Socrates of Constantinople

Complete Works

DELPHI CLASSICS

Ancient Classics Series

The Complete Works of

SOCRATES OF CONSTANTINOPLE

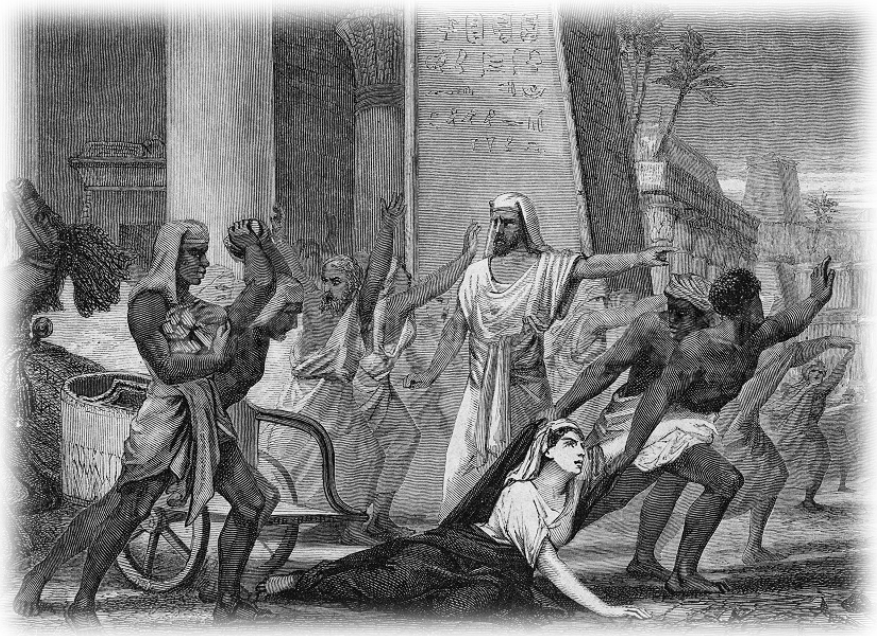
(c. 380-440)

Contents

Version 1

The Complete Works of

SOCRATES OF CONSTANTINOPLE



By Delphi Classics, 2026

COPYRIGHT

Complete Works of Socrates of Constantinople

First published in the United Kingdom in 2026 by Delphi Classics.

ISBN: 978 1 80170 300 0

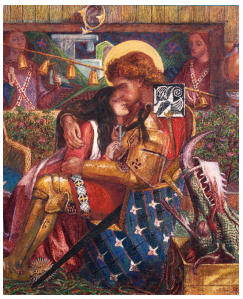
Delphi Classics
is an imprint of
Delphi Publishing Ltd
Hastings, East Sussex
United Kingdom
Contact: sales@delphiclassics.com

DELPHI CLASSICS

www.delphiclassics.com

Enjoying our *Ancient Classics* eBooks? Then try our:

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY



MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Jacobus de Voragine
The Golden Legend

DELPHI CLASSICS

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Asser
Life of King Alfred

DELPHI CLASSICS

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Marco Polo
The Travels

DELPHI CLASSICS

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Geoffrey of Monmouth
Complete Works

DELPHI CLASSICS

Browse the Medieval Library so far…

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Einhard
Collected Works

DELPHI CLASSICS

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

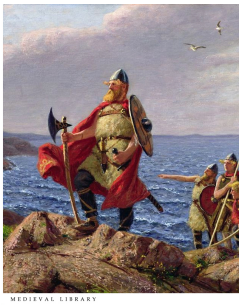
The Book of
Margery Kempe

DELPHI CLASSICS

MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Anglo-Saxon
Chronicle

DELPHI CLASSICS



MEDIEVAL LIBRARY

Saxo Grammaticus
Gesta Danorum

DELPHI CLASSICS

The Translation

Istanbul, ancient Constantinople — Socrates' birthplace

The map of Constantinople by Florentine cartographer Cristoforo Buondelmonti, 1422

Church History (c. 439)

Translated by A. C. Zenos, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, 1890

The fifth-century Byzantine historian Socrates of Constantinople (c. 380-c.440), also known as Socrates Scholasticus, was the first known layman to write church history and a contemporary of Sozomen and Theodoret of Cyrus. Even in ancient times, little seems to have been known of his life, except for what can be gleaned from references in his work. His teachers, noted in his prefaces, were the grammarians Helladius and Ammonius, who came to Constantinople from Alexandria, where in 391 they had been involved in a violent revolt that culminated in the destruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria. No certainty exists as to Socrates' precise vocation, though it may be inferred that he was a legal consultant. He is often assumed to have been a follower of Novatianism, but this is based on the fact that he gives many details about the Novatianists and speaks of them in generous terms, as he does of Arians and other groups. He speaks of himself as belonging to the church.

