




Sławomir Bralewski (Łódź)

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4708-0103>

“WHERE DO THESE TERRIBLE DISEASES AND PESTILENCES COME FROM?”. ILLNESS IN THE ROMAN WORLD IN LIGHT OF THE *ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY* OF EUSEBIUS OF CAESAREA

Abstract. Eusebius of Caesarea did not put diseases at the center of his introduction to *Church History*. He used them instrumentally to promote his theses. Therefore, he neither referred to the medical knowledge of that time nor did he conduct their scientific classification or description. Nevertheless, Eusebius' account contains observations about the sick and their afflictions. The Bishop of Caesarea clearly distinguished between diseases suffered by individuals and those that plagued the masses. In addition, they can be divided into diseases of the body, diseases of the mind, and diseases of the soul.

Eusebius treated disease as a tool in God's hands, with the help of which He intervened in history for the benefit of Christians.

For Eusebius, the best physician of the body and soul was Jesus Christ, who, with his miraculous power, healed all diseases, expelled unclean spirits and demons, and even raised the dead.

Keywords: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, illness, Roman Empire

In the 4th century AD, Greco-Roman culture experienced a revival, as evidenced by the historiographical works produced at the time. One of the most famous authors of classical historiography of this period was undoubtedly Eusebius of Caesarea, the originator of the Church historiography created at that time¹. Eusebius, who wrote in Greek, interpreted history from a Christian

¹ EUZEBIUSZ Z CEZAREI, *Historia kościelna*, trans. A. CABA, based on the trans. by A. LISIECKI, ed. H. PIETRAS, Kraków 2013 [= ŻMT, 70] (cetera: EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS). The literature on Eusebius of Caesarea and various aspects of his work is prolific. Cf. such works as: J.R. FRANK, *Eusebius of Caesarea*, [in:] *Historians of the Christian Tradition*, ed. M. BAUMAN, M.I. KLAUBER, Nashville 1995, p. 59–78; W. TABBERNEE, *Eusebius' Theology of Persecution: As seen in the Various Editions of his Church History*, *J ECS* 5, 1997, p. 319–334; D. MENDELS, *The Media Revolution of Early Christianity. An Essay on Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History*, Cambridge 1999; E. CAROTENUTO, *Tradizione e innovazione nella Historia ecclesiastica di Eusebio di Cesarea*, Naples 2001; S. MORLET, *L'Introduction de l'Histoire ecclésiastique d'Eusèbe de Césarée (I, 2–4): étude génétique, littéraire et rhétorique*, REAP

perspective; he was not only a follower of Christ, but also a bishop of the Church in Caesarea in Palestine and a Christian erudite. Describing nearly three centuries of Church history, he referred to various cases of diseases plaguing individuals or entire communities. Where did these incessant pestilences and terrible diseases come from? What caused the frequent deaths and such a varied and great mortality rate? The people of Alexandria pondered these questions in the 260s, as reported by Dionysius of Alexandria in one of his letters², quoted by Eusebius. How did Eusebius of Caesarea approach this subject? Is any reflection on this subject captured in his *Ecclesiastical History*?

In this article, I will attempt to explore the following issues: What was disease for Eusebius? What terminology did he use in defining its various cases? What types of diseases was he aware of? Did he understand the causes of the infirmities he described? Did he pay attention to people's attitudes toward diseases? Finally, did he mention their treatment?

Terminology

Eusebius of Caesarea used the Greek vocabulary typical of the time to refer to the illness of individuals or to diseases affecting broader social groups, i.e. pestilence. In the former case, he mostly employed the term νόσος³, meaning disease, but also suffering, misery, anguish, madness, insanity and disgrace (I, 13, 12; I, 13, 17; VI, 43, 14; VII, 22, 6; VIII, 13, 11; IX, 7, 11; X, 4, 71)⁴. Sometimes he also used this term when he wrote about the plague (VII, 22, 1; VII, 22, 6). Furthermore, Eusebius applied the expression ἀσθένεια to refer to sickness and weakness⁵ or μαλακία⁶ (I, 13, 12). In his writing, we can also encounter terms such as πάθος (I, 13, 8; I, 13, 10; I, 13, 12; I, 13, 17; III, 6, 12; VII, 18, 1) – translated as a pathological condition, affliction, trouble, passion, but also suffering, torment and death⁷ – and

52, 2006, p. 57–94; *Reconsidering Eusebius. Collected Papers and Literary, Historical, and Theological Issues*, ed. S. INOWLOCKI, C. ZAMAGNI, Leiden–Boston 2011 [= VC.S, 107], p. 69–86; *Eusebius of Caesarea. Tradition and Innovations*, ed. A. JOHNSON, J. SCHOTT, Washington 2013 [= HelS]; A.P. JOHNSON, *Eusebius*, New York 2014.

² DIONYSIUS ALEXANDRINUS, *Epistula festalis ad Hieracem*, [in:] EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 9.

³ Mirko D. GRMEK (*Historia chorób u zarania cywilizacji zachodniej*, trans. A.B. MATUSIAK, Warszawa 2002, p. 54) linked this Greek term with Linear B.

⁴ Cf. *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, ed. G.W.H. LAMPE, Oxford 1961 (cetera: LAMPE), p. 922, s.v. νόσος; *Słownik grecko-polski*, vol. II, comp. O. JUREWICZ, Warszawa 2000 (cetera: JUREWICZ), p. 82, s.v. νόσος; cf. *Słownik grecko-polski*, vol. III, ed. Z. ABRAMOWICZÓWNA, Warszawa 1962, p. 216. Judyta IWAŃSKA (*Znaczenie terminu epidemia w starożytnej literaturze grecko-rzymskiej. Próba analizy na wybranych przykładach*, S.PN 35.4, 2014, p. 183) noted that *From Hippocrates until Ammian Marcellinus, the terms used to describe epidemic diseases in Greek were λοιμός and νόσος, with λοιμός being dominant*.

⁵ LAMPE, p. 243, s.v. ἀσθένεια; LSJ, p. 256, s.v. ἀσθένεια; JUREWICZ, vol. I, p. 116, s.v. ἀσθένεια.

⁶ LSJ, p. 1076, s.v. μαλακία; JUREWICZ, vol. II, p. 28, s.v. μαλακία.

⁷ LAMPE, p. 992–995, s.v. πάθος; JUREWICZ, vol. II, p. 136, s.v. πάθος.

νόσημα (I, 8, 9), referring to sickness, madness or misfortune⁸. At times, Eusebius reached for synonyms for the term disease in relation to the human body – διαφθορά meaning destruction, loss (VI, 4, 12), or ἀσθενής, translated as weak, powerless, sickly, lousy, and miserable⁹ (ἀσθενής τῷ σώματι – V, 1, 29). Interestingly, not once in the *History* did the term ἀρρωστία appear, which also means sickness and weakness¹⁰. In the sense of pestilence, in most cases, Eusebius used the term λοιμός (I, 2, 20; VII, 21, 9; VIII, 15, 2; IX, 8, 1; IX, 8, 3; IX, 8, 4; IX, 8, 12), already employed by Homer¹¹, which is usually translated as pestilence, plague, affliction, and scourge¹². In three instances, he utilized the verb λοιμώττω (II, 1, 2; IX, 8, 5; IX, 8, 11), which means to be afflicted by a plague¹³. Thus, to describe either disease or pestilence, Eusebius employed terms commonly known at the time, associated with misfortune, suffering or even annihilation and death, though clearly, he had his linguistic preferences.

Diseases of individuals

Diseases of the body

While mentioning diseases of various kinds, Eusebius rarely provided the names of the people affected. These included such figures as the legendary King Abgar of Edessa, King Herod of Judea, the rulers of the Roman Empire Galerius and Diocletian, the Church people Novatian, Origen, as well as a certain Abdos, son of Abdos¹⁴, and the old man Serapion¹⁵. Describing Abgar’s ailments, Eusebius only stated that the king suffered from a terrible disease, incurable by human means (πάθει τὸ σῶμα δεινῶ καὶ οὐ θεραπευτῶ ὅσον ἐπ’ ἀνθρωπειᾷ δυνάμει καταφθιρόμενος)¹⁶. On the other hand, the aforementioned Abdos, son of Abdos, was said to have been ill with gout (ποδάγγρα)¹⁷.

