life; for he strayed from it, slipped, and came to grief” (*Pan.* 67.1.4). The borderlands of Christian orthodoxy are precarious, indeed, across which faithful Christians drift and morph into heresiarchs.³⁷ I would like to focus more specifically in this section on just two significant heretical border-crossers. Young Richard Kim, in recent work on Epiphanius’s *Panarion*, noted the degree to which biography structures the later chapters of the bishop’s heresiography.³⁸ Following Kim’s lead, I want to touch on the biographies of two major heresiarchs of the *Panarion*: Origen and Arius.³⁹ These two “conversions” in particular highlight a second aspect of Epiphanius’ discourse of conversion: the erratic presence of Empire in the management of Christian boundaries.

Origen, against whose teaching Epiphanius waged a protracted battle,⁴⁰ begins his life in *Panarion* 64 as a model Christian, the pious son of a martyr, himself subject to harassment in Alexandria for his Christianity. Although he lapses at the pagan altar before the threat of sexual violence, he remains (as Epiphanius says) “of the orthodox, catholic faith” replanted in Caesarea (*Pan.* 64.3.1). From the beginning of his life, the shadow of Empire (in the form of religious persecution) casts a chill on Origen’s Christianity. Studious to a fault, Origen’s longing for knowledge leads him into heresy: “his wealth of learning proved to be his great downfall” (*Pan.* 64.3.8); he was “bitten by a baneful viper, I mean secular education (τῆς

³⁷On the socially permeable boundaries between early Christian communities, see now Kendra Eshelman, “Becoming Heretical: Affection and Ideology in Recruitment to Early Christianities,” *Harvard Theological Review* 104 (2011): 191–216.

³⁸See Young Richard Kim, “Reading the *Panarion* as Collective Biography: The Heresiarch as Unholy Man,” *Vigiliae Christianae* 64 (2010): 382–413, which considers the broader biographical strands linking sections of the *Panarion*.

³⁹Kim, “Imagined Worlds,” also looks at the biography of Mani, which is probably the longest heresiarchal biography in the *Panarion* (based, primarily, on the scurrilous *Acta Archelai*). While Mani’s biography is certainly rife with failed boundaries—of geography, status, and orthodoxy—he operates on the margins of all of these borders, never inhabiting “orthodoxy” in the way Origen and Arius do before their conversions to heresy.

⁴⁰See Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism*; Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 86–104; Rebecca Lyman, “The Making of a Heretic: The Life of Origen in Epiphanius’ *Panarion* 64,” *Studia Patristica* 31 (1997): 445–51; Rebecca Lyman, “Origen as Ascetic Theologian: Orthodoxy and Authority in the Fourth-Century Church,” in *Origeniana Septima*, eds. Wolfgang Beinert and Uwe Kühneweg (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), 187–94; Kim, “Imagined Worlds,” 118–49. Epiphanius’s earliest extant treatise, the *Ancoratus*, singles out the teachings of Origen—particularly his anti-materialism and allegory—for refutation: *Ancoratus* 54–63 (I refer to the Grieschichen christlichen Schriften edition of Karl Holl).

κοσμικῆς προπαίδειας), and became the cause of others' death" (*Pan.* 64.72.5).⁴¹ The sexual violence of the state and the intellectual violence of "worldly education" are perhaps not unrelated in Epiphanius's mind, insofar as they both envision the boundaries of the person (body and mind) subject to the deteriorating outside influence of Empire (political and cultural). Origen immediately retrojects these negative material and intellectual influences back outward. In addition to producing "mortally dangerous exegesis" (*Pan.* 64.3.9), Origen was rumored to have devised unnatural ways of "dealing with his body," such as methods of chemical castration and medical memory-enhancement.⁴²

