UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Justina as Queen:
Reading the Late Antique Empress Beyond Gender

A Dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

by

Rachel Brooks Tyra

June 2022

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Michele R. Salzman, Chairperson
Dr. Denver Graninger
Dr. Fariba Zarinebaf

The Dissertation of Rachel Brooks Tyra is approved by:

_____

_____

_____

Committee Chairperson

University of California, Riverside

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project would not have been possible without the mentoring and encouragement of my devoted committee. My advisor, Dr. Michele R. Salzman was tireless and unwavering in her support and advice on my research and writing. Her encouragement, guidance, and thoughtful comments on my work have made me a stronger, more confident scholar. Dr. Denver Graninger has been supportive throughout my project and continually challenged me to think deeper about my analysis of imperial women. Dr. Fariba Zarinebaf gave me the opportunity to explore other empires and has encouraged my interest in power negotiations.

I also want to thank Dr. Piotr Gorecki and the other members of UCR's Ancient Mediterranean Study Group. This group not only gave me helpful and constructive feedback on my work, but also provided a collaborative and supportive space to share ideas. Additionally, my Graduate Student Affairs Advisor, Alesha Jaennette, helped me through the dissertation process, and always provided a friendly ear.

Some of my dissertation was inspired by my time at the American Academy of Rome's summer program. In particular, my thoughts and analysis of the bathhouse space was inspired by my time in Rome. This would not have been possible without the financial support from the Roger Ransom Award, The Department of History Research Award, and the Intercollegiate Center for Classical Studies. I also want to thank my grandmother, Barbara Purrington, who helped fund my summer program in Rome, and shared my passion for the city.

Lastly, I want to thank my family for all of the love, patience, and support they have always given me. I thank my brothers, Dr. Steven Tyra and Alec Tyra, Esq., and my sisters-in-law, Sami and Kim for their love and friendship. I specifically want to thank Steven for helping me with my Greek translations and finding articles; I want to thank Alec who helped me with all of my titles and came up with the title of my dissertation. I give very special thanks to my parents, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, for everything they have provided. They listened to every new idea and discovery, helped with the writing of my dissertation, and provided love and support my whole life.

Thank you to Jesus Christ, who heard every prayer and frustration during this process; and there were many.

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, Saundra and David Tyra.

Thank you for all the love and support.

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Justina as Queen:
Reading the Empress Beyond Gender

by

Rachel Brooks Tyra

Doctor of Philosophy, Graduate Program in History
University of California, Riverside, June 2022
Dr. Michele R. Salzman, Chairperson

The Empress Justina (370-388) is a central figure in the Valentinian dynasty (364-392), as well as one of the most important and influential empresses in Late Antiquity. Justina's reign as empress spanned the majority of this period and her legacy reached well beyond into the fifth century. During her reign, Justina played a pivotal role in stabilizing and securing both her husband's imperial legitimacy and her son's imperial succession and security.

During the usurpation of Magnus Maximus (383-388), Justina and Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, fought over control and influence of the Milanese basilica. This conflict has often been seen as a doctrinal dispute between Nicene and Arian Christians. However, if we understand that her goal was securing Valentinian II's reign and defeating Magnus Maximus, we can conclude that Justina was a pragmatic and effective empress. Ultimately, Justina set a standard for imperial women and their role in Church

politics. Her legacy impacted not only later fifth century women, but also the representation of Helena as an empress.

Ultimately, I argue that imperial women exerted real influence in the late fourth century. Furthermore, my analysis of the sources reveals the influence of late antique imperial women by looking beyond gendered stereotypes. In order to do this, I focus on the reign of the Empress Justina and her role during the basilica conflict with the Bishop Ambrose. Through a reanalysis of this conflict, I suggest alternative explanations for Justina's actions and motivations. Accordingly, I conclude that Justina had a lasting legacy on the depiction of imperial women in the late fourth and fifth centuries and became a model for imperial women's engagement with bishops and ecclesiastical politics.

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ABBREVIATIONS

CA	*Collectio Avellana*
CSEL	*Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum*
CTh	*Codex Theodosianus*
HA	*Historia Augusta*
HE	*Historia Ecclesiastica*
JLA	*Journal of Late Antiquity*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
LCL	*Loeb Classical Library*
LSJ	H. Liddell, R. Scott and H. Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Clarendon Press. 1940.
NPNF	*The Writings of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers,* ed. P. Schaff et al. (Peabody, 1887–92] 1995)
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*
PLRE	*The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire,* 3 vols., ed A.H.M Jones, J.R. Martindale, and J. Morris (Cambridge, 1971-1992)
SC	*Sources Chrétiennes*
SLA	*Studies in Late Antiquity*

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Introduction:
Rewriting the Late Fourth Century Empress

In 2003, the historian Edward Champlain did the unthinkable. He rewrote the image of Nero from one of the worst "bad" emperors of the Roman Empire into a nuanced, complex figure, who was not as "bad" or as hated as accepted sources and scholarship had previously assumed. In the beginning of his work, Champlain asked a series of questions that allowed him to reassess the events and life of Nero as the sources present it. Champlain states,

> The pages of Tacitus, Dio, and Suetonius drip with the blood of Nero's victims. Horror mounts on horror. But what if we were to accept the writers' facts and reject their explanations – what if we were to adopt Nero's version of events? That is, the executions, the forced suicides, the matricide, were necessary for the safety of the emperor and the good of the state? Much of Nero's monstrosity would fall away….What if we also accepted his own explanations for his other villainies or, where such explanations are lacking, what if we tried to set them against the expectations of his contemporaries, rather than the condemnations of posterity? We might then create a new vision of the man…[1]

[1] Edward Champlin, *Nero* (Kindle Locations 494-498). Kindle Edition.

the Emperors of the first and second century Roman Empire, such as Nero, Claudius, and Caracalla, and other leaders, such as bishops and barbarian commanders, as well as whole temporal periods have subsequently received significant new interpretations.[2] However, imperial Roman women, particularly of the late antique period, have received uneven treatment and reassessment.

This is not to say that imperial women, and women in general, have not been the focus of many important studies. Kenneth Holum's *Theodosian Women* still looms large in the field of late antique imperial women, as does Anthony Barrett's *Agrippina: Sex, Power, and Politics in the Early Empire* for Julio-Claudian imperial women. The works of Suzanne Dixon and Kate Cooper on Roman family, Elizabeth Clark and Susanna Elm on Christian ascetic women, and Judith Evans-Grubbs on women and Roman law are just a small sampling of the work on women and empresses in the Roman Empire.[3]

Nevertheless, the study of imperial women in modern scholarship faces severe limitations. Since there are so few imperial women produced written and material sources, how do scholars assess the role of these women? How do they navigate the tropes of male-centric sources that confine women into specific motifs to serve a literary purpose? The trap with these questions, as it is argued, is either the material, taken at face value, will lead to a skewed representation of women, or, more nihilistically,

[2] For example, Peter Brown began reassessing the Late Roman Empire and challenged Gibbon's decline narrative; Timothy Barnes, Francois Paschoud, and Ronald Syme have reassessed sources such as Ammianus Marcellinus and Eusebius, Zosimus, and the *Historia Augusta*. Virginia Burrus, Claudia Rapp, and Michele Salzman have reassessed the concept of Christianization and Christianity and Roman elites. This is just a small snapshot to show how the late 20th and 21st century has shifted in Roman and Ancient Mediterranean history.

[3] See Holum (1989); Barret (1996); Dixon (2001); Cooper (1996); Clark (1990); Elm (1994); and Evans-Grubbs (2002).

because of the limitations of the sources, historians are unable to approach a historical empress.[4]

However, I argue that using new questions, such as those Champlain posed, and moving away from a strict gendered-focused methodology, will provide a new way of approaching late antique imperial women and, specifically, will allow us to discuss real examples of female imperial agency and authority. In order to do this, I will focus my work on one imperial woman, specifically, the late fourth century empress Justina (370-388) and the legacy and impact she had on depictions of women in the sources.

I.2 Background and Subject

Justina is a central figure in the western imperial court during the Valentinian dynasty. The Valentinian dynasty (364-392) suffers from being sandwiched between two dominant and powerful Roman dynasties, the Constantinian and Theodosian. In fact, the end of the Valentinian dynasty ran concurrently and intersects with the beginning of the Theodosian Dynasty (379-457). Justina's reign as empress spanned the majority of this period and her legacy reached well beyond into the fifth century. During this period, Justina played a pivotal role as a stabilizing force for both her husband's legitimacy and her son's security.

The Valentinian dynasty began in 364 when Jovian's tumultuous eight month reign came to an end. It is worth noting here, also, that Jovian's short reign succeeded Julian the Apostate's controversial reign, which was also rather short. Therefore,

[4] This is one point I will discuss more below. But, that historians cannot really unearth women in history is a caveat that is consistently made in gender-focused scholarship on the ancient Mediterranean world.

Valentinian's succession and reign reasserted stability after this period.[5] Immediately upon his succession, Valentinian elevated his younger brother, Valens, as a co-Augustus in order to achieve this dynastic stability and prevent a succession crisis.[6] With Valens's elevation, the empire was split in half with a ruler in the east and the west. Although this move of co-ruling was not unprecedented, after the Valentinian Dynasty, the Roman Empire would never again have a single ruler, and the eastern and western portions of the empire would continually evolve away from each other.[7]

Upon becoming emperor, Valentinian I was already married to Marina Severa and had a son, Gratian, who would become a future emperor. In the east, Valens was also married, but had no male issue.[8] The lack of an older male issue presented a potential vulnerability for the Valentinian dynasty. This vulnerability became especially pronounced in in 366 and 367. In 366, Valens ended an attempted coup made by the usurper, Procopius. In 367, Valentinian suffered an illness that forced him to face his mortality. The combination of events likely revealed the potential succession crisis. Therefore, Valentinian elevated an eight year old Gratian as a co-ruler in the west.[9]

Three years later, Valentinian would further strengthen his dynastic claims when he divorced his first wife and married Justina. As early as Themistius, the late fourth

[5] See Lenski (2014), 21-24 for the succession of Valentinian.

[6] Ibid, 24.

[7] Although the imperial rule was split at this time, this evolution of the east and west of the Empire was slow and should not be overstated. A good, collaborative work that discusses various aspects of continued unity in the fourth century is *East and West in the Roman Empire of the Fourth Century*: *An End to Unity*? (2015) Edited by, Daniëlle Slootjes, Roald Dijkstra, Sanne van Poppel. Mark Hebblewhite (2020), 2 points out that Theodosius briefly united the Empire under his soul rule when Valentinian II died in 392, but he also had elevated his sons Arcadius and Honorius as co-augusti.

[8] See Lenski (2014), 103.

[9] See McEvoy (2013), 48-50 for Valentinian I's unprecedented move to not only make a co-augustus status for his sons, but also to do it when they were still children.

century rhetor, Justina was associated with the Constantinian line.[10] T.D. Barnes even suggested that she was the granddaughter or great-granddaughter of Constantine, possibly through Crispus, the son Constantine executed along with his wife Fausta.[11] Justina had already been married to the usurper, Magnentius, in order to secure a nominal connection to the Constantinian line.[12] Justina's marriage to Valentinian raised issues that influenced her depiction in the sources and which affected her later reception as an empress. Specifically, the fact that Valentinian I divorced one wife and married a widow of a usurper set an early tone for Justina's image as an empress, which is reflected Christian concerns about her undue influence on her husband and the empire at large. [13]

This image of a controversial empress continued throughout Justina's life, and especially increased when she became the only adult imperial person in an era rife with young, child-emperors.[14] After 378, both Valentinian and Valens were dead; Gratian, as Emperor in the west, was struggling as a young, new ruler being overshadowed by the newly appointed eastern Emperor, Theodosius I.[15] It was during this period that Justina made her mark as an imperial woman during her infamous conflict with St. Ambrose, the Bishop of Milan. This conflict has dominated, like her controversial marriage has dominated Justina's image as an empress. Sources like Rufinus, Sozomen, and,

[10] See David Woods (2004), 325-327 for Themistius's comments on Justina's origins.

[11] See François Chausson (2007) for the Constantinian connection to Justina. See also T.D. Barnes (1998), 124-126.

[12] See Washington (2015), 66-67.

[13] See McEvoy (2013), 105 and also Lenski (2014), 267 for Valentinian I's relaxed Christian standards beginning with Justina.

[14] McEvoy (2013), 125 points out that this position did not mean that Justina held any particular office like regent.

[15] See Hebblewhite (2020), 17-23.

unsurprisingly, Ambrose depict Justina as an Arian zealot persecuting the Nicene bishop.[16] Modern scholarship, in contrast, has downplayed Justina's agency. For instance, D.H. Williams focuses less on the Ambrose and Justina's conflict as one between bishop and court and more on the clash between two communities within Milan.[17] Similarly, Meaghan McEvoy cautions not to attribute any formal authority to Justina and downplays her power during the reign of her son, Valentinian II.[18]

Despite these portrayals, I will show that Justina was neither a religious zealot, nor lacking in real power and agency. In fact, Justina was a pragmatic and influential imperial person. She successfully secured her position in the empire, as well as her son Valentinian II, and her daughter, Galla. During her tenure as empress, she navigated usurpation attempts and played a role in drafting imperial legislation. She was a pivotal figure, who challenged both Theodosius's position on Arianism, but also asserted influence on ecclesiastical politics in Milan. Furthermore, Justina became a new model for imperial women and their role in Church politics, as well as how sources represented Christian imperial women. As I will show in chapter 3, Justina's legacy also influenced later fifth century empresses and their engagement with bishops, as well as the late fourth and early fifth century accounts of the Empress Helena, the mother of Constantine. For these reasons, I argue Justina ought to be regarded as a central figure in the Valentinian dynasty, as well as one of the most important and influential empresses in Late Antiquity.

[16] I discuss the tropes used against Justina in these sources and more in my first chapter.
[17] See D.H. Williams (1995), 208-212.
[18] See McEvoy (2013), 124.

I.3 Methodology

Although there are many great works that are devoted to the study of Roman women, from survey anthologies, to focused biographies, I will address just a few that I suggest exemplify the field, and have influenced my own work. In the first place, I follow Mary Boatwright's recent work that highlights several significant imperial women in order to "reclaim their value as individuals."[19] Boatwright defines imperial women as any woman connected to the emperor through marriage or immediate family members.[20] Boatwright situates these women withing their historic context using a plethora of source material. Through these women, she not only highlights the particular roles and depictions of imperial women, but also creates a fuller understanding of the time period in which the women lived.[21] I will approach Justina as both an important individual, as well as a Moreover, Boatwright defines an imperial woman as a point of contact for the larger context of the late fourth century.

No discussion of women in late antiquity would be complete without paying homage to Sarah Pomeroy's paradigm shifting work, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Salves*: *Women in Late Antiquity*. At the beginning of her introduction, Pomeroy claims that her work began with the question, "what were women doing?"[22] This was a relatively new question when Pomeroy asked it. It put women forward as the primary

[19] Boatwright (2021), 9.
[20] Ibid, 2.
[21] See] Boatwright. *Imperial Women of Rome: Power, Gender, Context*, (2021).
[22] See Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Salves: Women in Late Antiquity* (1975;1995), xiv.

subject, but also attributed action and activity to women's lives that was not always connected to their male counterparts.

Two and a half decades later, Suzanne Dixon's book, *Reading Roman Women* moved from asking what women were doing, to why and how women functioned and were treated in the sources. Dixon engaged with variety of written and material evidence and used context to explain why and how the context of these sources explained their use of women.[23] However, Dixon suggests that because of the nature of male-dominated source material, approaching historic women in antiquity may be impossible, but still worth attempting.[24]

A little over a decade after Dixon, Amy Richlin's *Arguments with Silence* compiled several approaches to address various genre related issues concerning classics and women's history. In her introduction, Richlin asks, "who are we talking about when we say Roman women?"[25] She presents the problematic nature of women as an entire, monolithic category, and laments the lack of female voices in the ancient sources, as well as underrepresented areas in modern scholarship, especially in areas of women in late antiquity, lower-class women, and female sexuality. Furthermore, like Dixon, she questions the ability of modern historians to study women, but argues that it is, nonetheless, an important endeavor.[26]

Along with these pioneering works, there have been several anthologies focused on women in the Roman world, and, more broadly, the ancient Mediterranean world.

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[23] See Dixon, *Reading Roman Women: Sources, Genres, and Real Life* (2001).
[24] See Dixon (2001), 5.
[25] Richlin, *Arguments with Silence: Writing the History of Roman Women* (2014), 12.
[26] Richlin (2014), 1-35.

Ronnie Ancona's introduction to Oxford University Press's *New Directions in the Study of Women in the Greco-Roman World* describes the importance of interdisciplinarity and breaking the bounds of traditional focus of ancient temporal and geographic borders.[27] This claim of interdisciplinarity and diversity of time and space reflects Richlin's arguments in *Arguments with Silence.* Regardless of the claim, however, the volume is focused mainly on Greek and Hellenistic examples of women, with a few Roman Republic, early Roman Empire, and one Roman Egypt.[28]

Blackwell's *A Companion to Women in the Ancient World* edited by James and Dillon, though earlier than Oxford's companion is more expansive in its geographical and temporal reach. But, the editors acknowledge the source material for non-elite women limits an historian's reach. However, the work acknowledges this short coming and still strives for interdisciplinary analysis using myriad source types. Yet, even in this case, the editors and several contributors to the anthology remain skeptical, questioning, "whether a given body of evidence can in fact reveal any realities about women in antiquity."[29] Additionally, James and Dillon add,

> Methodology this becomes a primary issue in the study of these materials: inherent biases in the materials mean that what we read and see cannot be taken at face value.… Specialists in a given field know not to treat their evidence naïvely, but do not necessarily recognize the gender biases in other material. The ancient sources on women seem so starkly self-evident and are so visually striking that they themselves tempt readers and viewers to understand them as unmediated reality.[30]

[27] See Ronnie Ancona, (2021), 6.
[28] See Acona (2021), 6-10.
[29] See James and Dillon (2015), 2.
[30] See James and Dillon (2015), 1.

Essentially a caveat on women in ancient history has become so common place, it is seen fairly consistently in works focused on imperial women and women in the general. The argument above suggesting that specialists do not tend to recognize gender-bias in the sources, itself ignores the many types of biases that exist in the sources. The senatorial biases of historians against the emperors, biases of Christian sources, biases of late pagan sources, the propaganda of numismatics, statuary, and epigraphy, these and more are all examples of the challenges of dealing with ancient history, and, for that matter any history.

Sandra Joshel contends with the gender biases in her analysis of Tacitus's depiction of Messalina, claimed that Messalina acted as a symbolic representation in Tacitus's account. Not only did she serve to emasculate the emperor, but, as Joshel suggests, she acted as a symbolic representation of a bad empire.[31] As such, Joshel concludes that Messalina as an historic figure with agency is difficult to ascertain from Tacitus's narrative. However, Joshel is focused on how Tacitus crafts his narrative, more than on Messalina as an historic figure. Accordingly, Joshel also acknowledges the biases that cloud any historic image of the Emperor Claudius. She states,

> In his account of Claudius, the fourth emperor, Tacitus worked within a senatorial tradition that depicted Claudius as a fool and a pedant, either ignorant of the machinations of his freedmen and wives or else subservient to their wishes.[32]

[31] See Sandra Joshel (1995), 52.
[32] See Joshel (1995), 53.

This acknowledgment of Tacitus's biases allows Joshel to understand the relationship of gender and power in his account and understand how women functioned as symbols or tropes in Tacitus.

Similarly, Julie Langford and Judith Ginsberg take similar approaches as Joshel. Langford, rather than focus on an actual historic woman, uses the depictions of Julia Domna to analyze how sources between the third and fourth century depict elite women. Her analysis focuses on the rhetoric of the sources, rather than trying to "peek" behind the narratives to find an historic figure.[33] She does this in order to understand the negotiations of power in the Roman Empire, and how images of women were used in these negotiations. Likewise, Ginsberg analyzes the literary depictions of the Empress Agrippina in order to find the "the cultural assumptions about the role of women."[34] While these studies are important and useful for highlighting the tropes that must be dealt with in the sources, I will go beyond these tropes to "peek behind the rhetoric" as Langford puts it, in order to understand the motivations and influence of Justina as a real historic figure.[35]

Even though historians recognize these biases in the sources, it has not prevented historians from doing history of emperors and other elite male figures. Just as Champlin recognized the biases inherent in the sources covering Nero, it did not prevent a new analysis of the emperor. It is not common to suggest that because of these biases, historians remain skeptical about whether they can eke out an historical narrative.

[33] See Julie Langford (2013), 1-5.
[34] See Judith Ginsberg (2006), 9-10.
[35] Langford (2013), 3.

Moreover, in general, historians addressing emperors, senators, military or other male figures do not tend to remind or caution their readers that these are masculine figures, being described using masculine tropes and language, unless the study is taking a specifically gendered approach. For example, the way Joshel highlighted the gendered tropes Tacitus uses to depict Claudius as a weak emperor were part of Joshel's overall analysis of how Tacitus used gender and women in his work. However, while male figures, like emperors, in ancient history can be studied beyond their gender, female figures have been reduced to it.

This is not to say that the work of gender history is unimportant to my work, but only that it is just one way I will address the empresses. As Victoria Leonard has shown, in her study on the Empress Placidia's marriage to the Visigoth, Athaulf, there is a stark difference from the historical narrative and the "lived experience" of historical figures, particularly women. Leonard focuses her arguments on a revisionist reading of the sources that notes the silences of women and rejects the idea that silence is synonymous with passivity or consent.[36] By reading against the sources, Leonard does not deny the gendered tropes, but embraces them and uses them to better understand the "lived experience" of Placidia through a comparative approach that challenges how and why the sources depict Placidia. Leonard's main focus is to represent the sexual experience and violence women endured using Placidia as a model, which is often silenced in the

[36] See Victoria Leonard (2019), 335.

sources.[37] My main focus will be on Justina's influence and the motivations for her actions, which are equally silenced.

Therefore, while I will recognize the biases of the sources, I will look beyond those biases to find a new type of empress. Just as Champlin and Leonard recognized the biases on the sources for Nero and Placidia, and still dared to question whether we can "create a new vision of the man," or find the "lived experience" of the woman, my analysis will dare to find a new vision of the Empress Justina. One that exists beyond her gender.

I.4 Historiography on Justina

There is not a large corpus of material devoted to the study of the Empress Justina. However, she does appear in scholarship focused on St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and on the Emperor Valentinian. Overall, treatment of Justina has focused largely on her dynastic connections and marriages and her conflict with St. Ambrose, both of which I discuss at greater length in chapters 1 and 2.

As regards Justina's origins, Francois Chausson's *Stemmata Aurea Constantin, Justine, Théodose: Revendications Généalogiques et Idéologie Impériale au IVe Siècle ap. J.-C* is one of the fullest treatments of Justina's origins and dynastic connections. This is an important work on the role of dynastic connections and Justina's connection to the Constantinian line. Chausson's work also uses several interesting connections with the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*). This is important to note, because the *HA*, as a late fourth

[37] Leonard (2019), 341-345.

century text, engages with this time period's tropes regarding imperial women. I will discuss the HA more in my second chapter.[38]

Similarly, David Woods has also discussed Justina's dynastic origins and importance, as well as her marriage to Valentinian I. In two separate articles, Woods makes the claim that Justina is, in fact, a relative of Constantine, and that Valentinian ultimately repudiated her and sent her into exile. Both of these claims are based on limited corroboration and shaky source material. I counter these arguments in my first chapter.[39]

Alongside scholarship focused on Justina's dynastic importance, there have been several studies that have looked at the literary descriptions of Justina as a heretic. In particular, Amélie Belleli and Sławomir Bralewski. Belleli's argument claims that the depiction of Justina put forth by Ambrose has obscured her historical character. Ambrose presented Justina as a heretic and persecutor of Nicene Christianity. Since his depiction was so influential it was adopted in later historical accounts, transforming Justina from a historical figure into a literary example of a "bad" empress.[40]

Bralewski also focuses on the representation of Justina in both Sozomen and Socrates Scholasticus. However, instead of focusing on Justina as a literary "type,"

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[38] Chausson, François, (L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2007). Part of this book was originally part of Chausson's thesis.

[39] See Woods, "The Constantinian Origin of Justina (Themistius, *Or*. 3.43b)," (2004), 325-327. See also, Woods, "Valentinian I, Severa, Marina and Justina," (2006), 173-188. Along with Woods and Chausson, J. Rougé also has several earlier articles on Justina's origins and marriage to Valentinian. See Rougé, "Justine, La Belle Sicilienne," *Latomus*, (no.33, 1974), 676-678; and "La Pseudo-Bigamie de Valentinien Ier," (1958), 5-15.

[40] See Belleli, "Justine en Jézabel. La Fabrication Textuelle d'une Mauvaise Impératrice Romaine dans la Première Moitié du Ve Siècle," (2016), 93-107.

Bralewski compares Sozomen and Socrates in order to understand how each historian and how they viewed heresy and its relationship with women. Bralewski specifically notes Socrates's use of beauty to describe Justina and suggests that this presents a more positive portrait of the empress than Sozomen's depiction.[41] Although Bralewski's comparative model between historians is insightful he does not problematize the use of beauty and seduction that were common tropes for women in ancient sources.

This scholarship has provided much insight into Justina's dynastic importance and her representation in the sources. However, the main focus on Justina in these works tends to obscure the historical context in which she lived. Since they are specifically looking at her origins, the potential bigamy of her marriage to Valentinian I, and how the sources react to her alleged heresy, they do not underscore the events that led to Valentinian I's marriage, or why it may have been necessary to have a strong dynastic connection.[42] Likewise, the accused heresy was part of the larger conflict with Ambrose and this conflict occurred during a volatile moment in the late fourth century. Therefore, I will be addressing these aspects of Justina's life, but understanding them through a contextual framework and assessing why and how Justina navigated these situations.

[41] See Bralewski, "Could a Heretic be a Beautiful Woman in Socrates of Constantinople's and Sozomenus's Eyes?" (2017), 204-212.

[42] Barnes (1998), 124 shows that modern scholars believe that Socrates Scholasticus claims that Justina and Valentinian I engaged in a bigamous marriage with Valentinian I's first wife, Marina Severa. But, Barnes shows that this is inaccurate and that Socrates refers to Marina Severa as Valentinian's former wife. See Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 4.31. Socrates was likely referring to Valentinian remarrying so quickly after his divorce. There were some rules regarding hasty remarriages. There was also a general dislike of divorce and remarriage in the Christian community. See Evans-Grubbs (2002), 223-224.

I.5 General Historiography

As I stated earlier, in order to reassess Justina's dynastic role and marriage, as well as her conflict with Ambrose of Milan, it is important to understand modern scholarship of the Late Antique period the Roman Empire. Specifically, I focus on the fourth and fifth centuries and, especially, the Valentinian dynasty from 364-392. The Valentinian dynasty, of which Justina was empress, has not been treated consistently by scholars. The Valentinian dynasty is separate and distinct from the Constantinian and Theodosian dynasties. This fact has not always been recognized by modern historians. One of the fullest treatments of the Valentinian period is Noel Lenski's *Failure of Empire*. However, Lenski mainly focuses on the east and Valens's rule. Additionally, he ends his analysis at the end of the Battle of Adrianople, and he therefore ignores the continuation of the Valentinian dynasty in the west under Gratian and Valentinian II. Despite the fact that Lenski has more of an eastern focus, he discusses, albeit briefly, Justina's marriage to Valentinian I and concludes that Justina served to bolster Valentinian's dynastic connections.[43]

There is a consistent tension in the field of Late Antiquity between continuity and collapse. Lenski, as the title of his work suggests, leans toward decline, although not without acknowledging the slow progress demarcated by strong cultural output.[44] Meaghan McEvoy takes a similar approach to the late fourth through early fifth centuries. Although, she does not explicitly call this period one of decline, it is heavily suggested.

[43] See Lenski (2002), 103-104; 242.

[44] In particular, Lenski notes that the Roman Empire in terms of territory and military strength declined. See Lenski (2002), 369-373. For a different perspective from the "continuous decline" analysis, see Salzman, *The Falls of Rome*: *Crises, Resilience, and Resurgence in Late Antiquity*, (Cambridge, 2021).

She argues that the role of emperor, particularly under child-emperors such as Gratian and Valentinian II in the west during the end of the fourth century, and Honorius and Arcadius in the west and east, respectively during the fifth century indicated that the imperial status had taken on aspects of a figurehead and roles, such as Stilicho's *magister militum* were becoming increasingly more powerful.[45]

McEvoy does well to show how new elite positions increased in prominence in the late fourth and fifth centuries due to the youth of emperors like Valentinian II and Honorius. She shows how these rules created vacuums of power for usurpers, like Magnus Maximus, and Roman elites, like Stilicho, to exert control. However, McEvoy does not do enough to define what she means by "child," or "rule." For example, McEvoy defines Gratian as a child-emperor, but even though he was elevated only nominally by his father; and, by the time he succeeded Valentinian I, he was already sixteen, not that much younger than figures like Octavian and Commodus who were around 19 when they began ruling.[46] Gratian's age also is significantly different from Honorius, who was only eleven when he succeeded in the west.[47] Additionally, although the late fourth century heirs, like Gratian, Valentinian II, and Honorius were hailed as *augusti* in their youth by Valentinian I and Theodosius I, they were not technically ruling since their fathers were still alive at the time. Furthermore, McEvoy is reluctant to associate real authority to empresses, like Justina, who were widowed and left with the

[45] See McEvoy, *Child-Emperor Rule in the Late Roman West, AD 367-455* (Oxford, 2013), 307-313.

[46] For dating emperors' reigns and lives, see Meijer, *Emperors Don't Die in Bed*. Trans. by S. J. Leinbach, (Routledge, 2004), 14, 63.

[47] For Honorius's early years, see McEvoy (2013), 138-141.

care of a child-emperor. Despite this, McEvoy's work is important for its focus on the changing role of the imperial court and the figure of the emperor. She also shows the growing importance of new Roman elites during a precarious era in the Roman Empire.

Along with Lenski and McEvoy, there has been much work done on Ambrose and his writings. In particular, the works of D.H. Williams, Neil McLynn, Michael Stuart Williams, and J.H.W.G Liebeschuetz have all demonstrated the significance Ambrose's works and life in the Roman Empire in the late fourth century. D.H. Williams has focused on Ambrose's role as a bishop and the religious controversies of Ambrose's time. McLynn and Stuart Williams have both provided full biographical accounts of Ambrose. Liebeschuetz has done both, provide an account of Ambrose's life and times, as well as analyzed his work and addressed his role as a religious figure.[48]

Since Ambrose is an essential figure in Justina's story, understanding the changing role of bishops, the imperial court, and Roman elites is essential to the backdrop of Justina and Ambrose's conflict. Claudia Rapp's work on the changing status of bishops, and Michele Salzman's work on the senatorial elite during both continuity and crises have provided a clear backdrop to Ambrose and Justina. Rapp argues that the bishop transforms into a civic authority and even refers to Ambrose as the first "senatorial bishop" suggesting a Christianization of Roman elites, as well as a shift in traditional elites.[49] Salzman has emphasized the continued importance of the Roman

[48] See Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (2013).

[49] See Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire*, (2002); and *The Falls of Rome Crises, Resilience, and Resurgence in Late Antiquity*. 2021.

senate and carefully defines elites as a status of power recognized by non-elites, and elevated social-economic position.[50]

Along with Rapp and Salzman, Julia Hillner's work on the relationship between bishops and empresses in late antiquity, along with her published notes on her forthcoming book on Helena have focused on the role of imperial women in ecclesiastical affairs. In particular, her focus on the interactions between imperial women and clerics and the portrayal of those interactions in the sources has had influence in my approach to Justina's conflict with Ambrose. Hillner suggests that the bulk of these portrayals of imperial women have negative connotations and use gendered tropes, like Jezebel and Eve. I follow this argument, but further problematize these depictions with an analysis of how and when Justina received this depiction in order to show that, although gendered, they were tropes directed at women who exerted real imperial authority.

Additionally, Hillner has also shown that late antique imperial women were writing letters related to business and politics. These letters provide a deeper insight into the activities of imperial women during this period. Hillner, in discussing letter writing and concepts of authorship in late antiquity, cautions that modern scholars not assume these letters necessarily provide an authentic and private voice of an imperial woman.[51] Nevertheless, Hillner concludes that the increase in letter writing by imperial women in late antiquity coincides with the increase of visibility in these women and represents the changing nature of the Roman imperial court, especially as the court became increasingly

[50] See Hillner, "Imperial Women and Clerical Exile in Late Antiquity," (2019), 369-412; and also "Empresses, Queens, and Letters: Finding a 'Female Voice' in Late Antiquity?" (2019), 353–382.

[51] See Hillner, "Empresses, Queens, and Letters: Finding a 'Female Voice' in Late Antiquity?" (2019), 353–382.

Christian.[52] Moreover, Hillner, following Linda Olson's argument, has also warned that women in history often "bear an extra burden of proof" merely for being women, when, in actuality, men and male figures ought to require the same scrutiny.[53] In essence, scholars of women first must show women were capable of acting and then prove they did, in fact, act. Hillner's scholarship not only provides important research and evidence for my own project but also supports my methodological approach to the study of Justina.

The work of Kenneth Holum continues to be influential for both the study of the imperial women, in general, and especially of the Theodosian dynasty. In part one of Holum's book, he focuses on particular Theodosian women. In part two, Holum focuses on their role as empress during the Theodosian dynasty.[54] This structure has influenced my own approach to Justina. In the first two chapters of my dissertation, I will focus on Justina. In the third chapter, I will focus on role Justina as empress.

Mark Hebblewhite's work on the role of the emperor in the late third and fourth century, as well as his recent biography on the Emperor Theodosius have been important to my own research.[55] In particular, Hebblewhite's discussion of Theodosius's role as emperor is not only an excellent source of information for this period, but also a good example of imperial biography. Hebblewhite approaches Theodosius as a significant

[52] Hillner (2019), 373-374.

[53] See Hillner (2019), 373. See also Linda Olson. 'Reading, Writing, and Relationships in Dialogue', in *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* edited by L. Olson and K. Kerby-Fulton, (2005), 5.

[54] See Holum, *Theodosian Empresses: Women and Imperial Dominion in Late Antiquity*, (1989).

[55] See Mark Hebblewhite, *The Emperor and the Army in the Later Roman Empire, AD 235-395* (2016); see also, *Theodosius and the Limits of Empire*, (2020).

figure that acts as a point of contact for a larger context.[56] I argue that Justina acts as a similar figure for her period.

Lastly, the biographies of Helena and Galla Placidia, by Jan Willem Drijvers and Hagith Sivan respectively have served as sources of information for both of these imperial women, who appear in my last chapter, as well as models for biographies of imperial women. Drijvers's approach to Helena delves into both Helena's historical context and approaches the empress as a legendary figure.[57] Sivan's approach to Galla Placidia uses information about women in late antiquity to form interpretations about Placidia's life in places where the sources are silent.[58] Similarly, I approach Justina as a literary construction and then strip away that construction using the timeline of events to form an interpretation into Justina's actions and motivations.

I.6 The Source Material

Overall, the fourth century was a complex period where the constant strain on the Empire's boarders, shifts in imperial power and in ecclesiastical authority gave the period a sense of urgency and constant change One change, in particular, was the shift to ecclesiastical histories in the fourth century. One of the main ecclesiastical histories of the late fourth century is by Rufinus of Aquileia, who wrote in the west and had direct knowledge of Ambrose and Justina's conflict.[59]

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[56] See Hebblewhite (2020), 1-2.

[57] See Jan Willem Drijvers (1992) *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True Cross.*

[58] See Hagith Sivan (2011) in *Galla Placidia*: *The Last Roman Empress.*

[59] See *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia: Books 10 and 11* Translation and Introduction by Philip A. Amidon, 1997.

The other historical narratives for this period primarily were written in the fifth century and therefore, necessarily draw much of the fifth century into any discussion of the fourth. The ecclesiastical histories of Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Theodoret of Cyrus, all of whom wrote in the fifth century, are relevant to my dissertation. More importantly, all three of these historians were writing in the east and yet, are the only sources for the western empire. Because of their ecclesiastical perspective, some scholars have suggested they were more prone to take the side of a bishop in any conflict with an imperial woman. However, as I will show in my third chapter, this is not always the case. As I will show, historians, like Theodoret, blamed John Chrysotom for his conflict with the Empress Eudoxia. Moreover, imperial women were not the only figures these sources depicted as negative. Emperors who acted against the Church were also subject to negative press. The most obvious example of this is the Emperor Julian, who received positive treatment in Ammianus Marcellinus's account; yet, Julian's image was skewered in later fifth century sources.[60]

Along with these ecclesiastical historical narratives, I engage with several biographical accounts from the fourth and fifth centuries. Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*, Paulinus the Deacon's *Life of St Ambrose*, Sulpicius Severus's *Life of Martin of Tours*, and St. Augustine's autobiographical account, *Confessions.* Biographical accounts are all biased toward their subject and often distort both events and timelines in order to

[60] For fourth century historians see, Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity*. 2002; Vessey, *Latin Christian Writers in Late Antiquity and Their Texts*, 2005; and Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome*. 2011. See also, Urbainczyk, "Vice and Advice in Socrates and Sozomen" in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*. 1998, 299-320. See also Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State*, 1997.

construct a narrative that provides a moral example using the figure of the biography. Nevertheless, the biographers listed above personally knew the subjects of their accounts, or were contemporary with the figures they wrote about.[61]

Beyond the biographical and historical narratives, I also rely heavily on letters and speeches, mainly panegyrics and sermons, from both St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan and John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople. Obviously, letters and speeches written by the bishops in conflict with imperial women present a biased perspective. In both cases, Ambrose and Chrysostom present themselves as persecuted victims. However, both conflicts developed after the bishops had a relatively peaceful relationship with the imperial women. Therefore, even the invective the bishops use and when they use it, provides a great deal of information about the actions that the empress took and why she took it.[62]

Lastly, I use law codes and numismatic evidence for the role of imperial women in the late fourth early fifth century. Both the law codes and the numismatic evidence shows the real influence imperial women had on the functioning of the empire during this period. In the case of the laws, Justina had direct involvement in imperial decrees through the direct influence of the emperor. However, these laws have to be understood within the context in order to see Justina's influence. In contrast, the numismatic evidence of the later Theodosian women shows their dynastic importance, but does not

[61] Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius,* 1981 and also Eusebius *Life of Constantine.* Translated and Introduction by Averil Cameron, 1999. See also Thomas Hägg, *The Art of Biography in Antiquity*, 2012.

[62] See *Late Antique Letter Collections: A Critical Introduction and Reference Guide* edited by Bradley K. Storin, Cristiana Sogno, Edward J. Watts

necessarily show any action on the part of the empress because there is no evidence women were involved in the creation of coins.[63]

I.7 Structure and Argument

Since the textual source material is essential to Justina, who is not featured on numismatic evidence, my first chapter discusses how she is presented in the sources. In this chapter, I focus on the multiple gendered tropes that the sources use to depict Justina. By going through each trope applied to Justina, I highlight the bias of the source and explain why the trope was used, as well as the impact it had on Justina's image. After acknowledging these tropes, I analyze what caused the sources, particularly Ambrose, to depict Justina in a negative way. I question what was occurring and what Justina was doing in order to incur Ambrose's invective. I demonstrate that the negative portrayal of Justina that emerges from Ambrose's invective was the result of Justina's growing influence in Milan.

In chapter two, I move beyond the tropes and depiction in the sources in order to analyze when and why Justina and Ambrose clashed. Since non-textual sources for Justina are virtually nonexistent, I reconstruct a timeline of events in order to explain Justina's conflict with Ambrose and provide alternative motivations for her actions than those provided by Ambrose. In addition to the timeline, I corroborate her motivations using law codes, letters from the usurper, Magnus Maximus, and Ambrose's panegyric to the Emperor Valentinian. I argue that Justina was not a religious zealot who fought for the Arian doctrines, nor was her conflict with Ambrose a mere literary construction.

[63] See *Law, Society, and Authority in Late Antiquity* edited by Ralph Mathisen (2001).

Rather, the conflict between Ambrose and Justina was a result of Magnus Maximus's usurpation, which threatened the security of her son's reign and the stability of the western Empire. Justina used Arian groups to form alliances to prevent Magnus Maximus from moving into Italy and threatening her son's rule. However, using the Arian community threatened Ambrose's position, which resulted in his antagonism toward Justina.

The last chapter uses this same method of analyzing tropes to better explain the portrayal Justina's predecessor, Helena, and Justina's successors, Eudoxia and Galla Placidia. The analysis of Helena reveals how her depiction was a late fourth century construction, created, in part, because of Ambrose and Justina's conflict, as I will show in my third chapter. In this same chapter, I examine Eudoxia and Placidia as a part of a continuing legacy of imperial women engaging in ecclesiastical affairs and conflicting with the growing influence of bishops. These conflicts were the result of the growing importance of empresses and bishops to maintain stability in the city and empire during a period when emperors were either too young or too inept to take action. Accordingly, bishops and empresses fought over who had greater power in the moment.

In my epilogue, I argue that imperial women exerted real influence in the late fourth century. Furthermore, the sources can be used to reveal that influence once one looks beyond the gendered stereotypes by asking when and why these stereotypes appear in the sources. In this dissertation, I have focused on the reign of the Empress Justina and her role during the basilica conflict with the Bishop Ambrose. Through a reanalysis of this conflict, I suggest alternative explanations for Justina's actions, which reveal she was

a savvy and pragmatic empress. I conclude that Justina left a lasting legacy on the depiction of imperial women in the late fourth and fifth centuries. Moreover, her willingness to assert her influence over and against the bishop of Milan opened up new possibilities for imperial women to forcefully and effectively engage in ecclesiastical politics against hostile bishops.

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Reanalyzing Gendered Tropes: Justina in the Sources

I argue that the Empress Justina is an essential figure in the late fourth century transition of imperial power and the change in the relationship between the imperial court and the rising power of Christian bishops. In general, scholars like Meaghan McEvoy, Neil McLynn, and D.H. Williams, have focused more on the role of Ambrose and downgraded Justina's influence and role as an empress.[64] However, Justina's depiction in ancient sources, ranging from Late Antique histories, biographies, letters, and panegyrics provides a somewhat different view of her role and power of as an imperial woman at the end of the fourth century.

In this chapter, I will focus on the role of Justina first as a powerful symbol for imperial continuity and legitimacy. Additionally, I will show that, although the sources

[64] See D.H. Williams *Ambrose of Milan and the End of the Arian-Nicene Conflicts*, (1995). He makes an important point about the fact that "Arianism" does not just end with Ambrose. See my discussion on McEvoy in the introduction. Neil McLynn *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (1994). McLynn allows Justina to occupy the role of persecutor without much problematization.

use specific tropes in order to undermine Justina's character, these tropes never fully come to fruition. This suggests two things. First, despite her lack of praise in the sources, Justina managed to subvert traditional expectations and exercised her influence, as opposed to the stereotypical limits placed on other imperial women. Second, by the late fourth century, these tropes had evolved. Accordingly, Justina serves as a nexus to the changes in the late fourth century imperial court and in the later role of empresses in Church politics, and the rise of aristocratic bishops. In the next chapter, I will focus on Justina's conflict with Ambrose and show not only that Justina wielded actual influence, but also that the motivations for her actions were far more pragmatic than previously has been suggested.[65]

1.2 Approaching an Empress: Historiographical Approaches to Justina

Justina has not been given any lengthy focused treatment in modern scholarship.[66] Several texts focused on the late fourth century, or Ambrose, have dealt with Justina as a minor figure. There are many articles that have addressed her origins and her marriage with Valentinian I, as well as her Homoean associations. In particular, scholars have noted the peculiar courtship and marriage story presented in Socrates Scholasticus's *Historia Ecclesiastica*. In general, the main focus of her treatment has

[65] Here, I am commenting, in particular, on the commonplace presumption that Justina was Arian and motivated by these beliefs. For example, McLynn claims that, although removed from formal decision-making processes, Justina and Ambrose were a "long-standing" enemies based on Arian heresy. See McLynn (1994), 171-172. Similarly, McEvoy draws connections between Gratian's request for a basilica as well as a statement of faith from Ambrose, to the arrival of his Homoean step-mother in Milan. See McEvoy (2013), 119-120. The general acceptance of Justina's Homoean beliefs as the impetus of these conflicts is what I am addressing.

[66] This is to the best of my knowledge at the completion of this dissertation.

revolved around two events: Justina's marriage to Valentinian I and her conflict with Bishop Ambrose. In this chapter, I will focus first on her marriage with Valentinian, as well as several gendered literary tropes that painted Justina as a typical "bad empress."[67] I will then address how Justina's image as a "bad empress" was largely influenced by Ambrose's narrative. I will conclude by showing that these tropes were not stagnant constructions and that understanding their application to Justina can reveal more about her influence in the late fourth century.

Justina's origins and marriage to Valentinian have been a subject of interest among scholars primarily for two reasons. The first is the controversy over her supposed familial connection to the Constantinian dynasty. The second reason is because Justina has a rather unique role as Valentinian I's second wife. This was a little unusual, although not entirely unheard of for Roman emperors.[68] However, it was made more unique because of the fact that Valentinian was still married to Marina Severa and chose to divorce her and marry Justina. Divorce was not heard of among Roman emperors. However, most of divorced emperors tended to be earlier, especially during the Julio-Claudian period. At the beginning of the fourth century, Constantine may have put aside Minervina, the mother of Crispus, for Fausta, who was the daughter of Maximian. Maximian was Constantine's rival and the marriage was used to create an alliance.

[67] The idea of "good" and "bad" empresses comes from a number of sources, but in particular, Amy Richlin (2014), 108; Ginsberg (2006) 107; Herrin (2013), 1-7; Pryzwansky (2008, diss.). Here, good empresses are those that do not transgress their position and attempt to influence the emperor's policies or succession and a bad empress usually assumes too much power and creates some conflict or stands in opposition with local elites.

[68] Several emperors, like Tiberius, Septimius Severus, and Constantine were married twice, but their first wives were usually dead and had died prior to their succession. Claudius had multiple wives while emperor.

Therefore, if Constantine did divorce Minervina, he, like Valentinian, did it for dynastic legitimation and security. But, it is unclear if Minervina was Constantine's mistress or wife. It is also unclear if Constantine actually put aside Minervina or if she was already dead when he married Fausta. Moreover, Constantine actually restricted the ability to divorce in the 330's, which would make his alleged divorce even more controversial.[69] Regardless, of previous emperors, it is important to consider why Valentinian I would choose to divorce and remarry. I agree with those scholars who argue that Justina provided a dynastic connection to the Constantinian line.[70] Nevertheless, Socrates Scholasticus makes no mention of this connection and instead used Justina as a symbol of the threat of female seduction and power.

1.3 Justina's Origins: Arguing For Socrates Scholasticus's Account

Socrates Scholasticus's account presents a controversial marriage between Valentinian I and Justina that coincides with Justina's reception as an empress in other sources. Before I discuss why scholars ought to give precedence to Socrates's account over other sources, it is important to understand Justina's origins. The scholarship on her origins demonstrates her dynastic importance to the new emperor Valentinian I.

David Woods, for one, argued that Justina was connected to the Constantinian line and this fact thus made her a valuable commodity. Marriage to her provided a legitimate connection to an imperial dynasty and therefore, provided a legitimate claim to

[69] Barnes (2011), 48-49 argues that Minervina was dead before Constantine married Fausta. In contrast, Lenski suggests that Constantine put aside Minervina; but Lenski (2006), 64 also calls her a companion not a wife. See Humfress (2006), 215 for Constantine's laws restricting divorce.

[70] For this argument see, especially, McEvoy 92013), 105.

imperial rule.[71] In this case, I agree with Woods, and he is not the only one who supports Justina's Constantinian connection. T.D. Barnes, Meghan McEvoy, and Noel Lenski have all acknowledged the widespread belief that Justina was connected with the Constantinian dynasty.[72]

Unfortunately, there is no conclusive evidence that supports this connection. Yet, regardless of her actual heritage, Valentinian I married Justina for dynastic legitimation – either because of an actual or prevailing belief that she was connected to Constantine, or because she had previously been an empress through her marriage to Magnentius.[73] The fact that both Valentinian I and Magnentius sought a marriage with Justina suggests that she had important dynastic connections that provided a usurper and a new imperial dynasty with legitimation. This has led modern scholars like Woods, Barnes, and McEvoy to assume and support Justina's connection to the Constantinian dynasty. For my purposes, I will not attempt to prove the legitimacy of her origins, but I do think it is an important aspect of Justina's character that was widely believed to be true in her own time period.

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[71] See Woods (2004), 325-327. Additionally, Woods concludes that Themistius's use of the term *νόθος* to describe Magnentius and his heirs as a line of "bastards and spurious successors" as evidence of the fact that Justina must have been connected, possibly as a bastard offspring, to Constantine's line. In my opinion, the evidence here is inconclusive at best. The use of *νόθος* in Themistius could easily be referring to the fact that he was a foreign usurper and, therefore, threatened the name of Rome. As Themistius states in the passage quoted by Woods, "It is because of our [Constantinople's] founder that the Germans and the Jazygi do not luxuriate in the labours of the ancient Romans and that Rome's proud and mighty name has not been utterly abused, nor has been erased, or falls to bastard and spurious successors..." In this passage, Magnentius himself could be the bastard and spurious successor not his offspring with Justina. Despite this, it is enough to show that Justina was believed to be connected to the Constantinian line and that Valentinian and Magnentius were both attempting to legitimate their succession through marriage. In other words, their belief in her connection is more important here than proving she had any actual biological claim.

[72] See Barnes (1998), 124 and Barnes (1982), 44. See also Lenski, (2002), 103; McEvoy (2013), 105. See also R.M. Frakes (2006), 97.

[73] See Woods (2004), 325-327.

The ancient sources that recount Justina's marriage to Valentinian tend to be later, the earliest and most complete version being Socrates Scholasticus's account. However, modern scholars have eschewed Socrates's account in favor of sources, such as Sozomen and Zosimus, which are even later. For Instance, for McEvoy, Zosimus's account takes precedence and the story of Justina's marriage to Valentinian I, as Socrates relates it, goes unacknowledged in her narrative, even though she does cite Socrates for Valentinian I's marriage.[74] Similarly, Lenski gives precedence to the later accounts, but he does address Socrates's account. Specifically, Lenski focuses on the fact that Socrates's account seems to suggest that Valentinian legalized bigamy in order to marry Justina when he was still married to his first wife, Severa, essentially focusing on the salacious aspects of the story.[75]

T.D. Barnes also addresses this issue of bigamy and argues that it is a misreading of Socrates's account. In fact, Barnes states,

> Socrates does not say that Valentinian issued a law permitting bigamy, as has sometimes been assumed: he not only fails to say that Valentinian's law allowed a man to marry two women at the same time, but he also explicitly calls Severa the emperor's "former wife." What Socrates says is that Valentinian issued a legal ruling that permitted him (and incidentally others) to remarry after divorce. On general grounds, Socrates deserves precedence over much later writers.[76]

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[74] See McEvoy (2013), 104-105 and note 5. To be fair to McEvoy, the purpose of her book is not to delve into the marriage of Justina and Valentinian, but to analyze the Empire's response to children being named emperors, which largely occur beginning with Gratian. However, the lack of acknowledgment reflects the general attitude of giving more credence to the later accounts in regards to this particular episode.

[75] See Lenski (2002), 103 and 267-269.

[76] See Barnes (1998), 124. Here, Barnes goes on to discuss the fact that there is even a clear law barring remarriage that Valentinian was obviously addressing. These laws are also discussed in Lenski (2002), 267-268. For more on marriage laws and edicts barring bigamy see Evans Grubbs (2002), 161.

Here, Barnes not only takes the stance that Socrates has been misinterpreted, but also that his account provides a more accurate picture to the relationship between Valentinian I and his first and second wives.

Moreover, Barnes gives precedence to Socrates's account as opposed to John Malalas's version, which does not discuss Justina at all. Rather, Malalas's account addresses the reason for Valentinian's divorce with his first wife, Marina Severa.[77] In contrast to Barnes's position, Woods argues that John Malalas's account is credible and attempts to show that Malalas had merely confused two separate issues involving an empress in an attempt to discredit Socrates Scholasticus and give precedence to Malalas.[78]

Essentially, Woods claims that Justina was actually the banished empress referred to in Malalas's account as opposed to Valentinian I's first wife. Although Woods's argument is important because of his use of John Chrysostom, who, like Ambrose, plays an integral role in interactions between the imperial women, I disagree with Woods for several reasons. In the next section I will go through Woods's argument and how I think we should understand John Chrysostom, but, for now, I will be following Barnes's argument that Socrates Scholasticus should be given more precedence.

[77] According to John Malalas's account, Valentinian divorced his Marina Severa because she used her influence as an empress to defraud a person of their land and then sold it for a profit. Valentinian was infuriated with such unethical behavior and therefore banished his wife. See John Malalas 341 and trans. Jefferies et al. (1986), 185.

[78] See Woods (2006), 173-188.

As regards Justina's reign, there are, again, two main threads that seem to separate modern scholars focused on this period and on, specifically, Justina.[79] On one side, there has been an acceptance of Justina as a devout Arian and that she was earnest in her religious convictions, which prompted the conflict with Ambrose.[80] On the other side, the conflict between Ambrose and Justina is exaggerated and that Justina would not have been powerful enough to engage in such a conflict, or that there is no reason to assume Justina and Ambrose were such bitter enemies.[81] I do not adhere to either of these stances and in fact, will show that not only can we see evidence for Justina's real influence, but also the focus on the conflict as a local and religious issue obscures Justina's actions and motivations and puts Ambrose as the main figure in the conflict. However, Ambrose purposefully created this picture of the conflict and I will show that reading against his version will make Justina the main actor, who sought to maintain a stable and secure reign for her son.

1.4 Justina and Chrysostom: How Bishops Describe Imperial Women

Retuning to Woods's argument, he focuses on a small portion in John Malalas, in which the author refers to Valentinian I's first wife as Marina Severa. This appears to be a mistake. Woods shows that the name Marina Severa has become a combination of two

[79] Of course, this is a broad statement and in no way meant to be stated as a universal truth, merely a generalization that shows up regularly in scholarship

[80] See Holum (1982); D.H. Williams (1995); and Neil McLynn (1994). Both recognize Justina as an Arian in conflict with the Nicene Ambrose. McLynn does state that her influence was likely less pronounced than Ambrose would have his readers believe. See McLynn (1994), 172.

