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In the Shadow of Persecution: Athanasius of Alexandria and the Making of the Arian Heresy

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in History

by

Christopher James Nofziger

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March 2020

The dissertation of Christopher James Nofziger is approved.

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March 2020

In the Shadow of Persecution: Athanasius of Alexandria and the Making of the Arian

Heresy

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ABSTRACT

In the Shadow of Persecution: Athanasius of Alexandria and the Making of the Arian Heresy

by

Christopher James Nofziger

The story of the Arian heresy was the work of an embittered bishop named Athanasius of Alexandria (c.298-373 CE) who underwent five exiles under four separate emperors. It was a story that Athanasius and others wrapped around themselves at a time of identity creation and uncertainty. Scholarship on Arianism and Athanasius has up to this point been content to merely deconstruct and discount Athanasius' grand narratives, classifying them as either misleading or outright fictitious. Yet all seem to take the widespread popularity and preservation of this narrative for granted. This dissertation asks two simple questions: why did this story of "Arians" resonate with contemporary audiences, and just as importantly, who read and replicated Athanasius' ideas and how did they get access to it?

The following study argues that that Athanasius harnessed a widespread anxiety about the effect that imperial power and coercion had upon the salvation of Christian communities. The source of this insecurity was not related directly to the damage that imperial officials imparted on the bodies of Christians (martyrs had that covered), but rather the fact that when faced with the pressure to conform, Christian communities split into factions of

acquiescence and resistance. The result was that these acts of violence threatened the unity of Christian communities and by extension their salvation.

As for how this narrative circled, and with whom, this dissertation takes a two-fold approach. First, it argues that it was Egypt's positioning relative to the Mediterranean wind patterns and Athanasius' two exiles (335-37, 339-45), which took him as far afield as Trier in Gaul that contributed success of the narrative. Both during his exile and after his return, the difficulties offered by the Mediterranean winds left only a few highly concentrated corridors of correspondence through which Athanasius maintained an extensive but documentable social network.

To determine how the narrative functioned in a social network context, the study utilizes a social network database rendered through the visualization software GEPHI. The result is a geographically-based image of Athanasius' social network through which we can watch the story of "Arianism" move across both time and space: information that traveled through the trade networks of antiquity and ultimately between individuals. It becomes clear that the first generation of people who used term "Arianism" were those marginalized by Constantius' efforts at unification and who possessed an understanding of imperial authority shaped by the memory and after-effects of the persecution. It was the generation that came after however that ultimately propelled the narrative to its lasting success. This generation of wealthy, ascetically-minded individuals had only known an ascendant and wealthy Christianity. They found the Arian narrative attractive in part because of Athanasius' distaste for imperial authority fit with their own rejection of careers in its bureaucracy and his apocalyptic language and imagery fit their worldview. But Athanasius also managed to weave the Arian narrative into the spiritual authority of the desert monks, a group he courted

between 346 and 357, successfully bringing them under the authority of the Alexandrian

episcopate.

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Introduction

An excerpt from the late-fourth century ecclesiastical historian Philostorgius tells a story about three bishops of the early fourth-century Church. Sitting on a portico in Chalcedon in the early morning, Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theognis of Nicaea, and Maris of Chalcedon were comfortably discussing theology. As the conversation progressed, their discourse escalated, and the bishops became heatedly divided. Suddenly, a great earthquake shook the ground directly beneath their small gathering and an "intense darkness fell about… causing sheer terror."[1] Fear brought perspective to the bishops, who quit their squabbling and aligned themselves in united deference to God. Philostorgius and his three bishops ended up on the losing side of history, condemned as "Arians" by their opponents who subscribed to the creed put forth by the Council of Nicaea in 325 and recognized it as an authority above all subsequent councils. But they were not the monolithic entity that Nicene Christians claimed they were. The previous story is a fantasy of unity, of elevating above petty politics and theology to embrace the true cause of Christianity. In the thinking of the day, a united empire brought everyone closer to God. It was the great vehicle which, when guided by a leader who was himself close to God, bridged the expansive gap between the creator and the created. The question of the century was, whose Christianity was the right one to make that

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[1] Philostorgius, *Church History*, trans. Philip Amidon (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2007), II.1. The account compiled by Amidon uses an excerpt of Philostorgius found in the Codex Angelicus: Vita Constantini. This version refers to Eusebius as "just having converted to the *heteroousian* heresy," no doubt an edit offered by the 9th century compiler, as Philostorgius himself saw Eusebius of Nicomedia as an antecessor champion of his contemporary Eunomian party. It is also significant to notice the absence of Arius, who by this time had taken on heretical connotations for all theological associations and was a convenient label to place upon the opposition.

happen? The story of fourth century Christians in the Roman Empire is one of dreams set against a harsh reality. Christians were no more divided in the fourth century than they had been during previous centuries, but the explosive growth of Christian wealth and power made the dream of a single universal Church appear so close and so possible.

The fourth century began with division and persecution. First under Diocletian (r.284-305) and Maximian (286-305) and then Galerius (r.305-311), these persecutions not only divided Christians and non-Christians but Christian communities themselves. When Constantine and Licinius issued their joint Edict of Religious Toleration in 314, the Christians' outlook shifted from despair to hope. With Constantine himself as a patron of the church, wealth and optimism flooded the many Christian Churches of the empire. For Christians like Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine was the philosopher king who had come to unify Christians of the empire under a single banner and bring salvation and Truth to all. Monasticism, a new brand of spirituality, reached a fever pitch and spread out of Egypt, bringing apocalyptic thinking that saw contemporary strife as a cosmic battle between good and evil. The salvation of the empire was at stake. Christians of many varieties thought that that the dream of a divine empire in harmony with God was within their reach, if only a thunderclap like the one Philostorgius envisioned would come from the sky and make all Christians agree on a perfect understanding of God.

This imminent dream turned out to be a tall order. By the mid-fourth century, the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire were in the throes of a venomous debate about the nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son. Bishops and laymen alike held a variety of opinions on whether the Son was "of the same essence or nature" as the Father, co-eternal or begotten, eternally begotten or made. The debate was not an intellectual exercise limited to

bathhouse debates and the universities in the empire. It wrenched communities apart as the

struggle played out along webs of secular and ecclesiastical patronage.[2] By the 350s a small

but increasingly powerful group of Christians, who favored the creed given at Nicaea in 325,

began to refer to anyone who disagreed with them "Arians," hearkening back to the

controversial presbyter of Alexandria who Constantine exiled at Nicaea. Since the end of the

fourth century, the entire conflict over theology that dominated the century has been

commonly referred to as the Arian Controversy. Subsequent generations of Christians saw it

as a period in which an internal force threatened the cohesion of the Church that the apostles

established after Christ ascended to the presence of God, a theological cancer that spread out

of Alexandria and infected congregations throughout the Roman world. As hinted above,

scholarship has long since dismantled the illusion that Christianity was a unified entity. For

the first three centuries of its existence, a diverse ecosystem of Christian communities

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Translations accompanied by the Greek are my own and derived from the Greek manuscript in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca*, vol. 25 (Paris, 1857). Translations for which I present only the English come from the Wace and Schaff translation in the *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*. More recent translations of select Athanasian works are available, for example his *Letters to the Virgins*, and Festal Letters in David Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995). Wace and Schaff's 1892 translation is a serviceable translation of Athanasius' works, though unfortunately no one has yet undertaken the task of creating an updated English edition of the entire corpus. All scriptural references are from the Michael D. Coogan, ed., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[2] Peter Brown urges historians to look at the social context that drives interaction and conflict between lines of patronage, wealth, and *amicitia*, a suggestion that this study finds quite applicable. Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 32. Elizabeth Clarke similarly argues that the word "Origen" also became a word that meant more than just a "Platonizing" theological bent, it articulated and defined existing social networks between Christian leaders and communities. Elizabeth A. Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

peppered the Mediterranean possessing a spectrum of beliefs about Christ, practices, sacred texts, and ecclesiastical structures. The debates of the fourth century were not an internal threat to some pre-established apostolic harmony, but rather a symptom of the consensus-making process itself.

Despite this scholarly consensus that the fourth-century controversies involved a spectrum of theological ideas and were not really about Arius himself or his beliefs, there has been no concerted effort to figure how a lowly priest like Arius came to be such an important symbol of the controversy for members of the Nicene faction outside of Alexandria. Why did calling someone an Arian constitute such an effective and lasting method of slander? The general underlying assumption seems to be that the "dangerous" nature of Arius' subordinating theology and his role in events leading up to Nicaea provided sufficient context. But if the authority of Nicaea and the narrative surrounding it was a work in progress in the 350s and 360s as it is widely acknowledged to be, it seems premature to assume that the name Arius meant anything to anyone outside Alexandria, particularly in the Western Roman Empire.[3]

Yet by the mid-to-late fourth century western bishops like Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose of Milan used the term Arian to denounce their local political and theological opponents. Ambrose famously used it against his adversary Auxentius in Milan and to this day scholars still use the term to describe Auxentius and other bishops of northern Italy. The

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[3] For discussions of the events leading up to Nicaea and its memory during the subsequent controversies, see John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea* (Crestwood, NY: Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001); Khaled Anatolios and Brian Daley, *Retrieving Nicaea: The Development and Meaning of Trinitarian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford University Press, USA, 2006); H. A. Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

problem is, those labeled as Arians had absolutely no social connections to the presbyter of

Alexandria and often only a fleeting similarity in theology. Just as importantly, no one ever

claimed to be an Arian, except perhaps the Arius' small group of Alexandrian followers.

Despite these issues, scholarship on the fourth century remains frustratingly tolerant of the

terms "Arian" or "Arianism" with respect to non-Nicene categories of thought, a casualty of

the word's lasting impression on the memory of the fourth century. For that, we have

Athanasius of Alexandria to thank. By the fifth century, ecclesiastical historians adopted

Athanasius' narrative almost wholesale, preserving the concept of an "Arian controversy."

Athanasius made Arius the arch-heretic of the early Church and the symbol of Christian

disunity until the so-called heretical crises of the 11th and 12th centuries. Peter the Venerable,

a Clunaic abbot writing in the early 12th century, "updated" the conventional heretical

classification system to accommodate Islam, placing Mohammed somewhere "between

Arius and the Antichrist." Peter's new fantasy heresy league overturned a six-hundred-year-

old tradition that placed Arius at the top of the ranking system.[4] That Athanasius secured for

Arius, an almost unknown presbyter from Alexandria, the throne of the "King of Heretics"

is impressive. That his dominance lasted until the twelfth century testifies to the integral role

Arius played in the narrative identity of Nicene Christians. So how did the memory of Arius

evolve from obscure troublemaking presbyter to the heretical monster of early Christianity?

The Road to Nicaea

The story Athanasius wove into the fabric of Nicene Christian belief had its origins in

the city of Alexandria, one of the largest centers of Christianity alongside Rome, Antioch,

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[4] Dominique Iogna-Prat, *Order & Exclusion: Cluny and Christendom Face Heresy, Judaism, and Islam, 1000-1150* (Cornell University Press, 2002), 342.

Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Carthage.[5] Since at least the time of Dionysius (d.264), the

bishop of Alexandria began spreading his power throughout Egypt and beyond, claiming

primacy over surrounding ecclesiastical offices. As Carlos Galvão-Sobrinho notes, bishops

closely tied the legitimacy of their leadership to belief. They saw themselves as the

legitimate heirs of divine knowledge and truth, passed down through apostolic succession.[6]

Within each community these concepts varied widely, but in the second century church

leaders displayed a significant degree of flexibility on matters of theology.[7] The second half

of the fourth century saw the emergence of a much different type of bishop, one firmly

grounded in both the political and religious fabric of their community and a center of social

and theological authority. The power of the metropolitan bishop increased, especially in the

larger urban centers of the empire and Constantine's incorporation of bishops into the

financial and administrative aspects of empire fortified their position.[8]

This new sense of authority and centralized power in the figure of the bishop not only

strained inter-communal relationships as bishops forsook doctrinal flexibility for dogmatic

theological formulae. It also caused conflict between individual bishops and the *pontifex*

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[5] It bears keeping in mind that the bishop of Constantinople was a newcomer to the scene and not necessarily a welcome addition among the older episcopal sees.

[6] Carlos R. Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power: Theological Controversy and Christian Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2013), 21.

[7] Ibid., 15.

[8] Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (University of California Press, 2005), 243. Rapp provides detail around the law of 318 which allowed municipal cases to transferred to the *episcopale iudicium* and its subsequent effect on ecclesiastical power. For the effect that increased wealth had upon the institutional and ideological structure of the Church see, Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 72–80.

maximus: the emperor himself. Athanasius' unwavering stance on his theology and refusal

to recognize dissent within the areas under his authority (even when they corresponded with

imperial opinion) put him at odds with the most powerful court bishop in the Roman world,

Eusebius of Nicomedia, and the emperor Constantius II. In an effort to boost his own

position locally and within the wider episcopal community, Athanasius cultivated narratives

with accompanying letters and edicts that tried to make sense of his current troubles. He

traced his current dispute with Eusebius and Constantius to a prior conflict that took place

more than twenty years prior between his predecessor Alexander of Alexandria and the

presbyter Arius.

Athanasius obscured many details about that early conflict to fit his own needs. The

carefully selected documents and bombastic narrative that Athanasius provides offer little

insight into the broader significance of the conflict and its ties to other similar inter-

Christian disputes. That said, scholars have generally done a good job exhausting what little

evidence exists for this initial quarrel.[9] We do know that prior to 318 a dispute arose

between Alexander and Arius regarding the nature of the Son and His relationship with the

Father.[10] Simply put, Arius' appears to have regarded the Son as a created entity.[11] It is

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[9] Critical analyses of this difficult period can be found in Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*; Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1987); R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 AD* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988).

[10] For dating the early controversy, see Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 3.

[11] Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 21. Galvão-Sobrinho argues that Arius' ideas offended Alexander's sensibilities because "to the bishop… Arius' idea of a "humanized" Christ had to be condemned because it seemed to open the door to a view of the church that denied prelates their monopoly of spiritual power." If indeed the Son was a created being, He was susceptible to change. If He was susceptible to change, He was capable of performing good and evil acts. By extension, Christ was therefore able to choose between

likely that the initial dispute between Arius and Alexander was far more banal than later accounts made it out to be, and the fact that Alexander invited Arius to a debate first builds a strong case for Alexander's flexible approach to the initial argument. It was Arius' persistence that eventually perturbed Alexander. When Arius refused to cooperate even after the debate, Alexander called a council of Egyptian and Libyan bishops that excommunicated Arius and his followers.

As limited as our knowledge of Arius is, we certainly get the impression that he was persistent in his efforts. In 318, Arius wrote a brief letter to one of the most powerful bishops of the day, Eusebius of Nicomedia, and asked him to intervene on his behalf.[12] The resulting discord between Alexander and Eusebius and his supporting bishops, according to Athanasius, caught Constantine's attention and led to a council in the city of Nicaea in 325.[13] This council produced a series of canons dictating proper ecclesiastical conduct and a creed. It also deposed several bishops whom Constantine saw as troublesome or more likely, closely connected to the court of his deceased rival, Licinius. The primary significance of the council, both for subsequent generations of Christian thinkers and contemporary scholars, was the creed that it produced. After Nicaea, Christians subscribed to creeds in order to align themselves with imperial power and articulate their own divisions.

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good and evil. If he was able to choose between good and evil, then he came to his position as Son of God through conventional means. It was the possibility of an individual attaining salvation and even a position akin to Christ.

[12] For dating of the letter, see Hans-Georg Opitz, ed., *Athanasius Werke.* (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1934), 1–3.

[13] Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., "Canons and Creed of the Council of Nicaea," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series Volume 14*, 5th ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1892), 8–56.

Subscription to these creeds was an amalgamated act of theological preference, political

alignment, personal relationships, and scholastic history, one that most bishops negotiated

deftly throughout the fourth century.

The creed produced at Nicaea did not initially hold the universal authority that later

bishops claimed. It espoused a predominantly Alexandrian theological position and used the

word *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος), meaning "of the same substance," to express the relationship

between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.[14] The world *homoousios* was popular among Late

Platonist thinkers and according to Eusebius, it was Constantine himself who suggested it.[15]

According to this model, the Son (Jesus) was not a created being. He was co-eternal with the

Father, of the same "stuff," and therefore *not* subordinate to the Father in the same way that

that the biological terms "father" and "son" would otherwise assume. Athanasius and other

theologians who supported the use of this word often used the analogy that the Father was

like the sun itself, and the incarnate Son was a beacon of light that shone from the sun.[16]

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[14] Galvão-Sobrinho, *Doctrine and Power*, 21. Galvão-Sobrinho notes that Alexander likely formulated his own theology because of the disagreement with Arius. Hence, while many underlying ideas may see continuity in an "Alexandrian" context and beyond, the particular definition formulated in the 320s was very much a product of its time.

[15] Eusebius of Caesarea, "Epistula Eusebii," in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, trans. Philip Schaff and Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 4.

[16] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Ad Constantium," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), XXV.15.

One cannot have three suns, nor can one separate the radiance of the sun from the essence of its origin.[17]

Other theologians, most notably Origen, used the similar word *ousia* (οὐσια) as a synonym for *hypostases* (ὑπόστασις). This however was not a reference to ideas of "substance" or "essence" inherent to each member of the Trinity, but merely a form of classification for the three individual entities, just as Platonists discussed the existence of the One/Monad (μονάς), the Intellect/Nous (νοῦς), and Soul/Psyche (ψυχή) as being above matter.[18] Nicaea however used the word *homoousios* or "consubstantial," to describe the essential relationship between the Father and the Son. It denoted no inherent hierarchy to the Trinity, making them of equal prestige and origin before all other things. The council also denounced views that claimed "there was a time when he [the Son] was not" or that he was "created out of nothing."[19] This decision however raised objections from those who questioned whether something that possessed the substance of One itself could truly come into the world as a material being. Yet for the moment, most of the attending members of the council (almost all of them from the eastern provinces) signed the creed and deposed those who would not subscribe to it, among them Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia. Their exile was brief. Constantine admitted both back into communion only three years later and

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[17] The analogy unfortunately falls apart if you consider it from the perspective of modern physics.

[18] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 66.

[19] Schaff and Wace, "Canons and Creed of the Council of Nicaea," 3.

Alexander's death in 328 meant that with no strong opposition, the feud at least appeared finished.[20]

A word of caution on the previous narrative. The "cause and effect" vis-à-vis that the discord in Alexandria produced a definitive council under Constantine that brought the Christian world under an Alexandrian theological formula is unnervingly "Alexandrian" in its orientation, a point that caters almost too well to Athanasius' own conflict with Constantius II in the middle part of the fourth century. As Athanasius laid out this story of Arius, he dedicated the narrative to drawing a correlation between his current adversary Eusebius of Nicomedia and Arius, which perhaps gives the original letter from Arius to Eusebius (a letter that scholars have heavily scrutinized for both its historical and theological substance), undue significance. The rhetorical quality of the letter lay in its existence. For Athanasius, this letter was the smoking gun that associated his current adversaries with the "impiety" of a presbyter that Constantine himself exiled. In this respect, Athanasius "universalized" the Alexandrian issues of his predecessor and injected his own struggle into this grand narrative. He was not just a disgraced bishop who fell out of favor with the emperor, he was a stalwart bastion of orthodoxy against a flood of heresy. As overstated as the connection between Arius and Nicaea may be, we can conclude that Constantine and Nicaea settled the feud between Alexander and Arius by the death of Alexander in 328. The state of the see itself, however, was no more secure as a result.

When we consider Athanasius' later career and the exiles that inspired his literary works, it is worth reflecting upon both the difficulty with which he attained the see of Alexandria

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[20] Maurice Wiles, "Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy," in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark, 1993), 32.

and the persistent difficulties he faced holding it. His career was not simply (as Athanasius presents it) a fluctuation between externally imposed turmoil, exile, and communal bliss. It included a delicate balance within the Alexandrian community itself, a reality with which Athanasius had to contend from the day he claimed to be the legitimate heir of Alexander. He spent the rest of his career maintaining this inheritance through his written works. In fact, Athanasius was so successful in his endeavors, scholarship has taken the better part of a century to understand both the precarious position of Athanasius himself and the ways he constructed his polemical works to this purpose.

Literary Review

Studies of early Christianity, and particularly the fourth century, suffer from a chronic case of disciplinary tunnel vision. In 2012, William Arnal and Russel McCutcheon critiqued New Testament scholarship in Religious Studies departments and observed that there was an overwhelming tendency for Christian scholarship within the field of Religious Studies to be self-referential in nature.[21] These studies take a select group of Christian authors, Scripture, and texts for granted, elevating the importance of a choice corpus of texts without considering the epistemological implications of this carefully curated lineage of theology and history. When scholars study this tradition on its own terms, they tend toward arcane questions of self-reinforcing importance, like "Christian" historical topics or theology.[22] To drive the point home further, there has historically been embarrassingly little intersection even between these two areas. For decades historians (particularly those who followed in the

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[21] William Arnal and Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane: The Political Nature of "Religion,"* 1 edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 135.

[22] Ibid., 137.

line of Leopold Von Ranke) thumbed their noses at theology, continuing the view Edward

Gibbon that it was because Christians spent so much time thinking about the next world that

they stopped caring about running this one and dropped the Roman Empire on its head.[23]

Meanwhile, theologians were often content to study theology in a vacuum bereft of

context.[24] The result were traditions in isolation.

For most of the twentieth century, these two approaches left their mark on studies of

Arius, Athanasius, and fourth-century Christianity. Most studies on Athanasius, Arius, and

Arianism conducted followed in the steps of Eduard Schwartz's political history *Zur*

Geschichte des Athanasius (1904-11) or theologian Adolf von Harnack's, *Lehrbuch der*

Dogmengeschichte (1909).[25]

Theological Approaches to Athanasius and Arius

The fourth century has long been a period of fascination for those with a penchant for

theology. Nuanced arguments over creeds, the intriguing connections between Christian and

late Platonist thought, and a substantial corpus of surviving works made the area a fertile

ground for studies in early Christian intellectualism. Despite this, scholarship afforded

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[23] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. III, 1781, chapt. XXVIII. For a much more nuanced discussion of the historiographical schools, see Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 1–28.

[24] Arnal and McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane*, 136. Arnal and McCutcheon's reasons for these observations lie in a new paradigm for defining religion, a word that in contemporary usage places Christianity as its comparative center. They argue for a three-fold, graduated expansion of the "counter-intuitive being" framework posited by Pascal Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (University of California Press, 1994).

[25] Eduard Schwartz, *Zur Geschichte des Athanasius.* (Berlin: W. De Gruyter, 1959), 18; Adolf von Harnack, *Lehrbuch Der Dogmengeschichte*, vol. 2 (Tubingen, 1909).

Athanasius himself very little theological attention in until the 1960s. It could have been because Athanasius received a poor reputation from historians like Gibbon, or perhaps it was just that scholars were unable (or unwilling) to stop ogling the Cappadocians. Initial excurses, like those of Boström (1932) and Pollard (1957), looked at the connections between Athanasius and other theologians like Origen and Methodius of Olympus and did not expend much effort trying to understand the bishop himself and his own contributions to theology.[26]

In the early 1960s, Charles Kannengiesser emerged as a prominent scholar of Athanasius with early works on his Festal Letters (1964) and the Athanasian/Alexandrian Christology (1973).[27] Kannengiesser's versatile approach to Athanasius often merged the theological and political facets of Athanasius, although his deep admiration of Athanasius put him somewhat at odds with the earlier German authors Otto Seeck (1911) and Eduard Schwartz who focused on Athanasius' interactions with imperial authority. Kannengiesser saw Athanasius as an insightful innovator in the field of theology and a reluctant bishop caught in a mire of imperial politics. This idealized version of Athanasius was not without its merits, although Kannengiesser's desire to see history and theology weigh in on Christianity's "modern

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[26] F. Boström, *Studier till den grekiska teologins frälsningslära med särskild hänsyn till Methodius av Olympus och Athanasius av Alexandria* (Lund: Ohlsson, 1932); T. E. Pollard, "Logos and Son in Origen, Arius and Athanasius," in *Studia Patristica. Papers Presented to the Second International Conference on Patristic Studies Held at Christ Church, Oxford 1955, I* (Akad.-Verl., 1957), 282–87.

[27] Charles Kannengiesser, "Le Témoignage Des Lettres Festales de Saint Athanase Sur La Date de l'Apologie Contre Les Païens-Sur l'Incarnation Du Verbe," 1964; Charles Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," *Theological Studies* 34 (1973): 103–13.

crises" shows up in his depictions of Athanasius.[28] Current authorities on Athanasius and his

contributions take a decidedly theological approach, including discussions surrounding the

existence of a distinctly "Nicene" strain of theology. For example, Khaled Anatolios' 2004

study argues for a logical, systematic undercurrent to Athanasius' thought that adds a certain

coherence to his many seemingly disparate, highly polemical works.[29]

Broad scholarly interest in the figure of Arius, as accessed through Athanasius, began a

little earlier in the twentieth century. Studies by Telfer (1949) and Nautin (1949) included a

high degree of criticism with regard to Athanasius' perspective of Arius and his theology,

calling on scholars to adopt a critical eye toward what we can actually discern about his

doctrine.[30] Realizing the effect of Christian orthodox tradition upon the study of Arius,

Maurice Wiles also argued in 1962 for a more sympathetic approach to the historical Arius,

one that considered the presbyter on his own terms rather than the expectations of the later

debates.[31] Studies on the *Thalia* of Arius (one of his only extant works) proliferated between

1963 and 1983 led by Wyss (1963); Boularand (1967); Stead (1978); Simonetti (1980);

West (1982); and Inwood (1983).[32] These works discussed every aspect of the *Thalia* from

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[28] Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," 105.

[29] David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of His Thought* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004); Anatolios and Daley, *Retrieving Nicaea*.

[30] W. Telfer, "St. Peter of Alexandria and Arius," *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949): 117–30; P. Nautin, "Deux Interpolations Orthodoxes Dans Une Lettre d'Arius," *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949): 131–41.

[31] M. Wiles, "In Defence of Arius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 13 (1962): 339–47.

[32] D. Wyss, "La Thalia Di Ario," *Dioniso* 37 (1963): 241–54; E. Boularand, "Aux Sources de La Doctrine d'Arius," *Bulletin de Littérature Ecclésiastique* 68 (1967): 3–19; G. C. Stead, "The Thalia of Arius and the Testimony of Athanasius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 29 (1978): 20–52; M. Simonetti, "Ancora Sulla Datazione Della Thalia Di Ario,"

meter to Platonist influence and Originist theology as scholars grasped to understand the

origins of Arius' theology and the complications presented to us by the fragments in

Athanasius' works. Earlier traditions of scholarship speculated that Arius' theology

emigrated from the school at Antioch but by the mid-1960s Christopher Stead (1964) argued

that the evidence for this link, a reference to Lucian of Antioch found in Arius' letter to

Eusebius of Nicomedia was no more than a formality and had no necessary bearing on his

theology itself.[33] Similarly, Rudolf Lorenz (1979) argued that the third century theologian

Origen (who taught in both Alexandria and Caesarea) influenced Arius only in his doctrine

of the Incarnation, not Trinitarian theology.[34] Kannengiesser (1982) argued for dialogue

between Arius and the Alexandrian Platonic tradition, but entirely within Alexandria.[35]

Underlying questions and concerns remained as these conclusions drew on extremely

limited evidence: how much should we take Athanasius at his word? What was the

theological landscape of Christian theology in the Mediterranean in the fourth century and

how did it conform or not conform to Athanasius' picture? Were the debates of the later

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Studi Storico-Religiosi, 1980, 349–54; M. L. West, "The Metre of Arius' Thalia," *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1982): 98–105; B. Inwood, "Comments on Professor Görgemann's Paper. The Two Forms of Oikeiosis in Arius and the Stoa," in *On Stoic and Peripatetic Ethics. The Work of Arius Didymus* (Transaction Books, 1983), 190–201.

[33] G. C. Stead, "The Platonism of Arius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 15 (1964): 24.

[34] Rudolf Lorenz, *Arius judaizans?: Unters. zur dogmengeschichtl. Einordnung d. Arius* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 8.

[35] E. Blochet, "La Pensée Grecque Dans Le Mysticisme Oriental," *Revue de l'Orient Chrétien* 8 (1932 1931): 101–77. Blochet, who looks primarily at later Muslim authors and their attempts to syncretize neo-Platonic philosophy and Muslim theology, placed Arius among the Platonist Christians of Alexandria. Lorenz, *Arius judaizans?*, 223. Lorenz argues that Origenist thought about the incarnation influenced Arius, not Origen's Trinitarian theology itself. Raoul Mortley, "The Alien God in Arius," in *Platonism in Late Antiquity* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 205–15. Mortley concurs with Stead on the influence of Platonist tradition on Arius' ideas regarding the subordination of the Son.

fourth century in any way connected to Arius? Even the most sympathetic of Athanasian

scholars, Charles Kannengiesser, acknowledged these problems within the discipline of

Athanasian studies. Writing in 1982, Kannengiesser argued that the problem between Arius

and Alexander was not one of "Arianism," as Athanasius argued, but of hermeneutics.[36] In

the late 1980s, two studies emerged that tried to put the theology of Athanasius and his

claims regarding the theology of Arius in a wider contextual (yet still Christian) perspective.

Rowan Williams' 1987 monograph argued that not only did Arius support a commonly held

understanding of the relationship between the Father and the Son, but his theology was

conservatively Alexandrian in nature when compared to that of Alexander and Athanasius.[37]

The extensive research of R.P.C. Hanson (1989) offered a broader survey of the

Christological environment of the Eastern Mediterranean. Hanson showed that "subordinist"

positions similar to Arius' were just as common, if not more so, than the Trinitarian

approach that Athanasius supported. Hanson argued that no "subordinist" heresy emanated

out of Alexandria and engulfed the Christian world in controversy. The political aspects of

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[36] Charles Kannengiesser, *Holy Scripture and Hellenistic Hermeneutics in Alexandrian Christology: The Arian Crisis*, vol. 41 (Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1982), 2. Hansen (1989) disagrees with this sentiment and I also have my doubts about Kannengiesser's insistence that Alexandria served as the "point of ignition" for this debate. His argument that the initial dispute between Arius and Alexander was hermeneutical in nature is also problematic and overshadows the inner communal dimensions instigated by persecution. Debate continues on Athanasius' theology within a Christian context, see: Christopher Stead, *Doctrine and Philosophy in Early Christianity : Arius, Athanasius, Augustine* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000); Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*; John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: True God of True God*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004); John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: One of the Holy Trinity*, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Saint Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004); Anatolios, *Athanasius*; Khaled Anatolios, "The Influence of Irenaeus on Athanasius'," *Studia Patristica: XXXVI*, 2004, 463–76; Anatolios and Daley, *Retrieving Nicaea*.

[37] Williams, *Arius*, 230–32.

the controversy evolved out of the dispute between Alexander and Arius, although Arius' theology itself was not unique.[38]

The vast majority of these efforts have helped develop our understanding of Athanasius' theological position and its relationship with other centers of Christian thought, and to a much more limited extent, the ideas of Arius himself. The questions these theologically-focused works pose rarely take time to develop a historical understanding of the relationship between the Athanasius' works and his own ideological, political, and social context in a manner that does not reduce such influences to a Christian/pagan dichotomy. This is not to say that none of the aforementioned scholars took politics seriously. Charles Kannengiesser, Rowan Williams, and R.P.C. Hansen all focused on the intersection of theology and politics under the Christian emperors. Indeed, these scholars generally saw the divisions within theology as political motivating forces themselves, around which emperors danced, trying to wrangle concessions, compromise, and consensus. But the relationship between the theological and political in these works is unified only insofar as *differences* in theological conclusions are assumed to be the reason behind conflict. That belief is by itself a motivating factor, or that discordant belief results in violence and political dissent is an assumption that often rests unchallenged.[39] This concept is just as problematic in the ancient world as the idea of political expediency or opportunity, which displaces any notion of "true belief" by juxtaposing it with the political benefits it offered at the time.

Political Approaches to Athanasius and Arius

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[38] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, xix–xx.

[39] Arnal and McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane*, 143.Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 6–8.

The early 20th century German historians Otto Seeck (1911) and Eduard Schwartz (1904-11), foreshadowing a similar approach in Ronald Syme's *Roman Revolution* (1939), focused on Athanasius as a bishop engaged in the *Realpolitik* of his time.[40] In 1981 and again in 1994, T.D. Barnes challenged Charles Kannengiesser's benevolent depiction of Athanasius as the unassuming Alexandrian homebody, uncomfortably caught up in the politics of the period. Barnes took a critical approach toward Athanasius reminiscent of the German historians with his detail-oriented source criticism that fixed Athanasius and his contemporaries in space and time. Barnes' study offered an un-paralleled framework from which to understand textual elements problematic within Athanasius' accounts and an unflinching chronological framework that was at times a bit *too* rigid. His book *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (1994) focused more on the politics *surrounding* theology and less on theology itself. Barnes focused substantially on the "holes" in Athanasius' writings and argued that under Constantius, bishops and councils exerted a force that even emperors could not overturn.[41] Contrasting Kannengiesser's benevolent attitude toward Athanasius, Barnes strongly labeled Athanasius a "liar" and the equivalent of "a modern gangster."[42] Barnes' work was critical with regard to dating and locating important periods and events in Athanasius' career, but did little for

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[40] Schwartz, *Zur Geschichte des Athanasius.*; Otto Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* (Metzler, Stuttgart, 1911).

[41] T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Harvard, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 172. Kannengiesser, "Athanasius of Alexandria and the Foundation of Traditional Christology," 8.

[42] T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 181.

understanding the rhetoric of Athanasius himself and how exactly it functioned in a political context.

Inspired by the works of Barnes, Hanson, and Williams, the scholarship of the early 1990s renewed its interest in Athanasius' rhetoric and the issues at stake during the Christological debates between 343 and 381. These studies overwhelmingly arrived at the conclusion that the term Arian, as used by Athanasius and others, was one of slander and did not constitute a form of self-identification. Maurice Wiles (1993) argued that Arius himself was only a marginal figure in the later debates and questioned even his significance as a physical figure in the initial discourse surrounding the Council of Nicaea (outside of Alexandria).[43] Nicaea itself as a theological benchmark only grew in importance during the 350s, the result of Athanasius' efforts to counter the authority of contemporary councils. Rebecca Lyman (1993) argued that the lack of any consensus on what Arius meant to those invoking his name shows that Athanasius' use of Arianism differs substantially from that of Cyril of Jerusalem and Gregory Nazianzus in the 350s and 360s.[44]

David Gwynn's 2007 book *The Eusebians* is one of the few to have investigated the rhetorical aspects of the word Arianism itself. Gwynn focuses on Athanasius' theological and political rhetoric surrounding existence of a "Eusebian party," a group that Athanasius consistently referred to as Arian. *The Eusebians* looks closely at the rhetoric of Athanasius himself and the constructed nature of the Eusebians as a cohesive party. He concludes that

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[43] Wiles, "Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy," 71.

[44] Lyman, Rebecca, "A Topography of Heresy: Mapping the Rhetorical Creation of Arianism," in *Arianism After Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts*, ed. Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (T&T Clark, 1993), 45–65.

"the Arian party of the Eusebians" never existed as a distinct ecclesiastical or theological entity, and the "Arianism" that Athanasius attributes to those men does not reflect either the doctrines of Arius himself or the known writings of any of the individual "Eusebians."[45] The nature of Gwynn's argument is important for both our knowledge of Athanasius' rhetorical strategy and his descriptions of theological categories and in its confirmation of suspicions harbored in the last twenty-five years of historiography. With no fault to its purpose, Gwynn's study tells us little about why Arianism existed as a category of its own, and the reasons behind its rhetorical success.[46] Generally speaking, scholarship on Arianism assumes that Arius' theology and his condemnation at Nicaea serve as sufficient ground for the prolific use of the word Arian as a derogatory label in the later fourth century.

No group or individual ever called themselves Arians, nor did Athanasius' use of the word as a label for his opponents necessarily reveal political or theological similarities between them. The inability of the word Arianism to describe, in objectively historical terms, any political or theological faction prompted Rowan Williams in 1992 to argue that the label Arian should be abandoned.[47] Yet it is worth asking why scholarship has failed to acknowledge this fact. Is the definition of Arianism as an established "other" so integral to the idea of a Nicene tradition itself that we cannot bear to disarm it as a useful narrative category despite its ahistorical nature? The persistence of the term, and scholars'

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[45]David Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the Arian Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 245.

[46] David M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians : The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the « Arian Controversy »* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 245. Much like the Eusebians, the orthodoxy that Athanasius elevated was just as fragmented.

[47] Rowan Williams, "Article Review: R.P.C. Hanson's 'Search for the Christian Doctrine of God,'" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 45 (1992): 101–11.

unwillingness to complicate the issue further, highlights the degree to which our understanding of the fourth century still rests upon a curated Nicene perspective and one entrenched in understandings of the political and theological as separate categories of study.

A New Approach to Late Antiquity

Scholarship on early Christianity has increasingly engaged in what one might refer to as "worldbuilding." It is becoming increasingly clear that in order to understand the experience of those under our microscope, we must treat human interaction and thought as fluid and intersectional, as part of a shifting chaotic soup of boundary construction, enforcement, and infiltration. People who identified as Christian in the Roman Empire grew up in pre-ordained structures of thought and practice that they shared with their non-Christian counterparts. They shared physical environments, ate, and worshipped next to each other so that the boundaries between what it meant to be Christian or act like a Christian were porous and more often than not so ill-defined that bishops, priests, and monks went out of their way to develop new ways of sorting the wheat from the chaff.

The distinction that early twentieth-century scholars made between politics and religion falls apart when viewed through the experience of a fourth-century person, and one could quite reasonably question if this has ever been the case. Studies in anthropology and sociology have ushered in new questions on how ideas function in social spaces. Arnal and McCutcheon offer a useful critique of the modern notion of "religion" and how our modern notion of the word synthesizes what are in effect a series of overlapping practices.

> Religion is not its own thing: One of its central hallmarks is essentially a by-product of behaviors that have little to do with religion, the same set of behaviors that gives us money, families, and Luke Skywalker… it also means that the explanation for so-called religious phenomena need not be unified, that practices and discourse around gods may not be related in any essential or unique way to, say, sexual ethics, moral discourses, purity regulations, taboo's,

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sacrifices and divinations, or ecclesiastical institutions… We probably should not, for example, attempt to synthesize all of the details and aspects of the surviving ancient Christian literature as equally "religious" dimensions of a single insight, notion, or orientation – we should avoid trying to provide theological explanations for, say, institutional features of the groups represented by these documents, or of the moral rhetoric used in the texts.[48]

Classification in this sense, though comforting as it might be, is useless if our goal is to offer an honest perspective on human experience and whatever causalities might guide it. Just because an idea came from the writing of a bishop did not mean that it fit into an over-arching system under the auspices of the Church, nor did it necessarily belong to the person or group from which it came. To relegate any discussion of fourth-century thought to a purely Christian-centric or doctrinally-based discussion caters to modern ideas of religion (if not practice), as separate from the secular, *vis-à-vis* the state. On that same note, a purely political focus obscures the way that philosophical ideas constituted forces behind decision making processes and visions of how the world itself should be structured.

In terms of Athanasius himself, E.P. Meijering began this discussion in 1968 when he looked at the ways in which Athanasius' theology, rhetorical style, and philosophical tools depended upon those found in Mediterranean intellectualism in general. The book remains a benchmark study for understanding Platonist elements in Athanasius. Meijering argued that Athanasius saw Platonism's divine hierarchy as the center of its antithesis to Christianity.[49] The ontology of Athanasius' arguments relied heavily upon Greek philosophy, an aspect that

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[48] Arnal and McCutcheon, *The Sacred Is the Profane*, 162.

[49] This particular debate goes back to Harnack, *Lehrbuch Der Dogmengeschichte*, 2:211, 223, 227. Harnack argued that Athanasius cut loose the Christian faith from Greek philosophy, particularly through his concern about redemption and not cosmology. Eginhard Peter Meijering, *Orthodoxy and Platonism in Athanasius: Synthesis or Antithesis?* (Brill Archive, 1968), 1–4; 129–31.

the bishop did not see as particularly problematic. The tools of the philosophers were fine instruments with which to discuss God, especially the relationship between the Father and Son. In this respect, Athanasius' ideas represented a synthesis with the Greek tradition rather than a departure as Harnack argued. Meijering's study problematized the discussion of these labels in a philosophical environment where it was difficult, if not sometimes impossible, to distinguish a definitively Christian tradition.

Pushing the discussion beyond the purely theological, Dominic J. O'Meara (1993) argued that Late Platonism was not merely a bunch of philosophers detached from the world who speculated about the divine from atop their proverbial white towers. It was at its root a political philosophy, one that emphasized devotion and interaction with the world with the goal of ordering society in a way that reconnected humanity with the divine.[50] Susanna Elm (2012) argued that Christians shared this same ideal, largely because they all came from the same institutional framework and shared a cultural matrix that facilitated certain assumptions about the way the universe worked. Elm found that the emperor Julian and Gregory Nazianzus shared a structural understanding of the divine and its connection to the world, an understanding that stemmed from the classical elements of *paideia* and Platonic and Aristotelian textual traditions. While they agreed upon these common principles, they disagreed about the means, and who precisely, held access to the cure (*pharmakon*) that would bring the community under the authority of the emperor (*oikoumenê*) closer to the divine.[51]

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[50] D. J. O'Meara, *Platonopolis: Platonic Political Philosophy in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 13–16.

[51] Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 82.

How exactly Christians negotiated and lived this shared intellectual and institutional experience, a boots-on-the-ground perspective if you will, is what Edward Watts looked at in a 2010 study on a late fifth-century riot in Alexandria. Almost 150 years after Athanasius, students at the academy in Alexandria still studied with both Christian and Hellene faculty. Watts' case study shows how one student's punishment for violating the traditional deference given toward one's teachers resulted in claims of persecution on the part of the Christian bishop and the subsequent destruction of temples.[52] Isabella Sandwell (2007) also focuses on efforts by Christian leaders to demarcate boundaries between their own parishioners and non-Christians within a mixed social environment. Sandwell points out that John Chrysostom, a presbyter of Antioch and later Bishop of Constantinople (397-403), had a difficult time enforcing social boundaries between Christians and non-Christians, and categorized activities and practices accordingly to regulate and define the Christian community.[53]

Sandwell's study taps into one of the significant issues facing historians of Late Antique Christianity: what exactly did it mean to be a Christian? By the fourth century CE, six hundred years of Hellenism had shaped the eastern Mediterranean and four hundred years of Roman rule further encouraged the spread of these values and concepts. Members of the Christian communities were first and foremost participants within their immediate environments (mostly urban) and shared public space, common beliefs, values, and social practices with non-Christians. Christian inclusion in this cultural and social matrix extended

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[52] Edward Jay Watts, *Riot in Alexandria: Tradition and Group Dynamics in Late Antique Pagan and Christian Communities* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 8.

[53] Isabella Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity: Greeks, Jews, and Christians in Antioch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 8.

even into the many philosophical circles of the Late Antique Mediterranean. The social and ideological boundaries between Christian and pagan, Greek philosopher and Christian theologian were not self-evident. By the late third century, the philosophical synthesis of Platonism and close relationship between Platonists and Christians meant that both used a standard cosmological model to describe the physical world and its relationship with the divine.[54] Many, if not most Christian theologians practiced their craft alongside their pagan counterparts and shared many of the same teachers. The mid third-century philosopher Ammonius Saccus taught a number of prominent intellectuals including the Christian theologian Origen and the Platonist philosopher Plotinus.[55] The common social and intellectual matrix that Christians shared with their fellow Romans was the underlying reality within which Christian identities formed. To overlook interaction is to confuse the static notion of "identity" with the process of its creation and practice.

To treat Christianity as a set of practices, beliefs, and expressions, tangled up with the many interlocking facets of Roman cultural norms, Hellenistic intellectualism, and local traditions, rather than its own isolated world, is to approach Athanasius with an eye to how he positioned himself in relation to those he lived alongside. It means spending as much time looking closely at the cultural matrix in which he lived, the underpinning assumptions

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[54] Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome*, 162.

