The writings of the Church Fathers form a distinct body of literature which shaped the early Church and built upon the doctrinal foundations of Christianity recently established within the New Testament and by oral and ecclesiastical tradition. Christian literature in the period c. 100–c. 400 constitutes one of the most influential textual oeuvres of any religion. Written mainly in Greek, Latin and Syriac, patristic literature emanated from all parts of the early Christian world and helped to extend its boundaries. The works of Irenaeus, Origen, Hippolytus, Eusebius, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, John Chrysostom, Ephrem, the gnostics, the Montanists and the Cappadocians are among the best-known examples of an extensive set of texts grappling with the theological issues at the heart of early Christianity – many of which still lie at its heart today. This History is the first systematic account of that literature and its setting for many years. The work of individual writers in shaping the various genres and forms of Christian literature is considered, and the volume also offers three general essays covering distinct periods in the development of Christian literature. These pieces survey the social, cultural and doctrinal context within which Christian literature arose and within which it was used by Christians. The book is intended for use by theologians and historians, providing a landmark reference work for scholars, teachers and students.

Frances Young is Edward Cadbury Professor of Theology at the University of Birmingham.

Lewis Ayres is Assistant Professor of Historical Theology at the Candler School of Theology and Graduate Division of Religion, Emory University.

Andrew Louth is Professor of Patristic and Byzantine Studies at the University of Durham.
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Lewis Ayres, Emory University
John Behr, St Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary
Sebastian P. Brock, University of Oxford
Henry Chadwick, University of Cambridge (Emeritus)
John David Dawson, Haverford College
Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Brown University
Ronald E. Heine, Puget Sound Christian College
David G. Hunter, Iowa State University
Andrew Louth, University of Durham
R. A. Markus, University of Nottingham (Emeritus)
Oliver Nicholson, University of Minnesota
Richard A. Norris, Jr., The Union Theological Seminary (Emeritus)
Karen Jo Torjesen, Claremont Graduate University
Mark Vessey, University of British Columbia
Frances Young, University of Birmingham
Editors’ preface

The excellent Cambridge Histories have not so far included a scholarly compendium on the literature of early Christianity. This volume seeks to fill that gap, while taking note of new developments in the field, which make it particularly appropriate to undertake the production of such a volume at this time.

This literature has traditionally been studied by students of Christian theology and Christian scholars with an interest in the doctrinal and organizational development of the Church. It has commonly been described using the adjective ‘patristic’, since these authors were considered the ‘Fathers’ of the Church, and introductory handbooks have been known as ‘Patrologies’. It is not intended to ignore the concerns of this clientele, though it is hoped that a wider readership may also turn to this volume as a standard work of reference. Increasing historical interest in the late Roman and early Byzantine worlds has made the subject much more interdisciplinary. Indeed, it could be argued that this material is simply a subclass of the literature of late antiquity, and a reference work should include the whole range of material. However, this would consign the material in this volume to a small section, and since it is a substantial and historically significant subclass, there is a case to be made for examining it in its own right, as long as the wider historical context, and the sharing of perspectives and concerns with non-Christian contemporaries, are made clear.

This greater interdisciplinary focus has been particularly important, however, since it has meant that the material is now studied with a broader range of issues in mind. Feminists have challenged the designation ‘patristic’, and questions of social identity and social level have become important, together with issues such as the parting of the ways with Judaism, and the process of Christianization. ‘Heretics’ have been re-habilitated, and their motivations and ideas studied with greater sympathy, especially as they were history’s losers. New material, such as the Nag Hammadi find and the Tura papyri, have
Editors’ preface

occasioned more intensive research. This material can no longer be presented simply as sources for the history of the development of Christian doctrine, important though that project remains.

At the same time the hermeneutical questions raised in relation to New Testament interpretation have hardly begun to touch the field, so that questions of appropriation are ripe for consideration. Conversely, there has been an awakening interest in early Christian interpretation of Scripture, as perspectives other than the historical have opened up in biblical studies. These questions are of particular interest to the editors, and attention to them should have a considerable place in a volume of this kind. The adoption of the canon and the formative place it held in Christian thinking, as interpreted by the exponents in the Church, also have their background in the ancient veneration for literature and the place of rhetoric and literary study in the educational system.

