



TWO NOTES ON AURELIUS VICTOR'S *LIBER DE CAESARIBVS* (10.5 *LAUTVSQVE* AND 13.3 *SATISQVE*)

ABSTRACT

At Aur. Vict. Caes. 10.5, the reading lautus should be retained; -que is a dittography and should be deleted. At 13.3, satis should be emended into sagatis. This article also provides a brief analysis of Victor's references to clothing and attempts to explain why he comments on the Dacian costume at 13.3, the only ethnographic reference to clothing in the entire work.

Keywords: textual criticism; Aurelius Victor; Titus; Trajan; Dacians; ancient clothing; *pilleus*; *sagum*

I

Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 10.5: ita biennio post ac menses fere nouem, amphitheatri perfecto opere **lautusque** ueneno interiit, anno aevi quadragesimo, cum eius pater septuagesimo obisset, imperator decenni.

The phrase *lautusque* couples an extraordinary public event of Titus' reign, the grand opening of the Colosseum (*amphitheatri perfecto opere*), with a personal daily routine such as taking a bath. This combination has seemed problematic to many scholars. Already J. Lipsius, at the end of the sixteenth century, wondered whether *lautusque* makes any sense at all and proposed the emendation *lautibusque*, from an unattested fourth-declension noun *lautus*, meaning 'baths'.¹ Three centuries later, this idea was espoused by E. Klebs, who defended the reading *lautus*, interpreting it as the genitive singular of this unattested noun, governed by *opere*.² Either way, the translation would be: 'after the completion of the amphitheatre and of a bathing facility'. J. Arntzen, in the eighteenth century, emended *lautusque* into *ludisque*: 'after the completion of the amphitheatre and the performance of the inaugural games'.³ In his 1971 monograph on Victor, C.E.V. Nixon quotes this sentence with a question mark after *lautusque*, indicating his inability to interpret it.⁴ According to P. Dufraigne, '*lautus* is difficult to account for' and Victor may have misunderstood Dio's text, or some unknown source, which mentioned a bathing town as the locality where Titus died (cf. Cass. Dio 66.26.1 μετῆλλαξεν ἐν τοῖς ὕδασι ἐν οἷς καὶ ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ; Suet. *Vesp.* 24.2 *Aquae Cutilliae*).⁵ H.W. Bird evades the issue with a rather unliteral translation: 'when work on the amphitheatre had been completed in a splendid manner'.⁶ The most recent commentators wonder whether there is a lacuna before *lautusque*.⁷

¹ J. Lipsius, *De Amphitheatro* (Antwerp, 1584), 16. On the noun *lautus*, see *TLL* 7.2.1069.3–7.

² E. Klebs, '*Lautus* und Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 10, 5', *Archiv für lateinische Lexicographie* 7 (1892), 438–40.

³ J. Arntzen, *Sexti Aurelii Victoris Historia Romana* (Amsterdam, 1733).

⁴ C.E.V. Nixon, 'An historiographical study of the *Caesares* of Sextus Aurelius Victor' (Diss., University of Michigan, 1971), 405.

⁵ P. Dufraigne, *Aurélius Victor. Livre des Césars* (Paris, 1975), ad loc.

⁶ H.W. Bird, *Aurelius Victor: Liber de Caesaribus* (Liverpool, 1994), 13. The issue is not mentioned in the commentary ad loc.

⁷ M.A. Nickbakht and C. Scardino, *Aurelius Victor* (Leiden, 2021), 64 and 180.

