Hospitality, not Honors: Portraits and Patronage in the *Acts of John*[*]

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Abstract

In this article, I examine how the apocryphal *Acts of John* depicts wealthy Christian converts as part of the "Christianization" of Ephesus. I note how the *Acts of John* uses its portrayal of leading citizens not only to critique, but to preserve and adapt prevailing expectations surrounding Greco-Roman cultic patronage. My analysis comprises two parts. In the first part, I discuss the ways in which the *Acts of John* undermines prevalent Greco-Roman practices of benefaction. I note that the *Acts of John* criticizes monetary offerings as part of cultic "exchanges," and thus indirectly condemns the patronage of religious institutions by wealthy benefactors. Relatedly, the *Acts of John*'s portrait scene, most often analyzed for its witness to early Christian aniconism, challenges Greco-Roman patronage norms by questioning the propriety of dedicatory portraits. In the second part, I track the ways in which the *Acts of John* preserves and adapts prevailing modes of ancient benefaction. Specifically, the *Acts of John* positions domestic hospitality as the primary means by which wealthy converts ought to support the Christian mission. Taken together, my two-part examination establishes that the *Acts of John* both challenges and redirects prevailing practices of Greco-Roman patronage as part of a broader articulation of proper Christian piety.

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Introduction

According to the apocryphal acts written in his name, the apostle John experienced a fate unlike many of his apostolic associates: a peaceful death. The *Acts of John* narrates that its titular apostle concluded his ministry in Ephesus by traveling outside the city, selecting and preparing a burial place, and expiring peacefully on the spot (106–110). Perhaps informed by this legendary death and burial, just outside of Roman-era Ephesus there developed a tomb cult associated with John, which continued to grow in religious, cultural, and civic significance as Christianity became the dominant cultic tradition in the Mediterranean. Eventually, in the first half of the sixth century, the emperor Justinian financed a monumental cruciform basilica on the site.[1] In recognition of the emperor's patronage, the capitals on the basilica's colonnades included monograms of Justinian and his empress, Theodora, while the interior decoration included a painting of Christ crowning the imperial couple.[2] According to the *Acts of John*, however, the apostle would have been none too pleased with the honorary images adorning his dedicated basilica. John scolds his follower Lycomedes for producing an honorary image of the apostle, which Lycomedes justifies based on the fact that John is the "benefactor" of the followers of Christ (27; see discussion below).[3]

The tension between the *Acts of John*'s condemnation of honorific portraits and the appearance of such imagery in the Basilica of St. John speaks to a more wide-ranging issue in ancient Christianity: How should wealthy Christians support the faith, and how are they to be honored (if at all) for their beneficence? The apocryphal acts of the apostles, including the *Acts of John*, provide important opportunities for contemplating such questions, as these narratives often focus on prominent and wealthy citizens and their purported conversion to Christian membership. Past analyses of the role of prominent citizens in the apocryphal acts have largely focused on how the acts have challenged social norms.[4] In what follows, however, I turn attention to how the *Acts of John* uses its portrayal of prominent citizens as a way

[1] Sabine Ladstätter and Andreas Pülz, "Ephesus in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Period: Changes in Its Urban Character from the Third to the Seventh Century AD," in *The Transition to Late Antiquity, on the Danube and Beyond* (ed. Andrew Poulter; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 391–433, at 414; Clive Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity: A Late Antique, Byzantine and Turkish City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979) 113–15. Justinian's Basilica of St. John replaced a smaller basilica that had existed at the site, built originally in the 5th cent.

[2] Foss, *Ephesus after Antiquity*, 89.

[3] Translations of the *Acts of John* are from *The Apocryphal New Testament* (ed. J. K. Elliott; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993; repr., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2009) 310–38.

[4] See especially Candida Moss, "Roman Imperialism: The Political Context of Early Christian Apocrypha," in *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha* (ed. Andrew Gregory and Christopher Tuckett; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015) 378–88; Judith Perkins, "Social

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not only to critique but to preserve and adapt prevailing expectations surrounding Greco-Roman cultic patronage.

My analysis comprises two parts. In the first part, I discuss the *Acts of John*'s undermining of prevalent Greco-Roman practices of benefaction. I note that the *Acts of John* criticizes monetary offerings as part of cultic "exchanges" and thus indirectly condemns the financial patronage of religious institutions by wealthy benefactors. Relatedly, the *Acts of John*'s famous portrait scene, most often analyzed for its apparent witness to early Christian aniconism, challenges Greco-Roman cultural norms by questioning the propriety of honoring benefactors with dedicatory portraits. In the second part I show how, by contrast, the *Acts of John* preserves and adapts prevailing modes of ancient benefaction. Specifically, the *Acts of John* positions upper-class domestic hospitality as the primary means by which wealthy converts ought to support the Christian mission in lieu of financial offerings and dedicatory portraits. Taken together, my two-part examination establishes that the *Acts of John* both challenges and redirects prevailing practices of Greco-Roman patronage as part of a broader articulation of proper Christian piety. In this way, the *Acts of John* emerges as an important witness to how early Christians described and prescribed particular understandings of ritual action and thus interwove their own practices into the cultural fabric of the Roman world.

Excursus: Locating the *Acts of John*

Throughout my analysis, I situate the intratextual themes of the *Acts of John* within the broader sociocultural contexts of Ephesus, the city in which the *Acts of John* is largely set. It is necessary here to provide two important methodological caveats. First, the *Acts of John* is traditionally dated to the second or third century,[5] but the text itself rests on a rather thin documentary foundation—all of our witnesses are secondary and quite late, and so speaking of any kind of unified or stable tradition within this early period is a treacherous enterprise.[6] Nevertheless, there is reliable ancient evidence that the stories associated with the *Acts of John* existed as part of various written collections beginning as early as the second and third centuries

Geography in the *Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,*" in *Space in the Ancient Novel* (ed. Michael Paschalis and Stavros Frangoulidis; Groningen: Barkhuis, 2002) 118–31.

[5] The collection of the apocryphal acts within Manichaean literature beginning in the 3rd cent. CE provides the most reliable evidence for the early circulation of the *Acts of John.* The likely use of the *Acts of John* by other apocryphal acts (such as the *Acts of Peter*, and possibly the *Acts of Paul and Thecla*) suggests that the apocryphal traditions at the base of the *Acts of John* were in circulation perhaps by the 2nd cent. Taken together, these disparate references to an early *Acts of John* place the origins of the textual tradition in the 2nd cent. On these points, see Knut Schäferdiek, "The Acts of John," in *New Testament Apocrypha* (ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher; trans. R. McL. Wilson; 2 vols.; rev. ed.; Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 2:152–71, at 152–56; Pieter Lalleman, *The Acts of John: A Two-Stage Initiation into Johannine Gnosticism* (Leuven: Peeters, 1998) 60.

[6] On the manuscript history of the *Acts of John*, see Lalleman, *The Acts of John*, 6–10; Schäferdiek, "The Acts of John," 152–71.

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CE;[7] thus, I will be reading the reconstructed *Acts of John* as textual remnants of these early storytelling traditions associating John with Ephesus.[8] Second, my contextualization of the *Acts of John* within the environment of Ephesus is not based on an assertion that this ancient city was the *Acts of John*'s place of origin. The ultimate provenance of the *Acts of John* is still heavily contested, though scholars often forward Ephesus or the province of Asia Minor as candidates.[9] Nevertheless, I do not aim here to probe the authorial "intentions" of whoever first recorded or produced the *Acts of John*. Rather, I examine the potential interpretive ramifications of the *Acts of John* as its earliest renditions were disseminated and read in the second and third centuries CE.

