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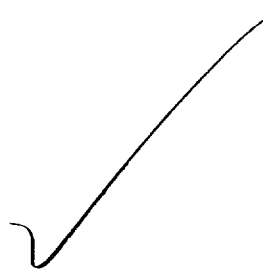
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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

Notes on the Genuineness of the Constantinian Documents in Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*¹

by A. H. M. JONES

Professor of Ancient History, University of Cambridge

One of the principal arguments against the authenticity of the Constantinian documents, and of the *Life* in which they are incorporated, has been the phrase used by Constantine in one of them² to describe his age at the opening of the Great Persecution in A.D. 303—*τότε κομιδῇ παῖς ἔτι ὑπάρχων*. According to data provided by the author of the *Life*³—and by other sources—Constantine was about 63 when he died in 337, and would therefore have been about 29 when the Persecution opened. A man of 29 could not possibly be described as a *παῖς*, and the phrase was, therefore, it was argued, evidence that the document in which it occurred was a forgery. As there is now strong presumptive evidence that the document is in fact genuine, it may be worth while to reconsider the passage.

Seeck⁴ has already convincingly argued that Constantine's age at his death was exaggerated. His precise age was apparently unknown: the author of the *Life* is careful not to give an exact figure, and other writers give 62, 64, 65 and 66.⁵ Phrases used by the Panegyrists suggest a considerably younger age. Nazarius would hardly have stated that Constantine was *adhuc aevi immaturus* when he mounted the throne in 306 if he was 32, nor would other orators have addressed him in 307 and 310 as *imperator adulescens*⁶ if he were 33 and 36. To those who believe in the genuineness of the *Life*, the most valuable and precise piece of evidence is Eusebius's description of his first meeting with the future emperor, as he was passing through Palestine with Diocletian, probably either in 296 when Diocletian was marching to Egypt to suppress the rebellion of Achilleus, or when he was returning from Egypt in 297. Eusebius describes Constantine as *ἤδη ἐκ τοῦ παιδὸς ἐπὶ τὸν νεανίαν διαβάς*, that is, about 13 or 14.⁷ In that case Constantine would have been about 19 when the Persecution began in 303.

Can *παῖς* be used to describe a youth of 19? The edict, if genuine, will have been written in Latin, and the text we possess will be the official Greek

¹ This paper was read to the International Conference on Patristic Studies at Oxford in 1951. ² Eus., *Vita Constantini*, ii. 51. ³ Ibid., i. 5, 7-8; iv. 53. ⁴ *Untergang*, i. 406 ff.

⁵ Victor, *Caes.*, xli. 16; *Epit.*, xli. 15; Eutropius, x. 8. 2; Zonares, xiii. 4.

⁶ *Paneg. Vet.*, iv. 16, vi. 17, vii. 5. Seeck (loc. cit.) gives other less probant examples of similar language from the Panegyrists and also cites *Firm. Mat.*, i. 10. 16 and Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, i. 1. 14.

⁷ Eus., *V.C.*, i. 19.

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translation. It is possible that Constantine used the word *puer*, which is used to describe young men of 19 or 20 when it is desired to emphasise their youth; Cicero for instance speaks of Octavian as *puer* at 19,¹ and Silius Italicus uses the same word of Scipio Africanus at 20.² In that case the official translator will have mechanically rendered *puer* by *παῖς*. But even if Constantine had written *adulescens* the translator would probably have rendered it *παῖς*, for in the Greek of the period there was no half way term between *παῖς* and *νεός* or *νεανίας* as the phrase which I have quoted above from Eusebius indicates, and *νεός* was clearly inappropriate since it failed to convey the emperor's meaning that he was still immature. *Παῖς* was the only word available, and it was not inappropriate, for it had by the fourth century come to cover a wider range of age than in classical Greek. This is most clearly demonstrated by a passage in Libanius (*Orat.*, liii. 3-4), where he protests against the novel practice of inviting *παῖδες* to the banquet of the Olympia. The kind of person who should be invited is *οὗτος ἐκ παίδων ἐξῆλθε καὶ που τις καὶ μέλλων, πατήρ τε ὦν ἤδη καὶ δεικνὺς ἐν δικαστηρίοις αὐτόν*. One could thus be a father and practise at the bar while still a *παῖς*. He cites his own case, where according to the good old practice he was not invited at the age of 14 or 18, but only when at 22 he had begun to make a name for himself. Granted then that Constantine was about ten years younger than he represented himself to be in his latter years—a supposition supported by all the evidence contemporary with his youth—he would naturally have described himself as *puer* or *adulescens* in 303, and the official translator would naturally have rendered either word by *παῖς* in Greek.

