

RECLAIMING THE NON-NICENE PAST:
THEOPHILUS THE INDIAN AND ULFILA THE GOTH AS MISSIONARY HEROES

By

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In the first half of the fifth century, the Eunomian layman Philostorgius published the *Ecclesiastical History*, offering up a decidedly non-Nicene vision of Christian history to the educated readers of the Later Roman Empire. Living during the resolutely Nicene reign of Theodosius II, the historian not only had little hope of his work finding a welcome audience but even faced possible persecution as a heretic for the publication. Nevertheless, Philostorgius knowingly took the risk, as he desired not only to counter the Nicene representation of history by Rufinus of Aquileia, but also to reclaim the memory of the Christian past for his own faith community.

Along with the non-Nicene work of Auxentius of Durostorum, Philostorgius's history miraculously survived and preserved alternative visions of Christian history. Labeled as Arians or heretics in their own time, these two non-Nicene writers used missionary accounts of Theophilus the Indian and Ulfila the Goth to reclaim the narrative of Christian history. Since these texts both represent and create an idea of mission, an analysis of these non-Nicene texts and a comparison with the Nicene histories of the period, will shed light on the distinctiveness of non-Nicene mission. While scholars such as W. H. C. Frend have made significant contributions to the history of mission in late antiquity, the role of non-Nicene missionaries has not received

any attention. Additionally, by exploring Philostorgius's and Auxentius's understanding of the past, a more complete picture of late antique histories can be drawn. The narratives of Theophilus's and Ulfila's missions played a central role in the reconstruction of the memory of true Christian history for these non-Nicene writers.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Toward the end of the fourth century, a learned layman in his twenties set forth upon a long journey from Cappadocia, the ancient Roman province of his birth, to the great capital city of Constantinople. Although the exact reasons for this journey are unknown, soon upon his arrival the young man visited a retired bishop striving to minister to the members of a persecuted religious community. As the bishop was the founding hero of the Christian faith the young man had embraced from childhood, the meeting marked an epoch in his life, but the reaction of the aged gentleman as well as the content of this interaction have been lost. One can imagine, however, that the old bishop offered guidance and encouragement simply by virtue of his presence, since in his later recollection of the meeting, the young man chose to emphasize the appearance of the elderly hero of the faith, connecting his physical features with the man's "incomparable intelligence and virtue." One hopes that the legendary leader of the faith communicated all that he intended to the young man, for the emperor Theodosius I soon sent the bishop into his final exile.¹

1. Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. and ed. Philip R. Amidon (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 10.6. There seems to be a lot of confusion in the secondary literature on where it was that Philostorgius met Eunomius, either in Constantinople or the estate of Dacora in Cappadocia. The setting of the meeting matters because it relates to two completely different episodes in the life of Eunomius. Dacora: Gabriele Marasco, "The Church Historians (II): Philostorgius and Gelasius of Cyzicus," in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity, Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. Gabriele Marasco (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 258; and Hartmut Leppin, "Heretical Historiography: Philostorgius," in *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001): 111; Constantinople: Richard Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus and the Nicene Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 350; Eran I. Argov, "Giving the Heretic a Voice: Philostorgius of Borissus and Greek Ecclesiastical Historiography," *Athenaeum* 89 (2001): 497-524; and Alanna E. Nobbs, "Philostorgius' View of the Past," in *Reading the Past in Late Antiquity*, ed. Graeme Clarke (Rushcutters Bay, NSW, Australia: Australian National University Press, 1990), 256. Dacora on the way to Constantinople: Raymond Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 39. The confusion stems from Philostorgius's tendency to use flashbacks in his narrative. Nevertheless, it seems clear to me that Philostorgius met Eunomius in Constantinople, as he states that he saw him "when he [Philostorgius] was twenty years old and had gone to Constantinople." It is not clear, however, why the historians who include the detail in their work completely fail to acknowledge their disagreement with each other. The critical edition of Philostorgius is Joseph Bidez, *Philostorgius, Kirchengeschichte: Mit dem Leben des Lucian von Antiochien und den Fragmenten eines arianischen Historiographen* (3rd ed.; rev. by Friedhelm Winkelmann; GCS; Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981).

The aged bishop was none other than Eunomius of Cyzicus (d. 393 AD), famous to some and infamous to others for his support of a Christian group that denied the theological formulations of the Council of Nicaea of 325. His young visitor, Philostorgius (368-c. 439), would eventually compose the Ecclesiastical History, in which Eunomius plays a significant role as an ardent defender of the one true faith—Eunomian Christianity.² Detractors also referred to the members of this sect as “Anomoeans” or “Dissimilarians” and, just as inaccurately, “Arians.” Indeed, such improper designations continue to the present day in modern scholarship.³ But, as Philostorgius makes amply clear at the beginning of his work, the followers of this particular creed preferred the designation Eunomian.⁴

The story of this remarkable meeting between these two, arguably most significant, historical representatives of this non-Nicene sect reveals hints of both its triumphant heyday and eventual fall into infamy and obscurity. All other non-Nicene groups ultimately shared this fate. For centuries, the victors—adherents to the Nicene Creed—wrote histories outlining the sudden Arian threat that arose to contest the one true Christian faith, as expressed at Nicaea and existing since the time of Christ. The story continued with a courageous rallying of the Nicene forces around such venerable figures as Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 293-373) and Basil of Caesarea (330-379) toward a final and definitive victory. As they told the story, polemicists and historians alike conflated various opponents to Nicaea under the one useful epithet of “Arian.” And, most unfortunately of all, they incorporated these people into their histories only to demonstrate how “true” Christianity benefited from this challenge. “Arians” mattered only inasmuch as they

2. Throughout this paper, I use such terms as “orthodoxy” or “true Christianity” and I always use them from the perspective of the historical actors. I will try to make this clear each time; nevertheless, the reader should keep this in mind.

3. See full discussion below, 56-60.

4. Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1.

helped early Christians formulate their core beliefs and unite against a formidable foe.

Philostorgius experienced both of these Nicene viewpoints during his lifetime. He lived in a world where the majority labeled him “Arian” and denied his faith any legitimacy or continuity with the Apostolic Church. He must have known that his arduous intellectual effort to reclaim the past for his community of believers would not be welcome in the Theodosian Empire and might even prove dangerous to himself personally. Yet, despite these circumstances, around the third decade of the fifth century, he completed his account of the history of the Church; reading it, one imagines that he found strength and inspiration from his early meeting with the hero of his faith.

What did Philostorgius desire that his readers take away from his *Ecclesiastical History*? How did non-Nicene Christians want to remember the establishment and expansion of Christianity? These are some of the questions guiding this inquiry into the non-Nicene memory of the past. As the Nicene sources have primarily defined narratives of Christianization, an evaluation of the perspective of non-Nicene writers is long overdue. While recent scholarship has challenged the dichotomy of heresy versus orthodoxy and acknowledged the flourishing of diverse “Christianities” in Late Antiquity,⁵ these advances in the field have had a limited effect on treatments of Christianization. Specifically, numerous fine works on Arianism in the past generation have added nuance to our understanding of the Arian controversy and Arian theology,

5. Most recently, see Eduard Iricinschi and Holger M. Zellentin, eds., *Heresy and Identity in Late Antiquity* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), David M. Gwynn, Susanne Bangert, and Luke Lavan, eds., *Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), which also incorporates archaeology into the discussion; and Richard Lim, “Christian Triumph and Controversy,” in *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). Reflecting the new sensitivity to variants of Christianity, *The Cambridge History of Christianity, Vol. 2: Constantine to c.600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Part I, 9-148, treats regional developments in four chapters on diverse regional “Christianities.”

but these newer perspectives have not been integrated into narratives of Christianization.⁶ As missionaries play a major role in Philostorgius's non-Nicene reconstruction of true Christian history, his representation of mission will serve as the focus of this analysis. For the purposes of this study, "mission" will refer both to a delegation to an area beyond the Roman frontier with at least a partially Christianizing intent and to the representation of such an event within the Christian sources of the period.⁷ The term "embassy" will emphasize the imperial aspects of the delegation. Specifically, I will focus on the missionary efforts of Theophilus the Indian and Ulfila the Goth because their missions were central to the ecclesio-political goals of non-Nicene emperors and bishops and essential to the non-Nicene memory of the past.⁸

6. On the development of theology during the fourth century and the construction of the "Arian" controversy see first of all R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: the Arian Controversy, 318-381* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1988); Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and its Legacy: an Approach to Fourth-century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Rowan Williams, *Arius: Heresy and Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1987); Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Thomas A. Kopecek, *A History of Neo-Arianism* (Cambridge, MA: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979); and Richard Vaggione's *Eunomius of Cyzicus*.

7. While in the past scholars wrote about missions, conversions, and Christianization with a sure understanding of the meanings and connotations of the terms (see, for example, W. H. C. Frend's *The Rise of Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984)), more recently historians have acknowledged that modern understandings of mission do not necessarily coincide with late antique and medieval notions of these terms. Additionally, the Christianization of an area might occur without a group of people traveling there with the intention of evangelization. And finally, the relationship between the event of conversion or mission and the representation of such events in the sources are not one and the same. For helpful discussions of the complexities associated with these terms see Andrea Sterk, "Mission From Below: Captive Women and Conversion on the East Roman Frontiers," *Church History* 79:1 (March 2010): 1-8, and Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelization of Europe, 400-1050* (Longman, 2001), 3-5.

8. Theophilus is known as "the Indian" because Philostorgius refers to him this way. Gregory of Nyssa pejoratively calls Theophilus a member of the nomadic tribe of Blemmyes, who lived south of Egypt and raided Egyptian settlements (*Contra Eunomium* 1. 47). Presumably, the designation "Indian" originated from the fact that Theophilus came from the island of Diva inhabited by Divaeans who "too are among those known as Indians" (Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4). On the location of "Diva" see Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 40 n. 8, for the Maldives; for Socotra see Albrecht Dihle, "L'ambassade de Théophile l'Indien ré-examinée," in *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel: Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 24-27 Juin 1987*, ed. Toufic Fahd (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 461; and Gonzalo Fernandez, "The Evangelizing Mission of Theophilus 'the Indian' and the Ecclesiastical Policy of Constantius II," *Klio* 71 (1989), 361; see Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1984), 98, for "one of the islands in or near the Persian Gulf;" Shahid also compellingly argues against Ceylon or an island in the Red Sea, 97. The appellation may also stem from Theophilus's association with the areas he traveled to as a missionary: Himyar (South Yemen), the Indian subcontinent, Diva, and Aksum (Ethiopia). Beginning in the fourth century, all Greek and Roman sources could refer to any and all of these

While only Philostorgius relates the story of Theophilus's mission, the sources for the mission of Ulfila are more abundant, but predominantly from the Nicene perspective. The only other non-Nicene source for Ulfila is the western bishop Auxentius of Durostorum's late fourth-century account describing the life and ministry of the Goth.⁹ While Auxentius is not, strictly speaking, an ecclesiastical historian, his account of Ulfila seeks to reclaim the past in the same way as Philostorgius's Ecclesiastical History. Auxentius subscribed to a homoean Christian creed, which differed from Philostorgius's Eunomian formulation.¹⁰ Nevertheless, both Auxentius and Philostorgius shared a vision as well as a struggle to restore Christian memory from the perspective of a non-Nicene community. Philostorgius afforded the homoean Ulfila a place of honor in his history, perhaps accurately reflecting a time when the lines between various non-Nicene groups were not so sharply drawn. Thus, an analysis of the representation of the missions of Theophilus and Ulfila by the non-Nicene writers Philostorgius and Auxentius will reveal alternative visions of Christianization in Late Antiquity. This reassessment is long overdue as the missions themselves, especially in the case of Theophilus, have received scant

locations as "India" and/or inhabited by "Indians." For more on this aspect of Byzantine geography see: Philip Mayerson, "A Confusion of Indias: Asian India and African India in the Byzantine Sources," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 113, (1993): 169-174.

9. For work on Auxentius one must look to the brief discussion in Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), which also provides a translation of Auxentius's *Letter on the Life, Faith, and Death of Ulfila*, 137-143. Also, the critical edition of Auxentius's text is found in Roger Gryson, *Scolies Ariennes Sur Le Concile D'Aquilée, Sources Chrétiennes* 267 (Paris: Cerf, 1980); and *Corpus Christianorum, series Latina* 87 (Turnholt, 1982), 160-166. Subsequent references to the text refer to section numbers from the *Corpus Christianorum* edition with the *Source Chrétiennes* section numbers in square brackets. See also the relevant sections in Neil McLynn's *Ambrose of Milan: Church and Court in a Christian Capital* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 183-206, and Daniel Williams's *Ambrose of Milan and the end of the Nicene-Arian Conflicts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 100-200.

10. The homoeans avoided terminology describing God's substance such as the Nicene *homoousios* and differed from the Eunomians in insisting on some similarity between God the Father and His Son, while the Eunomians denied this similarity.

scholarly assessment in the past and have been characterized by a dismissive attitude and carelessness with regard to the sources.¹¹

The two non-Nicene accounts have suffered derision as nothing more than “Arian” polemic while the missionary accounts of historians who supported the decisions of the Council of Nicaea have long supplanted any dissenting voices. The early fifth-century ecclesiastical history of the Latin writer Rufinus and the mid fifth-century Greek ecclesiastical histories of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret all embraced the theological formulations of Nicaea and helped create and spread stereotypes about “Arians.” These fifth-century ecclesiastical historians provided accounts of similar time periods and events and followed the model of the first ecclesiastical historian, Eusebius of Caesarea.¹² Their theological allegiance to the Council of Nicaea ensured that their version of events would not only serve as the dominant narrative during their own time period but also for subsequent generations, down to the present day. A

11. For example, two scholars state that Constantius II sought to replace the Nicene bishop Frumentius with Theophilus the Indian as bishop of Aksum, although no primary source mentions any such potential replacement. See John Spencer Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (New York: Longman, 1979), 293, and Ralph W. Mathisen, “Barbarian Bishops and the Churches ‘in Barbaricis Gentibus’ During Late Antiquity,” *Speculum* 72 (1997): 666. Irfan Shahid does not go this far, but does maintain that Theophilus carried Constantius’s letter to Aksum (*Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, 92); once again, apart from a chronological possibility there is no direct evidence to suggest this. Also, Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity* (Princeton University Press, 1993), 112 rightly argues that the communication was too important to have traveled through Himyar and India with Theophilus before reaching Aksum. Curiously, Fowden does not mention whose assertion he is challenging. See also the confusion discussed earlier about the meeting between Eunomius and Philostorgius, 7 n. 1.

