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The Addressee of *Laus Pisonis*

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“A panegyric (261 hexameters) on a certain Calpurnius Piso, perhaps the conspirator (Tac. *Ann.* 15. 48) or the consul of A.D. 57.” So *Laus Pisonis* is described, not for the first time, in a recent handbook.¹ Anonymous works provoke fantasy, and excesses of fantasy may provoke in other scholars an excess of caution.

The most recent commentators on the poem say that “with certainty” or “with the greatest probability” the addressee may be identified with the conspirator C. Calpurnius Piso and the Piso Calpurnius of a scholion on Juvenal 5. 109, himself identifiable thanks to Suetonius (*Gaius* 25. 1), Dio (59. 8. 7-8), and Tacitus (*Ann.* 15. 48, 65), with the conspirator.² Nowhere, indeed, do any of these sources conflict, and all of them except the poem plainly concern the conspirator. Neither Suetonius nor Dio, however, has anything relevant to the poem; the poem and Tacitus agree only on attributes not seldom accorded to members of the Roman aristocracy; and the poem and the scholion agree only on one attribute unlikely to have been possessed by more than one Calpurnius Piso, brilliance at *latrunculi*. The identification therefore turns on the authority of the scholion.

It appears in the edition of Juvenal published at Venice in 1486 by Georgius Valla, who ascribes the information, or at least the first part of it, to one Probus. This Probus sometimes furnishes precious

¹ *Cambridge history of classical literature II: Latin literature* (Cambridge 1982), p. 886; cf. J. W. and A. M. Duff, *Minor Latin poets* (London—Cambridge, Mass. 1934), p. 289.

² Gladys Martin, *Laus Pisonis* (diss., Cornell 1917), pp. 15-19; A. Seel, *Laus Pisonis: Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (diss., Erlangen 1969), pp. 118-20.

material absent from the other scholia on Juvenal, for instance the quotation on 4. 94 from Statius' *Bellum Germanicum*; and it is now clear that his commentary, which as it came into Valla's hands was "mirae brevitatis" and gave out at 8. 198, had been used in much the same state by two readers of Juvenal at Brescia 500 years before.³ In general, therefore, Valla's Probus deserves quite as much respect as the other scholia, the fullest of which occur in manuscripts only another 150 years older. In particular passages, however, it is not always easy to distinguish Probus from Valla, and Valla has also been suspected of filling out Probus' brief notes with information drawn from other sources available to him, which in 1486 would have included most of the Latin literature known today. Consequently one reads such statements as these:⁴

Schol. Vallae ad Iuvenal. 5, 109 digna vix sunt quae adhibeantur, nam maximam partem ex Tacito prompta neque 'Probi' sed ipsius Vallae esse viri docti suspicati sunt, cf. Wessner in ed. (1931) p. 253 et XX-XXIII.

In the latter place Wessner expounds "Vallae morem rationemque amplificandi et interpolandi"; in the former he rightly says that Valla took from Tacitus the account of Seneca's last moments given in the scholion on 5. 109. No one, however, has shown how Valla could have compiled from Tacitus or other sources the accompanying scholion on Piso.

As Valla prints it, the scholion is corrupt in four places, but only superficially.⁵ Wessner's text may be rendered as follows:

Calpurnius Piso, as Probus says, came of an old family. He took tragic parts on the stage and was so accomplished and clever at the game of *latrunculi* that crowds flocked to watch him play. As a result he ingratiated himself with the emperor Gaius, who suddenly banished him on suspicion of resuming relations with the wife Gaius took from him and then returned. In due course under Claudius he came back,

³ See most recently Gius. Billanovich, *Italia Medioevale e Umanistica* 22 (1979), pp. 367-95, especially pp. 373-76, 390-95; for bibliography, p. 392, note 4. Incidentally, it seems likely to me that 6. 614abc owe their circulation to Probus' commentary: the early manuscripts that present them belong to northern Italy, and their disagreement over where to put them betrays incorporation from the margin. I also doubt whether Probus assigned them to Juvenal or was even citing earlier scholars who did. On the text and meaning of the lines see G. Luck, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 76 (1972), pp. 229-30.