Folded within the story of Origen's fall from orthodoxy to heresy is the story of Ambrose, his eventual patron. Origen is pressed to meet Ambrose ("a prominent imperial official") so he may draw him from heresy (Epiphanius guesses Marcionite or Sabellian) to the proper orthodoxy which, at that time, Origen professed (*Pan.* 64.3.1). Origen is seemingly successful: Ambrose is converted from his "other heresy" to orthodoxy, and bankrolls Origen's prodigious textual and exegetical criticism (*Pan.* 64.3.2–4). Yet it is precisely because he has acquired the support of Ambrose—the convert from heresy—that Origen can himself become so swallowed up in "learning" that he begins to produce his "dangerous exegeses." Instead of clearly articulating a boundary between orthodoxy and heresy, the life of Origen becomes a kind of Möbius strip, leading without clear transition from childhood orthodoxy to near apostasy to learned orthodoxy (even converting heretics!) to the most dire heresy.

Origen's heresy is marked at its core by the baleful influences of "the world" (ὁ κόσμος): Roman power, evident in persecution, and Greek knowledge, evident in overly intellectualized interpretation. Yet Epiphanius himself is deeply embedded in both *imperium* and *paideia*, a learned bishop riding comfortably (or, at least, unself-consciously) in the eddies of imperial Christian power. But perhaps this reflection is not accidental, as Epiphanius succeeds where Origen fails. In other words, the "outside" forces he sees as

⁴¹Kim, "Imagined Worlds," highlights the "denunciation of classical culture" (8) throughout Epiphanius's oeuvre, particularly in his attack on Origen (esp. 144–48); Lyman, "Origen," also describes Epiphanius as "a man of limited education" (187) and sees in his attack on Origen a "populist" rejection of *paideia* (192–94). While it does seem clear that Epiphanius did not have formal philosophical education, it seems undeniable that he must have had grammatical and some rhetorical education; therefore, his attacks on "Hellenistic *paideia*" should be understood as themselves highly rhetorical devices.

⁴²Eusebius of Caesarea, a partisan of Origen, recounts the castration in *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.8.1, in terms that seem to indicate a more mechanical act on Origen's part, described twice as "an action" (τοῦργον, ἔργον); certainly Epiphanius's younger contemporary Jerome envisioned something more straightforward: *ferro truncaret genitalia* (ep. 84.8). See Dechow, *Dogma and Mysticism* (128–29), who highlights Epiphanius's "skepticism" about Origen's castration.

responsible for Origen's conversion to heresy are now contained safely "within" Epiphanius's own orthodox Christianity. Of course the projection of worldly power into the realm of heresy even as it remains within the orbit of orthodoxy places Epiphanius's imperial Christianity in a problematic situation, one that certainly haunted post-Constantinian Christianity. What is the relationship between Christianity and "the world?" Epiphanius's life of Origen—converter of heretics, convert to heresy—does not resolve, but merely embodies and contains this ambiguity.

If Origen's conversion problematizes the secular foundations of Epiphanius's Greco-Roman Christian Empire, Arius's tale bears witness to the power of empire to squeeze out evil and defend its own boundaries. Epiphanius prefaces his account of Arius with just such an image of masterful expulsion: "Alexander removed him from office and expelled him from the church and the city, as a great evil which had sprung up in the world" (*Pan.* 69.1.1). In the same introductory section, Epiphanius (impossibly) aligns the beginning of Arius's life and Christian Empire, as the heresiarch was "born during the reign of the great and blessed emperor Constantine" (*Pan.* 69.1.3).⁴³ Arius even functions as an inverse Constantine: whereas the first Christian emperor "was admirable in the practice of Christianity," Arius "succeeded in detaching a large number [from it]" (*Pan.* 69.1.4).

