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# THE SOURCES OF THE *HISTORIA AUGUSTA* RE-EXAMINED

*Abstract:* The first step toward unravelling the mysteries of the late Roman biographical collection called the *Historia Augusta* is to separate out the authentic historical material from the fictions which the author offers in abundance. This article presents a careful re-examination of the evidence for the sources of each section of the work, concluding that the author draws upon Enmann's *Kaisergeschichte* and its progeny, Marius Maximus, Herodian, Dexippus, and, for the last *Lives*, a Greek source, perhaps Eunapius.

## 1. Introduction

Ronald Syme described the late Roman biographical collection that we call the *Historia Augusta* as 'the most enigmatic work that Antiquity has transmitted'.[1] In 1889, Hermann Dessau demonstrated that the work, which purports to be the product of six different authors writing in the early fourth century, is in fact the product of a single author writing decades later.[2] Since that demonstration, no fully satisfactory explanation of the *HA* has won out. The *HA* combines false and invented passages with passages drawn from traditional historians and biographers, but identifying the authentic material is particularly challenging in the absence of a full understanding of the purpose and nature of the work itself.[3]

Dessau's arguments were immediately opposed by Mommsen, who offered a complicated series of mostly-unconvincing explanations for the problems Dessau had revealed.[4] But Mommsen's scepticism found takers as late as Momigliano because of his pointed question, 'cui bono?'.[5] Why would someone undertake such a complicated, extensive, and unprecedented fraud?

Various explanations for the composition of the *Historia Augusta* have been offered. Some argued that the author had a political purpose: Baynes

[1] Syme (1971b) 1. Cf. Chastagnol (1994) i: 'certainement l'ouvrage le plus énigmatique que nous ait légué l'Antiquité'; Mehl (2001) 147: 'wohl das mysteriöseste Werk der antiken Literatur'.

[2] Dessau (1889).

[3] The best introduction to the *Historia Augusta* is Chastagnol (1994); see also Paschoud (1996); Birley (2003).

[4] Mommsen (1890).

[5] Mommsen (1890) 229; Momigliano (1954) 129.

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thought the author was a propagandist on behalf of the emperor Julian, while Stern held that that the author favoured Constantius II.[6] Straub argues for a religious purpose: the author speaks for persecuted pagans in asking for tolerance from the Christians of the early fifth century.[7] These theories failed to find general acceptance because of weaknesses particular to each but also because of a better understanding of the nature of the invented material in the *HA*. Syme dubbed the author a 'rogue grammarian' to emphasise that much of the author's inventiveness lies in humorous wordplay and allusion without a polemical connection to contemporary events.[8] While some of the inventions of the *HA*-author might conceivably be interpreted in a political or theological way, most cannot. The allusions and jokes that Syme highlights, and that decades of scholarship since Syme have greatly augmented, would only distract from or even undermine any serious argument the author might be trying to convey.

Chastagnol, like Syme, recognised the playful nature of much of the fiction in the biographies. He contrasts scholars who sought to interpret the work as propaganda, composed to pursue a definite programme, with his own attempts merely to describe the prejudices and mindset of the author in light of the material he invents.[9] Thus Chastagnol concludes that the author is a pagan who favours the Senate and the Roman aristocracy and despises the lower classes and the barbarians.[10] But this more modest approach to the study of the work leaves the question 'cui bono?' unanswered.

Paschoud attempts a synthesis of Straub, Syme, and Chastagnol, with mixed results. He recognises the playfulness of the author, and in his extraordinary commentaries on the later books of the *HA* he adds greatly to the catalogue of examples of the author burlesquing Cicero, Suetonius, Ammianus, Jerome, and others. At the same time, he reads the author's political and religious views as much more serious than Chastagnol had suggested. For example, Paschoud suggests that the final books of the *HA* can be understood as a sort of philosophical-historical fable which transmits an alternative vision of history. The emperor Probus is a stand-in for Julian, Carus for Valentinian I, Carinus for Gratian.[11] Elsewhere Paschoud argues that the fictitious debate over the consultation of the Sibylline books found

[6] Baynes (1926); Stern (1953).

[7] Straub (1963).

[8] 'Rogue *grammaticus*': Syme (1968) 207; see also Syme (1971a) 13, 76; Syme (1983) 62, 128.

[9] Chastagnol (1994) cxxxii–cxxxiii.

[10] Chastagnol (1994) clxxiv.

[11] Paschoud (2002) xxv.

in the life of Aurelian (*Aur.* 18.4–19.8) should be understood as one of several pointed criticisms that the author directs toward the religious policy of Theodosius I.[12] The *HA*-author is thus imagined to compose and invent in the service of a political and theological agenda, even if only some of his inventions support that agenda.

Paschoud's method presents some new problems. First, the interpreter grants himself the ability to dismiss some invented material as the irreverent product of a rogue grammarian, and elevate other invented material as representative of a serious political or theological view. Paschoud and Chastagnol both conclude that the *HA*-author should be associated with the pagan intellectual movement that resisted the Christianisation of the empire at the turn of the fourth century. But Cameron has recently argued, exhaustively and effectively, that the pagan intellectual movement is a modern construct at odds with ancient realities.[13] This certainly calls into question the decisions to label certain passages substantive and dismiss others as unimportant. And the problems go beyond the specific choices and interpretation of any one scholar. Why would an author with a substantive argument to make include so many irrelevant or contradictory inventions alongside the meaningful ones? He would risk the argument being overlooked or interpreted ironically in a sea of trivia and humour.

I believe it is necessary to reject entirely the idea that the author has a political or theological point to make. Instead, we should understand the work as a literary puzzle or game, and the audience's recognition and enjoyment of the many complex allusions it contains as its sole purpose. The study of the *Historia Augusta* itself is most productively undertaken by specialists in literature, not history. Yet its preservation of substantial amounts of material from authentic historical traditions means that historians of the imperial period must come to grips with its nature.

The separation of authentic from fictional material is the necessary first step for any interpretation of the *HA*, and this separation requires investigation of the sources of the work. One of the ways in which the *Historia Augusta* differs from more typical ancient works of historiography is how often it cites sources for its claims. Marius Maximus, Herodian, and Dexippus are cited often (thirty, ten, and eighteen times, respectively). The author also cites thirty-five otherwise unknown authorities, often multiple times, with one Junius Cordus receiving twenty-seven mentions.[14] And in addition to these named citations, the author falls back on the more common ancient tech-

[12] Paschoud (2006).

[13] Cameron (2011).

[14] Syme (1983) 99.

nique of referring to 'many authors' or 'other authors' or 'some authors' dozens of times. Of course, despite surface appearances, the *HA* is more like a work of fiction than an actual work of historiography. Not only are most of its cited authorities inventions of its author, but even those sources that are authentic have been manipulated and distorted. While the distinction between historiographical and literary sources is an important one from the point of view of the modern historian, it was not important to the *HA*-author. He did not seek to write true history, and so did not necessarily see a need to distinguish between sources that claimed to offer the truth and sources that were fictional.

The author's lack of interest in the careful presentation of material that he found in his historiographical sources makes their reconstruction a forbidding problem. Nevertheless, scholars have long recognised that the identification of the sources of the work would be valuable for reconstructing the history and historiography of the second and third centuries. The only monograph on the subject, Barnes' *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*, was written in 1978.[15] Although it remains the starting point for investigating the problem, much important work has appeared since then, including Birley on Marius Maximus, Paschoud on Dexippus, and Paschoud, Cameron, and others on Nicomachus Flavianus. A re-examination of the question that incorporates these more recent studies, and that reconsiders some past arguments in light of them, offers a timely and necessary starting point for understanding the methodology of the enigmatic author of the *HA*.

I propose to focus in this paper particularly on those sources drawn upon by the *HA* that preserve actual historical traditions, beginning with the earliest and most fact-filled lives and ending with the final, largely fictional lives. The identification of an underlying source only begins the process of analysis, because the *HA*-author treats historians and biographers just as he treats Suetonius, Cicero, and Vergil, as opportunities for playful distortion.

