Eusebius Pope of Rome, a Legendary Figure of the Hagiographical Tradition

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THE HISTORY OF THE PAPACY and popes of the fourth century would seem to be too well-documented a subject in general to leave room for literary imagination.[1] And still it seems there have been blind spots, which gave space for literary creations of entirely legendary figures. We investigate one of those, a product of an interesting legendary development. The name of Eusebius, bishop of Rome, can be found in diverse Christian Oriental traditions, but no properly historical document testifies to his existence or his literary activity. Far from pronouncing any hypercritical judgments with H. Teitler,[2] we trace the outline of this dossier in order to better understand the implications of the emergence of this figure in Late Antique hagiography.

Eusebius of Rome, a hero of the Syriac Julian Romance

W. Wright found in a manuscript in the British Museum a hagiographical fragment about Julian the Apostate and the Christian opposition to his paganism; he passed it on to Th.

[1] E.g. C. Piétri, *Roma christiana: Recherches sur l'Eglise de Rome, son organisation, sa politique, son idéologie de Miltiade à Sixte III (311–440)* (Rome 1976); M. R. Salzman, *The Making of a Christian Aristocracy: Social and Religious Change in the Western Roman Empire* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2004); J. Moorhead, *The Popes and the Church of Rome in Late Antiquity* (London 2017).

[2] H. C. Teitler, *The Last Pagan Emperor: Julian the Apostate and the War against Christianity* (Oxford 2017) 4–5.

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Nöldeke, who tasked his student J. G. E. Hoffmann to edit it.[3] One of the protagonists in the text is the elderly bishop of Rome, named Eusebius (ܐܘܣܒܝܘܣ), "nearly 97 years old" (ܒܗܐ ܣܒܐ ܡܠܐ ܫܢ̈ܝܐ. ܕܗܘ ܠܟ ܟܠ ܡܫܘܚܬܐ ܕܫܢ̈ܘܗܝ, ܡܠ[ܐ]ܦ ܗܘܐ)[4] when Julian became emperor. In 1896, the famous Lazarist P. Bedjan independently published the life of Eusebius under the title *The History of the Victorious Eusebius the Blessed Bishop of the Roman Church in the Days of Julian the Tyrant and Gentile* (ܬܫܥܝܬܐ ܕܢܨܚܢܘܗܝ, ܐܘܣܒܝܘܣ ܛܘܒܢܐ ܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܕܪܗܘܡܝܐ: ܒܝܘܡܝ ܝܘܠܝܢܘܣ ܛܪܘܢܐ ܘܚܢܦܐ).[5] In his preface (viii) Bedjan wrote that he took the text from the same MS. (BL Add. 14.641).

As scholars became acquainted with the *Romance* the near-unanimous judgement on its historicity was quite negative. Th. Nöldeke, P. Peeters, and others labeled this Eusebius a wholly fictitious figure, a fruit of the propagandist imagination of an ignorant Miaphysite cleric.[6] We argue that in the light of present research this seems too hasty a conclusion, for a thorough analysis shows that the compiler of the *Romance* was not so ignorant, used a considerable library at his disposal, and (rather than invented) combined and rearranged historical witnesses about Julian and his time. First we argue against a recent hypothesis holding that the *Romance* was written as an entire piece in the seventh century.[7] It was a compilation of various

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[3] J. G. E. Hoffmann, *Iulianos der Abtrünnige: Syrische Erzählungen* (Leiden 1880). Reprinted with corrections, M. Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance: A New English Translation* (Piscataway 2017).

[4] H6/S18, cf. H12/S31 (pagination is to the editions of Hoffmann and Sokolov)

[5] P. Bedjan, *Acta martyrum et sanctorum* VI (Leipzig 1896) 218–297. Notably, he cautiously changed the title from *episqōpā d̲ə-rhōma* to *episqōpā d̲ə-ʕed̲tā d̲ə-rhōma* / ܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܐ ܕܪܗܘܡܝܐ to ܐܦܝܣܩܘܦܐ ܕܥܕܬܐ ܕܪܗܘܡܝܐ (Roman/Byzantine Church)

[6] Th. Nöldeke, "Ueber den syrischen Roman von Kaiser Julian," *ZDMG* 28 (1874) 263–292, at 265.

[7] M. Mazzola and P. Van Nuffelen, "The Julian Romance: A Full Text and a New Date," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 16 (2023) 324–377.

sources mostly of hagiographic nature, but all written in the fourth and fifth centuries. The compiler, a Western Syrian (miaphysite), did not use the *Miscellaneous chronicle* as M. Mazzola and P. van Nuffelen maintain, but both the *Miscellaneous chronicler* and the *Siirt chronicler* used the *Romance* at least partly. Thus in the present article we disallow the new hypothesis as not sufficiently supported by the evidence. Second, we argue that the creation of Eusebius of Rome was performed in the Syriac milieu in which the Judas Cyriacus legend emerged, which was then used by the *Romance* compiler.

In 2001 another fragment of the *Romance* was published, from the lower layer of the palimpsest *Paris.syr.* 378. Quite recently it was completed by *Vat.sir.* 37 describing the last moments of Constantius II in the East and the succession of Julian. Eusebius is introduced in this fragment when. during his march against Julian. Constantius II falls gravely ill and then receives a delegation of Italian bishops led by Eusebius bishop of Rome (ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܕܪܗܝܐ),[8] who wish to bid farewell to the "Christian emperor" (ܩܠܝܣܪ ܡܠܟܐ). Constantius has a lengthy conversation with the bishops and dies soon after.

