

Anician Myths

ALAN CAMERON

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the widely held view that politics in fifth- and sixth-century Italy were largely driven by rivalry between the two great families of the Anicii and the Decii, supposedly following distinctive policies (pro- or anti-eastern, philo- or anti-barbarian, etc.). It is probable that individual members of these (and other) families had feuds and disagreements from time to time, but there is absolutely no evidence for continuing rivalry between Decii and Anicii as families, let alone on specific issues of public policy. Indeed by the mid-fifth century the Anicii fell into a rapid decline. The nobility continued to play a central rôle in the social and (especially) religious life of late fifth- and early sixth-century Italy. Their wealth gave them great power, but it was power that they exercised in relatively restricted, essentially traditional fields, mainly on their estates and in the city of Rome. The quite extraordinary sums they spent on games right down into the sixth century illustrate their overriding concern for popular favour at a purely local level. In this context there was continuing competition between all noble families rich enough to compete. Indeed, the barbarian kings encouraged the nobility to spend their fortunes competing with each other to the benefit of the city and population of Rome.

Keywords: Late Roman politics; Anicii; Decii; Petronius Probus; Symmachus; Boethius; Cassiodorus; Olybrius

I THE PROBLEM

By the second half of the third century, the authority of the Roman senate had reached the lowest point in its thousand-year history, excluded from military commands and yielding to distant armies its traditional right of proclaiming new emperors. No one could have foreseen its remarkable revival, if in a somewhat different form, in the course of the fourth century. This is not the place to describe that revival, accompanied by an enormous expansion in size and the creation of a second senate in Constantine's new eastern capital Constantinople.¹ My concern is with the increasing domination of the senate of Rome during this period by a small number of immensely rich landowners.

While the senate had long ceased to exercise any significant collective authority, individual members of the great families wielded considerable power by virtue of their

The following abbreviations are used in the notes for frequently cited:

Cameron, *Last Pagans* = Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (2011)

Chastagnol, *Fastes* = André Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962)

Matthews, *Western Aristocracies* = John Matthews, *Western Aristocracies and Imperial Court* (1975; rev. edn 1990)

Settipani, *Continuité gentilice* = Christian Settipani, *Continuité gentilice et continuité familiale dans les familles sénatoriales romaines à l'époque impériale: mythe et réalité* (2000)

¹ Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*; A. Chastagnol, *Le sénat romain à l'époque impériale* (1992); P. Heather, *CAH* xiii (1998), 184–210; useful summary by G. P. Burton in *OCD*³ (1996), 1386–7.

JRS 102 (2012), pp. 133–171. © The Author(s) 2012.

Published by The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.

doi:10.1017/S007543581200007X

wealth. This wealth and the power it bought actually increased as imperial power declined in the West, reaching a new high under the barbarian kings of Italy. As John Matthews put it, 'viewing the senate of the time of Odoacer and Theoderic, one might have been forgiven for mistaking it for the senate of the late Republic, as a few great families dominated the public life of the city and filled those offices of state which their masters at Ravenna conceded to them'.² Only one of these families could actually claim descent from a Republican dynasty, the Acilii Glabrones. The most famous was the comparatively upstart house of the Anicii.

Much has been written about the Anicii. Their rise in the third century and dominance in the age of Constantine have been carefully studied,³ but after that even the most basic facts are in doubt. Their rôle in the political and even intellectual life of the fifth and sixth centuries as characterized in much writing of the past half century is pure fantasy. This paper seeks on the one hand to strip away the nonsense, and, on the other, to contribute to the modern debate about the rôle of noble families in the social, religious and political life of late antique Italy.

According to Giuseppe Zecchini, the activity of the Anicii from c. A.D. 400 down to the 530s can only be understood with reference to their continuing rivalry with another powerful aristocratic family, the Decii.⁴ The two families are supposed to have followed distinctive policies for more than a century, identified as pro- or anti-eastern, philo- or anti-barbarian, pro-catholic or pro-pagan. On this basis it has often been assumed that, in effect, whatever the Anicii did or wanted, the Decii did or wanted the exact opposite.

It has to be said straightaway that there is not a shred of solid evidence for rivalry of any sort at any time between Anicii and Decii. It is probable that, like most aristocrats, individual members of these (and other) families had feuds and disagreements from time to time, but there is absolutely no evidence for continuing rivalry between Decii and Anicii *as families*, let alone on specific issues of public policy. Nor is there either evidence or even probability that all members of the Anicii or Decii, or of any other noble family for that matter, pursued the same 'policies' generation after generation. In every family, especially where vast estates, great wealth and real power are at stake, younger brothers are jealous of older brothers,⁵ sons feud with fathers, and daughters marry ambitious outsiders who try to deflect the family wealth and power to their own aims and dependants. John Moorhead has shown that the four consular sons of Caecina Decius Basilius cos. 463, so far from forming a united Decian block, squabbled among themselves on issues both large and small.⁶ Personal issues aside, the four brothers must have married into different families with concerns and traditions of their own, as did their consular sons in turn (Fig. 4). The likelihood that all male descendants continued to agree on what was best for any family over more than a century in the fast changing political climate of fifth- and sixth-century Italy is remote. The world of

² 'Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius', in M. Gibson (ed.), *Boethius, his Life, Thought and Influence* (1981), 15–43, reprinted in J. Matthews, *Political Life and Culture in Late Roman Society* (1985), ch. 5.

³ D. M. Novak, 'The early history of the Anician family', *Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History* 1 (1979), 119–65; 'Anicianae domus culmen, nobilitatis culmen', *Klio* 62 (1980), 473–93; M. Christol, 'À propos des Anicii: le III^e siècle', *Mélanges de l'École française à Rome* 98 (1986), 141–64; P. I. Wilkins, 'The African Anicii — a neglected text and a new genealogy', *Chiron* 18 (1988), 377–82.

⁴ G. Zecchini, 'I Gesta de Xysti Purgatione e le fazioni aristocratiche a Roma alla metà del V secolo', *Rivista di storia della chiesa in Italia* 34 (1980), 60–74; 'La politica degli Anicii nel V secolo', *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi Boeziani* (1981), 123–38; 'La politica religiosa di Aezio', in M. Sordi (ed.), *Religione e politica nel mondo antico* (1981), 250–77; Aezio. *L'ultima difesa dell'Occidente romano* (1983); *Ricerche di storiografia latina tardoantica* (1993) and *Ricerche di storiografia latina tardoantica II* (2011); L. Cracco Ruggini, 'Nobiltà romana e potere nell'età di Boezio', *Atti ... Studi Boeziani* (1981), 73–96; 'Gli Anicii a Roma e in provincia', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome* 100 (1988), 69–85.

⁵ 'solita fratribus odia', Tacitus, *Ann.* 4.60.3.

⁶ 'The Decii under Theoderic', *Historia* 33 (1984), 107–15.

Odoacar and Theoderic became increasingly different from the world of Honorius and Valentinian III.

A further peculiarity of much modern writing on the subject is that other families are held to be ‘branches of’ or ‘merged with’ the Anicii, a process which apparently only worked in one direction. Because a member of one branch of the Symmachi married an Anicia, the Symmachi are claimed as one of these ‘branches’. This is a strange concept. The power and wealth of the Anicii were so overwhelming (it seems) that anyone lucky enough to snare an Anician wife was automatically considered a member of some sort of Anician collective, from which his descendants could never break away, obliged to follow Anician ‘policies’ in perpetuity. Most moderns writing about the Anicii employ the terms ‘clan’ and ‘group’ rather than ‘family’, as if aware that they are assuming something much larger and more comprehensive than a regular family.

In effect, this approach sees Anicii and Decii as political parties rather than families. Inevitably, one is reminded of the once fashionable view that politics under the Republic consisted of ‘contests for office and influence between coalitions of aristocratic families’.⁷ That view is seldom held now in a strong form, but there are good reasons for maintaining a weaker version. The only way to win public office then was through elections, and that required the support of those able to mobilize large numbers of voters. Inevitably, ambitious nobles must have cultivated other nobles, promising to get out the vote for them or their sons in future elections. The only two texts that refer to actions of the Anicii as a family both just accuse them of greed.⁸ A major difference from the supposed Republican factions is that they were assumed to be based on family ties *instead of* common policies, whereas we are asked to believe that Anicii and Decii shared both blood *and* policies, generation after generation. Yet while the two might coincide for a period, it is obviously most unlikely that they would continue to coincide over more than a century. Each successive generation brings new in-laws, new relationships, new situations, and new concerns — especially after A.D. 476.

To take a case where we have much more concrete evidence than for any of the supposed Anician and Decian factions discussed in this paper, much has been written of the personal, religious and familial ties between the Symmachi and Nicomachi at the end of the fourth century. But while both were pagans, the elder Nicomachus Flavianus pursued a career at court while Q. Aur. Symmachus preferred the traditional aristocratic career, and they certainly did not follow the same policies on every issue. Symmachus openly backed the usurper Maximus (A.D. 383–89) but had nothing to do with Eugenius (A.D. 392–94), while Nicomachus Flavianus held office under Eugenius but not Maximus.⁹

Zecchini’s method for determining which family was dominant and which in eclipse at any given moment is to identify those who held the city and praetorian prefectures and consulships at the time. But this reflects a misguided notion of why the nobility sought these offices, how they won them, and what they expected to do while holding them. They sought them for status, influence, and wealth rather than to pursue policies, and those who acquired power used it to win office for their sons and in-laws (more on this below). On the basis of supposed Anicians in high office at the time, we are asked to believe that the Anicii ‘supported’ first the western usurper John (A.D. 423–25) and later the generalissimo Aetius (A.D. 433–54). The supremacy of Aetius allegedly marked the ‘crest of the wave’ for the Anicii, while his fall was a disaster for them.¹⁰ As we shall see, on Zecchini’s own evidence this is simply false (see below).

⁷ P. A. Brunt, *The Fall of the Roman Republic and Related Essays* (1988), 443–502, at 443, citing the most important earlier discussions.

⁸ Amm. Marc. 16.8.13; Zos. 6.7.4.

⁹ For full discussion, Cameron, *Last Pagans*, *passim*.

¹⁰ ‘La presa di potere da parte di Aezio ... riporta gli Anicii sulla cresta dell’onda ...’, Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1981), 126.

Not only is there no evidence for any such ‘support’. The real Achilles’ heel of this approach to the fifth- and sixth-century Anicii lies in identifying Anicii. For example, the following are regularly listed as leading members of the Anicii during the supremacy of Aetius: Anicius Auchenius Bassus cos. 431; Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus cos. 438; Petronius Maximus cos. 433 and 443; Q. Aurelius Symmachus cos. 446; Gennadius Avienus cos. 450; and Boethius PPO in 454. That looks an impressive constellation. But there are serious, not to say fatal objections. There is no actual evidence that a single one of these men ‘supported’ Aetius (whatever that might mean), let alone throughout the period of his ascendancy. More important, only one of them, Bassus, can even be considered Anician in the fullest sense. This is obviously not unconnected with the fact that, unlike the Decii, the Anicii failed to produce enough male heirs in the direct line. The over-generous definition of what it meant to be a ‘member of the Anicii’ is not the least of the problems in most modern writing on the subject.¹¹

II PETRONIUS PROBUS

The Anicii reached a peak of power and splendour in the age of Constantine, with Anicius Iulianus consul in 322, his brother Anicius Paulinus consul in 325, and Iulianus’ son Anicius Paulinus iunior consul in 334 (Fig. 2). One at least of these men converted to Christianity, one of the earliest men of such high rank to do so, thus achieving a different sort of fame in the eyes of posterity.¹² The three of them practically monopolized the prefecture of Rome for almost a decade. But from then till the 370s, no Anicius held any of the great offices of state. A cryptic passage of Ammianus, probably written in the late 380s but referring to 356/57, describes the ‘posterity’ of Anicii unspecified striving for gain ‘in emulation of their ancestors’ (‘ad avorum aemulationem posteritas tendens’, 16.8.13). By the mid-fourth century they were clearly in decline.

By its close we find two different men posing as restorer of the family fortunes: Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus cos. 371 and Anicius Auchenius Bassus, prefect of Rome (PVR)¹³ in 382. Modern scholars have generally taken little notice of Bassus’ claim. He was certainly a person of less consequence than Probus, perhaps the most powerful private citizen of his age. But Bassus was at least a genuine Anician in the direct line, whereas Probus, contrary to widespread belief, was not. A posthumous dedication by one of his consular sons and his daughter proclaims Probus the ‘eminence’ or ‘bulwark’ of the Anician house: ‘Sexto Petronio Probo Anicianae domus culmini ... Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius v. c. consul ordinarius et Anicia Iuliana c. f. eius devotissimi filii dedicarunt’ (*ILS* 1267). And so he was. But that does not prove him born an Anician.

Chastagnol argued that his father, Petronius Probinus cos. 341, married an (unidentifiable) Anicia.¹⁴ Why then did Probinus name his son Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus, without a single Anician name?¹⁵ The key text here is a verse epistle Ausonius addressed to Probus, after his consulship (371) and before he laid down his third praetorian prefecture (375). The poem accompanies a little book of Latin fables, which Ausonius sent Probus for the education of the son recently born to his wife, Anicia Faltonia Proba. According to lines 32–4, Probus ‘renews the stock of the Amnii

¹¹ As noted in passing by J. J. O’Donnell, ‘Liberius the Patrician’, *Traditio* 37 (1981), 33: ‘The *gens Anicia* ... is a great favorite of modern scholars (whose enthusiasm has tempted them to attach many unrelated figures, without evidence).’

¹² Which one remains uncertain: Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 179–81.

¹³ P(raefectus) V(rbis) R(omae); I also use the abbreviation P(raefectus) P(raetori)O for praetorian prefect.

¹⁴ Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 124.

¹⁵ The natural assumption is that he married a Claudia, especially if Petronius Claudius is another of his sons (see below).

and decorates with equal garlands the family tree of the Anicii' ('stirpis novator Amniae/paribusque comit infulis/Aniciorum stemmata'). The name *Amnius* is only found twice applied to actual persons: Amnius Manius Caesonius Nicomachus Anicius Paulinus cos. 334 (*ILS* 1220), and his father Amnius Anicius Iulianus cos. 322. Both Claudian and Prudentius use *Amniadae* as a poetic patronymic for later generations of the Anicii.¹⁶ In an inscription dated to 395 Proba's two younger sons describe her as 'an ornament to the *Amnii*, Pincii and Anicii' (*ILS* 1269), and her granddaughter Demetrias, who dedicated herself to a life of good works and virginity, is described on her funerary inscription as 'Dem[etria]s Am[nia virgo]' (*ILS* 8988. 1 = *ILCV* 1765. 1), where, since the inscription is in verse, *Amnia* is surely not one of Demetrias' actual names but an adjective to be taken with *virgo*, meaning 'Anician female'.¹⁷

On the basis of Ausonius' *stirps Amnia*, Seck identified Petronius Probus as a grandson of Amnius Anicius Paulinus cos. 334. But that would not explain the *paribus* (let alone his names). Why 'equal' garlands? They are equal because Probus himself came from a *different* but equally distinguished family; both his father and his grandfather in the male line had been consuls before him: Petronius Probinus cos. 341 and Petronius Probianus cos. 322 (Fig. 1).

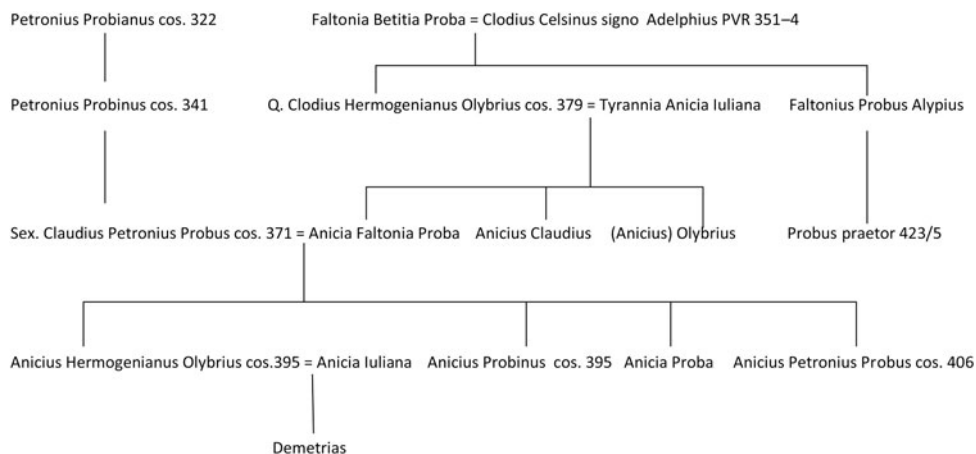


FIG. 1. The family of the Petronii and Olybrii.

That Probus' Anician connection did not begin till his marriage is put beyond doubt by a later passage in the same poem of Ausonius:

ut hinc avi ac patris decus, /mixto resurgens sanguine,
 Probiano itemque Anicio, /ut quondam in Albae moenibus
 supremus Aenea status /Silvios Iulis miscuit;
 sic iste qui natus tui ... /suescat peritus fabulis
 simul et iocari et discere (82–93).

So that hereby the pride of his father and grandfather, springing from the mingled blood of the Probi and Anicii, as of old within the walls of Alba the last scion of Aeneas united the lines of Silvius and Iulus, so that he who is your son ... may become versed in fables, growing used to play and learn at the same time.

¹⁶ Claud., *Ol. et Prob.* 9; Prud., *contra Symm.* 1.551.

¹⁷ Part of the name is missing, but the AM is clearly visible, and given her ancestry no other supplement is possible.

The father of line 82 must be Probus himself, the grandfather Probinus cos. 341. If this child *unites* the blood of the Probi and Anicii, they must before then have been *separate*. Nothing could be more telling in context than Ausonius' analogy: Probus is compared to Aeneas uniting the Trojans and Rutulians through the son Silvius born to him by his wife Lavinia. Extravagant though the comparison is, it would simply have misfired if both Probus and his wife Proba had been Anicii. If Proba is to play Lavinia to Probus' Aeneas, their families must till that moment have been entirely separate. It follows that Probus cannot have been an Anician by birth.

