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Source: *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Nov., 1961), pp. 239-249

Published by: Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Classical Association

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/637713>

Accessed: 22-12-2019 16:32 UTC

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SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE LATER ROMAN EMPIRE: THE EVIDENCE OF AUSONIUS

THE description Ausonius has given us of his family and of the teachers and professors of Bordeaux in the mid-fourth century is exceptional among our sources because of its detail and completeness. There is no reason to suppose that the picture he gives is untypical of life in the provinces and it makes a welcome change from the histories of aristocratic politics at Rome or Constantinople. It provides an excellent opportunity for a pilot study in which we may see how the conflicting elements of social status were in practice reconciled and applied. In the traditional, and still prevalent view, the society of the Later Roman Empire was 'crushed . . . in the iron clamp of castes separated from one another by barriers which could not be passed'.¹ The evidence of Ausonius suggests that this judgement should be qualified. The society of the fourth century may have been stable. It was not static.

To be sure people in Bordeaux were conscious of status.² Birth and wealth were never far from their minds. But the more practical among them were ready to marry their daughters off to a man with little background but good prospects. The more humane considered that charm, intelligence, and learning compensated considerably for a deficient inheritance. Ausonius himself acknowledged the importance of birth and wealth, rarely missed them out in his description of people; but he also judged people for their professional skill, still more for their kindness, wit, and courtesy, and even for their considerate treatment of their servants. Such an attitude which views human beings roughly for what they are is completely inimical to a caste-society.

When we see Ausonius striving to harmonize the whole gamut of social criteria, birth, wealth, education, charm, ability, and kindness, any idea of a simple and fixed status system seems too rigid. Teachers and professors, for example, were often without the advantages of distinguished birth and were relatively poor. Yet some of them were able to enjoy, as they are today, a social standing which made them acceptable if not equal to the upper classes.³

¹ A. Alföldi, *A Conflict of Ideas in the Later Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1952), p. 28. To the same effect: O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der Antiken Welt* (Berlin, 1901), ii, 301; P. Charanis, 'On the Social Structure of the Later Roman Empire', *Byzantion* xvii (1944-5), 39.

² It may be useful to distinguish between class, status-group, and caste in the Weberian manner. Class refers to the *economic*, or, more specifically, market situation of people as this is affected by their possession of goods or their opportunities for income. Status-groups possess an emotional consciousness of unity (in the Weberian terminology, are communities), and are determined by every

social estimation of honour. Castes are highly developed status-groups, typified by exclusiveness and endogamy. Cf. *From Max Weber*, ed. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (London, 1948), pp. 180-95.

³ Professors were to some extent atypical. Through their public speeches they subjected talents to public judgement and more than in other professions their competence became a significant factor in their success. The most able, therefore, and not necessarily the most gentlemanly, had an easier path to the top. But the evidence for mobility even in Ausonius is not confined to professors.

Neither consciousness of status nor the existence of definable status groups, such as the decurionate, precluded social mobility. If we take into account the whole range of mobility in this provincial society, whether it is one man's marginal progress from slave to freed elementary teacher, whether it is a family's slow groping through three generations towards wealth and power, or whether it is Ausonius' own meteoric rise from professor to praetorian prefect, it becomes all the more difficult to draw the line and say with Seeck or Alföldi: here is the barrier which no one crossed.¹

I. THE FAMILY OF AUSONIUS

Ausonius was not ashamed of his family background. Although a little mixed it had its respectable side. Naturally he was not above glossing over some of the weaker points. Like Symmachus recommending men for admission to the Senate, when good birth was lacking he praised virtues.²

He tells us a fair amount about his mother's family. His maternal grandfather, Caecilius Argicius Arborius (I),³ was an Aeduan of a wealthy family which 'combined many noble houses'.⁴ As must have happened fairly often in the unsettled conditions of Gaul in the third century, both Arborius and his father (II) were proscribed by the pretender Victorinus (A.D. 269–70) and exiled to Tarbellae (modern Dax) in south-west France.⁵ While in exile Arborius married the well-born but penniless Aemilia (III).⁶ Then, in more prosperous times, the family seems to have recovered from this double blow of proscription and a poor marriage, for 'with many an exertion they raised a small amount of money, a relief for their old age but not a fortune'.⁷ Their competence was almost certainly the *parvum herediolum* cultivated for three generations which Ausonius later inherited.⁸ Nor was it so small. It consisted of over a thousand iugera (roughly 700 acres), two-thirds of it woodland but containing a hundred iugera of vineyards.⁹ The couple (I and III) had four children, three girls and a boy (IV–VII). One girl (IV) married Julius Ausonius (XIII), the father of the great Ausonius (XVIII). The boy (V) went in for an academic career, and at the time of his sister's marriage, he may well have been a professor of rhetoric at Toulouse.¹⁰ Of the other two sisters one (VI) died on her

¹ See p. 239, n. 1.

