
THE LAST DAYS OF NESTORIUS IN THE SYRIAC SOURCES



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If the theological debates of the first half of the fifth century haunt the sixth, then the Council of Chalcedon hangs as a sort of specter over the Justinianic Church. Although Chalcedon was ostensibly a legitimately constituted general council, the legitimacy of its doctrinal decisions were questioned and even excoriated by many in the East.¹ The interpretation (*hermenaia*) of the faith imposed on the assembled bishops by the imperial representatives spoke in no uncertain terms of Christ's two natures after the incarnation, and the *Tome* of Leo I (*Ep.* 28) clearly articulated the independent functioning of each nature in the single person of Christ.² The principle charge made against Chalcedon by its opponents was that it revived the heresy of Nestorius, which had been decisively condemned, so it was believed, at the Council of Ephesus in 431. Considerable scholarship has been dedicated to disproving the Nestorian underpinnings of Chalcedon, and to proving that the formula "in two natures" was Cyrillian.³ Suffice it to say that these attempts have had to work around the fact that the bishop of Alexandria *never* himself used the formula. In fact, after 433 Cyril tended strongly to the formulations "out of two natures" and "one incarnate na-

ture", precisely to exclude the Antiochene "two natures".⁴

While the doctrine produced at Chalcedon may differ subtly from Nestorius' own teaching—I refer here to the affirmation of the one *prosopon* and one *hypostasis* of Christ—the core of the council's doctrinal pronouncements fundamentally agreed with the Antiochene tradition. It was within this tradition that the bulk of Nestorius' beliefs lay. Nestorius was in full agreement with Theodore of Mopsuestia on the need for a human and divine nature in Christ in order to avoid the danger of an Apollinarian "mingling" or "mixture" inherent in the "one nature", although some of Nestorius' speculative flights might well not have met with Theodore's approval.⁵

Yet Nestorianism was *never* defined in 431 at First Ephesus in terms of natures; Nestorius was condemned as the "New Judas" with no reference at all to the number of natures of Christ.⁶ Nestorius' position was only caricatured for advancing the "two sons" and for rejecting *Theotokos* as a proper appellation for Mary. The reality, as has been shown in various studies, was quite different: Nestorius accepted *Theotokos* with only a few quibbles, and he adamantly denied that his talk of the two natures and two

prosopa of Christ entailed the “two sons”, the heresy of Paul of Samosata.⁷

When Cyril, in ignorance of Nestorius’ theological pedigree, assented to an Antiochene statement of belief in a letter of 433, *Laetentur Caeli*, the two natures were given the imprimatur of the bishop’s prestige and authority, recently won by his defeat of Nestorius.⁸ With the “two natures” now cast as superficially cyrillican in the so-called “Symbol of Reunion,” it could be used by Flavian of Constantinople in 448 to convict the archimandrite Eutyches for teaching the “one nature” and that Christ took his body from heaven. When Second Ephesus, the so-called *Latrocinium*, convened in the next year to rehabilitate Eutyches, they put aside Cyril’s *Laetentur Caeli* and the Antiochene statement in favour of Cyril’s post-433 writings. In 450, when the new emperor Marcian and his consort Pulcheria conceived of an eastern council to undo the apparent injustices of Second Ephesus, it was to the affirmation of the “two natures” in 448 that they turned. Fortuitously, pope Leo had written a treatise, his *Tomus ad Flavianum*, that independently and in complete ignorance of eastern developments and Cyril’s work, insisted unequivocally on the independent function of two natures in the person of Christ that most would have regarded as very uncyrillican.⁹

It was through this circuitous route that the essence of Nestorius’ beliefs, without his name attached to them, came to be affirmed at the Council of Chalcedon under a cyrillican guise. What is often not discussed with respect to Chalcedon is what Nestorius’ own views would have been on the decisions of the council. We are most fortunate in possessing a Syriac translation of Nestorius’ *apologia pro vita sua*, the *Liber Heraclidis*,

discovered near Lake Van in the early 1880s.¹⁰ The work is not, however, without its problems. First, the language of the translation is often unclear and garbled due to an overly literal rendering that frequently omits names in favour of pronouns. Second, there are sections of the text missing and other surviving sections that are clearly dislocated within the manuscript that Paul Bedjan, its editor, worked from. Third and perhaps most worrying is that the unity of the surviving work, and the authenticity of several of its sections, has been called into question, particularly by Luise Abramowski.¹¹

Let us begin with what can be gleaned of Nestorius’ life after the Council of Ephesus in 431. The emperor Theodosius permitted the deposed bishop to return to his monastery just outside of Antioch as a free man in the fall of 431. But an edict of the emperor Theodosius II formally condemned Nestorius and proscribed his writings several years later.¹² With this imperial order, a formal legal category was created for Nestorians, or rather Simonians (after Simon Magus), to be added to the list of banned heresies that had accumulated since the time of Constantine the Great. By 435 Nestorius and his friend Irenaeus were officially sent into exile and first went to Petra in Arabia.¹³ How long the two remained in Petra is unknown, but Irenaeus seems to have escaped from exile and in 446 or thereabouts he reappears in Tyre as its ordained bishop. There was no imperial order to recall Irenaeus and Theodosius deposed him in February of 448, when he learned to his surprise that this determined follower of Nestorius had not only returned but become a bishop.¹⁴ Irenaeus’ illegal return was doubtless due to the influence of Theodoret of Cyrillus and Domnus of Antioch. It is tell-

ing that Irenaeus, a man so closely associated with Nestorius, could still find friends in Syria as late as 447.

