
Matthias Becker’s translation of Eunapius of Sardis’ Βίοι φιλοσόφων καὶ σοφιστῶν (hereafter VPS for Βιτae philosοφorum et sophistarum) is the first into German, his commentary only the second in any language on the whole of the work. In both, he has succeeded admirably. I suspect it will be a long time between Becker’s and the next commentary devoted to the VPS, though, as most of us know only too well, curiositas nihil recusat (SHA Aurelian 10.1). As for his translation, I anticipate the story will be different, and that Becker’s version will stimulate the creation of another German translation, free-standing, moderately priced, and, consequently, accessible to a broader readership. Here though, as one would expect from a shortened and revised dissertation (Tübingen, 2011), Becker’s target is not so much a ‘readership’ as it is a ‘constituency’.

This distinction, to the degree it is justified, applies far less to Becker’s translation (pp. 78–143) than to his Commentary (pp. 144–569) and lengthy Introduction (pp. 13–77). The German of his version of the VPS is almost always a clear and accurate rendering of the Greek. But for scholars who will want to see just what it is that Becker has translated, he could have made things easier. As it is, to check the Greek behind his translation requires access to Giuseppe Giangrande’s edition—by far the best of the VPS—, the textual divisions of which Becker follows. All who plan to use his translation in conjunction with the Greek of Jean François Boissonade’s

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2 *Eunapii vitae sophistarum* (Rome: Typis Publicae Officinacae Polygraphicae, 1956), reprinted in Civiletti (above, n. 1), and in the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*. 
Didot or with Wright’s Loeb text (which employs the Didot pagination) be warned: use Giangrande to get to the right spot in the Greek.¹

This advice pertains, too, to those interested mainly in Becker’s commentary, the lemmata in which follow Giangrande’s page and line numbers rather than the divisions of Giangrande’s text. Thus, for example, the lemma of what the commentary cites (p. 349) as p. 40.2-3 is VPS VI.11.9 both in Giangrande’s text and at p. 103 of Becker’s translation. Here the TLG will not help, for it does not include Giangrande’s pagination, only his divisions of the text itself, and Becker’s parenthetical reference on p. 102 to the Giangrande pagination is too easily missed. Despite its resultant inconvenience, the subset of users of the commentary frustrated by this method should remember that it permits greater precision and thereby facilitates the use of Becker’s work by those who do have Giangrande’s text.

Becker’s Introduction provides a review of earlier editions and translations of and scholarship on the VPS, an account of Eunapius’ life, interests, his qualities as a writer, and an appreciation of his intellectual milieu. Its focus is, of course, on the VPS itself, its date, sources, Eunapius’ conceptualisation of his subject matter and its categorisation into periods, his purpose, and the characteristics peculiar to collective biography, the literary genre within which Becker situates the VPS. With respect to the last—i.e., collective biography and how it can inform us about Eunapius’ views as they were shaped by his contemplation of an iconic collection of individuals through whose biographies he hoped to inspire the formation of a new generation of Hellenes—, Becker draws his inspiration primarily from Patricia Cox Miller and Jan Stenger.² Because of the explanatory power Becker attributes to ‘collective biography’ in his Commentary, this portion of his Introduction (pp. 38–41) demands careful reading. Becker’s nuanced view of the VPS as pagan hagiography and of its relationship as such to its Christian counterpart (pp. 51–77) likewise requires attention in its own right, not just because of its regular recurrence in the Commentary.³ His Introduction, then, provides a bigger picture and furnishes a framework that

³ Philostratorum, Eunapii, Himerii Opera (Paris: Ambroise Firmin Didot, 1850, repr. of 1822 ed.). For Wright, see above, n. 1.


⁵ For the latter, see Becker, p. 664, under Hagiographie (christliche) and Hagiographie (pagane).
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scholars who will consult Becker’s Commentary for guidance about specific passages in the VPS should not neglect.

Becker’s Commentary is impressive and will benefit all students of Eunapius. Thematic headings help to keep readers from losing sight of the forest for the trees, and most readers will appreciate the inclusion in the Commentary of succinct overviews of each of Eunapius’ subjects as they appear in succession. Treatment of textual difficulties and of modern emendations and conjectures is thorough and, even if one does not always agree, Becker clearly states the rationale for the text he translates. Modern scholars whose divergent or even mutually exclusive views of how specific passages should be understood receive a uniformly fair hearing. Citations of parallel passages are abundant, though sometimes perhaps too much so.

