

MAXIMINUS THRAX, GENERAL OF SEVERUS ALEXANDER AND VICTOR OVER THE PERSIANS? SOME CONSIDERATIONS CONCERNING THE SOURCES OF QUINTUS AURELIUS SYMMACHUS’ *ROMAN HISTORY**

Abstract. This article explores the historiographical accounts that attest the presence of Maximinus Thrax in the Persian campaign of Severus Alexander. The Western tradition is silent about this episode, except for a brief passage in Jordanes’ *Getica*. Jordanes acknowledges his source for Maximinus as the lost *Roman History* of Symmachus the Younger. Yet neither the remarkable designation of Severus Alexander as ‘Alexander Mamaeae’ nor Maximinus’ Persian campaign under Severus Alexander appear in those works which modern scholars commonly understand to be the sources of Symmachus’ information about Maximinus: that is, the *Life of the Two Maximini* in the *Historia Augusta* and Orosius. Further, while Herodian and some Byzantine historians shed some light on Maximinus’ presence in Persia, none of these accounts appears to share a common source with the item from Symmachus’ *History*. Thus Jordanes’ reference to Maximinus in Persia reveals the presence of a Greek source used by Symmachus that was evidently a distinctive element in the extremely complex historiographical tradition surrounding Severus Alexander’s Persian campaign. As an exercise in *Quellenforschung*, this article also sheds light on the compositional methods of all the historians discussed, above all Jordanes and Symmachus, the creativity and independence of both of whom continues to be a matter of considerable scholarly controversy.

Keywords: Maximinus Thrax, Jordanes, Symmachus, Cassiodorus, Alexander Severus, Byzantine historiography

Introduction

In *The Origin and Deeds of the Getae* (*Get.* 83–8) the sixth-century historian Jordanes, writing c. AD 550, preserves an excerpt from the lost *Roman History* of Quintus Aurelius Symmachus the Younger, specifically from the biography of Maximinus Thrax, and this excerpt has been the subject of intense scholarly interest.¹ The excerpt shows strong textual parallels with the

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¹ On Symmachus the Younger generally see *PLRE II* (1980) 1044–6; Vitiello (2008). Within the immense literature on Symmachus’ *Roman History* see Ensslin (1949) 5–13; Hartke (1951) 26 ff., 427–39; O’Donnell (1982) 234–6; Schwartz (1983); Callu (1985) 97–119; Lippold (1991) 164–77; Zecchini (1993) 82–5; Christensen (2002) 109–12; Baldini (2004) 241–52; (2005) 37–43; (2007); Cameron (2011) 203, 635–6; Mastrandrea (2011); Festy (2014). F. Paschoud is preparing a study of the fragment as an appendix to his edition of the *Vita*

account in the *Life of the Two Maximini* in the *Historia Augusta* that is there attributed to Julius Capitolinus. Now it is generally accepted that Symmachus' *Roman History* cannot be identified with the *Historia Augusta*,² and our excerpt supports this, because it contains two key elements which are absent from the *Life of the Two Maximini*.³ Scholars generally and rightly agree that Symmachus' main source here is the *Historia Augusta*, with supplementation from Orosius.⁴ The excerpt in fact constitutes the only evidence that the *Historia Augusta*, a work which was not in general circulation until the beginning of the sixth-century, belonged to the 'literary patrimony' of the Nicomachi and Symmachi families, the ancestors whom Symmachus the Younger aimed to imitate in his *History* (*parentesque suos imitatus historiam quoque Romanam septem libris edidit*).⁵ But the following discussion will argue that Symmachus must also have relied upon a Greek source, which thus emerges as another element within the large and complex historiographical tradition on Severus Alexander and Maximinus.

In discussing the relationship between Jordanes and Symmachus, I take at face value Jordanes' claim to have inserted the excerpt of Symmachus' *History* himself,⁶ rather than supposing that such an insertion had already been made by Jordanes' immediate predecessor Cassiodorus in his *History of the Goths*, the work which Jordanes claims to have abridged while adding his own Greek and Latin authors (cf. *Get. praef.* 1–3), and that Jordanes was here directly copying Cassiodorus' own wording.⁷ The latter view would make

Maximini Duo of the *Historia Augusta*, forthcoming in the *Collection des Universités de France, Budé*. The excellent, detailed commentary of Lippold (1991) is dedicated to the *Vita Maximini Duo*.

² For a different position see recently Mastrandrea (2011) 226, 228 ff.

³ Namely, the designation 'Alexander Mamaeae' and the notice of Maximinus' service against Persia (parts 1 and 2 below).

⁴ *SHA Max.* 1.1–6; 2.1–7; 3.1–5; 4.4; 4.6; *Oros.* 7.19.1–2; cf. e.g. Cameron (2011) 636, who comments: 'the one quotation we have consists of verbatim excerpt from a known source, the *Historia Augusta*, combined with excerpts from Orosius, apparently his account on Maximinus in its entirety'; see further, nn. 12 and 14 below.

⁵ *Anec. Hold.* ll. 7–8 (Galonnier (1996) 306, 309, 311–12; cf. also nn. 13 and 36 below). On the circulation of the *Historia Augusta* at the beginning of the sixth-century and later see Callu (1985).

⁶ *Get.* 88: *quod nos idcirco huic nostro opusculo de Symmachi historia mutuauimus*.

⁷ The general question of such possible borrowings is very complex, given the loss of both Cassiodorus' and Symmachus' works and the brevity of the intervals between the respective works (below). It is true that Cassiodorus also used a variety of sources in his history; see *Var.* 9.25.5 (Mommsen ed. (1894b)), *originem Gothicam historiam fecit esse Romanam, colligens quasi in unam coronam germen floridum quod per librorum campos passim fuerat ante dispersum*, and there may well be Cassiodoran traces in Jordanes. For example, in *Get.* 58 Jordanes describes Cassius Dio (a source whom he also uses in *Get.* 39–40) as *storicus et antiquitatum*

Jordanes dishonest (not perhaps itself an insuperable objection). But it would also make Cassiodorus explicitly cite Symmachus, which he is unlikely to have done.⁸ Consequently, this paper also has implications for our understanding and assessment of Jordanes.

We must first contextualise the excerpt of Symmachus and spell out the main source relationships relevant to our enquiry. The excerpt was taken from the fifth book of Symmachus' *History*, as Jordanes states in *Get.* 83.⁹ It comes between *Get.* 83 and *Get.* 88, and its position within the *Getica* is deliberate. It follows the Amal genealogy of *Get.* 79–81. Maximinus is descended from those *Getae* who had settled in Thrace and Moesia, the areas south of the Danube which would be settled by the Goths two centuries later. The scope of the excerpt is demarcated by the clear verbal links between *Get.* 82 **nunc ... doceamus ... quomodo ordo gentis, unde agimus**, *cursus sui metam expleuit* and the last part of *Get.* 88: *quod nos idcirco huic nostro opusculo de Symmachi historia mutuauimus, quatenus gentem, unde agimus, ostenderemus ad regni Romani fastigium usque uenisse. ceterum causa exigit, ad id, unde digressimus, redeamus.*¹⁰

The short reference to Maximinus in Persia discussed in section 2 follows the section derived from the *Historia Augusta*, which describes Maximinus' physical appearance, as well as his youth and early career,¹¹ and precedes the information taken from Orosius to explain the fate of Maximinus: the persecutions of the Christians are mentioned at the beginning and at the end of Jordanes' excerpt, on both occasions in connection with the death of the em-

diligentissimus inquisitor; this description may derive from Cassiodorus, who similarly describes Symmachus in *Var.* 4.51.2 as *antiquorum diligentissimus imitator, modernorum nobilissimus institutor*; cf. Moorhead (1992) 161 n. 104. But our case is different for the reasons cited in the text.

