Eötvös Loránd University
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Theses of the doctoral dissertation

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Epitome de Caesaribus
—
The last pagan historical work written in Latin language

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I. Subject and Purpose of the Thesis

My dissertation is about the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, which is a 48 chapters long breviary titled *Libellus de vita et moribus imperatorum breviatus ex libris Sexti Aurelii Victoris a Caesare Augusto usque ad Theodosium* in medieval codices. This work, written at the turn of the 4th-5th century, was the last pagan historical work written in Latin, therefore it separates the era of ancient and medieval historiography as well. When the unknown author finished the *Epitome*, Christianity was already the state religion of the Roman Empire, and even the last counter-emperor, Eugenius, supported by the pagans, had been defeated. However, in the city of Rome there were still a few conservative senators protecting the old traditions. In his younger years maybe the unknown author of the *Epitome* was also the member of this pagan senatorial group led by Quintus Aurelius Symmachus and Virius Nicomachus Flavianus. My thesis at first clarifies the misunderstandings around the breviary common even in scientific circles, then following the text tradition examination, the Hungarian translation and the commentary, it examines the *Epitome* from the micro level (text) to the macro level (introduction of the era); recently, interest in the *Epitome* has increased in Central and Eastern Europe, as the Romanian and the Polish translations of the work were completed in 2012 and 2015, respectively. The last pagan historical work written in Latin between 395 and 408 is not only interesting due to its era-closing symbolic significance, but because extremely important unique data are retained for posterity about the realm of emperor Nerva (96-98), about the location where Septimius Severus was proclaimed emperor (193), about the Germanic wars led by Aurelian in 270/271, or about Diocletian's death (313). Apparently there are many errors and false data contained in the breviary, which had to be corrected in the commentary. The purpose of the thesis on the one hand was to prepare the first complete Hungarian translation and commentary of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, on the other hand - in spite of the limited volume of the dissertation - I tried to provide a more or less complete picture not only about the breviary and the unknown author with his interests, but about the historical era in which the work originated as well. I also analysed the photo version of the Gudianus Latinus 84 codex from the 9th century, which contains the oldest manuscript of the *Epitome*; photos are attached at the end of my thesis in the Photo Gallery. In the commentary of the breviary chronological statements, mistakes and unique data of the epitomist, as well as quantitative information and text parts on counter-emperors and usurpers were considered priorities. In my hypothesis the exceptionally high number of counter-emperors (36) helps to clarify the time of the origin of the breviary. I also illustrated on maps the geographic locations mentioned in
the work, as well as the locations where the *Epitome* states the usurpers were proclaimed, and the information I received revealed the prominent role of Gaul – besides Rome and Northern Italy. I used this information to formulate my hypothesis concerning the time of the origin of the work.

II. Structure of the Thesis

In my dissertation the translation and the commentary is followed by a section where I am trying to answer questions arising in connection with the text, the author and the most important issues of the era. Is there any connection between the work and Aurelius Victor's *Liber de Caesaribus*? What are the characteristics of the Gudianus Latinus 84 codex, which is the oldest remaining manuscript containing the *Epitome*? Which ancient works were the sources of the epitomist? What is the genre of the *Epitome* and when was it written? How are the individual chapters of the breviary structured? What information does the last known historical work written in Latin by a pagan author disclose about Pannonia? Who was the unknown epitomist? What was the social status and the religion of the unknown author? Based on the text, what topics was the author interested in? What was the milieu of the Late Antique Rome? How did Christianity become the dominant religion of the empire, and what methods were used to overtake pagan cults? Who were the last pagans? - these were the questions I asked.

1. Introduction: In the introduction I made it clear that, contrary to the medieval codices, the *Epitome de Caesaribus* has nothing to do with Aurelius Victor, as Victor's *Liber de Caesaribus* and the unknown epitomist's breviary are separated by a lifetime. The title "*Epitome de Caesaribus*" is just a modern title used since Johannes Arntzen published the text in 1733.

2. Text tradition and research history: I followed the history of the breviary from the early Middle Ages to the 21st century. As early as 417, Orosius used the *Epitome* when writing his Christian historical work. The work from the 7th century titled *Terminatione Provinciarum Italicae* was the first to connect the breviary to Aurelius Victor, and from then all medieval codices attributed the short historical work of the epitomist to Victor, until the humanists highlighted the differences between the *Liber de Caesaribus* and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. I devoted an entire sub-section to the Gudianus Latinus 84 codex from the 9th
century, which contains the oldest complete manuscript of the work. The monk who copied the work omitted words in two places from the codex, one of them was the title of Ovid's work (Ars Amatoria - Epit. de Caes. 1.24.) - possibly deliberately, while the other was a proper noun in the accusative (Aquileiam - Epit. de Caes. 25.2.). I pointed out that the monk could not speak Ancient Greek, as he wrote the Greek words of the Epitome in Latin letters; and he did not have thorough knowledge of the Roman history either, as in his marginal notes he often confused legitimate emperors with counter-emperors. The first translations of the work were published in the Modern Period, and also the first scientific results can be dated to this time (19th century). We must emphasize the modern results about the work from the Late Antiquity, especially the book of Jörg Schlumberger, published in 1974, and the book of Michel Festy, published in 1999.