² Symm. *Or.* 6. 1–3; 7. 4.

³ Roman figures refer to the genealogical tree (p. 249).

⁴ Aus. 4. 4. 4. (All references unless otherwise specified are to R. Peiper's edition of Ausonius, Leipzig, 1886.) 'Noble' (*Nobilitas, nobilis*) has to be taken with a pinch of salt. It covered a wide range of respectability, from squires to aristocrats. Perhaps *nobilis* is best rendered, well-born.

⁵ 4. 4. 8–9, 11–12. It may well have been Ausonius' great-grandfather and his great-great-grandfather who were proscribed, so Seeck, *R.E.* ii. 3. 419 (1). The text and the chronology are difficult, but the matter is not germane to our problems. In either case the family was impoverished.

⁶ 4. 4. 14; 5. 16. 8.

⁷ 4. 4. 15–16. C. Jullian ('Ausone et son Temps', *Rev. Hist.* xlvii [1891], 245) thinks that Caecilius Argicius Arborius turned his astrological knowledge to profit.

⁸ 3. 1. 2–3, 9. The case for this view is argued below.

⁹ 3. 1. 21–23.

¹⁰ Aemilius Magnus Arborius (V) died before 337; if we read at 4. 4. 25: *amissum flecti post trina decennia natum* (post with V), he must have been born c. 307, in which case his career is remarkable but has the support of *iuveni* (5. 16. 10). Peiper emends *post* to *per*, and Seeck *décennia* to *vicennia* (!), *R.E.* ii. 3. 420 (2), preferring him to have died aged sixty. Yet in either case, in 308, when his sister married Julius Ausonius, he would have been of little social importance, either a *rhetor* at Toulouse or a child. Cf. 4. 3. 11.

honeymoon;¹ the other (VII) remained an 'avowed virgin'.² The Arborii were proud of their origins, very respectable, but not too well off.³

About his father's background Ausonius is rather reticent. This is in itself suspicious. We hear no personal detail of his paternal grandfather (VIII). Yet Ausonius would never have missed an opportunity to glorify the family name. His father, Julius Ausonius (XIII), which is as far back as he is willing to go, was born in the neighbouring province of Novempopulana, but practised medicine at Bordeaux.⁴ His Latin was not fluent; Greek seems to have been his natural tongue.⁵ In any case his lack of Latin precludes a distinguished origin. Perhaps he may have been the son of an eastern Greek-speaking doctor, originally a slave but freed. Such men were common, and the name Ausonius—Westerner—seems a typical slave name. It would explain the poet's reticence about his grandfather.

In one passage Ausonius says that he has inherited a farm cultivated by his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather. Commentators have taken this to mean a paternal line of succession.⁶ But if Ausonius' paternal grandfather (VIII) had done anything so respectable as to cultivate a thousand iugera of land we should surely have been told. It would probably have made him liable to curial duties. We hear nothing of it. But his son, Julius Ausonius (XIII), was a decurion of both Bazas and Bordeaux. P. Grimal has very cleverly shown that the poet's estate, Lucaniacus, which Peiper identifies as the inheritance, was not in Bazas where Julius Ausonius was born, but on the borders of Bordeaux and Santes.⁷ Why then was Julius Ausonius a decurion of Bazas and Bordeaux, when he had land only in Bordeaux? The simple answer could be that his father (VIII) had been manumitted in Bazas, which would have given him and Julius Ausonius *origo* there, and that on Julius Ausonius' marriage into the Arborii, the estate came into his hands either as a dowry, or somewhat later as an inheritance from his wife's father (I). His wife died earlier (c. 353) than he did;⁸ under Roman law he would have had the usufruct until his death⁹; the property then passed to his son. When Ausonius says his father, grandfather, and great-grandfather cultivated the same estate it was a *suggestio falsi* designed to cover the tracks of a humble paternity.

