

THE ARIAN HERESY, ETHNIC DESIGNATIONS AND RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCE

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Abstract: *This article examines the ideological, rhetorical and theological construction of otherness in the context of the Arian crisis in the fourth and fifth centuries by focusing primarily on the analysis of the debates and conflicts stemming from it in Socrates Scholasticus' treatise Ecclesiastical History. In his historical narration and his assessment of important historical figures and events from the time period, Socrates Scholasticus not only emphasizes the inner divisions in the empire and the political, social and religious ramifications of Arianism that he witnesses. He emphasizes especially the period from the reign of Constantine to rule Theodosius I and he also focuses on the danger from without to the safety and integrity of the state and the church. In his accounts of the historical events affecting the empire and the church, Socrates Scholasticus highlights the image and self-definition of Roman identity vis a vis barbarian people groups, such as the Goths, and he draws a parallel between the enemies of Rome, who are both on the inside and on the outside of the territorial borders. While he identifies certain individuals from within Roman society as possessing barbarian characteristics, such as cruelty and inhumanity, and who are also adherents of the teaching of Arius, he also stresses the natural tendencies of the Gothic tribes not only to embody barbaric qualities but also to be staunch followers of Arianism. Socrates Scholasticus attempts to create a parallel between the proponents of the heretical teaching of Arius, which presents as a long-standing problem for the church in the fourth century and beyond, on the one hand, and the external threat of foreign groups and the physical danger of outside enemies of the Roman state, i.e., the Goths, who embrace and continue to propagate Arianism. The image of the "other" to Roman civic identity and Christian self-definition in his writings, therefore, is informed by his understanding of the role of the Arian Goths in destabilizing and directly causing the decline of the Roman empire, in addition to dividing and weakening the church and the Roman state. The image of the barbarian other, such as the Goths, and of the adherents of Arianism, whether on the inside or on the outside of the territories of the empire, coincide and merge in his treatise, as they come to represent the enemy to the peace of the Roman people, as well as the chief adversary of the orthodox formulation of Christianity and the unity of church.*

Keywords: *Arian heresy, Fathers of the Church, fourth century*

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The Arian controversy is one of the major theological debates that caused major division and opposition in the fourth century and affected the ecclesiastical structures of governance, as well as the political and social fabric of the Roman state for several centuries, as it reverberated and spread within and beyond the boundaries of the empire.¹ In addition to theological arguments and ecclesiological frameworks of debate and decision making, such as the convening of the church leaders in the context of local and ecumenical church councils, there was an important deployment of ethnic and religious designations. One such concept was the use of the term “barbarian” as the “other” vis-a-vis Roman civic identity and Christian religious self-definition in the context of the theological discussions and debates surrounding the church councils and the attempts for defining orthodoxy and heresy.² For the purpose of this analysis of the Arian debate and the construction of the barbarian other in both ethnic and religious terms, I will take into consideration the historical work of Socrates Scholasticus, rather than focus on the actual theological arguments and treatises, such as for instance the writings of Athanasius of Alexandria, who was one of the main figures intimately involved in the debates and discussions with Arius and his followers, as well as a chief contributor to the formulation of the Nicene creed and the definition of the formula of *homoousion* in support of the full divinity of Christ and equality of the Trinitarian God.³

Socrates of Constantinople, also known as Socrates Scholasticus, in his treatise Ecclesiastical History encompasses the history of the church in the fourth and fifth centuries (305 CE – 439 CE), with special attention to the period from the reign of Constantine to the rule of Theodosius I. In fact, he purports to continue the work of his predecessor Eusebius of Caesarea, whose treatise was also entitled Ecclesiastical History, but he attempts a more impartial analysis of events as he tries to separate the affairs of the state from the affairs of the church, as much as possible, at the same time when he notes the interplay between the two especially after the acceptance of Christianity as the newly established religion of the Roman state. For example, in chapter five of his treatise, he explains his approach to historiography, as follows:

¹ For analysis of the problem of the Arian controversy, see a variety of scholarly views presented in Gregg 1985. For in-depth analysis of the historical figure Arius and the influence of his teaching during and after his lifetime, see Williams 1987; Hanson 2005; Barnes, Michel and Williams 1993.

² For example, see a scholarly discussion from different viewpoints in Berndt & Steinacher 2014.

