

A CONSULAR EPICUREAN UNDER THE EARLY PRINCIPATE

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“I HAVE DESERTED to the camp of my enemy Epicurus” (Cic. *Fam.* 9.20.1). Cicero wrote in jest: no one could doubt his immunity to the *inlecebrae voluptatis*. Still there were earnest converts to Epicureanism among his peers, for example L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (*cos.* 58) and C. Vibius Pansa (*cos.* 43);¹ and he made C. Cassius and C. Trebatius Testa the butt of persiflage for defecting from *virtus* to *voluptas*.² But the heyday of Epicureanism, at least as a faith for Roman aristocrats, drew to a close with the establishment of the Augustan Principate, which propagated a state-serving rather than an individualistic morality, and in the first century A.D. the senatorial Epicurean must have been a fish out of water. Still, Syme has cautioned that “the dearth of evidence may be deceptive,”³ and in the light of this warning it may be prudent to scrutinize a dim figure from the reign of Gaius—an Epicurean senator known only by the odd *gentilicium* Pompedius.

Josephus recounts, among the outrages of Gaius, the ordeal of Pompedius (Πομπήδιος) and his mistress Quintilia, an actress celebrated for her beauty (*AJ* 19.32–36). Pompedius, συγκλητικός μὲν, τὰς ἀρχὰς δὲ διεληλυθὼς σχεδὸν ἀπάσας, Ἐπικούρειος δ' ἄλλως καὶ δι' αὐτὸ ἀπράγμονος ἐπιτηδευτῆς βίου,⁴ was accused of defaming the emperor by a certain Timidius,⁵ who brought Quintilia as a witness and prevailed on Gaius to have her examined under torture. Despite her torments Quintilia revealed nothing to incriminate Pompedius, and when Gaius saw her injuries, even he was touched by remorse and freed both her and her patron.

Who is the Epicurean Pompedius? For several reasons I think he may be P. Pomponius Secundus (*PIR*¹ P 563),⁶ *suff.* 44, legate of Upper Germany, where he won *triumphalis honos* in 50,⁷ highly esteemed tragic

¹Piso: R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution* (Oxford 1939) 135 f., 149 f.; Pansa: Cic. *Fam.* 15.19.3.

²Cassius: Cic. *Fam.* 15.16; cf. 15.19.3; Trebatius: *ibid.* 7.12. On the flowering of Epicureanism at the close of the Republic, A. Momigliano, Review of B. Farrington, *Science and Politics in the Ancient World*, in *JRS* 31 (1941) 149 ff.

³*Tacitus* (Oxford 1958) 538.

⁴“A senator who had held nearly all the magistracies, but apart from this was an Epicurean and therefore devoted to the quiet life.”

⁵The name is elsewhere unknown and probably corrupt.

⁶For the full name, P. Calvisius Sabinus Pomponius Secundus, *AE* 1971 (published 1974) 275.

⁷*Tac. Ann.* 12.27–28; cf. *CIL* 13. 5200, 5201, 5237, 11515. An undated inscription shows that he was also proconsul of Crete and Cyrene, no doubt before his consulship

poet (Quint. *Inst.* 10.1.98), and one of very few persons to win the unqualified approbation of Tacitus, who characterizes him as *multa morum elegantia et ingenio inlustri*.⁸

1) The name Πομπήδιος⁹ should be emended to read Πομπώνιος. An excerptor of Cassius Dio, who has left a sketchy but recognizable account of the investigation before Gaius, calls the accused Pomponius rather than Pompedius.¹⁰ Moreover, Πομπήδιος, which occurs only here in Josephus, looks suspiciously like another of the many names in *AJ* which have been altered beyond recognition in composition or transmission.¹¹ And there is not much doubt how to restore it. At *AJ* 19.263, where Josephus records the part of Q. Pomponius Secundus (*suff.* 41; the brother of P. Pomponius Secundus) in the events following the assassination of Gaius, the manuscripts give the *gentilicium* as Πομπήϊος, a corruption of Πομπώνιος;¹² a similar corruption will have transformed Πομπώνιος into Πομπήδιος at 19.32–36.¹³

2) P. Pomponius Secundus was almost certainly of praetorian rank in the reign of Gaius and could properly be described as “having held nearly all the magistracies” (τὰς ἀρχὰς δὲ διεληλυθὼς σχεδὸν ἀπάσας). In a muddled

(P. Romanelli, “Un nuovo governatore della provincia di Creta e Cirene: P. Pomponio Secondo,” *Quaderni di Archeologia della Libia* 4 [1961] 69).

