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## Rutilius Namatianus, Melania the Younger, and the Monks of Capraria

Gavin Kelly

The elegiac poem of Rutilius Namatianus *De Reditu Suo*, 'On his Return', which describes his sea-voyage from Rome to his native Gaul in the autumn of 417, left little impact in Antiquity.<sup>1</sup> But ever since its rediscovery in 1493, it has charmed readers, a late antique poem admired even by those who do not generally love late antique poetry. Rutilius' metre and language are classicizing, his debt to Vergil and Ovid is plain, and he is the last Latin poet we know to have been a pagan; these facets, combined with his poignant praises of the Roman world-empire in his hymn to Rome, gave him a nostalgic place at the end of many histories of Latin literature. In part because of the poem's sense of place and landscape on the voyage up the Italian coast, it has been particularly popular in Italy, where it has even inspired a film.<sup>2</sup>

The last pagan Latin poet, perhaps the last pagan prefect of Rome, seems a most appropriate topic with which to honour Alan Cameron.<sup>3</sup> Alan's most important scholarly contribution on our poet came in an early article of 1967: 'Rutilius Namatianus, St. Augustine, and the Date of the *De Reditu Suo*'.<sup>4</sup> Rutilius was writing – or at least his poem is set – in the 1169<sup>th</sup> year of Rome (1.135-6): 'although with a thousand years and sixteen decades completed, your ninth year besides is passing'.<sup>5</sup> But given uncertainties in the calendar which it is not necessary to elaborate here, there has been debate as to how to interpret this information. It was long thought that Rutilius' voyage belonged to the autumn of 416. Jérôme Carcopino had argued that the actual date was 417, while in his book on Rutilius of 1961 Italo Lana argued for 415.<sup>6</sup> Alan followed Carcopino, but refined the latter's argument from astrological references and added an allusion

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It is an honour to offer this piece in affectionate memory of Alan Cameron. The names of all those who have heard versions of this piece and have made useful comments elude me, but I would like to acknowledge help of various sorts from Cornelia van der Poll, Kate Cooper, Fabio Guidetti, Michael Hendry, Calum Maciver, and Adriano Russo, as well as from this book's editors.

<sup>1</sup> Sidonius is Rutilius' only certain reader from Antiquity (e.g. Brocca 2003-2004, 285-90), though suggestions have been made about possible echoes in the *Epigrammata Bobiensia*; Russo 2019 has now identified the influence of Rutilius on the verse of Paul the Deacon in the late eighth century.

<sup>2</sup> Claudio Bondi, *De reditu – il ritorno* (2004).

<sup>3</sup> Whether you consider Rutilius the last known pagan prefect of Rome (he held the office briefly in mid-414) will depend on whether you accept Alan Cameron's argument for the Christianity of his friend Volusianus, appointed prefect during Rutilius' journey (1.415-428, and see n. 11 below).

<sup>4</sup> Cameron 1967b; see also Cameron 1970, 250-1.

<sup>5</sup> *Quamuis sedecies denis et mille peractis  
annus praeterea iam tibi nonus eat.*

<sup>6</sup> Carcopino 1928 (reprinted and amplified 1963); Lana 1961, ch. 1.

to St Augustine as part of the proof. The overwhelming weight of the evidence is on his side, and his argument is made much more efficiently than Carcopino's or Lana's. Classical scholars, reconstructing texts and events on the basis of limited evidence, cannot have more than faint hope that a new source will be discovered and prove their theories correct. But that is exactly what happened to Alan in this case. Six years after his article came out, Mirella Ferrari published a scrap of parchment, dateable to ca. 700, which was reused to patch up the lower margin of a page of a Turin codex (F IV 25, folio 22r). It contained two fragmentary passages from the lost parts of Rutilius' second book.<sup>7</sup> In the second the poet sings the praises of the master of the soldiers and future emperor Constantius III, and refers to his second consulship – precisely in 417. So Alan was proved right.<sup>8</sup>

But Rutilius Namatianus is also found, as one would expect, in the long cast-list of *The Last Pagans of Rome*, where a part of a chapter is dedicated to analysis of the author's attitude to Christianity. Although Alan Cameron concurs (with near certainty, at any rate) with the general view that Rutilius was a pagan, he adduces the praises of Constantius as evidence against interpreting the poem as pagan polemic, and argues that the passages that have been seen as attacks on Christianity would not have seemed so to contemporaries.<sup>9</sup> The central focus of this article is one of these passages. The poet's voyage home to Gaul takes him past the island of Capraria (modern Capraia). The sight of Capraria, an established monastery when Rutilius sailed in autumn 417, provokes the poet into a tirade against monks (1.439-52). After discussing individual points of the passage (section 2), I suggest that this passage makes coded reference to one of the great celebrities of fifth-century monasticism, Melania the Younger (section 3), and to explore the implications of this link for our understanding of both Rutilius and Melania. Before that, however, I would like to show why we might expect Rutilius' poem to contain such a coded reference (section 1).

### 1. *De reditu suo as a poème à clé*

Rutilius' readers have long had the feeling that this is poetry strongly directed at a particular social or literary circle. Throughout the poet's journey, places skirted prompt reflexion on the recent past, and people encountered prompt passages of praise or blame. In particular, the first

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<sup>7</sup> Ferrari 1973, 12-13, 15-30.

<sup>8</sup> Some Italian literary scholars have clung loyally but most unconvincingly to Lana's date of 415: see e.g. Brocca 2005, 170-84. Note also a curiosity, Stéphane Ratti's republication of Carcopino 1963 in the French electronic journal *Anabases* with a short prefatory article entitled 'Rutilius Namatianus: Jérôme Carcopino avait raison!' (Ratti 2012b). He explains how Carcopino's arguments had been definitively confirmed by the discovery of the Turin fragments. But though he has a full scholarly apparatus, Ratti never mentions the name of Alan Cameron, seemingly unwilling to acknowledge that he too was right

<sup>9</sup> Cameron 2011a, 207-18, esp. 208.

book alone has nine passages in praise of aristocratic friends, almost all of them praised specifically as holders of high office; the Turin fragments from the second book, discovered in 1973, add a tenth.<sup>10</sup> Some scholars tended to identify the friends of Rutilius as being universally pagans, members of the circle of Symmachus, and an incidental achievement of Alan Cameron's in the *Last Pagans* is to show both how weak the evidence for is in several cases, and how misguided it is to link those named to Symmachus, 15 years dead at the time of Rutilius' voyage.<sup>11</sup> There is also a series of invectives, including that provoked by the monks of Capraria. A second and equally vigorous anti-monastic passage is found at the island of Gorgo; the attack is on a specific hermit rather than cenobites, an unnamed aristocrat who gave up his marriage and his wealth for a filthy and degraded life there (1.515-26). Previously, an encounter with a disagreeable Jewish landlord prompted a forceful – indeed notorious – anti-semitic rant (1.381-99), and at the beginning of the second book, there is an attack on the late generalissimo Stilicho (2.41-60).

