



AURELIUS VICTOR

AURELIUS VICTOR, SEXTUS, born in Africa ca. 325/330, held high positions under Julian and Theodosius. He was a contemporary of Ammianus Marcellinus. Of the several works attributed to him, only one survives: the *Liber de Caesaribus* or “Book of Emperors,” an abridgment of imperial biographies from Augustus to Constantius II. Aurelius is classed with the epitomists (abbreviators), a group of writers well represented in the fourth century. His accounts, of course, are secondhand. Among the sources he may have used are Suetonius, Tacitus, the imperial biographer Marius Maximus, and perhaps—directly or indirectly—Dio Cassius and Flavius Josephus. He makes only brief mention of Roman relations with the Persians. In most cases, he condenses and simplifies enormously the accounts of his sources. Trajan’s Parthian war, for instance, is reduced to a simple delivery of hostages (13.7), and Lucius Verus’s campaign against the Parthians is dispatched in a single sentence (16.4). The “Book of Emperors” contains a number of distortions of historical facts: Xerxes (= Ardašīr) is defeated by Alexander Severus (24.2), Narseh is captured by Maximianus Galerius (39.35; in fact, Narseh ran away). It is also difficult to believe the author when he reports a war between Vespasian and Vologeses I (9.10). In dealing with Valerian’s capture by the Persians, he echoes an unverifiable tradition according to which the emperor suffered flaying on Šāpūr I’s order. In general, Aurelius Victor records few of the many episodes in the Romans’ struggle with Iran, though it spanned centuries; his interests lie elsewhere. It is therefore highly characteristic that he should say not a word about the incessant battling which his contemporary, Emperor Constantius II, carried on against the Sasanian Šāpūr II. On the



subject of Romano-Parthian and Romano-Persian (i.e., Sasanian) relations, the “Book of Emperors” is highly uninformative compared with the contemporary “breviaries” of Eutropus and Festus Rufus.

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