[55] Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trans. Kirsopp Lake, John Ernest Leonard Oulton, and Hugh Jackson Lawlor (London; New York: W. Heinemann ; G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1926), VI.19. Eusebius claims that Ammonius was a Christian, however the diversity of his students and shared intellectual culture should give us pause over anyone's attempt to claim his philosophy. See Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2012), 2–7.

about the world and the universe that he shared with his friends and adversaries, as it does at how he nuanced those assumptions to draw borders around himself and his followers. It also means that if we are going to trace how Athanasius transformed Arius from presbyter into the scourge of Nicene Christianity, we must look at the physical environment in which he lived. We must account for the ways in which the environment, both natural and built, affected who the bishop talked to and the places he traveled. We must, to the best of our abilities, try to understand the world in which Athanasius lived.

Argument

Scholarship up to this point has laid bare the illusion of Arianism. There were no self-professed Arians outside of Alexandria. It was not a conspiracy born out of the dispute between Arius and Alexander that snaked its way into the imperial court. The beliefs Athanasius categorized as "Arian" were not radical by the standards of their time nor was there any unified movement behind them. They were merely the result of two centuries of local Christian thought gathering around imperial power for the first time. Though those around Eusebius constituted a tight-knit political network that extended out Constantius' court and despised and tried to depose Athanasius, they often had good reason to do so. Athanasius' Arianism lies up to this point deconstructed and exposed, leaving behind an increasingly significant question: how and why did it come to exist in the first place?

This dissertation attempts to reverse-engineer the Arian controversy, specifically the "cosmic" version of Arianism that made its way into the late fourth-century narratives of Jerome and Gelasius of Caesarea, and the early fifth-century histories of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret. It asks two simple questions: why did this story of "Arians" resonate with

contemporary audiences, and just as importantly, who read and replicated Athanasius' ideas and how did they get access to them?

The answer to the first question is the focus of Chapters 1 and 2. I argue that in his works, Athanasius harnessed a widespread anxiety about the effect of imperial power and coercion on the salvation of Christian communities. The source of this insecurity was not directly related to the damage that imperial officials imparted on the bodies of Christians (martyrs had that covered), but rather the fact that when faced with the pressure to conform, Christian communities split into factions of acquiescence and resistance. The real danger lay in the persecution's aftermath, in dealing with the resentment and broken relationships that emerged among those forced to make the decision between loyalty and survival. Yet for Athanasius and his contemporaries, the danger of persecution did not stop at the division it created. It had spiritual consequences.

Violence in colloquial terms suggests physical acts of coercion, usually intentional in nature. But as Johan Galtung argues, violence is present in both personal and structural forms, working as a physical and latent force that seeks to limit the potential of individual agents.[56] For Athanasius, his opponents' incorrect understanding of the divine resulted in

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[56] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," *Journal of Peace Research* 6, no. 3 (January 1, 1969): 167–68. Galtung's study seeks to understand the meaning of peace, and by extension discusses the possible meanings of violence in order to define its antithesis. Galtung adopts a wide definition of violence that suggests violence exists in more spheres than its visible, physically coercive elements. Violence, he argues, is present where human beings are being influenced. It exists in two principle categories: personal and structural violence. Within the category of personal violence, violence can be intended, not intended, physical, psychological, conducted with objects, or conducted without objects. The second category, structural violence, is by definition less personal in its application and exists as a controlling force between the potential of an individual and their actual ability to act as an agent in any given situation. Violence as a structural force is thus any visible or invisible force of power that seeks to limit human potential.

incorrect action: acts of violence that threatened the unity of Christian communities and by extension their salvation. The true violence was not in the martyrs who were sent to heaven, but to those who caved in the face of pressure and might otherwise have been saved. It placed a limit on their potential to reach unity with God.

Regardless of how good Athanasius' rhetorical skills were, or how much he used Arianism to leverage the insecurity of Christian communities throughout the empire, an idea only survives its author by leaving the dimly lit room of its conception. A literary text is a material object. From the moment the author touches ink to papyrus, vellum, or paper the information the author encodes is the result of experience gathered, information that once transcribed onto a physical medium travels through the world from person to person across time.

In Chapter 3, I argue that both Egypt's position relative to the Mediterranean wind patterns and Athanasius' two exiles (335-37, 339-45), which took him as far afield as Trier in Gaul, played a role in the success of the narrative. Using resources in the digital humanities including Pleiades and Walter Scheidel's ORBIS project out of Stanford University, I developed a database of Athanasius' travels that can then be visualized through GIS platforms including Grass GIS, Mapbox, and Google Earth. The result is a series of overlays that show Athanasius' travels in an environmental context, the factors that influenced who Athanasius met, and, upon his return to Alexandria, with whom he was able to maintain correspondence. Scholarship has understated the severity with which the wind patterns of the Mediterranean Sea controlled the regularity and direction of maritime travel from Alexandria. In fact, the only reason so many Roman merchants were willing to brave the difficult return journey from Egypt was because to the south of Alexandria lay a much

easier and faster trade route that stretched to India and brought expensive luxury goods across its 3,800 mile-span.

Much like a desert landscape peppered with occupants and oases, people can carve out parts of the landscape as they see fit. A new dwelling here, some irrigation there, unique preferences for color or construction. But the lay of the land itself constrains the possibilities of human action. Everyone faces the sun, the sand, the floods, the valleys, the mountains. They travel similar paths, never straying too far from the nearest resource whether it be shelter or water. As much as academics love to pull taxonomy from the finer details that distinguish one entity from another, we cannot lose sight of the topography that circumscribes the objects of discussion whether they be intellectual or physical: the stadia within which individuals negotiate their existence.

Space is often taken for granted and treated as a neutral landscape within which human beings interact, rather than a dynamic force in and of itself. The recent "spatial turn" in geography and anthropology, however, treats space as an active participant in the worlds of both humans and animals. It is a silent source that is often difficult to see, but as Kate Brown argues, it is a powerful motivator that remains as problematic and unreliable, and yet significant, as our literary sources.[57] Pulling a narrative from something as polyphonic as the environment is difficult, as Brown acknowledges, yet the benefits lie in a more complete picture of the experience of individuals within it.

> For all the problems in trying to see the past from the limited perspective of place, I don't think that is reason to give up… think about it – history occurs in place, not as historians common believe, in time. Or rather, time and place

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[57] Kate Brown, *Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

> have been mixed together metaphorically so that everything, past and present, takes place in a particular space of time.[58]

The use of environment adds an element that offers some solid foundation against which to place subjectivity. It also, to Brown's point, helps to release our perspectives and imagination from the constraints of our textual sources.

Whether we are talking about the volatile ocean, the open desert, or a gridded cityscape, I argue that environment played a prominent role in the experiences of those who existed within them, and by extension in the way they communicated those experiences. For Athanasius, however, both during his exile and after his return, the difficulties offered by the Mediterranean winds left only a few highly concentrated corridors of correspondence through which he maintained an extensive but documentable social network.

Tracing this social network is the goal of the final chapter of this dissertation. Using a social network database rendered through the visualization software GEPHI, I put those individuals who used the term Arianism into a dynamic set of relationships through which we can see at work the social boundaries that narratives like Arianism sought to defend. The result is a geographically-based image of Athanasius' social network through which we can watch the story of "Arianism" move across both time and space: information that traveled through the trade networks of antiquity and ultimately between individuals. This interwoven approach offers a view of early Christianity that steps beyond the limited illumination of the text itself, an intricate project that would not have been possible without interdisciplinary resources. I argue that the first generation of people who used term "Arianism" were those marginalized by Constantius' efforts at unification and who possessed an understanding of

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[58] Kate Brown, *Dispatches from Dystopia: Histories of Places Not Yet Forgotten* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 6.

imperial authority shaped by the memory and after-effects of persecution. Their key concerns were the consequences such violence had on the local autonomy of bishops and the division and violence that came out of persecution. Yet it was the generation that came after that ultimately propelled the narrative to its lasting success. This generation of wealthy, ascetically-minded individuals had only known an ascendant and wealthy Christianity. They found Arian narrative attractive in part because of Athanasius' distaste for imperial authority fit with their own rejection of careers in its bureaucracy and his apocalyptic language and imagery fit their worldview. But Athanasius also managed to weave the Arian narrative into the spiritual authority of the desert monks, a group he courted between 346 and 357, successfully bringing them under the authority of the Alexandrian episcopate.

If we are to follow the success of Athanasius' Arian narrative, we must treat it as a physical object, something that moved through space and time between people: subject to weather, geography, and built environments. Athanasius and his stories traveled, constrained by the environment around it. Yet simultaneously, those very stories altered the way some Christians themselves viewed the world and their place within it. If we are to answer how Arianism became as powerful as it did, each of these elements must be considered a unique player in the story.

A few clarifications need to be made before moving forward. When I say that "Arianism" is a constructed idea, I refer to the Arianism of Athanasius. The terms "Arians, Arian madmen" show up early on (for example in the letter from the Council of Jerusalem's 335), but they only refer to the small group of Alexandrians who followed Arius. While some may have seen in Eusebius of Nicomedia a patron of these heretics in the 330s, it was at best a loose social connection and certainly not a widespread conspiracy. I am interested

instead in the Arianism of Athanasius, the Arianism that is a disease that infects those who come into contact with it. This stretch is even more surprising in that until the middle of the fourth century, for most Christians the initial dispute between Arius and Alexander mattered very little. Athanasius himself elevated the lowly presbyter to the role of grand heretic and transformed his few followers in Alexandria into the culprits behind a vast Mediterranean conspiracy that even infiltrated the Imperial court. From this point onward, unless otherwise specified, the reader may assume that references to "Arians" and "Arianism" (henceforth to be used without scare quotes) refer to Athanasius' own creations, rather than any group that self-identified as such or that one could objectively describe as having a true or substantial affiliation with Arius.

Conclusion

Scholarly interest in Arianism has waned drastically since its peak in the late 1980s. With Athanasius' conspiracy debunked, Constantius rehabilitated, and the Christological debates placed in their wider intellectual and historical context, Arians seem no longer relevant to studies that remain embedded in the traditional silos of theological or historical study. Similarly, the dearth of surviving counter-narratives makes moving beyond this point uncomfortable for disciplines that remain entrenched in literary evidence. Yet the goal of this dissertation is to push the broader discussion of Arianism from deconstruction to construction; to uncover the process by which Athanasius and others created a narrative that in the end was real, in the sense that it informed and explained their experiences and defined a notion of self and community that lasted for centuries. This endeavor required a small dose of imagination, a spectrum of theoretical approaches, new tools from the digital humanities, and a bit of personal experience on the part of the author. As unconventional as the approach

may seem at times, my hope is that the result helps push scholarship on Arianism outside of our comfort zone, helping us explore new questions and experiences in what has up to this point been silent darkness beyond the textual illumination that has guided the subject for the past century.

Chapter 1

A Comfortable Silence

Introduction

There are arguments to be made from silence. Most historians are accustomed to its

presence; the absence of a source lost to time or purposeful destruction, an author who

overlooks a topic of our interest for personal or social reasons. As perpetually irritating as

these obstacles are, we seldom engage with the silence itself. Like a series of lamps in the

darkness we stick to our sources, basking in the illusory security that we are engaging in a

conversation across space and time with a tangible historical actor.[1] I think we can learn a

lot from poking and prodding at the darkness that surrounds those little spots of light. We

can even question the existence of that hazy line between the light and the dark; we can ask

why certain things were said and others left unsaid, particularly in cases where one would

think something should have been said; perhaps an issue that must have been sitting on the

tongue of our historical actor because it surrounded their existence. Athanasius of

Alexandria was a polemical artist of the early Christian Church and in his later career he

never failed to cry conspiracy against his adversaries or issue a grand treatise against those

he saw as heretics and schismatics. Next to Augustine of Hippo and perhaps Eusebius of

Caesarea, Athanasius' works survive as one of the largest corpuses by a single individual in

the first four centuries of the Church, yet he wrote the majority of these works after 340,

over a decade after he succeeded Alexander as bishop. Within the surviving works from that

first ten years, namely personal letters, Festal Letters, and one large two-part work called the

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[1] Amy Richlin, *Arguments with Silence: Writing the History of Roman Women* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 6.

contra Gentes/de Incarnatione which he largely based on a similar work by Eusebius of

Caesarea, there is a deafening silence around his adversaries who tenaciously dogged his

existence from the day he took office. None of Athanasius' own works from this early

period mention Arius, nor do they or call any of his adversaries Arians, and there are only

scant references to the followers of Melitius, who between Athanasius' election in 328 and

exile in 335 brought successive legal challenges against him.

This chapter looks at what Athanasius left unsaid about his adversaries in his early

works. The Great Persecution caused the problems he faced in his early career as a young

thirty-year-old bishop of Alexandria, one of the biggest and most prestigious cities in the

Roman Empire. This persecution in the east under Maximinus led to a substantial rift in the

Alexandrian community between those who adhered to their faith under the threat of

persecution, and the so-called *lapsi* who recanted. The result was two parallel churches, one

under the bishop Melitius and the other under Alexander. Athanasius lived with the

ramifications of this division. It threatened his very career during his first six years as bishop

of Alexandria and yet he said very little about the Melitians, and nothing connecting them to

the persecution. The experience of these years was integral to his later works, where

Melitians, Arians, and the persecution all play a role in his narrative circus. To understand

Athanasius' silence is to understand the reason for his later verbosity and candor on the

topic, and we should acknowledge the complications, and indeed possible benefits, that

come from breaking the silence surrounding violence and cycle of division it perpetuated.

Violence and Memory

The scale of violence witnessed in the twentieth century, not to mention even the first

decade and a half of the twenty-first century, is so insurmountable that it almost desensitizes

one's mind to the significance of large-scale violence in the ancient world. Even cases like

the massacre at the Hippodrome in Thessalonica where the emperor Theodosius supposedly

ordered the massacre of 7,000 people in response to the murder of his *magister militum*

Butheric, or the fields outside of Adrianople where two-thirds of Valens' army of 40,000-

strong army perished in a day, a scholar is careful to attribute at least some weight to

possible hyperbole on the part of the author.[2] Contemporary violence is measured in

pictures, video, and graves. In the ancient world it appears only abstractly to us in the midst

of flowing prose. Yet it bears keeping in mind that the trauma of victims derives not from

the scale of the violence, but the intimacy of it. Those of us who view the violence from afar

marvel at its scale; those who experience it firsthand see their personal world torn apart. It is

often not the stranger one fears but the neighbor, family member, or community. The

disintegration of a once-stable set of social relationships produces an incredible feeling of

insecurity and often an intense anger that accompanies the sense of betrayal. The results are

acute trauma linked to a severe feeling of vulnerability which manifests in feelings of

hostility or paranoia toward those the individual sees as social outsiders or individuals. Part

of this suspicion and mistrust stems from the fact that communal violence does not fall

cleanly along pre-existent social lines, but brings with it a persistent negotiation of those

lines through which same individuals or groups may traverse the social or political

boundaries, leaving one group or another with a feeling of "betrayal" to those with whom

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[2] Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 5th ed., vol. 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), V.17. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, trans. John Carew Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), XXXI. Themistius, "Oration 16," in *Politics, Philosophy, and Empire in the Fourth Century: Select Orations of Themistius*, trans. Peter Heather and David Moncur (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 16.206d.

they once shared a close relationship, with the result that offended parties tend to respond

violently in self-defense to new threats, whether perceived or real.[3]

On December 15, 1999, the United Nations Independent Inquiry into the actions of the

United Nations during the 1994 genocide in Rwanda issued their report on the staggering

800,000 individuals killed in 100 days between April and July of that year. Hutus killed

approximately 700,000 Tutsis and 50,000 "moderate" Hutus, and committed acts of torture,

rape, and psychological violence.[4] The causes of the genocide were compound, but

ultimately stemmed from an inverted power system that emerged in the wake of Belgian

colonial rule that ended in 1962. Although the Hutu government planned and organized the

atrocities, and military and paramilitary troops participated in the genocide, the measure of

the violence was intimate. Alison Des Forges, in her 1999 study for the Human Rights

Watch, "Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda," discusses the complex

situation communities faced when they negotiated their own personal loyalties and pre-

existing feuds with the Hutu government imperative to turn over Tutsis and their

sympathizers.

> Even had RPF (Rwandan Patriotic Front) progress been less dramatic, the decision by
> the interim government to push the genocide ever deeper into the community
> undermined its authority. People found it hard to believe that women, children, and
> the elderly and infirm posed the same threat as armed soldiers. Many of the women

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[3] Ervin Staub et al., "Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing: An Intervention and Its Experimental Evaluation in Rwanda," *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology* 24, no. 3 (2005): 299–300.

[4] Ibid., 299.

"UN Report of the Independent Inquiry into the Actions of the United Nations During the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda" (United Nations Security Council, December 15, 1999), 1, http://www.cfr.org/rwanda/un-report-independent-inquiry-into-actions-united-nations-during-1994-genocide-rwanda/p24243. The report offered an admission of responsibility on the part of the international community to act, and specifically the inability of the United Nations to provide relevant resources to the conflict when it was needed most.

targeted after mid-May were wives or mothers of Hutu and many of the clergy, teachers, and medical personnel were highly esteemed by their Hutu neighbors. Hutu solidarity, at most a short-lived myth, crumbled as protectors of these newly specified targets clashed with others whose own personal or political interests were served by continuing the genocide. These embittered killers sometimes turned on the communities and the authorities who had given them license to kill. The authorities found that the legitimacy which they had used at the start to cover the genocide had been consumed during the course of the killing campaign and that they no longer had the authority to control the assassins whom they had armed… In such struggles, having zealously implemented the genocide was no guarantee of safety and anyone, regardless of attitude toward Tutsi, could be accused of being *icyitso* (an accomplice).[5]

The blunt force of the trauma, though orchestrated at the national level, fell most heavily at the local level. The government offered what amounted to a *carte blanche*, upon which old grudges could be revived or decades of social-economic insecurity and oppression reversed or avenged. Those who seized upon the opportunity expressed anger not only at those whom they held responsible for these ills, but those who fell in the middle and could have been perceived as "soft" on their Tutsi neighbors or who actively harbored them.[6] Those liminal figures, cornered between the rhetoric of the oppressor and their intimate social relationships, exemplify the fluid nature of social relationships in the midst of partisan rhetoric and also one of the most controversial elements of post-violence attempts at reconciliation.

In the wake of the Rwandan Genocide, the UN issued a report that sought to acknowledge its own complacency and contrition during the genocide; a Band-Aid on a gaping wound that continues to affect those living in exile and in Rwanda. The report was the beginning an extended effort to offer some kind of explanation and accountability on the part of the international community and promote healing and recompense for those involved.

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[5] Alison Liebhafsky Des Forges, *"Leave None to Tell the Story": Genocide in Rwanda* (Human Rights Watch, 1999), 838–39.

[6] Ibid., 839.

Part of this took the form of the justice tribunal, an approach that emerged in the wake of WWII atrocities, and the more recent but complementary truth-telling tribunal, which sought to assuage the negative psychological effects of trauma, lessen the collective tolerance for retributive violence and by extension the raise the probability for intercommunal peace.[7] In Rwanda, truth-telling took the form of the *gacaca*: weekly small, public, and mandatory tribunals where survivors, witnesses, and the assembled community gathered to hear, often in the presence of family members of the accused. The local nature of the so-called healing process was born out of the "intimate" nature of the genocide that pitted communities, neighbors, and family members against one another.[8] In the past decade, the conventional wisdom behind the words "truth and reconciliation," as though the two are inextricably linked, has been called into question by scholars in psychology.[9] The question boils down to how groups and individuals can move forward without reinvigorating violence. How much wading through the memory of communal violence is too much? Does reliving the memories of trauma cause increased trauma or resolution? Initial studies suggest that resolution through discussion depends upon the level of proximity to the violence itself;

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[7] David Mendeloff, "Trauma and Vengeance: Assessing the Psychological and Emotional Effects of Post-Conflict Justice," *Human Rights Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2009): 597–99.

[8] Staub et al., "Healing, Reconciliation, Forgiving and the Prevention of Violence after Genocide or Mass Killing."

[9] Mendeloff, "Trauma and Vengeance," 594, 621. Mendeloff points out that although studies on the western criminal justice show that victims exhibit a dissatisfaction or lack of resolution when the criminal justice system does not meet their expectations of justice, the opposite is not yet clear. When their expectations are met, do they feel a sense of resolution or justice? To which we might add, exactly to who's expectations is the justice system supposed to conform? In the case of the former state of Yugoslavia, "even though most victims have considered the ICTY (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia) to be fair and to have produced fair verdicts, they nonetheless have been generally unhappy with the punishment meted out."

those further away are more likely to see it as a resolution. Those closer see less clear

benefit and their personal definitions of justice itself appear to lead to vastly different

conclusions about whether or not the tribunal served justice or whether their problems with

their neighbors were reconciled.[10] The validity of such a process is not something I wish to

weigh in on, but the question itself concerning the profitability of discussion opens up new

ways to think about the silence of our ancient authors. Regardless of whether the choice

occurred on the conscious or unconscious level, the very existence of that binary *choice* to

talk about a traumatic experience tells us something about what the author stood to gain or

lose (personally, politically, or otherwise), from such an emotionally-charged issue. There

was always the possibility of prolonging personal psychological trauma or reigniting

violence from simmering tensions and almost 1700 years ago, Eusebius of Caesarea

grappled with this very idea and made the decision to maintain his silence on the issue.

After Eusebius finished his *Ecclesiastical History*, one of his next projects was to fulfill

a promise he made in that work: an account of the martyrs from his homeland of Palestine.

In addition to a full-length book on the subject, it is likely that Eusebius produced an

abridged version of the so-called *History of the Martyrs of Palestine*, a version of which we

have today thanks to an anonymous author in the early fifth century who translated it into

Syriac. Found in a monastery in the Nitrian Desert, this abridged version is nevertheless an

invigorating if not somewhat nauseating read. Eusebius' accounts take place in

chronological order, but the reader cannot help but notice by the second or third story that

the characters in the various accounts are intimately acquainted. Eusebius himself knew

most of them personally and he weaves between his subjects a social network strengthened

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[10] Ibid., 594.

by their commitment to Christ. When many individuals met with persecution or martyrdom on the part of Roman individuals, they did so on behalf of a close friend or family member who was in prison or previously martyred. Eusebius encourages the reader to feel both sympathy and optimism. Persecution by the monolithic other, the pagan Roman authorities, reinforced social ties within the Christian community. Eusebius' martyrs united Caesarea, their bodies provided physical proof of God's love and their and connection with Divine. When the Roman governor Urbanus ordered the young martyr Epiphanius cast into the sea, a great storm kicked up the waves of the Mediterranean Sea and caused the whole city to tremble.

> And at the same time, the sea, even as if it were unable to endure it, vomited back the holy body of the martyr of God, and carried it with the waves and laid it before the gate of the city… And this which took place was proclaimed to all the inhabitants of the city, and they all ran at once and pushed against each other in order that they might obtain a sight, both boys and men and old men together, and all grades of women, so that even the modest virgins, who kept to their own apartments, went out to see this sight. And the whole city together, even the very children as well, gave glory to the God of the Christians alone, confessing with a loud voice the name of Christ, who had given strength to the martyr in his lifetime to endure such afflictions, and at his death had showed prodigies to all who beheld.[11]

The natural world's rejection of the spiritual martyr and its return of that sacred body to the community confirmed the Christian faith, the sanctity of their struggle, and temporarily broke down social barriers between individuals, uniting them in wonder at the power of God. Everyone came together, even the virgins who cloistered themselves from the mundane came out to experience the miracle. As Eusebius' proclamation of spiritual and temporal unity among the members of the community of Caesarea grows louder, so too does his silence around the members of that liminal space between persecutor and persecuted:

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[11] Eusebius of Caesarea, *The History of the Martyrs in Palestine*, trans. William Cureton (London and Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1861), 18.

those who provided or rejected cover for the afflicted or deserted their Christian brethren in the face of persecution. The reinforced optimism in the Martyrs of Palestine forms a dissonant chord that his fourth century audience would have noticed. Those who abandoned Christianity in the face of persecution or took advantage of the absence of martyred bishops and clergy for their own benefit resulted in schisms that lasted for a century in cities like Rome, Antioch, Hippo, and Alexandria. So where were they in Caesarea? Eusebius provides an explanation for that silence in the preface to the eighth chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History* as he prepares to recount the persecutions under Diocletian.

It was, Eusebius claims, the result of the freedom granted Christians at the time of his youth, that Christians "fell into laxity and sloth," and fought amongst themselves, assailing one another with "words like spears," forming factions in the name of belief and engaging in the worst sorts of hypocrisy, finagling, and hubris. In the scope of Eusebius' work, which followed a Christian teleology from the beginning of Creation through his present day, the persecution was the result of Christians' own inadequacies and an allusion to the prophets' warning to the Jews of God's impending wrath and their subsequent exile from Israel. In this sense the Diocletanic persecution was a purge of the worst elements of Christian society that had manifested in that period, a new Great Flood that sorted the wheat from the chaff. It was not without pain, Eusebius recounts, that "we saw with our very eyes the houses of prayer cast down to their foundations from top to bottom, and the inspired and sacred Scriptures committed to the flames in the midst of the market-places."[12] But perhaps worse was the mockery that fell upon the supposed shepherds of the church, the pillars of the community, who shamefully hid themselves from the onslaught and others captured in that shame and

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[12] Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VIII.2.

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humiliated by their captors. Eusebius only briefly dwells on this unpleasant memory before resolving to expunge any further details of their memory from the record.

> But as to these, it is not our part to describe their melancholy misfortunes in the issue, even as we do not think it proper to hand down to memory their dissensions and unnatural conduct to one another during the persecution. Therefore, we resolved to place on record nothing more about them than what would justify the divine judgment. Accordingly, we determined not even to mention those who have been tried by the persecution, or have made utter shipwreck of their salvation, and of their own free will were plunged in the depth of the billows; but we shall add to the general history only such things as may be profitable, first to ourselves, and then to those that come after us..."[13]

The dissension and division of the persecution had no role to play in Eusebius' vision of the new Christianity under the benevolent rule of Constantine. The first Christian emperor had once again brought unity to the empire that flourished under Augustus in the glow of Christ's arrival.

> And these nations, in every village, city, and district, actuated by some insane spirit were engaged in incessant and murderous war and conflict. But by two mighty powers, starting from the same point, the Roman empire, which henceforth was swayed by a single sovereign, and the Christian religion, subdued and reconciled these contending elements.[14]

Constantine was not only the new Augustus, but the true philosopher king who represented a reflection of God's heavenly kingship conveyed through the Logos, with the purpose of "bringing souls through teaching to the heavenly kingdom beyond this world."[15] But in the few brief sentences of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius exposes his severe disappointment and distaste for those who made "shipwreck of their faith," and caused the

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Eusebius of Caesarea, "Oration in Praise of Constantine," in *Eusebius: Church History, Life of Constantine the Great, and Oration in Praise of Constantine*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, 5th ed., vol. 1, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 16.5.

[15] O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 148.

mockery of Christianity in the midst of the death of some of his close friends and acquaintances in Caesarea. His ire for them was such that he made no secret of their fate: cast into the burning fires of Hell as a result of their own weak will. Eusebius saw nothing profitable in the process of memorializing the inter-communal trauma of his city. For him, the personal pain, shame, and anger were still palpable and their effects still visible in Caesarea in the late 320s. He perceived that dwelling on the details of that trauma would not offer any kind of resolution to those involved, unless their actions truly justified the punishment meted out by God. By this he of course meant those who were most severely at fault. The most traumatic stories, the people who abandoned their faith, the brothers and sisters who betrayed one another in the face of persecution, and the families and communities divided on course of action should be forgotten.

Eusebius' personal involvement in the persecution and his decision to maintain his silence must also be accompanied by an acknowledgment of his substantial privilege and comfort in the world that emerged out of the persecution. His image of a chaotic and divided Christianity before Diocletian only makes sense in light of the fact that Eusebius basked in the favor of Constantine's spiritually new and "unified" empire. For him the world was created anew and in a much more favorable light than the one in which he himself was brought up before the persecution, and so the persecution was in many senses the end of his worst problems.

The Effects of the Persecution in Alexandria

For others, the persecution under Diocletian, Galerius, and later Maximian was the beginning of their troubles. The peace that Constantine helped cultivate in the Alexandrian church at Nicaea between the once distinct "Church of the Martyrs" under Melitius and the

metropolitan episcopate under Alexander was tedious at best. If Epiphanius' familiarity with the Egyptian tradition on the topic is correct, the Church of the Martyrs was steeped in a sense of cultivated superiority regarding their performance during the persecution. They were the confessors, the true Christians who showed their zeal and devotion to Christ under pressure and they refused to conform to Alexander's lenient status toward the *lapsi*, particularly members of the clergy who recanted or fled.[16] Epiphanius' claim that Alexander accepted this parallel Church of the Martyrs is certainly questionable, but a division based on the performance of individuals during the persecution mirrors circumstances in other Christian communities. Unlike Peter and Alexander who accepted penance from both clergy and laity, the Melitians refused to let any lapsed clergy regain their title. The priesthood had to remain pure in its faith and conviction, if it was to truly lead the community to God.[17]

A community whose bonds are forged in violent struggle and whose sense of belonging is rooted in a feeling of spiritual superiority is a tough nut to crack. One can imagine how the Melitian sense of superiority, particularly within the priesthood, chafed at the "compromise" Constantine issued at Nicaea. The council exiled Melitius, but then forced the bishops he had appointed to serve beneath their brethren under Alexander and revoked their privilege to nominate other clergy or succeed their predecessors without approval from the Alexandrian church. It was, to my view, an administrative compromise. The Melitian bishops retained their position with constraints that channeled power through the episcopacy, thus ensuring that each subsequent generation of bishops would remain in

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[16] Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Books II and III (Sects 47-80)*, trans. Frank Williams (New York, NY: E.J. Brill, 1994), V.48.3.

[17]Ibid.

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communion with the mother church.[18] The bonds forged in persecution, however, are not so

easily broken. To suggest to those who suffered that their brethren who took the "easy" way

out now decided the parameters of communion and trajectory of their careers was

unthinkable. The council's decision was a blow to the most essential boundary that

circumscribed the Church of the Martyrs' identity. Apostolic succession was the basis by

which bishops articulated their authority, an unbroken line of descent to the original

apostles. According to the Council, those who had maintained that line of faith unbroken

were less than those who had cut and run. And those cowards now also controlled the

Melitian clergy's ability to decide who was worthy to succeed them. To their minds, the

very historical and spiritual essence of what it meant to be a bishop was at stake. The

Melitians may have had some respect for Peter, but Alexander himself did not suffer during

the persecution and neither did his closest advisor and student, the young Athanasius. Peace

only lasted for three years after Nicaea, and then an opportunity for the Melitians to re-assert

their independence from the Alexandrian Church appeared.

Three significant events for the Melitians and the Alexandrian episcopate occurred

between 326 and 328. First, it seems that a council of bishops readmitted Arius from his

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[18]Theodoret provides the letter of Melitius to the Synod at Nicaea. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.8. See also Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," in *Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Historians*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. A.C. Zenos, 5th ed., vol. 2, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1892), II.14. Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis*, 1994, V.48.4. Epiphanius also glosses over the provisions at Nicaea. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 59. Athanasius just refuses to talk about it.

exile in Illyricum some at some point during that two-year span.[19] The dating of this event is

not exact, but Barnes argues convincingly that Constantine recalled Arius to communion

around 327 and that on account of a hostile reaction from Alexander traveled to Libya where

he waited and continued to petition for his return.[20] This would have been a symbolic though

not practical defeat for Alexander, one that lasted until Arius' death in 336.[21] Secondly,

Constantine reconciled with Eusebius of Nicomedia in late 327, and the bishop quickly

resumed his place as a member of the royal family's inner circle. This guaranteed that the

aging Alexander and his successor would find no audience with the emperor nor benefit

from any direct imperial support.[22] Lastly and most significantly, Alexander himself died on

April 17, 328.[23]

The peace over which Alexander presided in his last few years quickly unraveled as

members of the Church of the Martyrs saw an opportunity to either turn the ecclesiastical

hierarchy on its head or at least reassert their status as the proper inheritors of apostolic

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[19] Timothy D. Barnes, "The Exile and Recalls of Arius," *Journal of Theological Studies* 60, no. 1 (2009): 127–28. Uta Heil, *Athanasius von Alexandrien de sententia Dionysii: Einleitung, Übersetzung und Kommentar* (Walter de Gruyter, 1999); Hanns Christof Brennecke, *Studien Zur Geschichte Der Homöer ; Der Osten Bis Zum Ende Der Homöischen Reichskirche* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1988). Uta Heil, Brennake, and other disagree with Barnes on this point. They argue that Arius died before 330.

[20] Barnes, "The Exile and Recalls of Arius," 126–27.

[21] Ibid., 127.

[22] Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 5th ed. (Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1892); Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica"; Philostorgius, *Philostorgius*; David Gwynn, "Constantine and the Other Eusebius," *Prudentia* 31, no. 2 (1999): 109.

[23] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Index," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 495–505.

succession. Our Nicene sources place the impetus for their next move on Eusebius, but while the bishop of Nicomedia harbored no small resentment toward the Alexandrian Church, I think this simplistic view puts far too much emphasis on the outside influence of the imperial court, a rhetorical twist that turns attention away from the incredibly divided nature of the Alexandrian Christian community and blames foreigners for internal problems, subsequently denying local actors their own agency and the Alexandrian episcopacy any weakness.[24] Three uncomfortable years was insufficient time to reconcile a decade and a half of resentment, nor the shame and feeling of indignation that members of the Church of the Martyrs likely felt after Nicaea. The death of Alexander was an opportunity to reassert independence or perhaps even influence the election of the new bishop.

Athanasius was away from Alexandria when Alexander died, a worst-case scenario for the young deacon who was probably not yet thirty years old. Sozomen recalls a story handed down by Apolinarius, where the dying bishop called to Athanasius, and another man by the same name who happened to be in the room came to him. Alexander did not acknowledge him, and he called again but this time the other Athanasius did not come forward, at which point he realized that his designated successor was absent. The dying bishop then exclaimed, "O Athanasius, thou thinkest to escape, but thou wilt not escape." To which Sozomen comments that in this way Alexander meant that Athanasius would be "called to the conflict."[25] A prophetic flourish on the part of later writers, but it certainly attests to the fact

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[24] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, vol. 26, 1871, 248–409; Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.XV; Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.XVII-XVIII; Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis*, 1994, V.46.

[25] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.

that Athanasius' succession was a long shot and contested from the beginning. The Melitian

bishops, many of whom were senior members in the church by this time, successfully

elected a man named Theonas in a move that might have actually preserved peace in the

Church. A bishop favored by the Church of the Martyrs would have rendered the decision at

Nicaea impotent, and perhaps even inverted the hierarchy of bishops in Alexandria.

Unfortunately, Theonas died three months later. It was a stroke of luck for Athanasius, who

arrived in Alexandria at the moment the episcopal seat was vacant.[26] Sozomen and

Epiphanius are the only sources who describe Athanasius' subsequent election in any detail,

and interestingly Sozomen includes two competing narratives of what happened.

Both sources assert that a council was held, though only Epiphanius tells us that this

happened after Theonas' death. Epiphanius claims that Athanasius became bishop by God's

will, and Sozomen says that Athanasius tried to flee from the responsibility and concealed

himself away, and only through the help of God were the bishops able to find him. But

Sozomen also says the following:

> The Arians assert that after the death of Alexander, the respective followers of that
> bishop and of Melitius held communion together, and fifty-four bishops from Thebes,
> and other parts of Egypt, assembled together, and agreed by oath to choose by a
> common vote, the man who could advantageously administer the Church of
> Alexandria; but that seven of the bishops, in violation of their oath, and contrary to
> the opinion of all, secretly ordained Athanasius; and that on this account many of the
> people and of the Egyptian clergy seceded from communion with him.[27]

These two main narratives seem to fall into conventional categories: the reluctant

acceptance and the secret election. Neither is likely entirely true, and to assume that the truth

falls somewhere in the middle would be a fallacious conclusion. The only thing we can say

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[26] Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis*, 1994, V.46.

[27] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," I.17.

for sure is that after Alexander's death, Athanasius' succession was not immediate nor was it recognized by a sizeable portion of the population. We know that Melitius' successor John Arcaph appointed a parallel bishop in Alexandria named Hierascius even after Athanasius' election who reigned until at least 334, suggesting that if indeed Athanasius held a council outside of the influence of the Melitians (though not necessarily secret), the Melitians responded in kind.[28] After all, as Alexander's successor it is doubtful Athanasius would have set aside the provisions of Nicaea and allowed the Melitian bishops equal participation in the election. I think it is safe to say that Athanasius' election fractured the Alexandrian community yet again, leading to two Alexandrian bishops and the disintegration of any Nicene accord.

Athanasius began his tenure as bishop as a man under siege. The effects of the division between Melitius and Peter consumed his existence and neither party seemed willing after this point to engage in another compromise of their own accord. It was something that Athanasius never let go of; he maintained his grudge against the Church of the Martyrs well into his later career. Part of this visceral reaction in his later *Apologia Contra Arianos* may indeed have been the twenty-some odd years of personal and antagonistic resistance that the Melitian bishops put up against him, but we should also pay attention to the antagonism that they put up against his teacher and friend Alexander. Athanasius' account of the early schism is short and cryptic, significantly more hostile than the "agree to disagree" perspective that Epiphanius provides. According to Athanasius, Peter held a council that deposed Melitius for "many crimes" including "offering sacrifice to idols."[29] Instead of

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[28] "P.Lond.6.1914" 335AD, London, British Library.

[29] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1871, 59.

holding another council to appeal the decision and engage with the issue, Melitius refused to

back down and split from Peter into schism, resisting first Peter, then Achillas, followed by

Alexander. As much as Athanasius championed Nicaea later in his life, the council's

decision to admit the Melitian bishops into the church still stung. Even in the *Apologia*,

which Athanasius wrote decades later, he sidestepped the issue, declaring that, "the

Melitians on whatever grounds (for it is not necessary now to mention the reason) were

received," and the feeble nature of the whole arrangement was shown when after

Alexander's death, "the Melitians, who ought to have remained quiet, and to have been

grateful that they were received on any terms, like dogs unable to forget their vomit, were

again troubling the Churches."[30] Despite the shackles the council placed on their hierarchy

and succession, Athanasius felt that the Melitians got more than they deserved at Nicaea and

that his predecessor should not have compromised at all.

This is evident in Athanasius' interpretation of the relationship between King David and

his son Absalom. The bishop compares Absalom to Melitius, declaring that, "as he was

disgraced by his deposition, he might by his calumnies mislead the simple." Athanasius uses

Absalom one-dimensionally; David's son kills his brother, then proceeds to slander and

rebel against his father, representing in his disgrace the figure of Melitius. Anyone familiar

with the story of David and Absalom however should view Athanasius' words with a raised

eyebrow.[31] The story is a tragedy about how a family became divided from within, a father

who continued to love his son even after he tears apart his house, his succession, and even

violated his father's bedchambers. But this is not how Athanasius read it. He focused on the

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[30] Ibid.

[31] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 2 Samuel 18:5.

actions of Absalom and his ingratitude toward David, rather than the king's inner conflict, a departure from Athanasius' contemporaries who typically focused on David as an allegory for bishop. It appears to me that even decades after the Melitians challenged his position, Athanasius was still triggered by the standard reading of this story. Perhaps he empathized more with Joab, who despite the king's orders killed Absalom himself. Joab spared no time wrangling about whether to follow the king's orders or bribe his soldiers to do the work. I wonder if Athanasius thought he might act as Joab did, given a second chance, had he seen Melitius caught in the branch of a tree like Absalom; whether he too might have thrust three spears into his opponent's heart, leaving him there in a tree ominously "hanging between heaven and earth."[32]

That Athanasius does not describe his enemies in detail in his early years as bishop has led to two main historical approaches for the period. A small cohort argue that because there is little contemporary evidence for such conflict that the later charges against Athanasius were probably exaggerated.[33] Others treat the retrospective accounts as hearsay and sidestep a narrative account. I would like to make an argument for the deafening sound of silence. Like a snake who can choose when to inject venom into a bite, Athanasius always faced a choice about whether to talk about his opponents or the conflict. He was never obligated to bring it up. Like Eusebius of Caesarea, he could push it down, pretend it didn't exist in the

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[32] Ibid., 2 Samuel 18:9-14. Absalom killed his half-brother Amnon when he found that Amnon had raped his sister Tamar. Absalom then indeed fled his father's wrath, but Samuel 2, 13:30-14:33 is not about the condemnation of Absalom but his eventual reconciliation with David. The emotional climax of the story focuses on the inner turmoil of David who, just after having been reconciled with Absalom finds out that his son has taken advantage of his clemency and rebelled against him. Yet even despite these acts as David prepared for battle against Abaslom he told Joab, his nephew and close advisor, to tell his commanders, "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom."

[33] For a summary of these arguments, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 19–23; Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria*, 23–26.

hopes that it might go away. I think this is exactly what he did during the first few years of his tenure. That he refused to directly call out his enemies does not mean that Athanasius did not engage with the issue. He simply implemented a more cautious approach to the subject as he forsook the possibility of reconciliation between members of a Christian community that had existed before the persecution. He turned his own congregation's sense of belonging and self away from their schismatic brethren toward new theological, historical, and political connections with other Christian communities in the empire under the rhetoric of Christian universality promoted by the emperor Constantine.

Athanasius' festal letters are incredibly important and often underused. Part of the reluctance on the part of historians to engage with these texts is understandably due to the difficulties surrounding their dating. Only excerpts of them come down to us in Greek, the rest coming from later collections in Coptic and Syriac. Parallel but independent to these sources runs the Festal Index, created shortly after Athanasius' death by an anonymous source. Some letters have only one possible date, based on the date of Easter for that year presented in the letter, but others have as many as three possible dates. Scholarship therefore has sought for quite some time to reconcile the letter order in the Festal Index with the letters in both the Syriac and Coptic versions. Camplani's 1989 translation and study of the letters is the most in-depth study on them since Schwartz, and I find his dating the most authoritative on the matter and will use them here. Despite their difficulties, these letters are an invaluable link in our ability to see how Athanasius and other Alexandrian bishops articulated the significance of their policies, theology, and politics to their supporters. These correspondences were direct points of brief instructional contact between Athanasius and his congregation, similar to a short State of the Union address. The letters are generally not

long; some are as short as a paragraph and others the length of a typical letter. Athanasius usually produced his festal letters in two parts, the message and the important festal dates.[34] The Festal Index, compiled by an anonymous source after Athanasius' death, often correlates the two, and shows that in some years of exile or duress Athanasius either did not write a Festal Letter or wrote only a short one. What Athanasius rarely failed to do was provide the dates for Easter, the six-day pascal fast, and the Lenten fast, which he usually did long before the Easter they announced, possibly as far in advance as immediately after the preceding Easter.[35] Although these dates appear as a short addendum at the end of each letter, they were extremely important to the congregation. The very date of Easter was a contentious topic in every corner of the Mediterranean, as local traditions which diverged along whether groups used the lunar or the Julian solar calendar, celebrated the Pasch on the 14th or 15th of Nisan, or even in the case of the Solar calendar, how the date translated to that calendar.[36]

Athanasius typically wrote the message itself between January and February of each year, which suggests that he wrote his first festal letter only five months after his contested election.[37] David Brakke offers a compelling argument for why Athanasius' adversaries and election are absent from the letter, arguing that it was precisely because of the precarious nature of the (supposedly) thirty-year-old bishop's position that he was "not willing to

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[34] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 183–91.

[35] Ibid., 183.

[36] Thomas J. Talley, *The Origins of the Liturgical Year* (New York, NY: Pueblo Publishing Company, Inc., 1986), 27.

[37] Alberto Camplani, *Le Lettere Festali Di Atanasio Di Alexandria* (Rome, 1989), 72–80.

mount a frontal rhetorical assault on his opponents."[38] It is a far cry from the older, more

confrontational Athanasius with which we are more familiar, but it does not mean that he

was inactive. He turned instead to a familiar trope within the Christian community as a

means of surreptitiously attacking his opponents. His early festal letters engage extensively

with a process that Miriam Taylor calls "associative anti-Judaism," a process by which

members of a Christian church placed upon their opponent certain qualities they described

as "Jewish," that they might align the position of their opponents with "typical traits known

from salvation history as characteristic of that which was archetypically obsolete and

typically wrong."[39] If it was "backward," it was Jewish, if it included betrayal or division in

the face of Truth, it could be Jewish. This rhetoric of course could encompass actual Jews,

who at the time were undergoing their own process of syncretism, codification, and

boundary enforcement, but it was also used to police boundaries within Christianity.[40] In his

later Festal Letters Athanasius explicitly associates the Melitians with "schismatic" aspects

of Judaism, but we also see him engage surreptitiously with the issue in the festal letters that

he issued between 329 and 333 when his episcopate was at its most vulnerable. Here he only

vaguely touched upon the Melitian opposition, choosing instead to differentiate his own

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[38] David Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 4 (2001): 454.