Ephesus provides a plausible interpretive context for such a reading, since it is the central location for the *Acts of John* narrative and became home to a tomb cult dedicated to John. As such, legends regarding the apostle's miraculous founding of Christianity and death in the city—likely informed by earlier renditions of the *Acts of John*—in all probability circulated in various forms among both Ephesian residents and pilgrims.[10] Thus, Ephesus makes for a natural place from which to investigate the potential interpretive contexts that will have shaped, and been shaped by, the reception of the *Acts of John*.

[7] The Second Council of Nicaea (787 CE), for example, cites parts of chs. 27–28, 93–95, and 97–98, which provides evidence for ancient (if multiform) collections of the *Acts of John*. The Manichaean Psalms (ca. 3rd cent.) also show knowledge of the *Acts of John* in collected form. For further discussion on these points, see Lalleman, *The Acts of John,* 5–42; Schäferdiek, "The Acts of John," 152–71; *Acta Iohannis* (ed. Eric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli; 2 vols.; Corpus Christianorum Series Apocryphorum 2; Turnhout: Brepols, 1983) 2:679–702.

[8] On textual fluidity in the apocryphal acts, see Kim Haines-Eitzen, *The Gendered Palimpsest: Women, Writing, and Representations in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 113–27.

[9] Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt have all been forwarded as potential locations of origin for the *Acts of John*. For discussion, see *Acta Iohannis* (ed. Junod and Kaestli) 1:501–3; Helmut Engelmann, "Ephesos und die Johannesakten," *ZPE* 103 (1994) 297–302; Lalleman, *The Acts of John*, 265; Schäferdiek, "The Acts of John," 152–71; W. M. Gessel, "Die Johannestradition auf dem Ayasoluk im Lichte der apokryphen Johannesakten," in *Lingua Restituta Orientalis. Festgabe für Julius Assfalg* (ed. Regine Schulz; Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 1990) 108–13; Jan Bremmer, "The Apocryphal Acts: Authors, Place, Time and Readership," in *The Apocryphal Acts of Thomas* (ed. Jan Bremmer; Leuven: Peeters, 2001) 149–70.

[10] Even if the *Acts of John* did not originate in Ephesus or Asia Minor (see n. 9), there is evidence for exchanges between local Ephesian cultures and the literary traditions of the *Acts of John*; some later narrative renditions of John's burial, for example, show signs of having been influenced by local Ephesian cult practices. On this, see the discussion by Knut Schäferdiek, who points out this connection with regard to the *Passio Johannis* and *Virtutes Johannis* (Schäferdiek, "The Acts of John," 155). Based in part on this evidence, Pieter Lalleman has suggested that the *Acts of John* was particularly popular in Ephesus, and that Ephesian-influenced redactions of the early *Acts of John* likely circulated at an early period (Lalleman, *The Acts of John*, 22). See also the work of Junod and Kaestli, who posit a deliberate Ephesian redaction of the text, which resulted in its current state of preservation (*Acta Iohannis* [ed. Junod and Kaestli] 1:104).

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Healing "without Payment": Critiques of Cultic Exchange in the *Acts of John*

In line with other apocryphal acts from early Christianity, the narrative in the *Acts of John* includes a thoroughgoing focus on wealthy and prominent Roman citizens.[11] Several of John's interlocutors and converts, for example, are identified as "very rich" (πάνυ πλούσιος; 18), a "commander-in-chief" (στρατηγός; 19, 31), "wealthy" (εὐδαίμων; 19), and a "prominent [citizen]" (πρῶτος; 31, 56, 73).[12] Skeptical readers might suspect that the *Acts of John* (and other apocryphal acts) centralized such wealthy and prominent citizens as part of an attempt to curry their favor, and, presumably, their accompanying financial support. And yet, the *Acts of John* perplexingly deters this kind of financial support by condemning the exchange of money as part of cultic transactions.

During John's travels to Smyrna, for example, Antipatros, a prominent Smyrnaean civic official, attempts to bribe John for the healing of his sons: "Servant of God, I have heard tell that you have performed many good and great wonders in Ephesus. Behold, I offer you a hundred thousand gold pieces. I have twin sons who since birth have been possessed of a demon. . . . Take pity on me and on them" (56). John responds with a prompt dismissal of Antipatros's gift: "My healer works without payment, and heals freely; in exchange for illness he accepts the souls cured. . . . Give your soul to God and you will find your sons in good health by the power of Christ" (56).[13] John thereafter prays to God for Antipatros's sons, who are immediately healed and appear before John and their father in good health (57). Antipatros responds by falling down before John; the latter in turn orders that Antipatros give money to the poor (57).[14] We encounter similar denunciations of direct monetary exchanges in John's prayer before his death, when he identifies Jesus as "the only protector and physician of your servants, who heal freely" (108; see also 22). The *Acts of John* no doubt here builds on the long-standing ancient stereotype that disreputable physicians charge for their work, a point underscored

[11] On wealth and class status in the apocryphal acts, see Andrew Jacobs, "A Family Affair: Marriage, Class, and Ethics in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," *JECS* 7 (1999) 105–38.

[12] Greek text of the *Acts of John* is from *Acta Iohannis* (ed. Junod and Kaestli).

[13] For comparable themes of Christian preachers healing without charge, see *Acts Andr.* 26; *Acts Thom.* 20, 104.

[14] John's command that Antipatros give a financial offering to the poor (57.6) would seem to stand at odds with his previous refusal to accept any kind of monetary payment for healing Antipatros's sons (56.8). It is possible that the former phrase is a later addition to the text, which might help explain this intratextual tension (on the textual difficulties involved with the ending of this chapter, see *Acta Iohannis* [ed. Junod and Kaestli] 1:242). If John's command to give to the poor does belong to the early versions of the *Acts of John*, it is possible that either 1) this represents an unresolved tension between the *Acts of John*'s discomfort with financial offerings and broader Christian practices of support for the impoverished; and/or 2) because John seemingly commands that Antipatros give money to the poor directly (rather than through John), the text construes such an offering as belonging to a different category of (acceptable) pecuniary transactions.

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by Antipatros's earlier reference to John as a "faithful doctor" (πιστὸς ἰατρός; 56).[15] It is also possible that the *Acts of John* here forwards a subtle criticism of Greco-Roman healing cults, such as those dedicated to Asclepius; if that is the case, the *Acts of John* implies that, whereas such healing cults demand financial support from their patrons, the Christian God requires only conversion and devotion.

There are indications elsewhere in the *Acts of John*, however, that the narrative's critique extends beyond that of greedy doctors or competing healing cults. During his healing of Cleopatra and Lycomedes, for example, John stresses that believers should implore Jesus "not for gold, not for silver, not for riches, not for possession, not for any transient, earthly goods," but for the restoration of the soul (22). Elsewhere, John similarly encourages his listeners to "not lay up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where everything withers away" (34).[16] These two passages suggest that the *Acts of John*'s portrayal of the Christian God as an unpaid healer draws upon a more wide-ranging discomfort with the possession or exchange of material goods. John has a stark warning, in fact, for those who place too much value in earthly belongings: "You who are rich, rejoice not because you have treasures! For their possession causes you unlimited sorrow, if you lose them" (34). As a final example, John also argues that the torments of the avaricious will extend even past this earthly life: "If you kept treasures without helping the poor, having left this body and being in flames of fire, you will find no one who will have mercy on you when you are begging for mercy" (35).