¹ 4. 25. 5-8.

² 4. 6. *tit.* 'avowed virgin' is H. G. E. White's fine translation of *virgo devota*, Loeb edition, i. 67.

³ Taking the scale worked out by Professor A. H. M. Jones (*J.R.S.* xliii [1953], 49-50) from an inscription from Thera, Ausonius' estate would have been roughly equal to seven *iuga*. At Tralles, a Roman Senator had 75 *iuga* and three decurions 20½, 17, and 57½ *iuga* each. On the other hand, seven *iuga* is very much larger than the average holding. Finally, it must be observed that the assessment of land and the qualifications for the decurionate differed from town to town.

⁴ 1. 1. 3-5; 3. 4. 1, 4.

⁵ 3. 4. 9-10: *sermone impromptus Latio, verum Attica lingua / sufficit culti vocibus eloquii*. I agree with P. Martino, *Ausone et les commences du Christianisme en Gaule*, Thèse de

lettres (Paris, 1906), p. 27; contra, Julian (*Rev. Hist.* xlvii [1891], 244), who for no apparent reason except the desire to claim Ausonius as the first Gallic poet, says that Ausonius' natural language was Gallic. He is followed by R. Pichon (*Les derniers écrivains profanes* [Paris, 1906], pp. 302-3) and C. Favez (*Mus. Helv.* iii [1946], 122), who argue from the awkward turn of phrase. Professor Jones has suggested that this was a polite way of saying his Latin was not literary; and in Gaul his medical Greek would probably have passed muster.

⁶ 3. 1. 1-3: *Maiorum regna meorum / quod proavus, quod avus, quod pater excoluit / quod mihi iam senior . . . reliquit*. Cf. Pichon, *op. cit.*, p. 302; Favez, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-3, n. 25.

⁷ P. Grimal, *R.E.A.* lv (1953), 113-25; Peiper, *op. cit.*, cix-cx.

⁸ 3. 4. 37-38.

⁹ Cf. *C.Th.* 3. 13. 3; 8. 18 *passim*.

The rest of Julius Ausonius' family was scarcely distinguished. He had two brothers and two sisters (IX–XII). One brother was a merchant; having gathered his wealth in various ways he died in Britain, intestate.¹ The other brother, a cheery good-living soul, left Ausonius his heir, but, as the latter wryly remarks, it was only in name.² Of his two sisters one was a consecrated virgin,³ and the other died young, having married a man about whom Ausonius preferred to say nothing.⁴

Julius Ausonius married young, probably when he was twenty.⁵ Whether his father was of servile origin or not, he had not a single ancestor of social significance, and although he was little more than a medical student he married the daughter of a relatively impoverished but noble house. It was a movement upwards. Yet the couple were not well-off; they lived thriftily but not sordidly, and neither increased nor diminished their estate.⁶ The doctor was ready to help all who asked free of charge.⁷ And as a result his son was certainly glad as a young man of the help he received from his aunt (XI). 'Like a mother she gave me what she could from the little she had.'⁸ This seems rather more than the casual reward for a nephew's visit and the phrasing, *quod potuit*, seems to exclude a legacy.⁹ It shows how tight the family's budgeting was.

Nevertheless Ausonius received a good education. He did not go to one of the fashionable universities like Rome or Constantinople or Athens, but studied under his maternal uncle, Aemilius Magnus Arborius (V), who was professor at Toulouse.¹⁰ While there Arborius had married well (*nobilis et dotata uxor*), and had become friendly with the half-brothers of Constantine the Great.¹¹ Possibly through their influence, and no doubt helped by his experience as an advocate in Novempopulana and in Spain, he was made governor of Gallia Narbonensis.¹² He then became professor of rhetoric at Constantinople, and finished his life as tutor to a Caesar, possibly Constans or Constantine II.¹³ He died a wealthy man and Constantine was considerate enough to send his body back to his home town of Bordeaux.¹⁴

The family fortunes were looking up. In the late 320's Ausonius' sister (XVI), a woman of strong character and cheerful determination, married Pomponius Maximus (XV), the leader of the Bordeaux Senate.¹⁵ This must have been quite a *coup* for a doctor's daughter, who can hardly have had a large dowry, and however much doctors were respected, they were hardly the social equals of the largest landowners.

