

# ‘THE ONLY EVENT MIGHTIER THAN EVERY-ONE’S HOPE’: CLASSICAL HISTORIOGRAPHY AND EUSEBIUS’ PLAGUE NARRATIVE\*

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*Abstract:* Classicists have downplayed ecclesiastical historians’ participation in classical historiography. This study provides a test case for Christian engagement with classical historiography through a close reading of Eusebius’ account of the Plague of Cyprian in the *Ecclesiastical History* (7.21–2). Deploying carefully-selected quotations from Dionysius, the bishop of Alexandria in the 250s AD, Eusebius referenced Thucydides’ plague and invited comparison to further plague narratives in Diodorus, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and Josephus. Whereas pagans in plague narratives undergo violence and communal breakdown, Eusebius’ Christians celebrate Easter harmoniously and care courageously for plague victims. Eusebius’ plague also highlights divine vengeance on pagan Alexandrians, displays Christian virtue and knowledge, represents Christians as honourable sufferers, and underscores a Christian rejection of cosmic contingency.

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*Keywords:* Eusebius, Christian historiography, plague, classical canon, Thucydides, quotation

## 1. Classical Historiography and Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*

Historians of the Hellenistic and Roman periods used histories from Classical Greece as models for their narratives.<sup>1</sup> Not only authors who identified as Greeks and Romans but also those who embraced other identities—from the Babylonian Berossus and the Egyptian Manetho to the Jew Josephus and the Phoenician Philo of Byblos—wrote histories in Greek that valorised their peoples’ identities.<sup>2</sup> We should expect Hellenising historiography to have

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<sup>1</sup> Thucydides, Herodotus, and Xenophon, as well as Theopompus, Philistus, and Ephorus, in that order, provided models for later historians: Nicolai (1992), Matijašić (2018), Kennedy (2018).

<sup>2</sup> On Manetho and Berossus, see Dillery (2015); Philo’s fragments with commentary are in Baumgarten (1981).

attracted Christian authors as well. By the third century AD, highly educated Christians had developed a network, however fragile and divided, of *pepaideumenoí* throughout the eastern Empire who read the same paradigmatic texts as other Hellenophones.<sup>3</sup> While these Christians' writings often imitated biblical and other early Christian texts, and their theologies and historical narratives had to cohere with Scripture, there was no prohibition against drawing textual forms or rhetoric from classical discourse. Christians could deploy Greek historiography to prove their Hellenic bona fides,<sup>4</sup> or could compete with the tradition—or both.

The array of options from both Jewish/Christian and classicising traditions informed the first historian of the Christian church, Eusebius of Caesarea. Primarily a biblical editor, scholar, and educator,<sup>5</sup> between AD 311 and 315 Eusebius wrote the first history of the Christian church.<sup>6</sup> Yet in describing a religious organisation and its most accomplished leaders, controversies, and relations with outsiders, Eusebius eschewed numerous biblical, Jewish, or Christian models for narratives about the past. Biblical quotations aside, few of Eusebius' forms, themes, and rhetorical tactics evoke the Torah, Deuteronomistic History, Chronicles, Maccabean histories, gospels and Acts, or the novelistic Christian narratives available to him.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Eusebius imitated established non-Christian Greek genres:<sup>8</sup> his profiles of Christians followed the form of collective biographies of intellectuals such as Diogenes Laertius'; his heavy use of quotation resembled Greek

<sup>3</sup> The seminal study of this network is Nautin (1961). Paradigmatic texts: see Cribiore (2001) 220–44; on Christians continuing classical education, see Beavis (2000) 417–20.

<sup>4</sup> As did the first Christian historian, Julius Africanus, who drew chronological structures, research practices, and rhetoric from Greek chronicles (though the fragmentary state of his works render such a conclusion provisional): see, e.g., Roberto (2011) 67–106; cf. Burgess and Kulikowski (2013) 114–9.

<sup>5</sup> Biblical scholar and editor: e.g., Grafton and Williams (2006) 178–208; educator: Johnson (2014) 51–84.

<sup>6</sup> Whereas, following Laqueur (1929), many scholars once posited a first edition of the *History* in the 280s or 290s, most now accept the composition hypothesis of Burgess (1997), who advocates two versions between 313 and 316 and a third version in 324 or 325. While Neri (2012), Cassin–Debié–Perrin (2012), and Johnson (2014) 104–12 present alternative hypotheses, none posits a first version before 311.

<sup>7</sup> James Corke-Webster must look hard to find a probable intertextual relationship between the *Ecclesiastical History* and the Maccabean histories: Corke-Webster (2019) 159–63. On Eusebius' deviation from Luke-Acts, see Marksches (2013). Eusebius and apocryphal literature: cf. Carriker (2003) 162–3, 234, 310.

<sup>8</sup> To be sure, scriptural texts written in Greek already imitated classical genres, most prominently in 2 Maccabees and in Luke-Acts; on the former, see, e.g., Schwartz (2008), esp. 65–71; on the latter, see, e.g., Moles (2011) and (2014).

anthological collection; and his elaborate syntax and heavy, abstract style echoed classical rhetoricians.<sup>9</sup>

Despite these Hellenic features, scholars—including classicists, classical historians, and early Christian specialists—rarely consider Eusebius' *History* together with other Greek histories from the classical Greek through Roman imperial periods;<sup>10</sup> when they do, they almost invariably assert that the *History* was a wholly original product of a scholar immersed in peculiarly Christian intellectual habits.<sup>11</sup> The reasons for the *History*'s exclusion from these scholars' consideration range from the unconvincing to the arbitrary. Eusebius' date, firmly within the period that moderns have dubbed Late Antiquity, should not exclude his history, since the usual rearguard of classical historiography, Ammianus Marcellinus, was active two generations after Eusebius' death. Other supposedly exceptional traits of Eusebius—his biblical religion, his supernatural causation and emphasis on free will, his focus on religious institutions and practices—also characterise Josephus' histories and have not excluded Josephus from classicists' consideration.<sup>12</sup> The one possibly valid reason for exclusion would be to assert that Eusebius' non-historical forms (e.g., extensive quotation, bibliographical listings) render his *historia* different in kind from *historia* in the Herodotean/Thucydidean tradition.<sup>13</sup> Was what Eusebius called *ekklēsiastikē historia* a completely novel kind of narrative?

I have argued recently that the originality of Eusebian historiography in fact lay in its combination of previous genres, both historiographical and non-historiographical, most of them drawn from the classical Greek tradition.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Biographies: see Alexandre (1998), DeVore (2013a). Chronicles: Mosshammer (1979) remains the classic study; see also Burgess and Kulikowski (2013) 119–27. Anthologies: compare *HE* 1.1.4 with Barns (1950) 132 n. 1, but cf. Corke-Webster (2019) 49–52. Syntax and style: see esp. Clay (2012) 37–40.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Fornara (1983), Marincola (1997), Feldherr (2009), and Pitcher (2009) never mention the *Ecclesiastical History*, and Marincola (2007) 297, 574 devotes just two and a half paragraphs to the *History* despite its seminal character and origins in the Roman Empire. By contrast, recent general works in other languages have fully included Eusebius' *History*: e.g., Lachenaud (2004), Näf (2010).

<sup>11</sup> Most quotably, Harries (1991) 269 says of Eusebius' supposed total originality that 'ecclesiastical history ... sprang, fully-formed, from the head of Eusebius of Caesarea.' Longer works—most by specialists in early Christianity rather than classicists or ancient historians—that represent Eusebian historiography as wholly alien to the classical tradition include Grant (1980), Chesnut (1986), Mendels (1999), Verdoner (2011); cf. Carotenuto (2001), Prinziwalli (2012), Torres Guerra (2016).

<sup>12</sup> Among the works in n. 10 above, Marincola (1997) and (2007), and Feldherr (2009) devote full consideration to Josephus.

<sup>13</sup> E.g., Schwartz (1907) 1395, who called Eusebius' *historia* 'eine Sammlung von überliefertem Material', or more recently Treadgold (2007) 33–41.

<sup>14</sup> DeVore (2013b).

Eusebius' use of classical genres (including national and war historiography) should not be surprising. The Caesarean scholar knew several previous Greek historians—most obviously Josephus, but also Herodotus, Thucydides, Dionysius of Halicarnassus,<sup>15</sup> and Diodorus—quite well.<sup>16</sup> And Eusebius follows traditional Greek historiographical practice in many ways.<sup>17</sup> He wrote from the foundation of his nation (*ethnos*)<sup>18</sup> until the present but with a prehistory (*archaiologia*, *HE* 2. pref. 1) extending that nation's origins back to the origins of humanity, like Dionysius of Halicarnassus or Josephus; for his chronology Eusebius correlated events with Roman heads of state, like Diodorus or Dionysius of Halicarnassus; and Eusebius narrated through the perspective of his own nation, like many Greek and Roman historians. Moreover, it seems *a priori* that strategic allusion to earlier classical historians would bolster Eusebius' authority. Such allusions would not only exhibit his elite status as a *pepaideumenos*,<sup>19</sup> but also compare Christian identity to the identities from the ancient literary canon that ancient readers knew best.

This paper assesses Eusebius' engagement with classical historiography through a case study of one episode in Eusebius' *History*, the plague of AD 249 through the 260s (sometimes called the Plague of Cyprian after the Carthaginian bishop who described the plague at length). The plague seems to have shocked much of the Roman Empire:<sup>20</sup> Kyle Harper's pioneering studies have demonstrated that it killed many Roman subjects and probably

<sup>15</sup> This paper refers to three men named Dionysius: the bishop of Alexandria from AD 248 to 264; the Augustan rhetorician from Halicarnassus; and the tyrant of Syracuse in the fourth century BC. Where 'Dionysius' appears without a toponym, I refer to the bishop of Alexandria.

<sup>16</sup> Eusebius' extensive quotations of Josephus are well-known: see *HE* 1.5–3.8 *passim* and Inowlocki (2006) *passim* on Josephus' appearances in Eusebius' other works. Herodotus and Thucydides: Eusebius' *Theophany* described Herodotus' *logos* about Croesus in some detail (2.69) and summarised several disparate episodes from Thucydides (2.68); on Thucydides' plague in particular, Jerome's translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (2.LXXXVIIb, c p. 115 Helm; cf. the Armenian translation of the *Chronicle* p. 194 Karst) referred to the Athenian plague directly before noting Thucydides' *floruit*, suggesting that Eusebius associated that plague with Thucydides. Diodorus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus: Eusebius used Diodorus at length in his *Chronicle* and *Praeparatio Evangelica*, while Dionysius' *Roman Antiquities* provided much information about the Roman Republic for the *Chronicle*. See Mondello (2015) 42–58, 62–77.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the content of this paragraph see DeVore (2013b) 26–39.

<sup>18</sup> Eusebius represented Christians as an *ethnos* (*HE* 1.4.2, 4.7.10, 10.4.19) in accordance with second-century Christian apologetic. See Johnson (2006) 225–7.