But Nestorius did not so easily escape his exile and was moved from Petra to Egypt. Because there is a hiatus of a decade between the years 438/9 and 449 in the narration of the *Liber Heraclidis*, one suspects that he was moved to isolation in Egypt at the former date. Evagrius *scholasticus*, writing at the end of the sixth century, is one of very few ancient authors who can claim to have detailed information about Nestorius in exile. He appears to have consulted at least two book-length works of Nestorius as well as a collection of letters.¹⁵ The excerpts of Nestorius' letter to the controller of the Thebaid in Egypt show that Nestorius had been moved to the Oasis in Western Egypt. Now known as the Kharga Oasis, Nestorius' place of exile lay 100 miles west of the Nile and encompassed an area about 15 miles wide and 100 miles long with a concentration of watered areas. The letters quoted by Evagrius also tell us that Nestorius had been moved around considerably in the Oasis and had been captured by marauding barbarians, who are identified as "Nobades". Nestorius was released by his captors in Panopolis on the Nile, 100 miles to the east. He sought to justify this move to the civil authorities in Egypt so as not to be thought a fugitive from exile. Later, soldiers moved him to Elephantine, 200 miles to the south, but the controller of the Thebaid changed his mind yet again and moved Nestorius back to the outskirts of Panopolis. At a loss to explain just why Nestorius was exiled in 436 and not earlier, Evagrius presents this pitiful petition of Nestorius, complaining of his treatment in Egypt, as conclusive proof of the deposed bishop's arrogance and contempt for impe-

rial authority. But of these events in Egypt, Nestorius gives virtually no hint at all in his *apologia*.

Nestorius picked up his pen to resume the *Liber Heraclidis* as early as the year 449. This last section, the second part of Book II in Paul Bedjan's edition, is appended to the other text of the *Liber* with no evidence that Nestorius went back to revise his earlier writings in light of new developments contained therein. Nestorius says that he was encouraged to begin writing again as he received news of recent events in the East from his friends.¹⁶ Nestorius discusses the trial of Eutyches in the fall of 448 and the subsequent persecution and condemnation of Flavian of Constantinople for his efforts against the "one nature". By his quotations and references, Nestorius demonstrates that he had access to a copy of the *acta* of at least the first session of Second Ephesus in 449 and good information about the Home Synod of Constantinople in 448.

In the fall of Flavian Nestorius saw a distinct parallel for his own plight and yet further evidence of the wickedness of his erstwhile supporter, the emperor Theodosius, towards the orthodox. The section concludes with a prophecy, clearly a *vaticinium ex eventu*, of the misfortunes that he predicts will befall the empire because of its emperor's impiety. Among these he includes the Vandal sack of Rome in 455, the last datable event in all of the *Liber Heraclidis*.¹⁷ Yet there is a mystery here. If Nestorius lived as late as 455 or 456 and had good information of events in the East, why does he include no references whatsoever to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, a massive change in ecclesiastical politics that could not have escaped his notice? The next latest event reported by Nestorius is the death of

Theodosius at the end of July 450.¹⁸ I would strongly suggest that the final prophecy of the *Liber* must be set aside as a later addition by one of Nestorius' supporters. Therefore the *terminus post quem* and *terminus ante quem* for the *Liber* can be set quite precisely by the death of Theodosius and the accession of Marcian respectively in late August. If it took at least two months for news of Theodosius' death, and of Marcian's accession to reach Egypt, Nestorius must have finished what has come down to us in September or October of 450. But just how long after this time did Nestorius live, and what might he have thought of Chalcedon?

Nestorius had seen a copy of Leo's *Tome*, a letter written to Flavian by the pope in the summer of 449, which laid out a strongly dyophysite christological statement. Nestorius heartily approved of the document and saw it as fully in line with his own belief, but despite the requests of his unnamed supporters, he declined to involve himself in the struggle:

But, because many were blaming me many times for not having written unto Leo, bishop of Rome, to teach him all the things which were committed, such as came to pass, and the change of faith, as if unto a man who is correct in his faith, especially when there had been given unto me, [even] unto me, a part of the letter relating to the judgment concerning Flavian and Eutyches, wherein it was revealed that [he feared] not the friendship of [his] majesty (i.e. Leo did not fear to confront Theodosius), for this reason I wrote not, not because I am a proud man and senseless, but so that I might not hinder from his running him who was running fairly because of the

prejudice against my person. But I was content to endure the things whereof they accused me, in order that, while I was accused thereof, they might accept without hindrance the teaching of the Fathers; for I have no word [to say] concerning what was committed against me. And further I wrote not for the purpose that I, to whom for many years there was not one [moment of] repose nor human solace, might not be suspected of surely fleeing from the contest, fearing the labors [thereof]; for sufficient are the wrongs that have come upon the world [and] which are more able than I to make the oppression of the true faith shine forth in the eyes of every man.¹⁹

From the *Liber Heraclidis* we also learn that Nestorius fully approved of the "Symbol of Reunion" of 433, although he did question the legitimacy of the diplomacy that led to it, especially the assent of many Eastern bishops to his deposition.²⁰ Thus it must have been clear to Nestorius' supporters in 450 that Marcian and Pulcheria's plan to approve Leo's *Tome* along with a strongly dyophysite statement of faith at a general council the next year was an opportunity for the deposed bishop to prove his orthodoxy before his death. Nestorius implies as much when he talks of his supporters pushing him to re-enter ecclesiastical politics. With the death of Theodosius and the accession of an emperor committed to both Leo's *Tome* and overturning the results of Second Ephesus, his vindication must have seemed close at hand.