³ Athanasius’ polemical writings against his theological opponents include Orations Against the Arians, his treatises Letters to Serapion and On the Holy Spirit, his work entitled On the Incarnation, as well as his two-part work, Against the Heathen and The Incarnation of the Word of God.

“... having set out to write a church history we still intermingle with ecclesiastical matters, such an account of the wars which took place during the period under consideration, as could be duly authenticated. For this we have done for several reasons: first, in order to lay before our readers an exact statement of facts; but secondly, in order that the minds of the readers might not become satiated with the repetition of the contentious disputes of bishops, and their insidious designs against one another; but more especially that it might be made apparent, that whenever the affairs of the state were disturbed, those of the Church, as if by some vital sympathy, became disordered also. Indeed, whoever shall attentively examine the subject will find, that the mischiefs of the state, and the troubles of the church have been inseparably connected; for he will perceive that they have either arisen together, or immediately succeeded one another. Sometimes the affairs of the Church come first in order; then commotions in the state follow, and sometimes the reverse, so that I cannot believe this invariable interchange is merely fortuitous, but am persuaded that it proceeds from our iniquities.”⁴

Unlike Eusebius of Caesarea, Socrates Scholasticus does not attempt to write an hagiographical account of the early church and the Roman state under the rule of Christian emperors and instead he purports to maintain objective view and impartial assessment by pointing to the various errors of the influential leaders in the ecclesiastical organizations and the political structures of the state and he is at liberty to offer critical evaluation of the actions of bishops and emperors alike. One of the issues that he addresses in his treatise is the effect of Arius and the adherents of his teaching both within and outside the borders of the Roman state, as well as a number of other heretical teachings that affected the political life and the development of the church. It is specifically to the representation of Arius and his followers, usually described as Arians, that will be under consideration here in the context of the literary, religious and political construct of the “other” both vis-à-vis the Roman state and of the Church in this treatise. Although Socrates Scholasticus does mention a number of different historical figures and their heretical teachings that undermined the Nicene creed and disturbed the harmony of the church, according to him, it was especially the rise and the spread of the teaching of Arius that had the greatest impact both on the ecclesiastical and the secular structures in the fourth and fifth centuries and he pays special attention to it. While others arose and subsided quickly, Arianism presented a particular challenge as it continued to persist and to spread not only during the lifetime of Arius, but also continued to present many challenges long after the time of its origin.

Arius was a highly persuasive priest in Alexandria, Egypt, whose teaching had a very wide-spread and significant influence both during his lifetime and

⁴ Socr. *HE* VI.1. Translation of the original Greek text of Socrates Scholasticus’ *Ecclesiastical History* is based on the translation of A.C. Zenos (1987) in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 2.

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long after his death. In addition to stirring up theological debates and controversies in his native land of Egypt and coming into opposition with Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, his speculative arguments and his theological ideas reached far beyond and were an impetus for the convening of the first ecumenical council by emperor Constantine in 325 in the city of Nicaea, which led to the orthodox formulation of the creed of Nicaea. Due to various sympathies that emperor Constantine and his successors had, however, Arianism continued to exist and to influence the highest echelons of both the church and the state and to necessitate further theological debates and controversies in the eastern provinces, as well as in the western provinces.

Socrates Scholasticus presents in his *Ecclesiastical History*, which he offers as a continuation of Eusebius's work, a very similar profile of Arians as the "other" to *Romanitas* in two different contexts: namely, members of Roman society, who espouse heresy and cause inner divisions, and the inhabitants of outside territories, such as the Gothic tribes, who present an immediate threat to the peace and prosperity of the empire. While for the citizens of Rome it is individual characteristics and personal actions that are consistent with the image of the barbarian, such as cruelty and inhumanity, the tribes of the Goths were viewed as the "other" not only as embracing an antithetical version of Christianity, but also as savage inhabitants of the uncivilized world.⁵ In this sense, the Goths who come to accept Arianism posed a double threat to Roman society – not only to the unity of the Christian religion, which was essential to the integrity of the state, but also to the actual borders of the Roman empire. In this manner, they represented a formidable physical and a spiritual danger to the welfare of both the church and the state. Whereas Roman citizens, such as Arius and other clergy, were banished and sent into exile as a measure of punishment, the chieftains the Goths could not be dealt with in the same way.