12. Some promising work has been done toward a more critical reading of ecclesiastical historians. Good starting points are Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Evagrius*, 2nd ed. (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986); David Rohrbacher, *The Historians of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 2002); and Warren Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007). For an analysis of the ecclesiastical historians’ construction of reality in terms of “retributive justice,” see G. W. Trompf, *Early Christian Historiography: Narratives of Retributive Justice* (London: Continuum, 2000). Several recent studies have highlighted the individuality of the Nicene ecclesiastical historians rather than treating them as a unit. For Rufinus see, Françoise Thelamon, *Païens et Chrétiens au IVe Siècle: L’apport de l’“Histoire Ecclésiastique” de Rufin d’Aquilée* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1981); for Socrates see, Theresa Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1997); Urbainczyk, “Observations on the Differences between the Church Histories of Socrates and Sozomen,” *Historia* 46 (1997): 355-373; for Theodoret see, Theresa Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

comparison of Nicene representations of mission in these histories with those of their non-Nicene counterparts will enable us to reassess the notions of mission and the progress of Christianization in the post-Constantinian period and at the same time provide a fuller and more accurate picture of post-Eusebian historiography.

Given the missionary directives in the New Testament, it is surprising that the story of early Christian mission remains to be told in full.¹³ While the subject has certainly inspired major scholarly studies such as the now classic *Christianizing the Roman Empire* by Ramsay MacMullen, as well as more popular approaches like that of the sociologist of religion, Rodney Stark, the field has largely been defined by a focus on pre-Constantinian Christian mission.¹⁴ Recently, Andrea Sterk has commented on the tendency of historians to argue for a lack of missionary activity during the pre-Constantinian era and points out the relative scarcity of studies of mission beyond the fourth century.¹⁵ She acknowledges the growing body of scholarship on Christian mission for the early Middle Ages in the West, but explains that the situation differs substantially for eastern mission.¹⁶ Sterk's article is a prime example of how historians are beginning to reassess the subjects of mission and Christianization and reinvigorate this field.¹⁷

13. Matthew 28: 19-20, Mark 16: 20; W.H.C. Frend, "The Missions of the Early Church, 180-700 AD," in *Miscellanea Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, vol. 3, edited by Derek Baker (Louvain, 1970), 5, 23.

14. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984); Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996).

15. Sterk, "Mission From Below: Captive Women and Conversion on the East Roman Frontiers," 3-4.

16. For excellent studies of Christianization and mission in the West see, Ian Wood, *The Missionary Life: Saints and the Evangelization of Europe, 400-1050*; James C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); and last but not least, Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003).

17. For recent reassessments of eastern Christianization see also Sterk, "Mission From Below;" Andrea Sterk, "'Representing' Mission From Below: Historians as Interpreters and Agents of Christianization," *Church History* 79:2 (June 2010): 271-304; Cornelia Horn, "The Lives and Literary Roles of Children in Advancing Conversion to Christianity: Hagiography from the Caucasus in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages," *Church*

Still, many aspects of the history of Christian mission in and beyond the fourth century warrant further study. Any consideration of the distinction between Nicene and non-Nicene mission remains almost completely absent from the recent scholarship on Christianization.¹⁸ While “Monophysite” and “Nestorian” missionary figures have garnered occasional attention from scholars,¹⁹ such “Arian” missionaries as Ulfila and Theophilus the Indian have received far less scrutiny. The activities of Ulfila, celebrated for his Gothic translation of the Bible, have certainly inspired historians more than the lesser known career of the missionary Theophilus, yet representations of both frequently fail to incorporate a critical analysis of the sources for these important figures. Redressing this deficiency requires a careful examination of the ways in which ecclesiastical historians shaped both the debates and the stories that they recounted.²⁰ Figures

History 76:2 (2007): 262-297; Christopher Haas, “Mountain Constantines: The Christianization of Aksum and Iberia,” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1:1 (2008): 101-126; S. A. Ivanov, *Vizantiiskoe Missionerstvo: Mozhno li sdelat' iz “varvara” khristianina* [Can a “Barbarian” be turned into a Christian: Cultural History of Byzantine Missionary Activity] (Moscow: Iazyki Slavianskoi Kul'tury, 2003).

18. Though scholars have discussed Ulfila’s mission or the mission of Theophilus individually, there are no studies of “Arian” or non-Nicene mission as a whole. Ulfila’s mission receives substantial treatment from E. A. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 78-132, and in Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991), 124-143. Ulfila’s potential conversion is discussed in Hagith Sivan, “Ulfila’s Own Conversion,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 89 (1996): 373-386; see also Timothy D. Barnes, “The Consecration of Ulfila,” in *From Eusebius to Augustine: Selected Papers, 1982-1993* (Brookfield, VT: Variorum, 1994), 541-545. For the mission of Theophilus see Albrecht Dihle, “Die Sendung des Inders Theophilus,” *Palingenesia* 4 (1969): 330-336; Albrecht Dihle, “L’ambassade de Théophile l’Indien ré-examinée,” 461-68; and Gianfranco Fiaccadori, “Teofilo Indiano,” *Studi classici e orientali* 33 (1983): 295-331; 34 (1984): 271-308. There is no major study of Theophilus in English, but see the relevant section in Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, 86-106 as well as the highly problematic article of Gonzalo Fernandez, “The Evangelizing Mission of Theophilus ‘the Indian’ and the Ecclesiastical Policy of Constantius II,” 361-366, which will be discussed below.

19. For example, W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); and most recently, Jeanne-Nicole Saint-Laurent, “Apostolic Memories: Religious Differentiation and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Syriac Missionary Literature” (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 2009).

20. Fortunately, some recent work on Philostorgius and other ecclesiastical historians has moved us in this direction. See Thomas C. Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography* (Leiden: Brill, 2005); also, on Philostorgius see Alanna Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ View of the Past.” For a highly perceptive evaluation of the diverse concerns within the sources on Ulfila in particular, see Neil McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City: Ulfila and his Interpreters,” in *Wolf Liebeschuetz Reflected: Essays Presented by Colleagues, Friends, and Pupils*, edited by John Drinkwater and Benet Salway, (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), 125-135.

such as Philostorgius did not merely seek to provide an account of events; rather, they sought to express their own theology and their view of the world. They helped shape a specific vision of the past, which included a particular understanding of mission and conversion. Always bearing in mind that these texts both represent and create an idea of mission, an analysis of the accounts of the non-Nicene writers Philostorgius and Auxentius will make clear the distinctiveness of non-Nicene mission. Past treatment of their mission accounts has focused on a simple reconstruction of events, which obscures the complexity of these narratives. In reality, missionary activity, multiple layers of text, memories of the past, and the politics of belief—whether “heretical” or “orthodox”—were all integral aspects of the process of Christianization in Late Antiquity. A reexamination of the sources for the missionary work of Theophilus and Ulfila will reveal the fascinating intersections between mission, heresy, and historiography that cast light on the broader phenomenon of Christianization in this pivotal age.

CHAPTER 2 NON-NICENE MISSION IN CONTEXT

The Sources: Non-Nicene and Nicene Historians

The complex nature of the extant sources on non-Nicene mission proves challenging for any examination of the missionaries Theophilus and Ulfila. While the reigning narratives of fourth-century missionary history are those recounted by the major Greek and Latin fifth-century Nicene ecclesiastical historians, only the three Greek Nicene histories of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret treat the mission of Ulfila. These histories were all composed subsequent to the work of the non-Nicene historian, Philostorgius. The other major Nicene historian, Rufinus of Aquileia, writing his Latin account subsequent to Auxentius and prior to Philostorgius, does not mention Ulfila at all. Moreover, none of the Nicene church histories includes any account of Theophilus, leaving Philostorgius as the only witness to his missionary activity. We will start, then, with a survey of the non-Nicene sources on mission, before introducing the better-known Nicene ecclesiastical histories.

Although both the main non-Nicene sources on Theophilus and Ulfila prove rather problematic, they are nonetheless intriguing texts, deserving of much more attention than they have received and crucial for any thorough study of mission in the fourth century. Philostorgius's *Ecclesiastical History* was written and published between 425 and 433 in two volumes, comprising twelve books, and covered the years from 320 to 425.¹ The entire work is an acrostic, as Philostorgius composed his history in such way that the first letter of each book spells out his name.² The work visibly emphasizes Philostorgius's Eunomian faith in the title, "The History of

1. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xix.

2. Philostorgius included an epigram that stated this fact: Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1; the patriarch Photius also commented on the fact in his *Bibliotheca*: Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 2. The critical edition of Photius's *Bibliotheca* is Rene Henry, ed. and trans., *Photius: Bibliotheca* (9 vols.; Paris: Belles Lettres, 1959-1991). Codex 40 is in 1:23-25.

Philostorgius, The Eunomian from Cappadocia,” as well as throughout the history.³ It also reveals that he utilized the libraries at Constantinople and read extensively in pagan as well as Christian sources.⁴ In the *Ecclesiastical History*, Philostorgius mentions the fascinating sights he saw in Constantinople and that he also wrote a polemic against Porphyry and a eulogy of Eunomius.⁵ Finally, the author’s inclusion and discussion of the Visigothic sack of Rome in 410 shows his significant interest in western and secular events in comparison to the other ecclesiastical historians.⁶

As a document propounding a non-Nicene vision of history, Philostorgius’s work required a miracle to survive within a triumphantly Nicene world, as, for example, the pro-Nicene Roman emperors ordered the burning of Eunomius’s works. The miracle occurred in the form of the discovery of the *Ecclesiastical History* in the library at Constantinople by the ninth-century patriarch Photius.⁷ Although appalled by Philostorgius’s “eulogy of the heretics,” Photius appreciated the historian’s work and style enough to epitomize it.⁸ Nobbs conjectures that Photius may have read Philostorgius’s history as part of his preparation for a series of sermons

3. Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1.

4. Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ View of the Past,” 256; Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xviii.

5. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.11, 3.21, 10.10.

6. Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ View of the Past,” 257-258.

7. Other borrowers from Philostorgius also provide access to his work, such as the *Artemii Passio*, an anonymous *Life of Constantine*, an anonymous homoean history, the *Suda*, and others. Amidon’s introduction, xxi; Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ View of the Past,” 252. Joseph Bidez’s edition of the text incorporates all of these known fragments into the appropriate section of Photius’s epitome and, if they appear in more than one source, highlights those words as ones that Philostorgius originally wrote.

8. Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1, 2; Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ View of the Past,” 252. Argov argues that there is good reason to believe that Photius was not the author of the epitome, although he does not propose another identification for the epitomator, 520-524. I follow McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 128, in not viewing Argov’s argument as persuasive.

on the Arian controversy.⁹ She also rightly points out that the detailed portions of the epitome reveal as much about Photius's interests as they do about the content of Philostorgius's history. On the other hand, the selections with more detail seem to quote Philostorgius more directly.¹⁰ One can easily discern Photius's editorial remarks expressing his opinion on the lack of orthodox doctrine and truthfulness in the history. Thus, a critical reading of the source has to account for any potential distortion or censorship on the part of Photius; thankfully, the patriarch was apparently a "careful, if hostile, epitomizer."¹¹ For the study of mission, Philostorgius serves as a most valuable source due to the important role the missionaries Theophilus and Ulfila play in his narrative.

Similarly to the *Ecclesiastical History*, the letter of Auxentius of Durostorum concerning Ulfila the Goth survived in a precarious fashion. Auxentius wrote the *Letter on the Life, Faith and Death of Ulfila* soon after the Gothic bishop's death in Constantinople in 383 amid the proceedings of the Conference of Sects.¹² Neil McLynn compellingly argues that Auxentius wrote to persuade the homoean representatives assembled at the conference to adopt the letter's ecclesio-political direction and credal formulation.¹³ He concludes, "He was both staking a claim to Ulfila's memory and putting his legacy to work."¹⁴ While it is important to acknowledge Auxentius's immediate intention in writing the letter, one can also examine the specific ways in which the author represents the memory of Ulfila and his missionary past. Given the homoean

9. As opposed to for his entry on Philostorgius in his *Bibliotheca*—a collection of descriptions and excerpts of works that Photius had read. The epitome of the *Ecclesiastical History* is separate from this work.

10. Nobbs, "Philostorgius' View of the Past," 254-255.

11. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xxiii.

12. McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 125.

13. McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 125-127.

14. McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 127.

and momentary character of the letter, its subsequent reappearance and preservation in a different context is another small miracle. In the mid-fifth century, the non-Nicene theologian Maximinus quoted the letter in his ‘dissertatio’ on the council of Aquileia of 381, which was then preserved on the margins of a manuscript of Ambrose’s *De Fide*.¹⁵ While the incompleteness and uncertain manner of transmission of the letter pose challenges of interpretation, the fact that Auxentius was a close disciple of Ulfila contributes to the value of the letter as a source.¹⁶ Although problematic in nature, these rare texts, having survived despite Nicene censorship, still provide invaluable evidence for the representation of non-Nicene mission.

The Nicene writer Rufinus of Aquileia (345-410/411) translated and continued the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius.¹⁷ Rufinus’s Latin translation and continuation enjoyed immediate success and exerted a lasting influence in the medieval west as the definitive account of early Church history. Published in 402 or 403, the work not only extends Eusebius’s history to the time of Theodosius I’s death in 395, but also contains numerous free translations,

15. Heather and Matthews, 145-6. The letter is incomplete and it is uncertain to whom the letter was addressed, 146. Barnes, “The Consecration of Ulfila,” very strongly questions the reliability and usefulness of the letter, arguing that when Maximinus preserved the letter he was likely to have altered it and if he in fact did not do so, Auxentius’s placement of Ulfila’s life within Biblical typology is sufficient to demote the letter from the status of “privileged witness” (543). While I agree that Auxentius had Biblical themes in mind when he stated that Ulfila had been a bishop for forty years and, possibly, even with Barnes’s date for Ulfila’s consecration, I still maintain that Auxentius’s letter has far more to offer than simply evidence on the dates of Ulfila’s episcopacy.

16. Obviously, this close relationship could also have led Auxentius to indulge in “open partisanship of his cause.” Heather and Matthews, 135.

