

Athanasius' First Exile

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THE EXACT SEQUENCE of events during the summer and fall of A.D. 335 that culminated in the exile of Athanasius to Gaul quickly became lost in religious polemic, as muddled accounts written barely a century later show. Fortunately, the dedicated and frequently brilliant efforts of a series of scholars in this century have succeeded in resolving much of the confusion, so that only a few uncertainties remain. The picture that emerges helps us to understand the system of coöperation between Church and State that was emerging in this period.¹

The general outline of what happened during these months is quite clear. The Council of Tyre, called by Constantine to resolve the charges brought against Athanasius by the Meletians, went into session in July 335. Even by the standards of that contentious period, its proceedings were raucous. Athanasius, despairing of a fair hearing, quit the meetings and took his case directly to the emperor, who responded by summoning the council to meet in his presence in Constantinople. Only a handful of bishops actually came to the capital, but the upshot was that on 7 November 335 Athanasius entered the first of the three exiles he would endure during his lengthy episcopate.

But when exactly did Athanasius see the emperor, and how and why was he exiled? Was it a decision of the emperor, or of a synod? Two key documents allow this very general outline to be filled in more completely. The first is the Index to Athanasius' *Festal Letters*, compiled in Egypt late in the fourth century, which has proved to be

¹ These events are first mentioned in Book 4 of Eusebius of Caesarea's essay *De vita Constantini*, published between 337 and 339. Eusebius was an eyewitness and a participant, but his discussion, while still important, is too general to be of more than marginal use. The accounts of Socrates (*HE* 1.27–35) and Sozomen (*HE* 2.25–28) depend heavily on Athanasius' *Apologia contra Arianos* (*Apol.sec.*, ed. H. G. Opitz, *Athanasius' Werke* II.1 [Berlin 1938–40] 88–168), written to justify restoration to his see, probably in 357 (Opitz 167n.). The opposite, but equally tendentious, account of Philostorgius survives only in an epitome. On this last see W. Rusch, "A la recherche de l'Athanasie historique," in C. Kannengieser, ed., *Politique et théologie chez Athanasie d'Alexandrie* (Paris 1974) 161–77.

quite reliable once certain peculiarities are recognized.² Index 8, for the year 335/6, reads, in Robertson's translation:

In this year he went to that Synod of his enemies which was assembled at Tyre. Now he journeyed from this place [Alexandria] on xvii Epiphi [11 July], but when a discovery was made of the plot against him he removed thence and fled in an open boat to Constantinople. Arriving there on ii Athyr [30 October], after eight days [6 November] he presented himself before the emperor Constantine, and spoke plainly. But his enemies, by various secret devices, influenced the Emperor, who suddenly condemned him to exile, and he set out on the tenth of Athyr [7 November] to Gaul . . .³

The other is Constantine's letter to the bishops at Tyre, reproduced by Athanasius in his *Apologia*. Here Constantine describes how a scarcely recognizable Athanasius accosted him as he rode into the city on horseback:

Victor Constantine Greatest Augustus to the Bishops gathered in Tyre:

I do not know what has been decided amid the tumult and fury of your synod, but it seems somehow that the truth has been distorted by a certain turbulent disorder, clearly through that squabbling (*ἔρεσχελίαν*) with your neighbors which you want to prevail, not taking into account what is pleasing to God. But it will be an act of divine Providence both to dissipate the evils of this love of strife that has come into the open and to disclose whether those who met in that place paid any attention to the truth and whether you judged the issues without any favor or enmity. Therefore I wish all of you to assemble before my Piety with all haste, so that you yourselves may present a precise account of your activities.

The reason I have thought fit to write these things to you and summon you to me by this letter you will know from the following.

As I was going into our eponymous and all-blessed city of Constantinople (as it happened, I was on horseback at the time), sud-

² A. Martin and M. Albert, ed., *Histoire 'acéphale' et Index syriaque des Lettres festales d'Athanase d'Alexandrie* (= *Sources chrétiennes* 317 [Paris 1985]) 73ff. Lietzmann's brief treatment of the first exile, "Chronologie der ersten und zweiten Verbannung des Athanasius," *ZWT* 44 (1901) 380–82, failed to unravel the method of dating, which had already been explained in A. Robertson, ed., *Select Writings and Letters of Athanasius* (= *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* IV.2 [New York 1891]) 500ff. O. Seeck tested the dates in "Urkundenfälschungen des 4. Jahrhunderts," *ZKG* 30 (1909) 407f.