A recently published papyrus has strikingly confirmed the authenticity of one of the Constantinian edicts cited by Eusebius. The papyrus is P. Lond. 878 and has been published by Mr. Skeat in *Aus Antike und Orient*, 127-30.³ Mr. Skeat selected it because it contained a reference to Britain, but was unable to elucidate its character. The text is written on the back of a petition which he has plausibly dated to 319-20, and the hand 'does not appear to be very much later than that of the recto'. It is definitely a non-literary hand. We have therefore a document (in the narrow sense, not a book), written not long after 320. Following a suggestion made by Mr. C. E. Stevens of Magdalen College, Oxford, I searched the text of Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*. The papyrus proved to be part of Constantine's letter to the provincials issued after the defeat of Licinius, and to correspond verbatim with Eusebius, *Vit. Const.*, ii. 27 and 28 with the end of 26 and the opening of 29. By a fortunate chance it contains Constantine's allusion to the pains of Hell and his definition of *τὸ θεῖον* as *ὁ μόνον τε καὶ ὡς ὄντως ἔ[στι καὶ διαρκῆ κατὰ πάντος ἔχει τοῦ χρόνου] τῆν δύναμιν*.

¹ Cic., *ad Fam.*, x. 28.3, xii. 25. 4; *ad Att.*, xvi. 11.6, 15.3; *Phil.*, iv. 3

² Sil. Ital., xv. 33, 46.

³ Mr. Skeat has kindly provided a revised text of the papyrus, collated with that of Eusebius, together with notes on the palaeography and restoration of the text. These are printed below.

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Cambridge

the authenticity of the text in which they are found in Constantine in one of the edicts of the Persecution in A.D. 303. The data provided by the inscription at Constantinian was about 63 years old when he was described as a *παῖς*, a fact which may be worth while to

Constantine's age at his death is presently unknown: the various authorities are generally in agreement, and other writers on the subject suggest a date of death of 337. It is contended that Constantine died in 306 if he was 32, 307 and 310 as *imperator* in the genuineness of the evidence is Eusebius's authority, as he was passing on in 1296 when Diocletian and Maximian, or when he was Constantine as *ἡδὴ* 13 or 14.⁷ In that case the persecution began in 303. The edict, if genuine, will still be the official Greek

Patristic Studies at Oxford
 . 53. ⁴ *Untergang*, i. 406 ff.
 . res, xiii. 4.
 her less probant examples
 . t., i. 10. 16 and Lactantius,

Col. i

(about 22 lines lost)

- 1 [οὐδ' ἂν ἀπὸ λόγου συμβαίνοι. Ὅσοι μὲν γὰρ μετὰ δικαίας γνώμης ἐπί τινας ἐ]ρχ[οντα.]
 2 [πράξεις, καὶ τὸν τοῦ κρείττονος φόβον διηλεκῶς ἔχουσαν ἐν νῶ, βεβαία]ν τῆ[ν περὶ]
 3 [αὐτὸν φυλάττοντες πίστιν, καὶ τοὺς παρόντας φόβους τε καὶ κινδυνούς οὐκ ἄγουσαν]
 4 [τῶν μελλουσῶν ἐκείνων ἐλπίδων προτιμωτέρους· κἂν εἰ πρὸς καιρὸν δυσχερῶν]

(foot of column)

1-4. The dashes at the ends of the lines are in the original; cf. Palaeographical Note. 1. ρ is certain, and χ virtually so. 2. the fragment of the ν is a line curving upwards. This is incompatible with the normal forms of ν used in the papyrus, but a ν of this unusual type occurs medially in σεμωλογίῃσαι in col. ii, l. 20.