17. For Rufinus see Françoise Thelamon, *Paiens et Chrétiens au IVe Siècle: L’apport de l’ “Histoire Ecclésiastique” de Rufin d’ Aquilée*; C. P. Hammond, “The Last Ten Years of Rufinus’ Life and the Date of His Move South from Aquileia,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 28 (1977), 372-429; Peter Van Deun, “The Church Historians After Eusebius,” in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity, Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, edited by Gabriele Marasco (Leiden: Brill, 2003); Mark Humphries, “Rufinus’s Eusebius: Translation, Continuation, and Edition in the Latin *Ecclesiastical History*,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16: 2 (2008): 143-164; and Rufinus of Aquileia, *Church History, Books 10 and 11*, trans. Philip R. Amidon (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). The critical edition of Rufinus’s *Ecclesiastical History* is in Eduard Schwartz and Theodore Mommsen, eds. *Eusebius Werke* (GCS; Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1999).

paraphrases, and corrections of the original.¹⁸ Philostorgius viewed Rufinus's representation of Christian history as decidedly pro-Nicene and responded to Rufinus accordingly in his own ecclesiastical history.¹⁹ Amidon even states, "...it becomes evident that he intends to counter wherever possible the pro-Nicene story told by Rufinus of Aquileia in his continuation of Eusebius's church history."²⁰ The differing treatments of mission in Rufinus's and Philostorgius's narratives have also been noted by scholars.²¹

The three other ecclesiastical historians of the fifth century—Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret—are usually treated together and referred to as the synoptical church historians in the secondary literature. More recently, historians have begun to acknowledge these historians as individuals and highlight and analyze their differences.²² As Hartmut Leppin points out, "For all that they have in common, the three so-called 'synoptical' Church historians are individual authors with divergent views, whose works illustrate the intellectual richness of the Theodosian age."²³ Comparable to the ambiguity surrounding Philostorgius, the known facts concerning the life of Socrates [Scholasticus] of Constantinople (c. 380-after 439) are few, and all of them

18. More recently, Mark Humphries has argued for viewing the Latin version as a thematically unified whole to show Rufinus's interpretation and vision of Christian history. This approach proves fruitful in its successful effort to draw out Rufinus's representations of the Christian past. Humphries, 143-164; For the controversy surrounding Rufinus's alleged copying of Gelasius of Caesarea see, Humphries, 150-151; Amidon, *Church History of Rufinus*, xvi-xvii; Rohrbacher, 100-101; and Van Deun, 162.

19. Passages in which Philostorgius most clearly responds to Rufinus (he does not mention him by name): 2.11, 3.4.

20. Amidon, *Philostorgius's Church History*, xxiii.

21. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 40 n. 8; McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 129; Marasco, 262; and see the discussion below, 35-39.

22. For example, Sterk, "'Representing' Mission From Below: Historians as Interpreters and Agents of Christianization," 287-288; Nobbs, "Philostorgius' View of the Past," 251; Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople*, 1; Leppin, "The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus," in *Greek and Roman Historiography in Late Antiquity, Fourth to Sixth Century A.D.*, ed. Gabriele Marasco (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

23. Leppin, "The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus," 253.

derive from his *Ecclesiastical History*, completed shortly after 439.²⁴ There is some controversy concerning his religious affiliation, specifically whether or not he was a member of the Novatian sect.²⁵ His history covers events between the reign of Constantine and 439 and, significantly for the purposes of this paper, includes passages on Ulfila and shows evidence of possibly consulting Philostorgius's *Ecclesiastical History* as a source.²⁶

Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History* served as a valuable source for the next Church historian, Sozomen (c.380-c.446), who composed his work before 450. Going as far back as Photius, scholars have remarked on Sozomen's writing style as more rhetorical than that of Socrates.²⁷ But Sozomen's history differed from his predecessor in other crucial ways. For example, "Sozomen, in contrast to Socrates, is less nervous about extracting useful materials from the Philostorgian narrative."²⁸ Sozomen also includes and modifies Socrates' treatment of Ulfila and

24. Leppin, "The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus," 223; for an argument for a date between 439 and 443, see Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople*, 20. Despite the suggestive nature of his name, Socrates did not have any association with the legal profession. Leppin, "The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus," 221; Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople*, 13-14. But see Chesnut, 175-177.

25. Hartmut Leppin at one time dissented from the majority opinion and argued that Socrates was not a Novatian, but later retracted his doubts. Undoubtedly, even if Socrates were not a Novatian, he still presented a highly favorable opinion of the Novatian Church. Leppin, "The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus," 222; Peter Van Nuffelen, "Episcopal Succession in Constantinople (381-450 C.E.): The Local Dynamics of Power," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 18:3 (2010), 428 n. 11; Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople*, 28. Unlike Philostorgius, Socrates' schismatic sympathies did not result in the suppression and neglect of his history.

26. Trompf, 214 n.4, 231-232; Trompf, focusing on the themes of his study, compares passages covering the same events in Philostorgius and Socrates to make this argument; for example, on the earthquake at Nicomedia (Philostorgius, 4.10; Socrates, 2.39). While Trompf does not argue that Socrates (unlike Sozomen) used Philostorgius extensively, he does provide enough examples to prove his point. See also Alanna M. Nobbs, "Philostorgius' Ecclesiastical History: An 'Alternative Ideology,'" *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.2 (1991): 271-281, who suggests that Philostorgius's version of the past and its implications for the present, served as a challenge to Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret as a narrative that needed to be responded to and superceded. She cites passages from the Nicene historians that appear to directly respond to Philostorgius's non-Nicene vision of the past.

27. Trompf, 215; Leppin, "The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus," 224; Sterk, "'Representing' Mission from Below," 291; Urbainczyk, "Observations on the Differences between the Church Histories of Socrates and Sozomen," 356.

28. Trompf, 214; Also see 214 n. 4, 215 n. 8, 219, 235, for specific examples of Sozomen's inversion of Philostorgius's version of events. Amidon too cites Sozomen's response (4.16) to Philostorgius's description of the

other accounts of mission. His significantly longer version of the events surrounding Ulfila not only reveals his views on mission, but also provides evidence on how Ulfila acquired his missionary reputation.

Much more is known about the final historian under consideration—Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393-c.460)—since he wrote numerous other works in addition to his *Ecclesiastical History* and supported Nestorius during the Nestorian controversy.²⁹ As a result, the Second Council of Constantinople in 553 posthumously condemned several of Theodoret’s writings as heretical.³⁰ Theodoret’s *Ecclesiastical History* was composed sometime between 444 and 450 and covered events between 323 and 428.³¹ While Theodoret also used and modified the work of Rufinus, Socrates, and Sozomen, his representation of Ulfila and his role in the missionary narrative differ significantly from their portrayal of the Gothic bishop.³²

Even at a quick glance, the three “synoptical” historians appear significantly different from one another. Like Philostorgius, however, they all sought to continue the legacy of Church history left by Eusebius, including his emphasis on the providential spread of the Christian faith. Additionally, Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret included a wealth of evidence that reveals their view of mission and serves as a valuable source for examining the accounts of Philostorgius and Auxentius. The divergent ways in which all of these writers present Ulfila in particular merits

earthquake at Nicomedia, Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 70 n. 18. See Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ Ecclesiastical History,” for the general idea that Sozomen was responding to non-Nicene historiography.

29. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus*, 25.

30. Leppin, “The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus,” 225. Similarly to Socrates, Theodoret’s heretical sympathies did not result in the suppression of his history.

31. Leppin, “The Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus and Theodoretus,” 226; or Chesnut, 201, for a composition date between 441/2-449.

32. Trompf, 215. See discussion below, 43-44.

careful attention.³³ First, however, we must briefly narrate the missions of Theophilus and Ulfila as related in the non-Nicene sources and provide some historical context for the figures involved in these missionary endeavors.

The Missions of Theophilus and Ulfila in Non-Nicene Memory

Philostorgius's account of Theophilus's mission to the Kingdom of Himyar (modern day Yemen) offers one of the first references to Christianity in South Arabia.³⁴ The historian begins the story with the assertion that the emperor Constantius II (337-361) sent an embassy to the Himyarites and continues with a brief ethno-geographic description of the people and location. He outlines Constantius's goals for the embassy as well as the extent of the support that the emperor provided. Philostorgius then tells his readers that upon reaching the Himyarites, Theophilus, as one of the leaders of the mission, "tried to persuade their ruler to worship Christ and renounce pagan error."³⁵ The missionary's entreaties were at first thwarted by the Jews, but Theophilus performed numerous miracles, the king converted, and the "embassy was successful."³⁶ The ruler of Himyar then built three churches, using his own resources instead of the funds that Constantius had supplied for the embassy. After consecrating and decorating the churches to the best of his ability, Theophilus sailed to his native island of Diva and then "on to the rest of the Indian country," where he corrected some of the practices of the Christians there but affirmed their belief of "other in substance" as orthodox.³⁷ Following an apparent gap in the

33. See Mclynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 131-135.

34. See Shahid, 87-93, for a discussion of the uncertain nature of the other sources describing Christianity in South Arabia, including the stories of Bartholomew and Pantaenus. His contention that Theophilus's mission "reveals the origin of South Arabian Christianity in the fourth century" is, characteristically, too strong.

35. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

36. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

37. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.5. On the location of "Diva" see above, 10 n. 8. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 42 n. 13, identifies the "rest of the Indian country" as Malabar or the Indian subcontinent in general.

text, we learn that Theophilus eventually sailed from Great Arabia to the Kingdom of Aksum in northeastern Africa, where he “took care of matters” and finally returned to the Roman Empire. Philostorgius then concludes the missionary story with the assurance that Constantius showed Theophilus great honor upon his return.³⁸

The story of Ulfila’s mission to the Goths proves more challenging to narrate as all of the sources provide conflicting and chronologically problematic accounts of the events.³⁹ In accordance with the focus of this analysis, only the versions of Philostorgius and Auxentius follow.⁴⁰ Philostorgius begins his account in the fourth century with the story of a persecution of Gothic Christians for their faith and the exodus of a large number of them under the leadership of Ulfila into Roman territory. The historian then jumps back in time to explain how the Goths had turned to Christianity in the first place through the agency of Roman captives from Cappadocia (including Ulfila’s ancestors) in the middle of the third century. These Christians had converted their Gothic captors upon arrival in Gothic territory somewhere beyond the Danube. Philostorgius then moves forward in time and explains that Ulfila had been consecrated the first bishop of the Goths by Eusebius of Nicomedia (d. 341) during an embassy to the Roman Empire on which he had been sent by a Gothic ruler.⁴¹ Ulfila then “looked after their [the Goths’] various interests, invented an alphabet just for them, and translated all of the Scriptures into their language, except for the books of Kings, since these contain the history of the wars and the

38. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.6.

39. The sources for Ulfila’s mission are Philostorgius, Auxentius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret, and Jordanes. Philostorgius places these events during the reign of Constantine I. This causes a variety of chronological problems, but makes sense within Philostorgius’s construction of the *Ecclesiastical History*. See McLynn’s, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” for an astute analysis of the problems and suggestions for resolving them.

40. See below for an analysis of the Nicene versions, 39-46.

41. The immediate cause for this embassy is a source of some contention among scholars. See full discussion below, 52. For Eusebius of Nicomedia see, Colm Luibheid, “The Arianism of Eusebius of Nicomedia,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 43 (1976): 3-23.

nation was warlike and needed its aggressiveness curbed rather than kindled.”⁴² Philostorgius then resumes his initial narrative and states that the Roman emperor allowed the Christian Goths to settle in Moesia and “held [Ulfila] in the highest esteem, going so far as to refer to him often as ‘the Moses of our time.’”⁴³

Auxentius’s account, composed around 383, differs mostly in its organization of the narrative of Ulfila’s life, as it begins with an extensive statement of the Gothic bishop’s beliefs, then outlines the main events of his life, and finally concludes with his creed.⁴⁴ He affirms that Ulfila was consecrated bishop “for the salvation of many among the people of the Goths.”⁴⁵ The bishop “corrected the people of the Goths, who were living in hunger and dearth of preaching but with no heed to their condition, and taught them to live by the rule of evangelic, apostolic and prophetic truth, and he showed the Christians (among them) to be truly Christians, and multiplied their numbers.”⁴⁶ He then narrates the story of persecution and exodus and adds the detail of the occurrence of martyrdom. Unlike Philostorgius, Auxentius does not mention that Ulfila translated the Bible, but he does declare that the bishop preached in Greek, Latin, and Gothic, and left behind works on theology in those three languages.⁴⁷ These non-Nicene accounts of

42. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5.

43. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5. It would be interesting to explore whether or not Philostorgius or Constantius connected this comparison to Moses with Eusebius’s comparison of Constantine to Moses in the *Life of Constantine*. See Vaggione, *Eunomius of Cyzicus*, 193, for the argument that this description by Philostorgius is an example of the wonder-working, virtuous, and well-connected at court bishop that the members of the Eunomian circle viewed themselves as. Nonetheless, the reference to Moses is significant, especially as coming from an emperor about a bishop. For more on the significance of Moses see Claudia Rapp, “Comparison, Paradigm and the Case of Moses in Panegyric and Hagiography,” in *The Propaganda of Power: The Role of Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, ed. Mary Whitby (Leiden: Brill, 1998).

44. Auxentius places Ulfila’s exodus into Roman territory during the reign of Constantius II. See above for a discussion of Auxentius as a source for Ulfila, 18.

45. Auxentius, 35[56].

46. Auxentius, 35[56].

47. Auxentius, 33[53].

Ulfila's mission among the Goths potentially influenced subsequent representations of these events as Nicene historians sought to respond to and make sense of the role of this homoean bishop in Christian history.

Emperors, Empire, and Bishops

As the missionary activity of Theophilus and Ulfila occurred within the context of the imperial policy of Constantius II, any inquiry into these missions must consider the history and distinctive features of his reign. Following the death of Constantine in 337, rule over the Roman Empire fell to three of his sons—Constantine II, Constantius II, and Constans. Predictably, the territorial division of the Empire into arenas of power for each brother did not ensure a peaceful coexistence, and thus, through a combination of chance and military success, Constantius became sole ruler in 350. His reputation has been overshadowed to this day by the successful rhetoric of his opponents, such as Athanasius of Alexandria, who “damned him as an ‘Arian,’ a persecutor, a devil incarnate, or even an Antichrist.”⁴⁸ Scholars have since acknowledged the daunting challenges the emperor faced and pointed out the approval of his rule among respected members of the Christian leadership such as Cyril of Jerusalem.⁴⁹ From the very beginning of his reign, Constantius engaged in political struggles with both his brothers and usurpers of the throne such as Magnentius. Constantius also waged continuous war with the Persian Empire for twelve years and dealt with military emergencies along the Rhine and Danube frontiers. And, finally, he actively sought a solution to the doctrinal controversy, which had threatened the unity of the Empire since the Council of Nicaea.

