

**The Travels of the Infant Paulinus and the Unitarian Character of the
Eucharisticos.**

A Replication to Carlo M. Lucarini

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In the mid-fifth century, Paulinus Pellaeus composed an autobiography of 616 hexametric verses styled as a *Thanksgiving to God*. Though a major source for the transformation of Late Roman Gaul, it was only at the beginning of the third millennium that the *Eucharisticos Deo* was deemed worthy a Teubner edition. This was eventually produced by Carlo M. Lucarini in 2006.¹ Being basic to the chronology of the whole poem, Paulinus' age at writing, his date of birth, the travels during his infancy, and the year of his conversion to the church are addressed in the preface (pp. X-XII). Quite unusually for a Teubner *praefatio*, a section of my own treatment of these issues is quoted at length. Nevertheless, this honour turns out to be dubious, for most of my argument is either misrepresented or simply ignored.² Lucarini rather trusts in Pierre Courcelle's analytical postulation, according to which the bulk of the poem was written in 455, but published in 459 after its clumsy revision. Hence a replication is needed, if only for the sake of defending the unitarian conception of the autobiography.

In order to enable the reader to follow the controversy at stake, I shall quote some key passages of the *Eucharisticos* and briefly comment on their chronological implications. I shall thereby follow the lines of my article published in *Mnemosyne* 55 (I.) and then confront them with Lucarini's criticism (II.). To the latter, I shall reply firstly by systematically pointing out the strength of the main arguments already deployed, but ignored by Lucarini (III.), secondly by drawing attention to some contradictions within his own account (IV.), and thirdly by refuting directly the premise which led him to reject my view (V.). A short conclusion will be drawn in the end (VI.).

¹ I discuss the merits and shortcomings of the booklet, among others, in a review in *BMCR* 2007.10.09.

² While no one would expect Lucarini to have considered Coskun (2005), (2006), his lecture of Coskun (2002a) appears to have been confined to fractions of pp. 330-34. Beyond this, he wholly ignores Coskun (2002b) and (2003). There is likewise no mention of McLynn (1995) or Colombi (1996).

I.

Still within the initial invocation of God (vv. 1-21), Paulinus indicates his current age:

12 altera ab undecima annorum currente meorum
 hebdomade sex aestivi flagrantia solis
 14 solstitia et totidem brumae iam frigora vidi.

Thus after seventy-seven years, he has lived to see six further summers and winters, so that he is in his 83rd year at the time of writing. Next Paulinus sets out to tell the story of his life from his birth down to his present situation (vv. 22ff.). It began with some kind of an Odyssey, as his father Thalassius held prominent posts in the imperial administration: Paulinus was born in Macedonian Pella, while Thalassius served there as the 'deputy of the illustrious prefecture' of Illyricum (vv. 24ff.). After his promotion to the rank of the *proconsul Africae*, they travelled to Carthage. Later on, the family visited the city of Rome (vv. 35ff.), before finally returning home to Bordeaux (vv. 42-49).

Paulinus there met his famous grandfather for the first time:

48 tunc et avus primum illic fit mihi cognitus, anni
 49 eiusdem consul, nostra trieteride prima.

Although the grandfather is not named explicitly, the audience was supposed to identify him with the poet, professor and courtier Decimius Magnus Ausonius, who held the consulship in 379. By dating the arrival at Bordeaux to the year of his ancestor's most distinguished magistracy as well as still within his own *trieteris*, the author obviously conveys the chronological key to his biography. It is generally concluded that Paulinus was around three by that time; that he had been born in 376; and that he published the *Eucharisticos* in 359.³

However, being in one's *trieteris* does not mean having completed one's third year. Ausonius rather met his grandson in the course of his 3rd year. Moreover, the consul returned to Bordeaux in autumn 379. If Thalassius and his family had left Carthage in September or, at the latest, in early October, they would not have arrived before November; but since they also visited Rome on the way, they probably reached the Aquitanian capital around December 379.

³ Cf., e.g., Moussy (1974), 12; McLynn (1995), 461. For further references, cf. Coskun (2002a), 332 n. 4.

