

PAUL AND PLUTARCH ON BOASTING

Michael Wojciechowski

Wydział Teologii UWM, Olsztyn, Poland

The issue of boasting, or praising oneself, receives a wide and specific treatment in the epistles of Paul. This issue is known to the Old Testament and ancient literature. Therefore, a good understanding and evaluation of the Pauline concept requires a comparison with its background. Paul expressed the idea of boasting by the Greek verb *καυχάομαι* and related words, but other vocabulary could be considered as well. However, in order to obtain a more precise picture I shall concentrate on this root. I shall also omit related subjects of glory,¹ and so on, because their study would exceed the framework of this article. The same applies to some further autobiographical remarks of Paul, only indirectly related to the subject of boasting.

Paul himself indicates the Old Testament as his inspiration. Twice he refers to Jer. 9.23 (in 1 Cor. 1.31 and 2 Cor 10.17):

Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches; but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me that I am the LORD who practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth (Jer. 9.22-23 RSV, cf. 2 Esd. 7.98).

Vain boasting is often rebuked in the Bible (e.g. 1 Kgs 20.11; Prov. 25.14; 27.1; Pss 52.1; 94.3-4; 115.1: 'Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory'). Men cannot boast if confronted with God (e.g. 1 Sam. 2.2-3; Judg. 7.2). It is permitted to humans to find glory in the

1. Cf. A.D. Leeman, 'Cicero's Waardering van de Roem en haar Achtergrond in de Hellenistische Wijsbegeerte en de Romeinse Samenleving' (published thesis, Rotterdam, 1949).

divine works and in their piety (1 Chron. 16.28-29; 29.11; Pss 5.11; 89.15-18; Sir. 1.11; 9.16; 10.22; 17.9; 39.8; 50.20).

These parallels are certainly valid, but to understand Pauline thinking in full, we should consider the Hellenistic background as well. This question has not received sufficient treatment, although it has been mentioned. Most often the Pauline views on boasting are studied in themselves. It is symptomatic that in the *Neuer Wettstein* the verses about boasting lack adequate ancient parallels.² Some works do raise this subject, but their point is more the rhetorical devices of Paul than his ideas on boasting: H.D. Betz compares the self-defense of Paul to that of Socrates,³ E.A. Judge finds in his letters a parody of rhetorical boasting,⁴ and C. Forbes studies self-praise in the context of rhetorical comparison and irony.⁵ A well-researched article by J.A. Glancy is limited to the boasting of scars.⁶ On the other hand, J. Sánchez Bosch, in the introductory chapter of his book on Pauline boasting,⁷ collects Greek texts with *καυχάομαι* and so on, but fails to consider Plutarch and Quintilian, who discuss self-praise with more detail than any other ancient author. Perhaps he has limited himself to the study of the verb, *καυχάομαι* (replaced in Plutarch by other vocabulary), or he does not consider later authors a valid source. Betz's examination of Plutarch's treatise, *De laude ipsius*, is very brief on this point.⁸ In the recent book, *Paul in the Greco-Roman World*, there is an article on boasting by D.F. Watson that does offer four valuable pages on self-praise in the ancient world, but the

2. *Neuer Wettstein: Texte zum Neuen Testament aus Griechenland und Hellenismus*. II. *Texte zur Briefliteratur und zur Johannesapokalypse*, Teilband 1 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1996), pp. 85-87, 116-17, 256-68, 413-14, 484-86, 488-89, 496, 504-505, 510, 577-78, 588.

3. H.D. Betz, *Der Apostel Paulus und die sokratische Tradition* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1972).

4. E.A. Judge, 'Paul's Boasting in Relation to Contemporary Professional Practice', *AusBR* 18 (1968), pp. 37-50.

5. C. Forbes, 'Comparison, Self-Praise, and Irony: Paul's Boasting and the Conventions of Hellenistic Rhetoric', *NTS* 32.1 (1986), pp. 1-30.

6. J.A. Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings (2 Corinthians 11.23-25)', *JBL* 123.1 (2004), pp. 99-135.

