

Zeitschrift: Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica

Herausgeber: Schweizerische Vereinigung für Altertumswissenschaft

Band: 46 (1989)

Heft: 2

Artikel: The life and times of Calpurnius Piso

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-36079>

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The Life and Times of Calpurnius Piso

By Edward Champlin, Princeton

I

The poem “De Laude Pisonis”, technically competent, conceptually bizarre, gives special resonance to the word “minor”. The reader’s first reaction is one of baffled amusement: surely the piece is a joke?¹ Yet one element that centuries of sharp-eyed criticism have failed to detect in its 261 lines is a sense of humour. Why then bother with it? The answer is threefold. First, because modern scholarship has so often insisted on assigning the poem to a known literary universe, to the “Age of Nero” however loosely defined, and to see in it the early work of a known poet, be he Saleius Bassus, Statius, Calpurnius Siculus, or Lucan, although both dates and identifications have little support². Second, because the piece was clearly influential. The author’s talent was appreciated by Juvenal and by Calpurnius Siculus, at least, and arguably by Lucan, and therefore deserves to be assigned its proper place in the sequence of Latin poetry. And third, because the panegyric addresses a man commonly identified as the Calpurnius Piso who lent his name, if little else, to the notorious conspiracy of A.D. 65: if the identification can be sustained, some insight is gained, if not into the history of the conspirator, at least into the frustrating existence of a Republican nobilis under an imperial dynasty.

No one doubts that the poem belongs roughly in the first century, and the broad termini are clear, some time well after Maecenas, who has become the historical exemplar of poetic patronage (lines 230–248), and before Juvenal, who was clearly familiar with the work, indeed modelled one of his more renowned satires on a passage from it³. At the other extreme, few would subscribe to the wilder theories on the poet’s date and identity, such as Haupt’s proposition that Calpurnius Piso heard the nameless poet’s cry for help, gave him money, and then adopted him to produce – T. Calpurnius Siculus⁴. Yet

1 The Cambridge History of Classical Literature, II Latin Literature (Cambridge 1982) 628: “a distinctly odd composition and, if the poet expected Piso to approve of what he said, addressed to a distinctly odd person” (F. R. D. Goodyear). But cf. M. D. Reeve, *The addressee of the Laus Pisonis*, Ill. Class. Stud. 9 (1984) 42–48, at 44 n. 8: “It is a fluent, orderly and sober piece in a thankless and inebriating genre, and maintains interest with little recourse to padding.”

2 Since the author has not yet reached his twentieth summer (line 261), he could not have written much before 59 if he were Statius (born c. 40), or before 58 if he were Lucan (born 39).

3 Ed. Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London 1980) 381–382, with references.

4 M. Haupt, *Opuscula I* (Leipzig 1875) 391–392.

most would feel that the poem is vaguely "Neronian", or belongs in "the Neronian Age": the most recent substantial investigation of it, after a full and fair review of previous opinions on the poem's date and authorship, argues that the *Laus Pisonis* was written at some time between 57/8 and 59, and confirms (albeit circumspectly) the old identification of the poet with the young Lucan⁵. Lucan remains the safe favourite for those in quest of an author, but romantics continue to press the claims of that putative Neronian poet, Calpurnius Siculus⁶.

The historical evidence for the Neronian date can be summarized briefly: there is none. An emperor is barely mentioned (71) but there is no allusion to any recognizable historical fact, and arguments from style, which generally arise from an attempt to link the young poet to one or other preselected Neronian celebrity, remain inconclusive. Most would agree that the laudatus was the nobleman who was to give his name to the Pisonian conspiracy against Nero, but that says little about the date (it could have been written before or even after Nero) and nothing about the author. Recently two eminent Latinists have expressed extreme caution: "Efforts to identify the poet have been fruitless"⁷; "if the poem was indeed written under Nero", "exact dating is unattainable"; "language and metre may indicate, and certainly do not preclude, a Neronian date"⁸.

Pending greater certainty from students of Latin style, some historical observations may be hazarded.

II

What does the *Laus Pisonis* tell us about its subject? First, that he was a highly noble Calpurnius Piso, a fact hammered home in the first 26 lines. Next,

5 A. Seel, *Laus Pisonis. Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar* (Diss. Erlangen 1969): date, 124–129; author, 139–189. A full bibliography is offered, and the debt to the 1917 Cornell dissertation of G. Martin is clearly acknowledged. Cf. (e.g.) M. T. Griffin, *Nero. End of a Dynasty* (London 1984) 147; H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Latin Literature*³ (London 1954) 383; J. W. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age*² (New York 1960) 268–269; W. S. Teuffel/W. Kroll/F. Skutsch, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, Bd. 2⁶ (Leipzig/Berlin 1910) 279–280; and obiter A. Momigliano in his highly influential paper *Literary Chronology of the Neronian Age*, CQ 38 (1944) 99.

6 R. Verdière, *T. Calpurnii Siculi, De Laude Pisonis et Bucolica* (et al.) (Coll. Latomus 79, 1954): written in the summer of 52 or 53, before Calpurnius turned to his *Bucolica*. J. P. Sullivan, *Literature and Politics in the Age of Nero* (Ithaca, N.Y. 1985) 36.

7 E. J. Kenney, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*² (Oxford 1970) 583. Cf. his remark in a review of Seel (supra n. 5), CR n.s. 22 (1972) 279: "attempts to ascribe the poem to a known author are probably futile."

8 Goodyear (supra n. 1) 629. 886. Others have assumed a Claudian date, e.g. M. Schanz/C. Hosius, *Geschichte der römischen Literatur*, 2. Teil (München 1935) 490: "Wir werden das Gedicht wohl noch in die Zeit des Claudius hinaufzurücken haben. Wer der Verfasser des Gedichts ist, lässt sich nicht bestimmen."

and something made so excruciatingly clear by the poet as to require no documentation, that he had no military experience whatsoever. The man's virtues were purely civil and private and are set out at some length. He is an accomplished orator, accustomed to defend clients on both civil and criminal charges with an eloquence by turns harsh and honied (37–64. 99), and to sing the praises of Caesar's *numen* before a hushed senate (65–71. 98). The natural mode of relaxation for such a man is the practice of declamation with his friends or clients at home, an art at which he is proficient in both Greek and Latin, as *facunda Neapolis* can attest (81–99). Moreover, he is wealthy, an attribute which becomes an aristocratic virtue when he subvents penurious *cultores* with unexpected *census* (108–111). His character is variously praised for its mildness (129) or for its dignity and wit (162–163). He writes light verse and plays the lyre (163–177), while for even lighter diversion he practices with weapons, plays ball, or indulges in his love of the *ludus latrunculorum*, that is, checkers or draughts (178–208). Two single points are worth some stress. First, three times the poet calls Piso young, *iuvēnis* (32. 109. 211), whatever that may mean. And second, the hushed senate has listened when his purple counted twice twelve fasces, as he celebrated with grateful heart the *Caesareum numen* (70–71): from that it has naturally been deduced that Piso held the consulship.

The picture of the talented and generous orator who relaxes among his friends with declamation and poetry is perfectly unexceptionable: such a man might well appear in the pages of the younger Pliny. Yet it is quite undermined by the poet's almost grotesque insistence on his subject's non-existent military prowess, as expressed in every facet of his civilian career, down to his mastery of checkers. It is this paradox which makes Piso appear a somewhat contemptible character, an effect surely the opposite to that intended by the petitioner for his favour. How does this character correspond to the conspirator known from other sources?

