

EUNAPIUS ON LIBANIUS' REFUSAL OF A PREFECTURE

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IN HIS *Vitae Sophistarum*, published in late 399 or early 400, Eunapius of Sardis says of Libanius, τῶν δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα βασιλέων καὶ τῶν ἀξιωματῶν τὸ μέγιστον αὐτῷ προσθέντων (τὸν γὰρ τῆς αὐλῆς ἑπαρχὸν μέχρι προσηγορίας ἔχειν ἐκέλευον), οὐκ ἐδέξατο φήσας τὸν σοφιστὴν εἶναι μείζονα.¹ Since Sievers,² this incident has been associated with Theodosius the Great, an identification that led to allegations that Eunapius had either innocently confused or consciously conflated Libanius' rejection of an honorary quaestorship under Julian with the acceptance in 383 of an honorary prefecture under Theodosius.³ However, as Julian is the only emperor named in the βίος—and that immediately preceding the passage in question (in VS 16.2.6)—the most natural interpretation of τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα βασιλέων would be as a reference to Valentinian and Valens. Elsewhere in the *Vitae Sophistarum*, the Pannonian brothers are almost certainly οἱ μετὰ Ἰουλιανὸν who exiled and then recalled Oribasius (21.1.5), and may also be signified later in the life of Julian's physician by τῶν μετὰ ταῦτα βασιλέων (21.2.6). The precise date of Libanius' refusal of the prefecture should, therefore, fall within the *termini* of Valens' accession on March 28, 364 and Valentinian's death on November 17, 375 (Amm. Marc. 26.4.3 and 30.5.15).

By his own admission, Libanius emerged from the short reign of Jovian *persona non grata*, and his ardent support of Julian minimizes the likelihood of any rehabilitation before Valens' defeat in spring 366 of Julian's kinsman, the usurper Procopius.⁴ Likewise, Libanius seems never to have recovered in Valens' eyes from suspicions aroused by the so-called conspiracy of Theodorus (ca 371).⁵ Thus, when the emperor arrived in Antioch on November 10, 371, Libanius was not permitted to deliver in full the panegyric he had composed in praise of Valens' campaign against the Goths (*Or.* 1.144). Indeed, there is a gap from 365 to 388 in Libanius' copious correspondence, and the lone surviving specimen of his literary

¹VS 16.2.8, ed. G. Giangrande, *Eunapii Vitae Sophistarum* (Rome 1956). On the date, see T. M. Banchich, "The Date of Eunapius' *Vitae Sophistarum*," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 185–194.

²G. R. Sievers, *Das Leben des Libanius* (Berlin 1868) 292–293.

³So, for example, *PLRE* 1.506. P. Petit, "Sur la date du *Pro Templis* de Libanius," *Byzantion* 21 (1951) 293–294, sets Theodosius' gift in 383, but makes no mention of Eunapius.

⁴*Or.* 1.136–138, ed. A. F. Norman, *Libanius' Autobiography* (Oxford 1965), with Norman's annotation, pp. 188–189.

⁵See *PLRE* 1.898, Theodorus 13, for the evidence concerning the conspiracy.

activity between 366 and 378 is the first installment of the *Autobiography*.⁶ Yet, in a later section of that same oration, but one apparently composed before Theodosius' award of the prefecture of 383, Libanius speaks of *τινὲς ἐκ βασιλέων τιμαί*, none of which are known to have been granted by Julian's predecessor Constantius,⁷ and, in the *To Those Who Called Him Tiresome* of 380, refers again to *τιμαί* refused.⁸ The quaestorship offered by Julian must be one of these; the prefecture offered by Valentinian and Valens is perhaps another. If so, the overture was most likely made between 367 and 370.

