

REVIEW–DISCUSSION

ELUSIVE LATE ANTIQUE HISTORIANS

Bruno Bleckmann, Barbara Court, and Antonia Knöpges, *Profane Zeitgeschichtsschreibung des ausgehenden 4. und frühen 5. Jahrhunderts*. Kleine und fragmentarische Historiker der Spätantike DI–5. Paderborn: Brill/Schöningh, 2023. Pp. I–XLV + 526. Hardback, €139.25. ISBN 978-3-506-79292-1.

After spending decades breaking out of scholarly poverty, late antique historiography is now enjoying an *embarras de richesses*. Thanks primarily to the determined efforts of Peter Van Nuffelen and Lieve Van Hoof at Ghent, there is an indispensable reference work which is both authoritative and comprehensive: *CHAP*.¹ It forms an integral part of their related historiographical projects.² Next, there are individual editions and translations of what may be classified as historical texts in a diversity of late antique languages (mainly Greek, Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Persian, and Arabic). Many of these are the product of projects to gather and publish together texts of a particular kind. Some are long established (*GCS*, *CFHB*, Budé)³ but others have sprung up more recently for the purpose at hand, particularly those involving translations.⁴ Then, there are the extensive projects made possible by modern technology and for which substantial requisite funding has been forthcoming, mainly from German academies.⁵

¹ Van Nuffelen and Van Hoof (2020), with associated database <https://www.late-antique-historiography.ugent.be/database/>. For the wider context see Croke (2023).

² Notably, their two important volumes: Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2020) and (forthcoming).

³ Among recent volumes should be mentioned Wallraff et al. (2007), Wallraff–Stutz–Marinedes (2018), Wahlgren (2005), Mariev (2008), and Festy, with Vitiello (2022).

⁴ Pride of place for translations must go to *Translated Texts for Historians* (TTH) from Liverpool University Press (<https://www.liverpooluniversitypress.co.uk/topic/book-series/translated-texts-for-historians?target=titleSearch>), which contains historiographical texts such as Zachariah of Mitylene (Syriac), Sebeos (Armenian), Khalifa ibn Khayyat (Arabic), Mardānfarrox son of Ohrmazddād (Persian), as well as Evagrius (Greek) and Orosius (Latin). Other relevant translations include Burgess and Kulikowski (2013), Schott (2019), Bjornlie (2022), Kosiński et al. (2021), Palo (2023), and Klein (2023).

⁵ These include the recently completed Mainz commentaries on Procopius' *Buildings* (<https://www.instag.geschichte.uni-mainz.de/procopius-and-the-language-of-buildings/>), the commentary on Procopius' *Secret History* led by Rene Pfeilshifter at Würzburg

Arguably, the most ambitious Academy series is that funded by the Nordrhein-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften at Dusseldorf to produce a series of volumes which cover the ‘minor historians’ of late antiquity and especially those which have only survived in later quotations and fragments. Hence, *Kleine und fragmentarische Historiker der Spätantike* (details at <http://kfhist.awk.nrw.de>). The series, a sort of complement to the famous collection of fragments of Greek historians by Friedrich Jacoby, is divided into a range of defined modules with each text having a number preceded by its module, e.g., ‘G5 Prosper Tiro’. One can dispute what is meant by ‘minor’ (e.g., ‘B3 Eutropius’) and whether purely hypothetical texts (e.g., B1 Enmann’s lost *Kaisergeschichte*) warrant separate treatment and publication, plus whether the modular divide of secular/religious is everywhere sustainable. Confining the collection to Greek and Latin texts only is also an understandable limitation, while chronicles present a particular challenge. Not only are there clearly attributed individual ones (e.g., Hydatius, Prosper) but there are also plenty of anonymous ones (e.g., ‘Berlin Chronicle’), as well as much later manuscript fragments in an annalistic form. The series has been blessed with its drivers (Bruno Bleckmann, assisted by Markus Stern), its publisher (Brill/Schöningh), and its selection of authors and editors. Together, for such a disparate collection, they have assured the consistent quality of output, not to mention its remarkable speed. The overall plan and the multi-authored volumes to date bear clear testimony to the project’s vision and value.

