



Ausonius' *Caesares*

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Abstract. Ausonius from Burdigala (Bordeaux) writes between 379-383 CE his poetic work entitled *Caesares*. This poetic collection is a biography of emperors's life in verse (in hexameter and elegiac couplets). *Caesares* are not complete; the work stops suddenly at the incomplete quatrain of Elagabalus. In this paper we are dealing with the kind of collection, we examine Ausonius' style of various parts (Monosticha and Tetrasticha) and highlight the sources of the poet (Suetonius, Tacitus, *Kaisergeschichte*, Marius Maximus etc.). Also, we discuss the assumptions which Ausonius' scholars have made about the lost part of this collection.

Keywords: Ausonius; *Caesares*; Suetonius; *Kaisergeschichte*; Marius Maximus; biography in verse; Late Antiquity.

Resumen. Ausonio de Burdigala (Burdeos) escribe entre los años 379-383 su obra poética titulada *Caesares*. Esta colección es una biografía de la vida de los emperadores en verso (hexámetro y dístico elegíaco). *Caesares* no está completa; la obra acaba de repente en el cuarteto dedicado a Heliogábalo. En este trabajo abordamos el género de la colección, examinamos el estilo de Ausonio en varias partes (monósticos y tetrásticos) y destacamos las fuentes (Suetonio, Tácito, *Kaisergeschichte*, Mario Máximo). Asimismo valoramos las diferentes opiniones que los estudiosos de Ausonio han expresado sobre la parte perdida de esta colección.

Palabras clave: Ausonio; *Caesares*; Suetonio; *Kaisergeschichte*; Mario Máximo; biografía en verso; Antigüedad tardía.

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1. Introduction: the work and its genre

Caesares of Decimus Magnus Ausonius (310-395 CE) from Bordeaux (Burdigala)² occupy a significant place in his great poetic collection³. The work is written in Latin and here the *grammaticus* Ausonius demonstrates his great erudition. Simultaneously, while in some of his works the poet seems to be mocking and parodying (such as *Griphus Ternarii Numeri*), and in others seems like a *homo ludens* (*Technopaignion*, *Ludus Septem Sapientium*), in *Caesares* he adopts a serious attitude.

Caesares constitutes a biography of emperors in verse. The historical conditions that prevailed during the 4th century contributed significantly to the development of this genre. During the Late Antiquity, the relationship between the emperor and the senate is mitigated due to *adoptio* (Berger 1953, p.350), which is the process of acquisition of successors for the imperial throne by adoption – a theme that Ausonius points out too. The features of these *principes* are, in their majority, a wisdom of high level and an intense tendency for philosophy. The Senate has changed dramatically in its composition and has created new ideals of its adjustment. In the Latin literature of this era, a motive for writing historiography with senatorial ideology is lacking and, in its place, biographies of emperors appear. Thus, the political circumstances and the need of the public reading for entertainment contribute to the development of the genre of the imperial biographies (von Albrecht 1992, Band 2, pp.1047-1054; Cornell 2013)⁴.

Ausonius dedicates this work to his son, Hesperius. *Caesares* are composed of three sequences of a single verse (*Monosticha*) in hexameter, each of them themed by the succession of the emperors, the duration of their reign and their death retrospectively, and of twenty four quatrains (*Tetrasticha*) in elegiac couplets, which start from Julius Caesar and end with Elagabalus. Each of these parts has an introduction in verse. The first consists of five hexameters verses and the second of two elegiac couplets (Green 1999, p.575)⁵. At the same time, another division of the collection coexists; that is the author-source from which every time Ausonius derives his poetical material. Thus, there is the first part (from the beginning to Domitian's quatrain), in which, as the poet himself declares, his source is Suetonius (Szelest 1976, pp.433-442)⁶, and the second (from Nerva's to the unfinished quatrain of Elagabalus), in which he doesn't reveal from which author he draws his information. The division of this work is evident from its titles too; the first part is entitled *Ausonii de XII Caesaribus per Suetonium Tranquillum scriptis*, and the second is entitled *De Caesaribus post Tranquillum tetrasticha*. In the second introduction Ausonius declares that he wrote about all the emperors he knew; this statement made Schenkl highlight that *Caesares* are not completed at Elagabalus' couplet and that many more verses are missing (Schenkl 1883, p. xiv).

² For Ausonius' origin, see Alvar Ezquerra (1990, vol.1, pp.11-27); Polymeracis (2001, pp.63-79); Polymeracis (2013, pp.337-340 and 344-345).

³ For Ausonius' life and works, see Alvar Ezquerra (1990, vol.1, pp.11-100); Rand (1927, pp.28-41); Martindale (1971, pp.140-152); Green (1991, pp. xv-xi); von Albrecht (1992, Band 2, pp.1047-1054).

