

THE AGE, ANCESTRY, AND CAREER OF GORDIAN I

IN the Severan period the proconsulship of Africa or Asia was normally held some 15 to 17 years after the consulship.¹ Although there are comparatively few consuls in this period whose ages can be firmly established, what evidence there is suggests that the consulship was normally held in the early forties, on occasions as early as the mid thirties:² a *consularis* could, therefore, hope to attain a premier proconsulship aged about 60. Thus the future emperor P. Helvius Pertinax,³ who was born on 1st August 126, held the proconsulship of Africa, probably in 188/9,⁴ at the age of 62. M. Didius Julianus, the imperial successor to Pertinax, also succeeded him in Africa⁵ aged about 56.⁶ C. Vettius Sabinianus was born before 136⁶ and his proconsulship fell about 192/3⁷ when he was at least 56 years old. The historian Cassius Dio was born in 163 or 164⁸ and proconsul of Africa in 223/4⁹ aged about 60: and Q. Tineius Sacerdos was proconsul of Asia, perhaps in 210/11,¹⁰ aged about 60.¹¹

Indeed, throughout the first two and a half centuries of the Empire only two senior proconsuls are known to have been substantially older than this. P. Mummius Sisenna, *cos. ord.* 133, was proconsul of Asia in 150/1¹² when he was at least 66 and possibly several years older.¹³ Older still was C. Julius Cornutus Tertullus, the colleague of the younger Pliny in both the prefecture of the *aerarium Saturni* and the consulship, who was at least 56 when he held the *fascēs* in 100¹⁴ and at least 73 when proconsul of Africa in 117/18.¹⁵

Herodian preserves a tradition that Gordian I was *πρεσβύτερος . . . ἐς ἔτος ἡδὴ περί που ὀγδοηκοστών* (7. 5. 2): he is paraphrased by the Augustan Biographer (*Tres Gord.* 9. 1) and followed by Zonaras, who gives Gordian's age as 79.¹⁶ If so, Gordian was some years older than any other attested case, and it may be that the information is correct and attracted Herodian's attention for this very reason. But it is sufficiently unusual to warrant both an examination of Herodian's ideas of old age and his accuracy with regard to age in general; and a reconsideration of other evidence pertaining to Gordian's age, ancestry, and career.

¹ B. E. Thomasson, *Die Statthalter der römischen Provinzen Nordafrikas von Augustus bis Diocletianus* (Lund, 1960) (hereafter 'Thomasson'), i. 31.

² J. Morris, *Listy Filologické* lxxxvii (1964), 329 f., 335.

³ *P.I.R.*² H 73.

⁴ Thomasson, ii. 91 f. He began life an equestrian, H. G. Pflaum, *Les Carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous l'Haut-Empire romain* (Paris, 1960/1), 451 ff. no. 179, and arrived late at the consulship.

⁵ Thomasson, ii. 92 ff.

⁶ Morris, art. cit. 329.

⁷ Thomasson, ii. 93 ff.

⁸ F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford, 1964), 13.

⁹ Thomasson, ii. 118 f.

¹⁰ Thomasson, i. 25: perhaps earlier, G. Barbieri, *Albo* no. 501.

¹¹ He was *salus palatinus* in 170 (*C.I.L.* vi. 1958). The age at which a young patrician was co-opted into the *salii* is uncertain, but Marcus Aurelius, a *salus* aged 8 (*S.H.A. Marc.* 4. 2), was probably an exception. Tineius was probably born about 150.

¹² Thomasson, i. 24: D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor* (Princeton, 1950), 1584.

¹³ Morris, art. cit. 329.

¹⁴ Morris, art. cit. 328; perhaps older, R. Syme, *Tacitus* (Oxford, 1958), 82.

¹⁵ R. Syme, *R.E.A.* lxvii (1965), 329, citing *I.L.S.* 1024.

¹⁶ 12. 17. 11 p. 579 Pinder.

