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PROBA'S CENTO: ITS DATE, PURPOSE, AND RECEPTION

It may seem faintly absurd to claim or imply that a Vergilian cento has suffered unjustified neglect from scholars. These works—of which there are sixteen, covering a period of over three centuries within Late Antiquity[1]—are usually treated at best with amused tolerance, and at worst (as in the new *Anthologia Latina*)[2] with angry disdain. Though always ingenious, sometimes funny, and occasionally informative about the reception of Vergil, they are seldom admired. Even among Italian scholars, some of whom have paid much attention to centos, a recession has set in since the *annus mirabilis* of 1981, which saw two editions of the *Medea* of Hosidius Geta.[3] Proba has, deservedly, attracted more attention than most; her aims and methods as a Christian poetess were carefully and illuminatingly studied twenty years ago by Reinhard Herzog,[4] and her interest as a female Roman aristocrat has brought her further attention, especially in recent years.[5] The main aim of the present article is to suggest a particular context and a serious purpose for her cento. A postscript will show that it went on to enjoy considerable popularity until the end of the century, and an introductory section will discuss its date, but very briefly, since Matthews has convincingly said most of what needs to be said about a recent attempt to redate it.[6] Proba's preface, much of it not in cento form, calls for detailed treatment from various angles—textual, literary, historical—and will be explored in a separate article.

THE DATE

Before Shanzer wrote the work was generally dated to the 350s or 360s, on the basis of information supplied by the manuscripts. Shanzer claimed, first, that the manuscript *subscriptiones* (sic) do not deserve the reliance that has been placed on them, and secondly, that the work was written after the *Carmen contra paganos*, which cannot (as she argued) be earlier than 384 or later than 385.[7] Both lines of argument lead her to assert that the authoress is not Faltonia Betitia Proba (Proba 2 in *PLRE*), as traditionally assumed, but her granddaughter Anicia Faltonia Proba (Proba 3); and that since the statements which point to the elder Proba are 'muddled' and 'arbitrarily imported' at some stage, this is not at odds with the best of the evidence. Matthews has demonstrated that the statement that Proba was the wife of

[1] See F. Ermini, *Il centone di Proba e la poesia centonaria Latina* (Rome, 1909), pp. 42–55.

[2] *Anthologia Latina 1.* 1: D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed.), (Stuttgart, 1982), *Praefatio* p. III.

[3] For the bibliography relevant to both Geta and Proba, see the article on Proba by R. Herzog in R. Herzog (ed.), *Restauration und Erneuerung: Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr.* (Munich, 1989), pp. 337–40, and F. E. Consolino, 'Da Osidio Geta ad Ausonio e Proba: le molte possibilità del centone', *Atene e Roma* ns 28 (1983), pp. 133–51.

[4] R. Herzog, *Die Bibelepik der Lateinischen Spätantike* 1 (Munich, 1975), pp. xlix–li and 3–51.

[5] M. R. Salzmann, *Helios* 16 (1989), 207–20, and H. Sivan, *Vigiliae Christianae* 47 (1993), 140–57.

[6] J. F. Matthews, 'The Poetess Proba and Fourth Century Rome: questions of interpretation' in Christol, M., Demougin, S., Duval, Y., Lepelley, C., Pietri, L., (edd.), *Institutions, Société, et Vie politique dans l'Empire Romain au ive siècle ap. J.-C.*, pp. 277–304 (Rome, 1992) (this appeared when an earlier version of this paper had been completed), taking issue with D. Shanzer, 'The anonymous *carmen contra paganos* and the Date and Identity of the centonist Proba', *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 32 (1986), pp. 232–48.

[7] Shanzer, pp. 237–44. For the CCP, see *Anthologia Latina* 4 Riese, 3 Shackleton Bailey.

Adelphius, *praefectus urbis Romae* or in one version *ex praefecto* (he held the honour in 351), which is made by Isidore,[8] by the manuscript *Vat. Pal. Lat.* 1753[9] and by the so-called *codex Mutinensis*,[10] comes from a source which was unusually accurate, and one with which Isidore had a demonstrable connection.[11] The statement in the *codex Mutinensis* that Proba had earlier written of the war of Constantius (so Seeck for the manuscript's *Constantini*)[12] against Magnentius does not sound like a medieval fiction—it is hardly comparable, as Shanzer claims, with the idea of Remigius of Auxerre that Martianus Capella went to Rome and met Cicero[13]—and Matthews has shown that it fits the historical context suggested by the opening lines of her preface perfectly well. It is the information that points in a different direction that needs to be sceptically examined. First, there is the phrase *Aniciorum mater* in *Vat. Pal. Lat.* 1753, which, unless (as Matthews suggests with some hesitation) it is taken to mean 'the *doyenne* of the Anician *gens*', clearly points to Proba 3. This is surely a gloss, both intrusive and obtrusive, for until the new sentence begins, with the words *praedicta Proba*, any descriptive epithets ought to be in the genitive case.[14] Presumably it originated in the heyday of the younger Proba. Secondly, it is stated not only in a marginal comment on line 689 of the poem in *Vat. Reg. Lat.* 1666[15] but also in *Taurinensis* F IV 7[16], that Proba was wife of Alypius, which is not true of any known Proba. Matthews was right to point out that the marginal comment has no intrinsic connection with the attribution of the poem in the same manuscript to Faltonia Betitia Proba, so refuting Shanzer's assertion that the manuscript is 'not even self-consistent', but some explanation of it is required. I suggest that it is the result of the insidious kind of error known as *saut du même au même*. A scribe reading something like *uxor Adelphi mater Olibrii et Aliepii* (as the *codex Mutinensis* has it) might easily have jumped from the second word to the sixth and so condemned his readers and copyists to an error which they could not correct or even suspect. Thirdly, we find in a medieval catalogue of the Abbey of Lobbes the entry *Centon Valeriae Aniciae de vigiliis veteris ac novi testamenti*.[17] *Vigiliis* is demonstrably a corruption of *Vergilii*

[8] *De viris illustribus* 18; *Etymologiae* 1. 39. 26.

