

# THE CAREER OF VIRIUS NICOMACHUS FLAVIANUS\*

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VIRIUS NICOMACHUS FLAVIANUS plays a considerable role in most modern accounts of the late fourth century. But his career presents unusual difficulties of chronology and interpretation, while the establishment of the dates of his terms in public office is a task usually (and wrongly) undertaken separately from an assessment of his actions in office, particularly those of the last years of his life. What is needed is searching re-examination of both Flavianus' career and its significance, with careful scrutiny of the evidence on which our knowledge rests.<sup>1</sup>

## I—FLAVIANUS' PUBLIC OFFICES

There are three sources for the dating of events in Flavianus' life, of various precision and quality. Epigraphic evidence furnishes the outline of his career; the law codes add fragments of specific information; and the letters of Symmachus provide some hard evidence, some imprecise hints, and a fair amount of information useless for our purposes.

Two separate inscriptions give Flavianus' *cursus honorum*. The first was erected by Q. Fabius Memmius Symmachus to Flavianus' memory as his *prosocer optimus*;<sup>2</sup> by thus alluding to Symmachus' marriage to Flavianus' granddaughter, the inscription demands a date of 401 or later.<sup>3</sup> This inscription gives the fullest outline of Flavianus' career and is

\*I owe a debt of gratitude to Professor T. D. Barnes for subjecting an earlier draft of this paper to his scrupulous examination. In the notes that follow I use several common ancient abbreviations for high officials of the later empire: *QSP*, *quaestor sacri palatii*; *CSL*, *comes sacrarum largitionum*; *PVR*, *praefectus urbi*; *PPO*, *praefectus praetorio*.

<sup>1</sup>This paper proposes a new set of dates for the offices held by Flavianus. Some earlier scholars have held that the term as *QSP* was followed immediately in 382/383 by a term as *PPO*; and that second and sometimes third terms as *PPO* are to be assigned to the years 390–394 (this position was advanced by Seeck in his edition of Symmachus; defended by W. Hartke, *Klio* 31 [1938] 430–436; and most recently held by J. P. Callu, *Mélanges d'histoire ancienne offerts à William Seston* (1974) 73–80—on which see note 40 below). The alternative position was also first proposed by Seeck, in his *Regesten* (1919), developed by H. L. Levy, *The Invective in Rufinum of Claudius Claudianus* (1935) 27–31 (reprinted in his *Claudian's In Rufinum* [1971] 245–249). These authors dated the terms as *QSP* and *PPO* all to the years 389–394. *PLRE* ostensibly adopted the second position, but did not do so consistently; see note 27 below. Finally, every history of the period treats (in often almost identical terms) Flavianus' actions in 393–394; the most recent is J. F. Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court, A.D. 364–425* (1975) 237–246.

<sup>2</sup>*CIL* 6.1782 (*ILS* 2947); this Symmachus is son of the orator and letter-writer.

<sup>3</sup>Symm. *Ep.* 4.14, 9.93–94. *PLRE* 1.347, following Dessau, dates the inscription to 394, erroneously.

not contradicted elsewhere. For convenience I give here the list of offices from that inscription and note a few pieces of corroborative evidence for non-controversial positions and dates.

*quaestor*  
*praetor*<sup>4</sup>  
*pontifex maior*<sup>5</sup>  
*consularis Siciliae*<sup>6</sup>  
*vicarius Africae*<sup>7</sup>  
*quaestor intra palatium*<sup>8</sup>  
*praefectus praetorio iterum*  
*consul ordinarius*  
*historicus disertissimus*<sup>9</sup>

The second inscription was erected by Flavianus' grandson, Appius Nicomachus Dexter, in 431, during the term as praetorian prefect for Italy, Illyricum, and Africa of Flavianus' son, Nicomachus Flavianus the younger.<sup>10</sup> The inscription contains the text of an imperial decree, issued in the name of Theodosius II and Valentinian III, honoring the elder Flavianus and completing the rehabilitation of his reputation after his involvement in Eugenius' usurpation of 392–394. The *cursus* given on the later, more official inscription is somewhat abbreviated, recording the following offices:

*consularis Siciliae*  
*vicarius Africae*  
*quaestor aulae divi Theodosii*  
*praefectus praetorio Italiae Illyrici et Africae iterum*

In the same inscription the younger Flavianus is identified as having been consular of Campania, proconsul of Asia, *praef. urbi saepius*, and now praetorian prefect. Elsewhere the younger Flavianus is identified as

<sup>4</sup>Both the ordinary quaestorship and the praetorship were very young men's honors at this time; Symmachus' son may have been about 9 and 17 respectively when he received them.

<sup>5</sup>This is the only religious post attributed to Flavianus, the same one attributed to Symmachus in *CIL* 6.1699 (*ILS* 2946); the parallel is discussed by J. F. Matthews, *JRS* 63 (1973) 187–188.

<sup>6</sup>In 365, as shown by Symm. *Ep.* 2.44; cf. also *Ep.* 2.27, alluding to the same office.

<sup>7</sup>In 376–377: Amm. Marc. 28.6.28. The citizens of Lepcis Magna honored Flavianus with an inscription (*Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, 475: from 377–378); while in office he received *CTh* 16.6.2 against Donatism. But he seems to have sided with the Donatists to such an extent that Augustine, writing in 405, mistook him for a Donatist himself (Aug. *Ep.* 87.8). See further J. Guey, *REA* 52 (1950) 77–89.

<sup>8</sup>That is, *QSP*, the lowest-ranking position carrying status as *illustris*.

<sup>9</sup>He wrote *Annales* (*CIL* 6.1783) and translated Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (Sid. Apoll. *Ep.* 8.3.1).

<sup>10</sup>*CIL* 6.1783 (*ILS* 2948).

