Ulfila's Own Conversion

Hagith Sivan
University of Kansas

Ulfila the Goth (ca. 310–383) has gained fame as the Arian apostle to his people.[1] More accurately, he was responsible for the conversion of some Goths to semi-Arianism during the 340s.[2] Yet two distinct traditions exist regarding Ulfila's own religious formation. One is an Arianized version of his life in the reports of Philostorgius and Auxentius, which claims Ulfila as an Arian from birth. The other, a Nicene version gleaned from the works of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret, asserts that Ulfila "converted" from Nicene orthodoxy to Arianism sometime between 360 and 376. How compelling is either biography? If, moreover, Ulfila had remained loyal to Nicene doctrines until at least 360, to what had he converted the Goths in the 340s?

In this article I propose to locate the critical events of Ulfila's religious progression in the late 330s against the background of the diplomacy, court politics, and religious confrontations that followed the demise of Constantine.

[1]In this paper, I use the terms Nicene/orthodox(y) and Arian/Arianism in their widest possible senses to denote two basic dispositions toward the trinitarian question. I am, of course, aware of the differences between and inside each, but for the purpose of this paper, these umbrella terms should suffice. For a lengthy exploration of the subject, see Richard Patrick Crosland Hanson, *The Search for the Christian Doctrine of God: The Arian Controversy* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988).

[2]Edward Arthur Thompson, *The Visigoths in the Time of Ulfila* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1966), still provides the most readable introduction to the subject of both the bishop and Gothia. Among more recent contributions the lengthy introduction of Roger Gryson (*Scolies ariennes sur le Concile d'Aquilée* [SC 267; Paris: Cerf, 1980]) to Auxentius's *Vita Ulfilae* is invaluable.

HTR 89:4 (1996) 373–86

I shall endeavor to show that it was indeed an early "conversion" which shaped the course of the bishop's life and fixed his loyalty to a particular brand of Arianism. The treatment of Ulfila's "conversion" in the sources also provides an important test case for understanding the formation of Nicene and Arianized historiographical traditions in Late Antiquity.

The Nicene Biography of Ulfila

Nicene historians attributed Ulfila's change of heart to various causes, and they set it within various historical contexts. Although all three are primarily interested in the Gothic mass conversion to Arianism rather than in the beliefs of one individual, they provide invaluable insights into both the bishop and his nation.

Theodoret (ca. 393–466): Theodoret, whose evidence modern historians have largely ignored, introduces a mass Gothic conversion to Arianism into his description of a diplomatic exchange between Goths and Romans.[3] According to him, Eudoxius, the bishop of Constantinople (360–370) and an Arian, suggested to the emperor Valens (364–378), also an Arian, that converting the Goths to the imperial creed would go a long way toward bolstering the peace accord between the Goths and the empire. While the use of religion as a political tool in a peace process appeared reasonable, Valens and Eudoxius encountered unexpected resistance from the Gothic chieftains, who strenuously opposed both peace and conversion. They insisted on loyalty to the Nicene orthodoxy of their fathers, or so Theodoret assures his readers.[4]

At this point in his narrative, Theodoret presents Ulfila as the venerable bishop of the Goths.[5] Eudoxius meets with him and presents him with both an eloquent exposition of the Arian tenets and a generous bribe. These methods of persuasion find their mark, and as a result Ulfila prevails upon his Gothic flock (and presumably their chieftains) to convert from orthodoxy to Arianism under the false impression that no real doctrinal difference between the two positions existed. One might well be suspicious of Theodoret's reconstruction of events. That the Goths may not have fully discerned the more intricate theological differences between the Nicene and Arian camps is credible enough. It is, however, difficult to believe that they could have been completely oblivious to the basics of the theological dispute, especially if they had been orthodox originally, as Theodoret asserts.

[3]Theodoret *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.33.
[4]Ibid.
[5]Ibid.

Theodoret's grasp of basic chronology and of Ulfila's own history is also tenuous. He connects the Gothic mass conversion to the crossing of the Danube in 376, a turning point in Gothic history as contemporary sources amply illustrate.[6] He feels compelled, however, to resurrect Eudoxius for the occasion—the bishop had died in 370. Theodoret also chooses to emphasize the Goths' recent orthodox past to the neglect of their deeply-rooted paganism. Above all, Theodoret dates Ulfila's Arian mission among the Goths to the mid-370s instead of its traditional dating to the 340s and thus endows him with a Nicene affiliation prior to his conversion to Arianism.

