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CHESTER G. STARR

THE fourth century after Christ is one of the most interesting eras of ancient history, for during its course the world began to turn openly from ancient to medieval ways. Quite apart from the crucial position of the century, the complexity of its cross-currents must in themselves be highly attractive to the speculative historian. Nor is it a dark century. The greater Christian figures like Athanasius, Ambrose, Augustine, and others have left voluminous expositions of their ideas; we have the writings of such pagans as Symmachus and Ausonius; the edicts of the emperors have largely been preserved in the Theodosian Code, and the emperor Julian wrote abundantly. There is perhaps more first-hand and second-hand written evidence for this century than for any other of ancient history.

Yet the century has been curiously neglected by modern scholars. Some begin with the era but press rapidly on to things medieval; others are most interested in the classical centuries and come down regretfully, if at all, to this decadent age. More work is being done now than in the past, but much remains. The history of the city of Rome itself, for instance, has never been fully explored. The Theodosian Code presents a grim picture of imperial autocracy, which has often been sketched; that there were very real limits in practice to this autocracy still needs careful exposition. The intellectual history of the century has been presented most often as a *Kulturkampf* between pagan and Christian; but it is far more complicated and fascinating than this interpretation would suggest. While the greater men of the age have received a fair amount of attention, the minor figures have been almost completely ignored. One of these is the historian Sextus Aurelius Victor, a brief consideration of whose life and work may suggest the light which men of the second rank can throw on the currents of fourth-century thought.

I

Of the life of Aurelius Victor we know very little, and modern scholars have not been inclined to regret our lack of information. A native of North Africa, he served with success in the imperial bureaucracy, but we can see him at only two points in what must have been a fairly long career. In the year 361 the new emperor Julian made him governor of Pannonia Secunda

and also honored him with a bronze statue. Ammianus Marcellinus, who tells us this fact, terms him a "writer of history," praises his sobriety, and notes that he later became prefect of the city of Rome. Aurelius Victor probably held this most honorable post about 389; one surviving inscription attests that he had by this time become a *vir clarissimus,* a member of the official aristocracy.[1]

For further insight into the man we must turn to his own history. The *Liber de Caesaribus* is a brief survey of the Roman Empire from Augustus to Constantius (337–361),[2] a sketch of about fifty pages which he completed in the year 360. This work perhaps had an immediate aim of demonstrating to the emperors his literary ability, and as such it was apparently successful; but Aurelius Victor gained little lasting reputation from the labor he imposed upon himself. Men of the Middle Ages regarded it so little that only two late manuscripts survive.[3] The best modern edition we owe to the methodical efforts of the Teubner series, but to my knowledge his history has never been published in English.[4] Nowadays Aurelius Victor turns up chiefly in footnotes as a minor source for events of the third and fourth centuries.

This disinterest is due partly to his brevity, more to the unfortunate circumstance that he lived in the fourth century, and most of all to his atrocious Latin style.[5] Self-educated, Aurelius Victor tried seriously to write in a proper, educated style. As far as possible he followed classical usage, even embellishing his sentences with echoes of Sallust, for this late republican historian was much esteemed as a stylist.[6] Men of the Late Empire, however, were separated by a great gulf from the era of Cicero and Sallust and were no longer able fully to follow the models of the past. To be learned now required that one

[1] Ammianus Marcellinus 21.10.6; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum,* VI, 1186 (= Dessau 2945). The other ancient references (Jerome, *Epp.* 10.3; Joannes Lydus, *De Mag.* 3.7; Paul the Deacon, *Hist. Lang.* 2.18) give no further information.

[2] At the outset it must be emphasized that the work we have is the one which Aurelius Victor wrote, and not an epitome. So Alexander Enmann, "Eine verlorene Geschichte der römischen Kaiser und das Buch *De viris illustribus urbis Romae*," *Philologus,* Supp. IV (1884), 335–501, esp. 396–407; *contra,* Theodor Opitz, "Quaestionum de Sexto Aurelio Victore capita tria," *Acta societatis philologae Lipsiensis,* II (1872), 199–270; Eduard von Wölfflin, "Aurelius Victor," *Rheinisches Museum,* XXIX (1874), 282–308; and, a different approach, L. Jeep, "Aurelii Victoris de Caesaribus Historia e l'Epitome de Caesaribus," *Rivista di filologia,* I (1873), 505–18.