7. J. Sánchez Bosch, '*Gloriarse*' *segun San Pablo* (AnBib, 40; Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1970), pp. 4-26.

8. H.D. Betz, '*De laude ipsius* (Moralia 539A-547F)', in H.D. Betz (ed.), *Plutarch's Ethical Writings and Early Christian Literature* (SCHNT, 4; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), pp. 367-93 (378-81).

comparison with Paul is not developed.⁹ L. Aejmelaeus does mention Plutarch in this context (but I have no access to his article on the subject).¹⁰

Why concentrate on Plutarch? His treatise on self-praise, *De laude ipsius* (Περὶ τοῦ ἑαυτὸν ἐπαινεῖν ἀνεπιφθόνως, *De se ipsum citra invidiam laudando*, *On Praising Oneself Inoffensively: Moralia* no. 40, 539A-547F),¹¹ is the only larger text on this subject in ancient literature and contains a mature reflection on it. It represents the same epoch, being only 40 to 50 years later than the Pauline writings. Plutarch's works present quite well the opinions of educated people in his period.¹² Because of their textbook aspect, they paint the background we are looking for better than more original works could. However, I shall not abstain from quoting other authors if necessary — namely, a section from Quintilian, *Education of the Orator* (11.1.15-28),¹³ stemming from the same period, and some minor texts.¹⁴

At the beginning of *De laude ipsius* we read: 'In theory, my dear Herculanus, it is agreed that to speak to others of one's own importance or power is offensive, but in practice not many even of those who condemn such conduct avoid the odium of it' (*Mor.* 539AB).

The verb *καυχάομαι* (with related words) is frequent in the Septuagint and Christian literature, but not in other Greek sources.¹⁵ It seems that the meaning of this word was too negative for it to be used

9. D.F. Watson, 'Paul and Boasting', in J.P. Sampley (ed.), *Paul in the Greco-Roman World: A Handbook* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2003), pp. 77-100 (79-81, 90-94, 97).

10. L. Aejmelaeus, 'Tårebrevet och Plutarkhos: Paulus' självskryt i "Tårebrevet" (2.Kor. 10-13) jämfört med Plutarkhos' regler för det rätta sättet att berömma sig själv', *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* 101.2 (1996), pp. 108-118.

11. Plutarch, *Moralia* VII (LCL). Cf., with notes, *Plutarque, Oeuvres morales* VII.2 (Paris: Budé, 1974), pp. 57-85, 187-94.

12. An *a priori* difference with Paul is to be noted here: Plutarch represented the current establishment, Paul was an outsider.

13. *Institutio oratoria*, in Quintilian, IV (LCL).

14. Alexander of Ephesus (summary of *Peri rhētorikōn aphormēn*); Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Letter to Pompeius* 92; Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 57.6-10; Hermogenes of Tarsus(?), *Peri methodou deinoiētos (De methodo vehementiae)* 25.

15. Thesaurus Linguae Graece 3.1 notes *καυχῆναι*- 69 times until the end of the first century CE (most of them in the sixth and fifth century BCE). The numbers for LXX (79) and the New Testament (64) are higher. In the first century, *καυχῆναι*- occurs three times in Philo, three in Josephus, two in Plutarch, one in Apollonius the Sophist.

more often.¹⁶ Plutarch fails to use it in *De laude ipsius*, except in a classical quotation,¹⁷ preferring other words.

Most sayings of Paul on boasting relate directly to his own situation, to his self-praise. There are also some general remarks on vain boasting, which are more stereotypical and need not be considered here. They fit in the general line of ancient sources, critical towards boasting.

It seems essential to begin with a classification of Pauline texts on boasting. I shall divide them into five distinct groups.¹⁸ Each group can be compared separately with the background texts, because in each case the relation between them can be different. This point was also missing in the works I have cited. In Plutarch we shall be able to find some comparative material for each of these five Pauline categories.