³ Robertson (*supra* n.2) 503. For the text cf. Martin and Albert (*supra* n.2) 232ff. These editors have repunctuated their translation, so that Athanasius arrives in Constantinople eight days after leaving Tyre. The sequence of events makes this construction unlikely (n.12 *infra*).

denly the bishop Athanasius came into the middle of the street with certain others whom he had with him, so unexpectedly as even to give cause for alarm. For as God who sees all is my witness, I neither recognized him nor was I able to tell at first sight who he was, until certain of our companions, when we asked to be informed, as was fitting, reported to us both who he was and the injustice he had suffered.

I neither conversed with him at that time nor agreed to a meeting. But although he kept demanding to be heard, I declined and was about to order him driven away, when with greater outspokenness he claimed he wanted nothing more from me than your summons, so that he could complain in your presence about what he had been forced to suffer. Since this seemed reasonable to me and fitting to the times, I readily ordered these things be written to you, so that all you who made up the synod that met in Tyre (*τὴν σύνοδον τὴν ἐν Τύρῳ γενομένην*) would immediately hasten to the court of my Clemency and show clearly by the very facts the pure and unperverted nature of your judgment to me, who you would not deny am a true servant of God. For through my service to God, peace reigns everywhere and the barbarians themselves, who until now were ignorant of the truth, truly bless the name of God.

Clearly, he who knows not the truth cannot know God. But nevertheless, as has already been said, even the barbarians now through me, the true servant of God, know God and have learned to reverence him, who they have seen by the very facts shields me and everywhere provides for me. Now these know and reverence God primarily for fear of us. But we who are supposed to advocate (for I would not say defend) the holy mysteries of his Grace, we, I say, do nothing but that which encourages discord and hatred and, to speak frankly, which leads to the destruction of the human race.

So hasten, as already has been said, and take care that all may come to us swiftly, persuaded that I will try with all my might to set things straight, so that those things may be protected which in God's law are especially inviolate, against which neither blame nor any ill repute will be able to be attached, when the enemies of the law—whoever under the guise of the holy name proffer many and varied blasphemies—are clearly scattered and wholly crushed and completely obliterated.⁴

⁴ *Apol.sec.* 86.2–12 (Opitz 164f). The version of the letter in Gelasius *HE* 3.18 (G. Loeschke and M. Heinemann, edd., *GCS* 28 [Leipzig 1918] 179ff) does not include Constantine's refusal to speak with the bishop, replacing it instead with further testimony to his piety. Its authenticity must remain dubious, despite a valiant effort by N. H. Baynes, "Athanasiana," *JEA* 11 (1925) 61–65, esp. 63, to attribute the difference to editing by an embarrassed Athanasius (supported by T. D. Barnes, "Emperors and Bishops, A.D. 324–344," *AJAH* 3 [1978] 53–75, esp. 74 n.65, calling attention to

Athanasius follows the letter with the remark that, "When those around Eusebius [*sc.* of Nicomedia] learned this, knowing what they had done, they forbade the other bishops from coming along, and went alone, by themselves" ⁵ Now this comment is clearly in error. Given the constraints imposed by the *Festal Index*, there was scarcely time for Constantine's letter to reach Tyre, much less for the bishops to have travelled thence to Constantinople, before the meeting that led to Athanasius' exile. A delegation of bishops, their meeting at Tyre concluded, must already have been en route to the capital with their decisions at the time of Constantine's summons, unaware that such a letter had ever been written. Even without the time limitation imposed by the *Index*, only such a reconstruction can explain why Constantine received the delegation, instead of finding the entire Council guilty of ignoring his summons.

