



---

The Life and Times of Calpurnius Siculus

Author(s): Edward Champlin

Source: *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 68 (1978), pp. 95-110

Published by: Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/299629>

Accessed: 23/03/2010 20:02

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=sprs>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).



*Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Roman Studies*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

# THE LIFE AND TIMES OF CALPURNIUS SICULUS

By EDWARD CHAMPLIN

## I.

Until the early nineteenth century it was agreed that the Eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus were products of the reign of Carinus, for the name of the poet Nemesianus appeared in the manuscripts and Nemesian was known as the author of the (partly surviving) *Cynegetica*, which explicitly praises the sons of the emperor Carus. However, in 1819 G. Sarpe first raised some of the arguments for setting the poems in the early years of the reign of Nero, and in 1854, in what Wilamowitz subsequently lauded as a model of scholarship, M. Haupt firmly distinguished the seven poems of Calpurnius from the four of Nemesian. With the link to Nemesian went the only support for a date in the later third century, and Haupt settled the identification of Calpurnius Siculus as a Neronian poet which has remained entrenched to this day.<sup>1</sup> Attempts there have been to upset it, by seeing in the young Caesar praised a Domitian, a Commodus, a Severus Alexander, a Gordian III, even a Probus, but such attempts were clearly heterodox and obviously flawed.<sup>2</sup> Those that were not refuted were ignored, and only isolated doubt remains today.<sup>3</sup>

A work of literature can be the most deceptive of historical documents, and the mechanical act of dating it is one to be approached with exceptional diffidence, for it will be built upon by the historian and the critic alike. Yet too often hypothesis is accepted as fact, and fresh examination of the work can produce startling revisions in chronology.<sup>4</sup> The aim of this paper is simply to replace one hypothesis as to the date of Calpurnius Siculus with another which is equally valid and perhaps (in the author's opinion) more so. For the sake of clarity, its arguments may be set forth briefly at once. First, with but one exception, all of the traditional indications of a Neronian date are based on circumstantial details which are equally appropriate to other periods in imperial history; and various objections can be advanced to discount the Neronian date and to favour one in the late second or third century. Second, the one explicit reference to Nero is not as exclusive as it appears, and while Nero cannot be rejected Severus Alexander is equally appropriate. Third, granted that the indications of a Severan date are at least no weaker than those for a Neronian date, the eclogues can be comfortably aligned with events of the reigns of Elagabalus and Alexander. In short, it is a matter of fact that a Neronian date cannot be proved and a Severan date disproved; it is a matter of opinion which is the more likely. Given the tentative nature of the arguments to be advanced, it would be out of order to draw any large conclusions; but if they are acceptable the slight diminution in our knowledge of the relatively familiar age of Nero will be more than offset by a dramatic addition to the history and literature of that enigmatic twilight, the reign of Severus Alexander.

## II

The positive arguments for a Neronian date may be quickly and generally dismissed, for it must be emphasized at the outset that with a single exception they are based on

<sup>1</sup> M. Haupt, *De carminibus bucolicis Calpurnii et Nemesiani* (1854) = *Opuscula* 1 (1875), 358-406. The best summary is still that of C. H. Keene in his edition, *The Eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus and M. Aur. Nemesianus* (1887), 2 f.; cf. also, R. Verdière, *T. Calpurnii Siculi 'De laude Pisonis et Bucolica' et M. Annaei Lucani 'De laude Caesaris' Einsiedlensis quae dicuntur carmina*, *Coll. Latomus* XIX (1954), 15 f. (the title is a fair indication of the contents), and the incisive comments of A. Momigliano, *CQ* 58 (1944), 97-9. Texts and translations are offered by J. W. and A. M. Duff, *Minor Latin Poets* (1935), 218 f. (Loeb); R. Verdière, *op. cit.*, 124-209; and D. Korzeniewski, *Hirtengedichte aus neronischer Zeit* (1971), 10-73. I have relied throughout on Korzeniewski's text.

Among those who have read earlier versions of this paper I must pick out for special thanks Professor

James Zetzel and Mr. David Halperin, and Professor Millar and the Editorial Committee. As the reader will soon discover, none of these gentlemen could possibly be held responsible for its contents.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the article on Calpurnius by the man of letters Richard Garnett in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*<sup>9</sup>, defended at *JPh* 16 (1888), 216-19; or the remarks of a zoologist, G. Jennison, at *CR* 36 (1922), 23, greatly expanded in his *Animals for show and pleasure in ancient Rome* (1937), 188-9. For other attempts see Schanz-Hosius II<sup>4</sup> (1935), 487.

<sup>3</sup> Though strongly expressed by A. Chastagnol, *BHAC* 1972/4, 81-2.

<sup>4</sup> cf. in this journal A. Cameron, 'The date and identity of Macrobius', *JRS* 56 (1966), 25-38, and C. P. Jones, 'Aelius Aristides, Εἰς βασιλέα', *JRS* 62 (1972), 134-52.

circumstantial evidence.<sup>5</sup> There is a wealth of such detail to be sure, but it is not proof. Therefore, should the single piece of apparently direct evidence be impugned as such (Section IV, below), and should reasons be advanced which appear to prohibit the reign of Nero (Section III), the circumstantial detail will lose all value as chronological evidence. Indeed, once we approach such detail without prejudice it proves less weighty than it first appears. Much has been noticed in these poems that is applicable to the early years of Nero's reign: the advent of a new emperor is celebrated, one who is young and beautiful, a veritable god comparable to Apollo and to Jupiter; war is vanquished, peace and justice are enthroned; the senate is freed, the consul regains his dignity and his power; lavish games are celebrated in an immense amphitheatre. All very interesting, but why need it point to Nero alone? As standard propaganda of the principate it can also be applied with more or less success to the euphoric early years of almost any young prince; indeed it would be difficult to imagine an ambitious panegyrist omitting much of it. Further, the poetic genre likewise imposes a standard. The idea of Apollo's reign over the new golden age of peace and plenty was not conceived in the reign of Nero nor did it die with him: it was a classic standard known to every generation since Vergil. The skill of a bucolic poet would be gauged by his success in marrying it to the particular conditions of his own day, and Nero was not the only Apollinian Caesar whose praises could be sung. Therefore, rather than consider each individual and inconclusive item, we need only look closely at the basic presumption that Nero was the emperor concerned.

### III.

There are several objections to be raised against the identification of Calpurnius' Caesar with Nero. Some of them seem also to point to a date sometime in the third century. None of them positively discounts Nero as the subject of panegyric, but taken together they must raise a serious shadow of doubt.

There is no question that as a bucolic poet Calpurnius Siculus succeeded Vergil and preceded Nemesian, that is, if he were writing in the early years of Nero he flourished about a century after the one and about two centuries before the other. It is curious then that in matters of both form and content his eclogues have been seen as so closely allied to the later poet.<sup>6</sup> If he were writing, like Nemesian, in a third-century context that would explain several items which are somewhat difficult to account for. First, in the seventh eclogue the poet furnishes a list of the exotic beasts exhibited at an imperial *venatio* in the amphitheatre. In one opinion, of the eight beasts mentioned in the catalogue, only the hippopotamus was known in Rome before the day of Nero.<sup>7</sup> Second, in the same eclogue (at VII. 50-3) there seems to be a reference to an elaborate windlass affair in the arena which should be the *cochleae*, not in fact attested before the later fourth century.<sup>8</sup> Third, and more serious, at IV. 87 Caesar is defined as 'facundo comitatus Apolline'. The idea of an emperor associated with a divine *comes* (which is surely the implication of *comitatus*) is clearly one incorporating various time-honoured concepts. Nevertheless, with the single aberration of Commodus and his *Hercules comes*, the precise formulation of the emperor's divine friend, protector, servant, companion, or even nature, as his *comes*, does not appear in imperial propaganda or private documents before the third century.<sup>9</sup>

Individual anomalies might be explained away. Taken together, they make Calpurnius an odd figure in the first century, perhaps one more at home in a later era. An even more

<sup>5</sup> The exception is discussed below, in section IV; all of the individual passages are discussed at other points, *passim*. Easily the clearest exposition of the Neronian date is that by Momigliano, *op. cit.* (n. 1). I exclude here any consideration of literary reminiscences or echoes between Calpurnius and Neronian writers, leaving them to others more qualified to comment. Such correlations strike me as, for the most part, quite inconclusive: they may indicate a contemporary writer, but they may also reveal the taste and erudition of one living several generations later (or the fantasy of a modern observer).