The *Romance* narrative is then (in the main part published by Hoffmann) transferred to Rome where Julian's envoy and "one of the labourers of the emperor" (ܚܕ ܡܢ ܦܠܚܝ ܡܠܟܐ) Adocetus (H12/S31) arrives and offers that Eusebius renounce Christianity and become a pagan high priest. Eusebius refuses, tears the imperial letter to pieces, and locks himself in the "Great Church" accompanied by his flock. Further along, Adocetus demands that the Roman aristocracy submit themselves to Julian and build a pagan altar opposite the Great Church. The local nobility, led by senator Volusianus (... ܚܕ ܡܢ ܪܘܫܝ ܒܝܬ ܪܗܡܐ) confess Christianity and declare that they do not recognize the authority of the Apostate (H20/S47). Nevertheless, Roman pagans and Jews respond to Adocetus' call and begin to build the altar. Meanwhile, Roman senators sent a message to

[8] Here the word *Rhomē* (ܪܗܡܝ) as the proper name of the city is used.

the monasteries in the vicinity of Rome. Hundreds of their residents, led by the exarch (*ʾeksarḵā*) of the Roman monasteries, named Adoxios,[9] and accompanied by Christian soldiers from Mesopotamia, burst into the city, massacre the pagans and Jews, free Eusebius, and burn the pagan priests on the unfinished altar. Julian's envoy Adocetus manages to escape (H12–33/S17–73).

Having learned of the events in Rome, Julian becomes furious and plans to punish the city, but is advised against it by the wise pagan philosopher Plataeus (ܦܠܛܝܐܣ ... ܚܟܝܡܐ ܕܐܬܝܢܝ).[10] Next, the emperor himself comes to Rome and organizes games. Eusebius and the Christian senators are arrested and put in chains. The populace, including the abbot Adocetus, opposes Julian and as a result he too is imprisoned. The emperor tortures and tries to execute Eusebius, and each of his attempts miraculously fails: the pagan priests who were supposed to burn the bishop are themselves incinerated, the executioner who has approached the pope falls dead, and the other executioner's sword disappears. In the end, one of Julian's advisers persuades the emperor to give up and the humiliated Apostate leaves for Constantinople (H33–74/S73–155).

Literary Eusebius of Rome is opposed to Julian in many ways. First, as a Christian he is opposed to an apostate, next, he is a bishop opposed to the emperor, and last, he is a city-leader opposed to the chamberlain of the emperor on the question of building a pagan cult place and demolishing churches. At first glance, the portion of the *Romance* dealing with the confrontation between Eusebius and Julian is pure fantasy. Emperor Julian never visited Rome, and the historical Pope Eusebius died half

[9] *Romance* H43/S92–93; the two names sound more or less the same, but the orthography differs.

[10] H33/S73: ܐܦܠܛܘܢ has been erroneously transliterated by Sokolov as Aplatus, whereas alaph (ܐ) here is prosthetic, masking the Greek initial consonantal cluster.

a century before the reign of the Apostate (in 309–310).[11] Finally, in the middle of the fourth century, the senatorial aristocracy of Rome was predominantly pagan and would hardly have opposed the religious policies of the new emperor. But a closer look shows that the compiler used diverse sources, changing them in order to produce a piece of fiction.

Eusebius of Rome – Eusebius of Constantinople – Eusebius of Nicomedia

The first fact to note is that the *Romance* is not the only source that puts Pope Eusebius in an anachronistic context. A bishop Eusebius of Rome is also mentioned in the *Cyriacus Legend* that is a part of the *Inventio Crucis* cycle.[12] It tells of Constantine's mother

[11] The brief pontificate of Eusebius fell between those of Marcellus and Miltiades and is usually dated to 309 or 310. According to the hardly reliable *Liber Pontificalis* (22) he had occupied the See of St. Peter for two years one month and twenty-five days (or six years one month and three days). The more credible *Catalogus Liberianus* defines his episcopate as a period of four months and sixteen days, from the fourteenth day before the Kalends of May to the sixteenth before the Kalends of September, April 18 to August 17. As is easy to see, the *Catalogus Liberianus* is internally contradictory—the stated dates do not match the stated span. But this can be resolved by adding the period of his short exile to the actual time of Eusebius' office as bishop of Rome. The circumstances of his bishopric are reconstructed from epigram 18 of Pope Damasus: under Eusebius, the Roman congregation was divided over the question of the *lapsi*. Eusebius favored permitting the *lapsi* of the Great Persecution to enter ecclesiastical communion after repentance. This was opposed by a party of rigorists led by a certain Heraclius. The schism led to bloody clashes in the streets of the city. As a result, the usurper Maxentius, who controlled Italy, ordered the leaders of both parties to be removed from the capital, which led to Eusebius' exile to Sicily, where he died a martyr: *Not.Eccl.Urb.Rom.* 22 (*PL* 101, 1361C), *Eusebius papa et martir longe in antro requiescit*. See A. Di Berardino, "Eusebio, santo," *Enciclopedia dei papi* I (2000: https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/santo-eusebio_(Enciclopedia-dei-Papi); D. Trout, *Damasus of Rome: The Epigraphic Poetry* (Oxford 2015) 119; J. Rüpke and D. Richardson, *Fasti Sacerdotum: A Prosopography of Pagan, Jewish, and Christian Religious Officials in the City of Rome* (Oxford 2009) 670, no. 1558 Eusebius (2).