[3] The popularity of late imperial historians in the Middle Ages is discussed by M. L. W. Laistner, "Some Reflections on Latin Historical Writing in the Fifth Century," *Classical Philology,* XXXV (1940), 241–58.

[4] Beverly T. Moss submitted a translation as a Ph.D. dissertation at the University of North Carolina (1943); see also Alma N. Noble, "Indices verborum omnium quae in Sexti Aurelii Victoris libro de Caesaribus et incerti auctoris epitoma de Caesaribus reperiuntur" (dissertation, Ohio State, 1938).

[5] "Aufgedunsen und überladen" in the judgment of Martin Schanz, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur bis zum Gesetzgebungswerk des Kaisers Justinian,* IV (2d ed.; Munich, 1914), 73.

[6] Eduard von Wölfflin, "Zur Latinität der Epitome Caesarum," *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik,* XII (1902), 445–53, and *Rheinisches Museum,* XXIX (1874), 285–93; Theodor Opitz, "Sallustius und Aurelius Victor," *Neue Jahrbücher,* CXXVII (1883), 217–22.

use an affected style with tortured word order, involved sentences, and artificial conceits; the humble pen of Aurelius Victor could produce no compensating flashes of wit or figures of speech.

A historian, however, is not to be judged purely as a stylist. The small handbook of Aurelius Victor is a product of the same spirit which led other men of the fourth century to compose a variety of sketches on earlier Roman history.[7] Like most of these works his account is a succession of imperial biographies—and in view of the autocracy of the Empire the emphasis on personalities is quite logical—but unlike his fellow historians Aurelius Victor tried to integrate his biographies into a coherent history.[8]

In his choice of facts and above all in his generalizations Aurelius Victor demonstrates that he had brooded over the development of Roman history; and he expressed his personal views to a degree most uncommon in epitomes.[9] Aurelius Victor was not a genius, but among the minor historians of the century he stands out as a man of unusual stamp. Two of the most interesting aspects of his thought are his picture of the development of the imperial system as an autocracy and his assertion that the Empire was justified primarily by its support of culture.

II

Aurelius Victor is a historian solely of the Empire. As we today look back on this epoch, we are inclined to view it favorably. On the great stage of the Roman Empire was enacted the political unification of the Mediterranean world as well as the expansion of classical civilization into many parts of Europe previously barbarian. The Early Empire, moreover, enjoyed two centuries of peace, order, and prosperity, and these aspects appeal powerfully to distressed modern minds. True, not all men who lived within the period itself appreciated these blessings; those who speak most clearly to us largely represent aristocratic opinion and often, as Tacitus, give a bitter picture of aristocratic sufferings at the hands of capricious absolutism. But scholars today tend to discount these muffled protests—civilization must progress, and we hearken rather to Virgil's famous phrase:

[7] E.g., the *Breviarium* of Eutropius; the *Breviarium* of Festus; the anonymous *De viris illustribus urbis Romae, De origine gentis Romanae,* and *Epitome de Caesaribus* (which draws from Aurelius Victor in its earlier chapters); the extraordinary potpourri called the *Historia Augusta.* See Schanz, IV, 51–108.

[8] Cf. the somewhat harsh but just estimate of his work, "eine neue Kreuzung von Historie und Biographie," by Friedrich Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* (Leipzig, 1901), p. 307.

[9] This fact, often missed, was appreciated by Enmann, *Philologus,* Supp. IV (1884), 341, 399; Wölfflin, *Rheinisches Museum,* XXIX (1874), 284–85; Ernst Hohl, "Vopiscus und die Biographie des Kaisers Tacitus," *Klio,* XI (1911), 178–229, 284–324, esp. 209, 225.

