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ORIGEN, AQUILA, AND EUSEBIUS

T. D. BARNES

FEW false principles have so endeared themselves to students of the ancient world as that of "squaring the evidence." Among its classic exponents are to be found many writers on the Athenian Empire of the fifth century B.C. Thucydides states that, when the Delian League (or Alliance) was formed, some of the allies were to provide money for the common cause, others ships.¹ As for the collection of contributions, he continues (1.96.2),

καὶ Ἑλληνοταμίαι τότε πρῶτον Ἀθηναίοις κατέστη ἀρχή, οἱ ἐδέχοντο τὸν φόρον· οὕτω γὰρ ὠνομάσθη τῶν χρημάτων ἡ φορά. ἦν δ' ὁ πρῶτος φόρος ταχθεὶς τετρακόσια τάλαντα καὶ ἐξήκοντα.

Two questions can clearly be distinguished. First, assuming the total of 460 talents to be authentic and accurate, did it comprise payments of money alone, or include a cash equivalent for the ships contributed by some cities instead of money? Second, which of these two possibilities did Thucydides intend to assert? Scholars' answers to the first question have naturally and inevitably differed, since two incompatible views of the original extent of the League's membership are at least arguable.² There is, however, a disturbing tendency to make the answer to the second question fit that to the first, so that everyone, whatever his views on the historical development of the League, can claim to have the support of Thucydides.³ That is surely illegitimate. Thucydides' words are unambiguous: τὸν φόρον is glossed as τῶν χρημάτων ἡ φορά, and ὁ πρῶτος φόρος ταχθεὶς came to 460 talents. Thucydides therefore states that the 460 talents comprised money alone⁴ — whether he was right or wrong is another matter entirely.⁵

¹ Thucydides 1.96.

² Cf. B. D. Meritt, H. T. Wade-Gery, and M. F. McGregor, *The Athenian Tribute Lists* 3 (1950) 194ff.

³ Note N. G. L. Hammond, *History of Greece* (1959) 257: "the total of money — called *phoros* . . ."; id., *History of Greece*² (1967) 257: "ships and money together made up the first *phoros*."

⁴ R. Meiggs, *CR* 66 (1952) 97.

⁵ M. Chambers, *CP* 53 (1958) 26ff, argues for a mistake by Thucydides.

A similar problem arises with a passage of Eusebius (HE 6.3.3):

ἔτος δ' ἦγεν ὀκτωκαιδέκατον (sc. Origen) καθ' ὃ τοῦ τῆς κατηχήσεως προέστη διδασκαλείου· ἐν ᾧ καὶ προκόπτει ἐπὶ τῶν κατὰ Ἀκύλαν τῆς Ἀλεξανδρείας ἡγούμενον διωγμῶν, ὅτε καὶ μάλιστα διαβόητον ἐκτίησάτο παρὰ πᾶσιν τοῖς ἀπὸ τῆς πίστεως ὀρμωμένοις ὄνομα δι' ἣν ἐνεδείκνυτο πρὸς ἅπαντας τοὺς ἁγίους ἀγνῶτάς τε καὶ γνωρίμους μάρτυρας δεξιῶσιν τε καὶ προθυμίαν.

Elsewhere, Eusebius states that Origen was sixteen in the tenth year of the reign of Septimius Severus.⁶ By this he means either April 202 to April 203 (Severus was proclaimed emperor on 9 April 193) or 29 August 201 to 28 August 202 (Severus' tenth regnal year in Egypt), more probably the latter.⁷ Moreover, he assigns the death of Origen (at the age of sixty-nine) to the reign of Trebonianus Gallus (i.e. to 251–253).⁸ On Eusebius' chronology, therefore, Origen was probably born in 185 — though 184 and 186 cannot be absolutely excluded.⁹