A dedication to Probus from the family home in Verona from the early 370s, probably before his marriage, says nothing of any Anician connection, proclaiming him simply 'grandson of Probianus and son of Probinus, prefects of the city and consuls' ('nepoti Probiani, filio Probinus vv. cc., praef[f]. urbis et cons'). Apart from different forms of the name Probus, the one name all three share is Petronius, whence the family is generally known as the Petronii.

It is no doubt the coincidence that Petronius Probus' wife was also called Proba that fostered the idea that they were both Anicians by birth (like Franklin Roosevelt marrying Eleanor Roosevelt). From the generation of their children on, Probus and Proba were certainly treated as Anician names. But neither is found among the Anicii in earlier generations. Probus/Proba are common enough names,¹⁸ and it is surely no more than coincidence that Petronius Probus married an Anicia who happened to be called Proba.

Proba's full name was Anicia Faltonia Proba. The uncommon Faltonia leaves little doubt about her descent. As Seeck saw, her father must have been Q. Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius cos. 379, son of the Christian poetess Faltonia Betitia Proba. As it happens, this family is particularly well documented (Fig. 1). There is no sign of an Anician connection until Proba's son Clodius Hermogenianus Olybrius married Tyrrania Anicia Iuliana, a union securely attested by a dedication to Iuliana which explicitly styles her wife of Olybrius.¹⁹ That Olybrius had a brother called Faltonius Probus Alypius is securely attested by a Roman dedication that spells out their names in full, and a note in a lost tenth-century manuscript of Proba's one surviving poem describes her as *uxor Adelphi* and *mater Olibrii et Aliepii*.²⁰ Olybrius and Proba seem to have had three children, to each of whom they gave (at least) one name from the family of Betitia Proba and Clodius Celsinus, and the name Anicius from their mother's family (Fig. 1).

The younger Olybrius, named for his father and so presumably the eldest, was governor of Tuscia-Umbria in 370.²¹ The elder Olybrius was proconsul of Africa in 361 and *consularis* of Campania before this. For their eldest son to have held a provincial governorship by 370, the marriage of the elder Olybrius and Iuliana cannot have fallen later than c. 345. Since neither of his sons rose higher than *consularis*, they may have died in their twenties or thirties. A fragmentary dedication in Crete reveals that Anicius Claudius had held a provincial governorship by 382.²² The marriage of their daughter Faltonia Proba to Petronius Probus must have taken place a year or two before 375.

What is the ancestry of Tyrrania Anicia Iuliana?²³ Most scholars have identified her as a daughter of Anicius Auchenius Bassus (PVR 382), because he married a

¹⁸ PIR vi² (1998), p. 410; *PLRE* i and ii and *PCBE* sub nomine.

¹⁹ 'Tyrraniae Aniciae Iulianae c.f. coniugi Q. Clodi Hermogeniani Olybri v.c., consularis Campaniae, proconsulis Africae, praefecti urbis, praef. praet. Illyrici, praef. praet. Orientis, consulis ordinarii, Fl. Clodius Rufus v.p. patronae perpetuae', *ILS* 1271.

²⁰ 'Q. Clodio Hermogeniano Olybri v.c., fratri admirandae pietatis, Faltonius Probus Alypius v.c.', *ILS* 1270; Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 331.

²¹ *Cod. Theod.* 12.1.72; the addresses of laws only give one name, but it is likely that he too was called Anicius.

²² A. Cameron, 'Anicius Claudius (I. Cret. iv. 322)', *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 57 (1984), 147–8.

²³ Seeck and Chastagnol identified Olybrius' wife as a daughter of Anicius Auchenius Bassus, whose wife was called Turrenia Honorata. But even allowing for a teenage bride, how could the consul of 379 marry the daughter of a PVR 382?

Turrenia Honorata. But the name Turranius is not uncommon in the early fourth century,²⁴ and we shall see in the following section that Bassus himself was not born till c. 355. The *Iuliana* points to Anicius Iulianus cos. 322, the first known Iulianus among the Anicii. The contrast between the presence and absence of the Anician name in successive generations of the families of both Hermogenianus Olybrius and Petronius Probus strongly suggests that these two marriages were their first Anician connections. Olybrius married a daughter or (more probably) granddaughter of Anicius Iulianus cos. 322; Probus married Olybrius' daughter (Fig. 1).

It is instructive to take a closer look at a dedication to Anicia Faltonia Proba from her two younger sons, describing her as 'consulis uxori, consulis filiae, consulum matri' (*ILS* 1269). She was the wife, daughter and mother of consuls — but not granddaughter, much less great-granddaughter. She was not a direct descendant of one of the great Constantinian Anicii. Probus' Anician connection was at two removes on the female side.

The best commentary on Ausonius' 'paribus ... infulis' comes in Probus' own epitaph, two poems of eighteen (A) and thirty (B) lines copied by M. Vegio from the now long destroyed mausoleum of Probus.²⁵ According to A.3–4,

consulibus proavis socerisque et consule maior
quod geminas consul reddidit ipse domos.

So Vegio's transcript, but *consule maior* makes no sense.²⁶ We are bound to accept Löfstedt's correction *socero*:²⁷ Probus is greater than both his own consular forebears (Probinus and Probianus)²⁸ and his consular father-in-law (the elder Olybrius)²⁹ because by his own consulship ('consul ... ipse') he restored *two* houses. *Reddidit* is being used here in the sense 'put back (in its proper or normal position)'.³⁰ Ideally a consular house produced a new consul in each generation, and the conceit here is that, being both born into and marrying into consular families, Probus was 'restoring' *two* noble houses. Once again, clear proof that he claimed to be uniting two *different* houses, his own (the Petronii) and the Anicii. The poet does not name the Anicii, and (in context) for good reason. The father-in-law whose achievements he had 'restored' was Olybrius cos. 379, *not* himself an Anician by birth. Like Probus, he too had married into the Anicii.

Petronius Probus and Anicia Faltonia Proba had five children. The eldest, the unnamed subject of Ausonius' poem, lived long enough to marry a woman called Furia,³¹ but died soon after, apparently before 395, or he would surely have become consul that year together with Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius instead of the third brother, Anicius Probinus. A fourth brother, Anicius Petronius Probus, became consul in 406, and there was also a daughter, Anicia Proba. Following the example of his father-in-law Olybrius cos. 379, he gave all his children the Anician name, but on surviving evidence only the

²⁴ PLRE i.925–6; Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 15–17; F. Chausson, *Stemmata aurea: Constantin, Justine, Théodose, revendications généalogiques et idéologie impériale au IV s. ap. J.C.* (2007), 176–8.

²⁵ CIL vi.1756; ICUR n.s. ii (1935), no. 4219; CIL vi.8.3 (2000), pp. 4752–3; M. G. Schmidt, 'Ambrosii carmen de obitu Probi', *Hermes* 127 (1999), 99–116; D. Trout, 'The verse epitaph(s) of Petronius Probus', *New England Classical Journal* 28 (2001), 157–76.

²⁶ B. Croke and J. D. Harries, *Religious Conflict in Fourth-Century Rome* (1982), 117, improbably supplement 'greater than a [normal] consul'.

²⁷ E. Löfstedt, 'Zu lateinischen Inschriften', *Eranos* 13 (1913), 72–82 n. 1, a correction I jotted down in my edition of SeecK many years ago, before coming across this article.

²⁸ In fact father and grandfather; the poet used *proavi* because it fitted the metre.

²⁹ Schmidt, op. cit. (n. 25) has argued that the far more Christian B is the work of Ambrose, but there can be little doubt that Proba commissioned A (cf. A. 15–18), in which case her claim that Probus excelled her own father Olybrius might be thought unflattering to her two brothers, Anicius Claudius and Olybrius. Both were in fact probably dead by 390.

³⁰ OLD s.v. *reddo* 1.

³¹ On Furia, see PLRE i.375.

two youngest sons names from his own family.³² Whatever Ausonius might say about the ‘equal garlands’ of the Petronii, it seems clear that Probus himself attached more importance to the heritage of his Anician wife.

His marriage must have fallen a year or so before Ausonius’ poem celebrating the birth of his first child. Taegert’s date of 374/5 must be approximately correct. According to Claudian’s panegyric on the consulship of Olybrius and Probinus in January 395, neither had yet grown the first down on his cheeks (69–70; cf. *pubentes* 142), and Jerome refers to Olybrius, the elder of the two, as ‘consul quidem in pueritia’ (*Ep.* 130.3). Taegert and Barnes infer that neither was born before c. 380.³³ Perhaps so, but that would leave a gap of more than five years between the first and second child. Jerome and Claudian are perhaps exaggerating slightly to underline the uniqueness of the honour accorded them. Olybrius and Probinus may have been in their late rather than early teens in 395. Even so, it is hard to believe that Probinus, the younger of the two, is the Probinus attested as proconsul of Africa in 397.³⁴ Teenagers holding the purely ceremonial office of consul are one thing, but the proconsulship of Africa was a full-time administrative post.

While giving all their children the name Anicius, Probus and Proba seem to have regarded Amnius and Pincius as obsolete, nor are they found in later generations. More shadowy than even the Amnii, the Pincii have left no identifiable representative. That a family of this name did once exist is proved by the *domus Pinciana* mentioned by Cassiodorus (*Variae* 3.10), presumably to be identified with the *palatium Pinciorum* of the *Liber Pontificalis* (60.6), on what by the fourth century had come to be called the Pincian Hill. It is difficult to believe that we should know so little of the Pincii and Amnii if they went back to the comparatively well documented High Empire, let alone the Republic. More probably they have fallen through the many gaps in our knowledge of the third-century aristocracy. It is tempting to conjecture that the Amnii were in any case nothing more than a branch of the Annii who decided to enhance their exclusivity by a change of spelling — like pretentious Smiths who proclaim themselves Smythe.

III ANICIUS AUCHENIUS BASSUS

The inscription that supplies most of our information about Anicius Auchenius Bassus (*ILS* 1262) claims that both his father and grandfather were ordinary consuls: ‘claritatem generis *paternis avitisque fastorum paginis* celebratam ... reddidit auctiorem’. We are bound to accept so precise a claim, in which case it is difficult to see who the father could be but Amnius Manius Caesonius Nicomachus Anicius Paulinus cos. 334, son of Amnius Anicius Iulianus cos. 322 (Fig. 2). The Caesonius in his father’s nomenclature suggests a connection with Caesonius Bassus cos. 317, which would explain Bassus’ own last name, not previously found among the Anicii.³⁵

These identifications are all but compelling, but there is nonetheless a chronological problem. Bassus’ urban prefecture is securely dated to 382, hence forty-eight years after his father’s consulate. How can this be? In the ordinary way we might eliminate the gap by postulating an undocumented intermediate generation, but then we would lose the

³² For the eldest who died young, purely as a guess I would suggest Anicius (Petronius) Probianus.

³³ W. Taegert, *Panegyricus dictus Olybrio et Probino consulibus* (1988), 25–9; T. D. Barnes, *AJP* 111 (1990), 418 (reviewing Taegert). Barnes suggests (p. 419) that the firstborn was a son from an earlier marriage, but that would require that his first and second wives should both have been Anicians.

³⁴ *Cod. Theod.* 12.5.3. On the basis of a dubious inference from Symm., *Ep.* 9.126 (see too Roda and Callu ad loc.), *PLRE* i.735 takes his proconsulate back to 396, but the office was normally held for just one year, in this case presumably cut short by Gildo’s rebellion: T. D. Barnes, ‘Between Theodosius and Justinian: Late Roman prosopography’, *Phoenix* 37 (1983), 256–7.

³⁵ But there are plenty of other Bassi (*PLRE* i.151–8), notably Iunius Bassus cos. 331.

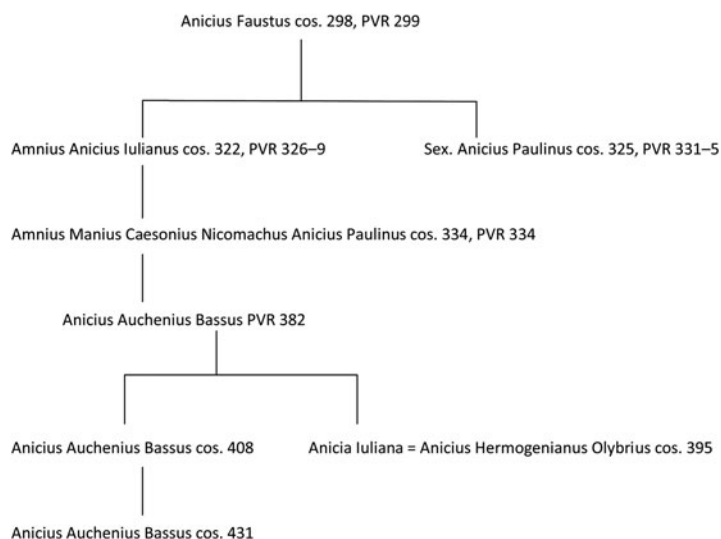


FIG. 2. The family of Anicius Auchenius Bassus.

emphatically identified consular father. Seck and Chastagnol assumed that, for some reason unknown, Bassus' public career was retarded. But the dedications reveal an ambitious man; note particularly the one in the Forum of Trajan: 'quaestori candidato, uno eodemque tempore praetori tutelari, proconsuli Campaniae, praefecto urbi.' The formula 'A uno eodemque tempore BC' should link B and C, not A and B.³⁶ The praetorship, a sinecure held in the late teens or early twenties, marked a young aristocrat's entry into public life. Bassus is apparently boasting that he entered on his first provincial governorship (datable no earlier than 379) before his year as praetor had finished. A young man born to privilege who enjoyed life in Rome might have delayed his first governorship, but hardly his praetorship. Taken by itself, the evidence implies an accelerated rather than retarded career. On this assumption he might have been twenty-five in (say) 380, that is to say born *c.* 355.

His father, Anicius Paulinus, was probably young when he held his consulship in 334 (his father had been consul only nine years earlier in 325). Let us say he was born soon after 300. If so, Anicius Bassus would have been born when his father was about fifty-five. Roman nobles, with estates and status to pass on to the next generation, did not normally wait so long to marry and have a family. The obvious explanation is a first marriage without issue, or with sons who died young, which would also have the advantage of explaining the missing Anician generation in the mid-fourth century. As soon as he was old enough, young Bassus hastened to pursue his family obligations, only to discover that outsiders, Petronius Probus and the sons of Hermogenianus Olybrius, were claiming the Anician family mantle.

On at least two public dedications Bassus proclaimed himself '*restitutor generis Aniciorum*'.³⁷ This might be no more than a reference to the long gap since his father last held high office: we're back. But in view of the fact that an outsider, Petronius Probus, was making the same claim at the same time ('*stirpis novator Amniae*'), we are

³⁶ As I argued in *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985), at 166-8.

³⁷ *ILS* 1263; *CIL* x.5651; perhaps to be restored in 9.1568.

surely bound to see Bassus' claim as a defiant statement: I am the real thing, a direct descendant in the main line of the Anicii.

The rival claims can be dated fairly precisely. We know from Ausonius that Probus was flaunting his new Anician son *c.* 375. And Bassus began advertising his claim while proconsul of Campania, *c.* 380. Probus' claim rested on more than the Anician son he had sired. It is not just a question of whether he was (or whether contemporaries considered him) a 'real' Anician. By their marriages, Probus and the elder Olybrius must between them have acquired a significant portion of the Anician family estates and connections, to which Probus was able to add the presumably not insignificant wealth he had inherited from his own consular forebears. The chorus of accusations about his greed makes it clear that he substantially increased whatever wealth he had acquired by either route. Bassus had no doubt grown up in the expectation that he would be the head of the family and controller of its wealth and destiny. He cannot have been pleased to watch this arrogant outsider play the part he had grown up assuming would be his.

Bassus' *uno eodemque tempore* boast is rather curious. There were many provincial governorships, not hard for any well-connected young noble to come by, nor does he deserve much credit for leaving Rome before the end of his sinecure year of office as praetor.³⁸ Consider now a boastful dedication from Capua praising Probus for being *uno eodemque tempore* praetorian prefect and ordinary consul.³⁹ Probus was prefect from 368–75 and consul in 371; Bassus was proconsul of Campania between 379 and 382. These are the only surviving examples of the *uno eodemque tempore* formula in such a dedication, they are nearly contemporary, and the two men involved were rivals. As proconsul of Campania Bassus is likely to have seen Probus' monument in Capua. Is he perhaps mocking Probus' boastfulness by trivializing it? After all, the combination was not uncommon (Placidus PPO 342–44 and cos. 343; Lollianus PPO 355–36 and cos. 355; Mamertinus PPO 361–65 and cos. 362; Ausonius PPO 377–79 and cos. 379), since service as praetorian prefect was one of the main qualifications for the honour of the consulship. But no one else we know of publicly boasted about it.

Bassus defiantly proclaimed himself 'restitutor generis Aniciorum' on his dedications and contrived to preserve the individuality of his own branch of the family by calling his son by his own distinctive name Bassus, passed on in turn to his grandson. As for Auchenius, Claudian treats it as a metrically convenient poeticism for 'Anicius'; e.g., *Pan. Ol. et Prob.* 8,

scis genus Auchenium, nec te latuere potentes
Amniadae,

and (especially) line 21, where after claiming that no other family could claim equality with the Anicii, he concludes:

sed prima sede relicta
Auchenii, de iure licet certare secundo.

leaving the first place to the Auchenii, let who will contest for the second.

'Such a compliment paid to the obscure name of the Auchenii has amazed the critics', remarked Gibbon. Although the name is only now known to us in the person and line of Anicius Auchenius Bassus, on the evidence of Claudian it cannot originally have been

³⁸ The duties of a late fourth-century praetor were hardly onerous, chief among them being presiding at games provided (and paid for) by his father: A. Chastagnol, 'Observations sur le consulat suffect et la préture du Bas-Empire', *Revue Historique* 219 (1958), 221–53, at 243–53.