Remember, Romans,
To rule the people under law, to establish
The way of peace, to battle down the haughty,
To spare the meek.[10]

When we turn to Aurelius Victor, we find that he expresses a view which is neither entirely ours nor quite like that of Tacitus. Let us begin, as Aurelius Victor does, with Augustus. The opening sentence of his book strikes a firm note: "In the 722d year of the city, there began at Rome the habit of obedience to one man." The most important fact about the Empire, then, was that it was an autocracy. In his second sentence the historian brings before us the founder of the Empire, called Augustus by the Senate for his clemency in the battle of factions, who charmed the soldiers by gifts, the people by his care of the food supply, and bent all others without difficulty. After this rather Tacitean, incisive beginning, which notes the three active elements in the Roman political structure, Aurelius Victor touches on the military achievements of Augustus; his support of learned men, "who were abundant"; his deification; and his general felicity, apart from family troubles. One sentence is enough to praise his general ways and to censure his luxuriousness, his delight in games, and his overindulgence in sleep.

The whole treatment of Augustus covers less than one page. In general tone it is quite similar to other fourth-century appreciations of the founder of the Roman Empire, but the account of Aurelius Victor is sharper, more distinct, than most. The *Epitome de Caesaribus,* for instance, which devotes almost four pages to the same subject, copies word for word some of Aurelius Victor's remarks but weakens the picture by drawing additional details and scurrilous rumor from Suetonius, all interlarded with feeble reflections. If we were to trace in detail the fourth-century conception of Augustus, we would find that it was already well set in the history of Dio Cassius, written shortly after 200. As generations of absolutism passed and the outward cloak of the Augustan principate began to wear thin, men could see ever more clearly that the true political character of the Empire had been established in the days of its founder.

Men of Aurelius Victor's age, in sum, may have appreciated some aspects of the Early Empire better than we can today. On the other hand, they did not voice the blind hatred of the whole system which Tacitus expresses. In literary ability, the shimmering innuendo with which Tacitus condemns Augustus at the beginning of his *Annals* far outstrips the bald epitome of Aurelius Victor; but the later historian comes closer to understanding the

[10] *Aeneid* 6.851–53 (trans. Rolfe Humphries); on other ancient praise, see Wilhelm Gernentz, *Laudes Romae* (Rostock, 1918).

positive achievement of Augustus. Men of the fourth century had accepted the Empire both in its good and in its bad aspects.

In dealing with the Empire after Augustus, Aurelius Victor found a pattern of development which fell into four stages—the first century to Nerva, the golden age to Maximinus, the chaos of the third century, and the new era beginning with Diocletian. By these stages he ordered his account, but only roughly;[11] we must not expect to find in Aurelius Victor the clear analysis of a great historian. Nor was the whole story intended to demonstrate progress; Aurelius Victor was not a Christian like Orosius, who wrote a history of man to make manifest the truth of Christian revelation.

A few points in the account of Aurelius Victor deserve notice. Within the first stage the crucial point seems to be the accession of Claudius (A.D. 41), which was the decisive step toward consolidation of autocracy.[12] The appearance of emperors sprung from the provinces begins the second phase; looking back over the whole of Roman history at this juncture, Aurelius Victor bluntly affirms that "the city of Rome has grown particularly through the virtue of outsiders and adopted arts" (11.13). As a native of North Africa and as a subject of the world-state of the fourth century, in which Rome itself had lost its central importance, Aurelius Victor could view the rise of the provinces with as much equanimity as we can—in contrast to Tacitus!

In 235 Maximinus, "first of the military rulers, almost bereft of learning, seized the power by the will of the legions" (25.1), and the bitter chaos of the mid-third century commenced. Although fourth-century historians commonly selected this event as a turning point, Aurelius Victor felt more keenly than most the collapse which began with Maximinus. Autocracy was one thing; its virtual control by the undisciplined greed of barbarian soldiery was quite another, and the source of the deluge in his conservative, civilian view.[13] The rulers, "good and bad, noble and ignoble, and often uneducated" (24.9) rose and fell as the soldiers elevated and murdered them. Rare was the emperor, like Probus, who tried to discipline them; rare, too, the abnegation of the soldiers themselves which permitted the Senate to name Tacitus to the throne.