II

On several occasions Herodian refers to Gordian I as an old man, calling him *πρεσβύτης* four times¹ and *γέρων* once;² phrases of similar intent are also employed.³ Technical meanings of these words and phrases should not be sought, but it is worth observing that Philo, quoting Hippocrates on the Seven Ages of Man, indicates that a man was *πρεσβύτης* between the ages of 49 and 56, after which he was *γέρων*:⁴ and in the Republic a man was *senex* over the age of 46.⁵

Herodian uses this vocabulary on other occasions: Pertinax twice speaks of himself as *πρεσβύτης*⁶ in 193 when he was aged 66.⁷ Julia Maesa is five times called *πρεσβύτις*:⁸ her birthdate is not known but she was older than her sister, the empress Julia Domna, since Maesa's daughter, Julia Soaemias, was probably born before 180⁹ whereas Julia Domna herself did not marry Septimius Severus until 187. Herodian writes in the context of the year 218, by which time Maesa was probably over 60. Commodus' sister Cornificia, described by Herodian as *πρεσβύτις*¹⁰ at the time of her murder by Caracalla, either at the end of 211 or beginning of 212, was only a little over 50.¹¹

On the other hand M. Oclatinus Adventus is only *πρεσβύτης πάνυ*¹² in 216, although he refuses the purple on account of his age.¹³ His date of birth cannot be established but he was certainly older than Macrinus who was born in 164;¹⁴ in fact Adventus may have been as old as 60 in 216.¹⁵

The emperors Pupienus and Balbinus are *πρεσβύται*;¹⁶ their ages are supplied by another source—Pupienus 74 and Balbinus 60.¹⁷ This is hardly reliable;¹⁸ Balbinus, *cos. II ord.* with Caracalla in 213, ought to be older than Pupienus, *II ord.* in 234, and coin portraits show this to be the case. Zonaras' information would carry more conviction if these ages were reversed.

Marcus Aurelius too is described as old,¹⁹ not altogether unjustifiably since he so describes himself.²⁰ Herodian so refers to him at the beginning of the second German expedition, by which time Marcus was nearly 59.²¹

Apart from these specific uses, Herodian employs such terms as rhetorical devices in contrast with youth and health, especially in his references to Septimius Severus. He reports that in 193 Severus wrote to Clodius Albinus that, whereas the latter was in his prime, he (Severus) was a *πρεσβύτης* suffering from gout;²² Severus was 48 at the time²³ and the two men were probably

¹ 7. 5. 2; 7. 8. 3; 7. 9. 9; 7. 10. 1.

² 7. 5. 4.

³ 7. 5. 7; 7. 8. 2.

⁴ Philo i. 26 (*de opificio mundi* 105).

⁵ Gell. *N.A.* 10. 28. 1. Cf. Livy 30. 30. 10.

⁶ 5. 3. 3; 5. 3. 11; cf. 2. 10. 4, 2. 13. 6.

⁷ Born 1 August 126, *P.I.R.*² H 73.

⁸ 5. 3. 3; 5. 3. 11; 5. 5. 6; 5. 7. 3; 6. 1. 4.

⁹ C. Huelson, *Rhein. Mus.* lxxxii (1932), 371.

¹⁰ 4. 6. 3.

¹¹ Probably born about 160 (perhaps a little earlier): H. G. Pflaum, *J. de Sav.* 1961, 36 f.; A. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (London, 1966), 321.

¹² 4. 12. 1.

¹³ 4. 12. 2; Dio 78 (79). 14. 2, cf. 14. 1.

¹⁴ Dio 78 (79). 40. 3 . . . γέρων ὢν (πεντήκοντα γὰρ καὶ τέσσαρα ἦγεν ἔτη, τριῶν ποὺ μηνῶν δέοντα ἢ πέντε).

¹⁵ Pflaum, *C.P.* 666 suggests that he was

about 60 when procurator in Britain c. 205–8.

¹⁶ 7. 6. 8; 7. 8. 8.