The *Acts of John*'s thoroughgoing condemnation of and discomfort with wealth also surfaces in the way it portrays the benefits of Christian faith as cost-free. During John's healing of Lycomedes, for example, John emphasizes that the Christian God is a "physician" whose servants "heal freely" (22). Similarly, John elsewhere prays to Jesus as "the only protector and physician of your servants, who heal freely" (108). The *Acts of John*'s simultaneous discomfort with material goods and construal of God's therapeutic gifts as free of charge help explain John's self-presentation to the Ephesian crowds as "no merchant who buys or exchanges goods" (33). In this way, John explicitly distances his own activities from monetary transactions.

When read in concert, the *Acts of John*'s wide-ranging disparagement of wealth, championing of God as a giver of complimentary gifts, and portrayal of John as an apostle uneasy with the intermixing of monetary offerings and cultic practice would seem here to implicate not only avaricious physicians, therefore, but also the regular monetary exchanges that took place as part of Greco-Roman cultic practices. Greco-Roman religion had as its foundation a relationship of generalized

[15] See Norman Underwood, "Medicine, Money, and Christian Rhetoric: The Socio-Economic Dimensions of Healthcare in Late Antiquity," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 2 (2018) 342–84. The *Acts of John* likely also draws here on the common stereotypes associating financial offerings with "magical" practitioners. On the broader issue of religion, magic, and ancient "marketplaces," see the recent treatment by Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

[16] Elsewhere, John encourages believers not "to be ensnared by thirst after money" (69).

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reciprocity—the deferred return of goods and blessings in exchange for routine religious patronage—between gods and humans.[17] Leading citizens and political leaders, represented within the *Acts of John* by characters such as Antipatros or Lycomedes, played an important part in this system of reciprocity through direct financial support of cultic systems. Such support included monetary gifts to cultic centers, financing of building construction, subsidizing of cultic expenses, and other forms of patronage. To understand the importance of public euergetism to Greco-Roman religion, one need look no further than Ephesus, the civic setting for much of the *Acts of John*'s extant narrative. Guy Rogers has noted with regard to Ephesus that the "competitive framework of public euergetism" provided the foundation for the cult and mysteries of Artemis, Ephesus's primary goddess.[18] He points out, moreover, that the cultic professionals associated with the cult of Artemis were typically citizens who constituted "the wealthiest 1 percent" or a "club of millionaires by ancient standards."[19] This outsized wealth among cultic specialists was necessary since it was expected that the highest-ranking cultic officials would finance the daily cultic practices and major festivals associated with Artemis.[20]

The archaeological remains of Ephesian material culture attest to these networks of cultic exchange. Nearly all of the monumental cultic architecture in the city was the result of major gifts by wealthy citizens (or, in some cases, emperors) and/or paid explicit honor to prominent citizens' support of Ephesus's cultic activities. The famous library of Celsus, for example, began as a *heroon* (tomb-shrine) dedicated to Tiberius Julius Celsus Polemaeanus, completed in 110 CE.[21] In the Roman period, the central Curetes Street featured several sites honoring various benefactors and prominent citizens, including the Pollio monuments, the Memmius monuments, the tomb of Arsinoë IV, and the *heroon* of Androklos.[22] The famous Salutaris inscription of the early second century CE attests to the provision by Salutaris for the display of statues of Trajan, Plotina, the Roman senate, the equestrian order, the Roman people, and Augustus as part of civic processions.[23] As a final example, the path

[17] On this, see especially Robert Parker, "Pleasing Thighs: Reciprocity in Greek Religion," in *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (ed. Christopher Gill, Norman Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) 105–25; John Scheid, *An Introduction to Roman Religion* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003) 23; John Scheid, *On Greek Religion* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011) 95.

[18] Guy Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis of Ephesos: Cult, Polis, and Change in the Graeco-Roman World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012) 166–67.

[19] Ibid., 189.

[20] Ibid., 189–92.

[21] Peter Scherrer, "The City of Ephesus from the Roman Period to Late Antiquity," in *Ephesos, Metropolis of Asia: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Its Archaeology, Religion, and Culture* (ed. Helmut Koester; HTS 41; Cambridge: Harvard Divinity School, 2004) 1–25, at 11–12. A *heroon* was a tomb-shrine typically dedicated to heroes, heroines, or otherwise legendary figures.

[22] Angela Kalinowski, "The Vedii Antonini: Aspects of Patronage and Benefaction in Second-Century Ephesos," *Phoenix* 56 (2002) 109–49, at 125.

[23] Christine M. Thomas, "At Home in the City of Artemis: Religion in Ephesos in the Literary Imagination of the Roman Period," in *Ephesos* (ed. Koester) 81–117, at 110.

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between the Temple of Artemis and the city was covered by the so-called Stoa of Damianus, a portico built in the late second century CE that provided cover for practitioners moving to and from the famous temple.[24] At every turn, therefore, Ephesian residents and visitors will have encountered in the cityscape physical reminders of how the beneficence of wealthy patrons undergirded their civic and cultic institutions.[25] Guy Rogers notes in particular that "the mid-to-late second century A.D. truly was the era of the large civic gift in Ephesos, often of more than 1,000 denarii or even an entire building." Thus, early editions of the *Acts of John* will have been read and interpreted within a context where patrons' support for cultic practice and civic architecture was particularly robust in the main city of its narrative.[26]

This broader cultic landscape deepens the significance of John's rejection of monetary exchange as part of cultic practice. Antipatros's offer of substantial monetary support to John's cause would have constituted a standard mode of cultic patronage within the context of ancient Asia Minor. John's refusal of this gift, therefore, suggests that John's ministry aims not only at changing its converts' cultic affiliations but at transforming the way in which they envision their relations and exchanges with their cultic community. Through the apostle's repeated indication that he, among other servants of God, can "heal freely," the *Acts of John* implies that other "gods" and their followers are either avaricious or ineffective "quacks." In this way, the *Acts of John* strikes at the heart of public euergetism, and thus undermines the patronage systems that supported cultic institutions across the ancient Mediterranean.

Portraits and Patrons in the *Acts of John*

John's refusal to accept financial offerings is just one way that the *Acts of John* signals its distaste for traditional Greco-Roman modes of cultic patronage. We encounter another significant moment in the *Acts of John*'s famous portrait scene. The apostle's first major miracle in Ephesus is the resurrection of Lycomedes (the "leading citizen" of the city) and his wife Cleopatra. After John had successfully brought about the couple's dual resurrection, Lycomedes commissioned a portrait of the apostle. After the portrait was finished, Lycomedes hung it in his bedroom (*Acts of John* 27). John begins to notice, however, that Lycomedes is entering his bedroom alone—apparently as part of some kind of cultic practice with the portrait of John—when the other believers are gathering with the apostle (27). John then goes into Lycomedes's room and is dismayed at the sight of the portrait: "He saw the crowned picture of an old man, and candlesticks and an altar before it. And he

[24] Dieter Knibbe, "Via Sacra Ephesiaca: New Aspects of the Cult of Artemis Ephesia," in *Ephesos* (ed. Koester) 141–55, at 149–50. See also Philostratus, *Lives of the Sophists,* 2.23.605.

