

THE SON OF THE EMPEROR MACRINUS

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I. On one aspect the reign of Macrinus is a brief interlude in the story of the Severan dynasty. Antoninus Caracalla was assassinated on April 8, 217. A year had hardly elapsed when chance and the potency of his name and memory led to the proclamation of the boy Elagabalus, alleged to be his son (at Emesa on May 16, 218). The rapid and dramatic actions engross attention and dominate the narrations that survive, to the obscuration of sundry other matters; and modern accounts tend to conform. However, those narrations have another use. They illustrate the methods of historians, and their quality.

Of what Cassius Dio wrote from personal knowledge, this portion is the most instructive, so it has been affirmed.¹ Dio was at Rome, his text happens to be almost intact, and it reveals, along with many facts and names, the judgements provoked in a senator by a distasteful phenomenon: the first knight to seize the power, and he of lowly extraction. As for the fluent and superficial Herodian, who here exhibits most of his known defects, there is no call to expatiate in this place. The enquiry concerns the *Historia Augusta*.

The preface of the *Vita Macrini* opens on the theme of emperors, princes, and usurpers who did not reign or live for long. There was not much to report about them. None the less, the author will be at pains to publish the fruits of diligent research: *ex diversis historicis eruta in lucem proferemus*. And to be sure only *digna memoratu*, for the neglect of which he goes on to castigate 'Junius Cordus,' the archetype of the frivolous biographer. After the noble professions, the product may come as a surprise—at least to any who lack familiarity with the habits of the genial impostor. Fiction almost total. With rare exceptions, the facts are confined to a single passage dealing with the insurrection at Emesa and the end of Macrinus (8.3–10.4). It is a drastic abbreviation of Herodian, whose name is not disclosed in the *Vita*.

No Greek writer had hitherto been used in any of the biographies of emperors, so it is generally held. And other features make the *Macrinus* a cardinal or crucial point in the structure and composition of the *HA*. A sequence of Latin biographies, it is clear, was the basic source employed for the *Vitae* from Hadrian to Caracalla. For discretion, their author may be styled *Ignotus*.² A number of scholars prefer to invoke a known name,

¹F. Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio* (Oxford 1964) 160.

²As briefly assumed in *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1968) 43; 92; 177. For the full argument, *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 30 ff. The chapter is reprinted from *HAC* 1966/67 (1968) 131 ff.

that of Marius Maximus (cos. II, 223), who wrote the lives of the twelve rulers from Nerva to Elagabalus.³

It would be a relief to waive the problems that bedevil this section of the *HA*, but something will have to be said about a matter often neglected, the biographies of princes and pretenders. To wit, those of Aelius Caesar, Avidius Cassius, Pescennius Niger, Clodius Albinus, Geta. There is no reason to suppose that they were composed as they now stand, suitably subjoined to sundry "primary *Vitae*." Hence the hypothesis has been advanced that the five "secondary *Vitae*" fall between the *Caracalla* and the *Macrinus*. But not without hesitation expressed and the notion broached that they might all belong later, after the biography of Severus Alexander.⁴ For several sporadic reasons. One item was the game-pie of Hadrian, the *tetrafarmacum*, so designated on the authority of Marius Maximus in the *Vita Alexandri* (30.6). Likewise in the *Vita Aelii* (5.5). In the latter passage the author, referring to that appellation which he had adopted in the *Vita Hadriani* (21.4, where Maximus is not named), asserts that the pie was really a *pentefarmacum*, and the credit for inventing the dish belongs to Aelius Caesar. The author thus corrects Maximus. It is one of his typical and fraudulent elaborations. Therefore the *Aelius* might seem posterior to the *Alexander*.

On the other hand, however, the author, when composing the *Alexander* and wishing to cite Marius Maximus as an authority, may have chosen to ignore his previous invention. Furthermore, there was a contrary sign about the "secondary *Vitae*" that ought to have been discerned, adduced, and exploited. Alexander thought that panegyrics of emperors were silly. He was moved by the precedent of Pescennius: *quod exemplo Nigri Pescennii stultum ducebat* (*Alex.* 35.1). The *Vita* of that pretender has a lengthy development and coherent argument which culminates in his aphorism *nam viventes laudare inrisio est* (11.6). The reference in the *Alexander* is clear and explicit. Not to any verdict of the historical Pescennius. Only the author's fabrication in a fictional biography. Therefore, though the term "proof" is not of easy application when the *HA* is in cause, the *Pescennius* is proved anterior to the *Alexander*. And with it goes its partner, the biography of Clodius Albinus.⁵

II. There is a sixth biography of this inferior class. Subjoined to *Macrinus* is his son *Diadumenianus*, whom the *HA* calls 'Diadumenus,' as do the

³See now A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus* (London 1971) App. 2; A. D. E. Cameron, *JRS* 61 (1971) 262 ff. (reviewing *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*).