His sole extant work, *Ἐκκλησιαστική Ἱστορία* covers the history of late ancient Christianity during the years 305 to 439. He informs us that the purpose of his history is to continue the work of the fourth century historian Eusebius of Caesarea, whose own *Ecclesiastical History* provides an account of the development of Early Christianity from the first century to c. 326. Socrates narrates in simple Greek language, explaining important events of the Church from the days of Constantine up to Socrates' own time. In many respects, his account is well-balanced and he is careful not to use hyperbolic titles when referring to prominent personalities in the church and the government. He even criticises his literary model Eusebius for his excessive praises to Emperor Constantine the Great in his *Vita Constantini*.

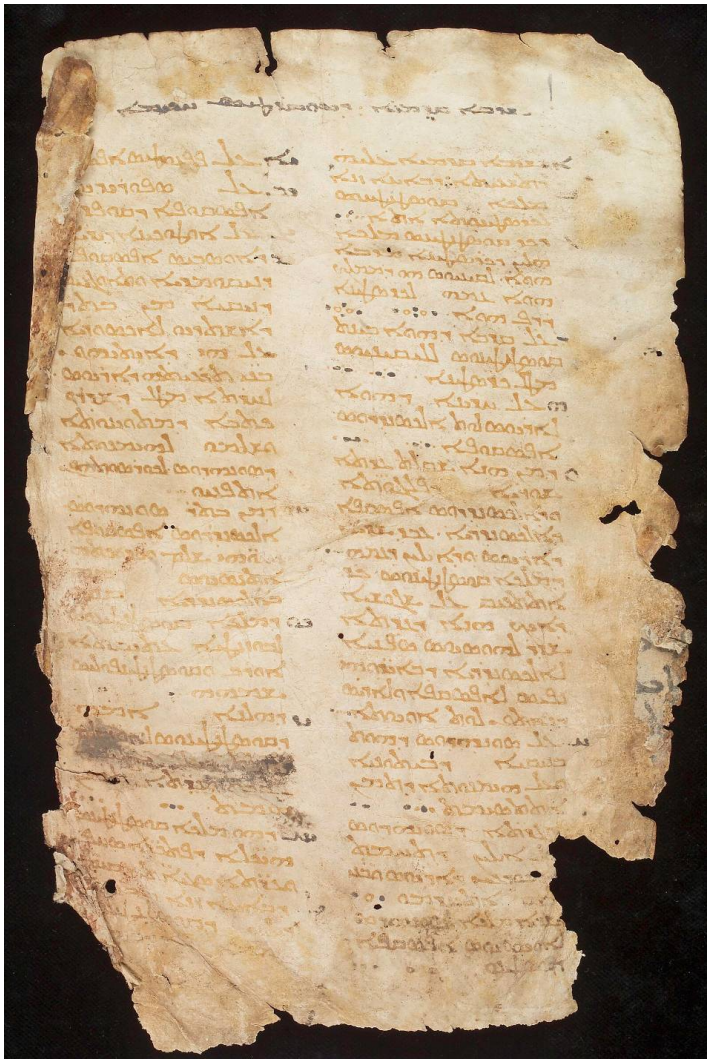
Today, Socrates is important for being one of the few sources of information about Hypatia, the female mathematician and philosopher of Alexandria, who was murdered by a mob, allegedly by order of Patriarch Cyril of Alexandria. This incident occurred during Lent in March 415 and is related in Chapter XV of Book VII. Socrates presents her murder as entirely politically motivated and makes no mention of any role that Hypatia's Neoplatonism might have played in her death, arguing instead that she was killed for supporting local prefect Orestes in his political struggle against Cyril. The historian condemns the actions of the mob, declaring, "Surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort." Hypatia's murder shocked the empire and transformed her into a 'martyr for philosophy', leading future Neoplatonists such as the historian Damascius to become increasingly fervent in their opposition to Christianity.

Socrates asserts that he owed the impulse to write his history to a certain Theodorus, who is alluded to in the *proemium* of the second book as a holy man of God. The contemporary historians Sozomen and Theodoret were combined with Socrates in a sixth-century compilation, which has obscured their differences until recently, when their individual portrayals of the series of Christian emperors were distinguished one from another and contrasted by Hartmut Leppin, Von Constantin dem Großen zu Theodosius II (Göttingen 1996).

