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AVIENUS OR AVIENIUS?

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Some 25 years ago I drew attention to the true name of the astronomical and geographical poet till then known as Rufius Festus Avienus, utilising a newly found inscription from Bulla Regia that presented him as Postumius Rufius Festus *signo Avienius*.¹ I did not at the time think of myself as advancing a thesis or arguing a case, merely pointing out what I took for granted everyone would at once acknowledge as welcome new information refining our understanding.

I had overlooked the resistance of mankind not only to new ideas but even to new information. Again and again I saw myself described as advancing a thesis, arguing a case. More surprisingly, I found that a number of scholars rejected the new information simply and solely on the grounds that it did not agree with the old information. Specific objections were raised by Charles Murgia, Jochen Küppers, Jean Soubiran and Richard Seagraves, and the comprehensive recent treatment by K. Smolak merely mentions the new inscription in passing.²

Seagrave's paper (n. 2 above) was entitled "The Riddle of Rufius Festus". I had never thought of so modest an issue meriting so grand a characterization, but if there is a riddle here, the Bulla Regia inscription holds the key. Though not especially important in itself, the identification touches on some ill understood aspects of late Roman nomenclature, and helps to clarify our understanding of the poet's posterity. A fortified restatement may thus be of some value.

We may begin with the longest and most interesting of the inscriptions, *CIL VI.537 (ILS 2944)*:

R. Festus v.c. de se ad deam Nort[am]:

Festus, Musoni suboles prolesque Avieni,
unde tui latices traxerunt, Caesia, nomen,
Nortia, te veneror, Lari cretus Vulsiniensi,
Roman habitans, gemino proconsulis auctus honor[e],
carmina multa serens, vitam insons, integer aevum,
coniugio laetus Placidae numeroque frequenti
natorum exultans, vivax sit spiritus ollis!
cetera compositus fatorum lege trahentur.

¹ *CQ* 17 (1967) 385-99. The text of the inscription was communicated by Richard Duncan-Jones to *PLRE I* (Cambridge 1971), 336, but not so far as I know formally published.

² Ch. Murgia, *CSCA* 3 (1970) 185-197; J. Küppers, *Die Fabeln Avians: Studien zu Darstellung und Erzählweise spätantiker Fabeldichtung* (Bonn 1977) 20-25; J. Soubiran, *Aviένus: les Phénomènes d'Aratos* (Paris 1981) 9-22; R. Seagraves, in *Actes du VII^e Congrès international d'épigraphie grecque et latine* (Bucarest 1979) 468-70; K. Smolak, in *Restauration und Erneuerung: Die lateinische Literatur von 284 bis 374 n. Chr.*, ed. R. Herzog (Munich 1989) 321-7, now in a revised French translation, *Restauration et Renouveau: La littérature latine de 284 à 374 après J.-C.* (Paris 1993) 367-74, with full bibliography.

Sancto patri filius Placidus:

Ibis in optatas sedes; nam Iuppiter aethram
pandit, Feste, tibi, candidus ut venias.
Iamq(ue) venis, tendit dextras chorus inde deorum,
et toto tibi iam plauditur ecce polo.

This is a complex dedication. The first poem was evidently written by Festus himself, looking back contentedly on his life, honours, marriage, children, ancestors and local religious traditions in old age. His son Placidus (one of many) rightly saw that it would make a highly appropriate epitaph, and appended a piece of his own. To explain the change of author and theme, he added two lines of explanation in prose to frame the two poems.

Yet despite the clarity of the framework, modern readers have understandably been puzzled. On the one hand, as Wernsdorf pointed out long ago, there can be no doubt that Festus is indeed the translator (or rather paraphrast) of Aratus. For the first couplet of Placidus's poem unmistakably alludes to the beginning of the translation:

Carminis incentor mihi Iuppiter. auspice terras
linquo Iove et celsam reserat dux *Iuppiter aethram*
imus in astra Iovis monitu, Iovis omine caelum
et Iovis imperio mortalibus aethera *pando*.

