CALPURNIUS SICULUS: TECHNIQUE AND DATE

By R. MAYER

In 1854 Moritz Haupt, in a classic exercise of the higher criticism, established that only the first seven poems of a collection of eleven which had all passed under his name could be attributed to Calpurnius, and that the last four belonged to Nemesianus (*Opuscula* 1. 358–406). This division and attribution is beyond question now. Haupt then went on to show that Calpurnius was active in the Neronian age. Some of the evidence was philological. Indeed, it was the very evidence which he had used to distinguish the techniques of the two poets. E. Champlin, however, claims that ' all the traditional indications of a Neronian date are based on circumstantial details which are equally appropriate to other periods in imperial history '.[1] This is incautious. For Champlin, unlike Haupt, fails to consider such matters as prosody and diction, which are, after all, historical data that may prove to be as useful tools to the historian as an allusion to a barbarian invasion or to a consular year. In fact, all the ascertainable evidence was not put into the balance. We now turn to that evidence.

In pointing out the different techniques found in Calpurnius and in Nemesianus Haupt observed that their treatment of the prosody of final *o* is notably distinct (p. 359). For Calpurnius follows a rigid practice and shortens the *o* of *puto* and *nescio* only, a licence established in Augustan poetry. But Nemesianus, apart from some by then common dactylic shortenings (e.g., *horreo*, 2. 43), also allows himself a number of palimbacchiac forms such as *expecto*, 2. 26. These appear first in Statius, for example, *agnosco* at *Silu.* 5. 1. 239; Professor R. D. Williams discusses the freedom of Statius in this matter in his note to *Th.* 10. 89. A molossus thereafter is commonly shortened to form a palimbacchiac; there are instances in Serenus Sammonicus who wrote in the early third century—he would be a contemporary of the redated Calpurnius. The use of this prosodical observation went further. For, as Haupt saw, it not only distinguished the poets one from another, but it also strongly suggested that Calpurnius wrote before Statius, at a time when the shortening of final *o* in hexameter verse was restricted to a very few types (p. 391). Haupt's deduction was endorsed by that consummate metrist, Lucian Müller, in *De Re Metrica* (1894), pp. 23 and 34 ff. Müller added the evidence of the Einsiedln Eclogues, which had been published after Haupt wrote, in 1869. They too are very strict about shortening final *o*, and they too are Neronian. And we may also add the *Ilias Latina*, now acknowledged to be Neronian or earlier; the prosody of final *o* conforms to pre-Statian practice. This evidence must be of the first importance when it is a question of dating a poet. And yet it was also ignored by A. E. Radke.[2] She at least is aware of the existence of the prosodical evidence, but chooses not to face it squarely in an effort to set the clock back and attribute all the poems to one writer. To the student of literary history, however, Haupt's argument is cogent and cannot be kicked down like a sandcastle.

In fine, the prosodical technique of Calpurnius is that of the mid-first century and not of the third. Now it may be asked whether Calpurnius might not have chosen to imitate the manner of an earlier age. Let us test this. Claudian was a classicizing poet of the late fourth century, and he modelled himself with some success upon Ovid and Lucan. His prosody is described by Th. Birt as ' castigatissimus ', for Claudian denies himself the use of certain long allowed practices, such as the shortening of final *o* in gerunds, a correption found in the tragedies of Seneca and first in Juvenal for hexameter verse. And yet for all his care he nevertheless shortens the final *o* of a cretic word to form a dactyl and, more notably, of a molossus to form a palimbacchiac (e.g., *De Raptu Proserpinae* 1. 114 *laxabo*, 196 *commendo*; see *MGH* edition (1892), p. ccxi). Such prosody is not that of Ovid or Lucan. It marks a technique dating from the time of Statius. And so, eager as he clearly was to purify his style, Claudian failed to notice ' irregularities '. His ear was not sufficiently well attuned, or, to put it more kindly, he did not have an historical approach to prosody. It is hard to believe that where a Claudian ' failed ', a third-century Calpurnius succeeded.

Two more philological points deserve notice, literary reminiscence and diction. Haupt showed that Nemesianus knew his Statius, but that so far as Calpurnius is concerned Statius might not have written (pp. 370 f.). Champlin is justifiably cautious about the value

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[1] E. Champlin, ' The life and times of Calpurnius Siculus ', *JRS* 68 (1978), 95.

