



MERSİN ÜNİVERSİTESİ KILIKIA ARKEOLOJİSİNİ ARAŞTIRMA MERKEZİ

MERSIN UNIVERSITY PUBLICATIONS OF THE RESEARCH CENTER OF CILICIAN ARCHAEOLOGY

KAAM  
YAYINLARI

OLBA  
XVII



**KAAM YAYINLARI**  
**OLBA**  
**XVII**

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ISSN 1301 7667

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(KAAM)  
YAYINLARI-XVII

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CILICIAN ARCHAEOLOGY  
(KAAM)-XVII

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JOURNAL 'OLBA'**

Olba is printed once a year in May. Deadline for sending papers is November of each year.

The Journal 'Olba', being published since 1998 by the 'Research Center of Cilician Archaeology' of the Mersin University (Turkey), includes original studies done on prehistory, protohistory, classical archaeology, classical philology (language and culture), ancient history, numismatics and Byzantine History of Art.

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## ACACIUS, 'TARSI EPISCOPUS': DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF ARIANISM

Erendiz ÖZBAYOĞLU\*

### ABSTRACT

Acacius's significance relates to the controversies between Arianism and monolithic church doctrine, and as a consequence, the ideas that developed during the 4th century that caused turmoil in the Eastern Church. After the condemnation of Arius's doctrine as heretical at the Nicaean Council in A.D. 325, orthodox opponents regarded many bishops as heretics; some were expelled, while others, called Homoians, formed the base of the episcopate. Acacius, was appointed as episcopus by Acacius Caesariensis in 360 (?), presumably up to 379 (?), after Silvanus of the Ecclesia Tarsensis Metropolis of Dioecesis Antiochena (Le Quien, 869 sqq.). He was cited and studied by Basilus, Epiphanius, Sozomenus, and Theodoretus, who were interested in the Churches' dealings with heretics. This paper analyzes the acts that played determinative roles in this interaction and focuses on the religious viewpoints that this aroused as well as the social and economic problems that the late Roman Empire faced in managing the Cilician territory.

**Keywords:** Acacius, Arius, Tarsus, *Homoios*, 'like', *Homiousios*, 'of like substance', *Anhomoios*, 'unlike'.

### ÖZET

#### Tarsus Episkoposu Akakios: Ariuşçu Belirtileri Ayırt Etmek

Akakios'un önemi onun, Arius'un (Yun. Areios) izleyicileriyle, bütüncü Kilise öğretisi izleyicileri arasındaki çekişmeler ve bunun sonucu IV. yüzyılda Doğu Kilisesi'nde en büyük karışıklıklara yol açan farklı düşüncelerle bağlantılı olmasındadır. İznik'te, 325 yılında toplanan konsilde, Areios öğretisinin sapkın olarak kınanmasının ardından ortodoks karşıtlar birçok episkoposu sapkın olarak nitelediler ve bunların bir bölümü görevlerinden uzaklaştırılırken bir bölümü de İsa'ya ilişkin *homoios*, 'benzer' öğretisini izleyerek episkoposluğun gücünü oluşturdular. Akakios, Silvanos'tan sonra -ve Diodoros'tan önce-, 360 (?) yılında, Kaisareia (Filistin) episkoposu Akakios tarafından, Antiocheia Dioikesis'i, Tarsus

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Metropolis Kilisesi episkoposu yapıldı –görevi, tahmin edildiği gibi 379 (?) yılına kadar sürmedi-; Theodoretos, Sozomenos, Epiphanius ve Basileios gibi kilise tarihi yazarlarının yaptıkları göndermelerde, bu kilise de sapkın mezhebin egemenliği altında gösterilir. Bildiride, bu etkileşimde belirleyici rolü olan eylemler araştırılarak, Roma İmparatorluğu'nun, geç bir dönemde, Kilikia'nın yönetimi sırasında karşı karşıya kaldığı toplumsal ve ekonomik sorunlar arasında ortaya çıkan dinsel bakış açısı saptanmaya çalışılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Akakios, Areios, Tarsus, *Homoios*, 'benzer', *Homoiousios*, 'özde ve tözde benzer', *Anhomoios*, 'farklı'.