[81] See McEvoy (2013) for an example of the first case; and Stuart Williams (2017) for an example of the second case.

different names used to describe the first empress.[82] In Malalas, the author refers to the empress as just Marina. The rest of the Malalas passage focuses on why Valentinian I divorced his first wife and had her banished. In Malalas's version Marina Severa uses her position as empress to unlawfully acquire a parcel of land. Valentinian I is enraged by this unethical behavior and divorces and banishes her.[83]

Woods uses the fact that Malalas mistook the empress's name to suggest that Valentinian actually banished Justina and that was why she was in Sirmium at the time of Valentinian I's death. He claims the Malalas passage is actually about Justina, not Valentinian's first wife.[84] But, Woods's largest piece of corroborating evidence is an ambiguous passage from John Chrysostom.[85] Moreover, Woods does not address the fact that Malalas clearly states in this passage that once Gratian became the emperor, he recalled his mother from banishment (it is worth noting here that Justina was not Gratian's mother). Therefore, Malalas was clearly confused For these reasons, Woods' argument that Justina was the actual empress referred to in John Malalas does not have adequate support.

Additionally, Woods does not adequately deal with the fact that the sources – though having differing versions – all seem to agree that Valentinian did divorce his wife and remarry, which begs the question what does an emperor do with a divorced first wife if not banish her? Afterall, Marina Severa's presence, as Gratian's mother, might have

[82] See Woods (2006), 173-174.
[83] See John Malalas *The Chronicle of John Malalas* trans. by. Jeffery et al. 185.
[84] See Woods (2006), 179-184.
[85] See Woods (2006), 181-183. The portion of John Chrysostom that Woods cites comes from *A letter to a Young Widow* in NPNF vol. 9. I am using the same translation below.

challenged Justina's position as Valentinian I's new wife and empress. Since there is no evidence that Justina was ever exiled, it seems a bit of a stretch to assume Malalas confused Justina for Valentinian's first wife. However, the passage in John Chrysostom that Woods uses is worth looking into, because it is about imperial women and Chrysostom would later have a conflict with the Empress Eudoxia. Therefore, understanding how Chrysostom describes empresses is useful for understanding how bishops interacted with imperial women and sheds light on Ambrose's writings concerning Justina, as well as understanding Chrysostom's own conflict later.

The passage from John Chrysostom, which Woods cites, states,

> Now passing over ancient times, of those who have reigned in our own generation, nine in all, only two have ended their life by a natural death; and of the others one was slain by a usurper, one in battle, one by a conspiracy of his household guards, one by the very man who elected him, and invested him with the purple, **and of their wives some, as it is reported, perished by poison, others died of mere sorrow; while of those who still survive one, who has an orphan son, is trembling with alarm lest any of those who are in power dreading what may happen in the future should destroy him; another has reluctantly yielded to much entreaty to return from the exile into which she had been driven by him who held the chief power. And of the wives of the present rulers the one who has recovered a little from her former calamities has much sorrow mingled with her joy because the possessor of power is still young and inexperienced and has many designing men on all sides of him; and the other is ready to die of fear, and spends her time more miserably than criminals condemned to death because her husband ever since he assumed the crown up to the present day has been constantly engaged in warfare and fighting, and is more**

exhausted by the shame and the reproaches which assail him on all sides than by actual calamities.[86]

The highlighted portion of this passage is what Woods cites. However, I have included the beginning of this passage because it is essential for understanding the development of this section and who Chrysostom is referencing, and why Woods's argument cannot be correct.

Here, Chrysostom makes it very clear at the beginning of the passage that he is thinking about the succession of nine emperors within his own lifetime. Later in this letter Chrysostom also mentions the calamities of a great war in which Rome is currently embroiled. Accordingly, based on Chrysostom's lifetime, from c. 347-407, the major calamity is quite likely the Battle of Adrianople in 378.[87] Additionally, at the end of this passage, he mentions two current emperors, which is either Valentinian II and Theodosius or Theodosius and Gratian. In the first case, the letter would have to be written after Gratian's death in 383, and in the latter case, Chrysostom chose to ignore Gratian's junior emperor in the west. Therefore, the date of 379, when Theodosius and

[86] Καὶ ἵνα τὰ παλαιὰ ἀφῶμεν, τῶν βασιλευσάντων ἐπὶ τῆς γενεᾶς τῆς ἡμετέρας, ἐννέα γεγενημένων ἁπάντων, δύο μόνοι κοινῷ θανάτῳ τὸν βίον κατέλυσαν· τῶν δὲ ἄλλων ὁ μὲν ὑπὸ τυράννου, ὁ δὲ ἐν πολέμῳ, ὁ δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν ἔνδον φυλαττόντων αὐτὸν ἐπιβουλευθείς, ὁ δὲ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ τοῦ χειροτονήσαντος, καὶ τὴν ἀλουργίδα περιθέντος αὐτῷ. Αἱ δὲ τούτοις συνοικήσασαι γυναῖκες, αἱ μέν, ὥς φασι, φαρμάκοις ἀπέθανον, αἱ δὲ ὑπὸ τῆς ἀθυμίας αὐτῆς. Τῶν δὲ ἔτι περιουσῶν ἡ μὲν παῖδα ἔχουσα ὀρφανὸν τρέμει καὶ δέδοικε μή τις αὐτὸν τῶν κρατούντων φόβῳ τῶν μελλόντων ἀνέλῃ. Ἡ δὲ μόλις πολλῶν δεηθέντων ἀπὸ τῆς ὑπερορίας ἐπανῆλθεν εἰς ἣν αὐτὴν ὁ κρατῶν ἐξέβαλε πρότερον. Τῶν δὲ τοῖς νῦν βασιλεύουσι συνοικουσῶν ἡ μὲν ὑπὸ τῶν προτέρων ἀναπνεύσασα συμφορῶν ἀναμεμιγμένην ἔχει πολλὴν τῇ ἡδονῇ τὴν ὀδύνην διὰ τὸ σφόδρα ἔτι νέον εἶναι καὶ ἄπειρον τὸν κρατοῦντα καὶ πολλοὺς πολλαχόθεν ἔχειν τοὺς ἐπιβουλεύοντας· ἡ δὲ ἀποτέθνηκε τῷ δέει καὶ τῶν καταδίκων ἀθλιώτερον ζῇ διὰ τὸ τὸν ἄνδρα αὐτῆς, ἐξ οὗ τὸ διάδημα ἀνεδήσατο μέχρι τῆς σήμερον, ἐν πολέμοις διατρίβειν καὶ μάχαις καὶ τῶν συμφορῶν πλέον ὑπὸ τῆς αἰσχύνης ἀναλίσκεσθαι καὶ τοῖς παρὰ πάντων ὀνείδεσιν. John Chrysostom *ad viduam juniorem* (To a Young Widow), PG 48.599–610. English trans.by W.R.W. Stephens, Series 1, vol. 9 (1968), 124. This bold portion is the part that Woods actually cites, but I included the beginning of the passage here.

[87] See Liebeschuetz (2011), 124-126 for the early life of John Chrysostom.

Gratian had both succeeded as emperors in the east and west, respectively, is the earliest *terminus ante quem* for this letter. David Woods, Noel Lenski, and JND Kelly, all claim 380 as the likely date and go no later than 382.[88] I however, will suggest a *terminus ante quem* of 383 for this letter, and suggest that the two emperors being referred to are Valentinian II and Theodosius I.

At the very least, knowing Chrysostom is operating within Theodosius's reign, we can start with Theodosius and count back nine emperors in order to get a clearer list of the nine emperors. This means the earliest emperor of the nine mentioned is likely Constantius II (337–361 CE) and his co-ruler, Constantius Gallus, who only technically held the title of Caesar, not Augustus. Gallus died in 354 when Constantius II executed him for treason[89] Technically, Constans also was alive as a co-ruler, albeit briefly, during Chrysostom's life, however, he died without a widow, which would mean that he would not fit the theme of widowhood in this letter, and, especially, this passage. Moreover, beginning with Constantius II fits the logical clues that Chrysostom provides when he lists the emperors in this passage.[90] His main focus is to show the suffering of life of marriage and widowhood even at the imperial level. Therefore, his list of emperors is brief and not in temporal order, whereas his list of empresses follows a temporal order

[88] In particular, Kelly argues that it cannot be later that 381 because Chrysostom does not make mention of Theodosius's victory over the Goths in 382. See Kelly (1998), 47. See also Lenski (2014), 53.

[89] See McEvoy (2020), 300 in The Sons of Constantine, AD 337-361: In the Shadows of Constantine and Julian.

[90] Constantine II died in 340 and Constans died in 350. Chrysostom was born in c.347 but, would have had little memory of Constans and Constans did not have a wife, which means he did not fit the theme of the letter, namely of husbands who died leaving widows. For more on these dates, see the entries for Constans and Constantine II in *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire: Volume 1* ed. By A.H.M. Jones, et al.

and contains more detail. At the beginning of the list, Chrysostom dismisses the emperors who died of natural causes. In this case, based on our nine emperors beginning with Constantius II, the only two who died of natural causes are Constantius II and Valentinian I, all of which fits the limits of Chrysostom's structure.[91]

The second emperor mentioned in the passage is one who was killed by a usurper. According to W.R.W. Stephens, this is referring to Constans, who was he states was killed by the usurper Magnentius.[92] If the terminus ante quem of this letter was earlier than 382, than Constans would be the only emperor that fit this description. However, Constans died without a wife, so he does not fit the theme of widowhood in the letter and this passage. Therefore, the only other emperor in the parameters of this letter would be Gratian, who died in 383 against the usurper, Magnus Maximus.[93] Hence, I suggest a *terminus ante quem* of 383 for this letter.

After Gratian, the list describes an emperor who died in battle. This could be Julian, who was mortally wounded in the Battle of Ctesiphon.[94] However, Julian's wife, Helena, died before the emperor; therefore, was not a widow, which means Julian's death does not fit the theme of the letter, just as Constans did not fit.[95] This means that the emperor who died in battle is likely Valens, who died at the Battle of Adrianople.

[91] Constantius II died of an illness just before his campaign against Julian and Valentinian I had some type of stroke or aneurysm during peace talks with the Quadi on his campaign. See Ammianus, 21.15.1-3 for Constantius II's death and 30.6.1-6 for the death of Valentinian I.

[92] See Omissi (2018), 176-178, for the death of Constans.

[93] See Hebblewhite (2020), 68-69.

[94] See Susanna Elm (2012), 4 in Emperor and Author: The Writings of Julian 'the Apostate

[95] According to Harries (2012), 267, Helena died in 360.

After Julian, Jovian reigned for a brief period. He died under suspicious circumstances, but he did leave a widowed wife and son. Jovian's wife Charito is not mentioned after his reign, but his son did have an eye poked out in order to prevent him from making any imperial claims.[96] According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Jovian was assassinated; a point Ammianus makes by comparing Jovian to Scipio Aemilianus, who was the hero general of the Punic Wars and also died under suspicious circumstances.[97] Thus, this would make Jovian a likely candidate for the emperor who died from a conspiracy.

The next emperor Chrysostom mentions in his list is one who was killed by "the very man who elected him, and invested him with purple." W.R.W. Stephens –the translator used both here and by Woods – posits that this refers to Gallus Caesar, who acted as a Caesar under Constantius II, but never became an actual Augustus, or ruling emperor.[98] However, Constantius did execute Gallus on charges of treason. The conundrum is that shortly before his execution, Gallus's wife died.[99] It may be the deaths were so close together that Chrysostom was not aware that Gallus died after his wife. However, it is unclear who else would fit this description.

Immediately following the emperors, Chrysostom goes through a parallel list of the suffering empresses who were widowed. Similar to his progression with the

[96] See Drijvers (2022), 28-29, he claims Charito's name is first attested in a 9th century source and that she had two children with Jovian. See also Lenski (2014), 20 for the gouging of Jovian's son's eye.

[97] See Ammianus 25.10.12-15. Ammianus's comparison to Scipio provides a powerful insight into how Ammianus judged Jovian.

[98] See John Chrysostom *A letter to a Young Widow* in NPNF Series 1, vol. 9 trans. W.R.W Stephens, 124 ff. 7. Stephens even states Gallus never became an Augustus.

[99] See Ammianus Marcellinus 14.11.6, who claims she died on her way to plead with her brother, Constantius II, to not convict her husband of treason. Based on this both deaths were very close together.

emperors, he glosses over the empresses who are already dead and no longer suffer from widowhood. In this case, he mentions some who died from poison and some from heartache. The empress who died from poisoning is fairly obvious; Ammianus accused the empress Eusebia of poisoning Helena, the wife of Julian.[100] The widows who suffered from heartache are a little more ambiguous, but Faustina, the third wife of Constantius II who lived to see her husband die, but may not have been alive around 383.[101] Moreover, these women also fit the temporal parameters of Chrysostom's passage.

After mentioning the deceased empresses, Chrysostom launches into another list of living empresses and presumably this list should be understood to be chronological order. This list is divided into two parts: the first are the widowed empresses who are still alive, and the second are the empresses of the current reigning emperors.

The first empress is described as a mother in constant fear for her son was likely, Charito, the wife of Jovian. Her son posed a potential threat to current emperors and therefore, had a precarious position in the empire.[102] As stated earlier, her son even had his eye poked out in order to prevent any imperial claims. Chrysostom follows Charito with the mention of a widow who was sent into exile and only reluctantly returns. This has generally been assumed to be Marina Severa, but Woods argues that it is actually Justina. But Woods' argument does not make sense. Nothing in the sources suggests

[100] See Ammianus Marcellinus 16.10.18-20.

[101] For Faustina see Harries (2012), 264 and for Domnica's marriage with Valens see Lenski (2014), 53.

[102] For support on the frightened empress being Charito see Lenski (2002), 20 and ff.40. Lenski argues that Charito's fear was unfounded because her son was blinded in one eye to ensure he could never rule.

Justina was exiled, or that she was a reluctant empress. This means that Marina Severa is likely the empress. She would have been reluctant because of the tension of the simultaneous succession of both her son Gratian and his half-brother, Valentinian II.[103] The fact that Marina Severa was the deposed empress, that Justina had taken her husband and title, and had more authority at this point than she, would have made the situation uncomfortable for her and for her son.

Gratian already was sharing power with his four-year-old brother and fighting campaigns with Goths and later in Gaul. Any conflict within the imperial court would not have benefitted anyone. What is more interesting, is that if this woman is Marina Severa, than Chrysostom was acknowledging Valentinian I's divorced wife as a widow. This would be strange for Chrysostom unless he was making a subtle comment on his attitude toward the emperor's divorce. The other empress who was still alive and would fit the temporal progression is Domnica, the wife of Valens. Little is known about her after the Battle of Adrianople. If she suffered exile it could have occurred under Valens or Theodosius, but there is no evidence to support this.

Another important point to note about this exiled empress is that she was not one of the two empresses connected to living emperors, i.e. Valentinian II and Theodosius. Since I argue that Chrysostom wrote this after Gratian's death, the exiled empress could not be either empress connected to a living emperor. Since Justina was still connected with a living emperor, she could not be the exiled empress.

[103] For the succession of Valentinian II, see McEvoy (2013), 59.

Woods argues that because Chrysostom says, "and of the wives of the present rulers..." that it must be referring to Constantia (the wife of Gratian) and Aelia Flaccilla (the wife of Theodosius).[104] However, given the *terminus ante quem* of 383, than Gratian would not be one of the two living emperors. Instead, those emperors would be Theodosius I and Valentinian II. By 383, both Gratian and, his first wife, Constantia were dead. Zosimus does mention that Gratian had a second wife, Laeta, but she would have been an empress of mere months and therefore, not likely to warrant much attention from Chrysostom in the east.[105] But more importantly, in 383, Laeta would not have been an empress of a current living emperor as Chrysostom describes. Chrysostom claims one of the two empresses is of the current, living emperor. Since we began with Theodosius, this empress must be Aelia Flaccilla, Theodosius I's first wife. This is supported by the fact that Chrysostom launches into a diatribe, after this passage, of Theodosius's constant warfare with the Goths. Therefore, it makes sense that the empress with a living husband is Aelia Flaccilla. Even Woods agrees that this description must refer to Aelia Flaccilla.[106]

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[104] Both Stephens the translator of the passage and Woods argue that this must be Constantia. But that is likely because Stephens translated *Τῶν δὲ τοῖς νῦν βασιλεύουσι συνοικουσῶν* as "And of the wives of the present rulers. Yet, *συνοικουσῶν* does not necessarily mean wife and is an odd description of the empresses in a letter about wives and widows. In fact, when Chrysostom initially describes these imperial wives, he uses the term *συνοικήσασαι γυναῖκες*. The later use of *βασιλεύουσι συνοικουσῶν* suggests a focus on those still cohabitating with a ruler as opposed to the previous focus of a wife. Justina was a wife of an emperor and a current mother, or cohabitor with a ruler, and, therefore, a *βασιλεύουσι συνοικουσῶν*.

[105] See Zosimus, 5.164. Zosimus does mention that Theodosius helped Laeta and her mother help manage a famine caused by Alaric's seizure of Rome, which suggests she was still alive in 410, but no other mention of her is given in any other sources, which is odd if she was feeding people from the imperial table as Zosimus states.

[106] See Woods (2006), 182.

The reason that the other empress of a current, living emperor must be Justina is based on the description Chrysostom provides. According to the passage, this particular empress had recently recovered from her turmoil, but was still distressed because her emperor was still a young and inexperienced. By the earliest estimation of when this letter was written, Valentinian I would have been dead for at least five years, and Valentinian II would have been only 12 years old if this letter were written in 383. This makes Justina a perfect match for this description.

Additionally, even if the letter was written in 381, it could not have been Constantia because she did not have a child. It could be Aelia Flaccilla, because Arcadius was born in 377 but, Aelia Flaccilla is the other empress who is in turmoil for her husband. If Chrysostom wrote this letter in 380 and listing only two empresses, then this would mean that Chrysostom was outright ignoring the fact that there were three acknowledged emperors in 381, and more importantly, there would have been no reason for Constantia to be mourning anything since Gratian was still alive. In contrast, Justina would have been a widow of eight years and as the mother of Valentinian II would have plenty of reason to worry for son.

As such, the year 383 was the only point in Chrysostom's present timeline of writing when there were only two acknowledged emperors. Valentinian II and Gratian ruled jointly with Theodosius I until Gratian died in 383 during his conflict with the usurper Magnus Maximus. By 384, Theodosius I had formerly recognized Magnus

Maximus as a ruling emperor.[107] For these reasons, Justina must be the acknowledged empress fearing for her son. It also means there is no reason to assume Justina was ever exiled as Woods suggests.

In fact, Woods acknowledges that modern scholars have largely agreed that Chrysostom's mention of a formerly exiled empress must be Marina Severa, but he argues that Severa would not have been reluctant to return to exile while her son was in power as the emperor. He insists that Malalas did not confuse Marina with Severa, but that they were distinct persons and a later interpolation confused the passage. He claims that the use of two different terms to describe Marina - *Αὐγοῦστα* and *βασίλισσα* – show that there must have been interpolation in the passage and Malalas was actually describing two women, one of whom was named Marina and the other of whom was the empress.

He also claims that this empress was not Severa, but in fact Justina. To further this claim, Woods asserts two points. The first is that the name Marina appears as one of the names of Arcadius's daughters with Empress Aelia Eudoxia. Arcadius had five children: Flacilla (named for Arcadius's mother), Pulcheria (named for Arcadius's sister), Arcadia (named for Arcadius), and Theodosius (named for Arcadius's father). The last child was a daughter named Marina, which does not appear to fit in Arcadius's genealogical nomenclature. Therefore, Woods surmises that Marina came from Eudoxia's family and that she may have been general Bauto's wife and, as such, friends

[107] See Sophia Lunn-Rockliffe ("Commemorating the Usurper Magnus Maximus: Ekphrasis, Poetry, and History in Pacatus' Panegyric of Theodosius," 2010), 320 for Gratian's death and Theodosius's recognition.

Justina. Thus, Woods concludes, Justina and Marina are actually the two people referred to in John Malalas's original account – though he was confused and assumed it was Severa. The second point Woods asserts is that Chrysostom describes the exiled empress as hesitant to return and Woods claims that, under the reign of Gratian, Severa would not have been hesitant to return from exile; therefore, it must be Justina.[108]

However, Woods ignores several factors in analyzing both Chrysostom and John Malalas that need to be addressed. I have already shown that it is unlikely that Justina was the formerly exiled empress in Chrysostom's account. Wood's main point of contention that it must be Justina is that Chrysostom claims the former empress only returned reluctantly and, if Valentinian were dead and Gratian were in charge, Severa would have had no reason to be reluctant to return. However, he posits no reason why, if it were Justina, she would be reluctant to come out of exile given the fact that her son was also proclaimed emperor when Valentinian I died. Secondly, Woods ignores the fact that Chrysostom's letter is meant to provide comfort and sympathy to a young widow. In discussing the imperial women, he shows that even the most elite women experience the pain and trials of widowhood (while at the same time making subtle political jabs at Theodosius's handling of conflicts with the Goths). However, Severa had been divorced from Valentinian I for over a decade before his death and would not have been considered his widow or the wife of an emperor, current or otherwise. Therefore, it would be strange to include an ex-wife in this particular list and out of character for both

[108] See Woods (2006), 179-184.

a late fourth understanding of divorce, especially from a Christian bishop like Chrysostom.[109]

Regarding his analysis of Malalas, Woods ignores the important difference in terms like *Αὐγοῦστα* and *βασίλισσα*. Since empresses in the Valentinian dynasty did not receive the title of Augusta, far from proving interpolation, Malalas's use of the term suggests a far more challenging construction. By the time Malalas was writing, it was fairly common for empresses to receive the title of Augusta, but it also reflects a deeper contrast with Malalas's ignoring of Justina as an empress. Giving both titles to Severa and ignoring Justina as an empress could be a rhetorical strategy to emphasize Justina's lack of legitimacy. Regardless if these terms were used rhetorically or as the result of interpolation, Woods does not address the fact that Valentinian II did divorce his first wife and married Justina. As such, Severa would have been exiled from the imperial court and there is no reason to assume from Malalas's account that Justina was the exiled empress.

Establishing Justina was not exiled and that she is the empress Chrysostom refers to as, "the one who has recovered a little from her former calamities has much sorrow mingled with her joy because the possessor of power is still young and inexperienced and has many designing men on all sides of him" is important for two reasons. The first is that it reflects Justina's status and role as a mother empress. Chrysostom's passage suggests Justina was concerned with the fact that her son was threatened with "designing men" on all sides of him. Valentinian II's youth made him particularly vulnerable to

[109] See Evan Grubbs (2002), 202-215.

generals seeking to further their career or perhaps even become emperor. Yet, Justina remains a clear presence in his life and is clearly aware of the situation. Furthermore, the whole tone of the letter shows the pronounced presence of imperial women and how they were still visible figures even after the emperor had died. The way that Chrysostom describes their position acknowledges the difficulties and insecurities that these women faced even with their elite status.

Justina's insecure position in her son's life and her concern for him was a major motivation for many of her action which led to her conflict with Ambrose. This brings me to the second reason that Chrysostom's focus on imperial women is so important. This passage reflects the growing tensions between elite bishops, like Chrysostom and Ambrose, and the imperial court, which often resulted in conflict between the bishop and empress toward the end of the fourth century. Like, Chrysostom had his own conflict with the empress, Eudoxia. Yet, as I will show, it was Justina's initial conflict with Ambrose that set a pattern for imperial women in terms of their role as an empress and their interactions with elite bishops.

1.5 Justina as an Empress: Background to Justina's Marriage to Valentinian I

In November of 375, the Emperor Valentinian I died of natural causes while campaigning on the northeastern frontier and stationed in Brigetio (modern day Hungary.)[110] And so ended the reign of the emperor that Ammianus Marcellinus described as "bloodthirsty" in his punishments, even as he conceded that while the

[110] According Ammianus Marcellinus 30.6.1-5, envoys of the Quadi came to negotiate with the emperor and they so enraged the emperor that he had an aneurysm and died.

Emperor's excesses were bent toward severity and cruelty, he was not lewd or unchaste in his desires and maintained a certain amount of chastity in his court.[111] Ammianus's account of Valentinian I is not particularly praiseworthy. Valentinian I's cruelty and severity as an Emperor are noted throughout Ammianus Marcellinus's account. The fact that Valentinian came from a humble family living in Pannonia was a detriment to the emperor both during and after his life. Valentinian's humble origins, which likely dogged the emperor during his reign, show again how important it was to have some dynastic connection. This made Justina an important member of his court, if for no other reason than she served as a symbolic connection to traditional Roman elites.[112]

Valentinian I divorce and remarriage attest to his concern with creating a strong, enduring dynasty. Additionally, he also had both of his sons elevated to the rank of Augustus in order to secure their position. In fact, in 367, when Gratian was only 8 years old, he was proclaimed co-emperor with his father. After his father's death in 375, when Gratian was 16 years old, and his brother, Valentinian II, was only 4, they were hailed as co- Emperors, and succeeded their father.[113] Unlike Valentinian I, who was considered excessive in severity and cruelty, both Gratian and Valentinian II were considered weak emperors. For instance, Gratian's premature death during Magnus Maximus's coup was

[111] See Ammianus Marcellinus 30.8.1 for comments of his bloodthirstiness and 30.9.2 for comments of his chaste desires.

[112] As I showed in the previous section, Justina was believed to be connected to the Constantinian line and was the former wife of the usurper Magnentius.

[113] For Valentinian's death see Ammianus Marcellinus 30.6.2. For their ages see Lenski (2002), 220-222. I discuss Valentinian II's succession more in the next chapter.

blamed on his later excesses and his weakness for being led too easily by his feckless counselors.[114]

Valentinian II would later be accused of a similar weakness; except in his case, he was also accused of allowing his mother to run roughshod over him. Although, both Gratian and Valentinian II had relatively long reigns – Gratian ruled for 8 years and Valentinian technically ruled for 17, they also both died relatively young – Gratian at 24 and Valentinian II at 21. This is one reason why they are remembered as weak emperors. Yet, the fact that they survived, continued to rule, and their dynasty even continued after their deaths suggests they were more effective than impotent child-emperors. However, McEvoy argues that the tolerance of the "boy-emperors" during the reign of Gratian and Valentinian II was the result of a formal bureaucracy and court system that was stable and institutional in the late fourth century. She suggests that the Roman bureaucratic system did not need the direct guidance of an emperor and, accordingly, that, "real demands on imperial authority had diminished."[115]

The role of empress was not an institutional one, and did not have any formally recognized authority attached to it. As McEvoy argues,

> Modern scholarship has often attributed the position of regent to Justina, but... in fact there simply was no such constitutional office within the Roman government. Justina had therefore no legal power to direct imperial policy, though no doubt her personal influence with her son was a significant factor.[116]

[114] McEvoy (2013), 118-120, even argues that Ambrose claimed Gratian was always pestering him for advice because he lacked the confidence to make his own decisions.

[115] McEvoy, 306.

[116] See McEvoy (2013), 125.

Here, McEvoy acknowledges that Justina may have influence with her son, yet her analysis undermines that point by barely acknowledging Justina's role in several key moments during Valentinian II's reign. Additionally, McEvoy's argument comes directly after eschewing Justina's role in the *Homoean* conflict with Ambrose, claiming she likely had little influence in the situation and it is attributable to the "constitutional" courts and advisors under Valentinian.[117] McEvoy states:

> The empress Justina has often been viewed as the prime mover on the Homoean side, but despite the prevailing opinion of both ancient and modern commentators, the conflict cannot be attributed solely, or even largely, to the religious fervor of Valentinian's mother, but must in fact have had the backing of the boy's advisers, given the constitutional methods which were used by the court in the attempt to prevail over Ambrose. [118]

This argument assumes Justina had could not have been the "prime mover" of the imperial court and its advisors. However, the Roman system was largely built on tradition and custom and policy could and varied from emperor to emperor.[119] Since Valentinian II was still a child, it is reasonable to suggest that Justina influenced the custom and policy of these advisers. Furthermore, the passing of law during the imperial period was the product of enactments and decrees of the emperor. For instance, throughout the fourth century, various emperors changed policy as regarded the status of

[117] McEvoy sites the constitutional methods of the court, but does not explain what this Roman constitution is. McEvoy, 124-126.

[118] Ibid, 124-125.

[119] See Dario Mantovani (2016), 30 and Francisco Pina Polo (2016), 84-86 for arguments about Roman law being more of an amalgamation of custom and tradition than a formalized structure. See also R. Malcolm Errington (2007), 7-10 for the importance of the emperor and the changes in policy between emperors in the late fourth century.

Christianity and the role of episcopate.[120] McEvoy is right to acknowledge a strong bureaucracy developed during this period, but that does not negate the power of imperial court. [121] The continued importance of the imperial court in the late fourth century, during the reign of a child-emperor created space for new imperial figures, like empresses to exert their influence. Justina served as a powerful figure in the imperial court and, even though she had no formal title, that does not mean she did not wield real authority.

Additionally, the Roman elite class was not a static system.[122] These changes were important to the role and status of bishops within the realm of cities, as well as the empire. Along with these changes, the Roman aristocracy, the *clarissimate*, increased in the fourth century under the direction of Constantine and it was a status that women held in connection with their husbands.[123] Accordingly, if when were part of the elite *clarissimate*, then we should also recognize that women, through connections to husbands, fathers, sons, and brothers were also part of the imperial court and we should not assume that their position did not come with real influence.

The senatorial aristocracy, especially during Valentinian I's reign, expanded, which shows the continued importance of the emperor in setting and determining the

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[120] Here, I am thinking about the decrees regarding Christian teachers and orators under Julian or Theodosius I's policy on religious sacrifice. In fact, Salzman notes that the imperial bureaucracy was increasingly Christianized in the fourth century with the exception of Julian's reign, which reflects the affect the emperor still had upon the political system and the mutable nature of the *constitutio* in the late Roman Empire. See Salzman (2009), 125-127.

[121] Jed W. Atkins (Roman Political Thought, 2018; 11-13) and Benjamin Strauss (*Crisis and Constitutionalism*: *Roman Political Thought from the Fall of the Republic to the Age of Revolution*, 2016) – on the definition and activation of the constitution in Rome; Jill Harries (Law and Empire: Ideas, Practices, Actors, 2013; 50-55) and Kaius Tuori (The Emperor of Law: The Emergence of Roman Imperial Adjudication, 2016) for the role of the emperor on the constitution and political systems of Rome.

[122] According to Salzman (2002), 28-29.

[123] See Salzman (2021), 55-54 for Constantine's increase of the *classismate* and women as elite figures.

highest strata of society.[124] Accordingly, Salzman argues that, by this point, emperors consulted with the senate as a matter of tradition rather than because of any "constitutional" demand.[125] Therefore, the emperor at the time of Valentinian dynasty remained the central authority in an empire that was continually in flux. Thus, the emperor was necessary to this system and when there was no strong imperial figure it was not uncommon for various figures such as generals to step in and fill the power vacuum. Just as they had no formal right to take such power their position gave them influence, which resulted in real authority.

We cannot dismiss the impact of Justina and her role as an empress. While she had no decreed authority, the traditions and customs of inherited power were imbued in her position as an empress. She had the symbolic power to legitimize both Valentinian I and II and she wielded real influence over her son, as an empress mother. And while it is true that women were limited in their ability to rule, Justina still played a significant role in maintaining her son's reign. Although Justina was not necessarily more powerful than previous empresses, she served as a new type of empress that not only legitimized the emperor through dynastic association, but acted as the advocate for the emperor and played an role in the increasingly important question of religious orthodoxy and the imperial court's adherence to it.

While not an official or constitutionalized "regent," Justina still acted as an advocate for her son's power, and a legitimizer of dynastically imparted authority. She

[124] See Salzman (2009) for Christianization of imperial elite and the nature of the aristocracy in the fourth century. See Rapp (2013) for the increasing influence of the episcopate on the Roman political system.

[125] See Salzman (2009), 36.

was a central figure in religio-political controversy with Ambrose. Because of this role, Justina's depiction in the sources shifts from a focus on her actions as a wife or mother to one of a Christian woman and leader in the late fourth century. As the sources will show, her religious affiliations were central to the depiction of her character in a way that was not previously seen in depictions of imperial women.

1.6 Justina's Marriage and the Destructive Power of Lust: The Trope of Candaules's Wife

It is important to establish Justina as one of the empresses in Chrysostom's letter, and to understand the importance of the imperial court and her position in that court in the late fourth century. In the first place, these points established that, as early as 383, Justina was a well-known and visible figure in the imperial court. This means that the invective used against Justina's character was directed at a person who had established herself and her influence before her conflict with Ambrose even began. Therefore, when we analyze her depiction in the sources it should be as an independent elite figure that had a larger reach than her conflict with Ambrose. In the second place, these points also counter the precedence Woods gives to John Malalas's account. Chrysostom is Woods's main corroboration for his argument. However, having refuted this point, and following the lead of T.D. Barnes's, Socrates Scholasticus has fuller account of the empress's early life and should be given precedence over Malalas.

There is not much known about the early life of the Empress Justina. Historians consider the few accounts of her life that exist from Socrates Scholasticus and later historians, like Zosimus, with a skeptical eye. As I already discussed, the account of Justina's early life in Socrates Scholasticus has largely been seen as a rhetorical account

more than anything that suggests a historically accurate depiction.[126] In general, the source material about Justina is brought under scrutiny in terms of its trustworthiness and accuracy and most of the current scholarship on Justina is focused on the contentious interactions she had with Ambrose of Milan and as the mother of the young Valentinian II.[127]

But, the debate regarding how powerful the empress really was in the conflict has obscured attention to how the empress is represented in the sources and how these representations, while not necessarily reflecting Justina's role in the Ambrose conflict, nevertheless, also reflect a new way of representing imperial women using a Christianized aesthetic. This aesthetic sought to incorporate a new Christianized mentality regarding orthodoxy, virginity, and sexuality. Yet, at the same time, Justina's depiction in Socrates Scholasticus shows a thriving culture that still engaged with classical tropes to depict gender roles. Justina's portrayal in the sources reflects the late fourth century desire to assert what they considered a Roman tradition that incorporated the fears brought on through changing borders and the Christianization of Roman authority.

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[126] Woods (2006), 173-175, argues that Socrates Scholasticus's account of Justina's marriage to Valentinian has been considered so outlandish that historians often combine it with the account from John Malalas even though he generally regarded as a less reliable source than Socrates. Barnes (1998), 124-126, argues that Socrates's account, which suggests that Valentinian made a law allowing for two wives has been misread. He argues that the law does not refer to bigamy, but instead merely allows remarriage after divorce. Lenski (2014) 267-268, claims that divorce was socially frowned upon in the Roman Empire, but various legal allowances had been made. I plan to explore how divorce may have affected the representation of Valentinian or Justina.

[127] See Cameron and Garnsey (Cambridge, 1998), 104-110; Lunn-Rockcliffe (*Journal of Late Antiquity*, 2010), 319; Georgiou (*Journal of Early Christian Studies*, 2013), 606-607. All these serve as examples of modern scholarship that refers to Justina as an overbearing mother, especially in connection to the conflict with Ambrose.

One of the few accounts of Justina's early life is the story in Socrates Scholasticus's regarding Justina's first marriage and her subsequent betrothal and marriage to the Emperor Valentinian I. According to Socrates Scholasticus, Justina was originally married to a usurper named Magnentius, who was old, and for this reason, unable to fulfill some of his "husbandly duties."[128] Justina came from a dynastic union and was still presented as a virgin in Socrates's account, which made her a desirable match for Valentinian.[129] According to Socrates's account, at some point, Valentinian's first wife, Severa, the mother of the Emperor Gratian, met Justina at a bathhouse. Socrates claims that Severa was so taken with her beauty that she struck up a relationship with Justina. The account states,

> Χρόνῳ δὲ ὕστερον τῇ γαμετῇ τοῦ βασιλέωσ Οὐαλεντινιανοῦ Σευήρᾳ γνωρίμη κατθίσταται, καὶ συνεχεῖσ ἐποιεῖτο πρὸσ τὴν βασιλίδα τὰσ συντυχίασ; ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐκρατύνθη ἡ συνήθεια, ἤδη καὶ συνελούετο αὐτῇ. Ὡσ οὖν εἶδεν (αὐτὴν) λουμένην τὴν Ἰουστίναν ἡ Σευήρα ἠράσθη ἡ τοῦ κάλλουσ τῆσ παρθένου...[130]
>
> At length, the woman became known to the wife of the Emperor Valentinian, Severa, and she continuously made meetings with the Empress; and at length, the intimacy was strengthened so that she even bathed with her. When Severa saw Justina bathing, she was enamored with the beauty of the young woman... [131]

[128] Socrates Scholasticus, *HE* 4.30-4.31.

[129] Barnes (1998), 123-126, claims that Valentinian I's divorce nor Justina widowhood posed any significant challenge to their marriage. See also Lenski, (2014), 102-104; McEvoy, (2013), 105, she claims that Valentinian discarded Severa because Justina was a more dynastically useful wife.

[130] Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 31.13-14 from the SC 505.

[131] Socrates Scholasticus *HE*, 4.31.13-14 (Translation is my own).

Based on the passage, there is a clear suggestion that Severa's and Justina's relationship included a sexual component.[132] *ἔραμαι* (and the active, *ἐράω*) is a familiar concept throughout ancient texts and, when used to describe an emotional state, usually refers to sexual passion and is most commonly associated with men, albeit not exclusively.[133] In general, *ἔραμαι* or *ἐράω*, as a motif, has destructive or negative connotations. When it is associated with rulers, it often foreshadows destruction to the entire empire.

One such example, which mirrors several aspects of Justina's story is the myth of Candaules. Dating as far back as Herodotus, this myth shows the particular danger of passion and seduction that overwhelms rulers. It also depicts the seductive danger of women. However, as Herodotus's version of this motif will show, Socrates had to distort the typical motif in order to use it for Justina. I suggest this is because Justina was not a "typical" empress and challenged traditional roles throughout her reign.

Herodotus uses *ἐράω* to describe Candaules's passion and blind lust for his wife. However, that is not the only connection between Socrates Scholasticus's account and Herodotus's story of Candaules. There are several motifs in this story that were transmitted throughout antiquity and reflect Socrates's connection to a thriving late fourth century culture that was still actively connected to the early classical world. Yet, as

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[132] Several translations also support this argument. For example, in the Sources Chrétiennes edition, the French translation for Ὡσ οὖν εἶδεν (αὐτὴν) λουμένην τὴν Ἰουστίναν ἡ Σευήρα ἠράσθη ἡ τοῦ κάλλουσ τῆσ παρθένου, is "Lors donc que Sévéra vit Justine au bain, elle se prit d'amour pour la beauté de jeune fille." In comparison, the English translation from the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translates it as "When Severa saw Justina in the bath she was greatly struck with the beauty of the virgin..." Yet, both of these translations undermine the use of ἠράσθη, the aorist passive of ἔραμαι. The information about the usage of *ἠράσθη* comes from the information collected through multiple dictionaries including LSJ, Slater, Autenrieths, and LMPG thanks to the *ΛΟΓΕΙΟΝ* website developed Philip Posner, Ethan Della Rocca and Josh Day and the Classics Department at the University of Chicago.

[133] Henry George Liddell. Robert Scott. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Edited by, Sir Henry Stuart Jones. Clarendon Press, 1940; see entry for *ἔραμαι*.

stated, even in using these motifs Socrates also reflects several important Christianized changes. Here, I will first explore the Candaules story in Herodotus and its transmission in order to provide one example of the danger of *ἐράω* and how it was continually used in Greek and Latin works. Then I will show how and why Socrates uses these motifs for Justina and in what ways it reflects his Christian beliefs.

In Herodotus's account, King Candaules of Lydia was so enamored with his wife's beauty that Candaules wanted his favorite among his bodyguard, Gyges, to see her naked so that he would be able to appreciate just how beautiful she was.[134] Herodotus states,

> οὗτος δὴ ὢν ὁ Κανδαύλης **ἠράσθη** τῆς ἑωυτοῦ γυναικός, ἐρασθεὶς δὲ ἐνόμιζέ οἱ εἶναι γυναῖκα πολλὸν πασέων **καλλίστην**. ὥστε δὲ ταῦτα νομίζων, ἦν γάρ οἱ τῶν αἰχμοφόρων Γύγης ὁ Δασκύλου ἀρεσκόμενος μάλιστα, τούτῳ τῷ Γύγῃ καὶ τὰ σπουδαιέστερα τῶν πρηγμάτων ὑπερετίθετο ὁ Κανδαύλης καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῆς γυναικὸς ὑπερεπαινέων. χρόνου δὲ οὐ πολλοῦ διελθόντος (χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλῃ γενέσθαι κακῶ) ἔλεγε πρὸς τὸν Γύγην τοιάδε. Γύγη, οὐ γὰρ σε δοκέω πείθεσθαι μοι λέγοντι περὶ τοῦ εἴδεος τῆς γυναικός (ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν), ποίεε ὅκως ἐκείνην θεήσεαι γυμνήν.[135]
>
> This Candaules, then, fell in love with his own wife, so much so that he believed her to be by far the most beautiful woman in the world; and believing this, he praised her beauty beyond measure to Gyges son of Dascylus, who was his favorite among his bodyguard; for it was to Gyges that he entrusted all his most important secrets. [2] After a little while, Candaules, doomed to misfortune, spoke to Gyges thus: "Gyges, I do not think that you believe what I say about the beauty of my wife; men trust their ears less than their eyes: so, you must see her naked."[136]

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[134] Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.8.1-4.
[135] Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.8.1-2.
[136] Herodotus, *Histories*. English translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge. Harvard University Press. 1920.

Herodotus clearly intertwines Candaules's passion for his wife is with her physical beauty, claiming she was "*καλλίστην*" – "most beautiful." In fact, Candaules becomes so enamored with her that he cannot contain his passion and must share it, or show it off, with his most trusted friend. He eventually convinces Gyges to secretly observe her undress before bed. However, Candaules's wife sees Gyges watching her and shamed him for his and her husband's actions. This ultimately leads to Candaules's downfall and ruin, because his wife repays his actions by plotting with Gyges to kill and usurp his rule.[137] Thus, in Herodotus's account of Candaules, the term *ἠράσθη* is associated with a powerful, consuming passion that leads to some sort of destruction or ruin. Furthermore, Candaules's passion for his wife is directly connected to her beauty – similar to the passion Severa had for Justina's beauty – but Candaules's actions show he has overestimated the reach of his power. This hubris associated with passion and power together is what proves destructive.[138]

This story of Candaules and Gyges is well attested throughout antiquity and especially in throughout the Roman Empire.[139] Later, both Cicero and Pliny the Elder mention the story and its moral implications – although they both follow Plato's version

[137] Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.9-12. (The story of Candaules appears in earlier Roman histories. He appears in Pliny the Elder, Cicero, and Plutarch. I plan to further investigate any other connections.)

[138] Another example of this use of ἠράσθη comes from Homer's *Iliad* 16.182; there he actually uses the middle voice *ἠράσατ'*. Homer also uses *ἔραμαι* in the *Iliad* 3.446 when Paris claims that "desire" first compelled him to engage in affair with Helen, which is another example of the destructive nature of this particular type of desire or passion. In this example, it is also important to note that the relationship between power and beauty. Helen's story as the most beautiful woman was part of the reason Paris abducted her, but her connection as the daughter of Zeus and her role in power politics between Sparta and Troy are also important factors.

[139] See Smith (AJP 1920), 1-37. Despite its age, Kirby Flower Smith's essay, "The Literary Tradition of Gyges and Candaules" provides an excellent overview of the various myths of Candaules and Gyges and their reception throughout the ancient and early modern periods.

more closely than Herodotus's version.[140] In contrast, Plutarch does allude to Herodotus's version in his *Moralia*. Plutarch discuses physical attraction and the potential threats of ἐράω - love. He states, "...for lovers themselves believe, and would have all others think, that the object of *passion* (is pleasing and excellent; and this made Candaules the Lydian force Gyges into his chamber to behold the beauty of his naked wife."[141] Plutarch's version of the myth follows the pattern of Herodotus's account except that Plutarch directly moralizes the story and uses it as an example of what can happen when one's passions are not checked.

It is clear that Plutarch is aware of Herodotus's account. Both Herodotus and Plutarch remained well known throughout antiquity. Plutarch continued to be important, especially among Christian theologians like Basil of Caesarea and Cyril of Alexandria.[142] Herodotus also was still known; for instance, Ammianus Marcellinus, although writing in Latin, was well aware of Herodotus's work.[143] More importantly, recounting Herodotus, and specifically the myth of Candaules and Gyges had become established as rhetorical lessons and exercises for grammarians and students of rhetoric. For example, Libanius's

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[140] In addition to Herodotus's version of this story, Plato had his own version of Gyges's story involving a magical ring that made him invisible and helped him usurp Candaules (clearly these types of rings are dangerous for both man and hobbit alike.) See Plato's *Republic* Book 2 Section 359d-360e. See Cicero *de Officiis* 3.38 and also Pliny the Elder *Natural Histories* 35.34. Whereas Libanius's account is a retelling of Herodotus's version of Candaules and Gyges (as will be shown below), Cicero retells Plato's version and even cites him. Pliny's *Natural Histories* have several sections that name both Candaules and Gyges, but discuss these stories in fewer details than the other examples given.

[141] See Plutarch Quaes. Conv. 1.5.12-16: αὐτοί τε γὰρ οὕτω πεπεισμένοι τυγχάνουσι καὶ βούλονται πεπεῖσθαι πάντας, ὡς καλῶν κἀγαθῶν ἐρῶντες. τοῦτο καὶ τὸν Λυδὸν ἐπῆρε Κανδαύλην τῆς ἑαυτοῦ γυναικὸς ἐπισπᾶσθαι θεατὴν εἰς τὸ δωμάτιον τὸν. Translation by William W. Goodwin (Loeb Classical Library). See also Plut. Quaes. Gr. 45 for his account of how Gyges killed Candaules.

142 See Arkadiy Avdokhin "Plutarch and Early Christian Theologians" (Brill 2019), 103-118 and Sébastien Morlet, "Plutarch in Christian Apologetics (Eusebios, Theodoretos, Cyril" (Brill 2019), 119-135.

143 See Félix Racine "Herodotus's Reception in Latin Literature from Cicero to the 12th Century" (Brill 2016), 193-212.

Progymnasmata recounts Herodotus's account of the story in a shortened version. In his account, Libanius states, *Ἤρα τῆς ἑαυτοῦ γυναικὸς ὁ Κανδαύλης καὶ παρεκάλει τὸν Γύγην ἐπὶ τὴν θέαν τῆς ὥπρας* – trans. "Candaules loved his wife and invited Gyges to gaze upon her beauty."[144] Here, Libanius uses the imperfect form of *ἔραμαι* and follows the same pattern and motifs as Herodotus: Candaules was overcome by his passion and it caused him to expose his wife's nudity, which ultimately results in his downfall. Given the extent the reception of this story has throughout the Roman Empire, especially into the Late Antique period, it provides an important trope to the depiction of women and succession of power, namely, that women incite passion (sexual and usually through their nudity) and this passion is either used to bring down a ruler or help instate a new one and often times both simultaneously.

What the transmission of this myth really shows is that such motifs of women were common and accessible throughout antiquity, which is why Socrates clearly engages with these tropes. After Severa initially witnesses Justina's nudity in the bath, Socrates goes on to relate that Severa felt compelled to introduce Justina to Valentinian I, who was also quite overcome by her beauty. Socrates's account then is ambiguous as to whether Valentinian married Justina and has a bigamous marriage, or if he sought to divorce Severa and then married Justina. What is not unclear is that Justina does become Valentinian's wife and Gratian's stepmother and ultimately displaces Severa.[145] Socrates's account reflects a long tradition of hubris and downfall associated with lustful

[144] See Libanius *Progymnasmata* Narration 16. Translated by Craig A. Gibson (Society of Biblical Literature, 2008).

[145] Socrates Scholasticus, *HE*, 4.31.

passion and beauty. The theme of Candaules using his position as a ruler to share his wife's naked beauty is similar to Severa, as empress, sharing Justina's beauty with Valentinian. In all these cases, the passion compelled by lust and the subsequent abuse or overreach of power leads to downfall or destruction.

In addition to the Candaules story, Socrates's account of Justina resembles *the Historia Augusta's* (HA) representation of Julia Domna and her son Caracalla. In the HA, Julia Domna is described as the stepmother and seducer of the Emperor Caracalla. When Caracalla succeeded his father, Septimius Severus, there was an initial instability that threatened his transition to power. He was accused of assassinating his brother, Geta, and according to the HA, he continued to incur disfavor with the senate and people until he was assassinated while relieving himself during a journey to Edessa.[146] These details are corroborated with earlier sources from the third century, namely, the accounts of Herodian and Cassius Dio.[147] However, the HA's version of Caracalla's reign deviates the most in its inclusion of Julia Domna's relationship to the Caracalla. This relationship is a fourth century invention and is only included in other fourth century texts, such as Aurelius Victor.[148]

The accounts of Julia Domna and Caracalla's relationship in Aurelius Victor and the HA are very similar. In fact, only Aurelius Victor and the HA contain the story of

[146] HA, "Caracalla," 7.1-2.
[147] See Cassius Dio 78.2 and Herodian 4.3-6.
[148] Aurelius Victor*, Liber de Caesaribus*, 21.3-4.

Julia Domna's seduction and marriage to her "stepson."[149] The author of the HA is explicit in his claim about an illicit and sexual relationship between Caracalla and Julia. According to the HA, Caracalla was driven to engage in an illicit relationship with his stepmother after he caught her exposing herself and was driven to extremes on account of his lust. The text states,

> Interest scire quemadmodum novercam suam Iuliam uxorem duxisse dicatur, quae cum esset pulcherrima et quasi per neglegentiam se maxima corporis parte nudasset, dixissetque Antoninus, **"Vellem, si liceret,"** respondisse fertur, **"Si libet, licet,** an nescis te imperatorem esse et leges dare, non accipere?[150]
>
> It is important to know in what manner it is said [Caracalla] took Julia, his stepmother, as a wife, who, since she was very beautiful and as though through negligence, had exposed herself by a great portion of her body, and Antoninus [Caracalla] said, "**I would desire to, if permitted**;" it is reported that she responded, "**If it pleases (you), it is permitted.** Or do you not know that you are the emperor and you give the laws, you do not receive them?

Here, the HA author claims that Julia initiated the seduction by exposing herself to Caracalla as though on accident. The fact that she exposed her nudity to Caracalla occurs

[149] Firstly, Cassius Dio and Herodian do not claim that Julia Domna was the stepmother of Caracalla, but rather that she was his birth mother. In fact, there is no evidence to support the claim that Julia Domna was the stepmother. Secondly, the third century sources do not claim that Julia Domna had a sexual relationship with Caracalla. The closest these sources come to this claim is Herodian's account that calls Julia Domna a "Jocasta." This reference to the mother-wife of Oedipus suggests that Herodian was making a veiled claim to some inappropriate relationship with Caracalla, but it is not explicit. See Herodian, 4.9.3. He only reports this as a rumor meant to disparage Caracalla and Julia and he does not mention any illicit marriage. See Herodian Books I-IV, trans by, Whittaker. Harvard University Press, 1969. (LCL Edition) see pg.423 ff.3. This research comes from my Master's Thesis, "The Thematic Connections Between Roman Women and Imperial Succession in the Historia Augusta" (UCR 2018), 63.

[150] HA, "Caracalla" 10.1-4.

both in the HA and in Aurelius Victor.[151] In the Caracalla's initial lust is a consequence of his seeing Julia, much like Gyges's lust after he saw Candaules's wife. In this way, the HA changes the pattern of the Candaules trope – rather than being overcome with a passion that leads to immoral and destructive behavior toward his stepmother, the HA presents Caracalla as a victim of Julia's manipulation. In other words, Julia steps into the role of Candaules and Caracalla the role of Gyges. She exposes herself to Caracalla and then completes her manipulation by dictating to him his powers as an emperor. In the HA account, Julia defines imperial authority when she claims "*an nescis te imperatorem esse et leges dare, non accipere* – " Or do you not know that you are the emperor and you give the laws, you do not receive them?" The idea that an empress defines the power of the emperor is an important theme in this altered trope.

In comparison, Victor also claimed Julia Domna exposed herself to Caracalla and pretended that it was an accident.[152] However, at the end of Victor's account, he states, "...quippe quae pudorem velamento exuerat... – "indeed, she had stripped off her modesty with her clothes."[153] Here, Aurelius Victor caps off his account with a moralizing about immodesty and its association with female nudity. Cothing in the late Roman Empire

[151] As I showed in my MA, "It is debated if Victor is responsible for the HA's version of this episode. For example, H.W. Bird (Liverpool, 1994), 113 ff. 4, suggests the inaccurate detail about Julia being Caracalla's stepmother comes from the KG or even possibly Marius Maximus. As a fourth century source, the KG may have included such false information, but it seems less likely for a source such as Marius Maximus that was contemporary with Herodian. More importantly, this particular version of Caracalla's seduction and marriage to Julia does not appear in other fourth century biographers like Eutropius or the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, [although they cite the inappropriate relationship and claim Julia was Caracalla's Stepmother]. Therefore, because of the strong similarities, historians, such as Meckler (University of Michigan, Classical Studies, 1994), suggest that the HA used Aurelius Victor for this account."

[152] Aurelius Victor, *Liber de Caesaribus*, 21.3-4.

[153] Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus* . 21.4 trans. by H.W. Bird. Liverpool University Press, 1994.

was as much a moral issue as a necessity for both men and women. Moreover, modesty was both a state of being as a performance.[154] In Julia's case, Aurelius Victor depicts her as stripped of morality both literally and figuratively. And in both being and acting immodest, she leads Caracalla to also act immodestly.

But, what is important to note here is this expression "to strip of modesty with clothes." Smith argues that the commonplace usage of this phrase reflects how Herodotus's story of Candaules and Gyges was reflected in the literary tradition and tropes used about women. He cites the use of the phrase by Plato, Plutarch, and even Clement of Alexandria.[155] These three sources are all focused on the issue of the modesty of the woman and the dangers of immodest women.

But, in the case of Julia Domna, she incites the passion. In other words, she takes on the role of both Candaules's wife and Candaules. Julia takes on the role of ruler, but instead of her just leading to her own downfall she precipitates the downfall of Caracalla as well. Accordingly, the HA author and Aurelius Victor focus the origins of Julia's and Caracalla's downfall with the illicit relationship that began the moment when Caracalla spied Julia's nudity. This resembles the account in Socrates Scholasticus regarding Justina and Severa. In Justina's case, she was naked while bathing in front of Severa, which drove Severa into entering into an inappropriate and ultimately destructive relationship. Like Justina, Julia is aware of the effect of her nudity and uses it to promote

[154] Wilkinson (2015) 33-36 notes that clothing is not the only way to preform modesty – it can also be done through a modest diet and refraining from an overabundance of luxury in general. And, of course, refraining from sexual immorality or overt sexualization for both men and women was important to the virtue of modest.

[155] See Smith (1920) 20-22.

desire and lust. Ultimately, both Justina and Julia Domna use their nudity in order to advance their own position and increase their own authority. In both cases, they are successful and take the position of empress that was not rightfully theirs, in Julia's case because she involved herself in a semi-incestuous marriage and in Justina's case because she literally displaced Severa. In of both these late fourth century and early fifth century Roman histories – the HA and Socrates Scholasticus – the authors describe an empress that is part of the downfall of another through their manipulation of lust.