For example, in book two of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Socrates Scholasticus describes the tenuous situation in the capital city of Constantinople on account of the different religious factions that were for and against the teaching of Arius. According to the description that he provides, the Arian clergy caused conflict, division and violence on the Roman population. He writes with respect to some of the clerics that they:

"... supported the Arian error, and were instigators of the most violent conflicts in the churches, one of which was connected with Macedonius at Constantinople. By this intestine war among the Christians, continuous seditions arose in that city, and many lives were sacrificed in consequence of these occurrences."⁶

⁵ For detailed analysis and presentation of the image of the barbarian in ancient Greek and Roman literature, see Dauge 1981.

⁶ Socr. *HE* II.12.

As a matter of fact, Socrates Scholasticus explains that the need for replacement of deceased clergy and the appointment of new ones led to the appeal of emperor Constantius, one of the sons of Constantine, to the military in order to cope with the situation. He explains the precarious situation caused by the followers of Arianism, as follows:

“Accordingly, he [Emperor Constantius] ordered his general Hermogenes, who had been dispatched to Thrace, to pass through Constantinople on his way, and expel Paul from the church. He, on arriving at Constantinople, threw the whole city into confusion, attempting to cast out the bishop; for sedition immediately arose from the people in their eagerness to defend the bishop. And when Hermogenes persisted in his efforts to drive out Paul by means of his military force, the people became exasperated as is usual in such cases; and making a desperate attack upon him, they set his house on fire, and after dragging through the city, they at last put him to death.”⁷

The assassination of the general Hermogenes by the population of Constantinople led to the return of emperor Constantius from Antioch to Constantinople in order for him to remove personally bishop Paul and to punish the citizens with a reduction of the distribution of wheat because of their cruel actions. In this particular instance, it is not only the role of specific leaders, such as Arius and other clergy, who embody characteristics which are usually associated with barbaric and uncivilized people, such as cruelty and inhumanity, but it is also the crowds of people, who are influenced by them as well. The description of the cruel actions of the city population given by Socrates Scholasticus does not only indicate a heated theological debate and a power struggle for the seat of the bishop, but in fact the real possibility of a civil war and the potential danger to the political and social *status quo*.

In addition to the acts of violence, such as the murder of the army general, committed by the mob in Constantinople, Socrates Scholasticus also comments on similar events in Alexandria and attempts to analyze the causes of such extreme behavior by attributing these especially to allegiance to a heresy and division along political and religious lines. He writes:

“God the Judge of all only knows the true causes of these disorders; but no one of any experience can be ignorant of the fact, that such fatal accidents are for the most part concomitants of the factious movements of the populace.”⁸

While the presentation of such extreme acts of violence in the cities of Alexandria and Constantinople is challenging because several Christian emperors showed favor toward the teachings of Arius and either protected openly or

⁷ Socr. *HE* II.13.

⁸ Socr. *HE* II.15.

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promoted visibly Arian bishops and priests. For instance, Socrates Scholasticus gives an account of the promotion of the Arian sympathizer Macedonius to the seat of a bishop with the help of the prefect and the intervention of the army. The historian describes the terrible outcome in this manner:

“As the prefect with Macedonius came near the church, an irrational panic seized the multitude and even the soldiers themselves; for as the assemblage was so numerous and no room to admit the passage of the prefect and Macedonius was found, the soldiers attempted to thrust aside the people by force. But the confined space into which they were crowded together rendering it impossible to recede, the soldiers imagined that resistance was offered, and that the populace intentionally stopped the passage; they accordingly began to use their naked swords, and to cut down those that stood in their way. It is affirmed that about 3150 persons were massacred on this occasion; of whom the greater part fell under the weapons of the soldiers, and the rest were crushed to death by the desperate efforts of the multitude to escape their violence.”⁹

The accounts of the different encounters and various conflicts between the Arian and the Nicene factions that Socrates Scholasticus provides make it clear that the very existence and spread of Arianism presented a real threat to the fabric of Roman society, not merely to the cohesion and unity of the church, as was demonstrated by followers of Arius, such as Macedonius and many others. The historian makes it evident that this threat concerned the highest echelons of Roman society, including the army and imperial palace, as well as everyday citizens and the population at large. As he remarks in book five of the *Ecclesiastical History*, one can observe easily that the church and the state were in a complex relationship of mutual inter-dependence and the condition of the one affected the other in drastic and important ways, as no one was rendered immune to the effects of heretical teachings and aberrant ideas that allegedly led to irrational behavior and violent actions both on part of individuals and on part of the city mob, which was easily swept.

