

**CLAUDIAN AS AN  
HISTORICAL  
AUTHORITY**

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Claudian as an Historical Authority by J. H. E. Crees

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by

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'si qua fides argentibus omnia Musis.'



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## PREFACE

**I**N this dissertation I have attempted an estimate of the value of Claudian's poems as historical authorities, chiefly for the years 395—404 A.D., the period in which the bulk of his work, probably all his Latin poems, was written. I have worked independently through the ancient authorities, but have not neglected to make myself familiar with the results of modern investigations wherever that was possible. When a modern writer has been followed closely, the debt is acknowledged in a footnote, and a list of the works chiefly used, and of the literature on the subject, is appended. I have marked with an asterisk those works of which I have been unable to consult a copy, and in drawing up this list have found the British Museum Catalogue and Professor Bury's edition of Gibbon of great use.

From the nature of the case, it can rarely happen that a poet is the chief authority for a period. But the paucity of other trustworthy material and the copiousness of the information which Claudian gives us, have led many critics to avail themselves freely of Claudian's poems, and perhaps may justify another

examination of the history of this limited period. While familiarity with Claudian's works has only intensified my admiration for his wonderful artistic gifts—and few poets even in Latin literature, the least spontaneous and most elaborated of all literatures, repay more richly a minute study—I have not been able to follow him with indiscriminating loyalty, still less have I been able to rank myself with those who regard his works as almost valueless historically speaking, a conclusion which does not do justice to his great powers of narrative, his faculty of delineating character, and the brilliance of his special pleading. It is true that Claudian writes with a bias, but even critics of the present day (Professor Mahaffy, for instance) have held that bias is a necessary element in the composition of a truly great history. That his accounts need the closest scrutiny I would not deny, and I have endeavoured throughout to test his statements most rigorously. Whatever result we attain to, of this at least we may be certain, Claudian would have cared little whether our opinion was favourable or not. He used ancient history most aptly and extensively both for texts and for illustration; it was natural that he should make of contemporary events an *ἐπιδείξις* or an advocate's exposition. An examination of Claudian must therefore be at once literary and historical, and I have pointed out at various places the artistic motives which have led to curtailment or to entire reticence. His skill in the use of the various literary forms is also noticeable.

He has achieved successes in the Panegyric, the Epic style, the Satire, not to speak of the Elegiac form and the Epithalamion. His position as a poet and a client inevitably prevented his attitude from approximating to that strict impartiality, or at least fairness and moderation, which we rightly demand in the professed historian. And after whatever deduction we please has been made for bias, and for considerations of artistic expediency, his works remain inestimably valuable as the last great expression of the Roman spirit in literature, and also as an exposition of the point of view taken by Stilicho with regard to contemporary events. Seeing that Stilicho is, on the Roman side, the one great figure of the epoch, we may congratulate ourselves that through the fortunate accident of his friendship with Claudian, we may form so vivid a picture of Rome's last great man. Indeed what perhaps has detracted most from the historical value of Claudian is not a partiality, for which we can make due allowance, but the troubled circumstances of the age, and the dissensions between East and West, which, as Eunapius almost at the time pointed out, made a historian's task so difficult.

I had formed all my conclusions previous to reading Gueldenpenning, the only modern writer who has treated this period in detail throughout—he confines himself practically to Eastern affairs—and have therefore found that in my treatment of some matters I have been anticipated. I venture to hope that in such