NESTORIUS AND THE POLITICAL FACTIONS OF FIFTH-CENTURY BYZANTIUM: FACTORS IN HIS PERSONAL DOWNFALL

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When Nestorius was summoned to the Byzantine capital in the spring of 428 it was undoubtedly on the recommendation of his old friend the newly-elected Archbishop John of Antioch. The imperial agents had been sent to Syria to bring back a candidate for the vacant see; one who would be suitable for the prestigious post, but suitable largely for being otherwise unknown. The reason for this was the turmoil that already existed within the ecclesiastical factions of the capital, and the desire of the emperor's advisers for an outsider. Whoever it was that took that throne was destined from the outset to be courted by all interested parties, and run the risk of offending them all, even if (as seems to be the case with Nestorius) he adopted the policy of forging ahead independently.

After the death of the archbishop of Constantinople, Atticus, after a nineteen-year reign (406–25), politicking for the see had been vigorous. Then the emperor had chosen the mild-mannered Sisinnius who had been the people's candidate, and some of the ill feeling had been dissipated by Sisinnius’s consecration of one of the alternative contenders, Proclus, to a bishop's throne in Cyzicos. Unfortunately the people of that city refused to accept a hierarch imposed on them by the capital, and Proclus thus returned to Constantinople as a bishop, and remained an influential figure in the city's ecclesiastical and political affairs. When Sisinnius died after less than two years in office those internal ferment that had caused such strife in 426 began again with a vengeance. Proclus was undoubtedly urging his claims again, and indeed was to be successful in gaining the throne of Constantinople, but not until 434. Then he had a distinguished reign of twelve years, acting as an important mediator in the fraught Ephesine aftermath. In other words, when the Empire most needed a man of consummate

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2 Cf. Socrates, *Church history*, 7. 28.
3 27 February 426 to December 427.
political and theological acumen to restore the prestige of a throne that had been severely damaged in the events of Ephesus, one who could stand up to and mediate between Cyril and the Syrian bishops, it was Proclus who was chosen, and who fulfilled his task with skill. Why was he so unacceptable for the vacant see of 427? The answer to this may well lie in his political alignment, for Proclus was a favourite of the monastic party, and closely associated with the Augusta Pulcheria. In choosing the new archbishop, the emperor wanted a confidant who would be his own man. The task of distancing the emperor’s powerful sister, as well as weakening the monastic hold over the church politics of the city, was something that Theodosius undoubtedly wanted the new archbishop to instigate. This explains both the refusal of Proclus’s claims, as well as most aspects of Nestorius’s early actions in the first years of holding office. It also explains the emperor’s loyalty to him until his position was absolutely untenable in the aftermath of the council of 431. The sources that suggest Theodosius venerated Nestorius and even ‘sat at his feet’ like a disciple, such as Barhadbeshabba’s History of the Fathers., are clearly employing something of a topos but it is certainly one that recalls an accurate historical sense of the close relations between Nestorius and the emperor at the outset.

If Proclus can be seen as Pulcheria’s man, then Nestorius was with the emperor, and probably encouraged the weak character of Theodosius in his obvious attempts to free himself from the influence of his dominant sister. This initial alignment, though unavoidable, was probably Nestorius’s largest single mistake, for the aristocracy of the court knew her power well, and there were few, even of Theodosius’s closest confidants, who were prepared to be seen to cross her in any way. In his early days at court Nestorius must have been emboldened to his task by ignorance of the pre-history of the manner in which the dynasty had been stabilized by Pulcheria, and an ill-founded confidence in the support that the

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4 Proclus was associated with the famous recluse Dalmatius, who had already refused the Emperor’s invitation to assume office himself. It was hardly likely that he would have seriously considered the post, but his selection for the honour after forty-eight years of self-immurement in a cell in the city, perhaps indicates that the Emperor thought he might have been sympathetic to his desire to restrict the movements of monks, and their involvement in politics, something that Nestorius attempted to impose soon after. Nestorius gives an account of the electioneering for the vacant see in his Book of Heraclides (Nau’s translation, 241–3).