[12] BHG 465–465b / BHO 233–236; I. Guidi, "Textes orientaux inédits du

Helena's search for the Holy Wood with the aid of a certain Jew named Judas, who eventually converts to Christianity. According to the legend, after the bishop of Jerusalem died, the Roman bishop Eusebius (ܐܘܣܒܝܘܣ ܩܣܛܪܐ ܕܪܘܡܝ ܗܘ)[13] renamed Judas as Cyriacus and ordained him the new bishop of the Holy City at Helena's request. The information on the ordination of Judas by Eusebius is repeated in the *Martyrdom of Judas Cyriacus*,[14] which tells of Julian's trial of Cyriacus and his mother Anna in Jerusalem and their torments at the hands of the minions of the Apostate. Eusebius bishop of Rome is also mentioned in the correspondence of Papa bar Aggai, a spurious letter collection dated to the early fifth century (*Mingana Syr.* 47 fol. 35^{r}–36^{r}). Perhaps he made it there from the Judas Cyriacus legend.

The account is certainly a piece of epic hagiography like the legend of Eusebius in the *Romance*. Julian never visited Jerusalem (although some hagiographical stories tell of his coming to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple and to destroy some tombs of Christian saints), and no authoritative source mentioned Judas Cyriacus as a local bishop. However, the very tradition of a Jew who helped Helena find the Cross and was baptized in Jerusalem by the "Roman bishop" Eusebius is not as outlandish as it may seem. Helena's pilgrimage took place between 326 and

Martyre de Judas Cyriaque, évêque de Jérusalem: I. Texte syriaque," *ROrChr* SER. I 9 (1904) 79–95; H. J. W. Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross. The Judas Kyriakos Legend in Syriac* (Louvain 1997); M. van Esbroeck, "Hélène à Edesse et la Croix," in G. J. Reinink et al. (eds.), *After Bardaisan: Studies on Continuity and Change in Syriac Christianity in Honour of Professor Han J.W. Drijvers* (Leuven 1999) 107–115; S. Trovato, *"Molti fedeli di Cristo morirono tra terribili pene": Bibliografia agiografica giulianea con edizione della Passio Cyriaci BGH 465b* (Udine 2019).

[13] Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross* 38 (transl. 56).

[14] Guidi, *ROrChr* SER. I 9 (1904) 88 (transl. 80): ܩܣܛܪܐ ܕܪܘܡܝ ܗܘ ܐܘܣܒܝܘܣ; but in Saint-Petersburg BP NS 4, the name of Eusebius is omitted: N. Pigoulewsky, "Le Martyre de Saint Cyriaque de Jérusalem," *ROrChr* SER. III 26 (1927) 305–331. Cf. Drijvers, *The Finding of the True Cross* 22–23.

328/330,[15] thus at least fifteen years after the death of the historical Pope Eusebius. But who was the Eusebius to whom the hagiographer attributed the episcopal ordination of Judas?

According to Theodoret of Cyrrhus (*HE* 1.20–21), sometime before the Council of Antioch in 328–330,[16] i.e. about the same time that Helena was staying in the Holy City, Jerusalem was visited by Bishop Eusebius of Nicomedia. Originally serving as bishop of Berytus, Eusebius had connections to influential figures like Julius Julianus, the praetorian prefect to the emperor Licinius from 315 to 324.[17] This association might have played a role in Eusebius' transfer to the see of Nicomedia, Licinius' capital, sometime after 314. Eusebius is believed to have

[15] Helena's journey has traditionally been associated with the mysterious execution of her grandson Crispus and daughter-in-law Fausta in 326 (Zos. 2.29.2; *Epit. de Caes.* 41.11–12): e.g. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (London 1981) 220–221; E .D. Hunt, *Holy Land Pilgrimage in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1984) 32–35; H. A. Pohlsander, "Crispus: Brilliant Career and Tragic End," *Historia* 33 (1984) 79–106, at 106; N. Lenski, "Empresses in the Holy Land: The Creation of a Christian Utopia in Late Antique Palestine," in L. Ellis et al. (eds.), *Travel, Communication and Geography in Late Antiquity* (London 2004) 113–124, at 115; G. Zecchini, "Costantino e la morte di Crispo," in V. Neri (ed.), *La storiografia tardoantica. In memoria di A. Baldini* (Milan 2017) 127–138, at 135; contra: E. Moreno Resano, "Las ejecuciones de Crispo, Licinio el Joven y Fausta (año 326 d.C.): nuevas observaciones," *DHA* 41 (2015) 177–200, at 196; J. W. Drijvers, *Helena Augusta: the Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of her Finding of the True Cross* (Leiden 1992) 62–63. The most common date for her death is 328; see Drijvers 73. However, T. D. Barnes believes that she died as early as 327: *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge 1982) 9.

[16] It deposed the local bishop Eustathius, who was accused of insulting Helena; obviously, this conflict could only have taken place during her journey to the East. See H. Chadwick, "The Fall of Eustathius of Antioch," *JThS* 49 (1948) 27–35, at 31–35; H. A. Drake, "Constantine and Eusebius in Antioch," *SLA* 7 (2023) 106–136, at 109 ff.