⁴ With this genre dealt Marius Maximus, Aurelius Victor, the writers of *Historia Augusta*, etc.

⁵ In the whole of Ausonius' poetic production, only two cases there are in which the introduction of the poems are in verse, i.e. *Caesares* (1-5) and *Ludus Septem Sapientium* (1-18).

⁶ Ausonius' text come from Green (1991, pp.161-168). The English translation comes from White (1951, pp.330-347). Cf. *Caesares*, Mon. 4-5: *Sua quemque monosticha signant, / Quorum per plenam seriem Suetonius olim / nomina, res gestas uitamque obitumque peregit* («A single verse here records each of those emperors of whom through all their array Suetonius once detailed the names, the deeds, the lives and deaths»).

It is not clear when this work was written. Peiper (1976, p.cv) believes that Ausonius composed it at the beginning of 380 AD, while Syme (1971, p.94) thinks that *Caesares* are written in 379 AD or later (both critics believe that in these years the poet also writes *Fasti*, a historical work, which he dedicates to Hesperius too). Green supports that the poet's preference for adoptees emperors might be an indication of the chronology of the work. He notes characteristically: «it is difficult to believe that Ausonius could have written so unequivocally about the superiority of adopted emperors to those born to the purple before the death of Gratian, the son of Valentinian I» (Green 1991, p.558). Thus, he supposes that the work is written after 383 AD. Conclusively, we could say that *Caesares* have been composed in the years 379-383 AD or later.

The popularity of this work is shown by the extensive manuscript tradition (Alvar Ezquerra 1990, pp.138-160) *Caesares* are included in their current form in Ausonius' V, B and W *codices*. *Codex* E includes only the monostichs, while the Z includes the monostichs and the six quatrains from Nerva to Commodus. Also, many *codices* of Suetonius and Sidonius conclude Ausonius' *Caesares*. There is a disagreement about the titles of various parts of the work; also, for the part from Nerva to Elagabalus, *codices* V and Γ have the title *Nerva tetrasticha*, Z has the title *de Caesaribus post Tranquillum* and K is entitled *de Caesaribus post Tranquillum Nerva*. Green believes that these titles do not come from another scribe, but from Ausonius himself, like the titles of his works *Parentalia* and *Professores*, which belong to the same period (Green 1991, pp. xli-xlix).

Liebermann (1989, pp.268-308) classifies this work to Ausonius' historical-scholastic poems of Ausonius. The fact is that this is not a history in verse, but a set (mainly) of epigrams, on a topic (lives of emperors) which fascinated Ausonius (von Albrecht, Band 2, pp.1052-1054).

Caesares have a clear historical background, but this is not sufficient to classify the work in the historiographical genre. The poet makes obvious this affinity by quoting the name of Suetonius. While historiography propounds the public actions of famous men, biography is mainly interested for their private life. Ausonius is interested in this dimension too. He does not describe the exploits of emperors; he does not relate the development of the Roman Empire with their own. His interests lay in the characters of his protagonists, with their advantages and defects. However, for influential political figures, such as emperors, a biography cannot be indifferent to their historical achievements; but Ausonius seems to be indifferent to them. He deals only with the ethics of the emperors.

If we examine *Caesares* as a whole, we see that there are key differences with the genre of encomium in many parts. In that genre emphasis is given on political, moral, spiritual achievements of the famous men, while in *Caesares* the important clue is the personal life of every emperor, so (for most emperors) Ausonius mentions their negative side (passions)⁷. The literary portrait is based on individual characteristics of the person described and is not complete. That happens in this work too, with the personality of each emperor being the central part of it. But, while the literary portrait is about the enumeration of specific properties or specific anecdotes, which, in the mind of the author, reflect one person, in *Caesares* Ausonius does not list a cat-

⁷ The laudatory element subsides in Suetonius too.

atalogue of virtues or defects of the emperors, nor includes anecdotes about them. He merely highlights two or three features that are indicative of their character, and at several times he intervenes in his work commenting⁸ and formulating wise maxims⁹.

So, in what genre can we classify this work? Is it a biography in verse? Is it a collection of portraits of the emperors? Is it merely a commentary in verse to Suetonius, as many critics have noted? (Rose 1994, p.251). Ausonius' tendency for moralism is pervasive in *Caesares*¹⁰. It is obvious that what interests him is the character of the emperors, their moral dimension. That's why he dedicates equally one quatrain for the famous emperors (for example Trajan, Hadrian), but also for the lesser known (for example, Didius Julianus, and Opilius Macrinus). Essentially, we would say that he does not care about emperors as politicians, but as influential historical figures with weaknesses and advantages. Unlike Suetonius, who, as the poet tells us at the beginning of the work, wrote about all the aspects of the emperors' lives¹¹, Ausonius comments only on their moral dimension by allusion and hint, which are the key features of poetry. We are dealing with a moralistic poetic genre in catalogue form, which has as its protagonists the most important citizens of the Roman Empire, the emperors themselves.