¹⁷ Zonaras 12. 17, p. 579 Pinder, where Balbinus becomes 'Albinus': we should remember that Zonaras gives Gordian's age as 79.

¹⁸ R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford, 1971), 171.

¹⁹ Herodian 1. 3. 1 γηραιὸν ὄντα Μάρκον . . .

²⁰ *Meditations* 2. 2 (γέρον): 3. 5 (*πρεσβύτης*): cf. 8. 2; 9. 3; 12. 33.

²¹ Marcus was born on 26 April 121, S.H.A. *Marc.* 1. 5, and died on 17 March 180, S.H.A. *Marc.* 27. 11–12, Dio 71. 34, *Epit. de Caes.* 17. 2.

²² 2. 15. 4, with Whittaker's note ad loc. (Loeb edition, i. 244).

²³ Dio 77 (76). 17. 4. J. Guey, *B.S.N.A.F.* 1956, 33 ff.

near coevals.¹ The *πρεσβύτερος* Severus is also contrasted with the young Caracalla, described as *νεανίας*² and *παιδάριον*:³ and Severus' spirit is tougher than that of any *νεανίας*.⁴ Herodian's descriptions are justified in these instances;⁵ at his death in February 211 Severus was 65.

Herodian's use of terms denoting old age is thus wide ranging, extending from Severus at the age of 48 to Gordian I at the age of about 80. He does not use them in any technical sense, nor indeed with any consistency, and they therefore give little clue to the actual ages of the persons concerned.

III

In Gordian's case, Herodian provides a specific age; he does this for only two other individuals, Elagabalus and Severus Alexander. The passages concerned are: 5. 3. 3 *ὁ μὲν Βασιανὸς περὶ ἔτη γεγρονῶς τεσσαρακαῖδεκα, ὁ δὲ Ἀλεξιανὸς δεκάτου ἔτους ἐπιβεβηκῶς* relating to the year 218, perhaps April;⁶ 5. 7. 4 . . . *πατέρα μὲν ἐκείνον δοκεῖν ἔτη γεγρονότα περὶ που ἑκκαῖδεκα, τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον δὲ υἱὸν τοῦ δωδεκάτου ἐπιβαίνοντα . . .* referring to Alexander's formal adoption by Elagabalus, probably 26 June 221.⁷

Alexander's *dies natalis* was 1 October, the year either 208 or 209.⁸ He could not have been in his tenth year *c.* April 218 and in his twelfth in June 221. Similarly, Elagabalus may have been born early in 204⁹ and could not be accurately described as 'about 14' *c.* April 218 and 'about 16' in June 221. The only consistency between the two passages is that in each case the difference between the ages of the two youths is 4+ years; otherwise they are irreconcilable, and hardly conducive to confidence in Herodian's accuracy.

On other occasions Herodian is less than accurate where time is concerned. He allows Pertinax less than two months' rule (2. 4. 5) whereas he reigned for 87 days;¹⁰ he is confused over the length of Alexander's reign¹¹ and incorrect over that of Elagabalus,¹² although the time he allows Caracalla¹³ is accurate if reckoned from the death of Geta on 26 December 211;¹⁴ and he is not far wrong regarding the length of Severus' rule.¹⁵ But there is an apparent confusion even over the period covered by the History itself;¹⁶ and Alexander's Persian problems

¹ G. Alföldy, *H.A.C. Bonn* 1966/7 (Bonn, 1968), 19 ff. Any reconstruction of Albinus' career is hampered by the S.H.A. account, on which J. Hasebroek, *Die Fälschung der Vita Nigri und Vita Albinus in den S.H.A.* (diss. Heidelberg, 1916). He was perhaps born in 147 and suffect consul in 187.

² 3. 11. 1.

³ 3. 11. 7.

⁴ 3. 14. 2.

⁵ 3. 15. 1, 2, 4.

⁶ After Macrinus' first year—5. 3. 1.

⁷ *Dura Final Report* 5, 1, 200, though the reading is lacunose.