48. Timothy D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 106.

49. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 106-107.

Fortunately, Constantius had inherited certain imperial policies from his father Constantine that governed his approach to all his challenges. According to Timothy Barnes, “He felt that he had a duty to spread true belief both inside and outside the borders of the Roman Empire.”⁵⁰ Thus, the emperor participated in numerous Church councils and even introduced the concept of an empire-wide, enforceable definition of orthodoxy. The multiple councils of Sirmium (357-359) resulted in the Homoean creed, which affirmed the likeness of the Son to the Father instead of the *homoousios* (same substance) formulation of Nicaea and prohibited the use of *ousia* (substance) terminology. Although this attempted compromise failed to accomplish the goal of unification, the emperor’s degree of involvement in the disputes confirm Constantius’s dedication to the propagation of true belief. Constantius followed this principle just as energetically outside the Roman Empire, not only sending Theophilus with a mission to Himyar in South Arabia but also attempting to influence the consecration of a bishop in the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum.

Frend compellingly argues that one must view these activities within the context of imperial rivalry between Rome and Persia for spheres of political influence and trade.⁵¹ Throughout his reign, Constantius’s guiding principles contributed to this kind of interconnection between ecclesiastical and imperial struggles for power within the Empire. A telling example occurred early in his reign, when his brother Constans threatened to begin a civil war if Constantius did not recall the bishop Athanasius from exile. While it is tempting to view this intertwined relationship as an expression of imperial domination over the Church, one must take a closer look and take into account the limited success of Constantius’s goals. As Barnes asserts

50. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 120.

51. W.H.C. Frend, “The Church in the Reign of Constantius II (337-361): Mission—Monasticism—Worship,” in *L’Eglise et l’Empire au IVe siècle: sept exposés suivis de discussions*, ed. Friedrich Vittinghoff and Albrecht Dihle (Genève: Fondation Hardt, 1989), 81.

when describing the conflict between the Emperor Constantius and the bishop Athanasius, “It is thus clear that in the middle of the fourth century a Roman emperor did not enjoy complete control over Egypt, where a popular bishop of Alexandria could resist his will successfully and with impunity.”⁵² The reign of Theodosius I (379-395) along with the legally binding Nicene pronouncements of the Council of Constantinople in 381 brought this distinct Constantinian period of Christian history to a close. Writing during the reign of Theodosius II (408-450), by contrast, Philostorgius describes the adventures of Theophilus and Ulfila as existing in a world very different from his own harsh reality since it was still full of opportunities for Eunomian Christianity. By his time, this world had already vanished into the past.

Before Philostorgius worked to make sense of the world around him, Auxentius had actively struggled to create a world in which non-Nicene Christianity could thrive. Auxentius of Durostorum would later become Auxentius of Milan, the famous opponent of Ambrose in a fight for ecclesiastical and political influence.⁵³ The letter Auxentius wrote describing the life, faith, and death of Ulfila serves as an example of both bishops’ active engagement in the ecclesio-political contests of the fourth century. While Auxentius fought for the legitimacy of an illegal form of Christianity just as Philostorgius did, it is important to note the difference between the ecclesio-political environments in which each of the authors wrote. During Ulfila’s and Auxentius’s lifetime there was still room for ecclesiastical politics and doctrinal variety regarding the Trinity. Not only had the Nicene formulations of the Council of Constantinople not yet had a chance to settle, but the allegiances and doctrinal definitions of the “heretics” themselves were still in flux. After all, following his proclamation of Nicene orthodoxy as the

52. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius*, 168.

53. There is some controversy surrounding this issue. Heather and Matthews argue for the identification of the two, 146. As does McLynn, *Ambrose of Milan*, 183.

official religion of the empire and subsequent problems enforcing it, Theodosius I at least attempted to provide all of the various theological camps (at least four were present at the Conference of Sects in 383) a fair hearing.⁵⁴ But by the time Philostorgius wrote his *Ecclesiastical History*, Nicene Christianity had already been established for some time and “its opponents had long hardened into sects.”⁵⁵ While Philostorgius’s Eunomian faith included a set definition of belief and a clear faction of Eunomian faithful, Auxentius’s homoean community did not possess this type of coherency.⁵⁶ Thus, Auxentius lived in a world that allowed him the freedom to express and fight for his faith and provided the environment for a work of a more polemical and immediate character than Philostorgius’s. When Auxentius wrote his letter on Ulfila he not only wanted to ensure a non-Nicene representation of the past, but he also sought to use Ulfila’s legacy to further the goals of contemporary homoean sympathizers.

The context of Philostorgius’s life is crucial because the ecclesiastical historian has left scholars so little factual information about himself. He was born in the village of Borissus in Cappadocia around 368 into the Eunomian family of Carterius and his wife, Eulampios. Eulampios’s father Anysius served as a presbyter for a Nicene congregation. Philostorgius relates that, during the reign of Valens, Carterius converted his wife from Nicene Christianity to Eunomianism, ultimately leading to the conversion of her entire side of the family.⁵⁷

As a young man around the age of 20, Philostorgius traveled to Constantinople.⁵⁸ While he does not relate the reasons for his travel to the city, Philostorgius emphasizes that he met

54. McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 126.

55. McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 127.

56. McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 125-127.

57. Philostorgius, *EH*, 9.9.

58. Philostorgius, *EH*, 10.6.

Eunomius there and expresses his admiration and enthusiastic impressions of the man. He also marveled at the sights and sounds of Constantinople and satisfied his intellectual curiosity at the rich libraries of the capital city.⁵⁹ In addition to the *Ecclesiastical History*, he also wrote the now lost works of polemic against Porphyry and a eulogy of Eunomius.⁶⁰ Finally, Philostorgius shows a broader outlook on the world than other ecclesiastical historians, and provides more extensive coverage of events in the West Roman Empire. Unfortunately, this is the extent of the few facts one can state about him. However, a quick overview of the world Philostorgius lived in may provide some more insight into why and how he came to write the *Ecclesiastical History*.

As one living and writing in an empire that had embraced the Nicene vision of the past as well as the ecclesiastical policies of Theodosius the Great, Philostorgius must have had little hope that his views would find a wide readership. Nevertheless, he may have found encouragement in the founding of the new university in Constantinople by Theodosius II in 425.⁶¹ Additionally, Alanna Nobbs argues that Philostorgius may have reasonably expected pagans to read his work because he used such sources as Olympiodorus and strayed from the Eusebian model of church history by including a significant number of geographical and ethnographic digressions as well as extensively narrating secular and political events.⁶² The reign of Theodosius II is typically associated with the Theodosian law code, the beginnings of the Christological controversies, and the threat of Huns sacking Constantinople. If he continued to live in the imperial capital, Philostorgius would have had firsthand knowledge of imperial policy

59. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.11; Nobbs, "Philostorgius' View of the Past," 256; Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xviii.

60. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.21, 10.10.

61. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xix.

62. Nobbs, "Philostorgius' View of the Past," 260.

and current affairs. He would have known that imperial legislation increasingly concerned itself with the eradication of heresy and the creation of a unified Christian Empire. As Fergus Millar shows, heterodox belief appeared as the most dangerous internal threat to the well being of the Empire, followed by paganism and Judaism. Millar states, “The hostile appellations given by outsiders to endless Christian subgroups alleged to be guilty of false belief haunt the pages of contemporary Christian writers, just as they do the pronouncements of the Emperor.”⁶³ One can gain access into Philostorgius’s perspective on this hostile climate within the empire through a closer reading of the *Ecclesiastical History*. He was indeed writing as a lone warrior of sorts for his faith, paralleling his fascination with the Maccabees. In fact, he apparently began his history with the account of this faithful minority of Jews who stood in opposition to Hellenism and the threat of polytheism that came with it.⁶⁴ It seems clear how Philostorgius must have felt about Theodosius II’s edicts that stripped various civil rights from Eunomians and employed such rhetoric as this one from 423:

We command to be enforced the provisions which were established by the sainted grandfather and father of Our Clemency concerning all heretics whose name and false doctrines We execrate, namely, the Eunomians, the Arians, the Macedonians, and all of the others whose sects it disgusts Us to insert in Our most pious sanction, all of whom have different names but the same perfidy. All of them shall know that if they persist in the aforesaid madness, they shall be subject to the penalty which has been threatened.⁶⁵

Emotional rhetoric aside, it is striking how the imperial edict refers to a multitude of names for the sects, as Philostorgius has shown that using the appropriate designation ‘Eunomian’ is important to him. Millar suggests that those hostile to non-Nicene Christians continued to use

63. Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief under Theodosius II (408-450)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 130.

64. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xix; Philostorgius, *EH*, 1.1

65. CTh XVI, quoted in Millar, 150-151.

Athanasius's effective tool of grouping them all together and treating them as identical as a deliberate government strategy in the battle for doctrinal unity in the Empire.

It is less clear what Philostorgius thought about another theological controversy rising during his own lifetime—the Christological debates surrounding Nestorius. Amidon dates the publication of Philostorgius's work between 425 and 433; Nestorius became Patriarch of Constantinople in 428, an event that rapidly led to the Council of Ephesus in 431.⁶⁶ Therefore, Philostorgius may have witnessed these events while writing his history. But even if he had concluded and published the work before the outbreak of the Nestorian controversy, he would still have been aware of the imperial dedication to eradicating all non-Nicene forms of belief. Millar writes that the imperial rhetoric during Theodosius's reign served as a means of obtaining the unity he felt it was his duty to enforce. He also notes that Theodosius's response to "heretics" was much less violent compared to that of his predecessors.⁶⁷ However, as Theodosius preferred to utilize the powers of rhetoric and persuasion to accomplish his goals, educated non-Nicene Christians such as Philostorgius would still be facing the negation of any legitimacy of their faith community. Theodosius's imperial pronouncements attest to the idea of a multiplicity of heresies and schisms still threatening the Church. Yet, simultaneously, the Theodosian Empire had already witnessed the triumph of Nicene Christianity and subsequent strict imposition of orthodoxy. What perspective did Philostorgius have on these two seemingly incompatible realities? Did Philostorgius look to a memory of a non-Nicene past in the context of fighting to reclaim something that was already irrevocably lost? Or did he write with hope precisely because he was amid a sea of Christianities? Whatever the case, the vitriolic anti-Eunomian rhetoric of

66. Amidon, xix; McLynn dates the *Ecclesiastical History* to "about 430," "Little Wolf in the Big City," 127.

67. Millar, 157.

the Theodosian court would certainly have led Philostorgius to reflect on the nature and therefore the history of his own faith community.

Additionally, during the reign of Theodosius II one not only finds an *Ecclesiastical History* written by Philostorgius, but also by Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret. On the one hand, it may only appear that this time period witnessed a boom in the writing of ecclesiastical history because of a peculiarity in the survival of the sources. But, on the other hand, such a proliferation does appear to be more than just coincidence. Hartmut Leppin argues that it may well be a sign of “the consolidation of Christian faith in Roman state and society,” while simultaneously revealing the diversity of possible political and religious affinities even during the Theodosian age.⁶⁸ As Philostorgius wrote after Rufinus’s translation and continuation but before Socrates, Sozomen, or Theodoret and from a non-Nicene perspective, his work stands in an interesting place within this historiography.⁶⁹ As one of the first to continue Eusebius’s ecclesiastical history, Philostorgius ought to be the first place historians would look; but it has not been this way historically. Leppin argues that the main adversaries in the other three ecclesiastical histories are “heretics” and not pagans, while Amidon asserts that for Philostorgius the main enemy is the Gnostic with dangerous pagan messages and idolatry hiding behind the label of “orthodox.”⁷⁰ While Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret had accepted Eusebius’s model and consequently the triumph of Christianity against paganism—but not yet heresy—as an accomplished fact, Philostorgius perceived the world from a different perspective. By looking back to the past and the memory of his non-Nicene community, Philostorgius could represent his

68. Hartmut Leppin, “Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus, and Theodoretus,” 220.

69. Nobbs, “Philostorgius’ View of the Past,” 252.

70. Leppin, “Church Historians (I): Socrates, Sozomenus, and Theodoretus,” 220; Amidon, *Philostorgius*, xx.

own present struggles as a continuing fight against the forces of the Gnostics and pagans threatening the true monotheistic faith. The significance of Theodosius II's reign as the context for Philostorgius's history perhaps reflects both the rigid aspects of this age—an era of the establishment of Nicene orthodoxy—as well as in the continued diversity of Christianity even during this time period. Perhaps Philostorgius thought that his faith had a chance if Christians still continued to debate the nature of the true Christian faith in his lifetime and vie for the support of the Emperor.

CHAPTER 3 NICENE HISTORIANS ON NON-NICENE MISSIONARIES

According to Philostorgius, Ulfila did not set out on a mission to evangelize the Goths, but rather served them as a bishop. How then did Ulfila acquire the persistent reputation of Apostle to the Goths and the main agent of Gothic conversion? Possibly, the answer lies in the portrayal of Ulfila in other Nicene sources that would have left a more lasting legacy than non-Nicene ones. A close analysis of the Nicene sources will demonstrate that Ulfila did not always possess this missionary reputation. Nonetheless, the Nicene sources will also reveal a possible reason for the persistence of Ulfila's portrayal in modern day historiography as the missionary who converted the Goths to Arianism. The case of Ulfila serves as only one example of the need to reexamine the dominant mission narratives. A comparison with Rufinus's representation of mission will reveal the ways in which Rufinus and Philostorgius valued different facets of Christianization and presented differing roles for bishops and emperors in the process. By analyzing the representation of mission in the Nicene sources one can question the assumptions about the process of Christianization in Late Antiquity.

