

THE CAREER OF CORIPPUS AGAIN

Among other recent attempts to correct what he takes to be Cameronian misconceptions, Barry Baldwin has reopened the question of a difficult passage in the panegyric to Anastasius the quaestor prefaced to Corippus' *In laudem Iustini*.¹ His discussion perfectly correctly emphasizes the fragility of our knowledge of Corippus' life and background, but unfortunately it introduces certain misconceptions itself which make a rejoinder inescapable, especially since new arguments may be adduced.

It is best to start from the beginning, with the *Iohannis*. A commentary on this poem is long overdue and may perhaps be stimulated by the current publicity which Corippus is enjoying.² In the meantime, it ought certainly to be possible to locate the poem more firmly in the background of post-reconquest Byzantine Africa. John Troglita, the general whose exploits the *Iohannis* records, is, to Baldwin, a 'shadowy figure'.³ True, it is mere surmise that he might have recommended Corippus to Justinian, but someone clearly did introduce him to the court, for the *In laudem Iustini* shows him tackling the most central imperial subject with all the confidence of an insider. He could hardly have approached it in so knowledgeable and indeed tendentious a way⁴ unless there were more to his claims to have the patronage of senior officials close to the throne than Baldwin is prepared to admit.⁵ 'There is no clear reason why Justinian would particularly wish to reward the poet on his own account', Baldwin writes;⁶ but Justinian was constantly engaged in an attempt — all too often unsuccessful — to find panegyrists, and if Corippus had found his way to Constantinople, as he somehow did, there is no way that he would have failed to be solicited by the imperial office.⁷ Baldwin's scepticism, in fact, seems to be misplaced, for he is

¹ 'The Career of Corippus', *CQ* N.S. 28 (1978), 372–6; cf. also 'Four Problems in Agathias', *Byz. Zeit.* 70 (1977), 295–305, and 'A Note on the Religious Sympathies of the Factions', *Byzantion* 48 (1978), 275–6.

² Besides the edition of the *Iohannis* by J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear (Cambridge, 1970), those of the *In laudem Iustini* by Averil Cameron (London, 1976) and U. J. Stache (Berlin, 1976). A Budé edition is promised also by S. Antès.

³ *CQ* N.S. 28 (1978), 373; page-references henceforth to Baldwin's work relate to this article unless otherwise specified. John remained *magister militum Africae* until at least A.D. 552, after which date he may have soon died (C. Diehl, *L'Afrique byzantine* (1896), p. 381). The recent work of Denys Pringle on military campaigns and fortification in Byzantine Africa (Oxford D.Phil. thesis, 1979) sheds much light on Corippus' description of John Troglita's campaigns.

⁴ Especially shown in his delicate handling of the element of senatorial *coup* in Justin's accession and inauguration. The

poem generally is written as an apologia for Justin.

⁵ p. 375. Baldwin questions whether Corippus' claim to have the support of Anastasius, Thomas, the praetorian prefect of Africa, Magnus the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, Theodorus the son of Peter the Patrician and himself *magister officiorum* in A. D. 566, and a certain Demetrius (*Iust.* 1.15–27: there may have been more — the passage ends in a lacuna) is more than literary convention. But the point is that these are the men who put Justin on the throne and whose version Corippus is (presumably) paid to publicize.

⁶ p. 373.

⁷ It may seem equally unlikely that Procopius, as the author of the *Wars*, should have seemed suitable as a panegyrist of Justinian's buildings. But the experience of John the Lydian (*De Mag.* 3.28) makes clear Justinian's natural desire to win the services of any likely literary talent. Imperial panegyric themes in the kontakia of Romanos have recently been emphasized