⁸ For a recent discussion of the relationship between Cassiodorus and Symmachus see Festy (2014) 228–30, who rightly suggests that Symmachus' historical work was banned after his execution. In that case, it is unlikely that Cassiodorus would mention Symmachus' work in his *History of the Goths*, on which he probably was working in the late 520s, shortly after Symmachus' execution. We know that Cassiodorus' work was finished by 533, as is testified in *Var.* 9.25.4: *tetendit se [i.e. Cassiodorus] etiam in antiquam prosapiem nostram, lectione discens quod uix maiorum notitia cana retinebat. iste reges Gothorum longa obliuione celatos latibulo uetustatis eduxit. iste Hamalos cum generis sui claritate restituit, euidenter ostendens in septimam decimam progeniem stirpem nos habere regalem.*

⁹ Quoted below in n. 15.

¹⁰ The Latin quotations here and elsewhere are from Mommsen (1882), who follows the manuscripts of the family *HPVL*, the more reliable tradition, although cf. n. 15 for a minor complication.

¹¹ Cf. *SHA Max.* 1–4. For philological comparison see Mastrandrea (2011) 214–6; the closeness of the parallels excludes any possibility of Symmachus' here using the *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus (cf. below, n. 36).

peror (*Get.* 83: **is triennio regnans, dum in Christianos arma commoueret**, *imperium simul et uitam amisit*; *Get.* 88: **qui cuncta bona sua in persecutione Christianorum malo uoto foedauit, occisusque Aquileia a Puppione ...**).¹² Symmachus, imitator of Cato, who surpassed the virtues of the ancients through his *sanctissima religio* (sc. that of Christianity),¹³ clearly added this information both to frame his biography of Maximinus and to give it a strong religious unity. Also in Orosius' history, Symmachus found the place of Severus Alexander's death, Mogontiacum, the circumstances of his assassination (*tumultu militari*), and the reference to the soldiers' choice of Maximinus as emperor without the Senate's deliberation.¹⁴

We now turn to the two distinctive elements in the excerpt that are relevant to our enquiry.

1. Alexander Mamaeae

In *Get.* 83 and 88, Jordanes denotes Severus Alexander, Maximinus' predecessor, as 'Alexander Mamaeae', 'Alexander [son] of Mamaea'.¹⁵ The im-

¹² See Oros. *Adv. Pag.* 7.19.2: *sed continuo, hoc est tertio quam regnabat anno, a Pupieno Aquileiae interfectus et persecutionis et uitae finem fecit.*

¹³ Cf. *Anec. Hold.* ll. 5–6: *uir philosophus, qui antiqui Catonis fuit nouellus imitator, sed uirtutes ueterum sanctissima religione transcendit* (ed. Galonnier (1996) 306); cf. also Cassiod. *Var.* 4.51.2, quoted above, at n. 7.

¹⁴ Oros. *Adv. Pag.* 7.18.8: *sed militari tumultu apud Mogontiacum interfectus est*; 19.1–2: *Maximinus ... nulla senatus uoluntate imperator ab exercitu, postquam bellum in Germania prospere gesserat, creatus persecutionem in Christianos ... exercuit.* Cf. Jerome *Chron.* s.a. 235 (used by Cassiod. *Chron.* s.a. 235: *Alexander occiditur Mogontiaci tumultu militari*); Jord. *Rom.* 280: *Mogontiaco tumultu occiditur militari*; *Get.* 88: *eoque Mogontiaco militari tumultu occiso ipse exercitus electione absque senatus consultu effectus est imperator.* See the observations of Hartke (1951) 435.

¹⁵ There are in fact manuscript complexities here. The manuscripts XYZ of the *Getica* report the fuller and more normal formulation *Alexander Mamaeae filius* in 83 (cf. Mommsen (1882) 78; Giunta and Grillone (1991) 38 and 137, also the *stemma* at p. XVI). *Alexander Mamaeae filius* is also used by Jerome in *Chron.* s.a. 223 (whence Cassiod. *Chron.* s.a. 223), by Prosper *Chron.* 717, also by Jordanes *Rom.* 280 (who often relies on Jerome for information about the emperors); see below, n. 32. Either, then, copyists of the XYZ family were puzzled by the Grecism *Alexander Mamaeae*, and this led them to add the word *filius* in 83, or the manuscripts XYZ preserve the true reading and the presence of the two different designations within the same fragment could be explained by the hypothesis that the occurrence in *Get.* 83 is part of Jordanes' own introduction to Symmachus' fragment (***et quia iam superius diximus eos transito Danubio aliquantum temporis in Mysiam Thraciamque uixisse, ex eorum reliquiis fuit et Maximinus imp. post Alexandrum Mamaeae filium. nam, ut dicit Symmachus in quinto suae historiae libro***), whereas the occurrence at 88 represents the words of Symmachus. Whichever option we choose (and the first is simpler), any occurrence of the counter-intuitive Latin formulation *Alexander Mamaeae* requires explanation.

portant role that the Augusta Julia Mamaea (like the other Juliae of the Severan dynasty) played in raising her son and in advising him is indeed widely testified both in the Greek and in the Latin historiographical traditions.¹⁶ But this striking way of denoting parentage—registering sonship from the mother, not the father, and even omitting the word ‘son’—seems to reflect the hand of Symmachus rather than of Jordanes, who in *Get.* 83–8 is closely reproducing Symmachus’ text.¹⁷ However, the form *Alexander Mamaeae* is absent from the *Life of the Two Maximini* and Orosius, two of Symmachus’ agreed sources for his biography of Maximinus; both those sources refer to Severus Alexander as *Aurelius Alexander*.¹⁸ In fact, in the whole collection of the *Historia Augusta*, the form *Alexander Mamaeae* appears only twice: first in the *Life of Alexander Severus* (with the even more unusual inversion *Mammaeae Alexander*), in an anecdote referring to Alexander’s birth—where it is used to distinguish him from Alexander the Great, and again in the *Life of Carus*, in the list of good emperors in the long digression on the ages of Rome.¹⁹ Apart from these occurrences, the expression *Alexander Mamaeae* is extremely rare, if not non-existent, in the extant Latin literature.

The use of the genitive here without ‘filius’ reflects Greek idiom, where the genitive of person to express filiation is of course common, when, for example, Greek authors want to indicate an emperor who is the son of his predecessor. But such genitives are of course only applied to mothers in special cases such as our own.²⁰ Even in our case, Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας, the Greek

¹⁶ See for example Herodn. 5.8.10; 6.1.1, 1.5, 1.8–9, 5.8–9, 8.3, 9.4, 9.7–8; *SHA Alex.* 14.7; 26.9; 59.8; 60.2; 66.1; Aur. Vict. 24.5. Cf. Jerome *Chron.* s.a. 232, whence Cassiod. *Chron.* s.a. 235. See further Martinelli (1991).

