

MICHAEL KULIKOWSKI

THE *EPISTULA HONORII*, AGAIN

aus: Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik 122 (1998) 247–252

© Dr. Rudolf Habelt GmbH, Bonn

THE *EPISTULA HONORII*, AGAIN

The unique Spanish letter known conventionally as the *Epistula Honorii* has attracted a good deal of intermittent attention since it was brought to the notice of the scholarly world by José Maria Lacarra in 1945.¹ The text of the *Epistula* has been published three times, but always with editorial emendation. Most recently, in an article published in this journal, Hagith Sivan translates and comments on an edited text of the *Epistula*, with which she publishes a facsimile that allows for comparison with her transcription.² The problem with this approach lies in the extreme difficulty of the *Epistula*'s text. It is not only lacunose, but also thoroughly corrupt. Without emendation, it makes sense only in short fits and starts. Emendation, however, prejudices the case. There is actually no way to emend the text that does not read into it meanings that may or may not be there. With a text as corrupt as the *Epistula*, extant in one unique copy, even to repunctuate is to distort. The manuscript readings in Sivan's *apparatus criticus* in fact point the only useful way forward, that is to a diplomatic edition that allows scholars to interact with the transmitted text. If we accept that much of that transmitted text is nonsense, and make no assumptions about what it might or ought to have said, we are at least on firm ground. The text will offer us much less information than we might hope for, but what we do have will be free of speculation and wishful thinking.

The *Epistula Honorii*, hereafter EH, is preserved in Codex 78, Bibl. Acad. Hist. Madrid, usually known as the *Rotense*. The manuscript has 232 folios and falls into two sections. The first is a complete Orosius which once circulated independently from the second half, the *Rotense* itself. The *Rotense* begins on folio 156v after the blank 156r, and is best described as a miscellany. Among other things, it contains Isidore's histories, the chronicle of Alfonso III, the *chronica Albeldense*, and various regnal lists and other *laterculi*. A small dossier of documents relating to Pamplona, including the EH, a text on the city's walls, and a laudatory poem on the tenth-century queen Leudegundia, appears under the title *De Laude Pampilone*. According to M. C. Díaz y Díaz in his magisterial study of the *Rotense*, the Pamplonan documents were probably already associated before their appearance in the *Rotense* and the textual corruptions of the EH were present in the copy from which the *Rotense* scribe worked.³

As we have said, the whole *Epistula* is one large textual problem. Thus, in approaching it textually we must be careful to see it as much as is possible outside any presumed historical context. To do otherwise risks importing assumptions about that context into the text of the letter itself. A diplomatic text of the letter follows. It is not an edition, in that it neglects the editor's duty of making a text readable. It is thus no improvement on previous editions, but if anything a step backwards. That, however, is precisely the point. Emendation of a text such as this one is an impediment to an honest understanding of its historical value. The text is followed by a set of narrowly textual notes and then a discussion of the letter as a historical source. Since I conclude that the EH is too corrupt to allow for any sort of trustworthy emendation, I nowhere include a rationalized or edited version of the text. I have, however, included both Jones' and Sivan's emended editions in an appendix, as examples of plausible but speculative reconstructions.

¹ The *editio princeps* is in J. M. Lacarra, Textos navarros del códice de Roda, *Estudios de Edad Media de la Corona de Aragón* 1 (1945), 268–9.

² H. Sivan, An unedited letter of the emperor Honorius to the Spanish soldiers, *ZPE* 61 (1985), 273–87. The text also appears in A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1964), 3.36, reproduced by A. Balil, La defensa de Hispania en el Bajo Imperio: amenaza exterior y inquietud interna, *Legio VII Gemina* (León, 1970), 616; and E. Demougeot, Une lettre de l'empereur Honorius sur l'*hospitium* des soldats, *RHDF* 34 (1956), 25–49.

³ See M. C. Díaz y Díaz, *Libros y librerías en la Rioja altomedieval* (Logroño, 1979), 32–42.