Socrates (ca. 380–450): Socrates, another orthodox ecclesiastical historian, associates a Gothic mass conversion with internecine disputes between two pagan Gothic chieftains, Athanaric and Fritigern.[7] In this version, Fritigern defeated his rival Athanaric with imperial reinforcements, and subsequently embraced Arianism out of gratitude to the emperor. Here the chain of events clearly leads from Valens to Fritigern to the latter's Gothic followers. Ulfila plays a relatively minor role in this tale as a teaching missionary who undertook to instruct the Goths in their new faith. Ulfila apparently embarked on his missionary task among Fritigern's subjects with such zeal that he provoked Athanaric to initiate a persecution of the Arian Goths in his own domain. These events apparently transpired in the early 370s, before the Goths crossed the Danube in 376.

In his history, Socrates calls Ulfila "a bishop,"[8] and places him in Fritigern's camp as an intellectual apostle who tutored the Goths in both letters and Christianity (in its Arian guise, of course). In his description of the Council of Constantinople of 360, however, Socrates insists on Ulfila's roots in orthodoxy.[9] He asserts that Ulfila had been a Nicene from the very beginning of his career and had only subscribed to Arian tenets when he signed the canons of that council.

Sozomen (late fourth to midfifth century): Of the Nicene historians, Sozomen provides the fullest narrative, according Ulfila a pride of place.[10] He casts Ulfila as the chief of an important embassy that the Goths sent to

[6]Ammianus (*Res Gestae* 31.4–5) describes the crossing in graphic and dramatic details. Whether or not the conversion can be as accurately dated has been a subject of much modern controversy. For an excellent survey of both ancient and modern sources, see Zeev Rubin, "The Conversion of the Visigoths to Christianity," *Museum Helveticum* 38 (1981) 34–54.

[7]Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.33–34.

[8]Ibid.

[9]Ibid. 2.41.

[10]Sozomen *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.37.

Valens in 376 to ask for imperial permission to settle on Roman soil. This mission is well attested in contemporary secular sources, although none of them refers to a bishop as its sole leader or to Ulfila himself.[11] Once on Roman soil, the Goths succumbed to internal disputes, with the aforementioned Athanaric and Fritigern leading the fray. Like Socrates, Sozomen attributes to Fritigern a willing, if politically motivated, conversion to Arianism.[12]

Sozomen also appends to this story a lengthy coda in the form of a miniature biography of Ulfila.[13] Ulfila, hitherto a loyal Nicene, participated in the Council of Constantinople in 360, where he supported the Arians Eudoxius and Acacius without embracing their theological position. Although Sozomen's portrayal implausibly insists upon Ulfila's loyalty to Nicene orthodoxy despite his siding with two notable Arian leaders, it at least has the merit of linking the Goth with Eudoxius during the latter's lifetime. In order to account for Ulfila's ultimate conversion to Arianism, Sozomen reintroduces him to the capital, engages him in religious debates with Arian leaders, and involves him in a mysterious embassy that required access to imperial circles.[14] Ulfila, he claims, converted to Arianism as the only way to obtain the help of Arian leaders in furthering his urgent mission.

In spite of chronological discrepancies and factual inconsistencies, the three Nicene accounts agree on several features of Ulfila's career.[15] These include: (1) the bishop's Nicene leanings prior to his "conversion" to Arianism; (2) his possibly insincere conversion under political duress from orthodoxy to Arianism in 360 or thereabouts; (3) personal contacts with leading members of the Arian faction in Constantinople who were influential at court; and (4) a leading role in a mass Gothic conversion to Arianism

[11]Ammianus *Res Gestae* 31.4–5; Eunapius frag. 42 (Roger C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire* [2 vols.; Liverpool: Cairns, 1981–83]) are the most important. See Herwig Wolfram (*History of the Goths* [trans. T. J. Dunlap; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988] 423 n. 2) for a fuller list of ancient and modern sources.

[12]Sozomen *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.37.6–7.

[13]Ibid., 6.37.8–9.

[14]Ibid., 6.37.9; This embassy undoubtedly has no link with the one in 376 which sought land for the Goths within the empire. Sozomen not only clearly distinguishes between the two but makes the earlier one (in the 360s) the occasion for Ulfila's conversion.