## 2. Enmann's *Kaisergeschichte* and the *KG* Descendants

In 1889, Alexander Enmann argued that certain shared errors in the fourth-century epitomes written by Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, and the anonymous *Epitome de Caesaribus* could best be explained by positing a common, now-lost source. This work, now known as Enmann's *Kaisergeschichte* (abbreviated *KG* in the English-language literature and *EKG* in European works), is an im-

[15] Barnes (1978); see also Barnes (1995).

portant source for the whole of the *Historia Augusta*.[16] More recent work has allowed us to offer an outline of what the lost source was like. The *KG* presented short sketches of each emperor from Augustus at least as far as Constantius II. The early lives of the *KG* draw their information largely, but not entirely, from Suetonius. While the sources for the later lives cannot be determined with certainty, it is possible that the biographer Marius Maximus was a source for the emperors of the second and early third century, since a passage of the *HA* that the author attributes to Marius Maximus is found in Eutropius (*Marc.* 1.6 ~ Eutr. 8.9.1). The *KG* proved to be quite influential. Although it was short and not especially reliable, the paucity of Latin sources for the second and third centuries led many later historians to turn to it for information. In addition to the three breviarists mentioned above, the *KG* was probably used by Jerome in his *Chronicle*, by Ammianus Marcellinus, by the breviarist Festus, and by the chronicler Polemius Silvius.

The influence of the *KG* can be detected in the *HA* by finding parallels in language or in content with the *breviaria* of Aurelius Victor and of Eutropius, who relied on the *KG* alone for their account of the imperial period. An immediate problem arises, however. How are we to determine whether the *HA*-author is using the *KG* or one of the breviarists directly? Although for many passages this is an unanswerable question, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the *HA*-author definitely uses the *KG* and Victor directly, and probably uses Eutropius as well.

One of the key contentions of Dessau's pathbreaking 1889 article, which proved that the *HA* could not be a product of the age of Constantine, was that the *HA* reproduced a section of Aurelius Victor, whose work was published in 360 (*Sev.* 17.5 to 19.4 = Victor 20.1, 10–30).[17] This passage in the *Life* of Septimius Severus contains a major error found in *KG* sources but not elsewhere, the conflation of the short-lived emperor Didius Julianus with the legal scholar Salvius Julianus.[18] We might now suspect that this classic passage derives from the *KG* itself, rather than Victor, as Chausson argues, but there are other passages in the *HA* that must derive from Victor.[19] In his chapter on the reign of the emperor Philip, Victor follows the *KG* in reporting that Philip had banned male prostitution (28.6–7). He adds his own moralising reflection to the effect that such activity continues, nevertheless, to his own day, since men seek out even more avidly what is forbidden. The

[16] Enmann (1884); see also Cohn (1884). Modern bibliography in Rohrbacher (2009) 709 n. 1.

[17] Dessau (1889) 363–7.

[18] Hohl (1955) 220–8.

[19] Chausson (1997) 97–114.

*HA* lacks a life of Philip, since the author has contrived a 'lacuna' which extends from the death of Gordian III to the end of the life of Valerian.[20] One of the ways we can tell that the lacuna is an authorial invention is the author's reluctance to let good material from the *KG* go to waste. For example, he takes the information on Philip and male prostitution and inserts it into the *Life* of Severus Alexander (24.4). The *HA*-author claims, falsely, that Alexander had considered such a ban, which, he adds, Philip later promulgated, adding that Alexander thought better of it since he realised that 'men are more apt to demand a vice that is prohibited' (*homines inlicita magis prohibita poscant furore iactati*). The moralising reflection is typical of Victor, not the *KG*.[21] Victor's penchant for didacticism and also his somewhat ornate style point to other examples where it is likely the *HA*-author is working from Victor's elaborated text rather than the plainer text of the *KG*.[22] Finally, the discussion of the *interregnum* between the reigns of Aurelian and Tacitus is probably based in part on Victor himself, not the *KG*.[23]

Whether the *HA*-author has also used Eutropius directly is harder to ascertain, in part because Eutropius himself seems to closely mirror the original language of the *KG*. Dessau had pointed out that the section of Eutropius dedicated to Marcus Aurelius had been replicated nearly word-for-word in the *HA* life of Marcus (16.3–18.2).[24] It may be that Eutropius was especially close to the *KG* for this passage, however. And because the *KG* itself probably used the biographer Marius Maximus as a source, it is also possible that both the *KG* and the *HA* draw from Maximus here. Chastagnol offers a few more passages where the language of Eutropius and the *HA* are very close, though again we could be reading the *KG* rather than Eutropius.[25] Stronger proof of the use of Eutropius can be found in some shared errors.[26] Some manuscripts of Eutropius (and the translation of Eutropius into Greek by Capito) give the name Lollianus for the Gallic usurper Laelianus (Eutr. 9.9.1), an error found also in the *Historia Augusta* (*tyr. trig.* 5), although not in Victor (33.8) or in the coin evidence. In addition, Eutropius mistakenly gave the name Trebellianus to the usurper under Gallienus, Regalianus (9.8.2). In *Gall.* 9.1 the *HA*-author demonstrates that he knows that Regalianus is the

[20] On the false lacuna: Birley (1976); Ratti (2000) xix–xxviii.

[21] Chastagnol (1966) 54–7.

[22] Chastagnol (1967); (1968).

[23] den Hengst (1981) 111–13.

[24] Dessau (1889) 368–70.

[25] Chastagnol (1994) lxviii–lxix.

[26] Damsholt (1964) 138–50.

correct name, and Regalianus is also counted as one of the thirty tyrants (*tyr. trig.* 10), but among the thirty tyrants we also find an invented usurper, Trebellianus (*tyr. trig.* 26), whose name was perhaps inspired by the error found in Eutropius.

Barnes wondered whether the *HA*-author had used yet another breviary in the *KG*-tradition, the work of Festus.[27] He points to a number of passages (*Probus* 1.6, 7.1; *tyr. trig.* 11.6–7, 33.7–8) in which the *HA*-author proclaims his allegiance to the facts, even at the expense of rhetorical brilliance, and argues that this is a parody of the preface of Festus, who states that he will 'outline and not elaborate history' (*res gestas signabo, non eloquar*). For Barnes, the humour of the parody would come from the contrast between Festus, who offers and delivers unadorned facts, and the *HA*-author, who promises the facts but produces only empty verbiage. But Festus' preface is false modesty, for his work is not devoid of rhetorical adornment.[28] And while Barnes may be correct that Festus' preface presents the closest parallel to the passages in extant historiographical literature, it remains a commonplace. But it is not impossible that the author is familiar with the preface, at least, of the work.

The *KG* and other *breviaria* served as a guide or framework for the author, particularly as the biographies progressed and his other sources became scantier. In some of the later lives of the *HA*, virtually the only true information derives from the paragraph-long description of the emperor in the *KG*, embellished by the *HA*-author's invented material. The *KG* tradition often served as a starting point for more elaborate invention. For example, the *KG* described the death of the usurper Aureolus at a place known still to contemporaries as *pons Aureoli*; the *HA*-author follows with a short, invented verse inscription, supposedly translated from Greek, that he claims marks Aureolus' tomb and bridge (*tyr. trig.* 11.4–5). The author also enjoys using the *KG* in a kind of scholarship-theatre, where he contrasts his base source with information from the *KG*, referred to as 'other historians' or 'Latin writers'. For example, the author purports to be sometimes unsure whether the 'Maximus' he finds in Herodian and Dexippus and the 'Pupienus' he finds in the *KG* (Victor 26–7, Eutr. 9.2) are the same person (they are, the emperor Marcus Clodius Pupienus Maximus). At one point he contrasts the views of Herodian and Dexippus with those of 'Latin writers' in expressing this quandary (*Max. et Balb.* 33.2).

[27] Barnes (1970).

[28] See, e.g., Baldwin (1978) 197–218.

## 3. Marius Maximus (1)

Let us consider next the so-called 'primary' lives, the lives of emperors as opposed to usurpers or Caesars, that run from Hadrian to Elagabalus.[29] These *Lives* all offer information that is credible, and often collaborated by other sources, on the emperors' birthdays, place of birth, career prior to their ascension to the throne, and other precise facts and dates. In a series of painstaking studies on these early lives, Pflaum demonstrates that a high percentage of the people mentioned by name can be shown to be real through epigraphic and other trustworthy evidence.[30]

From where has the *HA*-author derived this factual material? The author himself cites Marius Maximus twenty-nine times. Ancient methods of citation are unreliable, and the *HA*-author is particularly untrustworthy, but a coherent picture of Marius Maximus does emerge from investigation of the citations in the *HA* and the single other ancient citation of Maximus by one of the ancient commentators on the text of Juvenal 4.53.[31] Like Suetonius, Maximus offered extensive genealogical information on the emperors (*Marc.* 1.6), and he is probably the source of this information in all of the early lives of the *Historia Augusta.* He was an innovator in including many primary sources in his biographies: letters, documents, acclamations, and orations (e.g., *Marc.* 25.10; *Comm.* 15.4, 18.2; *Pert.* 2.8, 15.8). Also like Suetonius, he included information less lofty than that typically found in history, such as insulting verses about a swelling in Commodus' groin (*Comm.* 13.2) or Hadrian's purported invention of the casserole known as *tetrapharmacum* (*Hadr.* 21.4), but he was not credulous. For example, he repeated reports of Hadrian's miraculous ability to heal the blind, but called it a hoax (*Hadr.* 25.4). The *HA* provides citations to lives by Maximus of eight emperors, and the scholiast to Juvenal implies a life of Nerva; it is natural, then, to assume that Marius Maximus has followed Suetonius with *Lives* of the second twelve emperors, and natural as well to identify Marius Maximus with the senator L. Marius Maximus Perpetuus Aurelianus, a general and holder of high offices who was consul for the second time in 223.