[9] *incipiunt indicula centonis probae inlustris romanae aniciorum mater De Maronis qui et virgilii mantuani vatis libris praedicta proba, uxor adelphy expraefecto urbis hunc centon religiosa mente amore Christi spiritu ferventi prudenter enucliate defloravit*, as recorded by A. Reifferscheid in *Sitzungsberichte der Kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Wien) phil.-hist. Classe*, LVI (1867), p. 552.

[10] *Proba uxor Adelphi mater Olibrii et Aliepii, cum Constantini bellum adversus Magnentium conscripsisset, conscripsit et hunc librum*, recorded by B. de Montfaucon, *Diarium Italicum* (Paris, 1702), p. 36. This and other manuscript texts are quoted from K. Schenkl's edition (*Poetae Christiani Minores*, *CSEL* 16, (Prague, Vienna, Leipzig, 1888), pp. 511–609. As Matthews shows (279), Montfaucon found it at the abbey of S. Benedictus Padolirensis, now San Benedetto Po.

[11] Pp. 285–8.

[12] O. Seeck, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi Quae Supersunt*, (*MGH AA* VI 1), p. xcv; the names are also confused in manuscripts of Ausonius, *Grat. Act.* 53–4, and elsewhere.

[13] Shanzer, p. 233 n. 4.

[14] *inlustris* may also be a gloss, not of course on grammatical grounds, but because it is more appropriate to the later fourth century (Matthews, p. 290 n. 24) than the middle. This is no problem, since even if the words *Aniciorum mater* were written in the lifetime of Proba 3 the interval before the addition of the gloss need not be a long one.

[15] *ut colant (Christum) omnes, ut adorent, hortatur (Proba), imo etiam et Alipyum virum suum id facere monet.*

[16] *Probae Alipii uxoris cento.* The manuscript was briefly reported by Schenkl, who had received various information about it from his friend J. Müller but uses it nowhere else; see also C. Cipolla, G. de Sanctis and C. Frati in *RFIC* 32 (1904), p. 568.

[17] F. Dolbeau, 'Un nouveau catalogue des manuscrits de Lobbes aux xie et xiie siècles', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 14 (1979), p. 219 (no. 238).

libris or something similar; *Valeriae* is likely to be a trivialisation of *Vetitiae* or of some corruption of it, while *Aniciae* may be due to the abovementioned error *Aniciorum mater*, whether as an inference or a palaeographical development from it, or to some other reflection of Proba 3. Whatever the value of the catalogue's testimony in this case, the name Anicia is a small thing to set against the other pieces of evidence now convincingly reinstated.

The diversity of this manuscript information, then, is not due to 'medieval importation' or free fantasy, as Shanzer suggested, but to various familiar kinds of scribal corruption, including an early gloss. To this extent we may almost agree with Shanzer's hyperbole that 'confusion is apparent in the manuscripts from the very start'.[18] And indeed, viewed as a whole, the manuscript evidence on this point could fairly be described 'muddled'; but the patient analysis of muddle can be very illuminating, especially when as here a core of good information emerges. The fact that the ascription to Proba 2 is also rather 'sporadic' is not a problem; it is typical of scribes to be selective in such circumstances, as almost any set of *tituli* introducing an ancient writer will show.

Shanzer's second line of argument is that line 17 of Proba's preface (which until line 24 is not a cento) *iurgantesque deos procerum victosque penates* alludes to the *Carmen contra paganos*, where the same phrase *iurgantesque deos* in line 22 is followed by *proceres* (vocative) in the next line. Although some might reject the parallel as insignificant or derive it from a hypothetical common source, the exact identity of wording and metrical position are certainly notable. The matter deserves fuller attention than can be given here, including a full examination of the context and some questioning of the transmitted text, but for the time being two points, one general and one particular, can be made. First, the mode of allusion is one sense fuller, and in another weaker, than one would expect. In such cases verbal similarity (*iurgantesque deos*) is generally reckoned to be enough, but Proba evidently thought that *procerum* should be added in case it were missed; yet *procerum* in itself is not exactly very explicit. Would it convey to a reader not already alerted to the echo that here was an allusion to *CCP*? Secondly, since Proba is steeped in Vergil one might suggest a Vergilian sense and reference for her *procerum*: the founder-fathers of the Roman state. To point out that the Roman pantheon was prone from the outset to internal dissension and bickering (the Trojans had been bidden to include Juno in their worship) is a very good point to make in the context.

The case for Proba 2 is not put in jeopardy by the scornful comments of Jerome in a letter to Paulinus of Nola,[19] in which he laments that centos were penned by all sorts of inadequates: *hanc (scripturarum ars) garrula anus, hanc delirus senex, hanc soleocista verbosus, hanc universi praesumunt, lacerant, docent, antequam discant. alii adducto supercilio grandia verba trutinantes inter mulierculas de sacris litteris philosophantur, alii discunt—pro pudor!—a feminis, quod viros doceant, et, ne parum hoc sit, quadam facilitate verborum, immo audacia, disserunt aliis quod ipsi non intellegunt.* It is indeed quite likely that there is a reference to Proba behind the stereotype of the *garrula anus*—she seems to be quoted later in this passage,[20] though in a cento one can never be completely sure—but the present tense should not be

[18] Shanzer, p. 235, n. 22.

[19] *Ep.* 53.7. On the date and circumstances, see P. Nautin, *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 19 (1973), pp. 213–30.