⁴*Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 64; 71; 75. The chapter is reprinted from *HAC* 1968/69 (1970) 285 ff. Observe also later in the book pp. 87; 282.

⁵See further "The Composition of the *Historia Augusta*. Recent Theories," *JRS* 62 (1972), forthcoming.

Latin epitomators. The product is generally dismissed as valueless, for history at least. Not without reason. The author himself gives the show away: there will be nothing worth saying, except that the prince was an 'Antoninus' (*Macr.* 10.6, cf. *Diad.* 1.1). Indeed, otherwise he would have been lumped in with his parent (*Diad.* 6.1). That should suffice. None the less, this verbose conglomerate of redundant fictions carries some relevance to the methods of the author, his habits, and his purpose.

There are sundry perplexities.⁶ First of all, the rank and titulature of Macrinus' son. Cassius Dio must be the point of departure.⁷ On receipt of Macrinus' first despatch (so he states) the Senate voted that the son be made a patrician and bear the titles of *princeps iuventutis* and 'Caesar' (78. 17.1). The nomination as Caesar cannot be correct, as emerges a little later: it was learned at Rome that Diadumenianus had been proclaimed Caesar and Antoninus, ostensibly by the troops, in fact by instigation of his father (19.1). Finally, the prince was made an emperor when Macrinus on the news from Emesa came to Apamea (34.2). That is, soon after May 16, 218. Then, at a later point in his narrative, Dio has two references to these matters. First, he reverts to the occasion when the first despatch was read out in the Senate (37.5). Second, a letter is mentioned (a joint letter), in which Macrinus referred to his son as both Caesar and emperor, but omitted the title of 'Antoninus' (37.6).

Excellent in so many ways, Dio's account of the reign is confused and marred by defects of structure. Also, he is guilty of a lapse of memory, as can happen all the more easily when a writer is narrating the history of his own times, not copying a source. He first antedated the conferment of the title 'Caesar.' Then in the sequel he gave no indication of the interval of time that ensued before the prince was in fact proclaimed Caesar. He was at Zeugma at the time, as is revealed in a casual statement at the end (40.1). Whether before or after the parent's campaign in Mesopotamia, that is a question—and those operations continue to baffle precision of dating.⁸ For present purposes it is enough to keep separate the two stages in the elevation of Diadumenianus. First, 'Caesar' and

⁶For the history, see above all H. v. Petrikovits, *PW* 18. 539 ff.; *Klio* 31 (1938) 103 ff. The study of H. J. Bassett (*Macrinus and Diadumenianus* [Diss. Michigan 1920]) is obsolete on various counts. For the coins, H. Mattingly, *B. M. Coins, Rom. Emp.* 5 (1950) ccxiii ff. For a rehabilitation of Macrinus (necessary but irrelevant to the theme of the present paper), H. Mattingly, *Studies Presented to David M. Robinson* (St. Louis 1953) 962 ff.

⁷Dio's references to the son of Macrinus are as follows: 78.17.1, 19.1, 20.1, 20.3, 34.2, 37.5 f., 40.1, 40.5; 80.1.4.

⁸P. Salama, *REA* 66 (1964) 334 ff. Herodian puts the Parthian War immediately after the accession of Macrinus (4. 14.3, cf. *Macr.* 2.2). Thus Petrikovits (*op. cit.* [above, n. 6] 540), but others prefer the autumn, e.g., Millar (*op. cit.* [above, n. 1] 165). See also the annotation of C. R. Whittaker in his edition of Herodian (Loeb 1964) 1.464 f.

'Antoninus,' then full association in the imperial power in the last days. That is necessary for the evaluation of the other sources.

All that Herodian contributes is a single sentence in epilogue on his father's end: with him perished his son called Diadumenianus, whom he had appointed Caesar.⁹ Herodian, it will be noted, has Macrinus both captured and killed at Chalcedon, which he had reached in his flight to the west. According to Dio, however, Macrinus was taken thence to Syria and there executed, whereas his son had been apprehended, by sad irony, precisely at Zeugma (40.1 f.). In Dio's account it is not clear that both were put to death at the same time and place.

Certain brief statements in the Latin epitomators cause most of the trouble: Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, the *Epitome* of Pseudo-Victor. They go back to a work which was itself a summary, namely that *Kaisergeschichte* which Enmann established through concordances in language and content—and, most telling, by the reproduction of the same errors. Hence the original version can often be divined. In this instance, pretty scrappy. At the same time, discrepancies are significant. While Eutropius is curt, prosaic, and impersonal, Victor has pretensions to style and is not loath to parade his views on education, morality, and government. Further, the *Epitome*, in various ways enigmatic, has drawn on sources other than Enmann's *KG*.

