

# EUTROPIUS AND FESTUS: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE EMPIRE AND IMPERIAL POLICY IN A.D. 369/370

H.W. Bird

By A.D. 369 the eastern emperor Valens had been campaigning against the Goths in the region of the lower Danube for three years. After somewhat desultory fighting he was finally successful in reducing them to such straits that they were compelled to send several suppliant deputations to him to beg for pardon and peace. This was granted and, probably towards the end of that year, Valens was able to return to Constantinople where with some justification he celebrated a triumph and assumed the title Gothicus Maximus.<sup>1</sup> It is likely that Eutropius, the emperor's *magister memoriae*, chose this moment to present Valens with his *Breviarium* of Roman History. The work was apparently commissioned by and dedicated to the emperor<sup>2</sup> and well-received, for it seems that Eutropius was subsequently appointed pro-consul of Asia, a much coveted post.<sup>3</sup>

The present paper attempts to show that one of the underlying purposes of the *Breviarium* was to encourage Valens to adopt an aggressive eastern policy against the Persians and restore to Roman rule those provinces ceded to the Persians six years earlier by Jovian. The latter had been compelled to sign an unfavourable and unpopular peace treaty in A.D. 363 because his army was severely short of food and constantly harassed in its retreat, and because the new emperor was justifiably worried about usurpations occurring in the West or even at Constantinople during his absence.

In addition, it will be argued that the *Breviarium* of Festus, which probably appeared only a few months after that of Eutropius, was deliberately

designed to emphasize Rome's series of successes against the Persians and its current ability to defeat them and recover its lost possessions.<sup>4</sup>

Jovian had gained peace by conceding the great fortresses of Nisibis, Singara, and Castra Maurorum in Mesopotamia and the five provinces and fifteen fortresses beyond the Tigris. Apparently even that had failed to satisfy Sapor. While Eutropius was composing his *Breviarium* and Valens was occupied with the Goths, the king broke the agreement and *iniectabat Armeniae manum*. He captured its king, Arsaces, by treachery, blinded and executed him, placed a puppet on the throne, and replaced Sauromaces of Iberia, the Roman nominee, with his own, Aspacures. The Romans responded by sending Arsaces' son Papa back to Armenia and subsequently despatched an army there under Count Arintheus. In addition they sent another army under Terentius to replace Sauromaces on the throne of Iberia. Valens, however, still embroiled on the Danube, tried to smooth over difficulties with Sapor by compromising. At the suggestion of Aspacures he divided Iberia into two parts, with Sauromaces holding the western region, Aspacures the eastern. Sapor, angry that he had not been consulted and that the Romans had aided the Armenians contrary to the terms of Jovian's peace treaty, refused to accept the situation and prepared for war.<sup>5</sup>

Eutropius informs us that he had accompanied Julian on the emperor's Persian campaign,<sup>6</sup> perhaps as his *magister epistolarum*.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore; he appears to have been with Valens on the latter's Gothic campaigns for he exhibits items of precise information about that area.<sup>8</sup> He would, therefore, have accurate knowledge of the peace treaty with the Persians and of the Romans' military ability and capacity to mount a successful expedition in the East. A careful reading of certain passages particularly in the later chapters of the *Breviarium* gives the impression that one of the aims of his work was to persuade Valens, and perhaps, too, his military advisors, to pursue a vigorous policy against Sapor and recover the provinces and fortresses given up by Jovian.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, den Boer was moved to write some years ago that "the one thread which runs throughout the book is the dignity of war. War was always better than peace without honour."<sup>10</sup>

The imperial theme commences with the first sentence of the work:

Romanum imperium, quo neque ab exordio ullum fere  
minus neque incrementis toto orbe amplius humana  
potest memoria recordari . . . .

Thereafter, and throughout his description of the whole panorama of Rome's

progress from an insignificant settlement of pastoral bandits to a world empire, Eutropius gives far more prominence to campaigns and conquests than he does to civil matters. But it is when he arrives at the Battle of Pharsalus in 48 B.C., towards the end of the republican section of his work, that he makes his first telling comment:<sup>11</sup>

Never before had a greater number of Roman forces assembled in one place or under better generals, forces which would easily have subdued the whole world, had they been led against barbarians.

