REMEMBERING NICAEA

The *Ecclesiastical History* of Anonymous Cyzicenus

*Introduction and translation by*
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Preface

The text presented in this volume largely has been neglected by historians of early Christian thought and culture as well as scholars of late antiquity more generally. On the one hand, this disinterest is understandable. As a self-described compilation (proem. 24), the text offers little in the way of innovative theology or new historical insights. Much of the text summarizes or repeats verbatim other, better-known texts, such as the histories of Eusebius, Theodoret, and Socrates. On the other hand, the text merits study precisely as a compilation. To put it succinctly, the Ecclesiastical History attributed to “Gelasius of Cyzicus” is most important not as a factual source on the emperor Constantine or the Council of Nicaea but as a case study in the ways the council and Nicene orthodoxy were imagined and constructed during the theological controversies ongoing in the late fifth century.1

The present volume therefore seeks to rectify the neglect of the Ecclesiastical History by placing the text back into its late fifth-century context. Compilations in general are not neutral collections of past textual fragments but rather are motivated by contemporary ideological concerns. This particular compilation explicitly states these concerns. The author claims to have created the text in order to prove that the true heirs to the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) were those who supported the decisions of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), whom he labels orthodox, rather than the opponents of Chalcedon, the so-called Eutychians, whom he has been encountering (proem. 9–13). The author also suggests that his image of Constantine should serve as a model for Christian Roman emperors, their theology, and their interactions with the church (see, e.g., proem. 1; 1.10.10; 3.1.1–5). To fulfill these purposes, he takes excerpts from earlier

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1. In seeing historical texts about Constantine less as sources for facts of his life than as windows into the authors’ times, methods, and goals, we follow in the footsteps of Kazhdan 1987; Lieu 1996, 2012; and several excellent contributions in Bjornlie 2017.
writers—sometimes altering the words of the text—and juxtaposes them in order to create a new narrative that imagines Nicaea as an indisputable precursor to Chalcedon and portrays Constantine as an unwaveringly pious, orthodox emperor. In this way the *Ecclesiastical History* demonstrates the importance of the Christian past to a Christian present and the power of historical narratives in contemporary debates.

This does not mean that the *Ecclesiastical History* is valueless for historical studies of the Council of Nicaea. One of the letters that scholars use to understand the Arian controversy, the central theological debate at Nicaea, survives only in the *Ecclesiastical History* (3.15.1–5; Urk. 32). Other letters survive in few independent sources, making the versions preserved in this text essential for comparison. The *Ecclesiastical History* also features the earliest Greek version of the canons of Nicaea (2.32). This document may have been transmitted through the *Ecclesiastical History* of Gelasius (2018, 13–21), the bishop of Caesarea, whose complete account has been lost but is known to us through the testimony of several Byzantine bibliophiles, including the patriarch Photius. Comparison to other historical texts shows that our text borrows heavily from a document-rich historical source that scholars generally identify as the Gelasius’s (2018, xlv–l) history, making this *Ecclesiastical History* crucial for understanding the scope and purpose of its lost source. The *Ecclesiastical History* thus furnishes evidence from earlier Christian historians who also fashioned their own versions of Nicaea’s legacy. One of the more interesting examples of this is the Dispute with Phaedo, a long dialogue apparently taken from an unknown earlier source that dramatizes a debate between an Arian philosopher and the church fathers attending the Council of Nicaea. This document appears in no other surviving text, and neither do three other unique texts preserved in this account: a long speech at the start of the council attributed to Constantine, possibly derived from another lost historical text by Philip of Side (2.7.1–41; Hansen 1998; Heyden 2006), a

2. For example, *Urk.* 28 survives only in Athanasius’s *De decretis* and the epistolary appendix to the *Ecclesiastical History* (see appendix 1); *Urk.* 4b, 25, 27, 31, 33, 34 survive in three sources, including the present text.

3. Van Nuffelen (2002) reopened debate on the *Ecclesiastical History* of Gelasius with an important rereading of the evidence, suggesting that the source shared by Anonymous Cyzicenus and the fifth-century ecclesiastical historians was actually a mid-fifth-century composition that drew from Rufinus and Socrates and was circulated pseudonymously under the name Gelasius of Caesarea. If Van Nuffelen is correct, then Anonymous Cyzice- nus was drawing on this pseudonymous composition.
confession of faith purportedly spoken by Hosius of Cordoba (*Hist. eccl.* 2.12), and a list of regulations of the church supposedly ratified by the council (2.31).