⁸*Ann.* 5.8.2; cf. 12.28.2; *Dial.* 13.3. Cf. M. Bonaria, “Pomponius,” *RE Suppl.* 10 (1965) 550.

⁹The manuscripts, in the selection of B. Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera* (Berlin 1885–1895), read: 19.32 πομπή|ιος A: πομπήδιος MWE: *pompidius* Lat 19.33 πομπηδῖω AMWE: *pompidio* Lat 19.36 πομπήϊον A: πομπήδιον MW: πομπίδιον E: *pompidium* Lat.

¹⁰*Dio-Exc. Val.* 59.26.4; cf. Suet. *Gaius* 16.4.

¹¹E.g., Κλούτιος = Cluvius? (an ex-consul), Βαθύβιος a senator (19.91), and Βρόγχος or Βροῦχος a tribune of the plebs (19.234); cf. Μινουκιανός = both Vinicianus and Vinicius (19.251–252).

¹²καὶ τῶν ὑπάτων ὁ ἕτερος Κόιντος Πομπήϊος δι’ αἰτίας ἦν τῷ στρατιωτικῷ μᾶλλον ὥς ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ τὴν σύγκλητον παρακαλῶν, . . . Cf. *BJ* 2.205, treating the same events: . . . ἡ δὲ σύγκλητος, ἐξηγουμένων τῶν ὑπάτων Σεντίου Σατορνίνου καὶ Πομπωνίου Σεκούνδου, τρισὶν ταῖς συμμενοῦσαις σπείραις ἐπιτρέψασα φυλάττειν τὴν πόλιν εἰς τὸ Καπετώλιον ἡθροίσθη, καὶ διὰ τὴν ὀμότητα τὴν Γαίου Κλαυδίου πολεμεῖν ἐψηφίζετο.

¹³This argument seems to invalidate Lambertz’ identification of Pompedius and the Pompeius Pennus of Sen. *Ben.* 2.12.1 (“Pompeius,” *RE* 21 [1952] 2283); except for the similarity of the names Pompedius and Pompeius (which stands only if Pompedius is a corruption of Pompeius rather than of Pomponius), *Ben.* 2.12.1 and *AJ* 19.32–36 have little enough in common; the description of Pompeius Pennus as *vir consularis* and *summis usus honoribus* also conflicts with Josephus’ description of Pompedius as having held *almost* all the magistracies. Hanslik’s proposal (“Pomponius,” *RE* 21 [1952] 2343) that both Pompedius in Josephus and Pompeius in Seneca are to be identified as *Pomponius Pennus* (nowhere attested) strains the evidence. For skepticism about the combination of *Ben.* 2.12.1 and *AJ* 19.32–36, A. Stein, “Timidius,” *RE* 6A (1936) 1256, and L. Feldman, *Josephus* 9 (London 1965) 231.

statement under 37 Dio notes that one of the state prisoners granted amnesty on the accession of Gaius was Quintus Pomponius, ἐπὶ τοῖς ἔτεσιν ἐν τῷ οἰκήματι μεθ' ὑπατείας κακῶθεις (59.6.2). It is clear that Dio has here confused Publius Pomponius, who *was* held from 31 on a charge of complicity with Sejanus,¹⁴ and his brother Quintus, who was *not*; less clear is what lies behind the phrase μεθ' ὑπατείας, since the *fasti* do not admit a consulship of Publius—or of Quintus, for that matter—under Tiberius. One must assume that Publius held a high office (but not the consulship) before his arrest in 31; and a praetorship makes better sense than a lesser office.¹⁵ This assumption is consistent with the testimony of Pliny the Elder about the issue of the fecund Vistilia, mother of the Pomponii (*HN* 7.39):

Vistilia, Gliti ac postea Pomponi atque Orfiti clarissimorum civium coniunx, ex his quattuor partus enixa septimo semper mense, genuit Suillium Rufum undecimo, Corbulonem septimo, utrumque consulem, postea Caesoniam, Gaii principis coniugem, octavo.

Vistilia's fifth child, P. Suillius Rufus, was *quaestor Germanici* at the latest in 19, the year of Germanicus' death.¹⁶ P. Pomponius Secundus, who was senior to Suillius by two marriages, should have been *quaestor* before that, with plenty of time to reach the praetorship by 31.¹⁷

3) The only praetorian Pomponii clearly attested under Gaius are Publius and his brother Quintus. There may of course have been others, for example, children of C. Pomponius Graecinus (*suff.* 16) or of his brother L. Pomponius Flaccus (*cos.* 17),¹⁸ but none is on record, and the effective choice narrows to the two Pomponii Secundi. The turbulent career of Quintus in the late reign of Tiberius¹⁹ as well as his subversive role in 41, when he supported restoration of the Republic,²⁰ and in 42, when he took part in the *bellum civile* of Scribonianus against Claudius,²¹

¹⁴Tac. *Ann.* 5.8.2; cf. 6.18.1.