¹⁷ In *Get.* 83 Jordanes gives a resumé of what follows at 84–88: *Nam, ut dicit Symmachus in quinto suae historiae libro, Maximinus, inquit, Caesar mortuo Alexandro ab exercitu effectus est imp., ex infimis parentibus in Thracia natus, a patre Gotho nomine Micca, matre Halana, quae Ababa dicebatur. Is triennio regnans, dum in Christianos arma commoueret, imperium simul et uitam amisit.* In his other historical work, the *Roman History*, Jordanes abridges Symmachus with similar wording (*Rom.* 280–1): *cui [Alexandro] successit Maximinus ex corpore militari in regno. Maximinus genere Gothico, patre Micca Ababaque Alana genitus matre, sola militum uoluntate ad imperium concedens, bellum aduersus Germanos feliciter gessit, indeque reuertens, contra Christianos mouens intestino proelio, uix tres annos regnans, Aquileia a Puppieno occisus est,* but with the introductory formulation (*Rom.* 280) *Alexander Mamae (sic!) filius.* This has the same emphasis, itself striking, on maternal parentage, but the explicit addition of *filius* reflects another tradition as well as Symmachus (see p. 204 below).

¹⁸ Cf. the observations of Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) XI–XVIII.

¹⁹ See respectively *SHA Alex.* 5.2: *eadem die natalem habet hic Mammaeae Alexander qua ille Magnus excessit e uita* (cf. Prosper *Chron.* 717, Mommsen (1894a): *Alexander Mamaeae filius ... sumpto nomine ab imperatore Alexandro*); *Car.* 3.4: *nihil post haec praeter Seueri diligentiam usque ad Alexandrum Mamaeae sensit bonum.*

²⁰ Cf. especially Martinelli (1991).

original of *Alexander Mamaeae*, is far from universal in the overall Greek tradition: it is missing in the works of Herodian, Cassius Dio (probably), and Zosimus (early sixth-century), and it is not used by the fourth-century Roman emperor Julian in his *Symposion* (313a), where he criticises ὁ Σύρος Ἀλέξανδρος for relying too much on his mother. Yet the expression is found extensively in the Greek literature of Byzantine authors: Procopius of Caesarea, Agathias, John of Antioch, Symeon Logothetes, George Syncellus, Ephraemius, George Cedrenus, Michael Glycas, John Xiphilinus, and John Zonaras.²¹ How, then, do we explain Symmachus' use of the designation *Alexander Mamaeae*? In deriving Severus Alexander's parentage from his mother, Symmachus *could* have been influenced by the *Historia Augusta*, with its two occurrences of the form *Alexander Mamaeae*, and/or by the Latin expression *Alexander Mamaeae filius*, which was evidently quite widespread, as Jerome, Prosper and Cassiodorus testify. Since Jerome is based on the lost Chronicle of Eusebius, the latter also may have designated Severus Alexander as Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας υἱός. In using the *distinctive* form, *Alexander Mamaeae* without *filius* (= υἱός), Symmachus *could* have been influenced directly by the *Historia Augusta*. But these theoretical possibilities do not seem very likely, given Symmachus' close reliance on the *Life of the Two Maximini*, which does not have the form *Alexander Mamaeae*, and another possibility exists, namely that Symmachus consulted a Greek source in addition to the *Life of the Two Maximini*, that it was this source which designated Severus Alexander as Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας, and this source which through whatever channels influenced the Byzantine material. There is nothing against this possibility, since Symma-

²¹ See respectively Procopius of Caesarea *Aed.* 3.1, Agathias 4.24 (differently in 2.26), John of Antioch, frs. 163–65 (Mariev ed. = Müller frs. 139–41; the information of fr. 163 is found also in *Suidae Lexicon* 1124.103), Symeon Logothetes *Chron.* 73.1 (Wahlgren ed. p. 98), George Syncellus (Mosshammer ed. p. 438), Ephraemius (Bekker ed. p. 15), George Cedrenus (Bekker ed. p. 450), Glycas (Bekker ed. p. 453), Zonaras 12.15B (Dindorf ed. p. 119–120). Some of these authors are considered as depending on the *Leoquelle* (cf. below, nn. 48 and 49); cf. Bleckmann (1992), whose investigation, however, starts with Maximinus. Martinelli (1991) does not consider these late authors, and attributes the expression to Cassius Dio on the basis of Zonaras 12.15B, also on the basis of the fact that the expression Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας appears in the title of the *Epitome* of Xiphilinus. Curiously, however, this expression is missing in all the fragments of Xiphilinus based on Cassius Dio. It is unlikely that Zonaras 12.15B is a direct transcription from Cassius Dio. Zonaras' account for these events is based on the *Epitome* of Xiphilinus. Zonaras uses the form Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας also for events postdating Dio's work. John of Antioch also uses this expression, although it is missing in Herodian, his main source for the reigns of Alexander Severus and Maximinus. Alexander's military campaign took place in 231/2, and thus was not included in Cassius Dio's *History*, which concluded with the year 229. For an overview of the historiography of the wars with Persia see Potter (2004) 232–6. Finally, the *Historia Augusta* does not seem to rely on the work of Cassius Dio for the *Life of Alexander Severus*. Cf. Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014), LI–LII, 61–2.

chus' knowledge of the Greek language was enviable,²² and the possibility is increased by the extensive presence of the form in the later Greek tradition as represented by the Byzantine material. The possibility becomes even likelier when other textual evidence is taken into account. This brings us to our second section.

2. Severus Alexander's Persian Campaign

In *Get.* 88, the expression 'Alexander Mamaeae' appears together with the news that Maximinus ***sub Alexandrum Mamaeae contra Parthos mirabiliter dimicavit***. Symmachus counts this episode among Maximinus' good actions, the *cuncta bona sua* before his persecution of the Christians. The episode is missing both in Orosius and in the *Historia Augusta* (which only makes the general statement that Maximinus *sub Alexandro imperatore enituit*).²³ *Get.* 88 is stylistically comparable with a passage from Jordanes' other historical work, the *Romana: Rom.* 280 ***Alexander Mamae*** (sic!) ***filius ... contra Xersen regem Persarum arma arripiens mirabiliter de Parthorum spoliis triumphavit***.²⁴ The repetition of the adverb *mirabiliter* is particularly striking. Hartke speculated that the specific use of *mirabiliter* in *Get.* 88 and *Rom.* 280 betrays the hand of Jordanes, apologist of the Goths and himself of Gothic descent, rather than that of the Roman aristocrat Symmachus,²⁵ and he suggested that it was not Symmachus but Jordanes who committed the mistake of confusing the Parthians with the Persians. But there are several objections to this speculation. The confusion between Parthians and Persians was very widespread in the Roman historical tradition.²⁶ Symmachus himself must have had a strong interest in Maximinus, the emperor whose 'Gothic' origins carried an implicit assimilation with Theoderic, the Gothic king of Italy, whose subject Symmachus was. Interestingly, Maximinus is labelled as '**Gothus**' rather than '**Thrax**'; after all, he came from the same areas as

²² Cf. for example Boethius *Inst. Arith.* I praef. 3: *cum tu utrarumque peritissimus litterarum possis Graiae orationis expertibus quantum de nobis iudicare audeant sola tantum pronuntiatione praescribere.*

²³ *SHA Max.* 1.4 (cf. Herodn. 6.8.1), and more specifically *Max.* 5.3–7 and 6. The information on Maximinus in Persia is also not to be found in Eusebius of Caesarea *HE* 6.28, which Mommsen (ed. (1882), p. XXXIX) believed to be one of the sources of Symmachus/Jordanes. For that question see recently Mastrandrea (2011) 220.

