

The Fate of Eustathius of Antioch

By R. P. C. Hanson

I

The aim of this article is to show that the year 326 is an impossibly early one for the deposition of Eustathius, and to consider the reasons for that deposition.

We shall first consider the extract from an anti-Arian writing of Eustathius given by Theodoret H.E. I.8.1–5 (Parmentier). It must be distinguished from what Theodoret says later (I.21.1–9) about the deposition, a passage which (with the possible exception of one detail) deserves little credence. The earlier reference to Eustathius, however, has every appearance of quoting Eustathius' actual words, for its style is like the inflated and ornate language of other fragments of Eustathius.¹ In this extract Eustathius begins by speaking of the Council of Nicaea. He says that when the subject of belief was discussed, ἐναργῆς μὲν ἔλεγχος τὸ γράμμα τῆς Εὐσεβίου προὑβάλλετο βλασφημίας. It was read in the presence of the whole council and caused an outcry with consequent embarrassment to its author. „And when the faction (ἐργαστήριον) of Eusebius' followers (οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Εὐσέβιον) was shown up“, the document was torn up then and there, and some, as part of a policy, began to suggest compromise, and so silenced all those who were orthodox (τοὺς ἄριστα λέγειν εἰωθότας). The Arians were afraid of being exiled („ostracised“), and eagerly condemned the rejected doctrine (Arius' teaching) and put their signatures to documents to that effect (συμφάνοις γράμμασιν, presumably the Nicene Creed and its anathemas). Then follows a passage which must be given in full:

τῶν δὲ προεδριῶν διὰ πλείστης ὄσης περιδρομῆς κρατήσαντες, δέον αὐτοὺς ὑπόπτωσιν λαμβάνειν, τοτὲ μὲν λεληθότως, τοτὲ δὲ προφανῶς τὰς ἀποψηφισθείσας πρεσβεύουσι δόξας, διαφόροις ἐπιβουλεύοντες τοῖς ἐλέγχοις. βουλόμενοι δὲ διη παγιῶσαι τὰ ζιζανιώδη φυτουργήματα, δεδοίκασι τοὺς ἐπιγνώμονας, ἐκκλίνουσι τοὺς ἐφόρους καὶ ταύτη τοὺς τῆς εὐσεβείας κήρυκας ἐκπολεμοῦσιν. οὐχ οὕτως δὲ πιστεύομεν ὡς ἀνθρώπους δύνασθαι κρατῆσαι πώποτε τοῦ θεοῦ. κἂν γὰρ πάλιν ἰσχύσωσι, πάλιν ἠττηθήσονται, κατὰ τὸν σεμνόφωνον προφήτην Ἡσαΐαν.

¹ See M. Spanneut, *Recherches sur les écrits d'Eustache d'Antioche* (Lille 1948).

This passage can be translated thus:

„However, now that they have gained control of the leading position (i.e. leading sees) by enormous intrigue, since they had to accept submission (to the Nicene Creed), they are beginning, sometimes secretly, sometimes openly, to advocate the condemned doctrines, using various accusations (or possibly arguments) to forward their plot. They want to establish the rank weeds (i.e. Arianism) but are afraid of the more intelligent and are avoiding the authorities (i.e. Constantine), and so it is that they are waging war against the champions of orthodoxy. But we do not believe that godless men can ever conquer the Divinity. And even if they are in power at one time, at another they will be defeated, as the solemn-sounding prophet Isaiah says“ (Isa 8,9 [LXX]).