If Nestorius agreed with the substance of Chalcedon, can we go further and claim that Nestorius was himself recalled to the council? Nestorius says nothing about such a possibility, and the voluminous *acta* of

Chalcedon also make no reference at all to any summons. Almost without exception all modern scholars have rejected this possibility out of hand. Their argument is a sort of simple syllogism: Chalcedon was orthodox; Nestorius was a heretic; therefore Chalcedon could not have vindicated Nestorius. To countenance the reality of Nestorius' recall is to imagine Chalcedon as something other than it turned to be; to do this we must abandon any sense that the decisions of Chalcedon were part of a natural evolution in orthodoxy and the perfect *via media* between the heretical extremes of Nestorianism and Eutychianism. Chalcedon was rooted in the demands of the moment, and seen in light of these contemporary contingencies, not idealized historical hindsight, the recall of Nestorius indeed makes considerable sense. The evidence for his recall comes mostly from sources hostile to Chalcedon; as such they have been largely dismissed as fanciful and even deviant. Yet taken together they present a consistent and compelling picture of the elderly Nestorius' return from exile.

The accounts of John Rufus' *Plerophories* and Zachariah of Mitylene's *Ecclesiastical History*, written a little over 50 years after Chalcedon, both survive in Syriac and are the earliest sources that speak of Nestorius' recall by Marcian. First Rufus claims that his version of events derived directly from the now lost Ecclesiastical History of Timothy Aelurus, a miaphysite bishop who had been a contemporary of Nestorius during his exile in Egypt:

At this time, by the permission and will of God, it happened, because of our numerous sins, that our venerable emperor Theodosius died, a year after the Second Council of Ephesus. His

successor did not imitate his ardent zeal for the faith; and all the affairs of the Church were troubled and were contrary to the law against heretics (i.e. *CTh.* 16.5.66), which was brought by the venerable and notable Theodosius. From then up to the present those who fear God have been persecuted, and every blasphemous and rash tongue can in complete freedom speak against Christ. For, after Marcian was on the throne, he sent to Egypt a tribune of the guardsmen to recall Nestorius and a certain Dorotheus, who had been a bishop and had gone into exile with Nestorius out of his own volition. And as some people say, Dorotheus was very well known and much beloved by he who was then reigning. When the tribune had been sent, he arrived in the Thebaid—this is as far as most people know, because this fact was not made known publicly—he found Nestorius in the place named after Pan (i.e. Panopolis), a city of the Thebaid, under guard in a fort (*castrum*) and afflicted by a terrible illness. It happened that Nestorius had been captured by barbarians from the Oasis, where he had been exiled by the venerable emperor Theodosius, and that, in the city of Pan, he was sold by them [the barbarians] to the inhabitants. When the *comes* Andrew, who was then in the Thebaid, learned of this, while the emperor Theodosius was still living, he instructed him [Nestorius], after he had bought him back, to remain and to live in the fort and to do nothing and to say nothing rash. As soon as the envoy of the emperor [Marcian] found Nestorius sick in the city of Pan, as has already been said, with Dorotheus, he made known the orders that he had received and, on account

of the Egyptians, he announced to them by a sign that there was no trap in their recall. But Dorotheus asked the tribune to take into account the weakness of Nestorius, as his condition was deteriorating day by day; for his tongue was rotting and had gone out of his mouth, while the tribune was present there; his speech had become unclear and each day his tongue rotted and thus became more detached, so that he became an object of fright and horror, as the tribune attested afterwards to many. God was the author of that which we have told, for the [tribune] reported that he urged that tried drugs be brought from all the cities that were in the neighbourhood of Panopolis, but they were not able to remedy the illness. For it was God who had struck him down and who made known his terrible death to many through the report [of the tribune] and by means of [the call for] the medicines. After the death of Nestorius, Dorotheus buried him in a certain spot, while the tribune sent by the emperor was with him and, after this man's death, the tribune went back to go to the court.²¹

Zachariah's account survives in epitome and shows signs of compression by omitting some of the details found in Rufus:

This Marcian favoured the doctrine of Nestorius, and was well disposed towards him; and so he sent John the Tribune, to recall Nestorius from his place of banishment in Oasis; and to recall also Dorotheus, the bishop who was with him. And it happened while he was returning, that he set at naught the holy Virgin, the *Theotokos*, and said, "What is Mary? Why should she indeed be called the *Theotokos*?" And the righteous judgment

of God speedily overtook him (as he had been the case formerly with Arius, who blasphemed against the Son of God). Accordingly he fell from his mule, and the tongue of this Nestorius was cut off, and his mouth was eaten by worms, and he died on the roadway. And his companion Dorotheus died also. And the emperor, hearing of it, was greatly grieved; and he was thinking upon what had occurred, and he was in doubt as to what he should do.

However, written directions from Marcian the emperor were delivered by John the Tribune to Dioscorus and Juvenalis, calling upon them to meet in Council, and John also informed them of what had happened to Nestorius and to Dorotheus.

And when the bishops of every place, who were summoned, were preparing to meet at Nicea, Providence did not allow them; for the king issued a new order that the assembly should be convened to Chalcedon, so that Nicea might not be the meeting-place of rebels.