This volume is the latest in the series, and from Module D which means ‘Secular historiography of the late fourth and early fifth century’. It is a book for scholars and scholars in the making, not for tyros. The immediate question then is: what can I find here that I won’t find elsewhere for the texts concerned? The five late fourth-/early fifth-century texts (D1–5 in the parlance of the series) are (D1) the *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus; (D2) an anonymous historian mentioned in a letter of Symmachus; (D3) the so-called *Epitome de Caesaribus*; (D4) Sulpicius Alexander; and (D5) Frigeridus. Now, Nicomachus’

(<https://www.geschichte.uni-wuerzburg.de/institut/alte-geschichte/forschung/prokops-geheimgeschichte/>), the commentary on the *Chronicle of John Malalas*, with related studies, led by Mischa Meier at Tübingen (<https://www.hadw-bw.de/forschung/forschungsstelle/malalas-kommentar>), the edition, translation, and commentary on the *History* of John of Ephesus being led by Hartmut Leppin at Frankfurt (https://www.geschichte.unifrankfurt.de/128623040/Kommentar_zur_Kirchengeschichte_des_Johannes_von_Ephesus#a_d24_241c4-4e31501a), that on the Ethiopic version of the *Chronicle* of John of Nikiu led by Daria Eligena at Hamburg (https://www.aai.uni-hamburg.de/en/ethiostudies/research/john_ofnikiu.html), and that on the *Chronicle* of Dionysius of Tel-Mahre at Ghent (<https://research.flw.ugent.be/en/projects/re-assembling-past-dionysius-tel-mahre-early-syriac-historiography-and-its-byzantine-and-and>). To these may be added the *UK Research and Innovation* project ‘The Last Historians of Rome’ led by Gavin Kelly (Edinburgh). There may be others unknown to me.

Annales do not survive and their contents can only be hypothesised, identifying Symmachus' historian is pure guesswork, while for Sulpicius Alexander and Frigeridus only fragments are extant in later quotations from Gregory of Tours. Alongside this very slender harvest sits the *Epitome de Caesaribus*—a substantial, work surviving in several manuscripts and which, inevitably, takes up most of the book (73–432). That may not seem much for the reader but digging deeper has its rewards.

For each of the above authors there is an invariably well-informed and clearly presented introduction. For each text there is also a translation, as well as a detailed historical and philological commentary. The volume is a collaborative enterprise of three authors with their respective contributions clearly delineated (vi). In summary, the philological introductions and the philological points in the commentary (with Latin lemmata) are the work of Barbara Court, along with the translation of the *Epitome*; the historical introductions and commentary (with German lemmata) are the work of Antonia Knöpges. Bruno Bleckmann is responsible for the rest and is occasionally (as 'B.B.') left to complement the commentary. The division of labour may not always be clear but that is no problem, except for the occasional 'me' or 'in my opinion' which leaves the reader wondering. There is also an up-to-date bibliography and list of abbreviations, although 'HLL' (p. 51, n. 2) seems to be missing. Since four of these historians (Nicomachus Flavianus, Symmachus' *anonymus*, Sulpicius Alexander, and Frigeridus) have also been treated recently in the important collection of Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2020) comparison is inevitable and instructive. The remaining one, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, has been the subject of a detailed Budé volume by Michel Festy.⁶ Most importantly of all, but unfortunate for the timing of this volume, is the new study of Justin Stover and George Woudhuysen (2023) which clearly impacts this book's treatment of the *Epitome* in fundamental ways, as explained below.

Not much can be said about Nicomachus Flavianus and Symmachus' historian. The fact remains that only inscriptions refer to Nicomachus' *annales* (*CIL* 6.1783) and to him as a 'learned historian' (*CIL* 6.1782). No fragment or quotation survives from his *annales* which may not be a title (*Annales*) and may, or may not, have been dedicated to Theodosius. Its content, scope, purpose, and length are all unknown.⁷ While the *KFHist* authors consider it possible that the *annales* has left no trace (16), they still follow the claims of various modern historians who have imputed the presence of Flavianus' *annales* behind the work of other late antique historians including other lost ones. Paschoud, for

⁶ Festy (1999). Before Festy there was the standard edition of Pichlmayr (1912).