This extract, of course, not only gives us information about the Council of Nicaea but also, in the passage just quoted entire in Greek, gives a general summary of what happened immediately after the Council. The first question to determine is, to which Eusebius is Eustathius referring here, to Eusebius of Caesarea or to Eusebius of Nicomedia? Some scholars have decided that Eustathius meant the bishop of Caesarea, mainly on the grounds (to be considered later) that it was he who brought about Eustathius' downfall.² But a short consideration will show the extreme improbability of this conclusion. We know from Eusebius of Caesarea's letter to his flock in Caesarea written immediately after the Council what the document was which he produced at Nicaea.³ It would be absurd to imagine that a creed like this could have aroused furious opposition and have eventually been publicly torn up. Eusebius in fact tells us that the Emperor warmly approved of it and declared it to be orthodox. Besides, it is unlikely that the bishop of Caesarea began the debate at Nicaea by producing a creed to be a basis of agreement; he was chiefly concerned to ensure that the provisional condemnation for heresy which had been passed on him at the Council of Antioch a few months before should be lifted, and this end was achieved by the production of this creed. On the other hand, we have independent evidence that Eusebius of Nicomedia produced a document at Nicaea which met with disapproval. Ambrose, in his work *De Fide*, tells us so and produces a sentence from the document which is not inconsistent with what we know of this Eusebius' ideas from his Letter to Paulinus of Tyre.⁴ If the document referred to by Eustathius as torn up by indignant members of the Council during a session of the Council is identical with that described by Eusebius of Caesarea as accepted by all and welcomed by Constantine, then one or other of these two

² Dr. Henry Chadwick takes this view in an article to be discussed below.

³ See K.-G. Opitz, *Urkunde zur Geschichte des Arianischen Streites* (Berlin 1934), III, No. 20 (42 ff.).

⁴ *De Fide* III.15 (125), *si verum, inquit, dei filium et increatum dicimus, hominon cum patre incipimus confiteri* (see Opitz, op cit No. 21). For Eusebius of Nicomedia's Letter to Paulinus see the same work, No. 8.

writers is convicted, not merely of inaccuracy, but of blatant mendacity about a subject which when each wrote must have still been fresh in the memory of many. G. C. Stead has plausibly suggested that it was the anti-Arians at Nicaea who produced the letter of Eusebius of Nicomedia in order to embarrass the Arians at the outset.⁵ For Stead, of course, Eustathius' Eusebius is he of Caesarea. We are compelled to conclude that the Eusebius referred to by Eustathius in the passage quoted above is the bishop of Nicomedia, and our conclusion is reinforced by the expression used by Eustathius, τῶν ἀμφὶ Εὐσέβιον, which is almost identical with term οἱ περὶ Εὐσέβιον used consistently by Athanasius.⁶ Almost all authorities agree that the leading creator and agent of pro-Arian policy shortly after Nicaea was Eusebius of Nicomedia rather than his namesake of Caesarea.

We now face a choice of conclusions. If the person referred to in this extract is Eusebius of Nicomedia, either Eustathius regarded the bishop of Nicomedia as his main antagonist and wrote this passage after he had been deposed through the activity of this Eusebius, or he wrote this passage before he was deposed (perhaps by Eusebius of Caesarea) and did not yet appreciate the threat which the bishop of Caesarea constituted to his tenure of the see of Antioch. What we cannot conclude is that Eustathius, having been deposed through the agency of Eusebius of Caesarea in 326, afterwards wrote a passage describing Eusebius of Nicomedia as the main agent of pro-Arian intrigue at the Nicene Council and later. If we adopt either of the conclusions posed as alternatives above, we cannot imagine that Eustathius was deposed in 326, for in that year Eusebius of Nicomedia was in exile; he could not have been influential in the deposition of Eustathius in that year. But if Eustathius wrote this passage before he (Eustathius) was exiled, then he must have written it at a time when Eusebius of Nicomedia was active in intrigue, having gained some successes in deposing bishops who opposed him, and was no longer languishing in helpless exile. In that case Eustathius must have been still bishop of Antioch after 326, and probably as late as 328 or 329.

In fact, the reconstruction of events which places the deposition of Eustathius as early as 326 has this antecedent improbability, that it gives him very little time either to expel a number of pro-Arian presbyters from his see after the Nicene Council, as he did,⁷ or to create a strong nucleus of devoted followers who would for years and years after his deposition and later after his death cherish his memory and perpetuate his doctrine. He can, on the

⁵ „Eusebius and the Council of Nicaea“, *Journal of Theological Studies* 24 (N S), 1973, 85–100.

