

## REVIEW

## OLD AND NEW DEBATES ON SOZOMEN

Caterina C. Berardi, *Linee di storiografia ecclesiastica in Sozomeno di Gaza*. Auctores Nostri, 16. Bari: Edipuglia, 2016. Pp. 180. Paperback, €30.00. ISBN 978-88-7228-807-8.

Studies on the fifth-century Church historians Socrates, Sozomen, and Theoderet are very much to be welcomed. The last published monograph was my 2004 study of Socrates and Sozomen, but there are more recent, as yet unpublished dissertations by L. Gardiner on Socrates (Cambridge, 2013) and by E. Delacenserie on the reception of Socrates (Ghent, 2016). Especially for Theoderet and Sozomen, then, there is still much room for new voices. Thanks to full editions and translations in the *Sources chrétiennes* series these texts have also become more accessible. The monograph by Caterina Berardi (henceforth B.) studies four aspects of Sozomen's history of the Church. Between a first chapter on the life and work, and a final one on the reception of Sozomen, she focuses on his historical method, the praise of the emperor, anti-pagan polemic, and digressions (in a chapter that, in fact, describes his attitude towards miracles and ascetics). An appendix with translations of some key passages concludes the volume.

Sadly, the book is not the best of offerings. The analysis is overly descriptive, engages in a superficial and sometimes strange manner with earlier scholarship, and error is too frequent to inspire confidence. To start with, the introduction offers a *status quaestionis* that strangely omits important works that are used elsewhere in the book (e.g. H. Leppin, *Von Constantin dem Grossen zu Theodosius II. Das christliche Kaisertum bei den Kirchenhistorikern Socrates, Sozomenus und Theodoret* (1996); and my own *Un héritage de paix et de piété. Étude sur les histoires ecclésiastiques de Socrate et de Sozomène* (2004)). The fears generated by this strange state of the art come true in the first chapter on the life and work of Sozomen. It ignores the longest treatment of these matters (my 2004 monograph, which is quoted at the very end of the chapter, but clearly not used before) and misinterprets other scholarship. A date of birth ca. 380 is the elder opinion: I have offered arguments for a later date (termini 403–27, probably early fifth century: Van Nuffelen (2004) 51–3); there is no need to suppose that Sozomen was educated by monks to explain his sympathy for that life style; neither of the passages (7.16.4, 19.3–5) invoked to sustain the idea of a visit to Rome actually necessitates such a hypothesis; there is much more recent literature on the title

of *scholasticus* than the 1921 *RE* article (see now M. Loukaki, ‘Σχολαστικός. Remarques sur le sens du terme à Byzance (IVe–XVe siècles)’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 109 (2016): 41–72, providing references to earlier work). Obviously, the author is more than welcome to disagree with my conclusions, but one would expect engagement with them. Simply sticking to older scholarship is strange. Yet other errors suggest the author has simply a limited grasp of her subject. One is astonished to read that ‘we cannot know what role Sozomen had in relation to the law, given that he does not appear in the list of compilers of the Codex Theodosianus’ (17), as if these would be the only lawyers known to us and as if it were not sufficiently clear from Sozomen’s history that he never reached the upper echelons of society. How the fact that Theodosius II was born in 401 and died in 450 helps to arrive at a plausible date of publication in 443, remains a mystery to me. To top it all, the old *terminus post quem* of the work (443), based on a reference in the Dedication (13) to a voyage by the emperor, is maintained by the author whilst referring to the article of Charlotte Roueché (‘Theodosius II, the Cities and the Date of the “Church History” of Sozomen’, *JThS* 37 (1986): 130–2) that actually refutes that date (cf. 41).

