

## THE CAREER OF CORIPPUS

When Joseph Partsch wrote 'Flavii Cresconii Corippi de vita paucissima comperta habemus' in the preface (p. xliii) to his long-standard edition (*Monumenta Germaniae Historica*, 1879), he was not exaggerating. Yet this has not prevented scholars (including Partsch himself!) from equipping the poet with a career, largely in Constantinople. Most recently, some of the details have been revived (albeit with decent caution) in the admirable edition of the *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris* by Averil Cameron.<sup>1</sup> But almost every item is based solely on guesswork; the supposed career may seem to melt away under a fresh and dispassionate look at what has passed for evidence.

The poem in honour of Justin II is preserved largely by a single manuscript (M), Matritensis 10029.<sup>2</sup> It attaches the title *grammaticus* to the name of Corippus. Hence he is billed by commentators as a small-town teacher in Africa. In itself, there is nothing improbable about this. It is obvious enough from his poems that Corippus was an educated man. Very many poets in the late Roman and early Byzantine periods were indeed grammarians.<sup>3</sup> And the preface to the *Johannis* (25-6) speaks of activity in the countryside before coming to Carthage: 'quondam per rura locutus/ urbis per populos carmina mitto palam.'

Nevertheless, there is no solid evidence that Corippus followed the profession of teacher. The label *grammaticus* need not represent more than a scribal inference. 'Quondam per rura locutus' may rather imply a wandering poet of the breed so ably described by Alan Cameron,<sup>4</sup> trying his luck from place to place. Another line (19) from the preface to the *Johannis* is, in its plangency, consonant with this notion: 'nutat in angusto discors fortuna poetae'. Furthermore, even after making all due allowance for the *topos* of modesty, it seems odd that a teacher should in the same preface call himself *ignarus* (25) and refer deprecatingly to his epic as 'quos doctrina negat confert victoria versus'. A singularly poor advertisement for his own professional competence, especially in a poem delivered before the *proceres* of Carthage!<sup>5</sup>

The *Johannis* has been presumed a success, with an emboldened Corippus<sup>6</sup> sailing off to Byzantium. That might be true, but it does not necessarily follow. These poets were for ever travelling in search of patrons and fortune, and Constantinople was obviously one of the prime attractions. Nothing forbids the more doleful possibility that Corippus moved on because the *Johannis* had not made his fortune.

It has been further imagined that our poet went to Constantinople armed with patronage and protection in high places. This is essentially conjured out of

<sup>1</sup> This commentary (London, 1976) is hereafter referred to by author's name. So is that of U. J. Stache (Berlin, 1976).

<sup>2</sup> For details, cf. Partsch, pp. l-lvi; Cameron, p. 20.

<sup>3</sup> See Alan Cameron, 'Wandering Poets: a Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt', *Historia* 14 (1965), 491.

<sup>4</sup> Art. cit.

<sup>5</sup> Even allowing for the probability

that it occurs in a line consciously echoing Juvenal's 'si natura negat . . .' (it is so regarded by G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (Oxford, 1954), p. 302).

<sup>6</sup> The phrase is Alan Cameron's, art. cit. 490. Similarly, Stache, p. 2, assumes that 'Der literarische Erfolg der *Johannis* ermutigte ihn anscheinend, in die Hauptstadt Konstantinopel überzusiedeln'.

the following lines from the Panegyric to Anastasius, prefixed to the *In laudem Justinii*:

quod labor indulsit, quod fessis provida Musis  
 alma per insomnes meruit vigilantia noctes,  
 hi sacri monstrant apices. lege, summe magister,  
 et causam defende meam. tibi sanctio vestrum  
 commendat famulum. vestro de fonte creatur  
 rivulus iste meus, sub cuius nomine gesto  
 principis officium. (42-8)

Everything turns on *sacri apices* and *sanctio*. Partsch (p. xlv) and F. Skutsch (*RE*. IV.1.1238), followed now by Mrs. Cameron, maintained that these words refer to a decree of Justinian rewarding Corippus for the *Johannis* with a position in the imperial civil service (*principis officium*).