By "going to the stars" the poet had meant (of course) a mental journey. Placidus neatly adapts the phraseology to describe the final journey of his father's soul. The "resting place" (*sedes*) to which he is going is "longed-for" (*optatas*) not because he had wanted to die but because it is his beloved stars.³

On the other hand, the poet is identified as Festus, not Avienus. Indeed he is so identified no fewer than three times in the course of the inscription. And if two of them occur in the poems, where the disyllabic Festus can be accommodated more easily to the requirements of the metre, the first is set out formally in prose complete with a title of rank: *R. Festus v.c.* The only point in the dedication where we find *Avienus* or *Avienius* is the ambiguous genitival phrase *prolesque Avieni*. If a man who is three times styled Festus proclaims himself the son (or descendant) of Avien(i)us, the implication is surely that this is *not* his own name—or at any rate not his principal name. E. Groag inferred that the deceased was the son of the translator rather than the translator himself,⁴ but the allusions to the translation (ignored by Groag) seem to exclude this possibility.

Since line 4 mentions two proconsulates it has usually been assumed that the poet Festus is to be recognized in the Ῥούφιτος Φῆςτος attested as proconsul of Achaëa in an undated inscription from Athens (*IG III².4222*). Once again, no mention of Avienus. This brings us to the Bulla Regia inscription:

ABIENII. eximiae integritatis viro ac mire bonitatis exemplo Postumio Rufio
Festo ampl(issimo) proco[n]s[ul]i c.v. vice sacra [iudicanti].

³ Placidus's *chorus deorum* is also perhaps an echo of *anni chorus* in line 37.

⁴ *Die Reichsbeamten von Achaia in spätrömischer Zeit*, Diss. Pann. I.14 (Budapest 1946) 50 n. 1.

According to Seagraves, this "may or may not be our poet-proconsul", expressing the hope that "further epigraphic discoveries confirm that 'Postumius' is in fact the praenomen of the poet". There are two points here. First, by the second half of the fourth century the old distinction between praenomen, nomen and cognomen had long since disappeared, and the traditional praenomina survived only in a few old families (notably the Symmachi).⁵ Instead, elite males normally bore three or four names that commemorated various family connections.⁶ Second, in most social contexts they were known by only two of these names, sufficient to identify without ambiguity. This style was already well established by the first century, as can be seen above all in the usage of the younger Pliny.⁷

Men known to us from literary and legal sources by one or two names are commonly revealed by dedications and cursus inscriptions to have had additional names, sometimes several. An extreme example is the consul of 343, known from literary sources and papyri as Furius Placidus, but from a dedication as M. Maecius Memmius Furius Baburius Caecilianus Placidus (*PLRE* I.705). The man known from innumerable literary sources as Petronius Probus is revealed by just two out of 18 dedications to have had the traditional praenomen Sex(tus)—and in the eighteenth and last published to have been called Claudius as well.⁸

It was only to be expected that epigraphic discoveries would sooner or later produce at least one additional name for Rufius Festus. Nor do we need further finds to illustrate the Postumius. There is already Rufius Postumius Festus cos. 472, surely a descendant—and likewise no Avien(i)us. There can be little doubt that the Bulla Regia inscription attests the only fourth century Rufius Festus we know of in the other of the two proconsulates we know he held.

If so, it must have been his first. Officials with judicial power of a certain rank (proconsuls and city and praetorian prefects) were entitled to describe themselves as *vice sacra iudicantes*, "judging in the place of the emperor". By a curious but well documented convention, the second time a man held such a post, he described himself as *iterum vice sacra iudicans*, the third time *tertio* and so on. Thus when we find (as we often do) a prefect of Rome described as *iterum v.s.i.*, we may infer, even without explicit documentation, that he had previously held a proconsulate, by the late fourth century normally of Africa.⁹ Various other

⁵ H. Thylander, *Études sur l'épigraphie latine* (Lund 1952) 77-81. Already by the late Republic some aristocrats had begun to employ a *cognomen* instead of *praenomen*: Paullus Aemilius Lepidus, Potitus Valerius Messala (R. Syme, *Historia* 7 [1958] 172-88, repr. in *Roman Papers* I [1979] 361-77).

⁶ Most Symmachi down the generations were Aurelii, but it was clearly the (in origin) cognomen Symmachus rather than this least exclusive of one-time *gentilicia* (*PIR* and *PLRE* s.v.) that served as family name. Practice varied considerably between the great aristocratic families. While most members of the Anicii bore the name Anicius, in other families only the eldest would get the family name. For example, Q. Aur. Symmachus cos. 391 was apparently the only one of four brothers to receive the name Symmachus, which was the only one of his own names that he passed on to his son.