Closer relative of *Caesares* is, of course, the biography. Ausonius uses this kinship to make a demonstration of his poetic capacity. This demonstration lies in the fact that he chooses a prime topic of prose (biographies of emperors), he draws from it these elements that will help him to make a succinct description of Caesars' characters and finally renders this material into a whole poetic collection. This practice, i.e. to transcribe in verse traditional themes of prose, is applied by Ausonius in other collections as well, such as the *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, *Griphus Ternarii Numeri*, etc. Thus, he makes obvious his ablative capacity and his poetic talent.

2. Ausonius' sources for the first part of *Caesares*

Ausonius declares that Suetonius is his source in the title (in regard to the first part of the poem) and elsewhere¹². However, by a closer investigation of the poem, the reader finds that, except from the famous Roman biographer, Ausonius' source is – to a lesser extent – Tacitus too¹³. Also, he uses phrases from poets (Virgil, Ovid, and

⁸ For example, cf. *Caesares* Tetr. 28: *Disce ex Tranquillo: set meminisse piget* («Read them in Tranquillus: but to recall them disgusts»), 36: *Hoc solum fecit nobile, quod periit* («by an honorable death did this one noble deed-he died»), 50: *Cur duo quae dederant, tertius eripuit* («Why did the third snatch that away which the two had given?»)

⁹ See section 5 of this article.

¹⁰ See section 5 of this article. This trend is illustrated by the fact that when he talks about the bad emperors, he underlines particularly the punishment, as his purpose is to proclaim that no one vicious is spared.

¹¹ *Caesares* Mon. 4-5: *Quorum per plenam seriem Suetonius olim / Nomina, res gestas uitamque obitumque peregit* («of those emperors of whom through all their array Suetonius once detailed the names, the deeds, the lives and deaths»).

¹² See the title *Ausonii de XII Caesaribus per Suetonium Tranquillum scriptis* («Ausonius on the twelve Caesars whose lives were written by Suetonius Tranquillus»), Mon. 4: *Suetonius peregit* («Suetonius once detailed»), Tetr. 28: *disce ex Tranquillo* («read them in Tranquillus»).

¹³ The text and the English translation of Tacitus' *Annals* come from Jackson (1969) and of *Histories* from Moore (1956). For example, cf. *Caesares* Mon. 9: *cognomen Caligae cui castra dederunt* («the troops nicknamed after the soldier's boots») with *Ann.* 1.41: *quem militari uocabulo Caligulam appellebant, quia plerumque ad concilianda uulgi studia eo tegmine pedum induebatur* («whom soldier-like they had dubbed 'Bootikins'-

Juvenal) and incorporates them into his own context¹⁴. But why, although an intertextual connection between Ausonius and other writers exists, he states that Suetonius was his only source? Perhaps, as supported by Green, Ausonius' main aim was to give validity to his work – after all we must not forget that Suetonius is the most known Roman biographer – or to «advertise» his ability to transport the biographies of the prose writer in verse (Green 1981, p.231). About other authors, who could be Ausonius' «bibliography», Green (1991, p.559) refers that: «there is little to suggest that he used Plutarch or Herodian; a few items which are shared with Dio alone among extant historians could well have come to him from another source. Nothing of significance links him closely with the recent histories of Aurelius Victor or Eutropius with the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, written in the following decade or with the sources postulated for them». On the other hand, the parallel passages between the second part of *Caesares* and *Historia Augusta* show how Ausonius affected the writers of subsequent collection (Momigliano 1954, pp.22-46; Baldwin 1981, pp.438-445; Syme 1983; Kay 2001, p.76; Thompson 2008, pp.445-475).

Therefore, Ausonius uses biographical material, where moralistic overtones are attributed; namely, he applies the practice of an older Roman biographer, Cornelius Nepos – with the difference that Ausonius adapts this material to verse. We must not forget that Nepos is the first (as far we know) author who wrote biographies of politicians. The modern reader perceives the moral purpose that permeates Nepos' entire work by reading his biographies. Biographies of Cimon, Conon, Iphicrates, Chavrias and Timotheus are brief, but – despite their brevity – the strong interest of the writer for their *virtus* and *vitia* is evident. Besides the moralistic discourse, there is another common element between Ausonius and Nepos; to the earlier author there are biographies approaching the genre of encomium too, as are those of Epaminondas, Agesilaus and Atticus. However, Nepos, like our poet, doesn't stay only to the praise of his protagonists. He mixes the encomiastic features with the negative dimensions of their characters¹⁵, a practice followed by Ausonius too¹⁶.

