

Better Late than Early: Reflections on the Date of Calpurnius Siculus

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Back in 1978, Champlin¹ fluttered the dovescotes by relocating Calpurnius Siculus from the reign of Nero to that of Alexander Severus. First in the rush to "refute" him were Mayer² and Townend,³ followed at a more considered distance by Wiseman.⁴ Also unmoved was the veteran Calpurnian editor, Verdière.⁵ His paper might (or might not) have restrained the producers⁶ of flowery essays on the literary *Zeitgeist*, wherein the Neronian date was assumed but not discussed.

Gathering an ally, Champlin remained unrepentant. In 1986, he and Armstrong (the latter providing a thorough and late-leaning linguistic examination of the poems) declared: "What more is there to be said?"⁷ Quite a lot, as it turned out. The most recent editors, Amat in the Budé series and Schröder in his agreeably titled⁸ commentary on the fourth of the eclogues, upheld the Neronian position. On the other side, Armstrong and Champlin received a powerful boost from the rigorous analysis of language

¹ E. J. Champlin, "The Life and Times of Calpurnius Siculus," *JRS* 68 (1978) 95–110.

² R. Mayer, "Calpurnius Siculus: Technique and Date," *JRS* 70 (1980) 175–76.

³ G. B. Townend, "Calpurnius Siculus and the Munus Neronis," *JRS* 70 (1980) 166–74.

⁴ T. P. Wiseman, "Calpurnius Siculus and the Claudian Civil War," *JRS* 72 (1982) 57–67.

⁵ R. Verdière, "Le genre bucolique à l'époque de Néron: les 'Bucolica' de T. Calpurnius Siculus et les 'Carmina Einsidlensia'. Etat de la question et prospectives," *ANRW* II.32.3 (Berlin and New York 1985) 1845–1924.

⁶ Notably E. W. Leach, "Corydon Revisited: An Interpretation of the Political Eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus," *Ramus* 2 (1973) 53–97, and "Neronian Pastoral and the World of Power," *Ramus* 4 (1975) 204–30; cf. C. Newlands, "Urban Pastoral: The Seventh Eclogue of Calpurnius Siculus," *ClAnt* 6 (1987) 218–31. For all too many more such effusions, see the bibliography in Schröder (below, note 8).

⁷ D. Armstrong, "Stylistics and the Date of Calpurnius Siculus," *Philologus* 130 (1986) 113–36, precluded (104–12) by Champlin's "History and the Date of Calpurnius Siculus," with an attached postscript (137) from which this quotation is taken. Armstrong was partly anticipated by E. Merone, *Innovazioni linguistiche in Calpurnio Siculo* (Naples 1967). See also A. Mahr, *Untersuchungen zur Sprache in den Eklogen des Calpurnius Siculus* (diss. Vienna 1963) and A. Novelli, *Il linguaggio di Calpurnio Siculo* (Lecce 1980).

⁸ B. Schröder, *Carmina non quae nemorale resultent* (Frankfurt am Main, Berne, New York, and Paris 1991).

and style by Courtney,⁹ showing a large repertory of Calpurnian borrowings from the likes of Lucan, Martial, Silius Italicus, and Statius. *Contra* Townend's reliance on the *munus Neronis*, a palmary paper¹⁰ on such matters expresses brief, albeit unargued, doubt. Most recently, Horsfall¹¹ in a characteristically learned and witty round-up of the latest editions has proposed (if I understand his sometimes elliptical prose aright) a new wrinkle: Calpurnius is full of Neronian detail, but in a diction that puts him in a later period. As Horsfall concludes, "It does not help to run away from the problems posed by Calpurnius and there is a lot more work to be undertaken."