5 Theodosius II’s sister, who was Augusta in her own right, and had acted as regent during his minority.

6 Citations from this work are by chapter- and page-number in the edition by F. Nau in PO 9 (1913). This is a Syriac church history, defending the Church of the East and its authorities, including Diodore, Theodore and Nestorius (the latter in chs 21–30). The text comes from the end of the sixth century. Its writer knows Socrates’s Church history and also the Book of Heraclides. Its importance as a source lies in the fact that it also seems to know the lost ‘History’ composed by Nestorius, and possibly the lost ‘Tragedy’ of Count Irenaeus. Nestorius’s aristocratic friend and defender at Ephesus. Cf. F. Nau in PO 9. 500–1.
emperor would give him. He was like a trusting man leaning on a beckoning reed. It was only later that, 'He came to see how the emperor would bend in the direction of every wind that blew.'

Nestorius was consecrated bishop on 10 April 428, and parts of his initial sermon have survived. It can be taken as a policy statement for the incoming administration like the Queen’s Speech, and should be seen to be as much an indicator of Theodosius’s intent as that of Nestorius himself. His opponents have long seized on one of its most famous phrases to signify the extent of his supposed ‘arrogance’:

Emperor, give me your Kingdom purified of heretics, and I will give you in return the Kingdom of Heaven. Give me victory over the rebellious, and I will give you victory over the barbarian Persians.

But this would be a completely misinformed interpretation of this sermon, for Nestorius was here speaking rhetorically, in persona Dei, and outlining more of an official policy intent than a personal vendetta he intended to pursue against heretics. The aspects of that policy, which we shall consider shortly, demonstrate that it was not Nestorius’s arrogance that created unrest throughout his see, rather his inexperience and the inflexibility that characterized his judgements – undoubtedly an aspect of that inexperience.

The reforms in the realm of theology which he instituted, at first by means of his chaplain Anastasius whom he had brought with him in his entourage from Antioch, and subsequently by his own preaching and that of his episcopal friend Dorotheos of Marcianopolis, led to controversies on an international scale. These originated from the imposition of Antiochene christology on to the church of Constantinople, and grew to become one of Christianity's greatest theological disputes after the Arian crisis of the fourth century. That controversy still divides the churches of the Orient.

This paper will not seek to cover that ground, however, and will restrict itself to the events of Nestorius’s early administration, on the premise that his downfall had been orchestrated, almost in full, largely before the Council of Ephesus (431) ever opened. This study, therefore, seeks to ask why Nestorius had alienated so many people so quickly in his active period as archbishop of Byzantium (428–30).

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7 Barhadbeshabba, History, ch. 25, 555.
8 A hermeneutic first begun by Socrates and repeated by many commentators since.
9 Barhadbeshabba, History, ch. 20, 521; cf. Socrates, Church history, 7. 28–32; also Evagrius's Church history, 1. 7.
10 For a fuller account see J.A. McGuckin, St Cyril of Alexandria and the christological controversy (Leiden: Brill, 1994). For the history of Nestorius and his doctrine see 20–118.
11 For studies of the later stages of this controversy see the full bibliography in McGuckin, St Cyril of Alexandria.
The consecration sermon, of course, gives us the first clue. The Arians had been definitively proscribed as far back as the Council of Constantinople in 381. In the following decades Theodosius I progressively acted against them, permanently diminishing their significance as a vital force in the theology and politics of the Christian East.\textsuperscript{12} In the time of Gregory Nazianzen's arrival at Constantinople in 379, the Arians held every church in the city. Fifty years later, Nestorius knew that they held on by a fingernail, with merely a chapel of ease at their disposal, and clergy that came from barbarian lands to serve the needs of barbarian troops. Why, then, did Nestorius think it necessary to open his administration with a highly publicized move against the Arians, a move that must have been from the outset known to be more symbolic than realistic?

The recent murder of Bishop Antony of the Hellespont may have provoked his actions. Antony had been purging 'Macedonians', that is Arian sympathizers who rejected the doctrine of the Trinity, and two assassins from their party had subsequently murdered him. On the wider front, Nestorius's consecration speech demonstrates a general principle in the political theology of the Eastern Roman Empire, that fidelity to God's will was the ultimate aspect that secured its political stability. Chief among the required faithfulnesses of the new people of God, the Byzantines, was doctrinal purity, or orthodoxy of faith. What may seem to moderns a merely abstract matter of niceties of theology was, to the faithful of that period, a critical matter of military security. If God was displeased with the orthodoxy of the capital he might even allow his new kingdom to fall into the hands of punishing infidels, just as he had once purified Israel at the hands of the Assyrian 'wolf'. This fear was more than stimulated at the time of Nestorius's accession by the great inroads the barbarians had made: the immense pressure on the northern borders, the wars in Africa, and the necessary reliance on Gothic mercenaries for the security of the capital.