[39] Miriam S. Taylor, *Anti-Judaism and Early Christian Identity: A Critique of the Scholarly Consensus* (New York, NY: Brill, 1995), 181–86.

[40] Daniel Boyarin, "Hybridity and Heresy: Apartheid Comparative Religion in Late Antiquity," *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, 2005, 342–43. Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," 456. Brakke argues that this notion of "backwardness" was applied as part of his effort to institute a 40-day Lenten fast prior to the Pascal fast in 333/34.

congregation from the rest through their acceptance of the growing notion of a universal Church.

Those Who Rend the Coat of Christ

The days for the Pascal fast at the end of Athanasius' first letter are attributable to only a single date, making it one of the few inarguable letters from his early episcopate. In it, Athanasius argues for the historical and cosmological significance of the Pasch itself. As Brakke observes, there are no Melitians or any kind of specific reference to any opposition groups in this early letter, but Athanasius does use this very broad discussion of the significance of the Pasch to endorse a Christianity that supersedes any commitment to the local, a universal expansion and replacement of the Laws of Moses and traditions of the Hebrews.[41] Athanasius begins the letter by inviting the congregation to participate in the season which stands above all others, the division between which was first proscribed to Israel under the Levitical feasts by Moses.[42] Much like a child, Israel existed under a shadow of lack of understanding, one in which the Law functioned as the mediator between the Israelites. For its time, Mosaic Law in this regard was "admirable, and the shadow was excellent, otherwise it would not have wrought fear, and induced reverence in those who heard."[43] But the revelation announced in the Incarnation of Christ represented the point of perfect connection between the created and uncreated; all things that came before were

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[41] Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," 453–54.

[42] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter I," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 2.

[43] Ibid., 3.

imperfect. The new covenant under Christ superseded and *progressed* the relationship

between humanity and God; hence, the Christian Pasch that celebrated the death and

resurrection of Christ was representative of the new connection, and the Jewish Passover an

irrelevant relic. Mosaic Law, Athanasius contended, was explicit in the fact that the

Passover feast had to be celebrated in the city of Jerusalem and at the temple there, "for on

this account, in that city alone was there an altar and temple built, and in no other city were

they permitted to perform these rites, so that when the city should come to an end, then those

things that were figurative might also be done away."[44] But the arrival of Christ signified the

end of the shadow, and therefore the end of any need to celebrate the Jewish Passover in its

original form, limited to a single city and a single temple. The arrival of the Word,

unmediated through prophets or old scripture, came straight from God through the Logos

itself; it tossed away the shadow of the law and expanded the special nature of God's

message beyond Israel. Christianity was the new and universal message of God, and the

Word of God was accessible to all, in every place. Evidence of this was shown when the

curtain of the temple itself was ripped and the temple and city themselves destroyed.[45]

The archetype of "the Jews" that Athanasius uses is a flexible and expandable idea that

has more to do with the division between "old" and "new," and "local" and "universal" than

the contemporary Jews of Alexandria. Athanasius codified these ideas in the dichotomy of

"Christian spirit" and "Jewish flesh," in which things of the flesh included localism and

tradition, those things opposed to the idea of universality, and earthly concerns or

indulgences. The Christian Spirit in contrast was concerned with heavenly ideals like

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[44] Ibid., 7.

[45] Ibid., 8.

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devotion to unanimity and universal practice, and those virtues that nourish the soul.[46]

Athanasius drew his audience's mind away from the local, petty divisions within his city toward a network of Christianity abroad that Constantine began after the defeat of Licinius in 324. His discussion of the Christian flesh and Jewish spirit was not abstract, but a statement of belonging and a rejection of the old communal ties within Alexandria. Outwardly, the position allowed Athanasius to point at his adversaries as those who departed willingly from the "the Church." The idea that "they" split from "us" directs the blame away from a group of Christians who now claimed authority and continuity through their unity with the universal, rather than the "parting of ways" that we see in Epiphanius in which a once whole church divided into two parallel churches. To claim the universal is to claim continuity, and although the Church of the Martyrs would have likely claimed continuity through their performance during the persecution, their position concerning the *lapsi* put them at a disadvantage with Constantine's policy of unhindered reconciliation between Christian communities (a problem that Athanasius himself faced with Arius). Athanasius' early Festal Letters reshaped the identity of his fractal piece of the Alexandrian community, coaxing it into an "orthodox" network of Christians that supposedly spanned the Mediterranean. It was a clever approach to a very difficult problem, but it also gave Athanasius some important capital when it came to dealing with Constantine himself.

Appealing to Constantine

In the wake of the Melitian challenge to his election, Athanasius seems to have rejected any hope of reconciliation and refused to recognize them as a parallel church. Athanasius'

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[46] Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," 478. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter I," 5.

festal letters suggest that he took a delicate approach to the issue, but widespread conflict between the two churches remained endemic. It was likely that this conflict and Athanasius' refusal to recognize bishops within the Church of Martyrs led John Arcaph, Melitius' successor, to send a delegation to the emperor at Constantinople and Nicomedia. Access to the emperor was unsurprisingly difficult; Epiphanius records that "when court officials heard the name, "Melitians," without knowing what that might be, they would not let them petition the emperor."[47] By the 330s, the emperor's court was becoming increasingly difficult to navigate with its thousands of career bureaucrats, internal networks of patronage, and policies concerning how one might petition the emperor's favor.

Under the Principate, those seeking recompense or imperial action would only have needed to petition their provincial officials and local governors. Prior to the third century, management of the empire functioned along a dynamic series of exchanges that centered on the provision of mutual obligations, services, or goods that formed networks of patronage beginning at the local level and emanated outward. After the third-century crisis that saw the standoff between local elites and imperial control, primarily where taxation for the army was concerned, with emperors increasingly sought centralized control over local matters.[48] The result was an ever-growing bureaucracy around the emperor that regulated access through career bureaucrats and in part replaced the previous systems of patronage. By the sixth century the central imperial government employed between 30,000 to 35,000 career

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[47] Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis*, 1994, V.46.5.

[48] Christopher Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 109–10.

bureaucrats (up from a few hundred in the second century).[49] Part of the solution to

navigating this vast network included the exchange of money for services, which helped to

regulate the ever-growing line of individuals seeking imperial attention.[50] Yet this regulated

system of access expanded slowly. The Melitian delegation at Constantinople could still rely

somewhat upon the traditional systems of patronage that continued to exist alongside this

new system, and it was by following the more traditional methods of access that the

delegation from the Church of the Martyrs gained audience with the emperor.

Eusebius and his close associates Theognis of Nicaea and Maris of Chalcedon

represented the inner ecclesiastical circle of Constantine. It was primarily Eusebius and

Theognis who Sozomen says "possessed great confidence of speech and authority with the

emperor."[51] They likely acted as ecclesiastical gatekeepers for the inner circle, and it was

with them that John and his delegation first found a receptive audience. Sozomen claims that

Eusebius wanted the return of Arius to Alexandria from Libya, and that he asked the

Melitians to consent to it in return for an audience with the emperor.[52] It is hard to

substantiate this request, although if what both Eusebius and the Melitians wanted to see was

the overthrow of Athanasius and the installment of a new bishop who was tolerant of the

parallel churches and independence for the Church of the Martyrs, acceptance of Arius was

likely a plausible condition for the imperial court who above all, wanted to see a unified

Church in Alexandria. This kind of *quid pro quo* was a standard part of the exchange of

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[49] Ibid., 111.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.22.

[52] Ibid.

favors that granted patronage in the court and should not be seen as confirmation of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, who subscribe to Athanasius' claim that it was Eusebius of Nicomedia who bribed the Melitians to bring charges against Athanasius. Such assertions follow the rhetoric of Athanasius who always perceived the charges against him as a top-down conspiracy, agitating those he saw as under his jurisdiction. Such rhetoric is indicative of Athanasius' later polemical works under a hostile emperor, which insisted on the conspiratorial machinations of the court and played off growing frustrations surrounding the issues of transparency and accessibility within the burgeoning centralized government. As we will see later, the Melitians had plenty of reason to bring charges before Constantine on their own initiative. But the first charge that Eusebius and the Melitians brought before Constantine was indeed that Athanasius was excluding people from communion with the Church, a complaint both groups had in common.[53]

Constantine first reprimanded Athanasius for his refusal to recognize the Melitians with a letter, after which the delegation under John furthered their charges with the claim that Athanasius had exacted a tax on Egypt of linen garments and then proceeded to pay gold to a potential imperial usurper named Philumenus.[54] It was these accusations that led

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[53] Ibid., II.XIX.

[54] Constantine's Letter in Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," in *Socrates, Sozomenus: Church Historians*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. A.C. Zenos, 5th ed., vol. 2, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1892), I.27. Socrates claims that the letter was directed at Athanasius for not allowing Arius to return to Alexandria, but judging by the fact that the delegation from the Church of the Martyrs also brought this up suggests that Constantine's reprimand was issued against Athanasius' general attitude rather than opposition to just Arius.

> Since you have been apprised of my will, afford unhindered access into the church to all those who are desirous of entering it. For if it shall be intimated to me that you have prohibited any of those claiming to be reunited to the church, or have hindered

Constantine to call Athanasius to his court, although our sources are disparate on where this discussion occurred. Theodoret claims that it was in Constantinople and Socrates says that it was at Psamathia, a suburb of Nicomedia.[55] Athanasius arrived likely in the second half of 331 at the emperor's court and managed to persuade Constantine that the accusations were false. The fact that Constantine ended up supporting Athanasius is in some ways surprising, considering that (other accusations aside), Athanasius had previously refused to allow Arius back into communion. If what Constantine ultimately wanted was unity in the Alexandrian Church, Athanasius must have offered him some kind of commitment that overshadowed his partisan actions. It was no foregone conclusion that Athanasius was the "orthodox" successor of Alexander; as Constantine threatened in his letter to Athanasius, he had no qualms about replacing him.[56] But Athanasius did have three things going for him. He had a predecessor who showed a commitment to Constantine's ideal at Nicaea, he himself had been at Nicaea, and the divisions between himself and the Melitians had led him to pursue this angle rhetorically in his letters since the beginning of his career. He not only could depict himself as a loyal extension of Constantine and his policies, but he could make the promise of a unified Church in a way that the Church of the Martyrs could not. As David Brakke observes, Athanasius went to great lengths in his festal letters to draw this distinction

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their admission, I will forthwith send someone who at my command shall depose you, and drive you into exile.

For the charges leveled against Athanasius, see Ibid. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.25. Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.22.

[55] Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.25.

Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.22.

[56] Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.27.

between a commitment to place as opposed to the universal, and it is entirely possible that he used this rhetoric to great effect at court.[57] Constantine confirmed Athanasius as bishop of Alexandria, which overrode any previous challenges to the legitimacy of his succession, and the emperor wrote a letter to the Alexandrian people confirming his decision.

> Believe me, my brethren, the wicked men were unable to effect anything against your bishop. They surely could have had no other design than to waste our time, and to leave themselves no place for repentance in this life. Do you, therefore, help yourselves, and love that which wins your love; and exert all your power in the expulsion of those who wish to destroy your concord. Look unto God and love one another. I joyfully welcomed Athanasius your bishop; and I have conversed with him as with one whom I know to be a man of God.[58]

It is clear in the letter that the Church of the Martyrs fared badly, though it certainly did not stop them from continuing to levy accusations against Athanasius. That said, Constantine also urged the community to "exert all your power in the expulsion of those who wish to destroy your concord," a sentiment that unlikely eased the delicate tensions between Athanasius' church and the other factions, least of all with the Church of the Martyrs. It would appear that after this confrontation, things actually got worse in lower Egypt.

We cannot confirm when Athanasius started using violence against his opponents. Generally, our sources talk about specific acts of violence only between 332 and 335: after Athanasius met with Constantine and before the Council of Tyre. Socrates and Theodoret, both of whom favored Athanasius and provided little detail of the accusations against him, do not mention charges of violence as part of the initial round of accusations brought before the emperor. They instead say that the Melitians accused Athanasius of refusing to allow

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[57] Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," 476.

[58] Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.25.

others into the church, of exacting a tax upon the people of Egypt, and giving money to

Philumenus, a man with imperial aspirations.[59] Epiphanius in his more sympathetic

approach to the Melitians also says that the violence did not start until after this first meeting

between Athanasius and Constantine, claiming that he, "pleaded with them, he exhorted

them, and they would not listen; he pressed and urged them *<and they would not obey>*."[60]

Epiphanius blames the later instance of the breaking of a sacred chalice on a Nicene deacon

and a mob of the laity who raided a Melitian service, and says it is out of this that the

intrigue against Athanasius grew. Sozomen discusses the same charges as Theodoret and

Socrates, but adds that the Melitians "imputed to Athanasius and the bishops of his party all

the bloodshed, bonds, unjust blows, wounds, and conflagrations of churches."[61] Sozomen's

charges lack the specificity of the later allegations against Athanasius, and certainly do not

seem to match the tone of Athanasius' festal letters. Indeed, because his festal letters tread

so carefully on the issue, it is doubtful that Athanasius himself at least overtly instigated any

violence against his adversaries. The simmering tensions that existed after Alexander's

death however likely took on a life of their own and Sozomen records that Constantine

found it difficult to discern between the accusations of the two groups, "since there were

such mutual allegations, and many accusations were frequently stirred up by each party."[62]

If Athanasius played any role in the violence at this early point, it was likely passive in

nature and fed off the pre-existing pressures between Christian communities. This changed,

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[59] Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.27. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.28.

[60] Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Ephiphanius of Salamis*, 1994, V.48.7.

[61] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.22.

[62] Ibid.

however, after Athanasius' meeting with Constantine. It appears that once he had

Constantine's support, the young bishop no longer felt that he had to be silent on the matter

in public, and felt increasingly at liberty to confront his adversaries head on and use more

extreme measures against them.

On the Offensive

Constantine's support for Athanasius invigorated the young bishop, who for the first

time in his career could count on support for his claim as bishop and the sole preeminent

representative of a "catholic" church in Egypt. It was because of Constantine's blessing in

the very presence of his domestic and international opponents that Athanasius seems to have

cast aside his subtle knife and adopted a hardline approach toward his adversaries. In his 332

festal letter to the congregation, Athanasius directly addressed his congregation concerning

his absence and doings abroad. He apologized for the late nature of the letter on account of

his protracted journey and a grave illness that he suffered. Despite these problems, the letter,

> …should still be considered well-timed, since our enemies having been put to shame
> and reproved by the Church, because they persecuted us without a cause, we may now
> sing a festal song of praise, uttering the triumphant hymn against Pharaoh; we will
> sing unto the Lord for he is to be gloriously praised; the horse and his rider he hath
> cast into the sea.[63]

The first part of this introduction stresses a feeling of a great burden being lifted off the

congregation, one that stems from the issue of a verdict from the "Church" as the greater

body to which Athanasius had been appealing. In this respect, Constantine's decision

vindicated both Athanasius' legitimacy and reinforced the connections he and his

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[63] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter IV," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 1.

congregation shared with the wider church centered in Constantinople. It is also interesting that in this introduction Athanasius explicitly calls out the Church of the Martyrs as the persecutors.

The rest of the letter continues this celebratory tone in a way that, although not unusual to other festal letters, emphasizes the international nature of Christ's message. Their stalwart faith and commitment to Christ as celebrated in the Pascal season, should instill upon them the feeling that Christ has "given unto you to tread upon serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy," and indeed in the wake of the news that their bishop had prevailed at court the congregation felt that way.[64] The recognition of Constantine indeed provided Athanasius with a newfound authority in a way he did not have before and Athanasius returns to the root of this newfound authority when he emphasizes that the abolition of death has given birth to a new kingdom without boundaries,

> For when death reigned, 'sitting down by the rivers of Babylon, we wept', and mourned, because we felt the bitterness of captivity; but now that death and the kingdom of the devil is abolished, everything is entirely filled with joy and gladness. God is no longer known only in Judaea, but in all the earth, 'their voice hath gone forth, and the knowledge of him hath filled all the earth.'[65]

When the shadow lifted, no longer were rites restricted to Jerusalem, nor were they restricted to "types" or certain groups of people, but "He willed it to be in every place, so that 'in every place incense and a sacrifice might be offered to him."[66] Again, we must stress the contextual nature of this letter in this new commitment of Athanasius to Constantine. It was not a route that he was somehow obligated to take from the start. It was a decision he

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[64] Ibid., 3.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 4.

made in the midst of a severely divided community, one in which new relationships had to be forged to compensate for a loss of an older community or as was the case after Nicaea, a faltering and uneasy coalition. To further stress this, we can look at the fact that his opponents did the same thing, reaching out to other communities and individuals like Eusebius of Nicomedia for support. It was a process of tentacles from Alexandria grappling for familiar social connections, political connections, and theology. The Church of the Martyrs was at a disadvantage in this regard, however, for their entire sense of self revolved around an insular set of circumstances. Although at court they tried to make Athanasius look like the impediment to unity, it was likely the fact that Athanasius himself pointed to Nicaea, both for his theological and episcopal authority that led to his success. This was for Constantine perhaps the litmus test of loyalty, and something to which the Church of the Martyrs would have been reluctant to do since it compromised their ecclesiastical independence. Both sides recognized the party line and tried to play to it.

Athanasius couldn't resist calling out his opponents directly in front of the congregation in this moment of newfound authority. The previous year (331) he had stressed to the community to "let us be at peace with our enemies. Let us bind up those who are scattered abroad, banish pride, and return to lowliness of mind, being at peace with all men, and urging the brethren unto love."[67] In 332 his tone changed, and the message of humility and goodwill seems to have subsided in favor of authority. Athanasius concluded his letter by declaring that he himself was at the court of the emperor and had sent the letter to Egypt by way of an *officialis*, who had received the letter from the very hand of the Praetorian Prefect, himself a Christian.

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[67] Ibid.

Let us for a minute imagine the scene when Athanasius' letter was read before the congregation. Everyone knew about the division, it was a lived reality for those in the Church, but the silence of the young bishop in previous years covered the trauma of the division that still very well could have been alive outside of the confines of the church. Now Athanasius' letter declared that,

> …the Melitians, who were present there, being envious sought our ruin before the Emperor. But they were put to shame and driven away thence as calumniators, being confuted by many things. Those who were driven away were Callinicus, Ision, Eudaemon, and "Geloeus Hieracammon who calls himself Eulogius.[68]

One can imagine some in the congregation shifting uneasily, as they knew of family members and friends who attended the Church of the Martyrs. Others may have felt like this was a long time coming, a chance for the bishop to act upon those who had resisted reconciliation. But the fact that Athanasius called them "Melitians," a name that the Church of the Martyrs did not themselves use for another two centuries, explicitly fixed their existence to a specific origin. It dredged up of old feelings of division and antagonism: a dog whistle to the congregation. Further, by calling out his opponents by name Athanasius ostracized bishops who affiliated with those individuals and called into question their loyalty. His boldness was a reflection of the shifting balance of power in Alexandria, as a young and insecure bishop finally found the means to act upon what he believed to be his apostolic prerogative, and ability to the issue with security and conviction. The battle lines were drawn, and rhetoric and action were set free.

A Heavy-Handed Bishop, 332-334

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[68] Ibid., 5.

Athanasius made some of the biggest mistakes of his career between 332 and 334, actions that haunted him for decades afterward. The controversial nature of those actions and the subsequent rhetoric surrounding them obscures Athanasius's guilt relative to any specific crime. That said, the allegations that Athanasius' opponents, both at home and abroad, levied against him between 332 and 335 were somewhat different in nature from those that originally brought him before Constantine. The earlier accusations concerned his refusal to let Arius and others back into the church, along with charges of bribery and extracting tribute in the form of linen garments. The new accusations however seem to have stuck and likely had had some basis in truth, though to what extent is still difficult to discern. Accusations of intimidation and assault pursued him for much of his career and he dedicated a significant portion of his later works to these later charges. Our four main sources for the second wave of accusations are an encyclical letter from the bishops of Egypt who supported Athanasius in 339 are Athanasius himself and the ecclesiastical historians Sozomen, Socrates, and Theodoret. There is some corroboration between these accounts, all of them used Athanasius to some extent for their source material, but Theodoret and Socrates in particular follow the account provided by the Encyclical letter of 339 and focus on the allegations that were most easily refuted at Tyre in 335. I will briefly list these below then follow them with the longer list of allegations found only in Sozomen's account.

The most common accusation against Athanasius that occurs in all four accounts is that Athanasius ordered the murder of an Arsenius, a Melitian bishop. The story is a triumphant one for Athanasius' faction, as they flouted it as evidence to their claim that their bishop was the victim of a conspiracy that emanated from Eusebius of Nicomedia all the way down to the local Alexandrian opposition. Sozomen and Theodoret also say that the opposition

claimed that Athanasius cut off the hand of Arsenius and kept it for magical purposes, presenting it at court as evidence of the Melitian bishop's demise.[69] The second most common accusation shows up in Socrates, Sozomen, and Athanasius and deals with Macarius, a presbyter close to Athanasius. Supposedly Macarius went into the Mareotis church under Ischyrus and threw down his episcopal chair, broke a mystical cup, rushed the altar, and overturned a table.[70] Sozomen and Theodoret also mention the accusation that Athanasius visited the home of a woman who had taken an oath of virginity and raped her in the middle of the night.[71]

All three of these accounts take a predominant place in the apologetic narratives of Athanasius, partly because of their outrageous nature, but also the ease by which they were refuted at Tyre. The stories enter a formulaic narrative that focuses on the conspiratorial origins of the charges, followed by their gradual unraveling and finally the ultimate vindication of Athanasius at Tyre. In the case of Arsenius, Athanasius' allies tracked the supposedly murdered bishop to a monastery in the Thebaid. They then spirited the bishop off to Tyre where they presented him before the council along with witnesses who attested to his identity and the machinations of the Eusebians.[72] Similarly Athanasius' supporters, when they questioned the woman who charged him with rape, tricked her into falsely identifying another man as Athanasius, bringing into doubt the validity of her story.[73] She

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[69] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.13. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.28.

[70] Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.27. Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.25. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 64.

[71] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.25. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.28.

[72] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.28. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.28.

[73] Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.28. Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.25.

too later supposedly recanted and confessed to the conspiracy of the Eusebians.[74] In the case of Ischyrus and Macarius, Athanasius and his allies argued that Ischyrus was never an ordained priest, and therefore the sacred nature of the vessels and sanctity of the church in question were void.[75] While all three of these accounts comprise the majority of discussions about Tyre, we cannot ignore the other charges found only in Sozomen.

Sozomen alone seems to give a full spectrum of the charges brought against Athanasius at Tyre in 335. The charges that show up here are more difficult for Athanasius and his supporters to refute outright, and it is therefore not surprising that the other accounts focused less on them and more on those they saw as emblematic of the Eusebian conspiracy against Athanasius. Those that Sozomen recounts speak to a broader range of acts of intimidation. These include an elaboration on the story of Ischryus that claims that Athanasius put Ischyrus in jail under the false pretense of him having thrown stones at a statue of the emperor, and that in order to cover up the actions of Macarius, Athanasius deposed and threatened with excommunication Callinicus, bishop of the church at Pelusium and a member of the original delegation to Constantine, unless he would help dispel the charges against Macarius and Athanasius. When Callinicus refused, Athanasius had him tortured and thrown in prison and then turned the church at Pelusium over to a deposed presbyter named Mark.[76]

Sozomen also elaborates upon the story of Arsenius, saying that Athanasius had ordered a bishop under his command to burn the house of Arsenius, then imprisoned him and had

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[74] Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.28.

[75] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 12.

[76] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.25.

him flogged. Arsenius escaped after which he fled and everyone supposed that he had died, hence leading to the allegations against Athanasius.[77] He writes that at Tyre, the bishops read out a letter that consisted entirely of complaints levied against Athanasius by the population of Alexandria, particularly regarding the fact that he had barred them from coming back into communion. Members of the Church of the Martyrs, Euplus, Pachomias, Isaac, Achillas, and Hermaeon, accused him of committing violent acts against them and their congregations, a charge echoed by others who claimed that once they had separated themselves from communion with Athanasius and his church, that the bishop had resorted to violence and even thrown them in prison.[78]

The purpose of recounting these charges is not to discern which specific charges were plausible or fabricated. It is entirely possible that the account of Arsenius could contain some truth to both accounts; that Athanasius never murdered Arsenius but did use his authority to intimidate the bishop of the Church of the Martyrs and caused his flight to Thebes. What is interesting is how the accusations against Athanasius change so suddenly after he receives the sanction from Constantine from ones of fraud and deception to outright violence and intimidation. It would be mere foolishness to envision that all these accusations came *ex nihil*, and a stock of letters from a trove of Melitian documents from 334 give credence to the idea that Athanasius did indeed act along these lines. The papyrological record for the Church of the Martyrs in the mid-fourth century is surprisingly strong, and acts as a significant narrative contrast to the later Nicene sources influenced by Athanasius'

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[77] Ibid.

[78] Ibid.

side of the story.[79] The letter in question, papyrus no. 1914, emerged in 1924 through the efforts of H.I. Bell from the archive of Aurelius Pageus who headed the Hathor monastery, which was possibly a holdout of the Church of the Martyrs. The letter was personal and written by a priest or monk named Callistus at a crucial time for both the Church of the Martyrs and Athanasius himself, sometime between May or June of 335, immediately before the Council of Tyre. The letter records events surrounding someone Callistus calls *papa* Heraiscus of Alexandria, a leading member of the Church of the Martyrs and an attack on him by Athanasius' supporters. As Hans Hauben notes, the letter displays extreme emotional stress as it details the abuses that Athanasius and other members of his church inflicted upon the Church of the Martyrs.[80] It seems that despite the hope of Callistus for some kind of peace when the *praepositus* gave an apology to the bishop for actions taken against the church, the relationship between the parallel churches was continuing to fall apart at the seams.[81] Athanasius was undoubtedly guilty of using coercive force; that much can be ascertained. Though to condemn him solely on that fact fails to recognize the complex processes that both allowed him to make the decisions he did and act upon them.

What led Athanasius to take these extreme measures and why did he see it as his prerogative? The power of a bishop during Constantine's reign was neither uniform nor certain. Many bishops found themselves blessed with increased fiscal resources and

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[79] Hans Hauben, *Hans Hauben: Studies on the Melitian Schism in Egypt (AD 306-335)*, ed. Peter Van Nuffelen (Franham, UK: Ashgate, 2012), xiii.

[80] Hans Hauben, "On the Melitians in P. London VI (P.Jews) 1914: The Problem of Papas Heraiscus," in *Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Congress of Payrology, New York, 24-31 July 1980*, ed. R.S. Bagnall et al., American Studies in Papyrology 23 (Chico, CA, 1981), 448.

[81] Ibid., 453.

increased ecumenical and practical authority. As Claudia Rapp notes, however, the

"pragmatic authority" of the bishop was dangerously close to that of a magistrate starting in

the fourth century. This pragmatic authority also only represented one facet of a bishop's

role and sense of communal responsibility, other elements including ascetic and spiritual

authority. But from the third century onward, bishops found themselves increasingly in

control of public duties. Similar to Peter Brown's description of holy man as a spiritual

patronus, bridging a growing gap between the divine and the profane, the bishop

increasingly served as a *patronus* for secular issues.[82] Like the holy man, the bishop

interceded on behalf of the community for concerns ranging from tax exemption and

forgiveness to the distribution of grain and financial resources. As Rapp describes, bishops'

rhetoric was a formidable means of protecting the community in interactions with civic

leaders. In fact, the insistence upon which commentators described the title of bishop as

"work" rather than "honor," actively tried to differentiate the position of bishop from that of

the civil magistracy. By the fourth century, the duties of a bishop of the civil administration

overlapped to the extent that some felt uneasy about how a bishop's public role might

conflict with the spiritual and ascetic attributes of the episcopacy.[83]

   During Constantine's reign bishops saw an expansion of new realities and new

possibilities when it came to their pragmatic authority. These included the *episcopalis*

audentia or episcopal courts, which granted limited power to bishops to take on cases from

civil courts as long as both parties agreed to the arbitration. Other new responsibilities

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[82] Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 156. Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101.

[83] Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 167.

included further ability to administer to the poor through financial means of distribution of foodstuffs and the ability to notarize the manumission of slaves.[84] The position of bishop also increasingly became a favored route of civic and social advancement for *curiales*, who in Late Antiquity performed extensive duties at the local level for imperial administration.[85] It used to be that scholars talked of the "decline of the curia" in tandem with the rise of the episcopacy, but the replacement of the latter with the former is now seen as a misleading conclusion. Although the *curiales* did indeed see some restructuring of their role and privileges, the local social elite formed a working relationship with the bishop as many bishops actually came from the curial class itself. When we consider this overlap and the role that the *curiales* played in performing tasks such as control of brigandage, *irenophylarchos* (guardian of the peace), putting on public spectacles, overseeing the construction of public works, we get a sense of the ways in which the religious functions of the bishop were intertwined with the social obligations and structures around it. In the early fourth century we see a general lack of definite rules surrounding the civic limits of episcopal authority. Such limits did not see codification in law for a long time, only coming into partial form in the Theodosian Code of the early fifth century and more complete attention in the Code of Justinian in the sixth century.[86] Athanasius was part of a new generation of bishops exploring the new limits of episcopal authority. This came as new means by which to cultivate new definitions of community and control the parameters of

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[84] Ibid., 239–40.

[85] Ibid., 280–81.

[86] Rapp points out that only a small end section of the Theodosian code paid attention to this, whereas it was given precedence in the Code of Justinian, right up front.

that community, as well as checks on one another and defining the limits that their peers could take. It was a dynamic enterprise that tested the interpretation of apostolic traditions against the new expectations of conformity and universalism that Constantine promoted and yet at times contradicted the immensely local focus and background of most Christian communities. There are a number of possibilities by which to interpret Athanasius' actions as a leader with spiritual and pragmatic power, first and foremost of which however should be what he saw as the immediate needs of the community itself, a sense of structure and order within a divided community.

To clarify, Athanasius was not a part of the *novi homines* or the *curiales*, but he was a part of this upheaval and restructuring. Though he came from humble origins, it is unlikely that Athanasius burdened himself with studies of law and imperial precedents like Augustine and Ambrose, and perhaps he had a bit of a chip on his shoulder when it came to such education. But he nevertheless saw himself as an inheritor of the apostolic tradition, the *episokopos*, the overseer of the church, the representative that stood between God and the Christian Community. The limits of ecclesiastical power were uncodified, and if it was order that Constantine wanted in the Church at Alexandria, it was order he was going to get. We must be careful not to retroactively impose Athanasius' later rhetoric back onto his early years, but he even in his treatise on his predecessor Dionysius, which he wrote in the 350s, he expressed the idea that a bishop's role as "physician" of the community required flexibility.

> For a physician, knowing himself, addresses wounds in ways that to some seem unsuitable, but yet is ever watchful of their health. Similarly, the right-minded teacher

arranges and caters his instruction to the character of his students, until he carries them onto the road of perfection.[87]

The context in this instance was purely theological, and an anachronistic attempt to rationalize the thought of his predecessor amidst claims that Dionysius held to alternative, almost monophysitic views of the Trinity in his refutation of Sabellius. But the notion of the physician as a flexible and dynamic treater of maladies shows that Athanasius saw his responsibilities as open to interpretation given the needs of the community. Between 332 and 334, the Christian communities in Alexandria required a stronger hand, and he had the power behind him to push those boundaries of what his predecessors were able to do. As Claudia Rapp points out, in the fourth century, a "bishop's judgment was based on common sense, custom, and the tenets of the Christian religion."[88] Constantine's support was a blank check and given the unstable nature of his early career, Athanasius used that to his advantage.

Into Exile

Yet for all Athanasius' effort to align himself with Constantine's court, he stood at a distinct disadvantage. His youth, relative inexperience, and lack of connections to the court were significant obstacles to any kind of insider status. Both physical distance and the opacity of court dynamics prevented Athanasius from achieving any favored status with Constantine. Proximity was key, and it was a game that Eusebius of Nicomedia played well. When the opportunity came in 339, he left his appointment in Nicomedia to be close to

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[87] Athanasius of Alexandria, "De Sententia Dionysii," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 6.

[88] Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 248.

Constantius II in Constantinople.[89] Even in Nicomedia, however, itself a favorite center of

imperial rule during Constantine's reign, Eusebius was only 90km from Constantinople, a

distance that could be covered by road in about three days, or by ship in about twelve

hours.[90] "Those around Eusebius," as Athanasius later referred to them, were his most

dangerous opponents. They prevented him from cultivating a relationship or even audience

with the emperor. Despite Constantine's earlier approval of his succession, Athanasius

remained outside of the emperor's circle. The supposed eminence of his position as the

bishop of Alexandria counted for little in in the practical politics of the court, and the fact

that Constantine never actually visited Alexandria meant that access to the emperor could

only be gained through travel to a foreign city whose complex personal and administrative

networks, not to mention hostile clergymen, created an almost insurmountable obstacle to a

young, low-born bishop. Once Eusebius lodged a long list of complaints against Athanasius,

grievances brought to him by Athanasius' local adversaries, it was immensely difficult for

Athanasius to counter them. And Eusebius was likely very aware of this fact.

It wasn't until 334 that Constantine ordered a council to examine the actions of

Athanasius. A papyrus heralding the commencement of this council suggests that it was to

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[89] Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," II.8.

[90] Orbis, Nicomedia to Constantinople. Orbis posits 0.3 (7 hours) days by ship to cover 90km along a coastal route. I have edited this to twelve hours (which could be longer if captains were reluctant to navigate coastal waters in darkness) to account for real-world difficulties in navigation like fluctuating local wind patterns and adverse currents. In the open ocean, a half-day's journey would be much more realistic but at least half of the journey from Nicomedia to Constantinople takes place along a small extension of the Sea of Marmara protected on both the north and south sides by major bodies of land, which would have shielded it from much of the prevailing winds, making ships rely upon an inconsistent alteration between oar and wind power.

be held in Caesarea.[91] But we are unsure whether the council was ever actually held, or whether it was simply postponed and re-scheduled to Tyre the following year. Athanasius refused to attend this initial council despite its imperial mandate, sensing that with Eusebius' backing the council would not end in his favor. It was only in response to Constantine's own angry summons that Athanasius attended the second council in the summer of 335.[92]

The council, chaired by Flacilus of Antioch, had a good turnout. The Church of the Martyrs sent their chief bishop John Arcaph as their representative, flanked by close associates of Eusebius from the Balkans: Ursacius of Singidunum and Valens of Mursa. As discussed earlier, although the fantastical accounts put forth by Athanasius and our later ecclesiastical historians depict a series of refutations by Athanasius and his supporters, the evidence against Athanasius was quite expansive and not as easily refuted as the charges surrounding Arsenius and the woman sent to seduce him. The council ordered a delegation to Mareotis to find evidence of the evidence against Athanasius concerning Ischyrus and the chalice, supported by the local prefect Philagrius. It was, as R.P.C. Hanson notes, a "perfectly reasonable measure, indeed… a surprisingly fair one."[93] But the cards were nonetheless stacked against Athanasius and the foregone nature of their conclusion such that the bishop fled the council in secret for Constantinople.

What better way to circumvent the stalwart bureaucracy and court gatekeeping than surprise the emperor himself with an audience? It was an almost cinematic moment, the

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[91] Duane Wade-Hampton Arnold, "Sir Harold Idris Bell and Athanasius : A Reconsideration of London Papyrus 1914," in *Studia Patristica, XXI* (Peeters, 1989), 377–83.

[92] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.25. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.26. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 258–59.

[93] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 260.

young bishop appearing before the emperor in the middle of the streets of Nicomedia on

October 30, 335 demanding that the emperor denounce the verdict at Tyre (which had seen

Athanasius' escape as evidence of his guilt). His move did not work according to its initial

intent, but it did cause Constantine to call a number of the bishops from Tyre to

Constantinople for questioning and seems to have resurrected his distaste for both parties of

the Alexandrian dispute. The emperor exiled John Arcaph, as Hanson suggests, possibly

because he revived the affair of Arsenius in a manner that the emperor found tiresome.[94]

Even though, for a moment, the emperor seemed to have found favor with Athanasius in at

least questioning the actions of the council, Constantine in the end settled on the only

solution which might have favored peace in Alexandria: he sent Athanasius into exile in

Trier.

    The exact series of events that led Constantine to exile Athanasius remain obscure. In

part, it likely had to do with the fact that as an outsider, the inner circle prevailed, and

Athanasius was ultimately rejected by the gatekeepers of the imperial court under the

influence of Eusebius. To settle on the idea of conspiracy and Eusebius' control over

ecclesiastical matters however does not exonerate Athanasius from any part in the decision.

The sheer number of accusations against him must have held some sway, despite his ability

to refute some of the most heinous. Even the prospect of a bishop using that kind of violence

to subvert other Christian leaders in his community would have provided a significant

problem for Constantine, who since the first decade of his career as emperor had supported

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[94] Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.31. Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia
Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.30.

his rule in direct opposition to Diocletian and surrounded himself with an ideology that ran directly counter to the methods of religious coercion used by his predecessor.

Athanasius himself ascribed Constantine's decision to his own "safety," and later Christian authors attributed it to a final accusation brought forth by Eusebius and his allies that Athanasius had meddled in the grain trade to Constantinople.[95] But the reality of Constantine's decision may have been both from a desire to purge both sides of the problem from Alexandria, and also because even the rumors of the bishop's actions, valid in part or in full, ran directly counter to Constantine's policies of religious tolerance forged two decades earlier in the court at Trier. Athanasius could very well have proved a liability to Constantine's very philosophy of rule.

The circumstances under which Diocletian and his counterpart Galerius issued a series of edicts against Christians between 303 and 305 are complex. Both emperors employed Christians in their court. Their presence is attested in Diocletian's court by Lactantius' in his account of the auspices performed at court in 299, in which the haruspex blamed Christians for making the sign of the cross during the ritual.[96] Similarly Galerius, to whom our sources tend to subscribe an ingrained and continual animosity toward Christians, also employed Christians in his households in the east and also used Christians in his army prior to 299

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[95] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 9. Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.30. Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," I.29.

[96] Lactantius, "De Mortibus Persecutorum," in *The Fathers of the Third and Fourth Centuries: Lactantius, Venantius, Asterius, Victorinus, Dionysius, Apostolic Teaching and Constitutions, Homily, Liturgies*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. William Fletcher, vol. 7, Ante-Nicene Fathers (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1886), IX..

when an edict of Diocletian purged them from it.[97] Playing behind the scenes of these decisions that started with the failed divination in 299 was a series of inner-academic disputes that came out of the long line of students descended from the philosopher Ammonius Saccus. Goaded by his student Iamblichus' interpretation of Plotinus, Porphyry, who saw himself as the guardian of his teacher's philosophy, turned on Iamblichus' commitment to theurgy that shared with Christians a notion of universal access to the divine.[98] This rang in stark contrast to Porphyry's insistence that only an ascetic lifestyle of virtue and philosophical reflection could raise the soul with the transcendent One. Rituals like the Eucharist or Theurgy could not perform this task. Turning on Christians and Iamblichus alike, Porphyry wrote a series of works against both groups, of which only fragments survive. It was this initial division that in a way jump-started the logic behind the persecution, which was in fact pushed in court by two lecturers who Galerius called to court in late 302, one of whom contemporary scholars conclude was Porphyry himself.[99] Elizabeth DePalma Digeser argues that it was Porphyry's treatises against Christians and his conclusion that Jesus was just a man and not god that helped foster the conclusion that the Christian practice of feasting on the flesh and blood of a dead man was a polluting ceremony that attracted daemons. Digeser concludes that as a result, "certain officials and Apolline prophets not only began to voice concerns that Christians, whom these arguments cast as polluted, were interfering with the efficacy of traditional civic rites long associated with

[97] Digeser, *A Threat to Public Piety: Christians, Platonists, and the Great Persecution*, 4.

[98] Ibid., 6. Iamblichus also studied under the Christian bishop Anatolius of Laodicea before he went to Porphyry.

[99] Ibid., 5.

preserving the community's health and safety, but they did so in a way that got imperial attention."[100] Christians and their rites were a liability to the state, they compromised the link between divine favor and the empire and it was this threat and ire at court that led Diocletian and Galerius to issue their edicts against the Christians.

Porphyry's effects on the Christian community cannot be understated. Contemporary Christians like Eusebius of Caesarea, Methodius of Olympus, Arnobius of Sicca wrote treatises against him, as did Christians for generations after who disassembled his works and used them piecemeal in their apologies to critics of Christianity. Another respondent to Porphyry was Lactantius, who between 305 and 310 wrote in direct response to the actions of persecution themselves. The Divine Institutes establish seven principles that responded to the supposed incompatibility of Christianity with respect to imperial rule. Lactantius claimed that Christianity actually represented the principles of the early empire better than the philosophical and legal innovators of his own time, drawing extensively upon Cicero's "On the Laws" to support his conclusions that according to Roman reason itself, those who upheld the traditional cults had to tolerate Christian worship.[101] In the process, Lactantius advocated an imperial structure that allowed all citizens to exercise their legal obligations to the emperor. Further promoting Christianity as the basis for just rule, Lactantius argued in Book 5 of his Divine Institutes that one could only find true justice in empire that worshiped the Supreme God.[102]

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[100] Ibid., 164–65.

[101] Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius & Rome* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000), 12.

[102] Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, trans. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey (Liverpool University Press, 2003), V.

Lactantius focused on establishing the limits of imperial coercion, in particular the role that rhetoric and persuasion played as acceptable means of coercion. Physical coercion, or violence on the part of imperial authority was a morally bankrupt means by which to approach religious conversion or uniformity.[103] Lactantius argued that a "true deity" would rebuff attempts of human coercion to infringe upon the free will of worship and reject converts gained in such a way.[104] While in Trier, Lactantius used his connections with Constantine to pitch this philosophical concept of tolerance to the emperor. The evidence for Constantine's adoption of these principles, while visible in the Edict of Milan in 313, are increasingly present after the death of Licinius in 324.[105] Lactantius reasoned that argumentation and vigorous rhetoric were all acceptable means of reconciling differences and philosophical problems. Physical coercion however rested beyond the proper limits of religious conflict and not coincidentally, the philosophical character of Constantine's rule and his vision of temporal peace.[106] If Constantine used violence in a colloquial sense, his divine sanction meant that such efforts were productive for the Christian community and did not disrupt the integrity of the community nor impinged upon the relationship between the bishop and his congregation.

If it was Constantine who represented the primary link between humanity and the divine, bishops did not share that same sense of prestige. Athanasius' resort to corporal punishment,

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[103] Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, "Lactantius' Doctrine of Religious Freedom and Its Influence on Constantine's Religious Policy," *For the Religious Freedom Project at Georgetown University*, 2014.

[104] Ibid., 6.

[105] Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire*, 28, 136.

[106] Ibid., 122–45.

threats, and intimidation were not indicative of true *religio* and philosophical discourse but rather threatened the fragile link between the community, their emperor, and by extension the divine. Athanasius was a liability to Constantine and could not remain in Alexandria and so the emperor sent him to Trier, the very city where Lactantius petitioned Constantine with his ideas of toleration. It is tempting to see the poetic justice in this move, and a little historical imagination begs us to wonder if the punishment was intended to fit the crime.

Conclusion

What remains most interesting about the period between Athanasius' election and his first exile is that despite the machinations of the Church of the Martyrs, and their relentless attempts to remove him from power, Athanasius produced no polemical works against them, only mentioning the Melitians in brevity or circuitously. Neither did he even begin to resort to the language of the "Arian conspiracy" that would later form the basis for his polemical railing against his opponents. Yet the continuing reverberations of the trauma of the communal division that came out of the persecution surrounded him: parallel churches and bishops that to Athanasius' mind subverted the notion of a singular unified Alexandrian episcopate. They undermined and outmaneuvered the young bishop, at first keeping him from using his new authority and then once he had authority, using their connections to oust him. He lived the trauma of the persecution and it shaped the entire chronology and actions of the first eight years of his tenure as bishop. We should not take for granted that Athanasius, even as the bishop of Alexandria, would reach out to Constantine so fervently and be the international phenomenon for which we know him. The Universal Church that Constantine promoted was a fractal and tedious entity, evidenced by the intense internal discord that fostered the debates and divisions of the fourth century.