While our few fragments of Marius Maximus would suggest a biographer at least the equal of Suetonius in reliability and comprehensiveness, scholars have typically held him in low regard, swayed, most likely, by the two explicit ancient discussions of his value. The first is from the *HA*-author himself. In explaining his decision to provide *Lives* of the minor usurpers and Caesars, he surveys previous biographical practices. The excellent Suetoni-

[29] The lives are similarly categorised in Syme (1971a) 56; Chastagnol (1994) xxxvii–xlvi.

[30] These include Pflaum (1966); (1970); (1972); (1974a); (1974b); (1976a); (1976b).

[31] Birley (1997).

us, he says, a lover of brevity, naturally treated pretenders only in passing, but so too did Marius Maximus, 'the wordiest man of all, who entangled himself in pseudo-historical volumes. Did he descend to such accuracy of detail?' (*quid Marius Maximus, homo omnium verbosissimus, qui et mythistoricis se voluminibus implicavit? num ad istam descriptionem curamque descendit*?, *quad. tyr.* 1.2) In interpreting this passage, it is important, first, to recognise the context. The *HA*-author excuses Suetonius for his failure to provide separate biographies for usurpers, because his work was relatively brief. Maximus, however, because of his extreme verbosity, had plenty of space to write separate biographies, yet failed to do so. That is to say, the *HA*-author criticises Maximus for failing to conform to his idiosyncratic belief that usurpers deserve their own biographies, a criticism that says nothing about Maximus' skill or value. Maximus is dismissed for being *verbosissimus*, but we might translate this as comprehensiveness rather than excessive wordiness. The *HA*-author, uninterested in true history, was not impressed by all the factual details that Maximus kept including in his biographies, which only complicated his attempts to summarise the lives. His ironic complaint ought not, however, influence our judgment of Maximus' ability. Second is Maximus' entanglement in 'pseudo-historical volumes'. The words *mythistoricus* and *mythistoria* are inventions of the *HA*-author and appear nowhere else in Latin literature. In the introduction to the Macrinus, when the author discusses a fake source, the pseudo-biographer Junius Cordus, he seems to define *mythistoria* as works containing trivia improper for inclusion in serious history. This passage has traditionally been read to include Maximus among those devotees of trivia, with the *mythistoricis voluminibus* being his own works, but we should rather understand the *HA*-author to be saying that, in Maximus' highly detailed account, he engaged with or drew upon gossipy or scandalous sources. Again the criticism is aimed at Maximus' 'failure' to devote separate lives to the usurpers and Caesars as the *HA*-author has done, despite his general comprehensiveness. The *HA*-author's criticism of another biographer for trivialities can only be taken in the most ironic and humorous of ways.

The second discussion of Marius Maximus' work occurs in a satirical digression in the historian Ammianus Marcellinus. Ammianus wants to portray the aristocrats of the city of Rome as ignoramuses, uninterested in philosophy or literature: 'Some of them hate learning as they do poison, and read with attentive care only Juvenal and Marius Maximus, in their boundless idleness handling no other books than these, for what reason it is not for my humble mind to judge' (*Quidam detestantes ut venena doctrinas Iuvenalem et Marium Maximum curatiore studio legunt, nulla volumina praeter haec in profundo otio contrectantes, quam ob causam non iudicioli est nostri*, 28.4.14). Ammianus does not seek to criticise Marius Maximus, any more than he seeks to criticise Juve-

nal. Rather, both authors provide numerous examples of aristocrats behaving badly, and Ammianus' sarcastic presentation ('my humble mind') suggests that the aristocrats lack the self-awareness to realise that these moralistic authors offer objects of criticism, not examples for living. (That Maximus did not refuse to draw conclusions or pass moral judgments is clear from *Alex.* 48.6, 65.4; *Hadr.* 20.3, 25.4). Birley has offered an alternate reading of this passage.[32] He suggests that the richness of prosopographical detail found in the early books of the *HA* and presumably derived from Maximus would have made the work attractive to aristocrats seeking to trace or to create illustrious ancestries. This interpretation seems to me to be at odds with the rhetorical pairing of Maximus with Juvenal in the passage, but it does perhaps help explain Maximus' popularity in the fourth century.

Neither the *HA*-author's own criticism nor the glancing blow of Ammianus ought to persuade us that Marius Maximus was not the competent biographer his fragments suggest. He was positioned at the highest echelons of power in the Roman state. A successful general on the Severan side of the civil war of 193, he served as proconsul of both Asia and Africa under Caracalla and was appointed to the prefecture of the city of Rome under the usurper Macrinus in 217. Having faded from view during the short reign of Elagabalus, he was consul after his fall in 223. He would have been writing his biographies, then, around the same time that fellow senator Dio Cassius was completing his history. He would have had access to the documents and archives of the Roman government and would have been directly familiar with many of the people he wrote about.

It seems likely, then, that the lost work of Marius Maximus, twelve biographies of the emperors from Nerva to Elagabalus, was the source from which the *HA*-author derived what is true in the early lives. The *HA*-author used Maximus not only for historical material in the early lives, but also adapted and parodied many of his characteristic features in the later fictionalised lives. For instance, Maximus' careful but exhausting prosopographical studies may have inspired the *HA*-author to invent the absurd names that populate the lives. Maximus offers extensive material about the emperors prior to their coronations. The *HA*-author tells us that he reproduced an entire speech of Marcus Aurelius in which the emperor praises Pertinax on the occasion of his consulship (*Pert.* 2.8). The later lives of the *Historia Augusta* make it seem that the archives are similarly overflowing with speeches and letters written by previous emperors to their eventual successors. For example, the second half of the Life of Claudius is made up of a series of fictional letters from Decius, Valerian, and Gallienus (7.1–5, 8.4–9.2, 14.1–17.7). Simi-

[32] Birley (1997) 2681.

larly, Maximus' reproduction of acclamations and documents may have inspired the fabrication of the same in the *HA*.[33]

The *HA*-author's preoccupation with methodological reflection on junior emperors and usurpers may, more speculatively, stem ultimately from Maximus. At the beginning of the *Life* of Verus, the *HA*-author claims that 'most' historians who have treated the lives of Verus and Marcus Aurelius have presented Verus first, then Marcus, in the order of their reigns rather than their lives. The *HA*-author proposes, however, that he will present Marcus before Verus. The order that the *HA*-author attributes to 'most' writers seems much less natural than his chosen order. We should probably think that Maximus had himself followed the more unusual choice, and had devoted some space to defending this choice, and that the *HA*-author was inspired by this methodological digression to provide his own. We will see below the speculation that Maximus treated the legitimate emperor Macrinus contemptuously, as if he were a usurper. It would be very revealing to see the language with which Maximus defined Macrinus. It is likely that we would see echoes in the language the *HA*-author uses to explain his own approach to usurpers.

## 4. 'Ignotus'

A minority of scholars have argued that Maximus cannot be the sole source of the information of the early lives. This theory is most closely associated with Ronald Syme, who argued for the existence of 'Ignotus', 'a Latin biographical source, accurate and sober, that was used as far as Caracalla'.[34] Syme argued that the *HA*-author first used only Ignotus for the lives from Hadrian to Caracalla, and then turned to Marius Maximus, first to supplement the nine lives covered by Ignotus, and then as the basis for the remaining lives through to Elagabalus. I find the case for Ignotus underwhelming, but working through the arguments for Ignotus will help clarify the nature and structure of Maximus and of the *HA* itself.

The argument for Ignotus proceeds from both structure and content. The primary lives of the *Historia Augusta* are haphazardly constructed, with frequent repetitions and events presented out of chronological order. This Syme took as evidence for a sloppy merging of two separate works, although it might also be explained, of course, as a sloppy abridgement of Maximus

[33] Every document in the *HA* is fictitious: Homo (1926).