⁷ H.U. Instinsky, *Formalien im Briefwechsel des Plinius mit Kaiser Trajan*, Abh. d. Akad. d. Wiss. in Mainz 1969, 12, 4-6.

⁸ For a full study of Probus's names, see my paper in *JRS* 75 (1985) 164-82.

⁹ For a series of examples, A. Chastagnol, *REA* 58 (1956) 243-4; D. Vera, *Athenaeum* 61 (1983) 34.

useful inferences may also be made. For example, in the case of the younger Nicomachus Flavianus, who is known to have held three city prefectures following a proconsulate of Asia,¹⁰ an inscription that describes him as *praef(ectus) urbi iterum v[ice] sacra iudicans* (*Ann. Épigr.* 1934, 147) must refer to his first prefecture.¹¹ On the other hand, when we find a prefect of Rome (for example, Epiphanius *PVR* 412-4) described simply as *vice sacra iud.*, it follows this was his first judicial post of this rank. By the same token, if the Bulla Regia inscription refers to the poet, it must commemorate the first of his two proconsulates.

The opening ABIENII, set out in the genitive separately from the body of the dedication, is a well documented phenomenon, generally known as "detached signum".¹² A signum is a sobriquet or additional name, and a great many are known from inscriptions and papyri. Unfortunately they are seldom mentioned as such in literature, and very little is understood of the context in which they were used. Though apparently not admissible in official texts (such as imperial laws), they were nonetheless more than nicknames. Modern nicknames are mostly informal alternatives for first names employed by a circle of intimates, whereas (*e.g.*) Q. Flavius Maesius Egnatius Lollianus *signo* Mavortius cos. 355 was generally known by his signum alone. Indeed he is identified by the single name Mavortius in so formal a source as the history of Ammianus Marcellinus. More surprising still, Lollianus's son—Q. Flavius Maesius Cornelius Egnatius Severus Lollianus—was known as Mavortius iunior,¹³ thus ruling out one otherwise attractive possible explanation, namely that such signa were intended to distinguish homonyms or near homonyms in polyonymous aristocratic families. Like Lollianus, C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus (*PVR* 365) was also generally known by his signum Lampadius. So invariably in literary sources; but in the addresses of imperial laws he appears no less invariably as Volusianus. More puzzlingly, the signum is not mentioned in 14 out of 15 honorific inscriptions, while in the fifteenth (a Greek epigram) he appears as Lampadius alone.¹⁴

On the other hand, there is no indication that so well documented a figure as Q. Aurelius Symmachus cos. 391 was ever called by the signum Eusebius known from just one inscription (*ILS* 2946). It is not used (for example) in letters to his father, brothers or daughter, nor in the informal conversation of Macrobius's *Saturnalia*, where he appears as an interlocutor together with several of his closest friends. The same applies to his father, L. Aur. Avianus Symmachus, known again from just one inscription by the detached signum Phosphorius (*ILS* 1257). Rather surprisingly, the signum Eusebius is quite common at a much lower level

¹⁰ *PLRE* I. 345-9; I shall in fact be assigning different dates to his three prefectures elsewhere.

¹¹ J.J. O'Donnell (*Phoenix* 32 [1978] 129-43) identified the office as Flavianus's second prefecture, mistakenly pausing after instead of before the *iterum*.

¹² I. Kajanto, *Supernomina: A Study in Latin Epigraphy*, *Comm. Hum. Litt. Soc. Sc. Fenn.* 40.1 (Helsinki 1966) 57-75; cf. *JRS* 75 (1985) 172.

¹³ Sources in *PLRE* I s. vv. and A. Chastagnol, *Fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (Paris 1962) 114-21.

¹⁴ *PLRE* I.978-9; they are cited in full by Chastagnol (n. 13) 164-9.

of society, apparently identifying membership of a funeral club (Kajanto [n. 12 above], 81), but such an explanation can hardly apply to the Symmachi.¹⁵