Consequently, Paulinus was born in 377 and the poem is more likely to have been composed early in 460 than in 459.⁴

Both of these years seem to conflict with Paulinus' report of his conversion to the church. As the text poses serious problems, it is given in full (following Claude Moussy's edition):⁵

468 confessusque igitur, penitenda quae mihi noram,
 proposita studui constrictus vivere lege,
 470 non digno fortasse pians commissa labore,
 sed rectam servare fidem non inscius ipse,
 errorum discendo vias per dogmata prava,
 quae reprobans sociata aliis nunc respuo culpis.
 post autem, exacta iam ter trieteride quinta,
 475 rite recurrente statuto tempore Pascha
 ad tua, Christe Deus, altaria sacra reversus
 te miserante tua gaudens sacramenta recepi
 478 ante hos ter decies super et his quattuor annis.

If Paulinus returned to the 'holy altar' of Christ at the age of 45 (v. 474: 3 x 3 x 5), this will have happened Easter 423, presupposing a birth around August 377, or Easter 421 according to the chronology hitherto prevalent.⁶ But since this event took place in the 34th year⁷ before the composition of the *Eucharisticos* (V. 478: 3 x 10 + 4), one difficulty arises: Paulinus would have been 78/79, not 82/83 years old, when he wrote these verses, and they could no longer be dated to A.D. 460 or 459. Wilhelm Brandes thus purports an error by the autobiographer. Courcelle, in contrast, concludes that the core of the autobiography was composed earlier than the preface and the introductory verses (which attest the above-mentioned age of 82/83 years). Hence he as-

⁴ Cf. Coskun (2002a), 331-36 for dating the composition to February/April 460; Coskun (2002b), 384-87; 91-94 for Ausonius and the second half of 379.

⁵ 'And thus, after confessing what I knew deserved my repentance, I tried to live strictly according to the set rule; maybe I did not atone for my deeds by the appropriate punishment, but myself I was well aware to keep the right faith, by learning the ways which lead to errors through corrupt doctrines, which I now disapprove of and reject together with other sins. But afterwards, when the fifth triennium had already thrice been completed and Easter duly recurred at its fixed date, I returned to your holy altar, Christ my God, and, through your mercy, joyfully received your sacraments, these thrice ten years ago and, in addition to these, another four.'

⁶ The year 421 is suggested, among others, by Brandes (1888), 275; Courcelle (1964), 167 n. 3; PLRE 1.678; McLynn (1995), 476; Marccone (1995), 20. But it depends on a birthday prior to Easter 376.

⁷ Unless Paulinus explicitly states the completion of a period of time, the current unit tends to be counted, as if it were complete. For a broader discussion of dating within the autobiography, cf. now Coskun (2005), 147-49.

signs the later parts to A.D. 459 and the first draft to A.D. 455. His view has been adopted by most commentators today, though with the notable exception of Neil McLynn, who suggests solving the difficulty by ‘correcting’ v. 478.⁸

However, the whole problem resides in the constitution of v. 474. Codex Bernensis reads: *post autem, exacta iam tetreteride quinta*, whereas the *editio princeps* of Margarinus de la Bigne has *iam trie-teride*. Unaware of the existence of the codex Bernensis, which was only discovered in the later 19th century, Louis Lenain de Tillemont accepted *trieteride*, but added *ter* in order to comply with the metrical demands. All subsequent editions have followed him. But *tetreteride* is morphologically fully acceptable and also attested otherwise.⁹ Admittedly, one has to tolerate a hiatus after *autem*, but this is not unparalleled in the *Eucharisticos*.¹⁰

It is thus unjustified to reject the transmitted *tetreteride*, all the more because it makes much better sense than the conjectured *ter trieteride*. As the text now stands, it lacks any explicit reference to the author’s age and can therefore only be related to the duration of Paulinus’ separation from the church.¹¹ At any rate, since the author undisputedly reveals his age at the time of his *reversio* in v. 478 (counting back the years from his current situation), it would be pointless to read the data provided in v. 474 as an otiose variation of the same fact (counting the years up from his birth). This is even more unlikely given that the total of years is less than 82, whether one counts three times five years with de la Bigne or nine times five years with Tillemont. Paulinus rather renounced the holy communion for twenty years. Accordingly, he had participated in the Eucharist for the last time in 407 and was re-admitted to the sacraments Easter 427, i.e. the 34th year before writing his autobiography early in 460.

