

Forging a History: the Inventions and Intellectual  
Community of the *Historia Augusta*

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
Classical Studies in the Graduate School  
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ABSTRACT

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## Abstract

This dissertation reexamines the origins, intent, and perceived historical value of the fourth-century series of Latin imperial biographies known as the *Historia Augusta*. Over the course of the twentieth century, the text was interpreted as a historical “forgery” created by a “rogue scholar” who took pleasure in deceiving most, if not all, of his audience into accepting at face value the text’s false attribution to six fictitious biographers, its spurious imperial dedications, and its reliance on fabricated sources. In the last decade, studies have instead begun to suggest that many of the “fraudulent” elements of the *Historia Augusta* were not intended to deceive but rather entertain knowledgeable readers by interpolating elements from the ancient novel into a biographical text.

Drawing upon recent reinterpretations of the author, audience, and literary milieu of the *Historia Augusta*, my study reconsiders the purposes of the invented attributions, dedications, and fabricated sources within the collection. Many recent studies have concluded that the inventions of the *Historia Augusta* can only obscure or detract from any historical purpose and that the primary intended function of the *Historia Augusta* was entertainment. In contrast, through reassessment of the work’s composition and the forms and frequency of the inventions across the collection, this study demonstrates that the author uses his inventions to forge thematic and structural

links across the thirty biographies and to encourage deeper reflection on his biographical subjects, the limitations of authentic history, and his contemporary political context.

I begin my analysis in Chapter One by reviewing recent scholarship that suggests the *Historia Augusta's* readers would have been primed to recognize the collection's inventions as parodic imitations of novelistic conventions rather than as fraud by their familiarity with the ancient novel and other fictive works. By examining the role of social networks in the revision and circulation of texts, I conclude that the need for friends in the circulation process impedes the ability of the *Historia Augusta's* author to disseminate his work anonymously and further suggests that the work was intended for a knowledgeable audience.

Then, in Chapter Two, I turn to ask more fundamental questions about the composition and aims of the work. Through analysis of the evidence for accretion and false-ends within the *Historia Augusta*, I argue that the collection came to fruition only after several stages of revision. In particular, I demonstrate that the work's invented attributions and the imperial dedications were not an original design component of the collection at the outset of the composition, but were retroactively added at an intermediate stage of the composition when the author was making broad-scale revisions and alterations to roughly half of the lives.

Through a series of close readings and careful analysis of the text's political and intellectual context, Chapters Three through Five suggest that the inventions were gradually devised and added to the lives as the author became increasingly engaged with contemporary texts and more self-reflective on the notion of historical evidence and research. Chapter Three demonstrates that the biographer attributions and *personae* evolved from puns that signaled the virtues of the emperors into central figures in the author's self-reflective commentary on his own scholarly community. Chapter Four argues the imperial invocations were deliberately added not only to establish a comparison between the legacies of Diocletian and Constantine but also to shore up thematic elements concerning the Antonine dynasty that had subsequently become prominent in the composition. Chapter Five illustrates that the fabricated documents in the lives of the usurpers systematically undermine negative accounts of imperial challengers found in other contemporary sources and encourage more positive interpretations of usurpers' merits and motivations.

By demonstrating the ways that the author uses the attributions, dedications, and fictitious documents to engage with the cultural and political transformations affecting his scholarly community, this study concludes that more credence should be given to the author's proposition that he intended his work to serve as a historical source for historians to come (*Car.* 21.2-3). So too, by challenging the rigid delineations between fact and fiction, truth and fraudulence in the *Historia Augusta*, my research creates new

avenues for further research not only on the *Historia Augusta* but also on the ways that creative impersonation and fabrication could be harnessed for historical purposes in other ancient texts.

FAMILIAE, AMICIS, ATQUE SODALIBUS MEIS

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## List of Abbreviations

In addition to the abbreviations below, citations in this dissertation follow those used by the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th edition.

### The Lives of the *Historia Augusta* (HA)

<i>Hadr.</i>	<i>Hadrian</i>
<i>Ael.</i>	<i>Aelius</i>
<i>Pius</i>	<i>Antoninus Pius</i>
<i>Marc.</i>	<i>Marcus Aurelius</i>
<i>Ver.</i>	<i>Verus</i>
<i>Did. Iul.</i>	<i>Didius Iulianus</i>
<i>Comm.</i>	<i>Commodus</i>
<i>Pert.</i>	<i>Pertinax</i>
<i>Av. Cass.</i>	<i>Avidius Cassius</i>
<i>Sev.</i>	<i>Septimius Severus</i>
<i>Pesc. Nig.</i>	<i>Pescennius Niger</i>
<i>Carac.</i>	<i>Caracalla</i>
<i>Geta</i>	<i>Geta</i>
<i>Elag.</i>	<i>Elagabalus</i>

<i>Diad.</i>	<i>Diadumenianus</i>
<i>Macr.</i>	<i>Opellius Macrinus</i>
<i>Clod. Alb.</i>	<i>Clodius Albinus</i>
<i>Sev. Alex.</i>	<i>Alexander Severus</i>
<i>Max. Duo</i>	<i>The Two Maximini</i>
<i>Gord.</i>	<i>The Three Gordians</i>
<i>Max. et Balb.</i>	<i>Maximus and Balbinus</i>
<i>Valer.</i>	<i>The Two Valerians</i>
<i>Gall.</i>	<i>The Two Gallieni</i>
<i>Tyr. Trig.</i>	<i>The Thirty Pretenders</i>
<i>Claud.</i>	<i>The Deified Claudius</i>
<i>Aur.</i>	<i>The Deified Aurelian</i>
<i>Tac.</i>	<i>Tacitus</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Probus</i>
<i>Quad. Tyr.</i>	<i>The Four Tyrants</i>
<i>Car.</i>	<i>The Carus, Carinus, and Numerian</i>

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collaborative projects have played an integral role in inspiring and sustaining my curiosity for all aspects of the ancient world.

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## Chapter 1 The Interplay of Fact and Fiction in the *Historia Augusta*

This study reexamines the origins, intent, and perceived historical value of the series of late fourth-century imperial biographies known as the *Historia Augusta*.<sup>1</sup> Across its thirty biographies, the *Historia Augusta* presents a sweeping narrative of the emperors, heirs apparent, and usurpers who shaped the course of the Empire from the reigns of Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE) through Carinus (r. 283-285 CE).<sup>2</sup> Although it stands as one of our main textual witnesses to the second and third centuries CE, few ancient texts have been the target of such singular and aggrieved scholarly disdain as the *Historia Augusta*. The collection has been decried as “bad biography,” as a “plague” upon the history of the High and Late Empire, and as a fourth-century “forgery” more concerned with fiction than with fact.<sup>3</sup> This notoriety stems from the numerous fabrications and inventions found throughout the collection, ranging from hundreds of “bogus” names

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<sup>1</sup> Although the collection has also been referred to as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* or *SHA*, the *Scriptores* has been gradually retired to deemphasize the biographers as the true creators of the work, as doubts about their nature arose. Whether this collection was originally combined under a single title or what that title might have been is unknown: see Thomson 2007.

<sup>2</sup> The narrative is disrupted by a lacuna for the years of 244-260 CE, during which lives of Philip and his son (r. 244-249 CE), Decius (249-251), Trebonianus Gallus and his son Volusianus (251-253), and Aemilianus (253) might have been featured. Part of the *Life of Valerian* is also missing. Whether this lacuna is a result of losses due to the manuscript tradition or was a deliberate omission on the part of the Author has been a topic of debate: see Birley 1976, den Hengst 1981: 70-2, Ratti 2002: xix-xxvii, and Rohrbacher 2016: 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> On the *Historia Augusta* as a plague, see Birley 1996: 68. On the *HA* as a forgery, see Momigliano 1954.

and invented historical figures to three much more significant inventions concerning the purported authorship, audience, and sources of the work.<sup>4</sup>

The collection purports to be a compilation of lives written in the late third to early fourth centuries CE by six biographers, named in the *incipits* of our earliest manuscript as Aelius Spartianus, Vulcacius Gallicanus, Aelius Lampridius, Julius Capitolinus, Trebellius Pollio, and Flavius Vopiscus.<sup>5</sup> These biographers dedicate many of their lives to a series of imperial patrons, including Diocletian (*r.* 284-305 CE), Constantine (*r.* 306-337 CE), and Constantius Chlorus (*r.* 293-306 CE), and several of the biographers' purported contemporaries. They repeatedly assure their readers that they sought out every piece of available evidence for their biographies, and they take special pride in incorporating into their writings dozens of excerpts from imperial correspondence, *senatus consulta*, and other documentary sources, which they claim to have unearthed in libraries around Rome and the personal collections of their friends.<sup>6</sup>

Rigorous analysis of the work's sources, internal contradictions, and anachronisms has proven its authorship, audience, and evidence to be far from what they appear, however. Foremost, the stylistic and thematic similarities across the

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<sup>4</sup> On the spurious source citations and "bogus names," see Syme 1968: 165-175, Syme 1983: 98-108, Cameron 1994: 125-163, and Rohrbacher 2016: 21-29.

<sup>5</sup> The lives of the *Historia Augusta* are attributed to these six biographers from the very earliest manuscript tradition, see Ballou 1914 and Magie 1924: i-xv.

<sup>6</sup> Momigliano 1954: 25 tallies at least one hundred and twenty-four documents. For more on the libraries and documents cited within the text, see below.

collection have proven that the *Historia Augusta* is not in fact the work of six biographers writing around the turn of the fourth century. Instead, the collection is the work of a single anonymous individual, known in this study as “the Author,” writing in Rome in the late fourth to early fifth century CE (370s-410s CE).<sup>7</sup> In addition to adopting six fictitious pseudonyms, anachronistic language and allusions found throughout the lives suggest that this Author fabricated the imperial dedications to Diocletian, Constantine, and Constantius Chlorus and invented the biographers’ supposed companions.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, the spurious content, improbable origins, and unlikely materials of the purported primary documents have also convinced scholars that these sources were additional inventions of the Author.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Doubts about the work’s authorship can be dated as early as I. Casaubon (1559-1614), but H. Dessau’s efforts in refuting the purported authorship and date have been considered foundational to twentieth-century revisions to our understanding of the work. For background on the date and authorship of the *Historia Augusta*, see Dessau 1892, Dessau 1889, Mommsen 1890, Seeck 1890, Momigliano 1954, White 1967: 111-33, Syme 1968: 72-79, 176-210, Syme 1971, Adams 1977, Barnes 1978: 13-15, den Hengst 2002, Cameron 2011: 743-5, and Rohrbacher 2016: 4-8. Debates about the precise *terminus post quem* and *terminus ante quem* remain a point of contention. Many have dated the work to the last decade of the fourth century (394-400 CE), but recent studies have advocated for dates both earlier and later in the century. Alan Cameron has recently reiterated his position that nothing conclusively dates the composition later than the 370s, while Rohrbacher has attempted to push the dating into the fifth century to the 409/410 range. See Cameron 2011: 743-781 and Rohrbacher 2016: 153-169. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will examine how the *Historia Augusta* reflects the larger political and cultural transitions of the last few decades of the fourth century rather than trying to draw exact parallels to a particular period, particularly due to evidence that the work was written over some duration of time, as Chapter Two will argue.

<sup>8</sup> For studies of the work’s anachronistic inconsistencies and administrative terminology, see Syme 1971b: 45-53, Bruggisser 1996: 111-132, and Thomson 2012: 38 n. 5.

<sup>9</sup> Attempts to ascertain the authenticity of sources began in the mid-nineteenth century. For a summary of the early history of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship, see Hay 1911: 4-10. For several foundational studies of the work’s sources, see Barnes 1978: 32-78, 124-125, Chastagnol 1994: ix-clxxxii, Rohrbacher 2013, Rohrbacher 2016, and more below.

Since these fabrications came to light more than a century ago, numerous attempts have been made to explain the circumstances that would lead an author, who repeatedly attests to his commitment to historical *fides*, to adopt these fictitious pseudonyms and to interpolate his work with such rampant fabrications.<sup>10</sup> Scholars of the early and mid-twentieth century initially posited that the Author adopted these false *noms de plume* in order to avoid backlash for subversive religious or political views encoded within the text.<sup>11</sup> As disagreements over the nature and strength of the Author's religious convictions arose, however, subsequent studies rejected the notion that the collection exhibits any coherent political or religious message subversive enough to merit such extreme lengths to preserve anonymity.<sup>12</sup>

For others, the Author's reliance on invented materials was taken as proof that he was merely a "bad biographer" who fabricated sources when he was unable or unwilling to obtain reliable historical information.<sup>13</sup> The increasing amounts of fabricated materials found in the later stages of the collection were taken as confirmation that the Author unwittingly ceded control to his natural predilection for invention over time and began to invent an entire cadre of fictitious biographers, historians, and events

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<sup>10</sup> On dedication to *fides*, see Syme 1971b: 33-33, Wiseman 1993, Jenkins 2006: 138-145, Pausch 2010: 119, and Rohrbacher 2016: 69. Remarks about *fides* can be found in *Av. Cass.* 10.9, *Aur.* 17.1, *Tyr. Trig.* 33.8, and *Quad. Tyr.* 15.9, among others.

<sup>11</sup> See Baynes 1924, Hartke 1940, Momigliano 1954: 23, 42, and Straub 1963.

<sup>12</sup> Syme 1972: 123-4, Cameron 2011: 781-782, and Rohrbacher 2016: 1, 87-133.

<sup>13</sup> Gibbon called him a "wretched biographer," according to Syme 1972: 123.

with abandon until his project had transformed into something unrecognizable.<sup>14</sup> Then, realizing how egregious his inventions had become, the Author was thought to have taken a series of steps to cloak his shoddy scholarship. For example, late in the collection, the Author began to try to assuage the doubts of suspicious readers by reaffirming his adherence to historical *fides* and insisting that all historians make use of fabrications (*Aur.* 2.1-2) and added the falsified imperial invocations to grant his work a thin veneer of respectability. Momigliano even once posited that the Author might have adopted the false pseudonyms in order to “safeguard himself from awkward questions” about the historical merit of his work.<sup>15</sup>

Over the course of the last half-century, however, the *Historia Augusta* has increasingly been seen as a “historical hoax” or “forgery” deliberately created by a “rogue scholar” who took pleasure in deceiving most, if not all, of his audience into accepting the text’s false premise and fabricated sources at face value.<sup>16</sup> Some posited that the work’s spurious imperial invocations, purported early fourth-century origins, and references to fourth-century aristocratic families were designed to increase its value to rare book collectors or to entice aristocratic patrons into purchasing the text.<sup>17</sup> Sir R.

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<sup>14</sup> This trajectory is traced in Barnes 1978: 1, Cameron 2011: 778-782, and Rohrbacher 2016: 8-15.

<sup>15</sup> Momigliano 1954: 42. Alan Cameron has also suggested the Author might have been reluctant and embarrassed to put his name to a work with more fiction than fact: see Cameron 2011: 782.

<sup>16</sup> See Syme 1968: 205, Syme 1971a: 15, and Cameron 2011: 782, 778.

<sup>17</sup> Dessau 1898, Dessau 1892, Hohl 1914, and Syme 1968: 154.

Syme famously identified the Author as a “rogue scholiast” with much more opaque motivations. According to Syme, the Author had the ability to make a veritable history but instead willfully “succumbed to the seductions of fraud and mystification” in an era of increasing fraudulence.<sup>18</sup> In Syme’s estimation, the Author amused himself by using the anonymity of his adopted *personae* to devise an entire cadre of fictitious historical figures, events, and sources according to his own arbitrary design.<sup>19</sup>

While Syme’s portrait of an unpredictable *auctor* who intentionally lingered in the shadows and unleashed his text upon an unsuspecting audience remains quite captivating, several significant shifts in our understanding of the literary milieu of the late fourth century have challenged the position that the *Historia Augusta* was a “hoax” created to deceive gullible readers. Recent reassessments of the literary milieu of the late fourth century have instead suggested that the Author was likely writing for an original audience who knew the Author’s identity and played an active role in providing sources and circulating the text.<sup>20</sup> Renewed analysis of other so-called “fakes” and “forgeries” have additionally suggested that many readers would have been primed to recognize

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<sup>18</sup> These conclusions are found across Syme’s writings on the *HA*, but for a sample of his views, see Syme 1968: 118-125, 192-210, and Syme 1971a: 77.

<sup>19</sup> Syme 1968: 198, 214 and Syme 1971: 62, 76-77.

<sup>20</sup> Primarily championed by Rohrbacher 2016: 72-86, see more below.

and decode the *Historia Augusta's* authorial impersonations and fictional premise due to their familiarity with the ancient novel and other fictive works.<sup>21</sup>

Based on these trends, recent studies over the last fifteen years by D. Rohrbacher, D. Pausch, N. Horsfall, and others have begun to suggest that many of the “fraudulent” elements of the *Historia Augusta*—its fictional narrators, invented sources, and pseudo-authentication devices—were not intended to deceive but rather entertain knowledgeable readers by interpolating elements from the ancient novel into a biographical text.<sup>22</sup> Building on Syme’s notion that the Author reduced “erudite method to a mockery,” Rohrbacher and others have argued that the work is best interpreted as a “biographical parody,” which was designed to entertain a fourth-century audience who were looking for more “active reading challenges” and who enjoyed works that blended elements of fictive and historical genres.<sup>23</sup>

Despite the many advances made by the works of Rohrbacher, Pausch, and others, many of these works continue to promulgate the same underlying assumptions about the work’s inventions that have been held for generations. Throughout the numerous interpretations of the work’s origins and purposes, the vast body of scholarly work on the *Historia Augusta* has either implicitly or explicitly assumed that the rampant

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<sup>21</sup> See below.

<sup>22</sup> See Rohrbacher 2016: 58-86, Pausch 2010, and Horsfall 2009.

<sup>23</sup> See Syme 1968: 204 and Rohrbacher 2016: 70. The notion of “active reading challenges” is based on Ní Mheallaigh’s 2008 study on the origins of pseudo-documents in the ancient novel, see more below.

inventions can only obscure or detract from any historical instruction the text might impart about the second and third centuries. With the growing interest in the literary and novelistic parallels of the work's inventions, the position that the Author lacked any sincere intention of informing his readers about the rulers of the second and third centuries has become an increasingly explicit thread in many recent studies. G. W. Bowerstock has concluded that the Author only "pretended [...] to be writing historical biographies," and Rohrbacher argues in his recent 2016 monograph that the *Historia Augusta* should be considered "a biographical collection in appearance alone," because it "does not have the goal normal to biography of instructing its readers about the lives of its subjects."<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Rohrbacher concludes that the *Historia Augusta* "must be studied as literary fiction, not as history."<sup>25</sup>

As part of this trend, the historical content of the collection has been instead recast merely as a requisite framework on which to build the Author's parody of historiographic conventions. For example, T. Jenkins has argued that the Author "padded his bogus history" with a few genuine historical "tidbits needed to lend an air of verisimilitude to the proceedings." Jenkins follows up this conclusion with the conviction that in the *Historia Augusta*, "titillation is to be had at the expense of Truth."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> See Bowerstock 1994: 43 and Rohrbacher 2016: 14.

<sup>25</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 14.

<sup>26</sup> Jenkins 2006: 138.

Admittedly, the entirety of the *Historia Augusta* is not what some would call “authentic” historical truth and the parodic nature of the text is at times undeniable. Yet scholars have long recognized that ancient audiences did not expect strict delineations between truth and fiction in their historical works, but instead expected some fluidity and conflation between fictional and historical modes of discourse.<sup>27</sup> Although the *Historia Augusta* contains elements of parody and conventions from the ancient novel that are often considered fictional, I argue to frame the entire *Historia Augusta* as a “biographical parody” overlooks the many ways that the Author harnesses his inventions to enhance and strengthen the historical narrative of his thirty biographies.

Drawing upon recent reinterpretations of the Author, audience, and the literary milieu of the *Historia Augusta*, my study reexamines the purposes of the Author’s impersonation of six biographic narrators, the falsified dedications to Diocletian and Constantine, and the use of fictitious sources across the collection. Through analysis of the work’s composition and the forms and frequency of the inventions across the collection, this study demonstrates that the inventions were not original components of the authorial vision for the work. Instead, I present novel evidence to suggest that the collection arrived at its current form only over the course of several stages of revision,

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<sup>27</sup> See, e.g., Feeney 1993, Wiseman 1993, Marincola 1997: 117-127, Marincola 2009, and Rothschild 2009.

and I demonstrate that many of the work's inventions were devised and retroactively added to the lives only after two-thirds of the collection was complete.

As I demonstrate below, the Author added the attributions, invocations, and fabricated documents in order to forge thematic and structural links across the thirty biographies and encourage deeper reflection on his biographical subjects, the limitations of authentic history, and his contemporary political context. In particular, through a series of close readings and careful analysis of the text's intellectual and political context, this dissertation demonstrates that the attributions, imperial dedications, and fabricated sources all serve an integral role in shaping the lessons the Author hoped to impart about the second and third centuries, while also engaging in contemporary discourses about literary patronage, imperial legitimacy, and the effects of imperial censorship.

So doing, this study contributes to our understanding of the *Historia Augusta* in several ways. Primarily, by demonstrating that the inventions were a later elaboration of a traditional biographical project and were added to enhance the historical narrative of the collection, this study presents novel arguments to challenge the position that the Author's love for invention was "innate" and that parody was the primary driving purpose behind the work. Instead, this study illustrates that the Author developed and added his inventions in order to forge together biography, parody, and political commentary to create an informative as well as entertaining historical work.

In the process, this study also contributes a more rigorous examination of the ways that the work might have been circulated and shared with its original readers. In addition, whereas the Author's clear predilection towards senatorial power and shared rule and his concerns about child emperors and imperial succession (see below, Chapters Four and Five) have been alternatively denounced as "utopian fantasies" or too "commonplace" in other contemporary works to be independently meaningful,<sup>28</sup> this study affirms that the *Historia Augusta* does present unique perspectives on usurpation and imperial censorship in the late fourth century.

Thus, by challenging the rigid delineations between fact and fiction, truth and fraudulence, and history and invention in the *Historia Augusta*, my research aims to create new avenues for further research on the *Historia Augusta*, a text which touches upon many eras of Roman history with its second and third-century subject matter, its fictitious Diocletianic and Constantinian "dramatic" origins, and its late fourth-century composition. In addition, by revealing the ways that creative impersonation and fabrication could be harnessed for historical purposes in the *Historia Augusta*, my study aims to provide a model for exploring how invention could also be used for historiographic purposes in other ancient texts and so-called forgeries.

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<sup>28</sup> Cameron 2011: 782 and Rohrbacher 2016: 85-86, 134.

## ***Unmasking a “Rogue”: The Author and Audience of the Historia Augusta***

In setting out to study how the inventions enhance the historical narrative of the *Historia Augusta*, this dissertation engages with many ongoing debates concerning the work’s Author, audience, and purpose. Renewed interest in so-called “fakes” and “forgeries” in the ancient world over the last two decades along with the growing focus on the literature and social history of Late Antiquity has provided many new contributions to our understanding of the *Historia Augusta*’s original social and literary context.<sup>29</sup> I build upon the conclusions of several recent studies, but especially Rohrbacher’s *The Play of Allusion in the Historia Augusta* (2016), that have collectively begun to challenge the feasibility of a solitary author writing in “rogue” isolation who circulated his text clandestinely in the hopes of deceiving his readers.

As noted above, the work has often been interpreted as the work of a “rogue scholar” who hid behind a mask of adopted *alter egos* in order to indulge in “fraud and mystification” for his own opaque purposes. Traditionally, the adoption of the false pseudonyms and the spurious dedications were interpreted as proof that the Author hoped to obscure his identity, and only his shoddy scholarship and extreme haste left

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<sup>29</sup> E.g., Rosenmeyer 2001, Peirano 2012, McGill 2012, and Ehrman 2013. Current scholarship on Late Antiquity is too vast to list here, but for several representative works on the literature and society of Late Antiquity see Geatrex and Elton 2015 and Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen 2015.

behind enough anachronisms and discrepancies to allow modern scholars to discover his ruse.<sup>30</sup>

The Author's ruse has certainly been successful at masking his identity from modern scholars. Despite much ink spilt on the topic, attempts to identify the Author of the *Historia Augusta* have reached little consensus.<sup>31</sup> The Author's familiarity with many aristocratic family names in Rome, his knowledge of Roman topography, and the nature of his sources have led many scholars to believe he was involved in the networks of aristocratic patronage and literary production in the city of Rome in the last quarter of the fourth century.<sup>32</sup> Although several have posited that the Author also had connections to Gaul, the extent to which the Author's adopted *personae* and their purported readers are depicted in Rome suggest that the Author was far more familiar and concerned with the city than any other location.<sup>33</sup>

The two "biographers" associated with the later portion of the collection, "Trebellius Pollio" and "Flavius Vopiscus," are particularly depicted as being familiar

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<sup>30</sup> Hays 1911: 11 and Baynes 1924: 73-4. Syme often discussed the Author's habit of occasionally "raising the veil" to reveal his deception to readers: see, e.g., Syme 1968: 2-3 and Syme 1971a: 14-15.

<sup>31</sup> Attempts by S. Ratti to identify the Author as Nichomachus Flavianus or his sons, and by M. Thomson as an associate of Symmachus' by the name of Naucellius, have not been widely accepted: see Ratti 2007, 2008, 2010, 2016, Thomson 2012: 70-88, and Cameron 2016.

<sup>32</sup> On the Author's connections with Rome, see Long 2002, Cameron 1964: 364-374, Syme 1971: 1, and Thomson 2012: 69.

<sup>33</sup> Several scholars have advocated for connections with Gaul, but none preclude an Author who was familiar with Rome as well: see Cameron 2011: 777, Honoré 1987: 157, and Barnes 1998b: 40.

with many locations and families throughout Rome. They claim to visit many of the libraries in Rome, including the Ulpian Library, and they expect that readers at the Temple of Peace will have access to their works (*Aur.* 8.1, 24.7-9, *Tac.* 8.1, *Prob.* 2.1, *Tyr. Trig.* 25.4, 33.4-5). They also purport to attend various social engagements in Rome. For example, “Vopiscus” claims to have “recently beheld the consulship of Furius Placidus celebrated in the Circus” (*Aur.* 15.4), and “Trebellius Pollio” attests to attending dinner parties at the Temple of Hercules (*Tyr. Trig.* 14.3-5). The biographers additionally claim to be acquainted with families and individuals who are reportedly residing in the city, noting that the descendants of Aurelian still dwell in Rome (*Aur.* 42.1).

The *Historia Augusta's* “biographers” also assume that their readers will share their knowledge of locations and socialites in Rome. For example, “Vopiscus” appeals to his readers’ common knowledge of the Temple of Jupiter, asserting, “For you remember that in the Temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus on the Capitolium there was a short woolen cloak of a purple hue” (*meministis enim fuisse in Templo Iovis Optimi Maximi Capitolini pallium breve purpureum lanestre*) (*Aur.* 29.1).<sup>34</sup> In addition, the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, the biographer Vopiscus explains at length that he will not include a name of a specific woman because her name is known “now” amongst his readers in Rome, and future generations will profit nothing from it (*Quad. Tyr.* 3.5). Thus, the work gives

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<sup>34</sup> On the expectation that the *HA's* readers would share topographical knowledge of Rome, see Long 2002: 226.

many indications that the “biographers” and their readers were expected to share a common milieu in the city of Rome. Although the “biographers” must be distanced from the Author as fictional constructs and *personae* distinct from the Author himself, this focus on the city, along with his aforementioned use of family names and topographical knowledge, suggest that he can be safely situated in the city of Rome.

Apart from his association with Rome, few other agreements have been reached about the motivations or identity of this figure, however. Over the years, he has been variously identified as a retired *grammaticus*, a lawyer, or a bureaucrat.<sup>35</sup> The Author has been described as a staunch pagan, a Christian apostate, and an advocate for religious tolerance.<sup>36</sup> Some have argued the Author was at the center of aristocratic and senatorial power, while others have argued he remained on the fringes of high society and sought to gain the support of aristocratic patrons.<sup>37</sup>

Because of the references to fourth-century families found throughout the text, the Author has often been thought to belong to the literary circles associated with Sex. Claudius Petronius Probus, Quintus Aurelius Symmachus, and Virius Nichomachus Flavianus. These three figures have often been seen as the central patrons of literary

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<sup>35</sup> Syme 1968: 154-202, Honoré 1987: 156, and Honoré 1998: 190-211. Cameron 2011: 775-778 suggests the Author may have been a servant in employ of Petronius Probus who had served in Gaul.

<sup>36</sup> Momigliano 1954: 23, 42, Paschoud 2003: 357-369, and Bertrand-Dagenbach 2014: xvi, xxii-xxv.

<sup>37</sup> E.g., Syme 1968: 154, Honoré 1998: 190-211, and Barnes 1998b: 39-41.

circles whose members were divided along very strict religious and family divides.<sup>38</sup>

The Author's association with these figures and their role in literary production in the city in the late fourth century have been called into question over the last few decades, however. Recent studies have downplayed Symmachus and Probus' role as patrons of literary production in the late fourth century. While their correspondence proves that Symmachus and Probus were approached for help with literary compositions, they were hardly the only ones sponsoring or aiding in the production of literature.<sup>39</sup> Instead, correspondence between figures of the era confirm that authors commonly relied upon a wide range of friends and directed their works to an audience from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>40</sup>

Ongoing studies of the period have also challenged the position that fourth-century literary communities were driven by familial or religious exclusivity. Even though increasing numbers of aristocrats were converting to Christianity over the course of the fourth century, religious identity for most individuals remained very fluid, and many readers read widely without limiting their selections to religious divisions.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the fact that the Probi, Symmachi, and Nichomachi had spent generations

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<sup>38</sup> E.g., Salzman 2002, Sogno 2006: 59-87, Ratti 2007, 2008, and 2010, and Cameron 2011: 360-83.

<sup>39</sup> Sogno 2006: 59-87, Cameron 2011: 452-478.

<sup>40</sup> On Symmachus' and Ammianus' range of political and literary connections, see Brown 2012: 101 and Barnes 1998: 59-61.

<sup>41</sup> On religious identity in the fourth century, see Salzman 2002, Sandwell 2007, Cameron 2011: 354, Jones 2014: 90-125, Rebillard 2012, Boin 2015, and Rebillard and Rüpke 2015.

living side-by-side and intermarrying means that many names were shared across the families, which further complicates any attempts to connect the *Historia Augusta* and its Author definitively with any one family more than another.<sup>42</sup>

Because of the ongoing debates over how to best identify the Author and his audience, this study posits that it is most useful to situate the Author and his audience within the broadest possible spectrum of overlapping networks of patronage, privilege, class, and family kinship in the last quarter of the fourth century. As such, this study aims to study the *Historia Augusta* as a work shaped by the many intersecting literary and political interactions of the time.

Even though the Author's identity remains hidden from modern scholars, renewed interest in the literary groups of the Late Empire and how they functioned has suggested that the work's original readers were likely far more knowledgeable of the Author's identity than previously supposed. The works of R. Starr, P. White, J. W. Iddeng, and W. Johnson have long illustrated that textual production in the ancient Roman world commonly relied on "concentric circles" of friends to aid in the copying and circulation of texts.<sup>43</sup> In his recent monograph on the *Historia Augusta*, Rohrbacher applies this model of textual circulation to the collection to argue that the social mechanisms that helped in the composition and circulation of texts would have

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<sup>42</sup> Sogno 2006: 64 and Salzman 2002: 47.

<sup>43</sup> Starr 1987: 213-23, Iddeng 2006: 58-84, White 2009: 268-87, Johnson 2009, and Johnson 2010.

impeded the ability of the Author to retain his anonymity.<sup>44</sup> He notes that, while isolated cases of fraud-for-profit exist, the vast majority of these cases were works misattributed to known authors or were works disseminated without the author's permission.<sup>45</sup> Further, he notes that the frauds that were circulated tend to be of a much simpler sort than the imbroglia of history, allusion, and parody that is the *Historia Augusta*.

While Rohrbacher halts his discussion of the *Historia Augusta's* circulation there, further analysis of circulation in the fourth century suggests that the need to involve friends and associates in the process would have made it difficult for writers to circulate their work anonymously, even if they wanted to. The correspondence of figures like Jerome, Symmachus, and Libanius suggest that writers of the Late Empire, like their predecessors in the Republic and High Empire, commonly relied on a network of friends and patrons to provide access to sources, recommend revisions, fund copyists, and circulate drafts of texts.<sup>46</sup> While writers could also deposit copies of their text in a public library or with a bookseller, many appear to have done so in order to make their work

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<sup>44</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 72-73.

<sup>45</sup> For example, Galen had works of his circulated without his knowledge and also had works falsely attributed to him: see Rohrbacher 2016: 72. For more on Galen's writings, see Tucci 2008 and Johnson 2010: 74-97.

<sup>46</sup> Symmachus lent sources to friends, circulated the works of his correspondents, and in turn sent speeches to his associates (*Ep.* 3.11, 4, 4.18, 4.29, 4.45.1, 5.9.1, 1.44.3, 1.52, 1.78.1, 1.105, 5.43, and 8.22). Libanius and Jerome also request that their patrons aid in hiring copyists for their works, see Libanius *Or.* I 113, Jerome, *Ep.* 15/27.3, 71/75. They also expect their friends to aid in circulating the texts and making it available to interested readers Libanius (*Ep.* 615, 619, Jerome *Ep.* 47.3). On Symmachus' letters, see Cameron 1964, Cameron 2011: 361-2, and Sogno 2006: 23-25. On Jerome's letters, see Williams 2006: 241-243.

more accessible to interested readers and to allow for the copying of their texts without incurring the cost themselves. Even so, the correspondence of Jerome as well as that of earlier authors like Martial and Galen suggests that word-of-mouth knowledge or direct communications between authors and readers were necessary to direct interested parties to the appropriate bookshop or library where the authors' works were available.<sup>47</sup>

Passages from within the *Historia Augusta* provide further support for the proposition that the Author indeed saw the aid of friends in the composition and circulation of works as a normative part of the process. References in the lives assigned to the last two biographers, "Trebellius Pollio" and "Flavius Vopiscus," suggest that the Author assumed friends and associates would provide the biographers with sources, debate the quality of their work, and help to circulate the lives. For example, Vopiscus thanks his "aged friend" "Turdulus Gallicanus" for lending his journal as a source for the *Life of Probus* (*Prob.* 2.1), and, in the *Life of Aurelian*, "Vopiscus" explains that the prefect of the city, Junius Tiberianus, supplied him with access to the Ulpian library, where he could access a journal written by Aurelian himself (*Aur.* 1.2-10).

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<sup>47</sup> For example, Martial directs his friend Quintus to obtain a copy of his work through a bookseller, so Martial himself would not incur the expense of copying (*Epigr.* 4.72): see Starr 1987: 215. Likewise, to satisfy the desires of his friends in Pergamum, Galen deposited a copy of each of his new works in a public library there so that they could copy his works at their own expense and inclination: see Tucci 2013: 304 n. 67. On library usage and the book trade in the Empire more generally, also see Norman 1960: 122-123, Starr 1987, Starr 1990, Dix 1994, Houston 2004, Dix and Houston 2006, Nicholls 2013, Tucci 2013, Johnson 2013, and Zarorojnyi 2013.

At the end of the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants*, “Trebellius Pollio” also thanks his addressee, an unnamed kinsman of Herrenius Celsus, for providing recommendations for revision, and he asks his aid in circulating the work.<sup>48</sup> “Trebellius” expresses his gratitude to his reader for advising against his original plan to include the lives of two female tyrants in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.9-10).<sup>49</sup> He states, “This error on my part, however, your accurate learning, mindful of history, prevented. And so I am grateful that the kindness of your wisdom has filled out my title” (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.9-10).<sup>50</sup> With the changes now in place and his mistake averted, “Pollio” grants his reader permission to share additional copies of his work with others, saying, “Now bestow on anyone you wish this little book, written not with elegance but with fidelity to the truth” (*da nunc cuiuis libellum, non tam diserte quam fideliter scriptum*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 33.8). Although the notion of revision in the *Historia Augusta* is a vexed question as the following chapter addresses, correspondence throughout the Empire suggests that it was a common practice for writers to circulate drafts among friends and patrons in order to receive

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<sup>48</sup> The reader is identified as an unnamed kinsman of Herrenius Celsus earlier in the life (22.12).

<sup>49</sup> The two female usurpers in question are Zenobia and Vitruvia, sometimes referred to as Victoria: see *Tyr. Trig.* 30.1-31.6. For more on this passage, see Chapter Two below.

<sup>50</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the *HA* are derived or adapted from Magie’s three-volume Loeb edition (1921, 1924, 1932). The Latin text of the *HA* used throughout this study is also derived from Magie’s three volumes.

feedback or to reinforce their bonds of *amicitia*, adding credence to the situation described between “Pollio” and his reader.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, although these exchanges are fictitious, the process described in the *Historia Augusta* aligns with our understanding of how works, both finished and in progress, were circulated among groups of friends and patrons for advice and commentary. Their presence in the text demonstrates that the Author found these situations plausible and treated them as a normative component of the composition and circulation process. Indeed, much of what made the biographers and their individual claims plausible for so long is that their activities to a great extent reflect the social processes that have long been recognized to form the foundation for literary production in the ancient Roman world.

In addition to the assumption that the biographers’ readers would aid in the composition of the text and would share their knowledge of events and individuals in Rome, further references throughout the collection suggest that the Author expected his readers to share knowledge of common texts and to enjoy debating the merits of competing sources. On several occasions throughout the collection, the “biographers” recommend that their readers should consult the biographies of Marius Maximus

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<sup>51</sup> On the evidence for revision in the ancient world, see Gurd 2011.

should they wish to learn more (e.g., *Av. Cass.* 6.6-7, 9.5) or should seek out additional sources should they wish to double-check his references (*Tac.* 8.1).<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, as Rohrbacher has noted, vignettes in the *Historia Augusta* depict the “biographers” and their peers in the midst of scholarly debate over the authority of various pieces of literature.<sup>53</sup> One of the vignettes identified by Rohrbacher appears at the beginning of the *Life of Four Tyrants*, where Vopiscus reminds his reader Bassus of a recent debate they and their companions had engaged in over the usurper Firmus.

Vopiscus recalls,

For you know, my dear Bassus, how great an argument we had but recently with Marcus Fonteius, that lover of history, when he asserted that Firmus, who had seized Egypt in the time of Aurelian, was not an emperor, but merely a brigand, while I, and together with me Rufius Celsus and Ceionius Julianus and Fabius Sossianus, argued against him, maintaining that Firmus had both worn the purple and called himself Augustus on the coins that he struck. Archontius Severus even brought out certain coins of Firmus’ and proved, moreover, from Greek and Egyptian books that in Firmus’ edicts he had called himself emperor. Fonteius, on the other hand, in his contention against us, had only the argument that Aurelian wrote in one of his edicts, not that he had slain a pretender, but that he had rid the state of a brigand. (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.1-4)

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<sup>52</sup> That readers would have copies of Marius Maximus on hand is perhaps not surprising considering its popularity at the time. Ammianus famously critiqued readers of the time for reading only Marius Maximus and Juvenal, and “in their boundless idleness handling no other books than these” (28.4.14). Trans. Rolfe 1939. The popularity of Marius Maximus has often been cited as the inspiration behind the Author’s own biographical collection: see Birley 2003: 127-130, Cameron 2011: 779-781, Rohrbacher 2013: 153-156, and more below in Chapter Two.

<sup>53</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 82-85.

*Scis enim, mi Basse, quanta nobis contentio proxime fuerit cum amatore historiarum Marco Fonteio, cum ille diceret Firmum, qui Aureliani temporibus Aegyptum occupaverat, latrunculum fuisse non principem, contra ego mecumque Rufius Celsus et Ceionius Iulianus et Fabius Sossianus contenderent, dicentes illum et purpura usum et percussa moneta Augustum esse vocitatum, cum etiam nummos eius Severus Archontius protulit, de Graecis autem Aegyptiisque libris convicit illum ἀντοκράτορα in edictis suis esse vocatum. et illi quidem adversum nos contendenti haec sola ratio fuit, quod dicebat Aurelianum in edicto suo non scripsisse quod tyrannum occidisset, sed quod latrunculum quendam a re publica removisset.*

In the debate, Vopiscus, Bassus, and their companions each proffer various forms of evidence, including coins, edicts, and books, to debate the proper title for the usurper Firmus.

As Rohrbacher has noted, elements of the scene are parodic, but the scene “presupposes the reasonableness of a gathering and a debate by *amatores historiarum* over historical definitions and historical facts.”<sup>54</sup> This supports Rohrbacher’s argument that the *Historia Augusta* likely derived from a group that shared the Author’s knowledge and affinity for historiographic texts, and that the vignettes of scholarly debates in the *Historia Augusta* may depict just the sorts of gatherings in which the biographical collection was shared with its readers.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 82-85. He notes that the figure named Marcus Fonteius shares a name with a figure associated with brigandage in an oration of Cicero, and he also notes that the references to Egyptian books are likely another example of the Author’s reference of “fantastical” pseudo-sources.

<sup>55</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 72-73.

Similarly, in the preface to the life of *Aurelian*, “Vopiscus” describes a recent occasion on which he shared a carriage ride with the prefect of the city of Rome, Junius Tiberianus. During the ride, “Vopiscus” claims that he and the prefect “engaged in much conversation” particularly concerning “the lives of emperors” (*praecipue de vita principum*) (*Aur.* 1.1-2). Like the process of circulation outlined in the text, these scholarly exchanges mirror the sorts of scholarly gatherings and debates over texts thought to be a common feature of reading communities throughout the Empire. Descriptions of such gatherings can be found in works of authors in the Antonine period through Macrobius’ *Symposium* in the early fifth century.<sup>56</sup> For this reason, these vignettes again represent another way that the text identifies the active participation of readers in vetting sources and sharing texts as a normative part of scholarly endeavors.

Therefore, these passages and contemporary evidence both suggest that collaboration between writers and readers was a necessary component of textual production. Because the Author treats the active participation of friends as a normative feature in the composition of the lives and because of the difficulties preventing anonymous circulation, it is reasonable to posit that the Author also turned to his friends for occasional aid, just as his “biographers” do. Indeed, the assumptions that the text’s

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<sup>56</sup> Johnson has thoroughly discussed the social role that the collective scrutiny and discussion of texts play in the formation of elite reading communities in the works of Aulus Gellius, Galen, and Fronto: see Johnson 2009, Johnson 2010, and Johnson 2013. Fantham 2013: 283 has also noted the importance of learned discussions in Plutarch’s *Table Talk* and Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae*. See Kaster 2010 for discussions of idealized scholarship and elite communities in Macrobius.

readers would share the “biographers’” knowledge of the city and historical texts suggest that the Author envisioned his readers as kindred spirits of a close-knit community that would have further been able to identify him, despite the work’s false attribution to six biographers.

### ***The Sources and Novelistic Influences of the Historia Augusta***

The proposition that the *Historia Augusta*’s audience was actively engaged with the text is further confirmed by ongoing analysis of the *Historia Augusta*’s sources and creative influences. As mentioned above, the Author has repeatedly been described as a “bad biographer” who had a limited number of reliable sources at his disposal and made unscrupulous use of the few sources he did have, preferring to turn to invention as the quality of his available sources decreased. Syme insisted that the increasing amounts of invention in the later portion of the collection were not a sign of the Author’s lack of control, but instead reflected the Author’s growing boldness and confidence in his inventions.<sup>57</sup> Syme’s conviction that “literary effort” is evident throughout the collection was bolstered by T. Barnes’ study of the sources used in the collection, in which he concluded that the Author “had at his disposal sources of information which

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<sup>57</sup> Syme 1972: 129.

were, at least on occasion, better than any other historical account of the period which has survived from antiquity.”<sup>58</sup>

Ongoing studies of the work’s sources and allusions have led to greater appreciation for the Author’s facility with texts. They have affirmed that the Author was a man of substantial learning who selectively used invention and wry wit to weave together an impressive array of allusions to literary and historical texts. Barnes, A. Chastagnol, and Rohrbacher, among many others, have concluded that the Author consulted a notable range of Latin and Greek historical texts including the lost biographies of Marius Maximus (cos. II 233 CE), one or more lost Latin biographical works known as the *Kaisergeschichte* or the *Ignotus*, and the Greek historians Herodian and Dexippus.<sup>59</sup> In addition to these works, the Author appears to have consulted a range of fourth-century texts, including the writings of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Ammianus Marcellinus, Jerome, Eusebius, and Lactantius.<sup>60</sup> In addition to these historical texts, ongoing studies of the work’s intertextual allusions have suggested that

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<sup>58</sup> Syme 1968: 204 and Barnes 1978: 22.

<sup>59</sup> The tradition of source criticism is too expansive to recount in full here. For several foundational works on the sources, see Syme 1971b: 34-44, Barnes 1978: 32-78, 124-125, Chastagnol 1994: ix-lxxxvi, Rohrbacher 2013, and Rohrbacher 2016.

<sup>60</sup> On the *HA*’s allusions to Jerome, see Syme 1968: 80-83, den Hengst 1981: 122-127, Chastagnol 1994: xcii-xcvii, Rohrbacher 2016: 101-133. Straub 1963: 81-105. Several believe that Jerome instead referred to the *HA*, Barnes 1991, Cameron 2016. See Zinsli 2005 for overlap with Eusebius’ *Life of Constantine*, and Ratti 2002 on overlap with Lactantius. On debate over the Author’s references to Ausonius, Claudian, and Cassius Dio, see Kolb 1972, 1995, Syme 1972: 125, den Hengst 1991: 169-70, Chastagnol 1994: xci-xciii, Paschoud 2002: 64-5, 400-4, Ratti 2008, Thomson 2012: 52, and Rohrbacher 2016: 17-18.

the Author also consulted and fashioned allusions to many additional works of literature, including Cicero, Vergil, Seneca, Juvenal, and Aulus Gellius.<sup>61</sup> Evidence also suggests that the Author further consulted guidebooks on imperial law and Roman architecture, as well as the cookbooks of the gourmand Apicius.<sup>62</sup>

While A. Momigliano and Alan Cameron have both denounced the Author's scholarship as worthy of embarrassment, Rohrbacher concluded that the *Historia Augusta's* allusions to this wide array of sources would have represented a worthy display of erudition to readers in the late fourth century.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, the extent of the Author's facility with these texts led both Rohrbacher and M. Thomson, the authors of the two most recent monographs on the *Historia Augusta*, to describe the Author not as a "poor historian" but instead as a "creative inventor" who deliberately used invention to weave allusions to contemporary texts.<sup>64</sup> Rohrbacher has illustrated that many of the spurious details and anecdotes in the lives might be the result of extensive allusive play with other contemporary fourth-century texts like Jerome and Ammianus.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> On the use of Juvenal, see Cameron 1964, Schwarz 1982: 634-644, den Hengst 1981: 35, Paschoud 1997: 126, Birley 2002: 41, and Burgersdijk 2006: 141-149.

<sup>62</sup> Honoré 1991: 13-41, Long 2002: 188-192, and Rohrbacher 2016: 54, 114.

<sup>63</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 45-46, 85-86, 170-172.

<sup>64</sup> Thomson 2012: 118-120, Rohrbacher 2016: 2. Thomson has said the Author possessed the "fertile mind of an inventor" and Rohrbacher's study begins from the position that the Author was "a creative inventor" who "invents in the service of a literary program that values inventiveness for its own sake."

<sup>65</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 101-150.

As Rohrbacher has argued, however, the notion that readers would share the Author's knowledge of common texts and enjoy debating the merits of his sources presents additional reasons to believe that the work was designed to engage his readers rather than deceive them. As Rohrbacher notes, the numerous allusions in the *Historia Augusta* would have little value unless the work's original readers were expected to be able to recognize and understand them. Indeed, Rohrbacher notes that the extent to which the Author weaves "webs of allusions" to fourth-century authors like Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Jerome would have provided readers familiar with these sources ample opportunities to have recognized their incongruity with the text's purported Tetrarchic date.<sup>66</sup> In fact, the use of so many references to fourth century texts seems a blatant contradiction to the proposition that the Author intended to hide his identity at all.