When Acacius (Greek Akakios) became bishop of Tarsus in 360, the long period of various controversies which arose during the Arian movement in the early Church was coming to an end. Still, different subjects at different times continued to spread and to agitate the clergy, but not the laity, who remained orthodox.

Acacius became bishop after the destitution of Silvanus<sup>1</sup>, assigned by the Council of Constantinople (Istanbul), held in 360 and presided over by Acacius, bishop of Caesarea (in Palestine). The assignment of Acacius affirmed the triumph of the Homoians against the Homoiousians, two conflicting parties that, in the course of the transition of Arianism, represented the modified Arianists and anti-Arianist opponents respectively. Homoians, in regard to the persons in the Trinity, in fact maintained that Christ, the Son, is 'like' (*homoios*) to the Father. Homoousians, or semi-Arians, held that the Son is 'of like substance' (*homoiousios*) with the Father, therefore most of them remaining at heart orthodox, using the term *ousia*, 'substance' and rejecting half-way the test word of the Council of Nicaea (Greek Nikaia; now Iznik), in 325, where Arianism was condemned.

Acacius was consecrated bishop of Tarsus by his more active and dexterous name-sake Acacius, bishop of Caesarea, who was defined as an 'éminence grise'<sup>2</sup>: he was responsible for replacing Maximus with Cyril (Greek Kyrillos) to the see of Jerusalem; he managed to install to the see of Antioch (Greek Antiokheia; now Antakya) his friend Meletius; when Liberius was banished, he placed, in all probability, Felix to the see of Rome; when he presided over the Council of Constantinople, in 360, as Constantius' chief ecclesiastical adviser in the East<sup>3</sup>, many supporters

<sup>1</sup> Philostorgius, V,1; Simonetti 1975, 341.

<sup>2</sup> Hanson 1997, 580.

<sup>3</sup> Hanson 1997, 380.

of the Homoousian Theology were deposed, as Philostorgius relates<sup>4</sup>; in Nicomedia (Greek Nikomedeia; now Izmit) he replaced Cecropius with Onesimus; in Ancyra (Ankara), he installed Athenaius in place of Basil (Greek Basileios); in Antioch he expelled all the clergy that were against Aetius, Arianist and Eudoxius, the Anhomoian leader.

While Acacius, bishop of Tarsus, during his seemingly brief tenure, followed a non-interventionist policy and preferred not to involve himself in any dispute or quarrel between the followers of orthodoxy or any other schism or heresy, his name-sake Acacius, bishop of Caeserea, was very active, a symbol of the various currents of heresies, so that it is said of him that 'if he is not a pure weathercock, he tried to keep the ship of the Church afloat in difficult times'<sup>5</sup>.

When Acacius succeeded Eusebius to the see of Caeserea in 341 – where he remained in charge for twenty-five years until his death- he was strictly Arianist, and Arianism, according to recent research, tended to be minimized in regard to the figure of Arius (Greek Areios) and his theology as a source of a single opponent party, instead of being emphasized as an designation for all teachings, essentially in contrast with the Creed of Nicaea<sup>6</sup>.

The doctrinal controversy, is therefore not a single opposition initiated, ca. 318, by Arius, presbyter in Alexandria, where the traditional theology had had an adequate ambience.

Firstly Origen (ca. 185-254), who emphasized the difference between the full divinity of the Father and the lesser divinity of the Son, and expressed that if God is called Father he must be Father of a son, must have influenced Arius<sup>7</sup>; for instance, his doctrine that the Son is not 'from the *ousia* of the Father, for he is altogether alien (*alotrion*) from the Father, created, and only a Son by grace'<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, Arius' statement that Logos manifested itself in various *epinoiai*, 'aspects', affirms that he borrowed the term from Origen<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Philostorgius, V,1.

<sup>5</sup> Hanson 1997, 583.

<sup>6</sup> Williams 1990, sv. 'Arianism'.

<sup>7</sup> For names as possible predecessors of Arius see Hanson 1997, 60 sqq.

