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WHICH PROBA WROTE THE CENTO?

There has been much discussion in recent years of the identity of the Proba who in the fourth century (this much is agreed), compiled a Virgilian cento on Christian themes. The candidates are Faltonia Betitia Proba (*PLRE* 2) and Anicia Faltonia Proba (*PLRE* 3).[1] Their husbands were respectively Clodius Celsinus *signo* Adelphius and Petronius Probus. Timothy Barnes has now championed the view that the latter woman was the centonist with new arguments[2] that have the effect of refining and reinforcing to some extent the identification which Danuta Shanzer first put forward in 1986[3] and subsequently developed in 1994[4] in reply to an important intervention by John Matthews in 1992.[5] In the wake of Matthews' paper I added some relevant points in the first of two articles on the cento, in favour of the older opinion that the elder Proba was the centonist.[6]

Barnes argues that on the basis of inscriptional evidence the elder of these Probas may be proved to have died before her husband, and that he probably died soon after his prefecture of the city ended in December 351.[7] Now in the preface to the cento its writer mentions that she had written an earlier poem on a civil war of some kind. This is identified in a manuscript now lost[8] as a conflict between Magnentius and Constantine (*sic*); this must be the war of 350–3, with an easily understood corruption of the name *Constantii*.[9] Assuming that the epicist waited until the war was over, and took some time to finish it, the elder Proba cannot be the author, for (it is argued) her husband, and so she herself, was dead by then. The younger Proba must therefore be the author of the cento. The unnamed *coniunx* of its line 693 would require to be re-identified along with her, but that is no problem.[10]

This article will examine (1) the significance of the epigraphic formulae which Barnes utilises, and (2) his arguments for the date of Adelphius' death; it will then turn to (3) Shanzer's argument that Proba wrote after the *Carmen Contra Paganos* and (4) an argument presented by her from an apparent reference in the cento to the date of Easter, which likewise would set the poem in the late 380s or even a short time after

[1] See A.H.M. Jones, J.R. Martindale, J. Morris (edd.), *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire* vol. 1 (Cambridge, 1971), 732–3.

[2] T.D. Barnes, 'An urban prefect and his wife', *CQ* 56 (2006), 249–56.

[3] D. Shanzer, 'The anonymous *Carmen contra paganos* and the date and identity of the centonist Proba', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 32 (1986), 232–48.

[4] D. Shanzer, 'The date and identity of the centonist Proba', *Recherches Augustiniennes* 27 (1994), 75–96.

[5] J.F. Matthews, 'The poetess Proba and fourth-century Rome: questions of interpretation', in M.Christol et al. (edd.), *Institutions, Société et Vie Politique dans l'Empire Romain au IVe siècle ap. J.-C.* (Collection de l'École Française de Rome 159 [Rome, 1992]), 277–304.

[6] R.P.H. Green, 'Proba's cento: its date, purpose and reception', *CQ* 45 (1995), 551–63.

[7] As stated in the *Chronographer of the Year 354* (fuller details in Barnes [n. 2], 249, n. 1).

[8] Details and discussion in Matthews (n. 5), 279–80.

[9] Shanzer (n. 3), 232–3 argued that this evidence of its content should be ignored, and that the poem was in fact mythological (from a *Thebaid*, then?); on which see Green (n. 6), 552. On the allusions to Lucan, see R.P.H. Green, 'Proba's introduction to her cento', *CQ* 47 (1997), 548–9, at 550.

[10] For the text of the cento see C. Schenkl, *Poetae Latini Minores*, *CSEL* 16. 569–609 (Vienna, Prague, Leipzig, 1888).

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that. After quickly revisiting other supposed pointers to such a date, I conclude that there is no compelling reason to abandon the thesis that it was the elder Proba who wrote the cento.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EPIGRAPHICAL FORMULAE

According to Barnes, we may infer that Proba predeceased her husband from an inscription that mentions Adelphius and his wife: *Clodius Adelfius v(ir) c(larissimus) ex praefectis urbis uxori incomparabili et sibi fecit* (*CIL* 6.1712).[11] The column on which this inscription is written, now lost and perhaps last seen in the eighteenth century, existed in the Renaissance in the church of S. Anastasia in Rome.[12] Matthews suggested a link with the original, fourth-century, church of S. Anastasia,[13] but, as Barnes says, this need not have been the original site. *Habent sua fata columnae*: the transferral of such *spolia* from one building to another is not uncommon. But whatever the original context of the inscription, and the exact nature of the thing which Adelphius *fecit*, the inscription clearly has the form of a *Grabinschrift*,[14] and it is not unreasonable to compare its language with that of other funerary inscriptions.