Apart from Philostorgius, none of the other ecclesiastical historians include the story of Theophilus's mission to South Arabia. Most likely, they purposefully omit the story to revise the non-Nicene account, just as Philostorgius ignores Rufinus's narrative of the Christianization of Aksum and Iberia (Georgia) and, possibly, gives Ulfila a larger role in his narrative because Rufinus leaves him out completely.¹ Rufinus's account of Frumentius's adventures in Aksum provides a valuable source of comparison with Theophilus from the Nicene perspective, as Philostorgius is clearly responding to it with his narrative of the mission to Himyar.² In addition

1. McLynn, 129.

2. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 40 n. 8.

to Philostorgius's evident response to Rufinus, both mission stories occur in the context of trade in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean, and thus a comparison can provide valuable insight. Rufinus's account also reflects his view of Constantius as the bad "Arian" emperor, as the evidence suggests that he deliberately skews the chronology to make the events take place during the reign of Constantine not Constantius.³ Nevertheless, his narrative still shows his idea of how conversion of foreign kingdoms occurred or ought to have occurred.

From the beginning, Rufinus's missionary account stands out as strikingly different from that of Philostorgius. In Philostorgius's narrative, as described earlier, Theophilus is chosen by the emperor himself to embark on the embassy for the purpose of converting the king. In Rufinus's story the beginning of Christianity in Aksum occurs when a Roman is traveling on the Red Sea, is shipwrecked, everybody on board is killed, and only two young boys are spared. These boys—now captives—grow into valuable members of the royal court at Aksum. As an adult, Frumentius takes the initiative to take care of Roman merchant Christians living in and traveling to Aksum.⁴ In this case, Philostorgius records a similar situation with Theophilus attending to the resident aliens in Himyar.⁵ Philostorgius may simply be following Rufinus or more likely reflecting the reality of the spread of Christianity in these areas through trade. But the representation of the initial impetus for the missions is certainly completely different. Philostorgius's representation reflects not only his response to Rufinus, but also his view of what role mission played in the history of the Eunomian community. Similar to Philostorgius's placement of the account of Ulfila and the first mention of Theophilus's mission right next to one another, Rufinus moves from his account of the Christianization of Aksum straight into the

3. As suggested by Thelamon. Cited in Amidon, *Rufinus*, 20 n. 20.

4. Rufinus, 10.9, 10.10.

5. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

account of the conversion of Iberia through another “accidental missionary,” a female captive. According to Rufinus this mission also took place during the reign of Constantine, who is delighted at the end of the story to hear of the conversion of this foreign kingdom.⁶ As Philostorgius does not seem to be directly responding to Rufinus’s account of the conversion of Iberia, a closer comparison of just the narratives relating to Aksum and Himyar follow.⁷

In Rufinus’s account of the conversion of Aksum, Frumentius is on the one hand an accidental missionary, as he finds himself in Aksum not by his own will and certainly not sent by an emperor as in Philostorgius’s account of Theophilus. On the other hand, Frumentius displays remarkable initiative as the one who begins attending to the needs of the Christian Roman merchants. Rufinus states, “God put it into his mind and heart to begin making careful inquiries if there were any Christians among the Roman merchants, and to give them extensive rights, which he urged them to use, to build places of assembly in each location, in which they might gather for prayer in the Roman manner.”⁸ Again, this passage reveals the theme occurring in the work of both Rufinus and Philostorgius concerning the importance of trade in the spread of Christianity in this region. The passage also emphasizes the apostolic character of Frumentius, evident both from his own initiative and from God’s calling him to take care of Roman Christians. Additionally, upon being allowed to leave Aksum, Frumentius is the one to travel to Athanasius in Alexandria and report on the spread of Christianity in Aksum in contrast to his

6. Rufinus, 10.11.

7. Parallels between the stories are possible, however, as the story of the female captive in Iberia and Ulfila’s captive ancestors both indicate the importance of captives in the spread of Christianity. For more on captives see Sterk, “Mission From Below: Captive Women and Conversion on the East Roman Frontiers,” 1-39.

8. Rufinus, 10.9.

brother Aedesius, who travels home to Tyre.⁹ Rufinus clearly highlights Frumentius's leadership abilities in contrast to his brother, but also attributes them to God's intervention.

Philostorgius similarly presents Theophilus as taking the initiative in the mission narrative. Before he is even sent on the mission, Theophilus takes advantage of his status as a hostage at the Roman court to embrace a life of virtue, orthodoxy, and celibacy.¹⁰ Then, upon his arrival in Himyar, Theophilus—even though he is only one of the leaders of the embassy—attempts to persuade the king to convert to Christianity and succeeds through his performance of miracles.¹¹ Philostorgius shows that Theophilus possessed not only the initiative similar to that of Frumentius, but also had full imperial support as well as miraculous powers. Philostorgius does not explicitly state that God inspired Theophilus to exhibit initiative during his mission, as Rufinus states about Frumentius. This is possibly due to the limitations of Photius's epitome, but it also fits with the way Philostorgius constructed his history. God's pleasure and displeasure, and therefore, the lack or abundance of divine gifts does not need to be explicitly stated because it is evident in the lives of such men as Theophilus. Philostorgius represents Theophilus as possessing Constantius's support as part of his understanding of the Eunomian community. This community included the type of men to whom God showed his divine favor by giving them eloquence and the ability to perform miracles. This divine favor was also evident because these men were close to the imperial court and enjoyed the support and praise of the emperor himself. Philostorgius viewed as positive this close connection to the imperial court of members of the Eunomian community as it reflected their active engagement in the affairs of the world.

9. See Françoise Thelamon, "'Apôtres et Prophètes de Notre Temps.' Les évêques et les moines présentés comme apôtres et prophètes contemporains dans l'Histoire ecclésiastique de Rufin," *Antichità altoadriatiche* 39 (1992): 174, for how Rufinus represents Frumentius as an "apostle of our time."

10. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

11. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

Philostorgius further revises Rufinus by recounting that Theophilus not only established relations with one foreign kingdom, as did Frumentius, but after Himyar Theophilus traveled further and had an impact on Christianity and relations with Rome in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean arena of trade. This comparison of Rufinus's and Philostorgius's representation reveals not only how these historians perceived mission, but the nature of Christian history in general. Specifically, both emphasize God's providential role in the Christianization of foreign peoples, but Philostorgius gives the emperor a greater role than does Rufinus, because imperial favor confirms Theophilus's godly characteristics.

Unlike Theophilus, Ulfila played a role in the representation of the past from the Nicene perspective. Scholars have frequently expressed surprise and commented on Ulfila appearing in Socrates and Sozomen at all, and, moreover in a favorable light.¹² Neil McLynn's article on the four main sources for Ulfila—Auxentius, Philostorgius, Socrates, Sozomen—persuasively illuminates the limitations of these sources for any certain reconstruction of the life of Ulfila. Nevertheless, McLynn provides a valuable perspective on these sources and refreshing analysis of why they represented Ulfila as they did as opposed to attempting to reconcile the sources or argue for the reliability of one over the other.¹³ Overall, I agree with and build on his argument and try to elaborate more specifically on the reasons the historians represented Ulfila as they do and how this relates to the legacy of Ulfila as a missionary/apostle. As Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret all to a degree followed and used Rufinus, it is significant that they include any mention of Ulfila since Rufinus completely leaves him out of his narrative. By examining the context of the accounts of Ulfila in the *Ecclesiastical Histories*, we can better see the ways in

12. McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 131.

13. See the important article by Peter Heather, "The Crossing of the Danube and the Gothic Conversion," that analyzes the discrepancies in the evidence for the conversion of the Goths.

which the Nicene historian viewed Ulfila and Christianization in general. Socrates and Sozomen both place the story of Ulfila right before the account of the Saracen Queen Mavia's request for the consecration of the holy man Moses as bishop of her land in exchange for peace with the Romans. (By contrast, Theodoret places the story of Mavia a little earlier than the story of Ulfila.) Rufinus as far as we know is the first to record this story of Queen Mavia and Moses, but he does not place it in the context of the other conversion narratives described earlier.¹⁴ Why does Socrates include the account of Ulfila at all, and why does he insert it right before the account of Mavia?

Socrates first briefly mentions Ulfila at the end of a description of the Council of Constantinople in 360. He curiously states, "To this creed Ulfilas bishop of the Goths gave his assent, although he had previously adhered to that of Nicaea."¹⁵ Although it may not be completely clear why Socrates chooses to mention Ulfila at this particular point, it is evident that he was concerned about the bishop's orthodoxy. He emphasizes that Ulfila had been a Nicene Christian prior to signing the creed of this council. Why would Socrates be concerned with whether or not Ulfila was a non-Nicene Christian? The answer lies in the next passage in which Socrates includes Ulfila in the context of the Christianization of the Goths.¹⁶ Socrates differs from Philostorgius and places the conversion of the Goths to "Arianism" during the conflict between Athanaric and Fritigern. He claims that the Goths converted to Christianity after Fritigern accepted the faith of emperor Valens because the emperor had helped him defeat Athanaric. Socrates then states that this is the reason that the Goths are Arians down to his own

14. Rufinus, *EH*, 11.6.

15. Socrates, *EH*, 2.41; McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 131, for a convincing theory on why Socrates inserted Ulfila at this point in his text.

16. Socrates, *EH*, 4.33.

day. Then, almost as if it had happened earlier or independently of the political deal between Fritigern and Valens, he introduces Ulfila as “their bishop at that time” who “invented the Gothic letters, and translated the Sacred Scriptures into their own language, [and] undertook to instruct these barbarians in the Divine oracles.”¹⁷ He then continues to describe how Ulfila labored not only with the Goths owing allegiance to Fritigern but also with the followers of Athanaric. This, of course, led to the persecution and martyrdom of the Arian Christians. He then concludes this account with the observation that the martyrdoms indicate that the Goths did not embrace Arius’s doctrine in full due to “simplicity of mind.”¹⁸ Like Philostorgius, Socrates does not explicitly attribute any conversions to Ulfila. Instead, he uses his earlier assertion of Ulfila’s actual orthodoxy to make sense of the Arian martyrs.

A comparison of this story of the Gothic conversion with a similar attempt to convert the Saracens will further reveal Socrates’ ambiguous representation of Ulfila. The emperor’s involvement in the affairs of the Goths and his influence on their conversion to Arianism had the potential to offer Valens security on the Danube frontier, but according to Socrates it led to the opposite of his intentions—a war with the Goths resulting in his death in the battle of Adrianople. Right before he relates the story of Valens’s demise, Socrates narrates the story of the Saracen Queen Mavia, as mentioned earlier.¹⁹ This account is also interpreted as a Christianization account, although Rufinus and possibly even Socrates did not intend it in this way.²⁰ The story tells of how Queen Mavia is only willing to make peace with the Romans and cease raiding the frontier if the holy man Moses is made bishop of her people. He is dragged

17. Socrates, *EH*, 4.33.

18. Socrates, *EH*, 4.33.

19. Socrates, *EH*, 4.36.

20. Amidon, *Rufinus*, 68 n. 7.

against his will from the desert to be consecrated by the bishop of Alexandria. Moses refuses because he will not accept consecration from the Arian bishop of Alexandria Lucius who has been persecuting monks and Nicene Christians. Moses is then consecrated by Nicene Christians in exile in the desert and Mavia makes peace with the Romans. Socrates concludes, “and so scrupulously did Mavia observe the peace thus entered into with the Romans that she gave her daughter in marriage to Victor the commander-in-chief of the Roman army.”²¹ Thus, Socrates presents the conversion of the Goths as leading to Valens’s downfall and much suffering for the people of the Roman Empire, but the consecration of a bishop for Mavia as bringing lasting success and leading to peace. Only the promotion of true Nicene Christianity could lead to any kind of political gain, while encouragement of non-Nicene Christianity caused the death of Valens. Ulfila does not fit into this simple dichotomy. On the one hand he is part of the story that ends with the ill-fated conversion of the Goths to Arianism. On the other hand, his translation of the Bible and Socrates’ insistence that Ulfila had not always been an Arian allowed the historian to present Ulfila, and by extension the Arian Gothic martyrs, as authentic soldiers for Christ.²² This demonstrates that Socrates struggled with Ulfila’s place in the narrative of Christianization.

While retaining Socrates’ basic framework, Sozomen significantly expands his account of Ulfila and the conversion of the Goths. He also much more explicitly presents it as a narrative describing the conversion of the Goths to Arianism, despite the fact that his account also presents difficult chronological problems.²³ He states that Ulfila—already a bishop—was appointed to go on an embassy on behalf of the Goths fleeing from the Huns. He then follows the similar story of Athanaric and Fritigern and the subsequent conversion of the Goths to Arianism. Here Sozomen

21. Socrates, *EH*, 4.36.

22. McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 132.

23. McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 132-133.

interjects with “It does not, however, appear to me that this is the only reason that can be advanced to account for the Goths having retained, even to the present day, the tenets of Arianism.”²⁴ He then outlines the role that he views Ulfila must have played in the conversion of the Goths to Arianism. He argues that Ulfila must not have abandoned Nicaea when he signed the creed at the council of Constantinople in 360 and that Ulfila only allied himself with the “Arian” bishops seriously when he needed to for the purposes of negotiating assistance from the Roman Empire. Then he suggests that the Goths listened to Ulfila because he had already been a good bishop to them by translating the Bible and leading a life of virtue. As Ulfila had stood by them even through the time of persecution, the Goths obviously followed wherever he led. While the historian’s explanation of Ulfila as the driving and main reason of the Goth’s Arianism makes sense, it is less clear why he is so positive in his description of Ulfila. McLynn persuasively argues that Sozomen is trying to reconcile the conflicting evidence that he has in front of him. This is why on the one hand he argues that Ulfila was a virtuous bishop and diminishes his connection to Arianism, while simultaneously presenting him as the main reason the Goths converted to Arianism. While Socrates does not attribute any conversions to Ulfila, Sozomen rewrites Socrates’ account to give credit for the conversion of the followers of Athanaric to Ulfila.²⁵ This expansion of Socrates’ narrative by Sozomen accounts for Ulfila’s subsequent reputation as the leading figure for the conversion of the Goths to Arian Christianity.

Theodoret’s version of the events offers a strikingly unflattering portrayal of Ulfila.²⁶ McLynn asserts that just as Socrates and Sozomen use Ulfila for their own purposes, Theodoret does the same, yet in doing so, presents a completely unrealistic portrait of Ulfila. Theodoret

24. Sozomen, *EH*, 6.37.

25. Sozomen, *EH*, 6.37.

26. Theodoret, *EH*, 4.33.

describes the familiar story of Valens and the Gothic leaders needing to come to an agreement and relates that when the emperor and the “Arian” bishop Eudoxius encountered some resistance they appealed to Ulfila. According to Theodoret, “Partly by the fascination of his eloquence and partly by bribes with which he baited his proposals Eudoxius succeeded in inducing him to persuade the barbarians to embrace communion with the emperor, so Ulphilas won them over on the plea that the quarrel between the different parties was really one of personal rivalry and involved no difference in doctrine.”²⁷ McLynn does not go any further in his analysis of Theodoret’s version than to state that the historian presents an unrealistic description of Ulfila. While McLynn rightly notes how negatively Theodoret portrays Ulfila, he fails to notice the evident and surprising theme common to all three versions of this story—that the Goths did not really convert to Arianism. Either they converted in simplicity of mind and thus remained true to Christ, or they did not embrace the full version of Arianism, or the bishop who had convinced them to embrace it was not a real Arian either.