The solutions proposed by these scholars seem unconvincing not only because they are highly speculative but especially because they focus on the content, rather than the form, of the transmitted text. The meaning of the passage is clear: Titus was poisoned after taking a bath (*lautus ueneno interit*),⁸ at a time when the Flavian amphitheatre had already been dedicated. Although this version is unique to Victor, each of the elements that compose it is confirmed by other ancient sources. The chronological reference to the completion of the amphitheatre is correct, since the Colosseum was officially opened in 80 C.E., one year before Titus' death.⁹ The sequence bath > meal > death is confirmed by a contemporary medical treatise (although in connection with a disease, not with poisoning).¹⁰ The detail that Titus died from poisoning is indeed dubious, since according to most sources he died of a disease; but it is attested by one other source (although this source does not mention the bath).¹¹ Whether or not the sequence bath > poisoning is historically true,¹² there is no reason (I believe) to question that this is what Victor wrote and meant. Quintilian complains that the ancient Romans drank heavily while at the baths (1.6.44), a fact confirmed by Mart. 12.70.6–8. Furthermore, it was normal practice for both commoners and emperors to have a meal right after returning from the baths.¹³ Thus, an emperor's eating or drinking session while or immediately after bathing may have been (and may have seemed to Victor) an ideal occasion to try and poison him. This is confirmed by Herodian and the author of the so-called *Epitome de Caesaribus*. Both narrate a plot to kill Commodus carried out by administering poison to him as soon as he came back from a bath, when it was easiest to catch him off guard (Hdn. 1.17.8 ἐλθόντι δὲ αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τοῦ λουτροῦ ἐμβαλοῦσα ἐς τε κύλικα τὸ φάρμακον οἶνον τε κεράσσασα εὐώδει δίδωσι πιεῖν; *Epit. de Caes.* 17.5 *egresso e balneo ueneni poculum obtulit*). The same strategy was used by the Lombard queen Rosamund, who killed her second husband, the usurper Helmichis, by handing him a poisoned cup as he was coming out of a bath (Paul the Deacon, *Hist. Lang.* 2.29 *egredienti ei de lauacro ueneni poculum ... propinauit*).

The problem with *lautusque* is merely formal: why should Victor connect the ablative absolute *perfecto opere* to the participle *lautus* through a conjunction (*-que*)? True, Victor makes frequent recourse to a type of *uariatio* that combines, through the conjunction 'and', elements belonging to two distinct grammatical classes, as in the following cases: 3.17 *militares plebisque animos*; 4.5 *genus mulierum atque seruile*;

⁸ A normal routine (see below) and a normal construction of the participle of *lauo*: cf. e.g. Tac. *Germ.* 22.1 *lauti cibum capiunt*; Plin. *Ep.* 6.16.12 *lotus accubat, cenat*; Apul. *Met.* 9.24.1 *lauti cenam petebamus*.

⁹ Cf. e.g. Suet. *Tit.* 10.2 and Cass. Dio 66.25.1–26.1 with C.L. Murison, *Rebellion and Reconstruction. Galba to Domitian. An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 64–67 (A.D. 68–96)* (Atlanta, 1999), 199–201.

¹⁰ Plut. *De sanitate* 3. A disease complicated by unwise use of the baths before dinner must have been the official version of Titus' death as provided by the court physicians: cf. F. Grosso, 'La morte di Tito', in M. Bonaria (ed.), *ANTIAΩPON Hugoni Henrico Paoli oblatum* (Genova, 1956), 137–62, at 147.

¹¹ Poisoning: here and Philostr. *VA* 6.32. Disease: Plut. *De sanitate* 3, Suet. *Tit.* 10.1, Eutr. 7.22, *Epit. de Caes.* 10.5. Cassius Dio (66.26.2) mentions both disease and murder, but not poison.

¹² For further bibliography on Titus' death: C.L. Murison, 'The death of Titus: a reconsideration', *AHB* 9 (1995), 135–42; P. Robiano, 'Philostrate, sur la mort de Titus: essai d'interprétation', *Latomus* 75 (2016), 482–7.

