

BACCHIUS, DIONYSIUS, AND CONSTANTINE

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COD. VEN. MARC. VI. 10 CONTAINS (among other musical writings) the "Introduction" (*Eisagoge*) of Bacchius Geron, "Old Bacchius," followed by a Pythagorean treatise also ascribed to Bacchius, followed in turn by an eight-line poem in which a certain Dionysius claims to have supplemented Bacchius and dedicates his book to an emperor called Constantine. It has generally and plausibly been inferred that the Pythagorean treatise should be attributed to Dionysius rather than Bacchius; there are two other MSS where the name Dionysius is added in the margin at the beginning of the work and a third where it is added at the end.¹ C. Jan, the last editor of Bacchius, assumed that Dionysius was his contemporary and assistant. But Dionysius claims only to have added (using a suitably musical metaphor) material that "harmonized" with Bacchius. We cannot securely infer a personal relationship between the two men. It is only Dionysius who can be connected with Constantine.

But which Constantine? Constantine the Great, according to Jan. More recently T. D. Barnes included Dionysius in a (rather short) list of Greek writers patronized by Constantine the Great:² "at an unknown date, one Dionysius dedicated a work on music to the emperor, saluting him as a lover of the art, a finder and giver of all kinds of culture." The date is indeed unknown. Nor is it just the exact year that is uncertain. The very century is in doubt. For in all probability the emperor is not Constantine I (306–337) at all, but Constantine VII (913–959). Here are the verses:

Τῆς μουσικῆς ἔλεξε Βακχεῖος Γέρων
τόνους τρόπους μέλη τε καὶ συμφωνίας.
τούτῳ συνῶδὰ Διονύσιος γράφων
τὸν παμμέγιστον δεσπότην Κωνσταντῖνον
σοφὸν ἔραστήν δείκνυσι τεχνημάτων.
τὸν τῶν ἀπάντων γὰρ σοφῶν παιδευμάτων
ἔφευρετὴν τε καὶ δότην πεφηνότα
ταύτης προσήκεν οὐδαμῶς εἶναι ξένον.

Old Bacchius told of the tones, tropes, melodies, and symphonies of music. Dionysius wrote an accompaniment to him and revealed the almighty emperor Constantine a discerning lover of the craft. For it was in no way fitting for a man

¹C. Janus (K. von Jan), *Musici Scriptores Graeci* (Hildesheim 1895) 285 f., and *Die Eisagoge des Bacchius* (Programm Strassburg 1890, 1891).

²*Constantine and Eusebius* (Harvard 1981) 72. Cf. too *PLRE* 1 143, where Baccheius is said to have "written under Constantine."

shown to be the discoverer and giver of every department of culture and wisdom to be a stranger to this art [sc. music].

Doubts about a fourth-century date were first expressed by Christ-Schmid-Stählin—though on inadequate grounds.³ They mistakenly described the verses as Babrian scazons, and claimed that in the examples Bacchius chose to illustrate the various metres (§ 101) “der Wortakzent auf die Iktussilbe fällt.” This is true of some of the illustrations: e.g., the trochee (πῶλος); the anapaest (βασιλεύς); the iambus (θεῶν) and “irrational” iambus (ὀργή). It is also true of σπένδω the spondee illustration, though this is surely taken over from some earlier source (cf. Arist. Quintilianus *De musica* 1.15). But it is not true of his illustrations for the two “composite” metres, the enhoplion, presumably a genuine classical quotation (Page *PMG* no. 956); and the dochmiac, apparently taken from Euripides *Or.* 55 (see Bergk *PLG* adesp. 103 note, 3⁴ 723). Nor is it conspicuously true of all the remaining “simple” metres: the paean (εὐπλόκαμε) or pyrrhus (λόγος). Even if we could be sure that Bacchius himself made up all the examples that do coincide, word accent was certainly beginning to have some impact on verse ictus as early as the second century.⁴ So even if Bacchius did deliberately illustrate the anapaest with βασιλεύς rather than (say) πλόκαμος that would still be a far cry from the systematic accent regulation that eventually transformed Byzantine poetry. Taken by itself this argument falls far short of supporting Christ-Schmid-Stähelin’s guess (correct though we shall see it was) that Dionysius’ emperor was Constantine VII.