A number of Champlin's Neronian opponents professed to be upholding the "traditional" date. An imprudent, if not impudent, claim. Before Haupt¹² in 1854, developing the adumbrations of Sarpe¹³ in 1819, the third century *was* the traditional date. Ultimately, it harks back to the anonymous individual who first bound Calpurnius and Nemesianus together in the same volume. The eighteenth century had no doubts. In the excitement engendered by Champlin, it was overlooked, by inadvertence or design, that Edward Gibbon had Calpurnius firmly settled in the late third century, detecting about half a dozen allusions in his verses to the times of Aurelian, Probus, and Carus.¹⁴ There was also Samuel Johnson who, passing the *Eclogues* of Virgil under individual review,¹⁵ opined that, "If we except Calphurnius (sic), an obscure writer of the lower ages, I know not that a single pastoral was written after him by any poet, till the revival of literature." A number of professional scholars converged on the same century, if not the same reign.¹⁶ *Alii alia tentaverunt*. As a matter of disconcerting, though often forgotten fact, using exactly the same small body of evidence, people have variously assigned our poet to the reigns of Claudius, Nero, Domitian, Commodus, the younger Gordian, Probus, Carus, and sons, and Diocletian–Constantine.¹⁷

⁹ E. Courtney, "Imitation, chronologie littéraire et Calpurnius Siculus," *REL* 65 (1987) 148–57.

¹⁰ K. Coleman, "Launching into History: Aquatic Displays in the Early Empire," *JRS* 83 (1993) 48–74, esp. 57.

¹¹ N. Horsfall, "Cleaning up Calpurnius," *CR* 43 (1993) 267–70. Though mainly concerned with the Budé of J. Amat (Paris 1991) and with Schröder, he also pays brief and deprecatory attention to the Mexican edition of S. Díaz Cántora (Mexico City 1989).

¹² M. Haupt, *De carminibus bucolicis Calpurnii et Nemesiani* (Berlin 1854).

¹³ G. Sarpe, *Quaestiones philologicae* (Rostock 1819).

¹⁴ All occur in chapters 11 and 12 of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; they will be inspected later.

¹⁵ *Adventurer* no. 92, September 22, 1753.

¹⁶ Thus modifying the remark of Armstrong (above, note 7) 122, about Calpurnius being "left in the company of Tertullian, where indeed, until 1854, the instinct of scholars of Latin poetry usually placed him."

¹⁷ To save what would be a lot of space, I shall not enumerate them all here. Apart from the surveys in Amat and Schröder, the various datings and their proponents are inventoried by, e.g. C. H. Keene in his edition (London 1887; repr. Hildesheim 1969), by M. D. Reeve, "The Textual Tradition of Calpurnius and Nemesianus," *CQ* 28 (1978) 223–38, esp. 223 n. 1, and by

On the historical side, the Neronians (Townend being perhaps the prime example) lay great store on Calpurnius' accounts of a comet (1. 77–83), a set of games in an unspecified amphitheatre (7. 23–84), and a young prince who (1. 45) pleaded a successful case for the Iuli: *maternis causam qui vicit Iulis*. This last, indeed, is often seen as their ace in the hole, being equated with the stripling Nero's speech on behalf of the people of Ilium in A.D. 53, an event mentioned both by Suetonius (*Nero* 7. 2) and Tacitus (*Ann.* 12. 58). They are, however, obliged to admit that *Iuli* in the sense of Trojans is a most unusual, perhaps unique,¹⁸ usage. This in itself is no great problem: Calpurnius is no stranger to innovative diction. What is less often observed is that *Iulis* is not necessarily the right reading. Some manuscripts have *in ulnis*, a reading actually printed by Keene, quoting hyperbolic parallels from authors as diverse as Manilius, Petronius, and (in Greek) Themistius. A suitable young prodigy can be found in Numerian, said by the *Historia Augusta* (*Car.* 11. 1) to have been *eloquentia etiam praepollens, adeo ut puer publice declamaverit*. This connection was made by Wernsdorf in his edition (Altenburg 1780). A third reading, *in ulmis*, was printed by Adelung (Petersburg 1804), who saw in it some reference to an anecdote of Numerian's youth. I am not, of course, saying that *Iulis* must be wrong, simply that, given this textual uncertainty, the Neronians are too confident.

I do, however, wonder what "maternal Trojans" is supposed to mean. According to Suetonius (*DJ* 6. 1; cf. Dio 43. 43), Julius Caesar distinguished between his maternal and paternal ancestry, tracing his mother's side back via Ancus Martius to the kings, his father's side to Venus. There is also Ovid, *Amores* 1. 8. 42, *at Venus Aeneae regnat in urbe sui*, in the "shocking"¹⁹ context of hedonism at Rome. For a parallel to what Calpurnius is supposedly saying, we have to go to a late poet, Rutilius Namatianus, *De reditu* 1. 67–68: "auctores generis Venerem Martemque fatemur, / Aeneadam matrem Romulidumque patrem."