Early in this period separating Procopius' execution from the conspiracy of Theodorus, Libanius discovered a powerful advocate in the person of Flavius Lucipinus, *consul prior* in 367.⁹ To repay the favor of Lucipinus, Libanius had recommended him to the influential former *comes Orientis* Archelaus, who, in the following year, requested an audience with Libanius, but was discouraged.¹⁰ Another Archelaus, *comes sacrarum largitionum* in 369 and the nephew of the aforementioned Archelaus, was, however, in 368 or 369 granted the privilege withheld from his uncle.¹¹ So, it seems, Libanius was temporarily possessed of admirers capable of eliciting from the emperor an honorary title—in this case, that of praetorian prefect. Why Libanius chose not to accept the title is uncertain, but it should be remembered that his decision was not without precedent.¹²

Besides illuminating a relatively dark period in Libanius' life, this explanation of *Vitae Sophistarum* 16.2.8 has some relevance to the question of the chronology of the publication of Eunapius' *History*, for early in the

⁶Cf. O. Seeck, *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet* (Leipzig 1906) 316–442, on the chronology of the letters, and A. F. Norman, *Libanius: Selected Works* 1 (Cambridge, Mass. 1969) l–liii, for the dates of the orations in general, with *Libanius' Autobiography* (above, n. 4) xii–xvii, on *Or.* 1 in particular.

⁷*Or.* 1.204, with Norman's note (above, n. 4, 207).

⁸*Or.* 2.8, ed. R. Foerster, *Libanii Opera* (Leipzig 1903) 1.1. See also A. F. Norman, *Libanius: Selected Works* 2 (Cambridge, Mass. 1977) 14.

⁹*Or.* 1.164–165. Cf. *PLRE* 1.520–521, Fl. Lucipinus 6.

¹⁰*Or.* 1.116, with Norman (above, n. 4) 197–198, and *PLRE* 1.100, Archelaus 1.

¹¹Cf. *Or.* 1.166 and *Or.* 2.9. The nephew is Archelaus 3, *PLRE* 1.100.

¹²Libanius mentions his refusal of an ἀρχή, probably the quaestorship offered by Julian, at *Or.* 1.125. Themistius may well have turned his back on an urban prefecture. See L. J. Daly, "Themistius' Refusal of a Magistracy," *Byzantion* 53 (1983) 164–211.

In the *Chronica* of Jerome, under the year 368, ed. R. Helm, *Die Chronik des Hieronymus* (Berlin 1956) 245, lines 16–17, appears the notice: *Libanius Antiochenus rhetor insignis habetur*. This led Sievers (above, n. 2, 253) to place Libanius' *Or.* 18, the *Funeral Oration over Julian*, in 369. P. Petit, in *Libanius et la vie municipale à Antioche au IV^e siècle après J.-C.* (Paris 1955), though not citing Jerome, championed 368, pp. 185–186. The case for 365 is stated by Norman, *Libanius: Selected Works* 1 (above, n. 6) xxxiv with note a. In fact, Jerome's entry need be nothing more than an allusion to the rehabilitation of Libanius outlined above.

biography of Libanius Eunapius notes: Μνήμην μὲν οὖν αὐτῷ τὴν πρέπουσαν καὶ τοῖς βιβλίοις τοῖς κατὰ Ἰουλιανὸν ἢ γραφῇ πεποιήται, τὰ δὲ καθ' ἕκαστον νῦν ἐπεξελεύσεται (VS 16.1.9), which implies that the account of Libanius in the *Vitae Sophistarum* reflects material that stood in the Julianic books of the *History*.¹³ It had long been the consensus that, in one form or other, the portion of the *History* completed prior to the *Vitae Sophistarum* covered the period to ca 396 and appeared shortly thereafter, but in 1976 T. D. Barnes proposed a terminus of 378 and a publication date of ca 380.¹⁴ If the life of Libanius in the *Vitae Sophistarum* does mirror the contents of the *History*, Barnes' dates can only stand if Libanius' refusal of a prefecture is moved back from its traditional Theodosian date. It must be emphasized, however, that the redating of this episode to ca 368 only removes an impediment to, but does not confirm, Barnes' thesis.

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¹³The fragments are now to be read in R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire* 2 (Liverpool 1983) 2–50, which supersedes the former standard collection of Müller, *FHG* 4.7–56. The *Suda* entry "Libanios," Λ 486, ed. A. Adler, *Suidae Lexicon* (Leipzig 1933) 3.267, lines 19–25 (= fr. 26.2 Blockley 2.38) acknowledges Julian's admiration for Libanius, but ascribes it in part to the emperor's wish to embarrass the rival sophist (and Eunapius' former mentor) Prohaeresius.

¹⁴"The Sources of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*," *CP* 71 (1976) 265–268. Barnes further developed his position in *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels 1978) 114–123.