Of all the cases of illness, the historian devoted the most space to describing Herod’s maladies, quoting extensively from Flavius Josephus’ account¹⁸. The illness

⁸ LAMPE, p. 922, s.v. νόσημα; JUREWICZ, vol. II, p. 82, s.v. νόσημα.

⁹ LSJ, p. 256, s.v. ἀσθενής; JUREWICZ, vol. I, p. 116, s.v. ἀσθενής.

¹⁰ LSJ, p. 247, s.v. ἀρρωστία; JUREWICZ, vol. I, p. 112, s.v. ἀρρωστία.

¹¹ HOMER, *The Iliad*, I, 60, trans. A.T. MURRAY, London–Cambridge Mass. 1960.

¹² LSJ, p. 1060, s.v. λοιμός; JUREWICZ, vol. II, p. 19, s.v. λοιμός.

¹³ LSJ, p. 1060, s.v. λοιμώττω; JUREWICZ, vol. II, p. 19, s.v. λοιμώττω. See also: J. IWAŃSKA, *Znaczenie...*, p. 175–184.

¹⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 18.

¹⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 44, 2–5.

¹⁶ A. PALMER, *The Place of King Abgar in the Scheme of Eusebius’ Ecclesiastical History*, BAELAC 8, 1998, p. 17–19.

¹⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 18.

¹⁸ IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, XVII, 6, 5, ed. B. NIESE, [in:] *Flavii Iosephi Opera*, vol. I–IV, Berlin 1955 (cetera: IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *Antiquitates Iudaicae*); IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *De bello Iudaico*, I, 33, 5, ed. B. NIESE, [in:] *Flavii Iosephi Opera*, vol. VI, Berlin 1955 (cetera: IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS,

of the Roman-appointed King of Judea reportedly engulfed his entire body and tormented him with various afflictions (ποικίλοις πάθεσιν). Eusebius cites that Herod was burned by a slow fire, consuming his ulcer-covered insides, which was accompanied by severe abdominal pains. In addition, we read that Herod suffered from terrible unsatisfied hunger. His lower abdomen and legs were affected by swelling, and maggots bred in the sores of his private parts. His breathing was labored, and he could not lie down due to shortness of breath. He had a fever, although it was not high. An unpleasant smell came from his mouth, and he suffered unbearable itching all over his skin¹⁹. As Eusebius emphasized, the disease led to his death²⁰.

Eusebius also devoted considerable attention to the illness of Emperor Galerius. According to the historian's account, this ruler's health problems began with gluttony, an affliction that had turned his body into a fatty lump even before he fell ill. The disease manifested with an ulcer that appeared suddenly inside his intimate parts, and, along with a suppurative fistula, wreaked incurable (ἀνίατος) havoc in his bowels. Countless worms crawled in his wounds, while a corpse-like fetor (θανατώδη τε ὀδμήν) wafted from them. In addition, according to Eusebius' account, the obese body consumed by the disease began to rot, which was a horrendous and unbearable sight for those nearby (ἀφόρητον καὶ φρικτοτάτην)²¹.

De bello Iudaico). See: J.W. VAN HENTEN, *Herod the Great in Josephus*, [in:] *A Companion to Josephus*, ed. H.H. CHAPMAN, Z. RODGERS, Chichester 2016, p. 235–246.

¹⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 8, 6–9. On Herod's illness see: J. MCSHERRY, *Worms, Diabetes and King Herod the Great*, JMB 5, 1997, p. 167–169; N. KOKKINOS, *Herod's Horrid Death*, BARev 43, 1998, p. 8–62; F.P. RETIEF, J.F.G. CILLIERS, *The Illnesses of Herod the Great*, ATHe 26.2 (sup. 7), 2006, p. 278–293; A. KASHER, E. WITZTUM, *King Herod: A Persecuted Persecutor. A Case Study in Psychohistory and Psychobiography*, Berlin 2007, p. 391–404; K. CZAJKOWSKI, B. ECKHARDT, *Herod and the Worms*, [in:] *Herod in History. Nicolaus of Damascus and the Augustan Context*, Oxford 2021, p. 165–174.

²⁰ On the date of Herod's death, see: T.D. BARNES, *The Date of Herod's Death*, JTS 19, 1968, p. 204–209.

²¹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 16, 4–5. The most detailed account of Galerius' illness and death can be found in the work by LACTANTIUS (*De mortibus persecutorum*, XXXIII, 1–11, ed. J. MOREAU, Paris 1954, cetera: LACTANTIUS), who builds an image similar to the one presented by Eusebius. See: P. COOK, *Lactantius on the Death of Galerius: A Re-Reading of De Mortibus Persecutorum* 33, VC 73, 2019, p. 385–403. Galerius' illness was also mentioned in other sources: *Origo Constantini*, 3, vol. I, *Text und Kommentar*, ed. I. KÖNIG, Trier 1987; OROSE, *Histoires (Contre les Païens)*, VII, 28, 12–13, vol. III, ed., trans. M.-P. ARNAUD-LINDET, Paris 1991 [= CUF.SG, 297] (cetera: OROSIUS); *Ioannis Zonarae Epitome historiarum libri XIII–XVIII*, XII, 34, rec. T. BÜTTNER WOBST, BONNAE 1897 [= CSHB] (cetera: ZONARAS); AURELIUS VICTOR, *Liber de caesaribus*, 40, 9, rec. F. PICHLMAYER, R. GRÜNDER, Leipzig 1970 [= BSGR] (cetera: AURELIUS VICTOR); ZOSIME, *Histoire nouvelle*, II, 11, vol. I, ed., trans. F. PASCHOUD, Paris 1979 [= CUF] (cetera: ZOSIMOS). On Galerius' illness see: A.A. KOUSULIS, K. ECONOMOPOULOS, M. HATZINGER, A. ESHRAGHIAN, S. TSIODRAS, *The Fatal Disease of Emperor Galerius*, JACS 215, 2012, p. 890–893; R. SUSKI, *Galeriusz, cesarz, wódz, prześladowca*, Kraków 2016, p. 349–371.

Eusebius also included information about Emperor Diocletian, in which he pointed out that a long and very unpleasant illness or bodily impotence (μακρᾶ καὶ ἐπιλυποτάτη τῆ τοῦ σώματος ἀσθενεία) led to this ruler’s death (διεργασθεῖς)²². When introducing his readers to the figure of Origen, Eusebius drew attention to the weakness and decrepitude of the man’s torso or chest (διαφθορᾶς τοῦ θώρακος), which in the Polish translation of Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History* was rendered as a stomach disease²³. Eusebius also cited a case of illness of an unnamed man whose body was unexpectedly covered with disease from head to toe²⁴. Furthermore, he mentioned a woman suffering from hemorrhage, who, according to the three Gospels, was healed by Christ²⁵. Describing the fate of Patiens, Bishop of Lyon, who was ninety years old at the time, Eusebius explained that the old man’s body was so weak that he could hardly breathe, but he was strengthened by the power of his spirit and animated by a desire for martyrdom. His body may have been broken by old age and disease, but his soul remained strong so Christ would triumph through it²⁶. When discussing Novatus²⁷, the historian wrote that the theologian’s case of severe illness (νόσος [...] χαλεπός) was spurred by satanic possession²⁸. This was undoubtedly a reference to a bodily illness, since later in his argument, Eusebius revealed that the sick man was bed-ridden and appeared to be close to dying.