*praefecto urbi iterum*,<sup>11</sup> *praefectus urbi iterum*,<sup>12</sup> and as *ter praef. urb.*<sup>13</sup>

On this information alone, controversy has occurred over the exact number of prefectures exercised by father and son. Briefly, it is held that offices held under the usurper Eugenius were a matter of embarrassment later; the *saepius* of the 431 inscription, therefore, is meant to conceal the first of the son's three terms as urban prefect. This theory arose, however, at a time when it was assumed that Nicomachus Flavianus the elder had himself held the praetorian prefecture three times and that the use of *iterum* in the 431 inscription is a similar device to conceal service under a usurper. It was never explained, however, why different devices would be used in the different cases, nor how *saepius* (an odd term to use in the *cursus* by any standards) would not have attracted rather than repelled suspicions.

The theory of censorship in the counting of prefectures arose, moreover, because of a legalistic omission elsewhere on the 431 inscription: the avoidance of any mention of the ordinary consulship of Flavianus the elder.<sup>14</sup> But since recognition of an ordinary consul by the reigning emperor was a necessary condition of getting his name on the fasti, the legal situation of a consulship held under a usurper was the same as if the office had never been held; hence a bureaucratic nicety with detail is responsible for the omission on the inscription.

It does not follow, however, that prefectures would be treated the same way, nor is the evidence of the inscriptions to be read as though they were. If, as is widely accepted today and as will be argued further below, Flavianus the elder did in fact only hold the praetorian prefecture twice, once under Theodosius and once under Eugenius, then his inscriptions are accurate on that point and therefore it is not plausible to assume that one of the same inscriptions has been censored on that same point where his son is concerned. If both surviving inscriptions which identify the son as urban prefect *iterum* are dated before his third term (in late 408), the evidence for his prefectures is consistent and complete. The odd term *saepius* in the 431 inscription then becomes merely a bit of boasting; the unwary reader might even assume that the number implied was larger than three, but would be unlikely to assume it was smaller.<sup>15</sup>

The epigraphic evidence, therefore, provides a list of offices held and

<sup>11</sup>*ILS* 8985; before 431, since no mention is made of his service as praetorian prefect.

<sup>12</sup>*AE* 1934.147 (under Arcadius, therefore between 395 and 408).

<sup>13</sup>In the subscription at the end of book eight of Livy in the *Codex Mediceus* of the tenth/eleventh century.

<sup>14</sup>In 394, attested even in Christian inscriptions, e.g., *ICUR* 1.419–421.

<sup>15</sup>It should be added here (and will be expanded upon later) that there is other, debatable evidence that Nicomachus Flavianus was not very intimately involved in the usurpation as such (and *a fortiori* his son would not have been) and had little to fear from imperial ire: Rufinus, *HE* 2.33. The possibility must be kept in mind.

their order, but does not give concrete dates in most cases. On the other hand, the evidence furnished by the law codes, while providing some firm dates, is made slippery by errors in dating and attribution of individual laws in the course of compiling the Codes. Arranged chronologically, the following laws tell us something about Flavianus' career:<sup>16</sup>

*CTh* 16.6.2 (17 Oct. 377), *Ad Flavianum vic. Africh.* So the mss of the Theodosian Code; when the same law was placed in the Justinianic Code (*CJ* 1.6.1), it was addressed *Ad Florianum Vic. Asiae*; but this man is otherwise unknown and in any event the content of the law is unmistakably anti-Donatist, condemning second baptism.<sup>17</sup>

*CTh* 7.18.8 + 9.29.2 (27 Feb., year questioned). The mss in both places (this is one decree broken in parts for inclusion in the Code) give the address as *Ad Flavianum PPO* and date the law to *Merobaude II et Saturnino cons.* (i.e., 383). But there is no room whatever on the fasti for a praetorian prefecture for Flavianus in 383; it was necessary to assume a collegiate prefecture to make room.<sup>18</sup> Mommsen's solution was to change the year to 391 (*Tatiano et Symmacho cons.*) when Flavianus was known to be praetorian prefect; Seeck, in the *Regesten*, altered the address instead, to *Ad Flavianum Proc. Asiae*, referring to the younger Flavianus' service in that post known to date to 383. Seeck should probably be followed for offering the simpler solution to a confusion common in the Codes.

*CTh* 12.6.18 (10 May 383), *Flaviano Proc. Asiae*. This gives a firm date for the son's term in office, a useful benchmark for the father's career (as will be evident below).

*CTh* 9.40.13 (18 August, year questioned). The mss address the law *Flaviano PPO Illyrici et Ital.* in the consulship of Antonius and Syagrius (382). The content of the law, however, is unmistakably that referred to elsewhere as having been issued by Theodosius in 390 after the massacre at Thessalonica.<sup>19</sup>

*CTh* 16.7.4–5 (11 May 391), *Flaviano PPO*.

*CTh* 1.1.2 + 3.1.6 (27 May 391), *Flaviano PPO Illyrici et Italiae*. A single edict, broken in parts for the Code.

*CTh* 10.10.20 (8 April 392), *Flaviano PPO*.

The evidence furnished by the Codes for the dates in the elder Flavianus' career, therefore, is as follows:

*vicarius Africae*, 17 October 377

*praefectus praetorio*, 18 August 390–8 April 392.

The one disputed edict assigning a praetorian prefecture to 383 is either addressed to the son of our subject or is to be redated to 391.

Symmachus' letters, finally, provide both much and little. All ninety-one letters of the second book of his correspondence (about a tenth of the total collection) are addressed to the elder Flavianus, but many cannot

<sup>16</sup>Dates and addressees of laws are given without comment when there is no controversy.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. note 7 above.

<sup>18</sup>This escape is not possible after A. H. M. Jones, "Collegiate Prefectures," *JRS* 54 (1964) 78–89; Callu, (above, n. 1) 74–75, attempts to make space, without success, for a *PPO* of eastern Illyricum alone.