[34] Syme (1983) 15. Syme's discussions of Ignotus are scattered throughout his work; the most comprehensive is in Syme (1971a) 30–53. See also Barnes (1978) 98–107; Benario (1997).

alone. Syme believed that he had detected in the *Life* of Hadrian, in particular, two sources, one positively disposed toward the emperor, and one negatively disposed. Benario, in his commentary on the *Life*, presents material attributed to each tendency in contrasting columns.[35] But few of these purported contradictions are really contradictory. In many cases it is easy to imagine that Maximus provided more than one source or opinion on a matter. In others, we can assume that the *HA*-author has added his own opinions to his source text, or simply that the *HA*-author has garbled his source in the course of excerpting it. Syme argued more broadly that the sober and reliable information in the lives could not be attributed to the trivial and scandalous Marius Maximus. This argument depends crucially, of course, on how trivial we believe Marius Maximus to be. Syme's next step, after positing the need for Ignotus, was to attempt to disentangle the two sources through structural and content analysis, despite, as he readily admits, the danger of circular argumentation. A sceptical critic will find that these analyses tend to attribute to Ignotus what is true in the lives, and to Maximus as what is not.

There are other, less subjective, arguments for Ignotus as a source. One concerns a passage in the *Life* of Severus (9.1). The *HA*-author falsely claims that Pescennius Niger was killed at Cyzicus, although Greek sources make it clear that this is an error and Niger in fact died at Antioch. The error is found in other Latin sources dependent upon the *KG*, such as Victor and Eutropius. Since Marius Maximus commanded one of the armies of Septimius Severus in the civil war where Niger was killed, he could hardly have been mistaken about this fact. Barnes argues that Ignotus must be the source, ironically proving the existence of a biographer defined by his accuracy through an error.[36] But it is possible to explain the error without recourse to Ignotus. Cameron, for example, argues that the *HA*-author derived the error from the *KG*, suggesting that the presumably full and detailed account of Maximus would have been too tedious for the *HA*-author to work through.[37] Birley argues for a textual error (confusing *apud Ciliciam* with *apud Cyzicum*) occurring early enough in the manuscript tradition to allow the error to enter the *KG* as well.[38]

Two of the stronger arguments on behalf of Ignotus focus on the Life of Macrinus and the Life of Verus. Marius Maximus was appointed to high office by Macrinus, and so we would expect that his Life of Macrinus would

[35] Benario (1980) 8–12.

[36] Barnes (1978) 106.

[37] Cameron (1971) 266.

[38] Birley (1997) 2713.

be particularly rich, but the *HA* Life of Macrinus is quite short, and dependent upon Herodian and the *KG*. In the preface to the Life of Macrinus, the *HA*-author ruminates on historical accuracy and criticises one of his favourite invented sources, Junius Cordus. These sorts of prefaces are common before the later, unreliable, lives, and before the lives of Caesars or usurpers, not the more factual early lives. For Ignotus supporters, the Macrinus marks the point where our author has only Marius Maximus, not Ignotus, as a source. This argument is augmented by the points made by Barnes on the Life of Lucius Verus.[39] The Life of Verus, who was co-emperor for a time along with Marcus Aurelius, had been relegated since the time of Mommsen to the category of a secondary life, the lives of Caesars and usurpers that are of poor quality and that are usually assumed to have been written after the composition of the main line of imperial lives. But Barnes showed that the Life of Verus was full of factual material and should be classified as a primary, not a secondary, life. The significance of this classification for Barnes derives from the consideration of a series of quatrains the poet Ausonius wrote in 379 on the Roman emperors called the *Caesares*. After the first twelve, which correspond to the twelve *Caesars* of Suetonius from Julius to Domitian, there is a second group of twelve, ending with Elagabalus (this quatrain is defective, missing its last two lines). This group Barnes associated with the twelve *Caesars* of Marius Maximus. Since Ausonius has no poem dedicated to Verus, Barnes argued that the *HA* Life of Verus must be from material offered by Ignotus, not Maximus.

Scholars sceptical of the Ignotus hypothesis have responded to these challenges in several ways. Maximus would presumably have been embarrassed by his role in the government of the unpopular Macrinus, so Birley, for example, argues that the *Life* of Macrinus may have been 'contemptuously' short.[40] Cameron goes further and suggests that Maximus did not write a Life of Macrinus, but treated him as a usurper in the Elagabalus.[41] This would attribute to Maximus a collection of only eleven lives, though. As for the Verus, Birley and Cameron argue that it could have been made up of factual material drawn from the Marcus Aurelius, which we know was long (at least two books). It is a bit difficult, however, to understand the sharp contrast between the *HA*-author's remarkable ability to construct a secondary life out of a primary one in the case of the Verus and his slapdash job in the case of the other secondary lives.

[39] Barnes (1967) 66 n. 11.

[40] Birley (1997) 2713.

[41] Cameron (1971) 264.

Let me offer a new solution to the problem. First, we now know that the connection of the second twelve poems of Ausonius with the work of Marius Maximus is a tenuous one. Some manuscript evidence suggests that the *Caesares* did not terminate with Elagabalus but continued up to the emperors of Ausonius' own time.[42] Ausonius may have been dependent not upon Maximus but upon the *KG*, or any other mixture of sources.[43] Without the support of Ausonius, nothing prevents us from believing that Marius Maximus did write a life of Verus, and did not write a life of Macrinus. The *HA*-author begins the life of Verus with the claim that 'most' biographers have treated Verus first, and then Marcus, but that he will reverse the order. Since the order Marcus–Verus would seem to be the most natural one, this represents, perhaps, as I have speculated, a parodic retort to Maximus' explanation for his own reversal of the usual order. Syme offers two citations from the life of Avidius Cassius (*Avid. Cass.* 6.7, 9.5) to support his claim that Maximus' life of Marcus 'comprised two books, the first of them terminating with the decease of Verus'.[44] The division of the Marcus, however, says nothing at all about the existence of a separate life of Verus, since Verus would have to be discussed in the life of Marcus as well as in his own life. Thus this argument is irrelevant to the existence of Ignotus. We should conclude, then, that the Macrinus is a true secondary life constructed from bits of the Elagabalus, a primary life, and that the *HA* life of Verus is based on an original Verus by Marius Maximus. This explanation is preferable to the argument of Ignotus supporters who claim that Maximus wrote a life of Macrinus and a life of Elagabalus. The Elagabalus contains some solid factual material and cites Maximus, even if it is not to the standards of the lives attributed to Ignotus because of the fantastic passages that take up the second half of the piece. The life of Macrinus could have been constructed similarly, had Maximus written a life of Macrinus.

Ignotus supporters see the decline in the factual content of the Elagabalus and especially the Severus Alexander as evidence of the end of the use of Ignotus and the need for the *HA*-author to depend upon Maximus alone, but both lives contain fiction that all scholars would attribute to the *HA*-author himself, not to Maximus. The choice to offer fantasy cannot be blamed on the inadequacies of Maximus, whom even the most severe critics imagine to have a core of true or at least plausible information. Rather, we are witnessing literary decisions by our author that were not driven by source changes and cannot be explained away by them.

[42] Green (1981) 226–36.

[43] Compare Burgess (1993) and Green (1999).

[44] Syme (1971a) 57.

Like many source-critical controversies in the study of the *Historia Augusta*, the question of Ignotus is not, ultimately, of great weight. We may attribute 'good' information to Ignotus and 'bad' information to Marius Maximus, or posit a Maximus who offers a mix of good and bad, but in either case we are discussing sources that barely exist outside of the *Historia Augusta* itself. Two historians have offered studies in which they attempt to identify material as Ignotan or Maximan.[45] In neither can we say that the identification allows for an improved ability to evaluate the historical evidence, because the usual standards for identification are too closely linked to our pre-existing evaluation of the evidence itself.

## 5. Marius Maximus (2)

Having discussed the most prominent attempt to add a second source to Marius Maximus, we may now turn to an attempt to get rid of Marius Maximus altogether. François Paschoud argues that, in light of the fraudulent play with names and sources that we see in the *HA*, and the lack of good evidence about Marius Maximus outside of the *HA*, there is little reason to accept the prevailing hypotheses that see Marius Maximus as the source of at least some of the material in the early lives.[46] If this argument were accepted, the sources for the early lives would then have to be considered entirely unknown.