[20] See P. Courcelle, 'Les Exégèses Chrétiennes de la Quatrième Eglogue', *Revue des Etudes Anciennes*, 59 (1957), pp. 309–10.

taken to imply that she was active or even alive in 394.[21] Satire is more effective if set in the present; much better to give the idea that people are doing it all the time than to specify the real grievance. As will be seen later, Jerome had a good reason at this particular time to warn his correspondent against a work written a generation earlier.

Nor is it at odds with the presumed historical context, but on the contrary, as Matthews has shown, Proba 2 fits rather well. Adelphius was indeed *praefectus urbis* under the usurper Magnentius in 351, but neither this nor the statement of Ammianus[22] that he became suspect to the usurper need rule out the possibility that his wife wrote a poem about the conflict with Constantius.[23] Certainly the first two lines of Proba's preface seem if anything pro-Constantinian: *iamdudum temerasse duces pia foedera pacis, regnandi miseros tenuit quos dira cupido*.... The '*duces*' have violated a state of peace, and so look like the usurping forces; their desire to rule is, in some sense, '*dira*'.[24] The remainder, it is true, emphasises the total slaughter and mayhem, though the expression of line 6, which breaks up the flow of Lucanian rhetoric, raises problems that are more than stylistic. If there is a reference to Constantius' triumph (as it is described in Ammianus) in Rome in 357, a date slightly later than that of Matthews would be necessary; and if it is hostile to the emperor then this line, though not necessarily the poem about the civil war, might be thought to follow Constantius' death. But whatever the nuances of the preface, or the nature of the earlier poem, there is no good reason not to set it somewhere in the decade or so after Adelphius' urban prefecture.

THE PURPOSE OF THE CENTO

Centos are essentially a frivolous genre, but Proba is not writing for fun. She emerges as a serious and earnest writer, [25] one who uses Vergil with discrimination and is not afraid to 'correct' him when necessary.[26] It is not her concern to build bridges on which pagans and Christians may meet, as Minucius Felix tried to do. Nor does she resort to Vergil for proof-texts. In one of the few articles to touch on the strategy of this cento, Wiesen[27] sought to present her work as a development of a process which he found in germ in the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, where at 19.2–3 the apologist seems tacitly to combine two Vergilian texts (*G.* 4.221f. and *A.* 1.743) to suit his purpose. But whatever the explanation of that,[28] there is a world of difference not only in scale but also in purpose between Proba's arduous endeavour and this isolated phenomenon in Minucius. Proba is not using Vergil to elucidate or commend complexities of Christian theology; most of the time she uses him to describe things which do not require explanation, such as riches and storms. And she is obviously not an anticipator of Fulgentius, treating Vergil as a 'code' to be 'deciphered'.[29] She is not allegorising Vergil, and nowhere suggests that she has penetrated to a level of meaning which others have missed. So what exactly was she up to?

[21] It is not known when Proba 2 died; Proba 3 was alive in 410.

[22] Ammianus 16. 6. 2.

[23] Matthews, pp. 291–9, against Shanzer, p. 235, n. 22 (end).

[24] For *dira cupido* cf. Verg. *G.* 1.37 (preceded by *regnandi*), and *A.* 6.373 and 721, 9.185.

[25] As noted by I. Opelt in her useful article 'Der zürnende Christus im Cento der Proba', *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 7 (1964), pp. 106–116, at p. 114, Proba adds to the Sermon on the Mount a denunciation of idolatry.

[26] Her discrimination may be seen in her use of the Fourth Eclogue (cf. P. Courcelle, op. cit., pp. 294–319; Opelt, op. cit., p. 109); and her readiness to correct Vergil in line 25 of the Preface.

[27] D. S. Wiesen, *Hermes* 99 (1971), p. 72.

[28] Wiesen, agreeing with P. Courcelle, *Archives d'Histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire du Moyen Age* 22 (1955), p. 39, maintains that this is deliberate (pp. 86–7).

[29] Wiesen, p. 72.

It is as well to avoid such generalisations as 'such was the intellectual climate of the fourth century'[30] (one recalls Gibbon's vague pontification on 'the taste of the age' when dismissing Ausonius) and to set aside colourful words about 'redeeming epic' or the redemption of humanity through epic.[31] Nor should Vergil be enrolled too hastily among the ranks of Christians,[32] or said to be 'baptized'.[33] We do indeed have a sort of 'symbiosis of Christianity and classical culture',[34] but a very strange one. Why resort to this bizarre and essentially playful form, one despised then as well as now, rather than (for example) compiling a philosophical dialogue like Minucius or metaphrasing the Bible into epic hexameters as Juvencus did? A writer seeking a challenge should not have found it difficult to improve on either of these. Chronology offers the basis of an answer: the date to which Proba's cento now seems firmly anchored suggests that the context may well be the reign of Julian. This was suggested long ago by Amatucci,[35] albeit on the basis of the false reading *natis* in line 12 and vague surmises about the age of her sons. Amatucci linked the cento to Julian's notorious law which forbade Christian teachers of grammar and rhetoric to practise in schools (*C. Th.* 13.3.5), and saw line 23 (*Vergilium cecinisse loquar pia munera Christi*) as a riposte to Julian's scornful suggestion in his letter on the subject (*Ep.* 61 Bidez, 36 Wright) that Christians should go to their churches and teach Matthew and Luke. The drift of his very compressed argument is not at all clear, but the idea deserves further exploration.

