

Monsters in Mesopotamia: Edessa, Goths, and Roman Identity in *Euphemia and the Goth* and  
the *Julian Romance*

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## Dedication

For my grandfathers, Ronald Pugmire and Robert Barrus. Brilliant scientists and paragons of kindness, I will forever cherish their guidance and encouragement.

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## Abstract

The late antique Mediterranean world was a time of great changes. The historiography of the time period is often divided geographically and linguistically, with the Latin West focusing on decline and rupture and the Greek East focusing on continuity and transformation. This paper examines *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, two Syriac texts from Edessa, a city in northern Mesopotamia on the Roman eastern frontier. Even though Edessa was situated on the borderlands of the Roman empire, these two texts engage in Roman imperial ideology and discourse in the late fifth and sixth centuries to critique Roman leadership and assert their own Roman identity as a “Rome” of the eastern empire. Using borderlands and “monster” theory, I argue that these texts portray Edessa as the exemplary model of *Romanitas* through their commitment to Roman law, justice, and pure Christianity and piety. This Roman identity is constructed against “barbarian” Goths, “monsters” of Syriac literature, who are represented as the antithesis of Roman values. In a time when Edessa’s Roman identity was in question by the imperial core, “Gothic” figures could serve as powerful rhetorical tools to critique the failures in the Roman West and the perceived “corruption” of Roman identity. I conclude that Edessa’s viewpoint shows the interconnectedness of the late antique world, too often broken by the historiographical divide.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In Tacitus's *Germania*, he describes witnessing a civil war between German tribes and remarks: "Long may it last, I pray, and persist among the nations, this—if not love for us—at least hatred for each other: since now that the destinies of the Empire drive it on, Fortune can guarantee us nothing better than discord among our foes."<sup>1</sup> Here, Tacitus hints at the purpose of his writing. As Ellen O'Gorman points out, Tacitus does not lead the reader through Germany to create an ethnography of the German people; rather, "[t]he search through Germany [...] is a search for Rome and what are seen as Roman values."<sup>2</sup> Writing in the late first and early second century CE, Tacitus used the Germans as a literary tool to critique the state of the Roman empire itself which he argues had become corrupted by "eastern" morals and luxury.<sup>3</sup> The "Roman gaze" on Germany claims it as barbarous and inferior to Roman might and civilization, but Tacitus also points to the "precarious position of supremacy, from which it may at any point be toppled."<sup>4</sup> The discourse of barbarism Tacitus draws upon uses difference to highlight the perceived "otherness" present within the Roman empire.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 33.2, "*maneant, quaeso, duretque gentibus, si non amor nostril, at certe odium sui, quando urgentibus imperii fatis nihil iam praestere fortuna maius potest quam hostium discordiam.*" In M. Hutton and W. Peterson, trans., *Tacitus. Agricola. Germania. Dialogue on Oratory*, Loeb Classical Library 35, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 182-3.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen O'Gorman, "No Place Like Rome: Identity and Difference in the *Germania* of Tacitus," in Rhiannon Ash, ed., *Oxford Readings in Tacitus*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 95-118, here 114.

<sup>3</sup> O'Gorman, "No Place Like Rome," 112-3; see also Donald C. Earl, *The Moral and Political Tradition of Rome*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 19; and Erich S. Gruen, *Culture and National Identity in Republican Rome*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

<sup>4</sup> O'Gorman, "No Place Like Rome," 111.

<sup>5</sup> O'Gorman, "No Place Like Rome," 112; see also D.F. Kennedy, "'Augustan' and 'anti-Augustan': Reflections on Terms of Reference," in A. Powell, ed., *Roman Poetry and Propaganda in the Age of Augustus*, (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1992), 26-58, here 29; and Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 206.

Tacitus's anxieties of the precariousness of Rome's superiority became realized in the later Roman empire, or the age of late antiquity. The Roman capital moved east to Constantinople, the empire adopted an eastern religion, Christianity, as the official state religion, and the western provinces fell to "barbarian" armies who created their own kingdoms on Rome's primordial lands. As the empire's morale weakened with deposition of the last emperor of the Roman West in 476, doctrinal schisms, foreign invasions, plagues, increasing numbers of "barbarians" filling military and imperial positions, and costly campaigns of reconquest, Roman texts from the fifth and sixth centuries CE struggled with issues over Roman identity and the fate of the Roman empire. In this paper, I will focus on texts from the far eastern frontier of the Roman empire, produced in the city of Edessa in northern Mesopotamia. Because Edessa was situated on the eastern borderlands, was incorporated into the empire rather late, in the early third century CE, and wrote in a non-Roman language, Syriac, it would seem that Edessa would have little to say about the pan-Mediterranean issues surrounding Roman identity and empire. However, using borderlands and postcolonial theory, I will argue that their very position on the borderlands and their own self-understanding gave Edessa the tools and opportunities necessary to craft their own sense of legitimate Roman identity that challenged the centrality and orthodoxy of the imperial core. In a world where Roman boundaries and identity were in question, Edessa asserted itself as the home of pure Roman values and identity, a "new Rome" of the east.

This paper examines and compares two Syriac texts written in Edessa in the fifth or sixth centuries CE that have received little scholarly attention. *Euphemia and the Goth* is a hagiographical folktale focused on the local martyr shrine of Shmona, Guria, and Habbib. Even though the text has a local focus, the text traverses beyond the boundaries of Edessa, commenting on the incorporation of barbarian peoples, in this case Goths, into the Roman

empire. The second text, the *Julian Romance*, is in part historical fiction, part hagiography. This text broadens Edessa's geographic gaze and follows the emperor Julian's exploits from the westernmost boundaries of the empire to the borders of Persia. The *Romance* engages in contemporary discourse surrounding Roman identity, religious orthodoxy, and the responsibilities of the Roman emperor. In both *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, the authors use Roman ideology and discourse to critique contemporary Roman leadership, foreign policy, and assert their own Roman identity and centrality within the Roman world. I will argue that the texts portray Edessa as the exemplar model of Roman civic virtue, justice, and Christianity, key components of *Romanitas* in late antiquity. These identity constructions are built in comparison with the barbarian "other," the Goths, who were represented as the antithesis of Roman values. In the rest of this introductory chapter, I outline summaries of these two texts as well as an overview of contemporary scholarship, and outline the trajectory of my argument.

### ***Euphemia and the Goth: Summary and Scholarship***

For this paper, I use the Syriac text's English translation of *Euphemia and the Goth* by F.C. Burkitt, modified into modern English.<sup>6</sup> The official date of *Euphemia and the Goth*'s composition is unknown. Burkitt dates the text to no earlier than 430, but grants the text too much historical authenticity by twenty-first century historical standards.<sup>7</sup> The text's date of the Hunnic invasions in 396, 707 in the Seleucid year, matches accurate dates of a Hunnic invasion

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<sup>6</sup> F.C. Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth, with the Acts of Martyrdom of the Confessors of Edessa*, (London: Williams and Norgate, 1913). Christine Shepardson aided in modifying the translation and translating certain terms. Burkitt's translation is in great need of a new translation, and my reliance on the English translations of both texts remains a weakness of this paper. More engagement with the original Syriac, which has been begun by Alexey Muravyov, will yield even greater analyses of the text. See Alexey Muravyev (Муравьев), "'Perfidious Goth,' Holy Martyrs Cult and the Memory of Roman Troops in 5<sup>th</sup> Century Edessa," *Amsterdamer Beiträge Zur Älteren Germanistik* 80 (2020): 134-42.

<sup>7</sup> Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth*, 57.

in the Near East.<sup>8</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey followed Burkitt's early fifth-century date and attributed the text to one of a broad circulation of Edessene texts to glorify the city and celebrate its martyrs.<sup>9</sup> Philip Wood notes a late fifth-century or early sixth-century date would also be plausible, given the renewed wars with Persia under emperor Anastasius.<sup>10</sup> An exact date of the text is not necessary for the purposes of this paper; however, I situate the text in the late fifth or early sixth century, strengthened by the presence of the anti-Gothic soldier narratives in the *Chronicle Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* which will be discussed later in this paper.<sup>11</sup>

The narrator of *Euphemia and the Goth* claims to report the story as told to him by the *Paramonarius*, or custodian, of the Shrine of the Confessors, of "a miracle [...] that was performed in the blessed city of Edessa."<sup>12</sup> The story opens in 396 C.E., during an invasion of the Huns on the eastern border. A widow, Sophia, lives with her young daughter, Euphemia, who she was "bringing up in all modesty."<sup>13</sup> Because of the invasions, Gothic *Foederati* are sent to Edessa, and one "certain Goth of a bitter soul" is billeted in the house of Sophia.<sup>14</sup> The Goth is never named, showing his lack of humanity and interchangeability with other Goths. Sophia does her best to hide Euphemia from the Goth, but one day the Goth sees her and desires her. He begs

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<sup>8</sup> See G. Greatrex and M. Greatrex, "The Hunnic Invasion of the East of 395 and the Fortress of Ziatha," *Byzantion* 69, no. 1, (1999), 65-75. The same dates are also attested in the *Chronicle of Edessa* 40, and the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 9; see Benjamin Cowper Harris, "Selections from the Syriac. No. 1: The Chronicle of Edessa," *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 5 no. 9 (1864): 28-45, here 33; Frank R. Trombley and John W. Watt, eds., *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 9-10.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 no. 1 (1996): 27-56, here 36.

<sup>10</sup> Philip Wood, "We Have no King but Christ": *Christian Political Thought in Greater Syria on the Eve of the Arab Conquest (c. 400-585)*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 96.

<sup>11</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 93-4, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 111-3.

<sup>12</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth* 1, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 129.

<sup>13</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 5, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 131.

<sup>14</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 5, translated by Muravyov "Perfidious Goth," 138; also translated by Christine Shepardson, personal communication, 2020.

Sophia to let him marry her, and she continues to refuse. However, eventually he wears her out and she consents to let him marry her as long as Euphemia is able to stay near her in Edessa, to which he agrees. After there was no more conflict with the Huns, the Goth is ordered back to his home, and takes Euphemia with him. Furious and anguished over losing her only daughter, Sophia takes the Goth to the Shrine of the Confessors, calls on them for protection, and makes him swear an oath on their coffin that he will treat her well. He swears, saying, “As I deal with her and do to her, so may God deal with me! Lo, these holy ones are sureties that I will not grieve her!”<sup>15</sup>

The Goth and the now pregnant Euphemia make their way to his home. On the last leg of their journey, he suddenly strips off her “rich clothing” and dresses her as a slave girl.<sup>16</sup> He reveals that he already has a wife and family, and tells her that she must act like a slave and not reveal her identity, or he will kill her. Unable to communicate with anyone in Syriac, Euphemia cries out against him, and threatens him with the oath he had made to the martyrs. When they arrive at the Goth’s house, his first wife is immediately suspicious of the girl, and does not believe that she is simply his slave from Syria. Euphemia continues to cry to God for aid, and the Goth’s wife berates, beats, and overburdens Euphemia with work. When Euphemia gives birth to her baby, the wife sees that the baby resembles her husband. Later one day, she sends Euphemia to the market on errands and poisons the baby. When Euphemia returns and finds her baby deathly ill, she calls on the martyrs to help her. She takes a lock of wool and wipes her baby’s lips and keeps it hidden in a handkerchief. Soon the baby dies, and Euphemia devises a plan to see if it was the Goth’s wife who had poisoned him. During a meal, Euphemia, while acting as their serving maid, dips the lock of wool into the wife’s cup and serves her the drink. The Goth’s

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<sup>15</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 14, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 135.

<sup>16</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 15, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 135.

wife falls ill and dies. After seven days of mourning, the family suspects Euphemia of murder. Instead of waiting for their judge to return to try her, they instead drag her through the streets and lock her in the tomb of the Goth's wife with her rotting corpse, and plan to impale her and execute her the next morning. Euphemia cries out in prayer to the martyrs, saying "[m]y sureties the confessors, aid me in this hour!"<sup>17</sup>

Her prayer is heard, and the stink of the corpse is changed to a pleasant smell, a sign of the presence of the divine, and Euphemia falls asleep.<sup>18</sup> During the night, the martyrs miraculously transport Euphemia back to Edessa and place her at the martyrs' shrine. She approaches the shrine and hears a service being held within. She sits near the coffin crying in gratitude and tells the custodian what has happened to her. The custodian calls for Sophia, who at first does not recognize her daughter dressed as a slave, but mother and daughter are emotionally reunited. They begin to live a pious life "constant in prayer."<sup>19</sup> After a time, "justice was aroused upon that wicked and lying man the Goth," and he returns on military duty to Edessa.<sup>20</sup> One of Sophia's neighbors sees the Goth in a market and talks to him. Sophia's kinsmen and neighbors create a plan to catch and condemn him. They find the Goth and urge him to visit Sophia. The Goth agrees, and Sophia hides Euphemia while she talks to him. She asks the Goth about how her daughter is doing, and the Goth lies and tells her that she and the baby are well. Infuriated, Sophia tears her clothes and reproaches the Goth, exclaiming, "The sureties you gave me, they will bring your life to an end, treacherous one!"<sup>21</sup> Euphemia shows herself, and the Goth is stricken silent.

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<sup>17</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 26, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 141.

<sup>18</sup> On the role of smell, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, (Berkeley: University of California Press).

<sup>19</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 34, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 146.

<sup>20</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 35, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 146.

<sup>21</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 39, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 149.

The people of Edessa bind the Goth, collect and prepare legal documents for trial, and bring him before the Bishop Eulogius, who prepares the trial to be judged by the Stratelates. At the trial the affidavit is read, and the Stratelates condemns the Goths for actions, citing that he was “contemptuous of the pure laws of the Romans” and the oaths he had made by the martyrs.<sup>22</sup> Although the Bishop pleads for mercy for the Goth, the Goth is promptly executed outside the city walls.

It is surprising that such a harrowing and Romantic tale has received such little scholarly attention. The text has only been recently been closely analyzed by a few scholars. Susan Ashbrook Harvey discusses the story in the context of an article about the relationships between mothers and daughters in Syriac hagiography.<sup>23</sup> Harvey argues that these relationships are unique to Syriac hagiography in that they show how family relationships could be maintained in an ascetic lifestyle, as well as highlighting the societal struggles that these Christian women faced.<sup>24</sup> Philip Wood examines the text in a monograph about the relationship between politics and religion in Late Antique Syria.<sup>25</sup> Wood argues, using modern nationalism theories, that Syriac religious writing, particularly in Edessa, developed a growing sense of political and cultural independence from Rome.<sup>26</sup> Wood presents *Euphemia and the Goth* as a unique text that is “less developed and elite-driven” and represents a more popular work that asserts Edessa’s identity as not anti-Roman, but anti-military.<sup>27</sup> In his edition and translation of the Greek text from the *Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes*, Stratis Papaioannou argues that the story represents a

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<sup>22</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth*, 44, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 152.

<sup>23</sup> Harvey, “Sacred Bonding,” 36-41, 49-56.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey, “Sacred Bonding,” 28-9.

<sup>25</sup> Wood, “*We Have no King*,” 95-100.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, “*We Have no King*,” 1, 20, 258-9.

<sup>27</sup> Wood, “*We Have no King*,” 98-9.

“Christian novel” that derives from the Greek novel.<sup>28</sup> These Christian novels take themes from the Greek novel, such as emotions, family love, and exaggerated female agency, but replaces heterosexual romance with personal devotion to and protection from God.<sup>29</sup> Very recently, the text has reignited interest in scholarship. Thomas Dimambro presents an erudite analysis of the text. Following Wood’s argument, Dimambro argues the text negotiates its place in the empire in terms of the benefits provided by Roman law but with clear strands of the emergence of an ethnic independence.<sup>30</sup> Dimambro also persuasively shows how the text discusses the position and power of women and the asceticism that involved female-only living. Alexey Muravyov, in a recent article, has begun the important work of reexamining and translating the Syriac text, and he makes important observations.<sup>31</sup> These have been the only scholarly investigations of *Euphemia and the Goth* since Burkitt’s English translation of the Syriac in 1913.

### **The *Julian Romance*: Summary and Scholarship**

For the Syriac *Julian Romance*, I use the recent English translation by Michael Sokoloff.<sup>32</sup> Like *Euphemia and the Goth*, the *Julian Romance* also has no official date of composition. Some scholars, such as H.J.W. Drijvers, date the text to the middle of the fourth century, based on its similarity in language and themes to the writings of Ephrem.<sup>33</sup> Ephrem, for

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<sup>28</sup> Stratis Papaioannou, *Christian Novels from the Menologion of Symeon Metaphrastes*. Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 45, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), xiii-xiv. The Greek text is of a later provenance, considered to be a reworking of the Syriac original. The text has interesting differences in plot, dialogue, and emphases; however, because of the later provenance the text will not be the subject of close study in this paper.

<sup>29</sup> Papaioannou, *Christian Novels*, xvii-xviii; Charis Messis, “Fiction and/or Novelization in Byzantine Hagiography,” in Stephanos Efthymiadis, ed., *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography: Volume II: Genres and Contexts*, (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 315-44.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Dimambro, “Women on the Edge: Violence, ‘Othering,’ and the Limits of Imperial Power in *Euphemia and the Goth*,” in Kate Cooper and Jamie Wood, eds., *Social Control in Late Antiquity: The Violence of Small Worlds*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 318-36.

<sup>31</sup> Alexey Muravyev (Муравьев), “‘Perfidious Goth,’” 134-42.

<sup>32</sup> Michael Sokoloff, ed. and trans., *The Julian Romance*, (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> H.J.W. Drijvers, “The Syriac Romance of Julian, Its Function, Place, and Original Language,” in René Lavenant, ed., *VI Symposium Syriacum 1992: University of Cambridge, Faculty of Divinity, 30 August – 2 September 1992*, (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 1994), 201-14, here 207.

example, began a tradition of anti-Julian polemic in Syriac writing with his *Hymns Against Julian* written in the late fourth century.<sup>34</sup> Others, such as Philip Wood, date the text to the early sixth century based on the renewed wars with Persia and the text's desire for peace between the two empires, among other elements.<sup>35</sup> Muravyov, however, has stressed the synthetic nature of the text, complicating precise dating even further.<sup>36</sup> The location of the text's production is also unknown, but the greater scholarly consensus asserts that it was produced in Edessa in Syriac. The specificities of the text are beyond the scope of this paper; like *Euphemia and the Goth*, I situate the text in the sixth century based on contemporary concerns such as the Anastasian Persian War.

The *Julian Romance* consists of three parts. The first part, almost entirely lost, narrates the upbringing of Julian and the beginning of his reign. In particular, Julian is obsessed with destroying the work of Constantine in instituting Christianity. The second part of the text is set in Rome. A messenger of Julian, Adocetus, sends a message to the bishop of Rome, Eusebius, commanding him to renounce Christianity and turn to paganism. Eusebius refuses, saying "I am ashamed of you, that you call the madman an emperor and not, moreover, a tyrant."<sup>37</sup> The Jews and pagans in Rome rally around Julian's cause, while Eusebius calmly perseveres with the Christians, and even inspires the "chiefs of Rome" to reveal their Christian identities in the wake of persecutions. Julian arrives and engages in a long debate with Eusebius, and afterwards attempts to execute him by burning him on an altar. The fire leaves Eusebius unharmed,

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<sup>34</sup> Jan Willem Drijvers, "Ammianus, Jovian, and the Syriac Julian Romance," *Journal of Late Antiquity* 4 no. 2 (2011): 280-97, here 288; see also R. Contini, "Giuliano Imperatore nella tradizione Siriaca," in U. Criscuolo, ed., *Da Costantino a Teodosia II Grande: Cultura, società, diritto*, (Naples: M. D'Auria, 2003), 119-45.

<sup>35</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 133, 141-2; see also Kyle Smith, *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity*, (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 94.

<sup>36</sup> Alexei Muraviev (Муравьев), "The Syriac Julian Romance and Its Place in the Literary History," *Khristianskiy Vostok (XB)* 1 no. 7 (1999): 194-206, here 197.

<sup>37</sup> *Julian Romance* 18, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 42.

however, and instead burns and kills the surrounding pagan priests. After failing to kill him in a second attempt, Julian leaves the city in defeat, and the people of Rome exclaim to him, “If you do not worship Christ, whom the Christian emperors before you have worshipped, you shall not be called the emperor over us, for our city does not need at all a stranger to reign over it. Its emperor lives and exists, and he will never be destroyed.”<sup>38</sup>

The third and final part describes Julian’s affairs in the East and Jovian’s accession as emperor. Julian travels from Rome to Constantinople, Antioch, and finally Persia to wage war against Shapur. Julian visits and revels in pagan cities such as Antioch and Harran, while he is spurned by Edessa, and vows to destroy the city.<sup>39</sup> The text praises Edessa as “alone of all the cities of the east [that] dared to maintain her truth and to persevere in a united fashion in her religion, all of her publicly worshipping Christ and acknowledging him without fear.”<sup>40</sup> Jovian, meanwhile, a general of Julian and a secret Christian, tries to restrain Julian’s violent behavior and conspires with the Persian general Arimihr. After Julian is killed by a divinely-sent arrow, after multiple prophecies that he would be killed in Persia, Jovian is proclaimed emperor. Jovian pleases Shapur and negotiates a peace treaty that cedes Nisibis and other eastern Roman provinces to Persia in exchange for an end to the Christian persecutions in the Persian empire.<sup>41</sup> On his journey back to Constantinople, Jovian visits Edessa and receives a grand welcoming. During his visit he declares Edessa the most Christian city of the empire and declares, “I will lift

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<sup>38</sup> *Julian Romance* 54, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 114.

<sup>39</sup> In other sources, Antioch is described as a Christian, not “pagan” city. The *Romance* may have chosen Antioch because Julian historically visited the city and wrote about it in his *Misopogon*. Antioch and Harran were also Edessa’s greatest neighbors, suggesting Edessa wished to assert superiority over them.

<sup>40</sup> *Julian Romance* 137, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 280.

<sup>41</sup> Edessa also had close ties to Nisibis. Ephrem of Syria, for example, fled from Nisibis to Edessa in 363 during Persian conflict, along with many other migrants. The peace pact between Jovian and Shapur is regarded by ancient and modern historians as a disaster for Rome; it is thus significant that the *Romance* praises the peace and Jovian’s short reign.

up your head, strengthen you, and put you at the head of all the cities of my realm.”<sup>42</sup> While there, he also miraculously heals a sick and bedridden woman. The text concludes praising the peace and purification brought by Jovian’s reign, saying that in his short eight months of rule “the empire was secure in his hands” and likens him to a new Constantine.<sup>43</sup>

Although the *Julian Romance* has received more scholarly attention than *Euphemia and the Goth*, the text still lacks extensive in-depth scholarship. Scholars such as H.J.W. Drijvers, Jan Willem Drijvers, and Alexey Muravyov have published articles on the text musing on its date, themes, and comparisons to other sources.<sup>44</sup> Philip Wood has provided the longest analysis, in which he argues that the text’s criticism of Julian served as an attack on Justinian and his support of Chalcedonian Christianity.<sup>45</sup> This narrative, Wood argues, represents a development of Edessa’s assertion of a distinct “ethnie,” or Syriac identity.<sup>46</sup> In this paper, however, I argue that the text represents an assertion of Edessa’s Roman identity and role in the empire.

## Paper Overview

The rest of this paper will continue as follows. In chapter 2, I provide a historical overview of late antiquity, Roman perceptions of Goths, and a contextual survey of Edessa, and Syriac Christianity. In the history of late antiquity, I aim to show that examining Edessa’s Roman identity can provide nuance to a historiography that is often divided by narrative,

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<sup>42</sup> *Julian Romance* 233, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 472.

<sup>43</sup> *Julian Romance* 240, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 486.

<sup>44</sup> See, among others, Jan Willem Drijvers, “Ammianus,” 280-97; Jan Willem Drijvers, “Julian the Apostate and the City of Rome: Pagan-Christian Polemics in the Syriac Julian Romance,” in Wout Van Bekkum, Jan Willem Drijvers, and Alex C. Klugkist, eds., *Syriac Polemics. Studies in Honour of Gerrit Jan Reinik*, Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta 170, (Leuven: Uitgeverij Peeters en Departement Oosterse Studies, 2007), 1-20; Muraviev (Муравьев), “The Syriac Julian Romance,” 194-206; G.J. Reinik, “The Romance of Julian the Apostate as a Source for Seventh Century Syriac Apocalypses,” in P. Canivet and J.P. Rey-Coquais, eds., *La Syrie de Byzance à l’Islam VIIe-VIIIe siècles*, (Damas: Institut français de Damas, 1992), 75-86; H.J.W. Drijvers, “The Syriac Romance of Julian,” 201-14; Theodor Nöldeke, “Über den syrischen Roman von Kaiser Julian,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenlandischen Gesellschaft* 28 no. 2/3 (1874): 263-92.

<sup>45</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 133-62.

<sup>46</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 133, 162.

language, and geography. Narratives of decline and rupture tend to focus on the Latin West, while narratives of continuity and transformation focus on the Greek East. Edessa's own discourse on the fallen western empire and transformations within the eastern provinces reveal an engagement with both narratives, and suggests the fruitfulness of crossing geographic and linguistic boundaries which provides a more nuanced picture of the world of late antiquity. The historical overview of the Goths will not focus on the history of Goths as an "ethnic group," but rather on how the Goths were perceived as a group by the Romans. In this, I hope to emphasize that the Goths as they appear in the Syriac sources are representative of Roman stereotypes of barbarians used for rhetorical purposes. In the overview of Edessa and Syriac Christianity, I point out the key points necessary for understanding the political and religious context from which these texts were produced.

In chapter 3, I give an overview of the theoretical models and frameworks with which I approach the texts. Borderlands theories, which originated in precolonial American historiography and have been incorporated into studies with late antiquity, is a fruitful approach to examine the ways that Edessa negotiated and asserted its own power positioned between the two great empires of late antiquity, Rome and Persia. The works of scholars in these endeavors, such as the anthropologist Frederik Barth and the historian Nathanael Andrade, illuminate the ways in which groups drew and defined cultural boundaries. An important postcolonial theory used in my argument is Jeffrey Cohen's "monster theory," which is helpful to analyze the ways in which Syriac writers wrote about Goths and what they signified. Similar to O'Gorman's analysis of Tacitus's description of the Germans, the Goths as monstrous figures said more about the troubles and anxieties within the cultural boundaries of Rome than about the Goths themselves.

In the next three chapters, I lay out my analysis of the two texts. In chapters 4 and 5, I discuss how *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* construct Edessa as a city embodying true *Romanitas*. In chapter 4, I examine how Edessa is portrayed as being the exemplar of Roman civic virtue and justice. Both texts stress that Edessa reveres, obeys, and enforces Roman law, while the Goths and the tyrant emperor Julian do not. In a time when miaphysites were being increasingly persecuted, especially under Justinian's laws on Christian orthodoxy, and when the army had trouble disciplining federate soldiers who disregarded the law, the texts' assertions had potent legitimacy. In chapter 5, I turn to another vital aspect of late antique *Romanitas*, Christianity. Both of the texts I examine, as well as Edessa's famed stories of their Christian origins such as the Abgar legend, construct Edessa as the home of pure Christianity that was blessed by Christian emperors and even Jesus himself. These claims were similarly powerful in a time when emperors and ecclesiastical authorities struggled to define and enforce Christian orthodoxy.

Chapter 6 turns to an analysis of the monstrous figures in the text, the Goths and Julian, which are "anti-Romans" used to bolster Edessa's claims of Roman superiority. I argue, following Cohen's theory, that these figures embodied the fears and anxieties of the time when the empire was at a cultural, political, and religious crossroads. The Goths were responsible, in the eyes of the Romans, for the fall of the Roman West, but also made up the majority of the Roman army and began to hold high military and imperial offices, blurring the lines of Roman identity. Justinian aimed to restore the Roman empire to its former glory, but his attempts at unification in the law codes and Christian orthodoxy backfired, and his reconquest campaigns were costly and only temporarily successful; further, he strengthened the power of the emperor to an extent many deemed tyrannical. Edessa's choice of using Goths and a tyrannical emperor

as the texts “monstrous” villains thus hit upon the empire’s greatest weaknesses and shortcomings in the late fifth and sixth centuries, and became a powerful critique on the empire’s contemporary leadership and policies. Chapter 7 summarizes the arguments and conclusions of this paper, and I offer reasons why these analyses are important to the field of late antiquity and the problems of our own globalized world.

