

have been wrongly written as *crurac* and then corrected into *crura*.<sup>32</sup> It would not be surprising to find a device like hendiadys within a passage with poetical reminiscences and in a “carefully ornamented” period;<sup>33</sup> besides, it is used by Apuleius in many other places.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Another example of a transmission mistake with *ac* involved, though not exactly the same, is 8.2.5: *praesenti ac Lipsius praesentia* F.

33. GCA 1985, 63.

34. See, e.g., H. Koziol, *Der Stil des L. Apuleius* (1872; reprint, Hildesheim, Zürich, and New York, 1988), 226–27; R. T. van der Paardt, *L. Apuleius Madaurensis: “The Metamorphoses”: A Commentary on Book III with Text and Introduction* (Amsterdam, 1971), 58, 151; GCA 1985, 143, 171, 178; Kenney, *Cupid and Psyche* (n. 9 above), 132, 205; B. L. Hijmans Jr., et al., eds., *Apuleius Madaurensis “Metamorphoses,” Book IX* (Groningen, 1995), 41; M. Zimmerman, ed., *Apuleius Madaurensis: “Metamorphoses,” Book X* (Groningen, 2000), 97.

#### OF MICE AND EMPERORS: A NOTE ON AELIAN *DE NATURA ANIMALIUM* 6.40

Νῆσος ἐν τῷ Πόντῳ Ἡρακλεῖ ἐπώνυμος ἐκτετίμηται. οὐκοῦν ὅσον μυῶν ἐστὶν ἐνταῦθα σέβει τὸν θεόν, καὶ πᾶν ὅσον ἀνέιται αὐτῷ τοῦτο πιστεύει τῇ θεῷ κεχαρισμένον ἀνεῖσθαι καὶ οὐκ ἂν προσάψαιτο αὐτοῦ.

There is an island in the Black Sea named after Heracles, which has been highly honored. Now all the mice there pay reverence to the god, and they believe that the god has taken pleasure in the dedication of everything that is offered to him and would not touch it. (Ael. *NA* 6.40.1–5)

The author Claudius Aelianus, more commonly known as Aelian, was born in Praeneste (modern Palestrina) around 170 C.E. He spent his life in Rome.<sup>1</sup> Though he was Roman, he chose to write in Greek. It is mainly for his mastery over that language that he is named as a sophist by Philostratus and in the *Suda* lexicon, which also states that Aelian was a priest, but does not say of which deity.<sup>2</sup> In *De natura animalium* Aelian regularly mentions deities, with, of course, their connection to certain animals.

I am indebted to Laurence Emmett, Jaś Elsner, Ted Kaizer, and Fergus Millar, and to Shadi Bartsch and the anonymous reader of *CP*, for reading through earlier versions of this article. Their comments have greatly improved the argument, though that does not mean they actually believe it.

1. J. F. Kindstrand, “Claudius Aelianus und sein Werk,” *ANRW* 2.34.4 (1998): 2954–96, 2957. On Aelian, see also E. Bowie, “Aelian,” in *The Cambridge History of Classical Literature*, vol. 1, *Greek Literature*, ed. P. Easterling and B. M. W. Knox (Cambridge, 1985), 680–82. Also forthcoming is A. Lukinovich, “Les *Histoires variées* d’Elie: L’Agencement de la mosaïque,” *ANRW* 2.35.4. Texts and translations used for this article are adapted from N. G. Wilson, ed. and trans., *Aelian: “Historical Miscellany”* (“*Varia Historia*”) (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); A. Schofield, ed. and trans., *Aelian: “On the Characteristics of Animals,”* 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1958–59). For the wider cultural context in which Aelian wrote, see now the numerous articles in *Athenaeus and His World: Reading Greek Culture in the Roman Empire*, ed. D. Braund and J. Wilkins (Exeter, 2000).

2. Philostr. *VS* 2.31 (= 624); *Suda* 2.168.23–25 [Adler edition]. As Kindstrand (“Claudius Aelianus” [n. 1 above], p. 2958, n. 30) argues (with references), there is no evidence for the late-nineteenth-century assumption that Aelian was priest at the Fortuna temple of Praeneste.