[25] It is worth nothing that Ephesus was not alone in this regard. Every major Roman city for which we have archaeological data includes evidence for this kind of civic patronage.

[26] Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis*, 198.

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said to him, 'Lycomedes, what does this picture mean to you? Is it a picture of one of your gods? I see that you are still living like a heathen!'" (27).

Past commentators have most often read Lycomedes's commissioning of and cultic devotion to John's portrait, as well as John's eventual reprimand, in light of late antique Christian controversies regarding the propriety of images or "icons." Scholars have alternately pointed to John's censure as evidence of the *Acts of John*'s proto-iconoclasm or to Lycomedes's portrait veneration as testimony to the use of images in cultic settings in early Christianity.[27] The portrait scene in the *Acts of John* is indeed significant as an early textual witness to Christian attitudes toward imagery. After realizing that he is in fact represented in the portrait, for example, John responds that such images are "childish and imperfect: you have painted the dead picture of what is dead" (29).

While John's dismissal of images is important in and of itself, what is notable is the extent to which the scene directs attention to aspects beyond John's aniconic stance. It is significant, for example, that the portrait scene provides an extended description of the resources and time Lycomedes dedicates to producing his cultic homage to John. The *Acts of John* narrates that Lycomedes has "a talented painter as a friend" (26), whom he summons to view and paint John. The painter gathers the required materials and tells Lycomedes not to concern himself with the outcome (26). Lycomedes next identifies John to the painter and shuts the latter in a room from which he could see the apostle (26). The *Acts of John* next lays out the multistage process entailed in producing the portrait: first, the painter draws the outline of John, then paints him with colors, and then delivers the portrait to Lycomedes (27). Later, upon John's discovery of the portrait, we learn that Lycomedes crowned the portrait with garlands while also placing lamps beside and altars in front of the portrait (27).

With this sequence, the *Acts of John* describes in detail Lycomedes's procurement of a πίναξ or *tabula*, a framed wood-panel portrait that was commonly used in cultic settings.[28] Portraits such as these were typically "nonnarrative," and "present[ed]

[27] On images, iconoclasm, and the portrait scene from the *Acts of John*, see *Acta Iohannis* (ed. Junod and Kaestli) 2:446–56; Eric Junod and Jean-Daniel Kaestli, *L'histoire des Actes apocryphes des apôtres du IIIe au IXe siècle. Le cas des Actes de Jean* (Genève: Revue de théologie et de philosophie, 1982); Anita Strezova, "Overview on Iconophile and Iconoclastic Attitudes toward Images in Early Christianity and Late Antiquity," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 12 (36) (2013) 228–58, at 237; Jaś Elsner, "Iconoclasm as Discourse: From Antiquity to Byzantium," *The Art Bulletin* 94 (2012) 368–94, at 371; Thomas F. Mathews with Norman E. Muller, *The Dawn of Christian Art in Panel Paintings and Icons* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2016) 132–34; André Grabar, *Christian Iconography: A Study of Its Origins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) 85. On the potential Neoplatonic roots for the portrait scene, see Georges Florovsky, "Origen, Eusebius, and the Iconoclastic Controversy," *CH* 19 (1950) 77–96; J. D. Breckenridge, "Apocrypha of Early Christian Portraiture," *ByzZ* 67 (1974) 101–9.

[28] Mathews and Muller, *The Dawn of Christian Art*, 9.

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figures that face the viewer and invite veneration and conversation."[29] Greco-Roman (and early Christian) panel portraits were the forerunners for late ancient Christian icon veneration, as well as later European panel paintings.[30] Lycomedes's adorning of the portrait with garlands and use of lamps were both common elements of portrait-altars in the Greco-Roman world.[31] In light of John's eventual dismissal of Lycomedes's portrait veneration, however, why might the *Acts of John* devote such extended focus to Lycomedes's procurement and veneration of the image?

I suggest here that the *Acts of John*'s protracted narration of image production has the effect of focusing the reader's attention not only on the image itself, but the processes and material exchanges that took place as part of the image's production. In this way, the *Acts of John* draws attention to how the portrait, far from an isolated picture, is part of a broader network of economic, religious, and social practices that revolved around the honoring of gods and their cultic patrons. This becomes especially clear when we consider Lycomedes's own response to John's questioning regarding the portrait. When challenged by John regarding his cultic practice with the image, Lycomedes responds that such a portrait is an appropriate recognition of John's role as the benefactor of the Christian God:

> He alone is my God who has revived me and my wife from the dead. But if one is permitted next to God to call those gods who are our benefactors (εὐεργέτας), then it is you, father, who are painted in the picture, whom I crown, love, and worship as having become my good guide. (27)[32]

Lycomedes here articulates the logic that underlies much of the cultic practices surrounding civic benefaction: those who were able to support the gods with wealth (e.g., emperors, prominent local citizens) were in turn honored for their benefaction, sometimes with cultic activities rivaling those of the gods themselves. Siri Sande has noted how Lycomedes's response "shows that he regards [John] as his patron, and himself as client, since having one's patron's portrait painted was a common way of honouring him."[33] The acquisition of a panel painting, however, was an expensive process, one typically reserved for the wealthy and elite.[34] The *Acts of John*'s critique of patron imagery not only devalues images in general, therefore, but also functions as a more specific criticism of the standardized devotional portraits used by wealthy Roman citizens to honor benefactors.

[29] Thomas F. Mathews, *The Clash of the Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art* (rev. ed.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993) 179.

[30] Ibid., 178–79.

[31] Grabar, *Christian Iconography*, 85.

[32] For comparable language of an apostle being a benefactor, see *Acts of Andrew* 27.

[33] Siri Sande, "The Icon and Its Origins in Greco-Roman Portraiture," in *Aspects of Late Antiquity and Early Byzantium: Papers Read at a Colloquium Held at the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul 31 May–5 June 1992* (ed. L. Rydén and J. O. Rosenqvist; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1993) 75–84, at 78.

[34] Mathews and Muller, *The Dawn of Christian Art*, 16.

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Portraits and Patronage in the Context of Ancient Ephesus

An ancient visitor to Ephesus will have encountered numerous honorary images and dedications similar to the portrait condemned by the *Acts of John*. Prominent Greco-Roman civic and cultic structures often included inscriptions that identified the honored deities and emperors as well as the local benefactors that made the building possible,[35] and Ephesus was no exception. Statue bases discovered in Ephesus, for example, honor the cultic and civic generosity of the wealthy citizen Vedius Antoninus and his descendants.[36] Such public honoring of benefactors was also included in cult-specific buildings and courtyards. At the Prytaneion, a central location for Ephesian cultic ceremonies, the names of the "Curetes" officers (i.e., those who funded and conducted the rituals associated with Artemis) were inscribed upon pillars for public viewing.[37] Ephesus was also home to three temples officially dedicated to cults of Roman emperors—the civic benefactors par excellence—including temples dedicated to Augustus and his family,[38] the Flavian emperors,[39] and the emperor Hadrian.[40] Significantly, the image of the emperor was a major facet of imperial cultic practice, as seen in the proliferation of certain standardized, idealized portraits of the emperors (especially Augustus and his family) as part of imperial cultic spaces.[41]

The honorary portrayal of benefactors was not limited to public spaces. Hilke Thür has noted, for example, the extensive archaeological evidence for portraits and statuettes of emperors in the famous "Slope Houses" of Ephesus.[42] In Slope House 7, excavators discovered portrait heads of the emperor Tiberius and his mother Livia. Thür suggests that this was likely part of domestic devotion to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, through which the owners had received Roman citizenship.[43] In Slope House 6, an imperial portrait of Marcus Aurelius, Thür argues, was likely connected to the acquisition of senatorial ranking by the owners of the home, the

[35] Ann Marie Yasin, *Saints and Church Space in the Late Antique Mediterranean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) 102.