It certainly accords all too well, for a start, with Tacitus' dismissive sketch. For Tacitus, the conspirator is a nullity whose real vices are effectively concealed by mediocrity. *Initium coniurationis non a cupidine ipsius fuit*, begins the historian's account (Ann. 15, 49), and Piso is generally perceived as no more than a figurehead for the plot. Tacitus' portrayal of the conspirator can be compared in detail with that of the panegyric: if we subtract the flaws claimed or hinted at by Tacitus, traits obviously inappropriate for the Laus, every virtue or attribute can be paralleled from the poem. Thus,

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. (Ann. 15, 48) <i>Calpurnia genere
ortus</i> | <i>Calpi nomina</i> (3–4), <i>domus
Calpurnia</i> (15) |
| 2. <i>ac multas insignisque familias
paterna nobilitate complexus</i> | nobility <i>passim</i> , <i>avitis fulta
triumphis atria</i> (8–9), <i>pleni
numero consule fasti</i> (9),
<i>patrum</i> (22), <i>avis</i> (26) |

- | | |
|--|--|
| 3. <i>claro apud vulgum rumore erat
per virtutem</i> | <i>turba ... stipat fora</i> (38–39) to hear
Piso for the defense; when he plays
ball, <i>haeret in haec populus
spectacula totaque ludos turba ...
suos ... relinquit</i> (188–189) |
| 4. <i>namque facundiam tuendis civibus
exercebat</i> | Piso as defender in court: <i>hinc
quoque servati contingit gloria civis</i>
(30); <i>tua maestos defensura reos
vocem facundia mittit</i> (39–40, cf.
41–44. 99 <i>exonerare pios</i>) |
| 5. <i>largitionem adversum amicos</i> | <i>quis tua cultorum ... tuorum limina
pauper adit, quem non animosa
beatum excipit et subito iuvat
indulgentia censu?</i> (109–111) |
| 6. <i>et ignotis quoque comi sermone
et congressu</i> | <i>diligis ex aequo, nec te fortuna
colentum natalesve movent:
probitas spectatur in illis etc.</i>
(113–115) |
| 7. <i>etiam fortuita, corpus procerum,
decora facies</i> | <i>plenus gravitate serena vultus etc.</i>
(101–105) |
| (8. Ann. 15, 52 <i>apud Baias in villa
Pisonis</i>) | (eloquent Naples attests to his
eloquence 91–92). |

To what do these parallels amount? Individually they prove nothing, but cumulatively they have value both positive and negative, that is, every virtue found in Tacitus can be found in the *Laus Pisonis*, while the historian adds nothing that is not to be found in the poem. This congruence is more significant than it may at first appear, if we compare the virtues of Piso displayed in Tacitus and in the *Laus* with those praised in other panegyrics or in other Tacitean portraits. What is missing in each portrait of Piso is both military glory, indeed military service of any kind, and civilian career, be it conscientious magistracy or wise judgeship or just governorship or respectful counsel to the emperor. That two first-century Calpurnii Pisones should possess such precisely similar virtues and lack the rest is unlikely. It is fair to assume, if not that the conspirator and the laudatus were one and the same person, then at least that Tacitus considered them to be so.

Next, and in danger of being overlooked, is the evidence offered by Martial and Juvenal. Curiously, Piso the conspirator won some posthumous fame for something quite unconnected with the plot. *Pisones Senecasque ... mihi redde*, cries Martial to a miserly patron (12, 36). Elsewhere, he recalls the halcyon days when *Atria Pisonum stabant cum stemmate toto / et docti Senecae ter nume-*

randa domus – even with such great names about, Martial had chosen the knight Postumus as his patron (4, 40). And Juvenal adds his thoughts (5, 108–112):

*Nemo petit, modicis quae mittebantur amicis
a Seneca, quae Piso bonus, quae Cotta solebat
largiri; namque et titulis et fascibus olim
maior habebatur donandi gloria. Solum
poscimus ut cenes civiliter.*

Here then, before Tacitus, is a tradition of Piso the great patron, with no hint of Tacitean cynicism: *Piso bonus*. This must be the conspirator, for Martial (who was there) is recalling the time of Seneca. And Juvenal, at least, is thinking of him as the subject of the *Laus Pisonis*. In the days of Seneca and Piso and Cotta (actually a much earlier figure) *gloria donandi* was considered superior to *tituli* and *fascēs*; nowadays Juvenal can only hope that his host dines *civiliter*. Two Juvenalian themes are touched on in these lines, the uselessness of pedigree where character is lacking, and the unhappy lot of clients. Both are central to the *Laus Pisonis*. Indeed, at the beginning of the panegyric *tituli* occur three times (2. 12. 37), as Piso solves the poet's dilemma: he need not sing of ancestral *tituli* since Piso (who combines nobility with *nobilitas*) will surpass them; while the longest section of the poem (112–137) concerns his civil treatment of his clients, something even more precious than his gifts to them: in short, Juvenal's five lines are a virtual précis of the poem.

Assuming that Martial and Juvenal are thinking as one here, we thus have the great patron Piso from the *Laus* securely anchored in the reign of Nero, that is a contemporary of both Seneca and the young Martial. It is conceivable that he is a different man from the generous conspirator recalled by Tacitus, but not very likely.

The case for identity has been presented thus to show its likelihood before recourse is had to the most problematic source, the commentator on Juvenal called Valla's 'Probus'. This lost work, known in some detail from the 1486 edition of Juvenal by Giorgio Valla, is of uncertain independent value. It offers (ad Iuv. 5, 109) a brief notice on the Piso celebrated in Juvenal's fifth satire which seems very neatly to provide the missing link between the conspirator and the laudatus, so neatly in fact that it might be nothing more than a clever construction from the two texts and from hints elsewhere, by someone who had drawn the obvious conclusion, rather than an independent historical source. *Piso Calpurnius (ut Probus inquit),*

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. <i>antiqua familia,</i> | T(acitus) and LP |
| 2. <i>scaenico habitu tragoedias
actitavit,</i> | T 15, 65: <i>tragico ornatu canebat.</i>
LP 167ff.: <i>dulcis Apollinea sequitur
testudine cantus</i> |

- | | |
|--|--|
| 3. <i>in latrunculorum lusu tam perfectus et callidus</i> | LP 190–209: 192 <i>callidiore modo tabula variatur aperta calculus</i> ; 195 <i>quis non terga dedit?</i> |
| 4. <i>ut ad eum ludentem concurreretur.</i> | LP 188–189: <i>haeret in haec populus spectacula, totaque ludos turba repente suos iam sudabunda relinquit</i> |
| 5. <i>Ob haec insinuatus C. Caesari repente etiam relegatus est, quod consuetudinem pristinae uxoris abductae sibi ab ipso, deinde remissae repetivisse existimabatur.</i> | cf. Suetonius, Gaius 25, 1, Dio 59, 8, 7–8, and below, on Gaius' marriage and repudiation of Piso's bride, followed by their exile |
| 6. <i>Mox sub Claudio restitutus et post consulatum</i> | LP 70: <i>bissenos fasces</i> |
| 7. <i>materna hereditate ditatus magnificentissime vixit, meritos sublevare inopes ex utroque ordine solitus, de plebe vero certos quotquot annis ad equestrem censum dignitatemque provehere.</i> | T. 15, 48: <i>magnificentiae et aliquando luxuriae indulgebat</i>
LP 111: <i>subito iuvat indulgentia censu</i> |

How to evaluate this? The nature and even the existence of Valla's 'Probus' have long been debated, but recently there has been real advance. Independent attestation of 'Probus' centuries before Valla has turned up, and M. D. Reeve has demonstrated in particular that the Piso notice attributed to 'Probus' cannot have been cooked up from the *Laus Pisonis* by Valla himself – he did not know of the poem's existence – and that the presence of clausulae in the Piso notice and others in 'Probus' indicates a commentary written in antiquity⁹. So 'Probus' has become Probus the ancient scholiast, whoever he may have been.

Next, C. P. Jones has advanced strong arguments for seeing Suetonius' *De Viris Illustribus* as Probus' own source for the material in the Piso notice and elsewhere: divergence from Suetonian vocabulary may be due to transmission, while abridgment will account for the absence of Piso's eloquence or his conspiracy¹⁰. The most obvious clue for Jones is the second sentence of the notice, beginning *ob haec insinuatus C. Caesari*, which not only contains one of Suetonius' favourite expressions (found, *inter alia*, at Gaius 12, 2) but also echoes his account of the same incident at Gaius 25, 1. To this one might add that the Gaius episode was not to be found in the *Laus* and was almost certainly

⁹ M. D. Reeve (*supra* n. 1).

¹⁰ Suetonius in the *Probus* of Giorgio Valla, HSCP 90 (1986) 245–251.

not mentioned by Tacitus in the books now lost, since the conspirator is clearly being brought on the stage of the *Annales* for the first time at 15, 48. That is to say, the scholiast or his source has rather neatly made the connection between C. Piso the conspirator and the only other C. Piso known in the Claudian period, the man relegated by Gaius.