Touching Diadumenianus, the salient points are as follows. Of father and son together Eutropius states *facti imperatores* (8. 21), the *Epitome ab exercitu imperatores creati* (22). Victor, however, has the father proclaimed emperor by the legions, and the son Caesar (22.1). Further, Victor mentions the son's season of life and the significance of the name 'Antoninus': *eo quod ingens amissi principis desiderium erat adolescentem Antoninum vocare* (22.2). Again, only Victor alleges cruelty (in both): *horum nihil praeter saevos atque inciviles animos interim reperimus* (22.3). III. Dessau long ago detected a piece of Aurelius Victor which the author of the *HA*, fatigued by the task of compiling a source too ample for his needs, inserted in the *Vita Severi* (17.5–19.4). Recent investigations discover traces of Victor in diverse sections of the work.¹⁰ Moreover, brief comments of Victor serve as inspiration or guiding ideas, sometimes producing lengthy elaborations. Now Victor, alluding to the aftermath of Antoninus Caracalla, employs the phrase *ingens desiderium*, which might be his own, not taken from his source, the *KG*. However that may be, it appealed to the author of the *HA*. He reproduces the phrase itself, twice, and three times in periphrasis.¹¹ With this incentive he embarked on

⁹Herodian 5.4.12: συναρθεέντος αὐτῷ καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς ὃν ἦν ποιήσας Καίσαρα, Διαδουμηνιανὸν καλούμενον.

¹⁰A. Chastagnol, *HAC* 1966/67 (1968) 53 ff. Similarly in *RevPhil* 41 (1967) 85 ff.

¹¹*Diad.* 6.10; *Elag.* 3.1: *ingens desiderium*; *Macr.* 3.9: *tantum desiderium nominis*

tedious divagations about the potency of the *nomen Antoninorum*. He puts emphasis on Elagabalus as *ultimus Antoninorum*; and to the authentic six who bore the name he adds two more (viz. L. Verus and Geta). Hence the list of eight Antonini in annotation on a bogus prophecy (*Macr.* 3.3 ff.).¹²

Victor or the *KG*: the vicissitudes of the question are not devoid of instruction and entertainment. When the *KG* was assumed to have been written shortly after 284 it enjoyed high favour with scholars of the conservative persuasion, for it seemed to offer an escape from the distasteful consequence of conceding Victor: namely a date for the *HA* subsequent to 360. The bolt hole is now blocked. The *KG*, clearly later than 312, was presumably composed not long after 337.¹³

The employment of Victor being clear, there is a tendency to belittle his source or even reject it—and some deny the very existence of the *KG*. Better, the innocuous assumption that the author had both texts on his desk. Signs of the *KG* are not lacking. For example, Eutropius and the *Epitome* offer something not in Victor, namely Macrinus and his son proclaimed joint 'imperatores' at the outset. This notion, ignoring the earlier title of 'Caesar' for the son, crops up in different places in the *HA*. Thus, and highly significant, *Carac.* 8.10: *cum filio factus in castris imperator*. Observe also *Elag.* 1.4; 2.3.

In the biography of Macrinus the son is without delay associated in the power: *filio Diadumeno in participatum adscito* (5.1). And selections are quoted from the despatch which the two 'imperatores' (6.2) sent to the Senate. In one extract, where Macrinus alone speaks, he says, *Diadumenum filium meum vobis notum et imperio miles donavit et nomine, Antoninum videlicet appellans* (6.6). The *nomen Antoninum* thus suitably adheres from the outset (cf. 2.5; 3.8).

IV. Absent from Aurelius Victor, the notion of joint rulers should indicate dependance on the *KG*. Again, Victor knew that Diadumenianus was a Caesar (22.1). In the *Vita Macrini* this fact only emerges at a late stage, and it clearly does not come from Victor. At the end of the piece of abridged Herodian, after recording the killing of Macrinus and his son *in vico quodam Bithyniae*, the author has inserted annotation (10.4):

sciendum praeterea quod Caesar fuisse dicitur, non Augustus, Diadumenus puer, quem plerique pari fuisse cum patris imperio tradiderunt.

huius; *Diad.* 1.2: *ingens maeror*; *Carac.* 8.10: *multum Antoninus desideratus est*. Elsewhere in the *HA* the word *desiderium* occurs only in *Avid.* 7.3; *Maximin.* 11.1.

¹²For the tedious play with the *nomen Antoninorum* in the *HA* see *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 80 ff. Lighting upon the attractive notion, the author introduced it in earlier passages.

¹³As shown by T. D. Barnes, *HAC* 1968/69 (1970) 13 ff.

The item is noteworthy on three counts. First, criticism of those writers who reported that the prince was an 'Augustus,' sharing the supreme power on equal terms with his parents. The word *plerique* need not connote more than one. The author is alluding to the version which he accepted and developed without doubt or hesitation earlier in the *Vita*. That is, from the *KG*: it is here irrelevant that Diadumenianus was in fact proclaimed Augustus towards the end (at Apamea), as Dio alone of extant writers has recorded.