<sup>6</sup> Form: A. E. Radke, 'Zu Calpurnius und

Nemesian', *Hermes* 100 (1972), 615-23, arguing in fact for unity of authorship. Content: e.g., P. Damon, 'Modes of analogy in ancient and medieval verse', *University of California Publications in Classical Philology* 15. 6 (1961), 291-8.

<sup>7</sup> Jennison, *op. cit.* (n. 2); cf., however, J. M. C. Toynbee, *Animals in Roman life and art* (1973), esp. 93-4.

<sup>8</sup> Chastagnol, *op. cit.* (n. 3), 82.

<sup>9</sup> A. D. Nock, 'The emperor's divine *comes*', in his *Essays on religion and the ancient world*, ed. Z. Stewart (1972), 653-75 (= *JRS* 37 (1947), 102-16).

perplexing anomaly can be added. At IV. 38-49, the poet thanks his patron Meliboeus for saving him from exile on the shores of Baetica, 'trucibus obnoxia Mauris' (40). This raises a historical problem. In 35 B.C. the Moors—or rather their king, Bogud, who was embroiled in Roman civil affairs—briefly invaded Baetica and did some damage.<sup>10</sup> But with the advent of Augustus and of Juba II Mauretania was progressively romanized, a process which was accelerated by Caligula's murder of king Ptolemy in A.D. 40 and by the energetic annexation of the country. Occasional and sometimes prolonged troubles there were in the province and beyond its borders, but Baetica was far removed from the scene. It is only under Marcus Aurelius and subsequently, that is, at least two centuries after Bogud, that we hear at last of Moorish incursions into Baetica.<sup>11</sup> Therefore we must accept one of two alternatives. Calpurnius may be remembering in the age of Nero an invasion of almost a century earlier (and one which had sprung from the confusion of civil war), and he may be reflecting a state of trepidation which is otherwise quite unrecorded. Or, he may be referring under Marcus or a later emperor to a real possibility. The latter seems, to say the least, the more probable, and a strong indication for a third-century date.

This same passage holds a second problem. In it the shepherd poet looks with a shudder upon the past peril of a life in Spain. For him it would have meant exile, the furthest shore of earth, the end of the world, a barbarous land where the Muses are disregarded and the Moors threaten. He is talking, it should be repeated, not of Spain in general but of Baetica, where lie the pastures of Geryon and the great river Baetis flows to the sea (IV. 41-2). To describe this area as culturally backward in the day of Nero would be somewhat perverse, for the river Baetis flowed past the great colonies of Corduba and Hispalis, emerging into the western ocean not far from Gades itself. Now the patron Meliboeus has often been thought to be Seneca himself, whether rightly or wrongly. At the least, if these lines were written in the early years of Nero's reign (the standard assumption), they appeared as an appeal for imperial patronage at a time when Seneca was pre-eminent among the counsellors of the young emperor. Yet the philosopher-statesman was a native of Corduba and the leader of the Latin literary world in a century when the pace was set by men from Spain, and particularly by men from Baetica.<sup>12</sup> If Calpurnius Siculus was writing in the age of Nero, it is difficult not to see these lines as a monument of tactlessness.<sup>13</sup>

Next, there is a serious problem with the dramatic date of the first eclogue. There are in fact two dramatic dates. The bulk of the poem purports to be a prophecy delivered before the death of the previous emperor, predicting the coming golden age (I. 33-88). It refers to a comet visible over twenty nights, an obvious portent of the death of a Caesar, and this in fact tallies nicely with one indicating the death of Claudius which was visible for some time.<sup>14</sup> However, comets are common portents for the deaths of kings (Macrinus' end was foreshadowed thus), and there is a problem with the actual date of the poem itself. The prophecy is found by chance by some shepherds (I. 1-32) and they agree to send this marvellous adumbration of the new age off to the new emperor (89-94). The season of the year is important here. The vintage is at its height, therefore September or early October, again according well enough with the date of Nero's accession. But it is late summer (*declinis aestas*) and still hot, indeed the shepherds stumble on the prophecy only when they seek the coolness of the shade. What was the weather like in the time around Nero's accession on 13 October 54? Strangely enough, we know. In a genuinely contemporary work, the *Apocolocyntosis*, Seneca tells us that Phoebus had contracted the light with his shorter course and the nights were growing longer (compare the first line of Calpurnius: 'Nondum Solis equos declinis mitigat aestas'), that grim winter had plucked the fruits of rich autumn, and the last grapes were being plucked.<sup>15</sup> Clearly, then, the dramatic date of

<sup>10</sup> Dio 48. 45. 1-2, the only record.

<sup>11</sup> Source of a considerable bibliography. See most recently, M. Rachet, *Rome et les Berbères. Un problème militaire d'Auguste à Dioclétien*, Coll. *Latomus* 110 (1970), 203-11; and J. M. Blásquez, 'Hispania desde del año 138 al 235', *Hispania* 36 (1976), 1-87, at 70-7.

<sup>12</sup> Martial 1. 61 is the clearest recognition of a familiar theme.

<sup>13</sup> Two readers have suggested to me a friendly gibe on the part of Calpurnius here and in the Moorish reference. I find this highly unlikely: Calpurnius is a writer desperately lacking in a sense of humour, and he was clearly too eager for patronage in high places to attempt any over-familiarity. However, the objection does rob my argument of any conclusiveness.

<sup>14</sup> Dio 60. 35. 1, cf. Suetonius, *Claudius* 46.

<sup>15</sup> *Apoc.* 2.

the first eclogue can *not* be October 54, nor can the actual publication of the poem be assigned (as it has been universally) to the opening months of Nero's reign.<sup>16</sup> At the earliest, the dramatic date should be September 55 and the date of publication somewhat later. Too late, perhaps, for a flatterer attempting to catch the eye of a new emperor?

And finally, it is clear that at the time of writing there has recently been a civil war. The young god whose advent is praised in the first eclogue will subdue Bellona, binding and disarming her. Therefore

in sua vesanos torquebit viscera morsus  
et modo quae toto civilia distulit orbe,  
secum bella geret : nullos iam Roma Philippos  
deflebit, nullos ducet captiva triumphos. (l. 48-51)

It has been suggested, presumably with an eye to the 'Philippi's', that the Romans had long memories for the horrors of civil war.<sup>17</sup> But Philippi is merely the paradigm for a civil battle, and the value of *modo*, recently, in line 49 is unequivocal. Under no circumstances is it possible to see the reign of Claudius as a period of civil war, and timeless though the world of pastoral and the shepherds may be, it would be ludicrous to think of the events of a century before as recent, and to claim for Nero the introduction of a peace which had flourished for three generations. A reference has been found here to the programme outlined by Nero under the tutelage of Seneca at the beginning of the reign.<sup>18</sup> The expedient is a desperate one, for the passage of Tacitus adduced, a speech of Nero, includes the explicit sentiment in Nero's words that his youth had *not* been stained by civil strife or domestic discord. But for Calpurnius Siculus, who as an aspiring client of the emperor would hardly contradict what was surely the official view, there *had* been a civil war recently, peace was *now* restored, therefore the Caesar in his poems should *not* be Nero.

#### IV.

There is only one apparently unequivocal reference to Nero anywhere in the eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus, at l. 44-5 :

iuvenemque beata sequuntur  
saecula, maternis causam qui vicit Iulis.

Tacitus records under the year 53, that is, the year before the death of Claudius, that the ambitious young Nero undertook to defend the interests of the people of Troy (*causa Iliensium*): in a speech recounting the derivation of Rome from Troy and of the Julian family from Aeneas, he won for the modern Trojans immunity from public burdens.<sup>19</sup> The connection of this incident with the words of Calpurnius is so obvious as to be almost conclusive, and it gives extra depth to their meaning: not only do they refer openly to the celebrated cause won by Nero, they manage to slip in welcome flattery of his mother, with the emphasis on the first word in 'maternis Iulis'. However, there is a slight awkwardness: 'Iuli' is the plural of Iulus, the son of Aeneas, the hope of Ilium, and the eponymous ancestor of the *gens Iulia*. Hence, and naturally, 'Iuli' comes to signify the Julian family, the Iulii, for poets and others; but nowhere in Latin literature does the word signify the people of Troy, and indeed such an equation would be decidedly inept.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, on the face of it, we are simply dealing with a youth who has won a case 'for the maternal Iulii', that is, we must understand that Nero was defending the interests of his mother's house by defending its ancient homeland. The assumption is obvious and natural, but the important

<sup>16</sup> As at Momigliano, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 97-8.