The extant version of the law (*C. Th.* 13.3.5) reads as follows: *Magistros studiorum doctoresque excellere oportet moribus primum, deinde facundia. Sed quia singulis civitatibus adesse ipse non possum, iubeo quisque docere vult, non repente nec temere prosiliat ad hoc munus, sed iudicio ordinis probatus decretum curialium mereatur, optimorum conspirante consensu. Hoc enim decretum ad me tractandum referetur, ut altiore quodam honore nostra iudicia studiis civitatum accedant.* The first sentence, which is all that concerns us now, is remarkably bland: of course teachers should not be the sort of people to rob, seduce, murder, or otherwise harm their charges—though often the boot (so to speak) seems to have been on the other foot in the classrooms of Late Antiquity. The priority of *mores* is, however, significant; the law of eighteen months later which repealed this one begins *si quis erudiendis adulescentibus vita pariter et facundia idoneus erit* (*C. Th.* 13.3.6). Although we do not know the exact relation between the letter of Julian and the version of the law that we possess, we may assume that the letter is a good representation of the thinking behind his measure. This leaves one in no doubt why Julian's law was greeted with such indignation by Gregory of Nazianzen, Ammianus, and others.[36] Julian begins by defining *paideia* not as a matter of words but as a healthy disposition of a sensible mind, one which can distinguish good and evil. There is nothing extraordinary here (cf. Hor. *S.* 1.6.63 and Ausonius, IX. 9); what is novel, and aggressively so, is the subsequent accusation of moral inconsistency cast at Christian teachers on the grounds that they were teaching

[30] Wiesen, p. 84.

[31] F. E. Consolino, op. cit. (n. 3), p. 148.

[32] As by Herzog (op. cit. n. 3), p. 339.

[33] As by J. Fontaine, *Naissance de la poésie dans l'occident chrétien* (Paris, 1981), p. 105.

[34] R. A. Markus, 'Paganism, Christianity and the Latin Classics in the Fourth Century', in J. W. Binns (ed.), *Latin Literature of the Fourth Century* (London, 1974), p. 3.

[35] A. G. Amatucci, *Storia della Letteratura Latina Cristiana* (Turin, 1955), p. 131.

[36] Greg. Naz. *Or.* IV. 5 and 101/2, V. 39; Amm. 22.10.7, 25.4.20. These and other references are conveniently given by J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Imperatoris Caesaris Flavii Claudii Iuliani Epistulae Leges Poematia Fragmenta Varia* (Paris and London, 1922), pp. 69–75; and the article of B. C. Hardy 'The Emperor Julian and his school law' in *Church History* 37 (1968), 131–43, begins with a survey of reactions to the measure.

things in which they did not believe. The age-old question about the existence and nature of the gods is begged and resolved into a moral one, and the Christians reduced by Julian to the moral status of back-street traders and con-men. To remedy this unsatisfactory situation Julian offers the Christian teachers a choice. Though the text is not at all clear at this point, the first possibility is clear enough: they should not teach something which they do not take seriously. The alternative seems to be to persuade their pupils that neither Homer nor Hesiod nor any of the poets whom they expound is guilty of Christian charges, whether they be charges of impiety, stupidity, and error (so Wright, moulding the words κατεγνώκοτες ἀσέβειαν ἄνοιάν τε καὶ πλάνην εἰς τοὺς θεούς into his text with many undeclared supplements) or just of stupidity (Bidez, giving a paraphrase in French rather than trying to heal a badly lacerated text). In fact—although the appeal by the government to the 'consumer' may have to modern ears the ring of authenticity—the exact detail of this challenge to Christian teachers may have been, in Julian's eyes, ultimately unimportant; for the choice given a little later to the Christians seems to imply that any such persuasion would be unsuccessful. 'Let them imitate the poets' piety to the gods, or if they assume them to have erred in their attitude to the most precious beings, let them go to the churches of the Galileans to expound Matthew and Luke' (423 d). Whatever followed in the text—Bidez attributes the blank in the manuscript to the disgust of a Christian scribe—this reads rather like Marie Antoinette's insultingly impossible 'let them eat cake'. Marrou, it is true, made Julian the creator of the first Christian schools in antiquity (prefacing his statement with the surprising words 'sans paradoxe'), but on his own evidence these were very slow to appear.[37] In fact the alternative course of setting up Christian schools, whether in churches or somewhere else, was not only one that was not pursued at this juncture (this is hardly surprising, since the law was soon repealed) but one that Christians of this period could hardly have envisaged. The best evidence that it was unthinkable is that of Augustine's blueprint for Christian teaching and learning, his *De Doctrina Christiana*. In the first part of this work, which he wrote at the end of the fourth century, Augustine sought to prescribe the intellectual equipment necessary for a complete understanding of scripture, in a programme that is very similar to that of traditional education. He makes no institutional provision for its acquisition, and at least in the case of history (2. XXVII. 41 [104]) and logic (2. XXXI. 48 [120]) is not concerned whether these things are learnt in a Christian or a pagan environment. He seems to assume, notwithstanding the reservations that he so graphically expressed in his *Confessions*, that most Christians will go along to the grammatical schools and loot the Egyptians from an early age. In the second part of his treatise, written some thirty years later, he turns to rhetoric and allows that although rhetoric may be learnt exclusively from Christian texts young people who wish to learn rhetoric may learn it from secular texts, following the traditional rules, if they have the time (4. III. 4–5 [6–13]). Again, no specific institutional framework is considered. Evidence from John Chrysostom points the same way: although he sees the dangers of traditional education, he does not recommend the avoidance of pagan schools.[38] A Christian school seems not to be an option for the large numbers involved, and it is unlikely that Julian thought it a practical possibility; or if he did, he may have mischievously entertained the possibility that educated Christian teachers would bicker over the interpretation of scripture and so frustrate their own efforts.

[37] H.-I. Marrou, *Histoire de l'Education dans l'Antiquité* (Paris, 1948), p. 428.

[38] John Chrysostom, *adv. oppugn. vit. mon.* 3.12 (PG 47.367), partially quoted by P. Athanassiadi-Fowden, *Julian and Hellenism: an intellectual biography* (Oxford, 1981), p. 1.