<sup>19</sup> *Paideia* as elite self-representation: the classic works are Gleason (1995) and Whitmarsh (2001).

<sup>20</sup> 'Shock': cf. Morris (2017).

disrupted the Empire's economy, bureaucracy, and military to some extent.<sup>21</sup> The pestilential upheaval is unlikely to have been forgotten by the time Eusebius wrote his *History* in the early 310s.<sup>22</sup>

This plague, I contend, presented an opportunity to compare Christians with non-Christians. Plague scenes in canonical Greek authors featured an array of *topoi* that imperial *pepaideumenoí* could transpose into their own narratives.<sup>23</sup> Among writers of history,<sup>24</sup> Thucydides wrote the most famous plague. His searing account of Athenian suffering in 429 BC—proceeding from the geographical origins of the disease, to its symptoms, to attempts to treat it, to the despair and moral breakdown that Athenians ultimately underwent—soon became a *locus classicus*.<sup>25</sup> Comparable extended plague narratives adorned the pages of many subsequent Greek historians. Diodorus Siculus told of a plague that rocked the Carthaginians as they besieged Syracuse in 396 BC; Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *Roman Antiquities* described a plague that ravaged the early Roman Republic in the 470s BC; and Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* described a plague as divine punishment of King David for conducting a census.<sup>26</sup> Since, as noted above, Eusebius knew each of these Hellenophone historians, he had several Greek historiographical plague narratives to evoke. His narrative, I show, quotes Thucydides, contains a plausible allusion to Diodorus, and features several *topoi* shared with the other Greek plague narratives. A table of key *topoi* of plague narratives is provided as Table I.

<sup>21</sup> Harper (2015) and (2016) provide *Quellenforschung* and assert a maximalist impact; Parkin (1992) 63–4 is more sceptical of extensive demographic impact.

<sup>22</sup> Eusebius may have witnessed cases of it as a child, since he was born in the early 260s (*HE* 3.28.3, 7.26.3 with 7.28.3) and the plague continued its damage through *c.* 270. Eusebius also describes a plague under Maximinus Daia briefly in *HE* 9.8, a passage that deserves separate analysis.

<sup>23</sup> See Kennedy (2018) 22–3, 112–35, 150–5 with references to earlier works.

<sup>24</sup> The first classic Greek plague, of course, was Apollo's famous attack on the Achaeans in Book 1 of the *Iliad*, esp. 48–52. Although Eusebius knew Homer, I detect no Homeric allusions in Eusebius' plague narrative.

<sup>25</sup> The younger contemporary of Thucydides, Philistus of Syracuse, wrote a history of Sicily that probably described the plague described by Diodorus (14.70.4–71) that ravaged the Carthaginian military during a siege of Syracuse in 396 BC. While Philistus' plague narrative may underlie Diodorus' narrative (see, e.g., Meister (1967) 91–4), it is highly unlikely that Eusebius knew Philistus and so Philistus draws no further consideration here.

<sup>26</sup> Diod. 14.70.4–71 (cf. prev. n.); D.H. *AR* 10.53; Jos. *AJ* 7.321–8. On Josephus' plague, see Begg (1994).

**Table I**

	<b>Thuc.</b> <b>2.47.3-54</b>	<b>Diod.</b> <b>14.70.4-71</b>	<b>D.H. AR</b> <b>10.53</b>	<b>Jos. AJ</b> <b>7.318-26</b>	<b>Eus. HE</b> <b>7.21-2</b>
Community before Plague	2.35-46, 2.52.1-2	14.60, 63-64		7.318-320	7.21.2-8, 7.22.4-5
Failure of physicians	2.47.3-4	14.71.3	10.53.1		
Origins of plague	2.48.1-3	14.70.4 with 14.63.1		7.321-323	7.21.9
Plague symptoms	2.49, 2.51.1	14.70.6, 14.71.2-3		7.324-325	
Condition of corpses, esp. odour	2.50.1-2	14.71.2	10.53.4	7.325	Cf. 7.21.8
Victims' psychological response	2.51.3-4, 6, 2.52.1-2	14.71.3			7.22-6
Care for patients	2.51.4	14.71.1, 3-4	10.53.1		7.22.7
Demographic consequences			10.53.1	7.326	7.21.9
Death of caretakers	2.51.5-6	14.71.4	10.53.2	7.326	7.22.8
Disposal of victims	2.52.3-4	14.71.1	10.53.3-4	Cf. 7.326	7.22.9-10
Lament for victims				7.327	7.22.2-3
Communal breakdown	2.51.4, 2.52.3, 2.53	14.71.4			7.21.2-8, 7.22.10
Attempted cultic remedies	2.53-4-2.54		10.53.5-6, 10.54.1	7.327-328	
Political/military consequences	2.57.1, 2.58.2-3, 2.59-65	14.72-77	10.53-7-8, 10.54.2	7.329-334	7.21.9-10

As his source for the plague of Cyprian Eusebius used Dionysius of Alexandria, a well-educated Christian who witnessed and wrote contemporary accounts about the plague. Dionysius' material gave Eusebius the means to construct a plague narrative rich with classical allusions.<sup>27</sup> I argue that through this narrative Eusebius contrasts the 'orthodox' Christian church systematically with identity-groups from classical Greek histories, while exhibiting the classical knowledge required of a *pepaideumenos*. In doing so, I infer, the Caesarean scholar asserts divine vengeance on non-Christian Alexandrians, superior Christian virtue and knowledge, largescale Christian suffering, and divine providence as governing Christians' success.

<sup>27</sup> Since this is a study of Eusebius' plague narrative and its role in the *Ecclesiastical History*, and Eusebius seems not to have known sources about the plague of Cyprian other than Dionysius, I consider other accounts of this plague only where they reveal an alternative mode for describing the plague that Eusebius did not pursue. The earliest surviving alternative sources of the plague include Cyprian, *To Demetrianus* 10-11 and *On Mortality* 14-16, and Pontius, *Life of Cyprian* 9: see Harper (2015) 225-41. Although Eusebius could use Latin sources (cf. *HE* 4.8.8 and Torres Guerra (2014)), he knew almost none of Cyprian's writing: cf. *HE* 6.43.3, 7.2.

## 2. Quotation and Authorial Agency: Three Methodological Considerations

As with much of his narrative of the 250s and 260s,<sup>28</sup> Eusebius outsources most of his description of the Plague of Cyprian to the voice of Dionysius of Alexandria. Most of what we know about Dionysius comes from Eusebius, via quotations in the *History* (6.40–7.25) and Eusebius' *Praeparatio Evangelica* (14.23–27). Equipped with a formidable rhetorical education,<sup>29</sup> Dionysius came from a family in the decurion class of Alexandria and, after teaching in the famed catechetical school associated with the famous Christian intellectuals Clement and Origen,<sup>30</sup> became bishop of Alexandria between about 248 and 264. Dionysius wrote on subjects as diverse as cosmology, Christian calendar and ritual, ecclesiastical boundaries, literary criticism, defences of his own actions, and even imperial panegyric.<sup>31</sup> His best-known works, thanks to Eusebius, are his letters to churches ranging from Rome to Mesopotamia, as well as correspondence with many churches within Egypt.<sup>32</sup> Dionysius' surviving works cite several authors known to imperial *pepaideumenois*, including Homer, Hesiod, Plato, Epicurus, and, as seen below, Thucydides.<sup>33</sup> Dionysius, then, provided an outstanding model bishop for Eusebius, whose agenda included representing Christians as educated, literate Hellenophone elites.<sup>34</sup>

Even though Eusebius had other written sources, oral traditions, and some monuments available for representing ecclesiastical events of the 250s and 260s,<sup>35</sup> for this period he excerpted Dionysius' letters at great length and

<sup>28</sup> The stretch of the *History* focused on Dionysius (*HE* 6.40–7.26) includes more of Dionysius' words than Eusebius' own!

<sup>29</sup> On Dionysius' background in general, see Bienert (1978) 71–75, Jakab (2001) 3–4. Decurion class: see *HE* 7.11.18 with Bienert (1978) 72. Education: see in general Miller (1933) 2–25 on Dionysius' rhetorical skill; the Armenian translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* (p. 225 Karst) claims that Dionysius 'war als Meisterredner zu seinen Zeiten überaus rühmlich ausgezeichnet'.

<sup>30</sup> While Eusebius claims that Dionysius studied under Origen (*HE* 6.29.4), Bienert (1978) 87–134 shows that Dionysius was most likely a theological and ecclesiastical opponent of Origen in Alexandria.

<sup>31</sup> Dionysius' works are listed in *HE* 6.46, 7.20, 7.26 and in Jerome, *de Viris Illustribus* 69. For assessments of the known fragments of Dionysius, see Bienert (1978) esp. 28–70, Andresen (1979).

<sup>32</sup> Most *reliquiae* of Dionysius were collected in Feltoe (1904). See also Conybeare (1910) for important Armenian *reliquiae* identified later.

<sup>33</sup> See Miller (1933) 39–52 for references.

<sup>34</sup> See DeVore (2013a), (2014), and now Corke-Webster (2019), 89–120.

<sup>35</sup> Oral traditions and monuments are Eusebius' sources for *HE* 7.14–19, and the Caesarean scholar names acquaintances in *HE* 7.32 from whom he surely learned about ecclesiastical events (cf. *HE* 7.11.26); Eusebius could have said more about the council

usually verbatim.<sup>36</sup> Such direct quotation of earlier texts exemplifies Eusebius' most striking departure from earlier Greek historiography. The Caesarean scholar inserted far more verbatim quotation than Greek narrative historians before him,<sup>37</sup> with perhaps just under half of the *Ecclesiastical History* consisting of other authors' words.<sup>38</sup> Eusebius' narration by quotation demands methodological caution from any scholar attempting to identify his narrative aims and strategies.<sup>39</sup> Whom should we credit as the speaker of Eusebius' quotations?

Obviously Eusebius' framing of a source's words must be treated differently than the source's words themselves: whereas Eusebius exercised full control over his framing,<sup>40</sup> he is unlikely to have invented entire passages out of whole cloth and attributed them to his sources—or at least, unlikely to have done so frequently.<sup>41</sup> Eusebius' sources, then, limited the creativity that he could exercise in representing the church.<sup>42</sup> In considering Eusebius' agency over Dionysius' words about the plague, we must consider three ways in which Eusebius could have altered his source: by selecting certain portions of his *Vorlage* while omitting others; by altering the wording of excerpts from his *Vorlage*; and by displacing the quotations chronologically.

against Paul of Samosata in AD 268 than he did (*HE* 7.27–30; cf. Lang (2000) for an overview of the sources); and Eusebius had several works of Anatolius of Alexandria, a Christian philosopher active in the second half of the third century, from whose works he could likely have drawn more information (*HE* 7.32.6–21).

<sup>36</sup> The foregrounding of Dionysius is intentional and conspicuous: Eusebius declares in his preface to Book 7 that Dionysius 'will help us in working out the seventh book of the *Ecclesiastical History* in his own words [*ἰδίαις φωναῖς συνεκπονήσει*], relating [*ὑφηγούμενος*] each of the events of his own time in part through the letters that he has left behind.' Cf. above, n. 28.