This follows with another aspect of the Candaules myth that fits Justina and these empresses as a trope. In the story of Candaules and Gyges, it is Gyges's wife who directs the outcome of both men. After her victimization caused by Candaules's lust, she becomes the main actor of the story. In fact, Candaules was the passive agent through most of the story. First he is directed by his lust, then he falls victim to his wife's vengeance.[156] This happens because Candaules assumes that he will be able to commit his crime without his wife seeing him or Gyges; yet it is Candaules who has lost site, or perspective, because he is clouded by lust.[157] In fact, Candaules is blinded by the superficial beauty of his wife, which consumes him so much he ignores his duties as a ruler.[158] In the end, it is his wife who takes on the role of leader and determines who should succeed her husband. This suggests that the women use this male weakness in order to secure their own power and influence.

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[156] This argument was first brought to my attention by Dr. Denver Graninger. It is also well analyzed and supported in the chapter on Candaules's wife by Hazewindus (2004), 43-82.

[157] See Hazewindus (2004), 60-62.

[158] Flory (1987), 32-33 points out that Candaules ignored his duties as ruler and relying on Gyges as his advisor. He also shows that Gyges was forced to shoulder the burden of Candaules's rule, as well as his obsession with his wife.

Ultimately, this all shows the ways in which Socrates Scholasticus used classical tropes in order to represent the destructive power he believed Justina both possessed and wielded. However, there are two important aspects of Socrates's account that should be considered. In his account, although Justina's nudity is exploited, Socrates mentions several times that she was a virgin. This is particularly interesting, especially since Justina was once married to Magnentius. Moreover, Justina's actions only lead to Severa's displacement, not her complete destruction and in no way are Justina and Valentinian I hurt by the illicit lust. In that case, Severa serves the role of Candaules and Valentinian I and Justina act as Gyges and Candaules's wife.

In the first case, the focus on Justina's virginity poses an interesting question about her innocence tangled with her seductive beauty. Socrates Scholasticus is the only author to recount Justina and Valentinian's marriage in quite this detail. As Sławomir Bralewski notes, Socrates's account of Justina is for more balanced than, for example, Sozomen's account. As Bralewski shows, Sozomen's account of Justina focuses solely on her conflict with Ambrose and her pernicious Arian ways. He does not focus on her as a mother, wife, or even as a beautiful woman the way Socrates's account does.[159] Although there has been some suggestion that Socrates Scholasticus may have had his own Arian leanings, Theresa Urbainczyk has shown there is no clear evidence for such an argument and the best that can be said of Socrates is that he does not seem to adhere to on particular sect.[160] For these reasons, it is curious that Socrates would present Justina as a

[159] See Sławomir Bralewski (2017), 209-210, for a fuller comparison between Socrates Scholasticus's and Sozomen's presentation of Justina.

[160] Theresa Urbainczyk (1997), 18. Urbainczyk's book is still one of the fullest treatments on Socrates Scholasticus as an historian.

virgin, a status that was special for Late Antique leaders, like Chrysostom and Ambrose.[161] It is also curious that he does mention her status as a widow. Unilateral divorce, although not encouraged, was permissible throughout the history of the Roman Empire. However, under Constantine, rules for divorce became more restricted, especially for women seeking a divorce. It was not until the Emperor Julian that these new rules were rescinded.[162] Valentinian appears to have followed the rules established by Julian, which means that a unilateral divorce was not impossible and certainly not outside the power of the emperor.

Nevertheless, divorce for an emperor was unusual and divorce during the late fourth century was almost unheard of. In fact, there are only two documented divorces for the late third-early fourth centuries and only one extant divorce record from the reign Constantine of Constantine up to Justinian. According Grubbs, this data is consistent with the "survival rate" of marriage contracts in the fourth century.[163] This shows a decrease in the unilateral divorces, however, there is not a similar record for divorces mutual consent because they remained unrestricted until the time of Justinian.[164] One of these surviving records of divorce shows a former wife contractually agreeing to release her husband and allow him to remarry.[165] These records were fairly standard and in

[161] There has been a lot of work done on virginity and Christianity in antiquity. See Kate Cooper (1996) for a study of virginity in a socio-religious context of Christian Rome. And Sissel Undheim (2020) for a study of virginity in the context of the fourth century Roman Empire. Both provide definitions and studies on how virginity functioned as a religious moral and social status.

[162] See Lenski (2014), 267-268 and Wilkinson (2009) 49-50. Both discuss the role Constantine had in attempting to stamp out the practice of unilateral divorce. See also, Grubbs (1999) and Treggiari (1991) for a larger overview of marriage and divorce in Rome.

[163] Evans-Grubbs (2002), 214.

[164] Wilkinson (2009), 49.

[165] See Evans-Grubbs (2002), 214-216.

keeping with earlier Roman tradition on divorce. What is not in keeping with tradition, however, is the later focus on the subject of divorce after Julian revoked Constantine's rules.

Around the time of Justina's reign as empress, Christian leaders, such as Jerome, Augustine, and Ambrosiaster were deeply concerned about issues of virginity, marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Ambrosiaster, who wrote critical commentaries on the Paul's fist letter to the Corinthians, particularly lamented Julian's reforms on divorce, claiming, "Before Julian women were not able to divorce their husbands. Once they were given the right, however, they began to do what they could not before; for they began to divorce their husbands freely and on a daily basis."[166] Ambrosiaster's accusations about Julian and divorce do not appear to reflect the reality reflected in the records. But, it shows the

[166] Ambrosiaster, Lib. Quaest. 115. 12 (Souter, CSEL 50) Ante Iuliani edictum mulieres suis dimittere nequibant, accepta autem potestate coeperunt facere quod prius facere non poterant; coeperunt enim cottidie licenter viros suos dimitiere. Translation from Wilkinson (2009), 50, ff. 93.

concern that later Christian leaders had regarding the state of marriage.[167] It is also important to note that Ambrosiaster's concern is focused on how women were seeking divorce.[168] Since Ambrosiaster was active in Rome during the 380's, he would be well aware of Justina's and Valentinian's remarriage. Christian leaders had repudiated the act of divorce since Clement in the second century.[169] The difference between Clement's views on divorce and Ambrosiaster's is the focus on virginity and the institution of

[167] It is in this context that Valentinian divorced his first wife and married Justina. Additionally, there are only a handful of emperors who divorced wives while they were reigning. In general, the reasons for divorce are usually treason or adultery – sometimes both. Furthermore, in some cases where there was a situation of adultery or treason, some emperors opted for banishment, like the Emperors Caracalla and Commodus. According to the HA, Commodus caught his wife, Crispina, committing adultery and first "drove her out" and later had her killed. This idea of "driving out," literally the verb *exigo* in the Latin, differs from the idea of divorce expressed in Tacitus and Suetonius as *discidium* or *divortium*, both of which imply a parting or a separation. Specifically, there is a difference in the physical force and location applied to the *exigo*. Where at least two entities move away from one another with the use of *discidium* or *divortium*, the *exigo* implies one entity pushing away another. This is important because, Socrates Scholasticus is clear in his account that Valentinian wanted to make Justina his wife without having to repudiate Severa. Consequently, Socrates's account makes it unclear whether Valentian sought a divorce or banishment of his first wife. This ambiguity may show Socrates Scholasticus's bias in favor of Justina and Valentinian. Since divorce was so rejected by Christian leaders and laws against divorce had been reinstated under Honorius, which is when Socrates would have been writing his history, it is likely that Socrates did not want to portray Valentinian as divorced if he wanted to show Valentinian in a favorable light. See Cassius Dio 77.6.3 claims that Caracalla's wife Plautilla and her brother were banished and then killed after Caracalla became emperor. Likewise, Cassius Dio 73.4.6 claims Commodus banished his wife, Crispina, and then had her killed on false charges of adultery. HA, Commondus Antoninus 5.9-11 and Tacitus 2.86 and 14.1 for two examples of the use of *discidium* as divorce. He appears to use this over *divortium*, which Suetonius uses. For an example, see Suetonius, *Nero*, 35.2. Furthermore, the HA's use of *exigo* over *discidium* or *divortium* is consistent with Cassius Dio's account. Cassius Dio 73.4.6 also claims that Commodus banished his wife, literally from *ὑπερορίζω* in the Greek. See also Socrates Scholasticus, 4.31.13-14. Lastly, Wilkinson (2009), 50 notes that Honorius reinstated the Constintinian divorce laws.

[168] The focus on women here is fairly typical of church leaders at this time. Ambrosiaster, along with others, was adamant about the submissive role of the wife to the husband. See Salzman (2002), 148-150.

[169] Hunter (2007), 107-108.

remarriage in general that became fundamental questions to ascetic fourth century leaders like Jerome and Augustine.[170]

I suggest that Socrates's focus on Justina's virginity relates specifically to the fact that Justina does not quite fit the Candaules motif. She never met with destruction and yet, she later engages in heresy, persecutes an elite bishop, and assumes imperial responsibilities. By late fourth century standards, she ought to have met with destruction. Instead, Justina secures her son's reign while she is still alive and secures her legacy through marriage between her daughter and Theodosius I. For later historians, this would not have sat well with their sensibilities. Therefore, Socrates Scholasticus glosses over the fact that Justina was a widow and focuses on the fact that she was a pure virgin. After Valentinian I becomes enamored with her, she causes a scandalous divorce and loses her status as a virgin. In this way, Socrates suggests that Justina did meet with a kind of spiritual ruin. And this subtle commentary combined with the classical motif not only shows off Socrates's elite education, it also shows the spiritual destruction of Justina from virgin to persecuting empress. However, what it also reflects is that, although she transgressed religious and social boundaries, Justina was adept enough to retain her position and keep it secure despite what the negative literary narratives depict.

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[170] Jerome's ascetic views were on the more extreme end in Rome and one of the reasons he was ultimately pushed out of the city. Furthermore, he did not get along with Ambrose of Milan and there is some evidence that he knew of the anonymous Ambrosiaster and did not get along with him either. Shortly after Ambrosiaster's commentary on Paul, which expressed a more balanced view of remarriage and divorce, the Jovinian controversy broke out in Rome. Jovinian was opposed to ascetic practice and the idea that marriage should be avoided and if not avoided, sex should only be for procreative purposes. Accordingly, Jovinian was proclaimed a heretic. Nevertheless, the controversy forced other church leaders to weigh in on the issue of marriage and sex. Jerome's views proved so severe that even Augustine opposed him and argued, in *On the Good of Marriage*, that sexual relations within the bonds on marriage were good and appropriate. See Hunter's book, *Marriage and Sexuality in Early Christianity* (2018) for an overview of this issue.

1.7 Justina Compared to Tacitean Empresses: The Tropes of Messalina and Agrippina in Tacitus

Tacitus's use of women adopts similar motifs as the Candaules myth. Although he does not construct the story using a bath or nudity, Tacitus still uses women to show the dangerous and seductive nature of *ἐράω*. Moreover, just as Herodotus created a lasting trope about queens, so too does Tacitus create lasting depictions of good and bad imperial women. This makes Tacitus an important source for discussing how imperial women were represented in the sources. Using Tacitus's tropes and comparing them to Socrates Scholasticus we can also analyze the different representations of women over time.

Even in Tacitus, lust and passion continue to be important qualities for "bad" imperial women. In his example of Messalina, it proves dangerous for both emperor and empress. Messalina, the wife of emperor Claudius, threatened the empire both adultery and treason with her marriage to Silius.[171] Based on Tacitus's account of Messalina, she was the embodiment of destructive lust and passion. In this case, Messalina's actions technically created a bigamous marriage because she was already married to Claudius. This threatened the stability of the empire and the legitimacy of Claudius's rule. Tacitus's depiction of Messalina follows a senatorial tradition that was concerned with the power that emperor wielded and, in Tacitus's opinion, abused. In order to show the

[171] According to Tacitus *Annales* 11.26-34, Messalina infamously married Silius while Claudius was away making sacrifices in Ostia. Her bigamous marriage was part of her larger plan to kill Claudius and legitimize Silius in order to replace him with the emperor.

excesses of emperors, Tacitus often used their sexual passions and overly powerful women to emasculate and weaken the figure of the emperor.

For example, Messalina's sexual desires were particularly exaggerated and Tacitus clearly links Messalina's sexuality with her power and influence. Messalina constantly manipulated Claudius in order to achieve both her treasons and sexual desires. Tacitus constructs femininity as manipulative force that creates upheaval and instability. Yet, adultery is a common theme in invective against women in Latin literature and suggests that women were usually defined by their relationships to men and the family.[172] The dangers of Messalina's actions were predicated on the fact that she was the empress, but had too much influence and control of the emperor. They were especially harmful because her role is defined in relation to the emperor and his heir Britannicus, which provides her with a legitimate connection to authority and influence. Romans valued dynastic relationships and marriage was one of the most common ways to forge alliances and provide a successor and heirs. Since Messalina was the mother of an heir, she had this dynastic authority, yet she attempted to usurp the power of Claudius. Like the trope of Candaules, Messalina's seductive power ultimately led to her downfall and execution.[173]

Similarly, Tacitus's account of Agrippina is filled with invective for her character, especially as regards her relationship with Nero and her role in promoting Nero as

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[172] See Joshel (1995), 52-59 and Santoro L'Hoir (2006), 150–54 for Tacitus's portrayal of Messalina. See Richlin (2014), 70-74 for arguments regarding the portrayal of femininity in Latin.

[173] See Levick (2014), 28–31, shows women were involved in the process of alliance-marriages, but it is unclear to what extent and how much influence they wielded. For instance, she cautions against, "overemphasize the power of imperial women in the matter of marriages." However, in discussing Plotina's role in Hadrian's adoption she uses it as an example of women wielding power.

Claudius's successor.[174] Although contemporaries of Tacitus, like Suetonius, also report on Agrippina's crimes, Tacitus's depiction of imperial women best reflects the hostility of the early second century senatorial class toward the imperial court, whereas Suetonius's depiction follows a particular formula, which allows him to have clear "good" and "bad" models of women.[175] For example, Suetonius adheres to the salacious accounts that Agrippina had an incestuous relationship with Nero, toward which Tacitus shows more skepticism. But as Barrett notes, incest, even alleged was a common trope used to highlight the depraved nature of imperial women and men alike.[176] But, the real hallmark of Tacitean women is that they are political schemers, using any and all methods from sexual manipulation to outright murder. Rarely, does this leave imperial women in Tacitus with many redeeming qualities.[177] Agrippina as an incestuous wife, – lest we forget that Claudius was technically her uncle – murderer of an emperor, potentially an incestuous mother, and all-around political schemer epitomizes the dangers of powerful women and the threat of irrational passions.[178] Moreover, she also played the wicked stepmother in order to promote Nero as Emperor and, following her example, Nero ultimately poisoned Britannicus.[179]

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[174] Tacitus, *Annales*, 12-13. The role of Agrippina as a mother empress over her young emperor son will continue to serve as an important touchstone to compare the later fourth century empresses, like Justina, who were also responsible for their child-emperor sons.

[175] See Molly M. Pryzwansky (2008), 240-242 for an analysis of Suetonius's treatment of women. See also Anthony Barrett (1996), 206 for an assessment of Tacitus's attitudes toward women.

[176] Barret, (1996), 182-183.

[177] See Linda W. Rutland (Women as Makers of Kings in Tacitus, 1978), 15-18 for an analysis of Tacitean women and politics. See also L'Hoir (Tacitus and Women's Usurpation of Power, 1994), 21-23 for an analysis of the way Agrippina is depicted as a *dux femina* fit for the Roman stage.

[178] See Tacitus *Annals* 7.1-5 for Agrippina's marriage; *Annals* 7.67-7.69.1 for Agrippina's role in Claudius's death; and *Annals* 8-9.9 for Britannicus's death, her involvement in Nero's reign, and Agrippina's death.

[179] See Tacitus *Annals* 8.14-17 for Britannicus's death.

For these reasons, Agrippina became the paradigm for a "bad" empress throughout Roman histories. The tropes of incest or sexual manipulation, wicked stepmother, and attempts to control imperial rule were essential to "bad" or "dangerous" imperial women. In fact, the case of Julia Domna the *Historia Augusta* illustrates that this template for "bad empress still existed in the fourth century. Additionally, Justina has several features in Socrates's account that should have easily fit this paradigm. She was a second wife, who had previously been, married.[180] She became empress and stepmother after the emperor repudiated his first wife, and she promoted the status and role of her own son. However, Justina is not recorded as being sexually promiscuous. Even in the bath story, she is not the sexual aggressor. There is no record of tension or scheming between Gratian and Justina, nor is she accused or using poisons. Therefore, Justina's biggest crime was her heresy and persecution of a Nicene bishop. This reflects a new aspect of what constituted a "good" and "bad" empress and also shows that despite her detractors, Justina could not be neatly fit into existing tropes and paradigms.

1.8 Justina the Jezebel: Ambrose's Enduring Description of the Empress

Justina's marriage was depicted in Socrates's account using classical gendered tropes. However, as I have shown, in many ways she did not fit the precise formula for these Herodotean and Tacitean tropes the way in which earlier imperial women, like Messalina, and Agrippina embodied. Regardless, we should not see this as a means of suggesting that Socrates necessarily meant to present a positive portrait of the empress.

[180] Agrippina also had been married before she married Claudius. See Ginsberg (2006), 10-14 for more on Agrippina's background in the literary tradition.

He is still clearly presenting a "typical" account of a "bad" empress. This is especially evident in his later depiction of Justina. For example, Socrates Scholasticus claims that Justina's aggressive Arian tendencies were only kept in check while her husband was alive, but when her son was too young and vulnerable to stand up to her, she exploited her position to persecute Ambrose and the Nicene community in Milan.[181]

But, we can use the areas where Justina challenged and even subverted traditional tropes as ways of understanding her influence and agency. Justina was a wife to two different emperors, though Magnentius was considered a usurper within her own lifetime.[182] Despite her first mésalliance, she was still able to maintain her position, as precarious as it might have been, as an empress and wife to a usurping emperor. More than that, she was able to reestablish her position as an empress through her marriage to Valentinian I, even if she achieved it in a rather salacious way. However, she does not meet with any destruction or loss of power. The fact that the tropes suggest such women will or ought to come to a humbling demise and Justina does not emphasizes the authority she really did possess. In the face of such insecurities like the death of her husband (twice), and formidable foes, like the Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, usurpation that threatened her son, Justina is never overthrown and remained resilient and kept her children secure.

The fact that she was not overthrown is not for a lack of trying particularly on the part of St. Ambrose. Not only did he outright defy Justina and challenge her status as an

[181] See Socrates Scholasticus, *HE* 5.11 in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II.
[182] See Omissi (2018), 172.

empress and the authority of the Valentinian II, but he raised crowds in Milan to act against her.[183] In his writings, particularly in his letter to his sister Marcellina, Ambrose emphasizes his opinion of Justina and suggests through the use of three biblical tropes that Justina will ultimately be defeated. Nevertheless, within these tropes we can see the uncertainty Ambrose felt about his conflict with Justina and through this uncertainty better understand Justina's position as a mother empress and leader in the Milanese community.

This particular letter Ambrose wrote to his sister Marcellina described the conflict between Ambrose and the empress and showcased Ambrose's response to the conflict as those of a righteous holy man.[184] Liebeschuetz suggests that the letter to Marcellina – one of three letters that Ambrose wrote covering the conflict with Justina – was written later toward to climax of the conflict in 386.[185] However, it is important to remember that this letter was also hand selected by Ambrose to be a part of his carefully constructed letter collection, which was published much later after the conflict.[186] The tropes he uses to describe Justina are, therefore, meant to emphasize the religious aspects of this conflict and downplay the larger issue of Ambrose's insurrection of a basilica and refusal to comply with imperial laws and mandates.

[183] I will go into more detail into the crowds and conflict in Milan in the next chapter 2.2

[184] For definitions and background on holy men in Late Antiquity see Peter Brown (1989), 109-112. This term taps into the ascetic traditions of monks in Syria and Egypt. Monks often stood in conflict with traditional powers.

[185] G. Liebeschuetz (2005), 125-127.

[186] Ibid, 27.

Ambrose opens his letter to his sister with a general outline of the conflict. In the beginning of the letter, Ambrose makes it clear that he was fighting against severe pressure. He states,

> I myself was being pressed by the counts and tribunes to agree to an immediate handover of the basilica. They said that the emperor was exercising his legal rights, since all things were subject to his authority.[187]

Right away he depicts himself as a persecuted person. More importantly, he also depicts the local secular elite of Milan as in support of the empress and her policies.[188] In other words, Justina clearly had influencer and local support. In order to continue this depiction as a persecuted holy man, Ambrose turns Justina into Eve, Jezebel, and Herodias.

After Ambrose gives a chronologic account of, what he calls the "siege of the basilica," he tells his sister that he gave a sermon to the crowds – in an attempt to subdue mob violence that was attempting to protect him against the army sent by Justina. He then goes on to recount the sermon in its entirety. He opens with a comparison to Job and the trials that both he as an individual, and the larger Milanese community must expect to go through. Then he launches into his polemic against Justina, beginning with a comparison with Eve. Ambrose states,

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[187] See Ambrose *Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam* 20.7 "convenior ipse a comitibus et tribunis, ut basilicae fieret matura traditio, dicentibus imperatorem iure suo uti, eo guod in potestate eius essent omnia" Trans. by Liebeschuetz (2005) 76.8.1.

[188] This actually puts Ambrose in a precarious position because he, for all intents and purposes, appears to be defying and influencing the Milanese population to mutiny against the imperial court. Even Ambrose knows that he is treading dangerous ground because he emphasizes the fact that he is not a usurper at the end of this same letter. See Liebeschuetz (2005), 171.

> urgemur igitur praeceptis regalibus, sed confirmamur scripturae sermonibus, quae respondit: "tamquam una ex insipientibus locuta es." non mediocris igitur ista temptatio; namque asperiores temptationes has esse cognovimus, quae fiunt per mulieres. Denique per Evam etiam Adam supplantatus est eoque factum, ut a mandatis caelestibus deviaret.[189]
>
> So, we are harassed by imperial edicts but we are fortified by words of the Bible, which enable us to give the reply: *you have spoken like one of the foolish women*.[190] This testing is therefore no easy thing, for we know that trials and temptations issuing through women are particularly severe.' **After all Eve tripped up even Adam**, and that is how he came to disobey the instructions of heaven.[191]

The first line of this passage suggests that Ambrose and his followers can overcome these "harassing" imperial edicts because they are the words of "foolish women." This clearly indicates that Ambrose assumed the imperial edicts originated from Justina's influence. And he manages to get a biblical insult in by calling her a foolish woman. He doubles down on this theme with the reference to Eve's tempting of Adam. However, Ambrose opens himself up to some ambiguity and potential scorn with this passage. Initially he presents himself as Job. The holy man harassed by evil, yet never wavering in his faith. He then states that he and his followers are clearly being tested and it is an especially severe testing because it comes from a woman. Similar to the testing Adam endured with Eve. But in the case of Adam and Eve, unlike Job, Adam succumbs to the temptation. So, in this case it is unclear who Ambrose is associating as Adam. Likely, we can assume that he is referring to Justina's followers, since he is supposedly Job. If true than

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[189] See Ambrose, Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam Epistula 20.18.

[190] This line comes from Job 2.10. The context is the beginning of Job's trials when he is struck with sores all over his body. On account of this his wife beseeches him to curse God and die. Job calls her foolish and says it is not right to expect only blessings. The meaning of which is that one cannot be truly faithful if one is merely a fair-weather friend.

[191] Trans. is from Liebeschuetz (2005). The italicization is Liebeschuetz's and the bold is my edition.

we should recognize two important aspects of the biblical figures of both Job and Eve, as well as Ambrose and Justina.

Ambrose was familiar and well educated in the biblical figures of both Job and Eve. His use of these figures was specific and evocative for a Christian community also well-informed of these figures. Job, in particular, is a unique holy man in the Old Testament. He ultimately stands alone in faith against all adversity even when his wife and friends tell him he should turn from God. Ambrose, himself, supports this analysis of Job as a lone holy man faced with a crisis in a later sermon called, *De Interpellatione Iob et David*.[192] Importantly, this sermon shows how Ambrose and his community understood the figure of Job, which reveals how Ambrose wanted to be understood as a Job figure. For example, in the sermon, he states,

> Amissis itaque lob liberis atque omnibus suis praeter uxorem, quae sola ei ad temptationem fuerat seruata, perfusus etiam ulcere graui, cum uideret amicos suos non ad consolandum uenisse, sed exaggerandum et aceruandum dolorem, aduertit a domino datam in se aduersario temptandi sui potestatem.[193]
>
> Job had lost his children and all that was his except his wife, who alone had been kept for him for a temptation. At that time, he was covered all over with a grievous sore and he perceived that his friends had come not to give consolation but to increase and magnify his pain.[194]

[192] In the English translation this is translated as *The Prayer of Job and David*. But, I think that is a bit of a liberal translation. More literal would be an "intervention of…" but, most accurately would be "an appeal to" as in a legal sense, an appeal to a court or to an authority. Ambrose is doing exactly that in this work. He is appealing to the example and characters of Job and David. See Steinhauser (2016), 68 who also agrees that *interpellatione* has a the more legal sense of appeal, but that it is an analysis of the appeals that both Job and David make to God.

[193] CSEL 32.2. Ambrose, *De Interpellatione Iob et David*, 1.2.4.

[194] This translation is from Michael McHugh (1972), 330.

In this passage, Ambrose references the same point of Job's story from which he quoted directly in his letter to Marcellina when he compared himself to a Job figure. This particular sermon was written about a year or two after he initially wrote his letter to his sister. Steinhauser suggests the sermons were likely preached from 387 to 389.[195] This means that these sermons were written shortly after the climax to the conflict with Justina. Additionally, it was written during or shortly after Justina and the young Emperor Valentinian II were forced to flee Milan when the usurper, Magnus Maximus crossed into Italy.[196] With that context in mind, it is not surprising that Ambrose clearly underscores not only the righteousness of Job in the face of crisis, but also his loss of support from a wife and his friends. Yet, it is interesting that in his letter to his sister, he clearly establishes himself as a Job figure – clearly, he saw himself as righteous in the face of crisis, but it also suggests he found himself without any real support. This further suggests that Justina's influence in Milan may be more powerful than Ambrose would want his audience to believe.

The story of Job and the character of Job played an important role in early patristic theology as a figure who withstood some of the worst persecution without losing faith. Furthermore, Job was ultimately rewarded by God for maintaining his faith during persecution. Accordingly, his story resonated with the earlier Christians faced with persecution.[197] By the late fourth century, Ambrose's focus had shifted to two main

[195] See Steinhauser, 68 and McHugh, (1972), 327 in the introduction to his translation of this sermon agrees with this date range.

[196] This will be discussed more extensively in chapter 2.9.

[197] Certainly, the narratives of widespread imperial persecutions of the early Church have been exaggerated. For instance, in the early empire, Christians began as a small group that were sometimes persecuted for not participating in the imperial cult. See DePalma Digeser (2019), 25-26.

aspects of Job – his personal physical suffering, and the faithlessness of his wife. In fact, Ambrose comments in his sermon that Job's wife was only spared in order to act as a temptation and he heavily implies it in his letter to Marcellina, when he quotes the passage from Job and then discusses how women cause the worst temptation.[198] Therefore, he sets Justina up as Job's wife and himself as Job. Setting Justina up as a temptress and even a faithless wife is not shocking, again it was a common trope of a "bad" empress. However, Ambrose's association with Job in connection with the faithless wife also reveals the fact that Ambrose perhaps felt alone against a formidable attack from one who was supposed to give him support. In other words, Justina as the wife figure is a betrayer, which means Ambrose felt betrayed by the imperial court and Justina in particular. This suggests that perhaps Justina was not always Ambrose's adversary and that Ambrose had may, at one time have felt he had an alliance with Justina.[199]

This image of an unfaithful wife is furthered by Ambrose's additional use of Eve. Eve leads Adam to sin against God and not follow his laws regarding eating the fruit from the tree of knowledge. Their faithlessness and disobedience lead Adam and Eve to being cast out of Eden.[200] Again, Eve was a common trope used among Late Antique Christian writers to express temptation of women and the flesh. Furthermore, the figure of Adam connected to Eve poses an interesting dichotomy with Job. After all, Adam was

[198] CSEL 32.2. Ambrose, *de Interpellatione Iob et David*,1.2.

[199] I will expand on this theory in the next chapter when I show how Ambrose claimed to have been in alliance with Justina to act as a envoy to Magnus Maximus.

[200] See the book of Genesis 3:1-24. Here, and elsewhere, I use the ESV translation of biblical texts.

no Job. Obviously, Justina is Eve. But, the question remains then who does Ambrose set up as Adam. Ambrose answers that question toward the end of the letter when he describes how the conflict over the basilica ended. Ambrose states that the Milan's two factions – his supporters against the military and elites supporting Justina – were facing imminent and violent clash.[201] Using this trope, Ambrose is setting Justina up as leading the young emperor and Milanese community away from true Christianity. Ambrose, in refusing to allow the Basilica to be used by the imperial court, is acting as God's agent in keeping Justina from the metaphoric Eden.

In the case of Eve, it is clear that underlying her perfidy, is her seductive nature, which tempts Adam to eat the fruit. By the late fourth century, the "legacy of the sinfully sexual Eve" was well-established in in Christian topoi.[202] In addition to being a temptress, Eve was seen as a deceiver and as acting with a desire to be above her station, over Adam and creation, trying to make herself equal to God.[203] For Ambrose, Justina embodies both the image of a tempter and deceiver, however, as I argued above, Justina was never represented as sexually promiscuous. Rather, by the late fourth century, heresy had become just as pernicious and dangerous as a sexually aggressive woman. Justina as a heretical woman becomes a new topos as a representation of a "bad" empress and as the embodiment for heresy's dangers.

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[201] See Ambrose, *Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam Epistula* 20.22

[202] See Patricia Cox Miller (2005), 92. Also, refer to Judith Herrin (2021) for examples of how Eve became a symbol for the sin of women and the reason women were condemned to be inferior to men.

[203] See Peter C. Bouteneff (2019), 530-32 for more on Adam and Eve's image in the late fourth century.

This also coincides with Ambrose's use of Jezebel as a key illustration for his personal conflict with Justina. The images of Job's wife and Eve, while displaying the destructive nature of Justina, did not underscore the core of the conflict between the bishop and empress quite in the same way as the story of Jezebel. Ambrose depicts his conflict with Justina as a biblical allegory, using the images of Jezebel and Elijah, which is important because it reflects a new element between imperial women and elite bishops – namely, that imperial women are engaging in religious politics.

The biblical Jezebel appears in the Old Testament in the books of Kings.[204] She was the daughter of the King of the Sidonians, and married Ahab the king of Israel. Her marriage led Ahab into worship of Baal and Asherah, which was in direct conflict with Jewish religious law. In fact, the prophet Elijah accuses Ahab an account of "the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."[205] As such he main story of Jezebel (at least as concerned Ambrose) is about her conflict with the prophet Elijah. According to the biblical account, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal, whom Jezebel established, to a contest in order to see whose god would send signs to prove his divine authority. This contest would also establish which prophet was real and challenge Jezebel's authority to create prophets. Unsurprisingly, Elijah wins this contest and makes a mockery of the prophets and even turns the people of Israel against them and has them put to death. It is important to note that at this point, Ahab, the king of Israel was present and complacent toward Elijah's contest and its ensuing violence. It is

[204] Jezebel is first mentioned in 1 Kings 16:31; the name Jezebel also is mentioned in the New Testament, in the Book of Revelation as a slur against a woman who is acting as a false prophetess. See Revelation 2:20.

[205] See 1 Kings 18:19; unless otherwise stated all biblical citations come from the ESV translation.

not until Ahab tells Jezebel what happened to the prophets of Baal that Elijah faces any conflict. According to the text,

> Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and ran for his life and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there.[206]

The text shows that Jezebel's wrath was enough to force Elijah to flee, not any action on Ahab's part. Accordingly, Jezebel was used to embody a "bad" or "dangerous" queen. The memory of the biblical story and its later interpretations caused Jezebel to become synonymous of the worst sort of deceptive seductress, who only brought ruin, not to just herself and her husband, but to the whole kingdom of Israel.[207] Furthermore, Tuomas Rasimus suggests, Jezebel was an easy scapegoat because of her status as a Phoenician – meaning she presented not only as a foreign "other," but was also connected to an enemy kingdom.[208] This is an especially poignant note given the fact that Ambrose spends a lot of energy in his letters reminding the reader that Justina's supporters and army consisted largely of Goths. For example, Ambrose, in his letter to Marcellina, states,

> But Job was tested by bad news heaped on bad news, he was also tested by the woman who said: speak some word against God and die! You observe

[206] 1 Kings 19:1-3

[207] See Janet Howe Gaines (1999), 3-6. Gaines does a fairly thorough analysis of the early accounts of Jezebel and tracks how the story was used throughout ancient through early modern sources. She concludes that Jezebel becomes a trope for evil women and an admonition for women seeking to challenge male authority.

[208] Tuomas Rasimus (2017), 109-112; Rasimus claims that the enmity between the Israelites and the Phoenicians was well-attested even by Josephus's period.

> how many trials are now suddenly launched against me. Goths, weapons, federate troops, the merchants fined, and the saints punished.[209]

And then shortly after this passage he also states,

> And heathens did indeed come, and very much worse than heathens: for it was Goths who came, and men of a variety of foreign tribes, and they came armed, and after placing a cordon around the basilica they occupied it.[210]

In both cases, Ambrose makes it clear that Justina was supported using foreign allies. He focuses primarily on the support of the Goths, but the second passage makes clear that there was general "foreignness" also attached to her supporters. In the next chapter, I will discuss the impact of calling Justina's supporters Goths, but in this case, it is clear that Ambrose is attempting to portray Justina as an invading force. This is the same force that occupied the thoughts of the imperial women in John Chrysostom's letter, which not only reflects the threat that Goths posed for Rome, but also the additional insult Ambrose was giving Justina. The Goths were a force that threatened not just his position and Nicene Christianity, but the very welfare of Roman society. Just as Jezebel's reign was part of the Israelite downfall, Ambrose's allusion sets Justina up as a similar threat.

The climax of the conflict with Jezebel comes when she has Naboth the Jezreelite stoned to death in order to take his vineyard for Ahab. Naboth had refused to sell his land to Ahab, who wanted it, since it was unlawful under Mosaic law to permanently sell

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[209] See Ambrose *Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam* 20.16 trans. by Liebeschuetz. Temptatus est autem Iob nuntiis coacervatis malorum temptatus est etiam per mulierem, quae ait: "dic aliquod verbum in Deum et morere." videtis, quanta subito moveantur: Gothi, arma, gentiles, multa mercatorum, poena sanctorum.

[210] See Ambrose *Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam* 20.20 trans. by Liebeschuetz. Et re vera venerunt gentes, et plus etiam quam gentes venerunt; venerunt enim Gothi et diversarum nationum viri, venerunt cum armis et circumfusi occupaverunt basilicam.

the land that God had provided to the Israelites.[211] In response to his refusal, Jezebel has Naboth stoned to death in order to steal his property. However, she only does this after she scolds and ridicules Ahab for pouting about his inability to get the property. She even accuses him of not understanding what his own authority is as king, similarly to the way in which Julia Domna accused Caracalla of not understanding his authority as emperor.[212] This trope of a woman telling an emperor how to rule appears many times. Yet, it is again interesting to note that Justina is never accused of telling anyone how to rule except Ambrose. Nevertheless, it is this last act of a woman assuming a man's position that leads to Jezebel's later downfall and rather grisly death where she falls from a window, was eaten by dog, and given no funeral.[213]

Although the major conflict that seals Jezebel's fate seems to be connected with the Naboth episode, it is her initial conflict and persecution of the prophet Elijah that Ambrose emphasizes – likely to promote his own connection between the prophet and himself. More importantly, Elijah is seen as the victor in the conflict, whereas Naboth was killed and lost his land as a result. It is interesting that Ambrose makes a connection between himself and Elijah given the fact that he was adamant that he would not surrender the basilica to Justina. Yet, Elijah was quick to flee the wrath of Jezebel. What Ambrose attempts to emphasize is his own holiness and devotion in the face of persecution. As a result, Justina a represented as a queen who has control over religious

[211] Refer to Leviticus 25:23-34 for the rules on redeeming and selling property and 1 Kings 21:1-3 for when Naboth references these as the reason to not give Ahab his vineyard.

[212] See 1 Kings 21:7. Jezebel states, "Do you now govern Israel? Arise and eat bread and let your heart be cheerful; I will give you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite."

[213] See 2 Kings 9:30-37 for Jezebel's death.

policy. Ambrose could have focused his vitriol on Auxentius, the Arian bishop back by Justina, or he could have focused more on Valentinian as a weak ruler being controlled by his mother, the way Tacitus presented Nero. But, Valentinian II does not receive such a harsh criticism – even though Ambrose published these letters years after his rule. The Arian bishop likewise is only part of the problem. Ambrose firmly centers his conflict with Justina. Despite the negative portrayal, it is clear the Ambrose felt Justina had the influence and authority to create such a conflict.

Ambrose, making a connection between himself and Elijah and Justina with Jezebel is furthered when he also refers to Justina as Herodias. Herodias was the wife of Herod Antipas and appears in both the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Like Jezebel with Elijah, Herodias was cast as John the Baptist's persecutor. Although the story of Herodias involves a similar narrative – wherein a queen has a conflict with the local holy man and as a result seeks to persecute him – Herodias's conflict is focused on the fact that John the Baptist cast aspersions on her marriage to Herod Antipas, because she had formerly been married to his brother. John's claims threatened her position similarly to Elijah's destruction of the prophets of Baal threatened Jezebel. However, in the case of Herodias, she tricks Herod Antipas, who was too weak and afraid of public sentiment to

execute John the Baptist, to behead him.[214] Therefore, in the story of Herodias, she ultimately prevails in her conflict with a holy man, unlike Jezebel who never quite bested Elijah.

These three biblical women – Eve, Jezebel, and Herodias – are essential to Ambrose's presentation of the conflict between himself and the Empress Justina. Not only is he tapping into a long-established biblical trope on elite women in conflict with holy men or prophets, but also these references act as a sort of self-aggrandizement. These tropes turn Justina into more than just a heretic. Jezebel, in Christian tradition, became associated with sexual immorality and idolatry that leads to the destruction of not only their own (or their husband's) rule – as can be seen in both the case of Ahab and Herod, as well as Adam and Eve – but also, was a part of the ultimate destruction of their empire. Eve's actions led to humanity's ultimate downfall and forces humanity from Eden. Ahab and Jezebel were part of a long descent of the Kingdom of Israel, which ended in the Assyrian captivity. Herod was part of the larger story of Jesus, which Christians believed was all part of what led to the Roman destruction of the Jewish

[214] See Matthew 14:1-12 and Mark 6:14-29 for the story of Herodias. Both Matthew and Mark include the fact that John the Baptist had rebuked Herod and Herodias for marrying and that Herodias had her daughter, Salome, dance for Herod at a banquet and when he offered to give her a favor, she asked for the head of John the Baptist and Herod was forced to comply. Luke 3:19-20 also mentions that Herod imprisoned John, in part, because of his comments on Herodias's marriage to Herod. However, Luke does not give any details as to John's actual death. In fact, it is not until Luke 9:9 that Luke mentions that John the Baptist was dead. He cites a comment Herod makes in regard to rumors that Jesus was John and says "John I beheaded, but who is this about whom I hear such things?" Luke does not go into detail about Herodias or why John was ultimately beheaded, which does not mean that his story contradicts Matthew and Mark, it follows the same basic structure. The use of Herodias in Mark and Matthew follows the thematic structure of focusing on the continuity between the early prophets and Luke takes a more annalistic approach to the gospel.

temple. Therefore, Ambrose is activating that legacy of destruction and including Justina in it.

Meanwhile, he is also setting himself up as the persecuted holy man. In the case of Jezebel, Elijah was in conflict with a pagan queen, who was leading the Israelites away from God. This seduction away from God's correct doctrine is what leads to destruction and downfall. Essentially, Ambrose was using the conflict as a warning against the threat of heretical imperial power. Given that these were well-known aspects of Jezebel and Herodias's story, Ambrose uses his three biblical references to provide a specific and –in terms of its historical influence – persuasive portrait of Justina as an empress.

This was a portrait of a woman who encouraged disobedience to God's will through heresy (Eve), persecuted Holy men and stole property against God's will (Jezebel), and through seduction forced her husband and king to sacrifice a holy man contrary to God's wishes (Herodias). Yet, again, all of these women met with a demise and or collapse of their reigns, which never occurred with Justina. Nevertheless, these tropes stuck to Justina in all of the succeeding histories or accounts that dealt with the empress. For example, Rufinus claims that Justina was empowered with a spirit of Jezebel and that Ambrose was equipped with the spirit of Elijah.[215] Using such a description, Rufinus shows that he was familiar with Ambrose's account, and understood well his association between Justina and Jezebel and correspondingly the implied association between himself and Elijah. Additionally, Socrates Scholasticus, while not

[215] See Rufinus *HE* 11.15 trans. by Philip R. Amidon (1997).

addressing the empress as Jezebel, follows (as I have shown) the seductive danger that Justina posed to the empire, which fits well with the narrative Ambrose established.

These accounts influenced even later authors, such as Zosimus. Zosimus claimed that, after fleeing Milan, because of Magnus Maximus's advance from Gaul to Italy, Justina called upon Theodosius for support. In order to secure his support, she allegedly pushed her daughter on the emperor and encouraged their marriage. His account states,

> Justina, however, who was very shrewd and not slow to find an advantage, discovered Theodosius' amorous inclinations, and bringing in her daughter, Galla, who was renowned for her beauty, clasped the emperor's knees and begged him neither to let the death of Gratian (who gave him the empire) go unpunished, nor to let his relatives languish neglected and in despair. And as she said this, she showed him the girl weeping and bewailing her fate. As Theodosius listened to her he became captivated by the sight of the girl's beauty and showed in his eyes the striking effect she had on him. He deferred a decision, although he gave them reason to hope, until, his desire for the girl being increasingly excited, he went to Justina to ask for her daughter in marriage, seeing Flacilla his previous wife, was dead. She said she would not give her to him unless he undertook war against Maximus to avenge Gratian's death, and restored his father's kingdom to Valentinian.[216]

Zosimus's antagonism toward Theodosius is apparent in the beginning of the passage when he calls him too weak to want to defend the Empire from a usurper.[217] This story of

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[216] Zosimus 4.44.1-4 trans by Ronald T. Ridley (1982). τούτοις ἀντιφθέγγεσθαι μὲν οὐδεὶς τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς γερουσίας ἐθάρρει, δοκοῦσί πως κοινῇ τῇ πολιτείᾳ λυσιτελεῖν Ἰουστῖνα δὲ οὔτε πραγμάτων ἄπειρος οὖσα οὔτε πρὸς τὴν τοῦ συμφέροντος εὕρεσιν ἄπορος, ἐπισταμένη τὸ Θεοδοσίου περὶ τὰς ἐρωτικὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἐπιρρεπές, ἐφιστᾷ τε τὴν θυγατέρα Γάλλαν ἐξαισίῳ διαπρέπουσαν κάλλει, καὶ τῶν γονάτων ἐπιλαβομένη τοῦ βασιλέως ἱκέτευε μήτε τὸν Γρατιανοῦ τοῦ δεδωκότος οἱ τὴν βασιλείαν θάνατον περιιδεῖν ἀτιμώρητον, μήτε σφᾶς εἰκῇ κειμένους ἐᾶσαι, πάσης ἐκπεπτωκότας ἐλπίδος. καὶ ταῦτα λέγουσα τὴν κόρην ὀδυρομένην ἐδείκνυ καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀποκλαίουσαν τύχην. τούτων ἀκούσας ὁ Θεοδόσιος, καὶ ἅμα τῇ θέᾳ τοῦ τῆς κόρης κάλλους ἁλούς, παρέφαινε μὲν καὶ τῷ βλέμματι τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει τῆς κόρης πληγήν, ἀνεβάλλετο δὲ τὸ πρακτέον, χρηστὰς ἔχειν αὐταῖς ὑποφαίνων ἐλπίδας. ὡς δὲ πλέον ὑπεσμύχετο τῇ τῆς κόρης ἐπιθυμίᾳ, τὴν Ἰουστῖναν μετελθὼν ᾔτει τὴν θυγατέρα πρὸς γάμον οἷα Πλακίλλης τῆς πρότερον αὐτῷ γημαμένης ἀπαλλαγείσης. οὐκ ἄλλως δὲ ἔφασκε δώσειν, εἰ μὴ τὸν κατὰ Μαξίμου πόλεμον ἀράμενος τῇ τε Γρατιανοῦ τιμωρήσειεν ἀναιρέσει καὶ Οὐαλεντινιανῷ πάλιν ἀποδοίη τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς βασιλείαν.

[217] This was due to Zosimus's anti-Christian attitude that he exhibits in his history. See David Rohrbacher (2013), 72.

Justina presenting her daughter to seduce and manipulate Theodosius fit well with his polemic. However, it also fits with the narrative tropes Ambrose established and that Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus, and even Solomon, reinforce in their histories. Additionally, the story has clear echoing of Socrates's account of Justina's marriage with Valentinian I and with the Herodias trope. In other words, Zosimus picks up on the same negative persona that Justina has and uses it to highlight Theodosius's weaknesses. Yet, even in Zosimus's portrayal of Justina, the empress defies certain expectations that the such tropes bring. For instance, although it is unsurprising that Justina is portrayed as sexually manipulative, it is interesting that she does not attempt a seduction. Rather, she is shown as securing the position of her daughter – not for her own benefit, but for the protection of her son.

Nevertheless, Ambrose's descriptions of Justina became well-known and supported by Ambrose's friends. In the next section, I will show how other sources corroborate Ambrose's version of events. Ambrose's focus on the three biblical women to depict his conflict with Justina had even larger implications in how bishops depicted their relationship with empresses.[218] All three women were well-known to the late fourth century Christian communities and were well-recognized tropes for "dangerous" women. But, Ambrose's use of them against Justina takes on a new use and presents a new growing antagonism between elite bishops and the imperial court. These tropes would continue to be used is the Ambrosian style under John Chrysostom and his conflict with the Empress Eudoxia. Despite the attempt to show Justina as a dangerous seductress, a

[218] I will discuss this more in chapter 3.9 in my discussion on Chrysostom and Eudoxia.

wrathful heretic, and an overall dangerous or bad empress, her actions never result in any actual violence, or destruction. Quite the contrary, as I will show in the next chapter her actions – despite the tropes used to present them – reveal the logical maneuverings of an empress trying to keep the empire and her children secure.

1.9 Justina in Other Sources: Ambrose's Direct Legacy on the Image of Justina

Ambrose's conflict with Justina became a major event in the bishop's life. Because of this, the conflict is particularly colored by later fifth century accounts – particularly those of Paulinus of Milan and Augustine – both of whom were, at one, point pupils and friends of Ambrose.[219] Augustine of Hippo was famous for his numerous writings – particularly *Confessions*. Paulinus of Milan is less well-known, but his main existing work is a biography of Ambrose's life. Accordingly, these accounts are as belligerent toward Justina as Ambrose's letters.[220]

Both Augustine and Paulinus blame Justina for the discord with Ambrose and, in Augustine's case, depict her as an imperial mother with too much power. For instance, Augustine recounts in his *Confessions*, that Justina used her role to persecute Ambrose, which led the whole city to rise up against her. He states,

> Non longe coeperat Mediolanensis ecclesia genus hoc consolationis et exliortationis celebrare, niagno studio fratrum concinentium voeibus et cordibus, nimirum annus erat aut non multo amplius, cum lustina, Valentiniani regis pueri mater, hominem tuum Ambrosium persequeretur haeresis suae causa, qua fuerat seducta ab Arrianis. excubabat pia plebs in ecclesia, mori parata cum episcopo suo, servo tuo. ibi mater mea, ancilla tua, sollicitudinis et vigiliarum primas tenens, orationibus vivebat. nos

[219] See Brown (2000), 411-412. Brown even claims that Augustine saw Ambrose as a type of model bishop.

[220] For more on Augustine and Paulinus of Milan see Brown (2000), 411-412.

> adhue frigidi a calore spiritus tui, excitabaraur tamen civitate adtonita atque turbata.[221]
>
> Not long before had the Church of Milan begun to celebrate this kind of consolation and exhortation, and that with the great delight of the brethren, singing together both with voice and hearts. For about a year it was, or not much above, that Justina, mother to the boy Emperor Valentinian, persecuted thy servant Ambrose, in favor of her heresy, to which she was seduced by the Arians: the devout people watched day and night in the Church, ready to die with their Bishop, thy servant. There my mother, thy handmaid, bearing a chief part of those troubles and watchings, even lived by prayer: yea, we also, still unwarmed by the heat of thy spirit, were yet stirred up by the example of the amazed and disquieted city.[222]

Augustine's juxtaposition of his mother with Justina is key in this passage. Augustine does not refer to Justina the mother of the Augustus, but rather the *regis pueri mater*. This address fully underscored Justina's position as a mother of a weak emperor – not even a real Augustus, but a *regis pueri* – a boy king. The fact that the main subject here is *mater* and that Justina is described in relation to the boy king emphasizes the dominant position over her son, which Augustine attributes to her. Justina's role as mother is then further highlighted by Augustine's implied comparison to his own mother. In this case, Monica was praying and supporting the authority of the bishop, whereas Justina was trying to circumvent his authority. More importantly, Augustine claims Monica's actions, and those following her example, inspired him, even though he had not yet converted to Christianity. The fact that he credits Monica's actions as inspiring his own faith coupled with the claim that Justina was seduced to Arianism further emphasizes Justina's failings. Additionally, is puts the heresy in the position of the seductress and

[221] Augustine *Confessions* 9.7.
[222] Augustine *Confessions* 9.7 trans. by William Watts LCL edition.

Justina as the seduced. In that sense, Justina plays the role of the king being seduced by the woman or Adam being seduced by Eve.

Augustine also states that Justina's actions were a form or persecution in support of heresy, but his statement clearly shows that Justina's persecution was centered on Ambrose. Augustine does not claim she persecuted the Nicene church broadly, but that it was a conflict between Ambrose and Justina. Thus, Augustine's portrayal of Justina is as weakly seduced ruler and mother of the boy king, and she is also clearly caste in the role of the villain. This is emphasized in the way Augustine recounts this episode. He adopts similar language to describe her actions as the accounts of Socrates Scholasticus, the *Historia Augusta*, and Tacitus to illustrate the weakness of the emperor – or in this case the empress. In Justina's case, rather than saying she was seduced or under the control of *ἠράσθη*, or a sexual desire, but she is seduced by the heretical teachings of the Arians. Augustine states, "*qua fuerat seducta ab Arrianis*" she was the passive actor being seduced in much the same way as Justina's own husband Valentinian was seduced using the passive *ἠράσθη*. Augustine's description of the Arians being the seducers intentionally highlights the dangers of heresy in the same way that the overt sexuality of figures like Candaules wife, Julia Domna, Messalina, and Agrippina were depicted as dangerous. The women posed a threat to the stability and authority of the emperor and, transitively, the empire. This important because, in the previous cases, the respective authors also used these episodes to weaken the image and authority of the emperor. Here, Augustine uses the seductive nature of the Arians to show the threat they pose to the stability and wellbeing of the Church and to weaken the character and authority of

Justina. In so doing, however, he also situates Justina into the role of emperor. In other words, Justina assumes the role of the emperor in Augustine's account.

I posit that is why Augustine purposefully calls her the *regis pueri mater*, in order to minimize the authority, which he attributes to her. As I already stated, this term weakens the authority of both Justina and Valentinian II. Not only does he use a rather un-Roman term for the emperor, but also, he further weakens Valentinian II by calling him a *puer* – a boy. At the time, Valentinian II was thirteen years old.[223] At this age, he would still be deserving of the title *puer* by Roman standards, because, usually Romans did not consider a boy reaching maturity until they were fifteen.[224] Nevertheless, the idea that a boy being emperor was controversial and as emperor he would have wanted to not be seen as a boy. On the surface, Augustine appears to attack the figure of the emperor through the same means as the other historians and biographers discussed. The elements of seduction, an overly powerful woman, and an ineffectual emperor are all basic tropes seen in the accounts of Tacitus, Suetonius and even later in the *Historia Augusta* (to name only a few). But this does not explain the inversion of Justina's role that Augustine presents when he claims the Arians seduced her. This depiction, in effect, acknowledges Justina's authority while simultaneously trying to discredit it.

Similarly, Paulinus of Milan, also known as Paulinus the Deacon, and the author of Ambrose's biography, also attributes a fair amount of influence to Justina.

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[223] See Liebeschuetz and Hill (Liverpool University Press, 2005), 123. Hill's introduction to Ambrose's *Epistles* against Justina's action provide context about the emperor and his mother.

[224] See Christian Laes and Johan Strubbe (Cambridge University Press 2014) 28-33 for information of Roman traditional understanding of youth. See also Laes (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 90-96 for use terms for children and stages in life.

Furthermore, like Augustine, Paulinus also seems to focus the conflict between Ambrose and Justina. When Paulinus does show conflict within the larger religious sects of Milan, Ambrose and Justina are always at the center. For example, Paulinus states,

> …he [Ambrose] returned to Milan and there withstood countless insidious attacks of the above-mentioned woman Justina who, by bestowing offices and honors, aroused the people against the holy man.[225]

And then later, he states,

> Finally, from this time, the persecution which was aroused by the fury of Justina, that the bishop might be driven from the church, began to subside.[226]

Paulinus attributes the ability to not only appoint offices and honors to Justina, but also the influence to create furor against the bishop. Paulinus, like Ambrose, attempts to present the bishop as a holy man under persecution. In order to create this image, Paulinus needed a believably threating antagonist to set against Ambrose. In Paulinus's depiction of the conflict, Justina is much more of a Jezebel figure that Ambrose depicts. She is the one pushing the heresy, rather than passively being seduced by it as in Augustine. As such, her role as mother and wife to a legitimate emperor (however weakened) is downplayed and she stands as a "bad" empress creating fury or passion in response to her dangerous heresy.

According to Peter Brown, Paulinus's account of Ambrose was written nearly 25 years after Ambrose's death, which would have also made it a later work than

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[225] …Mediolanium revertitur, ibique supradictae Iustinae mulieris innumeras insidias sustinuit, quae muneribus atque honoribus adversus sanctum virum oblatis populos excitabat. Paulinus of Milan 12.1. A Translation of the Vita Sancti Ambrosii 4.12 trans. by Mary Simplicia Kaniecka (1928, 2020), 48.