The *Historia Ecclesiastica* was first edited in Greek by Robert Estienne, on the basis of Codex Regius 1443 (Paris, 1544); a translation into Latin by Johannes

Christophorson followed in 1612, which is important for its variant readings. The fundamental early modern edition, however, was produced by Henricus Valesius in Paris in 1668, which made use of the Codex Regius, Codex Vaticanus and a Codex Florentinus, and also employed the indirect tradition of Theodorus Lector (Codex Leonis Alladi).

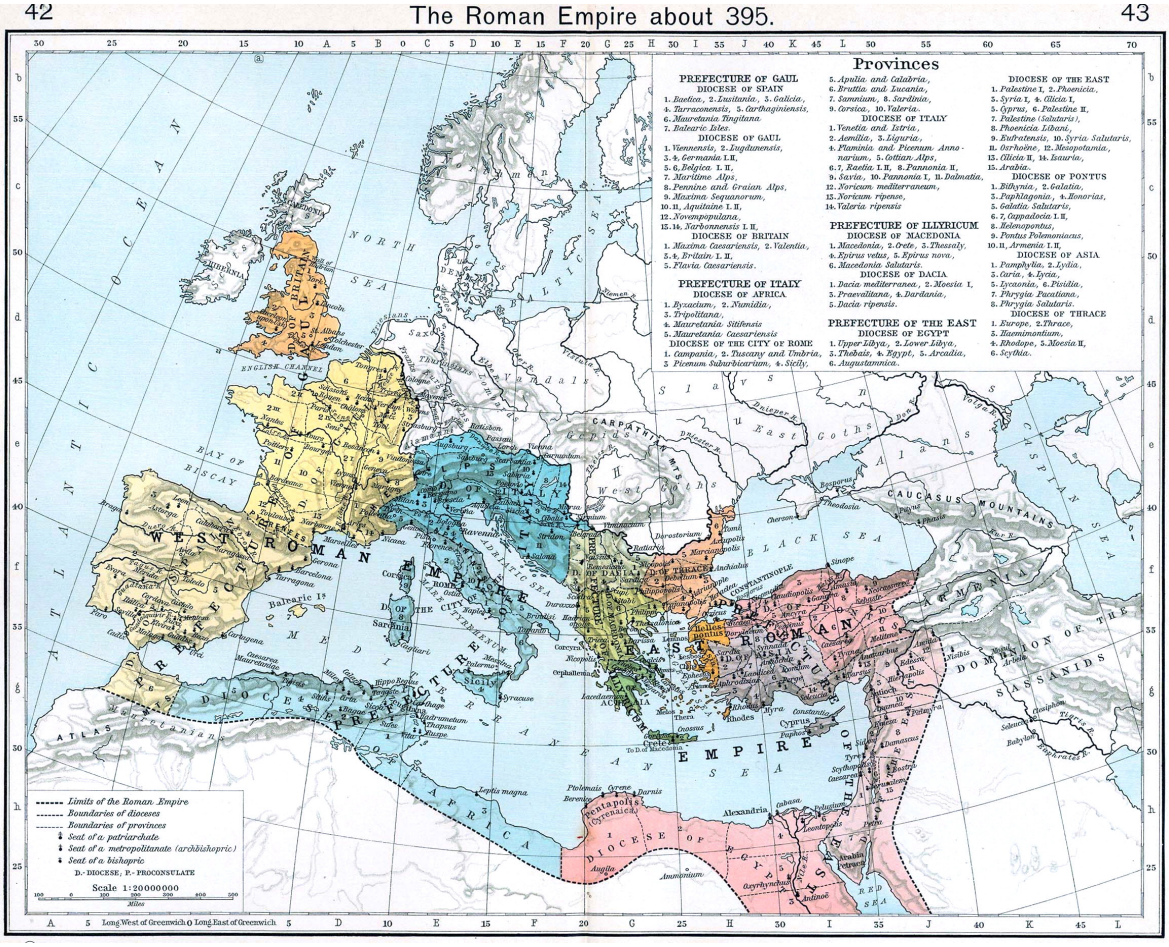
Socrates' *Historia ecclesiastica* is an indispensable documentary source for fourth and early fifth century Christian history. Through excerpts from the sixth century Latin translation, it provided the Medieval Latin church with a major portion of its knowledge of early Christianity. It encompasses religious and secular annals of the period in seven books. Each book corresponds to the reign of an Eastern Roman emperor, from Constantine I (306-337) to Theodosius II (408-450). Incorporating earlier sources verbatim and integrating conciliar proceedings with available letters of emperors and bishops, Socrates offers a comparatively impartial account of events, occasionally embellished with expanded anecdotes from eyewitnesses.