⁴ *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* C 284 (Groag) on C. Calpurnius Piso.

⁵ If the scholion is "maximam partem ipsius Vallae," how are these corruptions to be accounted for? They do not look like misprints.

and after holding the consulship and inheriting wealth from his mother he lived in great splendor and made a practice not only of supporting impecunious and deserving senators and knights but also of bestowing equestrian capital and rank on a number of men from the lower classes every year.

To begin with the *latrunculi*, we have seen that they occur elsewhere only in *Laus Pisonis*. Scholars who suppose that Valla took them from there⁶ cannot have looked at the transmission of the poem. The complete text first appears in an edition of Ovid published at Basel in 1527 by Johannes Sichardus, who had found a manuscript at Lorsch. Otherwise the only witness is the *Florilegium Gallicum*, compiled in central France about the middle of the 12th century.⁷ Its compiler evidently admired the poem; at any rate, he excerpted from it almost 200 of its 261 lines, an unusually high proportion.⁸ The longest passage he omitted consists of 19 lines, but it so happens that it is the poet's description of Piso's performance at *latrunculi*, which must have been even less intelligible in 12th-century France than it is now. That from northern Italy Valla's arm was long enough to reach Lorsch is neither attested nor plausible; and had he found the text either there or anywhere else, he would surely have printed it.⁹ Furthermore, the poem does not say that through acting and *latrunculi* Piso ingratiated himself with Gaius; neither the poem nor any other literary source says that he returned from exile under Claudius¹⁰ and after holding the consulship inherited wealth from his mother; and the scholion gives a more precise account of his beneficence.¹¹ Rather than believe that Valla either made these things up or imported them

⁶ Seel, p. 119, note 2; G. B. Townend, *Classical Quarterly* 66 (1972), p. 378.

⁷ On this anthology see R. H. Rouse, *Viator* 10 (1979), pp. 135-38.

⁸ J. Hamacher, *Florilegium Gallicum: Prolegomena und Edition der Exzerpte von Petronius Cicero, De oratore* (Bern und Frankfurt 1975), pp. 146-56, gives the compiler's text. Some modern readers too express guarded approval of the poem; cf. Schanz-Hosius II, p. 489, Vollmer in *Real-Encyclopädie* under *Laus Pisonis*. I hereby join them. It is a fluent, orderly, and sober poem in a thankless and inebriating genre, and maintains interest with little recourse to padding. The *Cambridge history*, pp. 628-29, makes fun of it.

⁹ Besides using Probus for the first time, he printed the first edition of Avienius. Cf. Billanovich, p. 394.

¹⁰ An inscription, *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* VI. 2032. 13, records his presence among the *fratres Aruales* at an unknown date under Claudius.

¹¹ For these reasons E. Matthias, "De scholiis in Iuvenalem," *Diss. Philol. Halenses* II (Halle 1876), pp. 279-81, derived the scholion from a source independent of Tacitus, Dio, and Suetonius. He did not mention *Laus Pisonis* or the problem of distinguishing between Probus and Valla.

from lost sources, it is much simpler to accept that the words *ut Probus inquit* cover the whole scholion and are true.

There is another reason for ruling out lost sources. The prose of the scholion exhibits clausulae throughout, whether quantitative or accentual:¹²

Piso Calpurnius (ut Probus inquit), antiqua familia, scaenico habitu tragoedias ac̄tīvīt, in latrunculorum lusu tam perfectū ē cāllidū ut ad eum ludentem concurrerēt. Ob haec insinuatus C. Caesari repente etiā relēgātū ē quod consuetudinem pristinae uxōris abductae sibi ab ipso, deinde remissae, repetivisse existimābāt. Mox sub Claudio restitūtū et post consulatum materna hereditatē ditātū magnificētissimē vixit, meritos sublevare inopes ex utroque ordine solitus, de plebe vero certos quotquot annis ad equestrem censum dignitatēquē prōvehēre.