⁸ Stein in *P.I.R.*³ A 1610 and Syme, *Emperors and Biography*, 146 admit either year: perhaps 209 is preferable, *Epit. de Caes.* 24. 4: I hope to return to this point elsewhere.

⁹ Lambert *R.E.* viiiA. 391: he could equally well have been born in 203 on Herodian's evidence.

¹⁰ Dio 73 (74). 10. 3: S.H.A. *Pert.* 15. 6, with the emendation LXVI for LX.

¹¹ Compare 6. 1. 7 and 6. 2. 1 with 6. 9. 3

and 6. 9. 8. See Whittaker's note, Loeb ii. 73, n. 3.

¹² 5. 8. 10, though Whittaker, loc. cit. points out that Herodian is correct if calculated from the date of Caracalla's death on 8 April 217 (Dio 79. (78) 5. 4; 6. 5). Elagabalus was killed on 13 March 222 (*Dura Final Report* 5, 1, 298).

¹³ 4. 3. 8.

¹⁴ T. D. Barnes, *J.T.S.* n.s. xix (1968), 521 f.; previously argued by A. von Domaszewski, *Sitz. Heidelberg. Akad. Phil.-hist. Kl.* xviii, Abhand. 13, 63 ff.

¹⁵ 3. 15. 3; 4. 4. 1—18 years. Severus' rule lasted 17 years 8 months and 3 days if reckoned from the death of Didius Julianus, Dio 74. 17. 5, cf. 76 (77). 17. 4, and 17 years 10 months and 3 days from the date of his proclamation by the troops at Carnuntum on 9 April 193, W. F. Snyder, *Y.C.S.* vii (1940), 100 f. He died on 4 February 211.

¹⁶ 1. 1. 5; 2. 15. 7. See Loeb i, Introduction ix ff.

could not have begun $\tau\hat{\eta}$ τεσσαρακαιδεκάτῳ ἔτει.¹ Herodian's success rate when dealing with time in general is not impressive and those statements in this context which are unsupported should, it is argued, be treated with circumspection.

IV

Iconography offers little positive assistance. The first two Gordians were *Augusti* for about three weeks only;² they did not visit Rome during this time, yet all their coinage was struck in the capital. Gordian I appears on the coins as a man of advanced years; the face is long with spare features, the hair closely borders the forehead, the nose is slightly hooked, and the beard is thin: the best examples show a distinct turn down of the mouth.³ All coins depict his wearing the laurel wreath and they were either worked from an existing bust of Gordian in Rome or were merely stylized portraits of an old man:⁴ either way, they do not suggest a man of 80 years.

Various busts have been identified with Gordian I, of which the most promising is that found at Carthage and now in the Museum at Bardo.⁵ Although ravaged by time, the face is that of an old man with hollow cheeks and sad eyes, his mouth exaggeratedly turned down, his expression stern and determined: he wears a laurel wreath and his hair extends to his forehead. The editors arrived at their identification more by a process of elimination than by any positive means: but although the location reinforces the identification and the head bears some resemblance to the coin portraits, it cannot be assigned to Gordian I with any certainty.

Nevertheless it is a more likely proposition than the head now at Castle Howard. This bust depicts a man of some years, his hair and beard close cropped, his face long and lean, his nose prominent, his mouth small, tight-lipped, and slightly turned down, his chin receding a little. Originally thought to be Antoninus Pius,⁶ then a private portrait of the time of Gordian III,⁷ it is assigned by the most recent editor to Gordian I on the basis of a reconciliation between the bust, the coin portraits, and the description of Gordian in the *Historia Augusta*.⁸ These criteria are suspect, the identification more so.⁹

Another possibility is a head in the National Museum at Belgrade;¹⁰ the subject is bearded, his hair receding, his forehead high, and his lips tight; originally thought to be of the Tetrarchic period, it has recently been identified with Gordian I;¹¹ again, the case must remain open.¹²

¹ Emended correctly to δεκάτῳ by F. Cas-sola, *R.A.A.N.* xxxviii (1963), 141 ff. and hesitantly accepted by Whittaker, *Loeb* ii. 88. The year meant is 230.

