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THE CENSUS OF QUIRINIUS.

I.

THE difficulties caused by the association established in Luke ii. 1 between the birth of Christ and a *census* taken in Judæa at the order of the Emperor Augustus are well known. Dr. Schürer devotes thirty-four pages in his *Gesch. des Jüd. Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi* to the subject, and any discussion of the difficulties might properly be rested on the foundation of his learned and careful work; but it is better merely to acknowledge my debt to him, and to leave our difference of opinion unnoticed. In the EXPOSITOR for January, 1897, p. 72, it is mentioned that exigencies of time prevented me at the moment from stating an argument on this subject. The pledge implied may be now redeemed; and though it is obviously beyond the bounds of an article to discuss the subject as a whole, one point at least, which is of central importance, may be illustrated.

The words of Luke should, as I believe, be understood thus: "There was issued a decree by Cæsar Augustus that *census* should be taken of the entire Roman world; this [with which we are concerned] took place, the first census [of the series], while Quirinius was administering the province Syria."

I believe that the synchronisms in Luke ii. 1, 2 and iii. 1, 2 are founded on a careful and extended study of history, and that the author wished to place Christian history in its proper position on the background of Roman history. Obviously it is impossible to maintain that view, if the first synchronism, which he establishes at such a critical point in his narrative, is a mere blunder, not merely erroneous in some detail, but involving false views in a number of essential points (as some scholars maintain).

Either this synchronism is right in essentials, or Luke was incapable of making correctly what must have been in his time a very simple investigation.

Now it is an all-important principle that, in contradistinction to Paul, who fully comprehends and adopts the Roman point of view (which he had been educated¹ from infancy to appreciate), Luke speaks of things Roman as they appeared to a Greek; the Greeks never could quite understand Roman matters, and Luke often uses popular and not strictly accurate terms for Roman things.² So it is in this case; he alone preserves for us here the memory of a principle and a fact of Roman organization, but he expresses it in untechnical language. What his meaning was will be brought out in the following pages.

We observe, as a preliminary, that Luke certainly knew of more than one "enrolment" or *census*. In *Acts* v. 37 he speaks of "the *census*," "the great *census*" (*ἡ ἀπογραφὴ*), meaning thereby the *census* taken about A.D. 6 by Quirinius; in the Gospel, chapter ii. 1, he speaks of a "first *census*." By no possibility can he have reckoned these two to be identical (except on the view that he was stupidly and incorrigibly inaccurate—a supposition which is not likely to be seriously maintained, but, if any one does maintain it, it would be useless to argue with him).

The suggestion has been made that the indictional periods of fifteen years began to run from the census of Quirinius. The indictions are not known to have been in use earlier than the fourth century, and are supposed to run from 312 (the year of the decisive victory of the Christian over the Pagan Emperor near the Mulvian Bridge); but if, as is held by many, the *census* of Quirinius occurred in B.C. 3, it would be the beginning of an indictional period. As we shall see, this suggestion is not correct, though it has

¹ *St. Paul*, pp. 30 f., 111, 135, 255, etc.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 225, 315.

a certain relation to the truth; the indictions and the indictional periods are a fourth century idea.

The sense given to *πρώτη* is, as I believe, the critical point in this statement; and, as is pointed out elsewhere,¹ this adjective must denote the first of several occurrences, and cannot simply be used, as some have suggested, to mean "the earlier of the two *census* held by Quirinius."² It implies that Luke thought of a series of census as having been taken in the Roman world. This force of *πρώτη*, which would be necessary in good Greek, is rejected for Luke and Paul by most scholars on the ground that in "New Testament Greek" the degrees of comparison were confused. That some New Testament writers confuse the force of comparative and superlative is true; but I must steadily protest against summing the style of them all up under the one category of "New Testament Greek." It is quite unscholarly to quote, *e.g.*, John to illustrate Luke's language. It is a well-known fact that the influence of the Semitic expression led the Carthaginians to blur the distinction of comparative and superlative in Latin,³ and the Hellenist Jews to blur that distinction in Greek. But it will in time be recognised that the attempt to treat Luke as blurring that distinction results in some serious misunderstandings of his meaning.⁴

Several points which are involved in Luke's statement have been, and are, disputed. In the first place, it is

¹ *St. Paul the Trav.*, p. 27.

