A NATIVITY POEM OF THE SIXTH CENTURY A.D.

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THE Latin poem of twenty-four lines which I shall discuss not only opens up questions of the development of Marian themes and imagery in Greek and Latin poetry of the sixth century A.D., especially in relation to the iconography of the Virgin, but also allows us to glimpse once again the intimate contacts which existed at high levels of society between Rome and Constantinople. In this case, as so rarely happens, it is actually possible to demonstrate a personal connection, with implications for a community of ideas between East and West that we sometimes tend to underestimate. The poem brings us into the world of Gregory the Great and his friendships within the court circles of Constantinople in the 580s, and especially with those highborn Roman émigrés whose presence in Constantinople in the later sixth century was still to make the Eastern capital seem like a cosmopolitan city.[1]

But first, there are textual problems to be discussed. The best version of the poem currently available is by Riese:[2]

Virgo parens hac luce deumque virumque creavit
  Gnara puerperii, nescia coniugii.
Obtulit haec iussis uterum docuitque futuros,
  Sola capax Christi quod queat esse fides.
Credidit et tumuit: verbum pro semine sumsit.
  Clauserunt magnum parvula membra deum.
Conditor extat opus, servi rex induit artus
  Mortalemque domum vivificator habet.
Ipse sator semenque sui matrisque creator,
  Filius ipse hominis, qui deus est hominum.
Adfulsit partus, lucem lux nostra petivit,
  Hospitii linquens ostia clausa sui.
Virginis et matris servatur gloria consors:
  Mater das hominem noscere, virgo deum.
Unius colitur duplex substantia nati:
  Vir, deus, haec duo sunt; unus utrumque tamen.
Spiritus huic genitorque suus sine fine cohaerent,
  Triplicitas simplex simplicitasque triplex.
Bis genitus, sine matre opifex, sine patre redemptor,
  Celsus utroque modo, celsior unde minor.

1. For a good counter to conventional views of the separation of East and West, see P. Brown, "Eastern and Western Christendom in Late Antiquity: A Parting of the Ways," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 1–23. I am grateful to Professor Thomas Gelzer for helpful comments and suggestions.

2. *Anth. Lat.* 1. 2. 494*c* Buecheler–Riese (Leipzig, 1906).

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Sic voluit nasci, domuit qui crimina mundi,
Et mortem iussit mortuus ipse mori.
Nostras ille suo tueatur numine vitas;
Protegat ille tuum, Rusticiana, genus.

In Riese's edition the poem is headed *Andreae oratoris*. The heading is given in A, the Antwerp MS of Sedulius, no. 126, of the tenth century, which Riese cites in his apparatus.[3] Although Riese appears at first sight to have revised his edition of the poem in the light of C. Caesar's article on this manuscript, on closer inspection his reporting in the apparatus criticus turns out to be seriously misleading. Caspar Barth printed a text of this poem in his *Adversaria*,[4] "ex codice ignoto, cum A faciens," as Riese reports. Thus Barth's testimony would seem to have independent value. But the very article cited by Riese shows clearly that Barth was not using a manuscript at all, but derived his knowledge of the poem entirely from Poelmann's edition of Prosper of Aquitaine, which appeared in 1560.[5] In this edition our poem appears between Prosper's epigrams and his *De providentia*. Poelmann found this poem in the same Sedulius manuscript (our A) which contained the works of Prosper, and edited it along with them. When Riese attributes to Barth the testimony that our poem is *Andreae oratoris de Maria virgine ad Rusticianam carmen*, he implies that Barth had found these words in an independent manuscript. The truth is that Barth copied them from Poelmann's edition, where they were used by Poelmann as a heading for the poem.[6] Thus the words *de Maria virgine* have no manuscript authority, but are merely a composition by the first editor based on the poem itself. We shall find that this is relevant for the interpretation of the poem, and we should not be misled by Poelmann's facile assumption that it is a poem about the Virgin.

There is in fact a different version of the last line which we must now consider. J.-B. de Rossi also edited this poem—but from Vaticanus Palatinus 833, where it belongs to a collection of inscriptional poems from the city of Rome.[7] In this version the last line reads: *Protegat ille tuum Gregori presule genus*. The clumsy and unmetrical *Gregori presule* immediately looks like a substitution for the metrically perfect reference to Rusticiana, and De Rossi, knowing the Rusticiana version from Barth but unaware of the Antwerp manuscript of Sedulius in which it is included, himself realized that the Rusticiana version must have been the original, and that our poem must have been used again for a different person.[8] In its context in Vaticanus Palatinus 833 the Gregory version is clearly pre-seventh century, and I

3. Riese refers to the discussion of this MS by C. Caesar, "Die Antwerpener Handschrift des Sedulius," *RhM* 56 (1901): 247–71; the MS was not used in Huemer's 1885 edition of Sedulius (*CSEL* 10), which also contains the epigrams of Prosper of Aquitaine and some short poems, including the one under discussion.