A related quality which can also be seen in *De reditu suo* is that it appears to be, to some extent, a *poème à clé*, a work in which some items are reported without names being given, in a way that would nevertheless have been understood by well-informed early readers. In a simple form, this comes with the poet's references to his friend Rufius Antonius Agrypnius Volusianus. The name by which he was generally known (the diacritic), Völüşānus, would not fit into elegiac verse. When first mentioned (1.170-2), he is *Rufius.../ qui Volusi antiquo deriuat stemmate nomen / et reges Rutulos teste Marone refert* ('Rufius, who derives his name from the ancient line of Volusus, and recalls the Rutulian kings, as witnessed by Vergil'). Alessandro Fo has suggested that the poet reveals somewhat more of Volusianus' full name by the juxtaposition of the words *Volusi antiquo*.<sup>12</sup> And at Volusianus' second appearance, the metrical problem is specifically indicated (1.419-422): 'I should like to embrace your true name in my poem, but a harsh rule shuns some feet; your *cognomen* will come in my verse, dearest Rufius; by it my page sings you before now.'<sup>13</sup> This sort of self-conscious circumlocution is not so rare in ancient poetry (one

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<sup>10</sup> 1.165-178 Volusianus and his father Albinus; 1.207-216 Palladius and his father Exuperantius; 1.267-276 Messala; 1.415-428 Volusianus again; 1.465-474 Albinus; 1.491-510 Victorinus; 1.541-558 Protadius; 1.575-596 Lachanius, the poet's father; 1.599-614 Decius and his father Lucillus. In book 2, fr. A11-16 (and beyond?), Marcellinus. Of these, only the youthful Palladius is not referred to as an office-holder.

<sup>11</sup> On the view that all Rutilius' friends were pagans see e.g. Corsaro 1981, 86, Cameron 2011a, 362, and 188-9 on Protadius, and 196-7 on Volusianus.

<sup>12</sup> Fo 2004, 180-191, esp. 189.

<sup>13</sup> *optarem uerum complecti carmine nomen, / sed quosdam refugit regula dura pedes. / cognomen uersu tuenerist, carissime Rufi; / illo te dudum pagina nostra canit.* I translate *ueniet* (Vessereau) for the unmetrical *ueneris*.

might exemplify from one of Rutilius' major models, Ovid's *Ex Ponto* 4.12.1-16) and the code is hardly difficult to break.

A rather more complex example of coded language arises when the poet's party halts at Portus Herculis (modern Porto Ercole, on the south of Monte Argentario). The rebel consul Lepidus had camped there in 78 BC, and this leads into an enumeration of four wicked Lepidi of Roman history, including the triumvir (1.295-306). The passage ends (1.307-12):

nunc quoque – sed melius de nostris fama queretur:  
iudex posteritas semina dira notet.  
nominibus certos credam decurrere mores?  
moribus an potius nomina certa dari?  
quidquid id est, mirus Latiis annalibus ordo,  
quod Lepidum totiens recidit ense malum.

Now too... but rumour will do better at complaining about our times. Let posterity be the judge that marks this ominous race. Should I believe that fixed characters run in names, or rather that fixed names are given to characters? Whatever the answer, there's an astonishing pattern in Latin histories, in that Lepidan infection so often recurs with the sword.

The poet seems about to indicate a modern recurrence of the name Lepidus in the person of a contemporary villain, but interrupts himself. There is clearly a fifth Lepidus, or more than one further Lepidus,<sup>14</sup> not identified in the text (though quite what we are to infer about him or them will depend on the interpretation of the obscure line 1.312). As it happens, a plausible conjecture has been made, by A. Zumpt in 1837: one of the very few attested Lepidi of late antiquity is Claudius Lepidus, a former provincial governor, *magister memoriae*, and *comes rerum privatarum*, who, probably in the first decade of the fifth century, helped his brother and brother's wife in the establishment of a walled Christian community called Theopolis ('the city of God!') at Sisteron in Provence.<sup>15</sup> The fifth Lepidus is usually thought to be not this man but his more famous brother, Claudius Postumus Dardanus, who as praetorian prefect of Gaul in c. 411-13 had played a significant and violent role in putting down the usurpation of Jovinus, and who was still execrated by members of the Gallic aristocracy half a century later (see Sidonius *Ep.* 5.9.1).<sup>16</sup> Fo has argued for the existence of a cryptographical hint at the name Postumus

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<sup>14</sup> So Castorina ad loc.

<sup>15</sup> *CIL* 12.1524 = *ILS* 1279. On the date see *PLRE* 2 s.v. Dardanus.

<sup>16</sup> See Zumpt 1837, 81-83; Lana 1961, 61-73; among recent literature supported by Fischer 1986 and Fo 2004; for a contrary view see Frye 1993.

Dardanus in the words *posteritas* (1.308) and *dari* (1.310).<sup>17</sup> Whatever our conclusions, this passage shows that Rutilius is prone to coded language when speaking negatively about his contemporaries. Similarly, the ascetic on Gorgo is left unnamed, and in one of the fragments discovered in 1973 there is a reference to a *praedo sagatus*, a brigand in a military cloak, seemingly otherwise unnamed (a usurper, perhaps?<sup>18</sup>). All this suggests that we should be ready to see potential coded reference in other passages too, such as that concerning Capraria.