⁸ Brandes (1888), 277. – Courcelle (1964), 167 n. 3, followed, e.g., by Moussy (1974), 17f. and 158; Marcone (1995), 104 and 116. – McLynn (1995), 463-65; 475 opts for 459 as year of composition and publication; his argument is partly based on Barth’s emendation to v. 478: *ante hos ter decies super et bis quattuor annis*. This would imply that up to 38 years had passed after the conversion on Easter 421 (p. 475). *Contra* Coskun (2002a), 341f.; Lucarini (2006), XII (against Barth).

⁹ For *tetreteris*, Moussy (1974), 186 refers to Censorius, *De die natali liber* 18,3 (ed. Hultsch, 37.3). Tillemont’s suggestion has been adopted by Brandes (1888), 274f., 309 and all subsequent editors.

¹⁰ Cf. Coskun (2002a), 342 n. 25; also Brandes’ *Index rei metricae* (p. 319).

¹¹ Contrary to vv. 12-14, 32f., 48f., 72, 121, 176, 232, 478, there is no indication to relate the data to his age; cf. Coskun (2005), 148f.

II.

Lucarini, however, rejects my chronology entirely as residing on a single misassumption: “tota enim Coskuni ratio ex ea coniectura pendet, Paulinum scilicet infantulum semper patrem suum comitatum esse, cum ipsius poetae verba hoc destricte denegent” (p. XI). My ‘premise’ is claimed to be contradicted by the fact that little Paulinus was trusted to nurses, thus not having been taken care of by his parents personally (v. 28: *trepidus nutricum creditum ulnis*). As a ‘due’ consequence, even my defence of the unitarian character of the poem is rejected: “omnino refelletur iudicium Coskuni, qui erroribus quos supra coarguimus opinionem fallaciorem miscuit, Paulinum scilicet sine intervallo poema composuisse” (p. XII). Instead, Courcelle’s position is re-instated without further discussion of the panoply of my argument.

III.

But my dissident view was firstly based on a profound prosopography of the family of Ausonius’ kin. E.g., the first husband of Paulinus’ mother was still alive in spring 376, and she was even dependent on an imperial privilege to be allowed to marry, before the 12 months of legally prescribed mourning had passed. This circumstance alone advocates a date of birth in the second half of 377.¹² But it goes well along with the fact that when Ausonius met Paulinus in Bordeaux towards the end of 379, the first *trieteris* of the boy had not yet passed – contrary to a presumed birthday prior to November or even December 376.

Secondly, Lucarini is unaware of all the implications that the imperial administration, travel facilities, and communication system of the Later Roman Empire would have on the career of Thalassius. For the present case, it is important that a *proconsul Africae* normally took over responsibility in April (not in January, as surmised on p. X), though sometimes also in September. And due to the slowness of ancient travelling, even the successor designate to the *proconsul Africae* could be addressed by an imperial letter. This, in fact, appears to have been the case with Thalassius.¹³

¹² Cf. CTh 3.8.1 on the mourning, with Coskun (2002a), 334f.

¹³ At least one imperial letter, four fragments of which have survived (CTh 11.30.37; 11.36.23-25), addressed Thalassius *proconsul Africae* on the 30th January 378; they were received the 26th April 378. Cf. Coskun (2002a), 333f. n. 5. But for the tenure of the *proconsules Africae*, cf. also Barnes (1985) and Coskun (2002b), 143-45; for the communication between the imperial palace and African officials as well as for the *mare clausum*, cf. Duncan-Jones (1990), 17-21; Coskun (2002b), 194f. with n. 31.

I have thirdly shown that the chronology of 377/460 is not only consistent with every single detail of the autobiography itself, but also with the historical background of late Roman Aquitaine. Note in particular the fatal blows of the year 407: the loss of his father, the litigation with his brother, and the invasion of Gaul by the Goths and Alans. These distressing events may well have led Paulinus astray from his former belief in Christ for two decades.¹⁴

IV.