Verdière in his edition (Brussels 1954). One may single out the arguments for the reign of the younger Gordian advanced by R. Garnett both in *Journ. Phil.* 16 (1888) 216–19, and in the 9th edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (in the 11th edition, the Neronian date takes over, and in the more recent ones Calpurnius is conspicuous by his absence), also the unspecified late date proposed by G. Jennison, "Polar Bears at Rome," *CR* 36 (1922) 73, developed in his *Animals for Show and Pleasure in Ancient Rome* (London 1937) 70, 71, 188, 189. J. M. C. Toynebee, *Animals in Roman Life and Art* (London 1973) 94 acknowledges Jennison's point about polar bears (for which, see later), but herself accepts the Neronian date, oddly describing this as "generally assigned for linguistic reasons."

¹⁸ Depending on how one interprets *Iulos* in Valerius Flaccus 1. 9: *oceanus Phrygios prius indignatus Iulos*. Champlin (above, note 1) 98, who states categorically that "nowhere in Latin literature does the word signify the people of Troy, and indeed such an equation would be decidedly inept," takes Valerius as referring to the Julio-Claudian dynasty. By contrast, the *Oxford Latin Dictionary* couples these passages from Calpurnius and Valerius, giving them both the Trojan allusion.

¹⁹ The adjective is that of G. W. Williams, *Change and Decline: Roman Literature in the Early Empire* (Berkeley and Los Angeles 1978) 62.

A speech about Iuli could encompass any number of themes, and certainly does not have to be about Trojans. Champlin argues for Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea, sisters and mothers respectively of Elagabalus and Alexander Severus. The lukewarm verdict accorded to the oratorical abilities of the younger Gordian by the *Historia Augusta*²⁰ does not help those who see him as the recipient of Calpurnius' praises. The elder Gordian, by contrast, was prolific in epic poetry as a *puerulus*, and turned to public debating in his pre-imperial adolescence.²¹

Townend claimed the games as "most decisive for a Neronian date." Much hinges on their venue, unspecified by the poet. Nowadays, the choices are boiled down to two: either the wooden amphitheatre erected by Nero in the year 57, or the Colosseum. If the latter, that is the end of the Neronian date, for obvious reasons. This dichotomy, it should be emphasised, is false. There are other possibilities. Probus, who offered both wild beast shows and gladiators in the Colosseum, also staged a magnificent *venatio* in the Circus. Gibbon, believing that Calpurnius is describing the games staged by Carinus in the Colosseum,²² compared the poet's awe at the building's height to that evinced by Constantius in the account of Ammianus (16. 10. 14). There may be more to be got out of this comparison. Calpurnius (7. 24) describes the theatre as *Tarpeium prope despectantia culmen*. Keene objected that the Colosseum is too far from the Tarpeian rock to merit this compliment. Champlin countered that the poet's words simply convey the height of the building. Now, in the Ammianean narrative, the Colosseum is a structure *ad cuius summitatem aegre visio humana conscendit*, juxtaposing this with a mention of *Iovis Tarpei delubra, quantum terrenis divina praecellunt*.

It was quite natural that the Colosseum should attract expressions of wonder at its size. The very first two poems in Martial's *Liber spectaculorum* dwell upon it. With regard to what went on there, Champlin established another link between Calpurnius and Martial, namely their joint use (Mart. *Sp.* 21. 5; Calp. 7. 57) of the phrase *genus omne ferarum*. This can be enhanced by Suetonius, *Tit.* 7. 3 *omne genus ferarum*, not indeed of the Colosseum but in a section on Titus' games that includes it.

Nothing now remains of Nero's wooden amphitheatre. It is most unlikely that it was so colossal as to evoke such awe at its height, even from the most lickspittle of poetic flatterers. Tacitus (*Ann.* 13. 31) pours scorn on those who would praise its *fundamenta et trabes*, and by implication on the building itself.²³ Suetonius who, it should be remembered, includes the

²⁰ *Gord.* 20. 6 *non magna non minima sed media*.

²¹ *Gord.* 3. 1-4, dubbing the verses *disertissimis*, withholding comment on the orations.