² See Dr. Plummer's edition of Luke (a work that has been most useful to me), p. 49. If any one wishes to appreciate one reason why there has been so little progress made in the understanding of New Testament history in recent years, he has only to read over the list of interpretations of this passage mentioned and rejected by Dr. Plummer on p. 50. To the plain student of Classical Literature and History it is hard to see how such interpretations could ever have been seriously proposed, except on the theory that nothing was too absurd for an early Christian writer.

³ See *Arch. für latein. Lexicogr.*, vii. p. 480.

⁴ *St. Paul the Trav.*, p. 26 f.

argued that the principle of taking a general census of the empire was never contemplated by Augustus. This would be a fatal objection to his statement, if it could be proved, and the chief aim of my paper is to meet it. Gardthausen, the latest historian of Augustus, speaks most emphatically on this point. After quoting Luke's words, he declares that, for Augustus's plans, a general census of the empire was neither necessary nor suitable.¹ Gardthausen here displays a familiarity with Augustus's intentions which is not justified by the evidence, and there is not given in his excellent (though not quite complete) statement of the evidence² anything to justify such a sweeping negative. He is not justified in saying more than that no evidence was known to him supporting Luke's statement as to Augustus's aims.

Now let us turn to the facts of history. Some years ago the discovery was made nearly simultaneously by three different scholars³ that periodical *census* were made in Egypt under the Roman Empire. The following occurrences of the *census* are proved with certainty, viz., in the years 89-90, 103-104, 117-118, 131-132, and so on until 229-230, and to these one authority adds 75-76 as highly probable.⁴ The remarkable fact is that these dates establish beyond question that the *census* were held according to a cycle of fourteen years, not of fifteen. The technical terms used in Egypt, ἀπογραφή and ἀπογράφειν, are the same that Luke employs.

The question remains, Who was the originator of the cycle? Every one who has familiarized himself with the

¹ "Ein allgemeiner Reichscensus war dazu weder nöthig noch zweckmässig." Gardthausen, *Augustus und seine Zeit*, part I., vol. ii., p. 923 (1896).

² *Op. cit.*, part II., vol. ii., p. 531 ff.

³ Kenyon, in *Classical Review*, 1893, p. 110; Wilcken, in *Hermes*, xxviii., 1893, p. 203 ff.; Viereck, in *Philologus*, iii., 1893, p. 219 ff. The purpose was enumeration and conscription, not taxation (Wilcken, p. 248 f.).

⁴ Viereck, *loc. cit.* The census under Vespasian is not fixed.

development of Roman administration under the empire will recognise straight away the strong probability that any important device of organization, which is known to have been in existence as early as Vespasian, must have come from Augustus; and especially in Egypt, where the Romans fell heirs to a highly organized administration, it is almost certain that this *census*-cycle went back to Augustus's administration. That principle, doubtless, would be universally admitted. But, fortunately, we are not left to mere general probability as confirming the precise and clear statement of Luke. We have definite evidence that the earlier *census* were made in various places and parts of the empire. The earliest periods of the *census* would be 23-22 B.C., 9-8 B.C., 5-6 A.D.,¹ and so on. The periods, then, started from the beginning of Augustus's reign in the most formal sense: the emperors reckoned their reign according to the tenure of the *tribunicia potestas*, and Augustus received the *tribunicia potestas* on 27th June, B.C. 23.

The first *census*-period, then, if our interpretation of Luke's word "first" is correct, must be supposed to have begun in 9-8 B.C.; and this year was, in all probability, selected as the fifteenth of Augustus's tribunician power and reign. In that year, as Augustus mentions in his review of his own life,² he took a *census* of the Roman citizens, who were 4,233,000 in number. But these reviews of the Roman citizens were held at irregular intervals, the first in 28 B.C. and the third in 14 A.D.; so that this fact, taken alone, would be of no importance. It is, however, important to notice that a *census* was held in Syria at that time; Sentius Saturninus governed Syria B.C. 9-7,³ and

¹ Wilcken, *Hermes*, 1893, p. 245, makes an arithmetical error of one year as to the periods before Christ.

² *Monumentum Ancyranum*, ii. 5-8 (ed. Mommsen, p. 39).

³ Liebenam and others say 8-6; but his successor, Varus, ruled in the years 6-4; and Lewin, *Fasti Sacri*, rightly points out that Saturninus came to Syria in 9.