4. *Adversaria* 56. 16 (Frankfurt, 1624; 2nd ed., 1628).

5. See Caesar, "Sedulius," p. 264.

6. Ibid., p. 265. Caesar conveniently quotes the relevant passage in Barth which proves the connection.

7. *ICUR*, 2.1. 63 (p. 109).

8. Ibid. (note).

think that De Rossi was undoubtedly right to assume that the Gregory named as *praesul* can only be Pope Gregory the Great (590–604).[9] If, then, the poem was adapted for Gregory I from an existing version, two different versions of it were in existence already in the sixth century; as Caesar observed,[10] this can be clearly seen in the existing manuscript tradition, for different manuscripts vary according to whether they derive from the Rusticiana version, which I shall argue is Constantinopolitan, or from the Gregory version, which is Roman. Such readings or headings as individual manuscripts may have must then be interpreted in the light of this dual tradition. Thus Vaticanus Palatinus 487, which contains only the last two lines, has them in the Rusticiana version. On the other hand, a twelfth-century MS in Trinity College, Cambridge,[11] clearly stems from the later adaptation, as we shall see.

This manuscript deserves more attention than it has had so far. Riese cites it only on line 24, and it is clear from his preface and apparatus criticus on *Anthologia Latina* 786*b* that he had not seen the MS himself.[12] The last line of this version is perhaps an even clumsier attempt to mend the meter: *Protegat ille tuum genus Gregorie praesul.* Its textual affinity is clearly with Vaticanus Palatinus 833, although in this later version the text is disturbed by the omission of lines 15 and 16 and the displacement of lines 17 and 18 after lines 19 and 20.[13] For our purposes, however, the heading of the poem in this MS is of more interest than the text presented, for before the text itself are written in red the words *Versus beati pape Gregorii*, and then a heading which reads: *In diem natalem Christi.* Several points can be made. First, the poem is here detached from its context of Christian inscriptions. In this manuscript it is the last of seventeen short poems, mostly unattributed and without titles, of which all the rest are about calendars or planets and signs of the zodiac. The first twelve are about the twelve months of the year. Some attempt has surely been made in the heading to give the poem a title which will make clear its association with the others in the group, and the connection is precisely that it is about a specific day—Christmas Day. The author of the headings, whoever he was, was in no doubt that the poem referred to Pope Gregory the Great, or that it was a poem not primarily about the Virgin (as Poelmann and Barth thought), but actually about the birth of Christ. This is a valuable clue in the exposition of the poem, and one that will lead us to reject De Rossi's assumption, based on his acceptance of the characterization of the poem as being *de Maria virgine*, that it was written perhaps as an inscription to accompany a picture of the Vir-

9. Ibid.; nothing in De Rossi's collection dates from a later period.
10. "Sedulius," p. 266.
11. Cantabrig. Tr. 0. 2. 24.
12. See pp. iv, 266 (vol. 1, pt. 2).
13. My thanks to the Librarian of Trinity College, Cambridge, for allowing me to consult this MS, and for subsequently providing me with a photograph. See M. R. James, *The Western MSS. in the Library of Trinity College, Cambridge*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, 1902), pp. 116–17. Readings in common with Vat. Pal. 833 are *saepserunt* (6), *Fit fabricator* (7), *pater* (10), *dans* (14).

gin holding the child Jesus.[14] Our poem found its way into this twelfth-century MS collection of miscellaneous grammatical and technical works, many of them by medieval authors (Charlemagne, Alcuin, Bede), not as an epigram accompanying an icon of the Virgin, but as a poem concerned with a date—the date of the birth of Christ.