The next contribution is E. Pöhlmann’s entry “Bakcheios” in *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*,⁵ which states without argument that Dionysius “gehört ins 10 Jh.” with a reference to Christ-Schmid-Stähelin, but more correctly (though again without argument) describing the verses as “Zwölfsilber.” These conclusions were adopted without any indication of other possibilities in C. Hannick’s recent survey of Byzantine musical literature.⁶ It is high time that Dionysius’ poem was subjected to a thorough examination.

There are three questions. (1) Can the verses be as early as the beginning

³*Geschichte der griechischen Litteratur* 2.2⁶ (Munich 1924), 895–896.

⁴It is impossible to assign any confident date to Bacchius, though he is more likely to be early or late imperial than (like Dionysius) Byzantine. There are signs that the work has been much abbreviated and there is even one MS that offers a text not yet adapted to the question and answer form in which we now have it. See Jan’s two editions and also his article “Die Metrik des Bacchius,” *RhM* 46 (1891) 557–576.

⁵*Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, ed. F. Blume, Band 15, Suppl. (Kassel 1973) 422–424.

⁶In H. Hunger, *Die Hochsprachliche Profane Literatur der Byzantiner* (Munich 1978) 184.

of the fourth century? (2) Do they have to be as late as the tenth century? (3) Are there any positive clues to the identity of the emperor?

The answer to the first question is surely negative. The verses are not (of course) scazons, but neither are they simply incompetent classical trimeters. They are what P. Maas christened "Byzantine dodecasyllables."⁷ Each line has, not twelve variable "elements," but twelve fixed syllables (no resolution at all). And while careful writers continue to observe most of the rules of classical prosody, they treated α, ι, and υ, the so-called *δίχρονα*, as "arbitrarily long or short without regard to their true quantity in classical Greek."⁸ Thus *Διονύσιος* in line 3, *δείκνυσσι* in 1.5 and *Κωνσταντῖνον* in 1.4, which is probably to be written thus with its natural perispomenon rather than Jan's paroxytone *metri causa*.⁹

The other distinguishing feature of the dodecasyllable is accent regulation, first at the line end and somewhat later at the required word break after the fifth or seventh syllable. The paroxytone with which all of Dionysius' lines end was the rule as early as the seventh century. There are proparoxytones at both the hephthemimeral breaks (1 and 2), while the penthemimeral are still relatively fluid (1 proparoxytone, 2 oxytone, and 3 paroxytones). Securely dated tenth-century dodecasyllables do combine this fairly strict observance of the hephthemimeral proparoxytone with much greater freedom at the penthemimeral break.¹⁰

So Dionysius' verses bear all the hallmarks of middle Byzantine technique. They cannot be as early as the fourth century, thus eliminating Constantine I (306–337) and II (337–340). But metrical considerations would not by themselves suffice to pronounce them as late as the tenth century. Not to mention the short-lived Constantine III (641), Constantine IV (668–685), V (741–775), and VI (780–797) all remain theoretical possibilities. But all reigned during what are traditionally and not wholly incorrectly known as the Dark Ages of Byzantium, and it would be surprising to find any of them hailed as patrons of every sort of culture. Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus (913–959), on the other hand, was by far the most active and enthusiastic of all imperial patrons of learning at Byzantium. He either sponsored or actually participated in innumerable

⁷Paul Maas "Der byzaninische Zwölfsilber," *ByzZeit* 12 (1903) 278 f. (= *Kleine Schriften* [Munich 1973] 242 f.)

⁸R. Browning, "An Unpublished Corpus of Byzantine Poems," *Byzantion* 33 (1963), 294 (= *Studies on Byzantine History, Literature, and Education* [London 1977] ch. 8). See too the list of examples in Theodosius Diaconus, *De Creta capta*, ed. H. Criscuolo (Leipzig 1979) xi.

