

AUSONIUS' *FASTI* AND *CAESARES* REVISITED

This paper reconsiders certain questions about Ausonius' two incomplete works on historical themes, *Fasti* and *Caesares*, with particular attention to points raised in a recent article by R. W. Burgess.¹ Of the *Fasti* we have only a few tantalizing snippets, the packaging and not the core: what did the work look like when it left Ausonius? What was its coverage? was it in verse or prose? The *Caesares* as we have it breaks off in mid-quatrain, at line 139: did it go beyond Elagabalus? What of the evidence in Giovanni Mansionario that Ausonius treated certain *imperatores* from Decius to Diocletian?²

I

First, the *Fasti*, of which the few remaining lines and the headings that precede them in the manuscripts are for convenience set out in full:³

Ausonius Hesperio filio sal.

Consulari libro subiciendi quem ego ex cunctis consulibus unum coegi Gregorio ex praef.

1.

Ignota aeternae ne sint tibi tempora Romae,
regibus et patrum ducta sub imperiis,
digessi fastos et nomina perpetis aevi,
sparsa iacent Latiam si qua per historiam.
sit tuus hic fructus, vigilatas accipe noctes;
obsequitur studio nostra lucerna tuo.
tu quoque venturos per longum consere Ianos,
ut mea conguessit pagina praeteritos.
exemplum iam patris habes, ut protinus et te
aggreget Ausoniis purpura consulibus.

2. Supputatio ab urbe condita in consulatum nostrum

Annis undecies centum coniunge quaternos,
undenos unamque super trieterida nocte:
haec erit aeternae series ab origine Romae.

3. In fine eiusdem libri additi

Hactenus ascripsi fastos. si fors volet, ultra
adiciam; si non, qui legis adicies.
scire cupis qui sim? titulum qui quartus ab imo est
quaere; leges nomen consulis Ausonii.

¹ R. W. Burgess, 'Principes cum tyrannis: two studies on the *Kaisergeschichte* and its tradition', *CQ* 43 (1993), 491–500.

² R. P. H. Green, *The Works of Ausonius* (Oxford, 1991), 720.

³ Uncertainties about the text, and the significance of the variants, need not concern us here: see Green (n. 2), 160–1 and 554–7.

4. De eodem

Urbis ab aeternae deductam rege Quirino
 annorum seriem cum, Procule, accipies,
 mille annos centumque et bis fluxisse novenos
 consulis Ausonii nomen ad usque leges.
 fors erit ut lustrum cum se cumulaverit istis
 confectam Proculus signet Olympiadam.

So what was the chronological range of this work? Ausonius tells us twice that it began with the Roman kings, in 1.2 and 4.1. Although it is certainly odd for Ausonius to claim that the kings were mentioned in the *Fasti* (as he seems to be doing), it is not correct to say that the work's last editor 'is rather confused over the nature of the *Fasti*, thinking that it . . . included accounts of the early kings of Rome'.⁴ If they were not there at all, why does Ausonius mention them? It is more pertinent to ask what form their appearance took: perhaps there was just a brief statement—not necessarily any longer than Tacitus' *principio Romanam urbem reges habuere*—followed by a few lines incorporating their names. At the other end Ausonius' *Fasti* continued until at least a year after Ausonius' own consulship (379). His statement (3.3) that he is fourth from the bottom can be taken in two ways: as indicating 380 if there were two consuls to a line or 382 if there was one.⁵ The work may well have ended with a complimentary reference to Ausonius' pupil, the emperor Gratian, who was consul with the new emperor Theodosius in 380. Unlike Burgess (495, n. 18), I see no reason why emperors should have been omitted from Ausonius' *Fasti*: they often held consulships in the fourth century, and any metrical difficulties with their names were not insuperable, as we shall see.

Ausonius does not tell us if the work was in verse; my contention that it was requires defence, since Burgess alleges confusion here too. According to him the evidence of the four surviving poems and the description of the work in Mansionario's list indicates that it was an example of a genre that was becoming very popular at the time:⁶ namely, annotated consular lists, like the *Consularia Constantinopolitana*.⁷ Whether or not this was a popular genre, or indeed a genre at all, we must now consider whether the *Fasti* were in prose or verse by examining the evidence to which Burgess rather cursorily appealed.