[17] Their connection is reconstructed from Ammianus' remark (22.9.4) that Eusebius was a kinsman of the future emperor Julian, who in turn was a grandson of Julius Julianus. See Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* 70; J. Vanderspoel, "Correspondence and Correspondents of Julius Julianus," *Byzantion* 69 (1999) 396–478, at 402, 410–411.

acquired some influence over Constantia, Licinius' wife and Constantine's sister[18] and was quite powerful at the court of the eastern Augustus.[19] During the first stage of the Trinitarian controversy Eusebius acted as one of the key supporters of Arius. In 325 he participated in the Council of Nicaea, and signed the new Creed, though not the anathemas. Soon after, he was exiled, only to be reinstalled in his see in 327 or early 328.[20] From this point forward, Eusebius was a significant figure in Constantine's entourage. In 337, Eusebius performed the baptism of the first Christian emperor at his deathbed.[21]

We can assume that this Eusebius should be identical with 'Eusebius' from the Cyriacus (Inventio) cycle.[22] The bishop of Nicomedia certainly did not ordain Judas as bishop of Jerusalem but could well have baptized him at the request of the Empress Helena. But why does the hagiographer persistently attribute to him the Roman bishopric? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine his later career as bishop of Nicomedia. In late 337 or early 338, after the dismissal of Bishop Paul, Eusebius received a prestigious appointment to the bishopric of Constantinople from the new eastern emperor Constantius II.[23] Constantinople was officially called the 'New Rome', and therefore the local bishop could well be considered a 'bishop of Rome'.

[18] See Philost. *HE* 1.9; Soc. 1.25; Soz. 3.19; Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* 70.

[19] After Licinius' defeat in 324 Constantine criticized Eusebius for supporting the "tyrant" (Athan. *De decr. Nic.* 41; Theod. *HE* 1.20; cf. Gelas. 1.11.20–32 and App. 1, ed. Heinemann and Loeschcke).

[20] For the sources see D. M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Construction of the 'Arian Controversy'* (Oxford 2007) 117–118 nn.40–42.

[21] For an overview of Eusebius' career see Gwynn, *The Eusebians* 116–119.

[22] However, the role of Eusebius of Rome in the Cyriacus legend reveals a confusion between Eusebius of Nicomedia and Eusebius of Caesarea. The hagiographer (or those who added pieces later) seems not to make a very clear distinction between the two personalities.

[23] Soc. 2.7; Soz. 3.4; Theod. *HE* 18.19.

Moreover, Eastern hagiographers often confused the Old and the New Romes, and consequently their bishops.[24] M. van Esbroeck has pointed out that in the Eastern Christian tradition there was an opposition of the two Romes during the Arian controversy.[25]

In the Eastern tradition seen more broadly, the connection between Constantine and his court bishop Eusebius was already well acknowledged in the fifth century. Thus Agathangelos' account of the visit of king Tiridates III (d. ca. 330) and Gregory the Illuminator (d. 331) to Constantine's court (874–875):[26]

> He passed through many towns with immense joy, and the princes of the cities that were on their way solemnly greeted them and gave them great honors. They rushed, hurriedly, over land and sea, until they reached the land of the Italians, the country of the Dalmatians, the royal city of the Romans. It was at once reported in the royal palace. And when [it] was heard by Constantine, the king of the divinely established honorable throne, and by the great patriarch, the archbishop of the imperial court named Eusebius (հայրապետն մեց արքեպիսկոպոսն աշխարհամուտ դռանն Եւսեբիոս), [they] went out to meet them with great love and honor and, greeting each other, rejoiced.

Here, as in the dossier of Judas Cyriacus, there is a chronological glitch: Eusebius of Nicomedia is said to be bishop of the capital in the 320s, that is, at least a decade before his actual elevation to the see of Constantinople. Scholars have noted a certain tendency of the Judas Cyriacus story to confuse two historical

[24] G. Fowden, "The Last Days of Constantine: Oppositional Versions and their Influence," *JRS* 84 (1994) 146–170, at 153–154; Drijvers, *Helena Augusta* 177 n.53.

[25] M. Van Esbroeck, "Rome l'ancienne et Constantinople vues de l'Arménie," in P. Siniscalco et al. (eds.), *La nozione di "Romano" tra cittadinanza e universalità* (Naples 1984) 351–355.

[26] R. W. Thomson, *Agathangelos. History of the Armenians* (Albany 1974) 408–409.

Eusebii.[27] Here in particular it could possibly mean that one of the sources of 'Agathangelos' mentioned the fictitious Eusebius of Rome first seen in the Judas Cyriacus life.

At the same time, the chronology of the complicated career of the bishop of Nicomedia was confusing even for historians who used much more reliable sources. For example, Theodoret reports that Eusebius seized the see of New Rome before he visited Palestine, i.e. ca. 327–328 (*HE* 1.18–19, 20–21). A similar confusion is found in the *Paschal Chronicle*, a work from the second quarter of the seventh century, whose author used, among other sources, the work of a well-informed 'Arian' historian of the late fourth century.[28] In this text, Eusebius is mentioned as bishop of Constantinople in the context of events of the first months of 337 (*Chron.Pasch.* A.D. 337), i.e. almost a year before he was transferred to the see of the Eastern capital. Therefore, quite a few Christian writers of the Late Antique era anachronistically titled Eusebius by the location of the last see he had occupied—the Bishop of Constantinople the New Rome. Thus, those authors who were not sufficiently devoted to the intricacies of Church politics in the second quarter of the fourth century could have perceived Eusebius of Nicomedia as bishop of Constantinople the New Rome, or simply 'bishop of Rome'.