<sup>8</sup> Hanson 1997, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Hanson 1997, 23.

Secondly, in another branch of Alexandrian tradition, the Jewish Christian concept of God, ‘with absolute primordial unity’ where ‘the Father is purely one, *monas*, the word, the Logos, is ‘many-in-one’<sup>10</sup>, suggests that it may correctly represent Arius’ thought of God.

Thirdly, among Arius’ signs of contact with concurrent interests, the theology of the martyr Lucian (Greek Loukianos), who was also one of his teachers, may be traced in subordinatist doctrine, subordination of the Son to the Father or subordination of the Holy Spirit to both, that seems to have been one of his theological antecedents.

Finally, some main points at which the Platonist tradition at Alexandria, viz. Neoplatonism, which was a mix of Platonic language and cosmology, Aristotelian logic and Pythagorean numerology, may have helped him. It should be remembered that Plotinos (207-270), father of Neoplatonism, and Origen had the same teacher, Ammonion Sakkas.

Arius first gained support in Palestine and among the other disciples of Lucian, notably Eusebius of Nicomedia, not least from Eusebius of Caesarea (in Palestine), the predecessor of Acacius.

Acacius, strictly Arianist, two years later becoming bishop, participated in the Council of Serdica (now Sophia), held in 343, called by Constans and his brother Constantius, respectively emperor of the West, supporter of the Nicæan Creed, and emperor of the East, supporter of the Arianizing party. Although their aim was to close ‘the widening rift between East and West’ and ‘to settle the question of the faith’<sup>11</sup>, no mutual understanding was possible and some bishops of both parties were ejected from their sees, and Acacius was also deposed, though not executed.

In the doctrinal statement of the Council, the Western point of view brought out that ‘the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost have one *hypostasis*, which is termed essence (*ousia*) by the heretics’. As a result the object of a less controversial expression, supported by Eusebians gave rise to new factions: Acacius became the leader of the Arian party, ca. 355, of Homoians, insisting that the Son was similar to the Father, rejecting both *homoousion*, ‘consubstantial, of one substance’ and *homoiousion*, ‘of like substance’, as mentioned above.

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<sup>10</sup> Williams 1990, *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Socrates, EH,II,20.

Later, when Acacius attended, but not openly, the Council of Sirmium (now Mirtovitz) held in 357, he must have observed the contemporary requirements for a council famous for its doctrinal formula, called 'Blasphemy', including the teaching of the extreme Arian party, as a result, of a text of an Arian creed.

At the Council of Seleucia (Greek Seleukeia) –together with that of Ariminum (now Rimini)- in 359, held to settle the Arian controversy, bishops of the West and the East, summoned by Emperor Constantius, were in attendance, and were roughly divided into two opposing parties<sup>12</sup>, the Homoiousians, among them Silvanus, bishop of Tarsus and Sophronius of Pompeiopolis (the Cilician or perhaps the Paphlagonian town of the same name) and Homoians, under the leadership of, among others, Acacius. Although an unproductive council, Acacius on the fourth day presented his creed in which he rejected, in addition to *homoousion* and *homoiousion*, also the *anhomoion*; he was supported by Anhomoians –in modern times called Neo-Arians, who maintained that Christ, the Son, was radically *anhomoios*, 'unlike' the Father. Acacius, who was Homoian at that moment, intended that the Son was 'like' the Father only 'in will', not 'in substance', and his creed, with this view, may have been favored by the Emperor Constantius, who found it useful to hold immediately another council in 360 at Constantinople, presided over by Acacius where the decisions taken in Ariminum as revised at Nice (Greek Nika; near Havsa, to the south of Edirne) and that of Seleucia were consolidated, proscribing *ousia*, 'substance' and *hypostasis*, 'person', declaring the Son 'like the Father'. Many bishops, among them Silvanus of Tarsus, were deposed and exiled by this council.

Constantius died in 361 and after a brief reign of Julian the pagan (361-363), Homoousian Iovianus succeeded him and reigned only one year, up to 364.