The text of the EH appears in the manuscript as follows (periods represent punctuation marks above the line between words, while colons represent two off-set points, one on the line and one above it):

Incipit . sacra honorii imperatoris . quam de roma detulit
 militie . urbis pampilonensis . cum sauiniano patricio quidem
 tempore erede prelatu in spaniam profectus est . ob infestatione
 diuersarum gentium barbarorum : honorius imperator glosus perpetuus
 triumphator . semper agustus : Uniuersis militibus nostris . senioribus iunioribus (5)
 speculatoribus . ac britannicis . gaudentes sanctissimi . comilitones nostri
 communium remuneratione meritorum et omnis iuxta exultatione
 gaudentes . his enim maxime est splendor . inluxtris . qui pari cunctos
 luce perfudit : A quos uos magnifice comites . hac magistri
 utriusque militiae ad similitudine nostre clementie constituti : Consti (10)
 tuta sit . uobis stipendia galliganarum . que constitutioni uestre
 porreximus ut eandem uis esset forma uirtutis . quibus excellens . una
 deuotio est . proinde instructissimi in eque nobis cuncta subdita sit
 In spania et amplica congruum et dignitatis augmentum que
 serenitas nostra aurias prestiterit usibus gratanter agnoscimus : (15)
 Ut ubi <ubi> uiuendi . dequidique . tempus extiterit omni alacritate atque
 uirtute abeatis ospitiis obsequamini quapropter fore quidem confidimus .
 ut muneris resolutis incitet . potius quam restinguat ardorem :
 Obtamus commilitones nostros per multos annos uene agere et alia
 manu bene ualete : amen (20)

A quick glance at the text above shows that the EH, as it appears in the *Rotense*, consists of three separable parts, viz. a prefatory incipit, the letter proper, and finally an eschatocol prefaced by the scribal insertion *et alia manu*. The incipit or heading runs as far as the word *barbarorum* in line 4. The actual letter ends at *agere* in line 19. The eschatocol and its scribal gloss conclude the text. Each of these parts, as we shall see, is of a different provenance and date, a point which is crucial to our understanding of the document as a whole. Before we turn to the historical questions raised by the EH, we need to address briefly the textual problems it places before us.

Notes:

line 3: *erede praelatus* allows no safe conjecture.

line 4: *glosus* = *gloriosus* but there are no expansion marks in the MS.

line 5: There must be a lacuna after *nostris*, as *senioribus* and *iunioribus* are not in themselves titles of troop units, and do not occur without the unit-title they modify unless that title forms an antecedent nearby. In the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Occ. 7.119–20) there is a pair of *Ascarii seniores* and *iuniores*, but there is no justification for assuming the pair in the EH to be identical with the pair in the ND, much less for supplying the lacuna in the EH with information from the ND. Neither the *speculatores* nor the *britannici* of the EH can be identified with positively documented late Roman units.

lines 6 and 8: One, at least, of the manuscript's *gaudentes* must be a hortatory *gaudeatis*, and the other can be. There is not much to choose between retaining the *et* in line 7 and emending both verbs, or retaining the second *gaudentes* while omitting the *et*.

line 8: The manuscript's *his* is nonsense. Either *hic* or *is* is possible.

line 9: The arguments of Sivan, 280, for *ad uos quos* as against Jones' *atque uos quoque* are compelling. That is to say, the letter should not switch addressees half way through, and thus the *comites ac magistri* ought to be the subject of a verb now hidden under the lacuna that follows *constituti* in line 10.

line 10: There must be a lacuna after *similitudinem*. Sivan translates the phrase as 'set up in the likeness of our clemency' but this is improbable. Jones emends to *similitudinem Galliarum sunt provisione nostrae clementiae constituti*. This makes good sense, but presupposes a greater certainty about the letter's contents than we in fact possess. There is also likely to be a lacuna after *constituti*.

line 11: *Constantiae* (or something similar) is necessary in place of the manuscript's *constitutioni*.

line 12: The manuscript's *eandem uis* [not, *pace* Sivan, *eundem vir*] *esset* etc. has produced unsatisfactory emendations from both Jones (*eorundem una esset*) and Demougeot/Sivan (*eadem uirescat*). One must here follow the counsel of despair and leave the corruption corrupt.

line 13: This is the crux of the letter. At least corruption and perhaps a lacuna lies behind *instructissimi*. One must decide whether Honorius is holding out the rewards in line 14 as future hopes or acknowledging them as a present reality. In the former case, *agnoscimus* must become *agnoscemus* (thus Jones). A related question is whether the *cuncta subdita* are in *Hispaniam* or whether the *augmentum* is valid there. The key lies behind the (meaningless as extant) *instructissimi*. A reasoned decision is not possible.

line 14: *amplica* is meaningless and clearly corrupt. It should disguise a feminine noun in the accusative. Jones' *amplificationem* is felicitous, his *amplificationem annonarum* too courageous.

