

## The Calpurnii Pisones. Family History and their Presence in Istria and Liburnia

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### *Abstract*

Following Šonje's publication of a votive inscription discovered on the island of Pag, Jaroslav Šašel published two brief studies (in 1963 and 1964) analysing the dedicant, Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia, and suggesting the broader significance of her family. The gens Calpurnia first appears in written sources in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC and gave numerous consuls during the late Republic and early Principate. Their prominence is reflected in the abundance of historiographic and epigraphic data, particularly concerning important figures from the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD. However, only a few members of the family can be directly linked to Istria and Dalmatia.

**Keywords:** Calpurnii Pisones; prosopography; Istria; Dalmatia; Pag

### *Izvleček*

#### ***Calpurnii Pisones. Zgodovina družine ter njihova prisotnost v Istri in Liburniji***

Po Šonjevi objavi votivnega napisa, odkritega na otoku Pagu, je Jaroslav Šašel v dveh kratkih študijah (leta 1963 in 1964) analiziral posvetilo Kalpurnije, hčere Pisona Avgura (*Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia*), in nakazal širši pomen njene družine. Rod Kalpurnijev se v pisnih virih prvič pojavi v 3. st. pr. n. št. in je v pozni republiki in zgodnjem principatu dal številne konzule. Njegov vpliv se odraža v obilici historiografskih in epigrafskih podatkov, zlasti o pomembnih osebnostih iz 1. st. pr. n. št. in 1. st. n. št. Vendar pa je le nekaj članov družine mogoče neposredno povezati z Istro in Dalmacijo.

**Ključne besede:** *Calpurnii Pisones*; prosopografija; Istra; Dalmacija; Pag

The anniversary of Jaroslav Šašel – a scholar whom some of us remember not only for his writings but also as a person – has provided the perfect opportunity for me to explore a question that has been on my mind for several years. In 1963, Šašel published a short text (as was his custom) on the Calpurnii, in *Živa antika* (*Antiquité vivante, Living Antiquity*),<sup>1</sup> expanding his findings the following year at the Akten des IV. internationalen Kongresses für griechische und lateinische Epigraphik (1964).<sup>2</sup> Both works were later reprinted in his *Opera Selecta* (1992). In these studies he examined the votive inscriptions dedicated by Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia from Caska on the island of Pag, and compiled epigraphical evidence for members of the family in Istria, Dalmatia and the Danubian provinces. A Calpurnius L. f. Piso is attested in the inscription on the Arch of Hercules in Pola,<sup>3</sup> fundamental for understanding the foundation of the colony.<sup>4</sup> Calpurnia dedicated at least four votive altars in Caska on the island of Pag – two discovered in 1904,<sup>5</sup> a third in 1955,<sup>6</sup> and the fourth more recently,<sup>7</sup> all within the same bay of Caska near Novalja. Despite the already extensive bibliography on the subject, these inscriptions have once again renewed interest in Calpurnia and her family.

The Calpurnii were a long-lived and extensive family of plebeian origin,<sup>8</sup> with at least four branches that emerged between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC, among which the Calpurnii Pisones were the most powerful and numerous. Alongside them were the Calpurnii Lanarii, Calpurnii Bestiae, and Calpurnii Bibuli.<sup>9</sup> They claimed descent from Calpus, a son of king Numa Pompilius, the second king of Rome, but some scholars have supposed an Etruscan origin of the name, judging from the *-urn-* element in the family name,<sup>10</sup> although epigraphical evidence from later centuries indicate the presence of the family also in Sabina, the origin of the Numa Pompilius.

The first Calpurnius appears in written sources only in 258 BC, M. Calpurnius Flamma, military tribune in 258 BC.<sup>11</sup> He was a hero of the First Punic War, as Livy reports that he led a detachment of 300 volunteers near Camarina in Sicily, which helped relieve the consular army that had fallen into an ambush. He was seemingly the sole survivor of the entire group, though gravely wounded.<sup>12</sup>

The next figure in the sources is C. Calpurnius Piso, who served as *praetor urbanus*

<sup>1</sup> Šašel 1963, 387–390 (= Šašel 1992, 75–78, in English, the original text is in Slovenian).

<sup>2</sup> Šašel 1964, 363–367 (= Šašel 1992, 90–94).

<sup>3</sup> CIL 5, 54; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 81.

<sup>4</sup> Fraschetti 1983, 77–101.

<sup>5</sup> Sticotti 1940, 179–181.

<sup>6</sup> Šonje 1958, 312–314.

<sup>7</sup> Grisonic et al. 2022, 232–236; Cesarik et al. 2024, 15–18.

<sup>8</sup> Hofmann-Löbl 1996.

<sup>9</sup> Zmeskal 2009, 57–62.

<sup>10</sup> More in Forsythe 1990, 296–297.

<sup>11</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1373 (Calpurnius 42); Broughton MRR 1, 207.

