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The Date of Eusebius' *Onomasticon* Revisited*

Ofer Pogorelsky

Abstract: This paper addresses the question of the date of Eusebius' *Onomasticon*, an issue that has been debated in scholarship since E. Klostermann's standard edition of 1904. In particular, it challenges the widely cited argument of T.D. Barnes from 1975, who dated the composition of the *Onomasticon* to the 290s CE, during the administrative reforms of Emperor Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy. Through a close reexamination of Barnes's thesis in light of recent advances in the study of the *Onomasticon*—including the new edition of the Greek text and the Syriac translation—as well as relevant archaeological, primarily epigraphical, evidence concerning Diocletian's reforms, I argue that Barnes's early dating is untenable. The revision presented here places the composition of the *Onomasticon* after the reforms, most plausibly during the decade of the 'Great Persecution' (303–313 CE), with its publication likely occurring shortly after 313 CE.

Keywords: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Onomasticon*, Petra, Aila, Reforms of Diocletian.

INTRODUCTION

Eusebius of Caesarea composed the *Onomasticon* as an aid to biblical exegesis.¹ By compiling a gazetteer of the Bible, the Church Father sought to familiarize the readers with the places mentioned in the Scripture and thus to illustrate its historical meaning.² He did so by identifying the biblical toponyms with sites of his own time and providing some contemporary information about them. Consequently, what was originally conceived as a geographical commentary on the Bible, became in modern times a precious source for the geography of the Holy Land in Eusebius's lifetime, namely the late third to early fourth centuries CE.³ Indeed, the value of the *Onomasticon* for the study of the Holy

* An abridged version of this paper was presented at the annual conference of the Israel Association for Byzantine Studies, held at Yad Yizhak Ben-Zvi Institute in Jerusalem in March 2023. I'm grateful to Prof. Oded Irshai of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem for reading an earlier draft of this paper and discussing the topic with me. I also thank the reviewers for *SCI* for their helpful comments.

¹ The title *Onomasticon* was assigned to the work by later copyists and scholars. The original title, as it appears in the late tenth-century *Codex Vaticanus* gr. 1456, the only surviving Greek manuscript (excluding apographs), is Περὶ τῶν τοπικῶν ὀνομάτων τῶν ἐν τῇ θεῇ γραφῇ, 'On the Place-Names in the Holy Scriptures'. In his *Commentary on Isaiah*, 75 (19, 4), Eusebius refers to the work as Τόποι, see Ziegler (1975), 127–128.

² For a recent appraisal of the *Onomasticon* as a geographical composition, see Stenger (2015).

³ The *Onomasticon* is occasionally regarded in scholarly literature as a practical 'travel-guide' for Christian pilgrims. Although the work—mostly in its Latin translation—certainly became something of a *vade mecum* for pilgrims already in the fourth century CE and remained so for centuries, this was not Eusebius's original intent in composing it. Cf. Di Segni (1999), 115: 'The *Onomasticon* was created to serve the scholarly reader of the Bible, and especially of the

Land in Eusebius' time and throughout Late Antiquity cannot be overstated.⁴ This, however, makes the question of its precise date all the more pertinent.

The *Onomasticon* is not explicitly dated, hence its date can only be deduced from internal and external information. By 'internal' I mean the geographical data contained in the entries of the *Onomasticon* and its relation to other source material. By 'external' I mean the information available to us on Eusebius' life and other works, as well as references to the *Onomasticon* by other writers.⁵

Another distinction to be made is between the composition date and the publication date. With nearly one thousand entries of biblical toponyms, the scholarly effort invested in producing the *Onomasticon* must have been considerable and likely required a substantial period of preparation.⁶ Thus, the composition of the *Onomasticon* probably spanned over a period of several years, while the publication occurred at a specific moment in time. Moreover, the publication may not have occurred immediately after the work's completion but could instead have been delayed until a later stage.

The date of the *Onomasticon* was discussed, or at least touched upon, in all the major treatments of the work, including its editions and translations, though not always with due attention to the distinction between composition and publication.⁷ Klostermann, in his standard edition of 1904, was rather cautious in dating the *Onomasticon* ('nicht gesichert ist die Abfassungszeit des Werkes'), though he accepted 336 CE as the *terminus ad quem* for its publication. The basis for this date was the death of Paulinus, bishop of Tyre, who is mentioned in Eusebius' preface to the *Onomasticon* and commonly regarded as the dedicatee of the work.⁸

Old Testament, and although Eusebius located many sites along roads or in relation to roads, this is for the sake of identification, rather than to guide a curious visitor'.

⁴ Cf. Notley and Safrai (2005), xi: 'The *Onomasticon* by Eusebius is the most important book for the study of the Holy Land in the Roman period'.

⁵ It may be worth mentioning that Eusebius' biography, composed by his pupil and successor to the See of Caesarea, Acacius, is no longer extant, see Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* ii, 4.

⁶ A long preparation time is conceivable also in light of the fact, stated in Eusebius' preface, that the *Onomasticon* was the fourth and final part of a wider scholarly project that included a Greek transliteration of the names of peoples mentioned in the Hebrew Scripture, a description (perhaps a map) of biblical Judaea with the territorial divisions of the Twelve Tribes, and a representation of biblical Jerusalem with a plan of the Temple. These three parts did not survive. In what is arguably the most profound study of the *Onomasticon*'s content and composition method, Melamed (1932–1933), 269 [72] has argued that the work was likely produced by several compilers, presumably Eusebius' assistants. However, the inconsistencies in phrasing and content evident throughout the work may be the result of a long and possibly intermittent preparation process. Cf. Stenger (2015), 386: 'Arguably, Eusebius will have gathered and added his information on each site piecemeal over many years', and Wallace-Hadrill (1960), 57: 'such a work is likely to have been based on notes taken over a number of years'.