The beginning and ends of Arius's life are also modeled on Judas: his conversion to heresy begins when "a spirit of Satan . . . entered" him (*Pan.* 69.2.1; cf. Luke 22:3), and ends when his body "bursts" and he expires (*Pan.* 69.10.3; Acts 1:18).⁴⁴ Like Judas, Arius is the false disciple, the traitor within; inspired by Satan, filled to bursting with wickedness, he succeeds in seducing others to his evil heresy, including clergy, monks, virgins, and even bishops. "Infused with the power of the devil" (*Pan.* 69.12.1), "inspired by vanity" (*Pan.* 69.3.1), Arius represents the vulnerability of the Christian body politic. Expelled from Alexandria, he flits around the eastern Mediterranean like a heretical tse-tse fly, carrying his contagion across provincial boundaries and within other city walls. Only the bishops of the East (and the threat of imperial sanction) can stop Arius's evil; special credit goes to Bishop Alexander of Constantinople, who prayed for the humiliating death that came to Arius while he sat on the toilet (*Pan.* 69.10.2–3).

⁴³Possibly Epiphanius means to say that Arius "emerged" at this time, but the Greek seems fairly clear: ἐγένετο δὲ οὗτος ὁ Ἀρειος ἐν χρόνοις Κωνσταντίνου τοῦ μεγάλου καὶ μακαρίτου βασιλέως, υἱοῦ Κωνσταντίνου. Such dating would make Arius in Epiphanius's account in his teens and twenties at the height of his heretical mischief (especially since Epiphanius also antedates Arius's death by at least a decade: see further discussion below).

⁴⁴The comparison is explicit in *Pan.* 68.6.9: "That night Arius went to the privy to relieve himself, and, like Judas once, burst. And thus his end came in a foul, unclean place."

On Epiphanius's timeline, Arius's death is followed immediately by the Council of Nicaea, the very watershed of Christian Empire. The juxtaposition of the obliterated boundaries of Arius's body and the newly constituted boundaries of the Christian Roman Empire are, indeed, striking. So striking, indeed, that it must help explain Epiphanius's curious—and impossible—chronology of Arius's life. Supposedly born “during the time of Constantine,” Arius somehow was also “an old man” (γέρον) when “he departed from the prescribed path” and entered into heresy some time in the 310s (*Pan.* 69.3.1).⁴⁵ So too we know (and imagine Epiphanius knew) that Arius outlived the Council of Nicaea by a decade or more.⁴⁶ Strict chronology is not Epiphanius's concern here; rather, as in the heretical slide of Origen, Epiphanius gazes upon the conversion of heretics and contemplates the force, or failure, of Empire.

III. BECOMING A CHRISTIAN

Conversion within Christian hierarchy speaks to the desire for, and instability of, episcopal control; conversion to Christian heresy problematizes the foundations of Christian empire; conversion to Christianity itself both materializes and dissolves the absolute frontiers of Christian identity, ultimately closing the religious frontier zone and folding “the other side” within. As a bishop, Epiphanius surely presided over many individual and communal conversions from non-Christian to Christian life. Unlike other contemporary bishops, however, he shows little interest in preserving any catechetical instruction or advice for the *illuminandi*.⁴⁷ He does, however, preserve several telling narratives of conversion to Christianity that cohere with his larger interests in religious transformations as illuminating moments of Christian discourse. Several of his lengthier accounts of conversion to Christianity involve conversion from Judaism.⁴⁸ Certainly, as Daniel Boyarin has convincingly argued, Epiphanius lingers on the Jewish-Christian border so long precisely in order to create a meaningful ideological divide between

⁴⁵Indeed, Epiphanius's testimony about Arius's advanced age in the 310s is often cited as evidence for dating Arius's birth to the 250s, as Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 2001), 30.

⁴⁶In the previous chapter on the Melitians, Epiphanius correctly notes that Arius lived for some time after the Council of Nicaea that anathematized him: *Pan.* 68.4.4–6, 6.7–9.

⁴⁷It is possible that *Ancoratus* 102–7, a refutation of paganism that ends in an exhortation to priests and bishops ministering to ex-pagans, retains some germs of Epiphanius's own instruction to converts on giving up idolatry.

