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PUBLILIUS OPTATIANUS PORFYRIUS

The poems of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius, and his exchange of letters with Constantine, are a contemporary witness for the emperor's reign and for his attitude to literature,¹ whose value is enhanced by the vicissitudes of Porfyrius' career: he was exiled, and later advanced to a double tenure of the prefecture of the city of Rome. But the poems and the letters can be related to their author's career, only if some degree of chronological precision is attained. The present article has three specific aims: first, to review the sparse evidence for Porfyrius' career; second, to argue that he composed a cycle of twenty poems for presentation to Constantine in 324 (viz. I – XVI, XVIII – XX, with XIIIa and XIIIb counting as two poems); and third, to propose that the poet's exchange of letters with Constantine be dated to November/December 312, immediately after Constantine became master of Rome.

If little claim to complete originality can be advanced, a fresh treatment of Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius can easily be justified. Although his life and career have been discussed several times in the present century, the results have been divergent, and the twenty poems have sometimes been distributed over a period of fully thirteen years (319 to 332).² Moreover, the

¹ Three critical editions have been published: L. Müller (Leipzig: Teubner 1877); E. Kluge (Leipzig: Teubner 1926); G. (I.) Polara (Turin: Paravia 1973)—I. *Textus adiuncto indice verborum*; II. *Commentarium criticum et exegeticum*. Where these scholars are named without an explicit reference being given, a reference should be understood (1) to Müller's introduction, pp. vii-x, (2) to Kluge's discussion of the dates of the individual poems on pp. 336-48 of the article cited in note 2, or (3) to Polara's commentary on the passage under consideration.

² See especially O. Seeck, 'Das Leben des Dichters Porphyrius', *RhM*, N.F. 63 (1908) 267-82; E. Kluge, 'Studien zu Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius', *Münchener Museum* 4 (1924) 323-48; E. Groag, 'Der Dichter Porfyrius in einer stadtrömischen Inschrift', *WS* 45 (1926/27) 102-9; R. Helm *RE* 23 (1959) cols. 1928-1936, s.v. Publilius 29; A. Chastagnol, *Les Fastes de la Préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962) 80-82; E. Castorina, *Questioni neoteriche* (1968) 275-95.

Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire has done a grave disservice to scholarship by proposing to identify Porfyrius as the anonymous prefect of the city of Rome whose horoscope Firmicus Maternus discusses (*Math.* 2.29.10-20).³ The identification has already been uncritically accepted and employed in the largest and fullest commentary on Porfyrius' works yet to be published.⁴ The *Prosopography*, however, neglected to mention the cardinal fact that the subject of the horoscope was born in March 303.⁵ He must, therefore, be Ceionius Rufius Albinus, *praefectus urbi* from 30 December 335 to 10 March 337, and the horoscope has a relevance to Porfyrius of a type which has not always been perceived.⁶ The *geniturae pater*, that is, on the correct identification, C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, was exiled by senatorial decree after twice holding an ordinary consulate and appears never to have returned to high office — which may be very pertinent to the date of Porfyrius' own exile.

I. *The Chronology of Porfyrius' Career*

Apart from his poems and the two letters, there are only four items of explicit evidence for the career of Porfyrius, heterogeneous in nature and disparate in the testimony which they provide. It will be necessary to proceed from the certain to the conjectural, and at least partly in reverse chronological order. The Chronographer of 354 registers Publilius Optatianus as *praefectus urbi* twice, from 7 September to 8 October 329 and from 7 April to 10 May 333 (*Chr. min.* I, p. 68). The double tenure, and the brevity of each term, are abnormal, but the

³ *P.L.R.E.* I (1971) 649, Optatianus 3; 1006-8, Anonymus 12, cf. p. 1004: "the career fits best that of Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius (*sic*) 3 (*Praefectus urbi* 329 and 333), and no other contemporary".

⁴ Polara includes Maternus' discussion of the horoscope as 'Testimonia de Optatiano' no. 3 (II, pp. 1-3). For the consequences, see his commentary on I. 13-18; II.32, etc. Nor is that the only peculiarity in Polara's treatment of Porfyrius. He denies the authenticity of poems XXII and XXIV and of the exchange of letters with Constantine (I, pp. xxix-xxxii). The arguments advanced are very far from being persuasive, and the following pages will assume that all four pieces are genuine.