A glance at Valla's preface suffices to show that he was not following either the quantitative or the accentual system, and he could hardly have strung together so many clausulae by accident. Moreover, other scholia on historical figures, and not scholia peculiar to Valla, exhibit clausulae:¹³

Sarmentus, nationē Tuscū, e domo Marci Favoni incertum libertū an servū, plurimis forma et urbanitatē promeritū eo fiduciaē venit ut pro equite Romano ageret, decuriam quoque quaestoriam cōpararet; quare per ludos, quia in primis XIII ordinibus sedit, haec a populo in eum dicta sunt . . . Dum autem causam usurpatae dignitatis dicit, precibus et gratia summo accusatōre dimissus est, cum apud iudices nihil aliud docere temptaret quam concessam sibi libertatem a Maecenate, ad quem sectio bonorum Favoni pertinuerat. Iam autem senex in maximis necessitatibus, ad quas libidine luxuriēque deciderat, coactus auctōnari cum interrogaretur cur scriptum quoque censoriū venderet, non infacete bonae se memoriae esse respondit . . . (5. 3)

¹² The two systems notoriously overlap. I have scanned by quantity, but everything I have marked fits the other system, and *ordine solitus* fits it better. At the meeting of the American Philological Association in December 1982 Ralph Hall and Steven Oberhelman described their work on clausulae in a wide range of imperial prose; some of their results will shortly be published in *Classical Philology*.

¹³ I choose a long example for the obvious reason, an example from satires 7-16 to show that the clausulae cannot be attributed to Townend's hypothetical commentator on 1-6, about whom more below. For other examples, not all equally clear, see the *Vita* printed by Wessner (where in line 18 read *in extrema Aegypti parte tendentis*, "quartered at the other end of Egypt"), 1.109 Valla, 155, 2.29, 4.53, 77, 6.620 = 628, 638, 7.199, 10.126, 11.91, 12.47. For long notes certainly not clausulated see e.g. 8.254, 10.274, 276, 15.173.

Mithridates cum per quadraginta annos adversus Romanos dimicasset, cum Pharnacem filium suum post ceteros eius fratres voluisset occidere, ab omni relicto exercitu est et exhausto veneno periit, accepto frequenter antidoto ut perire non posset. Postea vero Pharnaces successit eius imperio . . . (10. 273)

The use of clausulae in works as humble as commentaries has not been investigated,¹⁴ and most commentaries have come down in so distorted a form that the occurrence of clausulae in some places will rarely allow conclusions of any importance to be drawn from their absence in others.¹⁵ Occasionally, however, it may be helpful to know that someone composed a scholion in a particular form, and that is true of the scholion quoted by Valla on Juvenal 5. 109.

If any conflation of Calpurnii took place, therefore, it took place in Antiquity, not in 1486. Did it take place? The scholia on 4. 81 confuse Vibius Crispus with Passienus Crispus,¹⁶ but names are more often greeted with silence or total incomprehension than with confused erudition, and on satires 1-6 respectable sources, consulted perhaps by someone almost contemporary with Juvenal, appear to underlie many of the scholia.¹⁷ Be that as it may, Probus' statements on 5. 109 show no sign of conflation, and nothing suggests that he lifted the *latrunculi* from a poem about another Piso.

In short, it requires either an unhealthy appetite for coincidence or an indiscriminating mistrust of scholiasts to believe that *Laus Pisonis* was addressed to anyone other than the conspirator C. Calpurnius Piso.¹⁸

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¹⁴ A. Klotz, *Archiv für lat. Lexikographie* 15 (1908), pp. 504-08, detected quantitative clausulae in Lactantius Placidus' commentary on the *Thebaid*. In *Texts and transmission: a survey of the Latin classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford 1983), p. 395, note 14, I voiced a vague feeling about Donatus' commentary on Terence. Has anyone gone looking in Servius?

¹⁵ To take a trivial example from the scholion on 5. 3 (just quoted in the text), someone may object that a writer who ends a clause *dignitatis dicit* cannot have been using either quantitative or accentual clausulae; but transposition of *dicit* after *causam* will create a quantitative clausula, and we are lucky when scholia have suffered nothing worse in transmission than the misplacing of one word.

¹⁶ On this confusion see the *Appendix* below.