<sup>12</sup> The episode is mentioned several times in the sources: Liv. 20, 60, 11; Frontin. *Str.* 5, 15; Flor. I, 18, 13; Ampel. 10, 5; Oros. 4, 8, 2; Plin. *HN* 22, 11; [Aur. Vict.] *De vir. ill.* 39, 3; Zonar. 8, 12.

in 211 BC.<sup>13</sup> Captured by the Carthaginians in the Battle of Cannae, he was sent back to Rome to negotiate the release of prisoners in exchange for a ransom,<sup>14</sup> though the deal ultimately fell through. He later served as *propraetor* in Etruria and Capua.<sup>15</sup> It appears he had two sons, one of whom, C. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso became *praetor* in 186 BC. In 184 BC he achieved a triumph over the Lusitanians and Celtiberians. In 181 BC, he was involved, as *triumvir*, in founding the colony of Gravisca,<sup>16</sup> and was elected consul in 180 BC.<sup>17</sup> However, he died in office during the epidemic that broke out in Rome that same year.<sup>18</sup>

The second son, L. Calpurnius Piso is known only for his role as an envoy to the meeting of the Achaean League in 198 BC.<sup>19</sup> He had a son, L. Calpurnius L. f. C. n. Piso Frugi, who became consul in 133 BC. According to current prosopographical research, his career marked the beginning of a new sub-branch of the family: the Calpurnii Pisones Frugi. Born around 180 BC, Piso Frugi was plebeian tribune in 146 BC and played a role in suppressing of the Sicilian slave rebellion in 139 BC.<sup>20</sup> He later became *praetor* in 136 BC, consul in 133 BC<sup>21</sup> and censor in 120 BC.<sup>22</sup> In addition to his political career, he was a historian of the annalistic tradition, whose text is preserved in nearly 50 fragments<sup>23</sup> of his work covering Roman history from the origins to the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BC. It is believed that he completed the manuscript after the censorship, as many fragments reflect on his experiences in that role. As tribune in 149 BC, he was responsible for passing the *lex Calpurnia de pecuniis repetundis*,<sup>24</sup> a law directed at curbing abuses committed by provincial governors.

It is possible that the three Pisones who served as consuls in 148, 139, and 135 BC, were sons of Piso, the consul in 180 BC, making them cousins of the Frugi consul in 133 BC. While this is an appealing hypothesis, it cannot be firmly proven. However, it may serve as a working theory for further research. L. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso Caesoninus, consul in 148 BC, was clearly adopted into the family, as indicated by his agnomen, which suggests he was originally a member of the Caesonius family. The Caesonius family was an undistinguished plebeian lineage that only rose to relative political prominence much later, in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.<sup>25</sup> The name

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<sup>13</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1376 (Calpurnius 61); Broughton MRR 1, 272–280; Liv. 25, 41, 12.

<sup>14</sup> Liv. 22, 61, 6.

<sup>15</sup> Liv. 26, 28, 6; Liv. 27, 6, 1.

<sup>16</sup> Liv. 49, 29, 2.

<sup>17</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1376 (Calpurnius 62); Broughton MRR 1, 387.

<sup>18</sup> Liv. 40, 37, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Broughton MRR 1, 331; Liv. 32, 19, 11; Forsythe 1994, 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> Flor. 2, 7, 7.

<sup>21</sup> F. Münzer, C. Cichorius, PWRE, III, 1, 1392–1395 (Calpurnius 96); Broughton MRR 1, 492.

<sup>22</sup> Broughton MRR 1, 523.

<sup>23</sup> Forsythe 1994.

<sup>24</sup> Richardson 1987; Betts, Marshal 2013.

<sup>25</sup> PWRE III, 1, 1317–1318 (F. Münzer, E. Groag, A. Stein), 12 people.

likely derives from the praenomen Caeso,<sup>26</sup> also the root of the gentilium Caesius.<sup>27</sup> However, no prominent member of the Caesonius family is known from this period, leaving his origins unclear. Piso Caesoninus gained recognition for his military campaign in Spain as praetor in 154 BC,<sup>28</sup> though he was less successful during the Third Punic War when he campaigned around Carthage as consul.<sup>29</sup> His presumed brother, L. Calpurnius Piso, consul in 139 BC,<sup>30</sup> is scarcely mentioned in the historical sources. Valerius Maximus notes that during his consulship, the *praetor* ordered the expulsion of “Chaldeans” – oriental astrologers and magicians – from Italy.<sup>31</sup> The third brother, Q. Calpurnius C. f. C. n. Piso, consul in 135,<sup>32</sup> also failed to distinguish himself. He fought in Spain but achieved little success.<sup>33</sup>