⁴⁸In the earlier chapters of the *Panarion*, Epiphanius also discusses converts to Judaism (*Pan.* 20.1.5, 25.1.2), and one convert from Judaism to Samaritanism (*Pan.* 13.1.3). Epiphanius also describes Justin Martyr (who portrays himself in his *Dialogue with Trypho* as a Greek living in Samaria) as a convert to orthodoxy from “Samaritanism” (*Pan.* 46.1.3).

two messily interpenetrated religious categories.⁴⁹ But in closing and solidifying the Jewish-Christian frontier zone, Epiphanius ultimately embeds the Jewish “other” within his own Christian territory.⁵⁰

In a long digression in *Panarion* 30, his chapter against the Jewish-Christian “Ebionites,” Epiphanius relates the story of Count Joseph of Tiberias, a Christian aristocrat whom Epiphanius met in the 360s in Scythopolis.⁵¹ Joseph’s conversion narrative is long and convoluted; indeed, its length and complication seem to be something of the point. When Epiphanius meets Joseph, he is an orthodox Christian in Scythopolis, a Palestinian town full of Arians (*Pan.* 30.3.5–6); previously, however, Joseph had been a Jew, assistant to the Jewish Patriarch, Hillel. Upon Hillel’s death, Joseph was charged with keeping Hillel’s unruly child in line until he could assume the patriarchate. A series of events before and after Hillel’s death led Joseph toward Christianity—slowly and haltingly—until, once baptized as an orthodox Christian, he befriended Constantine and was given a high rank and the thankless task of building churches in Galilee. Multiple conversions from Judaism pervade this story, further echoing and complicating Joseph’s own conversion narrative, from the secret, deathbed conversion of the Patriarch Hillel (*Pan.* 30.4.5–7, 6.1–5) to an anonymous young ex-Jew living a closeted orthodox life in Scythopolis (*Pan.* 30.5.7).

Joseph’s own story is one of not-quite conversions. After watching, incredulous, as the Jewish Patriarch received deathbed catechism and baptism, Joseph discovers a secret cache of Hebrew translations of New Testament texts (*Pan.* 30.6.7–9).⁵² Neither of these fortuitous events convinces Joseph to embrace Christianity nor does his wonder at the prophylactic force of Christ’s name and cross, which protect a Christian maiden from the wicked magic of the Patriarch’s nefarious orphan son (*Pan.* 30.7.6–8.10).⁵³ Miracles follow: Joseph rises from his sickbed after a vision

⁴⁹Boyarin, *Border Lines*, 206–8.

⁵⁰Epiphanius’s hagiographers would claim that he had himself been raised Jewish until the age of sixteen, a claim that medieval and some modern scholars took at face value: *Vita Epiphani* 3–10 (Rapp, “*Vita* of Epiphanius,” 2:51–60).

⁵¹D. A. Washburn, “Tormenting the Tormentors: A Reinterpretation of Eusebius of Vercelli’s Letter from Scythopolis,” *Church History* 78 (2009): 731–55, gives the historical context for Epiphanius’s presence in Scythopolis in the early 360s; see also Stephen Goranson, “The Joseph of Tiberias Episode in Epiphanius: Studies in Jewish and Christian Relations,” Ph.D. Dissertation (Durham, N.C.: Duke University, 1990) and “Joseph of Tiberias Revisited: Orthodoxies and Heresies in Fourth-Century Galilee,” in *Galilee Through the Centuries: A Confluence of Cultures*, Duke Judaic Studies 1, ed. Eric M. Meyers (Winona Lake, Ill.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 335–43.

⁵²The memory of these texts, and Joseph’s discovery of them, is the hook for Epiphanius’s digression, after mentioning Ebionite use of Hebrew translations of the New Testament (*Pan.* 30.3.8–4.1).