These varying interpretations of Ulfila’s role in the conversion of the Goths to Arianism stand out as striking witnesses to the Nicene historians’ struggle to make sense of the Gothic bishop’s legacy. Following Rufinus, the historians had no need to present any account of Ulfila and the Christianization of the Goths. But they did. While all three authors adapted the story to fit the particular needs of their ecclesiastical history, all of the accounts share this common theme. All three are concerned with the question of how the Goths became Arians and likewise display evidence for prior acquaintance with Christianity on the part of the Goths, as confirmed by Philostorgius and Auxentius as well. McLynn argues that Socrates and Sozomen incorporated Ulfila into their accounts because the Gothic bishop had likely received an extravagant funeral

27. Theodoret, *EH*, 4.33.

when he happened to die in Constantinople and thus represented a figure worthy of note. This is possible, and McLynn presents a very compelling argument. Whether the answer to the puzzle lies in the funeral or not, Ulfila had clearly acquired a positive reputation in fifth-century Constantinople, and the historians were influenced by it. Due to this positive reputation, Ulfila later acquired the status of being the main agent of the conversion of the Gothic people. Yet, in their accounts of Ulfila, the Nicene ecclesiastical historians do not present the traditional view of an intentional mission with immediate positive results, but rather a more gradual and uncertain process of Christianization. Their accounts present imperial politics, translation of scripture, and martyrdom as the essentials of this process, rather than the agency of one man. Philostorgius presents Ulfila in a very similar way and also adds the story that the other historians are lacking because they do not want to include what may be evidence for Ulfila's non-Nicene background from the very beginning of his life. His unique account incorporates the story of Ulfila's ancestors from Cappadocia and the initial contacts and individual conversions that led to the spread of Christianity among the Goths. Additionally, the Nicene writers paint a picture in which bishops and emperors do not necessarily act harmoniously in the process of Christianization, while Philostorgius's account features much more collaboration between the two.

CHAPTER 4 INTERPRETING THE NON-NICENE SOURCES: HISTORY AND MEMORY

In interpreting the sources for non-Nicene missions one encounters three perplexing and unsatisfying scholarly tendencies. To begin with, scholars drawing from the dominant Nicene accounts have missed an entire aspect of the Christianization of the East. Since Theophilus's missionary exploits are described only in the non-Nicene account of Philostorgius, historians have for the most part overlooked him completely, yet the connection between Theophilus and Ulfila form the core of the major missionary policy of Constantius's reign. There have, however, been some nods in the right direction. For instance, Frend writes that Constantius's appointment of Ulfila "must be seen against the background of his interest in the mission of Theophilus 'the Indian' to various eastern countries."¹ Secondly, scholars have frequently failed to distinguish between Philostorgius's and Auxentius's representations of these missions and the actual (if any) conversion of Goths and Himyarites. Irfan Shahid, for example, clearly takes Philostorgius too much at his word when he states Constantius's "mission to the Southern Semites was crowned with success, a bright spot in an otherwise cheerless reign."² While the mission may have been successful, there is simply not enough evidence, epigraphic or literary, to make such a bold claim.³ A change in the phraseology of the inscriptions in South Arabia during the fourth century did occur, but as they indicate only the ruling elite's preference for monotheism, one cannot safely state whether this reflected the spread of Judaism or Christianity.⁴ More soberly, Amidon points out the difficulty of discerning the degree to which Theophilus "changed the political and

1. Frend, "The Missions of the Early Church, 180-700 AD," 11.

2. Shahid, 96.

3. Fowden, 110; See Shahid's attempt to resolve this problem, 102-104.

4. Robert Hoyland, *Arabia and the Arabs: From the Bronze Age to the Coming of Islam* (Routledge, 2001), 146-147.

ecclesiastical situation on the Red Sea coast,” considering the fact that Sassanid influence was restored in South Arabia following Julian the Apostate’s death in 363—seven years after the mission.⁵ While acknowledging the shift from references to a multiplicity of gods in favor of monotheistic statements, Robert Hoyland and Garth Fowden also affirm that in South Arabia, Christianity did not acquire a visible presence until the mid-fifth century.⁶ Scholars have, however, pointed out the importance of the distinction between event and narrative for other conversion accounts and the importance of the representation of mission within the sources. In particular, Peter Brown has observed that texts “can not be treated as neutral evidence for a process that happened, as it were, outside themselves. They were part of the process itself... They created a ‘representation’ of Christianization which gathered momentum over the generations.”⁷ Similarly, Philostorgius and Auxentius present Ulfila and Theophilus as missionary figures to preserve a non-Nicene vision of the past.

Clearly, Philostorgius wants his readers to take into account the significance of a mission sent “with the purpose of converting them [the Himyarites] to the true faith.”⁸ He emphasizes the importance of good character, orthodoxy, gifts, miracles, and church building for the success of mission.⁹ Significantly, Philostorgius does not include any of these elements in his account of Ulfila. While Ulfila later acquired the reputation as the one who converted the Goths to an “Arian” form of Christianity, it is striking that this text, which has traditionally been read as a

5. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 41 n. 9.

6. Hoyland, 147; Fowden, 112.

7. Peter Brown, “Conversion and Christianization in Late Antiquity: The Case of Augustine,” in *The Past before Us: the Challenge of Historiographies of Late Antiquity*, edited by Carole Straw and Richard Lim, (Brepols, 2004), 107.

8. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

9. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4-6; see full discussion below, 63-69.

missionary account, does not once refer to Ulfila converting anyone. This reputation has led modern scholars to claim, for example, that Ulfila's "most impressive achievements were his translation of the Bible into Gothic and his leadership in converting the Goths to Christianity."¹⁰ One does not need to diminish Ulfila's role in the Christianization of the later Roman Empire, but rather to define that role better by paying better attention to what the text actually says. In fact, Philostorgius gives credit only to the Cappadocian captives, not Ulfila, for the conversion of the Gothic people. He would naturally do so as this would ensure a conversion by members of his own Cappadocian non-Nicene faith community, whereas, he has serious reservations about Ulfila's association with the Council of Constantinople in 360 as it condemned Eunomius's associate Aetius.¹¹ Thirdly and finally, in addition to the overly enthusiastic assessment of the missionaries' successes, both the narrative of these events and the treatment of these non-Nicene sources have suffered from the persistence of the "orthodoxy" vs. "heresy" dichotomy.¹² Fortunately, more recent historians of the Arian controversy have moved the scholarship forward in this regard emphasizing instead the extent to which the ecclesiastical historians of late antiquity constructed and represented the past while the doctrinal reality on the ground was much less clear-cut than they would have readers see it.¹³ Thus, in evaluating the role of mission within non-Nicene memory one must challenge a consensus that fails to connect the two missions, overestimates their success, and perpetuates Arian stereotypes.

10. Van Dam, 15.

11. McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 130-131.

12. See Marasco, "The Church Historians (II): Philostorgius and Gelasius of Cyzicus," for example.

13. See above, 10 n. 6.

Connecting the Missions of Theophilus and Ulfila

Within the story of non-Nicene mission one encounters a wide range of seemingly incompatible figures. After all, do the activities of Ulfila in Gothia and the adventures of Theophilus among the “Indians” really form part of the same history? Truly, the figures involved were quite different from each other, distant in space and time. If one looks closely, however, a unifying picture emerges in which the actions and writings of these figures relate a narrative of non-Nicene mission. It may very well be fragmentary and unsatisfactory to some, but it is a story that both deserves and demands a retelling, as non-Nicene mission, though often ignored, had its own role in the Christianization process in Late Antiquity. Scholars have not connected the missions of Theophilus and Ulfila because they have failed to recognize that such missions were integral to the ecclesio-political policy of Constantius II and the non-Nicene reconstruction of the past. A description of the lives of the missionaries Theophilus and Ulfila will reveal the interconnected nature of their lives and missions.

While any certain reconstruction of the lives of Theophilus and Ulfila proves challenging, one may safely state that these men acquired and still possess the reputation of missionaries. The story of Theophilus’s adventure does not survive in any other sources, but Philostorgius presents a Eunomian church leader with a prominent but undefined role in a non-Nicene group that enjoyed some degree of success within the church-court circle of Constantius II.¹⁴ Theophilus “had no church of his own separately but belonged to all in common and might freely visit all the churches as though they were his own, the emperor bestowing every mark of the highest honor and respect upon him.”¹⁵ At a young age, under circumstances that remain unknown, he was sent

14. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.6, 3.6a, 4.1.

15. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.6a.

as a hostage to Constantinople from his native island of Diva.¹⁶ According to Philostorgius, Theophilus did not allow his time in Constantinople to go to waste and “formed his character to the highest degree of virtue and his beliefs in accordance with orthodoxy, choosing to live in celibacy.”¹⁷ Subsequently, he emerged as a monk-bishop with enough credentials for Constantius II to include him “among the leaders of this embassy,” namely, to Himyar in South Arabia.¹⁸ Upon his return to Constantinople, Theophilus did not acquire a see, but around 362 he took up a Eunomian leadership position in Antioch “to respond to a specific theological and pastoral need pending a more general settlement” during a formative period for the Eunomian church.¹⁹ He also suffered banishment twice in his life due to his close association with a contender for the throne, Julian the Apostate’s half-brother, Gallus.²⁰ The chronology of these events still needs to be determined definitively. It appears, however, that Constantius banished Theophilus for a variety of political reasons yet favored him in general and so recalled him twice. While the evidence is inconclusive, it seems that he remained in Antioch as a Eunomian bishop until his death.²¹

Even fewer facts can be stated about Ulfila despite the fact that the Goth gained more fame than Theophilus. Ulfila was the descendant of Christians living in the Roman province of Cappadocia who were captured in their native village of Sadagolthina and taken beyond the

16. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4. Shahid speculates that Theophilus’s status as a hostage indicates royal lineage. He goes so far as to claim that “His noble origin may also explain some personal traits he displayed throughout his career, a certain self-assurance, most likely derivative from his princely background,” 96-97.

17. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

18. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4. Scholars agree that the mission occurred in the 350’s and give the tentative exact date of 356. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 40; Shahid, 86; Fernandez, 361.

19. Philostorgius, *EH*, 8.2; Vaggione, 278-279.

20. Philostorgius, *EH*, 4.1; 4.7-8.

21. Philostorgius, *EH*, 9.18; Theophilus was still in Antioch around 380. Vaggione suggests that Theophilus was succeeded by Julian of Cilicia during this time, 318-319.

Danube into Gothia during the infamous Gothic raids of the mid-third century.²² Although he does not attribute any conversions to Ulfila, Philostorgius emphasizes the continuity of Christian resolve between his Cappadocian ancestors and the Gothic bishop: “But the faithful throng of captives, in associating with the barbarians, converted not a few of them to the faith and brought them over from paganism to Christianity...Ulfila himself was leader of the faithful who had gone into exile, having become their first bishop.”²³ He was born in 311, raised in a Christian family, and reached the office of *lector* in the Church in Gothia.²⁴ The question of whether or not Ulfila subscribed to a non-Nicene form of Christianity from the beginning of his adult life remains unsolvable and hopelessly misguided as it fails to address adequately the importance of the representation of Ulfila within both the Nicene and non-Nicene sources.²⁵ Regardless, he subscribed to a non-Nicene homoean creed in 360 and, as far as the sources indicate, remained true to this confession for the remainder of his life.²⁶

The dates of such critical events in Ulfila’s life like his consecration remain highly contentious and unresolved due to the chronological problems that Auxentius’s and Philostorgius’s accounts present.²⁷ He may have been a part of the embassies which the Goths

22. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5; Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, xiii, 81; Frend, “The Missions of the Early Church, 180-700 AD,” 12; McLynn suggests that Philostorgius’s own Cappadocian background “might reflect personal research” on this information, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 129; Heather and Matthews, 134 n. 21.

23. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5.

24. Auxentius, 35[56]; Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, xiv.

25. See above, 39-45, for a discussion of the various versions of Ulfila’s mission and see the extensive discussion in Sivan, 373-386.

26. He died in 383 at the Conference of Sects that he was attending as a delegate of the homoean party. Auxentius, 39[61]; McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 126-127; Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 20 n. 15.

27. For the various reconstructions of Ulfila’s career see Barnes, “The Consecration of Ulfila,” for 336 as a consecration date; Sivan for 337; Amidon (20-21 n. 15) for 336; Heather and Matthews for a *terminus ante quem* of 341; See also Peter Heather, “The Crossing of the Danube and the Gothic Conversion,” *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 27:3 (1986): 289-318, for an argument to reconcile all of the various sources for the conversion of the Goths. I favor the analysis (inconclusive as it is) of Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, xiv-xvii; and

sent to Constantine following the emperor's military victories in "Scythia" and consecrated as bishop in 336 during the Council of Constantinople.²⁸ Moreover, he may have traveled to Constantinople upon Constantine's death in 337 as part of a delegation to ensure the continuity of political relationships.²⁹ For the purposes of this argument it is sufficient to state that Ulfila traveled to Constantinople as a member of an embassy and was ordained by Eusebius of Nicomedia as "bishop of the Christians in the lands of the Goths."³⁰ He apparently received imperial support for this mission beyond the Danube frontier, suffered persecution and banishment in Gothia, and found protection for himself and his followers within the boundaries of the Roman Empire in Moesia.³¹ Philostorgius enthusiastically relates that Constantius held Ulfila "in the highest esteem, going so far as to refer to him often as 'the Moses of our time.'"³² It is most likely during this period that he completed all of his translation work on the Gothic Bible.³³ As a participant in the ecclesiastical politics of the time, Ulfila most certainly signed the homoean creed of Constantinople in 360.³⁴ He died in Constantinople in 383 in the midst of the Conference of Sects, becoming ill immediately after "the conduct of the council had been reconsidered by the impious ones for fear that they might be confuted."³⁵ Thus, the known

McLynn (125-135) as both focus less on reconstructing the exact chronology and more on the reasons why the sources represented Ulfila as they did.