²² As described by the *HA* (*Car.* 19), these spectacles have nothing in common with the one described by Calpurnius. There are also far more differences than similarities between the show narrated by the poet and the one put on by Probus.

²³ "Pauca memoria digna evenere, nisi cui libeat laudandis fundamentis et trabibus, quis molem amphitheatri apud campum Martis Caesar extruxerat."

item in the section devoted to Nero's commendable deeds, emphasises only the speed with which it was thrown up (*Nero* 12. 1 *intra anni spatium fabricato*)—not a word on its size or any other splendours. The biographer's silence is not the only instructive one here. The elder Pliny has two impressive things to say about Nero's amphitheatre: It contained a larchwood log 120 feet long and 2 feet thick, a natural wonder preserved from the reign of Tiberius (*NH* 16. 200), and its various equipments were lavishly encrusted with amber especially brought back from the German littoral by the knight Julianus (37. 45). Calpurnius has none of this. His mention of the woodwork is confined to the opening phrase *trabibus . . . textis*, nothing to do with size, but similar to Martial, *Sp.* 2. 2 *et crescunt media pegmata celsa via* (of the Colosseum's scaffoldings), also to the initial arrangements made for Probus' great games in the Circus: "genus autem spectaculi fuit tale: arbores validae per milites radicitus vulsae conexis late longaeque trabibus adfixae sunt, terra deinde superiecta totusque Circus ad silvae consitus speciem gratia novi viroris effrondit" (*HA, Prob.* 19. 3).

There are more relevant silences. Calpurnius goes into rhapsodies over bejewelled partitions, inlaid ivory beams, nets of gold wire, and some new-fangled device called a *rotulus* (the term is unique to this passage). Why none of this in Suetonius? As to the games witnessed by the speaker in Calpurnius, they could not possibly have been the *gladiatorium munus* mentioned and described by Suetonius (*Nero* 11. 1, 12. 1), for how could the flattering poet have failed to mention not only gladiators of any kind but the mercy of an emperor who the biographer says *neminem occidit, ne noxiorum quidem?*²⁴

Calpurnius' spectator is quite clear on what he saw: snow-white hares, horned boars, the "rare" elk, two exotic kinds of bull, sea calves either fighting with or striving in play against bears (*cum certantibus ursis*), and hippopotamuses. No gladiators, no *bestiarii*, no *naumachiae*, no pyrrhic dances—in other words, none of the things itemised by Suetonius.

A number of the creatures mentioned by Calpurnius repay inspection.²⁵ In Varro's days (*De re rust.* 3. 3. 2), the snow-white hare was rarely seen in Rome. Pliny mentions them (*NH* 8. 217), but not in any arena connection; likewise Pausanias (8. 17. 3). Only Calpurnius has them in a public show. This is also the case with his horned boars. The poet's allusion to the rarity

²⁴ The debate over whether the spectacles described by Suetonius, *Nero* 12. 1–2, comprise one entertainment or several seems needless. A *munus* is, strictly speaking, a *gladiatorial* show. Moreover, in his list of 11. 1, Suetonius rounds off a list of plurals with an explicit singular: "spectaculorum plurima et varia genera edidit: iuvenales, circenses, scaenicos ludos, gladiatorium munus." The epitomated accounts of Dio Cassius (61. 9. 1–5) do include a mention of fishes swimming with sea monsters, also bulls and bears, but it is made clear that all these spectacles included gladiators, *bestiarii*, *naumachiae*, and the like.

²⁵ For the full treatment, see the aforementioned books of Jennison and Toynbee (above, note 17), also the excursus in L. Friedländer, *Roman Life and Manners under the Early Empire*, tr. A. B. Gough (London 1913) IV 181–88.

of the elk is on the mark. Julius Caesar (*BG* 6. 27) retails absurd stories of their sleeping in trees. Pausanias (9. 12. 1) comments on how hard they were to catch and train. Pliny (*NH* 8. 38–39) has little on elk, and nothing about them being in shows, adding that their Scandinavian relative, the *achlis*, had never been seen in Rome.²⁶ The only emperors outside Calpurnius credited with displaying elk are the Gordians and Aurelian.²⁷ A hippopotamus was first exhibited at Rome in 58 B.C. Pliny's account of the creature (*NH* 8. 96) mentions no public appearances. Although Ammianus (22. 15. 21) says it was often brought to Rome, it was unobtainable in his own time. Outside Calpurnius, the only emperors we hear of in its connection are Antoninus Pius, Commodus, Elagabalus, Gordian III, and Philip.²⁸ Only our poet has performing seals; Pliny (*NH* 9. 41) describes their somnolence, their roaring, their ability to be trained to greet the public and respond to their own names, and the difficulty of killing them: Some of this may imply arena performances, but there is no explicit mention of same.