Caesoninus, the consul of 148 BC, had a son of the same name, L. Calpurnius L. f. C. n. Piso Caesoninus, who later became consul in 112 BC.<sup>34</sup> He died in 107 BC while serving as a legate in Gaul,<sup>35</sup> and had a son of the same name, who is only recorded as having served as *quaestor* in 100 BC.<sup>36</sup> According to Cicero, this *quaestor* married a daughter of Calventius, a merchant from Placentia in northern Italy (Gallia Cisalpina),<sup>37</sup> and was involved in weapons manufacturing during the Social War.<sup>38</sup> The *quaestor*’s son, L. Calpurnius L. f. L. n. Piso Caesoninus, became consul in 58 BC.<sup>39</sup> He is the best-documented of his lineage, as he was active during the most turbulent years of the Late Republic. His political stance and actions often clashed with those of Cicero, who frequently criticized him in his speeches and writings. Piso is also well known for marrying his daughter, Calpurnia, to Julius Caesar, although he remained a reserved and cautious member of Caesar’s political circle.<sup>40</sup> After serving as *praetor* in 61 BC, and consul in 58 BC, he was appointed governor of Macedonia.<sup>41</sup> His tenure led to charges of extortion, but he was acquitted, thanks in part to the support of Julius Caesar.<sup>42</sup> Caesar’s backing was also instrumental in Piso’s election as

<sup>26</sup> Chase 1897, 119.

<sup>27</sup> PWRE III, 1, 1312–1317 (E. Groag, F. Münzer, A. Stein, F. W. Conbruch), 30 people.

<sup>28</sup> App. *Hisp.* 10, 56.

<sup>29</sup> App. *Pun.* 16, 109–114.

<sup>30</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1382 (Calpurnius 73); Broughton MRR 1, 481; some sources bring Cn. as praenomen.

<sup>31</sup> Val. Max., 1, 3, 3.

<sup>32</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1386 (Calpurnius 86); Broughton MRR 1, 488.

<sup>33</sup> App., *Hisp.* 13, 83; Obs. 85.

<sup>34</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1386–1387 (Calpurnius 88); Broughton MRR 1, 538.

<sup>35</sup> Caes. *B Gall.* 1, 12, 7; Oros. 5, 15, 23; App. *B Civ.* 3.

<sup>36</sup> F. Münzer PWRE III, 1, 1387 (89); Broughton MRR 1, 576.

<sup>37</sup> Cic. *Pis.* 6, 23; Asc. *Pis.*, p. 5, ed. Orelli; Cic. *Prov. Cons.* 4; Cic. *Sest.* 9.

<sup>38</sup> Cic. *Red. sen.* 13, 15; *Pis.* 53, 67, 87; *QFr.* 3, 1, 11.

<sup>39</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE III, 1, 1387–1390 (Calpurnius 90); Broughton MRR 2, 193.

<sup>40</sup> Syme 1960b, 62 and 135.

<sup>41</sup> Bloch 1940, 487–488.

<sup>42</sup> Caes. *B Gall.* 1, 12, 7; Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 33, 3; Val. Max. 8, 1, 6.

consul, alongside Pompeius' preferred candidate.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, Piso sought support from Cicero, as his daughter Tullia was married to C. Calpurnius Piso Frugi,<sup>44</sup> the son of the Piso Frugi who had served as *praetor* in 74 BC.<sup>45</sup>

In the other branch of the family, Piso Frugi, the consul of 133 BC and historian, had a son who fought alongside him in the slave uprising in Sicily in 139.<sup>46</sup> As *praetor* in 112 BC, this son later campaigned in Spain, where he died in battle.<sup>47</sup> His own son, the *praetor* in 74 BC, served as *triumvir monetalis* (mintmaster) during the Social War, later accused P. Gabinius of *repetundae* (extortion and/or corruption),<sup>48</sup> and became *praetor* alongside Verres, whom he frequently opposed.<sup>49</sup> Some scholars believe that this Calpurnius Piso was the *tribunus plebis* in 89 BC, who proposed the establishment of two new tribes and granting of citizenship to soldiers.<sup>50</sup> Others, however, question whether this was the same person.<sup>51</sup> Cicero refers to the *praetor* of 74 BC as his friend, making the marriage between their children unsurprising, as such unions were often a means of solidifying political alliances. If this reconstruction is correct, there were the two main sub-branches of the Calpurnii Pisones – the Caesonini and the Frugi – at the very end of the Republic. The consul of 58 BC and Tullia's husband were fourth cousins.

The consul of 58 BC aligned himself with the tribune Publius Clodius against Cicero, who, in response, fiercely criticized him in his speeches and writings – likely with considerable exaggeration. One of the most unusual accusations concerned the consul's Epicurean protégé Philodemus.<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, Cicero's texts provide abundant details about the consul, making him the most prominent member of the Calpurnii in the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century BC. Elected censor in 50 BC, he is not explicitly mentioned in the sources as a duumvir of Pola, but it is now almost universally accepted that his name appears on the inscription of the Gate of Hercules in Pula,<sup>53</sup> alongside that of L. Cassius C. f. Longinus,<sup>54</sup> brother of one of the leading conspirators in the assassination of Julius Caesar on March 15<sup>th</sup>, 44 BC. Given that they would not have held such a position together after Caesar's death, this suggests that Pola was founded between 47 and

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<sup>43</sup> Caes. *B Gall.* 1, 6, 4; Ascon. *Mil.* 37; Suet. *Iul.* 9; Plut. *Vit. Caes.* 14, 8; Plut. *Vit. Pomp.* 48, 3; Plut. *Vit. Cat. Min.* 33, 3; App. *B Civ.* 2, 14; Dio Cass. 38, 9, 1 and 38, 13, 2.

