

Aurelius Victor: De Caesaribus

Translated with an introduction
and commentary by
H. W. BIRD



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Front cover drawing: Representation of a fourth-century Alamannic soldier.

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Volume 17

**LIBER DE CAESARIBUS
OF
SEXTUS AURELIUS VICTOR**

TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION
AND COMMENTARY

BY

H. W. BIRD

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PREFACE

This book is intended as a companion volume to my *Sextus Aurelius Victor: A Historiographical Study* (Liverpool, Francis Cairns, 1984), and *Eutropius: Breviarium* (Liverpool University Press, 1993). In general I have attempted to avoid replicating material found in them. The text followed, with a few exceptions noted in the commentary, is the Teubner edition of F.R. Pichlmayr and R. Gruendel, Leipzig, 1966. For purposes of comparison I have consulted the English translation of C.E.V. Nixon (Ann Arbor, 1971), the French translation of P. Dufraigne (Paris, 1975), and, very occasionally, the Russian translation of V.S. Sokolov (Moscow, 1963). In order to accommodate students the Loeb editions of classical sources were used when available.

I should again like to thank Gillian Clark for some kind and useful suggestions, also Mrs. Margie Prytulak, our secretary, for her indefatigable efforts, my university for granting me a Research Professorship when it was most needed, and my wife for her patience.

H. W. Bird
Windsor, Ontario
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untimely deaths, except for Octavian's, as well as by the deaths of his mother and brothers whom Tiberius had eliminated in various ways.³ For this reason everyone strove to mitigate the misfortune of such a great family with their expectations of the very young man; then again, because he had been born in the army⁴ (where he had acquired his surname from a military boot) he was loved and accepted by the legions. Furthermore, all the most sensible people believed that he would be like his relatives, but it turned out quite differently, as if by some law of nature which frequently, as if by design, produces bad men from good, boors from quite learned men and others of this kind or the opposite. In fact from his example many intelligent men have decided that it is more beneficial not to have children.⁵ Moreover in Caligula's case they were not very far from the truth inasmuch as for a long time he had so concealed the enormities of his nature by his proper behaviour and pretence of obedience that it was justly said in public that there had never been better servants nor a harsher master than he.⁶ Finally, after obtaining power, as is customary with people of such a disposition at the beginning, for several months of that year he granted extraordinary benefits to the people, the senators and the soldiers,⁷ and when a conspiracy had been reported, as if he did not believe it, he declared that it could hardly have been undertaken against him whose life was a burden or detriment to no one.⁸ But suddenly, after he had first killed a few innocent people through various crimes, he revealed the nature, as it were, of a wild beast that has tasted blood.⁹ And so thereafter three years passed while the world was defiled with the widespread murders of senators and nobles. Furthermore he amused himself by debauching his sisters and (mockingly) marrying noblewomen, and would go about dressed like a god since he claimed that he was Jupiter on account of his incest, but also Liber because of his chorus of Bacchantes.¹⁰ Similarly he concentrated his legions in one place with the expectation of crossing over into Germany, then ordered them to gather mussels and cockles on the shore of the Ocean while he