A second preliminary assumption to be made about the Capraria passage is that it should be read alongside other passages of invective in the work. This applies particularly, perhaps, to the anti-semitic passage and the attack on the hermit, but we should also bear in mind the passage just discussed on the fifth Lepidus (which, if it refers to Dardanus or his brother, could be related to their status as founders of a Christian community), and the attack on the late generalissimo Stilicho in the second book. In most of these passages, a generalized attack arises from the example of one particular individual. In fact, practice and methods of invective have much in common across these passages.<sup>19</sup>

## 2. The monks of Capraria and Rutilius' invective

Processu pelagi iam se Capraria tollit:	
squalet lucifugis insula plena uiris.	440
ipsi se monachos Graio cognomine dicunt,	
quod soli nullo uiuere teste uolunt.	
munera Fortunae metuunt, dum damna uerentur:	
quisquam sponte miser, ne miser esse queat?	
quaenam peruersi rabies tam stulta cerebri,	445
dum mala formides, nec bona posse pati?	
siue suas repetunt factorum <sup>20</sup> ergastula poenas,	
tristia seu nigro uiscera felle tument,	
sic nimiae bilis morbum adsignauit Homerus	
Bellerophonteis sollicitudinibus:	450
nam iuueni offenso saeui post tela doloris	

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<sup>17</sup> Fo 2004, 179.

<sup>18</sup> Sivan 1986, 526, argued for a reference to Alaric. It could of course be that in this case the name of the individual was on the lost left hand part of the page (though there is little room for it) or was revealed after the end of the fragment.

<sup>19</sup> For the importance of reading these passages together see also Verbaal 2006, 168-80.

<sup>20</sup> The reading of the archetype was *fatorum* (**VR**); Sannazaro suggested *fatorum* in the margin of **V**, and Pio's editio princeps (**B**) printed *ex fato* (also a conjecture). For confusion in the ms tradition between *facta* and *fata* cf. 1.92 (where the second *facta* should be emended to *fata*).

dicitur humanum displicuisse genus.

On the advance over the main Capraria now raises itself: the island is dingy, full of men who shun the light. They call themselves by a Greek surname, *monachoi*, because they wish to live alone without any witness. They fear the gifts of Fortune, while they dread her losses: would anyone to escape misery live of his own choice in misery? What stupid madness of a distorted brain is it not to be able to endure good things because you fear bad ones? whether they seek the slave-houses as their punishment for their deeds, or whether their sad innards swell with black bile. It was even so that Homer assigned the disease of excessive gall to Bellerophon's troubles: for it was after the arrows of a savage grief that the stricken youth is said to have conceived his loathing for the human race.

The island of Capraria lies around 50 kilometers west of from the Tuscan coast, roughly on the same latitude as Populonia (from where Rutilius was setting out) and as the northern tip of Corsica, a further 30 kilometers to the west. The island can be seen from the Tuscan coast in the right weather, and there is no reason to doubt that Rutilius and his crew saw it, but they are unlikely to have sailed very close and its inclusion was far from inevitable (the poem is not, after all, a faithful diary<sup>21</sup>). There had been monks on Capraria for at least twenty years at the time when Rutilius was writing, following a general trend towards monastic establishments in the islands both of the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Adriatic.<sup>22</sup> We learn from Orosius (*Hist.* 7.36.4) that there was an established monastery there early in the year 398 when Mascazel landed at the island on his way to Africa to fight against his brother Gildo. In the same year, Augustine sent a letter to an abbot named Eudoxius (*Ep.* 48).

A number of remarks on this text may be made. First, the overall charge against the monks of cutting themselves off from the world through hatred of the human race associates this passage with the attack on the hermit of Gorgo (*homines terrasque reliquit*, 1.521), but there is also a similarity with the attack on the Jewish innkeeper as *humanis animal dissociate cibis*, 'an animal cut off from human foods (1.384).<sup>23</sup> The association of the object of invective with animals is also present in the second anti-monastic passage: the hermit of Gorgo is described as transformed in his mind by his *secta* as the bodies of Odysseus' sailors were by Circe's magic (1.525-6). His

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<sup>21</sup> See Paschoud 1978, esp. 325.

<sup>22</sup> The standard work is Jenal 1995; see esp. 1.121-5 and 429-31.

<sup>23</sup> Note how the Kosher practice of avoiding certain foods, especially animals, is turned round to call the Jew himself an animal and how the hapax *dissociate* creates an allusion by opposition to the Aristotelian idea of man as *animal sociale*, represented in Latin by Seneca (*Ben.* 7.1.7, *Clem.* 1.3.2) and Lactantius (*Div. Inst.* 6.10.10, 17.20; *Epit.* 29.2).

assimilation to a spiritual pig reinforces the suggestion of the previous line that in his delusion the wretch believes that heavenly things can feed on filth (*infelix putat illuuiē caelestia pasci*, 1.523).<sup>24</sup> A similar association could also be identified within this passage, as Latin readers would probably associate the word *lucifugi* with Vergil's *Georgics* 4.243, where it denotes the beetles, *blatti*, that threaten to eat the bees' honey.

Line 442 glosses the word *monachi* in the previous line, as an unpoetic loanword from Greek, in which it was also a neologism.<sup>25</sup> Although glossing Christian words was not necessarily a sign of hostility, it seems to be so in this case.<sup>26</sup> A detail of the gloss is also worth questioning: the words *nullo teste*, with no witness, which are strictly speaking redundant alongside *soli* rendering *monachi*, might perhaps evoke the other meaning of *testis*, suggesting that these men (metaphorically or even literally) have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven's sake (Matthew 19.12). This double entendre is not unfamiliar in Latin literature, as for example in an extended passage near the end of Plautus' *Miles Gloriosus* (1420 and 1426).<sup>27</sup>

The interpretation of line 447 is unusually ambiguous by the standards of the author. The issues, all interrelated, are: 1) does *ergastula* mean prison-workhouses for slaves (the primary meaning), or is it here (also well-attested) a metonymy referring to the slaves from such a workhouse?<sup>28</sup> 2) And is it therefore nominative (as in the latter case) or accusative plural in apposition to *suas...poenas*? 3) should we read *fatorum* or *factorum* and is the genitive plural

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<sup>24</sup> *Illuuiēs* also of course summons up the stereotype of monks as unwashed, as does *squalet* in our passage (1.440).