<sup>44</sup> Cic. *Att.* 1, 3, 3. They were married in 67 BC. F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1391 (Calpurnius 93): he was *triumvir monetalis* in 61 BC.

<sup>45</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1395–1396 (Calpurnius 98).

<sup>46</sup> Val. Max. 4, 3, 10; Plin. *HN* 33, 38.

<sup>47</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1395 (Calpurnius 97); Cic. *Verr.* 4, 56; App. *Hisp.* 99.

<sup>48</sup> Cic. *Div. Caec.* 64.

<sup>49</sup> Cic. *Verr.* 1, 119.

<sup>50</sup> Sisenna fr. 17. Cf. Broughton MRR 2, 33–34.

<sup>51</sup> Syme 1955, 58.

<sup>52</sup> Cic. *Pis.* 68; Syme 1989, 345.

<sup>53</sup> CIL 5, 54; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 81.

<sup>54</sup> PIR<sup>2</sup> C 288; PIR<sup>2</sup> C 504.

45 BC.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, he disappears from historical records after the spring of 43 BC, his last recorded appearance is in the Senate on August 1, 43 BC.<sup>56</sup> He had a daughter, Calpurnia, who became Caesar's wife, and a son, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus, who later became *pontifex* and consul in 15 BC.<sup>57</sup> As the son was born 25 years after the daughter, it is likely that the consul had a second marriage.<sup>58</sup>

In the Frugi branch of the family, after the Calpurnius, who married Tullia, the genealogical thread is lost, making it impossible to reliably connect him to Cn. Calpurnius Piso Frugi, consul in 23 BC.<sup>59</sup> This Piso was a Republican who sided with Pompeius during the civil war and later joined the faction of Caesar's assassins. However, after their downfall he was pardoned and withdrew from political life until Augustus appointed him as *consul suffectus* in 23 BC.<sup>60</sup> It was to this Piso and his two sons that Horace dedicated his poem *Ars poetica*, written between 20 and 10 BC. In his study on Calpurnia L. Pisonis Auguris filia, Jaroslav Šašel cautiously observes that 'there are no definitive arguments' as to whether the poem was dedicated to Piso, consul in 23 BC, or to Piso, the *pontifex*,<sup>61</sup> though he favours the former.

Piso Caesoninus, consul in 58 BC, had a son, L. Calpurnius L. f. L. n. Piso Caesoninus Pontifex, who was consul in 15 BC. He took part in Augustus' wars against the Alpine tribes, served as proconsul of Transpadana, and was governor of Pamphylia (and likely Galatia). In 11 BC he distinguished himself by successfully suppressing unrest.<sup>62</sup> His proconsulship in Asia and the office of legate in Syria remain subjects of debate.<sup>63</sup> However, as Tacitus records, he later served as *praefectus urbi* for nearly 20 years and died in AD 32.<sup>64</sup> The suburban Villa dei Papiri near Herculaneum, renowned for its extraordinarily rich library of Greek and Latin texts,<sup>65</sup> is commonly associated with Calpurnius Piso Pontifex. However, it was likely inherited from his father, who was well known as a patron of philosophers, although his son probably shared the same intellectual and artistic interests, as was customary in aristocratic circles of the Augustan age. Not only has Horace's *Ars poetica* been linked to him, but Antipater of Thessalonica also dedicated several epigrams in his honour. His title of *pontifex* earned him the nickname that distinguished him from his distant cousin, the Augur.

L. Calpurnius Piso, the Augur, served as consul in 1 BC, he was later charged for

<sup>55</sup> Fraschetti 1983; Zecchini 2014.

<sup>56</sup> Cic. *Fam.* 12, 2, 2; Cic. *Phil.* 12, 3.

<sup>57</sup> E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1396–1399 (Calpurnius 99): E. Groag has Frugi, not Caesoninus; cf. PIR<sup>2</sup> C 289.

<sup>58</sup> Syme 1989, 330.

<sup>59</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE III, 1, 1391–1392 (Calpurnius 95); PIR II<sup>2</sup> C 286. See also Syme 1960a, 12.

<sup>60</sup> Dio Cass. 53, 30; Syme 1960b, 334–335.

<sup>61</sup> Šašel 1963, 387 (= Šašel 1992, 75); PIR<sup>2</sup> C 280.

<sup>62</sup> Dio Cass. 54, 34, 5–7; Vell. Pat. 2, 98, 1, 2; Flor. 2, 27; Liv. *Per.* 140; Zonar. 10, 34.

<sup>63</sup> Syme 1960b, 398; Syme 1989, 333–334.

<sup>64</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 6, 10; Vell. Pat. 2, 98; see also Syme 1989, 348–342 and Eilers 1996.