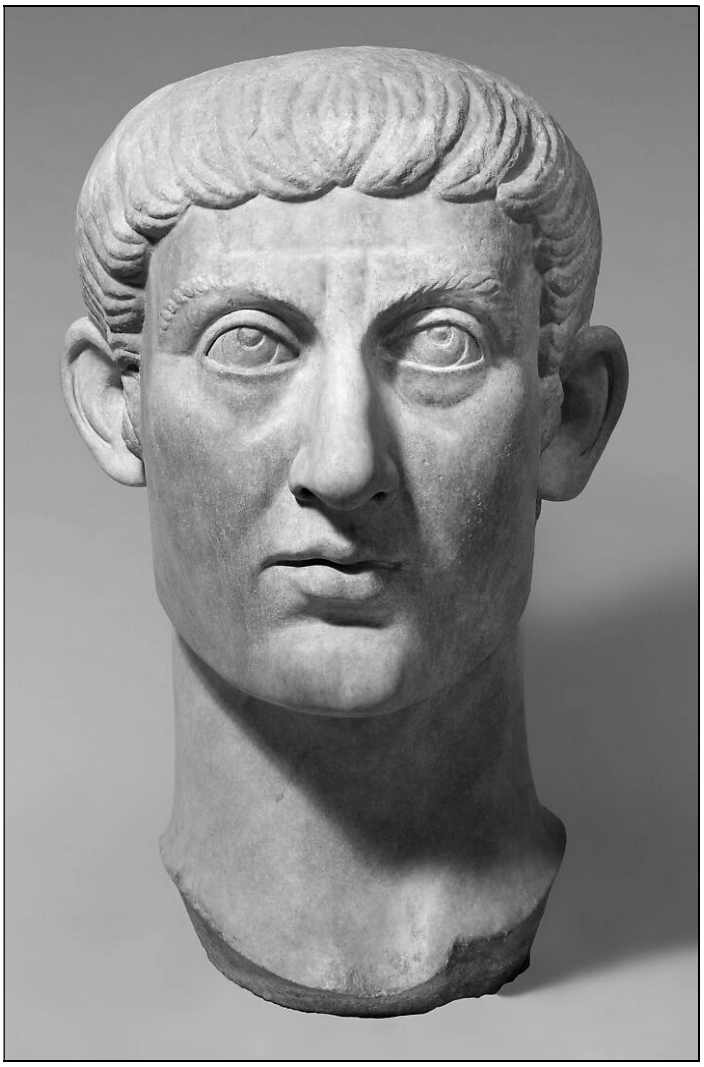
Sixth century manuscript page of Socrates' 'Historia Ecclesiastica'

Sixth century Syriac portrait of St. Eusebius of Caesarea from the Rabbula Gospels

CONTENTS



The Western and Eastern Roman Empires in 395



Marble portrait head of the Emperor Constantine I, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, c. 360

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE BASIS OF the present edition of Socrates' *Ecclesiastical History* is the translation in Bagster's series mentioned in the Introduction, Part IV. The changes introduced, however, are numerous. The translation was found unnecessarily free; so far as the needs of the English idiom require freedom no fault could, of course, have been found with the translation; but the divergences from the original in multitudes of cases were not warranted by any such need; they were more probably induced by the prevailing style of rhetoric common in the days when the translation was made. The change which has gradually come about in this respect called for modifications in the present edition. Many more might have been introduced without damage to the work. But it was felt that the scope and purpose of the edition only called for the most necessary of these changes.

In the preparation of the notes the editions of Hussey and Reading, containing Valesius' and Reading's annotations, were freely used. Whenever a note was taken bodily from these, it has been quoted and duly credited. It was thought best, however, usually to condense and reduce the number and bulk of these notes and introduce sparingly such new notes as were suggested by more recent study in ecclesiastical history.

The Introduction is almost altogether dependent on the literature quoted in Part I. The writer claims no original discovery respecting Socrates or his work. The facts had been diligently collected by his predecessors; he has simply rearranged them and put them into expression such as, to his mind, suits the requirements of the plan of the series.

A.C. ZENOS.

BOOK I.

End of Sample