In addition to these historical and literary texts, Bowerstock has convincingly argued that the *Historia Augusta's* *Life of Aurelianus* makes allusions to Heliodorus' *Aethiopika*, and the Author references Apuleius once as a writer of *Milesias Punicas* (*Clod. Alb.* 12.12).<sup>67</sup> Several studies have proposed that the Author may have been inspired by his familiarity with ancient works of fiction to incorporate a quasi-historical fictional setting and fictional narrators into his own work. Studies by Bowerstock, Pausch,

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<sup>66</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 73.

<sup>67</sup> Bowerstock 1994: 150-151, 156-160.

Horsfall, and Rohrbacher, among others, have illustrated that the *Historia Augusta's* fictional narrators, invented characters, and pseudo-sources mimic a range of tropes and conventions found in Lucian's *True Histories*, Heliodorus' lost *Aethiopika*, Dictys' *Ephemeris*, and Antonius Diogenes' *Wonders beyond Thule*.<sup>68</sup> Alan Cameron has also compared the *Historia Augusta's* use of "bogus" citations and names to trends seen in the third or fourth-century *Parallela Minora* of Pseudo-Plutarch.<sup>69</sup> Such scholars have suggested that Author of the *Historia Augusta* may have drawn upon his familiarity with such works when he was designing his falsified attributions, invocations, and spurious documents.

The fact that the Author was inspired to add novelistic elements into his biographies is perhaps not so surprising when we consider other examples of the genre of the time. As many ongoing studies have demonstrated, Late Antiquity was a time of increasing genre fluidity, and the genre of biography had already become a locus for experimentation with generic boundaries and fictitious embellishment during the third and fourth centuries CE.<sup>70</sup> As A. Kemezis has noted, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, a work with which the Author appears to have been familiar, already featured

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<sup>68</sup> See Horsfall 2009, Bowerstock 1994: 150-160, Pausch 2010: 124-125, and Rohrbacher 2016: 59-86. Syme 1968: 174 also noted connections between the *Historia Augusta's* invented figures and what he called "historical romance."

<sup>69</sup> Cameron 1994.

<sup>70</sup> Greatrex and Elton 2015.

the trope of a fictional narrator with special access to the narrative of his subject.<sup>71</sup> So too, S. Weingarten has demonstrated that Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* also exhibits many traces of Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* and that many Christian hagiographies blended tales of the miraculous into their accounts of saints' lives.<sup>72</sup> Thus, it is eminently possible that the Author was merely building upon ongoing contemporary trends in interpolating his work with these fictive elements.

The proposition that the Author was largely inspired to mimic elements found in the ancient novel or in other recent biographies has gone hand in hand with the realization that familiarity with these works would have further primed the *Historia Augusta's* readers to puzzle through the work's inventions. Jerome's letters make it apparent that Milesian tales, a genre closely associated with the novel, were popular in the last decades of the fourth century, read both in schoolrooms and at dinner parties around Rome (*Ep.* 12, *Con. Ruf.* 1.17).<sup>73</sup> Although Jerome lamented their lurid popularity, the novel appears to have commanded a wide enough audience through the turn of the fifth century that Augustine of Hippo assumed his readers would be familiar with Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* in the 420s (*De Civitate Dei* 18.18). Therefore, if the ancient

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<sup>71</sup> See Kemezis 2014: 61-101, Horsfall 1995, and *Aur.* 24.3. Jerome also appears to have been knowledgeable with Philostratus' *Life*: see Adkin 2000.

<sup>72</sup> Weingarten 2005: 80-104, cf. Rohrbacher 2016: 104-107.

<sup>73</sup> On the relationship between *Milesiae* and the ancient novel, see Jensson 2004: 267-9, especially 267 n. 500 for the content of Jerome's letters.

novel was as popular as Jerome suggests, it seems likely that the *Historia Augusta's* original readers would have been also familiar with these works.

Furthermore, in addition to their exposure to the ancient novel, studies by I. Peirano, B. Ehrman, and P. Rosenmeyer have suggested that few works deemed “fakes” or “forgeries” were intended to deceive their original readers. Instead, many were designed as sophisticated literary fictions, deriving from rhetorical exercises such as *imitatio* and *ethopoieia*, in which writers were encouraged to assume the guise of a historical figure or to imitate the style of well-known authors of the past.<sup>74</sup> As Ehrman argues, rhetorical exercises like *imitatio* and *ethopoieia* that were used into the fourth century would have created a “shared cultural paradigm” in which readers were further primed to expect and interpret authorial impersonations as the generic experiments they were, rather than as fraud.<sup>75</sup>

For these reasons, Pausch, Bowerstock, Horsfall, and Rohrbacher have suggested that exposure to these texts and other works of fiction would have provided the *Historia Augusta's* original readers with analogs for its fictitious narrators, invented characters, and pseudo-sources.<sup>76</sup> As Jenkins, Horsfall and Rohrbacher have suggested, the rare

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<sup>74</sup> Peirano 2012: 1-73, Ehrman 2013: 43-45, and Rosenmeyer 2001: 9-19, 193-233, 342-346. These sorts of writing practices may have been the origins of the “forged” correspondence between Seneca and St. Paul: see Ehrman 2013: 1-2 and Barnes 1991: 22 for more on origins, content, and dating of the letters between Seneca and Paul.

<sup>75</sup> Ehrman 2013: 1-2, 43-45.

<sup>76</sup> Pausch 2010, Bowerstock 1994, Horsfall 2009.

materials of the Author's fabricated sources (e.g. linen, ivory, *Aur.* 1.7, *Tac.* 8.1) and their overly improbable but verisimilitudinous origins for the sources may not have been intended to endow them with a false sense of authenticity. Instead, their supposedly obscure origins and improbable materials would have signaled readers to recognize them as the humorous imitations they were. Jenkins suggested that readers would have taken pleasure in discerning the fabricated documents "from crafty as yet by-the-rules imitations," and Rohrbacher has posited that much of the humor "relies on the incongruity of a rare and fanciful medium used to preserve banal, everyday material."<sup>77</sup>

Likewise, instead of desperate attempts to disguise the fictive nature of his evidence, the repeated assertions that the Author was committed to historical *fides* or that he added ostensibly fabricated documents "for the sake of truthfulness" (*fidei causa*) (*Aur.* 17.1) have been reinterpreted as attempts to evoke a chuckle of ironic appreciation from readers who recognized the Author's increasing license with the truth.<sup>78</sup> For example, "Pollio's" claim that "it is fact that I have determined to put before you and not mere words, especially when we have such an abundance of facts as in the lives of the thirty pretenders taken together" (*rem enim vobis proposui deferre, non verba, maxime tanta rerum copia ut in triginta tyrannorum simul vitis*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 11.7), in a life replete with

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<sup>77</sup> Jenkins 2006: 138-145 and Rohrbacher 2016: 69-72.

<sup>78</sup> See Jenkins 2006: 138-145, Pausch 2010: 119, and Rohrbacher 2016: 69-72.

fictitious documents and invented figures, would thus ring as comedic rather than as disingenuous.

On the whole, the prospect that the Author's readers were able to recognize and enjoy the *Historia Augusta's* self-consciousness about its fictionality and its "appropriation of the authorial persona" aligns with our understanding of why the ancient novel became popular during the second and third centuries.<sup>79</sup> In their studies of the development of ancient prose fiction in first and second centuries CE, K. Ní Mheallaigh, D. Feeney, and A. Morrison have argued that many of the metaliterary devices found in the *Historia Augusta*—such as fictitious narrators, pseudo-authentication devices, and pseudo-documentary sources—were used by authors of the ancient novel to entertain knowledgeable readers, who were seeking "more active reading challenges."<sup>80</sup>

Based on these recent studies of the *Historia Augusta's* literary models and sources, Rohrbacher has concluded that the Author's addition of a quasi-historical fictional setting and fictional narrators to the biographical genre may have been crafted to entertain a fourth-century audience who enjoyed works of metaliterary complexity and blended generic boundaries. In fact, readers may have expected this sort of

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<sup>79</sup> Morrison 2013: 288-289 and Rosenmeyer 2001: 204-209.

<sup>80</sup> Ní Mheallaigh 2008: 404-431, Feeney 1993, Rosenmeyer 2001: 133-169, and Morrison 2013: 288-289.

experimentation and fluidity between fictional and historical “modes” of discourse in the *Historia Augusta* because the aforementioned fluidity already found in biography.

The collective weight of all of these incremental reinterpretations of the work’s context and purpose have contributed to the recasting of the *Historia Augusta* not as a “historical hoax” but instead an amusing parody of historiographical and biographical conventions. Indeed, whereas Syme once posited that “aristocrats would hardly smile upon this travesty of literary and learning,” Rohrbacher concluded his recent monograph, in contrast, by stating that the *Historia Augusta* is best interpreted as an elaborate “biographical parody” for a “knowing and appreciative audience” to “recognize and unravel.”<sup>81</sup> Rohrbacher has posited that, like the edicts and coins produced in the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, the *Historia Augusta* as a whole would be presented to readers not “as an attempt to fool its audience” but “as a starting point for learned discourse” about the merits of historical impersonation and parody.<sup>82</sup>

The significance of this reinterpretation cannot be understated. The reinterpretation of the *Historia Augusta* as a work directed toward an attentive and engaged audience who were able to decode its inventions presents many new avenues to examine the ways in which the Author constructed his text to encourage reflection and discussion amongst its readers. My study will continue exploration of these themes.

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<sup>81</sup> Syme 1968: 212 and Rohrbacher 2016: 1, 14, 70-72.

<sup>82</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 82.

However, for all that the work of Rohrbacher, Pausch, Horsfall, Jenkins, and others have made significant advances in our understanding of the work, the conclusion that the work is a “biographical parody” and that its inventions were intended for parodic entertainment has not satisfactorily explained the variations in the forms and frequency of the inventions across the *Historia Augusta*. Nor have these studies specifically determined the manner in which the *Historia Augusta* was shared with its readers. This dissertation addresses both of these topics.

### ***Reframing the Purposes of Invention***

Part of scholarly frustration with the *Historia Augusta* has long been the recognition that the lives of the collection are not equally reliable. The later portion of the collection exhibits a larger quantity and variety of inventions. The lives attributed to the last two biographers feature more extended vignettes about the biographers’ purported social events and companions, and the spurious documents are more heavily concentrated in the lives of the usurpers, imperial heirs, and the final nine lives of the collection.

So too, the attributions to the biographers and the spurious invocations are recognized to shift across the course of the work. For example, each of the first twenty-one lives of the collection are attributed to one of four “biographers,” Aelius Spartianus, Vulcacius Gallicanus, Aelius Lampridius, and Julius Capitolinus, who alternate in a

seemingly random fashion.<sup>83</sup> These four biographers dedicate many, but not all, of their lives to Diocletian or Constantine.<sup>84</sup> Then, following the lacuna for the years of 244-260 CE, the final nine lives are attributed to two new “biographers,” Trebellius Pollio and Flavius Vopiscus. These biographers cease to attribute their lives to Diocletian and Constantine, and instead attribute their lives to a series of their peers apart from the *Life of the Deified Claudius*, which is dedicated to Constantine’s father, Constantius Chlorus.<sup>85</sup> So too, “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus” begin to regale their readers with much more elaborate digressions about their sources and various social engagements, as we have already begun to see above.

The explanation that the biographical *personae* and spurious dedications were primarily intended for entertainment does not explain these shifts across the entire collection. Even if the Author found the adoption of a fictitious narratorial *persona* amusing, why was it necessary to impersonate six separate *personae* and why are the last two biographers endowed with more distinct personalities? Or why, if he found it amusing to claim to address imperial figures, did he choose Diocletian and Constantine,

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<sup>83</sup> Spartianus is attributed with the *Hadrian, Aelius, Didius Iulianus, Septimius Severus, Pescennius Niger, Caracalla, Geta*; Capitolinus with the *Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Pertinax, Macrinus, Clodius Albinus, Two Maximini, Three Gordians, Maximinus and Balbinus*; Lampridius with the *Commodus, Elagabalus, Diadumenianus, Alexander Severus*; Gallicanus with the *Avidius Cassius*.

<sup>84</sup> Diocletian: *Ael* 1.1, *Marc.* 19.12, *Ver.* 11.4, *Avid. Cass.* 3.3, *Sev.* 20.4, *Pesc. Nig.* 9.1, *Macr.* 15.4. Constantine: *Clod Alb* 4.2, *Gord.* 1.1, *Elag.* 2.4, 34.1, 35.5, *Sev. Alex.* 65.1, *Max* 1.1.

<sup>85</sup> Pollio is attributed with the *Two Valerians, Gallienus, Thirty Tyrants, Claudius*; and Vopiscus with the *Aurelian, the Tacitus, Probus, Four Tyrants*, and the *Carus, Carinus, and Numrian*.

and why do these invocations cease following the lacuna so that the last two biographers primarily address invented peers?

On the whole, these variations have largely been explained as the result of the Author's lack of a coherent vision for his work; they are taken as proof that the content of the collection was driven by the arbitrary whims of the Author's growing confidence in his "native gift for deceit."<sup>86</sup> These explanations, however, are at odds with the recent conclusions that the Author exerted much greater control over the content of his biographies and was able to weave elaborate allusions to an impressive array of contemporary texts throughout the collection. Indeed, if, as Rohrbacher argues, the Author was able to use invention to weave allusions to contemporary works on a sentence-by-sentence level,<sup>87</sup> it seems reasonable to posit that the inventions that concerned overarching structural elements and tropes—such as the attributions to the biographers, the dedications to Diocletian and Constantine, and even the deployment of fictitious sources—could have been consciously deployed for similarly pointed purposes.

In the following five chapters, I argue that, while the assignment of the false biographers, the imperial dedications, and the number of forged documents in each life appear to be arbitrarily assigned in the aggregate, explanations for these variations can

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<sup>86</sup> Syme 1971a: 62 and Cameron 2011: 782.

<sup>87</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 16-46.

be given if we consider how the forms and purposes of the inventions evolved in conjunction with the biographical narrative across the thirty biographies. Many studies have been conducted on the impetus behind the attributions, invocations, and documents individually, but even these studies have lacked a cohesive narrative that explains the creative influences and decisions that spurred on the addition of these inventions and their uses across the collection as a whole.

Few studies have attempted to look comprehensively at the inventions and historical narrative of the *Historia Augusta* across the entire collection. In part, this lack is due to the difficulties involved in adequately addressing the numerous shifts in structure and tone across the thirty biographies. For example, some biographies cover the lives of individuals, while others provide accounts of up to thirty-two figures. Likewise, the *Life of Elagabalus*, filled with undeniably embellished, salacious stories, is a far different endeavor than the laudatory *Life of Marcus Aurelius* or the panegyric *Life of the Deified Claudius*.<sup>88</sup> Even Sir Ronald Syme, who repeatedly advocated for study of the *Historia Augusta* as a whole, balked at the difficulties involved in studying the collection in its entirety, calling the collection a “monster” whose thirty biographies are “disconcerting in their variety.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> On the panegyric mode of the lives of Claudius, Aurelianus, and Probus, see Thomson 2012: 27-28.

<sup>89</sup> Syme 1971a: 54.

More notably, the lack of studies attempting to analyze the *Historia Augusta's* inventions and historical narrative in conjunction with each other is due to another notable aspect of the collection that has been downplayed in recent scholarship: the *Historia Augusta's* historical context. A long tradition of source criticism has attempted to isolate and extract verifiable historical information from the collection's morass of invented materials. The tradition of making rigid delineations between the work's invented materials and its reliable historical information has led to both the fictive and historic materials being studied more or less in isolation. Those who hope to use the *Historia Augusta* as a historical text often judiciously mine the lives for isolated bits of information without addressing larger questions about the work's origins or purposes, and discerning the literary parallels and purposes behind the inventions has been left to a different set of scholars.

The modern approach of dividing the work into rigid categories examined by separate scholars is problematic for several reasons. First, the modern habit of parceling out the work into rigid categories does not adequately represent how ancient readers would have interacted with the text. It is extremely unlikely that the work's original ancient readers would have gleaned the work solely for historical facts or specifically for parodic adaptations of biographical conventions, as modern scholarship often does today. Secondly, I argue, studying the historical content and inventions of the text in isolation has allowed recent studies to overemphasize the inventions' centrality to the

text and to overlook the inventions' role in supporting and enhancing the biographical narrative across the thirty lives.

To address these problems, I examine the broad scale thematic and structural development of the collection and demonstrate that the *Historia Augusta* reached its current form only over the course of a series of revisions and alterations to the scope and content of the collection. In order to access the role of these inventions within the text, I consider both the text and its inventions as the product of a lengthy and socially-oriented revision process. In order to present a more coherent narrative of how the historical and inventive aims of the work evolved together throughout the collection over time, I approach the *Historia Augusta* as a work whose goals and influences underwent periodic changes at different points in its composition.

I study these transformations and evolutions across the work primarily through a series of close literary readings of the *Historia Augusta* and careful attention to the changes in the work's sources and literary and socio-political context of the late fourth century. Throughout, I am primarily concerned with illustrating the Author's aims and methods in the formation of the collection rather than evaluating the historicity of his account. I am, however, very attentive to how the *Historia Augusta* reflects and was shaped by its historical context, and to the ways that contemporary social networks would have aided in the composition and circulation of the biographies.

I begin my analysis in Chapter Two by reexamining fundamental questions about the composition, inspiration, and aims of the work. Through analysis of evidence for accretion and false-ends within the *Historia Augusta*, we see that the collection came to fruition only after several stages of revision, a notion rejected by others due to the repetitiveness and stylistic infelicities of the text.<sup>90</sup> Expanding on discussions by Syme, I demonstrate that the attributions to the six biographers and the imperial dedications were not an original design component of the collection at the outset of the composition. Instead, through analysis of thematic and logical inconsistencies, I argue that they were retroactively added at an intermediate stage of the composition when the Author was making broad-scale revisions and alterations to roughly half of the lives.<sup>91</sup> In closing, I also consider evidence that suggests how the *Historia Augusta* may have been shared and circulated with its original readers, and I evaluate how the evidence of circulation supports the theory of ongoing revision.

In Chapters Three through Five, I analyze evidence that suggests the inventions were gradually devised and added to the lives as the Author became increasingly engaged with contemporary texts and contemporary socio-political concerns. Chapter Three's series of close readings and careful analysis of the text's intellectual context reveal that the biographer attributions and *personae* gradually evolved from puns

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<sup>90</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 172.

<sup>91</sup> Expanding on discussions by Syme 1972 and Thomson 2012: 93-102.

signaling the virtues of the emperors, into central figures in the Author's self-reflective commentary on his own scholarly community.<sup>92</sup> I trace this development to the Author's increasing engagement with contemporary texts and increasing self-reflection on the aims of the biographical genre and the context in which he work was written, read, and shared. By studying the depictions of scholarly exchanges between the "biographers" and their companions, I illustrate the ways these vignettes not only were designed to humor the work's readers but also invited readers to reflect on the markers of their own erudition and ways that their society characterized learnedness.

Chapter Four turns to the fictitious invocations to Diocletian and Constantine. I contend that they were strategically grafted onto thirteen of the first twenty-one lives in order not only to establish a comparative schema between Diocletian's and Constantine's personal *virtus* and methods of succession, but also to shore up thematic elements about the Antonine dynasty and the dangers of hereditary succession that had subsequently become prominent in the collection. This chapter illustrates that even though the imperial dedications cease after the lacuna, the concern for the precedents set by Diocletian's and Constantine's reigns continues to shape the thematic content of the collection until the series' final *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*. After a brief review of the contemporary political climate, I argue that the dedications to Diocletian and

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<sup>92</sup> Building on discussions by Syme 1971, Honoré 1987: 156-176, and Rohrbacher 2016: 21-29.

Constantine were not primarily inspired by a desire to impugn Constantine's association with Christianity, as others have argued. My analysis reveals that the invocations were instead designed both to encourage readers to examine the dangers of dynastic monarchies and to propound upon the benefits of shared rule.

I demonstrate in Chapter Five that the fabricated documents also shaped the thematic messages of the collection. Through analysis of the fabricated letters in the five lives of usurpers, I illustrate that the documents systematically undermine negative accounts of usurpers found in other contemporary sources and encourage more positive interpretations of usurpers' merits and motivations.<sup>93</sup> By illustrating that the prefaces to these lives repeatedly condemn the ways emperors censored the history of these figures, the chapter argues that these fabricated documents represent a concerted effort to counter imperially sanctioned and arguably distorted accounts of these figures. Pointing to passages that condemn imperial hypocrisy and cruelty toward their rivals throughout the lives of the usurpers, this chapter concludes that the Author's sympathy with usurpers and their followers reflects the political disillusionment of a generation of senators and aristocrats in Rome who had witnessed multiple usurpation attempts and knew the dangers of taking sides in these political struggles first-hand.

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<sup>93</sup> I concur with the conclusions of Barnes 1996 and Grey 2010 that the author is unusually sympathetic towards usurpers for his time period.

In my conclusion, I reflect on the Author's concluding wish that his work would serve as a source for historians and generations to come (*Car.* 21.2-3). For many generations, the Author's repeated attestations of his commitment to historical *fides* and his desire to chronicle faithful portraits of his subjects' characters (e.g., *Macr.* 1.5) have been interpreted as misleading, disingenuous, or even ironic admissions of his departure from established historical tenets. By reviewing the ways that the Author uses the attributions, dedications, and fictitious documents to engage with the cultural and political transformations affecting his scholarly community, this study concludes that the *Historia Augusta* does serve as a window into the late fourth century and that more credence should be given to the Author's proposition that he intended his work to serve as a historical source for historians to come.

**Table 1: An Overview of the Lives of the *Historia Augusta* in Chronological Order**

<b>Biography</b>	<b>Attribution</b>	<b>Dedication</b>	<b>Traditional Placement</b>
<b>Hadrian</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"		Primary
<b>Aelius</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"	Diocletian	Secondary
<b>Antoninus Pius</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"		Primary
<b>Marcus Aurelius</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"	Diocletian	Primary
<b>Lucius Verus</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"	Diocletian	Primary
<b>Avidius Cassius</b>	"Vulcacius Gallicanus"	Diocletian	Secondary
<b>Commodus</b>	"Aelius Lampridius"		Primary
<b>Pertinax</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"		Primary
<b>Didius Iulianus</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"		Primary
<b>Severus</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"	Diocletian	Primary
<b>Pescennius Niger</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"	Diocletian	Secondary
<b>Clodius Albinus</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"	Constantine	Secondary
<b>Caracalla</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"		Primary
<b>Geta</b>	"Aelius Spartianus"	Constantine	Secondary
<b>Macrinus</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"	Diocletian	Intermediate
<b>Diadumenianus</b>	"Aelius Lampridius"		Intermediate
<b>Elagabalus</b>	"Aelius Lampridius"	Constantine	Intermediate
<b>Severus Alexander</b>	"Aelius Lampridius"	Constantine	Intermediate
<b>The Two Maximini</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"	Constantine	Intermediate
<b>The Three Gordians</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"	Constantine	Intermediate
<b>Maximus and Balbinus</b>	"Julius Capitolinus"		Intermediate
<b>The Two Valerians</b>	"Trebellius Pollio"		Later

<b>The Two Gallieni</b>	"Trebellius Pollio"		Later
<b>The Thirty Tyrants</b>	"Trebellius Pollio"	An unnamed kinsman of Herrenius Celsus	Later
<b>Claudius Gothicus</b>	"Trebellius Pollio"	Constantius Chlorus	Later
<b>Aurelian</b>	"Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius"	Ulpianus	Later
<b>Tacitus</b>	"Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius"		Later
<b>Probus</b>	"Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius"	Celsinus	Later
<b>The Four Tyrants</b>	"Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius"	Bassus	Later
<b>Carus, Carinus, and Numerian</b>	"Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius"		Later

## Chapter 2 Inspiration Strikes... Gradually: the Formation of the Collection and the Development of the Inventions

In order to explain the evolution of the inventions' forms and purposes across the collection, we must begin by exploring the creative processes that shaped the development of the *Historia Augusta* as a whole. As Chapter One argued, analysis of the literary milieu of the late fourth century and evidence from within the *Historia Augusta* indicate that the Author was likely writing for an audience who knew his identity and played an active role in providing sources and vetting the text. The creative impetus for the changes in the inventions across the collection, and the manner in which the work was composed and circulated within this backdrop, are topics that need further clarification.

As Chapter One noted, developing a cohesive theory for the construction of such a lengthy and disparate collection of lives has proven to be a formidable task.<sup>1</sup> Scholars have found it difficult to bridge two competing notions about the formation of the collection. On the one hand, the composition of the *Historia Augusta* has often been

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<sup>1</sup> Numerous attempts have been made to explain the stages of the formation of the collection. Mommsen argued for a "Diocletianic" series based on Latin sources and a "Constantinian" series based on Greek sources; others argued the key to understanding the lives was by distinguishing the biographical and annalistic traditions on which the collection was based: see Hay 1911: 13-14, Baynes 1924: 68-72, and Syme 1971b: 18- 21.

painted as a hurried and slapdash affair.<sup>2</sup> This perception of haste is supported partially by “Trebellius Pollio’s” assertion at the end of the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* that he was dictating the life with such speed that he had “not even the opportunity of drawing breath” (*Tyr. Trig.* 33.8) and partially by the opinion that the Author relied on flights of fancy rather than more arduous and time-consuming research.<sup>3</sup> Many have rejected the proposition that the Author made any substantial revisions to the lives, due to their repetitiveness and perceived stylistic infelicities.<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand, as noted in Chapter One, an exchange at the end of the *Thirty Tyrants* suggests that the Author *did* view revision and the circulations of drafts amongst his readers as a normative part of the composition process. Indeed, as Alan Cameron has noted, the references to editing and compilation throughout the lives, along with the changes in its influences and inventions between the earlier and later lives, confirm that, “the *Historia Augusta* as we have it was not all written at the same time, [...] and no theory that it was merits serious consideration.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Hartke, for instance, posited that the collection could have been written in as little as four months: see Hartke 1940: 146.

<sup>3</sup> Whether or not the Author used dictation has been a matter of debate: see Syme 1968: 73, 120 n. 5, 182-185.

<sup>4</sup> On the haste and perceived lack of revision in the *HA*, see Syme 1971b: 34-38, Birley 2003: 136-137, 146, and Rohrbacher 2016: 172. On the paratactic style of the lives and how it erases any traces of a Suetonian scheme in the *HA*, see Paschoud 1996: xxxv and Betrand-Dagenbach 2014: lxxiii.

<sup>5</sup> Cameron 1968: 18-20, cf. Cameron 1965: 240.

The most common theory that attempts to bridge these two competing forces within the text is that the *Historia Augusta* was written in four more-or-less discreet, successive stages. These four stages are largely based on the work's *Quellenforschung* and are commonly described as the "primary," "secondary," "intermediate," and "final" lives (see Table 1 above).<sup>6</sup> The "primary" stage has been described as a reworking of the lost set of imperial biographies written by Marius Maximus (cos. II 233 CE) with supplemental information drawn from the work known as the *Kaisergeschichte*. Only after the Author had completed this initial "primary" series of lives did he decide to add in a series of "secondary" lives of imperial heirs and usurpers.

The Author is then thought to have used the accounts of Herodian and Dexippus to create an "intermediate" section to detail the continuation of the Severan and Antonine lines after the death of Caracalla. As one last "final" stage, the Author is thought to have drawn primarily on invention and a smattering of allusions to contemporary sources to extend his collection through the reign of Carinus (*r.* 283-285 CE). In this conception of the work's formation, the increasing amounts of inventive content in the later stages of the collection are primarily viewed as a smooth and teleological progression, in which the Author increasingly turned to fabrication to fill

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<sup>6</sup> For an overview of these stages, see Chastagnol 1994: xxxvii-xlvi, Syme 1971a: 56, Birley 2006: 19-24, Rohrbacher 2016: 8-12 and more below.

out his biographies as he moved away from his biographical exemplars and the accounts of Herodian and Dexippus.

As my first chapter suggested, much about this vision of the collection is no longer tenable, however. Instead of drawing upon only a handful of major sources, ongoing studies of the *Historia Augusta's Quellenforschung* have demonstrated that the Author drew inspiration from a variety of genres and made allusions to a host of literary and historical texts throughout the collection. Furthermore, the variations in inventions cannot be so easily tied to the availability or lack of potential sources, since the attributions and invocations arise in multiple stages of the collection regardless of the sources used.

In contrast to the hurried and linear affair formerly proposed, this chapter illustrates that the collection and its inventions took their form only through a series of gradual large- and small-scale creative decisions, rather than being the product of a single deliberate overarching plan. In particular, this chapter builds on Syme's seminal argument that the order for the initial stages of the composition is vexed by evidence for revisions conducted upon the lives.<sup>7</sup> As this chapter argues, evidence throughout the collection suggests that the *Historia Augusta* reached its final form only after several stages of revisions were conducted upon the lives over a period of some time. Unlike

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<sup>7</sup> Syme 1972: 125-6 and Syme 1971a: 64, 71, 75, 87, 282.

Syme, however, who ultimately thought the lives were largely written and revised serially, this chapter uses evidence of accretions and “false-ends” at the ends of lives to argue that the Author was drafting and revising multiple lives simultaneously in order to strengthen the thematic and structural links across the collection.

This chapter also provides further support for Syme’s suggestion that the attributions to the biographers and the imperial dedications were not original components of the collection. Although Syme does not specifically identify when these inventions were added, this chapter presents evidence that suggests the attributions to the six fictitious biographers and the invented invocations were devised and retroactively added to the lives while the Author was editing the “secondary” and “intermediate” sections of the collection. In closing, this chapter examines possible methods in which the lives were circulated amongst its original readers while at the same time undergoing revision.

### ***Background on the Traditional Order of the Collection***

As mentioned above, most scholars agree that the collection was not written in the chronological order in which modern editions organize the lives.<sup>8</sup> Instead, scholars

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<sup>8</sup> The manuscript tradition also exhibits variation in the order and placement of the lives within the collection, further confounding certainty concerning the order: see Thomson 2012: 91-97 for an overview of the order found in the Palatinus Latinus 899 (P), Sigma, and an account of the lives given by Sedulius Scottus.

have traditionally posited that the collection was written in four successive stages, known as the “primary,” “secondary,” “intermediate,” and “final” lives, as outlined in Table 1 below. Although these divisions oversimplify the Author’s creative process and mask their fair share of controversy, as I argue below, these terms are ubiquitous in studies of the *Historia Augusta* and provide us with a helpful terminology to discuss the content of the collection.

In the “primary” stage, perceived to be the most reliable of the entire collection, scholars commonly place nine of the thirty lives, including those of Hadrian (r. 117-138 CE), and his successor Antoninus Pius (138-161 CE), as well as the lives of Marcus Aurelius (161-180 CE), his “brother” Lucius Verus (161-169 CE) with whom he briefly co-ruled, Aurelius’ ill-fated son Commodus (177-192 CE), and then Pertinax (193 CE), Didius Julianus (193 CE), Septimius Severus (193-211 CE), and Severus’ son Caracalla (198-217 CE).<sup>9</sup> The material in these nine lives, known as the “primary lives” or the “Nine *Vitae*,” is thought to be highly indebted to the influence of Marius Maximus and at least one or more Latin biographical sources, known as the *Kaisergeschichte* or the *Ignotus*.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Some have argued that the collection initially began with a *Life of Nerva* and a *Life of Trajan*, which were lost, but this remains a point of conjecture. For those who believe prefatory materials and lives may have been lost, see Syme 1968: 170, Meckler 1996: 364-375, and Thomson 2007.

<sup>10</sup> The influence of Marius Maximus on this first stage of the formation of the *HA* is undeniable. Maximus is cited by name no less than twenty-nine times across the collection. Maximus’ biographies have been argued to be the source of the *HA*’s interest in scandalous stories, genealogical information, the citation of

After completing the *Life of Caracalla*, it is generally thought that the Author then reworked portions of the material found in the “primary” lives to compose a “secondary” series of five lives devoted to the heirs and usurpers who shared or attempted to usurp power from these “primary” emperors.<sup>11</sup> These lives include accounts of Aelius, Hadrian’s short-lived adopted heir for the years 136-138 CE, and of Geta, the son of Septimius Severus and brief co-ruler with his brother Caracalla during the years 209-211 CE, as well as biographies of Avidius Cassius who rebelled under Marcus Aurelius in 175 CE, and the closely connected lives of Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus, who both took part in the power struggles against Septimius Severus in the years 193-197 CE. What reliable information is included in these lives is thought to derive largely from material found in the “primary” lives. These “secondary” lives are considered the first major step towards invention in the collection, since they include the first examples of fabricated documents.<sup>12</sup>

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documents, and extensive descriptions of emperors’ rise to power before their acclamation. The references to Marius Maximus in the *Historia Augusta* provide our main source of information for the content and scope of his biographies. On Marius Maximus, see Kulikowski 2007, Rohrbacher 2013: 153-156 and 159-162. Most scholars accept the argument for Enmann’s *Kaisergeschichte* as a major source for events between 260-337/357 CE, although Syme argues for another source, known as *Ignotus*, which terminated around 217 CE. On debate over *Ignotus*, see Syme 1971a: 30-53, Syme 1972: 125, Barnes 1978: 98-107, and Rohrbacher 2013: 156-160.

<sup>11</sup> Syme 1971a: 56-69.

<sup>12</sup> Syme 1971a: 56. The lives of the heirs and usurpers are also referred to as the “Nebenviten.” Baynes 1924: 69-70 states “the ‘Nebenviten’ are practically valueless for historical purposes.” Rohrbacher 2013: 162 also disparages their value.

In the “intermediate” section, the Author appears to have become less dependent on Marius Maximus, instead turning to the Greek histories of Herodian, whose history recounted the death of Marcus Aurelius (180 CE) through the rise of Gordian III in 238 CE, and of Dexippus, whose account ran until the death of Claudius in August 270.<sup>13</sup> The “intermediate” *vitae* include lives of Macrinus and his son Diadumenianus, who briefly took power following Caracalla’s assassination in 217-218 CE, as well as the brief restoration of the Severan line under Elagabalus (218-222 CE) and Severus Alexander (222-235 CE). These are joined by three joint-lives that cover the later dynasties of the Maximini and Gordian families (235-238 CE and 238-244 CE respectively) and the three-month tenure of the two regents of Gordian III, Maximus and Balbinus, in 238 CE. The collection is then interrupted by a lacuna following the death of Gordian III in 244 CE.<sup>14</sup>

The collection resumes part way through a fragmentary *Life of the Two Valerians* (253-260 CE), and continues on with eight other lives including an account of the *Two Gallieni*, who ruled in 253-268 CE, a composite life of thirty-two supposed challengers

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<sup>13</sup> For see a summary of viewpoints on the Greek sources of the collection, see Barnes 1978: 109-111 and Rohrbacher 2013: 163-173.

<sup>14</sup> Lives of Philip and his son (244-249), Decius (249-251), Trebonianus Gallus and his son Volusianus (251-253), and Aemilianus (253) might have been featured during this lacuna. Whether this lacuna is due to an accidental loss in the manuscript record or whether it was a purposeful omission on the part of the Author, has been much debated of late. Birley, den Hengst, Schlumberger, and Rohrbacher have argued that the lacuna is a purposeful omission, a fabrication in and of itself, driven by the Author’s desire either 1) to avoid subjects about whom the Author was lacking information or 2) to avoid discussing the pro-Christian religious policies of Philip or the persecutions and deaths of Decius and Valerian: see Birley 1976; den Hengst 1981: 14-16 and 70-2, Rohrbacher 2016: 9-10, and Pausch 2010: 117 n 12 for an overview of the major arguments.

who rebelled under Gallienus in the *Thirty Tyrants*, as well as lives of the *Deified Claudius* otherwise known as Claudius Gothicus (268-270 CE), the *Deified Aurelian* (270-275 CE), *Tacitus* (275-276 CE), *Probus* (276-282 CE), *the Four Tyrants* (ca. 279-282), and the *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian* (282-285 CE). These “final” nine lives are widely acknowledged to exhibit the greatest quantity of spurious material and fabricated letters.<sup>15</sup> What reliable information appears in these lives has been chiefly attributed to the use of the *breviaria* of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius.<sup>16</sup>

Due to their advanced forms of invention and their retrospection on stylistic and editorial decisions of the earlier lives, the “final” lives’ place as the last sequence of the collection has not been seriously questioned. Disagreements concerning the divisions of the “primary,” “secondary,” and “intermediate” lives persist, however, particularly concerning the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. Many of these disagreements reveal the limitations of using the theory of “major sources” alone to divide the lives.

One of the most widely acknowledged problems to the sequential source theory is the *Life of Clodius Albinus*. Although the life is often categorized in the “secondary” portion of the collection alongside the other lives of usurpers and imperial heirs, the *Clodius Albinus* draws repeatedly from the history of Herodian, the source associated

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<sup>15</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 8-16.

<sup>16</sup> For a summary of arguments concerning the *HA*’s direct use of Victor and Eutropius, see Barnes 1978: 95-7 and Rohrbacher 2013: 149-152.

with the “intermediate” section, and cites him by name twice (*Clod. Alb.* 1.2, 12.14).

Using the source explanation alone then, the *Life of Clodius Albinus* appears more closely linked to the “intermediate” stage of composition associated with the lives of Elagabalus, Severus Alexander, the Maximini, the Gordians, and Maximus and Balbinus, in which the Author makes use of Herodian and Dexippus. The *Life of Clodius Albinus* also shares with the “intermediate” lives references to a fictional foil biographer called “Aelius” or “Junius Cordus,” who is cited as a source for trivial information and gossip twenty-three times across the five lives of the *Clodius Albinus*, *Macrinus*, *Three Gordians*, *Two Maximini*, and *Maximus and Balbinus* but who is cited nowhere else in the other “secondary” lives.<sup>17</sup>

A host of similar problems arise concerning the sources and perceived nature of other “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. Some have argued the *Life of Elagabalus* could belong in the “primary” lives, since Marius Maximus’ collection is thought to have ended with an account of *Elagabalus* and it seems reasonable to posit that if the first stage of the composition was a direct reworking of Maximus’ lives the *Elagabalus* would belong in that category.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, P. White has noted that the *Life of Severus Alexander* draws upon the *Kaisergeschichte*, Marius Maximus, Herodian, and Dexippus, a fact which

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<sup>17</sup> For more on Cordus, see Thomson 2012: 96-97 and Chapter Three below.

<sup>18</sup> Syme 1972: 127.

also places it part way between the “primary” and “intermediate” lives.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Barnes has argued that the *Life of Verus*, often categorized as a “primary” life, is merely an extension of the *Life of Marcus Aurelius* and thus belongs in the “secondary” stage of the composition.<sup>20</sup> In a similar vein to Barnes, Rohrbacher has argued that the lives of Macrinus and Diadumenianus, often considered “intermediate lives” could be considered part of the “secondary” series, since they could be construed as challengers following Caracalla.<sup>21</sup> Rohrbacher also suggests that the *Two Maximini*, the *Three Gordians*, and *Maximus and Balbinus* belong in their own category due to the fact that they all feature multiple figures in each life, a structure distinct from the other “intermediate” lives.<sup>22</sup>

A larger problem with this source-narrative for the formation of the *Historia Augusta* is its assumption of a linear progression for the collection. Although these traditional divisions take note of some of the prefaces and structural changes across the collection, this division does not adequately represent how malleable the Author’s vision for the series was. It is clear that the Author was willing to make alterations to the

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<sup>19</sup> See White 1980: 276 for cogent challenges to the theory that the Author relied on only a single main source at a time, onto which he grafted or added material from more minor sources only occasionally or as necessary.

<sup>20</sup> See Barnes 1967: 65-70.

<sup>21</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 8.

<sup>22</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 8.

scope and content of his collection for a variety of reasons: as inspiration struck, as seemed expedient, or as new information became available.

Some of these changes are more discreet, such as when the Author alters his plan to write a *Life of Twenty Tyrants*, announced no less than three times in the *Life of the Two Gallieni* (*Gall.* 16.1, 19.6. 21.1), and instead composes a *Life of Thirty Tyrants*. The motivation to expand the life to include thirty challengers seems, in part, to have been made out of a desire to model his life on the famed Thirty Tyrants of Athens, an idea which seems to have come to him only after the composition of the *Life of the Two Gallieni* was complete.<sup>23</sup> So too, the Author repeatedly announces his plan to compose a life concerning the *two* Gordians, a father and son of the same name (*Macr.* 3.5, *Diad.* 6.3, *Elag.* 34.6). The Author eventually writes a life of the *three* Gordians, however, including an additional account of a grandson by the same name, apparently due to the fact that the Author had come across what he viewed as more reliable information in the interim.<sup>24</sup>

Other decisions, however, concerned much more substantial alterations to the structural and thematic content and scope of the lives, such as his decision to begin

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<sup>23</sup> Peter 1909: 190-222. Many of the figures recounted in this life are fictional, or are usurpers who are correctly dated to other reigns and not Gallienus. For more on the fictional usurpers in these lives, see Chapter Five below.

<sup>24</sup> The Author accuses "certain other writers" (*quidam imperiti scriptores*) for incorrectly saying that there were two, although he notes that Herodian and Dexippus correctly confirm that there were three (*Gord.* 2.1). Syme 1972: 131 believes the Author intended the allusion to refer to Aurelius Victor or Eutropius, since they both conflate the son and grandson into one person (cf. *Caes.* 27, *Eutr.* 9.2).

including lives of usurpers after the “primary” lives were complete. The Author makes additional changes to the trajectory of the collection later in the series. After writing multiple lives dealing with only single individuals, the Author announces that accounts of fathers and sons and multiple figures will be featured within single volumes henceforth from the *Life of the Two Maximini* (*Max.* 1.1-3), and he reaffirms this decision at the outset to the *Life of the Three Gordians* (*Gord.* 1.1-4). Additionally, the Author gradually changes his mind about when the collection will end. In the *Life of Elagabalus* 35.6, “Lampridius” announces that he intends to write lives of Diocletian, Maximian, Licinius, and Maxentius, but in *Probus* 1.5, “Vopiscus” claims he intends to write biographies for Maximian and Diocletian, with no mention of their *Caesares*. Two lives later, “Vopiscus” instead establishes that his project will end with Numerian, with the explanation that the lives of Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius already “have been related, each in a separate book, by Claudius Eusthenius, imperial secretary to Diocletian” (*Car.* 18.3-5).

These sorts of ongoing alterations to the scope and content of the collection suggest that the Author did not have a single coherent plan for his work from the outset. Instead, these changes suggest that the extent to which even the Author could foresee the direction that his collection would take was imperfect. Therefore, while it is true that the collection came about through a series of sequential decisions, caution is needed that the progression of the collection is not mistaken as teleologically predetermined toward

invention. Only a series of incremental creative decisions gradually shaped the course that the collection would take. Some of these decisions may have been sudden and opportunistic, while others may have been the result of more substantial deliberation. As the next section demonstrates, this same malleability played a role not only in determining the overarching scope of the collection, but also in the ultimate form and content of the individual lives.

### ***Evidence for Revision in the Historia Augusta***

As mentioned in the introduction, scholars have often rejected the possibility that the lives of the *Historia Augusta* underwent any substantial revision because of the repetitive nature of some of the lives and the many contradictions made about the professed scope and content of the lives. Indeed, Rohrbacher has stated that in comparison to “traditional, polished” works “the *HA* is left with its repetitiveness and awkwardness intact.”<sup>25</sup> Although the Author may not have performed the sorts of revisions and refinements that align with modern sensibilities, such as removing repetitiveness and polishing for stylistic effect, it is clear that he periodically revisited and refashioned individual lives.

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<sup>25</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 172 compares the *HA*, which he claims “was left with its repetitiveness and awkwardness intact,” to “a traditional, polished work would undergo several rounds of feedback, from recitation to distribution among friends, before it was ready for copying and ‘publication.’”

In particular, it seems that the Author frequently amended his biographies by adding additional information to the end of the lives. At least ten of the thirty lives exhibit signs of paratactic accretions at the end of the biographies, and several feature what Syme has deemed “false ends” in which a biography appears to draw to a close only to continue on with further information.<sup>26</sup> For example, the *Life of Pescennius Niger* initially appears to draw to a close, stating,

This, Diocletian, greatest of emperors, is what we have learned concerning Pescennius, gathering it from many books. [...] It now remains for me to speak of Clodius Albinus, who is considered this man's ally, in a way, since they rebelled against Severus similarly. (*Pesc. Nig.* 9.1-3)

*Haec sunt, Diocletiane maxime Augustorum, quae de Pescennio didicimus ex pluribus libris. [...] Sequitur pariter de Clodio Albino dicam, qui quasi socius huius habetur, quod et pariter contra Severum rebellarunt.*

Rather than continuing on to the *Life of Clodius Albinus*, however, the Author abruptly continues onward for three more chapters about Pescennius, in which the Author gives further accounts of omens and auguries concerning Pescennius' rise to power and ultimate death (9.6), presents a summary of his character and strategies as a military commander (10.1-11.3), and compares Niger to Severus and his favorite predecessors

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<sup>26</sup> Syme noted that these “false ends” can be found in the lives of Marcus Aurelius, Verus, Caracalla, Avidius Cassius, Pescennius Niger, Clodius Albinus, and Elagabalus; to these the *Life of Septimius Severus*, the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants*, and the *Life of Tacitus* can be added: see Syme 1972: 124-127.

(12.1-3). Only then does the Author close the life, adding an epigram testifying to Pescennius' greatness and honor (12.5-8).

Many of the false ends are recognizable through a similarly erratic, paratactic accretion of material. Indeed, the *Life of Tacitus* is one of the most egregious examples of this phenomenon. The Author appears to have extended the life on at least three separate occasions. In *Tac.* 16.8, the Author states, "Now, since I have for the time satisfied my zeal, I will bring this book to a close, believing that I have given satisfactory expression to my devotion and my desire" (*nunc quoniam interim meo studio satisfeci, claudam istud volumen, satisfactum arbitrans studio et cupiditati meae*). Instead of ending, however, the life goes on to describe a series of omens concerning Tacitus' reign (17.1-4), after which the Author *again* appears to draw the life to a close, saying, "But to what end shall I proceed further? There are others to relate these things; let us save ourselves for Probus and for Probus' famous deeds" (*sed quousque ultra progredimur? sunt a quibus ista dicantur. nos ad Probum et ad Probi gesta insignia reservemus*) (17.5). Spurning this promise, the Author continues to press on. The Author then adds, "Now since I have promised to quote some of the letters which showed the joy of the senate when Tacitus was created emperor, I will append the following and then make an end of writing (*his additis finem scribendi faciam*)" (18.1). Only after the Author appends four letters as evidence that the "ancient times had been restored" under Tacitus (18.2-19.5) does the life well and truly come to an end.

Although this paratactic accretion of material has been lamented as a sign of the Author's lack of stylistic polish, these additions may have been less patently unaesthetic to ancient readers. Ancient readers may have been conditioned to expect this sort of paratactic accretion of material at the end of the compositions. Adding addendums, otherwise known as subscripts (*subscripta*) or rescripts (*rescripta*), to pieces of correspondence as a form of response is a well-documented convention in the ancient world.<sup>27</sup> In part, the structure of book rolls made it easiest to attach additional pieces of papyri to the end of compositions. Even if the late fourth-century Author was writing using codices instead of book rolls, as M. Thomson has suggested, adding material at the end of lives instead of rewriting the entire body of the text may have saved the need of using additional papyri.<sup>28</sup>

Indeed, a unique passage at the end of the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants*, the very life scholars use to support the idea of haste, provides explicit evidence that the Author occasionally added material at the end of lives without altering the body of the text. As mentioned in Chapter One, at the end of the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* "Trebellius" comments that his reader, upon receiving the life, had recommended that the Author not include two female tyrants in the life. Yet it is notable that "Trebellius" responds to

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<sup>27</sup> Corcoran 2014: 173-178.