What demonstrates that Proba died first, according to Barnes, is that the mention of the wife precedes the mention (in the word *sibi*) of the husband. When, on her death, Adelphius saw to the making of the inscription, and presumably whatever structure went with it, he placed, or caused to be placed, his wife's name before the reference to himself, as the composers of such notices on funerary inscriptions tend to do.[15] The reverse order in this formula, with *sibi* preceding the name, description, or mention of the wife would imply that the husband had died first, or that both were alive at the time of commissioning. Barnes sees 'a significant difference' between these two formulae and maintains that on this evidence Proba's prior death 'seems indisputable'. In order to investigate the diagnostic value of this schema, let us present it diagrammatically. Formula (a), *Marcus sibi et uxori fecit*,[16] signifies that 'either both spouses are still alive [sc. at the time when the inscription was put up][17] or the one who commissioned the tomb died before his … spouse', and formula (b), *Marcus uxori et sibi fecit*, signifies that 'the spouse who commissioned the tomb was still alive, while the conjugal partner for whom he…commissioned it was already dead'.[18] Adjectives in these two formulae may be ignored for present purposes, for as Barnes made very clear it is unsafe to deduce that a person is dead simply from the use of a laudatory epithet; even the word *incomparabilis* (the 'Dear Departed' according to Shanzer),[19] appropriate both to the marital context and, perhaps, to the economic needs of the

[11] Barnes (n. 2), n. 20 gives references to other collections also.

[12] See *CIL* ad loc. , Matthews (n. 5), 299–303.

[13] Matthews (n. 5), 303–4.

[14] So Barnes (n. 2), 253, using the classification of H. Niquet, *Monumenta Virtutum Titulique. Senatorische Selbstdarstellung im spätantiken Rom im Spiegel der epigraphischen Denkmäler* (Stuttgart, 2002), 124, 142.

[15] Barnes (n. 2), 253–4.

[16] The words *uxori* and *marito* are here used for clarity; in fact the word *coniugi* is commoner for both.

[17] Of course, inscriptions may have been commissioned well in advance, with these final details left to the mason or the heirs to add as appropriate.

[18] The formulae *Marcia sibi et marito fecit* and *Marcia marito et sibi fecit* are not germane to the present issue, and references to these possibilities have been here omitted.

[19] Shanzer (n. 4), 81.

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stonemason, turns out to be commonplace and too standardised to be diagnostically useful.[20]

How robust is this schema, and can inferences based on it be regarded as indisputably correct? There are some fifty relevant inscriptions in Barnes's set, which consisted of *ILS* 7818–8560; in my survey of this set I have disregarded inscriptions which do not relate to the husband-wife context, though many of the characteristic expressions are also applied to other members of a nuclear family or to freedmen and freedwomen. To illustrate formula (b), which Adelphius' inscription instantiates, Barnes gives the following example, in the marital context,[21] which I shorten somewhat:

d(is) m(anibus) …dulcissimae Vibiae C(ai?) lib(ertae) Parthenope, dignissimae et incomparabili(s?) feminae, M. Aurelius Aug(usti) lib(ertus) Metras coniugi et sibi se vivos fecit (*ILS* 8024).

(This, except for small differences in the treatment of abbreviations, is the text of *CIL* (6.28875) and *ILS*; there is no need to question the integrity of *vivos*, as the *CQ* version with its wiggly brackets seems to do, for it may be taken as nominative singular (as it is in 8324),[22] and the use of *se* in agreement with a word in the nominative case is supported by expressions such as *se vivi* [8264, 8326]).[23] Other examples of (b) are 8027 and 8140 (where the wife's age is given), 8271 (evidently confirmed by *vivus*), 8448 (*in re sua posita est*), and 8462 (*quae…morie(n)s…*). Another indication may be *d. m.* (*dis manibus*) at the start of the inscription, followed by the woman's name in the dative case, as in 8294.[24] In the nature of the case, an example of formula (b) in which the wife is demonstrably alive at the time in question can hardly be expected; a scenario in which a predeceasing male commissions a tomb for himself and his surviving wife is highly unlikely, if not absurd (it might conceivably happen through testamentary instruction or some other arrangement). It is, moreover, in general easier to discern who is dead at the time in question than to discern who is alive, and so the interpretation of formula (b) is inherently resistant to falsification and so hard to validate.

But it should be noted that formula (a) is used of a predeceasing wife in 8072: *v.f. C(aius) Atilius C(astalii) lib(ertus) Florentinus sibi et dis manibus Iuliae Fortunatae uxoris optime meritae*. Here it seems that the man is alive,[25] and the woman deceased, at the time in question. A similar interpretation could be given to 8089: *d(is) m(anibus) Aurel(ius) Filocurius fecit se bibo sibi et Ulp(iae) Eupropie coiugi* [sic] *memoriolam*…. Here it looks as if Eupropia is not alive at the time in question,

[20] Barnes (n. 2), 254 and n. 26 shows how common the word is. It is notable that, at least in *ILS* 7818–8560, it is almost never misspelt, though sometimes deprived of its final morpheme in the interests of abbreviation. Stonemasons may have found it valuable.

[21] Barnes gives three examples in all (n. 2), 254.

[22] Henceforth all references are to *ILS* unless stated.

[23] And perhaps by *se viva* in various places, but of course no decision can be made between nominative and ablative in the feminine. The *se vivo* type of ablative absolute, where the person to whom *se* refers is also the subject of *fecit* is also common; see J.N. Adams, *The Text and Language of a Vulgar Latin Chronicle (Anonymus Valesianus II)* (London, 1976), 99–100, Leumann-Hofmann-Szantyr, *Lateinische Grammatik* (Munich, 1965), 139–40, and G. Konjetzny, 'De idiotismis syntacticis in titulis latinis urbanis conspicuis', *Archiv für Lateinische Lexicographie* 15 (1908), 299–351, at 322–4.