Probus or his source (Suetonius?) presumably knew the *Laus Pisonis*. The *latrunculi* are the key element, but there are verbal echoes as well¹¹, and it looks as if the *turba* which paused to watch Piso playing ball (188–189) has been transferred by the scholiast into an eager audience for his mastery at checkers (cf. 190ff.), not normally a large spectator sport. But curiously Probus says nothing about Piso the conspirator: abridgement, or ignorance? A scholiast who knew what Juvenal wrote, but not what Juvenal knew, would read only about the good patron Piso, nothing about his sad end, and could all too easily cobble together something from the *Laus Pisonis* and Suetonius' Gaius. Probus passes on some curious information, which will receive further attention below.

The case for identifying conspirator and *laudatus* remains frustratingly circumstantial. Tacitus and Juvenal, it can be argued, considered them to be one and the same man, and there is no sound reason to distrust them. Probus clearly recognized the man in Juvenal as the *laudatus*, and he identified him explicitly with the C. Piso whose wife was taken by Gaius. Now the conspirator was a C. Piso, and a C. Piso was an Arval priest from 38 until at least 63: clearly there was only one C. Piso from the reign of Gaius to that of Nero. "In short, it requires either an unhealthy appetite for coincidence or an indiscriminating mistrust of scholiasts to believe that the *Laus Pisonis* was addressed to anyone other than the conspirator C. Calpurnius Piso."¹² If we accept this, as we should, the poem cannot possibly have been written under Nero, as more than one argument will make clear. We should start with a discriminating mistrust of the scholiast Probus.

III

We know two things about Piso's senatorial career, that he was consul, and that he was *frater Arvalis*. The evidence for each needs reconsideration.

The subject of the *Laus Pisonis* had undoubtedly been consul (68–71):

*Quis digne referat, qualis tibi luce sub illa
gloria contigerit, qua tu, reticente senatu,
cum tua bis senos numeraret purpura fasces,
Caesareum grato cecinisti pectore numen?*

11 *in latrunculorum lusu ... callidus* cf. LP 192 *callidiore modo tabula variatur aperta calculus. certos ... ad equestrem censum ... provehere* cf. 111 *subito iuvat indulgentia censu*.

12 Reeve (supra n. 1) 46. This is certainly the standard view, as argued by E. Groag, *Calpurnius* 65, RE 3 (1899) 1377–1379: I have set it out here as fully as possible to show the problems of the position and to introduce the following discussion.

A rough and plausible date is provided for Piso's suffect consulship by Probus, following the account of his exile by Gaius: *Mox sub Claudio restitutus et post consulatum materna hereditate ditatus magnificentissime vixit*. Piso's name has not yet appeared as consul on the surviving fasti or on any inscription, wax tablet or papyrus, and the consular lists for the reign of Claudius, while rapidly filling in recent years, still show enough gaps in which it could be hidden: for example, the years 45 and 48, those most commonly guessed, could still accommodate the name C. Calpurnius Piso. But can we trust Probus' account?

Since he is our sole source for the date, this requires a considerable excursion into the thickets of Juvenalian scholia. First a point on method. Valla (no one would argue otherwise) could tacitly add material to his reports of Probus, from other sources or from his own imagination; Probus in turn, writing in late antiquity, will have drawn on several sources, which must have included both Suetonius' largely lost *De Viris Illustribus* and a completely vanished commentary on the first six satires by a scholar contemporary with the satirist¹³. Complex questions of sources and layers will here be left aside. The point to be made is that for whatever reason, authorial incompetence, ignorance, or malice, or abridgment or expansion of earlier sources, and regardless of the period to which we owe it (second, fourth, or fifteenth century), the material offered by Valla's Probus is, when not corroborated, quite untrustworthy in matters of chronology and prosopography. For example (and ignoring other kinds of misinformation)¹⁴:

Schol. in Iuvenalem 1, 20 *magnus Auruncae alumnus*: clearly the satirist Lucilius (cf. Ausonius, Epp. 11, 9, p. 237 Peiper = 15, 9, p. 246 Prete). Probus continues: or Turnus, the brother of the tragic poet Scaevus Memor, or Lenaeus, or Silius – who all (*ut Probus refert*) came from Aurunca! Turnus was powerful, he tells us, at the court of the Vespasians Titus and Domitian. But Domitian never bore the name Vespasian, and it is highly unlikely, for a start, that Pompey's freedman, the Greek-named Lenaeus, came from Campania.

1, 26 *cum pars Niliacae*: i.e., the notorious Crispinus. The major scholia are here confused or corrupt to the point of nonsense: *unus de consulibus liciniae ac de plebe Aegypti fuit, magnarum Romae postea facultatum*. Probus compounds the confusion: *Hic Crispinus e plebe fuit Aegyptia magnarum postea Romae facultatum et promotionum, siquidem ex libertino senator est a Nerone factus*. (The recentior ϕ , Probus' cousin and closest partner in crime [cf. Wessner's edition, XXff.] has two versions of this, in one 'correcting' Nero to Domitian.) Suspicious detail aside, the senatorial rank is a howler, since at 4, 32 Juvenal calls him *princeps equitum*. Even were he a senator, favour from Nero is highly unlikely (as ϕ realized).

13 His existence was deduced by G. B. Townend, *The earliest scholiast on Juvenal*, CQ n.s. 22 (1972) 376–387.

14 Where references are omitted, consult E. Courtney (supra n. 3) ad loc. Most passages are discussed by Townend (supra n. 13).

1, 33 *magni delator amici: Heliodorum significat delatorem*. Probus has *Heliodorus ... Stoicus, qui praeceptor Licinium Syllanum ... oppressit*. Emendation to L. Iunius Silanus is obviously required – ϕ actually has *Licinium Silanum* – but there is no sign that Probus thought him anything but a Licinius.

1, 35, on the delatores Massa, Carus and Latinus. The major scholia tell us that Massa was a fool, Carus a dwarf, and Latinus a mime, all three being freedmen of Nero (followed by much further nonsense): in truth, the first two were notorious aristocratic delatores under the Flavians. Probus compounds the fantasy: Massa was Trajan's fool and Carus his dwarf (but Valla offers his opinion that they were delatores under Nero)¹⁵.

3, 74 *Isaeo torrentior: Isaeus Romae orator omnibus eloquentior. de hoc Plinius Secundus ait* (Epp. 2, 3, 1) ... So the scholiast. Valla has: *Isaeus rhetor fuit Atheniensis (ut Probus inquit) illius temporis, cuius et Tranquillus meminit ... de quo Plinius in Epistolis ...* How much of this comes from Probus is unclear, and the reference to an otherwise unknown passage of Suetonius is tantalizing in the light of Jones' theory about Probus' use of Suetonius, though how Isaeus would figure in the *De Viris Illustribus* is unclear. This is relevant to the claim that he was Athenian (certainly not in Pliny): Philostratus (*Vitae soph.* 20) tells us that he was Assyrian by birth, but he did settle in Athens and his descendants turn up on inscriptions there¹⁶. Did Probus have his rather abstruse information from Suetonius? Given his track record, it would be better to assume that he is thinking of the classical orator here, and that the rest is Valla's addition.

3, 116 *Stoicus occidit: detulit Stoicus imperatori discipulum suum Baream* ... But Valla has: *Heliodorum Baream dicit (Probi testimonio, cuius supra (1, 33) meminimus)*. The mistake here *might* be Valla's, but that is irrelevant. The philosopher-delator involved was not Heliodorus but Egnatius Celer. Further mix-up at 1, 33 may or may not involve Probus.