on the contrary prepared to take the preface to the *Iobannis* at face value, despite its obvious literary *topoi*, using Corippus' claim to be *ignarus* as proof that he could not have been a teacher.⁸ I am not sure why Baldwin is so reluctant to accept the common meaning of *grammaticus*; but in any case the argument will not be advanced by a too literal understanding of the references to Corippus' *rustica Musa* and the like.⁹ We know nothing of Corippus' place of origin, or his social background, but it is unlikely that the *topos* of modesty is more than exactly that. We may perhaps accept that he did not originate in Carthage, and feels nervous in the presence of its now Byzantine *proceres*;¹⁰ but the stronger contrast in the preface is the literary one between the *rustica Musa* of Africa and the *Romanae Camenae*, the poetry of Virgil, with which he has already adversely compared his *Iobannis*.¹¹ It is a pleasant thought that Corippus might have been a 'wandering poet'.¹² But the literary output of Byzantine Africa in the mid-sixth century is in fact overwhelmingly ecclesiastical, which makes this idea rather less probable, if indeed poets could not also be *grammatici*.¹³ 'Wandering poets' need patrons, and we know too little about cultural conditions after the reconquest to allow the supposition that such patrons now existed. The situation was very unsettled for a generation after the reconquest; the Vandal patrons had left, and the Byzantine administrators who replaced them had little time for occasional poetry – military panegyric might be different.¹⁴ The efflorescence of poetic activity represented by Luxorius and his contemporaries under the Vandals cannot be documented under the new regime.

However, the victories of John Troglita, with his triumphal entry into Carthage thereafter, described by Corippus in a memorable passage inviting comparison with the near-contemporary descriptions of the entry of Theodoric to Rome in A.D. 500 and the return of Fulgentius and other Catholic exiles to

by E. Catafygiotu Topping ('On earthquakes and fires', *Byz. Zeit.* 71 (1978), 22–35). Corippus did not produce any work in honour of Justinian and perhaps indeed it was not Justinian who granted him this favour – see below.

⁸ p. 372.

⁹ *Iobannis*, pref., lines 25 f.: 'quid <quod ego> ignarus quondam per rura locutus, urbis per populos carmina mitto palam?/forsitan et fracto ponetur syllaba versu,/confiteor: Musa est rustica namque mea.'

¹⁰ line 1: 'Victoris, proceres, praesumpsi dicere laudes . . .' The name Cresconius is well represented among Christians in Roman Africa. J. L. Maier, *L'Épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* (Rome, 1973), pp. 280 ff., records two mid-sixth-century Numidian bishops of that name, plus a Crisconius at the end of the sixth century and twenty-two or possibly twenty-three Cresconii among bishops present at the Council of Carthage in A.D. 411. We may be sure then of the poet's Christian and African background; equally there is no reason to attempt to identify him with the

Cresconius who was the author of *Canones*, as one scribe does (see Partsch, ed., 1879, p. xliii). Names in -ius among African Christians – see I. Kajanto, *Onomastic Studies in the early Christian Inscriptions of Rome and Carthage* (Helsinki, 1963).

¹¹ 37–8: 'rustica Romanis dum certat Musa Camenis,/ductorem nostrum fama per astra vehit.' Cf. 11 ff. and especially 15–16: 'Aeneam superat melior virtute Iohannes,/sed non Vergilio carmina digna cano.'

¹² Baldwin, p. 372.

¹³ Literary energies went now more readily into opposing Justinian's attempt to enforce his position on the Three Chapters than into the occasional poetry which had provided a 'safe' because non-political outlet for some Romans under Vandal occupation.

¹⁴ First Belisarius, then Solomon set about restoring imperial rule and administration with great vigour, but in the years between the reconquest (A.D. 534) and the arrival of John Troglita (A.D. 546) the Byzantines were faced with military mutiny as well as Berber warfare. See Diehl, op. cit., pp. 51 ff., 33 ff.

Carthage in A.D. 523,¹⁵ provided an opportunity for panegyric of a very specialized kind, which tells us nothing about the more usual preoccupations of its author. Historians of North Africa have long recognized the *Iohannis* as a primary and reliable source for Berber customs, warfare, and African topography, even allowing for literary vagueness and mannerism.¹⁶ But what this tells us about Corippus himself remains more doubtful, save that the *Iohannis* displays the same eager and detailed research that is everywhere displayed in the *In laudem Iustini*. The earlier work has been admired, up to a point, for its technical proficiency, at least in comparison with the later one;¹⁷ but it also calls for a sympathetic interpretation which will do justice both to the African literary background and to the historical value of its ethnography.