It is hoped that, given this overall context, this work will provide a major volume of reference, distilling the present lively developments in the subject area and essaying some pioneering directions. The policy adopted has not been to provide a comprehensive encyclopedia or dictionary, of which there are already recent worthy representatives, such as Dizionario Patristico e di Antichità Cristiane (1983–8), edited by Angelo di Berardino, translated into English as Encyclopedia of the Early Church and published in 1992, or Encyclopedia of Early Christianity, edited by Ferguson and others, and published in 1990. Instead of brief introductory articles in alphabetical order by an enormous variety of scholars, an attempt is made to provide a coherent focus, and to concentrate on the literature, its interpretation and significance, and its context, historical, social, philosophical. The work takes account of heterodox as well orthodox, heretic as well as bishop. It provides essays on the major figures and authors, and assesses the major schools of Alexandria, Antioch, Edessa and Nisibis. It discusses the major controversies, not abstracting the important Christological struggle from a context in which other issues were at stake, such as Origenism and asceticism. It embraces feminist and sociological approaches to the material.

In some respects this work may replace the Patrologies, now thirty to forty years old, though without adopting the same style or pretending to offer comprehensive bibliographies. Some overlap in material and approach with Frances Young’s volume, From Nicaea to Chalcedon, may justly be suspected, but this should be complementary to that work: the A sections cover the literature of a much broader period and geographical location in relatively briefer compass, with the additional advantage of engaging a team of contributors
Editors’ preface

with varied expertise, while the B sections of each Part enable the generation of a greater sense of perspective than was possible in a series of essays on individual authors, as well as giving an opportunity to explore new hermeneutical questions.

This is meant to be a reference work, not necessarily a book to be read consecutively from cover to cover. Sections A and B are deliberately set up as different approaches to approximately the same material and some degree of overlap is to be expected, though in each period the A sections deal simply with extant material, surveying the literary deposit which has come down to us, while the B sections explore the contexts into which that material needs to be placed if it is to be understood in an informed way, including reference to significant works which are no longer extant and such fragmentary sources as contribute to reconstruction of those contexts.

This is not simply a general history, but a literary history, seeking to take questions concerning the genre and rhetoric of the texts seriously. It is also meant to be not just a contribution to the study of the past and its ‘objective’ reconstruction – the long-standing project of modernist historiography – but also a contribution to the interpretation and present appropriation of texts from the past; in other words, a resource for theological thinking that goes beyond the simple repetition of formulae or the use of past labels for present controversies.

This volume has been long in gestation. Its ‘onlie begetter’ was Frances Young, who designed the shape of the volume and commissioned the contributors. Soon, however, she was overwhelmed by the burdens of university administration, and the other two editors were invited to see the project through to completion. (In the final stages, the assistant editor, Dr Augustine Casiday, one-time research student at the University of Durham, proved invaluable in helping draw up the bibliography, preparing the chronological table, and compiling the index.) The final state of the volume is the responsibility of all three of us.
Abbreviations of patristic and other texts

AcPT = Acta Pauli et Theclae
AcJ = Acta Justini
Ad Nov. = Ad Novatianum
Adol. = Ad Adolescentes de legendis libris gentilium
Ad Phil. = Ad Philippense
Ad Serap. = Ad Serapionem
Afric. = Epistula ad Africanum
AH = Adversus Haereses
An. = De Anima
APet. = Acta Petri
Apol. = Apologeticum or Apologia
Apol. c. Hier. = Apologia contra Hieronymum
Apol. c. Ruf. = Apologia contra Rufinum
Ar. = Contra Arianos
Autol. = Ad Autolycum
Bapt. = De Baptismo
Barn. = Epistula Barnabae
Bibl. Cod. = Photius, Bibliotheca, cited by codex
Bon. = De bono mortis
BPud. = De Bono Pudicitiae
Carn. = De Carne Christi
Cast. = De Exhortatione Castitatis
Cat. = Catechesis
Cels. = Contra Celsum
CG = Contra Gentes
Chron. = Chronicorum
I Clem. = Prima Epistula Clementis
II Clem. = Epistula Secunda Clementis
Coet. = Oratio ad sanctorum coetum
### List of abbreviations of patristic and other texts