Bears were no novelty in the arenas of Rome. Pliny (*NH* 8. 130, 34. 127) has casual allusions to their being killed at shows, but the only specific exhibition mentioned (*NH* 8. 131) is that of Domitius Ahenobarbus in 61 B.C., a cue if ever there was one for importing any possible reference to the emperor Nero.

It is assumed that Calpurnius' swimming bears were of the polar variety. If so, a unique mention, one promoted by Jennison as evidence for a third-century date, given the failure of Pliny to mention the species.²⁹ His silence is certainly notable. Not, however, decisive, for these aquatic bears do not absolutely have to be polar. A local ursologist³⁰ tells me that other kinds of bears swim well and could, albeit with difficulty, be trained to romp in water alongside other creatures.

Calpurnius' description of a comet in his first poem is another lynchnpin of the Neronian dating. Champlin,³¹ however, has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that the poet's account is irreconcilable with the contemporary evidence of Seneca, *Apocolocyntosis* 2, also with Pliny, *NH*

²⁶ LSJ cite the Greek word for elk only from Pausanias 5. 12. 1, an obvious testimony to the rarity of references to this beast.

²⁷ On the sole evidence of the *HA*: *Gord.* 33. 1; *Aur.* 33. 4.

²⁸ Apart from Dio 72. 10. 3 for Commodus, we again rely on the *HA*: *AP* 10. 9; *Elag.* 28. 3; *Gord.* 33. 1–2.

²⁹ See above (note 17) for Jennison. Toynbee (above, note 17) 94 reasonably says that Pliny was not infallible on the subject of bears, noting his ignorance of the ancient evidence for the African species. But complete silence on a subject is not the same as making a mistake about one, and his failure to mention polar bears remains eloquent. Overall, it is striking, if not conclusive, how many of the animals mentioned by Calpurnius are otherwise only attested for considerably post-Neronian emperors.

³⁰ Mr. Steven Herrero of Calgary, to whom I am most grateful for information about bears, relayed in a telephone conversation on February 9, 1995.

³¹ As with the games and some other issues, I am not wasting space repeating points unimprovably made by Champlin in his two articles.

2. 92, "sidus terrificum . . . quo Claudius Caesar imperium reliquit Domitio Neroni, ac deinde principatu eius adsidium prope ac saevum," this latter standing in flagrant contrast to Calpurnius' (78) *placida radiantem luce cometem*.³²

There is more to be said, all on Champlin's side. Thanks to the Chinese records and the tables drawn up by modern astronomers,³³ we can be quite precise about the comet of 54. It was a broom star comet in Gemini with a white vapour trail, seven degrees long, pointing southeast. It appeared on June 9, moved toward the northeast, and disappeared from view after thirty-one days. Thus, it was not visible after early in July. Calpurnius specifically mentions its twentieth night of appearance. This figure has no scientific significance. At the beginning of his seventh poem, Lycotas has been waiting for twenty nights for the return of Corydon from Rome, while the very last line of the *Laus Pisonis* says of its author,³⁴ *coeperit et nondum vicesima aestas*.

A huge number of comets appeared during the period between A.D. 54 and the age of Diocletian and Constantine, being recorded for the years 55, 59, 60, 61, 64, 65, 66, 71, 75, 76, 77, 79, 84, 85, 101, 104, 110, 117, 125, 126, 128, 132, 133, 141, 149, 153, 154, 158, 161, 178, 180, 182, 186, 188, 191, 193, 200, 204, 205, 206, 207, 213, 217, 218, 222, 225, 232, 236, 238, 240, 245, 247, 248, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 257, 258, 259, 260, 262, 265, 268, 269, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 281, 283, 287, 290, 295, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 305, 315, 329, 336. Relatively few of these are recorded in extant Roman sources. The *Historia Augusta*, it should be stressed, has surprisingly few (perhaps one of its contrived quirks), and does not even employ the word *cometes*.³⁵ As Garnett saw, the epiphanies in both August and September of the year 238 could tie in with the accession of the younger Gordian. Other such third-century connections might be possible.