But the solution to this one problem creates another. It is commonly held, on the basis of the *Index*, that Athanasius first saw the emperor eight days after his arrival, which would be November 6, the day before his exile. This leaves precious little time for Constantine's letter to be drafted, the bishops to arrive, and the decisive confrontation to occur. One solution was to propose that the bishops had outpaced their prey and were already in Constantinople waiting for him to surface. But Baynes showed that this position is untenable, for in that case there would have been no need for the letter of summons. ⁶

Peeters, who has resolved so many of the chronological problems raised by this event, concluded that there never had been a second confrontation. After the encounter in the street, Athanasius was held under a kind of house-arrest while agents of his enemies, already in the capital, brought new charges to the emperor, who reacted by ordering immediate exile. ⁷ This reconstruction agrees with the bish-

transliteration of the technical Latin term *processus* at 3.18.4 as evidence for authenticity). It is hard to imagine Athanasius either adding the refusal or removing the flattery. Cf. E. Schwartz, "Zür Geschichte des Athanasius VIII," *GöttNachr* 1911, 367-426 (= "Von Nicaea bis zu Konstantins Tod," *Gesammelte Schriften* III [Berlin 1959] 188-264), esp. 422 n.1. See also C. T. H. R. Ehrhardt, "Constantinian Documents in Gelasius of Cyzicus, Ecclesiastical History," *JAC* 23 (1980) 55f.

⁵ *Apol. sec.* 87.1 (Opitz 165): ταῦτα μαθέντες οἱ περὶ Εὐσέβιον, καὶ εἰδότες ἃ ποιήκασιν, τοὺς μὲν ἄλλους ἐπισκόπους ἐκάλυσαν ἀνελεθεῖν, αὐτοὶ δὲ μόνοι . . . ἀνελεθόντες . . . Later church historians preferred to depict the meeting breaking up in disarray, with most of the participants scurrying for the cover of their respective sees: Soc. *HE* 1.33-35, Soz. *HE* 2.28. However satisfying dramatically, timing prevents such a scene from ever having been played.

⁶ *JRS* 18 (1928) 221.

⁷ P. Peeters, "L'épilogue du Synode de Tyre en 335," *AnalBoll* 63 (1945) 131-44.

op's own complaint that Constantine acted without granting him a hearing (*Apol.sec.* 87.2 [Opitz 166]): ὡς ἤκουσε τὴν τοιαύτην διαβολήν, εὐθὺς ἐπυρώθη, καὶ ἀντὶ τῆς ἀκροάσεως εἰς τὰς Γαλλίας ἡμᾶς ἀπέστειλεν. But it also raises the question how Athanasius knew about either Constantine's letter or the meeting that was held without him.

Peeter's own answer was that the bishop, held incommunicado until spirited aboard ship by Constantine's emissaries, did not in fact know the reason for his exile and simply constructed circumstances to explain the letter, which came into his possession much later.⁸ Others have been more skeptical, especially in light of Epiphanius' account of a blistering exchange between bishop and emperor.⁹ No matter how much credence one is willing to give Athanasius, it seems clear that he was hard put to explain why an emperor who, on his account, supported him so fervently should have reversed himself so suddenly.

A recent study by T. D. Barnes accepts the second, confrontational meeting, and presents the only logical conclusion: if Athanasius did not see Constantine until November 6 and was sent away a day later, and if his opponents could not have been in the city earlier, then they must have arrived "only a few hours" after dispatch of the letter and made their case directly.¹⁰ Yet had all this transpired so swiftly, it is difficult to conceive how Athanasius could even mistakenly have thought that the bishops had come in response to Constantine's summons.

Barnes relied heavily on Peeters for his chronology.¹¹ But one of the most significant results of the Bollandist's studies was to open up the interval between Athanasius' flight and his arrival in Constantinople. The bishop is often depicted as sailing directly to the capital. Yet Peeters observed that his dramatic flight must have taken place, at the latest, in early September, almost two months before his arrival in the capital.¹² He also noted that the Syriac word usually ren-

⁸ Peeters (*supra* n.7) 144.

⁹ *Adv.haer.* 68 (Migne, *PG* 42.197). See esp. Schwartz (*supra* n.4) 423.

¹⁰ T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge [Mass.] 1981) 240. See also Barnes (*supra* n.4) 62f.

¹¹ Barnes (*supra* n.4) 62f.

¹² Athanasius' decision to quit the council was prompted by the appointment of the fact-finding commission, which he considered prejudiced against him: *Apol.sec.* 82. Since the commission was in Egypt on September 8 (n.14 *infra*), it could not have been appointed later than the end of August. See P. Peeters, "Comment S. Athanase s'enfuit de Tyr en 335," *BAB* V.30 (1944) 131-77, esp. 160. There is, moreover, no indication that Athanasius attended the Encaenia celebration in Jerusalem, to which Constantine bade those attending the Council of Tyre adjourn (*Eus. VC* 4.43). Since

dered 'open boat' in translations specifically means 'log raft', a traditional form of local conveyance in Phoenicia. Properly read, he concluded, the *Festal Index* does not say that the bishop sailed directly to Constantinople in such a craft, but only that he used it to elude the harbor watch in his escape from Tyre.¹³ Given the time involved, it is not inconceivable that he proceeded overland rather than by sea, no doubt exercising caution to evade any pursuers.

