

‘VERSUS AUREI’ AND THE DATE OF THE *DE RAPTU PROSERPINAE* III

As C. Gruzelier argues, “over the dating of the *De Raptu Proserpinae* much ink has been spilt”.¹ Unlike most of Claudian’s political works, which are closely tied to particular people and events, this mythological epic gives its readers almost no references of the kind. The only real name appears in the preface to Book II: after describing the labours of Hercules the poet addresses his inspirer and refers to him as “another Tirynthian” (49–50):

<...> Sed tu Tirynthius alter,
Florentine, mihi, tu mea plectra moves <...>

Florentinus (also mentioned in a number of Symmachus’ letters)² was the city prefect in 395–397.³ According to Th. Birt’s opinion, accepted by many,⁴ the whole of the poem (i. e. all three books) is dedicated to the term of office of this *praefectus urbis*, and presumably, the *DRP* was left unfinished by dismissal of Florentinus.⁵ This viewpoint was energetically opposed by J. B. Hall and A. Cameron. Hall believed that “the two prefaces and the epic as a whole can no longer be regarded as necessarily linked to the period 395–397 when Florentinus was a city prefect”,⁶ and that only Book I was written in the first instance, while two others were encouraged by Florentinus “at a later date, still to be determined”.⁷ Cameron supported this assumption and proposed *In Rufinum* II as terminus post quem for the

¹ C. Gruzelier (ed.), *Claudian. De Raptu Proserpinae* (Oxford 1993) XVII.

² Symm. 4. 50–57.

³ Th. Birt (ed.), *Claudii Claudiani carmina*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica. Auctorum antiquissimorum 10 (Berolini 1892) XVI.

⁴ See, for example, M. Platnauer (ed.), *Claudian* 1 (London 1922) XIV and P. Far-
gues, *Claudien: Études sur la poésie et son temps* (Paris 1933) 16.

⁵ Birt (n. 3) XIV ss.

⁶ J. B. Hall (ed.), *Claudian. De raptu Proserpinae*, Cambridge Classical Texts and
Commentaries 11 (Cambridge 1969) 99.

⁷ Hall (n. 6) 103. “The extreme limits could be as early as c. 394, if book I was
written about 390 <...>, and as late as the period after 404, if Claudian was still alive
then” (104).

first book of the *DRP*⁸ (while the second and the third book were dated by him from the later period, namely 400–402).⁹

The latest editors of the poem – J. L. Charlet¹⁰ (1991) and C. Gruzelier¹¹ (1993) – also adhered to the opinion that there was a lapse of some duration between the first and two other books, but (with Hall) they prefer to see the *DRP* “as a more experimental work of his [=Claudian’s] earlier Roman years”.¹² Others did not attempt to date certain books of the epic, but considered the whole of the poem to be either a product of Claudian’s younger years¹³ or, on the contrary, one of his last works.¹⁴

As one can see, although some attempts were made to regard the first book as being prior to the rest, two others were implicitly considered to have been written simultaneously. The only explicit hypothesis comes from Cameron, who argues that “Book III presumably appeared at the same time as II, since it does not have a new preface of its own”.¹⁵ Such an assumption is, probably, true, for the *De consulatu Stilichonis*: Books I and II were written in early January 400,¹⁶ and Book II does not have a preface.¹⁷ If we follow Cameron, who dated Book III from February,¹⁸ the time gap could

⁸ A. Cameron, *Claudian: Poetry and Propaganda at the Court of Honorius* (Oxford 1970) 453 and XV. There is some inconsistency in his dating of the *In Rufinum*: in the table “Chronologia Claudianea” (XV–XVI) Cameron gives 397 and on p. 78 he speaks of 396. *Contra A. Fo*, “Osservazioni su alcune questioni relative al *De raptu Proserpinae di Claudiano*”, *Quaderni Catanesi di studi classici e medievali* 2 (1979) 389 n. 7.

⁹ Cameron (n. 8) XV and 463–464. This view was adopted by E. Potz, *Claudian: Kommentar zu de Raptu Proserpinae. Buch I*, Dissertationen der K.-Fr.-Universität Graz 65 (Graz 1985) 31.

