



Ausonius
Complete Works

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The Complete Works of
AUSONIUS

(c. 310-c. 395)



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The Delphi Classics Catalogue



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The Complete Works of
DECIMIUS MAGNUS AUSONIUS



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Complete Works of Ausonius



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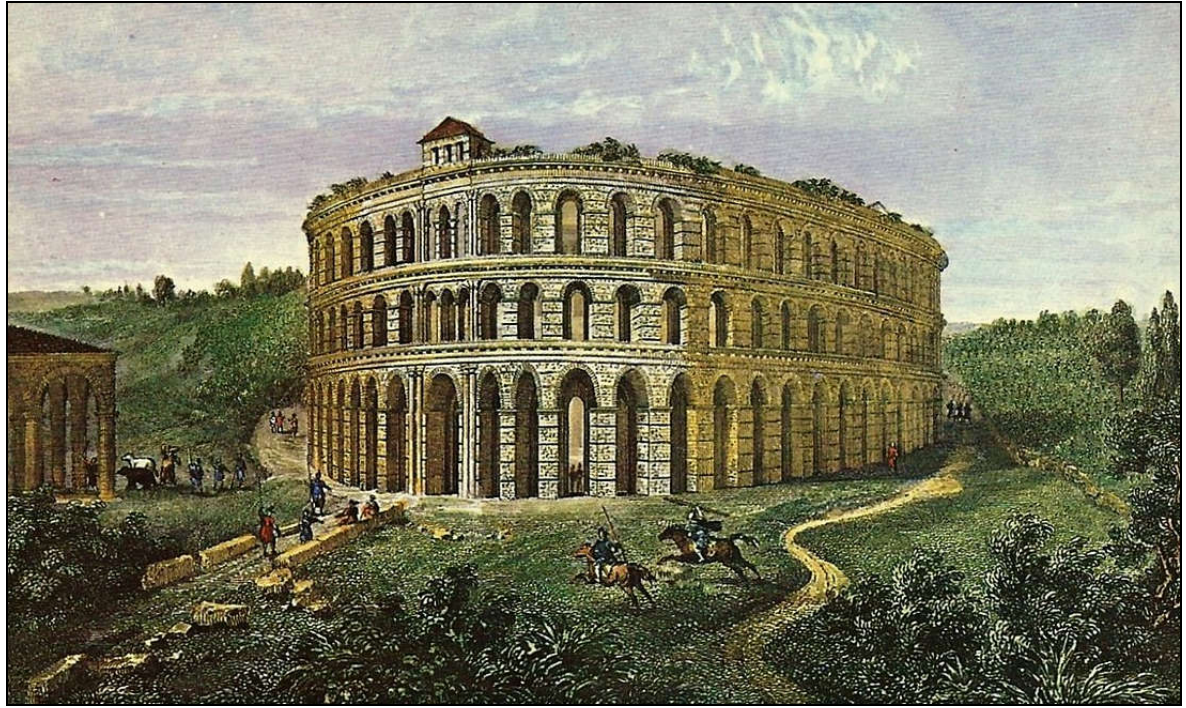
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The Translation



Bordeaux, France, the site of ancient Burdigala — Ausonius' birthplace



The Roman amphitheatre at Burdigala, c. 1755

The Works of Ausonius



Translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Loeb Classical Library, 1919-1921

Decimius Magnus Ausonius (c. 310-c. 395) was a Roman poet and teacher of rhetoric from Burdigala in Aquitaine, modern Bordeaux, France. Born the son of Julius Ausonius, a physician of Greek ancestry, and Aemilia Aeonina, the daughter of Caecilius Argicius Arborius, he was descended on both sides from established, land-owning Gallo-Roman families of south-western Gaul. Ausonius was given a strict upbringing by his aunt and grandmother, both named Aemilia. He received an excellent education at Bordeaux and Toulouse, where his maternal uncle, Aemilius Magnus Arborius, was a professor. He performed well in grammar and rhetoric, but professed that his progress in Greek was unsatisfactory. In 328 his uncle was summoned to Constantinople to become tutor to Constans, the youngest son of Constantine the Great, whereupon Ausonius returned to Bordeaux to complete his education under the rhetorician Minervius Alcimus.

Having completed his studies, he trained for a time as an advocate, but he preferred teaching. In 334 he became an instructor at a school of rhetoric in Bordeaux, and afterwards a rhetor. His teaching attracted many pupils, some of whom became eminent in public life. His most famous pupil was the poet Paulinus, who later became a Christian and Bishop of Nola.

After thirty years of teaching, Ausonius was summoned by the Emperor Valentinian I to teach his son, Gratian, the heir-apparent. When Valentinian took Gratian on the German campaigns of 368-9, Ausonius accompanied them. In time, he was able to turn literary skill into political capital. In recognition of his services, Valentinian bestowed on him the rank of quaestor. His presence at court gave Ausonius the opportunity to meet a number of influential people, including Quintus Aurelius Symmachus.