[15]Euangelos Chrysos (*Τὸ Βυζάντιον καὶ οἱ Γόθοι* [Thessaloniki: Hetaireia Makedonikon, 1972] 113–14) ascribes the similarities between Socrates and Sozomen to the latter's borrowing from the former. But as Peter J. Heather ("The Crossing of the Danube and the Gothic Conversion," *GRBS* 27 [1986] 298) demonstrates, however, Sozomen used another source in addition. On the relationships among the three historians, see Glenn F. Chesnut, *The First Christian Histories: Eusebius, Socrates, Sozomen, Theodoret and Evagrius* (2d ed.; Macon, GA: Mercer Unviersity Press, 1986).

in the 370s. The Nicene histories, while suspect at various points, thus provide a fairly coherent picture of the missionary, a picture that deserves closer scrutiny.

The Arian Biography of Ulfila

The orthodox accounts of Ulfila's life run counter to the conventional scholarly wisdom.[16] The regnant scholarly life of Ulfila derives primarily from the testimony of the Arian Auxentius (second half of the fourth century), who produced a biography of his mentor, as well as from entries in the fragmentary fifth-century *Historica ecclesiastica* of Philostorgius (ca. 368–425), an Arian sympathizer. The modern consensus includes the following elements: Ulfila's birth in 311, consecration as bishop of the Goths by a leading Arian cleric between 337 and 341, and a mission to Gothia in the 340s.[17] These missionary endeavors ended abruptly after seven years, in the wake of persecutions of Gothic Christians. Ulfila and his disciples returned to Roman soil in the late 340s and subsequently settled in Moesia with the blessing of the (Arian) emperor Constantius II. The following decades of the bishop's life remain hazy, although apparently marked by his translation of the Bible into Gothic, and punctuated by attendance at church councils (most notably those of Constantinople in 360 and 383) and by involvement in religious disputes among Christian factions. Ulfila died in 383, not long after the Goths and the Romans signed a major peace agreement which ended seven years of hostilities.

Both Philostorgius and Auxentius imply that Ulfila had been an Arian from the inception of his career, if not from birth. They seem, moreover, to have extensive knowledge about the early stages of the bishop's ministry prior to the 360s, precisely the period about which the Nicene historians are silent. In fact, the surviving fragments of Philostorgius's work cover only the period from Ulfila's birth to his expulsion from Gothia in the late 340s. Auxentius narrates the same period but, omitting about thirty-five years between the return to the empire in the 340s and the 380s, he extends Ulfila's biography through his mentor's participation in the Council of Constantinople in 383 and then to his death. Above all, the two Arian accounts omit a personal conversion, as have all modern accounts.

How likely, one should ask, is the story of such a conversion? Its very inclusion in Nicene narratives credits its authenticity, since Ulfila's aban-

[16]See n. 2 above. See also Peter J. Heather and John Matthews, "The Life and Work of Ulfila," in idem, *The Goths in the Fourth Century* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991) 133–43.

[17]Auxentius's letter which contains the biography appears in the critical edition by Roger Gryson. An English translation appears in Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 146–47. Philostorgius *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.5.

donment of the orthodox camp for the Arian cause hardly enhanced the glory of the church to which the three Nicene writers belonged. On the other hand, the absence of a conversion story in the Arianized account of Philostorgius lends further credibility to the event, since it is precisely this sort of episode that Philostorgius' ultraorthodox editor, Photius, was likely to omit. Auxentius's own reticence is similarly explicable. He was constructing a biography of an ideal religious leader who had never deviated from his purpose and certainly had never changed his creed. As a result, Auxentius's Ulfila displays a staunch and single-minded adherence to one form of belief throughout his life.[18]

That Ulfila's upbringing was not Arian appears probable on various grounds. Philostorgius calls attention to the existence of Cappadocian Christians among the Goths since at least the end of the third century.[19] Their type of Christianity, although only gleaned from sparse evidence such as the activities of the midthird-century bishop of Caesarea, Firmilian, was of the nature of what later became "orthodoxy."[20] Ulfila would thus have received the rudiments of his religious education in a pre-Nicene version. The participation of one Theophilus, "bishop of the Goths" (τῶν Γότθων ἐπίσκοπος), in the Council of Nicaea[21] and his subscription to its creed indicate that the tenets of orthodox Christianity infiltrated Gothia as early as 325, when Ulfila was only fourteen years old.[22] If there is need to attach a label to Gothic Christianity prior to Ulfila's missionary activities in the 340s, "orthodox" would be considerably more accurate than "Arian."