⁵ W. Koch, *Astrologische Rundschau* 23 (1931) 177-83; O. Neugebauer, *AJP* 74 (1953) 418-20.

⁶ For a full discussion of the horoscope, see *JRS* 65 (1975) 1ff.

source of the information is beyond reproach. Next, Jerome records 'Porphyrius misso ad Constantinum insigni volumine exilio liberatur', under the twenty-third year of Constantine (*Chronicle* p. 232^e Helm). The year intended is presumably A.D. 328/9, but Jerome's precise date has no authority,⁷ and involves the implausibility that Porfyrius would have been plucked from exile and almost immediately invested with the urban prefecture. A decent interval between recall and prefecture can safely be postulated, and the *vicennalia* of Constantine would be a more appropriate occasion than any other.⁸

The other two pieces of evidence are inscriptions. One, from Sparta, reveals that Publilius Optatianus was proconsul of Achaëa: the city honoured him as a benefactor and saviour, and the expense of the statue was defrayed by M. Aurelius Stephanus, twice high priest of the Augusti (*SEG* XI, 810 = *AE* 1931,6). The discoverer of the inscription contemplated a date of 330 or 334.⁹ But no man is likely to have been proconsul of Achaëa after an urban prefecture. Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius must have been proconsul either before his exile or between his restoration and first prefecture.¹⁰ The later date tends to be preferred.¹¹ But a date before 324 cannot be excluded,¹² and two very different possibilities are open: either after 316/7, when Constantine gained control of Greece in the War of Cibalae,¹³ or else a decade or more earlier, before Maxentius began to rule Rome and Italy. Although an equestrian *praeses provinciae Achaiae* is attested between 293 and 305 (*Corinth*

⁷ R. Helm, *Philologus*, Supp. 21.2 (1929) 89.

⁸ For amnesty on the occasion of an imperial anniversary, observe Eusebius, *Hist. Eccl.* 8.6.10; *Mart Pal.*, praef. 2 (the *vicennalia* of Diocletian).

⁹ A. M. Woodward, *BSA* 29 (1930) 36.

¹⁰ E. Groag also admitted (implausibly) the interval between the two prefectures, *Die Reichsbeamten von Achaia in spätrömischer Zeit* (1946) 26.

¹¹ A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 82; *P.L.R.E.* I, pp. 649; 1077.

¹² For the high priesthood of the Augusti at Sparta, see K. M. T. Chrimes/Atkinson, *Ancient Sparta* (1949) 202ff. It cannot be deduced from the title of the high priest that *SEG* XI, 810 must belong to a date when there was more than one Augustus, i.e. before 324.

¹³ M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (1972) 50, 63, assumes that Constantine did not gain control of Achaëa until 324.

VIII, 2, nos. 23-25), there is also evidence for senatorial proconsuls in the same period: Eunapius speaks of a well-educated Roman as proconsul, apparently c. 300 (VS 9.2.3ff., p. 483f.), and C. Vettius Cossinius Rufinus, *praefectus urbi* in 315/6, had earlier in his career been allotted the proconsulate of Achaëa by sortition (*ILS* 1217).¹⁴

The second inscription which bears Porfyrius' name is a fragment found at Rome, in the Piazza Colonna, which contains nothing but seven names, all incomplete:¹⁵

TURRANIUS	
CREPEREIUS	RO
PUBLILIUS	OPTATIAN
CEIONIUS RUFIVS	VOLVSI
N. ANICIUS	P
CILIVS	
PR	

For the date, two quite distinct possibilities are open. The fourth name is universally identified as Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, consul in 311 and 314, a powerful supporter of Maxentius who maintained his standing under Constantine, at least initially.¹⁶ If so, the inscription should be earlier than his fall and exile, probably in or shortly after 315 (Firmicus Maternus, *Math.* 2.29.10-12), and may without difficulty be assigned to the very early fourth century. On this dating, Turraniu[s] will be L. Turranius Gratianus, *praefectus urbi* in 290/1, and the fifth man may be Anicius Faustus, consul for the second time in 298, whose full name has been conjectured to be M. Junius Caesonius Nicomachus Anicius Faustus Paulinus.¹⁷ On the

¹⁴ For these governors, see now, respectively, *P.L.R.E.* 1, p. 685, Paulus 11; p. 1013, Anonymus 45; p. 777, Rufinus 15, arguing that the proconsulate should be dated 306 or earlier.

