

## Marianus of Eleutheropolis<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Geiger

The *Suda* tells us, in an entry some nine lines in length (M 194), all that is known about this person. The main problem that has been hitherto raised, his identity, has in my opinion been satisfactorily solved. However, it appears that there are other points of some interest of which no account has been taken. A re-evaluation is in place.

According to the above mentioned source Marianus, a consul, praefect and patrician under Anastasius (491-518) — all the offices may well have been honorary<sup>2</sup> — emigrated from Rome to Eleutheropolis in Palaestina Prima together with his father Marsus, an advocate at the court of the Praefect of the City of Rome. He paraphrased into iambs the hexameter poems of all the important Hellenistic poets: Theocritus, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius, Callimachus' *Hecale*, hymns, the *Aitia* and epigrams, Aratus, the *Theriaca* of Nicander<sup>3</sup> and many more paraphrases (μεταφράσεις).<sup>4</sup>

The customary identification of this man with Marianus Scholasticus, a poet of the *Cycle* of Agathias, was exploded over forty years ago,<sup>5</sup> and seems to have been abandoned by virtually everybody.<sup>6</sup> This has been later upheld and enhanced by each of the two authors of that groundbreaking paper separately,<sup>7</sup> and even those critics who doubted the attribution of the crucial poem (9.657) or its dating under Justin II<sup>8</sup> did not advocate the identification.

---

<sup>1</sup> I delivered a Hebrew version of this paper in October 2008, in a colloquium at Tel-Aviv University to mark Netta Zagagi's retirement — may it be both an enjoyable and a fruitful one.

<sup>2</sup> Thus *PLRE* II s.v. no. 3.

<sup>3</sup> The present author admits that he is one of the 'few who regret the loss of Marianus' literary productions' (N.G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* [Baltimore 1983], 32).

<sup>4</sup> These metaphrases should be distinguished from the rhetorical metaphrases of the schools. An example of these, close in time and space to Marianus, is ascribed to Procopius of Gaza (ca. 465-528). Phot. *cod.* 160 attests that he did Homeric paraphrases in various styles and H. Rabe, 'Aus Rhetoren Handschriften', *RhM* 63 (1908), 512-530 at 515 n. 2 prints two on *M* 322-8 from Vat. 2228 (Johannes Diaconus, commentary on Hermogenes περί μεθόδου δεινότητος), discussed by A. Brinkmann, 'Die Homer Metaphrase des Prokopios von Gaza', *RhM* 63 (1908), 618-623.

<sup>5</sup> Av. and Al. Cameron, 'The *Cycle* of Agathias', *JHS* 86 (1966), 17, 21.

<sup>6</sup> But note that in *DNP* no. 1 (M. of Eleutheropolis) is 'possibly' (möglichlicherweise) identical with no. 2 (M. Scholasticus) while the entry for no. 2 labels the identification with no. 1 as 'improbable' (unwahrscheinlich).

<sup>7</sup> Av. Cameron, 'Notes on the Sophiae, Sophianae and the Harbour of Sophia', *Byzantion* 37 (1967), 15-16; Al. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology: from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford 1993), 70-72.

<sup>8</sup> See R.C. McCail, 'The *Cycle* of Agathias: New Identifications Scrutinised', *JHS* 89 (1969), 94 n. 29; B. Baldwin, 'The Date of the *Cycle* of Agathias', *BZ* 73 (1980), 334.

The reasons for the rejection of the identification are three. First, chronology: the *Cycle* of Agathias, differently from the *Garlands* of Meleager and of Philip, contains only contemporaries of the anthologist; even though the Camerons have somewhat rescheduled the publication of Agathias from the reign of Justinian to the early years of Justin II, there obviously is no place in it for a poet of the age of Anastasius. To this point a further argument has been added in Alan Cameron's book: the poem in question has been attributed by Zonaras not to Marianus, but to Agathias himself. Though Zonaras is in this instance anyway an inferior source it can also be shown by text-critical points that this attribution is untenable. Second, the humble title of 'Scholasticus' would run counter to the custom of Agathias to boast with the titles of 'his' poets, and he would hardly conceal the fact that the man in question had been a consul, praefect and patrician. Third, the composition of entirely conventional epigrams in elegiac distichs would be the exact opposite to the iambic paraphrases attributed to Marianus of Eleutheropolis; these were obviously meant for middlebrow readers, losing their feeling for the lengths of syllables owing to the change from pitch to stress accent in Greek.