Firstly, the evidence of Giovanni Mansionario, which runs: *ad Hesperium filium concordie libri Fastorum cum libris consularibus librum unum*, which seems to mean 'to his son Hesperius one book of concord of the book of Fasti with consular books'. This is far from clear. *concordia* is probably 'harmony' (Augustine, for example, uses the word of an attempt to harmonize the gospels), but with what exactly were the consular books harmonized? Were the 'consular books' the *fasti* themselves or something that appeared in Ausonius' works? What was the relation of the one book to the consular books? Could the annotation of consular lists be described as harmonization? Conceivably the writer of these words is referring to the mathematics of poems 2 and 4, and means that by giving the total of the years Ausonius was in some way harmonizing this with his narrative; but it is all very uncertain. He may well

⁴ Burgess (n. 1), 495, n. 18.

⁵ Green (n. 2), 555.

⁶ The evidence given is the *Chronicle* of Jerome, dated by Burgess to 382.

⁷ R. W. Burgess, *The Chronicle of Hydatius and the Consularia Constantinopolitana* (Oxford, 1993).

have had no more knowledge of Ausonius' *Fasti* than we do. The date and provenance of this compilation are quite unclear.⁸

In the words of Ausonius himself, quoted above, at least two items suggest that he was attempting something more difficult than the annotation of consular lists. His claim in 1.4 that the names used in the *Fasti* are *sparsa . . . Latiam . . . per historiam* implies that the names were not easy to find, and that he was selective. But perhaps this could be claimed even if the names were all present in a list: in the *Caesares* (44/5) Ausonius implies that he derived the names of the first twelve emperors from his knowledge of Roman history, although they were all in his avowed source Suetonius. Then in 1.5 Ausonius describes his work as *vigilatas . . . noctes*: 'the fruit of wakeful nights', implying that the work was time-consuming and difficult or tiresome to compile. It is less easy to relate this description to the annotation of consular lists, even if he were annotating copiously (or exaggerating the difficulties). Moreover, his phrasing strongly suggests poetic composition.⁹

This is not undermined by the evidence of 3.2, where he says to his reader—to judge from *scire cupis qui sim?* this is the general reader, who is addressed by Ausonius elsewhere—*qui legis adicies*. The task of adding names of future consuls to a versified list if death should prevent Ausonius from continuing would not be unduly difficult for a like-minded scholar, especially with Ausonius' practice to guide him. Indeed, the phrase has more point if the reader were being exhorted to versify *suo Marte* rather than simply add names or comments in prose. One recalls the challenge implicitly issued by Vergil in *G.* 4.148 and taken up by Columella.

Further evidence may be drawn from one of the most puzzling features of the surviving snippets. In the second and fourth poems Ausonius makes much of the discovery that 1118 years have passed between the beginning of Rome and his own consulship. The second poem is simply a versified mathematical sum and the fourth poem tells Gregorius that he will read that 1118 years have passed since the foundations of the city. (This does not, of course, imply that every one of these years was represented by one or both consuls.) The apparently inescapable conclusion that this total is incorrect suggests that Ausonius did not have before him a complete record; if he had, he could easily have checked the number of years from the foundation of the city to his own consulship. Whatever the source of his error,¹⁰ it seems to be more like a calculation on the back of an envelope than one derived from the *Fasti* themselves.

More light is available to one who reads other works of Ausonius. It is not Ausonius' custom to preface prose works with an introduction in verse.¹¹ On the other hand, there are two cases where the introductory material to verse works is itself in verse: the *Caesares* (lines 1–5) and the *Ludus Septem Sapientum* (lines 1–18). Moreover, the medium of the *Caesares* points strongly to a versified *Fasti*. Other examples of Ausonius' delight in versifying intractable subject matter can be seen in the *Ordo Urbium Nobilium*, the *Griphus Ternarii Numeri*, and the elegies on deceased family members or teaching colleagues. The two individuals to whom the *Fasti* was addressed, Gregorius and Hesperius,¹² received from Ausonius works of this kind in verse: Gregorius *Cupid* and Hesperius the *Caesares*, the former an entertaining and

⁸ The notice seems to derive from an outdated list at the front of a Veronese manuscript: see M. D. Reeve, 'Some manuscripts of Ausonius', *Prometheus* 3 (1977), 112–20.

⁹ Green (n. 2), 556.

¹⁰ See Green (n. 2), 556–7.

¹¹ In *Ep.* 17, in case that should be thought an exception, the ten lines of verse with which the letter opens are not an introduction but part of an Ausonian joke.

¹² Green (n. 2), 554–6.

witty description of a painting, the latter a work presumably intended to amuse or delight rather than to inform.