¹⁵ I print a conflation of the two reports, *Notizie degli Scavi* (1917) 22 and *Bull. Comm.* 45 (1917) 225. The first element of the fifth name has been read both as '[I]VN' (F. Fornari, *Notizie degli Scavi* [1917] 22) and as '[AM]N' (A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 92).

¹⁶ For discussion of his family and career, see now *JRS* 65 (1975) 1ff.

¹⁷ He is so entered in *PIR*², A 601; G. Barbieri, *L'Albo senatorio da Settimio Severo a Carino* (193-285) [1952] no. 1802; A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 31-33. But

other hand, a date of c. 320 is sometimes adopted,¹⁸ and can perhaps be rendered strictly irrefutable by the easy (and probable) hypothesis that the great Volusianus had a homonymous son, father of C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, *praefectus urbi* in 365, and that it is he, not his father, who appears on the inscription.¹⁹ Turraniu[s] will then be the prefect's son,²⁰ and Anicius P[aulinus] can be the man with those names who was *praefectus urbi* in 334/5.²¹

The earlier date, though not demonstrable, is clearly preferable, and E. Groag very attractively identified the names as belonging to members of a priestly college whom Maxentius induced (or compelled) to contribute to the building of a temple.²² If that is correct, then Porfyrius had entered the college earlier than a man who was born in the fifth decade of the third century,²³ and his own birth can hardly be assigned to a date later than c. 260/270. However, even on the other view, there would still be a chance, perhaps even a probability, that he was proconsul of Achaëa before 306 — and therefore born before c. 275.

II. Historical Allusions in the Poems

Long ago L. Müller printed poems I – XX under the title 'Panegyricus Constantini' (a title which appears in the manuscripts, but is not there confined to these poems alone), and poems XXI – XXVIII as 'Carmina reliqua'. (Poem XVII is

Barbieri later corrected the entry to read 'Anicius Faustus' (p. 640), and *P.L.R.E.* I, p. 329 registers him under these two names alone. The second, sixth and seventh names are of no aid in dating, cf. *P.L.R.E.* I, p. 767, Rogatus 2; p. 10, Acilius 1; p. 1001, s.v. PR.

¹⁸ A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 16; 57; 81; 92. But Chastagnol denied the relevance of the horoscope of March 303, which he attributed to a Vettius Rufinus (ibid. 65ff.).

¹⁹ This Volusianus may already be attested by *Cod. Theod.* 13.3.1 (dated 321 or 324). Clearly not the consul of 311 and 314 as 'préfet du prétoire II en 321' (A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 58).

²⁰ *P.L.R.E.* I, pp. 402; 925.

²¹ A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 92.

²² E. Groag (note 2, above) 102ff.

²³ Volusianus was *corrector Italiae* from c. 282 to c. 290 (*ILS* 1213; *CIL* X, 1655).

correctly rejected by Müller, Kluge and Polara as inauthentic: it is a metrical explanation of XVIII composed by a much later hand.) Moreover, Müller expressly asserted that the 'panegyric' was written in exile and dedicated to Constantine at his *vicennalia*, in July 325. Similarly O. Seeck, in his study of Porfyrius' career, though preferring 326.²⁴ But E. Kluge, followed by most subsequent scholars, assigned three poems to dates somewhat removed from 325/6, viz. VI to 322/3, X to 319, XVIII to 332. Since the *Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* confuses the issue by referring to "panegyrics on the occasion" of Porfyrius' recall,²⁵ the evidence for the date of each poem must be reviewed individually. The essential and undisputed points of reference are as follows: (1) Crispus and the younger Constantine had been officially invested as Caesars on 1 March 317; (2) Licinius was defeated in the summer of 324, in battles at Hadrianople on 3 July and at Chrysopolis on 18 September; (3) Constantius was proclaimed Caesar on 8 November 324; (4) Constantine's *vicennalia* were celebrated at Nicomedia for a month beginning on 25 July 325 and again in Rome in the following summer, (5) Crispus was executed in the spring or early summer of 326, while the court was traveling to Rome.²⁶

I is clearly introductory and written in exile, but contains no datable historical allusion.

II seems to allude to the defeat of Licinius (25-28: 'armis civilibus ultor, . . . per te pax, optime ductor,/et bellis secura quies').

III implies that Constantine rules the whole world (12/13: 'aurea iam toto, victor, tua saecula pollent,/Constantine polo').