[226] See Paulinus of Milan 15.1 Denique ex hoc tempore sedari coepit persecutio quae Iustinae furore adcendebatur, ut sacerdos de ecclesia pelleretur. Paulinus of Milan 5.15 trans. by Mary Simplicia Kaniecka (1928, 2020), 51-52.

Augustine's *Confessions*. Brown also shows that Ambrose was both a mentor and hero to Augustine and Paulinus. Both Paulinus and Augustine knew each other from having been mentored under Ambrose.[227] They also remained in contact with each other, which is especially evident given the fact that Paulinus claims at the beginning of his biography that Augustine had requested he write a life of Ambrose.[228] These connections show that the legacy of Ambrose's depiction of his conflict with Justina had an enduring nature that was continued in later memoirs and histories.

1.10 Conclusion

Justina's representation in the sources symbolizes the changes in the late fourth century imperial court, and in the later role of empresses in Church politics and the rise of aristocratic bishops. Valentinian I's marriage to Justina was presented as a unique scenario that involved both the seductive power of the empress and her transformation from an innocent virgin to a literal homewrecker. Although her image is deeply connected to seduction and temptation, unlike her earlier predecessors, Justina was not represented as sexually transgressive. Instead, the late fourth century and later sources were concerned with Justina's religious leanings. By this period, Justina's Arian heresy was represented as no less transgressive or dangerous as a Messalina and Agrippina's use of sexually manipulative natures. Not only does this reflect the changes in representations of imperial women, but also the growing influence of elite bishops, like Ambrose, who set the foundation for Justina's depiction in later sources.

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[227] See Peter Brown (2000), 408-409.

[228] See The Life of Saint Ambrose: A Translation of the Vita Sancti Ambrosii trans. by Mary Simplicia Kaniecka (1928, 2020), 33.

Despite these literary depictions, Justina's role as an influential empress is still evident. Given the fact that multiple authors comment on her active role in the conflict with Ambrose, and that she was able to present enough of a threat for Ambrose to cast her as his main persecutor, shows that she played an active part in the religious and imperial policies of the Milanese community. Indeed, this was evident enough that even eastern bishops, such as John Chrysostom commented on her devoted to her son and concerned with protecting him from bigger, more immediate threats than heresy. In the next chapter, I will explore this as a main *opus operando* for Justina. In conclusion, despite the use of classical and biblical tropes to depict the dangers and threat that Justina posed as an empress, underlying these representations is an empress, who challenged the authority of bishops and set a precedent in Late Antique relationships between imperial women and elite bishops.

-2-

The Power of the Empress: Reading Justina in Her Context

In this chapter, I will address Justina's conflict and controversy with the Bishop Ambrose. This conflict dominates the ancient narratives surrounding Justina and has become a key focus for modern scholars. Modern historians have largely discussed Justina's role both as the empress during her son's reign and her interactions with Ambrose in two basic ways. The first way, Justina is presented as a devoted Arian who caused no end of grief for the Bishop of Milan. These scholars suggest that not only was Justina an Arian, but her actions also are motivated by purely theological or religious convictions.[229] In the second way, scholars argue since there is no conclusive evidence that Justina was an Arian or had any strong religious convictions, the conflict between Justina and Ambrose literary construction invented by Ambrose, Augustine, and late

[229] Scholars who fall into this camp are: Kenneth Holum (1989), 24-25; and Peter Brown (2011), 125 briefly mentions the crisis led by the Arian Justina. McEvoy focuses more on Gratian and Valentinian's role in the Basilica Crisis, but does not discount it as a crisis. See also Hebblewhite (2020) for an example of accepting at face value some sources that declare Justina an Arian, but rejecting sources that promote an image of a powerful and influential Queen.

fourth and early century historians, namely Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus. Furthermore, her representation in these contemporary sources affects her depiction in the later histories of Sozomen and Zosimus.[230]

I will present a new approach to understanding Justina's historical actions and motivations and argue that neither of these approaches allows for Justina's genuine agency. As such, I will present a new analysis of Justina's conflict with Ambrose that acknowledges her actions within the scope of the larger political context of the late fourth century. I will demonstrate that Magnus Maximus's usurpation was central to Justina's conflict with Ambrose and that her actions prove she was a politically savvy and pragmatic empress. Additionally, I will argue that her power posed a real threat to Ambrose's position as a bishop and for this reason he instigated the conflict and depicted her as a persecuting Jezebel.

2.2 When the Conflict Began: Paulinus of Milan's Account of Justina and Ambrose's First Meeting

Before discussing the conflict between Ambrose and Justina, it is important to establish the issues. According to Paulinus of Milan, Justina and Ambrose's conflict began well before the empress came to Milan. Paulinus dates it around 377, when Ambrose was tasked with appointing a new Bishop of Sirmium in the province of Pannonia. The previous bishop, Germinius, had been a member and adherent of the large Homoean community at Sirmium, which purportedly included the Empress Justina and

[230] Scholars who fall into this camp are McLynn (1994); Williams (2017), 216; T.D. Barnes notes that Sozomen used Socrates Scholasticus to write his own history.

the then 12-year-old Emperor, Valentinian II.[231] Germinius was a well-known and important leader of the Homoeans, a sect of Arian Christians that came into prominence in the later fourth century under the leadership of Bishop Acacius of Caesarea.[232] The Homoeans often conflicted with the Nicene sect, such as Ambrose, throughout the later fourth century.[233] When Germinius died around 376, it left an opening for both sides to gain some control of an important city, where part of the imperial court currently resided.[234]

Theologically, the Homoeans disagreed with the Nicene, or Homousian adherents, who followed the decision of the Council of Nicaea. Unlike the Homousians, who believed the Son was of the same substance and co-eternal with the Father, Homoeans believed that the Son was of like substance and not co-eternal with the Father. These names, "homousians" and "Nicene," or "Homoean" and "Arian" encompass a plethora of Christian groups during this period, each with nuanced practices. However, Homoean has become a modern, all-encompassing term for followers of Arius and Acacius.[235] Yet,

[231] Liebeschuetz (2011), 11-14.

[232] For more on Acacius of Caesarea, see Sarah Parvis (2014t), 54-56 in *Arianism Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed.*

[233] For more on this conflict See Williams (2006), 191-193 and Williams (1995), 45-80; also see, Galvao-Sobrinho (2013), 30-33; and also, Brian Dunkle (2016), 56-57 overview of Ambrose's position on the conflict.

[234] Stuart Williams, (2017), 118-119 discusses Sirmium and the likelihood of Ambrose's involvement in the election of a new bishop some 500 miles from Milan. For more on Germinus, see D.H. Williams (1996), 335-357. See Lenski (2014), 43 for evidence that Sirmium was an important imperial residence.

[235] Nicene and Homoean are broad theological definitions that I will use throughout to describe the two different fractions. As D.H. Williams (1996), 335-357 points out these are not always the best terms to use for the two groups in this period because they tend to create a theological homogeny where none existed. Although we should still acknowledge that there were many variances within each group and these are generic broad definitions to describe very complex topics, they are still the broadest terms to use in underscoring general Arian-Nicene conflicts.

at the time, Ambrose, and many other Nicene, fourth century Christian leaders referred to these groups as Arians.[236] For example Ambrose in his letter to his sister states,

> Prodire de Arianis nullus audebat, quia nec quisquam de civibus erat, pauci de familia regia, nonnulli etiam Gothi. quibus ut olim plaustra sedes erat, ita nunc plaustrum ecclesia est. quocumque femina ista processerit, secum suos omnes coetus vehit.[237]
>
> Not one of the Arians was brave enough to come out, since there were none of the citizens there, a few from the imperial household, and a number of Goths. At one time wagons were homes to these people, so now their wagon is the church. Wherever that woman makes her way she drags with her a swarm of followers.[238]

This passage is particularly important and will be addressed in greater detail later on in this chapter. For the moment, it is worth noting Ambrose's blanket use of the term Arian and its association with Justina and the basilica crisis. In other words, for Ambrose, it was not necessary to catalogue the difference and nuances of Homoean groups; it was enough for him that these groups were not Nicene adherents.

Thus, the theological debate between the Nicene and Homoean sects had become politically motivated conflicts in the late fourth century, especially after the death of Constantius II, who had been sympathetic and supportive of the Homoean sects. Both sides vied for position of influence in the imperial court. It is no surprise then when the Bishop Germinius died around 376, Ambrose used connections he had made in Sirmium in order to influence the outcome of the new bishop. According to Paulinus, Ambrose's support for Anemius, the Nicene-leaning Bishop, to replace Germinius ultimately proved

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[236] For the purposes of this paper, the terms Nicene Christianity as compared to Homoean Christianity will reflect the specific conflict between Ambrose as a Nicene Christian and Justina as an alleged Arian.

[237] See Ambrose of Milan *Ad Marcellina* 20.10.

[238] See Ambrose of Milan *Ad Marcellina,* Trans. by Liebeschuetz 76.12, 165.

successful.[239] Not only did this increase tensions between the Nicene and Homoean factions in Sirmium, but it also created a tension between the Bishop of Milan and the imperial court headed by Justina. This tension came to dominate the narratives of Justina's life and role as empress.[240]

For this reason, Paulinus of Milan, uses this event to introduce Justina into his narrative. According to Paulinus,

> Sirmium vero cum ad ordinandum episcopum Anemium perrexisset, ibique Justinae tunc temporis reginae potentia et multitudine coadunata de Ecclesia pelleretur; ut non ab ipso, sed ab haereticis arianus episcopus in eadem ecclesia ordinaretur[241]

> But when he [Ambrose] had come to Sirmium to consecrate Anemius as bishop, he was nearly driven from the church by the power of Justina, the empress at the time, and by a multitude, which had been gathered together. They intended that there might be no consecration by Ambrose, but that an Arian bishop might be consecrated by heretics in that very church.[242]

As discussed in the previous chapter, Paulinus's *Vita Ambrosii* was written 25 years after Ambrose was dead and per the request of Augustine of Hippo. According to Peter Brown, the Ambrose of Paulinus's biography, was a holy man of action who meted out diving punishment to at least six specific people for doing no less than criticizing the bishop.[243] In this case, Paulinus's passage is intended to highlight how Ambrose overcame tremendous obstacles in order to protect the sanctity of the Church. However,

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[239] Stuart Williams (2017), 118-120 claims that there does seem to be an association with Ambrose in Sirmium around 378 and with the writing of *de fide*. However, Stuart Williams also states that it was unlikely that Ambrose was there for the Sirmium episcopal election in which he would have had no authority. Likely, he was there to meet with Gratian.

[240] Neil McLynn (1994), 96-98 claims Paulinus the Deacon describes an early enmity forming between the court led by Justina and Ambrose due to the religious conflicts between the Homoean community and Ambrose's pick of a Nicene successor of the bishop.

[241] Paulinus of Milan 11.1.

[242] Paulinus of Milan 3.11 trans. by Sr. Mary Simplicia Kaniecka, 42

[243] See Brown, (2000), 414-415.

in doing so, Paulinus also attributes significant influence to Justina. In particular, Paulinus claims that it was Justina's *potentia* that threatened Ambrose's position. She alone had the power motivate a mob, the military, or even Valentinian II. But it is the fact that her position was backed by the addition of a multitude that suggests she was not some lone, zealot heretic attacking Ambrose.

Paulinus's account here suggests that there was multitude of non-Nicene Christians that opposed Ambrose.[244] This will be important to keep in mind when I turn to the basilica conflict between Justina and Ambrose, and Justina's motivations for siding with the Homoean sect in Milan. Secondly, this description connects back to Ambrose's description of Justina in his letter to Marcellina. In his letter, Ambrose also made comment that wherever Justina went a crowd followed her. Essentially, both Paulinus and Ambrose confirm through their descriptions, or more aptly, their criticisms, that Justina was able to gain the support of people and influence their actions. These accounts are meant to show Justina as engaging in activities that transgress her position as an empress and a woman.

However, Paulinus's account was written much later than the events he depicts. Although he had access to both Ambrose's own letter collection, which Ambrose compiled and edited himself, as well as Rufinus's *Ecclesiastical History*, the veracity of

[244] It is unclear whether the majority of people in Sirmium were Homoeans or Nicene, but for Ambrose this was not a democratic issue. He so zealously believed his position was the righteous one and, as such, was the only way people should be allowed to think and believe. In other words, any disagreement posed a threat to all society and, therefore, needed to be canceled. Nevertheless, there does seem to be several Homoean movements in Sirmium. For an example see Knut Schäferdiek (2014), 21-44. This article discusses Ufila and Homoeans in Sirmium during the Synod in 351.

his account is open to question.[245] Not only does Paulinus show his own bias in favor Ambrose with no attempt at subtlety, but he also follows the typical model for Latin biography in that he uses Ambrose's life as a moralizing subject and for Paulinus, nothing needed moralizing more than heresy.[246] This is not surprising given his involvement in the Pelagian controversy around the same time that he authored his biography on Ambrose.[247] From this, it is not difficult to conclude that Paulinus used the Ambrose's own conflict with heresy as a model for his own experiences. Nevertheless, as I showed in the last chapter, we can still use his account to assess Justina's influence and in this particular episode, where Paulinus shows other women heretics, we can compare Justina's actions and understand the larger role she had than just as Ambrose's antagonist.

My assessment of Justina goes against the idea that representations of women in the sources are only constructions and that they do not reflect that actual historical figure.[248] For example, modern scholars have argued that such descriptions of imperial women are used to underscore some other threat or weakness of the emperor or imperial authority in general.[249] I discussed the role of Messalina in Tacitus as an example of this type of female representation. Sandra Joshel supports this argument on Messalina, stating,

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[245] See Alan Cameron, (2011) 82-87.

[246] For more on Paulinus's life, see Émilien Lamirande, Paulin de Milan et la "Vita Ambrosii": Aspects de la religion sous le Bas-Empire" (1983).

[247] See Brown (2013), 145-146.

[248] As I state in my Introduction, I.3

[249] This follows my discussion on Tacitean women in chapter 1, XX.

> Roman women in the upper classes had wealth and influence but, at the same time, no public political roles and limited legal rights and were, moreover, the objects of a misogynist invective and an ideology that rewarded female subservience. Without attention to agency in representations of women, we reinscribe the villain/victim dichotomy in our attempt to uncover the lived reality of Roman women and cannot observe how representations of women serve male discourse, sexual, political, and moral.[250]

It is true that both Paulinus and Ambrose describe Justina in hostile ways. But their descriptions also reveal the extent of Justina's influence at this time although the exercise of that influence is not meant to be complimentary. However, Joshel's argument solely focuses on the reality of Messalina's agency as Messalina appears in Tacitus. She argues that women in Roman literature serve a trope crafted by male discourse and are tools that present a moral or political message. In this case, Messalina serves as a tool to show the weaknesses of the emperor. Furthermore, women in conflict with men, quite often, had a literary purpose of showing the effeminacy or weakness of the man and/or the inherent dangers of female power.[251] Likewise, women shown being modest or morally upright reflected the strength of the male dominated household and proper feminine behavior.[252]

Yet, this argument about does not adequately reflect the situation we find in the accounts of Paulinus and Ambrose. Although Paulinus does in fact use Justina and

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[250] See Joshel, (1995), 58.

[251] Ibid, 57-59.

[252] Wilkinson (2015), 117-120 argues that modesty in dress and speech served as a type of agency for women in Late Antiquity. There are earlier examples of "good" empresses and their association with modesty. For example, Pliny the Younger, in his panegyric to Trajan, exhorts the emperor for his devoted and modest wife. Julie Langford (2013), 92–93 notes that Plotina received such praise from Pliny's panegyric. She further shows that women were often praised when they remained removed from politics. Emily Ann Hemelrijk (2004), 116–19 also shows how Plotina was adept at balancing her political maneuverings. Modesty was one of her prime attributes and she used it along with her bond as the adoptive mother of Hadrian in order to get him to support her Epicurean schools. This shows how even in restrictive gender roles, women exerted their agency.

Ambrose's conflict in order to send a moral message, this does not mean we cannot use the account to assess the way the conflict occurred and the larger impact that it had on the role of bishops and imperial women alike. More importantly, as Peter Brown concurred, Ambrose in Paulinus's account was as much a literary construct as Justina. In fact, Brown even compared the Ambrose in Paulinus's depiction with Augustine's and found two fairly different portraits of the Bishop.[253] Yet, that has not prevented scholars from making a full and thorough examination of Ambrose as an historical figure. For instance, both McLynn and Stuart Williams acknowledge that Ambrose's involvement in such an election, miles away from his locus of authority, would have been irregular. Yet neither McLynn, nor Stuart Williams fully discredit Ambrose's involvement in this ecclesiastical election, despite the fact that the only source for it is Paulinus of Milan.[254] Therefore, Justina's influence and agency should be given as much consideration as Ambrose's, and, conversely, Ambrose's agency should be analyzed with the same scrutiny as Justina's. This is following Linda Olson's argument, which I discussed in my introduction.[255]

Paulinus juxtaposes the depiction of Justina against the character of Ambrose and it is clear that this juxtaposition is meant to present heretical women as persecutors, led by Justina. This places the Nicene-orthodox bishop and his followers as the persecuted group. The image of persecuted Christians by an imperial power had strong resonances with the hagiographies of earlier Christians, as well as biblical accounts of the apostles

[253] See Brown (2013), 145-146.

[254] See McLynn (1994), 91-93 and Stuart Williams (2017), 117-120. To be fair to both scholars, McLynn and Stuart Williams do not downplay the conflict between Ambrose and Justina, but Justina's motivations all begin with her Arian leanings.

[255] See Introduction, 20 and See also Linda Olson (2005), 5.

and Jesus. Yet, in many of these accounts, the persecutor is male. If Joshel is correct, then a female persecutor should weaken Ambrose's character. Yet, that is clearly not Paulinus's intent.

In this case, the standard formula used to analyze women – as seen in Joshel's analysis of Tacitus – is not applicable to the accounts of Ambrose and Paulinus. One could make the argument that the invisible character of Valentinian II is the main object of critique, not Ambrose. But, this appears incongruous with the context of the initial conflict, since both Justina and Ambrose play the main roles commonly seen in this type of trope. Additionally, at the time, Valentinian II was only co-emperor (and a rather junior one at that) with the Emperor Gratian.[256] Given the fact that both Ambrose and Paulinus claim that the bishop had a positive relationship with Gratian, it does not seem likely that either accounts sought to present a weakened image of the emperor or his brother.[257]

[256] In general, McEvoy (2013), 118-120, McLynn (1994), 91-93, and Stuart Williams (2017), 117-120 all agree that Gratian and Ambrose likely met in Sirmium in 378 around the same time that Ambrose wrote *de fide* for the emperor. McEvoy, who is more interested in the role Ambrose played in Gratian's nascent rule, argues that Ambrose had some influence, but not as much as he claims. She does not discuss Ambrose and Justina, as it is not pertinent to her discussion. McLynn and Stuart Williams both agree that this period saw a change for imperial policy as regarded Homoeans and that it had to do with Ambrose's influence on Gratian.

[257] As shown through Joshel, emperors in conflict with women were considered weak or "bad." However, as regards these gender types, Virginia Burrus (2000), 140-154 argues that Ambrose was part of a larger social context in the fourth century, which redefined gender using trinitarian and Christian beliefs. Nevertheless, as Craig Williams (2010), 150-171 has shown, imperium included authority over women and women were still presented as subservient to men. Boatwright (2021), 162-163 has also shown that sources depicted imperial women in a negative way show them as weak minded, which explains their subservient state. Yet, she also claims that imperial women could be depicted positively as intermediaries. What this shows is that the conflict between Ambrose and Justina in an earlier Roman period, like Joshel describes, could have created an image of a weakened bishop. Yet, as Burrus and Boatwright highlight, imperial women and gender during this period were not stagnant, nor were the biased males who depicted them.

Paulinus is clearly presenting Justina as the main actor and persecutor of Ambrose. Yet, Ambrose is the strong, moral leader of Paulinus's biography. This shows a change in the "bad" empress type.[258] Justina's conflict with Ambrose was not meant to create a weak male figure, but a strong male figure. Moreover, she does not pose as a sexual temptation, but a spiritual one. I submit that shows a new role for imperial women in connection with the increasingly Christianized imperial court.[259] But I also suggest that this new position was not just a literary device for the sources, such as Paulinus. Rather, Paulinus, while depicting Justina in a negative way, still underscored Justina's influence and visibility.[260] The influence and visibility of imperial women continued to increase throughout the end of the fourth century and into the fifth century, as I will show in the next chapter.

The fact that Ambrose is later challenged by a group of nameless women shows that his conflict with the empress reflected the changed depiction of gendered conflicts at this time. For example, after Paulinus introduces Justina, his account of Sirmium continues with a nameless Arian woman trying to drag Ambrose from his seat into a group of women intent on beating the bishop to death. But Ambrose rebukes her with the argument that no one has the right to touch a bishop. Paulinus then claims Ambrose had the last laugh because the next day the woman was found dead and everyone was too

[258] Burgersdijk and Ross (2018), 1-10 also caution that the emperor had little control over his depiction in the sources and dichotomies, like "good" and "bad" emperors should be treated carefully because such perceptions can change with the source. The same argument is applicable to imperial women.

[259] As Salzman (2021), 29 shows, except for Julian, emperors after Constantine supported the spread of Christianity.

[260] See Hillner (2019), 367 for her argument on the increased visibility of late antique imperial women.

afraid to further oppose him.[261] This story follows the standard literary trope regarding "uppity females," who dare challenge male authority and supremacy. The violent passion led the women to challenge Ambrose, who remained calm and righteous.[262] In the end, this passion proved to be destructive, not unlike the seductive passion of *eros* discussed in the last chapter.[263]

However, it is interesting that Ambrose is paired in conflict with an unnamed woman – someone either too insignificant socially or politically to name, or, as the case may be, someone who did not exist and was meant to showcase Ambrose's holy prowess. What makes it interesting is that Paulinus had to construct a conflict in which Ambrose prevailed over a woman. Although Ambrose's efforts to secure a new Nicene bishop for Sirmium prove successful, it was still clear from the earlier passage that he faced strong opposition. In this conflict in Sirmium, Justina was not destroyed or weakened by any act of "passion," and therefore, comes out of this initial conflict unscathed, as she does in the later Basilica Conflict in Milan.[264] As such, this story showcases Paulinus's attempt to moralize against heresy and present Ambrose as not only righteous, but powerful. The subsequent story of the mob of women is be taken as a warning about heresy and heretical women general, but it also proves Ambrose has the authority to stand against heresy, even when supported by the imperial court. This is an important note, because, as

[261] Paulinus of Milan, 3.11.

[262] Boatwright (2021), 163 says that sources would depict women as "weak minded and thus, susceptible to exotic cults." This would be applicable to women and heresy.

[263] See the discussion of Candaules's wife in chapter 1.6.

[264] This will be discussed in further detail below, but the main conflict between Ambrose and Justina was over the use of a Basilica. According to Ambrose, Justina attempted to take control of a basilica for Arian use. See Liebeschuetz (2011), 124-135 for an overview of this basilica conflict.

I will show later, Ambrose's letters about the basilica crisis show a deep need to prove that he is justified in defying imperial orders.

In the particular encounter with the mob of women, Paulinus highlights two things. The first is that Paulinus wanted to highlight Ambrose's divine authority and status as a holy man.[265] According to Paulinus,

> And when Ambrose had taken his place on the tribunal, caring nothing for the turmoil which was being stirred up by a woman [Justina], one of the Arian maidens, more imprudent than the rest, after ascending the tribunal and seizing the garment of the bishop, since she wished to drag him to a group of women so that he might be beaten by them and driven from the church, heard these words - as he himself was won't to relate: "Even if I am unworthy of so great an episcopal office, yet it does not become you or your profession to lay hands on any bishop whatsoever. Wherefore, you should fear the punishment of God lest something may happen to you." The event confirmed his words. On the following day he conducted her dead to the grave repaying kindness for insult. And this event threw no little fear in his opponents and brought peace to the Catholic Church at the consecration of the bishop.[266]

In this passage, Paulinus's account shifts in tone from the passages preceding it. It presents a negative encounter as compared to the positive accounts Ambrose has with other women, including his sister, a noble woman, and a sick woman whom he heals.[267]

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[265] See Peter Brown (1989), 101-109 for a definition of holy man and the role they had in the fifth and sixth century. Brown focuses his discussion mostly on Syrian ascetics. See also Claudia Rapp (2013), 15-16.

[266] Sirmium vero cum ad ordinandum episcopum Anemium perrexisset ibique Iustinae tunc temporis reginae potentia et multitudine coadunata de ecclesia pelleretur, ut non ab ipso, sed ab haereticis arrianus episcopus in eadem ecclesia ordinaretur, essetque constitutus in tribunali, nihil curans eorum quae a muliere excitabantur, una de virginibus Arrianorum inpudentior ceteris tribunal conscendens, adprehenso vestimento sacerdotis cum illum adtrahere vellet ad partem mulierum, ut ab ipsis caesus de ecclesia pelleretur, audivit, ut ipse solitus erat referre: «Etsi ego indignus tanto sacerdotio sum, tamen te non convenit vel tuam professionem in qualemcumque sacerdotem manus inicere; unde debes vereri Dei iudicium, ne tibi aliquid eveniat». 2. Quod dictum exitus confirmavit; nam alio die mortuam ad sepulcrum usque deduxit, gratiam pro contumelia rependens. Sed hoc factum non levem adversariis incussit metum pacemque magnam ecclesiae catholicae in ordinando episcopo tribuit. Paulinus of Milan 11.1-2 trans. by Sr. Mary Simplicia Kaniecka 3.11.

[267] Ibid, 3.11. These positive encounters with other women directly precede the account of the mob of women, which shows that it is not Ambrose who is causing problems with women.

Additionally, these earlier episodes are more narrative, meaning they describe Ambrose in action. They also are much shorter than the above episode, which has specific time-point references in terms of specific days and coinciding events. But, most importantly, this episode presents a negative interaction with women, as opposed to the previous positive interactions.

This particular passage also follows more typical literary tropes about women. For instance, the lead woman is described as impudent and actually steps on the tribunal next to Ambrose. This was a significant and symbolic moment given the importance of the Roman tribunal space. By the fourth century the tribunal already had ancient roots. During the Republican period the tribunal was a raised platform from which judgements and policies were passed. It was particularly associated with the role of praetor, but the tribunal platform was used in Roman civic and military settings alike.[268] By Ambrose's time, the tribunal remained a raised platform, but one used commonly by emperors, governors, and magistrates.

In fact, Ambrose had previously served as an advisor to the Praetor, before being forced into ecclesiastical service. Citing Rufinus's and Paulinus's account, McLynn shows that Ambrose attempted to refuse his ecclesiastical appointment, which the Milanese crowd was demanding him to take. According to the story, Ambrose fled and set up his tribunal from which he ordered those demanding his appointment to be tortured.[269] While separate ecclesiastical tribunals had existed prior to this, Claudia Rapp

[268] For more on these platform's, see Gregory Aldrete, (2004), 47-53. Aldrete mainly discusses the forum in Rome and the changes, but it is still a useful analysis of these spaces.

[269] See McLynn, (1994), 44.

argues that Ambrose's appointment in 374 set a new precedent for senatorial bishops.[270] Therefore, when Ambrose sat upon the tribunal he did so with all the gravitas of a former Roman elite official and a bishop, combining both a political and ecclesiastical space.

In contrast to Ambrose's elite personage, this insignificant, unnamed woman dared to step up beside Ambrose. Not only does this symbolically represent her impudence – she was putting herself on the same level as Ambrose, figuratively and literally – but, it also juxtaposes the two reactions episcopal election in Sirmium. Ambrose acts as the moral example in the passage. He appropriately uses the tribunal space to deliver an opinion on the peaceful appointment of a Nicene bishop. The woman steps up to the tribunal space in order to inflict unjustified violence in the name of her heretical beliefs.

As stated, the tribunal was an elite space that had political and social significance, even the emperor would sit on tribunals and give decrees and judgements.[271] It would not have been a space where women were welcome. In fact, one of Agrippina's more egregious sins was that she had her own tribunal seat set up next to Claudius and Nero.[272] As I showed last chapter, Agrippina represented the epitome of "bad" empress models so the fact that she used the tribunal is by no means an endorsement for other women to follow her example.[273] As such Paulinus uses this episode to portray the peaceful and just Ambrose as a victim of the irrational and violent heretical woman. Additionally, since

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[270] Claudia Rapp (2013), 190.

[271] See Francisco Pina Polo (2011), 75 for a fuller definition of a tribunal platform. Polo claims it was originally the seat of the consuls.

[272] See Anthony Barrett (1996), 123-124 and Ginsburg (2006), 38-40 for Agrippina's use of the tribunal.

[273] See my discussion in Chapter 1.7.

the woman is associated with the multitude supporting Justina, it is evident that Paulinus was drawing a connection between this woman and Justina and even alluding to Justina's overreaching authority. In the end of the encounter, Ambrose rebukes the woman specifically for attempting to touch a bishop and the next day the woman dies. In essence, Ambrose's rebuke and holy status defeat the heretical woman and put fear into the rest of the community.

In comparison, Paulinus's earlier accounts with women were less detailed, with the exception of Ambrose's healing a woman, which was styled similarly to biblical accounts of Jesus healing people.[274] The fact that one woman touched Ambrose with reverence and was healed and the other woman attempted to touch him in order to harm him and died further highlights Paulinus's moralizing against heresy and his depiction of Ambrose as a holy man of action.[275]

While the motif of a female mob has occurred in bacchanals and Greek plays, it does not often show up in historical accounts, particularly from the later histories of the Roman Empire. For instance, one of the most notable uses of a female mob motif occurs

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[274] Its resembles when a woman dared to touch Jesus in order to be healed. See Luke 8:43-48; But it more resembles the man who was brought on a pallet and lowered before Jesus. See Luke 5:17-28.

[275] Several apothegms attest to the threat women posed to an ascetic's resistance to lust and sex and they usually included a physical element of touching. A woman daring to touch a holy man in such an impassioned manner would have been a scandalous image. For example, according to one apothegm of Abba Daniel, a demon-possessed woman slapped the monk sent to heal her. The act of a woman touching a monk or, conversely, a monk touching a woman, was often seen as unholy among the Christian ascetic apothegms, because it led the monk to lust. However, in the above example, the woman touches the monk in violence and he responded by literally turning the other cheek. According to the apothegm, this act of perfect Christian obedience is what ultimately defeated the demon. The Abba's lack of violence mirrors Ambrose's response and, accordingly, the guilty party is exorcised – in this case through death – thanks to divine support. Additionally, Ambrose's rebuke of the woman follows similar arguments about a woman touching a holy man that many of the apothegms use. Ambrose's admiration for asceticism was well known, and it is clear his biographer uses this moment to highlight Ambrose's holiness. See *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, Daniel 3. Trans. by Benedicta Ward. 51-52.

in book 5 of the *Aeneid*. After the war games, Virgil describes how Juno stirs up the women into a mob, which sets fire to and destroys the Trojan ships.[276] The motif is implemented to show the destructive nature of passion and the subversion of traditional gender hierarchies.

For Paulinus's purposes, it was not just passion, but heretical beliefs that led to a breakdown of the traditional gender hierarchies. This was meant to be seen as a threat to society; much like the women burning the ships in the *Aeneid* was a threat to Aeneas's creation of a Roman society. Additionally, in both cases the women were spurred by a perverse relationship with a perceived divinity, which led them to act contrary to traditional societal norms.[277] As such, Paulinus uses this episode to show that Homoean heretics undermine the values of Roman society, just like a mob of unruly women. For Paulinus, Roman society was protected and spared destruction thanks to leaders, like Ambrose. It also suggests that the introduction of Justina at this moment in the biography, juxtaposed between positive and negative interactions with other women, was meant to convey how the author wants his audience to see Justina – as a dangerous female that threatened not only Ambrose and Nicene Christianity, but also long held Roman traditions and customs like the tribunal platform.

Yet, it is the very fact that Paulinus crafted this literary trope about a mob of women that gives us insight into the influence and agency of Justina. Ambrose does not

[276] For the example of the mob of women in the *Aeneid* see Virgil *Aeneid* 5.650-665.

[277] In Virgil *Aeneid* 5.650-665 the women are whipped into a mob by Juno's messenger. Juno wanted to thwart Aeneas and convinced the women to go against their leader. See, S. Georgia Nugent (1992), 255-256 for an analysis of this episode. Similarly, the mob of women against Ambrose were suppoorting heretical beliefs.

directly confront Justina in this encounter at Sirmium. The story is enough to cast doubt on the virtue of Justina.[278] It is possible, that Paulinus created a fictional mob of women in order to show his audience that Ambrose was a holy leader, who protected society from the threat of heretical beliefs that led women to transgress traditional gendered hierarchies. However, this conclusion should not lead to an argument about how Justina's conflict with Ambrose was also a fictionalized creation. Indeed, the very fact that Paulinus felt it necessary to show Ambrose in a separate conflict with women, in which he was the superior and he was able to exert his authority, suggests Ambrose may not have always appeared as the superior authority in his conflict with Justina. Therefore, Paulinus needed to contrive a circumstance that clearly presented Ambrose as the victor over heretical women.

Furthermore, the fact that both Paulinus and Ambrose mention how Justina drew support from "multitudes" supports the argument that Justina was influential enough that not only would Ambrose not have appeared as a "superior male," he may even have been unable to engage in direct conflict with her.[279] Even though the initial conflict between Justina and Ambrose may not have begun at Sirmium, it is clear that there was a conflict and that it was not a localized issue, nor was it merely about religious doctrine. As I will show, the argument that Justina was a religious zealot, who was harassing Ambrose in

[278] McLynn (1994), 91-92 cites Paulinus's passage of the mob of women, but makes no comment on its historicity.

[279] It is not as though there was not a precedence for empresses having conflicts with bishops. See Hillner (2019), 369-412 for a quantitative approach to these conflicts.

order to promote her heresy presented in the sources, will be refuted by looking at the complex timeline of events surrounding the conflict.[280]

Likewise, while the sources employ specific tropes to describe the conflict between Justina and Ambrose, these tropes, when viewed through a larger contextual lens can also present a clearer picture of Justina's actions than merely relegating her to the role of a literary stereotype. As I argued in the last chapter, while ancient sources use literary tropes, we do not have to consider the event or the person in the source a complete fabrication. And even where there is a fabrication, as in the mob of women, we can still use these accounts to show us more than just the social mores regarding gender. Ultimately, what these accounts show is that Justina had influence to engage Ambrose, and that there was a large enough community that supported Justina to make this conflict significant enough to be used shape the memory of Justina and Ambrose.

2.3 The Death of Valentinian I and the "Succession" of Justina: Background to the Conflict with Ambrose

Turning from Paulinus's account, I will show the conflict between Ambrose and Justina transpired over the course of a short, two-year period and only occurred because of the larger threat of Magnus Maximus's usurpation. Based on this I will argue that Justina's actions during this conflict are evidence of her adaptability and influence. I will focus on the period immediately before and after the events at Sirmium, which Paulinus describes. This period, from 375 to 388, was one of great change and upheaval for the Roman Empire. The borders of the Empire in both the east and west were unstable and

[280] My discussion below and in the last chapter emphasize that Ambrose sought to portray Justina as a heretical persecutor and himself as a holy man.

under attack. Gratian and Valens were constantly on campaign; prior to this period, Valens was forced to deal with Procopius's attempted coup in Constantinople, which lasted about a year.[281] Nevertheless, the Valentinian dynasty was fairly strong and stable. Valentinian, Valens, and later Gratian managed to maintain the empire in the aftermath of Julian's and Jovian's short reigns.[282]

The first major blow to the dynasty was the death of Valentinian I in 375. His death is recorded in several sources from Ammianus Marcellinus to Zosimus. But the most detailed accounts come from Ammianus and Socrates Scholasticus.[283] It is fairly well attested that Valentinian died while on campaign against the in the early winter of 375. According to Socrates Scholasticus he was meeting with an envoy from the Sarmatians, but Ammianus claims it was an envoy of the Quadi. Either way, both report that Valentinian became enraged during this meeting and as a result died. Socrates Scholasticus describes his death as something similar to an aneurysm.[284] However, Ammianus states,

> He felt the disease crushing him with a mighty force, and knew that the fated end of his life was at hand; and he tried to speak or give some orders, as was indicated by the gasps that often heaved his sides, by the grinding of his teeth, and by movements of his arms as if of men fighting with the cestus...[285]

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[281] Procopius's usurpation is recorded in Ammianus Marcellinus 26.5-10. It is also recorded in Socrates Scholasticus 4.3-6 and Sozomen 6.8.

[282] See Lenski (2002), 142 though Lenski does ultimately argue that this was the start of a slow decline.

[283] See Ammianus Marcellinus 30.7.6; Socrates Scholasticus 4.31; Zosimus 4.17, Zosimus states that Valentinian was meeting both the Quadi and the Sarmatians. Though this may be the historian combining two different accounts.

[284] Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 4.31.

[285] See Ammianus Marcellinus 30.7.6, trans. by J. C. Rolfe, LCL edition, 1939-1950. Sensit inmensa vi quadam urgente morborum, ultimae necessitatis adesse praescripta, dicereque conatus aliqua vel mandare, ut singultus ilia crebrius pulsans, stridorque dentium et brachiorum motus velut caestibus dimicantium indicabat,..

Ammianus, here, describes Valentinian's death as a slow, wasting disease. Yet, at the end, he continued to give orders and maintain his rule. Years before, Valentinian had already elevated his son, Gratian, to co-Augustus.[286] Since Gratian was already leading campaigns as an Augustus and Valens was firmly ensconced in the east, succession should have been fairly straightforward.[287] However, Ammianus claims that in order to ensure the stability after the Emperor's death, Merobaudes, a Roman general, had the army support Valentinian II as the new emperor. At the time Valentinian II was not with the Roman camp, but some 100 miles away with Justina. Ammianus states,

> Hocque concinenti omnium sententia confirmato Cerealis avunculus eius ocius missus eundem puerum lectica inpositum duxit in castra sextoque die post parentis obitum imperator legitime **declaratus** Augustus **nuncupatur** more sollemni.
>
> "When this had been approved by unanimous consent, the boys' uncle Cerealis was immediately sent to the place, put him in a litter, and brought him to the camp; and on the sixth day after the passing of his father he was in due form declared emperor, and after the customary manner hailed as Augustus."[288]

Ammianus is the only source that mentions Cerealis as the person who retrieved Valentinian II and provided the *declaratus* to the four-year-old boy, currently in his mother's care. Most of the other sources focus on Merobaudes, because he was somewhat influential figure, whose miliary career began in Julian's reign.[289] He maintained his position as a general in the west until he was killed for supporting Magnus

[286] McEvoy (2013), 111.

[287] However, to be fair, Roman succession was never a straightforward business. Nevertheless, past precedent would suggest that any challenge to Gratian and Valens would be recorded as usurpation.

[288] See Ammianus Marcellinus 30.10.5, trans. by J. C. Rolfe, LCL edition, 1939-1950.

[289] Hugh Elton (2018), 130 also gives precedence to Merobaudes as the key figure in the succession of Valentinian II.

Maximus's usurpation.[290] I suggest that Ammianus's inclusion of Cerealis's involvement shows Justina's early engagement with securing her son's reign. Ammianus shows that the figures closest to the young emperor and his succession were connected with Justina's family and her line. However, Justina becomes such a dominant figure in memory that she outshines the rest of her family and their involvement in Valentinian II's succession and early reign.

Cerealis's involvement in Valentinian II's succession does not receive much comment. But, this is not surprising. Very little is known about Ceralis accept that he was Justina's brother, an aristocrat, and served as Valentinian's *tribunus stabuli*. According to Lenski, the *tribunus stabuli* was responsible for a number of duties, not least of which was overseeing the stables of the imperial court and cavalry.[291] In other words, as Lenski notes, the *tribunus stabuli* had a position that kept him at the emperor's side during times of both war and peace.[292] But it is interesting to note that such partiality was given to Justina's family and suggests that she and her family had influence throughout the imperial court early into Justina's reign as empress. Her family's early engagement in the imperial court also shows that Justina had connections that she could later use in order to support her son's succession.

[290] See Christian R. Raschle, "Ambrosius' Predigt Gegen Magnus Maximus. Eine historische Interpretation der"explanatio in psalmum" 61 (62)" (2005), 50-51 for background on Magnus's usurpation and the role Merobaudes played.

[291] Lenski (2002), 54.

[292] See PLRE vol.1, 197 for the use of *tribunus stabuli*.

This was a key office. The general Stilicho also was a *tribunus stabuli* and he gathered power in the west, under Honorius's reign.[293] This furthers my argument that Justina ultimately relies in her family in terms of influence and importance. But, Cerealis's role in Valentinian's succession should not be minimized. McEvoy argues that Merobaudes wanted Valentinian II to be declared emperor in order to gain control, much like Stilicho and Honorius.[294] At the time of his succession, Valentinian was only four years old and would have appeared as an easily controlled cipher, who could be used to further one's own authority and status. However, Merobaudes was never quite powerful enough to gain influence over Gratian, or control through Valentinian II, which is probably why he eventually joined Magnus Maximus in an attempt to gain power.[295]

According to Ammianus, Cerealis is the one who went to Valentinian II and supplies the *declaratus* – announcement – which legitimized Valentinian II as an emperor until he was properly publicly hailed (*nuncupatur*) as emperor by the military and senate.[296] But, that means that, at the time of the *declaratus*, Justina was present and presiding over her son – who, again, was only four years old. Therefore, it is really Justina who receives and understands the impact of the *declaratus*. Furthermore, since Justina remains with Valentinian II throughout his early reign she likely went with him to

[293] This principle, of creating strong military leaders closely connected to the dynastic lineage was an important aspect of the fourth century. These positions evolved and became important for dynastic stability. See Henning Börm (2015), 262-264 in *Contested Monarchies: Integrating the Roman Empire in the Fourth Centurt AD.* See the entry for *Comes Stabuli* in the Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity, (2018), 376. The title changed to from *Tribunus* to *Comes* and Stilicho was the first to hold the new title.

[294] McEvoy (2013), 111-113.

[295] McEvoy (2013), 112.

[296] See McEvoy (2013), 54-55 for more on the reaction to Valentinian II's succession. See Henning Börm (2015), 242-242 for more on succession.

be hailed emperor by the military. In other words, she was as much a part of the succession process and determined the next steps in terms of Valentinian II's living and role as emperor.

Contemporary and later sources complain that Justina abused her influence not only as Valentinian II's mother, but also as the empress and guardian of the emperor.[297] This shows that throughout the upheaval of Valentinian's death, Justina maintained her position and authority in the imperial court, despite the maneuverings of men like Merobaudes and even in the face of two other existing emperors.[298] It is true that the contretemps that a mother or wife controls the emperor is a literary trope intended to effeminize and weaken the character of an emperor.[299] Despite this, Valentinian's character is not disparaged in the sources, though he is accused of being controlled by both his mother and a later general. After Valentinian II's death, the biggest complaint about the emperor was his youth, which allowed others, like his mother to control him. But, he was not accused of cruelty, nor was he accused of heresy after his mother left Milan.

Despite this accusation, Justina and Valentinian II do not reappear in the sources until after the Battle of Adrianople. Usually, the trope of an empress controlling her son is a way to highlight improper female power. This was already seen in the example of Agrippina and Nero. In fact, Agrippina committed several murders in order secure her

[297] See Hebblewhite (2020), 81-86 and Joyce Salisbury (2015), 24-27 for Justina's overbearing and zealous nature.

[298] Again, see McEvoy, 54-55 for Valens and Gratian's less than enthusiastic reception of a 4 year old co-emperor.

[299] See Boatwright (2021), 41-42 for more examples of this trope.

son's authority, including Nero's stepbrother Britannicus.[300] Since there is no evidence that Justina used Valentinian's new position to secure more influence, the motivation for securing her son's succession should not be seen as a trope of improper female power. By this, I mean that Justina, unlike Agrippina, did not use her son's succession as a way to further her own position. The silence of the sources until Justina arrives in Milan supports the argument that she was not overly influential or unduly using her influence until later when her son was endangered. Moreover, Stuart Williams has argued that Gratian and Valentinian did not maintain separate courts during their dual reign.[301] This shows Valentinian was not a threat to Gratian like Nero was to Britannicus. In this case, when we consider Justina's motivations, we should consider the position of empresses as described by John Chrysostom.

In my first chapter, I showed how Chrysostom outlined the concerns and issues of widowed empresses.[302] Justina would have been as aware of women, like Charito and her son as Chrysostom.[303] Fear for her son and his future motivated Justina and her family to secure Valentinian II's position. She did not use this new power to challenge Gratian or form a new court in opposition to him. Her motivation is not to increase her influence, but rather protect her son from forces that would threaten a child of a deceased emperor when rivals could feel threatened by his existence.

[300] See Ginsburg (2005), 35-43.
[301] See Stuart Williams (2017), 118.
[302] See my discussion in chapter 1.4.
[303] Again, see my previous discussion, 1.4. Charito was Jovian's wife and their son had his eye poked out so that he could not claim imperial status.

There were other opportunists that could have taken the "reins" from Valentinian II and posed a threat to his position.[304] Merobaudes clearly intended to do just that. However, it is Justina that contemporary sources, like Ambrose and later Socrates Scholasticus, describe as having undue influence. Later sources, like Zosimus, do describe Valentinian II's later issues with the overbearing general Arbogast, but this conflict did not develop until after Theodosius I has defeated Magnus Maximus.[305] By then, Justina either returned to Constantinople with Theodosius I's court or had died.[306] Additionally, Valentinian II receives the most criticism as emperor during this later period in his reign. For example, Sozomen states,

> While Theodosius was thus occupied in the wise and peaceful government of his subjects in the East, and in the service of God, intelligence was brought that Valentinian had been strangled. … It is said that the boy was noble in person, and excellent in royal manners; and that, had he lived to the age of manhood, he would have shown himself worthy of holding the reins of empire, and would have surpassed his father in magnanimity and justice. But though endowed with these promising qualities, he died in the manner above related.[307]

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[304] There are plenty of other examples of emperors being criticized for being controlled by a general or eunuch. See Shaun Tougher's analysis of Byzantine eunuchs in the imperial court and their influence. Tougher (1992), 168-184 in *Women, Men, and Eunuchs: Gender in Byzantium*

[305] See Zosimus 4.53.

[306] See PLRE vol.1, 488-489 for Justina's potential death or last citation from the sources.

[307] Translation from Philip Schaff. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II: Vol. 2: Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen: Ecclesiastical Histories. Sozomen *HE* 7.22 Καὶ ὁ μὲν Θεοδόσιος, ἐν εἰρήνῃ τὴν πρὸς ἕω ἀρχομένην ἰθύνων, ἐν τούτοις ἐσπούδαζε, καὶ ἐπιμελῶς μάλα τὸ θεῖον ἐθεράπευεν. Ἐν τούτῳ δὲ ἀγγέλλεται Οὐαλεντινιανὸς ὁ βασιλεὺς ἀγχόνῃ ἀπολωλέναι…Φασί γε μὴν τοῦτο τὸ μειράκιον εὐγενείᾳ σώματος, καὶ βασιλικῶν τρόπων ἀρετῇ, ὑπερφυῶς δόξαι τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἄξιον, καὶ οἷος μεγαλοψυχίᾳ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ ὑπερβαλέσθαι τὸν αὐτοῦ πατέρα, εἰ παρῆλθεν εἰς ἄνδρας: καὶ ὁ μὲν τοιοῦτος ὢν, ὧδε τέθνηκεν. There is also a description of the theories of how Valentinian died that I cut out of this passage for the sake of brevity. Sozomen and Socrates both conquer that Valentinian II died from strangulation in his sleep. Both also attribute the likely culprit to be an associate of Arborogast's. See Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 5.25 for a corroborating description.

On the surface Sozomen seems to give Valentinian II the benefit of the doubt, but the violence of Valentinian II's death is in direct comparison with the peaceful rule of Theodosius I. Additionally, Sozomen's suggestion that he could have been a good emperor, but died too young, also implies that while he was emperor he did not do a very good job. This suggests two things; the first is that Valentinian II became more vulnerable to usurpation when he was older and more independent. Chrysostom also alluded to this vulnerability in his letter to a young widow.[308] Second, Justina must have acted as a credible force against such attempts, since it is more likely that Valentinian was at his weakest when he was a child and both his brother and father had died; yet, he survived being manipulated by any generals and Maximus's usurpation. Therefore, knowing Justina's family, as opposed to Gratian or Merobaudes, was behind Valentinian II's succession supports the argument that the empress, and those loyal to her, i.e. her brother, played an important role in securing both Valentinian's position and early reign.

Finally, Cerealis's role in Valentinian II's succession is imperative given the familial dynamic within the imperial court at this time. We must remember the successor whom Valentinian I chose, and the already declared co-Augustus, was Gratian.[309] Gratian was Valentinian's first son by another woman. Gratian did not necessarily have any filial connection to Justina, which left her and Valentinian II, as a potential threat to Gratian's authority in the future, and therefore, vulnerable. In fact, Gratian's filial loyalty was revealed when recalled his mother, Severa, from the exile Valentinian I had sent her after

[308] See my discussion in chapter 1.4.
[309] McEvoy (2013), 49.

he divorced her and married Justina.[310] In fact, if Marina Severa was the recalled empress in Chrysostom's letter, and she was reluctant to return from exile, these sorts of political maneuverings of Justina's family may have been part of her concern.

The fact that the army and Justina's family rallied behind Valentinian II weakened Gratian's own position because it created a rival in the form a four-year-old boy. Again, thinking of John Chrysostom's letter, this was a fear for several empresses, including Charito whose son had his eye poked out in order to keep him from being an imperial rival.[311] It was in Justina and her son's best interest to assume authority. This was a trend throughout Justina's tenure as empress. As I showed in the last chapter, Justina survived the downfall of Magnentius and managed to reclaim her role as an empress despite Valentinian I's existing wife. As I will show in her conflict with Ambrose, Justina's actions are motivated by a desire to secure her son's position as emperor and his safety.

2.4 New Address, New Problems: The Beginning of Justina's Conflict with Ambrose

The second major crisis that hit the Valentinian dynasty occurred a mere three years after Valentinian I's death. At this point, Justina and Valentinian II were ensconced in Sirmium and had largely been left alone. For instance, Themistius's oration to Gratian in 376 acknowledges the joint rule of Valens and Gratian, but makes no mention of

[310] Ammianus Macellinus 28.1.57. Ammianus claims that Gratian even took advice from his mother to execute Doryphorianus for capital crimes. This shows that Gratian had a good relationship with his mother and she may have had her own influence as an imperial woman.

[311] See footnote 96 in chapter 1.4.

Valentinian II.[312] In fact, despite appearances, Lenski argues that the succession of Valentinian II was not a welcomed by either Gratian or Valens.[313] Valens was attempting to assume the role of superior emperor and Gratian was contending with asserting himself with his uncle. Having to share power with a child was an affront to both emperors and yet the fact that neither could prevent his succession shows both the influence of Valentinian's II's supporters who, as I have shown, were connected to Justina.[314]

In 378, Valens embarked upon the now infamous Battle of Adrianople against the Goths. Wars with the Goths had been plaguing the empire for most of Valentinian I's, Gratian's, and Valen's reigns. Valens launched his forces into battle early, deciding not to wait for backup from Gratian. Additionally, because of tensions between the eastern and the western courts, Gratian was slow in providing Valens with support. Even when he did send troops, he sent the general from Illyricum, who was, ostensibly, under Valentinian II's control.[315] This further suggests that Valentinian II's court was not particularly powerful. Yet, it is important to remember that 377/8 is also around the time that Paulinus of Milan claims Ambrose was in Sirmium and he and Justina first came into conflict.[316] Paulinus's account was written much later after the shock and trauma of Adrianople was set within collective Roman memory.[317] The timing of Justina and a mob of women threatening the Empire during such a fraught moment in Roman history,

[312] See John Vanderspoel (1995), 180-194 for a fuller analysis of Themistius and his relationship to the imperial court under Valens and Gratian.
[313] Lesnki (2002), 357-364.
[314] See McEvoy (2013), 54-55.
[315] See Lenski (2002), 336-339.
[316] See Mclynn (1994), 92-100 for his analysis of Ambrose in Sirmium.
[317] See Hebblewhite (2020), 17-25 for the impact of the Battle of Adrianople.

coupled with Ambrose's later accusations later accusations that the Homoean community following Justina was largely Gothic, explains why Paulinus chose this moment to begin the conflict between Justina and Ambrose.

The Battle of Adrianople occurred in August of 378 after tensions between the Goths in the Thracian province had come to a head. In the west, Gratian had already been fighting German tribes, the Lentienses, and had been successful against them before he traveled down the Danube and stopped at Sirmium, where he stayed for a few days and sent a note to his uncle asking him to wait for him to travel the nearly 250 miles from Sirmium to Adrianople. His stop at Sirmium makes sense knowing that not only was in an integral city of the Pannonian province, but also where an active imperial court. It would be a good spot to replenish supplies and forces.[318] However, Ammianus suggests that Gratian's success against the German tribes had made Valens jealous and he decided to advance on the Goths in order to gain the military glory. His jealousy cost him his life, along with an estimated two-thirds of Rome's eastern forces.[319] Ammianus also reports that after the catastrophic battle, the Goths laid siege to Thrace and then joined forces with the Huns and made moves to take Constantinople.[320]

The period between Valens's death and Gratian hailing Theodosius as co-Augusts was fraught with uncertainty as the eastern empire was left largely unprotected and ungoverned.[321] At this point, Gratian was still a young emperor at 19, but was suddenly the senior Augustus, and ostensibly the only real ruler. Yet, it would take five months

[318] Stuart Williams (2017), 119.
[319] Hebblewhite (2020), 17.
[320] See Ammianus Marcellinus, 31.15.1-31.
[321] Hebblewhite (2020), 17-25.

before Gratian agreed to name Theodosius as co-Augustus. As Hebblewhite points out, the choice of Theodosius was odd, but not shocking, given the fact that the main generals in the east were killed at Adrianople and the main general in the west, Merobaudes, had already made it clear he sought to increase his own authority.[322]

However, this five-month period is important for the very fact that Valentinian II and Justina are essentially absent from any discussion. Yet, Valentinian II was the co-emperor that should have succeeded Valens. After all, he had no problem succeeding Valentinian I when he was only four years old. As already stated above, it would have been a prime opportunity to take advantage of the power vacuum in the wake of Valens's death and subsequent chaos. Therefore, the fact that little is known of Justina and Valentinian during this period could be an attempt at self-preservation. Justina kept her son's court relatively quiet because it was the safer option. Having a 7-year-old assert his imperial authority at such a chaotic time would not have been wise.

I suggest that the silence of Valentinian II's court, during this period, actually reflects Justina's influence, and her motivation to secure her son's position. In other words, I argue that Justina only becomes an active empress when Magnus Maximus became a threat. Because of this threat, Justina used her influence to safeguard her son. As a result, Justina is present in the sources as an active empress during this period. As noted above, I make a similar argument about Justina's motivation and role in Valentinian II's succession in 375.

