Introduction

The age of Constantine the Great has long been a favourite area for scholarly debate, and recent works have done a great deal to increase understanding of the individuals and issues that dominated the first age of the Christian Roman empire. However, every discussion of this complex and difficult period opens new questions, and this is amply demonstrated by Timothy D. Barnes' *Constantine and Eusebius*. This book, often controversial and especially so regarding Constantine, does nevertheless establish that bishop Eusebius of Caesarea was not, as long thought, a close confidant and adviser to the emperor.

This raises several other major questions. If the bishop of Caesarea was not a confidant of the emperor, then who was the closest ecclesiastical figure to Constantine? And how influential would such an individual be? There have been several recent studies of bishops of late antiquity who closely interacted with emperors and the imperial family. Was there such a figure close to Constantine? And, if so, could he have influenced, or indeed been influenced by, Constantine's approach to the Church and to the

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great theological debates of the early fourth century, notably the 'Arian controversy'?³

It is to suggest answers to these questions that this article focuses on a bishop who scholars have always assumed was influential, but who strangely is almost never studied: Eusebius of Nicomedia. Unlike his namesake of Caesarea, the bishop of Nicomedia (c. 317-339, and then of Constantinople 339-342), has not left us great historical or theological works. The sources we have on his career are surprisingly poor, given that they all assert the importance of the man, and they are almost universally hostile. Thus Eusebius is often stereotyped and dismissed by modern writers, and his real importance has never been properly discussed.

Eusebius was the most prominent and powerful of Arius’ supporters in the years surrounding the latter’s condemnation at the Council of Nicaea in AD 325. This is the essential reason why in both ancient and modern writings Eusebius is almost invariably condemned as a heretic, and above all as the archetypal manipulative, scheming bishop. Athanasius of Alexandria, Eusebius’ greatest foe, called his enemies the ‘Eusebian gang’,⁴ like a political faction, and this has remained the accepted view. Newman called him ‘the most dexterous politician of the age’;⁵ and more

³ This is not the place to discuss the entire complex debate initiated by the argument between the presbyter Arius and his bishop Alexander of Alexandria. For a superb modern account, see R.P.C. Hanson, The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy 318-381 (Edinburgh, 1988).

⁴ e.g. Athanasius Oratio Contra Arianos 1.2. Indeed, Athanasius continued to call his foes the ‘party of Eusebius’ in the 350s (as in De Decretis Nicaenae Synodi 13.2, written c. 356/7), long after Eusebius of Nicomedia’s death in 341.

recently Barnes has continued to talk of the ‘gang around Eusebius’. Such views assume a lack of any genuine religious belief in the bishop of Nicomedia, and blame him for influencing Constantine against those who, like Athanasius, defended the Creed of the Council of Nicaea.

This article will argue that these basic assumptions are unfair, and reflect the hostility of our biased sources. Eusebius' theology may have ultimately fallen outside the later bounds of orthodoxy, but he was by no means Arian, and he did have strong religious convictions. This does not deny Eusebius’ role in ecclesiastical politics, in which even his enemies admitted his ability. However, recognising his religious sincerity creates a more rounded and more accurate picture of the man, and thus a better understanding of his role in these complex events.

Most importantly, a better understanding of Eusebius allows us to see more clearly his relationship with the emperor. It is the exaggeration of our sources which has led many modern writers to see his influence as the decisive factor in the religious policy of a strong-willed ruler like Constantine the Great. Instead, I will argue that there was an ongoing process of mutual interaction between the bishop and the ruler. Although very different men, Constantine and Eusebius shared a conservative desire for Church peace and unity. Thus it was possible for the first Christian emperor to act together with the first man who could be termed an eastern ‘court bishop’. Constantine's reign was to set many precedents for the developing relationship of Church and State in the Later Roman Empire, and this model of cooperation was by no means the least of them.

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7 e.g. Sozomen Historia Ecclesiastica 1.15.
Sources on Eusebius

Given the impact hostile sources have had on our picture of Eusebius of Nicomedia, some discussion of the nature of those sources seems necessary. The study of any individual of the age of Constantine is inevitably fraught with difficulties, due less to the quantity of the material than to its nature. This period was one of great conflict, both between pagans and Christians, and especially within the Church, where the Arian controversy polarised Christian opinion. The theological works of this period in particular were written in the middle of great conflict, and historical impartiality was hardly their purpose. Thus all our sources are inevitably tinged, to varying degrees, with the biases of polemic and apologetic.

The problems these sources pose have long been discussed, especially with regard to Constantine, but they need to be restated here in relation to Eusebius of Nicomedia. The most important and prolific writer of the period was Athanasius of Alexandria, who can hardly be expected to provide a balanced description of his old enemy. Athanasius' very one-sided works are consistent with his later image as the champion of the Council of Nicaea, condemning as Arian all those who opposed him. As Barnes has noted,⁸ these polemics greatly distort our picture of the conflict over Arianism, and nowhere is this more true than in the case of Eusebius of Nicomedia.

The biases of the contemporary writers of the Arian controversy, especially Athanasius, in turn influenced the fifth-century ecclesiastical historians Socrates, Sozomen and Theodoret. All three defended the pro-Athanasian, anti-Arian views that eventually triumphed as 'orthodoxy', although each writer brought his own opinions into his work. Socrates

⁸ Timothy D. Barnes, _Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire_ (Cambridge, MA and London, 1993), 128.
was perhaps the most impartial,\(^9\) while the slightly later Sozomen expanded and modified his predecessor’s work. Theodoret was bishop of Cyrrhus, and the most hostile to those, like Eusebius of Nicomedia, who were seen as Arian. There was one markedly different *Historia Ecclesiastica*, written by the ‘Neo-Arian’ Philostorgius, but only fragments of his work have survived, a typical fate for writers who opposed what became the accepted line.\(^10\)

Thus the evidence we have on the career of Eusebius of Nicomedia is almost entirely hostile. The only major exceptions are Philostorgius, who goes to the other extreme of almost worshipping his hero,\(^11\) and Eusebius of Caesarea. As well as the much-debated *Vita Constantini*, for which (along with the *Historia Ecclesiastica*) he is best known, the bishop of Caesarea also wrote a number of theological works. Like his namesake, Eusebius of Caesarea was seen as Arian by some of his contemporaries. The two men in fact held very similar ideas, as will be discussed further later in this article, and Eusebius of Caesarea admired the ‘other Eusebius’ enough to refer to him as ‘the Great’.\(^12\)

However, a greater problem than the bias of our sources in studying Eusebius of Nicomedia is the fact that his own works, like those of Arius,

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\(^9\) For a new discussion of this historian, see Theresa Urbainczyk, *Socrates of Constantinople: Historian of Church and State* (Ann Arbor, 1997).

