

ON THE DATE OF AVIANUS

SOBRE LA FECHA DE AVIANO

HEATHER WHITE
Birkbeck College, London

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Abstract: In the dedicatory letter of his *Fables*, Avianus addresses the emperor Theodosius II

Keywords: Avianus, *Fables*, Theodosius II, Theodosian Code.

Resumen: Aviano se dirige al emperador Teodosio II en la dedicatoria de sus *Fábulas*.

Palabras clave: Aviano, *Fábulas*, Teodosio II, Código teodosiano.

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Scholars have been puzzled by the identity of the person to whom Avianus dedicated his *Fables*. In his dedicatory letter, Avianus mentions the Athenians and the Romans:

*Dubitanti mihi, Theodosi optime, quoinam litterarum
titulo nostri nominis memoriam mandaremus,
fabularum textus occurrit, quod in his urbane concepta
falsitas deceat et non incumbat necessitas veritatis.
nam si quis tecum de oratione, quis de poemate
loqueretur, cum in utroque litterarum genere et
Atticos Graeca eruditione superes et Latinitate
Romanos?*

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According to ancient evidence, Avianus refers in line 1 of his letter to the emperor Theodosius¹. I would like to suggest that there is a reference in lines 5 ff. to the revival of the study of Greek and Latin under Theodosius II², and to the Theodosian Code. We should translate as follows:

¹ Cf. J. W. Duff and A. M. Duff, *Minor Latin Poets*, Loeb edition 1968, reprint, 680: Titulus: Incipiunt fabulae Aviani poetae: epistola eiusdem ad Theodosium C: ad imperatorem Theodosium Reg. Avianus addresses Theodosius as Theodosi optime: cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *bonus* A, 1, 5: "...Esp. as an epithet of the Roman emperors... *ex epistula optimi imperatoris Antonini*".

² Theodosius II refounded the school of higher learning in Constantinople. After 425 A. D. he endowed it with ten chairs of Greek and ten of Latin grammar, as well as chairs of Greek and Latin rhetoric: cf. Arthur E. R. Boak and William G. Sinnigen, *A History of Rome to A. D. 565*, reprint, New York 1965, 480.

«For who could speak with you about imperial messages (de oratione³) or about poetry? In both these divisions of literature you surpass the Athenians in Greek learning and the Romans in Latin Law (Latinitate⁴)».

The Theodosian Code was issued by Theodosius II in A. D. 438. The Code contained all still valid imperial ordinances, beginning with the reign of the first Christian emperor.

Conclusion. Avianus addresses the emperor Theodosius II in his dedicatory letter, and refers to the imperial edicts which were contained in the Theodosian Code.

³ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *oratio* III, D: “An imperial message... *oratio principis*”.

⁴ Cf. Lewis-Short, s.v. *latinitas* II: “The Latin Law”.