The second chapter compares the historical method of Sozomen to that of Socrates. B. emphasises Sozomen’s concern for truth, in which she finds the ‘modernity of his thought’ (23) and his closeness to the modern professional historian (39). Overtly descriptive, the chapter only discusses Sozomen’s proemium, in which he explains his usage of sources, and takes it at face value—disregarding the fact, highlighted over and over again by scholars of ancient historiography, that such statements are first and foremost rhetorical. If one confronts Sozomen’s theory to his actual practice (as in Van Nuffelen (2004) ch. 4), it becomes clear that he is far less reliant on archives, oral sources, eye-witnesses, and autopsy than he claims.

Chapter 3 discusses the praise of Theodosius II, especially in the Dedication, and that of Pulcheria in Book 9. It adheres to the traditional thesis that the praise for Pulcheria reflects her dominant position at court in the 440s, even if its first footnote cites approvingly the discussion to the contrary by myself (Van Nuffelen (2004) 83—but this treatment is then ignored in n. 19, where the traditional view is laid out). It also ignores recent scholarship on Theodosius II, esp. the recent volume edited by C. Kelly (*Theodosius II: Rethinking the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity* (2013)), which contains a chapter by L. Gardiner arguing that Socrates implicitly criticises Theodosius II. As Socrates is again the point of comparison for B., one would have expected her to discuss Gardiner’s revisionist position. The author does not sufficiently take into account that Book 9 is unfinished, which renders any generalising hypothesis about his attitude towards the court perilous, especially if the argument relies on the fact that someone is mentioned or not. She reaches the conclusion, in line with G.

Zecchini ('L'immagine di Teodosio II nella storiografia ecclesiastica', *Mediterraneo Antico* 5 (2002): 529–46), that the portrait by Socrates is 'predominantly theological' (53) ('religious' might be a better word), whilst that by Sozomen is more inspired by secular elements. For B., this points to Sozomen's desire to reshape the genre of ecclesiastical history by making it more classicising. The idea does not take into account that it is also very clear that Sozomen deprecates classicising history for not being able to grasp the true driving force behind events, God (Van Nuffelen (2004) 213–14). In sum, this chapter makes some valuable (if rarely original) observations, but fails to bring these into dialogue with other aspects of Sozomen's work in order to achieve a coherent picture. A final note: at 54 it is suggested that Sozomen only refers to the Bible once, but see Van Nuffelen (2004) 202.

Chapter 4 studies Sozomen's anti-pagan polemic, a point that has often been noted before. B. analyses the conspiracy against Valens (6.35), the destruction of the Serapeum (7.15), the nilometer affair (7.20), and the victory of Theodosius I over Eugenius (7.24). Still very descriptive, the discussion of the second of these case-studies is vitiated by a lack of knowledge of recent scholarship, especially (but not just) the work of Johannes Hahn (*Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt: Studien zu den Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Christen, Heiden und Juden im Osten des Römischen Reiches (von Konstantin bis Theodosius II)* (2004)) and also the recent work on the date by R. Burgess and J. H. F. Dijkstra ('The "Alexandrian World Chronicle", its *Consularia* and the Date of the Destruction of the Serapeum (with an Appendix on the List of *Praefecti Augustales*)', *Millennium* 10 (2013): 39–114). B. still follows older ideas (esp. J. Schwartz, 'La fin du Serapeum d'Alexandrie', in *Essays in Honour of C. Bradford Welles* (New Haven, 1966) 97–111) about possible shared sources between Rufinus and Sozomen, disregarding everything written since. She also accepts as a reality the destruction of numerous temples in the East, something that has been explicitly challenged, esp. by L. Lavan ('Introduction', in L. Lavan and M. Mulryan, edd., *The Archaeology of Late Antique Paganism* (Leiden, 2011) xv–lxv). The constant erroneous attribution of the Battle of the Frigidus to Theodosius II (70), not just in this chapter, is especially annoying (Theodosius I does not figure in the index). All of this is again followed by a comparison with Socrates, but what the differences in emphasis actually imply the author does not dwell upon. A minor note: 59 n. 4 cites Van Nuffelen (2004) 140–2 for parallels in Socrates, whilst those pages actually discuss Sozomen.