¹⁵A quaestorship would serve less well to make Dio's point that he suffered a serious indignity.

¹⁶Tac. *Ann.* 4.31.3; 13.42.3; R. Syme, "Domitius Corbulo," *JRS* 60 (1970) 27 f., favours A.D. 15.

¹⁷Syme (*ibid.* 31 f.) suggests a praetorship in 30, on the basis of Dio 59.6.2; he tentatively considers the possibility that Pliny erred in making the Pomponii senior to Suillius.

¹⁸Syme, *ibid.* 31 and n. 19; on the Pomponii now see W. Eck, "Pomponius," *RE Suppl.* 14 (1974) 438 ff. If Pomponius Labeo (*PIR*¹ P 546), who took his own life in 34 (Tac. *Ann.* 6.29.1), had a son, he was probably still too young to be *praetorius* under Gaius (the father appears to have been praetor himself about 25 [cf. Dio 58.24.3; Tac. *Ann.* 4.47.1]). The Pomponius vilified by the *eques* M. Terentius in the aftermath of Sejanus' fall (Tac. *Ann.* 6.8.5) cannot be ruled out—though it is also possible that he is P. Pomponius Secundus himself.

¹⁹Tac. *Ann.* 6.18.1; cf. 5.8.2.

²⁰Joseph. *AJ* 19.263; *BJ* 2.205; Dio-Ioann. Ant. 59.30.3.

²¹Tac. *Ann.* 13.43.2; M. Swan, *AJP* 91 (1970) 161 n. 49.

appear to rule out his being the apolitical "Pompedius" of *AF* 19.32–36. 4) It is plausible enough that P. Pomponius Secundus should be found in liaison with Quintilia, γυναῖκα τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς σκηνῆς ἐπιφανεία τοῦ ὠραίου περισπούδαστον (*AF* 19.33). His connections with the theatre were close: his tragedies were not merely recitation pieces but were written for the stage with the popular audience in mind;²² on one occasion he was the target of abuse during an outburst of the *theatralis populi lascivia* which intermittently broke the peace in Rome.²³

5) But the crucial question remains to answer: was P. Pomponius Secundus an Epicurean? Here a philosophic allusion of Tacitus offers a clue which goes far towards clinching his identification with "Pompedius." This is Tacitus' account of the crisis which overtook P. Vitellius²⁴ and Pomponius on the fall of Sejanus:

(1) *Relatum inde de P. Vitellio et Pomponio Secundo. illum indices arguebant claustra aerarii, cui praefectus erat, et militarem pecuniam rebus novis obtulisse; huic a Considio praetura functo obiectabatur Aelii Galli amicitia, qui punito Seiano in hortos Pomponii quasi fidissimum ad subsidium perfugisset. (2) neque aliud periclitantibus auxilii quam in fratrum constantia fuit, qui vades exstitere. mox crebris prolationibus spem ac metum iuxta gravatus Vitellius petito per speciem studiorum scalpro levem ictum venis intulit vitamque aegritudine animi finivit. at Pomponius multa morum elegantia et ingenio inlustri, dum adversam fortunam aequus tolerat, Tiberio superstes fuit (Ann. 5.8).*

Thus Vitellius, worn out with hopes and fears, succumbed to melancholy.²⁵ Pomponius, on the other hand (*at*), endured his troubles with equanimity (*aequus*), and outlived his persecutor. The clause *adversam fortunam aequus tolerat*, like Horace's *aequam memento rebus in arduis servare mentem*, epitomizes Epicurean teachings about facing misfortune.²⁶ Through it, I suggest, Tacitus signals a fact which he intends his reader to recall: Pomponius was an Epicurean.²⁷ And he makes the wretched end of Vitellius, stemming from a failure to moderate his passions, a foil for

²²Pliny *Epp.* 7.17.11; Tac. *Ann.* 11.13.1.

²³Tac. *Ann.* 11.13.1; cf. 1.54.2, 77.1–4.

²⁴*PIR*¹ V 502; M. Schuster, "Vitellius," *RE* 9A (1961) 385 ff.