<sup>19</sup>Sozomen, *HE* 7.25.7.

be dated at all.<sup>20</sup> It will suffice here to list all of the letters which bear substantively on the problems under study.<sup>21</sup>

*Epp.* 2.4–7 place Flavianus, out of office, in Campania in the fall of 383, by allusion to the famine of that year.<sup>22</sup>

*Ep.* 2.13 finds Flavianus in office relatively soon after 23 January 389.<sup>23</sup>

*Ep.* 2.18 finds Flavianus in office ca 389/390.<sup>24</sup>

*Ep.* 2.20 recommends two individuals to Flavianus (who is in office) who themselves turn up in office in 391; the letter is probably to be dated 390/391.<sup>25</sup>

*Ep.* 2.24 is addressed to Flavianus while in some office and mentions the imminent departure of the younger Flavianus for his post in Asia on the 28th of February; therefore, probably 382.<sup>26</sup>

*Ep.* 2.65 commends to Flavianus (who is in office) a man who is known to have been vicar of Africa in 385 and *comes sacrarum largitionum* (and therefore in no further need of commendations) by 387. If Flavianus was in some office in 382–383, that is the likely date for this letter.<sup>27</sup>

*Epp.* 2.76, 2.77, 2.78, 2.81 find Flavianus in office during the quaestorship of Symmachus' son (almost certainly late 393).<sup>28</sup>

*Ep.* 2.83, 2.84, 2.85 look forward to celebrations of Flavianus' consulship (he is already in office) which would take place in January 394; the letters date to late 393.

*Ep.* 3.69 seeks assistance from Richomer for Flavianus (who is *illustris*) and his son (for injuries suffered while *in sua proconsulari possessione*—383). To be dated very shortly after 383 (Richomer is *magister militum per Orientem* at the time).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>20</sup>The 81 letters to the younger Flavianus in the sixth book of Symmachus' collection virtually all date from after the father's death and offer little to us.

<sup>21</sup>Dates of letters are given according to my own researches (and justified in notes), but I have of course studied carefully the dates and arguments of Seeck (in his edition, *MGH.AA.VI*) and of J. P. Callu (in his Budé edition of the first two books).

<sup>22</sup>L. Ruggini, *Economia e Società nell' "Italia Annonaria"* (1961) 159–161. It would be convenient to agree with R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (1968) 6, followed by Callu *ad Ep.* 2.7, in dating that letter to the fall of 384 (leaving Flavianus more time in office), but I do not insist on the point.

<sup>23</sup>*CTh* 4.4.2 (23 Jan. 389) is spoken of there as a fairly recent enactment.

<sup>24</sup>The letter mentions a quarrel with one Hephaestio also discussed in *Epp.* 5.34–37, where the only firmly dated correspondence is from 389/390.

<sup>25</sup>Magnillus is vicar of Africa in 391, Romanus *comes* of Egypt in the same year (*PLRE* 1.769 wrongly identifies a separate Romanus).

<sup>26</sup>For it now seems likely that the younger Flavianus was already in office by 27 February 383 (*CTh* 7.18.8 + 9.29.2; discussed above).

<sup>27</sup>Licinius is probably vicar of Africa in 385, *CSL* in 387; note that *PLRE* 1.508 dates Symm. *Ep.* 2.65 to 383, even though that date depends upon the quaestorship of Flavianus, which *PLRE* elsewhere (1.347) postpones to 389.

<sup>28</sup>Seeck, *MGH.AA.VI*, pp. LVIII–LIX.

<sup>29</sup>I make much of this letter and give, therefore, its full text, which cannot be dated, I hold, to much later than 383 by its allusion to the younger Flavianus' term as proconsul (note emphasis below). *dominum meum et fratrem nostrum Flavianum celsum virtutibus et honoribus virum iustitiae tuae exsortem esse non patior. merito pro honoribus eius, quae causa poscit, allego sciens sine tua auctoritate commissa, quae sub obtentu tuo a quibusdam scaevae dissignata dicuntur. unde mihi maior fiducia, posse rem graviter vindicari, cum tua quoque fama pulsata sit. querellae autem genus hominum eius suggestio, si iusseris, persequetur, quia multiplex iniuria modum epistulae familiaris excedit. non minora etiam*

*Ep.* 3.90 addresses Rufinus to thank him for reporting the news of Flavianus' advancement to praetorian prefect. All correspondence with Rufinus dates to 389/390 (after Symmachus met Rufinus on the occasion of Theodosius' visit to Rome in 389). But the full text of the crucial statement is, *quaestorem antehac fratrem, nunc rectorem praetorianum litteris nuntiasti*.

*Ep.* 5.53 is connected with plans for Flavianus' consular celebrations, to be dated to late 393.

The evidence does not provide a clear-cut picture. Two letters certainly date the first role of Flavianus as an *illustris* to 382–383.<sup>30</sup> A third letter mandates a spell at court for Flavianus before 387 and probably before 385, and would therefore fit in with a 382–383 date for his quaestorship.<sup>31</sup> Another group of letters places him in office ca 389–391.<sup>32</sup> A final group dates from 393, when he is at court in high office anticipating his consulship.<sup>33</sup>

Given the sequence of offices as listed on the inscriptions, therefore, and bearing in mind the data from the Codes, the solution would seem to be to ascribe the term as *quaestor sacri palatii* to 382–383;<sup>34</sup> a first term as *praefectus praetorio* to ca 389–392; and a final term as prefect (overlapping his consulship) to 393–394. This is in fact the most probable sequence, which I accept; but there is a problem remaining. The letter which thanks Rufinus for the news of Flavianus' promotion to prefect includes, as quoted above, the remark that Rufinus had previously been the source of the news of Flavianus' promotion to quaestor. But Rufinus is not known to have held high office at court before 388, when he became

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filii inlustri viri, et ipse iam honoris et meriti, in sua proconsulari possessione toleravit, quae ad unius quidem pertinent noxam sed ad utriusque contemptum. ergo ut mos est tibi, auditis eorum allegationibus, qui tuentur absentium facultates, primo famam, quae optimo cuique pretiosa est, tunc amicitiam fidei indicem, postremo leges, pro quibus excubas, dignare defendere, ut ad inlustrem virum, qui per absentiam suorum nescit incommoda, prius gratia beneficii tui quam suorum dolor et querella perveniat. Something in the authoritative tone Symmachus affects makes me suspect that he writes, albeit privately, in character as urban prefect (384–385). I would also date *Symm. Epp.* 3.58 and 3.66 to the same time (Richomer's post in this period is known from eastern sources; see *PLRE* 1.765–766).