<sup>37</sup> Among earlier Greek historical writers, only biographers such as Philostratus, Diogenes Laertius, and Porphyry, who do quote their biographical subjects and witnesses to their subjects' lives extensively, use verbatim quotation comparably: Momigliano (1990) 140–1; Carotenuto (2001) 104; DeVore (2013a) 172.

<sup>38</sup> Treadgold (2007) 34.

<sup>39</sup> By 'quotation' (or 'excerpt') I mean passages where Eusebius claims to reproduce another voice as opposed to paraphrasing or summarising; the latter are not my concern here. The most extensive study of quotations across Eusebius' works is Inowlocki (2006), but see now Corke-Webster (2019) 47–52. For a catalogue of quotations in the *Ecclesiastical History* see Munnich (2012); the most extensive study of quotations in the *History* remains Carotenuto (2001).

<sup>40</sup> Eusebius' framing of quoted documents highlights themes for readers, sometimes manipulatively. See, e.g., Mendels (1999) 31–2; DeVore (2014) 242.

<sup>41</sup> The famous Testimonium Flavianum, Josephus' much-disputed notice about Jesus (*Jos. AJ* 18.63–4 = *Eus. HE* 1.11.8–9; *DE* 3.5.105–6), is one passage proposed as a wholesale Eusebian invention: see, e.g., Olson (2013). Whealey (2016) surveys the debate.

<sup>42</sup> One good discussion of the methodology of using source-texts is Magny (2014) 21–35.



### Selection and Omission of Quotations

The full quotation of authors with diverging agendas and content could potentially have let unintended information into the *History*, complicating or even contradicting Eusebius' narrative.<sup>43</sup> To address this contingency, Eusebius frequently intrudes to remove information from excerpts,<sup>44</sup> and on some occasions he demonstrably excludes content that would have violated qualities he wanted to represent in the church.

Two examples can illustrate how Eusebius' selection and omission affected his representation of the church.<sup>45</sup> First, in Book 2 of the *History* (*HE* 2.17) Eusebius proffered quotations and paraphrases from Philo of Alexandria's *On the Contemplative Life* to argue at length that an ascetic community called the Therapeutae, described by Philo as Jewish, was in fact proto-Christian. The most meticulous student of Eusebius' quotation, Sabrina Inowlocki, has systematically compared Eusebius' quotations with his Philonic *Vorlage*, showing that the *History* omitted Philo's comparisons of the Therapeutae to Bacchants or worshipers of Cybele, Philo's descriptions of the ascetics' Sabbath observance, and a scene of their symposia. The deleted content would have rendered problematic Eusebius' representation of these ascetics as Christian.<sup>46</sup> In a second section, Eusebius' description of the eruption of a Christian controversy on rebaptizing lapsed Christians in the 250s (*HE* 7.2–5), the *History* represents Dionysius as suppressing his partisanship to referee an ecclesiastical dispute. Whereas the Roman church readmitted lapsed Christians with no rebaptism, the Carthaginian church demanded a new baptism for readmission. Dionysius can only appear impartial because Eusebius cuts sections of Dionysius' correspondence, extant in Armenian

<sup>43</sup> One would expect, if Eusebius checked sources about the same events assiduously, that he would notice discrepancies and either (as Thucydides advises) try to resolve them or (like Herodotus) contrast the differing sources. Yet Eusebius rarely criticises content from 'orthodox' Christian sources (one exception: *HE* 3.39.12–3), suggesting that he suppressed conflicting information if he did not alter his quotations. See DeVore (2014) 235–43 on two episodes in which Eusebius silenced conflicting voices, even if he did not demonstrably falsify quoted passages.

<sup>44</sup> E.g., Eusebius declares that he has removed content from the *Martyrs of Lyons and Vienne*, at *HE* 5.1.4, 36, 62; 5.2.1, 5, 6; and from Cornelius' letter to Fabius of Antioch, at *HE* 6.43.7, 13, 16, 17, 18, 20, 21). In the passages discussed below Eusebius claims to have removed content at *HE* 7.22.7. Eusebius' interventions are sometimes so surgical as to leave only incomplete sentences as quotations from his sources: *HE* 2.17.13, 3.39.10, 4.16.6, 5.8.5, 6.43.16.

<sup>45</sup> See Inowlocki (2006) 168–72 for other examples from Eusebius' works.

<sup>46</sup> Inowlocki (2004) 314–18; omitted passages: Philo, *On the Contemplative Life* 12, 30–3, 36–67, 78.

translation, that denounced rebaptism and thus placed Dionysius firmly on the Roman side.<sup>47</sup>

In short, Eusebius actively selected at least the major outlines of included content, even if some undesired details slipped into his text. The insertions of information that obviously violates Eusebius' agenda are minor and brief. For example, whereas Eusebius' hostility to the Apocalypse of John is palpable, a number of quotations in the *History* allude reverently to Revelation.<sup>48</sup> While some stray information that Eusebius would have preferred to delete surely remained in some quotations, Eusebius generally chose his quotations carefully enough to reinforce his representation of the church.

Eusebius' sometime removal of key information from his sources has implications for reading his plague narratives. In cases where expected information is absent from a Eusebian quotation, it is possible that Eusebius deleted that information from his source text. Eusebius' deletion of information, then, is one reason why I credit Eusebius, and not his source, with an absence of expected information, such as *topoi* expected in a plague account that are absent.<sup>49</sup> If an expected *topos* is absent, we cannot assume that Eusebius' source-text omitted it.

### **Alterations of Quotations**

Eusebius' second means of exercising agency over his source was to alter the wording of quoted passages. To be sure, it is difficult to establish alterations with high certainty. Even where manuscripts of both the *History* and a given source-text survive, it is possible that later copyists either altered Eusebius'

<sup>47</sup> See DeVore (2014) 237–9; Armenian *reliquiae* in Conybeare (1910). 'Suppressing his partisanship' modifies my earlier argument. According to my earlier argument Eusebius concealed Dionysius' actual partisanship on rebaptism entirely; and indeed in the passage about the initial stages of the controversy (*HE* 7.2–5) Eusebius did, as the Armenian *reliquiae* show, omit portions of Dionysius' letters that criticised rebaptism while quoting the portions that urged ecclesiastical unity, which made Dionysius appear neutral at this early stage of the rebaptism debate. But subsequently, in *HE* 7.7.4 and 7.9.2–5 (from later in the controversy) Eusebius quotes passages from later letters of Dionysius that do disclose Dionysius' partisanship after his initial staging of the controversy, *pace* DeVore (2014) 238 n. 77. So instead of simply being impartial in the dispute, Eusebius' Dionysius comes off as suppressing his partisanship for the sake of ecclesiastical unity in *HE* 7.2–5, and only revealing his partisanship later. Moreover, it is notable that in *HE* 7.7.4 and 7.9.2–5 Dionysius presents his position on rebaptism as a local practice, leaving the door open for other churches to practice rebaptism; the Armenian *reliquiae* are harsher to practitioners of rebaptism.

<sup>48</sup> Hostility to Revelation: *HE* 3.25.2, 4; 3.39.3–6; 7.25; allusions to Revelation: *HE* 4.23.26, 5.1.10, 5.1.58, 5.2.3, 7.10.2–3.

<sup>49</sup> As I suggest below, Eusebius' readiness to omit passages from his *Vorlagen* might explain that absence of symptoms from his plague narrative.

manuscripts to conform to sources' manuscripts, or else altered the manuscripts of Eusebius' sources to conform to Eusebian manuscripts.<sup>50</sup> Nonetheless, there are numerous discrepancies between texts of Eusebius' *History* and the texts of his *Vorlagen* where it seems certain that Eusebius changed the text. In one example, in Book 2 Eusebius misquoted Josephus' narrative of the Judean King Agrippa I's death. Where Josephus wrote that Agrippa saw an owl sitting on a rope in a vision before his death, in Eusebius' quotation Agrippa saw an angel, a vision that would corroborate the angel who struck Agrippa down in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>51</sup> In another example, when excerpting the assertion from Tertullian's *Apology* that Tiberius protected the nascent church, Eusebius shifts from his translation of Tertullian into a genitive absolute about how Tiberius was fulfilling God's providence, a Eusebian theme; there is no notice as to where Tertullian's words end and Eusebius' begin.<sup>52</sup> Inowlocki has noted dozens of such alterations across Eusebius' works, concluding that Eusebius 'occasionally modified the text cited, mainly for theological and apologetic reasons. These changes proved to be infrequent but this makes their impact all the more powerful.'<sup>53</sup> Such tampering was one way Eusebius could control the potential dissonance and cacophony latent in many voices assembled in the *History*, and it is quite possible likewise that Eusebius tampered with Dionysius' letters.

Eusebius' occasional modification of sources' wording reinforces the conclusion of the previous section that Eusebius' agency lies behind absences of expected *topoi* in quotations. If Eusebius did not always refrain from changing his sources' wording, he could readily have infused a quotation with a *topos* that was not in his *Vorlage*. The absence of information in a quotation, therefore, must ultimately be Eusebius' choice.

These verbal alterations, together with Eusebius' omissions, provide multiple methods for Eusebius to adjust his sources' messages. Without an independent text of Eusebius' source for comparison with the *History*, then, we cannot pinpoint exactly where Eusebius' words displace the words of his sources. For quotations where we have no independent text of Eusebius' source, therefore, my practice is to read the words as substantially Eusebius' content even though the words belong ostensibly to another voice. Accordingly, in this paper I underscore the joint agency behind Eusebius' quotations of Dionysius of Alexandria by calling the narrator of these quotations 'Dionysius/Eusebius'.

<sup>50</sup> Inowlocki (2006) 85–90.

<sup>51</sup> Jos. *AJ* 19.346 = *HE* 2.10.6 = Acts 19.23; Inowlocki (2006) 190.

<sup>52</sup> *HE* 2.2.6 = Tert. *Apol.* 5.2. Providence as a Eusebian theme: see below, n. 119 and below, §5.

<sup>53</sup> Inowlocki (2006) 191–222 (quotation from 221). Other likely Eusebian changes include *HE* 4.15.9 = *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 5.1 and *HE* 5.6.5 = Irenaeus, *Against all Heresies* 3.3.3.