## Chapter 2

### Historical Context

#### **Late Antiquity: Rome, Persia, and the “Fall” of the West**

Late Antiquity is a relatively recent periodization, formed into its own field of study much to the thanks of Peter Brown.<sup>1</sup> Key themes of this periodization usually include the decline and “fall” of the Roman West, the transformation and “rise” of the Roman East and its transformation into the Byzantine Empire, the spread and totalization of Christianity, often referred to as “Christianization,” and the political, social, religious, cultural, and economic changes that transitioned the classical world to the medieval world. These themes are often divided around two narratives dictated by geography. The narrative of the Roman West focuses on political and military history and themes of decline and catastrophe. The period is often called the “later Roman empire” to denote the idea of decline and rupture. The narrative of the Roman East focuses on cultural, social, and religious history and examines the transformation and continuity of the eastern empire and other peoples, periodized as “late antiquity.” General periodizations often begin with the “crisis of the third century” or the conversion of Constantine to Christianity in the fourth century, and typically end with the Arab conquests of the eighth century.<sup>2</sup> Although this paper focuses on a city in the Roman East, it is important to understand

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Peter Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity, AD 150-750*, (New York: Harcourt, 1971).

<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarship has called into question the difficulties and ethical problems surrounding somewhat arbitrary historical periodizations. See, for example, Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time*, (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2008), who argues that medieval “feudalism” was an intellectual fabrication by writers in the 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries to justify European colonial enterprises. The problems surrounding Late Antique periodizations, such as narratives of the “triumph of Christianity,” are beyond the scope of this paper. For a historiographical overview of periodization problems, see, among others, Rita Testa, ed., *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate*, (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2017); James Edward, “The Rise and Function of the Concept ‘Late Antiquity,’” *Journal of Late Antiquity* 1 no. 1 (2008): 20-30; Arnaldo Marcone, “A Long Late Antiquity?: Considerations on a Controversial Periodization,” *Journal of Late Antiquity*, 1 no. 1 (2008): 4-19; Andrea Giardina, “Esplosione di Tardoantico,” *Studi Storici* 40 no. 1 (1999): 157-80. On Diocletian and the transition to the later Roman empire, see, among others, Roger Rees, *Diocletian and the Tetrarchy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004); S. J. J. Corcoran, *The Empire of the Tetrarchs: Imperial Pronouncements and Government, AD 284-324*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press,

the broader context of the empire in Late Antiquity to see the ways in which Edessa understood the broader historical currents of the period. Edessa's unique perspective also provides nuance to the historiographical divide of the period.

The narrative of the Roman west is one of collapse. Scholars have long debated of whether this collapse should be understood as a “decline and fall” due to economic problems and barbarian invasions, or rather a “transformation” as outside barbarian groups slowly became incorporated into and transformed the empire.<sup>3</sup> Over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, the empire lost territory to various indigenous groups and foreign invaders. One of the most notorious of these outside groups were called “the Goths.” King Alaric and his group of Visigoths led an attack on the city of Rome and successfully captured it in 410 CE. The fall of the city shocked the empire and led to much soul-searching, especially among Christian writers. Augustine, for example, wrote his magnum opus the *City of God* in the aftermath to justify why God had allowed such destruction to take place, which he ascribes to paganism and moral decline. Jerome, writing in Jerusalem, lamented that “the bright light of all the world was put

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2000); Stephen Williams, *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, (New York: Routledge, 1997). On the emperor Constantine, see, among others, Timothy Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014); David S. Potter, *Constantine the Emperor*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); R. Van Dam, *The Roman Revolution of Constantine*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Harold Drake, *Constantine and the Bishops: The Politics of Intolerance*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Timothy Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> The bibliography of these debates is beyond the scope of this paper. On decline and fall narratives, see, among others, Kyle Harper, *The Fate of Rome: Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017); Alan Bowman and Andrew Wilson, eds., *Quantifying the Roman Economy. Methods and Problems*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: a New History*, (London: Macmillan, 2005); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001). On transformation narratives, see, among others, R. W. Mathisen and D. R. Shanzer, eds., *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World; Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); Walter Goffat, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Walter Goffat, *Barbarians and Romans: The Techniques of Accommodation*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980); G. W. Bowersock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999).

out.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, the magnitude of the fall was felt across the empire. In 476 CE the Gothic commander Odoacer deposed the last western emperor, Romulus Augustulus, and declared himself a king. In the ensuing centuries, independent kingdoms took over the previous imperial structure, forming the foundation of what would become the medieval west. As I will argue, Edessa seems to be aware of these historical currents and used them to justify their Roman superiority in the eastern borderlands.

During this time, the eastern empire was the seat of Roman power and it maintained its authority for far longer than in the western provinces. The greatest foreign threats to the empire in Late Antiquity were the Hunnic invasions of the late fourth and fifth centuries and its greatest rival, the Sassanian Empire of Persia.<sup>5</sup> As will be discussed throughout this paper, the continuity of Rome in the East and war with Persia were narratives central to Edessa’s own Roman identity. Roman policy toward Persia fluctuated between tenuous peace and conflict, with many borderlands cities, including Edessa, caught in the middle. Edessa saw the emperor Julian’s campaign against Persia as one of the turning-points in the relationship between the two empires. Julian set out to invade Sasanian Persia in 363, likely to attempt to succeed in conquering Persia where previous emperors had not. The campaign was a failure, and Julian died from injuries in

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<sup>4</sup> Jerome, *Commentary on Ezekiel I*: Preface, in Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, eds., *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Series II (Vol. VI: Jerome)*, (Grand Rapids: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1890-6) 500. Rome was also besieged by Gaiseric in 455 and Ricimer in 472.

<sup>5</sup> For an overview of the Roman East and the relationship of Rome and Persia, see, among others, Fergus Millar, *A Greek Roman Empire: Power and Belief Under Theodosius II 408-450*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); Fergus Millar, *The Roman East 31 B.C. – A.D. 337*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Peter Edwell, *Rome and Persia at War: Imperial Competition and Contact, 193-363 CE*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021); Greg Fisher, *Rome, Persia, and Arabia: Shaping the Middle East from Pompey to Muhammad*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020); Rocco Palermo, *On the Edge of Empires: North Mesopotamia During the Roman Period (2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. CE)*, (New York: Routledge, 2019); Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Peter Edwell, *Between Rome and Persia: the Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra Under Roman Control*, (London: Routledge, 2008); Dignas Beate and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Geoffrey Greatex, *Rome and Persia at War, 502-532*, (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998).

the Persian desert.<sup>6</sup> Jovian, a short-lived emperor, ended the conflict by accepting a peace treaty, in which large regions of Roman territory, including the frontier city Nisibis, were ceded to the Persians.<sup>7</sup> The two empires remained mostly peaceful in the fifth century, largely because they were facing their own foreign pressures. Barbarian invasions threatened Rome in the West, while Hunnic invasions threatened Sasanian Persia. A peace treaty signed in 422 between Rome and Persia was emblematic of the situation. The agreement seems to include that Christians were not to be persecuted in the Persian Empire, as well as both sides providing financial support for the military, especially for the Persians to hold back the Hunnic invasions.

The long peace was ended at the beginning of the sixth century, and constant conflict thereafter threatened the stability of the eastern empire. As I will argue, Edessa was particularly concerned with these historical currents. War was reignited between King Kavadh I of Persia and Emperor Anastasius in 502 and recurred repeatedly throughout the century. In the middle of the century, Rome refocused its efforts in the West. Justinian spearheaded the effort to reconquer the western empire, especially Italy, which forced him to accept a treaty with Persia in which he had to pay annual tribute. Although he saw early success, his efforts ultimately failed and placed severe financial strain on the empire. In this paper I argue that Edessa's perceptions surrounding Justinian and the attempt to reunify the Roman empire help us to understand the connections between East and West and how narratives of decline and continuity are more nuanced and interconnected than the historiographical divide suggests.

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<sup>6</sup> For Julian, see, among others, Susanna Elm, *Sons of Hellenism, Fathers of the Church: Emperor Julian, Gregory of Nazianzus, and the Vision of Rome*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); G. W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978). On Julian's motivations for invading Persia, see Elm, *Sons of Hellenism*, 271-3.

<sup>7</sup> Jovian's peace treaty was understood to have been a monumental loss for Rome, but, as we shall see, Edessa saw it as a triumph, perhaps because it helped to establish a long-lasting peace in the fifth century.

## Perceptions of Goths

In the later Roman Empire, one of the most infamous “barbarian” groups that were increasingly integrated into the empire were the Goths. In modern scholarship, the Goths remain a somewhat controversial subject of study. Peter Heather is known as the preeminent scholar on the Goths, who focuses the Goths as a biological and cultural group, as well as their role in the destruction of the western empire.<sup>8</sup> Heather’s work, however, has been heavily criticized by scholars such as Michael Kulikowski, Guy Halsall, Geoffrey Greatrex, and others, for his oversimplified methods that can lead to dangerous rhetoric. Kulikowski, in his review of *Empires and Barbarians*, for example, notes that in his analysis of barbarian groups “he comes perilously close to recreating the old, *volkisch* notion of an inherent “Germanic” belief in freedom,” and warns that his narratives push the idea “that mass migration brings down empires and that immigrants have a strong tendency to destroy the society that hosts them.”<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of this paper, however, it is more important to examine how the Romans, and Edessa, wrote about the Goths as a barbarian “other.” In fact, it was not until these groups interacted more with Rome that they began to form group identities, as Romans continually designated them as an “other” people.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire*; Peter Heather, *The Goths*, (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1996); Peter Heather, *Goths and Romans, 332-489*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); Peter Heather and John Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Kulikowski, “Review: Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: The Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 42 no. 2 (2011): 277-9, here 278, 279. For a historiographic overview of Goths, see Michael Kulikowski, *Rome’s Gothic Wars: From the Third Century to Alaric*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43-70.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Patrick Greary, “Barbarians and Ethnicity,” in Bowersock, Brown, and Grabar, eds., *Late Antiquity*, 107-129, here 107. See also the works of Walter Goffart on “ethnogenesis,” such as Walter Goffart, *Barbarian Tides*, and Goffart, *Barbarians and Romans*. The only late antique source written by a Goth is the *Getica* of Jordanes, written in Constantinople around 550 CE in Latin. Jordanes provides a narrative of the origin of the Goths, but its historicity is suspect and a matter of scholarly debate. See Heather, *The Goths*, who discredits its historical accuracy; see Wolf Liebeschuetz, “Making a Gothic History: Does the *Getica* of Jordanes Preserve Genuinely Gothic Traditions?,” in *East and West in Late Antiquity*, (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 101-34, for a contrary view.

On the whole, the Romans wrote of the Goths as barbaric and violent.<sup>11</sup> They appear in texts bearing stereotypical barbaric traits, such as a lack of self-control, including drinking, lust, violence, and the inability to submit to the rule of law.<sup>12</sup> As we shall see, the Edessene texts use these same tropes in their discourse on Goths. Such stereotypes do not reflect historical reality about the Goths; rather, they were used by the Romans as propaganda to praise Rome's cultural superiority. As Ralph Mathisen notes, the image of the barbarian Goth "served their literary, psychological, and political purposes. Barbarian violence was the antithesis of Roman 'civilized' behavior. [...] It also provided the Roman government with a powerful propaganda resource."<sup>13</sup> Scholars, especially with the help of archaeological evidence, have shown that violence by Goths was far less than Roman sources would have us believe.<sup>14</sup> Such violent imagery was a continuation of the long-standing discourse on the violence of foreigners, and "they used sophisticated forms of ethnographic discourse to bolster these perceptions."<sup>15</sup> However, Goths became more integrated into the empire, especially through military and imperial appointments, which caused tension as the lines between Roman and Gothic identity blurred. As I will argue, Edessa also sensed this tension of identity as they bolstered their own Roman identity while chauvinistically stereotyping Goths.

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<sup>11</sup> Roman notions of "barbarity" will be further elaborated below.

<sup>12</sup> Ralph Mathisen, "Violent Behavior and the Construction of Barbarian Identity in Late Antiquity," in H.A. Drake, ed., *Violence in Late Antiquity: Perceptions and Practices*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006), 27-35, here 30; Peter Heather, "The Barbarian in Late Antiquity: Image, Reality, and Transformation," in Richard Miles, ed., *Constructing Identities in Late Antiquity*, (London, Routledge, 2002), 234-58, here 237.

<sup>13</sup> Mathisen, "Violent Behavior," 32-4, here 34; Heather, "The Barbarian in Late Antiquity," 236, 238.

<sup>14</sup> Amelia Robertson Brown, for example, notes that the Gothic raiding parties of Alaric in Roman Greece have little to no evidence of disruption or destruction in the material record. See Amelia Robertson Brown, "Banditry or Catastrophe?: History, Archaeology, and Barbarian Raids on Roman Greece," in Ralph W. Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer, eds., *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World: Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 79-96.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Pohl, "Perceptions of Barbarian Violence," in Drake, *Violence in Late Antiquity*, 15-26, here 25.

One of the Romans' main interactions with the Goths was through the military. It is in this context that Edessa would have lived with and interacted with Gothic soldiers. Goths were seen as fierce warriors, and thus desirable allies. They were incorporated into the military as *foederati*, or allied mercenaries.<sup>16</sup> *Foederati* became important in the Roman west as recruitment became an increasing problem in the fifth century. The large-scale military situation of late antiquity required fast, short-term, and mobile soldiers.<sup>17</sup> The use of *foederati* was a cheaper and easier means of fulfilling military requirements than financing a standing Roman army.<sup>18</sup> The Romans had a nuanced relationship with Goths in their military. Many of the Goths gained imperial honors and high positions in the military, while other military arrangements with leaders were fragile. The powerful Roman general Stilicho, for example, was likely of non-Roman descent, in this case the Vandals, and was placed in charge of the western empire by emperor Theodosius I in the late fourth century. He was heralded as a competent military leader and even married into the imperial family; however, his "barbarian" lineage tainted his reputation in both ancient and even modern sources.<sup>19</sup> He was killed in 408 in a mutiny after false rumors circulated that he wished to seize the Roman throne.

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<sup>16</sup> For *foederati*, see Hugh Elton, "Military Developments in the Fifth Century," in Michael Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 125-39; Timo Stickler, "The *Foederati*," in Paul Erdkamp, ed., *A Companion to the Roman Army*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 495-514; R. Scharf, *Foederati. Von der Völkerrechtlichen Kategorie zur Byzantinischen Truppengattung*, *TYCHE* 4, (Vienna: Holzhausen, 2001); Peter Heather, "Foedera and Foederati of the Fourth Century," in Walter Pohl, ed., *Kingdoms of the Empire: The Integrations of Barbarians in Late Antiquity*, (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 57-74; Hugh Elton, *Warfare in Roman Europe, AD 350-425*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996); R. Schulz, *Die Entwicklung des römischen Völkerrechts im vierten und fünften Jahrhundert n. Chr.*, (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> See Stickler, "The *Foederati*," 506-7.

<sup>18</sup> Stickler, "The *Foederati*," 507. Ammianus Marcellinus, for example, records Roman optimism of the arrangement: "...by the union of his own and foreign forces he would have an invincible army; also that instead of the levy of soldiers which was contributed annually by each province, there would accrue to the treasuries a vast amount of gold," Ammianus Marcellinus, *History* 31.4.4, in John C. Rolfe, trans., *Ammianus Marcellinus, History, Volume III: Books 27-31. Excerpta Valesiana*, Loeb Classical Library 331, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 402-3.

<sup>19</sup> Kulikowski, *Rome's Gothic Wars*, 164.

The influence of Goths in the Roman army increased throughout the fifth century and gained power beyond Roman control. After Alaric and his Goths successfully entered Rome in 410, Rome still continued to recruit Gothic soldiers, but they often disregarded the terms of the *foedera*.<sup>20</sup> As the western empire rapidly lost territory, it lost the financial means to persuade Gothic *foederati* to remain loyal. The eastern empire, with its own concerns on their own eastern frontier, didn't have the means to intervene in the situation. Finally, with the rising financial and political power of Gothic military leaders, soldiers increasingly made the cogent decision to join their forces instead of the Romans' and began to carve out their own kingdoms in Europe.<sup>21</sup> It is in this context that Edessa wrote about Goths to assert their own Roman identity and criticize contemporary Roman leadership on their failure to contain the Goths and their supposed violence. Edessa would have interacted with many *foederati* of different backgrounds, such as Arabs. The choice of writing about Goths, then, was rhetorically significant as they were most "alien" to the city.

### **Edessa: Historical and Political Context**

In the rest of this chapter, I will examine the unique position of Edessa and its place in the empire, both of which are crucial to understanding how they articulated their Roman identity. Edessa was a city in northern Mesopotamia, located today in Şanlıurfa, Turkey. It enjoyed a strategic position in the hinterlands among foothills, an elevation suited for rainfed agriculture and cereal production, and reliable water sources.<sup>22</sup> Its main river, along which the city was built,

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<sup>20</sup> Timo Stickler, *Aëtius: Gestaltungsspielräume eines Heermeisters im ausgehenden Weströmischen Reich*, (München: C. H. Beck, 2002), 208; see also J. F. Drinkwater and Hugh Elton, *Fifth-century Gaul: a Crisis of Identity?*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>21</sup> Elton, "Military Developments," 138-9.

<sup>22</sup> Judah Segal, *Edessa "The Blessed City"*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 5-6; Steven K. Ross, *Roman Edessa: Politics and Culture on the Eastern Fringes of the Roman Empire, 114-424 C.E.*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 14. Segal's volume remains the only full survey of Edessa, but its scholarship and citations are greatly outdated and insufficient. On the geography and climate of northern Mesopotamia, see Palermo, *On the Edge*, 9-23.

was the river Daisan, or Skirtos in Greek, meaning “leaping river,” flowing from north to west. River gates along Edessa’s western wall gave interior access to the river’s waters. The city’s close proximity to the Daisan left it particularly vulnerable to disastrous and deadly flooding.<sup>23</sup> The city also had natural springs and two famous pools beneath the city’s high mount citadel in the south-east. The pools remain today, one named the Birket Ibrahim, the Pool of Abraham, and the other the Birket Zulha, the pool of Zulha. The importance of these natural water sources can be seen by the presence of an altar dated to the late second century CE and Edessa’s oldest Christian shrine near the pools.<sup>24</sup> The city was walled with gates at the four cardinal points, which lasted until the twelfth century CE, and the main roads followed a cardinal grid system. The city was also at the crossroads of important ancient roads and highways, especially its connections through Nisibis to Persia.<sup>25</sup> Its position made Edessa prosperous and important through trade, particularly in the third and fourth centuries CE. The thirteenth-century *Tabula Peutingeriana*, for example, marks Edessa on its map sitting on a crossroads.<sup>26</sup> Edessa’s strategic location in terms of military defensibility is less clear; the city had vulnerable fortifications, including its Citadel, and its eastern neighbor Nisibis seemed to be of more importance to the great powers that fought over Mesopotamia. However, Edessa remained vital to military ambitions, especially in Roman campaigns against the Persian empire. For example, Cassius Dio, writing in the early third century, records that in Severus’s campaign against “barbarians,”

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<sup>23</sup> The end of the *Chronicle of Edessa* records the dates of the worst floods which broke through the walls of the city; see *Chronicle of Edessa* 106, in Cowper, “Selections from the Syriac,” 40.

<sup>24</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 8. The pools are mentioned by Egeria in her travels to Edessa; see Egeria *Travel Journal* 19.7, trans. Andrew S. Jacobs, in Bart D. Ehrman and Andrew S. Jacobs, eds., *Christianity in Late Antiquity 300-450 C.E. a Reader*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004,) 344. The names Abraham and Zulha, the wife of Potiphar, suggest Edessa felt an ancient connection with these figures of the Old Testament, a sentiment that would be continued as Edessa’s Christian population grew and asserted its roots with New Testament figures.

<sup>25</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 9; for a description of the road system, see the *Life of Dometios*, in J. Van den Gheyn, “Acta Graeca S. Dometii Martyris,” *Analecta Bollandiana* 19 (1900), 289-320.

<sup>26</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 15-17. For the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, see L. Dillemann, *Haute Mésopotamie orientale et pays adjacents*, (Paris: P. Geuthner, 1962); Palermo, *On the Edge*, 210-30.

including the Osroëni (Edessenes), Adiabeni, and the Arabians, his army suffered from severe lack of water because they did not have access to the water of Edessa.<sup>27</sup> Under Roman rule, Edessa was a central base for wars against the Persians. It is the Roman military presence in and around Edessa that the two main texts of this paper are concerned with. The city experienced hardships from billeting Roman soldiers as well as undergoing Persian sieges. Situated on the frontier between two great empires of antiquity, Edessa played a powerful role in the fate of both empires, and the imperial powers greatly shaped Edessa's historical and cultural trajectory.

Edessa has unclear origins, and as a result of this was seen throughout antiquity as a space separate from the Greek and Roman worlds. Edessa does not appear in the historical record until its foundation as a Seleucid colony called Orhay in 303/302 BCE. According to John Malalas, Seleucos I Nicator called Orhay "Antioch the Half-barbarian," following a long tradition of Greek and Roman attitudes of cultural superiority to the frontier Mesopotamian city.<sup>28</sup> When the last Seleucid king Antiochus VII Sidetes was killed in conflict with the Parthians around 130-129 BCE, a power vacuum opened across the Near East. Numerous areas, including Edessa, filled the vacuum by carving out their own autonomous regions ruled by powerful local families. Edessa became an independent kingdom ruled by a line of kings later termed the Abgarid dynasty.<sup>29</sup> The origin or ethnicity of this line is unknown, but the names of

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<sup>27</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 20-21; Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 75.2.2, in Earnest Cary and Herbert B. Foster, trans., *Dio Cassius Roman History, Volume IX: Books 71-80*, Loeb Classical Library 177 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1927), 196-99.

<sup>28</sup> John Malalas, *Chronicle* 17.418, in Elizabeth Jeffreys, Michael Jeffreys, and Roger Scott, trans., *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, (Sydney: Brill, 1986), 236-7. Discussions of perceived "barbarism" in Edessa will be discussed below throughout this paper.

<sup>29</sup> A list of kings and the dates of the reigns survives in the *Chronicle of Zuqnin*; see Witold Witakowski, *Pseudo-Dionysius of Tel-Mahre chronicle, known also as the Chronicle of Zuqnin. Pt. III.*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1996).

the kings have Semitic and Arabic origins.<sup>30</sup> Latin writers claim that the inhabitants of the kingdom were *Arabes*.<sup>31</sup> The Edessene texts, therefore, had much rhetorical work to do to assert their own Roman identity. As I argue with the aid of postcolonial theory, however, Edessa found ways to claim legitimate Roman identity in powerful ways.

Autonomous Edessa was situated between the two great powers of its time, Rome and Persia. In such a precarious border zone, it was able to retain its autonomy until it became a Roman colony in 212/213 CE under the emperor Caracalla.<sup>32</sup> The Abgarid kings seem to have been keenly aware of their situation and “played off” both empires at strategic times, siding with one or the other.<sup>33</sup> This was particularly the case during the Roman-Parthian wars from the first century BCE to the early third century CE. For example, Tacitus, writing in Latin, records an instance involving Edessa and Meherdates, a prince who competed for the Parthian throne with Roman support. In 49 CE, the *legatus* of Syria, Cassius Longus entrusted Acbarus (Abgar V), “king of the Arabs” and other Parthians to escort him through Edessa and continue to Parthia. Cassius warns the young prince that “the keen impulses of barbarians either wane with delay or change to disloyalty.” However, Meherdates ignores the advice, and Abgar delays him “for many days” in the luxury of Edessa.<sup>34</sup> Later on his delayed journey, the prince is abandoned and killed by Parthians. Although this Latin account is heavily biased against Edessa, it seems clear that Abgar, though lacking military and political power, understood and participated in the conflicts between Rome and Parthia, and was clever enough to frustrate Roman plans. This unique “borderlands” strategy with Persia continued under Roman rule, and is particularly important to

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<sup>30</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 9; Segal, *Edessa*, 9; H.J.W. Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs at Edessa*, (Leiden: Brill, 1980), 10.

<sup>31</sup> Pliny, *Natural History* 6.117, in John Bostock and H.T. Riley, trans., *Pliny the Elder, The Natural History*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1855); Tacitus, *Annals* 12.12, in A.J. Woodman, trans., *Tacitus. The Annals* (Cambridge, Hackett Publishing, 2004), 219; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 476.

<sup>33</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.12, in Woodman *Tacitus*, 219-220.

the ways in which the *Julian Romance* criticizes contemporary Roman leadership over wars with Persia.

During the reign of Trajan and the heightening Roman expansionism of the second century CE, Edessa became even more involved with Roman politics and slowly became dominated by them. When Trajan went to Antioch in 113/114 during his eastern campaign, king Abgar VII sent an embassy to express friendship with the emperor. Fergus Millar interprets this as cautious political maneuvering; by sending an embassy instead of going himself, Abgar could retain an air of neutrality.<sup>35</sup> Trajan takes up the offer and visits Edessa where he is entertained with a banquet and given gifts. He is also entertained, in a haunting image that reflects the harmful stereotypes outlined in Edward Said's *Orientalism*, by the king's son who performed a "barbaric dance."<sup>36</sup> The party won Trajan's favor. It was soon lost, however, when Abgar sided with Parthia in a revolt against Trajan. He sent Lucius Quietus to correct the situation in 116 CE, and Edessa was sacked and Abgar killed.<sup>37</sup> Following the defeat, in the ensuing conflict Rome and Parthia placed various puppet kings on the Edessene throne.<sup>38</sup>

Abgar VIII, also called Abgar the Great, attempted to turn the tide in a "last gasp of the Edessan spirit of independence and self-assertion."<sup>39</sup> He joined in a Parthian siege of Nisibis in 194 CE, but it failed and was put down by Septimius Severus. However, Severus allowed Abgar to retain his throne as a client king.<sup>40</sup> Steven Ross argues that Severus evidently didn't see Abgar

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<sup>35</sup> Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 102.

<sup>36</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.21.3, in Cary and Foster, *Dio Cassius Roman History*, 402-3; on "orientalism," see Said, *Orientalism*. The *Roman History* is written in Greek.

<sup>37</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.30.3, in Cary and Foster, *Dio Cassius Roman History*, 418-9; Segal, *Edessa*, 13.

<sup>38</sup> For an overview of historical and archaeological evidence of Trajan's campaigns in Mesopotamia, see Palermo, *On the Edge*, 26-32.

<sup>39</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 45.

<sup>40</sup> On submission to Severus, see Herodian, *History of the Empire* 3.9.2, in C. R. Whittaker, trans., *Herodian: History of the Empire*, Loeb Classical Library 454 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014), 316-7. A Latin inscription dating to 195 CE records provincial boundaries being drawn between the province of Osroene and the kingdom of Abgar. See *L'Année épigraphique* 1984, no. 919.

as a serious threat and saw him more useful as a potential ally.<sup>41</sup> Abgar remained submissive to Roman rule. He adopted a Roman name, sent his sons to Rome, and gave his skilled archers to the service of the Roman army. Procopius, writing of the Persian wars in the sixth century in Greek, says that Abgar visited Rome himself and pleased the emperor so much he did not want the king to leave.<sup>42</sup> Edessa seems to have prospered under Abgar the Great's rule. The figure of Abgar remained crucial throughout the ensuing centuries in asserting Edessa's early connections to Rome and Christianity, as will be discussed below. The pseudo-independence of the city ended in 212/213 CE when Abgar IX was deposed by emperor Caracalla and Edessa officially became a Roman colony.<sup>43</sup> After changing hands between Rome and Persia throughout the third century, Edessa remained a Roman city in the province of Osrhoene until overtaken by the Persian empire and Arab conquests in the seventh century CE.<sup>44</sup> However, Edessa had a long history of political independence that lasted well into Rome's dominance of the Mediterranean world. It is perhaps this independence and position on the borderlands that allowed Edessa to articulate their own Roman superiority against other places in the empire.