Then the Nestorian party earnestly urged and besought the king that Theodoret should be appointed the president of the Synod, and that, according to his word, every matter should be decided there.²²

According to both authors, Nestorius was accompanied in Egypt by a fellow exile, Dorotheus of Marcianopolis, who had been among his earliest supporters in Constantinople and exiled among the "14 Irreconcilables" in 434, those bishops who refused to re-enter into communion with John of Antioch once he accepted the deposition of Nestorius.²³ Following the death of Theodosius, according to Rufus and Zachariah, Marcian moved to recall Nestorius. Consis-

tent with the letter of Nestorius quoted in Evagrius, Zachariah states that the envoy of Marcian found Nestorius in a military fort (a *castrum*) in Panopolis. Unfortunately Nestorius, probably in his seventies by then, was gravely ill. The description of his illness in both authors may be a deliberate fiction to prove that he was suffering a God-sent punishment for heretics: his blasphemous tongue was being eaten away by worms. In both Zachariah and Rufus, despite the imperial recall, Nestorius was either too sick to make the trip back or, in the case of Rufus, fell from the back of his mule and died on the side of the road en route. Similar stories are found in two other miaphysite sources from Egypt in Coptic: the famed monk Shenute and a text purporting to be the exiled bishop Dioscorus' eulogy for his fellow Egyptian bishop Macarius.²⁴ Neither source adds significant or reliable detail.

A letter of the famous miaphysite bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug of the early 6th century adds yet further confirmation of these stories:

And this²⁵ came to pass at the end of Nestorius' life, as is said. And everything was written and sent to him while he was in exile: the act [drawn] before Flavian, and also the Letter of Leo. And had the judgment of the Lord not come quickly and taken him away before the council convened, he was summoned to come together with the other bishops. And I say these things not simply from hearsay, but because I learned them in truth from the one who was sent after him.²⁶

Philoxenus is clear that he had information about the recall of Nestorius from the unnamed official sent to summon him and that Nestorius had in his possession con-

ciliar *acta* and the *Tomus ad Flavianum*. This last claim is quite remarkable as it shows that either Philoxenus or his informant had access to a copy of the *Liber Heraclidis*. Philoxenus, like the other sources, reiterates that Nestorius died before he could reach the council.

Over a century after Zachariah and Rufus, the Nestorian bishop Barhadbesheba wrote an ecclesiastical history in which he gave a long biographical treatment of Nestorius. As best as can be determined, Barhadbesheba did not know of Zacharias' or Rufus' work, and had before him as a guide only Socrates *scholasticus*' *Ecclesiastical History* and a collection of Nestorius' own writings, which included his lost *Tragoedia*. Like the non-Chalcedonian Miaphysites, Barhadbesheba also claims that Nestorius was summoned to return by the emperor Marcian, but he differs in saying that he refused to leave his place of exile:

After the death of Theodosius the Younger, by whose weakness the illustrious one [Nestorius] had been deposed and so many ills have befallen the church, the victorious and faithful Marcian succeeded him and ordered that Nestorius be recalled immediately. His friends and high officials wrote him to let himself return; they sent to him a beast of burden and all that was necessary, and they informed him that the emperor had ordered an oecumenical council to take place. But Nestorius wrote back in response that he refused to return and said: "The solitude, in its desolation, delights me; the desert, with its flowers, pleases me, and interaction with the animals is agreeable to me. But I refused to enter into communion with those wicked men of the

present time.” The emperor ordered that he be conducted by force, but, when they had put him on a litter, he departed to Christ, his beloved, while fatigued and in haste. Cyril and John of Antioch had died before him, because they were involved in the deceits of the Sons of Syria and had boldly committed murder behind the door (2 Kings 3:37). When the patrician returned and recounted to the emperor the predictions and the demonstrations Nestorius had made, the emperor recalled immediately all the bishops who had been driven into exile with Nestorius. Nestorius remained for three years in Constantinople and four years in Antioch, when he had returned from Ephesus, and was in exile in Oasis for 18 years. All the years of his episcopate are 25 years.²⁷

Barhadbeshebbā's version of the recall is followed by the anonymous Syriac legend of Nestorius, which consequently has little independent value.²⁸

Barhadbeshebbā's depiction of Nestorius' refusal to leave Egypt and his preference for the solitude of the desert may explain the puzzling final sentence of the concluding prophecy in the *Liber Heraclidis*: “Rejoice for me, O desert, my beloved and my foster-parent and the home of my habitation, and my mother, the land of my exile, who even after my death will guard my body unto the resurrection by the will of God.” The final sentence of the prophecy in the *Liber* is eerily similar to the words of Nestorius reported by Barhadbeshebbā. If Barhadbeshebbā actually had before him a text of Nestorius that spoke of Marcian's offer to return and phrased Nestorius' refusal in just this way, then the redactor of

the *Liber* has deliberately suppressed the story of the recall, and indeed any mention of Chalcedon, but has retained Nestorius' poetic words as a sort of seal of authorship on the obviously falsified final prophecy. Why, if the editor of the *Liber Heraclidis* worked after the Council of Chalcedon, was not a mention of the recall inserted into the text of the *Liber* as evidence for his ultimate vindication? One suspects that the eventual condemnation of Nestorius at Chalcedon would have made his recall a sort of pitiful anticlimax to this strident work of self-defense. The redactor's silence about Chalcedon, when he knew full well about it, is made to fit with all the other reports that placed Nestorius' death before Chalcedon,

All of these anti-Chalcedonian sources, both Miaphysite and Nestorian, however consistent they may be, may seem to be only the fabrications of over-active imaginations. For the Miaphysites the story of Nestorius' recall only served to prove what they already believed of the council's dyophysite statements, that it was a “Nestorian council”, while for the supporters of Nestorius the stories of his death before the council at once proved that he was fundamentally orthodox, and served to explain why, if that were the case, he was not personally vindicated at Chalcedon. Yet there remains a final source to consider, the pro-Chalcedonian Evagrius who inadvertently provides decisive evidence in support of these stories that would otherwise be dismissed as anti-Chalcedonian propaganda.