²⁴ O. Seeck (note 2, above) 275ff. For the arrangement of the poems in the various manuscripts, see the table provided by G. Polara, I, p. xix.

²⁵ *P.L.R.E.* I, p. 649.

²⁶ For these dates, O. Seeck, *Regesten der Kaiser und Päpste für die Jahre 311 bis 476 n. Chr.* (1919) 165; 173ff. There are several errors in E. Kluge's discussion, 'Beiträge zur Chronologie der Geschichte Constantins des Grossen', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, XLII (1922) 89-102, some of which reappear in Polara's commentary (e.g. II, p. 77: 'Constantini victoriam ex Licinio a. 323 partam').

IV introduces V and refers twice to 'vicennia' (1; 7). One couplet is of some historical importance:

hos (i.e. Crispus and the younger Constantine) rupes Cirrhaea sonet
videatque coruscos
Ponti nobilitas, altera Roma, duces (5-6)

L. Müller identified the second Rome as Nicomedia, E. Kluge as Constantinople. The latter is surely correct, but Porfyrius ought to be writing before he discovered that on 8 November 324 Constantine had both formally founded the city and proclaimed his son Constantius Caesar.²⁷ For he speaks of two Caesars only (cf. XVI, 36). The poem, therefore, appears to indicate that Constantine already intended to establish a 'second Rome' on the Bosphorus in 324.²⁸

V celebrates Constantine's conquest of Licinius (3: 'Oriente recepto', etc.), to which it conjoins his *vicennalia*: the pattern reads 'AUG XX CAES X'.

VI alludes to a victory over Sarmatians (15) and to battles at Campona (18ff.), on the River Margus (22ff.), and at Bononia on the Danube (26ff.). The poem is normally dated 322/3 and used as evidence for Porfyrius' career.²⁹ Two passages are argued to prove that the poet accompanied Constantine, presumably as *comes*, on his Sarmatian campaign:

factorum gnarum tam grandia dicere vatem
iam totiens, Auguste, licet (16-17)

quaecumque parat (sc. Musa) sub lege sonare,
scruposis innexa modis, perfecta Camenis
vult resonare meis, et testis nota tropaea

²⁷ For the *dies imperii* of Constantius, see Amanianus 14.5.1; *CIL* I², 276 = *Inscr. Ital.* XIII.2, p. 259; *Chr. min.* I, p. 232; *Notizie degli Scavi* (1936) 96/7 = *AE* 1937, 119 (with plain 'idibus Nob.' in error). The coincidence of the two events is expressly stated by Themistius: βασιλεῖ δὲ εἰκότως συνανξάνεται πόλις ἢ τῆς βασιλείας ἡλικιώτις · πυνθάνομαι γὰρ ὡς καὶ ἡμφίασεν ὁμοῦ ὁ γεννήτωρ τὸ τε ἄστυ τῷ κύκλῳ καὶ τὸν νιέα τῇ ἀλουργίδι (*Orat.* 4.58b).

²⁸ Porfyrius tends to be overlooked in discussions of the foundation of Constantinople: e.g. A. Alföldi, *JRS* 47 (1947) 10ff.; R. Janin, *Constantinople byzantine*² (1964) 21ff.

²⁹ G. Polara rejects the date for the poem but retains the inference: 'Optatianus aperte palamque dixit se bello interfuisse' (on VI, 17).

depictis signare metris, cum munere sacro
mentis devotae placarint fata procellas (31-35)

Neither passage necessarily entails that Porphyrius was an eye-witness of Constantine's battles, only that he is a contemporary who knows about them (16). On the contrary, the second passage implies rather that the poet's exile prevents him from being an eye-witness: his Muse wishes to depict the victories as such, when 'the fates soothe the storms of her devoted mind by a sacred gift'. Since the 'sacred gift' must be an imperial pardon, the poem need not show that Porphyrius was exiled after the Sarmatian campaign. It may, nonetheless, have been written immediately after it, in 322 or 323 (the year is uncertain).³⁰

VII also refers to the Sarmatian campaign (32: 'victor Sarmatiae totiens'), and hence, despite the mention of 'toto victoria in orbe' (29), was probably written before the defeat of Licinius. If so, one passage has some historical significance:

indomitos reges seu pacis lubrica victor
aut bello sternens aut mitis foedere, nutu
esse tuos facis agrosque exercere tuorum (20-22)

Porphyrius seems to be saying that Constantine has defeated Sarmatian kings and made a treaty with them, by which they work the fields of his subjects.