The testimony of Mansionario, then, is quite unhelpful, the remnants of Ausonius' *Fasti* point to a versified work of some complexity, and Ausonius' general practice gives strong support. But would the production of such verses not be an exceptionally arduous task? Quite apart from the difficulty of finding something to say about some of the consuls long dead, are their names not difficult to fit into metre? No doubt Ausonius was selective (as he is with the cities of the *Ordo*, and perhaps, as we shall see, with later Roman emperors) when faced with at least a thousand different names. The obscure could simply be rejected, and so too any of little fame whose names were intractable—though in fact it is hard (at least in the first century B.C.) to find a single consul whose *nomen* or *cognomen* does not fit the hexameter easily in some form. And there were other expedients: Ausonius could take liberties such as using the name *Octavius* for Octavian;¹³ he could scan names in his own way, as he does *Scantiniam* in *Epigr.* 99.4, *Nepotianus* in *Prof.* 15.4; or he could paraphrase (Domitian in the *Caesares* is always *frater*). Consular names had provided little difficulty to Ennius, Vergil, and Lucan before him.

II

For the second part of this article, Mansionario's evidence about poems on the Roman emperors is the starting point. After stating that Ausonius wrote *ad hesperium filium suum de ordine imperatorum*, which corresponds at least to the opening words of what are now called the *Caesares*, he goes on: *Item ad eundem de imperatoribus res novas molitis a decio usque ad dioclecianum versu iambico trimetro iuxta libros eusebij nannetici ystorici*. This notice is unusually full: not only a simple title but detailed information about the work's content, metre, and historical source. The few who have considered this data have not been inclined to scepticism about the works authenticity.¹⁴

Two questions arise: who were these *imperatores*, and is this work correctly described as part of the *Caesares*? One answer to the second question can be rejected immediately: Burgess was wrong to think that metre ruled this out. It is not the case, as he alleges (496), that the *Caesares* we have is exclusively in elegiacs: lines 1–41 are hexameters. Indeed, a polymetric work, like Ausonius' *Bissula* and *Ephemeris* and some of his letters, would be quite typical.

But who, or what manner of men, were these *imperatores*? Burgess allows that the phrase *res novas moliri*¹⁵ may mean 'rebel' or 'revolt', as in Eutropius 10.4.4 (Maximus 'rebelling against' Licinius) and Jerome, *Chron.* 170h (an Athenian rebellion against the Romans in the reign of Tiberius), but claims that in the case of *imperatores* this phrase was 'always used of unsuccessful claimants to the purple', not legitimate emperors. There is no problem with two of the cases he adduces, Calocerus in the reign of Constantine (Jer. *Chron.* 233g) and Laelianus, who sought power in A.D. 269 (Eutropius 9.9.1). But a third, Aemilianus, so described in Eutropius 9.5 and Jer. *Chron.* 219f, raises problems. This man, who gained power in 253, was soon accepted as legitimate by the senate,¹⁶ and so was presumably 'successful', notwithstanding his

¹³ Cf. Juvenal 8.242.

¹⁴ M. D. Reeve (n. 8), 120; R. P. H. Green, 'Marius Maximus and Ausonius' *Caesares*', *CQ* 31 (1981), 226–36; H. Sivan, 'The historian Eusebius (of Nantes)', *JHS* 112 (1992), 158–63.

¹⁵ Not *molire*, as Burgess gives it on 496.

¹⁶ Aurelius Victor 31.3.

early death. The fact that Aemilianus, implicitly a *tyrannus* to Burgess, does not occur in Burgess's list of *tyranni* compiled from fourth-century sources indicates further confusion (though a problem is recognized in n. 36 [499]). In a situation as chaotic as that of the third century A.D. the word 'successful' should surely be avoided, and with it Burgess's opposition of 'unsuccessful/legitimate' (and, indeed, the word 'usurper' itself). The phrase *res novas moliri*, then, needs careful handling. It seems capable of referring to anyone who rose up against the current regime or who filled a vacuum, whatever the duration of his power later proved to be. It is therefore conceivable that Ausonius included Decius and Diocletian among the *res novas moliti*, and that the words *a decio usque ad dioclecianum* are not simply, as Burgess takes them, chronological termini exclusively reckoned. There were certainly emperors of note who did not achieve power in that way, but these could have been treated together with their rivals or opponents. Such a framework would have given Ausonius the opportunity to express himself on the Gallic emperors, about whom he may have known a great deal (cf. *Par.* 4.9–10). If he operated in this way on third-century emperors he need not, as Burgess wrongly takes me to have implied, have 'labelled all the emperors from Decius to Diocletian as usurpers'.¹⁷

