

## THE MISUNDERSTANDING OF CASSIODORUS *INSTITUTIONES* 1. 17. 2

Among the many *codices* carried by Cassiodorus when he returned to Italy from Constantinople in the early 550s was a copy of the chronicle of Marcellinus, an Illyrian who had lived for many years in Constantinople before writing his chronicle in A.D. 518/519. The chronicle covered events from 379 to the death of Anastasius (518) and was later continued by Marcellinus to 534.<sup>1</sup> That the chronicle is preserved at all is due partly to the fact that Cassiodorus recommended it in his reading guide for monks, the *Institutiones* (c. 555), where it is included under the heading 'Christian Historians' (*Inst.* 1. 17). If you want to know which chroniclers to read, says Cassiodorus, then begin with Jerome's translation of Eusebius and his own continuation of Eusebius to 378. Of all the continuators of Jerome Cassiodorus recommends Marcellinus and Prosper, but in mentioning Marcellinus he digresses slightly to include some valuable and unique information which he had picked up while in Constantinople on Marcellinus' public career.

This is what Cassiodorus says:

Chronica vero...scripsit Graece Eusebius; quae transtulit Hieronymus in Latinum, et usque ad tempora sua deduxit eximie. hunc subsecutus est...Marcellinus Illyricianus, qui adhuc patricii Iustiniani fertur egisse cancellos, sed meliore conditione devotus a tempore <Theodosii> principis usque ad fores imperii triumphalis Augusti Iustiniani opus suum Domino iuvante perduxit, ut qui ante fuit in obsequio suscepto gratus, postea ipsius imperio copiose amantissimus appareret (*Inst.* 1. 17. 2 ed. Mynors).

Although apparently straightforward, these lines have been continually misunderstood by scholars, not least because of a questionable editorial interpolation which has clouded the balance and structure of the passage.

It will be noticed that <Theodosii> does not exist in any manuscript of the *Institutiones* but was added by the first editor, Pamelius (1566), and has been accepted by all subsequent editors. Pamelius must have decided with the hindsight of a millennium that Cassiodorus' audience would not have understood from this passage the identity of the *princeps* in question or that the name had simply dropped out in transmission. Hence the insertion <Theodosii>.

Since Marcellinus' chronicle begins with the accession of Theodosius I in 379, 'Theodosii' would make perfect sense if Cassiodorus intended to say that after Marcellinus had been Justinian's *cancellarius* (early 520s) he wrote his *entire* chronicle from the accession of Theodosius I, and not just the continuation from 519 to 534. But Cassiodorus does not seem to be saying this at all. The structure of the passage seems clear.

As to chronicles, says Cassiodorus, there is that of Jerome first of all. After Jerome there is the chronicle of Marcellinus ('hunc subsecutus est...Marcellinus'), that is, the original edition to 518. This Marcellinus is said to have been a *cancellarius* to Justinian while the latter was still a patrician (523–7), but when Justinian became emperor ('melior conditione') Marcellinus displayed his loyalty by *continuing* ('perduxit') his own chronicle ('opus suum') from the time of the 'princeps' to the

<sup>1</sup> For Marcellinus' career see: Mommsen's introduction to his edition, MGH. AA. t. xi (Berlin, 1894), pp. 41–2; 'Marcellinus 9' *PLRE* II (1980) pp. 710–11; M. Schanz, C. Hosius and G. Krüger, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur* iv. 2 (Munich, 1920) pp. 110–112.

early part of the triumphal reign of Justinian Augustus. Who, then, was the 'princeps'? Surely Justin I (518–27), for it was Justin I not Theodosius I who was *princeps* when Justinian was still a *patricius*. Moreover, it was from the reign of Justin I that Marcellinus *continued* ('perduxit') his chronicle. If the name of the *princeps* has dropped out of the text, it seems to be <Iustini> which must be restored, not <Theodosii>.

It remains possible, of course, that Cassiodorus was being clumsy and telescoped his account without bothering to differentiate between the continuation of the chronicle from the emperor 'Justin' and the complete chronicle from 'Theodosius', but on balance it is safer to suppose an editorial error which has subsequently gone unnoticed.

This is not the only misunderstanding to have arisen from this passage. It has always been assumed on the basis, it seems, of the phrase 'melior condicione devotus' that Marcellinus must have become a monk after retiring from the service of Justinian.<sup>2</sup> Once again it is the structure of the passage which clarifies the meaning. Cassiodorus contrasts Marcellinus and Justinian both before and after 527 in a carefully balanced sentence: 'adhuc...sed' corresponds neatly and directly to 'ante...postea'. What he is saying is that Marcellinus was *cancellarius* while Justinian was still a patrician but in Justinian's 'better condition', that is after he became emperor, the loyal ('devotus') Marcellinus continued his chronicle to the greater glory of the new emperor. He who was profusely grateful when in Justinian's service ('ante') became most attached to his rule when Justinian assumed the purple ('postea').

It would appear to do violence to the precision and balance of Cassiodorus' Latin to construe 'melior conditio' as referring to Marcellinus rather than Justinian. In any case, 'melior condicione devotus', according to the usage of Cassiodorus, is not an obvious circumlocution for 'monk'.<sup>3</sup> We must therefore reject *Inst.* 1. 17. 2 as evidence to support the notion that Marcellinus compiled his chronicle as a monk, and emend <Theodosii> to <Iustini>.

Macquarie University, Sydney

BRIAN CROKE

<sup>2</sup> e.g. Mommsen op. cit. p. 42; J. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire* (London, 1923), ii. 39 n. 2; U. Moricca, *Storia della letteratura latina cristiana* iii. 2 (Turin, 1943), p. 1361; A. Momigliano, 'Gli Anicii e la storiografia latina del vi secolo d.C.', *Entretiens sur l'Antiquité Classique*, vol. 4 (Geneva, 1956), p. 276.

<sup>3</sup> For Cassiodorus' use of these words: M. Ennis, *The Vocabulary of the Institutiones of Cassiodorus* (Washington D.C. 1939), esp. p. 41. The phrase 'melior condicione' is correctly (I believe) interpreted by L. W. Jones, *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings by Cassiodorus Senator* (New York, 1946), p. 117 as 'upon the improvement of his employer's civil status'.