The identification of Eusebius of Nicomedia as 'Eusebius of Rome' is supported by the so-called Danubian version of the

[27] Drijvers, *Helena Augusta* 177 n.53; T. Canella, *Gli Actus Silvestri: Genesi di una leggenda su Costantino imperatore* (Spoleto 2006) 72.

[28] On the 'Arian' source of the *Chronicon Paschale* see H. C. Brennecke, *Studien zur Geschichte der Homöer: der Osten bis zum Ende der homöischen Reichskirche* (Tübingen 1988) 114–116, 152 ff.; M. Whitby and M. Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale 284-628 AD* (Liverpool 1989) XVI–XVIII; T. C. Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue: The Revolution of Nicene Historiography* (Leiden 2005) 57–80; P. Van Nuffelen, "Considérations sur l'anonyme homéen," in E. Amato et al. (eds.), *Les historiens fragmentaires de langue grecque à l'époque impériale et tardive* (Rennes 2021) 207–222.

Visio Constantini,[29] which tells that during the campaign against the barbarians, Constantine had a vision of the cross, after which he was baptized by "the bishop of Rome Eusebius." This legend seems to have been constructed from Eusebius of Caesarea's account of the heavenly vision of the Cross before the battle at the Milvian bridge (*Vit.Const.* 1.28) and some accounts of Constantine's baptism by Eusebius of Nicomedia. The report of the Church historian was used to provide information about the miraculous vision, whereas the name of the bishop who performed the sacrament was taken from an account of the baptism.

Since the fifth century most Greek Nicaean authors cautiously avoided mentioning the fact that Eusebius of Nicomedia was present at the deathbed of the 'pious emperor' Constantine in the quality of his attorney and finally baptizer, as reported by authors whose information goes back to the anonymous 'Arian' continuator of Eusebius.[30] It is well known that during the Arian controversy Eusebius of Nicomedia sided with the opponents of *homoousion*. As a result, in the works of the pro-Nicaean authors he was firmly set up as a heretic, a schemer, and one of the architects of the later 'Arian reaction'.[31] At the same time there is not even the slightest echo of this biased animosity in the *Romance*. The obvious sympathy of the author of the *Romance* for 'Eusebius of Rome', who is most likely to have been constructed on the bishop of Nicomedia, suggests that this story is indirectly derived from some source compiled by a writer who was using a post-Arian contamination of Eusebius and the Roman see but still using pro-Arian sources.

The connection of this part of the *Romance* to 'Arian' historiography is also hinted at by the author's high evaluation of

[29] See F. Lipari, *La version danubienne de la Visio Constantini: étude des versions proche-orientales et parallèles géorgiens* (diss. U. C. Louvain 2017).

[30] Hieron. *Chron.* 279a; Philost. 2.16; Theoph. *Chron.* A.M. 5828.

[31] E.g. Athan. *C. Ar.* 2.37, 40–41, 44, 47, 48; 7.56 ff.; 8; *Hist.Ar.* 5, 10, 15, 28 ff.; *De conc. Arim.* 5, 13, 15 ff.; *Hom. de Mt.* 11.27; Ruf. *HE* 10.5, 12; Soc. 1.14, 23; 2.8; Soz. 1.21; 2.16, 21–22; 3.1, 5–7, 19; Theod. *HE* 1.18–21, 26–28, 2.1.

Constantius II. The ecclesiastical policy of this emperor was a continuation and development of the anti-Nicaean line of the last years of Constantine I. As a result, in the works of orthodox historians of the Church of the fourth to sixth century Constantius II was mostly depicted as a persecutor of the Nicaeans. The *Romance* draws a completely different image of this Augustus. Here Constantius acts as a pious emperor, a friend and patron of the Church. In a comparable manner Ephrem in his *Madrāšē* against Julian[32] portrayed him as "pious emperor" (ܚܠܝܡܐ ܕ ܡܗܝܡܢܐ) without even mentioning his 'Arianism' that Ephrem was himself rebuking in his *Prose Refutations*. This tendency has been noted in other Syriac authors, who were less bothered with the struggle against 'Arianism' than their Greek colleagues. During a verbose conversation on his deathbed with the Italian bishops headed by Eusebius of Rome, Constantius says that he spent his entire reign in unwavering concern for the benefit of the Church and the clergy and laments that Julian's reign would bring much grief to Christianity.

This account is of course a piece of fiction. Constantius died on 5 November 361 in the Cilician town of Mopsucrene.[33] No Italian bishops were present at his deathbed or could have been there[34]—at that time the Apennine peninsula had already been under the control of the troops of the rebellious Caesar Julian for several months. At the same time, the setting of the last hours of Constantius II's life given in the *Romance* is rather similar to

[32] Ephr. Syr. *C. Jul.* 1.12,1; E. Papoutsakis, "The Making of a Syriac Fable. From Ephrem to Romanos," *Le muséon* 120 (2007) 29–75, and "*Is He the Rider of the Quadriga?* Ephrem the Syrian on Julian's Apotheosis," *Adamantius* 24 (2018) 398–415; S. H. Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in T. P. Halton et al. (eds.), *Diakonia: Essays in Honor of Robert T. Meyer* (Washington 1986) 22–52.

[33] Amm. Marc. 21.15.2–3; Soc. 2.47; *Consularia Constantinopolitana* A.D. 361.1; Hieron. *Chron.* 242b.