Similarities that seem to exist between Ausonius and Cornelius Nepos, a moralist author, lead us to the conclusion that – apart from the entertainment of the reader – our poet aimed at his moralistic education also. It seems that Ausonius fully implemented the principle which Horace states to his *Ars Poetica*, namely that the poet

Caligula-because, as an appeal to the fancy of the rank and file, he generally wore the footgear of that name»), *Caesares* Tetr. 30: *imperio proditus inferior* («seemed worthy to wield the scepter») with *Hist.* 1.49: *maior priuatousius dum priuatus fuit, et omnium consensus capax imperii nisi imperasset* («He seemed too great to be a subject so long as he was subject, and all would have agreed that he was equal to the imperial office if he had never held it»).

¹⁴ The text and the English translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* come from Fairclough (2006). The text and the English translation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* come from Miller (1971). The text and the English translation of Juvenal's *Satires* come from Braund (2004). Cf. *Caesares* Mon. 25: *tertia uos Latio regnantes nesciit aestas* («a third summer knew not your rule in Latium») with Verg. *Aen.* 1.265: *tertia dum Latio regnantem uiderit aestas* («till the third summer has seen him reigning in Latium»), *Caesares* Tetr. 85: *elegido...Histro* («chill Ister») with *Aen.* 8.610: *egelido flumine* («cool stream»), *Caesares* Tetr. 63: *documenta daturus* («to give proof») with Ov. *Met.* 3.579: *documenta dature* («to serve as a warning to others»), *Caesares* Mon. 17: *quem Caluum dixit sua Roma Neronem* («was called 'the bald Nero' by his subject Rome») with Juv. *Sat.* 4.38: *caluo seruiret Roma Neroni* («Rome was the slave of a bald Nero»), etc. See Green (1977, pp.441-452) and Dräger (2011, p.587).

¹⁵ This mixture is considered to be a method of Peripatetic School. The philosophical ethics, especially the discourse of human characters by Aristotle and Theophrastus provided a means for the internal structure of the biography, i.e. the striking contrast between virtues and defects.

¹⁶ In *Caesares* Ausonius includes epigrams for the good and bad characters too. In some, however, emperors, these two features coexist in the same quatrain. For example, the quatrain of Vespasian and Hadrian.

wants to benefit or to amuse or both together¹⁷. Ausonius' comments that his insistence to emphasize the justified punishment of evil emperors, the maxims which he disperses in *Caesares*, are elements that make us believe that *Caesares* are a poetical work with twofold purposes: the entertainment and the teaching of the reader. In *Caesares* Ausonius seems to combine the poetic art with his profession (*grammaticus* and *rhetor*). He is a poet, but simultaneously a teacher of his readers.

3. Ausonius' sources for the second part of *Caesares*

But from which authors Ausonius draws the material for the second part of *Caesares*? Also, what followed after the truncated quatrain of Elagabalus? These questions occupied the scholars of Ausonius and everyone attempted to give the most plausible answer.

Many believe that Ausonius draws his material for the second part of the collection from Marius Maximus (Barnes 1967, p.66, n.1; Syme 1971, p.90, n.1; Pastorino 1971, p.90; Della Corte 1975, pp.483-91; Barnes 1978, p.103). This opinion is primarily based on the fact that the second part of *Caesares* Ausonius deals with the same emperors with whom Marius Maximus wrote (from Nerva to Elagabalus). Green (1981, p.231) writes: «for the twelve Caesars from Nerva to Elagabalus Ausonius will surely have used a source, and if he used Suetonius for the earlier ones, then he could well have continued with Marius Maximus, who was in some sense the continuator of Suetonius». To the question why the poet does not mention the name of Maximus, as he mentions Suetonius, the same scholar gives a reasonable answer: «When Ausonius came to continue beyond Domitian, there was not the same prestige to be gained from citing Marius Maximus even if he used him» (Green 1981, p.231).

Green again, after his attempt to find some common ground between Ausonius and indirect testimonies of Maximus Marius as preserved in the *Historia Augusta*, concludes that the probability of exclusive use of Maximus by Ausonius seems rather doubtful (Green 1981, pp.231-236). The similarities between these two authors (the not-so-favorable attitude toward Hadrian, their common hate towards Faustina, mother of Commodus, the reference to the reluctance of Elvius Pertinax to undertake the imperial office and to the humble origins of Severus) may be justified by the fact that they may have come from a common source, unknown to us. In conclusion, we would say that it is very likely that Ausonius had read the biographies of Marius Maximus and had drawn his material for *Caesares* from there. However, we cannot determine with certainty what he took, or to claim that, as regards to the second part of the work, *Caesares* is a miniature in verse of biographies of Marius Maximus.