3. Hungarian translation: The first complete Hungarian translation of the Epitome de Caesaribus was based on Teubner's edition (1961) of the work. Until my thesis only the parts from Emperor Iulian (361-363) to Theodosius (379-395) were available in Hungarian, translated by András Patay-Horváth.

4. Commentary: The Hungarian commentary is based on the three most significant Epitome-commentaries (Schlumberger's thesis in German from 1974, Festy's book in French from 1999 and Zugravu's commentary in Romanian from 2012); however, more attention was paid to chronology, quantitative data analysis, counter-emperors and usurpers. Note that Schlumberger's pioneering work basically focused on source research, that is on the similarities and differences between the sources used by the epitomist and the Epitome, therefore he neglects chronology - this cannot be objected to because of the nature of his approach to the topic -, and makes minor mistakes due to the limited knowledge of his age, and what's more, he fails to highlight the mistakes and unique data of the author of the Epitome. Festy's nearly two hundred-page-commentary is similarly monumental to the German historian's book, however, there is a step forward: the French author cites and explains several parts of the text not included in Schlumberger's work; furthermore, the French author discusses the latest research results as well. Festy discusses the historical mistakes and the unique data of the epitomist in a separate chapter, however, this specific information needs to be completed in some cases, for example in the case of counter-emperors. Zugravu's work is basically updating the book of the French historian as well as
supplementing it with new data. The Romanian historian's precision is praiseworthy; out of
the three commentaries this work is the most extensive and thorough.

5. The Epitome: The fifth chapter is about the text itself. I defined the sources and the
genre of the Late Antique work, specified the date of origin of the Epitome, demonstrated how
each chapter is made up in the breviary, and collected the text parts on Pannonia; the sentence
on the proclamation of Septimius Severus in Savaria represents a particularly valuable source
(Epit. de Caes. 19.2.)

6. The unknown author: In the sixth chapter I tried to answer the question of who the
unknown epitomist was. I started out from Schlumberger's widely accepted hypothesis, who
stated that the unknown author not only used Virius Nicomachus Flavianus' Annales written
around 390 to compose his work, but he also personally knew the pagan senator who
committed suicide after the battle of Frigidus in 394. The epitomist could therefore be a
member of Macrobius' "Symmachus-circle"; and as Festus and Eutropius also wrote their
breviary at the request of an imperator, maybe the Epitome was also written at the request of
an emperor (Honorius, the Western Roman Emperor). Besides the pagan and neoplatonist
beliefs of the author I also discussed the henotheistic concepts of the epitomist and his
supposed religious relationship to the Sun and to the God of the Sun. At the end of the sixth
chapter I explored the interests of the epitomist. The Epitome is not an ordinary breviary, as it
is biographical in nature: the life and moral of the imperators are enlivened with anecdotes.
The high number of exemplums turn the work into a „mirror of kings”, as the author often
moralizes on the ideal characteristics of an imperator. The epitomist is also interested in the
emperors' sexuality and their interesting habits, as well as in bloody incidents and deaths. A
total of 108 deaths are included in the text, of which 75 are murders; and very often unique
black humor appears in the work. The author is interested in the sciences (medicine,
architecture), and - as it has been mentioned - the counter-emperors as well.

7. The last Pagans: The seventh chapter tried to present the 4th-5th century from pagan
perspective. How did Christianity - prosecuted by Diocletian - become the state religion at the
end of the 4th century? Until what date could representatives of the old cults get offices in
Christian state administration? Who were the last pagans? What methods did the Christian
emperors use to confine the ancient cults? I introduced also the last pagan historians, and
prepared a chronological table that can help us better understand the late ancient times (4th-5th century) and its political, religious and cultural events.

8-10. Summary, Bibliography, Photo Gallery: The summary of the work’s main conclusions, and of the used sources and modern works. In the Photo Gallery photos were attached from the Gudianus Latinus 84 codex, which contains the oldest (9th century) complete manuscript of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.

III. Conclusions of the Thesis

- The thesis contains the first complete Hungarian translation of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* and the Hungarian commentary of the work.

- Based on the text part of the *Epitome* on Caligula (*Epit. de Caes. 3.9*), in the commentary I examined the data of other ancient authors on the bridge built by the third Roman Emperor in the Puteolanus Gulf (page 72-73). I concluded that the gulf, which contains the Portus Iulius as well, was significantly altered several times in the imperial era, and its size was reduced due to human activity and/or environmental changes (earthquakes, eruptions of Mount Vesuvius). The length of Caligula's bridge and thus the diameter of the Puteolanus Gulf was described by Iosephus Flavius as 5,554 metres long at the end of the 1st century (30 *stadiums*' length), by Suetonius as 5,332 metres long at the beginning of the 2nd century (3,600 Roman *passi*), by Cassius Dio as 4,814 metres long in the 3rd century (26 *stadiums*' length), while as 4,443 metres (3 miles) long at the turn of the 4th-5th century by the *Epitome de Caesaribus*.