¹⁷ G. B. Townend, *Classical Quarterly* 66 (1972), pp. 376-87, an important and stimulating article.

¹⁸ The substance of this article formed part of a paper delivered in February 1983 at Urbana. Its submission to *ICS* is small return for the hospitality of Kevin Newman and his colleagues.

APPENDIX

Lipsius established in the second edition of his commentary on Tacitus (Antwerp 1589), pp. 128-29 on *Ann.* 12. 6, that the scholia on Juvenal 4. 81 confuse Vibius Crispus of Vercellae (*Tac. Dial.* 8. 1), present at Domitian's conclave, with Passienus Crispus of unknown origin, husband and allegedly victim of Agrippina. The confusion takes different forms, however, in PS and in Valla.

Emended in places irrelevant to the confusion, the scholion in PS reads as follows:

Municeps Vercellensis. Tirocinio suo in senatu ita coepit 'patres conscripti et tu, Caesar', propter quod simulata oratione plenissime a Tiberio conlaudatus. Plurimas sponte causas apud centumviros egit, pro qua re in basilica Iulia eius statua posita est. Consulatus duos gessit. Uxores habuit duas, primam Domitiam, deinde Agrippinam, illam amitam, hanc matrem Neronis Caesaris. Possedit bis milies sestertia. Omnium principum gratiam adpetivit sed praecipue C. Caesaris, quem iter facientem secutus est pedibus; hic nullo audiente ab eodem interrogatus haberetne sicut ipse cum sorore germana consuetudinem 'nondum' inquit quantumvis decenter et caute, ne aut negans eum argueret aut adsentiens semet mendacio dehonestaret. Periiit per fraudem Agrippinae, quam heredem reliquerat, et funere publico elatus est.

Vercellensis *Pithoeus*: visellens est PS

C. *add. Lipsius*

pedibus PS: per Alpes *Wessner ex Valla*

ab eodem *Wessner*: a Nerone PS

Everything here except presumably *municeps Vercellensis*, if that is the right reading, refers to Passienus Crispus, and the information came from Suetonius (= fr. 88 Reifferscheid). Other scholia, those in *Wessner's* $\phi\chi$, give only the story about the emperor's question and Crispus' reply; they make Tiberius the emperor, doubtless because he was named earlier in the fuller form of the note.

Valla ends with the same story, told of Tiberius, but begins as follows:

Vibius Crispus Placentinus (ut inquit Probus, nec me praeterit quid Tacitus scribat), et manu prōmptūs ēt līnguā, sub Claudio et consulātum ādēptūs ita modestia studium orandi tēmpērāvīt ut amorem in se principum prōvōcārēt. Idem postremo amissis plūrīmīs filiīs ab uxore speciosa, quam formae grātiā dūxērāt, veneno necatus est.

Wessner and others declare that *ut inquit Probus* is a lie and Valla assigned Vibius Crispus to Placentia because he came from Placentia

himself. That is surely incredible. What did he or Placentia stand to gain? He may on the other hand have interpolated *Vibius* from *Dial.* 8. 1, a defensible procedure; but if so, who was Crispus Placentinus? Passienus Crispus, for all we know, came from Placentia, but not everything said about Crispus Placentinus fits what the scholion in PS says about Passienus Crispus: many reasons might have led Passienus Crispus to marry Agrippina, but surely not her appearance, nor would she have entered someone else's biography as an anonymous beauty. Moreover, the unadorned consulship suits neither Passienus (*cos. II a. 44*) nor Vibius (*cos. ter.*). There is also a textual difficulty, underlined by the clausulae but present anyway: *sub Claudio et* must be corrupt, and either *et* is intrusive (or corrupt) or something has fallen out before it. If something has fallen out, the note could refer to Vibius Crispus, though *Placentinus* would then, it seems, be a mistake (see the epigraphic evidence cited by *PIR V. 379*). Whichever Crispus it refers to, the conflict with the scholion in PS seems to demand either an *aliter* or an *alius fuit Crispus* in some earlier form of the commentary.

I can go no further, but I am not yet convinced that Valla's Probus, let alone the original commentary, confused one Crispus with another.