Though accepting the identification of poet and Bulla Regia proconsul, John Matthews expressed some misgivings about the form Avienius because of "the inconsistencies and hesitations of ancient orthography between forms in -us and -ius, as well as some worrying cases which can be found of the formation of false signa from ordinary cognomina" (*Historia* 16 [1967] 490). Küppers pressed these same arguments much more vigorously than Matthews himself, insisting that they rendered my thesis "untenable".¹⁶ Yet the first point is simply irrelevant in the case of a text clearly set out with a detached signum. For *all* signa end in -ius. As for the second, seeing how little we understand the various types of signa, it does not seem helpful to call one type "false",¹⁷ implying ancient error rather than modern ignorance. Matthews cited the example of a dedication from Lepcis Magna that gives Nicomachus Flavianus the elder the detached signum Flavianius.¹⁸ This is certainly a surprise; balancing dedications to statues of Flavianus and Symmachus erected side by side in the house of the Symmachi on the Caelian hill record Eusebius for Symmachus but nothing comparable for Flavianus. Taken by itself, the Lepcis dedication might have been set aside as a possible error, especially since there is a parallel dedication from the same time and place to Magnius Asper Flavianus with the detached signum Flavianius.¹⁹ But there are many other exactly parallel dedications at Lepcis to fourth-century governors of Tripolitania with signa formed in the same way: for example, Nilius from Archontius Nilus, Nepotianius from Fl. Nepotianus, Benedictius from Vivius Benedictus, Romulius from Laenatius Romulus.²⁰ Inconsistently enough *PLRE* records Romulius but none of the other five. Fourth-century dedications from Lepcis offer many signa *not* formed from cognomina as well, together with some apparently identical with cognomina.²¹ When there are so many, none of them attested elsewhere, on what grounds are we entitled to accept some and dismiss others?²² It is not easy to believe (with Kajanto) that such important people were

¹⁵ In keeping with her general interpretation of signa, H. Wuilleumier, *Mém. Acad. Inscr.* 13. 2 (1933) 608 saw mystical and religious significance in both Eusebius and Phosphorius.

¹⁶ "unhaltbar", Küppers (n. 2 above), 21; so too Soubiran (n. 2 above), 18.

¹⁷ The term seems to originate with J. Guey, *RÉA* 52 (1950) 78-9. Guey refers to Wuilleumier 1933, 572, but all she says is that in such cases "il ne s'agit pas là d'un *signum* véritable". By contrast, the doyen of such studies, A. Chastagnol, remarks matter of factly when discussing the career of Laenatius Romulus (below) on "l'usage, bien connu, de donner parfois pour *signum* à un personnage son propre *cognomen* en changeant la désinence -us en -ius" (*Latomus* 25 [1966] 541 n. 1).

¹⁸ *Inscriptions of Roman Tripolitania*, ed. J.M. Reynolds and J.B. Ward Perkins (London 1955) no. 475; first published by J. Guey, *RÉA* 52 (1950) 78-9.

¹⁹ *Inscr. Rom. Trip.* 575. Not that it really helps to postulate confusion with the other Flavianus, since if he was *signo* Flavianius, why should Nicomachus Flavianus not have been so too?

²⁰ *Inscr. Rom. Trip.* 562-3, 565, 571 and 574; the governors of Tripolitania are listed in *PLRE* I. 1088-9 and (more fully) by A. Chastagnol, *Antiquités africaines* 1 (1967) 126-30. Compare too from Rome Honoratianus from Honoratianus (*CIL* vi. 1722).

²¹ *Inscr. Rom. Trip.* 561, 576, 577, 578; 480, 529, 564.

²² Contemporaries may (of course) have had different names for different types. One of the reasons the phenomenon seems so puzzling to us may be that we are trying to explain them all in the same terms.

given "extemporized nicknames...for decorative purposes" (Kajanto [n. 12 above], 63), but however the cognomen-type differed from regular signa and in whatever contexts (other than dedications) they were used, they were evidently an established local usage.

In any case, whatever the status of these formations, they are completely irrelevant to the Bulla Regia dedication. For in every example of so-called false signum, the cognomen from which it was formed is present in the body of the dedication (*FLAVIANII V.C. Nicomacho Flaviano...*). Yet there is no Avienus in the Bulla Regia dedication, where the honorand's name closes with the cognomen Festus as on both the other dedications. It is only literary sources that supply Avienus. The Bulla Regia ABIENI is a typical aristocratic signum of the traditional sort, exactly parallel to Lampadius and Mavortius.