The great problem with this otherwise 'standard' policy of Nestorius to insist on the doctrinal purging of the last of the Arian elements at Constantinople, was that the Arian presence in the capital had taken on an entirely new significance with the presence of Gothic troops stationed there in considerable numbers, all of whom were ancestrally Arian in their faith. His decision to forbid them the use of any church at all was widely seen as an unnecessarily provocative measure. In fact this policy was symbolically allied with the radical party at the court who wished to

\textsuperscript{12} The same cannot be said of the West where, with the barbarian invasions of the fifth century, the churches of Italy and North Africa found themselves dealing with Arian overlords once again.
rid the capital of the foreign troops. Wiser counsels among the aristocracy were dismayed at the confrontational manner in which Nestorius, seemingly desiring an ‘innocent’ religious reform, had prodded a sleeping bear. From hearing of his plans in that first sermon a deep unease was felt among leading members of the nobility.\textsuperscript{13}

The emperor supported his demands that the clergy of the Arian chapel should be brought to acknowledge his jurisdiction. This was a reasonable compromise that might mean all or nothing, depending on the zeal of the bishop in question. Sisinnius had allowed the Arians to hold services without let or hindrance. The Arian congregation, however, sensed a new policy in operation, and when the Prefect’s soldiers appeared to enforce Nestorius’s demands, the congregation set fire to their own church rather than surrender it.\textsuperscript{14} The conflagration that resulted destroyed a whole area of Constantinopolitan houses, and Nestorius was widely blamed for a riot that could have had disastrous consequences if the Gothic Arian troops had joined in on the wrong side.\textsuperscript{15} The wits of Constantinople, always ready to prick the pretensions of their leaders, thereafter called him their ‘firebrand’ bishop, with a sardonic twist.\textsuperscript{16}

Despite the inauspicious start, Nestorius was determined to press ahead. He was possibly one of the drafters of the anti-heretical legislation that issued from the court at this period, demonstrating that he was fully in tune with the emperor’s policy, not pressing ahead on his own initiative.\textsuperscript{17} This determination to advance such a policy alarmed many of the aristocrats, doubtless those in key military positions, and alerted them to the dangers of having a zealot archbishop who could rouse the vacillating emperor to an unwanted decisiveness:

Nestorius would not cease from the struggle, and fought with them [the Arians] courageously, frustrating all their machinations and divesting them of power . . . . and so, for this reason, a great fear took hold not only of many of his clergy who suffered from this error,\textsuperscript{18} but even of some of the great ones of the Empire.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{13} Barhadbeshabba, \textit{History}, ch. 20, 521.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} ‘The fire spread to incinerate a great many houses. They blamed Nestorius for it’ (Barhadbeshabba, \textit{History}, ch. 20, 521).
\textsuperscript{16} Socrates, \textit{Church history}, 7. 28–9.
\textsuperscript{17} Cf. K.G. Holum, \textit{Theodosian empresses: women and imperial dominion in late Antiquity} (London : University of California, 1982), 150.
\textsuperscript{18} Barhadbeshabba is implying, inaccurately, that Nestorius’s clerical opponents in the capital were tarred with the Arian brush. In fact they were strongly Cyrilline in their christology, thus holding positions that Nestorius was to caricature as being logically synonymous with pro-Arian premisses.
\textsuperscript{19} Barhadbeshabba, \textit{History}, ch. 20, 522.
In his refusal to allow the rebuilding even of a small military chapel for the use of the Goth mercenaries he earned the hostility of many senior army officials. All this had occurred within the first week of his consecration.