After being officially brought into the Roman Empire, Edessa seems to have flourished. With new government offices, the presence of the imperial army, and Caracalla's universalizing Roman citizenship, Edessa appeared to take part in the Roman world smoothly, and many of the first magistrates took Greek and Roman names.<sup>45</sup> Into the third and especially in the fourth

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<sup>41</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 51.

<sup>42</sup> Procopius, *The Persian Wars* 2.12.5-11, in H.B. Dewing, trans., *Procopius. History of the Wars, Volume I: Books 1-2. (Persian War)*, Classical Library 48, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1914), 364-5.

<sup>43</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 78.12.1, in Cary and Foster, *Cassius Dio Roman History*, 304-5. For the documentary evidence of the creation of the Osrhoene province, see "P. Mesopotamia B" in J. Teixidor, "Deux documents Syriacques Du IIIe Siècle Ap. J.-C., provenant du Moyen Euphrate," *Comptes Rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 134 no.1 (1990): 144-66; and H. J. W. Drijvers and J. F. Healey, *The Old Syriac Inscriptions of Edessa and Osrhoene: Texts, Translations, and Commentary*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 232, 238.

<sup>44</sup> Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 479; Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 65-8.

century, the region experienced a flourishing of Syriac literature, education, and Christianity, and Edessa was one of the main centers of this development. Edessa had good Greek education and was home to three famous educational centers, namely the School of the Armenians, School of the Persians, and School of the Syrians.<sup>46</sup> Edessa's archives also had a reputation of being reliable.<sup>47</sup> Though now a Roman political entity, in the frontier of the eastern empire Edessa remained a rich hybrid including influences such as Aramaic, Hellenistic, Arab, Persian, and Roman culture.<sup>48</sup> Its position on Rome's eastern frontier made it a porous zone that balanced Mesopotamia between the eastern and western empires.<sup>49</sup> Thus, Edessa had many different political and cultural identities to draw upon. It is interesting, then, that the texts stress Roman identity when it was at its most fluid in late antiquity.

Throughout the fourth and fifth centuries Edessa experienced times of relative political peace, aside from the religious controversies which will be discussed below. Diocletian's efforts to secure the eastern frontier and a peace treaty in 299 CE brought stability in the border zone between Rome and Persia.<sup>50</sup> As noted above, Edessa became an important base for the Roman army during campaigns against Persia and in defense against invasions of the Huns.<sup>51</sup> Inside the city there was a permanent garrison as well as *comitatenses*, *palatini*, *limitanei*, and foreign *foederati*. Edessene civilians, especially in times of war, were responsible for housing and

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<sup>46</sup> For the schools, see Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: the School of Nisibis and Christian Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>47</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 20; on the archive's reliability, Eusebius mentions the archives in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.13.5, in Kirsopp Lake, trans., *Ecclesiastical History, Volume I: Books 1-5*, Loeb Classical Library 153 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), 86-7.

<sup>48</sup> Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*, 17.

<sup>49</sup> For an analysis of the relationship of Rome and Persia in Northern Mesopotamia, see Palermo, *On the Edge*, here 2.

<sup>50</sup> Palermo, *On the Edge*, 52; Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 190.

<sup>51</sup> Hunnic invasions posed threats to northern Mesopotamia in 395-6, 515, and 531 CE. On the Huns, see, among others, Hyun-Jin Kim, *The Huns, Rome and the Birth of Europe*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); O. J. Maenchen-Helfen, *The World of the Huns: Studies in Their History and Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); Colin D. Gordon, *The Age of Attila: Fifth-Century Byzantium and the Barbarians*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960).

feeding soldiers, often at great expense, causing tension and even violence.<sup>52</sup> It is in this context, and the convergence of many ethnicities and identities, that the two texts of this paper assert Edessa's Roman identity.

The sixth century saw hard times for the Mediterranean world, including Edessa. The city suffered floods, plagues, famines, and other natural disasters at the turn of the sixth century.<sup>53</sup> When war reignited between Rome and Persia again by king Kavadh, Edessa was again caught in the center of the conflict. The city's walls experienced damage and decay in 499 CE, and hasty repair had to be undertaken when the city was sieged in 502 CE.<sup>54</sup> Civilians were purportedly able to keep Kavadh's forces out of the city, but the Persians plundered outside the walls and in the surrounding countryside. It was during this time that Edessa complained about the uncouth behavior of the billeted Gothic soldiers.<sup>55</sup> Subsequent wars broke out in 527, 562, 579, 590, and 603. Edessa came under Persian rule in 609, and was briefly reconquered by emperor Heraclius in 628 before being taken by followers of Muhammad in 639. The sixth century was thus an unstable period on the eastern frontier, and it is in this context the Edessene texts claim a Roman identity, perhaps representing a desire to return to the peace of the fifth century.

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<sup>52</sup> Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, 35; Segal, *Edessa*, 117-8; for an overview of the Roman army in Syria, see Nigel Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). Edessa claimed that they received particular mistreatment from Gothic *foederati*, which will be discussed below.

<sup>53</sup> On the attested natural disasters, see *Chronicle of Edessa* 78, 79, 91, 96, in Cowper, "Selections from the Syriac," 36-8. On the greater climactic changes of "Little Ice Age" of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, subsequent famine, and outbreak of the bubonic plague across the Mediterranean world, see, among others, Ulf Buentgen, Vladimir S. Myglan, Fredrik Charpentier Ljungqvist, Michael McCormick, Nicola Di Cosmo, Michael Sigl, Johann Jungclauss, et al., "Cooling and Societal Change during the Late Antique Little Ice Age from 536 to around 660 AD," *Nature Geoscience* 9 no. 3 (March 2016): 231-6; William Rosen, *Justinian's Flea: Plague, Empire, and the Birth of Europe*, (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007); Dionysius Stathakopoulos, *Famine and Pestilence in the Late Roman and Early Byzantine Empire*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2004).

<sup>54</sup> Greatrex, *Rome and Persia at War*, 41; *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 36, 52, 77.

<sup>55</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 93-4; further discussion below.

## Edessa and Syriac Christianity

A key component of Edessa's identity and its articulation in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* is its emphasis on Christianity. Syriac Christianity has had a long-standing reputation from late antiquity to twentieth-century scholarship as being fiercely unorthodox and exotic. Peter Brown himself deemed Syria "notoriously the Wild and Woolly West of ascetic heresy."<sup>56</sup> However, recent scholarship has begun to revise this prevailing narrative. It remains vital to consider both the uniqueness of Syriac Christianity as well as its participation in imperial discourse surrounding orthodox Christianity and empire as a whole.<sup>57</sup> This is the case with Edessa, whose Christianity was at once unique and separate from Antioch's Greek-speaking writers as well as integrated into imperial Christian discourses surrounding orthodoxy. In the remainder of this chapter, I briefly overview the development of Edessa's Christianity, its unique and local attributes, and its important related texts.

Prior to its annexation as a Roman colony, Edessa had a diverse religious landscape of "pagan" and Jewish communities.<sup>58</sup> Christianity seems to have reached Edessa in the late second century CE. The *Chronicle of Edessa* provides the first date for the existence of a Christian church already in 201.<sup>59</sup> An inscription dated to the early third century found in Phrygia mentions encountering Christians around and on the road to Nisibis.<sup>60</sup> A prominent Christian

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<sup>56</sup> Peter Brown, "The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity," *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), 84; for a good summary of the caricatured nature of Syriac Christianity, see Christine Shepardson, "Syria, Syriac, Syrian: Negotiating East and West," in Philip Rousseau, Jutta Raithel, eds., *A Companion to Late Antiquity*, (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 455-66, here 455-8.

<sup>57</sup> Shepardson, "Syria, Syriac, Syrian," 456, 465-6. For a survey of Syriac Christian discourse, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

<sup>58</sup> For an overview of pre-Christian religions at Edessa, see Ross, *Roman Edessa*, chapter 5, "A 'Golden Age?' The Culture of Pre-Christian Edessa;" and Drijvers, *Cults and Beliefs*.

<sup>59</sup> *Chronicle of Edessa* 8, in Cowper, "Selections from the Syriac," 31.

<sup>60</sup> H. Grégoire, "Bardesane et S. Abercius," *Byzantion* 25-7 (1955-7), 363-8; D. Bundy, "The *Life of Abercius*: Its Significance for Early Syriac Christianity," *The Second Century* 7 no. 3 (1990), 163-76; D. Bundy, "Christianity in Syria," in D. N. Freedman, ed., *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 970-9.

figure in the late second to early third century was Bardaisan, who was also learned in Greek philosophy and an esteemed member of Abgar the Great's court. Bardaisan and his followers were later deemed heretical by many writers in late antiquity.<sup>61</sup> His teachings have been connected to Gnosticism, which has also been tied to Syria and Edessa by its connections to the apostle Thomas.<sup>62</sup> Traditionally the apostle is said to have converted Abgar V to Christianity, but this remains speculation. Throughout the third and fourth centuries, Christianity became more prominent in Edessa and throughout the Near East. Edessa seems to have felt the effects of the Diocletianic persecutions in various martyr stories. Three notable martyrs include Shmona and Gurya, said to be martyred in 309 CE, and Habbib in 310 CE.<sup>63</sup> For these martyrs, a shrine was built on a hill outside the city's northern walls which contained their bones. A church was built in their honor by Bishop Abraham in the mid-fourth century CE inside the walls near the northern gate. In times of war, the bones were placed in this church for safe-keeping.<sup>64</sup> These three martyrs and their shrines are central to *Euphemia and the Goth*, a tale likely recited at the shrine during their festival.

A major and influential Syriac Christian figure in the fourth century was Ephrem, who fled to Edessa when Nisibis fell to the Persians in 363 as a result of Julian's defeat and Jovian's subsequent peace treaty. Ephrem was a proponent of Nicene Christianity and keenly aware of imperial discourse surrounding orthodoxy. He sought to integrate local Christianity with that of the empire. As Christine Shepardson has pointed out, Christian discourse was an apt vehicle for Syrians to participate in the broader empire through debates surrounding church and empire in

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<sup>61</sup> On Bardaisan in general, see, among others, H. J. W. Drijvers, *Bardaisan of Edessa*, (Assen: Van Gorcum & Company, 1966); Ilaria Ramelli, *Bardaisan of Edessa: a Reassessment of the Evidence and a New Interpretation*, (Piscataway: Gorgias Press, 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 44, 166, 174-6; Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 130.

<sup>63</sup> See the *Martyrdom of Shmona and Guria* and the *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon*, see Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth*, 90-128.

<sup>64</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 182.

the fourth century.<sup>65</sup> Ephrem's writings are greatly concerned with condemning the heresies he found in Edessa, including Christian groups that followed Bardaisan, Mani, and Marcian, as well as pagans and Jews. His concern likely indicates that these populations were numerous there.<sup>66</sup> Many of his condemnations fall in line with groups that other eastern imperial writers were concerned with, including Jews and pagans as well as Arians, Anomeans, and Homoian Christians.<sup>67</sup> Ephrem's writings became widely influential, and many of his works were translated into Greek, putting Syriac Christian discourse on the imperial radar. Another particularity of Christianity during Ephrem's time was its unique asceticism. The Syrian practice was called the *bnay qyama/bnat qyama*, or "Sons/Daughters of the Covenant."<sup>68</sup> These ascetics were committed to chastity, but unlike other ascetics could live together or with their families while in service of their priest or bishop. Ephrem's influence, especially his concern with imperial orthodoxy, anti-Jewish and anti-pagan rhetoric, and polemic against Julian, appears in the *Julian Romance*. Ephrem thus was an important figure for later writers to draw on his imperial and orthodox authority.

In the early fifth century, Bishop Rabbula continued Ephrem's work of standardizing Edessa's Christianity and maintaining imperial orthodoxy. The Council of Ephesus in 431 was decided in favor of Cyril of Alexandria and the title of *theotokos*, or "God-bearer," to the Virgin

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<sup>65</sup> Shepardson, "Syria, Syriac, Syrian," 460.

<sup>66</sup> Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 124.

<sup>67</sup> Shepardson, "Syria, Syriac, Syrian," 461; see also Christine Shepardson, "'Exchanging Reed for Reed': Mapping Contemporary Heretics onto Biblical Jews in Ephrem's Hymns on Faith," *Hugoye* 5 (2002); Christine Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria*, (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2008); and Sidney Griffith, "Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa, and the Church of the Empire," in Thomas Halton and Joseph Williams, eds., *Diakonia: Studies in Honor of Robert T. Meyer*, (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 22-52.

<sup>68</sup> On "Sons/Daughters of the Covenant," see the works of Susan Ashbrook Harvey, especially Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Revisiting the Daughters of the Covenant: Women's Choirs and Sacred Song in Ancient Syriac Christianity," *Hugoye* 8 no. 2 (2005); and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 34; see also S. P. Brock, "Early Syrian Asceticism," *Numen* 20 no. 1 (1973), 1-19.

Mary and condemned Nestorius, who opposed the title.<sup>69</sup> Rabbula upheld the outcome of the council, thus maintaining imperial orthodoxy in Edessa. As a result, many “heretical” features of Edessa were purged. For example, Narsai, a follower of Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose teachings were conflated with Nestorius, was forced to flee with his followers to Nisibis and later into the Persian empire.<sup>70</sup> Rabbula also purportedly razed the heretical landscape; four pagan temples were destroyed as well as a synagogue that was converted into the Church of St. Stephen.<sup>71</sup> Rabbula also had a reputation of austerity and simplicity.<sup>72</sup> He is attributed to having written *Rules* to moderate ascetic behavior, including the *bnay qyama/bnat ayama*. At the other end of the scale, he was also remembered as a caretaker of the poor, and was responsible for building infirmaries and other institutions of charity.<sup>73</sup> Rabbula’s influence is also apparent in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, especially in the former’s focus on Edessa’s ability to protect its vulnerable citizens.

In the middle of the fifth century, theological controversies further divided the Christian world, and Edessa and the eastern empire experienced deep and irresolvable schisms. Eutyches of Constantinople was a proponent of the “one nature” of Christ, which was officially declared a heresy in the Council of Chalcedon in 451.<sup>74</sup> Those who rejected the ruling of the council are

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<sup>69</sup> For the Council of Ephesus, see, among others, Susan Wessel, *Cyril of Alexandria and the Nestorian Controversy: The Making of a Saint and a Heretic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Frances Young, *From Nicaea to Chalcedon: A Guide to the Literature and its Background*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

<sup>70</sup> Shepardson, “Syria, Syriac, Syrian,” 463.

<sup>71</sup> Such assertions may be exaggerated rhetoric; however, for the possible takeover of the synagogue in Edessa, see the *Chronicle of Edessa* 51, in Cowper, “Selections from the Syriac,” 34.

<sup>72</sup> Segal, *Edessa*, 91-2.

<sup>73</sup> See Robert Doran, *Stewards of the Poor: The Man of God, Rabbula, and Hiba in Fifth-Century Edessa*, (Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 2006); also Maria Daerfler, “The Holy Man in the Courts of Rome: Roman Law and Clerical Justice in Fifth-Century Syria,” *Studies in Late Antiquity* 3 no. 2 (2019): 192-211. For Rabbula in general, see Georg Blum, *Rabbula von Edessa; der Christ, der Bischof, der Theologe*, (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1969); and H. J. W. Drijvers, “The Man of God of Edessa, Bishop Rabbula, and the Urban Poor: Church and Society in the Fifth Century,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 4 no. 2 (1996): 235-48.

<sup>74</sup> Eutyches had first gained approval at the Second Council of Ephesus in 449. This council was later deemed illegitimate and officially condemned in both Councils of Chalcedon in 451 and Constantinople in 553. For the foundational scholarship on the Council of Chalcedon of 451, see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of the Monophysite*

called miaphysites in scholarship, and have continued in various churches today, including the Syrian Orthodox Church.<sup>75</sup> After Chalcedon, leaders for and against the council were in constant conflict. The narrative, derived from Eusebius and emperor Constantine, that Roman emperors were the orthodox purveyors of divine will was beginning to crack.<sup>76</sup> In the aftermath, many emperors kept a policy of advocating for peace between the two sides. For example, in 482 the emperor Zeno put forth the *Henotikon*, drafted by Bishop Acacius of Constantinople, which sought to placate and unite the schism from Chalcedon. The *Henotikon* was not able to heal the divide, and in some cases caused further schisms and controversies.<sup>77</sup> However, the effort allowed miaphysites to continue to spread, build churches, and organize into a greater episcopal system.<sup>78</sup> Edessa's position on the borderlands also allowed miaphysites to maintain their authority.

The policy of toleration, however, did not last beyond the emperor Anastasius, who died in 518. Emperor Justin I was a strong supporter of Chalcedon and wished to impose it across the

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*Movement: Chapters in the History of the Church in the Fifth and Sixth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972); and J. Lebon, *Le Monophysisme sévérien. Étude historique littéraire et théologique sur la résistance Monophysite au concile de Chalcédoine jusqu'à la constitution de l'Église jacobite* (Louvain: J. Van Linthout, 1909). For the council and issues surrounding it, see, among others, Richard Price and Michael Gaddis, *The Acts of the Council of Chalcedon, vol. 1-3* (Liverpool: Liverpool of University Press, 2005); Patrick Gray, "The Legacy of Chalcedon: Christological Problems and their Significance," in Michael Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 215-38; Volker-Lorenz Menze, *Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Wood, *We Have No King*, 163-75; Mark Smith, *The Idea of Nicaea in the Early Church Councils, AD 431-451* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>75</sup> The term "miaphysite" has also been known as "monophysite," but this term has recently fallen out of favor because of its derogatory meaning.

<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Nestor Kavvadas, "Severus of Antioch and Changing Miaphysite Attitudes toward Byzantium," in *Severus of Antioch: His Life and Times*, John D'Alton and Youhanna Youssef, eds., (Boston: Brill, 2016), 124-37. For the Christian population in the eastern empire, however, the understanding and boundaries of Christian orthodoxy were much more fluid and complex; see, for example, David Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society, and Simple Believers*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 58, 63-6.

<sup>77</sup> For example, a pro-Chalcedonian general named Vitalian revolted twice against the emperor Anastasius who promoted the *Henotikon*; see Hugh Elton, "Fighting for Chalcedon: Vitalian's Rebellion against Anastasius," in Jitse Dijkstra and Christiane Raschle, eds., *Religious Violence in the Ancient World: From Classical Athens to Late Antiquity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 367-88.

<sup>78</sup> Shepardson, "Syria, Syriac, Syrian," 463.

empire, resulting in persecution and exiled bishops.<sup>79</sup> For example, Bishop Paul of Edessa, a miaphysite, was exiled in 519 and 522.<sup>80</sup> The emperor replaced him with Bishop Asclepius, who reportedly violently persecuted the miaphysite population. In addition, a certain Goth named Liberius, nicknamed the “bull-eater,” persecuted miaphysites under Asclepius.<sup>81</sup> In 525 the Daisan flooded, which was taken to be a sign of divine will against Asclepius, and the persecuted rose up against him. Asclepius fled and died in Antioch.<sup>82</sup> In 526 Paul recanted and wrote in favor of Chalcedon and was allowed to return to his see in Edessa. Under the reign of Justinian, the empress Theodora allowed the exiled bishop Theodosius to appoint miaphysite bishops throughout the empire.<sup>83</sup> Theodosius ordained Jacob bishop of Edessa, whose followers became known by their opponents as “Jacobites,” and the city became a center of miaphysite teaching despite the ongoing persecutions. Edessa, even though a peripheral enclave for miaphysitism, experienced and participated in the imperial debates and struggles over defining Christian orthodoxy. The miaphysite persecutions under Justin and Justinian, as well as the Goths’ role in them, are important to Edessa’s critique of Roman leadership in favor of their own Roman superiority as the home of true Christianity.

As a center of Syriac learning and literature, religious texts produced in Edessa became central to their religious identity. Four religious texts are important to *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, including the Abgar legend, the *Doctrina Addai*, the *Martyrdom of*

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<sup>79</sup> On Justin I, see Menze, *Justinian*, 22-30.

<sup>80</sup> On Paul of Edessa, see Menze, *Justinian*, 50-5

<sup>81</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* 8.4.75, in Robert R. Phenix and Cornelia B. Horn, trans., *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor: Church and War in Late Antiquity*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011), 294-5.

<sup>82</sup> *Chronicle of Edessa* 92, in Cowper, “Selections from the Syriac,” 37.

<sup>83</sup> On Theodora’s role in miaphysitism, see, among others, James Evans, *The Empress Theodora: Partner of Justinian*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002); Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Theodora the ‘Believing Queen’: A Study in Syriac Historiographical Tradition,” *Hugoye* 4 no. 2 (2001): 209-34; Menze, *Justinian*, 208-28; Michaela Dirschlmaier, “Xenodocheia – Reception Camps for Refugees? About Clerical and Imperial Patronage for the Xenoi,” in Dirk Rohmann, Jörg Ulrich, and Margarita Vallejo Girvés, eds., *Mobility and Exile at the End of Antiquity*, (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2018), 161-73.

*Shmona and Guria*, and the *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon*. One of the main trends in Christian discourse was creating and claiming a Christian past, and Edessa could lay strong claims in this trend.<sup>84</sup> The city was particularly famous for its legendary connections to Jesus, not only through the Syriac language, but also as the holder of his words and image. The *Letters of Jesus and Abgar* is perhaps Edessa's most important religious text.<sup>85</sup> Highlighted in Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History*, the legendary letters are said to preserve the correspondence between Abgar the Great and Jesus.<sup>86</sup> Abgar writes a letter to Jesus asking to heal him, and Jesus sends a reply saying that he cannot come himself but will send an apostle. After the Crucifixion, the apostle Thomas sends Thaddeus to Edessa to fulfill Jesus' promise. This tale was well-known throughout the empire. Egeria, a woman from the western empire, visited Edessa during her pilgrimage journey in the late fourth century and records its main attraction as the palace of Abgar and the *Letters*, which she was familiar with before traveling. While there, the bishop of Edessa gives her a tour, and tells Egeria stories of the protective nature of the letters, including their power to ward off a Persian attack.<sup>87</sup> He also takes her to the gate where the messenger carrying Jesus's letters had entered, and describes how the people keep the gate ritually clean.<sup>88</sup> Egeria herself sees the letters, remarking that it seemed "better [...] to receive them from him in that place, just in case, perhaps, our copies back home turn out to be less complete."<sup>89</sup> Thus, the Abgar legend was well-known even in the western empire, and Edessa was seen as the authentic source for access to Jesus's own writings, setting it apart as a holy city connected to early

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<sup>84</sup> On trends in Christian discourse, see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); for this trend, see chapter 4, "The Power of the Past," 120-154.

<sup>85</sup> Steven Ross argues that the text is similar to classical genealogical myths which traced a city or people to a divine ancestor. See Ross, *Roman Edessa*, 135.

<sup>86</sup> See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.13, in Lake, *Eusebius*, 86-97.

<sup>87</sup> Egeria, 19.9, in Jacobs, "Egeria," 344.

<sup>88</sup> Egeria, 19.17, in Jacobs, "Egeria," 344.

<sup>89</sup> Egeria, 19.19, in Jacobs, "Egeria," 345.

Christian origins. This claim was vital to the articulation of Edessa's pure Christianity in the two texts examined in this paper.

The story of King Abgar and Jesus is also recounted in the *Doctrina Addai*, written in the late fourth or early fifth century.<sup>90</sup> This version adds that Abgar went to Jerusalem and saw and spoke to Jesus, and Edessa's court painter created a portrait of Jesus to hang in Abgar's palace.<sup>91</sup> The apostle Thomas sent a disciple, now named Addai, to Edessa to preach. Addai preached, healed, and converted the people of Edessa, and "rejoiced" that the majority of the people believed in Christ.<sup>92</sup> Addai sets up a church in Edessa involving the elites of Abgar's court, or the *bnay hire*. The *Doctrina Addai* was a significant religious text which, as will be discussed throughout this paper, was key to Edessa's claims as a city with early connections with Christianity, orthodox religious authority, and loyalty to the Roman Empire.

The two other religious texts important to mention here are those in connection with *Euphemia and the Goth*, namely the Edessene martyrs who rescue Euphemia. The *Martyrdom of Shmona and Guria* and the *Martyrdom of Habbib the Deacon* describe Diocletianic martyrs of the early fourth century.<sup>93</sup> Although the texts that remain are of a later provenance, they are thought to be historical martyrs and contain genuine information about fourth century Edessa.<sup>94</sup> Ephrem, for example, writing in the mid-fourth century, mentions the three martyrs, and they are

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<sup>90</sup> On the *Doctrina Addai*, see, among others, Sidney Griffith, "The Doctrina Addai as a Paradigm of Christian Thought in Edessa in the Fifth Century," *Hugoye* 6 no. 2 (2009): 269-92; Wood, *We Have no King*, 82-95; Sebastian Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in Harold W. Attridge and Göhei Hata, eds., *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 212-34; J.W. Drijvers, "The Protonike Legend, the *Doctrina Addai* and bishop Rabbula of Edessa," *Vigiliae Christianae* 51 no. 3 (1997): 298-315; A. Desreumaux, "Le Doctrine d'Addai: le chroniqueur et ses documents," *Apocrypha* 1 (1990): 249-68; H.J.W. Drijvers, "Addai und Mani, Christentum und Manichäismus im dritten Jahrhundert im Syrien," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 221 (1983): 171-85.

<sup>91</sup> *Doctrina Addai* 3, 5, in G. Phillips, trans., *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*, (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1876).

<sup>92</sup> *Doctrina Addai* 30.

<sup>93</sup> For the texts and an English translation, see F. C. Burkitt, *Euphemia and the Goth*, 90-111 and 163-71 for Shmona and Guria, 112-28 and 172-82 for Habbib; for other commentary, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Edessan Martyrs and Ascetic Tradition," *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 236 (1990): 195-206.

<sup>94</sup> Millar, *The Roman Near East*, 486.

also listed on a martyrdom calendar from 411 that lists the three as Edessa's only martyrs.<sup>95</sup> The martyrs are significant, especially in *Euphemia and the Goth*, because they are humble and lowly figures. Shmona and Guria were two laymen who did not live in the city itself, but in the surrounding countryside, and Habbib was a local deacon.<sup>96</sup> Thus, these martyrs were likely significant to Edessa's identity and for the local Christian population. As will be discussed below, these martyrs were key figures to the construction of Edessa as the exemplar of Roman Christian and civic virtues in *Euphemia and the Goth*.

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<sup>95</sup> Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," 223-4; Ephrem, *Carmina Nisibena* 33.13; for the calendar, see F. Nau, *Un martyrologie et douze ménologes syriaques*, *Patrologia Orientalis* 10 no. 1 (1912): 7-26.

<sup>96</sup> Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 36; Wood, *We Have no King*, 99.

## Chapter 3

### Borderlands and Postcolonial Theory

Borders and frontiers have received increased scholarly attention throughout the twentieth century. Borderlands theory was first articulated and utilized in early American history to study the relationships of indigenous peoples with European empires, particularly in areas such as the American Southwest.<sup>1</sup> The theoretical framework has since expanded to other fields, particularly in conjunction with postcolonial theory. In history, scholars have utilized these theories in many areas, such as the medieval period and the late antique Near East, a few examples of which will be given below. In their addition to the *Very Short Introduction* series by Oxford, Alexander Diener and Joshua Hagen demonstrate the utility of borderlands theory. As they define, borders are “areas of opportunity and insecurity, zones of contact and conflict, sites of cooperation and competition, [and] places of ambivalent identities and aggressive assertions of difference[.]”<sup>2</sup> They note that in the ancient world, societies tended to exhibit flexible approaches to territory and borders, which functioned as “transitional frontier zones” containing a “fluid mixture of peoples.”<sup>3</sup> In the modern world, with increased globalization, they note an increased concern over border security, heightened tensions of an “us versus them” mentality, and increased violence and injustice associated with the process of border crossing.<sup>4</sup>

This framework, then, is especially suited to examine Edessa’s self-representation. Edessa was very much on the borderland of a multicultural Roman world, situated between the powerful Roman and Persian empires. Through contacts such as war and trade, Edessa had a

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<sup>1</sup> For an overview of borderlands theory in American historiography, see Daniel Usner, “Borderlands,” in Daniel Vickers, ed., *A Companion to Colonial America*, (Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 408-24.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander C. Diener and Joshua Hagen, *Borders: A Very Short Introduction*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2012), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Diener and Hagen, *Borders*, 39.

