

***PULCHERIA (399-453) (Aelia Pulcheria)***

Augusta, eldest daughter of Emperor Arcadius (383-408). She showed such a precocious ability that on 4 July 414 she was given the title of Augusta and became the regent for her brother, Theodosius II. Her strong, if self-willed, personality acted as a foil to the more sensitive yet not unstatesmanlike qualities of her brother. Deeply religious by nature, Pulcheria, who resolved to remain a virgin, was on excellent terms with Patriarch Atticus (406-427) of Constantinople.

While in no way opposed to the choice of NESTORIUS as patriarch in 428, she moved progressively toward support of [CYRIL OF ALEXANDRIA](#) during the crisis surrounding the Council of EPHESUS. She and Eudocia, Theodosius' wife, were recipients of a memorial by Cyril justifying his Christology, particularly by reference to the eucharistic sacrifice. This remained Pulcheria's position. From 430 on her influence on the court of Theodosius was supreme, and she gradually ousted Eudocia, her onetime protégée, from influence, until the latter withdrew in semiexile to Jerusalem in 444. About that time, however, Pulcheria's control was threatened by the emperor's grand chamberlain, Chrysaphius, who influenced the emperor in the more strongly [Monophysite](#) direction represented by DIOSCORUS I of Alexandria and the archimandrite EUTYCHES.

In the great crisis of 449-451 that led to the Council of CHALCEDON, [Pulcheria](#) gave consistent support to the anti- [Monophysite](#) cause. She supported Patriarch Flavian against Eutyches. The papal legates to Ephesus II (449) took with them letters from Pope Leo to Pulcheria (*Letters* 30 and 31) assuring her that a vital principle was at stake in what appeared to be an abstruse wrangle. After the victory of Dioscorus at the council, Pope Leo treated [Pulcheria](#) as his principal lifeline to the imperial court. In March 450 he corresponded with her, accepting her assurance of opposition to Ephesus II (*Letter* 60), and in July told her that he would recognize the choice of Dioscorus as patriarch of

Constantinople if Anatolius would accept Cyril's second letter to Nestorius and Leo's *Tome* (*Letter 70*). The outcome of these proposals was never tested, for Theodosius died suddenly, after a hunting accident, on 28 July 450, before the pope's delegates could reach Constantinople.

[Pulcheria](#) immediately resumed the power she had been losing to Chrysaphius. The latter found himself arrested and was subsequently executed. An elderly, distinguished Thracian soldier, Marcian, was chosen as emperor, and Pulcheria married him to become his consort (24 August 450). During the next months she worked toward, first, the undoing of the [decisions](#) of Ephesus II, and second, for a new ecumenical council that would settle the Christological issue along the lines of the *Tome* of Leo and Cyril's doctrine as accepted in the formula of the reunion of 433. The council delayed first by the threat from the Huns, and then by the change of location from Nicaea to Chalcedon, met on 10 October 451. [Pulcheria](#) accompanied her husband for the formal promulgation of the Christological definition on 25 October.

After the council [Pulcheria](#) received letters from Pope Leo thanking her for her steadfastness in the faith but also asserting his opposition to [Canon 28](#) (*Letters 105 and 106*); however, there is no reason to think that she accepted the papal viewpoint regarding the ecclesiastical status of Constantinople. On the other hand, her commitment to the two-nature Christology made her a target for abuse from the anti-Chalcedonians. To John Rufus in his *Plerophoriae* (early sixth century), [Pulcheria](#) was a "false virgin," and her husband was denounced as "the new Assyrian." She died in 453, leaving her goods to the poor.

Like her kinswoman Galla Placidia, [Pulcheria](#) was extremely able, and shared responsibility for policies that enabled the eastern Roman provinces to survive practically unscathed the disasters that befell the West. Her influence over her brother's education and religion is not doubted. Her letters preserved in Pope Leo's correspondence suggest that she may have been more propapal than most other Latin-speaking

artistocrats in Constantinople. Pulcheria was one of the principal architects of the Council of Chalcedon, and the results corresponded with her consistently held views. Not unnaturally, the [anti-Chalcedonians](#) regarded her as an opponent, while to the Latins she was a saint.

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