⁵³The son (whose name Epiphanius thinks might be Judas [*Pan.* 30.7.2]) had seen the Christian woman in a bath; he and a friend attempted to cast spells on her, but she was protected by the “sign

of “the Lord” (*Pan.* 30.10.1) and himself cures a “naked madman” by invoking Jesus’ name (*Pan.* 30.10.3–7). When his final conversion does come, it is almost an accident: unhappy provincial Jews discover Joseph reading borrowed copies of the gospels, and throw him in a river to drown. Rescued from drowning, Epiphanius announces, Joseph was now “found worthy of holy baptism” (*Pan.* 30.11.3–7). It is unclear if Epiphanius means that the attempted murder by his co-religionists had proved him (to himself? to other Christians?) worthy of baptism, or whether the near-drowning itself was deemed ritually sufficient. Either way, the Jew has at last become a Christian.

The stuttering nature of Joseph’s conversion demonstrates the force required in Epiphanius’s narrative to bring closure to the frontier zone of Judaism and Christianity, the yawning distance established between the two religious territories. Yet other figures within the text curiously minimize this discursive distance, partially re-hybridizing the painstakingly disentangled religious threads. I refer here not to the heretical “Ebionites,” the refutation of whom has been interrupted by Joseph’s tale, but rather to other Jewish figures who precede Joseph in conversion from Judaism to Christianity. The first and most surprising (to Joseph and the reader) is the patriarch Hillel: out of nowhere, it seems, Hillel calls for a bishop to come and baptize him. The rest of the household is tricked into the thinking the bishop is a doctor and the water is medicinal; only Joseph, peering through “cracks in the doors,” knows the truth (*Pan.* 30.4.5–7, 6.4). Later, when Joseph himself falls ill, “an elder, a scholar of the Law,” who also reveals himself as a crypto-Christian, visits him. He “whispers” to Joseph, encouraging him to accept Jesus as Lord (*Pan.* 30.9.2–3). That such instances of secret conversion are not outliers is made clear by Epiphanius, who verifies that this is (apparently) common: “I have heard this sort of thing from someone else,” a Jew who “honored Christians and loved them” apparently because someone (we don’t know who) whispered “secretly” when he was sick that he would be judged by “Jesus Christ, the crucified Son of God” (*Pan.* 30.9.4–5).

What purpose does this trio of crypto-Christian Jewish converts serve, especially when juxtaposed with Joseph, the almost comically reluctant convert? In a discourse of conversion that emphasizes individuality, interiority, and introspection, these four converts might speak to the difficult nature of internal reorientation. Like Augustine crying out for “chastity, but not yet,” these Jews crave Christ but cannot whole-heartedly give themselves to him. But Epiphanius does not focus his conversion stories on the internal mechanics of the soul; instead he frames his tale with bishops and emperors,

and faith of Christ,” teaching Joseph that “where Christ’s name was, and the sign of his cross, the power of sorcery did not prevail” (*Pan.* 30.8.10).

with patriarchs and aristocrats, and with orthodoxy and heresy. Viswanathan writes that, in the colonial context, “[c]onverts function as strategic displacements of religious and ethnic groups, allowing writers to probe questions of selective incorporation and exclusion not easily approached by more direct means.”⁵⁴ When addressing the “heresy” of the Ebionites, the question of incorporation and exclusion is paramount: what part of Judaism “remains” in Christianity? Where does the authoritative bishop establish his closed frontier? The stuttering and repetitive conversion of Joseph, resonating and rebounding off of these ancillary characters, seems to allow Epiphanius to imagine a Christianity that has always contained the remains of Judaism, whispering secretively even in the bedchamber of the most prestigious Jews in Palestine. In the end, the frontier, once closed, dissolves as the true Jews morph, slow-motion before our eyes, into orthodox Christians.⁵⁵

Epiphanius indicates this absorption of Judaism by Christianity when he briefly mentions another “conversion” narrative in this chapter of the *Panarion*. It seems the Ebionites themselves claim that the apostle Paul was originally a pagan (φάσκουσιν αὐτὸν εἶναι Ἕλληνα) who

desired to marry a daughter of the high priest, and had therefore become a proselyte and been circumcised. But since he still could not marry that sort of girl he became angry and wrote against circumcision, and against the Sabbath and the legislation. (*Pan.* 30.16.9)