<sup>28</sup> Thomson 2012: 99, 99 n. 21 bases his argument on contemporary uses of the terms *liber* and *volumen*, which the Author uses to describe his work (*Max. Duo* 1.1, *Gord.* 1.3, *Tac.* 31.8). Parchment and copying was cost prohibitive; some authors relied on wealthy friends and patrons to copy their texts: see Chapter One above.

his reader's comments not with a revision to the body of the text, but instead with an addendum at the end of the life. The *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* initially appears to come to a close following the discussion of two female rulers, Zenobia and Victoria (*Tyr. Trig.* 30.1-31.5). Declaring that he has said all "that I have deemed worthy of being related concerning the thirty pretenders," "Trebellius" states that he will turn his attention to writing a "special book" on the *Life of Claudius* and his brother Quintillus (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.5-6).

Yet rather than turning immediately to the *Life of Claudius*, "Trebellius" launches into his response to his reader's concerns and announces a retraction of his coverage of the two women. He addresses his reader and requests that his reader "consent to add to his volume" (*hos volumini tuo volens addas*) accounts of two further male tyrants, Titus and Censorinus (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.8).<sup>29</sup> The "biographer" admits these usurpers more properly belong under other rulers, but explains the necessity of the addendum by saying:

It was with deliberate purpose that I included the women, namely that I might make a mock of Gallienus, a greater monster than whom the Roman state has never endured [...]. This error on my part, however, the diligence of your erudition, mindful of history, prevented. And so I am grateful that the kindness of your wisdom has filled out my title. Now no one in the Temple of Peace will say that among the pretenders I included women, [...] for this they are wont to bandy about concerning me with merriment and jests. (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.7-11)

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<sup>29</sup> The reader is identified as an unnamed kinsman of Herrenius Celsus earlier in the life (22.12).

*Studiose in medio feminas posui ad ludibrium Gallieni, quo nihil prodigiosius passa est Romana res publica [...]. sed errorem meum memor historiae diligentia tuae eruditionis avertit. habeo igitur gratiam, quod titulum meum prudentiae tuae benignitas implevit. nemo in Templo Pacis dicturus est me feminas inter tyrannos, [...] ut ipsi de me solent cum risu et ioco iactitare, posuisse.*

This passage suggests, then, that the reader had warned “Trebellius Pollio” that his accounts of the two female tyrants might not be well received and might even be a cause of mockery from other readers. Yet rather than excising the offending material, “Pollio” merely adds additional replacement information to the life (*Tyr. Trig.* 32.1-33.6). Only after the Author extends the life and details the lives of Titus and Censorinus does he bring the collection to a close again, saying, “Now you have the number complete of the thirty tyrants” (*habes integrum triginta numerum tyrannorum*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 33.7).

This passage is interesting not only in that it directly addresses the fact that the Author added material at the end of lives but also because it provides an explanation for the jarring style of the “false ends” found elsewhere. The fact that “Pollio” added the additional accounts of Titus and Censorinus without excising the accounts of the two female tyrants in the body of the text suggests that revisions could be added to lives without editing the body of the text. This may provide an explanation for the reason the Author did not feel the need to provide more clear transitions in the paratactic accretions found in other lives, since readers might have been accustomed to additions at the ends of compositions without thorough revision into the body of the text.

Furthermore, although “Pollio” announces that he was writing in all haste to send the revisions back to his reader at the end of the *Thirty Tyrants*, we need to question if all of the additions and accretions found throughout the collection were made so swiftly after the initial composition of each life. Nothing in the text directly indicates how soon such additions were made after the initial drafts of the lives were completed. If we look to comparative examples in the ancient world, however, the composition and revision of large-scale historical projects were often the work of some duration. Cassius Dio wrote the eighty books of his *Historia Romana* across twenty-two years, and Ammianus appears to have been interviewing eyewitnesses, collecting materials, and drafting portions of his *Res Gestae* for the better part of a decade at least.<sup>30</sup>

Admittedly, the *Historia Augusta*, as it now stands, is not as lengthy a work as Ammianus’ *Res Gestae*, but there is no reason to think that the Author was not also writing and revising his collection over a period of time.<sup>31</sup> As demonstrated above, the collection was fashioned over enough of a duration that the Author made several large alterations to his intended scope. Additionally, “Flavius Vopiscus,” the last of the six biographers, expresses his concern that old age may take him before he completes his

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<sup>30</sup> On the lengthy duration of Dio’s composition, see Millar 1964: 250. On Ammianus’ duration, see Cameron 2011: 354. Vergil also wrote the *Aeneid* over some ten years, and it was still undergoing revision at the time of Vergil’s death in 19 BCE.

<sup>31</sup> Sterz 1977: 714 also posits that the collection may have been written over a period of some years in the 390s and early fifth century during the reign of Theodosius due to what he sees as changes in the Author’s outlook toward Christianity.

project (e.g., *Tac.* 15.4, 16.7, *Claud.* 2.4, *Prob.* 1.5). While concerns that old age may cut short literary endeavors is a trope found in other works, the repetition of this theme at least supports the idea that the Author envisioned his project as having the potential to drag on for some time.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, since the *Tacitus* draws to a close on three separate occasions, the impulse for addition may have been a drawn out affair.

Therefore, the drafts of the lives may have remained unfinished and in flux for quite some time as the Author periodically returned to the lives to add material while he was drafting other lives. A comment in the *Pescennius* supports the proposition that the Author gradually accumulated marginalia and added accretions as he found new information “in other books.” Before launching into his discussion, the Author states that he will add further information, so that he does not seem to have omitted “any of the tales which are told of Pescennius, for all that they can be read in other books” (*ne quid ex iis quae ad Pescennium pertinent praeterisse videamur, licet aliis libris cognosci possint*) (*Pesc. Nig.* 9.5). For this reason, revisions to the lives may not have been made serially, one at a time; rather, the Author may have conducted revisions on multiple lives gradually as the opportunity arose or inspiration struck.

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<sup>32</sup> Thomson has used these cogitations on old age to argue that the Author himself was an old man and to identify the Author as Naucellius, an elderly associate of Symmachus, though this connection is tenuous: see Thomson 2012: 73-76.

## *The “Secondary” and “Intermediate” Lives as a Place of Ongoing Revision*

Indeed, if we reject the idea that the lives were written serially and posit instead that the Author could have been drafting and revising multiple lives simultaneously, many more avenues arise to explain the peculiarities of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. Syme, who has dealt the most intently and thoroughly with the order and composition of the *Historia Augusta*, formerly suggested that some of the problems with the order of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives can be explained if we reject the notion that the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives were two distinct stages of the composition.<sup>33</sup>

Instead of the traditional sequential order, Syme suggested that the first lives written after the conclusion of the “primary” lives were the *Macrinus*, the *Elagabalus*, and the *Severus Alexander*. He suggested these three lives might have been written in a run together, since they all feature similarly worded transitions about the murder of each one’s predecessor, such as ‘*occiso ergo Antonino Bassiano*’ (*Macr.* 2.1), ‘*igitur occiso Macrino*’ (*Elag.* 1.4), and ‘*interfecto Vario Heliogabalo*’ (*Sev. Alex.* 1.1). Only after completing these

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<sup>33</sup> Syme has returned repeatedly to the order and composition across the course of his career. His conception of the composition evolved substantially over the years: see Syme 1968: 182-185, Syme 1971a: 64, 71, 75, and Syme 1972 for an overview.

lives did Syme think the Author turned his interest to writing the *Life of Diadumenianus*, the son of Macrinus, and the “secondary” lives of the usurpers.<sup>34</sup>

Then, in order to explain why references to the invented biographer “Junius Cordus” are absent in the *Elagabalus*, *Severus Alexander*, and the secondary lives, but appear in the *Clodius Albinus*, the preface to the *Life of Macrinus*, and the lives of the Maximini and Gordians, Syme posited that the idea for “Junius Cordus” was devised sometime during or before the drafting of the *Clodius Albinus*, which Syme believed was one of the last “secondary” lives to be drafted. He then posited that the Author continued the trope into the lives of the Maximini and the Gordians. Lastly, Syme posited that the Author retroactively fashioned a preface for the *Life of Macrinus*, both to introduce the foil “Junius Cordus” and to announce the Author’s intention to include lives of usurpers and heirs. Syme concluded that the *Macrinus* was then intended to serve as the introduction to the entire second third of the collection, including both the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives.<sup>35</sup>

By and large, Syme’s vision of a more integrated and piecemeal composition collection of the “secondary” and “intermediate” sections seems correct. Ultimately, Syme left the exact order of the lives as a “vexed question,” however, because allusions between the *Life of Pescennius Niger* and the *Life of Severus Alexander* made it problematic

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<sup>34</sup> Syme 1972: 127.

<sup>35</sup> Syme 1972: 126.

for him to say that all the “secondary” lives were written after the composition of the *Macrinus, Elagabalus, and Severus Alexander*.<sup>36</sup> Syme noted that the *Life of Severus Alexander* alludes to the claim made in the *Pescennius* that Niger rejected any interest in panegyric (*Pesc. Nig.* 11.6, cf. *Sev. Alex.* 35.1). In Syme’s mind, this allusion necessitated that the *Life of Pescennius Niger* was written prior to the *Alexander Severus*, thus thwarting his hunch that the lives of the usurpers were written after the *Macrinus, Elagabalus, and Severus Alexander*. Syme also found his order problematic because he believed the *Clodius Albinus* had to have been written in close succession after the completion of the *Pescennius Niger*, since the Author notes in the *Pescennius* his intention to move on to a *Life of Clodius Albinus*.<sup>37</sup>

As much as Syme did an admirable job explicating the problems of dividing the composition of the *Historia Augusta*’s lives into rigid categories, he ultimately defaulted to the assumption that the lives must have been completed more-or-less serially. Syme also believed that any additions or accretions to the lives were done shortly after the initial compilation. He called both the initial drafting and revision done to the lives “hasty and impatient.”<sup>38</sup> But if we reject the idea that these were done serially and instead accept that multiple lives could have been under revision simultaneously, we

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<sup>36</sup> Syme 1972: 127 admits that a single theory of composition in which the secondary lives were all written in “a run or a cluster” “might not hold for all of them.”

<sup>37</sup> Syme 1972: 123-4.

<sup>38</sup> Syme 1971: 73.

can resolve some of the lingering problems that Syme had concerning the order of the collection.

For example, the reference in the *Severus Alexander* to Niger's disdain for panegyric, which Syme found so problematic, in fact alludes to a passage of the *Pescennius* (11.6) that falls within the accreted material at the end of the *Pescennius* (*Pesc. Nig.* 9.4-12.8). Since these accretions could have been added at any point after the life was initially drafted, it is possible that the passage concerning the usurper's distrust of panegyric was retroactively added to the *Pescennius* during or after the completion of the *Severus Alexander* to shore up the consistency across the lives. Similarly, although the *Life of Clodius Albinus* is closely related in material and themes to the *Life of Pescennius Niger*, the composition of the *Albinus* was not necessarily done in close succession with the completion of the *Pescennius*, as Syme posited. Even though the Author states his intention to write a *Life of Clodius Albinus* in the original end to the *Pescennius* (9.1-2), it is not clear that the Author began composing the *Albinus* immediately thereafter. Indeed, the passage stating the intention to write a *Life of Clodius Albinus* may not have been added to the *Pescennius* until a draft of the *Clodius Albinus* was underway so as to provide a connection between the two lives.

Further evidence that the Author was using his additions and revisions to strengthen links across the lives can be found in the *Life of Elagabalus*. The conclusion of

the *Life of Elagabalus* appears to have been added to on at least two separate occasions.<sup>39</sup> In the first addition, the Author states his intention “to tell of the two Gordians, father and son, who desired to be called after the family of the Antonines” (*Elag.* 34.6). In the second addition, the Author expresses his intent to write lives of Aurelian and Claudius along with other later emperors up to the time of Constantine (*Elag.* 35.2-4). Chronologically, none of the three lives mentioned—the *Life of the Gordians*, the *Life of Aurelian*, and the *Life of Claudius Gothicus*—immediately follow the *Life of Elagabalus*.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, the retroactive addition of announcements stating the Author’s intention to include these lives suggest that the Author also used the additions to forge links with lives dispersed throughout the traditional stages of the collection.

There are many reasons to believe that the Author periodically revisited the *Elagabalus* and the *Severus Alexander* while drafting the lives of other figures in the “secondary” and “intermediate” portions of the collection. As mentioned above, both of these lives draw upon a variety of sources, including Marius Maximus, the *KG*, Herodian, and Dexippus, associated with all first three sections of the collection. So too, there are signs that the Author was reflecting broadly on the figures described in the

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<sup>39</sup> Syme 1972: 130 identifies this as a “double-epilogue,” cf. Syme 1971a: 59-60. For more on this double-epilogue and its contents, see Chapter Four below.

<sup>40</sup> Elagabalus’ ruled 218-222 CE, whereas the Gordians only came to power only after Severus Alexander (222-235 CE) and the Maximini (235-338 CE) and ruled 238-244 CE. Claudius Gothicus (268-270 CE) and Aurelian (270-275 CE) were again substantially later.

“secondary” and “intermediate” lives during this period. For example, the preface to the *Life of Severus Alexander* directly alludes to the legacies of Pescennius Niger, Clodius Albinus, and Avidius Cassius. In this preface, the Author remarks that Severus Alexander came to power during a time when “soldiers had now grown accustomed to appoint their own emperors, often in a disorderly fashion,” and notes that these soldiers “had chosen as emperors Pescennius Niger, Clodius Albinus, Avidius Cassius [...]. And thus were sown the seeds of civil wars” (*Alex. Sev.* 1.6-7). Certainly, the *Severus Alexander’s* reflections on earlier usurpers and the *Elagabalus’* anticipation of lives to come, suggest that the Author was reflecting both backward and forward across the collection while bringing these lives to their final form.

As the discussion above has demonstrated, the Author repeatedly returned to the lives to add material and revise the lives as part of an ongoing and organic process. In addition, the variety of ways that he used these revisions to signal thematic and structural links across the lives suggests that the Author was very much concerned with the overarching connections between the lives and considered the juxtaposition of his lives a normative part of the reading of the collection. Taken together then, the evidence for this more fluid and freeform type of revision, in which the Author periodically returned to lives and made additions to shore up consistency or to signal upcoming lives to readers, and the proposition that the Author intended his lives to be read in juxtaposition to each other provide many new ways to envision the formation of the

collection. Indeed, these conclusions also have important ramifications for how we can trace the development of the inventions.

### ***The Introduction of the Inventions***

Several peculiar characteristics of the imperial invocations and the attributions to the six biographers suggest that they were retroactively added to the lives during this period of large-scale revision associated with the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. The invocations, in particular, are a phenomenon closely associated with the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. Of the thirteen lives featuring invocations, only three are found in the so-called “primary” lives; the other ten are found in the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives.<sup>41</sup> The invocations’ frequent appearance in the prefaces and conclusions of lives, or in what might have been the original preface or conclusion of lives prior to later accretions, make them suspect as later additions in ten of the thirteen lives in which they appear (*Ael.* 1.1, 2.2; *Ver.* 11.4; *Av. Cass.* 3.3; *Pesc. Nig.* 9.1; *Geta* 1.1; *Macr.* 15.4; *Elag.* 34.1, 35.3-5; *Alex. Sev.* 65.1, *Max.* 1.1; *Gord.* 1.1, 34.6).<sup>42</sup> The only two invocations not found in a preface or a conclusion are those in the primary

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<sup>41</sup> In fact, invocations are present in all five of the “secondary” *vitae* and all of the “intermediate” lives apart from the *Life of Diadumenianus* and that of *Maximus and Balbinus*.

<sup>42</sup> As we argued above, the two of the invocations found in the “body” of the “secondary” lives of *Avidius Cassius* 3.3 and *Pesc. Nig.* 9.1 may have been the original opening or conclusion of the life before the Author added additional material to the lives.

lives of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus, but these two invocations also show signs of being later revisions, as Chapter Four will argue.

Syme posited that the idea of adding invocations was possibly devised during the composition of the secondary lives and was an established convention within the *Historia Augusta* at some point prior to the final revisions on the *Life of Elagabalus* and *Life of Alexander Severus*.<sup>43</sup> He argued for this placement because he saw a shift from the brief, formal, and impersonal invocations to Diocletian and Constantine in the earlier lives to the more elaborate and “impudent” conclusions to the *Elagabalus* and the *Severus Alexander*, where the Author boldly counsels Constantine against his association with eunuchs, for instance (*Alex. Sev.* 67.1). This greater elaboration and boldness led Syme to believe that the invocations in the *Elagabalus* and the *Severus Alexander* represent an advanced version of the invocations.

The “biographer” of the *Life of Elagabalus* also states that he had written additional lives for Constantine, “So much concerning Elagabalus, the details of whose life you wished me [...] to present to you, inasmuch as I have already presented the lives of earlier emperors” (*haec sunt de Heliogabalo, cuius vitam [...] tibi offerri voluisti, cum iam aliorum ante tulerimus*) (*Elag.* 35.1), a fact which Syme took as proof that the *Elagabalus* was not the first life to have featured an invocation after the idea had been devised. On

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<sup>43</sup> Syme 1972: 130-131. Syme recants his earlier position from Syme 1971a: 60 that, “there is no reason for supposing that these invocations are a subsequent addition.”

the whole, however, Syme thought the invocations were constructed and fashioned to each of the lives serially and shortly after their initial drafting.

Yet verbal echoes and thematic similarities in the prefatory and concluding invocations to Diocletian across the *Macrinus*, the *Avidius Cassius*, the *Pescennius*, and the *Clodius Albinus* suggest that the invocations were fashioned together and retroactively added to the lives simultaneously or in quick succession to each other. In addition to providing an introduction to “Junius Cordus,” the preface of the *Macrinus* also announces the Author’s intent to write the lives of all rulers, whether they be “emperors, usurpers, or Caesars.” The preface begins by saying:

The lives of such emperors, usurpers or Caesars, as held their throne for no long time lie hidden away in darkness, because, in the first place, there is nothing in their private lives worth telling, since they would have remained totally unknown had they not aspired to the throne; and, in the second place, not much can be said about their sovereignty, because they did not hold it long. Nonetheless, we shall bring forward what we have discovered in various historical works — and they shall be facts that are worthy to be related. (*Macr.* 1.1-2)

*Vitae illorum principum seu tyrannorum sive Caesarum qui non diu imperaverunt in obscuro latent, idcirco quod neque de privata eorum vita digna sunt quae dicantur, cum omnino ne scirentur quidem, nisi adspirassent ad imperium, et de imperio, quod non diu tenuerunt, non multa dici possunt. nos tamen ex diversis historicis eruta in lucem proferemus, et ea quidem quae memoratu digna erunt. non enim est quisquam qui in vita non ad diem quodcumque fecerit. sed eius qui vitas aliorum scribere orditur officium est digna cognitione perscribere.*

If we look to other “secondary” and “intermediate” lives that may have been being drafted or revised around the same time, many of them share prefatory or concluding invocations that ruminate over these same themes.

Echoes of the *Macrinus*’ professed interest in the lives of emperors, usurpers, and Caesars can be found in the prefaces to the *Life of Aelius* and the *Life of Pescennius Niger* in which Diocletian is addressed. The *Life of Aelius* reiterates the Author’s intention to write lives not only of *Augusti* but also *Caesares*, saying,

It is my purpose, Diocletian Augustus, greatest of a long line of rulers, to present to the knowledge of your Divine Majesty, not only those who have held as ruling emperors the high post which you maintain but also those who either have borne the name of Caesar, though never hailed emperors or Augusti, or have attained in some other fashion to the fame of the imperial power or the hope of gaining it. (*Ael.* 1.1)

*In animo mihi est, Diocletiane Auguste, tot principum maxime, non solum eos qui principum locum in hac statione quam temperas retentarunt, ut usque ad divum Hadrianum feci, sed illos etiam qui vel Caesarum nomine appellati sunt nec principes aut Augusti fuerunt vel quolibet alio genere aut in famam aut in spem principatus venerunt, cognitioni numinis tui sternere.*

The opening materials of the *Life of Pescennius Niger* expound similarly on the difficulty of fairly setting down “in writing the lives of men who, through other men’s victories, remained mere pretenders” (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.1-2). So too, what appears to be the original conclusion of the *Life of Pescennius Niger* (before the accretion of material), also shares with the preface of the *Macrinus* and *Aelius* a concern for thorough coverage of all rulers. It states, “For when a man consigns to books the lives of men who were not rulers in the

state, or of those, again, who were not declared emperors by the senate, or, lastly, of those who were so quickly killed that they could not attain to fame his task is difficult” (*Pesc. Nig.* 9.1).

The invocations to Diocletian found at the ends of the *Macrinus* and the *Pescennius* exhibit further important similarities. Both announce that they are presenting the finished product of their research to Diocletian. The *Macrinus* concludes by saying,

We have gathered together these facts concerning Macrinus from many sources and have presented them to Your Serenity, Diocletian Augustus, because we have seen that you are desirous of learning about the emperors of former times. (*Macr.* 15.3-4)

*quae de plurimis collecta Serenitati tuae, Diocletiane Auguste, detulimus, quia te cupidum veterum imperatorum esse perspeximus.*

What appears to be the original conclusion of the *Life of Pescennius Niger* before the accretion of material addresses Diocletian in nearly parallel wording, stating: “This, Diocletian, greatest of emperors, is what we have learned concerning Pescennius, gathering it from many books” (*haec sunt, Diocletiane maxime Augustorum, quae de Pescennio didicimus ex pluribus libris*) (*Pesc. Nig.* 9.1).

At the very least, these similarities suggest that the Author was ruminating over the same themes while he was drafting and revising lives during this period of the collection. However, the closely similar themes, the formulaic wording, and the fact that all of them link Diocletian with the themes of usurpers suggest a coherent pattern. In particular, the similar formulae (*quae de collecta [...] perspeximus* and *quae [...] didicimus ex*

*pluribus libris*) and the reference to Diocletian as *Diocletiane Auguste* and *Diocletiane maxime Augustorum* shared between the concluding invocations of the *Macrinus* and the *Pescennius* suggest that these two conclusions may have been formulated around the same time and retroactively added to the lives. Thus, it is possible that the Author fashioned all three prefatory invocations together and added them to the lives simultaneously or in quick succession so as to shore up larger thematic and structural connections across the lives in this section.

The invocation to Diocletian in the *Life of Avidius Cassius* also bears striking resemblance to the invocation passages found at the beginnings and conclusions of the *Macrinus* and *Pescennius Niger*. The invocation in the *Avidius Cassius* states,

But let us briefly portray the nature and character of the man; for not very much can be known about those men whose lives no one has dared to render illustrious through fear of those by whom they were overcome. We will add, moreover, how he came to the throne, and how he was killed, and where he was conquered. For I have undertaken, Diocletian Augustus, to set down in writing the lives of all who have held the imperial title whether rightfully or without right, in order that you may become acquainted with all the emperors that have ever worn the purple. (*Av. Cass.* 3.1-3)

*sed nos hominis naturam et mores breviter explicabimus. neque enim plura de his sciri possunt, quorum vitam et illustrare nullus audet eorum causa a quibus oppressi fuerint. addemus autem quemadmodum ad imperium venerit et quemadmodum sit occisus et ubi victus. proposui enim, Diocletiane Auguste, omnes qui imperatorum nomen sive iusta causa sive iniusta habuerunt, in litteras mittere, ut omnes purpuratos Augustos cognosceres.*

The reminder that “not very much can be known about those men whose lives no one has dared to render illustrious through fear of those by whom they were overcome” closely mirrors the prefaces of the *Macrinus*, *Aelius*, and *Pescennius Niger* in both content and form. The similarities suggest that it too may have been fashioned and added to the life around the same time.

The invocation, however, does not arise at the immediate beginning of the life. The *Life of Avidius Cassius* first begins with a brief account of Cassius’ upbringing (*Av. Cass.* 1.1-5) and excerpts from two lengthy letters purportedly written by Verus and Marcus Aurelius discussing the extent of Cassius’ treachery (*Av. Cass.* 1.6-2.8), before it transitions into the invocation noted above. The account of Cassius’ upbringing and the accounts of the two letters feature similar abrupt changes of topic—from Cassius’ father to notions of his treachery—without notable transitions, much like those that appear in the paratactic accretions at the end of lives. It is possible that like the “false-ends,” the invocation passage in the *Clodius Albinus* stands as a sort of “false-beginning.” If this is so, the invocation may have been constructed at the same time as the other Diocletianic dedications in the *Aelius*, *Niger*, and *Macrinus*. The Author, however, continued to augment the beginning of the life with further material at a later date.

Thus, there are reasons to suspect that many of the invocations to Diocletian were retroactively added as parts of prefaces and conclusions to the lives of the *Macrinus*, the *Aelius*, the *Pescennius*, and the *Clodius Albinus*. Indeed, it appears that the

Author retroactively devised and added them to the lives to forge stronger structural and thematic links across the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. If we look more broadly, the remaining invocations to Diocletian and Constantine may also have been retroactively attached to the lives during this same period, as Chapter Four will demonstrate.

Analysis of the attributions to the biographers suggests that they too were retroactively added to the collection. Although “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus,” the “biographers” associated with the “final” lives, are endowed with more distinctive personalities and social connections, nothing definitively differentiates between the *personae* of the four biographers within the body-text of the first twenty-one lives before the lacuna. The main distinctions between the first four “biographers” are their names, “Aelius Spartianus,” “Vulcacius Gallicanus,” “Aelius Lampridius,” and “Julius Capitolinus,” which appear only in the manuscript *incipits* and *explicitis* of the lives associated with them. Since the names of the first four biographers appear only in these locations that were easily modifiable, they, like the prefaces and conclusions, might have been added at a later date to drafts of lives that had already been composed.

The only time any of the names of the first four biographers appear in the body of a life is in the *Life of Probus*, the twenty-eighth life of the series. Here, “Vopiscus” asserts that he was inspired to imitate the “biographers” “Julius Capitolinus” and “Aelius Lampridius,” along with Marius Maximus, Suetonius, and “the others who have

handed down to memory these and other such details not so much with eloquence as with truthfulness" (*Prob.* 2.3-4). If readers were not already familiar with the pseudonyms "Julius Capitolinus" and "Aelius Lampridius" prior to reading the *Life of Probus*, these references would be nonsensical and devoid of any meaning, humorous or otherwise.<sup>44</sup> Therefore, these references establish the *Life of Probus* as a *terminus ante quem* for the attributions to at least two of the *personae* found in the first twenty-one lives.

The *terminus ante quem* for "Trebellius Pollio" is slightly earlier. "Vopiscus" twice defends the merits and industry of "Trebellius Pollio," his immediate predecessor: once in the preface to the *Life of Aurelian* 1.1-10, the twenty-sixth life of the series, and once in the preface to the *Life of the Four Tyrants* (*Quad. Tyr.* 1.3), the twenty-ninth life of the series.<sup>45</sup> Even so, the convention of assigning lives to the biographers need only have been well established by the *Life of Aurelian*, leaving the Author with a wide window in which to decide to assign his biographies to a series of adopted *alter egos*.

Multiple discrepancies concerning the attributions in the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives hold further clues to when the Author may have first assigned the lives to the invented "biographers." These inconsistencies concern instances in which one

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<sup>44</sup> Comments such as these once led scholars to believe that Vopiscus was a real individual who served as a redactor, compiler, and/or editor of the entire collection: see Baynes 1926: 147.

<sup>45</sup> "Vopiscus" discusses the reputation of "Trebellius Pollio" with Junius Tiberianus, the purported prefect of the city in the *Aurelian*, and "Vopiscus" also praises "Pollio" for his industry compared to Marius Maximus in the *Four Tyrants*.

“biographer” claims to have written a life that is ascribed to another “biographer.” For example, the biographer “Spartianus” promises to write a *Life of Clodius Albinus* in the *Life of Pescennius Niger* (*Pesc. Nig.* 9.3). The *Albinus*, however, is attributed to “Julius Capitolinus.” The confusion is only compounded, when in the *Albinus* “Julius Capitolinus” references a Delphic oracle that he claims, “we quoted in the *Life of Pescennius*” (1.4-5). Similarly, “Capitolinus” promises to write a *Life of Commodus* (*Marc.* 19.4), although the *Commodus* is attributed to “Lampridius.”<sup>46</sup>

Dessau and many others since have argued that these contradictions were a purposeful ploy to make it seem that the *Historia Augusta* was the result of a much more lively and expansive biographical tradition than actually existed in the fourth century.<sup>47</sup> That is, the contradictions give the impression that Julius Capitolinus wrote a *Life of Pescennius* that was not included in the series and that Spartianus likewise wrote a duplicate *Life of Albinus* that was not incorporated into the collection. Alternatively, Syme has argued that the puzzling inconsistencies can be explained if the four *noms de plume* were added retroactively after the initial drafting of the primary and secondary

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<sup>46</sup> Multiple examples of this phenomenon exist. Another well-known example is that the biographer “Aelius Spartianus” promises to “talk at greater length” about the family of Verus (*Ael.* 2.9), but the *Life of Verus* is later attributed to Capitolinus. Likewise, “Lampridius” suggests that he will incorporate an account of Diadumenus into a *Life of Macrinus* (*Diad.* 6.1), but the lives of Macrinus and Diadumenianus are attributed to “Julius Capitolinus.” “Lampridius” also states his intention to write of the Gordians (*Elag.* 34.6), although that life is ultimately ascribed to “Capitolinus”: see Syme 1971: 61 and Thomson 2012: 21 for further examples.

<sup>47</sup> See Dessau 1889: 378-379 and Long 2002: 182.

lives.<sup>48</sup> Syme proposed that the Author initially wrote the lives in his own voice, having not yet devised the disparate *personae*, and thus spoke of his future intentions and compositions as if they were all one and the same. Syme posited that the back- and forward-references between lives became problematic only after the Author later decided to assign the different pseudonyms to the collection and did not alter the body of the text to take heed of the new contributions.<sup>49</sup>

Although Syme provides no explanation for when these attributions may have been added, it is likely that they were added only after the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives had reached a near final form. Many of the inconsistencies concerning the attributions arise in the *Macrinus* or in “secondary” and “intermediate” lives that appear to have been written or revised after the *Macrinus*, including the *Aelius*, the *Niger*, the *Clodius Albinus*, the *Elagabalus*, and the *Gordians* as well as several of the primary lives that appear to have undergone some revision (the *Marcus*, *Verus*, and the *Commodus*). Therefore, if the attributions became problematic only after they were retroactively applied, the categorization of the lives between the biographers likely occurred at some point after the *Macrinus* was drafted and before the composition of the *Life of Aurelian*. We may conclude that this was in the period then in which the lives of

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<sup>48</sup> Syme 1972: 132.

<sup>49</sup> Syme 1968: 73-5. Syme 1968: 211 notes, “it must also be asked at what stage the author decided to add dedications and pass himself off as a collection,” but does not offer an answer.

the usurpers, the *Elagabalus*, *Severus Alexander*, and the three joint-lives were being drafted and revised.

As for the fabricated documents, their origins have been the least debated aspect of the collection's inventions. No fabricated documents are found in the "primary" lives.<sup>50</sup> In fact, in several "primary" lives the Author refuses to include transcripts of documents from Marius Maximus due to their great length (*Pert.* 2.8, 15.8). Scholars have often argued the Author was first impelled to fabricate documents to "fill out" the "secondary" lives of the usurpers Avidius Cassius, Pescennius Niger, and Albinus Clodius because he lacked further reliable information about these men beyond what was already included about these usurpers in the "primary" lives of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus. If we accept Syme's rationale that the "secondary" lives may have only been written after the *Macrinus* and other "intermediate" lives, it is possible that the lives of the usurpers were not the first lives to feature fabricated sources after all. The *Macrinus* features at least one invented letter (6.2-9), so it possible that the letters too were devised for a different purpose than commonly assumed.

For these reasons, the addition of the attributions, invocations, and fabricated letters can all be identified as later additions to the Author's biographical project and can be traced to the period in which the Author was drafting and revising the "secondary"

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<sup>50</sup> One document is included in the "primary" *Life of Commodus* (18.1-19.9), but the Author claims to excerpt the document from Marius Maximus, so it not a direct parallel with the sources the Author invents later.

and “intermediate” lives. Although the prospect that the inventions were retroactively added to the lives runs contrary to the common belief that such fabrications were an “innate” part of the Author’s project, their later addition should not be so shocking. As argued above, the Author decided to make several alterations to the proposed scope and structure of his collection even up to the very end of its completion, suggesting that all parts of his project were subject to change at any time.

While the remaining chapters of this dissertation illustrate why this period of the collection was so rich in creative inspiration, for now it is important to note that the inspiration for the attributions, invocations, and fabricated documents may not have arisen at the same time or developed out of a single impetus. Although the decision to pass off the collection as that of six biographers has often been seen as inherently linked to the decision to use the invocations to pass off the work as that of an earlier generation, the two inventions may have been devised separately. Indeed, if the attributions and the invocations were developed according to their own logic and applied without too much care for the other, it would explain some of the chronological inconsistencies concerning the attributions. For example, two of the biographers appear to have rather extended careers that spanned the reigns of both Diocletian and Constantine; further, “Trebellius Pollio,” one of the later biographers, claims that Constantius I is the reigning Caesar at

the time of his composition of the *Probus*, while “Vopiscus” alludes to those who wrote to Constantine as his and Trebellius’ predecessors.<sup>51</sup>

### *The Circulation of the Text*

The argument that the Author was able to make broad scale revisions across the collection and retroactively add the inventions to the lives as a series of prefaces and conclusions necessarily relies on the postulate that the Author was able to emend or update the master copies (or the original versions) of the biographies before the collection was ultimately gathered into a single volume. Our information about the earliest circulation of the text and how and when it came to be bound together into a single collection is notably limited.<sup>52</sup> The earliest evidence for the circulation of the *Historia Augusta* occurs roughly two generations after the work’s original composition. Q. Aurelius Memmius Symmachus, consul in 485 and great-grandson of Q. Aurelius Symmachus, appears to have had access to the *Two Maximini* in the late fifth century. He excerpts portions of the *Two Maximini* to compose part of his own *Historia Romana*, which was in turn excerpted in Jordanes’ *Getica* (c. 551 CE).

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<sup>51</sup> As Thomson 2012: 21 notes, “Spartianus and Capitolinus dedicate some of their works to Diocletian (284-305) and some to Constantine, sole emperor after his defeat of Licinius (324), leaving an unexplained pause of twenty years in both of their literary careers.” Lampridius dedicates the lives of Elagabalus and Alexander Severus to Constantine, but he is then named as a biographer in the *Life of Probus* which purports to have been written during the reign of Constantine’s father, Constantius Chlorus (*Prob.* 2.7).

<sup>52</sup> See Thomson 2012: 103-106.

Despite this scarcity of direct evidence concerning the initial circulation of the lives, several methods can be proposed that would allow for the theory of revision suggested above. As noted in Chapter One, it is possible that portions of the collection were shared in private group settings and read aloud, a method that Rohrbacher has proposed due to the vignettes found in the lives of the *Historia Augusta* which feature depictions of similar scholarly forums.<sup>53</sup> It is true that multiple authors throughout the Republic and Empire depict the group vetting of texts and the ensuing scholarly debate as a common occurrence.<sup>54</sup> Certainly, the discussion of texts in a domestic setting is a central feature of Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, written a generation or so later than the *Historia Augusta*.<sup>55</sup>

Although the vignettes from within the *Historia Augusta* provide evidence that corroborate the possibility that the lives were shared in small gatherings, references from within the text suggest that the Author also envisioned his work to be circulated in hard copy. "Pollio's" comment that his reader should feel free to "bestow on anyone you

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<sup>53</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 72-86.

<sup>54</sup> On group readings and recitations in the High Empire, see Johnson 2010: 98-136 and Johnson 2013: 362-3. Although the *HA* and Macrobius suggest domestic readings and debates were reasonably common, direct evidence for public recitations in the fourth century is limited, however. Libanius' *Ep.* 1063.1-4 (c. 392) serves as our main evidence for the phenomenon. In the letter, Libanius praises an unidentified Marcellinus for recent public recitations of his work in Rome and encourages Marcellinus to continue sharing further installments his work at literary gatherings in the city. On the identity of this Marcellinus and the possibility that Ammianus Marcellinus gave public recitals of his work, see Fornara 1992: 328-344 and Kelly 2008: 111-112.

<sup>55</sup> On literary debates in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, see Gerth: 58-114 and Cameron 2011: 239-247, 390-395, 538-539.

wish this little book" (*da nunc cuiuis libellum*) suggests that the reader was expected to receive a hard copy of the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.33.8).<sup>56</sup> The Author also describes his lives in physical terms in the *Life of the Three Gordians*. The Author declares that he had decided to incorporate the lives of fathers and sons into single lives in order to spare Constantine the hassle of "unrolling many volumes and only read one story" (*quare tres Gordianos hoc libro conexui, [...] consulens et meo labori et lectioni tuae, ne cogereris plurimos codices volvendo unam tamen paene historiam lectitare*) (*Gord.* 1.4).<sup>57</sup> While it is debatable whether this description of Constantine's interaction with the lives was merely poetic license or a realistic image of how the Author envisioned his readers to interact with his text, the description of Constantine "unrolling volumes" certainly evokes the idea of a single reader perusing physical copies of the lives at his leisure.

Even if the lives were circulated in hard copy, nothing in the earlier lives suggests that the Author's ability to revise portions of the twenty-one lives simultaneously would have been limited. It is possible that the Author circulated larger installments of his work only once he deemed a segment complete, but it is also possible that he routinely emended his lives and sent them out to his readers for "review" while

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<sup>56</sup> The passage notes that the critics at the Temple of Peace "have now the number complete, gathered into my writings from the secret stores of history" (*habent integrum numerum ex arcanis historiae in meas litteras datum*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.11).

<sup>57</sup> For more on the Author's decision to begin incorporating fathers and sons into individual lives, see Chapter Four below.

continuing to update them.<sup>58</sup> The passage in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* suggests that the Author could envision his work “complete” at several stages in the process. From the exchange, it can be inferred that the life was initially considered “finished” (*expletum*) after the inclusion of the two female tyrants, but following its revision the life is again considered newly “complete” (*integrum*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.8, 31.11, cf. 33.7). Therefore, it is possible that the Author saw his lives as “finished” on several occasions while at the same time constantly cycling drafts at various stages of completion through multiple readers. Considering the possibility that the Author shared “updated” versions of the lives as he periodically altered and amended them, it is even possible that drafts of the “primary,” “secondary,” or “intermediate” lives had already been circulated to readers before the decision to devise and add the false pseudonyms and imperial invocations had been made.

While there is no evidence to countermand the proposal that the Author was able to make periodic large-scale revisions to the first twenty-one lives of the collection, there is some evidence to suggest that the final five lives of the collection were drafted,

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<sup>58</sup> Although evidence for the circulation of texts in the fourth century is limited, it may not have been unusual for fourth-century authors to publish longer works in several installments. Through analysis of the prefaces to books 15 and 26.1.1 of the *Res Gestae*, Fornara has suggested that Ammianus Marcellinus published groups of books in installments with intervals of time intervening each section. R. C. Blockley has also argued that the first edition of Eunapius’ *Universal History*, written in the late fourth century, was published in three separate parts and that the first ten books of Olympiodorus’ *History* may have circulated separately from the rest of the composition in the early fifth-century: see Fornara 1990: 169-172 and Blockley 1981: 3-5, 29. For a summary of arguments against Ammianus’ circulation in installments, see Kelly 2008: 114.

revised, and circulated individually rather than as a group. A retraction made in the *Life of the Four Tyrants* suggests that the Author had a more limited ability to make substantial revisions to the final lives of the collection. In the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, “Vopiscus” retracts certain statements made in the *Life of Aurelian* concerning the usurper Firmus. In the *Life of Aurelian*, “Vopiscus” states that Firmus had “laid claim to Egypt, but without the imperial insignia” (*sine insignibus imperii*) (*Aur.* 32.2). At the beginning of the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, however, “Vopiscus” announces that Firmus “had both worn the purple and called himself Augustus on the coins that he had struck” (*purpura usus et percussa moneta Augustum esse vocitatus*) (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.1).

In the *Four Tyrants*, “Vopiscus” addresses this inconsistency directly, saying,

I myself in my life of Aurelian, before I became familiar with the whole story of Firmus, considered him not among those who had worn the purple, but as a sort of brigand; which I have stated at this point so that no one of my readers may think that I am inconsistent. (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.3)

*ipse ego in Aureliani vita, priusquam de Firmo cuncta cognoscerem, Firmum non inter purpuratos habui sed quasi quendam latronem; quod idcirco dixi ne quis me oblitum aestimaret mei. sed ne volumini, quod brevissimum promisi, multa coniectam, veniamus ad Firmum.*

This retraction is interesting for several reasons. First, the need to announce a retraction suggests that the Author was either unwilling or unable to edit the *Life of Aurelian* to clear up the consistency. Secondly, “Vopiscus”’ concern about appearing inconsistent indicates that he expected his audience to have already read the *Life of Aurelian* and to be familiar with the contents of the life prior to reading the *Life of the Four Tyrants*. Taken

together then, the retraction and the Author's fear of appearing inconsistent suggest that the Author may have been unable to return to the *Life of Aurelianus* and make thorough adjustments because a "finished" draft of the life had already been released to his readers at an earlier time.

Other contradictions could be explained if the Author had a more limited ability to edit the last five lives of the collection. One of the clearest examples concerns the Author's decision to write a *Life of Thirty Tyrants* instead of a *Life of Twenty Tyrants*. In the *Life of the Gallieni*, the Author thrice repeats his intentions to write a *Life of Twenty Tyrants* (*Gall.* 16.1, 19.6, 21.1). If the Author had wished, revising the *Gallieni* to indicate the switch from twenty to thirty tyrants appears like it would have been an easy emendation to make. Instead, what we find is a single notice indicating that the Author intends to write a life of thirty (*Gall.* 19.7) awkwardly inserted between the three notices stating his intention to write a *Life of Twenty Tyrants*.<sup>59</sup>

The best explanation for this rapid juxtaposition of contradictory statements seems to be that, when initially composing and coming to the end of the *Life of the Gallieni*, the Author fully intended to write a *Life of Twenty Tyrants*. Having later decided

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<sup>59</sup> In *Gall.* 19.6, he states "it is our purpose to include twenty pretenders in one single book, since there is not much to be told about them, and many things have already been said in the *Life of Gallienus*." This pronouncement is *immediately* then followed in *Gall.* 19.7 with the statement "It will suffice, meanwhile, to have told in this book these facts concerning Gallienus; for much has already been said in the *Life of Valerian*, and other things shall be told in the book which is to be entitled 'Concerning the Thirty Pretenders.'" Only a mere page later again in 21.1 does the reader see, "Now let us pass on to the twenty pretenders, who arose in the time of Gallienus because of contempt for the evil prince."

to proceed with a *Life of Thirty Tyrants*, either the Author or a later reader retroactively inserted the partial correction to rectify the inconsistency without more substantially redacting the offending statements.

In addition, unlike the first twenty-one lives, the final five lives each contain their own extended preface. These prefaces introduce elements or sources that are thematically relevant to the individual life in which they are featured. For example, the *Life of Tacitus* features a lengthy history of the practice of regencies relevant for the discussion of the ruler (*Tac.* 1.1-6), the *Life of the Four Tyrants* reflects on the decision to add lives of usurpers as something that makes the collection superior to those of Suetonius and Marius Maximus (*Quad. Tyr.* 1.1-1.4), and the final *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian* ends with an elaborate, poetic metaphor that compares the fate of the Roman State to a ship upon the sea (*Car.* 1.1-3.7). Syme attributes these extended prefaces, particularly that found in the *Life of Aurelian* in which “Vopiscus” has a lengthy chat with the prefect of the city concerning the merits of “Trebellius Pollio’s” writings (*Aur.* 1.1-2.2), to the Author’s growing confidence and impertinence.<sup>60</sup> While the more elaborate prefaces do suggest that the Author was gaining confidence in his authorial voice, the elaborate prefaces may also suggest that the lives were designed as “stand-alone” compositions to be circulated individually rather than together.

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<sup>60</sup> Syme 1972: 131.

Thus, while reconstructing the work's exact circulation is impossible, evidence suggests that the process was not fully consistent across the collection and that two or more separate processes might have been at work at different stages of the collection's formation. Even if notions of how the lives were circulated must be left as suggestive instead of conclusive, it seems safe to say that the experience ancient readers had with the text differed greatly from that of modern readers.

## *Conclusion*

Faced with such a multifarious collection, one can understand why Mommsen and others were loath to abandon the position that the lives of the *Historia Augusta* were written by several biographers with differences in creative vision.<sup>61</sup> Yet, as the discussion above has demonstrated, many of the complex variations across the *Historia Augusta* can be explained as the result of periodic accretions to the lives and revisions to the Author's intended scope of the collection.

As this chapter has demonstrated, the theory that the Author wrote his work in four discreet stages vastly oversimplifies the Author's creative process. The four traditional divisions both wrongly depict the work as a teleological progression toward invention and overlook the ways that the Author was revising his lives to ensure

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<sup>61</sup> See Mommsen 1889 and Baynes 1924: 74-5, 145-6.

thematic consistency across large portions of his collection. Furthermore, the evidence that the Author was revising the lives to strengthen their thematic and structural cohesion hints that the Author himself considered the juxtaposition of multiple lives a normative part of the reading of the collection, rather than viewing each biography as a stand-alone composition subject to its own logic and serving its own interests.

This chapter has also provided further evidence that the inventions were not an inherent component of the biographies at the outset of the collection. Instead, they seem to be the result of a series of creative decisions made during an intermediate stage of the composition. As this chapter notes, the attributions and invocations were not added merely to entertain but to shape the thematic and structural cohesion of the Author's *biographical* project that was already well underway. Indeed, if the attributions to the biographers and the imperial invocations were retroactively added only after two-thirds of the collection was already drafted, as this chapter has argued, the centrality of the inventions to the project needs to be reassessed. To claim that the Author devised any large portion of the collection solely as a means of indulging his "innate" love of invention seems untenable.

Furthermore, the evidence that the Author continued to accrue historical material about his subjects and make additions to the lives of Pescennius Niger and Avidius Cassius even after he had added the invocations suggest that he *did* endeavor to

compile biographical compositions above and beyond the minimum required to add his inventions, as Bowerstock and Jenkins have argued.<sup>62</sup>

The question remains: if these inventions were not an original element of the biographies, what purpose did their addition serve, or by what rationale were they applied? Syme, as successful as he was at problematizing the order of the lives and identifying evidence for accretion at the end of the lives, repeatedly disavowed any logic behind the additions of the invocations or the biographers. Syme stated repeatedly that the Author's "genial" decision to "multiply his identity" was a mere "afterthought," and that the specific names of the biographers were assigned "without care or discrimination."<sup>63</sup> Likewise, Syme offered no explanation for the Author's decision to devise the spurious invocations, except that they were "a product of the author's developing impudence," and he believed that the letters were designed only to "fill space."<sup>64</sup>

As the following chapters will demonstrate, the choices to add these conventions were far from meaningless or arbitrary, however. Even from the limited scope of this chapter, the beginning of an organizational and thematic rationale can be detected in the invocations. As we discussed above, the *Life of Macrinus*, the *Life of Aelius*, the *Life of*

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<sup>62</sup> See Chapter One above.

<sup>63</sup> Syme 1971a: 74-75, 128-132.

<sup>64</sup> Syme 1972: 131

*Avidius Cassius*, and the *Life of Pescennius Niger* all feature invocations to Diocletian that link him to the importance of studying *Caesares* and usurpers. Chapter Four will examine the remaining invocations in light of other thematic interconnections the Author was forging across the collection. First, however, Chapter Three will turn to consider how the Author's increasing engagement with texts and his reflection on his own process in drafting and sharing his work may have influenced the decision to add the attributions to the biographers.