Acacius and his followers, together with Meletius of Antioch and his followers, sent a letter to Jovian, written at the end of the Council held in Antioch, in 363, endorsing the *homoousion*: "...we submit to Your Reverence that we accept and hold to the creed of the holy Council of Nicaea which was assembled a long time ago. And when we mention the

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<sup>12</sup> Özyıldırım 2007, 125 sqq.

word in it which is agreed to by some, the *homoousion*, it has received a sound interpretation among the Fathers, signifying that the Son was born from the *ousia* of the Father and that he is like the Father in *ousia*"<sup>13</sup>.

Socrates rightly says that the followers of Acacius "were always inclined to join the party in power and they perceived that the Emperor at that time was in favour of the Nicaean Creed"<sup>14</sup>.

As proof of this statement, Acacius returned to Arianism under Valens (364-378), who was an opponent of the Nicaean Creed and a supporter of the Homoian party.

According to Theodoretus<sup>15</sup>, Emperor Valens was influenced by Empress Dominica to take the wrong way and become Arianist. Simonetti (390) on the other hand, observing that in the East the religious situation was much more complex than in the West, where Emperor Valentinian, with a Nicaean majority, had left the people free to their faith. In the East the Nicaean minority mixed with Arianists, Anhomoians, Homoousians, etc., forming a conflicting rivalry with tension more or less according to the region involved. Valens preferred to commit himself to a policy of enforcing theological uniformity.

The Emperor with his edict of 5 May 365 ordered the expulsion of bishops from their sees who had been earlier expelled by Constantius and returned from exile upon Julians' accession; the target of Valens was, over all, Homoiousians, victims of Constantius<sup>16</sup>.

Meanwhile Homoiousians were assembled in the Council of Lampsacus (Lapseki) in order to invalidate the decisions taken at Ariminum and Constantinople in 359 and 360, and opted for the Dedication Creed of Antioch, 341. The date of the council, according to Simonetti<sup>17</sup>, must be put between the transition of Valentinian from Constantinople, after his accession, in the spring of 364, and the return of Valens after accompanying his brother in the West, in the late summer/autumn of 364. On the other hand

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<sup>13</sup> Hanson 1997, 581.

<sup>14</sup> Socrates, EH,III,25.

<sup>15</sup> Theodoretus, HE,IV,12.

<sup>16</sup> Simonetti 1975, 395.

<sup>17</sup> Simonetti 1975, 395.



Hanson<sup>18</sup> says that the date cannot be later than 366 (death of Liberius, bishop of Rome) nor than earlier than the accession of Valens in 364.

One of the decisions of this council was to send a deputation of three bishops, Eustathius of Sebaste (Sivas), Silvanus of Tarsus and Theophilus of Castabala, to the West to meet Valentinian and Liberius, bishop of Rome, and ask for the stabilization of the Church. However, when they arrived, they were unable to meet the emperor, who was in Gaul, and met only Liberius. They expressed their hostility to Anomeans and their readiness to accept *homoousion*, being not different of signification 'like in respect of *ousia*', declared themselves of the Nicæan Creed.

When they returned to the East, the three bishops planned a council in Tarsus, but this did not prove possible because of a lack of agreement on *homoousion* among all Homousians and Valens, and they were persuaded by Eudoxius, now bishop of Constantinople, to prohibit it.

A later initiative came from the party of Macedonius of Constantinople, Eleusios of Cyzicus, Eustathius of Sebaste and Sophronius of Pompeiopolis. They affirmed the second Creed of Antioch, 341, often referred as the 'Dedication Creed', with 'its statement that the Son is the exact image of the *ousia* of the Father and with its firm adherence to three *hypostases*'<sup>19</sup>, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The question of the Holy Spirit, already continuing to agitate also those who had decided to adhere to *homoousion*, was in fact the ulterior motive of dissension that would attract more attention, beginning from 370<sup>20</sup>.

Acacius was deposed by the decision of the Council of Lampsacus in 365, and died in 365 or 366.