Paschoud offers several reasons to be sceptical of the Marius Maximus hypothesis. In the absence of the *HA* evidence, he points out, we would most likely take Marius Maximus to be a poet, since in our only two citations of him outside of the *HA* he is mentioned in the context of Juvenal. Paschoud emphasises the untrustworthy way in which the *HA*-author deals with other sources. At least five of his sixteen citations of Dexippus, for example, are probably fraudulent, and Dexippus seems to be cited only when he is not the main source of information, but when he contrasts with the *HA*-author's findings in the *KG* or Herodian. Herodian is cited three times under a false name, Appian. And Gargilius Martialis, whom we know as a writer on agriculture and medicine, is cited twice as a biographer, almost certainly falsely. Why, Paschoud asks, should we accept the citations of Marius Maximus as accurate, given these examples for comparison?[47]

[45] Rubin (1980); Benario (1980).

[46] Paschoud (1999).

[47] Syme also expresses concern about the reliability of Maximus citations: Syme (1971a) 123.

Paschoud prefers to offer reasons for scepticism rather than a new paradigm, so it is necessary to consider several different scenarios that his scepticism might imply. We can distinguish 'weak' scepticism, where we question whether Maximus is the actual name of the author's biographical source, from 'strong' scepticism, where Maximus is a simple invention like so many other of the *HA*'s bogus historical sources, such as Junius Cordus, Lollius Urbicus, or Acholius. The implications of 'weak' scepticism are not very significant. If Maximus is a biographer but is cited under a false name, as Herodian is occasionally cited as Appian, then we can no longer gain insight into his work from the biography of the consul of 223. Not much is lost in this case. In fact, some of the problems with the idea that Marius Maximus is the source of the early lives disappears if we understand 'Marius Maximus' to be a pseudonym. Our concerns with the poor quality of the Macrinus and with the false placement of the death of Pescennius Niger at Cyzicus, for example, derive from biographical assumptions.

On the other hand, if we believe that Marius Maximus is in reality not a biographer, but a name like Gargilius Martialis that the *HA*-author has plucked from Ammianus and the Juvenal *scholia* and has made responsible for much of the earlier part of the *HA*, then we obviously are left with a substantially different view of the methods of the *HA*-author and of the *HA* as a whole. The invention of Marius Maximus, however, is surely a task too difficult for our author to undertake from scratch. The early books of the *HA* are rich in factual detail, and if the details do not derive from Marius Maximus or a work attributed by our author to Marius Maximus, we must posit considerable historical research and collation on the part of our author, whose skills then evaporated as he turned to the rest of his work. What is more, the collected fragments of Maximus cohere and are consistent with an author writing a dozen lives in emulation of Suetonius. One might contrast the invented biographer Cordus. Almost every single one of the twenty-seven citations to Cordus in the *HA* is to a fabrication. Cordus appears almost entirely in those lives for which Herodian is the primary source, and he disappears when Herodian is abandoned. Some material claimed to derive from Cordus is actually from Cicero or Suetonius. The fragments of Maximus share none of these characteristics. Schlumberger provides further reasons to reject the 'strong' anti-Maximus scenario.[48] The *Epitome de Caesaribus* and the *Historia Augusta* share a Latin biographical source for the period traditionally attributed to Marius Maximus, in addition to their shared use of the *KG*. This source is either Maximus himself, or another Latin biographer to whom the *HA*-author has chosen to give the name Maximus.

[48] Schlumberger (2010).

The factuality of the primary lives, combined with the lack of interest of the *HA*-author in facts, demand that the sources for these lives be few in number. Paschoud's cautions do not greatly affect the available hypotheses. First, we may attribute all the material to Marius Maximus, who is revealed to be a full, detailed, and mostly accurate, if often sensationalistic, source, much like Suetonius. Second, we may attribute the accurate material largely to an unknown source, Ignotus, and make Maximus a supplementary source of more trivial information. Third, we may choose the first or second option, but think of Marius Maximus as pseudo-Marius Maximus, a false name chosen to cover a more or less accurate biographical work. I find the first and simplest hypothesis the most compelling.

## 6. Secondary Lives

The sharp contrast between the lives of emperors and the secondary lives, the lives of usurpers and Caesars, is readily apparent. As a rule, the material in the subsidiary lives is either drawn from the source that informed the main lives, or is invented. The author depends therefore, on no additional sources beyond Marius Maximus to construct the lives of Aelius, Avidius Cassius, Pescennius Niger, Clodius Albinus, Geta, Macrinus, and Diadumenianus.

An analysis of the life of Aelius, Hadrian's Caesar, will provide a demonstration. Chapter 1 is a prologue dedicated to Diocletian, a fantasy. Chapter 2.1 draws a couple of (erroneous) details from *Hadrian* 23; 2.2 continues the dedication to Diocletian; 2.3–5 is a learned digression on the name Caesar; and 2.6–10 is drawn from *Hadrian* 23 again. Chapter 3 spends more time on material from *Hadrian* 23, and 3.9 draws a detail on Hadrian's astrological interests from *Hadrian* 16. Chapter 4 is a mix of invented prophecies and anecdotes, concluding with the notice of the Caesar's death also found in *Hadrian* 23. The description of Aelius' character in 5.1–12 are entirely invented, although one detail on the casserole known as the *tetrapharmacum* is derived from *Hadrian* 21.4. Chapter 5 ends with a discussion of Aelius' heirs; the errors in this section are also found at the beginning of the *Life* of Marcus. Chapters 5 and 6 are either fantasy or repeat material found in *Hadrian* 23 or 24. Chapter 7 offers material from *Hadrian* 24 and fantasy. The biography is thus created almost entirely from the two sections of the *Hadrian* that were dedicated to Aelius in the first place, and from the imagination.

## 7. Herodian

The imperial bureaucrat Herodian wrote a history in Greek around 250 that has been preserved in its entirety.[49] It covers the period from the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180 to the accession of Gordian III in 238. It is the main source for the account of the years 235–238 in the *Historia Augusta*, encompassing the lives collected under the *Duo Maximi*, the *Tres Gordiani*, and the *Maximus et Balbinus*. Herodian was also used in an unsystematic way in several other *Lives*. Some of the ten citations of Herodian by name in the *HA* are found in the *Lives* of Clodius Albinus and of Alexander Severus, for example, and he is used without citation in the *Elagabalus*.[50] The *HA*-author did not use Herodian as much as he might have for the *Life* of Alexander Severus.[51] Instead, the *HA*-author chose to use the *KG* alone for the chronological structure of the Alexander Severus, which is otherwise an elaborate and fantastic invention.

Three times Herodian is, oddly, cited under the name of Arrian, a name that evokes the second-century Greek historian of the same name (*Maximin.* 33.3, *Gord.* 2.1, *Max. et Balb.* 1.2). It may be that this represents a mistake, either by the author or in the manuscript tradition.[52] Given the nature of the *HA*, others have reasonably argued that the substitution is purposeful, but no satisfactory explanation of the name has been offered. Domaszewski suggested that the name was a purposeful piece of mystification derived from the name of the consul Arrian, given at *Gord.* 29.1.[53] More plausibly, Paschoud and Potter look for explanations in the fact that Arrian is always paired with the historian Dexippus who, like Arrian the historian, includes among his works a history of the events after the death of Alexander the Great.[54]

Because we actually possess the text of Herodian, we have the rare opportunity to watch the *HA*-author as he works with his source for this small group of *Lives*. In his comprehensive studies of the use of Herodian by the *Historia Augusta*, Kolb has classified the different approaches of our author to Herodian into several categories: word-for-word translation, abbreviation,

[49] Sidebottom (1998); Marasco (1998); Opelt (1998).

[50] Chastagnol (1994) xli; Kolb (1976) 144–6.

[51] Kolb (1976) 146–52.

[52] This is the suggestion, for example, of Hartke (1951) 379 n. 2.

[53] von Domaszewski (1918) 81–2.