[322] Hebblewhite (2020), 24.

In the aftermath, Theodosius, initially a Roman general from Spain, became Valens's successor in the east. Gratian agreed to transfer control of Illyricum to Theodosius, who took charge of the continuing Gothic Wars, which raged until 382.[323] Gratian recognized that he was ill-equipped to defend the region in light of the recent influx of Gothic invasions. Because of this, Justina and Valentinian II removed themselves from Sirmium, and moved to Milan to reside with the Court of Gratian.[324] Justina and Valentinian's move also included her royal court, which likely meant other Homoean adherents and "mobs of women." Justina became a resident in Milan, bringing with her a cohort and army of former Sirmium residents, many of whom were Roman soldiers of Gothic origin.[325] This meant that Justina's relocation increased the numbers of the Homoean community that was already present in Milan and which Ambrose had already been working to suppress.

At this point I want to address my use of the terms Homoean and Nicene. I recognize that these are broad terms used to describe vast and complex beliefs and do not really capture the nuance and variation of the multitude of Christianized communities in the fourth century Roman Empire. But, broadly speaking, the Homoeans disagreed with the Nicene, or Homousian sects following the decision of the Council of Nicaea.[326] Yet, regardless of actual belief and practice, the Nicene and Homoean sects became politically motivated factions in the late fourth century, especially after the death of Constantius II,

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[323] Kulikowski (2006), 202; Kulikowski has a very helpful biographical glossary of both Roman emperors and generals, as well as Gothic leaders.

[324] See Stuart Williams (2017), 197-198 for this move.

[325] Uta Heil (2014), 109 in Arianism: Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed.

[326] See Oliver Nicholson (2018), 126 the entry Homoean in the *Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* provides a broad definition of Homoean and the Council of Nicaea.

who had been sympathetic and supportive of Arian/Homoean sects. Both sides vied for position of influence in the imperial court. The terms Homoean and Nicene have become the *de rigueur* names in modern scholarship to identify the complex spectrum of Christological doctrines throughout the Empire during this period. In this case, I am using the terms to identify the division between Ambrose and Justina, as opposed to a specific theological concept, although it should be noted that Ambrose and many of the ancient sources refer to Justina as an Arian.

These politically charged factions between Nicene and Homoean Christians, were one of the first issues Theodosius addressed in order to exert his legitimacy as emperor. Since his appointment was done out of necessity rather than by overwhelming support, Theodosius sought to secure legitimacy, similar to Valentinian I when he married Justina for her connection to the Constantinian dynasty. In this case, Theodosius sought legitimacy through the Church.[327] Furthermore, by 380, Theodosius already had established himself as a military leader and taken control of Thessalonica.[328] The Gothic forces split and half moved east and the other half attacked Pannonia, where Gratian's forces defeated them.

Along with his military success, he passed the Edict of Thessalonica, which decreed that Christianity was the official religion of the Empire and sought to prevent heretical Christians from using church space.[329] His timing of the edict came after he

[327] Hebblewhite (2020), 58.
[328] Ibid, 30.
[329] *CTh* XVI.1.2. The text as recorded in the Theodosian Code specifically states that the law was addressed as "*Edictum ad populum vrb(is) constantinop(olitanae)*" An edict to the population of Constantinople." This shows that Theodosius was the main architect of the edict.

suffered a severe illness and coincided with his baptism. However, the edict was issued jointly with both Gratian and Valentinian II.[330] This cooperation between the two imperial courts would have given Theodosius legitimacy. Additionally, Valentinian II's court had officially moved to Milan in 380, which also shows that if Justina had overwhelming influence as an Arian follower, she did not exert to prevent the move from a place where she had already established her influence.

The following year, Theodosius further supported his edict with the first Council of Constantinople, which met throughout the summer and reaffirmed the Edict of Thessalonica, stressing the official Christianity was Nicene Christianity; along with this he also managed to end the war with the Goths at the same time, although official peace would not be declared until 382.[331] The political importance of the edict should not be underestimated. Theodosius's enactment of a sweeping religious edict, following military success, and then his calling of a Church council was meant to show off his authority.[332] Theodosius's actions also followed a similar pattern as Constantine's issuance of the Edict of Milan and then later the Council of Nicaea.[333] This further shows how Theodosius sought to legitimize his reign and connect himself to the Constantinian dynasty.

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[330] *CTh* XVI.1.2.

[331] See Socrates Scholasticus 5.8-11. Although Socrates wrongly asserts that this was contemporaneous with Maximus's revolt in 383.

[332] See Hebblewhite (2020), 58-59.

[333] Constantine was quick to set up authority over Christianity. See Charles Matson Odahl (2004), 194-199. Matson also connects the Council of Nicaea with the conclusion of Constantine's conflict with Licinius.

Despite the importance the Council has come to have in theological and Church history, at the time, the western bishops were largely ignored, which caused friction in the Church. For example, Ambrose was not an attendee; his lack of attendance shows the division that was growing between the eastern and western Churches.[334] Additionally, the fact that Theodosius was, technically, junior Augustus, yet, had called an ecumenical council unilaterally, challenged Gratian's authority. At this time, the Church had become a powerful tool and ally for emperors. Theodosius's actions sought to consolidate the eastern Church and put it under his authority. But it also weakend Gratian's standing with the more powerful eastern bishops. It also challenged the authority of western bishops, like Ambrose, because they were excluded from the council. And because of this, western bishops, with Gratian's support, held their own council, the Council of Aquileia a few months later.[335]

By this point, Gratian had moved his court west and divided his time between Aquileia and Milan. During the Council of Aquileia, Ambrose submitted his now famous, *de Spiritu*, which was a more in-depth tract of a previous doctrine, the *de fide.* Ambrose had written both tracts because Gratian had commissioned him to write them in order to address the Homoean controversy, which already existed prior to Justina's arrival in the city.[336] Ambrose uses the fact that Gratian had personally asked him to

[334] See Hebblewhite (2020), 56-57. See McLynn (1994), 145-146 makes the point that the eastern and western Churches were increasingly divided.

[335] For the dating of these councils and their decisions see Lenski (1994) and Barnes (1999). For the division between Gratian and Theodosius, see Hebblewhite (56-57). Rufinus gives an account in his tenth book about the council of Aquileia. However, this view is not accepted by all scholars.

[336] Michael Stuart Williams argues that *de fide* was likely commissioned around 378 and completed before 380.

write *de fide* as evidence for his own authority and connection with the imperial court, a connection that Justina later challenged. However, the relationship between Ambrose and Gratian was not always so friendly. For instance, at the beginning of *de Spiritu* Ambrose mentions that he was pleased to write this given the fact that Gratian recently returned a basilica to Milan.[337] Ambrose, in *de Spiritu,* states,

> spiritus, inquam, sancti hoc munus, hoc opus est, qui a nobis quidem tunc praedicabatur, sed in te operabatur. nec superioris temporis damna deploro, quandoquidem sequestratio illa basilicae cuiusdam faenoris traxit usuras. etenim basilicam sequestrati, ut fidem probares. impleuit igitur propositum suum pietas tua, quae sic sequestrauerat, ut probaret, sic probauit, ut redderet. nec fructum amisi et iudicium teneo, patuitque omnibus in quadam facti discretione discretam tibi numquam fuisse sententiam. patuit, inquam, omnibus et tuum non fuisse, cum sequestrares, et tuum esse, cum redderes.
>
> This gift, I say, this act is owed to the Holy Spirit, who was then indeed being preached by us, but who was working in you. Nor do I regret the injury inflicted beforehand, since indeed that sequestration of the basilica attracted interest like a sort of loan. For truly you sequestered the basilica in order to prove your faith. And so your piety made good on its intention: it had sequestered the basilica in order to prove itself, and so proved itself by returning it. Nor have I been denied the proceeds, and I have been given your backing, and it has been made clear to all that in spite of a certain divergence of action there was in you never any divergent opinion. It was, I say, made clear to all, both that it had not been of yourself that you sequestered it, and that it was of yourself that you restored it.[338]

The above passage alludes to a particular event in which Gratian had taken over a basilica for his own use. Although Ambrose claims that Gratian was in the wrong for his sequestering of the basilica, he also pardons his actions because Gratian returned the basilica and had no "divergent" opinion. Everything from the dating of the event, and

[337] See McLynn (1994), 97-104.
[338] Ambrose. *De Spiritu* I.1.20–1; trans. Michael Stuart Williams (2017), 199.

what Ambrose meant by *sequestrauerat*, and who was involved, are debated throughout the major modern studies focused on Ambrose. Following Neil McLynn and Michael Stuart Williams, Ambrose likely wrote the passage around 380/1.[339]

This is important because Justina would have just arrived in Milan around the same time. Therefore, she was not a part of this initial "basilica" crisis that Ambrose referred to when he wrote *de Spiritu*, since Ambrose was writing about the event after it had occurred.[340] Ambrose was willing to make public his conflict with the imperial court. It is clear in the above passage that Ambrose did not recognize imperial authority over the physical space of the church.[341] It also shows that there was tension over religious protocol in Milan prior to Justina's arrival, and there it was a precedent prior to Justina for the imperial court to sequester a basilica for its use. Ambrose wrote *de Spiritu* in 380 and was referring to an already resolved conflict. Since Justina arrived in Milan around 380, she was not involved in this conflict. All of these points tend to undercut the argument that Justina was a religious zealot, who created a conflict with Ambrose, or that it would have been unprecedented for Justina to take over a basilica. In fact, it reflects Ambrose's fiercely protective attitude toward churches

[339] This and when exactly Justina arrived in Milan are hugely debated. McLynn (1994), 121-123 argues that Justina was likely to have fled Sirmium in 378 when the Roman army was there and likely left for Milan around 380. Michael Stuart Williams (2017) 197-198 acknowledges the difficulty in tracing the court but argues that there is no reason to place Justina in Milan until 383. I think this is too late and side with McLynn.

[340] Stuart Williams (2017), 205.

[341] Virginia Burrus (1995), 78 argues that Justina was in Milan around 378, which is earlier than most scholars believe and means that Justina was there before Gratian. I do not follow Burrus's dating. Instead, I use the dating of McLynn.

Initially it was Gratian who sequestered a basilica. In fact, Michael Stuart Williams has suggested that Gratian may have "sequestered" a basilica for the private use of the emperor during the Easter service. This was not unusual as the Emperor often worshipped in private spaces, rather than with the urban community.[342] The use of the basilica in this way threatened Ambrose because an imperial basilica with a separate clerical leader challenged his supremacy as well as his authority as the religious leader in Milan and in the residing imperial court. I suggest Ambrose sought to increase his authority using his position as a bishop A competing bishop challenged his status. As Claudia Rapp shows, Ambrose was one of the first "senatorial bishops."[343] He himself had served as a governor and prefect and came from a family of senatorial elites. It was not until the opening for the Bishop of Milan when Ambrose decided to make the lateral move from political elite to clerical elite.[344] His background lent itself well to involving himself with the imperial court and involve himself he did. Williams argues that Ambrose's main objective in these imperial conflicts is actually to maintain unity. However, if we consider his role as a senatorial bishop, then, rather than see contentions for basilica space as just a fight for doctrinal unity we can consider it within the scope of a senatorial bishop vying for primacy both locally and within the recognition of the imperial court.[345] Although this basilica "crisis" was resolved with little controversy, it

[342] Stuart Williams (2017), 203.
[343] Claudia Rapp, (2013), 190.
[344] Claudia Rapp, (2013), 190.
[345] Ibid, 203. See also Salzman (2002), 132-134 and Rapp (2005) on the growing importance of clerical positions among aristocrats in the late fourth century. See Mclynn (1994) 174-179 on Imperial religious space in Milan.

reflects a pattern that Ambrose had about exerting his control and authority within Milan and over the space of the basilica.

Thus, within a decade, Justina married Valentinian, gave birth to both Galla and Valentinian II, lost her husband while he was on campaign, used family connections to help orchestrate her son's succession, survived through the Gothic Wars and Valens's death, and had to move her home while a new upstart emperor tool over her old home. Despite all of these events, Justina has very little involvement after her son is hailed emperor. The biggest event that the sources discuss is Paulinus of Milan's much later account that suggests the same year as Adrianople, Justina gathered a mob of women who attacked Ambrose. This silence on Justina suggests that she was not attempting to use her position, or her son's position to exert undue influence, or zealously fighting for Homoean dominance. Rather, she and her son remained quietly in Sirmium until it was no longer safe to remain and then were forced to leave and go to Milan, likely because it was closest to Gratian and, as such, more secure. This ten-year period does not depict an opportunistic empress using the many calamities to advance her son's role as emperor or her role as empress.[346] Yet, as I showed in the last chapter, that is how Ambrose and Augustine depict her, which means the events after Sirmium and in Milan had the biggest impact on Justina as an empress. But the real question is, how did Justina go from quiet Empress to religious zealot in the depictions presented by Ambrose and other sources?

[346] I am not suggesting that Justina could not have been an ambitious empress. I am merely suggesting she did not let her ambition to threaten her position or her son's position.

2.5 The Threat of Magnus Maximus: The Usurpation that Caused the Basilica Conflict

By 381, Justina was newly arrived in Milan, Gratian also had moved to Milan and formed a close relationship with Ambrose.[347] This ultimately gave Ambrose the clout, as Bishop, to enact specific reforms targeted against the Homoean community, which was fairly sizeable at this time. Even prior to Justina's arrival with her cohort of Arian adherents, Milan had a Homoean community. In fact, the bishop prior to Ambrose was Homoean.[348] Ambrose was even dealing with several factions around the time Justina arrived in Milan. Prior to 380, Ambrose and his original tract, *de Fide,* were met with scorn from Palladius, Bishop of Ratiaria, a city near Sirmium. Both bishops seemed to vie for Gratian's favor and that led to conflict between the two. It was one of Gratian's first tests in dealing with ecclesiastical conflict, and it was especially important in light of Theodosius's decisive action toward Church affairs. Also, it is what prompted Ambrose to create additional sections to *de Fide*, which ultimately formed *de Spiritu* and was presented to the emperor in the Spring of 381.[349]

Yet, in many ways Gratian and Ambrose's close relationship caused Gratian to become a strong supporter of the Bishop and immerse himself in theological concerns. For this reason, he had set out to create a Council that would address some of the

[347] See McLynn (1994), 122.

[348] See Cameron (2011), 34-36. Cameron asserts that Gratian may not have been as enamored with Ambrose as has been assumed. Rather, Gratian was trying to balance the Homoean and Nicene factions, particularly in Milan, which still had a community that was loyal to the former, Homoean bishop, Auxentius.

[349] See Stuart Williams (2017), 128-129 and McLynn (1994), 115-116. Both discuss the Ambrose's composition of writing *de fide* and *de Spiritu* and agree that the impetus behind the initial composition was some theological debates and that Ambrose was using the work as a way to ally Gratian to his position.

theological debates. However, as I showed above, Theodosius upstaged Gratian's council with the Council of Constantinople and the Edict of Thessalonica. These things put Gratian's authority on the defensive and in response he called the Council of Aquileia a few months after Constantinople and then in 382, under the authority of Damasus I, Bishop of Rome, the was another council, the Council of Rome, which was largely ignored in the east, though the eastern bishops had been invited.[350] The fact that the eastern bishops were invited shows that Gratian recognized the importance of having their loyalty and support. That the eastern bishops did not come shows that they were already ignoring the authority of the west. Therefore, it was imperative for figures like Ambrose to exert their authority as bishop and it was also important for Gratian to assert himself as the senior Augustus.

Unfortunately for Gratian, his focus on these religious issues, and his competition with Theodosius over them, caused him to ignore the northern provinces and borders.[351] Roman generals in those areas took the opportunity to exert their own imperial rule and claim authority. As a result, Gratian's reign was ineffective at best, and his loss of support from his troops led to the rise and usurpation of Magnus Maximus in Gaul.[352]

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[350] Hebblewhite (2020), 96-98 talks about the failure of the Council of Aquileia and how Ambrose actually diplomatically handled the lack of eastern bishops in order to prevent Gratian embarrassment.

[351] McEvoy (2013), 111-113, argues that the interactions between Ambrose and Gratian should not be taken to mean any close intimacy between the two. Rather, Ambrose's actions may have been in support of Gratian who had been embarrassed when Theodosius held his own ecumenical council. If McEvoy is correct then it shows that Ambrose often had conflicts with imperial authority.

[352] McEvoy (2013), 120-122, suggests that the fact that Merobaudes defected to Magnus Maximus's side and was able to take with him a good portion of the western troops meant that Merobaudes was the real military leader in the west. McEvoy shows the evidence of the defected troops shows Gratian had lost support from the military.

Once again, Justina and her son were on the front lines of a crisis. Yet, this was not the first usurpation attempt Justina had ever witnessed. Her first husband had been declared a usurper, or more accurately a *tyrannus* in her own lifetime.[353] Additionally, Valens, early in his reign had to put down the revolt of the would-be usurper, Procopius.[354] It was a typical and old story in the Roman Empire that had its roots in the late Republic.[355] As McEvoy has pointed out, Rome did not have an officially defined title of regent that Justina had any claim to, but the title and recognition of emperor was not any more clearly defined.[356] Although the military and/or the senate needed to support a claim to imperial authority in order for it to be legitimate, a connection to tradition, i.e. dynastic lineage, also helped cement a claim to authority.[357] Nevertheless, the distinction between emperor and usurper is murky and is often dependent on the judgment of later sources. This issue of legitimate power and usurpation was such a concern for Romans that it was even an issue in the conflict between Ambrose and Justina, which I will discuss more later.

During this unstable period, Justina and her now 12-year-old son, and emperor, experienced yet another threat to their safety and position. Adrastos Omissi argues that

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[353] See Barnes (2001), 101-109 for more on Magnentius's usurpation.

[354] See Lenski (2002), 60-72 for a fuller discussion of Procopius's usurpation and the role that Valens's wife Domnica and her well-hated father and praetorian prefect, Petronius had in causing the attempted coup. See also Ammianus Marcellinus 26.6.1-19 for his account of Procopius's usurpation attempt and Petronius's character.

[355] Omissi (2018), 3-4. See also Christopher Burden-Strevens (2019), 137-139.

[356] McEvoy, (2013) 9-12. See also Omissi (2018), 34 following Mommsen argues that a concept of constitutional legitimacy for emperors was irrelevant when military and elite support abounded. However, not everyone agrees with this.

[357] For basic outline of usurpation see Szidat, *Usurpator Tanti Nominis*. See also Omissi (2018), 21-25 for a discussion of the succession practices and breakdown of how Romans defined a usurper. For analyzing how sources depict imperial legitimacy and usurpation see Andrew G. Scott (2018) and his interpretation of Dio Cassius on Elegabalus.

Gratian's neglect and overall weakness initially led to Theodosius assuming more power and authority, despite technically being the junior emperor. This precedent opened the door for other leaders to attempt to take over the west.[358] In 383, while fighting in Gaul, Magnus Maximus's general killed Gratian and once again Justina and her son were in the middle of a dangerous situation. However, this time was even more dangerous because Valentinian II had no buffer as co-emperor in the west, and in the east, Theodosius made the situation more fraught by acknowledging Magnus as a legitimate Augustus in 384.[359]

Theodosius I's decision may seem strange but, Magnus Maximus was a Roman general from Britain, who had earlier military connections with Theodosius.[360] Additionally, Magnus Maximus's father had served under Valentinian I and subdued conflict in Britain. Likely, during this period, both a young Theodosius and Magnus Maximus had served in Britain with the elder Theodosius.[361] This prior relationship may have been why Theodosius so easily accepted Magnus Maximus. Additionally, Theodosius was not particularly loyal to the Valentinian dynasty because his father, who had served as successful and loyal general to Valentinian I, was arrested and executed in Carthage in 376.[362] This would not have given Theodosius a warm regard to either Gratian or Valentinian II. Moreover, it is also important to note that during this period

[358] See Omissi (2018), 264-265 and Kulikowski (2019), 80.

[359] Adrastos Omissi (2018), 263-270 argues that Theodosius actually had connections with Magnus Maximus and Theodosius's initial lack of resistance may have indicated a lack of support for the very vulnerable Valentinian II. The fact that Maximus was not able to conquer Valentinian II may indicate that he had a strong court, and I argue that Justina played a big role in that strength. See Hebblewhite (2020), 70-72 for Theodosius acceptance of Magnus Maximus and the various theories than explain Theodosius's reasons for doing it.

[360] See Rufinus 11.14 and Zosimus 4.35; See Hebblewhite (2020), 24 and ff. 54. See also, McEvoy (2013), 86.

[361] Omissi (2018), 263-364.

[362] See Hebblewhite (2020), 15-16.

Theodosius was dealing with his own conflicts with Persia.[363] All of these factors likely contributed to his decision to make a quick peace with Magnus Maximus and allow him to rule the area of Gaul, which left Valentinian II in a rather perilous state.

In the summer of 383, when Gratian fought against the incursion of Maximus, Zosimus relates that it was Maximus's *magister* militum, Andragathius, who pursued and killed Gratian in Lyons.[364] Whereas, Rufinus claims that Andragathius tricked Gratian to get him away from his bodyguard and then treacherously murdered him.[365] However it was, Gratian died in 383, and by 385, his 12-year-old half-brother the sole emperor and successor of Italy, while Magnus Maximus became established in Gaul. But, Maximus was not without his supporters in Rome. Famously, the pagan senator, Symmachus wrote a panegyric for the *tyrannus* Emperor, which he came to later regret.[366] Maximus's Nicene leanings also earned him favor in Sulpicius Severus's dialogues of St. Martin of Tours. According Sulpicius,

> Et quia palatium semel ingress sumus, licet diuresis in palatio temporibus gesta conectam : nequam enim praetermittendum uidetur circa Martini admirationem reginae fidelis exemplum. Maximus imperator rempublicam gubernabat, uir omni uita merito praedicandus, si ei uel diadema non legitime tumultuante milte inpositum repudiare uel armis ciuilibus abstinere licuisset.[367]
>
> And, indeed, it does not seem to me right that I should pass unmentioned the example of admiration for Martin, which was shown by a faithful queen. Maximus then ruled the state, a man worthy of being extolled in his whole life, if only he had been permitted to reject a crown thrust upon him

[363] Ibid, 70-72.
[364] See Zosimus 4.35.6
[365] See Rufinus *HE* 11.14 and Zosimus 4.35.
[366] This panegyric is now, unfortunately lost. It is likely that Symmachus destroyed it. See Humphries (1999), 105 in *The Late Roman World and Its Historian: Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus*. Humphries discusses how Symmachus was shunned after Magnus's defeat in 388.
[367] Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogues*. 2.6.

> by the soldiery in an illegal tumult, or had been able to keep out of civil war.[368]

Sulpicius Severus praises Magnus Maximus through the usurper's wife.[369] Her piety shown through her treatment of St. Martin contrasts heavily with Justina's portrayal by other religious leaders, like Ambrose and Augustine. In fact, Sulpicius bemoans Magnus Maximus's status as a usurper. He even suggests that he should have been permitted to be emperor without the stigma of civil war. This praise is the result of Magnus Maximus's determined effort to ally with Nicene Christians. Nevertheless, he is presented in the histories as a usurper, mainly because he later challenges the more popular and more powerful, Theodosius. Meanwhile, the concept of usurpation surrounds Justina's narrative and reflects the precarious nature of imperial authority and succession, as well as how that authority became entrenched in Christian doctrine. Justina recognized this connection and attempted to use it in order to secure Valentinian II's position as an emperor. As we will see, her plan fails and she falls back on her tried and true tool of dynastic linkage.

Sulpicius Severus's description of Magnus Maximus also included the important detail about Magnus Maximus's wife. Sulpicius calls her a queen and describes how she correctly admired Martin of Tours. This acts as a further recommendation for Magnus Maximus, because he was wise enough to have such a wife.[370] It also contrasts directly

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[368] Translation by Alexander Roberts (2019).

[369] Although she is never named, Magnus Maximus and his wife become important figures in later British and Welsh histories. Magnus Maximus's wife becomes known as *Elen* and later Helen and is even considered a saint in Wales, who is often confused with Constantine's mother. See Joseph A. McMullen (2011), 231-233 for more on Magnus Maximus's wife in Welsh tradition.

[370] It is similar to Pliny's praise of Trajan for having a modest wife. See my comment above, 107n252.

with Justina. Both are queens and both have direct contact with the bishop. But in Maximus's wife's case, she presents a quiet admiration for the bishop. The inclusion of this description to emphasize why Magnus Maximus would have been the better emperor suggests that Sulpicius understood Justina's role in Valentinian II's court as controversial. He knew that Justina and Ambrose were adversaries and she was by no means a quiet admirer of her bishop.

It also shows the larger impact that Justina's conflict. It was well known enough to use as fodder for Maximus and his supporters. In fact, Maximus even wrote two letters that are preserved in the *Collectio Avellana* asserting his Nicene orthodoxy and condemning, in particular, Manichaeism and heresy in general.[371] Maximus also sent an envoy with a peace offer to Valentinian II that proposed having the young Emperor and Justina sent to Trier so that he could assume guardianship over both the young emperor and his territories. In response, Ambrose was made an envoy for Valentinian II and was tasked with soundly rebuffed this suggestion.[372] Nevertheless, the fact that Ambrose was used as an emissary, and Maximus's demonstration of his support for Nicene-orthodoxy, shows how important ecclesiastical support became to imperial legitimacy and power during this period.

Alongside this growing ecclesiastical power, was the fact that that Magnus Maximus wanted to have control over Valentinian II. This either meant removing Valentinian II from Justina's protection and/or also bringing Justina with the court and

[371] See *CA* 39 and 40 in Otto Günther (ed.) CSEL 35.

[372] This occurred sometime in 383 after Magnus Maximus had killed Gratian and taken control of Gaul. See Escribano Paño (2019), 53.

having control over her. This control would have supplied a source of legitimacy for his own authority. In either case, it shows that Justina's role in the imperial court was necessary for Valentinian, since, at 12 years of age, he was still considered a child in need of a guardian. Eventually, as I stated, Theodosius stepped in and secured a temporary peace, which gave control of Gaul to Magnus Maximus. Ambrose had been sent as part of Valentinian II's delegation to draw up peace terms with Maximus and, in turn, Maximus sent a peace delegation to Theodosius. By 384, Theodosius had declared Maximus a co-emperor in the west and Maximus had agreed to maintain him control within the boundary of Gaul, while Valentinian kept control of Italy and Sicily.[373]

Even with peace established, Maximus continued to cull support and challenge Valentinian II's rule. His letter to Bishop Siricius in Rome is evidence of his attempts to gain support and favor.[374] In his letter, Maximus writes,

> Moreover, we profess that we have this intention and will: that the Catholic faith, with all bishops agreeing by the distant removal of all dissension and unanimously serving God, may continue steadfastly unimpaired and inviolable. For our accession has detected and has discovered some matters so defiled and polluted by the strain of impious persons, that unless our precaution and cure, which came from of Supreme God, speedily had carried assistance against these matters, mighty schism and destruction surely would have arisen, so that these diseases, with difficulty able to be healed, later would have hardened.[375]

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[373] See Rufinus 11.15; Zosimus 4.37, and Ambrose *de Obitu Valentiniani* 28 for the source's description of this peace and Ambrose as an envoy.

[374] Bishop Siricius, often referred to as St. or Pope Siricius, was Bishop of Rome from 384-399. See Coleman-Norton (1966), 399-402.

[375] See *Epistula* 40 [CSEL 35.90-1] trans. by Coleman-Norton (1966), 399-400. Ceterum id nobis animi et uoluntatis esse profitemur, ut fides catholica procul omni dissension summota concordantibus uniuersis sacerdotibus et unanimiter deo seruientibus illaesa et inuiolabilis perseueret. Nam noster aduentus ita inquinata aliqua et sceleratorum labe polluta deprehendit et repperit, ut, nisi nostra prouisio atque medicina, quae ex dei summi timore ueniebat, his opem celeriter attulisset, ingens profecto diuulsio atque perdition fuisset exorta, ut uix sananda postea uitia concreuissent.

His letter ostensibly is about removing Manichaeism. However, he only mentions that once at the very end of the letter. Meanwhile, he clearly states that any dissension and those who promote dissent are a threat. The fact that he wrote this letter in 385, when tension between Justina and Ambrose was just beginning suggests that Maximus was attempting to curry favor away from Valentinian II by using the conflict between imperial court and bishop. Maximus clearly used his position as a recognized Nicene adherent in order to promote his legitimacy as an emperor. His reference to removing any dissent was not only aimed in order to win the Bishop of Rome as an ally, but also to legitimize any action he took against Valentinian. Yet, just as his actions were an attempt to gain allies, so too are Justina's. Her need for a basilica and her conflict with Ambrose broke out right when Valentinian II was most vulnerable. As I will show, even in her conflict with Ambrose, Justina continued to work with him, proving her actions far more pragmatic than religious.

2.6 The Queen's Gambit: Justina's Motivations and Maneuverings as a Pragmatic Strategist

Back in Milan tensions between Justina and Ambrose increased leading to the Basilica Conflict in 386, likely over the Basilica Portiana. This occurred two years after Theodosius formerly recognized Maximus as a Roman Emperor co-ruling in the west and after one year of growing tensions and anxiety in Milan.[376] However, once again there was no immediate conflict between Ambrose and Justina to suggest that Justina was devout Arian supporter. Their conflict did not even break out until several events

[376] The exact location of the Basilica is disputed see Andrew Lenox-Conyngham (1982) and Gunter Gottlieb (1985) Also, Liebeschuetz, 122-125; Williams, 214-217.

prompted Justina to attempt to defeat Magnus Maximus through various alliances and political maneuverings.

Between 386 and 387 Milan erupted in conflict between the Homoean community led by Justina and the Nicene community led by Ambrose. So, what happened between Magnus's usurpation in 383 and 386 that led to this conflict? There were two episodes that would have motivated Justina to attempt to undermine Magnus Maximus's rule and secure Valentinian's reign. As I stated, Ambrose, acting as an imperial ambassador, was sent twice to Trier in order to prevent Magnus Maximus from pushing his control into Italy, which, he continually attempted. One of the delegations that Ambrose was a part of was to deal with Magnus's demand that Valentinian become his ward and move, with his mother, to the court in Trier.[377] Not only would this mean that Justina would lose her position of influence over her son, but it also endangered her safety and the safety of her son.

Magnus Maximus's control of Valentinian would have removed a rival and would have further secured his legitimacy as the emperor in the west. Since he was not able to gain control of Valentinian II, thanks to the alliance of Justina's refusal and Ambrose's negotiations, Maximus sought to enhance his legitimacy the same way Theodosius initially enhanced his. In 385, a bishop from Avila, Priscillian was accused of performing magic. The case was brought before Maximus, who sentenced Priscillian to

[377] See Raschle (2005), 49-53 for a narrative of Magnus from 383 until he was conquered by Theodosius in 388.

death.[378] Despite the fact that Priscillian was not regarded as an orthodox, Nicene bishop, by figures such as Ambrose, this sentencing was not well received by other bishops in Gaul and Italy. For example, Ambrose, Jerome, and Damasus, the bishop of Rome, all opposed Magnus Maximus's decision.[379] Their reaction suggests the other bishops felt both threatened and affronted by Maximus's actions. In fact, Sulpicius Severus reports that Martin of Tours felt that a secular judge, such as Maximus ought not preside over an ecclesiastical case.[380] Additionally, Pacatus's famous panegyric to Theodosius contains several reminders of his association with Magnus Maximus, perhaps as a way to criticize the emperor for backing Magnus Maximus. As such, Maximus's attempt to legitimize himself through ecclesiastical politics actually backfired and put the bishops more firmly in accord with Valentinian II's court.[381]

At the end of 385, Justina had witnessed the changing role of the church in the east and the west. Theodosius I's slew of new imperial decrees limited the rights of Homoeans and imperial powers was clearly capitalizing on the church as a source for political alliances. She had witnessed firsthand the benefit of an alliance with a bishop. Ambrose had secured Valentinian II from Magnus Maximus's authority. This context must be considered in any analysis of Justina's actions. It was not until 386 when Justina

[378] See Virginia Burrus (1995), 94-98. Burrus describes the crimes of which Priscillian stood accused and his execution. According to Burrus part of his magic included the accusation of sexual immorality, such as orgies.

[379] Burrus (1995), 99-100.

[380] See Sulpicius Severus *Chronica,* 2.50

[381] See Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe, "Commemorating the Usurper Magnus Maximus: Ekphrasis, Poetry, and History in Pacatus' Panegyric of Theodosius" in JLA (2010), 316-336. Lunn-Rockliffe provides a new perspective on Pacatus's inclusion of Magnus Maximus that suggests that provides critique and embarrassment for both Theodosius and the memory of Magnus Maximus.

suddenly demanded a basilica for the Homoean community in Milan. After five years in Milan, Justina and Ambrose finally engaged in a genuine conflict over who had authority of the basilica and church space. During this contest, Justina displays genuine agency and pragmatic decision-making.

2.7 Queen to Bishop: The Contest over the Basilica and Questions of Power

It is only after Magnus Maximus's failed attempts to take control of her son's court and his failed attempt to build an alliance with the bishops that Justina creates a conflict with Ambrose. In 386, although there was a united front between the imperial court and Ambrose against Maximus, back in Milan, Ambrose was ignoring summons from Valentinian II, which he claimed Justina was behind.[382] Additionally, Justina tried several times to remove Ambrose from power, including: establishing an Arian bishop for the Homoean community to oppose Ambrose, trying to kidnap, attempting to arrest him, and run him out of Milan, all of which Ambrose thwarted.[383]

But this conflict and Ambrose's continued support of Valentinian seem to be at odds with the hardline division between Ambrose and Justina. The fact that Ambrose was picked as the ambassador to prevent Maximus's advancement into Italy shows that the Bishop of Milan and the early court of Valentinian II were on the same side and even willing to cooperate during the early 380's. Despite Paulinus's argument that Justina and Ambrose had become bitter enemies while Justina was still in Illyricum, there was no sense of antagonism between the two until later in Valentinian II's reign. In fact,

[382] Ambrose *Epst.* 75.18-19; See also Liebeschuetz (2005), 141n4
[383] Liebeschuetz, 128-129 and Ambrose *Epistle* 30 to Valentinian II

Michael Stuart Williams argues that both the lack of evidence of any early antagonism and Ambrose's own words in his "Oration of the Death of Valentinian," suggest that there was even an early relationship of cordiality between the Empress and the Bishop.[384] In the Oration, Ambrose states,

> Ego te susceptible parvulum, cum legatus ad hostem tuum pergerem. Ego Justinae maternis traditum manibus amplexus sum. Ego tuus iterum legatus repetivi Gallias, et mihi dulce illud officium fuit pro salute tua primo, deinde pro pace atque pietate, qua fraternas reliquias postulabas[385]
>
> I took you up as a small boy, when I travelled as an envoy to your enemy. When you were entrusted to me by your mother, Justina's hands, I embraced you. I travelled to Gaul a second time and this duty was congenial to me, firstly because it involved your safety, and secondly because it was undertaken on behalf of peace and piety, which made you demand your brother's ashes.[386]

Williams argues that the fact that Ambrose shows how Justina entrusted Valentinian's safety to him meant that, at the very least, the early discord between Ambrose and Valentinian's court was over-emphasized in later sources or set aside in order to deal with the crisis.[387] I go further and suggest that the real conflict did not begin until 385 at the earliest and reached its apex in 386.[388] We know that Ambrose did serve on two diplomatic ventures to attempt to halt Magnus Maximus from continuing his coup into Italy. In the above passage, Ambrose not only recognized Justina as in part responsible

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[384] Williams, (2017), 215-217.

[385] Ambrose *de Obitu Valentiniani* 28. Ambrosius, Explanatio symboli, De sacramentis, De mysteriis, De paenitentia, De excessu fratris Satyri, De obitu Valentiniani, De obitu Theodosii – ed. O. Faller 1955.

[386] Ambrose *de Obitu Valentiniani* 28. Translation from Liebeschuetz, with some of my own alterations, among a few minor things, the biggest and most significant change was the addition of Justina's name, which Liebeschuetz inexplicably leaves out.

[387] See Stuart Williams (2017), 215 and also, McLynn (1994), 160-161. They are not as generous about the lack of conflict as I am.

[388] Stuart Williams (2017), 226-239 discusses the controversy over some of the dating in the conflict. I follow his timeline.

for placing Ambrose in the position of 'caretaker' of Valentinian II, but he also cedes to her the authority to make such a placement. Additionally, in this passage he cites Justina by name, and acknowledges her role in the face of a threat to the imperial court in Milan. There is even a subtle praise of her actions since they resulted in giving Ambrose authority, which mean two things. The first is that Justina is credited with the authority to influence or give Ambrose any power. The second is that Justina was willing to ally herself with Ambrose regardless of any theological stance. This shows that Justina was pragmatic enough to recognize Ambrose as influential and, therefore, useful in supporting and legitimizing Valentinian II. It is also noteworthy that Ambrose does not specifically name Justina in the letters concerning the Basilica Crisis as he does in the above passage. Furthermore, the oration was written after the death of both Valentinian and Justina, which suggests that Ambrose would have been less inclined to praise Justina if she really was his archenemy. It would have been just as easy to leave her out of the funeral oration.

Latin imperial funeral orations, like Latin imperial panegyrics, followed particular formula. Ambrose has the two most extant Latin funeral orations of the late fourth century.[389] Both employ a clear Christianized formula, but nevertheless, follow the typical model of funeral orations – namely, they were speeches of praise. Ambrose's oration to Valentinian, as compared to his oration of Theodosius, follows a more Christianized formula rather than a classical one. For example, rather than extol the merits of Valentinian's reign, Ambrose laments his death and extols his Christian

[389] Liebeschuetz (2011), 358-361.

virtues.[390] There are two reasons for this focus. The first is that the death of Valentinian II resulted in a power struggle in the west, which made orators cautious about praising the former emperor.[391] The second is that Ambrose was making a specific political statement about his own authority as compared to the imperial court. He could not overtly criticize Valentinian or Justina, because Theodosius was still strong in the east and allied to the memory of Valentinian through his sister, Galla.[392] But by commending his virtues, Ambrose, as Valentinian's 'caretaker' and mentor, essentially asserts his own authority and virtues, rather than commending Valentinian reign emperor.

Regardless, in praising himself this way he ultimately acknowledged of Justina as the cause and the one with the ability to establish Ambrose as the 'caretaker' and mentor. He could have given Valentinian the authority, but he chose to make Justina the agent. One could argue that making Justina the agent is meant to weaken Valentinian's authority; but – as with the nameless mob of women – this has the potential to also weaken Ambrose, since his authority originated from a woman. In that case, it does not seem likely that this is meant to be a barb, but rather shows that perhaps the situation between Justina and Ambrose was not as fraught as it seemed.

Since the funeral oration to Valentinian II was made after much of the conflict between Justina and Ambrose had concluded, we need address Ambrose's earlier

[390] See Oliver Nicholson (2019), 630.

[391] For example, after Valentinian II fled to Thessalonica, Symmachus made a panegyric to Maximus, which he later regretted. Maybe why it is no longer in existence. See Kelly (2015), 216. See also Leppin (2015), 198-214 in *Contested Monarchy* for more on the specific conflicts between Emperor and usurper.

[392] McLynn (1994), 292 claims that Zosimus's story of Justina presenting Galla to Theodosius is implausible. However, he does not explain why this is implausible and still uses Zosimus as a source in other places.

statements regarding the Empress. The main conflict between 385 and 386 was over the use of a basilica. Just as Gratian had "sequestered" a basilica for imperial use in 381. Stuart Williams calls this "first basilica crisis." I suggest calling it a crisis is a bit of an overstatement. It was more of a disagreement over the proper use of a basilica and was connected to Gratian's demand for *de Spirtu* and the conflicts in the council of Aquileia. What this initial conflict shows is that Ambrose had a penchant for fighting over basilica usage with the imperial court, and that Gratian and Ambrose were not always in agreement. [393]

Valentinian II, also attempted to take control of a basilica and establish a Homoean bishop, named Auxentius. Ostensibly, this was all at the behest of Justina, because she was a devout Arian adherent. This is based on several fairly contemporary source accounts that claim Justina was behind all of this and that she was a zealous and heretical Arian, who harassed the poor, pious, and devout Nicene, Ambrose.[394] Ambrose's letters, which include an open Sermon and a letter to his sister, Marcellina, serve as the closest testimony. Augustine also discusses Justina's perfidy in his *Confessions*. At the time, Augustine was in Milan being mentored by Ambrose.[395] Additionally, Paulinus of Milan recounts the events, as do Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus, and the much later historian, Zosimus.

[393] See Stuart Williams (2017), 195-206 for the "first basilica crisis."

[394] Both Augustine *Confessions* 9.7 and Rufinus 11.15 depict Justina as a zealous persecutor of Ambrose.

[395] See my discussion on the passage from *Confessions* in Chapter 1.9.

In contrast to his later funeral oration, Ambrose wrote an earlier letter to his sister, Marcellina full of invective toward the empress. As I showed above, Ambrose describes Justina and her followers as outsiders or non-Romans. Again, in the letter, he states,

> prodire de Arianis nullus audebat, quia nec quisquam de civibus erat, pauci de familia regia, nonnulli etiam **Gothi**.[396]
>
> Not one of the Arians was brave enough to come out, since there were none of the citizens there, a few from the imperial household, and a number of *Goths*.[397]

This is a portion of the same passage from above where I discussed the importance of the "swarm of followers." Here, I focus on Ambrose's "otherization" of the Homoean community. Following this statement, Ambrose goes on to describe how, through Justina's manipulation, an imperial edict was issued ordering Ambrose to vacate the basilica. He relates that he defied this order and claimed that the emperor had no legal right to interfere in matters of the church, which seem to ignore his earlier interactions with Gratian and the Council of Aquileia and decades of imperial interference in Christian church matters. Although this is a letter to his sister, it is important to note that Ambrose likely assumed there would be a much larger audience for it, especially given the fact that it was later included in his own curated letter collection.[398] Yet, here he does not specifically name Justina as he did in the funeral oration, which shows he may have had some concern about specifically naming her. Such concern would, again, underscore the influence that Justina wielded.

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[396]Ambrose, *Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam* 20.10.
[397] Ambrose, Letter 76.12 trans. Liebeschuetz (2005).
[398] Bronwen Neil and Pauline Evans (2015), 100-112.

This was not the only time in this letter that Ambrose describes Justina's followers as Goths. In fact, in the letter to Marcellina, he calls Justina's followers Goths. Ambrose throughout several letters to Valentinian and Theodosius does not often refer to the Goths and it is not a commonly used term in his letters. However, in his letter to Marcellina, he refers to Justina's followers specifically using the term *gothi* four times, including the instance in the above passage. However, before this passage, he also states the following,

> detestabar invidiam fundendi cruoris, offerebam iugulum meum. Aderant **Gothi** tribuni, adoriebar eos dicens: „Propterea vos possessio Romana suscepit ut perturbationis publicae vos praebeatis ministros? Quo transibitis si haec deleta fuerint?"[399]
>
> I shrank from the odium of being the cause of bloodshed. I offered my own throat. Some tribunes of the *Goths* were standing close by. I sell them saying: "was it for this that the Roman empire admitted you, that you should offer yourselves as agents for the promotion of civil strife? To where will you immigrate if this region is destroyed?"

Then later in the letter, when Ambrose compares himself to Job, which I discussed in the last chapter, he says,

> Videtis quanta subito moveantur. **Gothi** arma gentiles multa mercatorum poena sanctorum. Advertitis quid iubeatur cum mandatur: trade basilicam hoe est dic aliquod verbum in deum et morere?[400]
>
> You observe how many trials are now suddenly launched against me. *Goths*, weapons, federate troops, the merchants find, and the Saints punished. You realize what is being ordered to do when the instruction is given: "surrender the Basilica"?

And then after he compares Justina to Jezebel and Herodias, Ambrose launches into an apology for his defense of the basilica against the imperial court. He states,

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[399] Ambrose Letter 76.9 trans Liebeschuetz (2005).
[400] Ambrose Letter 76.12 trans Liebeschuetz (2005).

> statimque o converti sermonem meum dicens: 'Quam alta et profunda oracula sunt spiritus sancti! Matutinis horis lectum est, ut meministis fratres, quod summo animi dolore respondemus: Deus, venerunt gentes in hereditatem tuam. Et re vera venerunt gentes et plus etiam quam gentes venerunt, venerunt enim **Gothi** et diversarum nationum viri, venerunt cum armis et circumfusi occupaverunt basilicam.[401]
>
> Immediately I brought my sermon round to this. I said: how lofty and profound are the prophecies of the Holy Spirit! You remember, brethren, the reading at Matins, which we then repeated with great sorrow of soul. It was: *oh God, the heathens have come into your inheritance.* And heathens did indeed come, and very much worse than heathens: four it was *Goths* who came, and men of a variety of foreign tribes, and they came armed, and after placing a cordon around the Basilica they occupied it.

Throughout the letters, which Ambrose writes regarding the Basilica Crisis, there are two main arguments he makes to both the imperial court and the public. The first, as is clear in the passage above, is that the Arians causing trouble are not from Milan. In fact, they are not even Roman, but are Goths (according to Ambrose). By making this claim Ambrose attempts to show that the Homoean community that is causing disruption in Milan specifically connects to the Sirmium cohort that came with Justina. This goes back to his claim that she brings a "swarm of followers" that only cause disruption, much like the other mob of women at Sirmium.[402] Thus, Ambrose employs the same trope in order to show how the Homoean community threatens Roman values and society. This is enhanced by the fact that the Homoeans are non-Roman.

It is no accident that Ambrose named the Homoeans Goths. The Battle of Adrianople would have still loomed large and the Gothic Wars had only officially ended

[401] Ambrose Letter 76.20 trans. Liebeschuetz (2005).

[402] See the discussion above in 2.2 for Ambrose's claim that Justina always had a swarm of followers.

a few years before. Given the animosity that was likely felt toward Goths anyway, this connection not only made Homoeans heretics, but also enemies of the Empire.[403] Moreover, if Justina is the leader of a group of heretical Goths that threaten Roman society, it raised questions about her legitimacy and efficacy as an empress.

Ambrose is not the only late fourth century writer who acknowledges the otherness and threat that Goths symbolized for Rome. As I already showed, John Chrysostom's letter, written after Adrianople, and perhaps even after the Gothic Wars in 382, discussed the fear the Empress Flacilla had for Theodosius because of his campaigns against the Goths.[404] Additionally, contentions with Gothic tribes did not disappear at the end of 382. In 386, the same year that the Basilica conflict broke out in Milan, and while Theodosius was fighting the Persians over the border space of modern-day Armenia, he also staved off an incursion of Gothic tribes along the Danube frontier.[405] These contentions continued into the fifth century, culminating in another campaign, where Alaric led the now infamous Sack of Rome in 410. Just as the Battle of Adrianople colored the historical narrative of Ammianus, so too did the Sack of 410, which can be clearly seen in the historical account of Orosius, and in Augustine's work *City of God*. In fact, Orosius even claims that at one point the Goths asked for a bishop and Valens, on account of his wickedness, purposefully sent them an Arian bishop.[406] However, what

[403] Ralph Mathisen (2014), 1480-150, argues that in fact there was no conflict between the Goths and Romans, specifically as it pertained to the Arian Goths and Nicene Romans. His main piece of evidence is a law in 386 that allowed the assembly of the Arian communities. However, I will address this law below and show that it was an anomaly that served a specific purpose at a specific time

[404] See discussion of Chysostom's letter in Chapter 1.4.

[405] Kelly (2015), 216 in *Contested Monarchy*.

[406] Orosius, *Seven Book Against the Pagans*, trans. A.T. Fear (2010), 383.

this shows is that there was deep association between Goths and Arians that amplified the otherness and antagonism of the Roman elite, particularly elite Bishops, like Ambrose.[407]

The second argument that Ambrose consistently makes in his letters on the basilica conflict is that he is not trying to usurp imperial power. Instead, he is acting with the authority of a bishop over a basilica and the emperor, spurred on by Justina, was acting where imperial authority did not extend. For example, he says,

> haec gesta sunt atque utinam iam finita! sed graviores motus futuros plena commotionis imperialia verba indicant. ego tyrannus appellor, et plus etiam quam tyrannus. nam cum imperatorem comites obsecrarent, uti prodiret ad ecclesiam, idque petitu militum facere se dicerent, respondit: "si vobis iusserit Ambrosius, vinctum.me tradetis." quid post hanc vocem supersit, considera.[408]

> This is what happened, and would that this was the end of my story. But that worse disturbances are on the way is implied in some very threatening words of the emperor. I am called a usurper and even worse than a usurper. For when the counts were beseeching the emperor to proceed to the church, and said they were doing this at the request of the soldiers, he replied: 'if Ambrose were to give an order, you would hand me over to him in chains.'[409]

Ambrose was aware that this conflict was occurring while Magnus Maximus threatened Valentinian's authority. Therefore, he was concerned that his resistance to Valentinian and Justina would raise questions about Ambrose's loyalties or, in turn, weaken Valentinian II's position as emperor. But this does not seem to be a goal Ambrose had. He is very clear to claim he is not trying to usurp power. However, Ambrose was also making a bold claim that the emperor's authority was limited and did not extend within

[407] For more on this association between Goths and Arianism see, Matthew, (1975), 354.
[408] Ambrose, *Epistula ad Sororem Marcellinam* 20.35.
[409] Ambrose, Letter 76.27 trans. Liebeschuetz (2005).

the local space of a church. Essentially, Ambrose's arguments are attempted to portray himself as a loyal Roman aristocrat, but also as a powerful bishop. This goes back to the idea that perhaps and Ambrose and Justina's conflict was not as fraught as it seemed. Ambrose is trying to maintain his authority as bishop and another, Homoean bishop with the ear of the Emperor challenged his position. But throughout the conflict, Ambrose maintains a clear loyalty to Valentinian II's reign as emperor.

If we can imagine Ambrose as aware of the context of the Gothic Wars and the threat of Magnus Maximus, then we can also imagine that Justina is also aware of this context. Her experiences with Magnentius and Valentinian I, the attempted coup of Procopius during Valens's reign, Valens death, Gratian's death at Magnus Maximus's bidding, and Magnus Maximus's continued presence, would have taught her that it was essential to ally herself to protect both her own and her son's position. Theodosius had just pushed the Goths west and made any non-Nicene worship illegal. He betrayed Valentinian II and supported Magnus Maximus. Given the circumstances, allying with the large Homoean community in Milan would have been the politically savvy move. There is no indication prior to the conflicts with Magnus Maximus that Justina attempted to exert a Homoean doctrine or subvert Ambrose's authority. In fact, Ambrose's funeral oration actually shows collaboration earlier on in Justina's residency in Milan. But as the threat grew, Justina needed new allies, both in Gaul and Italy.

2.8 The Empress's New Decree: Justina's Agency in Law Decrees Made in under Valentinian II

In 386, it was clear that Ambrose and Justina had a conflict over the use of a basilica in Milan. It also was clear that this conflict was not the same as the conflict with

Gratian over a Basilica, which Ambrose alludes to in his *de Spititu*. One reason this is so clear is the involvement of Auxentius, an Arian bishop, for whom Justina was attempting to support and provide a basilica.[410] Thus, Justina, as opposed to Gratian, appears to be establishing another bishop in Milan and wanted to provide a basilica for Auxentius and the Arian community of Gaul and Northern Italy.[411] This threatened Ambrose's authority as Bishop in Milan, but also as the bishop connected to the imperial court. However, Justina's actions would have increased the position of Milan as a main ecclesiastical capital that boasted two bishops.[412] Moreover, it also would have created an alliance with the non-Nicene Christians of Gaul that were not supportive of Magnus Maximus, especially since he had written his own letter in support of Nicene Orthodoxy in 385, the same year he executed Priscillian.

The conflict over the basilica had widespread impact affecting the status of imperial and clerical authority and Justina's influence in the situation was pronounced. The response of the court was to assert itself as the main authority over ecclesiastical affairs, once again using the church to support imperial authority. I already stated that Theodosius called an ecumenical council almost immediately after becoming Emperor.

[410] See John Moorhead (1999), 132-134.

[411] See Stuart Williams (2017), 195-206.

[412] Liebeschuetz (2011), 257-261 describes how Ambrose ultimately won his conflict with Justina and maintained his superiority in Milan. In contrast, Liebeschuetz claims Chrysostom lost his conflict with Eudoxia. However, this depends on what is understood to be a "win" or a "loss." Justina could have used more force against Ambrose, as Eudoxia did with Chrysostom, but her main concern was diminishing Magnus Maximus's power, not Ambrose, and in that she ended up being successful. See also Uta Heil, (2014), 109.

The Council of Constantinople reasserted the principles of Nicaea and supported the policy of *nullus haereticis,* which Theodosius had decreed prior to the Council.[413]

This anti-heretical stance was steadfastly supported in both the east and the west until 386, when Valentinian II, with the implicit support of Theodosius, decreed that it was illegal to persecute any Homoean adherent. It states,

> *Imppp. Valentinianus, Theodosius et Arcadius aaa. ad Eusignium praefectum praetorio.*
>
> Damus copiam colligendi his, qui secundum ea sentiunt, quae temporibus divae memoriae Constanti sacerdotibus convocatis ex omni orbe Romano expositaque fide ab his ipsis, qui dissentire noscuntur, Ariminensi concilio, Constantinopolitano etiam confirmata in aeternum mansura decreta sunt. Conveniendi etiam quibus iussimus patescat arbitrium, scituris his, qui sibi tantum existimant colligendi copiam contributam, quod, si turbulentum quippiam contra nostrae tranquillitatis praeceptum faciendum esse temptaverint, ut seditionis auctores pacisque turbatae ecclesiae, etiam maiestatis capite ac sanguine sint supplicia luituri, manente nihilo minus eos supplicio, qui contra hanc dispositionem nostram obreptive aut clanculo supplicare temptaverint.
>
> *Dat. X kal. feb. Mediolano Honorio nob. p. et Evodio conss. (386 ian. 23).*[414]

> *Emperors Valentinian, Theodosius, and Arcadius's Augusti to use Eusignius, praetorian prefect*. We give the facility of assembling to those who believe according to those matters which have been voted to endure forever in the times of Constantius of deified memory, when bishops had been convened from all the Roman world and the faith had been declared by those very persons who now are known to dissent at the Council of Rimini and also had been confirmed by the Council of Constantinople. The authority of assembly also should extend to the persons for whom we have so ordered, but with those who think that facility of assembling has been granted only to themselves knowing that, if they shall have tried to do any turbulent act contrary to our Tranquility's command they shall pay penalties of treason even by their head and blood as authors of sedition and of the disturbed peace of the Church, with punishment no less awaiting those who shall have tried to supplicate us surreptitiously or

[413] See *CTh* 16.5.6; 16.5.8; and 16.1.3. All three work together to eliminate worship, church building, and the appointment of bishops by Arians or any group deemed heretical. See also Holum (1989), 17-19.