When Evagrius wrote in the late sixth century, his main source for the years 450 and 451, apart from the *acta* of Chalcedon, of which he had a full text, was the Ecclesiastical History of Zachariah. Evagrius went out of his way to contest many of Zacha-

riah's statements, and in particular he sought to disprove the story of Nestorius' recall. His argument is less than convincing:

Zacharias the *rhetor* indeed, through bias (ἐμπαθῶς), says that even Nestorius was summoned from his exile. But the fact that Nestorius was consistently anathematized by the Synod demonstrates that this was not the case. This is also quite clearly revealed by Eustathius, the bishop of Beirut, writing in these words to a bishop John and to another John, an elder, concerning what had been transacted at the Synod: 'Those who sought the remains of Nestorius objected once again and shouted against the Synod, "Why are the saints anathematized?"' The result was that the emperor in anger instructed the guardsmen to drive them away.²⁹

The condemnation of Nestorius at Chalcedon, Evagrius thought, contradicted any order to recall him. But there was yet further evidence that Evagrius knew about aside from Zachariah that obviously troubled him. Evagrius adduced a letter of Eustathius of Beirut, who had been among the leaders of Second Ephesus and who complained that he had been forced to subscribe at Chalcedon, that purported to prove that Nestorius could not have been recalled.³⁰ Eustathius says that some bishops at Chalcedon asked for the return of Nestorius' remains, a request the emperor flatly refused. Since the emperor seems to have been present at the council, the incident must have occurred at the sixth session or later.

Although the *acta* of Chalcedon contain no such demands, we are still not justified in thinking that the apparent candor of the *acta* precludes their historicity. In the investigation held in 449 into the accuracy of the re-

coding of Eutyches' statements, the notary sent to speak with Eutyches, when confronted with the notes from individual bishops that differed from his own transcription, protested that even the best tachygraphists or "speed writers" could not record all the statements made:

John the notary said: "Your magnificence and the most God-beloved and holy synod know that, when someone is sent to go and convey a message to others, it is impossible to report back the exact words; not even any of the most reputed orators could do this, to convey and transmit to people the exact words of another person... I ask not to be required to repeat the exact words he used, since no one can do this, to transmit someone's words verbatim (αὐτολεξεῖ); but order the reading of what is written in my aide-memoire (ἐν τῷ ὑπομνηστικῷ)."³¹

The best that a scribe could do is take short-hand notes in his notebook and then later reconstruct the full statements according to his memory. The notary Aetius, at the same investigation, also stated that it was not uncommon at councils that when many bishops were shouting out, the statements of only one or two would be taken as the statement of the whole:

Aetius deacon and notary said: "It often happens at these most holy gatherings that one of the most God-beloved bishops present says something, and what one man says is recorded and counted as if everyone alike had said it. This is what has happened from time immemorial: for instance, one person speaks and we write, 'The holy council said...'"³²

It is easy to infer from what Aetius says that the statements of a few bishops could

easily be overlooked. This must apply *a fortiori* to Chalcedon, for unlike previous councils secretaries from the imperial consistory, not the secretaries of individual bishops, recorded the meetings.³³ It is quite conceivable that the notaries were instructed to exclude from their record the protestations about Nestorius that could prove embarrassing to the emperor, as Eustathius indicates that they were to Marcian.

A careful reader will realize that the upshot of Evagrius' quotation of Eustathius is not the definitive rebuttal of Zachariah that he had hoped for. Evagrius has *not* shown that Nestorius was not recalled, but only that Nestorius died before Chalcedon, precisely what all the sources, both Miaphysite and Nestorian, agree upon. If this is the best response that Evagrius can come up with, then one should seriously reconsider the stories of Nestorius' recall. To understand Nestorius' recall, though, we have to reconsider the aims of Chalcedon itself. Like modern historians, Evagrius sees Chalcedon only for what it was, a reality that attained even in antiquity the level of historical necessity. Evagrius sought to disparage Nestorius so as to entirely disassociate the work of the Council of Chalcedon from the deposed bishop; it was unthinkable that Nestorius should have been involved in the slightest with a council that produced such a definitive statement of christological orthodoxy. The argument for the recall of Nestorius assumes, by contrast, that Chalcedon was a contingent, not a necessary event and could consequently have turned out otherwise than it did. Once Chalcedon is looked at in this light, the stories in Rufus, Zacharias and Barhadbeshebbā assume a new historical reality, for these earlier writers can speak of Nestorius' exile and recall

unencumbered by Evagrius' need to justify Chalcedon.

When Marcian came to power in August 450 he had no ties to the family of Theodosius and little to justify his selection beyond the favour shown him by the barbarian generals Aspar and Zeno; indeed he was considered by the western Augustus, Valentinian III, nothing less than a usurper who should be removed at the first opportunity.³⁴ Marcian took as his consort the 52-year old sister of Theodosius to establish some sort of continuity with the Theodosian line. By so doing he committed himself to acquiescing to the demands of Pulcheria and pope Leo that he reverse the decisions of Second Ephesus. This entailed the rejection of Cyril's post-433 writings that asserted the sufficiency formulae "one incarnate nature" and "out of two natures", the rehabilitation of Antiochene dyophysites like Theodoret of Cyrillus, and the approval of Leo's *Tome* in the East. If all these conditions were met Leo and Pulcheria would intercede on Marcian's behalf with Valentinian to ensure his recognition in the West.