A few years later (c. 334) Ausonius himself followed the example of his sister and uncle. He married well. Admittedly he had the advantage of his uncle's (V) fame at court, and he had an influential brother-in-law (XV). He was by this time a *grammaticus*,¹⁶ with perhaps some practice in the courts.¹⁷ His wife (XX) came from a family of long and high standing (*Nobilis a provavis et origine clara senatus*).¹⁸ Her father had devoted his life to the management of his

¹ 4. 7. 2–4.

² 4. 7. 10.

¹² 4. 3. 12–14. ¹³ 4. 3. 16; 5. 16. 15.

³ 4. 26. 3–4.

⁴ 4. 27.

¹⁴ 5. 16. 17–18.

⁵ 18. 19. 13. For the chronology cf. F.

Marx, *R.E.* ii. 4. 2562(2).

¹⁵ 4. 12. 3–4, 9–11; 4. 15. 3, 6–7.

⁶ 3. 4. 7, 17.

⁷ 3. 4. 11–12.

¹⁶ A *grammaticus* was a teacher of literature, second in standing to a professor (*rhetor*). He would take boys and girls when they could read and write. The *rhetor* took children over 14. Cf. p. 245, n. 3 below.

⁸ 4. 26. 5–6: *et mihi, quod potuit, quamvis de paupere summa, mater uti adtribuit.*

⁹ Favez (op. cit., p. 122) says a legacy, but without argument.

¹⁷ 1. 1. 17–18.

¹⁸ 4. 9. 5.

¹⁰ 4. 3. 8–11.

¹¹ 5. 16. 9–12.

estates, hunting, and good living.¹ It seems curious that, apart from the social difference, he would have appreciated the scholarly Ausonius as a son-in-law. Perhaps he recognized his ability. For he approved the match although he did not live to see it consummated.²

Thus Ausonius, his father, his uncle, and his sister all contracted marriages which were socially and financially advantageous to themselves and to the *gens Ausonia*. If the status groups had been exclusive or endogamous this would have been impossible. Henceforward Ausonius had powerful connexions through his wife's relations and his sister's husband. For thirty years, however, he remained in Bordeaux as teacher and professor. His sister's husband died,³ and doubtless he helped her orphaned children. His nephew (XXI) followed his career and became a *grammaticus*.⁴ His niece (XXIV) married a coeval of Ausonius, who was a decurion of Bazas. He was a financial officer (*scriiniarius*) to a praetorian prefect, diocesan treasurer of Africa (*rationalis*), and governor (*corrector*) of a province in Spain, a post which could have given him senatorial rank.⁵ Ausonius' own daughter married a man who came from a leading family of great distinction. He died shortly afterwards, so we can guess that his known career was completed by the time of his marriage. He had been advocate of the treasury, adviser to a praetorian prefect (*assessor*), and governor of Dalmatia.⁶ The comparatively high rank of these new additions to the family of Ausonius, still professor at Bordeaux, shows that the process of improvement had not stopped. The family had come a long way from its days of proscription and medicine. And it had secured this advance through the talents and character of its members, through marriages which cut across social barriers, and through the exploitation of its connexions.

2. AUSONIUS AT COURT

In 364 Ausonius was summoned to the court of Valentinian I at Treves to be tutor to the young prince Gratian. He soon became Count, Quaestor of the Sacred Palace, and was responsible for writing imperial decrees. On Valentinian's death in 375, and the accession of Gratian, his pupil, Ausonius rose to be praetorian prefect. The family did not lose by it. Ausonius secured the praetorian prefecture for his aged father and his son at the same time, while his son-in-law was made proconsular of Africa. The Ausonian family for a short time ruled the whole of the western world. As a crowning glory Ausonius was made consul in 379.⁷ Pichon misses the point in comparing the consulate of the Late Empire with the consulate of the Republic and finding it wanting. He dismisses the honours of the Empire as a mere show, devoid of real power.⁸ This may be partially true; neither praetorian prefects nor consuls were the sole powers in the state. But their tenure ennobled a whole line, and usually enriched it at the same time.