[54] Potter (1990): 363–9; Paschoud (1991) 220.

supplementation, and the wholesale transformation or transposition of details or whole scenes.[55]

A few examples of the changes the *HA*-author has made to his Herodianic source material will demonstrate the author's methods of invention. (1) A minor example can be seen in the supplementation of Herodian 7.1.8, which recounts how Maximinus seized and executed some accused conspirators. At *Max.* 10.6, the *HA*-author adds that the exact (and absurd) number of conspirators was 4000. (2) Herodian 7.2.8 states that Maximinus, after success in a battle against the Germans, 'made a report on the battle and his own distinguished part in a dispatch to the senate and the people'. The *HA*-author invents and reports the supposed text of the letter, and adds that Maximinus had pictures of the battle painted in order to describe his victory in another medium (*Max.* 12.5–11). (3) At Herodian 8.6.8, we are told that the emperor Balbinus sacrificed a hecatomb, traditionally a sacrifice of one hundred bulls. This statement is repeated by the *HA*-author at *Max.* 24.7. When the same incident is recalled at *Maximus and Balbinus* 1.1, the author adds a fake learned digression on hecatombs, including the claim that when emperors performed a hecatomb, they selected royal victims, such as one hundred lions or eagles, for sacrifice. (4) After the Gordians were killed in Africa, Herodian tells us, the Senate voted in secret to select Maximus and Balbinus as their heirs (7.10.3). When the *HA*-author reports this detail at *Gord.* 12.1, he adds another long and phony discussion of the so-called *senatus consultum tacitum*, a secret decree unheard of in other sources.[56] When the same story recurs at the beginning of the *Maximus and Balbinus* (1.1), the *HA*-author specifies that the Senate had met in the Temple of Concord. This detail is not found in other sources; Whittaker suggests that the *HA*-author has taken the detail from Cicero, who records several secret meetings from republican times that took place there.[57]

In some places, then, the *HA*-author has supplemented Herodian with false details, phony letters, and fake scholarly digressions. These are frequently seen elements throughout the *HA*, becoming increasingly elaborate and wild in the secondary and late lives. Detail, documents, and digressions were likely a distinguishing feature of Marius Maximus' work. When the *HA*-author sought, however haphazardly, to conform his lives dependent upon Herodian to the earlier lives dependent upon Marius Maximus, he naturally added and invented 'Maximan' material.

[55] Kolb (1972; 1976; 1995).

[56] Béranger (1987).

[57] Whittaker (1969) II.225 n. 3.

## 8. Dexippus

There is general agreement that the source for the period from 238 to 270, in addition to the *KG*, is the third-century Athenian historian Dexippus.[58] Dexippus is extant only in fragments, although he is better attested than Marius Maximus by fragments derived from sources other than the *HA* itself—which is not to say that he is very well attested. Dexippus wrote three works: the *Events after Alexander* (the Great), the *Scythica*, and, most important for our purposes, the *Chronicle*, an annalistic history beginning in remote antiquity and covering about a thousand years up to the reign of Claudius II.

There are several compelling reasons to attribute some of the material in this section of the *Historia Augusta* to Dexippus. First, we know from a fragment of the historian Eunapius (F 1), whose work followed Dexippus and whose preface criticises him, that Dexippus' *Chronicle* was arranged by consular dates. Eleven times in this section, but only rarely outside it, events are dated by the consuls of the year. Second, Barnes points to evidence of an eastern focus for this section, including multiple trustworthy names and events.[59] Third, there is evidence for the use of a source written in the Greek language for this section in multiple phrases and errors that are best explained by translation or mistranslation. Paschoud offers an example from *Claud.* 11.3: the Latin phrase *fame ac pestilentia* probably translates the Greek λιμὸς καὶ λοιμός, a phrase found in Hesiod and Thucydides and appropriate for the archaising Dexippus to use.[60] Some terminology in the Gallienus is also telling. The *HA*-author also uses the Greek *decennia* for Latin *decennalia* at *Gall.* 7.4, but in a passage in the same *Life* that derives from the *KG* he reverts to the term *decennalia* (*Gall.* 21.5). He also uses *Achaei* for *Graeci* (and also *Achaia*, *Achaicae*) and *Scythae* for *Gothi*.[61]

The pattern of citation of Dexippus is striking. Fourteen of the seventeen citations of Dexippus arise in the narrative of events of the year 238, where the author uses Herodian as his primary source. The *HA*-author seems to cite Dexippus, then, almost exclusively when he is not the primary source of his narrative. In the large majority of the occasions when Dexippus is cited, his version of events is being contrasted with another historian, sometimes Herodian, sometimes vaguely described 'historians', and sometimes one of the author's invented authors, such as Cordus. Thus in general we can say

[58] Martin (2006); Janiszewski (2006) 39–54; Brandt (1999); Millar (1969).

[59] Barnes (1978) 110–11.

[60] Paschoud (1991) 248.

[61] Ratti (2000) lxiv with n. 255.

that the *HA*-author typically cites Dexippus when he is a secondary source, either to support the primary source or to register differences.

Syme mentions in passing that 'It cannot be taken as certain that the *HA* is accurate in reporting Dexippus', and Paschoud's detailed study demonstrates the correctness of Syme's intuition.[62] Dexippus is credited with two claims about the family of Alexander Severus (49.3–5), for example, that are false and that he probably did not make. Dexippus is also made to claim that the citizens of Aquileia so hated Maximus that they used women's hair to make bows for their arrows (*Max. et Balb.* 16.4). The story is repeated two more times, notably without attribution to Dexippus (*Maximin.* 33.1, *Max. et Balb.* 11.3). The construction of bows from the hair of women is a commonplace of the Latin tradition, found in Caesar, Frontinus, and Servius *auctus*, and Paschoud argues forcefully that it is absurd to think that the *HA*-author derived it from a third-century Greek source.[63] One more likely false citation of Dexippus is the attribution to the historian of some facts about the apocryphal usurper 'Titus' (*tyr. trig.* 32), an invention of the *HA*-author.[64]

The four *Lives* after 238 that are attributed to Trebellius Pollio are dependent upon Dexippus and the *KG* alone. Dexippus' *Chronicle* covered about a thousand years, and even if it became more dense as it progressed, it must have provided far less usable material than the works of Marius Maximus or Herodian had. It is difficult to demonstrate any particular influence that the use of Dexippus had on the *HA*-author. Janiszewski speculates that the prophecy in the *Life* of Tacitus (*Tac.* 15.2), which imagines an emperor ruling over the whole world, is inspired by Dexippus' description of the vastness of the world (*FGrHist* 100 F 12), but such descriptions are very conventional.[65] Instead, the sparseness of Dexippus has encouraged the author toward greater invention.

## 9. The Source After 270

The last *Lives* of the *Historia Augusta*, from Claudius to Carinus, are largely fiction after the end of Dexippus' history in 270. In the *Lives of the Thirty Tyrants*, for example, some of the usurpers for whom the author provides capsule biographies seem to be entirely invented, and of others it is clear that the author knows little more than a name. The author continued to use the

[62] Syme (1971a) 253 n. 3; Paschoud (1991).

[63] Paschoud (1991) 240.

[64] Paschoud (1991) 244–5; Straub (1968) 102–4.

[65] Janiszewski (2006) 50–1.

*KG*, as we can see by continuing parallels with *KG*-sources like Eutropius and Victor. Yet it has long been recognised that some details of the later *Lives* find parallels in certain later Greek sources, such as the fifth-century historian Zosimus and the twelfth-century historian Zonaras. Is it possible to identify the source of this information?

We must first modestly recognise the limits to our ability to reconstruct lost sources. Our extant sources may well have altered their sources for their own purposes or out of error. Conversely, our lost sources must themselves depend upon other lost sources, written or oral, which will have shaped them in ways we cannot recover. The most prudent approach to this question is probably to simply describe this source as one with affinities to later Greek works and leave it at that, especially because we will not find more specific identification valuable in the broader interpretation of the *Historia Augusta*. But since such a disproportionately large amount of scholarly attention has been spent on the question, we will look at two of the most common answers.

## 9.1. Eunapius

Ernst Hohl first suggested that the source for the material found also in Byzantine sources was the *History After Dexippus* of Eunapius of Sardis.[66] A number of fragments of Eunapius' history, which covered the period from 270 to 404, are still extant, and in addition Eunapius was the sole source for a large section of the *New History* of Zosimus, which survives. The ninth-century patriarch Photius, who read both Eunapius and Zosimus, describes Zosimus as simply transcribing Eunapius, and there are other reasons as well for believing that Zosimus presents a close approximation to Eunapius in general. Barnes in his 1978 study championed Hohl's suggestion, but when he returned to the question twenty years later he felt less confident that it was correct.[67]

Much of the controversy over the Eunapius solution has focused on dating. While the *History* of Eunapius is fragmentary, his biographical collection, *The Lives of the Sophists*, which was published in 399, is extant. In the *Lives*, he sometimes refers to material that he has already covered in the published books of his history, and other times refers to material that he hopes or expects to cover in the later books of history. On first glance, the date of the books written after 399 should not matter for a student of the *HA*, since the *HA* comes to an end in 285. To judge from Zosimus, the bulk of Eunapius' work focused on the fourth century, so it is reasonable to expect that

[66] Hohl (1911) 189–90.