Like many contemporaries, Aurelius Victor sensed that the period we call the Late Empire, from A.D. 284 onward, was a new era, and a sad one. He condemned corruption in the postal system and the weight of taxation;[14]

[11] While this division may have some connection with the chronological limits of certain sources of imperial history (cf. Hermann Peter, *Die geschichtliche Litteratur über die römische Kaiserzeit bis Theodosius I und ihre Quellen,* II [Leipzig, 1897], 141–46, 153), it does not entirely correspond; his analysis does not rise from so simple a root.

[12] "Ita Romae regia potestas firmata," 3.20.

[13] 3.15, 11.9–11, 18.2, 26.6, 31.1, 34.1, 35.7.

[14] The more direct attacks by the anonymous author of *De rebus bellicis* have recently been edited by E. A. Thompson, *A Roman Reformer and Inventor* (Oxford, 1952); cf. also the

after noticing that the emperor Philip duly celebrated the 1000th anniversary of the founding of Rome, he sadly commented that the 1100th year passed in his own times without ceremonies (28.2).

III

To Aurelius Victor the political history of the Empire is a matter primarily of emperors and *soldatesca,* with barbarians on the fringe. So in a sense it was, but this view is obviously a reflection of the general character of the fourth-century Empire, beset by the corruption of the governing circles, by the greed of a steadily less disciplined soldiery, and by an inner decay marked in civil wars, peasant uprisings, and general violence of life.[15]

Aurelius Victor himself was born on a small country estate, of an untutored father (21.5), but rose through the imperial bureaucracy to membership in the aristocracy of the Late Empire. At first glance he might seem to be expressing an aristocratic point of view in reaction against the unbridled despotism of his masters, even though, as I have noted, he accepted the Empire as inevitable. The aristocratic point of view, moreover, was dominant in the sources from which he drew his knowledge of the past; and at many points he repeats aristocratic approval or rejection of emperors based on the attitude of these rulers toward the upper classes. Gallienus, for instance, is sharply condemned by Aurelius Victor for excluding senators from military commands. Aurelius Victor thus has been labeled a senatorial adherent, and the most recent treatment of his history has called it "brimful of senatorial arrogance."[16]

It is at this point, however, that one must be most delicate in assessing the character of the man. The label just noted is not quite right, and a brief exploration of the point may be worth while in suggesting the complexity of fourth-century politics. When we look more closely at the work of Aurelius Victor, it becomes obvious that he pays less attention to the aristocracy of the Early Empire than a reader of Tacitus or Suetonius would expect. More significant is the fact that he emphasizes the Senate less than does his own contemporary, Eutropius;[17] again, between the *Historia Augusta,* a flagrantly partial senatorial interpretation of the past, and the brief history of Aurelius

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powerful, brief picture of the corruption drawn by Andrew Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Late Roman Empire: The Clash between the Senate and Valentinian I* (Oxford, 1952), pp. 28–36, *ex* Seeck and the sources.

[15] Among the more recent surveys of the era, cf. *Cambridge Ancient History,* XII (Cambridge, 1939); Maurice Besnier, *L'Empire romain de l'avènement des Sévères au concile de Nicée* (Paris, 1937); André Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien, 325–395* (Paris, 1947); Ferdinand Lot, *La fin du monde antique et le début du Moyen Age* (rev. ed.; Paris, 1951).

[16] Alföldi, *Conflict of Ideas,* p. 98.

[17] So too Peter, *Die geschichtliche Litteratur,* II, 151–52; Hohl, *Klio,* XI (1911), 225.

Victor there is a tremendous difference in tone.[18] In repeated statements Aurelius Victor makes it clear that he would prefer to have noble and especially educated rulers—but in such a structure who would not? And, if he is to be taken simply as an aristocratic mouthpiece, it is remarkable that he is willing to praise valiant rulers even though he must regretfully note their imperfections in origin and upbringing.[19]