<sup>4</sup> Diener and Hagen, *Borders*, 61.

diverse population and a multitude of identities. Their position on the frontier shaped the way Edessa wrote about its place in the world and provided the literate elite with the tools and opportunities to articulate and claim identity. After its incorporation into the Roman empire, and especially in texts such as *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, Edessa laid a strong claim as an exemplar of Roman identity that was normative within the trends of Roman discourse. This section outlines the theories and methods associated with borderlands and postcolonial thought that will be helpful to examine how the texts articulated Roman identity on the periphery of the empire.

Examinations of borderlands in different places and time periods yields fruitful comparisons. Edessa survived as an autonomous monarchy for centuries before it came under full Roman control in the early third century CE. Because of their position on the frontier zone between the Roman and Persian empires, Edessa was able to carefully maintain influence by playing off the rivalry between the great powers. Similar situations appear in cases of the indigenous communities in colonial North America. As Adelman and Aron illustrate, the peoples of the Great Lakes were able to maintain autonomy and agency when the French and British empires were competing for control of North America. Because of the rivalry, the frontier zone between the empires remained fluid and the people of the Great Lakes developed a new “political economy” with peaceful cultural and economic exchange and even ethnic mixing.<sup>5</sup> However, after the American Revolution and the War of 1812, imperial borders became more solidified. As new Americans and British Canadians put a new emphasis on maintaining control of “private” land, the people of the Great Lakes lost political autonomy and the syncretic

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<sup>5</sup> Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History,” *The American Historical Review* 104 no. 3 (1999): 814-41, here 820-1.

community in which they had once flourished.<sup>6</sup> Edessa also maintained autonomy between the Roman and Persian empires until it was made a Roman *colonia* in 212/3, and afterwards expressed favor towards peace and cooperation between the two rivals. Even before official annexation, however, Abgar the Great seems to have sensed the tide was turning in Rome's favor. As noted above, after the failed Parthian revolt at Nisibis, he gave his two sons and a group of archers to Rome and adopted a Latin name, Lucius Aelius Aurelius Septimius Abgarus.

As Andrew Cayton and Fredrika Teute observe, American frontier areas were arenas for the "extension of the construction of power relations in larger political entities," and "essential to probing internal power dynamics [in] analyzing gender, race, and status hierarchies."<sup>7</sup> The American southwest is a borderland that was, and is, continually contested long after the European wars of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As such, the region provides fertile ground for these borderlands dynamics. Clara Lomas, for example, provides a thoughtful analysis of women on the frontiers in the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century. During the conflict, female writers wrote empowering narratives, such as *The Lady was a Rebel* by Villegas de Magnón, which focused on the triviality of geopolitical boundaries and the strength of the connectedness and simultaneous multiplicity of language, culture, and female experiences.<sup>8</sup> In the political arena of the frontier, however, the agency of women was repurposed to suit the needs of the larger political entity. The newspaper *La Voz de la Mujer*, written by men disguised as women, urged women to instill courage in their sons and send them to

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<sup>6</sup> Adelman and Aron, "From Borderlands to Borders," 821-3.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, "Introduction: On the Connection of Frontiers," in Andrew R.L. Cayton and Fredrika J. Teute, eds., *Contact Points: American Frontiers from the Mohawk Valley to the Mississippi, 1750-1830*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1-15, here 10.

<sup>8</sup> Clara Lomas, "Transborder Discourse: The Articulation of Gender in the Borderlands in the Early Twentieth-Century," in Antonia Castañeda, Susan H. Armitage, Patricia Hart, and Karen Weathermon, eds., *Gender on the Borderlands: The Frontiers Reader*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), 51-74, here 66-8. For gender on the border, see also the monumental work of Gloria Anzálúa; Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, (San Francisco: Spinsters, 1987).

war. The frontier opportunities for women, then, were “politicized to serve a nationalist cause.”<sup>9</sup> As we shall see later, similar anxieties of women and agency in the borderlands are present in the Syriac texts of Edessa. *Euphemia and the Goth*, as will be discussed below, tells of a female “experience” written by male authors. In a similar fashion to the newspaper, the main character’s femininity is exploited to solidify the community’s boundaries and to flout cultural superiority to outsiders.

Scholars in the late antique Roman East have pursued similar frontier studies with bountiful results. Elizabeth Fowden’s *The Barbarian Plain*, for example, masterfully examines the cult of St. Sergius at Rusafa on the Syrian frontier between the Roman and Persian empires.<sup>10</sup> Rusafa and the saint’s shrine were crossing points for many different groups, such as pilgrims and Arab nomads. The popularity of the cult and its significance across cultures meant that it was often used for political purposes as it could draw diverse groups together.<sup>11</sup> As a result, the city and the saint’s shrine were vital for political control of the Syrian steppe. Control of the shrine not only gave those in power control over the many people who travelled there, but also control over the saint’s protective powers. In this way, saints’ shrines on the frontier could act as Christian “cores” that exerted strong centripetal forces.<sup>12</sup> As I argue later, Edessa used these same opportunities to present themselves as a core of Roman Christianity.

Greg Fisher has applied borderlands theory to examine Arab groups and their interactions with Rome and Persia in *Between Empires*.<sup>13</sup> As groups such as the Jafnids and Naşrids made

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<sup>9</sup> Lomas, “Transborder Discourse,” 59-60; see also Emma Pérez, “A la Mujer: A Critique of the Partido Liberal Mexicano’s Gender Ideology,” in Adelaida R. Del Castillo, ed., *Between Borders: Essays on Mexicana/Chicana History*, (Encino: Floricanto, 1990), 459-82.

<sup>10</sup> Elizabeth Key Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain: Saint Sergius between Rome and Iran*, (Berkeley: +University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 118.

<sup>12</sup> Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 58.

<sup>13</sup> Greg Fisher, *Between Empires: Arabs, Romans, and Sasanians in Late Antiquity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

alliances with both imperial powers, they incorporated Roman elite idioms into their own identities while maintaining enough distance to remain politically autonomous. These Arab groups are particularly useful to examine how Roman Christianity provided a political tool for peripheral peoples. Many converted to Christianity, giving them access to imperial political and economic structures, but kept their affiliation ambiguous to avoid the doctrinal schisms.<sup>14</sup> Those who did identify with miaphysitism, however, were still able to avoid imperial condemnation because of their position on the periphery in the “fluid religious landscape of sixth-century Syria.”<sup>15</sup> Christianity was similarly a powerful political tool for Edessa, who began to assert their Christianity soon after becoming a Roman city, especially to emphasize the longevity of the city’s Christian origins. It was these assertions, amplified by their peripheral status, that allowed Edessa to claim true Christianity in the face of miaphysite persecutions.

Key to borderlands theory is the idea of boundary formation, which has been recently reevaluated with postcolonial theory. Frederik Barth has argued that a key aspect of group formation, ethnicity in particular, is the establishment of a “social boundary” between the group and others. It is the boundary itself, not the cultural makeup of the interior group, that defines it. Some of the features that mark the ethnic boundary are shared criteria of evaluating and judging behavior, values, and cultural differences.<sup>16</sup> For different groups to peacefully coexist, there must be a “positive bond” between groups based on complementary cultural features while still maintaining a separate ethnic boundary.<sup>17</sup> However, increased contact between groups often coincides with greater numbers of individuals and groups crossing these boundaries, resulting in

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<sup>14</sup> Fisher, *Between Empires*, 39, 67-71.

<sup>15</sup> Fisher, *Between Empires*, 55, 61.

<sup>16</sup> Frederik Barth, “Introduction,” in Frederik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, (Oslo: Universitets Forlaget, 1969), 9-38, here 15.

<sup>17</sup> Barth, “Introduction,” 18-9.

identity changes and increased ethnic ambiguity. In this ambiguity, Barth argues that political leaders often reinforce the group boundary by reviving traditional values and establishing “historical traditions to justify and glorify the [...] identity.”<sup>18</sup> In the analysis that follows, I argue that the Syriac authors used techniques similar to what Barth describes to show Edessa’s values as being clearly bounded in the walls of Edessa, against the “other,” in an established Roman tradition. Edessa draws clear boundaries against other areas of the empire that do not share the traditional Roman values that it is emblematic of itself. As the boundaries surrounding Roman identity became increasingly blurred in the fifth and sixth centuries, Edessa seems to more vehemently promote traditional values and historical narratives to reinforce their cultural boundary, just as Barth describes.

Identity boundaries in late antiquity, especially Roman identity, were powerfully tied to religious boundaries. As the Roman empire “Christianized,” Christian writers created a boundary against a religious “other” to solidify “Christianity” as a concept. Daniel Boyarin examines this boundary formation in the Christianity of late antiquity.<sup>19</sup> Boyarin argues that a key element in boundary creation is the masking of hybridity, or the “in-between” space of mixing, negotiation, and translation of culture.<sup>20</sup> For Christianity to define itself, it had to create “religious difference” through the concepts of heresiology and orthodoxy.<sup>21</sup> This became especially clear in anti-Jewish and anti-pagan discourse and polemic. Writings from Edessa greatly participated in this discourse to claim their own religious purity, especially in the *Julian Romance*. In doing so, the texts were asserting “some cognitive control over the bewildering complexity of a frontier

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<sup>18</sup> Barth, “Introduction,” 33-5.

<sup>19</sup> Daniel Boyarin, “Hybridity and Heresy: Apartheid Comparative Religion in Late Antiquity,” in Ania Loomba, Suvir Kaul, Matti Bunzi, Antoinette Burton, and Jed Esty, eds., *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 339-58.

<sup>20</sup> Boyarin, “Hybridity,” 341-3; Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, (London: Routledge, 1994), 38-9.

<sup>21</sup> Boyarin, “Hybridity,” 349, 353.

zone.”<sup>22</sup> Boyarin also points out that in polemical “name-calling,” it shows the reality of the “other’s” presence.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps the fear of the presence of pagans and Jews in Edessa prompted these texts’ assertion of Edessa’s superior identity and association with imperial authority and orthodoxy. As I will argue, the articulation of these stringent religious boundaries highlights the reality that the world of late antiquity, including Edessa, was becoming more hybridized despite the desires of the discourse.

In defining a boundary against an “other,” it is important to understand that our own binary conceptions of borders had no place in the ancient mind. Whittaker tackles this problem at length to argue that the Roman empire did not have hard-defined borders in *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*.<sup>24</sup> The Romans, he argues, imagined an *imperium sine fine* centered in the city of Rome that had a divine mandate to rule and civilize the entire world.<sup>25</sup> The “borders” of the empire are better understood as zones of power and accessibility, or control of the social space. One example Whittaker notes is that the interiority of the empire was denoted by “the juridical boundary of civil law.”<sup>26</sup> In the later Roman empire, when control of the frontiers came under increasing pressure in both the East and West, he notes that “frontier ideology became more extreme in its praise of traditional Roman values and superiority.”<sup>27</sup> As I will argue below, these trends can be felt in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*. As Edessene and

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<sup>22</sup> Boyarin, “Hybridity,” 342; David Chichester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1996), 22-3.

<sup>23</sup> Boyarin, “Hybridity,” 351; Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (New York: Routledge, 1997), 2.

<sup>24</sup> C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 32-7.

<sup>26</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 25, 68; see also Pol Troussset, “La frontière et ses contradictions,” *Travaux de la Maison de l’Orient* 21, (1993): 25-33.

<sup>27</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 197-8; Whittaker compares this phenomenon with a case study of precolonial Africa wherein traditional ideology was heightened when the frontier came under pressure. See Igor Kopytoff, *The African Frontier: the Reproduction of Traditional African Societies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

Roman frontiers come under pressure in the texts, the writers increasingly assert Edessa's own traditional Roman values and the longevity of their place within the empire.

The legitimacy of frontier peoples' claims to traditional *Romanitas*, however, is often questioned in ancient and modern sources because of their distance from the center of Roman power. Thus, an equally important modern conception to dispel is the binary of "core" and "periphery," which has come under reconsideration in postcolonial discourse.<sup>28</sup> A contradiction in imperial Roman discourse frequently becomes a problem: those brought under Roman rule were conquered by Rome's "civilizing" mission, but were criticized for merely "mimicking" Romanness.<sup>29</sup> However, postcolonial scholarship has begun reexamining the ways in which peripheral peoples could articulate legitimate claims of centrality. Nathanael Andrade, writing about Syria's identity in the Greek-dominating period but which follows the same trend in Roman domination, argues that Syrians could use Roman or Syrian "idioms" to experience their identity as Syrian and Roman simultaneously. In this way, Syrians were able to create their own "Romanness." As Andrade states, as Syrians "redefined sameness and difference" it "empowered Syria's inhabitants to navigate the nebulous divide between colonizer and colonized" to "assert their forms of Greekness and eventually Romanness to be as legitimate and 'central' as classical ones."<sup>30</sup> Thus, peripheral peoples, using imperial discourse, were able to claim their own sense of

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<sup>28</sup> Nathanael J. Andrade, *Syrian Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 28-9; see also Benjamin Isaac, "Core-periphery notions," in Benjamin Isaac, ed., *Empire and Ideology in the Graeco-Roman World: Selected Papers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 99-121; Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983); Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon, (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 61-77.

<sup>29</sup> Andrade, *Syrian Identity*, 29-30; on colonial mimicry, see Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 335-51.

<sup>30</sup> Andrade, *Syrian identity*, 31-2; see also Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, "Between metropole and colony: rethinking a research agenda," in Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler, eds., *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Culture in a Bourgeois World*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1-58.

Roman legacy that challenged the imperial core by reconstituting their own historical narratives. This historical reconstitution, as we shall see, is particularly evident in the *Julian Romance*.

A final framework with which I analyze Edessa's self-identification is a theory that nicely combines the theoretical frameworks outlined here and the Syriac texts considered in this paper, Jeffrey Cohen's "monster theory."<sup>31</sup> As he argues, monsters and "monstrousness" are a "mode of cultural discourse."<sup>32</sup> Examining monsters reveals the boundaries, anxieties, and desires of a particular society; as he succinctly states, "the monstrous body is pure culture."<sup>33</sup> The monster usually inhabits a contested cultural space, such as across a border or in a frontier, because it demands "polyphony, mixed response, and resistance to integration."<sup>34</sup> In this way, "the monster is difference made flesh," and this difference is usually articulated in cultural, political, racial, economic, or sexual terms.<sup>35</sup> The monster thus "reveals that difference is arbitrary" and threatens to destroy the cultural structure of a society.<sup>36</sup> The monster simultaneously embodies a society's greatest fears while serving as a strict guardian of the group's identity. The texts considered in this paper feature malevolent villains that interestingly map onto the "monster" as delineated by Cohen. In *Euphemia and the Goth*, the bitter and lustful Gothic soldier whisks Euphemia away and across the border into a land with no rule of law. There, the Goth's wife is the antithesis of a Roman Christian woman. In the *Julian Romance*, Julian is portrayed as a wicked tyrant bent on destroying Christianity and Roman order. As I will argue later, monster theory can perhaps allow us to gain insight into Edessa's view of the Roman

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<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory: Reading Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, "Preface: In a Time of Monsters," in Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory*, vii-xiv, here viii.

<sup>33</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in Cohen, ed., *Monster Theory*, 3-25, here 4.

<sup>34</sup> Cohen, "Monster Culture," 7.

<sup>35</sup> Cohen, "Monster Theory," 7.

<sup>36</sup> Cohen, "Monster Theory," 12.

empire. The monsters in these texts clearly convey Roman fears and anxieties surrounding the blurring lines of Roman identity in late antiquity, while simultaneously drawing lines around the Roman purity of Edessa. As Edessa's own Roman identity was in question during the wars and religious persecutions of the sixth century, the presence of Gothic monsters in the text could serve as a powerful critique to the hybridity and mixture that Rome had allowed to enter into the empire, as their own soldiers were deemed responsible for the fall of the western provinces. In addition, as Roman emperors sought to reunify the empire, the reality of the empire's heterogeneity came to the fore, the very concept which a monster perfectly embodies.

In summary, borderlands and postcolonial theories are profitable lenses with which to view *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*. Edessa was situated on the periphery of the Roman empire, but the distance gave the city the room to maneuver between Rome and Persia and to uphold its own agency. With that agency, however, Edessa claimed a central place within the Roman empire and Christianity. These claims were made by participating in normative Roman discourse, making them legitimate and potent. So strong were Edessa's claims that they had the confidence to criticize contemporary Roman leadership, including their failure in the Roman West, and to proclaim that it was Edessa, not Constantinople or Antioch, that was the new Rome of the East.

## Chapter 4

### Edessa as the Exemplar of Roman Civic Virtue and Justice

In the preface to the *Codex of Justinian*, which sought to unify all Roman law in the mid-sixth century, Justinian defines the two vital components of *Romanitas*:

The supreme safeguard of the State, stemming from two sources, (namely) arms and laws, and through them reinforcing its vitality, has made the fortunate Roman race preeminent above all peoples in the past, and, God willing, will do so forever. Each of these (arms and laws) has always flourished through the help of the other; as military affairs are safeguarded by the laws, so the laws themselves are maintained by the protection of arms.<sup>1</sup>

It is thus the Roman army and the rule of Roman law that mark and preserve Roman boundaries and values, and these two entities exemplified all that was exceptional and good about Roman rule. As I will argue in this chapter, Edessa asserted its own *Romanitas* in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* against the bitter Gothic soldier and the mad tyrant Julian, both of whom are abhorrent Roman soldiers who violate Roman law. The articulation of Edessa's Roman identity, then, was legitimately constructed within the well-known bounds of Roman discourse, and powerful enough to claim an identity as a "new Rome."

To make a claim of superior *Romanitas*, Edessene writers had to work against a long history of Roman stereotypes of eastern peoples. Because of its peripheral position on the eastern frontier, Edessa at times had a "barbaric" reputation among Latin and Greek Roman writers. Several examples above of this derogatory language are beneficial to repeat here. Tacitus, for

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<sup>1</sup> *Confirmation of the Codex of Justinian*, in Fred H. Blume, trans., Paul Krueger, Bruce W. Frier, Serena Connolly, Simona Corcoran, Michael H. Crawford, John Noël Dillon, et al, eds., *The Codex of Justinian: a New Annotated Translation, with Parallel Latin and Greek Text Based on a Translation by Justice Fred H. Blume*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 5.

example, says that “barbaric” kings like those at Edessa were by nature conniving and disloyal.<sup>2</sup> Tacitus is also stereotypically critical of soldiers from Syria, describing them as “sluggish” and unable to keep up with “the responsibilities of Romans.”<sup>3</sup> Cassius Dio takes care to note how the emperor Trajan was entertained by a young boy performing a “barbaric dance” in Abgar VII’s court.<sup>4</sup> Even John Malalas, a Syrian man writing in Greek from Antioch, reports that Edessa was called “Antioch the half-barbarian.”<sup>5</sup> These characterizations place Edessa within typical derogatory stereotypes of eastern Mediterranean peoples as being lazy, effeminate, and licentious. Such stereotypes take root in the earliest conceptions of the Roman world and derive from barbarity as defined by the ancient Greeks.<sup>6</sup> Livy, for example, states that Macedonians who colonized the eastern world “have degenerated into Syrians, Parthians, and Egyptians” because of their prolonged distance from the civilized world.<sup>7</sup> It is against the wall of this centuries-long discourse that Edessa participated to assert its own centrality in the Roman world. In this chapter, I argue that one of the ways the writers of *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* claimed Roman identity was to portray Edessa as the true home of Roman civic values, in particular, adherence to Roman law and justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 12.12, in Woodman *Tacitus*, 219-220.

<sup>3</sup> Tacitus, *Annals*, 13.35.1, in Woodman *Tacitus*, 262.

<sup>4</sup> Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 68.21.3, in Cary and Foster, *Dio Cassius Roman History*, 402-3

<sup>5</sup> John Malalas, *Chronicle* 17.418, in Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, 236-7.

<sup>6</sup> On the creation of the Greek “oriental barbarian,” see, among others, Yang Huang, “Invention of Barbarian and Emergence of Orientalism: Classical Greece,” *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 37 no. 4 (2010): 556-66; Lynette Mitchell, *Panhellenism and the Barbarian in Archaic and Classical Greece*, (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2007); Benjamin Issac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Other*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Irak Malkin, ed., *Ancient Perceptions of Greek Ethnicity*, (Washington DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2001); Thomas Harrison, *The Emptiness of Asia. Aeschylus’ Persians and the History of the Fifth Century*, (London: Duckworth, 2000); Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Pericles Georges, *Barbarian Asia and the Greek Experience from the Archaic Period to the Age of Xenophon*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994); Edith Hall, *Inventing the Barbarian. Greek Self-Definition through Tragedy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); Edmond Lévy, “Naissance du concept de barbare,” *Ktèma* 9 (1984): 5-15; Said, *Orientalism*.

<sup>7</sup> Livy, *History of Rome* 38.17.11-12; in J. C. Yardley, trans., *Livy. History of Rome, Volume XI: Books 38-40*, Loeb Classical Library 313, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 2018), 56-7.

With the above analytical framework from the previous section in mind, I will next examine the expression of Roman civic virtue and justice in *Euphemia and the Goth*. These attributes are evoked in strong comparisons with those outside of Edessa, following Barth's articulations of boundary creation. As Dimambro notes, the story places Edessa as a civilized society within the imperial system and shows that the Roman law and government will protect its citizens against foreign agents.<sup>8</sup> In the text, the Roman "judicial system" is heavily juxtaposed against the lying Goth and the violent, vengeful society of his homeland.<sup>9</sup> Edessa keeps its sacred oaths, takes care of its vulnerable citizens, follows the correct legal process, respects Roman laws, and is protected by Justice. The Goth breaks oaths and violates Roman law, his wife commits infanticide, and his family seeks violent revenge outside of proper legal process. Thus, the Goth serves to make Edessa appear more Roman; Edessa is lawful, and the Gothic Roman soldier is not.

When Sophia realizes that she can no longer keep Euphemia from leaving with the Goth to his homeland, she beseeches the martyrs to "go with her [Euphemia] and stand up for her in the country of the stranger, for to God and to you I trust on her behalf."<sup>10</sup> The Goth then swears an oath, placing his hand on the coffin, saying "As I deal with her and do unto her, so may God deal with me! Lo, these holy ones are sureties that I will not grieve her!"<sup>11</sup> The oaths taken bind the characters together and the Goth's oath is the mechanism that binds his fate to Justice and the divine power of the martyrs. The swearing of oaths was a binding and powerful practice across the Mediterranean world and in the Roman empire. Dimambro notes how this oath is the only

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<sup>8</sup> Dimambro, "Women on the Edge," 319, 323; see also Wood, *We Have no King*, 98.

<sup>9</sup> Much of my analysis of the comparison of Edessa with the Goth's homeland is similar to and follows Dimambro, "Women on the Edge."

<sup>10</sup> *Euphemia* 14, in Burkitt *Euphemia* 134-5.

<sup>11</sup> *Euphemia* 14, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 135.

way that Sophia, a vulnerable widow, is able to gain verbal power over the Goth, because she had already lost to his persuasion by marrying her daughter.<sup>12</sup> Oaths were especially important on the frontier in military affairs, and records of oaths were kept as binding documents.<sup>13</sup> Though they were integral for keeping peace, Romans often expressed distrust about barbarians' ability to keep their oaths.<sup>14</sup> Thus Edessa is presented as a city of loyal oath-keepers within the imperial system against the unfaithful Goth.

The Goth not only breaks his oath but also breaks laws. The Goth marries Euphemia under false pretenses, as he was already married. In addition, a law in the Theodosian Code, dated to the 370s CE, prohibits marriages between provincial women and *gentiles*.<sup>15</sup> Ralph Mathisen argues that this law was concerned with barbarian soldiers marrying Roman women in the provinces because of the complications regarding legal status and land inheritance it could cause.<sup>16</sup> More broadly, however, concern over barbarian marriages were due to stereotypical fears of barbarians being disloyal. Such marriages, however, seem to have been common and part of late antique transformations of "barbarians" becoming more integrated into the Roman empire.<sup>17</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey rightly emphasizes that the concern over the marriage would have been especially great because Sophia was a widow and, at the beginning of the story, had no male family to help her. The fate of her daughter was thus in perilous hands.<sup>18</sup> That the Goth

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<sup>12</sup> Dimambro, "Women on the Edge," 330.

<sup>13</sup> Kevin Uhalde, "Barbarian Traffic, Demon Oaths, and Christian Scruples (Aug. *Epist.* 46-47)," in Mathisen and Shanzer, eds., *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World*, 253-62, here 257-8. Oaths followed imperial formulae, and evidence of specifically Christian oaths doesn't come until the early 5<sup>th</sup> century. See, for example, *Papiri della Società Italiana* 689, dated between 408-423 CE.

<sup>14</sup> Uhalde, "Barbarian Traffic," 258.

<sup>15</sup> *Codex Theodosianus* 3.14.1.

<sup>16</sup> Ralph Mathisen, "Provinciales, Gentiles, and Marriages between Romans and Barbarians in the Late Roman Empire," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009): 140-55, here 154.

<sup>17</sup> Mathisen, "Provinciales," 140, 145-6.

<sup>18</sup> Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 40; see also Richard B. Lyman Jr., "Barbarism and Religion: Late Roman and Early Medieval Childhood," in Lloyd deMause, ed., *The History of Childhood*, (New York: Psychohistory Press, 1974), 75-100.

was a soldier is also part of a long tradition of myths about soldiers preying on women's virtue.<sup>19</sup> Harvey also argues that the Goth's bigamous marriage made his abuse towards Euphemia equivalent to rape, a crime made more heinous by her socially vulnerable position.<sup>20</sup> In the eyes of the Roman court at the end of the text, however, the Goth's greatest crime is changing Euphemia's social status from freeborn to slave. As a female-only household, Sophia and her daughter's freeborn status was their strongest social standing. When the Goth strips off her clothing and dresses her as a slave, Euphemia speaks for the first time in the text, saying, "Thanks for your kindness, robber, stealing away free men by day, that you have revealed to me that I am a slave-girl and hast fettered me with the yoke of slavery, and hast not killed me with drawn sword!"<sup>21</sup> It is the injustice of illegal enslavement that causes Euphemia to cry out to the martyrs for help and vengeance, as well as that which finally arouses her male family members to help bring the Goth to court after Euphemia's miraculous return.<sup>22</sup> It is thus the barbaric outsider that threatens the safety of women in Roman Edessa, and he pays no heed to their legal standing in the Roman world. His disdain and violation of Roman law is what shocks the court in Edessa, as will be discussed further below.

The greatest contrast of Edessa's Roman civic virtues is the comparison of how the Edessenes and the Goths treat their victims and carry out justice. As Dimambro notes of the contrast, Edessa is a civil society where Roman law protects the powerless, while the Goths use illegitimate violence unjustly and do not have access to Roman law.<sup>23</sup> The Goth's homeland is

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<sup>19</sup> See Frédéric Blaive, "Le Mythe indo-européen du Guerrier Impie et le péché contre le vertu des femmes," *Latomus* 46 (1987): 169-79.

<sup>20</sup> Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 40; see also Angeliki Laiou, "Sex, Consent, and Coercion in Byzantium," in Angeliki Laiou, ed., *Consent and Coercion to Sex and Marriage in Ancient and Medieval Societies*, (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1993), 109-221.

<sup>21</sup> *Euphemia*, 16, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 136.

<sup>22</sup> Harvey, "Sacred Bonding," 41.