<sup>17</sup> J. P. Postgate, *CR* 16 (1902), 38-40, *contra* Garnett, *op. cit.* (n. 2).

<sup>18</sup> Keene, *op. cit.* (n. 1), recalling Tacitus, *Ann.* 13. 4.

<sup>19</sup> Tacitus, *Ann.* 12. 58. 1, cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 7. 2.

<sup>20</sup> On Iulus and his history, see S. Weinstock, *Divus Iulius* (1971), 4-18. 'Iulos' in the plural,

signifying the Julio-Claudian dynasty, is employed by Valerius Flaccus at *Argonautica* 1. 9; for other occurrences of the name, consult Swanson's *Names in Roman Verse*. Vergil, *Aen.* 1. 267-8, mentions the story that Iulus was originally 'Ilus', that is, a homonym for the eponymous founder of Ilium. However, the equation Iuli = Ilienses is still an awkward problem.

point is that there is no explicit reference to Troy in this line, merely an implicit one, and that there is therefore no explicit reference to Nero's attested speech *Pro Iliensibus*. Thus, while these lines continue to provide the strongest item of circumstantial evidence for the Neronian date, they cease to constitute proof. The crucial question then becomes whether they can be applied to any other emperor. If they can, there will remain no firm evidence whatsoever that Calpurnius Siculus wrote in the days of Nero.

Taken literally these lines refer to a Caesar whose maternal ancestors were members of the *gens Iulia*. The list of suitable young candidates between the days of Vergil and Nemesian is short. Nero and Caligula may be discounted for the reasons outlined above (Section III). Caracalla and Geta may likewise be eliminated: even in the unlikely event of Geta being quite ignored in the praise of his brother, any reference to their unhappy mother Julia Domna would be both unfortunate and (in this context) meaningless; and it would be difficult to look upon the reign of Caracalla as in any way a reaction against the misrule of his predecessor, a situation pre-supposed in Eclogue 1. Discounting the existence of an unknown, we are left with the cousins Elagabalus and Alexander, whose mothers and common grandmother were all Iuliae. Elagabalus, however, is excluded by other considerations. There have been civil wars recently (1. 46-51), but apparently peace has since prevailed, however false (54-6), and the present emperor has taken up the burden of Roman affairs so unshaken that the transfer of the world from his predecessor has caused no resounding crash (83-6). Clearly this cannot be Elagabalus, who acceded through a pitched battle with the forces of Macrinus. Therefore it should be referred to the succession of Severus Alexander in 222: the recent civil wars will recall precisely that struggle of Elagabalus and Macrinus in 218, and the false peace disturbed by silent steel will echo the various abortive rebellions against the rule of Elagabalus.<sup>21</sup> If that is so, the new golden age will have begun for Calpurnius Siculus on 13 March 222.

If the Caesar of the first eclogue were Severus Alexander, how then to account for 'maternis causam vicit Iulis'? The history of the later 'Severan' dynasty provides an answer. Between 218 and 235 two Syrian boys ruled the Roman empire, but the government was conducted by their grandmother Iulia Maesa, and initially also by Iulia Soaemias Bassiana, the mother of Elagabalus, then by her sister Iulia Avita Mamaea, the mother of Alexander. This was only natural, for both boys were fatherless and scarcely pubescent at the time of their accession, and it was through their mothers that they could claim any connection with the previous dynasty; indeed these Syrian ladies dominate the dynastic history of the age. After the murder of Caracalla, the usurper Macrinus may have hastened the death of the empress Domna, the widow of Septimius Severus, and he certainly felt it necessary to confine her sister Maesa to her estates at Emesa. From this natural base of power in her ancestral home, Maesa engineered the rebellion of her grandson, the priest of Elagabalus, and it is significant that when Macrinus declared war it was not merely against Elagabalus and Alexander, but their mothers and grandmother as well.<sup>22</sup> This close identification of the boys with their maternal ancestors is highly significant, and it would not be misleading to characterize the subsequent seventeen years as a matriarchy. The extravagances of Elagabalus tend to overshadow the amply attested position of Maesa and Soaemias (to whom he was devoted): not only were they duly honoured as Augustae, they continued to participate in the rites of their native god (now elevated to the chief position at Rome), they appeared in the senate, they ran the empire.<sup>23</sup> The ultimate indication of the power of Maesa lies in the death of Elagabalus, who was overthrown by neither the senate nor the people nor the army, but by a plot of his grandmother and his aunt. The sources, all contemporary or based on contemporary material, agree that the old lady soon realized that the boy was getting out of control and that she coolly set about to ensure the fall of one grandson and the rise of the other. (In that light the alleged attempts of Elagabalus to destroy his cousin may simply reflect propaganda spread after his murder by the regime.) Maesa and Mamaea it was who arranged the adoption of Alexander and his nomination

<sup>21</sup> See further below, Section v.

<sup>22</sup> Dio 78. 38. 1, 4, 23. 1-6; Herodian 4. 13. 8, 5. 3. 2, 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> *HA, Elagabalus* 2. 1, 12. 3; Dio 79. 11, 17. 2;

Herodian 5. 1. 1 f.; *BMC Cat.* v. 38-68, etc. E. Linkommies, *Stud. Or.* 11. 5 (1945), 6; J. Babelon, *Les impératrices syriennes* (1957).

to the Caesarship by Elagabalus, Maesa and Mammaea it was who ensured his safety and his popularity with the troops through speeches and bribery. When Elagabalus and his mother were duly eliminated by the guard the government was carried smoothly on by the same ministers under the direction of Maesa and her new associate, liberty and safety were proclaimed, and Mammaea was recognized as Iuno Conservatrix.<sup>24</sup> Rome was closer to true matriarchy than might seem possible. An unprecedented inscription, dating precisely from the crucial year of 222, accordingly honours the emperor Severus Alexander not only as the conventional son of the god Antoninus (Caracalla) and grandson of the god Severus, but as the son of Iulia Mamaea (*sic*) Augusta and grandson of Iulia Maesa Augusta as well.<sup>25</sup>

The words 'maternis Iulis' are clearly pivotal in the prophecy contained in the First Eclogue, leading from its introduction into its specific claims, that is from general remarks about peace and the return of *aurea aetas* and Themis, to details of the future achievements of the young god. When he is first introduced the maternal ancestors appear in the same breath, so closely after him in fact that we should suspect a causal connection: blessed ages will follow the youth who won the cause or case for 'maternal Julians'. 'Causam vincere', to win a case, is here a legal usage applied metaphorically to the struggle between Elagabalus and Alexander.<sup>26</sup> 'Maternis Iulis', in the dative of interest, then reaffirms the nature of the government which had been subjected to the excesses of Elagabalus, but which had survived him. The situation is unusual to say the least: despite the assassination of one emperor and the elevation of another, the same *domus divina* continues to flourish. It could not be blamed for past excesses under its rule; it could and must be praised for rescuing and restoring the state and itself. And the fortunes of the matriarchy and of Alexander are indissolubly one, their cause is the same. Therefore it might be said of Alexander, 'maternis causam vicit Iulis'.

## v.

There is reason to doubt that Calpurnius belongs to the age of Nero and to suspect that he should be assigned to a later period; and there is reason to believe that the one reference in his poems which appeared exclusively Neronian might equally be applied to Severus Alexander. If we then entertain the hypothesis that the Eclogues might be assigned to the age of Alexander, how well do they fit into the context of his reign?

The seven poems of Calpurnius Siculus form a single, engagingly constructed volume. Numbers II, III, V and VI are straightforward pastoral efforts, but the first, middle, and last poems are patently something different, courtly and personal, open bids for patronage, and firmly contemporary in their references despite the timeless bucolic setting. Together they form an intelligible story and they are clearly autobiographical, the shepherd poet Corydon being Calpurnius himself.<sup>27</sup> If in chronological order (which they seem to be) they purport to span three years in the poet's life, and if the years are consecutive (as they may be) the first year and a half of a new reign. To put the hypothesis as succinctly as possible, the dramatic date of the seven Eclogues of Calpurnius Siculus may fall in the early days of Severus Alexander, most economically between September 222 and April 224.