<sup>65</sup> Longo Auricchio et al. 2020; Fleischer 2021.

treason (*maiestas*) and committed suicide in AD 24.<sup>66</sup> His likely older brother, Cn. Calpurnius Piso, was consul in 7 BC,<sup>67</sup> and subsequently governor of Hispania, Africa and later Syria. While in Syria, he came into conflict with the immensely popular Germanicus, and when Germanicus died in AD 19 in Antioch, Gnaeus was accused of having played a role in his death. Facing trial, he took his own life in AD 20.<sup>68</sup> The remarkable discovery in the province of Baetica of bronze tablets with the text of the *Senatus Consultum*<sup>69</sup> concerning Piso's trial (which was carried out after his death) has raised many questions and sparked extensive scholarly debate.<sup>70</sup> Piso was married to Munatia Plancina, granddaughter of L. Munatius Plancus, consul in 42 BC and censor in 22 BC. They had two sons,<sup>71</sup> M. Calpurnius Cn. f. Cn. n. Piso,<sup>72</sup> and L. Calpurnius Piso, who became consul in AD 27,<sup>73</sup> later serving as *praefectus urbi* in AD 36–37,<sup>74</sup> and as governor of Africa the following year. His son was Calpurnius, consul in AD 57.<sup>75</sup>

In the Caesonini branch of the family, L. Calpurnius Pontifex had a daughter – Calpurnia, who married L. Nonius Asprenas, consul in AD 6. He also had a son – L. Calpurnius Piso,<sup>76</sup> and adopted M. Licinius Crassus, who became consul in AD 27, together with L. Calpurnius Piso of the Frugi branch.<sup>77</sup> Crassus' reclaimed the Calpurnii family name, becoming L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi Licinianus. He was exiled by Nero, recalled by Galba, who even adopted him as his intended successor to the throne, although this plan was never realized, as both were murdered in AD 69. It is possible that C. Calpurnius Piso Crassus Frugi Licinianus, *consul suffectus* in AD 87,<sup>78</sup> was his son, but this remains unproven.

However, the list does not end here, as there are other Calpurnii from the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries who cannot be definitively placed within the family tree (or trees; *Fig. 1*). One such figure is a C. Calpurnius Piso, who served as *consul suffectus* AD 42,<sup>79</sup> and was likely governor of Dalmatia between AD 42 and 50.<sup>80</sup> He took part in the conspiracy against Nero in AD 65, was even considered its leader, and committed suicide

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<sup>66</sup> Dio Cass., index lib. Iv. See Syme 1989, 367–381. PIR<sup>2</sup> C 290.

<sup>67</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE III, 1, 1380–1382 (Calpurnius 70); PIR<sup>2</sup> C 287.

<sup>68</sup> Shotter 1974.

<sup>69</sup> Eck et al. 1996; EDH 030785.

<sup>70</sup> Damon, Takács 1999; Cooley 2023.

<sup>71</sup> Syme 1980.

<sup>72</sup> E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1386 (Calpurnius 85); PIR<sup>2</sup> C 296.

<sup>73</sup> E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1383–1384 (Calpurnius 76); PIR<sup>2</sup> C 293.

<sup>74</sup> Joseph. *AJ* 18, 169.

<sup>75</sup> PIR<sup>2</sup> C 294.

<sup>76</sup> PIR II<sup>2</sup> C 292.

<sup>77</sup> Syme 1960, 424.

<sup>78</sup> Aur. Vict. *Epit. de Caes.* 12; Cass. Dio 68, 3, 16; Grainger 2003, 69–72.

<sup>79</sup> E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1377–1379 (Calpurnius 65).

<sup>80</sup> Betz 1938, 31–32; Tončinić 2011, 167; CIL 3, 12794. Wilkes 1969, 83 thinks he was the consul of AD 27.