It is easy to exaggerate the number of teachers in the Roman Empire (for example, it is debatable whether a decent sized city like Bordeaux had more than one chair of rhetoric),[39] but there can be no doubt that the law aimed a savage blow at an élite. Most of its victims will have been less able to cope than Prohaeresius, Victorinus, and Ausonius.[40] They will have lost their *auditoria* (prominently mentioned in the repealing law), and their income; they will have lost a position of considerable status[41] and an important ladder to social advancement. As far as Christian pupils were concerned, it was seen as no less catastrophic. Bowersock is surely right to say 'within little more than a generation the educated élite of the empire would be pagan'.[42] Although later writers say that Christian pupils were debarred from the schools,[43] his letter makes it quite clear that Julian wanted them to remain under pagan influences. But they would be separated at a stroke from their Christian teachers, as Jerome implies when he describes Julian's vain concession to the Christian Prohaeresius with the words *cum sibi specialiter Iulianus concederet ut Christianos doceret*.[44] Keeping his chair and continuing to teach Christians were one and the same thing. Henceforth all pupils would be taught, if not by virulent pagans like Julian himself, by teachers who, whatever they might have done before, now had an incentive to take the gods seriously. It would be very difficult for a teacher to maintain a position of professional neutrality;[45] teachers who had soft-pedalled on Vergil's gods out of respect for Christian sensibilities (or because of their own scepticism) now had to give them more weight. This requirement might alienate some, but the majority would conform.

Various reactions to this crisis may be imagined. To rigorists the alternative of ignoring Homer and Vergil and the rest, and expounding Matthew and Luke in church premises or elsewhere to relatively small groups of willing students, may have seemed attractive. At least so it would appear from the remarks of such people as the earlier Tertullian and the contemporary John Chrysostom,[46] although none had benefited more from traditional education than these. But there is no evidence that such attitudes were strongly to the fore at this time. We do, however, have in Socrates and other writers details of an attempt to provide an alternative literature for the use of those who (as these writers wrongly believed) had been banned from state schools. Evidently a certain Apollinarius[47] set to and created a complete rival literature, classical in form but Christian in content. The father wrote a Christian grammar (one that did not draw on classical texts), and rewrote the Mosaic books and the historical works of the Old Testament partly in epic hexameters and partly in tragedies, while the younger put the New Testament into Platonic dialogues. Sozomen adds to their oeuvre comedies in the style of Menander and Pindaric odes. The Psalms are not mentioned; an extant fragment of an ancient Psalm paraphrase has been attributed

[39] See R. P. H. Green, *CQ* 35 (1985), 493–5 and A. D. Booth, *Phoenix* 36 (1982), 329–343.

[40] For Prohaeresius, see Jerome, *Chron. s.a.* 363, for Victorinus, Augustine, *Confessions* 8.5 (10), and for Ausonius the less clear-cut evidence assembled by R. P. H. Green in *CQ* 35 (1985), 502 and 505.

[41] Marrou, *Education*, 409–414, to be read against R. A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language: the grammarian and society in Late Antiquity* (University of California, 1988), pp. 99–134.

[42] G. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate* (London, 1978), p. 84.

[43] Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* 18.52, Socrates 3.16, Sozomen 5.18 (PG 67.419–21 and 1269–72).

[44] See n. 40.

[45] So R. Browning, *The Emperor Julian* (London, 1975), p. 173.

[46] Tertullian, *de Idol.* 10; for John Chrysostom, see n. 38.

[47] According to *RE* 1.2842–3 the younger Apollinarius, later to become the bishop of Laodicea, wrote all these works, since the father seems to have died about 360; but if that is true it is more likely that they were written before the crisis than that Socrates is confused. But the identification of poet and theologian is far from certain: see also *RAC* 1. 520–1.

to them, but this seems unlikely.[48] The aim of these compositions was obviously to preserve the stylistic and grammatical heritage of ancient Greek literature; in the words of Socrates ὅπως μηδεὶς τρόπος τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς γλώττης τοῖς χριστιανοῖς ἀνήκοος ᾖ. In his eyes the main loss to Christian students would have been the arsenal of arguments that were deployed for paganism and against Christianity, arguments which—as Gregory has said—showed the weakness of paganism and could be used by Christians to demolish it. But, at least in the mid-fifth century, the programme of the Apollinarii had great ideological appeal, for Socrates finds it necessary to defend at some length his belief that they were second best, and Sozomen showers great praise on these hastily compiled ersatz classics. Indeed, after reading Sozomen, one wonders why Christians ever went back to the classics. But they did, and the works of the Apollinarii were in Socrates' time virtually unknown: ἐν ἴσῳ τοῦ μὴ γραφῆναι λογίζονται.

These works were not centos; Proba's work on the other hand was, and follows a rather different path. Again there is the aim to preserve the grammar, metre, style, and vocabulary of the ancient text. But why recycle Vergil, and why cast him in this particular mould? If necessary, the work of Juvencus, which seems to have been quite well-known, could have served; his recipe might obviously be applied to other scriptures. It does not seem that the cento was particularly fashionable at this time: most of the extant ones are later. Vergil was of course immensely popular, but so was Homer, and yet Apollinarius had not felt it necessary to go to the length of preserving his exact words. It seems that Proba was not concerned with providing an alternative literature like the Apollinarii; nor is it for a moment likely that she was simply disguising Christian material to elude the censors, in the way that bibles disguised as *Das Kapital* used to be smuggled into communist countries. Her aim, I suggest, was to try to meet Julian halfway and keep Christian teachers in their classrooms. Her text (as implied in the prologue) is a Vergil without gods, and so a Vergil no longer vulnerable to Christian criticism. The language given to the gods may be used, as in lines 29–30, but it is put to new purposes. Vergil's verses had been detoxified by being sundered from their contexts[49] or—as in the case of the few lines which in themselves were morally or theologically offensive—ignored. If teachers used this as a textbook they might persuade their students that they did not regard the Vergil represented here as impious (or stupid, or misguided) towards the gods, and so, in Julian's terms, they could safeguard their moral integrity. (In this light one may detect irony in Proba's claim in line 12 of her preface to be a *vatis proba*). It was of course a poor substitute for the real Vergil, and indeed a drastic bowdlerisation; but in a time of crisis might have seemed a possible way out. At least in some places it might convince the *curiae* to whom the law had given the task of approving teachers in accordance with the imperial blueprint: in Rome Proba would have a good chance of aristocratic support, and elsewhere there would be Christian councils who would do what they could to frustrate or delay the law. And as well as meeting this crisis, albeit at a cost that seems to us very great, Proba had gone on the offensive and incorporated an outline of Christian teaching, not without her own emphases,[50] on the important early chapters of Genesis and the life, death and ascension of Christ.