What was their relation to the *Caesares*? The work which modern editors call the *Caesares* breaks off after two lines on Elagabalus; editors since at least Souchay have generally assumed that more than the second half of the expected quatrain may have been lost. If Ausonius continued to arrange his emperors in twelves (his first set followed Suetonius), we can envisage that his second set ended with Elagabalus and that there followed two more sets, one perhaps from Alexander Severus to Diocletian¹⁸ and one from the tetrarchs to Gratian.¹⁹ Where does this leave the *res novas moliti*? The Suetonian emperors were treated by Ausonius in three separate poems, one on their order, one on the length of their reigns, and one on their deaths, and it is quite possible that such variations originally existed on the second dozen. Perhaps it is to such a parallel set, on the third group of twelve, that Mansionario refers. Treating an emperor more than once, in different contexts, is obviously no problem for Ausonius, but he could also have brought in some names not mentioned heretofore. In such a schema Mansionario's men could easily have formed part of the *Caesares*.

There is a possible objection to both this view and my former view which should be raised. If these iambic trimeters were part of the *Caesares*, why are they mentioned separately in Mansionario's list? The detail presented in this item goes beyond what is normally found in manuscripts of Ausonius, and like the (albeit misguided) comment on Paulinus in Mansionario's second item²⁰ suggests a critic at work. If the item derives from such a person's observation, how and why did the 'usurpers' or 'uprisers' catch his eye? Because of their unusual metre, one might suggest, or because they concluded the *Caesares* and were therefore rather conspicuous: in which case the fourth set of emperors, which as suggested above may have gone as far as Gratian, was probably no longer present. Perhaps Ausonius never put it to paper, his plans frustrated by Gratian's unexpectedly early death.

¹⁷ Burgess (n. 1), 496, commenting on Green (n. 2), 557–8.

¹⁸ Perhaps consisting of Alexander Severus, Maximinus Thrax, Philip, Decius, Valerian, Gallienus, Claudius II, Aurelian, Tacitus, Probus, Carus, and Diocletian.

¹⁹ These must have included Constantine, Constans and Constantius, Julian, Jovian, Valentinian I, Valens, and Gratian, preceded by some of the tetrarchs and ending perhaps with Valentinian II and Theodosius I.

²⁰ In his second sentence he calls Ausonius' correspondent *poncium paulinum primo beati ambrosij notarium* (which he was not), then *nolanus episcopus*, which he later became.

It has not been the aim of this paper to comment on Burgess's main thesis—that the *Kaisergeschichte* (*KG*), postulated by historians to account for striking similarities in the various imperial narratives of this period, was written by Eusebius of Nantes—but two points may be made. The identification of Eusebius of Nantes with the Greek writer Eusebius, made provisionally by Green and then in more detail by Sivan,²¹ is not ruled out by the fact that the Eusebius mentioned by Evagrius stopped at Carus; Ausonius could easily have followed him as far as Carus but used another source, if indeed he needed one, for Diocletian. For the early *Caesares* he cites only Suetonius, but clearly used Tacitus too.

Secondly, it is crucial to Burgess's argument that strong similarities be demonstrated between the *KG* and what Ausonius evidently had to say about 'usurpers' or 'uprisers'. How strong are they? After stating that there were twenty-six named usurpers in the *KG*²² in the years between Decius and Diocletian, he says 'This matches the *Tyranni* exactly' (meaning by *Tyranni* Ausonius' work). But in fact we know next to nothing about the numbers of such rulers in Ausonius' version. Furthermore, the 'gap' in the series of *tyranni* which Burgess detects before Decius—the absence in both *KG* and Ausonius of usurpers from that period who are attested elsewhere—is speculative and illusory. We cannot exclude the possibility that Ausonius treated pre-Decian usurpers of the third century in a lost portion. Alternatively, the fact that Ausonius included only full emperors in his account of emperors from Nerva to Elagabalus could be taken as evidence that he was not interested in *tyranni* in general but only those of the later third century, including the various Gallic potentates that he mentions at *Par.* 4.9–10 in connection with his family history.²³

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²¹ Green (n. 14), 230; Sivan (n. 14), 162.

²² Burgess (n. 1), 497. The relevant appendix contains twenty-seven names.

²³ I am grateful to the audience at a Manchester University Classics seminar in October 1996 who listened to a rather indigestible paper in which these points were raised, and in particular to Dr John Briscoe and Prof. Tim Cornell for their helpful comments. A *CQ* referee later made others.