Before we can take this argument further, the Rusticiana mentioned in the original version must be identified. The attribution to Andreas *orator* given in A is not much help. No suitable Andreas seems to emerge from the files of the second volume of *PLRE*. As for Rusticiana, De Rossi assumed that she was the wife of Boethius, whose sufferings after the Gothic capture of Rome in 546 are described by Procopius.[15] Forced to beg for her bread, she was saved from the enmity of the Goths by Totila himself.[16] The daughter of Symmachus, she was the mother of the consuls of 522, themselves called Boethius and Symmachus.[17] But after 546 there is no further evidence. Another Rusticiana died in 538,[18] but nothing more is known about her. But there is a third, the granddaughter of Boethius, called by the same name as her grandmother.[19] This lady moved from Rome to Constantinople toward the end of the sixth century, and was there one of the circle of Westerners around the court of the Emperor Maurice.[20] We are still in the world of the great families who could span both Rome and Constantinople. Boethius belonged to the Anicii; thus this Rusticiana was one of the clan that had been such a factor in the politics of the first half of the century.[21] So far the Western aristocrats in Constantinople at the end of the sixth century have received less study, but their influence must still have been considerable, and Rusticiana the younger was a leading member of the group. We do not know exactly when she moved to the East, but her daughter married Apion III of Oxyrhynchus, probably early in the 590s.[22] She would then surely have been in Constantinople when Gregory,

14. See the discussion in *ICUR*, 2.1. 63 (p. 109): "Epigramma fortasse appictum imagini Virginis puerum Iesum gestantis."

15. *BG* 3. 20. 27.

16. *BG* 3. 20. 29–31.

17. See *PLRE* 2, s.v. "Rusticiana" 1.

18. *CIL*, 6. 32042, described as *inl(ustris) f(emina)*.

19. See J. Sundwall, *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte des ausgehenden Römertums* (Helsingfors, 1919), pp. 102–3.

20. We await a study by T. S. Brown which will illuminate this circle. In the meantime see F. Homes Dudden, *Gregory the Great. His Place in History and Thought*, vol. 1 (London, 1905), pp. 154–55; E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 618, n. 1. P. Goubert, *Byzance avant l'Islam*, vol. 2.2: *Rome, Byzance et Carthage* (Paris, 1965), pp. 148–52, uses the evidence of Gregory's letters, but without reference to Rusticiana.

21. See A. Momigliano, "Cassiodorus and Italian Culture of His Time," *PBA* 41 (1956): 207–45; idem, "Gli Anicii e la storiografia latina del VI sec. d. C.," *Rendiconti Accademia dei Lincei*, Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche, ser. 8, 11–12 (1956): 231–54 (both in *Secondo contributo alla storia degli studi classici* [Rome, 1960], pp. 191–254).

22. See Sundwall, *Abhandlungen*, p. 104. Despite E. R. Hardy, *The Large Estates of Byzantine Egypt* (New York, 1931), p. 37, further developed (with detailed discussion of the careers of Strategius and Apion II under Justinian) in idem, "The Egyptian Policy of Justinian, *DOP* 22 (1968): 23–41, esp. p. 35 ("after two generations of prominence in the imperial court the family seems to have retired to its native province"), it is clear from Gregory's letters that the Apiones of the late sixth century spent a good part of their time in Constantinople.

the future pope, was there as *apocrisiarius* from 579 to 586; it must have been then that the two met and laid the foundations of the friendship that was to continue until the first years of the seventh century.[23]

Sundwall was surely right in identifying the Rusticiana of our poem with this great lady.[24] During his years in Constantinople Gregory met a whole group of people with whom he continued to correspond after his return to Rome as pope. They included the empress herself, the emperor's sister, two ladies called Italica and Dominica, Leander of Seville, Anastasius the ex-patriarch of Antioch, and Cyriacus the future patriarch of Constantinople.[25] Given such a network, it is overwhelmingly likely that the two versions of our poem somehow reflect the close connection between Gregory and the younger Rusticiana. Gregory wanted her to come to Rome in A.D. 598—he says he cannot understand her liking for Constantinople and her neglect of Rome[26]—but, though "everyone" wanted to see her again, she apparently did not return. In 601 Gregory thanked her for sending a gift of a pair of curtains to St. Peter's; they had not been installed with the exact ceremony she requested because Gregory was ill with gout, and the messenger (a Symmachus) bearing Rusticiana's letter with full instructions had delayed it out of consideration for the pope's health.[27] In the same letter Gregory mentions another gift from Rusticiana, to the monastery of St. Andrew. The last letter dates from February 603;[28] when he wrote it, Gregory evidently did not yet know of the murder of Maurice.[29] But in May he was writing an official letter to the new emperor Phocas,[30] and in June he wrote to Rusticiana's daughter Eusebia, wife of Apion, urging her to forget the troubles of the *regia civitas* by keeping her mind on spiritual matters.[31] We might be tempted to suppose that Rusticiana had suffered in the debacle that struck Maurice and his family, but this is unlikely, for in his letter to her daughter Gregory only mentions the general woes of the city and Eusebia's own concern for her possessions (*divitiae*). At any rate, after this we hear no more of Rusticiana, and Gregory's correspondence ends in the following year.