In addition, Nestorius’s reforming zeal searched around for another highly visible symbol which could be easily and memorably effected. He was to find it soon enough, and its impact this time was on the lower masses of Byzantium. In this he again showed his political inexperience, for the Byzantine city factions were extremely volatile, and the court had good reason to fear them. Nestorius wished to make a statement about the immorality of many of the entertainments, and the substance of his edict, allowing for the exaggerations contained in Barhadsheshabba’s account of it, seems to have been a prohibition of nudity in the theatre, circus and stadium. Part of that nudity to which he objected, was undoubtedly what today would be referred to as ‘exotic dancers’, many of whom doubled as cheap prostitutes for the poorer classes. This kind of sexual transaction was an ancient ancillary part of Roman theatre life; indeed the practice of what used to go on regularly in the niches and archways (fornices) around the theatres and stadia gave a new word to the Roman Christian vocabulary: fornicatio. Barhadsheshabba retains the account of the events though in an overstated form:

He suppressed profane entertainments entirely at Constantinople, particularly the circus, an entertainment with chariots, and the impure theatre of the naked mummers where prostitutes performed in front of the crowd, and also the hunt, or combat with dangerous animals, and the racetrack where men competed against one another, and the Blues and Greens who were naked and spread pork fat all over their bodies.

The depiction of this as a total suppression is a topos of moral-reform rhetoric, but the key issue in the account is clearly the concern for public nudity, which Nestorius wanted to control. Barhadsheshabba’s account returns to this theme in a more specific narrative on how Nestorius was successful in banishing the associations of orchestai, the striptease dancers, from within the city limits:

He commanded that the dancers, that is those who wriggled up against one another in the nude, should leave, along with their organizers, and go outside the city.

22 ‘He put an end to all of this. In a word he suppressed every game invented by the demons’ (ibid.).
While the saint tried by imperial order to expel these dancers, they in turn sought by every conceivable means to stay put. But having fought for a long while, they were unsuccessful.23

The difficulty Nestorius had in making a success of this action perhaps demonstrates the greater problems he had in persuading any at court of the wisdom of a move against the popular factions and their entertainments.

When the dance troops finally left the city limits, wailing and lamenting, we have an interesting indication that although public resentment against the archbishop was felt, people did not dare to voice it, as long as he was seen to enjoy the emperor's confidence:

When people asked the dancers why they were in distress, and why they had to leave the city, they replied: 'It is because of Bishop Nestorius'. And when the name of Nestorius was mentioned, men kept silence. The Emperor Theodosius held him in high regard.24

Barhadbeshabba's claim for a wholesale suppression of the theatre as well as the races is simply incredible, and is not supported from other sources as a serious reform. It is credible, however, that Nestorius wished to make his presence felt in such circles, and chose to separate the sleazier aspects of theatre life from the main loci of the capital's places of entertainment. To this end he moved to close down the many strip clubs which were operating in lucrative sites and expel them to off-city limits. It is difficult to gauge the popular reaction to this, but one might deduce that it did little to endear the bishop to many among the masses who frequented the entertainments almost as the prime reason for their being. It may have some bearing on the popular anger that was directed against him later in his reign (430) when he so desperately needed a secure home front, when the sees of Alexandria and Rome had already condemned his teachings in their local synods and demanded his recantation. It was, for example, just such a popular demonstration of dislike that induced Theodosius finally to abandon his protegé in the aftermath of the double condemnations of Cyril and Nestorius emanating from the confused acts of the Council(s) of 431.25 The masses at the capital had then chanted slogans for three days and occupied important buildings in Constantinople, demanding the deposition of their unpopular

24 Ibid., 523.
25 See McGuckin, St Cyril of Alexandria, 98; Holum, Theodosian empresses, 170.
26 Sources in ACO, 1.1.3 (14). Ibas, in his Letter to Mari, also claimed that Nestorius was not allowed by the emperor to return to the capital from the council of Ephesus largely because 'He was hated by the city and the elite citizens.' The text is cited by Facundus (PL 67. 664).
bishop.26 It was a demonstration of the political will of the Demos that was part of the traditional fabric of city politics, and very dangerous for the court to ignore.27

Another of Nestorius's reform movements seems to have brought him into similar conflict with many powerful factions in the city, and this was his attempt to regularize monastic life in the capital. Monasticism came relatively late to Byzantium, but once it arrived it flourished there as nowhere else28 and developed in a peculiar way, in close proximity with the affairs of the city. From its inception one might almost say that it was a form of city-monasticism, where monks were closely involved, sometimes as secretaries and scribes, in the day-to-day affairs of the capital. Famous ascetics came and went, attracting enthusiastic followings. The monasteries were patronized by the nobility, and on several occasions the Augusta Pulcheria had shown herself to be an active patron and protector of the monks.