### Chapter 3 The Six Biographers and their Scholarly Community: A Loving Parody of Late Antique Erudition

Arguably the most puzzling yet captivating invention of the *Historia Augusta* is its attribution to a series of six fictitious biographers. As Chapter One argued, traditional explanations for these attributions are no longer tenable. While scholars have long assumed that these attributions were a deliberate attempt to “veil” the Author’s identity, the mechanisms involved in the circulation of texts likely would have prohibited these pseudonyms from maintaining the Author’s anonymity. Furthermore, the ubiquity of fictitious narrators in the ancient novel and other works of fiction would have primed fourth-century readers to expect and appreciate such authorial impersonations. Even so, few direct parallels for the *Historia Augusta*’s impersonation of multiple biographers exist.

As Alan Cameron once remarked, even amongst other so-called “forgeries,” the decision to attribute the *Historia Augusta* to “a team of collaborators is unprecedented.”<sup>1</sup> Cameron noted that it was much more common for writers “to publish anonymously,” or “to adopt a single, plausible pseudonym.” Extant examples of the ancient novel suggest that narration in the genre was primarily held by a single dominant narrator,

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<sup>1</sup> Cameron 2011: 782.

who occasionally handed over his narration to another character to tell a story.<sup>2</sup>

Likewise, rhetorical exercises like *ethopoeia* and *imitatio* encouraged the imitation of the style or *persona* of a well-known literary or historical figure of the past. In contrast, the Author instead chose to impersonate six distinct individuals, who were otherwise unattested in the historical record.

In addition to the Author's unique choice to impersonate six unattested figures, Chapter Two's examination of the inconsistencies in the attributions across the collection suggests that the spurious biographers were not an original design component of the *Historia Augusta*. Instead, they appear to have been added retroactively while the Author was making broad scale revisions across the "primary," "secondary," and "intermediate" lives, again setting the Author's adoption of these *personae* apart from the other literary precedents in which the authorial impersonation was an inherent component of the work. Therefore, a different model is needed to explain the Author's decision to attribute the work to six distinct fictitious figures.

As noted in the previous chapter, Syme repeatedly stated that the Author's "genial" decision to "multiply his identity" was a mere "afterthought," and that the specific names of the biographers were assigned "without care or discrimination."<sup>3</sup> Yet

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<sup>2</sup> E.g., Lucius in Apuleius' *Golden Ass* or Encolpius in Petronius' *Satyricon*. For more on the phenomenon of dominant narrators and focalization in the ancient novel, see Whitmarsh and Bartsch 2008: 237-260.

<sup>3</sup> Syme 1971: 74-5, 128-132.

clear variations can be detected in the attributions of the biographers across the lives. Scholars have long recognized that the four “biographers” associated with the first twenty-one lives have little to distinguish them but their names: “Aelius Spartianus,” “Vulcacius Gallicanus,” “Aelius Lampridius,” and “Julius Capitolinus.” In contrast, the two biographers associated with the “later” lives of the collection, “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius,” are endowed with much more distinct personalities, and their lives feature a higher quantity of conversational asides and digressions about the origins of their sources, their social engagements, and purported contemporaries.<sup>4</sup>

Syme posited that the transition to more elaborate *personae* in the “later” lives was a natural extension of the Author’s general penchant for “bogus names” and his growing confidence in his deception. In a similar vein, Rohrbacher, Pausch, and others have suggested that the more elaborate vignettes about the biographers in the “later” lives reflect the growing parodic and novelistic tendencies in the work, since a higher quantity of invented documents and ironic attestations of the Author’s commitment to historical *fides* can also be found in the “later” lives.<sup>5</sup>

Building on Chapter Two’s conclusion that these attributions were likely added near the completion of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives, this chapter examines

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Thomson 2012: 72-3. Thomson has remarked that Vopiscus “presents a marked literary personality” speaking, “with an independent voice, especially when he engages in dialogues with Roman notables.”

<sup>5</sup> See Pausch 2010, and on the greater invention of the later lives, see Barnes 1978: 1, Cameron 2011: 778-782, Thomson 2012: 72, and Rohrbacher 2016: 8-15.

the “secondary,” “intermediate,” and “later” lives for possible explanations for the initial concept and transformation of the attributions across the collection. By analyzing the names of the biographers and their functions across the collection, this chapter argues that the shift toward more elaborate *personae* in the later biographers was not merely an inevitable or predetermined result of the Author’s growing boldness or novelistic tendencies. Instead, the transformation of the *personae* is linked to a deliberate shift in the Author’s use of the biographers across the collection.

In particular, this chapter illustrates that the attributions fulfill two separate functions in the collection. First, this chapter presents further evidence to support T. Honoré’s theory that the names of the first four biographers were designed as allusions to imperial virtues and family *gens* and were systematically assigned to the lives according to each subject’s characteristic *virtus* (or lack thereof). I build upon his theory, however, to suggest that these attributions were inspired by the Author’s reflection on the aims of the biographical genre as he increasingly engaged with a greater range of historical and literary texts.

In contrast, I argue the more distinct *personae* of the “later” biographers, “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus,” become a main lens through which the Author develops an exaggerated and parodic caricature of his own contemporary scholarly milieu. In addition, I argue the transition to this more parodic reflection on his own and his readers habits can be tied to the shift in the Author’s focus from the

biographical aims and content of the lives to the social context in which his biographies were written and disseminated.

### ***The First Four Biographers and Reflections on Imperial Virtus***

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, few if any differences in style or outlook can be detected in the lives attributed to the biographers “Aelius Spartianus,” “Vulcacius Gallicanus,” “Aelius Lampridius,” and “Julius Capitolinus.”<sup>6</sup> The main distinction between the first four “biographers” is their names, which appear to be a combination of puns that allude to imperial families as well rhetorical and satirical texts, as I discuss more below.<sup>7</sup> The Author’s use of puns and allusions to fashion the names of the biographers is unsurprising. Similar games concerning nomenclature can be found in other fourth-century texts, suggesting that the Author and his readers were primed to expect and appreciate such diversions.<sup>8</sup>

The Author clearly had a fondness for the medium and often used puns to fill in gaps in the historical record, since the epithets given to the biographers are but a small

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<sup>6</sup> Attempts to determine stylistic variations in the lives attributed to different biographers have found little to distinguish the lives. Many of the stylistic variations have been attributed to the Author’s close paraphrasing of a wide variety of sources.

<sup>7</sup> The origins and connotations of the names have been a topic of long standing interest. For an overview of the scholarship, see Hohl 1912, Domasewski 1918, Birley 2002, Honoré 1987, Syme 1968: 165-169, 184-5, Thomson 2012: 29-32, and Rohrbacher 2016: 21-24.

<sup>8</sup> On the “growth in allusive complexity” across multiple genres in the fourth century, from the “patchwork” centos of Ausonius to Ammianus, see Rohrbacher 2016: 16-21, Roberts 1989, and Kelly 2008.

fraction of the some two hundred “bogus” names scattered throughout the *Historia Augusta* that Syme deemed “redolent of fraud.”<sup>9</sup> Studies by Syme, Rohrbacher, Thomson, and others have demonstrated that many of the invented names throughout the *Historia Augusta* derive from an eclectic mix of literary allusions to lost treatises of Suetonius, scholiasts on Cicero and Juvenal, monuments throughout the city of Rome, and other contemporary figures and works. As Rohrbacher notes, these puns and allusions were one of the primary ways that the Author played with intertexts and provided readers with opportunities for scholarly debate and discussion concerning their origins.<sup>10</sup>

Syme posited that a clear trajectory could be traced from the Author’s penchant for punning throughout the lives and the Author’s decision to “pass himself off as a plurality.” Syme identified the Author’s invention of the fictitious foil biographer variously called “Aelius Cordus” or “Junius Cordus” as a key transitional stage in the Author’s growing fondness for bogus names and ironic deception.<sup>11</sup> As noted in Chapter Two, “Junius Cordus” is cited as a source for trivial information twenty-three times in

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<sup>9</sup> Syme 1968: 165-169, 184-5.

<sup>10</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 16-22.

<sup>11</sup> Most agree that Cordus is purely an invention of the Author or a coded reference to a contemporary historian, since no other attestations exist for Cordus beyond the *HA*. A select few, however, like Lippold, have argued that Cordus was a real biographer from the middle of the third century. On Cordus as an invention, see Syme 1972: 126-7 and Thomson 2012: 96-97. On Cordus as a real figure, see Lippold 1998: 153-177.

the five “intermediate” lives and the *Life of Clodius Albinus*. The Author cites him, for instance, as the source for the information that the fiancée of Maximinus the Younger received as betrothal presents “a necklace of nine pearls; a net-work cap with eleven emeralds; and a bracelet with a row of four sapphires” (*Max. Duo* 27.7) and that Clodius Albinus regularly ate “one hundred Campanian peaches, ten Ostian melons, twenty pounds of Labican grapes, one hundred figpeckers, and four hundred oysters” when famished (*Clod. Alb.* 11.2-4).

Thomson has argued that the foil’s name, “Aelius Iunius Cordus,” was devised to allude to Juvenal, more fully known as Decimus *Iunius* Iuvenalis, and a figure from Juvenal’s first satire named Cordus, who is derided for his prolix accounts of useless information and his poor prose (*Iuv.* 1.1-6).<sup>12</sup> Certainly, this interpretation of the name provides a fitting epithet for the figure if we consider the description of the “Cordus” in the preface to the *Life of Macrinus*. There, the Author describes “Cordus” as a biographer who was

fond of publishing the lives of those emperors whom he considered the more obscure. He did not, however, accomplish much; for he found but little information and that not worth noting. He openly declared that he would search out the most trivial details [...]. By searching out all this sort of thing and recording it, he filled his books with *mythistoriae*. (*Macr.* 1.2-5)<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Thomson 2012: 96 n. 11.

<sup>13</sup> The only two documented uses of the term *mythistoria* are found in the *HA*. In *Quad. Tyr.* 1.2, the charge of dealing in *mythistoria* is also leveled at Marius Maximus.

*et Iunio quidem Cordo studium fuit eorum imperatorum vitas edere quos obscuriores videbat. qui non multum profecit; nam et pauca repperit et indigna memoratu, adserens se minima quaeque persecuturum [...]. quae ille omnia exsequendo libros mythistoriis replevit talia scribendo [...].*

Jenkins and Rohrbacher, among others, have noted the irony of the Author's criticism of "Cordus," considering the Author's own penchant for the trivial and spurious.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, Syme saw the Author's ironic critiques of "Cordus" as a sign of the Author's growing boldness in his inventions and posited that the Author took such pleasure in inventing "Cordus" that he "engendered a novel device" of assigning the lives to a series of further invented biographers.<sup>15</sup>

On the one hand, the creation of Cordus does provide some important context for the origins and timing of the Author's addition of the attributions. As Syme notes, the invention of the recurring character of Cordus is an important transitional stage from the Author's more common use of puns to fashion names for more fleeting and obscure figures like the wife of Emperor Gordian and the decision to attribute his work to a series of recurring epithets. Furthermore, the references to "Cordus" arise in the "intermediate" and "secondary" lives that appear to have been under revision in the period immediately prior to the attributions' addition, demonstrating that the Author was making creative changes at this period in the composition. On the other hand, there

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<sup>14</sup> See Jenkins 2006: 139 and Rohrbacher 2016: 63-9.

<sup>15</sup> Syme 1971a: 73.

are reasons to doubt that the attributions were merely a result of the Author's increasing irony and boldness with puns.

In direct contrast to Syme's claim that "the labels have been assigned without much thought" and it is a "gain to disregard them,"<sup>16</sup> ongoing studies of the first four biographers' names in the decades since Syme have detected a clear pattern in the design and assignments of the biographer attributions across the first twenty-one lives. Honoré, in particular, has proposed the most encompassing explanation for the names. Honoré proposed that the Author carefully constructed the names for the first four of his *alter egos* from a combination of allusions to imperial dynasties and imperial virtues. For example, Honoré proposed that three of the *nomina* granted to the biographers—"Aelius," "Julius," and "Flavius"—were designed to allude to the imperial *gens* of Hadrian, his successors, the Julio-Claudians, and the Flavians, while the *cognomina* bestowed upon the biographers—"Spartianus," "Capitolinus," "Lampridus," and "Gallicanus"—were designed as allusions to four distinct imperial characteristics.<sup>17</sup>

By combining these *nomina* and *cognomina*, Honoré posited that the Author created fitting sobriquets to assign to each emperor, based on a "simple typology of imperial character." For instance, "Aelius Spartianus" was assigned to the biography of Publius Aelius Hadrianus and others known for their "Spartan" and stern militaristic

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<sup>16</sup> Syme 1968: 176.

<sup>17</sup> See Honoré 1987: 170-173 and Thomson 2012: 29-31.

disposition, such as Didius Iulianus, Septimius Severus, Caracalla, and Pescennius Niger, while “Julius Capitolinus” was bestowed on those who were “on good terms with the senate,” such as Marcus Aurelius, Pertinax, Albinus Clodius, and Macrinus, or those who ruled during the period when the senate “asserted its independence and appointed its own emperors,” such as the Maximini, Gordians, and Maximus and Balbinus.<sup>18</sup> In turn, Honoré posited that the *cognomen* of “Aelius Lampridius,” to whom the *Commodus*, *Diadumenianus*, *Elagabalus*, and *Severus Alexander* are assigned, might be a reference to *lampas*, to denote those who were “frivolous and fond of the night-lights.”<sup>19</sup> Lastly, the name Vulcacius Gallicanus, assigned to the purported biographer of the usurper Avidius Cassius, was thought to evoke the rebelliousness of the Gauls and allude to a fourth-century historian listed in the *Origo* (10.2).<sup>20</sup>

Honoré posited that the Author then grouped any remaining emperors under these primary divisions by a rather simple logic. Honoré posited that those who did not exercise independent or “effective” rule were assigned to the “same biographer as the emperor who nominated them Caesar or Augustus, unless their character clearly puts

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<sup>18</sup> Honoré 1987: 171, Rohrbacher 2016: 21-22 seems inclined to support this connection, noting that Capitolinus narrates events in the capitol during 238 CE in the *Life of Maximus and Balbinus*.

<sup>19</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 21-22 supports Honoré’s interpretation of “Lampridius” as a reference to lamps, since Rohrbacher detects a similar play on words with “Lampridia” meaning “light” in the *Pescennius Niger*. There, the name Lampridia is given to Pescennius’ mother, which appears to be a humorous contrast with his father’s name “Fuscus” meaning dusky. With “Niger” standing for dark, the family then respectively holds the names “Bright,” “Dusky,” and “Dark.”

<sup>20</sup> Honoré 1987: 172; Honoré builds some of his argument upon that of Domaszewski 1918.

them in a different category.”<sup>21</sup> This explanation thus explains why Hadrian’s short-lived heir Aelius is assigned to the same biographer as Hadrian, “Aelius Spartianus;” why Lucius Verus is assigned to “Julius Capitolinus,” the biographer associated with his co-ruler Marcus Aurelius; and why Geta is assigned to “Aelius Spartianus,” the biographer associated with his father and brother. So too, Honoré thought that the Author occasionally assigned a biographer to a life if he wished certain lives to be read alongside each other. For example, Honoré posited that “Lampridius” was assigned to the *Severus Alexander*, despite Severus Alexander’s famed virtue, because the Author intended the *Life of Elagabalus* and the other “luxury-prone” rulers to be read in comparison to Severus Alexander’s more virtuous demeanor.

In the three decades since Honoré proposed this theory, several additional valences have been proposed for the names. Thomson, for instance, has proposed that the name “Gallicanus,” in addition to alluding to the rebelliousness of the Gauls, may also allude to Gallic tutors and rhetoricians who were held in high esteem and were hired as tutors in Rome in the fourth century CE.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Rohrbacher has also noted that “Vulcacius,” in addition to the fourth-century historian listed in the *Origo*, may also allude to a commentator on Cicero known to Jerome.<sup>23</sup> The most sustained debate has

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<sup>21</sup> Honoré 1987: 171-2.

<sup>22</sup> Thomson 2012: 33.

<sup>23</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 21-24.

concerned the unusual *cognomen* “Lampridius.” Instead of an allusion to a “fondness for night lights,” Thomson has proposed that “Lampridius” may have been derived from the late Latin term *lampreda* for lamprey eels, and therefore works as a reference to Elagabalus’s indulgence in luxurious foods, including seafood.<sup>24</sup> An alternate explanation for the connection may lie in lamprey eels’ habit of attaching themselves to rocks on the seabed, seen in its origins from the alternate Late Latin form *lampetra*, from a combination of *lambō* (“to lick”) and *petra* (“stone”). It is possible that the name was intended to evoke the “low” rank of Commodus, Diadumenianus, and Elagabalus among the emperors included in the *Historia Augusta* and their need to “cling” parasitically to their fathers’ legacy for legitimacy.<sup>25</sup>

Accepting that the names may hold additional valences does not undermine Honore’s explanation that the names were assigned to distinguish important imperial characteristics, however. Since the perceived purpose behind such allusions, not only in the *Historia Augusta* but also in a range of works and genres across the fourth century, was to initiate debate and discussion over their possible origins, epithets that encapsulated multiple potential meanings were even desirable.

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<sup>24</sup> Thomson 2012: 30-31.

<sup>25</sup> For a sample of passages critical of these figures, see *Comm.* 1.7-3.1, 5.1, *Diad.* 1.7-2.10, 8.3-9, and *Elag.* 34.1. For more on the Author’s disdain for these figures and hereditary succession, see Chapter Four below.

In the attempts to track down further possible valences and allusions in the monikers, the full historiographic ramifications of Honoré's theory have been overlooked, however. The allusive epithets given to the biographers have largely been interpreted along Syme's initial claim that they were merely an extension of the Author's ongoing games with puns and literary intertexts. The primary focus has remained on the perceived entertainment value provided by these allusions.<sup>26</sup> Even Honoré himself, who noted these patterns, concluded that the names were assigned "partly as camouflage and partly as entertainment."<sup>27</sup> Yet the names assigned to the biographers should be considered distinct from the other puns found throughout the lives.

While deciphering the epithets bestowed upon the biographers would have held some amusement for the work's original readers, once deciphered, these allusive epithets guided the reader to identify overarching patterns concerning emperors' merits and abilities. Indeed, by assigning the names based on imperial *gens* and virtues, the Author was in effect signaling to readers possible ways of classifying the collection's subjects according to the types of exemplars his subjects could provide concerning the efficacy of various imperial characteristics. Therefore, far from "camouflaging" the Author's identity, obscuring the historical content of the *Historia Augusta*, or merely entertaining the work's readers, the addition of these attributions enhanced the

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<sup>26</sup> E.g., Rohrbacher 2016: 21-24.

<sup>27</sup> Honoré 1987: 172.

historical value of the biographical collection by highlighting patterns concerning imperial moral exemplars to those who could interpret the names.

As to why the Author chose to use the epithets to divide his collection only after the “primary,” “secondary,” and “intermediate” lives were nearly complete, evidence suggests that the Author was becoming increasingly introspective about the expectations readers had for biographical works during the composition of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. If we return to the description of “Cordus” in the preface of the *Macrinus*, we see that the Author’s invention of “Cordus” coincides with the Author’s broader reflection on the aims and expectations of the biographical genre. In the preface, the Author pairs his semi-ironic rebuke of Cordus’ predilection for trivia with the assertion that in biography,

nothing at all should be said of petty matters or certainly very little, and then only when light can thereby be thrown on character. It is character, of course, that we really want to know, but only to a certain extent, that from this the rest may be inferred. (*Macr.* 1.5)

*cum omnino rerum vilium aut nulla scribenda sint aut nimis pauca, si tamen ex his mores possint animadverti, qui re vera sciendi sunt, sed ex parte, ut ex ea cetera colligantur.*

In this way, the Author, while knowingly acknowledging the stereotypical criticisms lodged against biographers’ penchant for trivia, also reinforces his position that the grander purpose of biography resides in instructing readers about the character of important figures. The Author also reaffirms his dedication to revealing the character

(*mores*) and nature (*natura*) of his subjects in several of the other “secondary” and “intermediate” lives (e.g., *Av. Cass.* 3.1, *Alb. Clod.* 10.1).

This greater reflection on the importance of character to the genre of biography may have arisen as the Author began to interact with a greater range of historical genres while drafting and revising the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. The period appears to have been an important juncture during the composition when the Author began to diversify his sources and creative influences. During this period, the Author’s dependence on the imperial biographies of Marius Maximus and the *Kaisergeschichte* began to wane, and the frequency of allusions to other historians and genres begin to increase.<sup>28</sup> It is possible that the Author devised the addition of the attributions to signal imperial virtues as a way to reaffirm his commitment to the traditional aims of biography, even while at the same time experimenting with a larger range of styles.

In addition, the Author may have hit upon the concept of attributing his work to a cadre of disparate figures from his interaction with other contemporary sources. Rohrbacher has proposed that the Author may have been inspired to attribute his work to multiple figures based on the example set by the bible or gospel tracts whose books were assigned to multiple authors.<sup>29</sup> Rohrbacher’s conclusion that the *Historia Augusta* is only occasionally interested in religious matters, however, argues against his theory that

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<sup>28</sup> See Chapter Two above, and also Betrand-Dagenbach 2014: xliii and Rohrbacher 2016: 20.

<sup>29</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 5 n. 4.

the entire premise of emulating six biographers was an extended reference to Christian texts.<sup>30</sup> More promisingly, Thomson has proposed that the Author may have drawn inspiration for the premise of multiple authors and the imperial dedications from the *Panegyrici Latini*, a compilation of late third and early fourth-century panegyrics by a series of orators that were circulated in the last quarter of the century.<sup>31</sup> Thomson has noted that the panegyrics even provide some context for the Author's choice of imperial virtues, since the panegyrics often focused on identifying and praising the virtues of their subjects.<sup>32</sup>

In part, the later addition of the epithets also makes sense: the collection needed to have reached enough of a critical mass for connections and comparisons to be made between his imperial exemplars. Honoré also accepted that the names might have been retroactively added, since, as he noted, it would have been "easier after several lives have been written to see into what categories [the rulers] might be divided."<sup>33</sup> In addition, the drive to categorize his imperial exemplars was a natural extension of the Author's ongoing attempts to revise the "primary," "secondary," and "intermediate"

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<sup>30</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 132-133.

<sup>31</sup> On the *Panegyrici Latini*, see Thomson 2012: 25-28 and more below in Chapter Four.

<sup>32</sup> For example, Thomson notes that Pacatus described the court of Theodosius as Spartan (*Pan. Lat.* II(XII) 13,4).

<sup>33</sup> Honoré 1987: 172.

lives in order to create thematic interconnections across the collection, as illustrated in Chapter Two.

At the very least, the design of the first four biographers to signal distinctions in imperial *virtutes* across the collection illustrates that the Author was actively reflecting on the content of his collection and was actively shaping the ways in which readers might derive meaning from it. Thus, the above discussion has shown that, despite the more parodic uses of the *personae* in the “later lives” (as we will discuss below), the addition of these inventions was first and foremost designed as a means of enriching and enhancing the historical content of the collection.

### ***Trebellius Pollio and Flavius Vopiscus: Caricaturing and Characterizing Learnedness***

When we turn to the later lives associated with “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus,” it is clear, as Honoré noted, that the Author largely “abandons the original scheme” of using the names to serve as indicators of imperial virtues.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, rather than allusions to imperial characteristics, the names bestowed upon the later biographers have been traced to a primarily “scholiastic context” and are thought to allude to a range of obscure commentators and figures from the works of Cicero and

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<sup>34</sup> Honoré 1987: 172.

Juvenal. “Trebellius,” for instance, has been connected with a partisan of Mark Antony who was referenced in Cicero’s correspondence (*Fam.* 11.13), and “Pollio” has been connected with Gaius Asinius Pollio (75 BCE- 4 CE), the late Republican literary critic who was the patron of Vergil and Horace and who was also a partisan of Antony’s.<sup>35</sup> Likewise, “Flavius Vopiscus Syracusius” has been posited to allude to a figure by the name of C. Iulius Caesar Strabo Vopiscus from Cicero’s dialogue *de Oratore* (2.217-97) who advocates for the need of humor in public oratory and praises the Syracusians for their use of humor.<sup>36</sup>

In both cases, we can see that the Author still devises the monikers as appropriate indicators of the collection’s contents. For “Trebellius,” whose most famous life is that of the *Thirty Tyrants*, the Author designs a fitting moniker for a figure who has a predilection for rival claimants to the throne and who tussles with literary critics at the Temple of Peace, as we have already seen. Likewise, “Vopiscus,” who is attributed with the most inventive and parodic lives of the collection, receives a name alluding to a figure who advocates for the importance of humor and invention in compositions. Yet the Author breaks with the convention established in the earlier lives, because

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<sup>35</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 21-24, den Hengst 1981: 68-69, 106-7, and Domazweski 1918.

<sup>36</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 23. Hohl 1912: 474-482 also suggested that “Vopiscus” may have derived from the name given to a twin whose sibling perishes in the womb. He suggests Vopiscus figuratively serves as the longest surviving “sibling” by being the last of the six biographers. Thomson 2012: 73-74 has also posited that the *cognomen* “Syracusius,” which denotes a Syracusan origin may have been ancient novel.

“Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus” are far more than names relegated to the margins of the work.

As noted above, the *personae* and vignettes associated with these figures are far more elaborate than the biographers in the “primary,” “secondary,” and “intermediate” lives. “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus” are not the only invented figures in the later lives. The two “biographers” mention numerous other companions in the course of the lives, and they purportedly address their lives to a series of figures, who are presumably their social peers, including an Ulpianus (*Aur.* 1.9), a Bassus (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.1), a Celsinus (*Prob.* 1.2), and an unnamed kinsman of an unattested Herennius Celus (*Tyr. Trig.* 22.12). The parodic nature of these *personae* is also undeniable.

As outlined in Chapter One, the two later “biographers” interpolate their biographies with descriptions of their social engagements and their attempts to secure sources for their works. For example, the “later” lives attributed to “Trebellius Pollio” and “Flavius Vopiscus” include several lengthy digressions in which the “biographers” and their companions debate the nature of sources and historical events, as noted in Chapters One and Two. In the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, for instance, “Vopiscus” and his companions debate the proper title to give the usurper Firmus by weighing the authority of various forms of evidence, including imperial edicts, Greek books, and coins (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.1-4). In the prologue to the *Life of Aurelian*, “Vopiscus” similarly describes how he and the prefect of the city, Junius Tiberianus, carried on a discussion

about the “lives of the emperors” (*de vita principum*) while sharing a carriage ride together, and the “biographer” notes that Tiberianus offers him access to linen books (*libri lintei*) in the Ulpian Library in which Emperor Aurelian kept his diary (*Aur.* 1.1-7).<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the *Thirty Tyrants* ends with a passage that depicts Pollio debating with his reader the best way to avoid criticism from the critics at the Temple of Peace (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.6-12, 33.7-8).

Although the basic premises of these exchanges reflect our evidence for typical scholarly exchanges in the fourth century, as noted in Chapter One, the sources, locations, and figures referenced within these passages mark each of these exchanges as notably exaggerated and parodic. Rohrbacher, for instance, has argued the references to obscure Greek and Egyptian books in the *Life of the Four Tyrants* are on par with the types of rare Phrygian sources found in the ancient novel.<sup>38</sup> In addition, numerous scholars have noted that the linen books referenced in the *Life of Aurelian* should also be held suspect, since linen was an unusual material for sources, particularly for the daily

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<sup>37</sup> Contradictions in the dates of Tiberianus’ prefectures in 291/292 and 303/304 and the schedule of festival of the *Hilaria* during which the exchange is set have proven this interlude to be fictitious, see Magie 1932: 192 n. 2.

<sup>38</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 82-4. The names bestowed on the biographers’ companions in the passage also hint at the fictionality of the exchange. For example, Rohrbacher notes that the name of one of the figures concerned about Firmus’ status as a brigand, Marcus Fonteius, shares his name with a man defended on charges of brigandage by Cicero, marking it as parodic.

field journals of an emperor.<sup>39</sup> In a similar fashion, “Vopiscus” insists in the *Life of Tacitus* that he referred to a “decree of the senate, signed by Tacitus himself with his own hand” which he found in an “ivory book in the Ulpian Library, in the sixth case” (*Tac.* 8.1). Despite Vopiscus’ reassurance that “decrees which pertained to the emperors were long inscribed in books of ivory,” den Hengst and Rohrbacher have pointed out that ivory too was a medium far more suited to mystical texts such as the Sibylline oracles rather than imperial edicts.<sup>40</sup>

The libraries in which these sources are purportedly found and the locations referenced in these vignettes also signal the fictive nature of these purported exchanges. Although the “biographers” claim to visit the resources of the Ulpian Library at the Baths of Diocletian, the Porphyry Portico, and the *Domus Tiberiana* and reference the Temple of Peace, scholars have expressed doubt that these venues were still extant and functioning repositories in the late fourth century.<sup>41</sup> A fire is known to have destroyed most of the holdings in the Temple of Peace and the Palatine library in March 192 CE, and evidence for whether these libraries ever returned to full functionality is limited.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Wiseman 1993: 125, den Hengst 1981: 104, Rohrbacher 2016: 68, and Johnson 2013: 355. Johnson notes that these may have been “an invention based on the *Libri lintei* of the Republic, said to have contained lists of the early Republican magistrates of Rome.”

<sup>40</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 67-69 and den Hengst 1981: 104.

<sup>41</sup> The biographers reference the Ulpian Library in *Aur.* 1.7-10, *Aur.* 8.1, *Tac.* 8.1, *Prob.* 2.1, *Car.* 11.3; the *Domus Tiberiana* in *Prob.* 2.1, *Pius* 10.4; the Library of Peace in *Tyr. Trig.* 31.7-12; as well as the Porphyry portico in *Prob.* 2.1.

<sup>42</sup> See Tucci 2008: 133-149 and Johnson 2013: 352-355.

So too, several have expressed doubts that the Ulpian Library was a working repository in the fourth century, and the exact identification of the Porphyry Portico remains debated.<sup>43</sup>

Syme argued that the Author's claims to visit the Ulpian Library should particularly be held suspect, due to inconsistencies concerning the claims made about the library's holdings. For example, although in *Life of Tacitus* the Author (in the guise of "Vopiscus") claims to have found an ivory decree written in Tacitus' hand in the Ulpian library, in the *Life of Probus* "Vopiscus" then later claims to have been unable to find the same document (*Tac.* 8.1, cf. *Prob.* 7.1).<sup>44</sup> Johnson and Rohrbacher have additionally noted that the Temple of Peace, where Trebellius' critics are said to originate, is a location commonly associated with literary critics and scholarly displays in the works of Aulus Gellius and Galen.<sup>45</sup> As such, the Author may have devised the location as an allusion to its notoriety for such displays rather than intending it to be an accurate topographical reference.

In many ways, the references to improbable sources and libraries are thought to serve as a humorous parody of the more sober sorts of documents found in other

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<sup>43</sup> On doubts about the continued functionality of the Ulpian Library into the fourth century, see Robathan 1939: 528, Dix 1994: 291-292, Long 2002: 229, and Rohrbacher 2016: 69.

<sup>44</sup> Syme 1972: 126.

<sup>45</sup> See Johnson 2010: 89, Johnson 2013: 352-353, Rohrbacher 2015t: 151, Gell. *Noct. Att.* 16.8.1-3, and Galen *de Libr. Propr.* 21-22.

historical sources or to allude to the fantastical sources found in the ancient novel, as noted in Chapter One. As Chapter one also demonstrated, much of the elaborate allusions to contemporary figures and improbable sources and the more elaborate *personae* have been taken as a sign of the Author's growing confidence in his inventions and as confirmation that the "later" lives of the collection are primarily intended for entertainment rather than instruction. It is relatively undeniable that the Author fashioned these *personae* and vignettes to entertain his readers with exaggerated reflection of their own scholarly endeavors.

The Author finds several ways incorporate his readers into the *Historia Augusta's* games of scholarly point and counterpoint with apocryphal sources and rare texts. The "biographers" occasionally break the "fourth-wall," as it were, to challenge readers to prove their own scholarly credentials with texts and sources. For example, after concluding his debate with the prefect in the *Life of Aurelian*, "Vopiscus" assures his reader, "Ulpianus," that he has "gathered together into one little book all that was worthy of mention" from the Greek sources and the "linen books" (*lintei libri*) available in the Ulpian Library. "Vopiscus" insists, however, that his reader should "demand the linen books themselves, which the Ulpian Library will furnish you whenever you desire" if he is unsatisfied with Vopiscus' conclusions (*Aur.* 1.9). Similarly, in the *Life of Tacitus*, "Vopiscus" recommends that his reader refer to the ivory books in the Ulpian library if he believed "Vopiscus" had "rashly put faith in some Greek or Latin writer"

(*Tac.* 8.1). In all likelihood, the proposition that readers should seek out ostensibly apocryphal sources from a possibly defunct library was intended as a humorous jest, but the challenges to refute the “biographers” also encouraged readers to envision themselves as equal participants in the *Historia Augusta*’s games with rare sources.

In addition, many of the biographers’ companions bear names widely attested in the fourth century, such as Bassus or Celsinus, so it would have been relatively easy for readers to see reflections of themselves and their companions in the *Historia Augusta*’s scholarly exchanges.<sup>46</sup> Syme even suggests that the Author deliberately assigned the companions of the “biographers” names borne by his actual friends or patrons, so that they could serve as thinly veiled references to the Author’s contemporaries.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, the names and other identifying features of the biographers and their companions allow them to represent a cosmopolitan group of scholars from a range of social classes and geographical origins across the empire.

Of the six biographers, “Gallicanus” alone receives the designation of *v.c.* or *vir clarissimus*, a title regularly borne by senators during the Late Empire.<sup>48</sup> Meanwhile, “Pollio” and “Vopiscus” appear to be well-connected and move in similar social circles within circles in the city of Rome. Even so, they do not purport to have direct access to

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<sup>46</sup> See Thomson 2012: 76 and Paschoud 2001: 205-6.

<sup>47</sup> Syme 1968: 193.

<sup>48</sup> Cameron 1964b: 16. As Cameron has remarked, this title was commonly found in the fourth century “on dedicatory inscriptions and after titles and subscriptions to published works.”

the imperial throne as do “Spartianus,” “Lampridius,” and “Capitolinus,” who direct their lives to Diocletian and Constantine, as the following chapter discusses.<sup>49</sup> So too, the names of “Vulcacius *Gallicanus*” and “Flavius Vopiscus *Syracusius*” evoke different geographic origins. Presumably, the Author himself was somewhere on the social and political spectrum in Rome, but it is impossible for his own personal circumstances to match each of these men exactly. Instead, one by one, the Author impersonates in turn a different figure representative of a cross section of men whom we might expect to be writing history at this time.

For this reason, although the personality and preoccupations of the later two biographers have often been conflated with the Author’s own personality and interests, their voices need not be exact replicas of his own.<sup>50</sup> Authors of the ancient novel certainly enjoyed blurring distinctions between themselves and their narrators: one has only to think of the narrator of Lucian’s *True History* or Lucius, the narrator in Apuleius’ *Golden Ass*, to realize that authors of the novel enjoyed maintaining the ambiguity between themselves and their narrators as long as possible.<sup>51</sup> Even so, it is widely

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<sup>49</sup> In the *Life of Aurelian*, Vopiscus discusses how he was the grateful beneficiary of a ride home from prefect of the city, Junius Tiberianus (*Aur.* 1.10). Vopiscus’ familiarity suggests they were prior acquaintances, but Vopiscus’ overly obsequious note that the prefect is a *vir illustris* and “one to be named only with a prefix of deep respect” (*vir illustris et praefata reverentia nominandus*) suggests that it is an honor he himself does not hold.

<sup>50</sup> Honoré 1987: 172 n. 274 and Thomson 2012: 72.

<sup>51</sup> Whitmarsh 2013: 233-246 notes that many ancient novels play with the idea of what he terms a “fictional autobiography,” in which “the author and narrator are assumed to be identical,” but the narrator is

accepted that second-century readers of the novel were equipped to distinguish between the “real” Apuleius and his *alter ego*.<sup>52</sup> In a similar fashion, original readers of the *Historia Augusta* who were familiar with the Author would have been better equipped than modern scholars to detect the ways these *personae* diverged from his typical mode of address. Therefore, even if the biographers cannot be completely divorced from their role as mouthpieces and *alter egos* of the Author, we must consider that these biographer *personae* were not meant to be direct representations of the Author himself.

Instead, just as the sources they put forward and the libraries they claim to visit are exaggerated versions of more typical sources, there is reason to suspect that the biographers and their companions also serve as exaggerated caricatures of “stock” scholarly traits and habits. Indeed, how else might a caricature of fourth-century *literati* appear if not scholars who zealously insist that they have used every available source, no matter how obscure, and that they have scoured every nook and cranny of all

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increasingly revealed to be an assumed persona distinct from the author himself. Many ancient novelists appear to have purposefully left the identity of the narrator ambiguous for protracted periods. For example, Encolpius is not named until a run-in with his friend Ascyrtos at the end of first chapter of *Satyricon*: before that we have to read a longwinded lament of declining educational tenets, a tale about a friend’s near escape from another man’s predatory sexual interest, and an account of Encolpius’ own sexual tryst with Ascyrtos’ lover. Likewise, in the *Metamorphoses*, the name of the narrator is not revealed until Pythias sees and names Lucius in the market at the end of Book 1.

<sup>52</sup> Keulen 2004: 227. Keulen suggests that second-century readers, because of their familiarity with the framing devices of Socratic dialogues, “would be able to see through an ambiguous *persona* like Lucius, who is [...] at the same time *alter ego* and mouthpiece of the author Apuleius.”

available libraries? Who flaunt their access to well-connected patrons, insist upon the *fides* of their accounts, and appear embarrassed when they must retract their work?

For example, “Trebellius Pollio” serves as a running gag of an embattled biographer whose work can never find a kind ear. “Pollio’s” grumbling reference that the critics at the Temple of Peace were “wont to bandy about him with merriment and jests” (*ut ipsi de me solent cum risu et ioco iactitare*) casts the exchange as just the latest skirmish in “Pollio’s” ongoing battle against his “credentialed” rivals (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.10). The caricature of “Trebellius” as a beleaguered scholar continues in the prologue to the *Life of Aurelian* as well. There, during “Vopiscus’” conversation with the prefect of the city, Junius Tiberianus, “Pollio’s” mediocre abilities as a historian become the topic of conversation. The prefect criticizes “Pollio’s” style and content as “too careless and too brief” (*multa incuriose, multa breviter*) (*Aur.* 2.1), unfortunately vindicating “Pollio’s” concerns about developing a poor reputation.

In fact, “Vopiscus” decides to defend “Pollio’s” reputation by citing instances from Tacitus, Livy, and other historians that stretch believability. He insists that, “there was no writer, at least in the realm of history, who had not told some lie” (*neminem scriptorum, quantum ad historiam pertinet, non aliquid esse mentitum*) (*Aur.* 2.1). Faced with this logic, the prefect throws up his hands and relents, saying, “Well then, write as you will. You will be safe in saying whatever you wish, since you will have as comrades in falsehood those authors whom we admire for the style of their histories” (“*Scribe ut libet.*

*securus quod velis dices, habiturus mendaciorum comites, quos historicae eloquentiae miramur auctores*") (*Aur.* 2.1-2). This passage has famously been dubbed a "charter of mendacity" by Syme and T. P. Wiseman, and has often been interpreted as a sign of the Author's ironic awareness of his own license with the truth.<sup>53</sup>

Of course, by parodying his own *alter egos*, the Author implicates himself in the very scholarly tendencies he is trying to mock, but there is still room to see these adopted *personae* as caricatures of overly zealous historians which were designed to allude to any scholar from his community. The "biographers" are not the only ones who appeal to rare sources; "Vopiscus" finds himself among kindred spirits who are eager to weigh in on historical debates and put forward their own suspect evidence, including the coins, to Greek and Egyptian books, to imperial edicts. So too, the notorious *lintei libri* are first offered to "Vopiscus" by the prefect Tiberianus, so all are involved in the same sorts of scholarly displays and interests.

The original readers of the *Historia Augusta* may not have had to look very far to find appropriate benchmarks for these caricatures, since to decipher the allusions and puns behind these names given to the biographers, readers had to prove that they were just as well versed in the very sort of obscure scholiasts and commentary culture as the

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<sup>53</sup> See Wiseman 1993, who also summarizes Syme's conclusions about the passage.

biographers and their companions claim to be.<sup>54</sup> Being implicated in these vignettes, however, was not necessarily a liability. While Syme believed that the Author would be uncomfortable satirizing those of his own circle,<sup>55</sup> the pervasive satire directed at emperors, oracles, even the biographers throughout the *Historia Augusta* suggests that the Author found no one beyond reproach.

Furthermore, the parody is not actually negative. Although the Author exaggerates the pretensions and idiosyncrasies of the *literati* culture, the biographers and their associates are bound together by a strong sense of camaraderie. Countless individuals provide the biographers with sources, demonstrating the communal efforts of the writing process. "Pollio," despite his beleaguered reputation, receives helpful feedback from his reader, and "Vopiscus" defends "Pollio's" reputation against criticism. Likewise, although "Fonteius'" evidence is deemed insufficiently authoritative in the debate in the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, he is described as a "lover of history" (*amator historiarum*) and finds kindred spirits with which to debate (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.1-4). Thus, the Author's depiction of these scholarly figures and exchanges walk the line between comedic parody and commemoration of his scholarly community.

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<sup>54</sup> Rohrbacher 2016 concludes similarly that the allusions throughout the collection encourage readers to demonstrate and perform their own erudition to play along with the game.

<sup>55</sup> Syme 1968: 154-212. On satire in the *HA* more generally, see Daniels 2013.

While these more elaborate parodies do signal an increase in the invention, it is important to note that the transformation of the biographers from allusive epithets to the central figures of a more elaborate caricature of the Author's *literati* community was not an inevitable or predetermined conclusion. Indeed, the Author could have maintained the same convention of using the biographers to signal imperial characteristics until the conclusion of the collection. Instead, he seems to have deliberately altered the scheme. Whereas the earlier four biographers are an offshoot of the Author's reflection on the *content* of his work, the *personae* and scholarly community of the later lives clearly derive from the Author's reflection on the *context* in which the work was created. In part, the shift to a more robust reflection on the scholarly community to which his work was directed can be seen as a natural extension of the Author's rumination on his endeavor in the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives. Therefore, it is possible that the Author naturally shifted to become more attentive and reflective on the nature of historical sources and scholarly exchanges as he shared his own lives with readers or had his own success or failures in obtaining adequate sources for his lives.

It is also possible that the Author's increasing engagement with a wider range of literary and historical works also helped to inspire the transition. Although the Author's impersonation has often been associated with the ancient novel, as Rohrbacher has noted, the scenes of scholarly competition over sources in the *Historia Augusta* are much more reminiscent of the debates over antiquarian sources and rare words in the

miscellanies of Aulus Gellius' *Attic Nights* and Athenaeus' *Dinner Table Philosophers*.<sup>56</sup>

Like the figures in the works of Gellius and Athenaeus, the biographers and their companions emphasize their "insider" access to rare texts as a sign of their scholarly credentials.<sup>57</sup> The depictions of scholarly settings in the *Historia Augusta*, like those in Aulus Gellius' *Atticae Noctes*, Athenaeus' *Deipnosophists*, and Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, also fuse realistic and fictitious elements to comment on the scholarly proclivities of the Author's learned community.<sup>58</sup>

Like Gellius, the Author also uses his caricatures and *personae* to represent different scholarly tropes. For example, E. Gunderson has argued that Gellius depicts his contemporaries Fronto, Taurus, Apollinaris, and Favorinus as "exemplars of various types: the Latinist, the Philosopher, the Grammarian, the Hellenist."<sup>59</sup> In addition, the Author also shares Gellius' and Apuleius' "self-conscious sense of humor" in parodying the very proclivities he, in fact, exhibits.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> On depictions of scholarly debate in Aulus Gellius and Athenaeus, see Johnson 2010: 32-73 and Rorhbacher 2016: 17, 68, and 77. Access to libraries both public and private is often flaunted as a mark of status: see Johnson 2010: 11-13, 39-40, 94, 134-5, 202-5, Johnson 2013, and Zadorojnyi 2013: 378.

<sup>57</sup> Horsfall 2009: 61-62 even notes that a connection can be made between the Gellius' and the *HA*'s use or invented sources. He notes that in Gell. *Att. Noct.* 9.4, Gellius refers to rare old books that he found by chance at Brundisium that are suspiciously described "in gloating detail" and probably were invented as an allusion to Pliny.

<sup>58</sup> On the connections between Macrobius' *Saturnalia* and Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, see Gunderson 2009: 255.

<sup>59</sup> Gunderson 2009: 173-174.

<sup>60</sup> Keulen 2004: 244.

Several allusions to Aulus Gellius can be detected in the later lives of the *Historia Augusta*, suggesting that the Author was familiar with Gellius' work. The Author cites Gellius by name alongside Sallust in the preface to the *Life of Probus* as a source for an anecdote about Alexander the Great's reaction upon seeing the tomb of Achilles (*Prob.* 1.1). Rohrbacher has also noted that several figures in the *Historia Augusta* share their names with figures found in the *Noctes* and the *Deipnosophists*.<sup>61</sup> The works of Ammianus Marcellinus, Jerome, and Macrobius also include allusions to Aulus Gellius, suggesting that the *Noctes* may have been a relatively widely shared text in the late fourth century.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, it is possible that the Author was inspired by his reading of Gellius to incorporate a similar homage to his literary community into the text.<sup>63</sup>

Similarly, it is possible that the inclusion of a more focused parody of his scholarly community into his work was an effort to combine elements of two popular works at the time: Juvenal and Marius Maximus. In his famous satire against the Roman aristocracy, Ammianus Marcellinus laments that the aristocrats "read with attentive care only Juvenal and Marius Maximus, in their boundless idleness handling no other books

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<sup>61</sup> Rohrbacher 2016 has suggested that the addressee of *Life of Probus*, Celsinus, might be reference to one of patrons of Aulus Gellius, also named Celsinus (*Prob.* 1.2, cf. *Noct.* 19.10.10). Baldwin 1981 has posited that the reference to Livius Laurensis in *Comm.* 20.1 may be a reference the Laurensis, who was patron and host of the gathering of Athenaeus. The name for the biographer "Pollio" may also derive from a reference to an "Asinius Pollio" with whom Gellius debates in the *Noctes Atticae* (10.26.1).

<sup>62</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 18-20, see Amm 30.4.11-12, cf. Gell. 4.1.1 and Gell 1.10-1-2. For Macrobius' allusions to the author, see Gunderson 2009: 256, 263.

<sup>63</sup> See Rohrbacher 2016: 17, 68, 77, 82, 85, 139 for a summary of the possible allusions.

than these" (*Iuvenalem et Marium Maximum curatiore studio legunt, nulla volumina praeter haec in profundo otio contrectantes*) (28.4.14-15).<sup>64</sup> As A. Cameron and C. Sogno have illustrated, allusions to Juvenal can be found in an impressive range of authors and genres in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>65</sup> The demonstrated popularity of Juvenal at the time suggests that readers had a taste for this sort of satirical reading and may have enjoyed a similarly ironic reflection on their own scholarly endeavors. It is clear from several allusions in the "intermediate" and "later" lives that the Author was drawing more readily upon the works of Juvenal in the second half of the collection, so it may be that he was inspired to adopt more elaborate *personae* from Juvenal as well.<sup>66</sup>

Yet, while it is true that these vignettes and caricatures were likely meant to humor readers with exaggerated depictions of their own endeavors, the Author did not completely abandon the convention of using the biographers to reflect on the nature of his biographical project. Although the vignettes and the caricatures in the later lives are decidedly more parodic than the earlier attributions and are less directly connected to the historical aims of the collection, the later biographers and their endeavors still

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<sup>64</sup> On Ammianus' criticism of the aristocracy and the Juvenalian influences on this passage, see Cameron 1964: 369-370, Sogno 2012: 363-377, and Ross 2015: 358-362.