The purpose of these passages is, like that of most of the book, to teach and entertain, but also to moralize—to show how often animals' virtues outshine those of men.<sup>3</sup>

The pious mice of the Black Sea fit this argument well. Not only do they worship the god properly, leaving the vine to grow luxuriously for him (οὐκοῦν καὶ ἄμπελος τῷ θεῷ κομᾷ), believing it to be for the sole purpose of sacrifice to Heracles. They even leave the island "when the grapes reach maturity," (ὅταν οὖν ἐς ἀκμὴν αἱ ῥάγες ἔρχωνται, οἱ δὲ ἀπολείπουσι τὴν νῆσον οἱ μύες), because "they honor it as something that is dedicated to the god alone" (τετίμηται ὡς ἀνάθημα αὐτῷ μόνῳ). How much better their behavior is, Aelian finishes the passage by saying, than that of Hippon, Diagoras, and Herostratus—"men who preferred by one means or another to rob the gods of their names and functions" (οἱ καὶ τὰ τῶν θεῶν ὀνόματα καὶ ἔργα ἀμωσγέπως συλᾶν προηρημένοι).<sup>4</sup> At first sight this seems a wholly harmless moralizing passage, showing how the "Pontic mice" are more virtuous than the abhorrent "atheists." Yet why mice? There is no apparent connection between Heracles and mice, positive or negative. This would not pose a problem if Aelian had brought together totally unrelated divinities and animals more often in his work. But he does not. In fact, he seems rather systematic in linking divinities with their sacred animals.

Aphrodite is mentioned in connection with pigeons and cows, both animals that were believed to have strong ties with the goddess.<sup>5</sup> Monstrous sea serpents, and crabs "whose shell measured one foot across in all directions" (οἷς τὸ μὲν ὄστρακον τὴν περιφέρειαν εἶχε πανταχόθεν πόδα) are quite naturally deemed sacred to Poseidon (Ael. NA 17.1). Apollo figures in passages with swans, wolves, hawks, ravens, and serpents. Swans were Apollo's sacred animals, and wolves and hawks, too, were strongly linked with the deity.<sup>6</sup> Ravens were well known as ominous birds, much used

3. Kindstrand, "Claudius Aelianus," 2962–68; W. Hübner, "Der Mensch in Aelians Tiergeschichten," *A & A* 30 (1984): 154–76; F. Maspero, *Bestiario antico: Gli animali-simbolo e il loro significato nell'immaginario dei popoli antichi* (Casale Monferrato, 1997), 10. Cf. U. Dierauer, *Tier und Mensch im Denken der Antike: Studien zur Tierpsychologie, Anthropologie und Ethik* (Amsterdam, 1977), 273–92.

4. All three men were infamous for their "atheism." Hippon of Samos was satirized by Cratinus as an atheist (cf. H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*<sup>6</sup> [Berlin 1952], 38), whereas Diagoras of Melos was similarly described by Cicero (*Nat. D.*, 1.2.63; cf. Diod. Sic. 13.6.7); Herostratos of Ephesus, finally, was notorious for burning down Artemis' temple.

5. Aphrodite and pigeons: Ael. NA 4.2; 10.33; 10.50. Depictions of Aphrodite with pigeons: *LIMC* 2.2.349–50, 1012. See also Ov. *Met.* 15.386; cf. Maspero, *Bestiario antico* (n. 3 above), 115–19, at 118. Aphrodite and cows: Ael. NA 10.27: "... they believe that cows are related to this goddess, because the cow feels a strong incitement to love. ..." Significantly, the passage takes place in Egypt, where cows were held in high esteem (Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 50–54, at 50). The Egyptian goddess Hathor, among whose functions was that of a love goddess, was symbolized by a cow (H. Brunner, *Altägyptische Religion: Grundzüge* [Darmstadt, 1989], 21–23). For an illustration of Hathor depicted with a cow's head: E. Hornung, *Der Eine und die Vielen: Ägyptische Gottesvorstellungen* (Darmstadt, 1971), pl. 1. Depictions of Aphrodite with cows: *LIMC* 2.2.899a–c.