Gratian liked and respected his tutor, and when he became emperor in 375 he bestowed on Ausonius and his family the highest civil honors. That year Ausonius was made Praetorian Prefect of Gaul, campaigned against the Alemanni and received as part of his booty a slave-girl, Bissula (to whom he addressed a poem), while his father, though nearly ninety years old, was given the rank of Prefect of Illyricum. In 376 Ausonius' son, Hesperius, was made proconsul of Africa. In 379 Ausonius was awarded the consulate, the highest Roman honour.

Four years later, the army of Britain, led by Magnus Maximus, revolted against Gratian and assassinated him at Lyons; when Valentinian II was driven out of Italy, Ausonius retired to his estates near Burdigala. Following the overthrow of Magnus Maximus by Theodosius I in 388, Ausonius did not leave his country estates. They were, he wrote, the "nest of his old age" and there he spent the remainder of his days, composing poetry and writing to many eminent contemporaries, several of whom had been his pupils. His estates supposedly included the land now owned by Château Ausone, which takes its name from him. He appears to have been a late and perhaps not very enthusiastic convert to Christianity. He died in c. 395.

Ausonius' best-known poems are *Mosella*, a description of the river Moselle, and *Ephemeris*, an account of a typical day in his life. His many other verses portray his

concern for his family, friends, teachers, and circle of well-to-do acquaintances and his delight in the technical handling of metre.

Although much admired by his contemporaries, Ausonius' works have not since been ranked among Latin literature's finest. His style is easy and fluent, and *Mosella* is appreciated for its evocation of the life and country along the river Moselle, but he was considered derivative and unoriginal by later critics. Edward Gibbon famously pronounced in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that "the poetical fame of Ausonius condemns the taste of his age." Still, many of Ausonius' extant works reveal deep feeling, with an engaging and lively tone, opening an intriguing window into the world of the late Empire.



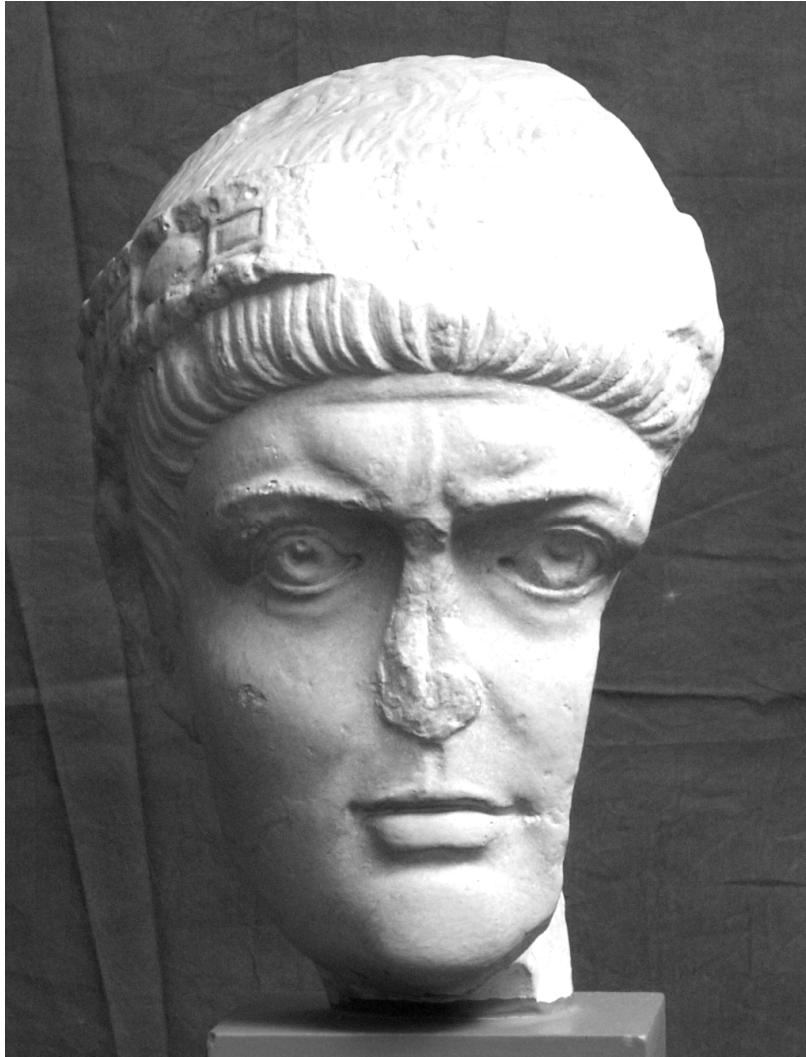
A monument to Ausonius in Milan



Sculpture of Ausonius in Bordeaux by Bertrand Piéchaud

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Restored bust of Valentinian I (321-375), the Roman Emperor from 364 to 375, Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 1475



Bust of Gratian (359-383), Roman Emperor from 367 to 383, and son of Valentinian I, Glyptothek, Munich



The countryside of Château Ausone, the site of Ausonius' estates. Today, the area functions as a renowned wine estate, located in Saint-Émilion, Gironde.