1. *God, Christ and their Gifts as Sources of Glory*

1 Corinthians 1.29, 31: ‘so that no human being might boast in the presence of God...as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord; 2 Cor. 10.8: ‘For even if I boast a little too much of our authority, which the Lord gave for building you up and not for destroying you, I shall not be put to shame’; Phil. 3.3: ‘For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh’; Gal. 6.14: ‘But far be it from me to glory except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world’; cf. Rom. 1.16; Rom. 5.2-3: ‘Through him we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice (καυχώμεθα) in our hope of sharing the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice (καυχώμεθα) in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance’; Rom. 5.11: ‘Not only so, but we also rejoice (καυχώμενοι) in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation’; Rom. 15.17: ‘In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud (καύχησιν) of my work for God’.

Identifying God as the source of glory and authority is obviously rooted in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, relating glory and boasting to God corresponds, to some extent, with ancient thought, although classical

16. Cf. C. Spicq, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), II, pp. 295-96; Sánchez Bosch, ‘*Gloriarse*’, pp. 4-20 negative aspects, pp. 21-23 positive ones.

17. From Pindar: *Mor.* 539C; *καύχημα* occurs in *Aemilius Paulus* (27.6.2).

18. The order inside the five sections is basically chronological. I quote according to the RSV.

authors expressed the same idea less clearly. For the Greeks, insolence (*hubris*) toward the gods was considered most dangerous. Therefore, Plutarch advises politicians to attribute their achievements to fate or the gods:

But those who are forced to speak in their own praise are made more enduring by another procedure as well: not to lay claim to everything, but to disburden themselves, as it were, of honour, letting part of it rest with chance [Tyche], and part with god. For this reason Achilles did well to say: Since I by Heaven's will have slain this man (*Mor.* 542E).

This is followed by a series of examples, up to *Mor.* 543A; for example, Python of Aenos comments on his performance with the words: 'This, men of Athens, was the doing of some god; I did but lend my arm' (542F). The same view appears already in 541C: 'Thus Achilles at other times yielded the glory to Heaven and showed his modesty by saying: "If we by Zeus's high will shall take at last the lofty walls of Troy"'.

Having commended rulers who abstain from divinization, Plutarch adds a practical criticism of exaggeration: 'Whereas the rhetorical sophists who at their displays of eloquence accept from the audience the cries of "how divine" and "spoken like a god" lose even such commendations as "fairly said" and "spoken as becomes a man"' (*Mor.* 543F).

The same idea occurs in Quintilian. According to him, Cicero preferred to attribute the honour of victory over Catilina to the Senate and the gods (*Inst. or.* 11.1.23: *M. Tullius saepe dicit de oppressa coniuratione Catilinae, sed modo id virtuti senatus, modo providentiae deorum immortalium adsigna*—Cicero often speaks of his suppression of the Catilinarian conspiracy, but either attributes his success to the courage shown by the senate or to the providence of the immortal gods).¹⁹

We may find here a similarity with Paul, even if a loose one. On the other hand, Paul challenges all the conventions of his world, boasting of the crucifixion, something terrible and abhorrent for his contemporaries. 'Messiah crucified' is an intended provocation, something indeed scandalous and foolish for Jews and Greeks (1 Cor. 1.23). This idea is proper to Paul.

19. However, Cicero did not abstain from self-praise!

2. *Christians as the Pride of Paul*

1 Thessalonians 2.19: 'For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting (καυχῆσεως) before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? For you are our glory (δόξα) and joy'; 2 Thess. 1.4: 'Therefore we ourselves boast of you in the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions'; 1 Cor. 15.31: 'I protest, brethren, by my pride (καύχησιν) in you which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!'; 2 Cor. 7.4: 'I have great pride (καύχησις) in you; I am filled with comfort'; 2 Cor. 8.24: 'So give proof, before the churches, of your love and our boasting about you to these men'; Phil. 2.16: 'you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud (καύχημα) that I did not run in vain or labour in vain'.