²⁵Cf. Suet. *Vit.* 2.3: *in custodiam fratri datus scalpro librario venas sibi incidit, nec tam mortis paenitentia quam suorum obstinatione obligari curarique se passus in eadem custodia morbo periit.*

²⁶Cf. H. Usener, *Epicurea* (Leipzig 1887) fr. 488: ἡ ταπεινὴ ψυχὴ τοῖς μὲν εὐμερῆμασιν ἐχαυνώθη, ταῖς δὲ συμφοραῖς καθηρέθη.

²⁷Among the allusions abounding in Tacitus are enough of a philosophic kind to show that this interpretation is consistent with his style. In describing the mental anguish which overtook Tiberius in his late reign Tacitus alludes to Plato's description of the "ideal" tyrant's tormented soul (*Ann.* 6.6.2, cf. Plato *Gorg.* 524e–525a, *Resp.* 579e). In recounting the suicide of Seneca he introduces anonymous reminiscences of Socrates' death (15.61.2, cf. Plato *Phd.* 117b; 15.62.2, cf. *Phd.* 117d–e; 15.64.3). When he sketches the Stoic education and character of Helvidius Priscus, he does so without naming the sect (*Hist.* 4.5.2). On allusion in Tacitus, Borzsák, "Tacitus," *RE* Suppl. 11 (1968) 499–503. Cf. Syme (above, note 3) 474 n. 1.

the philosophical disposition of Pomponius.²⁸ In Epicurean terms Pomponius affirmed the value of life, eschewing death so long as the balance of pleasure against pain stood in his favour.²⁹

The conjecture that *Ann.* 5.8.2 contains an Epicurean allusion is borne out by comparison with *Ann.* 6.22.2. Here, in surveying Epicurean and Stoic (or Stoic-Platonic)³⁰ doctrines, as well as popular astrological belief, on chance and fate, Tacitus alludes³¹ to the Stoic view that men can be happy amidst adversity *si . . . gravem fortunam constanter tolerant*. The close verbal parallel between this allusion to Stoic doctrine and the allusion in *Ann.* 5.8.2 to the comparable Epicurean doctrine—*adversam fortunam aequus tolerat*—gives further assurance that the latter, like the former, is a philosophic formulation.³² *Constanter* appears to sum up the Stoic trouble ethic,³³ *aequus* the Epicurean. The Stoic faces adversity with active resolve; he may even embrace it as an opportunity of proving his virtue. The Epicurean adopts a more quietistic attitude; he does not, like the Stoic, view adversity as indifferent: it can cause pain—which is evil—to *boni* as well as *deteriores*, and he cannot therefore count on externalizing it *Stoice*. But he can reduce its effects: by moderating his desires and fears he learns to face it unperturbed (*aequus*).

Was there an audience to grasp an allusion to the Epicureanism of Pomponius Secundus? Some knowledge of his character must have attached to his remarkable and persistent literary reputation. To Quintilian, writing late in the first century A.D., he was, as a tragic poet, *eorum quos viderim longe princeps* (*Inst.* 10.1.98). Tacitus, in recording the triumphal honours won by Pomponius in Upper Germany in 50, asserts that his military achievement was *modica pars famae eius apud*

²⁸Note the particle *at*, strongly adversative.

²⁹Cf. J. M. Rist, *Epicurus: An Introduction* (Cambridge 1972) 111; N. W. De Witt, *Epicurus and his Philosophy* (Minneapolis 1954) 315 ff. Epicurus was able in his final illness to offset severe physical pain through the recollection of past happiness (D. L. 10.22; cf. 10.118).

³⁰W. Theiler, "Tacitus und die antike Schicksalslehre," *Phyllobolia für Peter von der Mühl* (Basel 1945) 35–90, holds that much of *Ann.* 6.22.2 (*ac tamen electionem vitae . . . inconsulte utantur*) derives from the teaching of the Platonic philosopher Gaius, a contemporary of Tacitus and the teacher of Albinus. Without denying the presence of Platonic elements here—and *contaminatio* of Stoic and Platonic ideas was already in full career when Tacitus wrote (see J. M. Rist, *Stoic Philosophy* [Cambridge 1969] 213 ff., 264 ff.)—, there are good reasons for thinking that 6.22.2 is predominantly Stoic.

³¹Here again he leaves to the reader to identify the doctrines he has in mind.

³²Note the similar formula in Tac. *Ann.* 16.9.2: *illic indignissimum casum sapienter tolerans a centurione ad caedem misso corripitur* [*L. Iunius Silanus Torquatus*]; cf. P. Wessner, *Scholia in Iuvenalem Vetustiora* 1 (Stuttgart 1967) 33.