<sup>65</sup> Sogno 2012: 363-377 and Cameron 1964: 363-377. Cameron notes that "we find quotations from and allusions to him in every writer of any distinction at all" in the period. Together, the two scholars find allusions in Macrobius, Symmachus, Servius, Ammianus, Lactantius, Claudian, among others.

<sup>66</sup> Cameron 1964a: 363-367. Cameron notes at least six direct allusions to Juvenal in the "intermediate" and "later" lives, and only one in the "primary" lives. The later lives also exhibit an increased amount of more generalized satire too and feature several examples of passing invective (e.g., *Car.* 20.4-21.1); see Syme 1968: 195.

encourage readers to reflect on their own place in the context and chain of historical production. The Author uses these vignettes to reflect on contemporary issues concerning readers' roles in providing feedback and aiding writers in gaining access to sources and circulating their texts.

### *Conclusion*

Reflecting on the webs of allusion he finds in the *Historia Augusta*, Rohrbacher concluded his recent 2016 monograph by stating, "The *Historia Augusta* was the product of a very specific time. The turn of the fifth century was a great era of exegesis and other forms of reflection upon texts."<sup>67</sup> While Rohrbacher is correct that the *Historia Augusta* represents a larger trend of works that playfully alluded to themselves as texts, this discussion has demonstrated that the Author was just as interested in the scholars who wrote, read, and discussed these texts.

Indeed, as this chapter has shown, the Author's efforts to enhance the historical value of his work for readers by adding markers to indicate patterns of imperial characteristics, and to present readers with a way to reflect on their own scholarly endeavors, reveal his awareness of the many ways that readers might engage with his text. As this discussion has demonstrated, the attribution of the lives to six fictitious

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<sup>67</sup> Rohrbacher 2015t: 309.

biographers was never intended to obscure or “veil” the Author’s identity. Instead, through an examination of the evolution of the biographers’ names and other identifying features, this chapter has illustrated that the Author’s invention of a cadre of fictitious biographers served several important functions across the course of the work.

The names of the first four biographers were devised as allusive puns on imperial characteristics and virtues, which the Author methodically assigned to his collection in order to identify different categories of imperial exemplars based on typologies of characters and virtues. Thus, far from obscuring the historical aims of the text, the initial attributions were added to enhance the historical purposes of his collection by signaling to readers helpful means of comparing rulers against their predecessors. As demonstrated above, the decision to devise these allusions appears to have been the result of the Author’s ongoing reflection about the expectations readers held about the biographical genre in comparison to other historical genres during the composition of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. In particular, the Author’s discussions of biography’s grander purpose of instructing its readers about the character of its subjects suggest that the allusions to imperial characteristics may have been added as a way for the Author to reaffirm his commitment to focusing on character in his collection.

Over the course of the collection, however, this reflection on the content and aims of the text seems to have expanded to include rumination over the context in which

the lives of the *Historia Augusta* were written and read. With this transition, the two “later” biographers developed into more fully-fledged *personae* that the Author used to parody scholarly idiosyncrasies within his own literary community. While these caricatures exhibit the characteristic tongue-in-cheek irony and parodic sensibilities associated with the *Historia Augusta*, they also allow the Author to comment on the value of readers’ participation in the construction of historical works.

Thus, this chapter has contributed to our understanding of the inventions of the *Historia Augusta* by illustrating that the Author used the attributions to enhance, rather than obscure, the historical purposes of his collection. In addition, the identification of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives as a key period of increasing interaction with a more diverse range of sources holds important clues into the origins and purposes of the inventions. As the following chapter argues, the drive to begin categorizing emperors by their dominant traits and virtues during the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives also had a direct impact on the inspiration and purposes behind the addition of the imperial invocations to Diocletian and Constantine.

## Chapter 4 Competing Legacies: Depictions of Diocletian and Constantine in the *Historia Augusta*

The figures of Diocletian (r. 284-305 CE) and Constantine (co-ruler with Licinius 312-324 CE, sole ruler after his defeat of Licinius in 324-337 CE) loom large in the *Historia Augusta*, featuring as the dedicatees of thirteen of the first twenty-one lives. Seven of the collection's thirty lives are dedicated to Diocletian (the *Aelius*, the *Marcus Aurelius*, the *Verus*, the *Avidius Cassius*, the *Severus*, the *Pescennius Niger*, and the *Macrinus*), and another six (the *Geta*, the *Clodius Albinus*, the *Elagabalus*, the *Severus Alexander*, the *Two Maximini*, and the *Three Gordians*) are addressed to Constantine.<sup>1</sup> These addresses often occur in short passages at the end or beginning of the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives, and, while the majority of the invocations refer to Diocletian and Constantine deferentially as "Your Clemency" and "Your Piety," several assume a cordial, almost presumptuous familiarity with the rulers, such as when "Lampridius" wheedles Constantine about his choice of friends and advisors at length (*Sev. Alex.* 66.1-67.3).

As Chapter Two argued, the invocations do not appear to be an original design component of the collection but, like the biographer *personae*, were retroactively added to lives during or after the composition of the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives, while the Author was performing revisions on large swaths of the collection. However,

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<sup>1</sup> Diocletian: *Ael.* 1.1, *Marc.* 19.12, *Ver.* 11.4, *Av. Cass.* 3.3, *Sev.* 20.4, *Pesc. Nig.* 9.1, *Macr.* 15.4. Constantine: *Clod. Alb.* 4.2, *Gord.* 1.1, *Elag.* 2.4, 34.1, 35.5; *Sev. Alex.* 65.1, *Max.* 1.1.

what impelled the addition of these invocations and by what rationale they were applied still need to be addressed.

Scholars have often detected a disparity in the tone and associations drawn by the invocations between the two rulers. While the invocations favorably compare Diocletian to Marcus Aurelius (*Marc.* 19.12, *Ver.* 11.2-4), praise him for his desire to learn from his predecessors (*Macr.* 15.4), and call him a “father of a golden age” (*Elag.* 35.4), the dedications to Constantine have been interpreted as far less flattering. R. Turcan and G. Bonamente, among many others, have suggested that the invocations to Constantine found in the lives of Severus Alexander and Elagabalus were intended to embarrass Constantine’s legacy, both by claiming he was under the power of eunuchs (*Sev. Alex.* 66.1-7) and by associating him with Elagabalus, a notoriously debauched ruler who is listed several times among a list of Rome’s worst tyrants (*Elag.* 1.1, 33.1, 34.1).<sup>2</sup>

Numerous scholars including W. Hartke, Turcan, A. R. Birley, and Bonamente have attributed these disparities and the motivation for the invocations to the Author’s religious bias.<sup>3</sup> Passages praising Severus Alexander’s and Aurelian’s policies of tolerance (e.g., *Sev. Alex.* 22.4-5, 29.2) have been taken as confirmation that the Author mourned the loss of tolerance for traditional pagan beliefs formerly defended under the

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<sup>2</sup> Turcan 1988 and Bonamente 2014: 68-70.

<sup>3</sup> Hartke 1951: 342-3, Straub 1952: 100, Turcan 1988: 47-48, Birley 2003: 143-144, and Bonamente 2014: 46-47.

Tetrarchy.<sup>4</sup> In contrast, Elagabalus' forceful imposition of a foreign religious cult has been read as a veiled criticism of Constantine's role in initiating imperial support for Christianity.<sup>5</sup> Many studies have concluded that the invocations were intended to be a veiled commentary on the political and religious policies ushered in under Constantine and continued under Theodosius (r. 379-395). The desire to interpret the invocations through the guise of religion is understandable. From the beginning of the fourth century, Christian writers like Lactantius, Eusebius, and Praxagoras of Athens enshrined Constantine as a champion of the Christian faith and branded Diocletian and the Tetrarchs as those responsible for the series of policies known as the Great Persecution (303-313 CE).<sup>6</sup> As the fourth century wore on, Constantine's purported role in the promulgation of Christianity remained a polarizing topic, inspiring praise in the *Origo* and mockery in Julian's *Caesares* and the writings of Eunapius.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bonamente 2014: 56-7, Bertrand-Dagenbach 1990: 70-71, Fowden 1991: 119-120, and Icks 2012: 114.

<sup>5</sup> Parallels have been drawn between Constantine's and Elagabalus' sun worship, their destruction of tombs on the Palatine and Vatican hills (*Elag.* 29.1-2), their refusal to perform traditional rites on the Capitoline hill (*Elag.* 15.7), and Elagabalus' plundering of the *sacra* of other cults and Constantine's transfer of the *palladium* to his new capitol of Constantinople, among others: see Hartke 1951: 342-3, Straub 1952: 100, Turcan 1988: 47-48, Fowden 1991: 119-121, Birley 2003: 143-144, and Bonamente 2014: 46-47.

<sup>6</sup> The "Great Persecution" refers to a series of empire-wide policies enacted under Diocletian, Maximian, Galerius, and Constantius rescinding the legal rights of Christians and limiting the rights of the clergy. On the policies enacted under the Tetrarchs, see Curran 1999: 48-50. For more on the Christian tradition and Praxagoras' lost *History of Constantine the Great*, see Leadbetter 2009: 15; Lieu and Montserrat 1996: 23-24; Rees 204: 9; Bleckmann 2010: 353-354.

<sup>7</sup> On the dating and content of the *Origo Constantini Imperatoris* (also known as the Anonymous Valesianus), see König 1987 and Barnes 1989. On Eunapius and Julian's *Caesares* (362 CE), see Lieu and Montserrat 1996: 9-12, and Blockley 1981: 1-27.

Although the religious aspects of Diocletian's and Constantine's legacies were an unavoidable part of their tradition, there are many reasons to doubt that religious bias was the primary motivation behind the invocations in the *Historia Augusta*. Rohrbacher and Cameron have recently challenged the nature and strength of the Author's religious convictions, and M. Icks and S. Zinsli have downplayed the religious import of Constantine's association with Elagabalus. Instead, Icks and Zinsli have argued that the points of comparison between Constantine's and Elagabalus' religious policies were just one of many satirical elements of the comparison.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, those who have interpreted the invocations as motivated by a desire to impugn Constantine's religious associations have then struggled to explain why the Author seemingly mitigates his criticism of Constantine by praising the ruler's reverence for the Antonine dynasty, flattering his father Constantius Chlorus I (r. 293-306), and lauding his alleged ancestral connection with the emperor Claudius Gothicus (r. 268-270).<sup>9</sup> Nor does the proposed religious motivation explain why the Author then associates Constantine with the *Life of Three Gordians* and *Life of the Two Maximini*, the first lives to include fathers and sons in single lives.

Building on the conclusions of Chapters Two and Three, this chapter reassesses the creative impetus for the invocations by tracing the themes and influences that grew

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<sup>8</sup> See Rohrbacher 2016: 87-132, Cameron 2011: 781-2, Zinsli 2005, and Icks 2012: 114-115.

<sup>9</sup> See more below.

to prominence in the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives prior to the addition of the invocations. Instead of a sudden desire to comment on Constantine’s religious policies, this chapter argues that the inspiration for the imperial dedications developed out of three interrelated themes that became prominent in the middle stage of the collection. These trends include the Author’s growing preoccupation with the *nomen Antoninorum*, his interest in qualities that distinguish good emperors (*boni principes*) from bad emperors (*mali principes*), and his reflection on imperial succession. This chapter demonstrates that reading the invocations in conjunction with these three themes, particularly the Author’s growing concerns about hereditary succession and his preference for shared rule, provides a much more coherent and consistent means of interpreting the invocations than via their religious associations.

Furthermore, by tracing the evolution of the invocations across the collection, this chapter illustrates that, like the biographer *personae*, the invented dedications served a range of functions in the *Historia Augusta*. Not only did the Author use the invocations to contrast the personal *virtus* of Diocletian and Constantine and the precedents the two rulers set for imperial succession, but the Author also used their retroactive addition to his biographies to enhance the thematic consistency of his positions on the Antonines and filial succession across the “primary,” “secondary,” and “intermediate” lives. So too, this chapter demonstrates that even after the invocations to Diocletian and Constantine cease following the *Life of the Gordians* the Author continues to refine and elaborate on

the comparison between the two rulers in the “later” lives of the collection. In particular, this chapter makes a novel argument for the ways that the Author draws explicit connections between the material in the later lives and the invocations found in earlier lives of the collection, and illustrates that the themes concerning Diocletian and Constantine play a key role in the culmination of the entire collection in the *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*.

Thus, in addition to presenting a novel explanation for the interpretations of the invocations, this chapter also contributes to our understanding of the ways in which the Author used the dedications to forge thematic consistency across the entire collection and to encourage his readers to reflect on traditional biographical themes, such as the larger patterns of imperial succession and imperial *virtus* across the rulers of the Late Empire.

### ***Boni Principes, the Nomen Antoninorum, and Imperial Succession***

As Chapter Three noted, the period immediately preceding the addition of the attributions and the invocations was a time of increasing creativity and thematic development within the collection. During this period, the Author became increasingly engaged with contemporary works, made the decision to devote independent lives to usurpers and imperial heirs, and added the attributions to the first four “biographers” to signal comparisons between the virtues assigned to various imperial figures.

Three further developments affirm that the Author was diversifying his sources and impressing greater structural and thematic coherence on his imperial exemplars in the period immediately preceding the addition of the invocations. First, the Author begins to classify many of his imperial subjects into two categories: “good emperors” (*boni principes*) and “bad emperors” (*mali principes*).<sup>10</sup> As A. Scheithauer, C. Bertrand-Dagenbach, and D. Burgersdijk have noted, these divisions appear to be largely based on ideal imperial virtues that became increasingly codified over the centuries following Augustus’ *Res Gestae*.<sup>11</sup> Emperors like Marcus Aurelius, Antoninus Pius, and Severus Alexander, who possess the qualities of *bonitas*, *abstinentia*, *moderatio*, *liberalitas*, *civilitas*, and *clementia* are said to be *boni principes* (*Diad.* 7.4-5, *Sev. Alex.* 1.5). In contrast, those described as *improbi*, *impuri*, *crudeles*, *iniusti*, or *libidinosi* are labeled *mali principes* (e.g., *Sev. Alex.* 65.1). Secondly, the Author also becomes increasingly fixated on the history and pedigree of those who held the *nomen Antoninorum* or the “name of the Antonines.”<sup>12</sup> The Author devotes lengthy passages to tracing the pedigree of all who

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<sup>10</sup> The Author makes several exceptions, such as Lucius Verus, whom he refuses to classify “among either the good or bad emperors” (*neque inter bonos neque inter malos principes ponitur*) (*Ver.* 1.3). On *boni*, *mali*, and neutral emperors in the *HA*, see Scheithauer 1987: 36-70, Bertrand-Dagenbach 1990: 154-163, and Burgersdijk 2013: 291-295, 301-309.

<sup>11</sup> Interest in ideal imperial virtues can also be found in Suetonius’ *Lives of the Caesars* and Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, which lists over thirty-five separate qualities that should be held by rulers: see Wallace-Hadrill 1981: 313-317, Wallace-Hadrill 1983: 142-145, Peachin 2006: 148-149, and Burgersdijk 2013: 289-291.

<sup>12</sup> This *nomen* was initially held by Antoninus Pius and was later assumed by Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus after their adoption. On the *HA*’s preoccupation with the name, see Syme 1971: 78-88 and Barnes 1972.

had ever held the name in numerous “intermediate” lives (*Macr.* 2.5-3.9, *Diad.* 1.21, 6.1-10; *Elag.* 3.1), and he claims to add lives of Geta or Diadumenianus for no other reason except for the fact that they held the name (*Geta* 1.1, *Diad.* 6.1).<sup>13</sup>

The Author’s reflection on *boni* and *mali principes* and his preoccupation with the *nomen Antoninorum* were closely linked.<sup>14</sup> As G. Adams has demonstrated, the Author uses the *nomen Antoninorum* as a “standard of evaluation” to compare imperial figures to the *bonitas* or “goodness” of the Antonines and Marcus Aurelius.<sup>15</sup> The connection between the Antonines’ *bonitas* and general respect for the *nomen Antoninorum* is most clearly drawn in the *Life of Diadumenianus*. In the *Diadumenianus*, the Author explains that the high reverence of the name was “a result of the love felt for the three emperors” Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus, and Marcus Aurelius due to “their wisdom, kindness, and righteousness” (*sapientia, bonitas, pietas*) (*Diad.* 7.4-5). This love, he explains, allowed the name to become an important tool in reinforcing imperial legitimacy and gaining the goodwill of the people, senate, and military. As he describes in the *Diadumenianus*, “the name of the Antonines was at that time so greatly beloved, that he who had not the prestige of this name did not seem to merit the imperial power” (*et fuit quidem tam*

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<sup>13</sup> Both of these lives contain little information beyond exposition of their fathers’ motivations for naming them Antoninus (*Diad.* 2.10, 7.5-7) and a series of omens that presage their holding of the title Antoninus (*Geta* 3.5, 3.8, 5.3; *Diad.* 5.4-5): see Syme 1971: 82-86 and Bonamente 2014: 66

<sup>14</sup> Scheithauer 1987: 65-70 and Bertrand-Dagenbach 1990: 76-106.

<sup>15</sup> Adams 2012: 195-200.

*amabile illis temporibus nomen Antoninorum, ut qui eo nomine non niteretur mereri non videretur imperium*) (*Diad.* 6.2).

Scheithauer and Bertrand-Dagenbach have noted that the Author uses the divisions between *boni* and *mali principes* and those worthy and unworthy of the *nomen Antoninorum* to make broad comparisons between figures in this portion of the collection.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the Author uses these means of evaluation to set up a framework of comparison for his imperial exemplars against two poles. On the one side, the Author establishes Marcus Aurelius as the ideal *bonus princeps* and the most deserving of the *nomen*; on the other, he places Elagabalus, who is repeatedly said to “defile the venerated name of the Antonines” (*Macr.* 7.8; *Elag.* 1.7, 18.1, 34.6, 33.8, *Sev. Alex.* 7.2-6) and whose *mala* acts are said to exceed that of previous *mali principes* (*Elag.* 13.1, 33.1, *Sev. Alex.* 7.4).<sup>17</sup> This sliding spectrum of comparison is most clearly outlined in the *Life of Macrinus*. There, the Author claims that it was well known that:

the name of the Antonines, which began with Pius, gradually sank from one Antonine to another to the lowest degradation; for Marcus alone by his manner of life exalted that holy name, while Verus lowered, and Commodus even profaned the reverence due to the consecrated name. (*Macr.* 7.7)

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<sup>16</sup> See Scheithauer 1987: 65-70 and Bertrand-Degenbach 1990: 154-163. Burgersdijk 2013: 300-309 also discusses *boni* and *mali principes*, but focuses primarily on those in the “later” lives of the collection.

<sup>17</sup> As Icks, Zinsli, and Bonamente have noted, the portrait of Elagabalus as a debauched tyrant draws upon elements of Suetonius’ *Life of Nero* to portray Elagabalus as a conglomeration of the failings of all of Rome’s most notorious tyrants: see Icks 2012: 109-112, Zinsli 2005: 118, and Bonamente 2014: 68-70.

*ostenditur Antonini nomen coepisse a Pio et paulatim per Antoninos usque ad sordes ultimas pervenisse, si quidem solus Marcus nomen illud sanctum vitae genere auxisse videatur, Verus autem degenerasse, Commodus vero etiam polluisse sacra nominis reverentiam.*

The Author continues to lament the lack of worthiness of those who followed after Commodus, saying “And what can we say of Caracalla Antoninus, and what of this youth Diadumenianus? And finally, what of Elagabalus, the last of the Antonines, who is said to have lived in the lowest depths of foulness?” (*Macr.* 7.8), thus establishing a direct contrast between Marcus and the later Antonines.

Although scholars have previously noted the Author’s preoccupations with these themes, little attention has been given to the fact that the Author’s interest in *boni* and *mali principes* and the *nomen Antoninorum* can be identified as elements unique to the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. While the Author evaluates the merits and deeds of emperors in the “primary” lives, the terms *bonus princeps* and *malus princeps* are used on only five occasions in the nine primary lives (*Ver.* 1.3, *Marc.* 19.10, *Sev.* 21.11, 23.3, *Pert.* 15.2).<sup>18</sup> Four of these five references—those in the *Marcus Aurelius*, *Verus*, and *Severus*—arise in passages that were likely added as part of the revision process during the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives, as will be discussed further below, leaving

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<sup>18</sup> Pertinax is said to be a *bonus princeps* (*Pert.* 15.2), Marcus Aurelius is called a *bonus princeps* (*Marc.* 19.10), and a passage of the *Septimius Severus* discusses the merits of those who hold the name *Antoninus* in the context of *boni* and *mali principes* (*Sev.* 21.11, 23.3). The *Commodus* touches on the importance of recognizing *boni* from *mali* individuals, and refers to Commodus as *illud malum* “that bad one,” which might signal that these topics were beginning to gain the Author’s interest in the very last lives of the “primary” section (*Comm.* 19.7, 20.5).

only one reference in the “primary” lives. In contrast, references to *boni* and *mali principes* and emperors who possess the quality of *bonitas* make a sudden proliferation starting in the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives, where more than twenty-one references arise across nine lives.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, the Author’s preoccupation with the *nomen Antoninorum* as an indicator of imperial *virtus* and legitimacy also comes to prominence only after the completion of the “primary” lives. The process by which Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus came to hold the name “Antoninus” is described at several junctures in the “primary” lives (*Pius* 4.5, 6.10, 10.3, *Marc.* 7.5-7, *Comm.* 1.1-5), as is Severus’ later decision to bestow the *nomen* on his sons, Caracalla and Geta (*Sev.* 10.3-6, *Carac.* 8.10). The link between the Antonines’ *bonitas* and the reverence of the name, however, is not made explicit until passages in the “intermediate” and “secondary” lives of the *Elagabalus*, the *Macrinus*, the *Diadumenianus*, the *Geta*, and the *Gordiani* (e.g., *Diad.* 2.3). This connection arises concurrently with the decision to begin portraying Marcus Aurelius as the ideal *bonus princeps* over the course of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives.<sup>20</sup> In the

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Hadrian is said to act not as a *bonus princeps* (*Ael.* 6.7); Gordian the Elder is described as *bonus* and possessing *boni mores* (*Gord.* 5.3, 7.1), Gordian II is described as being of “notable goodness” (*bonitatis insignis*) (*Gord.* 18.1) and belonging among the good men (*Gord.* 19.6), and Gordian III described as *bonus princeps* (*Gord.* 24.5), and Maximus and Balbinus described as *boni imperatores* and both are said to possess *bonitas* (*Max et Balb.* 1.2, 7.1-2, 15.1); the younger Maximinus is said to possess *bonitas* (*Duo Max.* 24.1). For more see also *Av. Cass.* 8.3, 13.8, *Diad.* 7.4-5, *Elag.* 10.4, *Elag.* 34.4, cf. *Sev. Alex.* 1.4, 7.2, 11.1, 27.8, 46.5, 65.2-4.

<sup>20</sup> Marcus’ *bonitas* and status as a *bonus princeps* are referenced several times in the *Diad.* 6.5, *Elag.* 1.2, 2.4, *Gord.* 3.3, and the later lives of *Claud.* 2.3, *Aur.* 42.4, *Car.* 3.4.

“primary” *Life of Marcus Aurelius*, Marcus is praised time and time again for his clemency, modesty, geniality, generosity, and commitment to philosophy (*Marc.* 1.1, 4.10, 4.7, 5.6-8, 6.10), as well as his military prowess and deference to the senate (*Marc.* 8.12-14, 10.1-9, 26.13).<sup>21</sup> The only time Marcus is described as a *bonus princeps* in the “primary” lives, however, is in the invocation passage in *Marc.* 19.10, which is suspected to be a later addition as will be discussed below.

The third major development in the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives can be traced to the Author’s reflections on imperial virtues and the legitimizing power of the *nomen Antoninorum*. During this period, the Author’s positions on imperial succession become more entrenched. Scholars have long recognized that the Author exhibits anxiety about hereditary succession and boy princes (*pueri principes*) and professes a favor for shared rule in the “later” *Life of Tacitus* (*Tac.* 6.1-7).<sup>22</sup> Earlier indications of the Author’s concerns about hereditary succession can be traced to his ruminations over the *nomen Antoninorum*, however. Time after time, sons such as Diadumenianus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus, who are bestowed with the name “Antoninus” by their fathers, are deemed unworthy of the name and the mantle bestowed on them (e.g., *Macr.* 7.7-8). All

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<sup>21</sup> See Adams 2012: 196-200

<sup>22</sup> On the Author’s concern for *pueri principes*, see Hartke 1951, den Hengst 1981: 12, Paschoud 1996: 269-275, Grey 2010: 90-91, Bonamente 2014: 67-8, and Rohrbacher 2016: 158-169. This anxiety has largely been attributed to the Author’s disapproval with Gratian’s, Valentinian’s, or Theodosius’ choices to leave the empire to their sons.

three are also in their own way decried as possessing *malus* traits such as being *perniciosus*, *scaenicus*, and *saevisse* (*Marc.* 19.6, *Comm.* 1.7-3.1, 5.1, *Diad.* 1.7-2.10, 8.3-9). So too, Geta, another son, is said to die before he can live up to the high expectations of the name (*Geta* 1.1-2.5), again reinforcing the trend that sons make poor heirs.

The first explicit indication of the Author's approval of shared or collegial rule can also be found in the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives. In the "primary" lives, the Author discusses the details of Hadrian's decision to adopt Antoninus Pius and Pius' subsequent adoption of Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius (*Hadr.* 23.10-24.3, *Pius* 4.1-9, *Marc.* 7.5-6, *Ver.* 2.1-2, 3.6).<sup>23</sup> Only in the "secondary" *Life of Aelius*, however, does the Author first explicitly conflate the good done for the empire under the Antonines with their policy of adoption and shared rule. In the *Life of Aelius*, which nominally concerns Hadrian's first adopted heir who died before he could assume power in 138 CE, the Author devotes much of the account to the benefits conferred on the empire by the later adoptions of Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. In a lengthy passage devoted to Antoninus Pius' adoption of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, the Author lauds the "novelty and dignity" (*novitas et dignitas*) of the shared rule of Marcus Aurelius and

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<sup>23</sup> The Author exhibits some confusion over the exact process by which the arrangement was made. At some times the Author correctly reports that Antoninus Pius adopted both Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (*Hadr.* 24.1, *Ael.* 6.9, *Pius* 4.5), where at other times he mistakenly reports that Marcus first adopted Lucius Verus (*Ael.* 5.1, 5.12); see Magie 1921: 142 n. 1.

Lucius Verus, and notes that they went on to rule “in so democratic a manner that no one missed the lenient ways of Pius” (*Ael.* 5.14, 8.1).

The Author’s increasing preoccupation with these topics during the composition of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives should not be surprising, however, since these interests align with many of the other characteristic trends of this period of the collection. First and foremost, the drive to categorize emperors as *boni* or *mali principes* and to compare the worthiness of all who ever held the *nomen Antoninorum* is a natural extension of the Author’s overarching classification of imperial *virtutes*, discussed in Chapter Three. So too, the Author’s reflections on patterns of dynastic success and failure and different forms of succession in the context of the *nomen Antoninorum* align with his increasing investment in comparing competing forms of legitimacy, as seen in his newfound interest in covering the lives of usurpers and *Caesares* around this period of the composition.

Secondly, the Author’s interests in *boni* and *mali principes* and the *nomen Antoninorum* have also been attributed to his interaction with contemporary works, another trend previously associated with this period. Syme and Barnes, among others, have suggested that the Author’s interest in the *nomen Antoninorum* and the genealogy of the Antonines may have arisen from his reading of Aurelius Victor or Ausonius.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Syme 1971: 85-87, Syme 1983: 54, Barnes 1967: 70, and Betrand-Dagenbach 2014: lxxxii, 57-58. On the importance of genealogy to legitimacy more generally in the fourth century, see Chausson 2007: 189-254.

Similarly, Burgersdijk has argued the *Historia Augusta's* interest in the virtues of *boni* and *mali principes* was inspired by interaction with the *Panegyrici Latini*, a collection of panegyrics compiled in the early fourth century and circulated in Rome over the course of the next century.<sup>25</sup> This suggests that the Author was again drawing inspiration from his sources and was incorporating elements of multiple genres into his text for his own purposes, an inference that mirrors Chapter Three's conclusions about the diversification of the Author's influences at this period in the collection.

While tracing the origins of these elements to the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives is important in its own right, understanding that the Author's interest in *boni* and *mali principes*, the *nomen Antoninorum*, and imperial succession only gradually come to prominence in the "secondary" and "intermediate" portions of the collection also provides important insights into the inspiration and timing of the invocations' addition. Taken together, these growing influences—the Author's increasing engagement with contemporary historians, his growing preoccupation with

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<sup>25</sup> Burgersdijk 2013: 289-293. In particular, Burgersdijk has argued the Author's interest in *boni principes* may have been a result of the Author's familiarity with Pliny's *Panegyricus*, a speech written in honor of Trajan in 100 CE, which had become attached to the *Panegyrici Latini* as an exemplary form of the genre early in the fourth century. In the speech, Pliny praises Trajan's using many of the virtues lauded in the *Historia Augusta*, such as *pietas* and *abstinentia* (*Pan.* 2.6, 75.4-6). Although rumination on imperial virtues a common trope in works of history and biography, as Burgersdijk notes, the phrases *bonus princeps* or *malus princeps* are quite rare in other historians. Suetonius uses the term only once, and Tacitus and Ammianus Marcellinus only use the phrases nine times combined (*Suet. Tib.* 2.37.2; *Tac. Ann.* 15.66.1, *Hist.* 1.16.1, 1.46.1, 2.37.2, 4.42.6, and *Agric.* 42.4, 43.4; *Amm. Marc.* 16.5.16, 17.13.32), suggesting that it did arise from outside the historical genre. On *Panegyrici Latini* more generally and the virtues favored by panegyrists, see Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 1-23.

comparing emperors and their predecessors' *virtutes*, and his reflection on patterns of dynastic success and failure through the *nomen Antoninorum*—provide important context for why the Author may have begun to reflect on legacies of Diocletian and Constantine during the composition of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives.

Firstly, many of the sources the Author referenced during this period, particularly those that may have provided inspiration for the Author's interest in the *nomen Antoninorum* and *boni* and *mali principes* like the *Panegyrici Latini* and Aurelius Victor, included substantial coverage of Diocletian, the Tetrarchs, and Constantine. As mentioned above, the legacies of both rulers were hotly contested in works throughout the fourth century. The polarized depictions of Constantine and Diocletian in these sources would have provided ample material and tempting parallels for the Author's preexisting interests in imperial *virtus* and succession.

For example, whereas Diocletian and the other Tetrarchs were panned as religious persecutors in some works, in others, they received wary respect for their military prowess and their ability to police the boundaries of the empire.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, while the *Panegyrici Latini*, Eusebius, and others praised Constantine and his sons for their *virtus* and victories over the Tetrarchs, Aurelius Victor and many of the Author's other recent predecessors, like Eutropius and Julian, were far less flattering to

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<sup>26</sup> For background on the Tetrarchy, see Corcoran 1996 and Rees 2004, and Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.24-25, 30, 46-48, Eutr. *Brev.* 9.22; Festus, *Brev.* 25, Jul. *Caes.* 315.

Constantine. As B. Bleckmann has noted, authors over the fourth century grew far more hostile to Constantine.<sup>27</sup> The works of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Julian, and Eunapius all contain insinuations about Constantine's penchant for luxury, cronyism, and choice of companions.<sup>28</sup> Thus, one can easily surmise that the Author was moved to engage with ongoing debate in his own work, especially considering that the depictions of Constantine and Diocletian in his sources naturally converged with the Author's ongoing interest in evaluating emperors' *virtus* against their predecessors' characteristics.

Furthermore, the stark contrast between their means of succession also mapped onto the Author's increasing reflection on competing forms of imperial legitimacy. Diocletian shared power with several men whom he selected due to his confidence in their ability to rule. Constantine, in contrast, rooted his initial claim to power in his father's position as *Augustus* and used that paternal connection to justify his acclamation bid in 306 CE.<sup>29</sup> Constantine also later bequeathed the empire to his three sons, Constantine II (*r.* 337-340), Constantius II (*r.* 337-361), and Constans (*r.* 337-350), only for them to spend several decades in tense standoffs and scuffles over the division of the

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<sup>27</sup> On the growing negativity of later fourth-century works, see B. Bleckmann 2010: 354, Malosse 1997: 519.

<sup>28</sup> Jul. *Caes.* 336, Aur. *Vict. Caes.* 41, Eunapius *Vit. Soph.* 462, Zos. 11.32.1; see also Fowden 1991: 120, Humphries 2010: 75-88, and Thomson 2012: 38-39.

<sup>29</sup> For example, see Eus. *Vit. Const.* 1.22, trans. Odahl 2004: 83.

empire.<sup>30</sup> The innovation of Diocletian's arrangement and the aftermath of Constantine's reign ensured that this contrast was a constant focus in other works of the time.

Therefore, accounts of the two rulers in contemporary works also provided ready parallels for the Author's nascent comparison between collegial rule and hereditary succession.

Although it is impossible to pinpoint the exact creative genius that led the Author to incorporate a comparison of Diocletian and Constantine into the work as a series of spurious invocations scattered throughout the lives rather than composing individual lives of these two figures, the Author's engagement with fourth-century sources may also have inspired the conceit of imperial interlocutors. Thomson has posited that the Author mirrored his semblance of imperial dedications on the panegyrics in the *Panegyrici Latini* addressed to Constantine and the other Tetrarchs.<sup>31</sup> The invocations may also have been inspired by a desire to simulate the imperial dedications that graced the pages of many of his recent predecessors, including Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Festus.<sup>32</sup> It is clear that the Author was already moved to

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<sup>30</sup> For background on Constantine's rise to power and the later reigns of his sons, see Pohlsander 1996, Van Dam 2007, Barnes 2011, and Potter 2012.

<sup>31</sup> The *Panegyrici Latini* is a collection of panegyrics from late third century, multiple orators and authors, including Pliny, Pacatus, Claudius Mamertinus, Nazarius, Eumenius, among others. It was likely a rhetorical handbook. Thomson has proposed that the *Panegyrici Latini* may have provided a model for the Author's impersonation of a multi-authored corpus purportedly dating from the Tetrarchic Period and the generation following: see Thomson 2012: 25-28.

<sup>32</sup> For more on the dedications and possible bias of these works, see Chapter Five.

invention by his reflection on the *nomen Antoninorum*: Burgersdijk has demonstrated that the Author began to invent spurious documents in order to elaborate on the reasons behind Macrinus' and Severus' decision to bestow the *nomen* upon their sons.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the decision to invent the invocations addressing Diocletian and Constantine as imperial patrons might not have been much of a next step. The decision to create invented imperial dedications may have served as an innovative way to enter into contemporary debate while simultaneously parodying a common trope.

Compared to devoting individual lives to Diocletian and Constantine, the decision to add references to the rulers as dedications also held a certain strategic value. Developing his commentary as a series of invocations grafted onto preexisting lives allowed the Author to evoke pointed comparisons between Diocletian and Constantine and the figures recounted in his text, as the following section shows.

### ***The Invocations and the Importance of Succession***

As noted in the introduction, scholars have long recognized that the invocations draw upon the distinctions between *boni* and *mali principes* and the comparisons to figures in the Antonine *gens* to flatter Diocletian and insult Constantine. For example, invocations in the *Lucius Verus* and *Marcus Aurelius* draw favorable connections between

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<sup>33</sup> Burgersdijk 2010: 160-173, 219-230.

Diocletian and Marcus Aurelius. The invocation in the *Lucius Verus* affirms that, “Since from the time of Marcus onward, with the exception of your Clemency, Diocletian Augustus, not even flattery, it seems, has been able to fashion such an emperor” (*cum adhuc post Marcum praeter vestram clementiam, Diocletiane Auguste, imperatorem talem nec adulatio videatur potuisse confingere*) (*Ver.* 11.2-4). In similar fashion, the invocation in the *Life of Marcus Aurelius* affirms that Diocletian not only worshipped Marcus “among his divinities [...] as one apart” but also had pronounced his desire “in life and gentleness, to be such a one as Marcus” (*semper visum est et videtur vos [...] vita et clementia tales esse cupere qualis fuit Marcus*) (*Marc.* 19.12).<sup>34</sup> Due to the high praise of Marcus Aurelius and the Antonine *gens* in the collection, these comparisons have been interpreted as highly flattering and positive associations for the ruler, as noted above in the introduction.

Scholars have also acknowledged that the Author uses the invocation in the *Aelius* to further strengthen the connection between Diocletian and the Antonines by framing Diocletian as the inheritor of the “noble” model of adoption and shared rule instituted by Hadrian.<sup>35</sup> There, the Author announces his intention to tell of Aelius Verus, who was the first to join the imperial family by adoption and

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<sup>34</sup> Williams 1985: 9-12, 186 argues that Diocletian may have been inspired in administrative forms and personal pursuits by Marcus Aurelius. For more on Marcus’ philosophical tendencies, see Adams 2012: 189-190.

<sup>35</sup> Birley 2003: 141, Grey 2010: 90-91, Burgersdijk 2013: 310.

to be called Caesar not by last will and testament, as was previously the custom, nor yet in the fashion in which Trajan was adopted, but well nigh in the same manner as in our own time your Clemency conferred the name of Caesar on Maximianus and on Constantius, as on true sons of the imperial house and heirs apparent of your August Majesty. (*Ael.* 1.2-2.2)

*primus tantum Caesar est appellatus, non testamento, ut antea solebat, neque eo modo quo Traianus est adoptatus, sed eo prope genere quo nostris temporibus a vestra clementia Maximianus atque Constantius Caesares dicti sunt quasi quidam principum filii veri et designati augustae maiestatis heredes.*

As C. Grey and J. P. Callu have noted, the Author draws an explicit connection between Diocletian and the precedent established by Hadrian in which a living heir was granted the title of *Caesar*.<sup>36</sup>

The invocation in the *Life of Septimus Severus* has also been thought to flatter Diocletian by reinforcing the connection between the Antonines' and Diocletian's method of adoption.<sup>37</sup> In the *Life of Severus*, the Author addresses a tirade about the disappointment of hereditary successors to Diocletian, stating:

Indeed, when I reflect on the matter, Diocletian Augustus, it is quite clear to me that practically no great man has left the world a son of real excellence or value. In short, most of them either died without issue of their own, or had such children that it would have been better for humanity had they departed without offspring. (*Sev.* 20.4-5)

*et reputanti mihi, Diocletiane Auguste, neminem prope magnorum virorum optimum et utilem filium reliquisse satis claret. denique aut sine liberis veris*

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<sup>36</sup> Grey 2010: 90 and Callu et al. 1992: xxiii-xxv.

<sup>37</sup> Burgersdijk 2013: 291-292 also notes that "the possibility that a natural son of a good emperor might not be a good successor" is a "sub-theme" of the *Severus*.

*interierunt aut tales habuerunt plerique, ut melius fuerit de rebus humanis sine posteritate discedere.*

Reflecting on examples from Romulus onward, the Author is unable to identify a single biological son whom he deems successful, and he states that the only exception should be granted to “sons by adoption, lest our thoughts turn to those two guardian spirits of the state, Pius and Marcus Antoninus” (*Sev.* 20.1).

Although this passage arises in a “primary” life, the invocation in the *Severus* has been identified as a later addition because it arises in a series of apparent accretions at the end of the biography (*Sev.* 20.1-24.5).<sup>38</sup> The passage exhibits typical signs of accretion, beginning abruptly with a profession of the Author’s reluctance to pass over what can be found in the writings of Aelius Maurus, the supposed freedman of Hadrian’s freedman, Phlegon (*Sev.* 20.1). The passage is also stylistically distinct from the surrounding passages, featuring a series of rhetorical questions and colloquial addresses. Therefore, there is reason to believe it was added at a later date after the themes of succession became prominent in the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives.

In contrast, scholars have argued that the invocations to Constantine in the *Life of Elagabalus* and the *Life of Severus* pointedly embarrass Constantine by associating him with a notorious *malus princeps* and depict him as unable to live up to the ideals of a

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<sup>38</sup> Syme 1972 notes his belief that the *Life of Severus* was revised on several occasions, Syme thought there were two brief insertions (10.5, 16.14), then an interpolation from Aurelius Victor 17.5-19.1, and another added portion starting at 19.2, the lengthy one discussed here.

*bonus princeps*.<sup>39</sup> Elagabalus' status as the "worst" and "last of the Antonines" and his inclusion among a list of Rome's worst tyrants is referenced several times in close proximity to the invocations to Constantine (*Elag.* 1.1, 2.2-4, 33.1, 33.8, 34.1). So too, in the invocation at the conclusion of the *Elagabalus*, the Author (in the guise of "Lampridius") asks pardon for setting down in writing "so many vile details" (*multa improba*) about Elagabalus, and states that he was "unwilling and reluctant" (*invitum et retractantem*) to write a life of such a figure and persisted only because Constantine had compelled him (*Elag.* 34.2, 35.1). This professed hesitancy is, of course, contradicted by the indulgence with which the Author recounts Elagabalus' many and varied exploits, but the proposition that the Author was writing the life of such a "farrago" only at the extreme insistence of Constantine further underscores the embarrassing connection, as Thomson and others have noted.<sup>40</sup>

Constantine's association with the *malus* and tyrannous ruler is also highlighted in the concluding invocation in the *Life of Severus Alexander*. There, the Author warns Constantine of the danger posed to *boni principes* by *mali* friends. He states, "It is well known to Your Piety, [...], that the state in which the ruler is evil is happier and almost safer than the one in which he has evil friends" (*notum est illud Pietati tuae, [...] meliorem*

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<sup>39</sup> Hartke 1951: 342-3, Straub 1952: 100, Turcan 1988: 47-48, Birley 2003: 143-144, and Bonamente 2014: 46-47, 67-69.

<sup>40</sup> Thomson 2012: 38-39.

*esse rem publicam et prope tutiorem, in qua princeps malus est, ea, in qua sunt amici principis mali*) (*Sev. Alex.* 65.4). The biographer warns specifically against allowing eunuchs to assume positions of power, stating that “these creatures alone cause the downfall of emperors” by keeping them apart from the people and misleading them with false information (*Sev. Alex.* 66.3-4).<sup>41</sup> While the Author praises Severus Alexander for wisely choosing only friends who were “upright, revered, temperate, pious” (*sanctos, venerabiles, continentes, religiosos*) (*Sev. Alex.* 66.2), the Author directly charges Constantine with being under the power of eunuchs. He states: “I know, O prince, that it is perilous to say these words to an emperor who has been in subjection to such creatures.” He goes on to express his hope that Constantine, now having “learned how much evil resides in these pests, and how they mislead rulers,” will “keep them in their proper place” (*Sev. Alex.* 67.1).<sup>42</sup>

Considering the lengthy accounts of Elagabalus’ proclivity to surround himself with counselors as debauched as himself (*Elag.* 10.2-12.4), the passage has long been interpreted as drawing another parallel between Constantine and the tyrannous ruler.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> On the dangers of a *clausus imperator* and the *HA*’s disdain toward eunuchs, see Chastagnol 1994: clvii-clviii, Bertrand-Degabach 1990: 68-72, and den Hengst 1981: 14. The *HA*’s disdain towards eunuchs can be found throughout the collection (*Gord.* 24-25; *Aur.* 43) and may have served as was a coded commentary on the eunuchs who held considerable influence in the imperial courts of the late fourth century.

<sup>42</sup> The invocations were in part deemed anachronistic due to comments like these, because libel laws forbade criticisms of Constantine during his reign (*CTh* 9.34.1-2): see Bertrand-Dagenbach 1990: 70 and Thomson 2012: 38-39.

<sup>43</sup> Bonamente 2014: 76-80.

The implication that Constantine was unable to select appropriate advisors also distances him further from the ideal of Marcus Aurelius, who was praised not only for ruling well but also for using his influence to “make bad men good, and good men excellent” (*fecitque ex malis bonos, ex bonis optimos*) (*Marc.* 12.1-2). For these reasons, scholars have long recognized that the Author uses the contrast between *boni* and *mali principes* and his association with Elagabalus, deemed so unworthy of association with the Antonines, to reflect poorly on Constantine’s qualities and to place him in opposition to Diocletian’s positive association with Marcus Aurelius.<sup>44</sup>

The contrast between Diocletian and Constantine breaks down, however, when the remaining invocations to Constantine are considered. As noted in the introduction, a series of invocations to Constantine in the *Elagabalus*, *Gordians*, and *Maximini* appear to mitigate the Author’s criticism of Constantine by praising his reverence for the Antonine dynasty, flattering his father Constantius Chlorus I (*r.* 293-306), and lauding his alleged ancestral connection with the emperor Claudius Gothicus (*r.* 268-270). While it is possible that the Author was merely contradicting himself, a more coherent theory for interpreting these invocations to Constantine arises if we reconsider the dedications to

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<sup>44</sup> Fowden, Zinsli, and others have noted that many of the Author’s insinuations about Constantine’s debauchery and lack of discretion in choice of friends were topics already found in other writers of the time, supporting the proposition that the Author was drawing on contemporary sources for inspiration while making these associations: see Fowden 1991 and Zinsli 2005.

both rulers in light of the Author's other increasing preoccupation at the time: his growing preference for shared rule and his concerns about hereditary succession.

Although scholars have noted that Diocletian is favorably associated with the Antonine's version of shared rule in both the *Aelius* and the *Septimius Severus*, the full import of the Author's increasing contrast between forms of imperial succession to the Diocletianic invocations has not been understood. For example, the Diocletianic invocations in the the *Marcus Aurelius* and the *Septimius Severus* can both be identified as retroactive attempts by the Author to reinforce his preference for adoption and collegial rule and to clarify his position on Marcus' and Severus' decisions to leave the empire in the hands of their less qualified sons.

The invocation to Diocletian in the *Life of Marcus Aurelius* arises in a larger passage, which has been identified as a later addition to the life (*Marc.* 15.1-19.12).<sup>45</sup> In the extended passage, the Author defends Marcus' reputation as a *bonus princeps* against charges of leaving the empire to an unworthy son. The passage begins with the Author stating his surprise that "This man, so great, so good, and an associate of the gods both in life and in death, left one son Commodus" (*Marc.* 18.4). The Author then digresses to considered the "plausible" (*veri simile videtur*) theory that Commodus was not, in fact,

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<sup>45</sup> This passage is thought by many to be an interpolation, because it is unusual in that it is only one of two invocations found in primary life and that it is the only invocation found in the middle of a life rather than at the end or beginning of a life, as is customary. Debates about its scope and timing of its addition continue. The passages in doubt run from 15.1-19.12. On the details of this passage and reasons to suspect its later addition, see Syme 1972: 292, Barnes 1978: 47, Adams 2012: 25, 155-162.

begotten by Marcus Aurelius. Instead, he suggests that Commodus was begotten during an affair of Faustina, Marcus' wife and empress, with a gladiator at Caieta (*Marc.* 19.1-7). The Author uses this theory to posit that Commodus' lack of virtue derived not from Marcus but from this alternative parentage. The Author concludes that, regardless of Commodus' origins and failings, no one thought less of Marcus because "truly such is the power of the life, the holiness, the serenity, and the righteousness of a *bonus princeps* (*valet boni principis vita sanctitas tranquillitas pietas*) that not even the scorn felt for his kin can sully his own good reputation" (*Marc.* 19.10). Only after reinforcing Marcus' status as a *bonus princeps* does the invocation go on to state that Diocletian had chosen to model himself on Marcus Aurelius (*Marc.* 19.12).

Now, disappointment in Marcus' poor choice of successor was not unique to the *Historia Augusta*, nor is this the only place in the collection where the Author attempts to mitigate Marcus' role in Commodus' nomination.<sup>46</sup> However, it is understandable why the Author may have wanted to insert an additional passage to mitigate further Marcus' responsibility in naming his biological son Commodus as heir after casting Marcus Aurelius as champion of the benefits for the state that can be done by the policy of adoption in the *Aelius* and other "secondary" and "intermediate" lives.