Athanasius enthusiastically supported Constantine, not just because he had no other choice, but because circumstances in Alexandria required him to look elsewhere for support and to start rebuilding a new community in the face of the division wrought by the persecution. But these new connections with Christian universalism allowed him to revisit the divisions in Alexandria and inflict literal and figurative blows upon the parallel churches and non-conformists who, like the Jews, he despised for their dedication to the "local" rather than the "universal".[107] What is interesting however, is that for all his actions against the divisions in the Alexandrian church, the actual works he produced during this period are relatively silent with regard to his enemies and any discussion of their connection to the events of the persecution. The young bishop lived the repercussions of the persecution, but he did not talk about them. The silence of Athanasius' early career on these elements, much like Eusebius' take on the *lapsi* and others in Caesarea, is deafening but understandable. Much like Eusebius he had no recourse to lay into the past. His first few years as bishop were too vulnerable to disturb it, and from 332 to 335, much like Eusebius, he was in a position of power and authority to confront it head on with action.

But the Council of Tyre in 335 and the events that surrounded it were a rude awakening to the zealous young bishop who experienced the full brunt of imperial politics and eventually Constantine's rejection of his extreme methods. Athanasius quietly abided in Trier for two years, although Constantine does not seem to have issued a replacement to Alexandria in his absence. When Constantine died in 337, Athanasius faced new opportunities and challenges. With Constantine dead and the seat still vacant, he saw an opportunity to return to Alexandria as bishop. But the new power in the east was

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[107] Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," 478–81.

Constantius II, the son of Constantine, and Eusebius of Nicomedia led the new emperor's

close circle of bishops. To make matters worse, Athanasius spent most of his exile in the

court of Constantius' brother Constantine II, and the two emperors were not on good terms.

Though Athanasius remained a persona non grata in the east, he nonetheless decided to take

up his see as a bishop under siege. It was undoubtedly because of Constantine II's support

that Athanasius felt confident he could hold out in Alexandria and in the face of immediate

pressure from Eusebius and the eastern bishops, he adopted a new strategy of resistance and

subversion. Athanasius used the experience of his own early career and that of his

community to cultivate a base of support among other exiled bishops and his colleagues in

the west. He broke his silence and started writing his opponents, those he began to call

Arians, into the memory of the Great Persecution.

Chapter 2

Arius Redevivus

Introduction

> How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavored to form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as beautiful. Beautiful!-Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun white sockets in which they were set, his shriveled complexion, and straight black lips. – Mary Shelly, Frankenstein

A composite of different bodies, tissues, and organs, Mary Shelley's monster haunted the fringes of early nineteenth century society and science. It delved into the seemingly infinite possibilities of an era marked by creation and understanding. The methods that made Frankenstein monster were believable if only stretched, it pushed the boundaries of the possible and played with contemporary insecurities. Most importantly, it policed that realm of possibility: a dire warning that tampering with nature could lead to humanity's own demise. Athanasius' Arians share this aspect of the Frankenstein monster. Athanasius himself was a Victor von Frankenstein (or more accurately a Mary Shelley) for his time. The Arians were his own creation: an amalgam of religious and political factions interwoven with recognizable theologies, encapsulated in historical narrative that gave the monster a genealogy and origin story. To his readers the monster was profoundly real. The people he identified as Arians existed, the theological ideas they supposedly espoused were identifiable, the dangers they posed palpable. Athanasius' monster policed the social and theological boundaries of the mid-fourth century Mediterranean. They were an international force, very different from Arius himself and the small group of presbyters that opposed Alexander. Athanasius spent an inordinate amount of time and effort between the end of his

first exile and his death in 373 building up the Arians, their theology, and their narrative, efforts that were ultimately very successful.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the Arian cohort of Alexandria was a diminutive although symbolically significant faction. If not for Arius' connections to Eusebius of Nicomedia, he may have resulted in nothing more than a footnote in the annals of Alexandrian ecclesiastical history. His symbolic value after Constantine sent him into exile mattered only to Alexander and Athanasius, who both harbored resentment against the presbyter for challenging the power of the Alexandrian episcopate and bringing in outside support. The real threat to Athanasius were the Meletians, and he spent the first years as bishop fending off their challenges. He managed this with some success, but ultimately his methods proved too unpalatable for Constantine and contradicted the ideals upon which the emperor differentiated himself from his predecessors.

Athanasius' time in Trier and his travels to Rome and Milan brought the bishop a sense of perspective and most importantly, new allies. Trier was home to Constantine's son Constantine II, and although we don't know exactly what Athanasius was up to during his time at court, it is undoubtable that he spent a lot of it in the court at Trier and gained the favor of Constantine.[1] These new contacts came in handy first when Constantine died in 337 and the empire subsequently fell into the hands of his three sons: Constantine II in the west, Constans in the middle, and Constantius II in the east. Even though Alexandria was in the territory of Constantius II, Constantine II sent Athanasius back to the city, an act that likely infuriated Constantius II to no end. The brothers were not on good terms, partly because

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[1] Athanasius would later have to downplay his role in Constans' court to Constantius II when his patron died. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Ad Constantium," 3.

Constantius began his reign with a sizeable purge of family members and administrators in Constantinople, and all three of the sons of Constantine looked to expand their territories.[2] But Athanasius did not just gain powerful allies. He acquired an audience that extended beyond the Eastern Mediterranean and whose support he could leverage against Constantius and any local Alexandrian opposition. But he still needed a way to articulate his problems to that audience. The Meletians were an Alexandrian phenomenon, their opposition to the Alexandrian bishops was limited in its scope and importance to anyone but Athanasius. But as a figure, Arius brought symbolic value. He was a "clean slate" upon which Athanasius could describe the conflict he faced, and a convenient one at that. Arius had been dead less than a decade, and it was out his freshly dead corpse that that Athanasius fashioned his monster.[3] Its arms were the divided theological discourses at stake within the empire, its legs the memory of persecution and the division it caused; its body Constantius' imperial court and the threat that those powerful bishops embroiled in its bureaucracy, and finally, its connective tissue was a conspiratorial genealogy that linked his contemporary adversaries back to Arius, and to the persecution itself. This monster, this Arian, with all its interdependent parts, served one purpose. It threatened the potential of orthodox Christian communities to reach the divine.[4] This chapter outlines how Athanasius built this Arian

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[2] R. W. Burgess, "THE SUMMER OF BLOOD: The 'Great Massacre' of 337 and the Promotion of the Sons of Constantine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 62 (January 1, 2008): 9–10.

[3] Barnes, "The Exile and Recalls of Arius," 127.

[4] This was a big issue in the Late Antique psyche and likely played a significant role in Athanasius' insistence on the full Incarnation of the Word. See J. Rebecca Lyman, *Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius* (Clarendon Press, 1993). And Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*.

monster between his second and third exiles (337-356). It explores the interlocking aspects of its body that made its story resonate, and how it prowled the borders between orthodox and heresy.

Salvation at Stake

A key aspect of any monster is its ability to serve as a relevant threat. Athanasius, like all members of the Hellenic intellectual milieu, saw institutional policy and the study of the as inseparable and mutually dependent. Most Hellenic philosophies of Late Antiquity dealt with some process of "divinization," and Christians like Athanasius were no exception. The term divinization could mean a variety of things, from the process of becoming a god to living a "godly life."[5] How exactly people accomplished this was similarly based upon the philosophy and the type of divinization they envisioned. We can therefore talk about divinization as a cultural phenomenon, a widely held conviction shared between different groups, a cultural *lingua franca* if you will, but the specific processes and goals involved varied widely. But the possibility of rising from the human condition to make some contact with the divine and the idea that this could and should somehow be achieved through the guidance of a special kind of individual, was a common intellectual and religious currency.[6]

As Dominic O'Meara points out, institutional policies underpinned this process. The Late Platonist writings of Plotinus, Iamblichus, and Porphyry are a useful meter for this broader cultural process of divinization, particularly because they synthesized previous traditions into a single system that tried to "reconstruct" the original philosophy of Pythagoras. Plotinus' student Porphyry later refined and codified his teacher's ideas into the

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[5] O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 31.

[6] Ibid., 32.

Enneads, a series of pedagogical steps that first introduced the student to Plotinus' ideas through his *vita*, and then guided the student along these series of steps to the process of divinization.[7] According to Porphyry, Plotinus himself achieved this goal four times, but enlightenment of the self was not the ultimate goal of the good philosopher.[8] The ideal philosopher had to relay the messages acquired from this divine inspiration or lifestyle to those around them. Like Plato's "Allegory of the Cave," the philosopher had a moral obligation to return from their moment of enlightenment to teach others.[9] It was in this obligation, O'Meara argues, that laid the groundwork for political engagement. The philosopher must 'descend' so as to help bring this divine life to others and work on an institutional level to achieve it.[10] The ascent to the divine was not an abstract self-fulfilling pursuit, but included a moral and spiritual obligation, a reason for the philosopher to concern themselves with the creation and ascent of a political community.

Anyone in the third and fourth centuries who wanted to serve in a bureaucratic post or came from a family of means engaged in the educational system known as *paideia*. Individual teachers provided students with a rhetorical education, access to a shared literary corpus, and virtues befitting members of the elite.[11] Often students whose families possessed sufficient means would go on a grand educational tour to cities like Athens, Alexandria, and

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[7] Dominic J. O'Meara, *Plotinus: An Introduction to the Enneads* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1993), 2.

[8] Porphyry, *On the Life of Plotinus and the Order of His Books*, trans. A.H. Armstrong, vol. 440, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 23.

[9] Plato, *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan David Bloom (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1968), VII.514-519.

[10] O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 76–79.

[11] Watts, *Riot in Alexandria*, 17.

Rome to study with famous teachers. Regardless of one's devotional preferences, this was

the accepted educational standard in most places in the empire. Many if not most Christian

theologians practiced their craft alongside counterparts who did not share their faith and

shared many of the same teachers. The mid third-century philosopher Ammonius Saccus

taught prominent intellectuals like the Christian theologian Origen and the Platonist

philosopher Plotinus.[12] This common social and intellectual matrix meant that Christians

shared and participated in a common underlying reality within which they negotiated their

own corner of identity. When Eusebius of Caesarea enthusiastically wrote an oration in

praise of the first Christian emperor Constantine, he based his representation of Constantine

on the philosopher king. Constantine, Eusebius claimed, was a reflection of God's heavenly

kingship conveyed through the Logos, with the purpose of "bringing souls through teaching

to the heavenly kingdom beyond this world."[13] O'Meara points out that Eusebius' ideas are

consistent with the works of Plotinus, Diotogenes, the Pesudo-Pythagorean "Mirrors of

Princes" of Ecphantus, and Sthenidas and he observes that although their individual means

of accessing the divine and its exact nature differed, they shared the same principal that the

Emperor as the primary catalyst of this climb to the divine.

O'Meara's study looks past the latent cynicism that often accompanies works that

observe the Christological controversies through a purely political lens.[14] The instability and

[12] Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI.19. Eusebius claims that Ammonius was a Christian, however the diversity of his students and shared intellectual culture should give us pause over anyone's attempt to claim his philosophy. See Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire*, 2–7.

[13] O'Meara, *Platonopolis*, 148.

[14] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 181. Barnes focuses substantially on the "holes" in Athanasius' writings and argued that under Constantius, bishops and councils exerted a force that even emperors could not overturn.[14] Contrasting Kannengiesser's benevolent

intrigue of the period undoubtedly nurtured its fair share of *Realpolitik* and opportunists, but the very popularity of individuals like Athanasius suggests that their ideas spoke to an undercurrent of real social and ideological conviction. It is far less important to dwell on whether or not these individuals believed in the goods they sold than it is to look at how they sold them. When we adopt an empathetic approach to the way that individuals fulfilled their spiritual and institutional goals simultaneously, we add nuance to some of the most basic questions of the period, questions like, why did some individuals find the theological component of their Christian identity so crucial? For how many people did these issues actually matter? Why was one theological explanation necessary? Why did the emperor need to weigh in on any theological discussion? And finally, why did a single word have the power to divide entire communities? Our ability to understand the cultural assumptions of Late Antique individuals (particularly, though certainly not exclusively, elite Roman Christian males) is the key to answering these questions.

Susanna Elm's 2012 study on the disputes between the emperor Julian and Gregory Nazianzus tackles many of these issues. Elm points out that Julian and Gregory shared a common understanding of the importance that the divine played in good governance of the empire and ultimately how the people of the Roman world could reach God.[15] What they disagreed on was who precisely served as that link and had the power to divinize the *oikoumenê*. Each saw their respective roles (Gregory as bishop, Julian as emperor) as

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attitude toward Athanasius, Barnes strongly labels Athanasius a "liar" and the equivalent of "a modern gangster."[14] Barnes' work remains critical with regard to dating and locating important periods and events in Athanasius' career, but does little for understanding the rhetoric of Athanasius himself and how exactly it functioned in a political context.

[15] Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome*, 1st ed. (University of California Press, 2012), 480.

fulfilling that purpose. Elm's work highlights the stakes involved in theological discussions. Divinization and a prosperous empire required perfect knowledge of God. Everyone had to fulfill their correct role in the chain, but whose faith and what role they played were matters in dispute. David Brakke brings this same approach to Athanasius' community building in Alexandria. He argues that Athanasius created a Christian *politeia* that corralled the various ascetic traditions in Egypt.[16] He supported an approach to asceticism that was not a wholesale rejection of society but encouraged varying levels of involvement. Much like Plato's philosopher and the ideals of Plotinus (as shaped by Porphyry), Athanasius seems to have embraced and encouraged ascetics to engage politically on behalf of the episcopacy. Although a clear hierarchy exists between the bishop and ascetics in Athanasius' *Life of Antony*, the hero ascetic comes out of the desert at the behest of the Alexandrian bishop to denounce the insidious Arian heresy.[17]

The Arians represented a threat to this process of divinization. It was a threat with which Athanasius was intimately familiar, a danger he experienced firsthand even fifteen years after the last persecution ended. Any outside threat to his own role as bishop threatened to break the delicate social fabric that held the Christian community together. Constantine

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[16] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 81. As Claudia Rapp argues, we must acknowledge the ways in which the facets of a bishop's power work together in the political, doctrinal, and ascetic spheres. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 18–19. Brakke also argues that Athanasius' creation of a Christian scriptural canon were also connected to this same effort. David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt : Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter," *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994): 395.

[17] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Vita Antonii," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 69.

himself never threatened that connection. He exiled Athanasius but did not try to replace him. The real threat came when Constantius II appointed a new bishop to replace Athanasius.

A Monster is Born: Festal Letter XI of 339

When Constantine I died in June of 337, Athanasius returned to Alexandria from his first exile under the authority of Constantine II. The emperor was the eldest of the three sons and at the time ruler of Gaul, Iberia, and the western portion of North Africa. Athanasius met Constantine while in exile in Trier and his familiarity at the court likely earned him a ticket home in late 337. This did not sit well with Constantine's younger brother Constantius II, whose eastern territories included Egypt and Alexandria. The relationship between the three sons of Constantine bordered on open hostility throughout their respective reigns and the antagonism steadily increased from 337 to 340, when Constantine II marched against his younger brother Constans and died in battle at Aquileia.[18] Unfortunately for Athanasius, his connection to Constantine II during his first exile likely earned him the enmity of Constantius II. A bishop loyal to his brother was a liability in Alexandria, the bread basket of Constantinople.

Athanasius' already fiery antagonism with the powerful bishop, Eusebius of Nicomedia likely further exacerbated the distrust that Constantius felt toward Athanasius. In early 338 Constantius appointed Eusebius the Bishop of Constantinople. During the last months of 338, Constantius and Eusebius called a new council in the city of Antioch to inspect the same charges that had been levied against Athanasius at Tyre. This council, which likely

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[18] Burgess, "THE SUMMER OF BLOOD," 8–16. Sextus Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus*, trans. H. W. Bird (Liverpool University Press, 1994), XLI:21.

began meeting in late 338 or the first month of 339, was in session at the time Athanasius sat down to write his yearly festal letter to the congregation.

Like sermons, the Festal Letters are important resources for those interested in how Athanasius and other Alexandrian bishops articulated the significance of their policies and theology to their supporters. These correspondences were direct points of brief instructional contact between Athanasius and his congregation, similar to a stump speech. They were not typically long; some are as short as a paragraph and others the length of a letter. These moments of contact are valuable. They allow us to see how bishops like Athanasius defended, defined, or re-defined, the inclusive and exclusive boundaries of the community to their constituents.[19]

Theological boundaries in Alexandria, like any social construct, required constant attention and response from the bishop to shore up breaches, concords, or entanglement within the community.[20] If the bishop of Alexandria considered doctrine a key component of what it meant to be a part of the community, he still had to explain to his congregation why this idea mattered. In times when the presiding emperor recognized Athanasius as bishop of Alexandria, the bishop could address these issues in person through sermons from the many churches in Alexandria.[21] In exile, however, loyal followers in Alexandria likely read the Festal Letters aloud to the congregation at Easter (if they received one). The timing of these letters is important, Easter was the principal Christian holiday in the fourth century and

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[19] Sandwell, *Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, 17–19.

[20] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, Inc., 1998), 15, 18–19, 26.

[21] Christopher Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity: Topography and Social Conflict* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006), 210–11.

therefore these messages possessed a sacred quality. The frenetic nature of Athanasius'

career also gave these Festal letters further importance. They were not routine

communications but often messages from a desperate bishop to a congregation under siege:

a congregation in danger of being broken up or redefined by the dominate powers in

Alexandria and Constantinople. The Festal Letter of 339 is a curious example. It is likely

that Athanasius wrote the letter at the same time the bishops gathered at Antioch to decide

his fate, and it weighed heavily upon his mind.[22] With Eusebius of Nicomedia at the helm of

the council and Constantius' support, Athanasius probably knew that his time as the only

bishop in Alexandria was limited. The siege was about to begin and his Easter letter, issued

during the most sacred season of the Christian liturgical calendar, gave Athanasius an

opportunity to communicate the gravitas of the situation to his congregation.

Festal Letter XI is one of Athanasius' longer annual letters. He wrote it, like most of the

festal letters, in January or February of 339.[23] Our ability to ascribe a date to a particular

Festal Letter is not easy and relies upon matching the dates of Easter and its accompanying

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[22] Frances Margaret Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and Its Background* (Fortress Press, 1983), 80.

[23] For the sake of brevity, I will not address here all the textual issues at stake behind the Festal Letters. There are two extant manuscripts of the Festal Index and its Letters, one in Syriac found in 1855 and another in Coptic that was published in 1955 by Lefort. The Coptic version contains additional material for several letters, although its accompanying Festal Index is from a separate tradition and therefore makes dating many of these letters difficult. For a concise synopsis of the manuscript scholarship see Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2007, 45–48; Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 183–91; Charles Kannengiesser, "Le Verbe de Dieu Selon Athanase d'Alexandrie," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 45 (1989): 82. For the Coptic version of the texts see L.T. Lefort, *Saint Athanase: Lettres Festales et Pastorales En Copte, Scriptores Coptici* (Louvain: Imprimerie Orientaliste L. Durbecq, 1955). A detailed analysis of the manuscript tradition can be found in Camplani, *Le Lettere Festali Di Atanasio Di Alexandria*.

feasts with the days given in the Festal Index.[24] If multiple entries for the same date of

Easter exist, it becomes much more difficult to say for sure when Athanasius issued a

particular letter. Letter XI calls for Easter on the 20th of Pharmuthi (April 15).[25] There are

three times during the tenure of Athanasius that Easter fell upon the 20th of Parmuthi

according to the Festal Index: 333, 339, and 344. The content of the letter alone allows us to

discredit the earliest date. Athanasius references the "Ario-maniacs" directly in the letter, a

term that does not show up until after 339 in his other works.[26] It is the first time the monster

appears. As for 344, the Festal Index for that year records that Athanasius was at the time in

exile and celebrated Easter in Aquileia. It states that, "Of this Easter-day, [Athanasius] gave

notice in few words to the presbyters of Alexandria, but he was unable to do so to the

country."[27] The insinuation is that either no Festal Letter materialized for that year, or it was

only a short letter and indeed the Syrian manuscript provides no letter for 344. The Festal

Index entry for 345 offers the same formulaic explanation for his lack of detailed

correspondence, saying "Of this Easter-day, he gave notice in few words to the presbyters of

Alexandria, but not to the country."[28] In this case, we do have a letter for 345 and it is

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[24] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2007, 48.

[25] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter XI," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 15.

[26] Michel R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams, eds., *Arianism after Arius: Essays on the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 35–36. Barnes argues that *Festal Letter XI* is the first instance we know of where Athanasius uses the term.

[27] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Index," XVI.

[28] Ibid., XVII.

predictably short, only giving in a single paragraph the necessary dates for the Easter fast.[29]

It is likely that the letter of 344, if it existed at all, was likely of the same formula and at

most just noted the celebration dates. The long-winded nature of Letter XI and its reference

to Ario-maniacs suggests that it was indeed the Festal Letter of 339, the same Easter season

that Gregory of Cappadocia marched into Alexandria and Athanasius fled the city.

With the threat of the council hanging over his head, Athanasius realized that his first

priority should be to reinforce his network of support among bishops, presbyters, ascetics,

and lay individuals. He not only needed to defend his own position as the legitimate bishop

and benefactor of the community but reinforce the significance of his theology, one of the

key ways in which he distinguished himself from Eusebius of Nicomedia, Constantius II,

and the Christians in Alexandria who he called Arians. Festal Letter XI is a defense of

Athanasius' role as leader of the community and the significance of his theology for the

politeia and it starts, fittingly, with Paul of Tarsus.

Letter XI begins with an exaltation of Paul and highlights the proximity of the evangelist

to the Divine Word. Paul, Athanasius states, had his attention exclusively on the things of

virtue, the things that lived in harmony with love and godliness. As he became increasingly

trained in these ideals, he

> …was carried up even into heavenly places, and was borne to Paradise; to the end
> that, as he surpassed the conversation of men, he should be exalted above men. And
> when he descended, he preached to every man...[30]

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[29] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter XVII," in *Select Writings and Letters of
Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald
Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA:
Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 1.

[30] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter XI," 1.

Much like the philosopher king, Paul ascended through selfless and virtuous acts and attained perfect knowledge of God. There, God gave him a glimpse of the divine plan and its nature and conveyed to him some, but not all, of that information in perfect form. Paul saw the Gospel fulfilled in Christ but could not keep it for himself. Knowledge of the Divine was not something that one acquired for the sake of personal enlightenment and fulfillment. Instead, Athanasius claims, "[Paul] was of such a character, and apostolic grace was committed to him, he wrote, wishing 'that all men should be as he was.'"[31] The knowledge he achieved and its accompanying virtue went hand in hand for all humans, as they had for Paul. If one understood and interpreted the writings of Paul and the corresponding Gospels correctly, virtuous action would follow.[32]

Correct knowledge of God, when acquired through proper interpretation of Scripture, led to personal virtue. Athanasius traces the origins of this idea back to Moses. As the lawgiver, Moses' ability to create a society in the image of God's will stemmed from his ability to obtain correct knowledge of God himself. It was only in the aftermath of this intimacy with the Word that he brought the Law before the people. It was after this that Moses,

> …informed their minds of Him Who is truly God, and [proceeded] to lay down the law relating to those things whereby a man may be well—leasing to him, saying 'seek ye the Lord, and when ye have found Him, call upon Him; when He is near to you, let the wicked forsake his ways, and the lawless man his thoughts.

This knowledge of God passed down through the scriptures and interpreted from those who possessed the true authority of God is what Athanasius told his supporters formed the basis

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[31] Ibid.

[32] See Brakke (1994) for the social program that was Athanasius' creation of the canon. Setting forth a set of Gospels and letters of Paul that communicated the Word of God as it was originally intended was similarly a part of this connection between the theological and social elements. Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt," 409.

for their sense of order and true (natural) law. On the other side lay those whose intellect and impiety distanced themselves from that knowledge of God. It was they who disturbed the natural order, "for when the Guide to the laws is unknown, one does not readily pass on to us the observance of them."[33] Specifically in this case, Athanasius calls out the Arians of Alexandria and the Jews for their obstinate rejection of the perfect Godhead. The Jews, in their complete error, refused to acknowledge the special mission of God and the Arians were only slightly better but remained a "sad reflection" of true Christianity. The Ario-maniacs, as Athanasius calls them, turned from the true light of God and took away the Son from the Godhead and called him a creature.[34] By removing Christ from the Godhead [in this caricature] and insisting on his status as a created being, they would never be able to truly comprehend God's true nature and therefore would be unable to attain any kind of knowledge of the true law or pious belief.[35]

The Arians, however, were more than just a "sad reflection," of the true Christian tradition. Their impiety led to imperfect belief which in turn meant that their actions were dangerous and immoral. Athanasius quotes Psalms 24:1-2, declaring

> …nay, rather the unrighteous man is unable even to keep a portion of the law, for as is his mind, such of necessity must be his actions; as the Spirit says, re-proving such; 'The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God.'[36]

Belief influences action and just as correct knowledge created a community of the virtuous bound by perfect law, imperfect knowledge bred contempt, discord, and an inability

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[33] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Festal Letter XI," 2.

[34] Ibid., 4.

[35] Ibid., 13.

[36] Ibid., 8.

to adhere to any set of true laws. Those who do not acknowledge the true nature of God possess an inability to keep even the most basic of God's laws.

But what sorts of actions are the result of this impiety? Athanasius addresses this in the closing paragraphs of the festal letter. He declares to his congregation that when in power, those who do not acknowledge the true nature of God resort to the persecution of those who the impious recognize as truly pious. This is the ultimate act of rejecting God, it has the potential to disturb the true Christian community and fracture it. Athanasius saw his own deposition and the possible dissolution of his congregation on the horizon. He asserted that persecution was the inevitable repercussion against those who hold true belief. "Even now", he exclaims, "they wish to injure us, and by their accusations to compass our death, because of that godliness, whose helper is the Lord."[37] Calling upon a favorite in Matthew, often used in the context of martyrdom, Athanasius reassures his congregation,

> Blessed are ye when men revile you and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for your reward is great in heaven.[38]

The letter's conclusion is not a call to arms. It reassures the community of its own identity and identifies the hallmarks of the ungodly. Athanasius probably knew that the coercive powers of imperial power would be used against him (the only logical way to dislodge an obstinate bishop) and that his community would be either dismantled or placed under a new bishop. He needed to reinforce the boundaries that differentiated his community from other Christian factions in Alexandria and foreign ecclesiastical influence. Theology was the key component in this message, but its importance did not rest on abstract belief or

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[37] Ibid., 12.

[38] Ibid.

identity. Athanasius connected his correct theology to real life consequences: the stability and law-abiding nature of the community, and the violent and injurious actions of the persecutors.

The only reason that Athanasius could have envisioned that his rhetoric would have worked was if it was speaking to a cultural consensus about how theology and politics functioned. He wrote these words to a city whose inhabitants lived at the center of Late Antique p*aideia*, and whether they were Christian or not, they shared its cultural byproduct. The divided godhead of the Arians (at least as Athanasius described their theology), was not only a theological problem; it was a social problem. This divided notion of God manifested itself in a situation where the natural and ecclesiastical laws of God were inaccessible to those who did not have correct knowledge of God Himself. While the link between the political and theological showed themselves readily in the festal letter, we cannot cease our study here. The events that followed the Festal Letter allowed Athanasius to present his views on a much wider scale than just the effects of impious belief upon Alexandria. The *Epistula Encyclica* of 339, which he wrote months after he fled Alexandria, reflected upon what transpired in Alexandria and warned of the debilitating, and polluting effects that non-Nicene belief had upon the community. The letter directly challenges Constantius' own objectives of *homonia* and *eirênê* (concord and peace) and the *homoian* theology that the emperor supported.[39]

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[39] Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church*, 427.

The Monster Defiles: The Epistula Encyclica of 339

Eusebius of Nicomedia's first choice to replace Athanasius at the Council in 339 was Eusebius of Emesa, but Eusebius declined the invitation.[40] One cannot really blame him for declining the position; Alexandria was a notoriously difficult city to administer and the job description likely seemed indomitable. The Council's second choice was Gregory, who like Philagrius the prefect of Alexandria, was from Cappadocia. There was a certain logic to this decision, and Gregory and Philagrius seem to have been allies from the moment that Gregory entered the city.[41] In his exile, however, Athanasius quickly dominated the narrative concerning Gregory's rule in Alexandria. He exploited an undercurrent of unease about the way some bishops exercised their new political muscle in the post-Constantine environment. Bishops like Gregory and Eusebius found political and social mobility through promotions to new cities, a practice that Constantius supported but perturbed other clergy who held to the conviction that a bishop should be local and elected by the congregation.[42] Athanasius knew his experience would have an audience among those who despised these 'transient' bishops.

At some point in late 339, Athanasius penned an account of his exit from Alexandria and the actions of Gregory and his imperial supporters. This *Epistula Encyclica*, or encyclical letter, is in many ways very different from the Festal Letter in both form and content. Unlike the Festal Letter he wrote to his congregation in Alexandria, Athanasius' appeals to fellow bishops indicates that he intended it to circulate beyond Alexandria. Although Athanasius

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[40] Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, II.9.

[41] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 280.

[42] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 29.

urges the "bishops of the whole church" to unite against Gregory and not allow the Church

of the Alexandrians to be overrun by heretics, it is quite likely that this letter circulated

primarily among bishops in the west. We cannot therefore expect Athanasius to use the same

simple language and ideas we find in the festal letters, it is unlikely that Athanasius ever

expected that the encyclical letter to be read aloud to a public audience. The letter's

metaphors are denser, and the ideas are more complex. It is not therefore a continuation of

the ideas professed in Festal Letter XI, although it does fulfill the "prophecy" of persecution

that he predicted.[43] If anything, it shows an evolution of the simple premise that Athanasius

articulated to his congregation in Easter of 339: a vision of how the events that transpired in

Alexandria because of Gregory's impiety could affect the other Christian churches of the

Roman world.

The language of the letter invokes a combination of potent metaphors and violent,

gruesome, and sexual imagery as it describes the ways in which the mobs under Gregory

and Philagrius, the Prefect of Egypt, attacked the individuals whose ascetic traditions placed

them closest to God. As we saw in his Festal Letter, Athanasius saw proximity to God

through correct belief as an essential aspect of creating a unified community under divine

law, a connection upheld by his own presence and ability to interpret the nature of God. The

way that he describes the so-called persecution under Gregory and Philagrius is the

antithesis of this ideal. It shows how the outsiders destroyed the ascetic and ritual pillars that

connected the community to the Divine.

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[43] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 7.

Athanasius recalled in his encyclical letter that in the early months of 339, all was well in the city of Alexandria. The people,

> …were holding our assemblies in peace… and advancing in godly conversation, and our fellow-ministers in Egypt, and the Thebais, and Libya, were in love and peace both with one another and with us.[44]

That the many churches of Egypt and North Africa were in perfect harmony and peace may have struck most readers with surprise. Egypt, and Alexandria in particular, had a poor reputation when it came to internal stability between its Christian communities (and non-Christians for that matter). The diverse and highly concentrated city experience regular discord between factions, and Athanasius' claim must have struck his readers either as incredible, or completely unbelievable.[45] Skepticism aside, Athanasius was trying to make a point about the events that superseded this peace. The prefect Philagrius, supposedly without warning, issued an edict in March that broke the prevailing peace and expelled Athanasius from the city.[46] What follows is solely based on Athanasius' account and the message he intended to convey to his audience. The account is gratuitous, and he undoubtedly exaggerates the scope and violence of Gregory's actions. It is likely that Philagrius and Gregory did use coercion to intimidate Athanasius' most fervent followers and force him to depart. What Athanasius *says* happened however, is just as important because his account shaped the opinion of his contemporary allies and the subsequent narrative within the Nicene tradition.

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[44] Ibid., 1.

[45] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 10–12.

[46] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 2.

According to Athanasius, Gregory the impious Arian intruder and Philagrius the Prefect of Alexandria were the masterminds behind this persecution. The purpose of their respective appointments was to keep the *pax deorum* in the name of the emperor Constantius II, yet as administrators and individuals they were incredibly flawed. Philagrius, according to Athanasius, had a history of persecuting ascetics and Gregory was an Arian, one who held the same subordinate position on the Trinity as the Alexandrian followers of the presbyter Arius.[47] The impiety of Gregory led him to undermine the peace that Athanasius had cultivated over the previous decade. To set Gregory even further apart from the Christian community in Alexandria, Athanasius claims that neither Gregory nor Philagrius used Christians (Arian or otherwise) to wreak havoc on Athanasius, his church, and the most holy members of society, but rather the Jews and "heathens" (ἐθνικοί).

> Full of zeal against the church [Gregory], by means of promises which he afterwards fulfilled, succeeded in gaining over the heathen multitude, with the Jews and disorderly persons, and having excited their passions, sent them in a body with swords and clubs into the churches to attack the people.

Although both archetypes (Jews and pagans) played the role of antagonist in the persecution narratives of the second and third centuries, these two groups had an added significance in an era where distancing oneself from contemporary social practices through bodily asceticism was an increasingly popular path of connection to the Divine, particularly in Egypt. To be clear, asceticism was not a movement unique to Christianity and a search for the roots of asceticism extend far back in the classical tradition. But in the minds of fourth-century Christians, the new ascetic trend fostered antipathy toward groups that embodied the "old" social and political bonds.

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[47] Ibid., 3. "Philagrius, who has long been a persecutor of the Church and her virgins."

As Peter Brown argues in *The Body and Society* (1988), proponents of Christian

asceticism upheld the archetypes of pagans and Jews as the embodiment of the "old ways."

They were the antithesis to this new spirituality that rejected the body and contemporary

society. [48] During Athanasius' early years as bishop, enthusiasm for the ascetic lifestyle

among Christians as a whole was in its infancy. There was occasional tension between those

Christians who rejected society and those who chose to continue with their normal lives, an

issue that did not see any kind of theological resolution until at least the fifth century.[49] For

many Christians, however, those who achieved this ideal themselves functioned as conduits

between the world and the divine.[50] In the city of Alexandria, the enthusiasm for this new

movement was particularly strong though its forms were fluid and varied widely. Athanasius

was himself an early proponent of many of these practices, which extended to an alliance

with the desert ascetic Antony. His connection with these ascetics features prominently in

the persecution narrative of 339.[51]

Athanasius did not simply replicate a persecution narrative when he made the decision to

describe the Jews and pagans as the weapons of Gregory and Philagrius. These two impious

individuals were using the bodies of the old society as weapons against the bodies of a new

Christian spiritual hierarchy that was part of an inclusive Christian society. It is no

coincidence that Athanasius claimed that the groups who embodied the "old" attacked

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[48] Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1988), 8, 32.

[49] Ibid., 429.

[50] Brown, *The Cult of the Saints*, 38–43.

[51] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 81–84. Susanna Elm, `Virgins of God': The Making of Asceticism in Late Antiquity* (Clarendon Press, 1994), 331. Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity*, 103.

members of the "new" *politeia*. In his narrative of this so-called persecution, Athanasius

focuses almost exclusively on the acts of violence that these Jews and pagans carried out

against ascetics, sacred objects and locations in the church, and virgins.[52] All three of these

categories in some manner connected the Christian politeia to the divine. The former

represented the male *avant-garde* wing of this new community and although their role as

advocates and allies of Athanasius made them both symbols for the community and targets

for the persecutors, Athanasius spends a great deal of time talking about the latter two. The

sacred objects and locations of the Church and the virgins shared a common feature that

allowed Athanasius to advance his ideas regarding what happens to a community run by the

impious: their connection with the divine rested upon a sense of vulnerable purity.

The Encyclical Letter of 339 highlights the physical harm that the persecutors inflicted

upon the ascetic body. As the mobs of "heathens and Jews" under the authority of Gregory

and Philagrius moved through the city,

> Monks were being trampled underfoot and perishing; some were being hurled headlong; others were being destroyed with swords and clubs; others were being wounded and beaten."[53] Impious men followed the example of the Jews and heathens and, "were seizing upon the virgins and ascetics by the hands and dragging them along, and as they were haling them, endeavored to make them blaspheme and deny the Lord; and when they refused to do so, were beating them violently and trampling them under foot.[54]

Male ascetics and virgins were not the only ones to receive this physical punishment.

Athanasius does also briefly note violence against the broader community and ordained

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[52] Athanasius does mention violence against the broader community and ordained clergy but only in passing. He makes one reference to "presbyters and laymen having their flesh torn open," (Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 4.) and the scourging of "forty-three virgins and married women, and men of rank." (Ibid.)

[53] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 3.

[54] Ibid.

clergy. "Presbyters and laymen having their flesh torn open," and in a matter of one hour, Gregory saw his instruments scourge "forty-three virgins and married women, and men of rank."[55] The ascetic status of the monks meant nothing to the perpetrators, they trod over the bodies of the ascetics, beat them with clubs and stabbed them with swords. The Arians and corrupt imperial administrators, Athanasius tells his audience, were dismantling the peace that he had created within this new community of laymen, clergy, and ascetics. The chaos that these outsiders sowed did not dismantle the community as one might a building. The mob left a lasting effect upon the women and sacred spaces that they touched through sexual violation, defecation, and idolatry. Pollution was a strong cultural concern in Mediterranean antiquity, certain kinds of bodies and objects were particularly susceptible to it and became contagious as a result.[56]

The images of the violence against the male ascetics are indeed malicious, but Athanasius' representations of these acts seem to suggest that, to him, the real outrageous nature of these acts lay in the indifference that the persecutors gave to the male bodies. On the other hand, Athanasius describes the violence against virgins, and the objects and spaces in the church, in a much more "vulnerable" manner. There is a sense of liability in these two categories, by which I mean the ability of both of these "bodies" to experience defilement or pollution.

In the very first paragraph, Athanasius invokes a story from the Book of Judges and uses the female body as an analogy for the church. To briefly recount the narrative as it appears

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[55] Ibid., 4.

[56] Anne Carson, "Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity," in *Constructions of the Classical Body*, ed. James I. Porter (University of Michigan Press, 2002), 86–88.

in Judges, a Levite followed his unfaithful concubine (γυνή παλλακή) to her father's house

to get her back. After he enjoyed the hospitality of his concubine's father for a number of

days, the Levite departed for home with the concubine and a servant. They stayed in the city

of Gibeah with an old man who welcomed them into his home for the night. Their presence

prompted the appearance of a mob that surrounded the house and demanded to have sex

with the traveler. To avoid violating the guest/host relationship, the old man handed over the

Levite's concubine to the men in the mob rather than sacrifice his male guest. The mob

raped and beat the concubine throughout the night and left her dead upon the threshold of

the house. The Levite then demanded justice, cut the concubine's body into twelve pieces,

and sent each part to the tribes of Israel as evidence of such godless action.[57] The story bears

a significant resemblance to the account of Lot in Genesis and the analogy that Athanasius

draws between the actions of Gregory and the rape of the Levite's concubine is not subtle.

He uses the shock value of the story to his advantage, although he makes one small change

to the status of the concubine. Athanasius tells the story in the following way:

> I have thought it good to remind you of a history out of the Scriptures. It happened
> that a certain Levite was injured in the person of his wife (γυνή); and, when he
> considered the exceeding greatness of the pollution (for the woman was a Hebrew,
> and of the tribe of Judah), being astounded at the outrage which had been committed
> against him, he divided his wife's body… and sent a part of it to every tribe in Israel,
> in order that it might be understood that an injury like this pertained not only to
> himself, but extended to all alike…[58]

It is unlikely that the graphic imagery that pervades this story was lost on the audience.

Athanasius heightens the "pollution" of the female body by ignoring fact that the woman

was a concubine (γυνή παλλακή). He instead uses the colloquial and somewhat ambiguous

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[57] Judges 19:29.

[58] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 1.

word for wife, γυνή, to insinuate her status as a freewoman and legitimate wife, and by extension, the most integral part of the husband's *oikos*. Concubinage between a man and a free or unfree woman, or a younger man, was in many cases considered a legitimate alternative to marriage in antiquity, particularly in circumstances where the status between two partners was sufficiently disproportional to merit criticism and prevent conventional marriage. The practice therefore did not hold the same social status as marriage.[59] A concubine, be they free or a slave, had no legal rights and could come from any background. A wife however had to conform to a narrow set of social expectations and received a higher social status.[60] In order to reinforce the "exceeding greatness of the pollution," Athanasius lessens the ambiguity of her social status and altogether ignores the word παλλακή, thereby constructing a more potent metaphor the violation of his Church.[61]

The male cultural values of Mediterranean antiquity considered pollution, particularly that which affected the female body, as a serious concern. Anne Carson (2002) argues,

> Women [were] subject not only to incursion from without but to leakage from within, and, for this reason, her very presence may pose a threat to the integrity of the *oikos* of which she is a part and the polis that encompasses it.[62]

In this context, "female body" refers specifically to the body of a free Roman woman. Although free Roman women enjoyed only a limited form of citizenship, the difference

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[59] Glen Warren Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 388–89.

Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 698.

[60] Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar, *Late Antiquity*, 389.

[61] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 1.

[62] Carson, "Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity," 86.

between a "free" and an "unfree" body was paramount for any individual. The former

distinction distinguished whether the body of an individual was considered a social entity or

property, both before the law and within society.[63] This is especially true for a free female

body. A slave was property, their body was a commodity and thus could be used as its

masters saw fit. The free female body however was an insecure and penetrable entity, a

liability to both the *oikos* and society. This liability stemmed from the ability of the female

body to cross social boundaries that constituted the household and family, whether through

the acts of adultery, rape, marriage, or prostitution. The act of transgressing these boundaries

(whether as the transgressor or transgressed) polluted the household, of which she herself

was a part, what Carson refers to as simultaneously "pollutable, polluted, and polluting." [64]

This was the threat that the female body posed to those around her, whether the house she

lived in or society at large. Constantine enforced this notion of vulnerability in an edict

issued on April 1, 320 or 326, and laid blame upon an unmarried free woman even if she

gave consent to her abductor.

> If willing agreement is discovered in the girl, she shall be punished with the same
> severity as her ravisher, since impunity must not be granted even to those girls who
> are ravished against their will, when they could have kept themselves chaste at home
> up to the time of marriage or could have obtained the aid of neighbors by their cries
> and could have defended themselves by all their efforts.[65]

According to Roman custom, an unmarried girl conventionally received no penalty if a

man raped her. Under Constantine, that changed. In fact, *coloni* that reported abduction,

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[63] Richlin, *Arguments with Silence*, 11.

[64] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1966), 141. Carson, "Dirt and Desire: The Phenomenology of Female Pollution in Antiquity," 87.

[65] Clyde Pharr, trans., *The Theodosian Code and Novels, and the Sirmondian Constitutions* (The Lawbook Exchange, Ltd., 2001), 9.24.2.

rape, or basically *any kind of intercourse that happened to an unmarried woman*, would receive Latinity, if they were not already, and Roman citizenship, if they were already a Latin. The emphasis upon purity was such that the unmarried woman who was violated, regardless of her complicity in the act, would have to forfeit her rights of inheritance.[66] Constantine's edict stresses the protective nature of the *oikos*, the woman's place in that private sphere, and the vulnerability of that very protection. A free Roman woman had to be simultaneously contained and protected. This same sense of exposure and liability however also fostered the ideal of the virgin and heroic *mythos* of the ascetic woman. As Peter Brown similarly notes, Christian female ascetics became the tool with which Christian men "thought." Because of their status as a "gateway," women opened up the possibility of bodily censure for everyone. Brown points out that Thecla was an inspiration to both Christian women and men in that "even" as a woman she was able to overcome the temptations of Eve and maintain her virtue.[67]

Although this paper principally concerns itself with Athanasius and the way his texts portray ascetic women, I feel it necessary to clarify the distinction between the ideals that Athanasius presents for women, and the actual women who remain outside of the male-dominated literary spotlight.[68] I only briefly have room here to mention this notion, yet it bears remembering throughout this discussion the complexity and diversity of this emergent movement, the actors within it, and the way they themselves engaged with individuals like Athanasius in return. As Caroline Walker Bynum writes,

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[66] Ibid., 9.24.4.