⁶ C. Kannengeiser („Où et quand Arius composa-t-il la Thalie?“ (*Kyriakon, Festschrift Johannes Quasten*, edd. P. Grandfield and C. J. Jungmann, Münster [1970], Vol. I, 347 and n. 13) has pointed out the frequent occurrence of this term in Athanasius' works and noted that it also occurs in Julius of Rome and the Letters of the Council of Serdica. He refers to the phrase οἱ ἀμφὶ τὸν Εὐσέβιον in Sozomenus, H.E. 1, 15. 10. But in saying that there is no echo of the term elsewhere he has overlooked this occurrence in Eustathius.

⁷ Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum* 4.

reckoning that he was ousted in 326, have had not much more than a year to create a band of followers and leave a legacy of dissatisfaction and disturbance at his departure.⁸

If we look carefully at the words recorded in Theodoret H.E. I.8.1–5 we shall see that they do not in fact suggest that they were written by somebody who had not long before been driven out of his see for reasons which he must have regarded as unjust. They express dislike of the Arians and dislike of Eusebius of Nicomedia, of course, but they do not accuse anyone of actually deposing bishops unjustly, least of all himself. The verbs are in the present tense; they suggest that Eustathius is describing a process or policy which has begun indeed but has not touched him personally. And Eustathius states that he is sure that the policy now put in hand by the Arians will not succeed. It is, in fact, very likely that these words were written before he was deprived of his see, while a pamphlet war between pro-Nicenes and Arians was being carried on.⁹ It is therefore preferable to place Eustathius' deposition later than 326, in 328 or 329.

II

It is necessary, however, in order to maintain this position to show that the arguments in favour of the date of 326 for Eustathius' fall are less than compelling. These arguments are conveniently and ably put in an article by Dr. Henry Chadwick in a paper originally published in the *Journal of Theological Studies* in 1948 (Vol. 49 OS), but recently reprinted in *History and Thought in the Early Church* (London 1982) by the same author (XIII. 27–35). Theodoret H.E. I.21.1–9 connects Eustathius' fall with the activity of Eusebius of Nicomedia and Theognis of Nicaea soon after their return from exile, and Philostorgius (H.E. 2.7 [Bidez]) has a similar account. Chadwick's effort is directed towards discrediting this story and connecting the deposition of Eustathius with the work of Eusebius of Caesarea during the period when his namesake of Nicomedia and Theognis were in exile. He begins by referring¹⁰ to the theory of Schwartz, which we need not discuss in detail here. It depends upon two flimsy links, the assumption that when Asterius defended Eusebius of Nicomedia the latter was in exile, and the hypothesis that when Asterius described Paulinus of Tyre as makarios this implied that he was dead. The second is not certain; exceptions can be cited without much difficulty. The first is wholly improbable. To defend someone who had recently been exiled by the Emperor would have required heroic courage and we have no reason to assume that Asterius possessed this; rather

⁸ For the evidence for these disturbances, see Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini* 5, 59–62.

⁹ And in this pamphlet war Eustathius may well have written against Eusebius of Caesarea, as Socrates seems to indicate, H.E. 1,23.

¹⁰ *Op cit* 30–31.

the contrary as we know that he had lapsed during the recent persecution. No doubt Asterius was engaging in the general literary *melée* produced by the case of Arius, and this could have been at any time between 325 and 335. Chadwick himself (op cit 31) seems to think that Schwartz's theory is more ingenious than convincing.

More weighty evidence, however, is contained in the encyclical Letter issued by the Eastern bishops after the abortive Council of Serdica of 343 which declares that it was then seventeen years since Asclepas of Gaza had been deposed,¹¹ and the apparent statement in the encyclical of the Western bishops after that Council that Asclepas had been deposed at a Council of Antioch presided over by Eusebius of Caesarea. Seventeen years before 343¹² brings us to 327 (though Chadwick, dating Serdica to 342, calculates it as 326). If Eusebius of Caesarea was able to preside over a Council of Antioch surely Eustathius must have been deposed before (or even conceivably during) that Council; otherwise Eustathius himself would have been the proper person to preside. That Eusebius of Caesarea not only could but actually did preside over at least one Council of Antioch, and possibly over a second, is shown by the letter which Constantine wrote to him (quoted in his *Life of Constantine*) directing him to chair a council in Antioch in order to fill the vacancy in the see caused by the death of Euphronius,¹³ and by Schwartz's demonstration that some of the canons ascribed to the Dedication Council of Antioch of 341 (by which time Eusebius was dead) really belong to an earlier Antiochene Council presided over by Eusebius of Caesarea.¹⁴ Chadwick therefore suggests that Asclepas was deposed at a Council of Antioch where Eusebius of Caesarea presided and that Eustathius must have been deposed at a similar council, again with the bishop of Caesarea in charge, which took place even earlier, and indeed that the whole series of changes in the occupancy of the see of Antioch, Paulinus succeeding Eustathius, Eulalius Paulinus, Euphronius Eulalius, and finally Flacillus Euphronius, was over before Eusebius of Nicomedia and his fellow-exile returned from banishment in 327 or 328. He adds as a further point that Constantine's letter addressed to the synod of Antioch quoted in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Life of Constantine* (3.62) does not among the bishops addressed mention either Eusebius of Nicomedia or Theognis of Nicaea.¹⁵