<sup>30</sup>*Symm. Epp.* 2.24 and 3.69; *Ep.* 2.22 very probably alludes to the proconsulship of the younger Flavianus and the pregnancy of Symmachus' wife, and would then similarly date Flavianus' first *illustris* office to 383. But note that Flavianus was probably back in Campania in the fall of 383 (*Epp.* 2.4–7, and note 22 above). It is a debatable point whether he served as quaestor in Milan or Constantinople; his son's promotion (and a vague allusion in *Ep.* 2.23) makes Constantinople more likely (see further below).

<sup>31</sup>*Ep.* 2.65.

<sup>32</sup>*Epp.* 2.13, 2.18, 2.20, 3.90.

<sup>33</sup>*Epp.* 2.76–78, 2.81, 2.83–85, 5.53.

<sup>34</sup>Consideration should be given to the possibility that Flavianus went to court in 381, especially if *Symm. Ep.* 2.24 finds him already in office by late February 382. Whether the court in question is at Milan or Constantinople, he would have been unlikely to make the journey from Rome in the winter months.

*magister officiorum* under Theodosius. The best explanation of the dates of the letters to Rufinus surviving in Symmachus' collection, moreover, places them all in the year or so following Theodosius' visit to Rome in 389.<sup>35</sup> Thus Symmachus seems to be saying that news of Flavianus' promotion to quaestor came from a man he only met in 389, six years after the dates suggested above for Flavianus' service as quaestor.

There is no completely satisfying explanation to suggest for this peculiarity of the evidence. What must be said, however, is that if we were to interpret the letter to Rufinus (with Levy and *PLRE*) as assigning Flavianus' term as quaestor to 389/390, more problems would be raised than solved.

(1) What would we make of Symm. *Ep.* 2.24, which has Symmachus communicating with Flavianus by means of an *agens in rebus* whom he stopped at the Flaminian Gate of the city (the gate one would use to travel north over the Appennines to Milan or the land route to Constantinople, not south to Campania or Sicily, Flavianus' known haunts out of the city), about the impending proconsulship of Asia of the younger Flavianus?

(2) What of Symm. *Ep.* 3.69, where the conjunction of the father as *illustris* and son as proconsul in a letter of commendation (which Flavianus would not have needed after his elevation to prefect in 389/390) is certainly to be dated to a time very shortly after 382–383?

(3) What of Symm. *Ep.* 2.65, a commendation for a man who ceased to need commendations by 387?

(4) Finally, how are we to assume the younger Flavianus came by the unusual (for an Italian)<sup>36</sup> post of proconsul of Asia in 383, if at that time his father had never served in the east and had never exceeded the rank of vicar of Africa; for indeed the Asian proconsulship (with traditional proconsular independence) ranked higher than vicariates in the *Notitia Dignitatum*.<sup>37</sup> The most convincing explanation of his rise is to place the elder Flavianus at the Constantinopolitan court in 382–383 as *quaestor sacri palatii*.

In comparison with these obstacles, the difficulty with the letter to Rufinus is small. Our failure to explain it grows out of an ignorance of the facts, not out of facts positively obstructing an explanation. There is no concrete evidence for the actions of Rufinus in the years before he appears in Constantinople in 388; any definite explanation could only be speculation.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, to postpone Flavianus' term as quaestor to 389 requires not one difficult explanation, but four (at least).

<sup>35</sup>Levy (above, n. 1 [1971]) 248–249. I accept Levy's point for purposes of this article, that all Rufinus/Symmachus correspondence is from 389 or later; to be sure Symmachus did not waste much time corresponding with minor functionaries. The *possibility* of some correspondence dating to 383 cannot be ruled out and would redede the summoning of the younger Flavianus to court (Symm. *Ep.* 3.89) to a time when the summons can be shown to have led to advancement (namely appointment as proconsul of Asia). Rufinus is, after all, a westerner whose career is obscure.

<sup>36</sup>Other westerners in this post at this period (e.g., Eutropius) are known followers of Theodosius whose careers lie chiefly in the east.

<sup>37</sup>*Not. Dig.*, Or. 1.25–34 Seeck.

<sup>38</sup>See note 35 above.

For convenience, therefore, I give a table of the public offices of the *cursus* of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus and the dates when they were held.

*consularis Siciliae* (365)  
*vicarius Africae* (376–377)  
*quaestor sacri palatii* (381/382–383)  
*praefectus praetorio* (389/390–392)  
*praefectus praetorio iterum* (393–394)  
*consul ordinarius* (394)<sup>39</sup>

He died shortly after the battle of the Frigidus (5 September 394).<sup>40</sup>

## II—FLAVIANUS AND THE USURPATION OF EUGENIUS

Valentinian II died—murder and suicide are both suggested in the sources—in Vienne in Gaul on 15 May 392. The real power at his court was held by the *magister militum* Arbogast, who set up a sometime professor of grammar and bureaucrat named Eugenius in the purple. Both Arbogast and Eugenius died as a result of the battle of the Frigidus a little over two years later. The events of the intervening months interest us first because Flavianus served as praetorian prefect and consul under Eugenius. But this period takes on an added interest as the time of a series of events recorded in modern scholarship as the “last pagan revival in the

<sup>39</sup>*CIL* 6.1783 (A.D. 431) attributes the *Annales* to Flavianus as quaestor and prefect, therefore assigning their completion to the period 390–392 (before Flavianus sided with Eugenius).