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<sup>46</sup> Elsewhere, the *Historia Augusta* attempts to mitigate Marcus' role in Commodus' nomination by placing the responsibility for Commodus' acclamation upon the senate (*Comm* 1.10-2.5; *Av. Cass.* 13.4) and by reporting that Marcus regretted his decision on his deathbed (*Marc.* 27.11-12, 28.10). For more on Marcus and Commodus, see Adams 2012: 193-4.

So too, the invocation in the *Life of Severus* is part of a much larger passage that places great emphasis on the distinction between adoptive and biological sons. The passage begins by recounting how Severus rejoiced at the time of his death that “he was leaving two Antonini [Caracalla and Geta] to rule the state with equal powers, following the example of Pius, who left to the state Verus and Marcus Antoninus, his two sons by adoption” (*Sev.* 20.1). The Author claims that Severus “rejoiced all the more, because, while Pius had left only adopted sons, he was leaving sons of his own blood to rule the Roman state.” The Author immediately underscores Severus’ folly in believing rulers who were “sons of his own blood” (*per se genitos rectores*) would be the equivalent of Pius’ “adopted sons” (*Sev.* 20.1-2). The Author states that, “In these high hopes, however, he was grievously deceived; for the state was denied the one by murder, the other by his own character” (*Sev.* 20. 3).

The invocation passages in the *Marcus Aurelius* and *Septimius Severus* also contain very similar criticism about their decisions to leave the empire in the hands of their sons. In the *Marcus Aurelius* invocation, the Author states that if Marcus “had been truly fortunate he would not have left a son” (*Marc.* 18.4). The *Severus* echoes the sentiments, saying, “What could have been more fortunate for Marcus than not to have left Commodus as his heir? What [could have been] more fortunate for Septimius Severus than not to have even begotten Bassianus?” (*Sev.* 21.5-6). Therefore, both invocations concern the topic of imperial succession, and the recurring focus on succession in these

passages illustrate how intertwined the addition of the Diocletianic invocations were to the Author's positions on the topic.

The full ramifications of the Author's efforts to clarify his preference for shared rule in the Diocletianic invocations and his disdain for hereditary succession on his depiction of Constantine have not been explored. The Author's categorical disparagement of sons as worthy inheritors of the empire had ominous implications for Constantine. Constantine, a son who rooted his claims to legitimacy in his father's position as *Augustus* and a father who bequeathed the empire to his sons, was doubly implicated in the Author's critiques of hereditary succession. Because of the focus on Constantine's lineage in histories and panegyrics of the time, this familial connection would have been an unavoidable and well-known part of his legacy.<sup>47</sup>

Many of the invocations left unexplained by the theory that the Author hoped to criticize Constantine's religious leanings can be resolved in the context of the Author's growing concerns about hereditary succession. For example, the invocations to Constantine in the *Life of the Two Maximini* and the *Three Gordians* can be interpreted as slights to Constantine's dynastic pretensions. The invocations in the *Life of the Two Maximini* and the *Life of the Three Gordians* (*Max.* 1.1; *Gord.* 1.1, 34.6) have often been

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<sup>47</sup> While many works of the period praised Constantius Chlorus, works of the later fourth century increasingly focused on the infighting and fate of Constantine's sons in the generations following his death: see Rodgers 1989: 236-238. Seven of the twelve panegyrics in the *Panegyrici Latini* praise deeds or events concerning Constantius Chlorus, Constantine, or Constantine's sons, see *Pan. Lat.* IV-VI, VII-IX, XII. See also Eusebius *Vita Constantini* 1.22, Lieu and Montserrat 1996: 4-5, and Bleckmann 2010: 354.

interpreted as largely neutral, since they are little more than brief notices informing Constantine of the Author's decision to begin including biographies of sons and fathers in a single life.<sup>48</sup> In both cases, the Author offers a similar explanation for combining the accounts of fathers and sons into single volumes: he hoped to spare Constantine the "distasteful" (*fastidiosum*) task of unrolling "many volumes and yet read scarcely one story" (*ne cogereris plurimos codicesvolvendo unam tamen paene historiam lectitare*) (*Gord.* 1.1, cf. *Max. Duo* 1.1).

While these invocations concern an ostensibly innocuous editorial decision, the Author's disdain for hereditary succession found elsewhere suggests the proposition that the deeds of fathers and sons were insufficient to merit their own volumes can be read as pointedly dismissive of the contributions of these familial dynasties. Perceived slight can also be read into the Author's announcement, in the *Two Maximini*, that he will keep this arrangement for all the lives that follow thereafter, "except in the case of the great emperors" (*exceptis magnis imperatoribus*) (*Max. Duo* 1.3). Since the families do not receive separate treatment, the implication arises that these two family dynasties are not "great" enough to deserve further elaboration, again undermining the significance of familial dynasties in general.

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<sup>48</sup> den Hengst 1981: 14 and Burgersdijk 2013: 300-301 have both identified these invocations as neutral.

The invocations to Constantine in the *Life of the Two Maximini* and the *Life of the Three Gordians* can also be interpreted as allusions to the infighting and violence that engulfed Constantine's sons in the decades after his death. While the Author is careful to distinguish between the senate and army's hatred of the Maximini's brutality and their love of the Gordians' noble characters and military victories, both lives underscore the violent deaths and dissolution of these familial dynasties.<sup>49</sup> The association with the *Two Maximini*, in particular, evokes details concerning the untimely deaths of Constantine's sons. The *Life of the Two Maximini* describes how the Maximini were assassinated in their sleep by their own troops and their corpses were later cast into running water (*Max. Duo* 23.1, 23.6-7, 24.4, 26.2, 31.5). Like the Maximini, Constans was killed at the hands of his own soldiers in 350 CE, and the body of Constantine II was thrown in the river after he was killed at the hands of his brother's troops in 340 CE, according to Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 41.21-22).<sup>50</sup>

Similar allusion to the untimely deaths of Constantine's sons can be detected in Constantine's connection with the *Life of Geta*. The prefatory invocation states, "I am well aware, Constantine Augustus, that many besides Your Clemency may raise the question

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<sup>49</sup> The *Maximini* are assassinated in their sleep by their own troops for their brutal punishments exacted on their own troops (*Max.* 23.1, 23.6-7). Gordian the Younger is cut down in battle (*Gord.* 15.3-16.1), Gordian the elder commits suicide in grief at his son's demise (*Gord.* 16.3), and Gordian III executed through machinations of Philip (*Gord.* 28-31).

<sup>50</sup> On the political conflict between Constantine's sons, see Malosse 1997: 520.

why I should also write the life of Geta Antoninus, [...] for there is not much to relate in the life of a man who was removed from human affairs before he could take the imperial power conjointly with his brother" (*Geta* 1.1). The attention drawn to Geta's murder at the hands of his brother, Caracalla, calls to mind the internecine violence between Constantine II and Constantius II in the 330-340s.<sup>51</sup> So too, the focus on Geta's youth and early death before he could assume power with his brother mirrors the fate of Constantine's eldest son Crispus, who died in 326 CE under mysterious circumstances before he could share the power with his brothers.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Fowden has posited that a similar allusion is made in the *Elagabalus*, stating, "Elagabalus' unsuccessful attempt to murder his adopted son Alexander Severus recalls Constantine's murder of his son Crispus" (*Elag.* 13-14).

Readers in the fourth century CE would have been primed to expect allusions to the violence that plagued Constantine's sons in the decades after his death. As Bleckmann has illustrated, works of the mid- to late fourth century increasingly focused on rumors of Constantine's involvement in the deaths of his son Crispus and his wife Fausta, in particular.<sup>53</sup> Aurelius Victor and Julian both mention rumors of his

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<sup>51</sup> Like the *Two Maximini* and the *Three Gordians*, the life also records prophecies foretold Geta's death (*Geta* 4.2-4, 5.1, 5.4).

<sup>52</sup> On Crispus and his execution in 326 CE, see Leadbetter 2009: 7, Pohlsander 1984, and Pohlsander 1996: 86.

<sup>53</sup> Lieu and Montserrat 1996: 4-5 and Bleckmann 2010: 354.

involvement with various levels of certainty (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 41.10-16, Julian *Caes.* 336).<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, the decision to associate Constantine with these dynasties can be read as a pointed attempt to allude to the instability and dissolution of Constantine's own attempts to establish a familial monarchy.

Passages in the *Elagabalus* that ostensibly praise Constantine's ancestors and his association with the Antonine *gens* can also be reinterpreted as slights to Constantine's dynastic pretensions in the context of the Author's distrust of hereditary succession. In the extended introductory invocation to Constantine in the *Life of Elagabalus*, the Author appears to draw a contrast between Elagabalus' desecration of the *nomen Antoninorum* and Constantine's purported reverence of the *gens*. The Author attests that

Although he has defiled this most sacred name, you, Most Sacred Constantine, so revere this name of the Antonines that you have had portrayed in gold both Marcus and Pius together with the Constantii and the Claudii, as though they too were your ancestors, just as you have adopted the virtues of the ancients which are naturally suited to your own character. (*Elag.* 2.4)

*quamvis sanctum illud Antoninorum nomen polluerit, quod tu, Constantine sacratissime, ita veneraris, ut Marcum et Pium inter Constantios Claudiosque, velut maiores tuos, aureos formaveris, adoptans virtutes veterum tuis moribus congruentes.*

Bonamente has argued that this passage mitigates the overall criticism of Constantine in the *Life of Elagabalus* by praising the ruler's reverence of the Antonine *gens* and by

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<sup>54</sup> Julian's satire *Caesares* claims that the gods punished Constantine and his sons for shedding blood of their kin (*Caes.* 336).

acknowledging Constantine's *virtus* as being on par with the ancients.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Bonamente has argued that this passage also pays deference to Constantine by flattering his father, Constantius Chlorus, and his supposed ancestral connection with Claudius Gothicus, who is also noted with praise in the concluding invocation of the *Elagabalus*.<sup>56</sup> There, "Lampridius" promises to write for Constantine a *Life of Claudius*, whom he calls "the glory of all other emperors" (*horum omnium decus*) (*Elag.* 35.2-3).

Although these passages appear to flatter Constantius Chlorus and Claudius Gothicus, the reminders that Constantine rooted his legitimacy in his father and ancestry can be reinterpreted as liabilities in the context of the Author's disdain for familial succession. Praise of Constantine's ancestors did not necessarily reflect well on Constantine.<sup>57</sup> As the invocations in the *Marcus Aurelius* and the *Septimius Severus* confirm, having a praiseworthy father or ancestors did not guarantee that sons who inherit the empire will be of equal caliber as their fathers. Instead, the invocation

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<sup>55</sup> Bonamente 2014: 72-76.

<sup>56</sup> The *Historia Augusta* maintains that Constantius, and through him Constantine and his descendants, were descended from Claudius. The ancestral connection, however, has been deemed a fictitious invention of Constantine designed to increase his legitimacy by attaching his claim to an established lineage. The first evidence for this purported genealogical connection arises in a panegyric given at Trier in 309/310 CE: see Barnes 1978: 16, Syme 1983: 63-79, Lieu and Montserrat 1996: 66-69, and Rees 2004: 136-7.

<sup>57</sup> Praise of Constantius Chlorus was not unusual for writers of the fourth century. Constantius Chlorus was praised in Christian texts as father and promoter of Constantine and in many other works of the fourth century for his humility and military prowess: see Lieu and Montserrat 1996: 41-2. Eutropius, for example, praises Constantius for moderation, humility, and disinterest in personal wealth or undue power. Eutropius states that he "avoided the suspect prudence of Diocletian and the bloodthirsty rashness of Maximian" (*Brev.* 9.23, 10.1), trans. Rees 2004: 100-101.

passages in the *Marcus* and the *Septimius Severus* underscore how even *boni* or reasonably competent leaders can set the empire on a negative course by bestowing the empire on their hereditary sons. Indeed, Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus' sons, Commodus and Caracalla, are repeatedly named as two of the worst emperors of the entire collection (e.g., *Sev. Alex.* 7.4). So too, allusions to Constantine's ancestry would have been particularly compromising in the *Life of Elagabalus*, where Elagabalus is another poster child against allowing sons to inherit.

Although reading praise of Constantine's ancestors as an insult may seem a rather severe reinterpretation, the Author of the *Historia Augusta* was not the only fourth-century writer who used praise of Constantius Chlorus as a subtle rebuke of Constantine's own failings. H.-U. Wiemer and P.-L. Malosse have illustrated that in his *Or.* 59 given in 344/345 CE Libanius praised Constantius Chlorus' moderation and lenient tax policies in order to underscore Constantine's punitive nature and high tax levies.<sup>58</sup> They also demonstrate that Libanius praised Constantius Chlorus' decision to leave the empire to a single heir as a subtle rebuke of Constantine's decision to bequeath the empire to multiple sons. While there is no evidence to suggest that the Author of the *Historia Augusta* was familiar with this oration of Libanius, Libanius' oration at least

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<sup>58</sup> See Malosse 1997: 519-522 and Wiemer 1994: 511-524.

demonstrates that other writers used a similar strategy to undermine Constantine's legitimacy and to call into question his decisions to leave his inheritance to his sons.

Furthermore, the remark about Constantine's reverence for the *nomen Antoninorum* and his desire to worship Marcus and Pius as his ancestors may also hold a subtle rebuke. Unlike Diocletian who is directly said to be Marcus Aurelius' equal (*Ver.* 11.2-4), Constantine is merely said to have revered Marcus and Pius "as if they were [his] ancestors" (*ita veneraris [...] velut maiores tuos*) (*Elag.* 2.4). Throughout the *Elagabalus* and in other digressions on the *nomen*, the Author is very careful to distinguish between those who truly merited the name and those who undeservedly assumed the name in order to feign connections to the Antonines (*Diad.* 6.4-10, *Sev. Alex.* 10.5). Indeed, this distinction is repeatedly made throughout the *Life of Elagabalus* and *Severus Alexander*, where Elagabalus is called a "false holder" of the name and is said to have merely "simulated" holding it (*Elag.* 33.8, *Sev. Alex.* 10.5).<sup>59</sup>

The distinction between those who deserve the name and those who *desire* the name is also a central topic of the concluding invocation to Constantine in the *Elagabalus*. In the invocation to Constantine, the Author announces his intention to write about the Gordians, who "desired to be called after the family of the Antonines" (*qui se de Antoninorum genere dici volebant*). The Author is careful to note, however, that other

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<sup>59</sup> Elagabalus also charges Diadumenianus with being a "pseudo-Antoninus" (*Elag.* 8.4).

historians reported that the Gordians' name "was Antonius, and not Antoninus" (*Elag.* 34.6-7).<sup>60</sup> Despite noting how Gordian the Elder "admired the Antonines marvelously," wrote eulogies of all the Antonines who preceeded him, and bestowed the *nomen* on his son, the Author repudiates their association with the name twice more in the *Three Gordians*, which is also addressed to Constantine (*Gord.* 4.7-8, 9.5, 17.1).

Considering that Constantine is frequently linked with those who aspire to the name but are deemed unworthy of it (i.e., Geta, Elagabalus, and the Gordians) and that the distinction between those who desire and deserve the *nomen* is a central feature of two lives directly addressed to Constantine (the *Elagabalus* and the *Gordians*), the claim that he worshipped them merely *as if* they were his ancestors carries particular weight. Thus, the claim that Constantine aspired to include the Antonines among his ancestors can be read as another subtle challenge to Constantine's methods of bolstering his family dynasty.<sup>61</sup> Similarly, the claim that Constantine adopted only those virtues that were already "pleasing to his character" (*adoptans virtutes veterum tuis moribus congruentes*) leaves room for skepticism, especially considering the overt condemnation at the end of the *Severus Alexander* about his ability to choose appropriately *boni* companions.

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<sup>60</sup> The Author makes the same claim in *Macr.* 3.5: "while the two Gordians, on the other hand, must not be placed among the Antonini, for they either had only their praenomen or were called Antonii, not Antonini."

<sup>61</sup> Of the six figures with whom Constantine is associated, only one is deemed worthy of the name: Severus Alexander is offered the honor but refuses the title out of respect for Marcus Aurelius (*Sev. Alex.* 6-11). Although Geta is acknowledged to have been given the name, the life depicts Geta as one who died too young to live up to the name's promise (*Geta* 2.2-3), and, in the *Diadumenianus*, the Author throws doubt on the claim that Geta ever held the title Antoninus at all (*Diad.* 6.9).

The concerns expressed about Constantine's companions also provide reason to reinterpret the invocation to Constantine in the life of the usurper Clodius Albinus.<sup>62</sup> The brief invocation to Constantine arises in a passage concerned with Clodius' descent "from noble families at Rome, namely the Postumii, the Albini, and the Ceionii" (*Clod. Alb.* 4.1). The Author states that, "the last of these families is among the noblest today, for you, most powerful Constantine (*Constantine maxime*), have exalted it and shall exalt it further, though it gained its greatest prestige by the favour of Gallienus and the Gordians" (*Clod. Alb.* 4.2). As with the references to Constantine's ancestry, Birley and others have argued that the Author intended to flatter the "genealogical pretensions" of the Ceionii family by associating them with Constantine and other imperial figures.<sup>63</sup> Considering the Author's disdain for the Gallieni and his criticism of Constantine's companions in the *Life of Elagabalus* and the *Life of Severus Alexander*, however, the Ceionii's association with Constantine seems far more likely to be a veiled criticism of the family's purported connections.<sup>64</sup>

In this way, interpreting the invocations in the *Elagabalus*, *Geta*, *Two Maximini*, *Three Gordians*, and *Clodius Albinus* as slights to Constantine's dynastic pretensions and personal *virtus* presents a much more consistent depiction of Constantine across the

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<sup>62</sup> The invocation to Constantine in the *Clodius Albinus* is also unusual because it, like the invocations *Marcus* and the *Severus*, is found in the body text of the life rather than at the end.

<sup>63</sup> Birley 2003: 141-145 and Bonamente 2014: 64-67.

<sup>64</sup> On disdain for Gallienus, see *Tyr. Trig.* 31.7-12 and more in Chapter Five below.

collection and allows Constantine's associations in the collection to stand in clearer contrast to Diocletian's. Indeed, a stark contrast arises when we consider the associations holistically in light of succession. All seven figures with whom Diocletian is associated (Aelius, Macrinus, Avidius Cassius, Pescennius Niger, Lucius Verus, Marcus Aurelius, and Septimius Severus) were adopted or came to power through non-hereditary means. In contrast, five of the six figures associated with Constantine (Geta, Elagabalus, Severus Alexander, the Maximini, and the Gordians) root their claims to legitimacy in their lineage or bloodline.<sup>65</sup> This clear contrast further emphasizes the importance of succession's connection of the invocations.

In fact, as the following section shows, although any proposed order must remain suggestive instead of conclusive, a careful analysis of the logic and order behind the invocations suggest that the initial impetus behind the dedications may have concerned imperial succession.

### ***A Potential Order Behind the Invocations***

In addition to helping provide a more coherent means of interpreting the invocations, the recognition that the impetus for the invocations grew out of these three themes provides more support for the proposition that the dedications were devised and

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<sup>65</sup> The only exception to this rule is the invocation in the Clodius Albinus, discussed above.

retroactively added after the majority of the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives were already drafted. Because many of the invocations make explicit reference to the themes about *boni principes* and the worthiness of those who hold the *nomen Antoninorum*, as we have seen, the comparisons drawn by the dedications would not carry much weight unless the Author had already established these themes as valid modes of evaluation prior to adding the invocations.

For example, Constantine’s selective association with the *malus* Elagabalus and those unworthy of the *nomen Antoninorum* can only be encoded with meaning after the schemata concerning *boni* and *mali principes* and the *nomen Antoninorum* had become relatively solidified. Likewise, the connections between Diocletian and Marcus Aurelius established in the “primary” *Life of Lucius Verus* and the *Marcus Aurelius* would lose much of their impact unless they were added after the Author had decided to portray Marcus Aurelius as a *bonus* emperor.

Closer analysis of the invocations and the interconnections of the lives suggest that the invocations to Diocletian and Constantine were added in several stages as the Author gradually revised his work and elaborated on themes beginning with succession. For example, the six Diocletianic invocations can be divided into at least two distinct stages, based on the gradual elaboration of Diocletian’s connection with shared rule, non-hereditary succession, and the Antonines. As Chapter Two noted, a series of prefatory and concluding invocations to Diocletian in the *Macrinus*, *Aelius*, *Avidius*

*Cassius*, and *Pescennius Niger* express the Author's intention to include lives of *Augusti*, *Caesares*, and usurpers in remarkably similar phrasing. There, it was proposed that they might have been added at the same time or in quick succession to each other.

Of the invocations in these four lives, however, the *Aelius* establishes the most explicit and elaborate connection between Diocletian and the subject matter of the life. As mentioned above, the invocation identifies Diocletian as the direct inheritor of the Antonine procedure of adopting living heirs as *Caesares* and sharing power with other co-rulers. The Author's initial salutation of Diocletian as, "Diocletian Augustus, the greatest of a long line of rulers" (*Diocletiane Auguste, tot principum maxime*) (*Ael.* 1.1), indicates that he was reflecting on Diocletian in the context of succession and precedents.

Because of the distinct connection of Diocletian with the subject matter, it is possible that the *Aelius* was the first life to inspire the addition of a Diocletianic invocation. Then, having established the connection between Diocletian and the precedent of adoption and shared rule, it seemed natural to the Author to associate the Tetrarch with the lives of additional rulers who came to power by non-hereditary means, several of which were being drafted around the same time, including the *Avidius Cassius*, *Macrinus*, and *Pescennius Niger*. Later, the initial connection between Diocletian and the Antonines' procedure of shared rule first established in the *Aelius* may then in

turn have inspired the Author simultaneously to fashion further connections between Diocletian with Marcus Aurelius in the *Lucius Verus* and the *Marcus Aurelius*.

Indeed, the Author may have found opportunities to add the other three Diocletianic invocations to the three “primary” lives of *Marcus Aurelius*, *Lucius Verus*, and *Septimius Severus* while he was drafting the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. As Chapter Two noted, it is generally accepted that the *Marcus Aurelius*, *Lucius Verus*, and the *Septimius Severus* along with the other “primary” lives were more-or-less complete before the Author turned to write the “secondary” lives. While drafting the “secondary” lives of *Avidius Cassius*, *Pescennius Niger*, *Clodius Albinus*, and *Geta*, the Author is thought to have extensively reviewed the *Marcus Aurelius*, *Lucius Verus*, and the *Severus*, since similarities in wording suggest the Author used material from “primary” lives as a foundation for the “secondary” lives.

While the invocations in the *Marcus Aurelius* and *Septimius Severus* could have been added at any point, there are reasons to believe they were added around the same time that the Author was drafting the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives and developing his positions on imperial succession. The reference to Faustina’s infidelity in the passage in the *Marcus Aurelius* suggests that it may have been added around the time that the Author was drafting the *Avidius Cassius*. Faustina’s extramarital affairs are the subject of extensive conjecture in the *Avidius Cassius*, so the decision to blame her infidelity on Commodus’ inferiority in the *Marcus* may have come up around the same

time.<sup>66</sup> So too, the passage in the *Severus* seems like it would have been a likely addition after the the Author had already linked Antonines with praise of shared rule in the *Aelius* due to the parallels drawn between Antoninus Pius' and Severus' decision to bequeath the empire to their respective adoptive and biological sons.

Similarly, it is possible that the Author identified the elements in the *Marcus* and the *Verus* that were no longer consistent while drafting the *Avidius Cassius* and back-referencing the two lives, since both invocations appear to be borne out of the Author's desire to revise elements of his account in the *Life of Marcus Aurelius* that were incongruous with the Author's depiction of Marcus as a *bonus princeps* and the standard bearer of ideal shared rule in the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives.

Like the invocations in the *Marcus* and the *Severus*, the invocation in the *Verus* is a possible later accretion. This passage is found at the conclusion of the life, making it suspect as a site of possible later accretion. The invocation in the *Life of Lucius Verus* arises at the end of a longer passage concerning a rumor that Marcus had assassinated Lucius Verus either by serving him a poisoned sow's womb or by ordering a physician to bleed Verus unseasonably (*Ver.* 11.2-4). A similar account of Marcus' rumored involvement in his brother's death is found in the *Life of Marcus Aurelius*. In the *Marcus Aurelius*, the Author is relatively dismissive of the rumor, stating, "there is no emperor

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<sup>66</sup> On Faustina's infidelity, see more below, Chapter Five.

who is not the victim of some evil tale, and Marcus is no exception" (*Marc.* 15.5-6). Nonetheless, he does not directly reject Marcus' involvement. In the *Lucius Verus*, however, the Author firmly rejects the rumor, stating that it is not enough to "leave the matter undecided." Instead, he insists that "it is wrong even to think of such a deed in connection with Marcus" (*sed hoc nefas est de Marco putari*) and states that the matter must be rejected as definitively "discarded and disproved" (*totum purgatum confutatumque respuimus*) (*Ver.* 11.2-4).

A possible explanation for why the Author decided to make a more forceful refutation of the rumor arises if we consider how the depiction of Marcus shifted over the course of the collection. Considering that the Author had increasingly lauded the benefits of Marcus' and Lucius Verus' partnership in the *Life of Aelius* and several other "intermediate" lives, the Author may have decided it was imperative to extricate Marcus more forcefully from any responsibility in Verus' death in order to make his depiction of the pair more consistent with that found in the "secondary" and "intermediate" lives. Certainly, the proposition that Marcus assassinated his adoptive brother for political gain, originally recorded in the *Marcus Aurelius*, would have run contrary to the depiction of Marcus in the *Life of Avidius Cassius*, which highlights Marcus' clemency toward his would-be rival and his rival's supporters.<sup>67</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>67</sup> On Marcus' clemency toward Cassius and his supporters, see Chapter Five below.

Author may have been impelled to add in the invocation in the *Lucius Verus* to clear up the inconsistency.

The theory that the invocations in the *Marcus, Verus, and Severus* were retroactive additions while the Author was drafting the “secondary” lives of the usurpers *Avidius Cassius, Pescennius Niger, and Albinus Clodius* also explains why invocations are not found in other “primary” lives: the *Marcus, Verus, and the Severus* were the only three “primary” lives to be so thoroughly revisited while the Author was composing the secondary lives.

Admittedly, attempts to determine the order or logic by which the invocations to Constantine were added is more complicated, but analysis suggests that the first Constantinian invocations to be added also likely dealt primarily with his dynastic pretensions and imperial *virtus*. As Chapter Two noted, Syme detected an evolution in the content and tone of the invocations over time, from the more short and formal invocations found in the majority of lives, to the more “impudent” and elaborate invocations in the *Life of Elagabalus* and the *Life of Severus Alexander*. Due to their more elaborate and lengthy nature, Syme posited that the invocations to the *Elagabalus* and the *Severus Alexander* were the last to be added. As was also noted in Chapter Two, the concluding invocation passage to Constantine in the *Elagabalus* appears to have been added to and revised on at least two separate occasions, possibly at some time removed

from each other, which makes it difficult to determine at what point it reached its final form.

Analysis of the two halves of the concluding invocation to *Elagabalus*, however, provides insight into how the Constantinian invocations developed. The two halves of the concluding invocation to the *Elagabalus* can be identified by two repetitive statements in which the Author notes his unwillingness to talk about Elagabalus (*Elag.* 34.1, cf. *Elag.* 35.1). The first half of the invocation (*Elag.* 34.1-7) contains the note about the Author's intention to write about the Gordians and his concerns that they did not truly merit the *nomen*, while the second half (*Elag.* 35.1-7) includes the more forward-looking announcement of his intentions to write the "later lives" of *Claudian* and *Aurelian*, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

Of the two halves, the first half has more in common with the shorter and more formal Constantinian invocations in the *Gordians*, the *Maximini*, and the *Geta* because of its reference to the *nomen Antoninorum* and the *Life of the Gordians*. As Chapter Two argued, the *Maximini*, *Gordiani*, and the *Geta* were likely written around the same time or after the life of *Elagabalus* and the *Severus Alexander*, so it seems possible that the invocations in the *Maximini*, the *Gordiani*, and the *Geta*, those more directly concerned with family dynasties and the *nomen*, were added either prior or around the same time as the Author fashioned the first half of the concluding invocations to the *Life of Elagabalus*.

The second half is unique because it is the only passage where an invocation to one of the rulers directly comments on the other ruler. In the second half, the Author famously promises to compose lives of Diocletian, whom he calls a “Father of a Golden Age” (*aurei parens saeculi*), and of Maximian, whom he calls the “Father of an Age of Iron” (*parens saeculi [...] ferrei*), and to write of the “prowess” (*ius*) and “goodness” (*virtus*) of Licinius and Maxentius, the two defeated rivals of Constantine (*Elag.* 35.4-7). Like other nuances of the invocations in these lives, the favorable reference to Constantine’s rivals is thought to embarrass the leader.

As Dessau, Barnes, and many others have noted, portraying Diocletian’s reign as a golden age and praising the *virtus* of Constantine’s rivals would have been unthinkable for a historian contemporaneous with Constantine. Under Constantine, Diocletian was treated as “responsible for persecuting Christians and thus embroiling the Roman Empire in civil war and calamity,” and Licinius and Maxentius were immediately villainized after their respective defeats.<sup>68</sup> In addition, Turcan and Bonamente have argued the description of Diocletian as a “Father of a Golden Age” and Maximian as the “Father of an Age of Iron” evokes the “declining eras of metals” trope

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<sup>68</sup> Maxentius is referred to as a *tyrannus* on the Arch of Constantine, and his defeat is also depicted on the Arch’s southern façade. On the treatment of Maxentius and Licinius in the years after their defeats, see Dessau 1889: 338-339, Drake 1976: 22-30, Curran 1999: 86-90, Pohlsander 1996: 19-20, Bardill 2012: 92-93, Leadbetter 2009: 198-200, Barnes 2011: 71, Thomson 2012: 37, and Barnes 1978: 15 n. 5.

seen in Hesiod, Livy, Ovid, Seneca, and Juvenal.<sup>69</sup> If the trajectory set forth is projected into the future, the insinuation follows that those who follow Diocletian, including Constantine, can only ever but be part of a long path of decline and increasingly tawdry metals.

Because of its more forward-looking references and because of its unique comparison between the two rulers, it may suggest that this portion of the invocation was a later development after the Author had more fully developed the nuances of the comparison elsewhere. So too, as the following section shows, the “later” *Life of Aurelian* and the *Life of Claudian* share many points of overlap with the *Elagabalus*. This supports the possibility that the Author added the final half of the conclusion to the *Elagabalus* only after he had begun drafting the *Aurelian* and the *Claudius* to presage what was to come.

In any case, it is clear that the invocations were shaped by the Author’s shifting priorities and influences across the collection, and that the full nuances of the comparisons likely only gradually developed as the Author expanded his collection and found new elements for comparison. Moreover, the examination of the evidence across the collection demonstrates that the Author’s contrasting views on succession provide

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<sup>69</sup> Turcan 1993: 235 and Bonamente 2014: 56-59. The reference to Maximian as the “father of an age of iron” has also been taken as an allusion to Maximian’s reputation for severity. Cassius Dio also describes that, after the death of Marcus, the age turned to rust and iron under Commodus (Dio LXXI.36.4): see Syme 1971: 78.

the most consistent and encompassing way to interpret the invocations and the Author's contrast between Diocletian and Constantine. As the following section shows, although the invocations to Diocletian and Constantine abruptly cease following the *Life of the Three Gordians*, the Author continued to develop and refine the comparisons he was drawing between the two rulers' *virtutes* and modes of succession in the later lives of the collection.

### ***The Comparisons Continue in the Later Lives***

Although the invocations to Diocletian and Constantine abruptly cease following the *Life of the Three Gordians*, the Author did not abandon his preoccupation with the legacies of Diocletian and Constantine and his examination of the larger patterns of *boni* and *mali principes* and imperial succession in the later lives. The final two "biographers," while not addressing the rulers directly, are still connected to them. "Trebellius Pollio" addresses the *Life of the Deified Claudius* to Constantine's father, Constantius Chlorus I.<sup>70</sup> "Flavius Vopiscus" claims to derive quotes and other anecdotes about the Tetrarch from the eyewitness testimony of his father, who purportedly knew Diocletian when the emperor was still a commoner (*Aur.* 44.1-5), and of his grandfather, who claimed to be

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<sup>70</sup> The *Three Gallieni* also claims to be written during the reign of Constantius Chlorus but does not directly address him (*Gall* 7.1).

present in the assembly “when Aper was slain by the hand of Diocletian” (*Car.* 13.3).<sup>71</sup> Despite these changes, the Author continues to flatter Diocletian by depicting him as *bonus princeps*, while subtly undermining Constantine by associating him with *mali principes* and making continued references to his lineage throughout the later lives.

The clearest example of the Author’s ongoing comparison of Diocletian and Constantine is the final life of the collection, the *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*. The life is replete with references to the larger patterns of imperial succession and *boni* and *mali principes* throughout the collection. From the very beginning of the life, it is clear that the Author was reflecting on larger patterns of succession and *boni* and *mali principes* throughout the ages. The life begins with an extended preface in which the Author compares the Roman state to a ship repeatedly thrust up and down on a storm-tossed sea. The Author begins,

That it is Fate which governs the commonwealth, now exalting it to the heights and again thrusting it down to the depths, was made very clear by the death of Probus. For the state, in its course through the ages, was by turns raised up and dashed down by diverse commotions, and in the changes wrought now by some tempest and again by a time of prosperity, it suffered well nigh all the ills that human life may suffer in the lifetime of a single man. (*Car.* 1.1-2)

*Fato rem publicam regi eamque nunc ad summum evehi, nunc ad minima retrahi Probi mors satis prodidit. nam cum ducta per tempora variis vel erecta motibus*

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<sup>71</sup> The convention of citing one’s grandfather has been traced to Suetonius in *Otho* 10.1 and *Cal* 19.3. The *HA* also cites the fathers or grandfathers of the biographers as a source in: *Tyr. Trig.* 25.3, *Aur.* 43.2, *Quad Tyr.* 9.4, and *Car.* 14.1-3, 15.1 and 15.5. See Rohrbacher 2016: 50-53 for more on the connection between Suetonius and the *HA*, including the trope of autopsy.

*vel adflicta, nunc tempestate aliqua nunc felicitate variata omnia prope passa  
esset quae patitur in homine uno mortalitas.*

Thus describing the course of the Empire as a cyclical pattern in which periods of prosperity are followed by periods of decline, the Author traces the rise and fall of Rome “from the origin of the city” (*ab ortu urbis*). The Author identifies periods of prosperity throughout the Republic and under Augustus and Vespasian, and periods of strife and suffering, described as “shipwrecks” (*naufragii*), during the civil wars and under Nero, Titus, and Domitian (*Car.* 2.1-6).

When the Author reaches the eras and emperors discussed in the *Historia Augusta*, his assessments reinforce the patterns of *boni principes* found in the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. The Author remarks that the state

was happier than had been its wont under Nerva and Trajan and his successors as far as Marcus, but was sorely stricken by the madness and cruelty of Commodus. Thereafter, save for the diligent care of [Septimius] Severus, it knew naught that was good until [Severus] Alexander, the son of Mamaea. (*Car.* 3.3-4)

*per Nervam atque Traianum usque ad Marcum solito melior, Commodi vecordia  
et crudelitate lacerata est. nihil post haec praeter Severi diligentiam usque ad  
Alexandrum Mamaeae sensit bonum.*

Following Severus Alexander, the Author states that little good came to the Empire until Probus, who ruled “in accordance with the wish of the senate and people” (*Car.* 1.1-2).

Therefore, the passage reinforces that the Antonines, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius

Severus, and Probus—those associated with Diocletian<sup>72</sup>—are associated with periods of prosperity, while all those associated with Constantine apart from Severus Alexander—Geta, Elagabalus, the Gordians, and the Maximini—are relegated to periods of decline. Thus, as Burgersdijk notes, the alternation of *boni* and *mali principes* established throughout the collection are subsumed within the prefaces' description of alternating periods of prosperity and decline.<sup>73</sup>

When the Author turns to consider Carus (*r.* 282-283), and his two sons, Numerian (*r.* 283-284 CE) and Carinus (*r.* 282-285), the Author establishes that this family dynasty too falls under the pattern of decline. He immediately evokes many of the lessons about sons and inheritance from earlier in the collection by stating that Carus was “one to be ranked with the good rather than the evil princes” (*inter bonos magis quam inter malos principes*). The Author also notes that Carus would have been “a better ruler by far had he not left Carinus to be his heir” (*Car.* 3.8, cf. 9.4). Parallels with the plight of Septimius Severus' sons, Caracalla and Geta, also come to mind, as the Author describes how the empire is left at the mercy of Carinus after the premature death of his brother, Numerian, at the hands of a family member, his father-in-law Aper (*Car.* 12.1-2).

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<sup>72</sup> Bonamente and Burgersdijk have noted that Diocletian is named as one of the “most illustrious generals” trained by Probus, who is repeatedly called a *bonus princeps* (*Prob.* 12.2, 22.1-23.5) and is said to possess all of the qualities of Aurelian, Severus Alexander, the Antonines, Trajan, and Claudius (*Prob.* 12.1-2). Diocletian was regularly praised for his sound military strategy (*Eutr. Brev.* 9.26). For more on Probus as a *bonus princeps*, see Burgersdijk 2013: 301-309.

<sup>73</sup> Burgersdijk 2013: 305, 310 also notes the alternation of good and bad emperors.

Carinus was often depicted harshly in works of the fourth century, but the Author goes out of his way to depict Carinus as the paradigmatic *malus princeps* throughout the life.<sup>74</sup> Descriptions of Carinus' disrespect for the senate, sexual indulgences, ostentatious banquets, and bathing habits mirror those of Elagabalus (*Car.* 17.1-5). Carinus is described as "the most polluted of men, an adulterer and a constant corrupter of youth" (*homo omnium contaminatissimus, adulter, frequens corruptor iuventutis*), whereas Elagabalus is called "the most impure of all men" (*homo omnium impurissimus*) (*Car.* 16.1, cf. *Diad.* 9.5). In direct contradiction to the repeated warnings against the dangerous influence of debased friends on rulers, Carinus is said to have "defiled himself by unwonted vices and inordinate depravity," and to have "set aside all the best among his friends and retained or picked out all the vilest" (*Car.* 16.1-3). Like Elagabalus, he is said to fill the imperial palace with "actors and harlots, pantomimists, singers and pimps," and grant "favours most of all to the base" (*Car.* 17.2).<sup>75</sup>

The *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian* has a pivotal difference from the *Life of Elagabalus*, however. Whereas the Author laments at the end of the *Life of Elagabalus* that no one arose to overthrow the tyranny of Elagabalus sooner (*Elag.* 34.1), in the *Carus*,

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<sup>74</sup> Carus and Carinus are also critiqued in other contemporary works: see *Eutr. Brev.* 9.20 and *Jul. Caes.* 315.

<sup>75</sup> Carinus is particularly criticized for appointing his doorkeeper city prefect, which is said to be "a baser act than which no one can conceive or relate" and he is reported to have murdered the prefect of the guard so that he could replace him with Matronianus, said to be his procurer and "accomplice and assistant in debaucheries and lusts" (*Car.* 16.5-6).

*Carinus, and Numerian*, Diocletian arises as a *bonus princeps* to defeat the *malus* Carinus. While Carinus is said to be wallowing in depravity, Diocletian is described as the “most just avenger” (*vindex Numeriani iustissimus*) of Carinus’ brother Numerian, who was assassinated due to the machinations of his father-in-law Aper (*Car.* 13.1). The life describes how, after Aper’s treachery was discovered, the soldiers were asked, “who could be given to the commonwealth as a *bonus princeps*” (*quis daretur rei publicae bonus princeps*). The life records that “all, with a heaven-sent unanimity, conferred the title of Augustus on Diocletian” (*Car.* 13.1), thus confirming Diocletian’s status as a *bonus princeps* from the very first moment of his rule.

Compared to other accounts of Diocletian’s rise to power, the Author goes out of his way to describe Diocletian as embodying qualities that affirm his place alongside Marcus Aurelius as one of the *boni principes*.<sup>76</sup> The life describes Diocletian as “indispensable to the state” (*Car.* 10.1) and as “an outstanding man and wise, devoted to the commonwealth, devoted to his kindred, duly prepared to face whatever the occasion demanded” (*Car.* 13.1). The life also cites the eyewitness testimony of Vopiscus’ grandfather to note that Diocletian regretted the necessity of executing Aper. The life records that Diocletian “would not have wished to become known for such cruelty, especially in the first few days of his power, if Fate had not impelled him to this brutal

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<sup>76</sup> In contrast to the *HA*’s effusive praise, Victor notes only that Diocletian “was elected for his wisdom” (*Caes.* 39, cf. also *Eutr.* 9.20).

act of murder" (*Car.* 15.1). Diocletian's restraint mirrors Marcus Aurelius' mercy to those involved in the rebellion led by Avidius Cassius.<sup>77</sup>

Indeed, no small part of this life is dedicated to Diocletian's *bonitas*: roughly ten of the twenty-one chapters of the *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian* are devoted to Diocletian's rise to power. Within this account, the Author is careful to underscore the difference between Diocletian and his *malus* foe. Compared to the lavishness of Carinus and his family, Diocletian is said to be "most sparing in his liberality" (*Car.* 20.1) and to have remarked that while festivals and banquets "have a certain charm for the populace, they are of no importance in a good emperor" (*nullius sunt momenti apud principes bonos*) (*Car.* 20.1).<sup>78</sup> Because of the collection's repeated references to the superiority of *boni principes*, it comes as no surprise that Diocletian's *bonitas* and care for the empire allows him to overcome Carinus in battle at the Margus River, thus purging the empire of another scourge of a failed family dynasty (*Car.* 18.1-2).

With this success, the Author describes that Diocletian ushered in a time of prosperity under the Tetrarchs. Reflecting on the arrangement, the Author lauds the Tetrarchs for many other qualities attributed to *boni principes* throughout the series:

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<sup>77</sup> Victor notes that Diocletian pardoned many of those implicated in Numerian's death due to services for the state (*Aur. Vict. Caes.* 39.13).

<sup>78</sup> The Author's disapproval of lavish spending and games is further emphasized at the end of the *Carus*, and criticism of similar frivolities can be found in Ammianus: see Syme 1968: 195.

Here was the end of the three princes, Carus, Numerian, and Carinus, after whom the gods gave us Diocletian and Maximian to be our princes, joining to these great men Galerius and Constantius [...]. Four rulers, indeed, of the world were they, brave, wise, kindly, and wholly generous, all of one mind towards the commonwealth, very respectful to the Roman senate, moderate, friends of the people, revered, earnest, and pious, and in fact, such emperors as we have always prayed for. (*Car.* 18.3-5)

*Hic trium principum fuit finis, Cari, Numeriani et Carini. post quos Diocletianum et Maximianum principes di dederunt, iungentes talibus viris Galerium atque Constantium [...]. quattuor sane principes mundi fortes, sapientes, benigni et admodum liberales, unum in rem publicam sentientes, perreverentes Romani senatus, moderati, populi amici, persancti, graves, religiosi, et quales principes semper oravimus.*

Thus, he depicts tetrarchs as *boni principes* and portrays the peace and prosperity of their reign as the fruition of the promise of adoption and harmonious shared rule, discussed as early as the *Life of Aelius* and the *Life of Marcus Aurelius*.

No other fourth-century account presents such a favorable account of Diocletian and the Tetrarchy. In other fourth-century accounts, Galerius, Maximian, Licinius, and Maxentius were decried as cruel, savage, headstrong, meddlesome, uncouth, violent, and prone to sexual debauchery (Euseb. *Hist. eccl.* 10.8.1-9, 9.2, Lactant. *De mort. pers.* 9.9, Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.17, 39.24, 39.46, 40.12-13, 40.18-41, Eutr. 9.27, 10.3, Jul. *Caes.* 315, *Epit. de Caes.* 10.14). Diocletian was also frequently depicted as a domineering leader who treated his co-rulers with undue insolence and exacted disproportionately severe punishments for military setbacks (Eutr. *Brev.* 9.24-25, Festus 25, Amm. Marc. 14.11.10,

cf. Aur. Vict. 39.29, 39.36).<sup>79</sup> While Eutropius, Festus, and Victor all described the division of the empire as a practical solution to external threats, they also emphasized the fragility of the political arrangement and blamed the dissolution of the Tetrarchy on the distrust and disloyalty among its members (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.24-25, 30, 46-48, Eutr. *Brev.* 9.22; Festus, *Brev.* 25, Jul. *Caes.* 315).

Since the Tetrarchs represented an extension of Diocletian's reign and the *Historia Augusta* seems to desire to favor Diocletian at all cost, one can understand why the Author willfully omitted any negative details that would undermine his praise of Diocletian and his *virtus*. Indeed, the desire to depict the Tetrarchs as uncompromised *boni principes* and an example of harmonious shared rule may help explain why the Author foregoes his plan, announced in the *Elagabalus* and the *Probus*, to devote individual lives to Diocletian and the other Tetrarchs (*Elag.* 35.4-6, *Prob.* 1.3-5, cf. *Car.* 18.35).<sup>80</sup> By concluding the series without individual lives of the Tetrarchs, the Author is able to avoid addressing the less savory aspects of their reputations that would have

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<sup>79</sup> Several historians also expressed unease about Diocletian's pretensions to regal powers and the ostentatious dress assumed by him and the other Tetrarchs (Eutr. *Brev.* 9.26; Amm. Marc. 15.5.18). The unusually luxurious clothing and regal trappings of the Tetrarchs are addressed as early as the *Panegyrici Latini* X(2) 3.1-2, which was presented to Maximian at Trier on 21 April 289. On Diocletian's penchant for regal dress, see also Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.3 and Eutr. 9.26. Possible allusions to Diocletian's penchant for jewels and fine dyes can be found in the *HA* (*Aur.* 29.3), but these are described as passing observations about origins of various jewels and fabrics used in the ornamentation of emperors without any overt tones of criticism.

<sup>80</sup> In contrast, the Author never had the intention to write an individual life of Constantine, claiming he will leave his tale to the "more eloquent pages of those to whom a more kindly nature has granted this boon" (*Elag.* 35.4-5).

complicated their depiction as *boni principes*. So too, foregoing individual lives also allowed him to avoid addressing the political infighting that led to the Tetrarchy's violent dissolution. Therefore, Diocletian and the Tetrarchs could serve as the Author's final harmonious example of his aspirations for shared rule throughout the collection.<sup>81</sup>

In light of the cyclical pattern described in the preface, wherein periods of prosperity are always followed by periods of strife and decline, this glorification of the Tetrarchs as a period of prosperity also had ominous implications for Constantine. By establishing the Tetrarchs as a period of prosperity, the Author's pattern implied that the following era—that of Constantine—would be necessarily a period of decline, just as the eras of the metals suggested in the conclusion of the *Life of Elagabalus*.<sup>82</sup> Although Constantine is not directly evoked in the *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*, several elements implicate him in the narrative of this family dynasty nonetheless. First, the many allusions to the *Elagabalus* and the failings of Carinus to choose appropriate companions calls to mind Constantine's own association with pernicious advisors.

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<sup>81</sup> Avoiding details of their deaths was also an important motivation, because their deaths in other works were taken as confirmation of their lack of virtue. For example, in Lactantius and Eusebius, Galerius' suffers a horrible death as punishment for his role in the detention of Constantine and his role in persecutions; see Leadbetter 2009: 24.

<sup>82</sup> The implication that Diocletian then stood as a brief golden age between the tyranny of Carinus and the decline of Constantine may provide further explanation for Diocletian's association with the *Life of Macrinus*. Macrinus similarly served as a respite between two periods of tyranny represented by Carcaalla and Elagabalus.