Col. ii

- 1 [τινων πειραθεῖεν, τῶ μείζονας ἑαυτοῖς ἀποκεῖσθαι πιστεύειν τιμᾶς ἠνεγκαν, οὐδὲ τὰ προσ-]
 2 [πεσόντα βαρέως, ἀλλὰ τοσοῦτω λαμπροτέρας ἔτυχον εὐκλείας, ὅσω καὶ βαρυντέρων τῶν χαλεπῶν]
 3 [ἐπειράθησαν. Ὅσοι δὲ ἢ τὸ δίκαιον ἀτίμως παρεῖδον, ἢ τὸ κρῦπτον οὐκ ἔγνωσαν, καὶ οὐχ ἑαυτοὺς μὲν]
 4 [πιστῶς μετιόντας ὕβρει καὶ κολάσεων ἀνηκεῖστος ὑποβαλεῖν ἐτόλμησαν, καὶ οὐχ ἑαυτοὺς τοὺς]
 5 [ἀθλίους ἐφ' οἷς διὰ τὰς τοιαύτας ἐκό]λαξ[ον προφάσεις, ἔκριναν, εὐδαίμονας δὲ καὶ μακαριστοὺς τοὺς]
 6 [καὶ μέγρι τῶν τοιούτων τὴν πρὸς τὸ κρ]ῖττι[ον διασωζομένους εὐσέβειαν· τούτων πολλοὶ μὲν]
 7 [ἔπεσον στρατιαί, πολλοὶ δ' εἰς φυγὴν ἐ]τράπη[σαν, πᾶσα δὲ τούτων πολέμου παράταξις εἰς ἀσχίστην]
 8 [ἔληξεν ἦτταν· ἐκ τῶν το]ιούτων ἀναφροίνονται πόλεμ[ο]ι β[αρεῖς· ἐκ τῶν τοιούτων πορθήσεις πανώλε-]
 9 [θροι· ἐντεῦθεν ἐλατ]τώσις μὲν τῶν πρὸς τὰς χεῖρας ἀναγκ[αίων, πλήθος δὲ τῶν ἐπηρητημένων]

- 10 [δευνῶν· ἐντεῦθεν οἱ τ]ῆς τοσαύτης ἀρχησοὶ δυσσεβία[s, ἢ ἀναπλάντες τὰ ἔσχατα, θάνατον]

I submit that we have in P. Lond. 878 a contemporary copy of the Letter of A.D. 324. The papyrus proves beyond all reasonable doubt the authenticity of one of the Constantinian documents cited by Eusebius in the *Life*, and implies that of the rest. It does not of course prove that the *Life* in which they are quoted is a work of Eusebius, but I find it difficult to believe that a later forger would have troubled to search out the originals of old documents and copy them *in extenso*.

APPENDIX

by T. C. SKEAT

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Palaeographical Note.

The hand is a rapid, practised but unpretentious cursive. The fourth century is an age of transition, in palaeography as in other respects, and this hand is one of those which look back to the third century rather than forward to the usual Byzantine type. Professor E. G. Turner, who is editing the Abinnaeus papyri (mid 4th cent.), has given it as his opinion that the present hand in general style certainly seems to be earlier than the average hand of the Abinnaeus archive, and he suggests 330-50 as the outside limits within which the hand should be dated. This would not, of course, exclude the possibility of the papyrus being a contemporary copy of the Edict. In fact, the hand closely resembles that of P. Hamb. 21 (facsimile in Pl. VII) of A.D. 315, the similarity even extending to the long dashes at the ends of the lines, of which four are preserved in col. i.

Note on the restoration of the text.

The restoration of the last four lines of col. i rests wholly upon the identification of the four or five letters preserved. Such an identification must necessarily be somewhat precarious, but it is supported by the fact that nowhere else in the earlier part of the Edict do the same letters occur in the correct relative positions. If, then, the identification be accepted, l. 2 of col. i contained 63 letters, and the remaining lines of col. i here printed have been restored to about the same length. Col. ii, as restored, contains 26 lines. If col. i contained the same number of lines, there must be 22 lines wholly lost before the first line here printed. If these 22 lines contained 63 letters each, the total number of letters in them would be $22 \times 63 = 1386$. This figure is in close agreement with the number of letters in the opening part of the Edict (*i.e.* preceding the text here printed) which contains about 1350 letters. It is thus probable that the text of the Edict began at the top of col. i, and that it was not introduced by any heading or covering letter. The lines in col. ii were somewhat longer than those in col. i, the number of letters usually varying between 70 and 80. In lines 1-7 of col. ii, where little or no text is actually preserved, the text is printed *exempli gratia*, and there can of course be no certainty about either the readings of the papyrus or the exact points where the lines were divided.

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