Second, the basis of the criticism. Patently the sentence in Herodian which states that the prince had been appointed Caesar (viz. 5.4.12). That sentence is referred to a second time, with mention of Herodian's name, in the *Vita Diadumeni* (2.5). In this place the testimony of the historian appears to be disallowed—and it is discarded in the sequel. Naturally enough. It contradicts the author's whole theme, as announced in the opening words of this biography, namely Diadumenianus proclaimed emperor, along with his parent, by the army. Therefore, when citing Herodian, the author now adds censure. Herodian had ignored the particulars about the prince as emperor and an Antoninus which the author had just been relating: *Herodianus Graecus scriptor haec praeteriens*.

Third, and not a little peculiar. In these two passages the son of Macrinus is described as *puer*. That, it is to be presumed, reproduces the *παῖς* of Herodian. Eutropius and the *Epitome* have nothing about the age of the prince, whereas Victor styled him *adolescens*. Now the *Vita Macrini* so far had furnished no indication whatsoever, no hint of surprise or scandal. The simultaneous proclamation as emperor would convey to a reader in any age the impression that the action was not a total anomaly. Yet such it would have been—and no promising *début* for a new and insecure ruler. His son was a small boy, being only eight years old in the month of April, 217. Cassius Dio registers his age and also his birthday.¹⁴

V. The revealing item of annotation on Diadumenianus in the *Vita Macrini* (10.4), which has been discussed above, occurs in a disturbed context: it follows the killing of the prince (10.3), which, however, is again reported in the next sentence (10.5), after which the author, indicating a future project, candidly avows that, apart from the Antonine name, *non enim aliquid in eius vita erit quod dicatur* (10.6). The passage (10.4–6) looks like a subsequent addition—but not perhaps made after any great interval of time.

The rest of the *Vita* down to its conclusion with the invocation of Diocletian (11.1–15.4) may suitably be described as an appendage. It carries few facts. Among the fabrications are three pieces of verse allegedly

¹⁴Dio 78. 34.2; 20.1. The portraiture on coins offers no close indication of the boy's age, which by oversight seems not to be registered in *B. M. Coins, Rom. Emp.* 5 (1950).

translated from the Greek, Macrinus being the author of one of them, and a blended quotation from Virgil in which *egregius forma iuvenis* (*Aen.* 6. 861) is applied to his son. The poem of Macrinus earned only mockery (11.7). Later on some compensation is vouchsafed: *fecit iambos, qui non extant; iucundissimi autem fuisse dicuntur* (14.4). The disappearance of those delightful products evokes an explanation all too plausible: *perierunt in eo tumultu quo ipse occisus est, quando et omnia eius a militibus pervastata sunt* (14.5).

Macrinus is pilloried for arrogance and cruelty in a long section (12.1–11), notably harsh punishments visited on the soldiers. That theme had proved attractive, but adduced rather for praise in the portrayal of Avidius Cassius and Pescennius Niger. In this instance the author drew inspiration from his meagre Latin sources. Aurelius Victor registered the *saeuos atque inciviles animos* of both father and son (22.3).

It is one of the procedures of the author that when a biography seemed to reach a proper or even explicit conclusion with the decease of its subject he prolongs it with miscellaneous information, deriving sometimes from a different source or sources—and generally of dubious quality, or pure fable. Messy composition, or the need to fill up space. The phenomenon is manifest in the *Caracalla*.¹⁵ Perhaps the compilation of the basic source had proved too drastic. As for “secondary *vitae*,” observe those of Pescennius Niger and Clodius Albinus. The former is especially notable, for its main theme (military excellence and discipline) is taken up again and expounded in lavish fictions.

In the appendage of the *Macrinus* his son is twice called *puer* (14.1 f.). That reflects the discovery introduced from the sentence in Herodian. In the *Vita Diadumeni* he is *puer* no fewer than seven times. For example, *filium suum, tunc puerum* (1.3). And the ingenious author goes on to supply a vivid description of his arresting beauty: *puer fuit omnium speciosissimus, statura longiuscula, crine flavo, nigris oculis, naso deducto*. etc.¹⁶ But, by inadvertence, the notion slips in that he was no longer a boy, Observe the passage which states *ubi adolevit* (4.4).

That is not all. In this biography the author twice styles his boy emperor a *puerulus* (2.2; 6.1). That happens to correspond to his actual age. The author is perhaps writing better than he knew. Or rather, had he not meanwhile become aware of fresh sources of information?

VI. At some time after the author had reached the end of his abridging of Herodian he observed the word *παῖς* and with it acquired the notion that the son of Macrinus was only a boy, so it may be conjectured (cf. above).

¹⁵W. Reusch, *Klio*, Beiheft 24 (1931) 53 ff.

¹⁶ *Diad.* 3.2, quoted in full and without warning in *B. M. Coins, Rom. Emp.* 5 (1950) ccxiii.

Furthermore, it has been assumed so far in this enquiry that, apart from Herodian, the sole source employed in the *Vita Macrini* was the *KG*, with or without Victor (who might have furnished a detail, or rather a comment). Certain features not likely to have been reported in the *KG* may counsel a doubt.