<sup>25</sup> That said, this was not the word's first appearance in poetry: cf. Damasus *Carm.* 78.7, Paul. Nol. *Carm.* 17.219 (AD 400), 24.331 (?AD 400); it seems likely that Rutilius was aware at least of the poetry of Paulinus (see Guttilla 1994-95 and n. 35 below). It was a recent word in Greek too: Eunapius in similar fashion refers to τοὺς καλομένους μονάχους (*VS* 468), and a famous epigram of Palladas (*AP* 11.389) played on the neologism, asking εἰ μοναχοί, τί τοσοῖδε; τοσοῖδε δέ, πῶς πάλι μούνοι;/ ὦ πληθὺς μοναχῶν ψευσαμένη μονάδα ('If *monachoi*, why so many? Being so many, why again 'alone'? O multitude of *monachoi* laying false claim to solitariness!')

<sup>26</sup> This phenomenon in Greek and Latin historiography is the subject of one of Alan Cameron's earliest articles, co-authored with Averil Cameron (1964).

<sup>27</sup> For this play on words see Adams 1982, 67, who additionally cites Plautus *Curc.* 31, Phaedr. 3.11.5, Mart. 7.62.6, *Priap.* 15.7. I would also draw attention to an inspired conjecture by Michael Hendry on Juvenal 6.311, which has been accepted into Braund's Loeb text. The drunken Roman matrons urinate in the streets on the way home and then indulge in spontaneous outdoor Lesbian sex. The paradosis is *in uices equitant et luna teste mouentur* ('they take it in turns to ride and thrash about, witnessed by the moon'). Hendry (1996-97, 256-7) emends to *nullo teste* ('with none to witness/ without male genitalia').

<sup>28</sup> *TLL* s.v. *ergastulum*, B1 (5.2.758.3-23).



dependent on *ergastula* or on *poenas*? In my view, the association of islands with imprisonment as a punishment makes it preferable to see *ergastula* as slave workhouses, in apposition to *suas poenas factorum*, but other interpretations are possible.<sup>29</sup>

The critique of monasticism as misanthropic culminates in the marked and extended use of the example of Bellerophon, which is carefully marked as an allusion to Homer. In this, it shares features with both the other anti-monastic passage, in which the *secta* that inspires ascetic withdrawal is compared to Circe's magic (1.525), and the anti-Jewish invective, where the Jewish landlord at Falesia is called *hospite conductor durior Antiphate* (1.382) – a landlord harsher in his hospitality than Antiphates, the cannibal king of the Laestrygonians in *Odyssey* 10 (esp. 105-132). The citation of the Greek hero Bellerophon ostensibly looks to Homer *Iliad* 6.200-205:

ἀλλ' ὅτε δὴ καὶ κεῖνος ἀπήχθετο πᾶσι θεοῖσιν,  
ἦτοι ὁ καὶ πεδίον τὸ Ἀλήϊον οἶος ἀλᾶτο  
ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων, πάτον ἀνθρώπων ἀλεείνων·  
Ἴσανδρον δέ οἱ υἱὸν Ἄρης ἄτος πολέμοιο  
μαρνάμενον Σολύμοισι κατέκτανε κυδαλίμοισι·  
τὴν δὲ χολωσαμένη χρυσήνιος Ἄρτεμις ἔκτα.

But when Bellerophon came to be hated of all the gods, then he wandered alone over the Aleian plain, devouring his own soul, and shunning the paths of men; and Isander his son was slain by Ares insatiate of battle, as he fought against the glorious Solymi, and his daughter was slain in wrath by Artemis of the golden reins.

In dealing with western writers of the fourth and fifth centuries it is common for scholars to wonder whether vaunted knowledge of Homer is direct, indeed whether the author in question has a functional knowledge of Greek. This has been the case with Rutilius here and elsewhere: in one other ostensibly Homeric reference in the work (just before the departure from Rome), Homer is at the very least mediated through Ovid.<sup>30</sup> In this case too, there are Latin models that deserve to be taken seriously, above all the most important poetical engagement with asceticism that had yet been written in Latin, the verse-letter exchange between Ausonius and his former pupil Meropius Pontius Paulinus, the future bishop of Nola, written in the first half of the 390s. Together with his wife Therasia, and shortly after the deaths of his infant son and of his brother,

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<sup>29</sup> See in particular Bertotti 1969, n. 40 (on pp. 106-7). If *ergastula* is the subject, a translation might run 'if the workhouse slaves demand their own punishments for their crimes'.

<sup>30</sup> 1.195-6; cf. *Od.* 1.57-9. See Tissol 2002, 441-2.

Paulinus started selling their property and made a commitment to celibacy and asceticism.<sup>31</sup> In Ausonius' *Ep.* 29 (= 21 Green), he complains about the unknown person who has dissuaded Paulinus from replying to his letter, hoping that they live wretchedly in the wilderness (70-72):

...ceū dicitur olim  
mentis inops coetus hominum et uestigia uitans  
auiā perlustrasse uagus loca Bellerophontes.

Just as once, lost in mind and avoiding the intercourse and footprints of men they say  
wandering Bellerophon marked out the pathless places.

Ausonius' summary of the example of Bellerophon shows clear engagement with a passage of the *Tusculan disputations* (3.63), in which Cicero discusses excessive reactions to the deaths of one's loved ones and quotes the relevant passage of Homer in his own verse translation – Ausonius reproduces a half-line almost unchanged.<sup>32</sup> Paulinus replied to this jibe, as well as to Ausonius' previous comparison of Therasia to Tanaquil (*Ep.* 28 (=22 Green) 31), taking the attack on an unnamed person stopping him from writing as being a reference to himself – perhaps rightly.<sup>33</sup> The engagement with Ausonius' ideas goes across his two verse-letters,<sup>34</sup> but is particularly found in the following lines (Paulinus *Carm.* 10.189-192):

Ne me igitur, uenerande parens, his ut male uersum  
increpites studiis neque me uel coniuge carpas  
uel mentis uitio: non anxia Bellerophontis  
mens est nec Tanaquil mihi sed Lucretia coniunx

So do not chide me, revered father, as though I had turned to these pursuits perversely  
and do not twit me with my wife or with defect of mind. Mine is not the perturbed mind  
of Bellerophon, nor do I have as wife a Tanaquil but a Lucretia.