There is another aspect of the matter, seldom remarked. Referring to one of the comets that appeared in Nero's reign, Seneca (*NQ* 7. 17. 2) says categorically³⁶ that this is one which *cometis detraxit infamiam*. In the light of this, how feasible is it that Calpurnius should choose to make so much out of a notoriously feared phenomenon back in 54, even allowing for the way in which it is twisted into happy anticipation of the new ruler? For his part, Pliny (*NH* 2. 94) observes that only Augustus made a favorable fetish

³² Garnett (above, note 17) long ago raised doubts that Calpurnius' description of the comet fitted what we know from elsewhere about the one that appeared in 54; an ineffectual rejoinder was made by J. P. Postgate, "The Comet of Calpurnius Siculus," *CR* 16 (1902) 38–40.

³³ In particular, D. K. Yeomans, *Comets: A Chronological History of Observation, Science, Myth, and Folklore* (New York, Chichester, Brisbane, Toronto, and Singapore 1991); cf. B. G. Marsden, *Catalogue of Cometary Orbits* (Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, Cambridge, MA 1972; rev. ed. 1993).

³⁴ Thought by some to be Calpurnius himself, but that is another story, not one for the present investigation.

³⁵ Cf. *Clod. Alb.* 12. 3; *AS* 14. 5; *Car.* 8. 5.

³⁶ Surely not ironically, as the Loeb editor Corcoran suggests.

out of a comet. Most people continued to fear them: As Seneca (*NQ* 7. 1. 5) remarks, “non enim desunt qui terreant, qui significationes eius graves praedicent.”³⁷

In lines 49–50 of the first poem, the prophetic Faunus proclaims of Bellona that “modo quae toto civilia distulit orbe, / secum bella geret.” On this, Champlin makes what seems to me an incontrovertible point: “Under no circumstances is it possible to see the reign of Claudius as a period of civil war.” Townend could only feebly counter with vague talk of the conventions of imperial panegyric, sidestepping the precision of the poet’s *modo*. Wiseman made a (to use the term he applied to Champlin’s original thesis) heroic attempt to overcome the problem by connecting it with the abortive rebellion of Camillus Scribonianus back in 42. But this was ancient history by 54, and I do not see how a failed coup that began and ended within five days (Suet. *Claud.* 13) can possibly be accommodated to Calpurnius’ language.

In an otherwise close and often perceptive analysis of this part of the poem, Wiseman stops just short of lines 50–51: “. . . nullos iam Roma Philippos / deflebit, nullos ducet captiva triumphos.” Again, by no stretch of the imagination can this be made to suit the reign of Claudius. It is no use looking to the charge sheet of executed senators and knights presented in the *Apocolocyntosis*: That was lampoon, this is panegyric. Although in very guarded language, the late ruler of the end of Calpurnius’ poem is praised, not reviled. And even supposing him to have been Claudius, it was too soon to start casting aspersions upon him: We have it upon the authority of Tacitus (*Ann.* 14. 11) that the *temporum Claudianorum obliqua insectatione* did not get underway until the year 59, a consequence of Agrippina’s liquidation. Edward Gibbon, as is rarely remembered, saw in these verses “a very manifest allusion and censure,” to do with Aurelian’s leading of Tetricus in his triumphal procession, paraphrasing in addition the words of the *Historia Augusta* (*Aur.* 34. 4): “senatus, etsi aliquantulo tristior, quod senatores triumphari videbant.” I am not saying that Gibbon is necessarily right. But at the very least it is interesting to see how the great historian interpreted these verses, which most certainly suit the third century infinitely more than the reign of Claudius.

