THE DATE OF COMPOSITION OF THEODORET'S CHURCH HISTORY

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The histories of Socrates, Sozomen, and Theodoret are all written at roughly the same time and cover almost exactly the same period of history in closely parallel fashion. The verbal resemblances are so close that the problem of literary dependence must naturally arise. In this regard, it has been customary to consider Theodoret's Church History as in some sense dependent upon the histories of Socrates and Sozomen, principally because of the later date usually given to the bishop's history. The normal date of composition given now in works like Quasten, and Altaner and Stuiber, is 449/50.1 This seems to be based mainly on the calculation made by Parmentier and Scheidweiler in the introduction to the GCS edition of Theodoret's Church History: The reference to Theodosius II in Theod. H. E. V.36.1 as ὁ νῦν βασιλεύων, "the present emperor", gives one clear terminus, July 28, 450, the date of Theodosius' death. The other terminus is given by Theodoret's letter to Pope Leo the Great after he had been condemned at the Robber Council of Ephesus in August 449 (Theod. Epist. Sirm. 113). Theodoret gives a list of his writings which could be used as proof of his orthodoxy, and the Church History is not among them. Therefore, the argument goes, Theodoret must have written the history in less than a year, in the latter part of 449 and the first part of 450, while he was exiled to the monastery of his youth, at Nicerte, a village near Apamea.2

But one must ask whether that letter to Pope Leo in 449 listed all of Theodoret's works, as Parmentier and Scheidweiler believed. The key portion of Epist. Sirm. 113 reads as follows:

For I am the author of works, some written twenty years ago, some eighteen, some fifteen, some twelve years ago; some against the Arians and Eunomians, some against the Jews and the pagans, some against the Magi in Persia; others concerning universal providence, others concerning the divine generation of the Logos and the
divine Incarnation. I have written commentaries, by the grace of God, both on the apostolic writings and the prophetic oracles. It is easy to learn from these works whether I held unswerving to the rule of faith, or deviated from its unbending standard.3

As can be seen, the letter did not list the Church History per se but it also did not list Theodoret's collection of the life stories of thirty-one monks, the so-called Historia religiosa. Theodoret referred to this hagiographical work in his Church History (see for example H.E. IV.25.5) so it was already written when he was working on his Church History. (Quasten in fact dates the Historia religiosa at 444, five years before the letter to Pope Leo was written.)4

Futhermore, though this is an uncertain and subjective mode of argument, it is nevertheless difficult to imagine Theodoret turning out two works (the Historia religiosa and then the Church History) in less than a year while simultaneously trying to write letters, establish contacts in the West, and otherwise maneuver politically to save his whole career. But this would be required by Parmentier and Scheidweiler's theory. Surely Theodoret was not greatly interested in historiography in that crucial few months when his whole life as a theologian of the Church seemed to be at stake!

One must remember that Theodoret did not need to list all his works in the letter to Leo, only those works which established his orthodoxy with respect to the issues of 449. The Church History would not have been especially relevant to those issues (and neither for that matter would the Historia religiosa). One could hardly run through the Church History and make much of a decision as to whether its author held a doctrine of two sons, or denied the Theotokos, or supported a genuinely heretical "Nestorian" notion of the union between the divinity and the humanity in Christ.5 It is easy to understand how Theodoret could have left the history off his list of proof-texts, and he did not say in the letter to Leo that he was listing all his works. As an example of the way in which Theodoret clearly at times did not give full lists of his works when defending his orthodoxy in letters of this sort, one should compare Epist. Sirm. 82, dated December 448 by Azéma. As Theodoret admitted at the end of a very similar list there, he nevertheless left out, not just a few works, but ἕτερα πολλά from his list of writings.6 Letter 82 is clear proof that Letter 113 should not be relied on for an argument from silence.

But the argument can be taken even further. Letter 113 not only