For the second part of our collection, but also for this section which followed the quatrain of Elagabalus and is not saved today, some scholars believe that the poet used a collection of biographies which is unknown to us; its inventor, A. Enmann, named it *Kaisergeschichte* (Enmann 1884, pp.337-501; Burgess 1993, pp.491-500). It is a lost work, but we can assume that it existed based on other similar works –

¹⁷ The text and the English translation of Horaces' *Ars Poetica* come from Fairclough (1966), cf. *Ars Poetica* 333-334: *aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae* («Poets aim either to benefit, or to amuse, or to utter words at once both pleasing and helpful to life»).

after Ausonius' *Caesares* – that are at our disposal, such as *Caesares* of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius' *Breviarium ab urbe condita* and *Historia Augusta*. In these works there seems to be a common appearance of events and errors, and even common vocabulary, especially in narratives concerning the dark (because of the many suitors, usurpers and pretenders of the imperial throne) third century CE. It is likely that Ausonius drew his material from such a collection, which provided to him abundant information for this period.

4. Ausonius' style

Nugent, after her statement that the poet is a man who is fascinated by the game of words, names two important issues on this topic; the first is that in the entire corpus of Ausonius, statistically, the word that occurs most often is the noun *nomen* and the second that the poet likes etymological games and especially those having to do with proper names (Nugent 1990, p.36; Green 1991, p.36, Lolli 1997, pp.7-22). Both these features are present in *Caesares*. Specifically, the noun *nomen* occurs eleven times, eight in the simple form (in different, of course, cases: *nomen*, *nomine*, *nomina*) and three in complex form (*cognomen*, *praenomen*, *cognomina*). Moreover, Ausonius makes an etymological play with proper names in the cases of two emperors: in Caligula¹⁸ and in Caracalla¹⁹. Both these emperors do not seem to be particularly favorable to the poet. Also, both had nicknames that derive from clothing: Caligula from military boot (*caliga*)²⁰ and Caracalla from Gallic costume with hood, which at his era it had become very fashionable (*caracalla*)²¹. With this etymological playfulness the poet expresses in a satirical way his dislike for these emperors.

Ausonius expresses his dislike for another emperor, Domitian, in a different way; by the concealment of his name (*damnatio memoriae*). If we exclude the quatrain entitled by his name²², the poet – at three times which he refers to him – calls him «brother of Titus»²³. Ausonius avoids to refer Domitian's name, finding only as his positive feature that he was brother of «*orbis amor*» Titus²⁴.

Therefore, Ausonius' style is distinguished by an intense formalism. This characteristic, which also exists in other writers of Late Antiquity (Prudentius, Claudian), helps us to discern, as Papanghelis (2002, pp.234-235) writes: «Alexandrian hints in the poems of this era». The same scholar states: «the main factors of the style of these poets [...] sound very familiar: *εκφράσεις* of high vigilance, catalogs, a special

¹⁸ Cf. *Caesares* Mon. 9: *Caesar, cognomen Caligae cui castra dederunt* («next Caesar whom the troops nicknamed after the soldier's boots») and Tetr. 17-18: *Post hunc castrensi Caligae cognomina Caesar / Successit saeuo saeuior ingenio* («After him, nicknamed after the soldier's boot, / Caesar succeeded-more cruel than the master of cruelty»).

¹⁹ Cf. *Caesares* Tetr. 91-92: *Fratris morte nocens, punitus fine cruento, / inrisu populi tu, Caracalla, magis* («thou, guilty of thy brother's death and punished / with a bloody end, to thy jeering people art rather Caracalla»).

²⁰ See OLD, 1982, 258, s.u. «*caliga*», meaning 1.

²¹ See Gaffiot (2000: 264), s.u. «*caracalla*».

²² Cf. *Caesares* Tetr. 49-52, which is entitled *Domitianus*.

²³ Cf. *Caesares* Mon. 16-17: *Secutus / Frater, quem Caluum dixit sua Roma Neronem* («His brother following was called 'the bald Nero' by his subject Rome»), 29: *Quindicies saeuus potitur tum frater habenis*, («fifteen times while his brother held the reins of cruelty»), 41: *Sera grauem perimunt, sed iusta piacula fratrem* («Late but righteous vengeance destroyed his tyrannous brother»).