line 16: the second *ubi* has been expunged by the scribe and clear expunction points appear under each letter. Demougeot's *ubiubi* is simply a misunderstanding of the scribal dittography, while Sivan's *alibi* is more plausible than Jones' *otio*. Neither can be adopted with certainty.

line 17: the MS reads *ospitiis* (or perhaps *ospitius*), since one *i* appears in ligature with the preceding *t* and is followed by two separate minims. This arrangement suggests a blundered *hospitiis* but could just possibly be an equally blundered form of *hospitium*. With Sivan, I take the correct reading to be *abeatis ospitiis obsequamini* which is strained grammatically, but imports fewer assumptions than Jones' *oblatis hospitiis*, or, worse still, Demougeot's *habeatis hospitiis obsequium*.

line 20: *amen* is clearly a late addition. See Demougeot, 38.

The difficulties of the text should be apparent from this by no means exhaustive commentary. The most important part of the letter, the part, that is, which discussed its purpose, is hidden in the most lacunose part of the text, lines 13 to 19. This means that we must derive our understanding of our document from elsewhere within it. Unfortunately, there are few reliable grounds on which to draw conclusions. Let us take the problems in turn.

The title *De Laude Pampilone*, written in display capitals, appears in the *Rotense* before the *incipit* of the prefatory heading, and is often described as the manuscript title for the EH.⁴ The title, however, quite clearly belongs to the whole dossier of Pamplonan documents in the manuscript and should thus be left totally out of account in dealing with the EH itself.⁵ Our first problem, then, is the heading that accompanies the EH. It contains authentic-seeming material which is not derived from the text of the letter itself. On the other hand, it also presents some very suspicious features. Only the heading provides a context for the letter, which is itself unenlightening in its present state. In judging the historical value of the EH, therefore, we need to determine whether or not the heading can be accepted as valid evidence. Without it, the letter itself loses most of its use as a source.

We may take the letter first. Its text is almost certainly genuine, since its contents can have inspired no forger, and forgers generally take care to make their work intelligible. The letter is addressed to a number of units of soldiers. Among these are an unidentified unit of *Britannici*, and an unidentifiable unit of *speculatores*. There is also a pair of sister units on the common late Roman *senior/iunior* model, but their title is unfortunately missing.⁶ These soldiers are certainly in Spain, or on their way there, as the *in spania* of line 14 shows, though the extant EH was perhaps the Spanish copy of a letter sent to more than one provincial army.⁷ What these troops are doing in Spain is another matter. The text of the letter itself gives no clue. All we can be certain of is that they are being offered an *augmentum dignitatis*. Whether this is held out as an incentive for their service in Spain or grants them this *augmentum* as a reward for work already done is unclear. But how one reads the end of the letter depends on this point.

⁴ Thus Sivan, 275, prefaces her edition with the title *DE LAUDE PAMPILONE EPISTULA*, though the *epistula* has no manuscript attestation.

⁵ Whether it is the work of the tenth-century scribe or prefaced the original Pamplonan dossier from which he worked is insoluble and not relevant to the present discussion.

⁶ The distinction between *seniores* and *iuniores* does not go back to a division of the *comitatus* by Valentinian and Valens in 364 as was contended by D. Hoffmann, *Die spätromischen Bewegungsheere und die Notitia Dignitatum* (Düsseldorf, 1969–70). *Seniores* and *iuniores* had existed at least as early as 356 under Constantius II: see T. Drew-Bear, A fourth-century Latin soldier's epitaph from Nakolea, *HSCP* 81 (1977), 257–74 with D. Woods, Ammianus Marcellinus and the deaths of Bonosus and Maximilianus, *Hagiographica* 2 (1995), 31–7, for the distinction under Julian.

⁷ This suggestion of Sivan, 278, 280, is plausible but unsusceptible to proof.

A transfer or demobilisation is implied in *ubi <ubi> [fortasse alibi] uiuendi degendique tempus*, but this may either be a hazy prospect or a very real possibility. There is nothing elsewhere in the *Epistula* to make a solution here any easier and nowhere in the text of the letter itself is there the slightest clue to date or context.