<sup>40</sup>Rufinus, *HE* 2.33. My argument has been directed chiefly against the most commonly held position on these dates, that of the later Seeck, Levy, and *PLRE* (see above, note 1). The most recent study of the question deserves some separate refutation for attempting to re-establish the first dates proposed by the earlier Seeck. J. P. Callu, (above, note 1) 73–80, is not convincing, however. He hypothesizes a possible place on the fasti for a separate *PPO* for eastern Illyricum (because there is evidence of one such term for Eutropius ending in 381), in spite of the way in which this directly contradicts the epigraphic evidence as interpreted in this article, and completely in the face of the plain meaning of *CTh* 11.13.1 (19 Aug. 383), which addresses Sextus Petronius Probus over matters *per omne Illyricum* (which Callu quotes but does not understand, *art. cit.*, 74–75); he simply glosses over the difficulties created by Symm. *Ep.* 3.90 (75–76); and finally he limits the total number of terms as *PPO* to two by insisting (77: “nous avons insisté”) that Flavianus held office continually from 390 to 394, even though there is no evidence whatever for his activity between early 392 and mid-393 at the earliest and even though activity is attested for Apodemius as Theodosius’ appointee to the post during that very time. The argument is thus by turns circular and arbitrary, but never convincing, while awkward evidence is ignored or browbeaten, never faced honestly.



west."<sup>41</sup> Flavianus' role in this episode will emerge in a fresh light after re-examination of the ancient evidence.

One particular piece of evidence, the so-called *Carmen adversus Flavianum*, poses special problems of unparalleled importance and will be reserved until after discussion of the other evidence. The *Carmen* aside, then, the complete dossier of evidence for the pertinent events of 392–394 follows, in roughly chronological order of appearance, in which western sources precede eastern in both date and authority.

Ambrose, *Ep.* 57: when Eugenius approached Milan in early 393, Ambrose fled to Florence via Bologna.<sup>42</sup> From that safe retreat, he wrote a letter to Eugenius, chiding him gently for being, so to speak, "soft on paganism." In the letter, he recounts three earlier attempts to have funds restored to the old cults, beginning with Symmachus' *Relatio* of 384 and ending with an appeal to Valentinian II in Gaul in early 392 (*Ep.* 57.2–4). Eugenius took the throne; *compertum est postea donata illa* [i.e., the funds for the cults] *esse praecellentibus in republica, sed gentilis observantiae viris* (*Ep.* 57.6). Apparently Eugenius thought to placate Christian authorities by the subterfuge of giving the money to non-Christian senators rather than officially to the cults themselves; but Ambrose lets him know that the secret is out and remonstrates with him (and Ambrose obviously thinks of Eugenius as a Christian).

Ambrose, *Ep.* 61: a letter addressed to Theodosius at about the same time as *Ep.* 57; while in it Ambrose seeks protection *a barbari latronis* [sc. Arbogast] *immanitate et ab usurpatoris indigni* [sc. Eugenius] *solio*, it also justifies Ambrose's conduct: *eius* [sc. Eugenius] *vitabam praesentiam, qui se sacrilegio miscuisset* (*Ep.* 61.1–2). On the face of the accusations Ambrose was willing to make directly to Eugenius, that vocabulary is a little strong, characteristic of western Christian reaction to the events of these years. Note that Eugenius is not shown thus far to have done any more than what Symmachus and others had been attempting to get Valentinian II to do for a decade.

Ambrose, *Explanatio psalmi* 36: this dates from 394/395 and illustrates the self-defeating nature of sin by a recent example: *quod etiam proximo accidit bello, cum infideles et sacrilegi lacerarent aliquem in domino confidentem et regnum eius ereptum ire contenderent, ecclesiis domini persecutionum saeva minitantes, ut subito ventus oreretur . . .* [he tells of a miraculous wind at the battle of the Frigidus which blew the rebels' weapons back against them]. *deficiebant enim corde, cum deum adversum se pugnare cognoscerent. exierant itaque provocantes et de pharetra cordis sui adversus populum christianum venenata perfidiae iacula proferebant, sed in caput eorum sua revertebatur impietas* (*Explan. psal.* 36.25). The passage is short on concrete accusations; the only new item is the claim that the rebels threatened persecution to Christian churches; this accusation can be simply explained, as will appear shortly.

Paulinus, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii* 26–31: Paulinus wrote of these events as a first-hand witness who also had Ambrose's own letters to draw upon. He is the first author to impli-

<sup>41</sup>The classic presentation is H. Bloch, "A New Document of the Last Pagan Revival in the West, 393–394 A.D.," *Harvard Theological Review* 38 (1945) 199–244; essentially the same conclusions restated by Bloch appear in A. Momigliano, ed., *The Conflict Between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (1963) 193–218. More recently, the traditional story appears unchallenged in J. Ziegler, *Zur religiösen Haltung der Gegenkaiser im 4. Jahrh. n. Chr.* (1970) 85–104.

<sup>42</sup>Paulinus, *Vita Sancti Ambrosii* 27.

cate Flavianus by name: *Eugenius suscepit imperium, qui, ubi imperare coepit, non multo post petentibus Flaviano tunc praefecto et Arbogaste comite aram Victoriae et sumptus caerimoniarum, quod Valentinianus augustae memoriae adhuc in iunioribus annis constitutus petentibus denegaverat, oblitus fidei suae concessit* (*Vita* 26). The passage does not go farther than Ambrose's *Ep.* 57 in what it claims Eugenius did and similarly treats him as a Christian. The only other episode in Paulinus' account directly relating to the events of these years mentions Flavianus and the threat of persecution. The rebels have left Milan to face Theodosius: *promiserat enim Arbogastes tunc comes et Flavianus praefectus Mediolanio egredientes, cum victores reversi essent, stabulum se esse facturos in basilica ecclesiae Mediolanensis atque clericos sub armis probaturos* (*Vita* 31). After the battle, Ambrose intervened for followers of the usurper who sought refuge in churches (*ibid.*).