¹³ Commoners: Ter. *Phorm.* 339–42; Sen. *Dial.* 6.22.6; *Ep.* 83.5–6; Petron. *Sat.* 27–8, 130.7; Mart. 6.53.1–2, 11.52.1–4; Tac. *Ann.* 11.3.2, 15.52.1; Plin. *Ep.* 6.16.12; Apul. *Met.* 1.7.2–3, 2.11.4, 3.12.5–13.1, 5.3.1–3, 5.8.1–2, 5.15.1, 8.7.6, 8.29.2–3, 9.24.1. Emperors: Suet. *Vesp.* 21; *HA, Alex. Seu.* 30.5; *Epit. de Caes.* 9.15.

8.2 *Moesiae Pannonicque exercitus*; 11.4 *inchoata per patrem uel fratris studio*; 40.11 *huic quinquennii imperium, Constantio annum fuit*; 40.28 *ex auro aut argenteae [statuae]*; 41.4 *supplicium patibulorum et cruribus suffringendis*. In all these cases, however, the two elements are analogues: two complementary categories such as soldiers and civilians, two categories of supposedly inferior human beings such as women and slaves, two provinces, etc. At 10.5, on the contrary, the elements connected through *-que* refer to two quite incomparable facts: the inauguration of the Colosseum happens once in a lifetime at best, whereas surely Titus bathed before dinner on a regular basis. Moreover, *lautus* must refer to a bath that Titus took on the same day as his death, while the celebrations for the Colosseum were complete by the end of July 80 at the latest, more than a year before Titus died in September 81.¹⁴

Although Victor's style may be awkward at times, not all oddities found in the manuscripts have to be accepted without questioning. The only two existing manuscripts are heavily corrupted, recent (fifteenth century) and closely related to each other. Therefore, the probability of common mistakes is high. The particle *-que* may be the result of a banal dittography, one likely to occur when texts written in *scriptio continua* are copied. I would suggest: *amphitheatri perfecto opere, lautus[que] ueneno interiiit*. Confusions of *que/ue*, in both directions, are common in the transmission of any Latin text.¹⁵

II

Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 13.3: *quippe primus aut solus etiam uires Romanas trans Istrum propagauit, domitis in prouinciam Dacorum pilleatis satisque nationibus*.

The reading *satis* is obviously corrupted. The original reading must have been an adjective in the ablative, parallel to *pilleatis*. Several conjectures have been put forward: *Sacisque* by the early editors, *Iazygisque* by Schott, *aliisque* by Mommsen, *capillatisque* or *Sarmatisque* by Pichlmayr, *hirsutisque* or *bracatisque* by Dufraigne, *Scythisque* by Festy, *Scythicisque* by Colombo. None has imposed itself.¹⁶

The adjective juxtaposed with *pilleatis* may well be expected to designate another piece of clothing. The Dacians would be mentioned through reference to specific garments in the same way in which the Romans styled themselves as the *gens togata* (for example *Aen.* 1.282)¹⁷ and associated foreign peoples with certain clothes or clothing habits through adjectival epithets such as 'pallium-wearing' (Plaut. *Curc.* 288 *Graeci palliati*),

¹⁴ These celebrations are firmly dated to the spring/summer of the year 80: see Murison (n. 9), 199 on Cass. Dio 66.25.4 and 200 on 66.26.1. Admittedly, Dio's account is somewhat confused, and there exists the possibility that he may have erroneously thought that the Colosseum was dedicated in 81: cf. Murison (n. 9), 200 on Cass. Dio 66.26.1 and Murison (n. 12), 138. Victor may have thought the same, misled by Dio or some other source, but this is a rather speculative hypothesis and, however this may be, the problem of the odd coupling remains.

¹⁵ As was already clear to Servius in the fourth century: cf. his note on *Aen.* 2.37.

¹⁶ F. Pichlmayr, *Sexti Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus. Editio stereotypa correctior editionis primae* (Leipzig, 1970 [1911]); Dufraigne (n. 5); M. Festy, *Sextus Aurelius Victor, Livre des Césars. Édition critique et traduction* (Diss., Montpellier, 1991); M. Colombo, 'Due note danubiane', *Maia* 59 (2007), 344–51. The emendations by early editors, Schott and Mommsen are quoted by one or more of the listed editions. Nixon (n. 4), 63 opts for obelization.