That information comes in the heading, if it is admitted as evidence. It informs us that the letter of Honorius was brought from Rome by the soldiers of Pamplona with a certain Sabinianus, a patrician who went to Spain on account of its occupation by a diversity of barbarian tribes. This is problematical. First, the place from which the letter was brought. Honorius, it has been pointed out, was a rare visitor to Rome.⁸ He spent much of 404, and short stretches of 407, 408, 411, 414, and 416 there.⁹ Of these years, the first three are ruled out by the *infestatione barbarorum* of the heading itself. Spain was free of barbarians in those years. Likewise 411: Honorius' writ then ran nowhere west of the Alps. Only the last two dates, 414 and 416, are possible, and neither is readily explicable since it was precisely in these years that the imperial government had to recruit Athaulf and Wallia's Goths to act as its army in Spain.

Yet even if 414 and 416 are admitted as plausible dates, we encounter a second major difficulty in accepting the authenticity of the heading. That problem is Sabinianus' title. The title *patricius* is very rare for most of Honorius' reign and was borne only by his future co-emperor Constantius, a man very jealous of his status. There are three potential solutions: one, *Patricius* is in fact Sabinianus' cognomen; two, Constantius was not the only bearer of the patrician title under Honorius but instead shared it with this otherwise unattested Sabinianus; or three, the heading was written at a time when patricians were common and the title seemed plausible to the author of the heading. Of these three, the third is much the most likely.¹⁰

These objections have important consequences for the historical value of the heading. It cannot be contemporary with the actual letter of Honorius, since both Sabinianus' title and his receipt of the letter at Rome are suspect. When the heading was composed is hard to say, though probably between the mid-fifth century, when the title *patricius* became common, and the early seventh century, by which point it had become meaningless. The general inauthenticity of the heading also casts grave suspicion on the *militia Pampilonensis* it mentions. There is no record of Roman troops at Pamplona, though given the state of our knowledge of late Roman Spain this argument from silence has little weight.¹¹ Far more importantly, there is nothing in the actual letter to connect it with Pamplona, and the heading by itself is not enough. All of this, then, leaves us entirely without a context for the *Epistula*. Although the dispatch of an officer by Honorius' government *ob infestationem barbarorum* is plausible, the heading does nothing to demonstrate that it actually happened. Without the heading, the letter itself tells us almost nothing.

That being said, what are we left with? The best commentary on the letter has acknowledged all its faults, accepted that the heading is a late addition of uncertain value, and still gone on to draw conclusions from it.¹² More adventurous efforts have based whole reconstructions of late Roman *hospitium* on the EH.¹³ Even the relatively gentle emendation that Jones gave the text implies far more certainty about its contents than we can safely presume. We can, in the end, say very little about those contents.

The prefatory heading is inauthentic. It may contain genuine material but we cannot presume that it does. From the letter itself we can derive only one single piece of reliable information. At some point during the reign of Honorius, some units of the *comitatus*, the field army, were in Spain for some

⁸ Demougeot, 39.

⁹ O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste* (Stuttgart, 1919), 306–32.

¹⁰ *PLRE* 2.966 declines decisive comment.

¹¹ See M. Kulikowski, *The End of Roman Spain* (forthcoming).

¹² Sivan dissects the heading on pp. 277–8 effectively enough to undermine the conclusions she draws from it.

¹³ Demougeot's very title, *Une lettre . . . sur l'hospitium*, defines as the letter's subject a topic with which it does not deal unemended.

unknown period of time. This confirms the evidence of the *Notitia Dignitatum*, which shows a largish field army in Spain that probably, though by no means certainly, dates to the reign of Honorius.¹⁴ There is not, however, any reason that the units shown to have been in Spain by the *Notitia* and those shown to have been there by the EH should have been the same, or even have belonged to the same expedition.¹⁵ We can make plausible conjectures about when this army was sent to Spain on the basis of early fifth-century history, but there is not a single piece of evidence to raise such conjectures from the level of speculation.

The treatment of the *Epistula Honorii* given here is thus fundamentally unsatisfying. Sources for the fifth century are rare enough, and those for fifth-century Spain rarer still. To view the EH as we have done here is to rob ourselves of one of these precious sources. On the other hand, this outcome is perhaps better than making the converse assumption, that we know more than we really do. Sensible speculation on the words and content of the *Epistula* is available from Jones and Sivan, but because it is speculative it can be used to support no further hypotheses about either the late Roman army or the history of late Roman Spain. The only certain knowledge we can derive from Honorius' letter is that at some point during his reign, *comitatenses* loyal to him were stationed in Spain. That fact allows very little scope for further statements, but it is, if nothing else, a more solid foundation than the EH has hitherto been able to provide.