Furthermore, the Author also reports an invented rumor that Carus had considered stripping Carinus of his position as Caesar when he had learned the depth of his son's debauched ways, and naming Constantine's father Constantius Chlorus as his successor instead (*Car.* 17.6).<sup>83</sup> Although the rumor again flatters Constantius Chlorus, Carus' wish to strip his son of imperial power fundamentally concerns yet another father's regret at his decision to bequeath the empire to an unworthy son.<sup>84</sup> Considering that the life again serves as a cautionary tale of hereditary succession, the reference may therefore have been designed to call to mind Constantius Chlorus' impending disappointment in Constantine or to allude to the failures of Constantine's sons. Thus, the depiction reinforces that Constantine was fated to fail to live up to the legacy of those who preceded him twice over—both as son who takes up his father's inheritance, and again as a ruler who follows a *bonus princeps* and a golden age.

Although the culmination of the Author's comparison of Diocletian and Constantine is found in the *Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*, comparisons weave throughout the "later" portion of the collection. Many of them suggest that the Author was actively returning to elements of the invocation passages in the "intermediate" and "secondary" lives in order to build upon the comparisons established there. For

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<sup>83</sup> Syme 1971: 219 confirms that no other source repeats the rumor, suggesting it was the Author's invention.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Marcus Aurelius' deathbed proclamation of his regret at leaving the empire to Commodus (*Marc.* 27.11-12, 28.10).

example, the *Life of Aurelian* praises Diocletian in a passage that bears many striking similarities to the concluding invocation in the *Severus Alexander*, in which the Author lectures Constantine about the dangers of consorting with eunuchs.

In the *Life of Aurelian*, the Author turns to discuss *boni principes* and “what it is that makes emperors evil” (*quae res malos principes faciat*) (*Aur.* 43.1) in the context of the senate’s search for a replacement after Aurelian’s death. In nearly identical language to the counsel “Lampridius” gives Constantine in the *Severus Alexander*, the Author states that *mali principes* are often caused by “unscrupulous friends, pernicious attendants, the greediest eunuchs, [and] courtiers who are fools or knaves” (*amici praeterea improbi, satellites detestandi, eunuchi avarissimi, aulici vel stulti vel detestabiles*) (*Aur.* 43.1). The Author also reiterates his concern from the *Severus Alexander* that an emperor who falls prey to such advisors becomes “shut up in his palace, unable to know the truth. He is forced to know only what his advisors tell him” and as a result nominates corrupt men for powerful positions (*Aur.* 43.4, cf. *Sev. Alex.* 66.3).

In contrast to the *Severus Alexander*, where Constantine is construed as lacking the wisdom to avoid associating with eunuchs (*Sev. Alex.* 66.1-7), in the *Aurelian* Diocletian is praised for possessing the wisdom to avoid such figures. Citing the eyewitness testimony of his father, “Vopiscus” reports that Diocletian was known to remark that “nothing was harder than to rule well” (*dixisse nihil esse difficilius quam bene imperare*) and to warn others against such advisors, saying, “the favour of even a good

and wise and righteous emperor is often sold" (*ut Diocletianus ipse dicebat, bonus, cautus, optimus, venditur imperator*) (*Aur.* 43.3-5). Thus, not only does the passage directly evoke the theme of *boni principes* and the lessons of the *Severus Alexander*, it also aligns Diocletian with the likes of Severus Alexander and Marcus Aurelius, both said to have the foresight to choose upstanding companions and rule well (*Sev. Alex.* 66.2, *Marc.* 12.2), and with the other *boni principes* listed at the beginning of the passage including Augustus, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Septimius Severus, and the Deified Aurelian (*Aur.* 42.3-6). Diocletian's warning also mirrors the Author's comment in the *Elagabalus* that pernicious advisors "often sell the reputation of not only bad but also even of good princes" (*famam non solum malorum sed et bonorum principum vendunt*) (*Elag.* 10.4). This again suggests that the Author was reflecting on the negative example set by Elagabalus in which Constantine was implicated.

This contrast between Diocletian and Constantine is again underscored by another reference to Constantine's lineage. The Author reports that a Druidic priestess once prophesied to Aurelian that no imperial family

would have a name more illustrious in the commonwealth than the descendants of Claudius. And, in fact, Constantius is now our emperor, a man of Claudius' blood, whose descendants, I ween, will attain to that glory which the Druids foretold. (*Aur.* 44.4-5)

*nullius clarius in re publica nomen quam Claudii posteriorum futurum. et est quidem iam Constantius imperator, eiusdem vir sanguinis, cuius puto posteros ad eam gloriam quae a Druiadibus pronuntiata sit pervenire.*

Although this omen, like the references to Claudius and Constantius in the *Life of Elagabalus*, has often been interpreted as affirmation of Constantine's glory,<sup>85</sup> the passage is couched in skepticism. The Author prefaces the omen with the phrase "it may perhaps seem amazing" (*mirabile fortasse videtur*) and the less-than-conclusive assertion that "concerning this matter, posterity will be the judge" (*sed de hoc posterī iudicabunt*) (*Aur.* 44.3). This hedging, while not unusual for omens in the *Historia Augusta*, does signal that the validity of the omen is open for debate amongst his readers, perhaps with the implication again that the reader should doubt the foretold greatness of Constantine's line.

References to Constantine's lineage also arise in the *Life of the Deified Claudius*. Like the other references to his lineage earlier in the collection, this life has largely been read as confirmation of the Author's deference for Constantine's ancestors.<sup>86</sup> The life as a whole is very complimentary to Claudius Gothicus' merits as a ruler, depicting him as a *bonus princeps* who possessed "the valour of Trajan, the righteousness of Antoninus, the self-restraint of Augustus, and the good qualities of all the great emperors" (*in quo Traiani virtus, Antonini pietas, Augusti moderatio, et magnorum principum bona sic fuerunt*) (*Claud.* 2.3).<sup>87</sup> The *Life of Claudius* also includes an omen in which Claudius is promised

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<sup>85</sup> Bonamente 2014: 59-60.

<sup>86</sup> Bonamente 2014: 60-63.

<sup>87</sup> See Burgersdijk 2013: 301-304 on the panegyric nature of Claudius.

that his descendants will continue to “rule as monarchs, and make their children into monarchs also” (*regnabunt etenim tui minores et reges facient suos minores*). “Pollio” claims to record the omen, so that it would “be clear to all that Constantius, scion of a family divinely appointed, our most venerated Caesar, himself springs from a house of Augusti and will give us, likewise, many Augusti of his own” (*quae idcirco posui ut sit omnibus clarum Constantium, divini generis virum, sanctissimum Caesarem, et Augustae ipsum familiae esse et Augustos multos de se daturum*) (*Claud.* 10.3-4, 7).

Although this omen, like those above, has been read as an acknowledgement of the future glory and success of Constantine’s house, one should be suspicious of a literal reading. Although the omen states that Constantius will “give the world *Augusti*,” the passage repeatedly notes that the *Augusti* of Constantius’ lineage will rule as *reges* (“kings”). Considering the Author’s support for shared rule and senatorial power, and his ongoing concerns about hereditary succession, references to *reges* and monarchy can be read as another subtle way to undermine Constantine’s dynastic pretensions. So too, the overtly panegyric tone of the life, noted by Adams and Burgersdijk, makes the life’s contents and the Author’s intentions suspect. As the following chapter demonstrates, the Author repeatedly expresses his wariness and concern that panegyrics

do not accurately represent emperors (e.g., *Pesc. Nig.* 11.5-6), so his use of the style here may again be a pointed means of undermining the veracity of its contents.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, while subtle references to religion can be detected throughout the lives, such as when the Author states that the Tetrarchs “were pious emperors, such emperors as we have prayed for” (*religiosi, et quales principes semper oravimus*), the Author’s repeated references to Diocletian and Constantine’s *virtus* and the precedents they set for succession suggest that the Author saw them as far more than standard bearers of different religions.<sup>89</sup> Instead, Diocletian and Constantine held a much more prominent place in the Author’s larger conception of the interwoven patterns of *boni* and *mali principes* on whose shoulders rested the prosperity or downfall of the Empire.

## ***Conclusion***

As this discussion has shown, while Diocletian’s and Constantine’s religious leanings were undoubtedly subsumed within their depictions in the fourth century and beyond, the depiction of the two rulers in the *Historia Augusta* is far more concerned with the precedents they set for imperial legitimacy and the ideal virtues emperors should hold. So too, this discussion has demonstrated that the invocations were not

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<sup>88</sup> On the panegyric mode of the life, see Adams 2012: 36-7 and Burgersdijk 2013: 290, 311.

<sup>89</sup> Bonamente 2014: 56-57.

established merely as a way to compare Diocletian and Constantine or to humorously parody contemporary tropes of imperial dedications. Instead, like the biographer *personae*, the invocations also served an integral historiographic purpose. They impressed onto the collection greater thematic cohesion concerning the distinctions between *boni* and *mali principes* and imperial succession.

By endowing Diocletian and Constantine with such a prominent place throughout the collection, the Author used the legacy of the two figures to engage with the ongoing debate over the consequences of the Tetrarchy's fall and the rise of Constantine earlier in the fourth century, and to illustrate larger patterns in imperial history. It is true that the full nuances of these comparisons are left for the attentive reader to decipher across the collection. On the other hand, the multifaceted nature of this comparison and its constant presence across the *Historia Augusta* again testify to the careful craftsmanship with which the Author has constructed his collection.

As to the origins of the Author's distrust of hereditary succession, the fourth century saw a string of monarchical family dynasties with whom the Author may have taken umbrage, as den Hengst, Cameron, and others have argued.<sup>90</sup> The Author's anxiety with *pueri principes* has largely been attributed to his disapproval with the choices of Gratian, Valentinian, and Theodosius to leave the Empire to their sons. As the

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<sup>90</sup> On the Author's concern for *pueri principes*, see Hartke 1951, den Hengst 1981: 12, Paschoud 1996: 269-275, Grey 2010: 90-91, Bonamente 2014: 67-8, and Rohrbacher 2016: 158-169.

following chapter demonstrates, these family dynasties were characterized by endemic infighting and attempted usurpations throughout the fourth century. This contemporary political climate may have spurred on the Author's concerns about the stability of these dynasties and contributed to his apparent desire for more stable collegial rule, which the Antonines and Tetrarchy represented.

The Author's pessimism about the inherent instability of family dynasties should not be taken as proof that the Author was completely disheartened about the future of the Empire, however. Although Bonamente has suggested that the Author saw the changes made by Constantine as the beginning of an "irreversible deterioration,"<sup>91</sup> the Author's description of imperial history as a cycle of revolving periods of prosperity and strife suggests that the Author also had hope that a better epoch would again grace the Empire in the future.

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<sup>91</sup> Bonamente 2014: 58-59.

## Chapter 5 Giving Voice to an Untold History: The Invented Documents and Speeches in the Lives of the Usurpers

Alongside its biographies of legitimate emperors and their heirs, five of the *Historia Augusta's* thirty biographies cover the lives of thirty-nine men and women who attempted and failed to seize imperial power. Three of these five lives consider individuals who fought for power in the second century: the *Life of Avidius Cassius*, who rose in insurrection in 175 CE against Marcus Aurelius (r. 161-180 CE), and the *Life of Pescennius Niger* and the *Life of Clodius Albinus*, two contenders who fell to Septimius Severus (r. 193-211 CE) during the political upheaval following the death of Pertinax in the years 193-197 CE.<sup>1</sup> Two further lives, the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* and the *Life of the Four Tyrants*, collectively discuss an additional thirty-six individuals who reportedly rebelled under Gallienus (r. 253-268 CE),<sup>2</sup> Maximinus Thrax (235-238 CE), Claudius Gothicus (268-270 CE), Aurelian (270-275 CE), and Probus (276-282 CE).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the political struggles of this period, known as the year of the five emperors, see Bowman 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Gallienus ruled jointly with his father 253-260, with his brother Saloninus in 260, and alone from 260-268: see Potter 2004, Southern 2001, and Bray 1997.

<sup>3</sup> The *Thirty Tyrants* discusses the lives of not thirty but thirty-two individuals. The Author admits to including accounts of Titus and Censorinus who did not rebel under Gallienus but instead under Maximus and Claudius (*Tyr. Trig.* 31.7-12). On the political instability of the third century, see de Blois 2006: 25-36.

In choosing “to set down in writing the lives of all who have held the imperial title whether rightfully or without right” (*Av. Cass.* 3.3),<sup>4</sup> the Author broke with biographical tradition. By including independent lives of usurpers and heirs in his collection, the Author was, as he acknowledges, consciously diverting from his biographical models Suetonius and Marius Maximus, who had either covered usurpers merely “in passing” (*cursim*) or “joined them to the lives of others” (*alienis innexuit*) (*Quad. Tyr.* 1.1).<sup>5</sup> This innovation appears to have been of some import to the Author, since in other lives, even those not strictly devoted to challengers, he prides himself on devoting greater attention to usurpers than his predecessors.<sup>6</sup> Compared to other extant accounts of the fourth century, the choice to devote one-sixth of the entire work to these obscure villains of Roman history was unprecedented.<sup>7</sup> Considering that the bulk of

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<sup>4</sup> *Avid. Cass.* 3.3: *Proposui enim [...] omnes qui imperatorum nomen sive iusta causa sive iniusta habuerunt, in litteras mittere.*

<sup>5</sup> On the innovation of adding lives of co-emperors, heirs, and usurpers to the biographical genre, see Thomson 2012: 22 and Pausch 2010: 126-130.

<sup>6</sup> The Author also mentions his decision to record all figures whether they be “emperors, usurpers or Caesars” in the *Macrinus* and *Aelius* (*Macr.* 1.1, cf. *Ael.* 1.1, *Ael.* 7.5).

<sup>7</sup> Ammianus’ account of Procopius’ doomed attempts at the purple is the only extant prose Latin account to rival the *Historia Augusta*’s coverage of a single usurper (26.5.8-26.9.11). References suggest that the *Res Gestae* at one time included a lengthy account of Magnentius’ revolt against Constantius II as well, although only one chapter on the punishments inflicted upon his supporters remains in the extant books (14.5.1-9). Two lost poetic compositions also appear to have been devoted to usurpation attempts. Although better known for her Christian poems, Faltonia Betitia Proba, the wife of Clodius Celsinus Adelphus, wrote a cento celebrating Constantius II’s victory over Magnentius in 351 entitled *Constantini bellum adversus Magnentium*. She appears to have ordered the cento to be destroyed upon her death: see Cameron 2011: 327-337, 365, Fassina 2006: 261-272, and Lizzi Testa 2004: 118-119. Ausonius seems to have written a poem concerning the usurpers from Decius to Diocletian as well. Only the title, *De imperatoribus res novas molitis*, has been found

these lives is built on fiction, however, scholars have been suspicious of the motivations behind the *Historia Augusta's* more "substantial" coverage of these men.

Even within a collection known for its unreliability, the lives of the usurpers hold a particularly "evil repute" for their spuriousness.<sup>8</sup> The lives of Avidius Cassius, Pecennius Niger, and Clodius Albinus are considered largely redundant expansions of the lives of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus, adding little authentic information and repeating passages from the "primary" lives nearly verbatim.<sup>9</sup> Despite the Author's repeated reassurances that the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* is full of "an abundance of facts" (*maxime tanta rerum copia*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 11.7) or that he intends to record only deeds that were "worthy of remembering" (*digna memoratu*) in the *Life of the Four Tyrants* (*Quad. Tyr.* 6.1), both lives stretch credibility in myriad ways. Only nine of the thirty-two usurpers in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* are undeniably authentic usurpers who rebelled under Gallienus; many others are misattributed to his reign or are outright fictitious.<sup>10</sup>

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in a Renaissance catalogue: see Cameron 2011: 403-5 and Thomson 2012: 66 on possible content or bias of Ausonius' poem.

<sup>8</sup> Syme 1968: 176 says regarding the secondary lives: "as a class these *Vitae* enjoy and deserve an evil repute." See also Brandt 2006: 13 -23 and Drinkwater 2005: 65-66 on the fictions in the later lives of the usurpers.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Marc.* 25.5-26.1, 26.10-13 and *Av. Cass.* 8.2-9.4.

<sup>10</sup> Of the thirty-two usurpers, only nine are thought to be undeniably authentic usurpers who rebelled under Gallienus: Postumus (258-268), Laelianus (269), Marius (269), Ingenuus (258), Regalianus (258?), Aureolus (268), and Macrianus and his two sons (260-261). Others are misattributed to his reign: Valens "Superior" rebelled in the time of Decius and Victorinus, and Tetricus in the time of Claudius and Aurelian

The two collective lives also feature such fantastical tales as that Regalianus was raised to the purple after a schoolmaster insisted his name declined from "*rex, regis, regi, Regalianus*" (*Tyr. Trig.* 10.3-8), or that Firmus, who reportedly rebelled against Aurelian, swam among the crocodiles of the Nile and later rode a hippo and large ostriches (*Quad. Tyr.* 6.1).<sup>11</sup>

Much of their ill repute, however, can be traced to the fact that these lives are inseparable from discussions of the Author's use of fabricated documents. While fabricated documents are found in numerous lives of the *Historia Augusta*, such documents and sources are particularly prevalent in the lives of the usurpers. Together, these lives feature some four-dozen examples of fabricated imperial correspondence, transcripts of official speeches, *senatus consulta*, inscriptions, and even "eyewitness" accounts from which the Author purports to quote verbatim.<sup>12</sup>

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instead of Gallienus. Another seven may not have assumed the purple: Cyriades, Odaenathus, Maeonius, Ballista, Valens, Piso, and Aemilianus. Several are thought to be completely fictitious, including Saturninus, Trebellianus, Celsus, Censorinus: see Magie 1934: 148 n. 1, Syme 1968: 47-48, 54-58, and Grey 2010: 95. All the inventions may not have originated with the Author of the *HA*, however. The apochryphal Trebellianus seems to have "already made an appearance in the tradition of Eutropius before it occurred in the *Tyranni Triginta*": see Thomson 2012: 34 n. 71.

<sup>11</sup> For more on the names and puns in these lives, see Syme 1968: 157, 168. On doubts about the authenticity of the Firmus described in the *Four Tyrants*, see Syme 1968: 55 n. 3, Rohrbacher 2016: 35.

<sup>12</sup> The *Avidius Cassius* includes ten letters (1.6-9, 2.1-8, 5.4-8, 5.9-12, 9.6-8, 9.11-12, 10.1-10, 11.2-8, 12.1-10, 14.2-8) and a lengthy quotation of a decree of the senate (13.1-5). The *Pescennius Niger* includes excerpts of three letters (3.9-12, 4.1-3, 4.4), paraphrases the content of several others (7.2-6), and includes a long quote of Niger's epitaph (12.6-8). The *Clodius Albinus* incorporates seven letters (2.1-5, 4.6-7, 7.3-6, 10.6-8, 10.9-12, 12.5-12, 14.3-5), two extended speeches (3.3, 13.5-10). The *Thirty Tyrants* includes quotations of six purported

Scholars have posited that such pseudo-sources were first devised to “pad” the *Avidius Cassius*, *Pescennius Niger*, and *Clodius Albinus*, about whom the Author appeared to have little information beyond what was already included in the lives of Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus. Then, having devised this stratagem, the Author continued to flaunt his access to such rare sources across the course of the collection. These pseudo-sources are often thought to reach their fullest culmination of frivolity and spuriousness in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* and the *Four Tyrants*, seeing that at least one letter appears designed merely to allow “Aurelian” to outline the gifts he wished to give Bonosus, who later rebelled against Probus in 280-281 CE, on the occasion of his wedding (*Quad. Tyr.* 15.5-8).<sup>13</sup> Indeed, some have even argued that the Author was drawn to writing about usurpers and figures “about whom little was known” specifically because their obscurity presented “opportunities for his inventive fictions.”<sup>14</sup>

Since the documents are thought to originate and evolve to their fullest extent across the five “usurper” lives, these lives present an opportunity to reassess the origins

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letters (3.9-11, 9.6-9, 10.10-12, 12.15-18, 18.5-10, 30.5-12) and paraphrases the contents of another (*Tyr. Trig.* 18.11). The *Thirty Tyrants* also purports to quote from two speeches (8.8-13, 21.4) and lengthy transcripts of two exchanges (12.4-11, 30.23). The *Four Tyrants* features excerpts of four letters (5.3-6, 8.1-10, 12.7, 15.6-8), a transcript of one long speech (9.4-10.3), and two inscriptions (7.2, 33.5).

<sup>13</sup> Syme 1968: 55-56 describes the Author as “playing games” with a new “boldness and variety of deceptions” in these later lives.

<sup>14</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 171.

and evolution of the fabricated sources across the collection. While many have seen these lives and their documents as the epitome of the *Historia Augusta's* inventive and parodic agenda, I instead argue that, as in the cases of the “biographers” and the imperial invocations, the Author systematically designs and deploys the documents across his lives for a series of historiographic and historical purposes. By examining the content of the invented letters and how they are integrated into each biography, this chapter illustrates that the vast majority of the documents in the five lives encourage sympathetic interpretations of usurpers’ merits and motives and systematically undermine adverse accounts of these figures found in other third- and fourth-century sources.

Because the Author’s sympathetic portrait of usurpers is unusual for his time, at the end of the chapter I examine the political context of Rome in the fourth century for possible explanations for the Author’s uncommon views. By analyzing evidence from within the *Historia Augusta* and the political climate of the fourth century, I conclude that the *Historia Augusta's* sympathetic treatment of usurpers reflects the political disillusionment of a generation who had witnessed the unpredictability of usurpations first hand.

## *Unfulfilled Potential: the Merits and Motivations of Usurpers*

Although the Author makes the unusual decision to devote one-sixth of his collection to usurpers, usurpers' potential for sensationalism and scandal perhaps makes it unsurprising that the Author, inclined to the scandalous and the excessive, was drawn to writing about these famously villainous figures. As F. Paschoud and T. Grünewald have argued, by the late fourth century these figures had become associated with "a profusion of patently clichéd attributes."<sup>15</sup> While in panegyrics and monuments of the time those who defeated them were praised as "suppressors," "destroyers of noxious tyrants," and "promoters of the public security," usurpers were condemned as "brigands," "pirates," and "executioners," who were blind to the bloodshed and chaos they inflicted upon the state in their selfish pursuit of power.<sup>16</sup>

The sentiments and wording from these official speeches and monuments often found their way into other accounts of the time. Aurelius Victor, for example, described the usurper Maxentius as an "inhuman beast, made more abominable by his excessive

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<sup>15</sup> See Grünewald 2004: 84-96 and Paschoud 1997: 92-96.

<sup>16</sup> Grünewald 2004: 82 states that Pacatus, in a single panegyric to Theodosius I, described Magnus Maximus as an "'executioner', 'brute beast', 'public enemy,' 'mugger,' 'bandit', 'pirate', 'carpet-bagger' and 'gladiator' (*carnifex, belua, malum publicum, praedo, latro, pirate, spoliator, gladiator*)."<sup>16</sup> On Pacatus' speech, see also Lunn-Rockcliffe 2010. Similar language can be found in inscriptions from the time. *CIL* VI 1158, dedicated in 352/353 by the urban prefect in honor of the victory over the usurper Magnus Magnentius, hails emperor Constantius II as a "restorer of the Roman city and the whole world" and as *extinctor pestiferae tyrannidis*, "a suppressor of the noxious tyrant." In similar language, *CIL* VI 3791b commemorates Arcadius also as *extinctor tyrannorum ac auctor publicae securitatis*, a "destroyer of tyrants and a promoter of the public security." Imperial censorship of rivals' legacies is a tradition that can be traced as early as Augustus' treatment of Marc Antony in the *Res Gestae*.

lust," a man who was "responsible for the indiscriminate murder of many" (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 40).<sup>17</sup> Ammianus similarly calls Procopius a "disturber of the public peace," and portrays Procopius' rebellion as the inevitable outcome of a brash desire for power, describing it as "laughable," "rashly and blindly begun" from his first taste of royal power (26.6.1).

The Author evokes many of these stereotypes and caricatures in his ruminations on usurpers' gory excesses and notoriety for malice. In the *Life of Avidius Cassius*, for instance, the Author lingers over reports that Cassius doled out savage punishments to his troops. The Author states that Cassius punished deserters by amputating their arms or legs and crucified centurions who demanded bounty prices higher than originally agreed upon (*Av. Cass.* 4.1-5.1).<sup>18</sup> Victorinus, who claimed power in Gaul during the reign of Gallienus, is likewise disparaged for his lustful ways and for spending his time "seducing the wives of his soldiers and officers" (*Tyr. Trig.* 6.3).<sup>19</sup> As we might expect from the later lives attributed to the biographers Trebellius Pollio and Flavius Vopiscus, the caricatures of usurpers in the *Thirty Tyrants* and the *Four Tyrants* become

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<sup>17</sup> Victor also describes Maxentius as "shamefully inclined to violence" and an "unwarlike coward" in the same passage.

<sup>18</sup> The Author also draws connections between Avidius Cassius and Albinus Clodius and one of the most iconic enemies of the Republic by describing them both as "Catilines" (*Av. Cass.* 3.5, cf. *Clod. Alb.* 13.2).

<sup>19</sup> Aurelius Victor and Eutropius report similarly that Victorinus was a "compulsive lecher", "abandoned to excessive licentiousness," who was ultimately assassinated as retribution for his sexual violation of his commanders' wives (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 33.12, cf. *Eutr.* 9.9).

distinctively satirical. Usurpers are depicted as uneducated and uncultured, possessing the inhuman strength of Cyclopes or the remarkable ability to consume and urinate massive amounts of alcohol without feeling any ill effects (*Quad. Tyr.* 4.1, 14.5).<sup>20</sup>

Although the Author reports on their foibles for lust, gluttony, or undue cruelty, the Author is rarely categorically dismissive of these men and their qualities. Adding to the general frustration with the reliability of these lives, the Author often presents remarkably contradictory accounts of these figures. For example, after describing Cassius' unduly savage penalties, the Author then describes Cassius as sometimes "stern and savage, sometimes mild and gentle, often devout and again scornful of sacred things, addicted to drink and also temperate, a lover of eating yet able to endure hunger, a devotee of Venus and a lover of chastity" (*Av. Cass.* 3.4).<sup>21</sup> Similarly, at one point the Author claims that Pescennius Niger was "unbridled in indulgence in every manner of passion" (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.4), but later propounds that he was abstemious of women and food due to his piety and religiosity (*Pesc. Nig.* 6.5-10). On the one hand, conflicting

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<sup>20</sup> Firmus is compared to a Cyclops due to his swarthy and hairy complexion. He is reported to have possessed inhuman strength and the ability to hold an anvil on his chest while other men struck it with a mallet from above (*Quad. Tyr.* 4.1-3). The Author makes much of Bonosus' humble origins as the son of an illiterate Gallic mother and British father (*Quad. Tyr.* 14.1). For explorations of the possible origins of these caricatures and cultural stereotypes of provincials, the provinces, and usurpers more generally, see Grünewald 2004: 84-96, Paschoud 1996: 92-96, and Timonen 1991. These sexual and physical exploits have been seen as satire of calls to a celibacy and moderation found in Christian writings of Jerome and others of the time: see Rohrbacher 2016: 133 and Poignault 2001: 254-55.

<sup>21</sup> *Av. Cass.* 3.4: *fuit his moribus, ut nonnumquam trux et asper videretur, aliquando mitis et lenis, saepe religiosus, alias contemptor sacrorum, avidus vini item abstinens, cibi adpetens et inediae patiens, Veneris cupidus et castitatis amator.*

portraits are not particularly unique to the *Historia Augusta's* description of usurpers.<sup>22</sup> The *Life of Hadrian* has been noted to be particularly contradictory, due to the fact that the material seems drawn from two or more original sources with markedly divergent views of the emperor.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the usurpers' lives, however, the contradiction more often than not appears to be of the Author's own design.

Across the five lives, the Author cites more than a dozen letters purportedly sent by the emperors Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, Septimius Severus, Valerian, and Claudian concerning the qualifications of the usurpers who had once served as their officers, administrators, or counselors. The letters all categorically vouch for the merits and abilities of the challengers and appear to be correspondence sent on the occasion of their promotions from one position to another. For example, in one letter from the *Life of Pescennius Niger*, Marcus describes Niger as "vigorous in action, dignified in demeanour" and insists that Pescennius be placed in charge of 1,600 troops due to his merit (*Pesc. Nig.* 4.1-3). In another, Commodus states "I know Pescennius for a brave man, and I have already made him tribune twice," and he announces his intentions to name Pescennius a general (*Nig.* 4.4). In the *Life of Clodius Albinus*, excerpts from purported letters of Marcus Aurelius similarly describe Avidius as "a man of experience,

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Hadr.* 14.11.

<sup>23</sup> On the opposing views of the emperor in the *Life of Hadrian*, see Benario 1980: 8-13. On sources and contradictions in the lives, see White 1980: 273-274.

strict in his mode of life, respected for his character,” and Marcus explains that he placed Albinus in command of two squadrons of horse in hopes that he would “prove of value in the service of the camp” (*Clod. Alb.* 10.4-8).

Even amidst the slapstick accounts of usurpers’ physical and sexual exploits in the lives of the *Thirty Tyrants* and the *Four Tyrants*, numerous letters follow a similar formula and praise Postumus, Macrianus the Elder, Ballista, and Regalianus, among others, as able commanders and worthy stewards of the provinces. Many of the letters in these two lives emphasize the men’s skills at enforcing discipline and protecting the borders of the empire from incursions (*Tyr. Trig.* 5.1, 5.4, 15.7).<sup>24</sup> For example, in one letter, Valerian places Macrianus in charge of Persia, attesting that Macrianus is “loyal to me, and both beloved and feared by the soldiers” and asserting that Macrianus’ valor at every level of his career and brave deeds in battle should “serve as a pattern to others” (*Tyr. Trig.* 12.15-18).<sup>25</sup> In another, Valerian insists that Ballista was a wise administrator because he “refrained from burdening the provincials” and was able to exact rations and taxes in each province without undue logistical hassles (*Tyr. Trig.* 18.5-7).

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<sup>24</sup> Letters attributed to Valerian arise frequently as evidence in the “later” lives of the collection, not only in the lives of the usurpers, see *Aur.* 8.1 for one example.

<sup>25</sup> Macrianus the Elder was one of Valerian’s fiscal officers and ruled 259/260-261 CE from a stronghold in Egypt. Macrianus the Elder had two sons Macrianus the Younger (260-1) and Quietus who were also elevated to the purple. He was later defeated in Thrace: see Potter 2004: 256-259.

Certainly, these documents do, as many have noted, serve a practical purpose in providing details of usurpers' lives before their rebellions and expand accounts of men that would have otherwise been quite brief. The choice to fabricate letters in which emperors examined the merits of their officers and notified administrators in the field about changes in rank or policy is a logical solution to having insufficient material about their early careers. Yet if the Author's primary motivation was to indulge in the scandalous and extreme, one might expect that these documents would have been a prime location to underscore challengers' depravity, or at least speak to qualities that made them unfit for the throne. Instead, the letters vouch for their merits and abilities. Indeed, out of the four-dozen letters found in the five lives, only one can be said to play straightforwardly into the negative stereotypes of the usurpers: in one fabricated letter from the *Four Tyrants*, "Proculus" brags to his kinsman Maecianus that he deflowered one hundred Sarmation maidens within a fortnight (*Quad. Tyr.* 12.6-7).

The vast majority, far from contributing to negative accounts of these men, instead directly complicate the stereotypical qualities associated with usurpers or directly undermine disparaging accounts of these men found in other sources. For example, after recounting Cassius' "savagery" (*crudelitas*) and the harsh punishments he inflicted upon his troops, which the Author purports to have found in the writings of an unknown Aemilius Parthenianus (*Av. Cass.* 5.1), the Author almost immediately qualifies the portrait of Cassius as an abjectly cruel leader by presenting two letters

puportedly exchanged by Marcus Aurelius and his prefect. In these letters, Cassius' strictness is praised as a necessary component of good leadership. Asserting that "the state of Rome is rooted in the men and manners of the olden time," "Marcus Aurelius" states that he is placing Cassius in charge of the Syrian legions in hopes that Cassius might be able to enforce "ancient discipline" upon the troops who were "running riot in luxury" (*Av. Cass.* 5.4-7). Marcus' prefect confirms the wisdom of Marcus' decision to place Cassius in command of the Syrian legions, saying that "Nothing benefits Grecianized soldiers like a man who is somewhat strict" (*Av. Cass.* 5.9-10). Thus, the Author uses the letters to give the impression that Cassius was an able, if strict, commander, and he shortly thereafter asserts, "Cassius did not disappoint the expectation that had been formed of him" (*Av. Cass.* 6.1).

As the life continues, the Author continues to deploy documents systematically not only to reinterpret Cassius' character but also to undermine explanations of Cassius' motives given by Marius Maximus and other historical accounts. The Author notes that many historians, including Marius Maximus, proposed that Cassius rebelled "at the wish of Faustina [the Younger, the wife of Marcus Aurelius], who now despaired of Marcus' health and was afraid that [...] that someone would arise and seize the throne and make away with her children" (*Av. Cass.* 7.1). Similar reports of Faustina's infidelity and involvement in the affair are given by Cassius Dio and Julian, a convergence that

presented the Author with ample opportunity for embellishment on Cassius' immorality and disloyalty toward his emperor.<sup>26</sup>

Rather than concurring with the rumormongering accounts found elsewhere, however, the Author laboriously refutes any connection between Cassius and the empress by producing a series of four letters purportedly exchanged between Marcus Aurelius and Faustina.<sup>27</sup> Arguing that Faustina was unaware of the rebellion until Marcus informed her of the danger in the first letter (*Av. Cass.* 9.6-8), the Author instead claims that Faustina urged for harsh and swift punishment against Cassius in two subsequent letters. In one, Faustina urges Marcus Aurelius "if you love your children, to punish those rebels with all severity" (*Av. Cass.* 9.11-12), and, in the other, she demands that her husband show no "forbearance to men who have shown no forbearance to you and would show none either to me or to your children, should they be victorious" (*Av. Cass.* 10.1-5). Thus turning the tradition of Faustina's motherly concern for her children on its head, the Author concludes, "from these letters it can be seen that Faustina was not in collusion with Cassius, but, on the contrary, earnestly demanded his punishment" (*Av. Cass.* 11.1).

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<sup>26</sup> Cass. Dio gives a similar account of Faustina's concerns for the vulnerability of her young children (*Cass. Dio* 71.22.3). On the scope and origins of rumors concerning Faustina's affairs, as well as her role in Avidius Cassius' rebellion, see Boatwright 2003: 253-255 and Levick 2014: 80-85. On women in the *HA* more generally, see Wallinger 1990.

<sup>27</sup> The proposition that usurpers were urged on by the motivation of women was a stereotype of the time, one that is mocked in the later lives of the usurpers, see *Quad. Tyr.* 12.1, Poignault 2001, and Paschoud 1996: 96-98.

By disproving any possibility of an untoward affair between Cassius and the empress, the Author creates an opportunity to present an alternative explanation for Cassius' insurrection. Instead of choosing a different salacious motive, one full of cruelty or desire for revenge, the Author surprisingly argues that Cassius was moved to challenge Marcus Aurelius out of his conviction that Aurelius' administrative and military policies were harming the empire. As proof, the Author presents another letter, purportedly penned by Avidius to his son-in-law, in which Cassius blames Marcus Aurelius' philosophical ways for the loss of the military acuity of former generations. Cassius laments the fact that Aurelius' desire to appear lenient led him to appoint governors and proconsuls "whose manner of life he cannot sanction" and "who believe that their provinces were given them by the senate and [Marcus Aurelius] Antoninus only so that they might revel and grow rich" (*Av. Cass.* 14.3-7). In contrast, Avidius vows in the letter "to restore to the state a lawful government" and to return Rome to the rigor of its fathers (*Av. Cass.* 14.2-8).

The Author's claim to have had access to Cassius' correspondence is in itself rather extraordinary, since no other historian reports to have such an in-depth understanding of these figures.<sup>28</sup> What is more extraordinary, however, is the way that the Author recasts Cassius' motives to stem from an altruistic desire to restore military

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<sup>28</sup> Herodian alone presents a speech purportedly given by Pescennius Niger in which he seeks advice and acceptance from his supporters (2.8.2-5).

discipline for the good of the Empire. The position that Cassius was motivated out of concern for the Empire is a far cry from the portraits of usurpers painted in imperial panegyrics of the time, in which usurpers were described as blind to the bloodshed they caused in their pursuit of power. Thus, the Author's willingness to overlook Cassius' savagery and to present a more altruistic motivation for Cassius represents a significant departure from traditional depictions these imperial challengers.

Even more remarkable is the way the Author draws the *Life of Avidius Cassius* to a close. Following the letter in which Cassius states his intention to return the state to its ancient rigor, the Author concludes that Avidius Cassius, "though inclined, on the whole, to severity and cruelty, had he gained the throne, he would have made not a merciful and kind emperor but a beneficent and excellent one" (*fuisset non clemens et bonus, sed utilis et optimus imperator*) (*Av. Cass.* 13.8). Due to the comparisons drawn between the two rulers in the letter and the frequent description of Marcus Aurelius as *clemens and bonus*, "merciful and good," throughout the *Historia Augusta*, the comparison here is clear: while Marcus was a "merciful and good" emperor, in that position Cassius would have been *utilis et optimus*, "beneficent and excellent." Because Marcus Aurelius is repeatedly said to be the best *bonus princeps* throughout the the *Historia Augusta*, as illustrated in Chapter Four, the proposition that Cassius would have made a superior ruler had he been given the chance is astonishing and unexpected.

The invented documents in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* are similarly deployed to undermine disparaging depictions of usurpers found in the works of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius.<sup>29</sup> A unique twist in the *Life of Thirty Tyrants* is that the Author often first embellishes disparaging remarks made by Aurelius Victor or Eutropius for comedic effect before subverting them. For example, Aurelius Victor and Eutropius direct special scorn at Marius, who was part of the Gallic Empire after the assassination of Postumus in 269 CE, for his past profession as a blacksmith. Eutropius describes him as a “most base mechanic” (*vilissimus opifex*) (Eutr. 9.9), and Victor remarks that the acclamation of one of such low birth was proof that “the dignity of all noble qualities was an object of derision” (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 33).<sup>30</sup> Victor, Eutropius, and the Author of the *Historia Augusta* all make the same fallacious claim that Marius had the indignity of holding imperial power for only two or three days, suggesting that the Author was familiar with their accounts.<sup>31</sup>

In the *Thirty Tyrants*, the Author enhances the reports of Marius in Victor and Eutropius to claim that Marius’ black-smithing experience gave him the strength to hold

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<sup>29</sup> On the Author’s use of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius and commonalities across the three works, see Barnes 1978: 90-107, Bird 1994: 139 n. 12, Turcan 1993: 133-134, and Thomson 2012: 112-113.

<sup>30</sup> Trans. Bird 1994.

<sup>31</sup> Aurelius Victor and Eutropius both say Marius ruled only two days (*Caes.* 33, cf. *Eutr.* 9.9), while the *HA* states that he ruled for three days. The Author jests about the shortness of Marius’ reign, saying it made him all the more famous (*Tyr. Trig.* 8.2). The number of extant coins bearing his name suggests that his reign was at least several months long, however: see Magie 1932: 78-9 n 2.

back oncoming wagons with the strength of a single finger, and adds intrigue to Marius' demise by claiming that Marius was slain by a sword he had forged (*Tyr. Trig.* 6.2, 8.4-6).<sup>32</sup> The Author, however, then presents a transcript of Marius' acclamation speech in which Marius avows that his experience as a smith provide him with a fine awareness of how defense and displays of force are necessary for a ruler. In the purported speech, Marius begins by saying, "I know well, fellow-soldiers, that I can be taunted with my former trade, of which all of you are my witnesses," but, he continues, "Let men taunt me with working with steel as long as foreign nations shall know from their losses that I have handled steel" (*Tyr. Trig.* 8.8-11). The challenger concludes that his goal is to impress upon foreign nations that "the Roman people are a steel-clad folk, and that it shall be most of all the steel they fear in us" (*Tyr. Trig.* 8.8-11). While the puns on iron are surely meant to be humorous, the gist of the defense—that Marius' humble origins granted him the ability to defend the empire—is a decidedly more forgiving portrayal of the figure than that found in Aurelius Victor or Eutropius.<sup>33</sup>

The Author similarly uses documents to present a favorable depiction of Zenobia, the famous queen of Palmyra (r. 267-271) who rebelled against Aurelian. The Author appears to have been inspired by Eutropius' report that Zenobia was forced to walk before Aurelian's chariot in Rome during his "splendid triumph as the savior of

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<sup>32</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 37-39.

<sup>33</sup> On the repetition and wordplay around the term *ferrum* in this passage, see Rohrbacher 2016: 38.

the east and west" (Eutr. 9.13).<sup>34</sup> The Author humorously expands upon the entire affair, claiming that Aurelian was forced to send several notices to the senate defending himself against ridicule for celebrating such a lavish victory over a woman.<sup>35</sup> While this scenario is undoubtedly meant to poke fun at Aurelian's reputation, the letters also serve as robust praise of Zenobia's leadership abilities and paint her as a strong and capable leader.<sup>36</sup> In the letter, Aurelian details the services Zenobia had done for Rome and protests that:

those who find fault with me now would accord me praise in abundance, did they but know what manner of woman she is, how wise in counsels, how steadfast in plans, how firm toward the soldiers, how generous when necessity calls, and how stern when discipline demands. (*Tyr. Trig.* 30.5)

*mihi obici, quod non virile munus impleverim Zenobiam triumphando. ne illi, qui me reprehendunt, satis laudarent, si scirent quae illa sit mulier, quam prudens in consiliis, quam constans in dispositionibus, quam erga milites gravis, quam larga, cum necessitas postulet, quam tristis, cum severitas poscat.*

Aurelian further insists that "she did a great service to the Roman state when she preserved the imperial power in the East for herself, or for her children," and "such was the fear that this woman inspired in the peoples of the East and also the Egyptians that

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<sup>34</sup> Trans. Bird 1993: 58. On the historical events concerning Zenobia's reign, see Southern 2008 and Winsbury 2010. Eutropius notes that Zenobia's descendents remained in Rome, a fact also mentioned by the *HA* (*Tyr. Trig.* 25.4, 30.27), suggesting further overlap between the sources. On Roman triumphs more generally, see Beard 2007.

<sup>35</sup> Burgersdijk 2006: 141-150 detects a Juvenalian influence throughout the depiction.

<sup>36</sup> Aurelian concludes that her control over the east also benefited the west, because her "guard over the eastern frontier of the empire" allowed Claudius to complete his campaigns against the Goths in safety (*Tyr. Trig.* 30.11).

neither Arabs nor Saracens nor Armenians ever moved against her" (*Tyr. Trig.* 30.5-9). Again, this depiction of the queen is conspicuously more auspicious than that of Victor, who declines to even mention her by name, saying only that "bandits, or more accurately a woman, controlled the east" (*Aur. Vict. Caes.* 33).<sup>37</sup> In total, in five of the nine cases where the accounts of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and the *Historia Augusta* overlap, namely in the cases of Postumus, Victorinus, Marius, Zenobia, and Regalianus, the usurpers who are maligned in accounts of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius receive better treatment in the *Historia Augusta* purely through the use of documents.<sup>38</sup>

As in the *Avidius Cassius*, the documents in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* also emphasize the superiority of the usurpers' leadership abilities over those of Gallienus. For example, the Author depicts Marius' humble origins as more honorable than Gallienus' debauched lifestyle. In his speech, Marius states that he would rather "struggle with steel" than ruining himself "with wine and garlands and harlots and gluttony, as does Gallienus" (*Tyr. Trig.* 8.9). The Author also makes the distinction between Zenobia's and Gallienus' capabilities a central feature of his account of Zenobia. The Author purports to quote from an exchange between Aurelian and the queen in

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<sup>37</sup> The depiction of Zenobia in the *Thirty Tyrants* is remarkably more positive than the gendered, negative portrait of the queen in the *Life of Aurelian* 33-4, 39.1: see Jones 2016: 221-233.

<sup>38</sup> Aurelius Victor's account addresses nine usurpers under Gallienus: Ingebus, Regalianus, Postumus, Laelianus, Marius, Victorinus, Victoria, Tetricus, Aureolus (*Aur. Vict. Caes.* 37ff). Eutropius includes accounts only of seven usurpers: Ingenuus, Trebellianus, Postumus, Laelianus, Marius, Victorinus, Odenaethus (*Eutr.* 9.17ff).

which Aurelian poses the question to Zenobia, “Why is it, Zenobia, that you dared to show insolence to the emperors of Rome?” To which she is reported to have responded, “You, I know, are an emperor, indeed, for you win victories, but Gallienus and Aureolus and the others I never regarded as emperors” (*Tyr. Trig.* 30.23), thereby underscoring Gallienus’ ineffective military leadership.<sup>39</sup>

Now, disdain for Gallienus’ negligence is not in itself unique to the *Historia Augusta*. Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and Ammianus also condemn Gallienus’ penchant for debauchery, and they credit the large number of challengers to his neglect of the empire’s defenses (*Aur. Vict. Caes.* 33, *Eutr.* 9.8, *Amm. Marc.* 21.16.9-10, 30.8.8).<sup>40</sup> Yet even while remarking on Gallienus’ extreme failings, many remained critical of those who rebelled against his reign. Aurelius Victor, for instance, portrays the rebellions as a dire threat to the empire, saying that the “civil wars broke out which were far more frightful” (*Caes.* 33). Victor also later states, “nothing is more welcome and more distinguished than those who expel tyrants” (*Adeo acceptius praestantiusque tyrannorum depulsoribus nihil est*) (*Caes.* 40).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> As Paschoud and Grey have argued, the *Thirty Tyrants* depicts usurpers as a necessary check and balance to offset the ineptitude of Gallienus, who disregarded his duties in the defense of the empire: see Paschoud 2013: 196 and Grey 2010: 88. Grey argues that the *Gallieni* and the *Thirty Tyrants* emphasizes the tension “between a supposedly legitimate emperor whose behavior makes him unworthy of holding the *imperium* and a series of apparently illegitimate usurpers whose actions are those of a legitimate ruler.”

<sup>40</sup> See Bird 1994: 144 n. 28.

<sup>41</sup> Trans. Bird 1994, 49. Aurelius Victor treats the usurpers under Gallienus as opportunistic upstarts with few qualifications who merely were taking advantage of the disorder under Gallienus’ reign to rebel.

In comparison, the Author expresses his wish in the *Thirty Tyrants* that “it might have been possible for those who seized the imperial power to rule for a longer time” (*Tyr. Trig.* 10.15-17). His preference for the usurpers is apparent throughout the life, and he even coopts the term *tyrannus* and applies it to Gallienus. In one passage, Ingenuus is praised for holding off incursions made by the Sarmatians, and he is described as “necessary to the commonwealth and the troops” (*rei publicae necessarius et militibus*), whereas Gallienus is referred to as a brutal tyrant (*tyrannus crudelis*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 9.1-2). Indeed, Gallienus’ excesses and vices are said to be so pestiferous that the Author remarks that Gallienus “deserved to have many rebels rise up against him, and such was his cruelty that he was rightly regarded with fear” (*erat in eo ea luxuria ut rebelles plurimos mereretur et ea crudelitas ut iure timeretur*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 26.1, emphasis mine).

While this contrarian view of usurpers’ merits and motivations may seem natural for an Author who invented historical controversy even where none existed, the systematic and categorically favorable depictions presented by the documents across all five lives need some explanation.

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Eutropius praises Postumus and Odaenathus as important defenders of the empire in very similar language, for fulfilled a necessary role in ensuring the safety and the continuance of the empire while Gallienus indulged in his debauched habits (*Eutr.* 9.10-11, cf. *Tyr. Trig.* 5.5).