⁷ Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2020) 36–50 is the best summary of the complexities involved in both interpreting the inscription and discussing the alleged relationship of Nicomachus' *annales* to extant works.

example, insisted that the *Annales* is only one step removed from surviving in a single manuscript, as do Zosimus and Tacitus, hence scholars are entitled to discern its use by later writers: ‘Zosimus killed off Eunapius, why could not the *Epitome de Caesaribus* have killed off the *Annales* of Nicomachus Flavianus?’⁸ More controversial has surely been the insistence of Stéphane Ratti that the *annales* is nothing other than the *Historia Augusta*, the author of which must therefore be Nicomachus Flavianus.⁹ Others have shaken their scholarly heads at this claim, even Paschoud. Here the *KFHist* is more circumspect about Ratti’s thesis without rejecting it (17–18 (general), 19–20 (philological)). Otherwise, the entry is padded out (30–3) with other testimonia to Flavianus’ career.

As for the writer mentioned by Symmachus, here Symmachus, *Ep.* 9.110 is quoted in full, not just the second half of the letter, as in Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen ((2020) 73). Then only textual and philological annotation (65–9) is provided for this letter. Accordingly, the essential discussion about whether or not Symmachus is referring to a completed history, and whether it was the work of any known author, is overlooked, unlike the comparable treatment of Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen ((2020) 73–6). Stover and Woudhuysen ((2023) 149–51), for example, think Symmachus is referring to Aurelius Victor. They may be right. A ‘B.B.’ note would have been helpful here. While it would be easy to suggest that Nicomachus Flavianus and Symmachus’ *anonymus* have no place in a collection like this, they were also included by Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2020). For the sake of completeness, it is worth having them, although what can be said about them is vastly different from Sulpicius Alexander and Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus (also in Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen (2020)), let alone other more clearly established authors.

Sulpicius Alexander, and Renatus Profuturus Frigeridus, who survive only in quotations by Gregory of Tours where they are cited for the history of Gaul in the late fourth/early fifth century, are well treated here. First there is a biographical outline for each (438–41), followed by a detailed description of the manuscript tradition of Gregory covering the quotation of both (441–4),

⁸ Paschoud (2012) 386. This is not the place to answer Paschoud, except to point out that Eunapius was not ‘killed off’ by Zosimus. The history of Eunapius still existed in full in the ninth century, both editions in fact, when it was read by Photius (*Bibliotheca* 77, 98) and still in the tenth when it was excerpted from the imperial library copy for Constantine Porphyrogenitus’ collection of extracts, which, in turn formed the basis for its quotation in the eleventh-century *Suda*. Paschoud also cites Ammianus Marcellinus as being ‘only preserved in a single manuscript’. This is obviously an oversight on Paschoud’s part. There are several manuscripts of Ammianus, at least from Book XIV, but only the two oldest (ninth century) are of textual importance. Their relationship is disputed but see Kelly and Stover (2016). Likewise, it is misleading to link Pompeius Trogus to Flavianus since his history was well-known and his book-by-book structure is deliberately preserved in the later epitome by Justin.

⁹ Most accessible in Ratti (2011) and (2016).

then earlier editions of Gregory (444–9), orthography (449–52), language and style (452–5), with separate treatment of each, especially the question of the extent to which Gregory is quoting or merely paraphrasing them. Next, for each historian separately, comes the text, translation and commentary (459–518). Again, the *KFHist* authors tend to be comprehensive but cautious in their approach. For instance, they discuss the modern notion that Sulpicius may have continued Ammianus but conclude correctly that there is no real supporting evidence (436–7), and they identify Sulpicius Alexander as the ‘frater noster’ Alexander from Symmachus, *Ep.* 5.39 (438 with ‘B.B’. note at 471) because it is ‘plausible’. On the other hand, they are prepared to ascribe twenty books to Frigeridus’ history and a time of composition in the later 450s (439–40), which is pure speculation. For both text and translation, the authors of *KFHist*, reverse the practice of the Krusch edition by placing the original of Gregory in italics and the quotations of Sulpicius and Frigeridus in Roman type. This actually helps make clearer which parts are the work of the quoted historians although for Frigeridus (494–7) the division into smaller fragments in Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen ((2020) 103–24) is preferable. Van Hoof and Van Nuffelen do not include any apparatus for Gregory of Tours but its inclusion by the authors of the *KFHist* for each separate fragment of Sulpicius and Frigeridus is helpful. While details may be open to criticism, the commentary on these historians is detailed and illuminating.