In the First Eclogue, Corydon and his brother Ornytus are driven by the heat of the declining summer to abandon their winepress and their cattle and to seek refuge in the grove of Faunus. There they discover a prophecy newly inscribed in the bark of a beech tree, composed by the god himself to celebrate the advent of a new golden age. First, blessed ages will follow the youth who won his case for 'maternal Iulii', the proper contestant who triumphed for and through the guidance of the Iuliae. A programme is announced, alternately vague and specific: beyond certain obvious reforms, the poet may not

<sup>24</sup> *HA, Elagabalus* 15. 6-7; Dio 79. 19. 2-4, 20. 1; Herodian 5. 7. 1-4, 8. 2-3, 10; *BMC Cat.* vi. 42-54. The continuity of ministers is significant: Comazon, the notorious creature of Elagabalus, turns up again as prefect of the city; while the virtuous Ulpian, now prefect of Alexander's guard, had also held high office under his predecessor.

<sup>25</sup> *AE* 1912. 155 (Bulla Regia). Note also *ILS* 484, a dedication set up to the three in the atrium of Vesta

at Rome, a place of special significance: cf. Section v, below.

<sup>26</sup> *Causam vincere*: Ovid, *Heroides* 16. 76; Apuleius, *Florida* 18. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Most of the large critical bibliography on the poet and his poems is recorded in the recent essays of E. W. Leach, 'Corydon revisited', *Ramus* (1973), 53-97, and 'Neronian pastoral and the world of power', *Ramus* 4 (1975), 204-30.

have had much material to work with if it was business as usual under the old management. First, impious Bellona is subdued and bound, forced to turn upon herself the civil strife with which she recently harried the world. The historical reference is clearly to the accession of Elagabalus, and in pointed contrast to the swift and smooth introduction of Alexander and the continuance of civil peace. The prophecy is orthodox and safe enough, and in fact no war troubled the realm for the first five years and more of Alexander's reign. Next, the peace to come will be real peace, not domestic turmoil masquerading as peace :

candida Pax aderit, nec solum candida vultu,  
qualis saepe fuit, quae libera Marte professo,  
quae domito procul hoste, tamen grassantibus armis  
publica diffudit tacito discordia ferro :  
omne procul vitium simulatae cedere pacis  
iussit et insanos Clementia contudit enses.

(I. 54-9)

Clearly the years of Elagabalus will offer just such a picture of a world ostensibly at peace yet troubled with internal tumult. Just such a state of unrest is recorded by the historian Cassius Dio, who lived through it. So numerous indeed were the incidents of unrest that he fears his readers will disbelieve him ; therefore he provides us with details of several and a consideration of his sources of information.<sup>28</sup> Such a state of upheaval (inappropriate on all but the most intolerant view to the reign of Claudius) would merit the censure of a Severan poet. In each incident, it should be noted, trouble started with someone tampering with the troops, that is, ' grassantibus armis '.

From violent discord the theme progresses to violent repression. The concrete example offered is the common touchstone of a bad emperor, his persecution of the senate : the *curia* was all but empty (' raros patres '), its members dragged off to execution or imprisonment. The charge is a standard one in authors of aristocratic sympathies, but it does fit Elagabalus. Herodian mentions the slaughter in passing, the senator Dio provides a formal catalogue of the eminent victims with details of the allegations made against them.<sup>29</sup> There is a striking picture in the poem, the image of the empty senate. Hyperbole, but in the case of Elagabalus literally true, although for a different reason. In a generally sound passage in the biography, the *Historia Augusta* claims that in his struggle with the Caesar Alexander the emperor suddenly ordered the senate to leave the city. There was a scramble to depart, but the rare father (one name is given) did remain. It has been suggested that the source for this incident was the consular historian Marius Maximus, who was present in Rome in the last days of Elagabalus.<sup>30</sup> If so, he may have seen an almost empty *curia*.

After an interlude remarking in inflated style that Peace will bring back the reign of Saturn and of Numa (63-8), the theme of the fate of the senate is taken up again, and it emerges that the previous prince had added insult to injury :

iam nec adumbrati faciem mercatus honoris  
nec vacuos tacitus fasces et inane tribunal  
accipiet consul ;

(I. 69-71)

This again is standard practice in the bad emperor, abuse of the dignity of the senate as well as of the persons of its members, and it again happens to be true of Elagabalus ; or, rather, the usual charges levelled against bad emperors by surviving contemporaries were levelled against him. His insults to the senate were many but ordinary, varied only by the ingenuity of an unbalanced adolescent. The poet here is concerned especially with insults to the consulship : the semblance of honour was for sale in those days, the fasces empty, the tribunal a cipher, the consul silent in the midst of his indignities. In fact Elagabalus personally or through his agents sold every dignity or power he could, appointing senators indiscriminately, regardless of age, rank or wealth, and his minion Zoticus dabbled in the selling of ' smoke ', one aspect of which may have been a brisk business in honours, real or

<sup>28</sup> Dio 79. 7. Note also trouble in the Palmyrene cohort at Dura under Elagabalus : *P. Dura* 55.

<sup>29</sup> Herodian 5. 6. 1 ; Dio 79. 3. 4-7. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *HA, Elagabalus* 16. 1-4. R. Syme, *BHAC* 1968/9, 319-21, and *Emperors and biography* (1971), 118-21.

imaginary.<sup>31</sup> The *Historia Augusta* takes the lead in condemning the emperor for his appointments of thoroughly unworthy, usually base-born, men to important posts. Most of the instances given affect the higher equestrian offices, but there is evidence that the Syrian boy was not loath to tamper with the dignity of the consulship. Highest in his favour stood P. Valerius Comazon, a convicted felon and the *bête noire* of Cassius Dio, an equestrian military officer who became Elagabalus' praetorian prefect and was then swiftly adlected to consular rank, then was appointed consul and urban prefect twice in the reign of his master. But others were close behind, Claudius Aelius Pollio, the centurion who arrested Diadumenianus Caesar in 218 and who was rapidly promoted to the consular province of Germania Inferior; or the unknown who was the boy's secretary in Syria, proceeding directly to the legateship of the restive third legion Gallica, then to the consulship in absence, and thence to the praetorian prefecture.<sup>32</sup> Despite these enormities, the greatest insult of all to the consular dignity was the promotion of a slave-woman, the mother of the emperor's 'husband', to the rank of *consularis femina*.<sup>33</sup>

The mention of *inane tribunal* in a senatorial context allows transition to the restoration of law and order, a theme previously adumbrated in the revival of Themis under the new golden age:

sed legibus omne reductis  
ius aderit moremque fori vultumque priorem  
reddet et afflictum melior deus auferet aevum. (I. 71-3)

The return of *leges* and *ius* accords well with contemporary propaganda. The politically motivated informer, the sign of evil times, was crushed at the outset: 'maiestatis crimina cessant meo saeculo'.<sup>34</sup> Under Alexander, asserts Herodian, the affairs of government, both political and legal, were entrusted to the leading orators and jurisconsults of the day, and the *Historia Augusta* takes up and duly embellishes the theme.<sup>35</sup> Again, such conduct was standard for good emperors and even bad, but there was an additional element in the early days of Alexander which might especially inspire the pen of the panegyrist. After the change of emperors, Alexander appointed as praetorian prefect one of the greatest of jurisconsults, Ulpian, and entrusted to him the running of the empire.<sup>36</sup> The appointment was clearly political, a recognition of the lawyer's importance, for he had been removed from some office in the last days of Elagabalus. On 31 March 222 (that is, eighteen days after the new reign commenced) Ulpian is found as *praefectus annonae*, and by 1 December he is attested as *praefectus praetorio*; more significant, perhaps, he has progressed in the meantime from an already respectable *amicus meus* to the arresting *parens meus*.<sup>37</sup> Clearly the man commanded considerable influence with the Syrian empresses, an influence perhaps not unconnected with his origin in Phoenician Tyre. He was the pre-eminent jurisprudent of his day, certainly one of the most prolific ever, and he turned his energies with some success to righting the wrongs introduced by Elagabalus. Moreover, the appointment of this embodiment of the law may have been deliberately intended to symbolize the return of Themis after years of lawlessness: he was the first jurisconsult to fill the military praetorian prefecture since the removal and murder of Papinian.