³³*Constans* and *constantia* frequently carry Stoic overtones in Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.3.1, 4.5.2; *Ann.* 14.59.1, 15.63.2, 16.19.2, 16.25.1, 16.35.1). On *constantia* as a Stoic virtue, M. Grant, "Constantiae Augusti," *NC* 10 (1950) 33 ff.

posteris, in quis carminum gloria praeclit;³⁴ the present tense, *praeclit*, is significant. It is not likely that an Epicurean allusion will have been lost on the imperial court at the time Tacitus was writing. In 121 Pompeia Plotina Augusta, widow of Trajan and adoptive mother of Hadrian, petitioned Hadrian on behalf of the *secta Epicuri* in Athens to permit Popilius Theotimus, head of the school, and future heads, to select a successor among *peregrini*, as well as among Roman citizens, to whom the position had previously been restricted. When Hadrian assented, Plotina wrote congratulating the Epicurean brethren with an enthusiasm and intimacy that leave little doubt she was herself a disciple.³⁵

The high career of Pomponius Secundus contradicted Epicurean admonitions against political activity, though it should be remembered that, as much as their doctrines were regarded by critics as ἀνατρεπτικά πόλεως (Arr. *Epict. Diss.* 3.7.20), Epicureans did not view *voluptas* and *dignitas* as incompatible in all circumstances. They appear to have conceded that the ambitious man was better advised to enter politics than to frustrate a natural inclination. And in an emergency one would succour the state, without which there could be little peace and quiet for philosophy; the closing years of the Roman Republic offered notable examples.³⁶ For his part Tacitus probably relished the paradox of a consular Epicurean, which was all the more striking in a Stoic age: he took satisfaction in discovering competence or magnanimity where it was least expected, just as he did in exposing failure.³⁷ His standards were high: not even martyrdom ensured approval (*Agr.* 42.4). But he did not stint admiration for a man who could keep his head in the midst of troubles, bore the palm in tragedy, and, though devoted to the ἀπράγμων βίος, was a match for affairs when called upon.³⁸

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³⁴ *Ann.* 12.28; cf. *Dial.* 13.3.

³⁵ E. M. Smallwood, *Documents Illustrating the Principates of Nerva, Trajan and Hadrian* (Cambridge 1966) 442. On the influence of Epicureanism under the Principate, C. W. Chilton, *Diogenes of Oenoanda: The Fragments* (Oxford 1971) xxii ff.

³⁶ Inclination: Usener fr. 555; emergency: *Sen. Or.* 3.2; peace: Usener fr. 530; examples: Momigliano (above, note 2) 151 ff.; cf. notes 1–2 above.

³⁷ E.g., *Ann.* 15.57.2–58.1 (Epicharis); 16.18.1–2 (Petronius *arbiter elegantiae*).

³⁸ *Multa morum elegantia et ingenio inlustri*—so Tacitus characterizes Pomponius Secundus. What is *elegantia morum*? *Elegantia* itself is derived by *Oxford Latin Dictionary* from a putative verb *elegare* (= to choose) and has these meanings, among others: fastidiousness, choosiness, fineness of taste, correctness of conduct, scrupulousness, elegance of appearance, and good taste in the choice of words or presentation of ideas. The notion of discernment, whether aesthetic or ethical, predominates. The expression *elegantia morum* together with its equivalent *elegantia vitae* occurs three times in the extant works of Tacitus (*Hist.* 3.39.2, *Ann.* 5.8.2, 14.19) and carries “a strong note of social and moral approval” (Syme [above, note 3] 338). It describes judicious, high-

principled, and cultivated behaviour, and is best illustrated in Tacitus' characterization of Iunius Blaesus, where it appears to cover liberality consistent with one's means, the manners of a gentleman, integrity, and an aversion to intrigue or unseasonable ambition (*Hist.* 2.59.2, 3.38.3, 39.2). It is also illustrated, though indirectly, through Tacitus' portrayal of men deficient in it. Thus he contrasts the abject conduct of the emperor Vitellius and the turpitude of L. Vitellius with the *elegantia morum* of Blaesus, the unscrupulousness of Cn. Domitius Afer with the *elegantia vitae* of M. Servilius Nonianus (*Ann.* 4.52.1, 14.19), and, as we have seen, the instability and despondency of P. Vitellius with the *elegantia morum* of Pomponius Secundus (*Ann.* 5.8). It is worth adding that although Tacitus attributes *ingenium* to all three of Servilius, Afer, and Pomponius, he withholds the epithet *elegantia morum* from Afer, *quoquo facinore properus clarescere*.

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