Macrinus is said to have adopted the titles 'pius' and 'felix' (7.2; 5, cf., but aberrant, 11.2). The author betrays no awareness of the fact that those titles had been borne by Caracalla. And they happen to occur on some of the inscriptions of Macrinus, but not on any coin.¹⁷ Again, in the appendage it is stated that Macrinus was *in iure non incallidus* (13.1). In support of which (it is alleged) he decided to declare invalid *omnia rescripta veterum principum*, it being criminal to respect the authority of rulers like Commodus and Caracalla—and indeed Trajan never paid any attention to *libelli* addressed to him.

The whole conception is a chimera. None the less, some may object that Cassius Dio has a reference, albeit saying little, to the juristic attainments of this emperor (78.11.2). Further, in his first despatch to the Senate, Macrinus arrogated to himself the titles of 'pius' and 'felix' (16.2).

The suspicion has been entertained more than once that the *HA* has recourse to Cassius Dio, and the topic is now the subject of a detailed investigation.¹⁸ At first sight, something of a paradox. For Septimius Severus at least, the Latin biography which the author compiled was too full for his requirements, as he avows; *quoniam longum est minora persequi* (*Sev.* 17.5). He therefore turned to Aurelius Victor. Nor does he seem to have been at great pains to seek additional information about the rivals of Severus. When Latin sources failed, Herodian sufficed: shorter and more attractive than the long narrations of Dio.

There are general and initial grounds for dubitation. When facts of history are in question, it is not at all easy to establish derivation and dependence. There is a limit to the variations (both selection and language) with which facts can be consigned. Mere coincidences may mean nothing. Personal comment, errors or fabrications, that is another matter and safer guidance. Before admitting Cassius Dio it would be desirable to give some thought to a Latin writer of the time who dealt with the same transactions.

VII. For the *Vita Macrini* the author had not adopted a Latin biography as his basic source. That is clear. None the less, whether or no Marius Maximus had served that function down to the *Caracalla*, his name cannot

¹⁷e.g., *ILS* 463–465.

¹⁸F. Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta* (Bonn 1972). Unfortunately not yet accessible.

be left out of the reckoning. There is the full and admirable account of the last months of Elagabalus, carrying many names and facts: from the consular biographer, so it is argued.¹⁹ Further, he supplied the framework of that *Vita*.²⁰

It will not be appropriate in this place to do more than allude to the imbroglio of problems concerning the use of Maximus in the *HA*. Yet one thing may be said in passing. The citations of Maximus in the "Nine *Vitae*" of emperors (Hadrian to Caracalla) look like additional notes inserted on a revision after the original compilation (hasty and drastic) of the basic source. That is not clearly the case everywhere in the five biographies of princes and pretenders.²¹ Therefore it will be suitable to bear in mind the theory that the writing of those "secondary *Vitae*" falls between the *Caracalla* and the *Macrinus*.

On that theory, the author was already familiar with Marius Maximus when he came to compose the biography of Macrinus. Touching which, a further point. In that *Vita* the author refers to the *versus cuiusdam poetae* which explained that the name 'Antoninus' began with Pius and ended with Elagabalus—*Antoninorum ultimus* (6.7). The poet, it should seem, is none other than Ausonius.²² Now Ausonius in his *Caesares*, after the Suetonian twelve, produced a second sequence of rulers, Nerva to Elagabalus inclusive. The catalogue, be it noted, includes Macrinus but omits L. Verus. These "Twelve Caesars" correspond, it is generally held, to the biographical output of Marius Maximus. Perhaps a recent discovery during the renascence of Latin letters in the second half of the Fourth Century.

It has always seemed an enigma that the *HA* did not turn to the consular biographer and employ him as his basic source for the reign of Macrinus. Various explanations are proffered. For example, an old hypothesis has recently been revived: Maximus never wrote a separate biography of Macrinus, he regarded him as a usurper, as only an episode in the story of Elagabalus.²³ That will not take one very far. At the least Maximus would supply accurate detail about the age, origin, and career of Macrinus—and precise revelations about his inadequacies of policy and performance. No trace of such particulars in the *HA*, not even the

¹⁹*Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 121 ff. For a brief hint earlier, *Hermes* 96 (1968) 500.

²⁰T. D. Barnes, *HAC* 1968/69 (1970) 31. He provides the full statement in *HAC* 1970 (1972), forthcoming.

²¹As suggested in the paper "Marius Maximus Once More," *HAC* 1970 (1972), forthcoming.

²²T. D. Barnes, *JRS* 57 (1967) 70.

²³A. D. E. Cameron, *JRS* 61 (1971) 264.

fact that he came from Caesarea in Mauretania.²⁴ Furthermore, the quatrain describing Macrinus in Ausonius would presumably have to be disallowed, on one plea or another.