VIII refers to the sons of Constantine (6ff.) and their military achievements (33). G. Polara dates the poem to 320/1 and detects an allusion to the *quinquennalia* of the Caesars (6ff.), but E. Kluge had already observed that a date c. 325 is also tenable.

IX alludes to the defeat of Licinius (2ff.), names Crispus (24) and ends with the wish for a successful celebration of the emperor's *vicennalia* and his sons' *decennalia* (35/36).

X is commonly dated to 319, on the strength of a reference to Crispus and the Frangi:

paras nunc omine Crispi
Oceani intactas oras, quibus eruta Franci
dat regio procul ecce deum, cui devia latis
tota patent campis. (25-28)

³⁰ For the date of 322, most are content to appeal to O. Seeck, *Regesten*, 172. But Seeck adduced only Porphyrius and Zosimus 2.21, neither of whom actually states a date.

E. Kluge claimed that the poem was written to celebrate Crispus' victory over the Franci (which she dated to 319).³¹ But Porfyrius' main emphasis is surely on a future campaign by Constantine himself: with Crispus' earlier success as a good omen, he will reach the untouched shores of the Ocean. A phrase such as 'concordi saeclo' (21) and the line 'aspice! pacato parta est lux laeta sub orbe' (35) suggest that the poem was written after Licinius' defeat.

The words of the pattern, which include the phrase 'pater imperas, avus imperes', have commended a date in 322 to G. Polara, who puts the poem before Constantine's Sarmatian campaign, at a time when the wife of Crispus was known to be pregnant. However, since the child in question is attested only by a single allusion (*CTh* IX, 38, 1, of 30 October 322), she probably died in infancy, and the subjunctive of 'avus imperes' could have been equally apt in 324.

XI expressly celebrates the defeat of Licinius.

XII is normally also held to celebrate the defeat of Licinius, and the description of Constantine as 'mundi gloria, consul' (1) is often held to refer to his consulate in 326: hence O. Seeck dated the poem to that year, while E. Groag argued that Porfyrius used the term in autumn 325 in anticipation of Constantine's consulate on the following 1 January.³² But G. Polara has correctly observed that the future tenses (e.g. 3/4: 'mox carus Eois/tot populis pia iura ferēs') and the plea to Constantine to rescue the world (15-18) show that Porfyrius is writing before the defeat of Licinius (which Polara mistakenly here dates to 323). But what of 'consul'? Constantine was not in fact consul between 320 and 326. E. Kluge proposed to take the word as a synonym for 'consiliarius' or 'consultor',³³ and Polara alleges that it is 'generatim positum'. A better hypothesis is that Porfyrius, writing in the summer of 324, expected Constantine, after his impending victory, to become consul for the next year. It must surely have come as a surprise to many when one of the consuls of 325 was Licinius' pretorian prefect.³⁴

³¹ P. Bruun, *RIC* 7 (1966) 76, prefers 318.

³² O. Seeck (note 2, above) 275; E. Groag (note 2, above) 104.

³³ E. Kluge (note 26, above) 92f.

³⁴ viz. Julius Julianus (*P.L.R.E.* I, pp. 478/9).

XIIIa, XIIIb and XIV again celebrate the defeat of Licinius. XIIIa and XIIIb should be regarded as two poems, since they would have been written separately, presumably as a sort of diptych.

XV seems to contain no precise historical allusion.

XVI is normally dated after the defeat of Licinius, but G. Polara has observed that the poem speaks rather of a Constantine who rules Italy, Africa and the horrid north (10ff.) but not yet the whole world:

undique pakatis salvator maxima rebus
gaudia praestabis, dabis otia victor in orbe;
virtutum meritis vicennia praecipe vota. (33-35)

Although Polara dates the poem to 322, a date early in 324 cannot be excluded.