When Baldwin turns to his main argument, which is based on the *In laudem Iustini*, it is true that we have to contend with the fact that the poet has not been explicit; moreover, that he has used misleadingly similar terminology in the preface and in the panegyric to Anastasius for different things. If we begin with the panegyric, it is at least clear that Corippus is now old – ‘senio dextram, pie, porridge fesso’¹⁸ – and, apparently, not prospering – ‘vince meae/saevam fortunae, deprecor, iram.’¹⁹ Corippus uses an extended metaphor of the emperor as healer,²⁰ and suggests that his poem will be Justin’s reward, if he gives his aid.²¹ Line 43 describes Corippus as ‘nudatus propriis et plurima vulnera passus’. What is this suffering? In the panegyric to Anastasius Corippus uses the same terminology and asks the quaestor to take pity on his tired old age and heal his wounds. On the face of it, he is still in trouble, for he asks Anastasius, ‘causam defende meam’.²² But that ‘nudatus propriis’ means that Corippus had lost property in Africa²³ is no more than a guess, and I would argue against this interpretation on the grounds that in the panegyric to Anastasius Corippus seems to be making a *contrast* between the happy state of Africa thanks to the influence of Anastasius²⁴ and his own situation, still in need of assistance. ‘You have made Africa happy, now make me happy’ is the way the sense runs in lines 36–41. We do not know the circumstances, then. But to prove himself worthy of Anastasius’ attention Corippus advances an imperial order (‘sacri apices . . . sanctio’).²⁵ He is already

¹⁵ Corippus, *Iob.* 6.58–103; John led a procession which included Berber women riding on camels with their babies. Compare Ferrandus, *Vita Fulgentii* (ed. Lapeyre, 1929), 9 (Theodoric), 26 (Fulgentius).

¹⁶ See S. Gsell, *Histoire ancienne de l’Afrique du Nord* vi (Paris, 1927), 24 ff.; E. F. Gautier, *L’Islamisation de l’Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1927), pp. 172 ff.; Ch. Julien, *Histoire de l’Afrique du Nord* i, 2nd edn. (Paris, 1956), 263 ff.

¹⁷ Though I am glad to find that D. R. Shackleton Bailey shares my own higher opinion of the panegyric (*Gnomon* 50 (1978), 449). Opinions of Corippus’ worth tend to split between those of most editors, who view him from the linguistic point of view (e.g. Goodyear, *CR* 28 (1978), 257–8), and historians, who appreciate the value of his subject matter.

¹⁸ *Pref.*, line 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 44–8. For this metaphor, see Topping, art. cit. (n. 7), p. 26 f. (the image of Christ the physician, but in the context of a quasi-imperial panegyric).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 48, ‘pro munere carmina porto’.

²² *Pan. Anast.* 45. Cf. 48–9 ‘fessae miserere senectae,/vulneribusque meis solita pietate medere.’

²³ Baldwin, p. 375, following Partsch.

²⁴ lines 37 f. Cf. *Iust.* 1.18–21 on the recent benefits of Thomas’s rule in Africa.

²⁵ lines 42–6: ‘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/com mendat famulum.’

Anastasius's *famulus*, a *rivulus* from his *fons*,²⁶ and 'in his name' he holds an imperial office ('sub cuius nomine gesto/principis officium').²⁸ *Gesto*, especially with *officium*, has a specialized meaning in late Latin of 'office-holding' (*TLL* s.v. IIB). Anastasius, then, I take to be the head of bureau to whom the emperor has recommended Corippus. With his support, Corippus can offer his poem, as a kind of 'payment' to the emperor for his appointment.²⁸ *Hi* used with *sacri apices* can then be explained as a true demonstrative: Corippus' reference is to a recent pronouncement, i.e. a letter of Justin II, not of Justinian, as was previously supposed by Patsch and Skutsch and by myself. If we understand the passage this way we do not need to suppose that Corippus is alluding to a much earlier reward offered by Justinian for his *Iobannis*; *hi* becomes natural and Baldwin's objection that we would have expected such a decree to be mentioned in the preface to Justin II can also be easily met.