²⁴ See above, nn. 14 and 17. Cf. Ensslin (1949) 40, Hartke (1951) 434 n. 2, and Lippold (1991) 171 n. 39.

²⁵ Cf. Hartke (1951) 434 n. 2; differently Mastrandrea (2011) 219.

²⁶ The reference to the Parthians rather than to the Persians is also in *SHA Alex.* 50.1 (*iniit Parthicam expeditionem*), 56.9 (the senatorial acclamation: *uere Parthicus, uere Persicus*), 59.3 (*uictis iam Parthis*). For more examples of *Parthi* and *Persae* in the same sentence see Eutr. 9.2.2 (Gordianus), 9.7 (= *Epit. de Caes.* 32.5; Valerianus), also 10.16.1 (Julian).

those in which Theoderic and his Goths used to stay before moving to Italy.²⁷ *Rom.* 280, as Ensslin and Hartke himself showed, seems to depend (at least largely) on Symmachus, who probably himself there used the *Historia Augusta*.²⁸ The adverb *mirabiliter*, used both at *Get.* 88 and *Rom.* 280, is also used at *Rom.* 275–6, 294 and 302,²⁹ and it looks as if this whole small section of the *Romana* is exhibiting a characteristic Symmachan ‘thumb-print’. And in the *Getica*, Jordanes usually declares any sources that he uses in addition to Casiodorus’ *History*, and here, in *Get.* 88 he is explicitly following Symmachus.

More radically even than Hartke, Callu hypothesizes that Jordanes deduced that Maximinus fought against the Persians from the statement in the *Historia Augusta* that under Alexander Severus, Maximinus became tribune of the Fourth Legion (*quartae legionis ex tironibus quam ipse composuerat*), a legion which we know to have been stationed in the East.³⁰ But, while this item from the *Historia Augusta* provides further attestation of the presence of Maximinus in the East, it does not explain the account in *Get.* 88 for at least four reasons: first, it seems unlikely that the generic reference provided by the *Historia Augusta* would have been enough to inspire either Symmachus or Jordanes to speculate that Maximinus participated in Severus’ Persian campaign, especially given their distance in time from the events. Second, it was Symmachus and not Jordanes who used the *Historia Augusta*. Third, Maximinus’ Persian campaign is not an addition by Jordanes, but seems to have been part of Symmachus’ account. And fourth, the hypothesis that Jordanes tacitly added to Symmachus’ account an element from another source is itself implausible

²⁷ Festy (2003) 254–5. On the assimilation between Theoderic and Maximinus see also Zecchini (1993) 45, 62, 84–6. The position of Symmachus’ fragment in the *Getica* is purposeful (see above, p. 201).

²⁸ Cf. *SHA Alex.* 56.7–8: **Artaxerxen**, *potentissimum regem tam in re quam nomine, fuisum fugauimus*, ita ut eum terra **Persarum** fugientem uideret, et qua ducta fuerant quondam **signa nostrorum, ea rex ipse signis effugit relictis**; *ibid.* 55.1–2: *inde [in] Persas profectus Artaxerxen regem potentissimum uicit ... fuso denique fugatoque tanto rege ... statim Antiochiam rediit et de praeda quam Persis diripuit suum ditauit exercitum* ... See the parallel texts below, at n. 32. The expression *fuso fugatoque*, which is also used by Jordanes in *Rom.* 224, is typical of Sallust: *Jug.* 52.4 (*fusi fugatique*); 79.4; 99.3; the *Historia Augusta* is here influenced by Aurelius Victor 24.2, quoted below, at n. 32.

²⁹ *Rom.* 275: *Septimius Severus, Parthos et Adiabennos contra Romaniam insurgentes mirabiliter superauit*; *Rom.* 276: *Brittanicum bellum exortum, unde Seuerus mirabiliter triumphauit*; *Rom.* 302: *Dio-cletianus and Maximianus Post quam uictoriam mirabiliter ... triumphauerunt*.

³⁰ *SHA Max.* 5.5: *statim denique (Alexander) illum tribunum legioni quartae, ex tironibus quam ipse composuerat, dedit*; *Alex.* 59.7 (vague): *multi dicunt a Maximino inmissos tirones, qui ei ad exercendum dati fuerant, eum occidisse, multi aliter*; compare with Herodn. 6.8.2. Callu (1985) 113–15 with notes 81–5: ‘Ancien notaire d’un *magister militum*, Jordanès pouvait déduire de la notice de l’Histoire Auguste ce qu’il écrit des combats contre les Parthes’ (quotation p. 114); cf. Lip-pold (1991) 176, with n. 65, and 209–10, 379–80. See recently Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) LVI–VII, 170–1.

for several reasons: as stated above, in the *Getica*, Jordanes usually declares any sources that he uses in addition to Cassiodorus' *History*, and the reference to the Persian campaign is very short, and adds little to the profile of Maximinus.

We have therefore excellent reasons for believing that both Alexander's Persian campaign and Maximinus' participation in it were included in the *History* of Symmachus.³¹

The next element to consider is the representation of Severus Alexander's campaign as a victory (*Rom.* 280). Although the expedition—whatever its wider strategic consequences—actually ended with a retreat, Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and 'Aelius Lampridius' (Severus Alexander's fictitious biographer in the *Historia Augusta*) refer to it as a victorious campaign, and so does the Christian Orosius.³² According to the *Historia Augusta* and to the fourth-century Roman historian Festus, the victorious Alexander came to Rome sometime later to celebrate his triumph (actually held on September 25, 233).³³ Probably the reference to this event made by Jordanes in the *Romana* (*Rom.* 280: *mirabiliter de Parthorum spoliis triumphauit*) shows Symmachus using the *Historia Augusta*. Interestingly, however, for our purposes, in that work the pseudo-historian Lampridius, an avowed Alexander sympathizer, after describing the emperor's Roman triumph, adds:

haec nos et in annalibus et apud multos repperimus. sed quidam dicunt a seruo suo eum proditum non uicisse regem, sed, ne uinceretur, fugisse. quod contra multorum opinionem dici non dubium est his qui

³¹ Among the passages of the *Romana*, which Ensslin ((1949) 12–13, 38–9, and 46) believed to be derived from Symmachus, at least two are certain, and can also be found in the *Historia Augusta*: Pertinax's age, *Rom.* 274, and Probus' authorization to the Spaniards to cultivate the grapevine, *Rom.* 293; cf. Callu (1985) 111–12; Festy (2014).

