JUVENAL'S CRISPINUS

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As is well known, Crispinus was the victim of some of Juvenal's choicest abuse in the First and Fourth Satires. In the standard commentaries and prosopographical registers, he is universally regarded as a praefectus praetorio under Domitian.1 Since there is no other attestation for such a character, the equation has been something of a bother to historians. The present paper contends that there is not the slightest warrant for thinking that Crispinus was a prefect; further, that an analysis of what Juvenal actually says about him suggests that he was no more than a court buffoon.

The name Crispinus is unhelpfully common in all periods of Roman history. For Juvenal's own time, one notices (for easy instance) characters as diverse as the young son of Vettius Balanus who was celebrated in a poem by Statius (Silvae 5.2), and C. Clodius Crispinus, consul ordinarius in 113.2 Many Crispini feature in inscriptions, including (one may emphasise, in the present context) freedmen.3 Such frequency should make us wary of any glib equation of Juvenal's victim with the Crispinus mentioned in two epigrams of Martial (7.99; 8.48). In point of fact, it will be seen that there are solid grounds for the identification, but it does not in the least help to establish Crispinus as praetorian prefect.

I. This idea that Crispinus was praefectus praetorio is essentially that of B. Borghesi, Oeuvres complètes 5 (Paris, 1869), 513-6. It is perpetuated in the editions of Friedlander, Mayor (observe a discrepancy or error in his Index, p. 439, where Crispinus is billed as praefectus urbi), and Duff. Cf. also Friedlander's Sittengeschichte (Appendix II, 'The friends and companions of the Emperor', in vol. 4, 69, of the English version by A. B. Gough, London, 1913); PW 4.1720-1; J. A. Coo, Consilium Principis (Cambridge, 1955), 50, 162. This consensus is reflected in Stein's entry in PIR2 C 1586: “praefectum praetorio eum fuisse putant viri docti” (without discussion). The Bude Juvenal of Labriolle-Villeneuve offers no comment on Crispinus; it translates the descriptive phrase princeps equitum (4.32) as "prince de nos chevaliers". The problem is ignored by W. C. Helmbold & N. E. O'Neil, 'The Structure of Juvenal 4', AJP 77 (1956), 68-73. Hight exhibits mild reservations ("it should be emphasised that there is little external evidence for his rank") in Juvenal the Satirist (Oxford, 1954), 260, but accepts the idea without qualification 28 pages later. O. Hirschfeld, Untersuchungen auf dem Gebiet der römischen Verwaltungsgeschichte 1 (Berlin, 1877), 223, regarded Crispinus as an imperial secretary, for which there is no warrant either. It will be seen later that Furneaux (ad Ann. 15.34.3) may have disagreed. Syme, Tacitus (Oxford, 1958), 636, doubted the equation, suggesting instead (albeit without any argumentation) that Crispinus may have been praefectus annonae. Z. Yavetz, Plebs and Princeps (Oxford, 1969), calls our man "a terrible informer", M. Durry, Les Cohortes Prétoriennes (Paris, 1968), 149, n. 1, comments (without amplification) that "il n'est pas certain toutefois que Crispinus ait été préfet." J. G. Griffith, 'Juvenal and the Flavian Establishment,' GR 16 (1969), 145-6, suggested that he might have been praefectus Aegypti. However, he is less easily fitted in than Griffith supposes; cf. O. W. Reinmuth, A Working List of the Prefects of Egypt (New Haven, 1967), 86-9. The only scholar to have seriously challenged Crispinus' claims to any official position is P. White, 'Ecce Iterum Crispinus,' AJP 95 (1974), 377-82.

2. There is also the suffect consul A. Caepio Crispinus from around the year 97, albeit his precise position in the Fasti is uncertain; cf. Syme, Tacitus, 642, n. 2.

3. For the details, see I. Kajanto, The Latin Cognomina (Helsinki, 1965), 223.
There is one certain case of a Crispinus who was a holder of this office in the first century A.D. That was Rufrius Crispinus, a man fated to be the first husband of Poppaea, who served under Claudius. Gilbert Highet was led by this to wonder whether Crispinus in Juvenal might not be a false name, one inspired by the earlier prefect.

That notion imports (alas!) the vexed business of cover-names. It could be suggestive that Horace several times attacks a Crispinus in the Sermones; there is also one in Persius (5.126). The name might be thought endemic to satirical poetry. However, the Horatian Crispinus at least would appear to have been a real person, and a live one at that.

Moreover, the other eleven members of Domitian's cabinet on parade in Juvenal's Fourth Satire are readily identifiable as real people. It is difficult to see why the poet should feel any need to conceal the actual name of just one of the twelve, especially one who seems in any case to be dead or disgraced by the time Juvenal came to publish the poem.

Highet's idea also presupposes what has to be proved, namely that Juvenal's victim is a prefect concealed under the name of a predecessor in that office. It would be just as legitimate to see the satirist's target as a delator who is given the name of a notorious antecedent, namely Caepio Crispinus who was active under Tiberius.

Crispinus is probably best regarded as the real name of a real person. Not that it was necessarily the victim's original appellation. Should anyone wonder how the verna Canopi came by his respectable nomenclature, it would be sufficient to recall that the assumption of Roman names was common practice with freedmen, and popular enough with peregrini to earn a legal restraint from the emperor Claudius.

Juvenal introduces his victim thus:

\[
\textit{cum pars Niliacae plebis, cum verna Canopi}
\]
\[
\textit{Crispinus Tyrias umero revocante lacernas}
\]
\[
\textit{ventitent aestivum digitis sudantibus aurum}
\]
\[
\textit{nec sufferre queat maioris pondera gemmae,}
\]
\[
\textit{difficile est saturam non scribere. (1.25-30)}
\]

4. Tacitus, Annaeum 11.13; 11.45; 13.43.4.
7. Serm. 1.1.120; 1.3.139; 1.4.14; 2.7.45.
9. Albeit there are differing identifications of Montanus and Pompeius; cf. Highet, 260–1; Crook, op. cit., 50–1 (with his Prosopographical Index).
10. A necessary assumption, of course, if the last two lines of Satire One really mean that Juvenal did not attack living people (or, at least, not potent ones); cf. Friedländer, 'On the Personal Names in Juvenal', op. cit., 318–21. The opening lines of the Fourth Satire seem to suggest that Crispinus' fate was an object lesson of sorts.
The racialist ranting needs little comment. It is thoroughly traditional and familiar. For the picture of a base foreigner conspicuously rich in Rome (or Italy), one easily adduces the Petronian Trimalchio. A better case, however, may be that of Claudius Etruscus' father, whose death prompted an epicedium from the ready pen of Statius (Silvae 3.3). This man rose to high office and favours under several emperors from servile origins in Smyrna. It is worth remarking that slurring references to a man's beginnings were not restricted to satirical abuse. Statius thought such words as

\begin{quote}
\textit{supplevit fortuna genus culpamque parentum occluit.}
\end{quote}

appropriate to his effusion over the father of Claudius Etruscus!

A depraved Egyptian evokes no surprise. It need not be strictly true, however, that Crispinus derived from Canopus. The town was proverbial for its vices. Juvenal elsewhere (6.84; 15.46) employs it as a synonym for decadence. So do other Roman writers: Lucan, and Seneca, for easy instance. And Greek ones, also. Strabo (800a) talks of κανονιόμος, and it is worth remarking that Octavian is made to dub Antony a cymbal player from Canopus in a rhetorical confection of Cassius Dio (50.27.2).

The point is of some moment for those who favour the identification of Juvenal's Crispinus with the homonym in Martial. In one of his two relevant epigrams (7.99.2), the latter alludes to tua Memphis. Such a discrepancy need not rule out the identification. Indeed, the argument is reversible, for one could say "Your Memphis" to an Egyptian without implying that he actually came from there.

A good deal of ink has been spilled on the matter of Crispinus' ring. In essence, Housman had what ought to have been the last word. Yet there may be one additional facet to the joke. Strictly speaking, Crispinus should have worn a gilded iron ring, since only equestrians of free birth were entitled to the pure gold one. Juvenal may be saying that the languid Egyptian cannot abide the heavier ring appropriate to his station.

The company Crispinus keeps in Satire One is instructive. He is bracketed with an uxorious eunuch, a lady gladiator, a barber, a fat lawyer, and an assortment of delators and gigolos. Social types, in other words, not men of high official position. There is no hint that Crispinus is anything more than an effeminate foreigner.

This characterisation continues in Satire Four. The essence of Crispinus is summed up in the phrase \textit{aegrae solaque libidine fortes deliciae} (3–4). He is also a \textit{monstrum nulla virtute redemptum} (2). The language is strong, but not unparalleled, Later in the same poem, the blind delator Catullus Messallinus is

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13. Lucan 2.542; 10.64; Seneca, Ep. 51.3.
advertised as a *grande et conspicuum nostro quoque tempore monstrum* (115). It will be seen that this may well be significant.

The story of Crispinus and his fish occupies the first part of the poem. Apart from a further thrust at his Egyptian origins in line 24 (*succinctus patria quondam, Crispine, papyro*), there are no particular details of the rascal until we reach the climactic:

> *purpureus magni ructarit scurra Palati, iam princeps equitum* . . .

(31–2)

A scholiast took *princeps equitum* to indicate that Crispinas was (in his words) *magister equitum*. Hence the modern identification. It is clear, however, that this is merely an inference from the present passage. The scholiasts had no independent knowledge of Crispinus. When he appears in Satire One, they call him a senator and an *amicus* of Domitian.

Still more to the point, *princeps equitum* does not connote the office of *praefectus praetorio*. It is a much more general term than that. A letter of the younger Pliny offers a telling demonstration. It describes a certain Minicius Macrinus thus: *equestris ordinis princeps, quia nihil altius voluit; adiectus enim a divo Vespasiano inter praetorios honestam quietem huic nostrae—ambitioni dican an dignitati?—constantissime praetulit.*

Mayor laid much stress on the description of Crispinus as *purpureus*, citing John Lydus to the effect that a purple cloak was a badge of office for the praetorian prefect. This, in fact, clinches nothing, for a brace of reasons.

First, the purple is not restricted to one office. Valla, commenting on Juvenal 4.94, quotes the only four lines we possess of Statius’ epic *De bello Germanico*: *lumina: Nestorei mitis prudentia Crispi et Fabiui Veiento—potentem signat utrumque purpura, ter memores impleuntur nomine fastos—et prope Caesareae confinis Acilii aulae.* There are obvious reasons for thinking that Juvenal is parodying this in his register of Domitian’s advisors. To the immediate point is this use of purple to designate power: neither Veiento nor Vibius Crispus was praetorian prefect.

17. *Ep.* 1.14.5, with Sherwin-White’s note *ad locum*. In Cicero’s day, the phrase *princeps equestris ordinis* (or *equitum Romanorum*) appears to have connoted the first *decurio* of the first *turrem* of cavalry; see, e.g., Cicero, *Ad fam.* 11.16.2 (of his friend L. Aelius Lamia). For honorific extensions of the compliment, cf. *In verr.* 1.53.139: *tantes in adolescenti clarissimo ac prince (1) tuevniuit pudor suui*; *Pro Rab.* 2.3; *C. Curtius princeps ordinis equestris fortissimus et maximus publicanus*; *Pro Sulla* 12.34: *cum princeps, cum autore, cum signifer esset tuvennius; Ad fam.* 6.10.2: *cum omni gradu amplissimo dignissimus, tum certe ordinis su facilis princeps.* Cf. C. Nicolet, *L’ordre équestre* (Paris, 1974), 472; J. Hellegouarch, *Le vocabulaire latin des relations et des partis politiques sous la république* (Paris, 1963), 456. Needless to say, none of this has to do with praetorian prefects. Certainly, such a phrase can be used of a man who rose to this eminence, as is evidenced by Velleius’ description of Sejanus as *princeps equestris ordinis patre nato* (2.127.3). The point is, it does not have to connote a prefect, as the passage from Pliny shows. Juvenal is simply being sarcastic: Crispinus’ talents as a *scurra* made him the most influential of the knights (see later in this article for the parallel cases of Paelignus and Vatinius). Juvenal’s sequence, *ructarit scurra Palati / iam princeps equitum*, seems to me to reinforce this interpretation.

18. *De mag.* 2.13.2.
Secondly, this colour is not confined to men of rank. In Martial 8.48, someone has stolen Crispinus' Tyria abolla. This phrase at once reminds us of the Tyrias lacernas of Juvenal's victim, and makes an equation of the two characters tempting. But Mayor had no warrant for insisting that abolla must refer to military uniform. It is true that the praefectus urbi Pegasus has an abolla in Satire Four (76: rapta properbat abolla). However, the word can also denote the cloak of a philosopher, a meaning it must bear in Juvenal 3.115, where the crime of the Stoicus delator is described as facinus maioris abollae. Furthermore, Martial goes on to observe that not everyone is suited to the purple: nec nisi deliciis conventi iste color (8.48.6).

So Martial's Crispinus had a purple cloak that befitted a deliciae. The Crispinus of Juvenal has a Tyrian garment (1.27), is a purpureus scurra, and is stigmatised by the term deliciae. It may add up to an equation.

In Satire One, we observed the sort of company Crispinus kept. Likewise, in Domitian's cabinet he is coupled with the fat and sluggish Montanus, recurring only as a creature soaked in perfume: et matutino sudans Crispinus amomo (108). Again, no hint of any official position, in flagrant contrast to Pegasus, whose rank is clearly described, and Fuscus, identified as the praetorian prefect Cornelius Fuscus by the allusion to his fate in the Dacian war (111-2).

An imperial institution was the court jester, a person to mock and be mocked. Juvenal, in fact, found criticism of it a good way to open his Fifth Satire. Two outstanding examples in the pages of Tacitus19 are Paelignus under Claudius and Vatinus under Nero. Both are classified as scurrae: Claudius was drawn to Paelignus because of his own familiarity, conversatione scurrarum, whilst Vatinius employed facetitis scurrilibus.

Also, both were deformed. Paelignus was deridiculo corporis despicendus; Vatinius is described as a creature corpore detorto.20 Now, as we have seen, the characteristic of Crispinus most harped on by Juvenal is his physical frailty: he cannot support a heavy ring, and is abused in the words aegrae deliciae. It is also notable that Juvenal calls him a monstrum, for the other employment of that noun in Satire Four is with reference to a physically deficient character, the blind delator.

Crispinus is clearly a figure of influence at the court of Domitian. Which is in tune with the aforementioned scurrae. Paelignus was Claudio perquam familiaris; Vatinius eo usque valuit ut gratia pecunia vi nocendi etiam malos praemineret.21 Finally, these characters enjoyed a special licence to jest even at the

19. Ann. 12.49.1; 15.34.3. Furneaux's note on the latter passage adduces Crispinus, but does not indicate whether or not he accepted the praefectus praetorio identification.
20. Martial 14.96.2 also equips him with a long nose.
21. Cf. Tacitus, Dial. 11.2, for the potentia of Vatinius.
emperors. Vatinius may have been *primo in contumelias adsuntius*, but he went on to establish himself *optimi culuisque criminatione*, and was always saying to Nero, "I hate you because you are a senator."\textsuperscript{22} This quality may afford a link with the Crispinus of Martial 7.99, who is approached as a *candidus lector* with the power to influence Domitian's reading. That may well imply a degree of bullying persuasion, if we are to believe the claim of Suetonius (*Dom. 20*) that the last of the Flavians ignored history and poetry and read only the memoirs and transactions of Tiberius.

\textsuperscript{22} Dio Cassius 63.15.1.
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