[67] Barnes (1978) 112–13; cf. id. (1995) 17.

his more abbreviated third-century material would have available for the *HA*-author before 399.

The case for Eunapius as the source of the *HA* is complicated, however, by the parallels between the Greek material found in the *Historia Augusta* for events after 270 and the Greek material found in the anonymous Latin *Epitome de Caesaribus* for events after 270. Just as the Epitomator augmented his *KG*-material with Marius Maximus for the relevant *Lives*, so too he augmented his *KG*-material after 270 with a source that looks like the same source used by the *Historia Augusta*.[68] The *Epitome* described the death of Theodosius, and so was written after 395. Some would date it later, even as late as 408.[69] Thus it could be argued that the relevant material in Eunapius must have appeared too late to be a source of the *Epitome*, and so could not be the source of the *HA* either. A digression on the date of Eunapius is therefore necessary.

As Aaron Baker has demonstrated, scholars seeking to fix the date of Eunapius' *History* have misinterpreted the discussion of his work by Photius.[70] The patriarch claims to have seen two versions of Eunapius' work. While both, he says, cover the same period of time, the second version is different because the author has excised much of the anti-Christian material, to such an extent that he has left parts of it incoherent. Our fragments of Eunapius, and the relevant parts of Zosimus, are strongly anti-Christian, and so could not descend from the 'second edition'. In addition, if Eunapius himself had bowdlerised his own work (and why would he have?), one would expect him to have maintained the ornate rhetorical style that characterises our fragments. It seems likely, then, that Photius had seen a copy of Eunapius that a pious reader had tried, inexpertly, to bring into line with his religious sensibilities. But whether it was Eunapius himself or a later reader who aimed to soften the anti-Christian elements of the history, the two editions of Photius have nothing to do with the discussion in the *Lives* of material that was already published before 399 and material that Eunapius planned to write and publish after 399. Photius explicitly states that the two versions he has seen cover the full span of the history to 404, so it is incorrect to consider the material before 399 the 'first edition' and the later material the 'second edition'. This mistaken interpretation led Barnes to feel it necessary to argue that Eunapius had only reached 378 in the *History* (later emended to 383) before writing the *Lives*, against which Paschoud forcefully restated the argument

[68] For just one example, compare *Aurelian* 18–21 with Zosimus 1.49 and *Epitome* 35.2ff.

[69] For an early date, Cameron (2001). For a later date, Festy (1999) liii–lviii.

[70] Baker (1988).

for 395.[71] But since Eunapius is merely discussing the publication of his work in installments, the question is irrelevant to the dating of the *Epitome* or the *HA*. The material 'from the end of Dexippus' work to the time of Julian' that Eunapius claims to have summarised (F 15 Blockley = *Exc. de Sent.* 5) could have theoretically been published at any time after 363. The date and the nature of the history of Eunapius, then, allows it to serve as the conduit for Greek material into the *Historia Augusta* and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, on the one hand, and into the later Greek tradition from Zosimus onward.

Paschoud has argued that the Epitomator, whose work is fairly insubstantial, would have been unlikely to use a Greek source at all, let alone one as stylistically tortured as Eunapius.[72] Against this argument I would note first that Marius Maximus was, apparently, considerably more detailed than Suetonius had been, yet the Epitomator was able to make use of his work. Second, the earliest part of Eunapius, which was most important to the Epitomator, would also probably have been the section least elaborated and therefore the easiest to interpret. While the Greek tradition for the history of the third and early fourth century is more rich than the Latin tradition as exemplified by the *KG*, it is still not very extensive.

While the use of Eunapius is possible, we should not fool ourselves into thinking that we know more than we do about lost sources for the period. We know nothing of the sources for the later part of the *KG*, for example, or the sources for Eunapius himself.

## 9.2 Nicomachus Flavianus

A more recent explanation for the links in the later books of the *Historia Augusta* to the later Greek tradition is the attribution of this material to the *Annales* of the Roman senator Nicomachus Flavianus. This theory, first put forward in detail by Hartke and later adopted by Schlumberger and Paschoud, was championed after the important work of Bleckmann by a variety of scholars, including Baldini, Ratti, and Festy.[73] Flavianus is famous to posterity, of course, not as a historian, but as a prominent senator who sided with the usurper Eugenius during his revolt against the emperor Theodosius in 395 and committed suicide upon Eugenius' defeat. The existence of his *Annales* are known from an inscription put up by the historian's son in 431

[71] Barnes (1978) 115–23; Paschoud (1980).

[72] Paschoud (2001).

[73] Hartke (1940) 28–37; Schlumberger (1974) 240–8; Bleckmann (1992); (1995a); Paschoud (1994); (2001); (2002) xii–xix; Festy (1997); Baldini (1998); (2005). Cameron has now written extensively on the Nicomachus Flavianus theory in Cameron (2011) 627–90, which should be read with Paschoud (2012).

and from the biographical sketch known as the *Anecdoton Holderi*.[74] These annals have been claimed as a source, not only of the *Historia Augusta* and the *Epitome*, but also of Eunapius, Ammianus, and the seventh-century Peter the Patrician. I will avoid exploring every aspect of the question, concentrating on the *Annales* only insofar as they explain the source of the *Historia Augusta*.

Paschoud, the most energetic promoter of the theory, argues that the evidence for the role of the *Annales* can be found in the traces of a western, senatorially-biased work written in Latin in the later Greek historians. In truth, then, there are two theories being put forth, one about a particular Latin source for the later Greek tradition, and one attributing that source to Flavianus. Since the scope and the nature of the *Annales* are unknown to us from external evidence, the case for equating the posited Latin source with Nicomachus Flavianus in particular is weak. Cameron points out that the failure of Symmachus, in his extensive correspondence with Flavianus, to make any reference to his historical interests, and the lack of any reference to history in the portrayal of the character of Flavianus in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, make him an unlikely candidate for the role of author of an extensive and influential historical work.[75] But the association seems to have become engrained and even functions as a shibboleth for certain writers to demonstrate their adherence to the general theory of a Latin source.[76]

Paschoud points to several passages in Zosimus' account of the fourth century as evidence of a western and senatorial bias, including the digressions on the Secular Games (Zos. 2.1–7) and on the *pontifex maximus* (Zos. 4.36). Cameron has recently investigated these claims.[77] He argues that Mendelssohn was correct in seeing these digressions as Greek antiquarian material that Zosimus himself grafted onto his Eunapian base. For example, the digression on *pontifex maximus* combines misinformation, such as the claim that kings and emperors, not private citizens, could hold the office, with Greek pseudo-scholarship of a kind also found in John Lydus, such as the suggestion that the college of pontiffs had its origin in prehistoric Thessaly. We would expect neither the misinformation nor the Hellenisation from the pen of a patriotic, religiously-informed aristocrat like Nicomachus Flavianus.

[74] Galonnier (1996).

[75] Cameron (2011) 633–5.

[76] Consider, for example, in a recent *Festschrift* for Paschoud, how Bleckmann sees the use of the name as a blow against Anglo-Saxon recalcitrance: 'Dieser Autor sei zum Ärgernis der angelsächsischen Fachwelt und zur Freude des Jubilars hier wieder mit dem Etikett Nicomachus Flavianus versehen': Bleckmann (2010) 61.

[77] Cameron (2011) 644–58.

Zosimus makes one error and one major omission that provide further evidence against seeing Nicomachus Flavianus as his ultimate source. He fails to describe the conflict between pagans and Christians over Gratian's decision not to provide funds for the altar of Victory in the senate house, and he claims that Theodosius withdrew state funding for the traditional cults. It was Gratian, not Theodosius, who withdrew funding, and the affair of the Altar of Victory was a significant milestone in the disestablishment of traditional Roman religion, featuring duelling orations between such illustrious aristocrats as Symmachus and Ambrose. It is impossible to imagine a history by Flavianus, a close friend of Symmachus, that would not emphasise this controversy. It is also impossible to imagine that Flavianus mistakenly attributed the withdrawal of state support for pagan cult to Theodosius. Paschoud does have a theory that purports to explain these problems. He claims that a central theme of the history of Eunapius was the demonstration that Christians who act against paganism are punished, and that Eunapius wanted to ensure that every Christian emperor was guilty of anti-pagan activities. Since Gratian's refusal of the pontifical robe was sufficient anti-pagan activity for him, his additional act of subsidy withdrawal was attributed by Eunapius to Theodosius to ensure that both Christian emperors were portrayed as sufficiently anti-pagan.[78] The need for such *ad hoc* solutions weakens the case for Flavianus.