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<sup>31</sup> The bibliography on this correspondence is very considerable but see for example Trout 1999, 67-77, Rucker 2012, Brown 2012, 208-16, Fielding 2017, 22-51 (all of whom mention Rutilius' allusion).

<sup>32</sup> *ex hoc evenit, ut in animi doloribus alii solitudines captent, ut ait Homerus de Bellerophonte:*

*Qui miser in campis maerens errabat Aleis  
Ipse suum cor edens, hominum uestigia uitans.*

(“So it happens that some seek out deserted places when pained in spirit, as Homer says of Bellerophon: “who in wretched grief would wander on the Alean plains, eating his own heart, avoiding human tracks”).

<sup>33</sup> See e.g. Fielding 2017, 30-31.

<sup>34</sup> E.g. there is further engagement with the figure of Bellerophon at 10.157-9.

That Rutilius alludes to Ausonius and Paulinus seems certain, since the evidence for his knowledge of the former is unquestionable and that for his knowledge of the latter strong, since the use of a minor mythological *exemplum* from Homer to apply to monasticism is so distinct, and since the parallels go beyond simply the quoted passage.<sup>35</sup> For some readers, the interaction with the Latin texts has seemed primary, and scholars have expressed doubts about whether Rutilius actually had direct knowledge of Homer, partly because there are several differences from Homer.<sup>36</sup> Others will be discussed below, but most significantly, Homer does *not* attribute Bellerophon's troubles to an excess of black bile, i.e. melancholy (nor do Ausonius/ Paulinus).

This difference is in fact not such a strong argument for Rutilius being ignorant of Homer, since the idea that Bellerophon's 'eating up his heart' and isolating himself from humanity were to be associated with an excess of black bile has a long tradition.<sup>37</sup> The older *Scholia* (*Scholia vetera* bT ad *Il.* 6.202a) gloss the words ὄν θυμὸν κατέδων ('eating out his heart') with the explanation that 'he did not, as the newer writers say, isolate himself suffering from black bile, but grieving at the loss of his sons'.<sup>38</sup> The much later commentary of Eustathius (which however embraces much earlier material) at the same line points to one representative of the 'newer writers' who hold this view, glossing the whole line: 'i.e. fleeing from association with people, because spinning into melancholy, as Aristotle too reports in his own *Problems*.'<sup>39</sup> And indeed in *Problems* 30, 953a, Aristotle talks about melancholy, with examples including Ajax and Bellerophon, quoting these lines for his discussion of the latter. This does not prove beyond all doubt that Rutilius' knowledge of Homer was direct, but the fact that he is clearly aware of aspects of the Greek exegetical tradition is very suggestive. The interpretation is not otherwise attested in Latin, and my inference would be that Rutilius almost certainly did read Homer in the original, and in a text with marginal scholia.

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<sup>35</sup> Rutilius could be seen as echoing some of the language of Paulinus' *Carm.* 10 (e.g. 133, 134, 150 *perversus*; 135 *stulta Dei sapiens*; 197 *humanis... locis*). The reference to a madness in the brain (*rabies... cerebri*), however, goes beyond Ausonius and Paulinus's equivalents (*mens vaga, mentis inops, mentis uitio* etc.).

<sup>36</sup> For doubt as to knowledge of Homer at this point see Duval 1968, 185; Doblhofer 1970, 6-12, and 1972, 31-33 and 49-51; 1983, 000. I incline rather to the view of Tissol (2002, 439-41) that Rutilius follows a practice well known in earlier Latin writers of alluding to Homer through an intermediate text – what I would call, adapting Thomas 1986, a 'window allusion' (see Kelly 2008, 209-11 and for further references Tissol 2002, 441 n. 13). See also Fo 1992 on this passage and on 1.195-6.

<sup>37</sup> A point first made in print, as far as I know, by Fielding 2017, 32-33.

<sup>38</sup> οὐχ ὡς οἱ νεώτεροί φασι, μελαγχολάνας, ἀλλ' ὀδυνώμενος ἐπὶ τῇ τῶν παιδῶν ἀπωλείᾳ ἐμόναζεν.

<sup>39</sup> ἤγουν ἐκφεύγων τὴν μετ' ἀνθρώπων συνδιατριβήν, οἷα εἰς μελαγχολίαν ἐκκυλισθεῖς, καθὰ καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης ἐν τοῖς οἰκείοις ἰστορεῖ Προβλήμασι.

Rutilius' passage is violently hostile to monasticism, but its view of renunciation of the world as the result of mental illness was not culturally isolated. Christians like Ausonius could call excessive devotion to asceticism into question, particularly if it involved members of the upper classes. Ausonius in particular was writing in the aftermath of the execution of the extreme ascetic Priscillian of Avila and some of his aristocratic followers.<sup>40</sup> The idea of a link between withdrawal and melancholy was part of a wider discourse, and can be paralleled even in as unapologetic an ascete as Jerome.<sup>41</sup>

### 3. Melania the Younger?

I now wish to make a conjecture. I have argued that Rutilius' poem sometimes expresses itself in a coded way, and I would like to suggest that, along with other aspects of the passage, the specific reference to the monks' disease as *melancholia* is meant to hint at the name of Melania the Younger, who, with her husband Pinianus, was perhaps the most famous sponsor of monasticism in this period.<sup>42</sup> Melania was lauded by contemporaries, including Paulinus of Nola and Palladius in the *Lausiac History*, but the most detailed account comes in the life attributed to Gerontius, written not too long after her death in 439 and soon translated into Latin. A scion of an immensely rich and noble Roman family and granddaughter of another famous aristocratic ascetic, she was married to Pinianus, from a similarly exalted background, when she was in her fourteenth and he in his seventeenth year. According to Gerontius, she longed for a life of chastity from the start (*Vita Melaniae* 1). At any rate, after she had had two children and both had died, at the age of 20, she and Pinianus decided to renounce the world and began to liquidate their vast holdings of land and slaves and to give away the proceeds. This involved fighting the opposition of many senators (there were threats of confiscating the property they cared so little for to pay off Alaric's Goths) and, according to Gerontius, of members of their family – though her father relented on her deathbed and her mother Albina later joined her in asceticism.<sup>43</sup> Their departure from Italy shortly before the Gothic sack of Rome in 410 was not an easy one. Melania, Pinianus, and Albina spent the rest of their life

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<sup>40</sup> Trout 1999, 67-77.