It is not at all surprising that a lady such as Rusticiana living in Constantinople might have commissioned a poem in Latin, or found a poet capable of writing it for her. As Gregory's letters show, Latin was still in

23. Greg. *Epist.* 2. 27 (A.D. 592), 4. 44 (594), 8. 22 (598), 11. 26 (601), 13. 26 (603).
24. *Abhandlungen*, p. 104.
25. Homes Dudden, *Gregory the Great*, 1:154–55; Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, 2:618, nn. 1–2.
26. *Epist.* 8. 22.
27. *Epist.* 11. 26. Such was Rusticiana's deferential attitude toward Gregory that in this letter he asks his old friend to refrain from calling herself his *ancilla*. Seven or eight years earlier (encouraged by Gregory) she had been on a pilgrimage to Mt. Sinai (*Epist.* 2. 27, 4. 4). Later Rusticiana and Gregory were able to commiserate with each other when she, too, was afflicted with gout (*Epist.* 11. 26, 13. 26).
28. *Epist.* 13. 26.
29. Maurice and his sons were killed on November 26 or 27, 602: Theophylact 8. 113; *Chron. Pasch.*, 1:694 Bonn; Theophanes, p. 290 De Boor. See A. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1968), p. 52; J. B. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire from Arcadius to Irene (395 A.D. to 800 A.D.)*, vol. 2 (London, 1889), pp. 91–92.
30. *Epist.* 13. 34.
31. *Epist.* 13. 35.

regular use not only in the imperial bureaus, but also for communication between members of the upper classes, not all of them Westerners.[32] The fact that Gregory's knowledge of Greek continues to be disputed at least shows that there were still many in Constantinople who understood Latin.[33] Rusticiana had children and grandchildren living in Constantinople, frequent recipients of Gregory's good wishes and prayers,[34] and apparently still had friends and members of her family in Rome.[35] Quite apart from these personal connections, it is becoming clear that in general there was more Latin surviving in Constantinople even at the end of the sixth century than is commonly supposed, and there must certainly still have been some professional poets or rhetoricians capable of composing Latin works to order.[36] I suggest, therefore, that our poem was commissioned by Rusticiana for her own purposes, probably to inscribe on or beside some picture which she set up herself; subsequently, perhaps, she gave this picture to Gregory, who took it to Rome, where the epigram was freshly inscribed, either in Gregory's house or elsewhere, but with a suitably (and not very skillfully) altered ending. It is possible that the poem could have been composed in Rome before Rusticiana moved to the East, but it is prima facie much more likely that it belongs to the period of her residence in Constantinople. I shall argue that the content and style of the poem very much supports such an Eastern context. Fuller consideration of Corippus' panegyric on Justin II has revealed how completely the Latin language could be made a vehicle for sentiments and subject matter belonging wholly to Constantinople,[37] and I would suggest that in this poem we have another example of the continued use of Latin. But if our poem is basically an Eastern poem, we must be very cautious about using it to illustrate the development of Marian imagery or iconography in the West.

Despite lines 1–14, this poem is not, in its total effect, about the Virgin, even though the first half does, as we shall see, contain imagery and language parallel to other contemporary Marian texts. At line 15, the writer

32. E.g., *Epist.* 1. 4 (to the patriarch John of Constantinople), 1. 5 (to Theoctista, the sister of Maurice), 1. 7 (to Anastasius of Antioch)—merely a random sample.

33. Recently, J. M. Peterson, "Did Gregory the Great Know Greek?" *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 121–34.

34. Her daughter, Eusebia, married Apion III; she also had a son, Eudoxius, whose wife was called Gregoria. Eusebia and Apion III had daughters (unnamed) and the son Strategius, frequently mentioned by Gregory. All of these people seem to have been living in Constantinople; see *Epist.* 4. 44, 11. 26, 13. 26, 13. 35. *PLRE* 3 will eventually make it possible to demonstrate the deep penetration of the aristocracy of Constantinople by Westerners, at the end of the sixth century no less than at the beginning. Rusticiana and her family were, after all, related to the descendants of the great Anicia Juliana, who intermarried not merely with the surviving line of the Emperor Anastasius but also with the imperial family in the reigns of Justinian and Justin II. See Alan Cameron, "The House of Anastasius," *GRBS* 19 (1978): 259–76.