⁷ Note especially the excessive discussion by Timm (2017), LXXXIV–CXLIX.

⁸ Klostermann (1904), ix. For the date of Paulinus's death, see n.17 below. It should be noted that the dedication of the *Onomasticon* to Paulinus is, at best, implicit. While referring to Paulinus as 'holy man of God' (ἱερὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἄνθρωπος Παυλῖνε), Eusebius merely states in the preface that Paulinus was the one who suggested the idea for the *Onomasticon* (and for the other three lost geographical works). Incidentally, Paulinus was the explicit dedicatee of

As for the *terminus a quo*, Klostermann relied on Jerome's preface to the Latin translation, where it is stated that Eusebius composed the *Onomasticon* after the ten books of the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Chronicle*.⁹ Since the *Chronicle* (in its final form) reaches the year 324 CE, Klostermann proposed to date the *Onomasticon* between 324 and 336 CE, though acknowledging Thomsen's view that Jerome's statement does not necessarily reflect the actual chronological order of Eusebius' works but may signify their physical arrangement in the manuscript or codex that was used by Jerome.¹⁰

Thomsen, in his thorough study of the *Onomasticon*, composed roughly at the same time as Klostermann's edition, argued that the work must date prior to 324 CE due to the meager Christian presence reflected in it.¹¹ This meager presence stands in sharp contrast to the relatively widespread presence evidenced by the list of bishops from Palestine that participated in the Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in 325 CE.¹² In addition, the *Onomasticon* makes no mention of Constantine's ecclesiastical foundations in Palestine, which are described in some detail in Book III of Eusebius's *Life of Constantine*.

The *terminus ante quem* for the publication of the *Onomasticon* can be more firmly established based on internal information. Under the entry of Arbo (Ἀρβώ), which is identified with Hebron, Eusebius mentions the Oak of Abraham, that is, the Oak of Mamre, and relates that the site is 'worshiped openly by the Gentiles' (θρησκεύεται ἐπιφανῶς πρὸς τῶν ἐθνῶν).¹³ We know from Eusebius' own *Life of Constantine* (III, 51–53), that the Emperor ordered to demolish the pagan altars at Mamre after learning of their existence from his mother-in-law Eutropia, who had visited Palestine shortly before 326 CE.¹⁴ Considering the severe rebuke expressed in Constantine's letter to the bishops of Palestine, including Eusebius, and his explicit order to erect a church at the site, the mention of the pagan worship at Mamre in the *Onomasticon*, and the lack of mention of a church at the site, seems to be decisive evidence for dating the publication of the work prior to 326 CE.¹⁵

the tenth book of the *Church History*, at the beginning of which Eusebius writes: 'And having now added, while we pray, the tenth tome also of the Ecclesiastical History to those which preceded it, we shall dedicate this tome to thee, my most holy Paulinus (ἱερώτατέ μοι Παυλίνε), invoking thee as the seal of the whole work', Lawlor and Oulton (1927), 299.

⁹ Klostermann (1904), 3: *post decem ecclesiasticae historiae libros, post temporum canones*.

¹⁰ Thomsen (1903a), 101.

¹¹ Thomsen (1903a), 101: 'Für die Entstehung vor 324 scheint vor allem der Umstand zu sprechen, dass Eusebius auf fällig wenig vom Christentum in Palästina berichtet'.

¹² For the list of the eighteen or nineteen Palestinian bishops at Nicaea, see Di Segni, Tsafirir and Green (2015), 208–212.

¹³ Klostermann (1904), 6. English translations of the *Onomasticon*, here and throughout the paper follow Freeman-Grenville (2003).

¹⁴ Cameron and Hall (1999), 141–143. The story of Mamre is also reported by Sozomen., *Hist. eccl.* ii, 4. The issue of shared worship at Mamre was widely discussed in scholarship, most recently by Heyden (2020).

¹⁵ Jerome in his Latin translation, composed at the end of the fourth century, does mention a church at the site: *cumque a nostris ibidem ecclesia iam extructa sit*, see Klostermann (1904), 7. In fact, Constantine's church at Mamre was already noticed by the Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333 CE: *ibi basilica facta est iussu Constantini mirae pulchritudinis*, Geyer and Cuntz (1965), 20. Additional support for a date prior to 326 CE may be found in the reference to the *Onomasticon* in Eusebius' *Commentary on Isaiah* (see n.1 above), the composition of which

The *terminus post quem* for the publication of the *Onomasticon* is undoubtedly 313 CE, the year in which Eusebius was appointed bishop of Caesarea, since he is identified as such in the preface, which was likely added after the completion of the work. Thus, the timeframe for the publication of the *Onomasticon* can be securely established between 313–326 CE.

Several scholars proposed more narrow dates or specific occasions for the publication of the *Onomasticon* within this time frame based on external evidence. Wolf suggested that Eusebius dedicated the *Onomasticon* to Paulinus after the latter's retirement from the See of Tyre.¹⁶ However, the precise date of the retirement is unknown, apart from the fact that it occurred prior to the Council of Nicaea.¹⁷ Timm, in his recent new edition of the *Onomasticon*, argues in favor of 314 CE, based on the fact that the province of 'New Arabia', established in that year, is not mentioned in the work.¹⁸ Nevertheless, it is not fully clear whether this short-lived province was actually located in Palestine, or rather in Egypt.¹⁹ Another possibility is that the publication of the *Onomasticon* occurred around 315 CE, on the occasion of Eusebius' visit to Tyre to deliver his famous speech in honor of the newly built church in the city under bishop Paulinus.²⁰

The first scholar who explicitly addressed the question of the *Onomasticon*'s composition date was Barnes, who argued that the *Onomasticon* was likely compiled in an early stage of Eusebius' career, namely in the 290s.²¹ Barnes's argument relied on the way in which the *Onomasticon* describes the city of Petra — twice as belonging to Arabia and once as belonging to Palestine. According to Barnes, this reflects the administrative reforms of Emperor Diocletian, who transferred the areas of southern Transjordan, the Negev, and Sinai from the province of Arabia to the province of Palestine. Barnes claimed that since this change is reflected in the *Onomasticon*, the work must have been composed during the time of the reforms, which he dated 'no later than c. 300, perhaps even earlier'.²²

was dated by Hollerich (1999), 26, to the years 325–328 CE. However, according to Barnes (1981), 278, Eusebius was 'at work' on the *Commentary* around 330 CE.