Once he had reached the top, and had been placed among the *élite*, Ausonius

¹ 4. 8. 7-8.

² 4. 8. 11-12.

⁶ 4. 14. Cf. Stroheker, *op. cit.*, p. 170. no. 132.

³ 4. 15. 4.

⁴ 5. 11. 3. It is interesting to see the son of a leader of the *curia*, even if orphaned, become a *grammaticus*.

⁷ Cf. F. Marx, *R.E.* ii. 4. 2562 ff.

⁵ 4. 24. 5-12. Cf. K. F. Stroheker, *Der senatorische Adel im spätantiken Gallien* (Tübingen, 1948), p. 201, no. 289.

⁸ Pichon, *op. cit.*, pp. 194-6. It is a pity, because otherwise Pichon's is by far the most penetrating account of Ausonius which I have found, especially pp. 192-4.

could not resist looking back over his success. As was natural in a snobbish society he felt a little self-conscious. But he put a brave face on it and frankly acknowledged that he came from the middle class (*ex qua mediocritate*).¹ In thanking Gratian for his consulship he wrote:

'I cannot give surety by showing off the statues of my ancestors . . . nor can I show untold wealth and inheritances spread out over the earth; but what is known I can talk about, rather than boast of: a family of which I have no need to be ashamed, a household of irreproachable and not artificial virtue, a meagre fortune, but one lent distinction by learning and letters; economy without meanness, a capacity for humanity, a liberal outlook, an unpretentious pleasantness in eating, dressing and living.'²

On another occasion he wrote:

'You will make other consuls: renowned soldiers . . . men of ancient nobility, for names count for a good deal, and reputation takes the place of achievement.'³

Here is all the ambivalence of the social riser, the dilemma of pride and resentment. While he was flattered beyond measure to have been ranked with the ancient nobility he had not yet been assimilated, he had not yet accepted their values. It rankled that others could gain so easily the honours that he had won through skill and work. With great aristocrats, like Probus, he felt distinctly uncomfortable, as can be seen in a letter of his, which, even allowing for the conventions of the age, is grotesquely servile.⁴ With Symmachus, on the other hand, another aristocrat, he found refuge in discussing professional literary matters.⁵ With the aristocrats and within himself he was on the defensive. His awkward pride made him overplay his hand. His defence of solid virtue was too vehement. Yet he had the integrity to acknowledge his background, to describe the homeliness of his family, and who can blame him if he faltered at the last ditch, and was content with half the truth about his grandparents? Few new men would have done as much and fewer still would have kept Ausonius' humane touch.

3. THE PROFESSORS OF BORDEAUX

There was in the fourth century a tremendous revival of literary learning. It was typical of the period that the rough-and-ready emperor Valentinian I should have wanted his son brought up in the best scholarly tradition. Even emperors bow to aristocratic tastes. A gentleman in the fourth century was expected to be well read, well equipped with tags, if possible a poetaster into the bargain;⁶ hence the special position of the professors. They not only trained gentlemen, they helped them remain gentlemen by acting as their literary advisers. If they wrote themselves, they had the kind of social *éclat* which goes today to the cultural middlemen, conductors, actors, and soloists.⁷ They were

¹ 20. 1. 34.

² 20. 8. 230-40.

³ 20. 4. 105-10.

⁴ 18. 12 *passim*.

⁵ 18. 1-3.

⁶ e.g. Symmachus and his father, *Symm. Ep.* 1. 1-3.

⁷ Libanius was given the honorary rank of praetorian prefect. Prohaeresius was

honoured by Constans and made stratonpedarch, Eunapius, *Vita Sophistarum*, ed. G. Giangrande (Rome, 1956), 10. 7. 5; 16. 2. 8. In the fifth century the top professors at Constantinople were given high rank regularly, *C.Th.* 6. 21.

not on terms of social equality with the aristocrats, but they had contact with them. In a world in which there were no technical requirements for government posts, and where power was exploited properly only if it was used for the benefit of friends,¹ professors shared in the spoils. And the status of the profession was continually raised when professors secured profitable or honourable posts or when men of respectable birth succumbed to the charms of an academic life.² But we must not paint the picture too rosy. The traditional teachers at elementary levels had always in the days of the republic and early empire been slaves or freedmen, often scorned orientals. The tradition survived. The teachers of Bordeaux in the fourth century were a very mixed bag. And it is not surprising in a profession where skill was so often on display, that no hard-and-fast hereditary clique was formed, and that men of inferior social origins were able to climb on the band-wagon and so reach a higher status.³