There are a few missed opportunities. On p. 385, in the course of his commentary on VPS 48.13 (= VII.3.16/477), Becker, to his credit, notes as a parallel Suda X 555, an entry on Chrysanthius:

Χρύσανθιος· οὗτος ἐκ Σάρδεων ἦν, φιλόσοφος· ὃν διὰ γραµµάτων μεταπέµπεται Ἰουλιανός. ὁ δὲ κατὰ χώραν ἔµενε, τούτῳ ἐπελθὼν αὐτῷ πράττειν ἐκ τοῦ θείου. ὁς γε οὐ πρὸς τὴν περιτρέχουσαν καὶ κενὴν δόξαν ἀνέφερε τὸν ἑαυτοῦ βίον, ἀλλὰ πάντα εἰς τὸ θείου ὑπερτιθείς, ἐκείθεν ἀπαντά ἑπραττε.

Chrysanthius: He was a philosopher from Sardis. Julian summoned him via a letter. And he remained in his land—to do this having come to him from the divine. He, indeed, was not offering-up his own way of life for voguish and vacuous fame, but, having consigned everything to the divine, it was from there that he continued doing everything.

PLRE I (pp. 202–3, s.v. Chrysanthius of Sardis) does not list the entry, which with a high degree of certainly can be attributed to Eunapius’ History via the Excerpta historica of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. Ada Adler notes in her marginalia that the Suda drew the passage from the Excerpta historica and in her apparatus she invites comparison with the parallel in the VPS. She must have wished to signal by this that Constantine’s exceptors had taken from Eunapius’ History what ultimately became Suda X 555. Nonetheless, she never explicitly says so. Nor does she include X 555 in her list of Suda passages from that work (Adler V.81), which helps explain why X 555

6 Becker, pp. 481–2, on VPS X.8.1/493 (Giangrande p. 79.5–6), is a good example.
appears to have escaped the notice of editors of the fragments of the History. Apart from Χ 555 and one mention of him by Michael Psellus, we know Chrysanthius, directly or indirectly, solely through Eunapius. The compilers of the Suda, in turn, knew Eunapius well, but only through his History as it had been incorporated into the Excerpta historicca, not through the VPS. Consequently, Suda Χ 555 should be added to the fragments of Eunapius’ History. Becker was in a good position to have recognised this.

He was in a good position, too, to have considered more carefully than he has done whether or not it is possible to detect any changes over time in Eunapius’ attitudes toward individuals and groups by comparing what we know of the portion of his History completed before the publication of the VPS in or around 399 with what we can assign to sections of the History which post-dated the VPS. Since what the VPS has to say about an unnamed Eleusinian hierophant weighs heavily on this matter, it is surprising that Becker evidently missed arguments advanced against the identification of that hierophant with Nestorius (PLRE I.626, s.v. Nestorius 2). On the whole, though, Becker’s command of relevant bibliography (pp. 570–618) is impressive, and Raphael Brendel (pp. 1338–9) has filled most of the inevitable gaps. There is a select index of passages cited, along with indices of names of people, places, and subjects, themes, and concepts, all of which greatly enhance the utility of the commentary. Brendel (pp. 1337–8) has duly noted some relatively minor slips in spelling and some inconsistencies in citations of ancient authors. I spotted only one, inconsequential oversight in the Greek—a grave accent that should have become an acute when ἡδονάς was removed from its context (p. 146). All in all, the attention to detail and the high level of care in production exhibited throughout the book are a credit to the author, to those who read the iterations of his manuscript, and to the publisher.

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8 A review is not, of course, the proper place for anything but a cursory notice of the new fragment, a full treatment of which is planned for a more appropriate setting. For Chrysanthius in Psellus, see his Λόγος ἐπὶ τῷ ἐν Βλαχέρναις γεγονότι θαύµατι 410–16 (Orationes Hagiographicae, ed. Elizabeth A. Fisher (Stuttgart and Leipzig: B. G. Teubner, 1994) 216), also missing from the PLRE entry.