¹⁰ J.-L. Charlet (ed.), *Claudien. Oeuvres* 1 (Paris 1991) XXXII. See also his later article, in which he carries over the date of Books II and III to 396–397 (“Comment lire le *De raptu Proserpinae de Claudien*”, *RÉL* 78 [2000] 191).

¹¹ Gruzelier (n. 1) XVII–XIX.

¹² Hall (n. 6) 105. Cf. V. Cremona who gives the earliest date for first book – 390 and claims the *DRP* is less mature than Claudian’s other works (“La composizione del *De Raptu Proserpinae di Claudiano*”, *Aevum* [1948] 248 n. 1).

¹³ D. Romano’s argument was that Claudian’s mythological and Greek poetry belong to the first phase of his activity, i.e. before 395 (*Claudiano*, Biblioteca di cultura moderna 49 [Palermo 1958] 25).

¹⁴ P. Fabbri, “Del vero Claudiano”, *Athenaeum* 17 (1939) 39 (with no particular dates) argues that Claudian wrote the *DRP* after he had abandoned contemporary poetry (39). A rather extravagant idea belongs to a German translator of the poem G. F. v. Wedekind, who proposed to regard ‘Florentinus’ as a cognomen awarded to Stilico after the victory of Radagaisus at Fiesole in 406 (*Dichtungen des Claudius Claudianus* [Darmstadt 1868] 299).

¹⁵ Cameron (n. 8) 464.

¹⁶ Birt (n. 3) 189; Cameron (n. 8) XVI.

¹⁷ As a matter of fact the first one does not have it either.

¹⁸ Cameron (n. 8) XVI; *contra* Birt: “editus cum prioribus” ([n. 3] 220).

explain appearance of an individual preface. Nevertheless, *praeфationes* do not seem to be a solid basis for dating in Claudian’s case. Firstly, they do not necessarily precede all parts of his longer poems,¹⁹ secondly, a preface could be written after a relevant book.²⁰ This seems to imply that the absence of a preface before Book III of the *DRP* can neither bind it to Book II nor separate it from it.

We have seen that there are no irrefutable arguments for the dating of the *DRP* – either as a whole or its parts. Though the pros and cons will arise anyway, my argument for the dating of the *DRP* III will focus on stylistic analysis, and in particular, on the usage by Claudian of the ‘versus aurei’ (‘golden lines’), of which he seemed to be fond²¹ and sometimes practises “to the verge of monotony”,²² so that “l’artifice perde son effet”.²³

The term ‘golden line’ originated in England at least in the 17th century: the oldest and the generally accepted definition belongs to E. Burles in his *English Grammar*: “If the Verse does consist of two Adjectives, two Subjectives and a Verb only, the first Adjective agreeing with the first Substantive, the second with the second, and the Verb placed in the midst, it is called a Golden Verse: as,

Lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae”.²⁴

One runs across a similar interpretation, which appeared in 1685 soon after that of Burles and was applied to Claudian’s verse. J. Dryden in his preface to *Silvae* commented on his poetical manner with no particular enthusiasm: “All the versification and little variety of Claudian is included within the compass of four or five lines, and then he begins again in the same tenour; perpetually closing his sense at the end of a verse, and that verse

¹⁹ Cf. *In Rufinum* I and *In Eutripium* I.

²⁰ This is the case of the *In Rufinum* and the *In Eutripium* (Birt [n. 3] 33 and 93; Cameron [n. 8] XV–XVI).

²¹ For statistics see the most recent and thorough treatment of the subject see in: K. Mayer, “The golden line: ancient and medieval lists of special hexameters and modern scholarship”, in: C. D. Lanham (ed.), *Latin Grammar and Rhetoric: From Classical Theory to Medieval Practice* (London – New York 2002) 139–179. Also J. M. Baños Baños, “El *versus aureus* de Ennio a Estacio”, *Latomus* 51 (1992) 762–774. He treats the ‘golden line’ in a wider sense though and includes such models where nouns precede a verb or alternate with adjectives.

²² S. E. Wintbott, *Latin Hexameter* (London 1903) 220.