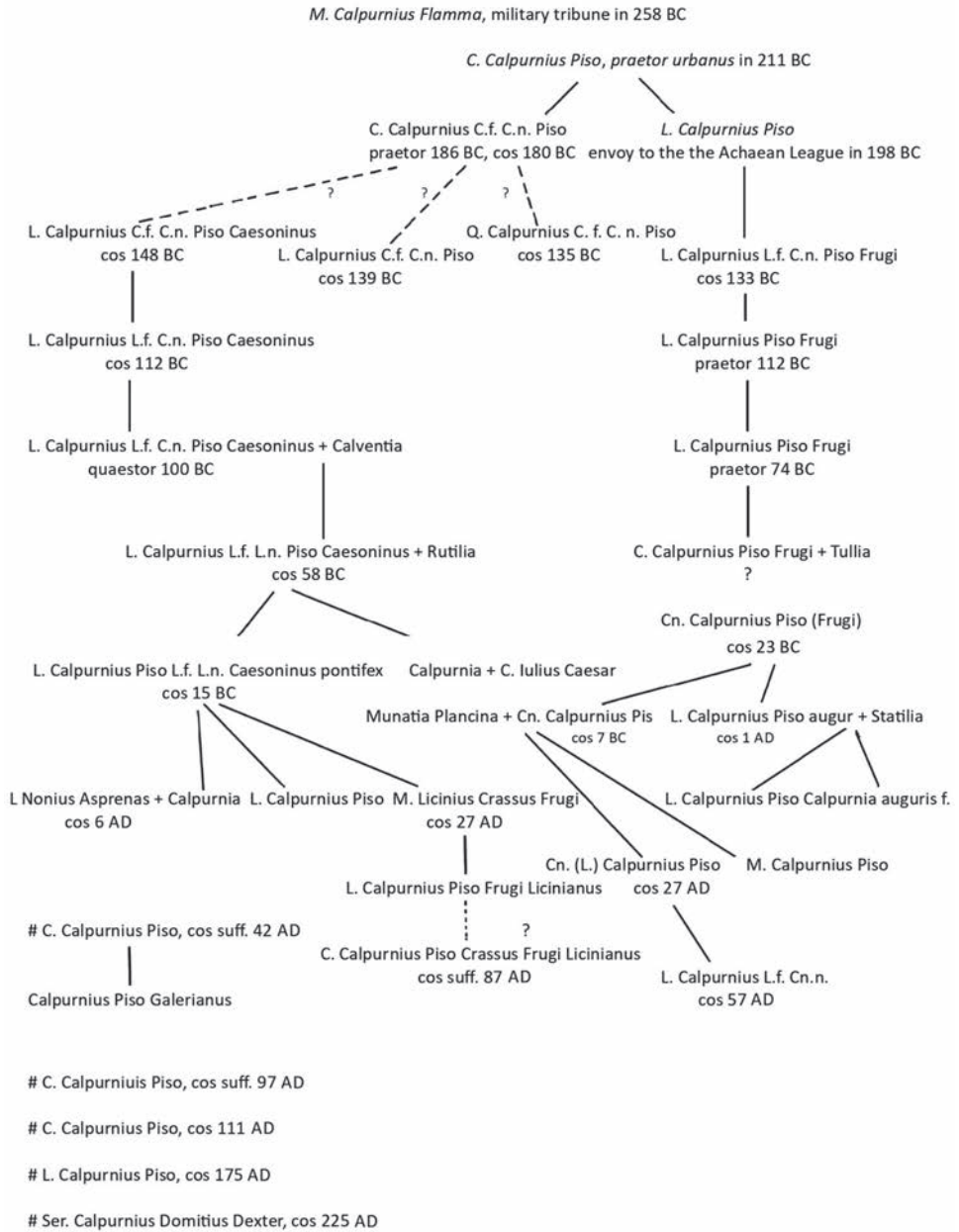


Fig. 1: The family tree of the Calpurnii Pisones



after the plot was uncovered by the emperor.<sup>81</sup> Tacitus provide extensive details about his life, but not enough to firmly establish his place within the genealogical lineage of the Calpurnii Pisones, despite mentioning that he was *consobrinus* (maternal cousin) of the Calpurnius who was consul in AD 57.<sup>82</sup> It is likely that a panegyric in verse, *Laus Pisonis*,<sup>83</sup> attributed to Calpurnius Siculus or Lucan (though other authors have been suggested),<sup>84</sup> was dedicated to him. His son, Calpurnius C. f. Piso Galerianus, was murdered in AD 69.<sup>85</sup> The poet Calpurnius Siculus, author of seven pastoral poems (*Eclogues*) and possibly the *Laus Pisonis*, was active in the Neronian period (mid-1<sup>st</sup> century AD).<sup>86</sup> His cognomen may suggest a servile origin, indicating that he could have been a freedman of an otherwise unknown Calpurnius.

Four more Calpurnii are recorded in the sources from the late 1<sup>st</sup> century AD to the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD.<sup>87</sup> A fragment of the *Fasti Ostienses* indicates that a Calpurnius Piso served as *consul suffectus* in AD 97,<sup>88</sup> a C. Calpurnius Piso was consul in AD 111,<sup>89</sup> L. Calpurnius Piso held the consulship in AD 175,<sup>90</sup> during the reign of Commodus, and Ser. Calpurnius Domitius Dexter was consul in AD 225.<sup>91</sup> This survey of all relevant Calpurnii from the senatorial elite<sup>92</sup> underscores the prominence of the gens, whose wealth and influence were considerable. Their extensive landholdings in Italy and various provinces likely contributed to the large number of freed Calpurnii and their descendants attested in epigraphic records.

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Our Calpurnia from Pag was the daughter of the Augur, and thus cousin of her uncle's two sons. She left her name on four altars dedicated to oriental deities in Caska, on the island of Pag. These altars are well known – three have been discussed by Jaroslav Šašel, while the fourth was examined more recently in a paper and a monograph.<sup>93</sup> Her devotion to oriental gods is evident, despite the fact that the Emperor Tiberius had banned such cults by decree in AD 19.<sup>94</sup> The first two inscriptions, noticed at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, are now lost, and we rely on transcriptions made

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<sup>81</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 15, 48–59; Suet. *Ner.* 36, SHA *Pesc. Nig.* 9, 2; SHA *Clod.* 12, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4, 49.