² *Chron.* 354, p. 147 Mommsen: *Zon.* 12. 17.

³ e.g. *R.I.C.* iv. 2. 160 no. 1 = *B.M.C.* vi p. 245 no. 1. There is a particularly fine example in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford which illustrates this characteristic.

⁴ R. A. G. Carson, *B.M.C.* vi p. 23.

⁵ A. Merlin, M. Poinssot, *Mon. Piot*, xiv (1944), 135 ff.

⁶ A. Michaelis, *Ancient Marbles in Great Britain* (Cambridge, 1882), 239.

⁷ F. Poulsen, *Photographische Einzelaufnahmen antiken Skulpturen* (Munich, 1887),

3024 ff.

⁸ H. von Heintze, *Rom. Mitt.* lxxiii (1956), 56 ff. and plates 21 and 22. The 'description' is in S.H.A. *Gord.* 6. 1-2 and says, inter alia, *facie bene lata*, which is not borne out by either bust or coins: the 'description', need it be said, is worthless.

⁹ Although it has found acceptance, e.g. by B. M. Felletti Maj, *Iconografia Imperiale Romana* (Rome, 1958), 128.

¹⁰ M. Grbic, *Choix de plastiques grecques et romaines au Musée National de Béograd* (Belgrade, 1958), plate 40.

¹¹ J. Frel, *Listy Filologické* xi (1963), 152.

¹² Grbic's plate is of too poor quality for valid observation. I should add that I have not seen any of the sculptures concerned.

Various other busts have been assigned to Gordian and later rejected.¹ The problem remains that there are no reliable criteria for these identifications and, whereas the Bardo head has the best claim, they are all better left beyond the pale of historical inquiry: besides, they cannot all be Gordian I! Suffice it to say that whereas the heads depict an old man, they hardly suggest an octogenarian.

V

A case cannot be proven on circumstantial evidence; but sufficient has been shown, it is argued, to justify the re-examination of Gordian's career without the preconception that he was about 80 years old in 238.

In the normal way Gordian should have been proconsul aged about 60;² he should therefore have been born ± 178 . The account of his career in the *Historia Augusta*³ can be discounted, leaving only one certain date prior to 237/8; he was *legatus Augusti pro praetore* of Britannia Inferior in 216.⁴ This praetorian post is perfectly compatible with the date of birth suggested here, whereas there are problems if he were born 20 years earlier. That mine of untruth, the *Historia Augusta*, provides the information that he came late to the consulship⁵ and one scholar⁶ has recently attempted to justify this one item while rightly rejecting the rest of the account. Gordian, it has been suggested, was expelled from the Senate by Severus because of his support for Pescennius Niger and was later restored by Caracalla. But, though many senators were removed in these circumstances by Severus (Dio 79. 8. 4), only one, P. Claudius Attalus Paternus,⁷ is known to have been restored by his successor, though this case was surely not unique. This explanation is ingenious—and unnecessary; better to assume that Gordian had a normal senatorial career. The coinage shows that he was consul but once: he is not known to have been patrician and should therefore have been consul about 220 or a little later, perhaps under Elagabalus, whose rule favoured senators from the east,⁸ or under Alexander. Not *consul ordinarius*, but we know the names of few suffects in this period.⁹

Flavius Philostratus dedicated his *Vitae Sophistarum* to Antonius Gordianus *ὅτι καὶ γένος ἐστὶ σοὶ πρὸς τὴν τέχνην ἐς Ἡρώδη τὸν σοφιστὴν ἀναφέροντι*: the dedicatee is thus a lineal descendant of the sophist millionaire Herodes Atticus.¹⁰ Philostratus and Gordianus were acquainted, and had discussed philosophy together:¹¹ and it is inconceivable that Philostratus could have confused Herodes Atticus, the subject of the longest biography in the *Vitae*, with some minor sophist.¹²

¹ Felletti Maj, op. cit. 130 f.