Nor is it just the layout of the Bulla Regia inscription that proves Avienius a signum. The one inscription we can refer with certainty to the poet is the one by his son that styles him R. Festus. There can be no question that Festus was his principal (diacritical) name. I take again an extreme example for illustration. C. Ceionius Rufius Volusianus *signo* Lampadius appears in inscriptions sometimes by his full name; sometimes as Caius Rufius Volusianus;²³ sometimes as Ceionius Rufius Volusianus; most often as Rufius Volusianus. The variation might appear bewildering, but there are three constants: the *sequence* is always the same, Volusianus is always included, and Volusianus always comes last. This was his diacritical, the one name (apart from his signum) he was known by in contexts that called for just one name. With a very few exceptions apparently designed to avoid confusion between near homonyms in the same family,²⁴ the diacritical was always the last in sequence, in the poet's case Festus.

Attempts have sometimes been made to pin down the dates of Festus's proconsulates on the assumption that the *Flaviano Myrmeico v.c. suo* to whom he sent a poetic request for pomegranates from his African estate is the elder Nicomachus Flavianus. It is not in itself impossible that such a grandee bore a name not attested in his three surviving dedications. Yet there can be no question that Flavianus was his diacritical. An otherwise unattested name *following* the diacritical would be highly anomalous. Nor, ending as it does in -us rather than -ius, can it plausibly be identified as a signum, quite apart from the fact that the inscription from Lepcis cited above has provided Flavianus with one signum already, Flavianus. Especially since in any case their general floruits make Festus a generation older, we are bound to conclude that Flavianus Myrmeicus is an otherwise unknown (and undatable) resident of N. Africa. We cannot even assume that Myrmeicus was a member of

²³ The mere fact that Caius is spelled out in full illustrates how unfamiliar the traditional praenomina had become.

²⁴ For example, Caecina Decius Albinus, son of Publilius Caecina Albinus, was known as Decius rather than Albinus to distinguish him at a glance from his father (*PLRE* s. vv., and for more examples, *JRS* 1981 (n. 8 above]).

the famous Flaviani; a glance at the first volumes of *PLRE* and *Prosopographie chrétienne du Bas-Empire* will show that the name was not uncommon, especially in Africa.²⁵

It is puzzling that those who reject the identification of the poet with the Bulla Regia proconsul are happy to accept identification with the proconsul from Athens, a Rufius Festus with no hint of an Avien(i)us. The Bulla Regia text does not after all contradict the other evidence. Rather it explains to perfection a puzzle not hitherto recognized as such, why a man officially known as Festus sometimes appears in literary texts as Avien(i)us. The parallel with Mavortius and Lampadius is exact: it was a signum.

In documents signa are always set apart from other names by one of several standard formulas—*qui/ quae et* (ὁ καί in Greek) *sive* or *signo*—or detached from (and usually above) the rest of the dedication in the genitive (Kajanto [n. 12 above], 57-75). This is an additional reason for dismissing as a forgery the following dedication imprudently exhumed by John Matthews:²⁶

R. Festi Avieni v.c. bis proconsulis et celebris poetae insignis memoria.

I cannot recall ever seeing a formal dedication to a Roman aristocrat that blurred the distinction between signa and nomina in this way.

Now for the evidence of the MSS.²⁷ Only two survive: Vind. 107 of s. X (V) and Ambros. D. 52 of s. XV (A), though since J. Soubiran has shown (*Rev. de Phil.* 49 [1975] 217-226) that A was copied directly from V, A is only of value for those parts of the text now missing in V. More important than both, however, is the lost source of the editio princeps of 1488 (E), to judge from its errors and virtually unpunctuated text, written in Carolingian minuscule (Soubiran [n. 2 above], 80). A Leiden MS (O) preserves a collation (but not text) of the two geographical poems; and Gudianus 132 of s. X (G) offers an incipit and some headings on f. 61^v, but no text.

E offers *Avienius* no fewer than four times, once in the nominative, three times in the genitive. The form *Avieni* appears only in the genitive, and since both the proconsular dedications give *Rufius*, we are entitled to read *Avieni* no less than *Rufi* as contracted forms. The manuscripts turn out to provide unexpectedly clear support for Avienius, with not a single unambiguous *Avienus* in the entire tradition.