[24] What ensues in this inscription, *filius…maritus…fecerunt*, is rare.

[25] *v.f.* stands for *vivus fecit*; we also find *v.* alone. Other forms used include *vius*, and the use in one or both places of *b* for *v* is not uncommon.

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although her name follows *sibi*. Similar perhaps is 8387: *d(is) m(anibus) T(itus) Aelius Victorinus vivo se ex arka* [sic] *pontificum comparavit, sibi et Marciae Apolaustidi coniugi suae incomparabili, cum qua vixi sine ulla iracundia*….The male claims to be alive, and so the words *cum qua vixi*… would signify that his wife is dead. He was never angry with her. It might be argued that the making of the structure is not mentioned, but only the purchase of the land; but why depart from the supposedly general schema and not postpone *sibi*, as could easily be done?

A more obscure case is 8074,[26] which with some help from Dessau may be presented as: *d(is) m(anibus) s(acrum) T(iti) Canin(i?) Sat(urnini) q(ui) v(ixit) a(nnis)* [gap] *se qui vivo monumentum sibi et Saturninae Nini [et] fil(iae) b(ene) m(erenti) coniug(i)* [many more words]…*faciendum locavit*. The tomb memorialises the man Saturninus in particular; his wife is perhaps dead at the time when the inscription was made. When alive, he secured the monument *sibi et coniugi*. If the word *vivo* is taken to imply, by setting up a contrast, that she was dead, we have another anomaly, in which formula (a) performs the function supposedly proper to formula (b). But perhaps both were alive then, and there are, admittedly, many uncertainties about the above reconstruction, with Dessau's corrections of its various possible errors, or *sphalmata* as he calls them, not beyond dispute.[27] In general, however, it does seem that even if formula (b) does represent a general convention, unselfconscious departures are made from it according to circumstances. It is hardly surprising that the alleged convention was not observed punctiliously over a wide area and during such a large span of time.

Let us give more attention to formula (a). This, according to Barnes, indicates one of two possibilities: either both are alive – this is also, of course, indicated sometimes in a different formula, *Marcus et Marcia…fecerunt*, as in 8264 and 8326 – or the one who commissioned the tomb dies before his or her spouse. It is often not clear how to decide for one or the other, as demonstrated by 8089, which I have cited above, but which Barnes gives as one of his examples of tombs constructed before either spouse died.[28] The problem of deciding how to interpret examples of formula (a) is intensified by the patchy use of the word *vivus*, in some form.[29] It presumably indicates that at least at the time in question – the moment when the inscription was commissioned and made – the person so described was alive, and it looks, too, as if it were intended to distinguish the survivor from the deceased. My own examination of the fifty or so relevant inscriptions from the above-mentioned set of 7818–8560 brought to light fifteen clear examples of formula (a), of which six lacked *vivus*[30] in some form or any other indication that the spouses were not both alive.[31] These, then, could also be considered as belonging to the sub-class of inscriptions attesting

[26] Its presentation in *CIL* 8.4387 is more precise. The man's name was perhaps Canininus, as inscribed on one side of the stele, and Wilmanns (*CIL* 8.18555) may not have been right to see an error in this as well as in *Caninini*, on the other side.

[27] But he does seem right to delete *et*: the wife was surely *Saturnina Nini filia*.

[28] I have problems with Barnes's other references at this point: with 8265 (if that is meant for 9265), 8291a, and 8324, which refers not to the man's wife but to a mother and another female.

[29] See n. 23.

[30] Where Marcia is involved, one example of *viva* – followed by *fec(it) sibi et…coniugi optimo* – came to light, out of some five examples (8218).

[31] These are 7888a, 8221/2, 8259, 8261, 8263, 8278. In the other category are 8073, 8090 (though here *me vivo*, which comes after several lines, refers to the provision of the land), 8151 (with *mihi…et conigi*), 8238 (here, unusually, both are indicated as alive), 8239, 8240 (where at least *v. f.* is clear), 8327, 8419, 8545.

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commissions made when both spouses were alive. Perhaps the same could apply, given the uncertainty that we saw above about any hard and fast rule behind formula (b), to the inscription relating to Adelphius and his wife?

It might be argued that to add these six inscriptions to the category of joint commissions is inappropriate, and that there is some reason for suggesting why the word *vivus* is omitted by a survivor, some explanation which might save the urban prefect's wife, so to speak, from remaining alive. Perhaps the survivor did not regard it as important; he would be in the tomb anyway before long, so why label the tomb in such a way? Or perhaps the point of the word *vivus* was not so much to state that its commissioner was still alive as to make a claim to praiseworthy forethought, to *pietas*, or to the ability to pay for such an important expense – it was actually commissioned by Marcus/Marcia, and not a third party. Some people might dispense with this claim. Or it might be argued that readers of the inscription would be well aware that the bereaved one was still alive, and that the fact did not need to be stated;[32] but what of casual acquaintances? An embarrassing, even farcical, situation could arise. Funerary inscriptions famously address the casual passer-by,[33] and the implied reader, if the term is admissible here, could be everyman from anywhere. In the absence of the *vivus* marker, then, we remain uncertain about how to interpret inscriptions that belong to formula (a). In the case of the inscription of Adelphius and Proba there is, analogously, no warrant to take it as indicating that the husband was alive but not his wife. If the conventions of funerary practice, as postulated by Barnes, were in fact often blurred, no reason needs to be given for the choice of their formula. But since we are actually dealing with a column, it is not impossible that the least important words *et sibi fecit* were left for the very bottom, with the male and female names, which occupy 14 and 9 lines respectively, enjoying greater prominence thereby.