<sup>41</sup> Jerome *Ep.* 125.16: *sunt qui humore cellarum immoderatisque ieiuniis taedio solitudinis ac nimia lectione ... uertuntur in μελαγχολίαν et Hippocratis magis fomentis quam nostris monitis indigent.*

<sup>42</sup> *PLRE* 1, s.v. Melania 2, Valerius Pinianus 2. The bibliography is extensive: see above all Clark 1984, Chin and Schroeder 2017 (on both Melaniae), and Brown 2012, 291-300, 322-5, 365-6. The standard edition of the life is Gorce 1962, and of the Latin version Laurence 2002; on the historicity of the life see also Barnes 2010, 249-52.

<sup>43</sup> See esp. Giardina 1988 and Brown 2012, 294-9, for how and why their senatorial peers were understandably alarmed.

founding monasteries around the Mediterranean on the proceeds of their sales, eventually settling in Palestine in 417. Melania was always controversial, and could be seen as either a woman of male virtues, and a figure of extraordinary generosity, or an unstable, anorexic, celebrity-hunting poor-little-rich-girl.

What should Capraria, where we hear only of male monks, have to do with Melania, a female monastic – and one who at the dramatic date of *De reditu suo* had just begun her residence in Palestine? At an early stage of her ascetic life, when she was still in Italy, her biographer lists Melania's and Pinianus' already worldwide benefactions (*Vita Graeca* 19):

Νήσους δὲ οὐκ ὀλίγας ὠνησάμενοι ἁγίοις ἀνδράσιν ἔδωρήσαντο· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἀσκητήρια μοναχῶν τε καὶ ἀειπαρθένων ὠνησάμενοι τοῖς οἰκοῦσιν αὐτὰ ἐχαρίσαντο, χρυσίον ἐκάστῳ τόπῳ τὸ ἱκανὸν παρέχοντες

Having bought not a few islands they gave them to holy men; likewise having bought monasteries of monks and eternal virgins they gifted them to those that lived there, providing each place with a sufficiency of gold.<sup>44</sup>

So Melania and Pinianus could well have bought and endowed a pre-existent monastery on Capraria. In that case, contemporary readers would have been prepared for a reference.

In arguing for a reference to Melania, one may start with the simple fact of her celebrity. Rutilius' reference to those who dread the gifts of fortune because they fear her losses, (1.443) may imply a particular concern with those renouncing great wealth rather than humbler monastics; the losses of fortune could then refer to the death of her children, which, in Palladius' account, played a major role in Melania and Pinianus' withdrawal. But this possible relationship is made very much more forceful by the *exemplum* of Bellerophon, marked specifically as being from Homer. As noted above, there is good reason to think that Rutilius knew Homer directly, but the allusion has details which are either not in the *Iliad* or actually in

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<sup>44</sup> The equivalent passage of the Latin life is as follows (*Vita Latina* 19.3, 5): *quantas uero insulas ementes, monachis praetiterunt loca et regiones... 5. coeperuntque et monasteriis praebere, et ipsa monasteria ementes donant monachis et uirginibus, et aliquibus certum pondus auri tribuentes*. The scholarly consensus is that the life was originally written in Greek, though as the current Greek version has undergone some redaction, the Latin version can offer valuable material. See Clark 1984, 4-13; Laurence 2002, 109-141; Laurence 2002, 301-315, has a useful table setting out parallels and divergences between the lives. *Vita Latina* 19.4 contains material which *Vita Graeca* places after 19.5 (note that no edition of the Greek life has yet been published with sentence divisions).

conflict with it. The first is that, in Homer, Bellerophon came to be hated by the gods and avoided men; subsequently his children were killed by the gods. In Rutilius (here, to be fair, he follows Homeric exegetical tradition), the process is reversed: it was *after* the arrows of a savage grief (*saeui post tela doloris*) that Bellerophon came to hate the human race. This fits well with the narrative of Melania and Pinianus' life in Palladius' *Lausiaca History* (more on this below), where depression from the loss of their children drives Pinianus, at least, to retreat from the world. Secondly (a lesser point), Bellerophon is described as a youth, a *iuuenis*: without going into the exact parameters of being a *iuuenis*, it clearly seems a better fit for Pinianus and Melania, who gave up the world at the ages of 23 and 20, than for Bellerophon, the father of adult children.<sup>45</sup> Thirdly, and crucially, Homer has Bellerophon 'devouring his own heart', but Rutilius claims falsely that Homer refers to the disease of excessive black bile (though this interpretation of "eating his own heart" might of course be found in the exegetical tradition). The specific reference to Homer invites the reader to translate *nigro felle* and *nimiae bilis* into Greek, and I suggest that the answer is Melan(cholia).

In support of the idea of a play on names, I have already shown that this is not the only such play in Rutilius' poem. Nor is it the only such play in fifth-century texts on the name of Melania. It is well known that her grandmother, S. Melania the Elder, was also referred to punningly by S. Jerome, as a woman 'whose name of Blackness (*nomen nigredinis*) bears witness to the shades of perfidy.'<sup>46</sup> An interesting parallel comes in a work of fifth-century martyr-fiction, the *Passio Eugeniae*.<sup>47</sup> Eugenia is the daughter of a governor of Alexandria who has left her family to become a Christian, disguised as a young man. As Eugenius, she cures the quartan fever of a matron of Alexandria called Melanthia, and unwittingly becomes the object of her lust and lavish gifts, both of which are rejected. When Melanthia starts making physical advances, Eugenia reproves her, with the words (11) '*recte Melanthiae nomen habere cognosceris: nigredinis enim repleta perfidia nigra diceris*' ("rightly you are known to have the name Melanthia: full of the treachery of blackness, you are called black"). In another recension of the same passion, the similarity to Jerome is even greater: '*recte nomen tuum nigredinis testatur perfidiam*' (PL 75.612).<sup>48</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Note also that *iuuenis* is also used for the aristocratic hermit of Gorgo (1.519).