That is, Paul had been a pagan, and then a Jew, and then (more or less) a Christian. The progression across these borders into Christianity makes sense in Epiphanius’s larger scheme of religious transformation, eliciting the fluidity and dynamism of identity and community, but works exactly against Epiphanius’s particular concern in his chapter on Jewish-Christians. Paul must be *authentically* Jewish before becoming truly Christian—just like Joseph of Tiberias, Joseph’s patriarchal employer, and the other Jews-made-Christians in the *Panarion*. The question, after all, revolves around the ability of Christianity to absorb *true* and authentic Judaism, at its core. For Paul to be an ersatz Jew would defeat the purpose of telling these conversion stories at all.

Epiphanius in fact returns to the apostle Paul’s religious transformation, from Jew to Christian, in one of his later works: a treatise *On Gems*, in which he provides intertextual interpretations of the twelve stones in the breastplate of

⁵⁴Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold*, 26.

⁵⁵As Boyarin notes: “All of the formerly orthodox Jews have now become orthodox Christians, a conversion portrayed as without remainder.” *Border Lines*, 213,

the Israelite high priest (Exod 28:15–20).⁵⁶ The last stone, onyx, is ascribed by Epiphanius to the tribe of Benjamin. The mention of this youngest son of Israel allows Epiphanius to link the gem also to Paul, “of the tribe of Benjamin” (Phil 3:5; Rom 11:1), the “last of the apostles.”⁵⁷ This section of the treatise (like much of the chapters) is a dazzling intertextual display; here, much of it is in the voice of Paul, stitched together out of passages from Paul’s letters and verses of Psalms. Old and New Testament recombine, even dance together, as focus shifts back and forth from Benjamin (the Old) to Paul (the New). The goblet of Benjamin covered in onyx (combining Genesis 44 and Exodus 28) becomes the cup from which Paul serves the “draft of the knowledge of God.”⁵⁸ Benjamin, the “ravener wolf” of Genesis 49, becomes Paul who, “in his youth, like a wolf, ravened and champed the bones and the flesh of many.”⁵⁹

Paul’s transformation from “ravener wolf,” persecutor of the church, into most beloved apostle is the main theme of Epiphanius’s spiritual interpretation of the onyx. Twice Epiphanius places us with Paul on the road to Damascus,⁶⁰ hearing the chastising voice of God and becoming the “chosen vessel” of God’s word. The layers of transformation are thick: from Benjamin (who is also associated by Epiphanius with Damascus, as the site where he was called “marvelous in his youth”⁶¹) to Paul, from “wolf” to apostle, and from Old Testament into New. Here the value of re-visioning “conversion” with Epiphanius becomes most evident. Whereas, for Augustine, Paul’s transformation on the road to Damascus became the index by which to understand God’s inscrutable correction of the individual, fallen soul, at the climax of Epiphanius’s spiritual interpretation of Aaron’s

⁵⁶Epiphanius’s *De gemmis* does not survive in the original Greek: an Old Georgian version appears to be our oldest witness, along with Armenian, Latin, and Coptic fragments. The much-abbreviated Latin version was printed in *Patrologia Graeca* 43:322–66, and a slightly fuller version in *Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum* 35:743–73; the Georgian and other fragments are available, with an introduction, in *Epiphanius’s “De Gemmis”: The Old Georgian Version and the Fragments of the Armenian Version*, ed. Robert P. Blake, Texts and Studies (London: Christopher’s, 1934). I cite from Blake’s English translation of the Old Georgian (by page and line number). The first half of the treatise is an antiquarian and naturalist overview of the twelve stones (their origins, uses, and so forth); the second half of the treatise uses each stone, and its association with a particular son of Israel, as a launching pad for a more wide-ranging work of exegetical contemplation.