In addition to the successors of Constantine, who were divided along their theological allegiance to Arianism and to Orthodoxy, Socrates Scholasticus highlights similar divisions among ruling emperors in the period following Jovian's death, when Valentinian and his brother Valens were proclaimed as co-emperors. Valens who was appointed to rule over the eastern part of the Empire was closely allied with the Arian party and favored Eudoxius as a leader of the church in Constantinople, while members of the Homoousion party were exiled, marginalized and persecuted¹⁰. In one of his accounts, he details the actions taken against the adherents of the Nicene creed in the following way:

⁹ Socr. *HE* II.16.

¹⁰ Socr. *HE* IV.

“The Emperor Valens, little affected by the calamities resulting from the famine, went to Antioch in Syria, and during his residence there cruelly persecuted such as would not embrace Arianism. For not content with ejecting out of almost all the churches of the East those who maintained the ‘homoousian’ opinion, he inflicted on them various punishments besides. He destroyed a greater number even than before, delivering them up to many different kinds of death, but especially drowning in the river.”¹¹

Here again one can see that the characterization of the adherents of Arianism, who are marked by cruelty and inhumanity, exhibited even towards other fellow Christians and fellow Roman citizens. In addition to describing Valens as someone who was undeterred in his attempts to convert and to suppress adherents of the Nicene creed, Socrates Scholasticus also associates the errant emperor with paganism and the worship of demons, rather than adherence to orthodox Christian belief and practice. In book four of the *Ecclesiastical History*, the author narrates an account of Valens’ inquiry regarding his successor in a pagan ritual of necromancy,¹² delineating him as a barbarian who follows dubious religious rituals. Due to the ambiguity of the oracle given by a pagan god or a demon, Socrates Scholasticus explains that the mind of the emperor was so darkened by the prophecy, that he proceeded to kill a number of individuals, who could be a potential threat to the throne. In addition to associating the emperor with heretical teachings and the use of force in eliminating followers of the Nicene creed, the historian draws a connection between pagan religious practices and the emperor’s paranoia and excessive use of violence in squashing possible contenders to the throne. The distinction between a barbarian and a Roman is blurred and eliminated in the presentation of Valens as someone who threatens his fellow citizens, as well as divides and negates the Christian religion.

Moreover, it is during the reign of Valens and immediately after the death of his brother Valentin that members of the Gothic tribes decide to form an alliance with the emperor and, as a result, they also come to embrace the Arian brand of Christianity.¹³ Due to the appeal of some of the Gothic tribes because of inner divisions amongst the Goths, according to the account of Socrates Scholasticus, emperor Valens takes the opportunity to support them militarily and to convert them to his preferred Arian form of Christianity.¹⁴ The historian comments on the events, as follows:

¹¹ Socr. *HE* IV.17.

¹² Cf. Socr. *HE* IV.19.

¹³ Socr. *HE* IV.33.

¹⁴ In Ferris’s definition of the “enemies of Rome” he devotes an entire chapter to the “enemies within” the realm of the Roman Empire, who represent the foreign tribes, such as Germanic, Gothic and others, who reside in the territory of the Roman state first as allies and then come to occupy it as foreign force by conquest and subjugation of the local population. See

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“Therefore, it is that so many of the Goths are even to the present time infected with the errors of Arianism, they having on the occasion preferred to become adherents to that heresy on the emperor’s account. Ulfilas, their bishop at that time, invented the Gothic letters, and translating the Sacred Scriptures into their own language, undertook to instruct these barbarians in the Divine oracles.”¹⁵