\(^10\) This had begun under Constantine, who ordered the works of Arius himself burnt and made the penalty for owning such works death: Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9.

\(^11\) Philostorgius tried at several points to improve Eusebius’ image. In particular (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9) he claimed that Eusebius signed a copy of the Nicene Creed which read *homoioihsios* not *homoousios*—an unlikely idea discussed further later in this article.

\(^12\) Eusebius of Caesarea *Contra Marcellum* 1.4.17-18.
have largely been lost. All that survive intact are his Letter to Paulinus of Tyre, and the letter he and Theognis of Nicaea wrote in 327, requesting that they be returned from exile after the Council of Nicaea. The Letter to Paulinus especially is vital for my discussion on Eusebius' theology that follows, but nothing has survived from Eusebius himself regarding his career after 327, when he was most influential with Constantine. Thus it needs to be realised that any analysis of this vital period must rely on a combination of hostile writers and panegyric. But this is true of much of the research done in recent years into this complex period, and from such material important conclusions can be drawn.

**The early career of Eusebius**

Eusebius was a prominent bishop long before Constantine's conquest of the east in 324. Initially bishop of the minor see of Berytus, in c. 317 he took 'surreptitious possession' of the see of Nicomedia, at this time the capital of Licinius, Constantine's eastern rival. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, Eusebius was distantly related to Julius Julianus,

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13 Although Eusebius of Caesarea (*Contra Marcellum* 1.4) and Sozomen (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.15) both comment on Eusebius of Nicomedia's learning.

14 In Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6.1.

15 Recorded in Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.14; Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.16.

16 The exact date of this move is uncertain, but it was probably between 315 and 317: see Hanson *Doctrine of God* (as in n.3), 133.

17 Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6. A similar view was stated by Alexander of Alexandria in his encyclical letter recorded in Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6.4.
Licinius’ Praetorian Prefect. This connection probably aided his move, and Eusebius also apparently became close to Constantia, Licinius’ wife and Constantine’s half-sister. Thus from the earliest evidence we have regarding his career, Eusebius is tied into court affairs. Whatever the exact circumstances of his translation to Nicomedia, the movement suggests that Eusebius had ambition for power within the Church, and also some degree of influence at court. Both factors were to remain in evidence throughout his career.

Eusebius’ connection to the imperial family may explain why he escaped unscathed through the persecution of Christians instigated by Licinius after 317. His own tutor, Lucian of Antioch, had been killed in Nicomedia itself in 313, but there is no evidence that Eusebius lapsed under the pressure, or indeed was ever accused of such behaviour. In a very hostile letter, Constantine later accused him of actually being ‘the participator in the tyrant’s savagery’, but this seems even more unlikely.

18 Julius was the father of Julian the Apostate. Ammianus Marcellinus Res Gestae 22.9.4 describes Julian as ‘having been brought up at Nicomedia by the bishop Eusebius, who was distantly related to him’.

19 Philostorgius (Historia Ecclesiastica 1.9) refers to such a connection by at least 325, as does Sozomen (Historia Ecclesiastica 2.27).

20 Eusebius of Caesarea Historia Ecclesiastica 10.8 and Vita Constantini 1.51.1-6.

21 Eusebius of Caesarea Historia Ecclesiastica 9.6.3.

22 Contrary to R.M. Grant, ‘Religion and Politics at the Council of Nicaea’, in Christian Beginnings: Apocalypse to History (London, 1983), chapter XI, 5, who suggested the letters destroyed by Constantine at Nicaea carried such charges. It is surely significant that even Athanasius never accused his great foe of such an act.

23 In Constantine’s letter to the church of Nicomedia ordering Eusebius’ removal, recorded in Gelasius of Cyzicus Historia Ecclesiastica 3 Appendix I.
Eusebius’ survival is a testimony to his connections and his political skills, which certainly included a capacity to compromise with the existing political power.

This flexibility was to be amply demonstrated after Constantine defeated Licinius in 324. Although Constantine later accused him of spying for Licinius, Eusebius’ connections to the imperial family seem if anything to have increased after the change of ruler. He was known to Constantine’s mother Helena, who greatly admired Eusebius’ tutor Lucian, while Constantia too remained at the court. It was from this period that the relationship between Eusebius and Constantine began to form, and Eusebius must have had some influence during Constantine’s introduction into eastern Church affairs.

In a world in which personal access to patronage and power was vital, Eusebius thus held potentially a very important position throughout this period. As Socrates wrote, ‘Eusebius possessed great influence, because the emperor resided at Nicomedia ... on this account therefore many of the bishops paid their court to Eusebius’. He was the most powerful bishop close to the emperor, and this importance was to be clearly visible in the early years of the Arian controversy.

After Arius was driven from Egypt in c. 321, Eusebius called a council of the Bithynian bishops to demand the presbyter’s restoration. He also encouraged other bishops to write to Alexander of Alexandria in protest, and his activities led that bishop to complain that Eusebius

24 ibid.


26 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.6.8.

27 Sozomen Historia Ecclesiastica 1.5.10. This council is usually dated to 320, but Rowan Williams at Arius: Heresy and Tradition (London, 1987), 58, has strongly argued for 324.
‘thinks that the affairs of the Church are under his control’. This is the earliest evidence of tension between the bishop of Alexandria, long influential in the East, and the bishop of the eastern capital. This rivalry was to have a long history as the bishops of Nicomedia and then Constantinople asserted their prestige, and Eusebius’ actions suggest he was an early claimant to primacy in the East. There is certainly a strong sense of competition when Alexander warns the other bishops in his letter, ‘if Eusebius should write to you, pay no attention to his communications’.  

This concern of Alexander to counteract the bishop of Nicomedia is the strongest evidence we could have that Eusebius had significant influence in Church affairs. Through his connections at court and his own ambition and ability, Eusebius was, as the sources proclaim him, a very important figure in ecclesiastical politics at the time of the Council of Nicaea. However, before any attempt can be made to assess how he used his influence, it is fundamental to recognise that political ambition was only one element in the complex motives behind his actions. Like any other human being, Eusebius was moved by a variety of concerns. Above all, to understand his role in the Arian controversy, his theological views must be considered. Religious belief is a hugely powerful motivation, and Eusebius’ very genuine convictions shed light on his character, and are vital to any discussion of his later relationship with Constantine.

