



SHORTER NOTES

NOT BY VICTOR: THE CODEX BARB. LAT. 812 AND *DE VIRIS ILLUSTRIBVS* RECONSIDERED

ABSTRACT

In 1911, Franz Pichlmayr listed Vatican codex Barb. Lat. 812 as a manuscript attributing De uiris illustribus to Aurelius Victor—a unique and significant claim. Later scholars, notably Sage, questioned the reliability of the claim and urged caution owing to past cataloguing errors. A 2025 examination of Barb. Lat. 812 revealed that it contains records from the Council of Trent, not De uiris illustribus. Attempts to resolve the discrepancy by checking related shelfmarks were unsuccessful. Whether Pichlmayr’s manuscript ever existed—and, if it did, what its identity was—remains unknown.

Keywords: *De uiris illustribus*; Aurelius Victor; Pichlmayr; Vatican manuscripts; textual attribution; Barb. Lat. 812

In the preface to his 1911 edition of *De uiris illustribus*, Franz Pichlmayr listed, as the second of the manuscripts he had not examined, the codex Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Barb. Lat. 812, in which the work was attributed to Aurelius Victor.¹ As Sage later pointed out, this was the only manuscript known to assign the text to that author.² It is well established that the erroneous ascription to Pliny the Elder is common to the manuscripts of Pichlmayr’s Class C. Such an attribution to Victor would therefore represent a rare exception, especially considering that the first ascription of *De uiris illustribus* to him that is otherwise known dates only to the edition of Andreas Schottus in 1577.³

Sage, however, also urged caution regarding Pichlmayr’s accuracy, noting that another unexamined manuscript of the same list (no. 16, *Claromontanus*), allegedly attributing the work to Aemilius Probus, was in fact a manuscript of Cornelius Nepos.⁴

During a research visit to the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana in January 2025, I was able to verify that codex Barb. Lat. 812 does not in fact contain *De uiris illustribus* but rather a collection of records from the Council of Trent. This paper codex, written in a single sixteenth-century hand, includes the following: fols. 1–156 *Diarium Concilii Tridentini sub Pio Quarto per Ioannem Astulfum Seruatium Septempedanum Picenum* (so identified in the index on fol. 1v), beginning on 2 October 1560 and ending on 10 December 1563; fols. 157–78, papal bulls and official documents dating from 1561 to 1563.

¹ F. Pichlmayr (ed.), *Sexti Aurelii Victoris, Liber de Caesaribus. Praecedunt Origo gentis Romanae et Liber de uiris illustribus urbis Romae. Subsequitur Epitome de Caesaribus* (Leipzig, 1911), xv n. 2: ‘Barberinus 812 Au. Victor. d. v. i. 4^o’.

² M.M. Sage, ‘The *De uiris illustribus*: authorship and date’, *Hermes* 108 (1980), 83–100, at 85.

³ R.D. Sweeney, ‘The ascription of a certain class of mss. of the *De uiris illustribus* of the Pseudo-Aurelius Victor’, *RhM* 101 (1958), 191–2, at 191.

⁴ See P. D’Elia, *Cornelio Nepote* (Rome, 1968), 80 n. 22.

I also investigated whether modifying or inverting the shelfmark digits might resolve the confusion, but these attempts were without avail. For instance, Barb. Lat. 821 contains a *Diarium Angeli Massarelli de Severino post et ante discessum ex Urbe ad Concilium Tridenti celebrandum die 23. Februarii 1545 usque ad diem primam Februarii anni 1546*, while Barb. Lat. 128 has materials from Seneca's *Epistulae ad Lucilium* and *Tragoediae*. I also explored other collections: for example, Vat. Lat. 812 (fols. 1r–447r) includes *Guibertus Tornacensis, O.F.M., m. 1284, Sermones dominicales*; Ott. Lat. 812 contains *Guillame Peiraut, Tractatus spiritualis de virtutibus et vitiis*. None of these proved helpful.

As a result, and in the absence of additional information, it is impossible to determine the source of Pichlmayr's information. Thus, hopes fade of identifying the only manuscript said to attribute *De uiris illustribus* to Aurelius Victor.

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