

THE ASCRIPTION OF A CERTAIN CLASS  
OF MSS. OF THE *DE VIRIS ILLUSTRIBUS*  
OF THE PSEUDO-AURELIUS VICTOR

It was widely held in the Renaissance that the *De Viris Illustribus* of the (Pseudo-)Aurelius Victor was, as almost all the MSS. indicate, a work of Pliny the Younger. Others held that the work was written by Suetonius, Cornelius Nepos, Hyginus, Asconius Pedianus, or Aemilius Probus<sup>1</sup>), but all considered the words of Pliny in a letter to Tacitus (*Ep.* VI, 20, 5), “posco librum Titi Livi et quasi per otium lego atque etiam, ut coeperam, excerpo”, an evidence for the belief that the work was by Pliny, whether they held them correct or not. Andreas Schottus, who, in 1577, first assigned the work to Aurelius Victor, refers to them bitterly as words “quibus huius libelli auctorem quidam facere se posse confidunt”<sup>2</sup>) and points out

their inapplicability, but the revised view, that they were the source of the MS. attribution, seemed probable to Schanz (*Gesch. d. röm. Litt. IV, 1, p. 71*) as late as 1914. Indeed, I have not been able to find any scholar who has disagreed or offered any alternative reason for this peculiar attribution.

A better reason lies, however, at hand. In the *Historia Augusta*, *Macrinus* 4, 2, we find mention of a certain Aurelius Victor "cui Pinio cognomen erat". Some MSS., as has been remarked, ascribe this work to Aurelius Victor. Presumably, therefore, at some earlier stage in the history of this text, a scholar<sup>3)</sup> reading the *Historia Augusta* and finding this passage, remembered the work of the to him unknown Aurelius Victor, and, gratefully, added in his copy the name "Pinius" (or perhaps "Pinio"). He, if not his source, or one of his successors, then corrupted "Pinius" into the better-known "Plinius", the meaningless "Aurelius Victor" was suppressed, and subsequent copyists, in accordance with their learning and ostentation, expanded this name into the various forms which are found today in most of the manuscripts of this text.

These MSS. would then, theoretically, form a separate class, although, if a great deal of contamination is present – as seems likely, although there has not yet been a really thorough examination of all known MSS. of this work – this has probably been rendered valueless as a criterion for editing the text.

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1) Cf. the Teubner edition of Pichlmayr, p. viii. This last attribution is found in a Clermont-Ferrand MS. of the 13th century which is the oldest known MS. of this text, mentioned by Pichlmayr but not consulted by him.

2) Often reprinted, e.g. in the Valpy edition, London, 1829, I, 25. I have not been able to consult his 1577 edition.

3) Of uncertain date, but possibly as late as the 13th century. As noted above, the oldest known MS. of this work is of this date, and all others seem to date from the next century or later.

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