To produce the desired outcome Marcian conceived of a council to meet at Nicaea in September of 451 under the strict supervision not of bishops, but of imperial officials bound by his orders. But the council had to steer a very difficult, if not impossible course between the Scylla and Charybdis of the balkanized Eastern debate. On the one side were the large number of bishops satisfied with Cyril's "out of two natures" and "one incarnate nature". On the other were those who still tried to uphold the Peace of 433, the substance of which was an Antiochene statement of belief that posited the two natures of Christ after the incarnation. To the former, the latter were Nestori-

ans, and to latter, the former were Eutychians. There was no obvious common ground on which the two sides could meet without accusations of heresy from one or other of the sides.

From the evidence of the *Liber Heraclidis*, Nestorius fully endorsed the *Tome* of Leo and the “two natures” of the Peace of 433. Nestorius’ return would crown the accomplishment of the Council and finally put to rest the christological controversy that had begun in 428. It is to be imagined that Nestorius would enter the church and walking in the aisle between the assembled bishops and kneel before Marcian and Pulcheria at the head of the church, where he would ask their forgiveness for disrupting the peace of the church and give his unqualified assent to the *Tome* of Leo, the definition of faith where Christ was “in two natures”, Cyril’s *Second Letter to Nestorius* and to the title *Theotokos*. Once Nestorius recanted, Theodosius’ legislation against the “Simonians” would be abrogated and talk of “two natures” could not be legally condemned as in any way heretical. In this way, the dyophysite position of Chalcedon could not subsequently be discredited by accusations of Nestorianism. Instead, the decrees of Chalcedon would oppose a single heresy, that of Eutyches, which, unlike Nestorianism, had a clearly defined form, thanks to the efforts of Basil of Seleucia and the patrician Florentius at the Home Synod of Constantinople in 448, that is, the rejection of Christ being “in two natures” after the incarnation.³⁵ By showing that even a confirmed heretic could be drawn back to the true faith, Marcian would illustrate to all that the Council of Chalcedon had a compelling claim to the truth.³⁶

There was another likely pressure exerted on Marcian. It is not beyond the realm

of possibility that Nestorius’ friends, who had been in communication with him, were effectively blackmailing Marcian with Nestorius’ endorsement of the *Tome* as early as the fall of 450. If Marcian did not rehabilitate Nestorius at the council they would disclose that exiled bishop’s approbation of the *Tome*, a very embarrassing revelation for Marcian and Pulcheria when the political situation demanded they force it upon the unwilling bishops. Who these friends were is not hard to guess at. Ibas of Edessa and Irenaeus of Tyre were surely two. Theodoret of Cyrrhus may also have been involved.³⁷ Though the extant collections of his letters contain no letters to Nestorius after about 434, there are letter fragments of Theodoret to Nestorius in Syriac that seem to suggest continued contact between the two men.³⁸

To many it may seem impossible that a condemned heretic could ever be recalled to a council, but there is in fact a very clear precedent in the fourth century that is often overlooked. Constantine summoned a council to meet in Constantinople during the summer of 336, with the emperor present.³⁹ When Arius was questioned by Constantine, he found him orthodox and the emperor planned to force Alexander of Constantinople into communication with him. But before Arius could officially be readmitted into communion with the Catholic church, he collapsed and died in the most unpleasant of circumstances—on the toilet from an explosive bout of diarrhea—according to ecclesiastical historian Socrates (*HE* 1.38):

It was then Saturday, and ... going out of the imperial palace, attended by a crowd of Eusebian partisans like guards, he [Arius] paraded proudly through the midst of the city, attracting the notice of all the people. As he ap-

proached the place called Constantine's Forum, where the column of porphyry is erected, a terror arising from the remorse of conscience seized Arius, and with the terror a violent relaxation of the bowels: he therefore enquired whether there was a convenient place near, and being directed to the back of Constantine's Forum, he hastened thither. Soon after a faintness came over him, and together with the evacuations his bowels protruded, followed by a copious hemorrhage, and the descent of the smaller intestines: moreover portions of his spleen and liver were brought off in the effusion of blood, so that he almost immediately died. The scene of this catastrophe still is shown at Constantinople, as I have said, behind the shambles in the colonnade: and by persons going by pointing the finger at the place, there is a perpetual remembrance preserved of this extraordinary kind of death.

To his enemies, the Nicene Christians, this was a sign from God and an answer to their prayers, or at the very least proof that an enterprising opponent had managed to poison him before he could taint the church with his communion. Arius' inglorious death meant that not even his close supporters chose to push the issue of his rehabilitation after 336.⁴⁰ Yet Constantine is not commonly remembered as sympathetic to Arius; indeed, the devout in succeeding centuries would have recoiled at the thought.

The case of Arius bears a strong similarity to that of Nestorius, a parallel certainly not lost on opponents to Chalcedon like Zachariah in the passage quoted above. The death of the exiled bishop on the road from Egypt, and the stories circulating of his tongue rotting out of his mouth, must have struck many as a sure sign that this outspo-

ken heretic was not destined by God to return. With Nestorius' not physically present to recant, there was no other option than to anathematize Nestorius at Chalcedon. A posthumous rehabilitation would have been a very hard sell, and Nestorius' friends did not push the issue, beyond the shouts recorded by Eustathius, much as Arius' supporters melted away after his death.