²³ J. Marouzeau, *Traité de stylistique appliquée au latin* (Paris 1935) 302.

²⁴ E. Burles, *Grammatica Burlesa, or, A new English grammar: made plain and easier for teacher & scholar, and profitable to gentlemen for the recovery of what they have lost by discontinuance from their studies* (London 1652) 357 [= R. C. Alston (ed.), *English Linguistics 1500–1800: A Collection of Facsimile Reprints* (Menston 1971) 307]. His example comes from Ovid, *Met.* 1. 147.

commonly which they call golden, or two substantives and two adjectives with a verb betwixt them to keep the peace”²⁵

Did antiquity have a definition of this poetical model? The evidence is, unfortunately, sparse, and the only testimonium comes from Diomedes Grammaticus, who in the *Ars Grammatica* discusses various types of Latin hexameters and mentions ‘teretes versus’: “Teretes sunt qui volubilem et cohaerentem continuant dictionem, ut

Torva Mimalloneis inflatur tibia bombis”²⁶

It is not easy to determine what he really meant by “volubilis et cohaerens dictio”, but his example cited fits very well into modern definitions of the ‘golden line’.

Wilkinson tried to restrict the usage of the term to *abCAB* scheme and proposed to call the chiastic form such as in Verg. *Georg.* 540: “Impositos duris crepitare incudibus ensis” the ‘silver line’,²⁷ yet most prefer to treat it as an equivalent of the ‘golden line’.²⁸

The verb that separates the adjectives from their nouns can be either in personal or impersonal (infinitive/participle²⁹) form. It had been already noticed that the ‘golden line’ was favoured by Neoteric poets,³⁰ in whose work it often has a central verb in a form of a present participle.³¹

What is to be understood as ‘versus aureus’ in this paper? I include ‘golden’ as well as ‘silver’ lines; the verb can be taken in either form mentioned above.³² I agree with R. F. Thomas that “smaller, uninflected

²⁵ H. T. Swedenerg, Jr., Earl Miner, V. A. Dearing (eds.), *The Works of John Dryden III* (Berkeley 1969) 6.

²⁶ H. Keil (ed.), *Grammatici Latini I* (Lipsiae 1855) 499.

²⁷ L. P. Wilkinson, *Golden Latin Artistry* (Cambridge 1963) 216.

²⁸ J. Hellegouarc’h, “Les yeux de la marquise... Quelques observations sur les commutations verbales dans l’hexametre latin”, *RÉL* 65 (1987) 277; R. F. Thomas (ed.), *Virgil, Georgics I*, Cambridge Greek and Latin Classics (Cambridge 1988) 86; Baños Baños (n. 21) 762.

²⁹ In Claudian, for example, “Et raucum bibulis inserpere murmur harenis” (*DRP* I, 258); “Crastina venturae spectantes gaudia praedae” (*DRP* I, 288); “Caeruleus tali prostratus Apolline Python” (*De IV Consulatu Honorii* 537) etc.

³⁰ See, for example, N. Hopkinson (ed.), *Callimachus, Hymn to Demeter*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries 27 (Cambridge 1984) 87–89; Gruzelier (n. 1) XXVIII; W. S. Anderson (ed.), *Ovid’s Metamorphoses Books 6–10* (Norman 1972) 28; A. S. Hollis (ed.), *Ovid. Metamorphoses: Book VIII* (Oxford 1970) 41.

³¹ E. g. “Mollia nudatae tollentem tegmina surae” (Cat. 64. 129) and “Irrita uento-sae linquens promissa procellae” (Cat. 64. 59).

³² There are exceptions, such as *DRP* 3. 116 (“Pignoris et cunctis objecti fraudibus anni”) and *Pan. Olybr. et Prob.* 2 (“Volvis inexhausto redeuntia saecula motu”) where the participle agrees with one of the following nouns.

words <...> hardly disturb the pattern”.³³ Therefore it is taken for granted here that a ‘golden line’ might contain five or more words: sometimes the author uses additional adverbs, particles (negative, copulative), pronouns (relative, personal, reflexive, interrogative), and conjunctions. I do not take examples where ‘versus aureus’ is spread over two lines³⁴ or where at least one adjective does not agree with following noun (*DRP* 1. 14):

Erecti roseas tendunt ad carmina cristas.