[36] Kalinowski, "The Vedii Antonini."

[37] Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis*, 12.

[38] S. R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984) 140.

[39] Thomas, "At Home in the City of Artemis," 108.

[40] Ibid., 108–9; Stefan Karwiese, "The Church of Mary and the Temple of Hadrian Olympius," in *Ephesos* (ed. Koester) 311–19, at 313; Hilke Thür, "The Processional Way in Ephesos as a Place of Cult and Burial," in *Ephesos* (ed. Koester) 157–200, at 174; Scherrer, "The City of Ephesus," 13. Not all scholars agree regarding the identification of this temple; for a dissenting perspective, see Christopher Jones, "The Olympieion and the Hadrianeion at Ephesos," *JHS* 113 (1993) 149–52.

[41] Price, *Rituals and Power*, 172–73.

[42] Hilke Thür, "Art and Architecture in Terrace House 2 in Ephesos: An Example of Domestic Architecture in the Roman Imperial Period," in *Contested Spaces: Temples in Roman Antiquity and the New Testament* (ed. David Balch and Annette Weissenrieder; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2012) 237–53.

[43] Ibid., 246.

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Aptus family.[44] Thus, in similar fashion to Lycomedes, "real" Ephesian citizens honored their patrons with devotional images and honors in both "public" and "private" settings.[45] Or, put another way, domestic cultic devotion to benefactors (like that of Lycomedes) was part of a much broader and integrated public/private cultic landscape.[46]

Thus, the portrait scene of the *Acts of John* simultaneously echoes and undermines what was standard practice across the Mediterranean, and certainly within the city of Ephesus: patrons and benefactors were to be honored with portraits, statues, and inscriptions, whether in public or domestic spheres, that attested to their support for the city and the gods.[47] These images and inscriptions served important functions in supporting cultic institutions. Laura Nasrallah notes, for example, that such public and private dedications "sought to bind the dedicatee . . . even more closely to a city, encouraging further benefaction."[48] Nasrallah's comments point us to how important it is to consider the affective role of such dedications, which served to remind onlookers of the necessary costs of cultic practices while also encouraging wealthy citizens to earn (further) public honor through cultic benefaction.

In this way, the images, inscriptions, and statues that honored cultic patrons were integral to soliciting and maintaining the benefaction that was necessary for architectural upkeep and the performance of routine rituals. By calling into question both the offering of monetary gifts to cultic causes and the honoring of benefactors with dedicatory images, therefore, the *Acts of John* strikes at the financial foundation for Ephesian (and broader Greco-Roman) cultic practices. This dual critique becomes all the more important when one considers that wealthy citizens are the focus of the *Acts of John* narrative. By centering such figures while undercutting their typical cultic activities, the *Acts of John* positions itself as a narrative that reorients the patron-cult relationship within the cultic fabric of Greco-Roman cities. In the section to follow, I outline how the *Acts of John* accomplishes this reorientation not only through the negation of honorific patronage networks, but also through prescriptive depictions of how prominent citizens and wealthy patrons should redirect their resources in support of the Christian cause.

[44] Ibid.

[45] For additional examples of devotional portraits in Ephesus, with potential connections to benefaction, see Elisabeth Rathmayr, "The Meaning and Use of Terracotta Figurines in the Terrace Houses in Ephesos," in *Religion in Ephesos Reconsidered* (ed. Daniel Schowalter, Steven J. Friesen, Sabine Ladstätter, and Christine Thomas; Leiden: Brill, 2020) 230–51.

[46] On the integration of the "public" and "private" cultic spheres, see Kim Bowes, *Private Worship, Public Values, and Religious Change in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 13; Kristina Sessa, "Christianity and the Cubiculum: Spiritual Politics and Domestic Space in Late Antique Rome," *JECS* 15 (2007) 171–204, at 176.

[47] On these points, with specific reference to Ephesus, see G. H. R. Horsley, "The Inscriptions of Ephesos and the New Testament," *NovT* 34 (1992) 105–68, at 136.

[48] Laura Salah Nasrallah, *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 5.

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Patronage Redirected: Domestic Hospitality in the *Acts of John*

The *Acts of John* depicts John's miracle working and instruction as taking place primarily, though not exclusively, within the domestic realm—that is, within private houses rather than public spaces.[49] John's first miracle in Ephesus, the resurrection of Lycomedes and his wife Cleopatra, takes place within inner bedchambers of the couple's home (19). We encounter the significance of the domestic sphere again later in the narrative, when, after John and the Ephesian crowds have dramatically brought about the toppling of the famous Temple of Artemis, the crowd entreats the apostle to remain among them and instruct them in the ways of the Christian God: "Help us, John . . . help us without hindrance, when we have come to your house! Receive us, who are desperate!" (44). John grants the crowd's request, declaring that his continued stay in Ephesus is necessary to edify them in the faith, and thereafter receives them at the "house of Andronicus" (45–46). It is notable here that the text again centralizes this activity within the home of a wealthy benefactor (i.e., Andronicus); we know from an earlier narrative in the *Acts of John* that Andronicus was a "captain" and "one of the most prominent Ephesians," who had initially questioned John's miracle-working abilities but later became his admirer and follower (31, see also 59). The home of Andronicus, then, serves as the primary place of instruction for John, where he intends to make the Ephesian crowds more resilient in their newfound faith. Interestingly, the *Acts of John* does not narrate John's instruction of the crowds but instead tells the story of the healing of the priest who had been killed in the temple's collapse (46–47). As such, the *Acts of John* positions the domestic sphere as the appropriate place for both Christian instruction and miracle working.

We see this emphasis again when John returns to Ephesus from travels in Laodicea and a crowd gathers in the home of Andronicus: "After this we came to Ephesus. And when the brethren who lived there had learned that John had returned after this long time, they met in the house of Andronicus, where [John] was also staying, grasped his feet, put his hands to their faces, and kissed them because they had touched his clothes" (62). Note here how the *Acts of John* specifies that John not only received Christians in Andronicus's house but also resided there. The *Acts of John* furthermore accentuates the intimate interactions between John and his followers, thus centralizing Andronicus's home as an important site for Christian community building and interaction with the apostle.

Domestic settings emerge elsewhere in the *Acts of John*'s narrative as significant sites for John's mission. After the dramatic story of the death and resurrection of John's follower Drusiana (63–86), for example, John and his followers return to the home of Andronicus, where the apostle accurately predicts that Fortunatus, Drusiana's erstwhile harasser, will soon die (86). Finally, John gathers the Ephesian

[49] John does perform some of his activities in the public sphere, including his healing of widows in the famous Ephesian Theater (30–36) and the destruction of the Temple of Artemis (37–45; see above).

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community for a final time on the "Lord's day" in the "house" of an unnamed believer, where he performs a cultic ceremony and says his final farewells (106–11). Afterward, John departs with a small retinue for his place of burial and dies, bringing the narrative of the *Acts of John* to a close.