[48] Good grounds for not doing so are offered by A. Ludwich, *Hermes* 13 (1878), 335–50, and J. Golega, 'Der Homerische Psalter' (*Studia Patristica et Byzantina* 6: Ettal, 1960), pp. 5–24 and 169–171.

[49] This is not entirely true, as noted by Herzog in his study of the cento (*Bibelepik*, 15–35), but the longer scenes which she evokes do not involve matters of doctrinal substance.

[50] See the article of I. Opelt cited in n. 25.

But supposing it satisfied Julian and his administration on political grounds, could it stand the educational test? Would it work? Was it worth teaching? Of course, much was lost, but the new text could have served a grammatical purpose very well. One can agree with Clark and Hatch that 'Children might then learn Vergilian Latin without needing to hear of Dido's passion or of bloody warfare';[51] or, one must add, the gods. To judge from the *Confessions*, the absence of Carthage and Dido would certainly not have worried Augustine. Christian children so taught would also forfeit a knowledge of what Ausonius referred to as *μύθους, πλάσματα et historiam*;[52] fiction and myth would be if anything a welcome loss to Christian educationalists, while *historiae*—by which one should understand allusions of all kinds, concerning such things as genealogy, religion, topography and so on—would hardly be missed, especially in a basically fictional text. So much for *enarratio auctorum* or *historice*: but the other main aim of *grammatice, ratio loquendi*,[53] could still be carried out. The young could still learn their basic grammar from this text. Little of what Quintilian recommended would be lost, and little of the sixfold function listed by Dionysius Thrax:[54] *πρῶτον ἀνάγνωσις ἐντριβὴς κατὰ προσῳδίαν, δεύτερον ἐξήγησις κατὰ τοὺς ἐνυπάρχοντας ποιητικοὺς τρόπους, τρίτον γλωσσῶν τε καὶ ἱστοριῶν πρόχειρος ἀπόδοσις, τέταρτον ἐτυμολογίας εὕρεσις, πέμπτον ἀναλογίας ἐκλογισμός, ἕκτον κρίσις ποιημάτων, ὃ δὴ κάλλιστον ἐστι πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ τέχνῃ*. The last mentioned, *pace* Browning,[55] was more aesthetic than ethical, at least if Quintilian is a guide;[56] but moral teaching of a sort—no less profound than the simple comments found in Servius—could still be performed by pointing out examples of *pietas*, courage and so forth in the etiolated text. In fact it looks as if moral or 'psychological' comment did not bulk large in a commentary: a survey of a sample of Servius' notes puts only one eighth of them into this category.[57] Nothing more than this could be expected from the *grammaticus*[58] even by Julian, who, as has been seen, had a rather different interest in morality. Proba's Vergil was, of course, a much abbreviated one, shorter than the shortest book of the *Aeneid*, but this should not have been an impediment to elementary learning. If all ancient teachers went through the text at the speed implied by Priscian's *Partitiones*[59] ('How many caesurae are there? What are they?... How many parts of speech are there?... How many nouns?', and so on, for each and every verse), it might not have mattered at all.

It is unlikely that Proba thought that the idea might be extended to other authors. In Lucan the gods would hardly be a problem; there was no need to work on him. Likewise the popular prose authors Cicero and Sallust could be read in large swathes without theological offence. Pastoral would later prove amenable to adaptation; but authors such as Terence and Horace, Persius or Juvenal, although variously used and imitated by subsequent Christian writers, hardly lend themselves to centonization. The transformed and sanitized Vergil, intended to serve the humble needs of the *grammaticus*, would thus have been the only work of its peculiar kind, but it could easily be accompanied by other texts from the repertoire of classical literature,

[51] E. A. Clark and D. F. Hatch, *The Golden Bough, the Oaken Cross: the Vergilian cento of Faltonia Betitia Proba* (American Academy of Religion: Texts and Translations 5 [1981]), pp. 7–8.

[52] Ausonius, *Prof.* 21.16, in the most recent text.

[53] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 1.9.1.

[54] *Dionysii Thracis Ars Grammatica*, in *Grammatici Graeci*, G. Uhlig (ed.), (Leipzig, 1883), sect. 1.

[55] R. Browning, *The Emperor Julian*, (London, 1975), p. 171.

[56] Quintilian *IO* 1.9.17, with F. H. Colson, *CQ* 8 (1914), 44f.

[57] R. R. Bolgar, *The Classical Heritage and its Beneficiaries* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 396 (n. 41).

[58] See Seneca, *Ep.* 88.3, admittedly a rather exaggerated account of the gap between *grammaticus* and philosopher.