28. Barnes, "The Consecration of Ulfila," 541-45; Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 20 n. 15.

29. Sivan, 381.

30. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5.

31. Auxentius, 36[58], 37[59]; Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, 96-98.

32. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5.

33. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 21.

34. McLynn, "Little Wolf in the Big City," 135.

35. Auxentius, 39[61]. Theodosius convened the Conference of Sects to resolve the theological dissent following the Council of Constantinople in 381. He intended to do so through open debate, but instead decided that a

activities of Ulfila the Goth reveal a man involved in ministry to Christian communities among the Gothic people as well as in the highly charged ecclesiastical disputes of his time. Those writing about him chose, however, to emphasize his role in the Christianization of the Goths. The Nicene historians sought to make sense of the stubborn Arianism of the Goths during their own lifetime, and the non-Nicene writers strived to claim Ulfila's memory for a specific vision of Christian history.

Despite their differences, Ulfila and Theophilus are characters in the same story—a story told by the non-Nicene writers Philostorgius and Auxentius, both of whom included representations of mission in their efforts to reclaim the past for their faith. For example, Philostorgius clearly emphasizes the importance of appropriate and orthodox consecration prior to embarking on a mission. He relates that the non-Nicene bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia consecrated both Theophilus the Indian and Ulfila prior to their participation in mission. According to Philostorgius, Theophilus “entered the ranks of deacons, Eusebius laying upon him his priestly hands.”³⁶ This is significant as Photius, in one of his editorial remarks, dolefully relates that Philostorgius held Eusebius of Nicomedia in such high esteem that he referred to him as “the Great.”³⁷ It follows that Philostorgius chose to emphasize the relationship and continuity of faith between Eusebius of Nicomedia, Theophilus, and Ulfila, because it ensured the success of the mission and foreshadowed the occurrence of events that furthered God's will on earth.

Further evidence to suggest that Philostorgius represented the importance of the connection between these two men is found in Book II in which he mentions Theophilus's

leading member of each group would “submit a written creed for his prayerful consideration.” This did not turn out well for the homoean party of which Ulfila was a member. McLynn, “Little Wolf in the Big City,” 126.

36. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4; Consecration of Ulfila, Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5.

37. Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1.

mission directly following the account of Ulfila.³⁸ Moreover, as the non-Nicene missionaries are connected through their consecrator, they are similarly connected through their non-Nicene patron, Constantius II: the emperor served as the impetus behind both of these missions.³⁹ Philostorgius relates that “Constantius sent an embassy to the people called of old Sabaeans and now known as Himyarites.”⁴⁰ Thus, it is safe to state that all of these figures shared a common role in non-Nicene mission.

Representation versus Reality

In their assessment of the missions of both Theophilus the Indian and Ulfila, historians have frequently taken the sources at face value and simply restated the supposed course of events. A striking example of this rather widespread approach appears in the work of Gonzalo Fernandez. In his article on Theophilus’s mission, the author writes that the hero “achieved substantial evangelizing success.”⁴¹ W. H. C. Frend concludes his assessment of Theophilus’s mission with almost identical language.⁴² These prove to be examples of extremely strong and problematic assertions when one considers the fact that Christianity was not established among the Himyarites to any substantial degree during this period.⁴³ Similarly, Fernandez claims, “With

38. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.6. The historian could have delayed mention of Theophilus until the fuller treatment he gives him in 3.4-6. McLynn states that “there are clear signs that their pairing is deliberate and contrived” (128).

39. It is not within the scope of this paper to argue whether or not Philostorgius meant “Constantine” or “Constantius” when he described the sending out of Ulfila and the chronological questions involved (2.5). It suffices to mention that while this question is highly controversial, it was likely Constantius II who actively supported Ulfila and his followers upon their flight from Gothia and “settled this emigrant people in the region of Moesia, each individual where he liked” (2.5).

40. Philostorgius continues to describe the Himyarites as descendants from Abraham through Keturah who “practice the custom of circumcision on the eighth day after birth” and “sacrifice to the sun, the moon, and the local demons,” *EH*, 3.4.

41. Fernandez, 361.

42. Frend, “Mission—Monasticism—Worship,” 82. “The mission c. 340 was extremely successful.”

43. Fowden, 110.

the ordinations of Ulfila and Theophilus, Eusebius wanted to give the Constantinople [sic] Church a role as the evangelist of barbarians.”⁴⁴ It is not clear that the Church of Constantinople or Eusebius of Nicomedia ever had any such goals. Philostorgius certainly does not mention any desire on Eusebius’s part to evangelize barbarians. Furthermore, as E. A. Thompson has so lucidly shown, “Throughout the whole period of the Roman Empire not a single example is known of a man who was appointed bishop with the specific task of going beyond the frontier to a wholly pagan region in order to convert the barbarians living there. If there was no Christian community beyond the relevant frontier, then no bishop was sent there.”⁴⁵ And indeed, Auxentius does not attribute Ulfila’s consecration to an imperial or personal goal to convert Goths outside the frontier; rather he states, “He showed the Christians (among them) to be truly Christians, and multiplied their numbers.”⁴⁶ One gets the impression that Ulfila’s task was to minister to existing Christians suffering from a lack of capable Christian leadership. In the same way, Philostorgius explains that in addition to a desire for the Himyarite king’s conversion, Constantius “also asked that it might be granted to build a church for the Romans who traveled there and for whoever of the local people might convert to the faith.”⁴⁷

While presenting an account of a mission, Philostorgius leaves other clues suggesting that Theophilus was needed more for his ministry among existing Christians than for a conversion effort among the people of Himyar. The missionary bishop succeeded in inspiring the Himyarite king to build three churches. In his concluding remarks on the success of the mission, Philostorgius writes that,

44. Fernandez, 362.

45. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, xvii. See also more recently, Mathisen, 667.

46. Auxentius, 35[57].

47. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

He put up one of the churches in the capital itself of the whole nation, called Tapharon. Another was located in what was the Roman market center, toward the outer ocean. The place is called Aden, and it is where voyagers from Roman territory were accustomed to put in. The third church was in the other part of the country, where there is a well-known Persian market center at the mouth of the Persian Gulf there.⁴⁸

Clearly, in addition to the fact that all three churches were built in areas of commerce and thus point to the presence of resident aliens, Philostorgius himself points out the importance of these locations for visiting Roman merchants and other travelers. So, while subsequent readers have interpreted this text as a straightforward account of the conversion of an entire people, Philostorgius suggests that Theophilus had successfully completed his mission when he had built churches for resident alien Christians. Evidently, Christianization occurs in a more complex manner than the written narrative of the event would seem to indicate.⁴⁹ Rather, the mission narratives which Auxentius and Philostorgius present serve specific purposes in the work and present the authors' visions and conceptions of mission and the memory of Christian history, as discussed in detail below.

The Problem of "Arianism"

In addition to the regrettable conflation of event and narrative in the scholarship on non-Nicene mission, an unfortunate use of imprecise terminology and even more importantly of interpretations clearly privileging the Nicene point of view persists in the secondary literature both on the missionaries and their historians. This phenomenon is surprising in light of all the scholarship that has problematized the histories of the past, which presented a teleological

48. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

49. For more on the relationship between chronicle and event see Wood, 25.

narrative of triumphant Nicene Christianity.⁵⁰ These works have not only rightly pointed out that the heretics did not view themselves as such, but have also shown that the conclusion to the Nicene controversy was not foregone and was actually riddled with tendentious moments. For example, what reason would a Christian living during the reign of a non-Nicene emperor have to imagine the eventual establishment of Nicene Christianity as orthodox? A more objective stance would require a movement away from privileging Nicene sources as well as a commitment to an analysis that does not perpetuate the polemic of such figures as Athanasius of Alexandria and Theodosius II but instead strives to depict the perspective of those long branded simply as “Arians.” Such an approach also has the advantage of revealing the actual richness and diversity of the religious life in Late Antiquity, which is otherwise obscured by an “orthodox” Nicene Christians versus “heretical” Arians dichotomy.

In light of recent scholarship, then, one does not expect such statements as appear in Gabriele Marasco’s work when he argues that Philostorgius “departed from [the other ecclesiastical historians] only because of his Arian faith.”⁵¹ Such an affirmation reveals the author’s assumptions about the primacy of Nicene ecclesiastical historians because it implies that Philostorgius followed Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, when in fact he wrote before them; indeed Marasco himself acknowledges this fact. Similarly, Marasco writes that Philostorgius’s “work was very polemical: it was composed to defend Arianism, particularly Aetius and Eunomius and their teachings and politics.”⁵² Again, the implication is that the work of the other ecclesiastical historians was somehow free of polemic and promotion of a particular cause. Also,

50. See above 10 n. 6. Also, Van Dam provides a valuable discussion on the subject, 8-45. I do not, however, agree with his assertion that rather than belief, “External social and cultural factors were more influential in determining the road actually taken,” 45.

51. Marasco, 259.

52. Marasco, 259.

Marasco uses the terms “Arianism” and “Arian” throughout the article to describe Philostorgius’s Christianity without any qualification or definition of terms. Philostorgius himself would not have taken kindly to being referred to as an Arian, and as noted earlier, in fact, he explicitly expressed his preference for the term Eunomian at the beginning of his history.⁵³

Thomas Ferguson provides a much more useful and insightful analysis of Philostorgius by placing him back into his context as an ecclesiastical historian of the fifth century who sought to reclaim the past for his faith community, just as other Nicene historians such as Rufinus were reconstructing the past.⁵⁴ Thus, Ferguson treats Theophilus’s mission as part of a broader argument on Philostorgius’s part on the role of mission within the life of Empire. He also rightly emphasizes the importance of Theophilus the Indian’s role as a wonder-worker and ascetic within the Eunomian community. Ferguson’s approach is a step in the right direction of freeing such non-Nicene figures as Theophilus and Ulfila as well as their interpreters, Philostorgius and Auxentius, from centuries of privileging Nicene historiography.

It follows that the missions of Theophilus and Ulfila are connected both through the narrators who present them to us, through their non-Nicene consecrator, and through the non-Nicene emperor who initiated their adventures. In addition, while Ulfila certainly very early on acquired the reputation of an apostle to the Goths, he was not sent on a mission to barbarians by either Constantius or Eusebius, but rather to minister to existing Christian communities beyond the Danube frontier. Furthermore, both Auxentius and Philostorgius emphasize Ulfila’s conversion powers only to a limited degree since other aspects of Ulfila are central to them, in particular theological alignments in the politics of Constantinople. This is not to say that Ulfila

53. Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1.

54. Ferguson, 125-163.

did not convert people or act as a missionary, but it is to say that our sources tell us next to nothing about what Ulfila actually did and more about what Auxentius and Philostorgius thought was important in their portrayal of him. Similarly, Constantius II did not send Theophilus the Indian on a religious mission but rather on a diplomatic one that also involved ministry towards Christians already living in South Arabia. Ironically, while Philostorgius emphasizes Theophilus's missionary activity much more than he does Ulfila's, Theophilus did not succeed in obtaining any substantial conversions in South Arabia as Ulfila must have done, in light of the eventual adoption of non-Nicene Christianity by the Visigoths. And while Ulfila's success as a missionary can be inferred, his reputation as "an Apostle to the Goths" proves somewhat misleading as, according to Wood, the Goths had "come into contact with Christianity long before the mission of Ulfilas, or their entry into the Roman Empire in 376."⁵⁵ Additionally, in accordance with E. A. Thompson's chronology the Goths had not yet converted in any substantial way to Christianity at the time of Ulfila's death. As Thompson aptly affirms, "The Apostle of the Goths did not convert the Goths to Christianity."⁵⁶

It is important to keep in mind that Philostorgius chose to represent Ulfila and Theophilus in a particular manner and that his account can tell us much about what Philostorgius thought mission was and what purpose it served in his narrative. The historian included the mission accounts in part to illustrate the importance of the missionary figure in the Eunomian community. Moreover, Philostorgius and Auxentius were not simply Arians presenting an Arian-biased view of the past. Rather, these authors perceived themselves as members of particular

55. Wood, 8. Wood does not discount Ulfila's contribution to the eventual evangelization of the Goths through the Gothic Bible, 7-8. Thompson argues that "However we may account for the conversion of the various Germanic peoples, we have no evidence for supposing that Roman missionaries played any substantial part in the process," E. A. Thompson, "Christianity and the Northern Barbarians," in *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century*, ed. Arnaldo Momigliano (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 76.

56. Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila*, 93.

“faith communities” dating back to a time before the corruption of Nicaea and sought to reclaim the past for these faith communities.⁵⁷ This applies to Philostorgius much more than to Auxentius, as Auxentius’s account had a very specific immediate purpose and context and must be viewed in this light.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, if one avoids the polemical labels of heretical and orthodox one can be more sensitive to the relevant sources and figures. Once we appreciate the sheer diversity of the theological landscape of this period, the history of non-Nicene mission becomes much clearer. As a more lucid picture emerges of the ways in which mission played a central role in the non-Nicene understanding of the past, it is also possible to evaluate the broader implications for the overall history of mission in late antiquity.

57. See Ferguson’s *The Past is Prologue* for a discussion of faith communities and competing historiographies.

58. See the earlier discussion of McLynn’s theory on the purpose of Auxentius’s letter, 14.

CHAPTER 5 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF NON-NICENE MISSION

Now that we have situated these non-Nicene missions in their context and addressed the historiographical issues associated with the study of this topic, we present some conclusions on distinctive features of the representation of these missions. First, a discussion of Auxentius's portrayal of Ulfila will reveal both the writer's specific preoccupations as well as aspects of his understanding of the Goth's role as an evangelist. Finally, a close analysis of Philostorgius's representation of Theophilus and Ulfila will be placed within the context of the ecclesiastical historian's specific views on mission and conversion more broadly.