The theological views of Eusebius

Throughout the Arian controversy, Eusebius was consistently to support Arius against those who would condemn the presbyter for heresy. Friendship played a part in that loyalty. Arius may have been a pupil

\footnote{In his encyclical letter in Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.6.}

\footnote{Ibid.}

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along with Eusebius under Lucian of Antioch, and certainly his Letter to Eusebius in c. 320 seems to assume a degree of closeness. But mindless loyalty hardly seems a trait of Eusebius’ personality. He had his own strong theological views on the dispute which Arius had provoked, and these need to be carefully studied.

It is a commonplace of many modern works on this period to assume that Eusebius shared the theological views of Arius. The latter’s letter to him certainly assumes Eusebius will be sympathetic to his ideas, but to simply call Eusebius an ‘Arian’ is to follow the polemic of our orthodox sources, especially Athanasius. It has been observed that it is the triumph of that polemic that we see the entire Arian controversy as over the views of Arius alone, and accordingly posit that anyone who opposed Athanasius or the Nicene creed must be Arian. In reality, the theological issues at stake were far more complex. While the Nicene Creed would later become the criterion for orthodoxy, this was by no means true in the early stages of the debate. There was room for a wide range of theological ideas, and Eusebius of Nicomedia played an important part in shaping the controversy, which continued long after his death.

30 Arius called himself sulloukianistes (fellow pupil of Lucian) in his Letter to Eusebius in Theodoret Historia Ecclesiastica 1.5.4. However, this may only mean a similarity of ideas, as argued at Williams Arius (as in n.27), 30. Arius is not on the (admittedly incomplete) list of Lucian’s pupils in Philostorgius Historia Ecclesiastica 2.3.14.7-8 and 2.14.25.10-14.

31 The sincerity of Arius’ flowery writing in that letter (ibid) is, however, impossible to define.

32 e.g. Barnes, Constantine (as in n.1), 226, who writes that Eusebius ‘sympathised with Arius’, and Averil Cameron, The Later Roman Empire: AD 284-430 (London, 1993), 70, who simply calls him the ‘Arian bishop’.

33 Michael R. Barnes and Daniel H. Williams (eds.), Arianism after Arius: Essays in the Development of the Fourth Century Trinitarian Conflicts (Edinburgh, 1993), xv.
Near the end of his life, Eusebius led what became known as the ‘Dedication Council’ of Antioch in 341, where the assembled bishops declared that they did not follow Arius—‘for how should we who are bishops follow a presbyter?’ Eusebius was never dependent on Arius for his beliefs. In an important but underused article, Colm Luibheid has demonstrated that what is known of his theology is not notably Arian. Little of Eusebius’ own writing survives, as was discussed earlier, but the most important source on his beliefs is his Letter to Paulinus of Tyre, written c. 320/1.

This letter demonstrates that Eusebius, like Arius, emphasised the priority and immutability of the Father, and thus in effect the subordination of the Son. He particularly opposed any description of the Son as *homoousios* (‘of one substance [or essence]’) with the Father. This expression was to become the most important, and the most controversial, element of the Nicene Creed, but in his letter Eusebius is explicit in his condemnation of such a concept:

‘We have never heard that there are two unbegotten beings, nor one divided in two. We have never learned nor believed, master, that this being experienced anything corporeal. Rather there is one who is unbegotten and one brought to being by him, not, however, from his own substance. He [the Son] is entirely without share in the unbegotten nature or its substance.’

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34 That Eusebius summoned this important council is stated by Socrates at *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.8.

35 Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.22.22.


37 Recorded in Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.6.1.
This statement, so certain in its rejection of *homoousios*, may in fact have encouraged the use of that term in the Nicene Creed. Ambrose of Milan\(^{38}\) claimed that one of Eusebius' letters had this effect, and, while it seems likely that the use of *homoousios* had already been discussed by some bishops before the Council, such a letter may have encouraged their decision.\(^{39}\) Eustathius of Antioch seems to refer to the same incident, albeit in much stronger language, in claiming that a 'blasphemous document'\(^{40}\) of a 'Eusebius' (almost certainly the bishop of Nicomedia), was condemned and torn up at the Council.

This opposition to *homoousios*, together with his support for Arius, is the basis of the misconception that Eusebius of Nicomedia was an 'Arian'. Such a conclusion is neither fair nor accurate. Eusebius is well short of describing the Son as *anomoios* to the Father, as Arius and the later Neo-Arians did.\(^{41}\) He preferred to say that 'we believe that his [the Son's] beginning is not only inexpressible but is incomprehensible to the

\(^{38}\) Ambrose *De Fide* 3.15.

\(^{39}\) We have far too little of Eusebius' writing to be certain of identifying the letter Ambrose refers to. However, the *Letter to Paulinus* is a highly plausible candidate, not least as this would help explain why Theodoret quoted it. This follows G.C. Stead, "Eusebius" and the Council of Nicaea' in *Substance and Illusion in the Christian Fathers* (London, 1985), Chapter V, 86, against Hanson, *Doctrine of God* (as in n.3), 161.

\(^{40}\) Eustathius' account of this event is recorded in Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8.1-5. The emphasis on the 'gang' around the Eusebius mentioned makes the identification with the bishop of Nicomedia obvious. The 'document' cannot be precisely identified, but, once again, the *Letter to Paulinus* is a plausible suggestion.

\(^{41}\) A point made by Stead *(Substance and Illusion* [as in n.39], 87) against Winrich Löhr, 'A Sense of Tradition: the Homoioousian Church Party', in Barnes and Williams *Arianism after Arius* (as in n.33), 100.
intelligence', and thus rejected Arius' view of the Son's origin as 'from what is not'. Eusebius' theological beliefs, if at times rather vague, reveal a deep conservatism, and this is vital to understanding his approach to the Arian controversy.

What needs to be recognised is that Eusebius' focus on the priority of the Father, and his dislike of homoousios, were neither Arian, nor in fact unusual. Before Arius, the great heresy of eastern Christianity had been Sabellianism. Also known as Monarchianism or Modalism, this heresy described the Trinity as 'modes' of one being, and so denied the individual existence of its three members. Arius' emphasis on the Father as separate and superior to the Son was a reaction to that heresy, and it was a reaction shared by many eastern bishops, including both Eusebii. To follow the account of Socrates, 'those objecting to the word "consubstantial [homoousios]" believed that those who accepted it leaned to the opinion of Sabellius and Montanus. They therefore denounced them as blasphemers who were subverting the existence of the Son of God'.