I also exclude ‘pseudo-golden lines’, in which one finds similar endings, but there is no real grammatical agreement (*Pan. Olybr. et Prob.* 83):

Ipsa, triumphatis quae possidet aethera regnis.

The following table illustrates the usage of the ‘golden line’ by Claudian in the *DRP* and his longer poems, which are listed in chronological order:³⁵

<i>De raptu Proserpinae</i> I	7,64 %
II (praefatio)	15,38 %
II	5,38 %
III	1,34 %
<i>Pan. Olybr. et Prob.</i> (395 A. D.)	5,02 %
<i>De III cos. Honor.</i> (early 396)	4,7 %
<i>In Rufinum</i> (396–397)	2,4 %
<i>De IV cos. Honor.</i> (January 398)	2,4 %
<i>Epith. Hon.</i> (398)	2,35 %
<i>De bello Gildonico</i> (autumn 398)	1,9 %
<i>In Eutropium</i> (399)	2,25 %
<i>De cos. Stilich.</i> (400)	2,98 %
<i>De Bello Getico</i> (402)	0,93 %
<i>De VI cos. Honor.</i> (404)	1,06 %

One can see that there is a difference in the frequency of occurrence of the ‘versus aurei’ in Books I–II (and its preface) and Book III of the *DRP*. Another observation to be made is that there is a gradual tendency to

³³ Thomas (n. 28) 86.

³⁴ E. g. *DRP* 1. 9–10; 163–164; 2. 354–355; 370–371; 3. 68–69. For the first time such an arrangement was noticed by Gruzelier (n. 1) XXVIII.

³⁵ I follow “Chronologia Claudiana” in Cameron (n. 8) XV–XVI.

decrease the usage of the ‘golden lines’ (best contrasted between early *Pan. Olybr. et Prob.* and the two latest of Claudian’s works, *De Bello Getico* and *De VI cos. Honor.*).

What else makes Book III different from the others? Five instances of six ‘versus aurei’ in it incorporate extra words (128 (vel), 225 (nec), 263 (sic), 343 (et), and 344 (-que, non)) and all of them are found in the central part of the book.³⁶ As compared with the *DRP* III, Books I and II contain chiefly “pure” examples and they are spread evenly through the text. Another important argument belongs to W. Barr who noticed that “there are proportionally more elisions in *DRP* III than in either of the other books or any of his other poems”.³⁷

To sum up, it seems to me that the combination of peculiar stylistic features in the *DRP* III cannot be a coincidence. Presumably it was written considerably later than Book II and should be dated from the last years of Claudian’s poetical activity. At this point I would agree with Cameron, who explained the incompleteness of the poem by the fact that “Claudian did not live to finish it”.³⁸

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Датировка поэмы Клавдiana “Похищение Прозерпины” вызывает серьезные трудности из-за почти полного отсутствия в ней хронологических привязок. Единственное упоминание имени Флорентина, префекта Рима в 395–397 гг., также не дает оснований для единодушных выводов исследователей. В статье предлагается использовать стилистический критерий, а именно частотность использования поэтом определенной разновидности гексаметра – так называемых “золотых стихов”. Приведенная таблица иллюстрирует заметное уменьшение такого рода строк в 3-й книге поэмы. Это совпадает с общей тенденцией сокращения числа “золотых стихов” в поздних сочинениях Клавдiana. Учитывая этот факт и то, что в последней книге поэмы количество элизий является наибольшим по сравнению с другими произведениями поэта, высказывается предположение о временном разрыве между написанием 2-й и 3-й книг “Похищения Прозерпины”.

³⁶ The first occurs in 128 and the last in 344 (the book contains 448 lines).

³⁷ W. Barr, *The Panegyrics of Claudian on the Third and Fourth Consulates of Honorius* (Unpublished diss. London 1954) 95. Cameron also speaks of the increasing tendency to use elisions in the later poems by Claudian (Cameron [n. 8] 466).

³⁸ Cameron (n. 8) 465. At the same time, I do not support his later dating of Book II (Cameron, op. cit. 464).