Next Paulinus' apologetic utterance on the Goths needs to be accounted for. For Courcelle, its drafting is conceivable only during the short period of peace under the emperor Eparchius Avitus.¹⁵ But if we accept the French scholar's suggestion for the date of birth (before Easter 376) and conversion (Easter 421), the 34th year would lead us to a day between Easter 454 and Easter 455. Avitus, however, acceded to the throne only in July 455. Moreover, Paulinus' 83rd year would have been completed, before the emperor Majorian settled a peace with the Goths in the course of 459, thus in all likelihood much later than Easter.¹⁶ It would be awkward to insist in dating the composition of the pro-Gothic verses to the brief period of peace, but not to care about their publication during a renewed war.

Admittedly, Lucarini's argument appears to be less flawed than Courcelle's in this regard. For, although he pretends to follow the latter throughout, he ignores that his own dating of Paulinus' birthday (second half of 377) and of the publication of the poem (459 or 460) is much closer to my reconstruction than to Courcelle's.¹⁷ On the other hand, he accepts the latter's date of composition (455/56). But, again, he fails to perceive the implication of his own premises: they would rather imply that Paulinus completed his 45th year in the second half of 422 and converted Easter 423. Hence the 34th year from then on ran from Easter 456 to Easter 457. Be this as it may, the entire argument is still based – just as Courcelle's – on Tillemont's untenable conjecture to v. 474. As far as we have seen, there is nothing to commend it.

¹⁴ Cf. vv. 232-53; Coskun (2002a), 344; (2005), 118-20 on the *frater indocilis*; (2006), 293-304 on *dogmata prava*.

¹⁵ Courcelle (1964), 167 n. 3, with reference to vv. 302ff., esp. 306f.: ... *cum iam in re publica nostra / cernamus plures Gothico florere favore*.

¹⁶ Cf. PLRE II 198 on Avitus; Priscus, frg. 36 ed. Blokley and McLynn (1995), 464 with n. 20 on Majorian.

¹⁷ The reason for tacitly accepting some of my conclusions and rejecting parts of Courcelle's assumptions remains obscure, all the more since Lucarini does not draw any connection to the history of 455/59.

V.

Let us now return to my allegedly false premise, i.e. that Paulinus travelled together with his father. In fact, I nowhere state that the infant used the same vehicle as Thalassius, although I do not see any reason to exclude the possibility that he did so. For there is nothing astonishing in the fact that the infant was cared for by servants, which was a normal practice among the elite.¹⁸ At any rate, I insist that the family's journey from Macedonia to Carthage, later to Rome and finally to Bordeaux was more or less contemporaneous. This is not only to be inferred from Paulinus' place of birth, from the autobiographer's explicit claim to have passed 18 months in the capital of Africa (vv. 34f.) – i.e. as long as his father served there as proconsul –, but also from the independent evidence of Symmachus, whom Thalassius met in Rome in autumn 379, just when his son stayed there (vv. 36-40).¹⁹

Moreover, I offered a commentary on Paulinus' travel from Macedonia to Africa, which, again, escaped Lucarini's eyes. Otherwise, he would have refrained from replacing the transmitted *Oceanumque* by *Aegaeumque* (v. 30), and suggesting in the apparatus (p. 3) that the infant embarked in Macedonian Demetrias. None of these allegations is compatible with Paulinus' crossing the Alps (v. 29) or sailing the *fretum Tyrreni*, let alone with the ancients' sailing routes and habits.²⁰

VI.

To conclude: instead of addressing any of my arguments properly, Lucarini continues to adhere to the authority of Courcelle. He thereby accepts chronological vagueness, where Paulinus is precise, confuses Paulinus' itinerary and Thalassius' career, although the evidence allows clarity, disregards the transmitted *tetreteride* in v. 474, and thus needlessly rejects the unitarian character and chronological consistency of the autobiography, which no shred of evidence allows us to question.

¹⁸ Cf. also vv. 77f.

¹⁹ Symm. epist. 1.25, with Coskun (2003), 48f.

²⁰ Cf. Coskun (2002a), 334. – Lucarini seems to be unaware of the *mare clausum*, on which see above, n. 13.

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