Christian communities, the readers of the letters of Paul, are his pride. Their laudatory description can be associated with the general principle of rhetoric that the speaker should aim at the approval of his audience. The *captatio benevolentiae* at the beginning of a speech was designed to achieve it. In the context of self-praise, Quintilian advises speakers to associate it with attributing success to others (*Inst. or.* 11.1.23 above). For Plutarch, self-praise should be combined with praising the hearers:

There is in that oration [Demosthenes, *On the Crown* is meant] a further point that it is useful to note: by most harmoniously blending the praises of his audience with his own he removed the offensiveness and self-love in his words... For in this way the hearers, taken off guard, accept with pleasure the praise of the speaker, which insinuates itself along with the praise of themselves; and their delight in the rehearsal of their own successes is followed at once with admiration and approval of him who made them possible. Hence Epameinondas said when Meneleidas derided him as prouder than Agamemnon: 'But it is your doing, men of Thebes; with your help alone I overthrew the Spartan empire in a day' (*Mor.* 542BC).

This is also illustrated by a saying of Zeno, who compares the number of Theophrastus's disciples with his own: 'His the larger chorus, mine the more harmonious' (545F).

Being sincere and passionate, Paul certainly does not praise his readers from interested motives, nor does he sweeten criticisms with compliments; he avoids flattery.²⁰ Nevertheless, his words of recognition directed to the recipients of the letters do agree with the method recommended in rhetoric.

20. Perhaps except for the others' sake; cf. Philemon and 2 Cor. 8–9.

3. *Paul Boasts of his Acts and Merits*

1 Corinthians 9.15: ‘But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing this to secure any such provision. For I would rather die than have anyone deprive me of my ground for boasting’; 2 Cor. 1.12: ‘For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom, but by the grace of God’; 2 Cor. 11.10: ‘As the truth of Christ is in me, this boast of mine [Paul has renounced material support] shall not be silenced in the regions of Achaia’; 2 Cor. 11.18, 21: ‘Since many boast of worldly things, I too will boast... But whatever anyone dares to boast of—I am speaking as a fool—I also dare to boast of that.’ In 2 Cor. 11.22–12.4, a list of merits follows (Jewish origin, following Christ, beatings, dangers, care for Churches, revelations). This list is then put into question to some extent, namely in 2 Cor. 12.5-6, where Paul boasts of his weakness. See also Rom. 5.3 below.

According to ancient authors, self-praise is sometimes admissible and permitted or even necessary. Boasting can have good aims. For example, Plutarch mentions some good reasons for self-praise:

Yet in spite of all this there are times when the statesman might venture on self-glorification (περιαυτολογίας), as it is called, not for any personal glory or pleasure, but when the occasion and the matter in hand demand that the truth be told about himself, as it might about another—especially when by permitting himself to mention his good accomplishments and character he is enabled to achieve some similar good. For such praise as this yields a handsome return, as a greater harvest of yet nobler praise springs up from it as from a seed. Indeed it is not as a reward or compensation for his merit that the statesman demands recognition and values it when accorded to his acts: he does so rather because the enjoyment of confidence and good repute affords means for further and yet nobler actions (*Mor.* 539EF).

It is permitted to commend oneself to give an example to others (544DE), to stop impertinent persons (544F), and also to counter praises of evil deeds and unfounded self-praises or compliments (545EF). Plutarch quotes such examples; for example, Nestor in Homer (544F). His speech (cf. *Iliad* 1.260-274) is commented on in a similar manner by Dio Chrysostom (*Or.* 57.3-10), who concludes that boasting let Nestor restrain the proud and gain the favour of the hearers.

Self-defense also permitted boasting. Plutarch says,

In the first place, self-praise (αὐτὸν δὲ ἐπαινεῖν) goes unresented if you are defending your good name and answering a charge [*Mor.* 540C,

Pericles and Epaminondas follow as examples]. Further, it is no less, nay even more, permissible for a statesman when wronged to make some boast (λέγειν τι περὶ αὐτοῦ) to those who deal hardly with him... For the freedom of speech (παρρησία) that is involved in a plea for justice gives scope for self-praise (μεγαληγόραν) (*Mor.* 541CD). But a man reproached for his very triumphs is entirely pardonable and escapes all censure if he extols (ἐγκωμιάζων) what he has done. For this, it is felt, is no recrimination but self-defense (*Mor.* 541E).