Let us take the last point first: the only bishops mentioned in Constantine's letter to the synod of Antioch are those whose sees are in the vicinity of Antioch. We should not expect him to summon bishops from the province of Bithynia, the whole length of Asia Minor removed from Antioch, in order

¹¹ Hilary, *Collectio Antiariana* (Feder CSEL 65) IV.11 (56,57).

¹² That the date of Serdica was 343 and not 342 has recently been argued with great cogency by L. W. Barnard in his article, „The Council of Serdica: some Problems Re-assessed“ (*Annuaire Historiae Conciliorum*, 1980, 1–25).

¹³ Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.61, 62.

¹⁴ Chadwick, op cit 34–35.

¹⁵ *Ibid* 34.

to take part in choosing a new bishop of Antioch. Next, we must look at the statements of the council of Eastern bishops after the Council of Serdica. Not only do they say that it was seventeen years since Asclepas was unfrocked, but also that when Asclepas was condemned Athanasius of Alexandria himself agreed to the act.¹⁶ The words do not necessarily imply that Athanasius himself was present at the Council, wherever it was held, which condemned Asclepas. It is unlikely that a bishop of Alexandria would have had occasion to attend a council concerned with the affairs of the see of Gaza. But the words imply that he assented to it and did not, when informed of it, protest against it. Chadwick tries to explain away this difficult piece of evidence by quoting a passage from the Eastern bishops' letter after Serdica which states that „those who are now with Marcellus himself are favouring him, Protogenes bishop of Sardica and Cyriacus of Naissus, who wrote their judgments against him with their own hand“, even though elsewhere in the same letter it is revealed that Cyriacus is now dead and has been succeeded by Gaudentius. Chadwick assumes that Gaudentius is held to have assented „with his own hand“ to what his predecessor did. So it was with Athanasius, who is held to have approved the deposition of Asclepas because his predecessor, Alexander, approved.¹⁷ But the cases are not on all fours: the first case does not mention Alexander the predecessor, the second does not mention Gaudentius the successor. On this theory Damasus must be held responsible for whatever Liberius publicly assented to and Ambrose for all the conciliar acts of Auxentius! It is much more likely that at this point in their encyclical the Eastern bishops simply forgot that Cyriacus was no longer alive, though they later remembered the fact. The ancients did not possess the unerring eye for accuracy which modern scholars enjoy. We must conclude that the authors of this document state that Athanasius, who succeeded to the see of Alexandria in 328, as archbishop of Alexandria approved of the deposition of Asclepas, and that therefore they were either wrong in this statement or, as is equally possible, wrong in stating that Asclepas had been deposed seventeen years before the Council of Serdica in 343. Both statements cannot be correct. This is not to contend that Eusebius of Nicomedia was necessarily concerned with the deposition of Asclepas, and before that of Eustathius, as Theodoret and Philostorgius assert; it is quite possible that Eusebius of Caesarea was the main mover in both cases, certainly he was Asclepas' metropolitan. But the deposition of Asclepas is most unlikely to have taken place as early as 326. Incidentally we may note that, though this point cannot be proved, the Western bishops' encyclical after Serdica does not actually say that Eusebius of Caesarea presided at the downfall of Asclepas, only that he was present at it (*praesentibus adversariis et Eusebio ex Caesarea*).¹⁸ It is not

¹⁶ Hilary, Coll. Antiar. IV.13 (57) *etenim adhuc cum esset episcopus Athanasius, Asclepan depositum sua sententis ipse damnavit.*

¹⁷ Chadwick, *op cit* 32, n. 1

¹⁸ Hilary, Coll. Ar. II(1).6(118).

impossible that Eustathius presided at the synod which deposed Asclepas. We do not know the reason for which he was deposed. Eusebius of Caesarea may have been mentioned not only as his metropolitan but as his chief adversary.