⁵⁷Two other gems are explicitly associated with apostles as well as Hebrew patriarchs in the second half of *De gemmis*: the red topaz is associated with Simeon and Judas Iscariot (124–25) while the green emerald is associated with Levi and John the evangelist (127–28). All of Epiphanius’s interpretations of the gems involve thick intertextuality between Old and New Testaments, particularly the gospels.

⁵⁸Blake, *De gemmis*, 169, lines 10–14.

⁵⁹Blake, *De gemmis*, 169, lines 21–24.

⁶⁰Blake, *De gemmis*, 167, line 15–168, line 16; 170, lines 4–13.

⁶¹Blake, *De gemmis*, 170, lines 5, 12–13; the reference seems to be Ps 68:27.

bejeweled breastplate that same conversion condenses the power and majesty of the total transformation of “old” into “new,” the absorption of Judaism into Christianity, past into present. The frontier zone between Judaism and Christianity closes, but we discover that Judaism remains *within* that frontier, enfolded within a totalizing vision of religious truth.

IV. CONCLUSION

When we peel back the genealogical layers of “conversion”—past A.D. Nock’s “reorientation of the soul”⁶² and William James’s unification of “a self hitherto divided,”⁶³ past Augustine’s overpowering introspective, retrospective gaze—sharpened at the geographic and historical limits of empire—we arrive at a discourse that is at once more expansive and less stable. Exteriorized, conversion becomes a social process no longer safeguarded invisibly within the psyche but rather subject to the structuring power of discourse. Furthermore, conversion, on my reading, indicates any religious transformation in which borders are acknowledged, crossed, and carefully managed. The movement from layperson to monk or cleric, of orthodox Christian to heretic, of Jew to Christian, are all imagined along the same terrain of socially embedded “becoming.”⁶⁴

Narratives about the change in religious status articulate moments at which the borders of religious identity become visible; because visible, they are subject to control. So Epiphanius, whose writings are replete with the anxiety of boundaries and borders, also relishes the narrative of border crossing because, in those moments in which the religious transformation is inscribed on the page, he displays control. The Roman Empire had similarly demonstrated its imperial mastery through the control of frontiers and boundaries, which (as recent studies have shown) operated not as high walls that kept the “other” outside, but rather as porous membranes that sought to control how others entered *into* the space of Roman control.⁶⁵ Roman historian David Cherry has remarked, “we would do better to define the Roman frontiers in the same way that historians of the western United States

⁶²Nock, *Conversion*, 7.

⁶³James, *Varieties*, 189.

⁶⁴On the expansion of “conversion” to include changes of status within Christianity, see James Muldoon, “Introduction: The Conversion of Europe,” in *Varieties of Religious Conversion in the Middle Ages* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1997), 1–10, where he speaks of a “conversion spectrum” (1).

⁶⁵A good summary of such work, incorporating theoretical work on “frontiers,” may be found in David Cherry, *Frontier and Society in Roman North Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 24–74.

have long described the American frontier, that is, as a *cultural process*.⁶⁶ Of course, the Roman Empire's frontier mastery eventually became a site for the disintegration—and reformation—of new European identities. So too we might look upon Epiphanius's masterful constructions of Christian becoming and see, in those very same moments, the anxiety of change: of un-becoming. The loss of containment, the failure to adequately police the borders of Christianity, necessarily haunt Epiphanius's imperial narratives from the frontier zone of Christian becoming.

⁶⁶Cherry, *Frontier and Society*, 27. Cherry's model is primarily economic (the Romans' "only identifiable policy in the [North African] frontier-zone is one of 'exploitation'" [74]), but he also signals his openness to cultural models. In this he follows the important work of C. R. Whittaker, much of which is condensed in his "Frontiers," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 11: *The High Empire, A.D. 70–192*, eds. Alan Bowman, Peter Garnsey, Dominic Rathbone (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 293–319.