THE DATE OF ADELPHIUS' DEATH

But when did Adelphius die? Barnes's scenario is that he was executed or exiled soon after a trial to be placed in late 351. The termination of his tenure of the office (this was short, though not exceptionally so for this period)[34] is generally seen as due to dismissal as a result of an accusation by Dorus, which is known from Ammianus.

> … Dorus quidam ex medico Scutariorum, quem nitentium rerum centurionem sub Magnentio Romae provectum rettulimus accusasse Adelphium urbi praefectum ut altiora coeptantem (16.6.2).

In this passage, in which he refers back to a section of his work now lost, Ammianus says no more, and nothing more is known or recoverable about the incident.[35] The charge, as Barnes explains, was surely one of plotting rebellion or usurpation. That Adelphius was convicted is inferred by Barnes from the fact that Dorus survived; Dorus has some influence in the year 356, when, as described in the context of the passage just quoted, he was prominent in the verbal attacks upon Arbetio, and presumably in the preliminaries of the ensuing trial, which in fact collapsed (16.6.3). If Dorus had earlier failed in his prosecution of Adelphius, Barnes continues, then he

[32] So apparently Barnes (n. 2), 254.
[33] Note in 8135 *bene valeas religiose qui hoc legis* after formula (a) and the names.
[34] *PLRE* 1.1054.
[35] For details of Dorus' rank, and an English translation, the reader may consult Barnes (n. 2), 250–1.

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would have been liable to a charge of *calumnia* and an equal punishment, if the normal rules and procedures of Roman law were applied,[36] and execution would probably have been Dorus' fate. The bare fact that Dorus survived – whatever his adventures in the years immediately following – virtually guarantees for Barnes that Adelphius succumbed after being accused.

But is the situation so black and white? The risk of calumny in these circumstances was certainly automatic, but the charge of calumny was not. Supposing that Adephius was charged but not condemned, he may have decided to leave things as they were and not proceed with his right of a counter-charge; it is also possible that the court for reasons best known to itself did not make the decision to accept from him a charge against Dorus. But it could also be that the charge against Adelphius never came to court. The accusation was certainly an important one, and one not likely to be ignored in the tense situation created by the usurpation of Magnentius; and there is no reason to argue that he was not worth pursuing in court, as one might do on the basis of Shanzer's visualisation of him as a 'comparatively inactive aristocratic old buffer wheeled out of retirement'[37] to be made *praefectus urbi* in 351.[38] Ammianus perhaps suggests that Dorus was acting opportunistically in 356; but it need not be assumed that he acted, or was perceived as acting, in this way in 351. However, the unsettled situation of the usurpation could well have complicated matters and severely affected rules and procedures. It is not clear where Adelphius' trial would have been held, or who would have held the whiphand; Barnes suggests that he was tried either by the senate (which would be without such senators as had taken up Constantius' offer of amnesty and fled to Pannonia)[39] or, later, 'by trusted supporters of Magnentius, who was presumably in Gaul'. The situation is unclear at a number of points; sufficiently unclear to make conclusions about Adelphius' death premature. Even if brought to trial and condemned, he might have suffered no more than dismissal, as suggested by Chastagnol.[40] He could have lived on for several years and been enjoying a green and dignified old age at the time when the cento was perhaps written;[41] and perhaps he did outlive her. Whether he and his wife became fully reconciled to Constantius, as Matthews argues, is debatable; what Proba says about her previous poem on the war between him and Magnentius is not only stylised but rather cool towards both men at a time when the easy rhetoric of good overcoming evil might have profitably been lavished on the victor.[42] Finally, Seyfarth's comment in support of his brief statement that Adelphius was not condemned[43] is worth repeating: the sons of our urban prefect and his wife went on to have successful careers. One was consul in 379, the other *praefectus urbi* in 391.

[36] Barnes (n. 2), 252. For the rules and procedures, see D.A. Centola, 'In Tema di Responsibilità Penale nella Legislazione Tardoimperiale', *Studia et Documenta Historiae et Iuris* 68 (2002), 567–78, developing id., *Il Crimen calumniae. Contributo allo studio del processo criminale romano* (Pubblicazioni del dipartimento di diritto romano e storia della scienza romanistica dell' università degli Studi di Napoli 'Federico II' 14) (Naples, 1999), 116–35.

[37] Shanzer (n. 4), 83. At the age of fifty he would be only a little younger than Magnentius.

[38] A birth date of *c*. 300 is inferred from his offices of *corrector* and then *consularis* in the 330s; it is not certain that he held a proconsulship some years later. For the details see *PLRE* and Barnes (n. 2), 249 and n. 3.

