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0521541085 - The Sentences of Sextus: A Contribution to the History of Early  
Christian Ethics

Henry Chadwick

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THE  
SENTENCES OF  
SEXTUS

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE  
HISTORY OF EARLY CHRISTIAN ETHICS

BY

HENRY CHADWICK

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of Divinity in the University of Oxford*



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TEXTS AND STUDIES  
CONTRIBUTIONS TO  
BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC LITERATURE

NEW SERIES

*Edited by*  
C. H. DODD

V  
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*To*

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## NOTE ON SIGLA EMPLOYED

Π, Υ. See pp. 3–4.

A, Q, W, O, P, V, B, G, L, J, S, U, C, M, T, c, w, r. See p. 4.

X, x. See p. 6.

Α. See p. 7.

Clit., Φ, Λ, Σ, Θ, Θb, Θc, Θd. See pp. 73–4.

Py., Po. See Section 4 of Part II, pp. 140 ff.

R = Rufinus (see p. 4).

D. See p. 84.

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## P R E F A C E

Among the literary remains of second-century Christianity a unique place is occupied by the remarkable collection of 451 ethical and religious aphorisms ascribed to Sextus. The collection presents many problems, especially with regard to its character and origin, to which it cannot yet be said that any agreed solution has been reached. The aphorisms came to have an intriguing history. From the third century onwards they were widely and appreciatively read by Christian folk, as is proved by the remarks of Origen, by the Syriac and Armenian translations, and by the extraordinary success of the Latin version made late in the fourth century by Tyrannius Rufinus of Aquileia. This translation of Rufinus played a minor role in the great quarrel between him and his former friend Jerome, becoming the target of some of Jerome's most vituperative observations. Yet it continued as a best seller, and had the distinction of being invoked by that earnest moralist, the British monk Pelagius, in order to lend support and authority to his enthusiastic campaign for moral rearmament. In medieval times the Latin version continued to be read and studied, especially in monastic circles. One aphorism is quoted as authoritative in the Rule of Saint Benedict.

A collection of ethical aphorisms, therefore, which over a period of many centuries found an extensive reading public in four languages among Christians from Britain to Mesopotamia, may properly appear worthy of study and examination. The collection is on any showing of great interest and importance for that neglected subject, the history of ethics. Perhaps it may be properly classified as the wisdom-literature of early Gentile Christendom.

The full text of the original Greek only became known at the end of the nineteenth century. For many centuries the West knew only Rufinus' version which was printed many times during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (though even that was in an abbreviated form). The Syriac versions were first printed by

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Lagarde in 1858. In 1873 Gildemeister produced the first critical edition of the Latin text, in which proper account was taken of the Syriac versions and of the surviving remnants of the Greek original, preserved mainly by incorporation in later Byzantine collections. Meantime the search for the complete Greek text continued; three years later its existence was first reported by Duchesne, who traced it in a codex of the tenth century in the library of the monastery of St John at Patmos, and announced this fact in 1876.<sup>1</sup> Four years later, in December 1880, Anton Elter found another manuscript containing the Sextine collection in the Vatican Library; indeed, he had the good fortune to find the codex on the very first day of his admission to that august repository. Twelve years later Elter's edition, containing the Greek and Latin texts in parallel columns, was at last published and has remained the standard edition since then. It is, however, an exceedingly rare book, only to be found in learned libraries and not in all of them. Elter's text was reprinted by Paola at Milan in 1937, but this book is also not now to be had. Accordingly, no apology seems necessary for offering here a revised edition of the text. I have been most fortunate in that the Patmos manuscript<sup>2</sup> has been collated for me by Mr Hugh Lloyd-Jones, Fellow of Corpus Christi College, Oxford; and in so far as this edition might claim to improve on Elter's, it is wholly due to his generous help. To him I also owe a transcript of the Pythagorean maxims in the same codex, hitherto unpublished.

It may be well to add that the study attached to the texts does not pretend to deal with all that could or ought to be said about the sentences. The problem has been approached from a limited and defined point of view. Much research remains to be done on the history of the collections of gnomic wisdom, which undoubtedly played a substantial part in ancient education (as is shown by the great fifth-century compilation of John Stobaeus). I have tried to resist the temptation to investigate background questions more than is really necessary. The interest governing

<sup>1</sup> *Archives des Missions Scientifiques*, 3e série, tom. III (1876), p. 440.

<sup>2</sup> The Vatican manuscript I have seen for myself, and in two or three places Elter's collations are corrected.



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the present study has lain in the affinity and difference between Christian morality of the second century and that of the surrounding world. The work is set forth, therefore, as a contribution to the much discussed question of the continuity and the discontinuity between the early Church and contemporary society—in part, the question associated since F. J. Dölger with the German phrase *Antike und Christentum*. Its original starting-point lay in some studies in the Christian Platonists of Alexandria. It is from this standpoint that account is here taken of Sextus' background and sources. It is for this reason that there stand appended to the text of Sextus himself the Epitome of Clitarchus and also the collection of 'The Gnomes of the Pythagoreans'. The sources and parallels have been examined for the sake of illuminating the intentions and presuppositions of the compiler of the Sextine collection; the collection is not discussed for the light it may throw upon Neopythagoreanism. The question 'Where did he find this?', though I hope it has not been neglected, has been subordinated to the question 'What did he do with it when he found it?'

Because the interest has been in the earliest form of the collection as known to Origen and translated by Rufinus, I have provided brief notes (pp. 163–81) only on 1–451. This collection was expanded with extra matter probably early in the fifth century, which is attested in the Greek, Syriac, and Armenian traditions; but I have not endeavoured to provide notes on these appendices. Of course they come from the same general *milieu*, but their character is subtly different and betrays an interest diverging in some degree from that of the original compiler.

The present study would not have been possible but for the labours of Gildemeister and Elter, and I have freely drawn upon the store of information which they gathered in the last century. Perhaps no one can work thoroughly over the ground covered by another without being from time to time exasperated at this or that piece of inaccuracy or by some failure to give a proper reference so that a statement may be checked. Elter was particularly inclined to present his information in a form deficient in clarity and to publish it in as obscure a corner as possible. But

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I have not decorated this book with polemical footnotes criticising scholars of the greatest learning, to whom I must express a deep sense of gratitude.

Among many debts I must particularly acknowledge what I owe to Mr Hugh Lloyd-Jones for his invaluable help not only in the collation of the Patmos manuscript but also in proposing several acute emendations, his restorations of 380 and 530 being (I think) quite certain; to Professor A. D. Nock for some useful references that I would otherwise have missed; to Dr C. H. Dodd for his kindness in including this volume in the series of *Texts and Studies*; and to my wife, without whose patient encouragement it would never have been written at all.

H. C.

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