³² Retreat: Herodn. 6.4.3–6.6.6; victory: *SHA Alex.* 55–7, 59.3. On the sources see Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) XLIII–IV, 160–2. Cf. in parallel with Festus 22.1 (on which Hartke (1951) 434 n. 2): *Persarum regem nobilissimum Xersem gloriose uicit ... de Persis Romae pompa spectabili triumphauit*; Aur. Vict. 24.2: ... *apparatu magno, bellum aduersus Xerxem, Persarum regem, mouet; quo fuso fugatoque ...*; Eutr. 8.23: ... *susceptoque aduersus Persas bello Xerxen eorum regem gloriosissime uicit*; Prosp. Chron. 717: *Alexander Xerxem regem Persarum gloriose uicit*; Hier. Chron. s.a. 223 (sic!): *Alexander Xerxem regem Persarum gloriosissime uicit*, whence Cassiod. Chron. s.a. 224 (Mommsen ed. (1894a)): *Alexander Xerxem regem Persarum uicit*; Oros. Adv. Pag. 7.18.7: *nam statim expeditione in Persas facta Xerxen regem eorum maximo bello uictor oppresit*. See also George Syncellus (Mosshammer ed., p. 438), who briefly describes the success of Alexander against the Persians, before relating his and his mother's arrival in Rome and their subsequent murders: *καὶ Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίαις υἱὸς μετὰ τὴν ἀναίρεσιν Οὐρανίου τοῦ τυράννου καὶ τὴν κατὰ Περσῶν εὐδοκίμησιν ἐπανελθὼν ἐν Ῥώμῃ ἀναιρεῖται...*

³³ Cf. *SHA Alex.* 56.1, and Festus 22.1 (quoted at previous note); on this tradition see recently Bertrand-Dagenbach (2013), in which, however, Jordanes' evidence is missing.

plurimos legerint. nam et amisisse illum exercitum dicunt fame, frigore ac morbo, ut Herodianus auctor est contra multorum opinionem.

All this we have found both in the annals and in many writers. Some assert, however, that he was betrayed by one of his slaves and did not conquer the king at all, but, on the contrary, was forced to flee in order to escape being conquered. But those who have read most of the writers are sure that this assertion is contrary to the general belief. It is also stated that he lost his army through hunger, cold, and disease, and this is the version given by Herodian, but contrary to the belief of the majority.³⁴

The correct reference to Herodian³⁵ lends credibility to the author's general representation of the source material. His evidence indicates that there were numerous accounts of Severus Alexander's campaign, within a vast and very complex historiographical tradition.³⁶ This quantity of material is not at all surprising, considering the comparison that was implied between Alexander the Great and this emperor. Severus Alexander was the first Roman emperor to bear the name of the great Macedonian king, and he was also the first Roman ever to face the Persians. It seems indeed that Severus Alexander himself was fascinated by the vast literature on Alexander the Great.³⁷ De-

³⁴ *SHA Alex.* 57.2–3 (ed. Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) 47, trans. Magie (1960) 295). This passage is followed by the description of the Emperor's *aduentus* and celebrations in *Alex.* 57.4–7. Maximinus would use Alexander's army from the East for his military campaign against the German tribes: cf. Herodn. 6.7.8, 7.1.9, *SHA Alex.* 61.8, *Max.* 11.7.

³⁵ Herodn. 6.6.3: καὶ τῶν τριῶν μοιρῶν τοῦ στρατοῦ ὧν ἔμεινε τὸ πλεῖστον ἀποβαλόντι διαφόροις συμφοραῖς, νόσῳ πολέμῳ κρύει. On Herodian as a source of the *Historia Augusta* see Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) LII–LXI, who argue that the author is not using him directly and Rohrbacher (2013) 163–4, who argues instead that he is using him directly.

³⁶ Cf. the observations of Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) LIV–V with n. 11, and LXXI with n. 141, who do not dismiss the possibility that the reference to 'the annals' includes the lost *Annales* of Virius Nicomachus Flavianus (*CIL* VI 1783 = *ILS* 2948), which, as it happens, along with the *Historia Augusta*, belong to the 'literary patrimony' of Symmachus the Younger; cf. p. 200 and n. 5 above. On the question of the *Annales* see recently Bleckmann (1995); Festy (1999) XXVIII–XXXI; Baldini (2005); (2010); Ratti (2007), (2010); Cameron (2011) 627–90.

³⁷ Cf. *SHA Alex.* 30.3: legit et uitam Alexandri, quem praecipue imitatus est, etsi in eo condemnabat ebrietatem et crudelitatem in amicos, quamuis utrumque defendatur a bonis scriptoribus, quibus saepius ille credebat. At the urging of his grandmother Julia Maesa, Alexander changed his name from Alexianus, his grandfather's name, to Alexander, like the Macedonian king (see Herodn. 5.7.3, C.D. 79.17.2–3). Interesting in this regard is Callu and Festy (2010), particularly pp. 117–8 concerning different passages from the *Historia Augusta*: 'Alexandre Sévère est donc

spite the negative outcome of his campaign, the Western historiographical tradition sympathized with him and celebrated him as a victor over the Persians. Bertrand-Dagenbach concludes her detailed analysis of the sources of (Pseudo-) Lampridius' *Life of Alexander Severus* with the following remarks: 'l'auteur connaissait deux traditions. L'une, latine, est favorable à l'empereur, l'autre, qui s'appuie sur une tradition grecque, lui est défavorable. Il ne l'approuve pas, mais il en fait état. Derrière le vocable de "traditio" se cache une multitude de biographes, chroniqueurs, historiographes, qu'il connaît directement et, le plus souvent, indirectement'.³⁸ For my purposes, the key word here is 'multitude'. Evidently there were many sources, including biographies, which Symmachus could have used to supplement the *Historia Augusta* and Orosius on the Persian war.³⁹ Nor are they likely to have been exclusively Latin, as the testimony of the eighth–ninth-century George Syncellus suggests.⁴⁰

The next element to consider is Symmachus' reference to Maximinus' activity in Persia. Apart from Symmachus himself, the surviving western Latin historiography is silent on this activity, but we find it repeatedly referenced in the Greek tradition. Herodian is the first extant author who provides such a reference, even though the reference is *en passant* and difficult to contextualize. In a speech, Maximinus encourages his soldiers, reminding them of his past in Persia as commander of the legions:

Πέρσαι τε οἱ πάλαι Μεσοποταμίαν κατατρέχοντες νῦν ἡσυχάζουσιν,
ἀγαπητῶς ἔχοντες τὰ ἑαυτῶν, δόξης τε τῆς ὑμετέρας ἐν τοῖς ὄπλοις

rattaché au Macédonien par plus d'un lien: né dans un temple voué au Conquérant, le jour même de l'anniversaire de sa mort, il entretient volontiers une relation déjà illustrée par Caracalla. Il écoutait les louanges de Magnus, présidait des jeux en son honneur, gravait son effigie sur des monnaies précieuses, installait sa statue dans le laraire des animae sanctiores, lisait sa Vie et cette lecture qu'il expurgeait l'incitait à imiter son héros, voire à le dépasser dans la campagne de Perse par son athlétisme et l'action d'une armée disciplinée et bien équipée'. See also Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) LXXXI–II. On the Latin translations of the Alexander literature cf. Cameron (2011) 560–4.