But the larger question is, what did the bishops do during these two months? It is clear that they were not free to take up the chase themselves. In early September, a fact-finding commission sent by the council to Egypt was still taking depositions.¹⁴ Even if the bishops had not waited for its return, but taken Athanasius' flight as admission of guilt, they still were obliged to remove themselves to Jerusalem for a lavish, eight-day ceremony to dedicate Constantine's new Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Encaenia festival lasted from September 13 to 20. The bishops, now sitting as the Council of Jerusalem, used their time well. Following Constantine's instructions they readmitted Athanasius' arch-enemy Arius to communion and bade all other churches in the East to do likewise.¹⁵

In all likelihood the bishops did wait for the return of the fact-finding commission before condemning Athanasius: to do otherwise would have been to play into the hands of an adversary whose defense from the start had stressed the prejudice of his accusers. Thus the formal finding of guilt would not have been made until after the Encaenia festivities, hence in late September or even early October. Less certain is whether the bishops returned to Tyre or continued to sit in Jerusalem. In his letter Constantine refers to the synod in the past tense, indicating that he thought it was no longer meeting at

the celebration began on September 13 (n.15 *infra*), the summons must have arrived, at the latest, in the first week in September. Athanasius' absence from Jerusalem thus corroborates early September as the time of his departure from Tyre.

¹³ Peeters (*supra* n.12) 152–65; cf. Peeters (*supra* n.7) 134f. The most recent translators opt for the more conservative 'barque': cf. Martin and Albert (*supra* n.2) 233 and n.21.

¹⁴ Athanasius' partisans responded to the presence of the commission with a flurry of letters and protests, reproduced in *Apol.sec.* 73–79. One sent to imperial officials (76) was formally dated 10 Thoth (September 8).

¹⁵ Their encyclical is reproduced in part at *Apol.sec.* 84 and more fully in Athan. *De synod.* 21. For the Council of Jerusalem see Eus. *VC* 4.43–47. The date of the Encaenia, firmly established in numerous Eastern synaxaries, appears in the *Paschal Chronicle* as September 16–23 because of a mistake in calculating the dates of the Egyptian month Thoth. See H. Vincent and F.-M. Abel, *Jérusalem: Recherches de topographie, d'archéologie et d'histoire* II (Paris 1914) 204 n.2; G. Garitte, *Le calendrier palestino-géorgien du Sinaiticus 34* (= *SubsHagiogr* 30 [Brussels 1958]) 328f.

Tyre; but the letter also shows that as of the time of his encounter with Athanasius he still did not know what it had decided—unusual if it had, indeed, concluded almost two months earlier. For present purposes date is more important than place.¹⁶

More important, too, is the bishops' response to Athanasius' flight. Knowing the outcome, historians have assumed that the bishops also knew from the start that Athanasius' destination was Constantinople. Yet from a contemporary perspective he would have been even more likely to head for Egypt, which had sheltered him so effectively in the past.¹⁷ Conceivably the bishops did not learn otherwise until the return of their commissioners from Egypt. At this point, did they panic? Constantine's letter suggests otherwise.

Relying on Athanasius' own account, and even more on the elaborations of later church historians, scholars typically describe this as an angry letter, sent by a Constantine outraged by the violence done to so saintly a churchman. But as it stands in the pages of Athanasius, it is a curiously contradictory document, sending perplexingly mixed signals. It is angriest at the beginning, denouncing the controversy and disorder of which he has heard. Yet even here Constantine makes clear that he does not yet know the outcome of the proceedings, and is asking the bishops to come to him so that he may have a full account.¹⁸ Then the tone changes, from peremptory to conciliatory. Constantine explains the reason for his summons—his encounter with Athanasius in the street—and then (something odd for an outraged partisan of Athanasius) takes pains to assure the bishops that he had refused to speak with the accused and was even prepared to drive him from his presence. Indeed, Constantine protests that he

¹⁶ Schwartz (*supra* n.4) 423 thought it procedurally impossible for the Council of Jerusalem to begin before the Council of Tyre had ended, and took Constantine's language to mean that that Council had adjourned. But this solution fails to explain why Constantine would not then have known of the council's decision. Barnes (*supra* n.10) 239 places the decision after the Encaenia and assumes that the bishops returned to Tyre. Significantly, Athanasius (*Apol.sec.* 87) does not say where the bishops were when they received Constantine's letter; Socrates (*HE* 1.33–35) says it reached them in Jerusalem. By this time, however, the delegation must already have been en route to Constantinople (*supra* n.5).