XVIII is commonly dated to 332, on the strength of the mention of Getae (11ff.), taken as an allusion to a Gothic war in that year (*Exc. Vales.* I, 31; *Chr. min.* I, p. 234). But the alleged allusion should be otherwise interpreted:

vincere florenti Latiales Sarmata ductu
rex tibi posse Getas viso dat limite, ultor.
vidit te, summum columen, qua velifer aestu
serus in Oceani pressit iuga Nysia pontus,
atque rudis radii scit lux exorta tropaea (11-15)

The first two lines (as G. Polara sees) allude to the Sarmatian victory of 322 or 323, the last three to Constantine's conquest of the east in 324. Moreover, civil war has recently ended and the emperor is styled consul:

Alme, tuas laurus aetas sustollet in astra.
luce tua signes fastus sine limite consul!
Marte serenus habes reiecto munia Graium
et Medi praestas in censum sceptrata redire. (1-4)

Again (as in XII, 1), an allusion may be detected to a consulate which Constantine was expected to assume on 1 January 325.

XIX alludes to the *vicennalia* (12; 30ff.) and its pattern contains the letters 'VOT. XX'. Further, the pattern (of a ship) appears to allude to Crispus' naval victory at Chrysopolis (36: [sc. pagina] 'Augustae subolis memorans insignia fata').

XXa and XXb are a single poem. For all the twenty-six lines in XXa have eighteen letters, while the twenty-six in XXb ascend one by one from twenty-five to fifty letters: set on their sides, with 'Augusto victore iuvat rata reddere vota' between them, the two halves of the poem depict an organ (described in XXb). The poem refers to the celebration in Rome of recent victories of the emperor and the Caesars (XXa. 1ff.)³⁵ — and to the poet's enforced and unwilling absence.

Poems XXI – XXVIII differ considerably, both from the preceding poems and from one another. None is addressed to Constantine, there is no common theme or group of themes, and while one is a hymn to Christ (XXIV), another depicts a pagan altar (XXVI, esp. 1: 'vides, ut ara stem dicata Pythio'), and a third invokes pagan deities (XXVII). Only two of these poems contain anything indicating a date: XXI attributes its existence to one Bassus (14/15: 'Bassus nunc prodero carmen/imperat'), while XXII refers to the consulate of its unnamed addressee (33). O. Seeck identified the addressee of XXII with Bassus, and both with the Bassus consul in 317.³⁶ The identification, if correct, would indicate that at least two of these poems were written some years before those which Porfyrius addressed to Constantine.³⁷

Poem XXIII deserves to be brought to the attention of students of late imperial prosopography. Porfyrius warns a Greek friend from Phrygia of his wife's adultery. The *versus intextus* reads

Μάρκε τέην ἄλογον, τὴν Ὑμνίδα, Νεῖλος ἐλαύνει.

The poet claims to be giving the real names (XXIII, 9): two senators with the *cognomen* Nilus are known from the middle of the fourth century.³⁸

³⁵ Not necessarily the *vicennalia*, as appears to be universally assumed.

³⁶ O. Seeck (note 2, above) 270f. Now known to be Caesonius Bassus (*P.L.R.E.* I, p. 154).

³⁷ Identity with Junius Bassus, consul in 331, is hesitantly preferred by A. Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 81; *P.L.R.E.* I, p. 155.

³⁸ *P.L.R.E.* I, p. 632.

III. *Porfyrius and Constantine*

From the facts set out so far, it is a legitimate inference (though not a necessary one) that Porfyrius composed a cycle of twenty poems (viz. I – XIIIa, XIIIb – XVI, XVIII – XX), which he intended to be presented to Constantine in support of his plea to be restored from exile. Most of the poems were written after Constantine defeated Licinius, and several passages refer to the emperor's *vicennalia* (325/6) and to the *decennalia* of the Caesars (326/7). Can a precise date be deduced? O. Seeck argued for the early months of 326,³⁹ while E. Kluge and others date many (though not all) of the poems to Constantine to the preceding year. But Porfyrius speaks of two Caesars alone (XVI.36), and never alludes to the Caesar proclaimed on 8 November 324. Accordingly, a slightly earlier date seems preferable: let it be proposed that Porfyrius finished and dispatched his cycle of poems pleading for mercy in the autumn of 324, and was recalled from exile shortly thereafter.⁴⁰

The extant poems to Constantine were not the first which Optatianus addressed to the emperor. He had presented expensively decorated manuscripts before his exile:

Quae quondam sueras pulchro decorata libello
 carmen in Augusti ferre, Thalia, manus,
 ostro tota nitens, argento auroque coruscis
 scripta notis, picto limite dicta notans,
 scriptoris bene compta manu meritoque renidens
 gratificum, domini visibus apta sacris,
 pallida nunc, . . .
 hinc trepido pede tecta petis venerabilis aulae (I.1-9)

Some of these poems may have been bucolic, for Porfyrius describes himself as 'ruris vates' (XV.15). It is accordingly of some interest that Porfyrius seems to reveal that he was African by origin (XVI.16ff.).⁴¹ In Africa at least, Latin culture and literature maintained an existence through the dark days of the

³⁹ O. Seeck (note 2, above) 267ff.

