COMMENTARY

Epp. Apoll. i

Εὐφράτη: The Stoic philosopher, pupil of Musonius Rufus and friend of the younger Pliny. See PIR² E 121; P. Grimal, “Deux figures de la Correspondance de Pline: le philosophe Euphrates et le rhéteur Isée,” Latomus 14 (1955) 370-83; Sherwin-White on Pliny, Epp. 1.10; and my comments below on the letters of Apollonius to Euphrates.

The very favorable comments on Euphrates that are found in the younger Pliny (Epp. 1.10), Epictetus (Arr., Epict. Diss. 3.15.8, 4.8.17 ff.) and Fronto, p. 133 van den Hout, stand in sharp contrast with Apollonius’s and Philostratus’s view of him. In the letters and the VA Euphrates is portrayed as a false philosopher, corrupt and despicable. An open quarrel broke out between Apollonius and Euphrates in 69 (VA 5.28-39). Euphrates attacked ξύν δρίγη τε καὶ λοιδορίας, Apollonius φιλοσόφως καὶ ξύν ελέγχῳ (VA 5.39). Apollonius wrote deservedly critical letters, Euphrates resorted to ψευδὴ γράμματα (VA 1.13). (But contrast Philostr., VS 488). Through an agent, Euphrates spred slanders about Apollonius among the Ethiopian gymnosophists, who consequently gave Apollonius a cold reception (VA 6.7-9, 13). Finally, Euphrates played a significant part in Apollonius’s indictment: He fed Domitian’s suspicions about Apollonius’s treasnable activities and paid off Apollonius’s accuser (VA 7.9, 8.3). Philostratus’s Euphrates tries to victimize Apollonius. According to an earlier and unsympathetic biographer of Apollonius, Moeragenes, it was Apollonius who victimized Euphrates and other philosophers by the force of his magic (Origen, Contra Cels. 6.41; see Epp. Apoll. 16 and 17 with my comments).

We have more letters to Euphrates than to any other single addressee—seventeen in the independently transmitted collection and two from Stobaeus. Philostratus knew many letters to Euphrates (VA 5.39, ἐκ τῶν πρῶς αὐτὸν [sc., Εὐφράτην] ἐπιστολῶν, πλέον γάρ) but quotes (perhaps) only one: see Appendix 4.

Εμοὶ πρὸς φιλοσόφους ... ποτὲ γένοιτο: The letter begins with the traditional rivalry between philosophy and rhetoric. In the Empire the term “sophist” seems to have been commonly used with the connotation “virtuoso rhetor”: G. W. Bowersock, Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire (1969) 12-14. γραμματιστάς in Epp. Apoll. 1 does not mean “low clerks” (Conybeare); it refers to the teacher of literary fundamentals, reading and writing. The student moved from the γραμματιστῆς to the γραμματικός to the rhetor/sophist: Philo, De congr. erudit. grat. 148 [540M]; Suet., Gram. 4; Sext. Emp., Math. 1.44-56; Mart. Cap. 3.229; H. Marrou, Histoire de l’éducation
dans l'antiquité² (1950) 223. Apollonius is scorning the whole of rhetorical culture, from its most illustrious practitioners down to the lowest schoolmasters who prepare students for advanced study.

tάδε μὲν οὖν . . . πάνυ πρός σε: Since Euphrates at least professes philosophy, he does not seem to be one of the σοφισταῖ, γραμματισταῖ, or similar ἄνθρωποι κακοδαμίμοις condemned in the opening sentence. However, some doubt is expressed in the words τόλην εἰ μὴ καὶ σὺ τούτων εἷς. Epp. Apoll. 3 imputes κακοδαμίμια to Euphrates. Also, σοφιστής had long been used as a term of abuse, meaning a fraud, a false or inferior version of what one professes to be, or (as Cic., Acad. 2.72, explains in a discussion of Greek philosophy) one who pursues philosophy ostentationis aut quaestus causa: TGL, s.v.; G. R. Stanton, AJPh 94 (1973) 351-58; C. P. Jones in G. W. Bowersock (ed.), Approaches to the Second Sophistic (1974) 12. In this sense of the word, Euphrates is a sophist and thus is subtly included among those denounced in the first sentence of Epp. Apoll. 1.

In Epp. Apoll. 2 Euphrates’s teaching is called σοφιστεῖα, and he is chided for profiting monetarily from it. In Epp. Apoll. 3 Euphrates is accused of ἀλάχρονεία, an insult commonly coupled elsewhere with σοφιστεῖα (e.g., Ps.-Pl., Eryx. 399C; Dio Chrys. 4.33; Plut., Adv. Colot. 1118D, 1124C; App., Epict. Diss. 2.20.23). For Euphrates’s defective philosophy see, in addition to the implicit criticism of Epp. Apoll. 1 (θεράπευ& σου τὰ πάθη κτλ.), Epp. Apoll. 18 and the more emphatic Epp. Apoll. 50; cf. Philostr., VA 2.26, 5.39, 6.7.

In hinting that Euphrates is a sophist, Apollonius may also be suggesting that his oratorical style is more accomplished and ornate than it should be for one who claims to be a philosopher; see my comment on Epp. Apoll. 94.

tοῖς δὲντως φιλοσοφοῦσιν: The plural may be intended as nothing more than a veiled allusion to Apollonius himself.

ἐτέει σοι καὶ γῆρας κτλ.: If the chronology (or supposed chronology) of the letters is squared with that of the VA, then this and the subsequent letters to Euphrates have the year 69 as their terminus post quem. From that year on, Apollonius and Euphrates were at odds with one another, and Apollonius chided Euphrates in letters (Philostr., VA 5.39). Euphrates died at an advanced age early in the reign of Hadrian: Dio Cass. 69.8.3 (διὰ τὸ γῆρας); Jerome, Chron., p. 198 Helm. It would be hazardous to attempt to specify, especially in philosophical or moral discourse, the lowest age at which the nearness of old age and death may be appropriately remarked.

Epp. Apoll. 2

φύσει μαθήσει [κτήσει] χρήσει: Olearius rightly excised κτήσει. What we are left with is the common notion of the trifold basis of virtue: natural disposition (φύσις), reasoning or theoretical training