In the end, one must come to feel that Aurelius Victor—like his famous contemporary Ammianus Marcellinus—did not fully belong to the old aristocracy embodied in the circles of the Symmachi and others.[20] That fact is an important signpost which warns us not to interpret the political history of the fourth century too simply. Even if we leave out of account the rising Christian hierarchy, there is ample evidence that the development of the fourth century was the result of many interlocking factors. Two old elements were the emperors and the aristocracy of birth; there were also the rising rural aristocracy and the leaders of the soldiery; but Aurelius Victor and Ammianus Marcellinus stem from yet another group, which we may term the "middle classes" of city and countryside. Both tended to approach the old aristocracy, yet both could take a position critical of the emperors on the one hand and the aristocracy on the other. Ammianus Marcellinus passed very sharp strictures on the Roman aristocracy of his day; Aurelius Victor does not indicate close relations to this group but his judgment on the upper classes of the Early Empire was far from flattering. If he considered them directly, it was not to dilate on their persecution by the emperors but to stress that their decline was the product of their own desire for security:

> And indeed, while they delighted in idleness and trembled for their riches and counted it more important than eternal life to guard and increase them, they themselves have paved the way for the barbarian soldiers to tyrannize over them and their children.[21]

[18] Alföldi, *Conflict of Ideas,* pp. 125–27, analyzes the ideal ruler of the *Historia Augusta.* On senatorial attitudes see also, among recent work, his *Die Kontorniaten: Ein verkanntes Propagandamittel der stadtrömischen heidnischen Aristokratie in ihrem Kampfe gegen das christliche Kaisertum,* 2 vols. (Budapest, 1943); and John A. McGeachy, Jr., *Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and the Senatorial Aristocracy of the West* (dissertation, University of Chicago, 1942).

[19] Cf. his significant judgment of Galerius and Constantius, "qui, quamquam humanitatis parum, ruris tamen ac militiae miseriis imbuti satis optimi reipublicae fuere" (39.26); and also 39.17, 39.28, 40.12–13. This line of thought, which Alföldi must admit, goes far toward upsetting his overly arbitrary interpretation of Aurelius Victor.

[20] Cf. E. A. Thompson, *The Historical Work of Ammianus Marcellinus* (Cambridge, Eng., 1947), pp. 14–16, 68, 126–29; and on Ammianus Marcellinus generally, M. L. W. Laistner, *The Greater Roman Historians* (Berkeley, 1947), chap. VIII. The anonymous author of *De rebus bellicis* seems to be of the same origins (Thompson, *Roman Reformer,* pp. 86–87); in considering "Olympiodorus of Thebes," *Classical Quarterly,* XXXVIII (1944), 43–52, Thompson concludes that this fifth-century historian attacked the upper classes even more harshly.

[21] 37.7 (trans. Alföldi, *Conflict of Ideas,* p. 105); cf. his terse remark (37.5) on the Senate's loss of power to install a ruler "incertum, an ipso cupiente per desidiam an metu seu dissensionum odio."

One feels that both Ammianus Marcellinus and Aurelius Victor, as conservative men and as outsiders, wished that the old aristocracy *had* stood up for its position against the emperors. This epoch was to be the first in the Empire, and also the last, in which the middle group could express its views. The old order had yielded its intellectual dominance over men's thoughts, both within and without Christianity; but the economic and political decline of the Mediterranean world was already producing the rural aristocracy which was to rule the Middle Ages.

IV

If Aurelius Victor's history reveals any arrogance, it is intellectual rather than senatorial. In this respect his brief work reflects even more clearly than the history of Ammianus Marcellinus a very interesting tendency of fourth-century thought in reaction to despotism.[22]

Outwardly the subjects generally accepted the mastery of their *dominus;* but as one probes more deeply one finds that men of the fourth century had not really abdicated all sense of human dignity. To fight against the emperors on the old planes of political activity was useless. The autonomy of the Senate had long since been lost, though some Roman aristocrats made feeble efforts to assert the honor of this body; and the urban units of government had likewise yielded their independence. But there were new fields of action. The Christian Church, for one, had been free in its days of persecution; once it was accepted by the state under Constantine, its leaders found their independence insidiously assailed by imperial power, and Athanasius, Ambrose, and John Chrysostom were forced to some remarkable steps of defiance. In the countryside the peasants sometimes moved to outright revolt against the exactions of the state; more quietly, the landowners proper were steadily carving out well-nigh feudal holdings which were increasingly independent of state authority.[23] As for those pagans who tried to live within the old framework of the upper classes, they too had at least one field in which to maintain their dignity—that of culture.