35. Perhaps the Symmachus mentioned in *Epist.* 11. 26 was her brother. See also *Epist.* 8. 22.

36. Coripp. *Iust.* 4. 154 mentions Latin panegyrics as still normal. Latin in Constantinople: I. Ševčenko, "A Late Antique Epigram and the So-Called Elder Magistrate from Aphrodisias," *Synthronon. Bibliothèque des cahiers archéologiques* 2 (1968): 32–33; G. Dagron, "Aux origines de la civilisation byzantine: langue de culture et langue d état," *Rev. hist.* 241 (1969): 23–56. A series of Western ambassadors were present in Constantinople throughout the sixth century.

37. See my edition (with commentary and translation), *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris, libri IV* (London, 1976).

leaves the Virgin and concentrates on her Son. The theme of the second half of the poem is actually Christ incarnate, and the prayer with which it ends is a prayer, not to the Virgin, but to Christ. De Rossi's supposition that it accompanied a picture of the Virgin and Child at least gives due weight to both halves of the poem, and it is well known that not until the very end of the sixth century do we even begin to find representations of the Virgin alone.[38] But I would suggest a different explanation. *Hac luce* in the first line gives a clue: why "this day"? Such a use of *hac* is typical of ekphrastic poetry, where the poet's aim is to invoke a visual scene with the most vivid language possible. He will point out individual elements in the picture, as though the reader is standing before it himself.[39] The effect is complete if the ekphrastic poem is inscribed beside or upon the work of art it describes.[40] Since the Gregory version of our poem appears in a collection of inscriptions preserved in manuscript but taken from their original sites, we can say that this second version *was* written up beside its subject, though it was clearly soon copied into book collections. As for the original poem, written for Rusticiana in Constantinople, we have no way of knowing whether it was inscribed on a wall or panel for her, too, or simply composed as an ekphrastic poem. That version, if it was inscribed, was evidently also copied out either then or later into manuscript, where it was attributed (at an unknown date) to Andreas *orator*. But whether inscribed or not, our poem is clearly ekphrastic: take, for example, the language of lines 11–12, with the vivid use of *adfulsit* of the birth of Christ. Then in line 14 the poet addresses the subject of the picture;[41] then we have *haec* in 16 and *huic* in 17.[42] *Sic voluit nasci* (21) gives us the answer, if we still need it: this is a poem about a Nativity scene. The ekphrastic pointers bring out the moment in time which the scene represents—the very birth of Christ, as indeed the scribe of the Trinity College MS or his model realized in heading the poem *In natalem diem Christi*. If the poem was inscribed on a wall in Rome, objects such as gems or medallions, which we know to have had Nativity scenes during this period,[43] are ruled out. But

38. Perhaps first in the Rabbula Gospels (A.D. 586); see G. A. Wellen, "Das Marienbild der frühchristlichen Kunst," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie, allgemeinen Ikonographie*, vol. 3 (Freiburg, 1971), s.v. "Maria" (p. 159).

39. For the manner of Byzantine *ekphrasis*, see H. Maguire, "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Works of Art," *DOP* 28 (1974): 113–40; C. Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *DOP* 17 (1963): 65–66; G. Downey, s.v. "Ekphrasis," *RAC* 4 (1959): 921–44; C. Mango, *The Homilies of Photius* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 290; C. Mango and E. J. W. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul," *DOP* 19 (1965): 115–48, 142–43.

40. The first poem of Merobaudes, describing a mosaic of the imperial family, provides a good comparison. See F. M. Clover, *Flavius Merobaudes. A Translation and Historical Commentary*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society, vol. 61, pt. 1 (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 16–17, 18, n. 28 (deictic pronouns). There are many problems associated with this poem; see recently T. D. Barnes, "Merobaudes on the Imperial Family," *Phoenix* 29 (1974): 314–19. But even ekphrastic poems inscribed alongside the works they described did not always describe the works realistically; see Maguire, "Truth and Convention," pp. 113–40.

41. As commonly in ekphrastic poems; cf. Merobaudes *Carm.* 1. 23 *o felix. . . .* For *topoi* of realism in *ekphraseis*, see Maguire, "Truth and Convention," pp. 125–26.

42. Cf. Merobaudes *Carm.* 1. 11 *hic ubi . . .*, 1. 17 *hac de prole . . .*, 1. 19 *en . . . iam*, 1. 21 *putares. . . .*

43. As, for example, the splendid late sixth-century gold encolpium at Dumbarton Oaks, perhaps struck for the baptism of the Emperor Maurice's son Theodosius in A.D. 584 (M. Ross, *Cata-*

it could well have accompanied a painted panel or conceivably even an ivory. Whatever the exact object, I would suggest that the younger Rusticiana in Constantinople may well have sent it as a Christmas gift to her friend Gregory, together with a copy of the poem describing it, which Gregory in turn caused to be inscribed in his house.