Thus, despite John's performance of miracles in prominent public spaces elsewhere in the *Acts of John* (e.g., at the Temple of Artemis [37–45], in the great theater [30–36]), the primary locales for his missionary work are in the homes of his converted followers. The *Acts of John*'s centralization of cultic practice in the domestic sphere may at least partially reflect the realities of the earliest Christian collectives, as most Christian gatherings occurred in domestic settings until purpose-built church structures became more common in the third and fourth centuries.[50] In keeping with the Christian communities elsewhere in the empire, therefore, Christians in Ephesus likely met as small groups in private or domestic spaces.[51] Nevertheless, it should be noted that despite the historical realities of the early Christian communities, not all early Christian texts centralized Christian activity within the domestic sphere. Among the apocryphal acts, for example, the *Acts of Peter* largely situates its apostle's ministry within the public thoroughfares of Rome.[52] I suggest, therefore, that the *Acts of John*'s emphasis on the domestic sphere not only echoes communal realities but also serves particular literary functions. Scholars have previously noted that the domestic sphere plays an outsized role in the apocryphal acts, suggesting that this may be due to the influence of (upper-class)

[50] On Christian worship in domestic locales, see Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (2nd ed.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); L. Michael White, *Building God's House: Architectural Adaptations among Pagans, Jews, and Christians* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Carolyn Osiek and David Balch, *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997); Carolyn Osiek and Margaret McDonald, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2006); Floyd Filson, "The Significance of the Early House Churches," *JBL* 58 (1939) 105–12; Richard Krautheimer, "The Beginnings of Early Christian Architecture," *RR* 3 (1939) 127–48. See also John S. Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations: Connecting and Belonging in the Ancient City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2019), published after the completion of this article. For the broader Roman civic context that occasioned such domestic meetings, see discussion of Christianity as "unofficial cult," below.

[51] Paul's letters and the Acts of the Apostles provide evidence for a Christian community in Ephesus as early as the mid-1st cent. CE, while the book of Revelation and the letters of Ignatius of Antioch suggest that the community remained through the late 1st and early 2nd cents. CE. On the nature of early Christianity at Ephesus, see Rick Strelan, *Paul, Artemis, and the Jews in Ephesus* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995) 15; Mikael Tellbe, *Christ-Believers in Ephesus: A Textual Analysis of Early Christian Identity Formation in a Local Perspective* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009); Paul Trebilco, *The Early Christians in Ephesus from Paul to Ignatius* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004); O. F. A. Meinardus, *St. Paul in Ephesus and the Cities of Galatia and Cyprus* (Athens: Lycabettus, 1973); Helmut Koester, "Ephesos in Early Christian Literature," in *Ephesos* (ed. Koester) 119–40; Christine Thomas, "Invisible 'Christians' in the Ephesian Landscape: Using Geophysical Surveys to De-Center Paul," in *Religion in Ephesos Reconsidered* (ed. Schowalter, Friesen, Ladstätter, and Thomas) 171–91.

[52] See *Acts Pet.* 11–14, 23–29, 32.

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women on the transmission of these texts,[53] or as part of a larger "counter-cultural" undermining of ancient domestic norms.[54] Significantly, Judith Perkins has argued that the apocryphal acts challenge the "spatial bases of social boundaries" through repeated emphases on the permeability between domestic and public spaces (e.g., the *matrona*'s bedroom, which in the apocryphal acts is frequented by the wandering preacher).[55] Perkins suggests, then, that the apocryphal acts offer domestic spaces as a kind of "countersite to the public spaces where the elite of the period forged their community," and so "work to resist the spatialities (and the power) of their contemporary society and to institute new spatial imaginaries and a new site for power."[56]

Building on Perkins's insights, I would add that the *Acts of John*'s centralization of cultic practices in the *domus* constitutes a challenge not only to Greco-Roman spatialities but also to cultic practices—namely, central practices of cultic patronage. We can see the significance of the domestic sphere for patronage in the aftermath of John's raising of Lycomedes and Cleopatra. After his own resurrection, Lycomedes implores John to stay in the home of the couple: "I beseech and adjure you by the God in whose name you have revived us, stay with us, both you and your companions" (25). Lycomedes here appropriately displays hospitality toward strangers (φιλοξενία), a classic Greco-Roman virtue that also became a prominent part of early Christian ethical instruction.[57] The text emphasizes that Cleopatra joins her husband in this offer of hospitality: "Likewise, Cleopatra grasped his feet and said the same" (25). Through the dual witness of Lycomedes and Cleopatra, then, the *Acts of John* provides an example for the proper response of newly converted believers: support and benefaction through the bestowal of communal lodging and gathering space in the domestic sphere.

We encounter this prescriptive portrayal of domestic patronage elsewhere in the *Acts of John*. When John first arrives in Ephesus, for example, the reader learns of arrangements made by one of John's wealthy benefactors, Cleobius, for the entertainment and lodging of the believers: "Cleobius said to his servants, 'Go to my relative Callippus and make yourselves comfortable in his house—for I am coming there with his son—that we may find everything prepared!'" (19). Here the *Acts of John* explicitly reveals that John and his compatriots will be relying on the benefaction of one of their wealthy acquaintances for lodging and shelter. What is more, Cleobius provides connections to Ephesian denizens through kinship lines ("my relative Callippus"), establishing the route by which John may build a

[53] On the role of women in the apocryphal acts tradition, see Stevan L. Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980); Virginia Burrus, *Chastity as Autonomy: Women in the Stories of Apocryphal Acts* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1987).

[54] Moss, "Roman Imperialism," 384–85.

[55] Perkins, "Social Geography," 119–20.

[56] Ibid., 118–19.

[57] On hospitality in Christian circles, see discussion below.

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broader network for his preaching and miracles. The explicit offers of domestic patronage through Lycomedes, Cleopatra, and Cleobius suggest that the *Acts of John*'s thoroughgoing centralization of Christian gatherings in the homes of named wealthy patrons is no accident but is part of a broader modeling of new forms of Christian patronage for elite benefactors; as summarized by Janos Bolyki, "it is fair that those who benefit from the apostolic miracle should contribute to the success of the mission by offering hospitality to the apostle and his companions."[58]

Of course, the *Acts of John* is not alone among ancient texts in exhorting its readers to display proper hospitality toward both stranger and friend. It was a standard trope in Greco-Roman literature that upstanding and pious citizens provided generous hospitality to guests and strangers. This motif stretches back to the Homeric epics, where (in)hospitality to guests serves as an index of a person's relative connection to Greek "civilization."[59] This cultural expectation remained operative in the literature of the Roman imperial period, as seen especially in the recurrent linkage between piety and proper hospitality in the Greco-Roman novels,[60] works that likely exerted influence over early Christian acts.[61] Jewish scriptures also include numerous ethical imperatives directing readers to provide hospitality to strangers and sojourners, as seen especially in the Covenant Code in Exodus (22:21), the priestly laws of Leviticus (19:33–34), and the Deuteronomic Code (Deut 16:14, 26:12).[62]

Early Christian literature prior to and concurrent with the approximate origins of the *Acts of John* similarly includes hospitality as an esteemed ethical custom. Paul enjoins the Romans, for example, to "extend hospitality to strangers" (Rom 12:13 NRSV), while the author of Hebrews orders readers to "not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Heb 13:2 NRSV).[63] Similarly, the Shepherd of Hermas lists "being hospitable" as one of the virtues of Christian piety (Herm. Mand. 8.10). Notably, the Acts of the Apostles, which served as inspiration for apocryphal acts such as the *Acts of John*, repeatedly portrays Peter and Paul as receiving hospitality from believers and potential converts (10:23, 16:11–15, 21:3–6, 21:7–16, 28:1–10, 28:13–14).[64]

[58] János Bolyki, "Miracle Stories in the Acts of John," in *The Acts of John* (ed. Jan Bremmer; Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1995) 15–35, at 19.