6. Apollo and swans: Ael. NA 11.1; Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 100–104, at 100: "Il cigno è l'uccello sacro ad Apollo." Depictions of Apollo with swans: *LIMC* 2.2.342–50, 741, 802, 917–18, 936, 938. See further *LIMC* 2.1.227–28. Apollo and wolves: Ael. NA 10.26, referring to Hom. *Il.* 4.101, "the wolf-born Apollo" (λυκηγενεΐ). Leto was said to have changed into a she-wolf before giving birth to Apollo (Arist. *De an.* 6.35). Further connections between Apollo and wolves: *LIMC* 2.1.223, 2.2.323. Apollo and hawks: Ael. NA 10.14 (in which Apollo is placed alongside Horus); Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 144, 146–47. Cf. Ael. NA 12.4, in which several gods are placed alongside different types of hawks. Artemis' link with hawks is well attested (Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 146), whereas Hera's follows naturally from Artem. *Oni-rocritica* 2.20. There are, however, no obvious connections with Athena and Hermes. Still, it seems that Aelian is here making the point that there are a great many kinds of hawks, rather than drawing a proper connection between the animals and particular deities.

in divination, and could thus easily be traced to the oracular Apollo.<sup>7</sup> Finally, the serpents that Aelian mentions are explicitly said to have “sprung from the Python at Delphi” (ἔκγονοι τοῦ ἐν Δελφοῖς Πυθῶνος εἶναι).<sup>8</sup> Again the relationship between god and beast is obvious.<sup>9</sup>

There is another type of animal with which Apollo was much connected in the ancient world, a connection made explicit by Aelian. For as Apollo *Smintheus*, a cult particularly popular in Asia Minor, the god “had a special relationship with mice.”<sup>10</sup> He was either their divine exterminator or their protector, and sometimes even appeared in the shape of a mouse.<sup>11</sup> Aelian mentions mice as Apollo’s sacred animal at Hamaxitus in the Troad (NA 12.5). He goes on to talk about the cult, recounting how “some Cretans who . . . were sent out to found a colony besought of the Pythian Apollo to tell them of some good place (χῶρον ἀγαθόν) . . . to found a city.” The oracle replied that the most advantageous place would be that “where the earth-born made war upon them” (ἐνθα ἂν αὐτοῖς οἱ γηγενεῖς πολεμήσωσιν). Later, when the Cretans camped for a night at Haxamitus, “a countless swarm of mice crept stealthily upon them” (μῶν δὲ ἄφατον τι πλῆθος ἐφερπύσαν), whereupon they decided to settle there, and built a temple to Apollo *Smintheus*.<sup>12</sup>

The connection between Apollo and mice is not that surprising. Mice were famous in the ancient world for their oracular function, mainly forecasting disaster or death.<sup>13</sup> In this, they could obviously be related to the oracular deity Apollo. Indeed, Aelian refers to the power of mice in premonition, both in his *De natura animalium* (7.8, 11.19) and in the *Varia historia* (1.11). Yet all of this still does not explain the pious Pontic mice who worship Heracles. Indeed, Aelian’s passage on Apollo *Smintheus* complicates matters even further. For in the first nine lines of that very passage, Heracles is mentioned, but not in connection with mice at all. These lines talk about the inhabitants of Thebes, who worship a weasel or marten (γαλένη) for helping during Heracles’ birth. This story, used by Ovid with some variations in *Metamorphoses* 9.306–23, recounts how Alcmena, unable to give birth through Hera’s evil ploys, was helped either by a weasel or by a nurse who was later transformed into a weasel. Aelian places this story alongside those surrounding Apollo *Smintheus*, to show that non-Egyptians, too, worship animals. But at the same time, he explicitly links

7. Apollo and ravens: Ael. NA 1.47–48. Cf. Cic. *Div.* 1.85; Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 124.

8. Ael. NA 11.2. Cf. *LIMC* 2.2.371–77.

9. Exceptions to obvious connections between gods and animals are two passages in which Hephaestus (11.3) and Athena (11.5) are mentioned alongside dogs. In both cases, the dogs function as guard dogs for the temple, much as Cerberus guarded the underworld. Their function as guard dogs seems to supersede any necessary bond between dogs and deities. Another rare connection is that between lions and Hephaestus (Ael. NA 12.7), which Aelian instantly explains by pointing to a lion’s fiery nature.