### Chronological Displacement<sup>54</sup>

Eusebius' third means of exercising agency over his sources is in the sequencing of quoted texts in the narrative of the *History*. Even if Eusebius transcribed his quotations entirely faithfully, he could distort their meaning by shifting texts from their historical context. Although generations of suspicious scholars have mostly reaffirmed Eusebius' chronological arrangement, he sometimes displaces texts quite egregiously. Most prominently, Eusebius places events from two martyr narratives, those of *Carpus, Pappylus, and Agathonice* and of *Pionius*, which describe executions from Decius' reign around AD 250, in the early reign of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus.<sup>55</sup> This clustering of martyrdoms immediately after Marcus and Lucius became emperors (*HE* 4.14.10) creates the impression of an outbreak of persecution at the start of these emperors' joint reign.<sup>56</sup>

The chronology of Dionysius' letters about the plague has prompted much scholarly debate.<sup>57</sup> Eusebius places the outbreak under Gallienus by quoting the letters about the plague in Book 7, chapters 21 and 22 of the *History*, after Gallienus became emperor in 260 (7.13).<sup>58</sup> Although most scholars have accepted Eusebius' dating,<sup>59</sup> there are serious problems with the Gallienan date. A textual problem is that Eusebius' dating contradicts his own *Chronicle*, on which he claims to have based the chronology of the *History* (*HE* 1.1.6); the

<sup>54</sup> I owe this section to acute comments from one of the anonymous reviewers.

<sup>55</sup> The *Martyrdom of Pionius* mentions Decius explicitly (2.1), and several indices indicate that events in *Carpus* occurred under Decius: see Jones (2012). Probably Eusebius placed these martyrdoms during Marcus' and Lucius' reign because he dated the martyrdom of Polycarp to those years and read the other martyr narratives in a collection with the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* (see *HE* 4.15.46); see also the next note. Another likely Eusebian displacement is the violence of *HE* 7.11.20–5, which almost certainly took place under Decius but which Eusebius dates to Valerian: see, e.g., Bienert (1978) 143–4, but cf. Tissot (1997).

<sup>56</sup> To make Lucius Verus a persecutor, Eusebius fudged the emperor-date for the *Martyrs of Lyon and Vienne* to date the mass martyrdom to 'the seventeenth year of Antoninus Verus' (*HE* 5. pref. 1), who gives way to Marcus Aurelius as sole emperor (cf. *HE* 5.5.1). Eusebius thus avoids acknowledging that Marcus Aurelius, a popular emperor in Late Antiquity, approved a mass martyrdom (*HE* 5.1.44, 47). Eusebius was well aware that Verus did not reign for seventeen years: cf. Eusebius' *Chronicle* CCXXXVIIIk p. 205 Helm = Armenian *Chronicle* p. 222 Karst, which has Verus dying in AD 169.

<sup>57</sup> Tissot (1997) 60–1 n. 41 has a convenient table with differing datings for Dionysius' correspondence.

<sup>58</sup> Chapters 14 to 19 are about events outside of Egypt mostly in Palestine, while *HE* 7.20 is one of Eusebius' many catalogues of Dionysius of Alexandria's writings.

<sup>59</sup> E.g., Andresen (1979) 414–28; Tissot (1997).

*Chronicle* situates the plague in Alexandria in AD 253.<sup>60</sup> A more serious, *a priori* problem is that dating this outbreak of the plague under Gallienus would imply that Alexandria suffered such an acute outbreak of the plague more than ten years after Cyprian experienced the epidemic in Carthage. Although the plague of Cyprian does seem to have recurred until around 270,<sup>61</sup> it seems implausible that Dionysius should have circulated such a vivid, harrowing description of responses to the plague when Romans had been experiencing it for more than ten years.<sup>62</sup>

In his 1978 book about Dionysius, Wolfgang Bienert proposed what I believe to be the most likely historical dating of Dionysius' plague letters. Bienert noted that the events described in Dionysius' letters quoted in 7.21 and 7.22 closely parallel the events described in another letter of Dionysius, to bishop Fabius of Antioch, that Eusebius quotes in Book 6, chapters 41, 42, and 44. The three letters assume that violence in the streets between two factions, a local persecution of Christians, a series of martyrdoms, and a short peace appear in the same sequence, and the letters even share diction in describing these events. Since Dionysius' letter to Fabius was written in 250, it seems likely that the two letters about the plague were also written around that year, rather than in the early 260s, during Gallienus' sole reign.<sup>63</sup>

By inserting Dionysius' plague letters in the reign of Gallienus, therefore, Eusebius shifted the letters not only from the likely time of their composition, but even from his own previous chronological placement of the event in his *Chronicle*. He must have had a reason for sequencing his plague narrative there.<sup>64</sup> I argue below that Eusebius created a revealing thematic resonance by placing the plague—and Christians' responses to it—in Gallienus' rule.

<sup>60</sup> Jerome, *Chronicle* 2.CCLVIIIa p. 219 Helm = the Armenian translation of the *Chronicle* p. 226 Karst. Accepting *c.* 253 as the historical date for Dionysius' correspondence about the plague is, e.g., Sordi (1962) 127–32. In presuming that the sequence of events in the *History* should be respected, Tissot (1997) 60 neglects the chronological discrepancy between the *History* and the *Chronicle*, even though Tissot (1997) 53 n. 11 knows the problem.

<sup>61</sup> Harper (2015) 236.

<sup>62</sup> It is worth noting that methodologically the event of the plague on the one hand, and the composition of the texts that describe them on the other, need not necessarily have occurred in close chronological succession. In this case, however, I see no reason to doubt that the letters were written shortly after the events they describe.

<sup>63</sup> *HE* 6.41.1, 5, 8–9; 7.21.1–2, 5–6; 7.22.4–6; Bienert (1978) 145–56, esp. 150–4, followed by Strobel (1993) 190–1, 199. Cf. Tissot (1997) 55–6 for objections to Bienert's dating, which I find unconvincing. If, on the contrary, the alternative dating of Sordi (1962) 127–32 of the letter to AD 252/3 is correct, then the implication still holds that Eusebius displaced the plague letters.

<sup>64</sup> The displacement may be due merely to the organisation of the collection of Dionysius' letters (cf. Andresen (1979) 414–21). Eusebius says in 7.20.1 that Dionysius left behind festal letters, and the letters of 7.21 and 7.22 are of this genre (including several festal

### 3. Alexandrians and the Plague: *Ecclesiastical History* 7.21

Before discussing Eusebius' use of *topoi* from plague narratives, I offer a brief summary of the *Ecclesiastical History*'s chapters on the plague of Cyprian. Like almost all of the chapters of the *History*, chapters 21 and 22 each have a title (*kephalaion*) that indicates its subject;<sup>65</sup> the title of chapter 21 is 'On Occurrences in Alexandria' (Περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ συμβάντων).<sup>66</sup> In the chapter Eusebius quotes from a letter of Dionysius to an Egyptian bishop named Hierax. In the quotations Dionysius/Eusebius begins with a biblically-inflected lamentation on riots in Alexandria but transitions to a description of rotting corpses in the Nile and then notes the scale of epidemic mortality in Alexandria. Zooming in from Alexandria in general to Christians' specific experience is chapter 22, titled 'On the Infectious Plague' (Περὶ τῆς ἐπισκηψίας νόσου). Here, in excerpts from a circular Easter letter by Dionysius,<sup>67</sup> the Christians first undergo public exclusion and death at the hands of the Alexandrian community, and then they, like other Alexandrians, experience the plague. The chapter lingers on the Christians' care for victims of the epidemic.

At the beginning of chapter 21, Eusebius, in his own voice, frames a festal letter from the Alexandrian bishop as being about *polemos kai stasis*, using the word *stasis* three times (7.21.1–2). Readers can expect a violent uprising in the city of Alexandria, and indeed Dionysius' voice, after a complaint about the difficulty of communicating amid the current upheaval (*HE* 7.21.2–3), describes an uprising (*HE* 7.21.4–6). While insurrections and wars were, of course, one of the chief subjects of Thucydidean historiography,<sup>68</sup> Dionysius/Eusebius narrates the uprising impressionistically and metaphorically.<sup>69</sup> The narration employs the imagery of biblical passages, mostly from Exodus (an

letters that Eusebius notes but leaves unquoted at 7.22.11); letter collections, moreover, were frequently arranged by theme (cf. Gibson (2012)). Yet the arrangement of the source would not explain why Eusebius had placed the plague in AD 253 in the *Chronicle* and then shifted the chronology when writing the *History*.

<sup>65</sup> The *kephalaia* were likely composed by Eusebius himself: Schwartz (1909) CLI–II; Junod (2012) 114.

<sup>66</sup> Because in the manuscripts there is no separate *kephalaion* for 7.17, the titles that fit the subject matter of our sections 7.21 and 7.22 are twentieth and twenty-first *kephalaia* of Book 7.

<sup>67</sup> On Egyptian Easter letters as a genre, see Külzer (1998); on Dionysius' use and possible creation of the genre, see Bienert (1978) 138–42.

<sup>68</sup> It is not obvious that the common phrase *stasis kai polemos* was meant to invoke Thucydides, as the phrase appears three other times in the *Ecclesiastical History*: *HE* 2.6.8, in Eusebius' own voice about Jews in Palestine; and in quotations in 5.2.7 (= the *Martyrs of Lyon*) and 6.41.9 (= Dionysius of Alexandria).

<sup>69</sup> As Bienert (1978) 157 complains.

appropriate source for an Easter letter).<sup>70</sup> Readers hear that the famous main avenue (*plateia*) of Alexandria is as forbidding as the desert that Israel wandered; the harbours resemble the sea in which Pharaoh's army drowned; the Nile has seemed drier than the Red Sea that Israel crossed to leave Egypt where Moses had to beat water out of a rock; and the river is as defiled by blood as when Moses turned its water into blood (*HE* 7.21.4–6).<sup>71</sup> From other biblical texts, Dionysius compares the flooded Nile to Noah's deluge, and calls the Nile the river Gihon from Genesis 2.13 (7.21.6–7).

If Eusebius intended to compete with classical historiography, these biblical passages may have seemed a cacophonous intrusion into his work.<sup>72</sup> Eusebius could have deleted these references from his quotations of Dionysius, as elsewhere he deleted content that complicated his message (see above, §2). I suggest two ways in which the biblical intertexts primed Eusebius' readers for his engagement with Greek historiography.<sup>73</sup>

The first important effect of the biblical references is to posit a cause for the plague of the 250s. The biblical desert, parting of the Red Sea, and Nile turning to blood come at the moment in a plague narrative where educated readers would expect an aetiology for the epidemic, as previous Greek historians had begun plague narratives with aetiologies, either geographical or divine (see Table I). Thucydides' account places the origins of the plague in Ethiopia before it came to Egypt, Africa, and Persia (Thuc. 2.48.1);<sup>74</sup> Diodorus asserts that the Carthaginian looting of a temple of Demeter and Kore in Achratine provoked their plague (Diod. 14.63.1–2, 14.70.4);<sup>75</sup> Josephus rep-

<sup>70</sup> As Bienert (1978) 161 and Strobel (1993) 195 note.

<sup>71</sup> Biblical intertexts: Ex. 7.14–25; Ex. 14.27–31; Ex. 17.1–7, Num. 20.2–13.

<sup>72</sup> Bienert (1978) 158 notes 'wie stark sich bei ihm das antike Erbe mit biblischem Sprachgebrauch bereits vermischt hat.'

