

SAINT GALLICANUS (CONSUL 317)

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WITHIN ITS LONG LIST of gifts made by Constantine to the Christian Church under Pope Silvester, the *Liber Pontificalis* includes the emperor's benefactions to the basilica of saints Peter, Paul, and John the Baptist at Ostia. Then, most unusually, it subjoins the benefactions of a certain Gallicanus to the same church, some three items of silver plate and four landed estates with a combined annual revenue of 869 solidi:

massam territorio Sabinense Mallianum, praest. sol. CXV et tremissium; fundum Picturas, territorio Velliterno, praest. sol. XLIII; fundum Surorum, via Claudia, territorio Vegentano, praest. sol. LVI; massa Gargiliana, territorio Suessano, praest. sol. DCLV.

(LP 34.29 = 184 Duchesne, 68 Mommsen)

The donor Gallicanus was patently a figure of unique importance: not only is he the sole commoner to be included in the *Liber Pontificalis* along with Constantine and as a benefactor of the same church, but another portion of the same *massa Gargiliana, territorio Suessano* also at one time belonged to the emperor himself, who donated it to the Lateran (LP 34.12).¹ Moreover, in time this Gallicanus was to provide the historical substratum for the largely fictitious "Acts of St. Gallicanus," not merely as the sober associate of Constantine and benefactor of Christian Ostia, but as the emperor's general, a suitor for his daughter's hand, and a martyr under Julian.² Who was he?

There are only two Gallicani of any eminence in the fourth century: Flavius Gallicanus, consul 330 (PLRE 1, Gallicanus 1), and Ovinus Gallicanus, consul 317 and prefect of the city of Rome 316–317 (PLRE 1, Gallicanus 3). Of these, it is the former who has been identified with the saint. Ovinus, we are told, was apparently a pagan, but Flavius should be one of "that pleiad of high Christian dignitaries" who are found so frequently at Constantine's court after 330.³ Yet Flavius Gallicanus and Ovinus Gallicanus are nothing more to us than names and dates, and there is not the slightest evidence that Flavius was a Christian or that

¹Moreover, they both held lands in two other areas as well, near Veii (LP 34.33) and in the Sabine territory (34.3, et al.).

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²AASS Iun.³ 7(1867) 33–34.

³H. Grégoire and P. Orgels, *Byzantion* 24 (1954) 581, followed by (e.g.) A. Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (Paris 1962) 70, 104–105 with 312.

Ovinus was not. The identification of Flavius with St. Gallicanus, which arises solely from the date of his consulship, is further buttressed by some special pleading from the *acta* of Gallicanus, a highly untrustworthy source.⁴ Properly, the material in the *LP* presented above must take precedence, with the *acta* providing (at best) confirmation. Proceeding in this fashion, it is the purpose of this note to suggest that it was rather the consul of 317, Ovinus Gallicanus, who gave so generously to the newly triumphant church and who eventually won fame as St. Gallicanus.

The Ovinii are one of those great third-century families who are all but impossible to trace: all of its members were obviously closely related, but whether in one or more lines and whether through males or females is usually quite unclear. From origins unknown it enters historical record in the late second and early third centuries with the Severan consul C. Ovinus Tertullus and consul designate L. Ovinus Rusticus Cornelianus, who were followed shortly by the consul L. Ovinus Proculus Modianus Afrikanus.⁵ In the latter half of the century we find a legate of Numidia, L. Ovinus Pudens Capella, and the consul M. Tineius Ovinus L.f. Arn. Castus Pulcher, who was himself (as his father and grandparents had been) patron of Tibur.⁶ These men were roughly contemporary with the family's great hour of glory: not one but two Ovinii, a Pacatianus and a Paternus, were prefects of the city of Rome under Probus (in 276–277 and 281, respectively), and they were soon followed in that office by their kinsman L. Caesonius Ovinus Manlius Rufinianus Bassus, whose career has recently been fully revealed by inscriptions.⁷ The next generation follows naturally with yet another consul and prefect of the city, Ovinus Gallicanus.