More could be added to this theme. The other great jurisprudent of the age was Iulius Paulus. Accordingly the *HA* pairs him with Ulpian as colleague in the praetorian prefecture, appointed perhaps by 'Heliogabalus', perhaps by Alexander, and certainly Ulpian's colleague in the guidance of the young prince.<sup>38</sup> Part of this at least is clearly romance, but it is not the *HA*'s creation, for a similar story is told by Aurelius Victor in his remarks on Alexander:

<sup>31</sup> *HA, Elagabalus* 6. 1-2, 10. 3, 11. 1, 12. 1; Dio 79. 15. 3; Herodian 5. 7. 6-7. Is the Zoticus of *Cy* 5. 55. 1. (cf. 6. 6. 1) the creature of Elagabalus?

<sup>32</sup> The evidence for these three is gathered at Pflaum, *Carrières* no. 290 + p. 996, *PIR*<sup>2</sup> C 770, and Pflaum, *Carrières* no. 293.

<sup>33</sup> Dio 79. 15. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Cy* 9. 8. 1, cf. 2. The chastity of the new reign was also declared, in obvious contrast with its predecessor: *Cy* 9. 9. 9.

<sup>35</sup> Herodian 6. 1. 4; *HA, Alexander* 15. 6, 16. 1-2, 51. 4; Dio 80. 1. 1, 2. 2, cf. 4. 2, and Zonaras 12. 15 (in the Loeb Dio at p. 488).

<sup>36</sup> Dio, loc. cit. On Ulpian see now G. Crifò, *ANRW* II. 15 (1976), 708-89.

<sup>37</sup> *HA, Elagabalus* 16. 4; *Digest* 8. 37. 4, 4. 65. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *HA, Alexander* 16. 1-2, 26. 5, 51. 4.

Adhuc Domitium Ulpianum, quem Heliogabalus praetorianis praefecerat, eodem honore retinens Paulloque inter exordia patriae reddito, iuris auctoribus, quantus erga optimos atque aequae studio esset, edocuit. (24. 6)

What are we to make of this? Ulpian's appointment as prefect by Elagabalus is a demonstrable error, but it may be an honest one, occasioned by hasty reading and ignorance, for Ulpian was indeed in some high office (not the prefecture) from which he was removed near the end of the boy's reign. That accounted for, there is no need to discard the remainder, for Paul was certainly alive and active in Rome in the early days of Alexander, with (at the least) access to the imperial archives.<sup>39</sup> The triumphant return from exile may be authentic, then, neatly combining with Ulpian's return to office, 'et redit ad terras tandem squalore situque/alma Themis posito.' If so, Alexander may well have depended on their wisdom in the early days of his reign, or have been represented by Maesa and Mammaea as doing so.

There should be another meaning intended in these lines. Not only will a better god bring back the old ways to the forum, he will even return it to its former look, removing the afflicted age. The god Elagabalus, undoubtedly a worse god (the contrast is pointed), had been the oppressor of the established cults of the city: his boy-priest had abducted the image of Magna Mater from its shrine; he had desecrated the sanctuary of Vesta in the Roman Forum, robbed it of the Palladium, and violated one of its virgins in an impious marriage.<sup>40</sup> Further, there is just a trace of actual building in the forum, perhaps a temple to the strange pairing of Elagabalus and Vesta; and of course a temple to the Syrian god was constructed on the Palatine, in a position which might be regarded as overlooking the Forum.<sup>41</sup> Under Alexander all was swept away, the old gods were liberated and the god Elagabalus was banished from the city of Rome, and it may be his temple on the Palatine which Alexander dedicated appropriately to Jupiter the Avenger early in his reign: 'afflictum melior deus auferet aevum'.

Next, a general exhortation to all the peoples of the earth to rejoice (74-6), and then the peroration in the form of an omen (77-83) and its proper interpretation (84-8). For twenty nights now a comet has shone in a clear sky, a star with mild light, clear and whole, not sparkling and bloody as was that which appeared to announce civil war after the death of Julius Caesar. No shooting star happens to be recorded in the early 220's, but that need cause no hesitation. It should, however, be remembered that the dramatic date of the First Eclogue is the vintage-time of September or early October. The birthday of the emperor Alexander was the first of October, and it happens that the *Historia Augusta* reports an omen observed on the day of his birth, a star of the first magnitude visible at Arca Caesarea throughout the day.<sup>42</sup> The biography of Severus Alexander is a notorious work of fiction, but it can be demonstrated that there is a factual framework which is derived, presumably, from the lost *Kaisergeschichte*.<sup>43</sup> Granted the existence of such a framework we can never be sure in many cases whether isolated items in the biography are genuine or not: Alexander was, for example, indeed born at Arca. With the emperor's star there may likewise be confirmation. A mosaic from a mansion at Thysdrus, in Africa, has been uncovered recently, depicting in several panels the months and seasons of the year. All the scenes are immediately identifiable save one, which shows two men facing each other in profile and pointing to a star. Underneath is the word 'Octobres', which should indicate by its form some festival on the Kalends, the Nones or the Ides, and the entire mosaic has been dated on grounds of style to the second quarter of the third century. The only plausible explanation advanced thus far is that this scene refers to an event connected with the birthday of

<sup>39</sup> *Dig.* 31. 87. 3 and 49. 1. 25, taken from Paul's *Responsa*, quote replies of the emperor Alexander to the *praefectus urbi* Claudius Iulianus and to the *koinon* of Bithynia. Ap. Claudius Iulianus (cos. 11 224) was probably prefect by late 223, and may have succeeded Comazon soon after the accession of Alexander in March 222; cf. Syme, *Emperors and Biography*, 151, 158.

<sup>40</sup> *HA, Elagabalus* 1. 6, 3. 4, 6. 6-7. 5; Herodian 5. 6. 2-10; and below. For the god Elagabalus see especially K. Gross, 'Elagabalus', *RAC* 4. 987-

1000; also G. H. Halsberghe, *The cult of Sol Invictus* (1972); and for the emperor's religious policy, T. D. Barnes, *BHAC* 1970, 60-2.

<sup>41</sup> Elagabalus' buildings: Platner-Ashby 199, 248, 307, 379; *Dix. Epig.* III, 667.

<sup>42</sup> *HA, Alexander* 13. 5. October 1: *CIL* 1<sup>2</sup>, p. 55, 274, and to be deduced from III, 3524 and (by elimination) from the *Feriale Duranum*, which is complete to September and omits Alexander's birthday.

<sup>43</sup> T. D. Barnes, *BHAC* 1968/9, 32-9.

the emperor Alexander on the Kalends of October.<sup>44</sup> If that is so, we may assume that the portentous star which may or may not have actually appeared at Alexander's birth was a symbol well publicized by the regime. The first chance to celebrate it publicly would fall on 1 October 222. Can we perhaps see the poet trying to translate some such event into the standard terms of eclogue, albeit with less than perfect success?

The hint that the poet is not fully in control of his material is reinforced by the subsequent five lines, the conclusion of the prophecy which has baffled all understanding with its obscurity. Ironically, here the true meaning of the star is to be made clear :

scilicet ipse deus Romanae pondera molis  
fortibus excipiet sic inconcussa lacertis  
ut neque translati sonitu fragor intonet orbis  
nec prius ex meritis defunctos Roma penates  
censeat, occasus nisi cum respexerit ortus.

(1. 84-8)

The first three lines are clear enough : peace will reign because the god himself will take the burden of the world upon his broad shoulders. But what is the other result of the weight of the world resting on such a firm support? No one knows, for the Latin is both obscure and ambiguous and the text has been subjected to wide emendation.<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, every interpretation has done more or less violence to the Latin as we have it, and it might be wisest to return a verdict of *non liquet*. The following is offered as simple speculation : Rome will not rightly consider her Penates to be defunct until, and only until, one reign has succeeded another ; that is, Rome had wrongly considered them to be defunct in the course of the previous reign, and the new reign with its powerful deity revealed the prematurity of her pessimism.