Socrates Scholasticus reflects on the fact that Valens determines to give parts of Thrace for inhabitation of the converted Goths, relying on their agreement for border control and military protection against any invasions.¹⁶ It is noteworthy that he also mentions Ulfilas, the first ordained bishop of the Goths, who had previously been taken as a captive from Cappadocia, who was able to translate the Bible from Greek into the Gothic language and, in this way, was enabled to facilitate the spread of Christianity among this people group. After a period of serving as a missionary among the Goths for several years, he returned to Roman territories during a time of persecutions. He most likely resided in Abritus, located to the south of the Danube river, where he was able to develop the script and to translate the Bible into Gothic language. In fact, Ulfilas was ordained as a bishop by Eusebius of Nicomedia, the same person, who had baptized emperor Constantine shortly before he died, and who was an Arian and had the full support of emperor Valens. It should be noted that Socrates Scholasticus refers to the Goths not only in a negative light in terms of their excessive cruelty and savagery even amongst themselves but he also portrays them in a positive light as having “simplicity of mind” and being ready to die on account of their faith, as many other Christian martyrs.¹⁷

However, according to the perceptive analysis of the historian, the military alliance between the Arian emperor Valens and the Gothic tribes allowing them free entry into Roman territory in parts of Thrace spelled the decline of the Empire, regardless of their willingness to accept Christianity and to be ready to give up their lives for the new religion. In spite of the demonstration of compassion, kindness and generosity on part of the Roman people to receive the Christianized Goths in their territory, Socrates Scholasticus describes their acts of destruction on the Thracian province leading to their eventual advance toward the capital city.¹⁸ He writes:

Ferris 2001, pp. 120–146.

¹⁵ Socr. *HE* IV.33.

¹⁶ Socrates Scholasticus writes in the *Ecclesiastical History*: “He therefore assigned them certain parts of Thrace for their habitation, deeming himself peculiarly fortunate in this matter: for he calculated that in future he should possess a ready and well-equipped army against all assailants; and hoped that the barbarians would be a more formidable guard to the frontiers of the empire even than the Romans themselves.” (*Ecclesiastical History* IV.34)

¹⁷ Socr. *HE* IV.33

¹⁸ For instance, in his examination of Eusebius’ work *Preparation of the Gospel*, Aaron John-

“The barbarians having been put into possession of Thrace, and securely enjoying that Roman province, were unable to bear their good fortune with moderation; but committing hostile aggressions upon their benefactors, devastated all Thrace and the adjacent countries”.¹⁹

In keeping with other ancient authors, Socrates Scholasticus ascribes specific characteristics to different people groups, that were viewed as barbarian, although some of them were eventually incorporated in the realm of the empire. When commenting on their predilections after their conversion to Arian Christianity, the historian dwells on their natural inclinations and essential characteristics as barbarians. It is clear that there is a definite characterization of different people groups and specific features that they embody both before and after their acceptance of Christianity, whether in its orthodox or heterodox formulation. For example, Socrates Scholasticus enumerates several groups in the eastern and the western provinces, as follows:

“Those who had pleasure in sin, encouraged by the license then granted them, took occasion from it to revel in every species of criminality. Now the Phrygians appear to be more temperate than other nations, and are seldom guilty of swearing. The Scythians, on the other hand, and the Thracians, are naturally of a very irritable disposition: while the inhabitants of the East are addicted to sensual pleasures. But the Paphlagonians and Phrygians are prone to neither of these vices; nor are the sports of the circus and theatrical exhibitions in much estimation among them even to the present day. And for this reason, it seems to me, these people, as well as others of the same character, so readily assented to the letters then written by Novatus. Fornication and adultery are regarded among them as the grossest enormities: and it is well known that there is no race of men on the face of the earth who more rigidly govern their passions in this respect than the Phrygians and Paphlagonians.”²⁰

It is evident that, on the one hand, Socrates tries to demonstrate the negative spiritual influences of heretical teachings, such as Arianism, on the fabric of Roman society and the church from the lowest to the highest ranks, from the crowds and the mobs to the emperors and the bishops. On the other hand, the historian emphasizes the important features of different people groups, such as the Thracians and the Scythians, as they define them and differentiate them from other ethnic groups. Given the double pre-determination presented in the Ecclesiastic History – first, their barbarian nature and essential characteristics of excess and cruelty and, secondly, their allegiance to Arianism, rather

son pays close attention to the arguments for constructing and representing ethnic identity and he emphasizes the importance of ethnic origin as well as *politeia* in terms of citizenship, civic norms, legal traditions, as well as religious beliefs and political institutions. See Johnson 2006, pp. 10–54.