His antecedents are crucial for the step from this consul and prefect to the benefactor of the church of Ostia. Sometime between the years 293 and 300, in his only other known office, Ovinus Gallicanus had been curator of the town of Teanum Sidicinum on the northern borders of Campania, and a family interest in the area may be deduced from the presence there of the freedman *augustalis* M. Ovinus Faustus.⁸ Particularly important here is the intimate connection in this period with the flourishing Caesonii Bassi: first, the urban prefect Caesonius Bassus, whose full career spanned the latter half of the third century, bore the

⁴Considered further below.

⁵*ILS* 423 and 8195; *CIL* II.4126 and *AE* 1935.21; and *ILS* 8093. One of these will be the landowning Ovinus involved in the lawsuit discussed by Paul at *Dig.* 4.4.38. The C. Avinius Octavianus who received a rescript from Valerian and his sons, and whose daughter was betrothed to a senator, was probably also a member of the family: *Epit. cod. Gregoriani Wisig.* 2.1.

⁶*PLRE* 1, Capella; *ILS* 1207.

⁷*PLRE* 1, Pacatianus 1, Paternus 1, Bassus 18.

⁸*CIL* X.4785, *ILS* 5677.

nomen Ovinus; second, Ovinus Gallicanus shared the ordinary consulship of 317 with that man's son or grandson, another Caesonius Bassus; and third, most relevantly, the prefect Caesonius Bassus' grandfather, C. Caesonius Macer Rufinianus, had been in his day *curator rei publicae Teanensium*.⁹ We may at once suspect a hereditary patronage based on landholdings in the area.¹⁰ Immediately adjacent to the west of the territory of Teanum Sidicinum lay that of the town of Suessa Aurunca, and any search for the lands of the Caesonii Bassi should start in that direction, where the prefect Bassus' father, L. Caesonius Lucillus Macer Rufinianus, is found as *curator rei publicae Suessanorum*.¹¹ In this regional context the natural assumption should be that the Ovinus Gallicanus who was curator of neighbouring Teanum is the same man as the pious Gallicanus who donated to the church at Ostia his highly lucrative portion of the *massa Gargiliana, territorio Suessano*.¹²

Confirmation of this identification may be found in the edifying but highly implausible "Acts of St. Gallicanus" prefixed to the Passion of the Saints John and Paul.¹³ As *dux exercitus Romani*, we are told there, this man defeated a Persian army which had invaded Syria, and he thereby won both triumphal ornaments and the love of the emperor Constantine. But when he also demanded the emperor's daughter in marriage (*sibi poscebat uxorem*), Constantine was understandably perplexed. Unfortunately for him, the "Scythians" chose that moment to invade Dacia and Thrace, thereby prompting a chorus of *comites, praefecti*, and *populus* to join in support of the general's demand. Constantia came to her father's rescue: if Gallicanus returned from the war victorious he would win both the consulship and her hand. In the meanwhile, an exchange was arranged between their two households: the daughters of Gallicanus came to live with the Princess, while two Christian eunuchs from her entourage, John and Paul, the heroes of the *Passio*, accompanied Gallicanus to the front. Happily, through their example and a timely visitation from Christ, the general was able to subdue the Scyths and free Thrace; but more importantly, the victor who had left Rome a pagan returned a convinced Christian.

⁹*ILS* 1182. I assume for reasons which will become evident that this is Teanum Sidicinum and not another.

¹⁰I would suspect that Ovinus Gallicanus was a very close relative of the great Caesonius Bassus, a grandson, son-in-law (and cousin), or even a son.

¹¹*ILS* 1186.

¹²If further proof is needed that the Ovinii held land at Suessa, note that Gallicanus at Teanum to the east is balanced by the presence of the third-century consul designate L. Ovinus L.f. Quir. Rusticus Cornelianus at Minturnae to the west: *AE* 1935.21.

¹³Most of the modern bibliography on St. Gallicanus is noted by the full, recent treatment of J. Mossay and D. Bundy, *Dictionnaire d'histoire et de géographie ecclésiastique*, fasc. 111 (1980) 843–845. Add R. Meiggs, *Ostia*² (1973) 521.