[414] *CTh* 16.4.1.

> secretly contrary to this our order. *Given on 23 January at Milan, the most noble boy Honorius and of Evodius being consuls*.[415]

This rule was given in Milan and occurs around the same time that Magnus Maximus began renewing his aggression against Valentinian and had made himself an anathema with the ecclesiastical community, and within the timeframe of Ambrose and Justina's conflict. It refers specifically to the right of the dissenters of the Councils of Rimini and Constantinople to assemble suggests that Justina's influence was enough to influence an imperial decree that impacted the entire Empire and stood in direct opposition to prior imperial policy.[416] This is emphasized by the fact that the decree originated in Milan. This policy was not long-lived and was nulled in 388 with the decree against heretics.[417] Incidentally, by 388, Justina had fled Milan to find security with Theodosius I. By then, Magnus Maximus was defeated and her son's reign was once again secured.

Nevertheless, the decree was attributed to both Valentinian and Theodosius. This was because Theodosius was also having conflicts in the east and needed support and alliance of the Arian community.[418] However, this was a specific law made at a specific time and it did not fit with the preceding or succeeding imperial mandates regarding heresies and heretical groups. Ralph Mathisen has suggested this law shows there was no antagonism between the two Christian factions, particularly as it pertained to the "Barbarian Arians" and the "Nicene Romans." Mathisen states, "Barbarian Arians, therefore, were a legally recognized group of Christians in the Roman Empire as if the

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[415] Translation from P.R. Coleman Norton, vol.2 (1966).

[416] The Council of Rimini, also known as the Council of Arminum was held in 358 under Constantius II in order to resolve the Arian conflict. See Ralph Mathisen, (2014), 145-147.

[417] See *CTh* 16.5.15.

[418] Ralph Mathisen (2014), 147.

late 380's, and there were no legal incompatibilities privileging Nicenes over them."[419] I agree with Mathisen's argument that there was likely no segregation between Arian barbarians and Roman Nicenes, and that these designations are too stark; not all barbarians were Arian and not all Romans were Nicene.[420]

However, his use of the 386 mandate allowing Arian assembly distorts the context of this particular law. This becomes clear when this mandate of 386 is analyzed with the preceding mandates issued in the 380's. Based on Coleman-Norton's collection of legal documents, there were nearly forty edicts and mandates issued between 379-386 that focused on ecclesiastical issues focused on heresy.[421] More than half were issued in the east and at least ten were directed to specifically segregating and outright eliminating non-Nicene Christian groups that were deemed heretics or reinforcing Nicene Christianity as the only legally recognized group.[422] Furthermore, several of these anti-heresy mandates directly referenced and made Arianism incompatible with Nicene Christianity.

There are several examples of these mandates and most of them focus on preventing heretics the use of a space to assemble or prevent clerical leaders for these communities. For example, in July 381 a law an imperial mandate was issued from Constantinople, which decreed that Eunomians and Arians were not allowed to build churches.[423] That same month, another mandate was issued from Heraclea that stated,

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[419] Mathisen (2014), 148.
[420] See Mathisen (2014), in Arianism Roman Heresy and Barbarian Creed, 145-192.
[421] P.R. Coleman, Roman State and Christian Church vol.1&2 (1966).
[422] This is based on my own examination of the legal documents from Coleman-Norton.
[423] *CTh* 16.5.8

> It shall be necessary that those in communion and fellowship of acceptable bishops should be allowed to occupy Catholic churches, but that all who descend from the communion of faith of these, whom the specific mention has been expressed, should be expelled from the churches as manifest heretics and that henceforth to them should be not allowed at the episcopal authority and the power of obtaining churches, that the priesthood of the true and Nicene faith may continue pure and that after our command's plain formulary an opportunity for malignant subtlety may not be given.[424]

The specific reference to the true and Nicene faith reflects the continual disenfranchisement of heretics under Theodosius. These mandates essentially made heresies, like the Homoeans, incompatible with Roman society. They took away the places to assembly, their ability to assemble, and the ecclesiastical leaders for these groups.[425] This shows that until the Mandate in 386, the imperial court, especially the imperial court under Theodosius, was systematically stripping non-Nicene sects from having any kind of formalized community. Since this had the largest impact of barbarian Homoean communities, they were, theoretically, the most incompatible with other Roman communities. Yet, this is assuming that these laws had any actual or widespread impact throughout the Empire. This is always a debated point, but it is not one I am making in this case. Rather, it is enough to know that the elite structures of the Empire were well-aware of these mandates and that the mandate in 386 stood in direct opposition to its predecessors, and again, was revoked only two years later.

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[424] *CTh* 16.1.3 hos ad optinendas catholicas ecclesias ex communione et consortio probabilium sacerdotum oportebit admitti: omnes autem, qui ab eorum, quos commemoratio specialis expressit, fidei communione dissentiunt, ut manifestos haereticos ab ecclesiis expelli neque his penitus posthac obtinendarum ecclesiarum pontificium facultatemque permitti, ut verae ac nicaenae fidei sacerdotia casta permaneant nec post evidentem praecepti nostri formam malignae locus detur astutiae. Trans. by Coleman-Norton (1966).

[425] See Coleman-Norton (1966), 325, the introduction to *CTh* 16.1.3 claims that this created a lot of tension and upheaval in the east, which may explain why Theodosius relaxed his stance on heresy for a short period.

The fact that this mandate was such an anomaly suggests that it was only enacted to serve a specific purpose. The fact that it was issued in Milan by the western imperial court when almost all the other anti-heretical mandates were issued through the eastern court further suggests that the main motivation for the mandate was the conflict between Justina and Ambrose occurring in Milan at the same time. Justina, who was trying to establish a legitimate Homoean community need to provide both a bishop and Church space in order to accomplish this. However, she was not unaware of the preceding laws that prohibited both the bishop and church from functioning. More importantly, she would have recognized that going against these mandates would pit Valentinian II's court against Theodosius. Theodosius knew Maximus and had already shown a willingness to support him as emperor. The last thing Valentinian II could afford was to lose all support of Theodosius, or appear to oppose him. Therefore, Justina chose to seek legitimate ways to achieve her goal of creating a Homoean community that was sympathetic to Valentinian's reign. The fact that it also served a purpose for Theodosius made it easier to gain his acceptance. The fact that Theodosius issued the mandate, Valentinian, Arcadius, but not Magnus Maximus shows that Justina was also influencing the two courts to collaborate to increase Valentinian II's legitimacy and diminish Magnus Maximus's authority.

However, having the backing of Theodosius made Ambrose's defiance appear as though he was defying the imperial authority, rather than just Justina's influence. Without the mandate, Ambrose had the benefit of only defying the emperor's mother and her Homoean community, which had already been undermined through the earlier

imperial mandates making heresy illegal. Yet, the new mandate put Ambrose as the antagonist. This explains why it was so important for him to reiterate throughout his letters on the conflict, to Valentinian and to his sister, Marcellina, that he was not a usurper or attempting to be a usurper. For instance, in his letter to Valentinian II, Ambrose states,

> But surely, whether we examine the succession of divine writings, or the events of history, who could possibly deny that in a case involving the faith, I repeat, in a case involving the faith, it has been usual for bishops to pass judgment on Christian emperors, not the emperors on bishops?[426]

This letter, written to Valentinian shortly after the mandate of 386, claims that Ambrose is only attempting to do his duty as bishop. He claims that he is following a tradition of bishops to instruct emperors in ecclesiastical matters. He also emphasizes he is only attempting to show influence in questions of faith, which implies that he is not attempting to influence or direct his authority in any way that was not permitted to him as a bishop.

This implication becomes an explicit statement later, in his letter to Marcellina. In that letter, which recounted the riots over the use of the basilica, Ambrose is insistent that he was not a usurper, or rather a *tyrannus*. He states,

> Si haec tyrannis videtur, habeo arma sed in Christi nomine, habeo offerendi mei corporis potestatem. Quid moraretur ferire si tyrannum putaret? … Habemus tyrannidem nostram. Tyrannis sacerdotis infirmitas est. Cum infirmor, inquit, tunc potens sum. Cavere tamen ne ipse sibi tyrannum faceret cui deus adversarium non excitavit. Non hoe Maximum dicere quod tyrannus ego sim Valentiniani qui se meae legationis obiectu queritur ad Italiam non potuisse transire. Addidi quia numquam sacerdotes tyranni fuerunt sed tyrannos saepe sunt passi.

[426]See Ambrose, Letter 75.4 trans. by Liebeschuetz (2005). At certe si vel scripturarum seriem divinarum vel vetera tempora retractemus, quis est qui abnuat in causa fidei, in causa inquam fidei, episcopos solere de imperatoribus Christians, non imperators de episcopis iudicare?

> If that looks like the behavior of a usurper, I agree that I have arms – but only for the service of Christ. I have power – to make the emperor an offering off my body. Why would he have hesitated to strike, if he thought me a usurper? … We have our personal "usurper": weakness is the "usurper" of the priest. "*When I become weak*," Paul said, "*then I am strong*." But he against whom God has not raised up an adversary must take care not to conjure up a usurper against himself. Not even Maximus makes this claim, that I am a usurper against Valentinian.[427]

Ambrose goes on to say that Maximus complains about Ambrose's support of Valentinian when he served as an envoy. In this passage, Ambrose clearly wants his audience, who, interestingly, is not the imperial court, to believe his resistance to imperial commands did not make him a usurper. This is likely because Ambrose understood how this episode may appear to the imperial court in the east, as well as other bishops, and especially how it might affect his legacy.

In general, scholars identify *tyranni* as equivalent with a usurper. I discussed this earlier when discussing Magnus Maximus's initial usurpation. Ambrose clearly did not want to appear as though he was subverting imperial power during a time when the issue of usurpation was still a threat for Valentinian II's court. As Humphries notes, the term *tyrannus* usually was attached retrospective to a usurper's reign, and neither usurper, nor *tyrannus* had a firm legal definition. Instead, Humphries argues that a usurper is best understood as a potential emperor whose reign unsuccessful.[428] The idea of success as a determiner for sifting legitimate emperors from the usurpers is difficult and problematic. For instance, Constantine defied the system of succession established by Diocletian and took power without any real dynastic claims. Yet, he is not considered a usurper.

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[427] Ambrose, *Epist*. 76.23, trans. by Liebeschuetz (2005).
[428] Humphries (2008), 85-86.

Similarly, Magnus Maximus is considered a usurper. Yet, his reign lasted four years – as long or longer than some legitimate emperors – and he was formally recognized by Theodosius I as a Roman Emperor. Therefore, it is important to determine what a usurper is and is not in terms of Roman standards. Following Humphries and Omissi, a usurper was determined based on the textual sources that were either contemporaneous or retrospective of the emperor/usurper's rule. Ambrose would have been cognizant of how Romans determined a *tyrannus* and wanted to prevent any such accusations.

Additionally, his appeal suggests that he was cognizant of the fact that the issue of usurpation was forefront in the conflict with Justina. He understood the undercurrents that were driving her actions and he did not want to be branded with the same brush as Maximus. He underscores this point with his claim that Maximus would not even call him a usurper. At this point, Maximus has attempted to gain an alliance with Italian bishops, like Ambrose. Furthermore, Maximus's letter, which I have quoted above, already had circulated. Ambrose's actions make him appear to be a supporter of Maximus, and his letter demonstrates that Ambrose wanted to distance himself from this accusation. However, this passage also reflects the fact that Ambrose knows his actions make him vulnerable to such accusations. This shows that even Ambrose recognized Justina's authority and the success of her collaboration with the eastern court to pit out the mandate in 386. He recognizes Justina and her alliance with the Homoean community as a real threat to his authority and to his own legacy. He attempts to undercut this with his insistence that he is not a usurper. Ultimately, Ambrose proves successful.

2.9 Making Love in the Time of War: Justina's Adaptability When Magnus Maximus Attempts to Conquer Milan

By the end of the decade, Ambrose had successfully maintained his control in Milan and set an important precedent for the power and role of a Bishop.[429] Meanwhile, Magnus Maximus continued to threaten Valentinian's reign until 387 when he crossed over the Alps into Italy. Because of this, Justina and her Emperor son fled Milan to Thessalonica, where, As Zosimus claims, Justina thrust her daughter, Galla, on the newly widowed Theodosius.[430] By 388 Theodosius, now Justina's son-in-law, had defeated Magnus Maximus.[431] Valentinian was restored as the sole emperor in the west, Ambrose remained firmly established in Milan, and Justina's legacy continued through her granddaughter Galla Placidia, who would go on to play regent to her own son Valentinian III, engage in several power struggles, and become a great patron of Nicene Christian basilicas.

When Magnus Maximus crossed the Alps in 387, the conflict between Ambrose and Justina immediately ended and Valentinian's court quickly left to find support from Theodosius. After fleeing, Justina shows not attempt to enforce her Homoean ways. In fact, Justina raised no ideological concerns over uniting her family with the devoutly Nicene Theodosius, who immediately revoked the mandate of 386, and continued to make anti-heretical decrees. However, Justina proves to be far more pragmatic than

[S]See Claudia Rapp (2013), 36 discusses Ambrose's philosophy of bishops being prominent in the cities.

[430] See Zosimus 4.44 for the account of Theodosius's marriage to Galla.

[431] Errington (2006), 223-227 claims Theodosius had never really supported Magnus Maximus and proved it by rejecting all the appointments he made to the priesthood. This was applauded by bishops in both the east and the west and further shows the growing political power of clerical offices.

ideological and secures her son's reign once again with an alliance forged by marriage. According to Zosimus,

> δοκοῦσί πως κοινῇ τῇ πολιτείᾳ λυσιτελεῖν· Ἰουστῖνα δὲ οὔτε πραγμάτων ἄπειρος οὖσαα οὔτε προς τὴν τοῦ συμφέροντος εὕρεσιν ἄπορος, ἐπισταμέν τὸ Θεοδοσίουυ περὶ τὰς ἐρωτικὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἐπιρρεπές, ἐφιστᾷ τε τὴν θυγατέρα Γάλλαν ἐξαισίῳ διαπρέπουσαν κάλλει, καὶ τῶν γονάτων ἐπιλαζομέν τοῦ βασιλέως ἱκέτευε μήτε τὸν Γρατιανοῦ τοῦ δεδωκότος οἱ τὴν βασιλείαν θάνατον περιιδεῖν ἀτιμώρητον, μήτε σφᾶς εἰκῇ κειμένους ἐᾶσαι, πάσης ἐκπεπτωκότας ἐλπίδος. Καὶ ταῦτα λέγουσα τὴν κόρην ὀδυρομένην ἐδείκνυ καὶ τὴν ἑαυτῆς ἀποκλαίουσαν τύχην· Τούτων ἀκούσας ὁ Θεοδόσιος, καὶ ἅμα τῇ θέᾳ τοῦ τῆς κόρης κάλλους ἁλούς, παρέφαινε μὲν καὶ τῷ βλέμματι τὴν ἐπὶ τῷ κάλλει τῆς κόρης πληγήν, ἀνεζαλλετο δὲ τὸ πρακτέον, χρηστὰς ἔκειν |
>
> Justina, however, who was very shrewd and not slow to find an advantage, discovered Theodosius's amorous inclinations, and bringing in her daughter, Galla, who was renowned for her beauty, clasped the emperor's knees and begged him neither to let the death of Gratian (who gave him the Empire) go unpunished, nor to let his relatives languish neglected and in despair. And as she said this she showed him the girl weeping and bewailing her fate. As Theodosius listened to her he became captivated by the site of the girl's beauty.[432]

Zosimus, here, clearly depicts Justina as a pragmatic politician and negotiator. When she was unable to thwart Magnus Maximus using the Arians, she manipulated Theodosius into an alliance, which served the same purpose. This story follows the same trope of Gyges story outlined in the last chapter. Additionally, it mirrors Justina's own rise to power. She once again uses lust and desire in order to gain political advantage. When she failed to make allies using religion, she fell back on her and her daughter's valuable dynastic linkage. In this case, rather than display herself, she displays her daughter, which was the role King Candaules had in the Gyges myth.[433]

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[432] Zosimus 4.44 trans. by Ronald T. Ridley (1982).
[433] See my discussion in Chapter 1.6.

Although Zosimus is clearly following a literary motif in order to critique both Justina and Theodosius, we should not ignore the persistent role Justina plays in both the literary sources and the timeline of events. If, in fact, Justina and Ambrose's conflicts did not arise until after Gratian's reign, as Williams suggests, then it coincided with the rise of Magnus Maximus as a threat to Valentinian. It is no coincidence that the so-called Basilica Crisis began after Theodosius acknowledged Magnus Maximus as an Augustus in the west. Stuart Williams suggests, and I think correctly, that Justina did not have a big role in the first basilica crisis of 380, involving Gratian. Since there is no evidence of her in Milan until 383, this makes sense.[434] All of her actions, when understood in the timeline beyond the micro-narrative of her conflict with Ambrose reflect specific and intentional choices made to prevent upheaval and usurpation.

Even though most accounts about her are polemical, they all coincide with the timeline of events and still reflect a powerful empress. For example, Socrates Scholasticus describes the Basilica crisis as follows:

> Ἰουστίνα δὲ ἡ τοῦ βασιλέως Οὐαλεντινιανοῦ μήτηρ, τὰ Ἀρειανῶν φρονοῦσα, ζῶντος μὲν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς, οὐδὲν εἶχεν βλάπτειν τοὺς φρονοῦντας τὸ ὁμοούσιον: ἐπειδὴ δὲ κομιδῇ νέος ἦν ὁ υἱὸς, καταλαμβάνουσα τὴν Μεδιολάνον ταραχὰς μεγίστας κατὰ τοῦ ἐπισκόπου Ἀμβροσίου ἐκίνησεν, εἰς ἐξορίαν αὐτὸν πεμφθῆναι κελεύουσα. Ὡς δὲ ὁ λαὸς ἀντεῖχεν, ὑπερβαλλόντως ἀγαπῶν τὸν Ἀμβρόσιον, καὶ τοῖς ἕλκειν ἐπὶ τὴν ἐξορίαν σπουδάζουσιν ἀνθίστατο, ἐν τοσούτῳ ἀγγέλλεται, ὅτι Γρατιανὸς δόλῳ τοῦ τυράννου Μαξίμου ἀνῄρητο…Τοῦτο ἐπιγενόμενον ἔπαυσε τὴν κατὰ Ἀμβροσίου τῆς μητρὸς τοῦ βασιλέως ὀργήν. Οὐαλεντινιανὸς δὲ καὶ ἄκων τῇ ἀνάγκῃ τοῦ καιροῦ πεισθεὶς τὴν Μαξίμου βασιλείαν προσδέχεται.[435]
>
> Justina*, mother of the Emperor Valentinian*, who entertained Arian sentiments, had been unable to harm the homoousians as long as her

[434] See Stuart Williams (2017), 216.
[435] Socrates Scholasticus, *HE* 5.11.

> husband lived had been unable to molest the Homoousians; but going to Milan while her son was still young, she manifested great hostility to Ambrose the bishop, and commanded that he should be banished. While the people from their excessive attachment to Ambrose, were offering resistance to those who were charged with taking him into exile, intelligence was brought that Gratian had been assassinated by the treachery of the tyrant Maximus... When this happened the Empress Justina's indignation against Ambrose was repressed. Afterwards Valentinian most unwillingly, but constrained by the necessity of the time, admitted Maximus as his colleague in the empire.[436]

Socrates's presentation of Justina shows how influential she was as an empress. Initially, she goes to Valentinian, but later in the section, Socrates claims she was the one planning to execute a new law. Furthermore, he claims that Justina had the audacity to "command" the banishment of Ambrose. In the construction of the passage, Socrates weakens her depiction through typical literary tropes. Her actions against Ambrose are impotent compared to his influence. And she is forced to concede defeat when a *tyrannus* proves more powerful than she. Yet, in using these literary tropes against Justina she is still ensconced as the "emperor" whose image is being purposefully weakened.

Traditionally, modern historians have either claimed Ambrose exaggerated the situation, or was using Justina as a typical "feminine trope." In other words, Justina is more a literary figure than an historical one. Or, historians condemn Justina as the trouble-causing heretic that Ambrose describes. But consider what the sources admit even while they condemn her: Justina had a large following; she was influential and it threatened Ambrose's own authority. Ambrose's claim that her followers were Goths

[436] Socrates Scholasticus, *HE* 5.11 trans. by Philip Schaff. NPNF Vol. 2.

and non-citizens, i.e., not Roman, is a typical polemic used regularly against usurpers and unpopular Roman Emperors. All these tropes are used against other emperors are typical of imperial polemic. This is not just a conflict between a woman and Ambrose, but a conflict between the imperial leadership and a local "uppity" bishop.

2.10 Conclusion

Modern Scholars have mainly approached a study of Justina through a particular lens that tends to either take the source material too literally, or denies Justina's role as an influential and pragmatic empress. Even though Ambrose and his followers, namely, Augustine and Paulinus of Milan, depict Justina as a zealous heretic that threatened the Church, Justina does not attempt to create any Homoean conflict until her son's rule is threatened by an openly devout Nicene usurper, who had already made himself repugnant by killing a non-Nicene bishop. The only other times she is mentioned in the sources, apart from her conflict with Ambrose, involves her marriage to Valentinian and her role in securing Valentinian II's succession after his father died, and then securing his reign again, as well as her daughter through a marriage alliance with Theodosius.

Therefore, studying Justina only through the lens of her gender and letting it determine what can or cannot be true because of that, we should readdress the sources and understand why Justina appears in them when she does. In other words, understanding the context of both Justina and the sources and determining why and how the sources depict her and her conflict with Ambrose in the first place. Here, I have shown that Justina's conflict with Ambrose and her actions were all prompted by the circumstances that forced to her act. I analyzed Justina through a contextual lens and

then reflecting on how her actions led to her depiction as a woman in the sources. The fact that Justina's appears in the sources when she does is not an accident, clearly, she played a role during Magnus Maximus's usurpation and her Homoean sympathies coincide with Magnus's own over-eager attempt to ally with Nicene bishops in Italy. This context is so fundamental to an understanding of Justina's role that I have included a timeline below to visually show how her actions were reactions to her circumstances and that she was acting as a pragmatic and shrewd leader.

-3-

The Legacy of Justina: Helena, Fausta, Eudoxia, and Galla Placidia

In my analysis of Justina, I acknowledged the role of various gender tropes that Ambrose and Socrates Scholasticus used in order to depict Justina as a prototypical "dangerous" late fourth century woman; one that used heresy to seduce as much as sex. However, I also argued that the reasons the sources depict Justina as a dangerous empress is as much as result of her actions as a literary construct. Understanding the context of the sources and events surrounding the depiction of Justina not only reflects a late fourth century concept of "dangerous" empress, but also shows how Justina operated as an imperial power. I will use this approach of acknowledging the tropes the sources use to depict women and then comparing the sources to the contextual events in order to analyze imperial women beyond these literary tropes to further show that Justina's actions led to the creation of the depiction of a prototypical late fourth century "good" or "pious" empress, as well as created a new legacy for imperial women.

In order to achieve this, I will analyze and compare the depiction of four empresses. This first two empresses are predecessors to Justina, the Constantinian Empresses, Helena and Fausta. I will show how their depiction in the sources changed between the early fourth century sources and the later sources. I will connect this change directly to Justina and her conflict with Ambrose. The second two empresses are direct successors to Justina, the Theodosian empresses, Aelia Eudoxia and Pulcheria. Both of these empresses had conflicts with bishops and I will show that their actions and role in religious controversies became a powerful tool for imperial women and was the result of Justina's legacy.

3.2 The Empresses Helena and Fausta: The Evolution of the Images of Imperial Women in the Late Fourth Century

The Empress Helena stands out as the epitome of a model imperial woman in the fourth century. Not only was she the mother of Constantine the Great, but she also, reportedly, served as an important leader in the Church. As a model empress, she became an important symbol of piety and Christian virtue in the late Roman world.[437] According to Leslie Brubaker, as a symbol, Helena's importance may have even surpassed the importance of her son's memory by the end of the fourth century.[438] She is especially remembered for her role in allegedly finding the cross on which Jesus was crucified. By in the late fourth century, she was revered as a holy woman by both the eastern and

[437] See Sławomir Bralewski (2017), 27-28 on Helena's model of *pietas* and the importance of the virtue in Roman society.

[438] See Leslie Brubaker (1997), 52.

western churches and continued to be an important figure even receiving a sainthood in both the Orthodox and Catholic Churches.[439]

The earliest accounts of Helena appear in Eusebius's biography of Constantine, the *vita Constantini*, as well as in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*. Resonances of Helena also appear on coins and in inscriptions from the early to mid-fourth century.[440] According to Eusebius, Helena spent time in the east and gave gifts and good works to every city she visited. Eusebius also relates that Helena was hailed Augusta and that she lived a long life, eventually dying when she was 80 years old. Additionally, these bare facts are recounted similarly in all the later sources, which lends a certain acceptance and credibility to them. However, Eusebius's account focuses for more on her imperial status and her connection to Constantine than the later sources. Like Paulinus of Milan, Eusebius's account of Constantine is meant to highlight and moralize all of Constantine's good qualities, and serve as an example for Christianized imperial power and authority.[441]

In contrast, the earliest textual sources on Fausta come from the late fourth century biographies of Eutropius and the anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus*.[442] However, like Helena, there were several coins minted with Fausta's image that hailed

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[439] For her role as an empress and saint see Hans A. Pohlsander, *Helena Empress and Saint* (1995) and Pohlsander, *The Emperor Constantine* (2004).

[440] Both Fausta and Helena appeared on coins during Constantine's reign. Both with the title of Augusta on the coins. After Constantine's reign, Helena still appeared on coins as a type of dynastic connection for Contantius's reign. For more on Helena and the numismatic evidence see, Leslie Brubaker, "Memories of Helena: Patterns in Imperial Female Matronages in the Fourth and Fifth Centuries," in Liz James, ed., *Women, Men and Eunuchs, Gender in Byzantium* (1997), 52–75. For Helena's legacy on coinage see, Kriszta Kotsis, "Defining Female Authority in Eighth-Century Byzantium: The Numismatic Images of the Empress Irene (797–802)" in JLA (2012), 185-215.

[441] See Barnes (1981), 265-271 for his argument about both the unfinished nature of the *vita Constantini* and its panegyric qualities.

[442] See Woods, (1998), 70-71.

her as an augusta.[443] All the later sources that mention Fausta agree that she was executed by Constantine and that her execution is somehow connected to her stepson, and Constantine's firstborn son, Crispus.[444] Yet, it is unclear if these sources can be reliably trusted and, as I will show, the story of Fausta's execution appears at a particular moment in the late fourth century when figures, like Ambrose, were using the Empress Helena as a symbol of Christian piety and a "good" empress. Moreover, like Fausta, little is known of Crispus from earlier fourth century sources excepts for a few coins minted in his honor and one brief mention in Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History.

3.3 Helena in Eusebius: The Early Depiction of Helena

Eusebius's version of Helena reflects the imperial strength and piety of Constantine's imperial court. In fact, I suggest, that Helena acts as symbol for the positive impact, which Eusebius attributes to Constantine. For instance, both Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen report that Helena found the true cross and do not attribute her Christianity or her actions as a Christian woman to Constantine.[445] However, Eusebius reports the opposite. Everything from Helena's conversion to Christianity to her actions as a Christian woman were all thanks to Constantine and his greatness. According to Eusebius, Constantine was the one who converted Helen and, therefore, all of her good

[443] Leslie Brubaker, (1997), 57.

[444] Woods (1998), 72-73 has argued that there is a reluctance to connect Fausta and Crispus's execution as part of a larger sexual affair between the two. For example, he claims Barnes argues that Fausta and Crispus were never together geographically, and therefore a relationship was not possible. See Barnes, (1981), 220; Barnes also argues that in other such cases Constantine showed a policy of exile not execution.

[445] See Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 1.17; Sozomen *HE* 2.2.

works and piety are a reflection of Constantine's own virtues and influence. Eusebius states,

> Thus passed away the Emperor's mother, one worthy of unfading memory both for her own Godloving deeds and for those of the extraordinary and astonishing offspring which arose from her. (2) He deserves to be blessed, all else apart, for his piety to the one who bore him. So far had he made her Godfearing, though she had not been such before, that she seemed to him to have been a disciple of the common Saviour from the first; and so far had he honoured her with imperial rank that she was acclaimed in all nations and by the military ranks as Augusta Imperatrix, and her portrait was stamped on gold coinage. (3) He even remitted to her authority over imperial treasuries, to use them at will and to manage them at her discretion, in whatever way she might wish and however she might judge best in each case, her son having accorded her distinction and eminence in these matters too. It was therefore right that while recording his memory we should also record those things wherein, by honouring his mother for her supreme piety, he satisfied the divine principles which impose the duty of honouring parents. [446]

Here, Eusebius claims that prior to Constantine, Helena had not been "Godfearing." Eusebius states that Constantine should be blessed for the piety he bestowed on his mother, namely her conversion. Eusebius's passage suggests that Constantine's conversion of Helena followed all her subsequent honors and role as an augusta, which again is credited to Constantine. Therefore, Constantine is the real authority behind Helena's great piety.

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[446] Ὧδε μὲν οὖν ἡ βασιλέως ἐτελειοῦτο μήτηρ, ἀξία γε μνήμης ἀλήστου τῶν τε αὐτῆς εἵνεκα θεοφιλῶν πράξεων τοῦ τ' ἐξ αὐτῆς φύντος ὑπερφυοῦς καὶ παραδόξου φυτοῦ, ὃν πρὸς τοῖς ἅπασι καὶ τῆς εἰς τὴν γειναμένην ὁσίας μακαρίζειν ἄξιον, οὕτω μὲν αὐτὴν θεοσεβῆ καταστήσαντα οὐκ οὖσαν πρότερον, ὡς αὐτῷ δοκεῖν ἐκ πρώτης τῷ κοινῷ σωτῆρι μεμαθητεῦσθαι, οὕτω δὲ ἀξιώματι βασιλικῷ τετιμηκότα, ὡς ἐν ἅπασιν ἔθνεσι παρ' αὐτοῖς τε τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς τάγμασιν αὐγούσταν βασιλίδα ἀναγορεύεσθαι, χρυσοῖς τε νομίσμασι καὶ τὴν αὐτῆς ἐκτυποῦσθαι εἰκόνα. ἤδη δὲ καὶ βασιλικῶν θησαυρῶν παρεῖχε τὴν ἐξουσίαν, ὡς χρῆσθαι κατὰ προαίρεσιν καὶ διοικεῖν κατὰ γνώμην, ὅπως ἂν ἐθέλοι καὶ ὡς ἂν εὖ ἔχειν αὐτῇ νομίζοιτο ἕκαστα, τοῦ παιδὸς αὐτὴν κἀν τούτοις διαπρεπῆ καὶ ἀξιοζήλωτον πεποιημένου. διὸ τῶν εἰς αὐτοῦ μνήμην ἀναφερομένων καὶ ταῦτ' εἰκότως ἡμῖν ἀνείληπται, ἃ δι' εὐσεβείας ὑπερβολὴν μητέρα τιμῶν θεσμοὺς ἀπεπλήρου θείους ἀμφὶ γονέων τιμῆς τὰ πρέποντα διαταττομένους. See Eusebius *Vita Constantini*, III.47, ed. F. Winkelmann (1975). For the see translations *Eusebius Life of Constantine*, 3.47 trans. by, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (1999).

After her conversion, Eusebius lists all of Helena's honors and details her role as an empress. However, the honors that Eusebius chronicles to emphasize Helena's importance and piety are not related to her pilgrimage or charity, which Eusebius earlier ascribed to her character. Rather, Helena's piety allowed her to have authority, such as imperial rank and power over the treasury, which she appropriately used for the benefit of the Church.[447] Eusebius even states that Constantine honored his mother by minting coins with her image. According to Drijvers, emperors minting coins honoring mothers or wives was not uncommon, but the fact that Eusebius comments on it suggests that there was something special about his actions.[448] Eusebius focuses this passage in the beginning and at the end on the idea that Helena is worthy of being remembered. By mentioning the coins Eusebius describes an actual artefact that proves Helena's memory will endure and supports his own argument.

Woods also shows that the use of Helena's image on coins continued after her death, as well as Constantine's death in 337, as a way to create dynastic links during the post-Constantine successions.[449] Along with this, many of the coins minted with Helena's image also had a cross included with the image and reflected the new iconography under Constantine.[450] The inclusion of such iconography was meant to

[447] See Eusebius's account of Helena and all of her good works in *Vita Constantini*, III.25-47; this is one of the fullest accounts of Helena's life and Cameron and Hall suggest that Eusebius not only would have been a contemporary source, but he also may have had first-hand knowledge of Helena. See the introduction to Eusebius *Life of Constantine*, 3.47 trans. by, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (1999).

[448] See Jan Willem Drijvers (1992), 39n2.

[449] See David Woods (2011), 192-195; Woods also discusses the use of Theodora on coins for a similar reason as Helena.

[450] Kriszta Kotsis, "Defining Female Authority in Eighth-Century Byzantium: The Numismatic Images of the Empress Irene (797–802)" in *JLA* (2012), 185-215.

depict Helena as the devout mother. This image was then reinforced in Eusebius's descriptions of Helena's actions as a pious Christian woman. Although this depiction of Helena's piety was forefront in Eusebius, it was also linked to the role as an empress and the power of the imperial court. The imagery on coins was meant to display imperial power and Eusebius does not overlook this. Therefore, Eusebius's mention of the coins furthers the argument that his depiction of Helena was meant to enhance Constantine's imperial authority and demonstrate his that his imperial authority was connected to his Christian piety.[451]

This is further supported in Eusebius's earlier description of Helena during her pilgrimage to Jerusalem. According to Eusebius,

> As she visited the whole east in the magnificence of imperial authority, she showered countless gifts upon the citizen bodies of' every city, and privately to each of' those who approached her and she made countless distributions also to the ranks of the soldiery with magnificent hand. She made innumerable gifts to the unclothed and unsupported poor, to some making gifts of money, to others abundantly supplying what was needed to cover the body. Others she set free from prison and from mines where they laboured in harsh conditions, she released the victims of fraud, and yet others she recalled from exile.[452]

This passage not only emphasizes the fact the Helena exuded the power of Constantine's imperial court wherever she went, it also shows that her pilgrimage in the east, likely

[451] Leslie Brubaker, (1997), 57 and Drijvers (1992), 39-54 for more on the Helena coins and the sources that mention the coins. Brubaker, in particular, believes that Eusebius mentions them because it was unique and worth note.

[452] Τὴν γάρ τοι σύμπασαν ἑῴαν μεγαλοπρεπείᾳ βασιλικῆς ἐξουσίας ἐμπεριελθοῦσα, μυρία μὲν ἀθρόως τοῖς κατὰ πόλιν ἐδωρεῖτο δήμοις ἰδίᾳ τε τῶν προσιόντων ἑκάστῳ, μυρία δὲ καὶ τοῖς στρατιωτικοῖς τάγμασι δεξιᾷ μεγαλοπρεπεῖ διένεμε, πλεῖστά θ' ὅσα πένησι γυμνοῖς καὶ ἀπεριστάτοις ἐδίδου, τοῖς μὲν χρημάτων δόσεις ποιουμένη, τοῖς δὲ τὰ πρὸς τὴν τοῦ σώματος σκέπην δαψιλῶς ἐπαρκοῦσα, ἑτέρους ἀπήλλαττε δεσμῶν μετάλλων τε κακοπαθείᾳ ταλαιπωρουμένους, ἠλευθέρου τε πλεονεκτουμένους, καὶ πάλιν ἄλλους ἐξορίας ἀνεκαλεῖτο. See Eusebius *Vita Constantini* III.44, ed. F. Winkelmann (1975). For the translations see *Eusebius Life of Constantine*, 3.44 trans. by, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (1999).

happening around 327, had similar elements to an imperial triumph.[453] For example, Helena made distributions to the soldiers. This type of gift giving and show of imperial magnanimity was a hallmark of Roman triumphs and shows of strength by the emperor.[454] The fact that Helena is described in such a role demonstrates her importance as a symbol of imperial power. It also depicts a type of triumphal authority that was not connected to the conflicts and power struggles that had plagued Constantine's early reign.[455]

Directly after this passage, Eusebius also describes Helena as traveling among the common "throng" and dressed in modest and dignified clothing. He says,

> ἦν γοῦν ὁρᾶν τὴν θαυμασίαν ἐν σεμνῇ καὶ εὐσταλεῖ περιβολῇ τῷ πλήθει **συναγελαζομένην** τήν τε πρὸς τὸ θεῖον εὐλάβειαν διὰ πάσης θεοφιλοῦς πράξεως **ἐπιδεικνυμένην**
>
> One might see the wonderful woman in dignified and modest attire joining the throng and manifesting reverence towards the divinity by every kind of practice dear to God.[456]

Based on this description, Julia Hillner has suggested that this Eusebius depicted a new relationship in late antiquity between empress walking and walking among crowds. She

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[453] Drijvers (1992), 65-69, notes that there was clear political motivations to Helena's acts of charity and highlights the timeline of her pilgrimage as occurring a year after Crispus's and Fausta's alleged executions.

[454] Mary Beard (2009), 35-40 shows how distributions, gifts, and big displays of wealth were deeply imbedded in Roman processions and triumphs and shows the example of Pompey and his lavish displays.

[455] Constantine came to power after struggles with Maxentius, Maximian, and Licinius. It was not until 324 that Licinius was defeated. The next year, both Fausta and Crispus died, perhaps from execution under an inauspicious scandal. After that, Helena and her pilgrimage and role as an imperial woman began in full force. For a full study on Constantine's reign see, Noel Lenski "Reign of Constantine," in *Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine* (2006), 59-90; See also Charles Matson Odahl (2004) *Constatnine and the Christian Empire* and Lenski *Constantine and the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics* (2016).

[456] See Eusebius *Vita Constantini*, III.45, ed. F. Winkelmann (1975). For the translations see *Eusebius Life of Constantine*, 3.45 trans. by, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (1999).

further suggests that this description resonates similar descriptions of later fourth century imperial women, like the Empress Eudoxia and Serena (Arcadius's and Honorius's adoptive sister), who were also shown walking among the crowds.[457] I agree with Julia Hillner's argument that Eusebius's description of Helena suggests a new portrait and role for fourth century imperial women. However, Helena's actions, in this passage, go beyond her joining or walking among the crowd.

As Hillner notes, the visibility of an Empress was limited and there are not many earlier depictions of imperial woman "among the throng," let alone on foot. Suetonius describes Messalina appearing with Claudius in a triumph and describes Nero and Agrippina carried in a litter together.[458] Herodian claimed Julia Domna called a meeting with all the imperial advisors in an effort to reconcile Geta and Caracalla after Septimius Severus had died. Similarly, Herodian also claims that Soaemias, Elagabalus's mother, was present with Elagabalus when he was assassinated in the Praetorian Camp.[459] Although these cases depict the empress in public settings, the imperial court, emperor and empress included, remain removed from the "general throng." This shows, with the exception of elite advisors and praetorians, as well as instances where imperial women went with the emperor on campaign, there are few public appearances of empresses, and almost none with the empress as a lone figure. One notable instance is Cassius Dio

[457] Julia Hillner is currently documenting her writing process for her forthcoming book on Helena on a dedicated website. This argument comes from an informal essay on this particular passage of Eusebius posted on her website. See Hillner, "Empress of Foot," www.writinghelena.wordpress.com, July 10, 2020.

[458] See Suetonius *Life of Claudius* 17.1-3 trans. by J.C. Rolfe LCL Edition 1914.

[459] See Herodian *Roman History* 4.3.8-9 and 5.8.3-9, trans. by Edward C. Echols, *Herodian of Antioch's History of the Roman Empire* (1961).

description of Plotina during Trajan's succession as emperor. According to Cassius Dio, when Plotina first entered the palace, she turned around and faced the crowd and assured them, "I enter here such a woman as I would fain be when I depart."[460] Here, not only is an empress making a public appearance, but she also addresses the crowd and assures the crowd of her good character. Yet, even here Plotina is away from the crowd and not seen walking with them the way Helena is depicted.

However, Helena is described as doing more than walking among the crowds. The term Eusebius uses, *συναγελαζομένην*, does not exactly mean walking. Literally translated, *συναγελαζομένην*, means "to herd together," as in livestock herds. In fact, that is how Polybius uses the term, in order to compare the necessity of human society to animals forming herds.[461] It is also different from how Eusebius describes the emperor walking. For instance, Eusebius describes Constantine as *διέβαινε*, "walking," or more accurately, "striding forth" into the Council of Nicaea.[462] Accordingly, Cameron and Hall translate *συναγελαζομένην* as "joining," not walking, which is closer to the implied use in Polybius. *Συναγελαζομένην* is a gathering together, and has a communal sense, which the idea of walking lacks.

Furthermore, Eusebius uses this herding together as the setting for Helena's real action, the "*ἐπιδεικνυμένην*." Here, Cameron and Hall translate *ἐπιδεικνυμένην* as "manifesting," but it also means "showing off," and "display." In some cases, this term

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[460] Cassius Dio *Roman History* 63.5.5 trans. by Earnest Cary. LCL Edition 1927.

[461] See Polybius *Histories* 6.5.7. See also the LSJ entry for *συναγελάζομαι*.

[462] In this case, Eusebius uses the term, *διέβαινε*, meaning to cross or stride. See Eusebius *Vita Constantini* 3.10. There is also the term *περιπατέω*, which just translates as "to walk." This is commonly seen in the Gospels referring to Jesus, walking in the desert. See Matthew 4:18 for an example. Also refer to the LSJ entry for *περιπατέω*.

was used to suggest a "parading" forth of the verb's object.[463] Therefore, what Eusebius's passage really depicts is the way in which Helena exhibited moral and Christian behavior to the people. She displayed it, even paraded before the crowds. She was not walking among the crowd, so much as the central figure, leading the crowd and performing for the crowd. This follows with Eusebius description of Helena in language that emphasizes the authority of the imperial court. Here, despite her modest appearance, she is still parading forth her virtues for the benefit of the throng watching her. She joins the crowd in order to display "reverence towards the divinity by every kind of practice dear to God."[464] Additionally, the practices dear to God are easily connected to Helena's earlier actions, namely, that describe Helena with "magnificence of imperial authority, she showered countless gifts upon the citizen bodies of every city."[465] Helena is depicted "herding with" or "herding together" all the cities of the east using the magnificence of imperial authority.

As I stated at the beginning of this section, the purpose of Eusebius's descriptions of Helena was to enhance the image of the Emperor Constantine. In these descriptions, Helena is shown as the bearer of imperial magnificence, as well as bringing the public an image of Christian behavior. All of Helena's actions are a result of and thanks to

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[463] Refer to the LSJ entry for "ἐπιδείκνυμι, ἐπιδείκνυμαι." The LSJ uses the example of Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.2.14, when Cyrus the Younger *ἐπιδεῖξαι* – "exhibited" or "paraded" his army before the Cilician Queen per her request.

[464] See the passage above and note 20. See Eusebius *Vita Constantini*, III.45, ed. F. Winkelmann (1975). For the translations see *Eusebius Life of Constantine*, 3.45 trans. by, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (1999).

[465] See passage above and note 16. See Eusebius *Vita Constantini* III.44, ed. F. Winkelmann (1975). For the translations see *Eusebius Life of Constantine*, 3.44 trans. by, Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall (1999).

Constantine. As Eusebius makes clear, Helena's conversion to Christianity was because of Constantine's influence. Therefore, Helena's exhibition of Christian behavior before the public was the result of Constantine's influence. Since Constantine gave Helena the control of the treasury, all of the gifts she gave out were really thank to him. This portrait of a "good," devout empress follows similar tropes that I discussed in the introduction. Helena is set up to enhance the image of the Emperor.

3.4 The Bishop Takes the Queen
Ambrose's Reconstruction of Helena's Image

By the late fourth century, Eusebius's image of Helena shifted and became more focused on the empress as the main champion of Christianity. The Emperor Constantine took a backseat to his mother's importance and role as a leader in Christianity. Additionally, the late fourth century Helena did not just travel to the east bringing imperial gifts and pomp. Instead, this Helena made a full pilgrimage to Jerusalem where she unearthed the true cross. The development of this story took hold of Helena's character and transformed her from empress to saint.

There is some controversy over the origination of the story among scholars. Scholars, such as Willem Drijvers and H.A. Drake, have concluded that because the later sources, like Ambrose, are the only ones to claim that Helena was instrumental in finding the true cross, it likely was a literary invention.[466] Although, Drake and Drijvers make sound arguments that the true cross was found during Constantine's reign, their rejection of Helena's involvement illustrates inconsistencies in how modern scholars approach the

[466] See Drijvers (1992), 79-146; Drijivers (2011), 125-174 for his research and argument on the true cross myth, as well as his later assessment of the myth. See H.A. Drake (1985), 1-22 for his argument.

textual source material. My purpose, here, is not to prove that Helena found the true cross or make any argument about when, or if, it was found. Rather, I will show that Drijvers's analysis is paradoxical with his conclusions. According to Drijvers, "It is not known exactly how and when the Cross, or pieces of wood alleged to be the Cross, was found in Jerusalem, but Helena had nothing to do with it, as most modern authors ascertain."[467] It is amazing that scholars can admit that there is no evidence to conclusively confirm how the cross, was found, but can conclusively confirm that it was not found by Helena. Nevertheless, Drijvers argues that the cross must have been found during Constantine's reign, and around the time when Helena was in Jerusalem dedicating the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. One of his main sources for this argument is a letter Cyril, Bishop of Jerusalem, wrote to Constantius II, claiming the cross was found during Constantine's reign.[468] Drijvers gives this later letter precedence over Eusebius, merely because Eusebius fails to mention the discovery of the cross.

However, Drijvers goes to great lengths to prove Eusebius purposefully does not mention the discovery of the cross being found during Constantine's reign, in order to validate the reliability of Cyril's later letter. He provides several arguments why Eusebius must have omitted the story, including that he was attempting to curb the power and influence of a rival bishop in Jerusalem. In a later work, he also concedes that Cyril wanted to grow his own influence and this story was a useful tool, and yet it is unclear

[467] Drijvers (2004), 173.

[468] Drijvers (2004) notes this in several places in his book, but notably his book, *Cyril of Jerusalem: Bishop of the City* and his article, "Helena Augusta, the Cross the Myth: Some New Reflections" (2011), 145-150.

why his story is more believable than Eusebius's silence.[469] As Drijvers goes on to show, there is more evidence that supports the Cyril over Eusebius. For example, he discusses several, albeit inconclusive, inscriptions from 351 and later that suggest the discovery of the cross in Constantine's reign. Additionally, he also claims that later sources, such as Jerome, Socrates of Scholasticus, and Sozomen, not only support the discovery of the cross in Constantine's reign, but also serve as sources for Cyril of Jerusalem's life. He does provide a caveat that these sources are imperfect, but does not explain why they are more legitimate as sources for Cyril than for Helena. This type of selective analysis in, and among, the source material, which elevates analyses of male agency over female agency, is a problem in scholarship. Furthermore, it also reflects a a modern problem in the approach to gender in history. Obviously, Ambrose, Socrates Scholasticus, and others had no problem ascribing such agency to Helena. Scholars have easily dismissed Helena's involvement, but not the story itself, even though she was supposedly present at the time the cross was discovered. Again, I am not making an argument about the historicity of the discovery of the true cross. Instead, I am suggesting scholars too easily dismiss the parts of textual sources that show female agency, while at the same time

[469] This is an especially confusing argument given the fact that Drijvers claims that Eusebius is the best source for the construction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. He does not explain how including such an important site in Eusebius's discussion would have increased the importance of the Bishop of Jerusalem less than the inclusion of the cross. In his later article, he back tracks this argument a little, claiming Eusebius did not willfully exclude the discovery of the cross; rather, he claims that Eusebius was unaware of it. But, in the article he doubles down on the argument that Helena had nothing to do with it, despite the fact that it happened during Constantine's reign. He does not adequately explain why it was not better known to Eusebius, given the importance of the discovery, or why Helena could not have been involved, given the fact that she was involved in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. See Drijvers (1992), 79-146; Drijivers (2011), 125-174.

cherry-picking those parts of the sources as evidence for the historicity of events and male agency that fits our understanding of gender.

The earliest version of the true cross story featuring Helena is found in Ambrose's funeral panegyric for Theodosius I. His account is fairly long, considering it is included in Theodosius's funeral oration, and it dominates the last third of the speech.[470] According to Drijvers, the story actually originated in the east and was first described by Cyril of Jerusalem's nephew, Gelasius of Caesarea and preserved in Rufinus's history.[471] However, as Andriani Georgiou has shown, there is some doubt to Rufinus's actual use of Gelasius, and, even if Rufinus used Gelasius, his version still postdates Ambrose's story by a few years, which means that Ambrose account would not have been dependent on the Rufinus/Gelasius story.[472] Regardless of which version of Helena finding the cross is first, Ambrose's story is unique for two reasons. The first reason is Helena, upon discovering the three crosses in Golgotha, recognized which one was the true cross by the attached *titulus*.[473] In the later accounts, Helena determines the true cross through miraculous signs. The second reason Ambrose's account is unique is that it is included in the funeral oration for Theodosius I. The other account of Helena come from the late fourth to fifth century histories. The one exception is Paulinus of Nola's letter, but his account appears to be a combination of the story found in Ambrose and a variation of the

[470] See Ambrose *Oration on the Death of Theodosius* 40-50 in Liebeschuetz (2005).
[471] Drijvers (2011), 151.
[472] Andriani Georgiou (2013), 601-603.
[473] Ambrose's story follows the Gospel accounts where Jesus was crucified with two thieves. Additionally, the Gospel accounts report that the Roman soldiers mockingly hung a sign on Jesus's cross that read: "This is Jesus, King of the Jews." See Matthew 27:36-38.

version found in Rufinus.[474] In contrast, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, and Theodoret all have a similar story as Rufinus's version of Helena's discovery of the cross.[475]

The fact that Ambrose's story is different than Rufinus's further suggests that Ambrose was not working from a shared, earlier source, such as Gelasius, as has been suggested for Rufinus's account. Instead, given the context of the source and its unique features, Ambrose's version of the story should be understood as separate from the traditional corpus of work surrounding the Helena legend. Moreover, Ambrose's version should be understood in the context of the funeral oration, as well as Ambrose's larger body of work in which the funeral oration is included.

Ambrose compiled, edited, and published his own letter collections shortly after the death of Theodosius in 395 and before his own death in 397.[476] Book ten of his collection includes Ambrose's letters to, and about his dealings with, the emperors, Gratian, Valentinian II, and Theodosius I. Liebeschuetz organizes book ten into six sections. The first section deals with two letters, both are to other bishops and involve issues regarding religious conflicts the other bishops were experiencing in their sees. The second group contains three documents, one of which is a letter from Symmachus, and all involve the controversy over the removal of the Altar of Victory from the senate chamber. These letter groups are then interrupted with a later letter to Theodosius in 388 concerning the issue of the destruction of a synagogue. The three letters concerning

[474] Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula* 31 (CSEL 29.2:267–75; trans. by Patrick Walsh, *Letters of St Paulinus of Nola, Ancient Christian Writers* 36 (1967).

[475] Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 21:475–78; trans. Amidon; Socrates Scholasticus *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.17 NPNF vol.2; Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.2 NPNF vol.2; Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.17 Aeterna Press.

[476] See Liebeschuetz (2005), 27-48.

Ambrose's conflict with Justina follows this letter and the funeral oration for Theodosius I comes immediately after this group. Book ten concludes with another letter Ambrose wrote to his sister. This one was about the discovery of relics of martyrs during Ambrose's consecration of a basilica in Milan.[477]

The organization of book ten illustrates Ambrose's ideal image of a bishop and the bishop's relationship with the imperial court and local elite. It also promotes his own accomplishments in order to prove how well he fit this ideal image. Therefore, the funeral oration for Theodosius is not only out of place, because it does not focus on the role of the bishop or on Theodosius's relationship with Ambrose. All the other inclusions in this book are either letters, or sermons posing as letters. The placement of the funeral oration also poses a conundrum. Instead of being grouped with other communications with Theodosius, it is included right after Ambrose's letters concerning Justina and the basilica conflict. Furthermore, Liebeschuetz suggests, the portion of the oration that concerns Helena appears to be a later addition to the oration and was not likely included in the original speech.[478] I argue that Ambrose's inclusion and placement of this speech is essential to how Ambrose depicts his conflict with Justina. The fact that Ambrose does not include his funeral oration for Valentinian II in his collection further supports this argument.

Unlike funeral oration for Theodosius, the oration for Valentinian II followed a more traditional outline for Christian funeral orations.[479] Additionally, it is the only place

[477] See Ambrose *Epistual* 77 in Liebeschuetz (2005), 204-212.
[478] Liebeschuetz (2005), 174-177.
[479] Liebeschuetz (2005), 361.

where Ambrose mentions Justina by name and commends her actions as an empress. It is unsurprising that Ambrose commends Justina in the funeral oration, considering he is complimenting how she handed over responsibility of Valentinian II's care to Ambrose.[480] Yet, this cooperative picture of Justina and Ambrose's relationship did not fit the carefully crafted image of the persecuted holy man that Ambrose developed in his letter to his sister, which I discussed in chapter 1.[481] Furthermore, I have already shown that Ambrose was careful to assert that he was not a usurper, an allegation that he clearly feared. Therefore, it makes sense that Ambrose would downplay the funeral oration of Valentinian. I suggest that including the funeral oration of Theodosius, right after the conflict with Justina, as well as including his letter to Theodosius just before this letter group highlights the importance of Theodosius over Valentinian and downplays the conflict Ambrose had with an imperial court, while still maintaining his image as a righteous, persecuted holy man.

The story of Helen only reinforces this argument. As I previously stated, Ambrose's story has several unique features that not only transformed the image of Helena, but also served as a model of a good empress in which to juxtapose the empress Justina. The first feature of Ambrose's story is Helena's comparison to Mary. According to Ambrose,

> vertit. visitata est Maria ut Evam decorem, liberaret; visitata est Helena ut imperators redimerentur. misit itaque filio suo Constantino diadema gemmis insignitum, quas pretiosior, ferro innexas crucis, redemtionis divine gemma connecteret. misit et fraenum. utroque usus est

[480] In *de obitu Valentiniani* Ambrose claims Justina placed Valentinian directly in his care. See my discussion in 2.7.

[481] Ambrose associated Justina with Jezebel, which would make it difficult to explain why she was also asking him for help, as he describes in the funeral oration for Valentinian II. See Chapter 1.8.