[59] *Grammatici Latini* (Keil), 3.459–515.

provided that Christians were not presented with such things as the scene in Terence's *Eunuchus* which so scandalized Augustine[60] and that references to pagan gods which might embarrass sensitive pagans—as for example in Plautus' *Amphitryo*—were avoided. In an emergency, then, the cento could have been a useful educational instrument, even if it stood alone, and it is not unreasonable to argue that Proba designed it as such. The later Christian writers already quoted provide a brief but graphic testimony to Christian panic at Julian's decree; what seems to us an illuminating but eccentric blip on the screen of fourth-century history must have seemed to them a wicked attempt to put the clock back and perhaps the prelude to a lifetime of persecution. Desperate situations often elicit desperate remedies; but such things, when overtaken by events, are quickly forgotten, as Socrates tells us had virtually happened to the efforts of the Apollinarii. It is hardly surprising—especially since our knowledge of the period is patchy, Ammianus notwithstanding—that there is no direct evidence to confirm that Proba's cento was designed as such a remedy. What kept it alive when it was no longer needed was presumably her name and family, and the severe lack of Christian literature in classical forms.

But was not the cento just a literary game? Why look for a serious purpose? Many of the extant examples concern myths, and Proba's contemporary Ausonius, who presumably had a wider acquaintance with the genre than we do—but not necessarily, as will be seen, a knowledge of Proba's—thinks of the genre as comic. And although in its published form its original purpose as an epithalamium of sorts for Gratian[61] is not prominent, he had surely expected at least a few smiles, if not coarse laughs, from the well-read. Proba's work, by contrast, can hardly be seen as anything but perfectly serious if it is read in conjunction with her introduction, which may have been written with an awareness of Juvencus' preface, and certainly brings to bear a battery of Christian polemic.

A more considerable objection is that there is little or nothing in the preface to suggest that the work was designed to be a school textbook. The combativeness of the first half would hardly have commended it to the authorities, and can hardly belong to the same phase. The second part (lines 29–55)—which may have once stood alone—is more conciliatory; although the severe corruption of the text in lines 38–42 and the inherent distortions of the cento form make the train of thought hard to discern, she seems to be saying that Moses, like Vergil in his sixth eclogue, expounded the beginnings of the world. Its closing lines suggest a didactic purpose, but if in 55 *pueri innuptaeque puellae* suggest the schoolroom, the preceding words *matres atque viri* do not. But what, one might well ask, could Proba be expected to say in a verse preface if she was offering such an ingenious textbook? Its circumstances and the instructions for its use would have been better presented in a prose preface; this may well have happened, with the introduction as we know it coming from her pen a few years later, when the dust had subsided.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE CENTO

As Socrates put it, providence intervened, and it is impossible to know if this shrewd contribution to the debate had any effect in the year and a half before its repeal. Perhaps it did not, for even if Julian had been minded to debate the matter, the *curiae* entrusted with enforcing the law had their instructions, and pressure could easily be applied. It was conceivably studied by the young Paulinus and Prudentius, and one

[60] *Confessions* 1.16 (26).

[61] As suggested by R. P. H. Green, *The Works of Ausonius* (Oxford, 1991), p. 518.

may imagine the young Jerome, if indeed he was a schoolboy at the time Julian died,[62] delightedly flinging his copy of Proba out of the window when he heard the news: but such speculation is unprofitable. What is particularly interesting is that the cento—unlike the efforts of the Apollinarii in the East—survived, and was indeed popular; there is a surprisingly large amount of evidence. There is, admittedly, nothing (at least to the present writer) in the voluminous work of Ausonius, most of it written later than 362, unless one accepts as evidence the rather commonplace phrase *studiis hominum* in *Ep.* 3.17 Green (cf. *hominum studiis* in line 19 of Proba). But the briefer work of Damasus, who died in 384, is more productive. The usual assumption that he imitated Proba[63] is confirmed not only by the chronological data already defended, but by the nature of the echoes. A conservative list of these would include 1.16 (also 12.4) *ex hoste tropaea* (cf. Proba, line 5); 2.5 *pia foedera* (cf. Proba, line 1); 11.5 *penetralia cordis* (cf. Proba 11: also in Juvencus 4.7, as Shanzer noted); 18.7 (also 48.4) *foedera pacis* (cf. Proba, 1). Three of the abovementioned phrases derive from Lucan; and since, as we have seen, this author was familiar to Proba, but not to Damasus, who had evidently read or at least remembered little of classical authors,[64] it is overwhelmingly likely that Proba found the phrases in Lucan, and that Damasus took them from her. The pattern of echoes is also significant. If they were confined to one small work of Damasus, as Shanzer argued with the help of some unconvincing parallels of her own,[65] then one might contend that Proba was the imitator; but they are not.

Later in the century there is more abundant evidence. Another cento, the pastorally flavoured cento of Pomponius, may have been written at about this time.[66] Then there is the reference already noted—perhaps unconscious, but none the less eloquent for this purpose—in the anonymous *Carmen contra paganos*. This is not the place to enter into the debate about the date and posthumous victim of this amazing broadsheet: the leading candidates seem to be Praetextatus and Flavianus.[67] There are possible quotations of her cento in Claudian and Paulinus,[68] and, as already noted, the latter received a savage broadside from Jerome against centos in general, and perhaps Proba's in particular.[69] There is perhaps a further echo in Prudentius, *contra Symmachum* 1.276 *nectaris ambrosii*: of course *ambrosia* and *nectar* are often mentioned in the same breath, but this particular phrase, with the adjective *ambrosius*, seems to be matched only in line 13 of Proba.[70] Finally, there is the first preface to Proba's cento (this is not the work of Proba herself), in which Arcadius is asked to pass it on in due course *Arcadio minori*. From this rather strange phrase—which cannot refer to a brother, as might be expected—Seeck deduced that the name of

[62] *Comm. in Abacuc*, 3.14 (CCL 76A. 660). On the date of his birth, see J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: his life, writings and controversies* (London, 1975), pp. 337–9 and A. D. Booth, *Phoenix* 33 (1979), 346–53. [63] M. Ihm, *Rh. Mus.* NF 50 (1895), 195; Shanzer, 245.