³⁸ Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) LXXII.

³⁹ Most of the biographers of Alexander mentioned in the *Historia Augusta* are probably fictitious; see the observations of Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) XXIX–XXXII. On the question of the sources of the *Historia Augusta* see Barnes (1978) esp. 57–9, 125, id. (1995), Chastagnol (1994) LII–LXXIII, and the very recent discussions of Cameron (2011) 743–82, Rohrbacher (2013), Bertrand-Dagenbach and Molinier-Arbo (2014) XXVIII–LXXII, including the references to Dexippus at LXI–VIII (the question of identification is particularly complex). With reference to the *Vita Maximini Duo* see Lippold (1991) 55–163.

⁴⁰ Cf. n. 32 above.

ἀρετῆς τε, πείρα τῶν ἐμῶν πράξεων, ἃς ἔγνωσαν ὅτε τῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς ὄχθαις στρατοπέδων ἡγούμην, ἀνεχούσης αὐτοῦς.

The Persians, after their invasion of Mesopotamia some time ago, are now quiet and content with their own possessions. Keeping them in check is your reputation for bravery in fighting and their knowledge and experience of my activities when I was a commander of legions on the frontier banks of the river.⁴¹

Maximinus does not specify his exact military role, but it is historically plausible that he could have been operating as *praefectus legionis* or *castrorum*, or as *praefectus Mesopotamiae*, or as *dux ripae* during Severus Alexander's campaign.⁴² As in *Get.* 88, Maximinus' presence in Persia is here represented as having had a positive effect. Nevertheless, Herodian's reference does not directly imply a military campaign under Severus Alexander. Maximinus is never mentioned by Herodian in his long and detailed description of Severus Alexander's Persian campaign. Herodian also claims that the expedition was unsuccessful, and that the emperor eventually decided to abandon the front.⁴³ This last claim is an important difference from Symmachus' source or sources, which, as we have seen, represented Alexander as victorious (*Rom.* 280, and indirectly *Get.* 88). Herodian had previously described Maximinus' earlier career, writing that: 'Soon, with the help of a bit of luck, he progressed through all the ranks in the army and was given charge of legions

⁴¹ Herodn. 7.8.4 (trans. Whittaker (1970) 209). See the different interpretation of *κατατρέχοντες* by Kettenhofen 1995, 167–8 n. 51 ('Auch die Perser, die sonst Mesopotamien heimzusuchen pflegten').

⁴² Cf. the observation of Whittaker (1970) 133 n. 12 and 208–9 n. 2: if *στρατοπέδων* is understood as plural, this could mean that Maximinus was in charge of the two legions as *praefectus Mesopotamiae*. Cf. Lippold (1991) 210 with notes 17–18: Maximinus may have been *praepositus uexillationum*. Even the sceptical Kettenhofen 1995, 168, admits: 'daß die Soldaten Maximins im Krieg des Severus Alexander die Perser in Schach gehalten hätten, klingt nicht sehr glaubwürdig. Entscheidend aber ist, daß die undeutliche Angabe ὅτε τῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς ὄχθαις στρατοπέδων ἡγούμην (VII 8.4) eine Statthalterschaft des Maximinus in Mesopotamien oder ein Amt wie das des *dux ripae*'. On Maximinus' career see Lippold (1991) 206–12.

⁴³ Cf. Herodn. 6.2.3–6.6.6, in which see 6.5.8–9 (trans. Whittaker (1970) 115): 'Perhaps it was due to fear – no doubt he wanted to avoid risking his own life and limb for the Roman empire. Or his mother may have restrained him because of her womanly timidity and excessive love for her son. She used to blunt Alexander's effort to behave bravely by convincing him that it was other people's job to take risk for him, not his to get involved in the battle. It was this which brought about the end of the invading Roman army'. This decision was followed by a bad defeat and the retreat of the army, which brought the wrath of the soldiers against Alexander, Herodn. 6.5.10–6.6.2.

and commands over provinces.⁴⁴ Herodian's evidence could include the possibility that the defence of the Persian border was at some point provided by Maximinus, but there is nothing specific here. Thus the hypothesis that Symmachus derived his information about Severus Alexander and about Maximinus in Persia from Herodian is thoroughly implausible.⁴⁵ On the other hand, the absence of testimony within the Latin tradition (excepting Symmachus himself) to Maximinus' presence in Persia, the implications of Maximinus' speech in Herodian, its very incompatibility with key elements of Herodian's main narrative, and a minority apologetic strain within that main narrative—Herodian reports that 'The Romans, far from having retreated ignominiously, had in some cases actually inflicted serious damage too on the enemy, and had only been destroyed in so far as they were fewer in number'⁴⁶—raise the possibility that Herodian had access to a Greek source, or a Greek tradition, that attested successful military activity by Maximinus in Persia under Severus Alexander and at least not unsuccessful activity by the emperor himself.

Besides both the evidence of Herodian himself and the implications, just discussed, of a Greek source or tradition behind Herodian that was favourable both to Alexander and to Maximinus in their dealings with Persia, there are interesting and varied Greek traditions—curiously overlooked by modern scholars—which emerge into the light in the later Byzantine material. The tenth-century Symeon Logothetes writes that the accession of Maximinus happened immediately after, if not during, this campaign: Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας ἐβασίλευσεν ἔτη ιγ', μῆνας η' ... οὗτος ἐκστρατεύσας κατὰ Περσῶν ἠττήθη κατὰ κράτος καὶ καταφρονηθεὶς ἐσφάγη· καὶ προεβάλοντο οἱ στρατιῶται Μαξιμίνον ('Alexander the son of Mamaea ruled for thirteen years and eight months ... While he was campaigning against the Persian, he was defeated by storm, and being scorned he was slain; and the soldiers elected Maximinus').⁴⁷ The same information is in the eleventh-century George Cedrenus who, over-sharply abridging his source, reports Severus Alexander's and

⁴⁴ Herodn. 6.8.1 (trans. Whittaker (1970) 133): εἶτα κατ'ὀλίγον αὐτὸν χειραγωγούσης τῆς τύχης ἐλθὼν διὰ πάσης τάξεως στρατιωτικῆς, ὡς στρατοπέδων τε ἐπιμέλειαν τῶν ἐθνῶν τε ἀρχὰς πιστευθῆναι.

⁴⁵ *Pace Callu* (1985) 115 n. 85, does not dismiss the hypothesis that Jordanes or Symmachus relied on Herodian, because his work was still read and used by early Byzantine authors. We could add to this hypothesis that Herodian 6.6.5 concedes to the army of Alexander a *Pyrrhic victory* (see in main text). However, as we see from *Rom.* 280 (see above, p. 207 with n. 31), Symmachus had attributed to Alexander full success in this campaign.

⁴⁶ Herodn. 6.6.5 (trans. Whittaker (1970) 119–21).

⁴⁷ *Chron.* 73.2 (Wahlgren ed., p. 98). Some of the elements are to be found in Cedrenus (quoted below, in n. 48) and Zonaras, and they may derive from the *Leoquelle*; see n. 49 below.

