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THE "WANDERING POET" AND THE GOVERNOR

ROBERT A. KASTER

THE "WANDERING POETS" OF EGYPT have in recent years become familiar figures in the cultural and social landscape of late antiquity. Surveys and case studies have shown us a group of men whose education in poetry and other literary forms allowed them to move beyond the place and station of their birth, to circulate throughout the East (and beyond) in search of patrons and a livelihood, and occasionally to become prominent actors in the affairs of the Empire.¹ But of course Egypt was not alone in producing these conspicuous examples of geographic or social mobility: this note concerns another such "wandering poet" of the East, the grammarian Diphilus. His case deserves to be better known, since it provides some interestingly detailed evidence for the movements and *modus vivendi* of such a man. That evidence, moreover, has caused a certain amount of confusion in the past, concerning both Diphilus himself and one of the imperial functionaries with whom he came into contact, the governor Heraclianus.

As with many other *littérateurs* and academics of the Eastern Empire of the fourth century, we know of Diphilus because he came within the orbit of Libanius, the sophist of Antioch. From Libanius we can gather a few basic and fairly unambiguous facts. The son of the grammarian Danaus, a teacher of some note, Diphilus was himself a grammarian, teaching in one of the Palestinian provinces in the late 380s; and like a number of other grammarians in the period, he not only taught the poetry of the ancients but composed poetry of his own.² It was with his poetry that Diphilus hoped to make his fortune: but here he met with disappointment; and here we

¹See especially A. Cameron, "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia* 14 (1965) 470 ff., *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford 1970) 4 ff., and "The Empress and the Poet: Paganism and Politics at the Court of Theodosius II," *YCS* 27 (1982) 217 ff., with D. T. Runia, "Another Wandering Poet," *Historia* 28 (1979) 254 ff., G. M. Browne, "Harpocration Panegyrista," *IllC/Stud* 2 (1977) 184 ff., L. Robert, "Deux inscriptions de Tarse et d'Argos," *BCH* 101 (1977) 113 n. 129.

²Filiation and profession: *Lib. Or.* 54.55 Δαναοῦ τοῦ γραμματιστοῦ τοῦ νέου πολλοῦς πεπαιδευκός: since Diphilus is said to be "doing the same work as his father" (*Or.* 54.55, cf. *Ep.* 969.1), with the further specification, that his subject was the ancient poets (*Ep.* 969.1), both father and son must have been grammarians, with *γραμματιστής* in *Or.* 54.55 = *γραμματικός*, as usually in Libanius (cf. P. Wolf, *Vom Schulwesen der Spätantike: Studien zu Libanius* [Baden-Baden 1952] 32 ff., with P. Petit, *Les étudiants de Libanius* [Paris 1956] 185 n. 194). On Danaus, see also the Appendix below; on the origins, the location, and the poetry of Diphilus, see further below. For grammarians as poets, see especially Cameron (above, n. 1) 491 ff.

encounter the central problem in interpreting the information Libanius gives us.

The analysis depends on two documents, the substance of which is presented below: a passage from *Or.* 54, Libanius' attack on the former consular of Syria Eustathius; and *Ep.* 969, a letter of recommendation for Diphilus to Heraclianus, a provincial governor. It should be noted that the letter is securely dated to 390, while *Or.* 54 cannot have been written before August 388 and was in all likelihood composed not long after March/April 389.³

3*Or.* 54.55–57

- 1) Diphilus is said to have been persuaded by Eustathius to leave Palestine (§55) and
- 2) go to Cilicia, where Eustathius promised "audiences and the income from them" for his poetry (*ibid.*); but
- 3) Eustathius failed to make good his promise of patronage, with the result that Diphilus made the rounds of Cilicia, gaining nothing, and was financially drained (*ibid.*).
- 4) When Diphilus was in despair (and also, it appears, in Antioch), Eustathius again promised his patronage, so that Diphilus could participate, as a poet, in a festival soon to be held at Antioch and its suburb, Daphne (§56).
- 5) Although this offer in itself was not wholly satisfactory to Diphilus (*ibid.*), Libanius advised him to accept (§57); whereupon
- 6) Eustathius broke his promise once more—in order (Libanius says) to make fools of Diphilus and (especially) of Libanius himself, lest Diphilus be able to spread the word of Libanius' influence to Palestine.

Ep. 969

- 1) Diphilus is said to be teaching in Palestine (§4, with §1 [n. 2 above]), and,
- 2) as a poet, is seeking access to Heraclianus, the governor of Diphilus' native province (§3, with §4 [cf. n. 19 below]).

³August 388: cf. *Or.* 54.20, the defeat of Maximus by Theodosius. March/April 389: the end of Eustathius' governorship, see below n. 7.

The similarity of points (1) and (2) in the two documents—movement from Palestine to another province for the sake of employment as a poet—has been taken to show that the texts refer, at least in part, to the same set of events: thus Otto Seeck concluded that the province of Diphilus' origin governed by Heraclianus (*Ep.* 969) was Cilicia (*Or.* 54.55); and others have joined him in that conclusion.⁴ But while the conclusion may conceivably be right in substance, the reasoning behind it is certainly wrong.

The key is the festival that is the subject of *Or.* 54.56–57. That festival must still have been thriving in the last years of the fourth century, must have been held both in the city proper and in the suburb Daphne (*Or.* 54.57), and must have been an occasion for poetic contests or displays. Among known festivals at Antioch, only the Olympic Games, held in July and August every fourth year, satisfy all three requirements.⁵ Further, only the Games of 388 can be involved in *Or.* 54: in general, the resentments that fuel the attack—the insults and misdeeds blamed by Libanius on Eustathius *qua* governor—stem from that period, and make it *a priori* very likely that the Games of 388 are meant;⁶ in particular, it was precisely in 388 that Eustathius was in a position to make—and break—the kind of promise described in *Or.* 54.56–57, for he was governor of Syria during the Olympic Games.⁷

The events described in *Or.* 54.55–57 and *Ep.* 969 cannot, therefore, be partially overlapping: they are rather sequential, involving the periods before and through the summer of 388, and 390, respectively. They can be reconstructed as follows:

a) established in Palestine, Diphilus embarks on his poetic enterprise in Cilicia—possibly as early as 387, to allow sufficient time for the circuit of the cities and his utter failure;

⁴O. Seeck, *Die Briefe des Libanius zeitlich geordnet* (Leipzig 1906) 171: similarly A.-J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne* (Paris 1959) 105 n. 7; *PLRE* 1 s.n. Danaus (p. 242), Diphilus (p. 261), Heraclianus 3 (p. 417).

⁵Cf. J. H. W. G. Liebeschuetz, *Antioch: City and Imperial Administration in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford 1972) 136 ff. and the studies cited 136 n. 2.

⁶Thus the grievances mentioned immediately before (§51 on Monimus, §§52–54 on the sophist Eusebius) and immediately after (§61) the passage concerning Diphilus certainly pertain to Eustathius' governorship.

⁷Eustathius was governor for ten months (*Or.* 54.75), including the time ca September 388 when the news of Maximus' defeat on 28 August would have reached Antioch (*Or.* 54.20): since his predecessor Lucianus had been deposed in the middle of 388, before the Games, Eustathius' governorship can be dated ca June/July 388—ca March/April 389, with *Or.* 54 composed not long after the latter date, cf. R. A. Pack, *Studies in Libanius and Antiochene Society under Theodosius* (Diss. University of Michigan, 1935) 121 ff. and A. F. Norman, *Libanius' Autobiography (Oratio I)* (London, New York and Toronto 1965) 227 f. (on *Or.* 1.269–270). That Eustathius made his promise to Diphilus while governor is assumed, e.g., by G. Downey, "The Olympic Games of Antioch in the Fourth Century A.D.," *TAPA* 70 (1939) 438, Liebeschuetz (above, n. 5) 143.

b) sometime shortly before the Olympic Games of 388, Diphilus arrives in Antioch or its environs;⁸ given to hope at first for a role in the Games by the governor Eustathius, he is then frustrated in that hope;

c) in 390, Diphilus is still teaching in Palestine, and still attempting to further his career as a poet with the help of Libanius, who commends him as a would-be encomiast to the governor Heraclianus.⁹

It is worth the while to emphasize a few of the details of Diphilus' circumstances that can be gathered from the two or three year segment of his career sketched above. The fact that his failure in Cilicia left him seriously out of pocket¹⁰ seems to place him in a class with other teachers and literary men of Libanius' acquaintance: compare the circumstances of the grammarian Cleobulus, who had sufficient means to avoid "base" employment, but who was nearly ruined by the unexpected burden of a lawsuit that went against him;¹¹ or the grammarian Didymus, a landholder able to give his son a full literary education—although his holdings were small, a mere "solace for a poor man;"¹² or the teacher and poet Eudaemon of Pelusium, a man of good birth but modest estate.¹³ All were thoroughly respectable men, but all lived more or less close to the edge: a run of bad luck might push them over; while good luck meant a precarious prosperity in a position of genteel dependence. They were naturally the recipients rather than the dispensers of patronage: in Diphilus' case, that meant running the risk of being squeezed between two patrons who happened to be conducting a feud (*Or.* 54.55–57). Such risks may explain why Diphilus evidently played it safe as a "wandering poet," not wholly giving himself over to his wanderings, but keeping a hedge against failure: thus it appears that, during the period covered by our documents, he retained his base of operations in Palestine, where he taught and whence he set out on his poetic forays.¹⁴

⁸*Or.* 54.56–57 (the interview between Diphilus and Eustathius described by Libanius, and Libanius' offer of advice) is presumably set in Antioch; Diphilus awaited his letter of invitation at Seleucia, the port of Antioch, 54.57.

⁹The problem of access for one in Diphilus' position is put very clearly in *Ep.* 969.2 (*Δίφιλος δὲ τῶν μὲν εἰς τὴν οἰκίαν σου πολλάκις ἐστὶν ἐλθόντων, τῶν δὲ οὐδ' ἀπαξ ἰδεῖν σε δυνηθέντων*): compare the frankness of *Ep.* 633, advising another poet (Eudaemon of Pelusium) to exploit fully, against possible rivals, the connection with the prefect of Egypt Gerontius that Libanius had provided (with *Ep.* 632, to Gerontius). Libanius discreetly urges Heraclianus to do well by Diphilus (an "honorarium," *Ep.* 969.3).

¹⁰*Or.* 54.55 *τῇ καθ' ἡμέραν δαπάνῃ κάμνοντα*.

¹¹Means: *Ep.* 52.3. Lawsuit: *Ep.* 52, 67–69, 90, 91, 155, 231, with H. F. Bouchery, *Themistius in Libanius' Brieven* (Antwerp 1936) 154 ff.

¹²Education of his son Rhetorius, cf. esp. *Ep.* 318.2. Estate: *Ep.* 317.2, 318.3 (and cf. also *Ep.* 318.3, Rhetorius one of *τῶν οὐκ εὐπόρων*). Didymus (*Ep.* 317.1), like Cleobulus (*Ep.* 68.1, 82.1–2, 361.2), had been one of Libanius' teachers.

¹³*Ep.* 108.2.

¹⁴Compare *Or.* 54.55 (Diphilus, teaching [cf. n. 2 above] in Palestine before his trip to Cilicia) and *Or.* 54.57 (*δευδὼν γὰρ ἐνόμιζεν* [sc. Eustathius], *εἰ πρὸς τὴν Παλαιστίνην*

Mention of those forays, however, brings us back to the one question that remains: what was Diphilus' native province, governed by Heraclianus in 390? Unfortunately, the question will probably need to remain without a certain answer. Heraclianus himself cannot usefully be identified with any other bearer of that name,¹⁵ nor can any inferences concerning the destination of *Ep.* 969 be drawn from the other letters with which it is grouped; and as was noted above, the reasons formerly advanced for choosing Cilicia cannot be valid. Of course, that choice could conceivably happen to be correct, irrespective of the reasoning behind it: there is room in the *Fasti* of the province, and Diphilus may have taken his connection with Cilicia into account when he first was persuaded by Eustathius to make his tour. Yet arguments of this sort cut both ways: thus, if Cilicia were Diphilus' native province, it would be odd, both that he should depend so completely upon Eustathius to act as his impresario, and that his failure should be so complete.¹⁶

But if not Cilicia, where? Egypt, although the home of many men like Diphilus, can very likely be ruled out. Libanius' letters to Egypt involving commendations (or the like) are in fact relatively uncommon throughout his career, and especially in these later years: such letters as there are go more often to the prefects of Egypt, not to governors of one or another of the Egyptian provinces;¹⁷ and Heraclianus could not have been the prefect.¹⁸ If one then limits the search *ex hypothesi* to Oriens, the area of Libanius' most extensive influence, one can eliminate Syria, Phoenice (the *Fasti* of which will not easily accept another governor at this time), and

ὕπαρξει Δίφιλω λέγειν εἶναι μοί τινα δύναμιν οἴαν φίλον ὠφελεῖν, after his trip to Cilicia) with *Ep.* 969.4 (Παλαιστίνην . . . ἐν ἣ ποιεῖται τὰς συνοουσίας).

¹⁵*PLRE* 1, p. 417, suggests that he may be identical with the *corrector Paphlagoniae* in 395 (= Heraclianus 4) known from *CTh.* 2.8.22: the identification would in any case provide no help for the year 390.

¹⁶With that dependence and failure contrast Libanius' statement in *Ep.* 969.4 *κἀκείνους . . . ἐν οἷς ἔφην οὓς εἰ τις ἔροιτο, τίνι μεγίστω φιλοτιμοῦνται, Δαναὸν ἐρούσι καὶ Δίφιλον*: a significant claim, even if one discounts a certain amount as part of the *lenocinia commendationis*. For the idea, compare *Ep.* 337.1 (of the grammarian Tiberinus of Arabia [cf. n. 20 below], teaching at Antioch), *Or.* 1.52 (of Libanius himself).

¹⁷Prefects: see *Ep.* 521 (Cataphronius, A.D. 356), 361 (Parnasius, A.D. 358), 291, 306, 632 (Gerontius, A.D. 361 [cf. n. 9 above]), 1183 (Hierius, A.D. 364), 1263, 1274, 1275, 1278 (Maximus, A.D. 364), and cf. *Ep.* 882.3 (Alexander, A.D. 388). The only governor of an Egyptian province to receive a letter from Libanius in the latter part of his career is Hesychius, *praeses Thebaidos* in 390–391 (*Ep.* 995): Libanius had special reason to know him, since he had been practicing as an advocate in Antioch only a few years earlier, cf. *Or.* 28.9 with *PLRE* 1, s.n. Hesychius 4, p. 429.

¹⁸The prefect Alexander (cf. n. 17) was in office from 388 through at least 18 February 390, his successor Evagrius was in office by 18 June 391: see A. Bauer, "Zur Liste der *Praefecti Augustales*," *WS* 24 (1902) 347 ff., with *PLRE* 1, s.n. Alexander 12 (p. 42), Evagrius 7 (p. 286).

whichever of the two Palestinian provinces was *not* Diphilus' base of operations:¹⁹ the most likely remaining candidate would then be Arabia, with its capital at Bostra, in this period enjoying high prosperity because of its position on the caravan routes.²⁰ But Libanius' patronage was capable of reaching beyond Oriens, to the provinces of Asiana and Pontica as well; and it is evidently preferable to leave the question of Diphilus' origin open. Accordingly, the province of Heraclianus must also be left uncertain: he should be removed from the *Fasti* of Cilicia (in *PLRE* 1) and be included among the "PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS (province unknown)."

APPENDIX: DANAUS AND ARISTODEMUS

By the period 388–90 Diphilus' father Danaus was a teacher of considerable experience (*Or.* 54.55) and, evidently, some renown: thus the opening sentence of *Ep.* 969 suggests that the governor Heraclianus was expected to know of Danaus' teaching and its quality, without preamble or explanation (οὗτος ἐστὶ Δίφιλος ὁ Δαναοῦ τὸ τοῦ πατρὸς ποιῶν, διδάσκων ὡς περ ἐκεῖνος, καὶ ἦν μὲν μοι καὶ βελτίω τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτὸν εἶπειν, ἀρκεῖ δέ μῃ χεῖρω).²¹ If he was a grammarian of note, it is tempting to identify him with the dedicatee of an epitome of Herodian's καθολικὴ προσῳδία made by a certain Aristodemus (*Suda* A.3915 ἐπιτομὴν τῆς καθόλου Ἡραδιανοῦ ἔγραψε πρὸς Δαναόν). The name Danaus is not at all common, and both his profession and the period (fourth quarter of the fourth century A.D.) would fit: no epitome of Herodian is known to have been made before the fourth century; but note *PAnt* 2, 67 = Pack² 2169 (fourth century A.D.), an epitome of Book 5 of the καθ. προσ.,²² and *PFlor* inv. 3005

¹⁹It is not unequivocally clear whether Diphilus lived and taught in Palestina Prima or P. Salutaris: the question is moot, however, since the phrasing of *Ep.* 969.4 (ἴσθι δέ ἐν τοῖς περὶ τοῦτον καὶ Παλαιστίνην εὐφρανῶν, ἐν ἧ ποιεῖται τὰς συνουσίας, κακεῖνους οἷς ἐφέστηκας, ἐν οἷς ἔφω) seems clearly to distinguish Heraclianus' province from either of the Palestines.

²⁰Libanius had earlier been acquainted with another grammarian, Tiberinus, from Arabia: see *Ep.* 337 (an. 358), with Wolf (above, n. 2) 32, Petit (above, n. 2) 85, *PLRE* 1 s.n., p. 913.

²¹Since Diphilus was a native of Heraclianus' province, Danaus was presumably teaching in that province at the time of his son's birth; both *Ep.* 969.4 (quoted above, n. 16) and Heraclianus' knowledge of Danaus, assumed by Libanius, can be taken to mean that he was still teaching there in 390. Certainly there is no evidence that Danaus moved to Palestine (the statement in *PLRE* 1 p. 242 that Danaus was teaching in Palestine is an error, evidently due to some confusion with his son).

²²With A. Wouters, "P. Ant. 2.67: A Compendium of Herodian's ΠΕΡΙ ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗΣ ΠΡΟΣΩΔΙΑΣ, Book V," *OLP* 6–7 (1975–6) 601 ff., *The Grammatical Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt* (Brussels 1979) 216 ff. The extant epitome of the καθ. προσ., variously attributed in the manuscripts to Theodosius of Alexandria or Arcadius (cf. *PW* II.1154, 4 ff. [Cohn]), would belong to this same period if the attribution to Theodosius (= *PLRE* II, s.n. 3, p. 1099 f.) is correct.

(fifth century A.D.), an epitome of the *περι κλίσεως ὀνομάτων*.²³ Of Aristodemus nothing more is recorded.²⁴

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²³With A. Wouters, "A Compendium of Herodian's ΠΕΡΙ ΚΛΙΣΕΩΣ ΟΝΟΜΑΤΩΝ," *ZPE* 11 (1973) 242 ff.; A. Carlini *et al.*, *Papiri letterari greci* (Pisa 1978) no. 26, pp. 181 ff.; Wouters, *The Grammatical Papyri* (above, n. 22) 231 ff.

²⁴I do not know the reason for Wouters' statement (above, n. 22) 602, that "we know only that [Aristodemus] must be dated somewhere between A.D. 200 and 300."