[64] M. Manitius, *Rh. M.* NF 45 (1890), 316–17. [65] Shanzer, 245.

[66] For Pomponius, see Schenkl, op. cit. pp. 560f. and 609–615; and J. L. Vidal, *Revue des Etudes Augustiniennes* 29 (1983), p. 236. For the unity of Proba and Pomponius in transmission, see Matthews, op. cit., pp. 285–6.

[67] Shanzer produces some new evidence for the former (pp. 240–44), but the chronological problems will have to be discussed more clearly than they are in her n. 50. For the latter, see J. F. Matthews, *Historia* 19 (1970), 464–79, reprinted in his *Political Life and Culture in Late Roman Society* (London, 1985), as item VII. Another way to get round the lingering death in line 27 would be to take *rependat* as potential.

[68] Cf. Claudian 28.396 *scilicet ut Latio respersos sanguine currus* (*aspicerem*) and line 6; and Paulinus *c.* 10.25–8 *ciere surdum Delphica Phoebum specu, vocare Musas numina fandique munus munere indultum dei petere e nemoribus aut iugis* and lines 13–15. [69] Cf. n. 19.

[70] On the date of this work, see J. D. Harries, *Latomus* 43 (1984), 69–84.

Arcadius' son, the future Theodosius II, was not yet known, and made the *terminus ante quem* 401, the year of the child's birth.[71] This may be correct; there was certainly no metrical necessity to avoid the name Theodosius, which others happily incorporated into the hexameter with synizesis of the first two vowels. But perhaps the *terminus ante quem* should be set earlier, for if these words were written between June 397 and April 401 the scribe would have been passing over one or more of Arcadius' daughters; this is a little surprising, since it should not be assumed that such a book would not be read by young women—especially perhaps, unless this point is anachronistic, a book of female authorship. (It is interesting to note that the gift may have borne fruit in the Homeric centos of Eudocia, wife of Theodosius II).[72] The reference in *Arcadio minori*, then—which need not be taken as referring to a male—may be intended to cover any children that Arcadius might have; if so, the *terminus ante quem* is June 397, when Flacilla was born.

On this evidence the cento of Proba was known to Damasus, but particularly influential in the mid 390s. The evidence of imitation in any particular writer is scanty, and the similarities sometimes tenuous, but it is worth suggesting that the work was the subject of a revival, one inspired by the noble Christian family[73] or by the emperor Theodosius, who at least in his oily letter to Ausonius saw himself as a patron after the model of Augustus,[74] or perhaps indeed by both in concert.[75] A poem written under the difficult circumstances of the reign of Julian might have seemed relevant to the years during or immediately after the usurpation of Arbogast and Eugenius. And at this time Christian poetry was still rather exiguous and experimental (witness the efforts of Endelechius[76] and the early works of Paulinus of Nola; Ausonius, though important,[77] wrote little); Proba's cento will have filled a gap before Paulinus and Prudentius provided works of greater elegance and substance. With the new competence and confidence of Christian poets Christian taste developed a new sophistication, and at the same time Christian readers became more comfortable with their Vergil. In this new atmosphere it is likely that Proba quickly fell out of favour. It may be possible by close reading to extend the story of her influence into the fifth century, though it would be a difficult task, especially as the use of Vergilian phrases is so common: nothing, for example, should be inferred from the fact that both Proba and Sedulius use the phrase *nova progenies* of Christ.[78] It has often been remarked that at the end of the century Proba appears in the Gelasian list of apocryphal books,[79] this shows that she was not completely forgotten, but it does not show that the work was current, or even available. After that, it is clear from his notices that Isidore treats her as a curiosity, and in the following century, at Corbie, she shared a manuscript with the riddles of Symphosius and Aldhelm.[80] She may have been quite well known—Aldhelm uses one line of hers to illustrate a metrical point[81]—but her

[71] Seeck, (op. cit. n. 12), p. xcvi. [72] Zonaras 13. 23. 39.

[73] For their literary efforts see Shanzer, op. cit., p. 247.

[74] R. P. H. Green, *The Works of Ausonius*, p. 707.

[75] For a possible example of such literary co-operation, see R. P. H. Green, *Respublica Litterarum* 1 (1978), p. 94 (n. 16).

[76] *Anthologia Latina* 893 Riese, with W. Schmid, *Rh. M.* NF 96 (1953), 101–65.

[77] See now R. P. H. Green, 'Ausonius at Prayer' in Ayres, L. (ed.), *The Passionate Intellect, Essays Presented to I. G.Kidd* (New Brunswick, 1995), pp. 333–43.

[78] See P. Courcelle, op. cit., p. 298. Not that such inferences are always impossible; the fact that similar bits of Vergil are used in obscene contexts may be evidence that Ausonius' *Cento Nuptialis* was read in Africa by Luxorius (*Anth. Lat.* [Riese], 18. 64–5).

[79] See *PL* 59. 162 *centimetrum de Christo, Virgilianis compaginatum versibus, apocryphum.*

[80] Schenkl, op. cit., p. 516. Now St Petersburg Class. lat. F xiv 1.

[81] *Aldhelmi Opera*, R. Ehwald (ed.), (MGH *AA* 15: Berlin, 1919), p. 188, line 31.

work is well on the way to becoming a pleasant and harmless diversion; and so, notwithstanding its author's status as heroine in Boccaccio and Christine de Pisan, it has remained ever since. But in her heyday the situation was very different. In its generation her cento was hardly an 'entreprise chimérique'[82]

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[82] P. de Labriolle, *Histoire de la Littérature Latine Chrétienne* (Paris, 1920), p. 430. I am grateful to my colleagues Jill Harries and Harry Hine for reading earlier versions of this paper and making valuable suggestions, and to the *CQ* referee.