

Making Orthodoxies in the West: The Creed of Rimini and the Legitimation of Arianism Ralph Mathisen, Urbana-Champaign

Much past discussion of the relations between Romans and barbarians during Late Antiquity has focused on supposed religious incompatibilities, with an assumption that Roman Nicene beliefs and barbarian Arian beliefs created an insurmountable barrier between barbarians and Romans. In this view, barbarians are portrayed as manifesting a sort of “unified” Arian front, with there being a collective form of barbarian Arianism that manifested distinctly barbarian attributes and served to segregate barbarians from Romans.

In more recent scholarship, however, it often has been observed that there is strangely little conflict “on the ground” between Nicene Romans and Arian barbarians. Roman Nicenes and barbarian Arians, for example, quite happily socialized and attended each other’s church services. But what has not been noticed is that even imperial legislation, after a spate of anti-Arian legislation in the early and mid 380s, soft-pedals condemnations of Arians-qua-Arians, preferring to focus on Eunomians, hard-core Arians who believed that there was no similarity or likeness between the father and son. What has been lacking, however, has been an institutional explanation for this observed lack of either popular or governmental opposition to “Arians” after the mid-380s. The answer, it is suggested here, is to be sought in the fourth-century negotiations among purely Roman Nicenes and Arians (a term one uses advisedly, in the realization that the so-called “Arians” never called themselves that!), which concluded with the Creed of Rimini in 359, ratified at Constantinople in 360, which attempted to bring conflict among the different parties to an end by anathematizing the use of the contentious “ousios” terminology.

After the supposedly definitive condemnation of Arianism at the Council of Constantinople in 381, the Creed of Rimini was given a special exemption in a western law of 386 that stated, We grant a full right of gathering to those who believe according to those things that ... were decreed, to remain valid for eternity, at the Council of Rimini [and] indeed were confirmed at Constantinople.” It is argued here that the revalidation of the Creed of Rimini in 386 either by accident or design served to conciliate homoian Arian barbarians in the Roman army at that same time that Anomoian Arian Romans -- Eunomians -- continued to be ill-treated by the government. Even after the fall of the western Roman empire, Arian barbarian peoples continued to use the Council of Rimini as the touchstone of their faith, at a time when satisfying the requirements of the Roman legal system was no longer an issue.

In the Roman world, adherence to the Creed of Rimini was what had defined barbarian Arianism, and made barbarian Arianism legal under Roman law. No barbarian specifically attested as having been charged with Arianism or having claimed exemption from legal penalties on heretics by citing adherence to the Creed of Rimini. But the very existence of the law would have kept either of these two scenarios ever from happening. Individually, barbarian Arians were not vilified, praised, or otherwise noted for being Arian. This, of course, did not keep Nicene churchmen from denouncing Arian beliefs, but it may have helped to further the genteel, drawing room debates, in North Africa and in Roman, Burgundian, and Frankish Gaul, that characterized encounters between Nicene Roman clerics and their Arian counterparts. The legal tolerance of the Creed of Rimini would have prevented any prosecutions or persecutions of barbarian Arians, and provided a back door through which barbarian Arians would have found legal, social, and even religious acceptability in the Roman world. This, in turn, would have been one more factor that facilitated the relatively smooth integration of barbarians into Roman society, where a general lack of antipathies between those identifying themselves as Romans or barbarians, or Nicenes and Arians, meant that the transition from Roman to barbarian Europe was accomplished with surprisingly little disruption.

Bibliography

- T. D. Barnes, *Athanasius and Constantius. Theology and Politics in the Constantinian Empire* (London 1993).
- D. B. Capelle, *La lettre d'Auxence sur Ulfila*, *Revue Bénédictine* 34, 1922, 224-233.
- Y.-M. Duval, *La ‘manoeuvre frauduleuse’ de Rimini: A la recherche du Liber adversus Ursacium et Valentem, Hilaire et son temps* (Paris 1969) 51-103.
- M. Gwynn, *The Eusebians: The Polemic of Athanasius of Alexandria and the Constructiton of the Arian Controversy* (Oxford 2007).

- D. M. Gwynn, Archaeology and the 'Arian Controversy' in the Fourth Century, in: D. M. Gwynn □ S. Bangert (eds.), *Late Antique Archaeology* 5,1, Religious Diversity in Late Antiquity (Brill, forthcoming).
- R. P. C. Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Edinburgh 1988).
- P. Heather □ J. Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool 1991).
- K. K. Klein, Die Dissertatio Maximini als Quelle der Wulfilabiographie, *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 83, 1951/52, 239-271.
- M. Meslin, *Les Ariens d'Occident*, 355-430 (Paris 1967).
- R. W. Mathisen, Agrestius of Lugo, Eparchius Avitus, and a Curious Fifth-Century Statement of Faith, *JChrSt* 2 (1994) 71-102.
- R. W. Mathisen, Sigisvult the Patrician, Maximinus the Arian, and Political Strategems in the Western Roman Empire ca. 425-440, *Early Medieval Europe* 8 (1999) 173-196.
- J. C. Russell, *The Germanization of Early Medieval Christianity: A Sociohistorical Approach to Religious Transformation* (New York 1996).
- H. Sivan, The Making of an Arian Goth. Ulfila Reconsidered, *Revue bénédictine* 105, 1995, 280-292.
- H. Silvestre, A propos d'une recente edition de la 'Damnatio Arrii' de Rimini, *RHE* 68, 1973, 102 -104.
- M. Weedman, Hilary and the Homoiousians. Using New Categories to Map the Trinitarian Controversy, *Church History* 76, 3, 2007, 491-510.
- M. Wiles, Attitudes to Arius in the Arian Controversy, in: M. Barnes □ D.H. Williams (eds.), *Arianism after Arius. Essays in the Development of the Fourth-Century Trinitarian Conflicts* (Edinburgh 1993) 31-43.
- D. H. Williams, When did the Emperor Gratian Return the Basilica to the Pro-Nicenes in Milan?, *Studia Patristica* 24, 1993, 208-215.