²⁴ Cf. *Caesares* Mon. 39: *Titus, orbis amor* («Titus, the world's darling»).

position of syntactical terms in verse, strong doses of rhetorical figures, highlighting of the single word, use of the word as a valuable material, priority of a single episode compared to the total plot. No wonder that some critics have spoken for a “New Alexandrinism”». Some of these features can be distinguished in *Caesares* (such as catalogue form, highlighting of a single word) and maybe, as the same philologist assumes: «constitute more than anything else a libation to classic poets».

5. Ausonius’ political and moral attitude

The favorable attitude Ausonius towards adoptees emperors is typical (as seen in quatrains whose source is an unknown writer and not Suetonius). Ausonius praises them²⁵. One of the leading principles of Stoic philosophy, which flourished considerably in the first Christian centuries, was that the governor of the state should be an enlightened ruler, the first (*princeps*) among the best, who by his skills and not because of his origin, would lead his people to the absolute prosperity. In this context, the method of adoption (*adoptio*) becomes a common practice (Berger 1953, p.350) that brought successful results²⁶. Ausonius knows it very well, and highlights it at several times in his work²⁷. Perhaps, the successful development of the adopted emperors reminded him himself. Ausonius, who wasn’t descended from an aristocratic family (at least from the side of his father), managed to reach to high offices (educator of Gratian, *comes, quaestor sacri palatii, praefectus praetorio trium Galliarum*), because of his work and the reputation that he gained from this (Hopkins 1961, pp.239-49; Sivan 1993, pp.31-74), thanks to the same things, that is, which secured one brilliant fame to the adoptees emperors.

Ausonius, in this serious and not lighthearted work, disperses quotations indicative of his morality. Thus, in the quatrain of Galba says: «yet it is a fitter order to satisfy men latter, to dissatisfy them earlier»²⁸. Then, in the quatrain of Vitellius he notes: «for the unworthy often approach the prize of sovereignty: none but the worthy hold them»²⁹. In the quatrain of Domitian he concludes: «for good men’s gifts are passing; injuries once done rankle forever»³⁰, while in the quatrain of Severus Pertinax he comments: «that place is no bar when native power is strong»³¹. From these words, we deduct the poet’s trend for moralizing and his strong belief for meritocracy. At the same time, he gives way a didactic tone throughout his work.

Ausonius’ attitude towards emperors is pretty much as expected. He is favorable toward Julius Caesar and Augustus, while his attitude towards the Claudian and Flavian dynasties is not surprising. He prefers Trajan than Hadrian; he praises the two first Antonines, while he condemns their descendants. Noteworthy is the very favorable attitude of the poet to Septimius Severus, which, according to Syme, is unique; Even Aurelius Victor, enthusiastic follower and compatriot of Severus,

²⁵ This praise culminates in *Caesares* Tetr. 64: *adscita quantum praemineant genitis* («how far adopted sons can excel the natural-born»).

²⁶ For example the successful adoptees emperors Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius etc.

²⁷ Cf. *Caesares* Tetr. 55-56, 59-60, 63-64, 67-68.

²⁸ *Caesares* Tetr. 31-32: *set iustior ordo est / Conplacuisse dehinc, displicuisse prius.*

²⁹ *Caesares* Tetr. 39-40: *quia praemia regni / Saepe indignus adit, non nisi dignus habet.*

³⁰ *Caesares* Tetr. 51-52: *qui dona bonorum / Sunt breuia; aeternum, quae nocuere, dolent.*

³¹ *Caesares* Tetr. 88: *Non obstare locus, cum ualet ingenium.*

had his reservations about him, especially on the subject of his predecessor's death, Didius Julianus (Syme 1971, p.93). Marius Maximus, although he was also Severus' supporter, does not seem to fully reflect the attitude of Ausonius towards him, as in a passage of *Historia Augusta*, in which his testimony is referred³², he accuses Severus for cruelty and duplicity. Moreover, the admiration which Ausonius felt for the emperor is evidenced by the number of verses devoted to him (six verses, as begins Severus' encomium from the second elegiac couplet of Didius Julianus)³³.

6. What about the lost part of *Caesares*?

As mentioned above, *Caesares* form a truncated collection interrupted in the first elegiac couplet of Elagabalus. Thereafter, Ausonius would probably continue his work with the emperors following and perhaps he would reach his narration in his own time. However, apart from the part of the work which is lost today, we see that the poet, in the second part of *Caesares* which survives, does not make any mention of the emperor Lucius Verus, Clodius Albinus and Pescennius Nigrus at all³⁴. I believe that he doesn't refer to them for three main reasons: first, because the three of them shared the throne and no one was sole emperor. Secondly, because Ausonius does not like them. According to Rostovtzeff (1984, p.239), Lucius Verus was a lazy and stupid man. The other two were enemies of Severus, Ausonius' favorite emperor. Therefore, Ausonius condemns their memory (*damnatio memoriae*)³⁵. Thirdly and most importantly, maybe his source (Marius Maximus?) did not mention them.