[39] Matthews (n. 5), 295–6, using Julian *Or.* 1.38 B and *Or*. 2.97 B–C.

[40] A. Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (Paris, 1962), 131–4.

[41] For the date, Green (n. 6), *passim*.

[42] Green (n. 6), 554 and Green (n. 9), 549–53.

[43] W. Seyfarth, *Ammianus Marcellinus, Römische Geschichte 1* (Berlin, 1968), 292.

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THE CENTO AND THE *CARMEN CONTRA PAGANOS*

It is, then, not improbable that Adelphius lived on; and at some point thereafter his wife may or may not have predeceased him. In the light of this it is worth re-examining the attractions of a later date for the cento, and the arguments for the identification of the younger Proba as its writer. There is no attempt here to see the wife of the urban prefect of 351 as active towards the end of the century, as Shanzer charges Matthews with doing.[44] There are perhaps two major, or at least largely undebated, attractions in a date in the 380s or 390s – these will be tackled first – and two others which, understandably, have caused less worry (or exultation).

In her article of 1986 Shanzer developed her case with an argument that the cento was written later than the anonymous *Carmen contra paganos* (*CCP*), a work to which modern scholars assign various dates but which is certainly more likely to date from the late fourth or early fifth century than the middle of the fourth (this has never been suggested; it is surely impossible). Her argument is based upon a marked similarity of diction between a passage in Proba and one in the *CCP*.[45] I alluded to this in my earlier articles, but perhaps in too compressed a fashion,[46] arguing that Shanzer had failed to prove that Proba was influenced by *CCP*. As she said,[47] the parallel needs to be faced and discussed. These are the two passages, with the one from *CCP* first:

> nuda Venus deflet, gaudet Mavortius heros,
> Iuppiter in medium nescit finire querellas
> **iurgantesque deos** stimulat Bellona flagello.
> Convenit his ducibus, **proceres**, sperare salutem
> sacratis, vestras liceat componere lites? (20–4)[48]

The three lines of Proba's cento are:

> non mihi saxa loqui vanus persuadeat error
> laurigerosque sequi tripodas et inania vota
> **iurgantesque deos procerum** victosque penates. (15–17) [49]

There does seem to be an intertextual relationship of note between these passages and in particular between the words here, as in Shanzer, given in bold; we surely do have 'a clear indication of a genetic relationship between the poems', as Shanzer declared, rightly ruling out that the similarity is accidental and dismissing the chance that they are both dependent on a lost work. Shanzer argued that the words from Proba, if written before those of *CCP*, would have no 'real function because these *iurgia deorum* are not specified', and 'the phrase *iurgantesque deos* would not be a precise quotation to parallel the well-known *victosque penates* ([Virg.] *Aen*. 1.68)'.[50] But we do not need a precise quotation of Virgil here; Proba is not stitching together Virgilian quotations at this point, and is free to take them from any source, including her own invention. There is in fact a parallel of a different kind: the quarrelling gods

[44] Shanzer (n. 4), 88–9.
[45] Shanzer (n. 3), 235–7.
[46] The need to adapt and bisect what was planned as a single article on Proba did not encourage fulness.
[47] Shanzer (n. 4), 89, referring back to her earlier article.
[48] Text as in A. Riese, *Anthologia Latina* (Leipzig, 1894), 1.1.4.
[49] Text as in C. Schenkl (ed.), *Poetae Latini Minores*, *CSEL* 16.570. For details of their interpretation and context, see Green (n. 9), 553–5.
[50] A line was omitted in the printing of the article, but the thrust seems to be clear.

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referred to are, like the defeated *penates*, those of the Trojans, as I suggested,[51] and in the context these references follow the poetic conventions just repudiated very aptly. The well-known fiction of the disputing Olympians – here supporting or persecuting the forbears of the Romans – which was such a gift to Christian polemicists is more appropriate than a sudden reference to the contemporary aristocracy. Such an explanation is perfectly intelligible and apt whether *CCP* preceded or not; the hypothesis that it can only be understood as an imitation is not needed. A 'real function' also seems to be quite obviously present.

But the question must be seen in the light of the allusions which Shanzer detected in *CCP* at this point. These are to Virgil, *Aeneid* 8. 696–8 and 703, which can be dealt with in a moment without full quotation, and Statius, *Thebaid* 10. 893–8.[52]

> **flet Venus** Harmoniae populos metuensque mariti
> stat procul et tacita Gradivum respicit ira.
> increpat Aonios audax Tritonia divos;
> Iunonem tacitam furibunda silentia torquent.
> non tamen haec turbant pacem Iovis: ecce quierant
> **iurgia**…