<sup>83</sup> Verdière 1954.

<sup>84</sup> Champlin 1989, 101–102.

<sup>85</sup> Tac. *Hist.* 4, 11; PIR<sup>2</sup> C 301.

<sup>86</sup> Baldwin 1995.

<sup>87</sup> Syme 1960b, 497.

<sup>88</sup> PIR<sup>2</sup> C 248; Zevi 1973, 127–137.

<sup>89</sup> F. Münzer, PWRE, III, 1, 1379 (Calpurnius 66); PIR<sup>2</sup> C 285.

<sup>90</sup> E. Groag, PWRE III, 1, 1386 (Calpurnius 82); PIR<sup>2</sup> C 295; SHA, *Comm.* 12.

<sup>91</sup> E. Groag, PWRE, III, 1, 1370–1371 (Calpurnius 33).

<sup>92</sup> In PIR<sup>2</sup> C 240–334, there are 94 male and female members of the gens (not only the *Pisones*), and the list is certainly not complete.

<sup>93</sup> Grisonic et al. 2022; Cesarik et al. 2024.

<sup>94</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2, 85; Joseph, *AJ*, 17, 3; Suet. *Tib.* 36.

soon after their discovery. Their texts are identical, and the name of the deity (or deities) is missing. Calpurnia is identified as L. Pisonis Auguris filia, Cn. Pisonis Neptis.

The text of the third inscription is challenging but largely readable, except for the first line, which appears to be encrypted – likely due to the imperial ban.<sup>95</sup> However, the openly written epithets in lines 2–6 clearly indicate an oriental cult. The fourth inscription is explicitly devoted to Isis, and both inscriptions contain the same formula of Calpurnia's name. It has been correctly suggested that the fourth inscription was consecrated towards the end of Tiberius' reign, implying that Calpurnia likely resided in Caska for an extended period. However, whether she lived there permanently or intermittently — as was common among the Roman elite — remains unknown. It appears that she never married, and she inherited her father's estate on Pag.<sup>96</sup>

The Calpurnii Pisones came into possession of estates on the island as a gift from Augustus, either to the consul of 23 BC or to his sons – the Augur (father of Calpurnia) and his brother. The chain of events that led to the latter's death by suicide in AD 20 is described in details by Tacitus,<sup>97</sup> as it was the consequence of the death of Germanicus, an affair that has drawn significant attention in modern historiography,<sup>98</sup> particularly following the discovery and publication of bronze tablets with the text of the *senatus consultum*.<sup>99</sup> The trial took place despite the defendant's suicide, and the verdict included a ban on mourning him, the removal of his statues and inscriptions, and a prohibition on using his *imagines* in the family's funeral processions. Additionally, his estates were confiscated 'with the exception of the lands which were in Illyricum', as they had been granted to his father (the consul 23 BC) by Augustus himself.<sup>100</sup> The Senate decreed that these lands in Illyricum were to be divided: half to his son (consul AD 27), who was required to change his *praenomen* from Gnaeus to Lucius,<sup>101</sup> the other half to his brother M. Calpurnius. However, from their joint property one million sesterces were to be given to Calpurnia, daughter of Cn. Calpurnius, about whom no further record exists.<sup>102</sup>

The fate of L. Calpurnius Piso Augur (consul AD 1), who was later accused of treason and committed suicide in AD 24, is not well documented. However, if Augustus donated lands in Illyricum to the elder Cn. Calpurnius (consul 23 BC), then half would have also belonged to the Augur. That the Calpurnii owned an estate (or estates) on Pag is beyond doubt. To expand upon the picture, Jaroslav Šašel produced,

<sup>95</sup> Grisonic et al. 2022, 242–244; Cesarik et al. 2024, 49.

<sup>96</sup> Grisonic et al. 2022, 247.

<sup>97</sup> Tac. *Ann.* 2, 34–84, 3, 1–18.

<sup>98</sup> Shotter 1968; Rapke 1982; Bird 1987.

<sup>99</sup> Eck et al. 1996; EDH 030785; Damon, Takács 1999; Mackay 2003; Lovenjak 2016; Pigoń 2023; Taterka 2023; Cooley 2023.

<sup>100</sup> Eck et al. 1996, lines 84–85.

<sup>101</sup> Eck et al. 1996, lines 99–100.

<sup>102</sup> Eck et al. 1996, lines 102–105.