A New Biography of Ulfila

With these considerations in mind, one must allow for the possibility of a personal conversion. The sources of the Nicene presentation of the bishop's life also deserve consideration. How, then, did the Nicene historians arrive at their version of Ulfila's conversion, and why did they date this critical

[18]*Semper credidi* ("I always believed") is the phrase that Auxentius uses to explicate Ulfila's credo (*Vita Ufilae* 63). One should note that Auxentius knew his hero only during the late phase of the latter's episcopal career.

[19]Philostorgius *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.5. Socrates (*Historia ecclesiastica* 1.18) claims that Constantine intended to send missionaries to the Goths after he signed a treaty with them in 332. It is unlikely, however, that Philostorgius invented both greater antiquity for Christianity in Gothia as well as Cappadocian connections. See also Hagith Sivan, "The Making of an Arian Goth: Ulfila Reconsidered," *Revue bénédictine* 105 (1995) 280–92.

[20]See Pierre Nautin, "Firmilian of Caesarea," *Encyclopedia of the Early Church* 1 (1992) 324.

[21]Although it is not entirely clear whether Theophilus represented the Danubian Goths or the Crimean Goths at Nicaea, his link with Ulfila points to the former.

[22]Socrates *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.41.

transformation to the 360s? A closer look at Sozomen's account is needed to gain an understanding of these issues.

In order to provide a precise context for Ulfila's conversion, Sozomen involves him in two diplomatic initiatives. In the first, the bishop heads a Gothic delegation dispatched in 376 to obtain imperial permission for the Goths to settle within the empire.[23] Negotiations took place somewhere along the Danubian *limes*, a fact that alone distinguishes it from the second embassy, which Sozomen clearly places in Constantinople. None of the surviving records of the 376 negotiations refers to Ulfila by name, although the success of the Gothic mission and the resultant treaty may have been partly owing to him.[24] One source, however, does acknowledge the presence of bishops among the Goths who migrated across the Danube in 376,[25] and another refers to a priest, a confidant of Fritigern, who conducted delicate negotiations with Valens on the eve of the battle of Adrianople in 378.[26] There is no evidence, however, that Ulfila either joined the crossing hordes or converted to a new creed at this time.

Although Ulfila's mission to Constantinople appears in Sozomen's narrative after the Danubian embassy, its place in the text is misleading. There is no doubt that the former event forms a digression. In fact, Sozomen reports two Ulfilian visits to the capital.[27] One brought him to the council of Constantinople in 360, while the other involved negotiations with the imperial court. The historian offers neither a date nor a reason for the second trip, but states that Ulfila needed the support of leading Arians in the capital in order to gain entry to courtiers useful to him. Sozomen also implicitly dates this episode to the early 360s and clearly connects the mission with Ulfila's own conversion to Arianism.

Sozomen's second embassy calls to mind a similar venture that Philostorgius includes in his narrative.[28] According to the latter, the young Ulfila participated in a diplomatic mission that an unnamed Gothic ruler sent to Constantinople during the reign of Constantine (306–337). Like Sozomen, Philostorgius does not disclose the purpose of this mission, but he does assert that hard on the heels of its appearance on Roman soil, Eusebius of

[23]Sozomen *Historia ecclesiastica* 6.37.5–6.

[24]Ammianus *Res Gestae* 31.2–4; Eunapius frag. 42; Wolfram, *History of the Goths*, 117–18. Heather, "Crossing of the Danube," 316–17.

[25]Eunapius (frag. 48.2) suspects that the Goths pretended to be Christians. He may have been wrong.

[26]See Ammianus *Res Gestae* 31.12.8 on the priest; but Ammianus's account is problematic. The priest appeared *cum aliis humilibus* ("with a few low class men"), an odd company for so critical and delicate a mission, and one hardly calculated to inspire Valens with confidence or a desire to cooperate. The Romans insisted on embassies worth their dignity.