Demosthenes follows as an example. Further on, Putarch writes: ‘This holds not only of those on trial and in peril; the unfortunate as well can boast and extol (μεγαλαυχία καὶ κόμπος) themselves with better grace than the fortunate’ (*Mor.* 541A).

The same view is developed by Quintilian, who allows claims to merit when speaking to enemies and false accusers (*Inst. or.* 11.1.17-18 and 23). Even then, he recommends moderation, quoting praises formulated by others, and showing that such self-praise is forced upon the speaker (11.1.21-22). Cicero and Demosthenes are mentioned as examples.

If necessary, it is permitted to cite our true merits. Plutarch stresses the matters of public life, a statesman’s self-praise, but he also takes into account the merits of philosophers: ‘So too Aristotle said to Alexander that not only the rulers of a great empire have a right to be proud but also those with true opinions about the gods’ (*Mor.* 545A); and ‘It is not making men lament and weep, but putting an end to sorrow and lamentation that is admirable’ (545F, philosophers’ tasks are meant). He quotes an epitaph of Crates of Thebes: ‘This have I: what I learned, what with deep thought I grasped, the Muses’ stern delight’ (546A).

According to these rules, Pauline boasts in 2 Corinthians are fully justified, because his opponents in Corinth have accused him without good reasons and damaged his reputation. He reacts in accordance with the ancient conventions. In particular, boasting of what is proper—spiritual things (2 Cor. 11.8), a pure conscience and the gospel—corresponds to Plutarch’s advice. Presenting his boasting as forced upon him (2 Cor. 12.11: ‘You forced me to it’) accords with the instructions of Quintilian (*Inst. or.* 11.1.22).

Nevertheless, Paul is less moderate than the perfect orator according to these theories. He denies possessing rhetorical qualifications (2 Cor. 11.5-6), although he does possess and use them, whereas Quintilian showcases Cicero who tells the truth about his own eloquence (*verum de eloquentia sua dicit, Inst. or.* 11.1.21). The merits Paul boasts of in 2 Corinthians 11–12 are not quite laudable for the ancients. Noble birth,

enduring many dangers and obstacles, being self-supporting and having revelations from God could be praised. Along with them, however, Paul lists punishments: prison and flogging. Battle scars were honorable, whereas flogging brought disgrace. Even the flogging of boys in Sparta, conceived as training, exposed them to jeers.²¹ It seems, therefore, that Paul is challenging the contemporary views here, but perhaps a philosophical indifference to sufferings and hardships is alluded to. It is not clearly stated.

4. *Paul Boasts of his Weakness*

2 Corinthians 11.30: 'If I must boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness'; 2 Cor. 12.1, 5, 6a: 'I must boast... On behalf of this man I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses. Though if I wish to boast, I shall not be a fool, for I shall be speaking the truth'; 2 Cor. 12.9b: 'I will all the more gladly boast of my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me'. Cf. the ironic remark from Gal. 6.4: 'But let each one test his own work, and then his reason to boast will be in himself alone and not in his neighbour'.

Boasting of floggings belongs with the boasting of weaknesses, peculiar to Paul. It contrasts with the general ancient and modern opinion that merits and successes are the source of glory. Plutarch obviously adheres to this view; he can only ask which merits are more laudable: goodness, virtue, justice, clemency or political achievements and honors (*Mor.* 543A-E). Quintilian criticizes one's posing as poor, obscure, weak or not eloquent (*Inst. or.* 11.1.21).

Only in some cases can admitting one's own weaknesses be recommended, as in Plutarch:

And in general when faults not altogether degrading or ignoble are set down beside the praise they do away with envy. Many also blunt the edge of envy by occasionally inserting into their own praise (τοῖς ἐγκωμίοις παρεμβάλλοντες) a confession even of poverty and indigence or actually of low birth (*Mor.* 544B).