Here the gods are taking sides, or showing where their support lies, as they consider the coming battle between the Theban brothers. Arguing that the writer of *CCP* here depends on Statius, Shanzer mentions that he has 'picked up', besides the similarity between *iurgia* and *iurgantes*, 'the central opposition between Mars and Venus', the phrase *Venus deflet*, and Jupiter's position as arbiter. But the opposition is not central within the passage, which begins at line 886: eight gods[53] (the reference to Vulcan in *mariti* at line 893 may be ignored) are quarrelling, and Venus and Mars are, at numbers six and seven out of the eight (or nine, if Juno is counted twice), no more prominent than the others. The verbs *deflet* (*CCP* 20) and *flet*, and their metrical deployment, contribute little if anything to the plausibility of an allusive interrelationship. Finally, there is a grand difference between the dignified, undisturbed, *pacem Iovis* of Statius' Jupiter, which seems quickly to quell their strife, and his inability to stop the gods' quarrels in *CCP*, where he seems to be at his wits' end, as critical commentators on the *Aeneid* might have noticed for themselves. As for the allusions to Virgil, *Aeneid* 8. 696–8 and 703 that Shanzer makes, these are less germane, though in two cases very striking. There is indubitably a reference to *Aeneid* 8. 703 *Bellona flagello* in *CCP*, and similar use is made by *CCP* of the tag *latrator Anubis* from *Aeneid* 8. 698, albeit seventy lines later and so of less relevance to the present issue. The connection between Virgil's *in mediis* in *Aeneid* 8. 696 and *CCP*'s *in medium* in 21 is trivial, for such expressions must be legion.

The point of these remarks is not to show how tricky it is to maintain against all comers the chronological priority of one writer to another with arguments of this kind; the difficulties of doing so, not least where writers of Late Antiquity are concerned, are well known. It is to counter Shanzer's point that 'If Proba wrote first, then we would have to make a very improbable assumption – that the *CCP* spontaneously expanded the slightly cryptic *iurgantesque deos procerum* into a mass of

[51] Green (n. 9), 555.

[52] The text follows the *OCT* – whence my *quierant* (Shanzer prints *quiescunt*) – and the emboldening is again as in Shanzer.

[53] Statius considers Perseus (*volucer Dananeius*) as a god here.

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allusions to its two relevant source-passages.'[54] The mass of allusions has crumbled significantly; and, as demonstrated above, the phrase *iurgantesque deos procerum* is not even slightly cryptic in its context. Most importantly, perhaps, the significance of the words 'spontaneously expanded' is not clear, and any poet may surely be allowed to be spontaneous. Could not the author of *CCP*, supposing it were the later poem, have noted Proba's words and been influenced by them (in two separate lines, 22 and 23), and also 'spontaneously' worked in allusions to Statius (if indeed there is an allusion to the passage quoted) and Virgil? On this reading Proba may well have written many years earlier, and then been taken up by a fellow polemicist, at a time when her work was, as I have argued, enjoying something of a revival.[55]

THE REFERENCE TO THE DATE OF EASTER

In 1994 Shanzer presented a new argument, to the effect that Proba alludes to a controversy, or at least a problem, which can be dated precisely to the year 387. This reference, suggested to her *per litteras* by Sam Barnish, is in the final lines of the cento, a sort of epilogue. In these lines, completely composed of Virgilian material like the body of the cento, Proba addresses her husband in these words:

> i decus, i nostrum, tantarum gloria rerum,
> et nos et tua dexter adi pede sacra secundo
> annua, quae differre nefas. celebrate faventes
> hunc, socii, morem sacrorum: hunc ipse teneto,
> o dulcis coniunx, et si pietate meremur,
> hac casti maneant in religione nepotes.

The third line, which is the one that concerns us, is taken from Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.173. That this is a reference to the Easter festival can surely not be doubted; the various rituals of Easter are the *annua sacra* of Christians *par excellence*. The words *quae differre nefas* must have more point than merely denoting the festival; they should not be dismissed as padding. Centonists – at least Proba – as a rule have something to say, even though their range of expression is deliberately limited. Personal or topical material is only to be expected in an epilogue – this term of course covers various kinds of formal closure – as it is in the endings of Virgil's fourth *Georgic* and Juvencus' *Evangeliorum Libri Quattuor*.[56] It is overwhelmingly likely that when Proba writes that it is wrong to delay this festival, she has a point to make, perhaps to support a relatively early celebration or to condemn a later one. The date of Easter was a thorny topic. To pronounce that Easter should be celebrated on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the vernal equinox, as was (and remains) laid down, does not conclude the matter. Within Christendom there were different interpretations of the Biblical evidence, different ideas of when exactly the moon might be considered full, and different calendars; accordingly the paschal cycles of Rome and of Alexandria were systematically different, and each of these sees had its own list of dates ruled out as too early or too late.[57] There were areas of quite reasonable disagreement, which doubtless on occasion had a political side to it. But it was also important for worshippers and catechumens (of all ages); granted that the

[54] Shanzer (n. 3), 236.
[55] Green (n. 6), 560–3.
[56] Virgil *G.* 4.559–66, Juvencus, *ELQ* 4.802–12.
[57] As explained by Shanzer (n. 4), 92–3.

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date must change from year to year, an apparent delay, or indeed anticipation, of Easter, the principal feast of the Christian year, would have been a source of anxiety to many. It will also have exercised various kinds of administrator, as well as the bishops and their advisers who were primarily involved, for it was not just a piece of slippery soap to wrongfoot those who for any reason needed to make plans or timetables.[58] Surely the *praefectus urbi* and his staff would be involved in certain ways in the organisation and management of the celebration.