[2] *Hermes* 100 (1972), 619 f.

of traced reminiscence (p. 96, n. 5), but the circumspection of Haupt can be relied upon. To his observations the following may be added. In despair over the value of literary pursuits, Martial says at 9. 73. 9 ' frange leues calamos et scinde, Thalia, libellos ', and in the same vein Juvenal says at 7. 27 ' frange miser calamum uigilataque proelia dele '. This very sentiment is found in Calpurnius 4. 23, ' frange puer calamos et inanes desere Musas '. Now a Neronian Calpurnius can easily be read by the Flavians Martial and Juvenal. It is not so easy, on the other hand, to account for the acquaintance of a third-century Calpurnius with the poets of the Silver Age. For literary historians are still agreed that this poetry was unpopular and neglected until a revival began about the middle of the fourth century.[3] The same view can be taken of the phrase ' sacer est locus ' found in both Persius 1. 113 and Calpurnius 2. 55. If the poets are contemporary, one could easily have read the other. But once again the student of literary history will find it hard to credit that a redated Calpurnius would have read Persius, neglected by the rest of his age. The last reminiscence worth noting is both the most important and the most puzzling. The second Einsiedln Eclogue begins ' quid tacitus Mystes? ' and Calpurnius's fourth eclogue begins ' quid tacitus Corydon . . .'. Both are composed in honour of a new reign, and, so long as they were seen to be contemporary, it was not possible to ascertain priority. But a redated Calpurnius must be imitating the Neronian eclogue. (And imitation goes further; for both poets the new emperor is simply *Caesar*, he is associated with Apollo, and both speak of civil war, Calp. 1. 49–51 and Eins. Ecl. 2. 32–4, which is discussed by A. E. Housman, *Collected Classical Papers* (1972), 799 f.) How does Calpurnius come to know of and even to model himself upon the courtly bucolic of Nero's age? One would expect him to go to the better-known Virgil for inspiration (as did the poet of the second Einsiedln Eclogue, who incorporates *Ecl.* 4. 10 at line 38). Instead Calpurnius, we must now believe, went down a by-way and adopted the manner of an obscure poet—so obscure that his fragmentary and anonymous work only resurfaced in 1869 ! And there remains the general objection already mentioned, that Silver Latin poetry was neglected by writers after Juvenal, and in the age to which Calpurnius is now assigned. Thus to the student of literary history the profound acquaintance of the new Calpurnius with poetry of the Silver Age—Persius, the second Einsiedln Eclogue, Martial or Juvenal—is both premature and unlikely (unlikely, because part of the ' minorness ' of minor poets is their enslavement to current fashion both in themes and in style).[4]

Nemesianus, moreover, gives his age away—not that he means to conceal it—by his diction, another sort of historical evidence. He uses, for example, a word like *ruralis* at 1. 65, which is not found in first-century poetry. And Haupt stressed the significance of the occurrence in his verse of a word like *fluor*, which is not found in literature before Apuleius.[5] But once again the diction of Calpurnius, like the prosody, is wholly classical (Haupt, p. 390). It was such evidence as this, combined with the observation of the infrequency of elision and the monotony of pause, which enabled Haupt to pin Calpurnius down to the Neronian age and its strict style. Such details are neither circumstantial nor appropriate to other periods in imperial history.

A third-century Calpurnius would therefore be something of a phoenix, so far as literary history is concerned. He successfully revives the prosody and diction of the mid-first century, a task at which others failed. He is deeply read in poets wholly neglected by his contemporaries. And, unless he slipped up over Martial and Juvenal, he manages to confine the latest of his literary reminiscences to the age of Nero, which, it seems, he chose as his model. It is hard to accept all of this. But it is not necessary to do so, for it must now be clear that Calpurnius is not the Chatterton of his age. Apart from other considerations, his prosody and diction are like fingerprints : unnoticed for the most part, they nevertheless mark him unmistakably as a poet of the first century.

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[3] This is discussed by G. Highet, *Juvenal the Satirist* (1954), 181–5; see also G. B. Townend, *JRS* 63 (1973), 150 for the dependance of Juvenal 7 on Calpurnius 4.

[4] Note also the similarities between Calpurnius 4 and the *Apocolocyntosis* discussed by A. D. Momi-

gliano, *CQ* 38 (1944), 98.

[5] Claudian too, despite an attempt to cleanse diction, lets in some unclassical words and syntax, as noted by J. B. Hall, *De Raptu Proserpinae* (1969), 110, n. 3.