When news of his death reached the capital, Marcian must have had to think fast to plan a new course for his council. It may well be that the delayed opening of the council and Marcian's own late arrival have much to do with his uncertainty over how to proceed. That Marcian was commanding an army in the field against the Huns in Thrace seems unlikely, when Attila was focused on the West. The eventual transfer of the council to Chalcedon, much closer to the capital, meant that Marcian could have even closer oversight of its controversial progress.

With Nestorius dead the architects of the council recast their strategy. The *Tome* of Leo and the dyophysite definition of faith would instead become the artificial *via media* between the heresies of Nestorianism and Eutychianism. This presentation of the issues, however, grossly misrepresented the *status quaestionis* in 451. For many in the East, if not the majority, the later work of Cyril enunciated the orthodoxy of the formulas "out of two natures" and "one incarnate nature"; any talk of "two natures" was by definition Nestorian. Thus to distinguish Chalcedon's "two natures" from Nestorianism rang false to such staunchly conservative cyrillians. It was imperative to disassociate the "two natures" of Chalcedon from what Nestorius had earlier taught and, for this reason, all formal references to his re-

call were suppressed. The evidence for this imperial order survived only in gossip circulating among Nestorius' friends and those near Panopolis, where Nestorius died. Only the pressure of the imperial commissioners, and doubtless a combination of threats, bribes and peer pressure not recorded in any formal records, permitted the Chalcedonian statement of belief to meet with approval by the assembled bishops. This was not the council Marcian had hoped for, as the vio-

lent and intractable opposition to it subsequently proved. Whether Chalcedon would have been more palatable with Nestorius present is doubtful, but the evidence, much of it preserved only in Syriac, is clear and consistent on the attempt to recall Nestorius. Rather than marginalize such sources as propaganda, it would behoove scholars of the fourth ecumenical council to regard them as preserving events otherwise unrecorded in the official *acta*.

NOTES

¹For the troubled reception of Chalcedon, see P.T.R. Gray, *The Defense of Chalcedon in the East (451–553)*, (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), pp. 17-43.

²For the so-called *definitio fidei*, in reality only an interpretation of the faith, see *Actio V* 34 ACO II.1.2, pp. 128-130. For a clear summary of the controversy, see now P.T.R. Gray, "The Legacy of Chalcedon. Christological Problems and their Significance," in M. Maas (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 215-22.

³See especially A. de Halleux, "Le Concile de Chalcédoine," *Revue des Sciences Religieuses* 67 (1993) 3-18.

⁴See Cyril's *Second Letter to Succensus* ACO I.1.6, pp. 151-157. While the ἕνωσις φυσικῆ of Cyril's *Third Letter to Nestorius* (ACO I.1.1, pp. 33-42, CPG 5317) implies one nature in retrospect, there is no evidence that Cyril himself understood it this way until after 433 when Acacius of Melitene and others alerted him to the dangers implicit in the "two natures" of the Antiochenes.

⁵For Nestorius' innovation within the tradition of Theodore, see R.C. Chestnut, "The Two Prosopa in Nestorius' *Bazaar of Heraclidis*," *JTS ns* 29 (1978) 392-409.

⁶*Coll. Vat.* 63 ACO I.1.2, p. 64.

⁷The classic defense of Nestorius is still M. Anastos, "Nestorius was orthodox," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 16 (1962) 119-40. For a sensitive treatment of Nestorius' condemnation and his doctrine, see A. de Halleux, "Nestorius. Histoire et doctrine," *Irenikon* 66 (1993) 38-51, 163-177; and *idem*, "Nestorius. History and Doctrine," in *First Non-official Consultation on Dialogue Within the Syriac Tradition* (Vienna: Pro Oriente, 1994), pp. 200-215.

⁸Cyril to John of Antioch, *Ep.* 39, *Coll. Vat.* 127, ACO I.1.4, pp. 15-20, CPG 5339.

⁹Cyril's *Third Letter to Nestorius* was not even known in the West until the sixth century. See N.M. Haring, "The Character and Range of Influence of St. Cyril of Alexandria on Latin Theology (430-1260)," *Medieval Studies* 12 (1950) 1-19, and E. Schwartz's remarks at ACO I.5(2), p. 236, and *praefatio* ACO I.5 III-V.

¹⁰*Liber Heraclidis* (text): Le Livre d'Heraclide de Damas, P. Bedjan ed., (Paris and Leipzig: O. Harrassowitz, 1910). English translation: G.R. Driver and L. Hodgson, *The bazaar of Heraclides*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925). French translation: F. Nau, *Le livre d'Heraclide de Damas*, (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1910). For the story of this text's discovery, see H. Chadwick, Review of Abramowski 1963, *JTS ns* 16 (1965) 214-216.

¹¹L. Abramowski, *Untersuchungen zum Liber Heraclidis des Nestorius*, CSCO 242, Subsidia 22 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1963).

¹²*CTh* 16.5.66.

¹³*Coll. Vat.* 110 ACO I.1.3, p. 67 and *Coll. Cas.* 277+278, ACO I.4, p. 203.

¹⁴*Coll. Vat.* 138, ACO I.1.4, p. 66.

¹⁵Evagrius *HE* 1.7. Text: The ecclesiastical history of Evagrius, J. Bidez and L. Parmentier eds., (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964), pp. 13-16. English translation: M. Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), pp. 20-25.

¹⁶*Liber Heraclidis*, Bedjan, 518-19, Driver and Hodgson, 378, and Nau, 330.

¹⁷*Liber Heraclidis*, Bedjan, 519, Driver and Hodgson, 379, and Nau, 331.