Before Nestorius came to Byzantium the relation between the monks and the bishops of the capital had been more than tense. Pulcheria had already intervened decisively to frustrate legal moves taken against leading monastics. In so doing she had greatly increased her own popularity, an outcome doubtless intended from the outset, albeit to the detriment of the standing of the archbishop of Constantinople; for in standing as the protector of ascetics she had successfully disarmed the potential danger to the dynasty of an unaligned source of popular power. Magistrates in the time of Nestorius were more than mindful of who had proved to be the greater power in this last conflict between the archbishop's palace and the royal Gynecaeum over the issue of monastic patronage and control. For this reason they were slow to support Nestorius, particularly when it became clear that Pulcheria's monastic clients, notable ascetics such as Dalmatius, Alexander and Hypatius, were one and all aligned in determined opposition to the new archbishop.

Shortly after his arrival Nestorius had tried to advance the difficult cause of bringing the ascetics under his canonical jurisdiction. Barḥadbashhabba tells the tale in terms of monastic decadence, monks who were carousing in taverns and frequenting women, but the general tenor of his narrative is clear and accurate enough, and allows us to see a wider issue at stake. Nestorius's real intent was to reduce monastic involvement in the affairs of the church and the city. The text reads as follows:

He saw monks wandering imprudently in public places, who were speaking and listening to speeches there, and receiving injury to themselves, who were falling into taverns, drinking indiscriminately with others, and who would even go to talk with women, and were thus a cause of scandal in the city and a reproach to those who were genuine monks. To stop this he ordered the Higoumens and their Bursars to go out themselves for any external business, and he forbade the other monks to go out unless they had a chaperone who could account for their good behaviour. He made arrangements for their food and necessary support. For this reason the whole body of monks fought against him, and called him an innovator and fomentor of discord. 29

By issuing rations to the monasteries he was probably trying to obviate the need for monks to earn their livings by secretarial services to the aristocracy, or from noble patronage. But this struck against established power relations, and was popular neither with the monks themselves, nor with their aristocratic patrons, not least one of the most famous of all those ‘women’ the monks were accused of talking with – the Augusta Pulcheria. Barhadbeshabba’s extraordinary conclusion: ‘The whole body of monks fought against him’, 30 is borne out by the evidence, even though the Syrian writer glosses over the doctrinal causes of conflict (since the monks were largely on the Cyrilline side 31) and attempts to reduce the causes of conflict to the standard topos of decadence in revolt against spiritual fervour.

One wandering ascetic and visionary then at Constantinople, the intemperate Basil, harangued Nestorius in his cathedral church while he was preaching. Nestorius had him beaten for his insubordination and arranged for his exile by the city magistrate Flavian. His designs were frustrated by other forces. The monophysite historian John Rufus 32 gives the account:

Basil was seized by that Thracian tyrant Flavian, who was then Prefect, and suffered much at his orders. He was beaten, covered with wounds, and in spite of public opinion was condemned to exile. When this sentence was proclaimed publicly in the city, the crowd carried him off to the church of St Euphemia, where he lived for a while praying and beseeching the Lord that he would not suffer the impious Nestorius to act much longer against the righteous. 33

