

Probus' Praetorian Games: Olympiodorus Fr.44

Alan Cameron

ὅτι πολλοὶ οἴκοι Ῥωμαίων προσόδους κατ' ἐνιαυτὸν ἐδέχοντο ἀπὸ τῶν κτημάτων αὐτῶν ἀνὰ μ' χρυσοῦ κεντηνάρια, χωρὶς τοῦ σίτου καὶ τοῦ οἴνου καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἀπάντων εἰδῶν, ἃ εἰς τρίτον συν-έτεινεν, εἰ ἐπιπράσκετο, τοῦ εἰσφερομένου χρυσίου. τῶν δὲ μετὰ τοὺς πρώτους δευτέρων οἴκων τῆς Ῥώμης πεντεκαίδεκα καὶ δέκα κεντηναρίων ἢ πρόσδοδος ἦν. καὶ ὅτι Πρόβος ὁ παῖς Ἀλυπίου τελέσας τὴν οἰκείαν πραιτοῦραν κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς Ἰωάννου τυραννίδος, δώδεκα κεντηνάρια χρυσίου ἀνήλωσε. Σύμμαχος δὲ ὁ λογογράφος, συγκλητικὸς ὢν τῶν μετρίων, πρὶν ἢ τὴν Ῥώμην ἀλῶναι τοῦ παιδὸς Συμμάχου πραιτοῦραν τελούντος κ' κεντηνάρια ἔδαπάνησε· Μάξιμος δέ, εἰς τῶν εὐπόρων, εἰς τὴν τοῦ υἱοῦ πραιτοῦραν τεσσαράκοντα κατεβάλετο κεντηνάρια.

(Olympiodorus fr.44 Müller = 41.2 Blockley)

Many of the Roman households received an income of four thousand pounds of gold per year from their properties, not including grain, wine and other produce which, if sold, would have amounted to one-third of the income in gold. The income of the households at Rome of the second class was one thousand or fifteen hundred pounds of gold. When Probus, the son of Alypius, celebrated his praetorship during the reign of the usurper John, he spent twelve hundred pounds of gold. Before the capture of Rome, Symmachus the orator, a senator of middling wealth, spent two thousand pounds when his son, Symmachus, celebrated his praetorship. Maximus, one of the wealthy men, spent four thousand pounds on his son's praetorship.¹

This fragment of Olympiodorus is well known to historians. It contains most of the statistics we have on the finances of the senatorial aristocracy of late antiquity. On this aspect it will be enough to

¹ With one major exception (discussed *infra*) I reproduce the translation of R. C. Blockley, *The Fragmentary Classicising Historians of the Later Roman Empire: Eunapius, Olympiodorus, Priscus and Malchus II* (Liverpool 1983) 206–07.

refer to the complementary recent studies of J.-P. Callu² and D. Vera.³

The question to be addressed here is the identity of the first pair of names. The text of Photius' *Bibliotheca*, from which all the extant fragments of Olympiodorus derive, rests on two primary mss.: A (*Marc.* 450) and M (*Marc.* 451), of which Bekker used only A. A offers *παῖς Ὀλυμπίου*. There is no wealthy aristocrat of the age called Olympius, though there is an Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius (*cos.* 395) who seems to fit the bill. It was Reinesius who first suggested this simple emendation, which has been generally accepted since. It was naturally Bekker's text, thus emended, that was quoted in the still widely used editions of L. Dindorf (*Historici Graeci Minores* I [1871]) and C. Müller (*Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum* IV [1868]).

Then in 1959 appeared the first volume of R. Henry's Budé Photius, based for the first time on the readings of M as well. M offers *παῖς Ἀλυπίου*. E. Martini showed in 1911 and Henry has confirmed that A and M are entirely independent of each other,⁴ so Ἀλυπίου is not to be seen as a correction of A's text (not that there is any reason why its copyist should have suspected error;⁵ Olympius is an unexceptionable name in itself, occurring in the early fragments of Olympiodorus—evidently the source of A's reading here).

Alypius is a perfectly acceptable aristocratic name and must surely be accepted. There is at least one other passage in Olympiodorus where M offers a preferable form for a proper name. In fr.13 Müller = 14 Blockley, M offers Ἰόβιος for A's Ἰοβιανός. Iovius is undoubtedly the correct form for this well-documented person, praetorian prefect of Italy in 409.⁶ Furthermore, Iovius is quite certainly what Olympiodorus wrote, since it is the form used by both Sozomen

² "Le 'centenarium' et l'enrichissement monétaire au Bas-Empire," *Ktema* 3 (1978) 301–16.

³ "Strutture agrarie e strutture patrimoniali nella tarda antichità: L'aristocrazia Romana fra agricoltura e commercio," *OPVS* 2 (1983) 489–533.

⁴ See Henry's edition, I (1959) xxv–xxxvi. It was thus a gross over-simplification for Blockley (220 n.79) to claim that the "best ms. of Photius reads Ὀλυμπίου." A is in general more reliable, but it is not infrequently M that offers the better text; cf. J. Duffy, *GRBS* 21 (1980) 264–65. It is a major weakness of Blockley's edition (especially when compared with Jacoby's *FGrHist*) that he gives virtually no information on MSS.