The most striking feature of the manuscript evidence is its combination of nomina plus signum alternating with nomina alone. E offers *Rufus* [sic] *Festus Avienius*; G and O *Rufi Festi Avieni*; two of the explicits in E and both incipits and explicits in V and A have *Rufi Festi* alone. This variation is not medieval caprice or carelessness. It may already have been present in late antique texts. The heading to the verse epistle about pomegranates gives every appearance of being original: *Ruf<i>us Festus Avienius v.c. Flaviano Myrmeico v.c. salutem*. This blurring of the distinction between nomina and signum is occasionally found

²⁵ No more do I see any positive reason to identify the Probus to whom the *Ora Maritima* is dedicated with Sex. Petronius Probus (so Matthews [p. 269 above] 487). No more precision is possible for Festus's proconsulates than mid fourth century (Murgia [n. 2 above] 192-7).

²⁶ Quoted in the commentary to *CIL VI.537* as *novicium*, exposed by de Rossi, *Annali Istit. Corrisp. Archeol.* 21 (1849) 345 n. 1.

²⁷ For a brief account, M.D. Reeve, *Texts and Transmissions* (Oxford 1983) 19-20.

elsewhere in literary texts. For example, though normally referring to Julian's praetorian prefect Saturninius Secundus by his signum *Salutius* alone, in just one passage Ammianus calls him *Secundus Salutius* (XXII.3.1). The closest parallel overall is provided by the variations in the nomenclature of the Constantinian poet (prefect of Rome in 329 and 333) *Publilius Optatianus signo Porfyrius*.²⁸ In official sources he appears, properly enough, under the first two names alone; in Jerome and Fulgentius and manuscripts of his dedicatory letter to Constantine as just *Porfyrius*.²⁹ But in the headings to most manuscripts under all three with the signum following the diacritical in last position, *Publilius Optatianus Porfyrius*.³⁰

Neither contemporary inscriptions nor manuscripts lend any support to the form *Avienus*. That leaves two mentions of the poet by near contemporary writers: Jerome and Servius. In his *Comm. in Titum* I.12 (*PL* 26.572), Jerome lists a few Latin translators of Aratus: *et Germanicus Caesar et nuper Avienus et multi, quos enumerare perlongum est*. In 1967 (n. 1 above) I assumed that the *Avienus* mentioned in three passages of the Servian commentary on Vergil (on *Geor.* I.488, *Aen.* X.272 and 388) was the fabulist generally known as *Avianus* but perhaps more correctly as *Avienus*. That was a mistake. As Charles Murgia at once pointed out, since the note on *Aen.* X.272 appears not only in Servius proper but also in Servius auctus or Danielis, almost certainly it derives from their common source in the commentary of Aelius Donatus. Donatus wrote around the middle of the fourth century, fully half a century before *Avianus*, but in time to know an early work by Rufius Festus.

As an editor of Servius Murgia was in a position to supply information on orthography:

The manuscripts of Servius are unanimous in all three places in attesting a spelling *Avienus*. Since this is apparently also the spelling of Jerome, it suggests that by the late fourth century the poet was probably known as *Avienus*.

Why so? Servius/Donatus and Jerome are early witnesses,³¹ but does Murgia really mean to imply that the text of their manuscripts is more reliable than contemporary dedications, one of them by the poet's own son?

Moreover, Murgia himself at once added a qualification. For the most important manuscript of Servius auctus (F of s. IX) reads *Avienius* in the D scholium on *Aen.* X.272, and *Aviemus* (which implies *-ius* rather than *-us*) in the Servian scholium on the same line. Murgia indicated that his long-awaited edition will probably read *Avienius* in the D scholium, which (as he conceded) "may have been the reading of Aelius Donatus" (n. 2 above, 192). Donatus, who wrote some three quarters of a century before Servius, was a contemporary of the poet and may have known him in Rome, where both lived. Küppers's claim (n. 2 above, 25) that the Servian references "sprechen eindeutig gegen den Namen *Avienus*" backfires.

²⁸ For his career, T.D. Barnes, *AJP* 96 (1975) 173-186.

²⁹ See the testimonia collected in G. Polara's edition, II (1973) 1-6.

³⁰ See the preface to G. Polara's edition of 1973 or, with more detail, his *Ricerche sulla tradizione manoscritta di Publilio Optaziano Porfirio* (Salerno 1971).

³¹ "Von großer Wichtigkeit für die Benennung des Rufius Festus Avienus sind die Zitate bei Hieronymus und Servius", Küppers 1977, 21.

If Servius got one of his references from Donatus, almost certainly this is where he got the other two. So if Donatus spelled the name Avienius, Servius (assuming we can trust his manuscripts) may simply have miscopied his source.