The poet's treatment of the subject still needs comment, however. For, despite his ekphrastic demonstratives, the poet does not describe the scene pictorially. There are no shepherds, no animals, no baby.[44] On the contrary, the treatment is doctrinal. The poem divides into two sections, the first focusing on the Virgin, the second on the Child, and in each the entire emphasis is on the theological implications of the Incarnation. At the close of the poem the emphasis is on the Child, who is the recipient of the poet's prayer to bless the family of the donor or patron. The naming of Rusticiana/Gregory is the literary equivalent of the portrayal of the donor in contemporary donor mosaics, but it is the Child, in His full theological realization, who will bless them. This recalls the doctrinal implications of the apse mosaics of the sixth century which portray an enthroned Virgin with the Child on her lap; there, too, the focus is on the Child, and the Virgin's role is that of the "vessel of the Incarnation," so that she is less there in her own right than as the way by which Christ was able to come into the world. Closer examination of our poem will make this point even more clearly. In the first fourteen lines, we have a miniature exposition of the theological significance of the Virgin. In lines 7–10, and even in lines 11–14, there is less focus on the Virgin than on the Father and the Son. In the parts that do especially concern the Virgin, two things are emphasized: first, her submission, which is the type of faith (*nescia*, *obtulit*, *fides*, *credidit*) and, second, the paradox of the birth (2 *gnara* . . . *nescia*, 5–6 *credidit et tumuit* . . . *clauserunt magnum parvula membra deum*). Thus the Virgin's function is as instrument; she is not accredited with any personal qualities but appears only in a symbolic role. The poem fits perfectly into the context of the development of Marian cult and literature in the late sixth century. It belongs to a time when the later characteristic aspects of the Virgin were as yet present in only the most rudimentary forms, if at all, a time when her chief representation was still basically doctrinal, as one of the central elements in the demonstration of orthodoxy. The large number of churches dedicated to the Virgin which Justinian erected in outlying or wavering

logue of the Byzantine and Early Medieval Antiquities in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection, vol. 2 [Washington, D.C., 1965], no. 36). A seventh-century marriage ring also at Dumbarton Oaks carries a Nativity scene (no. 47.15), and the theme was common on objects such as pyxides and censers, and also on ampullae from the Holy Land of the late sixth and early seventh centuries. One might think of an ivory diptych, bearing in mind the five-part diptych of which the central part, with Nativity scene, is in the John Rylands University Library, Victoria University, Manchester. But if the epigram really was inscribed on a wall, and the picture in question transported from Constantinople to Rome, we should have to envisage a portable image, in fact an icon. Speculation about the iconography of such an image is tempting, though there is little in the poem to help us; on the basis of the John Rylands diptych, however, and others of the objects mentioned, it could well have depicted an enthroned Virgin holding the Child, with a miniature Nativity representation below.

44. For other *ekphraseis* of Nativity scenes, cf. Maguire, "Truth and Convention," pp. 116, 118, 136.

parts of the empire as well as in major cities had exactly this function—to reinforce orthodoxy, not to boost the cult of the Virgin as such.[45] Justin II was also primarily concerned with the definition of orthodox belief.[46] When he sent a piece of the True Cross to Poitiers, his action was represented by the poet Venantius Fortunatus as illustrative of the concern for orthodoxy which the new emperor had evinced already in other actions.[47] The Cross of Justin II, now in the Vatican, shows Justin and his empress Sophia in a composition indicative of Trinitarian symbolism, with the Lamb of God in the center of the Cross.[48] When the poet Corippus wished to compliment Justin's order inserting the Creed of Constantinople into the liturgy of all churches, he did so by an elaborate evocation of Trinitarian symbolism,[49] followed by a paraphrase of the Creed itself. Our poem fits very well, therefore, into such a context.