[27]Sozomen *Historia ecclesiastica* 4.24.1–6.37.8; 6.37.9.

[28]Philostorgius *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.5.

Nicomedia, the leading Arian figure of the 330s and bishop of Constantinople between 338 and 341, consecrated Ulfila bishop. One obvious problem with this account is that it contradicts Auxentius's chronology which dates Ulfila's consecration to the early years of the reign of Constantius II.[29] Nor does Philostorgius account for the pivotal role that Eusebius of Nicomedia played in ecclesiastical politics even before his elevation to the see of Constantinople.

Modern scholarly efforts to reconcile the divergent chronologies of Ulfila's life include a proposal to reject the narrative of Auxentius in favor of that of Philostorgius.[30] In this reconstruction, Philostorgius depicts the Gothic delegation as reaching Constantinople in time for Constantine's *tricennalia* in 336. Ulfila was conveniently consecrated at the Council of Constantinople during this visit. Such a reconstruction, however, bristles with problems. To begin with, Ulfila's elevation to a bishopric need not have coincided with a church council.[31] There is, moreover, no evidence for a Gothic delegation to Constantine's *tricennalia*. While perhaps not decisive, the failure of Eusebius of Caesarea's lengthy panegyric on this imperial celebration to allude either to foreign delegations in general or to a Gothic one in particular is highly suggestive. Two further details undermine the credibility of the hypothesis of a Gothic embassy in 336 and Ulfila's consecration at that time. The pagan tribal leader who, according to Philostorgius, had commissioned the embassy to the empire was unlikely to have dispatched Ulfila among his delegates in order to facilitate his promotion to bishop. It is unclear, finally, how the consecrating bishop in 336 could have been Eusebius of Nicomedia, since he became patriarch of Constantinople only in 338.

Philostorgius's dating scheme, therefore, appears misguided. The fact that both he and Sozomen refer to an Ulfilian mission to the imperial court at Constantinople, however, is significant and has been overlooked hitherto. In spite of the chronological discrepancies between Philostorgius and Sozomen, both clearly echo the souvenirs of a single Constantinopolitan mission. When, then, could such an embassage have occurred, and what circumstances would have allowed one of its members to convert from the Nicene to the Arian camp and then receive a bishop's staff? To answer the first question, one must take a brief excursion into the history of Roman diplomacy during the fourth century.

[29]Auxentius, curiously, ignores Eusebius of Nicomedia, thus strengthening the impression that the historian was either surprisingly ignorant or highly selective regarding the facts of Ulfila's early career.

[30]Timothy David Barnes, "The Consecration of Ulfila," *JTS* 41 (1990) 541–45.

[31]Compare Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 142–43, who also disagree with Barnes.

The surviving evidence of diplomatic contacts between Goths and Romans indicates that dispatches of delegations were ordinarily a way of responding to an impending crisis or a change of government. On the eve of the battle of Adrianople in 378, for example, the Gothic chieftain Fritigern commissioned a clergyman as head of a delegation to the emperor Valens in an attempt to avert a major confrontation.[32] The death of an emperor also could provoke peoples on the outskirts of the empire to embark on diplomatic missions in order to stave off potential crises. According to Ammianus, the accession of Julian in 361 and the new emperor's warlike reputation led many neighbors of Rome to send embassies posthaste to confirm the peace and to offer fealty.[33]

It is precisely this type of situation that Philostorgius's Gothic mission evokes, and which, therefore, helps to date Ulfila's first Gothic mission to the year 337. Constantine's death in May of that year and the lack of clear arrangements for the imperial succession called into question the validity of previous agreements between Rome and its weaker neighbors. Just five years before his death, Constantine had signed a *foedus* with the Goths which entailed an exchange of hostages and presumably a commitment by the Goths to lend military aid upon demand.[34] The treaty now lay in the hands of his successor(s) who might elect to renege on it.