¹⁶ Wolf (1964), 73–74.

¹⁷ The bishop of Tyre at Nicaea was named Zeno, see Di Segni, Tsafrir and Green, (2015), 208–210. According to Burgess (1999), 190, Paulinus transferred from Tyre to Antioch in the early months of 324 CE and died in the autumn of the same year. If we accept Burgess's date for Paulinus's death, it will necessarily narrow the time frame for the *Onomasticon*'s publication to 313–324 CE. However, the chronology of Paulinus's life is rather complicated, see Burgess (1999), 184–191.

¹⁸ Timm (2017), CXLIX.

¹⁹ See Di Segni (2018), 252–254, with previous references, who concludes that 'the issue of New Arabia must remain open'. See also Di Segni (1993), 502, where New Arabia is referred to as a 'ghost province'.

²⁰ I thank Oded Irshai for this idea and for sharing with me his article on Eusebius' Tyre oration, see Irshai (2026). Eusebius' speech in honor of the church in Tyre appears in the tenth book of the *Church History*.

²¹ Barnes (1975).

²² Barnes (1975), 415. Elsewhere (p. 414, n.6) Barnes alludes to F.-M. Abel's dating of the incorporation of Petra in Palestine as 'around 295 CE'. The same argument is presented also in Barnes (1981), 106–111, and in Barnes (1982), 214: 'when Eusebius wrote "Petra, a city in Arabia" and "Petra, a famous city of Palaestina," both descriptions were accurate at the time

Based on Jerome's statement in the Latin translation, and as a corollary to his early dating of the *Onomasticon*, Barnes argued that Eusebius produced the first editions of his two historical works, the *Ecclesiastical History* and the *Chronicle*, before 303 CE. However, his arguments regarding the early dating of Eusebius' historical compositions were heavily criticized,²³ which seems to have made him abandon his early dating of the *Onomasticon*.²⁴ Nevertheless, Barnes's early date for the composition of the *Onomasticon* appears as optional in publications dealing with the work, alongside the later date of post-313 CE.²⁵

AILA IN THE ONOMASTICON

In light of recent advances in the study of the *Onomasticon*, including a new edition of the Greek text and a re-publication of a partial Syriac version, as well as new archaeological findings pertaining to the reforms of Diocletian, it seems worthwhile to reconsider Barnes's argument regarding Petra's representation in the *Onomasticon* and its implications on the date of the work. I shall begin, however, not with Petra but with Aila, whose description in the *Onomasticon* is also of crucial importance for the dating of the work.

Aila is mentioned in the *Onomasticon* under the entry of Ailam (Αἰλάμ), where Eusebius provides the following information (here and below the Greek text is taken from Klostermann's edition):²⁶

ἐν ἐσχάτοις ἐστὶ <Παλαιστίνης> παρακειμένη τῇ πρὸς μεσημβρίαν ἐρήμῳ καὶ τῇ πρὸς ἔρυθρῃ θαλάσσῃ [...] ἐγκάθεται δὲ αὐτόθι τάγμα Ῥωμαίων τὸ δέκατον. καλεῖται δὲ νῦν Αἰλά [...]

Lying on the boundary of Palestine in the desert to the south and beside the Red Sea [...] The Roman Tenth Legion is stationed there. It is called Aila now [...]

The designation of Aila as a city of Palestine poses a problem to Barnes's thesis that the *Onomasticon* was composed *during* the reforms of Diocletian. Since Barnes assumed that 'Eusebius compiled the work by going through the Bible verse by verse', the entry of Ailam, taken from Genesis 14:1, must have been one of the first entries to be written.²⁷ However, the information provided on Aila, namely its belonging to Palestine as well as the presence of the Tenth Legion in the city, two main components of Diocletian's re-organization in the region (see below), indicates that the entire work was compiled only

of writing—that is, Arabia Petraea was incorporated in Palaestina while Eusebius was engaged on compiling the gazetteer in the 290s.'

²³ See Barnes (2008), 66, n.40, to which one may add also Louth (1990).

²⁴ Barnes (2008), 66: 'Eusebius' use of Legio as a geographical point of reference provides no assistance in determining the precise date of the *Onomasticon*, which remains uncertain'. In this article, Barnes convincingly refutes the arguments of Notley and Safrai (2005), xiii–xv, who relied on the *Onomasticon*'s silence regarding the establishment of Maximianopolis in place of Legio as an indicator to the work's date.

²⁵ E.g. Walker (1990), 42, obviously following Barnes, asserted that Eusebius completed the *Onomasticon* 'during his thirties', namely in the 290s.

²⁶ Klostermann (1904), 6. Cf. Timm (2017), 7 (no. 6). For the English translation see Freeman-Grenville (2003), 14.