The first two arguments are not irrefutable. Although Marianus had been honoured by Anastasius, he may well have started his poetical career already in the last years of Justinian or the first of Justin II. Similarly, while still only a *scholasticus* under Justin II, his future honours under Anastasius could not have been divined by Agathias. It is the last argument that all but clinches the matter. I find it exceedingly difficult — though admittedly still not absolutely impossible — to believe that a thoroughly conventional poet later in life underwent a conversion that engaged him in an apparently long-term and well thought out program that was completely opposed to all that he stood for earlier in life.

Before taking leave of Marianus Scholasticus and turning to his namesake I would like to draw attention to an apparently neglected issue. We seem to know very little about the poetry books or other collections on which Agathias drew. Now of the six poems attributed to Marianus in the Anthology five have Eros as their subject: 9.626 and 627 are on a bath called Eros, 9.668 and 669 on a park called Eros, and 16.201 (preserved only in the *Planudean Anthology*) is 'To Garlanded Eros'. The remaining poem, the controversial one on the Palace Sophianae (9.657), dated to Justin II's reign, may have been later than the rest (all the others are undatable) and would thus perhaps not belong to a hypothetical collection on the subject of Eros.

To return to Marianus of Eleutheropolis. Accepting the *Suda*'s information on his works he should be evaluated in the due perspective of Late Greek iambic poetry.<sup>9</sup> The first author to come to mind is the Egyptian Helladius, known from Photius' résumé (*cod.* 279) of his iambic *Chrestomathia*, as well as of a number of other works in the same metre mentioned towards the end of that codex: *Athens*, the *Nile*, the *Egyptian*, the *Protrepticus*, *Rome*, *Fame* (φήμη), *Victory*, and *City of Antinous*. Photius dates him early in the fourth century, to Licinius and Maximin (*viz.*, Daia, thus probably for the text's Maximian). Photius reports in the same place that the following works in the same metre

<sup>9</sup> See Al. Cameron, 'Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt', *Historia* 14 (1965), 482; *id.*, 'Pap. Ant. III. 115 and the Iambic Prologue in Late Greek Poetry', *CQ* 20 (1970), 120-121.

are to be found in the same manuscript: Hermias of Hermupolis<sup>10</sup> on the antiquities of his city as well as other writings, Andronicus of the same city to his compatriot, the *comes* Phoebammon, Cyrus of Antinupolis<sup>11</sup> to the *dux* Mauricius (these must have been panegyrics); mixed metres were employed by the above mentioned Phoebammon for dramatic works, by the grammarian Horapollon<sup>12</sup> on the antiquities of Alexandria as well as for dramas, and for dramas by the grammarian Serenus.<sup>13</sup> Al. Cameron dates Andronicus, and Cyrus as a probable contemporary, to the second half of the fourth century. One may go along with his judgment not to make too much of the significance of Marianus, whose innovation did not catch on and was actually reversed with the hexameter revival of Nonnus and his school; nevertheless, Marianus' activity should at least be seen as an attempt, even if in the event not successful, to take Greek poetry to new — not necessarily more glorious — horizons. As hinted above, it is also a rather rare opportunity to appreciate the taste of not-elite readers.

However another aspect of our poet seems to have been totally kept out of sight. The *Suda* tells us only that he emigrated from Rome to Eleutheropolis, without any indication of the stage in his life when this occurred. Thus it will be only right and proper to look at Marianus' possible Roman, viz. Latin, background, especially so since we are informed that already his father — and we know nothing about earlier generations — was an advocate at Rome.

Now as is well known also in Latin poetry there was a movement away from the hexameter, and towards the iambic metre: eventually the iambic dimeter was to become the main vehicle of Christian hymns. This is not the place to attempt an evaluation of this trend, but a short discussion of two or three authors may be relevant to our present quest.