BOOK I. Prefatory Pieces

I. Ausonius to his Reader, Greeting



MY FATHER WAS Ausonius, and I bear the same name. Who I am, and what is my rank, my family, my home, and my native land, I have written here, that you might know me, good Sir, whoever you may have been, and when you know me, might honour me with a place in your memory. Bazas was my father's native place; my mother was of Aeduan race on her father's side, though her mother came from Aquae Tarbellae; while I myself was born at Bordeaux: four ancient cities contribute to the origin of my family. Thus my connexions are widely spread: many, if so they please, may adopt names which are derived from my house. Others like names brought in from outside; I like such as are taken from the main line and are not names of connexions, but proper to the family. But I return to my main theme. My father practised medicine — the only one of all the arts which produced a god; I gave myself up to Grammar, and then to Rhetoric, wherein I gained sufficient skill. I frequented the Courts as well, but preferred to follow the business of teaching, and won some repute as a grammarian; and though my renown was not of so high a degree as to approach that of Aemilius, or Scaurus, or Probus of Beyrût; yet it was high enough to let me look upon the teachers of my day, men famous in Aquitaine, as their equal rather than their inferior.

[23] Afterwards, when three decades with all their festivals were passed, I left my toils as a provincial teacher, receiving the command to enter the Emperor's golden palace. There I taught the young prince Grammar, and in due time Rhetoric; for, indeed, I have good reason for satisfaction and my boasting rests upon firm ground. Yet I confess that there have been tutors of greater fame, so but 'tis granted that there has been to none a nobler pupil. Alcaeus' offspring was taught by Atlas, and the son of Aeacus by Chiron — the first Jove's own son, and the other well-nigh sprung from Jove — and these had Thebes and Thessaly for their homes. But this my pupil reigns over the whole world, which is his own. He created me Companion and Quaestor, and crowned my honours with the prefectship of the provinces of Gaul, Libya, and Italy. I became consul, too, and was given the precedence on assuming the insignia and the curule chair, so that my colleague's name stood after mine.

[39] Such, then, is Ausonius: and you, on your part, do not despise me because I ask your favour for these songs of mine, without your seeking.

II. Ausonius to Syagrius



GENTLE SYAGRIUS, EVEN as you have a home within my heart and, like another self, inhabit the Ausonius we both share, so also shall your name stand on the front page of my book, that there may be no difference whether it be mine or yours.

III. A Letter of the Emperor Theodosius



THE EMPEROR THEODOSIUS to his father Ausonius, greeting.

My affection for you, and my admiration for your ability and learning, which could not possibly be higher, have caused me, my dearest father, to adopt as my own a custom followed by other princes and to send you under my own hand a friendly word asking you — not in right of my kingship, but of our mutual affection for each other — not to let me be cheated of a perusal of your works. Once I knew them well, but with time they have been forgotten; and now I long for them again, not only to refresh my memory as to those which are commonly known, but also to receive those which general report declares that you have added to the former. As you love me, then, consent to favour me with those treasures stored away in your desk, and so follow the example of the choicest writers, with whom you have earned an equal place. For when the Emperor Octavianus was reigning, they vied with one another in presenting him with their works, and set no limit to the number of the poems which they composed to his praise. You may be sure that though he may perhaps have admired these authors as much as I do you, he certainly did not have a greater personal affection for them. Farewell, my father.

IV. To my Lord and the Lord of All, Theodosius the Emperor, from Ausonius, your Servant



IF YELLOW CERES should bid the husbandman commit seed to the ground, or Mars order some general to take up arms, or Neptune command a fleet to put out to sea unrigged, then to obey confidently is as much a duty as to hesitate is the reverse. However much the wintry sea may rage with storms, or the land be yet unready for the seed, or the host still untrained for war, do not hesitate with such good councillors. Behests of mortals call for deliberation: what a god commands perform without wavering. The Emperor bids me write, and asks for my verse — nay, almost begs for it; power is masked under a courteous command. I have no skill to write, but Caesar has bidden me; well, I will have it. Why should I deny that I can do what he thinks that I can do? He by his own influence stirs up my feeble power, and he who bids me aids me as well; it is enough for me to obey. It is not safe to disoblige a god; though delay due to modesty often deserves praise, when we hold back despite the entreaties of our peers.

[17] Nay more, these songs of mine have long been ready to break out unbidden: and what book would not be Caesar's own in the hope to escape thereby the countless erasures of a wretched bard, always emending and emending for the worse? Remember only, father of the Romans, that you gave me the command, and where I fail you must bestow forgiveness on yourself.

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