It would be nice to see this, in fact, in the context of an understandable effort by the new regime to gain the support of available poetic talent. The whole circumstances of Justin's accession are proof of a deliberate *coup* which needed careful preparation, and Corippus' panegyric will have been one of the major assets in implanting the persuasion of the inevitability of the transfer and glossing over the prompt murder of Justin's rival, his homonym Justin the son of Germanus.²⁹ Another such asset would have been the publication of Agathias' *Cycle* of epigrams, now provided with a panegyric preface.³⁰ Now Baldwin has also recently argued for a return to the traditional idea that Agathias' preface to the *Cycle* refers to Justinian.³¹ But in supposing that the *Cycle* as a whole was published under Justinian he has overlooked those poems in it which are actually about Justin II and Sophia.³² Further, it seems perverse to separate Agathias' preface from the preface of Corippus' *In laudem Iustini*, which is closely similar. True, it is not proven that they had the same object, and it is obviously possible that Agathias' preface could, were it not for the poems just mentioned, refer to Justinian.³³ But the easy and natural assumption is that the two prefaces *did* have the same object. We are now in a far better position than previously to fill in the history of Justin II's reign, and in particular to see how ready the court was to exploit different ways of reinforcing the rule of Justin.³⁴

It will be clear that Baldwin's return to Foggini's interpretation of the passage in the panegyric to Anastasius³⁵ must be rejected. In the first place, it is out of the question to separate *sacri* from *apices*. *Sacer* is by no means a 'vague and overlooked epithet' in Corippus;³⁶ it is a technical term, one of the commonest and most specific of Corippus's epithets. When Baldwin adds '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'³⁷ he misses the fact that Corippus

²⁶ lines 46-7: 'vestro de fonte creatur/
rivulus iste meus.'

²⁷ lines 47-8.

²⁸ *Pref.*, 48.

²⁹ Evagrius, *H. E.* 5.2; Joh. Biclar., s.a.
568 [sic]: see my note on *Iust.* 1.1.

³⁰ *A. P.* 4.3.

³¹ *Byz. Zeit.* 70 (1977), 298-301.

³² *A. P.* 9.657, 658-9, 812-13; I.36 is probably relevant too. See Averil and Alan Cameron, 'The *Cycle* of Agathias', *JHS* 86 (1966), 6-25. Various claims made in this

article were challenged by R. C. McCail, *JHS* 89 (1969), 87-96, but not the dating.

³³ Baldwin, art. cit., p. 301.

³⁴ See e.g. Averil Cameron, 'The Early Religious Policies of Justin II.', *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976), 51-67; 'The Artistic Patronage of Justin II', *Byzantion* (forthcoming).

³⁵ *CQ N.S.* 28 (1978), 373 f. So too Stache, comm. ad loc.

³⁶ Baldwin, p. 373.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

writes in a kind of self-created technical language (hence my practice of translating such words literally)³⁸ and that *sacri* in the *In laudem Iustini* always means imperial. The only question is whether *apices* must mean a letter. Here I am most grateful to Professor Eric Turner for drawing my attention to a text which proves my interpretation. The first document in the Abinnaeus archive, the famous petition of Abinnaeus to the Emperors Constantius and Constans of A.D. 340–2,³⁹ sheds all the light that one could wish on the usage of Corippus. Abinnaeus had won imperial favour in return for services rendered in the shape of presenting a mission of Blemyes to the court in Constantinople and then escorting them back to their own country, a task which took him three years to complete. An imperial letter had gone to Count Valacius in Egypt, favouring Abinnaeus for the post of *praefectus alae* at Dionysias in the Fayyûm; but unfortunately for Abinnaeus, other letters had also been received, putting forward the claims of different candidates, and he was forced to go to the lengths of presenting a personal petition to the emperors asking them to confirm his appointment. The term *sacrae litterae*, with a reference also to *iudicium sacrum*, makes it perfectly clear that an imperial letter is in question; more important still, Abinnaeus actually writes *i[u]xta s[u]pra[dictos] ap[i]ces vestros*.⁴⁰ The editors explain how *apices* came to mean specifically a document written in the imperial chancellery hand, from its palaeographic characteristics.⁴¹ There is simply no question that *sacri* could, when associated with *apices*, mean anything other than 'imperial'. But further, the Abinnaeus petition refers precisely to the working of patronage through imperial influence, in fact to an imperial letter conferring an appointment as a reward for past services. It would be utterly perverse to think that Corippus' reference should be differently explained. In the panegyric to Anastasius, lines 42–3 make it quite clear that Corippus has earned and received a reward:

quod labor *indulsit*, quod fessis *provida* Musis
alma per insomnes *meruit* vigilantia noctes,
 hi sacri monstant *apices*.

The *apices*, then, attest to the reward. Corippus has received an imperial letter of appointment, and perhaps we can say that the letter was addressed to Anastasius, as Abinnaeus' letter was addressed to Valacius. Hence the next words, in which Corippus invites Anastasius to read the letter:

lege, summe magister,
 et causam defende meam. tibi sanctio vestrum
 commendat famulum.