The topic is picked up again in the last book<sup>12</sup> when the Battle of Mursa in A.D. 351 is discussed. In that struggle vast forces of the Roman Empire were destroyed, forces which would have been "sufficient for any foreign wars and for procuring many triumphs and lasting peace."

In the imperial period Augustus is highly praised for his success in wars and Eutropius observes that at no period was the Roman state more flourishing than under him. The author then gives a long list of his additions to the empire and includes the following statement:

He recovered Armenia from the Parthians: the Persians gave him hostages, which they had given to no one before, and they restored the Roman standards which they had taken from Crassus when they had defeated him.<sup>13</sup>

Subsequent emperors are judged to a great extent by their military accomplishments and naturally Trajan is to be preferred to all others. Eutropius diligently lists all of Trajan's conquests and alliances, in particular those in the East which are treated to twice as much coverage as those in the North, despite the fact that the Dacian conquests were more enduring and far more profitable:

The limits of the Roman empire, which, since the reign of Augustus, had been rather defended than honourably enlarged, he extended far and wide. He rebuilt some cities in Germany; he subdued Dacia by the overthrow of Decebalus, and formed a province beyond the Danube, in that territory which the Thraiphali, Victoali, and Thuringi now occupy. This province was a thousand miles in circumference.

He recovered Armenia, which the Parthians had seized, putting to death Parthamasires who held the government of it.

He gave a king to the Albani. He received into alliance the king of the Iberians, Sarmatians, Bosporani, Arabians, Osdroeni, and Colchians. He obtained the mastery over the Cordueni and Marcomedi, as well as over Anthemusia, an extensive region of Persia. He conquered and kept possession of Seleucia, Ctesiphon, Babylon, and the country of the Messenii. He advanced as far as the boundaries of India, and the Red Sea, where he formed three provinces, Armenia, Assyria, and Mesopotamia, including the tribes which border on Madena. He afterwards, too, reduced Arabia into the form of a province. He also fitted out a fleet for the Red Sea, that he might use it to lay waste the coasts of India.<sup>14</sup>

One reason for Eutropius' emphasis is his apparent desire to influence Valens. The latter had just concluded a successful campaign on the lower Danube (as had Trajan). With that achievement behind him Valens is now urged by Eutropius to emulate that best of emperors and regain those Roman possessions in the East which Trajan had once conquered and which Jovian had surrendered.

Unfortunately, according to Eutropius, Trajan was succeeded by his cousin's son, Hadrian. The latter, who was not selected to succeed by Trajan but rather gained the throne through the machinations of Plotina, Trajan's widow,

envying Trajan's glory, immediately gave up three of the provinces which Trajan had added to the empire, withdrawing the armies from Assyria, Mesopotamia and Armenia, and deciding that the Euphrates should be the boundary of the empire. When he was proceeding to act similarly with regard to Dacia, his friends dissuaded him, lest many Roman citizens should be left in the hands of the barbarians, because Trajan, after he had subdued Dacia, had transplanted thither an infinite number of men from the whole Roman world, to people the country and the cities as the land had been exhausted of inhabitants in the long war maintained by Decebalus.<sup>15</sup>

The report that Hadrian considered surrendering Dacia and was envious of all who excelled in anything is in Dio.<sup>16</sup> In their respective biographies of Hadrian, Perowne considered this a possibility but Henderson was quite sceptical.<sup>17</sup> It is feasible, however, that Hadrian, in his general review of the empire soon after his accession, considered all of his options,