Appendix

I include here the two plausibly emended editions of the EH which have appeared in the past fifty years, those of Jones and Sivan. They are meant to illustrate the sort of coherent account one can derive from the text should one choose to do so, but both incorporate readings that must remain wholly speculative.

(Jones, *LRE*, 3.36): cum Savinianus patricius quodam tempore erede praelatus in Hispaniam profectus est ob infestationem diversarum gentium barbararum: Honorius imperator gloriosus, perpetuus triumphator, semper augustus universis militibus nostris, Ascariis senioribus, iunioribus, Sagittariis Neruiis, Speculatoribus, Exculcatoribus iunioribus, Tubantibus, Felicibus senioribus, Invictis senioribus, Victo-ribus iunioribus, Invictis iunioribus ac Britannicis gaudeatis sanctissimi commilitones nostri communium remuneratione meritorum, et omnes iuxta exultatione gaudeatis. hic enim maxime est splendor inlus-tris qui pari cunctos luce perfundit. ad vos quoque magnifici comites ac magistri utriusque militiae ad similitudinem Galliarum sunt provisione nostrae clementiae constituti. constituta sint vobis stipendia Gallicanorum, quae constantiae vestrae porreximus ut eorundem una esset forma virtutis quibus excel-lens una devotio est. proinde instructis simul atque nobis cuncta subdita sunt in Hispania, et amplificati-onem annonarum congruam et dignitatis augmentum quae serenitas nostra vestris praestiterit usibus granter agnoscemus. ut ubi otio vivendi degendique tempus extiterit omni alacritate atque virtute obla-tis hospitii obsequamini; qua propter fore quidem confidimus ut muneris resolutio incitet potius quam

¹⁴ The date and use of the *Notitia* is a matter of enormous controversy, fully canvassed in my *End of Roman Spain*. A hugely important article by P. Brennan has appeared recently and should completely reshape the way the *Notitia* is approached: The *Notitia Dignitatum*, in *Les littératures techniques dans l'antiquité romaine*. Entretiens Hardt 42 (Geneva, 1995), 147–78. Brennan argues that the *Notitia* as extant was not an administrative tool of any sort, but rather an ideological document created at the court of Galla Placidia to emphasise the strength and unity of the empire at a time when it was very clearly dissolving. If one accepts this, the factual details preserved in the *Notitia* are of no value as sources for the historian because they were not originally intended to be exact or accurate. However, even if we prefer to see a practical intent behind the original *Notitia*, we must realise that the western half of the *Notitia* cannot be dated as a single text. Instead, each individual entry must be dated individually on the basis of outside testimony. No such testimony exists for the Spanish field army and so the *Notitia* cannot be used as a reliable comparative tool in discussions of the EH.

¹⁵ It is not, that is, possible to insert the names of the units listed at *Not. dig. occ.* 7.118–34 into the text of the EH as Jones, *LRE*, 3.36 does.

restinguat ardorem. optamus commilitones nostros per multos annos bene agere. et alia manu. bene ualete.

(Sivan, *ZPE* 61 [1985] 274): De Laude Pampilonis Epistula. Incipit sacra Honorii imperatoris quam de Roma detulit militia urbis Pampilonensis cum Saviniano patricio qui eodem tempore, erede praelatus, in Spaniam profectus est ob infestatione diversarum gentium barbarorum. Honorius imperator gloriosus, perpetuus triumphator, semper Augustus, universis militibus nostris, senioribus, iunioribus, speculatoribus ac Britannicis. gaudeatis sanctissimi commilitones nostri communium remuneratione meritorum, omnes iusta exultatione gaudentes: is enim maxime est splendor inlustris qui pari cunctos luce perfudit. atque vos quos magnifici comites ac magistri utriusque militiae ad similitudinem nostrae clementiae constituti *** constituta sint vobis stipendia Gallicanarum quae constantiae vestrae porreximus, ut eadem virescat forma virtutis quibus excellens una devotio est. proinde instructissimi *** aequae nobis cuncta subdita sint. In Spania et amplica congruum esse dignitatis augmentum quae serenitas nostra vestris praestiterit usibus gratanter agnoscimus. ut ubi alibi vivendi degendique tempus extiterit omni alacritate atque virtute abeat, hospitibus obsequamini. quapropter fore equidem confidimus ut muneris resolutio incitet potius quam restinguat ardorem. optamus commilitones nostros per multos annos bene agere. et alia manu: bene valete. Amen.

Washington and Lee University, Virginia

Michael Kulikowski