29 Barhadbeshabba, History, ch. 21, 529.
30 Ibid.
31 Nestorius (Book of Heraclides, 2. 1 (Nau’s translation, pp. 255-6)) indicates they were also receiving substantial aid direct from Cyril in Egypt.
32 The Plerophoria of John Rufus are a collection of anti-Nestorian stories. They are heavily prejudiced against him, just as Barhadbeshabba is heavily in favour. The writer also introduces a large element of visionary and ecstatic material to demonstrate to his readers the signs of God’s disfavour of Nestorius. Nonetheless the substance of several of his accounts carries some weight of authenticity, because on several occasions in relating stories about Nestorius he cites the authority of Peter the Iberian who told these events to him in person. Peter was, at the time of Nestorius’s episcopate, a young aristocrat being educated at the court of Constantinople as a diplomatic hostage. Cf. Plerophoria, ch. 1 (eds R. Graffin and F. Nau in PO 8 (1912)), 11-12.
33 John Rufus, Plerophoria, ch. 35, 80.
Basil was to continue his agitations with impunity at St Euphemia's only because it was a site of refuge under the patronage and protection of Pulcheria, and Flavian knew, wisely enough, the limits of his power. Here was another instance where the Augusta harnessed buoyant popular feeling by her support of notable ascetics in the face of legal sanction. Later, it was the claim of Basil and his companion Thalassius that Nestorius had violently assaulted them which was elevated as the main legal basis for the monastic party's demand that a general council should consider the entire christological dispute along with the behaviour of Nestorius in his see. The incident with Basil had thus been blown up from the legal discipline of a wandering monk causing an affray in the cathedral, to a cause for the investigation of the archbishop's entire administration. Nestorius had already agreed with the emperor that a local synod might be the best manner of dealing with the growing crisis on the doctrinal front, but after he had secured the imperial agreement for such a synod (presumably under his own control at the capital) someone of immense influence had changed the venue and the entire import of the synod by relocating it to Ephesus. Ostensibly this was for reasons of ensuring sufficient food supplies, but in reality an ecclesial site less favourable to Nestorius could hardly be imagined. The influence of the Augusta must be suspected behind these momentous backstage manoeuvres. By alienating the city's monastic leaders Nestorius had fatally weakened his position when the storms of the christological crisis broke upon him in 430 onwards.

Yet another of Nestorius's early reforms that roused no small degree of hostility in the circles against which it was directed, was his attempt to restrict the involvement of Byzantine women in the affairs of the church. Barhadbeshabba gives the account, focusing on how Nestorius wished to rein in the activities of certain virgins (deaconesses, and dedicated virgins - Pulcheria among them) who had an active role liturgically and charitably in the Great Church at Constantinople:

There were certain virgins who were sometimes charged to organize a service in the church, and when they came to the vigil services it so happened that these virgins sinned a great deal during the meals, being promiscuous with men. It

34 PG. 91. 1471-80.
35 John Rufus, Plerophoria, ch. 35, 81; ACO 1. 5. 7-10; McGuckin, St Cyril of Alexandria, 32-3.
37 These involved memorial meals. The service was a social gathering as well as a church Synaxis, where leading women could exercise some influence in the liturgical as well as charitable arrangements of the church. The common meal in Byzantium was an important way in which noble patrons and patronesses could reinforce the bonds of social dependency among their clients.
seemed to Nestorius only prudent and useful to forbid them their vigils, and instead he instructed that they could be given church alms, to remove any pretext they might have for going to these vigils. This act exposed him to almost being stoned by these women (and those who enjoyed their company).

Barhadbeshabba's account, as it did with the monastic legislation, neglects the social realities in favour of drawing a lurid picture of moral decline. The key issue here was surely not promiscuity but the manner in which this legislation affected important liturgical, and above all, social rights for highly placed women in Byzantine society. The use of common meals was an extremely important element of Byzantine social cohesion and political influence. In attacking the basis of it, once again Nestorius's concerns had alienated an important body of influential women who looked to their chief patron, the highest circle of the dedicated virgins of Constantinople: Pulcheria and her two royal sisters Arcadia and Marina. Nestorius's plans to distribute alms as a compensation only added insult to injury, for if the meals served to bond together the aristocratic women's circle of clients they were far more important as social events than merely the charitable distribution of food to the indigent, and to treat them as if they were no more than an excuse for 'handouts' caused both patron and client to lose face.

John Rufus preserves the account of how one very highly placed wife of a senator shouted out abuse of the archbishop from the ladies' galleries of the church when he was processing beneath. The details of the account serve to connect it with the affair of the meals and women's patronage which we have noticed earlier, and confirm the involvement of the highest rank of women aristocrats:

Bishop Peter [the Iberian] told us this story about the wife of Damarios the Praetorian Prefect. She was the venerable Elena, a holy woman, who gave out many alms, and loved Christ above all.