4, 81, on Crispus: the major scholia have: *municeps Vercellensis*, Probus: *Placentinus* – Vercellae is correct: Tacitus, *Dial.* 8. The whole long passage is a problem in the scholia, which wrongly identify Juvenal's man as Passienus

15 It may be well to add here that Probus can get it right occasionally, as at 1, 109, on the powerful freedmen Pallas and Licinus. The major scholia identify both as freedmen at the court of Claudius; Probus has much better information on Licinus, tracing his career from Julius Caesar to Tiberius. (Yet where Dio 54, 21 calls the man a Gaul, Probus has him *ex Germania puer captus*.) Similarly, the information on Palfurius Sura at 4, 53 looks superior; et al. – But also worth considering is material from ϕ where Probus is silent. For example, 2, 78, *Cretice*: the scholiast identifies as a generic nobilis or as Julius Creticus, an advocate under the Caesars. But Probus calls this passage an attack on the Metellus Creticus who conquered the Cretans; ϕ goes further to explain how Creticus won the name from a victory, just as his father Numidicus had from Numidia: in fact, Creticus (cos. 69 B.C.) was the son of Metellus Caprarius (cos. 113), who was the cousin of Numidicus (cos. 109). Since Probus and ϕ share the Metellan identification (which was surely not intended by Juvenal), it is probably only by chance or by Valla that Probus does not preserve this piece of misplaced erudition from their common source. Cf. ϕ 's marvellous identification of the Cremera at 2, 155: *Cremera est oppidum Italiae ...*

16 PIR² I 62.

(rather than the correct Vibius) Crispus, and the problem is compounded by a discordant notice in Valla's Probus, which has recently attracted close attention¹⁷. The major scholia register first Crispus (the man of Vercellae) and his flattery of Tiberius in the senate; his spontaneous undertaking of cases in the centumviral court, and the statue raised in the Basilica Iulia for his services there; his two consulships (suffect 27, ordinary 44); his two wives, Domitia and Agrippina, the aunt and mother of Nero (as is pointed out); his fortune of HS 200 million; an anecdote relating a clever remark to Gaius in a dangerous situation while crossing the Alps¹⁸; and his death at the hand of his heir, Agrippina, and his public funeral. The notice in Valla's Probus differs disconcertingly. Crispus, from Placentia, was ready with tongue and hand under Claudius, won the consulship and so tempered his *studium orandi* with *modestia* that he won the emperor's love; in the end, after losing several children, he was poisoned by his beautiful wife, whom he had married for her physical attraction; and the notice on him ends with the Alpine anecdote, but the scene is shifted to Crispus' youth and the interrogator, now Tiberius, seems to proposition him¹⁹. These Doppelgänger are particularly interesting because neither can be proven to be wrong, and Probus' account is both plausible and (but for one detail) not provably inaccurate. The one inaccuracy, the origin from Placentia, may be an insertion by Valla, who came from that city. But Probus is clearly inferior, whether out of ignorance or perversity: he *seems* to know of only one consulship, he seems to know of only one wife, he seems not to know the identity of that wife (surely a matter of great interest), he seems to know nothing of the centumviral successes and the immense fortune. There is probably more to be said on the matter, but here it is enough to remark that Valla's Probus gives an inferior version, with at least one error, of a scholion which was completely wrong in the first place.

5, 36, Helvidius: Probus comments, as part of a long notice with much interesting information: *Cum sub Nerone Achaia quaestor administraret*. A simple but telling example of his accuracy, and relevant to his dating of Piso's consulship, for Helvidius Priscus was quaestor, probably indeed in Achaia, but under Claudius²⁰. That is to say, the office is right but the date is quite wrong.

6, 245 *Celso*: an orator of that time who left seven books of Institutiones, according to the major scholia. Valla (without mentioning Probus) expands the name to Iunius Celsus, but surely this is the polymath A. Cornelius Celsus cited so often by Quintilian²¹.

17 Reeve (supra n. 1) 47–48; Jones (supra n. 10) 249–251.

18 *interrogatus, haberetne sicut ipse cum sorore germana consuetudinem, "nondum" inquit quantumvis decenter et caute*.

19 *interrogatus, haberetne stupri consuetudinem, respondit caute "nondum"*.

20 IK 17, 1 (*Ephesos* 7, 1) 3043–3044: only the "A" survives from the province's name – possibly Asia.

21 PIR² C 1355; pace Courtney (supra n. 3) ad loc.

6, 322, Medullina, an aristocratic lady of loose morals. Probus explains: there were two Medullinae at the same time, of whom one Valeria (the name is emended) was said to have married Claudius, the other Nero, etc. (more to the effect that the first was bad, the second good). Again, simple but telling. The confusion with the Messallinae, astonishingly elementary, may have arisen from the name of Claudius' early betrothed, Medullina²².

6, 638, Pontia the poisoner. Probus expands the scholion's *defuncto marito* to *defuncto Drymione marito*. But it is inconceivable that a daughter of the consular Petronii could have married a man named Drymio²³.

Valla's Probus, already fading out, stopped abruptly at 8, 198.

Clearly, like the Juvenalian scholia in general, Probus preserves valuable information. But, equally clearly, there is much that is simply not true, whatever its source. The point to be made is not how each item stands up to scrutiny, nor from what stratum of the tradition it may derive. It is rather to enunciate the principle that where information is preserved by Probus alone, or only by Probus and ϕ , that information cannot be trusted without external corroboration. Valla's Probus could make Suessa the home of not one but four satirists, make Crispinus a Neronian senator, make a Licinius Syllanus of a Iunius Silanus, place Massa and Carus at the court of Trajan (who would have been shocked), transform Egnatius into Heliodorus, derive Crispus from Placentia, date the quaestorship of Helvidius Priscus to the reign of Nero, name that emperor's wife Medullina, and so forth. Valla's Probus is not sound on names and dates, and mere plausibility cannot be a criterion with him. Without corroboration his information is inadmissible as evidence.

At 5, 109, on Piso, Probus tells us: *Mox sub Claudio restitutus et post consulatum materna hereditate ditatus magnificentissime vixit*. We know from the Laus that Piso held the consulship, but only Probus tells us when. The Claudian date might be true, but it would be all too easy to invent²⁴. Suetonius told the scholiast that Piso was exiled by Gaius, the poem told him that he was consul and rich: the natural deduction would be that it was under Gaius' successor that Piso's fortunes flourished. There is no reason to trust Probus here, but the search is opened for evidence to confirm or deny a Claudian consulship.

IV

The only other part of the conspirator's career known to us is his membership in the Arval Brethren. His attendance at the meetings of the college, as recorded by the Arval acta, is remarkable:

22 Suet. *Claudius* 26, 1: so Wessner 258.

23 If not fantasy, the name may be corrupt. The closest feasible substitute for *Drymione* might be *Durmio*, that is, a son or grandson of C. Ummidius Durmius Quadratus (cos. c. 40, died 60).

24 Indeed, everything in Probus' account of Piso could come from intelligent reading of sources available to us and a constructive imagination.

CIL VI 2028 = 32344 +AE 1983, 95	co-opted 24 May 38, present 27 May, 29 May, absent 26 June, 1 July, 2 July, 1 August, 31 August, present 21 September
VI 2029 = 32346	absent February and October 39
VI 2030 = 32347	present May and June 40
VI 2032	present January 44
[VI 2034 = 32348]	[record incomplete, 50/54]
AE 1977, 18	absent 29 May 53, present 12 October
[VI 2037 = 32352]	[record incomplete, 55]
VI 2039	present ?October 57, absent 6 November, present 4 December, 11 December
VI 2043	present ?January 63, present ?10 April, absent ?30 May
[VI 2044 = 32355]	[The next surviving fragment of the acta comes from 66, after Piso's death.]

The Arval college under the Julio-Claudian dynasty was largely the preserve of the established aristocracy. This has one advantage in that we know more about men from such families than about the relatively more obscure Arval Brethren of later periods. Thus, John Scheid's recent thorough survey of the recruitment and social origin of the *fratres Arvales* under the Julio-Claudians could produce a table of mean ages at time of co-optation, as follows: under Augustus, 40/41 years; Tiberius, 38 years; Gaius 31.5 years (actually, on his figures, 33); Claudius, 24/26.5 years; Nero, 33–36 years; and over the whole period, 34 years. Some confirmation of this is found in the fact that an appreciable majority (32 out of 56, or 4/7) were consular in rank when co-opted²⁵. These figures are roughly correct, but only very roughly, and Scheid is fully aware of the problems involved. In most cases we do not know the date of co-optation; the date of birth is rarely more than an educated guess; and conclusions must be based on careful and elaborate discussions of identities, of chronology, and of the content of individual fragments of the Arval acta.

That said, trends are clearly to be observed. The most obvious concerns the distinction of the college as originally conceived by Augustus, who preferred ex-consuls. His successors moved away from such distinction, but only very slightly. Scheid's rough figures for men of consular rank at the time of co-optation are as follows: Augustus, 15 out of 17 Arval priests; Tiberius, 6 of 12; Gaius,

25 J. Scheid, *Les Frères Arvales. Recrutement et origine sociale sous les Julio-Claudiens* (Paris 1975) 301–317, esp. 313.