Calpurnius goes on (63–68) to make Faunus proclaim that the new age of peace shall bring back the fiery spirit of Romulus and the pacificatory genius of Numa. “Why Numa?” asks Wiseman, going on to answer his own question by finding in the reference a (for Calpurnius) necessary allusion to the family of the poet’s patron, supposedly already cloaked under the dramatic name of Meliboeus throughout the poems. I should prefer to return to Gibbon: “The voice of congratulation and flattery was not silent; and we may still peruse, with pleasure and contempt, an eclogue which was

³⁷ Tacitus, *Ann.* 14. 22, observes, of the year 60, “sidus cometes effulsit; de quo vulgi opinio est tamquam mutationem regis portendat.”

composed on the accession of the emperor Carus." To this notion, we may link the following rigmarole on this emperor as the saviour of Rome in the *Historia Augusta* (*Car.* 2. 3): "quid deinde Numa loquar, qui frementem bellis et gravidam triumphis civitatem religione munivit." One could almost think the author had been reading Calpurnius here. And indeed, there may even be a planted clue to this effect: the bogus author of a bogus letter, namely Julius Calpurnius (*Car.* 8. 4). Furthermore, with the perennial debate over the precise meaning of Siculus in the poet's nomenclature in mind, we should recall that the ostensible author of this biography is none other than Flavius Vopiscus of *Syracuse*.

Mayer's claim that "the diction of Calpurnius is wholly classical" was absurd at the time, being both a misrepresentation of Haupt and a demonstration of ignorance of the contrary findings of Merone and Paladini made many years before.³⁸ It looks even sillier now, after the further work of Novelli and Armstrong; I here append in a footnote some gleanings to supplement the latter.³⁹

Mayer also set much store by Calpurnius' prosody, in particular his supposedly "rigid practice" with regard to final *o*, shortening this only in the cases of *puto* and *nescio*, two verbs licensed for this procedure by Augustan poetry. Again, Armstrong has laid out the statistical evidence, and there is no need to repeat it here. In brief, since there are only about half a dozen verbs with first person *o* in Calpurnius, and not a single gerund long or short, we are hardly entitled to say what the poet's practice was, rigorous or otherwise.⁴⁰ As to Nemesianus, while it is true (as has often been pointed out) that he is much freer than Calpurnius in his own eclogues, it is equally true (an observation not previously prominent) that in his *Cynegetica* he is much more "rigid": only two unusual shortenings in 325 hexameters.⁴¹

³⁸ See Armstrong (above, note 7) 114–15 on this point. For Merone, see above (note 7); cf. M. L. Paladini, "Osservazioni a Calpurnio Siculo," *Latomus* 15 (1956) 521–31.

³⁹ Above all, *praetorrida* at 2. 80. Armstrong rightly denotes this adjective as a hapax; it should be added, to enhance the point, that the cognate verb *praetorro* is found only in the 5th-century medical writer Caelius Aurelianus, *Chron.* 3. 8. 112. Other rarities include *oleastrum* (2. 44), the application of *gemmeus* to *fons* (2. 57), the figurative use of *scintillare* (5. 22), and the proper name Petason (6. 51, and nowhere else). This is also the place to clear up a cognate linguistic point. Horsfall and Schröder make much of the grammar and ramifications of *quid tacitus*, *Corydon?* in Calpurnius 4. 1 and *quid tacitus*, *Mystes?* in *Carm. Eins.* 2. 1. As to ramifications, I see nothing beyond possible echoes of, e.g. Virgil, *Aen.* 6. 841 *quis . . . tacitum?* or Horace, *Epod.* 5. 49 *quid tacuit?* Horsfall says that the expression is "a dactylic equivalent to the comic *quid taces?* for which I have not yet found exact parallels elsewhere." In the case of Calpurnius, the phrase can easily be taken as going with the following verb *sedes* (3), causing no grammatical oddity. In the *Carm. Eins.* line, there is no such verb, but we can easily understand *es*. Or dare we say that we here have another bit of late Latin?

⁴⁰ In addition, one or two more *-o* forms occur in the last foot of a line; Calpurnius often has *ego*, its *o* always unelided and short. There are very few elisions (none in poems 2, 4, 6) and one hiatus (7. 79).