Le Quien<sup>21</sup> records that Acacius became bishop of Tarsus when 'Silvano destituto ab Arianorum Constantinopolitana synodo' and when 'Acacius Caesarensis qua maxima tunc auctoritate valebat, quum per Orientis Ecclesias episcopus haeresi suae addictos impune crearet, Tarsensi Acacium alterum praefecit' and 'sedem hanc eo forsan tempore occupabat

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<sup>18</sup> Hanson 1997, 763.

<sup>19</sup> Hanson 1997, 351.

<sup>20</sup> Simonetti 1975, 399.

<sup>21</sup> Le Quien 1740, 872.

adhuc quo Basilius magnus<sup>22</sup> epistola 203 et 204 ecclesiam hanc ab haereticis subactam dolebat’.

The two letters in question, written in 375, in which the ‘abominable blasphemy of the Arians’ is detested, which relate to the quotation of Le Quien “this see, perhaps, was still occupied by him, viz. Acacius, up to the period when Basil<sup>23</sup> was lamenting that this church, viz. The see of Tarsus, was thrust upon by heretics”, may indicate that in 375 Acacius was still, or again, bishop of Tarsus.

In an another letter of Basil of Caesarea (now Kayseri) addressed to Eusebius, bishop of Samosata (now Samsat) dated to the autumn of 369, he laments the difficulty in finding words to express his affliction and says “For us, Tarsus, even Tarsus, is no more...so great a city, so opportunity situated as to include within its borders Isaurians and Cilicians, Cappadocians and Syrians, should be given over to destruction as an incident of the madness of one or two men”<sup>24</sup>. Deferrari argues that the lamentation of Basil relates to the death of Silvanus, saying ‘Silvanus, metropolitan of Tarsus, had died, and through the neglect of bishops was succeeded by an Arian’ (ibid.). Another source asserts the probable date of the death as 371<sup>25</sup>, which must be immediately after the return from Rome, because the same Deferrari in his comment (Letter, CCXLV, n.1) dates its after 365 and the visit to Rome, where the delegation presented a confession of faith to Liberius, bishop of Rome.

In an another letter of Basil written in 371, to Athenaios, bishop of Alexandria, the text which reads “More over, it surely has not escaped the notice of your unsurpassed wisdom that this same course of action has already been pleasing to your correligionists in the West, as is evident from the letter which was brought to us by the blessed Silvanus”<sup>26</sup>, may imply that Silvanus was dead, if the word *makarios*, ‘blessed’, is to be understood in this sense.

From 371 to 379, the year when Diodorus became bishop, we have no notice about who was at the head of the see of Tarsus<sup>27</sup>. Another letter of

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<sup>22</sup> Basilius Magnus, epistola 203 et 204.

<sup>23</sup> Basil, letters 203 and 204.

<sup>24</sup> Basil, Letter, XXXIV.

<sup>25</sup> Dizionario Patristico, sv. ‘Tarso’.

<sup>26</sup> Basil, Letter, CXIV.

<sup>27</sup> Kaçar 2003, 120 sqq.

Basil<sup>28</sup> addressed to 'Cyriacus and his followers of Tarsus', written in 372, may indicate Cyriacus as bishop for this date. The letter mentioned above, written in 375<sup>29</sup>, seems to exclude this possibility, since the provinces of Cilicia and Galatia, are not even mentioned, because of their denomination by Arian heretics.

Diodorus, who was of anti-Arianist tendency, became bishop of Tarsus in 379, one year after the death of Emperor Valens at Hadrianopolis (Edirne) in 378. He was an active theologian, who wrote on philosophical topics, and one of the leading figures of the Council of Constantinople in 381, where Arianism was conclusively condemned.

Emperor Theodosius (379-395) accepted baptism one year after of his accession, and he commanded all 'to practice that religion which the divine Peter the Apostle transmitted to the Romans', of which belief is in the single Deity of the Father, the Son and the the Holy Spirit, 'under the concept of equal majesty and of the Holy Trinity'. Arianism was condemned by the Council of Constantinople in 381 and proscribed in 383 as a 'false and vicious doctrine', and was declared illegal<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Basil, Letter, CXIV.

<sup>29</sup> Basil, Letter, CCIV.

<sup>30</sup> *Codex Theodosianus*, XVI,1,2;5,11-12.

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