Rufinus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 2.33: Rufinus himself was in Jerusalem in 394,<sup>43</sup> but he may be presumed to have had contact later with western ecclesiastical sources in compiling his account. He offers one really new piece of information, that the rebels (whom he calls *pagani*) renewed sacrifices and stained Rome with their victims' blood: *superstitiosius haec agente et cum omni animositate Flaviano tunc praefecto, cuius assertionibus magna enim erat eius in sapientia praerogativa, Eugenium victorem fore pro certo praesumpserat* (*HE* 2.33). The collapse of the rebel forces is mentioned without allusion to the miraculous wind: *post etiam magistri horum et doctores errorum praecipueque Flavianus plus pudoris quam sceleris reus cum potuisset evadere eruditus admodum vir, mereri se mortem pro errore iustius quam pro crimine iudicavit* (*ibid.*). This is the only piece of contemporary evidence for Flavianus' suicide<sup>44</sup> and seems to indicate that Flavianus was not so deeply involved in the usurpation itself as to have to despair of mercy from Theodosius.

Claudian, *III Cons. Hon.* 87 ff: Claudian's most specific reference to the battle of the Frigidus recounts the familiar story of the "miraculous" wind which sprang up to aid Theodosius, who is described as *nimum dilecte deo*, indicating the usual opposition between a good emperor and an evil usurper. This is made clearer by the frequent association in Claudian of the two *tyranni*, Magnus Maximus and Eugenius (in *Prob.*, *IV Cons. Hon.*, and *Gild.* most notably), where no distinction is made between the two. As always in Claudian, there is no hint whatever of any hostility between Christians and non-Christians.

Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 5.26: Augustine has a story of the battle of the Frigidus from eyewitnesses, who claim the rebels set up *Iovis simulacra* to overlook the field of battle.<sup>45</sup> This chapter also contains a passage praising Theodosius' mercy to the *inimicorum suorum filios* (*DCD* 5.26.36) who fled to churches for sanctuary. This is usually taken as a reference to the younger Flavianus, then urban prefect, and is even misread by Chastagnol to indicate that the younger Flavianus made an insincere act of conversion at this time.<sup>46</sup> It is not clear why the reference should be to the younger Flavianus (or any non-Christian) at all, especially when rebels seeking church sanctuary in northern Italy have already been mentioned by Paulinus (*Vita* 31).

Orosius, *Historiae adversus Paganos* 7.35: Orosius, writing about 417/418, borrows heavily from Augustine's treatment just cited.<sup>47</sup> He describes Arbogast as *nixus etiam praecipuo cultu idolorum* (7.35.12).

<sup>43</sup>F. X. Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia* (1945) 233.

<sup>44</sup>Flavianus' suicide is not mentioned in Sozomen, *HE* 7.22, as Bloch (above, note 41) 239 and *PLRE* 1.348 claim.

<sup>45</sup>Aug. *D.c.D.* (Ed. Dombart-Kalb, *CCSL*), 5.26.31–32 (probably written about 413–415).

<sup>46</sup>A. Chastagnol, *La préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le bas-empire* (1960) 443, and often elsewhere.

<sup>47</sup>He has an identical misquotation, for example, from Claudian, *III Cons. Hon.* 96 ff.

The eastern sources have much less to offer.

Philostorgius, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 11.2: Philostorgius connects the events of these years to religious politics only by asserting that Eugenius was a non-Christian ("Ἕλλην"), on which point he is probably wrong (given Ambrose's evidence).

Socrates, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.25: Socrates describes the events of 392–394 with no mention of religious politics.

Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 7.22–24: this account is obviously dependent in several points on Rufinus. Sozomen claims that Eugenius was an insincere Christian (an embroidery on the truth) and that Flavianus was skilled at foretelling the future—as Rufinus had said (Soz. *HE* 7.22). To the narrative of the battle he adds a story of a demoniac who appeared in a church in suburban Constantinople (where Theodosius had stopped to pray on his way to Italy) at the very day and hour of the battle hundreds of miles away and cried out, "You conquer me, and lay snares for my army," thus identifying the enemy with the devil at least (*HE* 7.24).

Theodoret, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 5.24: the only mention of religion here is an allusion to an image of Hercules allegedly carried at the battle of the Frigidus.

Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 4.54–55: though Zosimus is an outspoken partisan of the anti-Christian cause in general and here probably depends upon a good contemporary source in Eunapius, he tells the story of Eugenius' usurpation with no hint that religion is involved.

What conclusions are we authorized to draw from this evidence? They are few and limited.

First, the only persons recorded to have acted openly on behalf of the "pagan" cause in 392–394 are Arbogast and Flavianus. No other name occurs anywhere in our sources.

Second, the only support given "paganism" by Eugenius according to our sources was the money which he tried to "launder" by channelling through private hands.

Third, the only other "pagan" behavior reported under Eugenius' reign was connected with Flavianus: his haruspical activities. Rufinus' text may indicate that sacrifices were offered at Rome, but if so his text still associates those activities closely with haruspicy and with the name of Flavianus. This point will be discussed again in connection with the *Carmen* below.

Fourth, upon leaving Milan for battle, Arbogast and Flavianus were reported to have made an indiscreet remark about what they would do with Ambrose's basilica when they came back victorious.

Fifth, the troops of Eugenius set up objects at the field of battle which hostile eyes read as images of the ancient gods.

Sixth, historians who wrote from a strictly eastern point of view (i.e., Socrates for the Christians, Zosimus—that is, Eunapius—for the opposition) said nothing of the religious overtones read into the events by western Christians closer to the scene.

