CORIPPUSS ON THE WAKEFULNESS OF POETS AND EMPERORS

BY

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In the fourth book of his In Laudem Iustini Augusti Minoris Corippus turns to the ceremonies marking the new emperor's assumption of the consulship on the first of January, 566. When the morning of the auspicious day arrives the palace officials convey a great quantity of gold and silver to a large hall. Next, the emperor makes his way there and takes his seat on a splendid throne from which he receives the loyal obeisance of the senate (4. 1-141). This done, Justin orders the conscript fathers to be loaded with the gifts traditional on this occasion, whereupon the court orators shower him with the equally traditional panegyrics. Corippus celebrates the good fortune of these professionals who, in the magnificence of Justin, have no shortage of material for their compositions, though with the aid of an elaborate simile he adds that no one orator would be able to absorb so much inspiration any more than one man could drink the Nile on his own (4. 142-72). At this point there is a lacuna of several lines in the manuscript (M), and when the extant text resumes Corippus has switched to the first person plural:


Having made this generalizing digression, Corippus returns to the narrative of the day's events and now turns his attention to the divine rewards given by Justin for the pietas of his servants:

fertilis hinc Augusta manus felixque videri
plus voluit, nullumque suo praeferre favore.
namque illos donis conscriptis patribus aequos
esse dedit, cum distet honor. vigilantia noctis
hoc meruit carisque favens sapientia Musis.
doctor et princeps novit quod littera rerum
pars magna est magnusque labor scribentibus instat. (4. 179-85)

The identity of those who, though not themselves of senatorial
rank, are honored with gifts that match the ones presented to the
senators has been the subject of some confusion. Partsch, citing
lines 181-5, asserts that they are either tribuni et notarii or scrinarii,
or perhaps both together'). Furthermore, from the use of the first
person plural in lines 173-6 he deduces that Corippus himself
belongs to this class of functionary. The weakness of this interpreta-
tion is rightly disputed by Averil Cameron in her edition of the
poem:

"But it would surely be odd if this group came first after the
senators and received the same gifts. I suspect rather that Corippus
is referring to the orators, who would more naturally merit a
donative equal to the senate's and who would more probably follow
immediately after the senate. Corippus can certainly class himself
with these men (ll. 173-6), for what they have in common is the
writing of panegyrics on Justin")'.

Cameron's instinct and reasoning alike have surely led her to the
right conclusion. Her commentary, however, concentrates on the
historical Realien that underlie the text and is therefore understand-
ably silent on a literary theme whose appearance in the passage
under discussion confirms her suspicion.

This second class of recipients of the imperial largesse is said by
the poet to have deserved its benefactions by virtue of its 'vigilantia
noctis' and 'carisque favens sapientia Musis' (4. 182-3). The first
reference here must surely be to what was by Corippus' time a very
old and standard topos, the sleeplessness of the learned and devoted

1) J. Partsch, Corippi Africani Grammatici Libri Quae Supersunt (Monumenta Ger-
maniae Historica Auct. Ant. 3 Pt. 2) (Berlin 1879), XLIV-V.
2) Averil Cameron, Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In Laudem Iustini Augusti minoris