By the fourth century the Roman Empire had thrown up virtually a mandarin class, in which outward dignity and public advancement were quite commonly connected, on the civil side, with the possession of a veneer of classical culture. This interesting development, which has received considerable attention in recent years, has its roots far back in the Early Empire.[24]

[22] Ammianus, indeed, shares this respect for culture (e.g., 14.6.1, 21.10.8, 30.4.2).

[23] See my *Civilization and the Caesars: The Intellectual Revolution in the Roman Empire* (Ithaca, 1954), pp. 364–71.

[24] Alföldi, *Conflict of Ideas,* pp. 96 ff., has a good picture with extensive references; see also McGeachy, *Symmachus,* pp. 153 ff. Gaston Boissier, *La fin du paganisme: Etude sur les dernières*

Though its full characteristics cannot be discussed here, I may point out that the *Kulturkampf* of the fourth century was not so much a struggle of Christian with pagan, as some have put it, nor again solely of the heathen aristocracy against the rulers, but rather a battle by intellectuals of all types to maintain the dignity and autonomy of culture.

In part these men were fighting against the state to assert some modicum of independence within the autocracy under which they lived. To some extent they were striving to protect the standards by which they gained preferment in the civil service; men who rose without possessing the usual requirements of learning were bitterly assailed by Aurelius Victor.[25] But even more, perhaps, the educated classes of the fourth-century Empire were aware of the rising threat of barbarism within and without the Empire and were less consciously sensible of a decline in the classical form of civilization. "If we lose eloquence," asserted the rhetorician Libanius, "we shall become the same as the barbarians."[26]

The history of Aurelius Victor is one of the most conscious expressions of this emphasis. It may well have been written to advertise his own mastery of culture, and its pages have really not one but two major themes: beside the exposition of autocracy he underlines the significance of culture. Since the rulers were all-important, they should serve as ideal models of cultured Romans. On his first page he notes the encouragement of learning by Augustus; when he comes to the end of the Julio-Claudian line, he digresses (8.7–8) to stress the general learning of these rulers and to point out that emperors need both good morals and also education. The passage strikes a note which he frequently reiterates. Since the rulers *should* be educated, he must censure those who are not, though he may soften his criticism by pointing out their practical achievements. Eras, too, are good or bad depending in large part on whether men of education and learning—not quite the same thing as the senatorial class, it may be noted—are respected or disdained (24.9–10).

In sum, his history was an exhortation to the rulers to follow the path of learning. On the deeds of the current emperor Aurelius Victor must, like his fellows, be discreet, even flattering;[27] but in praising or censuring past rulers

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luttes religieuses en Occident au quatrième siècle, 2 vols. (5th ed.; Paris, 1907), is not to be overlooked; the character of fourth-century learning is well illuminated by Henri Irénée Marrou, *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Paris, 1938), pp. 11 ff., 85 ff., with his *Retractatio* (1949), pp. 680 ff.

[25] 9.12, 42.24.

[26] *Letter* 369.9.

[27] Although Aurelius Victor finished his history in 360 and so praised Constantius lavishly, his last sentences, which criticized that ruler, must certainly have been added after the accession of Julian in 361.

the pens of such men were relatively free, and their attitude certainly could be understood by their master. One of the most revealing passages in Aurelius Victor follows his brief account of the ephemeral emperor Didius Julianus. Like one other fourth-century historian Aurelius Victor confuses Didius with Salvius Julianus, the codifier of the praetor's edict under Hadrian,[28] and states that Septimius Severus ordered the writings of his adversary destroyed. Then comes his reflection:

> So much does the esteem of the learned arts avail that not even savage persecution can harm the fame of authors. A death of this manner, indeed, is a source of glory to those who suffer and a curse on those who order it; for all—and especially later generations—feel that such talents could not be repressed save in times of the collapse of public order and through sheer madness. Therefore one should trust the judgment of all good men and of myself too, inasmuch as I was born on a small farm to an untutored father and have secured a status of noble rank through learned studies in these days [20.2–5].