³⁹ Full bibliography at *Journal of Roman Studies* 75 (1985), 164–6.

exclusive to his branch of the Anician line. Like Amnius, it must have been an early Anician name available to all branches of the family if they wished, a name with an archaic flavour appropriate, like the sonorous patronymic Amniades, for hexameter verse. Nonetheless, Petronius Probus did not give the name to any of his children, perhaps unwilling to antagonize his rival. Anicius Auchenius Bassus and his wife Turrenia Honorata had several children.⁴⁰ It is worth pointing out that Bassus did not give any of her names to at any rate his eldest son, unusually given exactly the same names as himself, as was his grandson, consul in 431.⁴¹

IV THE HEIRS OF PROBUS

By c. 390, when he died, Petronius Probus had made his branch of the Anicii the richest and most powerful house in Rome. His two eldest sons were appointed consuls together in 395, and his youngest son consul in 406, all three before holding any other office. Most modern writers take it for granted that his heirs went from strength to strength. According to Zecchini, by the early fifth century their rôle increased in a world where the weakening of central power encouraged the development of senatorial power and factions. As a general proposition, this is no doubt true. But what is the evidence that the Anicii in particular rather than the aristocracy in general became increasingly influential?

Among other things, this view takes it for granted that all bearers of the Anician name worked together and presented a united front to the world. Quite apart from the intrinsic improbability of such an assumption, we have seen that there were rival branches. We should not assume that (Anicius) Olybrius and Anicius Claudius, the sons of Olybrius cos. 379, were happy to yield leadership of their line to the children of their sister Anicia Faltonia Proba. After all they too were born Anicii. That makes three branches — what we might call the Olybrian, Petronian and Bassan lines — already by the 380s.

Nor is this a modern distinction, invented by myself. We have already seen that Ausonius distinguished Probi and Anicii. And when extolling the glorious forebears of the Anician nun Demetrias, Jerome distinguishes ‘the famous names of the Probi and Olybrii and the illustrious line of the Anicii’.⁴² So too Prudentius, listing the earliest noble houses to convert to Christianity:

Amniadum suboles et pignera clara *Proborum*.
fetur enim ante alios generosus *Anicius* urbis
inlustrasse caput; sic se Roma inclyta iactat.
quin et *Olybriaci generisque et nominis heres*,
adiectus fastis...
ambit et Ausoniam Christo inclinare securem

The descendants of the *Amnii* and the illustrious scions of the *Probi*. It is said that a noble *Anicius* before all others shed lustre on the Roman senate,⁴³ and the *heir of the blood and name of Olybrius*, though a consul ... was eager to humble the Roman axe to Christ (CS 1.551–7).

⁴⁰ ‘Anicius Auchenius Bassus v. c. et Turrenia Honorata c. f. eius cum filiis deo sanctisque devoti’, *ILS* 1292.

⁴¹ Anicius Paulinus PVR in 380 (Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 207; *PLRE* i.678) may be an older brother of Anicius Bassus.

⁴² ‘Scilicet nunc mihi Proborum et Olybriorum clara repetenda sunt nomina, et inlustre Anicii sanguinis genus, in quo aut nullus, aut rarus est, qui non meruerit consulatum’, Jer., *Ep.* 130.3.

⁴³ For *caput urbis* = the senate, Cic., *Pro Mil.* 90 (even if the true reading is *orbis*, Prudentius’ text might have given *urbis*).

If contemporaries distinguished between Anicii, Probi, and the house of Olybrius, who are we to lump all three together indifferently as Anicii? The fact that, following the marriage between Petronius Probus and Anicia Proba, the three lines came together in their children did not mean that there were no other Anicii, Probi, and Olybrii.

In the short term the Petronian line fell into rapid decline. In the first place, not to mention the portion controlled by his widow, Probus' estates must have been divided five ways between his children (the first born was already married when he died). Second, not the least of the ways Probus himself built up his wealth and connections was by holding office after office, year after year. Even the Christian Jerome accused him of taxing Illyricum to ruin during one of his prefectures, and Ammianus memorably describes him as like a fish out of water when out of office. On surviving evidence, only the youngest of his sons held any office after their precocious consulships: Anicius Probus, who may have been *comes sacrarum largitionum* in 412–14, when still in his early twenties.⁴⁴ They no doubt continued to trade off the family prestige and exploit their father's connections, but holding office, especially high office giving access to the emperor, was a vital way of maintaining and increasing wealth, connections and power. More important still, not one (it seems) of Probus' three sons produced a son who lived to hold high office. It is impossible to overestimate the significance of failure to produce a male heir in an aristocratic family with vast estates.

The best documented of Probus' grandchildren is Demetrias, daughter of Olybrius cos. 395 and his wife Anicia Iuliana. When Jerome wrote to congratulate Demetrias on taking the veil in 414, he mentions the untimely death of her father, fortunate only in that he did not live to see the sack of Rome (*Ep.* 130.3). That is to say, Olybrius cos. 395 was dead by 410, barely thirty. *c.* 410 Augustine wrote to an obviously rich Roman widow called Italica with young children.⁴⁵ The name is rare, and it is natural to identify her as the mother of Anicia Italica,⁴⁶ wife of Valerius Faltonius Adelfius, cos. 451,⁴⁷ and to assume that she was the wife of one of the other two sons, a son who (since she was a widow) obviously died young. This son's only identifiable surviving child was a girl.

One other text is relevant here. A well-known excerpt of Olympiodorus preserved by Photius gives the names of three wealthy nobles who gave extravagant praetorian games in the first three decades of the fifth century. Here are the relevant details, as given by Marc. gr. 450 (A), the only manuscript used by Bekker for his long standard edition of Photius:⁴⁸

When Probus, the son of *Olympius*, celebrated his praetorship during the reign of the usurper John [423–5], he spent 1,200 pounds of gold. Before the capture of Rome [in fact in 402], Symmachus the orator, a senator of middling wealth, spent 2,000 pounds when his son, Symmachus, celebrated his praetorship. Maximus, one of the wealthy men, spent 4,000 pounds on his son's praetorship.

While common enough in itself,⁴⁹ the name Olympius is not found in the ranks of the higher aristocracy. Since we might expect to find the Anicii among the big spenders, most have accepted the easy correction Olybrius, identified as Olybrius cos. 395. This would give him a son called Probus who at any rate lived long enough to become

⁴⁴ R. Delmaire, *Les responsables des finances impériales au Bas-Empire romain* (1989), 182–4. Probus was *quaestor candidatus* in 395 and consul in 406. Symmachus' son Memmius Symmachus was *quaestor* in 393, when only ten.

⁴⁵ The name is found among the Ceionii: a Ceionius Italicus is attested as *consularis* of Numidia in 343 (*PLRE* i.466).

⁴⁶ These are the only two examples in *PLRE* i–ii; *PCBE* ii. i cites two more from *c.* 600.

⁴⁷ *PLRE* ii.8–9.

⁴⁸ A. Cameron, 'Probus' Praetorian Games', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 25 (1984), 193–6.

⁴⁹ *PLRE* ii.800–4 cite fifteen.

praetor. Probus would be a plausible Anician name, but the rhetoric of Olympiodorus' list implies that his Probus comes from a less rich family than Symmachus or Maximus, which hardly points to the Anicii. Marc. gr. 451 (M), first used in R. Henry's Budé edition, offers Alypius, a rare but securely attested aristocratic name that would remove the need for emendation.⁵⁰ Alypius could be confidently identified as Faltonius Probus Alypius, PVR 391 and younger brother of Olybrius cos. 379.⁵¹ Probus would also be a plausible name for a son of Alypius, 'in any case another Anician', according to Cracco Ruggini.⁵² But (as Fig. 1 illustrates) he would not have been descended from the line of Petronius Probus and Anicia Proba and so *not* actually an Anician on a strict definition. This would also suit his more modest expenditure. If this Probus was praetor in 423/5, when probably no more than twenty, he might well be the father of Valerius Faltonius Adelfius cos 451, who (as we have seen) married Anicia Italica, granddaughter of Olybrius 395. The names Faltonius and Adelfius would come from his grandfather and great-grandfather respectively, the non-Anician side of the family.

On the modern view of the Anicii as a political group rather than a regular family, the house of Faltonius Probus Alypius would be close enough to the house of Petronius Probus to count as Anician, and in most recent scholarship has indeed been so counted. But on the standard definition of a family, requiring blood descent or marriage as qualifications for membership, it was not. The most obvious defining feature of aristocracy is descent and exclusivity. It does not seem to have occurred to those who champion so generous a definition of the 'Anician group' and its 'allied' families that they are robbing this supposedly most exclusive of houses precisely of its exclusivity.

A lost inscription from Aquileia purports to be the epitaph, dated to 459, of Anicia Ulfina, daughter of Anicius Probus *v(ir) i(llu)stris* and Adeleta. An Anicius Probus whose daughter died at the age of eighteen in 459 *could* be a grandson (hardly a son) of Petronius Probus, but it is hard to believe that such a grandee would have a wife and daughter with the Germanic names Adeleta (Adelaide) and Ulfina. Even if (with *PLRE*) we correct the mother's name to Adelpia and the daughter's to Iuliana,⁵³ that still gives us no more than an Anicius Olybrius who claimed the title *vir illustris* and lived in Aquileia, where he buried his eighteen-year-old daughter. Settipani identifies this Probus with Olympiodorus' praetor Probus, but of course that presupposes accepting the emendation Olybrius rather than the transmitted Alypius.

The only authority for this epitaph is the notorious forger Girolamo Asquini, and many (from Mommsen on) have dismissed it as a modern forgery.⁵⁴ One might add that the old aristocracy affected the archaizing style *v(ir) cl(arissimus) et in(lu)stris* in dedications rather than the straightforward *v(ir) i(n)lustris*, a nicety of protocol that an early nineteenth-century forger is unlikely to have known.⁵⁵ On the other hand, why would a forger cast doubt on his 'find' by choosing not one but two such obviously non-Roman names? Anicii are found in the epigraphy of Aquileia, evidently at a lower social level (an Anicia Glucera).⁵⁶ If the dedication is authentic, this Anicius Probus, despite his title, must have

⁵⁰ Since A and M are entirely independent of each other, Alypius is not to be seen as a correction of A's Olympius.

⁵¹ 423/5 would be late in the day for Alypius to have a son in his late teens/early twenties, but there is always the possibility of a second marriage. Note too that Probus is said to have given his own games, whereas in both the other cases the father is named as the provider of the games. Presumably his father was dead.

⁵² Cracco Ruggini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1988), 83 n. 36.

⁵³ So C. Sotinel, *Identité civique et christianisme: Aquilée du III^e au VI^e siècle* (2005), 278–9, with full bibliography.

⁵⁴ S. Panciera, *Un falsario del primo ottocento, Girolamo Asquini, e l'epigrafia antica delle Venezie* (1970), 52–67 (accepting authenticity); M. P. Billanovich, 'Il falso epitafio aquileiese di Anicia Ulfina', *Rendiconti dell'Istituto Lombardo* 108 (1974), 530–50 (against).

⁵⁵ A. Cameron, 'Flavius: a nicety of protocol', *Latomus* 47 (1988), 26–33, at 32–3.

⁵⁶ *CIL* v.1071 = *CLE* 66; A. Calderini, *Aquileia Romana: ricerche di storia e di epigrafia* (1930), 450–1. The claim that the Aquileian martyrs Cantia, Cantianus and Cantianilla were 'de genere Aniciorum', though

been a poor relation — or no relation. Either way, it would be rash to use it to fill in gaps in the Anicii of Rome.

Olympiodorus' Maximus is generally identified as the father of Petronius Maximus cos. 433, 443 and short-lived emperor in 455.⁵⁷ Solely on the basis of the name Petronius, most recent historians simply assume that Petronius Maximus was an Anician, indeed, given his obvious importance, 'il "numero uno" della famiglia'.⁵⁸ But Maximus is not known as an Anician name until a century later with Fl. Maximus cos. 523. Many rely on a passage of Procopius that identifies this Maximus as a descendant of Petronius Maximus, but Cassiodorus, when praising his Anician lineage, does not mention Petronius Maximus.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the same Procopius elsewhere identifies Maximus 523 as a descendant of the usurper Magnus Maximus.⁶⁰ It is in any case pure assumption that the son of Olympiodorus' Maximus was himself called Maximus.⁶¹ If he was not, then any possibility of a link with Petronius Maximus vanishes.

Nor does the fact that Petronius Maximus gave his own son the equally un-Anician name Palladius support the assumption that he saw himself as leader of the Anicii. Zecchini insists that 'the main branch of the Petronii was fused with the Anicii', and so a Petronius Maximus had to be an Anician. But it is not as if Petronius Probus was the last of the Petronii. A Petronius Claudius is attested as proconsul of Africa in 368/70,⁶² an office practically monopolized by the aristocracy.⁶³ Given that Petronius Probus' full name was Sex. *Claudius* Petronius Probus and that he was praetorian prefect at the time, it is likely that this Petronius Claudius was a kinsman, perhaps a younger brother profiting from his elder brother's patronage. There is also Probinus proconsul of Africa in 397 (assuming that he is not the consul of 395), perhaps a son of Petronius Claudius. If either man lived long enough to marry and have sons, that would be enough to explain non-Anician fifth-century Petronii. Once again, most moderns would be tempted to count a brother or nephew of Petronius Probus as an Anician. But not by blood, and the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of such a brother would have been increasingly remote kin of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren of Petronius Probus. If we are going to count second and third cousins as Anicii, the total would soon reach the hundreds.

Zecchini also argues that only the support of the 'main branch' of the Anicii could explain Petronius Maximus' extraordinary career (four prefectures and two consulates).⁶⁴ But family support was not the way anyone won high office at this period. Powerful patrons at court helped, but we have already seen that only one core member of the Petronian branch of the Anicii (very briefly) held office at court in the early decades of the fifth century (Anicius Probus in 412–14). More important, the claim that Maximus descended from the 'main branch' of the Anicii admits of an almost mathematical refutation.

undoubtedly false, at any rate implies the presence of Anicii in Aquileia: see now R. Lizzi, 'Gli Anicii, i Canziani e la *Historia Augusta*', *Hist. Aug. Coll. Bambergensis* (2007), 279–94; Sotinel, *op. cit.* (n. 53), 278–80.

⁵⁷ Olympiodorus' Roman visit is usually dated to 424/25, in which case his Maximus must have been praetor some time between (say) 410 and 425, and so born between 390 and 405.

⁵⁸ Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1983), 251.

⁵⁹ As noted by T. Hodgkin, *The Letters of Cassiodorus* (1886), 424 n. 2.

⁶⁰ Settipani, *Continuité gentilice*, 381.

⁶¹ Since Olympiodorus' first two examples are listed in reverse chronological sequence (423–5 and 402), it is reasonable to assume that the third is earlier than 402, in which case a much earlier Maximus might be considered, such as Valerius Maximus PVR 361–62.

⁶² PLRE i.208; A. Chastagnol, *L'Italie et l'Afrique au Bas-Empire* (1987), 340.

⁶³ For a list of proconsuls between 337 and 392, T. D. Barnes, 'Proconsuls of Africa, 337–392', *Phoenix* 39 (1985), 144–53.

⁶⁴ Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1980), 73.

Insufficient attention has been paid to the dedication that describes his ‘a proavis atabis-que) nobilitas’ (*ILS* 809). While we need not take too seriously vague claims of consular ancestors made by hagiographers, eager to stress their heroes’ renunciation of worldly rank,⁶⁵ precise claims by contemporary writers and dedications are another matter. We have already analysed the case of Anicius Bassus, and will encounter several more in the course of this investigation. If Petronius Maximus could have claimed a consular father or even grandfather, he surely would have. As it is, he claims no more immediate consular forbear than a great-grandfather (*proavus*). He is known to have been born *c.* 396,⁶⁶ which makes it extremely unlikely that he could have been a son of either of the teenage Anician consuls of 395. But if he had been, he would then have been able to claim a consular father and grandfather, which he did not. If his father had married Probus’ daughter Anicia Proba,⁶⁷ he would still have been able to claim a consular grandfather, if on the female side. If his mother had married one of the two sons of Olybrius *cos.* 379, he would also have had a consular grandfather — but not great-grandfather. On chronological grounds a grandson or granddaughter of Olybrius *cos.* 379 would make a better link. That would give him a consular great-grandfather — but not great-great-grandfather. Hardly the ‘main line’ of the Anicii in any case.

Nor does descent from the Anicii Bassi provide the necessary consular ancestors. If Maximus’ father had been Bassus PVR 382 (or married Bassus’ daughter), that would have given him a consular grandfather as well as great-grandfather. Furthermore, birth *c.* 396 would have been rather late for such a match, given that Bassus PVR 382 had a son who was consul in 408. If his father (or father-in-law) had been Bassus *cos.* 408, he would have had a consular father. It is difficult to see any way Petronius Maximus could be a direct descendant of any of the three identifiable branches of the Anicii at the end of the fourth century.

In all probability not one of Olympiodorus’ three extravagant praetors was an Anician. And if a representative of the Anicii was not among the top three most conspicuous recent spenders known to Olympiodorus, the consequence is serious for the standing of the Petronian line of the family in the early decades of the fifth century. And if Petronius Maximus was not an Anician, the consequences are devastating. For his seizure of the purple in 455 is held to be the clearest proof of the power of a family that could engineer such a coup. But if it was a noble from *another* family that seized the throne, this proof would vanish. Some family we cannot even identify produced the most powerful private citizen of the age.

Only one likely direct male descendant of Petronius Probus can be identified: the Anicius Olybrius who ended his days as emperor of the West in 472. His own names and the names of his famous daughter, Anicia Iuliana, rebuilder of the recently excavated church of St Polyeuctus in Constantinople,⁶⁸ might suggest that he was Demetrias’ brother, son of Olybrius *cos.* 395 and the elder Anicia Iuliana. But Demetrias was born in the late 390s, and (according to Jerome) was on the point of marriage when she chose virginity in 414.⁶⁹ If Anicius Olybrius was her brother, he too would presumably have been born a little before or after 400. But since nothing is heard of him till *c.* 454 and his daughter lived till 527/28,⁷⁰ we must surely posit (at least) one intervening generation. We know

⁶⁵ e. g. ‘praetermitto ... usque ad consulatus provectam familiae suae nobilitatem’, Hilarius, *Vita Honorati* 4.2. For even more fanciful claims to mythological ancestors, see below.