including the possible withdrawal from Dacia, and prudently decided to retain the new and lucrative province and thereby protect the interests of the recent settlers and those of the state. Eutropius' account of Hadrian's reign was probably followed by Festus, who also noted Hadrian's envy of Trajan but omitted to report Hadrian's contemplated withdrawal from Dacia.<sup>18</sup> The other fourth-century sources, such as Aurelius Victor, the *Historia Augusta*, and the anonymous epitomator, are similarly silent in this regard. This is hardly surprising since it is unlikely that any of them had the same purpose or experience as Eutropius. He had witnessed in person the forced evacuation of Nisibis and other Roman cities in the provinces ceded to the Parthians<sup>19</sup> and had been unable to forget the pitiful suffering of their inhabitants. Furthermore he was in a position to understand and sympathize with the situation of those left behind. It was also a bitter and humiliating blow to his Roman pride. Quite naturally, then, he wanted to see Valens recover the lost possessions, which was a matter of major concern in 369. Ten years earlier, when Victor was writing, the Romans still held those possessions; twenty-five years later, when the *H.A.* and the *Epitome* were being composed, Rome was no longer in a position even to contemplate their recovery. Their loss had become accepted by most Romans.

It is at the end of his work, however, that Eutropius shows his feelings most clearly:

Jovian made peace with Sapor, a peace that was necessary but still ignominious for he was compelled to contract the empire's boundaries and give up a part of its territories. This had never happened prior to his time since the Roman Empire had been founded about eleven hundred and eighteen years previously. Even though our legions had been forced to pass under the yoke at the Caudine Forks by Pontus Telesinus, at Numantia in Spain and in Numidia, yet no part of the Roman territory was given up on any of these occasions. Such terms of peace would not have been entirely reprehensible if he had been willing, when the situation had been restored, to change the obligation of the treaty, as was done by the Romans in all the wars that I have mentioned; for war was immediately afterwards carried on against both the Samnites and the Numantines and the Numidians and the peace was not ratified. But as he feared a rival for power if he remained in the East he was too little concerned with his military renown.<sup>20</sup>

Ammianus, who had also taken part in Julian's Persian campaign and had witnessed the same lamentable scenes as Eutropius, was similarly angry at what he regarded as a shameful peace concluded by Jovian.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, he felt it would have been better to have fought ten battles rather than give up even one of Rome's fortresses.<sup>22</sup> In an emotional passage he rails against Fortune and then adds:

Yet what struck to the marrow of patriotic citizens was this, that fearful of a rival to his power and bearing in mind that it was in Gaul and Illyricum that many men had often sought higher positions, he hastened to outstrip the report of his coming and, under the pretext of avoiding perjury, he committed an act unworthy of an emperor by betraying Nisibis, which ever since the time of King Mithridates' reign had resisted with all its might the occupation of the Orient by the Persians. For never (I think) since the beginning of our city can it be found by reading our annals that any part of our territory has been yielded to an enemy by an emperor or a consul. . . . In fact, the ancient records teach us that treaties made in extreme necessity with shameful conditions, even when both parties had sworn an oath, on fixed terms, were immediately annulled by a renewal of war. (This happened) in former times when our legions were sent under the yoke at the Caudine Forks in Samnium, when Albinus in Numidia devised a shameful peace, and when Mancinus, the author of a disgracefully hasty treaty, was surrendered to the people of Numantia.<sup>23</sup>

Syme has already noted that Ammianus "had recourse to Eutropius, his companion in arms."<sup>24</sup> It seems very likely that we have here another example of the historian's indebtedness to the breviarist. Ammianus did, indeed, elaborate on Eutropius' theme, as his History demanded, and did not have the same didactic purpose, but he shared Eutropius' resentment and sense of shame.

Eutropius' implicit advice to Valens does not seem to have been followed, even though Valens may initially have intended to do so. Domestic plots engaged his attention.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, despite the victories of Trajanus (a strange coincidence of names) and Vadomir, the emperor was not able to make any serious attempt to recover the lost provinces, but he did refuse to yield to Sapor's later demands regarding Armenia and Iberia.<sup>26</sup> No settlement was reached between the two empires until about A.D. 388 when

Armenia was finally partitioned and Persia acquired the lion's share, about five-sixths of the country. Still, the Roman section was of significant strategic importance and, as Jones avers, "peace with Persia was worth paying for."<sup>27</sup>