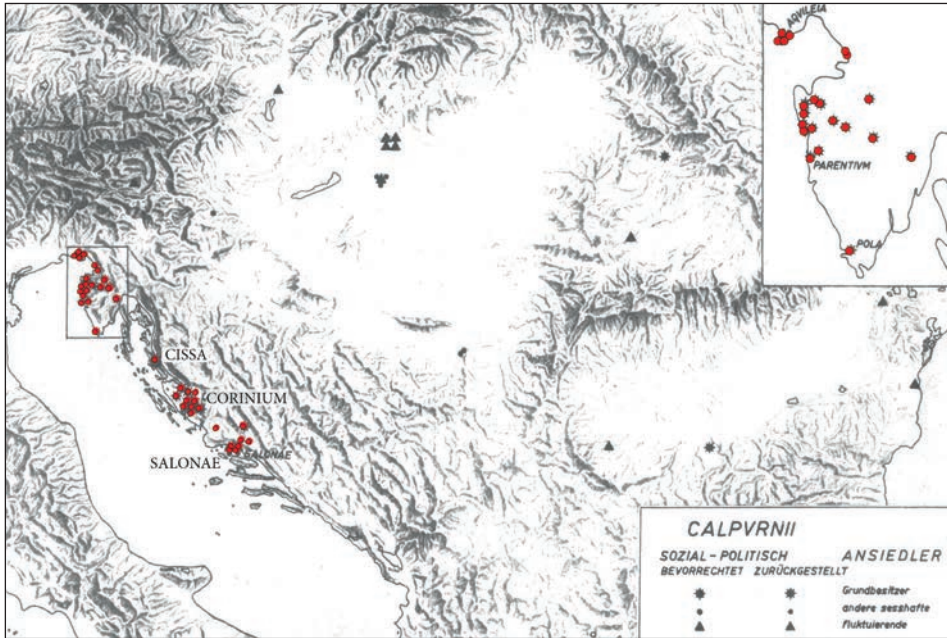


Fig. 2: Distribution of the Calpurnii in Istria and Dalmatia (Šašel 1964, T. XVII)

in *Probleme und Möglichkeiten onomastischer Forschung* (1964; Fig. 2),<sup>103</sup> a list of 48 Calpurnii in Istria and Dalmatia, along with 26 in the Danubian provinces. Of these, 21 are from Istria (including Aquileia), 14 from Liburnia (including Pag) and 13 from the rest of Dalmatia. After 60 years, hardly any new names can be added to the list, meaning that the statistical distribution remains largely unchanged. In the last column of the list (*Charakteristik*), Šašel attempted to classify individuals according to their social position based on the categories explained in the legend.<sup>104</sup> For clarity, I present these in pairs: landowners – settlers (meaning those who did not own the land), privileged – disadvantaged, sedentary – fluctuating.

Three concentrations on the eastern Adriatic are clearly evident: northwestern Istria from Koper to Umag and Novigrad, including Aquileia; Corinium (Karin) in southern Liburnia; and Salona with its surroundings. Caska, on the island of Pag, stands out as an isolated case but remains our most significant source for the family's history on the eastern Adriatic coast. Particularly interesting is the appearance of C. Calpurnius C. Frugi libertus, at Koper,<sup>105</sup> the only explicit reference to a member

<sup>103</sup> Šašel 1964, 363–367.

<sup>104</sup> Šašel 1964, 364–366.

<sup>105</sup> CIL 5, 495; Inscr. It. 10, 3, 15. Šašel erroneously gives Grožnjan as provenance.

of this branch. The name Caesoninus also appears in two fragmented inscriptions from Pola, which are absent from Šašel's list. These fragments seem to mention a Caesoninus,<sup>106</sup> but it is impossible to determine the precise individual. It could refer to the consul of 58 BC or the *pontifex*, and the fragment is too small to identify the type of inscription with certainty.

Šašel's swift analysis of the Calpurnii in Istria, Dalmatia and Pannonia led him to conclude that in Istria and Dalmatia they were firmly rooted in the land, whereas in Pannonia they appeared later (in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD), sporadically and temporarily, primarily engaging in administration or military service. A third nucleus of numerous epigraphic attestations of the Calpurnii is found in the western part of Regio Decima (Brixia, Verona, Vicetia), with nearly 20 recorded names. These attestations also provide evidence of family estates in the region. Given the many branches and sub-branches of the Calpurnii, their significant presence in the epigraphic record should not come as a surprise, although they represent just one of many examples of the Roman elite's economic interests in both Italy and the provinces, as economics has always been the foundation of politics – the two being inseparable. However, a deeper analysis of this relationship lies beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>106</sup> *L. Calpurnius L. f. Piso Cae(soninus)*; CIL 1, 2512; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 65; ...*L. Cal)purn(ius L. f. Cae)son(inus cos? ... vel II vir ? ...*; Inscr. It. 10, 1, 708?; ILJug 417.

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CIL = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berolini 1863–.

EDH = *Epigraphische Datenbank Heidelberg*, Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. <https://edh.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/home?lang=de> (last access 15 July 2025).

Inscr. It. = *Inscriptiones Italiae*, Roma 1916–.

PIR = E. Groag, A. Stein (eds.), *Prosopographia Imperii Romani saec. I. II. III, Editio altera, Pars II*, Berlin, Leipzig 1936.

PWRE = A. Pauly, G. Wissowa (eds.), *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, Stuttgart 1894–.

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