<sup>46</sup> Jerome *Ep.* 133.3: *Evagrius scribit ad eam cuius nomen nigredinis testatur perfidiae tenebras.*

<sup>47</sup> See now Lapidge 2017, 228-49, for an accessible translation, and for a summary Matthieu Pignot, *Cult of Saints*, E02490: <http://csla.history.ox.ac.uk/record.php?recid=E02490>. Citations adopt Lapidge's chapter numbering; he translates the version *BHL* 2667, thought to be the earlier recension, as edited by Mombritius 1910, 2.391-7 (a reprint of a late fifteenth-century edition), correcting the text as he goes (as I have done above). For the other version (*BHL* 2666) see *PL* 73.605-624. I am grateful to Kate Cooper for pointing me to this passage.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. also *PL* 73.615: *O Melanthia, nigredinis nomen, et tenebrosa Melanthia* ('O Melanthia, name of blackness, shady Melanthia'). The story continues with the rejected Melanthia accusing 'Eugenius' of rape; the trial

Melanthia is an *illustris femina* (13), she has infinite wealth (11), and the echo of Jerome's words makes it even more obvious that she is meant as a lightly disguised version of one of the Melaniae.<sup>49</sup> There are thus parallels for plays on Melania's name.

I have left until last one final piece of the argument. In the passage immediately preceding this digression, we have news that almost sends Rutilius back to Rome, that an admirable young man of noble family, already praised earlier in the poem (1.167-178), has just been appointed prefect of Rome (1.415-428). Rufius Volusianus is lauded in the two passages for his ancestry, his political participation, and for his impressive career. But he was also the brother of Melania's mother Albina. Although he had corresponded with Augustine on his objections to Christianity, he was baptized twenty years later on his deathbed following pressure from Melania (*Vita Melaniae* 54-55). The juxtaposition would be particularly apt between the devoted public servant Volusianus and his troublesome relatives.

If my proposal that Rutilius hints at the name of Melania is accepted, it has interesting corollaries regarding contemporary attitudes to – and perhaps also the basic facts of – her ascetic renunciation. Rutilius would be implying that Melania and Pinianus' renunciation of the world was the result of mental imbalance after the death of their children. This explains the chronological reversal of Homer's Bellerophon, and coheres with Palladius' account of her in the *Lausiaca History*. It clashes, however, with the testimony of Gerontius' *Life*, as the comparison below shows:

**Palladius *Lausiaca History* 61.2-3**

[After their two male children both die, she addresses Pinianus:] 'If you should choose to practice asceticism with me according to the rule of continence, I acknowledge you both as master and lord of my life. But if this seems oppressive to you because you are young, take all my possessions, and give freedom

**Gerontius, *Vita Melaniae Graeca* 1 (tr. Clark)**

[After marrying, but desiring to abandon worldly life, she pleads with Pinianus:] 'If, my lord, you consent to practice chastity along with me and live with me according to the law of continence, I contract with you as the lord and master of my life. If, however, this seems burdensome to you and if you do not have the strength to bear the burning passion of youth, just look: I place before you all my possessions; hereafter you are master of them and may use them as you wish, if only you will leave my body free so that I may present it spotless, with

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goes before the governor, and Eugenia simultaneously proves that she could not have committed the crime and reveals herself as his runaway daughter.

<sup>49</sup> This would argue for a slightly earlier date than 475-500, suggested by Lapidge 2017, 232: the dating is dependent on comparison to other *Passions*, themselves imprecisely dated.

only to my body so that I may fulfil my desire for God, sharing in the virtue for God of my grandmother, whose name I bear. For if God wanted us to remain in this world and have enjoyment from it, he would not have taken my children in untimely manner.<sup>50</sup>

[In the end Pinianus is persuaded.]

my soul, to Christ on that fearsome day. For it is in this way that I shall fulfil my desire for God.’

At first, however, he neither accepted her proposal nor did he, on the other hand, completely rule out her plan. Rather he replied to her in these words: ‘If and when by the ordinance of God we have two children to inherit our possessions, then both of us together shall renounce the world.’<sup>51</sup>

[A daughter is born and consecrated as a virgin; later (5) her prematurely born son dies.]

Palladius was writing around 420, when Melania was still alive, whereas the biography was written not long after her death in 439. It has long been clear that at this point Gerontius has based his narrative on Palladius (indeed this is one of the clinching arguments for the life’s original composition in Greek<sup>52</sup>), but has adapted it. The fact that has attracted most interest is that Palladius’ Melania explicitly draws attention to the fact that her ascetic aspirations are modelled on those of her grandmother, Melania the Elder, whereas this is simply suppressed in the *Vita*: Gerontius nowhere names or explicitly refers to the elder Melania, probably because she was theologically *persona non grata*.<sup>53</sup> But there are other divergences. Palladius describes two male children, the *Vita* a girl and a stillborn boy. For Palladius, Melania’s request to her husband comes after the death of her two children; for the *Vita* she was set on virginity from the

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<sup>50</sup> εἰ μὲν αἰρήσαι συνασκηθῆναι κάμοι κατὰ τὸν τῆς σωφροσύνης λόγον, καὶ δεσπότην σε οἶδα καὶ κύριον τῆς ἐμῆς ζωῆς· εἰ δὲ βαρὺ σοι τοῦτο καταφαίνεται ὡς νεωτέρῳ, πάντα μου λάβων τὰ πράγματα ἐλευθέρωσόν μου τὸ σῶμά, ἵνα πληρώσω μου κατὰ Θεὸν ἐπιθυμίαν, κληρονόμος γενομένη τῆς μάμμης τοῦ ζήλου, ἧς καὶ τὸ ὄνομα ἔχω. 3. Εἰ γὰρ ἐβούλετο παιδοποιεῖν ἡμᾶς ὁ Θεός, οὐκ ἂν μου ἔλαμβανεν ἄωρα τὰ τεχθέντα.