<sup>23</sup> Dimambro, "Women on the Edge," 324-6; see also Wood, *We Have no King*, 98. In the *foedus* of 382, the Goths were permitted to retain their own laws on land settled within the Roman empire; see Heather, *Goths*, 137; Jonathan

the antithesis to Roman Edessa. Stolen from the safety of Edessa, Euphemia is taken to what Sophia calls “the country of the stranger.”<sup>24</sup> She is further vulnerable because she is unable to communicate with anyone, as she only knows Syriac.<sup>25</sup> Now a slave in the Goth’s home, she is treated poorly by his wife, who has none of the virtue of the widow Sophia. She, like her husband, shares stereotypical barbaric traits such as a having a bad temper, “indignation,” and “envy.”<sup>26</sup> She stands in stark contrast to the hyper-feminized bodies of Sophia and Euphemia with masculine traits of power and agency within her own home. As Dimambro points out, in this barbarian land “female agency is turned upside down” as the wife holds power over the home as her husband seemingly remains submissive.<sup>27</sup> It is the wife who wields violence to kill Euphemia’s baby out of envy. Euphemia, in turn, kills the wife. A paradox appears here, as both women kill but one murder is legitimized.<sup>28</sup> Dimambro points out that Euphemia’s act is acceptable because as she has no access to Roman law or her social status, it remains her only recourse and is also sanctioned by God.<sup>29</sup>

When suspicion of the wife’s death falls on Euphemia, the full danger of her situation falls upon her. The Goth’s kinsmen “woke up like lions” to punish her.<sup>30</sup> Normally they would deliver her to a judge, but the judge was not in the country, so they take the matter of justice into

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Barlow, “Kinship, Identity and Fourth-Century Franks,” *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 45 no. 2 (1996): 230.

<sup>24</sup> *Euphemia* 14, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 134. The epithet even takes on biblical proportions, as Euphemia compares herself to Joseph taken captive to Egypt while she prays to God and the martyrs; see *Euphemia* 17, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 136. The literary trope of a “stranger in a foreign land” was common to Syriac literature; see Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 325; Brock, “Early Syrian Asceticism,” 9.

<sup>25</sup> As the text paints the image, “And the girl did not know how to speak in her [the wife’s] language or to appeal to her about anything, but only was weeping with sighing and calling the Confessors to her help; for she was longing for somebody to speak Syriac with her [.]” *Euphemia* 19, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 137-8.

<sup>26</sup> *Euphemia* 20, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 138.

<sup>27</sup> Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 331.

<sup>28</sup> As Cameron notes, such paradoxes were an important element of developing Christian discourse. See Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, 155-88.

<sup>29</sup> Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 127-8.

<sup>30</sup> *Euphemia* 24, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 140.

their own hands. They seize her and take her to the woman's tomb, "dragging her along and beating her," and seal her in next to the wife's corpse with a rock to block the entrance.<sup>31</sup> While the people of the city look on and grieve for the girl, the kinsmen make violent plans to "impale her on a stake and shoot at her with arrows, because the judge was far from that place."<sup>32</sup> Here the Goths display distinctly "un-Roman" behavior. They ignore proper legal process, act with violence and emotion, and take matters into their own hands. The Goth's home is clearly outside of Whittaker's juridical boundary.

These traits fall in line with stereotypical notions that barbarians were not capable of submitting to the rule of law.<sup>33</sup> In fact, Roman writers often appealed to the goodness of Roman law when comparing themselves to barbarian societies. Priscus, for example, records an example of a Roman defector who lived in Attila the Hun's court. After being questioned about why he abandoned the Romans, he tearfully admits that despite the empire's issues, Roman law is superior to the splendors of the barbarian court.<sup>34</sup> The stereotype was often also used with the Goths. Orosius, for example, makes the claim that Athaulf decided to side with the Romans because his Goths were unable obey the rule of law, a requirement for peace.<sup>35</sup> During the fifth and sixth centuries, control of the law and access to justice was key to asserting control over territory within and outside the Roman empire.<sup>36</sup> In *Euphemia's* treatment by the Goths, the writers of *Euphemia and the Goth* participated in the discourse about the goodness of Roman law

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<sup>31</sup> *Euphemia* 24, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 140. The image bears similarity to Jesus' entombment after his Crucifixion.

<sup>32</sup> *Euphemia* 24, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 141.

<sup>33</sup> Mathisen, "Violent Behavior," 30; Guy Halsall, "Funny Foreigners: Laughing with the Barbarians in Late Antiquity," in Guy Halsall, ed., *Humour, History and Politics in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 91-107; Heather, "The Barbarian in Late Antiquity," 237.

<sup>34</sup> See Priscus fragment 11.2, in R.C. Blockley, ed., *The Fragmentary Classicizing Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus, and Malchus*, (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1981), 272.

<sup>35</sup> Orosius, *History against the Pagans*, 7.43.5-7, in A.T. Fear, trans., *Orosius: Seven Books of History Against the Pagans*, (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 412.

<sup>36</sup> Caroline Humfress, "Law and Legal Culture in the Age of Attila," in Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, 140-55, here 145-6.

and used it to claim their own place within the just and lawful boundary of the Roman empire, to which I will now turn.

The clearest articulation of Edessa's participation in the Roman system is the Goth's prosecution brought about by Sophia and her kinsmen. When the Goth is recalled back into service at Edessa, "justice was aroused upon that wicked and lying man," and "Justice herself impelled him that in the very place that he had despised the oaths and lied he should receive the punishment of requital for his treachery."<sup>37</sup> When the Goth is spotted in the marketplace, the community and Sophia's kinsmen make a plan to catch the Goth in his lies and prosecute his crimes. He visits Sophia and fabricates a tale that Euphemia and their baby are happy and in good health at his home. After Sophia reveals Euphemia to him, he is struck silent with fear. In contrast to the Goth's kinsmen's violence, the Edessenes take proper, civilized recourse with Roman legal procedure, including the involvement of the church.<sup>38</sup> As the text describes:

And all they that were there seized that Goth, having bound him in the house in the midst of the house and they were all keeping watch over him. And they made an affidavit of all the affair, as it was from the beginning even to the end, and how with these many oaths and with great promises and with a deed of dowry he had taken the girl, swearing that he had not taken a wife in his own country, and how he had gone forth and given them for sureties the confessors, the victorious martyrs, and how he stretched out his right hand and took her from the coffin where lie the bones of the holy martyrs Shmona and Guria and Habbib[.]<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> *Euphemia* 35, 36, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 146-7.

<sup>38</sup> Dimambro, *Women on the Edge*, 329.

<sup>39</sup> *Euphemia* 41, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 150.

They take great pains to properly document all of the Goth's crimes before entering the judicial process. In contrast to the Goths, the text thus shows that the Edessenes had a clear understanding and appreciation of imperial administration and expresses that Edessa is within the civilized juridical borders of the Roman world.<sup>40</sup>

After preparing the documents, they hand the affair over to Bishop Eulogius. The bishop is shocked by the case, and prepares to bring the case to court by gathering his priests and the Paramonarius of the shrine and reads the affidavit to the Stratelates, likely the *magister militum* who was also in charge of judicial and administrative affairs.<sup>41</sup> The Stratelates calls the Goth and Euphemia to stand before himself and Bishop Eulogius, and "all the city was gathered together."<sup>42</sup> The affidavit is read aloud, and the Goth admits his guilt. The Stratelates, acting as judge, censures him, saying:

Oh audacious against the truth! how was it you did not tremble at the just judgement of God? And did also be contemptuous of the pure laws of the Romans, and did despise the oaths, and make nothing of the covenant of the suretyship of the holy martyrs, and give to subjection and bridle a free person with the yoke of slavery?<sup>43</sup>

Here the Stratelates lays out the Goth's crimes which violate the laws of God and the Roman empire, seemingly equated with equal weight. Thus, it is in Edessa that true Roman justice can be found, as most clearly demonstrated in this scene of courtroom drama. The Goth is at first sentenced to be killed by a sword and cremated, but the bishop, acting in a common Roman

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<sup>40</sup> Clifford Ando has argued that administrative and bureaucratic documents were one of the most important ways that the Roman empire communicated with its provinces, and the engagement with such records represented a way for provincials to consent to and engage in the Roman system. See Clifford Ando, *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), esp. 74-128.

<sup>41</sup> Muravyev (Муравьев), "Perfidious Goth," 141.

<sup>42</sup> *Euphemia* 43, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 152.

<sup>43</sup> *Euphemia* 44, in Burkitt, *Euphemia*, 152.

practice in the court, pleads for his mercy.<sup>44</sup> The Stratelates refuses to spare his life and kills him outside of the walls of the city, but relents in not burning his body after execution.

Some have argued that the bishops' role in the court is an expression of local resistance to imperial Roman rule.<sup>45</sup> However, bishops had a common role in the courts of the later Roman empire, and it was part of their clerical duty to plead for mercy within the judicial system. Constantine, for example, approved greater authority for judicial decisions that took place in churches, and a bishop's role as judge gained increased recognition beginning in the fourth century in the Theodosian Code.<sup>46</sup> Maria Doerfler, in an enlightening article about Bishop Rabbula's engagement with Roman law in Edessa, argues that Syrian clerics "were central participants in the Roman legal system" in ways that parallel to the same trends in the western empire.<sup>47</sup> In the *Life of Rabbula*, she argues, the bishop is depicted as being the righteous purveyor of justice and instructing his clerics about how to be good judges within the bounds of the Roman law. These sentiments of a bishop's role appear throughout the empire, suggesting that it was part of an empire-wide trend for provincial elites to engage in the Roman system.<sup>48</sup> Thus, the actions of the bishop Eulogius in *Euphemia* are well within his expected role in the increasingly "Christianized" Roman legal system. In summary, the text situates Edessa within the juridical boundary of the Roman empire, adhering to the sanctity of Roman law. This expression of Roman identity is constructed in opposition to the home of the Goths. The text thus uses Roman idioms to bolster the legitimacy of their claims, while drawing a boundary of

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<sup>44</sup> Further discussion of the bishop's role will be discussed later in this paper; see also Maria Doerfler, "The Holy Man in the Courts of Rome."

<sup>45</sup> For example, Dimambro, "Women on the Edge," 335.

<sup>46</sup> Doerfler, "The Holy Man," 194.

<sup>47</sup> Doerfler, "The Holy Man," 194. Doerfler compares Rabbula's "judicial administration" with that of Ambrose in the West.

<sup>48</sup> Doerfler, "The Holy Man," 211. See also Clifford Ando, *Law, Language, and Empire in the Roman Tradition: Empire and After*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), esp. 19-36.

difference against the Goths who violate the sanctity of Roman law and justice.

I will now turn to the *Julian Romance*, in which Edessa is also strongly evoked as a paragon of Roman civic virtue and justice. In this work, the landscape and historical scope broadens. The text, like *Euphemia*, also constructs Edessa's Roman identity in contrast to an outside identity, or a boundary of difference, as well as using Roman ideas to assert their own centrality within the empire. Instead of the figure of the Goth, the "un-Roman" foil is in fact a Roman emperor, the infamous apostate Julian. Julian's actions and rule over the Roman provinces are depicted as going against the ideals of civic order and justice, while Edessa, and later his successor Jovian, embody those ideals and work to oppose and undo Julian's damage. Such a claim demonstrates the agency and confidence of peripheral Edessa to assert its position within the Roman world.

As Wood states, Julian is presented as an archetype of the evils of pagans and barbarians, especially through madness and tyranny.<sup>49</sup> Throughout the text, he is presented as an unfit emperor who rules in his own self-interest and is blinded by madness and a zeal for destroying Christianity. As a consequence, the inhabitants of the provinces are said to suffer from a lack of the enforcement of law. There are multiple instances where provincials are said to be harassed and dragged through the streets without the permission of judges or because judges are not present.<sup>50</sup> These injustices are often pagan persecutions against Christians. In one example, the narrator laments of the Christians being persecuted:

Since non-judges had judged them, neither their place nor their names were written down, nor were their triumphs recorded. Had they been judged legally before judges,

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<sup>49</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 143-4.

<sup>50</sup> Examples include *Julian Romance* 12, 71, 98, 99 in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 3, 148, 202, 204.

their places would have been known, and their names and their victories would also have been placed into their archival records.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the injustices are further deplorable because the Roman system of documentation and administration had broken down in Julian's reign. The lack of records is a convenient way to explain away the historical inaccuracy of the depiction of Julian's reign, but more importantly reveals once again Edessa's acknowledgement of the importance of, and engagement in, the Roman imperial system of bureaucracy. The rhetoric of justice and the legal system here parallels that found in *Euphemia and the Goth*. Tales of provincials being dragged through the streets without the permission of judges matches the situation Euphemia finds herself in when at the mercy of the Goths. In contrast, at Edessa the community carefully documents the entire affair and puts the case in the hands of proper legal officials, the church and the acting judge. Once again, the use of Roman idioms strengthens Edessa's claims of a central place within the empire.

Julian's misrule is further emphasized by multiple attempts of characters trying to curb his wild behavior and to instill in him the virtues necessary to fulfill the imperial office. For example, the philosopher Aplatus admonishes Julian that to bear the title of emperor, he must obey and maintain "just laws" and treat his citizens well, or else he will be a tyrant.<sup>52</sup> Jovian, as a military officer under his command, implores Julian not to kill or enslave the conquered peoples, and to treat the captives of the army with better restraint and decorum. Julian, who trusts Jovian, then relents and orders restraint, and in particular forbids his soldiers to strip captives of their garments and to abuse the women in front of their husbands.<sup>53</sup> The criticism of Julian even

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<sup>51</sup> *Julian Romance* 98-9, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 202-4. That the text argues no names were recorded is a convenient excuse for the fact that widespread persecutions did not take place during the reign of Julian.

<sup>52</sup> *Julian Romance* 34-5, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 74-6.

<sup>53</sup> *Julian Romance* 163, 170, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 332, 346.

extends outside of the Roman empire. King Shapur writes to Julian, censuring his conduct in war and teaching him how to properly campaign, saying “Oh, weak Roman, this is not for you. A man for words and an inferior one for wars!”<sup>54</sup> Such tropes participated in the imperial discourse of the duties of an emperor. As Clifford Ando has argued, Roman imperial ideology created the office of the emperor as one dedicated to helping its subjects. Thus, the emperor’s subjects had room to hold the emperor to that standard. As he states, “The people endowed the emperor with their *imperium*, in exchange for which he undertook a burden, the guardianship of the state.”<sup>55</sup> Similarly, Wood argues that the text highlights the “contractual nature of Roman authority” with Rome and Edessa serving as models of ideal behavior.<sup>56</sup> Throughout the text, Julian clearly does not live up to the Roman standard and displays apathy and even hostility to his subjects, and thus his criticism is warranted.

The “un-Roman” behavior of Julian is contrasted with the behavior of his successor Jovian and the city of Edessa. Jovian works throughout the story to secretly keep Julian’s worst tyranny at bay. In the process, the text portrays him as possessing the characteristics of a good emperor.<sup>57</sup> For example, Jovian takes over the handling of the mistreated war captives and resettles them in Armenia, dealing “with them in goodness and mercy,” and he took special care to help the “downtrodden ones.”<sup>58</sup> After Julian dies, Jovian displays the humility and modesty expected of an emperor. At first he hides from the army, not wanting to take the role, but later is miraculously crowned. He shows reverence to Shapur, and thus winning his favor is able to negotiate a peace. Edessa begs him to visit their city, which he at first modestly declines, but

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<sup>54</sup> *Julian Romance* 161, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 328.

<sup>55</sup> Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 148.

<sup>56</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 157.

<sup>57</sup> As J.W. Drijvers points out, this favorable depiction of Jovian goes against the characterization given by Ammianus Marcellus, who considers him unfit to rule; Jan Willem Drijvers, “Ammianus, Jovian,” 285, 292.

<sup>58</sup> *Julian Romance* 173, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 352.

after insistence accepts. Jovian heaps praises upon Edessa, particularly about the city's pure religion, which will be discussed in the next chapter. Here, importantly, Jovian notes that out of all of the cities in the empire, Edessa was the only place to oppose Julian's tyranny, as they had refused to let him into their city and were unmoved by his threats. The city of Edessa is portrayed as a united community, parallel to the earlier description of the unity of Rome's senators in standing up to Julian.<sup>59</sup> As Drijvers argues, one of the main purposes of the text is to emphasize Edessa's "special place in Christendom" and the empire.<sup>60</sup> Wood has similarly argued that Julian's rejection from Rome parallels his opposition in Edessa, sets up a framework of just rule, and shows that Rome and Edessa "are the two chosen cities of the empire" who should serve as models for the rest of the provinces.<sup>61</sup> In praise, Jovian tells the Edessenes, "I will lift up your head, strengthen you, and put you at the head of all of the cities of my realm."<sup>62</sup> Thus, Edessa, like Rome, is portrayed as the only city of the empire that understood the role and duties of a good emperor, including treating citizens well and eradicating injustices, and held the current emperor to those standards. Just as Andrade describes, Edessa incorporates Roman idioms to craft their own legitimate centrality within the Roman world.

The historical context of the late fifth to early sixth century and the framework of borderlands and postcolonial theories help to elucidate the themes and meanings of these Syriac texts about Edessa's Roman identity as expressed in their demonstration of civic virtue and

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<sup>59</sup> The narrative of the Roman senate's unanimous opposition to Julian's paganism is a complete fabrication, as J. W. Drijvers has pointed out; Drijvers, "Julian the Apostate," 17. See, for example, the senatorial debates on the Altar of Victory, in Mattias Gassman, *Worshippers of the Gods: Debating Paganism in the Fourth-Century Roman West*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Michele Renee Salzman, ed., *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Richard Klein, *Der Streit um den Victoriaaltar*, (Darmstadt: Darmstadt Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972).

<sup>60</sup> Drijvers, "Ammianus, Jovian," 290-1.

<sup>61</sup> Wood, *We Have No King*, 134, 155.

<sup>62</sup> *Julian Romance* 233, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 472.

justice. After a long peace between Rome and Persia in the fifth century, Edessa suffered from the resurgence of conflict in 502 between Kavadh and Anastasius. Wood has persuasively argued that the narration and commentary on Julian's Persian campaign in the *Julian Romance* likely serves as a commentary on early sixth-century conflicts.<sup>63</sup> Jan Drijvers also argues that the text expresses a longing for peace on the border between the two empires.<sup>64</sup> Caught in the frontier, Edessa would suffer from the influx of soldiers, requiring food and housing, disruption of trade, and fortification, on top of the natural disasters and illnesses that ravaged the sixth-century Mediterranean world. Like the indigenous peoples on the borderlands of colonial America, it seems that Edessa desired a peaceful imperial rivalry between Rome and Persia from which they could profit from both sides. For example, the *Julian Romance* presents Jovian's peace treaty with Persia, considered a political and military disaster, and the Persians themselves in a wholly positive light. Muravyov has argued that the portrayal of the Persians suggests a possible Persian author for part of the text.<sup>65</sup> However, as an equal rival, imperial rhetoric dealt with the character of the Persians on a broad spectrum. Although not Roman, and therefore barbaric, some writers in the Roman world, particularly those involved in diplomatic and military affairs, spoke highly of Persia. Often, these pro-Persian narratives critiqued contemporary Roman leadership and morals.<sup>66</sup> Writers at Edessa seem to be engaging in the same discourse.

The discourse of peace in the *Julian Romance* similarly connects directly with the frontier position of Edessa. Jovian and Shapur easily negotiate the terms of the peace treaty,

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<sup>63</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 140-2, 159-60.

<sup>64</sup> Drijvers, "Ammianus, Jovian," 296-7.

<sup>65</sup> Muraviev (Муравьев), "The Syriac Julian Romance," 205-6.

<sup>66</sup> Scott McDonough, "Were the Sasanians Barbarians? Roman Writers on the 'Empire of the Persians,'" in Ralph Mathisen and Danuta Shanzer, eds., *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World: Cultural Interaction and the Creation of Identity in Late Antiquity*, (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2011), 55-66, here 57, 60-4.

which presents the greatest Roman losses, such as the remission of Nisibis, as just. The text further indicates that once the terms were agreed upon, Shapur suggests they formally sign it in a frontier area, saying:

My son, it is inappropriate that this written document should be drawn up in a province of our realm lest many think that Nisibis was taken from you by force as a result of the hardship of the incarceration which you had in our land. Rather, let us go out to the frontier area, and this document will be drawn up and ratified there by our signatures and by those of our chiefs. It will be known to everyone that after the two sides became friendly, made peace, ate and drank with each other, Nisibis was given to us by the good will of the Romans in lieu of the pillage of our land when they were situated in their country and thankful for our goodness.<sup>67</sup>

In summary, Edessa and the eastern frontier is presented as an area where peace between the two empires can be fostered and maintained, a peace which speaks within the parameters of normal Roman discourse. Even though Edessa was on the periphery of the empire, the texts use this position to show that they were legitimate judges of imperial foreign policy.

The historical context of the state of Roman laws also sheds light on the portrayal of Edessa as a model for Roman justice. Although the date of *Euphemia and the Goth's* composition is unknown, its concern with billeted Gothic soldiers is paralleled in the early sixth-century *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, which records the outbreak of the Persian war. The billeting of soldiers was a heavy burden on citizens, and the soldiers are often reported for bad behavior, particularly in eastern sources.<sup>68</sup> The *Chronicle* reports that Edessa's civilians

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<sup>67</sup> *Julian Romance* 224, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 454.

<sup>68</sup> For an overview of the burden of billeted soldiers, see Ramsay MacMullen, *Soldier and Civilian in the Later Roman Empire*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 78-89; Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians*, 107-10, 141.

complained about the Goths extracting more resources than could be supported. The *dux* Romanus decrees that the Goths receive a set monthly ration of oil, wood, and bedding. The Goths, however, rebel and try to kill him. The *dux* flees the scene and the Goths return to wreak havoc, “and they therefore stayed where they were billeted, acting according to their own desires. No one could control, restrain, or instruct them.”<sup>69</sup> Uncontrollable situations such as these seem to have been a recurring problem, as repeated laws in the Theodosian Code address soldiers illegally demanding goods from civilians’ homes.<sup>70</sup> The same sentiment of law-breaking Gothic soldiers is clearly present in *Euphemia and the Goth*. Although misbehaving soldiers do not appear in the *Julian Romance*, Julian himself is presented as ignoring and putting himself above Roman law and is significantly parallels the Goth in the *Euphemia* text. Wood argues that Julian’s disregard of law may be a critique of the emperor Justinian’s initiative to make his own compilation of Roman law, thus trying to destroy the established government and legal system.<sup>71</sup> Justinian’s efforts were focused on further unifying Rome’s legal system with Roman traditions and Christian values, which more than ever before infringed upon people’s daily lives.<sup>72</sup> With increasing miaphysite persecutions, Edessa was in a position to critique Justinian’s role as the overseer of Roman law and justice. The religious considerations will be addressed further in the next chapter.

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<sup>69</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 94, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 113.

<sup>70</sup> Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians*, 107-8. On the specific laws, see the *Theodosian Code* 7.4.12, 7.5.2, 7.8.1, 7.8.2, 7.8.3, 7.8.5, 7.8.8, 7.8.16, 7.9.1, 7.9.2, 7.9.3, and 7.9.4, ranging from the late 4<sup>th</sup> to early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries. For the rationing of oil, wood, and bedding that the *Chronicle* alludes to, see 7.9.4.

<sup>71</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 160; Caroline Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” in Michael Maas, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 161-84, here 162-3, 168-9.

<sup>72</sup> For an overview of Justinian’s legal initiatives, see Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice,” 161-84; and Peter Bell, *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian: Its Nature, Management, and Mediation*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 291-7.

In conclusion, in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, Edessa uses Roman rhetoric to claim its place as a model for Roman civic virtue and justice. Edessa's position on the borderlands, especially clear in the *Julian Romance*, is evoked as providing the city with the skill and knowledge to broker peace between the two empires using concepts from imperial discourse. The texts further justify Edessa's claims to their centrality in the Roman empire with means similar to what is described by Barth and Andrade. Edessa articulates its virtues in terms of Roman values, which results in a reduction of cultural differences between Rome and Edessa. There is a prevailing sense of danger outside Edessa's boundaries, and to combat the dangers, both texts assert the homogeneity of Edessene values within the community and the expulsion of outsiders. In the texts, Edessa is presented as within the juridical boundaries of the empire, where true justice and participation in the Roman system are found. Adherence and loyalty to Roman law was a prominent feature of *Romanitas*, and the texts directly juxtapose Edessa's Romanness with the Goths and Julian who disregard the sanctity of Roman law. In the context of renewed war with Persia, legal struggles with controlling perceived uncouth behavior of soldiers, and religious persecutions, these claims were significant. Edessa's position in the peripheral imperial zone gave them the space and freedom to make such claims, but their distance from the imperial core did not mean that their claims of Romanness were seen as illegitimate.

## Chapter 5

### Edessa as the Exemplar of Roman Christian Virtue

At the very beginning of the *Codex of Justinian*, the emperor emphasizes the other component key to pure *Romanitas*, orthodox Christianity. The first entry in the *Code of Justinian* is titled “The High Trinity and the Catholic Faith, and That No One Shall Dare to Discuss it Publicly.” The law reaffirmed the place of orthodox Christianity as the state religion and that the “mad and insane” who “suffer the infamy of heretical doctrine” would face the wrath of divine and imperial authority.<sup>1</sup> Justinian’s legal program represents a culmination of Christian discourse increasingly being incorporated into Roman Law.<sup>2</sup> Just as adherence to Roman law was inseparable from Roman identity, as discussed above, in late antiquity being a Christian became synonymous with being a good Roman within the empire. Just as *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* placed Edessa firmly within the bounds of Roman law and justice, in this section, I will similarly argue that Edessa also claimed to be the shining example of Roman Christianity. Even though the miaphysites of Edessa did not follow the outcome of the Council of Chalcedon later affirmed as orthodoxy under Justinian, these texts emphasize the piety and devotion of Edessa’s citizens to assert it as a home of pure Christianity. The same theoretical methods used in the previous section will continue to be of importance here, namely, the ability of peripheral Edessa to engage in imperial discourse to assert legitimate claims of centrality, as well as the importance of boundary-drawing to assert traditional values and group homogeneity. Scholarship on the role of Christianity in the Roman borderlands will also be useful to see how

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<sup>1</sup> *Codex of Justinian* 1.1.1, in Blume, *The Codex of Justinian*, 15.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion of the development, see David Hunt, “Christianizing the Roman Empire: The Evidence of the Code,” in Jill Harries and Ian Wood, eds., *The Theodosian Code: Studies in the Imperial Law of Late Antiquity*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 143-58.

Edessa engaged in an empire-wide discourse that irrevocably combined Roman and Christian identities.

Syriac Christianity, like other Christianities throughout the empire, developed with some regional distinctions. Some of its earliest manifestations remained more closely connected to local forms of Judaism than in other regions, and the lines between religious identities were fluid and blurred. Just as Boyarin theorized the importance of heresiology in the formation of Christian identity, fourth-century Syriac Christian writers fought back against religious hybridity by engaging in fierce anti-Jewish polemic.<sup>3</sup> Another unique feature of Syriac Christianity was an emphasis on asceticism and “singleness,” or complete external and internal devotion to God.<sup>4</sup> The Sons and Daughters of the Covenant are one example of this regional flavor of asceticism, whose presence may be reflected in *Euphemia and the Goth*.

As noted previously, however, Syriac Christianity and its writings engaged in the greater Roman discourse around Christianity, empire, and orthodoxy.<sup>5</sup> For example, one of Ephrem’s hymns from the mid-fourth century praises the Roman emperors Constantine and Constantius as “the kings who once gave shade” from the heat of summer by embracing Christianity, while controversies surrounding the heresy of Arianism created madness and “wars in the shade.”<sup>6</sup> Even Aphrahat, a Syriac Christian who lived in the Persian empire in the early fourth century, engaged in the same discourse. In his commentary on the Book of Daniel, Aphrahat asserts that God “handed over the kingdom to the Romans, who are called the sons of Esau; and the sons of

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<sup>3</sup> See also Wood, *We Have no King*, 103; Shepardson, “‘Exchanging Reed for Reed’”; Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy*; Sidney Griffith, “Ephraem, the Deacon of Edessa,” 22-52; H.J.W. Drijvers, “Jews and Christians at Edessa,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 36 (1985): 88-102; and Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia, I: The Parthian Period*, (Leiden: Brill, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis: John of Ephesus and the Lives of the Eastern Saints*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 4-8; Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 12-6.

<sup>5</sup> Shepardson, “Syria, Syriac, Syrian,” 456-61.

<sup>6</sup> Ephrem, *De Ecclesia*, trans. in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 106-111, here 111-2; see also Edmund Beck, ed., *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 199, (Leuven: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1960), 84-5.