> Constantinus et fidem transmisit ad posteros reges. principium itaque credentium imperatorum, sanctum est quod super fraenum; ex illo fides ut persecutio cessaret, devotio succederet.
>
> Mary was visited to set Eve free; Helena was visited so that emperors should be redeemed. That is why she sent to her son Constantine a diadem brilliant with jewels, which were embedded in the more precious jewel of divine redemption bound in the iron of the cross; that is why she also sent the bridle. Constantine used both, and passed on the faith to subsequent rulers. Thus the holy object on the bridle is the foundation of the belief of emperors. From this came faith, in order that persecution should end in true religion take its place.[482]

Here, Ambrose sets Mary up in contrast with Eve, and then claims Helena is a new Mary. This is not a comparison made in Rufinus, Socrates Scholasticus, Sozomen, or Theodoret.[483] Ambrose uses this parallel construction in order to symbolize Helena as the redeemer of emperors, namely, Constantine, and through this redemption the Empire was turned toward Christianity; in contrast, the world turned away from God because of Eve's seduction. However, Ambrose does not complete his parallel construction. If Helena is the new Mary, the question is, who is the new Eve? But, Ambrose, in the letter included immediately before this funeral oration, made a comparison between Justina and Eve. As I showed in Chapter 1, Ambrose makes it clear that Justina acts as an Eve figure and tempts Valentinian II and her followers away from Nicene Christianity.[484] In fact, the only other time Ambrose mentions Eve in this letter collection is in reference to his conflict with Justina. Therefore, analyzing Ambrose's depiction of Helena in the context of his letter collection shows how Ambrose uses Helena to contrast with Justina.

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[482] Ambrose *Funeral Oration for Theodosius*, 48 trans by, Liebeschuetz, (2005), 200.

[483] In fact, Sozomen plays down the role of Helena, whereas Socrates and Rufinus focus more on the relics and how the true cross was found. See Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 1.17; Sozomen *HE* 2.2. for their versions of the "true cross" story.

[484] See my discussion in Chapter 1.8.

In the other versions of this story, from Rufinus to Theodoret, Helena received divine intervention and there was a miracle associated with discovering the true cross. For example, Socrates Scholasticus's story not only contains a miracle, but it is attributed to Marcarius, the bishop of Jerusalem. According to Socrates's version,

> Since, however, it was doubtful which was the cross they were in search of, the emperor's mother was not a little distressed; but from this trouble the bishop of Jerusalem, Macarius, shortly relieved her. And he solved the doubt by faith, for he sought a sign from God and obtained it. The sign was this: a certain woman of the neighborhood, who had been long afflicted with disease, was now just at the point of death; the bishop therefore arranged it so that each of the crosses should be brought to the dying woman, believing that she would be healed on touching the precious cross. Nor was he disappointed in his expectation: for the two crosses having been applied which were not the Lord's, the woman still continued in a dying state; but when the third, which was the true cross, touched her, she was immediately healed, and recovered her former strength. In this manner then was the genuine cross discovered.[485]

Although Helena plays a role in initially discovering the cross, it is the bishop that ultimately determines which is the true cross. Rufinus, Theodoret and Sozomen's accounts all follow this pattern, which downplays Helena's role and increases the importance of the bishop. It is surprising that Ambrose, given his predilection for showing the importance of the bishop, did not capitalize on this version of the story. Yet,

[485] Ἐπεὶ δὲ ἀμφίβολος ἦν ὁ σταυρὸς ὁ ζητούμενος, οὐχ ἡ τυχοῦσα λύπη κατεῖχε τὴν τοῦ βασιλέως μητέρα. Οὐκ εἰς μακρὰν δὲ παύει τὰ τῆς λύπης ὁ τῶν Ἱεροσολύμων ἐπίσκοπος, ᾧ ὄνομα ἦν Μακάριος: λύει δὲ πίστει τὸ ἀμφίβολον: σημεῖον γὰρ ᾔτει παρὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ, καὶ ἐλάμβανε. Τὸ δὲ σημεῖον ἦν τοιοῦτο: γυνή τις τῶν ἐγχωρίων, νόσῳ χρονίᾳ ληφθεῖσα, πρὸς αὐτῷ λοιπὸν τῷ θανάτῳ ἐγένετο. Προσάγεσθαι οὖν τῇ ἀποθνησκούσῃ τῶν σταυρῶν ἕκαστον ὁ ἐπίσκοπος παρεσκεύασε, πιστεύσας ἀναρρωσθῆναι τὴν γυναῖκα ἁψαμένην τοῦ τιμίου σταυροῦ: καὶ τῆς ἐλπίδος οὐκ ἥμαρτε: προσενεχθέντων γὰρ τῶν μὴ κυρίων δύο σταυρῶν, ἔμενεν οὐδὲν ἧττον ἡ γυνὴ ἀποθνήσκουσα. Ὡς δὲ ὁ τρίτος ὁ γνήσιος προσηνέχθη, ἡ ἀποθνήσκουσα εὐθὺς ἀνερρώσθη, καὶ ἐν τοῖς ὑγιαίνουσιν ἦν. Τοῦτον μὲν οὖν τὸν τρόπον τὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ ξύλον ηὕρηται. Socrates Scholasticus 1.17 trans. by, Philip Schaff. NPNF Vol. 2.

this once again reflects Ambrose's originality from Rufinus and a potential earlier eastern source.

However, there is another explanation along with Ambrose's originality that also explains why he left out the mention of Macarius. Since Helena is set up as a new Christian role model for the emperors, and Justina acts as a new Eve, threatening all of Helena's work, it is necessary to find a new guide for the emperors, especially given that Ambrose included this story with the loss of Theodosius. One of the main themes in Ambrose's funeral oration is the fact that Arcadius and Honorius must now shoulder the responsibility of the ruling.[486] In the funeral oration, Ambrose also makes the claim that the first people Theodosius meets in death are Constantine and Gratian. Ambrose had always asserted that Gratian put himself in Ambrose's spiritual care. In this way, Ambrose alludes to himself as a spiritual mentor to the imperial court and one who had overseen a worthy emperor, like Gratian. It goes without saying that there is no mention of Valentinian II.

Lastly, right after the funeral oration, Ambrose ends book ten of his letter collection with another letter to his sister that documents his discovery of martyr relics in the basilica of Milan. According to Ambrose's letter, he found these relics because of divine intervention, and he found them, conveniently, during his conflict with Justina.[487] I argue Ambrose's organization of Theodosius funeral oration between two letters to Marcellina, about the basilica in Milan, shows that Ambrose uses the funeral oration to

[486] Ambrose addresses this at the beginning and the end of the funeral oration. Ambrose *Funeral Oration for Theodosius*, trans by, Liebeschuetz, (2005).

[487] See Ambrose *Epistula* 77.3-4 in Liebeschuetz (2005), 205.

interrupt the narrative of his conflict of Justina. Furthermore, the fact that Ambrose finds relics connects him to the figure of Helena. Accordingly, if Helena as the emperor's mother, acts as Constantine's spiritual guide, then Ambrose is a new redeemer. This also explains why Ambrose would not want to have included the figure of Macarius, because he was creating a connection between himself and Helena. Essentially, Ambrose's message is that the role of imperial upbringing and guidance has transitioned from mother to the bishop. This goes back to the issues Ambrose had with Justina's power and influence over Valentinian and reflects Ambrose's concern that his conflict with Justina was a stain on his career. With this organization he not only creates a new depiction of a good mother and empress, but then uses it to compare with Justina to show that she was a bad mother and empress. At the same time, Ambrose maintains his own self portrait as a holy man and sends a message to future emperors that bishops are the new spiritual leader, replacing Helena, the symbolic mother/empress figure. This was an especially powerful message in the context of young emperors, like Honorius and Arcadius, who also had strong imperial women in their courts.[488]

The last unique feature of Ambrose's version of Helena is the way in which Helena determines the true cross from the crosses of the thieves. According to Ambrose, Helena discerned the true cross through logic and biblical study. He claims that when Helena realized all three crosses could be the true cross, she read the Gospel passages, which led her to look for the *titulus*, a sign that read "*Jesus of Nazareth*, *King of the*

[488] Eudoxia, Arcadius's wife is discussed below. Likewise, Honorius's and Arcadius's half-sister, Galla Placidia will also be discussed later in this chapter. I will show how these women played an important role in the imperial court.

Jews."[489] Ambrose states that it was through this reasoning that Helena was able to discern the true cross. Not only does Ambrose credit Helena with finding the cross, but he also credits her with having and consulting with scripture. This was quite an accomplishment considering Helena came from humble origins. Ambrose claims that Helena was an inn-keeper, the term he uses is, *stabularia*, which is the feminized version of the term used for the inn-keeper who did not have room for Mary and Joseph during the birth of Jesus. However, *stabularia*, can also have negative connotations and often suggests either promiscuity or prostitution.[490] Ambrose attempts to negate this image through biblical connections, it is clear that he believes there is something notorious in Helena's background that he feels compelled to address.

Ambrose's compulsion to protect the image of Helena is the result of a competing late fourth century narrative that sought to undermine the memory of Constantine. According to Lenski, the competing narratives began with Julian, who delighted in defaming his Christian relatives. However, these narratives increased under late fourth century historians, like Eutropius and Eunapius. Lenski notes that Eutropius was likely using the earlier *Kaisergeschichte*, a lost fourth century source; similarly, Eunapius's late fourth century account was also lost, but preserved in Zosimus's history.[491]

These other accounts reveal a late fourth century tradition that capitalized on negative depictions of Constantine and sought to present a different picture of the Christian emperor. Ambrose was responding to this opposing tradition with his use of

[489] See Ambrose *Epistula* 77.45 in Liebeschuetz (2005), 199.
[490] See Ambrose *Epistula* 77.42 in Liebeschuetz (2005), 199n1. See also Drijvers (1992), 15 and Georgiou (2013), 604.
[491] See Lenski (2016), 1-3.

stabularia, but he was also using the image of Helena to highlight Justina's deficiencies as a Christian empress. In contrast, the negative images of Constantine used his relationship with imperial women to highlight the emperor's perfidy and hypocrisy as a Christian emperor. These accounts had success. Even Jerome's *Chronicon*, which acted as a continuation to Eusebius's history scorned Constantine for his Arian baptism, his concubine mother, and the murder of his son and wife.[492]

The focus on Helena and Fausta are meant to discredit the image of Constantine as a noble, Christian emperor. I already have discussed the sources' use of imperial women in this way. Accordingly, the slur of concubine against Helena is not that shocking. It is more shocking that his treatment of his wife is a main attack against his character. As I will show below, the image of Fausta coupled with Helena not only discredits Constantine's image, but also Helena's image. As Helena's image as an influential Christian became more important in the late fourth century, so too was the demand to discredit her character. Thus, I will show that the focus on Helena and Fausta in the late fourth century was a part of the growing visibility and influence of imperial women, which was connected to Justina's legacy.

3.5 Awash in Scandal: The Strange Execution to Fausta and its Connection to Helena

The other late sources that include Helena's discovery of the cross do not discuss Helena's background, or early life. The only sources that discuss Helena being a consort, or prostitute, are the late fourth through sixth century sources that that tend to be critical

[492] See Jerome *Chron*. 306-328; see also Lenski (2016), 2n12.

of Christianity, or Constantine's Arian leaning, as Jerome proves. The earliest extant source that negatively depicts Helena was the anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus*, which was written around 395.[493] This was the same year that Theodosius died and Ambrose gave his funeral oration. The fact that the *Epitome de Caesaribus* does not present Constantine as the great, Christian emperor has led to some arguments about the source's author and the intent of the work.[494] My focus here is the fac that the *Epitome* presents a new story about Helena and Fausta that contrasts completely with the other sources I have already discussed. If the *Epitome*'s included a story of Helena already in circulation around 395, it makes sense that Ambrose would include an addition to his funeral oration that acknowledged some of the unsavory claims about her background, but overriding them with her holiness.

As shown, by the late fourth century, Constantine and Helena had become symbols of a strong Christian Empire. Eusebius's account asserts this message and it was reinforced through inscriptions and coin minting. In addition to her connection to the imperial dynasty through coins, Helena also had a city named after her and she patronized the building of two bathhouses.[495] According to Drijvers, these bathhouses, located in Rome, suggest that Helena likely made Rome her residence, but it also attests to the overall presence and image that the empress had during Constantine's reign.[496] Although Eusebius does not specifically mention the baths, the inscriptions and

[493] See Jean-Luc Gauville (2005), 12-15 for research on the dating of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.
[494] See Lenski (2017), 27-29 for the *Epitome de Caesaribus*'s presentation of Constantine.
[495] See C. Mango, "The Empress Helena, Helenopolis, Pylae," TM 12, (1994) for more information on Helen's connection to the city named for her.
[496] See Jan Willem Drijvers (1992), 33.

Constantine's reforms of the aqueduct system in 330 all suggest that Helena was in residence and that the bath system was an important part of her patronage.[497] Helena's connection to baths is ironic given her relationship to her daughter-in-law, Fausta. However, I suggest that the story of Fausta's manner of execution and Helena's presence and memory in places like bathhouses was used in order to defame Helena and her image as a holy woman.

Fausta is a complicated and controversial figure. In the fourth century, she is only mentioned in a few sources. For example, she is referenced in the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, but the only other fourth century source that specifically mentions Fausta is Eutropius. He mentions Constantine's murder of his son, nephew, and wife. But he gives no specifics, nor does he even mention Fausta or Crispus by name.[498] Moreover, Eusebius omitted any mention of Fausta and her death from the *Vita Constantini*. This is because Eusebius's accounts of Constantine more or less follow the propaganda that turned Constantine into a divinely appointed emperor.[499] Despite this propaganda, Constantine's background, like Helena's, presented opportunities for his detractors. Constantine, like his father, had a wife before Fausta, with whom he has his firstborn son, Crispus. But, Constantine set aside his first wife to make the more politically

[497] For this argument see Joseph Francis Merriman, "The Empress Helena and The Aqua Augustea," (1977), 44-446.

[498] It may be that Eunapius discussed the murder as it is referenced in Zosimus 2.29. Jean-Luc Desnier (1987), 307-309 argues that Zosimus used the account of Fausta's death to show the hypocrisy of Constantine's conversion. See also *Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.11 and Eutropius *Breviarium* 10.3.

[499] See Antonia Harbus, (2002), 10.

advantageous marriage with Fausta; ironically, that allegedly is what Constantine's father did to Helena.[500]

By 326, both Crispus and Helena were deceased, but how and why remain unknown and controversial. Fausta's death, in particular, is historically controversial and usually connected with a discussion of Crispus's execution. Some scholars have suggested that Fausta died of natural causes, others have suggested that she had an affair with Crispus and also was executed.[501] According to the to the earliest record of Fausta's death, the anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus*, Fausta encouraged Constantine to execute his son Crispus. After Constantine complied his guilt drove him to execute Fausta in a hot bath. The text states,

> At Constantinus obtento totius Romani imperii mira bellorum felicitate regimine Fausta coniuge, ut putant, suggerente Crispum filium necari iubet. Dehinc uxorem suam Faustam in balneas ardentes coniectam interemit, cum eum mater Helena dolore nimio nepotis increparet.[502]

> But when Constantine had obtained control of the whole Roman Empire by means of his wondrous success in battle, he ordered his son Crispus to be put to death, at the suggestion of his wife Fausta, so they say. Then he killed his wife Fausta by hurling her into boiling baths when his mother Helena rebuked him with excessive grief for her grandson.[503]

While other late antique historians do comment of the fact that Crispus was executed and Fausta died the same year, few of the sources provide any details beyond that. According

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[500] Both Constantine and his father dismissed their first wives in order to make more dynastically powerful marriages. Helena may not even have been a legal wife to Constantine's father. See Hans A. Pohlsander (2004), 12-15.

[501] See Drijvers (1992), 59-62 for various theories on Fausta's death. See also Woods (1998), 73-74. Drijvers thinks that there is no way to know why Crispus and Fausta were executed. Woods disagrees and is more partial to a sexual affair between the two. They do agree that the *damnatio memoriae* that occurs throughout the sources for both Crispus and Fausta suggest there was an execution.

[502] *Epitome de Caesaribus* 41.11-12.

[503] Translation comes from David Woods article, "On the Death of the Empress Fausta." See Woods (1998), 70-71 and ff.5.

to Woods, after the *Empitome de Caesaribus*, the earliest sources to say that Fausta died in a hot bath (*balneas ardentes*) is Philostorgius and Sidonnius Apollinaris. Philostorgius's account is different from the anonymous Epitomater's in that Philostorgius describes the execution of Crispus and Fuasta similarly to the Epitomater, but Helena is completely absent from the event.[504] According to Philostorgius's version, as related by Photius, Fausta – who is only named as the "step-mother" – induced Constantine to execute his son, but was later caught in an act of adultery, which led to her own execution, but suffocation in a hot bath.[505] Sozomen, following an account that was similar to Philostorgius, also mentions that there was a rumor, which claimed Constantine killed his son and wife; but he refutes the accusation and blamed the story on pagans spreading the rumor in order to hurt the efficacy of Constantine's conversion.[506]

After these fifth century sources, only Zosimus and Gregory the Great repeat the story and, after them, much later medieval texts. However, Gregory the Great, and the later texts, like Sozomen and Socrates Scholasticus refute the veracity of the story.[507] In contrast, Zosimus follows the *Epitome*'s version, except Zosimus links the death of Crispus and Fausta to Constantine's conversion to Christianity. Zosimus, ever hostile to Christian Emperors, uses the moment to show that Constantine, who could not be absolved from his sins, sought a way to purify himself. Upon finding no absolution in Roman tradition, Constantine turned to Christianity, which gave him easy salvation from

[504] Woods (1998), 74-75.

[505] See the *Epitome of the Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius* 2.4, compiled by Photius, patriarch of Constantinople. trans. by Edward Walford, (1855).

[506] Sozomen 1.5.

[507] See Woods (1998), 70-75 for excerpts for the various accounts. See also, David Potter (2013), 246-247 for more information of Philostorgius's account.

his crime. Zosimus laments that Constantine turned his back on Roman ways. Similarly, following the Epitomator, Zosimus also claims Constantine killed Fausta in an overheated bath in order to appease Helena's grief over Crispus's death.[508]

The *Epitome de Caesaribus's* version is important for two reasons. The first is the strange way in which Fausta is executed, which recurs in all the subsequent versions. The second is Helena's role in Fausta's execution. In the first case, the use of the bath as a form of execution is unique, even for Roman executions. There are many studies on Roman baths, focused both on the practice and culture of bathing in the Roman world and the origins and features of the actual buildings themselves.[509]

It should not be surprising that Roman bathhouses are such a popular subject for research, or that they feature regularly in the ancient sources. Romans erected large public baths throughout the Empire, from Britannia to Ephesus. These spaces were constructed beginning in the late Republic and throughout the Empire, until such building projects declined in the late fourth century.[510] Both Diocletian and Constantine erected public baths in Rome and Helena supposedly patronized the reconstruction of another smaller bath complex.[511] There is some debate over whether Helena built a new complex or paid to refurbish an already existing bathhouse. Yet, even if Helena's patronage was only repairing an already existing bath complex, the public visibility and use of this bathhouse should not be underestimated. It was built in order to show off the imperial

[508] Zosimus *Historia Nova* 2.29. See also Jean-Luc Desnier (1987), 307-309.
[509] See Garret G. Fagan *Bathing in Public in the Roman World* (2002) for one such example.
[510] See Douglas R. Underwood (Re)using Ruins: Public Building in the Cities of the Late Antique West, A.D. 300-600. (2015), 38-48.
[511] See Fagan (2002), 115-117.

grandeur and by the late fourth century, and would have been well-known to regular visitors in Rome.[512]

Bathhouses became associated with imperial patronage and visible reminders of the emperor's power. This is why they were built all around the empire, and why Rome, alone, has 11 major bath complexes dedicated by several emperors.[513] Notably, the baths of Caracalla and Diocletian were built on an enormous scale and in well-travelled areas to exploit the visibility to travelers and residents of the city. For instance, the Baths of Caracalla were on the Via Appia, near the Severan Wall and across from the Circus Maximus.[514] Because of their grandeur and association with imperial power there are several Roman accounts, which use the bathhouse as a literary setting for imperial mockery in the fourth century. In the first century, Martial used the bath setting in several of his satiric epigrams.[515] By the second and third century public bathing and baths made appearances across various communities, for example, both Cassius Dio and Tertullian discuss bathing.[516] By the fourth century the trope of bathhouses, especially as

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[512] The exact patronage *Themae Helenae* are debated. They were likely on the eastern part of the Caelian Hill near the place where Helena resided when she was in Rome. The main evidence of their existence under Helena's patronage is an inscription and several indications under Constantine's edicts and the *CTh* that Helena sponsored the construction and repairs of Aqueducts. Even if Helena only sponsored repairs to an existing bath structure, the material evidence indicates there was a relationship between her time in Rome and the baths and aqueducts. See Joseph Francis Merriman (1977), 436-446 and Barnes (2011), 42 for evidence and dating of Helena's patronage for the bath complex in Rome. Fagan (1999), 117, says that Helen's patronage was to restore the baths that were part of the Heliogabalus palace on the Esquiline Hill, though he claims it is unclear if they were open to the public.

[513] See, Anne H. Kontokosta, "Building the Thermae Agrippae: Private Life, Public Space, and the Politics of Bathing in Early Imperial Rome" (2019), 46.

[514] This is based on my own study during the summer program at the American Academy in Rome.

[515] See Martial *Epigrammata* 3.51 and 11.75 as examples of bathing imagery occurring with men and women together.

[516] See Tertullian *Apologeticus* 42.1-4 of early Christian acknowledgment of bath houses as part of an everyday experience in Roman life. See Cassius Dio 69.8.2, like Martial, Cassius Dio shows intermixed bathing.

a way to critique the emperor had become an established literary motif, one that is clearly used in the *Epitome de Caesaribus* account of Fausta's death. Furthermore, this was not the first time a bathhouse was the setting for the death and destruction of a member of the imperial court. Specifically, Ammianus Marcellinus uses the setting to foreshadow Valens's defeat at Adrianople.

Ammianus Marcellinus uses the bath setting as a place for violence, similar to the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. In Ammianus's account, he states,

> et Antiochiae per rixas tumultusque vulgares id in consuetudinem venerat, ut quisquis [3] vim se pati existimaret, 'Vivus ardeat Valens' licentius clamitaret, vocesque praeconum audiebantur, assidue mandantium congeri ligna ad Valentini **lavacri** succensionem, studio ipsius principis conditi.
>
> At Antioch, in quarrels and riots of the common people, it became usual that whoever thought that he was suffering wrong shouted without restraint: "Let Valens be burned alive!" and the words of public criers were continually heard, directing the people to gather firewood, to set fire to the **baths** of Valens, in the building of which the emperor himself had taken such interest.[517]

In this passage, Ammianus sets the general public outcry against Valens at a bathhouse. The context of the passage is prior to Valens death at the Battle of Adrianople. Not only does the act of burning the baths represent the association the *thermae* have with the emperors, but Ammianus also uses this scene as a portent to Valens's actual defeat and death. Burning the baths acts as a symbolic action that mirrors Valens's later death by fire when he is hiding from the Gothic forces in a barn.[518] The fact that the "common" people destroy the baths is embarrassing for Valens's authority, since he cannot control his own

[517] Ammianus Marcellinus 31.1.2-3. Latin and Translation from John C. Rolfe, Ph.D., LCL Edition, 1935.

[518] Ammianus Marcellinus 31.13.12-17.

subjects. Likewise, the Roman army being defeated by barbarian forces is also a blow to Roman authority and dominance. In this case, the bath represents the Roman public and its destruction highlights Valens's ineptitude. Thus again, we see an example of the bathhouse as a setting used to mock imperial authority. Although not clearly set in a bath complex, even the story of Justina's marriage to Valentinian I uses this type of setting to create the trope of destructive passion. Yet, these examples and the story of the Fausta's death provide clear examples of how the bathhouse in correlation with public violence created a motif that critiqued the emperor's behavior.

This brings me to the second point about the *Epitome de Caesaribus*'s importance, the role Helena had in Fausta's execution. The connection between Helena, as the catalyst for Fausta's execution and her association with baths and aqueducts serves to highlight her culpability in Constantine's actions. Why was Helena involved? Her involvement not only makes her culpable in Fausta's death, but it also makes Constantine appear weak.[519] Constantine is represented as an emperor who reacts to the whim of women. According to the Epitomater, Constantine killed his son and successor merely on the say-so of Fausta, and then killed Fausta merely on the say-so of Helena. Because of this, Constantine appears fickle and at the command of women, but especially, his mother. This fits certain tropes that I explored earlier, such as the relationship between Nero and Agrippina.[520] However, in this case, as I already have shown with Justina, the late fourth century does not use the accusation of sexual immorality. Instead, women in

[519] Drijvers does not think her culpable, but Pohlsander disagrees. I side with Pohlsander. See Drijvers (1992), 61-62 and Pohlsander (2004), 58-59.

[520] See my discussion of Tacitean women in Chapter 1.7.

the late fourth century corrupt through bearing false witness, which leads to corrupt actions. Justina bore heresies to her son, Helena and Fausta convince Constantine to commit the crime of murder for based on nothing more than their wishes, as I showed above, it was not until later fifth century sources, that there was an added charge of adultery associated with Crispus and Fausta.

The Epitomator makes Helen appear as more responsible for Fausta's death than even Constantine. Eusebius's account could not have served as a basis for this story. Like the *Historia Augusta*, the *Epitome de Caesaribus* is an anonymous work, and much attention has been given to who the source was for both works, as well as the intention and likely background of the authors. It is not my intention to focus on or debate any of these points, however, it is worth noting that several scholars have questioned the religious leaning of the Epitomator and determined that he is pagan.[521] Alan Cameron has challenged this notion on several grounds and has ultimately concluded that it is not possible to determine if this is true and he does not believe there is a firm basis for the argument. Cameron also discusses what the possible main source for the *Epitome de Caesaribus* and address the issue of a possible lost source that may have served as the basis for several late fourth century works, including the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.[522]

As regards the particular episode of Fausta's death, I submit two points. The first is that there does not necessarily need to be an earlier source for this story. In fact, I

[521] See J. Schlumberger, "Epitome de Caesaribus" (1974) and "Die verlorenen Annalen des Nicomachus Flavianus: ein Werk über Geschichte der mischen Republik oder Kaiserzeit", BHAC 1982/1983, Bonn; see also G. Bonamente in *Greek And Roman Historiography In Late Antiquity* (2003), 85-126

[522] Cameron (2011), 669-670.

argue that the story of Fausta's execution, as presented in the *Epitome de Caesaribus* is a late fourth century invention. The second point is that, although I agree with Cameron that there is no way to definitively prove the Epitomator religious affiliation, the inclusion of this story shows a hostility to the pro-Nicene powers that controlled the imperial court in the late fourth century. This is proven through the reception of Fausta's execution in other sources and when this presentation of Helena is compared to other late fourth century sources.

In the first case, as I have said, the death of Fausta is not explicitly mentioned in the sources until *Epitome de Caesaribus*. Philostorgius through Photius and Zosimus through Eunapius also mention this account, although Philostorgius does not mention the involvement of Helena and Zosimus extends the story to connect it with Constantine's conversion, which Zosimus shows as a detriment to Roman society. The fact that the only sources that recount this execution of Fausta are those that had conflict with Nicene Christianity, or Christianity, in general, as is the case with Zosimus. Zosimus states,

> And when his own mother Helena expressed much sorrow for this atrocity, lamenting the young man's death with great bitterness, Constantine under pretense of comforting her, applied a remedy worse than the disease. For causing a bath to be heated to an extraordinary degree, he shut up Fausta in it, and a short time after took her out dead. Of which his conscience accusing him, as also of violating his oath, he went to the priests to be purified from his crimes. But they told him, that there was no kind of lustration that was sufficient to clear him of such enormities. A Spaniard, named Aegyptius, very familiar with the court-ladies, being at Rome, happened to fall into converse with Constantine, and assured him, that the Christian doctrine would teach him how to cleanse himself from all his offences, and that they who received it were immediately absolved from all their sins. Constantine had no sooner heard this than he easily believed what was told him, and forsaking the rites of

> his country, received those which Aegyptius offered him; and for the first instance of his impiety, suspected the truth of divination.[523]

Like the Epitomater, Zosimus accuses Helena of being the instigating force for Constantine's execution. However, earlier, just prior to this passage, Zosimus explicitly claims Constantine executed Crispus on suspicion of "debauching" his stepmother. The Epitomater's account is silent on what caused Fausta's and Crispus's death. As stated, Philostorgius makes the claim that there was a nefarious relationship between Crispus and Fausta, but Philostorgius also made Fausta the villain so that Crispus was the victim of the "evil stepmother" and the weak father.[524] Zosimus's account appears to make Fausta and equal victim with Crispus, or, at the very least, she is not responsible for false accusations that lead to Crispus's death, as she is in Philostorgius. But, Zosimus goes into great detail about how Constantine, unable to cleanse himself from his crime in a traditional Roman manner, seeks Christianity. This reflects Zosimus's anti-Christian stance, which made him equally hostile to Theodosius.

In contrast, the story is ignored by Socrates Scholasticus and only mentioned briefly in Sozomen in order to refute it. This suggests it is a late fourth century invention

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[523] τῆς δὲ Κωσταντίνου μητρὸς Ἑλένης ἐπὶ τῷ τηλικούτῳ πάθει δυσχεραινούσης καὶ ἀσχέτως τὴν ἀναίρεσιν τοῦ νέου φερούσης, παραμυθούμενος ὥσπερ αὐτὴν ὁ Κωσταντῖνος κακῷ τὸ κακὸν ἰάσατο μείζονι: βαλανεῖον γὰρ ὑπὲρ τὸ μέτρον ἐκπυρωθῆναι κελεύσας καὶ τούτῳ τὴν Φαῦσταν ἐναποθέμενος ἐξήγαγεν νεκρὰν γενομένην. ταῦτα συνεπιστάμενος ἑαυτῷ, καὶ προσέτι γε ὅρκων καταφρονήσεις, προσῄει τοῖς ἱερεῦσι καθάρσια τῶν ἡμαρτημένων αἰτῶν. εἰπόντων δὲ ὡς οὐ παραδέδοται καθαρμοῦ τρόπος δυσσεβήματα τηλικαῦτα καθῆραι δυνάμενος, Αἰγύπτιός τις ἐξ Ἰβηρίας εἰς τὴν Ῥώμην ἐλθὼν καὶ ταῖς εἰς τὰ βασίλεια γυναιξὶν συνήθης γενόμενος, ἐντυχὼν τῷ Κωσταντίνῳ πάσης ἁμαρτάδος ἀναιρετικὴν εἶναι τὴν τῶν Χριστιανῶν διεβεβαιώσατο δόξαν καὶ τοῦτο ἔχειν ἐπάγγελμα, τὸ τοὺς ἀσεβεῖς μεταλαμβάνοντας αὐτῆς πάσης ἁμαρτίας ἔξω παραχρῆμα καθίστασθαι. δεξαμένου δὲ ῥᾷστα τοῦ Κωσταντίνου τὸν λόγον καὶ ἀφεμένου μὲν τῶν πατρίων, μετασχόντος δὲ ὧν ὁ Αἰγύπτιος αὐτῷ μετεδίδου, τῆς ἀσεβείας τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐποιήσατο τὴν μαντικὴν ἔχειν ἐν ὑποψίᾳ. Zosimus *A New History*, Book 2.29 Trans. by W. Green and T. Chaplin, 1814.

[524] Pohlsander (2004), 58.

and it was only recounted in sources that were antagonistic to the ruling Christian parties in the late fourth century.[525] The fact that the story was included in a Latin source that was circulating two years before Ambrose added his story of Helena, and that Ambrose acknowledges Helena's potentially scandalous past, suggests that Ambrose used the story of Helena to thwart the pagan and/or Arian narratives on Constantine circulating during this time. However, the fact that Helena on whom Ambrose focuses, implies that Ambrose either was not concerned with how Constantine was represented, or that there was enough validity circulating with the Fausta and Crispus story that Ambrose was unwilling to contend with the controversy. Instead, Ambrose focused on Helena and transformed her into the force behind the Christianization of the empire. In doing so, he was also able to set a standard for a good, Christian empress that contrasted completely with Justina.

3.6 Conclusion of Helena and Fausta:

Helena's role as a mother and an empress is unique. She had no dynastic lineage, but through her title as Augusta and her patronage throughout the empire, she became an important representative of Constantine's imperial court. This is especially highlighted in Eusebius's account of the empress. However, by the end of the century, Helena had transformed from an empress into a holy woman, responsible for finding the true cross, converting Constantine, and being the mother of the Emperor that turned the Roman Empire to Christianity.

[525] The interesting thing about this point is that Sidonius Apollinaris references it. Since Sidonius Apollinaris was a bishop, it seems strange that he would engage with the unpopular pagan propaganda. See Sidonius Apollinaris *Epistle* 5.8 and Woods (1998), 71.

The image was subverted through her association with Faust's execution and her lowly background. This alternative narrative must have been noteworthy, since Gregory of Tours even acknowledges the rumor in his *History of the Franks* published at the end of the sixth century. According to Gregory,

> This Constantine in the twentieth year of his reign caused the death of his son Crispus by poison, and of his wife Fausta by means of a hot bath, because they had plotted to betray his rule. In his time the venerated wood of the Lord's cross was found, through the zeal of his mother Helen…[526]

Gregory of Tours's account reflects both the legacy of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* and Ambrose's story of Helena. Gregory of Tours, being a Nicene adherent, diminishes Constantine's actions with his claim that Fausta and Crispus were planning to betray him. Although Constantine would have had no choice but to execute his wife and son, it still is a similar story to Claudius's ordeal with Messalina, especially since Gregory even includes the odd form of execution that Fausta suffered. After recognizing this controversy, Gregory's comments on Constantine immediately turn to Helena and her discovery of the cross, serving to further diminish the impact of the Crispus and Fausta story. In this way, Helena becomes the most powerful dynastic connection in the Late Antique period and ultimately the symbol of Christian Rome and Christianized imperial court. This likely is why later empresses claimed heritage to the Constantinian dynasty, including Justina and her offspring. Ambrose's ultimate victory in his conflict with Justina was to create an image of an empress more powerful and more enduring than she her own and an image that future empresses attempted to embody.

[526] Gregory of Tours, *History of the Franks*, trans. Ernest Brehaut (1916), 1.36.

3.7 Eudoxia and Chrysostom: Background to the Conflict Between Empress and Bishop

Having discussed the growing importance of Helena at the end of the fourth century, I now move to a discussion of the empress, who dominated the last decade of this century. The Empress Eudoxia was the wife of Arcadius, Theodosius I's eldest son. Similar to her predecessor, Justina, she was also actively involved in the religious procedures of Constantinople. This involvement led to conflict between the empress and the Bishop of Constantinople, John Chrysostom. Although Eudoxia was important empress in the late fourth century for many reasons, my main focus in this section is her conflict with Chrysostom and the way in which the sources depict both the empress and the bishop. Additionally, I will show the impact of the image of Helena and how Eudoxia mirrored her image and actions following the vision of Helena presented in Ambrose and Eusebius. However, despite her efforts, Eudoxia followed the pattern of Justina's career and ended her reign as empress in an ignoble battle with John Chrysotom.

In order to understand Eudoxia's conflict with Chrysostom, it is necessary to first understand the social and political context and background of this period. In 395, around the time the *Epitome de Caesaribus* implicated Helena in Fausta's execution, the emperor Theodosius I died.[527] His death occurred a year after he fought and won the Battle of Frigidus. The Battle of Figidus also ended the attempted usurpation of Eugenius, who

[527] Theodosius died in Milan of sickness after defeating Arbogast and Eugenius at the Battle of Frigidus and reestablishing the Roman imperial court in Milan. See Hebblewhite (2020), 139-141 also suggests his failing health explains why Honorius was summoned to Milan and elevated to the rank of *augustus*.

had been propped up as emperor by the general, Arborogast. Arborogast had been Valentinian II's general, who had seized control of the imperial court after Justina left in 388. Very quickly after losing the protection of his mother, Valentinian II died. He died in 392 under suspicious circumstances and, by 393, Eugenius was hailed emperor.[528] In 394, Theodosius fought and defeated Eugenius and a year later, Theodosius died in Milan. This rocky upheaval left the very unprepared Arcadius and Honorius, Theodosius two sons with his first wife Flaccilla, in charge of an increasingly unstable empire.[529]

Given the unrest that Theodosius's death brought, Arcadius immediately sought to marry in order to secure the dynasty. Of course, this meant that there was an attempt to secure a powerful foothold through the emperor's marriage. Ultimately, Arcadius married Eudoxia, the daughter of Bauto, a Frankish general, who served as Valentinian II's *magister militum*. Bauto had already proven his Roman loyalties when he fought against Magnus Maximus's usurpation.[530] By the time of his daughter's marriage, Bauto had been dead for ten years. However, various factions were concerned that another general, Rufinus, was gaining too much influence over Arcadius.[531] Eudoxia was brought

[528] See Brian Croke (1976), 235-244 for more on Valentinian II's death and the role of the usurpers Arbogast and Eugenius.

[529] Alan Cameron (2011), 6, 117-124 analyzes the various narratives surrounding this battle and the aftermath. He focuses primarily on Ambrose and Rufinus's account of the battle. He concludes that the battle had less to do with pagan and Christian conflict that has been previously argued.

[530] Rather than dynastic marriages, marriage with powerful military or barbarian elites became the way in which to secure the empire. My discussion on Placidia below will show a similar situation with the *magister militum,* Stilicho. For more on this, see Ralph Mathisen "Provinciales, Gentiles, and Marriages between Romans and Barbarians in the Late Roman Empire," in JRS (2009), 140-155.

[531] This Rufinus is not to be confused with Rufinus of Aquileia, the historian. This Rufinus was a powerful and influential general that challenged Stilicho for authority. After preventing his influence in Arcadius's marriage, he ended up being assassinated in late 395. See Kelly (2004), 48-49.

forward in order to prevent Rufinus from further connecting himself to the emperor through marriage.[532]

Aelia Eudoxia and Arcadius were married in Constantinople in 395, before Theodosius's body had even been laid to rest. Barbarian uprisings spurred the urgency for marriage and a way to secure dynastic succession. It was a role Eudoxia took seriously, and, in the next decade, she bore six children, five survived to early childhood, and the sixth was a miscarriage that caused her death. However, Eudoxia fulfilled her role and bore Theodosius II, who succeeded his father as emperor in the east. Eudoxia also had Pulcheria, who also became an important imperial woman that came into conflict with a Bishop.[533]

Eudoxia was a much different empress than Justina. She did not travel around the empire or survive as a widowed empress, nor did she directly face the challenges to her position that plagued Justina's reign as empress. Most importantly, unlike Justina, who seemed to have a firm grasp of her imperial court, Eudoxia was under the direction and influence of several eunuchs, at least, according to the sources.[534] Her relationship with John Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople, was tumultuous and resulted in Chrysostom being banished twice. However, unlike Ambrose, who had doctrinal differences with Justina, Chrysostom's conflict with Eudoxia was the result of Chrysostom's concern over

[532] Alan Cameron and Jaqueline Long (1993), 6. See also T.D. Barnes "The Victims of Rufinus," in Classical Quarterly, (1984), 227-230.

[533] Kenneth Holum (1989), 52-53.

[534] Jonathan Stanfill (2019), 677 in *Revisioninig John Chrysostom* claims that Chrysostom and Eudoxia's court eunuch worked with the empress to put on processions that challenged the Arian processions in Constantinople.

the growing influence of imperial women.[535] Similarly, Eudoxia's antagonism toward Chrysostom is described as a feminine irrationality, especially because she had Chrysostom exiled twice.[536] However, I will show that Eudoxia's response to Chrysostom was consistent with an empress attempting to preserve imperial stability, particularly when Arcadius's authority was challenged with multiple Gothic uprisings.

3.8 Of Barbarians and Bishops: The Beginning of Eudoxia's Conflict

Early into Arcadius's reign, the new and inexperienced emperor dealt with a near coup from the powerful Gothic general, Gainas. Initially, Gainas was tasked with taking over troops from Rufinus and in this process Rufinus was killed. As a result there was a new attempt to gain superiority in the imperial court. It first went to the eunuch, Eutropius, who had orchestrated the marriage between Eudoxia and Arcadius.[537] However, Gainas wanted more control and began systematically removing any challengers to his authority, including Eutropius.[538] Eventually, he moved his Gothic and largely Arian forces into Constantinople. Chrysostom, like Ambrose was tasked with acting as an envoy to orchestrate peace. However, Chrysostom, unlike Ambrose, failed. His failure began the tensions between the imperial court and the bishop.[539]

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[535] See Liebeschuetz (2011), 181-184. Here, Liebeschuetz suggests that Chrysostom mismanaged his relationship with the empress.

[536] See Wendy Meyer (2006), 205-214 in *Violence in Late Antiquity* argues that Eudoxia's character was subjected to a type of literary violence that turned her into the worst feminine stereotypes.

[537] See Holum (1989), 59-60.

[538] There were several events that led to Gainas gaining such control. For a further account see Liebechuetz (2011), 225-231.

[539] Liebeschuetz (2011), 225-227 makes the argument that Chrysostom was a failure and it caused his lack of success as a bishop.

Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen are the best sources for this period and their accounts not only show how fraught was the situation with the Goths, but also how tempestuous was Chrysostom and Eudoxia's relationship. In the beginning of Eudoxia's reign, she was eager to be a model of a Christian empress, following the images of Helena and her deceased mother-in-law, Flacilla. At the time, Constantinople still had a sizeable Homoean community, which held processions and festivals throughout the city, complete with loud chanting, as both Socrates and Sozomen claim.[540] In response, John Chrysostom, in conjunction with Eudoxia, held their own procession in order to detract from the Homoeans. After this, the imperial court issued a rule banning imperial processions and Chrysostom commended Eudoxia for her modesty, similar to Helena's description in Eusebius. According to Chrysostom,

> Rather, like a maidservant she walked one step behind the holy relics, touching the casket and the veil which covered it. Suppressing all human vanity, she allowed herself to be seen by the crowd at the midst of the vast spectacle—she upon whom it's forbidden for even all the eunuchs who serve in the imperial palace to gaze. Instead, her desire for the martyrs, the tyranny and flame of love persuaded her to cast off all her masks and to display with naked enthusiasm her zeal for the holy martyrs.[541]

This passage is from a homily Chrysostom delivered when Eudoxia reclaimed the remains of martyrs from the main basilica in Constantinople and paraded them through

[540] See Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 6.8 and Sozomen *HE* 8.8.

[541] Καὶ τί δεῖ λέγειν γυναῖκας, ἢ ἄρχοντας, ὅπου καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ τὸ διάδημα περικειμένη καὶ τὴν πορφυρίδα περιβεβλημένη, παρὰ τὴν ὁδὸν ἅπασαν οὐδὲ μικρὸν τῶν λειψάνων ἀποσχέσθαι ἠνέσχετο, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ θεραπαινὶς παρηκολούθει τοῖς ἁγίοις, τῆς θήκης ἁπτομένη καὶ τῆς ὀθόνης τῆς ἐπικειμένης, καὶ πάντα τὸν ἀνθρώπινον καταπατοῦσα τῦφον, καὶ ἐν μέσῳ θεάτρῳ τοσούτῳ φαινομένη δήμῳ, ἣν οὐδὲ εὐνούχοις ἅπασι τοῖς ἐν ταῖς βασιλικαῖς στρεφομένοις αὐλαῖς θέμις ἰδεῖν; Ἀλλ' ὁ τῶν μαρτύρων πόθος καὶ ἡ τυραννὶς καὶ ἡ τῆς ἀγάπης φλὸξ ἅπαντα ταῦτα τὰ προσωπεῖα ῥῖψαι ἀνέπεισε, καὶ γυμνῇ τῇ προθυμίᾳ τὸν ζῆλον ἐπιδείξασθαι τὸν περὶ τοὺς ἁγίους μάρτυρας. See John Chrysostom Hom. 2 dicta postquam reliquiae martyrum in PG 63, 467-472. See also the translation by Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen (2000), 87.

the city. This homily occurred sometime after January 400 since that was when the ceremony took place.[542] As Mayer and Allen point out, the homily pays an obsequious homage to Eudoxia and may reflect the fact that Chrysostom and Eudoxia were on good terms with each other.[543] His language also emphasizes the image of an imperial woman, who joined the "common throng" similar to the image of Helena that Eusebius describes.[544] However, this procession was also part of Eudoxia's coronation as an Augusta, so just as with Helena, rather than trying to diminish imperial authority and presence, it was being put on full display.

Moreover, this procession occurred a year after Arcadius's conflict with Gainas. In the summer if 399, Arcadius was struggling against a rebellious Gothic-Roman generals, who were leading largely Gothic troops. Arcadius agreed to ally with Gainas in order to prevent another general, Tribigild, from mutinying. However, Gainas had concessions, namely Arcadius had to dismiss his powerful court advisor and eunuch, Eutropius. As stated, this was the same eunuch that played a major role in arranging Eudoxia's marriage to Arcadius; additionally, he was also an important ally for John Chrysostom.[545] By the summer of 400, the tentative cohabitation between Gainas and Arcadius in Constantinople had deteriorated. Eventually, Gainas and his troops left Constantinople. In the aftermath, there was a massacre of Gothic families still living in the city.[546] Chrysostom was sent as an envoy on behalf of Arcadius in order to come to

[542] See Holum (1989), 56-57.
[543] Wendy Mayer and Pauline Allen (2000), 92-93.
[544] See my discussion above, in 3.3 for Eusebius's description of Helena going out among the general or common "throng."
[545] See Cameron and Long (1993), 204-206.
[546] See Liebeschuetz (2011), 227n17.

some sort of peaceful resolution. Chrysostom was unsuccessful in gaining peace, but his role as an envoy reflected the importance and prestige that the office of bishop held by the end of the fourth century.[547]

Eudoxia's procession of martyr relics and her coronation as *augusta* occurred in the midst of this series of unfortunate events. Eudoxia's actions refocused the population of the city on the power of the imperial court. Holding this procession also was useful for presenting a sense of stability that was clearly lacking during this time. The fact that the bishop and the empress were working closely together, and that Chrysostom showed such deference to Eudoxia also projected this image of stability. Furthermore, these processions also acted as a counter-movement against the growing Arian processions, which Gainas encouraged.[548] Therefore, early into both of their reigns, Eudoxia and Chrysostom worked together to promote Arcadius's authority and Nicene orthodoxy.

3.9 From Friend to Foe: Chrysostom's First Banishment

The conflict between Eudoxia and Chrysostom on the surface appears petty and based on personal squabbles. However, the argument was actually over the empress's active role in ecclesiastical power struggles. I argue Eudoxia's intrusion into the space of ecclesiastical leadership threatened Chrysostom's authority. Moreover, Chrysostom's response to Eudoxia's actions threatened her position as empress. This led to a power

[547] Chrysostom's role of envoy was similar to Ambrose's position during Magnus Maximus's usurpation and once again showed that Ambrose was a trendsetter when it came to being a powerful bishop. See Liebeschuetz (2011), 227-228.

[548] Liebeschuetz (2011), 232.

struggle between the imperial court and bishop, similar to the one in which Justina and Ambrose engaged.

According to Socrates Scholasticus's account, Chrysostom's initial banishment was based on hearsay and insults. Socrates claims,

> When Epiphanius was gone, John was informed by some person that the Empress Eudoxia had stimulated Epiphanius against him. And being of a fiery temperament, and of a ready utterance, he soon after pronounced a public invective against women in general. The people readily took this as uttered indirectly against the empress and so the speech was laid hold of by evil-disposed persons, and reported to those in authority. At length on being informed of it the empress immediately complained to her husband, telling him that the insult offered to herself was equally an insult against him. The emperor therefore authorized Theophilus to convoke a Synod without delay against John; Severian also co-operated in promoting this, for he still retained his grudge against Chrysostom.[549]

Socrates's account eventually shows support for Chrysostom and makes him the victim of the empress and grudge-bearing bishops. However, Socrates also calls Chrysostom *θερμὸςὢν*, literally meaning hot, or feverish, but has the figurative application of hot-headed, or hasty.[550] According to Socrates, in his hotheaded hastiness, Chrysostom wrote an invective against all women. In general, Chrysostom was suspicious of women, especially elite women. However, this did not mean that he was necessarily antagonistic

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[549] Ἀποπλεύσαντος γὰρ τοῦ Ἐπιφανίου, πυνθάνεται παρὰ τινῶν ὁ Ἰωάννης, ὡς ἡ βασίλισσα Εὐδοξία τὸν Ἐπιφάνιον ἐξώπλισε κατ᾽ αὐτοῦ. Καὶ θερμὸς ὢν τὸ ἦθος καὶ περὶ τὸν λόγον ἕτοιμος, μὴ μελλήσας διέξεισι ψόγον κοινῶς κατὰ πασῶν γυναικῶν ἐπὶ τοῦ λαοῦ. Ἁρπάζει τὸ πλῆθος τὸν λόγον ὡς αἴνιγμα κατὰ τῆς βασιλίδος λεχθέν: καὶ ὁ λόγος ἐκληφθεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν κακουργούντων εἰς γνῶσιν ἄγεται τῶν κρατούντων. Γνοῦσα δὲ ἡ Αὐγοῦστα, πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα τὴν οἰκείαν ὕβριν ὠδύρατο, αὐτοῦ ὕβριν εἶναι λέγουσα τὴν ἑαυτῆς. Παρασκευάζει οὖν τὸν Θεόφιλον ταχεῖαν ποιεῖσθαι σύνοδον κατ᾽ αὐτοῦ: συγκατασκευάζει δὲ ταῦτα καὶ Σεβηριανός: ἔτι γὰρ τὴν λύπην ἐφύλαττεν. Οὐ πολὺς οὖν ἐν μέσῳ χρόνος, καὶ παρῆν Θεόφιλος πολλοὺς ἐκ διαφόρων πόλεων ἐπισκόπους κινήσας: τοῦτο δὲ καὶ τοῦ βασιλέως ἐκέλευε πρόσταγμα. Socrates Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, 6.15. See trans Philip Schaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series II: Vol. 2: Socrates Scholasticus and Sozomen: Ecclesiastical Histories*, Socrates Scholasticus, 6.15.

[550] See the LSJ entry for *θερμός.*

toward all women; he even formed a strong friendship with a woman, named Olympias. And wrote another tract in which he commended several other women known for their piety.[551] Nevertheless, Chrysostom was consistently antagonistic with the imperial court and not always prone to show imperial women in the best way. This was exemplified in his *Letter to a Young Widow*, which I discussed in chapter 1.[552] As I showed, in that letter, he uses his description of widowed imperial women as a way to specifically address his concerns over Theodosius's handling of the Gothic Wars.[553]

However, his conflict with Eudoxia was more complex than a mere "battle of the sexes," or his general critiques over Arcadius's reign. The initial conflict, which led to John Chrysostom's first banishment was the result of a conflict over both space and authority. As Socrates discusses, the conflict began with a group of monks, the Long Brothers, and the bishop of Alexandria, Theophilus. Eudoxia was brought into the conflict around 401 by the monks seeking advocacy from the empress. It was a conflict that Chrysostom had been avoiding in order to maintain peace with the powerful Alexandrian Diocese. But, because Eudoxia became involved, the imperial court called upon Chrysostom to adjudicate the situation. Chrysostom attempted to reconcile Theophilus with the monks, but as before, he was unsuccessful.[554]

Theophilus proved less conciliatory than Chrysostom had hoped. He delayed in appearing in Constantinople, per Arcadius's command, and during his delay he gathered

[551] Liebeschuetz (2011), 58.

[552]See Meyer "Constantinopolitan Women in Chrysostom's Circle" (1999), 265-288 for a broader analysis of Chrysostom's relationship with women.

[553] See Chapter 1.4 for my discussion of Chrysostom's letter.

[554] See Liebeschuetz (2011), 234.

forces to attack Chrysostom, including the venerable Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis. As a result, the Synod of the Oak was held in order to try and prove that Chrysostom was a follower of Origen.[555] This is the synod that Socrates refers to in the passage above.

Theophilus's plans failed, as Socrates reports in the passage, however, the fallout was rumor and hearsay that deteriorated Chrysostom's relationship with Eudoxia. In his hastiness, he believed that Eudoxia had turned against him, despite his previous accord with the empress and the fact that the imperial court had called on him to handle the conflict between monks and bishops in another diocese.[556] As a result, Palladius claims that Chrysostom wrote an sermon against women in which he compared Eudoxia to Jezebel.[557]

In the sermon, Chrysostom uses the image of Jezebel in order to create literary parallel of a holy man persecuted by an evil heretical queen. Chrysostom's invective against Eudoxia followed a similar pattern to Ambrose's descriptions of Justina. According to Chrysostom's *Sermo cum Iret in Exsilium*, Eudoxia was the embodiment of several biblical women. Chrysostom states,

> Ἀδελφοι, βούλομαι ἐφαπλῶσαι τὴν γλῶττάν μου πρὸς τὴν βασιλίδα. Ἀλλὰ τί εἴπω; Ἰεζάβελ θορυβεῖται καὶ Ἠλίας φεύγει. Ἡρωδιὰς εὐφραίνεται καὶ Ἰωάννης δεσμεύεται. Ἡ Αἰγυπτία ψεύδεται καὶ Ἰωσὴφ φυλακίζεται.[558]
>
> Brothers, I want to unroll my tongue against the empress. But what should I say? Jezebel raises clamours against [the prophet] and Elijah flies;

[555] This was called the synod of the oak. See JND Kelly (1995), 211-227.
[556] See Liebeschuetz (2011), 234-238.
[557] See Palladius Dialog. 8 in The Dialogue of Palladius concerning the Life of St. John Chrysostom, trans. by Herbert Moore (1921).
[558] John Chrysostom, *Sermo cum Iret in Exsilium* 45.7. The text comes from E. Bonfiglio (2011).

> Herodias rejoices and John is put in chains; the Egyptian woman lies and Joseph is thrown into prison.[559]

The authenticity of this sermon has been questioned by several scholars and this passage's authenticity, in particular, has been questioned because Chrysostom's response and feud with Eudoxia appears irrational. As, Bonfiglio has shown there is not enough linguistic correlation to accept this as Chrysostom's sermon.[560] However, I suggest the fact that Palladius, Socrates Scholasticus, and Sozomen all report the feud, and Palladius corroborates Chrysostom's invective use of Jezebel, suggests that Chrysostom may have used the image of Jezebel to depict his conflict with the Eudoxia in other contexts. Even if this was not Chrysostom's sermon, the connection between an empress in conflict with a bishop and the story of Jezebel was clearly well-established by this period. However, it is interesting to note that Ambrose's allusion to Jezebel was meant to highlight Justina's heretical stance. In the case of Chrysostom, the image of Jezebel is used merely to evoke an empress in conflict with a bishop. As such, we can see the transformation of the image of Jezebel from a trope that specifically highlighted the dangers of heretical imperial women, to one in which any imperial woman in contest with the Church becomes a Jezebel. Nevertheless, the trope continues to underscore the late fourth century tension between imperial women and bishops, as well as the influence and agency of both the bishop and imperial women.