As for Jerome, the last edition of his *Comm. in Titum* was that included in Vallarsi's second edition of 1688, meritorious for its day but long due for replacement by a text based on a wider manuscript base. Quite apart from the usual possibilities of manuscript error, this is one of the four commentaries on Pauline epistles Jerome admits to having dictated at great speed without revision.³² In the circumstances, it is not reassuring to reflect that this passage is now the main support for the spelling Avienus.

It remains to add, first that Avienus is by far the commoner name, appearing a number of times in all three volumes of *PLRE*, whereas the only known occurrence of Avienus in the higher reaches of late Roman society is the Bulla Regia inscription. And second that Avienus is probably (as I argued in 1967 [n. 1 above]) the true spelling of the popular fabulist now known as Avianus. This identification was vigorously contested by Küppers (n. 2 above, 10-64), largely on the basis of stemmatics. The great majority of the 114 manuscripts that carry the *Fables* give the author's name as Avianus, but three of the earliest (s. IX/X) give Avienus. Küppers objected that two other s. IX manuscripts (PV) that give no name are closely related to one s. X manuscript (Ka) that gives Avianus. Yet his inference that their lost common source "must have" given Avianus is hardly secure; it might equally have given no name. Ka's Avianus might have been imported from elsewhere. Nor does the fact that, according to Guaglianone, these three manuscripts represent a purer textual tradition than those that offer Avienus prove anything about the spelling of the author's name. It might be added that Guaglianone's work on the manuscripts (on which Küppers was entirely dependent), has come under fire in recent years.³³ Yet whatever the reading of the archetype, Avienus is also found in Eugenius of Toledo, three citations in a well informed ninth century grammatical work, and four more references in medieval library catalogues from France and Germany?³⁴

For Küppers, the spelling Avienus for the fabulist arose from confusion with Rufius Festus Avienus. The exact converse is more likely. The latter's geographical and astronomical poems were scarcely read in the middle ages. Küppers desperately argued that the confusion took place already in late antiquity, but the only late antique poet who can be proved to have read the *Aratea* is Paulinus of Nola.³⁵ Whether correct or not, the spelling Avienus for the popular fabulist may well have influenced the spelling of the far less popular Avienus.

³² All the relevant texts from the commentaries on *Philemon*, *Galatians*, *Ephesians* and *Titus* are quoted in Schanz-Hosius IV.1² (1914) 469-70.

³³ M.D. Reeve, *CR* 31 (1981) 209-11 (reviewing F. Gaide's Budé of 1980); *Texts and Transmissions* 29-32.

³⁴ *GLK* Supp. 174.15; 183.30; 185.23; for the medieval catalogues, *CQ* 17 (1967) 390-2.

³⁵ Smolak (n. 2 above), 327 and 373-4, respectively. Priscian had a motive to seek out the *Descriptio* when composing a similar work of his own, so hardly counts for general reception.

Once it is recognized that Avienus is both the correct form and a signum, we need to think again about some of the fifth- and sixth-century descendants claimed for Rufius Festus of Volsinii. According to Smolak, the Avienus who appears among the interlocutors of Macrobius's *Saturnalia* is probably one of the poet's numerous sons (n. 2 above, 321 and 367, respectively). The key text is I.6.6, where, while explaining how aristocratic *cognomina* were passed down from generation to generation in the great families, Praetextatus turns to Avienus: "So too your own Messala, who derives his name from the *cognomen* won by Valerius Maximus when he captured the famous city of Messana in Sicily." The distant ancestor is M. Valerius Maximus Messala cos. 263. B.C. But who is "your Messala"? Both Davies and Marinone translated "your friend Messala",³⁶ but two other combinations suggest a rather closer relationship. First, Gennadius Avienus cos. 450 is said by Sidonius to have belonged to a family known as the Corvini,³⁷ and one of his grandsons bears the name Messala.³⁸ Evidently they claimed descent from M. Valerius Messala Corvinus cos. 31.³⁹ It seems natural to infer that Macrobius's Avienus belonged to the same family. Now a man named Messala was praetorian prefect of Italy in 399-400. He is said by his friend Rutilius Namatianus to have claimed descent from the Publicola who was the first consul (*De Red.* 267-76), which again points to the Valerii. A man old enough to be PPO by 399 would be too old to be in his teens in 382 (Macrobius's dramatic date); too old (that is) to be the interlocutor Avienus himself⁴⁰ and yet too young to be his father. Perhaps rather an older brother.