⁶⁶ *PLRE* ii.749.

⁶⁷ If born *c.* 396, Maximus could not have been born to any of the daughters of Probus’ sons, given that the two eldest were still teenagers in 395.

⁶⁸ R. M. Harrison, *Temple for Byzantium: the Discovery and Excavation of Anicia Juliana’s Palace-Church in Istanbul* (1989).

⁶⁹ *PCBE* ii.1.544–5.

⁷⁰ *PLRE* ii.635–6.

from Augustine, who dedicated his *De bono viduitatis* to the elder Anicia Iuliana in 414, that she had more than one child, at least one of them male ('tu ... filios habes').⁷¹ Demetrias may have had a brother who lived long enough to marry and sire a son, but not long enough to win high office (at any rate, no such office-holder is on record). Given the fragility of imperial rule in the West and the importance of continuity, it is perhaps unlikely that Anicius Olybrius would have been proclaimed Western emperor in his seventies.

Petronius Probus' three sons were a disappointment. Not only did they do nothing and die young. They did not produce sons of their own, at any rate no sons who lived to hold the highest offices of state and advance the family fortunes.

V THE ACILII GLABRIONES

Bassus' homonymous sons were consuls in 408 and 431. Like all three of Probus' sons, Bassus cos. 408 won his consulate without (it seems) having held any other office — a hallmark of the highest nobility. But after 431 there are no more Anicii Bassi. Like the Petronian line, the Bassan line (if it did not die out altogether) must have passed down on the female side. The fact that the distinctive Auchenius does not appear among the names of the great Roman families of the late fifth and early sixth centuries strongly suggests that it died out.

In the absence of male issue, much of the Petronian family wealth must have passed through the female side. While there was evidently a dearth of male Anicians in the main lines, there are bound to have been a few daughters available for marriage to suitable outsiders. The first identifiable beneficiary is Acilius Glabrio Sibidius, whose full name is known from a dedication to him by his son, *Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus*, cos. 438, whose distinguished career ran from the 420s to the 440s.⁷² The lack of Anician names in the father and presence in the son suggests that Sibidius married an Anicia and advertised the union in the standard way in his son's nomenclature. On this basis Sibidius, Faustus and their descendants are regularly identified, in view of their undoubted importance, as leaders of the 'Anician group' down into the sixth century.

Let us take a closer look at Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus. With a consulship on top of three urban and two praetorian prefectures, he and Petronius Maximus were undoubtedly the two most distinguished men of the age, on the usual view twin leaders of the Anicii at the height of their power. According to one critic, Faustus 'represents the main line of the Anicii'.⁷³ But his distinction and influence need not derive from his father's Anician connection alone. Seen over the *longue durée*, the fame of the Acilii Glabrones far outshone that of the Anicii, relative parvenus. In 400 it was barely one hundred years since the first Anician ordinary consul, Anicius Faustus cos. 298. The Acilii Glabrones could boast a consul as far back as 191 B.C.⁷⁴ Herodian describes M' Acilius Glabrio cos. II A.D. 186, son of M' Acilius Glabrio cos. 152, as 'the most nobly born of the patricians, since he traced his descent from Aeneas son of Aphrodite and Anchises'. In 192 he turned down Pertinax's offer of the throne.⁷⁵ That any family should reproduce itself continuously in a direct line for seven hundred years is (of course) incredible, and it is likely that a few key links in the chain were forged on the female side, if not

⁷¹ Aug., *De bono vid.* 8.11. Augustine makes it clear that Iuliana only married once.

⁷² PLRE ii.452-4; Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 286-9.

⁷³ B. L. Twyman, 'Aetius and the aristocracy', *Historia* 19 (1970), 480-503, at 484.

⁷⁴ M. Dondin-Payre, *Exercice du pouvoir et continuité gentilice: les Acilii Glabrones* (1993).

⁷⁵ Herodian 2.3.4; PIR² A.59-73 with stemma on p. 12; M. T. W. Arnheim, *The Senatorial Aristocracy in the Later Roman Empire* (1972), 68-9, 107-9; generally, R. Syme, 'An eccentric patrician', *Roman Papers* iii (1984), 1316-36.

outright forged. There is a particularly embarrassing gap of more than a century between M. Acilius Glabrio cos. 256 and Sibidius.⁷⁶

But whether or not Sibidius was a genuine lineal descendant of the consul of 256, he ‘needed only’, as Corey Brennan put it, ‘to be genuine (or at least rich) enough to impress contemporaries’, which he evidently did.⁷⁷ A man who could boast such a lineage may have looked on an Anician marriage like an impoverished English duke a century ago seeking an American heiress to restore the stately home and repair the family fortune. He is not likely to have turned his back on more than seven hundred years of his own glorious family history and simply submerged himself into this hypothesized Anician collective. He will surely have seen himself as reviving the fortunes of the Acilii Glabrones by a good marriage.

Who did Sibidius marry? The first of his son’s three urban prefectures fell between 421 and 423,⁷⁸ implying a date of birth no later than c. 390, and perhaps a year or two earlier. This is much too early for Sibidius to have married either Anicia Proba, the daughter of Petronius Probus,⁷⁹ born no earlier than the mid-380s; or a daughter of Anicius Auchenius Bassus, born c. 355 and so unlikely to have married before c. 380. One possibility is a granddaughter of Olybrius cos. 379. If so, once again not the main Anician line.

Though no doubt a Christian, instead of building churches like Probus’ female descendants, Sibidius built a family forum, between the Piazza Navona and the Tiber.⁸⁰ His son ‘adorned’ this forum, and set up (at least) three statues there to commemorate three members of his family: his father, Sibidius; his father-in-law, Tarrutenius Maximilianus, *consularis* of Picenum and *vicarius* of Rome; and a ‘maternal great-grandfather’ (*proavo suo ma[terno]*) whose name is unfortunately lost. A maternal great-grandfather would be his Anician mother’s grandfather. If Petronius Probus and Anicius Bassus are excluded, possibly Olybrius 379, not himself an Anician.

But whoever Anicius Faustus’ mother was, the key fact is that her grandfather is not described as *Faustus*’ great-grandfather (*proavo suo*), but as his *mother’s* grandfather. At Rome a man’s nobility was determined by his agnatic ancestors, his forbears on the male side.⁸¹ While it was a grand thing to be ‘noble on both sides’, like Galba’s designated heir Piso Licinianus,⁸² nobility on the mother’s side alone never had the same weight as nobility passed down from father to son. Badel cites the case of Petronius Probus as an illustration of the ‘weakening’ of the traditional Roman view, but his is not a case of a ‘new’ man claiming nobility by marrying a noble wife. As a consul who was the son and grandson of consuls, by any standard Probus was impeccably noble in his own right. So far as we know he never claimed to be an Anician himself. He did not need to. What does appear to be an innovation is the fact that he chose to emphasize his wife’s family in the heritage of his five children, giving them all the name Anicius. In

⁷⁶ For Sibidius’ career, *PLRE* i.838–9. The gap is partly filled by an otherwise unidentifiable Acilius Glabrio, named with a dozen other senators at the beginning of the fourth century, who donated money for the construction of a building in Rome (*CIL* vi.37118, re-edited with full commentary in *CIL* vi.8.3 (2000), pp. 4819–20).

⁷⁷ T. C. Brennan, ‘Gentilician permanence and strategy over seven centuries?’, reviewing Dondin-Payre, op. cit. (n. 74), in *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 9 (1996), 335–8.

⁷⁸ Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 286–9.

⁷⁹ As assumed by Chastagnol, *Fastes* and by Settapani, *Continuité gentilice*, 194.

⁸⁰ For what is known of this forum, see R. E. A. Palmer, *Studies of the Northern Campus Martius in Ancient Rome*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 80.2 (1990), 47–50; Matthews, *Western Aristocracies*, 356–7; H. Niquet, *Monumenta virtutum titulique: Senatorische Selbstdarstellung im spätantiken Rom im Spiegel der epigraphischen Denkmäler* (2000), 253–9; for the dedication, see now *CIL* vi.8.3 (2000), pp. 5094–5.

⁸¹ C. Badel, *La noblesse de l’empire romain: les masques et la vertu* (2005), 140–3.

⁸² ‘nobilis utrimque’, Tac., *Hist.* 1.14.11, with Chilver’s commentary; Badel, op. cit. (n. 81), 141.

view of the constant emphasis in our sources on the wealth and greed of the Anicii, the explanation may be the predominantly Anician ownership of the estates controlled by Probus and his father-in-law, Olybrius cos. 379.

By giving his Anician great-grandfather the limiting epithet 'maternal', Anicius Faustus clearly implied that his primary forbears were the Acilii Glabrones. He remained first and foremost an Acilius Glabrio rather than an Anicius. The names of his three known descendants tell the same story: Anicius Acilius Aginantius Faustus cos. 483, Rufius Achilius Maecius Placidus cos. 481, and Rufius Acilius Sividius cos. 488. Since Faustus 438 was born no later than c. 390 and Faustus 483 held a second urban prefecture as late as c. 503, these men must be his grandsons rather than sons. They are probably cousins rather than brothers, the diversity of their names reflecting the fact that Faustus 438 had at least two sons who married into different families. Only one of them bears the name Anicius, while all three kept the Acilius. Faustus 483 has his grandfather's Faustus as diacritical, Sividius 488 his great-grandfather's Sibidius, neither of them Anician names. To judge from their nomenclature, this generation rated their Acilian above their Anician heritage, while also priding themselves on other connections. Brunt similarly objected to the theory of Republican factions that it was 'implausible that clans or families no less proud of their lineage ever accepted the leadership of Fabii, Metelli, etc.'⁸³

VI THE CORVINI

Another man regularly identified as a prominent Anician is Anicius Probus Faustus cos. 490. Given the combination of Anicius and Probus in his nomenclature, on this basis alone it is tempting to identify him as a direct descendant in the main Anician line, 'a senior member of the ... clan'.⁸⁴ Actually we are singularly well informed about his immediate family tree (Fig. 3). His father was Gennadius Avienus cos. 450, and Anicius Probus Faustus called his own sons Rufius Magnus Faustus Avienus and Ennodius Messala, consuls in 502 and 506 respectively; and the younger Avienus called his son, consul in 530, Rufius Gennadius Probus Orestes. Not one exclusively Anician name among them.⁸⁵ Gennadius Avienus no doubt married an Anician heiress, and, like Sibidius, advertised the connection in one of his son's names. Probus Faustus was no doubt proud of his Anician blood. But (as in the case of Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus) this does not seem to have been a connection his descendants chose to give priority.

In this case our most illuminating source is a letter of Sidonius, characterizing in some detail Gennadius Avienus and Caecina Decius Basilius cos. 463, the two most powerful men in Rome at the time of his visit in 467:

I debated ... which senators would have the influence to aid my hopes. There was really little hesitation about this, for there were very few whose claims as possible champions were worth weighing. Certainly there were many in the senate blessed with wealth and exalted in lineage (*opibus culti genere sublimes*) ... but (with all due respect to the rest) two consulars of the highest distinction, Gennadius Avienus and Caecina Basilius, stood out above their peers ... If we compare the two men, their characters, though both extraordinary, are nevertheless different ... When either of them happened to go out of doors, he was encircled by a swarming mass of clients who walked before him, after him, or at his side ... Avienus, so far

⁸³ Brunt, *op. cit.* (n. 7), 445.

⁸⁴ A. Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West, 411–533* (2003), 149.

⁸⁵ As we shall see, Probus/Proba were not exclusively Anician names.

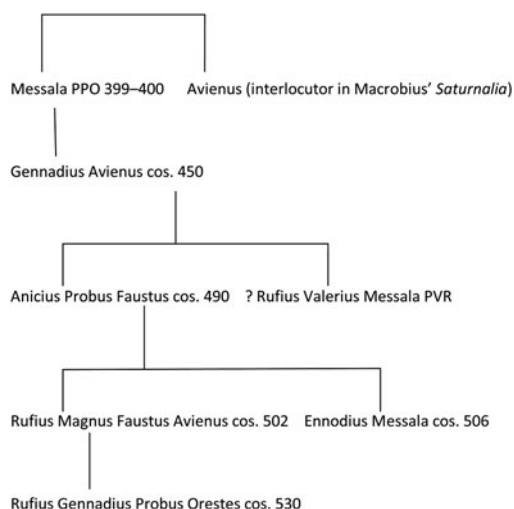


FIG. 3. The Corvini.

as his influence extended, exerted himself in promoting his sons, sons-in-law, and cousins, and as he was always busy with candidates from his own family, he was less helpful in meeting the wants of place-seekers outside his circle ... Such favours as Avienus obtained for his relatives when in office, Basilius bestowed on outsiders even when out of office (*Ep.* 1.9.2-4).

Not a word about the Anicii, an omission the more striking in that Sidonius directly names the families of which Basilius and Avienus were the current patriarchs, the Decii and Corvini respectively. In modern Anician mythology, the Decii were their great rivals. If Avienus was a doyen of the Anicii,⁸⁶ why does a well-informed contemporary observer say he was the head of a quite different family? One scholar simply defines the Corvini as an 'Anician house', without further explanation.⁸⁷ On a more natural interpretation of the passage, Sidonius was including the Anicii of this date under the heading 'those blessed with wealth and exalted in lineage' but not worth considering as promising sponsors for an ambitious young man.

The fact that one of Gennadius Avienus' grandsons was called Messala suggests that the Corvini claimed descent from Messala Corvinus cos. 31.⁸⁸ Nothing is known about Avienus' father, but in Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (1.6.26), written in the 430s but with a dramatic date of 382, when explaining how aristocratic cognomina were passed down from generation to generation in the great families, the host Praetextatus says to his fellow noble Avienus: 'So too your own Messala, who derives his name from the cognomen won by Valerius Maximus when he captured the famous city of Messina in Sicily.' This ancestor must be M' Valerius Maximus Messala cos. 263 B.C. As for 'your Messala', presumably Messala PPO of Italy in 399-400, whom Rutilius Namatianus even more ambitiously claimed to descend from Valerius Publicola cos. 509 B.C.⁸⁹ Messala and Avienus (represented as a young man at Macrobius' dramatic date in 382 but dead by the 430s) were no doubt brothers.⁹⁰ Brothers called Messala and Avienus

⁸⁶ So Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1981), 126.

⁸⁷ S. J. B. Barnish, 'Transformation and survival in the western senatorial aristocracy, ca 400-700', *Papers of the British School at Rome* 56 (1988), 120-55, at 134.

⁸⁸ Ch. 15 and stemma 9 in R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (1986).

⁸⁹ *De Red.* 1.267-72.

⁹⁰ Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 241-2.

would make appropriately named forbears for Gennadius Avienus and his line.⁹¹ A fifth-century urban prefect called Rufius Valerius Messala is also presumably related.⁹² Like the Acilii Glabrones (though probably with less justification), the Corvini were laying claim to a lineage that reached back centuries before the Anicii.

It is instructive to consider the terms in which Sidonius describes, as an eyewitness, the patronage exercised by the two great patriarchs of his day. No hint of the ‘policies’ that are supposed to have divided the Anicii and Decii down the decades (pro- or anti-eastern, pro- or anti-barbarian), policies for which there is not a scrap of textual evidence at any period. What Sidonius noticed, after careful (self-interested) observation, was that Gennadius Avienus limited his patronage to his ‘sons, sons-in-law and cousins’, while Caecina Decius was also helpful to ‘place-seekers outside his circle’. There is no suggestion of rivalry between the families, except in so far as each patriarch was trying to further the interests of his own protégés. Since no one held office for long, there were always enough to go around. For example, we know the names of no fewer than seventy-two urban prefects between 425 and 525, five between 440 and 445 – statistics the more impressive given that we have nothing like a complete list for the period. Avienus’ protégés must have been Corvini and in-laws, while Basilius did not restrict himself to Decii alone, as illustrated by the fact that he secured a city prefecture for Sidonius.

The line of Basilius cos. 463 virtually monopolized the consulship for four generations (Fig. 4). We have the full names of five of his twelve consular descendants, which reveal the now familiar mixture of recurring family names (Caecina, Decius and Basilius) together with new names, reflecting other connections considered important, some inevitably on the female side. The most intriguing is his great-great-grandson, consul in 541 (the last citizen consul ever appointed), Anicius Faustus Albinus Basilius.⁹³ Have even the Decii now become Anicii?⁹⁴

Momigliano thought it significant that ‘an Anicius was chosen as consul by Justinian in 541’.⁹⁵ Basilius cos. 541’s mother was no doubt an Anicia (not necessarily from a main branch of the family), and he may well have been proud of his in-laws, but a glance at Fig. 4 will show that his peers must have seen him as the Decian patriarch of his generation, adding to an accumulation of consulships not seen in one family since the Metelli won fifteen between 143 and 52 B.C. The aristocracy was much reduced in size by the sixth century, fewer great families offering suitable brides for the sons of their peers (further reduced by the tendency of rich heiresses to embrace virginity and widows to avoid remarriage at this period). The situation was exacerbated by the fact that Basilius cos. 463 and his eldest son Basilius cos. 480 had three and four sons respectively, all of whom, luckier than the Anicii, lived long enough to reach the consulate and have sons of their own. Decian males needed a lot of aristocratic heiresses. Despite the family decline, Anician daughters must still have come with enticing dowries, and by the late fifth century the entire aristocracy must have been linked by marriage one way or another to both Decii and Anicii. Basilius 541 can hardly have been the first Decius to have an Anician mother, and it should be noted that the majority of his names are Decian. By the sixth century the Anicii had

⁹¹ For much more ambitious, but highly speculative, family trees, Settipani, *Continuité gentile*, 161, 162, 164 and 165.

⁹² *PLRE* ii.761; S. Orlandi, *Epigrafia anfiteatrale dell’Occidente Romano* VI (2004), 495–6, no. 111. Purely as a conjecture, I have inserted him into the family tree as a second son of Gennadius Avienus; this would explain the Rufius in the next two generations.

