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The Title and Manuscript Tradition of the De viris illustribus

The De Viris Illustribus is a series of 77 short units covering Roman history from Proca to Pompey. The work is contained in Sexti Aurelii Victoris Liber de Caesaribus, edited by Francis Pichlmayr, published in 1911, corrected by Gruendel and reprinted in 19611). Manuscript studies conducted by J. B. Titchener at the Ohio State University show that Pichlmayr’s 1911 edition of the text is greatly in error and thus the 1961 reprint is not reliable either. The figure below gives the stemma of the earlier and more important manuscripts of the De Viris Illustribus. Titchener cites numerous instances which prove the existence of a single archetype2). The strongest single example occurs at the opening of Chapter 26, where all the manuscripts omit the name of Publius Decius Mus. Another important instance is in Chapter 4, where all the manuscripts have the identical error iovi delicio Titchener has also proved that manuscripts o and p are of doubtful value in establishing the archetype, since they are so highly edited. Since o and p are of doubtful value in recovering the archetype, they are obviously not good evidence for the original text. Pichlmayr, however, follows o and p very closely, even to the point of including nine extra lives (78–86) which were probably not in the archetype.

The first step in establishing the text of the De Viris Illustribus is to recover the text of the archetype. This project immediately reveals two surprising facts. The title of the archetype is not De Viris Illustribus and Gaius Plinius Secundus is the author according to the codices. It is unclear which Pliny is intended since the works of both Pliny the Elder and Pliny the Younger were circulated under the name of C. Plinius Secundus. All of the

earlier and more important codices have the name *Gaius Plinius Secundus* except for *o*, which omits *Gaius*, and *p* which omits *Gaius* and *Secundus*.

The title of the archetype is not *De Viris Illustribus* but *De Illustribus*. *V* has the reading *De Illustribus*; *(X)* was either *De Illustribus* or *Illustrium*. Since *f* has *De Illustribum*, it appears likely that *(X)* had that reading and that *N*, *R* and *L* omitted *De*, since they recognized that the text was faulty. *C* and *S* have the title *De Viris Illustribus* which was the correction made by *(λ)*. Pichlmayr follows *o* and *p* which also contain the reading *De Viris Illustribus*.

**STEMMA**

Archetype *(A₁) *(x) *V *(A₂) *(x¹) *(δ) *(x²) *N *(λ) *(x³) *R *f *L *C *(ψ) *S 15th century MSS *O *P 15th century MSS.

**SIGLA**

*V* Vaticanus 1917 anno MCCCXXVIII
*o* Oxoniensis 131 S. XV
*p* Bruxellensis (Pulmannianus) 9755 S. XV
*N* Barberinus IV C 34 S. XIV
*f* Reginensis Suec. 1494 S. XIV/XV
*L* Regina Lat. 1399 S. XIV
*R* Rossiano Lat. 395 S. XIV
*C* Oxoniensis 147 S. XIV/XV
*S* Hispalensis (in bibl. Columbina) AA 144. 50 S. XIV

(The two groups of 15th century manuscripts derived from *(ψ)* and *(δ)* are of little significance in determining the archetype).
The original title cannot be recovered except by emendation. Possibly the *De* governed a noun (or nouns) in the ablative case which at some point was lost, along with a noun which *illustrium* modified (e.g. *De illustrium virorum factis*). Hyginus, writing about famous men, entitled his work *De vita rebusque illustrium virorum*). The title by which the work has been traditionally known is the grammatically correct *De Viris Illustribus*, the reading of later manuscripts.

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A Note on Menander Dysc. 101 sq.

A pathetic crone, the Simiche of somewhat later, pointed out the hillock to him. Shortly after, with the scene vivid to his mind, Pyrrhias described his impressions. The old fellow up there was driving himself without stint. His pear trees had on them the wild crop which, sooner or later, he would feed to the stock. He kept on accumulating it, but all the same the stretching and the stooping at that age visibly perplexed his bones. Young Pyrrhias wondered whether, at the end of his day’s labour, the pears the crofter had gathered would be quite as abundant as his aches.

προσηλθεὶς μοι
γραίς τις κακοδαίμων. [αὐτῷ ὄνει δ’ οὖν λέγων
ἐπηρε’, ἐδειξεν αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ λοφίδου
ἐκεῖ περπατεῖσθαι, ἄρραδας ἢ πολύν
κόρων’ ἐαντὸς συλλέγοντα]

What he achieved with that was not a new witticism. It had a tradition behind it, and not unexpectedly, given the harshness of the earth in parts of Attica.

*Peisistratus*, you may read, taxed the Athenians by a tenth of what their farms would yield. As he was out one day, he asked an old husbandman who worked the ground where the other could only see rock and the perfect site for a quarry: “What sort of crops can you take off fields like these?” This one had an answer for him: “Pains is all I ever win, pains and sores, but Peisistratus sees that he gets a tithe of them!” The tyrant liked that, and in an accession of favoritism certified that for being blunt with him he would no longer be subject to the tax. “A tax-payer less, and thanks to his sores”: that used to be a cant word in Attica, and it arose as a comment on the roadside incident*.  

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1) Most understand Knemon to be actually ὄρθας συλλέγοντα, at the same time to be figuratively κόρων’ ἐαντὸς συλλέγοντα, and they definitely give to κόρων, literally a “pillory”, the meaning of a “painful stiffness”. But some cannot or cannot quite overcome their uneasiness. The present note attempts to convince the doubting by illustrating from elsewhere the widely accepted interpretation.