Perhaps the truest explanation lay on the surface, obvious and escaping notice. Various arguments about the *HA* labour under an assumption that the author was writing as a historian. That is to say, he had recourse to the best sources available. One example will do, appeal to the lost books of Ammianus Marcellinus, which would have furnished attractive details about emperors after Herodian ran out (in the year 238): not yet published, since the *HA* does not seem to have exploited them, so it is opined.²⁵

The axiom is a misconception. The author's bent and predilections are not those of a historian, or a serious enquirer. For example, he could have ascertained without effort a number of facts about Avidius Cassius or Pescennius Niger. He did not need them, or want them. The "secondary *Vitae*," being almost total fiction, and hence generally neglected by scholars, provide the clue to his idiosyncrasy. By technique and quality the *Macrinus* bears a close resemblance to the biographies in that category. And not fortuitous. If, on a theory which has not yet been refuted or discarded, the author had just been engaged on that form of creative composition, the *Macrinus* was a congenial sequel, as indeed the first words of its preface indicate. Why now compile and abridge yet another Latin biography? He had had enough of tedious occupations, unworthy of his talents. Fatigue and impatience are evident in the "Nine *Vitae*" of emperors.

To conclude this rubric. It may be supposed without discomfort that the author glanced at the *Vita Macrini* of Marius Maximus, or remembered something from a cursory reading. Hence items not likely to have been registered in the *KG*.²⁶ Further, having discovered that the son of Macrinus was a *puer*, he went on to call him a *puerulus* (*Diad.* 2.2; 6.1). Maximus would supply the boy's age. No call to invoke Cassius Dio.

The preface of the *Macrinus* promised facts dug up from *diversi historici*; and, at the end, addressing the Emperor Diocletian, the author has *de plurimis collecta* (15.4). By paradox, he appears to be telling the truth: Herodian, the *KG*, probably Victor, Marius Maximus. To be sure, none of them is named anywhere in the biography. Aurelius Victor was not only a writer but *praefectus urbi* in the year 389. An alert reader might have detected him in the guise of *Aurelii Victoris cui Pinio*

²⁴As stated by Dio, 78. 11.1. And no doubt by Maximus.

²⁵A. D. E. Cameron, *op. cit.* (above, n. 3) 257.

²⁶The search for which should be attended with vigilance. For example, coins were struck at Antioch in the prince's name, which happens to be true, but not *statim* (*Diad.* 2.6). And observe what follows: for himself, Macrinus refrained *usque ad iussum senatus*.

cognomen erat (4.2).²⁷ This person came out with odious remarks in the Senate, vilifying the origin and the variegated antecedents of the new ruler.

About Marius Maximus the author is equivocal. In the *Elagabalus*, where (so it is plausibly argued) Maximus furnished the basic structure, he is cited once, but not for any fact. Only for a fabrication. In the course of a passage which breaks the sequence of the narration (11.2–7), and includes a quotation from Terence, comes the assertion that Elagabalus composed *iocularia* at the vintage festival, with the remark: *horum pleraque Marius Maximus dicit in vita ipsius Heliogabali* (11.6).

This looks like a double fabrication. For a more subtle essay in fraudulence observe the fable about ‘Ovinus Camillus’ related in the *Alexander*. The conscientious author firmly asseverates that it is not to be found in the *Vita Traiani* of Marius Maximus (48.6).

VIII. So far so good. An investigation not bearing on questions of any great historical moment, merely the structure and sources of the *HA*, once again—and in one of its less exhilarating portions. The sequel and epilogue, it must be confessed, will be found to conform.

The *Vita Elagabali* is now in cause. After the preface it leads off with the statement (deriving from the *KG*) that Diadumenianus was at the outset invested *pari potestate imperii* with his father (1.4). Then, a little lower down, their joint rule is registered: *a Macrino, qui saevissime cum filio luxurioso et crudeli exercuit imperium* (2.3). No sign, therefore, of the author’s discovery that the son was only a *puer*—and even a *puerulus*, as twice in the *Vita Diadumeni*. According to that biography, the prince was put to death *non suo nomine* but because of his parent’s harsh rule: *ob incivilem patris atque asperum principatum* (8.2). But, so the author has ascertained, he was guilty of cruelty beyond his years (8.3); and letters from him are cited to show how the boy would have turned out had he lived, *quam asper futurus iuvenis* (8.9).

Aurelius Victor, it will again be recalled, stigmatized *saevos atque inciviles animos* in both father and son;²⁸ and for Victor the latter is an *adolescens*. In the sentence from the *Elagabalus* quoted above the son shares the opprobrium of the inhuman parent, but he is profligate as well—*luxuriosus et crudelis*.

Worse is to follow. In another passage Elagabalus himself after his arrival in Rome makes a savage attack on the memory of both: *insecutus est famam Macrini crudeliter, sed multi magis Diadumeni* (8.4). Now

²⁷There is no evidence that the historical Aurelius Victor bore this cognomen. The author had a friend called ‘Pinianus’ (*Aur.* 1.9, on Hohl’s conjecture). For contemporary Piniani, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta* (Oxford 1968) 193.