Chapter 5 opens without a definition of its theme, but first discusses Sozomen's references to miracles and providence. The opening sentence ('Sozomeno scrivo una storia provvidenziale'; 'la Provvidenza, che ricorre frequentemente nel corso dell'opera storica di Sozomeno' (81)) is the opposite of what I have written in Van Nuffelen (2004) 303: 'la providence divine est généralement absente'. The reader would be unable to notice this difference in opinion,

for she repeatedly cites my book in this chapter. B.'s understanding of providence seems muddled. Section 1.2 of Chapter 5 (p. 85) is entitled *τὶς πρόνοια* (*sic*) and discusses Sozomen's ideas on providence. For some reason the author seems to think that *τὶς πρόνοια* is the Greek rendering of 'providence' (cf. p. 81: 'la Provvidenza (*Τὶς πρόνοια*), che ricorre frequentemente nel corso dell'opera storica di Sozomeno'). A strange title for a chapter, for *Τὶς πρόνοια* would mean 'Which providence?'. Moreover, the expression *πρόνοιά τις* is typical for Socrates, who likes to emphasise the lack of certainty of mankind in noticing God at work (Van Nuffelen (2004) 296). It is never found in Sozomen (except at 4.13.4, but there it refers to action demanded from the emperor). Is some confusion taking place between Socrates and Sozomen? In fact, as a term, *pronoia* is rather rare in Sozomen (eleven occurrences), contrary to what the author suggests. Not all of these eleven instances, moreover, refer to God's providence. In fact, in section 1.2 B. discusses miracles, not episodes said to be happening by providence. One may wish to understand this as instances of divine providence, but B. should then explain why she thinks it is the case. The second section of the chapter analyses representations of monks, whereby B. often asks about the sources Sozomen used. That Van Nuffelen (2004) contains an appendix (with which, again, she should feel free to disagree, but obliged to engage) listing the sources for each chapter of Sozomen seems to have escaped her. That I also argued against treating the passages on monks as digressions (203) does not seem to have been noticed either.

Chapter 6 is a brief catalogue of later judgements on Sozomen, with a longer discussion of the testimony of Gregory the Great. In discussing Gregory the Great, *Letter* 7.31, which criticises the history of Sozomen, the author reaches the correct conclusion that Gregory had in his hands the *Historia Tripartita* of Cassiodorus. She fails to mention that his negative judgement is to be understood in the context of the Three Chapters Controversy, a fact that has been sufficiently discussed in previous scholarship on that schism (see already W. Jacob and R. Hanslik, *Cassiodori-Epiphanii Historia ecclesiastica tripartite* (Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum, 71; Vienna, 1952) vii–viii).

In the bibliography, one notices that only the 1960 edition by Bidez and Hansen is referenced, not the 1995 one, which contains twenty pages of corrections and additions. Only the first four books of Hansen's edition in the *Fontes christiani* series are included. There is much literature missing (besides the items already mentioned, see e.g. T. C. Ferguson, *The Past is Prologue. The Revolution of Nicene Historiography* (2005); E. Livrea, 'Costantino nella storiografia ecclesiastica del V secolo. Alcuni sogni e visioni', *Bizantinistica* 5 (2003): 171–88; C. Molé Ventura, 'Storia e narrativa nelle *Storie Ecclesiastiche*', *Salesianum* 67 (2005): 799–827).

Sadly, this is not a good book. There are too many errors, the author is not in command of scholarship and text, and the analysis is careless and superficial (I leave out recurring typos in quotations in languages other than Italian). A final disclaimer: since I am the author of the previous monograph on the Church historian Sozomen, it may look as if this review is a product of *ira et studium*. I can only hope I have given enough evidence in this review to sustain my judgement.

*Ghent University*

PETER VAN NUFFELEN  
peter.vannuffelen@ugent.be