Now, it is at least a reasonable possibility that the dignitaries of Carthage enjoyed the *Johannis*, and surely certain that its effusions were congenial to the recipient, John Troglita. How concerned any of these would be to reward the unknown poet from the country for his effort, we cannot say. John Troglita is a shadowy figure to us;<sup>7</sup> he might have been moved to recommend Corippus to the emperor. There is certainly no clear reason why Justinian would particularly wish to reward the poet on his own account. For references to the emperor are curt, formal, and for the most part quasi-prefatory near the front of individual books:<sup>8</sup> in the words of Partsch (p. xlv), 'Justinianum raro admodum nec nimia unquam adulatione memoravit'.

*Apices* (especially when accompanied by *sacri*) and *sanctio* are indeed technical terms for imperial decrees. However, Mrs. Cameron is unduly narrow in saying that 'it is hard to see what else they could mean'. *Apices* is an extremely versatile word, as the entries in the *TLL* disclose. Most pertinent is the meaning 'writings' or 'letter', attested in a host of later writers.<sup>9</sup>

Given this, why may it not refer to Corippus' poem in the passage under discussion? That is how it was taken by Foggini and Petschenig in the prefaces to their editions, with *officium* then alluding to the poet's duties and *rivulus* to the poem itself. Partsch (p. xlv n. 20) rejected this simply by adducing passages from the *Codex Justinianus* and Sidonius where *sacri apices* means imperial decrees.

That is not very cogent. We have seen that *apices* has no uniform meaning in late Latin. And *sacer* is a vague and overlooked epithet in panegyric. Because *sacri apices* in some texts means imperial decrees does not in the least guarantee that it does or should mean the same in Corippus.

Mrs Cameron's reason for rejecting the interpretation of Foggini and Petschenig

<sup>7</sup> Apart from Corippus' epic, cf. Procopius, *B. V.* 2.28, 45; Marcellinus Comes *auct.* a. 547 6; Jordanes, *Romana* 385 (the only source for the name Troglita).

<sup>8</sup> 1.15 'Justiniane, tuis, princeps, assurge triumphis'; 2.24-5 'tu, Justiniane, fovendo/cuncta doce'; 5.43 'Justiniane, tuis pugnet fortissimus armis'; 7.145-6 'Justinianus apex, orbis dominator Eoi/occiduique potens,

Romani gloria regni'.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Sidonius, *Ep.* 4.5; 6.8. In addition to the *TLL* entries, cf. O. J. Zimmermann, *The Late Latin Vocabulary of the Variae of Cassiodorus* (Washington, 1944), pp. 87, 146, for the variety of meanings of *apex/apices* in Cassiodorus and other late authors.

is that it makes 'vestro de fonte' and 'sub cuius nomine' 'very hard to explain'. They can, in fact, be very reasonably explained along the following lines.

The Panegyric on Anastasius begins with an elaborate image of the Tree of Life. A *fertilis arbor* stands 'sacrorum in medio nemorum' (8), its *apex* touches the stars (12), and it drinks 'de fonte' (13). Justin is the spring that waters the fertile tree (Anastasius), to whose shade and protection Corippus looks, stretching forth 'brachia ingenii studiique mei' (6-7).

At the end of the poem, Corippus is simply picking up these images and reapplying them, quite naturally, to his own work. By a play on words,<sup>10</sup> the poem to Justin is called *sacri apices* because it will represent the summit of Corippus' inspiration. Anastasius, already established as a *fertilis arbor*, now recurs as a life-giving *fons*, a traditional enough role in such poetic contexts. 'Rivulus iste meus' strikes the requisite note of modesty over the poet's effort.<sup>11</sup> Finally, the *In laudem Justini* can fairly be thought of as an *officium*. It is the poet's service and the emperor's right. Corippus himself practically confirms this interpretation in the opening lines:

esse reor mentem dominis aptare fidelem  
officio quocumque datur. praecommodo linguam (*In laud. Just.* 1.6-7)

By writing the poem, Corippus discharges his *officium* to his master.

The overall effect is one of balanced and developed imagery between the beginning and end of the Panegyric on Anastasius. A similar equipoise is achieved with the conclusion of the companion preface, which is addressed to Justin. In both pieces, there is a medical metaphor, with emperor and quaestor respectively asked to heal the *vulnera* of the poet. 'Senio dextram, pie, porrige fesso', Justin is besought (37), whilst Anastasius is asked 'fessae miserere senectae' (48). As his expression of *grates* to the emperor, Corippus states 'pro munere carmina porto'. In the other piece, 'sub cuius nomine gesto/ principis officium', with its strikingly similar phraseology, surely must bear the same meaning.