## *Presenting Alternatives to Contemporary Texts*

As discussed in Chapters One and Three, the *Historia Augusta* was likely directed toward a scholarly community in which discussion and agonistic debate over literary allusions would have been commonplace. The depiction of the biographer “Vopiscus” avidly debating with a group of companions over the appropriate title to apply to the usurper Firmus in the *Life of the Four Tyrants* (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.1-2) provides a model for the ways that the Author envisioned documentary evidence about usurpers could feature in scholarly debates.<sup>42</sup> In the passage, the five participants appear to be attuned to finely shaded distinctions of legitimacy between different titles bestowed on challengers. They avidly debate the appropriateness of no less than four distinct titles for Firmus, including *princeps*, a minor brigand (*latrunculum*), a tyrant (*tyrannus*), or an autocrat (*αὐτοκράτορα*), the term commonly equated to *imperator* in Greek epigraphy.<sup>43</sup> In their attempts to challenge the positions of their companions and to defend their preferred

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<sup>42</sup> Rorhbacher 2016: 82-85 also states that this scholarly debate, as well as the one found in the *Tyr. Trig.* 31.7-10, is a good model for the sorts of “scholarly groups with interest in historiography” in which he argues “we place the composition, recitation, and discussion of the *HA*.” On this passage, see also Ando 2012: 148, who notes that this debate concerns “issues of legitimacy, memory, and political power.” For possible satirical undertones concerning Christian debates over orthodoxy and heresy in this passage, see Chastagnol 1993: 49-50 and Chastagnol 1994: 1106-7.

<sup>43</sup> On the term *tyrannus*, which only seems to have become a standard title for usurpers starting with Maxentius, see Barnes 1996 and Grünwald 2004: 81-83.

title, the participants produce in turn a set of coins purportedly minted by Firmus, several obscure Greek and Egyptian edicts, and an imperial decree.<sup>44</sup>

While the members of this debate and the evidence they produce are certainly fictional and imbued with a strong dose of parody, this imagined forum demonstrates that the Author could at least envision potential readers who were aware of the nuances concerning usurpers and were eager to weigh the authority of various pieces of evidence. This vignette may also model how the Author envisioned his fabricated documents to work. As argued in Chapter One, although these documents may have tricked some readers into taking them at face value, their progressively improbable origins and rare materials (e.g. linen, ivory) likely would have hinted at their fictive nature to readers who were familiar with the convention of pseudo-sources from other ancient texts. Yet the Author may have hoped his fabricated documents, like the parodic coins and documents in the description of “Vopiscus” scholarly exchange, would spur on discussion about the treatment of usurpers in other available texts.

Indeed, the Author’s disagreements with Marius Maximus and his subtle undermining of Victor and Eutropius seem designed to provoke conversation about the distinctions between the *Historia Augusta* and these other textual witnesses. Even cursory comparisons of the accounts in Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and other

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<sup>44</sup> The Author himself cites coins minted by challengers as proof of their insurrections and titles: see *Tyr. Trig.* 26.1-7, 31.2-3.

contemporary works demonstrate that usurpers were frequently treated as a repetitive and ultimately predictable phenomenon. Ammianus clearly assumed his readers would have been all too familiar with the inevitable outcome of rebellions. In his account of Procopius' insurrection, he remarks with palpable sarcasm,

Certainly some may wonder that so laughable a reign, rashly and blindly begun, broke out into such lamentable disasters to the state, if perchance they are unacquainted with previous instances, and think that this happened for the first time. (26.6.19)<sup>45</sup>

*Mirantur quidam profecto inrisione digna principia incaute coepta et temere, ad ingemiscendas erupisse rei publicae clades, ignari forsitan exemplorum, accidisse primitus arbitantes.*

Therefore, for readers endowed with the ability to see through the fabrications and to understand how the documents alluded to and subverted other comparative accounts, the documents may have presented an opportunity for renewed discussions about a topic that was often treated with weary predictability in other sources of the time.

Certainly, the Author's conclusions that Avidius Cassius and Pescennius Niger were moved by altruistic concerns and that they would have been better emperors than Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus would have been a surprising and distinctive account. The concluding coda in the *Life of the Thirty Tyrants* also suggests that the Author could at least envision an audience eagerly clamoring for new, more expansive compositions on the usurpers. There, the biographer "Trebellius Pollio" claims that his

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<sup>45</sup> Trans. Rolfe 1940: 611.

reader was urging on the completion of the life “with such insistence” that he had “not even the opportunity of drawing breath” (*sic perurges ut respirandi non habeam facultatem*) (*Tyr. Trig.* 33.7-8). One explanation for their unexpectedly favorable evaluations, then, is that the Author merely hoped to add sensationalism to his account and thus distinguish himself from other sources.

### ***Distrust of the Imperial Narrative***

Analysis of the prefaces to the lives of the usurpers presents additional explanations for the documents’ unusually favorable depictions of these characters. In the prefaces, the Author often reiterates the difficulty of finding reliable sources about these figures. Although the Author notes that reliable sources are hard to find about all men who held the sovereignty for a short time (*Macr.* 1.1), the Author repeatedly remarks on the particular difficulty of finding consistent and thorough accounts concerning usurpers. In four of the five prefaces to the lives of the usurpers, the Author notes that he was writing not only despite, but, indeed, *because of* the extreme brevity with which other sources treat these figures. In the *Thirty Tyrants*, the Author notes that details about usurpers “vary widely” because “all those historians who have written in Greek or in Latin have passed over some of them without dwelling even on their names” (*Tyr. Trig.* 1.1-2). The *Four Tyrants* begins with a similar notice that “the minor

pretenders [...] have either been wholly omitted by most of the writers or else passed over briefly" (*Quadr. Tyr.* 1.1).<sup>46</sup>

In the prefaces to the *Avidius Cassius* and *Pescennius Niger*, however, the Author attributes the lack of thorough and consistent accounts about usurpers to the distortion and suppression caused by imperial influence. For example, in the *Life of Avidius Cassius* the Author warns that his account will be brief, specifically explaining that "not very much can be known about those men whose lives no one has dared to render illustrious out of fear of those by whom they were overcome" (*Av. Cass.* 3.1).<sup>47</sup> An even more extensive account of the forces working against the preservation of reliable historical accounts concerning these figures can be found in the preface to the *Life of Pescennius Niger*. There, the Author explains that, "It is an unusual task and a difficult one to set down fairly in writing the lives of men who, through other men's victories, remained mere pretenders" (*rarum atque difficile est ut, quos tyrannos aliquorum Victoria fecerit, bene mittantur in litteras*) (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.1). As he states,

in the first place, notable events that redound to their honor are distorted by historians; other events, in the second place, are suppressed; and, in the third place, no great care is bestowed upon inquiries into their ancestry and life, since it seems sufficient to recount their presumption, the battle in which they were overcome, and the punishment they suffered. (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.1-2)

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<sup>46</sup> *Quadr. Tyr.* 1.1: *Minusculos tyrannos scio plerosque tacuisse aut breviter praeterisse.*

<sup>47</sup> *Alb. Clod.* 3.1-3: *Sed nos hominis naturam et mores breviter explicabimus. neque enim plura de his sciri possunt, quorum vitam et illustrare nullus audit eorum causa a quibus oppressi fuerit.*

*primum enim, quae magna sunt in eorum honorem ab scriptoribus depravantur, deinde alia supprimuntur, postremo non magna diligentia in eorum genere ac vita requiritur, cum satis sit audaciam eorum et bellum, in quo victi fuerint, ac poenam proferre.*

Because of this distortion and suppression, he explains, “not all the facts concerning such men are preserved on our monuments or in our histories in full” (*ideo vix omnia de his plene in monumentis atque annalibus habentur*) (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.1).

Similar concerns about the validity of the imperial narrative run throughout the lives of the usurpers. Later in the *Life of Pescennius Niger*, the Author remarks that Niger refused to allow his acclamation to be commemorated in a panegyric.<sup>48</sup> Niger’s purported rationale for this decision is that, “the praise of the living is mere mockery, and most of all the praise of emperors, in whose power it is to kindle hope or fear, to give advancement in public life, to condemn to death, and to declare a man an outlaw” (*Pesc. Nig.* 11.5-6).<sup>49</sup> The repeated reference to the various forms of “fear” and retribution wielded by emperors found in both the *Avidius Cassius* and the *Pescennius Niger* reinforce the Author’s concern that imperial power had far reaching influence over the narrative of the time. So too, this same skepticism of imperial records is seen in the *Life of*

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<sup>48</sup> Kelly 2007 has suggested that both Eutropius and Ammianus hint at a disdain for the style of panegyrics, if not the content, so the Author may have been tapping into a general distrust in the official imperial declarations.

<sup>49</sup> *Pesc. Nig.* 11.5-6: [...] *imperatores, a quibus speratur, qui timentur, qui praestare publice possunt, qui possunt necare, qui proscribere.*

*the Four Tyrants*. The debate over Firmus and the value of various types of evidence seen above ultimately concludes when the Author (in the guise of “Vopiscus”) dismisses the edict of Aurelian as untrustworthy, sarcastically remarking “as if mighty emperors did not always use the term of brigand in speaking of those whom they slew when attempting to seize the purple!” (*Quad. Tyr.* 2.2).<sup>50</sup>

Scholars have traditionally been hesitant to grant much import to the Author’s repeated protestations about the inaccuracy and possible distortion of other sources. The Author’s protestations about the lack or inferiority of other accounts have instead been seen as part of the Author’s attempts to accentuate the significance of his own ability to call upon a trove of rare documents.<sup>51</sup> Admittedly, protestations about the distortion of the historical record and the influence of imperial censorship on the autonomy of historical accounts were established *topoi* in Roman writers throughout the ages, and little direct evidence suggests that imperial censorship directly interfered with the autonomy of historians to write as they wished in the fourth century.<sup>52</sup> The Author’s concern that imperial influence could negatively shape the legacy of fallen rivals in histories of the time should not be so easily discarded, however.

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<sup>50</sup> *Quad. Tyr.* 2.2: *proinde quasi digne tanti princeps nominis debuerit tyrannum appellare hominem tenebrarium, aut non semper latrones vocitaverint magni principes eos quos invadentes purpuras necaverunt.*

<sup>51</sup> Baynes 1924: 99-106 notes the mention of censorship but denies that it has any significance beyond a vague contemporary reference.

<sup>52</sup> Tacitus also lament the extent of imperial influence over the autonomy and accuracy of historical accounts in their respective eras: see Tac. *Hist.* 1.1, *Agr.* 2, Sailor 2008, and Mellor 2010: 78-90.

For centuries, the practices of *abolitio* and *damnatio memoriae* encouraged allusion and indirect reference to the names and deeds of usurpers in panegyrics, monuments, and official documents.<sup>53</sup> The Author appears to directly note the effect of these practices on the epigraphic and literary records when he states, “not all the facts concerning such men are preserved *on our monuments or in our histories* in full” (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.1, emphasis mine). Ammianus Marcellinus also announces that he was deliberately halting his narrative before reaching contemporary events, at least in part because he refused to allow social pressures to proscribe what was appropriate to write.<sup>54</sup> In such an environment, the perception that social pressure or self-interested circumspection would have pushed historians to promote a narrative that flattered reigning emperors would not have been hard to believe.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The practices of *abolitio* and *damnatio memoriae* did not completely obliterate or remove all memory of an individual or event condemned by these procedures. Instead, the practices encouraged oblique reference and indirect allusion to these individuals, thereby allowing their legacy to remain powerful as a warning to others aspiring to similar misdeeds. For more on these practices and other forms of memory sanction in fourth century CE, see Lenski 2002: 68-116, Hendrick 2000, Flower 2006, Lunn-Rockliffe 2010, Omissi 2013, Doyle 2015. For the effect of *damnatio memoriae* on material culture more generally, see Elsner 2004 and Varner 2004. For use of term tyrant in the fourth century, see Neri 1997 and Barnes 1996. The Theodosian Code often omits names of usurpers (*CTh.* 15.14.1-13), although there are a few exceptions: Licinius is named in 15.14.1, Maximus is called “the most nefarious of tyrants” 15.14.7, and Heraclianus, who rebelled in 413 CE, is named in 15.14.13, but he is named only for the decree to announce that his memory “should not be preserved under private or public recollection.” See Pharr 1952: 437-8 for translations.

<sup>54</sup> See Kelly 2007 for an analysis of Ammianus’ and Eutropius’ reticence to discuss contemporary events, a trope also seen in Juvenal.

<sup>55</sup> Wardman 1984: 220-237.

The Author's description of the typical succinctness of many fourth-century accounts is also fitting.<sup>56</sup> Although their historical works did become more lengthy as they approached their own present day, the accounts of Aurelius Victor and Eutropius devote only one sentence each to Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus, briefly recounting where they took power and where they were defeated (Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 20, cf. Eutr. 8.18). For example, Aurelius Victor says in regards to Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus only that,

He [Septimius Severus] defeated Pescennius Niger at Cyzicus, Clodius Albinus at Lyons and had them killed. Of these the former, who held Egypt as a military governor, had started a war in the hope of gaining supreme power. The latter, who had brought about the assassination of Pertinax, had seized power in Gaul while he was attempting through fear of his actions to cross over to Britain. (*Caes.* 20)<sup>57</sup>

*Pescennium Nigrum apud Cyzicenos, Clodium Albinum Lugduni victos coegit mori; quorum prior Aegyptum dux obtinens bellum moverat spe dominationis, alter Pertinacis auctor occidendi, cum eo metu in Britannos, quam provinciam a Commodo meruerat, transmittere niteretur, in Gallia invaserat imperium.*

Similarly, Eutropius notes only that, "Pescennius Niger, who had rebelled in Egypt and Syria, Severus killed at Cyzicus," and in the same breath he states that "Under [Severus], too, Clodius Albinus, who had been Julianus' ally in assassinating Pertinax and had

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<sup>56</sup> For an overview of fourth-century historiography and breviary conventions, see Bonamente 2003, Winkelmann 2003, and Banchich 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Trans. Bird 1994: 22.

made himself Caesar in Gaul, was defeated and killed at Lyons.”<sup>58</sup> As Barnes has demonstrated, the *Historia Augusta*, Eutropius, and Aurelius Victor all incorrectly record that Pescennius Niger was killed at Cyzicus instead of while fleeing Antioch, so the Author may have been familiar with their coverage of Pescennius Niger in particular.<sup>59</sup>

The Author’s concern that historical accounts of usurpers were often unfairly distorted provides another explanation for why his documents specifically undermine the negative accounts of usurpers found in Marius Maximus, Aurelius Victor, and Eutropius. The Author’s positive spin may have represented a conscious effort to rectify what he saw as unfair distortions of their legacy. Indeed, the Author seems to make this clear in the *Life of Avidius Cassius* when the Author blames the false rumors concerning Cassius and Faustina’s affair on Marius Maximus, who, he says, wished to defame the empress by saying “it was with her connivance that Cassius attempted to seize the throne” (*Av. Cass.* 9.9).<sup>60</sup> Thus, the Author suggests that Marius Maximus’ desire to defame Faustina led him to misrepresent Cassius’ motives in the process. Aurelius

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<sup>58</sup> Trans. Bird 1993: 54. Eutr. 8.18: *Pescennium Nigrum, qui in Aegypto et Syria rebellaverat, apud Cyzicum interfecit. [...] Sub eo etiam Clodius Albinus, qui in occidendo Pertinace socius fuerat Iuliano, Caesarem se in Gallia fecit, victusque apud Lugdunum et interfectus.* Neither Victor or Eutropius make mention of Avidius Cassius. The *Epitome de Caesaribus* 16.11 includes only the brief remark that, “In his time, Cassius, seizing a tyranny, was killed” (*Huius tempore Cassius tyrannidem arripiens exstinctus est*).

<sup>59</sup> Barnes 1978: 106 identifies the correct location of Niger’s death from Herodian 3.4.6 and Dio 75 (74).8.8.

<sup>60</sup> The Author twice suggests that readers wishing for further information should consult Marius Maximus in the *Life of Avidius Cassius* (*Av. Cass.* 6.6-7, 9.5). The Author cites Maximus twice for information about Severus’ decision to abandon his initial plan to name Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus as his successors (*Clod. Alb.* 3.4, 9).

Victor and Eutropius additionally both held positions in the imperial administration and their works were either commissioned by or directly addressed to emperors, so their objectivity may well have been doubted.<sup>61</sup>

The suggestion that usurpers were not receiving fair and accurate coverage is also found in many of the documents themselves. Numerous promotion letters purported penned by Marcus Aurelius, Valerian, and the other emperors repeat the sentiment that they wished the men to receive appropriate recognition for their deeds. For example, "Marcus Aurelius" purportedly closes one letter announcing Clodius Albinus' promotion to squad leader of two cavalry cohorts with the insistence that Albinus should be renowned to the state, and that he should "get the reward that he merits" (*habiturus praemium quod merebitur*) (*Alb. Clod.* 10.4-8). In some, the claim that they were not receiving the reward that they deserved even alludes to the fact that it was due to interference from imperial powers. For example, in one letter, Claudius praises Regalianus for recovering the district of Illyricum while stationed there as a governor, insisting that his deeds "were worthy of a triumph, did but the olden times still remain" (*Tyr. Trig.* 10.10-11). Claudius then warns Regalianus to "be mindful" of Gallienus and

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<sup>61</sup> For backgrounds on the respective careers and literary aspirations of Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Festus, and Ammianus Marcellinus, see Bird 1993; Bird 1994, Eadie 1967; Kelly 2008; Bonamente 2003: 86-87.

“be more cautious in gaining victories,” which suggests that Regalianus’ deeds went unnoticed due to the emperor’s jealousy.<sup>62</sup>

In the *Life of Pescennius Niger* and the *Life of Clodius Albinus*, the documents dovetail even more convincingly with the proposition that the Author was directly attempting to counter the ways that usurpers’ legacies were retrospectively distorted by the victorious rivals. In the two lives, the fabricated documents serve as a systematic counterweight to the negative portraits of Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus found in the autobiography of their rival, the emperor Septimius Severus.<sup>63</sup> In both lives, the Author claims to produce pieces of Severus’ private correspondence written before and after his victories as proof that Septimius Severus at first thought Pescennius and Clodius were worthy co-rulers or successors, but later used his influence to vilify his challengers (*Pesc. Nig.* 4.7, *Clod. Alb.* 1.2, 3.4).

Records of Severus’ admiration for Pescennius and Albinus are closely juxtaposed with the accounts that Severus later wrote in his autobiography in both lives. In the *Life of Pescennius Niger*, the Author claims to quote a letter Severus wrote shortly

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<sup>62</sup> Victor also portrays Gallienus as out of touch with reality and reports that Gallienus actively spread misinformation in Rome about the rebellions in order to give the illusion of military success and competency, see *Aur. Vict. Caes.* 33. On the trope of imperial jealousy concerning a governor’s military achievements in Tacitus and Cassius Dio, see Boatwright 2015: 133.

<sup>63</sup> The suspicion that Severus’ autobiographical account was not entirely trustworthy is not held by the *Historia Augusta* alone. Cassius Dio also expresses doubts about its representation of the truth, saying in describing Severus’ victory over Clodius, “I am not stating, how, what Severus wrote about it, but what actually took place” (Book 75/76.7).

after Pescennius' defeat. In the letter, Severus laments that he "cannot imitate the military discipline of this man whom we have overcome in war," and he calls Niger an "irreproachable" general (*Pesc. Nig.* 3.9-12). In contrast to Severus' laudatory remarks regarding Pescennius in the purported document, the Author remarks with some sarcasm, "if we may believe what Severus said in his writings, Niger was greedy for glory, hypocritical in his mode of life, base in morals" (*Pesc. Nig.* 5.1). As the life continues, the Author progressively undermines Severus' damning characterization of Pescennius by instead presenting documents that support a more laudatory depiction of the man. The Author claims to paraphrase several letters Niger sent to Marcus Aurelius and Commodus "when he saw the provinces being demoralized by frequent changes of administration," and the Author states that Niger suggested policy changes to prevent bribery and nepotism from influencing government appointments (*Pesc. Nig.* 7.2-3, 5-6).

Like in the case of Avidius Cassius and the other challengers in the *Thirty Tyrants*, the Author also later uses the documents to emphasize that the people agreed that, had he ruled, Niger would have corrected "all the evils which Severus, later, either could not or would not correct" (*Pesc. Nig.* 12.3). To support this position, the Author claims to quote from the text of a Delphic Oracle that confirmed Pescennius Niger would have been a superior ruler to Severus, although it predicted that Septimius would ultimately win the empire and rule for the following twenty years instead (*Pesc. Nig.* 8.1-6). At the very conclusion of the life, the Author also makes one last jab at Severus'

hypocrisy, by quoting an anecdote of Severus' in which Severus agrees that Pescennius might have brought about another golden age had he ruled (*Pesc. Nig.* 12.5-8).

A similar pattern arises in the *Life of Clodius Albinus*. The Author purports to quote from several letters in which Severus addresses Clodius as "my most loyal, most dear, and loving friend," and offers to rule the empire with Clodius as "brothers" on the throne (*Clod. Alb.* 7.3-6).<sup>64</sup> Like in the *Pescennius*, the Author shortly thereafter contrasts this cordiality with the statement that Severus "charged Albinus with being depraved and perfidious, unprincipled and dishonourable, covetous and extravagant" in his autobiography. In this case, the Author specifically states that Severus' about-face occurred due to the change of perspective after the war, saying "all this he wrote either during the war or after it, at a time when he merits less credence, since he was speaking of a foe" (*sed haec belli tempore vel post bellum, quando ei iam velut de hoste credi non poterat*) (*Clod. Alb.* 10.1-2).<sup>65</sup>

Immediately following this remark, the Author further underscores Severus' about-face, saying that during Clodius' life, "Severus himself sent many letters, as though to an intimate friend," and confirming that, "many persons, moreover, thought

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<sup>64</sup> The Author later reiterates that during Clodius Albinus' lifetime, "Severus himself sent Albinus many letters, as though to an intimate friend" and "wished to give him the name of Caesar, and when he made plans for a successor, he had Albinus foremost in mind" (*Alb. Clod.* 10.1-3).

<sup>65</sup> The concern that successors could warp their predecessors' legacies also appears in the *Life of Macrinus* (4.1-8).

well of Albinus" (*Clod. Alb.* 10.3). To support this more favorable depiction, the Author produces two letters attributed to Marcus Aurelius in which Marcus Aurelius describes Avidius as "a man of experience, strict in his mode of life, respected for his character," and expresses his confidence that Albinus would "prove of value in the service of the camp" (*Clod. Alb.* 10.4-7). The second letter praises Clodius for his loyalty during Cassius' insurrection (*Clod. Alb.* 10.9-12), directly contradicting the claims in Severus' autobiography that Clodius was "perfidious, unprincipled, and dishonourable" (*turpem malitiosum improbum*) (*Clod. Alb.* 10.1), thus underscoring Severus' hypocritical distortion of Clodius and Pescennius' legacies.

From these examples, we see that the letters not only provide opportunities for renewed discussions about the depictions of usurpers in other historical texts. The documents also pointedly target the overarching imperial narrative about the merits and motivations of these figures. Indeed, the undercurrent of distrust in the imperial narrative found throughout the five lives and the Author's willingness to deem challengers worthy candidates for the throne also leave open the possibility that the Author's accounts may not have been merely a literary exercise intended to enliven historical and academic debates but that they served as a way to comment on the contemporary political climate.

## *A Possible Context: The Plight of Supporters After the Dust Clears*

As Chapter One argued, the Author's familiarity with family names, knowledge of the topography of the city, and partiality toward senatorial power suggest that the collection was written in the city of Rome sometime during the years 370 to 410 CE. Across those decades and in the preceding generations, failed usurpers had received the support of the senate or senatorial families several times. They gave their support to Maxentius in 308-312, Magnus Magnentius in the 350s, Magnus Maximus in the 380s, and Eugenius in the 390s.<sup>66</sup> M. Humphries, J. Matthews, and R. Chenault, among others, have argued that Roman aristocrats provided support to these usurpers partly out of the desire to regain a pivotal role over the political events in the empire.<sup>67</sup>

In the fourth century, the growth of Tetrarchic and other imperial capitals increasingly sidelined the influence of the Roman senate. Many imperial candidates did not seek the senate's acclamation during the third century, and Diocletian later did away with the official requirement in a series of constitutional reforms. During the fourth century, the city of Rome and its senate went nearly sixty years without visits by reigning emperors. When they did visit, emperors came to reinforce their power and

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<sup>66</sup> For a history of the senate's support for rebellions in the fourth century see, Humphries 2015: 166. Aurelius Victor also records that Roman senatorial families played key roles in the resistance against Neoptianus' twenty-eight day long reign in the city in 350. The Roman senate supported another disputed claimant to the throne, Ioannes, in the 420s.

<sup>67</sup> See Matthews 1990: 1-55, 223-253; Chenault 2008; Humphries 2012; Grig and Kelly 2012: 1-30 for discussions of senatorial interests and forms of disapproval in the fourth century.

prevent further insurgencies.<sup>68</sup> As Humphries states, Constantius II and Theodosius visited Rome after their respective defeats of Magnentius and Maximus to make “ostentatious displays of their legitimacy,” command obedience from any supporters of their rivals, and suppress any other movements towards defection.<sup>69</sup> These visits included public ceremonies in which the emperors were honored by panegyrics and usurpers and their former supporters were denounced by public speeches. During the event, the entirety of the senate and portions of the populace were expected to attend these celebrations to show their support for the emperor.<sup>70</sup>

These meetings likely increased preexisting tensions among the emperors, the senate, and the city. Supporters of fallen challengers would have feared retribution, and the *populus* as a whole likely felt pressure to reaffirm their newfound loyalty to the victorious emperor.<sup>71</sup> Supporters of usurpers rarely remained unpunished. Theodosius’ sweeping clemency towards the supporters of Maximus in the late 380s was a rare

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<sup>68</sup> From the time when Constantine last visited Rome before going permanently to reside in Constantinople in 326 no emperor visited Rome for 30 years until Constantius came to Rome for a single month in 357. After Constantius left, it was another 30 years until Theodosius’ visit in 389: see Grig and Kelly 2012: 1-30; Chenault 2008: 50-53.

<sup>69</sup> Humphries 2015: 166. “It is surely no accident that both episodes provoked the emperors to make rare visits to Rome: the potential for treachery among the city’s aristocratic elite made such expeditions necessary.”

<sup>70</sup> On acclamations in the *HA* and the Later Roman Empire, see Baldwin 1981: 138-139 and Roueché 1984.

<sup>71</sup> For example, Symmachus was allowed to make a formal apology to Theodosius I for his support of Maximus, see Sogno 2006: 71-78.

occasion and worthy of mention by those on both sides of the struggle.<sup>72</sup> More often, supporters who backed the wrong contender could expect, at the very least, confiscation of property and removal from office.<sup>73</sup> For some, compulsory suicide, execution (sometimes of entire family lines), and even condemnation by *damnatio memoriae* awaited, such as that which befell Nicomachus Flavianus after the defeat of Eugenius and his forces in 394.<sup>74</sup>

Even those who remained on the political sidelines would have been aware of the wide-reaching effects and consequences of these political struggles, and memories of these conflicts had a long afterlife. In 350, the clash between Nepotianus' armed gladiators and the armed supporters of Magnus Magnentius took place in the city streets.<sup>75</sup> Aurelius Victor, for example, writing a decade later about Nepotianus' twenty-

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<sup>72</sup> See Humphries 2015: 166. Symmachus was a direct beneficiary of this clemency. He had presented a panegyric for the usurper Maximus (385-388), but was pardoned by Theodosius after Symmachus gave a public speech renouncing his former support of Maximus: see Sogno 2006: 59-69. Examples of clemency were often remarked upon: see Eutr. 7.21 for accounts of Titus' restrained response to conspirators, and Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 10.3-4.

<sup>73</sup> The Theodosian code presents many examples in which honors and positions were revoked: see *CTh.* 15.14.1-14 for instances in which emperors revoked laws made by and stripped privileges given by usurpers. For information about the revocation of privileges and statuses granted under Maximus and Eugenius, see Pharr 1952: 437-8.

<sup>74</sup> See Festy 2007 and Hendrick 2000 for discussion of the case of Nichomachus Flavianus, Praetorian Prefect of Italy in 390-392, and the consequences of his support of Eugenius. On Nichomachus as the potential author of the *Historia Augusta*, see Ratti 2007, 2008, 2016, although this position has little support: *contra*, Cameron 2016.

<sup>75</sup> According to Aurelius Victor, the resistance was led by the senatorial family of Titianus, when Nepotianus tried to enter the city on 3 June 350 following the assassination of the urban prefect. Ultimately, Nepotianus was killed in a bloody scuffle and his head was borne around Rome (*Caes.* 42).

eight day reign stated that in Rome, “everywhere the houses, squares, streets, and temples were filled with gore and corpses like tombs” (*Caes.* 42).

Because these struggles occurred several times within conceivable living memory of the Author and his readers, it is likely that the ongoing cultural memory of these events influenced the *Historia Augusta*'s accounts.<sup>76</sup> Nor would the Author of the *Historia Augusta* be the only contemporary author who let memories of recent events shape his accounts of past rebellions. Ammianus draws parallels between the fatal mistakes committed by Pescennius Niger and those made by Procopius (*Amm. Marc.* 26.8.15), and Humphries detects allusions to Theodosius' victories in Ammianus' account of Constantius II's victory over Magnentius in 357.<sup>77</sup>

Certainly, the pervasive distrust of the imperial narrative and the Author's willingness to disregard military victory and the imperial bloodline as a true means of legitimacy suggest that the Author may have been disillusioned with the contemporary political climate and the current expressions of imperial succession. Indeed, for the time, it was unprecedented to suggest that those deemed “tyrants” by history were qualified, or indeed more qualified, for the position than reigning emperors. In particular, the

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<sup>76</sup> Paschoud 1996: 87 also suggests that the lives of the usurpers in the *HA* serve as “doors to interpret the events of the present or recent past” and drew upon cultural memory of mythic and fantastic stereotypes of usurpers and draws on “imagination to compensate these silences of the historical tradition.”

<sup>77</sup> See Humphries 2015: 166-167, 188. He proposes that Ammianus' account of Constantius II's victory over Magnentius in 357 “may also be read as a direct commentary on the civil-war triumph of Theodosius, which must have been fresh in the memory of Ammianus' audience.”

position that usurpers were made tyrants only “through other men's victories” (*quos tyrannos aliorum victoria fecerit*) (*Pesc. Nig.* 1.1), and not due to an intrinsic lack of merit, suggests that the Author found military victory an unsuitable or fickle means of determining one’s ability to rule. This distrust of military victory particularly runs contrary to the common narrative at the time, because monuments and panegyrics of the Late Empire reiterate time and again that usurpers’ defeats were confirmation that divine benevolence watched over legitimate emperors.<sup>78</sup> The Author’s skepticism about the imperial bloodline and contemporary forms of imperial legitimacy also align with the Author’s overt condemnation of hereditary succession found throughout the collection, as Chapter Four illustrated.

So too, the Author’s close attention to the consequences of these political skirmishes reinforces the position that the Author was drawing upon contemporary events. In the lives of the usurpers, the Author is particularly attentive to the fate of usurpers’ supporters. While the *Marcus Aurelius* and *Severus* briefly comment on the outcomes of the battles and subsequent events, the lives of *Avidius Cassius*, *Pescennius Niger*, and *Clodius Albinus* address the fates of their families and supporters in much greater detail.<sup>79</sup> Here too, the fabricated documents play a key role by adding new

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<sup>78</sup> The support of divine benevolence is seen in the Arch of Constantine as well as many of the *Panegyrici Latini*: see Nixon and Rodgers 1994: 21-33.

<sup>79</sup> The *Marcus Aurelius* and the *Avidius Cassius* repeat nearly identical passages concerning Aurelius’ insistence that no senator implicated in the rebellion should be punished, that Antioch should be pardoned

nuances and details in ways that emphasize the stark comparison between Aurelius' clemency and Severus' cruelty.

For example, several documents in the *Life of Avidius Cassius* highlight Marcus' desire to extend clemency toward Cassius and his supporters. At the outset of the life, the Author presents two letters exchanged between Lucius Verus and Marcus Aurelius. Whereas Verus expresses wariness about Cassius' intentions for insurrection and suggests that Marcus take decisive action against Cassius, Marcus refuses to punish Cassius, stating, "in cases of treason it is inevitable that even those who have been proved guilty seem to suffer injustice" (*Av. Cass.* 2.4). Similarly, when Faustina demands swift retribution on Cassius' family and supporters, Marcus calls his wife's proposals "immoderate" and "cruel," and reminds her "there is nothing which endears a Roman emperor to mankind as much as the quality of mercy" (*Av. Cass.* 11.1-8).<sup>80</sup> The Author also purports to quote from a lengthy transcript of Marcus' message to the senate following Cassius' defeat. In the transcript, Marcus repeatedly orders the senate to allow Cassius' family to live unharmed, and he instructs them to "let the senate put no man to death. Let no senator be punished; let the blood of no distinguished man be shed; let

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despite its support for Cassius, and that the children of Cassius should retain their property and to travel freely, excepting only Cassius' oldest son (*Marc.* 25.5-26.1, 26.10-13, cf. *Av. Cass.* 8.2-9.4).

<sup>80</sup> *Av. Cass.* 11.5: *Non enim quicquam est, quod imperatorem Romanum melius commendet gentibus quam clementia.*

those who have been exiled return to their homes; let those who have been outlawed recover their estates" (*Av. Cass.* 11.5-12.10).<sup>81</sup>

In contrast, documents in the *Life of Clodius Albinus* underscore Severus' harsh treatment toward the supporters of Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus. In the *Life of Septimius Severus*, Severus is said to have returned to Rome full of wrath, and to have "put to death without trial" many "distinguished men, many of whom had been consuls and many praetors" (*Sev.* 11.7-9, 13.1-14.1).<sup>82</sup> The account of Severus' wrath and retribution receives a much fuller treatment in the *Life of Clodius Albinus*. There, the Author emphasizes the wide scope of Severus' retribution, stating that Severus put to death not only "those who were really of Albinus' party" but also "those who were only thought to be" (*Clod. Alb.* 12.2). He states that Severus "pardoned none, but killed them all, placing their goods on sale and depositing the proceeds in the public treasury" (*Clod. Alb.* 12.4).

The life also goes on to cite a transcript of the speech that Severus purportedly gave to the senate following his victories over Pescennius Niger and Albinus Clodius. In

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<sup>81</sup> The sentiment behind Marcus' request that "whoever, in the cause of the pretender, has fallen in the strife may, though slain, still be esteemed" (*Av. Cass.* 11.5-12.10) is reminiscent of Arcadius and Honorius' decree to the in 395 CE following the rebellion of Eugenius: "if any man was in the imperial service in the time of the tyrant or was given any post of administration [...], he shall not sustain the brand of infamy or be polluted by any title of disgrace" (*CTh* 15.14.11) Trans. Pharr 1952: 438.

<sup>82</sup> Such detail conflicts with the account given in Cassius Dio 74/75.9. Dio recounts that supporters of Niger were dealt with harshly, but that following Albinus' death, Severus pardoned thirty-five men with connections to Cassius and executed twenty-nine.

the speech, Severus rebukes the senators for their lack of gratitude for the services he had rendered to the state, claiming,

It was I who gave the city grain, I who waged many wars for the state, I who gave oil to the people of Rome, [...] and I who slew Pescennius Niger and freed you from the ills of a tyrant. A fine requital, truly, you have made me, a fine expression of thanks! (*Clod. Alb.* 12.5-10, cf. *Sev.* 11.7-9)

*ego frumenta rei publicae detuli, ego multa bella pro re publica gessi, ego populo Romano tantum olei detuli [...]. ego interfecto Pescennio Nigro vos a malis tyrannicis liberavi. magnam sane mihi reddidistis vicem, magnam gratiam.*

Considering that Severus had just executed by the Author's count no less than forty-one senators, Severus' petulant complaint that he had not received the gratitude owed to his victories can only reinforce the depiction of Severus as cruel and hypocritical throughout these lives.<sup>83</sup>

The recent occasions on which supporters had been pardoned or punished might explain why the Author expends so much energy detailing Severus' ruthless decimation of the senatorial and equestrian ranks in Rome after his victories over Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus.<sup>84</sup> The Author's disapproving account of Septimius' executions and confiscation of property from so many men without fair trial seems intended to invoke

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<sup>83</sup> In all three lives, Severus' duplicity in rescinding on initial promises of clemency is a prominent theme. Severus executes the families of Niger and Clodius despite his initial promises of clemency (*Sev.* 8.11, 9.1-8, 10.1-2, cf. *Pesc. Nig.* 6.1-4, *Clod. Alb.* 9.5). Severus also reneges on initial promises of clemency to the senate (*Sept. Sev.* 9.1-8).

<sup>84</sup> Cass. Dio 75.2.1-2 also recounts that Severus took an oath that he would not execute any senators but swiftly violated his promises.

shock and horror at the bloodshed and devastation done to the senatorial families in Rome.<sup>85</sup> In contrast, Marcus' assurances that privileges would not be revoked and violence would not befall former supporters of Avidius would have been a welcome message at many times in the fourth century. By being attentive to Marcus' mercy and Severus' wrath, the Author provided his readers with a basis to discuss the more recent treatment of the families and supporters of their fallen rivals.

In these ways, the fabricated documents in the lives of the usurpers provide a context to reflect on their contemporary political climate and the experiences of those who had personally lived through usurpations. Indeed, although C. Grey has argued that the Author treated these political and military struggles as far distant from concerns within the city of Rome,<sup>86</sup> the Author's awareness of the consequences of supporting usurpers illustrate that he was aware of how close to home these struggles could be.

Thus, the Author's more nuanced depictions of the men who struggled for imperial power may have been directed toward readers who were similarly dissatisfied with the repetitive, one-sided historical narrative found in contemporary literature. At the very least, the invented documents in the *Historia Augusta's* lives of the usurpers

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<sup>85</sup> Many of the victims bear names with connections to fourth-century aristocratic families as well, a parallel which may have been designed to underscore connections to the Author's late fourth-century readers, such as Celsinus and Rufinus. On the names in the *HA*, see Chapters One and Three above.

<sup>86</sup> Grey 2010: 98-100 describes the Author's depiction of the conflict and dangers of civil war as "compartmentalized" to the "margins of the empire."

represent one author's ability to envision more admirable qualities and intentions behind usurpers' rebellions.

## ***Conclusion***

Considering the overt fabrication and the invented documents in the *Historia Augusta's* lives of the usurpers, it is understandable why so many have doubted that any serious historical motivations could be lurking behind this facetious exterior. Yet the prevalence of fabricated documents in the *Historia Augusta's* lives of the usurpers should not be reasons to doubt that these lives performed an important historical function in the collection. As this chapter has shown, the fabricated documents arise in conjunction with the lives of the usurpers because the documents were a crucial means of providing more sympathetic narratives of usurpers' merits and motivations than those found in comparable sources of the time. Even though the documents are themselves invented, the Author uses them to speak to a certain overlooked truth: usurpers could hardly have been to a man (or woman) the heartless, selfish tyrants that the majority of historical sources depicted.

By encouraging renewed reflection on the legacy of usurpers and the effects of their rebellions, the Author may have hoped to provide a foundation for renewed discussions about contemporary forms of power and legitimacy. As this chapter has shown, the Author's distrust of the imperial narrative and his willingness to challenge

established markers of imperial legitimacy provide an important window into the political disillusionment of the city of Rome in the late fourth century. Thus, although Rohrbacher has argued the *Historia Augusta's* views are “surprisingly commonplace” and Cameron has remarked with greater disdain that the Author had “no agenda worthy of the name at all,”<sup>87</sup> the Author’s treatment of usurpers is a clear counter-perspective to the dominant historical narrative found in panegyrics, speeches, monuments, and texts of the fourth century.

In addition, although the scope of this current study was limited to the documents in the lives of the usurpers, the conclusion that the documents in these lives—those long denounced as the most spurious of the entire collection—play such an important role in the *Historia Augusta* suggests that further analysis of the documents in the other lives of the collection may also prove that they too serve multifarious historical purposes.

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<sup>87</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 134 and Cameron 2011: 781.

## Conclusion A Biographer After All

After presenting a sweeping overview of the numerous emperors, heirs apparent, and usurpers who helped shape the course of the Empire across second and third centuries CE, the Author draws the *Historia Augusta* to a close at the end of the *Life of Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*. He entrusts the collection to his reader with the words:

Receive, my friend, this gift of mine, which I, as I have often said, brought forth into the light of day, not for the sake of eloquence but due to an eagerness for knowledge, persisting in this project especially in the hopes that, if any eloquent writer should wish to disclose the deeds of the *principes*, he might not lack the material, since he will have my little biographies as aids for his eloquence. I entreat you, that you may be content and contend that I wished to write better than I was able. (*Car.* 21.2-3)

*Habe, mi amice, meum munus, quod ego, ut saepe dixi, non eloquentiae causa sed curiositatis in lumen edidi, id praecipue agens ut, si quis eloquens vellet facta principum reserare, materiam non requireret, habiturus meos libellos ministros eloquii. Te quaeso, sis contentus nosque sic voluisse scribere melius quam potuisse contendas.*

Considering that the collection turns as often to rulers' bizarre personal habits as to the political, religious, and military events that occur during each reign, few familiar with the colorful nature of the lives would doubt that the collection was driven on by the Author's wide-ranging *curiositas* or "eagerness for knowledge."

Yet, for generations, the proposition that the Author intended his work to be a useful and enlightening source for future historians has been deemed disingenuous, even laughable in light of the work's numerous fabrications. Indeed, as noted in Chapter

One, many scholars throughout the years have even denied the Author the title of “biographer,” or held that his collection is a “biography in appearance alone.” The historical content of the *Historia Augusta* has been derided as an unaesthetic transcription of prior sources, and little more than a requisite framework on which to build his parodies and increasingly indulge his innate love of invention and deception.

This dissertation has shown, however, that more credence should be given to the Author’s claims that he wished to construct a useful and informative historical work for generations to come. Through its analysis of the evolution of the inventions across the collection, this dissertation has illustrated that the attributions, invocations, and spurious documents, far from obscuring and detracting from the historical purposes of the collection, were designed to enhance the historical purposes of the work.

By examining the interplay of the work’s inventions and its historical narrative across the collection, this dissertation has demonstrated that the three major inventions of the *Historia Augusta*—its attribution to six fictitious biographers, its dedications to Diocletian and Constantine, and its invented documents—each play a key historiographic role in the collection. The preceding chapters have demonstrated that the attributions to the biographers allowed the Author to classify his imperial exemplars by characteristic virtues; the imperial invocations to Diocletian and Constantine allowed the Author to engage in ongoing historical debates about the legacy of the two rulers, while also reinforcing his positions on imperial succession and the Antonine dynasty; and the

invented letters in the lives of the usurpers provided an opportunity to present an alternative, more sympathetic narrative about the merits and motivations of usurpers and to criticize the role of imperial censorship in obstructing reliable narratives about these figures.

In addition to providing new ways to interpret the inventions, this dissertation has made a strong case for rejecting the proposition that the *Historia Augusta* was a hastily and shoddily constructed text. Whereas the Author's process has often been described as haphazard or unpredictable, my examination of the attributions, invocations, and invented documents across the collection has revealed the careful craftsmanship that guided the formation of the *Historia Augusta*. The extensive evidence of revision across the lives illustrates the Author's systematic efforts to construct thematically and structurally cohesive biographies across the entirety of the collection.

This project has also demonstrated that viewing the *Historia Augusta* as a teleological and predetermined progression toward parodic invention vastly oversimplifies the Author's creative process. Indeed, the fact that the Author maintains multiple overarching tropes, including the *boni* and *mali principes*, his classification of his subjects by their imperial virtues, and his use of the *nomen Antoninorum* throughout the collection, even up to the final life, indicates that the Author did not recklessly abandon his historical endeavors for invention in the "later" lives, as many have implied.

Instead, this study has shown that the inventions only developed as the result of a series of creative decisions, many of which can be traced to the period in which the Author was drafting and revising the “secondary” and “intermediate” lives. The preceding chapters have identified this period as a particularly formative stage in which the Author began to diversify the generic range of his sources and to draw inspiration for his inventions from contemporary texts. While such findings support the conclusions of Thomson and Rohrbacher that the Author was a “creative inventor,”<sup>1</sup> this study has shown that the Author selectively adapted elements of other works and genres to enrich and enhance his biographical project, rather than merely to entertain his readers.

My analysis has also shown that the collection was heavily engaged with ongoing historical and political debates and that the *Historia Augusta* was deeply indebted to the circumstances and environment in which it was written. This dissertation has shown that the Author’s sympathy for usurpers and his attention to the fate of the supporters and survivors of these rebellions hold unique insights into the political disillusionment of the period. Although the vignettes concerning “Trebellius Pollio,” “Flavius Vopiscus,” and their companions illustrate that the Author was very much aware of the immediate context in which the *Historia Augusta* would be read, revised, and disseminated, there are reasons to doubt Rohrbacher’s conclusion that the

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<sup>1</sup> Thomson 2012: 118-120, Rohrbacher 2016: 2.

*Historia Augusta* was intended for only a small contemporary audience and was “not meant to last beyond its initial unveiling.”<sup>2</sup>

While it is true that many of the work’s allusions to literature and contemporary events would resonate best amongst its original audience, it does not necessarily mean that Author could not foresee more enduring uses for his text, as he states in the concluding coda to the collection. Indeed, the Author’s concerns about the detrimental effects of imperial censorship and its role in curtailing the availability of reliable evidence concerning transitions of power suggest that the Author was keenly aware of the malleability of the historical record, and conscious of the role that his own collection had to play in the preservation and recording of history.

Admittedly, the *Historia Augusta* is the product of the Author’s many shifting influences and priorities. Because of the collection’s multifaceted and composite wealth of influences, the text resists easy categorization like many other works of the Late Empire. Yet one thing must be held certain: among the many other labels scholars have used to describe the Author, this study has shown that the Author does deserve the title “biographer.” The Author’s preoccupation with distinguishing *boni* and *mali* emperors, classifying his subjects by imperial *virtutes*, and identifying the forms of succession that were the most beneficial to the Empire illustrate just how immersed the Author was in

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<sup>2</sup> Rohrbacher 2016: 171-172.

many conventional concerns of the biographical genre. So too, the Author's efforts to highlight these themes throughout the collection indicate his attempts to construct a text that could impart lessons about imperial *virtutes*, legitimacy, and succession upon his readers.

For that reason, we can now set aside such damning judgments as Cameron's conclusion that, "The author of the *HA* was a frivolous, ignorant person with no agenda worthy of the name at all," or Rohrbacher's conclusion that the *Historia Augusta* should be considered "a biographical collection in appearance alone," because it "does not have the goal normal to biography of instructing its readers about the lives of its subjects."<sup>3</sup> Instead, it is necessary to see the *Historia Augusta* as the biographical work of a master craftsman who used invention to forge together a series of episodic biographies into a cohesive and richly nuanced biographical narrative.

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<sup>3</sup> See Cameron 2011: 781 and Rohrbacher 2016: 14, 175, although many others have held similar perspectives on the work: see Chapter One above.

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## Biography

Kathryn A. Langenfeld was born on April 22, 1987 in Saint Louis, Missouri. She received a B.A. in Classical Studies, emphasis Classical Languages (*summa cum laude*, with Departmental Honors) and a B.A. in History (*summa cum laude*) from the University of Missouri-Columbia in 2009. She matriculated to Duke's Department of Classical Studies in fall of 2009. At Duke, Kathryn was a J. B. Duke Fellow and was the recipient of a Julian Price Research Fellowship from the Duke Graduate School. She also received a Competitive Teaching Fellowship from the Department of Classical Studies. Her research interests include Roman Imperial Historiography, the Material Culture of the Roman Empire, and Late Antique Literary Culture.

In 2012, Kathryn attended the American Academy of Rome's Classical Summer School, and she spent the summer of 2013 teaching at museums and archaeological sites in Rome as the T.A. for Duke's study abroad program. Kathryn has presented multiple papers at the annual meetings of the Society for Classical Studies and the Classical Association of the Midwest and South. Her paper, "Challenging the 'Conspiracy of Silence': Historical Memory, Usurpers, and the Imperial Biographies of the *Historia Augusta*," won the CAMWS President's Award for Best Graduate Student Paper in 2014. Throughout her studies, Kathryn was also an active discussant and participant in the Duke Center for Late Ancient Studies and the Duke Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies.