

Justin under Justinian

The Rise of Emperor Justin II Revisited

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The accession of Emperor Justin II (r. 565–578) witnessed the end of an era. The last years of his uncle, Justinian (r. 527–565), saw plots and riots in Constantinople, the imperial treasury drained, and an uncertain future for the recently reconquered territories in Italy and North Africa. It is little wonder that Justin sought a change of course for the troubled Roman Empire, implementing a tighter fiscal regime and more reconciliatory religious policies while giving more say in local government to the old aristocracy.¹ A hard-line attitude toward the empire's neighbors was likewise adopted, leading to wars in the Balkans and with the Persians in the East.² Such a shift in tone is particularly evident in the new emperor's propaganda, for the renewal of the Roman state was repeatedly trumpeted, perhaps even marking a "turning-point in imperial ideology,"

1 Averil Cameron, "The Empress Sophia," *Byzantion* 45.1 (1975): 5–21, at 5–10, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change in Sixth-Century Byzantium* (London, 1981), chap. XI; eadem, "The Early Religious Policies of Justin II," *Studies in Church History* 13 (1976): 51–67, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, chap. X; P. Sarris, *Economy and Society in the Age of Justinian* (New York, 2006), 222–27.

2 On the Balkans: Michael Whitby, *The Emperor Maurice and His Historian: Theophylact Simocatta on Persian and Balkan Warfare* (Oxford, 1988), 86–87; A. Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars: Campaigning, Diplomacy and Development in Illyricum, Thrace and the Northern World A.D. 527–65* (Prenton, UK, 2016), 375–79; W. Pohl, *The Avars: A Steppe Empire in Central Europe, 567–822* (Ithaca, 2018), 58–82. On the Persian front: H. Turtledove, "Justin II's Observance of Justinian's Persian Treaty of 562," *BZ* 76 (1983): 292–301; Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 250–70.

in the words of Averil Cameron.³ In reality, renewing a struggling empire was not so easy; by the 570s, military defeats and ultimately futile religious persecutions dominate the historical narrative, even before Justin's illness in 574, which forced the co-option of a junior emperor, Tiberius II Constantine (r. 578–582), to act in his place.⁴

Despite these dramatic events, Justin's life and times have received little scholarly attention. Much like his namesake, the early sixth-century emperor Justin I (r. 518–527), the younger Justin is overshadowed by the long-lived Justinian, whose wars and reforms receive

3 Averil Cameron, "Images of Authority: Elites and Icons in Late Sixth-Century Byzantium," *Past & Present* 84 (1979): 3–35, at 11, 15, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, chap. XVIII; see now M. Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians: Kontingenzerfahrung und Kontingenzbewältigung im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Göttingen, 2003), 608–41; R. Scott, "Revisiting the Sixth-Century Turning Point," *Adamantius* 19 (2013): 303–13.

4 On Justin's reign as a whole: Michael Whitby, "The Successors of Justinian," in *Late Antiquity: Empire and Successors, A.D. 425–600*, ed. Averil Cameron, B. Ward-Perkins, and Michael Whitby, *CAH* 14 (Cambridge, 2000), 86–111, at 86–94; K. Rosen, "Iustinus II (Kaiser)," in *RAC* 19:778–801; P. Sarris, *Empires of Faith: The Fall of Rome to the Rise of Islam, 500–700* (New York, 2011), 227–32. On his religious policy: A. Grillmeier, with T. Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, pt. 2, *The Church of Constantinople in the Sixth Century*, trans. J. Cawte and P. Allen (London, 1995), 481–90. Attitudes of contemporary historians are surveyed in Averil Cameron, "Early Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*: Two Case Histories," *BMGS* 3.1 (1977): 1–17, at 2–11, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, chap. IX.

much more emphasis in histories of this period, perhaps obscuring other contemporary achievements of his wider family.⁵ Cameron already pointed to the lack of detailed studies of Justin II in 1976, and four decades later little has changed.⁶ While we now know a great deal more of the emperor's religious policies and diplomatic initiatives, in no small part thanks to Cameron's ground-breaking work, there remains little interest in other aspects of his rule, let alone a modern synthesis of his reign.⁷ Justin's reputation is also not helped by the available sources, many of which interpret his reign through highly partisan lenses. Corippus, for example, was a court poet who wrote a panegyric dedicated to the new emperor, but the value of his words is difficult to assess given the genre and his clear attempts to gloss over inconvenient facts.⁸ Due to the fragmentary nature of Menander the Guardsman's *History*, the fullest near-contemporary Greek narrative is from Evagrius Scholasticus's *Ecclesiastical History*, but the latter is vociferous in criticizing Justin for his mismanagement of the Persian war and the deposition of an Antiochene patriarch, ensuring that his portrait of the emperor is similarly one-sided.⁹ From a miaphysite perspective, John of Ephesus's *Ecclesiastical History* provides an

intimate view of the imperial court, but the bishop's writing is inflected by his knowledge of the emperor's eventual persecution of miaphysites, so his words likewise need to be used with care.¹⁰ These portrayals of Justin can be calibrated, not least through the use of Latin sources, but another approach would be to turn to the few sources that mention the emperor prior to his accession, such as the *Chronicle* of John Malalas, and to consider the evidence for Justin's family and wider network.¹¹

By revisiting the earliest texts and reconstructing Justin's time at court as much as the evidence allows, a very different portrait of the neglected emperor emerges, for a study of his rise to power reveals much about how he was embedded in events prior to his accession. His early career certainly should not be colored by military defeats and policy failures from the 570s, and there is still more to be said for the man himself. As a civilian emperor with no recorded military experience, Justin is often spoken of as an unglamorous candidate when compared to his chief dynastic competitor, a general also named Justin who had long served on the empire's frontiers.¹² The emperor's accession likewise has been framed as a "senatorial coup," with Justin II's own role neglected in favor of larger forces at work within the empire.¹³ Yet to survive in Constantinople, at the heart of imperial politics, Justin could not have been a man who was simply carried to power on the wave of senatorial reaction against Justinianic policies. This paper centers the evidence for Justin's agency and makes the case that he was an astute and well-connected political player in the volatile Constantinopolitan court, whose career up to 565 made his succession if not a certainty, then the most likely outcome.

The Courtier and the General

The eldest son of Emperor Justinian's sister, Vigilantia, the future Justin II stood as one of the most senior

5 A much-needed revision of Justin I's reign is provided by B. Croke, "Justinian under Justin: Reconfiguring a Reign," *BZ* 100.1 (2007): 13–56.

6 As noted in Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 51, n. 5, there were, and still are, only two detailed treatments of Justin's reign: K. Groh, *Geschichte des oströmischen Kaisers Justin II. nebst den Quellen* (Leipzig, 1889); E. Stein, *Studien zur Geschichte des byzantinischen Reiches vornehmlich unter den Kaisern Justinus II u. Tiberius Constantinus* (Stuttgart, 1919).

7 Two recent examples stand out in reinterpreting Justin's religious policy: M. Meier, "Die Translatio des Christusbildes von Kamulianai und der Kreuzreliquie von Apameia nach Konstantinopel unter Justin II: Ein übersehenes Datierungsproblem," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 7.2 (2003): 237–50; S. Esders, "'Avenger of All Perjury' in Constantinople, Ravenna and Metz: Saint Polyeuctus, Sigibert I, and the Division of Charibert's Kingdom in 568," in *Western Perspectives on the Mediterranean: Cultural Transfer in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, 400–800 AD*, ed. A. Fischer and I. Wood (London, 2014), 17–40.

8 Averil Cameron, ed. and trans., *Flavius Cresconius Corippus. In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris, Libri IV* (London, 1976), 4–7.

9 Menander the Guardsman, *History*, ed. R. C. Blockley (Liverpool, 1985); Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History*, ed. J. Bidez and L. Parmentier (London, 1898); Cameron, "Early Byzantine Kaiserkritik," 10–11; P. Allen, *Evagrius Scholasticus the Church Historian* (Leuven, 1981), 13–14.

10 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History*, trans. E. Brooks, CSCO 106 (Paris, 1936); Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 62–65.

11 John Malalas, *Chronicle*, ed. J. Thurn, CFHB 35 (Berlin, 2000).

12 "Iustinus 4," *PLRE* 3:750–54; his career and modern interpretations will be discussed in detail below.

13 Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 51; Cameron, *Corippus*, 156.

figures within the dynasty by 565.¹⁴ Given the old emperor's refusal to explicitly name an heir, however, his accession was seemingly far from assured, not least because of the existence of another Justin, who was the eldest son of Justinian's capable cousin, Germanus.¹⁵ The latter Justin already had a lengthy military career, making him a better candidate for the throne in the eyes of many modern historians.¹⁶ Yet as civilian emperors were far from unknown, it is perhaps worth questioning whether the more military-minded Justin was truly a likelier successor to Justinian when compared to our protagonist. The sole source to explicitly favor Justin the general as the better man of the two, Evagrius writing in Antioch ca. 593/4, clearly dislikes the emperor, so it is unlikely that the author's words are a neutral report of events three decades earlier.¹⁷ Even then, in a no doubt apocryphal tale inserted into this narrative, Evagrius notes that both Justins had "comparable prestige in life's illusions" before Justinian's death, a comment suggestive of Justin II being more deserving of the throne than the historian is otherwise willing to give him credit for.¹⁸

We must then turn to other sources to evaluate how contemporaries saw the dynasty. Although the evidence for his career in the 550s is slim, we can still detect some indications of our Justin's influence at court, setting the stage for events in the following decade. Moreover, while it is often stated that his presence in Constantinople and his role in the palace helped Justin to secure the throne, it is not yet clear what this process entailed.¹⁹ Justin's eventual smooth accession in 565 certainly suggests that he did indeed possess a group of influential supporters, and this article aims to explore his network as best as the fragmentary evidence allows. Moreover, by comparing Justin's networks with that of his competitor, Justin the son of Germanus, it becomes all the more obvious why Justinian's nephew succeeded him, and the other Justin, for all his military prowess, did not.

Justin II's early life is, unfortunately, shrouded in obscurity. If a thirteenth-century chronicle is a reliable guide, then the future emperor was born in 511, as he was said to have been sixty-seven years old when he died in 578.²⁰ Otherwise, we are reliant on the reasonable assumption by Ernst Stein that Justin was born by 520 at the latest, given the description by Corippus that the new emperor's "age is excellent" at his accession in 565.²¹ At some point in his adulthood, perhaps in the early 540s, Justin married Sophia, the niece of Empress Theodora, but this fact is again reported only in later sources.²² The first attestation of the future

14 "Iustinus 5," *PLRE* 3:754.

15 Both Corippus, *In Praise of Emperor Justin* 1.138 (ed. Cameron, 40), and John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10 (trans. Brooks, 51), make it clear that Justin was not named as Justinian's heir; Groh, *Justin II*, 40. On Germanus: Procopius, *History of the Wars* 7.40.9 (ed. J. Hauriy, rev. G. Wirth, 4 vols. [Leipzig, 1962–64], 2:477–78); "Germanus 4," *PLRE* 2:505–7. Germanus has occasionally been seen as a contender to the throne: J. Signes Codoñer, "Prokops *Anekdotia* und Justinians Nachfolge," *JÖB* 53 (2003): 47–82, but cf. B. Croke, "Procopius' *Secret History*: Rethinking the Date," *GRBS* 45.4 (2005): 405–31, at 422–25; H. Börm, "Procopius, His Predecessors, and the Genesis of the *Anekdotia*: Antimonarchic Discourse in Late Antique Historiography," in *Antimonarchic Discourse in Antiquity*, ed. H. Börm (Stuttgart, 2015), 305–46, at 332–33.

16 E. Stein, *Histoire du bas-empire*, vol. 2, *De la disparition de l'Empire d'Occident à la mort de Justinien (476–565)* (Paris, 1949), 744; A. H. M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284–602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1964), 1:304; J. Moorhead, *Justinian* (London, 1994), 175; J. A. S. Evans, *The Age of Justinian: The Circumstances of Imperial Power* (London, 1996), 263; Michael Whitby, trans., *The Ecclesiastical History of Evagrius Scholasticus*, TTH 33 (Liverpool, 2000), 256, n. 6.

17 Evagrius Scholasticus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1, 9 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 195–96, 205); Allen, *Evagrius*, 210; Cameron, "Early Byzantine *Kaiserkritik*," 10–11.

18 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 196; trans. Whitby, 256).

19 J. B. Bury, *History of The Later Roman Empire from the Death of Theodosius I. to the Death of Justinian*, 2 vols. (repr. New York, 1958), 2:71; Groh, *Justin II*, 42; Stein, *Bas-empire*, 745; Cameron, *Corippus*, 132; Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 6; Moorhead, *Justinian*, 175–76; Evans, *Age of Justinian*, 264; Whitby, "Successors of Justinian," 86.

20 *Synopsis Chronike* (ed. K. Sathas, *Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη*, vol. 7 [Paris, 1894], 104). This is first noted in D. Feissel, "Trois notes sur l'empereur Maurice," *TM* 16 (2010): 253–72, at 262, n. 57. The authorship of the chronicle is debated. For the traditional attribution to Theodore Skoutariotes: R. Tocci, ed., *Theodori Scutariotae chronica: Editio princeps*, CFHB 46 (Berlin, 2015), 64*–111*. For an anonymous author: K. Zafeiris, "The Issue of the Authorship of the *Synopsis Chronike* and Theodore Skoutariotes," *REB* 69 (2011): 253–63.

21 Stein, *Bas-empire*, 744; Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 1.53 (ed. Cameron, 38; trans. Cameron, 88).

22 "Sophia 1," *PLRE* 3:1179–80; Cameron, "Empress Sophia," 6; L. Garland, *Byzantine Empresses: Women and Power in Byzantium, AD 527–1204* (London, 1999), 40–41. Signes Codoñer, "Prokops *Anekdotia*," 71, n. 67, suggests that the marriage took place before 542.

emperor by a contemporary witness is thus from his maturity, in a Latin letter written by Pope Vigilius (537–555) amidst the Three Chapters controversy.²³ It details Justin and other senior officials' mission from Justinian to the pope in January 552 and describes the future emperor as an ex-consul and a *curopalates*.²⁴ In an account preserved in the *Acts of the Second Council of Constantinople*, we learn that in May 553 the beleaguered Vigilius requested another meeting, which again included Justin the ex-consul.²⁵

Justin's consular status is straightforward enough, for we can assume that he already held an honorary consulship, a prestigious but all too common position among the imperial elite.²⁶ The office of *curopalates* is, however, more interesting, for it was a relatively low-ranked position with unclear responsibilities in the palace in the fourth century, but from the fifth century onward had become an increasingly prominent office.²⁷ The last known eastern Roman *curopalates* was a certain Nomus, most likely the consul of 445, who became a patrician in 448, making the position a prestigious

one indeed if it was granted to one of the most preeminent men in the empire.²⁸ Following Stein's interpretation of Peter the Patrician's now-lost work on state ceremonies, it seems also likely that around 550 it was standard protocol for a retiring *curopalates* to be given the rank of *vir illustris*, the highest bureaucratic grade within the imperial hierarchy.²⁹ It is then only a minor innovation for Justin, who may have already become a *vir illustris* thanks to his honorary consulship, to become the *curopalates*.

The prestigious nature of this office is confirmed once we turn to the coterie of patricians and ex-consuls who met with Pope Vigilius alongside Justin. Among them were Belisarius the celebrated general, Cethegus the consul of 504, Peter the Patrician, the *magister officiorum*, Marcellus the *comes excubitorum*, and Constantine the *quaestor*; in short, some of the most influential officeholders within the resurgent empire.³⁰ Aside from the well-known responsibilities of these offices, it is also worth adding that in 518, during the contested succession following the death of Emperor Anastasius (r. 491–518), it was the *magister officiorum* Celer and the *comes excubitorum* Justin who were first informed of the emperor's demise and took the lead in shaping the

23 On the Three Chapters controversy: C. Sotinel, "Autorité pontificale et pouvoir impérial sous le règne de Justinien: Le pape Vigile," *MÉFR* 104.1 (1992): 439–63, repr. and trans. in C. Sotinel, *Church and Society in Late Antique Italy and Beyond* (Aldershot, 2010), chap. I, 1–25; Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians*, 282–89; R. Price, trans., *The Acts of the Council of Constantinople of 553, with Related Texts on the Three Chapters Controversy*, 2 vols., TTH 51 (Liverpool, 2009), 1:8–98, esp. 1:47–50 on the background to this letter.

24 Pope Vigilius, *Encyclical Letter* (ed. E. Schwartz, SBMünch 1940.2 [Munich, 1940], 1).

25 *Acts of the Second Council of Constantinople* 7.4.2 (ed. J. Straub, ACO IV, vol. 1 [Berlin, 1971], 185).

26 On this office: C. Courtois, "Exconsul: Observations sur l'histoire du consulat à l'époque byzantine," *Byzantion* 19 (1949): 37–58; R. Guiland, *Recherches sur les institutions byzantines*, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1967), 2:46–48.

27 This position has long exercised Byzantinists: J. B. Bury, *The Imperial Administrative System in the Ninth Century, with a Revised Text of the Kletorologion of Philotheos* (London, 1911), 33–34; A. E. R. Boak and J. E. Dunlap, *Two Studies in Later Roman and Byzantine Administration* (New York, 1924), 243–44; Stein, *Bas-empire*, 739–42; Jones, *Later Roman Empire*, 1:372, 571; R. Guiland, "Études sur l'histoire administrative de l'empire byzantin: Le curopalate," *Byzantina* 2 (1970): 185–249, at 187–89, repr. in R. Guiland, *Titres et fonctions de l'empire byzantin* (London, 1976), chap. III. This article follows the most recent interpretation of M. Whitby, "On the Omission of a Ceremony in Mid-Sixth Century Constantinople: Candidati, Curopalatus, Silentarii, Excubitores and Others," *Historia* 36.4 (1987): 462–88, at 469–76.

28 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 17.9 (ed. Thurn, 340); *Paschal Chronicle*, ed. L. Dindorf (Bonn, 1832), 613; Theophanes the Confessor, *Chronicle* AM 6015 (ed. C. de Boor [Leipzig, 1883], 168); "Nomus 3," *PLRE* 2:787, but this Nomus was not identified as the consul of 445 ("Nomus 1," 2:785–86). On this particular identification: E. Stein, "Untersuchungen zum Staatsrecht des Bas-Empire," *ZSavRom* 41 (1920), 246, n. 1; Whitby, "Omission of a Ceremony," 472. Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor, *Chronicle* 8.61 (trans. G. Greatrex et al., TTH 55 [Liverpool, 2011], 280), gives the same title to Justin I, but that is surely a confusion caused by Justin II's well-known association with the position.

29 Stein, *Bas-empire*, 742–43, n. 1; Whitby, "Omission of a Ceremony," 475. Whitby's reservation, at 475 and 482, n. 150, that another fragment of Peter the Patrician's work seems to date after 559, and so many years after it was clear that a *vir illustris*, Justin, had become the *curopalates* instead of the other way round, does not overly problematize Stein's argument. A singular recent exception, Justin II, would have surely not prevented Peter the Patrician from noting the general rule applicable to Justin's predecessors.

30 Vigilius, *Encyclical Letter* (ed. Schwartz, 1); the second meeting, recorded in *Acts of the Second Council of Constantinople* 7.4.2 (ed. Straub, 185), featured Belisarius, Cethegus, Justin, and the general Constantianus. Peter the Patrician appears again later (ed. Straub, 27 and 186); "Belisarius 1," "Cethegus," "Petrus 6," "Marcellus 3," "Constantinus 4," and "Constantianus 2," *PLRE* 3:181–224, 2:281–82, 3:994–98, 3:814–16, 3:342–43, and 3:334–37.

ensuing contested succession.³¹ Given the decisive role these officials could potentially play when the elderly Justinian inevitably died, Justin the *curopalates's* early association with these powerful men is something to be considered, especially if it is part of a pattern that would continue into the following decades.

For now, it needs only be said that the involvement of these men in the Three Chapters controversy is very understandable, for the ongoing dispute was a matter close to the emperor's heart, and it would be reasonable for the highest officials of the empire to have been drawn into dealing with a recalcitrant pope. The inclusion of Justin the *curopalates* admittedly may still have been due to his dynastic connection, but the experience should nonetheless be taken into account when discussing the *curopalates's* future career, particularly his religious policy upon his accession in 565. For more than a year between January 552 and May 553, the two dates when his role is securely attested, Justin would have had to keep abreast of the latest Christological developments, if only to understand the pope's position. It is of interest to note that unlike Justinian, Justin II's reception among contemporary western sources was also very positive, in no small part due to his apparently solid Chalcedonian credentials, an image his uncle would have found difficult to maintain given his persecution of Latin bishops.³² Moreover, in the same spirit as Justinian's doctrinal negotiations, Justin too would work to forge a workable compromise with eastern miaphysite Christians.³³ But whereas Justinian's theological interventions floundered in both the East and the West, Justin at least had secured some success among the post-Roman kingdoms, receiving glowing reviews from John of Biclaro in Visigothic Spain and Venantius Fortunatus in Frankish Gaul for his "orthodoxy," despite the ultimate failure of his negotiations with eastern miaphysites.³⁴ This was a far cry from what Justinian had achieved, for he was notably condemned

as the "son of the devil" by Bishop Nicetius of Trier for his Christological errors, whereas the arrival of eastern relics sent by Justin was welcomed by Nicetius's king and, just possibly, Nicetius himself.³⁵ As Christological controversies continued to eat up much imperial attention in the following decades, not to mention the internecine disputes within Chalcedonian and miaphysite communities, the *curopalates's* early experiences can only have further bolstered his awareness of the challenges facing any sixth-century emperor.

Nor should we imagine that the Three Chapters affair was disentangled from political matters. Justinian's principal theological advisor in this period was Theodore Ascidas, the bishop of Caesarea, and as Justin was a delegate sent in January 552 to harangue Vigilius following his deposition of Theodore and the pope's escape to Chalcedon (among other disagreements), it would be reasonable to propose that Theodore and Justin knew each other, at least in an official capacity.³⁶ Indeed, given Theodore's close involvement in the Three Chapters affair, he is likely the "bishop Theodore" who accompanied Justin in his second appearance in May 553, when together they and other notables were summoned by Vigilius to pass on a document to the emperor.³⁷ It is therefore intriguing to learn from John of Ephesus that it was a Bishop Theodore of Caesarea who persuaded the future empress Sophia to embrace Chalcedonian Christianity in place of her miaphysite beliefs, for the bishop argued that Justinian would never name Justin his successor if his nephew's wife opposed the emperor's faith. Sophia was allegedly persuaded, but she only embraced Chalcedonian Christianity three years before Justinian's death.³⁸ If

31 Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *On Ceremonies* 1.93 (ed. J. Reiske [Bonn, 1829], 426); Croke, "Justinian under Justin," 16–17.

32 Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 53–62; Esders, "Avenger of All Perjury," 33–37.

33 Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 62–65; Grillmeier, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, pt. 2, 482–90.

34 John of Biclaro, *Chronicle* 2 (ed. C. Cardelle de Hartmann, CCSL 173A [Turnhout, 2002], 59); Venantius Fortunatus, *To the August Justin and Sophia* 15–16, 23–48 (ed. F. Leo, MGH AuctAnt 4.1 [Berlin, 1881], 277).

35 Nicetius and Justinian: *Austrasian Letters* 7 (ed. W. Gundlach, MGH Ep 3 [Berlin, 1892], 118–19); H. A. Pohlsander, "A Call to Repentance: Bishop Nicetius of Trier to the Emperor Justinian," *Byzantion* 70.2 (2000): 456–73; M. Meier, "Eschatologie und Kommunikation im 6. Jahrhundert n. Chr.—oder: Wie Osten und Westen beständig aneinander vorbei redeten," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. W. Brandes and F. Schmieder (Berlin, 2008), 41–73, at 67–70. Nicetius and Justin: Esders, "Avenger of All Perjury," 32–37.

36 Pope Vigilius, *Letter of Excommunication to Theodore and Menas* (ed. Schwartz, 10–15).

37 *Acts of the Second Council of Constantinople* 7.4.2 (ed. Straub, 185); Price, *Acts of the Council of Constantinople*, 1:72.

38 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10 (trans. Brooks, 51). I would like to thank Silvio Roggo for bringing the appearance of Theodore Ascidas in this passage to my attention.

we take this tale at face value, then Theodore Ascidas could have favored Justin as the heir before 558, when the bishop died, meaning that the *curopalates* had an ally in the chief architect of Justinian's doctrinal policy.³⁹ At the very least, as John of Ephesus deliberately portrays Theodore as the person who seduced Sophia and Justin away from the miaphysite cause, his account still suggests that some contemporaries associated the bishop and Justin's political interests together.

The same affair would have also impacted the governance of post-conquest Italy. Although Vigilius and Cethegus were on different sides over Justinian's doctrinal policy by 552, they were in fact aligned together in 549 in pushing the emperor to undertake a renewed Italian offensive to end the Gothic War.⁴⁰ The eventually successful invasion, led by Narses into Italy in 552, would have no doubt pleased Cethegus and was surely a factor in persuading this Roman aristocrat to align with Justinian in condemning the Three Chapters. Even if the *curopalates* was ultimately exposed at a very superficial level to this doctrinal debate, Justin's position within the Justinianic regime would have imprinted on him valuable lessons on how to deal with these new western subjects of Constantinople. We are fortunate, for example, to still possess an undated reliquary of the True Cross sent by Justin and Sophia to the pope in Rome, which is surely an indication of his esteem for the former capital of the empire.⁴¹ In Rome itself, Justin would be remembered for sending grain to Rome from Alexandria during a famine, apparently at some point between 575 and 578.⁴² A later report from Michael the Syrian, that Justin would have sent a miaphysite delegation to Rome had the dastardly patriarch John Scholasticus of Constantinople (565–577) not intervened, remains unverifiable, but the tale nonetheless fits well with Western accounts of Justin being more mindful of the papacy's interests than his uncle.⁴³ After all, in his dealings with the Eternal City,

Justin surely could not help but also be reminded of his encounters with another pope in 552/3. The storm surrounding Vigilius and the troubled elevation of his successor, Pelagius I, had made clear just how unpopular Justinian's treatment of the papal delegation was and it is little wonder that Justin would attempt something different after his accession.⁴⁴ As someone who had personally met with Vigilius and worked with Theodore Ascidas before and during the Ecumenical Council of 553, the *curopalates* was certainly well placed to understand the strength of feeling the Three Chapters created and to push for a less confrontational alternative after his accession.

Justin's actions in 552/3, unfortunately, still do not shed much light on the *curopalates's* role in imperial government, but, assuming that Latin evidence of the position of *cura palatii* are references to the same or similar position, it is worth noting that two fifth-century aristocrats in the West had leveraged significant influence through this office as well. The future patrician Aetius was the *cura palatii* of the usurper John (r. 423–425) and was placed in charge of bringing Hunnic reinforcements to defend his master, an army that Aetius then used to gain a field command under the new regime upon John's defeat.⁴⁵ In this regard, Aetius's career is a mirror of that of Baduarius, Justin II's son-in-law, who was promptly appointed the new *curopalates* after the emperor's accession in 565.⁴⁶ Shortly afterward, perhaps as early as 566, Baduarius took to the field and led an army against the Lombards, which suggests that the *curopalates* in the East was similarly not limited to purely civilian duties.⁴⁷ While little can be said on the surface for the Gallic nobleman Consentius, who served as the *cura palatii* under Emperor Avitus (r. 455–456), Ralph Mathisen has suggested that he may have been involved in negotiations with the Vandals and

39 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.126 (ed. Thurn, 420).

40 Procopius, *Wars* 7.35.9–10 (ed. Haury, 2:454); *Liber pontificalis* 61.7–8 (ed. L. Duchesne, 2 vols. [Paris, 1886–92], 1:298–99).

41 A. McClanan, *Representations of Early Byzantine Empresses: Image and Empire* (New York, 2002), 163–68.

42 *Liber pontificalis* 64.1 (ed. Duchesne, 1:308).

43 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 10.5 (trans. J.-B. Chabot [Paris, 1899–1910], 2:295). See also the alleged concern displayed by Chalcedonian bishops for Rome's views in John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.2.4 (trans. Brooks, 23).

44 *Liber pontificalis* 62.1–2 (ed. Duchesne, 1:303).

45 Gregory of Tours, *Ten Books of Histories* 2.8 (ed. B. Krusch and W. Levison, MGH ScriptRerMerov 1.1 [Hannover, 1951], 51); Stein, *Bas-empire*, 740, n. 2, 796; "Aetius 7," *PLRE* 2:22; J. Wijnendaele, "The Early Career of Aëtius and the Murder of Felix (c. 425–430 CE)," *Historia* 66.4 (2017): 468–82, at 470–72.

46 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 2.284–85 (ed. Cameron, 56).

47 Theophylact Simocatta, *History* 6.10.10 (ed. C. de Boor, rev. P. Wirth [Stuttgart, 1972], 240). On dating: "Baduarius 2," *PLRE* 3:164; Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 378; E. Fabbro, *Warfare and the Making of Early Medieval Italy (568–652)* (Abingdon, UK, 2020), 46–47.

with the eastern emperor Marcian, which, if correct, is likewise a role that took Consentius well beyond the imperial palace.⁴⁸

From the *Variae* of Cassiodorus, a collection of sixth-century letters and templates compiled following the fall of Ostrogothic Italy, we also learn that in the Ostrogothic realm the *cura palatii* was responsible for the maintenance of the palace in Ravenna and possessed the rank of *vir spectabilis*, rather than the highest *vir illustris*. This official was nonetheless highly esteemed, for the *cura palatii* would walk just before the king in a royal procession; thus, even if its duties at the Ravennate court seem much more mundane, the position's relative prominence remains clear.⁴⁹ Moreover, as both the Ostrogothic *cura palatii* and a sixth-century eastern Roman *curopalates* had a golden staff as an insignia and walked in close proximity to their liege, a shared lineage would be the most economical explanation for their similarities.⁵⁰ The two positions therefore may not have been as divergent in their purposes as some interpretations imply, particularly given Shane Bjornlie's recent thesis that the *Variae* was ultimately compiled in the 540s to rehabilitate the Italian aristocracy in Constantinopolitan eyes, with the implication that its descriptions of Ostrogothic bureaucracy ought to be understood in the political and intellectual context of the eastern capital as well.⁵¹ For this particular letter, Bjornlie suggests that the constant appeals to antiquity helped to brush over the awkwardness of Ostrogothic palace-building, which may have been seen as infringing on imperial prerogatives, and to create the impression that "the Amals enjoyed architectural tastes similar to those of Justinian."⁵² In these

circumstances, it is tempting to argue that Cassiodorus would have also tried to reshape the epistle to be more in line with an eastern *curopalates*'s responsibilities, who in the 540s could well have been Justin, since his appearance in 552 is only the terminus ante quem of his elevation to that position.

It is then very appropriate that Justin was the patron of a number of building projects before his accession, activities that mirror the contemporary evidence from Cassiodorus. Building activity in itself was not unusual for members of the imperial family, for Justinian too had built and renovated churches during the reign of his predecessor,⁵³ but Justin stands out in the building of the Sophiae and the Sophianae palaces before Justinian's death, which at least equal Justinian's new palaces at Hieron and Jucundianae.⁵⁴ The renovation of the port of Julian, which was renamed in honor of the *curopalates*'s wife Sophia, and which was connected to the building of the Sophiae palace, is another major project that would have stamped Justin's name on Constantinople.⁵⁵ Combined with two other palaces built during his reign and the refurbishment of another, it would appear that Justin II had ample interest in the construction and renovation of imperial residences, as well as building work more generally, a fitting trait indeed if one of his responsibilities as a *curopalates* was the maintenance of palaces.⁵⁶

Finally, the *curopalates* may have retained some responsibility for the emperor's security, for according to Evagrius's account of Justin's accession in 565,

48 Sidonius Apollinaris, *Poem* 23.431 (ed. C. Luetjohann, MGH AuctAnt 8 [Berlin, 1887], 260); R. W. Mathisen, "Sidonius on the Reign of Avitus: A Study in Political Prudence," *TAPA* 109 (1979): 165–71, at 166–67; R. W. Mathisen, "Avitus, Italy and the East in A.D. 455–456," *Byzantion* 51.1 (1981): 232–47, at 245–46; M. R. Salzman, "Emperors and Elites in Rome after the Vandal Sack of 455," *AntTard* 25 (2017): 243–62, at 248.

49 Cassiodorus, *Variae* 7.5 (ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AuctAnt 12 [Berlin, 1894], 205–6).

50 Whitby, "Omission of a Ceremony," 473–74.

51 Most recently: C. Kelly, "Curopalates," *Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2018), 439. M. S. Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition between Rome, Ravenna and Constantinople: A Study of Cassiodorus and the 'Variae', 527–554* (New York, 2014), 19–34.

52 Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition*, 248; note though that Bjornlie sees the western *cura palatii* as the "curator of the palace" and thus as a less important office.

53 B. Croke, "Justinian, Theodora, and the Church of Saints Sergius and Bacchus," *DOP* 60 (2006): 25–63, at 29–30.

54 Averil Cameron, "Notes on the Sophiae, the Sophianae and the Harbour of Sophia," *Byzantion* 37 (1967): 11–20, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, chap. XIII; eadem, "The Artistic Patronage of Justin II," *Byzantion* 50.1 (1980): 62–84, at 72–73; repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, chap. XII. On Justinian's new palaces: Procopius, *On Buildings* 1.11.16 (ed. Haury, 4:43); idem, *Secret History* 26.23 (ed. Haury, 3:162).

55 P. Magdalino, "The Maritime Neighborhoods of Constantinople: Commercial and Residential Functions, Sixth to Twelfth Centuries," *DOP* 54 (2000): 209–26, at 212–19, further argues that the renovated harbor was partly the result of the district becoming a more significant economic hub due to the effects of the plague, making Justin's efforts all the more important in supporting Constantinopolitan life.

56 J. Bardill, *Brickstamps of Constantinople*, 2 vols. (New York, 2004), 1:37–38.

the *curopalates* was tasked with guarding the palace.⁵⁷ The precise remit cannot be determined, particularly as it is unclear how his role relates to the purviews of the *comes excubitorum*, the commander of the excubitors who were the chief protectors of the emperor, and the *magister officiorum*, who commanded the *scholae palatinae*, the traditional imperial retinue (but by the age of Justinian more of a ceremonial unit).⁵⁸ However, given the timely promotion of Tiberius, Justin's protégé, to the commander of the excubitors after 562, Stein's suggestion that the *curopalates* exercised oversight over the palace guards is very appropriate.⁵⁹ The *Chronicle* of John Malalas certainly implies that Justin had some involvement with the capital's security. In 559 Justin was responsible for escorting Bulgar raiders retreating from Constantinople, while in 562 and 563 Justin was involved in suppressing two bouts of rioting by the circus factions, giving him prime experience in dealing with a perennial problem for the rulers of Constantinople.⁶⁰

The intervention in 562, interestingly, also necessitated collaboration with Marinus, the *comes excubitorum* and presumably the predecessor to Tiberius, the next known *comes*.⁶¹ Having worked with both the *comes* Marcellus in 552 during their meeting with Vigilius and the *comes* Marinus in 562, Justin's success in elevating Tiberius becomes all the more

understandable, for his career in the preceding decade had required cooperation with the two (known) previous commanders of the excubitors. We are, as always, limited by the surviving evidence, but it should be reasonable to suppose that even if the *curopalates* did not officially have oversight over the excubitors, Justin was still personally, and moreover continuously, linked to this crucial unit's commanders. As the great-nephew of Justin I, the *curopalates* would have surely grown up with stories of his family's rise to prominence, which had culminated in 518 with the elevation of the elder Justin, Emperor Anastasius's *comes excubitorum*, to the throne. Taking recent history into account, building up a long-term relationship with this particular unit was perhaps an obvious step for a man seeking to succeed Justinian.

The future Justin II could not have been unusual in holding such imperial ambitions, as, judging by previous officeholders, this particular position offered opportunities to intervene in other domains and, if we account for the aforementioned Nomus the patrician, was one granted to men at the pinnacle of the political hierarchy. Justin's acquisition of this title must then be seen as a relative coup for the untested future emperor, for we have no evidence that he held any other office prior to his first appearance in 552, or that he had already gained the confidence of the elderly Justinian. This interpretation is supported by Paul the Silentiary's panegyric for Justinian and the Hagia Sophia, in which he waxes poetically on how in 558 Justinian rushed to the scene after the collapse of the church's famous dome without waiting for courtiers bearing golden staffs, who were supposed to escort the emperor on ceremonial occasions.⁶² This was, as Mary Whitby rightfully says, an allusion to the constant presence of the *curopalates*, who in 558 was, of course, Justin, and of the decurions, the two court positions that bore the aforementioned staffs as part of their duties.⁶³ Given the little we know of Justin's career, it is quite apt that this turn of phrase, referring to a courtier's absence, is instead also revealing of his role in court, for it suggests that the *curopalates* was someone who should have been ever-present by Justinian's side. With this in mind, we might be justified in giving more credence to the claim of John of

57 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 195).

58 On the decline of the *scholae*: Procopius, *Secret History* 24.15–23 (ed. Haury, 3:149–50); Agathias, *Histories* 5.15.2–6 (ed. R. Keydell, CFHB 2 [Berlin, 1967], 182–83); R. I. Frank, *Scholae Palatinae: The Palace Guards of the Later Roman Empire* (Rome, 1969), 213–16; M. Clauss, *Der magister officiorum in der Spätantike (4.–6. Jahrhundert): Das Amt und sein Einfluß auf die kaiserliche Politik* (Munich, 1980), 43–44. But note the more nuanced interpretations of J. F. Haldon, *Byzantine Praetorians: An Administrative, Institutional, and Social Survey of the Opsikion and Tagmata, c. 580–900* (Bonn, 1984), 126–28; Whitby, "Omission of a Ceremony," 465–66; B. Croke, "Leo I and the Palace Guard," *Byzantion* 75 (2005): 117–51, at 138–39.

59 Stein, *Bas-empire*, 739–40, n. 2.

60 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.129, 135, 146 (ed. Thurn, 422, 424, 430). As fighting during the riots of 561 and 565 also drew in the excubitors, recorded in 18.132, 151 (ed. Thurn, 422, 431), it is possible that Justin was also involved in suppressing the violence. On Justin II's success with the circus factions after his accession: Theophanes, *Chronicle* AM 6061 (ed. de Boor, 243); Alan Cameron, *Circus Factions: Blues and Greens at Rome and Byzantium* (Oxford, 1976), 127.

61 "Marinus 2," *PLRE* 3:831.

62 Paul the Silentiary, *Description of the Hagia Sophia* 259 (ed. C. De Stefani [Berlin, 2011], 17).

63 Whitby, "Omission of a Ceremony," 483.

Ephesus that officials were already agitating for Justin to be named as the *caesar*, and so successor to Justinian, before 562.⁶⁴ If the Bishop Theodore of Caesarea noted by John as someone sympathetic to Justin and Sophia's cause can indeed be identified as Theodore Ascidas, we might even suppose that at least one of the *curopalates*'s collaborators in 553 retained a positive relationship with Justin years later, which is yet another indication of the importance of reexamining the emperor's earlier career.

Of course, all these connections forged by Justin the *curopalates* would have been meaningless had the other Justin, the son of Germanus, built up similarly impressive connections throughout his life, yet the evidence for the general's prominence remains fragmentary. This Justin certainly rose to public attention much earlier, for he was the ordinary consul of 540 and served with his father on a military campaign the same year.⁶⁵ He was a young man at this point, perhaps only aged fifteen, meaning that he was younger than Justin the *curopalates*, possibly even by more than a decade.⁶⁶ Yet he was far from the exception in gaining such a prestigious position at a young age, for the consul of 539, Apion II, had also come into office as a teenager, or perhaps even as young as ten, if we follow the arguments of Joëlle Beaucamp.⁶⁷ Instead of as an indication of how Justinian viewed Justin the consul's future promise, it would be reasonable to argue that it was the political prominence of his father, Germanus, that led to the younger Justin receiving this honor. As the consulship was put into abeyance after 541 and only granted to four easterners (other than the emperor) in the preceding decade, it was quite impossible for Justin the *curopalates* to equal his relative's youthful achievement.⁶⁸ Instead, the consulship is only evidence that the future emperor or his family were not as favored as Germanus's family in the 530s. As we know nothing about Justin II's

parents, Vigilantia and Dulcidiu, apart from their names, it is perhaps understandable that the son of Germanus, being the heir of a well-regarded *magister militum* and a patrician, emerged into the historical record earlier.⁶⁹ Yet given the *curopalates*'s position of authority, as argued above, it is clear that the son of Vigilantia had managed to acquire and maintain Justinian's confidence in the decades following 540, and a better comparison would be to track how the career of Justin the consul had progressed in the same period.

Helpfully for historians today, the son of Germanus features widely in the narratives of Procopius, Agathias, and Menander the Guardsman, but it is also unfortunate that these notices, with one exception, are devoted to military affairs. This is a telling difference to the career of Justin the *curopalates*, who did not appear in these histories until he became the emperor, but nonetheless, as established above, remained active in Constantinople. The opposite was seemingly the case for the son of Germanus, for Procopius reports that his family had earned the ire of Empress Theodora.⁷⁰ The precise details of this feud cannot be reconstructed, not least because we only hear it from Procopius, but it seems to have had an impact, for Germanus did not hold any military commands in the 540s after his return from the Persian front, despite his military experience.⁷¹ Combined with a property dispute with Justinian involving the inheritance of Germanus's brother, Procopius paints Germanus and his sons as ripe for joining the conspiracy of the general Artabanes to murder Justinian in 548/9.⁷² Justin and his father were apparently loyal in this instance and helped to reveal the plot, but Germanus's involvement still displeased

64 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10 (trans. Brooks, 51).

65 Continuator of Marcellinus Comes, *Chronicle* 540.1 (ed. B. Croke [Sydney, 1995], 48); Procopius, *Wars* 2.6.10 (ed. Haury, 1:174); R. S. Bagnall et al., *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire* (Atlanta, 1987), 615.

66 Stein, *Bas-empire*, 744.

67 Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, 613. J. Beaucamp, "Apion et Praejecta: Hypothèses anciennes et nouvelles données," *REB* 59 (2001): 165–78, at 169–71. This is followed in Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 19, n. 47, and T. M. Hickey, *Wine, Wealth, and the State in Late Antique Egypt: The House of Apion at Oxyrhynchus* (Ann Arbor, 2012), 14.

68 Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, 7–12.

69 "Vigilantia," "Dulcidiu," *PLRE* 2:1165, 3:428. According to the *Patria of Constantinople* 3.117 (ed. T. Preger, 2 vols. [Leipzig, 1901–7], 2:254), Emperor Justinian built palaces at the Tauros for Vigilantia, but this account does little to strengthen our understanding of her family even if it is a reliable one.

70 Procopius, *Secret History* 5.8 (ed. Haury, 3:32); J. A. Evans, *The Empress Theodora: Partner of Justinian* (Austin, 2002), 49–50.

71 Cf. M. Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics in the Age of Justinian: A Study of Procopius* (Amsterdam, 2020), 182, who suggests that Germanus's career did not languish in the 540s.

72 Procopius, *Wars* 7.31.17–18, 32.10 (ed. Haury, 2:433, 435). For modern interpretations of this plot: Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians*, 261–63; Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics*, 176–91.

the emperor, with his anger allegedly only placated by Marcellus the *comes excubitorum*.⁷³ This displeasure may have had long-term consequences, for although Germanus was first chosen to lead a new army into Italy, he was replaced and then the invasion cancelled.⁷⁴

Germanus was again placed in charge when another Italian expedition was planned, and in 550 he and his sons began a recruitment campaign for a new army, only for his untimely death to interrupt this family endeavor.⁷⁵ The consular Justin's younger brother, Justinian, and their brother-in-law, John, nephew of Vitalian, were put in joint command of this nascent army,⁷⁶ but for unknown reasons Justin was rotated back to Thrace and was one of five generals, many with experience in the Balkans, to serve under a Scholasticus against Slav raiders in 551. This army suffered a defeat at Adrianople, but was able to secure a victory in the following battle.⁷⁷ Then Justin and his brother Justinian, the latter presumably having been recalled from the mooted Italian force, trailed a larger Slav force, but were unable to bring it to battle.⁷⁸ In 552, the two brothers and two other generals were sent to aid the Lombards against the Gepids, but their contingent never reached the battle, as the brothers were ordered to deal with religious unrest elsewhere.⁷⁹ This is the sum total of Justin's appearances in Procopius and together they present a rather unclear picture of his ability and renown, and he certainly did not yet stand out from the coterie of generals that feature in the Procopian narrative.

73 Procopius, *Wars* 7.33.48–50 (ed. Haury, 2:441); Averil Cameron, *Procopius and the Sixth Century* (London, 1985), 141. Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics*, 186–87, also highlights the possible friendship between Germanus and Marcellus.

74 Procopius, *Wars* 7.37.24–27 (ed. Haury, 2:466–67); D. Parnell, “Justinian’s Clemency and God’s Clemency,” *Byzantina Symmeikta* 30 (2020): 11–30, at 20. Note also the interesting suggestion in Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics*, 189, n. 131, that the reference in Procopius, *On Buildings* 1.1.16 (ed. Haury, 4:8), to conspirators of consular rank still serving as generals (thanks to Justinian’s clemency) may have included Justin the son of Germanus.

75 Procopius, *Wars* 7.39.17 (ed. Haury, 2:473–74).

76 Procopius, *Wars* 7.40.10 (ed. Haury, 2:478).

77 Procopius, *Wars* 7.40.34–45 (ed. Haury, 2:481–83); Cameron, *Procopius*, 140, n. 35; Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 309–10.

78 Procopius, *Wars* 8.25.1–5 (ed. Haury, 2:623–24); Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 311.

79 Procopius, *Wars* 8.25.11–13 (ed. Haury, 2:625–26); Sarantis, *Justinian’s Balkan Wars*, 313–19.

This Justin reappears in the narrative of Agathias in 554, when he was one of four generals sent to fight the Persians in Lazica. Interestingly, Agathias notes that Bessas, Martin, and Buzes were some of Justinian’s best generals, but he lists Justin separately.⁸⁰ This list cannot be pressed too hard, for there could be any number of reasons why Justin, despite his experience, is not explicitly noted in the first numeration of commanders, particularly as he was later named the second most senior general after Martin once Bessas fell into disfavor, and eventually became the highest-ranking commander, the *magister militum per Armeniam*, in 557.⁸¹ It is, however, a reminder that Justin does not emerge from the Agathian narrative entirely positively, despite his military experience and eventual promotion.⁸² As Agathias tells us, although Justin was an able commander, one of his subordinates, a certain John the Libyan, was rapacious in acquiring supplies for Justin’s army. This behavior was apparently tolerated by Justin, but, Agathias notes, this is nonetheless an injustice for which the general will receive his punishment in due time, a reference surely to his execution on the orders of Emperor Justin II and Empress Sophia.⁸³ It is quite possible that this story is a later besmirching of the general’s reputation emanating from the new emperor’s propaganda, or is rooted in contemporary criticisms that are liberal with the truth, much like Procopius’s attacks on many imperial officials, but the possibility that this attack is a genuine critique should not be dismissed.⁸⁴ When a distinguished general such as Belisarius was liable to be hated by his fellow generals, be accused of crimes he did not commit, and condemned in the most volatile terms by his own former secretary, it is unlikely that this Justin was universally admired, so we can safely presume that the son of Germanus had his own detractors, who would have worked to prevent his accession to the throne.

Finally, the last stage of this Justin’s career involved the Avars and it is here perhaps that he receives

80 Agathias, *Histories* 2.18.8 (ed. Keydell, 65); “Iustinus 4,” *PLRE* 3:752.

81 Agathias, *Histories* 3.2.8, 4.21.4 (ed. Keydell, 86, 149).

82 On the war itself: Stein, *Bas-empire*, 511–16; D. Braund, *Georgia in Antiquity: A History of Colchis and Transcaucasian Iberia, 550 BC–AD 562* (Oxford, 1994), 306–11.

83 Agathias, *Wars* 4.21.5–22.7 (ed. Keydell, 149–51).

84 D. Potter, *Theodora: Actress, Empress, Saint* (New York, 2015), 35.

the most positive coverage, but it is also a period when the sources are the scantiest. Having already met Avar envoys as the commander in Lazica, Justin once again encountered them when he served on the Danube in 561–62.⁸⁵ Through a ploy, Justin foiled an Avar attempt to cross the river and the general apparently acquitted himself well in the resulting conflict, though we possess no details of his accomplishments or the struggle itself.⁸⁶ This is the strongest evidence yet that Justin was an able and experienced commander, but it also means that he only truly jumps into the spotlight after 557 following his promotion, as previously he was either a subordinate or held a joint-command with his brother.

The limited evidence makes it very difficult to trace Justin's networks, as can be illustrated by his known clients. The first is John the Libyan from Agathias, which is hardly an encouraging indicator of Justin's judgment. The other two are Elminzur, a Hunnic officer serving Justin in Lazica, and Bonus, the commander of his household guard on the Danube.⁸⁷ We know nothing about Elminzur, and while Bonus seems to have remained a general under Justin II, his political influence, if any, is left unremembered. Compared to the known clients of the *curopalates*, which by 565 included the *comes excubitorum* and the patriarch of Constantinople, this is a paltry haul indeed. Of course, not all connections are visible if we only examine the two Justins' public careers. I therefore turn to the evidence for their immediate families, which clarifies a little how entangled our protagonists were with the Constantinopolitan aristocracy and also, unsurprisingly, sheds further light on how the two branches of the dynasty differed in their fortunes.

The House of Justin

The evidence for the son of Germanus is more straightforward, if only because of its relative paucity. As an illustration, the only relevant evidence comes from Procopius, whose *Secret History* reports that Justin was

unmarried when Empress Theodora died in 548. Thanks to Theodora's dispute with his father Germanus, other families allegedly avoided making politically disadvantageous marriages with Justin and his siblings.⁸⁸ Presumably, Justin's marriage (if he did marry) could not have taken place until after 548, but the sources of the following decades are less concerned with aristocratic marriages than Procopius, leaving historians blind to how Germanus's heir interacted with the imperial nobility.⁸⁹

We know a little more about the marriages of his siblings, but nonetheless they still do not attest to any great link to the established families. Justin's brother Justinian served as a general under Justin II and was seemingly involved in plots against Emperor Tiberius II Constantine, with the source for the latter report, Gregory of Tours, adding that Justinian had a son and a daughter.⁹⁰ Gregory further notes that Tiberius promised to marry his children to Justinian's children, which is a curious mirror to eastern reports of one of Tiberius's daughters marrying a certain Germanus.⁹¹ As Denis Feissel points out, the much later *Synopsis Chronike* also explicitly identifies Germanus as a son of the patrician Justinian.⁹² A thirteenth-century source is, of course, not an ideal guide to the sixth century, but when corroborated with Gregory of Tours, who does preserve useful information on Constantinopolitan court life, it is perhaps more trustworthy.⁹³ Such a

88 Procopius, *Secret History* 5.8 (ed. Haury, 3:32).

89 The exception is John of Ephesus, but his focus is on the affairs of miaphysite grandees and potential sympathizers, such as Justin II and Sophia.

90 "Justinianus 3," *PLRE* 3:744–47; Gregory of Tours, *Histories* 5.30 (ed. Krusch and Levison, 236). Note also Justin II's speech preserved in Theophylact, *History* 3.11.10 (ed. de Boor, 133), in which the emperor notes that he honored Tiberius more than his own family. As the speech is deemed by Averil Cameron, "An Emperor's Abdication," *BSI* 37.2 (1976): 166, to bear "unmistakeable marks of authenticity," it is perhaps an indication that the house of Germanus remained politically isolated from Justin II despite Justinian's service.

91 Theophanes, *Chronicle* AM 6074 (ed. de Boor, 252). Cf. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 7, who identifies Germanus as Justinian's half-brother Germanus, rather than his son.

92 Feissel, "Trois notes," 262–63; *Synopsis Chronike*, ed. Sathas, 104; "Germanus 5," *PLRE* 3:529.

93 Averil Cameron, "The Byzantine Sources of Gregory of Tours," *JTS* 26.2 (1975): 421–26, repr. in eadem, *Continuity and Change*, chap. XV; P. Schreiner, "Gregor von Tours und Byzanz,"

85 Menander, *History* 5 (ed. Blockley, 48–52).

86 Menander, *History* 5.4 (ed. Blockley, 52); Agathias, *Histories* 4.22.7 (ed. Keydell, 151); Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.1 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 196); Sarantis, *Justinian's Balkan Wars*, 333–36, 350–53; Pohl, *Avars*, 53–55.

87 Agathias, *Histories* 4.15.1–3 (ed. Keydell, 140–41); Menander, *History* 5.4 (ed. Blockley, 52); "Elminzur," "Bonus 4," *PLRE* 3:440, 241–42.

marriage would neatly bring together the blood relations of the Justinianic dynasty and the emperors adopted into the family. As Justin II had no surviving son and his brother, Marcellus, had left his properties to the state, which implies that he did not have any issue to pass his legacy to either, Germanus was probably one of a few, or the only, scion of the Justinianic clan of marriageable age in 582, and so an ideal partner for Tiberius's daughter.⁹⁴

Despite being one of the two men chosen to succeed Tiberius in 582, Germanus did not take up the offer, supposedly out of humility.⁹⁵ But his entanglement with the imperial throne did not end there, for in 601 his daughter married Theodosius, Emperor Maurice's eldest son, potentially making Germanus the grandfather of a future emperor had the usurper Phocas not overthrown Maurice in 602.⁹⁶ Reaching such dizzying heights of influence, however, no doubt owed much to Justinian, Germanus's father, and his service under Justin II and Tiberius II. Germanus's eventual prominence could be the result of the connections and goodwill built up by Justinian in the 570s, and it is not at all clear how much we can attribute to his family's influence under the reign of Emperor Justinian. We do not, for example, even know the name of Justinian's wife, despite her son's and granddaughter's imperial marriages.

The only clear evidence of a marriage among Germanus's children is that of Justin and Justinian's sister, Justina. According to Procopius, she remained unmarried even when she was eighteen, again due to the hostility of Empress Theodora. Seemingly out of expedience, or possibly to cement an alliance among those who were opposed to the empress, she then married John, a nephew of Vitalian (consul of 520), around 545.⁹⁷

in *Päpste, Privilegien, Provinzen: Beiträge zur Kirchen-, Rechts-, und Landesgeschichte. Festschrift für Werner Maleczek zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. J. Gießauf, R. Muraier, and M. P. Schennach (Vienna, 2010), 403–18.

94 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.18 (trans. Brooks, 203).

95 John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 94 (trans. H. Zotenberg [Paris, 1883], 402); Feissel, "Trois notes," 264.

96 Theophylact, *History* 8.4.10 (ed. de Boor, 291); Feissel, "Trois notes," 266–67.

97 Procopius, *Secret History* 5.9 (ed. Haury, 3:32); idem, *Wars* 7.12.11 (ed. Haury, 2:348); "Ioannes 46," *PLRE* 3:652–61; S. Cosentino, "Ioannes 76," in idem, *Prosopografia dell'Italia bizantina (493–804)*, 2 vols. (Bologna, 1996–2000), 2:143–50; Potter, *Theodora*, 201.

John was a notable general in Italy, but nonetheless of lower social standing than Justina, at least in the eyes of Procopius.⁹⁸ In his *Wars*, Procopius further repeats the rumor that John was not placed in charge of the expedition to Italy because other generals would not have followed his orders, hence Justinian making Narses the supreme commander instead—this again may suggest that John's rank or background was inferior in the eyes of the established aristocracy.⁹⁹ Germanus's family was, of course, closely related to the emperor, but this is not the only difference between their dynasty and the house of Vitalian, many members of which served Justinian loyally as generals.¹⁰⁰ In Jordanes's praise for Germanus's posthumous son, born of an Ostrogothic princess, he makes a point of highlighting this union of the Anician and Amal lines.¹⁰¹ The latter obviously refers to Ostrogothic royalty, but the former seems to suggest that Germanus was also related to the Anicii, an influential and wealthy Roman family. Though still unverifiable, modern scholarship has settled on Germanus having an Anician father, from the eastern branch based in Constantinople, while his mother was Emperor Justin I's sister.¹⁰² Germanus and his children were thus also firmly aristocratic beyond their relations to the incumbent emperor, and in such elevated circles it would be reasonable for Procopius to contend that anyone of nonroyal blood would have been an unworthy match for Justina.

98 Procopius, *Secret History* 5.10 (ed. Haury, 3:33).

99 Procopius, *Wars* 8.21.8 (ed. Haury, 2:601). A John described as a *vir gloriosus, magister militum*, and ex-consul from the province of Moesia is also celebrated in an Italian inscription at Pesaro, and could refer to John, nephew of Vitalian: G. B. de Rossi, *Inscriptiones christianae urbis Romae septimo saeculo antiquiores*, 2 vols. (Rome, 1857–88), 2.1: 8; no. 432, *AEpigr* 1998 (2001): 169. Not being a *vir illustris* and with a provincial background, this John may well have been seen as inferior by blue-blooded Constantinopolitans.

100 On the house of Vitalian under Justinian: D. A. Parnell, *Justinian's Men: Careers and Relationships of Byzantine Army Officers, 518–610* (London, 2017), 139–42.

101 Jordanes, *Getica* 314 (ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AuctAnt 5.1 [Berlin, 1882], 138).

102 N. Wagner, *Getica: Untersuchungen zum Leben des Jordanes und zur frühen Geschichte der Goten* (Berlin, 1967), 53–56; Alan Cameron, "Anician Myths," *JRS* 102 (2012): 133–71, at 160–61. Bjornlie, *Politics and Tradition*, 137, incorrectly suggests that Germanus had originally married an Anician spouse, Passara, which would not work with Jordanes's claim.

If we see this marital alliance through the lens of court politics, however, Justina and John's marriage would have been very appropriate. He was certainly an able general and his reputation was such that, according to Procopius, Princess Matasuntha, Germanus's future wife, had sought to marry him in 538 amidst the Gothic War (despite being already married to the Ostrogothic king, Witigis) and betray Ravenna to imperial forces.¹⁰³ This tale cannot be confirmed by other sources, but when combined with John's presence throughout the Procopian narrative, it does illustrate a sense of John's fame and importance in the Italian theatre. More crucially, John was seemingly a frequent thorn in his commander Belisarius's side, both disobeying his orders and allying with Narses, the general's competitor.¹⁰⁴ His service in Italy may have also extended beyond the Gothic War, if he can be identified as the John who received Pope Pelagius I's letter in 559, meaning that he continued to serve under his friend Narses, the supreme commander in Italy.¹⁰⁵ Given later legends of Justin II and Sophia's hostility to Narses, it is worth speculating whether the involvement of John with the house of Germanus may have contributed to the eventual dismissal of Narses in 568, two years after the purge of their other nemesis, Justin, John's brother-in-law.¹⁰⁶

The nephew of Vitalian was also tied to Germanus's family beyond his marriage, for he was one of the two commanders to take charge of the mooted Italian expedition after Germanus's death, together with the general's son, Justinian.¹⁰⁷ Buzes, probably the son of Vitalian and so John's cousin, had likewise fallen foul of Theodora's wrath and was imprisoned in 542/3.¹⁰⁸ He was later rehabilitated, and defended Germanus's innocence when the latter was implicated in Artabanes's treason in 549; we might presume that this was partly due to Germanus's status as the father-in-law of Buzes's cousin and their common experience

of maltreatment by Theodora.¹⁰⁹ Buzes's later service in Lazica alongside Justin may have further cemented this familial link.¹¹⁰

John's network therefore usefully complemented Germanus's own circle and, furthermore, could suggest that Germanus's own stance was broadly both anti-Theodora and anti-Belisarius, which provides another partial explanation for why his clan remained relatively marginalized despite their proximity to Justinian. In Procopius's no doubt carefully crafted account of the aforementioned conspiracy of Artabanes, the imminent arrival of Belisarius is described as a threat to the family of Germanus, and Michael Stewart is surely correct here to see this as evidence of some antipathy between the emperor's cousin and the most prominent general of his age.¹¹¹ The powerful Narses, another one of Belisarius's rivals, would have been an appropriate ally for Germanus and his son Justin, with John the nephew of Vitalian being the crucial bridge between the eunuch-generalissimo and his in-laws. Unfortunately, as Narses was seemingly based exclusively in the West following his Italian expedition and there is no evidence that he influenced Constantinopolitan politics in the following decade until his final dismissal by Justin II and Sophia, we can presume that the house of Germanus benefited much less from this relationship than they had hoped.¹¹²

Finally, there is Justin's half-sibling, Germanus—named after their father Germanus—who unfortunately remains a cipher. Born of an Ostrogothic princess, his birth represented the union of Roman aristocracy and Gothic royalty, at least according to Jordanes.¹¹³ As we know nothing else about him, however, it seems unlikely that these hopes were ever borne out, let alone helped to advance his half-brother Justin's dynastic ambitions.¹¹⁴ But that is little different from the poor evidence we have for Justinian and Justina,

103 Procopius, *Wars* 6.10.11 (ed. Haury, 2:194).

104 Summarized in "Ioannes 46," *PLRE* 3:654–57; Parnell, *Justinian's Men*, 107–18, 150.

105 "Ioannes 46," *PLRE* 3:661; Cosentino, "Ioannes 76," *Prosopografia*, 2:150. On his friendship with Narses: Procopius, *Wars* 6.16.5 (ed. Haury, 2:220).

106 "Narses 1," *PLRE* 3:925–26.

107 Procopius, *Wars* 7.40.10 (ed. Haury, 2:478).

108 Procopius, *Secret History* 4.6–11 (ed. Haury, 3:25–26); "Buzes," *PLRE* 3:254–57.

109 Procopius, *Wars* 7.33.45 (ed. Haury, 2:440).

110 "Buzes," *PLRE* 3:257.

111 Procopius, *Wars* 7.32.19 (ed. Haury, 2:436–37); Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics*, 184.

112 The only exceptions are accounts of Narses being drawn into miaphysite affairs, as recorded in John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.2 (trans. Brooks, 192), and Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 10.5 (trans. Chabot, 295–96).

113 Jordanes, *Getica* 314 (ed. Mommsen, 138). On the context of this marriage: Signes Codoñer, "Prokops *Anekdotia*," 73–78.

114 "Germanus 3," *PLRE* 3:528. Cf. Whitby, *Emperor Maurice*, 7.

whose careers and marriages also do not allow us to pinpoint anyone active in Constantinople who could have supported Justin's interests. Much, no doubt, can be blamed on the interests, and indeed survival, of our sources, but the difference with the immediate family of Justin the *curopalates* remains striking.

Without Empress Theodora blocking the way, the future emperor Justin and his siblings fared better than his competitor's family; for one, we can presume that they were married at an earlier age, as Procopius specifically notes that it was not the norm for the aforementioned Justina to still be unmarried at eighteen. Justin himself cannot have been a victim of Theodora's fury, for his wife—the eventual empress, Sophia—was Theodora's niece.¹¹⁵ When this marriage took place is unknown, but it seems reasonable to locate it in the 540s, which provides a neat contrast between the two Justins: whereas Justinian's nephew was favored enough to form a marriage alliance with the empress's family, Theodora's hostility prevented the son of Germanus from marrying at all.¹¹⁶ It is then plausible that the future emperor was already of greater political prominence (or at least more imperial favor) in the 540s, whereas Justin, the consul of 540, became less important after his brief moment in the spotlight.

Justin II's siblings, Marcellus and Praeicta, partook in similarly advantageous matches with aristocrats who were, as highlighted by Alan Cameron, members of the "house of Anastasius," that is, the extended family of Emperor Anastasius.¹¹⁷ Marcellus was married to Juliana, the daughter of "Magnus the consul," according to John of Ephesus.¹¹⁸ This consul's identity has attracted some debate. Averil Cameron has identified

him as the Magnus mentioned in Corippus's panegyric for Justin II, who served as the new emperor's *comes sacrarum largitionum* or, more probably, as a *logothete*.¹¹⁹ A likelier candidate for Juliana's father is Magnus, the consul of 518, as proposed by the *PLRE*.¹²⁰ The latter identification can be further supported by Procopius, as his *Secret History* blames Theodora for forcing unworthy marriages on two sisters descended from three generations of consuls, which limits the possible candidates considerably.¹²¹ As Magnus's father was likely Moschianus the consul of 512, and Alan Cameron has further proposed that his father-in-law was in turn Paul, consul of 496 and Anastasius's brother, it is possible, as Clive Foss has already pointed out, to place Juliana within this illustrious thrice-consular lineage.¹²² A marriage arranged by the empress for the emperor's nephew would certainly also be an appropriate topic for Procopius's *Secret History*, in which he vents his fury, real or imagined, against Justinian and Theodora.

Justin and Marcellus's sister, Praeicta, meanwhile first married Areobindus, a patrician sent as a general to North Africa; following the commander's death she

115 Sophia was the daughter of either Comito or Anastasia: Procopius, *Secret History* 9.3 (ed. Haury, 3:56); Cameron, "Empress Sophia," 6. There is a tendency to favor Sophia being the daughter of Comito and the general Sittas: Bury, *Later Roman Empire*, 2:71, n. 2; Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 40; Potter, *Theodora*, 197. Regardless of lineage, Sophia's father was probably a well-connected person, as Theodora presumably would have also arranged an advantageous marriage for the younger Anastasia.

116 Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 41; Signes Codoñer, "Prokops *Anekdata*," 71, n. 67.

117 Alan Cameron, "The House of Anastasius," *GRBS* 19.3 (1978): 259–76, repr. in idem, *Literature and Society in the Early Byzantine World* (Aldershot, 1985), chap. XIV.

118 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.12 (trans. Brooks, 53). An unfavorable tale involving Justin's sister-in-law, preserved in *Patria* 2.65 (ed. Preger, 2:187), may also refer to Juliana.

119 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 1.22 (ed. Cameron, 37, and commentary on 127–28). On this Magnus as the *comes sacrarum largitionum*: Stein, *Studien zur Geschichte*, 52, n. 9; "Magnus 2," *PLRE* 3:805–7; M. Kaplan, "Quelques aspects des maisons divines du VI^e au IX^e siècle," in idem, *Byzance: Villes et campagnes* (Paris, 2006), 138–56, at 150–52, originally printed in *Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Νίκο Σβορώνο*, 2 vols., ed. V. Kremmydas, Ch. Maltezos, and N. Panagiotakes (Rethymno, 1986), 1:70–96, at 88–91; D. Feissel, "Magnus, Mégas et les curateurs des 'maisons divines' de Justin II à Maurice," *TM* 9 (1985): 465–76, note also that Feissel argues against this Magnus being Marcellus's father-in-law at 466, n. 7, 476. On Magnus as a *logothete*: R. Delmaire, *Largesses sacrées et res privata: L'aerarium impérial et son administration du IV^e au VI^e siècle* (Rome, 1989), 229, n. 50; W. Brandes, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten: Untersuchungen zur byzantinischen Administration im 6.–9. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main, 2002), 284, n. 295; F. Montinaro, "Les premiers commerciaux byzantins," *TM* 17 (2013): 351–538, at 404.

120 "Magnus 5," "Iuliana 1," *PLRE* 2:701, 3:728; Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, 571. Cf. Cameron, "House of Anastasius," 273–74, who identifies the father as another Magnus from a different branch of the Anastasian clan.

121 Procopius, *Secret History* 17.7–14 (ed. Haury, 3:106).

122 C. Foss, "The Empress Theodora," *Byzantion* 72.1 (2002): 141–76, at 161–62; Cameron, "House of Anastasius," 261; Bagnall et al., *Consuls*, 527, 559; "Moschianus 2," "Paulus 26," *PLRE* 2: 766, 853. Cf. doubt expressed by Signes Codoñer, "Prokops *Anekdata*," 72, n. 68.

married John, another scion of the Anastasian dynasty.¹²³ He died before 566/7, but it is still an indication of how Justin's family had inserted itself into the imperial elite. As suggested by Cameron, the marriage of Justinian's only known niece was a significant manifestation of the esteem that John and his clan held within the empire, and it is worth bearing this in mind when considering how it might have shaped the prospects of Praeicta's brother.¹²⁴ Moreover, we once again witness the hand of Empress Theodora at work, for Praeicta had wanted to marry Artabanes, the future conspirator, but the empress championed the interests of Artabanes's first wife instead of permitting him to remarry, contributing (in Procopius's narrative at least) to his attempt to murder Justinian.¹²⁵

A marriage, of course, does not necessarily imply a political alliance, and we should not presume that Justin the *curopalates* and the Anastasian clan formed a monolithic faction. Instead, I seek to only point out that they bound Justin's family with individuals who were independently wealthy and influential, which cannot have been detrimental to his ambitions. A daughter from one of Praeicta's marriages, for example, was likely the wife of Apion II, a prominent Egyptian magnate from the influential Apion family and the consul of 539, again illustrating Justin II's familial links with the imperial aristocracy.¹²⁶ Similarly, Marcellus's fortunes appear to have been significant by his death, as John of Ephesus notes that his estates were comparable to the emperor's own holdings.¹²⁷ While Marcellus's properties could have grown mostly under the reign of his brother, a marriage with the Anastasian Juliana can only have improved his earlier standing as well. In any case, he also had a military career under Justinian, which no doubt further enhanced his wealth and gave the family another power base beyond that of Justin the *curopalates*.¹²⁸

The difference between the two Justins's extended families is then rather marked. While the future emperor's siblings were married to the descendants of consuls and so can be linked to the houses of Anastasius and Apion, we can only detect in the sources one named spouse for the four children of Germanus, and this John, Justina's husband, is explicitly noted by Procopius as coming from a lower stock. Moreover, Theodora's known involvement in Praeicta's second marriage and her presumed arrangement of Marcellus's match with Juliana have the extraordinary implication that Theodora arranged the marriages of all three of Vigilantia's children, for the match of Justin and Sophia, the empress's only attested niece, surely also had her approval.¹²⁹ Since Justin and Praeicta's marriages can be placed in the 540s, it again makes for a remarkable comparison with Germanus's children, for in the same decade their family was marginalized. Given the ages of Justinian and his empress, it was presumably quite straightforward for contemporaries to determine whom among the next generation were likely candidates for the throne, so these matches (and the lack of marriages) were also political choices, and, moreover, ones that could have been interpreted by astute observers as clues to where Theodora's, indirectly even Justinian's, preference lay in terms of succession. We might therefore propose that Justin the *curopalates* was already a more palatable candidate among the imperial aristocracy, if only because of the marriages that bound these great families together.

Before turning to the politics of succession itself, two other relations of Justin II ought to be discussed. The first is the *magister militum* Marcian who was sent to defeat a North African revolt in 563.¹³⁰ Marcian is yet another one of Justinian's nephews and was Justin II's cousin, descended from an otherwise unknown sister of the future emperor's mother and Justinian.¹³¹ In itself, his familial proximity to Justin does not mean that he would favor our protagonist over his competitor, but as Marcian remained a trusted general under Justin II, becoming the *magister militum per Orientem* in 572, it does suggest that his loyalty was (or at least was seen to be) beyond question. More certainly, we can point to

123 "Praeicta 1," "Areobindus 2," "Ioannes 63," *PLRE* 3:1048–49, 107–9, 665.

124 Cameron, "House of Anastasius," 267–68.

125 Procopius, *Wars* 7.31.1–14 (ed. Haury, 2:431–33); Moorhead, *Justinian*, 106; Evans, *Theodora*, 33; Stewart, *Masculinity, Identity, and Power Politics*, 167–68, 172–76.

126 Beaucamp, "Apion et Praejecta," 172–74, 177; Sarris, *Economy and Society*, 19. Cf. Stein, *Bas-empire*, 554, n. 1; Cameron, "House of Anastasius," 268–69.

127 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.18 (trans. Brooks, 203).

128 Procopius, *Wars* 2.28.2 (ed. Haury, 1:282); John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.132 (ed. Thurn, 423); "Marcellus 5," *PLRE* 3:816–17.

129 On the various marriages facilitated by Theodora: Garland, *Byzantine Empresses*, 37–38; Potter, *Theodora*, 201–2.

130 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.145 (ed. Thurn, 430).

131 "Marcianus 7," *PLRE* 3:821–23.

the general prominence of Justinian's nephews around the same time: in 562 Marcellus ventured out against the Bulgars and Justin the *curopalates* helped to suppress a Constantinopolitan riot, while in 563 Marcian was sent to North Africa and Justin suppressed another bout of unrest in April the same year.¹³² These notices from John Malalas are all too brief, but these events in 562/3 do show that Justinian's nephews were increasingly relied upon by the elderly emperor, precisely at the same time that Justin the son of Germanus was gaining fame fighting against the Avars on the Danube.

By his accession Justin the *curopalates* also had a son-in-law, Baduarius, who we can presume possessed some military talent as he was soon sent by the new emperor to support the Gepids against the Lombards and emerged victorious.¹³³ Baduarius was, in any case, a patrician prior to Justin's accession, so he must have been a relatively prominent member of the aristocracy already.¹³⁴ Combined with Marcellus and perhaps Marcian, the future Justin II therefore had a number of military men who could be counted on, including one from the next generation. Justin was, of course, still a civilian official based at court, but in this instance his military inexperience was ameliorated by commanders whom he could trust to be on his side, in addition to the connection the *curopalates* no doubt forged within the imperial palace itself. The gaps in the evidence, particularly the unfortunate loss of most of Menander the Guardsman's *History*, prevent a more detailed comparison with the networks of Justin and Justinian, the heirs of Germanus, but from what is available, Justin the *curopalates*'s family appears to have been better placed to contest the succession than the more isolated clan of Germanus, in no small part thanks to Theodora's efforts in the 540s.

The Politics of Succession

Having the support of friendly and influential kin was obviously never enough for a potential emperor to triumph, a fact amply demonstrated by the nephews of Emperor Anastasius in 518, whose absence from Constantinople and religious affiliation made it possible

for a court official, Justin the *comes excubitorum*, to accede to the throne instead.¹³⁵ Fortunately, there are similar indications that other individuals within the imperial court would have been amenable to Justin's eventual accession in 565. One intriguing possibility, raised by James Allan Evans, is that since Theodora had strongly disliked Germanus, even after her death her disapproval influenced Justinian against naming the son of Germanus as his heir.¹³⁶ Yet there is perhaps more to it than simply Theodora's shadow. In the 540s the empress's involvement in arranging various marriages seems to have worked toward securing advantageous connections for her family, but the connections forged would not have faded after her death, for the matches remained unbroken. Although the evidence for the 560s is fragmentary, it is possible to probe whether these links continued to work to Justin the *curopalates*'s advantage.

Unfortunately, we know little about Theodora's illegitimate daughter, not even her name, but we can say a bit more of the anonymous daughter's three sons, as well as another relative of unknown lineage.¹³⁷ Theodora's daughter had married a man, sadly also anonymous, of fine pedigree, as he was a grandson of Emperor Anastasius's sister, and as a result the influence of their three sons, Athanasius, John, and Anastasius, appears to have been quite considerable. John gained high honors and was eventually an envoy to Persia, while Athanasius allegedly liberally spent his wealth in support of his miaphysite faith.¹³⁸ We can further presume that Athanasius had a positive relationship with Justin and Sophia, for his will made the imperial couple his chief heirs.¹³⁹ It is difficult to date this will, as John of Ephesus only alludes to a *terminus ante quem* for the testament; it was apparently written prior to a schism within Athanasius's miaphysite faction, the tritheists, which probably took place in the early 570s, but it is impossible to be more certain.¹⁴⁰ However, given

132 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.132, 135, 145, 146 (ed. Thurn, 423, 424, 430).

133 Theophylact, *History* 6.10.10 (ed. de Boor, 240).

134 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 2.284–87 (ed. Cameron, 56).

135 Croke, "Justinian under Justin," 16.

136 Evans, *Age of Justinian*, 263, 268–69; Evans, *Theodora*, 50.

137 "Athanasius 5," "Ioannes 90," "Anastasius 8," "Georgius 7," *PLRE* 3:147, 676–77, 63, 515.

138 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.11, 5.1 (trans. Brooks, 51–52, 191); Cameron, "House of Anastasius," 269–72.

139 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.7 (trans. Brooks, 195).

140 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.7 (trans. Brooks, 195–96); R. Y. Ebied, A. Van Roey, and L. R. Wickham, *Peter of*

Michael the Syrian's (admittedly much later) report that Justin attempted to make the same Athanasius the miaphysite patriarch of Alexandria in 566, it seems reasonable to propose that Justin possessed friendly ties with Theodora's grandson from before his accession as well—an understandable rapport, for Sophia was the cousin of Athanasius's mother.¹⁴¹ The fervent anti-Chalcedonianism of Theodora's grandsons, as portrayed by John of Ephesus, may have provided further common ground, for the miaphysite historian reports that Sophia only abandoned her miaphysite faith out of political expedience around 562.¹⁴² The three brothers' kinsman, a certain George, is of unknown parentage, but he may also have married an Anastasian aristocrat, if we follow the *PLRE*'s suggestion that this George is identical to the figure noted in a family tree preserved by Nikephoros.¹⁴³ This identification is admittedly speculative, but given Theodora's daughter's advantageous match as well as her apparent influence in bringing about Marcellus's and Praeicta's marriages to Anastasian aristocrats, it nonetheless remains a tempting possibility to think that George's marriage had similarly bound together the houses of Theodora and Anastasius. Taken together, it is easy to imagine how Justin II could have benefited from this impressive bloc of potential supporters, had they been aligned by the same interests. We ought to be careful not to assume that a Theodoran "faction" simply continued the enmities of the empress, for she died seventeen years before Justin's accession, but her grandsons, the sons of Sophia's anonymous cousin, would have surely

at least viewed this Justin more positively than the son of Germanus, to whom they possessed no known links.

We must then turn to how these Theodoran links may have intersected with Justin's other allies. A few individuals of the *curopalates*'s network within the imperial court have already received some attention. Most prominent is perhaps the grand chamberlain Callinicus, who relayed Justinian's alleged deathbed pronouncement of Justin as his heir to the supposedly unsuspecting *curopalates*.¹⁴⁴ Given Callinicus's apparent patronage of John of Ephesus, who had elsewhere praised Sophia's sympathy (and allegedly that of Justin) for the miaphysite cause, the contention that all this was orchestrated to bring about the succession of the chamberlain's favored candidate certainly has merit.¹⁴⁵ From the panegyric by Corippus, we can also deduce that Anastasius, the *magister officiorum* and *quaestor* under the new regime, was a prominent supporter of the *curopalates*, for his unique status of holding two senior positions was evidently a reward from the emperor.¹⁴⁶ Anastasius's previous career is otherwise unknown, but an allusion by Corippus to the unspecified benefits he brought to North Africa could hint at his involvement with the latest event we know of for that province: the rebellion of 563 that was successfully defused by Marcian, Justin's cousin.¹⁴⁷ This interpretation is strengthened by the appearance of another magistrate in Corippus's panegyric, Thomas, who is praised for bringing peace to the province and may be identified as the regional praetorian prefect.¹⁴⁸ Thomas's peace-making is often linked to Marcian's military expedition, and given Anastasius and Thomas's patronage for Corippus, there is room to wonder whether these officials were aligned together due to their common experiences in the West, forming an "African"

Callinicum: Anti-Tritheist Dossier (Leuven, 1981), 22; A. Grillmeier, with T. Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, vol. 2, pt. 4, *The Church of Alexandria with Nubia and Ethiopia after 451*, trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (London, 1996), 109, n. 14, 138–41; L. S. B. MacCoull, "The Historical Context of John Philoponus' *De Opificio Mundi* in the Culture of Byzantine-Coptic Egypt," *Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum* 9.2 (2006): 397–423, at 414–15. But if Athanasius died in 571, as Pauline Allen suggests, based on the *Chronicle* of Eutychius of Alexandria, then the will can perhaps be pushed back to the 560s: Allen, *Evagrius*, 38.

141 Michael the Syrian, *Chronicle* 9.30, 10.1 (trans. Chabot, 253–54, 283–85); P. Booth, "Towards the Coptic Church: The Making of the Severan Episcopate," *Millennium* 14.1 (2017): 151–89, at 165.

142 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10–11, 5.1 (trans. Brooks, 50–52, 191). See also Justin II's initially conciliatory stance toward the miaphysites: Cameron, "Early Religious Policies," 62–65.

143 "Georgius 7," *PLRE* 3:515; C. de Boor, ed., *Nicephori archiepiscopi Constantinopolitani opuscula historica* (Leipzig, 1880), 104.

144 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 1.180, 4.332–44 (ed. Cameron, 41, 83); "Callinicus 2," *PLRE* 3:260–61.

145 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.41 (trans. Brooks, 78–79); Cameron, *Corippus*, 132.

146 Corippus, *In Praise of Anastasius the Quaestor and Magister* 32 (ed. Cameron, 35); "Anastasius 14," *PLRE* 3:64–66.

147 Corippus, *In Praise of Anastasius* 37–40 (ed. Cameron, 35–36, with commentary on 127); John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.145 (ed. Thurn, 430).

148 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 1.18 (ed. Cameron, 37).

faction at court that favored the future emperor and was in turn rewarded by Justin II.¹⁴⁹

We can be more certain of the loyalties of two other individuals already well established in the capital by 565. One is Justin's protégé, the future emperor Tiberius, who was appointed the *comes excubitorum* at some point after 562, ensuring that the *curopalates* had a client commanding the guards overseeing entrances to the imperial palace, which could only have been helpful in a contested succession. In 565 another friend, John Scholasticus, was elevated to become the patriarch of Constantinople.¹⁵⁰ John was the Antiochene *apocrisiarius* (envoy) to the imperial city and he can be safely seen as a supporter of Justin, as supposedly he had received a prediction from St. Symeon the Stylite the Younger that the *curopalates* would succeed Justinian, with the result that John promptly told this Justin of his imperial future.¹⁵¹ According to Evagrius, the *curopalates* also demanded money from Anastasius of Antioch when he attained the patriarchate in 559.¹⁵² As John Scholasticus was already in Constantinople before this, having been recently appointed as the preceding patriarch of Antioch's *apocrisiarius* to the capital, it is very tempting indeed to suggest that Justin was seeking to expand his influence in Syria.¹⁵³ Patriarch Anastasius was previously Antioch's *apocrisiarius* to Alexandria, mirroring John's position in Constantinople, and it stands to reason that the two men already knew each other, at least professionally.¹⁵⁴ If Justin was already acquainted with John in the capital, then he too may have followed the election of Anastasius with greater interest. This is all the more

significant as the previous patriarch, Dominus, was a Thracian supposedly selected by Justinian personally in 545.¹⁵⁵ Fourteen years later in a court where Justin the *curopalates* was increasingly prominent, it may then be plausible for Justin to have similarly intervened in Antiochene affairs. Regardless of what happened in 559, John Scholasticus's appointment as the patriarch of Constantinople six years later would have further bolstered Justin's position, if only because of the patriarch's role in crowning a new emperor.¹⁵⁶ The bishop of the capital, moreover, would have played an active role at court, as clearly seen by the introduction of the young Tiberius to Justin by the preceding patriarch, Eutychius.¹⁵⁷ Although we cannot recover from the sources what John Scholasticus did between his inauguration and Justin II's accession, it would be safe to presume that his new position did not do any harm to the *curopalates*'s imperial prospects.

These allies of the future emperor are well known, but further links can still be untangled from Constantinopolitan events in the last years of Justinian, and together they suggest that the *curopalates*'s reach was more extensive than hitherto supposed. While the accusations and conspiracies of the early 560s do not explicitly name Justin, it is worth revisiting these episodes in light of the previous discussion, for two of Theodora's kinsmen feature in the main source for this period, the *Chronicle* of John Malalas. One is George, of unknown parentage, and the other is John, one of the empress's grandsons. In 560 George was accused, alongside Aetherius, the curator of the Antiochus palace, and Gerontius, the city prefect, of plotting to make a certain Theodore the emperor in place of Justinian. This accusation was promptly recognized as baseless and the accuser punished.¹⁵⁸ In 562 George again came into the spotlight, when he and his relative John accused Zemarchus, the curator of the Placidia

149 "Thomas 15," *PLRE* 3:1318; Cameron, *Corippus*, 127; D. Pringle, *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest: An Account of the Military History and Archaeology of the African Provinces in the Sixth and Seventh Centuries* (Oxford, 2001), 40; Y. Modéran, *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine (IV^e–VII^e siècle)* (Rome, 2003), 667–68.

150 P. Van den Ven, "L'accession de Jean le Scholastique au siège patriarcal de Constantinople en 565," *Byzantion* 35.1 (1965): 320–52, at 339–42; S. Roggo, "The Deposition of Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople in 565 and the Aphthartodocetic Edict of Justinian," *Byzantion* 89 (2019): 433–46, at 441–42.

151 *Life of Symeon the Younger* 202–3 (ed. P. Van den Ven, SubsHag 32, 2 vols. [Brussels, 1962], 1.176–77).

152 Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.5 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 201).

153 *Life of Symeon the Younger* 202 (ed. Van den Ven, 1.176).

154 *Life of Symeon the Younger* 204 (ed. Van den Ven, 1.178).

155 *Life of Symeon the Younger* 72 (ed. Van den Ven, 1.62). On the accessions of Dominus and Anastasius more generally: P. Allen, "Episcopal Succession in Antioch in the Sixth Century," in *Episcopal Elections in Late Antiquity*, ed. J. Leemans et al. (Berlin, 2011), 23–38, at 30–32.

156 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 2.160 (ed. Cameron, 52; see also the useful commentary at 163–64).

157 Eustratius of Constantinople, *Life of Eutychius* 1883–84 (ed. C. Laga, CCSG 25 [Turnhout, 1992], 61); "Tiberius 1," *PLRE* 3:1324.

158 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.131 (ed. Thurn, 422); "Aetherius 2," "Gerontius 3," "Theodore 34," *PLRE* 3:21–22, 534, 1255–56.

palace, of speaking ill of Justinian.¹⁵⁹ As Zemarchus was replaced, it would appear that Theodora's relatives' accusation had more grounds for action (at least compared to George's own denunciation the previous year), or that they at least were more influential within the levers of power.¹⁶⁰ From these two incidents we can surmise that George and at least one other scion of the house of Theodora had acted in concert, and, more intriguingly, that George was portrayed as in league with Aetherius.

Aetherius was a serial intriguer of the 560s, as aside from his (allegedly) false accusation in 560, his nephew was involved in the "bankers' plot" of 562, which apparently implicated Aetherius himself.¹⁶¹ The curator was executed by Justin II in 566, supposedly for plotting to poison the new emperor. Despite this behavior, John of Ephesus depicts him as the patron of the new *magister officiorum* and *quaestor*, Anastasius.¹⁶² Given Anastasius's prominent position at Justin's court, it is possible that Aetherius was held in high esteem as well. Michael Whitby has already suggested that the execution of Aetherius in 566 can be seen as part of a purge of "over-mighty kingmakers," who had otherwise promoted the interests of Justin in previous years, but this hypothesis can be taken a little further.¹⁶³ Aetherius's association to George may, for example, be another clue to his wider network, for, as noted above, George himself was a likely member of the extended Anastasian-Theodoran family.

In a striking demonstration of the level of wealth managed by George and his fellow curators, in 565 the wealth of Belisarius also became the property of this

particular palace following the general's death.¹⁶⁴ We certainly should not directly link this windfall to the scandalous story found in Procopius's *Secret History* of Theodora seeking to gain Belisarius's properties, but it seems rather appropriate that one of the empress's relatives would end up managing what she had (allegedly) sought nearly two decades earlier.¹⁶⁵ Moreover, the next known holder of George's position, the curatorship of Marina palace, was Magnus, who is most likely the same Magnus who once served as Justin's *comes sacrarum largitionum* or as a *logothete* named by Corippus, which again attest to the curatorship's importance.¹⁶⁶ As Aetherius was the curator of the Antiochus palace when he and George were both accused of treason, while George's presumed rival, Zemarchus, was removed from his position as the curator of the Placidia palace, it would also be reasonable to say that these positions were seen as valuable prizes for ambitious men.¹⁶⁷ Wolfram Brandes's contention that these curators were increasingly crucial to the Justinianic regime thanks to the senatorial wealth they managed is then a very persuasive one.¹⁶⁸ Having these curators as allies could have been very helpful indeed for a would-be emperor, making it profitable for historians

164 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.149 (ed. Thurn, 431).

165 Procopius, *Secret History* 5.18–22 (ed. Haury, 3:34–35).

166 "Magnus 2," *PLRE* 3:805–7; Feissel, "Magnus;" Kaplan, "Quelques aspects," 150–52. On Magnus as a *logothete*: Delmaire, *Largesses sacrées*, 229, n. 50; Montinaro, "Les premiers commerciaux," 404; but even if Magnus was not the *comes sacrarum largitionum*, he was nonetheless a figure of importance, as he is highlighted in Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 1.22 (ed. Cameron, 37).

167 An otherwise unknown Thomas ("Thomas 20," *PLRE* 3:1320) is potentially another curator of the Placidia palace. His image was allegedly placed close to that of an imperial couple in the complex, but as this can refer to Justin and Sophia or Justinian and Theodora, it does not help to clarify whether he was Zemarchus's successor or predecessor. It may also be of interest that Theodora's sister, Comito, married the general Sittas at the Antiochus palace (John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.10 [ed. Thurn, 359]) and that Aetherius, her relative's ally, was the curator for this estate in the 560s, at a time when Sophia, most probably Comito and Sittas's daughter, was presumably increasingly prominent.

168 Brandes, *Finanzverwaltung in Krisenzeiten*, 625–26; Brandes, "Eine Verschwörung," 373. See also John of Nikiu, *Chronicle* 90 (trans. Zotenberg, 389–90), where Aetherius offered to Justinian a sorcerer's services, which may be another clue of his prominence in the imperial court. On curators more generally: Kaplan, "Quelques aspects," 142–53; M. Kaplan, *Les hommes et la terre à Byzance du VI^e au XI^e siècle: Propriété et exploitation du sol* (Paris, 1992), 161–62.

159 Theophanes, *Chronicle* AM 6054 (ed. de Boor, 237); "Zemarchus 2," *PLRE* 3:1416.

160 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.134 (ed. Thurn, 423).

161 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.141 (ed. Thurn, 425–29); Theophanes, *Chronicle* AM 6055 (ed. de Boor, 237–38); Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Excerpta de insidiis*, ed. C. de Boor (Berlin, 1905), 173–75. On the 562 plot: Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians*, 264–69; W. Brandes, "Eine Verschwörung gegen Justinian im Jahre 562 und Johannes Malalas," in *Die Weltchronik des Johannes Malalas: Quellenfragen*, ed. L. Carrara, M. Meier, and C. Radtki-Jansen (Stuttgart, 2017), 357–92.

162 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.29 (trans. Brooks, 69); "Anastasius 14," *PLRE* 3:64–66.

163 Whitby, "Successors of Justinian," 87. Cf. Allen, *Evagrius*, 211–12, on Aetherius and Addaeus possibly supporting the claim of Justin, son of Germanus.

today to probe other possible intersections between the friends of Aetherius and Justin.

If the always-plotting Aetherius had friends in high places, it provides yet another reason for why he survived for so long.¹⁶⁹ Although the curator was implicated in the “bankers’ plot” of 562, there were suspicions, according to John Malalas, that two of the high officials examining the case, Constantine the *quaestor* and Julian the *magister scriniorum*, favored Aetherius, leading to their removal from the investigation.¹⁷⁰ Constantine, interestingly, had held his office since 548/9, making him an established stalwart of the Justinianic regime, and he was one of the high officials, including Justin, sent to order Pope Vigilius to return to Constantinople in 552.¹⁷¹ Despite the appointment of two new investigators, the *comes excubitorum* Marinus and the general Constantianus, Aetherius still escaped punishment.¹⁷² Of the two investigators, the former had worked with Justin to end a faction riot mere months earlier, while the latter was a member of the imperial delegation that visited Vigilius in 553 alongside the *curopalates*.¹⁷³ In such elevated circles, it is entirely understandable that these high officials were colleagues or were friendly with both Justin and Aetherius, so by itself the “bankers’ plot” of 562 does not demonstrate any strong ties between the two.

It remains worth noting, however, that the *curopalates* and his brother Marcellus reappear in the historical narrative in that very year, the former subduing a riot while the latter defeated a Bulgar raid.¹⁷⁴ The year 562 is also when John of Ephesus places Sophia’s conversion to Chalcedonian Christianity, which is interpreted by the miaphysite historian as a move to bolster Justin’s chances to succeed Justinian.¹⁷⁵ More speculatively, this year may have had significance for a

partisan of Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople, for his *Life* notes that the patriarch foretold Justin’s imperial future more than three years before his accession.¹⁷⁶ Such a prediction was undoubtedly shaped by later circumstances rather than what Eutychius actually believed, but the common focus on 562 is interesting, for it may reflect that the debate over succession did return to prominence then and that Eutychius’s hagiographer sought to further bolster the patriarch’s memory by inserting him into the story as well.¹⁷⁷ Regardless, while Justin cannot be tied to the “bankers’ plot,” we can nonetheless safely presume that the seemingly more active *curopalates* watched the ensuing *furor* with great interest, all the more so as his network intersected with that of Aetherius.

Events in 565 would again prove to be advantageous for friends of both Aetherius and Justin. At the beginning of the year, Aetherius played a prominent role in the deposition of Patriarch Eutychius of Constantinople, together with Addaeus, the city prefect.¹⁷⁸ As argued by Silvio Roggo, Eutychius’s fall and the rise of John Scholasticus as his replacement are evidence of Justin II’s political maneuverings prior to his uncle’s death, for John had the favor of the future emperor.¹⁷⁹ With Eutychius’s hagiographer further suggesting that Aetherius and Addaeus are partially responsible for John Scholasticus’s election, one might even surmise that the two co-conspirators’ interests were aligned with Justin’s, for the *curopalates* had no doubt lobbied for his ally to be elevated to the patriarchate.¹⁸⁰ A few months later, Julian, the *magister scriniorum*, also returned to the spotlight, for he was elevated as the city prefect of Constantinople to curtail the riots of circus factions.¹⁸¹ While Julian’s alleged bias in favor of Aetherius in 562 cannot be used as a hint of his allegiance to Justin II in 565, it is worth noting that the prefect he replaced was Zemarchus, who had

169 On Justinian’s leniency: Mary Whitby, “The Occasion of Paul the Silentiary’s *Ekphrasis* of S. Sophia,” *CQ* 35.1 (1985): 215–28, at 222; Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians*, 268–69. See also Parnell, “Justinian’s Clemency,” for other examples of Justinian’s clemency.

170 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.141 (ed. Thurn, 428); “Constantinus 4,” “Iulianus 15,” *PLRE* 3:342–43, 735–36.

171 Vigilius, *Encyclical Letter* (ed. Schwartz, 1).

172 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.141 (ed. Thurn, 428–29); “Marinus 2,” “Constantianus 2,” *PLRE* 3:831, 334–37.

173 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.135 (ed. Thurn, 424); *Acts of the Second Council of Constantinople*, ed. Straub, 185.

174 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.132, 13 (ed. Thurn, 423, 424).

175 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10 (trans. Brooks, 51).

176 Eustratius, *Life of Eutychius*, 1850–51 (ed. Laga, 60).

177 I owe this point to Silvio Roggo, to whom I am also particularly grateful for sharing materials from his forthcoming PhD dissertation addressing this topic.

178 Eustratius, *Life of Eutychius*, 2133–37 (ed. Laga, 69).

179 Roggo, “Deposition of Eutychius,” 441–42.

180 Eustratius, *Life of Eutychius*, 2135–37 (ed. Laga, 69).

181 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.151 (ed. Thurn, 432); Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronicle* 566.2 (ed. T. Mommsen, MGH AuctAnt 11, *Chronica Minora* 2 [Berlin, 1894], 205).

once been denounced by George and Theodora's grandson and who was removed from his former position as a result.¹⁸² Zemarchus, in turn, was the replacement of Addaeus, Aetherius's partner-in-crime in removing Eutychius as the city prefect shortly after January 565;¹⁸³ an exceptionally rapid turnover of officeholders that is surely indicative of the infighting and competition within Justinian's court. Julian, moreover, appears to have been a stalwart of Justin and Sophia's new regime, composing poems in favor of the new ruling couple—his virtues were, in turn, praised by Corippus.¹⁸⁴ As the city prefect had allegedly unleashed ten months of terror against the circus factions in order to rein in the violence in 565, a period that overlapped with Justinian's death in November, it is likewise tempting to wonder if the supportive crowd faced by Justin at the hippodrome may have had other reasons to be so welcoming of their new emperor.¹⁸⁵

November 565 was also a favorable time for Aetherius, as his friends continued to prosper in the last year of Justinian's life. The city prefect until at least 566 was someone who had (perhaps ignominiously) favored the curator in 562, while Aetherius's protégée Anastasius would soon become Justin's *magister officiorum* and *quaestor*. The new patriarch John Scholasticus was presumably similarly grateful to the man who played a key role in Eutychius's deposition. Indeed, John of Ephesus specifically links together the patriarch and Anastasius for their persecution of miaphysites under Justin II, so their mutual ties to Aetherius may well have been a factor in their collaboration.¹⁸⁶ Combined with Aetherius's involvement with the Theodoran George in 560, it would be reasonable to say that the curator's friends broadly aligned with Justin's, which may hint at the *curopalates's* own politics in this period. We do not need to suggest that Justin was involved in any of these

plots against Justinian, but the evidence indicates that other friends of the new emperor's appointees were also already holding high offices, such as the curatorships of various imperial estates, and that they were fomenting intrigue for their own ends, interests that would have not been unfavorable to the *curopalates's* allies.

A maximalist interpretation of all these men working to secure Justin's accession to the throne throughout the early 560s is unwise, but taken together it is nonetheless interesting that those who feature in the political narrative in these years are so intertwined. A more cautious approach, to instead see these officials as individuals who would not have opposed the rise of Justin given their other connections, is more borne out by the evidence. Even so, the sources testify to the emperor's political acumen and illustrate the reach of his influence, if only because of his contacts and their networks' prominence in the surviving texts. Compared to the available evidence for the son of Germanus, who fought bravely on the Danube but otherwise cannot be tied to any Constantinopolitan grandee, even a limited interpretation of the *curopalates's* political ties would still give him an insurmountable advantage over his rival, despite his lack of military experience.



This article argues that Justin's inauguration was no shoddy, backroom affair, for his path to power was well paved. From his first appearance in 552, the *curopalates* moved in the corridors of powers and secured the clients and experience needed for a smooth transition. Armed with familial links to the houses of Theodora and Anastasius, possessing protégés such as John Scholasticus and Tiberius, and with friends tied to the increasingly prominent serial intriguer Aetherius, Justin can even be regarded as the logical successor to the old emperor, not as an inferior candidate when compared with his more military-minded namesake. Despite the more positive reception of the son of Germanus even in modern historiography, it remains impossible to reconstruct a network anywhere near as extensive or influential as that of Justin the *curopalates*, a testament perhaps to how events later in Justin II's reign have created a misleading, and far more negative, interpretation of his earlier career as well.

A final vindication of Justin's ability is the immediate shift in direction in the Roman Empire's policies.

182 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.151 (ed. Thurn, 431–32); “Zemarchus 2,” *PLRE* 3:1416. Cf. Kaplan, “Quelques aspects,” 156.

183 “Addaeus,” *PLRE* 3:14–15; A. Laniado, “L’aristocratie sénatoriale de Constantinople et la préfecture du prétoire d’Orient,” *TM* 22.1 (2018): 409–55, at 444–45.

184 Alan Cameron, “Some Prefects Called Julian,” *Byzantion* 47 (1977): 42–64, at 56–63, repr. in idem, *Literature and Society*, chap. XV; Cameron, *Corippus*, 194; “Iulianus 15,” *PLRE* 3:735.

185 John Malalas, *Chronicle* 18.151 (ed. Thurn 432); Victor of Tunnuna, *Chronicle* 566.2 (ed. Mommsen, 205); Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 4.3–7 (ed. Cameron, 73).

186 John of Ephesus, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.29 (trans. Brooks, 69).

From the restoration of the consulship to his gifts to churches in Rome and Poitiers, the new emperor evidently sought a different course compared to the tried-and-tested policies of Justinian. The latter move may have been particularly warranted, for his uncle's final years had witnessed yet another theological intervention by Justinian, this time to promote aphetartodocetism, the belief that Christ's body was incorruptible, a stance that was not popular to say the least.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, while a more muscular foreign policy, whether toward the Avars in the Balkans or the Persians, may seem to have been a mistake in hindsight, in the 560s the outlook was not so gloomy. The Avars' first meeting with Justin in 565 ended well for the empire, for the Avars were said to have been terrified and sought an easier target among the Merovingian Franks.¹⁸⁸ In the eastern theatre, the rise of a new Eurasian power, the Turks, provided an excellent opportunity for Justin to exploit, for in a future war Persia would face enemies on two fronts.¹⁸⁹ History would prove Justin wrong in his

187 Eustratius, *Life of Eutychius* 912–1047 (ed. Laga, 31–35); Evagrius, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.39–40 (ed. Bidez and Parmentier, 190–91); Allen, *Evagrius*, 204–5; Meier, *Das andere Zeitalter Justinians*, 289–91.

188 Corippus, *In Praise of Justin* 3.231–401 (ed. Cameron, 67–72); Menander, *History* 8 (ed. Blockley, 96); Pohl, *Avars*, 58–60.

189 M. Whittow, "Byzantium's Eurasian Policy in the Age of the Türk Empire," in *Empires and Exchanges in Eurasian Late Antiquity: Rome, China, Iran, and the Steppe, ca. 250–750*, ed. N. Di Cosmo and M. Maas (Cambridge, 2018), 279.

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assessment of the empire's strength, but at the beginning of his reign few of his allies could have predicted such a turn of events.

The implementation of these changes could not have been easy, but logically it follows that Justin needed officials and political allies willing to follow his lead in shaking up the status quo. Moreover, given the sharp, almost immediate about-turn in many imperial policies, the new emperor must have given much thought to how to secure their support, especially among men who had built their careers under his uncle. While the elderly Justinian may have no longer cared about worldly matters in his last years, his successor-in-waiting certainly did, and what we can piece together for his career before 565 confirms the positive portrayal of Justin from the earliest sources: that he was an energetic, even well-liked individual. If not a *caesar* in name, the *curopalates* did indeed operate in many spheres beyond his own considerable duties, having courted the aristocracy and been caught up in the Three Chapters controversy, perhaps even intervening in events as far as Antioch. Corippus's words, so often interpreted as only propaganda, thus ring truer than many historians had thought.

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