10. L. J. Bliquez, “Frogs and Mice and Athens,” *TAPA* 107 (1977): 11–25; 17.

11. Hom. *Il.* 1.39, with the comments in Eustathius, *In Homeri “Iliadem.”* For further details and references see B. Beckmann, *Die Maus im Altertum: Vorbereitende Untersuchungen zu einer Herausgabe der hochmittelalterlichen Mäusesagen* (Zurich, 1972), pp. 66–73, pp. 88–90, figs. 12–14, p. 96, n. 22; I. Trenčányi-Waldapfel, “Der Mäsegott bei Homer,” in *Geras: Studies Presented to George Thomson on the Occasion of His 60<sup>th</sup> Birthday*, ed. L. Varcl and R. F. Willetts (Prague, 1963), 211–23; 214–15, 222–23.

12. Ael. NA 12.5. Aelian begins with a story which is derived from *Iliad* 1.39, and which was probably well known at the end of the second century C.E., as it is also mentioned in Clement of Alexandria (*Protr.* 2.39) and Pausanias (2.5; 10.12.3). On this passage, and its place in a wider literary context: Beckmann, *Die Maus* (n. 11 above), 70, 76–78. Beckmann, however, erroneously refers to NA 13.5. It might be worth mentioning that *Smintheion*, modern Gülpýnar, was located near Hamaxitos; see *Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World*, vol. 2, *Map-by-Map Directory*, ed. R. J. A. Talbert (Princeton, 2000), 852.

13. Plin. *HN* 8.221–22; Livy, *Epit. Per.* 27.23; 30.2; Cic. *Div.* 1.44; Beckmann, *Die Maus*, 126.

Heracles to an animal that is a prime enemy of mice, just before emphasizing which deity mice should obey.

Let us look in more detail at the passage immediately following the devout Black-Sea mice (Ael. NA 6.41)—a passage that also emphasizes how weasels and mice are mortal enemies.<sup>14</sup> It deals with Egyptian mice, but more than anything else the militarily influenced language of the passage strikes the eye. Mice climb walls (τοῖς δὲ θριγκοῖς . . . ἐπαναβαίνουσιν), jump over trenches (ὑπερπηδῶσι τὰς τάφρους), and retreat in the formation of a hollow square to some mountain (ἐς τι ὄρος ἀναχωροῦσι τάξιν πλαισίου φυλάττοντες). They are even said to wait for exhausted youngsters, as is normal “for an armed force” (ὥς ἐν δυνάμει στρατιωτικῇ). Though these legions of mice are different from those that worshipped Heracles in the previous passage, the connection could hardly be ignored. Of course there was nothing new in mice being belligerent. In antiquity it was not unheard-of to point to the military-style organization that assembled mice demonstrated.<sup>15</sup> Aelian, however, does more than that. At one point (NA 17.17) he describes mice from the Caspian territory as a virtual invading army. They visit the land “in an invincible multitude” (πληθος ἄμαχον), crossing torrential rivers by gripping each other’s tails with their teeth, thus making “an unbreakable chain” (σύνδεσμον ἰσχυρότατον).<sup>16</sup> After doing so, they devastate the area, cutting and eating up anything that comes in their way.

So we have armies of marching and prophesying mice running through Aelian’s animal tales, some of which for still unknown reasons are described as worshipping Heracles. It is clear that they are unusual. What about Aelian’s Heracles? Are there any striking oddities about the deity in Aelian’s tales? As a matter of fact, there are. First of all, in the very last passage of the *De natura animalium* (17.46), right before the epilogue, we once more see Heracles surrounded by unusual animals: roosters. They are to be found in a temple to the deity adjacent to a temple to his wife Hebe, though the two temples are separated by a never-failing canal of clear water (ὄχετος δὲ ἄρα ἀενάου τε καὶ καθαροῦ ὕδατος διαρρεῖ μέσος). It is this very division that is central to the passage, for where there are roosters in Heracles’ temple, there are hens that keep to Hebe’s. Only in the breeding season do the cockerels fly across the stream to mate, and then again later on, after the eggs have hatched, to collect the male chicks for Heracles’ temple. It may or may not be relevant here that chickens, like mice, were thought of as warriorlike, and are explicitly identified as such by Aelian.<sup>17</sup> It might also be accidental that roosters were multiply linked to Apollo as sacred animals of his son Asclepius, favorites of his mother, Leto, and quite obviously as animals that announced sunrise. Yet it is conspicuous that Aelian shows his awareness of all these facts explicitly in his writing.<sup>18</sup> Again Heracles is connected to animals that really do not fit him, but rather evoke Apollo.