²⁸The word *incivilis* recurs in *Diad.* 8.2 (quoted above). Elsewhere only in *Aur.* 21.5.

Elagabalus in fact sent a dispatch from Antioch after the battle (which took place on June 8, 218) answering charges made by Macrinus; and, to counter aspersions cast on his own youth, he alleged that the son of Macrinus was only five years old. Dio reports the missive (79.1.2 ff.). The fact is worth registering, though it permits no conclusions about the sources of the *Vita Elagabali*.

To continue with this passage. Elagabalus goes on to disallow an opinion that the prince had mended his ways and become a model of virtue and valour: *quod ex luxuriosissimo extitisse vir fortissimus, gravissimus, severissimus diceretur* (8.4). The prince, it follows, had reached years of manhood.

That is not all. Elagabalus compelled several writers to publish unsavoury details about his habits and his vices (8.5):

coegit denique scriptores nonnullos nefanda, immo potius impia de eiusdem victu et luxuria disputare, ut in vita eius.

The text is in a disturbed condition. The remedy of Hohl is here adopted, which makes sense though it entails a lacuna at the end. The reference is to a biography of Diadumenianus, as is indicated by the word *luxuria* and by *eius* carrying on from *eiusdem*. Who then was its author? There is a choice of four.

First, supply *diximus*. No such statement occurs in the *Vita Diadumeni*. However, the author is not above giving a false reference—or had he perhaps not yet composed that biography, which he was proposing to insert before the *Elagabalus*?

Second, the name of Marius Maximus, although he did not write a life of the prince. Perhaps the author was careless and confused in his formulation, having really intended an allusion to the *Vita Macrini* of that biographer. Better, sheer deceit. He was capable of making questionable play with the name of Maximus, as witness *Elag.* 11.6 and *Alex.* 48.6 (discussed above).

Third, an unknown biographer, and spurious. There happens to be no characters of this type in the *Elagabalus*: a marked contrast to its sequel and pendant, the *Alexander*. No comment, however.

Fourth, the deleterious biographer 'Junius Cordus.' He was accorded a handsome introduction in the preface to the *Vita Macrini*, yet his name is absent from that biography and from the three that follow. This conjecture would provide him with a suitable occupation, namely a *Vita Diadumeni*, for he had undertaken *eorum imperatorum vitas edere quos obscuriores videbat* (*Macr.* 1.3).

Decision is baffled—and in any event it would not affect the main issue. As has been shown, three passages in the *Vita Elagabali* exhibit the son of Macrinus as an indubitable adult. How should the disturbing phenomenon be assessed?

From time to time scholars have been impelled to look for traces of plural authorship in the *HA*, even though faith may fade in the existence of the six ostensible biographers; and various arguments have been put forward. Fresh pleas will no doubt be welcome. Might not the signal discrepancy about the age of Macrinus' son be taken to imply the work of different hands in this section of the *HA*?

The biographies of Diadumenianus and of Elagabalus bear the same superscription, namely 'Aelius Lampridius.' That of Macrinus purports to be by 'Julius Capitolinus'—who, however, proposes to deal also with his son (10.6); and the author of that *Vita* thinks that he has written the *Macrinus* (*Diad.* 6.1). An imbroglio which may safely be resigned to those who believe in 'Julius Capitolinus,' or for that matter, in 'Junius Cordus.'

A plain fact dispels further vexation. The four biographies at the end of the first half of the *HA* (Macrinus to Alexander) are patently by the same hand. Their name-labels are not only a fraud, they were carelessly attached.

The discrepancy subsists. Perhaps not so flagrant that it cannot be explained by the haste and inadvertence of the author, or by sheer perversity and wilful deceit. Examples abound. Thus, having called Macrinus' son *luxuriosus et crudelis* (*Elag.* 2.3), he denounces allegations to his discredit as *nefanda, immo potius impia* (8.5). Pescennius Niger, introduced as *libidinis effrenatae ad omne genus cupiditatum*, becomes a model of chastity and restraint (*Pesc.* 1.4; 6.6). Again, it was the author's design to portray Severus Alexander as a youthful ruler, not only wise already and mature in judgement but endowed with martial physique and addicted to military pastimes. Once only is he off guard, calling him a *puer* (*Alex.* 14.7). Alexander was in fact twelve or thirteen on his accession.