Diseases of the mind

Eusebius also mentioned a particular illness, not a good omen (νόσον [...] οὐκ αἰσίας), which drove one of his contemporaries to lose his mind (καὶ τὰ τῆς διανοίας εἰς ἕκστασιν αὐτῷ παρήγητο). The context suggests that he was referring to Emperor Diocletian. He wrote about him as the first of the emperors, noting that as a result of the aforementioned illness, he retired to his ordinary, private life along with his co-emperor who was second in rank to him²⁹. Therefore, Eusebius meant Diocletian and Maximian³⁰. Interestingly, he attributed the disease only to Diocletian. Apparently, he recognized that Maximian, as a ruler of the second rank, had to submit to the will of the first *Augustus*. In the opinion of the Bishop of Caesarea, resigning from power as a result of this illness led to the split of the state into two

²² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, Addendum, 3.

²³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 4, 12.

²⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 9, 7.

²⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 18, 1; Mt 9: 20–22; Mc 5: 25–34; Lc 8: 43–48.

²⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, V, 1, 29.

²⁷ Eusebius was referring to Novatian.

²⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 43, 14.

²⁹ According to LACTANTIUS, XVIII, it was Galerius who forced Diocletian to abdicate. See on this subject: Ch.S. MACKAY, *Lactantius and the Succession to Diocletian*, CP 94.2, 1999, p. 198–209.

³⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 13, 11.

parts, which Eusebius believed had never happened before. The information about Diocletian's mental illness was obtained by the Bishop of Caesarea from sources, one of which was Lactantius. According to the latter's account, the ruler suffered from some kind of illness for a whole year, which took a severe form and almost led to his death. When he regained consciousness, he went insane and his mind was failing³¹.

Diseases occurring *en masse*

Diseases of the body

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius of Caesarea pointed to the constant pestilences (λοιμός) that scourged humanity alongside famines or wars³². Continuous plagues (συνεχεῖς λοιμοί) tormenting people were also mentioned by Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius³³. It should be emphasized that the Bishop of Caesarea provided only general statements about the plague without making references to the findings of Hippocrates³⁴ or Galen³⁵, that is, the medical knowledge of the time.

A specific case of the plague was one that struck Alexandria after the riots in that city during Macrian's usurpation between 260–261, and which is referred to in the literature as the "Plague of Cyprian"³⁶. According to Eusebius, the plague broke out before Easter (διαλαβούσης νόσου τῆς τε ἑορτῆς πλησιαζούσης)³⁷. Recent findings indicate that the wave of illness began in the winter months of 262/263³⁸. Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by the Bishop of Caesarea, wrote of the great sorrow in which the inhabitants were plunged; the city was drowning in tears while the

³¹ LACTANTIUS, XVII, 9: *demens enim factus est, ita ut certis horis insaniret, resipisceret*.

³² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 2, 20.

³³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 9.

³⁴ HIPPOCRATES (*Epidemics*, 2, 4–7, ed., trans. W.D. SMITH, Cambridge 1994 [= LCL, 477]) distinguished between three basic types of pestilence: pandemic, epidemic, and lemodic. This division was known to AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, among others (*Rerum gestarum libri qui supersunt*, XIX, 4, 7, vol. I–II, ed. C.V. CLARK, Berlin 1910–1915, cetera: AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS).

³⁵ See: A. PACEWICZ, *Galen o naturze wiedzy medycznej*, SPhW 4.4, 2009, p. 119–125.

³⁶ Cyprian Bishop of Carthage described in detail the course of this epidemic in a treatise *De mortalitate* (rec. G. HARTEL, [in:] CSEL, vol. III.1, Vindobonae 1868, p. 295–314), and S.R. HUEBNER also mentioned it in the fifth chapter of the dissertation *The "Plague of Cyprian": A Revised View of the Origin and Spread of a 3rd-c. CE Pandemic*, JRA 34, 2021, p. 1–24; T. SKIBIŃSKI, M.P. KSIĄŻYK, *Po-stawa chrześcijan wobec Zarazy Cypriana w świetle źródeł epoki*, VP 78, 2021, p. 121–140.

³⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 1. According to Sabine R. HUEBNER (*The "Plague of Cyprian"...*, p. 5), the first wave of the pestilence in Alexandria at that time took place during the persecution of Christians during the reign of Emperor Valerian, that is, in 257–258.

³⁸ See: S.R. HUEBNER, *The "Plague of Cyprian"...*, p. 2–6.

groans of the moribund and their loved ones could be heard everywhere³⁹. The epidemic mentioned by Eusebius and Dionysius was not limited to Alexandria and was not short-lived. It spread to various parts of the Roman Empire and festered there with varying intensity for almost twenty years (from 251/252 to 270)⁴⁰, significantly weakening the Roman Empire. Information about it can be found in various sources. Aurelius Victor⁴¹, Eutropius⁴², Orosius⁴³, Zosimos⁴⁴, Zonaras⁴⁵ or Jordanes⁴⁶ wrote about it.

The next epidemic described by Eusebius occurred in 312. This time the historian reported a plague, preceded by famine, which vexed the inhabitants of the eastern part of *Imperium Romanum* during the reign of Maximinus Daza. The situation of the population was aggravated by another disease, anthrax, which the Bishop of Caesarea conveyed as ulcers with accompanying fever. The aforementioned ulcer would eat into a person's entire body and attack their eyes, causing a great many men, women and children to lose their sight⁴⁷. Famine took a deadly toll on the poorer classes at the time. The rich, including the authorities, military commanders and thousands of officials, had sufficient food supplies but perished – whole families at a time – due to the plague, which brought them sudden and violent death⁴⁸. *Lamentations were heard everywhere; in all the alleys, in all the squares and streets, all one could see were the wailing funeral processions with their customary howling of flutes and clamor*⁴⁹. Eusebius concluded that death warred with a double-edged weapon: *with pestilence and with hunger, and soon, it took entire families, as one witnessed two or three corpses carried in one procession*⁵⁰. Quoting Flavius Josephus⁵¹, Eusebius also mentioned the sick residents of Jerusalem who

³⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 2. Analyzing the source message, Kyle HARPER (*Pandemics and Passages to Late Antiquity: Rethinking the Plague of c. 249–270 described by Cyprian*, JRA 28, 2015, p. 246) ruled out a number of diseases, such as the bubonic plague, measles, anthrax, cholera, typhoid, smallpox, and initially, even influenza. However, in his subsequent work, he takes into account epidemic influenza or hemorrhagic fever: IDEM, *The Fate of Rome. Climate, Disease, and the End of an Empire*, Princeton 2017, p. 141–144.

⁴⁰ According to S.R. HUEBNER (*The "Plague of Cyprian"...*, p. 6–13), the plague did not come to Egypt from the depths of Africa along the Nile, but was brought to the territory of the empire on the Danube by the Goths.

⁴¹ AURELIUS VICTOR, 30, 33.

⁴² EUTROPIUS, *Breviarium*, 9, 5, trans., comm. H. W. BIRD, Liverpool 1993.

⁴³ OROSIUS, VII, 21, 5.

⁴⁴ ZOSIMOS, I, 37, 3.

⁴⁵ ZONARAS, XII, 21.

⁴⁶ *Iordanis Getica*, 104, 106, [in:] MGH.AA, vol. V.1, ed. T. MOMMSEN, Berolini 1882.

⁴⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 1.

⁴⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 11.

⁴⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 11.

⁵⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 12.

⁵¹ IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *De bello Iudaico*, V, 13, 6.

did not have the strength to bury their loved ones during the siege of the city by Titus Flavius in the year 70⁵². The context suggests that this was a common occurrence. In this case, the illness resulted in a profound weakness of the sick.

Interestingly, in his *Ecclesiastical History* Eusebius did not write a single word⁵³ about one of the greatest epidemics in the history of the Roman Empire, which took place during the reign of Marcus Aurelius⁵⁴. By Galen, *pestis Antonini* was called the great plague⁵⁵, and by Ammian Marcellin the plague of primordial times (*labes primordialis*)⁵⁶. According to the latter historian, it possessed *the power of incurable diseases, and in the era of Verus and Marcus Antoninus it contaminated everything with a deadly disease, from the very Persian borders to the Rhine and Gaul*⁵⁷. It is unclear what disease ravaged the Roman Empire at the time – it may have been smallpox, spotted typhus or bubonic plague⁵⁸ – nor do we know how

⁵² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, III, 6, 12.