The first among these is Avienus, who according to Servius turned Virgil and Livy into iambs.<sup>14</sup> Also the identity of this Avienus has been discussed by Al. Cameron:<sup>15</sup> showing that Avienus, rather than Avianus, was the name of the fable writer, he identifies him with the iambic poet (albeit the alternative of identifying him with the translator of the *Aratea*, whose correct name according to Cameron is Avienus has also been put forward on the authority of S. Weinstock). Though Cameron notes the similarity of the versifications of Avienus and Marianus, for some reason he fails to mention the latter's Roman connexion. He also conjectures that Avienus only put into iambs some *fabulae* out of Virgil and Livy, unlike Marianus, who seems to have gone the whole hog. Be this as it may, the similarity is undeniable. As for the date of Avienus, both his identification with the fable-writer, a contemporary of Macrobius, and his quotation by Servius put him

<sup>10</sup> On his possible identification see R.A. Kaster, *Guardians of Language. The Grammarian and Society in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley etc 1988), 291 (no. 71).

<sup>11</sup> *PLRE* III no. 12.

<sup>12</sup> On his possible identifications see Kaster, *op. cit.* 294-5 (no. 77).

<sup>13</sup> Kaster, *op. cit.* 354-5 (no. 134).

<sup>14</sup> Serv. Aen. 10.272 ... *Avienus, qui iambis scripsit Vergilii fabulas*; 10.388 *Avienus ... qui totum Livium iambis scripsit ...*

<sup>15</sup> Al. Cameron, 'Macrobius, Avienus, and Avianus', *CQ* 17 (1967), 394-5; C.E. Murgia, 'Avienus's Supposed Iambic Version of Livy', *CSCA* 3 (1970), 185-197, who also discusses the identity and the date of Avienus, rejects the versification of Livy. Turning only Virgil into iambs would make him even more similar to Marianus.

early in the fifth century, thus conveniently allowing his example to be followed by Marianus.

Another poet who comes to mind is Alfius Avitus.<sup>16</sup> He composed a poem on *Excellentes* in iambic dimeters, perhaps in the early or middle third century, but that date is not certain.<sup>17</sup> If the *Excellentes* were *summi viri* — one dare not suggest that they were (some of) those represented in the *Forum Augustum*<sup>18</sup> — the author seems to have employed a modern form for an antiquarian task. If so, he indeed seems to have found a follower, a poet whose only extant fragment of five iambic dimeters comes from a poem called *Lupercalia* (or similarly) and deals with the name of Rome, derived from the daughter of Aesculapius. His name is Marianus.<sup>19</sup>

Obviously in the present context this information cannot be left unexplored. Though the name is not very frequent, it alone would not suffice for the identification. The Latin Marianus' time entirely depends on the conveyor of his fragment, Filagrius. Iunius Filagrius of Mediolanum<sup>20</sup> is dated by the *scriptio* of his commentary, dedicated to Valentinian III (425-455). If the Latin Marianus was his contemporary and if Filagrius wrote towards the end of Valentinian III's reign, we could just identify him with the future émigré to Palaestina Prima if the latter attained to his honours in old age early in the reign of Anastasius — a Procrustean bed, but perhaps one not impossible to survive. Alternatively the Latin versifier could have been the Greek's grandfather, either the father of the advocate Marsus or else, somewhat less probably, his maternal grandfather. In that case he would have been a contemporary of Avienus, creating something like a poetic trend. Of course a sheer coincidence of the names<sup>21</sup> is not impossible; but even in that case it would have been wrong to ignore the Roman background of a poet from Rome.

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

<sup>16</sup> E. Courtney, *The Fragmentary Latin Poets* (Oxford 1993), 403-4.

<sup>17</sup> Al. Cameron, 'Poetae Novelli', *HSCP* 84 (1980), 374; see there also for identifications.

<sup>18</sup> A suggestion not made in ch. 7 ('The Impact of the Gallery of Heroes') of J. Geiger, *The First Hall of Fame. A Study of the Statues in the Forum Augustum*, *Mnem. Suppl.* 295, (Leiden and Boston 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Filagr. ad Verg. *Buc.* 1.19; Courtney, *op. cit.* 405.

<sup>20</sup> *RE* X 1077-9, Iunius no. 127 (Tolkiehn); *DNP* s.v. Iunius no. III.2.

<sup>21</sup> The published volumes of *LGPN* list half a dozen or so instances of the name and there are about as many occurrences in the city of Rome.