²⁷ Barnes (1975), 414.

after the reforms. Barnes was aware of this problem, to which he responded in a footnote, stating that the editorial supplement <Παλαιστίνης> 'must be rejected (despite Jerome's *in extremis finibus Palaestinae*) or revision by the author postulated'.²⁸

In contrast to Barnes' view, the supplement <Παλαιστίνης> should be regarded as a secure restoration of Eusebius' original version, as can be inferred not only from Jerome's Latin translation, but also from the Greek text itself. Klostermann's restoration of <Παλαιστίνης> was based on the 1767 edition of Vallarsi, who explained the omission as a clear case of *homoioarkton*, namely an omission caused by the similar beginnings of adjacent words, in our case the subsequent participle παρακειμένη.²⁹ In addition, and more decisively, the word 'Palestine' appears explicitly in the Syriac translation of the *Onomasticon*, which was discovered only after Klostermann's edition.³⁰ The fact that the Syriac version is a translation of Eusebius' Greek text, rather than of Jerome's Latin translation, is evident from the text.

In fact, even without the explicit mention of Palestine in this entry, one can infer that Aila belonged to the province of Palestine at the time Eusebius was composing the *Onomasticon* solely based on the mention of the Tenth Legion in the city. We now know that the transfer of the Tenth Legion from Jerusalem to Aila was part of a wider deployment of military units to southern Palestine and Transjordan under Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy (293–305 CE). While the transfer of the Tenth Legion to Aila is known only from literary sources,³¹ the presence of other military units in the south is attested archaeologically. Thus, the Sixth Legion, which had been stationed during the second-third centuries CE at Legio in the Jezreel Valley, was transferred under the First Tetrarchy to Udrh in southern Transjordan, as attested by a Latin inscription discovered at the site.³²

Since both Aila and Udrh initially belonged to the province of Arabia, where two other legions were stationed, the Third Legion at Bostra and the Fourth Legion at Lejjun, the transfer of two additional legions from Palestine would have brought the number of legions under the command of the *dux* (military governor) of Arabia to four. To avoid such unwanted concentration of power under one official, an administrative adjustment was made – southern Transjordan, the Negev and most of the Sinai Peninsula were transferred from Arabia to Palestine. Thus, Bostra and Lejjun remained in Arabia, while Aila and Udrh were now part of Palestine. The result was an equal division of military

²⁸ Barnes (1975), 415 n.2.

²⁹ Vallarsi (1767), 130, footnote (g): *Supplendum heic nomen Παλαιστίνης et res ipsa postulat et Hieronymi interpretatio demonstrat. Subsequens vox παρακειμένη, quae ab iisdem literis inchoatur, ac nescio quid cum illa habet similitudinis, fraudi librario festinanti fuerit.*

³⁰ Rahmani et al. (1922–1923), 230 (no. 3): ܐܝܠܐ ܨܠܥܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܠܐ. The manuscript of the Syriac translation was lost after its publication without being photographed. Hence, the only available text is the one published by Rahmani et al. This text was reproduced (in transliteration) with English and German translations by Timm (2005), 6–8 (no. 6).

³¹ Apart from the *Onomasticon*, the presence of the Tenth Legion in Aila is mentioned also in Jerome's *Commentary on Ezekiel* (47, 18: *Ahila... ubi nunc moratur legio et praesidium Romanorum*) and in the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or. xxxiv: *Praefectus legionis decimae Fretensis, Ailae*). The only possible archaeological evidence for the presence of the Tenth Legion in Aila is a fragmentary Latin building inscription, likely from the time of Constantine, which was discovered in secondary use in Islamic Aqaba, see MacAdam (1989) = *IGLS XXI*, no. 150.

³² Kennedy and Falahat (2008).

power — two legions *per duces*.³³ It seems likely, however, that in reality the legions were transferred only after the adjustment of the provincial borders, so as to prevent the situation of having four legions under the *dux* of Arabia even for a short period of time.

The transfer of the Sixth Legion to Uduh may be dated to 303–304 CE based on the mention of the provincial governor Aelius Flavianus in the Latin inscription from the site. This Flavianus is to be identified with the governor of Palestine who is mentioned in Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine* as being in office at the onset of the Great Persecution dated to April of the 19th year of the reign of Diocletian, namely 303 CE.³⁴ From the same work, we know that Flavianus was succeeded as governor of Palestine by Urbanus in the second year of Diocletian's persecution, i.e. 304 CE, and the latter stayed in office until 308 CE, namely after Diocletian's abdication and the end of the First Tetrarchy in 305 CE. We don't know, however, when Flavianus began his term as governor, but if his appointment was directly connected to his role in the persecution of the Christians, it likely occurred not long before 303 CE.³⁵

Before the transfer of the legions, but presumably after the re-arrangement of the provincial borders, two auxiliary units were stationed in the Arava Valley, as indicated by two nearly-identical Latin inscriptions, also attributed to the First Tetrarchy, discovered at Yotvata and 'Ayn Gharandal.³⁶ The governor mentioned in these two inscriptions is named Priscus, who evidently preceded Flavianus as governor of Palestine, and is also attested in inscriptions from Caesarea Maritima.³⁷ In addition, several inscribed milestones dated to the First Tetrarchy were discovered north of Yotvata.³⁸ The distance recorded on these milestones refers to the fort at Yotvata, indicating that the milestones were erected by the army unit stationed there.³⁹ The milestones point to the existence of an imperial north-south artery of traffic in the Arava, which likely served, among other things, for the transfer of the Tenth Legion from Jerusalem to Aila.⁴⁰

It seems, then, that the redeployment of the auxiliary units was done in anticipation of the arrival of the legions. Thus, the overall re-organization of the region under Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy consisted of several steps: first the provincial borders were re-arranged by transferring southern Transjordan, the Negev, and Sinai, from Arabia to Palestine; then the auxiliary units were stationed in the Arava; and finally, around 303–304 CE, the two legions, the Tenth and the Sixth, were deployed southward to Aila and Uduh, respectively.⁴¹

³³ Di Segni (2018); Tsafir (1986). Cf. Ward (2012) for a more skeptical discussion of the evidence.