This is the most likely background for the appearance of a Gothic delegation in Constantinople. One of its delegates was a young polyglot named Ulfila, who knew Greek, Gothic, and Latin. His services would have proven useful in such turbulent times. More importantly, this scenario explains Philostorgius's reference to Constantine, rather than to one of his sons. In light of the confusion at court between May and September of 337, the identity of the new emperor was still unclear when the Gothic delegation reached the imperial capital. The presence of Constantius II in Constantinople soon after his father's death and the conspicuous role that he played in Constantine's state funeral must have helped to create the impression that he was his father's designated successor.[35] The Gothic delegation was perhaps only one of many foreign embassies attempting to gain access to the new ruler of the Roman world. The Goths needed some advantage in their

[32]Ammianus *Res Gestae* 31.12.8. This presbyter carried two letters from Fritigern to the emperor: one repeating the terms of the 376 *foedus* ("treaty") between the Roman government and the Goths, the other proposing a strategy for resisting anti-Roman groups. Ammianus states that the man was a close confidant of Fritigern. This claim echoes what all the Nicene ecclesiastical historians assert about the nature of the relationship between the Gothic chieftain and Ulfila. Was the ambassador possibly the venerable bishop himself?

[33]Ibid., 22.7.5.

[34]See Wolfram (*History of the Goths*, 61–63) for details of this arrangement.

[35]Eusebius *Vita Constantini* 70.

diplomatic gambit. That advantage came in the person of the Christian member of the embassy, Ulfila, who suddenly became a valuable tool in the political game to secure the imperial ear.

None of the sources, unfortunately, describes in detail how Ulfila gained entry to the circle of Eusebius of Nicomedia, a trusted confidant of Constantius II. Both Eusebius and Constantius were known Arians. The former probably enticed the young Goth with promises of Ulfila's rapid promotion within the church and of his own intervention on behalf of the Gothic embassy. The price that Ulfila's new *amicus* and patron exacted for his favors was conversion to the tenets of Arianism.[36]

A blend of politics and religion operated in this case on at least two levels. At the level of diplomatic negotiations, Constantius reaffirmed his father's policy of adherence to the treaty of 332. Besides a unique inscription, dating to 354, which bestows on Constantius II the title of *Gothicus maximus*,[37] there is no evidence of a Gothic victory by this emperor.[38] The Goths apparently also kept the peace and—even when menacing the provincials along the frontier—did not suffer from major retaliation until Valens led a Gothic expedition in 368.[39]

At the level of religious commitment, Ulfila exchanged the pro-Nicene creed of his youth for Eusebius's brand of Arianism and consequently gained an episcopal appointment as a reward. The willingness to "convert" for a specific gain is in itself a regular feature of the religious landscape of the period. Ulfila, however, not only experienced a personal conversion under the expert tutelage of Eusebius of Nicomedia, but also embarked on a missionary campaign among his own people beyond the Danube. The pre-

[36]Such tactics accord well with the tenor of politics at court during the years of Arian emperors. My reconstruction also can shed light on the prominence that the Nicene descriptions of Ulfila's conversion accord to Eudoxius. In their tale, Eudoxius apparently ensured that all recipients of the grain dole in the capital had to enter communion with the Arians unless they wished to forgo their rations. Not surprisingly, this collusion between church and court brought many new adherents to Arianism. William Telfer, "Paul of Constantinople," *HTR* 43 (1950) 40.

[37]*CIL* 3.3705 (*ILS* 732). See also Adelina Arnaldi, "I cognomina devictarum gentium dei successori di Constantino il grande," *Epigraphica* 39 (1977) 93–95.

[38]Unless, as seems unlikely, the persecution of Christians in Gothia was the result of hostilities with Rome. This assumption derives from an analysis of the *Passio Sancti Sabae*, which seems to record three waves of the persecution of Christians in Gothia, the first resulting in the expulsion of Ulfila. See Rubin, "Conversion of the Visigoths," 44. An inscription dated to 338–340 refers to the Gothic menace along the Danube and to fortifications erected for the security of the inhabitants (*CIL* 3.12483 [*ILS* 724]). A Gothic victory would need to have taken place between 338 and 354, if at all. See Arnaldi, "I cognomina devictarum," 95 n. 18.

[39]Ammianus *Res Gestae* 27.5, and at much greater length, Themistius *Ors.* 8 and 10 (both translated and discussed in Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 13–50).

cise date of his consecration is thus immaterial, since he might have lingered in Constantinople until Eusebius's death in 341.