The reward of the consulship followed and, more or less, the hand of Constantia, for Gallicanus did not marry the *sacratissima virgo* but chose rather to live in the palace *quasi gener Augustorum*. As his piety increased, this man who was *amicissimus Augustorum* divested himself of his worldly goods, including five thousand slaves whom he manumitted. Eventually he removed to Ostia with many of these freedmen in attendance, and there he built the first Christian church, dedicating it to St. Lawrence. After some time the apostate Julian ascended the throne and sent his agents to collect the taxes on *in Ostiensi pago quatuor casae* which Gallicanus had pledged to good works. These agents were smitten with leprosy, the good Gallicanus was forced to flee from Italy, and after a period of hermitage in Egypt he was slain there by an officer of Julian.

The "Acts of St. Gallicanus" have virtually no independent value: his adventures fall into the category of historical romance, that is, although every detail may be false or completely distorted the tale does purport to deal with real historical characters.¹⁴ Invention is obvious: the Persian invasion, the virgin Constantia, the first church at Ostia. Much more difficult is the confusion with certain aspects of the career of the similarly named Caesar Gallus, Julian's half-brother, who actually was married to a daughter of Constantine, Constantina, and who was purportedly the bulwark of Rome against Persia in Syria: this presumably represents conscious accretion to the legend of Gallicanus, invented for reasons which are here irrelevant.¹⁵ The slender factual basis, that is, the historical Gallicanus' connections with Constantine and with Ostia, is already evident in the *Liber Pontificalis*. As to Ostia, the church is wrong but the connection with John and Paul (even if the wrong John and Paul) is recalled, and the four properties donated to it are reflected in the *quatuor casae* mistakenly located at Ostia.¹⁶ The proximity to Constantine is likewise true, insofar as Ovinus Gallicanus (if he is the man in the *LP*) was indeed consul and (as city prefect and co-benefactor of Ostia) *amicus Caesaris*. Beyond this, the *acta* have nothing plausible to add.

However, indirectly the acts can be made to yield the one crucial item omitted by the *Liber Pontificalis*, the saint's *gentilicium*. Compare with their tale the following absurd and patently fictitious notice in the *Historia Augusta's* biography of the emperor Severus Alexander:

Cum quidam Ovinus Camillus senator antiquae familiae delicatissimus rebellare voluisset tyrannidem adfectans eique (sc. Alexandro) nuntiatum esset ac statim probatum, ad Palatium eum rogavit eique gratias egit, quod curam rei p., quae recusantibus bonis in-

¹⁴Analyzed by P. Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Note agiografiche* 5 (Vatican City 1915 [*Studi e Testi* 27]) 60–62, and H. Delehay, *Etudes sur le légendier romain* (1936) 125.

¹⁵Clearly demonstrated by Grégoire and Orgels, *Byzantion* 24 (1954) 579–605.

¹⁶Moreover, for what it is worth, an Ovinia L.f. Optata has turned up at Ostia, where the saint allegedly had many freedmen (*CIL* XIV.1441).

poneretur, sponte reciperet; deinde ad senatum processit et timentem ac tantae conscientiae tabe confectum participem imperii appellavit, in Palatium recepit, convivio adhibuit, ornamentis imperialibus et melioribus, quam ipse utebatur, adfecit. Et cum expeditio barbarica esset nuntiata, vel ipsum, si vellet ire vel ut secum proficisceretur, hortatus est. Et cum ipse pedes iter faceret, illum invitavit ad laborem; quem post quinque milia cunctantem equo sedere iussit, cumque post duas mansiones equo etiam fatigatus esset, carpento inposuit. Hoc quoque seu timore seu vere respicientem, abdicantem quin etiam imperium et mori paratum dimisit commendatumque militibus, a quibus Alexander unice amabatur, tutum ad villas suas ire praecepit, in quibus diu vixit. Sed post iussu imperatoris (Maximini) occisus est, quod et ille militaris esset et (Alexander) a militibus occisus est.