⁵³ This was observed by David J. DEVORE (*“The only event mightier than everyone’s hope”*: *Classical Historiography and Eusebius’ Plague Narrative*, H.On-L 14, 2020, p. 27), who, however, made no attempt to explain why this was the case.

⁵⁴ The aforementioned plague has a rich literature, see, e.g.: J.F. GILLIAM, *The Plague under Marcus Aurelius*, AJP 82.3, 1961, p. 225–251; R.J. LITTMAN, M.L. LITTMAN, *Galen and the Antonine Plague*, AJP 4.3, 1973, p. 243–255; R.P. DUNCAN-JONES, *The Impact of the Antonine Plague*, JRA 9, 1996, p. 108–136; P. JANISZEWSKI, *Natura w służbie propagandy. Katakлизmy i rzadkie fenomeny w łacińskich brewiariach historycznych i w “Historia Augusta”*, [in:] *Chrześcijaństwo u schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze*, vol. II, ed. T. DERDA, E. WIPSYZKA, Kraków 1999, p. 55–66; J.R. FEARS, *The Plague under Marcus Aurelius and the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, IDCNA 18, 2004 p. 65–77; Ch. BRUUN, *The Antonine Plague and the “Third-Century Crisis”*, [in:] *Crises and the Roman Empire. Proceedings of the Seventh Workshop of the International Network Impact of Empire (Nijmegen, June 20–24 2006)*, ed. O. HEKSTER, G. DE KLEIJN, D. SLOOTJES, Leiden–Boston 2007, p. 201–218; M. VLACH, *The Antonine Plague and Impact Possibilities during the Marcomannic Wars*, [in:] *Marcomannic Wars and Antonine Plague. Selected Essays on Two Disasters that shook the Roman World*, ed. M. ERDRICH, B. KOMORÓCZY, P. MADEJSKI, M. VLACH, Brno–Lublin 2020, p. 23–36; B. SITEK, *Pestis Antonini. Reakcja Marka Aureliusza na globalną starożytną epidemię*, TKPr 13.1, 2020, p. 389–399.

⁵⁵ See: R. FLEMMING, *Galen and the Plague*, [in:] *Galen’s Treatise Περὶ Ἀλμπίας (De indolentia) in Context. A Tale of Resilience*, ed. C. PETIT, Leiden 2019 [= SAM, 52], p. 219–244.

⁵⁶ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, XXIII 6, 24. The aforementioned disease was said to have been contracted by Roman troops after the capture of Seleucia in 165, when they ransacked a temple described by the historian as the temple of Apollo Comaeus and searched some kind of secret hiding place, hitherto inaccessible to the people.

⁵⁷ AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS, XXIII 6, 24. According to the findings by Richard P. DUNCAN-JONES (*The Antonine Plague Revisited*, Arc 52, 2018, p. 43), the aforementioned epidemic is captured in the sources in 165–192.

⁵⁸ J.F. GILLIAM, *The Plague under Marcus Aurelius...*, p. 225; R.J. LITTMAN, M.L. LITTMAN, *Galen and the Antonine Plague...*, p. 243–255; A.R. BIRLEY, *Marcus Aurelius. A Biography*, New York 2000, p. 49–50. Yan ZELENER (*Genetic Evidence, Density Dependence and Epidemiological Models of the Antonine Plague*, [in:] *L’Impatto della “peste antonina”*, ed. E. LO CASCIO, Bari 2012, p. 167–177) believe it was smallpox.

far-reaching the effects of the aforementioned plague were. Orosius wrote that it swept through all of Italy, whose cities and settlements became depopulated and decayed, becoming ruins overgrown with forests⁵⁹. Some researchers even believed that the epidemic situation at the time gradually led to the collapse of the Roman empire⁶⁰. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that Eusebius of Caesarea did not know about it, and yet he omitted it altogether. It seems that he did so deliberately. For what reason? The answer must be sought by analyzing the causes of diseases as defined by Eusebius, which is done below.

Diseases of the mind

In his account, Eusebius writes that the followers of traditional cults charged Christians with a kind of mental illness. He quotes a decree from Emperor Maximinus placed on a stele in Tyre⁶¹, in which the ruler accused Christians of a disease of the soul gripped by harmful confusion and vain foolishness⁶², and which a little further is called a grave disease (ἡ νόσου βαρείας)⁶³. In his view, the followers of Christ had lost their reason, since those of them who departed from Christianity returned to a simple, proper and beautiful mind (ὀρθὴν καὶ καλλίστην διάνοιαν)⁶⁴. Naturally, Eusebius did not share this assessment and suggested the opposite. He wrote of people suffering from the disease of satanic polytheism⁶⁵, who recovered by professing faith in one God, the Creator of all things, *and they worshipped Him with the rite of true piety, flowing from the divine and rational religion* (σώφρονος θρησκείας)⁶⁶. If, therefore, Christianity was a rational religion, it means that the followers of traditional cults who fought against it acted irrationally: they were the ones who lost their reason, and thus fell *en masse* into a disease of the mind.

⁵⁹ OROSIUS, VII, 15, 5–6. According to Kyle HARPER (*The Fate of Rome...*, p. 115), during that epidemic the Roman Empire lost about 10% of its entire population, and according to Yan ZELNER (*Genetic evidence...*, p. 167–177) the losses were even higher, reaching 22–24%.

⁶⁰ Ch. BRUUN, *The Antonine Plague...*, p. 201–218; J.R. FEARS, *The Plague under Marcus...*, p. 65–77; W.V. HARRIS, *The Great Pestilence and the Complexities of the Antonine-Severan Economy*, [in:] *L'Impatto...*, p. 331–338.

⁶¹ According to Stephen MITCHELL (*Maximinus and the Christians in A.D. 312: A New Latin Inscription*, JRS 78, 1988, p. 114), this regulation was published before May–June 312. See also: F. MILLAR, *The Emperor in the Roman World (31 B.C.–A.D. 337)*, London 1977, p. 582; T.D. BARNES, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, London 1982, p. 68.

⁶² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 9.

⁶³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 11.

⁶⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 11.

⁶⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 3, 2.

⁶⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 3, 2.

Diseases of the soul

Eusebius described not only cases of illness of the body, but also of the soul. These included the long-standing sickness of superstition (παλαιᾶ νόσῳ), idolatry (δαισιδαμονίας) and satanic, filthy polytheism (δαιμονικῆς κατέπτουον πολυθεΐας)⁶⁷, which had shackled (πεπεδημένοι) the human souls. As I pointed out earlier, he referred to the aforementioned affliction also as a disease of the mind, but it was primarily a disease of the soul, considering the eschatological consequences of this disease for specific people. It affected the followers of polytheism, and thus a great number of people at the time.

The plague also served Eusebius to highlight the destruction caused by heretics in the Church. He wrote that they *creep into the Church insidiously* (μεθόδῳ) *like the plague* (λοιμός) *and scabies* (ψωραλέος), *and wreak great havoc among those whom they manage to poison with their hidden venom, so pernicious and terrible* (δυσσαθῆ καὶ χαλεπὸν ἰόν)⁶⁸. Clearly, Eusebius was referring to a disease of the soul, similar in its contagiousness and insidiousness to the plague and scabies. Moreover, the aforementioned disease has disastrous consequences for man. It leads to havoc and fatal poisoning within him.