Like many aristocrats of the fourth century (for example, Jerome's friend Paula, allegedly descended from the Scipiones and Gracchi [*Ep.* 108.3]), Macrobius's Avienus claimed descent from the nobility of the Republic. Yet the poet Festus *signo* Avienus made more modest claims. Line 1 of the epitaph describes him as *Musoni suboles*. That is to say, he claimed descent from the Neronian philosopher Musonius Rufus from his own native Volsinii, perhaps with some justification, since many generations of Rufii Festi, like Musonius of equestrian status, are documented at Volsinii (Matthews [p. 269 above], 491-3). No son of a father so proud of his equestrian forbears could have switched the family story so dramatically as to claim descent from the Republican Valerii.

Soubiran (n. 2 above, 20) included in his list of the poet's descendants Gennadius Avienus (cos. 450), his grandson Rufius Magnus Faustus Avienus (cos. 501) and grandnephew Avienus cos. 502, claiming the authority of Matthews (who did not in fact make so positive

³⁶ L. Jan in his commentary of 1852 thought him a fictitious character.

³⁷ *Ep.* I.9.4; *PLRE* II. 193-4; Küppers (n. 2 above), 47. This connection was already made by De Rossi, *ICVR* I p. 328.

³⁸ Fl. Ennodius Messala 2 cos. 506 in *PLRE* II. 759-60

³⁹ *Ep.* I.9.4; *PLRE* II. 193-4; for the authentic posterity of Messala Corvinus down through the first century, R. Syme, *The Augustan Aristocracy* (Oxford 1986) 227-43, with stemma IX.

⁴⁰ *PLRE* II.760-61 actually identifies Messala PPO 399-400 with Macrobius's Avienus, under the style (Valerius) Messala Avienus 3. But "Messala tuus" is clearly distinguished from Avienus himself, nor is it credible that the man known to Symmachus, Rutilius and the Code as Messala should be styled Avienus in Macrobius. Macrobius's interlocutor appears a second time in the same volume of *PLRE* (II. 191-2) as Avienus 1.

a claim). We have seen that Gennadius Avienus is almost certainly a descendant rather of Macrobius's Avienus, of the line that boasted the blood of the Republican Valerii. If so, so too the consuls of 501 and 502. That is to say, there are positive grounds for detaching from the poet's posterity all four Avieni claimed as his descendants: Macrobius's interlocutor, and the consuls of 450, 501 and 502. This is not so very surprising. The key elements in the poet's nomenclature (as both inscriptions and manuscripts prove) were *Rufius* and *Festus*. We should not expect to find the signum *Avienius* reappearing regularly in successive generations.⁴¹

Ammianus mentions a senator called Abienus who was put to death ca 370 for adultery. According to Matthews, identification with the poet "is an intriguing open possibility".⁴² A remote possibility at best. Not only are we now compelled to take more seriously the variation between Avienus and Avienius; it is now established that there was a different aristocratic family prominent at this very period that certainly used the name Avienus, *not* Avienius. Furthermore, the circumstances of this man's death hardly square with the idyllic picture painted by the poet's epitaph.

The one descendant we can identify with virtual certainty is (as we have seen) Rufius Postumius Festus cos. 472.⁴³ All three of the names from the Bulla Regia dedication—and no Avien(i)us. It is the standard and reasonable assumption that this man was the son of the consul of 439, exactly a generation earlier, unfortunately known to us only as Festus. Rufius Placidus cos. 481, recalling the names of the poet's wife and son Placida and Placidus, is probably another. Rufius Aggerius Festus, known from a late fifth century seat in the Flavian amphitheatre, is also a possibility.⁴⁴

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⁴¹ We have already seen that *prolesque Avieni* in the epitaph might as easily come from *Avienius* as *Avienus*; signa were sometimes hereditary (Kajanto [n. 12 above], 69).

⁴² Amm. XXVIII.1.48-50; *PLRE* I. 126; Matthews (p. 269 above), 490.

⁴³ His *PLRE* entry (II.467) adds a Fl., mistakenly, as I explained in *Latomus* 57 (1988) 30-31.

⁴⁴ *PLRE* II.467, though the limits "?476/483" there given are unnecessarily narrow: see *JRS* 72 (1982) 144-5.