Tertullian mentions that a *census* was held in Judæa by him.¹

This is a remarkable statement, and its apparent discrepancy with Luke has caused much discussion. Several points in it are important to observe. (1) Tertullian did not content himself with making use of Luke; on the contrary, he differs from Luke; (2) Tertullian evidently must have consulted historical authorities, and found record of a provincial *census*. Now that the *census*-periods are fixed, we see that his procedure was probably as follows: he investigated the *census*-periods, and found that the first, in 9-8 B.C., began under the governor Sentius Saturninus. This *census* was probably held in the Roman province, and mentioned in Roman documents accessible to Tertullian. (3) Tertullian must, indubitably, have observed the difference between his statement and Luke's; and he preferred the evidence of the Roman documents.

We know from Pliny, *Hist. Nat.*, vii. 48 (159), that the records of the Italian *census* were so carefully preserved that in A.D. 48 Claudius could verify from the records of the earlier *census* the assertion made by a citizen of Bologna as to his age. The discoveries of Egyptian papyri show that there also the *census* records were preserved; and we may infer that the same rule was observed in every province. Accurate observation, registration, and preservation of all facts were the basis of Roman government; and a historian who wished to discover the facts of the early empire could easily do it if he were not disgracefully lazy or uncommonly stupid. With a man of ordinary ability and care, serious error proceeded only from intention to mislead (though a slip in some unimportant detail may be made by any man, however careful).

¹ Tert., *adv. Marc.*, iv. 19: "*census actos sub Augusto in Judæa per Sentium Saturninum.*" The preposition is regularly used to indicate that the Emperor carried out an action through the instrumentality of a governor of a province.

Further, in the year 8 B.C. Augustus gave Rome a municipal organization, divided it into regions and quarters, and in a certain class of inscriptions that year is reckoned as the year 1 of an epoch, which remained in use for some little time.¹ The year was, therefore, a marked and literally epoch-making year; and this is natural, if it was the beginning of an intended imperial system of universal registration. I say an intended system, because it would appear that the idea was too great for the time, and was not fully carried into effect. The administration of the empire was not sufficiently perfect and continuous in its working to carry out such a gigantic idea; and Augustus himself, as he grew old and feeble, neglected to carry it out himself in Rome; so that the next *census* there was not held until Tiberius had been associated with him in the empire. Dion Cassius indeed mentions that in 4 A.D. (a full year too soon) Augustus made a partial *census* of Roman citizens; but, as Mommsen and others have pointed out, Dion Cassius is certainly wrong about two of the four Roman *census*² which he attributes to Augustus; and his assertion as to the *census* of 4 A.D. cannot be credited on his sole authority, and is rejected by Mommsen.³

The second *census*-period fell in 5-6 A.D. Now, in 6 A.D. Quirinius was governor of Syria for the second time; and we know from Josephus that he was specially charged to make a *census* and valuation of the province.⁴ Moreover, an inscription (carried to Venice from Berytus), which was long dismissed as a forgery concocted to support Luke, but is now proved to be genuine by the discovery of the

¹ The year 1 A.D. is called *nono anno* in a well-known inscription, published in *Bullett. di Commiss. Arch. Rom.*, 1892, p. 67, and *Arch. Epigr. Mittheil. aus Oesterr.*, 1891, p. 77.

² He knew that Augustus held only three *census*, and explains that the enumeration in A.D. 4 was incomplete.

³ Edition of *Monum. Ancyrr.*, p. 37.

⁴ ἀποτιμησόμενος τὰ ἐν Συρίᾳ, *Ant. Jud.*, xvii. 13, 5.

long-lost stone, mentions that, by orders of Quirinius, governor of Syria, Q. Æmilius Secundus took the *census* of the city of Apameia in Syria, and numbered in it 170,000 citizens.¹ This was "the great census" of Judæa (see above).

The third *census*-period began in A.D. 19-20. I know nothing in the way of evidence that it was observed.

The fourth *census*-period began in A.D. 33-34. There is one very important piece of evidence as to this *census*. It is well known that nations which were not thoroughly Romanized strongly objected to the *census* as a mark of complete subjection; and Tacitus mentions that in A.D. 36 disturbances among a tribe called Kietai,² in Cilicia Tracheia, required the intervention of a Roman army from Syria, after the power of King Archelaus had proved insufficient to reduce the insurgents. He adds that the discontent of the Kietai was due to their having been compelled, as if they had been a Roman province,³ to submit to *census* and pay tribute. It is clear that an attempt had been made by Archelaus to carry out the Roman custom in his kingdom, which was a dependency of Rome (as the realm of Herod had been). There can be no doubt that he did so under orders from Rome, for no independent king would voluntarily curtail his own authority; and his action was felt by his subjects to be a step towards the Romanization of the land. They rebelled against a king so weak as to impose on them with his own hand the Roman yoke. Tacitus describes in a few words transactions which must have occupied a year or more.