(*HA Alexander* 48.1–6)

If the Gallicanus of the *LP* was indeed an Ovinus, the story in the *HA* becomes a simple parody of the deeds of St. Gallicanus. Here again we have the tale of an emperor and a noble senator with the uncommon name of Ovinus, but unlike the *dux* Gallicanus our Camillus is *delicatis-simus*. Nevertheless, he has dreams of empire, as indeed Gallicanus would have—for thus we must interpret the demand for marriage with Constantia. But where Constantine was thrown into a quandary Alexander is delighted and presents Camillus to court and senate alike; and both Ovinii actually move into the imperial palace.¹⁷ Then there is the *expeditio barbarica*: where the doughty Gallicanus had gone, Camillus hangs back; where Gallicanus had gone alone, Camillus will go only with Alexander; where Gallicanus had succeeded, Camillus renounces the mission. Camillus soon abdicates his shared power (*abdicantem imperium*) and retires, precisely the actions attributed to Gallicanus. And some time later, apparently at the order of a subsequent and more savage emperor (if the required emendation is accepted), Camillus, like Gallicanus, would be slain by the sword.

Such a parody assumes, of course, that the biographer of Alexander expected at least part of his audience to be familiar with the spectacular legend of St. Gallicanus (though not of course with the *acta* as we have them, which may date from the sixth century). To signal the precise reference he allows his readers the noble and unusual *nomen* of his hero, *Ovinus*, and he then indulges his fancy. This man was a Camillus, and that of course “was an appropriate *cognomen* for a senator of ancient lineage.”¹⁸ But what is more, it was properly military for a most unwarlike usurper, and in that least authentic of Roman legends the great Camillus had allegedly defeated the Gauls; that is, on later analogy, the dictator Camillus might be called “Gallicanus.” To state the argument simply, writing in the late fourth century the author of the *Historia Augusta* knew and was inclined to ridicule the legend which had grown

¹⁷Gallicanus quasi gener Augustorum in Palatio successit (*Acta* 6); cf. (of Alexander) in palatium recepit (sc. Camillum).

¹⁸R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 97, cf. 96.

up about an Ovinus Gallicanus, a great Roman nobleman who had converted with enthusiasm to Christianity in the early years of Constantine's reign.

If the St. Gallicanus of legend and the benefactor Gallicanus of the *Liber Pontificalis* are correctly identified with the consul of 317, his story will add something of interest to a large and much-discussed theme, the Christianization of the Roman aristocracy. Gallicanus will join Acilius Severus (cos. 323) and Anicius Paulinus (cos. 325) as one of a small group among the highest aristocracy who converted early to the religion of their emperor, an action not without significance in the uncertain years before the final defeat of Licinius.¹⁹ Perhaps he was the very first, a landmark to be commemorated by the early invention of a saintly career and by the grateful and unique record in the *LP* of his generosity to the church at an early date. The simple fact of this generosity is significant. The vast wealth of the later Roman aristocracy, in whose day more and more was concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer, is a matter of record; equally familiar is the immense growth in the wealth of the church in the fourth and fifth centuries: it must follow that the conversion of the aristocracy was of great economic consequence. While we can hardly discount the gifts of lesser people or of the emperor himself, this period is particularly marked for us by the awesome phenomenon of great Roman noblemen and women, proprietors of vast estates in every province of the empire, abandoning themselves to lives of prayer and good works, giving their all to the church, and (in Jerome's words) deliberately ruining themselves and their posterity.²⁰ Ovinus Gallicanus may have been remembered as the first private benefactor of the church on a large scale. He is certainly the last known member of his family.

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¹⁹*PLRE* 1, Severus 16 and Paulinus 15. The obscure passage at Prudentius *Contra Symmachum* 1.544 ff. does *not* suggest that Paulinus was the first Christian consul, indeed does not refer to him.

²⁰There is of course a mass of evidence for such total generosity, a theme or subject particularly of Jerome (*Epp.* 39, 52, 54, 66, 71, 77, 79, 108, 118, 127, 130, 154), Augustine (*Epp.* 42, 124–126, 262, *CD* 1.10), and Palladius (*Hist. Laus.* 41, 46, 54, 56, 57, 61, 62, 66).