¹⁷ Athanasius hid with the monks in upper Egypt to avoid attending the council called to judge him in Caesarea in 334 (Soz. *HE* 2.25). A papyrus published by H. I. Bell, *Jews and Christians in Egypt* (London 1924) 53ff, shows him vacillating prior to leaving for Tyre in 335, despite receiving a specific order from Constantine himself.

¹⁸ *Apol.sec.* 86.2 (Opitz 164f): ἐγὼ μὲν ἀγνοῶ τίνα ἐστὶ τὰ ὑπὸ τῆς ὑμετέρας συνόδου μετὰ θορύβου καὶ χειμῶνος κριθέντα. δοκεῖ δέ πως ὑπό τινος ἀταξίας ταραχῶδους ἢ ἀλήθεια διεστράφθαι τοιγαροῦν ἢ πειγμένως πάντας ὑμᾶς πρὸς τὴν ἐμὴν συνελθεῖν εὐσέβειαν βούλομαι, ἵνα τὴν τῶν πεπραγμένων ὑμῖν ἀκρίβειαν δι' ὑμῶν αὐτῶν παραστήσητε.

had only stopped, to begin with, because he had not recognized Athanasius. Finally, all he would consent to was a meeting at which the accusers would also be present.¹⁹

What can explain this eagerness to justify his summons and to assure bishops who purportedly have so roused his ire that he refused to speak with their adversary? As Peeters reasoned, it is likely that during these two months communications passed between bishops and emperor.²⁰ Given the problem created by Athanasius' earlier delaying tactics, it is not difficult to surmise the contents of such letters. In summoning the Council of Tyre, Constantine had given express guarantees, in language more than a little similar to that of this second letter, to preserve order and punish resisters.²¹ Upon Athanasius' flight, the bishops must have sought and received assurances that these guarantees would be honored. Hence this new letter, showing a Constantine exasperated by the reports of dissension but still careful to show that he was abiding by his agreement.

Even more significantly, Constantine's letter helps us interpret the *Festal Index*. As we have seen, scholars have taken the *Index* to say that Athanasius' encounter with Constantine in the streets did not occur until eight days after his arrival, on November 6, raising the question of what prompted the bishop to bide his time. In fact the language of the *Index* is more compressed: it merely states that Athanasius arrived on October 30 and met with the emperor eight days later.²² It was evidently Larsow who, by adding a footnote that linked the two in his German translation of 1852, first determined that the meeting eight days after Athanasius' arrival and the incident in the street described in Constantine's letter were one and the same.²³ Yet in his letter Constantine states explicitly that he refused an interview at the time of this encounter and only agreed to meet in the presence of others. In view of the brevity of the *Index*, which is clearly meant to give only highlights and not a complete chronology, it seems reasonable to conclude that the mention of Athanasius' encounter with Constantine eight days after his arrival refers to this formal meeting. Hence there is good reason to date the encounter in the street to the day of Athanasius' arrival in Constan-

¹⁹ *Apol.sec.* 86.8 (cf. *supra* n.4).

²⁰ *Supra* n.12: 167ff.

²¹ Eusebius quotes the letter at *VC* 4.42.

²² The Syriac *ethpe'el*—meaning either 'had himself seen by' (i.e., 'presented himself to') or 'was seen by'—is sufficiently vague to suggest either a formal meeting or a chance encounter. I am grateful to Professor William Countryman of The Church Divinity School of the Pacific for translating and advising me on this passage.

²³ *Die Fest-Briefe des Heiligen Athanasius* (Leipzig 1852) 28 n.2.

tinople (October 30) and to assume that the *Index* passes over this event in silence.