³⁴ Euseb., *Mart. Pal.* (S) pref., see Lawlor and Oulton (1927), 329.

³⁵ See Davenport (2010), 353.

³⁶ For the inscription from Yotvata see Roll (1989) and the corrected reading by Eck (1992); for the inscription from 'Ayn Gharandal see Darby (2015).

³⁷ *CIIP* II, nos. 1268, 1271, 1272.

³⁸ Roll and Avner (2008).

³⁹ As elsewhere in the desert regions of southern Palestine and Arabia, the milestones were most likely erected by a local army unit, see Ben David (2019).

⁴⁰ More on the Arava during the fourth century CE, see Isaac (2006), reprinted in Isaac (2017).

⁴¹ Even prior to the discovery of the Latin inscription in Uduh, Speidel (1979), 172 n.11 has already argued that 'legio VI Ferrata was moved, very likely at the same time [as legio X

Of the units that we now know were stationed in southern Palestine under Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, the *Onomasticon* mentions only the Tenth Legion at Aila.⁴² This is hardly surprising, since the *Onomasticon* does not provide a comprehensive description of Palestine but rather focuses on localities directly related to biblical toponyms. In any case, the mention of the Tenth Legion at Aila seems to indicate firmly that the entire work was composed after Diocletian's re-organization. With this conclusion in mind, we may now turn to the way Petra is described in the *Onomasticon* and examine whether or not it actually corroborates Barnes' thesis that the *Onomasticon* was composed during the Diocletianic re-organization.

PETRA IN THE *ONOMASTICON*

As mentioned above, Barnes' argument relied on the mention of Petra in three entries of the *Onomasticon* (according to Klostermann's edition). While the entries of Rekem (Ῥεκέμ) and Petra (Πέτρα) describe the city of Petra as belonging to Arabia, the entry of Arkem (Ἀρκέμ) names the city as belonging to Palestine, which according to Barnes, 'reflects a very recent administrative change'.⁴³ The entry of Kades Barne (Κάδης Βαρνή), which also describes Petra as belonging to Arabia, was only incidentally mentioned by Barnes in a footnote. I shall tackle these entries one by one.

The first case is the entry of Petra, which in Klostermann's edition appears as follows:⁴⁴

Πέτρα (Judg. 1:36). πόλις ἐν γῇ Ἐδὼμ τῆς Ἀραβίας, ἣτις ἐπεκλήθη Ἰεχθοήλ, ἥ καὶ Ῥεκέμ παρὰ Ἀσσυρίοις ὀνομάζεται.

Petra. A city in the land of Edom of Arabia, which was called Iechthoel, and which is also called Rekem by the Assyrians.

In the manuscript, the entry of Petra does not appear at the beginning of a line, nor under a heading indicating its biblical book or section. Moreover, Petra is the only entry in the *Onomasticon* under the letter *pi*. All this makes its attribution to a specific verse of the Scripture rather difficult. Klostermann reconstructed the heading 'Pentateuch' <τῆς Πεντατεύχου> based on Jerome's Latin translation (*De Pentateucho Moysi*) but he attributed the entry of Petra to Judg. 1:36. This verse, however, mentions Petra in relation to the borders of the land of the Amorites and does not seem to fit the content of the entry in the *Onomasticon*. Melamed has pointed out that the correct attribution of this entry is to the verse in II Kings 14:7, where Petra is mentioned in relation to Edom with its additional name Iechthoel, just as it appears in the *Onomasticon* entry.⁴⁵ This, however,

Fretensis], to Udruh near Petra, whereupon that portion of the province of Arabia was transferred to the province of Palestine'.

⁴² The mention of the Tenth Legion in Aila is also exceptional in the *Onomasticon* in being the only military unit explicitly designated by its name. All other references to army units in the *Onomasticon* are indicated merely by the term φρούριον ('garrison') or φρούριον στρατιωτῶν ('garrison of soldiers'). For all the military units mentioned in the *Onomasticon*, see Thomsen (1903b). 161–163.

⁴³ Barnes (1975), 414.

⁴⁴ Klostermann (1904), 142; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 79.

⁴⁵ Melamed (1966), 70 (no. 760); Melamed (1932–1933), 79 [33].

was not followed in Timm's new edition, where the entry of Petra was left without a biblical attribution.⁴⁶

The mention of Arabia in this entry does not seem to indicate Petra's administrative belonging, for it is used as a general geographical term indicating the location of Edom. It should be noted that in addition to being the name of a province, Arabia was also used in a general geographical sense, pertaining to the vast desert regions of Transjordan and the Arabian Peninsula.⁴⁷ Such usage may be found among Roman authors who wrote before the formal establishment of the province of Arabia in 106 CE, not to mention the frequent reference of Josephus to the Nabataeans as Arabs.⁴⁸ Thus, the mention of Arabia in the entry of Petra may be regarded as Eusebius' attempt to clarify Petra's relation to Edom, which appears in the biblical verse. Associating Petra with Palestine in this entry would have puzzled the contemporary reader, who was likely familiar with the well-established identification of Edom with Arabia.⁴⁹

This may also explain why in the entry of Αἰλάθ (I Kings 9:26), Eusebius was content with only quoting the biblical phrase ἐπὶ τοῦ χειλὸς τῆς ἐσχάτης θαλάσσης ἐν γῇ Ἐδὼμ, 'on the banks of the outermost sea in the land of Edom', without indicating the city's contemporary administrative belonging, which however appears in the matching entry of Αἰλάμ (see above). Another entry where Edom is mentioned in relation to Petra is Idumaea (Ἰδουμαία), where after explaining that the toponym derives from the Land of Esau (χώρα Ἡσαῦ), for he was also named Edom, Eusebius states that 'it is near Petra and called

⁴⁶ Timm (2017), 185 (no. 763).