¹⁹ Socr. *HE* IV.35

²⁰ Socr. *HE* IV.28.

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than the orthodox formulation of the Christian faith, it is easy to see how the Goths come to be identified as the arch enemies and as the main reason for the decline of the Roman empire in late antiquity, as well as the division and the weakening of the church as a whole. According to Socrates Scholasticus, the Goths had not only taken advantage of the act of beneficence on part of the Romans by moving into Thrace and inflicted acts of “hostile aggression”²¹ on the land and the population, but they also attempted to extend beyond the territory of Thrace and aspired to reach as far as Constantinople. The author of Ecclesiastical History points to the death of Valens, which according to him was much deserved on account of the unfortunate alignments of the emperor with the Arian party and with the Gothic tribes, as well as the eventual decline of the empire and the collapse of the western territories. Socrates Scholasticus narrates how the Goths not only “devastated all Thrace and the adjacent countries,”²² but also advanced toward the walls of the city of Constantinople, before they turned to the city of Rome. With regard to the immense threat posed by the Gothic tribes approaching the capital city in the east, he writes:

“... for the barbarians, who had already desolated Thrace, were now laying waste the very suburbs of Constantinople, there being no adequate force at hand to resist them. But when they undertook to make near approaches, even to the walls of the city, the people became exceedingly troubled, and began to murmur against the emperor; accusing him of having brought on the enemy there, and then indolently prolonging the struggle there, instead of at once marching out against the barbarians.”²³

Although Valens eventually realized the danger to the peace and security of the empire posed by the Goths, this realization comes too late and he is slain in a battle against them and is killed on the battlefield near the city of Adrianople in the province of Thrace. Socrates Scholasticus presents the death of the emperor as an act of justice and equity, however, not only for the destabilization and division of the church due to the emperor’s avid support and spread of Arianism, but also his alliance with savage barbarians, as the Goths, who brought further devastation and instability to the Roman population. Even after the defeat of Valens, the Goths attempt again to take the capital city and the historian specifies how “the barbarians again approached the very walls of Constantinople, and laid waste the suburbs on every side of it,”²⁴ before they are eventually pushed away from it. Following the death of Valens, the throne was succeeded by Gratian, who not only returned the orthodox clergy that had previously been exiled but also made efforts to strengthen the unity of the church

²¹ Socr. *HE* IV.35.

²² Socr. *HE* IV.35.

²³ Socr. *HE* IV.38.

²⁴ Socr. *HE* V.1.

and the integrity of the state as a result of the new policies. In addition, Gratian appointed as his co-emperor Theodosius and together they were able to not only promote the Nicene party both in the East and in the West, but also to succeed against the military threats of the Alemani and the Goths in the western provinces of the empire.

In spite of the fact that Gratian and Theodosius were able to successfully push away the Gothic tribes, the danger that they posed persisted after their reign. In book six of *Ecclesiastic History*, for example, Socrates Scholasticus narrates the attempted uprising organized by a Goth by the name of Gaïnas, who had obtained Roman citizenship via his successful service in the military. According to the account given by Socrates Scholasticus, Gaïnas tried to usurp sole power and caused a revolt with assistance of the Gothic troops. The historian describes the critical situation caused by the Gothic leader in this way:

“Gaïnas therefore immediately set out at the head of an immense number of the barbarous Goths, apparently on an expedition against Tribigildus, but with the real intention of establishing his own unjust domination. On reaching Phrygia he began to subvert everything. Consequently, the affairs of the Romans were immediately thrown into great consternation, not only on account of the vast barbarian force which Gaïnas had at his command, but also because the most fertile and opulent regions of the East were threatened with desolation.”²⁵

As can be evidenced both from the narration of the defeat of Valens by the Gothic tribes and the instigation caused by the Goth Gaïnas, the immediate military threat and the reality of death and destruction of the Roman population were undeniable. Once the borders of the Roman state were penetrated again by the Gothic tribes, the effects were lasting and far-reaching as they impacted different parts of the western territories of the empire.