Causes of diseases

When reporting on individual sick people, Eusebius generally provided the causes of their suffering. In Herod's case, it was a punishment for the numerous crimes committed by the King of Judea. According to the Bishop of Caesarea, by God's will (θεήλατος) Herod was struck by the whip (μάστιξ), which led to his death⁶⁹. Eusebius also cited Flavius Josephus in this case. The latter, referring to the causes of Herod's suffering, cited the opinion of fortune-tellers and people able to predict events (ἐλέγετο γοῦν ὑπὸ τῶν θειαζόντων καὶ οἷς ταῦτα προαποφθέγγεσθαι σοφία πρόκειται), who *said that God thus takes vengeance on the king for his many impious deeds*⁷⁰. In this case, Eusebius quoted the exact words of Flavius Josephus. In another place, however, when he made a reference to another work by the same historian, he slightly altered the message. In that text, Flavius Josephus also referred to the judgment of fortune-tellers, according to which Herod's illness was a punishment for the death of specific "learned men"⁷¹. However, in Eusebius'

⁶⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 3, 2.

⁶⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 1, 12: μεθόδῳ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν λοιμώδους καὶ ψωραλέας νόσου δίκη ὑποδύμενοι, τὰ μέγιστα λυμαίνονται τοὺς οἷς ἐναπομάζασθαι οἰοί τε ἄν εἶεν τὸν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀποκεκρυμμένον δυσσαθῆ καὶ χαλεπὸν ἰόν.

⁶⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 8, 5.

⁷⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 8, 8: ἐλέγετο γοῦν ὑπὸ τῶν θειαζόντων καὶ οἷς ταῦτα προαποφθέγγεσθαι σοφία πρόκειται, ποινήν τοῦ πολλοῦ καὶ δυσσεβοῦς ταύτην ὁ θεὸς εἰσπράττεσθαι παρὰ τοῦ βασιλέως. Cf. IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *Antiquitates Iudaicae*, XVII, 6, 5.

⁷¹ IOSEPHUS FLAVIUS, *De bello Iudaico*, I, 33, 5.

account, the fortune-tellers made a general statement that the ruler of Judea suffered as punishment (ποινή), with no explicit mention of the sin⁷². Writing about Herod's death, the historian concluded that he suffered a just punishment for murdering the children in Bethlehem and attempting to take the Savior's life⁷³.

Similarly, Galerius was said to have been punished by God for persecuting Christians. As Eusebius argued, the punishment sent by God first affected the ruler's body and then penetrated his soul⁷⁴. However, when the emperor realized the cause of his suffering, he humbled himself before God, the Creator of all things, and gave orders to cease the persecution⁷⁵, which briefly alleviated his suffering before he died⁷⁶.

Eusebius was aware that the followers of traditional cults applied similar logic to that used by Christians. The historian illustrates it by quoting a decree from Emperor Maximinus, placed on a stele in Tyre. This time it was the pagans who saw Christians as the cause of their misfortunes. In the decree, the ruler first called the followers of Christ not so much godless as hapless people (τῶν ἀσεβῶν ὅσον τῶν ἀθλίων)⁷⁷; later, however, they are referred to a godless, vile or criminal people (τῶν ἀθεμίτων). As the emperor indicated, when they appeared in Tyre, the city's inhabitants turned to the ruler – according to the phrase used on the stele – to ask for a cure and help (ἰασίν τινα καὶ βοήθειαν ἀπαιτοῦσα)⁷⁸. Therefore, in their view, Christians were a kind of disease that required a cure, all the more dangerous because it could spread to others.

Similarly, the terrible illness of the aforementioned man whose body unexpectedly got covered with disease from head to toe was presented as God's punishment, this time for perjury. In Eusebius' view, the culprit brought it upon himself by taking a false oath and swearing that his body ought to be consumed by a terrible disease if he was not telling the truth⁷⁹.

Eusebius of Caesarea also pointed to the plague as one type of punishment God inflicted upon entire communities for the evils they committed. He believed that the vigilant God was punishing mankind with *floods and fires enveloping the whole earth like a primeval forest*. He sent upon it incessant famines, wars and thunderbolts, as well as pestilences (λοιμός). He subjected people to constant floggings to impede *the development of a dangerous and very severe disease of the soul*⁸⁰.

⁷² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 8, 9.

⁷³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 8, 16.

⁷⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 17, 3: μέτεισιν δ' οὖν αὐτὸν θεήλατος κόλασις, ἐξ αὐτῆς αὐτοῦ καταρξαμένη σαρκός καὶ μέχρι τῆς ψυχῆς προελθοῦσα.

⁷⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 17, 1.

⁷⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, Addendum, 1.

⁷⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 3.

⁷⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 6.

⁷⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 9, 5–7.

⁸⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 2, 20.

For Eusebius, therefore, an illness of the soul was far more dangerous than an illness of the body for it led to eternal annihilation.

Eusebius argued that it was with famine and pestilence⁸¹ that God punished the Romans for the transgressions and persecution of Christians by Maximinus Daza⁸². However, this was not solely a punishment, but also an intervention by God, the Defender of the Church, on behalf of His flock. In Eusebius' opinion, He rushed from the heavens to aid the Christians⁸³, sending an unexpected famine, along with a plague and yet another disease, aforementioned anthrax which led to blindness⁸⁴. Furthermore, the plagues sent by God tested the veracity of religion. According to Eusebius, Maximinus – whom he described as a tyrant – boasted *that thanks to his zeal in serving idols and the persecution of Christians there were no famine, pestilence or war during his reign*, and as if in spite of his words, all these calamities befell the empire both suddenly and at once, *humiliating the tyrant's insolent pride before God*, while foreshadowing his ultimate downfall⁸⁵.

Eusebius was aware that illness was coupled with old age, which he noted when mentioning the ninety-year-old Patiens, Bishop of Lyon⁸⁶. In Eusebius' view, Origen's weakness and the deterioration of his torso or chest was the result of the austere lifestyle he had led, fasting, walking barefoot for long years, and abstaining even longer from wine and anything else that was not essential to keep him alive⁸⁷. Eusebius also realized that the source of the disease ravaging the inhabitants of besieged Jerusalem was hunger⁸⁸.

Eusebius believed that the diseases of the soul bound by superstition, idolatry and satanic polytheism, were caused by the cultivation of ancestral legacy (προγόνων διαδοχής) and old mistakes (τῆς ἀνέκαθεν πλάνης)⁸⁹. According to the historian, at the root of the severe illness that befell Novatian (to whom

⁸¹ In Eusebius' account, pestilence often accompanied war, and was preceded by, or at least co-occurred with, famine (EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 15, 2). Paweł JANISZEWSKI (*Żywioły w służbie propagandy, czyli po czyjej stronie stoi Bóg. Studium kłęsk i rzadkich fenomenów przyrodniczych u historyków Kościoła w IV i V wieku*, [in:] *Chrześcijaństwo u schyłku starożytności. Studia źródłoznawcze*, vol. III, ed. T. DERDA, E. WIPSYZKA, Kraków 2000, p. 31) pointed out that war, famine and pestilence have excellent Biblical as well as classical references.

⁸² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 1. The disease struck both the dwellers of the cities, where people died by the thousands, but also the residents of villages and settlements, where the mortality rate was even higher and led to their depopulation; see: EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 4–5.

⁸³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 16: τῆς ἰδίας ἐκκλησίας ὑπέρμαχος θεὸς μόνον οὐχὶ τὴν τοῦ τυράννου καθ' ἡμῶν ἐπιστομίζων μεγαλαυχίαν, τὴν ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν οὐράνιον συμμαχίαν ἐπεδείκνυτο. Paweł JANISZEWSKI (*Żywioły w służbie propagandy...*, p. 30–36) rightly emphasizes the propagandistic nature of Eusebius' argument on the subject.

⁸⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 1.

⁸⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 3.

⁸⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, V, 1, 29.

⁸⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 4, 12.

⁸⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, III, 6, 1–28.

⁸⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 3, 2.