Beyond its value as a repository of lost texts and as an example of the creative use of the past in post-Chalcedonian Christian controversies, the *Ecclesiastical History* is significant for its subsequent reception in Byzantium. In the ninth century, the patriarch Photius read a copy that presented the text as if it were the official minutes and proceedings, or *acta*, of the Council of Nicaea (Photius, *Bibl.* cod. 15). Later Byzantine authors paired the *Ecclesiastical History* with the genuine *acta* from the Council of Ephesus, and some authors even quoted from the Dispute with Phaedo with the citation formula “from the *acta* of the Council of Nicaea.”

Three letters of Constantine concerning the Arian controversy and its aftermath were attached early on to the end of the second book of the history in order to compile these related documents together. In short, the *Ecclesiastical History* successfully reimagined the first ecumenical council in a way that continued to appeal to subsequent generations of Greek-speaking, pro-Nicene Christians and, eventually, when the text came to Western Europe in the fifteenth century, Catholics of the Counter-Reformation.

Our translation, the first published in English and only the second in a modern language, includes the surviving portions of all three books of the *Ecclesiastical History* with explanatory footnotes analyzing the author’s manipulation of sources, as well as points of theological and historical interest. In order to guide the reader through the patchwork of source material and highlight Cyzicenus’s authorial voice, we mark passages borrowed from other sources by offsetting them from the framing narrative. This narrative describes, in order, how Constantine established a “peace of the church” (book 1), how the fathers at Nicaea debated with heretics and established “orthodoxy” (book 2), and how the machinations of Arius’s supporters crumbled before the piety of Constantine as well as the efforts of Athanasius to support Nicene orthodoxy (book 3). Also included in this volume are four appendixes essential for understanding the text: three letters that Byzantine and early modern copies of the text always

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4. For Byzantine authors quoting the text as “from the acts of the first council” (*ἐκ τῶν πρακτικῶν τῆς πρώτης συνόδου*), see Hansen 2002, x n. 1, and also the critical apparatus for the Dispute with Phaedo, 50–82. For the text being paired with the Acts of the Council of Ephesus, see xii–xiii.

5. The first was Hansen’s (2008) German translation.
include (appendix 1); the Byzantine *pinakes*—content listings—for book 3, which include information crucial to reconstructing the lost ending of the *Ecclesiastical History* (appendix 2); selections from the *Bibliotheca* of the patriarch Photius, whose description of the text is the only independent testimony for our history and whose summary also provides details for reconstructing the lost ending (appendix 3); and a letter from publisher Fédéric Morel to translator Robert Balfour explaining why their forthcoming edition of the previously anonymous work would bear the name Gelasius (appendix 4). In the introduction that follows, we explain the critical questions surrounding the *Ecclesiastical History* attributed to “Gelasius of Cyzicus,” including the background to the theological controversies of the late fifth century, the author’s sources, and the overall structure and plan of the history. But first we begin with the shadowy figure of the author himself, explaining why we have placed scare quotes around the name “Gelasius of Cyzicus.”
Abbreviations and Sigla


Alex.  Plutarch, *Alexander*

Anab.  Arrian, *Anabasis*

AnBoll  Analecta Bollandiana

Apol.  Plato, *Apologia*

Apol. Const.  Athanasius, *Apologia ad Constantium*

Apol. sec.  Athanasius, *Apologia secunda* (= *Apologia contra Arianos*)

As. Mos.  Assumption of Moses

BAI  *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*

BHG  *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca*

BHG 185  Life of Athanasius

BHG 1279  Life of Metrophanes and Alexander

Bibl.  Photius, *Bibliotheca*

ByzF  *Byzantinische Forschungen*

ByzZ  *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*

C. Ar.  Athanasius, *Orationes contra Arianos*


c.  circa

Chron.  Jerome, *Chronicon Eusebii a Graeco Latine redditum et continuatuum*

ClQ  *Classical Quarterly*

CNS  *Cristianesimo nella storia*

cod.  codex

Cod. justin.  Codex justinianus

Cod. theod.  Codex theodosianus

col(s).  column(s)