3 of 7; Claudius, 3 of 9; Nero, 5 of 11. But the slope is more gradual than initially appears. Under Augustus and Tiberius a hereditary principle quickly emerges, to supplement the preference for consular dignity: one of the two non-consuls co-opted under Augustus succeeded his father in the college (as apparently did one of the consulars), while three of the six not-yet-consuls co-opted under Tiberius simply replaced their fathers²⁶. Moreover, dynastic considerations need closer attention. Scheid has carefully segregated from his survey emperors, members of the imperial family, and heirs presumptive, excluding not only the five emperors themselves, but Agrippa, Marcellus, Drusus, Gaius and Lucius Caesar, Germanicus, Drusus Caesar, and Tiberius Gemellus: rightly excluded for, as a very different category, their ages and careers would have greatly misrepresented the average, private Arval Brother. Yet the criterion should logically extend to the period after Tiberius. Three of the six non-consuls co-opted under Claudius, at the ages of (about) 17, 19 and 22, were the emperor's sons-in-law, for 2 of whom (at least) accelerated careers are explicitly attested: surely to be accounted members of the dynasty therefore²⁷. Similarly, one of the four non-consuls co-opted under Gaius was that emperor's "golden sheep", M. Iunius Silanus: as the emperor's cousin and as the only other mature male descendant of Augustus at the time, he must have been something of an heir presumptive²⁸. In short, the decline in rank of the college after Augustus is less than it may appear.

Most importantly, a sharp change in policy does observably occur under Nero. This is easily demonstrated by Scheid in his chapter on the familial and hereditary character of the Arval Brethren. On Scheid's calculations, under Tiberius 6 men had close family connections with previous Arvales, 4 had distant connections, 2 had none at all; under Gaius the respective figures are 4, 2, and 1; under Claudius 6, 1, and 2; but under Nero shift dramatically to 3, 1, and 7. There is then a minor social revolution in the Arvales under Nero. Before him, such men as went into the college without any earlier connection with it had tended to be *novi homines* of unusual power or distinction, such as Vitellius and Otho (fathers of the later emperors); or nobles like Sextius Africanus or Aelius Lamia (under Claudius). It is only with Nero, and in the 60's, that men of the second rank appear, relative non-entities who had not only not reached the consulship, but who never would, men like Q. Tillius Sassius, Q. Postumius Cai...., M. Raecius Taurus, L. Maecius Postumus, and P. Valerius Marinus (cos. des. 69). There is a sharp and substantial decline in the social prestige of

26 Augustus: M. Caecilius Cornutus (Scheid 95. 102f.) and M. Valerius Messalla Messallinus (123–128). Tiberius: Cn. Domitius Ahenobarbus (137–142), Paullus Fabius Persicus (110–113), and Cn. Pompeius Augur (94f.).

27 Cn. Pompeius Magnus (Scheid 233f.), 5 year acceleration (Dio 60, 5, 8); L. Iunius Silanus (234–236), 5 year acceleration (ib.); Faustus Cornelius Sulla (251–254), consulship probably accelerated.

28 PIR² J 833.

the Arvales some years into the reign, a decline which was not to be reversed²⁹. These people appear in the surviving documents from 63 and 66, but none is present in the fragments from 57: the break came then, roughly, c. 60³⁰.

A slightly different picture of the “average” Arval priest under the Julio-Claudians emerges. Seven men (two already consular, five never to be consul) co-opted in the later years of Nero should be set aside, as should four men under Gaius and Claudius who are properly to be regarded as members of the dynasty. If that is done, the figures change somewhat: of the 47 non-dynastic members of the brotherhood co-opted before A.D. 60, 30, or almost 2/3, of them were already consular in rank at the time of their co-optation. None of them will have been under thirty, some of them were much older: this is crucial to our conception of the priesthood.

What of the other seventeen? As mentioned, there was a clear hereditary strain to selection, regardless of age or rank, and to the consulars known to have succeeded their fathers in the priesthood should be added at least four men, not yet consuls in the last years of Augustus and first of Tiberius, who stepped directly into their fathers’ places – one of them, Paullus Fabius Persicus, at about fifteen years of age. Such men, like members of the dynasty, are exceptions to the norm.

Of the thirteen who remain, we just do not know much, but one observation should be made: unless there is strong evidence to the contrary, we should assume that they too were normally over thirty. In only one case is there such evidence, that of M. Salvius Otho: he was co-opted in his mid-twenties, but he was a crony of the emperor, as his father had been a great favourite before him, and he can be considered, along with his brother, as his father’s joint-successor in the college³¹. On the other hand, there are several hazards in ascertaining the ages of the Arvales correctly, particularly in assuming that their consulships were achieved near the minimum age for the most favoured nobilis, that is, at 32. For example, L. Vitellius, consul for the first time in 34, and probably first attested as an Arval priest in 28. J. Scheid suggests a date of birth c. A.D. 1, hence accession to the priesthood in his late twenties. Yet however favoured he may have been, he was the son of a knight, not of a nobilis, and he should not have started on the career of a nobilis, with a consulship at thirty-three. In this case, strong doubt can be confirmed: Vitellius’ elder son, the future emperor, was born in A.D. 15, thus pushing his father’s birthdate back at least a decade. There is indeed no need to assume that most nobiles who held the consulship reached it in their early thirties. Take two examples: the patrician Taurus Statilius Corvinus, an Arval by A.D. 33 (co-opted in 32?), consul ordinarius in 45, therefore born c. A.D. 10 (Scheid); and T. Sextius Africanus, an Arval by 53

29 R. Syme, *Some arval brethren* (Oxford 1980).

30 CIL VI 2043 (63); 32355 (66); 2045 (late in the reign) – vs. 2038 and 2039 (57).

31 Scheid (*supra* n. 25) 250f.

(co-opted c. 43?), consul suffect in 59, therefore born c. 25 (Scheid)³². Both were of high birth and no known distinction: need they have become consul at the age of 34 or 35? Statilius Corvinus, as it happens, is attested as promagister of the college in 38, Sextius Africanus as magister in 53 – as such, each should have already held his praetorship *before* those years, and thus some time before his consulship³³. That is to say, there is no sign of rapid promotion in either career, no hint that they held offices at the minimum age.

The drift of this long disquisition is that the Arval college was not a group of young men, excepting members of the dynasty or those who took their fathers' places (age being irrelevant in both cases). There is no sign that it was a club for decorative young noblemen, while there is every indication that its members were either consular or of consular age, men in their thirties or older.

The relevance of this to Piso the conspirator is obvious. Under the emperor Gaius, seven men became Arval Brethren. One was something of an heir presumptive (M. Iunius Silanus, consul 46), while three were ex-consuls (Camillus Scribonianus, C. Appius Iunius Silanus, L. Salvius Otho). The other three were all co-opted on the 24th of May, 38³⁴. The first, L. Annius Vinicianus (PIR² A 701), son of a consul and almost certainly consul himself before 41, was just on the threshold of his consulship in 39/40, perhaps already designatus. The second, C. Caecina Largus (C 101), likewise son of a consul, was ordinarius in 42 – again, the choice may have been Gaius'. That leaves the third man, C. Piso, of the Republican nobility, consul (it is commonly assumed) under Claudius, in the mid or late 40's. But the sole explicit evidence that he was consul under Claudius is highly dubious, and inadmissible without further evidence. In the matter of the Arval college, at least, Gaius showed himself a conservative. Was Piso, too, nearing his consulship when he was co-opted into that body? Might he not have been consul under Gaius, in 39 or 40?

V

Before considering that question, a word on Piso's age and date of birth. J. Scheid suggested c. A.D. 10; better, R. Syme, no later than A.D. 8, which is more in keeping with the age of the normal Arval Brother at the time of co-optation. The important fact is this: the *Laus Pisonis* leaves its audience in no doubt that Piso was *iuuenis*. At line 32, the *iuuenis facunde* is urged, somewhat inelegantly, to surpass his ancestral *tituli*; at 109, the *iuuenis facunde* welcomes his *cultores* to his home; at 211, he is *felix et longa iuuenis dignissime vita*. It is quite correct to recall that the term "iuuenis", formally defined, could

32 Scheid (*supra* n. 25) 151–154. 158. 238f.

33 CIL VI 32344; AE 1977, 18. Praetorship: W. Eck, *Senatoren von Vespasian bis Hadrian. Prosopographische Untersuchungen mit Einschluss der Jahres- und Provinzialfasten der Statthalter*, Vestigia 13 (1970) 21–30.