Note especially *commendat*, the language of patronage. If confirmation is wanted, it is provided by *sanctio*, which after this exposition of *sacri apices* in the light of the Abinnaeus petition can mean nothing but what it normally does mean, namely an imperial order or law. Compare P. Abinn. 2.2 'iuxta divinitus

³⁸ Also missed by J. Richmond, *CR N.S.* 28 (1978), 47–8. But for *felix*, *pious*, *laetus*, *sacer*, and *sanctus* in the *In laudem Iustini* see my notes on *Pan. Anast.* 33, 36, and 50.

³⁹ Ed. H. I. Bell, V. Martin, E. G. Turner, and D. van Berchem, *The Abinnaeus Archive* (Oxford, 1962).

⁴⁰ *P. Abinn.* 1, 13, with the editors' note (p. 37).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 'the letter forms of the highly idiosyncratic imperial chancellery style have given their name to the documents written in them, imperial decrees, diplomas, letters etc.'

sancita' — 'in virtue of orders from imperial headquarters'. The weakest point of Baldwin's paper is his attempt to explain away *sanctio*: the 'alleged exhortation by Anastasius to Corippus (to write the poem) is simply given by the flattering poet the force of an imperial command or decree'.⁴² This last concession, tucked away in a footnote, in fact undermines Baldwin's whole argument. Nor is it possible, on his interpretation, to give any satisfactory force to 'causam defende meam': to whom, then, is Anastasius being asked to uphold Corippus? Finally, the phrase 'sub cuius nomine [i.e. Anastasius] gesto principis officium' (lines 47–8) is explained by Baldwin as a reference to the poet's duty exemplified in his verse, citing 'pro munere carmina porto' from the preface to Justin (line 48). In another context, *officium* might mean this; but on Baldwin's explanation *principis* is left hanging. The phrase would have to mean the poet's duty towards the emperor — hard enough to understand in any case, but especially so when (to borrow Baldwin's mode of argumentation and his explanation of the passage)⁴³ there has been no previous mention of the emperor at all. To accept Baldwin's interpretation of the whole passage involves questioning individual usages which when taken together have a natural and obvious meaning. The Abinnaeus story makes that meaning certain, and explains how and why Corippus needs the support of Anastasius as well as the emperor himself. Abinnaeus's petition was successful, and he obtained his appointment as *praefectus alae* from March A.D. 342. But Valacius was evidently still exposed to counter pressures, for Abinnaeus was dismissed in A.D. 344 (P. Abinn. 2); however, he was a determined man, quite prepared to make a second personal appeal to the emperor, after which he was indeed reinstated, by 1 May A.D. 346, remaining at Dionysias until at least A.D. 351.⁴⁴ Getting a post confirmed and keeping it could be hard work, even with imperial support. Corippus would very reasonably have felt that an imperial letter might not be enough; he would have to work on Anastasius too.

Even after this second look, however, we are forced to conclude that we know very little about Corippus' life or career. Baldwin's challenge has induced me to give up the too hasty assumption that *apices* referred to a decree of Justinian, and he is right to stress the complaints of the poet in the *In laudem Iustini*, which seem to imply that, whether or not the *Iobannis* had been a success at the time, Corippus had not attained permanent fame and prosperity. We still do not know how or why Corippus came to Constantinople or what his trouble was when he wrote the *In laudem Iustini*. But powerful men were on his side, and he was able to emerge as the poet of the new regime with as much alacrity as he had shown when he capitalized on the success of the armies of John Troglita. Corippus' most striking quality is his adaptability: first, as a Roman who had presumably lived under the Vandals, he quickly turned his pen to the service of the new Byzantine rulers, then, transplanted to the Eastern court at Constantinople, he, a Latin-speaking Westerner, wrote on behalf of the winning party in the struggle for power at the death of Justinian. The allusions in the poems will not clear up all our difficulties. But they do repay this further study, though only, as with much else in Corippus, in close relation to the social and political context of the time.

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⁴² p. 375 n. 14. Stache also finds *sanctio* difficult (n. ad loc.).

⁴³ p. 374, cf. 375.

⁴⁴ Bell, Martin, Turner, van Berchem, *intro.*, pp. 11 f.