<sup>73</sup> Two other effects of the biblical intertexts are less relevant for my purposes. The first, representing non-Christian Alexandrians as an oppressive reincarnation of the Egyptians in Exodus, reinforced contemporary Alexandrians' reputation for rioting: see, e.g., Trapp (2004) 119–22. Second, Dionysius'/Eusebius' intertext could defame the violators of the peace with the Egyptian identity of Israel's adversaries in Exodus (esp. *HE* 7.21.4). Even aside from the issue of the continuity of Egyptian identity from biblical to Dionysius'/Eusebius' times, such defaming was disingenuous because of Alexandria's distinct identity as a Greek city populated with Greek residents, where Egyptians were outsiders. See, e.g., Abd-El-Ghani (2004) 172–7; Rowlandson and Harker (2004). For most residents of the Roman Empire, Greek (and Roman) identity conferred higher status than Egyptian identity: see, e.g., Isaac (2004) 352–70.

<sup>74</sup> Kallet (2013) suggests that Thucydides left a divine origin of the Athenian plague implicit through allusions to Apollo's activity.

<sup>75</sup> Diodorus also notes that the disease flared up in the same location as a plague that had afflicted the Athenian attackers of Sicily (14.70.5).

resents David's plague as divine punishment for David's pride in ordering a census (*AJ* 7.321–4).<sup>76</sup>

Dionysius/Eusebius, then, fills the aetiological slot with biblical allusions. These allusions, it turns out, feature a distinct theme: retribution.<sup>77</sup> The book of Exodus, of course, revolves around retribution. Egypt's mistreatment of the Israelites provokes God's vengeance, and when the Israelites prove disobedient, God forces them to wander in the Sinai desert for forty years. Dionysius'/Eusebius' particular references to Exodus invoke God's reprisal: the plagues against Egypt, the drowning of Pharaoh's army, and Israel's wandering in the desert are all retributive.<sup>78</sup> Since these biblical retaliations colour the violence in Alexandria,<sup>79</sup> and in Dionysius'/Eusebius' narrative this retributive violence precedes the plague, Dionysius/Eusebius represents the plague as enforcing the *lex talionis* against Alexandria.<sup>80</sup>

The second effect of the Exodus intertext is to polarise Alexandria between Christians and insiders. As in Exodus the Israelites resided in a hostile foreign territory, so Dionysius represents Alexandria as a foreign country (*τὴν ὑπερορίαν*, 7.22.3), and the Christians are completely innocent of the violence that dominates their streets and neighbourhoods (7.22.4–5). Like the Israelites in Exodus, Dionysius' Christians must stay in hiding, isolated from oppressors.<sup>81</sup> Christian distance from pagan Alexandrians recurs throughout Dionysius'/Eusebius' narrative of the plague.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>76</sup> While Dionysius of Halicarnassus names no cause in his lengthiest plague narrative (*D.H. AR* 10.53.1), two shortly preceding plagues (10.40, 10.41.2; 10.42.1–2) were clearly divine punishments.

<sup>77</sup> Pace Bienert (1978) 160, who is 'unbefriedigt ... wegen der kaum erkennbaren christlichen Theologie' of the biblical allusions, retribution surely qualifies as a Christian theological motif; cf. Andresen (1979) 425.

<sup>78</sup> Equally retributive is the flood of Noah, which Dionysius/Eusebius also references in this passage (*HE* 7.21.6); and the story of the Garden of Eden, referenced in 7.21.7, also ends in divine retribution.

<sup>79</sup> The one episode from the biblical quotations that is not obviously retributive, Moses striking the rock to bring water out for Israel to drink in the Sinai desert (*HE* 7.21.5 = Ex. 17.1–7), both shows a converse to the retribution and foreshadows another retributive episode. The converse to retribution is that the episode rewards Israel's obedience with sustenance, while the foreshadowing is to a later episode in which Moses is ordered to draw water from a rock; there the Israelite lawgiver's failure to fulfil God's commands to the letter is the pretext for Moses' exclusion from the Promised Land (Num. 20.2–13).

<sup>80</sup> Dionysius/Eusebius implies that Christians understand this in 7.21.9, discussed below.

<sup>81</sup> On potential identification of the Egyptians of Exodus with Alexandrians in Dionysius' narrative, cf. above, n. 73.

<sup>82</sup> The themes of retribution and bipolarisation apply equally to Dionysius'/Eusebius' reference to Exodus 12.30 in the next chapter, at *HE* 7.22.3.



A transition from fighting in Alexandria to the plague comes with the introduction of dead bodies.<sup>83</sup> Although after the riots readers could expect corpses, Dionysius/Eusebius presents a city so replete with bodies as to be uninhabitable (*HE* 7.21.8):

ἢ πότε ὁ τεθολωμένος ὑπὸ τῶν πονηρῶν πανταχόθεν ἀναθυμιάσεων ἀῆρ εἰλικρινῆς γένοιτο; τοιοῦτοι γὰρ ἀπὸ τῆς γῆς ἀτμοὶ καὶ ἀπὸ θαλάσσης ἄνεμοι ποταμῶν τε αὔραι καὶ λιμένων ἀνιμήσεις ἀποπνέουσιν, ὡς σηπομένων ἐν πᾶσι τοῖς ὑποκειμένοις στοιχείοις νεκρῶν ἰχῶρας εἶναι τὰς δρόσους.

Or when could the air, polluted by the noxious fumes in every direction, become pure? Such vapours from the earth and gusts from the sea and river breezes and exhalations from harbours waft away as to make the dew into the blood of rotting corpses in all of its underlying elements.'

While the stench of corpses and the sight of unburied bodies surfacing in water appear at first to be a hyperbolic panorama of a city devastated by war, such odours and sights were a topos in plague narratives.<sup>84</sup> Diodorus and Dionysius of Halicarnassus represent a stink as wafting up from floating bodies: Diodorus' unburied Carthaginian plague victims exude a stench and the Sicilian marshes near them putrefy (*Diod.* 4.71.2); and in Dionysius of Halicarnassus Roman plague victims, thrown into the sewers, return to the shores and secrete an odour both through the air and into the Romans' water supply (*D.H. AR* 10.53.4).<sup>85</sup> Despite the context of a riot, the noxious experience of dead bodies forms a fitting transition from *stasis* to plague.<sup>86</sup>

When in the next sentence the plague appears explicitly, Dionysius/Eusebius focalises the epidemic through a non-Christian perspective. Dionysius' voice names the plague by describing an unspecified party's reaction to it (*HE* 7.21.9):

εἶτα θαυμάζουσιν καὶ διαποροῦσιν, πόθεν οἱ συνεχεῖς λοιμοί, πόθεν αἱ χαλεπαὶ νόσοι, πόθεν αἱ παντοδαπαὶ φθοραὶ, πόθεν ὁ ποικίλος καὶ πολὺς

<sup>83</sup> Harper (2015) 227 is surely right, against Strobel (1993) 196, that Dionysius here references the plague.

<sup>84</sup> Despite the apparent reticence of classical historians to note noxious odours: see Morgan (1992) 27–9.

<sup>85</sup> Thucydides' victims, meanwhile, emit fetid breath (*Thuc.* 2.49.2) and vultures hesitate to touch the bodies of plague victims, presumably due to the bodies' odour (2.50.1).

<sup>86</sup> Tissot (1997) 54 sees the passage as indicating miasma: on Roman views of stench and miasma see, e.g., Bradley (2015). It is worth noting also that Christian authors were conscious of the effect of odours on religious experience: Harvey (2006) 29–96.

τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὄλεθρος, διὰ τί μηκέτι τοσοῦτο πλῆθος οἰκητόρων ἢ μεγίστη πόλις ἐν αὐτῇ φέρει, ἀπὸ νηπίων ἀρξαμένη παιδῶν μέχρι τῶν εἰς ἄκρον γεγηρακότων, ὅσους ἠμογέροντας οὐς ἐκάλει, πρότερον ὄντας ἔτρεφεν·

Then they are dumbfounded and bewildered about where the overwhelming plagues, the brutal diseases, the manifold destructions, the enveloping and great destruction of men is from, why the great city no longer holds such a great multitude of inhabitants, starting from its babies, its children up to the extremes of old age, where it used to support a vibrant elderly population.

The focalisation of the plague through ‘their’ eyes extends the bipolarisation of violence in Alexandria to the bipolarised experience of the plague. The third person of this verb indicates that it is ‘they’ who are surprised and ignorant at the appearance of the plague. ‘They’, who are outside the speaker-audience relationship of the letter, have an unspecified identity and could thus be any non-Christians in Alexandria’s vast, diverse population. The plague—adaptable, painful, and lethal—infuses cognitive dissonance into Alexandrian non-Christians.

Christians, by contrast, not only appear to understand the retributive origin of the plague but also maintain a rational disposition. After attributing such a desperate lament to the non-Christian population of Alexandria, Dionysius/Eusebius confirms their cries with specific data, in a more factual, less-passionate tone (*HE* 7.21.9):

ἀλλ’ οἱ τεσσαρακοντούται καὶ μέχρι τῶν ἑβδομήκοντα ἐτῶν τοσοῦτον πλείονες τότε, ὥστε μὴ συμπληροῦσθαι νῦν τὸν ἀριθμὸν αὐτῶν, προσεγγραφέντων καὶ συγκαταλεγέντων εἰς τὸ δημόσιον σιτηρέσιον τῶν ἀπὸ τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα ἐτῶν μέχρι τῶν ὀγδοήκοντα, καὶ γεγόνασιν οἶον ἡλικιώται τῶν πάλαι γεραιτάτων οἱ ὄψει νεώτατοι.

Now, those aged forty to seventy years numbered far more then, so that as things stand the number of them does not reach completion among those registered and enrolled for the public grain-ration for fourteen- to eighty-year-olds, with the result that those recently coming of age have become the equals in age of the long-elderly.

In a moment when surviving non-Christians are at a loss, the Christian Dionysius plays fact-checker.<sup>87</sup> His tone is that of a bureaucrat, assessing the

<sup>87</sup> Where Strobel (1993) 197 doubts Dionysius had access to such information, it is surely possible that Dionysius’ congregation may have included Alexandrian civic officials privy to these numbers.

damage coolly. That such rationality is located with Christians displaces the Greek narrators who had dispassionately described epidemic effects in previous plague narratives.<sup>88</sup> Christian rationality underscores the bewilderment of non-Christians and adds polarisation of mentality to the polarisation of behaviour that separates Christians and outsiders.<sup>89</sup>

The next chapter transitions from a focus on pagan psychology amid the plague to concentration on the Christians of Alexandria.

#### 4. Christians and the Plague: *Ecclesiastical History* 7.22

Chapter 22 of the *Ecclesiastical History* describes Alexandrian Christians' experience of the plague. The chapter begins with Eusebius' brief introduction to Dionysius' festal letter. Here the Caesarean scholar uses genitive absolutes to denote two circumstances in which Dionysius wrote to his churches: 'with the place of war taken by plague, and with the festival approaching' (λοιμικῆς τὸν πόλεμον διαλαβούσης νόσου τῆς τε ἑορτῆς πλησιαζούσης, 7.22.1). But Eusebius adds an emotional reaction to the two events that he names as the letter's subjects, claiming that the letter 'indicates the sufferings of the disaster' (τὰ τῆς συμφορᾶς ἐπισημαινόμενος πάθη). While of course many Christians described emotions in their writings, *pathos* had especially strong resonances in Greek historiography, particularly in Thucydides.<sup>90</sup> Suffering binds Dionysius'/Eusebius' Christians with Periclean Athens and other peoples in Greek historical narratives.