¹ *Ephem. Epigraph.*, iv., p. 538.

² The reading *Clitæ*, in the ordinary texts of Tacitus, is false; the true reading is established by Wilhelm, *Arch. Epigr. Mittheil. aus Oesterr.*, 1894, p. 1 f.

³ *Nostrum in modum*. I quote the rendering of the words by Mr. Furneaux in his admirable edition. Similarly Nipperdey, "*wie die Bewohner der römischen Provinzen.*" As Archelaus was dependent on Syria, this suggests a Syrian *census*.

Archelaus was evidently ordered to carry out in his kingdom the Roman *census*, which strictly fell in the year 34; naturally this took some considerable time,¹ and we may be certain that Archelaus, besides being a feeble administrator (as we know from the general character of events at this time), would not be very eager to carry out the Roman scheme. In 35 the attempt to make *census* and valuation was going on,² and resulted in a rebellion, which, after Archelaus had vainly tried to restrain it, called for the intervention of the distant governor of Syria.

It is important to notice that, when the Roman *census* was carried out in a dependent kingdom, it was, apparently, not carried out by Roman officials, but left to the king to conduct at his own discretion and responsibility.

The fifth *census*-period began A.D. 47-48; and Tacitus mentions that the Emperor Claudius held a *census* of citizens in 48 (Tacitus, *Ann.*, xi. 25; Suet., *Claud.*, 16). The age of individual Roman citizens was recorded, according to their own statement, at this and at previous *census* (Pliny, *Nat. Hist.*, vii. 48 [159]). Claudius was engaged in duties connected with this *census* at Ostia in the middle of October, 48 (Tac., *Ann.*, xi. 31).

The sixth *census*-period fell in 61-62. I know no evidence that it was observed. The seventh period fell in 75-76; but for some reason it was anticipated by two years in Rome. Vespasian and Titus held the censorship (which was an office lasting eighteen months) in 73-74,³ and made an enumeration of Roman citizens.

These facts, each slight in itself, establish, when taken together, a probability that the Egyptian *census*-periods

¹ The Egyptian *census*-declarations are regularly dated late in the year following the *census*-year.

² Tacitus mentions the *census* and the tribute as two distinct facts.

³ Beginning April, 73, according to Chambalu *de magistrat. Flaviorum* (quoted by Goyau, *Chron. de l'Emp. Rom.*, s.a.).

are not peculiar to Egypt, but frequently coincide with the taking of *census* in some other part of the empire, and that the Egyptian custom springs out of some principle of wider application. That wider principle is recorded by one historian, and one only, viz., Luke; but his evidence comes in to explain and to connect the scattered facts. In several cases the Roman historians record only the *census* of Roman citizens, and evidently with true Roman pride regarded the *census* of the subject population as beneath the dignity of historical record. Augustus himself mentions only the *census* of Roman citizens; but we have distinct evidence that the first and second *census* were held in Syria, and the fourth in the dependent kingdom of Cilicia Tracheia.

The question may be asked why Augustus in his review of his own services to the state (the *Monumentum Ancyranum*) was silent about this fact in his career (so important in our eyes). But, besides the reason stated in the previous paragraph, we find that Augustus does not include in that document any statement as to his reorganization of the provinces.¹ Further, the principle, though laid down as a "counsel of perfection," was not carried out completely; and, therefore, it could not claim a place in the record of Augustus's achievements.

We notice, further, that these *census*-periods pass naturally into the indictional periods of the fourth century. The year 327-328 began a new *census*-period, and in that year Constantinople was founded. This year was taken as the beginning of an indictional period; but whereas the old *census*-periods had occurred every fifteenth year according to the old Roman method of counting (which reckoned in the total both starting and finishing point), but every fourteenth year according to the modern way of reckoning,

¹ He mentions his colonies in Pisidia, etc., but the *coloniæ*, of course, were Roman.

this year 327-328 was fifteen years (in the modern sense) later than 312, from the autumn of which year the indictional periods were considered to begin; and the indictional periods were henceforth reckoned as full fifteen years in our sense. This consideration suggests that the theory of *census*-periods lasted through the Roman Empire, however much the practice may have fallen short of the theory.