Esau are keeping the kingdom for him who gave it.”<sup>7</sup> The clearest inclusion of Syriac Christianity into imperial discourse is the legendary letters between Abgar and Jesus. Eusebius included the tale in Greek in his *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>8</sup> Although Eusebius was critical of those outside the Roman core, and at times criticized Syrians and the Syriac language as barbaric, the Abgar legend grants Edessa a central role in the foundation of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> The tale, and particularly the letter of Jesus, was well-known throughout the empire. For example, Egeria, a pilgrim likely from Spain, notes her familiarity with the letter in her description of her visit to Edessa in the late fourth century.<sup>10</sup> In Egypt, three healing amulets dating to the fifth and sixth century also invoke the letter of Jesus for protection.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Edessa and Syriac Christianity had deep roots in Christian discourse and had the tools necessary to assert their centrality in the Roman Christian world.

The Abgar legend was reworked in the Syriac *Doctrina Addai*, written in the late fourth or early fifth century. This version adds more details to the story in ways that are significant to the construction of Roman identity in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*. Edessa is portrayed as having deeper connections with Jesus, with Abgar physically speaking with him in Jerusalem, and the presence of the letter and a portrait of Jesus in Abgar’s palace. Thomas sends his disciple Addai to Edessa, who gives lengthy sermons to the people of the city. As Sidney Griffith has astutely argued, Addai’s sermons emphasize the legitimacy of Christian orthodoxy

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<sup>7</sup> Aphrahat, *Demonstrations* 5.229.25-232.2, trans. in Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 241; see also Jean Parisot, ed., *Aphraatis Sapientis Persae Demonstrationes*, *Patrologia Syriaca*, vol. 1, (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1894) 229-32.

<sup>8</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.13, in Lake, *Eusebius*, 86-97.

<sup>9</sup> On the narratives of barbarity in Eusebius, see Wood, *We Have no King*, 29-30.

<sup>10</sup> Egeria, *Travel Journal* 19.19, in Jacobs, “Egeria,” 345.

<sup>11</sup> See David Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 199; see also Andrew Mark Henry, “Apotropaic Autographs: Orality and Materiality in the Abgar-Jesus Inscriptions,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 17 (2016): 165-86; and Gregory J. Given, “Utility and Variance in Late Antique Witnesses to the Abgar-Jesus Correspondance,” *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 17 (2016): 187-222.

and practice, in this case Nicene orthodoxy, and Edessa's connection and loyalty to the Roman empire.<sup>12</sup> Abgar, for example, is portrayed as a loyal client king to the emperor Tiberius. He writes the emperor to tell him of the Jews' culpability in killing Jesus, a falsehood exemplary of the anti-Jewish rhetoric of the text, and Tiberius responds thanking Abgar for his loyalty and promising to exact punishment.<sup>13</sup> Addai also exhorts the people to obey civil and religious leaders, saying:

As to rulers and judges who have attained to this faith, love them, though you should be no respecter of persons in anything. But if they go astray, rebuke them justly that you might demonstrate the boldness of your integrity and that they might amend their ways so as not again to be directed by their own will.<sup>14</sup>

After Addai sets up a church at Edessa, the text also provides an anachronistic apostolic chain of succession. After Addai dies, Palut goes to Bishop Serapion in Antioch for ordination; Serapion received his ordination from Peter in Rome, who in turn was appointed by Jesus himself.<sup>15</sup> Edessa's ecclesiastical authority, then, is also tied directly to Jesus and the Roman empire. The *Doctrina* thus ties Edessa's conversion to Christianity directly to a long-standing loyalty within the Roman empire.

The *Doctrina Addai* also asserts the orthodoxy of Edessa's Christianity. As Griffith argues, the claims are often bolstered by anachronistic mentions of contemporary doctrinal controversies. As he notes, the text constantly reaffirms Nicene orthodoxy, such as the divinity of the Son and the Father and the scriptural canon.<sup>16</sup> Another key component of Christian

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<sup>12</sup> Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm," 271-2, 276, 279-80.

<sup>13</sup> Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm," 280.

<sup>14</sup> *Doctrina Addai*, in George Howard, trans., *The Teaching of Addai*, (Chico: Scholars Press, 1981), xlv-xlvi, 91-3; Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm," 283. *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* seem to take up this charge as they critique Roman leadership that strays from Roman and Christian ideals.

<sup>15</sup> Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm," 283-4.

<sup>16</sup> Griffith, "The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm," 284-5, 288-9; see also Wood, *We Have no King*, 90-5.

orthodoxy was also opposition to pagans and Jews. The text features fierce rhetoric against both imagined groups. The Jews are often called “crucifiers,” and Addai warns the Edessenes not to associate with them.<sup>17</sup> Griffith also argues that the text features rhetoric against Manichaeans, a group Ephrem was also concerned with.<sup>18</sup> Finally, Addai also exhorts the virtues of Christian and ascetic living, emphasizing the need to use money properly for the church and to take care of the needy and sick.<sup>19</sup> This text, like the original Abgar legend, also received recognition and circulation throughout the empire. Procopius, for example, writing in Greek alludes to the text in his *Persian Wars*.<sup>20</sup> The *Doctrina Addai* thus was an influential text that set up Edessa as a city connected to the very origins of Christianity and Jesus, orthodox belief and practice, and loyalty to the Roman empire. These claims were foundational to the further claims set forth in *Euphemia and the Goth* and especially the *Julian Romance*. As we shall see, both texts were concerned with many of the same themes present in the *Doctrina* to construct Edessa’s Roman identity.

*Euphemia and the Goth* is a hagiographical folktale associated with the cult of the Edessene martyrs Shmona, Guria, and Habbib. Because it is focused on a local martyr shrine, scholars have mostly focused on the local peculiarities of the text. Susan Harvey and Thomas Dimambro, for example, have examined the connections of Euphemia and Sophia with the ascetic lifestyle of “Sons and Daughters of the Covenant,” or *bnay/bnāt qyāmā*.<sup>21</sup> Although the

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<sup>17</sup> Griffith, “The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm,” 287-8; see also *Doctrina Addai* in Howard, *The Teaching of Addai*, xliii, 87.

<sup>18</sup> Griffith, “The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm,” 286-7; see also Sidney Griffith, “The ‘Thorn Among the Tares’: Mani and Manichaeism in the Works of St. Ephraem the Syrian,” in M.F. Wiles and E.J. Yarnold, eds., *Studia Patristica* Vol. 35, (Lueven: Peeters, 2001), 403-35.

<sup>19</sup> Griffith, “The *Doctrina Addai* as a Paradigm,” 289-90. Griffith agrees with the argument that Bishop Rabbula is responsible for the creation of the *Doctrina*, as his teachings match the concerns of the text; see also H.J.W. Drijvers, “The Man of God of Edessa.”

<sup>20</sup> Procopius, *The Persian Wars* 2.12.5-34, in Dewing, *Procopius*, 362-373; see also Wood, *We Have no King*, 86.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Harvey, “Sacred Bonding,” 51-4, Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 334-5; see also Wood, *We Have no King*, 96 on the local distinctiveness of the text, although he situates it with an empire-wide phenomenon.

text certainly focuses on the local needs of the community which the power of the local martyrs could protect, the power and discourse of saints' shrines extended well beyond their specific locale. As David Frankfurter comments on the arguments of Peter Brown in discussion of the cults in Egypt, saints' shrines constituted "a fundamental remapping of territory, center, and periphery."<sup>22</sup> Elizabeth Fowden notes the particular importance of shrines on the eastern frontier. Looking at the example of Mayperqat, she notes that the frontier city was important not only because of the power of its saints, but also because of its strategic position between Rome and Persia. In such a context, it became a potent space that linked Christians "across space and time," and both Roman and Persian emperors sought to be its patrons.<sup>23</sup> Thus, local saint shrines could be conceived as religious cores with powerful centripetal forces. This discourse is important in Edessa's assertion of centrality within the Roman empire despite its location on peripheral borderlands.

As Dimambro argues, one of the main purposes of *Euphemia and the Goth* is to show that the martyrs and community of Edessa protected its vulnerable citizens.<sup>24</sup> Taking care of the poor and needy was one of the main concerns of Bishop Rabbula, one of Edessa's most prominent bishops in the early fifth century.<sup>25</sup> The companion to the power of Roman law in Edessa, as discussed above, is the power of the Edessene martyrs. When at her most vulnerable, Sophia rightly turns to that power when Euphemia is going to be taken away from Edessa. Sophia takes her daughter to the tomb of the martyrs, and after humbly offering prayers and

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<sup>22</sup> Frankfurter, *Christianizing Egypt*, 106; Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> Fowden, *The Barbarian Plain*, 45-8, 56-9, quote at 56.

<sup>24</sup> Dimambro, "Women on the Edge," 319.

<sup>25</sup> See H.J.W. Drijvers, "Rabbula, The Man of God and the Urban Poor," in J.W. Drijvers and John W. Watt, eds., *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium and the Christian Orient*, (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 135-54. Some argue that Rabbula commissioned the writing of the *Doctrina Addai*, as it also shares a concern with taking care of the poor and regulating ascetic behavior.

tears, she beseeches the martyrs, saying, “I beseech you, victorious saints of God, go with her and stand up for her in the country of the stranger, for to God and to you I trust on her behalf.”<sup>26</sup> Sophia and Euphemia, as vulnerable women without a male in their household, thus place their whole security on the martyrs. Their pious devotion is the mechanism which miraculously saves Euphemia and brings justice against the Goth. The saints’ shrine is thus a focal point of power and authority.

When the Goth reveals that he is already married and that Euphemia must now act as a slave, Euphemia cries in distress and speaks for the first time in the text. She first rebukes him for going against his oath and then turns to God and the martyrs for aid, saying, “I will call to the sureties, [...] and that mighty power which is hidden in the bones of the martyrs.”<sup>27</sup> As she begins her desolate life as a slave, “by night and by day she was calling on God and saying only this: ‘My God, keep not your help far from me! Holy martyrs, rise up for me in the land of the stranger! Confessors, my sureties, see my servitude and judge judgement for my oppression!’”<sup>28</sup> Euphemia continuously shows her devotion and trust in the martyrs and God. When she is imprisoned in the Goth’s wife’s tomb, she calls on them a final time, saying, “Guria and Shmona and Habbib, pillars and props of Edessa the Blessed, quickly let your help overtake me! My sureties the confessors, aid me in this hour!”<sup>29</sup> Her petition and devotion are heard, and

the fierce and stinking smell of the stench of the corpse was turned to a pleasant smell of spices, and in the likeness of three men they appeared to her with a great light, saying to her: “Fear not, Euphemia; we are with you and we will not leave you! Quickly comes

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<sup>26</sup> *Euphemia* 14, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 134-5.

<sup>27</sup> *Euphemia* 16, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 136.

<sup>28</sup> *Euphemia* 19, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 137.

<sup>29</sup> *Euphemia* 26, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 141.

your deliverance, for our bond is near to be fulfilled, and the faith of your fathers is not to be oppressed.”<sup>30</sup>

The martyrs put Euphemia to sleep and miraculously bring her back to the martyr’s shrine in Edessa, and Shmona bids her farewell as the sun rises. Euphemia’s piety towards the authority of the martyrs is rewarded.

The story is thus a witness of the incredible potency of the Edessene martyrs. Euphemia, now in the position of a slave, in the “country of the stranger,” and unable to communicate to anyone in her native language of Syriac, maintains her devotion to the martyrs. The power of the martyrs extends beyond the boundaries of Edessa to rescue her. Euphemia addresses them as the “pillars” of Edessa, an image that evokes a spiritual “center” in Edessa from which their saving power could radiate outward and protect those in greatest need. The fact that these martyrs were lowly and humble people, a deacon and two laymen from the countryside, strengthens their association with helping the vulnerable. The Edessene martyrs thus possess strong centripetal forces similar to those articulated by Brown and Fowden, and martyr shrines were a particularly potent tool for borderlands peoples to assert their religious authority.

The martyrs also importantly evoke a connection to Edessa’s Christian origins. As Thomas Sizgorich has argued, the identities and boundaries of Christian communities were demarcated by their local martyr narratives. The martyrs represented a true Christian “primordial” ancestral past to which individuals and groups could “interpret contemporary events as further episodes within those narratives.”<sup>31</sup> Similarly, Elizabeth Castelli has argued that

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<sup>30</sup> *Euphemia* 27, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 141-2. The use of smells in Christian discourse, including hagiography, is discussed in Susan Harvey’s innovative study; see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*.

<sup>31</sup> Thomas Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity: Militant Devotion in Christianity and Islam*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 48-81, here 49.

the collective memory of suffering was important to sustaining Christian identity.<sup>32</sup> The primordial Christian ancestry of the martyrs in the above excerpts points to the Abgar legend and the *Doctrina Addai*, important narratives of Edessa's Christian past. Euphemia addresses the martyrs as pillars of "Edessa the Blessed," a reference to the blessing of Jesus in his letter to Abgar.<sup>33</sup> This blessing was also repeated in the *Doctrina Addai*, which added details surrounding the creation of Edessa's Christian church. The martyrs referring to the "faith of your fathers" in the *Euphemia* text likely points to this tradition. The text also presents biblical allusions to compare Euphemia's plight, including Joseph being taken captive to Egypt, Daniel in the lions' den, and the entombment of Jesus. Thus, Euphemia is placed in a continuous narrative that connects her suffering, the martyrdoms at Edessa, the *Doctrina Addai*, biblical traditions, and Jesus's relationship with Abgar and the city. As discussed above, the *Doctrina Addai* stresses Edessa's loyalty to the Roman empire, and that strain similarly appears in *Euphemia and the Goth* in the narratives of Edessa's Christian community. Thus, Edessa's claim of true Christianity is strengthened by its religious connections that reach back to Jesus himself.

The centripetal power of Edessa's martyrs also extends beyond Edessa to bring justice against the Goth and his wife. Just as they are shown as "un-Roman" in breaking laws and oaths in the previous chapter, the Goths are also portrayed as dangerously impious towards Christianity. The Goth goes to the martyrs' shrine as a "liar," and heinously swears an oath to protect Euphemia as his wife.<sup>34</sup> As noted above, oaths were seen as absolutely binding, and the Goth's infidelity represents a violent mockery against the sanctity of the Christian martyrs. In the

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<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture Making*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 25.

<sup>33</sup> The narrator also denotes Edessa as "the blessed city of Edessa" in the beginning of the text. See *Euphemia* 1, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 127.

<sup>34</sup> *Euphemia* 13, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 134.

Goth's home, his wife, who treats Euphemia harshly, is called a "companion to Jezebel the murtheress of the Prophets[.]"<sup>35</sup> Jezebel was infamous for introducing pagan worship to the kingdom of Israel; it is possible that this epithet may allude to Arianism, a "heretical" Christianity that was closely associated with Goths. The wife is killed after Euphemia poisons her, an action which is justified as the will of God because of her own crimes. After Euphemia is returned to Edessa, the Goth also faces divine justice. He is called to return on military duty to Edessa "by the providence of God," and so "this Goth was caught in the snare that he had hidden, and the Lord returned to him his recompence upon his head [.]"<sup>36</sup> His crime is framed as a crime against God, as the narrator states that he "despised the oaths and had contempt for the suretyship of the holy martyrs, and trembled not at the fearful judgement of God."<sup>37</sup> At his trial, the Stratelates condemns him for violating God and Roman law, two features, we have seen, that were the embodiment of *Romanitas* in late antiquity, saying:

how was it you did not tremble at the just judgement of God? And did also be contemptuous of the pure laws of the Romans, and did despise the oaths, and make nothing of the covenant of the suretyship of the holy martyrs[?]"<sup>38</sup>

Here, Roman law and Christianity are emphasized as one and the same, matching the Christianizing rhetoric of late antiquity that Justinian likewise stressed in his compilation of Roman law in the beginning of this chapter.

After Sophia and Euphemia are reunited, they live a pious life of ascetic devotion. In their home, they "were in constant prayer," and continue to pray at the martyr's shrine on

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<sup>35</sup> *Euphemia* 21, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 138.

<sup>36</sup> *Euphemia* 35, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 146-7.

<sup>37</sup> *Euphemia* 35, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 147.

<sup>38</sup> *Euphemia* 44, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 152.

Sundays and Fridays “in all modesty.”<sup>39</sup> Their lifestyle reflects the lay ascetic devotion of the martyrs themselves. Dimambro, following Harvey, argues that their conduct is reflective of the Sons and Daughters of the Covenant.<sup>40</sup> Although the text never makes this identification, much of their behavior, such as singing psalms and living together in an all-female household, signals to this tradition. However, similar stories of pious female Christians were prevalent throughout the Roman Near East and Syria.<sup>41</sup> As Dimambro also noted, Euphemia’s story may serve as a warning to women to stay within the confines of the domestic sphere of a patriarchal society.<sup>42</sup> The text likewise emphasizes the safety and protection that can be found in a pious lifestyle of a true Christian city, as well as marking the limits of appropriate behavior.

Bishop Eulogius in *Euphemia and the Goth*, who was also discussed in the previous section, is another important figure who demonstrates Edessa’s engagement with the Roman empire’s connections to Christianity. As we have seen, Eulogius was acting in his expected Christian duty to be involved in the Roman legal system and to plead for mercy on behalf of the Goth. Beginning with the endorsement of Constantine in the early fourth century, this episcopal role was one of the defining features of late antiquity. Bishops were particularly expected to help those vulnerable in the judicial system as well as the accused. A law dated to the early fifth century, for example, exhorts Christian bishops “to press judges into the humane treatment of

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<sup>39</sup> *Euphemia* 34, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 146.

<sup>40</sup> Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 334-5; Harvey, “Sacred Bonding,” 51-4.

<sup>41</sup> See Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, eds. and trans., *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998). Euphemia’s story is remarkably similar to the romantic legend of Mary in the *Life of Abraham*, a hermit who lived in a village neighboring Edessa in the fourth century. Like Euphemia, Mary falls prey to a man’s lust when her uncle Abraham’s attention wanes and she becomes visible from inside the home. Now violated, she goes to work as a prostitute in a tavern, perhaps similar to the foreign and dangerous homeland of the Goth beyond the borders of Edessa. Abraham “rescues” Mary and brings her back to be kept safe inside the walls of his home. This story, like *Euphemia*, shows the safety and protection of a Christian lifestyle. See Brock and Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, 27-39.

<sup>42</sup> Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 330, 335.

prisoners.”<sup>43</sup> Eulogius thus acts as a proper Roman bishop should, bolstering Edessa’s claims to having pure Roman Christianity. The actions of Eulogius in *Euphemia* parallel those of Eusebius, the fictional bishop of Rome, in the *Julian Romance*, to which I will now turn.

The second part of the *Julian Romance* focuses on the city of Rome and Eusebius’s opposition to Julian enforcing paganism. Rome’s faithful opposition to the pagan emperor sets up a direct comparison to Edessa’s privileged position as the “Rome” of the eastern empire. Eusebius, taking the mantle of countless Christian martyrs, refuses Julian’s demands to renounce Christianity to become pagan. Meditating on Julian’s persecutions, he laments the loss of previous Christian emperors, saying to God, “Woe to the kingdom which was deprived of your guidance.”<sup>44</sup> He comforts his clergy and fellow Christians inside his church, and prepares them to face martyrdom at the hands of Julian’s army, who had built a pagan altar outside the church to execute the Christians. Here, Edessa may have inserted its presence in the text. Five hundred Mesopotamian soldiers, disguised as monks, come to the city “out of zeal for God” to protect the Christians.<sup>45</sup> The Mesopotamians wage battle against Julian’s forces in the streets. In the midst of the fighting Eusebius tries to stop the zealous Christians from burning pagans on the altar, pleading for their mercy as Eulogius does for the Goth, saying:

My children, what will benefit from the death of these wretches? The more that they go in their idolatry and die in their sins, their repentance will be lost to them. However, if you wish, and it is right in your sight, let them be placed in monasteries to be taught the

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<sup>43</sup> *Theodosian Code* 9.3.7; trans in Hunt, “Christianizing in the Roman Empire,” 151.

<sup>44</sup> *Julian Romance* 8, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 22. These sentiments are reminiscent of the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem discussed above.

<sup>45</sup> *Julian Romance* 26, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 58. These soldiers used their zeal to kill many Jews and pagans, which will be discussed further below.

religion of the Church. Perhaps they will return from their iniquity, turn away from their error, find their soul in penitence, and gain a notion of their loss and their error.<sup>46</sup>

Later in the conflict, Eusebius and others are seized by Julian's army and set to be executed on the pagan altar. Before he is to be martyred, Eusebius makes one of many predictions throughout the narrative that Julian will be killed in Persia, a "true verdict" of God wrought by Julian's own actions.<sup>47</sup> When he goes to be burned on the altar, however, the fire doesn't touch him and instead engulfs the surrounding pagan priests in flame. The will of God now manifest, the people of Rome rebuke Julian, saying, "If you do not worship Christ, whom the Christian emperors before you have worshipped, you shall not be called the emperor over us, for our city does not need at all a stranger to reign over it. Its emperor lives and exists, and he will never be destroyed."<sup>48</sup> The city thus rejects Julian the tyrant and his imperial authority. Here again, to be a good Roman was the equivalent to being a good Christian, and Julian's performance as an emperor was condemned in comparison with other Christian emperors in another example of boundary drawing. Julian leaves the imperial capital angered and defeated.

Just as Rome rejects Julian and displays pious ecclesiastical leadership and a militantly Christian population, Edessa is presented in the third part of the text as Rome's equivalent in the Roman East. When Julian travels near Edessa, the city refuses to let him inside the walls, marking a clear boundary. A spokesman for the city, Aristoteles, tells a messenger of Julian:

[Edessa] does not even recognize you as emperor. Christ is the king of Edessa, and He dwells in its citadels. No foreigner is exalted above Him. If Edessa did not open its gate to the strong kings of Assyria, when they besieged it for three years and did not subdue it,

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<sup>46</sup> *Julian Romance* 28, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 62.

<sup>47</sup> *Julian Romance* 49, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 104.

<sup>48</sup> *Julian Romance* 54, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 114.

will Edessa open its gates and greet you, the mad One, the contemptible foreigner, the worshiper of idols? Heaven forbid, that your unclean feet which trod the thresholds of pagan temples should step in the streets of the “Blessed One.”<sup>49</sup>

Later, the Edessenes write a letter to Julian making similar claims, saying “[f]ar be it that Edessa, the Blessed One, the mother of the Christians, should let a stranger enter over her true king, through which she became strong and powerful. Her blessing made her a wall which cannot be subdued.”<sup>50</sup> Edessa thus equals Rome’s rejection of Julian, particularly because of its unique connection to Christianity and Jesus, which is presented as its defining strength. These sentiments are also echoed the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*. When Kavadh’s forces approach Edessa to siege it, Areobindus the Stratelates goes out before the gate to tell the Persians, “You have now seen in (your own) experience that the city belongs neither to you nor to Anastasius, but that it is the city of Christ, who has blessed it and has stood against your forces so that they may not take control of it.”<sup>51</sup> Philip Wood has argued that the claims of having “no king but Christ” represent a growing development of cultural and political independence separate from the Roman empire.<sup>52</sup> However, these sentiments were well within the normative Roman discourse of late antiquity, and as we shall see in no way reduce Edessa’s identification as an important city in the Roman empire. Claiming a primordial connection with Christ was one the most powerful rhetorical tools to assert Edessa’s religious centrality on the borderlands.

The *Julian Romance* strengthens Edessa’s connection to the Roman empire by building off of the traditions of the Abgar legend and the *Doctrina Addai*. The text invents a new Edessene letter, this time written by Constantine. At the request of an Edessene noble,

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<sup>49</sup> *Julian Romance* 123, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 252.

<sup>50</sup> *Julian Romance* 127-8, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 260-2.

<sup>51</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 61, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 79.

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Wood, *We Have no King*, 257-8.

Constantine writes a blessing to the city, although humbly acknowledging, “What can the Blessed City gain from our inferior one’s blessing?”<sup>53</sup> Constantine’s letter is read to the messengers of Julian, and afterwards the city further praises the first Christian emperor, saying:

Oh, Christian emperors, the empire of the House of Constantine, the Christian emperor, befits you. With the zealousness of your belief, you uprooted the roots of sin and removed the bushes of paganism. You turned all the nations to the worship of Christ. A crown and leadership are splendid for you, the builders of the churches and the ones who established orthodoxy in all corners (of the earth).<sup>54</sup>

Julian, once again, is thus presented as the antithesis to Constantine as a good Roman emperor. These praises of Constantine throughout the narrative set up Jovian’s accession to the throne as the coming of a “new Constantine” ordained by God, an interesting choice given that Jovian’s reign was less than a year and is commonly disregarded. For example, before Jovian reluctantly takes Julian’s place, he prostrates himself before a cross and prays on behalf of the empire, an allusion to Constantine and his connection to the Christian symbol.<sup>55</sup> After being miraculously crowned, Jovian’s soldiers exclaim, “From now on, Christ is the king over us in heaven, and Jovian is the king over us on earth.”<sup>56</sup> The authority to govern the entire empire thus comes from God alone. By emphasizing Edessa’s connections to Jesus and Constantine, Edessa’s ability to judge Roman imperial leadership thus is not illegitimate because of its position on the borderland. Instead, its connections to the two most important Christian figures in the Roman empire make it a legitimate source of authority.

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<sup>53</sup> *Julian Romance* 125, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 256.

<sup>54</sup> *Julian Romance* 125; “belief” (*haimanutha*) translated by Christine Shepardson, personal communication 2021. In Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 256. Edessa’s connection to Constantine may parallel his connection to Rome. Jan Drijvers has argued that the fictional bishop Eusebius and his church may reference the church in which the emperor was baptized in the *Acts of Sylvester*. See Drijvers, “Julian the Apostate,” 12-4.

<sup>55</sup> See also Drijvers, “Ammianus, Jovian,” 293-5.

<sup>56</sup> *Julian Romance* 201, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 408.

Edessa's loyalty to the Roman empire under good leadership is shown by their interactions with Jovian. The Edessenes beg the new emperor to visit their city on his way back to Constantinople, saying, "[c]onstant prayer is offered to God in our church for your majesty's peace, and that your years over our realm should be lengthened for the sake of your true orthodox belief."<sup>57</sup> Edessa is wholly supportive of the true Roman emperor. In recognition of their true religion, Jovian praises Edessa as the seat of true Christian conviction, saying "Edessa, more than all cities, has given proof of (her) religion."<sup>58</sup> Jovian then bestows his own blessing upon the city, saying, "I will lift up your head, strengthen you, and put you at the head of all the cities of my realm."<sup>59</sup> Edessa thus becomes the most prestigious city of the empire, the Rome of the East, because of the city's pure Christianity and devout piety. Edessa not only becomes the Christian "center" of the empire by its connections to Jesus, Constantine, and Jovian, but by acknowledgement of the entire empire. The bishop of Edessa tells Jovian that he has received letters from provinces throughout the empire, "letters of supplication and, as the city which received favor and mercy in your majesty's sight, have sent (them) to us."<sup>60</sup> Edessa is thus shown to be a center of ecclesiastical and imperial authority. Like *Euphemia and the Goth*, the *Julian Romance* connects Edessa to its Roman and Christian origins to assert its "centrality" within the empire, a claim legitimated by its interaction with wider Christian discourse.

Edessa's pure Christianity is also formulated in the *Julian Romance* by drawing boundaries of difference against other religious communities. These boundaries are violently articulated in the text's anti-pagan and anti-Jewish polemic. As Boyarin has noted, delineating

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<sup>57</sup> *Julian Romance* 227; "belief" (*haimanutha*) translated by Christine Shepardson, personal communication 2021. In Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 460.

<sup>58</sup> *Julian Romance* 232, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 470.

<sup>59</sup> *Julian Romance* 233, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 472.