However, the *pathos* bursting into the opening of chapter 22 is not what ancient readers would most likely expect in a plague narrative. A comparison to Thucydides' plague narrative is instructive. Thucydides famously prefaced his plague narrative with a sombre scene, an annual funeral at the Athenian Public Cemetery for Athenians who died in the Peloponnesian War, a passage dominated by the famous funeral oration attributed to Pericles (Thuc. 2.35–43). Such civic cohesion and communal mentality on the part of the mourning Athenians then dissolves as the plague shatters the community's confidence, stability, and unity (2.50–4).

Dionysius/Eusebius likewise invokes a communal gathering, but an Easter celebration rather than a funeral (*HE* 7.22.2):<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> For Dionysius/Eusebius, of course, people of Greek identity were lumped in with the non-Christians: see above, n. 73.

<sup>89</sup> The final sentence of Dionysius quoted in 7.21 underscores this polarisation of mentality, describing pagans as ignorant and unfazed by the imminent vanishing of humanity.

<sup>90</sup> In 1.23.1–3 Thucydides claims that he will spotlight the *pathēmata* of the Peloponnesian War: see Lateiner (1977), Connor (1984), esp. 30–2 on Thucydides' rhetoric of suffering.

<sup>91</sup> Easter celebration: see Bienert (1978) 138–42, Külzer (1998) 379.

τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις οὐκ ἂν δόξειεν καιρὸς ἐορτῆς εἶναι τὰ παρόντα οὐδὲ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς οὔτε οὗτος οὔτε τις ἕτερος, οὐχ ὅπως τῶν ἐπιλύπων, ἀλλ' οὐδ' εἴ τις περιχαρῆς, ὃν οἰηθεῖεν μάλιστα. νῦν μὲν γε θρήνοι πάντα, καὶ πενθοῦσιν πάντες, καὶ περιηχοῦσιν οἴμωγαὶ τὴν πόλιν διὰ τὸ πλῆθος τῶν τεθνηκότων καὶ τῶν ἀποθνησκόντων ὁσημέραι.

To other people the present would not seem to be a moment for a festival, and for the others neither this nor any other is that moment, not as an occasion of mourning nor even any if there should be any apparently happy festival. Now all sounds are wailings, and they all mourn, and laments reverberate in the city due to the masses of those suffering and dying each day.

Whereas in Thucydides a gathering of the entire polis precedes the plague, for Dionysius/Eusebius only the Christians hold a preceding festival: although 'all' (πάντες) mourn, the third-person verb *πενθοῦσιν* locates the mourning in others,<sup>92</sup> while 'we' can experience a joyous communal event.<sup>93</sup> The next sentence amplifies the Christian isolation from 'them'.<sup>94</sup> Dionysius/Eusebius describes the Christians of Alexandria as driven out of the public square, persecuted, and losing adherents to execution. Christians must celebrate their festivals in fields, deserts, ships, inns, or prisons, and though they undergo persecution, they can still take comfort: 'we alone endure all the outrages they inflicted on us, yet benefit from the sidelines as they turned on each other and suffered'. (*μόνοι μὲν ὑποστάντες ὅσα ἡμῖν ἐλυμήναντο, παραπολαύσαντες δὲ καὶ ὧν ἀλλήλους εἰργάσαντό τε καὶ πεπόνθασιν*, *HE* 7.22.4). Christians, then, can celebrate in the background as the violent Alexandrians eat their own.

With this celebration as the backdrop, plague breaks out (*βραχυτάτης δὲ ἡμῶν τε καὶ αὐτῶν τυχόντων ἀναπνοῆς, ἐπικατέσκηψεν ἡ νόσος αὕτη*, *HE* 7.22.6).<sup>95</sup> After noting the fear that the outbreak triggered,<sup>96</sup> Dionysius/

<sup>92</sup> The use of the third-person verbs parallels that in *HE* 7.21.9, discussed above.

<sup>93</sup> The word chosen by Dionysius/Eusebius to describe joy, *περιχαρῆς*, may echo the elevated joy (*τῷ παραχρῆμα περιχαρεῖ*) experienced by survivors of Thucydides' plague (*Thuc.* 2.51.6).

<sup>94</sup> For the sake of space I pass over the clause in 7.22.3, a quotation of the biblical story of the Passover in Exodus 12.30: see Bienert (1978) 162–3; see also above, 15–16 with n. 82.

<sup>95</sup> To denote the plague's onset Dionysius/Eusebius uses the rare verb *ἐπικατέσκηπτειν*, which may echo the word *κατασκήπτειν*, a frequent term in plague descriptions (e.g., *Thuc.* 2.49.8, *D.H. AR* 10.53.1, 7).

<sup>96</sup> '... an episode both more fearful to them than any fear and more cruel than any disaster whatsoever' (*πρᾶγμα φόβου τε παντὸς φοβερώτερον ἐκείνοις καὶ συμφορᾶς ἥστινος οὖν σχετλιώ-τερον*, *HE* 7.22.6).

Eusebius quotes a Thucydidean passage (Thuc. 2.64.1 = *HE* 7.24.6), the only quotation from a pagan narrative historian in the entire *Ecclesiastical History*.<sup>97</sup> Plague is, 'as one particular writer of theirs related, "the only event that has turned out mightier than everyone's hope"' (ὡς ἰδιός τις αὐτῶν ἀπήγγειλεν συγγραφεύς, "πρᾶγμα μόνον δὴ τῶν πάντων ἐλπίδος κρείσσον γενόμενον"; cf. Thuc. 2.50.1). With this invocation Dionysius'/Eusebius' readers confront the suffering of the Athenian plague, where the plague catalysed the breakdown of Athenian social relations. Dionysius/Eusebius draws the contrast between classical Athens and the Alexandrian church immediately after the quotation: 'for us, it wasn't like this, but it was a training ground and a test second to none of our other experiences' (ἡμῶν δὲ οὐ τοιοῦτο μὲν, γυμνάσιον δὲ καὶ δοκίμιον οὐδενὸς τῶν ἄλλων ἔλαττον).<sup>98</sup> An experience that had devastated Periclean Athens edified the Christians instead.

Shortly after this Eusebius leaves a lacuna in the quotation and picks Dionysius' voice up again with the heroic conduct of Christians. Most Christians (οἱ γοῦν πλεῖστοι τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν), Dionysius/Eusebius claims, stuck with one another, tended one another, and nursed their fellow-Christians untiringly and without reservation, often dying—gladly (ἀσμενέστατα)!—in the process of restoring their fellow-Christians to health (7.22.7). Here Dionysius/Eusebius draws contrasts with two pagan descriptions of care for victims, those of Diodorus and of Thucydides. Diodorus represents the Carthaginians as refusing altogether to care for or even to approach their plague victims, a refusal that Diodorus underscores with the rare word νοσοκομέω (Diod. 14.71.1). In 7.22.7 Dionysius/Eusebius employs the same word to denote Christians' active tending of patients. Dionysius/Eusebius may well have been evoking the Carthaginian communal breakdown as a foil for Christian unity amid the stress of a plague.

In Thucydides, meanwhile, some Athenians, afraid of contagion, refuse to tend their fellow-citizens, while Athenians with virtuous aspirations (οἱ ἀρετῆς τι μεταποιούμενοι), 'out of a sense of shame were unsparing of themselves in their attendance in their friends' houses, where even the members of the family were at last worn out by the moans of the dying, and succumbed to the force

<sup>97</sup> The *History*'s only other quotation of a pagan prose narrative is from Porphyry's *Against the Christians* (*HE* 6.19.4–8), even though Eusebius knew a number of pagan historians very well (see above, §1). While the quotation of Thucydides appears in an excerpt of Dionysius and so may conceivably have slipped past Eusebius' redactive radar, Eusebius did eliminate unfriendly material from his sources (see above, §2), so the presence of Thucydides' voice in the *History* most likely reflects Eusebius' intentions.

<sup>98</sup> Dionysius'/Eusebius' next sentence suggests that the plague attacked pagan Alexandrians more devastatingly than the Christians: 'While it didn't stay away even from us, it penetrated among the Gentiles deeply' (ἀπέσχετο μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲ ἡμῶν, πολλὰ δὲ ἐξῆλθεν εἰς τὰ ἔθνη).

of the disaster' (αἰσχύνῃ γὰρ ἠφείδουν σφῶν αὐτῶν ἐσιόντες παρὰ τοὺς φίλους, ἐπεὶ καὶ τὰς ὀλοφύρσεις τῶν ἀπογιγνομένων τελευτῶντες καὶ οἱ οἰκέοι ἐξέκαμνον ὑπὸ τοῦ πολλοῦ κακοῦ νικώμενοι, Thuc. 2.51.5, trans. Crawley, modified).<sup>99</sup> For Thucydides exertion for fellow-citizens ends ignominiously (and is apparently rare, as even family members grow weary caring for others). By way of comparison, Dionysius/Eusebius underscores Christians' consistent care by calling Christians as a class ἀφειδοῦντες, a term that Thucydides applies only to some, especially virtuous Athenians.<sup>100</sup> In addition, whereas Thucydides' would-be altruists care only for friends and family, for Eusebius' Christians there is no explicit distinction between family members and co-religionists: Christians care for all members of the community as though their bonds are familial.<sup>101</sup>

Christians' communal harmony continues as Dionysius/Eusebius moves from treatment of the plague-stricken to disposal of the deceased. The pagan plague narratives had all emphasised the breakdown of communal norms surrounding burial of the dead (see Table I). Thucydides' Athenians disturb the funeral pyres of fellow-citizens; Diodorus' Carthaginians, overwhelmed and afraid, quit burying their dead; and Dionysius of Halicarnassus' Romans drop their dead into the gutter.<sup>102</sup> By contrast, Dionysius/Eusebius says that Christian caregivers shut victims' eyes and mouths, lay them out for burial, bathe their bodies, and adorn them in full burial clothes. The caregivers go so far as to embrace the bodies of deceased caregivers (7.22.9). The putrefaction and stench of corpses, which had played such a large part in Dionysius'/Eusebius' account of the *stasis* and plague in Alexandria as a whole (see Table I and above, §3 with *HE* 7.21.8), are conspicuously absent here; odour plays no part in Christian caregivers' perspective. Whatever the consequences, Christian burial is systematic, ordered, and honourable. Among sufferers from plagues, it is the Christians who persist in societal norms for proper burial.