At the Council of Nicaea almost all the eastern bishops did sign the Nicene Creed. However, the long duration of the Arian controversy was to prove that many shared the Eusebii's Sabellian fears. Above all, the potential implications of homoousios worried a number of these men. Eusebius of Caesarea's famous and embarrassed letter to his own see after the Council struggles to justify his acceptance of that term, and exactly the same conservative fears are revealed by the bishops that Eusebius of

42 In the Letter to Paulinus cited earlier.

43 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.5.

44 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.23.

45 The letter states that it was agreed that 'the phrase “of the substance” was indicative of the Son's being indeed from the Father, yet without being as if a part of him'. See Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.8; Theodoret Historia Ecclesiastica 1.12.
Nicomedia gathered at Antioch in 341. The ‘Second Creed’ of this Council was apparently intended to replace Nicaea as the standard of orthodoxy, and as Eusebius was the Council’s leader it is a strong guide to his concerns. The Creed is very scriptural, and avoids any use of *homoousios*, but it is not Arian. Instead it concentrates on rejecting those who link the Father and the Son too closely, and so threaten Sabellianism. The bishops at Antioch thus declared their belief in ‘a Father truly Father, Son truly Son, Holy Ghost truly Holy Ghost’.

This creed, vague and thus acceptable to many, is a good reflection of the theology of Eusebius of Nicomedia. He was not an Arian, but a conservative eastern bishop, as was Eusebius of Caesarea. He disliked the dangers of too closely debating definitions (hence his belief that the generation of the Son could not be known), and he shared Arius’ fear of Sabellianism far more than he did Arius’ own views. From these principles Eusebius never wavered, and they underlie many of his actions against those he saw as promoting dangerous and heretical ideas after the Council of Nicaea. But he did sign the Nicene Creed. His actions at that first great Church Council reflect both his theological views and his political prominence, and it is at this stage that the investigation of his relationship with Constantine needs to begin.

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46 Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.10; Athanasius *De Synodis* 23.

47 It is possible that the Creed was meant to represent the views of Eusebius’ master, Lucian of Antioch, but as our source (Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.5.9) is not sure, there is no way to be certain.

48 A concern Eusebius also emphasised in his *Letter to Paulinus*.

49 Philip Rousseau (*Basil of Caesarea* [Berkeley and Oxford, 1994], 96) has noted that the creed sought to secure unity ‘by stating as little as possible’.
Eusebius and the Council of Nicaea

As the bishop of Nicomedia, Eusebius was the ranking local metropolitan at the Council of Nicaea. Thus it is likely that he was the much-debated individual who gave the opening address to the Council after Constantine.50 This position, and his prominence at court, would also suggest that he was in a position to exert influence on the other bishops at Nicaea—but the limits of this influence were soon to be exposed. The Council of Nicaea was to prove that no bishop could directly oppose the will of the emperor.

Eusebius was unable to prevent the condemnation of Arius, and he left the Council under suspicion after opposing the Creed and its use of homoousios. He did steadfastly refuse to anathematise Arius, maintaining that the presbyter had been misrepresented.51 However, although Socrates thought that he did not sign the Creed either,52 it seems more likely that he did yield to pressure. The unlikely claim of Eusebius’ fifth century supporter Philostorgius that Eusebius actually doctored a creed so that it read homoiousios not homoousios53 certainly suggests that the historian felt there was something to explain. Like Eusebius of Caesarea and many others, Eusebius of Nicomedia bowed to the emperor’s wishes, and retained

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50 The kephalaion (chapter-heading) of Eusebius of Caesarea Vita Constantini 3.1 merely says ‘the bishop Eusebius’. Sozomen (Historia Ecclesiastica 1.10) thought it was Eusebius of Caesarea, while Theodoret (Historia Ecclesiastica 1.7-10) claimed it was Eustathius of Antioch. Scholars tend to support the claims of their own subject on this issue (e.g. R.V. Sellers, Eustathius of Antioch and his Place in the Early History of Church Doctrine [Cambridge, 1928], 25), but I would maintain that Eusebius of Nicomedia, as metropolitan, has the strongest claim.

51 This was the claim of Eusebius and his supporter Theognis of Nicaea in their letter in 327 (see n.15 above).

52 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.8.

53 Philostorgius Historia Ecclesiastica 1.9.
his see by signing a creed about which he personally had grave misgivings.

This concession did not preserve Eusebius' position for long. Soon after the Council, in September/October 325, Eusebius and Theognis of Nicaea were exiled by Constantine.\(^54\) Philostorgius referred to a letter they wrote to Constantine withdrawing agreement with the Nicene Creed,\(^55\) but again this seems an attempt to improve their image. Instead, Constantine emphasised in his letter to the church of Nicomedia\(^56\) that the two men consorted with heretics, as they continued to maintain links to those condemned as Arian.\(^57\) Importantly, Constantine also complained in the letter that 'Eusebius perverted my judgement', evidence that Eusebius did have influence with the emperor. The two bishops were only restored in late 327, after a letter which again rejected the anathemas but recognised the Creed, declaring that 'we are not the ones to oppose your decisions, but rather agree to them'.\(^58\)

\(^{54}\) Sozomen \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 1.21.3-4.

\(^{55}\) Philostorgius \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 2.16.

\(^{56}\) See n. 23 above.

\(^{57}\) A third bishop with similar views to theirs, Theodore of Laodicea, was warned by Constantine against such behaviour in a letter recorded by Gelasius of Cyzicus \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 3 Appendix 2.

\(^{58}\) Recorded in Socrates \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 1.14; Sozomen \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 2.16. It is not certain to whom this letter was formally addressed: apparently an ecclesiastical body. It was once thought that this was the so-called Second Session of Nicaea, but more probably it was a local council in their home province of Bithynia, as at Barnes, 'Emperors and Bishops' (as in n.6), 60-61. In any case, Constantine seems very much the true target of their appeal.
This was certainly a surrender, a pragmatic recognition of Constantine's power. It does not mean that Eusebius had abandoned his own theological views, as will be demonstrated later in the article. But he was a politician, and he accepted that in the new Christian empire the views of the emperor had to be respected. And so he compromised. Eusebius did not make another public theological statement until 341, after Constantine's death, and so he plainly recognised that, under Constantine, the Nicene Creed was inviolable. As Eusebius himself remained unhappy with the Creed, he evidently chose to bow to the emperor's wishes.

