

JEROME AND THE *ORIGO CONSTANTINI IMPERATORIS*

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A NINTH-CENTURY MANUSCRIPT, probably written in Verona, now in the Deutsche Staatsbibliothek in East Berlin, preserves a brief Latin account of the family, career, and reign of Constantine (ms Phillippus 1885, fols. 30^v–36^v).¹ The *Origo Constantini Imperatoris*, as the manuscript styles the work, is an important historical source for an often badly documented period, and is especially valuable for the complicated political and military manoeuvres of the years 306–311 and for the conflict between Constantine and Licinius, which between them occupy twenty-four of the thirty-five sections into which the work is conventionally divided (4–10, 13–29).² The *Origo* is not inerrant: for example, it alleges that Severus, who became Caesar in 305 and Augustus in 306, took over all the territories previously ruled by Maximian (5), whereas it is clear that in fact Spain was transferred to the control of the new Augustus Constantius in 305 and passed from him to his son Constantine in 306. Moreover, the *Origo* elsewhere, with a different inaccuracy, defines Severus' domain as Italy, Africa, and the Pannonias (9). Eutropius, in contrast, correctly states that Galerius ruled the whole of Illyricum (*Brev.* 10.1.1).³

Despite such errors, however, the *Origo* contains so much precise and valuable information about the early fourth century that a date of composition

¹Now edited by I. König, *Origo Constantini. Anonymus Valesianus, Teil 1. Text und Kommentar* (Trier 1987, Trierer Historische Forschungen 11), with the fullest available discussions of the manuscript and of the date and nature of the work, a text which improves slightly on the excellent edition of J. Moreau and V. Velkov (*Excerpta Valesiana*² [Leipzig 1968]), a German translation, and a voluminous commentary.

In 17 König rightly prints Seeck's emendation *apud Philippopolim* in place of the transmitted but geographically erroneous *apud Philippos* printed by earlier editors (O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt* 1⁴ [Stuttgart 1921] 506–507).

²Note especially the account of the otherwise totally obscure political background to the war of Cibalae (14–15; cf. T. D. Barnes, *Constantine and Eusebius* [Cambridge, Mass. 1981] 66–67). König unfortunately retains the disproved date of 314 for the war instead of the correct 316/7 (119–123), with appeal to M. R. Alföldi, "Die Niederermeler 'Kaiserfibel.' Zum Datum des ersten Krieges zwischen Konstantin und Licinius," *BJ* 176 (1976) 183–200.

³T. D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, Mass. 1982) 197.

close to the death of Constantine in 337 has often been presumed.⁴ In his introduction, König challenges this inference and dates the *Origo* to the very late fourth century, during the reign of Theodosius. He explains the excellence of its information by postulating as its principal source an early biography of Constantine which was also used by the extant Zosimus ca 500 and in the lost "Kaisergeschichte" whose existence was demonstrated by A. Enmann in 1883, but he claims that the author of the *Origo* shows knowledge of Jerome's *Chronicle*, which cannot have been available to him before Jerome himself brought the original with him from Constantinople to Italy in the winter of 380/1.⁵ Such an analysis is not in itself implausible, for a certain overlapping in the early part of the *Origo* (principally between 5–6 and 9) could be the result of abridgement from a fuller (and possibly much earlier) written source. Yet, on general grounds, it hardly appears probable that the *Origo* could be contemporaneous with Eunapius and Ammianus Marcellinus: its overall tenor, apart from the interpolations from Orosius, points rather to the reign of Constantius, to the period before Julian was proclaimed Augustus. But König's case cannot be disproved by a *priori* or general considerations. He offers a precise and specific argument for a date after 381: is it valid?

Three pairs of passages carry the force of the argument, in two of which Jerome's frequent source Eutropius is also relevant to the comparison.⁶

First, the proclamation of Maxentius:

in urbe Roma praetoriani milites Maxentium filium Herculi imperatorem crearunt (Origo 6);

Maxentius, Herculi Maximiani filius, a praetorianis militibus Romae Augustus appellatur (Jerome Chronicle 229^a Helm);

Romae interea praetoriani excito tumultu Maxentium, Herculi filium, qui haud procul ab urbe in villa publica morabatur, Augustum nuncupaverunt (Eutropius Brev. 10.2.3).

Where is the "astounding verbal similarity" between Jerome and the *Origo*? No writer who recorded the proclamation of Maxentius could avoid naming

⁴For the fullest exposition of the argument, see E. Klebs, "Das Valesische Bruchstück zur Geschichte Constantins," *Philologus* 47 (1889) 53–80. König's bibliography surprisingly fails to register this still valuable article.

⁵König 19–28. For the "Kaisergeschichte," see T. D. Barnes, "The Lost Kaisergeschichte and the Latin Historical Tradition," *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium* 1968/1969 (Bonn 1970) 13–43, where it is argued that neither the *Origo* nor Zosimus draws on this lost source (24–27).