In addition to omitting the stench, Dionysius/Eusebius is silent on an equally standard topic of previous plague narratives, symptoms (see Table I). Plague symptoms had occupied much of Thucydides' attention, so that future researchers might have useful data in case the epidemic should recur (Thuc. 2.48.3–49.8; cf. 1.22.3); likewise, Diodorus and Josephus had described

<sup>99</sup> Bienert (1978) 164 notes the Athenians who care for others.

<sup>100</sup> In 7.22.8 Dionysius/Eusebius amplifies the uniformity of Christian care by asserting that presbyters, deacons, and laypeople (πρεσβύτεροί τε τινες καὶ διάκονοι καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ)—that is, all ranks of the church below the bishop—died tending the sick.

<sup>101</sup> This may have been a wider Christian trope: cf. Cyprian, *On Mortality* 15–16.

<sup>102</sup> Thuc. 2.52, Diod. 14.71.1; D.H. *AR* 10.53.3. Josephus mentions deaths from plague during burial of the dead (*AJ* 7.326) but nowhere says explicitly whether norms of burial were upheld or violated.

symptoms in their respective narratives (Diod. 14.71.2–3, Jos. *AJ* 7.325).<sup>103</sup> Eusebius, by contrast, devotes no space to the bodily symptoms of the plague, either in chapter 21 or 22. If in any of his writings Dionysius had described the symptoms of the Plague of Cyprian, Eusebius deleted the description;<sup>104</sup> nor did the Caesarean scholar insert any description of the plague from his own memory or inquiry.<sup>105</sup>

Why omit the plague's symptoms? Effacing epidemic symptoms was certainly not a Christian literary habit.<sup>106</sup> Although Eusebius was a Platonist and thus devalued bodily qualities,<sup>107</sup> his Platonism was not so extreme as to preclude interest in bodily injuries: Eusebius describes the symptoms of diseases suffered by Herod the Great, Herod Agrippa, and Galerius with apparent glee,<sup>108</sup> and the *History* parades numerous disfigured bodies in its martyrdoms.<sup>109</sup> On the other hand, Eusebius omits symptoms of a famous disease of Abgar, a king of Edessa, who after a visit from an apostle converts to Christianity and is healed of his disease (*HE* 1.13). It seems that for Eusebius damaged bodies represent either God's retribution or (in martyrdom) God's glorification. But when God's people suffer from disease, and their ailing bodies represent neither punishment nor glorification but rather an opportunity for other Christians to exercise virtue, then the symptoms are superfluous. The bodies are a means to the end of Christian virtue but not worthy in themselves of description. What mattered was Christians' responsive action, not the bodily conditions that motivated them. Accordingly, the plague

<sup>103</sup> Dionysius of Halicarnassus, interestingly, also omits the symptoms of the plague in fifth-century Rome.

<sup>104</sup> As noted above, between *HE* 7.22.6 and 7.22.7 Eusebius claims to have omitted some of Dionysius' words; perhaps Dionysius' letter had described the plague's symptoms here, as Miller (1933) 42 suggests, or the plague's symptoms may have appeared after Eusebius ends his quotation in *HE* 7.22.10. There is no reason to deny that a description of medical symptoms could appear in the hortatory and informative genre of the festal letter: see Külzer (1998) 388–90. On the other hand, as Miller (1933) 54 and Harper (2016) both assert, Dionysius could expect his addressees already to know the symptoms of such a great pandemic.

<sup>105</sup> Inquiries: Eusebius had visited the Fayyum (*HE* 8.9.4), surely traveling through the great harbour of Alexandria from Caesarea, and could have made inquiries. Memory: see above, n. 22.

<sup>106</sup> Cyprian, *On Mortality* 14 describes the symptoms of the same plague at some length.

<sup>107</sup> In *HE* 5. pref. 3–4 Eusebius proffers Platonist psychocentrism as a riposte to Greek war historiography. On this passage cf. DeVore (2013b) 36–8; on Eusebius' Platonism see in general Strutwolf (1999).

<sup>108</sup> See *HE* 1.8.5–16 (= Jos. *AJ* 17.168–70, 656–60), 2.10 (= Acts 12.19–23, Jos. *AJ* 19.343–51), 8.16 with 8.app.3; see also 6.9.7, 9.8.1. Disease can likewise be a mark of divine disfavour for other Greek historians: e.g., Hdt. 6.27; D.H. *AR* 10.40.1–2, 10.42.1, Jos. *AJ* 7.321–8.

<sup>109</sup> See, e.g., *HE* 2.23, 5.1 (*passim*), 6.5, 6.39.4, 8.5–12 (*passim*), 9.8.1, 8.

of Cyprian could have been any disease, with any symptoms; the lacking specificity lent the narrative more universality.

At the end of Eusebius' quotation Dionysius' voice underlines the distinction between Christians and non-Christians. Pagan Alexandrians (*ta ethnē*) have given up the ordered burial of the dead: they 'shoved away those who had begun to suffer the plague and fled from their dearest family members and threw them half dead into the road and treated them like dung' (τὰ δέ γε ἔθνη πᾶν τοῦναντίον· καὶ νοσεῖν ἀρχομένους ἀπωθοῦντο καὶ ἀπέφευγον τοὺς φιλτάτους κὰν ταῖς ὁδοῖς ἐρρίπτουν ἡμιθνήτας καὶ νεκροὺς ἀτάφους ἀπεσκυβαλίζοντο, *HE* 7.22.10). Here is another echo of Thucydides, who describes the dead abandoned in the plague as 'rolling around in the streets and half dead around the springs out of desire for water' (νεκροὶ ... ἐν ταῖς ὁδοῖς ἐκαλινδοῦντο καὶ περὶ τὰς κρήνας ἀπάσας ἡμιθνήτες τοῦ ὕδατος ἐπιθυμία, *Thuc.* 2.52.2). For Dionysius/Eusebius the plague draws the same desperate, horrifying responses from contemporary pagan Alexandrians that it did from Periclean Athenians. For pagans, whether classical Athenian or imperial Alexandrian, plague provokes a complete disruption of communal bonds.

This comparison between Dionysius' contemporary church and the paradigmatic classical Greek community underscores Dionysius'/Eusebius' ethical bipolarity between the Christians and the non-Christians of Alexandria. At length Dionysius/Eusebius has compared 'them,' or *ta ethnē* (7.21.9, 7.22.6, 10) to 'us' (7.22.4–8). In contrast to the third-person verbs that we have seen describing outsiders' reactions to the plague, Dionysius'/Eusebius' first-person plural invites audiences to identify as part of the group performing such heroic acts.<sup>110</sup> The foil to 'us' is pagans in plague narratives, especially that of Thucydides; the Athenian historian, after all, is for Dionysius/Eusebius 'a particular one of *their* historians' (ἰδιὸς τις αὐτῶν ἀπήγγειλεν συγγραφεύς, 7.22.6).<sup>111</sup> Indeed, this invocation of Greek plague-narratives extends the ethical bipolarisation back in time. The Greek intertexts imply that the current failings of Alexandrians had always been non-Christian failings, as exemplified by Thucydides' classical Athenians, whom Greek-speaking Romans widely considered the greatest of Hellenic poleis.<sup>112</sup> If the Athenian master is the star witness, highlighting the failure of the most vibrant classical city to maintain its cohesion in desperate circumstances, and the other Hellenophone historians provide plentiful parallel failures, then the collapse of non-Christian care is not isolated, but a transhistorical non-Christian flaw, surfacing

<sup>110</sup> Cf. Verdoner (2011) 91–8 on Eusebius' inclusive use of the first-person plural in his narratorial voice.

<sup>111</sup> And this even though, as his *paideia* (see above, §2) as well as his masterful literary critique of the book of Revelation quoted in *HE* 7.25 shows, Dionysius was himself a master of that defining trait of Greek identity, the Greek language.

<sup>112</sup> See, e.g., Spawforth (2012).



repeatedly and unmistakably.<sup>113</sup> In the comparison, then, Christians come off as timelessly virtuous.<sup>114</sup>

Eusebius concludes his plague narrative on that contrast. Ending the quotation from Dionysius, the Caesarean scholar notes that Dionysius sent another festal letter to Christians in Egypt when Alexandria was at peace (7.22.11). This conclusion to the plague marks a final contrast with earlier Greek plague narratives, in that in earlier narratives the plagues affected the course of subsequent narration (see Table I). Thucydides' plague catalysed a series of changes: the Spartans shy away from attacking Athens for fear of the plague (Thuc. 2.57.1); the Athenians lose more than a quarter of their northern Aegean infantry force (2.58.2–3); and the Athenians regret fighting the war at all, fining Pericles for advocating it (2.59.1–2, 2.65.2). Likewise, after Diodorus' plague Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse, seizes the opportunity and attacks the Carthaginian camp, incinerating the Carthaginian fleet and forcing the Carthaginians to withdraw from Sicily (Diod. 14.72–6). Dionysius of Halicarnassus' Roman plague motivates Rome's neighbours to mobilise for war, though the plague soon infects them and curtails the offensive; furthermore, Latium goes uncultivated, so that plague begets famine (D.H. *AR* 10.53.7). According to Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* (*AJ* 7.329–34), after God suspends the plague against Israel a prophet commands David to build an altar at a certain threshing-floor and sacrifice to God there; David does so, and this site, Josephus reports, later became the location of Solomon's temple.

As we have seen, Eusebius had already included consequences for non-Christian Alexandria in chapter 21, where the plague eliminates much of the Alexandrian population (*HE* 7.21.9). For Christians, however, the denouement plays out differently. In chapter 22 and thereafter the Christian community suffers no after-effects of the epidemic—indeed, Eusebius never invokes the plague again. The absence of subsequent disease has two implications worth highlighting.

First, it is here that Eusebius' chronological displacement of the plague letters (see above, §2) to Gallienus' rule becomes salient. Eusebius follows the plague accounts with Dionysius' florid praise of the usurper Macrianus' defeat and the restoration of Gallienus' rule, and with it, peace and prosperity (7.23.1–

<sup>113</sup> The Israelites of Josephus' *Jewish Antiquities* provide a *tertium quid* to this dichotomy: in Josephus' plague account David asks God to spare his people from further deaths (εἰπε πρὸς τὸν θεόν, ὡς αὐτὸς εἶη κολασθῆναι δίκαιος ὁ ποιμήν, τὰ δὲ ποίμνια σώζεσθαι μηδὲν ἀμαρτόντα, καὶ ἡντιβόλει τὴν ὀργὴν εἰς αὐτὸν ..., φείδεσθαι δὲ τοῦ λαοῦ, *AJ* 7.327–8), which certainly shows care for the Israelite people, albeit after David risked this people's livelihood with his disobedience.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Stark (1996) 84–5, who makes precisely this comparison and draws precisely the Christian-friendly conclusion that Eusebius implied.