<sup>60</sup> *Julian Romance* 230, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 466.

the boundaries against Jews and heretical Christians was fundamental to the formulation of Christian identity. Edessa likewise presented their Christian identity as violently exclusionary of Jews and pagans. This polemic is presented again as a parallel between Rome and Edessa. The pagans and Jews in both cities are presented as allies of the tyrant Julian. When the pagan altar is announced to be built outside Eusebius's church, for example, the Jews "clapped their hands, stamped their feet, and danced. They incited and encouraged the pagans in the building of the altar."<sup>61</sup> The Mesopotamian soldiers disguised as monks come to Rome and slaughter the pagans and Jews "like dogs" in the streets, while God protects the Mesopotamians and none are injured.<sup>62</sup> The Jews in Edessa suffer the same treatment. The Christians still in Julian's army on the Persian campaign flee to Edessa, recognizing it as the only true Christian city, and promise to protect it from Julian. When the Jews prepare to greet Julian as he approaches Edessa, the Christian soldiers "placed themselves against them within the city gate and outside of its walls, and they made a great massacre."<sup>63</sup> In this way, Edessa's devotion to "pure" Christianity is emphasized in its total opposition to Jews, the "enemies" of Christendom, a ubiquitous trope in a long and reprehensible narrative of anti-Jewish violence. As Wood points out, the persecution portrayed in the text likely alludes to Jewish persecution under Constantine and was perceived as "correct Christian government."<sup>64</sup> As Sizgorich has similarly argued, Christian violence, especially committed by ascetics and monks, could be acceptable even outside the bounds of normative law in order to police the boundaries of Christianity.<sup>65</sup> Boundaries and violence against the Jews thus emphasize the supposed homogeneity of Christians in Edessa.

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<sup>61</sup> *Julian Romance* 24, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 54.

<sup>62</sup> *Julian Romance* 26, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 58.

<sup>63</sup> *Julian Romance* 138, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 282.

<sup>64</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 147, 150.

<sup>65</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief in Late Antiquity*, 108-43.

Edessa's Christian identity is also reinforced by drawing boundaries of difference with the other great Roman cities of the East. The Roman capital, for instance, is portrayed as bowing to Julian's whims. When Julian enters Constantinople, "the whole Senate [receives] him with honor," he throws presents to the joyous crowd, and he "receive[s] imperial acclamations[.]"<sup>66</sup> Closer rivals to Edessa were Antioch and Harran, who likewise welcome Julian with open arms. In Antioch, its citizens rejoice and decorate the streets. The narrator says that "[e]ver since the days of Constantine the believer, the mad ones had secretly embraced the insanity of the idols, but they were afraid to reveal themselves because of the belief of the Christian king."<sup>67</sup> The streets are strewn with idols and burning incense. Thus, the great Christian Antioch is slandered here as having secretly always been pagan. Harran is presented in similar terms. The Edessenes tell Jovian, "Edessa zealously burns like a glowing fire against Harran on account of the paganism of its residents."<sup>68</sup> As many have argued, these contrasts clearly situate Edessa as the new "Rome" of the eastern empire, and deny the imperial authority of larger cities like Constantinople and Antioch.<sup>69</sup> Here again we also see a manifestation of Barth's "cultural boundary." Edessa defines its Christian identity against its differences with other groups, such as Jews, pagans, and cities like Constantinople and Antioch. This articulation of difference, however, was highly rhetorical and masked the reality of religious hybridity in late antiquity, which will be discussed further in the next chapter. Barth's notion that the process of boundary-drawing also includes a revival of traditional values and glorification of historical traditions seems to also be reflected in these texts. Both *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*

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<sup>66</sup> *Julian Romance* 99-100, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 204-6.

<sup>67</sup> *Julian Romance* 116; "believer" and "belief" (*haimanutha*) translated by Christine Shepardson, personal communication 2021; in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 238.

<sup>68</sup> *Julian Romance* 232, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 470.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Wood, *We Have no King*, 133.

make allusions and connections to their Christian and Roman past to bolster their identity as the exemplars of Roman Christianity. The Abgar legend, martyrs, and connection with Constantine all further this narrative. It is through the use of these Roman “idioms” by which Edessa can make legitimate claims of centrality on the Roman frontier.

Edessa’s assertion of its position as the center of Roman Christianity becomes more poignant when placed in the historical context of the late fifth to sixth centuries. Up until the Council of Chalcedon, Edessa remained within the bounds of imperially-sanctioned Christian orthodoxy. As has been noted above, figures like Ephrem and Rabbula and texts like the *Doctrina Addai* reinforced Edessa’s loyalty to Nicene orthodoxy. The Council of Chalcedon in 451 marked the beginning of a miaphysite schism. However, emperors like Zeno and Anastasius did not fully support the Council of Chalcedon, and worked to support miaphysites and promote toleration. Edessa’s distance from Constantinople likely further helped its miaphysite community to continue to prosper in the decades after Chalcedon. Edessa continued to praise and express loyalty to the Roman emperors who supported miaphysites over Chalcedonians. In the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, for example, the author praises the emperor Anastasius, who supported miaphysites, throughout the text as a “faithful emperor,” and absolves him from blame for the Persian War of 502.<sup>70</sup> In a scene almost identical to Jovian’s entry into Edessa in the *Julian Romance*, Anastasius, after being hesitant to burden the city with the army after their complaints about the Gothic soldiers, enters Edessa in triumph. All of the city goes out to welcome him in joy, including “[a]ll the clergy, the children of the covenant, and the monks[,]” and all rejoiced that Anastasius had made peace, “praising God, who in his grace and mercy had brought peace to both empires, [and] the citizens sent him on his way with songs fitting for him

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<sup>70</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 6, in Trombley and Watt, *Chronicle* 6.

and for (the emperor) who had sent him.”<sup>71</sup> Anastasius is thus portrayed, like Jovian, as a good emperor, chosen by God, and praised for making peace. Anastasius also takes the time to visit Edessa, staying for three days, showing care and support for the frontier city that had endured the hardships of billeted soldiers and the Persian army ravaging the countryside.

The *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* is an important comparative text that parallels the concerns of *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* and reveals what is perhaps a more accurate picture of the religious hybridity of Edessa. The chronicle is thought to be of great historical value and to be composed directly following the end of the war in 506.<sup>72</sup> The text makes no note of the Chalcedonian controversies, and Edessa is portrayed as wholly loyal to the Roman emperor.<sup>73</sup> The narrator claims that the Persian war was incited by the Persians, who were being used as an instrument of God to punish Edessa because of its recent relapse into paganism. The natural disasters, such as earthquakes, famines, and plagues, are also named as divine punishments. The author also brings in the example of the good emperor Constantine to rebuke the Edessenes, reporting that during the celebration of a pagan festival, the cross held by Constantine’s statue miraculously levitated for two days.<sup>74</sup> The presence of paganism at Edessa represents a reality of religious hybridity with which the Syriac authors are clearly concerned. Just as Boyarin and Barth note, religious “boundary crossing” spurs the assertion of homogenous traditional values, in this case Christianity. In a time when Edessa’s Christianity was in question

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<sup>71</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 100, in Trombley and Watt, *Chronicle* 117-8. Trombley and Watt also note that the scene resembles a late antique imperial *adventus*; see Sabine G. MacCormack, *Art and Ceremony in Late Antiquity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 17-89.

<sup>72</sup> Trombley and Watt, *Chronicle*, xxvii.

<sup>73</sup> Anastasius began to support the miaphysite cause in 512. A later addition to the end of the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, apparently written by a Chalcedonian Christian, reads, “Even if this emperor seemed (to act) differently at the end of his life, let no one make difficulty over his praises, but let him remember what was done by Solomon in the closing period of his life.” *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 101, in Trombley and Watt, *Chronicle* 118.

<sup>74</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 27, in Trombley and Watt, *Chronicle* 25.

due to the presence of pagan festivals, the author reaffirms its Christian identity by condemning the boundary crossers and pointing to the pure Christianity of the past, including the emperor Constantine and the protection given by the Abgar letter. These same sentiments are present in *Euphemia and the Goth* and strikingly similar in the *Julian Romance*.

In the early sixth century, Edessa's orthodoxy and Christian identity came under increasing hostility from the imperial core. At the end of the Persian war in 506, Edessa's distance from the imperial capital and the emperors' desire for coexistence meant that the city's miaphysite community continued mostly unaffected by doctrinal schisms. The emperor Anastasius even began to more openly favor miaphysitism in 512. However, the religious climate began to change in the reigns of Justin and Justinian. As Susan Ashbrook Harvey notes, imperial interests turned away from the eastern provinces towards focusing on reconquering the Roman West, and also championed the Chalcedonian cause that was more popular in the western provinces.<sup>75</sup> Imperially-endorsed persecutions against miaphysite clergy began in 518 and were felt particularly hard in Mesopotamia.<sup>76</sup> The situation was further worsened by continual outbreak of wars with Persia and the staggering cost of the western conquests, the burden of which was placed on the economy of the Roman East.<sup>77</sup> Wood argues that Julian in the *Romance* is meant to criticize the emperor Justinian. For example, he argues that the Jews as allies to Justinian mirrors the miaphysite sentiment that the Jews were allies to the Chalcedonian cause. Additionally, Julian's Persian campaign parallels Justinian reopening war with Persia in 527.<sup>78</sup> It is thus possible that the *Julian Romance* represents Edessa's counterclaim to the religious policies of Justinian, such as the law given at the beginning of this chapter.

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<sup>75</sup> Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Asceticism and Society in Crisis*, 23-5.

<sup>76</sup> Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 24.

<sup>77</sup> Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 25.

<sup>78</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 158-62.

Justinian sought to equate Chalcedonian orthodoxy with Roman identity. Texts such as *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* thus may assert the longevity of Edessa's Christianity, imperial loyalty, and exclusion of pagans and Jews to push back against the policies of Justinian as anti-Roman and anti-Christian. This imperial criticism, however, was a normative feature of Christian discourse. As Sizgorich has noted, the emperor had to tread carefully because of his longstanding reputation as a persecutor and apostate of Christianity, precedents firmly set in martyrologies and polemic against Julian. It was the job of Christian bishops to warn the emperor of falling back into this role.<sup>79</sup> Ambrose, for example, warns emperor Theodosius against punishing Christians who burned a synagogue in Callinicum in 388. This discourse even extended beyond Christian writers; Libanius, for example, criticizes the destruction of pagan temples under Theodosius by contrasting his weak character with the strength of Constantine.<sup>80</sup> Edessa's imperial criticisms, then, incorporated Roman idioms that placed them legitimately within the discourse surrounding the image of the emperor and the role of Christianity in the empire.

In summary, *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* present Edessa as the exemplar of Roman Christianity, and the "mother of all Christians." Edessa was the home of pure Christian piety and devotion. As orthodox Christianity became increasingly integrated into the concept of *Romanitas*, Edessa participated in the discourse by placing themselves in an exceptional and central position within Roman Christianity. On the borderlands, focal points of sacred power, such as the Edessene martyrs and the historical narratives that connected Edessa to Jesus and Constantine, could act as powerful centripetal forces to make legitimate claims of religious centrality in the Roman world. This was strengthened by an assertion of traditional

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<sup>79</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 102.

<sup>80</sup> Sizgorich, *Violence and Belief*, 82, 93.

values and the inventions of historical narratives to show Edessa's long-standing loyalty to the Roman empire and their devout piety to Christianity. These claims were significant in a time when Edessa's orthodoxy was in question after the Chalcedonian schism, and Edessa could make legitimate counterclaims with narratives familiar to the Roman empire, such as the Abgar legend, and using normative Christian discourse. In this way, Edessa participated in criticism of contemporary emperors by acting as a rightful judge of their "Romanness," including their administrative and religious behavior, because of their own divine favor as the "Blessed City."

## Chapter 6

“Monstrous Romans”: Goths and *Romanitas*

In *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* we have seen that Edessa is presented as emblematic of *Romanitas* in late antiquity, namely as loyal adherents to Roman law and Christianity. These traits were also intimately connected with the city’s imagined past to fashion an identity as the “Rome of the eastern empire,” specially designated by the blessings of emperors and Jesus himself. This identity was constructed by comparing themselves with an “other,” drawing a boundary much like that as described by Barth. The “other” in these texts, in addition to other Syriac literature which will be discussed below, were figures who were demonstrably un-Roman: the Goths. Violent, barbaric, unruly, beyond the control of Roman law, and heretical, the Goths haunt the pages of Syriac literature. They appear in scenes of violence and conflict, and are used to incite fear and dread of their barbarity or awe in their strength. With the aid of Jeffrey Cohen’s “monster theory,” in this chapter I argue that key to the boundary-drawing process of Edessa’s Roman identity was justification of their *Romanitas* by contrasting themselves with a group of imagined “anti-Romans,” the Goths.<sup>1</sup> These claims were particularly effective in an age when endemic warfare, doctrinal disputes, contested frontiers, and movements of peoples were collapsing the categories of what the Roman empire was and who was Roman. Because the “imagined” Goths were widely held responsible for the fall of Rome, deemed heretical as Arians, and were despised for “barbaric behavior,” they could become a powerful rhetorical device that drew upon Rome’s greatest weaknesses, anxieties, and fears.

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<sup>1</sup> Their confidence in their own Roman identity extended all the way to the imperial core to the emperor himself, as I will later argue, following Wood, that the *Julian Romance* compares Julian to Justinian, who the text decries as similarly “anti-Roman.” Regarding “monster theory,” not all of Cohen’s seven theses map perfectly onto the ways in which Goths appear in Syriac literature, but much of his arguments provide a fruitful lens for analyzing their meaning.

Little attention has been paid to the Goths as they appear in Syriac literature. Often, they are dismissed as simple stand-ins for barbarians or synonyms for soldiers in the Roman army, which was mainly composed of federate troops in late antiquity. In his analysis of *Euphemia and the Goth*, for example, Philip Wood summarizes that the Goth “is characterized according to [...] barbarian stereotypes” but that the “antipathy represented in the *Life* [towards outsiders] may not have been limited to the Goths per se.” The key distinction is against the alien nature of the Roman army as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Alexey Muravyov asserts that “it is clear that the anonymous Goth is a faceless literary figure of a villain who could be in fact anyone,” and that the author chose to name a Goth perhaps because of the contemporary events recorded in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*.<sup>3</sup> In Geoffrey Greatrex’s translated edition of the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, the translators dismiss the importance of the naming of Goths as a simple designation for any Roman soldier.<sup>4</sup> Goths are particularly prominent in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*. Regarding their presence, Trombley and Watt argue that the author “shares the common prejudice of Syrian provincials against ‘Goths,’” but that their rowdy behavior is “narrated with scarcely concealed amusement.”<sup>5</sup> While these arguments may reveal truths about Goths in Syriac literature, I aim to show that the choice to write Goths into the literature is rhetorically significant in an empire-wide narrative about the nature of the Roman empire and Roman identity in late antiquity.

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<sup>2</sup> Woof, *We Have no King*, 97-8.

<sup>3</sup> Muravyev, “Perfidious Goth,” 138.

<sup>4</sup> Greatrex, Phenix and Horn, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, 295; see also Menze, *Justinian*, 120 note 55; and A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284-602: A Social, Economic, and Administrative Survey*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964), 1263 note 53.

<sup>5</sup> Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, xxxviii.

The act of naming “Goths” had potent meaning, and was not simply used to designate an ethnic or military group. In an article discussing the Roman practice of cataloguing barbarian names, Ralph Mathisen shows that naming barbarian groups had rhetorical and ideological implications. Even simple lists of groups could convey a sense of Roman superiority, convey horror of the masses outside of the Roman boundaries, and even in a magical sense to gain control of the groups in the act of naming.<sup>6</sup> For example, Nazarius, in a Latin panegyric of Constantine, writes of barbarians, “[w]hy should I mention the Bructeri, why the Chamavi, why the Cherusci, Lancionae, Alamanni, Tubantes? Their names sound the signal for war; the monstrosity of uncivilized nations employs horror in their own terminology.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the names of the groups themselves stir up feelings of horror and images of violence. Such was the case also with the Goths, particularly because of their association with the fall of Rome in 410. Pelagius, for example, in a letter to Demetrias equating the sack of Rome to Judgement Day, writes:

It came to pass recently, as you yourself have heard, when to the shrill sound of the war-trumpet and the shouts of the Goths Rome, the mistress of the world, trembled under the weight of a sad fear. [...] Everything was thrown into confusion and disorder by fear, in every home there was lamentation, and terror was spread through all alike. Slave and noble were on the same footing: all saw the same image of death[.]<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ralph Mathisen, “Catalogues of Barbarians in Late Antiquity,” in Mathisen, *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World*, 19-26; see also Walter Goffat, “Rome, Constantinople, and the Barbarians,” *American Historical Review* 36 (1981): 275-306, here 277.

<sup>7</sup> Nazarius, *Panegyric of Constantine* 18, in C.E.V. Nixon and Barbara Saylor Rodgers, eds., *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors. The Panegyrici Latini: Introduction, Translation, and Historical Commentary, with the Latin Text of R.A.B. Mynors*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 363; Mathisen, “Catalogues of Barbarians,” 23.

<sup>8</sup> Pelagius, Letter to Demetrias 30, in B.R. Rees, *The Letters of Pelagius and His Followers*, (Rochester: Boydell Press, 1991); Mathisen, “Catalogues of Barbarians,” 23-4.

In the use of names such as “the Goths” the speaker or writer thus has the intent to evoke an emotional response from the listener or reader. The specific naming of Goths may have brought forth a range of horrific images and associations.

It is here, then, that Jeffrey Cohen’s “monster theory” may help to elucidate why the Goths were used and what they signify in the texts. Although not all of his outlined “seven theses” may fit onto the literary use of the Goths, many of his claims as to what monsters mean and why they are created prove helpful for analysis. First, the monster, like a zeitgeist, is an “embodiment of a certain cultural moment” that represents all the fears, anxieties, and desires of a culture. Often born at a “metaphoric crossroads,” the monster collapses time and identity to reveal society’s greatest terrors, doubts, and appetites.<sup>9</sup> During late antiquity, the boundaries of the empire and Roman identity were rapidly shifting, and the period is often seen as the crossroads between the ancient and medieval worlds. This cultural moment, then, is ripe for the proliferation of monsters. Second, the monster always escapes its own destruction, becoming an ever-present danger. The monster reappears in times of crisis to once again unveil its cultural body which shifts and transforms to serve contemporary social issues.<sup>10</sup> The monster also refuses to be categorized; it defies binary categories, relishes in “disturbing hybrids” and “polyphony.” In short, the monster refuses to integrate into the “natural” order and represents a “contested cultural space.”<sup>11</sup> In addition, the monster “is difference made flesh,” “an incorporation of the Outside.” This perceived foreign “difference” is always reflective of difference within. Often, the difference is used to justify feelings of cultural superiority or programs of violent domination. In an example relevant to Syriac texts, Cohen argues that European xenophobic depictions of Jews

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<sup>9</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 4.

<sup>10</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 4-6.

<sup>11</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 6-7.

reveal the anxieties about Jewish peoples living and often thriving within communities they sought to homogenize.<sup>12</sup> Such depictions serve to naturalize “the subjugation of one cultural body by another by writing the body excluded from personhood and agency as in every way different, monstrous.”<sup>13</sup> As we shall see, Roman identity crises caused by barbarian migrations and religious schism spurred chauvinistic boundary-drawing that utilized similar rhetoric. Finally, the monster can also live in the realm of danger, liberation, and fantasy, policing the border of society and punishing those who are too curious to cross. The social boundaries the monster polices often enclose the permissible social movement of women.<sup>14</sup> In sum, the monster is an embodiment of a culture’s anxieties to maintain its own order and fear over those who persistently resist compliance into the established order.

In the changing world of late antiquity, anxieties over defining *Romanitas* and the Roman empire were heightened, and the “imagined” Goths played a large role in the narratives that tried to justify who or what was Roman. As Jonathan Conant has pointed out, Roman identity became increasingly ambiguous as the empire’s border shrunk at the same time as “outside” peoples increasingly were granted citizenship.<sup>15</sup> The barbarian group that was most written about was the Goths, who made military alliances with Rome and formed an increasingly important part of the Roman army beginning in the fourth century. The Goths’ presence in the late fourth century marked the “first official recognition” of an independent barbarian group living within the Roman empire, which led to much anxiety and violent rhetoric by the Roman elite.<sup>16</sup> As the boundaries of Roman citizenship and identity became more blurred by the Goths, elites pushed

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<sup>12</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 7-12.

<sup>13</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 11.

<sup>14</sup> Cohen, “Monster Theory,” 12-20.

<sup>15</sup> Jonathan P. Conant, “Romanness in the Age of Attila,” in Maas, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Attila*, 156-72, here 156-7.

<sup>16</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 187-90.

back in ways that evoke Cohen's monster. Themistius, writing in Greek, compares Goths to "the most savage beasts," for example.<sup>17</sup> The introduction of Goths into the empire greatly confused categories of Roman and non-Roman. As an allied group, they fought in Rome's armies and lived within its territory, but they occupied a tenuous space between citizenship and non-citizenship. The situation was further confused as they began to form their own independent kingdoms in the western empire and, at the symbolic extreme, conquered the heart of the Roman world. The situation in the Roman West thus loomed large over a centuries-long tradition of the divine superiority of Roman rule. Emperors had long flaunted their successes in holding back the barbarian hordes from imperial borders; the Goths quickly shattered that illusion. The Goths as an imagined "cultural body" thus embody the fears and anxieties of the late antique Roman world. Unable to face the reality of their changing world, Whittaker notes, "the menacing shadow of the barbarian Goth allowed writers to reaffirm the grandeur of Rome in the face of the barbarian world."<sup>18</sup> Similar to Barth, Whittaker argues that as the frontiers were under greater pressure, "frontier ideology became more extreme in its praise of traditional Roman values and superiority" and that xenophobic sentiments were "frozen into stereotypes."<sup>19</sup> As Cohen formulated, the Gothic monster thus also seems to have been created to assert Roman superiority at a time when it was at its most fragile.

Even though Edessa was at the far eastern frontier of the empire, the concerns surrounding its fate were central to their own welfare. In the late fifth and sixth centuries, as we have seen, Edessa was at the forefront of reignited wars with Persia, increasing violence in the

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<sup>17</sup> Themistius *Oration* 10.139, in Heather and Matthews, *The Goths in the Fourth Century*, 44; Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 188.

<sup>18</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 195; Suzanne Teillet, *Des Goths à la nation gothique: Les origines d'une idée en Occident de la fin du Ve au VIIe siècle*, (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 1984), 47.

<sup>19</sup> Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 196-8; he cites an anthropological study of pre-colonial African frontiers as a comparative example that also saw that "ideology tends to be at its purest on the frontier where it is most under pressure," Whittaker, *Frontiers*, 195; Igor Kopytoff, *The African Frontier*.

Christological debates following the council of Chalcedon, and the disasters associated with floods, famines, and plagues. The constancy of war meant that Roman soldiers became a fixture of the landscape, and Goths were perceived to make up a majority of the soldiery.<sup>20</sup> Soldiers, particularly in the eastern empire, had a reputation for bad behavior, as we shall see below. Billeted soldiers brought heavy burdens to the indigenous population, and they had a reputation of frequently exploiting their hosts. The burden of soldiers may have been particularly onerous to Edessa during the Persian wars after the long peace between the two empires in the fifth century, as well as on top of the plagues and famines the city experienced. As Susan Ashbrook Harvey has pointed out, in the military programs of Justin and Justinian the eastern provinces bore the decimating responsibility of financing wars with Persia and efforts to reconquer North Africa and the western empire.<sup>21</sup> As a kingdom that had long maintained stability on its frontier position and claimed to have the divine protection of Jesus himself, Edessa had strong merit to express dissatisfaction with Rome's foreign policy and reliance on foreign Gothic troops.

As the integration of barbarian groups into the Roman empire complicated citizenship, Romanness began to be increasingly articulated in terms of cultural behavior and Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Miaphysitism, which remained prevalent in Edessa and Syria, strongly continued even after deemed heretical in 451. Miaphysite Christians were largely permitted to practice freely in Edessa by emperors until the reigns of Justin and Justinian, who began to order official persecutions in an effort to reunify the empire. Miaphysites often describe Gothic soldiers as their persecutors, and communities claimed to be hunted down and persecuted by Gothic soldiers

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<sup>20</sup> It is significant that the Syriac literature singles out Gothic *foederati* and soldiers, and makes no mention of other groups, such as Arab *foederati*. Their position on the eastern borderlands meant that Edessa likely had more familiarity with these groups, making the western Goths even more foreign and alien in their perceived behaviors.

<sup>21</sup> Harvey, *Asceticism and Society*, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Conant, "Romanness," 171.

who were deployed by the emperor to enforce Chalcedonian orthodoxy.<sup>23</sup> Geoffrey Greatrex argues that these soldiers destabilized the eastern frontier and garnered distrust among Roman citizens. These soldiers became less “Roman” and more “Gothic” as relations worsened.<sup>24</sup> The Roman army looked more and more like a foreign army, barbaric, persecutory, and dangerous.<sup>25</sup> Goths were also long-considered to be Arians, which Syriac Christians had long condemned as heresy. The presence of violent Goths throughout Syriac sources, then, further strengthen Edessa’s Roman identity. The monstrous, heretical Goths could be used to assert the superiority of Edessa’s loyalty, Christian piety, and Romanness.

In summary, the Goths appear as a monstrous body in Syriac literature at a time when their identity as Romans and place in the Roman empire was in question. As seen in the previous two chapters, Edessa made strong claims in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance* that they enjoyed a privileged position as the “Rome” of the East because of their adherence to Roman law, their loyalty to the empire, their primordial connections to Christianity, and their privileged protection and favor of past Roman emperors and even God. As I will argue below, Edessa used monstrous Goths to justify and assert their claims to pure *Romanitas*. The choice of Goths was a potent one, as they embodied the fears and anxieties of the Roman empire.

In *Euphemia and the Goth*, the Goth and his wife are presented as monstrous figures. They receive no names, further stripping them of their humanity. As Wood notes, the Goth embodies all of the stereotypical barbaric traits, including licentiousness, lack of self-control, anger, disloyalty, and disrespect to Roman law and religion.<sup>26</sup> He appears in the text at times of

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<sup>23</sup> G. Greatrex, “Moines, Militaires et Défense de la Frontière Orientale Au Vie s.,” in Ariel Lewin, Pietrina Pellegrini, Zbigniew Fiema, and Sylvain Janniard, eds., *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest: Proceedings of a Colloquium Held at Potenza, Acerenza and Matera, Italy / May 2005*, (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2007, 288-9.

<sup>24</sup> Greatrex, “Moines, Militaires et Défense,” 290.

<sup>25</sup> Greatrex, “Moines, Militaires et Défense,” 295.

<sup>26</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 97.

crisis when the invasions of the barbarian Huns call the army to Edessa. Because of his position in the army, he is mobile, wealthy, and powerful.<sup>27</sup> His mobility makes him slippery; he uses persuasion and deception to marry Euphemia and whisk her away to his home without fear of consequence. The Goth's marriage and enslavement of Euphemia, as we have seen, were sexual crimes that were especially egregious to her position as a free person. Once they cross the boundary of the safety of Edessa, the Goth is able to reveal the extent of his lust.

"[H]e rose up against her like a destroying wolf and stripped off her rich clothing that she was clothed with, and unloosed from her the gold with which she was festooned, and clothed her in the costume of a slave-girl."<sup>28</sup> In this graphic scene, the Goth may be the monster that embodies the fantasies and desires of aggression and domination that are forbidden in the normative confines of society.<sup>29</sup> Across the boundary he takes Euphemia to the outside, barbaric world of danger and alien norms. Dimambro has eruditely shown that in the Goth's home gender norms are flipped on their head.<sup>30</sup> The Goth loses all power to his wife, who has monstrous femininity. She wields all verbal and physical power within her home, and uses violence against Euphemia and her baby, whom she kills. After the wife dies, her kin exact monstrous revenge on Euphemia. The Goth and his wife are thus the embodiment of difference and foreignness. The Goth is a monstrous Roman soldier; sent to Edessa on behalf of Rome to protect its people from barbarians, he in fact descends upon the city to violently exploit its most vulnerable citizens. Edessa's Roman values of adherence to Roman law and Christianity are juxtaposed against the Goth's "anti-Romanness," which is delineated in monstrous terms to justify Edessa's cultural superiority.

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<sup>27</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 98.

<sup>28</sup> *Euphemia and the Goth* 15, in Burkitt, *Euphemia* 135.

<sup>29</sup> Cohen, "Monster Theory," 17.

<sup>30</sup> See Dimambro, "Women on the Edge," 331-2.