I submit, therefore, that on the basis of this evidence, the "last pagan revival" is reduced to a half-hearted attempt by Eugenius to buy support

in Italy, some indiscreet actions of Flavianus, and an angry, overblown, propagandizing reaction by Christians, taking their lead from the influential patriarch of Milan, Ambrose.<sup>48</sup>

### III—THE CARMEN CODICIS PARISINI LATINI 8084

One piece of evidence has been left to the side throughout this last discussion: the so-called *Carmen adversus Flavianum* found in a sixth-century manuscript comprising a complete edition of the works of Prudentius and then this poem in a different hand. The poem is an anonymous attack against an influential opponent of Christianity who is not clearly identified. The customary identification since Mommsen's time has been that the dignitary is Flavianus;<sup>49</sup> no attempts have been made to identify the author.<sup>50</sup>

The problems with this poem are complex and cannot be resolved here; indeed, I would hold that the only responsible position for the scholar is dogmatic agnosticism.<sup>51</sup> The issue is important, however, and can be

<sup>48</sup>Bloch's 1945 article published an inscription discovered at Ostia in 1938 showing the restoration of a temple of Hercules in 394 by Numerius Proiectus, *praefectus annonae* and one "of the circle of Flavianus himself" (234). Of the inscription several things need to be said: that the dating is plausible but uncertain in the restoration of an extremely fragmentary inscription; that it is not clear that what Proiectus did was in any way counter to the laws against the ancient cults as laid down by Theodosius (merely restoring a building was not culpable at that time—and for that matter, the crucial verb describing what Proiectus did to the *Cellam Herc.* is entirely missing from the inscription); and that if we restore *cellam Herc[uleam]* (cf. *ILS* 622, *porticu Herculea*), the structure could easily become a granary dating to the reign of Maximian. The inscription was discovered "not far from the temple of Hercules" (about 50 to 60 yards away) in the "via degli Horrea Epagathiana," (Bloch, 201), which was smack in the middle of a large group of grain facilities (cf. R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia* [1960], maps at 284—granaries—and 382—temples). Nor should we, moreover, conclude that simply because two things took place in Italy at the same time they were intimately connected. Proiectus may have decided entirely on his own that the new regime would not act against him. That he served as prefect of the annona does not in itself prove that he was "in the circle" of the younger Flavianus as prefect of the city.

<sup>49</sup>T. Mommsen, "Carmen codicis Parisini 8084," *Hermes* 4 (1870) 350–364; repr. in his *Gesammelte Schriften* 7 (1909) 485–498; the earliest reliable text and commentary for the poem.

<sup>50</sup>Two other poems of this period have been thought to be by the same anonymous author: the *Carmen ad quendam senatorem* (printed at *CSEL* 3.3.302 and again at *CSEL* 23.1.227) and the so-called *poema ultimum* attributed to Paulinus of Nola in the mss (*CSEL* 30.329); for identification of authorship, see E. Dekkers, *Clavis Patrum Latinorum*<sup>2</sup> (1961) nos. 206, 1432. These poems have nothing to offer as evidence for our problems.

<sup>51</sup>Pace J. F. Matthews, *Historia* 19 (1970) 466: "To reserve judgement is the least defensible of attitudes." The evidence here simply cannot be forced to admit confident and responsible judgement.

discussed fruitfully only if both possibilities are considered. Four candidates for the identification have been canvassed: L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus, Vettius Agorius Praetextatus, Nicomachus Flavianus, and Gabinius Barbarus Pompeianus.<sup>52</sup> No completely convincing argument can be made out for any one of these figures, and there are difficulties with all four (perhaps more with Praetextatus than with the other three).

To be sure the strongest argument against identifying the subject of the poem with Flavianus is *ex silentio*: whatever Flavianus was up to in 392–394, it was connected with a usurpation of the imperial throne and an attempt to overthrow a good Christian emperor. Only the most glancing allusions to this can be read into the poem by its most enthusiastic students and then usually only with the help of conjectural emendation. But there are numerous internal difficulties with the identification as well.

For example, the subject of the *Carmen* seems to have been an urban rather than praetorian prefect (*Carmen* 25, 28). He seems to have died a lingering death (27), probably of dropsy (121), unlike Flavianus' suicide. His activities under scrutiny seem to have lasted only three months (28) and to have literally driven the citizens of the city of Rome to take up arms (32–33). He is accused of having bribed Christians to apostasize with offers of high office; but the offices are not ones which would necessarily be in the gift of either an urban or a praetorian prefect (85–86).<sup>53</sup> He is survived by a wife who seems equally devoted to the old religion.<sup>54</sup>

Two arguments coming from outside the *Carmen* offer the best support, meanwhile, for identifying its subject with Flavianus.<sup>55</sup> First, there survives a letter of Symmachus to Ambrose, dating from 395/397 with near certainty, in which Ambrose is asked to assist Marcianus, *vir optimus sed invidia tyrannici temporis involutus* (*Ep.* 3.33), who is being asked to repay salary earned under the usurper (as Flavianus the younger was asked to

<sup>52</sup>For a recent treatment arguing for Symmachus (*PVR* 365, father of the famous orator), S. Mazzarino, in the first volume of his *Antico, tardoantico, ed èra costantiniana* (1974); for Praetextatus, Silvio A. D'Ostilio, *Carmen Codicis Parisini 8084* (unpublished thesis in the Catholic University of America, 1957); for Flavianus, J. F. Matthews, "The Historical Setting of the 'Carmen Contra Paganos' (Cod. Par. Lat. 8084)," *Historia* 19 (1970) 464–479; for Pompeianus (*PVR* 408–409), G. Manganaro, "La reazione pagana a Roma nel 408–9 d.c. e il poemetto anonimo 'Contra Paganos,'" *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 13 (1960) 210–224, and elsewhere.

<sup>53</sup>Leucadius must have been either *rationalis rei privatae per Africam* or *rationalis rei privatae fundorum domus divinae per Africam*, both of which offices were under the supervision of the *comes rerum privatarum* (*Not. Dig.*, Occ. 12.11, 12.16 [ed. Seeck]); Marcianus was proconsul of Africa, an anomalous position under no direct jurisdiction.