3).<sup>115</sup> The juxtaposition of plague with panegyric has thematic resonance. Far from pondering any post-epidemic trauma, the *History* amplifies the laudatory tone and triumphant representation of the Christians under the plague as it transfers its subject to the emperor's resurgence. Similarly as the plague is an occasion for Christians to exhibit their own virtues, rather than a sudden, inexplicable calamity or a divine decimation, so too the horror of a usurper's rebellion prompts God to restore peace and prosperity under the rightful emperor.<sup>116</sup> Where in chapter 21 on pagan Alexandrians, retribution had been the upshot of the plague, the Christian plague narrative of chapter 22 and the defeat of the usurper in chapter 23 both involved successful handling of a lethal threat. Thanks to Eusebius' chronological displacement, a parallel trajectory unites Christians and Romans, church and empire, bishop and emperor in attaining success.

Second, the absence of aftershocks parallels many moments of Christian adversity in Eusebius' *History*. Events that disrupt the Christian community in one chapter rarely affect it in subsequent chapters.<sup>117</sup> Even contagious, expansive events like epidemics are contained within a chapter or two, to be faced once and done with. What persists are the occasions, from encounters with important Romans to doctrinal controversies to martyrdoms,<sup>118</sup> for Christians to embody the virtues of courage, endurance, concord, faith, and piety. Eusebius' Christians, with divine support, rise to the occasion consistently. Hence, after a catastrophic plague comes the restoration of peace, tranquillity, and prosperity rather than lingering trauma, disability, and challenges. While such a stark illustration of divine providence might deviate from tragic classical sensibilities, it surely fulfils Christian expectations of divine providence.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Earlier, Eusebius credits Gallienus for decriminalising Christianity (*HE* 7.13, also quoting Dionysius), making Gallienus an especially appropriate subject of praise.

<sup>116</sup> In 7.23.1–3 Dionysius/Eusebius never actually credits Gallienus' agency for the restoration, instead using solar and biological metaphors to denote the restoration; Gallienus' return to power is a natural (implicitly divine) action. Cf. Trompf (2015) 46–50.

<sup>117</sup> A number of scholars have noted the largely 'static' narrative arc of the *History*: e.g., Timpe (1989) 191–2; Carotenuto (2001) xix–xx, 22–24; Morgan (2005) 195–6, 202. Note, similarly, that the *History*'s many 'heretics' rarely disrupt the church for more than a chapter, as Willing (2008) 469–71 observes.

<sup>118</sup> Encounters: see, e.g., DeVore (2013a) 170–1; doctrinal controversies: see in general Willing (2008).

<sup>119</sup> Which was a key Eusebian theme: e.g., *HE* 2.2.6, 2.14.6, 6.2.4, 8.16.3, 8.17.6, 9.8.15.

## 5. Conclusions

Eusebius had no obligation to describe an epidemic in the *Ecclesiastical History*. Disease figures nowhere in the *History*'s famous 166-word first sentence naming the text's subjects,<sup>120</sup> and the *History* makes no mention of the other great epidemic that had disturbed the Roman Empire, the Antonine Plague.<sup>121</sup> Eusebius could also have noted the Plague of Cyprian in a sentence or two, as he did in his *Chronicle*, rather than describing it at length. Dionysius' letters about this plague, however, provided Eusebius with an irresistible opportunity to deploy *topoi* from classical historiography that thrust the contrast between Christians and non-Christians, implicit throughout the *History*, into unmistakable relief.

Eusebius' plague narrative compares the church with privileged peoples in classical historiography, distinguishing Christians from non-Christians in a stark bipolarity. One function of this episode was to insinuate that numerous non-Christians deserved retribution from the divine. It is after a riot among Alexandrians that the plague hits, and the epidemic hits outsiders far harder than Christians. Although Christians experience the disease, their isolation mitigates its effects. And the prefiguration of the plague in Christian scriptures informs Christians as to why this plague attacks when it does. Compared to these urban residents, Christians are both less affected and more enlightened.

A second function of the episode is to highlight Christian virtues: whereas in most earlier Greek histories the bonds of community dissolve under the strain of violence and death, in Eusebius Christians endure pain and even death to sustain their community. Eusebius, then, used this epidemic to depict Christians as more caring, brave, persistent, cohesive, steadfast, and pious than non-Christians. While the use of pagan *topoi* demonstrated Christian mastery of the requisite knowledge of the most sophisticated of non-Christians, elite Greeks,<sup>122</sup> Dionysius'/Eusebius' mastery of a second discourse, biblical

<sup>120</sup> To my knowledge Josephus is the only ancient Greek historian who includes a comparable sentence in his introductory chapter: *Bj* 1.19–29. Eusebius' subjects are: successions of bishops; activities, leaders, and officials in the church; heretics; the punishment of the Jews for killing Christ; persecution, martyrdom, and Christian triumph. Plagues could fit under activities conducted (*ὅσα ... πραγματευθήναι*, *HE* 1.1.1), or in many cases God's vindication of his people (*εὐμενῆ τοῦ σωτήρος ἡμῶν ἀντίληψιν*, 1.1.2), but placing them into these categories represented a tactical choice on Eusebius' part.

<sup>121</sup> Eusebius briefly describes a plague punishing Maximinus Daia in *HE* 9.8, which I hope to discuss in a separate paper.

<sup>122</sup> Much of Eusebius' oeuvre revolved around competition with Greek-speaking intellectuals: Johnson (2006) argues persuasively that ethnic (or national) rather than religious debate, framed in terms inherited from the Hellenistic period, is the best frame for

lore, added a further dimension to Christian virtue, underscoring Christians' superior access to divine knowledge. Since privileged knowledge was prized in the Roman Empire generally,<sup>123</sup> Dionysius'/Eusebius' display of this knowledge complimented Christians' interpersonal integrity.

A third function of the plague narrative is to reinforce Christians' status as victims. Of course, Eusebius' Christians are frequent victims in martyr narratives, who undergo false accusations, nasty tortures, ignominious deaths, and dishonourable body disposal, as well as exile.<sup>124</sup> While likewise the absence of bodily symptoms of the plague might seem to mute the suffering in Eusebius' plague, in fact Eusebius' martyrs also do not suffer constantly—which is unsurprising in light of Stephanie Cobb's recent demonstration that the heroes of earlier Christian martyr narratives rarely exhibit pain.<sup>125</sup> Yet Dionysius'/Eusebius' Christians, like Thucydides' Greeks, do suffer: as Dionysius/Eusebius claims, Christians were 'alone enduring all the outrages they inflicted' (7.22.5), and the charged term *pathos* recurs in Eusebius' plague narrative (7.22.1, 7.22.7). This suffering brings these Christians into direct comparison with Thucydides' Athenians—and unlike those classical Greeks (or Diodorus' Carthaginians or Dionysius' Romans), Eusebius' Christians maintain their virtues amid overwhelming pain. This, Eusebius implies, renders the Christians uniquely worthy of divine favour—a message especially valorising for Eusebius' Christian audience in the wake of the very recent persecutions under Diocletian, Galerius, and Maximinus Daia.<sup>126</sup>

Finally, Eusebius' plague narrative effaces one conspicuous effect of epidemic experience, the deep consciousness of contingency. Eusebius' sole quotation of Thucydides in his plague narrative (and the only quotation of a classical historian in his *History*) is precisely about how the Athenian plague had shocked Athenians' hopeful anticipation (*elpis*). It is well known that in Thucydides hope (*elpis*) signals optimism about coming events that will be subverted by an unexpected catastrophe.<sup>127</sup> In contrast, Eusebius contends

understanding Eusebius' polemic; Kofsky (2000) provides a more traditional interpretation of Eusebius as critiquing pagan (or Hellenic) religion.

<sup>123</sup> See, e.g., Marincola (1997) 90–5.

<sup>124</sup> False accusations: e.g., *HE* 2.23.22, 3.19–20, 4.13.3, 4.15.19, 5.1.14, 5.1.26, 6.41.21; tortures: most concentrated in *HE* 5.1, 6.41, 8.5–12, but see also, e.g., 3.32.6, 4.15.30–37, 4.15.47, 6.4.3–6.5.2, 6.39.4–5; body disposal: 5.1.59, 6.2–3, 8.6.7, 8.7.7; cf. 4.15.41. Exile: *HE* 6.40, 7.10.

<sup>125</sup> Cobb (2016) terms this phenomenon 'divine analgesia'. Eusebius retained traces of the analgesia in quotations of earlier martyr narratives (*HE* 2.23.2–17, 3.26.6, 4.15.15–45, 4.16.3–9, 4.17.2–13, 5.1.2–64, 6.41–2, 8.10.2–10; cf. 7.11.2–25).

<sup>126</sup> The persecution almost monopolises Books 8–9 of the *Ecclesiastical History*; and see above, n. 6 on the date of the *History*.

<sup>127</sup> Cornford (1907), esp. 222–42 is the classic account of *elpis* in Thucydides. See also Connor (1984) 123–7 and *passim*; cf. Meier (2005) on contingency in Thucydides.

that such a contingency as a lethal pandemic could not shock the church. It is others who wonder about its causes, while Christians understand that the plague is retribution for Alexandria's sins. It is others who are rattled to the point of losing rationality, while Christians dispassionately assess the epidemic's damage. It is others who abandon traditional communal norms, while Christians cherish and honour the dead.

The grip of contingency extends from the historians' subjects to the historians themselves: whereas for other historians plagues instigate long-term consequences, for Eusebius' Christians such rattling, disruptive events are self-contained opportunities to enact divinely-inspired virtue. After all, the biblical texts deployed by Dionysius/Eusebius show that God has long punished violent wrongdoers and relieved his people of life-threatening hardship, and the juxtaposition with Gallienus' restoration to power reaffirms God's restoration of rightful order to the cosmos. Christian *elpis* thus remains unscarred by crushing disaster. In Eusebian historiography catastrophic contingencies feel domesticated, even normal and expected. Plague, riot, dislocation, war, and martyrdom enact the Christian God's plan for punishing evil while educating, honouring, and preserving faithful Christians. Their catastrophes do not confound the Christian cosmos,<sup>128</sup> as plague convulses Thucydides' Athenians, Diodorus' Carthaginians, Dionysius of Halicarnassus' Romans, and even Josephus' Israelites into deep dissonance.

Eusebius, then, inverts the *topoi* of earlier plague narratives to minimise historiographical contingency in favour of pervasive divine providence. But to repudiate this longstanding classical premise he reconfigured the imagery, diction, and rhetoric of those very classical authors. Eusebius' own *paideia* and the Hellenism of eastern-Roman elites ensured that there could be no other discursive field in which to compete, and accordingly Eusebius critiqued elite Greek culture not with specifically Christian and Jewish weapons, but with the very classical discourse that he opposed—or, better, aimed to reform.<sup>129</sup> It is imperative, therefore, to read Eusebian historiography not as alien to the classical tradition, nor even as the reception of it, but rather as a fully-fledged participant in ancient Greek historiography.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Demonic forces, though, do provide a counterweight to God's activity that can apply unexpected shocks: see Johannessen (2016).

<sup>129</sup> As did other Hellenophone Christian authors of the fourth century. An outstanding example is Gregory of Nazianzus: see Elm (2012).

<sup>130</sup> On 'participation' in a genre, see Frow (2006) 12–28.

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