34 CIL VI 2028 = 32344 + AE 1983, 95.

embrace men up to 45 or even 50 years of age, but it would be misguided to insist on what is clearly a technical usage. Most Romans would think in daily life of men in their twenties and thirties, and the subject of the poem is surely young in our sense³⁵. The triple emphasis on his youth, the urging to surpass his ancestors, the wish for a long life, all speak for this³⁶. They are perfectly consonant with a young nobilis, recently consul in his early thirties.

The point of this excursus is the following. It is most likely that C. Piso, *frater Arvalis* in 38, was born not later than A.D. 8, and probably not too much earlier. If the poem were indeed written between 57 and 59, as has been seriously argued, it was celebrating not only a *iuvenis* who was around fifty years of age, but (even more importantly) one whose prospects of surpassing his ancestors would by then be severely limited. It might be possible, but it would be ridiculous. Whenever the *Laus Pisonis* was written, it was not under Nero.

VI

A date of birth in or before A.D. 8 would be quite consonant with a consulship in 39 or 40 for a young patrician of the Republican nobility. Here the matter of Piso's strange wedding day is relevant. The sources are confused and contradictory.

First, Suetonius (Gaius 25, 1): *Liviam Orestillam C. Pisoni nubentem, cum ad officium et ipse venisset, ad se deduci imperavit intraque paucos dies repudiatam biennio post relegavit, quod repetisse usum prioris mariti tempore medio videbatur.*

Next Dio (59, 8, 7): τήν τε θυγατέρα αὐτοῦ ἐκβαλὼν ἔγημε Κορνηλίαν Ὀρεστίλλαν, ἣν ἥρπασεν ἐν αὐτοῖς τοῖς γάμοις οὓς τῷ ἡγγυημένῳ αὐτὴν Γαῖῳ Καλπουρνίῳ Πίσωνι συνεώρταζε. πρὶν δὲ δύο μῆνας ἐξελευεῖν, ἀμφοτέρους σφᾶς ὡς καὶ συγγιγνομένους ἀλλήλοις ἐξώρισε.

And finally, Probus (5, 109): *repente etiam relegatus est, quod consuetudinem pristinae uxoris abductae sibi ab ipso [C. Caesare], deinde remissae repetivisse existimabatur.*

This is a mess: the wife's name is intractable, the dates vary, Suetonius seems unaware that Piso was relegated as well. The name and identity of the wife are not relevant here – she was clearly from the high aristocracy – but the dates of marriage and exile are.

First, Dio's lapse of less than two months between the two events is commonly regarded as an error. Livia Orestilla's successor as the emperor's wife was

35 So A. A. Bell, *A new approach to the Laus Pisonis*, *Latomus* 44 (1985) 871–878, at 874f.: the evidence clearly divides between technical and daily usage.

36 Note also the generally youthful atmosphere of the poem: the *iuventus* flocks from all over Rome to hear Piso declaiming when the courts are out of session (84), while the poet himself is in his *primos annos* (73), *iuvenile decus* has just begun to colour his cheeks, before his twentieth summer (260f.).

Lollia Paulina, who married Gaius in late September or early October 38³⁷. C. Piso attended the Arval college on three days in late May and on 21 September in 38, and in May and June of 40. Since it is unlikely in the extreme that he was recalled from exile before the accession of Claudius (as indeed Probus tells us), he will not have been relegated before 2/4 June, 40, the last date his presence in Rome is attested³⁸. Thus, Suetonius' *biennium* should be correct, and one could date the marriage to (roughly) summer 38, and the exile to the summer, autumn or very early winter of 40 (before Gaius' assassination in January of 41).

Here an argument from silence enters, and the silence is that of the *Laus Pisonis*. What exactly does the poem tell us about the events of Piso's life, the facts apart from his ancestry, his character and his private habits? Remarkably little. Near its beginning the poet is carried away by Piso's *virtus* and his life admirable *per omnes modos*, whatever that may mean. Nobility he would have achieved, had he not been born noble, and his way of life is steady (5ff.). He pleads successfully in the law courts, saving the lives of citizens, defending capital charges (30ff.). He has praised as consul the *Caesareum numen*, that is, in his consular *gratiarum actio* (66ff.). And that is it – thereafter we hear only of his private life, his bilingual eloquence, his magnanimous patronage, his performance on the lyre, his physical prowess, and his games.

So much is missing. Despite the pervasive martial tone, there is no word of armies led or provinces governed. Hence it is deduced, rightly, that he led no army, governed no province. But one might go further: since his panegyrist can think, in terms however vague, of future glory, it really must be deduced that the poem was written soon after the consulship, while there was still hope. Likewise, there is no hint of wife or children, although a wife existed in 65, and a married son was killed in 69³⁹. If they had existed at the time of the poem, which so closely follows the subject's private life (*Quare age, Calliope, ... limina Pisonis mecum pete*, 81), would they have been omitted? Perhaps so, but the son's absence in a work so taken with the glory of the *domus Calpurnia* is most remarkable.

There is, moreover, one event which should be there but isn't, the one thing of importance that happened in Piso's dismally uneventful life before 65: his exile. A tyrant destroyed this man's marriage, then drove the star-crossed lovers into exile. The story is tragic, Piso the blameless villain. His panegyrist sings of Piso's success in saving those suffering under capital charges, but ignores Piso's own brush with danger, his own capital conviction and exile. And Piso's grateful praise of the *Caesareum numen* is a tepid rendering by the poet of what should have been a paean of fervent gratitude to the emperor Claudius for restoring

37 Cf. PIR² L 328 for the sources.

38 CIL VI 33347, 26: the next fragment of the *Acta* comes from the year 44.

39 Tacitus, *Ann.* 15, 59; 53; *Hist.* 4, 11. 49.

him from exile and advancing him to the consulship. True, the marriage of Piso's bride to Gaius might have to be treated with delicacy, but a poet capable of portraying every action of the inert Piso as bursting with military ardour would have no trouble in conveying the proper tone. Yet from beginning to end tranquillity reigns, with no hint of crisis survived and overcome, no sign of the Pisonian *virtus* displayed under pressure. This passes belief.

The obvious solution is that the poem was written *before* Piso was sent into exile in the latter half of A.D. 40. It was written at a time when Piso indeed had no wife, and when a careful poet would not expand too much on the *Caesareum numen*. It was written after the young Piso was consul, and the consular fasti are full throughout the 30's and into the first half of 39. The *Laus Pisonis* was therefore written by an unknown poet in 39 or 40.

VII

From first to last, the poem invests C. Piso's career, if it can be called that, with a stridently military tone.

Pisonian *atria* boast ancestral triumphs (8), and the *manus bellica patrum armorumque labor* were sung by ancient poets (22f.). Piso's field of battle in these times of peace, rivalling his ancestors, is the court of law (27–29):

*licet exercere togatae
munia militiae, licet et sine sanguinis haustu
mitia legitimo sub iudice bella movere.*

In court too can one save a fellow citizen and win the palm for one's doorway (30f.), arms give way to (Ciceronian) forensic eloquence (36) and the crowds who formerly watched the triumphs of the Pisos now pack the court (37ff.), and so on, as Piso conquers the judge. The poet is too weak to describe the power of Pisonian oratory (72), which he has earlier described as a horse tamed and controlled by a Thessalian rider (49ff.), followed by comparisons of the orator with Homeric heroes (61). Calliope is invoked to accompany the fainthearted poet into Piso's house (81) – appropriately, the muse of heroic epic. Thundering forensic eloquence is laid aside there for lighter arms (87), that is, declamation. Relaxation is essential: the army cannot always stand ready, the trumpet cannot blare continuously, the Cretan archer must relax his bow, the soldier lay aside his arms and armour (140–144), even Jupiter sets aside his arms (152). To everything there is a season: if war calls, he will be a soldier, if peace, a civilian; in peace the law court is fitting, in war the camp (155–158). Even fierce Achilles played the lyre in the midst of war, with the same thumb that hurled the spear against the enemy (173–177). Piso's sports include weapons practice of a most vigorous kind (178–184) and aggressive ball-playing. And finally, the culmination of all this, an extended metaphor on checkers as war, with black and white glass soldiers: Piso's opponents always retreat, he never loses a piece, his re-

treating pawn captures its pursuer, a reinforcement saves the day, another piece delays the enemy, yet another bursts through the enemy line to capture a citadel, and withal Piso loses few men while his hands resound with a crowd of captive pieces (190–208).