⁹³ The interval between Albinus cos. 493 and Basilius cos. 541 is surely too large for a single generation.

⁹⁴ The entry of Faustus and Avienus into the Decian line among the sons of Basilius cos. 480 (Fig. 3) suggests a marriage link with the Corvini.

⁹⁵ A. Momigliano, ‘Cassiodorus and Italian culture of his time’, *Proceedings of the British Academy* 41 (1955), 207–45 = *Secondo Contributo alla storia degli studi classici* (1960), 191–229, at 247.

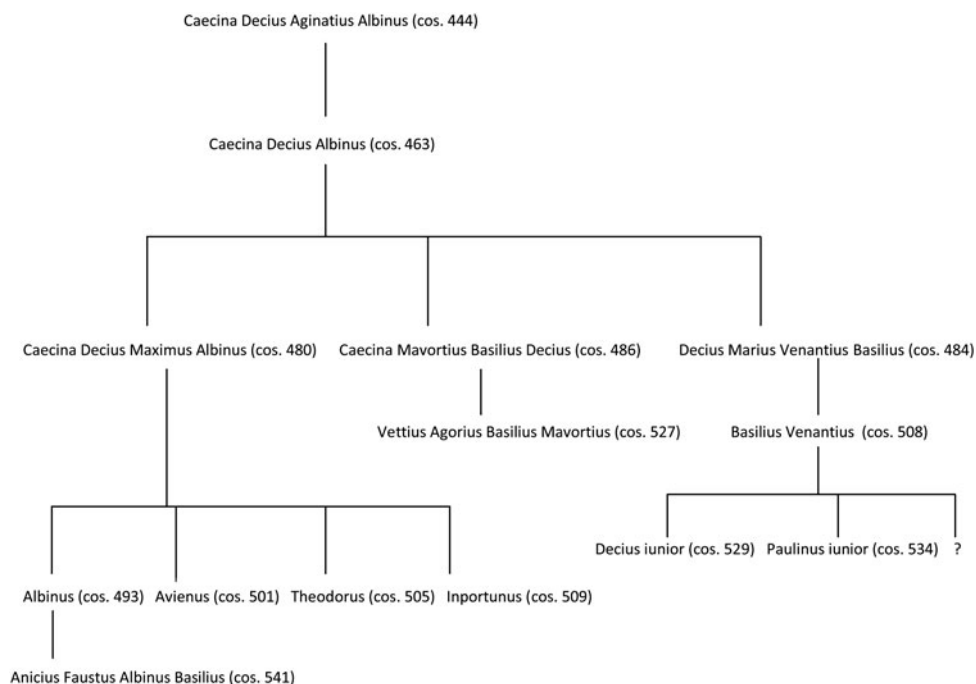


FIG. 4. The Decii.

transferred most of their wealth to the East, and Justinian may have been impressed by the familiar Anicius in Basilius' nomenclature. But he chose Basilius for what was to prove the last citizen consulship less because he was an Anician than because he was the most distinguished surviving noble left in a Rome whence most had long since fled.

VII THE SYMMACHI

At the time of Sidonius' visit (467) the Anicii were at best the third most powerful family in Rome — perhaps actually the fourth, if we take the Symmachi into consideration. It has often been asserted that the Anicii 'merged' with the Symmachi. Llewellyn writes of 'the Anicii and the related Symmachi', as though the Symmachi were only important because of their Anician connection.⁹⁶ But the Symmachi were an immensely wealthy and distinguished family in their own right, with ordinary consulships in all but one generation between 330 and 522, and a suffect consulship in the late third century.⁹⁷

Zecchini describes Aurelius Memmius Symmachus cos. 485 as 'an Anician son' of Symmachus cos. 446, and in a telling slip Cracco Ruggini cites him as Q. *Anicius* Memmius Symmachus.⁹⁸ The fact is that his names proclaim Symmachus cos. 485 a

⁹⁶ P. Llewellyn, *Rome in the Dark Ages* (1970), 28; B. Lançon, *Rome dans l'Antiquité tardive* (1995), 85.

⁹⁷ The one exception is Q. Fabius Memmius Symmachus, son of Symmachus cos. 391. Since nothing is known of his career after his praetorship in 402, he may have died young — though not so young that he did not marry and produce a son, the consul of 446. L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus, the father of Symmachus 391, was consul designate for 367 when he died. For the antiquity of the Symmachi, see A. Cameron, 'The antiquity of the Symmachi', *Historia* 48 (1999), 477–505.

⁹⁸ Cracco Ruggini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1981), 77.

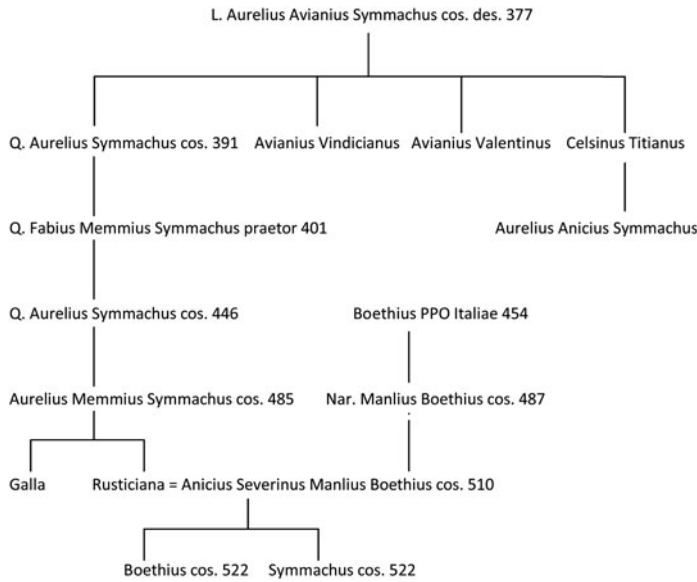


FIG. 5. The Symmachi and the Boethii.

direct descendant of Q. *Aurelius* Symmachus cos. 391, through his son, Q. Fabius *Memmius* Symmachus, praetor 402.⁹⁹

Yet according to Settipani, ‘at the beginning of the fifth century, the Symmachi ... began to use the family name (*gentilice*) Anicius’.¹⁰⁰ This is a misleading formulation. The formula ‘use the family name’ implies that the Symmachi were formally declaring themselves an Anician subsidiary. But by the late fourth century the concept of family name is hard to pin down. Noble nomenclature was no longer a simple matter of praenomen, family name and cognomen. In Republican times, the presence of certain names (Aemilii, Licinii, Corneli) was an automatic pointer to membership of certain families, with the different branches distinguished by cognomina (Aemilii Lepidi, Licinii Crassi, Corneli Scipiones). Those who identify *Anicius* Acilius Glabrio Faustus, *Anicius* Probus Faustus, *Anicius* Acilius Aginantius Faustus, and *Anicius* Faustus Albinus Basilius straightforwardly as Anicians are in effect assuming that the same principles still applied. Anyone styled Anicius, regardless of his other names, could automatically be counted a core member of the ‘Anician group’.

But in the course of the fourth century the practice of name-giving in the aristocracy changed radically. Some changes from traditional practice are already obvious in the families of Petronius Probus and Olybrius 379, notably the emphasis on descent on the female side. Remarkably enough, instead of being given names handed down over the generations in the male line, Petronius Probus’ eldest surviving son,¹⁰¹ Anicius Hermogenianus Olybrius cos. 395, got all three of his names from his mother’s family. Another innovation is that, unlike the third-century and Constantinian Anicii, the old praenomina disappear¹⁰² and in their stead we find Anicius, the ‘family name’, in first

⁹⁹ The Memmius came into the family from Symmachus cos. 391’s father-in-law Memmius Vitrasius Orfitus.

¹⁰⁰ Settipani, *Continuité gentilice*, 412.

¹⁰¹ For a guess about the names of the eldest, see n. 32 above.

¹⁰² The Symmachi were unusual in continuing to use the traditional praenomina down into at least the early fifth century: Cameron, *op. cit.* (n. 97), 485–7.

place. One or two other families, the Macrobiani for example, followed this unusual custom of placing the family name first.¹⁰³ In the Symmachi, the family name always came last. In the Decii, apparently in any position: for example, in first, second and fourth place in the case of the three sons of Basilius 463 (Fig. 4).

The ‘family name’ of the Symmachi may once have been Avianius,¹⁰⁴ but by the late third century it had become Symmachus, though only (it seems) for the eldest son. Q. Aurelius Symmachus cos. 391 was the eldest son of L. Aur. Avianius Symmachus. He had three younger brothers, Celsinus Titianus, Avianius Vindicianus and Avianus Valentinus.¹⁰⁵ Titianus lived long enough to be vicar of Africa and Vindicianus and Valentinus to be governors of Campania, but all three were dead by 380.¹⁰⁶ The names Titianus, Vindicianus and Valentinus signalled various marriage connections, a new development in the aristocracy, reflected (for example) in the names of successive generations of the Decii (Fig. 4). Anyone marrying an Anician daughter would feel entitled to treat the Anician name no differently from the name of any other family he married into when naming his children. It did not mean that he thought of himself as Anician first and anything else a distant second — or indeed that he was so considered by other Anicii. The names Titianus, Vindicianus and Valentinus do not reappear in later generations of the Symmachi, though things might have been different if Symmachus cos. 391 had died young and one of his brothers had survived to become the family patriarch.

Settipani’s claim that the Symmachi adopted the ‘gentilice’ Anicius is based on Aurelius Anicius Symmachus, PVR in 418–20. But since we know from the abundant evidence of his correspondence that Symmachus cos. 391 had only one son, Q. Fabius Memmius Symmachus (praetor 401), Aurelius Anicius Symmachus must have been a *nephew* of Symmachus cos. 391, son of one of his three brothers and an otherwise unidentifiable Anicia.¹⁰⁷ For some, this is enough to place all future generations of Symmachi in the Anician camp. For example, one of the ‘proofs’ that the Anicii supported Aetius is held to be the fact that a Symmachus shared the consulate for 446 with Aetius.

But there is no trace of any Anician name in the main line of the Symmachi, which descends directly on the male side from 330 to 485.¹⁰⁸ Symmachus cos. 391 was close to Titianus, and included a batch of letters to him in Book 1 of his published correspondence. But for whatever reason he did not include any letters to Vindicianus or Valentinus, nor to Anicius Symmachus. Whether or not he resented the Anician connection that produced Anicius Symmachus, it is surely significant that so devoted a family man as Symmachus never even mentioned, much less addressed his nephew in his correspondence, so abundant precisely in the last decade of his life, when the young man was taking the first steps in a career that led to the proconsulship of Africa in 415 and prefecture of Rome in 418–20. There is no indication that any of the later Symmachi descend from Aurelius Anicius Symmachus rather than Symmachus cos. 391.

Symmachus cos. 485 had daughters called Rusticiana and Galla, traditional family names. Rusticiana was the name of the wife of Symmachus cos. 391 and Galla the name of the wife of Memmius Symmachus (in another telling slip Cracco Ruggini gives the

¹⁰³ Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 238.

¹⁰⁴ Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 487.

¹⁰⁵ Chastagnol, *Fastes*, 160, 218; M. R. Salzman and M. Roberts, *The Letters of Symmachus: Book I* (2011), xix–xx.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Tertius hic mihi de optimis fratribus luctus est’, Symm., *Ep.* 3.6.2, Titianus’ death in 380. Presumably all three had one other name as well, unfortunately unknown.

¹⁰⁷ Note too that his father gave him a majority of Symmachian names, and that Anicius stands in second place, not, as in almost all other known bearers of the name, in first place.

¹⁰⁸ Symmachus cos. 522 is the son of Boethius and a daughter of Symmachus cos. 485. Avianus Symmachus the father of Symmachus cos. 391 died consul designate in 377.

younger Rusticana the style *Anicia* Rusticana). Down the generations all these Symmachi must have married girls from other families, but, repudiating their fourth-century practice, the fifth-century Symmachi returned to the older style of confining themselves to names in the direct male line rather than marriage connections.

One name that has been made to bear more weight than it can stand is a supposed third daughter of Symmachus cos. 485 called Proba, supposedly an Anician name and so proof of a valued Anician connection. But quite apart from the fact that Proba is not an exclusively Anician name, the text on which this house of cards rests has been misread. Fulgentius of Ruspe, in a letter to a widowed nun called Galla, describes her as having a father, grandfather, father-in-law and husband who were all consuls (*avo, patre, socero, marito consulibus*).¹⁰⁹ Gregory the Great describes a noble nun called Galla who was the widowed daughter of Symmachus the consul and patrician.¹¹⁰ Since the father of Symmachus cos. 485 was, like him, a consul, there can be no doubt that Gregory and Fulgentius are referring to the same Galla, daughter of Symmachus cos. 485 and granddaughter of Symmachus cos. 446. Galla's unnamed husband must have been consul between about 495 and 510, son of a man who had also been consul. No known Anician fits the bill, but at least seven western consuls during this period were Decii or Corvini, and every one had a consular father.

On the very same page Fulgentius refers to Galla's *sister* Proba, also a nun, as being 'avis atavisque nata consulibus'. The standard assumption is that, being Galla's sister, Proba too was a daughter of Symmachus cos. 485. But Proba's consular forebears are explicitly limited to grandfathers and *atavi* (more remote ancestors). If she too had been the daughter of a consul, why would the obviously well-informed and sycophantic Fulgentius say only granddaughter? When his language about Galla's forbears is so precise,¹¹¹ we are bound to accept that he is similarly precise only a few lines later about Proba's. Obviously Fulgentius is characterizing them as *spiritual*, not biological sisters. Proba was *not* a daughter of Symmachus cos. 485.

The fifth- and sixth-century Symmachi may well have enjoyed close relations with one or another of the various branches of the Anicii, but why would descendants in the main line of so rich, powerful and long-established a family have thought of themselves as anything but Symmachi?

VIII BOETHIUS

That leaves the philosopher Boethius, in full Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, son of the western consul of 487, whose full names are given on his consular diptych as Nar. Manlius Boethius.¹¹² Presumably Boethius père married an Anicia, once again often assumed to place all future (and even past) Boethii in the Anician camp. For example, the fact that the philosopher's *grandfather*, praetorian prefect in 454, is said to have been a friend of Aetius and was killed with him is taken to confirm Anician support of Aetius. But there is no reason to believe that it was this Boethius who contracted the marriage that resulted in his philosopher grandson being given the name Anicius. Many refer to the philosopher straightforwardly as 'an Anician',¹¹³ but if the Anicius in his nomenclature is so significant, what of the Severinus? The usually cautious Momigliano was attracted by

¹⁰⁹ *Ep. II ad Gallam viduam* 31 (CC 91.208).

¹¹⁰ Greg., *Dial.* 4.14.1 (SC 265, p. 55).

¹¹¹ Note that he does not give Galla a consular *proavus*, correctly, since Memmius Symmachus was not consul (Fig. 5).

¹¹² Some strange guesses have been made about the abbreviation NAR (Narses, Cracco Ruggini, op. cit. (n. 4, 1981), 82), but the simplest solution is that the N is an error for M, and that the name abbreviated is Marius: A. Cameron, 'Boethius's father's name', *ZPE* 44 (1981), 181–3.

¹¹³ 'un anicio', Zecchini, op. cit. (n. 4, 1983), 52.

Hodgkin's fanciful suggestion that Boethius was named after Saint Severinus of Noricum, buried in the Lucullanum monastery by its abbot, his biographer Eugippius, who dedicated a book to the noble nun Proba and so is credited with Anician connections. Zecchini went so far as to characterize the giving of this name to the baby Boethius as a 'decision of the Anicii'.¹¹⁴ It is incomparably more likely that it came from a marriage connection with Severinus cos. 482, son of Severinus cos. 461, a man of great influence, according to Sidonius (*Ep.* 1.11.10). Does this make the Boethii a branch of the Severini? From about this period we have a prefect of Rome and patrician called Venantius Severinus Faustus, evidently another product of a connection with the Severini.¹¹⁵

Both Boethius' parents died when he was very young, and he was brought up, *not* by the Anicii, but by Symmachus cos. 485. Here is Lady Philosophy addressing Boethius in his prison cell:¹¹⁶

When you lost your own father you were cared for by men of the highest rank (*summorum te virorum cura suscepit*), and being chosen to become kin to the first men in the state (*in affinitatem principum civitatis*), which is the most valuable kind of kinship (*quod pretiosissimum propinquitatis genus est*), you became dear to them even before you were actually related by marriage. Who did not call you happy, with such immensely distinguished in-laws (*tanto splendore socerorum*), with such a chaste wife, and with the blessing of sons to follow you?

A page later Philosophy reassures him with the information that 'your father-in-law Symmachus, that most precious ornament of mankind, lives safely, and being a man wholly formed in wisdom and virtue ... and therefore without concern for his own troubles, he laments over yours'. 'Need I speak', she continues, 'of your sons, both consuls, who, for children of their age, already take after the nature of either their father or their grandfather (*vel paterni vel aviti specimen elucet ingenii*).' These sons, significantly named Boethius and Symmachus,¹¹⁷ were appointed consuls while still children, a striking illustration of the prestige of the Symmachi at this time. The father and grandfather to whom he alludes are obviously Boethius himself and Symmachus cos. 485.

What is so interesting about this heavily autobiographical passage is its consistent use of kinship terminology. Despite what appear to be generic plurals (*virorum, principum, socerorum*), the reference is undoubtedly to one family, the family that took him in as an orphan and into which he subsequently married, the Symmachi. He dedicated his *De trinitate*¹¹⁸ and *De arithmetica*¹¹⁹ to Symmachus. Nor are the dedications mere formalities. In both cases, dedicatory epistles insist that Symmachus is the only person on whose advice Boethius relies and the only person whose judgement he values. In his *Contra Eutychem et Nestorium*, dedicated to John the Deacon, he refers to an occasion when a letter on its subject matter was read publicly, regretting that he was sitting a long way from the one person whose reaction he was most anxious to see. Chadwick thought this might have been the Pope, but a few lines later Boethius says that once he has John's reactions to what he himself has written he will 'send the work on to be judged by the man to whom I always submit everything'.¹²⁰ This is what he elsewhere

¹¹⁴ T. Hodgkin, *Italy and her Invaders* iii (1885), 523; Momigliano, op. cit. (n. 95), 252; M. A. Wes, *Das Ende des Kaisertums im Westen des römischen Reichs* (1967), 147; Zecchini, op. cit. (n. 4, 1993), 89.

¹¹⁵ Orlandi, op. cit. (n. 92), 436 and 478–9.

¹¹⁶ *De consol. phil.* 2.3–4.

¹¹⁷ It would have been instructive to know their full names, but (despite the incorrect information supplied on p. xi n.a of the Loeb Boethius) we do not.

¹¹⁸ Conveniently available in the Loeb Boethius (rev. edn S. J. Tester, 1967), 2–4.

¹¹⁹ H. Oosthout and I. Schilling, *A.M.S Boethii De arithmetica* (1999), 3–6.

¹²⁰ *Contra Eutychem*. pr. (pp. 74–6 Loeb); H. Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology and Philosophy* (1981), 181.

says of Symmachus. The dedication to *De arithmetica* calls on Symmachus to advance his endeavours *paterna gratia*. Even if by birth Boethius owed some allegiance to the Anicii, his own words imply a single-minded devotion to the Symmachi in his adult years.

Yet Cracco Ruggini refers to Boethius and Symmachus as ‘illustrious Anicians’, and according to Momigliano Cassiodorus ‘never lost an opportunity to celebrate Boethius’ family, the Anicii’.¹²¹ There are in fact just two passages in the *Variae* where Cassiodorus (channelling King Theodohad) praises the Anicii. But there are four much longer and more specific passages where he praises the Decii. First, *Var.* 3.6:

It is the blood of the Decii that especially dazzles the eye of my [Theoderic’s] serenity. For so many successive years, it has shone out with the brightness of consistent virtue; and though glory is a rarity, no variation can be detected in so long a family tree ... See how a fourfold glory springs from a single seed, an honour to the citizens, a glory to their family, an increase to the Senate. They blaze out in their common merits, but you can still find one to praise for his personal qualities ...

And so on for a page and a half, celebrating the patriciate conferred on Inportunus, cos. 509, one of the four consular sons (the ‘fourfold glory’) of Caecina Decius Maximus Basilius cos. 480, son of Basilius cos. 463. Then there is *Var.* 9.22, celebrating the 534 consulate of Paulinus, great-grandson of Basilius cos. 463:

In your family Rome recognizes the descendants of her ancient heroes the Decii, a line honoured in earlier centuries, protectors of our liberty, glory of the senate ... In an age of heroes none loved their country more.

The consulate is a high honour, but one that is routine for your family. The Roman Senate is composed almost entirely of Decii ...

Then *Var.* 9.23 on the same subject, praising Paulinus’ father Venantius cos. 508:

Such an honour [the consulate] is no surprise for the family of the Decii, for their halls (*atria*) are full of laurelled fasces ... Venantius, glorying in so many children, father to so many consuls. For others this is a rare distinction, for [the Decii] birth is practically synonymous with the consulate.

No less striking is *Var.* 8.22, comparing the patrician Cyprianus, not himself a Decian, to the Decii and Corvini of old.¹²² In context, the reference is to the legendary *devotio* of the Decii Mures, father and son, in 340 and 295 B.C. So too a fragmentary panegyric of Cassiodorus, claiming that Theoderic surpassed the *devotio* of the Decii (p. 467. 4 Mommsen). The late antique Decii evidently affected descent from these Republican heroes, a claim Cassiodorus twice explicitly evokes, describing Inportunus learning ‘in the books of the ancients’ (presumably Livy 8.9 and 10.28) about his great ancestors ‘living on through their glorious deaths’.¹²³ Ennodius too includes Decii and Corvini in lists of Republican heroes, never Anicii.¹²⁴ Praise of the Republican Decii and Corvini was obviously intended to call to mind their present-day ‘descendants’. The Anicii were unable to make any such claim. There were indeed Republican Anicii, but quite apart from the fact that they hailed from Praeneste rather than, as the later Anicii, from North Africa, they were not in the first or perhaps even the second rank of great Roman

¹²¹ Cracco Ruggini, op. cit. (n. 4, 1988), 70; Momigliano, op. cit. (n. 95), 189.

¹²² ‘Similes habuistis olim, patres conscripti, Decios, similes vetustas praedicat fuisse Corvinos’, *Var.* 8.22.3; for Cyprianus, *PLRE* ii.332–3.

¹²³ *Var.* 3.6.4–5; cf. 9.22.3.

¹²⁴ Ennod. pp. 14.12 and 66.25. J. Moorhead, *Theoderic in Italy* (1992), 164. has remarked on ‘the lack of interest displayed by Cassiodorus ... and Ennodius in the Anicii, and their apparently higher level of interest in the Decii’.

houses.¹²⁵ The Decii, like the Corvini and Acilii Glabrones, claimed a glorious Republican past.

Let us return to the two letters (*Var.* 10.11 and 12) that praise the Anicii, written in 535. The first is addressed to Maximus cos. 523,¹²⁶ the second to the senate about Maximus:

Ancient times begot the Anicii, a house almost equal to royalty. The dignity of their name, channelled down to you in your blood, has shone forth more powerfully and gloriously ... They are a family renowned throughout the world ...

Twelve years earlier Cassiodorus (channelling Theoderic) had written congratulating Maximus on his consulship, without mentioning the distinction of his family. There can be little doubt why this is first mentioned in the two later letters. Both allude to Maximus' recent marriage to an (unnamed) Gothic princess: 'you have earned a bride of royal blood whom you did not dare to hope for in your consulship.' Maximus is described as a man 'worthy of my (Theodohad's) kinship', and told that 'heretofore your family has indeed been praised, but it has not been adorned by such a bond; there is no further way for your nobility to increase'. This praise of the Anicii has nothing to do with any personal connection of Cassiodorus, still less of Boethius. It is solely motivated by the decision of the Gothic royal house that only an Anicius had the pedigree to marry a princess of the blood royal. Cassiodorus' letters to Boethius and Symmachus never mention the Anicii.

When Cassiodorus characterizes the family of Maximus as 'paene principibus pares' (*Var.* 10.11.2), this was neither family loyalty nor even flattery inspired by their current power, but the simple truth. Anicius Olybrius cos. 464 had married an imperial princess and in 472 served as emperor himself. Barnish styled Maximus a 'kinsman' of Boethius.¹²⁷ But the Anicia Boethius' father married may have been several branches removed from Maximus and the kinship correspondingly remote. In this sense almost any aristocrat of this period was 'kin' to most of the great families. But when Theodohad was looking around for a husband for his granddaughter,¹²⁸ only the Anicii could point to royalty in their family tree. If the years covered by Cassiodorus' *Variae* had been dominated by any truly important Anicii, why does he mention only the relatively insignificant Maximus?

IX ORDO GENERIS CASSIODORORUM

Mention of Cassiodorus brings us to a subject that can no longer be postponed: the much discussed (and much misunderstood) document known after its discoverer as *Anecdoton Holderi*, published by Herman Usener in 1877.¹²⁹ It is described in its heading as *Excerpta ex libello Cassiodori Senatoris, monachi, servi Dei, ex patricio et consule ordinario, quaestore et magistro officiorum, quem scripsit ad Rufium Petronium Nicomachum [Cethegum], exconsule ordinario, patricium et magistrum officiorum*, followed by what looks like the title of the work excerpted: *Ordo generis Cassiodororum*, 'Genealogy of the Cassiodori'.

¹²⁵ Briefly, *Kleine Pauly* i (1975), 354; T. P. Wiseman, *Roman Studies* (1987), 341.

¹²⁶ Often referred to as Anicius Maximus. He may have borne the name Anicius, but it is not actually attested in any surviving text or inscription.

¹²⁷ S. J. B. Barnish, *Cassiodorus: Variae*, Translated Texts for Historians 12 (1992), 133 n. 2.

¹²⁸ An inference from the fact that Theodohad was elderly by 535: *PLRE* ii.1067–8.

¹²⁹ *Anecdoton Holderi: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte Roms in ostgotischer Zeit* (1877), translated into French with useful introduction and bibliography by A. Galonnier, *Anecdoton Holderi ou Ordo Generis Cassiodororum: Éléments pour une étude de l'authenticité Boécienne des opuscula sacra* (1997).

But what follows is certainly not a genealogy nor even a history of the Cassiodori. Of the three biographies included, only one fits such a title, that of Cassiodorus himself. And even that is almost comically inadequate compared with the substantial autobiographical material included in several of the *Variae* (1.3–4; 3.28; 9.24–5), purportedly letters of Theoderic and Athalaric praising Cassiodorus and his father, but in fact (of course) written by Cassiodorus himself. *Var.* 1.4 also includes detailed information about his grandfather and great-grandfather.

Why then does a work titled *Ordo generis Cassiodorum* deal with only one of the Cassiodori but include biographies of two other, on the rest of our evidence, unrelated people, Symmachus *cos.* 485 and Boethius? On the standard modern interpretation, what the title ‘really’ means is that all four men named in these excerpts, including Cassiodorus and his dedicatee Cethegus, were members of a larger group, the super-family of the (unnamed) Anicii.¹³⁰ Indeed, according to Zecchini, Cassiodorus here ‘declares his kinship with the Anicii’.¹³¹ ‘Declares’ implies an explicit, not to say proud claim; it certainly implies that the Anicii are at least *mentioned*. But they are not.

According to Momigliano, by ‘includ[ing] Symmachus and Boethius in the account of his own family’ Cassiodorus *must have* regarded them as kinsmen.¹³² Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator has been linked to the Anicii at one remove through the Symmachi, in the belief that, like Boethius, the Symmachi were members of the ‘Anician group’. Aurelius was indeed a name regularly borne by the Symmachi, but is by no means confined to them.¹³³ Cassiodorus refers to the noble nun Proba as his *parens* (*Inst.* 1.23.1), but over and above the fact that *parens* is a vague term, often used as no more than a respectful address to an older person, we have seen that Proba was *not* Symmachus’ daughter.

If the title had gone on to say *et propinquorum*, it might have been argued that Cassiodorus was listing famous people to whom he was related, however remotely. But the very precise phrase *Ordo generis Cassiodorum* clearly implies members of his own immediate family. Furthermore, his account in the *Variae* (especially 1.4) of the lives of his father, grandfather and great-grandfather says nothing about their marriages or other kinship connections. In the *Variae* Cassiodorus mentions only his direct forebears in the male line, of whom he seems to have been extremely proud: ‘fame also celebrates the previous Cassiodori; although that name may run in other families, it still belongs especially in this, an ancient stock, a race much praised ...’ (*Var.* 1.4.9). The implication is that all those he included were actually called Cassiodorus.

Jordanes, writing no earlier than 551, concludes his *Getica*, known to have drawn on Cassiodorus’ *Gothic History*, with the marriage of Justinian’s cousin Germanus to the Gothic princess Matasuentha in 551, characterizing the marriage as a ‘union of the race of the Anicii with the stock of the Amali’.¹³⁴ ‘Nobody except Cassiodorus’, according to Momigliano, could have represented this marriage as a union of Anicii and Amali rather than a union of the Gothic and Roman royal houses. On this basis he argued that Jordanes was drawing on, not the original edition of Cassiodorus’ book, completed at an unknown date between 519 and 533,¹³⁵ but a revision published in 551. But there

¹³⁰ So most recently A. Giardina, *Cassiodoro politico* (2006), 16.

¹³¹ ‘dichiara la sua parentela con gli Anicii’, Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1983), 91 n. 304; so again in ‘La politica religiosa di Aezio’, *CISA* 7 (1981), 274 n. 142; so too F. Troncarelli in *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 35 (1989), 130 (‘C. metteva in risalto i suoi legami di parentela con gli Anicii’).

¹³² Momigliano, *op. cit.* (n. 95), 204 (my italics); and in *Diz. biogr. degli Italiani* 21 (1978), 495. Many others have said something similar.

¹³³ See the entries for Aurelius in *PLRE* i (seven pages) and ii.

¹³⁴ ‘coniuncta Aniciorum genus cum Amala stirpe spem adhuc utriusque generi domino praestante promittit’, *Get.* 314.

¹³⁵ J. O’Donnell, *Cassiodorus* (1979), 44.

are problems with the notion of a revised edition of the *Gothic History*.¹³⁶ Moreover, there are two facts that have been largely ignored even in earlier criticisms of Momigliano's famous thesis. First and most obviously, it is entirely dependent on the assumption that Cassiodorus saw himself as an Anician. Second, the Anicii at issue here are the *eastern* branch: Jordanes himself wrote in Constantinople, and Germanus' father must on any hypothesis have been an (unidentifiable) eastern Anicius who married a sister of Justin I.¹³⁷ The eastern Anicii considered themselves less aristocrats than royalty. In the immense poem inscribed around the interior of the great church of St Polyeuctus in Constantinople she rebuilt, the younger Anicia Iuliana describes herself, *not* as an Anician, but as a princess of the blood royal, a direct descendant of the founder of the church, the empress Eudocia (Fig. 6).¹³⁸ Before her marriage to Areobindus the emperor Zeno had (unsuccessfully) offered her hand to Theoderic, a traditional fate for princesses.¹³⁹ There is no evidence that the eastern Anicii made common cause with their more humble Roman cousins.

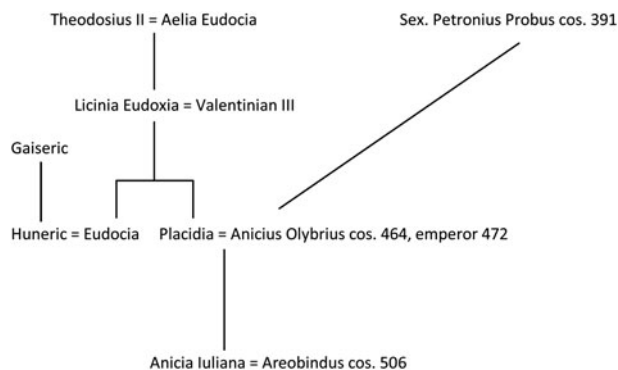


FIG. 6. The family of Anicia Iuliana.

As for Rufius Petronius Nicomachus Cethegus, the dedicatee, it is true that his two middle names are found in the Anician line, though Nicomachus not since the 330s and Petronius is not an exclusively Anician name.¹⁴⁰ As it happens we have solid contemporary information about his family tree. Though his father was Probinus cos. 489, none of his supposedly Anician names were borne by his grandfather, Rufius Achilius Maecius Placidus.¹⁴¹ His closest known Anician connection is his great-great-grandfather Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus cos. 438. It is a stretch to see him as a key member of the 'Anician group'.

The truth is that this curiously widespread 'Anician' interpretation of the *Anecdoton* simply assumes that the Anicii were a super-family incorporating other families, and relies entirely on information (actually guesswork) *outside* the *Anecdoton*. How then do

¹³⁶ Against, see especially B. Croke, 'Cassiodorus and the *Getica* of Jordanes', *CP* 82 (1987), 117–34; P. Heather, *Goths and Romans 332–489* (1991), 38–52; W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (2006), 59.

¹³⁷ See O'Donnell, *op. cit.* (n. 135), 271.

¹³⁸ Where she claimed to be the daughter of (Olybrius and) Placidia, granddaughter of (Valentinian III and) Licinia Eudoxia, and great-granddaughter of (Theodosius II and) Eudocia (*AP* 1.10.8).

¹³⁹ Malchus F 18.3 (p. 432. 27 Blockley).

¹⁴⁰ For Petronius, *PLRE* ii.862–4 and *PCBE* 2. ii.1722–5; Chausson, *op. cit.* (n. 24), 182–5, rather implausibly, tries to tie together all known Nicomachi.

¹⁴¹ Ennodius, p. 314.36–8 Vogel; and see their entries in *PLRE* ii. For an imaginative reconstruction of further stages in the family tree, Settipani, *Continuité gentilice*, 131.

we account for the inclusion of biographies of Symmachus and Boethius? The explanation may lie in the clumsy and incoherent words that follow the title *Ordo generis Cassiodororum*: namely 'qui scriptores extiterint ex eorum progenie vel ex quibus eruditus ***', 'which writers descended from their family, or the learned men from/by whom they [?were instructed?]'. This makes little sense as it stands, and at least one word, if not several, must be missing at the end. It is perhaps no more than a guess of the excerptor intended to explain why two out of the three abbreviated biographies included are of famous writers *not* related to Cassiodorus. On any hypothesis, *qui scriptores* and *ex quibus eruditus* suggest intellectual influences rather than marital or blood connections.

Some have argued that the original *libellus* was barely longer than these excerpts, but the fact that it was dedicated to an important aristocrat accorded his full titles suggests a regular book rather than just a broadsheet. Yet the fact that the entry for Cassiodorus himself runs to less than ten lines suggests that 'excerpts' is an exaggeration. What we have is surely, at best, a drastic abridgement of whatever Cassiodorus wrote. That the biographies are, in the form in which we have them, the work of a poorly informed epitomator is confirmed by their errors.

The omission of Cethegus' diacritical, the name he was known by in one-name contexts, might be explained as nothing more than scribal omission. But consider the titles given Cassiodorus himself in the very first line. We have the correct sequence of his titles as of 537/38 in the heading to his *Variae*: *ex quaestore, ex consule ordinario, ex magistro officiorum, praefectus praetorio atque patricius*. That is to say, he was still praefect at the date of publication, and was not named *patricius* till after his appointment as praefect. The heading to the *Ordo generis* omits his praefecture, places his patriciate too early, and mistakenly calls him *former* patrician, making the gross error of treating the patriciate as an office rather than an honorific title that, once awarded, was held for life.