For the reader of *Caesares* this reasonable question arises: why Ausonius refers four times (in *monosticha* for their sequence, the duration of their power, their death and in the quatrains of each one) to the emperors whose lives and works derive from Suetonius, while for the emperors for which the source is unknown, makes a unique reference (in the quatrains)? Why he does not prefix any *monostichum* in the second part of the work too (entitled *de Caesaribus post Tranquillum tetrasticha*)? A definitive answer cannot be given. Perhaps he considered the first twelve emperors more popular³⁶ – after all, the greatest Roman biographer, Suetonius, has written for them. Also, he might want to offer further information on them, because these emperors were older and therefore more unknown to the readers of his era. But since a big part of *Caesares* has been lost and we do not know what followed, we can surmise that Ausonius probably did more references for the emperors of the second section to the missing part of the work.

What followed after the quatrain of Elagabalus? There is no doubt that the work of Ausonius continued, perhaps until his era³⁷. The testimony of Giovanni Man-

³² Cf. *Historia Augusta* Spartianus, Sev. 15.

³³ *Caesares* Tetr. 83-88.

³⁴ Ausonius refers implicitly to the emperors Geta and Antoninus Diadumenianus, cf. *Caesares* Tetr. 91: *fratris morte nocens* («guilty for thy brother's death») for the first one and *Caesares* Tetr. 95: *mox cum prole ruit* («Soon with his son is he o'erthrown») for the second.

³⁵ However, the writers of *Historia Augusta* deal with these three emperors also.

³⁶ Cf. *Caesares* Mon. 1: *Caesareos procures* («Here take the twice six Caesars»).

³⁷ Cf. *Caesares* Tetr. 3-4: *incipiam ab diuo percurramque ordine cunctos / noui Romanae quos memor historiae* («I will begin with the divine and run in sequence over all those princes whom I know, mindful of Roman history»).

sionario³⁸ enabled scholars to formulate interesting hypotheses about the extent of *Caesares* and what it followed in their lost past. The Veronese archaeologist, after his reference to *Caesares*³⁹, states: *item ad eundem de imperatoribus res novas molitis a decio usque ad diocleianum uersu iambico trimetro iuxta libros eusebii nannetici ystorici*. After this statement, the following questions reasonably arise: in which work does he refer to? Is it a non-genuine work of his or an authentic which is not saved to us? What does this phrase *res novas molitis* means? Who is Eusebius Nanneticus and, most importantly, which was the connection of that work with *Caesares*?

Many critics agree that the work which Mansionario describes is an original Ausonian one (Green 1981, p.230; Burgess 1993, p.496; Green 1999, p.576). It seems that the Italian knew very well what he was saying, as this information provides us with many details. He does not only give a simple title, but he refers to the content of the work, its extent and historical source, a practice that he does not follow in the case of *Caesares*.

To answer the question for which work Mansionario is talking about, we must first explain what the phrase *res novas molitis* means, in order to understand what the content of this work was. Green believes that Mansionario by this phrase (using it such as Tacitus in *Ann.*15.35) refers to the usurpers of the imperial throne (Green 1981, p.229). Burgess gives a similar interpretation. He writes that this sentence is not unusual and that generally the phrase *res novas molire* means «rise against» or «revolt», and that together with the noun *imperatores* the whole phrase is interpreted as «usurp the imperial office», where «usurp» is always used for the failed attempts of someone to become emperor and not for legitimate emperors (Burgess 1993, pp.496-497). From these interpretations it is obvious that Ausonius composed one poetic collection which had as its theme the usurpers of the imperial throne⁴⁰, and especially those who lived between the years of Decius' governance (249-251 CE) and that of Diocletian (284-305 CE). In this work Ausonius must be occupied with Gauls emperors too, who were very familiar to him.

But who is this Eusebius Nanneticus? What more do we know about him, beyond that his name is Greek and his homeland the French city of Nantes? Probably is a historian who composed an extensive work (*iuxta libros*) for the Roman emperors. After this reasonable deduction, critics' opinion are different; Green supports that Eusebius was Greek and even perhaps a distant relative of Ausonius. He assumes that is rather the historian for whom Euagrius speaks in his *Ecclesiastical History* (5.24) and who wrote the history of the Roman emperors from August to Carus (283 CE) around 300 AD (Green 1981, p.230). Burgess on the other side believes that this is not a historian who wrote in Greek, but in Latin, for the western audience. Also, he assumes that is very likely that this Eusebius (Sivan 1992, pp.158-163) is the author of *Kaisergeschichte* (Burgess 1993, pp.496-497).