As we look back, we know that Aurelius Victor and his type were fighting a losing battle. In opposing that terrible despotism which appears in the all-regulating edicts of the Theodosian Code they had some partial successes; for the emperors generally accepted the ideal of culture and paid real respect to its exponents.[29] Nevertheless the emperors had also to obey the brutal voice of the soldiery, and they were desperately driven by the impossible requirements of a decaying political and economic structure.

Yet more, classical civilization had virtually yielded to a new scheme of thought, without any really conscious battle to preserve the old system. Nonetheless the rearguard action by the mandarins of the fourth century had a great significance in the development of Western civilization. Christian fathers had to put other virtues ahead of culture, but they were so deeply influenced by contemporary thought that most of them did not discard the ideal of culture itself. The greater leaders of the fourth-century Church had received an education of the same type as that of which Aurelius Victor was so proud; and they aided in the transmission of its ideals and of much of its substance to the Middle Ages and beyond.[30]

[28] Cf. E. Kornemann, "Der Jurist Salvius Julianus und Kaiser Didius Julianus," *Klio,* VI (1906), 178–84.

[29] Cf. the efforts of the rulers to be educated or to train their heirs; their employment of scholars (Alföldi, *Conflict of Ideas,* pp. 107–11) and their formal proclamations that education was necessary for preferment (*C.Th.* 14.1.1); their commissions to Eutropius and Festus to write the history of earlier times; their bans even on barbarian clothing (*C.Th.* 14.10.2–4).

[30] This great issue has been widely explored; see in recent literature M. L. W. Laistner, *Christianity and Pagan Culture* (Ithaca, 1951); and my *Civilization and the Caesars,* pp. 349–54, 359, 402.

V

In concentrating upon the work of any particular figure, one always runs the risk of claiming for him undue originality. To avoid this error in the case of Aurelius Victor is particularly important; he is significant by the very fact that he reflects several main currents of fourth-century thought as well as its factual body of knowledge of the past.

Like other historians of the era Aurelius Victor took most of his materials from a very few earlier works. By this time the history of the Early Empire had been reduced to "une fable convenue," in which the judgments on Trajan, Gallienus, and other rulers had been set; to support these judgments men had available a common stock of facts, errors, and slurs from which they drew greater or lesser quantities at their pleasure. Since the days of Enmann, it is generally agreed that the fourth century relied chiefly upon an "imperial history," now lost, which covered the era from Augustus down to some point about or after 300.[31] This work itself depended heavily on Suetonius for the emperors of the first century; the sources for its treatment of later rulers cannot be entirely determined.

That some such survey did exist seems clear from the verbal similarities of Eutropius, Aurelius Victor, and other fourth-century writers. On the other hand, these historians cannot be dismissed as simple abbreviators of *one* earlier work. Enmann himself, while placing great weight on his "imperial history," was more careful than some of the scholars who have relied upon his discovery, and pointed out that in all our extant epitomes we can detect several sources.[32] Men of the fourth century, moreover, must be allowed the possibility of drawing directly on the primary works themselves, such as the biographies of Suetonius (and also the histories of Tacitus in the case of Ammianus Marcellinus at least); presumably Aurelius Victor himself had spent considerable time perusing Sallust. There is no reason, in brief, why we may not grant about as much industry to these writers of the fourth century as to the authors of modern textbooks.

[31] On this and other sources, particularly as Aurelius Victor drew on them, see the works of Opitz, Jeep, Wölfflin, Enmann, Peter, and Hohl cited earlier; also Richard Armstedt, "Quae ratio intercedat inter undecim capita priora Sexti Aurelii Victoris et libri de Caesaribus et Epitomes quae dicitur," *Jahresbericht über das Schuljahr 1884–85* (Bückeburg), and Arthur Cohn, *Quibus ex fontibus Sexti Aurelii Victoris et Libri de Caesaribus et Epitomes undecima capita priora fluxerint* (Berlin, 1884) (these I have not seen). The volume of studies specifically concerned with the sources of the *Historia Augusta* cannot be listed here; cf. David Magie's introduction to the second volume of the Loeb translation (London, 1924); *Cambridge Ancient History,* XII (1939), 730; and Werner Hartke, *Geschichte und Politik im spätantiken Rom: Untersuchungen über die Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (*Klio,* Beih. XLV, 1940).