Eusebius referred to as Novatus) was satanic possession⁹⁰. Similarly, in Eusebius' view, before the coming of Christ, the entire human race (τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος) had suffered *from the madness of sinister demons* (σκότω βαθεῖ δαιμόνων ἀλιτηρίων πλάνη), who turned all their deadly power against people and made them succumb to a dark night and deep darkness⁹¹. These demons infected souls with a terrible, lethal poison (τοῖς ἰώδεσι καὶ ψυχοφθόροις δηλητηρίοις), and led them to demise with *these murderous sacrifices offered to dead idols* (μόνον οὐχὶ νεκροῦντος ταῖς τῶν νεκρῶν εἰδώλων νεκροποιοῖς θυσίαις)⁹².

The Bishop of Caesarea may have also recognized the natural sources of disease, since he cited a letter from Dionysius, Bishop of Alexandria, written after the riots taking place in that city during Macrian's usurpation. In the letter, Dionysius pointed to the numerous killings committed at the time. The bloodshed turned the hitherto peaceful ports of the city into the Red Sea⁹³. He wrote about the fetor rising from decomposing bodies and how everything was steeped in a sea of bitterness⁹⁴. He was puzzled why *people still wonder and do not know where these incessant pestilences and these terrible diseases come from, what caused the frequent deaths, and such a varied and great mortality rate*⁹⁵. It seems Dionysius saw the cause of these misfortunes in the harmful vapors, which hovered everywhere and made the air heavy. They were exacerbated by fumes coming from the ground and brought by winds from the sea or river. According to Dionysius, compared to these vapors, *the fetor of decomposing corpses was refreshing dew*⁹⁶.

There is no doubt, however, that Dionysius also interpreted these illnesses as a punishment sent by God and the imminent end of the world, which was met with obliviousness. He lamented, *And although people witness the human race diminishing and depleting on earth with each passing day, they do not tremble at the thought of the approaching final doom*⁹⁷.

Eusebius also seems to be aware that the reason why certain diseases spread was their contagiousness. Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by him, drew attention to the fearful reaction of those around the ill during the plague. The sick were spurned and abandoned by their loved ones. Therefore, person-to-person transmission and infection through contact with the sick were known factors. The dying were thrown into the street and left unburied after death. However, as Dionysius pointed out, the extreme caution was of little use, because death was taking a heavy toll anyway⁹⁸.

⁹⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 43, 14.

⁹¹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, X, 4, 13.

⁹² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, X, 4, 14.

⁹³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 4.

⁹⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 7–8.

⁹⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 9.

⁹⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 8.

⁹⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 21, 10.

⁹⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 10.

In the context of what Eusebius wrote about the causes of diseases – especially those affecting people *en masse* – in which he saw God punishing people for various transgressions, one can be tempted to answer the question why the historian's account omitted the plague that was rampant when Marcus Aurelius was the emperor. Undoubtedly, the key to understanding the decision of the Bishop of Caesarea is the information he includes in his *Ecclesiastical History* on the reign of Marcus Aurelius. First, in Book IV, he quotes a letter from the ruler addressed to the Asiatic Union, in which the emperor orders that complaints denouncing Christians be dismissed and informers be punished⁹⁹. Furthermore, in Book V, he wrote about the miracle of a storm (σηκπητός) and heavy rain (ὄμβρος), which came as a result of the prayers of Christians who were in the imperial army and which saved Marcus Aurelius' soldiers in a clash with the Germanic and Sarmatian peoples¹⁰⁰. Eusebius referred in his account to the message of traditional¹⁰¹ and Christian¹⁰² believers, aware of the different interpretations of the event – *interpretatio pagana* and *interpretatio christiana*. For Eusebius, a credible witness to the documented events was Tertullian, who mentioned the letters of Marcus Aurelius, in which the emperor affirmed that when his army was perishing in Germania for lack of water, it was saved by the prayers of Christians. As a token of gratitude, the emperor reportedly announced that all those who would disturb the Christians by lodging complaints against them would face death¹⁰³. In this context, the account of the plague devastating the empire would be in conflict with Eusebius' interpretation of pestilence in *Ecclesiastical History*, where it was presented as God's intervention in history, His way of punishing and educating humanity. If Marcus Aurelius favored Christians, and this was proven by the "miracle of rain" mentioned by Eusebius, then God could not have punished the ruler or his subjects. This clearly illustrates that Eusebius' goal was not to faithfully reconstruct history, but to convince the reader of God's alliance with mankind, a heavenly symmachia (οὐράνιον συμμαχίαν)¹⁰⁴ that would lead mankind to salvation by carrying out the plan of Divine Providence¹⁰⁵.

⁹⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IV, 13, 1–7.

¹⁰⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, V, 5, 1–2. See on this topic: M. ZIÓŁKOWSKI, "Cud deszczu" i chrześcijaństwo, AUNC.H 27, 1992, p. 89–95; P. JANISZEWSKI, *Żywioty w służbie propagandy...*, p. 20–21; P. KOVÁCS, *Marcus Aurelius' Rain Miracle and the Marcomannic Wars*, Leiden 2008.

¹⁰¹ While he did not mention any of the pagan writers, we know that the following authors wrote about these events: CASSIUS DIO, *Historia Romana*, LXXI, 8–10, ed. U.Ph. BOISSEvain, Berlin 1931; *Histoire Auguste. Les empereurs romains des II^e et III^e siècles*, XXIV, 4, ed. A. CHASTAGNOL, Paris 1994.

¹⁰² EUSEBIUS (V, 5, 4) referred to the un preserved account of Apollinaris of Hierapolis and Tertullian.

¹⁰³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, V, 5, 5–6; TERTULLIANUS, *Apologeticum*, V, 6, ed. E. DEKKERS, Turnholti 1954.

¹⁰⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 7, 16.

¹⁰⁵ See: P. JANISZEWSKI, *Żywioty w służbie propagandy...*, p. 36–37.

Treatment

In his Church history, Eusebius of Caesarea also mentioned the treatment of diseases. In the case of Herod – this time relying on the message of Flavius Josephus – he emphasized that Herod fought his illness. As the Bishop of Caesarea wrote, the sick person wanted to live and braved the terrible suffering; he did not lose hope of being cured and sought treatment options (σωτηρίαν τε ἠλιζεν καὶ θεραπείας ἐπενόει)¹⁰⁶. To this end, he had himself transported beyond Jordan to the warm springs of Kalliroe to take baths there. However, the doctors decided that the ruler’s body must first be warmed up with oil, and for this purpose, it was immersed in a tub filled with olive oil. However, when he fainted during this bath, he finally lost all hope of recovery.

The aforementioned Emperor Galerius also sought help from doctors. As Eusebius’ message may suggest, some physicians would not undertake a treatment that was doomed to failure. The bishop classified them as those who could not endure the overwhelming odor. However, others made an attempt, but without success. Both were executed. The historian was deeply convinced, however, there was no hope of saving the emperor¹⁰⁷.

Eusebius explained after Philo¹⁰⁸ the origin of the name therapists¹⁰⁹ – the ascetics who had been living in Alexandria when the church community started to form there¹¹⁰. He indicated that, just like doctors, they freed a person from evil passions (κακίας παθῶν), soothed and healed the souls of people who sought their help¹¹¹. It is irrelevant to our considerations whether these ascetics really performed these actions. What matters is how Eusebius, citing Philo, perceived the activities of doctors, whose jobs involved not only taking care of the body, but also healing the spirit of damaged people, thus fulfilling the role of today’s psychologists or even

¹⁰⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 8, 10.

¹⁰⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 17, 5.

¹⁰⁸ PHILO ALEXANDRINUS, *De vita contemplativa*, praef. F. DAUMAS, trans. P. MIQUEL, Paris 1963 [= OPhA, 29].