Many of the transdanubian Goths whom Ulfila indoctrinated in the tenets of Arianism in the 340s probably already had been Christians and thus would have converted, like him, from orthodoxy to Arianism.[40] Whether or not Ulfila managed to extend his mission to the vast majority of his people, who were still pagans, remains unclear. His efforts may have led to his expulsion after only seven years in Gothia. When the bishop returned to Roman soil with his loyal followers, Constantius allowed them to settle in Moesia, where Ulfila apparently completed his translation of the Bible into Gothic. It must have been as a patron of the Arian Goths within the empire, moreover, that the emperor entered the pages of the Gothic calendar.[41] The calendar commemorates the anniversary of Constantius' death, a unique honor which places a Roman emperor in the company of martyrs and apostles.

If Ulfila's conversion was due to a complex combination of factors, so also was the reporting of this change in subsequent historiography. This event, clearly a critical stage in the bishop's theological development, came to feature prominently in Nicene histories. Did it, however, leave any traces in Gothic histories? How influential was Ulfila in Arianizing the Goths? Given the current state of the evidence, it is impossible to reconstruct with accuracy a Gothic version of their past, and especially of the beginnings of Christianity in their midst. The fourth-century *Passio Sancti Sabae* recounts persecutions of Christians in Gothia, probably in the early 370s, and its hero Sabas himself was evidently a Catholic and not an Arian.[42] The Gothic calendar, moreover, provides more information about Gothic martyrs of both Arian and Nicene persuasion, but neither the calendar nor the *Passio* speak of Ulfila's place within Gothic Christianity.

In the late sixth century, the Gothic (orthodox) historian Jordanes referred to Ulfila as the bishop of a group called *Gothi minores* ("Lesser Goths"), dwellers in Moesia whom the author knew to have been in his own time poor and peaceful people who were fond of drinking milk.[43] The passage in Jordanes unfortunately furnishes no clue as to the activities of

[40]It is a vexed question whether Ulfila was appointed as a bishop of the Christians in Gothia or as a bishop of the Goths in general. The former appears more plausible. For rival missions in Gothia, see Sivan, "Making of an Arian Goth," 287–88.

[41]For the text and an English translation, see Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 128–30.

[42]See Hippolyte Delehaye, "Saints de Thrace et de Mesie," *Analecta Bollandiana* 31 (1912) 216–21 for the text; Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 111–12 for translation; and Rubin, "Conversion of the Visigoths," 36–37 for discussion.

[43]Jordanes *Getica* 267.

Ulfila and his contemporaries. Jordanes's reticence may lend support to the Arian versions of Auxentius and Philostorgius, who also dissociate Ulfila from the main course of Gothic history. Odd as it may appear, the introduction of Arian Christianity to the Gothic masses by Ulfila in the 370s never entered the extant Gothic historiography.

The search for an explanation of Ulfila's prominence in later writings leads, then, to Arian-Roman traditions—back, that is, to Auxentius and Philostorgius. Neither was writing a Gothic history, but both sought to create an Arianized version of the history of the church. As representatives of an Arian school of historiography they cast the bishop as the pious shepherd of a large group of Goths who fled the persecution at home and came to the empire with the blessing of an Arian emperor (Constantius II). Auxentius probably knew about Ulfila's involvement in a Gothic mission in the 340s from the man himself. But any role that his hero may have played in later Gothic history bore no relevance to the biography which Auxentius reconstructed. Auxentius's successful portrayal of Ulfila as an Arian leader, meanwhile, probably inspired Philostorgius, who presumably had access to the circle of Auxentius, to assign the bishop a prominent role in his own account of the church in the fourth century. A Cappadocian himself, Philostorgius went so far as to ascribe a Cappadocian origin both to Christianity in Gothia and to Ulfila's ancestors. Above all, Philostorgius must have been as aware as the later Nicene historians were of the strength of Germanic Arianism in the early fifth century. Since this was a period of decline for Roman Arianism, he deliberately advanced Ulfila to a position of prominence as the outstanding exemplar of the earliest Gothic Arianism. Philostorgius probably also had access to a source containing information about Ulfila's first visit to Constantinople, his dealings with leading Arians in the capital, and his relationship to the Arian emperor Constantius II.

From the Arian sources, the elevated portrayal of Ulfila moved to the Orthodox historiography. The Nicene historians who, like Philostorgius, puzzled over fifth-century Gothic Arianism were aware of only one Gothic mass conversion in the fourth century. To account for the vibrancy of Gothic Arianism in their own time they, too, resorted to Ulfila. After all, how else could they explain the tenacious adherence of the Goths to Arianism half a century after the deaths of both Valens and Fritigern, the men who had engineered the Gothic conversion in the 370s? As a result, Nicene historiography created its own version of the history of Gothic Arianism.

