EUNAPIUS OF SARDES AND THE WRITING OF HISTORY

BY

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In spite of increasing interest in Greek historiography of the later Roman Empire, that has led to fundamental studies on Dexippus, Olympiodorus and Zosimus, the work of Eunapius of Sardes has remained somewhat neglected. Understandably, as it would require a great degree of benevolence to challenge Schmidt’s verdict on him: “ein ganz unhistorischer Kopf”. However, lesser historians might reflect the general attitude of their time and give expression to a specific kind of historical consciousness that is often more representative than that of their more outstanding colleagues. Moreover, Eunapius’ history was an important source for Zosimus; research on that interesting historian on Rome’s fall implies going into the intricate questions of his dependence upon Eunapius. Photius says that Zosimus’ work was practically a copy of Eunapius’ history. Even if this should not be taken in a literal sense, it is important to know to what degree Zosimus’ specific approach to the history of the fourth century reflects the historical thought of Eunapius, who was a contemporary witness for the period between 360 and 420.

For a judicious assessment of Eunapius as a historian the 88 fragments in the Byzantine excerpts are insufficient—it is just a


2) Photius *Bibl.* cod. 98 Εἶπον δ’ ἐν τῷ οὖ γράψαι αὐτὸν ἱστορίαν, ἀλλὰ μεταγράψαι τὴν Εὐναπίου τῷ συντόμῳ μόνον διαφέρουσαν.
random selection 3). To use Zosimus’ account as our guideline is more or less a petitio principii, and is hardly very helpful, if only for the reason that the Byzantine historian needed only four books, where Eunapius needed fourteen. I do not want to contribute to the important question of Zosimus’ sources. But perhaps it is possible to look into Eunapius’ ‘workshop’ by trying to envisage his personal remarks on historical method as a coherent whole, related to his cultural and social context. A strong impulse to such an approach was given by the provoking study of Paschoud, Cinq études sur Zosime 4); his arguments, though often very discutable, have done much to renew my interest in fourth-century historiography.

Eunapius’ history (Χρονικὴ Ιστορία, Phot.) covers the period between the death of Claudius Gothicus (270) and 404. Photius knew two editions of the work, the νέα ἔκδοσις being more concise and less anti-Christian than the first one. Both editions comprised the same period 5). How was the work planned? At what time were the editions published? Photius says that, as a consequence of τῶν ἤττῶν περικοπῶν, in the second edition the different λόγοι were clumsily pitched together 6). Now, we know that Eunapius mentioned the reign of the empress Pulcheria—according to him, a time of incredible corruption 7). Paschoud suggests that this passage can hardly have been written before 423, since after that date, as a consequence of the marriage between Theodosius II and Eudoxia, the star of Pulcheria was waning 8). This implies that (1) Eunapius was still working on his νέα ἔκδοσις in his seventies (he was born in 350) 9); perhaps he did not have time to make a tolerable new

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5) Photius in Dindorf, p. 206, 14 ff. Δῶ καὶ πραγματείας τὴν αὐτῆν περι-έχουσας ἱστορίαν συγγράφατο.
6) Photius in Dind. p. 206, 20 ff. ἐν δὲ τῇ δευτέρᾳ, ἢν καὶ νέαν ἔκδοσιν ἐπιγράφει, τὴν μὲν πολλὰν ὀβριν καὶ ἄσελγειάν, ἢν κατὰ τῆς εἰσείθειας ἐπικλαῖαν ὑπετέμεναι .... συμβαίνει οὖν ἐν τῇ νέᾳ ἔκδοσις πολλὰ τῶν χαριῶν διὰ τῶς γεγενημένας τῶν ἤττῶν περικοπῶν ἀσάφως ἐκκείσθαι.
7) Hist. fr. 87.
8) O.C., 170; 174.
9) Schmidt, RE VI, 1128.