John goes on to describe how she had a vision of impending doom three years before Nestorius ever arrived, but that when he began to make his presence felt in the church she expressed her hostility openly:

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38 Instead of the meal.
39 Barhadbeshabba, *History*, ch. 21, 528.
40 Pulcheria's two ladies-in-waiting, Marcella and Droseria, were among the listed contacts of Cyril at court. They each received 50 lbs of gold for services rendered in representing the interests of Cyril's party in the Royal Gynecaeum. Text in Nau, *Livre d'Héraclide*, 368; see also Battifol in note 48 below.
41 John Rufus, *Plerophoria*, ch. 36, 81.
Elena never wanted to receive Nestorius into her house, though he presented himself on numerous occasions to pay her a visit. She would not accept the mysteries from his hands. . . . This Elena cried out from the upper galleries in a loud voice and cursed him saying: 'Be damned, you Antichrist'.

John Rufus relates that the incident of crying out against him took place on the same occasion as the monk Basil was haranguing the archbishop from the cathedral floor. Such highly connected women, making common cause with the monks for reasons of their own, were able to cause Nestorius much political damage, and surely financed much of the opposition against him.

Even so, it cannot be doubted that his greatest opponent was the Augusta Pulcheria. In her person the other forces of opposition, the monks and famous ascetics, the dedicated virgins, and the aristocratic women of the capital, all find their centre and point of focus. Nestorius, as we may deduce, had already crossed her path incidentally by his moves against monastic ascetics, by his arguably ill-advised hostility to the very idea of an Arian garrison church, and by his hostility to the liturgical pretensions of the Constantinople 'virgins' and the women's association with which they were involved. Almost as soon as he arrived, however, he had crossed Pulcheria face to face, in a most dramatic way, and one that earned her lasting hostility.

The account of this clash is contained in the Nestorian source the 'Letter to Cosmas'. Nestorius's own feelings about the hostility of the 'aggressive' Pulcheria can also be found in the *Book of Heraclides*. Some of the background of Pulcheria's earlier life will help to explain why she saw this seemingly trivial incident to be an attack on the very basis of her claims to continuing power and active influence at court. To safeguard the minority of Theodosius II, her brother, Pulcheria, on behalf of herself and her two royal sisters, had publicly declared their dedication to perpetual virginity. An altar testifying to this vow was prominent in Nestorius's cathedral. When Theodosius assumed the reign for himself her

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42 Ibid., 82.
43 For a fuller account see McGuckin, *St Cyril of Alexandria*, 24–6; Holum, *Theodosian empresses*, ch. 5.
44 §8 (ed. F. Nau in PO 13), 279; French translation also in Nau, *Livre d'Héraclide*, 361–2. L. Abramowski (*Untersuchungen zum Liber Heraclidis des Nestorius* (CSCO 242, Subsidia 22, 1963, pp. 15–20)) does not attribute much weight to the tradition, but still assigns to it the status of local Constantinopolitan gossip. Holum, *Theodosian empresses*, treats the source much more positively as an important indicator of events, which latter perspective I share.
45 'Again [,Cyril,] you had on your side an aggressive woman, a queen, a young virgin, who fought against me because I was not willing to acquiesce in her demands to describe as a spouse of Christ (a person) corrupted by men'. Nestorius adds, ruefully, that 'Here on earth she prevailed against me, but it shall not be so in front of the Judgement Seat of Christ' (Nau, *Livre d'Héraclide*, 1. 2, p. 89).
status as active regent ceased, and as female Basilissai had then no formal status in the Byzantine hierarchies of power, it was important for her to redefine her role. She continued to exert an immense influence over her brother, and over imperial policy. But whereas her brother’s basileia was legally defined, and exercised through his clear heading of the system of magistracies, military commands, and diplomatic patronage, her power was more diffused through the nexus of social bonds she had built up during her period as regent Augusta, and the great amount of personal wealth she continued to command. The whole fabric of this personal power rested on the important symbol of her freely chosen sacrifice of marriage which had stabilized the dynasty at that critical time, and thus her ‘dedicated virginity’ was more than a merely personal affair, it was the root and foundation of an almost sacral basileia. She was not likely to allow this symbolic power-base to be attacked with impunity.

She seems to have established the right to communicate alongside the emperor, within the sanctuary: a liturgical expression both of her dedicated status, and of her imperial rank. Nestorius was taken aback when he first encountered this practice, possibly at the very first state liturgy he conducted in the cathedral, and he refused to administer the sacrament to her under those terms. This mistake he was to compound even further.