This tension is further shown by the fact that Chrysostom was engaged in a conflict with Eudoxia and was ultimately banished twice. Moreover, there are more

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[559] The translation and punctuation are from Emilio Bonfiglio (2011), 109.
[560] See Emilio Bonfiglio (2011), 2-23.

credible instances where Chrysostom did insult Eudoxia. For example, Chrysostom's *Sermo Ante Quam Iret in Exsilium* makes a more veiled attack against the empress. In contrast to *Sermo cum Iret in Exsilium*, the *Sermo Ante Quam Iret in Exsilium*, which Bonfiglio identifies as a reasonably authentic *Chrystomian* text, discusses the conflict and the impending exile.[561] Although Chrysostom does not address any particular adversary in this text, several comments allude to the imperial court. In one case, he warns his unnamed adversary with reminders of past tyrants that had threatened the Church, only to later meet with ruin. Chrysostom states,

> The devil wanted to destabilize the Church because the city stood firm. Wicked, iniquitous devil! You could not prevail over the walls, and you expect to prevail over the Church? Is the Church inside the walls? The Church is in the crowds of believers! Here there are such stable columns, not bound with iron, but firmly united together by faith. I do not [necessarily] mean such a crowd, but you would not have prevailed even if there were only one person.[562]

The fact that Chrysostom's sermon refers to a tyrant attacking the Church and then claims the devil sought to destabilize the Church draws a connection between the figure of the tyrant and the devil. If we assume this figure refers to the imperial court, then the tyrant and the devil are both the emperor or the empress. This is not a wild assumption. The corroboration from other sources and the fact that Chrysostom was exiled confirms that he was in conflict with the imperial court in Constantinople and that it was primarily based on Eudoxia's involvement in ecclesiastical affairs.

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[561] See Bonfiglio (2011), 229-230.

[562] Επειδή ἔστιη ἡ πόλεις, τὴν ἐκκλησίαν ἠθελησεν ὁ διάβολος σαλεῦσαι. Μιαρὲ καὶ παμμίαρε διάβολε. Τοίχων οὐ περιεγένου καὶ ἐκκλησίας προσδοκᾷς περιγενέσθαι; Μὴ γὰρ ἐν τοίχοις ἡ εκκλησία; Ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν πιστῶν ἡ εκκλησία. Ἰδοὺ πόσοι στῦλοι ἑδραῖοι οὐ σιδήρῳ δεδεμένοι, ἀλλὰ πίστει ἐσφιγμένοι. Οὐ λέγω ὅτι τοσοῦτον πλῆθος, αλλ᾽ οὐδὲ εἰ εἷς ἦν περιεγένου. John Chrysostom, Sermo Ante Quam Iret in Exsilium, 7.54-60 in Bonfiglio (2011), 72-73. See the translation in Bonfiglio, 78-79.

3.10 The Second Exile

Although Chrysostom's first exile was predicated on rumor and petty fighting between bishops, which led to a feud between Chrysostom and Eudoxia, his second banishment was a much clearer power struggle between the empress and the bishop. As such the second banishment actually shed more light on the Chrysostom's first exile. As I will show, this conflict was the result of Eudoxia's attempt to fuel support for the imperial court and create stability in Constantinople.

According to Holum, Eudoxia recalled Chrysostom after the death of her daughter, Flacilla. However, there is no clear evidence of when Flacilla died, though she is believed to have predeceased Arcadius.[563] The feud began with a silver statue of Eudoxia that was established to the south of the basilica and in front of the senate house.[564] Along with the statue, there was a anniversary commemoration for Eudoxia's receipt of the title of *augusta*. The commemoration involved dancing and other performances. Socrates describes the event and Chrysostom's reaction as follows,

> At this time a silver statue of the Empress Eudoxia covered with a **long robe** was erected upon a column of porphyry supported by a lofty base. And this stood neither near nor far from the church named *Sophia*, but one-half the breadth of the street separated them. At this statue public games were accustomed to be performed; these John regarded as an insult offered to the church, and having regained his ordinary freedom and keenness of tongue, he employed his tongue against those who tolerated them. Now while it would have been proper to induce the authorities by a supplicatory petition to discontinue the games, he did not do this, but employing abusive language he ridiculed those who had enjoined such practices. The empress once more applied his expressions to herself as indicating marked contempt toward her own person: she therefore endeavored to procure the convocation of another council of bishops

[563] Holum (1989), 75-76.
[564] Holum (1989), 76.

> against him. When John became aware of this, he delivered in the church that celebrated oration commencing with these words: 'Again Herodias raves; again, she is troubled; she dances again; and again, desires to receive John's head in a charger.' This, of course, exasperated the empress still more.[565]

Sozomen's account mirrors Socrates's version. Both agree on the location of the statue, that it was placed on a column of porphyry, and that it was constructed out of silver. As regards the resulting celebration, Socrates and Sozomen describe slightly different accounts. Socrates does not give much detail and only mentions public games. In contrast, Sozomen claims that there were and dancers and other performers, of the type specific to statue dedications for the emperor. Traditionally, these celebrations are seen as the cause of Chrysostom's ire, which led him to call Eudoxia a "raving Herodias." Both Sozomen and Socrates claim he called her this and both of their accounts are fairly similar with only a few variations in vocabulary.[566] The ceremony's performances have been cited as a main instigator in causing Chrysostom's anger; so much so that Holum

[565] Τῆς Αὐγούστης Εὐδοξίας ἀνδριὰς ἀνέστη ἀργυροῦς ἐπὶ κίονος πορφυροῦ, **χλανίδα** ἐνδεδυμένος: ἕστηκε δὲ οὗτος ἐπὶ βήματος ὑψηλοῦ, οὔτε ἐγγὺς οὔτε πόρρω τῆς ἐκκλησίας, ᾗ ἐπώνυμον Σοφία: ἀλλὰ διείργει ἄμφω μέση πλατείας ὁδός. Ἐπὶ τούτῳ συνήθως δημώδεις ἤγοντο παιδιαί: Ἰωάννης δὲ ὕβριν τὰ γινόμενα τῆς ἐκκλησίας νομίζων, τὴν συνήθη τε παρρησίαν ἀνακτησάμενος, πάλιν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γλῶτταν κατὰ τῶν ταῦτα ποιούντων ἐξώπλιζε. Καὶ δέον τοὺς κρατοῦντας λόγῳ παρακλητικῷ πείθειν παῦσαι τῆς παιδιᾶς, ὁ δὲ τοῦτο μὲν οὐκ ἐποίει: καταφορικῇ δὲ τῇ γλώσσῃ χρησάμενος ἔσκωπτε τοὺς γενέσθαι ταῦτα κελεύσαντας. Ἡ δὲ βασίλισσα πάλιν εἰς ἑαυτὴν εἶλκε τὰ γενόμενα: καὶ ὕβριν ἑαυτῆς τοὺς ἐκείνου λόγους νομίζουσα, πάλιν παρασκευάζει σύνοδον ἐπισκόπων συνάγεσθαι κατ᾽ αὐτοῦ. Αἰσθόμενος δὲ ὁ Ἰωάννης τὴν περιβόητον ἐκείνην ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας διεξῆλθεν ὁμιλίαν, ἧς ἡ ἀρχή: Πάλιν Ἡρωδιὰς μαίνεται, πάλιν ταράσσεται, πάλιν ὀρχεῖται, πάλιν ἐπὶ πίνακι τὴν κεφαλὴν Ἰωάννου ζητεῖ λαβεῖν. Τοῦτο πλέον πρὸς ὀργὴν ἐξῆψε τὴν βασιλίδα. Socrates Scholasticus Ecclesiastical History 6.18. Trans. by Philip Schaff. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers Series* II: Vol. 2: Socrates Scholasticus *Ecclesiastical History*

[566] Both Sozomen and Socrates Scholasticus quotes the same line about Herodias raving. See Socrates Scholasticus *Ecclesiastical History* 6.18. "Πάλιν Ἡρωδιὰς μαίνεται, πάλιν ταράσσεται, πάλιν ὀρχεῖται, πάλιν ἐπὶ πίνακι τὴν κεφαλὴν Ἰωάννου ζητεῖ λαβεῖν. As compared to Sozomen *Ecclesiastical History* 8.20 Πάλιν Ἡρωδιὰς μαίνεται, πάλιν ὀρχεῖται, πάλιν Ἰωάννου τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐπὶ πίνακος σπουδάζει λαβεῖν.

suggested one of the reasons Chrysostom could not abide by the ceremony was because of the noise.[567]

However, the elements of the ceremony and its connection to traditional imperial authority, along with the location, and materials used in Eudoxia's statue would have been the real cause of conflict. Both the ceremony's connection to a pre-Christian Empire and its location were a threat to Chrysostom's authority in the city. For instance, Judith Herrin asserts that the celebration was a part of the larger tradition of Roman imperial ceremony and commemoration, which harkened back to a pre-Christian, Roman tradition.[568]

Chrysostom's fear of this threat is emphasized in the fact that the noise of the commemoration was an element of contention. The noise of the ceremony is reminiscent of the Arian festivals that involved singing, which Eudoxia and Chrysostom had worked together to stop, ironically using processions that included singing.[569] This show of imperial authority, so similar to Arian entertainment must have challenged Chrysostom's sensibilities. Just as an Arian population threatened Chrysostom's Nicene authority, so too did Eudoxia's engagement in Church politics.

Moreover, the celebration also mirrored Constantine's ceremonies in 330, which inaugurated Constantinople as the eastern capital of the Empire. In fact, during that ceremony, Constantine had a golden statue erected and placed on a porphyry column in the middle of the forum. The statue of depicted Constantine with Apollonian imagery

[567] Holum (1989), 76.
[568] Herrin (2013), 165-166.
[569] See Liebeschuetz (2011), 232.

and a piece of the true cross was supposedly inserted into the statue. The celebrations centered around the statue lasted forty days, during which the power and wealth of Constantine's imperial court was on full display.[570] Eudoxia's ceremony mirrored Constantine's and according to Holum, Eudoxia's statue even depicted her wearing a *paludamentum*, a robe traditionally worn by a Roman general, and the emperor.[571] This connection to the Constantinian dynasty is further evidence of the symbolic power that the figures of Constantine and Helena had garnered in the late fourth century, which was reflected in the story of the true cross.

This ceremony connected Eudoxia to the founder and powerful figure of Constantinople. It also connected her to Helena through the statue of Constantine, which contained the piece of the true cross that Helena procured for Constantine.[572] Previously, I showed that Ambrose uses a connection to Helena and the true cross as a way to strengthen his authority, particularly as holy man. Here, Eudoxia's connection in the same way strengthens her authority as a leader in the Church. This ceremony came on the heels of Eudoxia's involvement with the Alexandrian monks and her potential collusion with the bishops, who led the synod against Chrysostom. Therefore, Chrysostom, upon returning from banishment, likely saw Eudoxia as a potential rival for

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[570] See Christopher Kelly (1999), 170-171 in *Late Antiquity*: *A Guide to the Postclassical World*, edited by Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar. Kelly gives a full description of Constantine's celebration and the column and statue of Constantine.

[571] See Holum (1989), 76; 34 respectively for his description of the statue and the *paludamentum* and the use of *paludamentum* as a male costume adopted by Theodosian women. Socrates description of the statue claims it depicted Eudoxia in a *χλανίς*, which as a gender-neutral upper-garment or shawl. The term later gets connected to the shorter military *χλαμύς*, which was associated with the Latin, *paludamentum*. See the LSJ entry for *χλανίς*. However, as Holum shows, Eudoxia was depicted in other places, like coins, with a *paludamentum*.

[572] The piece of the true cross was actually one of the pieces of the nails that allegedly Helena gathered and sent to Constantine. See Christopher Kelly (1999), 170.

influence. This follows with the conflict between Ambrose and Justina. In fact, this also follows Ambrose's initial, and much smaller, conflict with Gratian, which I mentioned in chapter two.[573] In both conflicts, Ambrose was concerned over the imperial courts use of basilicas, which superseded his position. In Chrysostom's case, Eudoxia is his rival and her involvement in church affairs likewise, supersedes his authority.

In the end, Chrysostom's in ability to collaborate with the empress, and his perceived antagonism toward her, earned him another banishment, less than a year after his first.[574] This second banishment was permanent, but had consequences for the city of Constantinople. Unlike in the conflict with Justina and Ambrose, Eudoxia and Chrysostom could not contain the crowd's response. In solidarity to the bishop, the crowds erupted in protest to the banishment. Although there were crowds that supposedly came to support Ambrose, there was no mention of violence in Milan; nor was Justina accused of ordering the troops to attack the crowds when they were sent to control the crowds and sequester the basilica. Both Ambrose and Justina made a show of force, but had the wherewithal to prevent the crowds and troops from violence. This presents a direct contrast to the lack of control either Chrysostom or Eudoxia had in Constantinople. After Chrysostom's second banishment the city rioted and burned down several buildings.[575] The response of the crowd in this case mirrored the crowd reaction after Gainas and the Arians were pushed out of the city. The crowd's response revealed

[573] See Chapter 2.6 and Stuart Williams (2017) 195-207 for the conflict with Gratian. Stuart Williams calls this the "First Basilica Crisis."

[574] JND Kelly (1998), 250-271 for a full discussion on Chrysostom's final exile and the impact it had on the imperial court, the bishop, and the city of Constantinople.

[575] Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 5.18; Socrates describes how Chrysostom had to be removed from the city by force and how his supporters started fires throughout the city.

the growing power of bishops; however, Eudoxia ability to banish such an authority also reflects the influence of late fourth century imperial women.

3.11 Conclusion of Eudoxia:

This second conflict between Chrysostom and Eudoxia has several elements that show that Chrysostom attempted to place Eudoxia in the role of the dangerous, heretical empress, despite the fact that she was a strong supporter of Nicene Christianity. For example, the consistent claims of Herodias and Jezebel mark Eudoxia as a persecutor of holy men. While the sources were consistent in reporting that Chrysostom used this language against Eudoxia, they did not necessarily take his side. Even Socrates claims that Chrysostom was using his status to rail against even those who tolerated him.[576]

Furthermore, Chrysostom's and Eudoxia's conflict initially was sparked when Eudoxia overstepped Chrysostom's authority and adjudicated the situation with the monks even after Chrysostom turned them down. After Eudoxia brought Chrysostom back, he felt further antagonized when she installed a statue near his church that proclaimed her authority – an authority that connected with Constantine, an emperor well-known for his engagement in ecclesiastic affairs. Her ceremony also mirrored the Arian festivals that Eudoxia and Chrysostom had worked together to end. All of this caused Chrysostom to feel his authority was threatened by an imperial woman.

In the end, Eudoxia's and Chrysostom's conflict ended in tragedy and violence. Chrysostom was banished for life, the city erupted in riots and shortly after this, Eudoxia

[576] Socrates Scholasticus *HE* 5.18; Socrates suggests that once he regained his position he also regained his sharp tongue.

suffered a miscarriage that resulted in her death.[577] Moreover, the conflict created an issue for the sources reporting on it. Unlike Justina, Eudoxia was a Nicene adherent and supported several other powerful bishops. In many ways, sources, like Sozomen and Socrates of Scholasticus, were conflicted on how to present the conflict. As such, the issues behind the conflicts were muddled and was not well-defined. Theodoret is loath to even report on it, claiming,

> At this part of my history, I know not what sentiments to entertain; wishful as I am to relate the wrong inflicted on Chrysostom, I yet regard in other respects the high character of those who wronged him. I shall therefore do my best to conceal even their names.[578]

The fact that Theodoret does not wish to name Eudoxia and that the other sources do not present her as the villain suggests that the role of imperial women in the late fourth century was more complex than "good" vs. "bad" empress. Although she engaged in conflict with a powerful bishop, Eudoxia was still a virtuous Nicene Christian, who patronized several churches during her reign. This shows that the sources were not depicting imperial women in a stagnant way based on their gender. Rather, their faith and adherence to orthodoxy proved more important in how the empress was depicted. Ultimately, Eudoxia and Chrysostom show that there was a consistent engagement between imperial women and bishops throughout the late fourth century and that imperial women were visible and active in the Church.

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[577] According to Sozomen *HE* 8.27; Sozomen attributes her death to divine judgment; See also Holum, 77.

[578] ἐγὼ δὲ ἐν τῷδε τῷ μέρει τῆς ἱστορίας γενόμενος οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι πάθω. διηγήσασθαι γὰρ τὴν κατὰ τούτου τολμηθεῖσαν ἀδικίαν βουλόμενος τὴν ἄλλην ἀρετὴν τῶν ἠδικηκότων αἰσχύνομαι. οὗ δὴ χάριν αὐτῶν καὶ τὰς προσηγορίας κατακρύψαι πειράσομαι. See Theodoret *Ecclesiastical History* 5.34 trans. NPNF vol.2-03.

3.12 Beyond the Bishop: Galla Placidia

While Arcadius and Eudoxia were dealing with ecclesiastical conflicts and overly-powerful generals in the east, the west was continually dealing with tensions along the borders and Honorius early reign was, essentially, usurped by the *magister militum*, Stilicho. Stilicho managed to maintain some stability, but his death in 408 opened opportunities for power.[579] In 410, the infamous Alaric's infamous sacking of Rome further weakened Honorius reign. Eventually, Honorius's and Arcadius's half-sister, Galla Placidia would lend influence that strengthened Honorius and secure the western empire for a little longer.[580]

Galla Placidia inserted herself in myriad political and religious intrigues that bombarded the western Roman empire at the turn of the century. Like her grandmother, Justina, Placidia, in 425, became the empress-mother of the six year old emperor, Valentinian III and acted as a main force in his early reign. In recent scholarship, Placidia has become an one of the important late antique imperial women, in some ways, overshadowing her grandmother. In fact, Stewart Irvin Oost even claimed that unlike her half-witted, half-brothers, Placidia was a child worthy of Theodosius the Great's legacy.[581] However, Placidia's struggle with ecclesiastical leaders coupled with her two

[579] Salzman (2021), 101 suggests Stilicho had created many enemies and his death left Honorius with the repercussions.

[580] One reason Galla Placidia was able to maintain stability was through marriages. Her second marriage, in 417, was to general Constantius, later Constantius III, who was responsible for restoring some stability after the Sack of 410 Salzman (2021), 107-109.

[581] See Oost (1968), 310.

marriages and dogged attempts to maintain her position makes her far more worthy of bearing Justina's legacy.

There have been several major studies done on Placidia. Oost's biography, and more recently, Hagith Sivan's and Joyce Salisbury's works have done much to show the impact and agency that Galla Placidia had in the early fifth century.[582] Hagith Sivan, in particular, reconstructs Placidia's life through the use of scant source material coupled with general models of life for women and their experiences in the fifth century.[583] Since Placidia's life has been given such a full treatment elsewhere, I will not be going into as much detail about her reign and early life. Instead, I will focus on one particular controversy that occurred during Placidia's second marriage, when she resided with her brother, Honorius, in Rome. During this period, Placidia became integrally involved in the conflict over the succession of the Bishop of Rome. This conflict shows the authority that the imperial court maintained over ecclesiastical affairs into the fifth century, as well as the agency of imperial women in these conflicts.

3.13 Portrait of a Princess: Background of Galla Placidia

Although I am not focusing on Placidia's early reign, it is still important to provide background to both Placidia and the controversy over the papal succession. Placidia was born early in Galla and Theodosius's marriage, and was sent to Milan for

[582] See the General Historiography section in my introduction, I.5.

[583] Hagith Sivan (2011), 2-8; Sivan acknowledges that for some of her narrative construction she does not have direct source evidence, but she used knowledge of imperial women and women in general to make some inferences in the life of Placidia.

Theodosius's funeral in 395.[584] After the funeral, Placidia remained in Milan with her brother Honorius. She was installed in Stilicho's household and raised by Stilicho and his wife, Serena, alongside their daughter, Maria, who later became the short-lived wife of Honorius.[585] Placidia later removed to Rome until the Sack of 410.

During the Sack the senate accused Serena of colluding with Alaric and helping him break into the city.[586] According to Zosimus, Placidia actually sided with the senate, when they accused Serena of colluding with Alaric and bringing the Goths to Rome. Zosimus states,

> When Alaric was near Rome, besieging its inhabitants, the Senate suspected Serena of bringing the barbarians against their city. The whole Senate therefore, with Placidia, uterine sister to the emperor, thought it proper that she should suffer death, for being the cause of the present calamity. They observed, that "Alaric, upon Serena being removed, will retire from the city, because no person will remain by whom he can hope the town to be betrayed into his hands."[587]

In 410, Placidia would have been, at the oldest 22, at the youngest 17, depending on when she was born. Scholars are divided on what Zosimus's account reveals as regards Placidia's general involvement and authority as an empress. On one side, of the argument, Placidia was young and used to promote the decision that Senate had already made, or was intimidated and threatened into supporting the decision to execute

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[584] Galla, Placidia's mother, and Justina's daughter, had died the previous year. See, Hebblewhite, 137; See Hagith Sivan (2011), 12n13 for the controversy over the dating of Placidia'a birth.

[585] See Salisbury (2015), 46-50.

[586] See Sivan (2011), 28-29.

[587] Zosimus New History 5.38. Ἤδη δὲ Ἀλλαρίχου περὶ τὴν Ῥώμην ὄντος καὶ καταστήσαντος εἰς τὴν πολιορκίαν τοὺς ἔνδον, ἐν ὑποψίᾳ ἔλαβε τὴν Σερήναν ἡ γερουσία, οἷα τοὺς βαρβάρους κατὰ τῆς Πόλεως ἀγαγοῦσαν, καὶ ἐδόκει κοινῇ τε τῇ γερουσίᾳ πάσῃ καὶ Πλακιδίᾳ τῇ ὁμοπατρίᾳ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀδελφῇ ταύτην ἀναιρεθῆναι τῶν περιεστώτων κακῶν οὖσαν αἰτίαν: καὶ Ἀλλάριχον γὰρ αὐτὸν Σερήνας ἐκποδὼν γενομένης ἀναχωρήσειν τῆς πόλεως οἷα μηδενὸς ὄντος ἔτι τοῦ προδώσειν τὴν πόλιν ἐλπιζομένου.

Serena.[588] On the other side of the divide is the argument that Placidia was in full command of her decision and that she was breaking free from the control and manipulation that both she and her brother endured under Stilicho.[589] Both of these arguments tend to concur that Stilicho and Serena were not favored by the Senate. However, the second argument also assumes that Placidia potentially hated Serena; either way, we must make an assumption, either on the part of the empress's motivations or on the motivation of the senate.

However, both of these arguments tend to ignore the context of Zosimus's account. In the first case, Zosimus's source for his book 6 relies heavily on the now lost, fifth century historian, Olympiodorus, who, Treadgold claims was a discreet, but convinced Pagan.[590] Furthermore, Olympiodorus was antagonistic toward Honorius's court. This is seen in several of his still surviving excerpts. For example, on one of these excerpts, Olympiodorus claims that Honorius was seen in public with Placidia sharing inappropriate caresses, which preceded Placidia's exile from the imperial court in the west.[591] This story is consistent with traditional tropes written against both emperors and empresses. In fact, it is strikingly similar to the depiction of Agrippina and Nero presented in Suetonius.[592] Olympiodorus, and his later pagan counter-part Zosimus, were

[588] Thomas Christopher Lawrence (2013), 36-38; see also Sivan, 9n1.

[589] Oost (1968), 85. With this argument, Oost also provides an explanation that Placidia may even have believed that Serena committed treason.

[590] W. Treadgold "The Diplomatic Career and Historical Work of Olympiodorus of Thebes," (2004), 709-733.

[591] See Blockley (1981), Olympiodorus, fr. 38

[592] See Suetonius *Nero* 28.1-2. Suetonius uses similar tropes to Tacitus in creating "good" and "bad" depictions of imperial people. Incest was one of the most transgressive sexual crimes and is a common trope for imperial women in Suetonius. See Pryzwansky (2008), 170-171.

drawing on such tropes in order to highlight the wickedness and weakness they perceived as features of Honorius's reign, particularly as regards his handling of the Sack of 410. Honorius and his court, in general, suffered in popularity for his lethargic response to the invading forces.[593] Therefore, the representation of Placidia in these sources, as scant as that representation is, must be viewed through this contextual lens, which makes her role in Serena's execution suspect, but not impossible.

Nevertheless, as I showed in my first chapter, even with these tropes, Zosimus's story of Placidia and Serena still provides evidence of Placidia's role as an imperial woman. For instance, one important aspect of the story is that it shows that Placidia was in Rome during Alaric's siege. In contrast, Honorius was in Ravenna. In fact, Procopius records an amusing, yet damning anecdote, which claims that Honorius was confused his pet chicken, named Rome, with the city and showed more concern for the bird than for the capital of his empire.[594] This shows that not only did Placidia have reign over a separate court from her brother, but that she served as the head of the imperial court in the absence of her brother. Even if she was only a symbolic figurehead, Zosimus's passage shows that imperial women held real and significant positions in Late Roman Empire. Whether the Senate coerced Placidia is not the important point in this case. It is the fact that the Senate needed to have imperial cooperation in the face of immense pressure and that imperial cooperation, symbolic or otherwise, came from the empress,

[593] Honorius, in the sources was accused of being manipulated by his eunuchs. See Salzman (2021), 101.

[594] For the story of Honorius's pet chicken see Procopius, *The Vandalic War* 3.2.25-26 and Salzman (2021), 98.

not the emperor. Zosimus's account, therefore, implicitly acknowledges this role of imperial women.

3.14 Ecclesiastical Succession and the Empress: Galla Placidia's Masterful Handling of an Episcopal Conflict

Although Zosimus's account relates a version of the young Placidia that cannot be corroborated, Placidia's later involvement in the papal succession conflict between 418-419 seems to support his representation of an active and influential imperial woman. This papal conflict occurred after Placidia, newly married to her second husband, Constantius III, arrived at the court in Ravenna.[595] Honorius, who was still childless, immediately elevated Constantius to co-augustus and as his successor. They then proclaimed Placidia as an Augusta.[596] This was an unpopular move in the East, where Theododius II, Eudoxia's son, was reigning.[597] It did not help, that Constantius and Placidia had named their son Valentinian, following her mother's dynastic lineage, rather than a proper Theodosian dynastic name. The eastern court even refused to recognize Constantius as a co-ruler with Honorius. Accordingly, when an ecclesiastical dispute erupted in Rome after the precipitous death of Pope Zosimus, in 418, it was incumbent upon the western court to handle the conflict in order to ensure the recognized authority of the bishop of Rome, and avoid undue influence from the eastern court and its bishops.

[595] See Salisbury (2015), 124-125.

[596] McEvoy (2013), 238-239 notes that Galla Placidia was already elevated as an augusta and that it is one of the few cases of a child-empress.

[597] At this point Theodosius II would have been around 18 and would have been reigning for almost as long. According to Kelly (2013), 139 Theodosius II refused to recognize Constantius III. However, after Constantius III died in 421 and Galla Placidia removed to where she aquited herself well poltically since Theodosius II recognized her son as a junior ruler in the west after Honorius died. See Salzman (2021), 137 and Salisbury (2015), 135-136.

I argue that the imperial response to the ecclesiastical conflict reflects the tension between the imperial court and the growing power of the ecclesiastic elites. In the first place, the conflict over the See of Rome came down to two rival successors: Boniface and Eulalius. Initially, Placidia favored Eulalius as the successor and implored her brother to support him alongside her.[598] However, both potential successors had factions of support and in order to maintain peace, Honorius ordered a synod to meet and decide the successor. In the interim, he ordered both Boniface and Eulalius out of the city so that they could not cause any discord.[599] During this period, Honorius sent letters to the powerful and well-known bishops in Africa, including St. Augustine of Hippo, asking them to join the synod. This was because the bishops from Africa added legitimacy to the proceedings.[600] I also suggest the fact that the African bishops were invited, but the eastern bishops of Constantinople and Antioch were not consulted sent a clear message about the divide between the eastern and western imperial courts.

In addition to Honorius's letters, Placidia sent her own letters reiterate the request that the African bishops join the synod. She also sent a letter to the venerable, Paulinus of Nola requesting his presence. All three of these letters still exist and provide one of the few female voices from Antiquity. Within these letters, Placidia appeals to an episcopal sense of vanity and duty regarding the role of bishops in addressing ecclesiastical successions. As I have shown in the case of Justina and Eudoxia, the conflicts between the imperial court and bishops were about spheres of authority. In

[598] See Sivan (2011), 73-76.
[599] Salisbury (2015), 125.
[600] Ibid, 125-127.

Justina and Ambrose's case it was a physical sphere in the form of the basilica. Eudoxia and Chrysostom conflicted over influence over more broad ecclesiastical issues. Placidia recognized these spheres of influence and shows her deference for the clerical leadership.

In addition to this, Placidia also highlighted her connection to the imperial court through her brother Honorius. One of the letters, written to the African bishops, states,

> EIUSDEM EPISTOLA AD AUGUSTINUM ALYPIUM EUHODIUM DONATIANUM SILUANUM NOUATUM ET DEUTERIUM EPISCOPOS UNIFORMIS.
>
> …Sed quamuis sacra domni **germani** mei Augusti principis ad Italiae synodum conuocans auctoritas non neglegenda peruenerit, quibus precor, ut desiderabilem aspectum benedictionis tuae sine excusatione concedens omnipotenti deo gratum iudices hunc laborem, quod et pro eximio sacerdote et pro santae uitae meritis sententiam prolaturus remunerationem uexationis huis in praemio diuino intellegis constitutam.
>
> Data XIII. Kal, April. Rauennae.
>
> CIRCULAR LETTER OF THE SAME TO AUGUSTINE, ALYPIUS, EUHODIUS, DONATIAN, SILVANUS, NOVARTUS, AND DEUTERIUS, BISHOPS
>
> …But although the sacred authority of the Lord Augustus, my blood brother the emperor, summoning you to a synod in Italy, has come to you and must not be neglected, we judge that also specially granting your Benedictions' desirable aspect without excuse, may judge this letter pleasing to Almighty God, because, for the purpose of producing a verdict both on behalf of a distinguished bishop and on behalf of a holy life's merits, you perceive that the remuneration of this vexation has been fixed in a divine reward.
>
> Given on 20 March at Ravenna.[601]

Although, Placidia does not call herself by name in this letter, the mention of her blood-brother, the emperor, clearly indicates her identity. Furthermore, she is clearly underlining her relationship with Honorius as opposed to Honorius's relationship with

[601] See Galla Placidia Epistula 28 [CSEL 35.73–74] trans. by, Coleman-Norton (1966), 599.

another imperial connection. It cannot refer to Constantius III, a nominal brother through marriage, and it could not be Theodosius II, because Honorius was his uncle not brother. The only person it could be is Placidia. The exact description here is that Honorius was Placidia's *germani* from *germanus a um* means of the same parents, or at least of the same father.[602] This focus on being connected to Honorius through their father, Theodosius I, was clearly an important aspect to emphasize. It was so important that it became a general descriptor of Placidia. A descriptor that Zosimus clearly drew upon when he referred to Placidia as the "uterine sister" or *ὁμοπατρία*, which literally means "by the same father."[603] Likely, Placidia's letters, being imperial letters, were well circulated and they would have been the earliest sources describing the empress.[604] It is not unreasonable to assume these letters influenced the language in the later histories, like Zosimus.

This is important because I argue that Placidia's use of *germani* in this letter was a concerted form of propaganda used to emphasize her connection to the Theodosian line. As I stated earlier, Theodosius II was not thrilled with Constantius III's elevation to co-Augustus. In particular, he capitalized on the fact that he and his potential future offspring were more properly Theodosian than Placidia, a half-sister of Honorius and Arcadius, with a son named for her grandmother's dynastic lineage, not the Theodosian dynasty. Therefore, Placidia's emphasis on her exact relationship with Honorius served to not only highlight her imperial authority, but also to highlight her exact relationship

[602] See the Lewis and Short entry for *germanus a um.*
[603] See the LSJ entry for *ὁμοπατρία.*
[604] See Salisbury (2015), 126-127.

with Honorius. In essence, the claim in her letter is not just that she is Honorius half-sister, but that she is wholly Theodosius I's daughter. This propaganda ultimately was successful since it is reflected even in Zosimus's account. Thus, this provides a real example of how an imperial woman not only had actual agency, but used that agency for self-representation.

3.15 Conclusion of Placidia:

After Honorius had Eulalius and Boniface leave the city, Eulalius returned and attempted to seize the basilica of St. John the Lateran.[605] Once again the Basilica became a contested space, which shows the symbolic power basilicas had achieved by this point. Oost suggests that the Eulalius was overly confident in Placidia's support, which caused his rash actions. However, both Honorius and Placidia did not react well to Eulalius's open defiance of imperial authority. Both Ambrose and Chrysostom had challenged imperial authority, but did so from positions as well-established bishops in their own right. Eulalius attempted nothing less than a usurpation of the papal succession. The imperial court could not overlook such defiance. For this reason, Eulalius was removed and Boniface became Boniface I, Bishop of Rome.[606]

Despite the initial opposition between Placidia and Boniface, both learned what Justina and Ambrose, and Eudoxia and John Chrysostom were unable to realize. That imperial authority and ecclesiastical authority needed to be in cooperation to maintain the strength of both and the Empire overall. Boniface eventually became very loyal to the

[605] Then and even now, this basilica is considered the holy seat of the Bishop of Rome, so seizing it was akin to seizing the seat. See Paolo Liverani (2020), 6-13 in *The Basilica of Saint John Lateran to 1600*.

[606] See Geoffrey D. Dunn (2020), 54-56.

empress and even maintained his support after her conflict with Honorius, which led her fleeing to the eastern court.[607] While in the east, she built connections with Theodoius II, and when Honorius died, he installed Placidia and her six year old son as a junior and Augusta in the west. He preferred this option as form of dynastic cohesion, rather than risk a usurpation to imperial authority in the west.[608] Accordingly, Galla Placidia ended her career following her grandmother's legacy. Both women were married to barbarian rulers, both remarried Roman emperors, and both had a son named Valentinian for whom they served as empress-mother. However, unlike her grandmother, Placidia maintained peaceful relations with Boniface, and, as such, was not plagued with the same challenges to her authority.

3.16 Conclusion of Justina's Legacy:

Helena, Eudoxia, and Galla Placidia all reflect the influence and visibility of imperial women in ecclesiastical and imperial affairs toward the end of the fourth century and beyond. Helena's story shows the evolution from the early to late fourth century, which wedded a connection between "good" and "bad" imperial women with their religious actions.

Additionally, Ambrose's use of the Helena story in Theodosius's funeral oration underscored the growing association and acceptance of imperial women as capable forces in matters of the Church and firmly established as a prominent and important persons in the imperial court. Eudoxia's conflict with Chrysostom reflected the tensions between

[607] Sivan (2011), 182-184 has complete timeline of Galla Placidia's life.
[608] See Kelly (2013), 15, 105.

imperial women and the bishop as regarded the use of space and displays of authority. Specifically, Chrysostom believed that Eudoxia had conspired against his authority in the Oak Synod. Similarly, Placidia's early tension with Boniface was the result of a power struggle. Furthermore, Placidia's active engagement in the succession of the Bishop of Rome confirms that imperial women had real authority in ecclesiastical affairs and that these actions shaped their representation in the sources: Helena as the pious "good empress," Eudoxia as the "raving Herodias," and Galla Placidia as the "blood-sister" of the emperor.

By the end of the fourth century imperial women became prominent figures in and challenged the spheres of episcopal influence. Helena became a figurehead for a virtuous holy woman and a new example of a "good" empress. Her patronage not only of churches, but civic spaces, like baths, was essential to her role as an empress. It also became a model for empresses, like Eudoxia. Eudoxia's donation of the silver crosses was following this model of a Christian empress. Similarly, Galla Placidia's deference to the bishops in her letter also can be attributed to the model. However, the model of Helena as crafted by Eusebius and Ambrose had two purposes. In Eusebius's case, he was establishing Helena as an example of Constantine's greatness and legitimacy as an emperor. For Ambrose, Helena was a figure who presented a stark contrast to Justina.

The problem with these images, is that neither of them were meant to present an historically accurate image of Helena. Even in the negative depictions of Helena were meant to show that the Constantinian dynasty was rife with corruption. Nevertheless, Helena appeared on coinage and building dedications throughout the empire. In her own

day she was a visible imperial woman who influence and agency. As such she has as complex a depiction in the sources as Eudoxia, Galla Placidia, and Justina.

Galla Placidia was a devoted Nicene and even helped counteract Arain processions in Constantinople, yet she is scorned for her actions against Ambrose. This shows that imperial women in the fourth century became judged as much on their relationships with bishops as on their relationships with their husbands. One reason I suggest caused this change in relational identity is because the emperors were often young and ineffective. McEvoy has shown that child-emperors dominated the end of the fourth through the fifth century.[609] This required new sources of power and influence. Imperial women and clerical elites began supplementing this loss of authority, along with the more usual suspects of generals and military elites. This was seen not only in imperial women, but also bishops like Ambrose and Chrysostom who acted as emissaries to the emperor. As such, the roles of bishops and imperial women often overlapped and conflicted. Justina set the tone for the way in which imperial women responded. From her legacy we see other imperial women continue to witness the actions of empresses geared toward preserving imperial stability.

[609] See McEvoy (2013), 317-320.

-4-

Epilogue

The sources produced in in the late fourth and early fifth century often reflect the complications and anxiety associated with succession and the instability of imperial rule. As I have shown, figures like Ambrose and Justina reflect the difficulties of maintaining relations and stability with the ever changing imperial court, and yet constantly having to negotiate between ecclesiastical and political authorities.

These negotiations of power were focused on imperial women and bishops have been long associated with Theodosian women. However, Justina was an important figure. Her actions left a legacy that led to new opportunities for imperial women. According to Ambrose, Rufinus, Augustine, Paulinus the Deacon, Sozomen, Socrates Scholasticus, Justina was an Arian, which caused the dispute between herself and Ambrose. Because of her Arian beliefs, she convinced her son, Emperor Valentinian II,

to attack Ambrose and his church. Even at face value this story shows an imperial woman having tremendous influence over the emperor, and it also highlights a conflict which associated imperial authority against Church authority. Moreover, since Christianity and imperial power were linked during the late fourth century, Justina's story depicts some of the social and political transformations of this period highlighted by both Lenski and McEvoy.

However, Justina was not necessarily as zealous in her religious convictions as the sources present. Valentinian I, as I have shown, remained rather uninvolved in ecclesiastical and doctrinal disputes, and there is no indication that Justina attempted to circumvent this or advocate for Arian doctrine. The sources suggest this was because she was unable to manipulate Valentinian I the same way she was able to manage her son.[610] However, the earliest indication in the timeline where Justina appears to advocate for the Homoean community is in 384, when Magnus Maximus usurped authority in Gaul. Although Paulinus's account of Ambrose's life claims an earlier encounter, I have shown that this event was likely a construction on Paulinus's part and that there is no evidence to suggest that Ambrose was ever in Sirmium. Rather, Paulinus's story highlights the position of Ambrose and the threat heretical women pose.

In contrast, Ambrose's own description of his early relationship with the empress was one of cooperation. In the panegyric for Valentinian II, Ambrose admits that Justina played a positive role in handing him the authority to negotiate a peace with Magnus

[610] Lenski (2014), 242 claims that Valentinian's religious leanings were ambiguous, but he was overall indifferent toward Arians.

Maximus. When Ambrose claimed that Justina handed her son over to his care, in essence, he suggests that Justina was the main agent, who allowed him to take up the role as the caregiver of the young emperor.[611] In other words, Justina gave Ambrose the authority. This shows that Ambrose acknowledged Justina's power; and he recognized that by claiming Justina gave him power he legitimized his own authority. Furthermore, the fact that Justina fled with the imperial court when Magnus Maximus attacked northern Italy, and did not appear again in the sources as a supporter for the Homoean community suggests that the empress was attempting to use the Homoean adherents as allies during a particularly tenuous moment.

Instead of taking Justina's portrayal in the sources as a manipulative heretic at face value or of consigning her to a literary creation, a new image of the empress emerges. By asking why Justina tried to exert her influence when she did, we are forced to see a larger picture of the events that motivated the empress's actions. In doing so, not only does Justina appear a far more pragmatic leader than has been assumed, but one with more authority than has been traditionally been credited to her. Even if this authority was based on the cultivation of allies, it still reflects a capable leader. For example, she, with her family's influence, secured her son's succession, but then quietly kept Valentinian II in Sirmium. She managed to prevent Merobaudes from controlling her son, as evidenced by the fact that the general, Arbogast, secured control over Valentinian after Justina left Milan and Valentinian lost her protection. Justina also secured her son's rule through a

[611] See my discussion in 2.7.

marriage alliance with Theodosius and her daughter Galla. Incidentally, this move also secured Galla's position as an empress and the mother of Galla Placidia.

4.2 Beyond the Trope

In order to understand Justina's pragmatism, it has been important to address and look beyond various tropes surrounding the depiction of imperial women in late antiquity. None of them were quite as pernicious as the trope of a seductive heretic. The images of Jezebel became strongly associated with the seductive female heretic. This image fit well with Socrates Scholasticus's bathhouse seduction following the motif of the Candaules myth. Socrates used the motif bathing and seduction in order to show Justina as a dangerous female. Justina embodied the threat of unchecked passion and weakened Valentinian I. The threat of this seductive passion, as the Candaules myth showed, is the stability of the empire. Candaules died and his kingdom was usurped by Gyges, all because of his obsession with his wife's beauty and her manipulation of that obsession. Similarly, Jezebel was a figure who also threatened the stability of her kingdom through her persecution of Elijah.

Socrates Scholasticus set his seduction story in a bathhouse. In chapter 3, I showed that bathhouses had a strong association with the emperor. The destruction of Valens in the bathhouse in Ammianus Marcellinus's account acted as a metaphor for Valens's death.[612] Thus, Justina's seduction in the bathhouse acted as a metaphor for her seduction of the imperial court. Moreover, the bathhouse was also used against the image of Helena. As a patron of a bathhouse in Rome her name became linked with a public

[612] See my discussion in chapter 3.5.

building. However, Fausta's death in a bathhouse, after Helena encouraged Constantine to seek justice for Crispus, once again shows the dangers of persuasive and influential women.

Additionally, Fausta's death was not unique, rather it also followed a trope established during Nero's reign. In this case, the trope was Seneca's description of Octavia, Nero's first wife, who suffered a similar execution in hot steam.[613] Jill Harries shows that this story was known in late antiquity and the connection between Fausta and Octavia was even made by Sidonius Appollinaris.[614] However, in Nero's case, the emperor had control of the execution. As I showed, Fausta was executed because Helena encouraged Constantine to execute her. According to the *Epitome de Caesaribus,* Constantine only "steamed" Fausta to death because Helena rebuked him for executing Crispus.[615] Moreover, Helena was associated with the bath structure and the connection between her encouragement and bathhouses highlights the influence she had on Constantine. Yet, it is important to remember that the story of Fausta's execution was shaped by a later fourth century tradition as well, and so should be considered also part of Justina's legacy.

I argue that the connection between imperial women and bathhouses was the result of the increased influence and visibility of imperial women in late antiquity. As I have shown, bathhouses were public and visible spaces and were already associated with emperors. Rather than focusing on the trope, the association of a space commonly

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[613] See Seneca's play *Octavia* for the death of Nero's wife.

[614] See Jill Harries (2014), 206-207 in *Being Christian in Late Antiquity: A Festschrift for Gillian Clark*. See also Sidonius Apollinaris *Letters* 5.8.2.

[615] See my discussion in 3.5.

connected with the power and influence of the emperor shows imperial women were connected with that influence. Helena even patronizes a bathhouse and physically marks the city with a building structure. This visibility associated with imperial power became connected with imperial women in the fourth century.

4.3 The Visible Empress

By asking new questions, as Champlain did for Nero, I have developed a new understanding of the Justina, an empress who was both visible and influential. Her influence led to Valentinian II's succession in 378 and a law that reinstated rights for Arians. In addition, she also gained popularity over large groups of people. For example, even in Rufinus's description of Justina we see can see an empress trying to raise forces and gain allies.

Rufinus states,

> Ipsa autem in ecclesiis garrire, strepere, animare et inflammare ad discordiam populous, sed quod minus res ex sententia cederet, inuriam putare et pro hac apud filium conqueri.
>
> She [Justina] went about the churches chattering noisily and trying to rouse and kindle discord among the people, but when she failed, she regarded herself as having been wronged, and complained to her son.[616]

Although this description presents a negative woman going about "noisily," we see an empress going around in public trying to make connections and alliances. Based on Rufinus's account she failed to create discord among the people. However, that assessment does not match the situation Ambrose described. Ambrose claimed that she

[616] Rufinus 11.15. *The Church History of Rufinus of Aquileia: Books 10 and 11*. trans. by Philip Amidon (1997).

had loyal gothic soldiers that she essential controlled.[617] Furthermore, Paulinus of Milan also claimed that Justina had swarms of followers.[618] Yet, what Rufinus shows is, despite her influence over soldiers and crowds, she never had to resort to any real violence or discord to achieve her goals. Rather, Justina used her position as empress to affect laws. She wielded imperial power over laws and customs to combat Ambrose's influence of doctrinal adherence. This follows the argument I discussed about imperial power and Roman elites having to adapt during the late fourth century.[619]

Rufinus's account above reflects the public visibility of Justina and late antique empresses. As the imperial women shouldered more of the burden of maintaining stability in the imperial court, the public visibility of the empress increased under Justina.[620] As I showed, earlier imperial women were praised for their lack of visibility and their quiet modesty. Plotina, in particular, was praised by both Cassius Dio and Pliny the Younger for these qualities.[621]

In contrast, late antique imperial women are not praised for their lack of visibility, but for the type of visibility they engendered. For example, Helena was praised for going out among the people and spreading her Christian charity and virtue. In contrast, Justina is repudiated for opposing an elite male figure. Additionally, Rufinus shows Justina is accused of inciting the crowds and causing upheaval in the city. Ambrose also accused

[617] See my discussion in Chapter 2.7.
[618] See my discussion in Chapter 2.2.
[619] See my discussion in Chapter 1.4.
[620] Leonard (2019), 345 discusses how Placidia's visibility was also "markedly increased" and how imperial women were useful as "bargaining chips." In this case, I use visibility as a way to discuss Justina's agency rather than her use to other male figures.
[621] See my discussion of Plotina, 182.

her of causing riotous crowds and praises himself for preventing the violence. According to his account,

> I could tell from the groans of the people that the church was surrounded. But during the reading of the lesson word was brought to me that the Basilica Nova to was filling up with people; bigger than when they had not been under duress; a shout had gone up for a reader. To be brief: the very soldiers who appeared to have taken possession of the Basilica, learning that I had given instruction that they were to be kept from joining the congregation in the Eucharist, started to come here to our service. At the site of them there was panic among the women; one of them rushed forward. The soldiers themselves, however, were declaring that they had come to prayer, not to battle. The people raised a cheer.[622]

This passage comes directly after the passage in which Ambrose claims Justina always travels with a "swarm" of followers. As I discussed, Ambrose asserted that the Milanese community did not support Justina.[623] Moreover, he claimed Justina brought outsiders and Gothic soldiers, who terrified the crowds. Ambrose depicts himself as the one who keeps the crowds calm and continues with the sermon despite the threat of the soldiers brought to an already tense situation. Daniëlle Slootjes has suggested that Christian crowd behavior, as depicted in late antique sources, contained a new element of violence in the name of belief. Even if not true, the threat of violence is pronounced in this passage and the tension is increased with the presence of the soldiers.[624] Slootjes's argument, however, suggests that the threat of violence did not come from the soldiers, as

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[622] See Ambrose *Epistula ad Marcellina* trans. Liebeschuetz (2005), 165. circumfusam basilicam esse gemitu populi intellexi. sed dum leguntur lectiones, intimatur mihi plenam populi esse basilicam etiam novam; maiorem videri plebem, quam cum essent omnes liberi; lectorem efflagitari. quid plura: milites ipsi, qui videbantur occupasse basilicam cognito, quod praecepissem, ut abstinerentur a communionis consortio, ad conventum hunc nostrum venire coeperunt. quibus visis turbantur mulierum animi, proripit se una. ipsi tamen milites se ad orationem venisse, non ad proelium loquebantur. clamavit aliqua populus.

[623] For the passage and my discussion see Chapter 2.2.

[624] See Daniëlle Slootjes (2016), 192 in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome.*

Ambrose claims. Instead, the threat of violence came from the crowd supporting Ambrose. Therefore, based on this account and understanding of the crowd, Ambrose was the threat and Justina was attempting to maintain stability in the city.

In the end, no violence occurs and the soldiers claimed they were there to pray. Liebeschuetz suggests that the soldiers were there to make the basilica ready for the emperor, but not to stop the community from entering the basilica.[625] Based on my reading of this passage, Justina was actually the one who maintained peace and stability in Milan by controlling the potentially violent crowd that Ambrose assembled. The presence of the soldiers alarmed the crowds and prevented any violence. Justina sent the soldiers and ordered them to maintain peace. The crowd cheered and the rest of Ambrose's sermon proceeded without conflict. In essence, Justina maintained peace in the city and used her imperial authority – the soldiers – to control the crowd.

In contrast, Eudoxia provides a different type of visibility for imperial women. In Eudoxia's case, there were two examples where the crowds reacted with violence. After Gainas left Constantinople, the crowds in the city attacked Arians and caused riots.[626] Similarly, after Chrysostom was banished for the second time, the crowds also rioted.[627] In both of these cases, Eudoxia had been present either before or after the crowd violence. Her processions with the silver crosses, for example, occurred a year after the Gainas riots. In both events, Eudoxia's visible presence was meant to restore stability to Constantinople and reinforce Arcadius's legitimacy and authority.

[625] See Liebeschuetz (2005), 165n8.
[626] See my discussion in 3.18.
[627] See my discussion in 3.10.

Justina's going about and visibly engaging with the people, is an action attributed to Helena and Eudoxia. Helena was praised by both Eusebius and Ambrose for her public appearances. Eudoxia, likewise, was also praised during her first public appearance, when she dedicated the silver crosses under the supervision of Chrysostom. Therefore, it is not easy to conclude that Justina's going out was a common negative trope used against imperial women. Justina, and later Eudoxia, only received criticism for going among the people when it was antagonistic to the bishop.

This sometimes-negative depiction of imperial women in public then further supports my overall claim that Justina and her predecessors engaged in a power struggle with bishops. Imperial women were not always negatively depicted for being visible or even influential in religio-political matters. Accordingly, the negative depictions of these late fourth and early fifth century women occurred because of power-struggles and conflicts with bishops. This is further proved by the fact that the one time Ambrose admits to working with Justina was when she literally put her son's care into his hands.[628] In the same manner, Eudoxia initially created a truce with Chrysostom by placing her son, Theodosius II, on his knee.[629] In both cases, the empress appears to be acquiescing to the authority of the bishop. But the fact that both women approached the bishop and attempted cooperation show that they were trying to negotiate these power struggles. Although Justina and Eudoxia have much different situations, they both act in ways to maintain stability in the empire. Justina acted in cooperation with Ambrose at the

[628] See my discussion on Ambrose's funeral oration for Valentinian II in chapter 2.5.

[629] Liebeschuetz (2011), 233-234; this was when Eudoxia was trying to get Chrysostom to call a truce with Severian, but the later conflict involving the Long brothers prevented this.

beginning of Magnus's usurpation and Eudoxia did the same a year after Gainas was ousted and Stilicho was fighting the Visigoths in the west. These actions further show that these empresses acted to secure ecclesiastical support during times of heightened insecurity. Furthermore, these are not the only cases where late antique imperial women acted as stabilizing influences.

As I have shown in chapter 3, both Galla Placidia and Pulcheria played similar roles as imperial women. In my discussion of Galla Placidia, I showed that Galla Placidia played an influential role in the controversial episcopal succession in Rome. Similarly, as I discuss below, Pulcheria allied with Cyril of Alexandria against the non-Nicene bishop, Nestorius. Both of these cases show examples of imperial women, who were engaged in ecclesiastical affairs during controversial moments.

The bishops, needing the support of the empress, not only reveals the evolution of powerful, bishops, but also shows that the empress was a recognized authority within the imperial court. This was why Ambrose, who understood the potential repercussions of his conflict with Justina, was quick to paint himself as the persecuted Elijah. Additionally, Ambrose was quick to insist he was not acting as a usurper, again showing his unwillingness to engage in a power struggle with a member of the imperial court, even a female member, lest it have real ramifications for his career, and even his life. Afterall, Chrysostom was allegedly banished for his conflict with an imperial woman.

4.4 Renegotiating Power

Because of the importance of the empress, bishops later in the fifth century began to understand how to utilize an alliance with an empress to advance their interests. After

their shaky beginning, Boniface and Placidia became loyal allies. He remained loyal to Placidia even after she argued with Honorius and had to flee east.[630] But Boniface was not the last to recognize the imperial authority an empress had.

During the reign of Theodosius II, the emperor's sister, Pulcheria, had command of her younger brother with the death of both parents. Like her predecessors, she showed her authority in ecclesiastical matters and eventually fell into conflict with Nestorius, Bishop of Constantinople. However, Theodosius II favored Nestorius and his wife at the time, Aelia Eudocia, had a strained relationship with Pulcheria. Cyril of Alexandria used the imperial discord between Pulcheria and Nestorius, the Bishop of Constantinople. Cyril allied with Pulcheria. Eventually, through their combined machinations, Nestorius was ousted, much like Chrysostom.[631] Cyril of Alexandria created an alliance with Pulcheria and with other Theodosian empresses because he understood that imperial women had genuine influence and power. Holum has shown that Cyril did not just address his letters to Theodosius II. Instead, he addressed letters to Theodosius and his wife, Eudocia. Cyril also wrote to Pulcheria, as the emperor's sister and a recognized imperial woman, for he understood the influence these women actually wielded.[632]

Pulcheria and Cyril's relationship reflects the growing influence of late antique imperial women, which began earlier, as I have argued, in light especially of the influence of Justina. Justina may not have been able to secure a basilica or oust Ambrose. However, if we understand that her goal was securing Valentinian II's reign

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[630] See Sivan (2011), 182-184.

[631] For more on Pulcheria see, Anthony McGuckin (1994), 25-33 and Susan Wessel (2004), 100-103.

[632] See Holum (1989), 159-163.

and defeating Magnus Maximus, we can conclude that she was a successful and effective Augusta. For these reasons, Justina needs to be regarded as a central figure in the Valentinian dynasty, as well as one of the most important empresses in the late Roman Empire.

Ultimately, Justina set a new standard for imperial women and demonstrated new possibilities for female influence on church-state relations. Imperial women had become visible members of the imperial court, Church, and society. Their visibility contributed to their ability to undertake political actions, a role that Justina had exercised most effectively during a time of heightened instability. By understanding the context in which imperial women acted, we can see that Justina was a pragmatic and capable figure.

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