It so happens that it was the Emperor Maurice, whose court was the meeting place for Gregory and Rusticiana, who made the Dormition of the Virgin into an official feast,[50] certainly an important step in the process leading to the spectacular recognition of the Virgin as savior and future protectress of the city of Constantinople during and after the siege of the city in A.D. 626.[51] But that recognition, and the enormous efflorescence of Marian devotion and Marian hymnography and homiletic which it produced, was still in the future when our poem was composed. We can, however, find still other parallels from the later sixth century for our poem's treatment of the theme. Undoubtedly there are earlier parallels in Western Latin poetry for the wordplays used in the first part of the poem, notably in Merobaudes' *De Christo* and the *De Salvatore* attributed to Claudian.[52] But the closest parallels, totally understandable if the poem was written in Constantinople, come from the prayer to the Virgin included in Corippus'

45. E.g., Procop. *Aed.* 6. 2. 20. Procopius tells us that Justinian himself wished the churches of the Theotokos to be given priority in the panegyric (*Aed.* 1. 3. 1). Other churches of the Virgin built by Justinian: *Aed.* 2. 10. 24, 3. 4. 12, 5. 6. 1, 5. 7. 5, 5. 9. 23, 6. 4. 4, 6. 5. 9, 6. 7. 16. The great church of the Virgin in Jerusalem (the Nea—*Aed.* 5. 6. 1) has now been discovered; see N. Avigad, "A Building Inscription of the Emperor Justinian and the Nea in Jerusalem," *Israel Exploration Journal* 27 (1977): 145–51. In Justinian's theological writings the Virgin plays the same role; cf. E. Schwartz, *Drei dogmatische Schriften Iustinians*[2], ed. M. Amelotti, R. Albertella, and L. Migliardi (Milan, 1973), pp. 16, 96–97, 114.

46. See Averil Cameron, "The Early Religious Policies of Justin II," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 51–67; A. de Halleux, "Trois synodes impériaux du VI[e] siècle dans une chronique syriaque inédite," in *A Tribute to Arthur Vööbus*, ed. R. H. Fischer (Chicago, 1977), pp. 302 ff. (I owe this reference to Professor H. J. W. Drijvers).

47. *Ad Iustinum et Sophiam Augustos* (*MGH*:*AA*, 4:275–78).

48. J. Beckwith, *The Art of Constantinople*[2] (London, 1968), pl. 55. See A. Grabar, *L'iconoclasme byzantin* (Paris, 1957), pp. 19, 25.

49. *Iust.* 4. 292–93. Creed: 4. 299–311.

50. Niceph. Call. *HE* 17. 28.

51. For this process, see Averil Cameron, "The Cult of the Theotokos in Sixth-Century Constantinople: A City Finds Its Symbol," *JTS*, n.s. 29 (1978): 79–108; N. Baynes, "The Supernatural Defenders of Constantinople," *Analecta Bollandiana* 67 (1949): 165–77 (= *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* [London, 1955], pp. 248–60); S. MacCormack, "Roma, Constantinopolis, the Emperor," *CQ* 25 (1975): 149.

52. For the authenticity of the *De Salvatore* (Claud. *Carm. min.* 32), see W. Schmid, s.v. "Claudianus" 1, *RAC* 3 (1957): 158–59. For Merobaudes, see S. Gennaro, *Da Claudiano a Merobaude* (Catania, 1959). T. Birt cites earlier parallels (*MGH*:*AA*, 10:330).

Latin panegyric for Justin II, composed in Constantinople in 566.[53] There is the same emphasis on Mary as the type of faith, the same paradoxes, the same vocabulary. In line 13, our poet picks up Corippus' *gloria matrum*,[54] and, in line 5, the conception of the Word *pro semine* (associated also with faith—*credula*). Both use the famous and much quoted phrase from Philippians 2: 7 (*μορφὴν δούλου λαβών*).[55] Nine lines from Corippus are in point:

> Virgo, *creatoris genetrix* sanctissima mundi,
> excelsi regina poli, specialiter una
> vera *parens* et virgo manens, *sine semine* patris
> quam deus elegit matrem sibi, *credula verbum*
> *concipiens* nostram genuisti feta salutem.
> o *pietas* miranda dei dictuque tremenda!
> *caelorum factor dominus deus*, unica patris
> forma dei, verae sese velamine carnis
> *induit*, et *servi formam* de virgine *sumpsit*.[56]

I have italicized the words and phrases recalled by our poem. Now the background for Corippus' phraseology, as I have tried to show elsewhere,[57] is Greek and contemporary—the Greek hymns and homilies on the Virgin current in Constantinople in the sixth century. The present poem has the same background, and its writer must have been as much influenced as Corippus by the *kontakia* of Romanos and others; like Corippus, our poet writes in Latin, in his case for Latin-speaking patrons, but he draws on the theology and imagery of the Eastern capital in which he lived.