Proponents of the importance of Nicomachus Flavianus also offer philological arguments that purport to show instances where later Greek historians must be drawing from a Latin-language source, directly or indirectly. Here, too, Cameron has offered counterarguments that are strong enough to ensure that no example seems to be to definitive proof of an ultimate Latin origin, which is not to say that no doubts remain.[79] Rather than recapitulate Cameron's work I will point to evidence in the other direction, where scholars have suggested that the *Epitome* and the *Historia Augusta* have a Greek source rather than a Latin one in the relevant places. In the *Life* of Firmus (*quad. tyr.* 3.4–6), we are told in a fantasy passage that the emperor Aurelian planned to erect a statue of 'Jupiter the Consul'. This is apparently a joke based on the Greek Ζεὺς ὕπατος. *Hypatos*, 'the most high', is an epithet of Zeus both in Homer and at real cult sites in antiquity (for example, in Athens before the Erechtheum: Paus. 1.26.6, 8.2.1), but the word in imperial Greek is also the regular translation for the office of consul.[80] In *Aurelian* 36, the murderer of the emperor is named Mnestheus, which is puzzling in light

[78] Paschoud (2006) 367–78.

[79] Cameron (2011) 659–65.

[80] See also Straub (1974).

of the agreement between Zosimus and Zonaras that his name was Eros. Hohl was the first to see that the *HA*-author had misunderstood his source: both Zosimus and Zonaras describe Eros' office as *τῶν ἔξωθεν φερομένων ἀποκρίσεων μηνυτής*, the functionary who delivers the responses of the emperor to petitioners (Zos. 1.62.1, Zon. 12.27).[81] Presumably the *HA*-author understood the name of the office as a personal name. Paschoud dismisses both of these examples with special pleading.[82] In addition, a usurper under Carinus, called just Julianus in Victor (39.9), has his full name, Sabinus Julianus, in the *Epitome* (38.6), and also in Zosimus (1.73.1). The presence of the full name in John of Antioch (F 163 Mueller) suggests that the full name is part of the Greek tradition with which the *Epitome* was familiar, not just a detail from the *KG* which Victor had omitted.[83] Finally we might add more broadly Potter's point that the *HA*-author invents a lot of fake Greek-named sources for the history of the third century, as we might expect if he were working from a Greek source himself.[84]

The power of *Quellenforschung* is limited. The case for Nicomachus Flavianus is not a strong one, even in the more mild sense of a western, Latin, pagan source. The case for Eunapius I feel is stronger, but it too hardly admits of proof.

## 10. The Sources Recapitulated

To sum up, the *HA*-author relied on the *KG* and the *breviaria* dependent upon the *KG*, Eutropius and Aurelius Victor, as a framework for the whole work. He used Marius Maximus for the early *Lives* through Elagabalus, perhaps with another source of higher quality (Syme's *Ignotus*); on Herodian for the year 238; on Dexippus' *Chronicle* until 270; and finally on a source with affinities to the sources of later Greek authors like Zosimus. It is most economical to consider the last source a Greek one, and he might in fact be Eunapius, but some argue for a western-oriented Latin source. The *HA*-author distorted and selectively excerpted his sources, and was happy at times to simply invent.

[81] Hohl (1911) 286–8.

[82] Paschoud (2002) 219–20: Jupiter the Consul recognised as a bilingual joke, but no recognition that a Greek source is likely; Paschoud (1996) 173–4: the error is attributed to the *KG*, although it is absent from *KG* sources.

[83] Birley (1996).

[84] Potter (1990) 364–5.

## 11. Alternative Sources

Some scholars have posited the use of additional sources beyond those I have discussed, which are worth considering further.

Frank Kolb has argued for more extensive use of Herodian and for the use of Dio Cassius by the *HA*-author.[85] He offers some interesting parallels between the language and content of the Greek authors and the *HA*. Scholars have generally been unconvinced by Kolb's case. Barnes offers several important arguments against the use of Dio.[86] First, the many loose connections that Kolb sees are hard to explain with a reasonable theory of composition. The *HA*-author was unconcerned with historical fact, and had trouble enough condensing the work of Marius Maximus. Why would he pore over the long and detailed work of Dio and select occasional phrases to scatter through his text? Second, Barnes notes that Kolb's parallels almost entirely lack the shared errors that are the best indicators of connections between works. Some of the similarities that Kolb identifies might best be attributed to sources shared by Marius Maximus and Dio, for example, or Maximus may himself have used Dio.

Potter argues that the *HA*-author does not draw directly on Herodian or Dexippus, but on a Latin work that is heavily dependent upon those Greek authors. He points to a number of minor differences between Herodian and the *HA* that are hard to explain as examples of purposeful changes of his source material by the *HA*-author. For example, the *HA*-author clearly believes that the usurper under Maximinus, Quartinus, is named Titus (Herod. 7.1.9, *Max.* 11.1–2, *tyr. trig.* 32.1). The examples that Potter provides are relatively few, however, and do not seem sufficient to me to justify imputing the changes and errors to an intermediary source when the *HA*-author is so ready to alter his source text whimsically or carelessly. An argument that Cameron makes against the importance of the *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus applies here as well: why did this valuable source of history in Latin leave no trace on the later Latin historiographical tradition?[87]

The complex system of Callu, apparently followed by Festy, which envisions four stages of redaction of the manuscript, also includes source innovations.[88] Callu puts forth Asinius Quadratus, the third-century Greek historian, and Eusebius of Nantes, cited by the sixth-century church historian

[85] Kolb (1972); (1995).

[86] Barnes (1978) 79–89.

[87] Potter (1990) 365–9. See also Bleckmann (1995b), rejected by Ratti (1999).

[88] Callu (1994) 74–5 provides a short summary of the theory, which is fleshed out in Callu (1992) xiv–lxx. The theory is presented as fact in Callu and Festy (2010) 117–33. Paschoud (1996) xxx–xxxvii offers a more detailed rejection.

Evagrius and a fourteenth-century manuscript, as sources for the *HA*. But there is little benefit in claiming as sources such barely known figures, and Callu's schema as a whole rests more on assertions than arguments or proof, and so has not found wide acceptance.

Zecchini surveys the lost Greek historians who may have covered events from 270 to 284, including Eusebius, Callinicus of Petra, Onasimus, Sotericus, and Praxagoras.[89] He argues that the historian Eusebius (whom he distinguishes from Eusebius of Nantes) is the likely source after 270, as he is the only historian who covers the full time period in a narrative rather than monograph style. According to the *Suda*, Eusebius' work was comprised of nine books in Ionic dialect, apparently in emulation of Herodotus, and covered the period from Octavian to the death of Carus. Only two fragments survive. Eusebius may in theory be the Greek source after 270; indeed, our near-total lack of information about Eusebius allows him to be almost anything. Zecchini's survey of the historians known to us omits those whom we do not know because they were not excerpted or cited in Byzantine compilations. He dismisses the possibility of Eunapius as the late Greek source for the reasons of dating that I have shown to be unfounded. Between Eusebius and Eunapius, I prefer Eunapius. Eusebius' work, if it followed the standard ancient progression of moving rapidly through the earlier periods and becoming slower and denser in the contemporary period, seems as if it would have had too much information on the fourteen years under consideration to be the source of the sparsely factual *Historia Augusta*, while Eunapius' early sections, following the same principle, would be terse. Also, we know that Eunapius was used by Zosimus, which would explain the connections between him and the *HA*, while the history of Eusebius after publication is obscure. But our lack of knowledge about the sources for the period makes certainty impossible.

## 12. Conclusion

The *HA*-author had access to works of biography and history that we no longer possess. His use of Herodian and, to some extent, the *KG*, allows us to see that although he begins with a source text, he often augments or burlesques the information he draws from it. While his citations of Marius Maximus are likely trustworthy, although selective, his citations of Dexippus sometimes mask his own inventions. For the final five *Lives* attributed to Vopiscus, the question of sources becomes particularly tricky because the

[89] Zecchini (1995).

author has largely freed himself from dependence on facts and would not be expected to fully exploit whatever sources he might command.

The factual details in the *Lives* from Hadrian to Elagabalus demonstrate that the author of the *Historia Augusta* has a good source for the early primary *Lives*. On the other hand, just because other *Lives* are deficient in factual details does not necessarily imply that the author lacks a good source. His choice to freely invent in the *Alexander Severus*, rather than make use of Herodian, and his inventions associated with the *KG*, Herodian, and Dexippus, show that he is not merely an earnest biographer forced into deception by insufficient resources. Instead, creative play with his sources is his purpose, whether those sources are historical or literary.[90]

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