

Zeus Is Dead! – Euhemerism in Origen's *Contra Celsum*

The Skeptical Euhemerism found in authors of Late Antiquity, and in particular those arguments made in the third book of Origen's *Contra Celsum*, have attracted the attention of scholars in two respects: First, the broader Christian apologetic which instrumentalized Euhemeristic concepts presents an intriguing opportunity for the study of Christian reception and utilization of classical non-Christian sources. Second, in the instance of the *Contra Celsum*, the arguments made by Celsus and Origen signal a dialectic between Christian and classical concepts, showing how each might have advanced and helped shape each other's thinking.

However, there is dissent in the literature over what constitutes Euhemerism or whether the Christians, properly speaking, made use of Euhemeristic ideas. On the one hand, the literature has noted the similarity between early Christian polemic against polytheism which argued that the gods were, in reality, once men who died and were subsequently deified, and the ideas put forth by Euhemerus (Gamble, 1979). On the other hand, Roubekas has argued that the apologetics employed by the Christians are not authentically Euhemeristic, and that the core message of Euhemerus has been misplaced by most (2012).

For the purposes of this paper, I will narrow my focus to examine the arguments made by Celsus and Origen concerning specifically Jupiter and his alleged tomb in Crete. Responding to Christian polemics raising the issue that there is a tradition in Crete that Jupiter has a tomb which suggests that he had died, Celsus remarks that Christians do not even know the place of this tomb. Origen responds pointing out that Celsus is alluding to a non literal interpretation of the tradition but that there is no record of any such allegorical interpretation existing in the tradition of the Cretans or otherwise (CC 3.43). This passage is of particular interest because Euhemerus

also cites Jupiter's tomb in Crete when formulating his initial argument, on account of which Roubekas states that this is the nearest that Celsus approaches to a true Euhemeristic argument, but that Origen's response highlights how Celsus's argument can not be viewed as Euhemeristic (2012, 88-89). Notably however, he does not evaluate the Euhemericity of Origen's response to Celsus.

In this paper, I examine Origen's response to Celsus regarding Jupiter in order to propose a dynamic view of the Christian reception of Euhemeristic ideas. While it can not be argued that Origen is on the whole a true Euhemerist, or that Christians widely made use of true Euhemeristic arguments, this paper serves to suggest a spectrum in which Christian arguments more or less closely resemble the original claims of Euhemerus. Through the examination of this particular instance, this paper seeks to shed light on pre-Nicaean Christian argumentation, and leaves room for further research in fully exploring the varied ways in which both Christians received classical arguments, and the inverse respectively.

Bibliography

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