Cassiodorus himself is said to have been 'adviser to his father while he was praetorian praefect and patrician' ('patris Cassiodori patricii et praefecti praetorii consiliarius'), after which he recited a panegyric on Theoderic, who appointed him quaestor. But Cassiodorus senior was not created patrician till after his praefecture, as we know from none other than his son who, quaestor at the time, wrote (in Theoderic's name) the letter of appointment, listing his posts in order (*Var.* 1.4). Furthermore, 'while he was patrician' reflects that same error about the patriciate. The errors are no doubt fairly trivial, but it is hard to believe that Cassiodorus of all people would get such details wrong. Another error is the styling of Theoderic *rex Gothorum*, a style never used by either the king himself or Cassiodorus.¹⁴² That is to say, these are not just sentences of Cassiodorus excerpted from a larger whole, but, in their present form, the work of an epitomator.

The use of official titles for both author and dedicatee suggests that the work epitomized was written before Cassiodorus abandoned his secular career for the religious life (by about 550), in which case *monachi* and *servi Dei* must be interpolations by the excerptor, familiar with the title pages of his later works. For example, the commentary on the Psalms: *Cassiodori Senatoris exigui servi Dei iam domino praestante conversi*. Cassiodorus himself would never have combined the two styles. Either the pompous official *ex quaestore* etc., or the self-abasing *servi Dei*.

The publication of the *Anecdota* marked a new stage in modern Boethian studies, since it explicitly ascribes to him the *De trinitate* and other theological works, till then assumed spurious. On the basis of this notice, no one now doubts that Boethius was a Christian, and even something of a theologian. Nonetheless, while there are no actual errors, the seven lines devoted to Boethius are to say the least peculiar. Even the briefest biography of

¹⁴² Giardina, *op. cit.* (n. 130), 149–50.

Boethius ought to mention the work that has made his name immortal, the *Consolatio Philosophiae*. Instead we are told about a *bucolicum carmen*, and two of the seven lines are devoted to a panegyric on Theoderic. Boethius undoubtedly had good Greek, enabling him to read logical and mathematical works in Greek. But to say that he was ‘an orator skilled in both languages’ is a very strange way to put it. It may be that Cassiodorus did not approve of the *Consolatio*, but even so he must have produced a better informed and more balanced account of the life and works of Boethius.

There is no major fault to find with the four and a half reasonably fluent lines devoted to Symmachus, though they cannot be more than a fraction of what Cassiodorus had to say about this important figure. One much quoted detail raises doubts: ‘dixit sententiam pro allecticiis in senatu, parentesque imitatus historiam quoque Romanam septem libris edidit.’ This *Roman History* ‘in imitation of his ancestors’ has, no doubt correctly, been taken as a reference to the *Annales* of the elder Nicomachus Flavianus. But some have gone further and inferred that Flavianus’ history was also in seven books.¹⁴³ Even if we were certain that this was pure Cassiodorus, the inference would be dubious. The clumsy way the clause about the history is tacked on to a clause on a different subject with a *-que* betrays the epitomator. Furthermore, *parentes* implies more than one family historian, yet there is no evidence of any other before the consul of 485. Since Symmachus cos. 485 was, like Symmachus cos. 391, a celebrated orator as well as a historian, the original text surely said that he imitated *both* his famous ancestors, obviously a greater achievement. *In senatu* balances *septem libris*, the one qualifying *sententiam*, the other *historiam*. It should be added that ‘in imitation of *his* ancestors’ (‘parentesque *suos* imitatus’) must refer to his own, Symmachian, ancestors, a further objection to the notion that the subtext of the *Anecdoton* is that all these men are Anicians.

The information in these capsule biographies no doubt derives ultimately from Cassiodorus, but in its present drastically abridged, error-filled form it is the work of an epitomator with no first-hand knowledge of what he wrote. Given the uncertain quality of what we have here, it is rash to make inferences about what we do not have. There is not the faintest hint of a reference to the Anicii in this scrappy text of less than a single page.

Even for Cassiodorus’ own immediate family, *Ordo generis Cassiodorum* would be an odd title. How far back in time did he go? *Ordo generis* implies many generations traced back to a founder. Chromatius of Aquileia uses this very phrase for the genealogy of Jesus in Luke.¹⁴⁴ I suggest that *Ordo generis Cassiodorum* is not the title of a lost book of Cassiodorus, but simply the heading to a family tree. Roman nobles had been compiling and maintaining their family trees for centuries.¹⁴⁵ The standard terms in the early Empire were *stemma* or *tabula generis*. As early as the late Republic many (not just the Julii) traced their line back to refugees from Troy.¹⁴⁶ The emperor Galba is said to have ‘displayed a family tree in his atrium on which he traced his father’s family back to Jupiter and his mother’s to Pasiphaë the wife of Minos’; the Acilii Glabrones traced their line back to Aeneas; and (according to Jerome) his patron Paula hers to Agamemnon.¹⁴⁷ Rutilius Namatianus describes Rufius Volusianus as tracing his line

¹⁴³ Most recently G. Zecchini, ‘Ende und Erbe der lateinisch-heidnischen Geschichtsschreibung’, in A. Goltz *et al.* (eds), *Jenseits der Grenzen* (2009), 92; S. Ratti, *Antiquus Error* (2010), 219. Against, A. Cameron, *JRA* 24 (2011), 836.

¹⁴⁴ Chrom., *Tract. in Matt.* 1.

¹⁴⁵ M. Bettini, *Anthropology and Roman Culture* (1991), 169–81 and 298–301; H. Flower, *Ancestor Masks and Aristocratic Power in Roman Culture* (1996), 211–17 and *passim* on *imagines*.

¹⁴⁶ T. P. Wiseman, ‘Legendary genealogies in late-republican Rome’, in *Roman Studies* (1987), 207–20; A. Cameron, *Greek Mythography in the Roman World* (2004), 228–9.

¹⁴⁷ Paula’s family tree is reconstructed by Settapani, *Continuité gentilice*, 133. For more examples of mythological genealogies, including the late antique Greek world, F. Chausson, ‘Les lignages mythiques dans quelques

antiquo stemmate to the Volusus addressed by Turnus in *Aeneid* 11.463, and a passage of Sidonius too long to quote describes the *antiquorum stemmata* of his kinsman Ferreolus, at the near end suggestively including the man's uncles as well as his father.¹⁴⁸ Writing of his patron Marcella, Jerome refers to her illustrious family and lineage, 'stemmata per consules et praefectos praetorio decurrentia' (*Ep.* 127.1), where the participle suggests the literal descent of a family tree down through generations of consuls and prefects.

These stemmata were displayed in the atria of aristocratic houses for all comers to see and admire. Cassiodorus writes of the atria of the Decii as being 'plena ... fascibus laureatis' (*Var.* 9.23.5), and Sidonius of men of senatorial stock rubbing shoulders every day with 'trabeatis proavorum imaginibus' (*Ep.* 1.6.2). Such statements, coming from people who moved in the highest Roman circles, are perhaps to be taken literally. Consider too Ausonius' lampoon on a man who 'scorns the illustrious names of the current age, hankering after an ancient pedigree' ('spernit vigentis clara saeculi nomina / antiqua captans stemmata') and had his mythological forebears woven into his silken robes, engraved on his silverware and painted 'on his threshold and on the ceiling of his atrium'.¹⁴⁹ We may be sceptical about the silk robes and silver plate, but the placing of these stemmata on the thresholds and ceiling of the man's atrium rings true.

Such stemmata were presumably also maintained in what we would call paper form. Some may have been included in biographies of famous men, but so far as I know only one survives complete with marriages and children: a 'Genealogy of Valentinian the Great' that by some strange fluke was included with the writings of the Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople.¹⁵⁰ Cassiodorus knew something about his great-grandfather, though probably little more than names beyond that. But names could take a family tree back another couple of generations. If this is the explanation of the *Ordo generis*, then we can have no idea at all what work of Cassiodorus was adorned by this stemma.

X ANICIUS OLYBRIUS

Most of the supposed leaders of the 'Anician group' in the fifth and sixth centuries (Aurelius Anicius Symmachus, Anicius Acilius Glabrio Faustus, Anicius Probus Faustus, Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, Anicius Faustus Albinus Basilius) seem to have acquired their Anician connection on the female side. However they came by it, some may have taken great pride in the name and claimed to be 'the' Anicii of their generation, while others may simply have looked on Anician brides as a welcome source of wealth. It does not follow that they inherited or were able to exercise the same sort of wealth and power as Petronius Probus. There is certainly no evidence that they saw each other as in any significant sense members of the same family. The variety of names they gave their sons and grandsons suggests that 'Anicianism' was not a connection that superseded being Acilii Glabrones, Corvini, Symmachi and so on.

Only one man we can identify after c. 450, Anicius Olybrius (eastern) cos. 464, can claim direct descent in one of the main Anician lines. By contrast, of the (at least) fifteen¹⁵¹ Decian consuls in five generations between 444 and 541, every single one was a direct descendant of

reventications généalogiques sous l'empire romain', in D. Auger and S. Saïd (eds), *Généalogies mythiques* (1998), 395–417.

¹⁴⁸ Rut. Nam., *De red.* 1.169–70; Sidon., *Ep.* 7.12.1–2.

¹⁴⁹ Auson., *Epigr.* 26 (p. 73 Green, with commentary on pp. 390–1).

¹⁵⁰ C. de Boor, *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opuscula historica* (1880), xxv, 103–4.

¹⁵¹ Fourteen recorded on Fig. 4, but since Cassiodorus comments so emphatically on the number of consular sons born to Basilius Venantius cos. 508 ('fecunda prole gaudentem et tot consularibus patrem ... tot protulit consulares ... tot meretur in filiis consulatus', *Var.* 9.23.3–4, of 533), there must have been more than the two so far identified. Surely at least three.

Caecina Albinus cos. 444 (a grandson, great-grandson and great-great-grandson all had at least three sons, all of whom became consuls). It has always been assumed that the wealth of the Anicii dwarfed that of all other great houses. Yet truly fabulous wealth must have been called on to finance fifteen consulships in five generations, while one of the few Anician consuls, Maximus cos. 523, needed the prompting of a letter from Theoderic to spend appropriately on his consular games.¹⁵² As for Anicius Olybrius, while he married a Theodosian princess and ended his days as emperor, his earlier career is a mystery. He is not known to have held any office except his consulship.

What sort of man would a weak emperor like Valentinian III choose to marry his daughter? Certainly a man of noble birth and great wealth, but hardly an ambitious man with a power base. Olybrius was surely seen as impeccably noble but no threat. We may recall the Maximus Theodahad chose to marry a Gothic princess. Cassiodorus waxes lyrical about his Anician blood, but says nothing about any achievements or offices held. O'Donnell neatly characterizes him as a 'luminary of low wattage'.¹⁵³ Nothing whatever is known about Maximus' ancestors. For all Cassiodorus' praise, there is no evidence that he was a direct descendant in the male line from either Petronius Probus or Anicius Bassus.¹⁵⁴

By 450 Valentinian III had two daughters, Eudocia and Placidia, aged perhaps twelve and ten, but no son. Since he was little more than a puppet of his generalissimo Aëtius, this was a dangerous situation. The men who married his daughters were likely to inherit his throne — perhaps without waiting for him to die. He betrothed Eudocia to the Vandal Gaiseric's son Huneric, perhaps as early as 442/43. As for Placidia, among candidates mentioned for her hand in addition to Olybrius are Aëtius' son Gaudentius and the future emperor Majorian, a military man. When Petronius Maximus seized the throne on Valentinian's murder in 455, he married his son Palladius to Eudocia. Later that year Geiseric sacked Rome, returning to Carthage with both princesses. Eudocia he married to Huneric, and after lengthy negotiations returned Placidia to Constantinople, whither Olybrius had fled before the sack. Some sources place the marriage of Olybrius and Placidia in Rome before the sack, others in Constantinople after Placidia's return.¹⁵⁵ Thereafter the couple remained in the East, where Olybrius received the eastern consulship for 464. Finally, in 472, when in Rome on an embassy from the eastern emperor Leo, he was proclaimed emperor by the generalissimo Ricimer, but died later that year, unrecognized by Leo.

On the face of it, Anicius Olybrius should have been the leading member of the Anicii in his generation, one of the most powerful men in Rome. But there is no evidence that he played any such rôle. He is never mentioned before his betrothal to Placidia, a rôle for which his principal qualifications were his wealth and the blueness of his blood. And while Petronius Maximus was consumed by ambition all his life, held all the highest offices twice each, and intrigued mightily for his brief tenure of the throne, Olybrius' only qualification was his marriage to Placidia. Leo had sent Olybrius to mediate in the civil war between the then western emperor Anthemius and Ricimer. Leo would hardly have selected him for such a mission if he suspected him of any such ambitions.¹⁵⁶ After

¹⁵² Cassiodorus, *Var.* 5.42.

¹⁵³ O'Donnell, *op. cit.* (n. 135), 271.

¹⁵⁴ If he was really a descendant of the usurper Petronius Maximus, who we have seen was *not* an Anician, the Anician connection may have come in a later generation.

¹⁵⁵ These betrothals are all uncertain and (even more frustrating) undatable: see the various entries in *PLRE* ii; F. M. Clover, 'The family and early career of Anicius Olybrius', *Historia* 27 (1978), 169–96; R. W. Mathisen, 'Anicius Olybrius', www.roman-emperors.org/olybrius.htm (1998).

¹⁵⁶ Malalas's story (375 Bonn = 298 Thurn) that Leo sent him with a letter to Anthemius ordering his execution is a folk motif with Homeric roots. If Leo had really suspected Olybrius of treachery he would never have sent him at all.

all, Anthemius (an easterner he himself had nominated five years earlier) was still alive, and Olybrius had never held any public office.

As both an Anician and the husband of a daughter of Valentinian, Olybrius might have been more welcome to the aristocracy of Rome than the Greek Anthemius. But by 472 he too had been living in Constantinople for decades. Many Roman aristocrats fled to Constantinople during Justinian's invasion of Italy, but it is a paradox that the most famous noble family of all deserted the sinking ship before even the Vandal sack of 455. The Anicii had extensive estates in the East (Anicia Faltonia Proba is said to have donated 'possessiones in Asia constitutas' for the support of the clergy and the poor,¹⁵⁷ but there must have been much else). From the mid-fifth century on Anician benefactions were largely transferred to the East, in the persons of Anicius Olybrius and his daughter Anicia Iuliana. Iuliana married the eastern general Areobindus cos. 506 (son and grandson of eastern consuls, all military men), and they had a son Olybrius, eastern consul as a child in 491, who married Irene, a niece of the emperor Anastasius, but is not known to have held any other office.¹⁵⁸ There was also an Olybrius cos. 526, apparently not the son of Olybrius cos. 491, who had only daughters. Since he is attested by a Roman inscription as early as January 526 and was in Rome when it fell to Totila in 546, presumably western consul, though there is no evidence about his parentage.¹⁵⁹

XI ANICIAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

It was Momigliano who first credited the Anicii with cultural and intellectual as well as political dominance. It should by now be obvious that this is entirely dependent on the assumption that Boethius, Cassiodorus and Symmachus cos. 485 were all core Anicians. Momigliano even wanted to add Ennodius, a Gaul who became professor of rhetoric in Milan and later bishop of Pavia, claiming that 'the intellectual prestige of the Anicii was not limited to Rome'.¹⁶⁰ On what basis? Ennodius' letters constantly appeal to his *adfnitas*, *necessitudo*, *consanguinitas*, *proximitas* and *propinquitat* with a variety of correspondents, not all of whom can have been genuinely related by blood or marriage. A number of such letters are addressed to Anicius Probus Faustus cos. 490 and his two consular sons Avienus and Messalla, but since the latter's full name was *Ennodius* Messala, whatever the familial link, there is no need to infer that it ran through the Anicii.¹⁶¹ And since Faustus' own Anician connection may be rather remote, to see Ennodius as an Anician cultural outpost in Northern Italy is far fetched.

Perhaps the strangest of all Anician myths is the claim that there was a specifically Anician historiography. The idea was first mooted by Momigliano and developed by Zecchini.¹⁶² The only serious contender in this area is the *Historia Romana* of Symmachus cos. 485, which is entirely lost.¹⁶³ How then do we know what it said? We return to W. Ensslin's thesis, developed by Marinus Wes, that Symmachus' history was the primary source of the *Chronicle* of Marcellinus and Jordanes's *Romana*, and base our conclusions on what

¹⁵⁷ ACO 2.1.90; cited at PLRE 1.733.

¹⁵⁸ PLRE ii, s. vv. Olybrius 3 and Irene, known from the genealogy preserved by Nicephorus, p. 104 de Boor.

¹⁵⁹ *Anth. Pal.* 1.10.39; *CLRE* 587 s.a. 526; Procopius 7.20.19.

¹⁶⁰ Momigliano, *op. cit.* (n. 95), 233; Llewellyn, *op. cit.* (n. 96), 29; Cracco Ruggini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1988); M. Cesa, *Ennodio: Vita del beatissimo Epifanio vescovo della chiesa pavese* (1988), 9 n. 6. For some extravagant further conjectures, see T. S. Mommaerts and D. H. Kelley, 'The Anicii of Gaul and Rome', in J. Drinkwater and H. Elton (eds), *Fifth-Century Gaul: a Crisis of Identity?* (1992), 111–21.

¹⁶¹ On the problem of identifying Ennodius' various kinfolk, see the careful analysis in S. A. H. Kennell, *Magnus Felix Ennodius: A Gentleman of the Church* (2000), 128–67.

¹⁶² 'Gli Anicii e la storiografia latina del VI secolo d. C.', now in *Secondo Contributo* ii (1960), 231–53; Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1983), 89–94.