Mamaea's deaths as following the failure of the Persian expedition.⁴⁸ In this same source, which belongs to the tradition of the *Leoquelle*, we also find reference to Maximinus as 'general of Alexander' (στρατηγὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου) in the context of his political career.⁴⁹ Even more interesting are the accounts of the twelfth-century author John Zonaras (he also drew from the *Leoquelle*) and of Theodorus Scutariotes, who wrote in the mid-thirteenth-century. Following Herodian, Zonaras relates that the Persian campaign was unsuccessful.⁵⁰ However, in his account of Maximinus he adds a further element: Severus Alexander had blamed Maximinus for his failure on the Persian front. The promotion of Maximinus to commander during the campaign turned out to be disappointing for Alexander, whose anger increased when his general was disgracefully defeated:

λέγεται δὲ κατὰ μῆνιν τὴν πρὸς Ἀλέξανδρον κινήσαι τὸν διωγμὸν, ὡς ἐκείνου τιμῶντος τοὺς σεβομένους Χριστόν. ἐμεμῆνει γὰρ κατ' ἐκείνου τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος, ὅτι στρατηγὸς ὑπ' ἐκείνου προχειρισθεὶς καὶ κατὰ Περσῶν ἐκστρατεύσας καὶ αἰσχίστα ἠττεθεὶς ὀργῆς ἐπειράθη βασιλικῆς.

It is said that he initiated the persecution because of his hatred toward Alexander, since the latter honored those who revered Christ. For he was angry with that ruler because, when he had been selected general by him and campaigned against the Persians and had been disgracefully defeated, he experienced imperial ire.⁵¹

This passage provides clear evidence of a tradition about Maximinus in Persia independent of Herodian's vague indication. Theodorus Scutariotes relays the same tradition, although within his account of Alexander's Persian campaign:

⁴⁸ Cedrenus (Bekker ed.) p. 450, 256C: οὗτος ἐκστρατεύσας κατὰ Περσῶν ἠττήθη κατὰ κράτος, καὶ καταφρονηθεὶς σφάττεται μετὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ. The strong similarities with the above-quoted Symeon Logothetes should be noted here. The two authors depend on the so-called *Leoquelle*: cf. nn. 21 and 49.

⁴⁹ Cf. Cedrenus (Bekker ed.) p. 450. Symeon *Chron.* 73 (Wahlgren ed. p. 98) wrongly refers to Maximinus as 'general of Alexandria', στρατηγὸς Ἀλεξανδρείας. The *Leoquelle* is a hypothetical lost source, from which Zonaras and Theophanes also drew; this source was identified by Patzig (1896) and (1897) behind the traditions of George the Monk, Cedrenus, and Leo the Grammarian (the latter belonging to the tradition of Symeon Logothetes). See Bleckmann (1992).

⁵⁰ Zon. 12.15A–C, partially based on Herodian; cf. the detailed commentary in Banchich and Lane (2009) 76–8.

⁵¹ Zon. 12.16C (Dindorf ed., p. 124), trans. Banchich and Lane (2009) 42.

Οὗτος ἐκρατέυσας κατὰ Περσῶν μετὰ τῆς μητρὸς, ἐν Ἀντιοχείᾳ προχειρίζεται στρατηγὸν Μαξιμῖνον, ὃς συμβαλὼν Πέρσαις ἠττᾶται, καθ' οὗ καὶ ὁ βασιλεὺς ἠγανάκτησε.

When he had campaigned against Persians with his mother, in Antioch he selected as general Maximinus, who, having attacked the Persians, was beaten, as a result of which the sovereign was vexed.⁵²

The two authors use the same tradition for different purposes. Zonaras refers to Maximinus' failure in the Persian campaign as one of the main reasons for his hatred of Severus Alexander and his mother; but he describes this episode in his account of Maximinus, as an explanation for his persecutions of Christians. Theodorus Scutariotes mentions Maximinus' Persian campaign in his account of Severus Alexander, but only when discussing Maximinus does he reference that emperor's hatred of Alexander and Mamaea.⁵³ But what was the source of these two authors? Two scholars of *Quellenforschung* have attempted to answer this question. Bleckmann conjectures that Zonaras used a 'Kirchengeschichte' for part of the reign of Alexander Severus and for the empire of Maximinus.⁵⁴ Banchich's perspective is quite different, although on some points he reaches similar conclusions: 'Parallels between George the Monk ... Symeon, Cedrenus, and Theodore Scutariotes are one of several factors that strongly suggest that the close correspondences between Zonaras, Herodian, and Eusebius result from Zonaras' use of an intermediate chronological source that integrated secular and ecclesiastical events and that itself depended for secular events from *ca.* 222 up to *ca.* 238 on a tradition that derived, in part, from Herodian'.⁵⁵ Zonaras' lost sources must have included the name of Maximinus among the generals of Alexander—as the above-quoted Cedrenus, who is part of the tradition of the *Leoquelle*, also shows.

Leaving aside precise source questions, we note that the tradition represented by John Zonaras and Theodorus Scutariotes offers a sort of middle

⁵² Theodorus Scutariotes (Sathas ed.), p. 35, ll. 8–10 (trans. Banchich and Lane (2009) 74); cf. *ibid.* ll. 1–18, on Alexander's reign.

⁵³ Cf. respectively Zonaras 12.16C, and Theodorus Scutariotes (Sathas ed.) p. 35, ll. 8–10 and 29–31.

⁵⁴ Cf. Bleckmann (1992) 32–53, also 416, with reference to Zonaras 12.16C–D (Dindorf ed. p. 123, 24–124, 19). As Bleckmann admits, Zonaras' *History* is a particularly complex source, which needs to be studied line by line.

⁵⁵ Banchich and Lane (2009) 73; see *ibid.* 8–11 on the *Quellenforschung* around Zonaras, and the observation at p. 79 on Zonaras' account on Maximinus: 'Parallels again suggest Zonaras' dependence on an intermediate source rather than his direct consultation of Herodian and Eusebius, the ultimate sources of much of the information he transmits'.

way between a victorious Severus Alexander (and Maximinus) and a defeated Alexander: he was defeated, but defeated through the military incompetence of Maximinus. There is an apologetic element here.

Severus Alexander fascinated late antique historians not only because of the parallels they drew with Alexander the Great, but also because of his relationship with Christianity (to which by contrast the *Historia Augusta* only barely alluded).⁵⁶ The first apparently philo-Christian Emperor was followed by one of the most brutal persecutors of the faith. Christian historiography highlighted this contrast. Eusebius, and in his footsteps Orosius, and later the Byzantine authors referred to the pious devotion of Mamaea and her meeting with Origen during her stay in Antioch in the winter of 232/3, at the time of the Persian campaign. This could be an important connection, for, if on one hand we read in Zonaras' source, Herodian (6.5.8–6.6.6), that after putting an end to the military operation, Alexander decided to stay in Antioch and enjoy the pleasures of the city, on the other hand the above-quoted Theodorus Scutariotes specifies that Maximinus was selected as general by Alexander in Antioch.⁵⁷ At the same time, Christian historians also attributed Maximinus' persecution of the Christians to his hatred of Mamaea and Severus Alexander, whose household included believers.⁵⁸ Eventually, the sources used by Zonaras would blame Maximinus for the failure of Severus Alexander's Persian campaign. To Zonaras, this event became an additional explanation for Maximinus' hatred of the Christians.