A potential obstacle to this conclusion appears in the *Justinianic Code*, where a law of Constantine from this year is quoted with the subscription *D. X kal. Nov. Nicopoli*.²⁴ If Constantine was in Nicopolis to promulgate this law on October 23, he is unlikely to have been back in the capital on October 30. This absence would justify the traditional reading of the *Index* and also explain why Athanasius waited eight days: Constantine was away from Constantinople until that date.²⁵ There is, however, good reason to question the subscription to this law, for two others in the *Theodosian Code* show that the emperor was in the capital at least on October 21, and possibly as late as October 22, making it impossible for him to have been in Nicopolis a day later.²⁶ For this reason the editor of the *Justinianic Code* suggested emending the Nicopolis law to read 'posted' instead of 'given'—a matter of changing *D.* to *PP*.²⁷

With or without emendation, the present state of the evidence clearly does not require Constantine's absence from the capital on October 30; on the other hand Athanasius' bedraggled and histrionic condition, implied by Constantine's failure to recognize him, along with the noisy demonstration Constantine describes, fit well with the day of Athanasius' arrival at Constantinople in a state of physical and emotional near-collapse after two harrowing months of living in fear for his life. The alternative, while possible, is not pleasant to consider: that the bishop had eight days to rest, think, and weigh his options before staging one of history's more striking *coups de théâtre*.

Thus it seems reasonable to conclude that Athanasius encountered the emperor the day he arrived in Constantinople, October 30, and gained the opportunity he sought to confront his accusers on their own arrival eight days later.²⁸ Although there would not have been time for the bishops to receive Constantine's letter in Tyre and travel to the capital, the interval would have been enough, perhaps, for Athanasius to think, with blurred memory some twenty years later, that they had come in response to such a summons.

²⁴ *Cod.Iust.* 40.4 (*CIC* II, P. Krüger, ed. [Berlin 1877] 85).

²⁵ Barnes (*supra* n.10) 239; cf. Barnes (*supra* n.4) 74 n.64.

²⁶ *Cod.Theod.* 16.8.5, 9.1, both of which represent different parts of *Const.Sirm.* 4. Slight differences in the dates are displayed in the edition of Mommsen-Meyer (I.1 ccxxiii).

²⁷ See Krüger (*supra* n.24) *ad loc.*

²⁸ Schwartz (*supra* n.4) 421ff recognized this possibility.

Most of the chronological problems posed by the limited and contradictory evidence for Athanasius' first exile are thus resolved by taking the *Index* to refer only to the formal meeting between Athanasius and his accusers that occurred on November 6 and precipitated his departure on the morning's tide.

The chronology of the events during these months may be illustrated as follows:

- July 11: Athanasius leaves for Tyre (*Festal Index* 8)
- Sept. 1–10: Athanasius flees Tyre (*Apol.sec.* 82)
- Sept. 13–20: Encaenia. Council of Jerusalem (*VC* 4.43f)
- ca Oct. 1: Athanasius condemned by Council
- Oct. 30: Athanasius arrives in Constantinople; confrontation in street (*Festal Index*; letter to bishops)
- ca Nov. 5: Arrival of bishops from Tyre
- Nov. 6: Interview with Constantine; Athanasius ordered into exile (*Festal Index*)
- Nov. 7: Athanasius sails for Gaul (*Festal Index*)

There remains the question of what precisely led Constantine to reverse himself so completely. Athanasius' own account, followed by most historians, is that the bishops realized that their decisions at Tyre were now tainted, and so brought forward a new charge: the imperious bishop was conspiring to prevent the grain fleet from sailing to Constantinople from Alexandria (*Apol.sec.* 87).

It has long been recognized that fairness to his adversaries was not uppermost in Athanasius' mind. Some have even suspected that the chief aim of his account was to demonstrate that his exile was not due to the decision of a properly constituted synod.²⁹ Nevertheless Athanasius' claim to have been exiled on a trumped-up charge has appealed to supporters and detractors alike: for his admirers the charge is easy to dismiss as a complete libel, whereas even for scholars more skeptical of the bishop's methods such a conspiracy has seemed sufficiently within the realm of possibility to explain Constantine's sudden action.

It simply cannot be. The grain fleet was Constantinople's lifeline and the key to its domestic tranquility. Interference with its arrival amounted to high treason, and called for sterner measures than exile: for Sopater it meant the axe.³⁰ Constantine might have shrunk from

²⁹ Cf. O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt*² IV (Stuttgart 1921) 57. For a useful recent discussion see also T. Orlandi, "Sull' Apologia secunda (contra Arianos) di Atanasio di Alessandria," *Augustinianum* 15 (1975) 49–79.