Secondly, Aelian discusses Heracles in his *Varia historia* as well. It is striking that in three separate passages he brings up occasions for a “new” Heracles. Twice the passage concerns Milo of Croton, who on seeing the feats of a certain Titormus, a man

14. Cf. Ael. NA 9.41 for mice’s fear of martens.

15. Beckmann, *Die Maus*, 65–66, 127. The *Batrachomyomachia* also instantly comes to mind.

16. Cf. also Ael. NA 5.22, showing how mice can save each other from drowning through similar actions.

17. Ael. VH 2.28; Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 162.

18. Ael. NA 4.29; Ael. VH 5.17. Cf. Pl. *Phd.* 66; Maspero, *Bestiario antico*, 160–61, 162: “Nella mitologia il gallo era sacro ad Asclepio . . . ad Apollo, come dio del sole. . .”

of extraordinary strength, exclaimed: "O Zeus, have you fathered another Heracles upon us?" (ὦ Ζεῦ, μὴ τοῦτον Ἡρακλῆ ἡμῖν ἕτερον ἔσπειρας;).<sup>19</sup> The third passage, nearer the beginning of the work, is even more noticeable (Ael. *VH* 2.32). It records that Heracles was not originally so called. It was only when he needed an oracle for some reason that Apollo's oracle stated: "Phoebus gives you the name of Heracles; for by doing favors to mankind you will win undying glory" (Ἡρακλῆ δέ σε Φοῖβος ἐπώνυμον ἐξονομάζει· ἦρα γὰρ ἀνθρώποισι φέρων κλέος ἀφθιτον ἔξεις).

If one combines all the above-discussed notions, a rather peculiar Heracleian image arises. The god is linked to animals that were very much warriorlike, but otherwise totally unlinked to Heracles himself. They rather belonged to Apollo, whereas elsewhere Aelian strictly keeps to connecting deities with their "own" animals. The animals in question do duly obey Heracles, though, either through surprising piety (the mice), or by adhering to a strict but peaceful system of segregation (the chickens). In the latter case, the coexistence takes place in a joint temple complex of Heracles and Hebe, thus putting emphasis on the eternal youth of the deity. Not only does Aelian's Heracles acquire stewardship over some of Apollo's animals, but even the name Heracles itself is given to him by Apollo. Simultaneously, we are made aware that men of particular qualities could "become" another Heracles.

All of this shows strong similarities to an important political event that took place in the years when Aelian was about twenty years old. In 191 C.E. the emperor Commodus drastically changed his self-representation, portraying himself thereafter with the attributes of, and even as the new incarnation of, Hercules. Strong emphasis on peace, fertility, and the emperor's eternal youth supported the new ideological program.<sup>20</sup> But though the last year of Commodus' reign was emphatically Herculean, Augustus' "Apollonian" image still defined the Principate, much as Apollo's temple on the Palatine still defined the imperial residence—something that must have been very visible to Aelian, who spent almost his whole life in the capital.<sup>21</sup>

Commodus, through his coinage, also hinted at the importance of Apollo as "founder" of the empire. In the exact year that the emperor started to mint coins and medallions reading *HERCULI COMMODIANO*, Apollo reappeared on the imperial coinage. Coins of all denominations, and a medallion, depict Apollo either holding the *cithara* and leaning on a column, or receiving the *cithara* from Victoria. The legend *APOLLINI PALATINO* makes clear, beyond the shadow of a doubt, which Apollo was depicted.<sup>22</sup> The appearance is all the more striking when one considers the almost complete absence of images of Apollo from imperial coins in the previous thirty years.<sup>23</sup> But noticeable as this reemergence of Apollo may have been, the deity was clearly outshone by the almost omnipresent Hercules. Furthermore, when in the following

19. Ael. *VH* 12.22; 12.47b (the last but one passage of the work).

20. O. Hekster, "Commodus-Hercules: The People's *Princeps*," *SCI* 20 (2001): 51–83. On Commodus' reign as a whole: O. Hekster, *Commodus: An Emperor at the Crossroads* (Amsterdam, 2002), 40–136. Cf. C. de Ranieri, "Commodo-Mercurio: Osservazioni sulla politica religiosa Comnodiana," *PP* 51 (1996): 422–41.