It is hard to find Western poems of the same period which will provide similar parallels,[58] but there is one major poem which offers itself for comparison, namely, the *In laudem Mariae* attributed to Venantius Fortunatus.[59] This is a long poem (360 lines), which from a very early date was included with the poems of Venantius; it has certain infelicities which have led some scholars to be very sure that it is not authentic.[60] My own view is that it probably is by Venantius, and belongs to the 590s;[61] even if it was not written by Venantius, it could hardly be dated much later. Some linguistic similarities have been detected between this poem and the Corippus passage just quoted, though they are not as close as those between Corippus and our poem.[62] The interest of the *In laudem Mariae* for the present study,

53. For fuller discussion of this passage, see Cameron, "Cult of the Theotokos," pp. 82–85.

54. *Iust.* 2. 62; cf. Proclus of Constantinople, *PG*, 65:680.

55. This was a text expounded in favor of Chalcedon by Justinian; see Schwartz, *Drei dogmatische Schriften Iustinians*, pp. 16, 96.

56. *Iust.* 2. 52–60; for full discussion, see my commentary, pp. 152–54.

57. "Cult of the Theotokos," pp. 86–87.

58. The fourth-century Latin poem on a Barcelona papyrus, supposed formerly to be a poem about the Virgin, is rather about God the Father, and in any case not at all similar; see A. Emmett, "The Subject of Psalmus Responsorius: P. Barc. 149b–153," *Museum Philologicum Londiniense* 2 (1977): 99–109. Nor is the hymn to the Virgin by Ennodius (*Carm.* 1. 19 *Hymnus S. Mariae*), except in some inescapable details.

59. Ed. Leo, *MGH:AA*, 4:371–80.

60. Ibid., p. xxiv.

61. "Cult of the Theotokos," pp. 91–96.

62. M. Manitius, "Zu spätlateinischen Dichtern," *Z. öst. Gym.* 37 (1886): 250–54.

however, is that, although it is a poem about the Virgin, one of its themes is the association of the Virgin with the definition of orthodoxy—exactly as we have it in our inscriptional poem, but on a bigger scale and with a more literary treatment.[63] There are many places in the *In laudem Mariae* where the poet uses the same terminology and ideas of the Virgin as we find both in Corippus and here,[64] but for our purposes the emphasis on Mary as a means to defining orthodoxy gives an excellent context for our poem.

In treating the theme of the Nativity in such a depersonalized and theological manner, our unknown poet has given us not only a small but precious addition to the collection of evidence illustrating the growing cult of the Virgin at the end of the sixth century, but also, and perhaps more pertinent for the circumstances in which he was writing, a document of complete Chalcedonian orthodoxy. The Virgin gave birth to "God and man" together (1); Christ had a *duplex substantia* (15); the Trinity is in existence *sine fine* (17). For *triplicitas simplex simplicitasque triplex* (18) we may again compare Venantius, this time the poem of thanks which he wrote to Justin II when the emperor sent his gift to Poitiers: *persona triplex, substantia simplex* (3). *Triplicitas* in our poem may be the first use of the word—it is the only example cited by Du Cange—but compare Sedulius *Carmen Paschale* 1. 298, also of the Trinity, "quod simplex triplicet quodque est triplicabile simplex." Again Venantius *Carmen* 5. 5. 41–42: "est deus, alta fides, unus trinus et trinus unus: / personis propriis stat tribus unus apex." The notion of *bis genitus* in line 19 is very striking, but again we have similar (though indeed not exactly parallel) plays of "mother" and "father" in, for example, Venantius *In laudem Mariae* 37–38. There, too, the idea that the Son became *minor* through his Incarnation is expressed (line 20 in our poem). Finally, our poet ends this section with a play on the idea of redemption, a theme which is found both in Corippus' Trinitarian section and in Venantius.[65]

So we have it: a small contribution to the corpus of sixth-century *ekphraseis*, to our sense of the developing cult of the Virgin, to our knowledge of contacts between the upper classes, both lay and ecclesiastical, of Rome and Constantinople. The culture of late sixth-century Constantinople is in urgent need of investigation, and texts like this, especially those without a direct imperial connection, will have a large part to play.

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63. Cf. *In laudem Mariae* 29–30, 251–52. Note 47 "sed redeo qua virgo trahit mihi laude canenda"; the Trinitarian material here is a conscious artistic digression.

64. E.g., 43 *induit artus*, 46 *formam servi*, 122 *concipiente fide*, 203 *vincens super omnia matres*, 210 *hospitium vitae*, 248–49 *inscia coniugio feta negante viro. / accipis et nescis.*

65. *Iust.* 4. 298, 4. 307–8; *In laudem Mariae* 123–24.