Such is the picture which Ausonius gives us of the teaching profession at Bordeaux. Exuperius, for example, was born at Bordeaux, but became professor of rhetoric at Toulouse. His presence was grand, his eloquence torrential, but his matter a little thin. Toulouse tired of him. He moved to Narbo, where he was lucky enough to receive high fees as tutor to the sons of Dalmatius, Constantine's half-brother. When they became Caesars in 335, he was given the governorship of a Spanish province which would have carried the title of *perfectissimus*. He died a rich man.⁴

He was, it might be objected, an exception. To teach Caesars was outside the normal schema of promotion. Yet changes in government, whether by the accession of new emperors, or by the more frequent change of high officials, or by the occasional revolution, brought about a change in personnel—supporters to be rewarded, old favourites to be deposed.⁵ As the rebellion of Maximus meant a temporary setback for the Ausonii,⁶ the revolt of Magnentius (353–8) brought Attius Tiro Delphidius to the fore. He was of ancient druid stock from Armorica (Loire valley). His family had been attached to the temple of Apollo Belenus. His grandfather, finding this no longer profitable in a Christian era, secured a job as a teacher in Bordeaux,⁷ through the influence of his son Attius Patera, who was already professor there and was later to teach with distinction at Rome.⁸ The rise of Christianity must have upset the position of many priestly families. Attius Tiro Delphidius excelled both his father and grandfather. 'He brightened all Gaul by his talent for writing prose and verse', said Jerome, half a century later.⁹ He practised as an advocate in

¹ Cf. Symm. *Ep.* 7. 94.

² Ausonius mentions five professors of Bordeaux with curial backgrounds; cf. also Libanius, *Or.* 1. 2; Eunapius, *Vita Sophistarum*, 6. 1. 1, 7. 1. 4.

³ By Diocletian's edict on prices, the *paedagogus* and the elementary teacher received 50 denarii per pupil per month; the teacher of arithmetic 75. An unskilled labourer received 25 and a skilled labourer received 50 denarii a day, with maintenance as well. Although a teacher could expect presents in kind, he may well at this level have had to have thirty pupils to earn as much as a skilled labourer. A *grammaticus* earned much more, 200 denarii per pupil

per month, and a *rhetor* 250, *C.I.L.* iii. 809. In 376 Gratian passed a law fixing the salaries of municipal teachers; *grammatici* were to receive 12 *annonae*, and *rhetores* 24, *C. Th.* 13. 3. 11.

⁴ 5. 17.

⁵ This process is always an important factor in social mobility, cf. A. Gouldner, *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy* (London, 1955), pp. 73–75.

⁶ 18. 20, *tit.* Ausonius' son, Hesperius, beat a hasty retreat from court.

⁷ 5. 4. 7–9; 5. 10. 22–30.

⁸ 5. 6. 16–19.

⁹ For both Attius Patera and Delphidius, cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 120, *praef.*

the provincial and praetorian courts, in addition to his teaching. When the rebellion of Magnentius offered the opportunity, he tried for higher things. Ausonius says of him :

You would have been better off if you had stayed quietly in the academic life, composing poems ; if by your massive lawsuits you had not aroused those animosities which found their weapons in a drive for vengeance ; if you had not risen to the palace confused in a time of tyranny. . . . You desired much, wandered through all the positions of rank, and deserved more than you got.¹

Naturally at the fall of Magnentius he was attacked, and was only saved through his father's influence. He became a professor again but did not stick at it long.² He appears briefly under Julian (361-3) as the vigorous prosecutor of an ex-governor on a charge of embezzlement. The suit was unsuccessful.³ His whole career was unsuccessful. But what is important for us is that he tried, that he filled, if only temporarily, all the positions of rank. He rose above the station to which he was born, using vigour, learning, and rhetoric as a spring-board.