- I provided a detailed commentary on all text parts in the *Epitome* about counter-emperors. I also thoroughly described the passages containing quantitative information.

- I found that several text parts are about the Sun or the God of the Sun, and I tried to associate these text parts with the religious beliefs of the unknown author. In *Epit. de Caes. 1.20*. Emperor Augustus is compared to the God of the Sun, in *Epit. de Caes. 4.9*. the author reports the appearance of a phoenix, the sun bird, in *Epit. de Caes. 12.12*. he writes about a solar eclipse following the death of Nerva, which symbolizes the emperor's deification, in *Epit. de Caes. 23.2*. the writer mentions by name Emperor
Elagabalus’ grandfather, who was a priest of Sol, while in *Epit. de Caes.* 35.5. he writes about Aurelian's golden robes, comparing him - the emperor, who wanted to revolutionize the cult of Sol in Rome - to Sol. It can therefore be stated that the unknown epitomist sympathized with the cult of the Sun God and followed *henotheistic* concepts.

- I collected all *Epitome* text parts about Pannonia. In the work there are a total of 25 references to our province. The most important of them is the information on the location of Septimius Severus’ proclamation (*Epit. de Caes.* 19.2.), which is Savaria, unlike the *Historia Augusta* mentions Carnuntum, not Savaria. According to the hypothesis of Šašel Kos, in the *Liber de Caesaribus* Aurelius Victor calls Severus during his proclamation incorrectly as the legate of Syria, because the geographical names of "Syria" and "Savaria / Sabaria" sound similar and can be easily confused.

- One of the most important hypothesis of my thesis is that the *terminus post quem* of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*’ completion was the invasion of the Vandal-Alan-Suevi tribal alliance against Gaul, the date of which (31. December 406.) we know from Prosper Tiro Aquitanus. How can I support my hypothesis?

1. The *Epitome de Caesaribus* conceals the name of the Vandal *magister militum*, Stilicho, although he was the most important historical figure of the Western Roman Empire in this historical era (394/395-408). The epitomist has also some weird anti-Alan lines, although the Alans supported the Theodosian dynasty at the battle of Frigidus in 394, at the battle of Pollentia in 402 and at the battle of Faesulae in 406. However, it is well known that following the Vandal-Alan-Suevi invasion of Gaul, an anti-Stilicho and anti-Vandal/Alan atmosphere reigned in Italy. The negative opinion of the *magister militum* was due to the fact that he was the one who recalled the majority of the Roman troops from the Rhine to Italy in response to the attack of Radagaisus’ Goths (406), and in this way he opened an opportunity for the attack by the vandals at the end of the year. The Vandal *magister militum* was also accused - which was absolutely ungrounded - of inviting his "brothers" to the empire.

2. From the breviaries of the Late Antiquity it is the *Epitome de Caesaribus* which mentions the most, thirty-six counter-emperors. I believe that the political situation
explains the large number of usurpers. In 407 a total of four persons proclaimed themselves counter-emperors in the western provinces: Marcus, Gratianus, Constantine III, and the son of Constantine III, Constans caesar.

3. On the map I illustrated the geographical names contained in the Epitome de Caesaribus, as well as the sites where counter-emperors were proclaimed. The maps make it clear that the unknown author was most familiar with Rome and Northern Italy within the areas of the Roman Empire, however, the dominance of Gaul is also remarkable. Gaul is named by the epitomist 13 times in total; in addition, the following Gallic cities are also included in the breviary: Lugdunum, Narbona, Massilia, Argentoratum, Argentaria, Arelatensis and Vienna. It can be presumed that there is a link between the epitomist and Gaul, but it is possible that Gaul appears so often in the breviary because of the political situation (Vandal-Alan-Suevi lootings in 407).

When the Vandal-Alan-Suevi alliance broke through the ripa of the Rhine, it started a process which resulted in the collapse of the Roman rule in Gaul (407), Hispania (409) and Britannia (410). In my opinion the terminus post quem of the origin of the Epitome was 31. December 406, while its terminus ante quem was 1. May 408, the death of Emperor Arcadius, who is mentioned in the breviary as a living person.

- I analysed the Gudianus Latinus 84 codex from the 9th century, which contains the oldest complete manuscript of the Epitome de Caesaribus besides the work of the military historian, Vegetius. The first known medieval version of the breviary is the work of a single monk, who, however, omitted two minor details of the Epitome from the codex. I examined why the reference to Ovid's Ars Amatoria is not included in the Gudianus Latinus 84’s Epitome version (Epit. de Caes. 1.24.). I noticed that the monk copying the work wrote the Greek words - contrary to Schlumberger's opinion - in Latin letters; and in his marginal notes he often confused legitimate emperors with usurpers.
III. Publications and Lectures in connection with the Thesis

1. Publications

- Sólyom Márk: Késő ókori anekdoták az első római császárról. Rubicon 25/9. 82-83.

2. Lectures