[32] *Philologus,* Supp. IV (1884), 370–74, 404–407, and *passim.* Eduard von Wölfflin, "Epitome," *Archiv für lateinische Lexikographie und Grammatik,* XII (1902), 333–44, delivered a vigorous assault on "dem unglückseligen 'Einquellenprincipe,'" and showed that virtually all epitomes of the imperial period depended on more than one source.

Whatever the origin of the facts embodied in the history of Aurelius Victor, his manipulation of his material has certain merits. He groups his facts according to a scheme and departs apparently more often from his sources than do his contemporaries;[33] he displays critical ability at various points in assessing the earlier tradition;[34] he generally voices frank judgments, apart from displaying undue enthusiasm over the house of Constantine and Constantius.[35]

In commenting on the deification of the emperor Gallienus, he shows that his heart was in his task and that history in his judgment had a distinct utility:

> If faith in history did not stand in the way—for history does not allow the good to be deprived of the rewards of fame nor permit the evil to secure eternal noble repute—virtue would be sought in vain; for deification, that unique and true honor, could be granted through influence to the bad and impiously withheld from the good [33.26].

More important than the pattern of facts is the system of values which underlies Aurelius Victor's account. As I have already suggested, his view of the Empire as an autocracy was far from original, and he at least tended to approach the aristocratic attitude in judging past rulers. The emphasis on culture as an independent value, which the Empire must protect and foster, can also be detected in men of the third century, an era in which the Mediterranean world was rent by internal war and pounded by invasions from without. Long ago, Rome had been valorous, but uncivilized; now its military power was failing, but it boasted ever more of its culture. And upon its common culture had largely depended in the last analysis the restoration of unity within the Empire at the end of the third century.

In this field as well, the fact that Aurelius Victor was indebted to his predecessors and expressed a common stock of thought of his contemporaries does not mean that he is without merit. He took over these views not because they had already been stated but rather because he himself believed in them. Our interpretation of the fourth century still suffers far too much from an underlying assumption that the era was one solely of sterility and decay; and so we are disinclined to allow any merits to its products, artistic, literary, or intellectual.[36] An age which produced the towering figures of Jerome and Augustine, the history of Ammianus Marcellinus, and a remarkable array of sculpture is not to be judged thus. Between the Early and the Late Empires

[33] Hohl, *Klio,* XI (1911), 209, 225; Enmann, *Philologus,* Supp. IV (1884), 387, 399.
[34] E.g., 5.9, 14.9, 20.34.
[35] See Peter, *Die geschichtliche Litteratur,* II, 146–48.
[36] A sad example is the recent diatribe by Bernard Berenson, *The Arch of Constantine* (London, 1954).

lay a tremendous intellectual revolution, and the men of the fourth century were thinking along new lines.[37]

One small fruit of this shift is the modest history by Aurelius Victor. The author disliked Christianity to the point of ignoring it, he esteemed classical civilization, but he could not help living in a world which had radically changed. His moralizing emphasis on virtue suggests the new era;[38] despite his repetition of omens and his praise of Diocletian's support of the old faith he displays as little real belief in paganism as do most of his non-Christian contemporaries; the faults in his prose style rise largely from the fact that he was trying to imitate an earlier style and really could not do so.

His whole history reveals in many respects a sense that the Empire was now quite different. Men living in this new era needed to know little of the past, and like numerous other writers of the fourth century Aurelius Victor attempted to give them the essential material in a brief compass. In his incisive, direct approach he far surpasses most of his contemporaries; his effort to make the earlier history of the Empire meaningful deserves our respect. His *Liber de Caesaribus* reflects both the currents of thought among the average educated class of the era and its view of the past.

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[37] Cf. my *Civilization and the Caesars*, pp. 281–83, 339–44, and *passim*.
[38] Cf. 14.8–9, 28.6–7.