⁴⁷ Cf. Di Segni (2018), 250: 'the term "Arabia" can mean different things. It does not necessarily refer to the province called Arabia, unless so clarified by the context. In a general ethnic-geographical sense it describes a vast region, stretching from the Nile to the Euphrates, inhabited by nomad peoples called Arabs... when such a source [ecclesiastical] speaks of "Petra in Arabia", this does not mean that the area of Petra had been detached from Palaestina and annexed again to Provincia Arabia; it just identifies Petra as a city in the land of the Arabs, and more specifically, for ecclesiastical writers it expresses its identification with biblical Reqem, the metropolis of Edom that was in Arabia.' Not all ecclesiastical authors were unambiguous as Cyril of Alexandria, who, writing in the early fifth century CE, when Petra was already part of Third Palestine, referred to the city as 'still located in the land of the Arabs' (Πέτρα, κατὰ τὴν Ἀρράβων γῆν καὶ εἰς δεῦρο κειμένη, Cyr. Alex., *In Is.* IV, 1; PG 70, 864).

⁴⁸ The numerous references to Arabia and Arabs in Greek and Latin sources are now conveniently presented under the vast entry of 'Arabia' in Di Segni, Tsafir and Green (2017), s.v. Arabia I, see especially section 4: Early Arabia and Nabataea (sources dealing with Arabs and Nabataeans before the foundation of Provincia Arabia in 106 CE). On the usage of the terms 'Arabs' and 'Arabia' by Josephus, see recently Schwartz (2024).

⁴⁹ See e.g. Epiphanius, *Panarion haer.* 51, 22, 11, ed. Holl (1980), 286: ἐν Πέτρᾳ τῇ πόλει (μητρόπολις δὲ ἐστὶ τῆς Ἀραβίας, ἥτις ἐστὶν Ἐδὼμ ἢ ἐν ταῖς γραφαῖς γεγραμμένη). Translated by Amidon (1990), 182: 'in the city of Petra (this is the capital of Arabia, which is called Edom in the scriptures).' A similar reference is found also in Epiphanius' Syriac version of *On Weights and Measures* (71), see Dean (1935), 74. Since Dean's translation of this passage is somewhat ambiguous, one may consult the translation of Baruch Levine ('Reqem ... which is in Arabia... it is moreover named Edom in the Scripture') cited in Mayerson (1984), 226 and Di Segni (2018), 251.

Gebalene' (ἀμφὶ τὴν Πέτραν Γεβαληνὴ καλουμένη).⁵⁰ As meticulously shown by Gatier, the toponym Gebalene is to be identified with the mountainous region now called al-Djibāl in southern Transjordan, part of the area traditionally associated with the land of Edom.⁵¹

The second case is the entry of Rekem, which in Klostermann's edition appears as follows:⁵²

Ῥεκὲμ (Num. 31:8). αὕτη ἐστὶν Πέτρα πόλις τῆς Ἀραβίας. ἥς ἐβασίλευσε Ῥοκόμ, ὃν ἀνεΐλον οἱ υἱοὶ Ἰσραήλ. λέγεται δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς βασιλεὺς Μαδιάμ.

Rekem. The same is the city of Petra of Arabia. It was ruled by Rekem (Rokom), whom the children of Israel slew. It is said also that he was King of Madiam.

First to the biblical attribution of the entry. Klostermann assigned it to the verse in Numbers 31:8, which may fit the content but poses a problem as to its location. In Klostermann's edition, Rekem is the final entry of the Pentateuch section, appearing after entries from later verses of Numbers and one entry from Deuteronomy. This discrepancy was solved by Melamed, who attributed the entry to Josh. 13:21, which also fits the content of the entry. The position in the manuscript of the heading 'Joshua' (Ἀπὸ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ) immediately after the entry of Rekem, was explained by Melamed as a scribal error.⁵³ Thus, he considered Rekem to be the first entry of the 'Joshua' section, and indeed, the other entries from Joshua are all from later verses.

However, in both Num. 31:8 and Josh. 13:21, Rekem is not mentioned as a toponym but rather as the name of one of the kings of Midian. The inclusion of the name in the *Onomasticon* was cleverly explained by Melamed in the following way: when Eusebius encountered the name Rekem among the kings of Midian he recalled the city of Rekem and created an independent entry, in which he associated the name both with Petra and the Midianite king. Midian (Μαδιάμ) appears also as a separate entry in the *Onomasticon*, where its location is given as 'beyond Arabia to the south in the desert of the Saracens, east of the Red Sea'.⁵⁴ Hence, the mention of Arabia in the entry of Rekem seems also to be as a general geographical term, and not as indicating the administrative belonging of Petra. Just like in the case of Edom, associating Midian with Palestine would have puzzled the reader.

The third case is the entry of Kades Barne, which in Klostermann's edition appears as follows:⁵⁵

Κάδης Βαρνη (Num. 32:8). ἔρημος ἡ παρατείνουσα Πέτρα πόλει τῆς Ἀραβίας, ἐνθα ἀναβάσα ἐτελεύτησεν Μαριάμ, καὶ Μωϋσῆς διστάσας παίει τὴν πέτραν [...]

Kades Barne. A desert alongside the city of Petra in Arabia where Miriam went and died, and Moses doubtingly struck the rock [...]

⁵⁰ Klostermann (1904), 102. Jerome's Latin translation reads: *est autem circa urbem Petram, quae nunc dicitur Gebalene*.

⁵¹ Gatier (2000).

⁵² Klostermann (1904), 144; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 80. Cf. Timm (2017), 188 (no. 774).

⁵³ Melamed (1966), 71 (no. 771); Melamed (1932–1933), 319–320 [6–7].

⁵⁴ Klostermann (1904), 124; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 70.

⁵⁵ Klostermann (1904), 112; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 64.