It is magnificent, but it is not war. That the poet intends to convey the martial *virtus* of Piso is indisputable, and it is cleverly done. At the same time, his sincerity ought not to be doubted, but it backfires, serving only to increase pity or contempt for the impotent Piso, dressed up in a costume that does not fit. The poet's problem is technically interesting: how to demonstrate that *virtus* has not died with the absence of wars, *nec enim, si bella quierunt, occidit et virtus* (26f.). The problem is intensified in Piso's case, or rather created, by the military glory of his ancestors, with whom he must be compared, and this appears to be the point of the poem: how can a poet show that a man so clearly inferior to his ancestors is in truth their equal?

The ancestors set the whole poem in motion: *tua nobilitas veterisque ... sublimia Calpi nomina, Romanas inter fulgentia gentes* are set against Piso's personal virtue, and this tension provides a theme to be made famous by Juvenal (8–10):

*nam quid imaginibus, quid avitis fulta triumphis
atria, quid pleni numero consule fasti
profuerint, cui vita labat?*

So prominent are the ancestors in the poem that they in effect tell us who Piso was.

Piso's ancestors account for *imagines* and triumphal ornaments in the *atrium*, the *fasti* show many a consul. The poet must plead lack of time to explain his neglect of the history of the *domus Calpurnia* (14ff.). It would take too long to recall the *tituli* and wearisome wars of the men of old, but their warlike hand and armed toil were fitting to the Romans of old, and poets sang of them (21–24). He, the panegyrist, can call Piso, shining with peaceful fame, the equal of his ancestors (25f.), indeed he urges him to surpass their *tituli* and the honours of ancestral fame. The crowds which flocked to watch *Pisonum claros triumphos* now fill the law-courts to hear Piso's eloquence set defendants free (37–40).

There were, from the mid-second century B.C. until the first century A.D., three main branches of the Pisones. One descended from L. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso Caesoninus, consul in 148, and it generally retained his agnomen, Caesoninus; he himself was the son of C. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso, consul in 180, and grandson of C. Calpurnius Piso, urban praetor in 211. The second branch descended from L. Calpurnius L. f. C. n. Piso Frugi, consul in 133, and it generally retained his agnomen, Frugi; he himself was presumably grandson of the praetor of 211, nephew of the consul of 180, and cousin of Caesoninus the consul of 148. And the third branch descended from Cn. Calpurnius Piso,

filiation unknown, consul in 139; he was most probably the son of a Cn. Calpurnius who was *monetalis* c. 189/180⁴⁰. Not to pursue the history of these houses any more closely than the poet has done, their representatives under the new principate of Augustus were, respectively: L. Calpurnius Piso the Pontifex, son of Julius Caesar's father-in-law Caesoninus and consul in 15 B.C.; M. Licinius Crassus Frugi, probably adopted by Crassus, the consul of 30 B.C., and himself consul in 14 B.C.; and the brothers Cn. Calpurnius Piso, consul 7 B.C. and future nemesis of Germanicus Caesar, and L. Calpurnius Piso the Augur, consul 1 B.C.⁴¹ Piso the conspirator was descended from one of these men, and it is not difficult to say which⁴².

The poet's strategy was dictated by the martial glory of his subject's ancestors, their wars and victories, and he refers specifically to the male line, the *domus Calpurnia: Pisonum claros triumphos*. The third branch of the Pisones, the Gnaei, display little military experience, no independent commands, and no known triumphs. The second, the Frugi, could claim one triumphator, but the family had not been Pisones for three or four generations before the conspirator, that is two adoptions had intervened and it is not certain that by the time of Augustus' death Calpurnian blood flowed in their veins⁴³. There was military glory in this line to be sure, but none of them was a Calpurnius Piso, while the whole emphasis of the first seventeen lines of the *Laus Pisonis* is on the *domus Calpurnia*⁴⁴.

Fortunately, the first branch displays military glory to spare. It appears first in the early second century in C. Calpurnius Piso (RE 62), praetor in Farther Spain in 186, who celebrated a triumph from the province in 184 and went on to hold the family's first consulship in 180. Then, for three generations, military prowess lay dormant. His son Caesoninus (RE 87) fought, albeit unsuccessfully, as praetor in Farther Spain in 154 and as consul in Africa in 148, and that man's son, again Caesoninus (RE 88), consul in 112, was killed in battle in Gaul in 107.

40 Crawford, RRC 153.

41 PIR C 289, L 189, C 287. 290.

42 Stemma of the family at PIR² C, opposite p. 54, with the corrections of R. Syme, *Piso Frugi and Crassus Frugi*, JRS 50 (1960) 12–20 = Roman Papers (RP) 2 (Oxford 1979) 496–509. See now Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986) 329–345. 367–381.

43 In the generally accepted reconstruction of R. Syme the line ran something as follows. A grandson of the first Piso Frugi (the consul of 133) was adopted by an elderly M. Pupius, becoming M. Pupius Piso Frugi (RE 10), praetor in 72 or 71, then proconsul in Spain, from which province he celebrated a triumph in 69; thereafter he served and saw action as Pompey's legate in the East, returning to hold the consulship of 61. This man's son, known only as M. Piso Frugi (RE 12) held the praetorship in 44, and it was he, so it appears, who gave his son in adoption to M. Licinius Crassus (PIR² L 186), consul 30 B.C., who triumphed *ex Thraecia et Geteis* in 27. That son, M. Licinius Crassus Frugi (L 189), consul 14 B.C., was in turn father of M. Licinius Crassus Frugi (L 190), consul A.D. 27, who won triumphal ornaments twice.

44 One of the sons of Crassus Frugi, consul 27, was Galba's Caesar, L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi Licinianus (C 300): he reverted to ancestral names or, more likely, was adopted by a L. Calpurnius Piso. His sister married L. Piso, consul 57.

Nothing is known of the next generation's exploits – there was yet another L. Caesoninus (RE 89), quaestor 100, possibly praetor urbanus in 90⁴⁵ – but glory finally returns in the next two generations, and it is these in particular that the poet should have in mind. After his consulship in 58, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (RE 90) fought hard and successfully against the Thracians as proconsul of Macedonia in the years 57 through 55. The skeleton of a great campaign can be discerned through the extravagant sneers of Cicero's *In Pisonem*: in brief, "a great victory was won by Q. Marcius and other legates" (54), "Piso was hailed as *imperator*" (38), "triumphal monuments were constructed" (92)⁴⁶. Piso, a committed Epicurean, did not want or request a triumph, said he had never wanted a triumph (56), even ridiculed M. Pupius Piso's *cupiditas triumphandi* (62). Cicero mocks this attitude at length (53–63) – but Piso's attitude was probably sincere, and his career thereafter in peace and war was one of firm and intelligent moderation⁴⁷.

His son, L. Calpurnius Piso the Pontifex (RE 99), was one of the great men of the Augustan and Tiberian era. After his consulship in 15 he was governor of Pamphylia, whence he was transferred to his father's old province of Macedonia to carry on another *Bellum Thracicum* as legate of Augustus⁴⁸. For his successes there two public supplications and triumphal ornaments for Piso were decreed by the senate, on the motion of Augustus. The Pontifex went on to be prefect of the city of Rome and died at the age of eighty, full of honours and famed for the tact with which he held that difficult office⁴⁹.

The line of the Caesonini was indisputably the most glorious of the Pisones. Their first consular ancestor had triumphed, Caesoninus and his son the Pontifex were both statesmen of exemplary character who achieved the highest offices of state, both consuls, Caesoninus censor, the Pontifex prefect of the city, and both won decisive victories against the Thracians. The poet may be pardoned for slight exaggeration if the father celebrated his victory only in his province, with acclamation as *imperator* and the erection of triumphal monuments, and if the son must be content with *ornamenta triumphalia* and public supplications. The military glory was real enough, and common knowledge: it was a heritage with which the poet had to contend.

There is something more. The poet declines to retell the glory of the Calpurnian house – it would take him a year to recall the *priscorum titulos operosaque bella*. Luckily that was unnecessary (22–24):

45 R. Syme, *Historia* 13 (1964) 159 = RP 2 (1979) 609.

46 R. G. M. Nisbet, *Piso's proconsulship of Macedonia 57–55 B.C.*, an excellent discussion, appendix 1 in his edition, Cicero, *In L. Calpurnium Pisonem oratio* (Oxford 1961) 172–180.