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<td>Commentarius in Matthaeum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CommPs.</td>
<td>Commentarius in Psalmos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conf.</td>
<td>Confessiones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cor.</td>
<td>De Corona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CTheod.</td>
<td>Codex Theodosianum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dan.</td>
<td>in Danielum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec.</td>
<td>De Decretis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dem.</td>
<td>Demonstratio Praedicationis Apostolicae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demetr.</td>
<td>Ad Demetrianum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dial.</td>
<td>Dialogus</td>
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<tr>
<td>Did.</td>
<td>Didache</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diog.</td>
<td>Epistula ad Diognetum</td>
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<tr>
<td>EcProph.</td>
<td>Elogiae Propheticae</td>
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<td>Enn.</td>
<td>Enneades</td>
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<td>Ep(p).</td>
<td>Epistulae</td>
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<td>Ephes.</td>
<td>Ep. ad Ephesios</td>
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<tr>
<td>ETh.</td>
<td>Ecclesiastica Theologia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eun.</td>
<td>Contra Eunomium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fug.</td>
<td>De Fuga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graec.</td>
<td>Oratio ad Graecos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg.</td>
<td>Ep. ad Gregorium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haec.</td>
<td>Refutatio omnium haeresium or Haereticarum fabularum compendium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Historia Ecclesiastica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Herac.</td>
<td>Disputatio cum Heracleida</td>
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<tr>
<td>Herm.</td>
<td>Adversus Hermogenem</td>
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<td>HExod.</td>
<td>Homilia in Exodum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hom. in Jud.</td>
<td>Homilia in Judices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR</td>
<td>Historia Romana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idol.</td>
<td>De Idololatria</td>
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<td>Idola</td>
<td>Quod idolatra dii non sint</td>
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<td>Ieiun.</td>
<td>De Ieiunio</td>
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<td>Il.</td>
<td>Ilias</td>
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<td>In Eph.</td>
<td>In Ephesios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Rep.</td>
<td>In Rempublicam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inst.</td>
<td>Institutiones or Institutiones Divinæ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inv.</td>
<td>De Inventione</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Io.</td>
<td>Commentarius in Ioannem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira</td>
<td>De Ira Dei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laps.</td>
<td>De Lapsis</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
List of abbreviations of patristic and other texts

Laus. = Historia Lauziaca
Leg. = Legatio
Magn. = Ad Magnesios
Mand. = Mandata
Marc. = Adversus Marcionem or Contra Marcellum
Mart. = Exhortatio ad Martyrium or De Martyribus Palestinae
Med. = Meditationes
Mon. = De Monogamia
Mort. = De Mortibus Persecutorum
MPol. = Martyrium Polycarpi
Nat. = Adversus Nationes
NHC = Nag Hammadi Codices
Noet. = Contra Noetum
Od. = Odysseas
Opif. = De Opificio Dei
Or. = De Oratione or Oratio
Paed. = Paedagogus
Paen. = De Paenitentia
Pan. = Panarion
Pan. Or. = Panegyrica in Origenem
Pass. Perp. = Passio Perpetuae
Pass. Scil. = Passio Sanctorum Scillitanorum
Philad. = Ad Philadelphenos
Polyc. = Epistula ad Polycarpum
Praecr. = De Praescriptione
Prax. = Adversus Praxean
PrEv. = Praeparatio Evangelica
Princ. = De Principiis
Procat. = Procatechesis
Pud. = De Pudicitia
Q. = Quaestio
Ref. = Refutatio Confessionis Eunomii
Rep. = Respublica
Res. = De Resurrectione Carnis
Rom. = Ad Romanos
Ruf. = Adversus Rufinum
Scap. = Ad Scapulam
Scorp. = Scorpiae
Sim. = Similitudines
List of abbreviations of patristic and other texts

Smyrn. = Ad Smyrnæos
Spect. = De Spectaculis
SpS = De Spiritu Sancto
Strom. = Stromateis
Syn. = De synodo or De synodis
TestDom. = Testimonium Domini
Tom. ad Ant. = Tomus ad Antiochenos
Trall. = Ad Trallianos
Trin. = De Trinitate
Ux. = Ad Uxorem
Val. = Contra Valentinianos
Vrg. = De Virginitate
Vir. Ill. = De Viris Illustribus
Vis. = Visio
Other abbreviations

These abbreviations are used in the notes, and in the bibliographies, where publication details can be found.

ACO: Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum
ACW: Ancient Christian Writers
AGLS: Alcuin / Grove Liturgical Studies
ANRW: Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt
BGL: Bibliothek der Griechischen Literatur
BLE: Bulletin de littérature ecclésiastique
BMus: Bibliothèque du Muséon
CAH: Cambridge Ancient History
CCSG: Corpus Christianorum. Series Graeca
CCSL: Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina
CHLG: Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy
CSCO: Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CSEL: Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CPG: Clavis Patrum Graecorum
CPL: Clavis Patrum Latinorum
CSS: Cistercian Studies Series
CWS: Classics of Western Spirituality
DCB: Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines
DEC: Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils
DLT: Darton Longman and Todd
DSp: Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, histoire et doctrine
ECF: Early Church Fathers
EEC: Encyclopedia of the Early Church
ET: English translation
FC: Fathers of the Church
List of other abbreviations