[59] Andrew Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels: Early Christian Hospitality in Its Mediterranean Setting* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2005) 37–38.

[60] See, especially, Chariton, *Chaereas and Callirhoe*; Heliodorus, *An Ethiopian Story*; Xenophon of Ephesus, *An Ephesian Tale*. For discussion, see Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 40–48.

[61] For an overview of relevant literature, see Hans-Josef Klauck, *The Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008) 7–14.

[62] Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 57.

[63] On hospitality in early Christian literature, see Lk 7:36, 9:1–6, 10:1–16, 10:38; 1 Cor 16:5–12; 2 Cor 1:15–16; Gal 4:13–14; Phil 22; Rom 1:10, 1:15, 15:22–25, 15:28–32; 1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8; 1 Pet 4:9; Hermas, Herm. Mand. 8.10; Did. 12; 1 Clem. 1.2, 11.1, 12.1–3, 19.7.

[64] For hospitality directed specifically toward missionaries or traveling preachers, see also Lk 9:1–6, 10:1–18, 3 Jn 5–8; Did. 11–12. For discussion, see Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 96.

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Among the early apocryphal acts, the *Acts of Paul*, *Peter*, *Andrew*, and *Thomas* likewise display their titular apostles receiving hospitality from various hosts.[65]

Based on this broader Christian tradition, it is perhaps unsurprising that the *Acts of John* depicts its title characters as engaging in acts of hospitality. In comparison with other early Christian acts, however, the *Acts of John* forefronts and intensifies the importance of hospitality. As noted previously, Lycomedes's and Cleopatra's offer of lodging to John is part of the first narrative sequence of his activities in Ephesus, and in response to his first major miracle in the city, which positions hospitality (alongside conversion) as the first "response" by converted believers to John's miraculous mission. What is more, whereas other early Christian acts portray their respective apostles as converting and receiving hospitality from "leading citizens" (e.g., Publius in the canonical Acts, Marcellus in the *Acts of Peter*, Stratocles in the *Acts of Andrew*, and Siphor in the *Acts of Thomas*), the *Acts of John* intensifies this motif by portraying five separate Ephesians (Lycomedes, Cleopatra, Callippus, Cleobius, and Andronicus) as providing some form of hospitality to John. The canonical Acts is the only other early Christian text to identify so many hosts. It is also noteworthy that the extant text of the *Acts of John* portrays three of these characters—Lycomedes, Cleopatra, and Cleobius—as explicitly enumerating their desire to provide hospitality to John. Such overt invitations are common in the canonical Acts (e.g., at 10:23, 16:15, 21:3–6, 28:1–10, 28:13–14) but relatively rare in the apocryphal acts.[66] In sum, when compared to analogous early Christian narratives, the *Acts of John* stands out for its recurrent chronicling of the hospitality shown by prominent citizens to its protagonist apostle, rivaled only by the canonical Acts in its centralization of this narrative motif.

This, in turn, has substantial ramifications for understanding the *Acts of John*'s comments regarding honorific images for benefactors. As noted above, the *Acts of John* dismisses Lycomedes's explanation that he commissioned and worshiped an image of John because the apostle served as his "benefactor." Significantly, this scene occurs immediately after Lycomedes's conversion by and accommodation of John. Through this narrative juxtaposition, the *Acts of John* subtly asserts that while wealthy and prominent citizens should provide hospitality to the Christian cause, they should not expect the kinds of private or public honors that were accorded to the leading patrons of Roman cities and cults. Thus, for the *Acts of John*, while Greco-Roman norms of hospitality ought to be preserved and adapted for the support of Christian preachers, concurrent expectations regarding cultic honors must be discarded. In this way, the *Acts of John* folds Christian ethics of hospitality and aniconism into a more wide-ranging redirection of Greco-Roman cultic benefaction in support of the Christian faith.

[65] See e.g. *Acts Paul* 3.2–7, 3.41, 9; *Acts Pet.* 14, 29–30; *Acts Thom.* 105, 131.

[66] See *Acts Paul* 3.2–7; *Acts Thom.* 42, 131. Such invitations are lacking in the *Acts of Peter* and *Acts of Andrew*.

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Patronage and New Christian Kinships

The provisioning of hospitality by wealthy patrons would have provided particularly important resources for the earliest Christian communities. Jerome Murphy-O'Connor has pointed out, for example, that even in wealthy cities such as Ephesus, most domestic spaces were not able to handle more than a handful of guests; in order to accommodate large (private) gatherings, therefore, early Christians will have required the hospitality of especially wealthy benefactors who owned rather spacious homes.[67] Additionally, the ability to meet in a large home will have afforded Christians a degree of privacy and intimacy that would be especially valuable to marginal groups.[68] Wayne Meeks notes that privacy and intimacy were in short supply in an ancient Mediterranean city such as Ephesus, where population density was high and nearly 25 percent of the space in a city was occupied by monumental public spaces, leaving domestic spaces quite small.[69] The provision of a domestic space for gathering, therefore, will have provided the Christian community much-needed space for ritual practice, communal meals, and instruction, all of which will have been more difficult in a public sphere that was generally hostile to (or at least suspicious of) novel foreign cults. Thus, the *Acts of John*'s emphasis on the benefaction-through-hospitality may in part reflect the great value that such spaces will have provided for Christian communities.

The centralization of benefaction by wealthy patrons within the *Acts of John* has great significance for its portrayal of early Christian communities. Due to space constraints within the city, the custom of hospitality was "an overwhelmingly upper-class institution";[70] thus, the *Acts of John*'s emphasis on the provision of large domestic spaces means that the followers of John in the *Acts of John* tend to come from rather affluent financial situations. Janos Bolyki, for example, has noted that "the social milieu [of the *Acts of John*] is made up by the upper class of the city."[71] The *Acts of John* explicitly points to or implies the great wealth of John's followers, especially that of Lycomedes, Cleobius, and Andronicus (18, 19, 63, 73).

The *Acts of John*'s broader concern with patronage not only helps explain its preoccupation with wealthy citizens, but it also provides added significance to the text's focus on the home (see discussion above). Past commentaries have largely focused on how the *Acts of John*'s *domus*-centricity negates certain aspects of Roman culture. Judith Perkins, as noted previously, has pointed out how the apocryphal acts position the home as a kind of Christian "countersite" to Greco-

[67] Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *St. Paul's Ephesus: Texts and Archaeology* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008) 196–97.

[68] Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 76.

[69] Ibid., 28–29. See also Kloppenborg, *Christ's Associations.*

[70] Gabriel Herman, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) 34.

[71] Bolyki, "Miracles Stories," 17.

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Roman public cults.[72] I would supplement these insights by stressing that the *Acts of John* not only "counters" prevailing modes of Roman patronage but also redirects such practices. Specifically, the *Acts of John* lays out the types of financial and political relationships that the *Acts of John* expects to be the foundation of the Christian community within the Roman urban environment. In doing so, it not only provides a "countersite" for Christian practice, it also narrates the performance of public religious patronage in a way that will have shaped the spatial and political realities of the Christian community.