¹⁷ For sources and bibliography, see, for instance, H.R. Goette, *Studien zu römischen Togadarstellungen* (Mainz am Rhein, 1990), 2 and n. 1.

'pilleus-wearing' (Mart. 10.72.5 *Parthos pilleatos*), 'trousered' (Pers. 3.53 *bracatis Medis*; and cf. the phrase *Gallia bracata*, designating Gallia Narbonensis as attested, for example, by Plin. *HN* 3.31), 'dressed in garments of Canusian wool' (Mart. 9.22.9 *Canusinatus Syrus*), 'ungirt' (*Aen.* 8.724 *discintos Afros*; Sil. *Pun.* 2.56 *discinctos Libyas*).

On the Arch of Constantine, Trajan's Column and other ancient artefacts, the Dacians are identified by their typical outfit, which consisted predominantly of *pillei*, *bracae* and *saga*.¹⁸ Victor was surely familiar with the Dacian dress, both from observation of these and similar monuments and through direct contact with real-life Dacians. Indigenous Dacian communities survived the Roman conquest and were integrated into the new province created by Trajan,¹⁹ one of the few things we know for sure about Victor is that, while writing the *De Caesaribus*, he was serving in the imperial bureaucracy at Sirmium, on the border between Pannonia and the former province of Dacia Apulensis (Amm. Marc. 21.10.6). The text written by Victor may have been: *domitis in prouinciam Dacorum pilleatis sagatisque nationibus*. A haplographic dropping of the syllable *ga* after *sa* is palaeographically probable and could have been facilitated by the semantic autonomy of the remaining letters (*satis*).

Support for this proposal comes from an analysis of Victor's references to clothing throughout his work. His *De Caesaribus* compresses 400 years of Roman history into only about fifty-five Teubner pages. Given this extreme condensation of material, it may seem surprising that Victor mentions an ethnographic detail such as the typical attire of a foreign people. In fact, the remark about the Dacians' *pillei* is the only ethnographic reference to clothing in the entire work, a circumstance that (however one emends the text) invites closer inspection. Excluding *Caes.* 13.3, there are 15 mentions of clothes, or lack thereof, in Victor. Of these, 2 are found in metaphorical or quasi-metaphorical phrases; the remaining 13 references (86 per cent) involve an employment of clothes that is forbidden, inappropriate or unusual.²⁰ Victor's fixation with the misuse of clothes is remarkable. It can be explained by various circumstances. In general, the ancient Romans were intensely preoccupied with the social implications of clothing.²¹ Imperial historians were often interested in the emperors' sartorial preferences as an indicator of their personality and character.²² Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, fourth-century bureaucratic officials such as Victor were obsessed with

¹⁸ Dacian captives wearing both a *pilleus* and a *sagum* figure prominently on the Arch of Constantine: see e.g. I. Ferris, *The Arch of Constantine. Inspired by the Divine* (Stroud, 2013), plates nos. 1, 10, 39 (between pages 96 and 97) and pages 50–5, 140 n. 2. For Dacians wearing the *sagum* on Trajan's Column, see F. Coarelli, *The Column of Trajan* (Rome, 2000), plates nos. 23–5, 28, 31, 40–1, 45–7, 68–9, 73–5, 79, 88, 105, 110–13, 146–9, 159–62, 169–70. Coins: *BMCRE* vol. 3 Trajan 839 = *RIC* II 543. Abundant materials on the iconography of the Dacians are now available in I. Nemeti, 'Dacians in Roman art', in S. Nemeti and D. Dana (edd.), *The Dacians in the Roman Empire* (Cluj-Napoca, 2019), 99–159.