He removed from an altar in the church a costly robe which Pulcheria had donated as its covering. This was certainly a rebuttal of her claim to have a special status as dedicated virgin. But it was a foolhardy move. In the first place, as an attack on her consecrated virginity it was an undermining of her sacral power that she could not tolerate if she was to retain her sphere of influences intact; but secondly it had other implications which were highly insulting. A virgin’s robe was a fitting gift for the Virgin’s Son, but the glittering dress of a good-time girl was hardly apposite. Nestorius may have meant no more than to express his disapproval of the kind of dedicated virginity Pulcheria was practising: presiding over a spectacular social calendar, and highly active in all the affairs of state, rather than living out his expectations of a retired and anonymous life in a convent. But it needed only a little elaboration in the alleys and markets of Constantinople for that rebuff to her virginal status to become a public slur on her chastity and her honour. On both counts, first in refusing her the right to communicate alongside the emperor, and thus signalling her inferior status, and secondly in deconstructing her theory of sacral virginity, Nestorius was loudly proclaiming himself as Theodosius’s man, not hers. If this was a deliberate policy on Nestorius’s part, to intrude himself between the weak emperor and the dominant sister from whom he longed to break free, then he underestimated her strength and the forces
which he had called down upon his head; and, like Chrysaphius who later did the same thing, he soon had cause to regret it.\footnote{Immediately on Theodosius’s death Pulcheria had Chrysaphius, who had intruded himself into the confidences of the Emperor to her detriment, impaled and decapitated as a public enemy. The Syriac Legend of Nestorius regards Pulcheria as the main agent behind Nestorius’s removal from the relative ease of his exile at Antioch to the severe penal colony of the Great Oasis. cf. Nau, \textit{Livre d’Héraclide}, xxv n. 1.}

When Nestorius first came to Constantinople as its bishop, it was largely because of his reputation as an unworldly ascetic and fine orator.\footnote{‘The sound of his voice was sweeter than the harp’ (Barthadbeshabba, \textit{History}, ch. 20, 518).} His political skills, as an administrator of a major church, were minimal, even if he had held some forms of ecclesiastical office in Antioch. When he found himself in the veritable ‘Byzantine’ intricacies of the church of Constantinople, with very different traditions in doctrine and church practice to those of his own Syria, his lack of political skills, and his evident determination to advance his Syrian entourage as his advisers, were soon to ensure his alienation from some of the most important factions in the city’s life. By moving against the Arian church he worried the leading military men who were more than aware how much depended on the good will of the Gothic Arian mercenaries. The household of Damarios, the praetorian prefect, would not even allow him to enter or be entertained under their roof. By attempting to reform the sleazier aspects of the theatrical life of the city we might expect that he did not earn the gratitude of a population so notoriously volatile as that in the capital. By moving against highly placed women in his liturgical reorganizations he offended important people. By attempting to restrict the movements and affairs of the monks, he roused a source of opposition within his very camp that he could not control and which became implacably opposed to all his intents. Finally, by identifying himself too trustingly as a client of Theodosius and no other, he alienated the Augusta Pulcheria whose enmity was enough to orchestrate his downfall by bringing several of these opposition factions together in harmony under her patronage.

When the doctrinal conflict between himself and Cyril of Alexandria came to a crisis point in the deadlocking of the council in the summer of 431, the fact that Cyril had an immensely strong personal power-base in his own church as well as in the monks of the capital, and many aristocrats whom he had sweetened with \textit{eulogiae},\footnote{Cf. P. Battifol. \textit{Les présents de S. Cyrille à la cour de Constantinople. Études de liturgie et d’archéologie chrétienne} (Paris: Plon, 1919); McGuckin, \textit{St Cyril of Alexandria}, 103.} counted greatly to his advantage. The fact that Nestorius had set almost everyone against him on the home front was the
deciding factor in Theodosius's reluctant decision to abandon his protégé and send him back to the monastery of Euprepios from whence he had come.

Nestorius had played into the hands of his enemies: the monks and the Byzantine aristocracy, chief among whom was the circle of the Augusta Pulcheria. Long before the council of Ephesus ever opened, his fate had largely been sealed and predetermined.