⁴⁰ Similarly, but not quite accurately, *P.L.R.E.* I, p. 649: "presumably composed in 324 and early 325, since no mention is made of Constantius Caesar".

⁴¹ O. Seeck (note 2, above) 268ff.

third century, and Nemesianus of Carthage wrote pastoral eclogues and didactic poetry c. 280.⁴²

The exchange of letters between Porfyrius and Constantine belongs to this earlier period, before the poet's exile. The imperial titles probably indicate a date before 324: 'domino Constantino maximo pio invicto et venerabili semper Augusto' and 'Invictus Constantinus Maximus Augustus'.⁴³ There is no allusion to the poet's exile or restoration, and the correspondence appears to proceed on the assumption that its occasion is Porfyrius' first (or possibly second) presentation of poems to the emperor.⁴⁴ A precise date can be divined. In autumn 312, Constantine defeated Maxentius and gained control of Italy and Africa, the Roman Senate rapidly came to terms with their new master and declared him to be the senior ruling Augustus.⁴⁵ If Optatianus speaks of 'clementia tua' (*Ep. Porfyrii* 1;9), of 'tua manus victrices' (2) and Constantine's legislation (6), and refers to his position as the first of the emperors (6: 'et invictus semper et primus es'), that may suggest that the letter was written in November/December 312 by one who had supported the defunct régime.

If this conjecture (it is no more) can be admitted, then Constantine's reply takes on a greater significance. For it becomes a sort of cultural manifesto, issued by the new ruler of Italy and Africa:

saeculo meo scribentes dicentesque non aliter benignus
auditus quam lenis aura prosequitur; denique etiam
studiis meritum a me testimonium non negatur (*Ep. Constantini* 6/7)

IV. *The Life of Porfyrius*

The occasion of the poet's exile can now be discussed. E.

⁴² Nemesianus, *Cynegetica* 64 alludes to 'divi fortissima pignora Cari', which entails a date of 283/4. On the cultural context, cf. *Tertullian. A Historical and Literary Study* (1971) 187ff.

⁴³ For the forms of Constantine's official titulature, *Diz. ep.* 1, pp. 645ff. After 324 one would expect the inclusion of 'victor' or 'triumphator'.

⁴⁴ Many of the correct arguments were used by L. Müller, in his preface, p. ix.

⁴⁵ Lactantius, *Mort. Pers.* 44.11.

Groag once proposed that Porfyrius' exile (which he dated after 322) should be connected with the fall of Ceionius Rufius Volusianus, whom he also conjectured to be a relative.⁴⁶ That hypothesis can stand, in a modified form. The poem from which Groag deduced that Porfyrius was still in favour at court in 322 will not bear that interpretation (VI), and Volusianus, who was exiled when his enemies combined to overcome him in the Roman Senate (Firmicus Maternus, *Math.* 2.29.11-12), probably fell in or shortly after 315. There is no obstacle to supposing that Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius was exiled as a result of the same political conflict.

For clarity, and ease of verification (or disproof), the various hypotheses argued above can be stated schematically:—
Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius

born c. 260/270

proconsul of Achaëa before 306

Epistula ad Constantinum November/December 312

exiled in or shortly after 315

presented poems I – XX to Constantine in autumn 324

recalled from exile early in 325

praefectus urbi 7 September-8 October 239 and again 7 April-10 May 333.

Only the prefecture of the city of Rome (it must be emphasized) is firmly dated by reliable evidence: the rest depends strictly and solely on hypothesis and conjecture.⁴⁷

T. D. BARNES

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⁴⁶ E. Groag (note 2, above) 107f.

⁴⁷ E. Castorina arrived at a similar general chronology, though by a slightly different route: "Tutto ciò, in definitiva, fa ritenere quanto mai probabile che già ai primi anni del IV secolo, e forse anche agli ultimi del III, Porfirio abbia poetato da *neotericus*" (note 2, above) 278.

I am grateful to my colleague Richard Tarrant for much helpful advice on the interpretation of Porfyrius' poems.