One more piece of evidence alleged in favour of dating the deposition of Eustathius to 326 is derived from the movements of the Empress Helena, Constantine's mother. Athanasius, *Historia Arianorum* 4, says that Eustathius was deposed because he had insulted Helena, and this was a pretext for getting rid of a strong opponent of Arian opinions. We know that at some time after the Council of Nicaea Helena made a tour of the Holy Places. We do not know exactly when she made this visit, nor the exact date of her death, though she certainly died before her son Constantine. Chadwick argues that Helena's visit was a kind of pilgrimage of reparation for the tragedy (whatever it was) that involved the deaths of Crispus, Constantine's eldest son by his first wife, and of Fausta, Constantine's second wife. These mysterious deaths took place in the first half of the year 326. If Helena visited Palestine in 326 she would have been in an excellent position to be insulted by Eustathius in that year as she passed through Antioch on her way to Jerusalem. Therefore it is likely that Eustathius' insulting reference (whatever it was) occurred in 326, and he was deposed shortly afterwards.¹⁹

We may doubt, to begin with, whether a church council in the early fourth century would have regarded itself as competent to depose a bishop on such a charge, and if it did whether the deposed bishop would have left behind him a band of devoted disciples. But even if a council at this period was competent to act in this way, the theory that Helena went to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage of reparation immediately after the unsavoury events connected with the death of two members of the imperial House is fantastic. That is precisely the time at which Helena is least likely to have undertaken such an enterprise. Constantine's policy over this unmistakable blot on the reputation of his dynasty was to hush the whole affair up. Crispus' name is erased from monuments. Eusebius of Caesarea, who had made laudatory references to Crispus in the first edition of his *Ecclesiastical History*, removes all mention of him in the second edition. In his *Life of Constantine* he says nothing whatever about the unhappy death of Constantine's first son and second wife. It is in the last degree unlikely that immediately after the disaster Constantine would have encouraged or permitted his mother to go on a well publicised pilgrimage which everyone, Christian or pagan, would have interpreted as one of reparation. The damage done to the reputation of his House was grave enough without this aggravation of it. We have no reason to think that Constantine was specially solicitous about his mother's feelings. The great basilica which he erected at Trier, and which still stands (though much restored) was apparently built on the site of an earlier building, then

¹⁹ Chadwick, *op cit* 32–34.

destroyed, in which there had been a mosaic of Helena. The attempt to pin the deposition of Eustathius to the year 326 by using the visit of Helena to the Holy Land cannot be sustained.

III

Finally we may consider the question, on what charge was Eustathius of Antioch deposed? The Eastern bishops after Serdica make a curiously indirect reference to him which suggests both that he had been deposed for the evil manner of his life and that he was by then (343) dead.²⁰ The Western bishops after Serdica do not mention him at all, which has caused some (e.g. Simonetti)²¹ to conclude that he had indeed misbehaved himself in some way. Philostorgius²² says that he was deposed for παιδίσκης μιξιν και αίσχροῦς ἡδονῆς. Theodoret (H.E. I.21.1–9) has a story of false accusation by the mother of an illegitimate baby which caused Eustathius to be deprived ὡς μοιχὸν ὁμοῦ και τύραννον. Socrates (H.E. 1.24) says that George, later Arian bishop of Laodicea said that Eustathius was deposed on doctrinal grounds for Sabellianism, on the accusation of Cyrus of Beroea, but he thinks the story implausible, for Cyrus himself was later deposed for Sabellianism.