Cor.  Tertullian, *De corona militis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>d.</td>
<td>died</td>
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<tr>
<td>Decr.</td>
<td>Athanasius, <em>De decretis</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eccl. theol.</td>
<td>Eusebius, <em>De ecclesiastica theologia</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ep.</td>
<td><em>Epistula</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Ep. mort. Ar.</td>
<td>Athanasius, <em>Epistula ad Serapionem de morte Arii</em></td>
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<td>Eran.</td>
<td>Theodoret, <em>Eranistes</em></td>
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<td>Eunom.</td>
<td>Basil, <em>Adversus Eunomium</em></td>
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<td>flor.</td>
<td>floruit</td>
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<td>FontChr</td>
<td>Fontes Christiani</td>
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<tr>
<td>GCS</td>
<td>Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte</td>
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<td>GNO</td>
<td><em>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>GRBS</td>
<td><em>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Haer.</td>
<td>Irenaeus, <em>Adversus haereses</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hist. eccl.</td>
<td><em>Historia ecclesiastica</em></td>
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<td>Hist. nov.</td>
<td>Zosimus, <em>Historia nova</em></td>
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<td>Hist. trip.</td>
<td>Cassiodorus, <em>Historia tripartita</em></td>
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<td>Hom.</td>
<td><em>Homilia</em></td>
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<td>Il.</td>
<td>Homer, <em>Ilias</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Inc.</td>
<td>Athanasius, <em>De incarnacione</em></td>
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<td>Inst.</td>
<td>Lactantius, <em>Divinarum institutionum libri VII</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>JEA</td>
<td><em>Journal of Egyptian Archaeology</em></td>
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<td>JECS</td>
<td><em>Journal of Early Christian Studies</em></td>
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<td>JLAnt</td>
<td><em>Journal of Late Antiquity</em></td>
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<td>LXX</td>
<td>Septuagint</td>
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<td>Mort.</td>
<td>Lactantius, <em>De mortibus persecutorum</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Od.</td>
<td>Homer, <em>Odyssea</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Or.</td>
<td>Gregory Nazianzen, <em>Oratio</em></td>
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<td>Or. sanct.</td>
<td>Constantine, <em>Oratio ad sanctos</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>par(r).</td>
<td>parallel(s)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pan.</td>
<td>Epiphanius, <em>Panarion</em></td>
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Abbreviations and Sigla

Phaedr. Plato, Phaedrus
Praep. ev. Eusebius, Praeparatio evangelica
Princ. Origen, De principiis (Peri archón)
proem. proemium
r. reigned
REByz Revue des études byzantines
RelArts Religion and the Arts
Res gest. Ammianus Marcellinus, Res gestae
RHE Revue d’histoire ecclésiastique
RM Rheinisches Museum
Sac. John Chrysostom, De sacerdotio
SC Sources chrétiennes
SDAWB Sitzungsberichte der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin: Klasse für Sprachen, Literatur und Kunst
Sib. Or. Sibylline Oracles
Spir. Basil, De Spiritu Sanctu
SRom Spicilegium Romanum
Syn. Hilary of Poitiers, De synodis; Athanasius, De synodis
Syr. d. Lucian, De syria dea
Tim. Plato, Timaeus
TTH Translated Texts for Historians
  Berlin: de Gruyter.
VC Vigiliae Christianae
Vir. ill. Jerome, De viris illustribus
Vit. Const. Eusebius of Caesarea, Vita Constantini
Vit. Porph. Mark the Deacon, Vita Porphyrii
ZAC Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum
ZKG Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte

Sigla

< > conjecture
<...> conjectural lacuna
References to manuscripts of the text follow the sigla in Hansen’s edition, reproduced below.

A  Ambrosianus gr. 534 (M 88 sup.), thirteenth century
R  Vaticanus gr. 1142, thirteenth century
H  Hierosolymitanus 111, 1588
a  Tradition common to A R (H)
V  Vaticanus gr. 830, 1446
E  Vaticanus gr. 1918 (Emmanuel Probatares), ca. 1546–1556
O  Vaticanus Ottobonianus gr. 261, ca. 1545–1560
p  Tradition common to E O
C  Cantabriensis Trinity College B.9.5, ca. 1546–1556
M  Matritensis 4672, ca. 1546–1556
b  Tradition common to V p CM
T  Taurinensis gr. 10 (B.I.1), fourteenth century (ca. 1370)
B  Athous Vatopedinus, cod. 31, fourteenth century
W  Vindobonensis hist. gr. 127, fourteenth century

[ ] added for clarity of translation