

Acts of Apollonius

Eusebius, *H. E.* 5.21, in the *Ante-Nicene Fathers*.

Chapter XXI. How Apollonius Suffered Martyrdom at Rome.

1 About the same time, in the reign of Commodus, our condition became more favorable, and through the grace of God the churches throughout the entire world enjoyed peace,³²⁸ and the word of salvation was leading every soul, from every race of man to the devout worship of the God of the universe. So that now at Rome many who were highly distinguished for wealth and family turned with all their household and relatives unto their salvation.

2 But the demon who hates what is good, being malignant in his nature, could not endure this, but prepared himself again for conflict, contriving many devices against us. And he brought to the judgment seat Apollonius,³²⁹ of the city of Rome, a man renowned among the faithful for learning and philosophy, having stirred up one of his servants, who was well fitted for such a purpose, to accuse him.³³⁰

3 But this wretched man made the charge unseasonably, because by a royal decree it was unlawful that informers of such things should live. And his legs were broken immediately, Perennius the judge having pronounced this sentence upon him.³³¹

4 But the martyr, highly beloved of God, being earnestly entreated and requested by the judge to give an account of himself before the Senate, made in the presence of all an eloquent defense of the faith for which he was witnessing. And as if by decree of the Senate he was put to death by decapitation; an ancient law requiring that those who were brought to the judgment seat and refused to recant should not be liberated,³³² Whoever desires to know his arguments before the judge and his answers to the questions of Perennius, and his entire defense before the Senate will find them in the records of the ancient martyrdoms which we have collected.³³³

³²⁸ Marcia, concubine of Commodus, and possessed of great influence over him, favored the Christians (according to Dion Cassius, LXII. 4), and as a consequence they enjoyed comparative peace during his reign.

³²⁹ Jerome (*de vir. ill.* chap. 42, and *Epist. ad Magnum*, 4) calls Apollonius a Roman senator. It is possible that this is only a natural conclusion drawn by Jerome from Eusebius' statement that he defended himself before the Senate; and this possibility might seem to be strengthened by the fact that Eusebius does not call him a senator here, as we should expect him to do if he knew him to be one. On the other hand, it is highly probable (as shown in the next note) that Jerome had read the fuller account of Apollonius' martyrdom included by Eusebius in his *Collection of Martyrdoms*, and hence it seems likely that that account contained the statement that Apollonius was a senator. Jerome makes Apollonius the author of an insigne volumen, which he read in the Senate in defense of his faith; but there seems to be no foundation for such a report. It is apparently the result simply of a misunderstanding of the words of Eusebius, who states that Apollonius delivered before the Senate a most eloquent defense of the faith, but does not imply that he wrote an apology. The words that Eusebius uses at the close of this chapter imply rather that the defense made by Apollonius was recorded after its delivery, and that it is this report of it which can be read in his *Collection of Martyrdoms*.

³³⁰ Jerome, followed by Sophronius, reports that the accusation against Apollonius was brought by a

slave. Jerome gives the slave's name as Severus (*a servo Severo proditus*); while Sophronius makes Severus the name of the judge (*para tou doulou para Sebhrw prodofej xristianoj einai*). The latter is impossible, however, as the name of the judge was Perennius according to Eusebius. Vallarsi states that some mss. of Jerome read *sub Commodo principe ac Severo proditus*, and supposes that *ac Severo* is a corruption for the words *a servo* (which he thinks may have stood alone in the original text), and that some student, perceiving the error, wrote upon the margin of his copy the words *a servo*, and that subsequently the note crept into the text, while the word *Severo* was still retained, thus producing our present reading *a servo Severo*. This is an ingenious suggestion, but the fact is overlooked that Sophronius undoubtedly read in the original translated by him the words *a servo Severo*, for we can explain his rendering only by supposing that he read thus, but understood the word *Severo* as the dative of the indirect object after *proditus*, instead of the ablative in apposition with *servo*. In the face of Sophronius' testimony to the original form of the text, no alteration of the common reading can be accepted. As to the source of Jerome's Severus, since there is nothing in the present chapter of Eusebius to suggest such an addition, and no reason can be imagined for the independent insertion of the name, the only legitimate conclusion seems to be, that the name occurred in the account of Apollonius' martyrdom referred to by Eusebius just below, and that Jerome took it thence. If this be so, then that martyrology must have been the authority also for Jerome's statement that Apollonius was accused by a slave; and hence the statement may be accepted as true, and not as the result of a misinterpretation of the reference of Eusebius' words (*ena ge tina uij tauta epithdeiwn*), as supposed by some. Since it is thus almost certain that Jerome had himself examined the fuller account of Apollonius' martyrdom referred to by Eusebius, a favorable light is thrown back upon his report that Apollonius was a senator, and it becomes probable that he obtained this statement from the same source (see the previous note).

³³¹ M. de Mandajors, in his *Histoire de l'Acad. des Inscript.* tom. 18, p. 226 (according to Gieseler's *Ch. Hist.*, Harper's edition, I. p. 127), "thinks that the slave was put to death as the betrayer of his master, according to an old law renewed by Trajan; but that the occurrence had been misunderstood by the Christians, and had given rise to the tradition, which is found in Tertullian and in the *Edictum ad Comm. A siae*, that an emperor at this period had decreed the punishment of death for denouncing a Christian." Such a law against the denunciation of masters by slaves was passed under Nerva; but Gieseler remarks that, in accordance with the principles of the laws upon this subject, "either Apollonius only, or his slave only, could have been put to death, but in no case both. Jerome does not say either that Severus was the slave of Apollonius, or that he was executed; and since Eusebius grounds this execution expressly on a supposititious law, it may have belonged only to the Oriental tradition, which may have adduced this instance in support of the alleged law." It is possible that Gieseler is right in this conclusion; but it is also quite possible that Eusebius' statement that the slave was executed is correct. The ground of the execution was, of course, not, as Eusebius thinks, the fact that he brought an accusation against a Christian, but, as remarked by de Mandajors, the fact that, being a slave, he betrayed his master. Had the informant been executed because he brought an accusation against a Christian, the subsequent execution of the latter would be inexplicable. But it is conceivable that the prefect Perennius may have sentenced the informant to death, in accordance with the old law mentioned by de Mandajors, and that then, Apollonius being a senator, he may have requested him to appear before that body, and make his defense to them, in order that he might pass judgment upon him in accordance with the decision of the Senate. It is quite conceivable that, the emperor being inclined to favor the Christians, Perennius may not have cared to pass judgment against Apollonius until he had learned the opinion of the Senate on the matter (cf. what Neander has to say on the subject, in his *Ch. Hist.*). As remarked by Valesius, the Senate was not a judicial court, and hence could not itself sentence Apollonius; but it could, of course, communicate to the prefect its opinion, and he could then pass judgment accordingly. It is significant that the Greek reads *wsan apo dogmatoj sugklhtou*, inserting the particle *wsan*, "as if"; i.e. "as if by decree of the Senate."

³³² Valesius thinks the reference here is to Pliny's rescript to Trajan (see above, Bk. III. chap. 33). This is possible, though the language of Eusebius seems to imply a more general reference to all kinds of cases, not simply to the cases of Christians.

³³³ On Eusebius' great *Collection of Martyrdoms*, which is now lost, see above, p. 30.