On this interpretation, *sub cuius nomine* loses its supposed difficulty. Ironically, my analysis also helps proponents of the rival view in the case of *vestro de fonte*. Mrs. Cameron is concerned that Anastasius is now the *fons*, whereas earlier on it had been Justin. Rightly rejecting the desperate effort of Skutsch, who applied *vestro* to Justin, she feels that 'we must just accept the clumsiness for what it is'.

No one would deny that Corippus is often a clumsy poet. *Fons* is wearisomely frequent in the address to Anastasius (lines 13, 15, 19 — twice, 20, 23, 24, 46). However, it was not a feat of clumsiness to transfer it from Justin to Anastasius. Rather is it a natural transition: the emperor nurtures the quaestor who in turn sustains the poet's little stream.

A word on *sacer* is called for. Writing on Corippus, J. B. Hall<sup>12</sup> observes that 'almost always *sacrum* means something like *quicquid destinatum est dis.*' That is, significantly, a definition favoured by late scholars such as Macrobius (3.7) and Festus (424.13 Lindsay). As Mrs. Cameron herself comments, *sacer* (like

<sup>10</sup> Such a word play would be in keeping with the constant punning by Corippus on the names of Justin, Sophia, and Vigilantia.

<sup>11</sup> Lactantius, *Op. D.* 20, has 'facundiae rivus'; Cicero, *de or.* 2.27. 117, 'tardi ingeni

est rivulos consecrari, fontis rerum non videre' is also worth noting.

<sup>12</sup> 'Notes on the text of Corippus', *BICS* 17 (1970), 94.

*sanctus* and *divinus*) is heavily overworked, since it may refer to anything connected with the emperor. The epithet could certainly be applied to *apices* in the case of a poem addressed to the emperor; the Horatian *sacer vates* (*Odes* 4.9.28) is worth recalling here.

In my opinion, it is a good deal easier to arrive at the above explanations than to account, on the view of Partsch—Skutsch—Cameron, for the *bi* that is prefixed to *sacri apices*. Up to this point in the poem, there has been no allusion to Justinian or decrees or a Corippian career. Nor is anything forthcoming along these lines. In a word, the demonstrative has nothing to demonstrate.<sup>13</sup>

We do not have to saddle Corippus with the degree of maladroitness thus envisaged. The *bi* is very natural, and naturally introduced at this juncture — if it refers to the poem.

It is also fair to ask, if *sacri apices* refers to a decree from Justinian, why there is no mention of it in the other prefatory poem, the one addressed to Justin. It would have been far more natural for the self-serving Corippus to remind the new emperor of how he himself had been honoured by the old than to restrict himself (as the Partsch—Skutsch—Cameron interpretation requires us to believe) to a single, awkward, and oblique allusion in the poem to the quaestor Anastasius.

The preface to Justin is all gloom, from the poet's point of view. He is old and in need of help, 'nudatus propriis et plurima vulnera passus' (43). There may have to be some discount for literary convention, but almost certainly we have a genuine autobiographical item here. What it is, we cannot say. Partsch (p. xlv) could well be right in connecting it with the *miseri Afri* whose sufferings are evoked in the address to Anastasius (37). Some slight linguistic support for this view may be afforded by the similar language used of African miseries at *Johannis* 4.102: 'Africa barbaricis planxit nudata rapinis'. Whatever be the source and nature of Corippus' misfortunes, the picture is not one of a successful poet in a civil-service post by courtesy of imperial decree.

In connection with the last matter, Mrs. Cameron observes that the poet 'seems at least to have had friends in high places, and he is free with his appeals to Justin, Anastasius, Vigilantia, and Sophia'. This is something of a *non sequitur*. The range of appeals may well betoken a *lack* of patrons rather than possession of same. And when Corippus claims (*In laud. Just.* 1.15–6) that 'urguet amans dominos carmenque inpellit adire/ quaestor Anastasius' — a number of other big names are also dropped — it does not prove that Anastasius actually was doing this, much less that the poet was in his service. The literary conventions stand in the way of easy literal acceptance. We should bear in mind that gorgeous anecdote of the younger Pliny (*Ep.* 6.15) concerning Javolenus Priscus who, upon hearing himself invoked by some poetaster with the formula 'Prisce, iubes', rejoined 'ego vero non iubeo'!<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> After completing the first version of this paper, I discovered that Stache had made the very same point to justify his revival of the Foggini-Petschenig interpretation of *sacri apices*.