Symmachus' account, however, differs from the Greek authors discussed above in crucial respects. Symmachus does not connect Maximinus' persecution of the Christians with Severus Alexander's and Mamaea's sympathies for the Christians or with the Persian campaign. Rather, as we have seen, he

⁵⁶ *SHA Alex.* 29.2: *matutinis horis in larario suo, in quo et diuos principes sed optimos electos et animas sanctiores, in quis Apollonium et, quantum scriptor suorum temporum dicit, Christum, Abraham et Orpheum et huiusmodi ceteros habebat ac maiorum effigies, rem diuinam faciebat.*

⁵⁷ Cf. Eus. *HE* 6.21.3–4. The role of Origen is discussed also by Zonaras 12.15D (who refers to Eusebius as his source), Symeon *Chron.* 73.3, p. 98 (which refers also to the religion of Mamaea and the hostility of Maximinus against the Christians, whom Severus Alexander had respected and protected), Cedrenus (Bekker ed.) p. 450, Ps. Symeon Logothetes (Paris. Gr. 1712, fol. 80 verso; see Praechter (1896) 527), Theodorus Scutariotes, p. 35, ll. 16–18. Orosius reports similar information, but attributes to Alexander the victory against the Persians: *Adv. Pag.* 7.18.7–8: *cuius mater Mamea Christiana Origenem presbyterum audire curauit. nam statim expeditione in Persas facta Xerxen regem eorum maximo bello uictor oppressit.*

⁵⁸ Cf. Eus. *HE* 6.28 (in which, however, there is no mention of a Persian campaign); Orosius *Adv. Pag.* 7.19.2 referring to Maximinus: *qui maxime propter Christianam Alexandri, cui successerat, et Mameae matris eius familiam persecutionem in sacerdotes et clericos, id est doctores, uel praecipue propter Origenem presbyterum miserat.* Cf. Symeon (Wahlgren ed.) 74, Cedrenus (Bekker ed.) p. 450, 256D, and Theodorus Scutariotes (Sathas ed.) 35, ll. 29–31; cf. Banchich and Lane (2009) 78–9.

frames the whole biography with this item, in such a way as to create a strong religious unity.⁵⁹ And, considered in the overall context of the surviving evidence, his notice concerning Maximinus' Persian campaign (*Get.* 88) represents the exception to a complex tradition which sometimes credited Alexander Severus with victories against the Persians, sometimes claimed that the Persian campaign ended with a retreat, and when relating the defeat of the Romans, sometimes placed the blame on Maximinus as a disgraceful general, and sometimes (if we go behind the traditions in Herodian) contrasted Alexander's failed campaign and Maximinus' allegedly successful command in Persia.

Unlike the source used by Zonaras and Theodorus Scutariotes, Symmachus' source counts Maximinus' participation in the Persian campaign among his good actions, the *cuncta bona sua*, to which also belonged the Germanic wars, inexplicably missing in the *Getica* but mentioned by Jordanes *Rom.* 281, which derives from Symmachus,⁶⁰ and by Orosius: *postquam bellum in Germania prospere gesserat persecutionem in Christianos ... exercuit.*⁶¹ By embracing Orosius' perspective, the persecutions against the Christians became Maximinus' downfall. In this way, Symmachus distanced himself from the pagan tradition of the *Historia Augusta*, his main source, which had fully condemned this barbarian emperor and his anti-senatorial policy, and he ascribed to Maximinus a good past.

Conclusions

We can now attempt to draw some conclusions from the complex mass of evidence discussed above. References to Maximinus' activity against the Persians were clearly part of the extensive Greek and Latin historiographical tradition that surrounded Severus Alexander and Mamaea, a tradition whose sources often intertwine. This tradition included Severus Alexander's *imitatio* of Alexander the Great, the Persian war, and also his and his mother's sympathies for the Christians. In the historiography, it was, mostly, but not exclusively, Latin, that celebrated Severus Alexander as victorious against the Persians, a lost source must have referred to Maximinus as a successful general on the Euphrates. Symmachus represents the only surviving concrete evidence of this otherwise unknown tradition (although it presumably also underlies Herodian's brief reference in Maximinus' speech). On the other hand, the tradition, mostly Greek, that discredited Alexander's Persian

⁵⁹ Cf. pp. 201–2 above.

⁶⁰ Quoted above, pp. 205–7.

⁶¹ Orosius *Adv. Pag.* 7.19.1. On the absence of reference to the German war see the observations of Ensslin (1949) 86.

campaign⁶² referred to Maximinus as a disgraceful general (as in Zonaras and Theodorus Scutariotes), and considered his appointment to be a bad choice made by the emperor: a choice which would have very serious consequences for the emperor himself, for his mother, and a few years later, for the Christians. To this tradition belonged the unknown source (probably a religious one) used by Zonaras.

That Symmachus supplemented the *Historia Augusta* and Orosius, his main sources for Severus Alexander and Maximinus, with a Greek source is indicated by a range of factors: Symmachus' use of the expression *Alexander Mamaeae*; the silence of the Western tradition about Maximinus' military activity in Persia; the hint of such a tradition in the Greek Herodian; and the very extensive material in the later Byzantine historians. The bilingual Symmachus may have had such a Greek source in his Roman library, or perhaps he came into contact with this during his stay in Constantinople around the year 519.⁶³ Can we be more precise about that source? Its salient characteristics would seem to be: (1) celebration of Severus Alexander's claim to victory over the Persians; (2) celebration of the claim that Maximinus was also victorious over the Persians; (3) representation of the two emperors as complementary rather than adversarial; and (4) possibly a non-Christian background (the Christian element in Symmachus' account being 'imported' from Orosius). Item (2) seems to rule out Dexippus, since he seems to have recorded the capture of Nisibis and Carrhae by the Persians during the reign of Maximinus.⁶⁴ Item (3) requires a source that did not implicate Maximinus as the one responsible in the mutiny that brought about Severus Alexander's death.⁶⁵ There is nothing particularly against a Greek source anterior to Herodian, hypothetically hinted at in Maximinus' speech (Herodn. 7.8.4) or the minority apologetic strand in Herodian's account of the Persian campaign.⁶⁶ But the source could have been much later, among the plethora of sources attested by the author of the *Historia Augusta*,⁶⁷ and this seems likelier. So our source must remain 'Graecus ignotus': 'ignotus', but, as I have tried to show, far from uninteresting or unworthy of investigation.

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⁶² See the observations above of Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014), quoted at p. 209.

⁶³ Cf. *PLRE* II (1980) 1045, also at n. 22.

⁶⁴ This assumption is based on George Syncellus (Mosshammer ed., 443), and Zonaras 12.18A. For indirect references see Herodn. 6.6.6., *SHA Gord.* 26.6, and *Max. et Balb.* 13.5. Cf. Kettenhofen (1995).

⁶⁵ Differently Herodn. 6.8.2, and *SHA Alex.* 59.7, *Max.* 5.5.

⁶⁶ See p. 211 above.

⁶⁷ See pp. 208–9 above.

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