The passage quoted appears to permit a deduction about the prefects of Egypt: on the strength of Eusebius' testimony, standard works of reference assign to 203 or even 202 the beginning of the prefecture of Subatianus Aquila, who is attested in office by contemporary papyri from autumn 206 to 210/211.¹⁰ Such indeed has been scholars' trust in Eusebius that they were prepared to discount documentary evidence. A papyrus dated to 209 was published in 1910, which *prima facie* implied that the prefect in 204 was not Aquila, but one Claudius Julianus.¹¹ Its publisher therefore conjectured that Subatianus Aquila was prefect twice, both before and after Julianus.¹² That hypothesis preserved the credit of Eusebius but was considered implausible by others, who adopted the view that Julianus was not *praefectus Aegypti* in 204, but merely a subordinate official.¹³ Again, a papyrus published in 1957

⁶ HE 6.2.2; 2.12.

⁷ On this point error and confusion are not absent from the discussions at JTS n.s. 19 (1968) 527; JRS 58 (1968) 41.

⁸ HE 7.1.

⁹ Cf. A. Harnack, *Die Chronologie der altchristlichen Litteratur bis Eusebius 2* (1904) 28: "185 (186)"; B. Altaner and A. Stuiber, *Patrologie*⁷ (1966) 197: "um 185."

¹⁰ PIR¹ S 681; L. Cantarelli, *La serie dei prefetti di Egitto* 1 (1906) 65f; A. Stein, *Die Präfecten von Aegypten* (1950) 111ff; O. W. Reinmuth, *RE* 22.2374. Rectification is now to hand: O. W. Reinmuth, "A Working List of the Prefects of Egypt 30 B.C. to 299 A.D.," *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 4 (1967) 75ff, at 106ff.

¹¹ P. Berol. 11532 = SB 4639.

¹² F. Zucker, *Sitzungsber. der preuss. Akad. Berlin* 1910, 710ff.

¹³ A. Stein, *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 5 (1913) 418ff. Followed by F. Preisigke, *RE* 10.2522; PIR² C 899; H. I. Bell, *CAH* 11.656.

unequivocally showed a Claudius Julianus to have been prefect of Egypt in the joint reign of Severus and his two sons (i.e. between 198 and 211).¹⁴ an attempt was then made to squeeze his tenure in after that of Aquila.¹⁵ Finally, in 1967, the misinterpreted documents were inspected anew, and two scholars independently proved that Claudius Julianus was after all prefect of Egypt in 203, 204, and probably 205/206.¹⁶ At the same time, a newly published papyrus removed all possible doubt: carrying the date of October/November 204, it refers to a letter τοῦ λαμπροτάτου ἡγεμόνος Κλα[υ]δίου Ἰουλιανοῦ.¹⁷

Eusebius is therefore in error — that seems the obvious conclusion.¹⁸ But not all are fully convinced:¹⁹ perhaps the error belongs, not to Eusebius, but to his translators and interpreters, from Rufinus in antiquity down to the present day.²⁰ With almost one accord, they take Eusebius' relative phrases (καθ' ὃ . . . ἐν ᾧ . . . ὅτε καὶ . . .) all to possess temporal significance.²¹ However, if ἐν ᾧ could be referred to the *didascaleion*, then Eusebius' credit can still be preserved despite the fresh evidence.²² Yet the three relative clauses are clearly correlative,²³ and it is easier to defend Eusebius when the third is completely omitted from consideration.²⁴ Further, Eusebius was predisposed to crowd together all the known persecutions of Christians during the opening decade of the third century, and hence to associate the martyrdoms under Aquila very closely with those under Laetus, which he put in 201/202 or 202/203.²⁵ It is hard to avoid concluding that the interpretation which abolishes Eusebius' error involves special pleading.

An apt parallel exists. Some years ago it was acutely observed that the obvious and accepted interpretation of one passage in the second *Epistula ad Caesarem* attributed to Sallust precludes a date before the

¹⁴ *Acme* 10 (1957) 161f = *SB* 9393 = *P. Mil. Vogl.* 237.

¹⁵ M. Vandoni, *Acme* 10 (1957) 161f.