'Defunctos penates' is a strange and powerful phrase, so strange and apparently meaningless that some would emend it away, reading perhaps 'parentes' and forcing upon the text some bizarre reference to Claudius. Yet the phrase means precisely what it says, and it points directly to Elagabalus. Not only had that emperor attempted to impose his exotic god as a tyrant over the other gods of Rome, he is recorded in so many words as physically attacking the Penates of Rome in the *Penus Vestae* :

Sacra p.R. sublatis penetralibus profanavit. Ignem perpetuum extinguere voluit. Nec Romanas tantum extinguere voluit religiones, sed per orbem terrae, unum studens, ut Heliogabalus deus ubique coleretur, et in penum Vestae, quod solae virgines solique pontifices adeunt, irrupit pollutus ipse omni contagione morum cum his, qui se polluerant. Et penetrale sacrum est auferre conatus cumque seriam quasi veram rapuisset, quam virgo maxima falsam monstraverat atque in ea nihil repperisset, adplosam fregit ; nec tamen quicquam religioni dempsit, quia plures similes factae dicuntur esse, ne quis veram umquam possit auferre. Haec cum ita essent, signum tamen, quod Palladium esse credebat, abstulit et auro vinctum in sui dei templo locavit.

(*HA, Elag.* 6. 6-9)

This tale has the look of propaganda after the fact. For our purposes, it is irrelevant how truthful the account may be, the fact that it existed and was believed is the important element ; indeed, one might suspect that Elagabalus actually succeeded in his designs, and that the tale about his deception by a facsimile was something concocted after his death to reassure an anxious public. The connection between this adventure and the interpretation of the two lines of Calpurnius suggested above is striking, not least in their carefully nurtured sense of relief that all is well. Thus, the last five lines of the poem can be seen as a summation of the future in contrast to the past. Alexander will so securely receive and bear

<sup>44</sup> H. Stern, 'L'image du mois d'Octobre sur un mosaïque d'El-Djem', *Journal des Savants* 1965, 117-31.

<sup>45</sup> Translations of the text as it stands : 'and that Rome will not regard the dead as defied in accord with merit ere the dawn of one reign can look back on the setting of the last' (Duff) ; 'et que Rome ne décrètera, sur leurs mérites, l'apothéose de ses empereurs morts que lorsque le couchant aura vu

derrière lui se lever les aurores' (Verdière) ; 'Rom wird nicht früher dies göttliche Haus des verdienstvollen Wirkens ledig erachten, bis abends die Sonne im Osten sich neiget' (Korzeniewski). That is with an agreed text, but there have been numerous attempts at emendation : see the *apparatus criticus* of Verdière. For puzzled exegesis, Verdière 239-40, Korzeniewski 89.

the world that the transfer of power will cause no crash, as it had done in the revolt of Elagabalus against Macrinus: that is, the new regime maintains peace. And he will so bear the burden that Rome will realize her ancestral deities to be safe after what was only an insane interlude: that is, the new regime guarantees a return to the old ways. Not only is the new emperor the rising sun in poetic parlance here, what word could be more appropriate than 'occasus' for the fallen power of the sun-god Elagabalus? The emphasis throughout the prophecy lies on the new emperor as *deus* (surely an idea redolent more of the third than of the first century), a better god, *melior deus*, who has triumphed. The poem thus fits admirably into what has been seen as a general rise in religious sentiment in third-century Rome, a sentiment directed particularly to the traditional cult of Vesta after the excesses of Caracalla and of Elagabalus.<sup>46</sup>

The First Eclogue ends with two brief and appropriately awestruck comments from the shepherds, the last line offering an echo of both the form and content of some earlier Latin poetry: 'forsitan Augustas feret haec Meliboeus ad aures.' The poem, in short, is a show-piece, a panegyric of a necessarily distant emperor and his regime in a bid for patronage, and it brims with hope for the future.

With the introduction of the patron Meliboeus as its first speaker, the Fourth Eclogue takes up where the first left off. Time has passed, vintage-time has given place to high summer ('iam fremit aestas') and the poet frets under lack of recognition. Therefore, most economically, if Eclogue I reflects the situation of September/October 222, the dramatic date of Eclogue IV could be June/August 223. This poem is the centrepiece of the book, not merely in its position but in its mingling of mood, looking back to the optimism of the beginning and forward to the pessimism of the end. Meliboeus chances upon Corydon and his brother Amyntas sitting disconsolate beneath a tree at the river's edge. Corydon, no longer content with simple pastoral, longs for the opportunity to sing the praises of the ruling god himself, and of the new golden age. Meliboeus doubts his skill in such grave exercises, but the poet, complimenting his patron's own talents at length, challenges him to judge whether he is a worthy successor to Vergil ('Tityrus') in his progress from bucolic to epic. Corydon and Amyntas then proceed to the heart of the poem, alternating in their praises of the benefits showered by the young emperor on his people. Naturally enough they open with an appeal to the generosity of the prince and they end with an appeal for the suffrage of Meliboeus. By the time they are through, he confesses himself to be pleasantly surprised.

Early in this exchange their patron chides Corydon for dissuading Amyntas from poetry on the classic ground that it does not pay. Corydon admits the charge but defends himself in a long and valuable passage of autobiography (29-63). His discontent had been merely the product of former times. Hope has returned with the advent of a new emperor, 'non deus idem'. Let Meliboeus but listen to the poet's panegyric and judge his potential for himself. The patron agrees, but expressing his doubts that Corydon can fill the role of the divine Tityrus and insisting that he and Amyntas take it in turn to sing the praises of the emperor, which they do, in an amoebian dialogue of five-line stanzas. First, both pray for the blessing of the emperor *comitatus Apolline* on their efforts. All who sing of Caesar must, of course, begin with Jove. Even Jupiter himself, to whom Caesar is closest, will set aside the cares of the world to listen to the songs of poets. This noble and proper introductory sentiment inspires an unusual response:

Aspicias, ut virides audito Caesare silvae  
conticeant? memini, quamvis urgente procella  
sic nemus immotis subito requiescere ramis,  
et dixi: 'deus hinc, certe deus expulit Euros.'  
nec mora, Pharsaliae solverunt sibila cannae.

(IV. 97-101)

The immediately soothing effect of the emperor's name on the troubled green world and the subsequent effect of his presence on pastoral happiness are of obvious interest to the student

<sup>46</sup> A. D. Nock, 'A diis electa: a chapter in the religious history of the third century', *Essays* 252-70

(= *HTR* 23 (1930), 251-74).

of the genre. But the political overtones are striking as well, fore-shadowing the explicit political content which is to follow. At his advent the storm had ceased to worry the grove, the god had expelled the east winds, poetry flourished again. All standard material perhaps, and appropriate to any new reign after a time of trouble, but the expulsion of the *east* winds is noteworthy: at the death of its boy-priest the sun-god of Syrian Emesa had been banished from the city which it had so upset.

The next three stanzas (in the standard order <sup>47</sup>) describe the blossoming of the earth in the benign presence of the imperial divinity. The important element here is the past tense. Just as the poet remembers his thoughts at the calming of the grove and the banishment of the winds, so the present occasion reminds him of a similar one in the past. Now the sheep are providing exceptionally rich and abundant milk and wool:

hoc ego iam, memini, semel hac in valle notavi  
et venisse Palen pecoris dixisse magistros.