It cannot be the case that there was a perception that Rome *always* delayed Easter; the dates of both sees varied within the legitimated periods, being sometimes relatively early in the season, sometimes relatively late.[59] It is reasonable, then, to seek a particular occasion for the centonist's comment. Following Barnish, Shanzer linked the words of Proba to a letter of Ambrose [60] to the bishops of Aemilia about the date for the celebration of Easter in 387, when there were particularly difficult problems and corresponding uncertainty (or so Ambrose claims) in northern and central Italy. In this letter, whose authenticity has now been strongly reasserted by Michaela Zelzer,[61] Ambrose opted for a very late date for the observance of Easter that year, in company with Alexandria but in disagreement with Rome. If Proba was aware of the problem when she wrote, she could well be censuring this decision and expressing the view from Rome; the date adopted (April 25) was certainly later than the date chosen by Rome, but by how much is not clear. Indeed, it was outside the later limit that Rome observed, which was 21 April.[62] To see Proba's comment in the light of this decision, as censuring Ambrose's move, obviously reinforces the later date for the composition of the cento, and with it the new identification of its author.

The case of 387 is conspicuous because of Ambrose's typically articulate intervention. At least one other case of heated debate is known – presumably considerable heat generated, or was generated by, Ambrose's letter – and that relates to the year 349. Then there was strong resistance to the Alexandrian date, strong enough for it to intrude into an otherwise dry and minimalist Syriac Chronicle, prefaced to the Festal Letters of Athanasius, which gives dates and little else.[63] It tells us that Alexandria would have preferred 23 April, but adopted the date chosen by the Roman church, which appealed to the instruction of St. Peter. There may have been other years when an agreed date was not achieved without dispute. There were certainly disagreements betweeen Rome and Alexandria about what the date should be; following Zelzer, Shanzer gives various dates on which the two churches differed in their computations but agreed to harmonise the dates of celebration. (The evidence is not unproblematic, partly because some sources seem to give the computed date, some the actual date; and there seems to be a tendency on Zelzer's part to reduce the differences to a minimum, for reasons that do not always emerge).[64] Shanzer uses such

[58] To traditionalists it must have been very strange that the main festival of a supposedly supreme God varied in such an un-Roman way, but that is not an issue here.

[59] Shanzer (n. 4), 93.

[60] Letter 13 in the *Epistulae extra collectionem* in M. Zelzer (ed.), *Sancti Ambrosii Opera*, Pars X (*CSEL* 82) (1982), 222–34 – not Letter 13 in the main series of Ambrose's letters – and *Ep*. 23 in the Maurists and Migne.

[61] M. Zelzer, 'Zum Osterfestbrief des heiligen Ambrosius und zur römischen Osterfestberechnung des 4. Jahrhunderts', *Wiener Schriften* N.F. 12 (1978), 187–204, at 189–96.

[62] Shanzer (n. 4), 95.

[63] *Patrologia Graeca* 26.1351–5, where a Latin translation of the original Syriac is given.

[64] Zelzer often, but usually with apparent good reason, disagrees with E. Schwartz, *Christliche und Judische Ostertafeln* (Berlin, 1905) and B. Krusch, *Studien zur christlich-mittelalterlichen Chronologie: der 84 jährige Zyklus und seine Quellen* (Leipzig, 1880).

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'compromises' as evidence that in the years concerned there was relatively little controversy, but what we cannot know is the strength of local feeling that may have arisen when one side was seen to be accommodating the other. It is also quite possible that in those cases where our evidence clearly shows a single date for the celebration this agreement may have been reached after controversy, or at least been accompanied by grumbles in more or less high places. Sometimes controversy may have been limited to Rome itself; conceivably the relatively late date of Easter in 353 (April 19) caused misgivings within its population. There was some scope for disagreement in 357, and it is not certain whether the Romans actually opted for a different date from Alexandria or not.[65] Evidence for local feeling is seldom available, and where it exists it is not above suspicion. When, for example, Ambrose contends in his above-mentioned letter that in the year 360 a dispute had been settled *sine ulla dubitatione maiorum*, this could, for all we know, be disingenuous, or based on insufficient information.[66] Discussing the Easter of that year, Krusch makes the point that the Alexandrians may 'have been victorious with their opinion'.[67] The losers, in Rome, may have been less than happy with the outcome, an Easter as late as 23 April.

If the centonist is the elder Proba, and if the cento was written two or three years later,[68] she could be alluding in her Epilogue to events in a particular year, such as 360; or she might be expressing a general disquiet which surfaced from time to time. When such delicate issues are concerned, people have long memories. The problems of 349, though settled within that year, may well have been known to one who two years later became urban prefect, and to his wife. There may well have been others. It was a continuing problem, if not a continuous controversy.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

More briefly, there are two other possible attractions of the later date and the later Proba to be noted. A reference to our centonist has been seen in a letter of Jerome written in the year 394 or very close to it.[69] In this (*Ep*. 53.7) he inveighs against various kinds of uneducated Christian writers who twist and misunderstand scripture: *hanc [scripturarum artem]*[70] *garrula anus, hanc delirus senex, hanc soloecista verbosus, hanc universi praesumunt, lacerant, docent, antequam discant*. At the end of the paragraph it becomes clear that centonists are one of his targets; he quotes lines of Virgil which were deployed in cento form so as to make 'Maro speak of Christ'. Three of these four passages are ones used by Proba – not an unlikely coincidence, it must be said, but some of the passages are by no means obvious candidates – and it seems not improbable that in the words *garrula anus* he means, or

[65] Zelzer (n. 52), 196–7, Shanzer (n. 4), 94 and n. 120.