To both Arian and Nicene ecclesiastical historians, the life of Ulfila thus offered a neat solution to two problems. For the former, he was an early protagonist of their creed who spread the word to a large number of Goths. For the latter, he provided a ready explanation for the tenacity of a creed vanishing from the center of the empire. In the Nicene version, the Goths

may have initially converted out of gratitude to Valens, but they were still Arians because of the enormous influence that Ulfila had exerted over them after his own conversion from orthodoxy to Arianism.

Conclusion

To summarize, Arianized Greek historiography appropriated Ulfila and elevated him to the rank of a national apostle. Nicene Greek historians did the same, at least partly in response to versions like Philostorgius's. On the other hand, the silence of the Latin church historians regarding Ulfila's role in the Arian formation of the Goths emphasizes the innovative role of the hellenophone historiography which cast Ulfila as the most important Gothic missionary and the fountainhead of Gothic Arianism. The earliest Nicene reference in the West to a mass Gothic conversion appears in the history of Orosius, written in the late 410s. Orosius claims that Valens sent "teachers of the Arian dogma" in response to a Gothic request to dispatch "bishops from whom they may learn the rules of the Christian faith."[44] The context of this passage implies that Orosius is thinking of a period just prior to the battle of Adrianople in 378. Like the Gothic sources, Orosius never refers to Ulfila or to his alleged role in the Christianization of the Goths in the 370s.

Ulfila first appears in the annals of Nicene-Greek ecclesiastical histories when they describe the notoriously pro-Arian Council of Constantinople of 360. The council, which favored the moderate Arians, was a plausible context in which to set the far-reaching conversion from orthodoxy to Arianism. Ulfila's involvement at Constantinople was significant enough to have left a mark on orthodox accounts of the council, as well as to obscure his earlier activities. His uncompromising commitment to Arianism from 360 until his death in 383 obliterated the memory of previous stages of his religious metamorphosis. Since the Arian accounts of Ulfila's life by Auxentius and Philostorgius preferred to focus on Ulfila's earlier life, the Nicene Greek historians had a free hand to construct a history which delayed Ulfila's acceptance of Arianism in order to make him the father of Gothic Arianism in the late fourth century.

The relative obscurity shrouding Ulfila's early decades is not surprising in view of the respectability of the semi-Arianism of such prominent leaders as Eusebius of Nicomedia and Eusebius of Caesarea. Only later, between the Councils of Constantinople of 360 and 383, did the Arian and Nicene sides harden into political and theological extremism. From the vantage point of the triumph of orthodoxy in the fifth century, a whole

[44]Orosius *Historia adversum paganos* 7.33.19. The translation is that of Rubin, "Conversion of the Visigoths," 50–51.

century after Ulfila's own conversion, both Arian and Nicene historians could rearrange the facts to suit their individual purposes. Such a rearrangement proved particularly convincing when it connected Ulfila with Eudoxius and Valens, respectively a controversial Arian figure and a powerful ruler famed for his energetic political machinations.

Taking their cue from the Nicene historiographical fiction about a belated conversion, modern scholars have regarded the Council of Constantinople as a turning point in Ulfila's own allegiance to Arian dogmas.[45] But whether or not he became an extreme Arian in 360, such a date obscures a far more critical transformation. Ulfila's initial conversion from orthodoxy to Eusebian (semi-)Arianism had already occurred by the late 330s. This early conversion, and not merely subsequent events in Gothia or the empire, explains both Ulfila's loyalty to Eusebian Arianism and the special treatment which Constantius II accorded him in the late 340s upon his flight to the empire. Without taking into account this early stage in Ulfila's career, all reconstructions of his activities lack a solid foundation.[46]

[45]See, for example, Heather and Matthews, *Goths in the Fourth Century*, 137–38; Gonzalez Fernandez, "Wulfila y el sinodo de Constantinople del ano 360," *Antiguedad y Cristianismo* 3 (1986) 47–51.

[46]I am grateful to the anonymous reader of *HTR* for useful criticism. My belated thanks go to Zeevic Rubin for introducing me to Ulfila, many, many years ago.