¹⁰⁹ J.E. TYLOR, *The So-Called Therapeutae of De vita Contemplativa: Identity and Character*, HTR 91, 1998, p. 3–24; D.M. HAY, *Foils for the Therapeutae: References to Other Texts and Persons in Philo’s Vita Contemplativa*, [in:] *Neotestamentica et Philonica. Studies in Honor of Peder Borgen*, ed. D.E. AUNE, T. SELAND, J.H. ULRICHSEN, Leiden–Boston 2003 [= NT.S, 106], p. 330–348; C. DEUTSCH, *The Therapeutae, Text Work, Ritual and Mystical Experience*, [in:] *Paradise Now. Essays on Early Jewish and Christian Mysticism*, ed. A. DE DECONICK, Atlanta 2006, p. 287–310; W. BIEDROŃ, *Społeczność terapeutów i esenicyzmy (II w. p.n.e. – I w. n.e.)*, Warszawa 2013; L. MISIARCZYK, *Terapeuci – Żydowski prekursorzy monastycyzmu chrześcijańskiego w De vita contemplativa Filona z Aleksandrii*, VP 70, 2018, p. 9–23.

¹¹⁰ EUSEBIUS (II, 17, 4; II, 17, 24) saw the therapists as a Judeo-Christian community, and this view persisted into the 18th century. See on this subject: L. MISIARCZYK, *Terapeuci...*, p. 15–16.

¹¹¹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 17, 3.

psychotherapists. Furthermore, Eusebius made an interesting mention of Luke the Evangelist. The historian emphasized that Luke was a doctor by profession (τὴν ἐπιστήμην δὲ ἰατρός), but it was from the apostles that he learned to heal souls (ψυχῶν θεραπευτικῆς)¹¹². The Bishops of Laodicea, Eusebius of Alexandria and Theodotus, were likened to doctors by Eusebius. The former, while still a resident of Alexandria, had enjoyed a great reputation. During the riots in Alexandria, when the district of Brucheion was besieged by Roman troops, he looked after the people who had managed to escape from the surrounded part of the city, being like a father and a doctor to them. Thanks to his compassionate and tender care, those exhausted by the siege restored their strength¹¹³. One of his successors, Theodotus, was proficient in the art in healing the human body, and no man surpassed his ability to heal the soul¹¹⁴.

Describing the fear of contact with sick people abandoned by their relatives during a pestilence¹¹⁵, the aforementioned Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius, indirectly points to the awareness that diseases were transmitted via human-to-human contact, and reveals the conviction that isolation from the ill was the only effective measure in the fight against the plague.

Eusebius viewed Christ to be the best doctor; the historian emphasized His sacrifice that was in line with the characteristics of Hippocrates¹¹⁶, according to which the doctor who tries to heal the sick, *looks at pain, touches what is repulsive, and compiles his own suffering from other people's ailments*¹¹⁷. Origen, who was close to Eusebius, also referred to this fragment from the work of Hippocrates¹¹⁸. The Bishop of Caesarea expressed his deep faith in Christ the Savior, stressing that *He saved us, who were not only sick, not only covered with terrible ulcers and full of boiling wounds, but even lay among the dead*¹¹⁹. The historian believed He was the Creator of life, the Giver of light, the great Physician and King, the Lord, and God's Anointed One¹²⁰; according to the author of the *History*, Christ cured all diseases (τὸν ἰώμενον πάσας τὰς νόσους)¹²¹.

Eusebius argued that the news of Christ's miraculous power had spread all over the world during the Savior's lifetime, and drew thousands of people to Judea, even from the most remote areas. He provided the above-mentioned Abgar of Edessa

¹¹² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, III, 4, 6.

¹¹³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 32, 11.

¹¹⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 32, 23: ἰατρικῆς μὲν γὰρ σωμάτων ἀπεφέρετο τὰ πρῶτα τῆς ἐπιστήμης, ψυχῶν δὲ θεραπευτικῆς οἶος οὐδὲ ἄλλος ἀνθρώπων ἐτύγχανεν.

¹¹⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 10.

¹¹⁶ HIPPOCRATES, *De natura hominis*, 1, ed. J. JOUANNA, Berlin 2002.

¹¹⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, X, 4, 11.

¹¹⁸ ORIGÈNE, *Contre Celse*, IV, 15, vol. II (*Livres III et IV*), ed., praef. M. BORRET, Paris 1968 [= SC, 136].

¹¹⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, X, 4, 11.

¹²⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, X, 4, 12.

¹²¹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, X, 4, 71.

as an example¹²². In Abgar's letter to Jesus, quoted by Eusebius, it is emphasized that Christ restored health without medicines and herbs (ἀνευ φαρμάκων καὶ βοτανῶν)¹²³. It is also pointed out that thanks to Jesus, the blind see, the lame walk, and the lepers recover. Additionally, the author of the letter was convinced that Christ's power cast out unclean spirits and demons, healed those who were tormented by chronic illness, and even raised the dead¹²⁴. In Eusebius' account, Jesus promised Abgar to send one of his disciples to heal him. The Syriac text translated by Eusebius shows that after the Ascension of the Savior, Jude (known as Thomas) sent Thaddeus, one of the seventy disciples of Christ, to Edessa. There, Thaddeus reportedly used God's power to heal every disease and infirmity (ἐν δυνάμει θεοῦ θεραπεύειν πᾶσαν νόσον καὶ μαλακίαν)¹²⁵. And when he laid his hand on Abgar in the name of Jesus Christ, the king was immediately cured of his sickness and suffering (ἐθεραπεύθη τῆς νόσου καὶ τοῦ πάθους)¹²⁶, which amazed him, all the more so because the healing was accomplished without medicine or herbs¹²⁷. The aforementioned Abdos, son of Abdos, was also said to have been healed of gout¹²⁸. Referring to the healings performed by Christ, Eusebius mentioned a woman suffering from a hemorrhage. According to tradition, she came from Paneada, and in front of her house stood a monument with an unknown climbing plant symbolizing a cure for all diseases¹²⁹. As Eusebius emphasized, the power of Christ was medicine for people whose souls suffered from the disease of superstition and idolatry. Thanks to the teachings and miracles of the Savior's disciples, they were freed from the shackles of satanic polytheism¹³⁰.

Attitude towards the disease

Eusebius' account shows that sick people could count on special treatment. The sick nearing death received the grace of accelerated baptism in bed by dousing¹³¹. Furthermore, someone who sinned could be absolved during the last

¹²² A. PALMER, *The Place of King Abgar...*, p. 17–19; M. TYCNER-WOLICKA, *Opowieść o wizerunku z Edessy. Cesarz Konstantyn Porfirogeneta i nieuczyniony ręką wizerunek Chrystusa*, Kraków 2009, p. 99–117.

¹²³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 6.

¹²⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 6: ὡς γὰρ λόγος, τυφλοὺς ἀναβλέπειν ποιεῖς, χολοὺς περιπατεῖν, καὶ λεπρῶς καθαρῖζεις, καὶ ἀκάθαρτα πνεύματα καὶ δαίμονας ἐκβάλλεις, καὶ τοὺς ἐν μακρονοσίᾳ βασανιζομένους θεραπεύεις, καὶ νεκροὺς ἐγείρεις.

¹²⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 12.

¹²⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 17.

¹²⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 18.

¹²⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 13, 18.

¹²⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 18, 2.

¹³⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, II, 3, 2.

¹³¹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 43, 14.

stage of their fatal disease. Such was the case of Serapion, a faithful old man who lived irreproachably for a long time, but made a sacrifice during the persecution of Christians. He was not offered holy communion until he fell ill, and after being unconscious for three days, he insisted on absolution¹³². A disease also exempted a person from the need to fulfill one's duties as exemplified by a sick presbyter who would not visit a dying man. Dionysius of Alexandria, quoted by Eusebius, justified the ill priest with the comment *therefore, he could not go*.