This acceptance of Constantine's own beliefs was vital in paving the way for Eusebius' return to prominence. Nicomedia was still the effective capital in 327, and Eusebius still retained some links to the imperial family.\(^{59}\) Indeed, Socrates believed that on their return both Eusebius and Theognis 'came into great consideration with the emperor, who honoured them exceedingly'.\(^{60}\) Eusebius seems soon to have carved a place once more in the imperial retinue.\(^{61}\) From this period on it is possible to describe Eusebius of Nicomedia accurately as a 'court bishop', and it is in the decade 327-337 that the interaction between Eusebius and Constantine most needs to be understood.

\(^{59}\) Constantia seems to have aided his return: see Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.19.3.

\(^{60}\) Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.23.

\(^{61}\) Eusebius replaced Ossius of Cordova, who had been with Constantine since at least 313 but who returned to his see in Spain in c. 326. See Victor C. De Clercq, *Ossius of Cordova: A Contribution to the History of the Constantinian Period* (Washington, 1954) for more on this bishop's career.
Constantine and Eusebius: the ‘Arian reaction’ after the Council of Nicaea

It is simply not possible in an article of this length to discuss all the aspects of the relationship between Constantine and Eusebius of Nicomedia in the years after 325. Barnes has recently observed that Constantine’s religious policies are poorly studied in this period, and these are the very years when our sources assert that Eusebius was most influential. But Eusebius’ role must now be reconsidered in the light of the above revised interpretation of his views and position. The rest of this article will focus on one specific aspect of this period, which reflects the need to reconsider the motives and relationship of Constantine and Eusebius as a whole: the so-called ‘Arian reaction’ after Nicaea.

It has long been observed that the years after 327 see an apparent reversal in Constantine’s religious policy. Having initially exiled those who opposed the Nicene Creed, including Eusebius himself, Constantine now exiled several of Nicaea’s strongest supporters: Eustathius of Antioch, Marcellus of Ancyra and above all Athanasius of Alexandria. Thomas Elliot has observed that the extent of this ‘Arian reaction’ has long been exaggerated, with very few bishops ever affected, but there is a need to explain Constantine’s actions. His apparent hostility to men who upheld the Nicene Creed led several later Byzantine writers to consider him an Arian, and, perhaps inevitably, it was Eusebius’ influence that was blamed for the way Constantine behaved.

Both Theodoret and Philostorgius noted that all the exilings occurred after Eusebius of Nicomedia returned to court, and the recurring

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theme in the ancient writers is of a concerted Arian plan, led by Eusebius, against the Nicenes. The sheer bulk of these claims, however exaggerated, suggests Eusebius did play a role—and that he had some influence at court is unquestionable. However, attributing to him such a massive change in Constantine’s policy surely exaggerates his importance as much as it downplays the strength of Constantine’s own convictions. Instead, we need to recognise that both these two men held very strong ideas. What is important is that together, although their motives differed greatly, they shared a fundamental emphasis on the unity of the Church. It was this emphasis that underlay the events after Nicaea later called the ‘Arian reaction’.

The alleged change in Constantine’s policy is in fact an illusion. Perhaps ironically, Constantine’s essential motive for the exile of the Nicene bishops was precisely the same as for his punishment of Eusebius himself. Constantine wanted Church unity, for both political and religious reasons. It was those who would disrupt that unity who earned his ire, and paid the price for opposing the imperial will. And equally importantly, Constantine’s motive was one that Eusebius of Nicomedia understood, and one he could support. His ‘letter of recantation’ in 327 demonstrated his willingness to accept Constantine’s policy of toleration, and it was those extremists who would not accept this peace, including Eustathius, Marcellus and Athanasius, whom both Constantine and Eusebius opposed. Thus the emperor and his leading bishop were able to work together towards a shared aim, and the ‘Arian reaction’ in fact demonstrates a model relationship of cooperation between Church and State.

65 Philostorgius Historia Ecclesiastica 2.7.

66 Sozomen Historia Ecclesiastica 2.19; Theodoret Historia Ecclesiastica 1.21. Many modern writers continue this assumption, as at Barnes, Constantine (as in n.1), 225-6.

67 See n. 58 above.
The importance of religious unity to Constantine’s Christian faith is often underestimated. Constantine’s opening speech at the Council of Nicaea emphasised that ‘intestine strife within the Church of God is far more evil and dangerous than any kind of war or conflict’.\(^{68}\) He burnt the mutual accusations presented to him there by various bishops,\(^{69}\) and throughout the Council he urged the gathered clergy to find a settlement that all could accept. For this purpose, *homoousios* seemed to him ideal.\(^{70}\) His letter to all churches after the Council celebrated in exaggerated fashion ‘the united judgement of all present’,\(^{71}\) and Constantine enforced this unity by exiling Arius and then Eusebius. But Constantine wished to tolerate all those who would accept the unity he desired, and so he restored Eusebius once that bishop withdrew his opposition.

It was the view of several nineteenth century writers that Constantine’s focus on unity simply demonstrated his political skill. Jacob Burckhardt wrote that Constantine ‘regarded the religious question

\(^{68}\) Eusebius of Caesarea *Vita Constantini* 3.12. Constantine had already demonstrated his concern for religious unity in his efforts to end the Donatist schism in Africa: see especially his letter to Miltiades of Rome in Eusebius of Caesarea *Historia Ecclesiastica* 10.5.18.

\(^{69}\) Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.8; Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.16; Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.11.

\(^{70}\) Constantine’s promotion of *homoousios* is emphasised in Eusebius of Caesarea’s letter home (see n.45 above), but Eusebius may well exaggerate the emperor’s role to justify his own acceptance of the creed.

\(^{71}\) Eusebius of Caesarea *Vita Constantini* 3.18. Constantine’s letter to Alexandria after Nicaea (in Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9) likewise heralds the ‘unanimous’ result of the Council, ignoring the two bishops who refused to sign.
exclusively from the point of view of political expediency',\textsuperscript{72} while J.H. Newman felt the emperor saw homoousios as 'a formula of peace not belief'.\textsuperscript{73} Few would now go to this extreme, for such political rationalism belongs to the modern world, not the age of Constantine—but the influence of these older writers remains. H.A. Drake, who accepted Constantine's faith, still proposed that Constantine favoured unity as 'a statement of policy not belief'.\textsuperscript{74} Such a distinction is both dubious and unnecessary. Constantine's emphasis on religious peace was in no way incompatible with religious belief, and indeed in his mind these ideas were inseparable.

Earlier pagan rulers, notably Diocletian, had paid close attention to religious peace as essential for the well-being of the empire. They sought to maintain the pax deorum, ensuring proper behaviour towards the gods, which in turn ensured divine favour and thus prosperity.\textsuperscript{75} Constantine continued these ideas. For him the need to secure divine favour was both a duty and a belief, and his letter to Alexander and Arius declares that 'I was aware that, if I should succeed in establishing, according to my wishes, a common harmony of sentiment among all the servants of God, the general course of affairs would also experience a change correspondent to the pious desires of them all'.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72}Jacob Burckhardt, \textit{The Age of Constantine the Great} (translation by Moses Hadas of \textit{Die Zeit Constantins des Grossen} [Basle, 1853]), 283.

\textsuperscript{73}Newman \textit{Arians} (as in n.5), 265.

\textsuperscript{74}H.A. Drake, 'Constantine and Consensus' \textit{Church History} 64 (1995), 10.

\textsuperscript{75}The pagan Zosimus (\textit{Nova Historia} 2.7.1) wrote that 'as long as all these rites' [the pagan Secular Games] 'were duly accomplished, the Roman empire remained intact ... but when the feast was neglected after Diocletian ... the empire gradually fell into ruins'. The persecution of Christianity had also been due in part to pagan efforts to secure unity and thus divine favour.

\textsuperscript{76}Eusebius of Caesarea \textit{Vita Constantini} 2.64-5.
Constantine thus saw Christian disunity as an insult to God, which harmed the empire spiritually as well as politically.\(^77\) The importance of this in understanding Constantine's actions at Nicaea and afterwards is obvious. For him, the precise theological implications of *homoousios* were not of great interest.\(^78\) Indeed, his letter to Alexander and Arius dismissed the issues raised by their conflicts as 'small and very insignificant questions'.\(^79\) But Constantine also believed that the Council of Nicaea had been divinely inspired,\(^80\) and his support for the Nicene Creed never wavered. He saw that Creed as the focus for Christian unity, and his attitude to individual bishops was grounded not on their precise theological views, but on whether they supported this ideal of peace. It was the extreme adherents of Nicaea who proved the greatest source of conflict in the years after the Council. They opposed Constantine's readiness to tolerate men they distrusted, like the Eusebii, and it was the disruption they caused that led the emperor to act against them.

The most vocal of these early anti-Arians was Eustathius of Antioch, who rejected 'the cause of reconciliation as a pretext'.\(^81\) This eventually led to his exile, probably in c. 328/9.\(^82\) Constantine may have been

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\(^77\) Other Christians held similar views. Eusebius of Caesarea blamed the Great Persecution on God's anger at Christian disunity (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 8.17).

\(^78\) Contrary to Thomas Elliot, 'Eusebian Frauds in the *Vita Constantini*' *Phoenix* 45 (1991), 166.

\(^79\) Eusebius of Caesarea *Vita Constantini* 2.71.

\(^80\) 'That which commended itself to the judgement of three hundred bishops cannot be other than the doctrine of God': Constantine's letter to Alexandria after the Council, in Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.9.

\(^81\) Theodoret *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.27.

\(^82\) Following R.P.G. Hanson, 'The fate of Eustathius of Antioch' *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 95 (1984), 171, against Henry Chadwick, 'The Fall of
motivated by claims that Eustathius abused his mother Helena, but more serious is the charge that Eustathius acted like a _turannos_ (tyrant). He excluded Arians from the churches in Antioch, which caused riots, and the _Vita Constantini_ condemns Eustathius as 'him on whose account the disturbance had arisen'. This was the kind of behaviour Constantine would not tolerate, with religious intransigence leading to social disruption, and so Eustathius had to be removed.

The case of Marcellus of Ancyra is very similar. He refused to accept the toleration of men he saw as Arian, and he especially opposed the condemnation of Athanasius at the Councils of Tyre and Jerusalem in 335. Instead, he continued to attack the Eusebii and other 'Arians'. This led to his own exile after the Council of Constantinople in 336, which Constantine attended, and there were riots when Marcellus tried to

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Eustathius of Antioch' in Chadwick, _History and Thought in the Early Church_ (London, 1982), Chapter XIII, 34, whose date of 326 seems too early.

83 Athanasius _Historia Arianorum_ 4.

84 Theodoret _Historia Ecclesiastica_ 1.21.

85 Athanasius _Historia Arianorum_ 4-5.

86 Eusebius _Vita Constantini_ 3.59; see also Socrates _Historia Ecclesiastica_ 1.24, although the latter argues that it was Eustathius' fall that led to the disturbances.

87 Athanasius _Historia Arianorum_ 6; Epiphanius _Panarion_ 72; Socrates _Historia Ecclesiastica_ 1.36; Sozomen _Historia Ecclesiastica_ 2.33. Rather unfairly, Barnes (Constantine [as in n.1], 241) calls Marcellus' stand an 'error of judgement'.

88 Marcellus' _Contra Asterinum_, against Asterius the Arian sophist, also condemned both Eusebii. See Eusebius of Caesarea's reply, _Contra Marcellum_ 1.4.

89 Eusebius _Contra Marcellum_ 2.4.30; Sozomen _Historia Ecclesiastica_ 2.33.
return on the emperor’s death in 337. Once again, a bishop who caused disturbances was deposed.

The case of Athanasius, the most famous victim of the ‘Arian reaction’ after Nicaea, reveals the same approach by Constantine. Like his predecessor Alexander, Athanasius steadily refused to allow Arius to return to Alexandria, which led Constantine to threaten him with exile. Equally seriously, although Barnes may have exaggerated in accusing Athanasius of the ‘systematic use of violence and intimidation’, the bishop did persecute both the Arians and the schismatic Meletians in Egypt. Constantine must have been concerned. Egypt was a very important province (a fact reflected in the rather dubious charge that Athanasius threatened to disrupt the grain fleet from Alexandria to Constantinople), and Athanasius’ actions were causing major social conflict. But more importantly, Athanasius was dividing the Church, and it was this that led to his exile. As Socrates admitted, ‘some affirm that the emperor came to this decision with a view to the establishment of unity in the Church, since Athanasius was inexorable in his refusal to hold communion with Arius and his adherents’.

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90 Athanasius Historia Arianorum 8.1.

91 Athanasius Apologia Contra Arianos 59; Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.27. Both blame Eusebius of Nicomedia for this threat.

92 Barnes, Athanasius and Constantius (as in n.8), 32.

93 A private Meletian letter in 334-5 (P.Lond. 1914, in H.I. Bell, Greek Papyri in the British Museum VI: Jews and Christians in Egypt; the Jewish Troubles in Alexandria and the Athanasian Controversy [London, 1924]) complains that ‘... he [Athanasius] carried off a bishop of the Lower Country and shut him in the Meat Market ... and Heraiscus too has been confined in the camp—I thank God our Master that the sufferings he endured have ceased’.

94 Athanasius Apologia Contra Arianos 87.1.

95 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.35.
In all these cases, Constantine was more concerned with religious and social unity than with the theological charges against the bishops in question. But his concern was genuine. Constantine did not need to be 'deceived' or manipulated into these actions by Eusebius or other 'Arians'. When Arius himself caused riots by trying to return to Alexandria, and threatened to create his own church, Constantine reacted in the same way by exiling the presbyter again in 332/3. Whatever his influence, Eusebius obviously could not prevent this second condemnation of Arius, and Constantine also delayed any decision on Athanasius until convinced the bishop had to be exiled. It was his own convictions which led Constantine to remove the Nicene bishops, as they disturbed the peace of the Church on which his empire depended.

Indeed, it would seem at first glance that there was no need for Eusebius of Nicomedia to have played any role in these events at all. But there is an element of truth in the emphasis of our sources on his importance. Every bishop exiled during the 'Arian reaction' was attacked in part on theological grounds, and every one was tried by a Church council, before Constantine made his decision. This ecclesiastical procedure was important in justifying the removal of the bishops from their sees, and in the church opposition to Eustathius, Marcellus and Athanasius the name Eusebius of Nicomedia constantly recurs. The cooperation between Eusebius and Constantine was thus essential to the relative success of Constantine's policy to secure Church peace, and Eusebius played a full part in the fates of the Nicene bishops. His motives for doing so are just as important as those of the emperor, and the earlier discussion of both his political skills and his theological convictions needs to be remembered here.

96 ibid.

97 An abusive letter from Constantine to Arius at this time is preserved in Gelasius Syntagma 3.19. Despite suspicions that it might be an Athanasian forgery, it seems to be authentic.
In our sources, Eusebius' sole motive is his ambition for dominance in ecclesiastical politics. The later orthodox writers saw the exile of the Nicene bishops as Eusebius' way to remove his rivals, and in particular Athanasius. That there was a rivalry between these two men cannot be doubted. Their conflict continued Eusebius' competition with Alexander for influence, and Athanasius plainly saw Eusebius as his main rival for wealth and political power. Perhaps the best evidence for Eusebius' desire to establish his superiority over Alexandria comes after Constantine's death, when Eusebius had become bishop of Constantinople. In 341 he ordained another Eusebius, surnamed Emisenus, as bishop of Alexandria in Athanasius' place. This attempt to replace Athanasius failed, but it testifies to Eusebius' ambition to strengthen his own power base, and thus to the importance of this motive in his actions.

Eusebius was certainly involved in the accusations of violence against Athanasius, many of which were very dubious. Eusebius and Theognis were sent by Constantine to attend the Council of Tyre in 335 which condemned Athanasius, and Eusebius led the bishops who came to Constantine from that Council and accused Athanasius of threatening the

98 Athanasius Apologia Contra Arianos 9.3.

99 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 2.9. The later attack by Theophilus of Alexandria on John Chrysostom shows this type of manoeuvre was to recur in the ecclesiastical rivalry of Constantinople and Alexandria. Indeed, N.H. Baynes called Athanasius 'Egypt's first champion in the duel between Alexandria and New Rome' ('Alexandria and Constantinople: A Study in Ecclesiastical Diplomacy' in Byzantine Studies and Other Essays [London, 1955], chapter VI, 103).

100 Most notably, it was claimed that Athanasius had murdered Arsenius of Hypsele, who was later produced alive. Athanasius Apologia Contra Arianos 65.1.

101 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.27.
food supply. Allegedly, Eusebius also used his court position to aid his rival’s foes. One priest who clashed with Athanasius, Ischyras, ‘sought refuge in Nicomedia, where he implored the protection of Eusebius; who, from his hatred of Athanasius, not only received him as presbyter, but even promised to confer upon him the dignity of the prelacy, if he would frame an accusation against Athanasius’. Whatever the accuracy of this account, it is certainly plausible that Eusebius exploited the advantages easy access to the court gave him. He was unquestionably the primary beneficiary from the fall of the Nicene bishops, and ample evidence testifies to the personal ambition that helped motivate his actions.

But such ambition was certainly not his only motive. Like Constantine, Eusebius wanted Church unity and peace. Long before the exile of Athanasius, Eusebius had written to him ‘desiring him to re-admit Arius and his adherents into the Church: the tone of the letter indeed being that of entreaty’. Like the emperor, Eusebius thus saw removing the bishops as a last resort, but he supported Constantine in trying to maintain the peace and dignity of the Church. We should also remember that there was a basis to the charges against those who were exiled. And, above all, Eusebius was far more concerned than Constantine with the theological issues involved in the Arian controversy.

It is usually assumed that Eusebius, as an Arian, attacked those who favoured the Nicene Creed. Socrates repeatedly claimed that Eusebius sought to remove Athanasius so that ‘the doctrine of consubstantiality be eradicated and Arianism introduced’. That Eusebius disliked the term

102 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.35.

103 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.27. According to Sozomen Historia Ecclesiastica 2.21.2, Eusebius also aided the Meletians.

104 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.23.

105 Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.9; cf 1.23.
homoousios is obvious, but (as has already been noted) this does not make him Arian, and he seems to have accepted that under Constantine the Creed itself could not be challenged. Instead, Eusebius was especially concerned by those bishops who interpreted homoousios in ways which he saw as Sabellian. Eustathius of Antioch was formally deposed for precisely this heresy,\(^{106}\) as he had claimed that the Father and Logos were inseparable,\(^{107}\) and the views of Marcellus of Ancyra were even more extreme. For conservatives, like the Eusebii, Marcellus was to become the greatest symbol of the dangers of homoousios.