[34] According to Philostorgius, the only bishop present at the deathbed of Constantius II was the Homoean Euzoius of Antioch, who performed the baptism of the dying emperor (*HE* 6.5).

Eusebius of Caesarea's description of the death of Constantine I in Nicomedia. In that account the latter emperor was surrounded by a host of bishops on his deathbed (*Vit.Const.* 4.61–62). One of them was Eusebius of Nicomedia, whose name the Caesarean hagiographer, however, does not mention. Eusebius of Nicomedia in 338 has been for some time *locum tenens* of the see of Constantinople, which makes the connection with Rome (at least New Rome) plausible. However, he died in 341, twenty years before Julian's reign. Indeed, these facts rule out his participation in the anti-Julian opposition in Rome in 361. But Eusebius left more than one reflection.

Acta Sylvestri and the confusion of Eusebii

The later tradition and especially *Donatio Contantini* cycle (reconstructed from the medieval *Confessio* and *Constitutum*) on purpose made Constantine I die in Rome and receive baptism not from Eusebius but from Sylvester.[35] The established opinion traces this story back to the *Acta Sylvestri* (BHL 7725–7742) used later by Pope Leo III or Anastasius Bibliothecarius to compose texts of the *Donatio*. But the act of replacing Eusebius with Sylvester in the account of the Milvian victory and the conversion and death of Constantine is interesting. As T. Canella has substantially proved, Eusebius of Rome already figured in the earliest version of the legend.[36] Canella in fact agreed with the opinion of M. Kohlbacher that the common early Syriac

[35]A. Di Rienzo, "Pope Sylvester: How to Create a Saint: The Syriac Contribution to the Sylvestrian Hagiography," in S. Minov et al. (eds.), *Syriac Hagiography. Texts and Beyond* (Leiden 2021) 113–134.

[36] See esp. *Gli Actus Silvestri* 70–72 and n.67, where Canella repeats Nöldeke's idea about the confusion: "A sua volta l'attribuzione del battesimo di Costantino a 'Eusebio vescovo di Roma' si deve ad una denominazione erronea di Eusebio di Nicomedia, il vescovo ariano che battezzò effettivamente Costantino nel 337: probabilmente la confusione scaturì dal fatto che Eusebio divenne negli ultimi quattro anni di vita vescovo di Costantinopoli, spesso chiamata 'nuova Roma' o 'seconda Roma'." Canella knows indeed of the fictitious Eusebius of the *Romance* but confuses Han Drijvers and J.W. Drijvers Jr. For further discussion see *Gli Actus Silvestri* 81–82.

idea that it was Eusebius of Rome who baptized Constantine and only later was he replaced by Sylvester.[37] M. van Esbroeck, also cited by Canella, made an important note that the oriental versions such as Syriac or Armenian preserved echoes of the anti-Arian alliance of Rome and Jerusalem against pro-Arian Constantinople.[38]

Thus, we are dealing with a parallel fact of having in place of the historical Sylvester a mythical Eusebius of Rome in the oriental versions of the *Founding of the Cross* and *Julian Romance*. For this reason, there is some interference between two emperors in the Syriac *Romance*. In the recently-found Vatican version the distinction is clearer, but the "holy emperor" and the "great warrior" look and speak very much alike.[39] The clearly arianizing Eusebius of Nicomedia should have been reflected in a praiswothy manner in different accounts besides Philostorgius that describe the triangle Consantine-Eusebius of Nicomedia-Constantius II as the sacred transmission of power. In this perspective, Julian's pagan reaction was certainly unexpected in a lawful succession blessed by "true bishops." Making a champion of the doubtful arianizing prelate was a tricky task. In the *Syrian Martyrology*, under the 8th of Tishri (November 8), the memory of Eusebius is preserved without specifying the place of his death. The Greek prototype of the *Martyrology* was written in the eastern part of the empire (probably in Nicomedia) around the times of Homoean emperor Valens.[40] We have already mentioned Ephrem's *Madrāšē* against Julian which points in the same

[37] M. Kohlbacher, "Die Taufe Kaiser Konstantins und ihr geheimer Held: Anmerkungen zu einem Memra des Jakob von Batnan in Sarug," in M. Tamcke (ed.), *Syriaca. Zu Geschichte, Theologie, Liturgie und Gegenwartslage der syrischen Kirchen* (Hamburg 2002) 29–76.

[38] Van Esbroeck, in *La nozione di "Romano"* 353.

[39] Mazzola and Van Nuffelen, *Journal of Late Antiquity* 16 (2023) 327.

[40] W. Wright, "An Ancient Syrian Martyrology," *The Journal of Sacred Literature* 8 (1866) 45–56, 423–432; G. Marino, "Approaching the Martyrologium Romanum. A Semiotic Perspective," *Lexia. Rivista di semiotica* 31–32 (2018) 175–215.

direction. However, it seems that some arianizing source was used by the compiler of the *Romance* in the sixth century.

Constantinople becoming Rome was a common procedure in sixth-century hagiography, espesially Syriac, where there was a very subtle difference between *rhōmā* meaning 'Roman Empire' (the same meaning Byzantium, cf. later Arabic *Rūm*) and the city of Rome (*rhōmyā*). Perhaps the most famous case was the life of an unnamed saint, the Man of God of Edessa called Alexius in the later Greek legend.[41] He was transformed by the Acoemetae tradition into a Constantinopolitan hero and later, following the mixture of the two Romes, into a Roman citizen, abiding in the lower room of his parents' house on the Mons Aventinus. In a similar manner, it seems, Eusebius was transformed into the bishop of Rome from the bishop of New Rome.