<sup>51</sup> εἰ μὲν βούλει, φησίν, κύριέ μου, ἀγνεύειν συν ἐμοὶ καὶ κατὰ τὸν τῆς σωφροσύνης συνοικισθῆναί μοι νόμον, καὶ κύριόν σε καὶ δεσπότην τῆς οἰκείας ζωῆς ἐπιγράφομαι· εἰ δὲ τοῦτό σοι ἐπαχθὲς καταφαίνεται, καὶ οὐκ ἰσχύεις ἐνέγκαι τὴν πύρωσιν τῆς νεότητος, ἰδοὺ πρόκεινται σοι ἅπαντά μου τὰ ὑπάρχοντα ὧν ἐντεῦθεν ἤδη δεσπότης γενόμενος χρῆσαι καθὼς βούλει, μόνον τὸ σῶμά μου ἐλευθέρωσον, ἵνα τοῦτο σὺν τῇ ψυχῇ μου ἄσπιλον παραστήσω τῷ Χριστῷ κατὰ τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην τὴν φοβερὰν· οὕτω γὰρ πληροφορήσω τὴν κατὰ Θεὸν μου ἐπιθυμίαν. Ὁ δὲ οὔτε ἐπένευσεν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τῇ προθέσει αὐτῆς, οὔτε πάλιν παντελῶς ἀπέστρεψεν αὐτὴν τα ῥήματα ἀπεκρίνατο· Ὅταν, τοῦ Κυρίου κελεύσαντος, τοὺς διαδόχους τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἡμῖν δύο παῖδας κτησόμεθα, τότε κοινῶς ἀμφοτέρω τῷ κόσμῳ ἀποτασσόμεθα.

<sup>52</sup> For details see Clark 1984, 9-10

<sup>53</sup> On this *damnatio memoriae* see Clark 1984, 148-151.



start. Indeed, Melania's statement in Palladius that if god had wanted us to remain in this world ... he would not have taken in untimely manner the children born to us is twisted by Gerontius by being put into the mouth of Pinianus, who promises that once they 'have two children to inherit their property, they will retreat from their worldly existence. The overall effect of Gerontius' changes is to date Melania's wish to renounce the world to the very beginning of her marriage. This of course fits with the abundant circumstantial detail of Gerontius' hagiography, with stories including that of her being forced to visit the public baths by her parents and only pretending to bathe (2), and with its overall tenor, implying a heroic and victorious battle with her relatives. So although the *Vita's* version of Melania and Pinianus' renunciation has probably gained more attention (understandably: after all Gerontius was a confidant of Melania in her later life and makes her the focus of his much longer narrative), the evidence of Rutilius, if accepted, supports Palladius' earlier account of how Melania and Pinianus came to renounce the world. Finally, the close comparison to the Greek sources suggests that we should probably see Rutilius as concerned above all with Pinianus' failure to behave as a Roman aristocrat should and his capitulation to the wishes of his wife: Bellerophon will therefore be a figure for Pinianus, and *melancholia* for the negative external influence of Melania.

#### 4. Conclusions

The diary-style format of *De reditu suo*, with first person narration predominantly in the present tense, combines with the strongly expressed emotions and swings of mood to give a sense of a highly personal poem; this character is reinforced by the associations of the elegiac metre. And yet the personal is inextricably connected to the political. The friends that the poet encounters are virtually all members of the aristocracy of service and men of high rank, and are commended precisely for their service, rank, and inherited qualities.<sup>54</sup> The places he encounters remind him of political events, and across the poem he gradually creates a picture, composed of fragments of memory and opinion, of contemporary political circumstances: the poem becomes a meditation on the Gothic sack of Rome, its causes and consequences, and the other connected problems of contemporary politics.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> An interesting reverse confirmation: when Rutilius is supplied with a magistrate's *carpentum* and horses to enter Pisa by a tribune who had reported to him as Master of the Offices, the man's name is left out, presumably as not senior enough (1.561-2).

<sup>55</sup> Among the images that build this picture: the need to rebuild Gaul (1.19-30); the problems of land-travel in Italy caused by the Goths (1.37-42); of the slow healing of Rome's scars after her misfortunes, with evocations of Pyrrhus and Hannibal (1.115-140); oblique reference to the defeat of the Goths in 416 (1.141-2); how the island of Giglio harboured refugees from Rome during the Gothic siege (1.331-336); Victorinus' status as a refugee from the capture of Toulouse (1.493-510); the crimes of Stilicho (2.41-60),

I have argued for a hitherto unnoticed covert reference in Rutilius' poem: in attacking on the monks of Capraria he alludes to the most notorious example of withdrawal from the world of the last decade or so, by Melania and Pinianus. If this is accepted, Rutilius' reaction becomes less an outburst against a social phenomenon that he dislikes in general terms and more in tune with the rest of the poem: the passage calls to mind aristocrats who do not live up to their obligations to the state and the expectation of begetting heirs. Given the disputes that raged over the disposal of Melania and Pinianus' property when Alaric was threatening the City in 408-10 and funds were badly needed by the senate, the passage becomes more closely tied to the series of reflections on the Gothic crisis.

This evocation of Melania and Pinianus also strongly supports Alan Cameron's view that this and Rutilius' other invective against monasticism 'would not have struck most lay Christian contemporaries as offensive'.<sup>56</sup> After all, we know what problems their Christian family and peers in the senate had with the couple's renunciation. He acknowledges, however, that Rutilius perhaps felt greater indignation at monasticism than his Christian contemporaries (and indeed the language of Rutilius is far more rebarbative than, say, that of Ausonius a generation earlier). Cameron rightly bases his argument on a reading of all four invective passages (adding those against Jews and against Stilicho). One could object, of course, that pagan contemporaries might have read these passages rather differently. Some individual phrases might seem to attack Christianity more broadly, but in a way that would always be deniable.<sup>57</sup> The *Last Pagans* has shown how difficult it is to identify pagan aristocrats after the prohibition of the traditional cults in 391/2: they fade out of view as their religion was driven from the public sphere. Obvious clues like priesthoods on career inscriptions are no longer available. Rutilius Namatianus is one of the last to be visible, and is only so because we happen to have a personal poem, and even in that, it is striking how much a distinctive pagan aristocratic viewpoint shares with Christian aristocratic viewpoints.

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where the sack of Rome is at last directly addressed. Finally, fragment B lauds the current holder of Stilicho's old office, Constantius, for restoring Roman pride.

<sup>56</sup> Cameron 2011a, 218.

<sup>57</sup> Above all, 1.525 *num, rogo, deterior Circaeis secta uenenis* and perhaps also 1.389 *radix stultitiae*.

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