[67] Brown, *The Body and Society*, 153–59.

[68] Richlin, *Arguments with Silence*, 5–6.

> A too rigid view of a binary opposition also misses a crucial point. It denies the women in question imagination, creativity, and thus the potential, as a 'marginal and disadvantaged [group] in society, to appropriate that society's dominant symbols and ideas in ways that revise and undercut them.[69]

If we allow our contemporary understandings of gender to flow too freely into the past, we "risk [interfering] with the richness of the texts, thus diminishing the 'lost voices' we are purporting to reconstruct."[70] Although Athanasius discusses the female body along lines consistent with the social anxiety surrounding feminine ideals and vulnerability, I ask the reader to keep in mind the narrow nature of this particular discussion and richness of the world that existed beyond it.

There are two extant, genuine letters of Athanasius to female ascetics and both are difficult to date.[71] In one of these later letters, titled *Letter to the Virgins who went to Jerusalem to Pray and have Returned*, Athanasius instructs a group of virgins on where and how to find the "Holy Land" without the need to travel. This instructional piece, intended for an urban community of female ascetics, details how they ought to function in this "exposed" environment. Athanasius promulgates both his ideal form of virginal purity for these women and the means by which they can preserve that purity. The most important aspect of this preservation was of course a cloistered community of women held in complete seclusion from the outside world and focused on ritual practice and the sanctity of their spirits. Some exceptions to this seclusion included the presence of priests who supplied instruction on divine matters, and the occasional walk to Church, the baths, or pilgrimage.

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[69] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (Zone Books, 1991), 17.

[70] Elm, `*Virgins of God'*, 17.

[71] Ibid., 332. Susanna Elm argues that Athanasius likely wrote both of these letters toward the end of his career.

At all times however, the virgin was to remain under the authority of the elder sisters and mother and above them, the male priest. If she violated these precepts after taking her vows, there was no possibility of redemption. Her body was compromised and therefore unable to rejoin the community.[72] The boundaries that Athanasius established as ideals for those virgins who were part of his *politeia* were not just the result of a focus on female purity, they were also protective measures for male ascetics. If male and female ascetics were to cohabitate, Athanasius argued, her very presence could potentially pose a threat to the sanctity of the man.[73] We see here the ideas of bodily vulnerability and liability spelled out explicitly in Athanasius' own writings, albeit at a later point in his career. Nevertheless, his earlier Encyclical Letter already shows that Athanasius was already concerned with pollution and the body of female ascetics and used it in the persecution narrative. Unlike the violence that the persecutors used against male ascetics, Athanasius highlights the polluting effects that this violence had upon the bodies of the female virgins.

Athanasius immediately draws the reader's attention to the purity of these "holy and undefiled virgins," (παρθένοι γάρ ἅγιαι καὶ ἀμίαντοι), the quality that (to Athanasius) set the female ascetics apart from their peers.[74] Although male ascetics could quite realistically face sexual temptation or physical violence, Athanasius does not mention any "defilement" relative to the bodies of male ascetics. It is solely the female body in this work carries the

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[72] Athanasius of Alexandria, "'Athanasiana Syriaca 2': S. Athanase: Lettre à Des Vierges Qui Étaient Allées Prier à Jérusaleme et Qui Étaient Revenues (=LVJer)," ed. J. Lebon, *Le Museon* 41 (1928): 189–203. Elm, `*Virgins of God'*, 332–34.

[73] Athanasius of Alexandria, "'Athanasiana Syriaca 2': S. Athanase: Lettre à Des Vierges Qui Étaient Allées Prier à Jérusaleme et Qui Étaient Revenues (=LVJer)," 197f. Elm, `*Virgins of God'*, 335.

[74] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 3.

burden of pollution. Virgins who were once "pure" experienced sexual assault, public humiliation and as a result, "defilement." Athanasius says that the persecutors had the virgins "stripped naked, and suffering treatment which is not to be named, and if they resisted, they were in danger of their lives."[75] Unlike other cases of blasphemy or renunciation, Athanasius denies the women the ability to resist. He then again highlights the public humiliation and violation of the female body, writing, "virgins were stripped of their veils and led away to the tribunal of the governor, had their goods confiscated and were scourged."[76] The whipping of the ascetic body is a current of similarity between genders, but in the case of female ascetics Athanasius always includes that extra element of violation (in this case the removal of their veils). This notion of defilement in the work extends only to two entities: the female body and sacred spaces. Like the body of the Levite's concubine, who Athanasius uses as a metaphor for the Church as a whole, the bodies of the female virgins signify both the initial purity, vulnerability, and subsequent pollution of the Church. In these images of the female body that Athanasius presents in line with the male culture of Late Antiquity, he foreshadows the effect of Gregory's impiety upon the structural elements of the Church.

Athanasius discusses the pollution of sacred spaces and objects in same manner. The Jews, Athanasius claims, defiled the baptistery, a location where the clergy ritually cleansed the bodies of catechumens.

> "…and the Jews, the murderers of our Lord, and the godless heathen entering irreverently (O strange boldness!) the holy Baptistery, were stripping themselves

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[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid., 4.

naked, and acting such a disgraceful part, both by word and deed, as one is ashamed even to relate."[77]

The Jews, outsiders and unbaptized individuals, violated the baptistery in a manner that rendered it unclean. A place of purity and cleansing, the baptistery was vulnerable to pollution by outside forces. Peter Brown's observation that the bodies of the Jews and pagans represented the old social and spiritual superstructure comes into play here as well. The Jews of the encyclical letter committed lewd bodily acts and blasphemy in the baptistery that counter its sacred purpose: sacred words and rituals that cleanse the human body and soul. Athanasius describes the desecration of the altar in similar terms, saying "they were offering birds and pine cones in sacrifice, singing the praises of their idols, and blaspheming even in the very churches our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God."[78] As if the connection between defilement and the body in connection with the space and objects was not clear enough, Athanasius asserts that Gregory gave over to the Jews and heathens the entire church to do with whatever they pleased.

> Upon this license of iniquity and disorder, their deeds were worse than in time of war, and more cruel than those of robbers. Some of them were plundering whatever fell in their way; others dividing up among themselves the sums which some had laid up there; the wine, of which there was a large quantity, the either drank or emptied out or carried away; they plundered the store of oil, and every one took as his spoil the doors and chancel rails; the candlesticks the forthwith laid aside in the wall, and lighted the candles of the church before their idols; *in a word, rape and death (ἀρπαγὴ καὶ θάνατος) pervaded the Church.*[79] [Emphasis added]

Athanasius anthropomorphizes the church as a vulnerable human body: prone to death and defilement in a manner equivalent to sexual assault. The insinuation behind this

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[77] Ibid., 3.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Ibid., 4.

comparison was graphic and familiar. It fit within the Pauline motif that described the Church as the "Bride of Christ."[80] Just as the male Christian culture ascribed to virgins and women the dual roles of exemplars and liabilities, the Church was simultaneously vulnerable to intrusion and prone to wandering. It was not immune to plunder, rape, death, or defilement.

When Athanasius wrote the Encyclical Letter of 339, he no doubt reflected upon the case he had made earlier that year to his own congregation in the Festal Letter. He had argued that his (correct) Trinitarian theology was a crucial element that maintained the social and spiritual integrity of the Christian community in Alexandria. Like Moses' experience on Mount Sinai, natural law in its purest form required direct knowledge of the divine and that was something, Athanasius argued, he alone could provide. But after losing the city to Gregory, Athanasius started making his case to communities other than his own. His needed support in exile and that probably prompted this change. He expanded his vision to encompass the entire *oikoumenê*. Like the *oikos* itself, the Church required a vigilant and orthodox figure of authority, a bishop who understood God and could apply this knowledge to the laws. The peace that Athanasius claims prevailed within the *politeia* under his rule was evidence of his correct theology. Gregory on the other hand represented the unfit husband, a cuckold, who both violated and allowed the defilement of the household. By allowing these things to happen, he destroyed the ordered society and severed its connections to God.

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[80] As in the festal letter, Athanasius makes several references to Paul's letters to the Corinthians and Romans.in his retorts to imperial authority over the church.

Athanasius' focus on the defilement of female ascetics and sacred spaces in the Church moves the persecution story away from its local context. Heterodoxy did not just manifest in physical violence and the destruction of the holy bonds between the community and the divine, it violated the *politeia* and everything within it. It was a contagion, a viral infection that threatened every other Church subscribed to the true faith. Athanasius raised the stakes for theology. It was no longer a relativistic concern within each Christian community: the orientation of one affected the sanctity of all. Unlike the violence against the Levite's concubine in which, "but a single woman was injured, and one Levite who suffered wrong; now the whole Church is injured, the priesthood insulted, and worst of all, piety is persecuted by impiety."[81] An attack on one is an attack against all. If pro-Nicene church leaders did not take notice, the pollution that Gregory inflicted upon Alexandria would spread and other bishops would find the pillars that connected them to God threatened.

> You should not be indignant now, lest if these things be passed over unnoticed, the same mischief shall by degrees extend itself to every Church, and so our schools of religion be turned into a market house and an exchange.[82]

Athanasius tapped into an existing set of social and cultural concerns and themes in order to establish theology as a social boundary with real and viral consequences. The effects of heterodoxy included not only physical violence against Christians, but pollution of the social and sacred pillars that connected the Christian community to God. These ideas set the foundation for the threat that the Arians posed, at the same that Constantius, Eusebius and others tried to consolidate all the churches under what Athanasius saw as a heterodox belief system. The debate over the nature of Christ was a doctrinal, social, and institutional

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[81] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Epistula Encyclica," 1.

[82] Ibid., 6.

concern for every bishop in the empire. To call someone an Arian was a "dog whistle," a veiled way to signify the threat they posed to both individual Christian communities and the empire as a whole. But a key component of the new monster was still missing. It needed a history, a way for the audience to understand where it came from and who was responsible for it.

The Monster's Pedigree: The Apologia Contra Arianos

The final piece of the puzzle required time. Athanasius had to establish a genealogy for his opponents, one that traced their origin to some damning creature. This practice was commonplace, for Christians it reached back to Justin Martyr and Irenaeus in the late second century, but even Irenaeus drew from Hellenistic academic thought.[83] Every thought had its original teacher. Some heresiologists like Epiphanius of Cyprus took this one step further and traced heresies all the way back to the devil himself, intertwining near contemporary history with cosmic and biblical narratives.[84] But Athanasius had no such grand need to trace his heresy all the way back to the origins of the world. For his purposes, Alexandria was the focal point for the origin of the heresy as it made his own diocese the focal point for the grapple between the forces of good and evil, the battle for the soul of the empire and its ability to reach the divine.

If the Encyclical Letter of 339 was Athanasius' first outline of the threat that the Arians posed, the *Apologia Contra Arianos* was the culminative masterpiece. Other works in this same vein were the *Historia Arianorum* (which we will discuss in Chapter 3), a work that

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[83] Boyarin, "Hybridity and Heresy," 339–42..

[84] Epiphanius of Salamis, *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1-46)*, trans. Frank Williams (New York, NY: E.J. Brill, 1987), xx–xxviii.

placed the heresy in a grand cosmological context, and the *Orationes Contra Arianos*, a work that created out of many pieces a monolithic theology for his "Arian" opponents against which he could elevate his own Nicene theology. Together the three works constitute different aspects of the heresy's body: its history, cosmological repercussions, and theology. This chapter will conclude with the element without which the heresy could not be grounded: its history.

Although scholars debate the methods by which Athanasius constructed the *Apologia Contra Arianos*, it appears that it was a gradual compilation he pieced together over the course of his last twenty years. Between 339 and 348, Athanasius wrote and circulated portions of the *Apologia*. He later edited and compiled these pieces into a coherent volume in with two distinct parts. The first section deals with the accusations levied against him by people he refers to as "those around Eusebius" (Οί περί ἐυσεβιόν). In his earlier works, the so-called "Eusebians" constitute his opposition at court after 337 and the bishops he accused of following Eusebius. It is only in his later works that Athanasius identified the Eusebians as Arians, conflating two terms and giving the Eusebians a set of narrative connections leading back to before the Council Nicaea.[85]

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[85] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1871. Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2006, 104–5. Gwynn argues that the theology of Arius and Eusebius were different, despite sharing some underlying similarities. Eusebius, "emphasized the priority and immutability of the Father, and thus in effect the subordination of the Son." Nevertheless, "Eusebius is well short of describing the Son as *aenomios* to the Father, as Arius and the later Neo-Arians did." In the end, Gwynn claims, it was his belief in the subordination of the Son and support of Arius that in Athanasius' mind rendered him "Arian." Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 30–31.on the other hand stresses the similarities between the available theology of Arius and Eusebius that resulted from their (supposed) common background. He notes specifically that Eusebius "was a strong supporter of Arius' theology and that he (or members of his school of thought) had already at an early stage in the controversy gone far to produce a consistent and thought-out position on the points under debate." Within their conclusions, he says, "we may trace the work of Lucian of Antioch."

The beginning of the *Apologia* insists that Athanasius' opponents are "insensible to shame, persist in their slander against me."[86] These recurring accusations concern Athanasius' supposed violent acts against dissident clergy which will be discussed in more depth below. In response to these charges, Athanasius guides the reader through a narrative that begins with his initial exoneration by a council in Egypt in 338 to the Council of Jerusalem in 346. Through this period, he saw exile under Constantius II, found an ally in Julius the bishop of Rome, and then experienced a final exoneration at the Council of Serdica in 343, after which he went on a victory lap around the Mediterranean that included the Council of Jerusalem. Athanasius carefully constructs the narrative, drawing on the pedigree of councils and bishops to show his innocence contrasted with the surreptitious actions of his adversaries. In particular, he presents as the *coup de grace* the testimony of two former "Eusebians" named Ursacius and Valens, who testified to the conspiracy against Athanasius after Eusebius of Nicomedia died in 341.[87]

The second part of the work is strange from a narrative standpoint. Athanasius does not follow his previous chronology but begins the second chapter thirty years before the end of part I with the initial dispute between Alexander and Arius. It ends with Constantine and Athanasius' initial exile after the Council of Tyre. Although some scholars have argued that the *Apologia* was a coherent work authored in the 350s, the general consensus is that Athanasius wrote parts of the *Apologia Contra Arianos* in response to varying problems of his career.[88] He then edited them throughout the later part of his life, re-crafting the narrative

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[86] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1871, 1.

[87] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Ad Constantium," 1.

[88] Opitz, *Athanasius Werke*. H.G. Opitz argues for the coherence of the work.

with allusions to contemporary issues.[89] The edited version we possess therefore presents

two parts out of order, both chronologically and in terms of their creation. Gwynn's proposal

establishes an acceptable set of guidelines for dealing with the text, but for the purposes of

this study I will treat the document as a constructed piece in its own right. Regardless of

when Athanasius wrote individual portions of the text, the finished whole is a clever and

effective attempt at an origin story for his opponents.

There is nothing accidental about the order of the *Apologia*. The text begins in 339,

diving without introduction straight into an Encyclical Letter that the Council of Egypt

issued in 338/39 in support of Athanasius. Like Athanasius' encyclical letter mentioned

earlier, the council's letter takes a similar approach to Athanasius' enemies. However, it

adds a layer of history with a narrative that begins with Arius himself and runs in an

unbroken narrative through the Council of Tyre in 335. That Athanasius uses a letter from a

council to convey this narrative, signed by the bishops of Egypt who supported Athanasius,

is no accident. It conveys authority by consensus, a collective narrative identity that he

presents as *the* accepted history of Egyptian Christianity and the origin of his contemporary

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[89] R. Seiler first crafted an elaborate reconstruction, dating almost section by section
approximately when Athanasius' constructed each one. R. Seiler, *Athanasius, Apologia
Contra Arianos: Ihre Entstehung Und Datierung* (Tübingen, 1932). T.D. Barnes simplified
this monumental task slightly from six specific compositions down to four. Barnes,
Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire, 192. As
Gwynn notes however, Barnes' outline as clever as it is, remains a hypothesis. The work is
rife with allusions and editing, rendering it impossible to substantiate exactly when certain
parts were written, as the line between retrospective narrative and contemporary defense is
incredibly thin. Rather than delve too deeply into Barnes' reconstruction, Gwynn offers a
reasonably safe opinion on the matter. He suggests that Athanasius wrote at least elements
of part one and compiled the supporting documents between 347 and 350/51, responding to
continued accusations against him after Serdica. Athanasius constructed Part 2 much earlier,
likely between 338 and 340, in response to the Council of Tyre and the Council of
Alexandria leading up to Serdica. Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2006, 20.

troubles in the 350s. That the Meletian and Eusebian opposition to Athanasius had two very different origins as we discussed in the first chapter, has no place in this story. Instead the letter presents Athanasius' opponents as a single enemy that spawned from Alexandria's own past, a specter that grew and enveloped the most powerful members of the Church.

With a quick transition Athanasius jumps from the Council of Alexandria to Rome. He includes a letter that Julius, the Bishop of Rome, released in support of Athanasius after the envoys of Eusebius declined to attend Julius' council that was to investigate the exiles of several bishops including Athanasius and Marcellus of Ancyra.[90] Julius explains that he heard two different narratives, one from an envoy of Gregory and the other from Athanasius.

> We have also been informed of the following circumstance by those who were at Alexandria. A certain Carpones, who had been excommunicated by Alexander for Arianism, was sent hither by one Gregory with certain others, also excommunicated for the same heresy. However, I had learnt the matter also from the Presbyter Macarius, and the Deacons Martyrius and Hesychius. For before the Presbyters of Athanasius arrived, they urged me to send letters to one Pistus at Alexandria, though at the same time the Bishop Athanasius was there. And when the Presbyters of the Bishop Athanasius came, they informed me that this Pistus was an Arian, and that he had been excommunicated by the Bishop Alexander and the Council of Nicaea, and then ordained by one Secundus, whom also the great Council excommunicated as an Arian.[91]

The narrative from Gregory claimed that Athanasius' exile was the result of crimes he committed during his tenure as bishop of Alexandria. Athanasius' presbyters however told a different story, one that traced the narrative all the way back to a conflict that began before Nicaea. Julius picked up Athanasius' narrative and ran with it, a clear indication to Eusebius whose side he had chosen. That Julius himself stops short of calling Eusebius and his cohort an Arian (in the letter the Arians are an Alexandrian contingent), is just a testament to the

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[90] Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 270–73.

[91] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 24.

time in which he wrote the letter. But the way in which Athanasius situates this letter in the context of the *Apologia*, on the coattails of the letter from the Council of Alexandria, gives authority to the idea that Athanasius' problems were not the result of Athanasius' actions, but a heretic condemned by Nicaea. By authority I don't just mean Julius' authority as bishop of Rome, but that this was the accepted truth of the matter from the standpoint of international consensus.

The letter issued by the Council of Serdica in 343 manufactures the final link between the Eusebians and Arius. It includes the same basic narrative going back to Arius and in fact references Julius' letter directly.[92] The objective of the council was a final trial sponsored by both Constans and Constantius II that included eastern and western bishops that would finally put the accusations against Athanasius and the other eastern exiles to rest.[93] 40 western bishops and 80 eastern bishops were slated to attend the council, as was Constans himself. The two groups of bishops were accommodated separately when they arrived in Serdica, but then two bishops from the eastern delegation, Arius of Palestine and Asterius of Arabia (both allies of Athanasius), switched sides. The Easterners were already reluctant attendees, they saw no reason for westerners to review the decisions they had already made lawfully by their own council. But when the western bishops refused to separate Arius and Asterius from the exiled bishops, the eastern delegation left.[94] The westerners proceeded

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[92] Ibid., 44.

[93] Hanson observes that Constantius was preoccupied with war against the Persians, and likely didn't have much of a choice other than to acquiesce to his brothers insistence on the joint council. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God*, 293.

[94] Ibid., 295–96.

without them, acquitted the exiles, and issued an encyclical letter that condemned all the eastern bishops but especially those who had succeeded Eusebius of Nicomedia as court bishops. It was in this letter that the Council completed the picture of Arianism as an international phenomenon with roots back to Arius himself.

> And we exhort all those, who either through fear, or through intrigues of certain persons, have held communion with Gregory, that being now admonished, exhorted, and persuaded by us, they withdraw from his detestable communion, and straightway unite themselves to the Catholic Church. What decrees have been passed by the holy Council against Theodorus, Narcissus, Stephanus, Acacius, Menophantus, Ursacius, Valens, and George, *who are the heads of the Arian heresy*, and have offended against you and the rest of the Churches, you will learn from the subjoined documents.[95] [Emphasis added]

The council did not mince words. Arianism was no longer just an Alexandrian problem, it was a cancer that had spread throughout the east. The successors of Eusebius were Arians, party to the same heretical doctrine and by extension the same vicious actions that accompany impiety.

> The Arian madmen have dared repeatedly to attack the servants of God, who maintain the right faith; they attempted to substitute a spurious doctrine, and to drive out the orthodox; and at last they made so violent an assault against the Faith, that it became known even to the piety of our most religious Emperors.[96]

In the course of a few short years, Athanasius successfully migrated the narrative from a small Egyptian council in 338/39, to one in Rome in late 339, and then finally to Serdica in 343 where it was approved by both Constans and Hosius of Corduba. Each time the scope of the threat increased, and each time Athanasius brought the Eusebians closer and closer to

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The main sources for the council are Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, II.20-22; Sozomenus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," II.3-12; Theodoret, "Ecclesiastical History," II.7.

[95] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 43.

[96] Ibid., 44.

Arius. But all the material at the beginning of the apologia, despite its discussion of earlier events, was created in 339 or after.

This is the trick that Athanasius plays in the *Apologia*. He frontloads the narrative evidence about the early conflict using letters that occur no earlier than 338/39. He creates the illusion that a narrative consensus existed before the second part of the work when Athanasius himself takes the narrative. By the time he dives into a detailed version of the Arian origin story and outlines the history of his troubles "from the beginning," Athanasius has already set the table and authenticated it. The only evidence he needs are scattered snippets of letters and lists of bishops, all of which really only corroborate the fact that the events he described happened. They do not provide the same narrative support that the earlier letters offer his story. It is through the letters issued by the Council of Alexandria, Julius, and the Encyclical Letter from the Council of Serdica that Athanasius secures the trust of his readers.

By the end of the *Apologia*, Athanasius has bestowed two key qualities upon his monster. He has given it an authenticated history that goes back to a presbyter condemned at Nicaea, a history confirmed during his own time by three councils. He has also made it into a worldwide threat. By conflating the followers of Arius with the Meletians and Eusebians, Athanasius created a heresy that was based in Alexandria and yet universal in its consequences. The monster had the potential to divide communities, pollute, and pour violence into any church. It challenged key values of the Greco-Roman world and brought disorder to that which was considered natural. It was a force simultaneously local and foreign.

Conclusion

By the time Athanasius wrote the *Apologia*, Arius was long dead, as was his patron Eusebius of Nicomedia. The battle was over, the memory of the years after the persecution decades removed. Athanasius was certainly not the only voice who sought to dominate their memory, nor was he the loudest at the time. But as a champion of Nicaea his works endured. As the champion of Nicaea, Athanasius emerged at the forefront of a movement that followed the death of Julian in 363 and culminated (posthumously) in the policies of the Theodosius I (r.379-395), continuing in the east through the death of Theodosius' son Theodosius II (d.450) and grandson Valentinian III in 455. Seventy years of Theodosian reign solidified the dominance of Nicene Christianity in both the eastern and western empire, effectively ensuring the continuity of Athanasius' monster for the next 1500 years.

His theological preferences aside, it was also ironically Athanasius' exiles that secured his monster its legacy. Between 335 and 346 his travels took him across the Roman Empire to imperial metropolitan centers that included Trier, Rome, Aquileia, Constantinople, Antioch, Constantinople, Nicomedia, and Jerusalem. The social network he developed during these travels ensured an audience that spanned an empire. In the west, as imperial power shifted east, bishops further from the center of power eagerly embraced narratives that afforded them local autonomy at the expense of a distant authority that was difficult to access.

Chapter 3

The Oikoumenê in Crisis

Introduction

Amitav Ghosh, son of an Indian diplomat and a doctoral student in anthropology at the University of Oxford, noticed something peculiar during his time as a researcher in the towns of Laṭaîfa and Nashâwy in 1980. The young researcher found it irritating that his hosts and acquaintances continuously interrogated him on certain aspects of Indian culture that they found to be irreconcilably preposterous, offensive, or odd. It was not their curiosity itself that annoyed Amitav, but two particular features of those interrogations. On the one hand, the specific aspects of Indian culture that his hosts identified as different or exotic, for example the "worship" of cows, polytheism, forced suicide of widows, and lack of circumcision, fit all-too closely with colonial caricatures of India. The second issue for Amitav was the way his hosts approached these differences. Behind the discussions lurked the subtext of a "primitive" and "backward" India. These ideas assured his Egyptian hosts that they were more "modern" and "advanced." They measured their own sense of progress and that of India's against a European modernity.[1] It was when Amitav finally felt compelled to defend India's modern military capabilities against an Imam named Khamees, that he realized how absurd it was that they both competed over whose modern mastery of technological violence was greater. "At that moment, despite the vast gap that lay between us, we understood each other perfectly We were travelling, he and I: we were travelling in

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[1] Amitav Ghosh, *In an Antique Land: History in the Guise of a Traveler's Tale* (London: Granta Books, 1992), 200, 235.

the West."[2] Amitav realized that the entire dialectic and their respective understanding of each other, relied upon European colonialism.

For Ghosh, it was this "funneling" of discourse about India, first through Europe, then back to Egypt, seemed historically odd. For millennia Egypt and India had been connected culturally and economically. There was no European intermediary. The two regions looked at one another squarely in the face, bound by a trade network that by the grace of the monsoon winds stretched from the Indian Ocean up through the Red Sea, across the Egyptian Desert to the Nile, and then downriver to the Mediterranean. Ghosh wrote *In an Antique Land* using two narratives, on medieval, one modern, to highlight this dissonance. The first of these narratives is the one we saw already, Amitav's own his own experiences as a social anthropologist in Egypt. The second narrative follows an unnamed Indian slave in the middle of the twelfth century, who we see only through the correspondence between the merchants Khalaf ibn Iṣḥaq and Ben Yijû. The business endeavors of Khalaf ibn Iṣḥaq and Ben Yijû connected the city of Aden in modern day Yemen to Mangalore on the south-west coast of India.[3] With these two narratives, Ghosh juxtaposes an ancient world where Egypt and India shared shared connective tissue by way of a long trade route that stretched from Southeast Asia to the Mediterranean, against a modern world shaped by colonialism that began with a Portuguese naval victory in 1509.[4]

Though he lived almost 800 years before Ben Yijû, Khalaf ibn Iṣḥaq, and the Indian slave, Athanasius' life revolved around this same intertwined network that stretched from

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[2] Ibid., 236.

[3] Ibid., 13–15.

[4] Ibid., 288.

India to the Mediterranean. During his years in Egypt, Athanasius took regular tours of duty

up and down the Nile to affirm and expand the power of the Alexandrian bishop and bolster

his relationship with ascetic communities on the fringes of Alexandria and the Thebaid. His

personal connections reached as far south as the kingdom of Axum in what is today

Ethiopia.[5] Egypt was home, but exile took him north toward the frigid, rainy winters and the

mild summers of northern Gaul. He traveled in boats, in carts, by foot, along paved and

unpaved paths and sailed along rhumb-lines that existed only in the minds of sailors who

had completed the journey dozens of times before. Except for the few times he had the

privilege to travel with imperial escort, Athanasius would have most regularly found himself

in the company of those who knew the routes, the tides, the winds, and hazards. Where they

traveled, he traveled, tripping over loose cobbles, feeling every bounce of the cart, every

nausea-inducing heave and jolt of the ship upon the short but steep and violent

Mediterranean windswell, and praying that the simple mortised joints that flexed with the

inlaid skeleton would hold together.[6] When he arrived at any destination, he became a

source of information about the goings on in Alexandria and other port cities he had visited,

developing relationships with like-minded individuals, churchmen and laity alike. Years

later when he returned to Alexandria, he would have relied upon similar well-traveled

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[5] Steven Kaplan, "Ezana's Conversion Reconsidered," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 13, no. 2 (1982): 101–9.

[6] Steven E. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route* (University of California Press, 2011), 197; Lionel Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1971), 202–5. Ship construction in the Roman Mediterranean was primarily shell-first construction that began with planks secured with mortised joints, later reinforced with framing. In this respect, it differs significantly from the modern practice of starting with a skeleton and building the craft around the initial supportive structure.

people to maintain these contacts. These people, invisible to us, carried those who bore Athanasius' letters, his apologetic writings, and his rants against his adversaries. Their routes decided the means and directions these objects traveled, and the comfort of those involved. As the electron carries modern information, these much slower beings of energy were the tissues that directed Athanasius himself and ultimately decided with whom he regularly exchanged correspondence.

This chapter argues three points. First, that Athanasius cultivated an expansive social network during his first two exiles (335-37, 339-45). This network, however, was not without its limiting factors, as personal relationships must be maintained over time and distance. Therefore, I also argue that the extant economic trade networks that stretched from India, up through the Red Sea, and then diffracted through the Mediterranean, molded the shape of Athanasius' network. Different routes that emanated from Alexandria presented varying ratios of cost, time, and social value for Athanasius, which ultimately determined what contacts he maintained. Third and finally, I argue that we can see and map this social network through one of Athanasius' more esoteric works, the *Historia Arianorum* (*HA*), which he wrote during his third exile among the ascetics in the Egyptian desert. Mapping Athanasius' world and his networks is crucial to understanding how his concept of "Arianism" and its accompanying narrative moved through the Late Antique world. The focus of the preceding chapters has been on the ideas within Athanasius' texts: the way outside forces could threaten the cohesion of a community and by extension its salvation. The next two chapters will move the discussion away from the first question which was, "why did the story of Arianism resonate?" to ask instead, "how did the story of Arianism resonate?" The success of Athanasius' narrative was only proportional to the audience who

read it themselves or heard it from someone who had. His works were (and remain) material objects and so we must turn our attention to the movement of people themselves to see how the stories Athanasius wove around his Arians traveled with their human hosts.

The Indian-Egyptian Network

The trade route that connected India and Mesopotamia is one of the oldest. The monsoon winds powered ships that left India's east coast and sailed to what today Oman on the tip of the Arabian Peninsula before moving north-east through the Persian Gulf. Early contact between the cities of the Indus River Valley and their counterparts between the Tigris and Euphrates is well-documented from at least the middle of the third millennium BCE.[7] It is not clear exactly when this early network intersected with the one that ran up through the Red Sea to Egypt, though by 2500BCE Egypt regularly ran trade as far south as the Horn of Africa.[8] By the time Ptolemaic mariners figured out how to navigate the monsoon winds in the fourth century BCE, the Trans-Arabian Incense Route had been running goods from India to Yemen then through both the Persian Gulf and Red Sea for millennia.[9] The Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE significantly increased the volume of goods that flowed along this route. The new Mediterranean-wide market provided incentives that decentralized the

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[7] Lajwanti Shahani, "Trade and Transport Mechanisms of Protohistoric Sea Trade Between Harappans and Mesopotamia with Fresh Evidence from Oman Peninsula," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 64/65 (2004): 375–77.

[8] Kathryn A. Bard and Rodolfo Fattovich, "The Middle Kingdom Red Sea Harbor at Mersa/Wadi Gawasis," *Journal of the American Research Center in Egypt* 47 (2011): 107–9.

[9] Lionel Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World* (UK: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1974), 118. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, 2.

Ptolemaic trade in favor of private mercantile ventures.[10] These travelers, as Steven

Sidebotham notes, were "amateur geographers, ethnographers and anthropologists."[11] They

created guides for other merchants, *periploi*, that guided the traveler from one destination to

another and detailed the goods to be found and occasionally customs of exchange.[12]

By 1100CE when Ben Yijû left Egypt and headed south, the route to India was already over 2500 years old. Moving upriver from the Delta, merchants would have travelled more than four hundred miles before reaching one of several possible departure cities along the Nile (Syene, Apollonopolis Magna, or Koptos). From there it was an overland desert journey of between 100 and 220 miles by camel or donkey to one of the port cities, which depending on the destination could take between six and twelve days. Even a few days in the desert required extensive

Figure 1. Eastern Desert Trade Routes (Image Credit: Steven Sidebotham, 2011)

preparation in the form of food, water, guides, and occasionally a military escort. An

inscription from Koptos circa 90 CE informed travelers that they could pre-pay for food and

shelter along the route, a service that lightened the load and gave a sense of security in the

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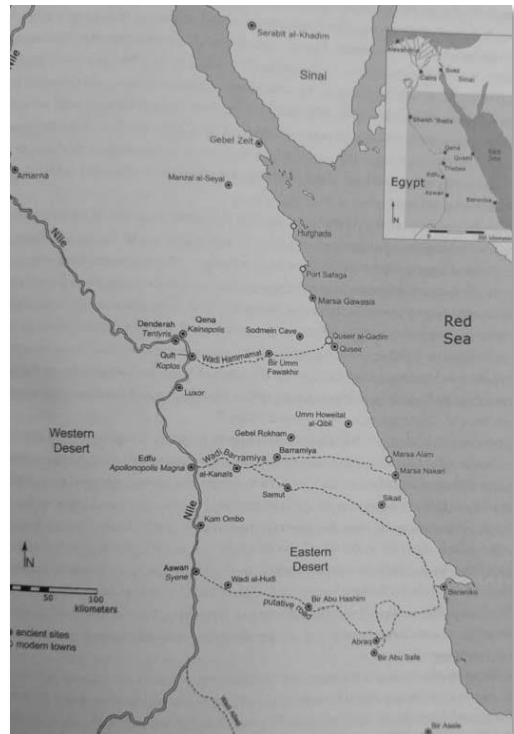
[10] Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, 5.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Lionel Casson, trans., *The Periplus Maris Erythraei: Text with Introduction, Translation, and Commentary* (Princeton University Press, 1989).

form of safe, dependable places to find rest.[13] When at last a traveler caught sight of one of

the major port cities of Quseir, Marsa Nakari, or Berenike, given fair weather, they were

only a seven-day sail away from the trading hub of Aden on the tip of Arabia.

    To put this journey in perspective let us consider that for Ben Yijû, who moved from the

Mediterranean to oversee business in Mangalore India, the almost 800 mile journey from

Alexandria to Berenike would have taken only twenty-five days.[14] An additional 800 miles

covered in a week of

Figure 2.Monsoon winds and a few possible routes (Image Credit: Sidebotham, 2011)

sailing would have

brought him to Aden,

followed by another one-

week voyage up the coast

of Arabia to Oman.[15] It

was from there (provided

it was the correct season)

that he would have
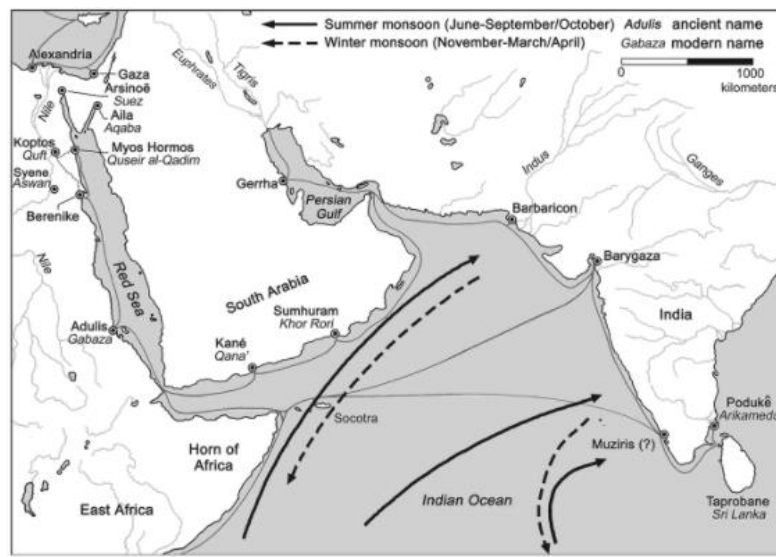
endured the final eight to nine-day crossing to Mangalore. Given ideal weather, Ben could

have covered over 3800 miles in approximately fifty days. Few merchants personally

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[13] Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, 3–5.

[14] Walter Scheidel and Elijah Meeks, *ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World* (Stanford University), accessed February 27, 2017, http://orbis.stanford.edu/.

[15] From the mouth of the Red Sea, a variety of options were open to the traveler depending on the winds and season. The Horn of Africa allowed for a more southerly (but longer passage) to Muziris, while a trip along the southern shore of Arabia reduced the time spent at sea and also allowed a vessel to put the monsoon winds further aft. This route however was ideal only if one wanted to reach Barbaricon or Barygaza.

followed their goods from India to Alexandria, though there were exceptions for people like Ben who travelled to set up shop or establish trade connections in India. Still, that goods themselves could potentially travel 3800 miles in fifty days was incredible by ancient standards. Goods like black pepper, sorghum, rice, coconut, sesame seeds, Jacob's Tear, frankincense, and myrrh (just to name a few) traveled quickly from India to Mediterranean were reciprocated with goods like escargot from France and walnuts, almonds, hazelnuts, and peaches from Egypt.[16] The containers themselves were one of the Mediterranean's biggest exports and the Mareotis Lake against which Alexandria sat was itself one of the biggest hubs of production for the vessels.[17] The city that Alexander the Great commissioned as an entry point for goods flowing into the Mediterranean was only tip of a series of highly efficient connections that ran almost four thousand miles.

Ghosh urges us to view Egypt and Alexandria in a new light. The assumption that Egypt's primary focus in antiquity was toward the Mediterranean World services a modern European narrative that severed existing memorial and historical ties between colonized regions, reorienting their focus toward the West as it extracted Egypt's culture and memory for its own purposes. In European scholarship, Alexandria traditionally exists in a kind of liminal relationship with the rest of Egypt. Although recent studies, notably that of Bagnall (1993), emphasize the cultural and economic ties between Alexandria and upper Egypt, modern antiquarian histories and disciplines like papyrology still adhere to narratives that

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[16] Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, 224–30.

[17] Christopher Haas, "Alexandria and the Mareotis Region," *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity. University of Michigan Press, Michigan*, 2001, 47–62.

depict the city as "*Alexandria ad Aegyptum*."[18] As Christopher Haas points out, this idea still exists in the language of modern Alexandrians who speak of going "to Egypt."[19]

The modern roots of this concept to back to Enlightenment thinkers like Edward Gibbon, who saw themselves as indebted to a Hellenistic/Roman intellectual tradition and fetishized the Alexandria as the harbinger of European intellectualism. As recently as 2001, author Theodore Vrettos wrote that Alexandria served as an outpost of Hellenism, where "Alexander hoped that the genius of Hellenism would be perpetuated, a metropolis of culture to benefit the entire world."[20] Although aspects of what we might cautiously call Hellenistic culture certainly wove their way into cities Alexander established throughout his empire, this "oasis" mentality colonizes the memory of locations that in truth negotiated these ideas in complicated and syncretic ways.[21] Vrettos pushes this colonial narrative further when he states that the Arab invasion facilitated the "death of the city." He claims that the Muslim armies rejected the city's diverse cosmopolitan and intellectual population in favor of a fundamentalist religious zealotry, which ultimately resulted in the second sack

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[18] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 6–7. Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 5–7, 107. Bagnall also provides a much-needed critique of the papyrological-centered approach to Late Antique Egypt. The absence of papyri from Alexandria, as Bagnall writes, "causes the great city to appear in an improbably passive role, as well as rendering invisible a considerable volume of traffic."

[19] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 33.

[20] Theodore Vrettos, *Alexandria: City of the Western Mind* (Simon and Schuster, 2010), xii.

[21] Susan Sherwin-White, "Seleucid Babylonia: A Case Study for the Installation and Development of Greek Rule," in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and Non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, ed. Amelie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White (London, UK: Duckworth, 1987), 1–31; R.J. van der Spek, "The Babylonian City," in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and Non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, ed. Amelie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White (London, UK: Duckworth, 1987), 57–74.

of the Library of Alexandria. It was after this, he claims, that Alexandria's role as the "beacon of Hellenism" waned.[22] It is not until the modern era, Vrettos claims, that Alexandria comes "back" into the fold of the western world. Yet even today, Alexandria remains "more closely connected with the rest of Egypt than ever in the past," suggesting that in antiquity the city was an intellectual outpost set against a "dark continent."[23]

The above narrative is decidedly wrong and ill-informed, yet it remains the extension of a prevailing attitude that Alexandria was (or even is) a point of light set against the background of a backward Egyptian, "eastern," or decidedly African, hinterland. This is not to understate Alexandria's role as an intellectual center for the Mediterranean.[24] But it was just one aspect of a city whose primary function, its very *raison d'être*, was its two giant harbors.[25] The harbors were the mouth of an organism that stretched from India, up through the Red Sea, through Egypt and then like a prism diffracted to various ports and cities throughout the Mediterranean world. Renewed scholarly interest in movement, economy, materiality, draws very different lines around Alexandria. This perspective adds valuable counternarrative to the image of the "city on the hill," and presents it as an urban center whose importance rested not on an innate Hellenism but rather the role it served as one point along a rich conveyor belt of goods. From the perspective of the Alexandrians themselves,

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[22] Vrettos, *Alexandria*, 211–14.

[23] Ibid., 220.

[24] Edward Jay Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, vol. 41 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2006), 143–48.

[25] Haas, *Alexandria in Late Antiquity*, 24. As Haas points out, the entire layout of the city facilitates a flow dedicated to the movement of goods. In addition, the grid pattern suggests a certain "openness," a city where movement and people are meant to be seen and movement controlled. Brown, *Dispatches from Dystopia*, 2015, 97–98.

the Mediterranean Sea and a trip northward presented far more difficulties than a voyage to the south.

A View from Alexandria

Those who stood in Alexandria with the goods that had floated down the Nile faced a set of challenges when looking northward. Situated on the shore of what one might conventionally see as a waterborne expressway to any of the major ports situated upon the shores of the Mediterranean, the sea posed several environmental challenges to the Alexandria-based traveler. Antique literature about the Mediterranean carries an element of fear, from Odysseus' less-than-ideal experiences with the winds and sea, to Pliny's lament that in times of old only pirates braved winter storms, but now foolhardy merchants braved the sea out of greed.[26] The literati feared the unpredictability and discomfort of sea travel. In the fifth century, Vegetius wrote that, "so far as the roughness of the sea is concerned, as caution protects the provident, so carelessness drowns the negligent."[27] Vegetius' caution is warranted in the context of the *Epitoma Rei Militarus*, an antiquarian endeavor that tried to compile military knowledge in the form of a technical treatise.[28] But the purpose of the treatise was to systematize in the face of unpredictability, to render the best possible scenario for success in order to move massive amounts of men (or in this case fleets of ships) across large stretches of ocean. Although in some cases our sources may serve as

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[26] Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, trans. John Bostock and H.T. Riley (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855), II.47.

[27] Vegetius, *Epitome of Military Science*, trans. N.P. Miller, second edition (Liverpool, UK: Liverpool University Press, 1996), IV.38. *Et pro acerbitate pelagi, sicut prouidos cautela tutatur, ita neglegentes extinguit incuria.*

[28] Ibid., xvi.

guides, we need to embrace the extreme flexibility of these principles. Most of these literary

efforts sought to compile and sort knowledge, not to seek out a living in the volatile sea.

Upon closer inspection, our sources' principles of when to sail or when not to sail were

cautionary guidelines and better suited for a passenger of means. They were also written

from the perspective of individuals looking to travel eastward from the western half of the

Mediterranean.

Let us for a moment consider the principle to which both Pliny and Vegetius attest: that

summer is the best season for travel in the Mediterranean. There is indeed less cyclonic

storm activity during the summer months, and both the reliability of the wind direction and

speed of travel increase significantly.[29] But we need to ask the question: for whom is it ideal

and reliable? A ship leaving Rome for luxury goods in Alexandria would have basked in the

following seas and steady winds from their aft quarter, and indeed this was the only way that

most ancient vessels could sail. Though modern monohulled ships can point as high as 15-

25 degrees *into* the wind, their square-rigged ancient counterparts relied upon a following

wind (90-270 degrees off the bow) to propel them across the sea at up to 8+ knots for

triremes and 4-5 knots for merchant vessels. Ancient vessels could go to wind to a limited

extent, but only slightly and at an abysmally slow speed of about two knots. If there was any

opposing current at all (and on the northern coast of Africa, the current flows in an easterly

direction at up a half-knot), progress could abruptly halt if not reverse.[30] The north-westerly

etesian winds of the Levantine basin, upon which Alexandria sits, though they may have

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[29] S. Zechetto and F. De Biasio, "Sea Surface Winds over the Mediterranean Basin from Satellite Data (2000-04): Meso- and Local-Scale Features on Annual and Seasonal Time Scales," *Journal of Applied Meteoroogy and Climatology* 46, no. 6 (2007): 820.