In A.D. 369 Eutropius could not foresee Valens' domestic problems of 371-372. Accordingly, in the singularly passionate assertion quoted above, he makes it clear that the Romans had endured severe losses in the past and still emerged victorious. In more than eleven centuries they had never given in, triumphing over all difficulties. In his narrative of the Republican period Eutropius delights in reciting the vast extent of enemy casualties, the incredible resources of the Roman state. Even after the sack of Rome by the Gauls, when the Latins refused to furnish troops, the Romans raised sixty thousand men by themselves, "so great was the power of the Romans in war while their territory was as yet but small."<sup>28</sup> In the Imperial period, although he cannot be as specific regarding numbers, he still stresses the magnitude of Rome's victories. In A.D. 369, then, Eutropius had no doubts about Rome's right to rule or about her military ability to maintain her empire. One can only speculate about his feeling several years later when the Goths destroyed the Roman army at Adrianople and killed Valens and most of his senior officers. I suspect, however, that even this disaster would not have shattered his imperial pride and confidence. Ammianus certainly retained his. In his discussion of a Roman defeat by the Goths in A.D. 376 he writes:

Those who are ignorant of history say that the state was never before overspread by such a dark cloud of misfortune, but they are deceived by the horror of recent ills which have overwhelmed them. For if they study earlier times or those which have recently passed, these will show that such dire disturbances have often happened.<sup>29</sup>

He, too, goes on to stress Rome's ability to suffer major disasters and still recover. This theme was subsequently developed by Claudian and Rutilius Namatianus "with apparent conviction," and, by the end of the fourth century, it "had become something of a commonplace, at any rate among educated circles in the West."<sup>30</sup>

For Eutropius, however, the theme was probably not a mere commonplace. Writing immediately after Valens' victories over the Goths and having experienced at first hand the successes of Julian in the East, he felt that

the Persians could be defeated and that the lost provinces could be recovered, if only Valens would act energetically.

That Eutropius was not a lone voice crying in the wilderness is graphically demonstrated by the appearance, probably in the following year, 370,<sup>31</sup> of Festus' *Breviarium*. Despite the strongly expressed doubts of den Boer<sup>32</sup> it seems almost certain that Festus had served as *consularis* in Syria and replaced Eutropius as Valens' *magister memoriae* in 370. He again replaced Eutropius as proconsul of Asia in 372 after he had falsely accused the latter of treason.<sup>33</sup>

Like Eutropius, Festus was commissioned by Valens to produce a short summary of Roman history. Momigliano suggested that the emperor found Eutropius' account to be too long.<sup>34</sup> The real *raison d'être* of the book, however, was Persia, which takes up practically half of the work.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, Festus' account of the *Roas partes totumque Orientem* spans chapters ten to thirty, or fully two-thirds of the book. It strikes me that Festus' commission differed substantially from that of Eutropius. The latter had been asked by Valens to write a brief, general account of Rome and the empire, similar to that of Aurelius Victor but without the tendentious moralizing and pretentious style which seemingly appealed to Julian and Ammianus but not to Valens. In addition, the republic was to be included. The result clearly pleased the emperor, hence his promotion of Eutropius to the proconsulship of Asia. Festus was commissioned, probably soon after the appearance of Eutropius' work in late 369, to compose a brief account of Roman expansion with heavy emphasis upon Valens' domain, the East, and in particular upon Rome's dealings with Parthia / Persia. The Romans, especially in the fourth century, did not have the modern academic's need, ability or desire to produce a work such as D. Magie's *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*. Thus Festus was expected to give an extremely brief survey of Rome's rise to power in Italy and the West, and then concentrate on the East. His service as *consularis* in Syria and presumably in other eastern parts would commend him to Valens and serve him well in his writing. He was also a patriotic imperialist.<sup>36</sup>

Festus did as he was ordered. His posts as *magister memoriae* and later as proconsul of Asia demonstrate that he had pleased Valens. The emperor and his entourage were presented with a handy reference of Rome's relations with the Parthians and Persians and a useful piece of propaganda.