² See p. 123.

³ R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford, 1968), 160 ff.

⁴ A. R. Birley, *Epigraphische Studien* iv (1967), 87 f. ⁵ *Gord.* 18. 5.

⁶ T. D. Barnes, *Latomus* xxvii (1968), 594 ff.

⁷ *P.I.R.*² C 795+800: Barbieri, *Albo* 140.

⁸ Syme, *Emperors and Biography*, 167.

⁹ A. R. Birley in *Britain and Rome: Essays presented to E. Birley*, ed. M. G. Jarret and B. Dobson (Kendal, 1965), 57 suggests 222. But there are very few parallels for the

interval between consulship and senior proconsulship in this period. *S.H.A. Gord.* 4. 2 is palpably wrong concerning the consulship with Caracalla at least. Alexander was sole consul on 15 April 222 (*C.I.L.* vi. 1454).

¹⁰ Barnes, art. cit. 586.

¹¹ Philostratus, *V.S.*, preface.

¹² As proposed by J. H. Oliver, *A.J.P.* lxxxix (1968), 345 ff., postulating Maecius Marullus and attempting to justify the lineage in *S.H.A. Gord.* 2. 2-4; Philostratus was taught by pupils of pupils of Herodes (e.g. *V.S.* 2. 21. 1 p. 602 Olearius) and was well acquainted with his life and work.

If Herodian is correct over the age of Gordian I, it is difficult, if not impossible, to see how he could have been a descendant of Herodes Atticus. The problem becomes more liable to solution if Gordian were born twenty years or so later.

So far as we know, Herodes Atticus had 5 children. One son died young,¹ and two others predeceased their mother, Regilla, who died *c.* 160.² Of these Athenais died first³ and her brother Herodes Regillus also seems to have predeceased his mother.⁴ The survivors were Bradua Atticus, probably the *cos. ord.* 185,⁵ and a daughter Elpinice. No husband is *attested* for Elpinice but this does not necessarily mean that she never married. Her sister Athenais married her relative L. Vibullius Hipparchus and gave birth to a daughter, also called Athenais,⁶ probably the only child if indeed the elder Athenais predeceased Regilla. Only one child of Bradua Atticus is attested⁷ but there may well have been more. In addition, Herodes adopted a collateral relative, L. Vibullius Claudius Herodes,⁸ of whose descendants nothing is known.

If Gordian were born about 178, there are several ways in which he could have been descended from Herodes Atticus, viz :

- (a) The son of a child of Elpinice;
- (b) A descendant of L. Vibullius Claudius Herodes;
- (c) The son of a daughter of Bradua Atticus;
- (d) The son of a daughter of Athenais and L. Vibullius Hipparchus;
- (e) The son of a daughter of another, unattested marriage of Herodes Atticus.

Of these the last will not be considered because such arguments are generally futile; and (d) is doubtful in the extreme if the elder Athenais predeceased her mother. We do not, however, know the fate of her daughter, also Athenais, who could just conceivably have been Gordian's mother. Descent from Bradua Atticus is also unlikely if, as seems the case, Bradua was born about 152 :⁹ his children could hardly have been born before 170.

But the first two possibilities remain fully open. Lack of evidence does not preclude a marriage for Elpinice—and we do not know how long she lived : and nothing is known of the marriage and descendants of L. Vibullius Claudius Herodes. Whereas it still remains impossible to place Gordian with certainty,

¹ Fronto, *ad M. Caes.* 1. 6. 8; 1. 8. 2, pp. 13 and 16 van den Hout.

² *I.G.R.R.* i. 194a, 11, 14–18; Barnes, art. cit. 582.

³ Philos. *V.S.* 2. 1. 10, pp. 557/8 Olearius.

⁴ Barnes, art. cit. 582 ff.; one may note that Philostratus was unaware of the existence of this child.

⁵ The identification is denied by Pflaum, *Syria* xxx (1953), 304 ff.; see also I. Avotins, *Phoenix* xxvii (1973), 68 ff.