⁹A. Cameron, *Porphyrius the Charioteer* (Oxford 1973) 194–195.

¹⁰As may be seen from the dodecasyllabic verse of Constantine the Rhodian, Theodosius Diaconus, and the anonymous corpus published (with the relevant statistics) by R. Browning (above, n. 8).

literary ventures in almost every field of knowledge:¹¹ a massive compilation (in 53 sections, each containing several volumes) of excerpts from more than a thousand years of ancient historical writing; a book of ceremonies; a history of Byzantine foreign policy (*De admin. imperio*); a catalogue of the provinces of the empire (*De thematibus*); encyclopaedic collections of military, agricultural (*Geoponica*), and even veterinary (*Hippiatrica*) works. Constantine himself wrote letters, speeches, and some part at least of the historical compilation known as *Theophanes continuatus*. One project which was missed in the two recent surveys by P. Lemerle and H. Hunger (above, notes 6 and 11) is the collection of medical writings in Laur.LXXIV.7 made by a certain Nicetas, who is praised in three long dodecasyllabic poems, one of which may actually be in Constantine's own hand.¹²

Even if we could ignore the metrical considerations, the last four lines of Dionysius' poem would be a surprising claim to make of Constantine I. Of course, some of the least cultivated of emperors received the most fulsome dedications from writers seeking imperial favour.¹³ But Dionysius goes much further than the routine platitudes about emperors who have restored arts long neglected. His Constantine is extolled as the "discoverer and giver of every kind of culture" (ἀπάντων . . . παιδευμάτων). That is to say (it seems), not just for rewarding and encouraging others but for research of his own, in many different fields. No emperor fits this description better than Constantine Porphyrogenitus. Music might indeed have been said to be the only art to which (on other evidence) he was "a stranger."

It seems difficult to doubt that Constantine VII is indeed the addressee of Dionysius' poem. The putting together of Bacchius' "Introduction" and his own treatise is the nucleus of one of those encyclopaedic collections that Constantine was so anxious to promote.¹⁴ The fullest expansion of this nucleus is to be found in Marc.VI.10 of (probably) the fourteenth century:¹⁵ Ptolemy's *Harmonica*, Ps.-Plutarch *De musica*, Porphyry's commentary on Ptolemy, Aristides Quintilianus, Bacchius, Dionysius, and the hymns of Mesomedes. On the other hand no Byzantine work on music can be dated earlier than the tenth century.¹⁶ So in this as in so many other

¹¹See the useful recent account in P. Lemerle, *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (Paris 1971) ch. 10.

¹²See H. Schöne, *Apollonius von Kitium* (Leipzig 1896) i-xvi. The MS is better known to Art historians because of its miniatures: K. Weitzmann, *Studies in Classical and Byzantine MS Illumination* (Chicago and London 1971) 195.

¹³There is a long catalogue of such imperial patronage in F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London 1977) 491-506.

¹⁴So Pohlmann (above, n. 5).

¹⁵Fully described by Jan, *Musici scriptores Graeci* (1895) xi-xvii; cf. R. P. Winnington-Ingram, *Aristides Quintilianus* (Leipzig 1963) xii-xiii, plates 1-4.

¹⁶Hannich (above, n. 6) 184.

fields, it was the patronage of Constantine Porphyrogenitus that initiated the rediscovery of ancient scholarship.

With Dionysius restored to his true tenth-century context, we must reduce by one the already short list of the cultural protégés of Constantine the Great. The Athenian Praxagoras wrote a history of his reign,¹⁷ and naturally there were innumerable panegyrics. Constantine also liked the odd philosopher at court.¹⁸ But in general he is not known to have had any close relationship with Greek men of letters.

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¹⁷F. Jacoby, *FGrHist* 219.

¹⁸Sopater (*PLRE* 1 846); the unnamed pagan philosopher mentioned by Eusebius, *Vita Const.* 4.55; on Nicagoras, see F. Millar, "P. Herennius Dexippus: The Greek World and the Third-Century Invasions," *JRS* 59 (1969) 17.