(IV. 105-6)

The implication is clear. Once before, *semel*, the same phenomenon has appeared. The dramatic date should therefore be the second year of the reign of the god who brought about the exuberance of spring, that is the summer of 223, as suggested above. Alexander had won the throne in mid-March 222: an alert poet could not miss the significance of an emperor who came in with the spring.<sup>48</sup>

A subsequent stanza manages somewhat cumbrously to import praise of the imperial policy on treasure-trove (117-21). The transition is strained, from the exuberance of the earth in general to literal treasure turned up by digging or ploughing, and modern comment has been equally uninspired. The law is stated clearly enough by the poet: 'si fors dedit, utitur auro' (118). Unfortunately for the proponent of a Neronian date, our first clear statement on the subject appears in a constitution of the emperor Hadrian, and what slender hints we have about Nero's policy suggests that treasure-trove was actually confiscated under his rule.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, an isolated remark in the Augustan biography of Severus Alexander, the validity of which is quite open to argument, would have it that in his day: 'thesaurus reppertos his qui repperant donavit'.<sup>50</sup>

The ploughman's liberation from this unlikely anxiety is echoed in the following stanzas, the substance of which is that the emperor's peace brings with it security. Significantly, this security is expressed in religious terms. Now the farmer can sacrifice to Ceres and to Dionysus, now the ancient Compitalia may be celebrated (122-6); now the Salii may dance (for no one now prevents it), and the shepherd may sing his songs, his pipes not overwhelmed by the noise of trumpets (127-32); now thanks to Caesar Pan and Faunus (who had of course rejoiced over the new age in the first eclogue) return to their haunts, the Naiad bathes in her pool and the Oread ranges over her mountains (132-6). Again the reference is especially apt to the religious tyranny lately exercised by the exotic sun-god of Emesa over the comfortable old deities of Rome. All of these lesser powers depend upon the security of Caesar's *numen*, therefore the major deities are devoutly enjoined to grant the youth a long, even an eternal, life, in order to preserve peace on earth.

With such proper sentiments the paean concludes, and Meliboeus pronounces himself to be duly impressed. The rustic singers whom he had expected are revealed as glorious

<sup>47</sup> For extensive re-ordering, see Verdière and Korzeniewski. Some lines have dropped out, but the standard order does seem to make consecutive sense.

<sup>48</sup> It has been suggested, cf. Keene, op. cit. (n. 1), that the 'spellbound tree' refers to the decayed *ficus ruminalis* which marvellously sent forth new shoots in 57: Tacitus, *Ann.* 13. 58. That might well be, but the three stanzas in which it occurs are a paean to the spring which is aroused by Caesar's presence, and *stupefacta arbos* need signify no more than a tree dormant for the winter.

<sup>49</sup> The standard treatment of *thesaurus* is that of P. Bonfante in *Mélanges P. Girard* (1912), I. 123 f.; cf., on Calpurnius in particular, J. Hubaux and M. Hicter, 'Le fouilleur et le trésor', *RIDA* 2 (1949),

425 f. However, the problems before Hadrian are still unresolved: W. W. Buckland and P. Stein, *A textbook of Roman law from Augustus to Justinian*<sup>3</sup> (1966), 218-20.

<sup>50</sup> *HA, Alexander* 46. 2. The text continues, incomprehensibly, '... et, si multi essent, addidit his eos, quos in suis habebat officiis.'

I am very tempted to see here a reference (in exaggerated and pastoral terms) to Alexander's edict of remission concerning the *aurum coronarium*, on the nature of which see especially A. K. Bowman, *BASP* 4 (1967), 59-74. The document concerned, *P. Fay.* 20, is dated very early in the reign (24 June 222), and is full of pointed references to the Elagabalus chaos.

poets who outstrip even Paelignian Ovid. Corydon does not miss his chance. Immediately he cries that poverty too often whispers in his ear; if only he owned a cottage and a pasture these mountains would resound with his songs. Let Meliboeus, who has the *admissio* into the palace, take these verses to the Palatine Phoebus, then he shall play Maecenas to Corydon's Vergil. Amyntas piously seconds these prayers, but he suggests that meanwhile the party turn its thoughts to dinner, and Meliboeus agrees that they should break off for the present, for now it is the heat of noontide. Thus, without conclusion but on a note of hope, the poem ends.

The Seventh and last Eclogue brings the book to a sombre end. It takes the form of a dialogue between Corydon and an older acquaintance, Lycotas, with whom he is on not very friendly terms. Corydon has travelled to Rome to attend Caesar's games, and he devotes a long monologue to their description at the request of Lycotas (23-72). The amphitheatre which he describes has naturally reminded casual readers of the Colosseum with its vast bulk and its ingenious arrangements for the introduction and the restraint of wild beasts.<sup>51</sup> To put the matter briefly, it is the Colosseum. Cassius Dio provides a vivid description of its destruction by fire on 23 August 217. The building was struck by lightning, a portent of course of the imminent demise of Macrinus; the upper level and all of the contents were destroyed, and the rest was ravaged.<sup>52</sup> Elagabalus began the work of restoration, but it was Alexander who more or less completed the reconstruction, commemorating the re-opening of the amphitheatre with an issue of coins in 223.<sup>53</sup>

Corydon has travelled to the games in the springtime, missing the lustration of the sheepfold at home (11-12). The episode is set then around the time of the Parilia on 21 April, most economically in the year 224. Something has gone wrong. The poet's poverty persists, in pointed contrast to the public splendour about him, and it prevents him from catching more than a distant glimpse of the Caesar whose favour he seems no longer to pursue. Ominously, perhaps, there is no mention of Meliboeus.

## VI.

A biography of T. Calpurnius Siculus would be slim indeed, and much must be subtracted from the little we think we know. First, the name itself is quite insecure. Siculus is most suspicious, probably not a *cognomen* at all but a bow to Theocritus and the genre of pastoral poetry.<sup>54</sup> And the *praenomen* Titus is very rare in the *gens Calpurnia*. Worse, it appears in one manuscript only, thus: 'Titi Calpurnii Siculi poetae clarissimi carmen', which looks disconcertingly like a derivation from the notice to be found in some codices, 'Incipiunt bucolica Theocriti Calpurnii siculi'.<sup>55</sup> Therefore we are left simply with Calpurnius. Nor do we have any idea of his origins. Siculus, even if it were a surname, is no indication of Sicilian birth. The mention of Baetica has aroused undue enthusiasm for that province as the poet's own. But he speaks of Baetica in the harsh terms of exile, where he would have to sing to heedless sheep, at the end of the earth where his prayers might

<sup>51</sup> Keene, *op. cit.* (n. 1), 197 f., has a valuable appendix on the amphitheatre of Calpurnius. His objection that the Colosseum is too far from the Tarpeian rock is unfounded: the poet's words 'Tarpeium prope despectantia culmen' need simply be taken as a description of the height of the structure. Nero built in 57 a large wooden amphitheatre in the Campus Martius and celebrated games in it. These spectacles answer to those in the Seventh Eclogue in that they were primarily *venationes*; the poet's account of the *spectacula* rising to the sky 'trabibus textis' certainly corresponds to a wooden structure; and his description of it does compare to the great size implied by Tacitus (*Ann.* 13. 31, cf. Suetonius, *Nero* 12. 1-2). However there is room for doubt. For Calpurnius the theatre glitters with gold and gilt, gems and ivory and marble (vii. 36, 41, 47-9, 53-6), and it is operated by ingenious and elaborate mechanisms (49-53, 69-72). But Suetonius is concerned only to say of Nero's structure that it was

built of wood and in less than a year, Tacitus merely that it was large and wooden. The difference between the two accounts might be ascribed to poetic and panegyric licence, but Calpurnius' structure certainly does sound more permanent. And for those who object that 'trabibus textis' should refer to a wooden structure, it could be answered that Alexander's was not apparently the final restoration of the Colosseum: Platner-Ashby 6. In the end, there is nothing to distinguish the building described by the poet from any other imperial construction.

<sup>52</sup> Dio 78. 25. 2-3.

<sup>53</sup> *HA*, *Elagabalus* 17. 8, cf. Herodian 5. 6. 7; *HA Alexander* 24. 3; *BMC Cat.* vi. 156-8.

<sup>54</sup> See the discussion at Verdière, 16-17. However, the surname just might have been adopted as appropriate by the poet himself.