21. Cf. P. Zanker, *Augustus und die Macht der Bilder* (München, 1987), 90–96; M. J. Strazzula, *Il principato di Apollo* (Rome, 1990).

22. Hercules Commodianus: W. Szaivert, *Die Münzprägung der Kaiser Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus und Commodus* (Vienna, 1986) [= *Moneta Imperii Romani (MIR)* 18], nos. 813–14, 1144–55. Apollo Palatinus: *MIR* 18, nos. 805–7, 1143.

23. The exceptions are *MIR* 18, nos. 611 (184 C.E.) and 1062 (a medallion by Marcus Aurelius from 174/5 C.E.). Commodus also minted coins depicting the Apollo Moneta in 190 C.E.; *MIR* 18, nos. 793–94.

year Hercules *Commodianus* was replaced by Hercules *Romanus*—the emperor as the god incarnate—Apollo once again disappeared from imperial imagery. Commodus-Hercules was going to be the undoubted founder of a new Golden Age.<sup>24</sup>

Could we not, then, read Aelian's Heracles as in some way reflecting the policies of the time? As Apollo had once heralded the golden age of Augustus, Hercules was now presented as responsible for the age of peace and abundance that Commodus was going to bring about. Yet, this new Hercules could never have governed his subjects, nor ruled his realm, without the foundations that "Apollo" had laid for him. His mandate was, as it were, derived from someone else. Aelian's Heracles obtained his name from Apollo, and was given the latter's divine animals. Do the men of exceptional strength who "became" Heracles in the *Varia historia* perhaps refer to Commodus' claims? The fact that the Pontic mice do not belong to Heracles as such then becomes the entire aim of the exercise. The unlikely soldiers leave the vine "to grow luxuriously" for a new Heracles, who has taken on many of Apollo's functions.

The year 191 C.E. would be quite early for Aelian to have started writing. But Commodus' change of representation, his death and the ensuing civil war, must have had their impact on anyone in the *urbs*—an impact that lasted until after the last Antonine's death. Thus, Athenaeus explicitly referred to Commodus' Herculean program.<sup>25</sup> Private iconography and military inscriptions and imagery also seem to have reacted to the emperor's portrayal as a new Hercules, both during his lifetime and afterwards.<sup>26</sup> Septimius Severus, furthermore, deified Commodus, and retroactively adopted himself into the Antonine dynasty. He also, to some extent, continued Commodus' Herculean image.<sup>27</sup>

Aelian's reception of the emperor's new image, with all its subtleties, would have been far from unique. This does not necessarily imply that many readers would instantly see the similarities. But we have some reason to suppose that Aelian might have incorporated political connotations in his texts. After all, Philostratus records how Aelian wrote a vehement indictment of Elagabalus—though only after the emperor's death.<sup>28</sup> Such an indictment of Commodus' reign would be more risky, even if Aelian had wanted to write it. Severus had, after all, become an Antonine. The message must have been clear. One had better comply with a new Heracles who commanded armies, both of men and beasts. This, perhaps, is what the mice on the unknown island in the Black Sea were trying to do.

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24. Hekster, *Commodus* (n. 20 above), 94–98, 107–8; C. de Ranieri, "Renovatio temporum e 'rifondazione di Roma' nell'ideologia politica e religiosa di Commodo," *SCO* 45 (1995): 329–68.

25. Ath. *Deipnosophistae* 12.537f.

26. S. Gozlan, "Les Mosaïques de la Maison d'Asinius Rufinus à Acholla (Tunisie)," in *Fifth International Colloquium on Ancient Mosaics*, ed. P. Johnson (Ann Arbor, 1994), 161–73; M. Speidel, "Commodus the God-emperor and the Army," *JRS* 83 (1993): 109–14; Hekster, "People's *Princeps*" (n. 20 above), 74–83, *Commodus*, 163–84.

27. Hekster, "People's *Princeps*," 77–78, *Commodus*, 186–95.

28. Philostr. *VS* 2.31 (= 625). Cf. *Suda* 2.251, n. 916A [Adler edition], which transmits a letter of Aelian with political information about Commodus' reign.