Marcellus was another failure.⁴ He was born in Bordeaux, but was driven away by the sternness of his mother to seek his fortune in Narbo. He found not only a home there but also a wife, the daughter of a well-born stranger who was impressed by the young man's ability. His popular school brought him the official position of teacher and made him well-off, but through some crooked dealing he lost everything at one stroke. Just as when Ausonius' grandparents were proscribed and they married their daughter to a doctor, the stranger living in Narbo was perhaps forced, because of his uprooting, to accept a son-in-law of a lower social standing. For Ausonius leaves us in no doubt that it was a rise in the world for Marcellus.

It is not necessary to give more examples in detail. The following two tables show, in so far as it is possible, the social origin of the teachers mentioned by Ausonius and their careers.

I. Origins

Of 17 no specific information is given. They can be presumed to be free-born, but in general undistinguished.

3 freedmen by birth (e.g. *libertina progenie* 5. 10. 15).

4 of low origin (e.g. *humili stirpe* 5. 10. 5-6).

2 of druid stock (1 of whom was a temple-keeper).

3 sons of *rhetores* or *grammatici*.

5 of at least curial family.

34

II. Careers

Of 20 no specific information is given on the end of their careers. They can be presumed to have finished as teachers.

2 finish as teachers in poverty or lowly positions.

2 become professors at Rome or Constantinople or both.

¹ 5. 5. 19-30.

² 5. 5. 31-4.

³ Amm. Marc. 18. 1. 4.

⁴ 5. 18.

- 4* marry specifically rich or noble wives.
 1* becomes rich possibly through his wife or his job.
 5† hold governorships or high administrative positions.

34

* Of whom none were decurions.

† Of whom only two were of curial family, but all were *rhetores* before their appointment.

What conclusions may be drawn? The sample is small and the conclusions must be tentative. The group does not seem to have been hereditary. Only three professors are said to have been the sons of professors; and this is the sort of information which Ausonius is unlikely to have passed over. Perhaps the sons of successful professors who had become governors, for example, tended to enter professions with more immediate and less competitive prospects of glory. Secondly the range of the teachers' origins and careers was very wide. It stretched from freedman to provincial governor. High social origin was not the sole key to success. Of the twelve men who were exceptionally successful only five were of higher than average origin, and of these at least four (Minervius and Patera, professors at Rome and Constantinople, Ausonius himself and Arborius, his uncle) were clearly men of considerable talent. It was professional skill much more than birth which carried the day. Of the same twelve successes ten had reached the position of *rhetor*, and only two were *grammatici*, when they married rich wives or gained high administrative positions. Skill within the profession was a factor in success outside it.

In search of success professors moved a lot from town to town. Of the thirty-four professors whose lives Ausonius describes, sixteen were either born in other towns and practised in Bordeaux, or were born in Bordeaux and practised elsewhere. Men equipped with professional qualifications and definite skills move more easily than other people, and do so in order to improve their professional and social status. And it is clear from Eunapius' *Lives of the Sophists* that such movement by professors was fairly common throughout the empire in the fourth century.¹ We have, then, a picture of an achievement-oriented status group, whose members were often geographically and socially mobile. Their position inside the group and the group's position inside society were not directly correlated to the usual criteria of status: birth and wealth. Finally, the teaching profession functioned as a well-used channel of social mobility.

4. AUSONIUS' SOCIAL OUTLOOK

In the portrayal of his colleagues Ausonius certainly took note of their birth. That we know the origin of seventeen out of thirty-four of them speaks for itself. As in most societies, the obvious criteria of wealth and birth were quickly clutched at. But as we have seen in his family and in the careers we have traced, they were not a completely overriding consideration. And for Ausonius—whose attitude was probably more kindly and tolerant than the average land-owner's—the character and morals of his colleagues were more important,

¹ e.g. Aedesius, a Cappadocian, went to university in Athens, and was a pupil in Syria as well; he taught at Pergamum, 5. 3. 10–6. 1. 4. Libanius moved from Antioch to Athens, Constantinople, Nicomedeia, Nicaea, and finally back to Antioch, 16. 1

and *R.E.* xxiv. 2485 ff. This kind of movement is an important factor in social mobility, cf. S. M. Lipset and R. Bendix, *Social Mobility in Industrial Society* (University of California Press, 1959), pp. 204–6.