¹⁸*Liber Heraclidis*, Bedjan, 506, Driver and Hodgson, 369, and Nau, 322.

¹⁹*Liber Heraclidis*, Bedjan, 520, Driver and Hodgson, 378-79, Nau, 330-31. There is no internal reason whatsoever to believe this passage an interpolation.

²⁰*Liber Heraclidis*, Bedjan 452-3, Driver

and Hodgson, 330-31, Nau, 290-91.

²¹ John Rufus, *Plerophories* 36 (PO pp. 83-85). The translation is my own. For discussion of John Rufus and Zachariah (see *infra*) viz. Chalcedon, see now M. Whitby, "The Church Historians and Chalcedon," in G. Marasco ed., *Greek and Latin Historiography in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), pp. 447-93. P. Mouterde, "Le Concile de Chalcédoine d'après les historiens monophysites de langue syriaque," in A. Grillmeier and H. Bacht, *Das Konzil von Chalkedon: Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol II (Würzburg: Echter-Verlag, 1962, c1954.), pp. 581-602, despite its title, does not deal at all with the stories of Nestorius' recall.

²² Zachariah of Mitylene, *HE* 3.1, F.J. Hamilton and E.W. Brooks trans., *The Syriac Chronicle Known as That of Zachariah of Mitylene* (London: Methuen and co., 1899), p. 43.

²³ *Coll. Cas.* 279, ACO I.4, pp. 203-204. Dorotheus had pronounced an infamous anathema on all those who used the title *theotokos*. *Coll. Vat.* 144, ACO I.1.5, p.11: εἴ τις λέγει θεοτόκον εἶναι τὴν Μαρίαν, οὗτος ἀνάθεμα ἔστω. He was removed by Nestorius' successor, Maximian, shortly after his accession.

²⁴ Dioscorus, *A panegyric on Macarius, bishop of Tkôw*, D.W. Johnson ed. and trans., CSCO 415, *Script. Coptici* 41 (Louvain, Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1980), pp. 79-8. For the story in Shenute, see J.F. Bethune-Baker, "The Date of the Death of Nestorius: Shenute, Zacharias, Evagrius," *Journal of Theological Studies* ns. 9 (1908) 601-5.

²⁵ i.e. the dissemination of Leo's *Tome* in the East in 450.

²⁶ Philoxenus of Mabbug, *Letter to the Monks of Senun*, André de Halleux ed., CSCO 231, (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1963), p. 18. I thank Iuliana Vezure for bringing this passage, along with a translation of it, to my attention.

²⁷ Barhadbeshebbā, *HE* 30 (PO 9, 585-586). The translation is my own.

²⁸ M. Brière, "La Légende Syriaque de Nestorius," *Revue de l'orient chrétien* 15 (1910) 24-25.

²⁹ Evagrius *HE* 2.2, J. Bidez and L. Parmentier eds., *The ecclesiastical history of Evagrius*, p. 39. English translation: Whitby, *The Ecclesiastical History*, p. 62. For brief discussion of this passage, see P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus, the Church Historian* (Leuven: Spicilegium sacrum lovaniense, 1981), pp. 99-100. Allen, while making the point that Evagrius does not disprove the recall *per se*, errs in identifying Eustathius as a diophysite.

³⁰ According to Zachariah *HE* 3.1, (trans. Hamilton and Brooks, 47).

³¹ *Cognitio de Gestis contra Eutychem* 644 ACO II.1.2 p. 160. Translation: R. Price and M. Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon*, Vol. 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), pp. 242-43. For Evagrius and Zachariah, see Pauline Allen, "Zachariah Scholasticus and the *Historia Ecclesiastica* of Evagrius Scholasticus," *Journal of Theological Studies* 31 (1980) 471-88.

³² *Cognitio de Gestis contra Eutychem* 767 ACO II.1.2 p. 170 (trans. Price and Gaddis, vol. I, 257).

³³ For an important study of the identities of the imperial commissioners, see R. Delmaire, "Les dignitaires laïcs au concile de Chalcédoine: notes sur la hiérarchie et les préséances au milieu du V^e siècle," *Byzantion* 54 (1984) 141-75.

³⁴ R.W. Burgess, "The Accession of Marcian in the Light of Chalcedonian Apologetic and Monophysite polemic," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 86/87 (1993/1994) 47-68, and C. Zuckerman, "L'Empire d'Orient et les Huns; notes sur Priscus," *Travaux et Mémoires Byzantines* 12 (1994) 159-182.

³⁵ See G. Bevan and P.T.R. Gray, "The Trial of Eutyches: A New Interpretation," (forthcoming).

³⁶ The only modern historian to take seriously this scenario of recall was G.E.M. de Ste. Croix in "The Council of Chalcedon," in *Christian Persecution, Martyrdom, and Orthodoxy*, Michael Whitby and Joseph Streeter eds., (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 280-81. Ste. Croix, however, underplayed the role of secular pressures behind the council, and

by extension the recall (272) and instead saw it only as an expression of imperial fiat.

³⁷For Theodore's support of Chalcedon after 451, see P.T.R. Gray, "Theodoret on the 'One Hypostasis.' An Antiochene Reading of Chalcedon," *Studia Patristica* 15 (1984) 301-304.

³⁸F. Loofs ed., *Nestoriana* (Halle: M. Niemeyer, 1905), nos. 310, 226, 243 and 253. Translated in Driver and Hodgson, *The bazaar of*

Heracleides, pp. 382-83.

³⁹For the Council of Constantinople and the recall of Arius, see T.D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius: Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 137.

⁴⁰T.D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 241-42.