For Auxentius, Ulfila's mission to the Goths almost disappears amid the long and detailed description of Ulfila's faith. Auxentius presented Ulfila as a great man of God not only because of his outstanding accomplishments such as his ministry to the Goths, knowledge of three languages, and leadership of his community in the face of persecution, but most importantly because of his unswerving and orthodox adherence to true homoean Christianity. Auxentius does, however, reveal how he viewed the proper role of a bishop of a Gothic community, as one not only subscribing to the correct creed, but also actively promoting it through preaching, teaching, and advocating it at the imperial court. He experienced these personally when Ulfila took him in and taught him the Scripture: "He received me from my parents as his disciple in the earliest years of my life; he taught me the Holy Scriptures and made plain the truth, and through the mercy of God and the grace of Christ he raised me in the faith, as his son in body and spirit."¹ He calls Ulfila "a man of great (spiritual) beauty, truly a confessor of Christ, teacher of piety and preacher of truth."² He emphasizes that Ulfila preached the truths of orthodox

1. Auxentius, 34[55].

2. Auxentius, 24[42].

Christianity “to those who wished to hear and to those who did not.”³ Auxentius makes certain to describe in great detail the exact content of Ulfila’s theology and lists his anathemas of many heresies, and significantly, he frames this long description in terms of Ulfila actively preaching and teaching these truths. Furthermore, Auxentius claims that Ulfila taught not only through oral instruction, but utilized his knowledge of Latin, Greek, and Gothic to write down his teachings: “He left behind him several tractates and many interpretations in these three languages for the benefit and edification of those willing to accept it, and as his own eternal memorial and recompense.”⁴ When he characterizes Ulfila’s mission to the Goths, Auxentius describes it in terms of Ulfila preaching the truth to them.⁵ The other representations of Ulfila do not specifically state that he accomplished his mission through preaching.

Finally, throughout the description of his life, Auxentius celebrates the importance of Ulfila in an imperial context. He begins his letter with the occasion of Ulfila going to Constantinople to the court of Theodosius and ends it with Ulfila’s death there.⁶ In describing the exodus of Christian Goths across the Danube, Auxentius writes of Ulfila that he “still in the reign of Constantius of blessed memory, was received with honor on Roman soil.”⁷ According to Auxentius, Ulfila ends his days in Constantinople when he learns that the Conference of Sects is not going according to the initial plan of holding disputation. Auxentius further relates that the Gothic bishop was honored in the capital city. In case his reader has any remaining doubts about the importance of Ulfila’s belief and teaching, Auxentius tells us that the Gothic bishop’s creed

3. Auxentius, 24[42].

4. Auxentius, 33[54].

5. Auxentius, 35[56].

6. The beginning of the letter is missing, but that is where our text begins.

7. Auxentius, 37[59].

was inscribed on his tombstone for all to see and ends the letter with a transcription of that creed.⁸

Philostorgius's view of mission and the role it played within the greater drama of Christian history becomes evident if one looks closely at the context of the mission accounts within the entire *Ecclesiastical History*. The function of the mission/conversion stories within the narrative reveal not only what Philostorgius thought of mission, but even how he perceived the world around him. For Philostorgius, the age when missionary activity flourished and resulted in the conversion of countless pagans had by his own lifetime passed into the realm of memory. Certain common features appear within these mission stories and reveal what was important to Philostorgius. There are only three missionary accounts in Philostorgius's entire history. Three sections on Constantine, Arius, and Philostorgius's mother deal with related issues of conversion or proselytism but do not quite fit within the category of mission narratives for this study. Constantine does indeed convert, but he is only one person and is so closely tied up with the Eusebian model to make it difficult to assess how Philostorgius viewed Constantine's conversion in the context of the conversion of entire peoples. Philostorgius also records Arius convincing people to come over to his side through songs, but these people do not convert; rather they are "simple folk" who are "stolen away" into heresy. Finally, Philostorgius's mother is convinced by her husband to "change allegiance" to Eunomian from Nicene Christianity. The conversion of large numbers of foreign pagans only occurs within the accounts of Ulfila, Agapetus, and Theophilus.⁹ It is possible that Photius only recorded ones of particular interest, but the fact that

8. Auxentius, 40[63].

9. Agapetus was a former soldier turned wonder-working presbyter during the reign of Constantine. Philostorgius, *HE*, 2.5, 2.8, 2.6, 3.4.

all three accounts occur in books two and three of the history during the reigns of Constantine and Constantius suggests that the silence for the remainder of the text is not accidental.

In addition to sharing an early context, these missionaries appear in the story somewhat out of chronological order, suggesting a deliberate construction of the stories into a single whole on the part of Philostorgius. The ecclesiastical historian mentions Ulfila first and gives a foreshadowing of Theophilus's mission. He then continues the story with Constantine striving to create unity in his Empire and thereby recalling the Arian bishops exiled at the council of Nicaea, and then relates the story of Agapetus. Such movement back and forth in time is characteristic of Philostorgius's work, but especially within the first half of the *Ecclesiastical History*. The Confessor Agapetus, an unwilling soldier during the reign of Licinius, became famous for his wonder-working and was eventually consecrated Bishop of Synnada. Within this shared context, the emperors perform other acts of piety right before or after the missions. Both Constantine and Constantius build magnificent churches as well as enable these three holy men to participate in missionary and evangelizing activity. Philostorgius paints a picture of a time when the beginning of the theological controversy—which would engulf the remainder of the history—was already evident, yet it still left hope for the flourishing of the true faith. This optimism diminishes as the history progresses with more and more natural disasters filling each page.

Besides the chronological disorder that characterizes these narratives, all three accounts share a focus on the theme of suffering. Examples abound: the trials of Ulfila's ancestors as captives from Cappadocia; Ulfila's suffering when he was obliged to flee into the Roman Empire to avoid persecution; Theophilus as a hostage as well as victim at the hands of imperial authority, which exiled him more than once; Agapetus's suffering as an unwilling soldier under Licinius

and a confessor (one who suffered persecution for the faith but not martyrdom). The trials of these individuals highlight their marginal status in society on the one hand, and the fortitude of their character on the other, which allowed them not only to overcome adverse circumstances but become pivotal figures within the story of the Christianization of the Roman world. Philostorgius emphasizes the trials of these men as well as the clear sign of distinction that they all obtained—all of these men also obtain Episcopal office. All three had lowly origins. Ulfila was a Goth and descendant of captives, Agapetus was a soldier on the verge of execution, and Theophilus was a hostage from a foreign land. Yet all of them, through their faith and service to God, were able to perform miracles, participate in the conversion of many people, and become bishops close to the imperial court. From his point of view, God showed favor toward these men because they overcame their circumstances and contributed to the spread of right Christian worship. Philostorgius frequently mentions the respect and high status that Theophilus possessed within the Eunomian community.

Miracles also feature prominently in Philostorgius's account; positive ones reveal divine favor, while the negative ones such as earthquakes serve as signs of God's warning and disapproval.¹⁰ While miracles only occur within the missions of Theophilus and Agapetus, Philostorgius still meant to link Ulfila's mission with the two other missions.¹¹ The miracles served as signs of divine approval for the missionaries' enterprise as well as a vindication of the suffering of the missionary heroes. One brief passage on Agapetus deserves to be quoted in full as it reveals Photius's own attitude as well as Philostorgius's emphasis on the miracle-working ability of this hero of the faith:

10. Trompf, 196-212.

11. See full discussion above, 48-54.

He spouts a lot of nonsense about his fellow sectarian Agapetus, the former soldier who was ordained presbyter by those of like mind with him and later became bishop of Synnada. He says that he raised the dead and expelled and eliminated many other calamities, and worked other marvels as well, and caused many of the pagans to convert to Christianity.¹²

Photius records the “nonsense” about Agapetus in the middle of a discussion of Constantine’s reign and the events of the Arian controversy. Perhaps Philostorgius was telling a story about the relationship between Constantine and Agapetus, but Photius neglects to mention this. Amidon states that “Constantine released him from service after he had healed one of his servants.”¹³ Agapetus apparently was also known for moving mountains and rivers out of the way. Indeed, Agapetus was so holy that he was able to raise the dead. As Photius provides only an abridged version of Philostorgius’s account it is difficult to get at what Philostorgius was doing with this story. But given that Photius mentions that Philostorgius spoke of Agapetus at length before the discussion of the high point of Constantine’s reign—between the reinstatement of the exiled Arian bishops and the building and beautification of Constantinople—he connects the well-being of the empire and therefore, divine favor, with the performance of miracles and the conversion of pagans.

A telling mention of Theophilus’s miracle-working abilities occurs in Photius’s entry on Philostorgius’s *Ecclesiastical History* in the *Bibliotheca*: Philostorgius “exalts especially...Theophilus the Indian, and several others for their marvels and their lives.”¹⁴ The fact that Photius chose to mention Theophilus specifically in his entry for the *Bibliotheca* indicates that he played a significant role in Philostorgius’s representation of the past and that he emphasized the exceptional nature of the bishop’s life as well as his miracles. Philostorgius

12. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.8, 2.8a.

13. Amidon, *Philostorgius*, 24 n. 25.

14. Philostorgius, *EH*, Prologue 1.

asserts Theophilus's miracle-working abilities in the section that fully describes the missionary's journey to Himyar. The section directly follows a discussion of how Constantius took good care of his Empire by building churches, transferring relics and attempting to oust Athanasius permanently from his see. Additionally, Constantius adhered to his father's practice of caring for Christians beyond Roman borders by sending Theophilus as an ambassador to the Kingdom of the Himyarites. Philostorgius states that "Constantius, then, sent an embassy to them with the purpose of converting them to the true faith" as well as requesting the construction of churches for the Christians already resident there. He provided ample funds for this purpose. Because the emperor's plan was to win over the king with amazing gifts, he outfitted the expedition accordingly with "all of two hundred of the finest breed of horses from Cappadocia conveyed on ships designed as cavalry transports, as well as many other gifts calculated to strike wonder at their sumptuousness and to enchant the beholder."¹⁵ Thus, Constantius sought to bedazzle the people and the ruler of Himyar with Roman wealth and technological superiority.

According to Philostorgius, however, this seemingly foolproof plan did not work out. Theophilus and the embassy showed up with the gifts and splendor, but the king did not at first respond positively because "the Jews in their usual way <tried to counter him?>"¹⁶ At this crucial point in the story, Theophilus stepped in and with "his marvelous works showed on more than one occasion how invincible the Christian faith is" and "the opposition was reduced, however unwillingly, to utter silence."¹⁷ Only after Theophilus's miraculous intervention did the king convert and agree to build the aforementioned Churches for Christians living in Himyar. Moreover, the ruler was "so struck...by Theophilus's works" that he personally funded the

15. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

16. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4, editor unsure about this portion of the text.

17. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

construction of the churches.¹⁸ Thus, Theophilus was able to convert the king through his God-given ability to perform miracles where Constantius's opulent gift-giving ability had failed. It would be nice to know which specific miracles Theophilus performed as compared with those of Agapetus, but the bishop's miracles are described in more detail on different occasions. Theophilus cured Constantius's wife from a fit of hysterics and also, like Agapetus, could raise the dead. Specifically, he brought a dead Jewish woman back to life.¹⁹ Clearly, Theophilus stands out as playing a remarkable role in his representation of Christian history as a whole, but it is also clear that Philostorgius connected miracles with the conversion of pagans.

The account of Theophilus's mission also reveals the role Philostorgius expected bishops to play within the unfolding of Christian history. While Roman emperors played a large part in the ecclesiastical history, time and time again Philostorgius emphasizes the agency of non-Nicene bishops to work for a better Christian world. In the story of Ulfila, Philostorgius stresses the role of Eusebius of Nicomedia and "the bishops with him" in the consecration of the Gothic bishop. Once Ulfila becomes a bishop he was able to minister to the Goths through his translation of scripture. Also, the emperor recognized the bishop's divine gifts as he held Ulfila "in the highest esteem" and referred to him as "the Moses of our time."²⁰ The narratives concerning Theophilus and Ulfila do not elide the emperor's substantial role in the missions or the political and diplomatic concerns at stake. Rather the two elements of the triumph of true Christianity and the imperial goals complement each other. It is a mark of Theophilus's distinction as a man of God that Constantius so singled him out and honored him by appointing him to this mission. Simultaneously, Constantius, despite his sumptuous display of wealth and

18. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4.

19. Philostorgius, *EH*, 4.7, 3.6.

20. Philostorgius, *EH*, 2.5.

power, could not achieve the conversion of the King of Himyar without the wonders worked by Theophilus. Philostorgius twice stresses how crucial the bishop's miracles were to the success of the mission and even the subsequent construction of churches.²¹ Theophilus's holiness allowed him to further Constantius's imperial goals. Constantius was blessed through the activities of such holy bishops as Theophilus and Ulfila because he favored God's true (non-Nicene) servants. In the end, Philostorgius emphasizes the role of suffering, miracles, and the agency of bishops in his narratives of non-Nicene mission to reveal the kind of men God favors and acts through in Christian history.

21. Philostorgius, *EH*, 3.4, 4a, 4b.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

On one level, the non-Nicene missions examined in this study did not possess any *intentional* goals of evangelism to pagans at all. From the perspective of Constantius, these missions were diplomatic embassies seeking to resolve frontier and trade problems. From the perspective of Eusebius of Nicomedia these missions were sent out to minister to already existing Christians beyond the Roman frontiers and to ensure the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Church in these areas. From the perspective of Theophilus and Ulfila we can only guess that these were both ecclesiastical and imperial missions and that Ulfila felt the call to evangelize pagan Goths more than did Theophilus for the Himyarites, perhaps due to Ulfila's background as a resident of Gothia. Ulfila spent thirty years ministering to a Gothic congregation, while Theophilus's mission was of a short enough duration to allow him to return to the Roman Empire and actively participate in events there.

Whatever the perspective of Ulfila, Theophilus, or their imperial and ecclesiastical contemporaries, the non-Nicene authors who recounted their lives represented them as missionary heroes. The variety of both the Nicene and non-Nicene perspectives does not diminish the role of these missions and their representations in the process of Christianization in Late Antiquity. The perspective of the non-Nicene writers shows specific ways in which mission played a significant role in their reconstruction of Christian history, distinct from the Nicene representation of the same past. From the perspective of Auxentius, Ulfila's mission to the Goths had more to do with Ulfila's theological integrity as a *homoean* Christian than anything else. From the perspective of Philostorgius, both Ulfila and Theophilus deserved a prominent place in his history as missionaries because they served to highlight moments of success for his own Eunomian faith community in comparison to his apocalyptic view of the world after the reign of

Theodosius I. By exalting Theophilus and Ulfila as men who visibly displayed God's favor and were an integral part of God's redemptive work in and beyond the Roman Empire, Philostorgius and Auxentius offered non-Nicene visions of mission which were part of the larger story of Christianization in Late Antiquity.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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