more important even than their professional capacities. Even when discount is made for the touch of gravestone encomia about his sketches he seems genuinely to have admired people for their kindly wit, their abstemiousness in food and drink, as well as for their modesty and cheerfulness.¹ In his women he liked beauty, faithfulness, and various homespun qualities (e.g. *lanificae manus*); but he regarded them as real characters, not as doormats or dolls.² In the male world, and especially in his civilized immediate circle, loyalty and friendship were the supreme virtues. When Paulinus deserted friendship, a correspondence in verse, and a political career for religious austerity, Ausonius, though a nominal Christian, was both bewildered and hurt.³ Polite friendship should count above everything. Ausonius also liked kindly consideration. He praises his father for helping the sick without charging.⁴ Of another man he says:

‘No one was more dignified than you, more charming, more generous to the poor by giving help if legal aid or education was needed.’⁵

Another friend, he says, was charming to his guests, never shouted at his clients, or spoke harshly to his servants.⁶

Ausonius was ready to accept ability wherever he saw it. With Delphidius who overreached himself he is kindly, if a little remonstrative.⁷ With Philo his bailiff, who used his Greek title, *epitropos*, to give himself stature, and who turned from being a bad bailiff to a roguish trader enriching himself at his former master’s expense, he is tolerant and amused.⁸ Perhaps it would not be too wide of the mark to leave this successful but still gentle professor with one of his own descriptions:⁹

‘He was Punic by birth; but the sort of man who could prove by his qualities that origin is no obstruction when the ability is there.’

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¹ 5. 4. 19; 5. 7. 1; 5. 15. 3; 5. 15. 9; 5. 24. 9.

² 4. 16. 3-4. ³ 18. 28. 6-7, 32-35.

⁴ 3. 4. 11-12. ⁵ 5. 2. 15-18.

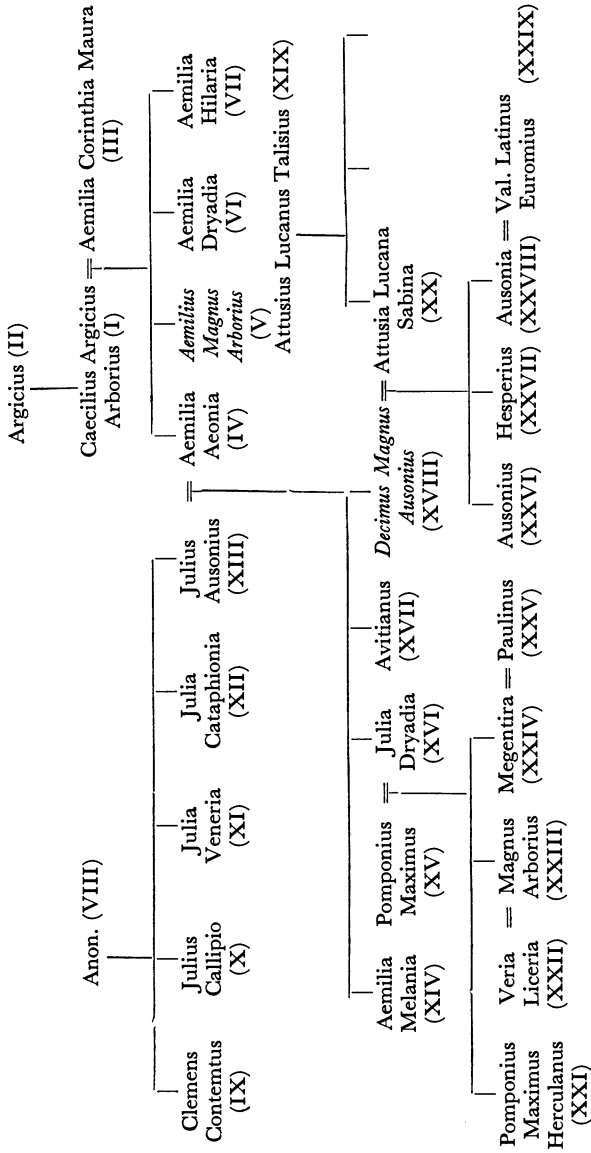
⁶ 5. 3. 11.

⁷ 5. 5. 19-30.

⁸ 18. 26.

⁹ Of Severus Pertinax, 14. 21. 3-4.

SOME OF THE AUSONIAN FAMILY



(Adapted from the Loeb Ausonius, p. 58A.)