³⁰ The story of Sopater's execution on a charge of blocking the trade winds appears in Eunap. *VS* 62.2.

visiting so severe a fate on a Christian patriarch, but, as Peeters pointed out, deportation with orders that he be shown every consideration without even being removed from his see simply does not fit such a charge. It may be that Athanasius intentionally drew this red herring across the trail of his exile. Or there might be some kernel of fact in it if the Sopater incident occurred about this time, for the atmosphere in the capital then would have been conducive to conspiracy charges against others than the hapless philosopher. Athanasius may have remembered, or chosen to remember, one such accusation against himself. In any case his sentence shows that Constantine did not take it seriously.³¹

Baynes found a more plausible solution embedded in Socrates' account. At precisely the point where he seems to be using a source other than Athanasius, he writes: "There are those who say the emperor had done this with the aim of unifying the church, since Athanasius avoided all communion with the Arians."³² This passage suggests that the answer is not to be found by examining the Church's concerns, but rather Constantine's.

Historians, looking back through a theological lens, have often depicted Constantine's religious policy in this period as wavering or even opportunistic, veering from Arian to orthodox and back.³³ In fact it was remarkably consistent. Throughout his reign he favored those who valued unity over purity, and common sense over a rigid adherence to principle; thus he considered the decisions of councils binding in matters of faith.³⁴ Earlier in the year, Constantine had pronounced himself satisfied with Arius' confession, and the bishops just meeting at Jerusalem had ordered him restored to communion. Had Athanasius refused in the emperor's presence to honor this decree, as he surely would have done, Constantine in turn would have found the bishops' complaints about his intransigent and overbearing behavior valid, and his counter-charge of ill-treatment without merit. Transport to Gaul with a charge to re-examine his position

³¹ Peeters (*supra* n.12) 170f. Sopater's death is usually dated earlier than 335, but Barnes (*supra* n.10) 253 speculates that it might have occurred at this time.

³² *HE* 1.35. *Soz.* *HE* 2.28.14 also includes concern for unity as an optional explanation. See Baynes (*supra* n.4) 64f; F. Winkelmann, "Konstantins Religionspolitik und ihre Motive im Urteil der literarischen Quellen des 4. und 5. Jahrhunderts," *ActaAnt* 9 (1961) 243.

³³ "Un pauvre homme qui tâtonnait," in the famous judgment of André Piganiol, *L'Empereur Constantin* (Paris 1932) 226.

³⁴ His express aim in summoning the Council of Tyre had been to restore concord and unity: see Eus. *VC* 4.42; on his general policy, N. H. Baynes, *Constantine the Great and the Christian Church*² (London 1972) 12ff.

was entirely appropriate under these circumstances, and leaving him in titular possession of his see a politically wise gesture.³⁵

There is a certain ironic justice in this dénouement. At Nicaea Athanasius had succeeded in using Constantine's overriding concern for unity to isolate those Arians whose theological principles were too pure to allow them to accept the tainted word *homoousios*. But his foes had learned well: a decade later Athanasius was hoisted on his own petard.

This new look at the details of Athanasius' first exile may rob historians of certain appealing vignettes: the bishop's calculated display of hysteria, the fear and trembling of his enemies at Tyre, the melodramatic arrival of the accusers in hot pursuit at Constantinople. But it may enable us to see a bit more clearly Constantine's goals and methods.

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³⁵ K. Girardet, *Kaisergericht und Bischofsgericht* (Bonn 1975) 73. Barnes (*supra* n.4) 74 n.66 dismisses this position as "totally impossible," because Constantine's letter of summons "implicitly annuls the decisions of the council" (63). It is perhaps better to think of Constantine acting as Eusebius describes him at *VC* 4.27.2: "And he ratified the rules of bishops which had been made known in synods" (*καὶ τοὺς τῶν ἐπισκόπων δὲ ὅρους τοὺς ἐν συνόδοις ἀποφανθέντας ἐπεσφραγίζετο*). That is, in acting as a court of appeal Constantine did not nullify the synod's decision but agreed to review it. Had he found for Athanasius, he would have sent the case back to the bishops; since he did not, he merely enforced the decision already made, making a further synod unnecessary.