In Chapter 15 Festus writes:

Scio nunc, inclyte princeps, quo tua pergat intentio. Requiris profecto, quotiens Babyloniae ac Romanorum arma conlata sint et quibus vicibus sagittis pila contenderint. Breviter eventus enumerabo bellorum. Furto hostes in paucis invenies esse laetatos, vera autem virtute semper Romanos probabis exstitisse victores.

Roman defeats are described, but frequently, as in the case of Crassus at Carrhae in 53 B.C., they are "softened by the thought that his death did not go unavenged since the son of the Parthian king perished as well."<sup>37</sup> It was Trajan, the Romans' favourite military hero, who conquered vast areas of the Persian realm, and only because he envied Trajan's glory did Hadrian cede Armenia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria.<sup>38</sup> It was offensive, writes Festus, to recall the fortunes of the unlucky Valerian, captured by Sapor and compelled to grow old in shameful servitude.<sup>39</sup> He felt similar distaste for Zenobia, who subjected the East to a woman's sway. Fortunately Aurelian tamed her and led her before his chariot in his triumph at Rome.<sup>40</sup>

Under Diocletian the Persians were duly humiliated, their king, Narses, fled, his wife and daughters were captured.<sup>41</sup> Constantine crushed the Goths and, at his approach, the kingdoms of Babylonia trembled and sent a suppliant legation to him.<sup>42</sup> Under Constantius Nisibis was thrice besieged, but the enemy suffered greater losses.<sup>43</sup> Julian, too, might have entered Ctesiphon victorious if the opportunity for plunder had not outweighed his concern for victory.<sup>44</sup> Even Jovian's humiliating treaty and evacuation are downplayed. It was the Persians who first asked for peace, and Jovian was *cupidior regni quam gloriae*.<sup>45</sup> Festus concludes his work by addressing his emperor as *invicte*, and wishing him as great a victory over the Babylonians (a derogatory term) as the one he had won over the Goths.

Eadie thinks that it was utterly inappropriate for Festus to end his narrative with the shameful peace concluded by Jovian, "scarcely a report to inspire Valens," but the author had simply run out of material.<sup>46</sup> It seems more likely that Festus "the undaunted optimist" as den Boer describes him,<sup>47</sup> was encouraging Valens to imitate such emperors as Trajan, Diocletian, and Julian and to reconquer Rome's eastern possessions, which Jovian had ceded in such a craven manner. For Festus "there was no such thing as a definite loss."<sup>48</sup>

The works of Eutropius and Festus, appearing as they did within months of each other and both at the request of the emperor Valens, demonstrate a remarkable confidence in the empire and its resources. This is no hint

of pessimism or defeatism. Valens wanted and obtained two different but complementary, upbeat accounts of Roman history, in part to justify his intended campaign against the Persians. Preparations may have commenced as early as 370 and the emperor subsequently moved to Antioch to take charge personally.<sup>49</sup> Other events supervened, however, and both empires offered only limited military responses to each other. The great eastern campaign never occurred. Diplomacy took the place of armed conflict and Rome had to accept the permanent loss of those provinces surrendered by Jovian.<sup>50</sup> The jingoistic encouragement of Eutropius and Festus had proven to be nugatory.

University of Windsor

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Amm. Marc. 27.5.7-10.

<sup>2</sup> Eutrop. *praef.*

<sup>3</sup> H.W. Bird, "Eutropius: His Life and Career," *E.M.C./C.V.* 32, N.S. 7, (1988) 51 ff. A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* (Cambridge 1971) 317 (henceforth cited as *P.L.R.E.*).

<sup>4</sup> On the "shameful peace treaty" *vid.* Amm. Marc. 25.7.13; 25.9.3 ff.; cf. Eutrop. 10.17; *H.A. Car.* 9. The latter was probably written after 390 (R. Syme, *Amianus and the H.A.* [Oxford 1968] 220). For Festus' purpose *vid.* the brief statement of A. Cameron, *C.R.* N.S. 19 (1969) 305-07; W. den Boer, *Some Minor Roman Historians* (Leiden 1972) 176-77.

<sup>5</sup> Amm. Marc. 27.12.1-18.

<sup>6</sup> Eutrop. 10.16.