In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Eusebius used the aforementioned extensive fragment of a letter from Dionysius of Alexandria, in which the latter made interesting observations about the different experiences of the plague in Christian and pagan communities¹³³. First, both groups had to endure the suffering caused by the war and the accompanying hunger¹³⁴. Then they both struggled with the plague. It did not spare Christians, but for pagans, it turned out to be more terrible than any other misfortune they might have feared. According to Dionysius, for Christians the plague (νόσος) was *a school and a test not worse than others*¹³⁵, and this stemmed from their attitude towards other people. Dionysius stressed that for the most part,

motivated by love and brotherly kindness, they did not spare themselves and lived for one another, visited the sick without regard for anything, served them without respite, nurtured them in Christ and gave their lives with great joy. They caught disease a from others, contracted plague from their brothers, and willingly took their pains upon themselves. And there were many who nurtured and strengthened others and died doing so, bringing death upon themselves¹³⁶.

Thus, according to the Bishop of Alexandria, Christians attended to the sick, not only risking contracting the disease, but they took their suffering upon themselves with joy and, with even greater joy, they gave their lives. They let go of the usual human fear of disease and death, which outside observers must have perceived as an aberration. On the other hand, for Dionysius, the behavior of Christians was completely understandable, since they looked after the sick "in Christ", and therefore, in their actions they were guided by faith, entrusting everything to Christ and probably expecting an eternal reward in heaven. It is noteworthy, however, that at the beginning of his argument Dionysius used the phrase *for the*

¹³² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VI, 44, 2–5.

¹³³ David J. DEVORE (*"The only event mightier..."*, p. 27) observed that Eusebius' quotation of Dionysius' letters on the Plague of Cyprian gave the historian the opportunity to apply toposes from classical historiography which highlighted the contrast between Christians and non-Christians.

¹³⁴ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 5. Famine very often accompanied the war, see: EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VIII, 15, 2.

¹³⁵ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 6.

¹³⁶ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 7. See also: T. SKIBIŃSKI, M.P. KSIĄŻYK, *Postawa chrześcijan...*, p. 121–140.

*most part, our brothers...*¹³⁷, which proves that the attitude described above was not represented by all the followers of Christ. Some unspecified minority did not manage to overcome their fears.

Dionysius recapitulated his argument with the following statement: *The best of our brothers, a number of presbyters, deacons and lay people, ended their lives in this way, and are much admired, as such a death being the fruit of great piety and strong faith is in no way inferior to martyrdom.* Thus, the Bishop of Alexandria compared Christians caring for the sick and consciously giving their lives for this cause to martyrs, hence, he too had no doubts about their eternal salvation. He considered them to be the best of Christians, but also emphasized their considerable number¹³⁸. However, the quoted letter of Dionysius suggests that some Christians even sought martyrdom, as it was sometimes the case with “blood” martyrs. Dionysius wrote:

they took the bodies of the saints in their arms and pressed them against their chests, closed their eyes and mouths, carried them on their shoulders, arranged them, hugged them, embraced them, washed them and dressed them in fine robes, and soon they underwent the same treatments, for those who stayed behind followed those who overtook them¹³⁹.

It appears that these brothers did more than the duty towards the dead required of them, not only ignoring the fact that they could contract a disease, but even desiring sickness and death.

Further in his letter, Dionysius describes the different attitude of pagans to the sick.

With pagans, it was quite different. Those who fell ill were rejected and abandoned by their relatives. They put the dying into the street and left the bodies unburied. They avoided contact with death and its proximity, but despite all precautions, it was not easy to escape it¹⁴⁰.

In the opinion of the Bishop of Alexandria, the fear of contracting a disease and, consequently, possible death, was so great among the pagans that it ruined relations between people close to each other, and as a result, the sick were alone in their suffering, died in the streets, and their bodies were left without burial. Therefore, the differences in attitudes between Christians and pagans were the result of disparate approaches to suffering and death. For Christians, these were a gateway to eternal life and true happiness, while pagans generally attached their hopes to temporal life.

¹³⁷ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 7: οἱ γοῦν πλείστοι τῶν ἀδελφῶν ἡμῶν.

¹³⁸ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 8: πρεσβύτεροι τέ τινες καὶ διάκονοι καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ λαοῦ.

¹³⁹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 9.

¹⁴⁰ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, VII, 22, 10.

Eusebius continued on this subject later in his *Church History*, while discussing the plague during the reign of Maximinus Daza. He stressed that in this difficult time only Christians *demonstrated with their actions the compassion and love they had for their brothers* and they did so to all those in need and were ready for any service¹⁴¹. And according to Eusebius, the group who was left to fend for themselves in their misfortune and required help was enormous. Christians took care of the dying by providing them with burial, and distributed bread to the starving and the exhausted. The Bishop of Caesarea stated: *When these deeds became known to the general public, all worshiped the God of Christians and recognized that only they were truly pious and godly, as they had proved it with their actions*¹⁴².

Summary

Eusebius of Caesarea did not put diseases at the center of his introduction to *Church History*¹⁴³. He used them instrumentally to promote his theses. Therefore, he neither referred to the medical knowledge of that time nor did he conduct their scientific classification or description. Nevertheless, Eusebius' account contains observations about the sick and their afflictions. The Bishop of Caesarea clearly distinguished between diseases suffered by individuals and those that plagued the masses. In addition, they can be divided into diseases of the body, diseases of the mind, and diseases of the soul. In the historian's account, the first type was associated with physical ailments and suffering that often led to death. Eusebius presented the maladies, sometimes in detail, not to prove how reliable he was as a researcher, but to illustrate how immense the suffering of the sick was. This stemmed from the belief held by Eusebius that diseases affecting individuals or entire communities were generally punishment for specific offenses. However, it should also be remembered that illness as an expression or manifestation of "God's punishment" for committed sins, crimes, etc., is one of the age-old literary toposes. As for Christians, a disease allowed them to share in Christ's martyrdom and His plan of salvation. The Bishop of Caesarea, therefore, included in his message only the diseases that fit his concept of history. He ignored those which contradicted the pattern, as was the case with the epidemic from the time of Marcus Aurelius. Eusebius treated disease as a tool in God's hands, with the help of which He intervened in history for the benefit of Christians. It should be emphasized once again that the aim of Eusebius was not to faithfully reconstruct history, but to convince the reader of the plan of divine Providence based on God's alliance with people, a heavenly *symmachia* that would lead humanity to salvation. It is noteworthy that the Bishop of Caesarea mentioned only two specific diseases

¹⁴¹ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 14.

¹⁴² EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, IX, 8, 13–14.

¹⁴³ EUSEBIUS CAESARIENSIS, I, 1–2.

in his work: scabies and gout. Eusebius also noted diseases of the mind, though he offered only two examples. One was Diocletian, who resigned from power, which resulted in a split of the empire, and the other one were the followers of traditional cults who, in his deep belief, were controlled by demons and acted irrationally. Finally, in his narrative, Eusebius wrote about the diseases of human souls. At the same time, he emphasized that the disease of the soul was much more dangerous than the disease of the body, as the latter led to an earthly death while the former resulted in eternal annihilation. According to Eusebius, the source of illness, both in body and soul, could also be Satan. It appears that the Bishop of Caesarea was aware of the natural causes of disease, such as noxious environment, hunger, or contagiousness, which was evident in the texts he quoted or in his own reflection. However, he treated them as secondary to God's will. The plague was also used by the Bishop of Caesarea to show different attitudes towards death resulting from the contrasting worldviews of Christians and pagans. Additionally, Eusebius devoted some attention to the patients' hope for recovery. He generally mentioned doctors, medicines, herbs, and baths in the warm springs of Kalliroe or in olive oil. The text of the Bishop of Caesarea suggests that doctors were involved not only in restoring the health of the body, but also in freeing people from evil passions or soothing and healing their spirits. Furthermore, they fulfilled the role of today's psychologists or even psychotherapists. For Eusebius, the best physician of the body and soul was Jesus Christ, who, with his miraculous power, healed all diseases, expelled unclean spirits and demons, and even raised the dead.

Translated by Katarzyna Szuster-Tardi

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Sławomir Bralewski

University of Lodz
Faculty of Philosophy and History
Institute of History
Department of Byzantine Studies
Kamińskiego 27a Street
90-219 Łódź, Polska/Poland
slawomir.bralewski@uni.lodz.pl