[30] Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, 285–87.

easily guided ships into the Alexandrian port would have presented an impenetrable barrier for any ship trying to leave that same port headed directly west.[31] Hence this "ideal" travel season, according to our sources, would not have worked quite as well for Alexandrians or any ships looking to leave the Egyptian port. Outbound vessels from Alexandria had to hop up the coast of the Levant, taking what advantage they could of a westerly variation of the etesian winds and a half-knot current that runs eastward along the African coast and then north up the coast (See Figure 3).

It was still not an ideal route for the sailors aboard the vessel, though perhaps it was perceived as better for any passengers that accompanied them. In order to get an idea of how an Alexandrian would have found their travel and correspondence circumscribed by these weather patterns, for a moment let us consider two scenarios of Athanasius' own experience: his early trip to Nicaea that began in May of 325, and his first two exiles to Trier, first under Constantine in the last few months of 335 and the second under Constantius in April of 339.

Gregory Nazianzus and the anonymous *Historia Acephala* tell us that Athanasius accompanied the elderly bishop Alexander to Nicaea in early May of

Figure 3. Bodies of the Mediterranean and their prevailing wind directions (Image credit: Zechetto and Biasio, 2007)

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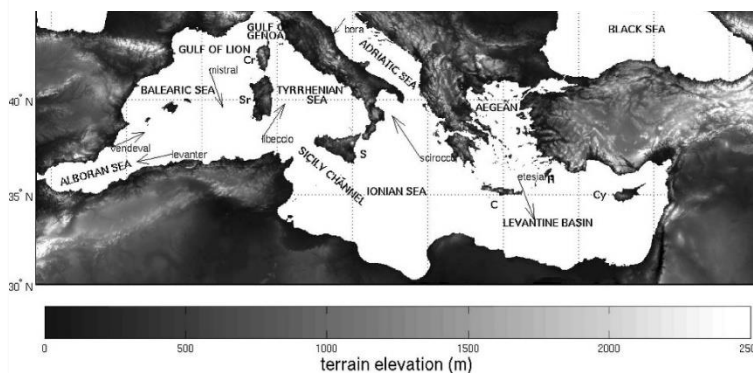
[31] Zechetto and Biasio, "Sea Surface Winds over the Mediterranean Basin from Satellite Data (2000-04): Meso- and Local-Scale Features on Annual and Seasonal Time Scales," 819–21.

325.[32] He would have only been in his mid-twenties when he first left the port at Alexandria,

catching the north-westerly etesian winds while riding the favorable current to make a series

of short passages between ports up the Levantine coast to Antioch and then Tarsus on the

coast of Anatolia. During these summer months, the large landmass to the north offered

respite from the prevailing winds if Athanasius and Alexander had chosen to continue along

the sea-route westward.[33] Littoral areas however are notorious for their variable winds,

which depending on the time of day can flow onshore (from the sea) or offshore (from the

land), or not at all. This variability brought its own problems. Travel could be limited to a

particular time of day (mornings or evenings) and intermittent locations with no wind could

mean waiting while the current pushed them slowly westward, or rowing, which one would

imagine in the sweltering Mediterranean summer heat was a terribly uncomfortable

experience. For the paying customer, though notably not the sailors, such a route would have

been a pleasant meander as they enjoyed the breeze and calm summer seas and their paid

hands toiled in the sun. Conditions would have remained similar as the ship wound its way

northward through the Aegean archipelago, snaking its way around islands and catching

favorable but intermittent local winds until they reached the Dardanelles that guarded the

entrance to the Sea of Marmara. Once to the Dardanelles, the rest of the journey was a easy

for both sailor and passenger as Aeolus bore them comfortably to Nicomedia, only a two-

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[32] Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration XXI," in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 5th ed., vol. 7 (Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 97–148.

[33] At Tarsus, Athanasius and Alexander could have taken an overland route to Ancyra and then Nicaea, a hot and dry journey that would have taken between a month to a month and a half. I would doubt that this route, even by cart, would have been preferable to their own respective comfort at sea with a summer breeze and typically calm coastal waters. Scheidel and Meeks, "ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World."

day journey by land to Nicaea. But this last leg from the Dardanelles to Nicomedia was a mere fraction of the total ground covered during the trip. While the paying traveler reclined in leisurely, calm, and to their mind less risky conditions, the volatility of near-coastal winds and the length of the trip (a minimum of 23 days) was undoubtedly physically demanding on the sailor leaving from Alexandria.

Winter, however, was the sailor's season. Though Pliny, in his preference for comfort, derided the uncouth

Figure 4. Pilot chart of the Mediterranean Sea in July, showing prevailing wind directions (blue roses) and current directions and velocity (green). (Image: Blue Seas Pilot Charts)
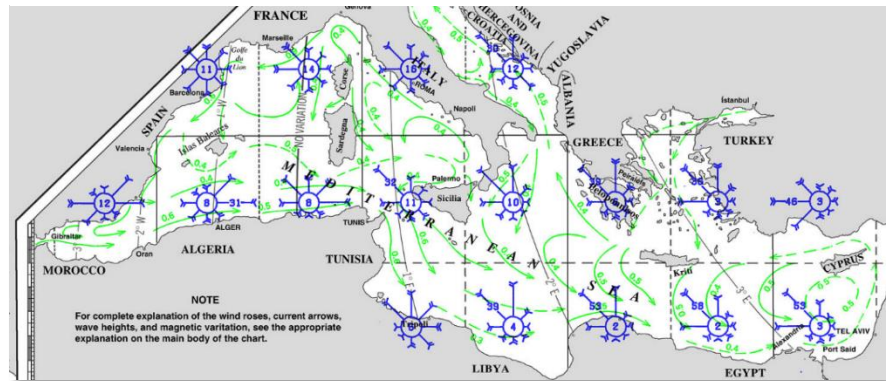
merchant or pirate, the variable conditions of the Mediterranean winter meant options for the sailor. Both Athanasius' first and second exiles occurred during these supposed less-than ideal months for traveling. Later when he reflected on the circumstances that led him and others to flee Constantius in April of 339, Athanasius lamented that the circumstances were so grave that "who, however inexperienced of the sea, did not choose rather to commit himself to it, and to risk all its dangers, than to witness their threatenings?"[34] Even in April the sea was a better option than the forces of the emperor, as the winter storms loomed over the inexperienced seaman. Cyclonic activity in the Mediterranean is high from October to

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[34] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 58.

May, which meant that westward journeys from Alexandria would have been considerably quicker. During the winter months, the northern hemisphere storms that form off the coast of North America move westward, building in wind and swell until they hit the Eurasian continent along varying paths that range from a more northward trajectory against Ireland, the British Isles, and the North Sea, or pushing south to Portugal (Figure 5). Parts of these low-pressure systems help form storms in the Mediterranean Sea in the Gulf of Genoa and Tyrrhenian Sea. Another area of cyclonic activity is off the coast of Southern Anatolia. As the wind moves in a clockwise direction, the shear from these storms creates an easterly wind along their southern quarter which under the right circumstances could lead to a quick passage from the east to the west.

Figure 5. Example of a North Atlantic low-pressure system in March (Image: weather.unisys.com)

Given a well-chosen weather window, a ship leaving Alexandria could ride the southern edge of one of these storms and reach Crete after only two nights at sea (Figure 6). After a day or two of working their way across the southern coast of the island, another three nights on the open ocean brought them to Sicily. As to the issue of comfort, I have yet to meet a sailor whose preference lies with choppy three-foot conditions on the nose or expending the

energy (manpower or modern fuel) required to deal with flat calm. We'd rather sail with a

Figure 6. Low pressure system passing over the northern Mediterranean in winter (Image: Windfinder.com)
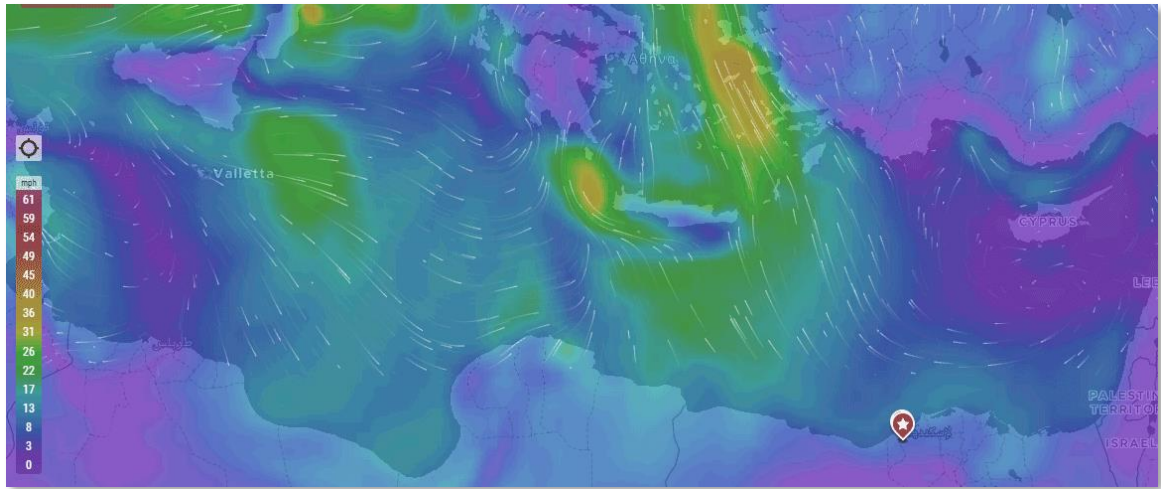
twenty-knot wind at our backs even if it means ten to fifteen-foot following seas. The pitching and swaying can be distressing for passengers and lead to seasickness but there is no easier or faster way to sail. To compare this winter journey to our summer route, which could take up to a month to travel from Alexandria to Nicomedia, in winter under a best-case scenario a ship could make the entire journey from Alexandria to Italy in less than a week. The risks involved may have been greater, but the effort and time expended were considerably less for the merchant sailor.

Figure 7. Prevailing westerly summer winds (Image: Windfinder.com)
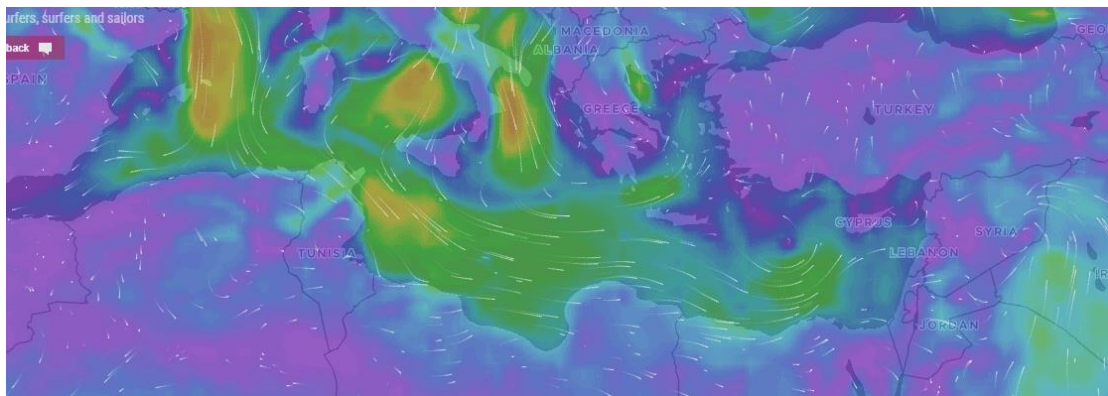
It is little wonder that a cautious tactician like Vegetius, or any traveler who didn't particularly like sea travel, would have decried the volatility of the winter months and preferred a leisurely, if long, trek up the coast during the summer months. It is the true shortcoming of our literary sources that we rely upon the passengers rather than the pilots. Those who had to work the oars, or whose living was tied to ship itself, would have abhorred the indirect summer route. This remains especially true if we consider our orientation in the ancient Mediterranean as one located in the east, rather than the west. For Rome, the option to send troops or merchants east was an easy one during the summer months (Figure 7) Travel from the eastern Mediterranean headed west was a very different scenario and required a razor-thin negotiation between time, security, and effort. It should come as no surprise that most individuals who performed labor on a boat would have preferred mitigated risk to toil. Though the sea is unpredictable, it has its moods, patterns, and warning signs. Athanasius might not have known much about them, but those who took him westward from Alexandria certainly did.

Given the difficulty and potential danger of Mediterranean travel from the eastern part of the basin, let us for a moment consider the world from the perspective of Athanasius in Alexandria. As it had for millennia, the Nile river provided a quick and comfortable commute for any traveler. The river runs uninterrupted inland from Alexandria for over 700 miles up to Syene (modern Aswan) at the first cataract. The same prevailing winds that prevented ancient ships from heading directly north or west propelled vessels effortlessly against the river's current. A boatman had only to sail upriver, unload or load goods, and then ride the current back down the Nile to the Mediterranean.[35] Visiting any of the churches

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[35] Casson, *Travel in the Ancient World*, 257–58.

over which Athanasius claimed authority, or even the monks in the Thebaid, was a relatively painless endeavor because of the regular opportunities to book travel with the large volume of mercantile vessels headed up or down river. Communication was therefore also rapid. A letter could make it from Alexandria as far as the first cataract in only sixteen days.[36] Indeed in terms of time spent traveling, Athanasius could have gone the 3800 miles to India (~50 days) in the about the same amount of time it took him to make it to his place of exile in Trier (~52 days), despite the fact that Trier was only 2500 miles from Alexandria.[37] Such comparisons are revelatory in that they yield a different perspective on how someone in the ancient world viewed themselves in relation to their surrounding environment. For Athanasius, the easiest routes for communication and travel lay upriver. The view southward and any business he had there would have been much preferable to the difficulties of the Mediterranean from a political and logistical standpoint. As far as Egypt is concerned, Ghosh's observations help reorient our tendency to over-accentuate Alexandria's connection to the Mediterranean world. If we focus our historical inquiry on a subject who stands on the shore of Egypt, we must consider their position relative to both directions of travel. Alexandria was an important part of Mediterranean commerce, but only because of a much longer series of even more efficient connections that extended up the Nile toward the Red Sea. This does not diminish the economic and cultural connections that Alexandria shared with the Mediterranean world, but it does complicate the *ease* by which merchants and other travelers maintained those connections. It was likely easier for a Roman to envision

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[36] Scheidel and Meeks, "ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World."

[37] Ibid.

Alexandria as a part of their world than an Alexandrian to think of themselves as part of Rome. For the regular Alexandrian, the preferred direction of travel was always along the river, not out into the sea.

But necessity drove Athanasius out of Egypt on many occasions to petition emperors, attend councils, or flee into exile. During the summer months, Athanasius would have boarded a vessel that took him on the leisurely voyage up the coast of Palestine. It was a comfortable journey for the

Figure 8. Athanasius' travels from 331 to 346

passenger, but long and taxing for those with whom he booked passage. It was in winter, when need drove Athanasius, that he could take the rough but fast passage on the wake of the Mediterranean storms up to Crete and then on to Italy. But in both cases prevailing winds and currents constrained the routes available to him. They kept Athanasius' world locked into a small set of ruts that ran primarily northward and rarely directly to the west. The places he visited between 331 and 348, represented in Figure 8, are an early indicator of this narrow pattern of travel, which we will explore later in the chapter. But as he stood on any given shore, whether at Ostia, Aquileia, or Nicomedia, with the winds of blowing in their usual pattern from the northwest, to Athanasius it must have seemed like the winds were always beckoning him to Alexandria, willing to sweep whatever ship he stepped onto east or south, toward home and the center of his world.

The constrained routes of travel we have discussed up to this point, molded the shape of Athanasius' social network. They determined who he met, with whom he was able to correspond regularly, and the cost of that transaction. But who were these people? Athanasius' extant pastoral and personal letters are not nearly as comprehensive as those of Jerome and Rufinus, so correspondence itself is a dead end.[38] To address this question I would like to turn our attention to one of his more esoteric works, the *Historia Arianorum*, and build our map of Athanasius' world both in terms of places and the people they contained. First however, we must turn our gaze back to Alexandria, as Athanasius on his return from a second exile, sailed with the etesian winds at his back past the island of Pharos and into the harbor on October 21st 346.

Consensus Building

Athanasius returned from his second exile on October 21st 346 to, as he describes it, momentous fanfare.[39] The entire city turned out in support of their bishop, reveling in the newfound unity that replaced the division that they experienced under Gregory of Cappadocia. Gregory had died the previous year, and it was only after Constans forcefully compelled Constantius to reach out multiple times to Athanasius that the bishop began his

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[38] Clark, *The Origenist Controversy*, 16–18. For a thorough discussion of the extant corpus of Athanasius letters, both original and pseudoepigraphical, see Lefort, *Saint Athanase: Lettres Festales et Pastorales En Copte, Scriptores Coptici*; Opitz, *Athanasius Werke.* Adam Schor made a similar effort to uncover the social networks from which the later ecclesiastical writer Theodoret compiled his history. Adam M. Schor, *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria* (University of California Press, 2011).

[39] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 25.

return journey.[40] Immediately following his return, Athanasius set about creating a new network of relationships throughout Egypt that centered around the Alexandrian patriarchate. Aided by the Nile River and the vessels that easily traversed the smoothly flowing river as they had for millennia, Athanasius moved swiftly throughout the Alexandrian *chora*, up through the Thebaid and first cataract, cementing relationships with other bishops, presbyters, and most importantly, the growing ascetic movement in the desert.[41] As David Brakke argues, during this period Athanasius used the discourse of ascetic renunciation to create a new coalition of Christians. He articulated a "laddered" understanding of asceticism that centered on the imitation of saintly behavior, which coupled together with the sacraments and doctrine of the incarnate Word, guided the individual on the ascent to heaven. Under this umbrella he brought together male and female ascetics and ordinary Christians who to varying degrees and according to their lifestyles, were able to participate in this schema.[42] By all accounts his efforts were successful in the space of just a few short years, a coalition soon put to the test by a series of events that gave Constantius reason to rethink his tolerance of Athanasius.

Only three years after Athanasius' return, the power balance between the sons of Constantine that had secured his return to Alexandria collapsed. On January 18th, 350 the Joviani and Herculiani legions along with an Illyrian cavalry unit elevated their commander

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[40] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 90–91.

[41] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 81.

[42] Ibid., 198–99.

Magnentius to the purple.[43] When he heard the news, Constans tried to flee across the

Pyrenees but supporters of Magnentius tracked him and ran him down.[44] News of the event

would have taken a while to reach Constantius, who at the time was engaged in war with the

Sassanian Empire in the east. In the meantime, the army in Pannonia declared a general

named Vetranio emperor at Mursa. It appears that in Rome too, a nephew of Constantius

claimed the title.[45] The west was in chaos. Fortunate for Constantius, a prevailing forty-year

drought ravaged the central Asian steppes and caused considerable unrest among the peoples

who depended upon the fragile ecosystem.[46] This crisis on the Sassanian northern frontier

forced Shapur II in 350 to make a hasty treaty with Constantius that lasted until 358.

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[43] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 165.

[44] Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, trans. Ronald T Ridley (Canberra: Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1982), II.58; Eutropius, *Breviarum Ad Urbe Condita*, trans. F. Ruehl (Leipzig: Teubner, 1887), X.9-11.

[45] Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, II.59. Eutropius, *Breviarum Ad Urbe Condita*, X.11.

[46] The effects of this drought were likely felt later in the empire with the movement of Huns, Greutungi and Tervingi in the 370's. Michael McCormick et al., "Climate Change during and after the Roman Empire: Reconstructing the Past from Scientific and Historical Evidence," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 43, no. 2 (2012): 190. Current analysis of dendrodata from Juniper trees in Central Asia confirms that a severe forty-year drought ravaged the region between 338 and 377 CE. Similarly, the studies on the level of the Dead Sea show that precipitation dropped significantly for almost two hundred years starting in the early third century, and alluvial deposits in the Rhône valley show that Western Europe was not immune from this extreme climate shift and saw unusually intense rainfall and lowered agricultural productivity as the result of intense cold between the fourth and seventh century. The severe drought in the steppes and decrease in agricultural capabilities in western Europe help explain the massive movement of peoples and thus imperial focus on the frontier. It is likely that the El Nino-South Oscillation (NSO) climate pattern caused this severe climate fluctuation, as dendrodata from both New Mexico and New Zealand suggest. Mark Humphries, "Late Antiquity and World History," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 11–12. Humphries points out in his article on Late Antiquity and World History, a wide geographical span of events affected the relationship between Persia and Rome just as much as their shared border.

Constantius was therefore able to march west. He first executed Vetranio and then after successful engagements against Magnentius at Mursa Major in 351, he defeated the usurper at Mons Seleucus in 353.[47] As the first sole-emperor in sixteen years, Constantius faced a difficult task. He had to reunify the complicated and administrative and political strands of the empire and risked alienating privileged individuals on both sides of the Mediterranean. Consensus-building is never without its protesters, and Constantius fared poorly among many of the extant chroniclers who wrote after his death. Stories of brutality and despotism from both Constantius and his associates like Gallus Caesar and Paul the Chain are not completely unwarranted but the exclusivity of these voices and this particular era of Constantius' reign shaped the subsequent narrative.[48]

Largely due to the antagonistic nature of the extant sources, historiographical perspectives on Constantius have for a long time been overly negative. Nicene writers like Athanasius and Hilary of Poitiers shaped the Nicene Christian tradition and depicted Constantius as a raving "Arian" emperor. Gibbon saw him as the least deserving of the sons of Constantine, stating that cruelty was the basis for his success against family and usurpers alike.[49] Mommsen took a more measured approach, admitting that Constantius' critics may have overstated their condemnation, but Mommsen still saw him as a dogmatic soldier, autocratic to a fault and overly full of self-importance.[50] Both Mommsen and Gibbon stayed

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[47] Eutropius, *Breviarum Ad Urbe Condita*, X.12. Zosimus, *Historia Nova*, II.60-65.

[48] Eutropius, *Breviarum Ad Urbe Condita*, X.13-15. Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 14.1.1-4, 14.5.6-10.

[49] Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. II, 1781, 246, 269.

[50] Theodor Mommsen, *A History of Rome Under the Emperors* (Routledge, 2005), 387, 394–95.

close to the analysis of non-Christian historians like Ammianus Marcellinus whose "soldierly impartiality" was not without its rhetorical twists. The image of Constantius as paranoid, brutal, and despotic, served as the rhetorical antithesis to Julian, who despite light admonishes from a loyal Ammianus still comes across as the enlightened and philosophical emperor that the empire deserved.[51]

In 1977, Robert Klein's *Constantius II: Und Die Christliche Kirche* ended the almost uniformly negative historiographical portrait of Constantius. Klein reevaluated Constantius' actions and polemic reactions to them through a political lens that differentiated between "internal" and "external" aspects of his reign. Klein's Constantius comes across as an even-handed monarch who resisted the tirades of fervent churchmen like Athanasius; a political statesman at his core.[52] Klein's analysis however understated the balance between Constantius' politics and his sense of philosophy. Though a "military man" at heart, Constantius also saw himself as a philosopher in the eastern tradition and as the sole ruler of the Roman *oikoumenê* understood his role in a unified religious and political context. As we discussed previously, at the center of this policy was not just political and ecclesiastical conformity for their own sake, but as Susanna Elm argues, a sincere effort to link the *oikoumenê*, the Roman World, to the Divine through proper understanding and modeling of

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[51] Eric Fournier, "The Adventus of Julian at Sirmium: The Literary Construction of Historical Reality in Ammianus Marcellinus," in *The Rhetoric of Power in Late Antiquity: Religion and Politics in Byzantium, Europe and the Early Islamic World*, ed. Elizabeth DePalma Digeser, Justin Stephens, and Robert M. Frakes (I.B.Tauris, 2010), 13–15.

[52] Richard Klein, *Constantius II. Und Die Christliche Kirche*, Impulse Der Forschung ; Bd. 26 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, [Abt. Verl.], 1977).

the Divine on earth.[53] Of course, this effort had little room for dissent and especially not for

those who resisted as fervently as Athanasius.

Beginning immediately

after the death of Constans,

mints under the authority of

Constantius released (first in

the east, then in the west after

he defeated Magnentius), a

series of high-denomination

coins (only on Gold Multiple and Solidus coins) that celebrated the renewed unification of

east and west (Figure 5).[54] The obverse side of these coins features a bust of Constantius II

wearing a pearl diadem, itself adorned with goods that came from India by way of

Alexandria. On the reverse side we see, along with the words GLORIA - REI – PVBLICAE,

anthropomorphic representations of Rome(left) and Constantinople (right). Although Rome

is enthroned, Constantinople bears a scepter and stands with her foot on the prow of a ship,

signifying naval prowess in the Roman tradition going back to Pompey the Great.[55] It is a

clear indication that though the empire is reunited, Constantinople holds the reins. A similar

special issue, from Rome this time, reinforces the resurgent symbolic role that Rome played

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[53] Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church*, 82.

[54] RIC VIII Rome 290. Andrew Meadows and Gilles Bransbourg, "Online Coins of the Roman Empire," *American Numismatic Society and the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University*, 2018, http://numismatics.org.

[55] Roberta Stewart, "The Jug and Lituus on Roman Republican Coin Types: Ritual Symbols and Political Power," *Phoenix* 51, no. 2 (1997): 186.

in Constantius' vision of the new unified empire. RIC VIII Rome 488, a medallion minted at Rome between 352 and 355 features on the obverse side a bust of Constantius, and on reverse side the image of Isis standing on a *tensa* drawn by two mules (Figure 10).[56] The celebration of Isis went back to the spring festivals of the first century that welcomed the grain ships from Egypt.[57]

Constantius' efforts to re-memorialize the relationship between Rome and Egypt invoked the idea of the unified empire under Augustus. As Nick Henck argues, Constantius instituted a public building project in Rome that was consistent with the other fourth century "builder emperors". This included, as Ammianus tells us, an obelisk shipped from Alexandria itself and placed on the edge of the Circus Maximus.[58] Although as Henck points out, Ammianus scorns Constantius' move as one of *vanitas*, it is likely that his effort was one of *pietas*.[59] Invoking the *memoria* of Augustus (who himself brought both the Obelisk of Montecitorio and Flaminio Obelisk to Rome in 10 BCE) not only situated Constantius in the line of sole-

Figure 10. Reverse-side image of Isis standing on a *tensa* (Image: American Numismatic Society)

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[56] RIC VIII Rome 488. Meadows and Bransbourg, "Online Coins of the Roman Empire."

[57] Constantine re-organized *annona civilis* when he built Constantinople. Grain from Alexandria went to the new city on the Bosporus and Carthage became the primary supplier for Rome. For the significance of the *annona civilis* in Rome for Christian and non-Christian concepts of charity in Late Antiquity, see Michele Renee Salzman, "From a Classical to a Christian City," *Studies in Late Antiquity* 1, no. 1 (February 1, 2017): 65–85.

[58] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, 16.10.20.

[59] Nick Henck, "Constantius ὁ Φιλοκτίστης?," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (January 1, 2001): 281.

emperors that included his father, it was consistent with imperial discourse that used Egypt to represent the exotic geographical and moral limits of the empire.[60] It was a connection that perhaps Athanasius would have enjoyed, if Constantius had not been the one at the helm of the project.

Representations of trans-Mediterranean unity were only a few stones along the road to *homonoia* and *eirene* (concord and peace). Councils were the primary mechanism by which Constantius sought to unify the empire. Constantius was up against a set of churches in the west who for sixteen years had made up the core of western Christianity. His hold on the eastern churches may have been strong but merging the two was a daunting task. The emperor first had to unravel the patronage networks that had previously revolved around his brother Constans in Trier and reorient them to his own court in Constantinople. Constantius called a series of small councils as he moved west to confront Magnentius, first in Sirmium in 351, then Arles in 353, and finally Milan in 355. The creed that each produced served as a standard to which the bishops present had to acquiesce. Those who refused faced exile, but many chose to recognize the authority of Constantius. The Late Antique imperial bureaucracy with all its gatekeeping and lines of patronage, which we saw earlier with the Melitians and Eusebius at Constantine's court, gave Athanasius a means to explain the rapid assimilation of many bishops in the west. He blamed their actions on fear and access to the court.[61] There is likely an element of truth to this. Many of the bishops from major cities like

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[60] Molly Swetnam-Burland, *Egypt in Italy: Visions of Egypt in Roman Imperial Culture* (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20, 23, 65–67.

[61] For a thorough study on the increasing complexity of this administration system in the fourth and fifth centuries and its accompanying networks of patronage, see Kelly, *Ruling the Later Roman Empire*.

Rome (Liberius), Milan (Dionysius), Trier (Paul), and Cordoba (Hosius) resisted early on,

likely fearing that the eastern system of bishops and their networks would absorb and

subsume those of the west that had revolved around Constans.[62] Though several of these

bishops eventually consented to Constantius' program of *homonoia* and *eirene*, the emperor

replaced several of these bishops with more obliging men of his own choosing.

These smaller councils in the west paved the way to larger councils that sought a wider

consensus from bishops across the empire. The first of these was at Sirmium in 357, then the

Councils of Seleucia/Ariminum in 359, and finally the Council of Constantinople in 360,

which yielded a theological and political consensus. It was just prior to this final push that

Constantius sent military police to arrest Athanasius at the Church of Theonas on February

8th, 356, forcing Athanasius to flee into the desert. Despite Athanasius' protests to the

contrary, by 360 to many in the empire it likely appeared that Constantius had succeeded in

recreating the unity and harmony of his father.[63] To most observers, it would have appeared

that Constantius *must* have the correct understanding of the divine, for the empire was

increasingly coming to replicate the stability and unity of heaven itself.

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[62] It is possible that the outcome at Sirmium made Fortunatianus, the bishop of Aquileia, see
the writing on the wall. He sided early on with Constantius and Jerome says he helped
persuade Liberius to come over to Constantius' side. Jerome, "De Viris Illusbribus," in
Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 5th ed.,
vol. 3 (Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1892), XCVII. His defection would
explain why Athanasius left him out of his account despite undoubted acquaintance with
him during his long stay in Aquileia during his second exile.

[63] The councils of Rimini and Seleucia in 359, despite internal quibbles, produced an
unprecedented concord in Christianity. Far from the shock that Jerome exhibited, the creed
was a palatable compromise and the embodiment of Constantius' concord and peace. Elm,
Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church, 48.

It was there in the desert that Athanasius sought refuge among the burgeoning ascetic

communities with whom he had developed relationships over the previous decade. In his

fury, Athanasius penned a work that called into question the very premise of Constantius'

"peace and concord".[64] It was also a time when the bishop had behind him a wealth of travel

experience and connections, only to then be cloistered from them. Granted, such a situation

was likely far more favorable to the Alexandrian bishop than a frantic departure across the

storm-ridden winter sea, only to be greeted in exile by the cold and perpetually dismal

dampness of northern Gaul. Yet the insult of being a prisoner in one's own land, unable to

access directly the communities he had spent the last few years courting, was insufferable.

Athanasius was probably able to travel between communities and cities in rural Egypt, but

entrance into them was difficult and dangerous. Guards policed the small gates around the

city and Constantius ordered the guards to be on the lookout for Athanasius and other exiled

bishops.[65] This proximal exile in the desert led him to regularly compare his situation to

Elijah and the prophet's dispute with Ahab, "who also was alone in his persecution, and God

was all in all to the holy man."[66] So too was Athanasius hungry and alone in the

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[64] Within the Athanasian corpus, the *Historia Arianorum* is one of the few dates where
scholarly consensus varies only minutely. The earliest estimates, specifically that of
Robertson's commentary for the 1892 NPNF edition of Athanasius' works, argued for 358
on the basis that Liberius and Hosius lapsed in the summer of 357. There is also the issue
that when Athanasius wrote the work, he assumed that Leontius of Antioch was alive.
Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2006, n.41. Barnes argues for a date of late 357, a date to which
Gwynn agrees because it resolves the issue of both Leontius of Antioch's death and the
lapses of Liberius and Hosius. For a complete summary of the aforementioned arguments,
see Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2007, 41.Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and
Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 126.

[65] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 19.

[66] Ibid., 47.

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wilderness.[67] Constantius, Athanasius joked, was so relentless in his efforts to contain

Athanasius that he sent a great many bishops into exile for the sole purpose of denying

Athanasius a single bishop to whom he could complain.[68] Though we can be sure the bishop

was not alone in the company of his ascetic supporters (undoubtedly unfortunate in their

position on the receiving end of his complaints) the sense of displacement and anger comes

through in the *Historia Arianorum*, a work that leads us toward a picture of the social

network that Athanasius created during his first two exiles.

A Network in the Historia Arianorum

The title "History of the Arians" is misleading, though over the past century scholars

have not been reluctant to glean. The work contains little historical thinking in the

conventional sense of the genre. It is less an enquiry into the "origins" of Athanasius'

opponents than it does the cosmic significance of Constantius himself. In contrast to his

Apologia ad Constantium, which Athanasius wrote in the years leading up to his third exile

as he tried to convince the emperor of his good will, the *HA* is an invective against

Constantius himself. As T.D. Barnes notes, the *HA* has more in common with political satire

or caricature in the vein of Procopius' *Secret History* or Synesius' work against Arcadius, an

assessment that most readers will find accurate.[69] After approaching the work from the

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 126. As Barnes also notes, the *Historia Arianorum* is one of Athanasius' less-well received works in the historiographical tradition, its rhetoric turning off many who would prefer it to, as Robertson (1892) said, "gladly believe to have come from any other pen." Archibald Robertson, *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 267.

perspective of political philosophy and salvation outlined in the previous chapters, I have

come to see that the significance of the work goes far deeper than its satirical and ahistorical

elements. These less-than-savory aspects of the work may have put off scholars for decades,

but they obfuscate a deeper story that resonated with Athanasius' contemporary audiences.

The *HA* is a complicated tour of the cosmological and geographical aspects of empire that

through fluctuations in geographical attention to space (local to empire-wide) orient the

reader to the inevitable cosmic implications of Constantius' reign.

   The work is therefore intricately tied to Athanasius' real-world experience. The content

represents a body of knowledge about bishops both "Arian" and "Orthodox," the

machinations of Constantius against them, and their own travels into exile. It is in this

strange hall of mirrors that Athanasius concedes the extent of the network he cultivated

during and after exile. There are three distinct acts to the work, within which Athanasius

takes the reader on a tour of the rise and fall of concord in the empire from his own early

career until the events following the death of Magnentius, a climax that consciously argues

the antithesis of the image Constantius tried to cultivate of himself and the empire.[70] For the

sake of conveying to the narrative feel of the *HA*, I will for the most part omit the actual

dates of events so that the reader can fully appreciate the strange sense of causality and flow

inherent to the work.

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[70] I think it appropriate to use the term "act" to describe the three primary narrative sections
of the *Historia Arianorum*. The Arian caricature grows increasingly stereotyped in his works
through his career to the point where they really do appear as actors on a stage. It is perhaps
no accident that in this very work, Athanasius himself describes the conspiracy as "a
comedy that they are performing on the stage, in which the pretended bishops are actors, and
Constantius the performer of their behests… and they dancing before him accomplish
through false accusations the banishment of the true believers of the Lord." Athanasius of
Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 52.

The introduction of the *HA* cues the reader into the essential traits of the Arian

conspiracy. His opponents are subversive hypocrites, criminals who exist only because they

have the favor of the emperor. In later sections of the work, these attributes point to a key

element of Athanasius' argument: the Arians surpass their heretical forbearers not because

of their ideas alone, but because the methods they employ as they banish bishops and disrupt

communities. The first act of the work is probably the closest to a "history" in the sense that

it follows a narrative chronology that ebbs between periods of peace and concord, and

violence and chaos. Athanasius begins with an account of the widespread machinations of

the Arians and continues through the death of Constantine, a tour of their efforts to

inseminate the empire with violence by removing locally-appointed bishops from their

cities. Much of the narrative focuses on the most controversial divisions of the day within

the communities of Antioch (Eustathius), Constantinople (Paul) and Adrianople (Eutropius),

but Athanasius also makes honorable mention of Balanea, Ancyra, Paltos, Antaradas, Gaza,

Beroea in Syria, Tenedos, Sirmium, and Tripolis.[71] The rapid tour across the empire gives

the sense that the conspiracy is far reaching, limited not to any single part of the empire but

a threat in every city.

Constantine's death brings a quick stop to this first period of confusion and heyday of

the Arian conspiracy. As his sons divide the empire between them, there is a short peace and

moment of consensus when, perceiving the Arian threat, "the three brothers, Constantine,

Constantius, and Constans, caused all after the death of their father to return to their own

country and Church."[72] It is a short-lived moment that passes quickly because the Arians

[71] Ibid., 4–7.

[72] Ibid., 8.

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cannot bear to see the decline of their heresy. They persuade Constantius to join their cause,

and with the eastern emperor behind them, the Arians again rise to power and create

problems for Athanasius even within the territory of his benefactor Constans in the west.

The Arians pursue Athanasius to Rome, where the bishop Julius holds a council that

exonerates Athanasius, although Alexandria suffers under Gregory of Cappadocia and the

prefect Philagrius who persecute bishops, virgins, and monks.[73] The standoff between the

Arian conspiracy under Ursacius and Valens and the lone figure of Athanasius reach a

critical moment when Constans writes to Constantius, urging an ecumenical council at

Serdica to resolve these problems of division and heresy. To Athanasius' mind, Serdica

should have been the end of the Arian problem. The council is a show of ecclesiastical unity

that is shattered when the bishops from the east bring with them the *comes* Musonianus and

an officer of the palace named Hesychius.[74]

　　The obstinate eastern bishops, Athanasius says, assumed that they could manipulate the

council with imperial power, a persistent theme in the *HA*, and certainly representative of

Athanasius' relationship with Constantius in 357 when he penned the work. Athanasius

contrasts the episcopal independence of the west with a bureaucratic secular authority in the

east that used intimidation to get its way. When the eastern delegation sees that the council

will be purely ecclesiastical, they withdraw and flee to the palace where they plot to further

incorporate Constantius into their designs.[75] This leads to one short Arian backlash in

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[73] Ibid., 11–15.

[74] Ibid., 15.

[75] Ibid.

Alexandria where they exile its orthodox clergy and Constantius orders that the borders of the city should be closed to not admit any of them, an act punishable by death.[76]

But the conspiracies of the Arians inevitably lead to their undoing in the final moments of the first act. The Council of Serdica sends two legates, Vincentius of Capua and Euphrates of Agrippina, to petition Constantius to let bishops acquitted at the council resume their post. Stephanus the bishop of Antioch, fearing this, sends a prostitute to Euphrates' quarters during Easter in the hopes of embarrassing him. When the woman recognizes Euphrates as a bishop, she reveals the conspiracy to all and Constantius deposes Stephanus and in his place, appoints a man named Leontius (who Athanasius characterizes as a eunuch). It is because of this event, Athanasius claims, that Constantius briefly perceives the Arian conspiracy, changes his mind, and allows Athanasius to return to Alexandria. Here we see Athanasius make an ungainly twist of causality that pervades the work. Though the Council took place in the autumn of 343, and the delegation from there reached Antioch in the spring of 344, Constantius did not fully endorse Athanasius' return until the death of Gregory on June 26, 345.[77] It was also because of repeated appeals and threats from Constans that Constantius changed his mind, though Athanasius mentions none of this in the work. The chronological gap allows Athanasius to shift the causality to a moral twist, locking Constantius in a pattern of indecision and irrationality. This is just one

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[76] Ibid., 19.

[77] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 90–92.

Ibid., 87.

example of the ways in which Athanasius treats time and space in the *HA* like clay, able to be condensed, expanded or warped to suit the cause.

As W.J.T. Mitchell argues, spatial form is present within a text, not just in connection with the more obvious temporal nature of literature (we visualize time in terms of space with units like long, short, interval, etc.).[78] There is a fluid molding of space and time in a text that places the reader in a particular spatial and temporal relationship with the text. Time can be made to produce the feeling that time has passed, slowed down, or been simply frozen.[79] On that same note our very interaction with a physical text puts us in a spatial relationship with it, as we engage with a "field of perception that is part of the descriptive space in the literary experience."[80] Mitchell leads us to think about the physical aspects of the text, both in the "world" it creates inside of itself as fluid ideas of time and space affect our mental image of the events that transpire, and well as the physical way we interact with a text in the real world. In this respect, we must be both cognizant of the effect that physical literature has upon our sense of space and place, as well as the internal world that the author creates. It is this three-dimensional "worldbuilding" that Athanasius plays with most. Temporally, individual anecdotes form a continuous stream of violence propagated by the emperor or his Arian allies. The conspiracy is always working, the minds of his opponents always contemplating Athanasius' demise. Decades melt away to form a sense of continuity or feverish indecision. One moment Constantius seems to support Athanasius, then suddenly he

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[78] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Spatial Form in Literature: Toward a General Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 6, no. 3 (1980): 541.

[79] Ibid., 543.

[80] Ibid., 551.

doesn't and persecutes all with little reason. Dates and context are unimportant here, what

matters is the unbroken flow of time. These quick shifts both serve to condense the instances

of violence into a short temporal space, again giving the illusion of constant struggle or

persecution, and give the impression of an indecisive and vacillating Constantius, another

subtle jab against the emperor's claim that he was the rational philosopher emperor.

Constantius' indecisiveness leads to the conclusion of the first act: Athanasius'

victorious return to Alexandria. It takes Constantius several attempts to persuade Athanasius

that he is sincere, but he ultimately succeeds and Athanasius takes a long meandering path

home that includes a victory lap through Palestine, where all the bishops "except two or

three," embraced communion with Athanasius and declared that "they wrote to excuse

themselves, on the ground that in what they had formerly written, they had acted, not

according to their own wishes, but by compulsion."[81] It is not unusual for Athanasius to

stress how readily he accepted the lapsed back into his fold. In the context of the work, it

allows him to show a benevolence that contrasts sharply with the caricature of his

opponents, but one could also see how such a policy was likely influenced by the legacy of

the Great Persecution in Alexandria discussed in Chapter 1.[82] Athanasius' accentuates his

unifying effect on the populace further upon his return home.

When Athanasius enters Alexandria, the city comes together in unity and virtue. Great

numbers of people take up the ascetic lifestyle, widows and orphans who once went hungry

and naked find care and peace. Young women who were to be married reject their suitors

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[81] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 25.

[82] Ibid.

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and maintain their virginity in the name of Christ. The joy of the people throughout Egypt and Libya results in the community uniting in unprecedented virtue.

> In a word, so great was their emulation in virtue, that you would have thought every family and every house a Church, by reason of the goodness of its inmates, and the prayers which were offered to God. And in the Churches there was a profound and wonderful peace…[83]

The image that Athanasius cultivates here, that of the proper bishop's return to his fold and resulting restoration of true virtue and concord, resonated with his later audience. Years later Gregory Nazianzus echoed Athanasius in his twenty-first oration for the bishop and imagined his entrance into Alexandria as that of Christ into Jerusalem, met with flowers, palms, dancing and singing and feasting. His return brought to the city "the speedy healing over, as in the body, of the wounds of separation," as the evil divisions wrought by George of Cappadocia unraveled with Athanasius' first step onto the quay.[84] The return of the true

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[83] Ibid.

[84] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Orationes Contra Arianos," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 29, 32. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration XXI."

> Permit me to revel a while longer in my description: for I am going there, and it is not easy to bring back even my words from that ceremony. [Athanasius] rode upon a colt, almost, blame me not for folly, as my Jesus did upon that other colt, whether it were the people of the Gentiles, whom He mounts in kindness, by setting it free from the bonds of ignorance, or something else, which the Scripture sets forth. He was welcomed with branches of trees, and garments with many flowers and of varied hue were torn off and strewn before him and under his feet: there alone was all that was glorious and costly and peerless treated with dishonor. Like, once more, to the entry of Christ were those that went before with shouts and followed with dances; only the crowd which sung his praises was not of children only, but every tongue was harmonious, as men contended only to outdo one another. I pass by the universal cheers, and the pouring forth of unguents, and the nightlong festivities, and the whole city gleaming with light, and the feasting in public and at home, and all the means of testifying to a city's joy, which were then in lavish and incredible profusion bestowed upon him… But yet it was not likely that envy could brook all this, or see the Church

bishop to Alexandria ended a period of division and ushered in a time when Egypt basked in the sunlit glow of unity and consensus.