Andrew Jacobs has explored how the *Acts of John* rationalizes domestic hospitality as a benefit for converted patrons—Lycomedes and Cleopatra, for example, will more easily remain "unsullied before the Lord" if community members are present with them (25). Jacobs concludes, therefore, that the text posits an itinerant Christian "family" as part of a broader "eradication of the upper-class family ethics" of the Roman Empire.[73] Jacobs's work helpfully shows how centralizing Christian patronage and community within the home entailed inserting the community into kinship networks centered on the domestic sphere. In Greco-Roman antiquity, "family" was defined first not by relational kinship but by relationships of dependence and subordination[74] and thus included other members of households, such as slaves, laborers, business partners, and other residents.[75] This had important ramifications both for the shape of the Christian community—that is, the hierarchical relationships between members—and for the method by which the community grew and spread its message. It is likely that most of the "evangelizing" done by early Christian missionaries was carried out by means of evangelization through the paterfamilias and/or another prominent member of the family (such as the *matrona*), who, when "converted," acted as a local connection who could utilize kinship ties to ingratiate Christians to local families.[76] This certainly seems to be the approach taken by John in the *Acts of John*: while the apostle does preach and convert en masse (e.g., in the theater, *Acts of John* 30–36), the primary means by which John spreads his message is through the prominent heads of household in Ephesus, including Lycomedes, Cleopatra, and Andronicus.

In this regard, it is notable that John's conversion of these leading family figures frequently centers on the resurrection (and thus restoration) of family members. Lycomedes, Cleopatra, and Andronicus, for example, are each rewarded with the miraculous resurrection of their spouse (18–24, 79–81). Antipatros, as discussed previously, has his sons restored from their demonic malady (56–57), while both a relative of the priest of Artemis and a patricide have their recently deceased relatives returned to life through John's miraculous healing (46–52). In each of these

[72] Perkins, "Social Geography."

[73] Jacobs, "A Family Affair," 131.

[74] James Rives, *Religion in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007) 117.

[75] Meeks, *First Urban Christians*, 30.

[76] Ibid., 77.

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narratives, the *Acts of John* manifestly connects conversion to the Christian faith with the restoration of family members. What is more, the *Acts of John* explicitly contrasts John's ability to renew kinship relations with the apparent ineffectiveness of competing cults to do the same. Before John resurrects Lycomedes and Cleopatra, for example, Lycomedes complains that his cultic devotion did little to forestall his family's suffering: "What good was it to me, that I was called godly to this day? I suffer more than a heathen, seeing you, Cleopatra, suffering so" (20). The *Acts of John* positions the restoration of kin, therefore, as a unique reward for the Christian convert. Thus, while the *Acts of John* strips wealthy patrons of their expected public honors, it implies that their piety will yield domestic and familial revitalization via the miraculously preserved Christian "family."[77]

Insofar as the *Acts of John* connects cultic and familial affiliation, the new "cult" of Christianity will not have differed widely from its Greco-Roman counterparts: patronage and leadership in many cults of the ancient Mediterranean were often passed along kinship lines.[78] Major patrons and their family members typically occupied the priestly offices in the cult of Artemis in Ephesus, for example.[79] The combination of kinship and patronage meant that the roles of priests and cultic officials were "something akin to that of a *paterfamilias*'s oversight of an overgrown household."[80] Hence, "Roman civic cult was . . . very much a religion of family and friends."[81] Significantly, hospitality to strangers likewise built upon and cultivated ties of (fictive) kinship.[82] When seen in this light, the *Acts of John*'s prescription that prominent citizens patronize the Christian cause through domestic hospitality reads much like a "recruitment" of prominent family leaders to abandon their formerly held cultic kinships and bring their extended "family" into the Christian household. In this way, the *Acts of John* adapts and redirects the kinship networks that undergirded Greco-Roman cultic economics in support of the Christian cause.

Conclusion: When in Ephesus

The *Acts of John* presents a wide-ranging critique and repositioning of prevailing Greco-Roman modes of cultic patronage. By calling into question both monetary gifts to cultic practitioners as well as the honoring of cultic patrons through honorific portraits, the *Acts of John* undermines two major aspects of cultic benefaction that will have been prevalent within the *Acts of John*'s interpretive contexts, including and especially the city of Ephesus. The *Acts of John* supplements this negation of prevailing Greco-Roman norms with its own portrayal of appropriate modes of Christian patronage—namely, the offering of domestic hospitality to the Christian

[77] Jacobs, "A Family Affair," 131.

[78] Bowes, *Private Worship*, 23.

[79] Rogers, *The Mysteries of Artemis*, 192.

[80] Bowes, *Private Worship*, 24.

[81] Ibid.

[82] On this, see Arterbury, *Entertaining Angels*, 39.

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community by wealthy benefactors. The recognition of the close interconnections between domestic space, patronage, and kinship helps to underscore the significance of the *Acts of John*'s centralization of Christian activity within the homes of wealthy citizens. By encouraging prominent Romans to provide domestic hospitality to Christian groups, the *Acts of John* not only provides an important "countersite" for Christian activity (à la Perkins), but additionally offers an alternative patronage paradigm whereby transformed networks of ancient benefaction and kinship would come to support the growth of the Christian community. This ultimately demonstrates that the ascendency of Christianity in Ephesus, at least as presented in the *Acts of John*, did not just entail the individual "choosing" of a different cult in a hypothetical religious "marketplace" but called for a reorganization of kinship and religious exchange such that Christianity took the shape of an entirely new (though still thoroughly "Roman") cultic economy.

The *Acts of John*'s reframing of ancient patronage has additional significance for rethinking how we situate the *Acts of John* within its broader ancient contexts. On the one hand, my analysis here echoes other scholarly insights in noting how the *Acts of John* presents the Christian mission as subverting certain Greco-Roman cultural values and systems. Yet, I have noted that while certain elements of the *Acts of John*'s "counterculture" are subversive, other aspects are rather conservative; namely, the *Acts of John*, in ways similar to Greco-Roman cultic systems, privileges the importance of the cultic patronage of wealthy, elite families. In doing so, it reasserts many of the connections between wealth and cultic power that were so ingrained in Greco-Roman cultic systems. Despite the *Acts of John*'s distancing of the Christian community from certain Greco-Roman normative practices (e.g., cultic monetary exchange), therefore, its ultimate portrayal of the community as a top-down, patron-supported "family" complicates any kind of wholesale differentiation between Christianity and competing ancient cults.

The longer history of ancient benefaction and the city of Ephesus obfuscates such differentiations even further.[83] The honorific imagery of Justinian and Theodora in Ephesus's Basilica of St. John is just one example of how the modes of honoring benefactors—including portrait statues and honorific inscriptions—continued to serve as the predominant way that communities and cities expressed their appreciation for their patrons' financial support.[84] In this way, the intertwined histories of the *Acts of John* and the city of Ephesus demonstrate how Christian communities continued to carry out their cultic activities—in cultic exchange, hospitality, or public honors—in ways that both diverged from and drew upon the Greco-Roman cultures from which they emerged.

[83] Anne Marie Yasin has traced how in the late antique period, "elites continued to give away their money but increasingly channeled it in new, and decidedly Christian directions—from public works and civic structures such as theater, baths, and gates, to church buildings, monasteries, *xenodochia*, alms, and charity" (Yasin, *Saints and Church Space*, 109).

[84] Ibid., 103.

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