GCS: Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller
Greg.: Gregorianum
GTS: Grazer Theologische Studien
HeyJ: Heythrop Journal
HeyM: Heythrop Monographs
HTR: Harvard Theological Review
HUT: Hermeneutische Untersuchungen zur Theologie
JAC: Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum
JECS: Journal of Early Christian Studies
JSNT: Journal for the Study of New Testament
JSOT: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament
JTS: Journal of Theological Studies
LCC: Library of Christian Classics
MGH: Monumenta Germaniae Historica
OCA: Orientalia Christiana Analecta
OCP: Orientalia Christiana Periodica
ODCC: Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church
Oecs: Oxford Early Christian Studies
OECS: Oxford Early Christian Texts
PG: Patrologia Graecca
PIOS: Pontificium Institutum Orientalium Studiorum (now, Pontificio Istituto Orientale)
PL: Patrologia Latina
PO: Patrologia Orientalis
PPS: Popular Patristics Series
PTS: Patristische Texte und Studien
RBen: Revue Bénédiction
RechSR: Recherches de science religieuse
REL: Revue des Études Latines
SA: Studia Anselmiana
SBAW: Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie des Wissenschafter
SBL: Studies in Biblical Literature
SC: Sources chrétienes
SCH: Studies in Church History
SEA: Studia Ephemeridis «Augustinianum»
SecCent: Second Century
SP: Studia Patristica
ST: Studi e Testi
SWGS: Schriften der wissenschaftliche Gesellschaft in Strassburg
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TCH:</td>
<td>Transformation of the Classical Heritage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ThH:</td>
<td>Théologie Historique</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TRE:</td>
<td>Theologische Realencyklopädie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TS:</td>
<td>Texts and Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TTH:</td>
<td>Translated Texts for Historians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TU:</td>
<td>Texte und Untersuchungen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VigChr:</td>
<td>Vigiliae Christianae</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZAC:</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum / Journal of ancient Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZKG:</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZNW:</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Chronological table of early Christian literature**

*Featuring key writers, works and events*

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<tr>
<th>Writers</th>
<th>Works</th>
<th>Events</th>
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</table>
| Philo of Alexandria  
(fl. c. 30–45)    | *The Shepherd of Hermas*  
(90–150)  
*Didache*  
(100–150) | Domitian’s persecution?  
(95–96)  
Trajan’s proscription of Christianity?  
(112) |
| Clement of Rome  
(fl. c. 95)      | Apocryphal Peter  
(c. 125–150)  
*Aristides of Athens, Apology*  
(c. 120–138)  
*Papias, Explanation of the Sayings of the Lord*  
(c. 130)  
*Epistle of Barnabas*  
(130–131) |                                |
| Ignatius of Antioch  
(fl. c. 100–115) |                                | |
| Ignatius of Antioch  
(fl. c. 100–115) |                                |                                |
| Domitian’s persecution?  
(95–96)  
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(112) | | |
| Valentinus at Rome  
(c. 136–165)   | *Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho*  
(c. 138)  
*Justin Martyr, First and Second Apologies*  
(148–161) | Bar Kochba’s revolt (138) |
| Marcion at Rome  
(fl. 144–?)     |                                |                                |
| Clement of Alexandria  
(c. 150–215)    | *Acts of John*  
(150–180) |                                |
| Bardaisan (154–c. 222)  
Tertullian (155–c. 220) |                                |                                |
| Polycarp (d. 156)    |                                |                                |
| Justin Martyr (d. 165)  
| *The Acts (= Martyrdom of St Justin and his companions*  
(165)  
*Melito, Peri Pascha*  
(c. 167–168) |                                |
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<th>Writers</th>
<th>Works</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>Discourse to the Greeks (c. 165–180)</td>
<td>The Martyrs of Scilli in Africa (17 July 180)</td>
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<td>Irenaeus (fl. c. 175–180)</td>
<td>Athenagoras, Supplication for the Christians (c. 177)</td>
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<td>Theophilus of Antioch, To Autolycus (180)</td>
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<td>Gospel of Peter (before 190)</td>
<td>Septimius Severus’ persecution? (c. 202–212)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acts of Paul and Thecla (before 190)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Acts of Peter (before 190)</td>
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<td>Acts of Thomas (c. 200–250)</td>
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<td>Cyprian (200/210–258)</td>
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<td>The martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity (7 March 202)</td>
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<td>Hippolytus (fl. 212–235)</td>
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<td>Origen, Against Celsus (246)</td>
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<td>Novatian (fl. 250–253)</td>
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<td>Antony the Great</td>
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<td>The Edict of Valerian (257–260)</td>
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<td>(250–356)</td>
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<td>Cyprian of Carthage’s martyrdom (14 September 258)</td>
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<td>Arian (256–336)</td>
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<td>Paul of Samosata</td>
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<td>(fl. c. 260–268)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eusebius of Caesarea</td>
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<tr>
<td>(263–339/140)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Athanasius (295–373)</td>
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| Lactantius (fl. 303–317) |                                                                                   | Diocletian’s persecution (303–305)                                                      (cont.)
### Chronological table (cont.)