Additionally, in book seven of the treatise, the historian describes in only a cursory manner the brutal invasion of the Gothic leader Alaric in Italy and Rome and the terrible destruction inflicted on the local population by the barbarian forces. Like Gaïnas, Alaric began as an ally of the Roman emperor and even had a long career in the ranks of the Roman army before he decided to retire and to garner following and support for himself. Alaric was not only declared to be a king of the Visigoths but also caused a tremendous loss and deep trauma to the population of the western provinces of the empire, as is evidenced in 410 during the sack of Rome. In the brief description of his actions, Socrates Scholasticus states:

“About this same time it happened that Rome was taken by the barbarians; for a certain Alaric, a barbarian who had been an ally of the Romans, and had served as an ally with the emperor Theodosius in the war against the usurper Eugenius, having on that account been honored with Roman dignities, was

²⁵ Socr. *HE* VI.6.

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unable to bear his good fortune. He did not choose to assume imperial authority, but retiring from Constantinople went into the Western parts, and arriving at Illyricum immediately laid waste the whole country. As he marched, however, the Thessalians opposed him at the mouths of the river Peneus, whence there is a pass over Mount Pindus to Nicopolis in Epirus; and coming to an engagement, the Thessalians killed about three thousand of his men. After this the barbarians that were with him destroying everything in their way, at last took Rome itself, which they pillaged, burning the greatest number of the magnificent structures and other admirable works of art it contained. The money and valuable articles they plundered and divided among themselves.²⁶

Unlike his contemporary Augustine, the bishop of Hippo, who composed a multi-volume work entitled *The City of God*, where he reflects on the events of the sack of Rome in 410 and the devastating effects that this event had for the western territories of the empire, Socrates Scholasticus is rather cursory and sparing in his descriptions of the actions of Alaric and his troops. However, it is clear that the profile of both Alaric and Gaïnas, as former members of the Roman military and as representatives of the Goths, as well as the tribes that they commanded and represented, are presented here as the main cause for the decline of the empire and the devastation of the city of Rome. As barbarians and as Arian Christians, the Goths and their leaders, according to Socrates Scholasticus, represent the “other” to the Roman citizens and to the adherents of the Nicene formulation of the creed of faith, which came to mark the identity of Roman Christians in the East and in the West. Although it took some time for Arianism to be driven out from the imperial courts and from the high echelons of the church, which was eventually accomplished by Theodosius, Arianism still continued to flourish among the Germanic and Gothic tribes for several more centuries. As barbarians – more specifically Goths – and as Arians they represented the arch enemy of the Roman populace for the next few centuries, leading to further conflict, desolation and contestation of territory in the west. As in the pages of the *Ecclesiastical History* of Socrates Scholasticus, so too in the pages of Augustine’s *City of God* and many other contemporary historical and theological writings from the period, the incursions of the western territories by Alaric at the end of the fourth and the beginning of the fifth century mark the steady decline of the Roman empire and the establishment of many new kingdoms on its territory. According to Socrates Scholasticus and his contemporaries, Alaric’s actions come to define the beginning of the end, not merely for the city of Rome and for the western territories of the empire, but also the inner fragmentation of Roman society and religion in the late antique period.

The construction of identity in the fourth and fifth centuries in Christianized Rome is a complex issue that entails not only the religious debates sur-

²⁶ Socr. *HE* VII.10.

rounding the definition of orthodoxy and heterodoxy but also the gradual incorporation of foreigners in the military structures and in the civic life of late antique society. The contestation of the concept of *Romanitas* or who can be considered to be properly Roman involves the dynamic discussions and developing definitions of Christianity, as well as the actual ethnic composition of the military and of the citizenry. As can be seen in Socrates Scholasticus' writings, the articulation of and the argumentation for Roman identity and Christian self-expression in the midst of many internal and external threats to the political and the spiritual dimensions of the concept of *Romanitas* allow him the opportunity to analyze and to criticize the images and reflections of self, as well as the perceptions and representations of the "other," as the barbarian foreigner, such as the Goths. His analysis of historical events and commentary on important historical figures and people groups demonstrates the complex interplay and mutual interdependence of the Roman population and its barbarian neighbors, as well as the immanent danger that the latter present. His critical reflections on the definitions of self and other, Roman and barbarian, orthodox and heterodox, are ultimately an attempt at self-understanding and self-determination in the midst of an increasingly uncertain world, full of many unknowns regarding the future of both the state and the church.

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