⁵ Interestingly enough, O. Seeck, *Q. Aurelii Symmachi quae supersunt* (Berlin 1883) xcvi n.436, was in favour of reading Ἀλυπίου, which, not yet knowing about M, he took to be a "correction" of "libri recentiores" (of which he evidently had some knowledge). A. Chastagnol, *Fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (Paris 1962) 237 n.202, seems to have thought that Seeck was proposing his own correction for what Chastagnol (like *PLRE* II 802 s.v. "Olympius (?) 3") took to be the only MS. reading, namely Ὀλυμπίου.

⁶ See the sources in *PLRE* II 623–24.

and Zosimus, both of whom drew on Olympiodorus. In the circumstances it was peculiarly perverse of both Henry and Blockley to print A's Ἰοβιανός. But observing this we are less surprised to discover that in fr.44 Henry prints Ὀλυμπίου and Blockley Ὀλυβρίου.

Alypius would be Faltonius Probus Alypius, son of Clodius Celstinus, prefect of Rome in 351, and the Christian poetess Faltonia Betitia Proba (*PLRE* I 49). He is described by Ammianus (28.1.16) as a "young man" (*adulescens*) *ca* 371, during or soon after the urban prefecture (369–370) of his brother Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius, later consul in 379 (*PLRE* I 640–42). He was presumably therefore born *ca* 345–350 and so somewhat younger than his brother. Alypius himself reached the urban prefecture in 391.

The praetorian games of his son Probus are dated to the reign of the usurper John, *viz.* 423–425. The praetor normally gave his games in his late teens,⁷ though perhaps rather later if his father was dead. All our evidence suggests that it was the father who not only paid for but organized the games, no easy task if they were to be the success that was so essential for the public reputation of the family. It took Symmachus more than two years of intense planning to put on the games Olympiodorus mentions in this passage.⁸

Olympiodorus clearly implies that, while in the second and third cases it was the father who put on his son's games, Probus gave his own. If born *ca* 350, Alypius might well have been dead by 425. But there is no problem in supposing that he sired a son *ca* 400, at the age of 50.⁹ There is no need to suppose that this was his first or only child. Probus would then have been *ca* 25 in 425, just about old enough to organize his own games.

Alypius had a mother and a niece (his brother Olybrius' daughter) called Proba, and he bore the name Probus himself. It is entirely plausible that he should have called a son Probus.

Given a choice of ms. readings, where one makes perfect historical sense (Alypius) and the other no historical sense (Olympius), we are surely bound to choose the first. It is methodologically indefensible to choose Olympius and then emend to Olybrius. The more so in that there is in fact a serious objection to reading Olybrius.

Olympiodorus begins by putting his aristocrats into two classes, the rich and the very rich. He then gives three examples of the sort of

⁷ For details see A. Chastagnol, "Observations sur le consulat suffect et la préture du Bas-Empire," *RHist* 209 (1958) 237–53.

⁸ For the details, S. Roda, *Commento storico al libro IX dell'epistolario di Q. Aurelio Simmaco* (Pisa 1981) 114f.

⁹ The last datable letter of Symmachus to him is of 397 (*Ep.* 7.71).

sums rich men might spend when they were really trying to make a splash. The sums are in ascending order of size: 1200 pounds of gold (Probus), 2000 pounds (Symmachus), 4000 pounds (Maximus).

So far so good. The problem is that Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius (*cos.* 395) was the eldest son of Petronius Probus and Anicia Faltonia Proba, the principal heir to the fortune of the Anicii (*PLRE* I 639–40). We should not expect him to be quoted as an example of relatively modest expenditure. Of course it is not hard to devise explanations for the apparent smallness of the sum. Perhaps “L’une des deux prétures inférieures,” according to A. Chastagnol.¹⁰ D. Vera suggests that the Anicii had suffered badly during Alaric’s sack of 410, and that the usurper John was ill-disposed to them.¹¹ But why should the Anicii have fared significantly worse than Maximus, who spent his 4000 pounds at about the same time? One might add that Olybrius was one of four sons and a daughter, which must have split Probus’ inheritance.

But all such explanations miss the point. Olympiodorus’ purpose was to illustrate the different levels of expenditure of different categories of wealthy people. His second and third examples fit this ascending scale. Symmachus is said to be “middling” rich and Maximus rich. The first name should be a family of less than middling status—barely rich at all. Yet we are asked to believe that he began instead with an uncharacteristically low expenditure by one of the wealthiest families of all. Why should he have chosen so inappropriate an illustration of his point? Olybrius is surely not a reading to be introduced into the text by conjecture.

Alypius, on the other hand, the reading of one branch of the ms. tradition, makes a perfect beginning for his series. Of distinguished birth, brother of a consul, related by marriage to the Anicii, and doubtless very comfortably off. But nowhere near in the front rank.

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
July, 1984

¹⁰ *Supra* n.5: 250.

¹¹ *Supra* n.3: 491.