In the *HA* however, it is not just Alexandria that revels in this newfound sense of unity. Although the empire is politically divided under two emperors, Serdica and its aftermath reveal true concord. Even Ursacius and Valens, his two arch-opponents and successors of Eusebius, recant their position before Julius of Rome and make peace with two of Athanasius' presbyters who happened to be there at the time.[85]

> And when they perceived the unanimity and peace (συμφωνίαν τε καὶ εἰρήνην) that existed between Athanasius and the Bishops (they were more than four hundred , from great Rome, and all Italy, from Calabria, Apulia, Campania, Bruttia, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, and the whole of Africa; and those from Gaul, Britain, and Spain, with the great Confessor Hosius; and also those from Pannonia, Noricum, Siscia, Dalmatia, Dardania, Dacia, Moesia, Macedonia, Thessaly, and all Achaia, and from Crete, Cyprus, and Lycia, with most of those from Palestine, Isauria, Egypt, the Thebais, the whole of Libya, and Pentapolis); when I say they perceived these things, they were possessed with envy and fear...[86]

Unlike Constantius' ὁμόνοια (*homonoia*) or oneness of mind, presumably inferring a singular organism embodied in the solitary figure of the emperor himself, Athanasius stresses συμφωνία (*symphonia*), a similar term that stresses unity but through a harmonious association between elements. It is perhaps a better suited word for this particular context in

restored again to the same glory and health as in former days, by the speedy healing over, as in the body, of the wounds of separation.

Though Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 6., laments the lack of historical details in Gregory's oration, the ideological implications of the work and its connection to Athanasius are significant in terms of Athanasius' residual network.

[85] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 26. Athanasius includes their letter to Julius, which he says he received from his friend Paul, the bishop of Trier. This is certainly indicative of the continued strength of correspondence between the two despite the immense distance and cost.

[86] Ibid., 28.

which bishops from across the empire, as Athanasius would have us believe, arrive at a moment of agreement together notably *without* those representing the emperor. In this respect, perhaps we can say *symphonia* can be reached in a politically divided empire as was the case at Serdica, the moment that Athanasius exemplifies as the ideal moment of true peace (εἰρήνη). It is here that we see the crescendo and conclusion of Athanasius' first act, wherein both Alexandria and the whole world, reach *true* concord and peace.

The second act (sections 29-51), fittingly undoes the concord of the first. Without missing a beat, Athanasius ignores four years and moves immediately from his return from exile to Magnentius' revolt. By conflating these events, Athanasius presents the very instant that Constantius' concord and peace ascends as the moment that the organic "orthodox" concord and peace of the church crumbles.[87] Constantius from this point onward joins the vanguard of the persecution himself, moving first to Arles and Milan where he starts his pogrom against orthodox bishops and forces Athanasius to flee from Alexandria. This ultimate moment of traumatic separation is where Athanasius digresses into the mechanisms by which the Arians, with Constantius at their head, exert their authority and coerce the bishops of the empire to their side.

Physical coercion, Athanasius argues, is evidence of a bankrupt ideology. Those who have confidence in what they believe do not need such tools to bring others to their cause. Constantius' efforts not only show him to be imbued with false philosophy, but his actions make a further correlation, as Constantius "like Devil, when he has no truth on his side,

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[87] Athanasius returned from exile in 346, Magnentius rose up against Constantius in 350, Constantius defeated him in 353, and forced Athanasius into exile in 356. For chronology, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 101–8.

attacks and breaks down the doors of them that admit him with axes and hammers."[88] This is

a recurring theme in the work. Violence and coercion carry the heresy of the Arians heresy

beyond the place where its appeal to the rational mind fails. By applying this force to the

church and placing imperial supervision over councils, Constantius oversteps his place in the

cosmic order. The bishops for their part try to instruct Constantius on that matter, telling him

that,

> …the kingdom was not his, but God's, who had given it to him, Whom also they bid
> him fear, lest He should suddenly take it away from him… warned him against
> infringing Ecclesiastical order, and mingling Roman sovereignty with the constitution
> of the Church.[89]

It is the most controversial message of the *Historia Arianorum*, and likely only one that

Athanasius could make when he had nothing left to lose. He directly challenges the

emperor's traditional role as the *pontifex maximus* and primary link to the divine, placing

instead the bishops themselves in that position as intermediary.

Once Athanasius establishes this dichotomy, he then moves to a detailed picture of two

instances of persecution; Liberius and Hosius. It is no coincidence that Athanasius brings

these two bishops into the picture. Liberius of course being the bishop of Rome, the spiritual

heart of the Roman Empire and Hosius of Cordoba was the bishop who presided over

Nicaea. Rhetorically in this order we see Constantius attack first the heart of the empire

itself, newly come into his hands, and then attack the basis for orthodox belief which the

emperor's father put into place himself.[90] Athanasius follows these two examples in the

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[88] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 33.

[89] Ibid., 34.

[90] Athanasius of Alexandria, "De Decretis," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th

western empire by bringing the reader back to Alexandria, which he serves up as an example

of the complete breakdown of society that happens when Constantius oversteps his authority

and deposes bishops.

In the third and final movement (sections 52-75), Athanasius conflates the geographical

and the cosmological. He argues that Constantius, as the new patron of the Arians, has taken

the heresy to an unprecedented level of violence that outdoes even the Great Persecution of

Diocletian. Other heresies when confronted by the rational arguments of orthodoxy become

confounded and silent. Christ has given individuals free will, and he knocks at the door and

waits for an individual to answer, "for the truth is not preached with swords or with darts,

nor by means of soldiers; but by persuasion and counsel."[91] With the emperor as their

patron, the Arians move beyond other heresies and coerce bishops to their side. Through

threats and promises, they represent a threat to Christianity never seen before, even during

the Great Persecution.[92] By performing actions that which is diametrically opposed to the

actions of Christ and holding opinions counter to him and persecuting the church on an

unprecedented scale, Constantius shows himself to be the Antichrist.

> He is surely such a one as Antichrist would be. He speaks words against the Most High by supporting this impious heresy: he makes war against the saints by banishing the Bishops… Moreover, he has surpassed those before him in wickedness, having devised a new mode of persecution… For he sends from strange places, distant a fifty days' journey, Bishops attended by soldiers to people unwilling to receive them; and instead of an introduction to the acquaintance of their people, they bring with them threatening messages and letters to the magistrates.[93]

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ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 97–148.

[91] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 33.

[92] Ibid., 40.

[93] Ibid., 74.

In fact, Athanasius goes so far as to correlate Constantius' actions with specific references from the book of Daniel; that he will surpass all others in the evil he commits, persecute saints, and "humble three kings," who Athanasius argues correspond to Vetranio, Magnentius, and Gallus.[94] In this final section we see Athanasius map the world in three dimensions. Time he conflates, placing all events in a moment of chaos brought to a crescendo. Geographical space he maximizes by cataloguing the many bishops that Constantius exiled, and finally warps the previous two dimensions into a cosmological context in which the turmoil heralds nothing less than the end times themselves.

The result of this cosmic revelation and the solo reign of Constantius is complete chaos. In Alexandria, the Arians under George of Cappadocia replicate the same acts that we saw Athanasius discuss in his *Epistula Encyclica* of 339 and the later *Apologia Contra Arianos* where he describes Gregory's entrance into Alexandria. Acting "like Scythians," the Arians scourge members of the clergy and ascetics alike under the authority of the comes, prefect, and head of police. Heathens, who once supported Christians during the persecution of Maxentius and hid them from the persecutors themselves become the instruments of persecution. The youths in particular approach virgins naked and harass them, exposing their heads, scourging their bodies, and expose them to horrific language. They even go so far as to sack the Church of Theonas. Fortunately, divine justice does not sit idly by and when one individual sits upon the bishop's throne singing lewd songs, he is struck in the bowls and defecates his own intestines.[95] Athanasius; imagination resorts to a series of tropes that highlight the chaos and division within Alexandria. The Arians even allow women insult

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[94] Ibid.

[95] Ibid., 57.

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anyone they choose, and they harass "holy and faithful women… like Bacchanals and Furies."[96] The Arians even corrupt the justice system itself, establishing a "new kind of court" which treats bishops worse than murderers and thieves.[97] It is not difficult here to see the contrast Athanasius poses to the image of peace and unity under Constantius. The emperor's removal of true bishops and willingness to replace them with heretical foreigners, results in catastrophic consequences for the moral and communal integrity of the city.

Athanasius' harsh polemic aside, the work is a fascinating look at how Athanasius deploys information to create what is in effect, an ever-shifting map of the empire. Athanasius teleports the reader from a rich description of violence in Alexandria, to another story of conspiracy and persecution in a far distant city. Occasionally Athanasius populates the interstitial places between specific events with phrases like, "he compelled then the people in every city to change their party," "how many in every city were roughly handled, lest they should accuse them as friends of the Bishops!," or "in short, every place and every city was full of fear and confusion, while the Bishops were dragged along to trial, and the magistrates witnessed the lamentations and groans of the people."[98] Coupled with the examples, these phrases consciously shape in the reader's mind a mental map, an image of an empire in turmoil where violence pervades every nook and cranny.[99] Though the quality

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[96] Ibid., 59.

[97] Ibid., 61.

[98] Ibid., 31.

[99] Although certain aspects of physical violence are extant and act as a starting point, the act of persecution for Athanasius did not need to go so far as to inflict bodily harm. The simple act of removing a bishop from his organic setting within a community was an act of violence under the rhetoric of persecution. It is, Athanasius contends, a new form of persecution, one that occurs when the emperor imposes upon a community an outside bishop, someone who breaks the chain of apostolic descent and has no knowledge of the needs and customs of the

of the information Athanasius provides may ring dissonant in the ear of the contemporary

historian, despite the problematic narrative of the work the more exacting information within

it constitutes real knowledge derived from real sources, showing the extent of Athanasius'

network.

Moving Through the World

It is always refreshing to emerge from Athanasius' literary funhouse and see the light of

day. When we last left Athanasius in the real world, he was penning the *Historia Arianorum*

in the Egyptian desert and compiling a narrative based on his own experiences to create a

world that appeared to be falling apart. But for whom was he writing this narrative? The

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community. To understand this correlation between the removal of a bishop and violence/persecution, I find Johan Galtung's work on violence and peace helpful. Galtung, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research," 168. Galtung summarizes his multifaced approach to violence by contending that, "violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations." In this definition, violence lies between what Galtung calls the "actual" and the "potential."[99] If for example, a vaccine were available to cure a patient, and a doctor or family member denied that person access to that vaccine, the action would constitute violence by limiting the patient's potential. When Athanasius invoked this appointment of outside bishops as persecution (despite the fact that it was an increasingly common practice after Constantine), he invoked an idea common among many of his contemporaries. Many Christians, including Gregory Nazianzus, saw the bishop as the focal link between the community and the Divine, something that could often run afoul of an emperor who saw themselves occupying the same space. Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church*, 82.

Interpreting scripture correctly was an important part of this idea, something that could only be guaranteed by the proper succession from the apostolic past. Breaking that apostolic succession was to introduce the possibility of error, and in the case of the Constantius, replacing bishops of the Nicene variety with those of a more moderate position completely severed the link between the community and the Divine. In this sense, Constantius denied Christian communities something they had access to: salvation. He didn't need to harm their bodies to persecute them, all he had to do was remove the head of their church and sever the connection between their souls and God. In this sense, Athanasius creates an image of violence that in the ancient psyche was more pervasive than the desecration of the body and thus challenged the Christian emperor's monopoly on conventional coercive tactics. Between Hellene monotheists, Christians, Jews, and Manichees, this was a common notion and would have been a recognizable concern for anyone within that cultural matrix.

real-life audience is elusive in comparison to Athanasius' other works and scholars have not engaged with the issue in much detail.

A letter to the monks precedes the manuscripts of the *H.A.,* leading some editors to label the work *Historia Arianorum ad monachos.*[100] Barnes (1993) takes this traditional stance to the issue, "the History of the Arians was addressed, if indeed it had a definite audience, to monks sympathetic to the author."[101] Gwynn (2009), argues against this traditional interpretation on the basis that the letter to the monks does not constitute a preface to the work, and that the content itself shows little concern with monastic themes. Instead he maintains that the work was for a wider Egyptian audience, as Athanasius calls for his followers to "endure this 'heretical persecution' and to continue to uphold his own legitimacy and orthodoxy."[102] Gwynn's position on the original "monastic" audience is certainly merited. Though shoring up loyalty among his last bastion of supporters would seem a good thing to do in a time of peril, the *HA* seems like an entirely inappropriate way to do so. Athanasius' *Life of Antony,* with its focus on the relationship between the bishop and the ascetic community, would seem like a much more suitable method of capturing the attention and loyalty of monks.[103] But I also find Gwynn's conclusion too limited. In his later career, Athanasius' language of universalism ran strong through the rest of his

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[100] Opitz, *Athanasius Werke.*, 181–82.

Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum Ad Monachos," in *Patrologiae Cursus Completus Series Graeca*, ed. J.P. Migne, vol. 25, 1871, 595.

[101] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, 126.

[102] Gwynn, *The Eusebians*, 2007, 41.

[103] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Vita Antonii."

works.[104] It was not just Gregory Athanasius hoped his readers would resist, but the entire network of that Gregory represented, headed of course by Constantius himself. Though Egypt's symbolic role in the work serves as a vehicle for understanding the effects of the Arians upon other communities, Egypt itself is not the focal point of the work. I believe we should look beyond Egypt for the answer to the question of audience. The scope of the work is paired with a philosophical depth that is often lost to the modern reader amidst the distracting, bombastic rhetoric of the *HA*. Caught up in the grotesque imagery, we lose focus on the underlying transcripts of legitimacy and power that gird the work.

Though the words of the *HA* may be brash, the ideas that drive the actions of the Arians actions are richly steeped in Late Antique philosophies of power, legitimacy, and connection to the divine. Athanasius makes a striking argument, one that could only come out of such a desperate time: that the bishop, not the emperor, was the primary point of contact with the divine, the true *pharmakon* for the empire. Susanna Elm identifies exactly this argument as the primary point of dispute between Constantius' successor Julian, and Gregory Nazianzus, but there is good reason to believe that this debate between the two was a direct continuation of the struggle between Athanasius and Constantius. Regardless of Athanasius' intentions, the *HA* would not have circulated widely while Constantius was still alive. The ideas contained within it however outlived Constantius and would certainly have been acceptable to some extent under Julian who had no problem with a narrative that said his predecessor was the antichrist. Further, Athanasius brings up Constantius' purge of the imperial family after Constantine's death.

> His uncles he slew; his cousins he put out of the way; he commiserated not the sufferings of his father-in-law, though he had married his daughter, or of his kinsmen;

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[104] Brakke, "Jewish Flesh and Christian Spirit in Athanasius of Alexandria," 456.

but he has ever been a transgressor of his oaths towards all. So likewise he treated his brother in an unholy manner; and now he pretends to build his sepulcher, although he delivered up to the barbarians his betrothed wife Olympias, whom his brother had protected till his death, and had brought up as his intended consort.[105]

Such language would have pleased Julian whose own parents perished in the purge.[106] Though Julian and Athanasius were not on good terms, it is unlikely that the emperor would have seen anything particularly offensive to his own person, in fact it may have helped his case for rebelling against Constantius.[107] But to bring us back to Gregory Nazianzus, the year that Constantius died (361) was the same year that Gregory's father ordained him a presbyter. It would have been the first year that Athanasius' *Historia Arianorum* could have circulated freely and it was Gregory of Nazianzus, who as we saw earlier, penned an oration to Athanasius after the bishop's death. As we will see in the next chapter, Gregory Nazianzus was a member of Athanasius' extended network and a moderate user of the word "Arian" to slander his own opponents. It is likely that though Athanasius was not the first come up with this idea, the desperation of that moment in 357 provoked him to put it into writing, opening up the discourse for other bishops.

The *HA* was a piece of resistance literature, and I suggest we turn to James C. Scott's work on the role of hidden transcripts to identify Athanasius' audience. Though perhaps only "hidden," in the sense that the dramatic nature of the work offends our own modern tastes and overshadows the message behind it, it still represents what Scott calls a "critique

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[105] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 69.

[106] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*; Burgess, "THE SUMMER OF BLOOD," 10. Julian, "Letter to the Senate and People of Athens," in *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, trans. Wilmer Cave Wright, vol. 2 (New York, NY: The MacMillan Co., 1913), 249. Julian himself only alludes to the events in his letter to the Athenians.

[107] Julian exiled Athanasius in 362 but Athanasius returned upon the emperor's death in 363. Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 121.

of power spoken behind the back of the dominant."[108] The *HA* contradicts the party line of Constantius and serves as an example for anyone who wanted to contest that power. In fact, the grotesque extravagance of the work engages in the dialectic of "disguise and surveillance," that Scott uses to frame the competing relationship between the powerful and the weak, a notion he exemplifies with a famous proverb of Jamaican slaves, "Play fool, to catch the wise."[109] On one level the melodramatic image of Constantius as the Antichrist and the blasphemy of pagans unleashed by the Arians upon orthodox churches critiques the person and leadership Constantius, but the dialogue hides a more insidious and dangerous critique: the figure of the emperor himself in relation to the divine.

It is this underlying argument, the role of the bishop vis-à-vis the emperor, controversial as it was, that suggests Athanasius' work was not for monks or laity, but for exactly the individuals he wrote about: members of his own episcopal network. It was a piece of resistance literature, one that urged fellow bishops to resist Constantius' program of unity and consensus. There was true risk in the unity of the network that Athanasius had created during his exile, particularly in the west. By 357, Hosius had lapsed, as had Fortunatianus of Aquileia and Liberius of Rome. The others in exile, though "coerced" as they might have been, were always at risk to accept to one degree or another Constantius' consensus-building for the sake of their community and careers. In the second to last section of the work, Athanasius reassures his audience that,

> …for them that endure tribulations here, as sailors reach a quiet haven after a storm, as wrestlers receive a crown after the combat, so these shall obtain great and eternal joy and delight in heaven;— such as Joseph obtained after those tribulations; such as

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[108] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Yale University Press, 1990), x.

[109] Ibid., 3.

the great Daniel had after his temptations and the manifold conspiracies of the courtiers against him; such as Paul now enjoys, being crowned by the Saviour; such as the people of God everywhere expect.[110]

Resist the emperor and have faith. It is not a complex message, but when connected to the other theme of *who* can connect the community to the divine, it throws into relief that the stakes behind resistance were not merely to preserve a Nicene theology, nor keep political power within Athanasius' network, but rather a combination of the two. Athanasius makes this clear when he describes the situation in Egypt, which had "heretofore been the only country, throughout which the profession of the orthodox faith was boldly maintained."[111] Because of its continuous and strong leadership, Egypt remained the ultimate prize, yet even there the Antichrist has stirred up trouble within Egypt so that when the devil comes, "he may find that the Churches in Egypt also are his own."[112] The stakes for the empire were cosmological. If the "true" bishops submit, they acquiesce to a world torn by violence and an *oikoumenê* that would be overcome by the devil and find itself severed from the divine. I do not think that in his exile Athanasius had any fantasies that the work would reach his ecclesiastical audience immediately, but he did envision a time when Constantius would be deceased. The Arians, like the Sadducees, Herodians, and Pharisees who could not obscure the truth though they had Pilate's favor, "are nevertheless left destitute, and wait in utter shame, expecting shortly to become bereft, like the partridge, when they shall see their patron near his death."[113] The status quo, Athanasius urges his audience, would eventually

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[110] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 79.

[111] Ibid., 78.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Ibid., 32.

overturn (though he probably could not in his wildest dreams have thought Constantius

would die so young at the age of 44). The audience of a literary work need not be tied to one

that is immediately accessible. It was the message that mattered, and its primary thesis

seems to have struck a chord among other bishops once it did start to circulate.

A Map of a Network

It is not just the internal content but also the potential audience of the *HA* that leads us to

think about the information Athanasius used to populate his literary map of an empire

riddled with violence and persecution. Earlier in the chapter, we discussed the two narrow

paths accessible to the

Figure 11. Map of Athanasius' travels (white) and instances of violence (red)

Alexandrian traveler
during the summer and
winter months: how the
environmental
constraints on travel in
the form of prevailing
winds and currents

oriented Athanasius' own view of the difficult nature of travel from Alexandria to other

parts of the Mediterranean. The literary world that Athanasius created in the *HA* reflected

this same world. The startlingly rigid patterns of Athanasius' travels between 335 and 347

become evident when we examine a map of his travels, overlaid with the incidents of

violence and persecution that he brings to bear in the *HA* (Figure 11). To be sure, there are

locations not mapped here where he undoubtedly stayed, but the locations marked with a

white dot are places of importance, mentioned primarily in his own writings or the letters

contained within them as locations where he met with emperors, stayed for an extended period, or attended a council. These were places of economic and political power, and thus their importance dictated the routes of travel and therefore the people with whom Athanasius came into contact. The red dots signify locations of violence or persecution in the *Historia Arianorum*, and their close correlation with the white locations expose three primary axes of travel, which correlate to shipping corridors and trade networks that emanated out of Alexandria.

The high concentration of instances of violence in the *HA* and Athanasius' own travels up the coast of Palestine stress the effect that the prevailing etesian winds had upon his network. Though merchant vessels regularly braved the winter storms to make the treks across the Mediterranean for grain and valuable goods, Athanasius did this only when absolutely necessary and as discussed before, it would have consisted of two long passages with few ports of call. The northward coast-hopping required during the summer months to visit councils and emperors however, meant that Athanasius visited a number of spots up and down the coast of the Levant, where he likely stopped for the night and sought out like-minded individuals for discussion, lodging, and perhaps a decent meal.

We see a second axis on the map, one that runs from Constantinople in a north-westerly direction along the Danube River, a pattern at the edge of the empire. There are three likely explanations for this route, each building upon the other. Since the last few decades of the third century, the fortune of emperors was made or broken by military activity along the Danube, Rhine, and Persian frontiers. The movement of peoples along these frontiers represented simultaneous opportunities for trade and the potential for violent disorder. On occasion troops in these regions raised their leaders to the purple through acclamation,

fomenting revolt. Constantine and his sons frequented cities like Antioch, Nicomedia, Caesarea in Cappadocia, Milan, Trier, and Viminacium, most of which were either along a frontier or within its proximity. But it was not just the emperors alone that drew Athanasius' travel. Where the emperors were, so too was there usually an army.

The army of the late empire was a mobile but nonetheless lumbering beast and it could not sufficiently mine resources from the surrounding area to sustain itself. The military reforms of the early Dominate period combined the *comitatenses* with fixed supply centers.[114] These warehouses (*horreae*), were the material part of the late antique *annona militaris*, and acted as fixed supply centers for the mobile military from the early third and into the fourth centuries.[115] Filling these warehouses and supplying the army required mercantile trade, making these locations foci for commerce with connections to other ports in the empire, one of the most important of which was Alexandria. The Egyptian grain supply ran from Alexandria to Constantinople and to other places that could not sustain themselves by means of their own hinterlands. Similarly, the Red Sea trade from India that brought goods up the Nile also attracted merchants. From Alexandria, they headed where the winds and currents allowed them in search of markets, and what better place to do so than imperial centers and supply depots? Three of the locations along the Danube where Athanasius stayed, Aquileia, Naissus, and Serdica, all sported a *horrea*. The fourth location, Viminacium in the east, was only a four-and-a-half-day journey from another *horrea* at

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[114] Pat Southern and Karen R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (Yale University Press, 1996), 79.

[115] Efthymios Rizos, "Centres of the Late Roman Military Supply Network in the Balkans: A Survey of Horrea," *Jahrbuch Des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums Mainz* 60, no. 2 (2015): 659–696.

Sirmium.[116] It quickly becomes clear that Athanasius positioned himself in these cities not just to because he occasionally needed to petition an emperor, but because they offered the fastest and cheapest form of communication with Alexandria itself.

The third and final axis, which runs north to south from Trier to Rome, again follows a major trade route that ran south through Milan. Trier and Milan, besides being imperial centers selected for their proximity to the frontier, were themselves host to *horreae* and with their link to Rome, again fall back into the sphere of fast and easy communication with Alexandria. Scholars have long observed that the frontiers of the late empire were economically vibrant centers. Far from being the "ends of civilization," rivers like the Danube were the highways of the ancient world, the foci of economic activity, cultural exchange, and trade.[117] In the fourth century, the political and military focus of the empire shifted to this borderland region. Considerable unrest on the frontiers manifested in the movement and migration of peoples, and potential usurpers whose troops raised them to the purple. The frontiers were a hub of activity, and they attracted emperors, merchants, and exiled bishops.[118]

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[116] Two of these locations (Sirmium and Serdica) were also places of major church councils in the mid-fourth century, which suggests they were chosen not only for their proximity to imperial centers but also for ease of logistics along existing prominent trade routes.

[117] C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, Ancient Society and History (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 8.

[118] There are, of course, outliers to these axes. But we must remember that Athanasius did not just bolster his network along linear lines of travel, but that church councils were locations of ecclesiastical convergence where he could meet new acquaintances. Hosius is a good example of this, their relationship going back to the Council of Nicaea in 325. In addition, as the *HA* makes abundantly clear, Athanasius was not the only bishop exiled. Early on he met Marcellus of Ancyra in Rome as a fellow exile, and later many bishops like Lucifer of Calaris were exiled to Egypt at a time when Athanasius was still bishop of Alexandria.

Athanasius' pattern of travel and its three axes make sense most when we orient back toward Alexandria. I made the comment earlier that when standing on almost any shore, Athanasius could have envisioned a ship taking him home on those steady northerly winds. While this is true in terms of travel *to* Alexandria, we must remember the individual standing in Alexandria facing the northward journey and how this bi-directional nature of exchange affected correspondence and social relationships. Noticeably absent from Athanasius' information in the HA are large percentages of North Africa, Spain and Gaul. Though in his travels to councils he undoubtedly met many people from these regions (Hosius of Corduba being the most obvious example) relationships required maintenance, facilitated by the volume of travel between the two points. Though ships bearing information from these areas could have easily made their way to Alexandria, relationships with individuals from these locations were difficult for Athanasius to maintain. Reciprocity between *amicitiae* was essential for the Late Antique correspondence, whether one was Christian or not, and letters maintained friendships and social networks when visitation was impossible.[119] The ships that came to bear grain and luxury goods from Alexandria's harbors found that winds and currents urged them away from these regions, which in turn made it difficult for Athanasius to keep up his end of the correspondence.

We can visualize this phenomenon on the macro-level using a Minard Diagram that Walter Scheidel developed his ORBIS project through Stanford University. A Minard

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[119] Michele Renee Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 54.

Michele Renee Salzman, "Travel and Communication in the Letters of Symmachus," in *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane*, ed. Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 92–94.

Diagram is a cost/time simulation, in this case for Walter Scheidel's project of the Roman World circa 200CE, the "flow" of the routes represent information drawn primarily from bulk-good and political-military

Figure 12. Flow map of Alexandria. The width of branches corresponds to the frequency of travel, the changing color from light blue to red corresponds to cost and time
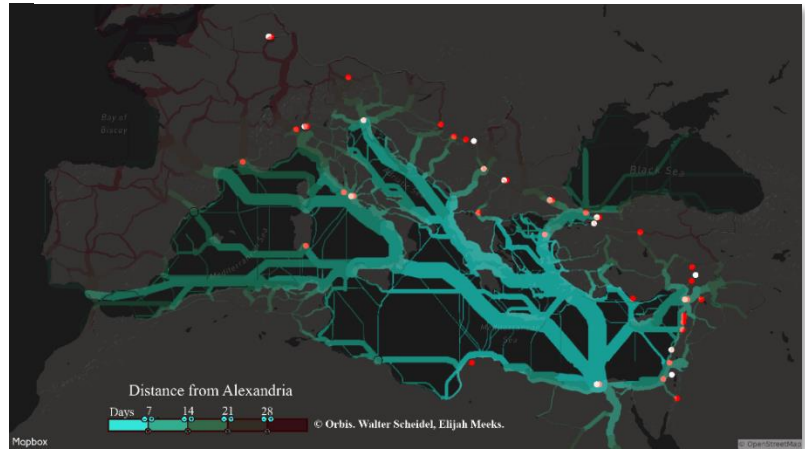
networks. Though relatively small in scope, bulk-good networks were intense as we can see by the limited routes and fact that once they reach a particular point, the cost/time ratio increases exponentially.[120] The flow map in Figure 12 highlights the correlation between the intensity of the Alexandrian trade network and Athanasius' social network as depicted in the *Historia Arianorum*. It is important, given our discussion earlier about reciprocity with respect to correspondence, to note that this map in the context of Mediterranean Sea travel does not distinguish between directional elements relating to the flow of traffic. We must not assume that every route allowed for effective communication. The connections to North

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[120] Walter Scheidel, "The Shape of the Roman World: Modelling Imperial Connectivity," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 27 (January 2014): 11. Scheidel, Walter, and Elijah Meeks. "ORBIS: The Stanford Geospatial Network Model of the Roman World." Stanford University. Accessed February 27, 2017. http://orbis.stanford.edu/. Though the ORBIS model is based on a model of the Roman world circa 200CE, the routes shown here are primarily major water routes that remained stable through most of the Roman period because of major emporia they helped tie together. Sidebotham, *Berenike and the Ancient Maritime Spice Route*, 208. In fact, the maritime economy of the fourth and fifth centuries was significantly larger than the late third century, rivaling the economic connectivity under the *Pax Romana*. Linda Ellis and Frank L. Kidner, *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity: Sacred and Profane* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

Africa and Spain, though they appear in the seven to fourteen-day range, would have been

unreliable for this purpose given the patterns of wind and current. The "strands" of these

branches are narrower in comparison to the broader branches of routes that run from

Alexandria toward Palestine, Pannonia by way of Anatolia, and Rome by way of Crete. The

relationship between the three axes we discussed above and Alexandria itself come into

relief when we account for the strategic role that Alexandria played both in the *annona*

civilis and *militaris*, but also as the final point of disbursement to the Mediterranean for

routes coming up the Trans-Arabian Incense Route. Though these goods were in demand in

many other places in the empire, environmental aspects curtailed the available routes that

ships could travel which in turn affected the volume of traffic, its frequency, and cost.

As I stressed earlier in the chapter, movement home for Athanasius was always faster

and easier than the departure. The Mediterranean environment made choices difficult or

irregular for Egyptians looking outward. The natural and easy routes lay inward, up toward

the Red Sea along the wide corridors of the Nile River and steady northerly winds. But the

Mediterranean still presented economic and political incentives, whether that was the

bureaucracy of the Roman Empire or the lavish goods from India housed in Alexandria that

called to merchants. Athanasius positioned himself in exile, and maintained relationships

with his northern brethren, according to these limited lines of travel.[121] Few of the points

marked above were on routes longer than twenty-one days. Granted, some places like Trier

were the residences of close friends or special relationships despite being outside of the most

efficient networks. But these were relationships that Athanasius and his counterpart deemed

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[121] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*,
94.

worth the effort, and it would seem that in the case where Paul of Trier sent Athanasius a copy of the recantation letters of Ursacius and Valens, such effort paid off.[122]

Conclusion

To Athanasius sitting in Alexandria, the routes leading north were limited in number and required a constant negotiation between risk and time. Perspectives like those of Amitav Ghosh present us with a new way of looking at Athanasius', and Alexandria's, relationship with the Mediterranean. It encourages us to scrutinize the notion that Egypt's existed in a quasi-"natural" relationship with Europe. Though we may question whether this is a purely modern creation, given that Rome itself (and Greece before it) held an infatuation with Egypt since the time of Augustus, I suspect that Egypt never returned that love in kind. The Egyptian world looked upriver, toward Nubia, Axum, and Ben Yijû's final destination of Mangalore. For Athanasius, trouble came from the north.

As we begin to turn our eye toward where the narrative of "Arians" germinated outside of Egypt, we must start with the routes along which Athanasius or his written works had the opportunity to travel. The map that this chapter set out to draw of Athanasius' Mediterranean network, will help us trace the contingencies surrounding who used the word Arianism. It shows us who had access to a definition that provided meaning to the word, and why individuals in this network chose to deploy the label in a specific context. In the next chapter, we will detach ourselves from Alexandria and travel the lines we established here, looking closely at the individuals with whom Athanasius maintained correspondence.

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[122] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 26.

Chapter 4

A Conspiracy Unmasked

Introduction

One of the most agreeable aspects of fame is that, at a certain point, one's reputation reaches a sort of critical mass and clients seek you out without any effort on your part. It is a phenomenon that the fourth-century rhetorician Libanius tried to achieve for years in Antioch as he set his sights on the *bouletērion*, the most public and prestigious speaking venue in the city. By dominating this public space and its swarms of students, Libanius was later able to retreat into private life, comfortable in the knowledge that students would seek him out in his home of their own accord.[1] The same could be said for Libanius' contemporary Athanasius.

Though last we left our bishop sitting in in exile in the desert in 357, connected to the world abroad by networks reached out to people and places he had visited during his first two exiles, Athanasius' fortunes shifted drastically in 361. For all the bureaucratic heft of the fourth-century imperial court, the rapid speed by which the tides of favor could change with the death of an emperor remained unchanged from the time of the Principate. Constantius died only two years after his Christian consensus at Ariminum while marching against the rebellion of his nephew Julian. This had a profound effect on those who under Constantius had been ecclesiastical insiders. Julian unraveled his cousin's achievements and gave clemency to exiled Nicene Christians, among them Athanasius. For Constantius'

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[1] Christine Shepardson, *Controlling Contested Places: Late Antique Antioch and the Spatial Politics of Religious Controversy* (Univ of California Press, 2014), 41.

supporters, the results were not so pleasant.[2] When news of the emperor's death reached

Alexandria, authorities imprisoned Athanasius' replacement George of Cappadocia. A

month later, on Christmas day 361, a lynch mob broke into the prison and murdered him.[3]

Athanasius marched triumphantly, once again, into Alexandria on February 21 of 362

and he immediately exercised what influence he had to stem a quarrel in Antioch between

Paulinus of Antioch and Meletius of Sebaste. In what was to be a reunion of sorts,

Athanasius and many of his closest supporters convened in the spring of 362 in Alexandria.

A significant number of those in attendance were individuals who Athanasius had included

in the *Historia Arianorum's* "map" of persecution four years earlier: Eusebius of Vercellae,

Asterius of Arabia Petraia, Cymatius of Paltus, Anatolius of Beroea, and Lucifer of Calaris,

in addition to members of the Egyptian clergy.[4] The council was an opportunity for

Athanasius to convene the closest members of his network and use the leverage his

reputation provided to reinforce a tenuous peace in the Antiochene Church. It was the first

exercise on the part of Athanasius and his faction to frame the current conflict from their

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[2] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Ammianus Marcellinus*, XXII.3-4.

[3] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Acephala," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 2.8-10.

[4] The Egyptians who saw exile in the *HA* and show up at the council are: Agathus of Phragonis, Ammonius of Pachnemunis, Agathodeamon, Adelphius of Onuphis, Dracontius of Lesser Hermupolis, and Paphnutius of Sais. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Tomus Ad Antiochenos," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 481–86. Athanasius of Alexandria, "Historia Arianorum," 4–7. For a description of the council, see Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 156–57.

own narrative position. The *Tomus ad Antiochenos* urges the parties of Antioch to receive those who were,

> seceding from the Arians… and welcome them as tutors and guardians; and unite them to our beloved Paulinus and his people… without requiring more from them than to anathematize the Arian heresy and confess the faith confessed by the holy fathers at Nicaea… for this is in truth a complete renunciation of the abominable heresy of the Arians.[5]

Athanasius and his cohort called for the Antiochenes to unite in the face of a greater adversary and put aside petty differences. The letter raised Athanasius' international profile as a moderator and leader in the region and designated him the leader of the movement as it redrew the lines of ecclesiastical division. As Athanasius' profile grew in a political climate that lacked Constantius' presence, it brought with it a wider range of solicitors.

It was soon after this council that a bishop named Rufinianus wrote an unsolicited letter to Athanasius and asked for clarification on how to deal with exactly these same issues of reconciliation. It is a short exchange, Athanasius praises Rufinianus' attempt to reach out as a pious and right action and offers the same advice as that give in the *Tomus ad Antiochenos*, and he wrote,

> But in the case of men not deliberate in impiety, but drawn away by necessity and violence, that they should not only receive pardon, but should occupy the position of clergy: the more so, in that they offered a plausible defense, and what had happened seemed due to a certain special purpose.[6]

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[5] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Tomus Ad Antiochenos," 3.

[6] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Letter LV to Rufinianus," in *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. Archibald Robertson, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Second Series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers Marketing, LLC, 1892), 566–67.

Athanasius provides broad opportunity for Rufinianus to interpret such excuses as he sees fit, though he ends the letter with a casual retreat to the overarching narrative of division he and the council issued to Antioch:

> Thanks to the Lord that filled you with all utterance and with all knowledge. Let then those that repent openly anathematize by name the error of Eudoxius and Euzoius. For they blasphemed still, and wrote that He was a creature, ringleaders of the Arian heresy. But let them confess the faith confessed by the fathers at Nicaea, and that they put no other synod before that one. Greet the brotherhood with you.[7]

By distancing themselves from the likes of Eudoxius and Euzoius, and reaching out to Athanasius, Rufinianus signaled that he was one of them. Rufinianus wrote to Athanasius looking for information that he himself and his own network could not provide. It was a simple question regarding how to deal with reconciliation of a community, but it came with the implicit assumption that Athanasius was a source for that information and could provide it as a figure of authority. Athanasius gladly served as that conduit. By doing so, he brought Rufinianus into the social network that the narrative represented, offering social capital to each individual and by extension, a vehicle along which the narrative of Arianism could move. In social networking terms, this represented a "weak tie," which despite its name is one of the most powerful features of a social network in that it offers the individuals control over new information that others in their network do not have access to.[8] It is one of the subtlest of ways that we can look at how the idea of Arianism moved, but the ones we shall look at in this chapter were those that formed a stronger relationship between those who used the word to describe their world.

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[7] Ibid.

[8] David Easley and Jon Kleinberg, *Networks, Crowds, and Markets: Reasoning About a Highly Connected World* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 59–63.

The social network data around which this chapter revolves provides a big-picture bookend to a discussion that has largely focused on Athanasius himself. It follows just a few of the ways in which a group of individuals with varying degrees of connectivity to one another wrapped themselves in the Arian narrative and all of the cosmic, political, and memorial connotations we have to this point discussed. As a point of clarity, at no point do I suggest that individuals adopted the term and its connotations from Athanasius wholesale, and from an epistemological perspective, it is unlikely anyone possessed complete access to Athanasius and his writings. What we instead focus on here are the social connections around which Arianism floated. This chapter is about those links, the ones that connect individuals and clusters of people. The first part will discuss the data that I bring to the table. The second part will then progress into the small group, the older generation around Athanasius who used the term Arian as a resistance narrative before finding a place among a younger and more ascetically-minded generation who ultimately helped transform the narrative from one of resistance against imperial authority to a narrative of domination in the reign of Theodosius I.

A Social Network, Visualized

Though the surviving Christian narrative texts of the fourth century lack diversity, the record remains rich in people. We owe this in part to the fact that Christians felt the need to categorize themselves and one another, a tradition that went back to Irenaeus but gained arguably exponentially greater importance under Constantine and his successors. Scholars have long recognized that these categories themselves, whether we are talking about "sects" "heresies" or "parties," were constructs that overlay a fluid reality. But what remains easier to establish are relationships between individuals. Individuals like Rufinus of Aquileia and

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Jerome could waver as friends and foes, but as Elizabeth Clark argued in her 1992 social

network study on the Origenist controversy, it was the social tensions between the two

stemmed from overlapping networks that tugged participants in separate directions. In this

case, Origen was a code word for a number of theological issues that rose from tensions

between individual loyalties.

This chapter follows similar lines but on a larger scale thanks to a database that I created

with available prosopographical data and then visualized with open-source social

networking software.[9] This social network map (Appendix 2) will serve throughout this

chapter as a guide for the forthcoming discussions. The graph is based on a list of 92

individuals (nodes) and 174 relationships (edges) that I compiled from prosopographies,

personal letters, and a few narrative works. Given our primary area of concern (those who

used the word Arianism and its accompanying narrative to describe opponents) and the

nature of the extant data, most of the data consists of those around Athanasius or who

followed the Nicene tradition. It is not meant to be a comprehensive list of fourth century

bishops. It is intended to highlight relationships and allow us to trace the movement of

Arianism between people. A note of caution: The graph as presented in static image on the

page is anachronistic, placing side by side individuals who were active from 310-410 CE.

This can be helpful for tracing connections across generations, but for any contemporary

snapshot it is best to refer to the video of the same data (Appendix 1), which takes into

account dating parameters so that nodes appear and disappear across time.

Several inferences can be developed from this graph using social network theories like

Triadic Closure, but our graph nonetheless reflects the limits of its source material. For

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[9] Gephi Consortium, "GEPHI," accessed February 15, 2019, gephi.org.

example, let us look at Eusebius of Emesa or Maximus of Jerusalem on our graph. As visualized on our graph they exist as endpoints, yet we know for a fact they would have their own local networks branching out from them. Thus, we can assume that the edges that connect them to people like Eusebius of Caesarea or Eutychius of Eleutheropolis represented bridges, that like the bishop Rufinus reaching out to Athanasius, represented connective tissue to other networks in the component. Similarly, the graph misrepresents the scale of node groups. If the writings of people like Eusebius of Nicomedia, Ursacius and Valens, or Auxentius of Milan had survived *en masse*, their component would be much larger. Considering that Eusebius and his successors Ursacius and Valens were more politically powerful under Constantine and Constantius than anyone on the left side of the graph, we can probably assume their network was enormous and broad, though perhaps was as a whole less intimate by virtue of its expanse. It is interesting however to see that we still nonetheless see firm divisions between groups. The graph does not include data that automatically assigns people into "parties," but instead focuses on personal relationships. In this respect seeks to mirror the fluidity of relationships. That said, divisions do show up (unsurprisingly) in the personal relationships themselves. As sociologists point out, and studies by Clark and Rodney Stark and William Bainbridge (1980) confirm, interpersonal connections form a stronger connective tissue than the ideas they use to delineate the boundaries of their community (e.g., theology).

What this graph *does* show is a detailed view of the individual relationships that tied together several of the most prominent factions in what we might call the mainstream imperial Christianities of the fourth century and those that served as the go-betweens (called bridges). Because this study is built around the sharing of information and narrative as an

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element of building relationships, I opted to show only relationships that, at least at some

point in the life of the relationship, could be described as *amicitia* between individuals.[10]

Each relationship is then ranked on a scale from 1 to 10 based on the following criteria:

1	Two individuals had presence in the same city at the same time as exiles, but no primary source evidence that they spoke.
2	Two individuals were present at the same council and hold similar views.
3-4	Two individuals those connected posthumously through written works. One individual referenced directly the work of the deceased or translated it.
5-6	Two individuals who reference one another's works in their letters, or that they exchanged casual correspondence.
7	Two individuals were close amici, or one individual ordinated the other as a priest or bishop.
8-9	Two individuals were in a student/teacher relationship.
10	Two individuals were biological or adopted family.

When visualized on the graph, thicker and darker lines translate to a stronger

relationship between two individuals and thin lines represent a weaker relationship.

Similarly, the more relationships an individual has, the larger their bubble appears on the

graph.[11] Any relationships placed in the lowest end of the scale (1-2) are purely

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[10] The data discussed here includes relationships that can be described as predominately friendly in nature. I do however include connections like the volatile relationship between Rufinus and Jerome. The master data set I built also includes negative relationships, which adds a fascinating and more complicated dynamic but is not as useful for answering the kinds of questions we ask in this chapter.