As noted, the bulk of this book is devoted to what it calls, by its usual title, the *Epitome de Caesaribus*. Here the author is ‘unknown’ (73). Elsewhere he is called ‘Pseudo Victor’ (Festy) or ‘Incertus Auctor’ (Pichlmayr). The *KFHist* authors have been able to take advantage of the earlier article by Stover and Woudhuysen on the date of the *Epitome de Caesaribus*¹⁰ but have not really come to grips with its implications, despite their detailed critical analysis of prose rhythm (*cursus*) in Jordanes and the vexed question of separating the *cursus* of author and sources (125–40). The full Stover/Woudhuysen thesis on Aurelius Victor is only set out in their recent book (2023) which needs to be briefly outlined here. The original history of Aurelius Victor, acclaimed as a ‘scriptor historicus’ by Ammianus who knew the work, is lost. Instead, according to Stover and Woudhuysen, what has survived are two separate epitomes of the original multi-volume work made centuries apart. In their manuscript titles they both claim abbreviation from the history of Aurelius Victor. What is called the *Epitome de Caesaribus* (*KFHist* D3) belongs to the eighth century (770 at earliest). It utilises sources that include Jordanes (sixth century) and Isidore of Seville (seventh century) and is ascribed to Paul the Deacon. In his own *Roman History* Paul preferred to follow the succinct account of Eutropius but he used the *Epitome* as well. What is called the *Historia Abbreviata*, generally

¹⁰ Stover and Woudhuysen (2021) 150–88.

known as the fourth-century *Caesares* of Aurelius Victor (but not in *KFHist* B2), is not the full history either. It is only an epitome not attested before the fifteenth century. Although these two epitomes end at different points (361 for the *Abbreviata* and 388 for the *Epitome*, brought to 395 by additions from Jordanes), and treat the original in different ways, there is enough material in common (language, attitudes, perspectives, etc.) to suggest they are both summaries of the same larger work, namely, the lost multi-volume history of Aurelius Victor. One immediate outcome is that there is no need for the *Kaisergeschichte* of Enmann, created primarily to explain the relationship of Aurelius Victor (at least the *Historia Abbreviata* version) and Eutropius primarily.

The *KFHist* authors, on the contrary, dismiss the well-attested manuscript title of the *Epitome*: ‘Libellus de vita et moribus imperatorum breuiatus ex libris Sexti Aurelii Victoris a Caesare Augusto usque ad Theodosium’. The manuscript title is considered to be neither genuine nor related to the books of Aurelius Victor’s history (101), and so is not included in the text (at 144), which is problematic. There is no good reason to consider the title a fabrication that cannot be taken literally. Indeed, it is deployed by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) as part of their case for arguing that the *Epitome* is an eighth century summary of the multi-volume work of Aurelius Victor. That is, it is not a separate late fourth-/early fifth-century work similar in character to Eutropius and Festus and predating Orosius, let alone Jordanes. Having dismissed the manuscript title, the *KFHist* writers presume that the *Epitome* is an independent, original, and self-contained text so that its clear fourth-century references mean it cannot be dated later (74–6). They point out that a later work could not ignore Christianity, and would not laud Theodosius to the same extent, nor could a later work affirm that the administrative reforms of Hadrian (*Epit.* 14.11) are still (‘hodie’) effective (76). To these may be added the ‘first person’ authorial references (*Epit.* 3.6, 8.6, 16.4, 42.21, 45.5). Moreover, the author of the *Epitome* seems to be familiar with court life and perhaps spent time in or around Milan (79). All this is mainly correct.

Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) see these as sure traces of a fourth-century text too, although they would not go so far as to link the *Epitome* to the local court of Honorius in particular (80). It’s just that they argue for the authenticity of the manuscript title and therefore see the text, including the authorial references, as being a Carolingian summary of the fourth century history of Aurelius Victor in the course of which some later texts (Jordanes in particular) are deployed as well. While the writers of *KFHist* cannot agree that any later sixth-century writer (let alone an eighth-century one) would stop at 395, the fact is that Carolingian enthusiasm for Roman texts such as the *Historia Augusta*, Eutropius, and Jordanes undermines any such objection. In the ninth century,

the great classical scholar and searcher of manuscripts Lupus of Ferrières clearly used his copy of the *Epitome* as a source of imperial examples.¹¹

If, as now seems likely following the Stover/Woudhuysen proposal, the *Epitome de Caesaribus* is an eighth-century summary of a large fourth-century history, then how can it be evaluated? What is the role of a treatment such as here for *KFHist* D₃? The original history of Aurelius Victor is not going to appear. The *Epitome* remains. So, the *Epitome* has to be handled according to its own merits even if its relationship to other texts, extant and not, is now seriously altered. Leaving aside the question of date, this *KFHist* version of the *Epitome* certainly has its merits. To begin with, there is always value in an improved text and a comprehensive discussion of both the manuscripts and the ‘indirect’ tradition (107–17). In addition, for the apparatus, the editors have sensibly chosen to use capital letters (instead of the usual lower case Greek letters) for the nineteen manuscripts. This makes it easier to follow the manuscript witnesses than in the previous editions of Pichlmayr and Festy. However, although individual manuscripts and their dates are listed in the introduction (97–9), in the sigla before the text the vital information of when the manuscripts were written is omitted and there is no *stemma codicum*. Here, the reader is obliged to resort to Festy (LXXXIV, but with additions/corrections at *KFHist*, 113–17). So too, the authors have usefully separated out the later writers who use the text, the so-called ‘indirect witnesses’ such as Paul the Deacon, Freculph, and Landolfus Sagax. This again increases the book’s user-friendliness but it also highlights that the earliest of these, Jordanes aside, is Paul the Deacon whom Stover and Woudhuysen argue is possibly the author of the *Epitome*.

How accurate the translation is I am not competent to judge, but there does appear to be a good balance between the technical language/nomenclature on the one hand and general readability on the other. Translating the text’s ‘Flaccus’ as ‘Horace’ (147 at *Epit.* 1.16) is a sensible example. Another is the routine inclusion of back references in the text and translation (e.g., 166–7: *Epit.* 10.16 to 10.6). The commentary, however, is not so balanced. For the reigns from Augustus to Elagabalus (*Epit.* 1–23), the notes tend to be mainly philological with very few historical ones, an exception being Hadrian’s various laws and decisions at *Epit.* 14.11 (252–3). Festy (1999) is fuller for this period and more valuable. It is only with the reign of Severus Alexander that detailed historical commentary begins. For the first time, the *KFHist* commentary (260–5) is longer than that of Festy (134–8) although the Severus Alexander entry itself (*Epit.* 24) is quite short. The authors see this as the point when comparison to other sources becomes meaningful (86). This explanation

¹¹ McKitterick (2004) 39–59, with 43 (on Eutropius as used by Paul the Deacon and Landolf), 208 and 275 (Lupus’ use of *Epitome* for examples to the Frankish king Charles the Bald).

covers not only the sudden increase in historical and historiographical notes but also a concentration on the complicated relationships between the *Epitome* and other texts, as traditionally understood.

Profane Zeitgeschichtsschreibung is well-structured, clearly presented and virtually free from typographical blemishes (the chapter heading ‘7.’ is missing at 241). The index that is confined to names in the text, therefore omitting those in the introduction and commentary, would be more helpful if page numbers were used, not just individual documents by section numbers. So, 176 not (or perhaps as well as) ‘Sabina: *Epit. Caes.* 14.8’. Anyone who has had to engage with these texts, not least their dates and relationships to each other, knows that editing, translating, and commenting on them can be controversial and forbidding work. The authors of *KFHist* D_{I–5} are to be commended for their clarity and their willingness to confront, at times challenge, disputed issues. However, whether the *Epitome de Caesaribus* will ultimately disappear from the realm of fourth-century texts, thereby necessitating at least a fresh commentary, remains to be seen.

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