Self-denigrating is condoned, but only exceptionally: it can make the acceptance of well-founded self-praise easier.

21. A large study on the ancient views on wounds and scars: Glancy, 'Boasting of Beatings'.

A similar motive is found in Paul, but only occasionally: ‘And to keep me from being too elated by the abundance of revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan, to harass me’ (2 Cor. 12.7). He really boasts of weaknesses and of the crucifixion, as in Gal. 6.14, quoted above in (§1). Paul obviously challenges the typical attitude of antiquity; his contemporaries appreciated well-founded and socially-accepted honors and praises.

5. *Paul Abstains from Boasting or Limits It*

1 Corinthians 9.16: ‘For if I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me’; 1 Cor. 13.3: ‘If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be able to boast,²² but have not love, I gain nothing’; 2 Cor. 10.13, 15-17: ‘But we will not boast beyond limit, but will keep to the limits God has apportioned us, to reach even to you... We do not boast beyond limit, in other men’s labours; but our hope is that as your faith increases, our field among you may be greatly enlarged, so that we may preach the gospel in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in another’s field. “Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord”’; 2 Cor. 10.12: ‘Not that we venture to class or compare ourselves (ἐγκρίναι ἢ συγκρίναι) with some of those who commend (συνιστάν-όντων) themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, they are without understanding.’

In these cases, Paul does exactly what was recommended by rhetorical theory. At the beginning of his treaty, Plutarch qualifies boasting as vice, universally perceived as such (*Mor.* 539A-D).²³ The whole treaty *De laude ipsius* can be summarized as follows: ‘boasting is to be avoided, self-praise can be admitted to a limited degree’.

What we have here is an interesting reference to the rhetorical method of comparison (συγκρίσις).²⁴ It could be an instrument of praise (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1393a; 1406b-1407a; Theon, *Progymnasmata* 2.112-115). The double biographies of Plutarch are based on positive comparisons. However, he advises one not to compare oneself with better people (*Mor.* 470C). Dio Chrysostom refuses such comparisons (*Or.* 32.39); he also quotes Diogenes rejecting comparisons with others (*Or.*

22. RSV and many others: ‘to be burned’, mss. καθήσωμαι or καθήσεται instead of καυχώσωμαι.

23. Cf. Dionysius of Halicarnassus, *Letter to Pompeius*, 92.

24. Cf. Forbes, ‘Comparison, Self-Praise, and Irony’, pp. 2-7.

4.35). On the other hand, Epictetus recommends comparisons, but as instruments of knowing and improving oneself (*Discourses* 2.18.24; 2.24.24; 3.22.60; cf. *Encheiridion* 33), whereas Lucian derides boastful comparisons (*A Professor of Public Speaking* 13 and 21). Such criticisms could have inspired Paul to some extent.

6. Conclusion

The following conclusion seems plausible. Sometimes the words of Paul accord with the counsels of contemporary rhetorical theory, later summarized by Plutarch—first of all when he does not want to boast (§5). But on the other hand, when Paul boasts of his weaknesses or even scourging (§§4, 3), he plainly rejects the rhetorical conventions, showing boldness and independence. Referring to God as the source of glory (§1) converges with rhetorical precepts, but it comes from the Old Testament and the personal piety of Paul. The positive motives of boasting mentioned by Paul (§3) agree with the suggestions of rhetoric. Praising the audience occurs, but is not pronounced (§2).

Paul was aware of the moral and rhetorical opinions of his contemporaries, but he made limited (even if creative) use of them. He said what he wanted to say, and not what the conventions dictated. However, he could make use of conventions when they corresponded to his ideas. This is probably true for the whole field of relations between the New Testament and Hellenistic culture. Boasting in Paul and Plutarch is a good test-case, being a relatively important issue, but not directly theological. It enables us also to compare Paul with current ancient opinions, widely held and known.