⁴¹ *Cano* in the opening line, *devotio* in the 5th foot of line 83. If the two fragments of a hexametric *De aucupio* attributed to him by Gybertus Longolius in a dialogue *De avibus* (Cologne 1544) are genuine, then he is shown to have allowed himself the unclassical

Still in thrall to Haupt, Mayer further proclaimed that “so far as Calpurnius is concerned Statius might not have written.” A doubly foolish proposition. First, Keene had pointed out some parallels nearly a century earlier, and we now have Courtney’s demonstration of the breadth and depth of Calpurnius’ debts to a variety of first-century poets. Second, why should a large Statian influence be presumed mandatory for Calpurnius, a writer of pastoral, as Statius was not? We have before our eyes on every page the blatant and dominating model we would expect: Virgil.⁴²

Finally, some apparently novel questions and observations which I hope may attract some response: (1) If Calpurnius is Neronian, why do we know nothing at all about him from any ancient quarter? (2) Why, despite his relative disdain for the bucolic genre, does Quintilian not mention him in Book 10?⁴³ (3) Why does Juvenal not parody pastoral as he does contemporary epic? (4) Why would a poet from the first century get attached to the late-third-century Nemesianus? (5) Why would Nemesianus go back to an obscure Neronian for his borrowings? (6) The most blatant pillaging of Calpurnius by Nemesianus occurs in only one poem, his second, in which a substantial number of lines and phrases are imitated or repeated from the third of Calpurnius’ eclogues.⁴⁴ Unlike modern plagiarism, ancient debts of this sort were meant to be recognised. But how many of Nemesianus’ readers could be expected to know a shadowy Calpurnius from two centuries ago? A Calpurnius much closer to his own time makes far more sense. If the *Historia Augusta* (*Car.* 11. 1) can be trusted, Nemesianus *in omnibus coloniis inlustratus emicuit* for his didactic epics,⁴⁵ and had a royal competitor in Numerian. Thus, a third-century date (the precise reign or reigns must still be left open) is by far the most economical explanation for Calpurnius’ poems being implicated with those of Nemesianus.⁴⁶

A last thought, varying Horsfall’s notion of Neronian themes in a later poet. To what extent are we obliged to look for precise Roman history in these pastoral exercises? Are the imperial themes and characters the

lengthening of the *u* in *gula*. There is, however, a late parallel in another African poet, Luxorius 17. 1: A touch of *Africitas*?

⁴² With the occasional dash of other classical poets, e.g. *Noctifer* (5. 121, the last line) is owed to Catullus 62. 7 where (Fordyce thinks) it was coined.

⁴³ 10. 1. 55: “*admirabilis in suo genere Theocritus, sed musa illa rustica et pastoralis non forum modo, verum ipsam etiam urbem reformidat.*” There is not the slightest sign here that Quintilian was aware of any Latin pastoral poetry containing overt political and personal references.

⁴⁴ All are conveniently indicated in the Loeb *Minor Latin Poets* edited by J. W. and A. M. Duff.

⁴⁵ Is it sheer perversity that induces the *HA* to omit mention of Nemesianus’ eclogues and to give the titles of his didactic works in Greek?

⁴⁶ One last detail can be inserted here. Unlike most of his other editors, the Duffs indicate by the use of bold print (I use capitals) how in 4. 164–66 Calpurnius spells out the word *fatum* in a suitable context: “*respiciat nostros utinam Fortuna labores / pulchrior et meritae faveaAT deus ipse iuventae! / nos tamen interea tenerUM mactabimus haedum.*” Such verbal tomfoolery is more characteristic of later Latin poetry than classical.

realities of the poet's own age or conventions required by Virgilian *imitatio*? Do we have to assume the "unmasking" approach of (to take the most notoriously quirky example) Léon Herrmann?⁴⁷ Much ink has been spilled over the question of the real identity of Meliboeus in Calpurnius. But when we contemplate the last line of the first poem, *forsitan augustas feret haec Meliboeus ad aures*, is there anything more to see than an intentionally recognisable adaptation of Virgil, *Ecl.* 3. 73 *divum referatis ad aures*? This is a real, not a rhetorical question.⁴⁸

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⁴⁷ See his inevitable "Les pseudonymes dans les Bucoliques de Calpurnius Siculus," *Latomus* 11 (1952) 27–44.

⁴⁸ After this article was written and sent to press, there appeared, only in 1995 despite its published date, F. Williams, "Polar Bears and Neronian Propaganda," *LCM* 19.1 (Jan. 1994) 2–5. This paper abounds in information about exotic beasts and Roman shows. It does not, however, shift Calpurnius out of Nero's reign, preferring simply to regard his description of the spectacle as (in Williams' words) an artful blending of the actual and the fictional.