⁶König 23: "Hierbei zeigen sich wörtliche Übereinstimmungen wesentlich häufiger und sind zudem verblüffender, da wir sie gleichzeitig mit der abweichenden Wortwahl Eutrops vergleichen können."

the new emperor, identifying him as Maximian's son, and mentioning Rome as the place and the praetorians as the agents. But Jerome and the *Origo* present the episode in different words except for the name Maxentius and the phrase *praetoriani milites*: in the *Origo*, the praetorians create Maxentius *imperator* in the city of Rome, whereas in Jerome Maxentius is called Augustus at Rome. The wording of the *Origo* is in fact closer to Eutropius than to Jerome.

Second, the proclamation of Crispus, Constantinus, and the younger Licinius as Caesars in 317:

Constantinus hoc cum Licinio absente constituit, ut filii Constantini Crispus et Constantinus, filius etiam Licini Licinius Caesares fierent et sic ab utroque concorditer regnaretur (*Origo* 19);

Crispus et Constantinus, filii Constantini, et Licinius adulescens, Licini Augusti filius, Constantini ex sorore nepos, Caesares appellantur (*Jerome Chronicle* 230^e Helm).

Here the similarity does not extend beyond the names of the new Caesars and their two fathers: the order of the Caesars' names reflects their order of precedence in the imperial college and warrants no inference at all about the literary relationship of two writers who reproduce it correctly.

Third, the death of Constantine as he prepared to invade Persia in 337:

Constantinus cum bellum pararet in Persas in suburbano Constantinopolitano villa publica iuxta Nicomediam dispositam bene rempublicam filiis tradens <diem obiit> (*Origo* 35);

Constantinus cum bellum pararet in Persas in Ancyron villa publica iuxta Nicomediam moritur (*Jerome Chronicle* 234^b Helm);

bellum adversus Parthos moliens . . . Nicomediae in villa publica obiit (*Eutropius Brev.* 10.8.2).

Here the comparison is complicated by the fact that in the relevant passage of the *Origo* the underlined words have been interpolated from Orosius (*Hist. adv. pag.* 7.28.31). Nevertheless, Jerome and the *Origo* do concur in their wording of the subordinate clause (*cum bellum pararet in Persas*). But does that prove the *Origo* dependent on Jerome? It could with equal plausibility be claimed that Jerome has replaced the wording of his source Eutropius (*bellum adversus Parthos moliens*) with an unconscious reminiscence of the *Origo* which he had read before 380. But a literary relationship between Jerome and the *Origo* is not at all a necessary hypothesis, since the combination *bellum parare* is not a rare one.⁷

The argument that the author of the *Origo* knew and used Jerome's *Chronicle* has not been sustained. There is no obstacle, therefore, to dating

⁷In fact, normal or even banal; cf. *TLL* II 1838–39.

the *Origo* before 380. On the contrary, many features of the text speak for an early date, in particular its avoidance of certain errors which permeate the Latin historical tradition deriving from the lost "Kaisergeschichte." The *Origo*, for example, presents Theodora, the wife of Constantius (emperor, 293–306), as the daughter of Maximian (1), not his step-daughter.⁸ That appears to be correct, on the evidence of a panegyric delivered before Maximian in 289 (*Pan. Lat.* 2 [10].11.4).⁹ Similarly, the author of the *Origo* knew that Constantine left the court of Galerius to join his father in Britain in the summer of 305 and participated in a victorious campaign against the Picts (4; cf. *Pan. Lat.* 6 [7].7).¹⁰ The correct chronology has been supplanted almost everywhere else by the colourful story, doubtless a deliberate invention for propaganda purposes, that because of Galerius' reluctance to let him go Constantine only reached his father as he lay dying in July 306.¹¹

How strong is this inference from good information for an early date? It is tempting to take refuge in A. Momigliano's sceptical verdict of twenty five years ago: "all is in doubt about the first part of the Anonymus Valensianus."¹² Yet, whatever uncertainties may remain about the date and purpose of the *Origo*, its contents leave little doubt that it is independent of all the other surviving literary sources for the Constantinian period. The most economical hypothesis which would account for the peculiar characteristics of the *Origo* as it has been preserved is that a redactor working after 417 abbreviated an original text of the middle decades of the fourth century at the same time as he interpolated passages from Orosius.¹³

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⁸ As alleged by authors dependent on the "Kaisergeschichte," viz. Victor *Caes.* 39.25; Eutropius *Brev.* 9.22, whence Jerome *Chronicle* 225⁵ Helm; *Epit. de Caes.* 39.2, 40.12.

⁹ *New Empire* (1982) 33. Philostorgius *HE* 2.16³ also has the truth.

¹⁰ T. D. Barnes, "Imperial Campaigns, A.D. 285–311," *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 174–193, at 191. The imperial titulature of 7 January 306 (*AE* 1961.240), 310 (*ILS* 660) and April 311 (Eusebius *HE* 8.17.3–5; cf. *New Empire* [1982] 22) proves that this British victory occurred in 305, not 306.

¹¹ Lactantius *Mort. Pers.* 24.8; Eusebius *VC* 1.21; Victor *Caes.* 40.2–3.

¹² A. Momigliano, *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963) 87.

¹³ As argued by Klebs 55 ff., esp. 66–67. Klebs also suggested that *Origo* 1 (ex qua [sc. Theodora] postea sex liberos Constantini fratres habuit) was interpolated from Jerome *Chronicle* 225⁵ Helm. It might, on the contrary, be the case that Jerome had read the *Origo* and reproduces its wording.