This entry was only briefly mentioned by Barnes in a footnote, evidently because it was assigned by Klostermann to the book of Numbers, which was also assigned to the entry of Rekem, and hence did not add much to Barnes's argument. However, a closer investigation of the entry reveals important information for the present discussion.

The mention of Arabia in this entry in Klostermann's edition was based on Jerome's Latin translation and a near-quote of Eusebius' passage by Procopius of Gaza.⁵⁶ The Syriac translation also mentions Arabia in this entry.⁵⁷ But in the Greek manuscript of the *Onomasticon*, Petra is designated in this entry as a city of Palestine (τῆς πόλεως Παλαιστίνης). Considering the widespread association of Petra with Arabia, the mention of Palestine in the Greek manuscript is evidently the *lectio difficilior* and hence should be preferred, as done by Timm in his new edition.⁵⁸ We may assume, then, that in this entry, Eusebius was originally referring to Petra's administrative status as a city of Palestine, but this was changed, perhaps out of habit, to Arabia by later copyists and translators.

The fourth case is the entry of Arkem, which in Klostermann's edition appears as follows:⁵⁹

Ἀρκέμ (II Kings 17: 30). κατὰ Ἰώσιππον αὕτη ἐστὶν Πέτρα πόλις ἐπίσημος τῆς Παλαιστίνης.

Arkem. According to Josephus this is Petra, a famous city of Palestine.

Klostermann attributed this entry to II Kings 17:30, although the toponym does not appear in the verse. In fact, this is the same verse that was attributed to the preceding entry of Asimath (Ἀσιμάθ) and its attribution to Arkem seems to be a plain editorial error. And indeed, in Timm's new edition, Arkem was not attributed to any biblical verse.⁶⁰ Barnes, however, relied on this attribution to argue that Arkem was the last of the four entries to be composed and thus reflected an administrative change. The content clearly points to Josephus as the source of the entry and indeed Klostermann referred in his apparatus to *Antiquities* IV, 4, 7 (4.82), where we find the following passage (referring to Moses):⁶¹

ἀπήγε τὴν δύναμιν διὰ τῆς ἐρήμου, καὶ τῆς Ἀραβίας ἐλθὼν εἰς χωρίον, ὃ μητρόπολιν αὐτῶν Ἄραβες νενομίκασι, πρότερον μὲν Ἄρκην λεγομένην Πέτραν δὲ νῦν ὀνομαζομένην.

He led his forces away through the desert and came to a place in Arabia which the Arabs have deemed their metropolis, formerly called Arce, today named Petra.

⁵⁶ PG 87/1, 1021D: Ἀπὸ Κάδης Βαρνή. Ἐρημός ἐστι τῇ Πέτρᾳ πόλει τῆς Ἀραβίας παρακειμένη. Ἐνθα καὶ Μαριάμ ἐτελεύτησε, καὶ Μωϋσῆς διστάσας αἶπει τὴν πέτραν.

⁵⁷ Rahmani et al. (1922–1923), 218219 (no. 46) = Timm (2005), 58–60 (no. 581).

⁵⁸ Timm (2017), 142 (no. 581): Κάδης Βαρνή. ἔρημος ἢ παρατείνουσα Πέτρα τῆς πόλεως Παλαιστίνης. Melamed (1932–1933), 258 [61] noted several other instances where the reading of the Greek manuscript should be preferred over Jerome's Latin translation.

⁵⁹ Klostermann (1904), 36; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 27.

⁶⁰ Timm (2017), 44 (no. 172). Melamed (1966), 18 (no. 171) also did not attribute Arkem to any biblical verse, arguing that this entry was taken directly from Josephus, see Melamed (1932–1933), 394 [16].

⁶¹ Text and translation from Thackeray and Marcus (1930), 42–43. Note the suggestion to read Ἀρεκέμην instead of Ἄρκην, in light of Eusebius's Ἀρκέμ.

It is clear that Eusebius deliberately altered Josephus's wording so as to indicate that Petra belonged to Palestine, rather than Arabia.⁶² This change may be explained in the following way: Josephus, writing before the creation of the province of Arabia, referred to Petra as the *metropolis* of the Arabs, namely the Nabataeans. By the term *metropolis* he evidently meant the capital city of the Nabataean kingdom. For Eusebius, however, designating Petra as the *metropolis* of Arabia would have implied that the city was the capital of the province of Arabia. But the actual capital of Arabia at the time was not Petra, but Bostra, which is indeed named in the *Onomasticon*, under the entry of Bosor (Βοσόρ), as the 'current *metropolis* of Arabia' (ἡ νῦν μητρόπολις τῆς Ἀραβίας).⁶³

This may have inclined Eusebius to indicate Petra's contemporary administrative belonging, namely to Palestine. However, by designating Petra as the *metropolis* of Palestine, Eusebius would have implied that the city was the provincial capital of Palestine. Eusebius knew well of course that the actual capital of Palestine was his own hometown of Caesarea Maritima. Hence, he chose to describe Petra in this entry not as a *metropolis*, but as a 'famous city' (πόλις ἐπίσημος), a phrase that does not entail any administrative connotations. This phrase is often, perhaps even systematically, used in the *Onomasticon* to describe prominent cities that were not provincial capitals in Eusebius's time, such as Philadelphia, Gerasa, and Esbos (Heshbon) in Arabia; Scythopolis, Gaza, and Azotus (Ashdod) in Palestine; and Damascus in the province of Phoenicē.

Eusebius' use of the term *metropolis* in the *Onomasticon* may provide a further clue, unnoticed so far by scholars, to the work's date. While five of the seven occurrences of this term in the work pertain anachronistically to biblical localities, two occurrences refer to contemporary *metropoleis* – the one is Bostra, mentioned above, and the other is Tyre, mentioned under the entry of Sor (Σόρ).⁶⁴ Tyre is designated as 'the *metropolis* of Phoenicia', evidently referring to the province of Syria-Phoenicē, established after the division of Syria by Septimius Severus around 194 CE.