³⁸ Giovanni de Matociis, better known as Giovanni Mansionario, was an archaeologist from Verona. In the margin of a copy of his work entitled *Historia Imperialis*, in which he dealt with the lives of the emperors from August to Charlemagne, about 1320, he gives a list of Ausonius' works. His testimony was first published by Weiss (1971, pp.71-72). It was republished Green (1991, p.720). The works which Mansionario refers are not all genuine. For example, two works that are unlikely to be authentic are *cronicam ab initio mundi usque ad tempus suum* and *libellum de nominibus mensium Hebreorum et Atheniensium*.

³⁹ There is no doubt that the phrase *item ad hesperium filium suum de ordine imperatorum* describes our work.

⁴⁰ The authors of *Historia Augusta* dealt with the usurpers emperors also.

Summarizing, we can say that the work described by Mansionario is probably a genuine work of Ausonius, that dealt mostly with the usurpers emperors⁴¹ who lived between 249-305 AD (from Decius to Diocletian), its source was Eusebius from Nantes and its metrics the iambic trimeter. Which, however, is the relation between this work and *Caesares*? Our work is a mere chapter of it or is it a separate poem?

It is obvious that Mansionario considers *Caesares* to be a separate work. That is why he makes particular mention for it, giving further information. Today, opinions are divided. In particular, Green, after his statement that this lost work is part of *Caesares*, argues that the description of the Mansionario is incorrect (Green 1981, p.230). He believes that the Italian was deceived by the different meter (iambic trimeter) of this part of *Caesares*, and therefore considered it as another, separate work, because he obviously was unaware of Ausonius' practice habit to use varied measures within the same poetical collection (as shown in *Parentalia* and in *Professores*). However, by iambic trimeter, as he writes, Ausonius could easily apply to verse the names of emperors such as Valerian, Diocletian, Laelianus and Regalianus. According to the same scholar, perhaps elegiac couplets stopped in the quatrains of Elagabalus and thereafter the collection continued in iambic trimeter, from Alexander Severus (222-235 AD) to the time of Ausonius (including the usurpers and legitimate emperors). The same opinion embraces Reeve too (Reeve 1977, pp.112-120).

Liebermann classifies *Caesares* in the same way. He divides the work into two large parts (he calls them a and b). The first part consists of two sections too (he calls them A and B). The part A includes the *monosticha* and the B part the quatrains – these which have to do with *de Caesaribus post Tranquillum* and with *de Caesaribus post Tranquillum*. In the second part (b) of *Caesares*, the scholar claims that Ausonius wrote in iambic trimeter for the usurpers emperors from Decius' era until that of Diocletian. Therefore, Liebermann also thinks that the lost work which Mansionario mentions is a part of our work (Liebermann 1989, pp.292-293).

On the other side, Burgess believes that this work, for which Mansionario speaks, is a separate work of Ausonius. He entitled it *Tyranni* and expresses the view that it is written at the same time when *Caesares* were composed. According to him, the main theme of *Tyranni* was the usurpers emperors between the years of Decius and Diocletian's. This scholar disagrees with Green using two main arguments: a) regarding the change of metrics (which Green sees as Ausonius' method), he declares that in *Parentalia* and in *Professores* the poet changes it only for a few individuals and not for the half of the work (as Green assumes that he does for *Caesares*) and b) regarding the different themes in the same work, such as the legitimate and the usurpers emperors, as it seems unlikely to him that Ausonius combined them (Burgess 1993, pp.496-497).

The theories of scholars about the form and content of the part of *Caesares* which is missing do not cease to be hypothetical. The only certainty is that this work was continued until Ausonius' era, as his main purpose in works in catalogue form (such as *Caesares*, *Parentalia*, *Professores* and *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*) was to complete the theme of each of them. Beyond that, both proposals of the scholars mentioned

⁴¹ The central theme of this work was the usurpers. Probably it included legitimate emperors too, if we think that Decius and Diocletian were such.

above are possible. If we combine the phrase *res novas molitis* used by Mansionario for the usurpers emperors and the adjective *nouans* («usurper», «rebel») which the poet attributes to Severus, then perhaps one of the main objections of Burgess – namely that it is not possible for Ausonius to combine different topics such as legal and usurpers emperors – could be rejected; after all, Severus was a usurper emperor and yet Ausonius includes him between *Caesares*. Maybe our poet completed *Caesares* by including the legal and usurpers emperors, but he also dealt with the usurpers exclusively in a separate and detailed work. Mansionario's testimony – for who we must not forget that is closer in time to Ausonius than we are – motivates us to believe that the second conjecture is the most probable.

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