[66] Schwartz (n. 64), 55, disputing the authenticity of the letter, condemned the statement as *eine Schwindelei*; he may have been attacking the idea that there was no hesitation and not, as Zelzer takes him to be doing, the idea that the problem of that year was not to be compared to that of 387.

[67] Krusch (n. 64), 76: 'Es scheint uns daher, das in diesem Jahre…die Alexandriner mit ihrer Ansicht gesiegt haben'.

[68] Cf. n. 39 above.

[69] On the various related problems see now D.E. Trout, 'The dates of the ordination of Paulinus of Bordeaux and of his departure for Nola', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 37 (1991), 237–6.

[70] At this point the word *scriptura* means writing in general (Jerome has just quoted Horace, *Ep*. 2.1.117) and not Christian scripture.

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includes, Proba.[71] If so, a reason for her prominence may be, as I have argued, not the fact that she wrote recently but that there had been a recent revival of interest in her work; while the importance of the matter to him gives justification (if it is needed) to his use of the present tense.[72] Jerome had an urgent point to make to his addressee, Paulinus of Nola, the brilliant pupil of Ausonius, who was known to be contemplating the possibility of devoting himself to the creation of Christian poetry at that time,[73] and the present tense is used by him to add bite to the satire.

Finally, and again briefly, much has been made in the past of the disagreements of the various manuscripts that offer data, which at least in the round might be considered a cause for concern. The evidence has been clearly laid out by Matthews,[74] and I subsequently argued that light can be shed on the apparent 'muddled ascription' (Shanzer's term)[75] by the application of some simple tools of textual criticism.[76] The datum that the centonist Proba was wife of Alypius (Alipyum) in a marginal gloss on line 689 in *Reginensis Latinus* 1666 (Matthews' sixth item) could be the result of an irremediable omission of material due to the kind of oversight that textual critics know by the name of *saut du même au même*; perhaps while dealing with a notice such as *uxor Adelphii mater Olibrii et Alipii* a scribe's eye moved from the first name to the last, because of the superficial similarity, thus omitting what lay between them and so making her son become her husband. In any case, that item is relatively unhelpful. Another piece of information, the words *Aniciorum mater* in the notice in *Palatinus Latinus* 1753 – which would certainly indicate the younger Proba – is undermined somewhat if one punctuates more sensibly than has been done heretofore: if a new sentence is begun with the words *praedicta Proba*, the words *Anciorum mater* fall into their logical place with the other words establishing her identity, but are betrayed as a gloss by the nominative case so conspicuous after the genitives *Probae inlustris Romanae* in the preceding sentence.[77] It is quite likely that a marginal note was uncritically and ungrammatically taken over into the text. The notice in the medieval catalogue of Lobbes brought into play by Shanzer[78] may follow this with its *Anicia*, but in any case scribes sometimes play fast and loose with a small number of famous names and there is no need to posit a direct relationship. (Trying to stemmatise, or posit an archetype, does not help where texts are so short.) Of course, glosses are not necessarily wrong, and Isidore, whose testimony to the traditional identity of the centonist is important, is not necessarily right, on such matters; but we need not with Shanzer despair of their evidence altogether.

In this and other respects, there is, I think, no need for me to repeat or refurbish the content of my earlier article or its attempts to corroborate the hypothesis that the cento was compiled by Faltonia Betitia Proba, the elder Proba, and the likelihood of a

[71] In the same paragraph Jerome censures unspecified *mulierculae* for teaching Christian things, and it is possible that the mention of the *anus* is likewise unspecific.

[72] Green (n. 6), 553–4, 561.

[73] R.P.H. Green, *Latin Epics of the New Testament* (Oxford, 2006), 146–8.

[74] Matthews (n. 5), 278–82, following Chastagnol (n. 40).

[75] Shanzer (n. 3), 235.

[76] Green (n. 6), 551–3.

[77] As noted by Matthews (n. 5), 290 and n. 24, referring to A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey* (Oxford, 1964), 143, the word *illustris* is appropriate to a praetorian prefect from the 350s, but not to an urban prefect until the time of Valentinian I, and this may apply by extension to their wives; but such a differentiation between these offices might well have been quite unknown to the writer of this notice.

[78] Shanzer (n. 3), 240–1.

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Julianic date and context. In her second article Shanzer spoke somewhat dismissively of the traditionally held 'vague consensus'[79] that the cento 'might belong to the reign of Julian'. There is now, clearly, not a consensus; nor is the matter any longer approached with vagueness. But now that a remarkably wide variety of relevant issues has been precisely identified and discussed, the case still holds up well.[80]

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[79] Shanzer (n. 4), 75.

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