To sum up, it seems probable that the whole episode of the *Romance* describing the last encounter between Constantius II and Eusebius of Rome was constructed on the basis of accounts of Eusebius of Caesarea and some Arian historiographers sympathetic to Constantius II, who also knew about the presence of Eusebius of Nicomedia at Constantine I's deathbed. But what was the source of the following story in the *Romance*, where Eusebius stands bravely against the tyrant Julian? Could it be the story of some real opponent of Julian of the same name?

Some other Eusebii

One famous namesake was a contemporary of Julian and Constantius, an anti-Arian polemicist and the bishop of Vercelli in Sardinia. He was sent by Pope Liberius as envoy to Constantius to summon a synod against Arians in Arelate. Because

[41] See C. E. Stebbins, "Les origines de la légende de Saint Alexis," *RBPhil* 51 (1973) 497–507; H. J. W. Drijvers, "The Man of Edessa, Bishop Rabbula, and the Urban Poor: Church and Society in the Fifth Century," *JECS* 4 (1996) 235–248, at 235–238; А. В. Муравьев, "Эфиопский Человек Божий. Заметки о сирийских влияниях в ранней эфиопской агиографии," *Вестник ПСТГУ* III: *Филология* 45 (2015) 47–60; A. Rogozhina, "The Anonymous Saint in the Armenian Tradition: Alexi(an)os the Voluntary Pauper or the Anonymous 'Man of God'?" *Armeniaca* 1 (2022) 39–47.

of his pro-Athanasian position he was first exiled to Scythopolis in Palestine, then to Cappadocia and later to Egypt. He returned to his see after the decree of Julian ordering all exiled bishops to return. Eusebius was present at a synod in Alexandria in 362, still under Julian, and died in 371. Ambrose called him a "saint."[42] In the *Martyrologium Hieronymianum* he is described as "confessor"[43] and in his *Vita* he is described as a "martyr"[44] in a rather unhistorical way, just like the hero of the *Romance*. The Western Syriac chronographer Michel Rabbo (or 'the Syrian' as he is often called after Chabot) mentions Eusebius several times and confuses him with some Eusebius "bishop of Italy" and Eusebius of Nicomedia.[45]

One more Eusebius, the bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia, figures in stories about Basil of Caesarea.[46] Eusebius was a successor of Dianius as the metropolitan bishop from 362 until 370. He ordained Basil as priest but later had some personal issues with Basil who fled from the city to Annisa. Certainly, he could have been picked up as a personal rival of Basil, but it looks rather improbable that the *Romance* used this figure well known to the Church historians and present in the Armenian work *Buzandaran patmutiunk'*.[47] There Basil as a priest shows up as an opponent of Arianism helping elderly Eusebius and quoting Genesis and other biblical testimonies against the Arians. Eusebius is thrown into the prison where he dies (here parallel

[42] *PL* XVI 1189, 1207, 1208.

[43] *Mart.Hieron.* 1 Aug.: *AASS* Nov. II 99.

[44] BHL 2748–2752; N. C. Everett, "Narrating the Life of Eusebius of Vercelli," in E. M. Tyler et al. (eds.), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout 2006) 133–166.

[45] M. Moosa, *The Syriac Chronicle of Michael Rabo* (Teaneck 2014) 168–169, 176.

[46] Eusebius is not mentioned in the later legendary *Vita* of Basil (BHG 252), but he is well represented in Basil's correspondence: Y. Courtonne, *Saint Basile. Correspondance* II (Paris 1961) *Ep.* 145 etc.

[47] 4.9: N. G. Garsoïan (ed.), *The Epic Histories attributed to P'awstos Buzand (Buzandaran Patmut'iwnk')* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1989) 129–130.

to the *Romance*).

Eusebius of Samosata was the hero of a renowned hagiographical dossier describing the life of the famous champion of Orthodoxy who under Julian the Apostate toured incognito around Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine disguised as a military officer and ordained clerics.[48] Certainly, his deeds were quite spectacular, and he became an epic hero, comparable to the fictitious Eusebius of Rome of the *Romance*. However, Eusebius of Samosata died in Dolicha in Commagene, far from Italy and Rome. His martyrdom was questionable as he died after being struck on the head by a roof tile thrown by an Arian woman. But the way his exile has been related in the *Vita* (ch. 25) and in Theodoret (*HE* 4.13) shows that he was an exemplary persecuted holy bishop. Whether his image could have influenced the compiler of the *Romance* is not clear and quite unlikely, but the name Eusebius in both romance-like hagiography romances is remarkable.

There was another Eusebius from Rome called Homo Dei (BHL 2740), the presbyter said to have supported (anti-)pope Felix against Liberius and clashed on this matter with Constantius II.[49] He was secluded in his small cubicle for seven months. He survived the persecution, but nothing is known of his relation to Julian, and he passed unnoticed in the East, and so is practically ruled out as a possible model.