The facts which have been stated would not be in themselves strong enough to prove a theory: they are too few to exclude chance coincidence. But this is a question of the credibility of a statement made by a good historian; and when we find that the facts support his statement, then his statement is placed on a much higher plane of historical authority.

Again, those who say that Luke's statement is a mere error, are bound to give some explanation how he fell into the error. The old-fashioned explanation, as stated by Mommsen, is that Luke borrowed from Josephus and mixed up truth and falsehood in his account. But it is now generally recognised that all attempts to show that Luke was dependent on Josephus have failed; the opinion is steadily growing stronger that the Third Gospel and Acts were written earlier than Josephus's historical works; and it will in that case be necessary to admit that Luke made an independent investigation of early Christian history and the general facts of Roman history. But how could an independent investigator fall into a blunder so portentous as the supposed error, and in a point so fundamental? A historian may be guilty of a slip in a name or some such detail; but the error attributed to Luke is not a mere slip. Unless the *census* was carried out according to a non-Roman tribal system, *i.e.*, under the government of a king (compare Luke i. 5), the idea is a meaningless invention. If Luke falsely turned the great

census of 6 A.D. into an older *census*, he went on to invent a whole chapter of history, and to violate the character of Roman procedure (which must have been well known to him), in order to produce a special effect required for his narrative. To me this seems a psychological impossibility.

Reason has now been given to believe that Luke is probably right in the following points: (1) A series of *census* were taken in Syria and in Egypt; (2) the idea of taking these *census* originated from Augustus; (3) the first *census* was taken some years B.C. On the other hand, although Augustus undoubtedly recognised the administrative value of obtaining full statistics of the whole empire,¹ and though the case of Syria and Egypt shows that he also recognised the necessity of periodically revising the statistics, yet we have no evidence proving that he definitely ordered the taking of *census* in every province, whether by general edict or by a clause in the instructions (*mandata*) given to each governor. But it is not necessary to understand Luke as affirming that Augustus actually issued such an order. According to Luke's way of mentioning Roman matters,² he need not be taken as meaning more than that Augustus laid down the theoretic principle that periodical *census* ought to be made of the empire. It is highly probable both that this principle was attributed to Augustus by general opinion in the first century, and that the general opinion was right in so doing.

It is quite uncritical and unhistorical in spirit to press Luke's language to the extremest technical limit in which it is capable of being understood, and then to declare that his statement is false, because that extreme form is not true. In my *St. Paul*, p. 48 f., an example is given of the

¹ This is proved by facts often collected: *e.g.*, see Plummer, p. 48; Schürer, ii., p. 434 ff.

² See the fourth paragraph of this paper.

way in which one of Luke's statements is squeezed into an absurd meaning, and then condemned for absurdity. Obscurity envelops the whole subject, and dogmatic negatives should be avoided until more evidence is obtained. Discoveries may be made any day. W. M. RAMSAY.

(To be continued.)

HENRY DRUMMOND.

It was a tragically solemn moment on Thursday, March 11, when, as the mourners were gathering to the funeral of Professor Candlish in the Free College Church, Glasgow, a telegram arrived from Tunbridge Wells, announcing the death of his colleague, Professor Drummond.

Drummond had been ill for two years with a rheumatic affection which baffled the physicians; but the impression was that he would come out of it. He had this expectation himself as lately as the New Year; and last summer and autumn, those by whom he was visited expressed themselves very hopefully. He retained to the last his mental energy and the cheerfulness of his disposition. But the disease had worn out his bodily strength; and at last he slipped through the doctors' hands somewhat suddenly.

My recollections of him go far back; for I used often to see him, a bright-eyed little fellow in flannels, standing behind the wickets on the school cricket-field, acquiring the experience which he was subsequently to turn to good account, for the religious instruction of boys, in *Baxter's Second Innings*. We were at the University of Edinburgh at the same time, and entered the New College together.

He was a very young student, and ripened slowly. The first unmistakable sample of his quality which he gave his fellow-students was an essay, delivered, near the end of his course, before the Theological Society, on "Spiritual Diagnosis." In a single hour this performance inspired