In this story, the monstrous Goth also patrols the boundaries of Edessa and, as Dimambro astutely points out, serves as a warning for women not to overstep the boundaries of their gender expectations.<sup>31</sup> When placed in the context of the Persian wars of 502-6, the monster as the guardian of cultural boundaries has further implications. As Trombley and Watt point out in their introduction to the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, because of the wars, officials had trouble keeping their inhabitants to stay inside the cities. To keep people from fleeing, “local churches tried to strengthen the argument [of staying inside the city] by circulating stories about the supposed apotropaic value of prominent local cults.”<sup>32</sup> The Goth in *Euphemia* certainly serves this precise function as a monster who represents the dangers of leaving the safety of Edessa and the protection of its martyrs. The strong presence of Goths in this chronicle adds weight to these two texts coming from or at least being relevant to the same time period.

Goths are fiercely prominent and fiercely monstrous in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*. Written shortly after the closing of the Persian conflict in 506 by an Edessene local elite, the text is written as “A Historical Narrative of the Period of Distress which occurred in Edessa, Amid, and all Mesopotamia.”<sup>33</sup> The author records the outbreaks of natural disasters, plagues, and war, which he ascribes as punishment from God because of the resurgence of pagan cults in Edessa. The Goths billeted at Edessa are presented as one of the major “distresses” that the population suffers, and once again appear in the written record in scenes of violence and chaos. Of the soldiers, the author writes, “those who came to our assistance ostensibly as saviours were going down and coming up, they looted us in a manner little short of enemies[.]”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Dimambro, “Women on the Edge,” 330.

<sup>32</sup> Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, xlvii.

<sup>33</sup> *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* title, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 86, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 103.

Thus the Goths are dangerous hybrid soldiers, acting as enemies when they should protect. Their power and mobility allow them to create chaos throughout Edessa as malevolent beings:

So excessive were (the Goths) in eating and drinking [...] that some of them, enjoying themselves in the upper storeys of houses, went out at night, befuddled with too much wine, and striding out into empty space, fell into the abyss and brought their life to an unfortunate end. Others dozed off while sitting and drinking, fell from upper storeys, and died on the spot. Yet others suffered in their beds from excessive eating. Some would put boiling water into the ears of those serving them for the slightest mistake. Others who had gone into a garden to take the produce handed out death by an arrow to the gardener when he rose to prevent them from stealing. [...] Yet others, overcome by their own rage, killed one another as their evil grew and no one restrained it.<sup>35</sup>

These figures are monsters who refuse to integrate into Edessa and relish in liberation and fulfillment of all desires. Like *Euphemia*, their behavior may allude to the fantasies of sexual domination, as their behavior towards women is described, “[i]n full view of everyone they had their way over the women in the streets and houses. They took oil, wood, salt, and other things for their own needs from the old women, widowed or poor, and they stopped them doing their own work in order to serve them.”<sup>36</sup> As discussed above, these Goths also are unable to be restrained by Roman law, and drive out their own *dux* named Romanus after he tried placing restrictions on their behavior. Although Romanus, a Latin name meaning “Roman,” is an attested historical figure, the literary image of him being driven from the city, powerless and alone, by

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<sup>35</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 96, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 114.

<sup>36</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 86, in Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 104-5.

Gothic forces is rhetorically striking.<sup>37</sup> The last vestige of “Romanness” in the Roman army is purged from the city. Even in this chronicle esteemed for its historical merit, the Goths are presented as a barbarous and monstrous trope, embodying the fears and anxieties of a Roman army that did not look or act Roman. The author of the text is keen to show his loyalty to the empire and the emperor Anastasius, and portraying monstrous Gothic figures was a powerful way to assert Edessa’s cultural superiority and its place within the Roman empire.

A comparison with other Syriac sources reveals similar uses of Goths, which suggest the trope was widespread throughout Mesopotamia and across confessional boundaries. Another Syriac source, the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, shows the reappearance of monstrous Goths, in particular in associations with religious persecution. The author likely wrote the text in Amida, a frontier city north-east of Edessa, in the mid-sixth century. The author has clear miaphysite leanings, and relates the history of doctrinal disputes and the prominent ecclesiastical figures that were involved in them.<sup>38</sup> Like the previous sources, the Goths appear in the narrative in scenes of violence and chaos. For example, the text reports a rebellion by a general Vitalian, a Goth, against the emperor Anastasius, who supported miaphysites. Being a Goth and a Roman general, Vitalian was precisely a figure who blurred the lines of who qualified to be Roman. The author seems to judge that he is not, in terms similar the treatment of the Goth in *Euphemia* and Julian in the *Romance*:

The tyrant Vitalian was a general during the time of Anastasius. He was a Goth, warlike and of a courageous mind, whom the barbarian obeyed. It was said that he wanted to make a rebellion against Anastasius, who exacted an oath from him, which Vitalian did

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<sup>37</sup> On Romanus, see Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, 111 note 516.

<sup>38</sup> Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, 8, 32-5, 61.

not keep, but he rebelled and rallied the barbarian nations around him, and made an assault on the domain of Anastasius [.]<sup>39</sup>

Vitalian approaches Constantinople itself and even seizes Hypatius, a Roman commander, whom he paraded around and insulted. Eventually, he returns Hypatius for ransom. After Anastasius dies, Justin seeks to make peace with him and they meet at the martyrion of Euphemia at Chalcedon, and he resumes his office as a Roman general.<sup>40</sup> However, in 520, Vitalian is killed exiting a bathhouse. The author judges the murder as divine retribution, saying, “Thus God requited him for the evil he had done in the time of Anastasius, and for the breaking of his oaths, and his army did no damage.”<sup>41</sup> Vitalian is disloyal to God, oaths, and the rule of Roman law and the emperor. Even though he gains high status in the empire, he is the antithesis of a good Roman.

The text also narrates miaphysite persecutions that happen in Edessa. After bishop Paul, who reluctantly accepted the council of Chalcedon after being exiled, dies, he is replaced by the pro-Chalcedonian bishop Asclepius in the early 520s. The author describes Asclepius as a chaste man who was kind to the poor and handled the church’s finances justly, but “he was active and harsh against the believers, and many were persecuted by him and abused with every suffering, or died under torture at the hands of Liberarius the Goth, a harsh governor, who was nicknamed ‘The Bull-Eater.’”<sup>42</sup> Here the Gothic figure seems to be presented as a monstrous minion of the two-faced bishop. The Goth once again appears at a time when Roman identity and Christianity were at a crossroads. The identity of miaphysites in Edessa was under pressure, and even their bishop is portrayed as having to betray his beliefs to retain his authority. The Chalcedonian

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<sup>39</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* 8.2.62, in Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor*, 282.

<sup>40</sup> The martyr Euphemia has no relation to *Euphemia and the Goth*.

<sup>41</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zacchariah Rhetor* 8.2, in Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* 283.

<sup>42</sup> *Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* 8.4, in Greatrex, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor* 294-5.

bishop Asclepius appears as a hybrid, both “gentle” towards the poor and violent against miaphysites. The Gothic ‘Bull-Eater’ haunts Edessa, torturing those who have seemingly strayed from the boundaries of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. These two monstrous figures thus represent the embodiment of the fears surrounding the category crises caused by the Chalcedonian schism. The author portrays Gothic figures like Vitalian and Liberarius in monstrous terms to show them as violent, disloyal, and quick to betray Roman law and Christianity. Their monstrosity is used to bolster the claims of Roman superiority over those who questioned the Romanness of miaphysites.

The trope of monstrous Goths also crosses confessional boundaries and appears in other literature from the region that supports Chalcedonian orthodoxy, such as the *Chronicle of John Malalas*. John Malalas was a writer from Antioch who had a career in Constantinople in the imperial bureaucracy. He was a strong supporter of Justinian and Chalcedonian orthodoxy.<sup>43</sup> Once again, the Goths appear in his narrative in times of disorder, revolt, and violence. One example involves a rebellion under emperor Leo. The emperor suspects a senator, Aspar, of planning a revolt, so the emperor has the senator and his sons killed in the palace. The killings spark a riot in Constantinople, including a “large band of Goths.” One of the Goths is singled out for his deeds:

a *comes* named Ostrys, entered the palace with some other Goths, shooting with their bows. A battle broke out between the *excubitores* and Ostrys, and there were many casualties. He was surrounded and saw that he was beaten, as so he fled, taking Aspar’s concubine, a beautiful Gothic girl, who escaped with him on horseback to Thrace, where he plundered estates.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*, xxii.

<sup>44</sup> *Chronicle of John Malalas* 14.40, in Jeffreys, Jeffreys, and Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas* 205.

Here there are resurgent themes of disloyalty, violence, lust, and fantasy. Like a monster, he is able to escape and cross back over the boundary of Roman civilization, taking a beautiful girl with him, to wreak havoc in Thrace freely. Goths appear elsewhere in John Malalas in similar terms.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the cultural monster of “Goths” was part of a semiotic vocabulary across Syria and Mesopotamia and across Christian confessional lines.

Goths do not appear in the *Julian Romance*. However, the emperor Julian is portrayed in monstrous terms and bears many similarities to the Goth in the *Euphemia* tale. Both are dangerous soldiers, evoking the “impious warrior” myth as outlined by Frédéric Blaive. According to Blaive, this mythic figure disregards and makes a mockery of the law, plunders property, rapes women, and challenges the gods themselves with his continued disrespect and worldly success. However, the gods always exact their revenge on him.<sup>46</sup> As soldiers, Julian and the Goth move from the Roman West, in Julian’s case from Gaul, eastwards to Edessa. Julian’s movement thus matches the movement of barbarian soldiers in the Roman army coming into the eastern provinces. Both are described as foreign and alien. The Goth’s home is called “the land of the stranger,” while Julian is called a “foreigner” by Edessa.<sup>47</sup> Just as divine justice is aroused against the Goth’s wickedness in *Euphemia*, so too is Julian ensnared for his crimes. Bishop

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<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *Chronicle of John Malalas* 14.23, 14.45, 16.3, 16.16, 18.71, 18.88. 14.23 provides an example of a Goth being admired for his strength. In one-on-one battle of Persia against Rome, the Romans chose a Gothic federate named Areobindus who, armed with a lasso, defeats the Persian warrior and a peace treaty is signed; see Jeffreys, Jeffrey, and Scott, *The Chronicle of John Malalas* 199. A similar story of strength is recorded in the *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 71, where a Gothic soldier named Ald heroically fights off Persian soldiers and drags a fallen soldier through a tunnel after it had been compromised. Even though he was wounded, he survived and had the strength to carry the soldier back to the Roman line when all others fled; see Trombley and Watt, *The Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite* 88. Such praises do not diminish the Goths’ monstrousness. Their strength and military prowess is portrayed as superhuman and imposing, to be feared and respected; these figures may have served to shame soldiers to act more heroically.

<sup>46</sup> Blaive, “Le Mythe,” 171. Blaive also notes comparisons in the portrayals of Roman figures, such as Julius Caesar and Marcus Crassus.

<sup>47</sup> See *Julian Romance* 123, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 252, “Christ is the king of Edessa, and He dwells in its citadels. No foreigner is exalted above Him. If Edessa did not open its gate to the strong kings of Assyria, when they besieged it for three years and did not subdue it, will Edessa open its gates and greet you, the mad One, the contemptible foreigner, the worshiper of idols?”

Eusebius of Rome foretells his impending doom, saying that justice will punish him and his followers, and predicts, “May he have no success, and may he not prosper in the Roman Empire because he dared to be arrogant against God, his creator, his destruction will be outside of their realm.”<sup>48</sup> The prophecy is repeated ad nauseum throughout the text. For example, Elpidus, a Christian in Antioch, tells Julian, “Justice will not desist from you until it exacts punishment from you for what you did to God’s servants.”<sup>49</sup> The prophecies become fulfilled as God acts as the divine force of judgement that carefully lays out a plan for Julian to be trapped. God is himself named “the Lord of Justice.”<sup>50</sup> The trap is set for Julian to die in Persia. The narrator tells us, “[t]he madman, however, did not know that his fate was laughing at him, and that the wretched man would shortly not exist, that the trap of justice was set for him in Persia, and that the Lord’s sword was sharpened for him.”<sup>51</sup> Both figures are thus present in similar terms, impious towards God and provoking his judgement.

Because of these similarities between the Goth and Julian, I argue that they are both portrayed in monstrous terms for the same purpose of justifying Edessa’s superior Roman identity. Throughout the *Romance*, Julian is described as a mad tyrant who is militantly devoted to paganism and the destruction of Christianity. As discussed in the previous two chapters, Julian, like the Goth, is described as the antithesis to a good Roman. Both are monstrous soldiers, serving in the Roman army but defying *Romanitas*, and Julian is transformed into a more frightening manifestation of a monstrous Roman emperor. Even though his role as emperor is to

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<sup>48</sup> *Julian Romance* 17, 18, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 40-42.

<sup>49</sup> *Julian Romance* 120, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 246.

<sup>50</sup> *Julian Romance* 92, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 190.

<sup>51</sup> *Julian Romance* 72, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance*, 150. Blaive also interestingly points out that an omen of an “impious warrior’s” impending doom is a horse that stumbles; see Blaive, “Le Mythe,” 174. In the *Julian Romance* 147, after Julian leaves Harran, “[h]is horse placed its mouth on his purple tunic and tore it from one end to the other, trembled beneath him, fell down, and died.” See Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 300.

protect the empire and its people, Julian disregards Roman law, justice, and Christianity. The author renders Julian's behavior in violently graphic terms:

[he] would sometimes enter into solitary tombs and speak in them by means of the magical practice of magicians with demons. He would sometimes tear out and remove the heart of children while they were still alive, work his enhancements, divine, and practice witchcraft with them. He would sometimes also split open (the wombs) of pregnant women, remove their fetuses, and perform his abominable profane mysteries with them.<sup>52</sup>

This rhetoric is used throughout late antique religious discourse to portray the "religious other" in degrading terms. Eusebius, for example, portrays Maxentius participating in similar disturbing rituals before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge against Constantine, the Christian hero.<sup>53</sup> Like a monster, Julian is the embodiment of this "otherness" which is particularly dangerous as he is the Roman emperor and heir to a Christian empire. Julian thus defies boundaries and categorization.

Like Cohen's monster, the "anti-Roman" monster reappears in the *Julian Romance*, revealing the terrors of its contemporary concerns. Philip Wood has provocatively argued that Julian is made to represent Justinian.<sup>54</sup> He was the first emperor, along with his predecessor Justin, to attempt to fully implement Chalcedonian orthodoxy across the empire, reconquer the western provinces, and unify Roman law into one code. Analyzing Julian's monstrosity gives further insight into the anxieties and fears of Christians in Edessa in the early sixth century. Until Justin and Justinian, Roman emperors had permitted or even endorsed miaphysite Christianity. Because Edessa was on the frontier of the empire, the city had even more room to practice

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<sup>52</sup> *Julian Romance* 93, in Sokoloff, *The Julian Romance* 192.

<sup>53</sup> See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 8.14, in J.E.L. Oulton, trans., *Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History Volume II: Books 6-10*, Loeb Classical Library 265, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1932), 302-13; and Eusebius, *Life of Constantine* 1.33-6. My thanks to Jacob Latham for this parallel.

<sup>54</sup> Wood, *We Have no King*, 159-62.

Christianity that was not supported by the council of Chalcedon. These two emperors, however, went further than any before them of making “unorthodox” Christianity illegal and enforcing legislation against “heresy.”<sup>55</sup> This effort was part of Justinian’s larger program of unifying the empire, and his compilation of Roman legal code in the *Code of Justinian* was the culmination of his efforts. Justinian framed the law code as divinely-mandated and thus established himself as a legitimate source of Roman and Christian authority.<sup>56</sup> As part of this ideological endeavor, Justinian appealed heavily to Rome’s past and fashioned himself as a reformer of the empire’s past glory.<sup>57</sup> The figure of the Roman emperor had been revered for his connection to divinity and maintaining divine favor for the welfare of his citizens since the time of Augustus, and it was this same discourse which Justinian drew upon.<sup>58</sup>

However, Justinian has been deemed by contemporary and modern historians alike as autocratic. Peter Bell has argued that his attempts at unification and holding onto power while his efforts increasingly failed recall the ways in which ancient and modern authoritarian regimes sought to maintain their authority.<sup>59</sup> Much of the discourse on the emperor’s authority in the sixth century revolved around separating tyranny from the imperial office.<sup>60</sup> This can be most blatantly seen in Procopius’s *Greek Secret History*. Much like the polemic against Julian in the *Romance*, Justinian is described as a tyrant who “used to proceed with the lightest of hearts to unjust murder of men and the seizure of other men’s money, and for him it was nothing that

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<sup>55</sup> Such persecutions were likely limited to ecclesiastical leaders, however.

<sup>56</sup> Caroline Humfress, “Law and Legal Practice in the Age of Justinian,” in Maas, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 167; Charles Pazdernik, “Justinianic Ideology and the Power of the Past,” in Maas, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 185-212, here 200-2.

<sup>57</sup> Pazdernik, “Justinianic Ideology,” 186.

<sup>58</sup> See, for example, Ando, *Imperial Ideology*, 146-8; Peter Herz, “Emperors: Caring for the Empire and Their Successors,” in Jörg Rüpke, ed., *A Companion to Roman Religion*, (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 304-16.

<sup>59</sup> Peter Bell, *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian*, 339.

<sup>60</sup> Pazdernik, “Justinianic Ideology,” 195. For further analysis of the upper imperial administration’s mistrust of Justinian, see Shane M. Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: a study of Cassiodorus and the Variae, 527-554*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

countless thousands of men should have been destroyed.”<sup>61</sup> Elsewhere he describes that Justinian and Theodora, contrary to past custom, demanded to be called “‘Master’ (δεσπότης) or ‘Mistress’” while all other magistrates should be called “‘slaves.’”<sup>62</sup> Even though this polemic is exaggerated, it shows that the literate elite were aware of Justinian’s efforts and shared a discourse that was concerned with the innovations he was implementing. Edessa clearly shared this understanding of the age as reflected in the *Julian Romance*.

Justinian’s efforts at unifying the empire, especially in terms of Christian orthodoxy and the reconquest of the Roman West, were not long-lasting and resulted in further polarization. As Charles Pazdernik has noted:

Justinian’s initiative exposed tensions between the imperial office [...] and other sources of authority and legitimacy deeply embedded in the social fabric of late antiquity. Questions emerged with special urgency about what it meant to be a Roman, to govern (or to be governed) lawfully, and to perpetuate institutions and practices sanctioned by their antiquity.<sup>63</sup>

This kind of crisis matches well with Cohen’s articulation of where a monster appears. Justinian, like Julian and the Goths, throws Roman identity into disarray, especially in the eyes of miaphysite Christians. Their Roman emperor was no longer acting Roman; he was pushing the boundaries of imperial authority, patronizing Christian heresy, and persecuting the faithful with armies of “un-Roman” soldiers. The empire was at a crossroads. Justinian’s western campaigns succeeded in regaining parts of Italy and North Africa, but at great cost. The western empire he failed to fully restore to Roman rule was now made up of powerful barbarian kingdoms, and he

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<sup>61</sup> Procopius *Secret History* 6.21, in H.B. Dewing, trans., *Procopius. The Anecdota or Secret History*, Loeb Classical Library 290, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1935), 74-5.

<sup>62</sup> Procopius *Secret History* 30.25-6, in Dewing, *Procopius*, 356-7.

<sup>63</sup> Pazdernik, “Justinianic Ideology,” 185-6.

failed to create lasting peace with Persia. The eastern provinces were saddled with the costs of financing wars on both fronts, while simultaneously billeting and living among Roman soldiers and being persecuted for their beliefs, all while natural disasters, famines, and plagues ravaged the cities and countryside. This was a time of cultural polyphony, a time ripe for the proliferation of monsters.

It was against this backdrop that miaphysite Christians further consolidated their identity, and they did so in explicitly Roman terms. As scholars have noted, miaphysite Christians were not limited to Syriac Christianity, and had a shared Roman identity in which they had legitimate claims to imperial loyalty and orthodoxy.<sup>64</sup> Just as Justinian used nostalgia to fashion himself as a restorer of Roman greatness, Volker Menze has shown that miaphysites also used narratives of the past to bind their community together. As he describes, writers perceived “in their commemoration of these times a continuity since the apostles without any breaks or bends.”<sup>65</sup> Historical counterpoints to these claims, such as the council of Chalcedon, receive hardly any mention in the literature. This sentiment is also present in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*. Both texts affirm the longevity of Edessa’s loyalty to Rome and its Christian orthodoxy with roots to Jesus and the apostles. No mention of Chalcedonian schisms or Christological debates is present; Edessa’s Roman identity is simply natural and self-evident.

As I have argued in this chapter, Edessa further asserted its Roman identity in opposition to monstrous figures. As Cohen argues, monsters were figures that appeared in times of identity crises that embodied a society’s anxieties and fears. The Goths appear in late antique literature as

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<sup>64</sup> Bell, *Social Conflict in the Age of Justinian*, 351; Lucas Van Rompay, “Society and Community in the Christian East,” in Maas, *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Justinian*, 239-66, here 256, 262. See also Garth Fowden, *Empire to Commonwealth: Consequences of Monotheism in Late Antiquity*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 133.

<sup>65</sup> Menze, *Justinian*, 275.

manifestations of the fears surrounding the transformation of the Roman empire and Roman identity. This trope was also utilized by the Syriac literate elite to express similar concerns about the nature of imperial power in the sixth century. In *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, monstrous Goths were used to assert Edessa's Roman superiority and critique contemporary imperial leadership. The Goths and Julian are Roman figures but wholly antithetical to Roman values. The literary figure of the Goth was a powerful rhetorical monster because it embodied Rome's greatest fears and weaknesses. The Roman empire yielded the West to the formation of barbarian kingdoms on top of its primeval land, while it courted its soldiers into its army and welcomed them into imperial honors and ranks. The heretical and barbaric soldiers flooded the eastern provinces, imposing a great financial burden, while emperors tried and failed to retake the western provinces at great cost. Cohen writes that "the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' a glyph that seeks a hierophant."<sup>66</sup> In *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, we can see that Edessa, even though on the fringes of the Roman frontier, was clearly aware of the state of the empire and the discourses surrounding it. The Gothic soldier who enslaves the innocent Euphemia and Julian who terrorizes the provinces, through this reading, may represent the empire-wide crises surrounding foreign policy, Roman identity, and religious schisms.

Just as the monster always reveals the monster that is within, these texts may provide a glimpse into contemporary peoples' understanding that the Roman world had completely changed. The pure, homogenous Roman community that was idealized was now monstrous, hybrid, and diverse; the boundaries between Roman and barbarian, Christian and heretic, and emperor and tyrant had been ruptured. Perhaps this signifies an awareness of the end of an era, a

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<sup>66</sup> Cohen, "Monster Theory," 4.

rupture of the period of late antiquity and its transformation into something else. The texts show a yearning for a return to the safety in the arms of the Edessene martyrs, or in the care of good Christian emperors like Constantine and Jovian. The presence and reappearance of monsters, however, leaves a ghostly trail of the deep-seated anxieties and tensions of the reality of the transformation of the Roman empire.

## Chapter 7

## Conclusion

At the end of Tacitus's *Germania*, he describes the barbarians that live on the edge of the known world. Even further, he reports that legend tells of people that live on the very fringe, "the Helusii and Oxiones [who] have human faces and features, the limbs and bodies of beasts: it has not been so ascertained, and I shall leave it an open question."<sup>1</sup> As O'Gorman describes:

[b]eyond the boundary the collapse of identity into difference continues, with semi-bestial humans. [...] the final words form the ultimate expression of abandonment, as the seeker finds only the all too familiar and the irremediably strange, which merge into one another and result not only in the failure of understanding [...] but in its very futility.<sup>2</sup>

Here is the emergence of the hybrid monster that defies all categorization and embodies difference itself. The half-human, half-beast creatures on the edge of the world show that a "pure" Roman identity does not and cannot exist.

In the tumultuous world of the fifth and sixth century Mediterranean, writers across the empire expressed their dreams of returning to a greater past and a more glorious empire, to a "pure" Roman identity. Justinian's efforts represent the culmination of these desires as he sought to unify the empire under his rule, impose his Christian beliefs, and reconquer the lost western provinces. I have attempted to argue that in *Euphemia and the Goth* and the *Julian Romance*, the Syriac writers in Edessa engaged in these same discourses as they wrote about their own glorious past which asserted the legitimacy of their Roman values and heritage. It was in Edessa, not

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Germania* 46.6, "Hellusios et Oxionas ora hominum voltusque, corpora atque artus feras gerere: quod ego ut incompertum in medio relinquam." In Hutton and Peterson, *Tacitus* 214-15.

<sup>2</sup> O'Gorman, "No Place Like Rome," 118.

Rome, overrun by Goths, and not Constantinople, a seat of heresy and injustice, that the purity of *Romanitas* could be found.

As I have argued, these Edessene texts constructed their exemplary *Romanitas* by showcasing their loyalty to Roman civic and Christian values. Edessa upheld Roman law and ensured justice for all of its citizens, even those who were most vulnerable. Edessa's Christian heritage had a genealogy that linked its kings to the Heavenly King, Christ, and a pure apostolic lineage for ecclesiastical authority. Edessa was the most stalwart defender of Christianity against pagans and Jews, or so the texts claim.<sup>3</sup> Because of these merits, Edessa saw that it had legitimate claims to critique imperial policy and leadership. Its position on the borderlands gave Edessa unique tools and strategies for expressing Roman centrality, such as the ability of miaphysites to flourish away from the imperial capital. Their long history of maintaining peace between the Roman and Persian empires also meant that they saw themselves as judges for legitimately critiquing Roman foreign policy. The western provinces and the Roman army had been corrupted by Goths, who were portrayed as in every sense "anti-Roman:" heretical, violent, and fugitives of Roman law. Julian, the tyrannical model for Justinian, madly sought to impose a Christianity the miaphysites saw as heretical, flooded the eastern provinces with Goths, and perpetuated wars that drained the finances of the East. These monstrous figures thus embody the fears and anxieties of this cultural moment, and, like Tacitus, reveal the fruitlessness of the search for Roman purity. The monstrous Goths were a preeminent part of the Roman empire; in truth, Roman identity was polyphony. The emperor, in trying to unify an empire that looked vastly different from the Augustan Golden Age, discovered that imposing singular categories of Christianity and world order was simply not possible.

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<sup>3</sup> The reality, of course, was much different. The *Chronicle of Pseudo-Joshua the Stylite*, as noted above, reports of Edessenes celebrating pagan festivals, which drew upon them divine wrath.

The historiography of late antiquity has likewise been fractured into two categories: decline and rupture in the Latin West, and continuity and transformation in the Greek East. Perhaps by examining Edessa's viewpoint from the eastern borderlands we are presented with a new monstrous hybrid. The texts examined in this paper seem to show that Edessa was aware of and engaged in both ideas. They understood and criticized the fall of the western provinces, while asserting their own continuity on the edges of the Roman East. They also understood, however, that the barbarians of the West had transformed into a new category of "Romans" and were becoming a prominent feature of life in the East, while also sensing that the empire ruled from Constantinople had become an entity entirely different from the imperial seat of power in the past. Edessa shows that binary categories do not fit so perfectly, and that reality lies in the heterogeneity of identities and discourses.

As a post-script, in studying the intercultural and changing world of the late antique Mediterranean, I see many of the same anxieties and tensions play out in our own increasingly globalized world.<sup>4</sup> Jeffrey Cohen, on the importance of looking at our own monsters, states, "[t]hey ask us to reevaluate our cultural assumptions about race, gender, sexuality, our perception of difference, our tolerance towards its expression. They ask us why we have created them."<sup>5</sup> We are currently experiencing a cultural moment when the boundaries such as race, gender, nations, and identities are becoming expanded, broken, and fluid. With the introduction of the internet, increased international migrations, and social justice movements, we are increasingly coming into contact with people who may look, think, speak, or act differently than we do. In my own country, and many other nations across the world, I see a frightening turn to

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<sup>4</sup> In making meaning of ancient texts to our contemporary selves, I follow the beautiful analysis of Catherine Brown on being "coeval" with texts; see Catherine Brown, "In the Middle," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30 no. 3 (2000): 547-74.

<sup>5</sup> Cohen, "Monster Theory," 20.

narratives of desiring to return to a “simpler,” “pure,” and often “Christian” heritage of a “true America.” Such a narrative of homogeneity, however, is a complete fabrication, as the world of late antiquity shows.

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### Vita

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