While during the first to third centuries CE, the term *metropolis* was used as an honorific title and did not necessarily indicate that a city was a provincial capital, namely the normal seat of the provincial governor, during the fourth and fifth centuries the term was almost exclusively used for the capital city of a province.⁶⁵ Though we lack direct evidence for the precise date and reason for this change, Millar has convincingly shown that it was likely an outcome of the 'Tetrarchic re-structuring'.⁶⁶ Thus, Eusebius' use of

⁶² In the Introduction to Freeman-Grenville (2003), 4, J.E. Taylor writes that 'in describing Petra as "a city of Palestine", Eusebius is actually referring to Josephus' opinion, rather than the situation in his own day'. This is evidently mistaken since in Josephus's time, Petra was part of the Nabataean Kingdom, which was occasionally referred to as Arabia by Josephus, but certainly not part of Palestine.

⁶³ Klostermann (1904), 46.

⁶⁴ Klostermann (1904), 162.

⁶⁵ Petra, for example, held the honorific status of a *metropolis* since the time of Trajan (114 CE), as evidenced by an inscription placed on a triumphal arch (*IGLS* XXI, no. 37). According to Bowersock (1983), 85, 'it had become clear from Trajan's grant of the title *metropolis* to Petra by 114 that it was not his intention, in placing the capital of the province at Bostra, to diminish the role of Petra as a center for the southern part of the Arabian territory'.

⁶⁶ Millar (2012), 71.

the title *metropolis* only for cities that were in effect provincial capitals lends further support to a post-Tetrarchic date for the composition of the *Onomasticon*.

Another entry that mentions Petra, but was not discussed by Barnes, is Gai (Γαί), which in Klostermann's edition appears as follows:⁶⁷

Γαί (Num. 33:44). ἐπὶ τῆς ἐρήμου σταθμὸς τῶν υἱῶν Ἰσραήλ. καὶ ἔστιν εἰς ἔτι νῦν Γαῖα πόλις τῇ Πέτρᾳ παρακειμένη.

Gai. A halt in the desert of the children of Israel, and there is still now Gaia, laying near the city of Petra.

Barnes seems to have ignored this entry because Eusebius' Greek version does not designate Petra, nor Gaia for that matter, as belonging to either Arabia or Palestine.⁶⁸ However, Jerome's Latin translation of this entry does designate Gaia as belonging to Palestine:⁶⁹

Gai castra in solitudine filiorum Israel, et usque hodie Gaia urbs dicitur Palaestinae iuxta ciuitatem Petram.

Gai. A camp of the children of Israel in the desert. Even today the city of Gaia of Palestine is mentioned near the city of Petra.

The question is whether Jerome added the mention of Palestine on his own initiative or translated it from Eusebius's original Greek text. This issue could have been resolved by the Syriac translation, but unfortunately the entry of Gai is missing in the Syriac version. Nevertheless, Eusebius' extant Greek text may hint that the original Greek version did mention Palestine. The participle *παρακειμένη*, which appears at the end of the entry of Gai, is the same participle that appears also in the entry of Ailam, and which caused the omission of the word *Παλαιστίνης* in that entry (see above). We may thus cautiously conjecture that Jerome's mention of Palestine was based on Eusebius's original Greek version, which designated Gaia (and hence also Petra) as belonging to Palestine. This was also the opinion of Klostermann, who deliberated in his apparatus whether the Greek text of this entry should be supplemented with '*Παλαιστίνης*'.⁷⁰ If so, then the entry of Gai provides additional, though tentative, evidence for the composition of the *Onomasticon* after the re-arrangement of the provincial borders between Palestine and Arabia, namely after Diocletian's reforms.

CONCLUSION

Dating the compilation of the *Onomasticon* to the time after the administrative and military reforms of Diocletian and the First Tetrarchy, that is after 303 CE, places the composition of the work in the years of the Great Persecution (303–313 CE). Barnes argued that 'it is not plausible (though not altogether impossible) to imagine Eusebius engaged in scholarly activity of this sort either during the decade of persecution (303–13)

⁶⁷ Klostermann (1904), 62; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 40.

⁶⁸ The toponym Gaia is identified with the modern village of Wadi Musa, near Petra. The name is attested in several Nabataean inscriptions discovered in the area, see Al-Salameen and Falahat (2012).

⁶⁹ Klostermann (1904), 63; Freeman-Grenville (2003), 40.

⁷⁰ Klostermann (1904), 62.

or during the following years'.⁷¹ Conversely, it may well be that Eusebius was inclined to dedicate the oppressing years of the persecutions not to Christian theological writing, but to a purely scholarly project devoted mainly to the Old Testament. The fact that Eusebius is known to have traveled outside of Palestine during that decade may account for the heterogeneous character of the work and the inconsistencies in content and phrasing between the various geographical entries.⁷²

In conclusion, the present revision indicates that Barnes' dating of the composition of the *Onomasticon* to the 290s is unfounded and should be discarded. The likely period of composition seems to be in the years of the Great Persecution (303–313 CE) with the final publication of the work following shortly after Eusebius's appointment as bishop of Caesarea in 313 CE. Nevertheless, the extant evidence does not allow us to firmly exclude the possibility that both the composition and publication took place after 313 CE.

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⁷¹ Barnes (1975), 415.

⁷² Wallace-Hadrill (1960), 13, 32, while dating the *Onomasticon* between 326 and 330 CE, asserted that 'the first decade of the fourth century was, in many respects, the richest period of his [Eusebius's] literary life, despite the disruption caused by the persecution of 303 and his consequent prolonged absence from Caesarea'.

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