We can rule out, as Chadwick rightly rules out,²³ the story of Eustathius' deposition for some sexual offence. It is a traditional ingredient of legend, or (in the case of the Easterners at Serdica) gossip or hearsay. It is unlikely that Eustathius would have left behind him a band of devoted disciples dedicated to preserving his memory and his writings if this sordid reason had been the cause of his downfall. Fifteen years later his successor Stephen, convicted of a no less sordid intrigue, left no band of admiring devotees. The story of Eustathius insulting the Empress Helena does not appear earlier than the period when Athanasius in the late 350s was writing the *Historia Arianorum*, in which, as Chadwick allows,²⁴ Athanasius „is inclined to be less in touch with historical fact than usual“. It is quite possible that later pro-Nicene writers preferred to represent their earlier heroes as deposed on non-theological grounds in order to conceal the fact, that they had really been deposed for unorthodoxy.

Athanasius in fact is not the only contemporary of Eustathius to refer to his fall. Socrates, as we have just seen, tells us that George of Laodicea reported that Eustathius had been deposed for Sabellianism. Now Athanasius (*Hist. Arian.* 4) informs us that this George was one of the Antiochene pres-

²⁰ Hilary, *Coll. Ar.* IV.27 (66) (the subject of the sentence is Ossius) sed et Eustasio et Quimatio adhaerebat pessime et carus fuit, de quorum vita infami et turpi dicendum nihil est; exitus enim illorum eos omnibus declaravit.

²¹ *La Crisi Ariana nel Quarto Secolo* (Rome 1975) 105–106.

²² H.E. 2.7 (Bidez 18,19).

²³ *Op cit* 28.

²⁴ *Op cit* 29.

byters expelled from Antioch by Eustathius on his return from the Council of Nicaea. George, though he was an opponent of Eustathius and no doubt regarded himself as a victim of Eustathius' injustice, was in a very good position to know the reason for Eustathius' fall, perhaps in a better position than was Athanasius. It is significant that George says nothing about an insult to Helena nor about sexual irregularities, though as an opponent of Eustathius he would no doubt have mentioned sordid and discreditable details had there been any. We have no reason to doubt the accuracy of Socrates here (he gives as his source a lost eulogy on Eusebius of Emesa by George), especially as he did not think that George had mentioned the true reason for Eustathius' fall. We cannot and need not explain the fact that Cyrus of Beroea was Eustathius' opponent at this point. We do not know, any more than Socrates knew, the intricate movements of ecclesiastical politics which at this point induced Cyrus to make an accusation of Sabellianism and later to succumb to a similar charge himself, nor how a bishop of Beroea (who may have directly succeeded Eustathius in that see) came to be accusing a bishop of Antioch. But we can recognize in this statement as early a piece of evidence as any about the reason for the fall of Eustathius, and accept that it is much the most probable. Not only would pro-Nicenes later have a good motive for suppressing this fact, but anything we know about Eustathius' theological views (a subject upon which this article will not enter) leads us to think that he could well have been accused of Sabellianism. It is just possible that the last two words of Theodoret's account of the accusation against Eustathius, *kai tyrannon*, may contain a grain of truth. Eustathius may have been arbitrary and violent in expelling Arians from his diocese after Nicaea.

We conclude, then, that Eustathius was deposed, not in 326, but in 328 or 329, not necessarily at the instigation of Eusebius of Nicomedia (though assuredly with his approval), but perhaps on the initiative of Eusebius of Caesarea, and deposed for unorthodoxy, for Sabellianism. The views of the Paulinists, his doctrinal successors were, after all, not easy to distinguish from Sabellianism of a mild sort even after 363. We do not know when Eustathius died. We must agree with Spanneut²⁵ that the extract from the work against Photinus ascribed to Eustathius evinces a theological vocabulary too far advanced to be regarded plausibly as that of Eustathius, and therefore we need not assume that he survived long enough to attack Photinus. He was almost certainly dead by the Council of Serdica in 343. It is likely that he was dead before the death of Constantine in 337, or otherwise we should have heard something of his return, or attempt to return, at that point. His death is the most probable reason for the silence of the Western bishops after Serdica about him rather than something discreditable in the reason for his deposition.

²⁵ *Recherches* etc. 82–83.