[48] BHG 2133–2135; BHO 293; F. Halkin, "Une vie grecque d'Eusèbe de Samosate," *AnalBoll* 85 (1967) 5–15; P. Devos, "Le dossier syriaque de S. Eusèbe de Samosate," *AnalBoll* 85 (1967) 195–240, "La Vie syriaque de saint Eusèbe de Samosate," *AnalBoll* 90 (1972) 360–362, and "Aspects de la correspondance de S. Basile de Césarée avec S. Eusèbe de Samosate et avec S. Amphiloque d'Iconium," *AnalBoll* 110 (1992) 241–259.

[49] *AASS* Aug. III 166: *a Constantio imperatore Ariano ob Catholicae fidei defensionem,* [*in Romano restituitur,*] *in quodam cubiculo domus suae inclusus, ibique menses septem in oratione constanter perseverans dormitionem accepit, cuius corpus Gregorius et Orosius presbyteri colligentes in coemeterio Callisti via Appia sepelierunt.* Cf. M. Lapidge, *The Roman Martyrs* (Oxford 2018) 297–300.

Finally, one can also mention the famous moderate anti-Nicaean writer and polymath Eusebius of Emesa, who was a disciple of Eusebius of Caesarea and favourite of Constantius.[50] He was often confused with his teacher or with Eusebius of Nicomedia, but he died about 359 and was certainly not alive by the time of Julian's reaction.

The reconstruction

Now, having all the elements at hand, we can attempt a reconstruction of the legend's development. The initial story of the conversion of Constantine culminated with his death in 337 and baptism by Eusebius of Nicomedia. The vague echo of the story of pope and physician Eusebius of Rome was the second element, in which the Arian intermezzo of Rome was overshadowed by the memory of the holy confessor tortured but remaining firm in his Catholic faith. At that moment (beginning of the fifth century) mention of the Arianism of the imperial court became all but welcomed. The time of historians scrupulously picking witnesses was coming to an end; a new generation of chroniclers and compilers, less careful about the reliability of their sources, was entering the scene. When the stories of Judas Cyriacus and the *Finding of the True Cross* were written down in the Syriac milieu, the connection of Old Rome and Constantine with 'holy confessor Eusebius' was stressed in the course of the damnatio memoriae of Arianism. It later became accepted in the Greek and other Eastern Christian traditions, in particular in the Armenian one. Some other figures of famous Eusebii could have contributed to the general mixture. Historians and compilers in the fifth-sixth centuries were preoccupied with cleansing the historical memory of unnecessary unorthodox elements, but they did not pay much attention to the mixture of different churchmen of the fourth century named Eusebius in the hagiographical sources.

[50] See R. E. Winn, *Eusebius of Emesa: Church and Theology in the Mid-Fourth Century* (Washington 2011).

The compiler of the *Romance* was a Miaphysite monk by the name of ʿAbdēl (or possibly Gabriel)[51] writing in Sandarōn fortress (*maḥōzā* / ܡܚܘܙܐ)[52] who used many different sources to produce a continuous story about the tyrant Julian and the exemplary bishop Eusebius. He was also indirectly hinting at the conflict between Justin I and Severus in 514 and also to the role of the young Justinian.[53] He put together different elements of the abovementioned dossiers, which resulted in the tale-like story of the holy bishop Eusebius of Rome opposing the apostate Julian.

Nonetheless, this was not the end of the story. The author of the *Acta Sylvestri*, instead of making the mythologized Eusebius, baptizer of Constantine, a confessor, has simply replaced him with the historical Sylvester. Thus, the story of Constantine has

[51] If we accept that an Arab translator of the *Romance* was correct in writing جبرايل.

[52] Van Esbroeck suggested that *Sandarōn mahōzā* is Alexandria: M. Van Esbroeck, "Le soi-disant roman de Julien l'Apostat," *Symposium Syriacum 1984, Literary Genres in Syriac Litterature* (Rome 1987) 191–202, at 200. This is highly unlikely, see A. V. Muraviev, "The Syriac Julian Romance and its Place in the Literary History," *Христианский Восток* 1(7) (1999) 194–206, at 202. Burkitt believed that this toponym is very close to *Sandaruk* of the *Acts of Judas Thomas*: F. C. Burkitt, "The Original Language of the Acts of Judas Thomas," *JThS* 1 (1900) 280–290, at 288. In the Greek version of this text *Sandaruk* is called *Andrapolis*, which in turn could be either Egyptian Andropolis (J. N. Farquhar, "The Apostle Thomas in North India," *BRL* 10 [1926] 80–111, at 96–97), some Indian city (A. von Gutschmid, "Die Königsnamen in den apokryphen Apostelgeschichten," *RhM* [1864] 161–183, 380–401, at 182), one of the cities of the Persian Gulf (Е. Н. Мещерская, *Деяния Иуды Фомы (культурно-историческая обусловленность раннесирийской легенды)* [Moscow 1990] 72), or Alexandretta (Muraviev, *Христианский восток* 1(7) [1999] 202). However, since Abdēl writes of himself being in a "pagan land" (*aṯrā ḏ-ḥanpē*), *Sandarōn mahōzā* was almost certainly located in Persia (or less possibly in the mountainous parts of Minor Asia where paganism persisted up to the latter half of the sixth century).

[53] A. V. Muravyev, *The Christian Orient on the Eve of the Arab Conquest: The Syriac World and Civilizational Processes in the 5–6th cc. A.D.* [in Russian] ((Moscow 2020) 150–151.

intermingled with the story of Constantius II and Julian, so that in a sort of puzzle-creation bishops could play the role of baptizers, confessors, or receivers of the gift of papal power.

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