¹⁶ F. Grosso, *Rendiconti Lincei*⁸ 22 (1967) 55ff; J. R. Rea, *Parola del Passato* 22 (1967) 48ff.

¹⁷ *BGU* 2024.

¹⁸ *JTS* n.s. 19 (1968) 527; *JRS* 58 (1968) 41; *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969) 13of.

¹⁹ Note the hesitation of Rea (above, n. 16) 53.

²⁰ Grosso (above, n. 16) 59.

²¹ Rufinus *HE* 6.3.3 (on which cf. J. E. L. Oulton, *JTS* 30 [1929] 16of). Among modern English translations note those of H. J. Lawlor and J. E. L. Oulton (1927), R. J. Deferrari (1955), and G. A. Williamson (1965).

²² Grosso (above, n. 16) 59. He cites in his favour the version of G. Bardy, *Sources Chrétiennes* 41 (1955) 87. The same view seems also to be shared by G. del Ton, *Scrinium Patristicum Laterense* 1 (1964) 438.

²³ Cf. Harnack (above, n. 9) 29.

²⁴ As in the quotation and discussion by Grosso (above, n. 16) 59.

²⁵ Cf. *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969) 131.

fall of the Roman Republic.²⁶ The adherents of authenticity, however, rather than relinquish a cherished belief, immediately espoused a new interpretation of the offending passage,²⁷ or else resuscitated an almost forgotten emendation.²⁸ The new interpretation then required a separate refutation.²⁹

All three cases (Thucydides, Eusebius, and pseudo-Sallust) point the same moral. The natural interpretation of any author should always be allowed due weight and should be elicited without reference to extraneous factors. Only after that is done ought one to ask what consequences follow. It is bad method, and often circular, to expound an author always in accordance with the prejudices of the exegete — or to interpret him in such a fashion that he always retains his reputation for accuracy even in the face of apparent refutation. In brief, many problems in history are such that the various items of evidence cannot be combined together or harmonised:³⁰ they are such that some testimony must simply be dismissed as erroneous.

Convicting Eusebius of error is not a trivial matter. The investigation of early Christian history is an arduous enough task, with evidence scanty and often hard to evaluate, and the ever-present danger of relapse into credulity.³¹ The temptation is great to accept Eusebius uncritically and to write modern histories of the earliest centuries of Christianity largely on the basis of his.³² But that procedure evades one of the central problems, which is precisely the quality of Eusebius as a historical witness.³³

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²⁶ Viz. *Epp. ad Caes.* 2.9.4. Cf. R. Syme, *Mus. Helv.* 15 (1958) 46ff.

²⁷ E.g. E. Malcovati, *Athenaeum* 36 (1958) 176; M. Gelzer, *Caesar*⁶ (1960) 167.

²⁸ Thus A. Rostagni, *Riv. fil.* 36 (1958) 102f.

²⁹ R. Syme, *Mus. Helv.* 19 (1962) 177ff; *Sallust* (1964) 338f.

³⁰ Cf. F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (1964) 119ff, esp. 123f, 156.

³¹ For some recent egregious examples of (Italian) credulity, see *JRS* 58 (1968) 32f, 39. The habit seems to be spreading to otherwise respectable quarters: observe P. Keresztes, *Harvard Theol. Rev.* 61 (1968) 321ff. Keresztes opines that "the *Acts* of Felicitas and her seven sons is fairly generally regarded as authentic" (325 n. 2). To the best of my knowledge, not one reputable scholar of the twentieth century has treated them as anything but fictitious through and through. Already in the nineteenth, J. B. Lightfoot saw that "the childishness" of these *acta* "condemns itself by its own absurdity" (*The Apostolic Fathers. Part II. S. Ignatius. S. Polycarp* 1² [1889] 512).

³² Whence much of the structure of H. Grégoire, *Les persécutions dans l'Empire romain*² (1964) and W. H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church* (1965).

³³ *JTS* n.s. 20 (1969) 130f.