[11] Initially I was cautious that those individuals who came across as having more connections were so because it is their extant materials upon which I built the database. Indeed, this is true to some extent and reflected in the complexity that sources allow for the left side of the graph vs. right side around Eusebius of Nicomedia. Eusebius appears small only because there is little data around which to build a network. That said however, Augustine of Hippo's corpus and letters is enormous and yet completely disproportionate to his contemporary influence as a network figure outside of his local North African community. Though on the far end of our graph chronologically, he had close connection to Jerome and Ambrose but that is it. What we can say is that although the graph is by nature incomplete, it most likely preserves a representative proportion. Meaning that with more

circumstantial in nature and act more as a benchmark for speculation. That said, very few edges fall in this category. Only 7 out of the 174 relationships are in the 1-2 range. Meanwhile, 28% of edges (49) fall into categories of casual acquaintance 5-6 range, and a startling 98 edges or 56% are between close friends, family, or a mentor/student relationship. What we see in this data is an incredibly dense network. It meant that small affronts could make highly exaggerated waves across the network, one person switching sides inevitably strained the social connections with other elements of the network. As an individual accrues more connections, their corresponding circle is larger.

Graph 1. Athanasius' social network in a geographic context

It is also worth pointing out the geographical limits of our data. Despite coverage of many of the principal cities of the fourth-century Roman empire, 73% of our nodes fall in the "eastern" empire; that is, to the east of Sirmium on the borders of the Illyricum and

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data, particularly those nodes on the left would likely increase in sizes yet at about the same rate.

Dacia dioceses (Graph 1) Our dataset points to a particular corridor of the eastern empire with vast empty regions in North Africa, Spain, Gaul, Italy, and Dacia/Thrace. It is just a reminder that even when we cover the relationships between 88 of the "prominent" figures in fourth century Christianity, many of whom the later Church came to see as its forebears or "Church Fathers", this dataset represents only a very, very limited snapshot of even extant Christian bishops of the period, let alone communities. Many of whom possibly fit into their own networks or helped bolster those of Eusebius of Nicomedia and his component.

Finally, before we move on to the nuances of the graph and the historical context itself, Appendix 2 also displays what I call, "the users": individuals who used the term Arians or Arianism in their extant works. We can speculate using the graph who might also have used that narrative, but the individuals in orange are those who we will be focusing on at most as we trace the narrative away from Athanasius. But first we will start with the small group of people who allied themselves directly around the bishop of Alexandria.

A Dissident Generation: "Oi Peri Athanasion"

In chapter 3 we saw how Athanasius expanded his vision of Arianism to encompass the emperor Constantius and placed the word in an apocalyptic framework that heralded the Antichrist. Much like images and ideas that Athanasius grafted into Arianism, the use of the word by others mirrored the story itself. It began as a small phenomenon, a coded narrative that circulated with a few individuals directly around Athanasius. We must keep in mind the lessons learned from the previous chapter: these stories circulated as material objects and words communicated between individuals in real space and time. They spread, slowly, along lines that mirrored relationships and the authority of those who had access to information. As Athanasius' authority grew, so too did his stories.

It is difficult to pinpoint the original users with much specificity, those I call "oi peri Athanasion": individuals who encountered this narrative directly from Athanasius himself, and like him, found themselves in a position of opposition during the reign of Constantius II. Calling back to our discussion of the *Historia Arianorum* we see in the Arianism of this early period the dialectic of "disguise and surveillance," a counternarrative that allows for coded communication between members of a minority opposition group. Arianism likely functioned as a "dog-whistle" for this small group. It was a coded narrative that set reinforced the sacred nature of their position in an atmosphere of "persecution," and used Constantine and Nicaea to reinforce its legitimacy. The narrative also provided a genealogical map of their adversaries that showed them rooted in theological perversion, communal discord, and imperial corruption. The very intimacy and danger of this kind of narrative means that we likely do not have to look far from Athanasius to find those who used the word. They would be the ones who had direct contact with the bishop, whether through direct conversation or letters, and a similar stake in the problems Athanasius himself faced.

Graph 2. Shortest paths (L=1) in Athanasius' network
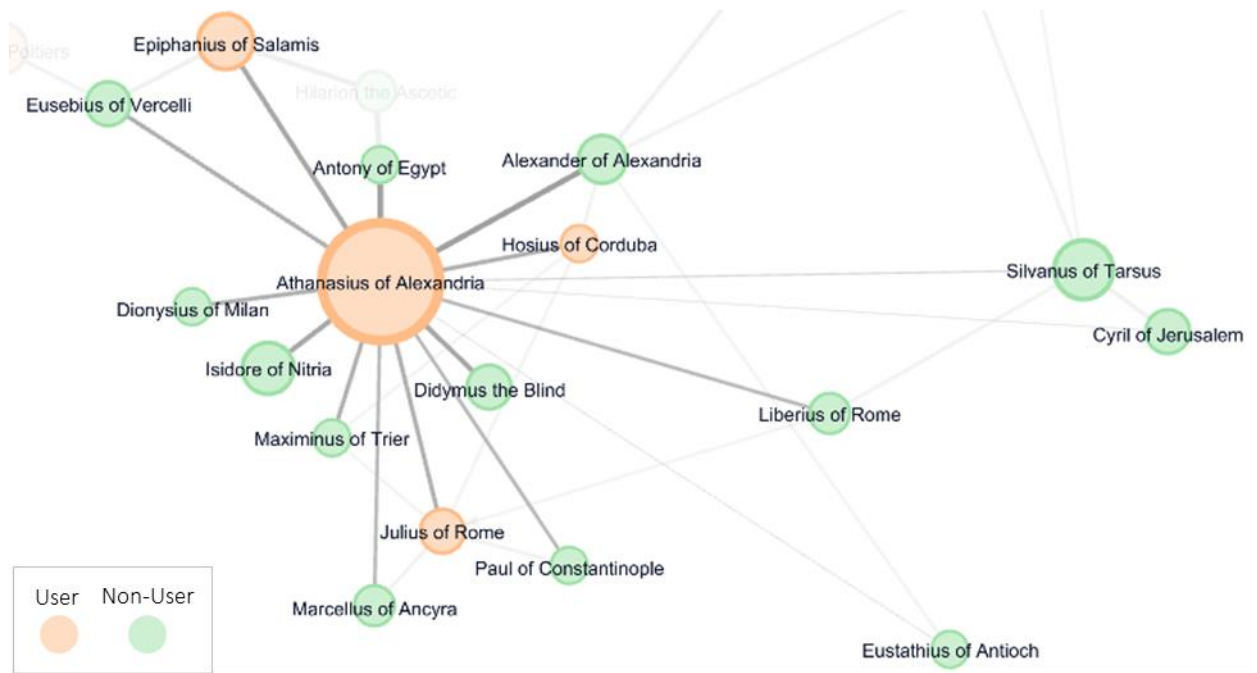
Of those who we know used the word Arian in a fashion like that of Athanasius, the earliest were Hosius of Corduba and Julius of Rome: two Athanasius' most powerful allies during his early exiles. Graph 2, above, presents a partial view of Athanasius' network and highlights the first-degree edges between 325 and 350. Given the limited surviving evidence for most of the individuals represented in the graph, it is difficult to account for every edge, yet Graph 2 does provide an adequate means by which to discuss information exchanges within a relatively clustered network.[12] This is not to say that other individuals in the circle

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[12] We can extrapolate a little on possible relationships that don't show up in the sources if we combine geographical and chronological proximity, alongside social visibility, with the principal of triadic closure: if two individuals in a network have at least one friend in common, the likelihood of them becoming friends over time increases. For example, Hosius is an opaque figure in the source material, and yet was one of Constantine's closest advisors and revered in the west as a confessor. We can assume with relative certainty that he knew Dionysius of Milan and Eusebius of Vercelli, two figures for whom we have almost no information but do know that they played a significant role in politics of the period. Though in our case, triadic closure forms around Athanasius himself, stronger associations could be formed by using the emperor's court as a centerpiece.

didn't latch onto the Arian narrative, in fact I think it quite likely that they did, but those whose works survived provided the narrative with tangible authority. In fact, the two earliest examples we have (Julius and Hosius) are because Athanasius himself preserved their words in his own works.

Athanasius' personal relationship with Hosius and his role as a present source of alternative information to Julius was the catalyst for this early transmission of Arianism. Hosius was one of the most famous and respected bishops of his time, a confessor who had survived the persecution of Diocletian. He presided over Nicaea and had the ear of Constantine in the west before the emperor turned his attention eastward. [13] Hosius likely met Athanasius when the young bishop accompanied Alexander to Nicaea, and he continued to support the Alexandrian bishop until the late 350s.[14] Despite his high profile, we have little in the way of primary source evidence to suggest when or why Hosius adopted the Arian narrative, save for perhaps his personal relationship with Athanasius and distaste for Eusebius and his affiliates. It is likely however that his motives mirrored those of Julius of Rome, for whom we have better and earlier evidence.

It was Athanasius who brought the story of the Arians with him when he fled Alexandria in 339 and sailed to Rome where he and other exiles petitioned Julius of Rome for help. As discussed in Chapter 2, Arians show up in Julius' letter to the Eusebians, when the bishops from the east refused to attend his council that sought to examine the validity of the exiles of

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[13] Socrates Scholasticus, "Historia Ecclesiastica," 1892, I.7.

[14] Though the western Christian tradition often emphasized its own participation at Nicaea through Hosius, recent scholarship emphasizes western isolation at Nicaea that continued for decades after. Jörg Ulrich, "Nicaea and the West," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51, no. 1 (March 1, 1997): 10–24.

eastern bishops that included Athanasius and Marcellus of Ancyra. From Eusebius'

perspective, and this is a theme that the Council of Serdica repeated in 343, Julius had no

authority to question the decision of an eastern council. It was an issue of sovereignty: any

attempt to undermine the council's decision was a challenge to both the episcopal authority

of Constantinople, and to the power of the emperor who presided over it. The cases of

Athanasius and Marcellus were internal issues for the eastern empire and its church, they

were not open to the judgment of outsiders. Though Julius couched the conflict as one that

affected the "universal church," any hope of recognizing that idea, if it had existed at all,

died with Constantine.[15] The empire was divided between three brothers, and the bishops

aligned themselves with the closest centers of power. Regardless of religious preference, the

social fabric of Roman aristocracy pivoted on patronage as the primary source of

connections, social capital and financial support, and patronage relied upon proximity and

bureaucracy, and though many Christians expressed ambivalence about this process, all

regular communication. Constantine's patronage of Christianity brought its ecclesiastical

structure into this growing bishops had to adopt a position within it.[16] Julius saw an

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[15] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 22.

[16] Constantine also expanded the senatorial aristocracy from its initial count of
approximately 600. In part due to the creation of the new senate in Constantinople, the effect
was that by 400 there were approximately 3,000 senatorial positions in the West alone. John
Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and the Imperial Court: A.D. 364-425* (Oxford: Clarendon
Press, 1990), 103. Michele Salzman argues that the military reforms of Diocletian and
expansion of the aristocracy by Constantine introduced a new and substantial group of
aristocrats with diminutive pedigrees and limited access to conventional sources of
aristocratic power. This new aristocracy however was not exempt from the social habitus of
their class, and therefore "traditional senatorial aristocratic values, such as friendship and
patronage, [were] addressed with a renewed emphasis." Salzman, *The Making of a Christian
Aristocracy*, 39. Christianity provided these new aristocrats with alternative access to
imperial patronage and just as significantly, a means of cultivating patronage within their
own networks.

opportunity in the eastern exiles, not just an opportunity to exercise authority over the

growing power of the upstart see of Constantinople, but also likely to create trouble for

Eusebius and his circle and in turn, the imperial court of Constantius.

It was not, Julius claimed, his own fault that the current discord arose. He upheld and

respected councils, particularly the decisions made at Nicaea. Yet, Julius says, Eusebius

must be shocked to hear that those decisions are being undermined in the very territory

where he and his council claim authority:

> The Arians who were excommunicated for their impiety by Alexander, the late Bishop
> of Alexandria, of blessed memory, were not only proscribed by the brethren in the
> several cities, but were also anathematized by the whole body assembled together in
> the great Council of Nicaea. For theirs was no ordinary offence, neither had they
> sinned against man, but against our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, the Son of the living
> God. And yet these persons who were proscribed by the whole world, and branded in
> every Church, are said now to have been admitted to communion again; which I think
> even you ought to hear with indignation. Who then are the parties who dishonor a
> council? Are not they who have set at nought the votes of the Three hundred, and have
> preferred impiety to godliness? The heresy of the Arian madmen was condemned and
> proscribed by the whole body of Bishops everywhere…[17]

Julius presents Nicaea is the focal point for two separate points about Eusebius'

relationship with councils. The first, that those condemned "by the whole world" were able

to return freely to the church is a thinly-veiled jab at Eusebius who was himself condemned

at Nicaea at the same time as Arius and sent into exile, until Constantine granted him and

several others clemency following the Council of Nicomedia in 327/28.[18] The second builds

upon the overt omission of Eusebius from the discussion of Nicaea itself. Instead of placing

Eusebius there at the moment of the council, he instead focuses on the haunting effect that

the council had upon Eusebius' contemporary network. The attack moves beyond Eusebius

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[17] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 23.

[18] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 17–18.

himself and scrutinizes the entire church over which he presides. Julius highlights the proximity that Eusebius and his affiliates share with the Arians.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Julius briefly notes that a delegation from Gregory of Cappadocia arrived headed by a man named Carpones, and that he was informed that Carpones was an Arian and excommunicated by Athanasius' predecessor, Alexander. Likewise, Eusebius' own emissaries urged him to write to a certain Pistus in Alexandria. It was Athanasius' own presbyters who informed Julius that both Alexander and Nicaea condemned and excommunicated Pistus and his mentor Secundus for Arianism. Though Julius stops short of calling Eusebius and his circle Arians, the subtext of the argument is clear: Eusebius and his supporters are fraternizing with Arian heretics who were condemned at Nicaea and thus themselves disrespectful of the Great Council.

For Julius, the logical extension of this impiety is disorder and dissention with bishops fleeing east. Though there was in fact a great deal of unity in the eastern churches under Constantius, Julius took the dissention and claims of persecution as evidence of cracks in the eastern churches, writing to Eusebius:

> …according to these representations, since the Churches are thus afflicted and treacherously assaulted, as our informants positively affirmed, who are they that have lighted up a flame of discord?... I wonder how you could write that unanimity prevailed in the Churches.[19]

The link between the bishop and their community was paramount to salvation as we discussed in Chapter 2. True theology and rational arguments unified a community in Truth; violence was the weapon of those who lacked rational argument. In this case, the dissention of bishops like Athanasius stemmed from the Eusebians' refusal to honor two decisions of

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[19] Athanasius of Alexandria, "Apologia Contra Arianos," 1892, 34.

Nicaea: they refused to denounce the Arians and ignored the Nicene canon that bishops should not move between communities, a practice that Eusebius and others in the East increasingly accepted as commonplace.[20] It is unlikely that Julius ever though this letter would persuade the eastern bishops of Athanasius' innocence or reinforce his own role as mediator. His argument revolves too much around the idea that the east was in disorder and had thrown the decisions at Nicaea to the wind. The east was in truth an increasingly unified front until the death of Constantius in 361 and probably would have rejected outright the evidence Julius provided.

Again, this is not to suggest that Julius knew nothing of Arius or his beliefs before Athanasius. But Athanasius offered a tangible connection between a deceased presbyter and his small Alexandrian following, and Julius' current rivalry with Eusebius of Nicomedia. Athanasius' initial correspondence with Rome via presbyters and later his own presence there was provided both a political opportunity for Julius and a narrative of dissident that came from the east itself. It came at a key moment when Julius wanted to both discredit Eusebius' claim that Julius disrespected the decision of a council and elevate Julius' own authority as mediator within the universal church. The eastern argument was jurisdictional in nature and rooted in the present. For all practical purposes, Eusebius was entirely justified in asserting that he and the other bishops of the eastern empire under Constantius had complete power to hold councils and enforce their decisions without being overturned by outside powers. To refute Eusebius' claim, Julius countered with an *ad hominem* attack on Eusebius' own actions relative to councils and shifted the discussion away from the present

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[20] Ibid., 25.

political topography of the empire. Arius was the lynchpin in this argument and Athanasius undoubtedly provided the necessary background and context for this affiliation.

Julius relied heavily upon Athanasius' narrative for the oppositional framework he provided in the letter. He identified his enemy, its failings, and gave it a history, using the Alexandrian narrative to connect the present crisis to a past issue, making his standoff with Eusebius no longer merely an issue of ecclesiastical sovereignty rooted in contemporary politics, but another episode in a decades-long battle for the soul of the Church. In Arianism Julius, and likely other bishops in the west, found a narrative of dissent, information derived from his adversary's home turf that subverted the idea that Eusebius and Constantius presided over a church that showed peace and unity and could thus issue a binding consensus from a council. It also exposed Eusebius as an associate of known heretics and someone who did not uphold the decisions of councils, turning back upon Eusebius the very accusations that the bishop of Constantinople levied against Julius.

The early users were a clustered group of individuals whose political associations and likewise theological views, placed them on the outside of politics in the east. Though prior to Magnentius' uprising in 349/50, westerners like Hosius and Julius basked in the favor of Constans, they likely adopted Athanasius' Arian narrative because it reinforced the boundary between themselves and the eastern bishops of Constantius II. It was an unequivocal show of solidarity with Athanasius and other eastern exiles that condemned the ecclesiastical hierarchy in of the east by providing a genealogical link to a theological pariah. It also connected the theology of the eastern bishops with their hard power and violence at the expense of rational argument. At Serdica specifically, this proved useful when the leaders of the western delegates needed to explain the actions of their eastern

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counterparts as an internal moral and theological failure, rather than a defense of their own ecclesiastical autonomy. Athanasius, personally present with each of these users, served as the gatekeeper. He leveraged information that his patrons in the west could use against their eastern counterparts.

**The Second Awakening: Turn On, Tune In, and Drop Out**

It was a new generation that took the idea of Arianism from the hands of Athanasius and the others in his immediate circle and made it the dominant narrative it later became. These were a younger group of clergy and ascetics who adopted Athanasius' more developed rhetoric wholesale from works such as from the *Apologia Contra Arianos* and especially the apocalyptic vision of the *Historia Arianorum*. What united these individuals was their fervor for the ascetic movement, a movement that as Edward Watts notes had a penchant for apocalyptic thinking. Watts' study, The Final Pagan Generation (2015) contextualizes the monastic movement and the ecclesiastical discord of the late fourth century. The generation of Christian leaders born after the death of Constantine and who came to maturity in the 360s did not remember a time when Christianity was not a growing force in the empire. They came largely from wealthy families and rejected the bureaucratic system in which their parents and grandparents had found success, embracing instead ascetic lifestyles or ecclesiastical posts. As Watts notes, asceticism had been crucial to Christianity since its earliest days, but in the fourth century it gathered momentum among elites.[21] With this came a different kind of power, a soft power that inspired and mobilized Christian communities across the Mediterranean world. Members of this movement included Rufinus of Aquileia,

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[21] Edward J. Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 1 edition (University of California Press, 2015), 149.

Jerome, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory Nazianzus, Epiphanius of Cyprus and Melania the Elder. They created and sponsored ascetic communities, knitting them together in a loose network through their travels.

Graph 3. Social network map 355-375
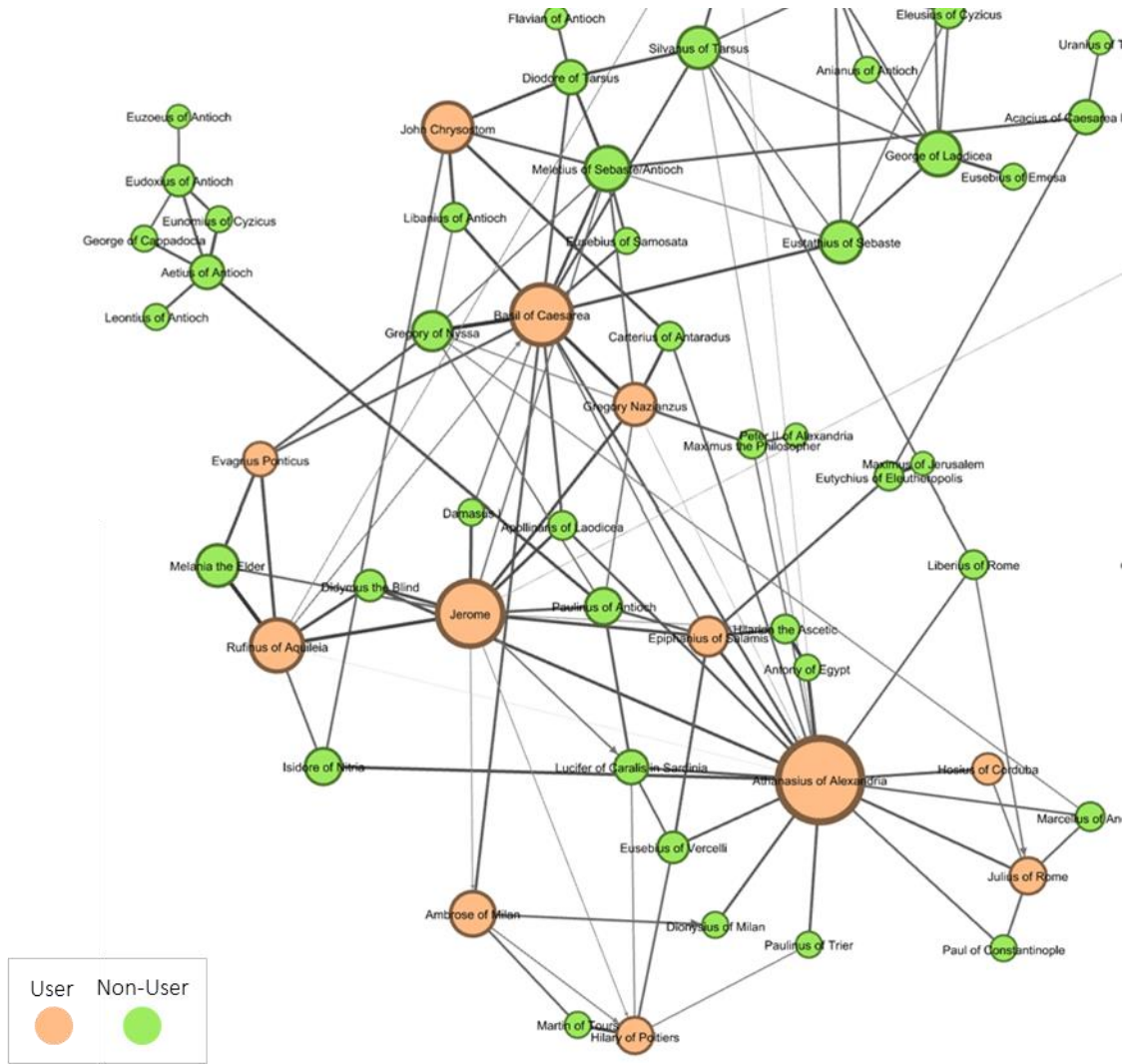
The graph above shows individuals who were active between 355 and 375 with thicker edges signifying a deeper relationship.[22] The paths however are not just relationships, but

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[22] Arrows at the end of an edge denote a one-way relationship or cases where we know that one individual read the works of another but perhaps never actually met them. Examples include Ambrose of Milan, who saw himself as the spiritual success to Dionysius and read

routes through which information could travel fastest. There is a direct correlation between the strength of a relationship and the bandwidth and speed at which information travels.[23] This remains true of late antiquity where relationships were built upon the regular exchange of information.[24] In this case, the clustering co-efficient of the network is .309 (on a scale of 0-1), signifying a high probability that within these networks two randomly selected friends of an individual would also be friends with one other. The concept of triadic closure can in fact help us visualize edges for which we may have no direct evidence. For example, although we have little evidence of any substantial relationship between Gregory Nazianzus and Athanasius, both shared a very close relationship with Basil of Caesarea. That Athanasius offhandedly mentions Gregory favorably in his *de Synodis*, is evidence of this phenomenon and likely indicates that there was not just awareness but likely casual interaction. We can therefore say with a high degree of certainty that at the very least, the ideas of Athanasius circulated to Gregory by way of Basil if not through direct correspondence.

Next to Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea was likely the next best-connected individual in the Nicene network and his life and in many respects exemplifies the experience felt by many in the generation that followed Athanasius. Born around 330 to a rich Cappadocian family, Basil had an extensive education befitting someone of his social stature, studying with some of the most illustrious teachers of the time. He studied with Libanius in Antioch,

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his works, Jerome and Lucifer of Calaris, Liberius of Rome who was a successor to Julius, and Rufinus of Aquileia who read the works of Basil of Caesarea.

[23] Easley and Kleinberg, *Networks, Crowds, and Markets*, 36.

[24] Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy*, 54, 219.

before traveling to Athens in 349/50 where it is possible that he studied with the Christian teacher Himerius and the rhetor Prohaeresis.[25] Completing the tour, like many other young wealthy people of his age, he found his way around 356 to Egypt where he fell in love with the promises of a Christian ascetic lifestyle at the same time when Athanasius was in hiding in the desert. The next year he joined his elder sister Macrina at a small ascetic community that his mother had established ten years prior at Annesi.

Eusebius of Caesarea ordained him shortly after his return from his travels in 360 and by 370 he became the bishop of Caesarea. Approximately fifty homilies and 300 of his letters survive. Basil identified strongly with the Nicene cause but had extensive connections that crossed political and doctrinal boundaries. Close associates of his included Gregory Nazianzus, Evagrius Ponticus, Epiphanius of Salamis, his brother Gregory of Nyssa. Like Athanasius, Basil was in social-networking terms, a gatekeeper. He occupied the interstitial space between network clusters, providing a vital link for those seeking information not readily available within their own network.[26] As Ayers and Radde-Gallwitz (2010) observe, Basil's status as an in-between man and facilitator allowed him to create a pro-Nicene network, one that stretched among ascetically-minded Christians of similar status.

Basil's experience echoes the lives of almost all the late fourth century users of Arianism, including Epiphanius of Salamis, Jerome, Rufinus, Gregory Nazianzus, Evagrius Ponticus, Epiphanius of Salamis, all of who found their way to Egypt and spent time with the ascetic communities there before taking their ideas with them to other corners of the

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[25] Lewis Ayers and Andrew Radde-Gallwitz, "Basil of Caesarea," in *Cambridge History of Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, by Lloyd Gerson, vol. I (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 459.

[26] Easley and Kleinberg, *Networks, Crowds, and Markets*, 66.

Roman world. As discussed in the previous chapter, just as overseas interest in asceticism picked up, Athanasius began seriously courting ascetics and established a network throughout Egypt that brought the monks under the Alexandrian patriarchate. Athanasius accomplished this new alliance in just a few years and the coalition he developed helped cement Nicene Christianity in not only the communities themselves, among but those who visited them seeking spiritual guidance. A key component of this effort was Athanasius' *Life of Antony*. Athanasius wrote it while hiding among the ascetics of the desert in the 350s to highlight ascetic support for his own theological position and authority as bishop.[27] Antony was a "model for moral imitation," that tied together the Alexandrian community both inside and outside the walls of the city.[28] The result was a text that articulated an ascetic brand that elites would find palatable. The result, according to Watts, was that the work,

> …immediately resonated with elites far beyond the Egyptian environment in which it was composed. It proved wildly popular with them because it provided a compelling way to articulate in attractive, elite terms a movement that was already beginning to take root across the empire.[29]

The story of Antony inspired a generation and drew them to the center of ascetic authority. Keeping in mind the lessons of the previous chapter, Egypt was a geographically natural destination from any port in the Mediterranean. Members of the generation seeking ascetic enlightenment in the "arcane wisdom" of Egypt simply followed the prevailing winds and found a place teeming with teachers willing to indulge their curiosities. Yet the movement they entertained movement was one carefully cultivated by Athanasius himself. To delve into each of these individuals and trace the flight of the narrative individually

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[27] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 154.

[28] Brakke, *Athanasius and the Politics of Asceticism*, 181–87.

[29] Watts, *The Final Pagan Generation*, 157.

would require a depth beyond the scope of this dissertation. But the social network map offers a clearer way to visualize these relationships and highlights the social proximity of the users.

The network of Nicene Christians was dense in terms of relationships and by extension, information. When Hilary of Poitiers, went into exile he developed a close relationship with Eusebius of Vercelli (who provided him with a copy of the Nicene Creed) who himself was a close ally of Athanasius.[30] By the time Hilary arrived in the east and began studying the doctrinal debates raging there, he was already enmeshed in the same social circles Athanasius had established years before. When he needed access to information, the most readily available material was that which flowed between members of the group of which he was already a part. Hilary then used that information to explain and categorize the divisions he saw in the west and began to identify "Arians" all around him. It is again necessary to insist that we think about information as physical texts and spoken words. Finding information was not easy, and though in our contemporary world we may complain of "information bubbles" and "feedback loops," it was undoubtedly much more insular in antiquity. When one went in search of answers, the information most readily available was that which moved through one's social connections, information that in most cases was itself reflective of the norms and beliefs of the people within that circle. In a world where physical texts took up space, the process of deciding what to keep and what to throw away affected how another person would learn about and interpret the world, even if those works themselves did not provide an overarching narrative.[31]

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[30] Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*.

[31] Hilary's *Liber Contra Constantium*, written after the council of Ariminum in 360, closely mirrors the *Historia Arianorum* in both its structure and themes. It is not a stretch of the

Conclusion

The Arianism of Athanasius was originally a counter-narrative. The story allowed a few closely-knit individuals without direct access to conventional sources of power to explain their marginality through conspiracy, highlight their own orthodoxy by appealing to the authority of an emperor whose memory and decisions were unassailable, and define and enforce the boundaries of their own social circle. The first generation of these users were exiles, self-described victims of Constantius' unification project who thought that these efforts undermined the local autonomy of bishops and sowed division and violence. They were succeeded by a generation of ascetically-minded individuals who shared close spiritual and social connections to Alexandria and rejected careers in the imperial bureaucracy, embracing alternative sources of power and adopting a cosmic and apocalyptic view of the world. It was only after Athanasius' death, in the wake of the existential and political crises that the Roman Empire faced in the late 370's, that the narrative ceased to be a story of resistance for the few and became the dominant narrative of orthodoxy and power. In a single day, the Gothic armies of Fritigern and Alavivus destroyed the eastern army and killed the emperor Valens himself. As the newly appointed eastern emperor Theodosius I sought to restore order in the wake of the crisis, he was eager to break all connections to his immediate predecessors and restore unity to the empire. Athanasius' narrative provided a view of Christianity that painted Theodosius' successors as corrupt, embroiled in conspiracy, and violent. It effectively de-legitimized 35 years of leadership under Constantius II, Julian, and Valens, and offered a clear path by which Theodosius could show

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imagination to suggest that Hilary may have acquired a copy of it during his travels in the east. Hilary of Poitiers, "Liber Contra Constantium," in *Patrologia Series Latina*, vol. 10, 1845, 571–605.

himself as the true successor of Constantine: a militant and pious emperor who could unite the emperor and church under one creed and restore the oikumene's connection to the divine. It was the seventy consecutive years of Theodosian dynastic rule in the empire that truly ensured the survival of the Arian monster.

Conclusion

In May of 2014, I was two years into my PhD study and had the opportunity to explore the Santa Barbara Mission-Archive Library with some of my colleagues. It wasn't a formal visit, and as historians of Late Antiquity we weren't looking for anything particular at the time. It turned out to be a moving experience. There is something about entering a room with rows upon rows of books, many of which are hundreds of years old, that restores a feeling of connection to the past, a sentiment that is difficult to appreciate when sitting at a computer or holding a volume whose cover is still perfectly intact. I regret to some extent that my work never required a trip to the archives, most of the manuscripts I used have been digitized and translated multiple times by scholars far more capable than myself. But when you hold in your hand a copy of Augustine's *Confessions* or Cicero's *Republic* from the seventeenth century, you cannot help but wonder how it got here.

When the Mexican government secularized the mission system in the mid-eighteenth century, all the letters and books from the other missions were transferred to Santa Barbara where they remain to this day. Before that, each book traveled any number of routes, by sea up the coast, or perhaps carried across the dry trails of the southern California hillsides. Dropped, scuffed, placed in sacks along with other belongings, they somehow made their way to a mission where they were stacked alongside piles of other books and letters that had made similar journeys. Though the works of Athanasius himself do not appear in the archives, his Arians still made their way to California in the works of Augustine of Hippo. If a Franciscan monk poured over Augustine's *City of God*, *Confessions*, or *Sermon on the Manichaeans*, he would have found the Arians at work, ever that haunting specter that looked to disrupt the order of the Church.

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It was not until two years later that the significance of this experience struck me as relevant to my own work. I had spent so much effort looking at the contents of books I hadn't stopped to think about the way that those texts had moved in their various forms throughout the world. 1200 years before Augustine's works ended up in an archive in Santa Barbara, he himself travelled to Milan early in his career where his mother later joined him, and he served as a teacher of rhetoric under the bishop Ambrose (r. 374-397). Ambrose himself was a prolific user of the Arian narrative. He came to the city sometime around 370 as a governor (*consularis*) and was well-educated and independently wealthy. As a man

befitting his rank, he engaged in acts of charity and public building that cemented his role as a patron of the city. One can still to this day see three of the basilicas he commissioned during his tenure as bishop: San Nazaro, Sant' Ambrogio, and San Simpliciano.[1] The

Figure 13. Laurentine complex

construction of these basilicas is fascinating when compared to the imperial Basilica of San

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[1] Harry O. Maier, "Private Space as the Social Context of Arianism in Ambrose's Milan," *Journal of Theological Studies* 45 (1994): 90. For Ambrose's building projects and their context, see Maier, "Private Space as the Social Context of Arianism in Ambrose's Milan"; Sylvia Crenshaw Schneider, "St. Ambrose and the Architecture of the Churches of Northern Italy: Ecclesiastical Architecture as a Function of Liturgy" (ProQuest, 2008); Neil B. McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (University of California Press, 1994).

Lorenzo, parts of which could very well have been constructed under the bishop Auxentius (r.355-372) with later additions under Theodosius I.[2]

Figure 14. Foundations of South Chapel in the Laurentian complex

The foundations of the San Lorenzo provide indication of imperial sponsorship that used the emperor's own engineers. The original blocks were large (and expensive) marble slabs that took a great deal of skill and to move and position. In contrast, the churches that Ambrose commissioned used thin bricks alternately angled outward that stood atop heavy applications of mortar that ranged from 2.5-5cm thick.[3] The result was a cheap and resilient construction that allowed Ambrose to quickly and efficiently dominate the built environment of the Milan.

Ambrose came to be the main force in not just Milan but the western Church through his ability to broaden and redefine the notion of the Christian community. He was, as Peter Brown argues, an individual who represented "the end of 'low-profile' Christianity of the

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[2] The two prevailing arguments are that San Lorenzo was constructed sometime around 370, or during the reign of Theodosius I or Stilicho (390-402). The evidence around both of these claims is discussed extensively in Suzanne Lewis, "San Lorenzo Revisited: A Theodosian Palace Church at Milan," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 32, no. 3 (October 1973): 197–222.

[3] Ibid., 201.

previous generations."[4] This may be more characteristically true of Christianity in the west,

Brown asserts that Ambrose successfully cultivated in Milan the idea of a Christian *populus*.

He used his wealth and influence to create an imagined community that brought the plebs

into the Church alongside the wealthy and changed the discourse around poverty. He created

a Church in the true modern sense of the word. In Brown's own words,

> Ambrose came to forge a language that proved to be well adapted to the ambitions of
> a religion that had dared to think of itself – at last and for the very first time – as a true
> "majority religion," as the church rose "like a moon waxing in brightness" above the
> Roman world.[5]

But this dominance came in the aftermath of a fight for that identity, one in which

Ambrose faced off against the successors of Auxentius (who he labeled as Arians) and the

support that they received from the empress Justina, the mother of Valentina II. During this fight against an outside imperial authority and his own efforts to maintain cohesion

Figure 15. Ambrose (top) flanked by the martyrs Gervase and Protase

within his own community, Ambrose turned to Athanasius' narrative as an aid. But the

Milanese bishop did not come to this narrative *ex nihil*. Ambrose was born in Trier under the

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[4] Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350-550 AD*, 122.

[5] Ibid., 147.

bishop Maximinius, who had welcomed Athanasius to the city during his first two exiles. When he became bishop of Milan in 374, he distanced himself from his predecessor Auxentius, who he called an Arian, by positioning himself as the legitimate successor to the bishop Dionysius of Milan (r.349-55). Ambrose went so far as to recover the bones of Dionysius from his place of exile and brought them back to Milan, an accomplishment for which he enlisted the help of Basil of Caesarea and with whom he became friends.[6] It is almost impossible to identify exactly where Ambrose first heard the word Arian used, but the places he grew up, the connections he fostered, show that it was no accident. This was the dominant narrative contained within that group and he found a use for it in his attempts to unify the community in Milan. When Augustine converted from Manicheanism to Christianity under Ambrose's influence, he found himself grafted into that same narrative and wove the word into his own works. And the rest, as they say, is history.

As these individuals moved around and sought information about the groups to which they belonged, and aligned themselves with new networks, they used Arianism in the same way that Athanasius had, to draw boundaries around themselves and their opponents, to give them a history and a way to interpret their actions and beliefs. The legacy of these networks meant that the ecclesiastical chroniclers of the fifth century, including Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret, declared a victory for Nicaea after 381. In their mind, the ecclesiastical opposition ceased to have any bearing in politics and therefore it was of little consequence that individual adherents of what they saw as Arianism or Hellenism remained practicing members of society, provided they did not challenge the power of Nicene bishops. Their

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[6] Basil of Caesarea, "Letter CXCVII To Ambrose of Milan," in *Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, 5th ed., vol. 4, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1892).

respective histories relied upon Athanasius' works for both documents and overall narrative structure. Athanasius' historical authority on the events and controversies that led up to the council of Ariminum was secure in the wake of the Theodosian dynasty.[7]

In the course of this dissertation, I hope to have moved the collective knowledge of Arianism past where it seems to have stagnated since Rowan Williams's review of R.P.C. Hanson's seminal work in 1992, where he recommended that because of the Hanson's work, "the time has probably come to relegate the term "Arianism" at least to inverted commas, and preferably to oblivion."[8] I understand the sentiment behind Williams' statement. To call anyone outside of Alexandria who was not a member of Arius' circle an Arian is historically false. The unproblematized use of the word unfortunately remains somewhat commonplace in scholarship and the reluctance of scholars to abandon it appears to stem more from complacency and unwillingness to dive into the complexities of ecclesiastical rivalries and ever-shifting networks of the period. It's a cop-out that creates a convenient, though misleading, binary. But the work that Hanson and others have done to deconstruct the historical reality of Athanasius' narrative is only the beginning of an opportunity to dive deeper into the Arian problem. Arianism *was* real. Much like one can say that there is no biological reality for the concept of race, it remains real in the sense that it shapes policy, subconscious and conscious thought, and facilitates institutional and personal violence. Some may see it only as an idea, but for others it is something that is experienced and endured daily.

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[7] Sozomen, Socrates Scholasticus, and Theodoret relied equally upon Athanasius' works to construct their narratives. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 205.

[8] Williams, "Article Review: R.P.C. Hanson's 'Search for the Christian Doctrine of God.'"

The two questions I asked at the beginning of this dissertation insist that we not only look at how ideas come from the world, but how they shape it as well. Arianism was real for Nicene Christians who positioned themselves within the social networks that Athanasius established and the information they contained. It was also real for those Romans or Goths without power under Theodosius and his successors who experienced policies and actions based on these ideas. As a result, we need to ask why this story of Arians resonated with Athanasius' contemporary audiences and just as importantly, who used, it, and how they accessed it in the first place. What was the process by which Arianism as a living idea left Athanasius' mind and moved through the world?

The first two chapters looked at the origins of Athanasius' Arian monster from the perspective of his own experience. Athanasius lived with the consequences of the Great Persecution. The coercion that imperial forces leveraged against Christians throughout the empire did not just manifest in stories of martyrdom and displays of steadfast loyalty to the faith in the face of violence. It had a darker side, one that people like Eusebius of Caesarea would have rather left to the silence of the past. The violence divided communities, it created lasting animosity between those who resisted and lost everything, and those who switched sides in order to survive. The Melitians who saw themselves as martyrs and true members of the faith refused Alexander's efforts to reconcile the Alexandrian Church. When Alexander died, they challenged the leadership of the young Athanasius who resorted to his own coercive tactics to remain in power. The result was exile for the bishop and decades of struggle to reclaim what he saw as his rightful place at the head of the Alexandrian Church.

When he returned to Alexandria after Constantine's death, Athanasius faced renewed pressure from outside forces including this time the emperor Constantius II himself. For

Athanasius the threats from home and abroad were one and the same. He roped his adversaries together and articulated that threat in terms recognizable to those who lived in the cultural milieu of *paideia* and Hellenistic thought. He created a monster whose false belief led to acts of violence that threatened the cohesion of the Christian community and by extension, its access to salvation. Those who were separated from the rightful leader of the church might be lost, who may have but for the actions of Eusebius and Constantius remained in the fold. It was a narrative of resistance against the powers of that day which by the council of 360 appeared indominable and on the cusp of establishing a true peace and unity throughout the Roman world.

That Athanasius' Arianism survived and came to dominate the way Christians remembered the fourth century was a testament to Athanasius' exiles, the relationship he built with the growing ascetic movement, and the environmental factors that affected how those texts and the people who carried them moved through the world. The last two chapters of this dissertation traced his ideas across time and space, first from an environmental perspective and then through the social networks that the ideas he developed help delineate.

For those looking out over Alexandria's two large harbors, moving north through the Mediterranean was a daunting and difficult task. The Etesian winds that consistently bear down on the coast from the north offer limited routes out of Alexandria. During summer months sailors had to make the difficult and labor-intensive journey up the coast. In the winter, they had to wait for weather windows when cyclonic storms crossed the northern Mediterranean and offered short bursts of south-easterly winds that allowed them to travel to Crete, Anatolia, or Cyprus and then westward. This contrasts sharply with a turn to the south, where the same winds that blow from the north make travel up the Nile and back

reliable and fast. The trip to the north held peril and discomfort, the south welcomed the Egyptian traveler.

When Athanasius was forced to flee Egypt, he stayed in places along a network of routes that facilitated rapid correspondence with Alexandria. His ideas were not free to spread wherever they chose. The winds, currents, and geography affected who he talked to, where he stayed, and the relationships he was able to maintain. They affected who had access to his works and narratives. That said, once his letters and books reached these places, they spread through social networks as ideas that supported the position of those within them. First they found a home as a resistance narrative among bishops like Hosius and Julius that resisted Constantius' efforts to unify the Church under the power of Constantinople. Constantius threatened not just their autonomy, but the integrity of their community and placed them further down the hierarchy because they were too far away to be a position themselves in the imperial court. It was the next generation though that really gave it lasting success. Ascetically-minded individuals rode the northerly winds to Egypt in search of spiritual guidance. They stayed among monks who Athanasius had courted and brought into the fold of the Alexandrian patriarchate. This generation saw themselves as people apart, and they saw in Athanasius' works a rejection of imperial authority and bureaucracy that coupled with an apocalyptic cosmic perspective. They kept the story alive until Theodosius and his heirs supported the narrative and the Christians who held to it in order to discredit and shape the way that people thought about the emperors who had come before them.

The story of Arianism is necessarily complicated and multifaceted. Anything but an interdisciplinary approach to the topic insufficiently captures the process by which Athanasius made a monster out of Arius and by extension shaped how Christians thought of

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themselves and their history for millennia. Any time we pick up a document, we cannot

allow ourselves to divorce it from its own history. Every piece of information we have from

the past moved with people, between people, often across long distances and difficult

terrain. We must ask ourselves why we hold these stories in our hands, why they sit on our

library shelves or on our computers. Who decided to that it was worth the effort to restore an

old manuscript or to translate it or take it with them to the next city? Why did they decide to

allow the book next to it to rot into nothing or why did they bury it in the Egyptian desert?

The texts themselves are their own story, one that cannot be separated from the information

they contain. To riff on a wonderful line from Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, these stories and texts

ask us why they were created. They ask us why we have kept them all this time.[9]

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[9] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Monster Theory: Reading Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 20.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

[Social network evolution](#)

Appendix 2

[Social network map](#)

Appendix 3

[Social network master spreadsheet](#)