¹⁶³ Except for a single quotation in Jordanes about the emperor Maximin, who reigned from 235 to 238.

they say.¹⁶⁴ The key item is Marcellinus' notorious claim, repeated verbatim by Jordanes, that with the deposition of Romulus Augustulus in 476 the 'western empire' fell. Wes argued that this reflects the attitude of the aristocracy of Rome (or a Symmachan faction therein), lamenting the fact that Italy was now a barbarian kingdom. A brilliant article by Brian Croke effectively demolished this antiquated piece of source criticism (significantly enough already abandoned by Ensslin himself) by showing that Marcellinus' perspective throughout is eastern and must be presumed to depend primarily on eastern sources.¹⁶⁵ The very fact that he referred to the *western* empire ('Hesperium Romanae gentis imperium') reveals an eastern perspective. Of course, if Marcellinus had drawn on a western source, he would have adjusted its terminology to suit his eastern perspective. But what exactly would that western source have said here? Certainly not that 'Romanae gentis imperium' fell, obviously false, given the survival of the eastern provinces ruled from New Rome. The deposition of Romulus in 476 directly affected only Italy, but the grandiose, almost apocalyptic claim that 'Hesperium Romanae gentis imperium' fell 522 (actually 519) years after the first Augustus began to rule in the 709th year after the foundation of Rome, surely embraces Gaul, Spain, and North Africa as well. The loss of Italy was the last straw, spelling the end of the entire western half of the empire, what eastern Romans referred to as ἡ τῆς ἐσπέρας βασιλεία, ruled by ὁ τῆς ἐσπέρας βασιλεὺς.¹⁶⁶ It is not easy to think of a formulation that could have been simply 'easternised' by the addition of *Hesperium*. Furthermore, if Marcellinus had read Symmachus' *History* at first hand, with understanding, how could he have made the ignorant blunder of twice styling Odoacer *rex Gothorum*?¹⁶⁷

As for the idea that linking the 'fall of the western empire' to a barbarian take-over was the perspective of a Roman aristocrat living under barbarian kings, the truth is that the aristocracy of Rome enjoyed an Indian summer of both prestige and power under Odoacer and Theoderic, almost monopolizing not only the western consulship (every year from 480 to 490) but the city and praetorian prefectures as well. Wes implausibly argued that the consulships of the 480s were conferred by the eastern emperor Zeno, but even if true (which it is not)¹⁶⁸ that would still not explain the multiple prefectures held by Odoacer's consuls.

Momigliano saw Symmachus' extensive cultural activities as a withdrawal from the barbarian world in which he was forced to live, but such activities were traditional for the Symmachi. Wes emphasizes that Symmachus himself held no office under Theoderic. But he did receive the consulship, a prefecture of Rome and the patriciate from Odoacer, and on Wes's own theory it was Odoacer rather than Theoderic who brought the 'western empire' to an end. In any case, the absence of posts under Theoderic is no more than an argument from silence. Symmachus certainly paid at least one visit to Constantinople, probably as an envoy for Theoderic, and in 522 received the extraordinary honour, unknown since the two sons of Petronius Probus held the consulship together in 395, of having his two grandsons appointed consuls together.

It is now generally accepted that the idea of treating the deposition of Romulus as the fall of Rome to barbarians was the perspective (and justification) of the Justinianic

¹⁶⁴ W. Ensslin, *Des Symmachus Historia Romana als Quelle für Jordanes* (Sitz. Bay. Akad. 1948. 3); Wes, op. cit. (n. 114).

¹⁶⁵ B. Croke, 'A.D. 476: the manufacture of a turning point', *Chiron* 13 (1983), 81–119; see too B. Croke, *Count Marcellinus and his Chronicle* (2001), 190–5.

¹⁶⁶ Texts cited by Croke, op. cit. (n. 165), 108.

¹⁶⁷ Marcell. a. 476. 2 and 489; cf. n. 153 above; W. Treadgold, *The Early Byzantine Historians* (2007), 232.

¹⁶⁸ Wes, op. cit. (n. 114), 151; against, A. Cameron and D. Schauer, 'The last consul: Basilus and his diptych', *Journal of Roman Studies* 72 (1982), 126–45, at 128.

reconquista.¹⁶⁹ As Croke emphasized, that it was eastern in origin seems put beyond doubt by the fact that the Byzantine chronicle tradition, first attested in Evagrius, writing *c.* 592, but probably taken over from Eustathius of Epiphaneia at the beginning of the sixth century, likewise underlines the epochal significance of the event by enumerating the years since the foundation of Rome by the first Romulus.¹⁷⁰

While accepting the general validity of Croke's critique, Zecchini did his best to save what he could of the idea that Marcellinus at any rate reflects key aspects of the history of Symmachus, by identifying what he claimed to be Anician details. For example, the allegedly sympathetic portrayal of the usurpation of the western throne by the notary John (423–25). According to Zecchini, (1) Marcellinus' 'positive evaluation' of John would be 'inexplicable' in an eastern source;¹⁷¹ (2) if his source was western it must have been Symmachus; and (3) if it was Symmachus, then Symmachus' history must have been written from an Anician point of view.

It will be obvious that the argument fails at the first hurdle by presupposing both that Symmachus was an Anician and that John was 'supported' by the Anicii. More specifically, Marcellinus' evaluation of John is *not* straightforwardly positive. Under the year 424 he reflects the eastern viewpoint that John was a usurper ('regnum ... invasit'). It is true that under 425 he says that John was killed 'by the treachery (*dolo*) rather than virtue of Ardabur and Aspar', but that is hostile to the two eastern generals rather than favourable to John. Their tactics were indeed underhand, and we should bear in mind, not only that both were Arian heretics, but that Aspar and his son, Ardabur the younger, were more than once accused of treachery in the course of the next four decades. In 465 Ardabur was disgraced for treasonous correspondence with Persia. In 471 Leo had both Aspar and Ardabur assassinated, and under that year Marcellinus records that 'the Arian Aspar was killed in the palace together with his Arian breed (*cum Arriana prole*)'.¹⁷² All of this must have been at the back of Marcellinus' mind when he wrote about their 'treachery' in 425. Hostility to Ardabur and Aspar unmistakably points to an eastern, not a western source. Even if there were contemporary evidence that his kinsmen supported John when he seized power (and there is not), why would Symmachus, writing a century later, have continued to reflect the favourable attitude that those kinsmen must have disavowed the moment John was deposed and executed?

Zecchini's second argument is based on Marcellinus' claim that the 'western empire' also fell with the murder of Aetius in 454. But this too is a perspective found in eastern as well as western texts. Zecchini drew attention to Marcellinus' statement that Aetius was killed together with 'his friend Boethius', praetorian prefect of Italy in 454. Yet this too was well known in the East (the killing of Boethius is described in some detail by Priscus).¹⁷³ Zecchini argues that the *combination* of these two elements points to an 'Anician source'. Yet there is no evidence for an Anician connection for the Boethii before the consul of 487, and even if there were, the fact that he is described as Aetius' friend would prove nothing about the politics of the Anicii in general.

¹⁶⁹ In addition to Croke, *op. cit.* (n. 165), see P. Heather, 'The historical culture of Ostrogothic Italy', in A. Giovanditto (ed.), *Teodorico il grande e i suoi Goti in Italia* (1993), 317–53, at 332–4; P. Amory, *People and Identity in Ostrogothic Italy* (1997), 109; Goffart, *op. cit.* (n. 136), 53–4; J. J. O'Donnell, *The Ruin of the Roman Empire* (2008), 214–15.

¹⁷⁰ Though with different figures: Marcellinus after 1,231 (actually 1,228) years; Evagrius (*HE* 2.16) and Theophanes (*AM* 5965) after 1,303 years. Surprisingly enough, Byzantines do not seem to have been very concerned about fixing an exact date for the foundation of Rome. Syncellus actually offers two different dates, *AM* 4752 and 4755 (p. 230. 5, 10 and 13 Mosshammer). I am grateful to Richard Burgess for help on this point.

¹⁷¹ Zecchini, *op. cit.* (n. 4, 1983), 49; (n. 4, 1993), 76–7.

¹⁷² See the detailed account by B. Croke, 'Dynasty and ethnicity: Emperor Leo I and the eclipse of Aspar', *Chiron* 35 (2005), 147–203.

¹⁷³ 'After killing Aetius, Valentinian also killed Boethius the prefect, who had been high in Aetius' favour', after which he 'exposed their bodies unburied in the forum' (*F* 30, p. 329. 39 Blockley).

XII CONCLUSIONS

The modern myth of the Anicii as the great power-brokers of the fifth and sixth centuries, where not just pure speculation, is based on a confusion. After the death of Petronius Probus their fame grew but their real power declined. It was the women who kept the reputation of the Petronian branch of the Anicii alive in the first few decades of the fifth century: Probus' widow, Anicia Faltonia Proba; her daughter-in-law the elder Anicia Iuliana (perhaps a daughter of Bassus, and if so an Anicia in her own right); and her granddaughter (Iuliana's daughter) Demetrias (not to mention the younger Anicia Iuliana a century later in Constantinople). All showered money on the Church, perhaps in part at least precisely because there were no ambitious husbands or brothers alive to stop them and exploit it for more traditional ends.¹⁷⁴

There can be no question that the nobility continued to play a central rôle in the life of late fifth- and early sixth-century Italy. From the late 420s on the city and praetorian prefectures were regularly held by members of the great families, and the consulship almost confined to them. The city prefecture had often been held by aristocrats in the fourth century, but the praetorian prefecture much less often, and the consulship very rarely. They served on embassies, especially between Ravenna and Constantinople, an important political rôle that also brought them prestige, in the East as well as the West. Members of the great Roman houses continued to be Very Important People.

They also played a steadily increasing rôle in the religious life of Rome, larger indeed than in pagan times,¹⁷⁵ not only founding churches but taking part in ecclesiastical elections and controversies. Here too family loyalties have been thought to be crucial. For example, during the Laurentian schism the Anicii are said to have supported Pope Symmachus while the Decii backed his rival Laurentius. In this case the only facts known are that Postumius Rufius Festus cos. 472 and Probinus cos. 489 supported Laurentius, and Faustus, Pope Symmachus.¹⁷⁶ Festus was evidently a man of great influence, entrusted with numerous embassies, presumably the son (perhaps grandson) of Festus cos. 439.¹⁷⁷ But not one of the three can be confidently identified as either Anician or Decian, which further undermines the assumption of a society divided between the two families.¹⁷⁸

Nonetheless, as Barnish has put it, 'aristocratic dominance ... may be deceptively impressive'. A number of newer or otherwise unknown names also appear in the fasti of high office.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, while the nobility undoubtedly played an important rôle in the civil administration of the Ostrogothic regime, they were entirely excluded from the military sphere. Furthermore, the fact that they normally held their prefectures for such short periods (often less than two years)¹⁸⁰ makes it unlikely that any individual noble

¹⁷⁴ P. Laurence, 'Proba, Juliana et Démétrias: le christianisme des femmes de la *gens Anicia* dans la première moitié du Ve siècle', *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 48 (2002), 131–63; A. Kurdock, 'Demetrias ancilla dei: Anicia Demetrias and the problem of the missing patron', in K. Cooper and J. Hillner (eds), *Religion, Dynasty, and Patronage in Early Christian Rome, 300–900* (2007), 190–224; C. Machado, 'Roman aristocrats and the Christianization of Rome', in R. Lizzi-Testa and P. Brown (eds), *Pagans and Christians in the Roman Empire: The Breaking of a Dialogue* (2011), 493–516.

¹⁷⁵ For the limited rôle of pagan *pontifices* in the religious life of fourth-century Rome, often overrated in modern studies, Cameron, *Last Pagans*, ch. 4.

¹⁷⁶ *Liber Pontificalis* § 53.

¹⁷⁷ Festus cos. 472 must have received his consulship early, since he was still alive in 513.

¹⁷⁸ According to Wes, op. cit. (n. 114), 99 a letter of Avitus of Vienne to Symmachus cos. 485 and Faustus 'Niger' proves that Symmachus too backed Pope Symmachus. But Chadwick pointed out that the letter seeks to persuade the two men rather than shows them already persuaded (H. Chadwick, *Boethius: The Consolations of Music, Logic, Theology, and Philosophy* (1981), 41, 287 n. 27; D. Schanzer and I. Wood, *Avitus of Vienne: Letters and Selected Prose* (2002), 159–62).

¹⁷⁹ Barnish, op. cit. (n. 87), at 129–30.

¹⁸⁰ In the fourth century sometimes only a few months: A. Chastagnol, *La préfecture urbaine à Rome sous le Bas-Empire* (1960), 187–8.

had the time or opportunity to acquire significantly more power than any other. Such power as the office conferred was spread fairly evenly around the élite. Apparently the attraction was less the power itself than the prestige of having held a post that conferred the rank of *illustris*. Those who held the post more than once proudly styled themselves PVR II or even (like Anicius Faustus) PVR III, however short their tenures. In the Ostrogothic age this rapid turnover of city prefects was regularized into annual appointments.¹⁸¹ While the authority of the city prefect was limited to the city of Rome, the praetorian prefecture carried access to the emperor, later king, at court. In the fourth century ambitious men often contrived to spend years at court as praetorian prefect, gaining wealth, power and influence (one of Petronius Probus' four prefectures lasted for seven years). This seems to have been less common under Odoacer and Theoderic. As for the consulship, it was a purely ceremonial honour, increasingly bestowed on the children of the nobility.

No one we know of held office at court longer than Cassiodorus, at intervals *quaestor palatii*, *magister officiorum* and praetorian prefect for more than twelve years. On the face of it, surely the most powerful man of the age. But as more than one scholar has pointed out, he was in office when both Theoderic and his successor Athalaric died and Theodahad and Amalasantha were murdered. If he had been involved in the decisions behind or provoked by any one of this succession of crises, how could he have kept his position?¹⁸² Cassiodorus' contribution to successive regimes consisted in his literary and administrative abilities. He played no part in the political decisions of his Gothic masters.

As for the far-fetched notion that the nobility exercised serious power behind the throne, 'supporting' usurpers and generalissimos, let us look again at the case of John. It is often alleged that he was proclaimed by senators.¹⁸³ But his only documented supporters were military men, Castinus the *magister militum* and the young Aetius.¹⁸⁴ It may be that his elevation was nominally ratified by the senate as a body, in the time-honoured way, but it is not clear what concrete support any individual noble or group of nobles could have offered. It is not as if they could realistically threaten to support a competitor. While it may be that some Anicii supported Aetius, is it credible that *anybody* actively opposed him? What could the Decii possibly have had against him that was worth risking the exclusion of the entire family from high office for the quarter century of his supremacy? In fact we know that the Decii did *not* oppose Aetius. While several Anicii held the praetorian prefecture of Italy for a year or so during this period, Decius Albinus cos. 444, doyen of the Decii, held it for six years, and an otherwise unknown Firminus (from neither family) for at least three.¹⁸⁵ We are bound to infer that Aetius saw Albinus as a more efficient or reliable ally than any of these Anicii.

As for all these 'policies' the late Roman nobility supposedly pursued, their wealth certainly gave them great power, but it was power that they exercised in a relatively restricted, essentially traditional field, mainly on their estates and in the city of Rome. Sidonius' eyewitness description of Gennadius Avienus and Caecina Basilius 'encircled by a swarming mass of clients' whenever they went out of doors has a very traditional ring. The quite extraordinary sums they spent on games right down into the sixth century illustrate their overriding concern for popular favour at a purely

¹⁸¹ Cass., *Var.* 1.42.3; 3.11.1; Chastagnol, *op. cit.* (n. 180), 188.

¹⁸² E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire* ii (1949), 128–9; Momigliano, *Sesto Contributo* vi. 2 (1980), 490; Giardina, *op. cit.* (n. 130), 15–21.

¹⁸³ Most explicitly by O. Seeck, *Gesch. des Untergangs der antiken Welt* vi (1921), 90, 407–8 ('nicht das Heer von Ravenna, sondern der Senat von Rom ...'), but the text he cites, οἱ δὲ τῆς ἐν Ῥώμῃ βασιλείως ἀύλης τῶν τινα ἐκεῖνη στρατιωτῶν ... βασιλέα αἰροῦνται (Procop., *BV* 1.3.7), by identifying John as 'one of the officials there', clearly points to the court in Ravenna. ἐν Ῥώμῃ here perhaps just means 'in the West'.

¹⁸⁴ For all sources, Seeck, *op. cit.* (n. 183) and *PLRE* ii.595.

¹⁸⁵ On the length of the various prefectures, *PLRE* ii.1248; for Firminus 2, *ib.* 471.

local level.¹⁸⁶ In this context there was continuing competition between *all* noble families rich enough to compete. Since the biggest games by far were the now (sometimes twice yearly) consular games, clearly this was a competition that the Decii, with their fifteen consulships in five generations, easily won. The barbarian kings encouraged the nobility to spend their fortunes competing with each other to the benefit of the city and population of Rome. We have seen that Theoderic actually reproached Maximus *cos.* 523 for not spending enough.

As for the argument that the Anicii were ‘philobarbarian’ and the Decii supported a rapprochement with the East, there is an obvious sense in which all aristocrats collaborated with their barbarian masters, to their own great profit. And while many nobles kept in touch with the eastern court, all must have been well aware that the lack of a western emperor had greatly increased their own power and prestige. Heather has shown that in some ways the Ostrogothic court ‘actively fostered Roman literary culture’.¹⁸⁷ Symmachus, for example, had held the highest offices of state in his youth and then been able to devote the rest of his life to scholarly *otium* in the best Roman tradition.¹⁸⁸ During the half century before the dramatic turn of events that led to the execution of Boethius in 524 and Symmachus in 525, few can have imagined that the restoration of imperial power in Italy would bring them any benefit. In the event the Justinianic reconquista spelled the end of both the Roman senate and aristocratic power.¹⁸⁹

Columbia University
adcr@columbia.edu

¹⁸⁶ Briefly, Cameron, *Last Pagans*, 790–1; more detail in V. Fauvinet-Ranson, *Decor Civitatis, Decor Italiae. Monuments, travaux publics et spectacles au VI^e siècle d’après les Variae de Cassiodore* (2006), 303–440.

¹⁸⁷ Heather, *op. cit.* (n. 169), 334.

¹⁸⁸ His date of birth is unknown, but since he held the consulship (485) forty years before his death (525), he must have held it fairly young. His two grandsons held theirs as small children.

¹⁸⁹ T. S. Brown, *Gentlemen and Officers: Imperial Administration and Aristocratic Power in Byzantine Italy A.D. 554–800* (1984), ch. 2.