<sup>54</sup>This description fits Praetextatus' widow perfectly (cf. *CIL* 6.1779), but Flavianus' widow is known to have survived him as well (Symm. *Ep.* 4.71, from 397).

<sup>55</sup>Line 112 (*te consule*) is a reasonably strong point if taken literally, weighing against Praetextatus and Pompeianus.

repay his father's salary<sup>56</sup>). This squares nicely with a term for Marcianus as proconsul of Africa under Eugenius at Flavianus' disposition.

Second, the description in Rufinus' account of affairs under Eugenius bears superficial resemblances to the behavior alleged in the *Carmen*: *at pagani, qui errores suos novis semper erroribus animant, innovare sacrificia, et Romam funestis victimis cruentare, inspicere exta pecudum, et ex fibrarum praescientia securam Eugenio victoriam nuntiare* (HE 2.33). Then Flavianus' haruspicy is mentioned specifically. Allowing for exaggeration in Rufinus' account, the specific mention of the city of Rome is enough to lend substantial plausibility to the identification of Flavianus with the subject of the *Carmen*.

But though our ballot in the end must be cast *non liquet*, the implications of the alternatives are not so very different. If the *Carmen* is not to be attached to Flavianus, then our earlier conclusions about the insignificance of the "pagan revival" of 392–394 need no amendment. But even if the *Carmen* is a direct attack on the behavior of Nicomachus Flavianus in 393 and 394, what more have we learned? Only two more names (Leucadius and Marcianus) have been in any way trivially implicated in the revival (doubling the total to four in all with Flavianus and Arbogast). The whole brunt of the tale remains where it was before: on Flavianus, who has been selected, it is clear, by the Christian writers of his time as whipping boy for the entire episode, whatever it entailed. Even if Flavianus visited Rome for a few months early in 394, as Matthews suggests,<sup>57</sup> his actions there (if that is what the *Carmen* and Rufinus allude to) were silly and inconsequential, resulting only in Christian propagandists having a likely target for their obloquy after his suicide.<sup>58</sup> We should be extremely reluctant, moreover, to take the *Carmen* as an accurate account of whatever Flavianus may have been up to; the propagandist clearly exaggerates and thus forces us to look askance at all the specific evidence he provides.

Indeed the whole usurpation of Eugenius seems to have been put down with a minimum of reprisals or lasting hostility. A few individuals were dunned for ill-gotten salaries, but even Ambrose intervened on behalf of frightened rebels cowering in his churches (and might intervene, Symmachus thought, to prevent exaction of Flavianus' own back pay). It has been suggested, moreover, that Symmachus, eight years later, was still able to make one last trip to Milan to the court of Honorius to ask for the same privileges for the old religion for which he had been asking for twenty years—and the awarding of which (covertly) is the only act

<sup>56</sup>Symm. *Epp.* 4.19, 4.51.

<sup>57</sup>J. F. Matthews, *Historia* 19 (1970) 478, a considerable advance in the argument for identifying Flavianus with the poem's subject.

<sup>58</sup>But even Rufinus, as quoted earlier (HE 2.33), indicates that Flavianus' involvement in the usurpation was so irrelevant as to leave him hope for imperial mercy.

of sympathy with the old religion of which Eugenius himself can be convicted.<sup>59</sup> And when Prudentius came to attack Symmachus and his cause, he was able to leave the events of 392–394 virtually unmentioned. The alleged religious significance of Eugenius' usurpation seems clearly to have been perceived only by a narrow circle of western churchmen, who did not succeed in having their view widely accepted—until the present century.

What religious practices may be attributed to Flavianus after all? His inscriptions list only one priesthood, the same one held by Symmachus (while they had contemporaries who held as many as ten).<sup>60</sup> In the ninety-one letters to him in Symmachus' collection I count only thirteen allusions, however remote, to the ancient religion; most of these are of the "I am recovering from illness with the help of the gods" variety.<sup>61</sup> Only three allusions are made to anything stronger than that; two mention forthcoming ceremonies at which Flavianus is expected to be present by virtue of his pontifical office<sup>62</sup> and one reports the desire of the Vestal Virgins to erect a statue to the memory of Praetextatus, a proposal Symmachus opposed as heartily as any Christian would.<sup>63</sup> The concrete evidence from 393–394 indicates that Flavianus dabbled in ritual and fortune-telling, and the *Carmen* may in the end do no more than repeat the same indications, if allowance is made for melodramatic exaggeration in the name of a propagandistic purpose not unlike that of "red-baiters" in modern times.

Thus an important phase in modern accounts of the supposedly heated struggle between dying "paganism" and rising Christianity disappears when the evidence is examined closely; in Virius Nicomachus Flavianus we are left with a single rather foolish figure prophesying victory for a usurper who never had a chance. Whatever went on in those years, it can no longer be claimed that anything like the "last pagan revival" long imagined in the events of 392–394 has any basis in the documents on which we depend.

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<sup>59</sup>T. D. Barnes, "The Historical Setting of Prudentius' *Contra Symmachum*," *AJP* 97 (1976) 373–386.

<sup>60</sup>A convenient table of priesthoods held by late fourth-century senators is printed in Bloch (above, note 41), following 244. My conclusions on this point resemble those of J. F. Matthews, *JRS* 63 (1973) 187–190, but are much more deliberately stated and are not so colored by the *Carmen*'s propaganda.

<sup>61</sup>For example, Symm. *Ep.* 2.49. Contrary to the opinion of Seeck and others, there is no reason to believe the letters of Symmachus were censored to cover up pagan sentiments: J. A. McGeachy, "The Editing of the Letters of Symmachus," *CP* 44 (1949) 222–229.

<sup>62</sup>Symm. *Epp.* 2.34, 2.53.

<sup>63</sup>Symm. *Ep.* 2.36.2–3; Symmachus' opposition was unavailing, as shown by *CIL* 6.2145 (*ILS* 1261).