<sup>14</sup> Few would want to accept Pliny's inference that Priscus was 'dubiae sanitatis' — quite the contrary! Cf. J. C. Yardley, 'Prisce iubes again', *CR* N.S. 22 (1972),

314–15. This matter bears on the question of what *sanctio* means in *Pan. Anast.* 45. Given the interpretation of *sacri apices* followed in this paper, *sanctio* (only here in Corippus) has to be explained. Petschenig suggested that it meant 'dedication', an unparalleled sense, as Stache points out. Stache himself offers the following: 'Vielleicht spielt Coripp darauf an, dass Anastasius als

Finally, *In laud. Just.* 4.173 f. contain praise of the emperor for his honouring of certain groups equally with the senate. Partsch (p. xlv), giving some of the 'credit' to Mommsen, claimed to find a particular warmth in the lines

quae circa dominos habeamus vota, probamus,  
dum canimus colimusque pios, veneramus ovantes.  
quos dum laudamus, laudem de laude meremur,  
et fruimur maiore bono.

and took them to indicate that Corippus was one of the *tribuni et notarii* or *scriniarii* allegedly here described.

A matter of taste, to be sure, but I can see only the usual rhetoric here, with no particular emotion evident. 'Laudem de laude', for instance, is reworked from 'laudibus addere laudes' a little earlier (4.164), and it is just as easy to point to 'cecinit . . . laudes' (4.156). On general principles, it seems a trifle naïve to find particular warmth in a batch of lines in a formal panegyric that consist mainly of a sequence of largely synonymous verbs (*probamus, canimus, colimus, veneramus, laudamus*). Some would describe the effect as frigid!

Since some lines are missing after 172, it is impossible to be sure to what group or groups the lines in question allude. However, we may not have lost much more than the completion of the comparison with the Nile begun at line 168. Mrs. Cameron convincingly argues that the verses cited by Partsch actually refer to the orators, that is to say the group introduced at line 154. Corippus can fairly include himself in a body whose function is specified as *laudes canere*. To Mrs. Cameron's observation that the concluding lines of the section

doctor et princeps novit quod littera rerum  
pars magna est magnusque labor scribentibus instat (184–5)

most naturally refer to literary composition, I would subjoin that the preceding

vigilantia noctis  
hoc meruit carisque favens sapientia Musis

is a reworking of the previously discussed

quod labor indulsit, quod fessis provida Musis  
alma per insomnes meruit vigilantia noctis (*Pan. Anast.* 42–3),

lines that can only refer to Corippus' own literary lucubrations.

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*magister officiorum* und *quaestor sacri palatii* Dienstherr der Hofbeamten war und somit ihm qua Gesetz die Fürsorge für seine Untergebenen oblag'. I am inclined to think that *sanctio* is merely another expression of the claim, discussed above, that Corippus is writing his poem at the behest of Anastasius. *Sanctio* did in fact come to mean 'order' in late Latin, as is evidenced by *Bon. Anast.* 362.5: 'Dorothea sanctionem agebat' (for this and other references, cf. F. Arnaldi, *Lexicon Latinitatis Italicae Medii Aevi* (Turin, 1970), s.v.). For the range of cognate meanings and nuances borne by *sanctio* see,

e.g., Gregory Turonensis (ed. B. Krusch in *MGH SRM* 1 (Berlin, 1950)), *Hist.* 2.6: 'dominicae sanctionis sententia'; 9.20: 'sanctione sacerdotali emendari'; Ennodius, *Pro Synodo* 80: 'praeter apostolici apicis sanctionem'; *Dict.* 22.3: 'sanctiones de externo iure conscriptas'; Dracontius, *Romulea* 5.233: 'instar habent hostis quos sanctio nulla coercet'; Cassiodorus, *Var.* 8. 13.4: 'constituta veteris sanctionis' (cf. *Var.* 2.27.2). In the line in question, the alleged exhortation by Anastasius to Corippus is simply given by the flattering poet the force of an imperial command or decree.