Marcellus allegedly believed that ‘the Logos himself ... was one and the same thing as God, called by the distinct names of Father and Son, but one in ousia and hypostasis’.\(^{108}\) He did not actually use homoousios, but his Sabellian and strictly monotheistic views were exactly what the Eusebii feared. The Contra Marcellum of Eusebius of Caesarea\(^{109}\) reflects this concern, while the same bishop’s later De Ecclesiastica Theologia refers directly to Marcellus as ‘Sabellius’ over forty times.\(^{110}\) Eusebius of

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\(^{106}\) Socrates Historia Ecclesiastica 1.24: although Socrates rejected this as the real reason for Eustathius’ fall, as the charge was made by Cyrus of Beroea, who was himself later deposed for Sabellianism.

\(^{107}\) J.-P. Migne Patrologia Graeca xviii, 677B. Socrates (Historia Ecclesiastica 1.23) claimed that Eustathius taught that there were three hypostases in the Trinity, but this formula only emerged later in the Arian Controversy and seems to be post eventum justification. Michel Spanneut, Recherches sur les écrits d’Eustache d’Antioche (1948), fragment 38 (107), suggests that Eustathius used one hypostasis.

\(^{108}\) According to the hostile Eusebius of Caesarea Contra Marcellum 1.4.

\(^{109}\) Written to justify Marcellus’ deposition in 336: see Eusebius Contra Marcellum 2.4.29.

\(^{110}\) e.g. Eusebius De Ecclesiastica Theologia 1.1, 1.20.6 etc. The estimate is that of J.T. Lienhard, ‘Pseudo-Athanasius Contra Sabellianos and Basil of
Nicomedia fully shared his namesake's concern. All the four creeds presented at his Council of Antioch in 341 emphasised the separation of the Father and the Son against Marcellus, and this was indeed the exact purpose of the lines of the Second Creed quoted above, declaring 'a Father truly Father, Son truly Son, Holy Ghost truly Holy Ghost'.

There were at least ninety bishops at that Council in 341, and Eusebius of Nicomedia was thus by no means in a minority in his concerns. Instead, he is better seen as the most visible representative of a large number of conservative eastern bishops. These men could accept the Nicene Creed if necessary under Constantine, but genuinely feared the ideas that *homoousios* could be made to support. This fear was a major factor in the long duration of the Arian controversy. After Eusebius of Nicomedia's death, his role was continued by the conservative Homoiousians, led by Basil of Ancyra (whom Eusebius had helped choose to replace Marcellus in 336). Basil used Eusebius' Second Creed of Antioch as his own Third Creed of Sirmium in 358, continuing the opposition to Sabellianism, and this concern had a marked influence on the final settlement of the debate inspired by Basil of Caesarea. The actions of all these bishops testify to the importance of the theological

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111 See n. 46 above.

112 Socrates (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.8) believed there were ninety bishops present, while Sozomen (*Historia Ecclesiastica* 3.5) gives ninety-seven.

113 Socrates *Historia Ecclesiastica* 1.36.

114 Sozomen *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.15.1-4; Epiphanius *Panarion* 73.5.4.

115 See J.T. Lienhard, 'Basil of Caesarea, Marcellus of Ancyra and "Sabellius"' *Church History* 58 (1989), 159. Basil (e.g. *Epistles* 125) continued to warn that Marcellus showed the dangers of misinterpreting *homoousios*.
issues at stake. Any analysis of Eusebius of Nicomedia's opposition to the Nicene bishops must take his own beliefs into account, whatever the political advantages he gained from their exile.

Eusebius' motives for his role in the 'Arian reaction' were certainly not those of the emperor. More than any other figure in this complex period, Eusebius was both a conservative theologian and a practical politician. He supported and encouraged Constantine's efforts to secure Church unity after 327, both because he genuinely agreed with that aim and because he feared the views that the Nicene bishops were expressing. At the same time his own importance was steadily rising, and his role in condemning the exiled bishops was crucial. It is hard to believe that the attempt to ensure unity would have been so successful as to be called a 'purge' by later scholars, had it not been a joint effort by the emperor and his leading bishop. Both men were moved by the inseparable combination of political interests and religious belief, and their cooperation created a model for the relationship of emperor and court bishop that endured in Byzantium for centuries.

Conclusion: the baptism of Constantine

The final confirmation of the close relationship of Eusebius and Constantine came on the death-bed of the emperor. Although openly Christian for over twenty years before his death, Constantine postponed his baptism until the end, and when he fell ill in 337 it was Eusebius of Nicomedia who performed the ceremony. Possibly Eusebius was merely the closest available prelate, but by 337 the two men had been closely linked for the best part of a decade. Quite simply, Eusebius was

116 Eusebius of Caesarea (Vita Constantini 4.62) did not name the priest at the baptism. Nor do Socrates (Historia Ecclesiastica 1.39) or Sozomen (Historia Ecclesiastica 2.34), possibly from embarrassment. Eusebius of Nicomedia is named in Jerome Chronicon.
the natural bishop to baptise Constantine.\textsuperscript{117} Two years later, Constantine's son Constantius translated Eusebius from Nicomedia to become the bishop of Constantinople.\textsuperscript{118} It was fitting recognition of Eusebius' ability, and a reward for a decade of close cooperation with Constantine in a relationship that played a vital role in shaping the Christian Roman empire.

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\textsuperscript{117} Constantine's baptism by a man later seen as Arian was to cause considerable embarrassment for Byzantine writers. Hence the myth that Constantine was actually baptised in Rome by the orthodox Pope Silvester. This fiction first appeared in the early fifth century \textit{Actus beati Silvestri}, and had become the accepted 'tradition' for the ninth century chronicler Theophanes, who rejected the claim of an 'Arian baptism' as a forgery (\textit{Chronographia, anno mundi 5828}). This is a good final reminder of how hard it is to trace the role of Eusebius through our hostile sources, and the entire episode deserves more attention than it is possible to provide here. See Samuel N.C. Lieu, 'From history to legend and legend to history: the medieval and Byzantine transformation of Constantine's \textit{Vita}' in Lieu and Montserrat \textit{Constantine} (as in n.62), 136-176.

\textsuperscript{118} Socrates \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 2.7.2; Sozomen \textit{Historia Ecclesiastica} 3.4.2-3.

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