⁶ W. Dittenberger, K. Purgold, *Olympia V: Die Inschriften* (Berlin, 1896), nos. 627/8, correctly interpreted by A. Stein, *P.I.R.*³ C 802 (p. 181).

⁷ Claudia Regilla (*P.I.R.*³ C 1117) who married M. Antonius Antius Lupus.

⁸ For his relationship to Herodes Atticus see Stein's stemma in *P.I.R.*² ii, opp. p. 182;

for the adoption, *I.G.* ii/iii² 3979. It does not necessarily follow that Herodes would have adopted a closer relative, as Barnes, art. cit. 586: note Herodes' displeasure with Bradua Atticus, Philos. *V.S.* 2. 1. 10, p. 558 Olearius.

⁹ Barnes, art. cit. 583. Patricians did not invariably reach the consulship *suo anno* but I know of only two late patrician consulships in this period, Q. Tineius Sacerdos (see above, p. 123) and Ti. Claudius Aurelius Pompeianus, born *c.* 170, *cos. ord.* 209; see Morris, art. cit. 382. But *Olympia V*, no. 623 implies that Athenais and Regillus were the youngest children, in which case Bradua would have been born in the 140s, as W. Dittenberger, *Hermes* xiii (1878), 79. The case remains unproven, though I incline towards 152.

descent from either of these two is possible if the later birth-date is adopted. It is worth adding that the progeny of the brother of Herodes Atticus, Ti. Claudius Atticus Herodianus,¹ are also unknown.

Gordian's origin was eastern, probably Cappadocia:² his full nomenclature was M. Antonius Gordianus Sempronianus Romanus Africanus, the third *cognomen* almost certainly added after his proclamation. Various names have been invoked,³ the most promising being Ti. Claudius Gordianus, legate of III Augusta and consul designate;⁴ and a Sempronia Romana, wife of a senator and daughter of the *ab epistulis Graecis* Sempronius Aquila.⁵ Tantalizing clues, but Gordian's ancestry still cannot be firmly placed.

Little is known of the life of Philostratus; he flourished under Septimius Severus and survived until the time of Philip the Arab;⁶ he now appears as *στρατηγός* in Athens in about 226.⁷ He was probably a near contemporary of Gordian I who may also have been a member of the so-called 'Circle' of the Syrian empress Julia Domna:⁸ like many of his peers, Gordian was probably a cultural dilettante.⁹ Philostratus addresses Gordian as *ἵπατος*, which could mean no more than *ἱπαικός* (= *consularis*),¹⁰ and as *ἀριστε ἀνθυπάτων*. The view which has gained acceptance is that a Gordian received the dedication while praetorian proconsul of Achaëa.¹¹ This argument is reasonable so far as it goes, but does not help us regarding the date: it is possible that the fact that Gordian had at one time been proconsul of Achaëa would have been sufficient justification for Philostratus to dedicate his book to his friend in these terms.

In any case there are no other indications that Gordian was ever proconsul of Achaëa, and another explanation is preferable. We do not know the date of completion of the *Vitæ*; the *terminus post quem* is 222, but the reference to the death of Elagabalus appears almost at the end of the work¹² and, although there are difficulties, it could have been completed shortly afterwards.¹³ Hence it could have been dedicated to Gordian I during, or shortly after, his consulship about 224, in which case *ἵπατος* need mean no more than consul or recent consul.

VI

It remains to answer the recently argued case¹⁴ that the recipient of Philostratus' dedication was not Gordian I but his homonymous son. There is no need to repeat the arguments: the case falls on account of the one word *ἵπατος*.

The Augustan biographer supplies a date of birth for the younger Gordian;¹⁵ he was 46 at the time of his death, and was thus born in 192 and, if this is accepted, a consulship is necessary. But sufficient reason has been given to reject Herodian's date of birth for the elder Gordian and, if the latter was born ± 178 , his son could not have been born much before 200 and could not have expected to attain the consulship before the early 240s.