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<th>Events</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ephrem the Syrian</td>
<td>Arnobius of Sicca, Against the pagans (c. 311)</td>
<td>Donatism (311–411)</td>
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<td>(c. 306–373)</td>
<td>Eusebius of Caesarea, Church History (c. 312–325)</td>
<td>The 'Edict' of Milan (313)</td>
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<td>Didymus the Blind</td>
<td>Eusebius of Caesarea, Preparation for the Gospel and Proof of the</td>
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<tr>
<td>(313–398)</td>
<td>Gospel (c. 314–315)</td>
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<td>Pachomius (fl. 320–346)</td>
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<td>Constantine</td>
<td>Athanasius, On the Incarnation (c. 320)</td>
<td>Council of Nicaea I (325)</td>
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<td>(regn. 325–337)</td>
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<td>Basil the Great (330–379)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gregory of Nazianzus</td>
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<tr>
<td>(330–389/390)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gregory of Nyssa</td>
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<td>(335–394)</td>
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<td>Ambrose (c. 340–397)</td>
<td>Aphraat, Demonstrations (c. 337–345)</td>
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<td>Jerome (340/342–420)</td>
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<td>Evagrius Ponticus</td>
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<td>(c. 345–399)</td>
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<td>Rufinus (c. 345–410)</td>
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<td>Cyril of Jerusalem</td>
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<td>(fl. 348–386)</td>
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<td>John Chrysostom</td>
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<td>(344/354–407)</td>
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<td>Hilary of Poitiers</td>
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<td>(fl. 350–368)</td>
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<td>Victorinus Afer</td>
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<td>(fl. 353–362)</td>
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<td>Augustine of Hippo</td>
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<tr>
<td>(354–430)</td>
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<td>John Cassian (c. 360–435)</td>
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<td>Julian the Apostate</td>
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<td>(regn. 361–363)</td>
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<td>Diodore of Tarsus</td>
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<td>Basil, Hexaemeron (before 370)</td>
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<td>Basil, On the Holy Spirit (375)</td>
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<td>Epiphanius of Salamis,</td>
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<td>Panarion (377)</td>
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<td>Death of Valens at</td>
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<td>Adrianople (378)</td>
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Chronological table

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<td>Gregory of Nyssa, Life of St Macrina (379)</td>
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<td>Gregory of Nazianzus, Five theological orations (380)</td>
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<td>Didymus (?), On the Trinity (c. 381–392)</td>
<td>Council of Constantinople I (381)</td>
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<td>Theodore of Mopsuestia, Catechetical Homilies (c. 388–392)</td>
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<td>Gregory of Nyssa, On the life of Moses (c. 390–392)</td>
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<td>Nemesis of Emeus, On the nature of man (c. 392–400)</td>
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<td>Augustine, On Christian doctrine (397–426)</td>
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<td>Augustine, Confessions (c. 400)</td>
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<td>Theodore (c. 393–458)</td>
<td>Doctrine of Addai (c. 400)</td>
<td>Alaric enters Rome (the 'Fall of Rome') (410)</td>
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<td>Palladius, Dialogue on the life of St John Chrysostom (c. 408)</td>
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<td>Augustine, City of God (413, Bks 20–22: 426)</td>
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<td>Cassian, Conferences (426–429)</td>
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<td>Socrates, Ecclesiastical History (c. 440)</td>
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<td>Sozomen, Ecclesiastical History (c. 439–450)</td>
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<td>Theodoret, Religious History (c. 440)</td>
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<td>John of Apamea (fl. c. 450)</td>
<td>Theodoret, Ecclesiastical History (448–449)</td>
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<td>Jacob of Sarug (451–521)</td>
<td>Council of Chalcedon (451)</td>
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Map: The Roman Empire in the late fourth century AD