¹⁹ D. Rascu, 'The supposed extermination of the Dacians: the literary tradition', in W.S. Hanson and I.P. Haynes, *Roman Dacia. The Making of a Provincial Society* (*JRA Supplement* 56) (Portsmouth, Rhode Island, 2004), 75–85, at 80–2 nn. 53–4.

²⁰ Forbidden: 40.25. Inappropriate: 3.10, 3.12, 3.13, 5.5, 6.3 (on the implications: R. Laurence, 'Investigating the emperor's *toga*: privileging images on coins', in M. Harlow [ed.], *Dress and Identity* [Oxford, 2012], 69–81, at 77), 27.1, 39.6 (*habitus* = 'clothing', not 'condition'; cf. J.A. Stover and G. Woudhuysen, 'Aurelius Victor and the ending of Sallust's *Jugurtha*', *Hermathena* 199 [2015], 93–134). Unusual or extravagant: 5.7, 21.1, 39.2. Nudity: 16.2, 21.3. Metaphorical: 14.1; 39.23.

²¹ Cf., for instance, U. Rothe, *The Toga and Roman Identity* (London, 2020), 12; A. Starbatty, *Aussehen ist Ansichtssache: Kleidung in der Kommunikation der römischer Antike* (Munich, 2010).

²² Cf., for instance, Stover and Woudhuysen (n. 20), 94–6 with some examples and bibliography.

dress code and clothing etiquette; this reflected the internal conflict within the late antique Roman elite between the civilian togate administrators and the increasingly powerful ‘barbarian’ upstarts from the military, whom the former criticized owing to their failure to conform to the Roman clothing traditions.²³ Victor’s focus on the misuse of clothes by Romans and his lack of curiosity about the costumes of foreign peoples together suggest that he may have meant his reference to the Dacian *pillei* at *Caes.* 13.3 not as a purely descriptive ethnographic detail but rather as a remark on a wardrobe choice that, to his eyes, seemed unorthodox.

How do these considerations relate to the conjecture that I have proposed above? The Dacians’ combination of *pillei* and *saga* must have shocked ancient Romans. These two garments belonged to the category of clothes that Roman citizens wore only on special occasions, which required them to put aside the traditional *toga*. But *pillei* and *saga* were associated, in Roman culture until the fourth century, with inherently opposite situations and feelings: the *pilleus* was worn during the merriment of the Saturnalia (with the concomitant adoption of a *synthesis* replacing the *toga*) and other festive celebrations; the *sagum* was worn (instead of the *toga*) during periods of mourning or national crisis.²⁴ That the *pilleus* and the *sagum* were perceived by ancient Romans as antithetical and, practically, as a contrasting pair is shown by Sen. *Ep.* 18. During the Saturnalia, Seneca urges Lucilius to do the opposite of the ‘*pilleus*-wearing’ crowd (18.3 *pilleatae turbae*) at least for a few days; this involves sleeping on a crude pallet, eating grimy bread and wearing a *sagum* (18.7).

In line with his preoccupation with anomalous clothing, Victor may have singled out *pillei* and *saga* at 13.3 precisely because the Dacians wore them simultaneously whereas for a Roman—and especially for a fourth-century bureaucrat—they were incompatible.

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²³ P. von Rummel, *Habitus Barbarus: Kleidung und Repräsentation spätantiker Eliten im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert* (Berlin, 2007); Rothe (n. 21), 155–6.

²⁴ For the *pilleus* as symbol of freedom and happiness, see L. Cleland, G. Davies and Ll. Llewellyn-Jones, *Greek and Roman Dress from A to Z* (London and New York, 2007), 148 and cf. e.g. Suet. *Ner.* 57.1. For the *sagum*, see the documentation in Alan Cameron, *The Last Pagans of Rome* (Oxford, 2011), 289–92 and cf. Oros. *Hist.* 5.18.15 *uestis maeroris*.