<sup>55</sup> For the manuscripts and their contents, see the edition of C. Giarratano, *Calpurnii et Nemesiani Bucolica*<sup>3</sup> (1943), vii-xxxix.

never be heard by *ipse deus* (iv. 38 f.) If that is not enough to discount a Baetican background, the words of the poet at one point all but say that he has never seen the place 'liquidis ubi cursibus ingens dicitur occiduas impellere Baetis harenas' (41-2; although here of course we may have to allow for poetic license). There is one slight hint as to his place of residence, but it is all but valueless. In order to attend Caesar's games Corydon has been gone from home for twenty days, and that is regarded as an extraordinarily long time for the journey (vii. 1-3). Therefore he pretends to live at the maximum a ten days' journey from the capital, but by what means? Properly, for a shepherd, it should be on foot or by cart, but the pastoral conceit need not be strained. For a poet a ship is equally possible, and a thought must go to North Africa, if only because that was the birthplace of almost every Latin writer of any note after the day of Tacitus and Juvenal.<sup>56</sup>

Of the poet's circumstances we have little worth knowing. By blood or vocation he may have had a brother ('Ornytus') taller than he (i. 4, 24-7), and a younger brother ('Amyntas') who was also a poet seeking imperial favour (iv. 16-18, etc.). He himself was a young man at the time of writing (iv. 10, 34). His rank was not high, as we might have surmised (vii. 25-7), and poverty accordingly furnishes an unpleasantly recurring theme. Hence the unblushing search for aristocratic and imperial patronage:

nunc mea rusticitas, si non valet arte polita  
carminis, at certe valeat pietate probari. (iv. 14-15)

Interest in the poet's career is aroused only with the arrival of his patron Meliboeus. Meliboeus it was who not only fed and lodged Corydon, as a patron should, but also saved him from Baetic exile. And since the poet seems to refer not to a retirement forced by poverty but to a real exile, his patron would appear to have been a person of some influence not only in the present reign but previously. When precisely is an open question, but the implication that Meliboeus saved him from fierce Moors would be arresting if the poet can be held to have lived through the brief and unlamented reign of the first and only Mauretanian emperor, Macrinus. That Meliboeus was of the very highest rank and influence is indeed confirmed by his apparent right of *admissio* to the emperor: 'nam tibi fas est/ sacra Palatini penetralia visere Phoebi' (iv. 158-9). He is, in short, probably an *amicus principis*. And, as is proper in a patron, he takes an active interest in the arts himself. Corydon prays that he may help correct the eclogues,

nam tibi non tantum venturos dicere ventos  
agricolis qualemque ferat sol aureus ortum  
attribuere dei, sed dulcia carmina saepe  
concinis. (iv. 53-6)

In the many fruitless attempts to identify Meliboeus, a powerful figure at the Neronian court has been sought who is known to have dabbled in meteorology as well as criticism. Seneca is the obvious candidate.<sup>57</sup> But to take these lines at their face value is tantamount to believing that the poet Corydon passed his days tending flocks of sheep.

If the proponents of a Neronian dating are allowed to invent such fantasies, brief indulgence must be granted to the advocate for a Severan date. The obvious candidate for Meliboeus is the consular biographer L. Marius Maximus, compiler of a scandalous continuation of Suetonius which ended with the life of Macrinus or Elagabalus.<sup>58</sup> He was certainly a patron worth cultivating. As it happens he had been in a position of supreme authority under Macrinus, *praefectus urbi* in Rome while the usurper remained in the East. Dismissed by Elagabalus, he made a triumphant return under Severus Alexander as one of the first pair of ordinary consuls in the new reign, his second consulship (223). Thus he was undoubtedly in a position to protect an oppressed poet and he could certainly recommend

<sup>56</sup> P. Monceaux, *Les africains. Études sur la littérature latine d'Afrique. Les païens* (1894).

<sup>57</sup> Bibliography at Verdère 49-50, and most recently at *RPh* 51 (1977), 15-21.

<sup>58</sup> On his career and writings, see Syme, *Emperors and biography*, 112-43, and A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African emperor* (1971), 308-26.

him in person to the emperor. He was certainly a man of letters as well, although any personal indulgence in poetry goes unrecorded. The intriguing question concerns the significance of a man who tells farmers of coming winds and promising sunsets: might this possibly refer to one who chronicled the rise and fall of emperors bad and good? Marius as Meliboeus is the purest speculation—he is the only literary figure in the Latin world of whom we are aware in the 220's—but he would make a euphonious counterpart to Calpurnius as Corydon.

However Meliboeus be identified, a more substantial contribution may be made to his biography and to the life of Corydon. The seven Eclogues were united to the four of Nemesian at an early date. When Calpurnius was assigned to the age of Nero they were duly separated, but if we were to return them to a third-century setting it might be worthwhile to reconsider the relationship of the two poets. Nemesian's first Eclogue, the only personal poem of his group, supplies a scrap of evidence. Two poets meet, Timetas and Tityrus. Timetas urges his friend to song, but Tityrus declines. He is old, his hair is white, and he has hung up his pipes to Pan. Timetas is the reigning poet now, let him sing of Meliboeus, now dead, who had heard and praised the songs of Timetas in his old age. Timetas then recites his *carmen*, which has been inscribed on the bark of a cherry-tree, in praise of Meliboeus the patron of poets and poetry, and the judge and law-giver of men (i. 35–80). Echoes of Calpurnius' first Eclogue are apparent in the poem, and beyond him of Vergil's fifth. The pedigree which has been observed here and elsewhere is significant in various ways. Here it serves to suggest that Nemesian's Tityrus is none other than Calpurnius himself. The identification is chronologically possible, if Calpurnius was a young man in the early 220's, for Nemesian's ambitious *Cynegetica* can be assigned to 283/4 and it is clearly written by a man versed in bucolic and now taking leave of it for more ambitious themes. The two poets could easily have known each other in the 260's or 270's. And the identification of Calpurnius with the Tityrus of Nemesian is eminently plausible.<sup>59</sup> In his eclogues Calpurnius' ambition to become the new Vergil is proclaimed unequivocally, for he has inherited the pipes of Tityrus (iv. 58–63). 'You seek a great deal', protests Meliboeus, 'if you endeavour to become a Tityrus', and yet after Corydon has sung his patron is forced to acknowledge his success. Thus, in a sense, Corydon has *become* Tityrus, and it is in this guise that we should see him in the poem of Nemesian. It too is programmatic: Nemesian flatters the senior poet handsomely with both an imitation of his verse and a graceful acknowledgment of his Vergilian reputation—while he also announces himself to be the new heir to Tityrus. Two connected poets in successive generations of the darkest age of Latin literary history would be a phenomenon worthy of our attention; and, what is more, it might be that the story of Corydon had a happy ending after all.

#### VII.

If the speculations offered above have any validity, several conclusions, literary and historical, might be drawn; but given the fragile nature of the hypothesis they must be postponed. In lieu of these a general observation may be made, on the conservative nature of Roman society.

Let us assume that the minor poet Calpurnius Siculus penned his seven Eclogues in the third decade of the third century. What follows? The poet Nemesian is plucked from a lonely existence in a vacuum to be set at a certain point in a long tradition. Vergil was imitated first by the Einsiedeln poet under Nero, then by Calpurnius Siculus under Alexander, then by Nemesian under (one might hazard the guess) Gallienus, and there were surely others more or less talented whose contributions chance has not preserved. That they continued to mine the same vein suggests that this was the sort of literature still desired by literate society despite the lapse of three centuries. The context of the poems of Calpurnius is as timeless as their text, the ambitious young poet ever on the verge of poverty, the aristocratic patron dabbling in poetry and politics, the young *princeps* around whom revolves the life of the world. Were it not for a handful of references, most of them quite obscure in nature, there would be no means of deciding between Nero and Alexander.

<sup>59</sup> On the closeness of Calpurnius and Nemesian, see the works cited in n. 6, above.

By chance we have perhaps been presented with a certain bulk of contemporary evidence for a very brief period in a notoriously ill-documented century. Yet however misconceived or exaggerated, the poet's euphoria is just what we might have expected under the circumstances. The brief nightmares of Macrinus and Elagabalus have passed away, and they are properly if quietly reviled. The emphasis is on restoration. Alexander's actions are just those of any popular new prince over the last two centuries, and there is much to be said for the sense of relative enlightenment under his rule which we derive from the historical sources, however dubious they may be for this period.<sup>60</sup> The third century was a genuine dark age for Rome, beset by intolerable pressures, and the picture is one of chaos, military, political, economic, then of survival through change and adaptation. Nevertheless, a case can be made for the inherent stability of a state which had survived to celebrate its millenium in the middle of this dark century, and we would do well to search for the elements of stability. It is no small achievement that two poets, one living at the beginning and one at the end of the darkest period of anarchy, should be able to indulge their talents, and that there should be a link between them.

*Princeton University*

<sup>60</sup> For an optimistic view, see especially A. Jardé, *Études critiques sur la vie et le règne de Sévère Alexandre* (1925), 21-62.