<sup>7</sup> *Loc. cit.* at n. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Eutrop. 8.2; 9.15.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. A. Victor, *De Caes.* 38.2: "Mesopotamia . . . quod ea Persarum quasi solemnibus bello subest." Victor, writing ten years earlier than

Eutropius, recognized that Mesopotamia was a constant source of conflict between the two empires.

<sup>10</sup> W. den Boer (at n. 4) 164, in reference to Eutropius' discussion of Jovian's peace treaty.

<sup>11</sup> Eutrop. 6.21.

<sup>12</sup> Eutrop. 10.12.

<sup>13</sup> Eutrop. 7.9.

<sup>14</sup> Eutrop. 8.2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Eutrop. 8.6. For a somewhat different account of these circumstances *vid.* Dio 69.1 and *H.A. Hadr.* 4.

<sup>16</sup> Dio 68.13; 29.3.2 ff. Cf. Florus I. 33.7: "Plus est provinciam retinere quam facere."

<sup>17</sup> S. Perowne, *Hadrian* (London 1960) 48; B.W. Henderson, *The Life and Principate of the Emperor Hadrian* (London 1923) 57, 145-46.

<sup>18</sup> Festus 20. For his dependence here upon Eutropius (as I believe) or a common source *vid.* J.W. Eadie, *The Breviarium of Festus* (London 1967) 140.

<sup>19</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 25.9.1 ff.

<sup>20</sup> Eutrop. 10.17.

<sup>21</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 25.7.13.

<sup>22</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 25.7.10.

<sup>23</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 25.9.7.

<sup>24</sup> Syme (at n. 4) 105. *Amm. Marc.* 14.11.10 < Eutrop. 9.24; *Amm. Marc.* 15.5.18 < Eutrop. 9.26. *Vid.* also E.A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Cambridge 1947) 121.

<sup>25</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 29.1.1-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 30.2.1-8.

<sup>27</sup> A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1964) I, 158.

<sup>28</sup> Eutrop. 2.6.

<sup>29</sup> *Amm. Marc.* 31.5.11-17.

<sup>30</sup> Thompson (at n. 24) 131, citing Claudian, *Bell. Get.* 145 ff.; *Stil.* III, 144 ff.; Rutilius, *de reditu suo*, I. 121 ff.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Eadie (at n. 18) 2.

<sup>32</sup> Den Boer (at n. 4) 178 ff.

<sup>33</sup> *P.L.R.E.*, 317, 334-35; Bird (at n. 3). Cf. Eadie (at n. 18) 2 ff.

Since the dedication of the Bamberg manuscript calls Festus *magister memoriae* he must have been promoted prior to the publication of the *Brevarium*, i.e. probably some time in A.D. 370, possibly as a reward for its completion.

<sup>34</sup> A. Momigliano, *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford 1963) 85-86: cf. A. Cameron, *C.R.*, N.S. 19 (1969) 305-07.

<sup>35</sup> Den Boer (at n. 4) 176-77. This theme is strongly emphasized by Cameron.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* p. 199.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 201.

<sup>38</sup> Festus 20.

<sup>39</sup> Festus 23.

<sup>40</sup> Festus 24.

<sup>41</sup> Festus 25.

<sup>42</sup> Festus 26.

<sup>43</sup> Festus 27.

<sup>44</sup> Festus 28. Amm. Marc. (24.7.1-2) writes that Julian was dissuaded by the sensible advice of some of his generals from besieging the impregnable city. *Vid.* also Magnus of Carrhae *F.H.G.* IV, 5-6; Socrates, *H.E.* 3.21.

<sup>45</sup> Festus 29. Cf. Eutrop. 10.17.

<sup>46</sup> Eadie (at n. 18) 153.

<sup>47</sup> Den Boer (at n. 4) 201.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> Amm. Marc. 29.1.1-4; A. Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétienne, 325-395* (Paris 1947) 175-77.

<sup>50</sup> For diplomatic relations between the two empires see R.C. Blockley, *Rome and Persia: International Relations in Late Antiquity* (Ottawa 1985) esp. pp. 19 ff. I should like to thank the anonymous referees for several helpful comments.