47 Nisbet XIV–XV.

48 References in the long notice at PIR² C 289, with R. Syme on *The Titulus Tiburtinus*, RP 3 (1984) 869–884, at 878–881.

49 Dio 54, 34, 7; Tacitus, *Ann.* 6, 10.

*manus sed bellica patrum
armorumque labor veteres decuere Quirites,
atque illos cecinere sui per carmina vates.*

Again, the context makes quite clear that this refers not, as is generally assumed, to any lays of ancient Rome or to the epics of a Naevius or an Ennius, but to poems about the deeds of the Calpurnii. More recent *vates* had sung of more recent successes, and we can identify at least one of them, for the Thracian War of Piso the Pontifex was celebrated in verse (now lost) by Antipater of Thessalonica, scores of whose epigrams, several of them addressed to his patron, survived in the Garland of Philip, and who returned with Piso from the East after his victory⁵⁰.

Again, perhaps, like father like son. Piso Caesoninus was a patron of Philodemus of Gadara, better known to us as an Epicurean philosopher, and one of Philodemus' epigrams inviting him to dinner has likewise survived in the Garland of Philip⁵¹. It is very likely that he accompanied his patron to Macedonia, and he may well have praised Piso's exploits there, if not in sustained epic then in epigrams⁵². It was the sort of thing poets did for their patrons: *rogatus, invitatus, coactus, ita multa ad istum de ipso quoque scripsit, ut omnes hominis libidines, omnia stupra, omnia cenarum conviviorumque genera, adulteria denique eius delicatissimis versibus expresserit*, as Cicero said of Philodemus' lighter efforts⁵³.

In brief, the two Calpurnii Pisones who won the greatest military renown in the late Republic and early Empire were also men with literary interests, the patrons of poets who could, and in one case certainly did, sing of their *manus bellica armorumque labor*. No other branch of the family comes near to rivalling this pair in war and the patronage of literature. Piso the Pontifex lived from 48 B.C. to A.D. 32 (we have a Tacitean obituary) and was decreed a public funeral by the senate⁵⁴; C. Piso the conspirator was born probably not later than A.D. 8: they should be grandfather and grandson⁵⁵.

50 A. S. F. Gow and D. L. Page, edd., *The Greek Anthology. The Garland of Philip and some contemporary epigrams* (Cambridge 1968) I 12–85, II 18–110, from the Greek Anthology; cf. C. Cichorius, *Römische Studien* (Leipzig/Berlin 1922) 327–331. The war poem: *Anth. Pal.* 9, 428 = Gow-Page, Antipater 1. Several others are relevant to both Piso and war.

51 Gow-Page I 350–369; II 371–400. Invitation: *Anth. Pal.* 11, 44 = Gow-Page, Philodemus 23.

52 Thus Cichorius 295–298: especially because *nec fere ab isto umquam discederet*. Contra Nisbet 183. However, Nisbet (180–182) does believe that the Porcius and Socraton *duae sinistrae Pisonis, scabies famesque mundi* of Catullus 47 were with Piso in Macedonia. The old suggestion that Socraton was a nickname for Philodemus has recently received strong support: D. Sider, *The love poetry of Philodemus*, *AJP* 108 (1987) 310–324, at 321–323. If Philodemus were indeed with his patron in Macedonia, it might be hard to avoid praising him.

53 *In Pisonem* 70.

54 *Ann.* 6, 10–11.

55 E. Groag, ap. *PIR*² C 284 tentatively suggested descent from the third branch, the Gnaei, that is, from Cn. Piso, cos. 7 B.C. or L. Piso Augur, cos. 1. This because the conspirator's son Galeria-

This has a bearing on the question of “the sons of Piso the Pontifex”. None are directly attested, but there are several possibilities⁵⁶. One obvious candidate for the intervening generation here is the Gaius son of Lucius, the first shaving of whose beard is the subject of a poem by the Augustan poet Apollonides, yet another found in the Garland of Philip – he will have married and died before the consulship⁵⁷. It often happened that sons took over their fathers’ places in the Arval Brethren. Such was not the case with Piso the conspirator, but it was very close. The only member of his gens to have preceded him in the Arval college was Piso the Pontifex, who died in his eightieth year in A.D. 32, just six years before the co-optation of C. Piso: the Pontifex outlived his sons, but he was soon followed in the college by a man who was surely his grandson.

VIII

It is suggested then that C. Calpurnius Piso was born in the first decade of the century, grandson of a pillar of the new principate, Piso the Pontifex. He was co-opted into the Arval college at or soon after the age of thirty, in 38, and he soon advanced to the consulship in 39 or 40, at an age appropriate to a member of the old nobility and the new patriciate, and at an age when the term “*iuvenis*” could be applied to him without a smile. Then, after recall from an undeserved exile, a life of private virtue or frustration for a quarter of a century, with no hint of public service or intimacy with the emperor⁵⁸.

The *Laus Pisonis* was written in 39 or 40, soon after Piso’s consulship and surely *before* his exile, offered by a fledgling poet to a noble youth. It was not “Neronian”, nor should it be ascribed to any known Neronian poet. Whatever similarities there may be found with Lucan or Calpurnius Siculus are to be explained, as with Juvenal, by those poet’s familiarity with the *Laus Pisonis*. Nor need it even be “Claudian”: aside from an unreliable scholiast on Juvenal there is no evidence, sound or otherwise, for dating the piece to the reign of Nero’s predecessor. The poem, it is argued, was written before the exile of Piso by Gaius, and Piso’s rank and probable age speak for a consulship under that emperor.

Thus, the portrait by Tacitus of the conspirator in 65 is separated by twenty-five years from that of the poem. Tacitus’ Piso is a curiously bland, ageless creature, easy to conceive of as the eloquent *iuvenis* of the *Laus Pisonis*.

nus was called by Tacitus *consobrinus* of his father-in-law L. Piso, cos. 57 (*Hist.* 4, 49), who was the grandson of the consul of 7 B.C. – but the term is surely being used very loosely.

56 R. Syme, *AJP* 101 (1980) 333–341 = *RP* 3 (1984) 1226–1232. It will be clear that Syme’s suggestion that the Pontifex is the father named in Horace’s *Ars Poetica* is assumed to be correct.

57 *Anth. Pal.* 10, 19 = Gow-Page, Apollonides 26. Cichorius 337–341; Syme 1227f. for the kinship with the Pontifex.

58 Nero enjoyed his villa at Baiae, but for its *amoenitas*, not for the owner’s company: Tacitus, *Ann.* 15, 52, 1.

Yet in truth, the man who would be emperor was nearer in age to Seneca than to Nero. It is all the more striking how closely the two portraits coincide.

As the conspiracy unravelled, unnamed friends of Piso urged him to make a move, to appeal for the support of the guard or the people, according to Tacitus. Even if they all forsook him, he would at least die gloriously, judged worthy by his ancestors and his descendants (Tac. Ann. 15, 59, 3): *miles potius deesset et plebes desereret, dum ipse maioribus, dum posteris, si vita praeiperetur, mortem adprobaret*. But Piso did nothing, he awaited the arrival of the soldiers, he opened his veins and he died, leaving a will notable for its gross flattery of Nero: such was his inert acquiescence, his “patientia”. The contrast in Tacitus between what his glorious family required and his own inglorious choice is pointed.

The Piso of 40 and the Piso of 65 are noted for the same civil virtues: the employment of eloquence for defense at law, the generosity to friends, courtesy to all. The tragedy is that these are mere attributes of Roman *nobilitas*, not the substance, and the contrast with his ancestors could hardly be more pointed. Piso’s grandfather and great-grandfather, one the counsellor and drinking-companion of Tiberius, the other father-in-law and ally of Julius Caesar, had guided the state in peace and war. C. Piso himself seems to have had no hand in public affairs, civil or military: the silences of the *Laus Pisonis* and of Tacitus are eloquent, and no document suggests any career. This could have been prudence on his part, but lack of talent and ambition seems more likely. All he had and all he was came from his family, and his immediate ancestors were not merely members of the Republican nobility but among its leaders. The heritage was crushing. It informs and distorts, it ultimately defeats, a well-meaning panegyric by a young poet who had little material to work with, and it is the only reason why, twenty-five years later, a man without qualities was chosen as the handsome and affable figurehead of a conspiracy against the emperor Nero.