The other evidence for the supposed consulship can likewise be rejected.

¹ *P.I.R.*² C 803: Avotins, art. cit. 74.

² Birley, *Britain and Rome*, 56 ff.

³ Syme, *Emperors and Biography*, 167.

⁴ *P.I.R.*² C 880. *A.E.* 1954, 138.

⁵ *I.G.R.R.* iii. 188.

⁶ Suidas 4 no. 421 Adler. G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1969), 2 ff.

⁷ J. S. Traill, *Hesperia* xl (1971), 311 ff.

⁸ Bowersock, op. cit. 101 ff.

⁹ Cf. S.H.A. *Gord.* 3.

¹⁰ Barnes, art. cit. 587.

¹¹ E. Groag, *Die römischen Reichsbeamten von Achaëa bis auf Diocletian* (Berlin, 1939), 87 f.; Barnes, art. cit. 588.

¹² *V.S.* 2. 31. 1, p. 625 Olearius.

¹³ Although it remains possible, albeit unlikely, that the *Vitæ* were not published until 238.

¹⁴ Barnes, art. cit. 581 ff.

¹⁵ S.H.A. *Gord.* 15. 2.

Both a denarius and a sestertius of Gordian II bearing the reverse legend P.M., TR.P., COS., P.P. have been found.¹ But the reverse of the denarius bears a very close resemblance to a similar coin of the elder Gordian (*R.I.C.* iv. 2. 160 no. 1) whilst the reverse of the sestertius is identical to that of a sestertius of Gordian I (*ibid.* 161 no. 7). Prior to 238 the title *pontifex maximus* was held by one man alone even where there were two emperors; Pupienus and Balbinus held the priesthood jointly but they were equal elected Augusti; previously, in practice at least, one emperor had always been superior to the other. Similarly it is likely that the elder Gordian alone was *pater patriae*, though it is true that Commodus adopted the title before the death of Marcus;² but Caracalla did not become *pater patriae* until after the death of Severus, and the elder Gordian was likewise senior to his son.

These coins should therefore be rejected as hybrids;³ and the consulship of Gordian II can also be rejected. He thus becomes a normal legate of his father in Africa prior to his anticipated consulship in the early 240s, and Gordian I can once again take his place as the honorand of the biographer of the sophists.

VII

It will be useful to summarize the revised careers of the first two Gordians:

Gordian I

Born c. 178

Quaestor and praetor under Septimius Severus

Leg. Aug. pr. pr. Britanniae inferioris 216

(Possibly, though unlikely, proconsul of Achaëa between 215 and 220)⁴

Consul a little after 220 (? 224)

Proconsul Africae 237/8

Gordian II

Born c. 200

Quaestor and praetor under Severus Alexander

Legate of his father in Africa 237/8

VIII

It is therefore suggested that Herodian's statement that Gordian I was about 80 in 238 should be rejected: by discarding this one simple point of information in the often unreliable Herodian we can account for Philostratus' dedication, and postulate a normal senatorial career, thus accounting for the bulk of the extraneous evidence. Although difficulties remain, they now appear more capable of solution.⁵

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¹ Denarius, *R.I.C.* iv. 2. 164 no. 9; sestertius, *ibid.* no. 10 = *B.M.C.* vi. 247 no. 18: the latter also bears the legend s.c.

² e.g. *R.I.C.* iii. 339.

³ H. Mattingly, *R.I.C.* iv. 2. 164, Carson, *B.M.C.* vi. 99; Carson however includes the sestertius in his catalogue and both scholars admit that they *could* be genuine, although Mattingly doubts it. Barnes, art. cit. 591, admits the sestertius without discussion.

⁴ Compare Herodian 7. 5. 2 (many provincial commands) with the purely urban career in S.H.A. *Gord.* 3. 5, 4. 8, though cf. 9. 1.

⁵ I am grateful to Dr. Fergus Millar and Professor P. A. Brunt for reading and commenting upon an earlier draft of this paper; they do not necessarily agree with the views here expressed.