IX. Such being the manner and habits of the author, the question were perhaps best given up. Yet there may be room for a hypothesis about the order of composition. Since the *Vita Elagabali* assumes Diadumenianus to be an equal partner in the imperial power from the beginning, and a grown man, it might have been written before the revelation that he was only a boy. If that were so, the author had chosen to go on at first with the narration of linked events, proceeding from *igitur occiso Macrino* (*Elag.* 1.4) and continuing to *interfecto Vario Heliogabalo* (*Alex.* 1.1) and the reign of Severus Alexander. The biographies of the two ostensible sons of Caracalla form a kind of unit, being a study in contrasts. On that showing, after he had completed *Alexander*, the author turned back and filled up space by supplementing *Macrinus* and composing *Diadumenus*.²⁹ The device of the name-labels may have been invented about this time,

²⁹And, be it supposed, not omitting a forward reference to the *Vita Elagabali* (*Diad.* 9.6).

or not much earlier. It was an oversight to inscribe the *Vita Diadumeni* with 'Aelius Lampridius,' but perhaps to be understood if that label had shortly before been attached to the biographies of Elagabalus and Alexander.³⁰

To support a hypothesis of this order it would be desirable to discover items that betray influences from the *Vita Alexandri*. Bogus names in the *HA* are a clue to many things. The *Vita Diadumeni* exhibits six of them towards the end.

In the appendage of the *Macrinus* the author spread himself on the topic of the emperor's harsh actions. The *Vita Diadumeni* is concordant, documenting the precocious cruelty of the boy prince (8.3). A letter to the parent is quoted where he is taken to task for displaying clemency towards malcontents, among them a *dux Armeniae* and a *legatus Asiae atque Arabiae* (8.5). Also a missive from the boy to his mother, urging drastic steps to forestall a conspiracy: *age igitur ut Arabianus et Tuscus et Gellius ad palum deligentur* (9.1).

The names have not failed to excite curiosity. Though 'Tuscus' offers no hold, 'Arabianus' looked promising. Might he not be identical with Domitius Aristaeus Arabianus, legate of Tineius Sacerdos the proconsul of Asia about the year 208?³¹ And the authenticity of 'Gellius' is seriously canvassed. Perhaps none other than that Gellius Maximus (the son of Caracalla's doctor), the commander of the legio IV Scythica, who made a proclamation in Syria in 219.³²

Some of the names in the *HA* which are declared dubious or bogus, on the basis of known facts (or more often rather the known practices of the author), might belong, it is true, to authentic characters of history, being taken from some source no longer extant. That is a safe recourse and by its nature an inexpugnable position, so it might appear.³³

There is a better approach, commended by the inventive fancy of the author. The name 'Arabianus' might have been suggested by the *legatus Asiae atque Arabiae* (in 8.5, a non-existent function). Otherwise, that scoundrel 'Septimius Arabianus,' who provoked Severus Alexander to make appeal to the god of Gaza and quote a tag from Cicero: *O Marna, O Iuppiter, O di immortales, Arabianus non solum vivit, verum etiam in senatum venit* (17.4). 'Gellius' might also be a reminiscence from that *Vita*, for it reproduced the epigram of Martial about a lady called 'Gellia.'³⁴

³⁰'Lampridius' may therefore take his name from 'Lampridia,' the mother of Pescennius Niger (*Pesc.* 1.3): that is, not the reverse process.

³¹*PIR*², D 134. The editor says *nescio num idem sit Arabianus*, but avows in *epistula sane absurde ficta*.

³²*PIR*², G 123, with the note *vide num idem sit Gellius Maximus*, n. 130. Further, "he may well be identical," as (discussing the doctor) V. Nutton, *CQ*² 21 (1971) 262.

³³And Marius Maximus would register Gellius Maximus in his *Vita Elagabali*.

³⁴*Alex.* 38.2, reproducing Martial 5. 29.

Nor should the wholly fictitious context of the three names be left out of account. About the letter sent to Macrinus the author states that some authorities held it to be the work of the boy's tutor 'Caelianus,' an African *rhetor* (8.9).³⁵ Further, the documents (he says) did harm to Diadumenianus, being divulged by the perfidy of a *notarius* and read out to the troops by a *cubicularius*. Such was the version of the historian 'Lollius Urbicus' (9.2). That person owes his name to the general in Britain who had been mentioned previously in the *HA* (*Pius* 5.4). For the full measure let 'Nonia Celsa' be added, who receives a happy letter from her husband Macrinus (7.5). The *cognomen* 'Celsus' is a strong favourite, 'Nonius Murcus' (*Clod. Alb.* 2.3) a patent figment, and doubts will adhere to 'Nonius Gracchus' (*Sev.* 13.3).

X. To resume. There is no compulsion (it will be seen) to believe that the names 'Arabianus' and 'Gellius' must reflect items in the *Vita Alexandri*. The treatment of the son of Macrinus in the *Elagabalus* is another matter. Though Elagabalus' denigrations may be dismissed as plain fiction (8.4 f.), the prince is none the less regarded as a colleague of his father, as an emperor, as adult and responsible (1.4; 2.3). Which represents the erroneous view transmitted by the *KG*. And no sign as yet of any awareness that he was a *puer*, or even *puerulus*.

Therefore a case could still be made out for the priority of the *Elagabalus*. Hence the *Diadumenus* (and also the appendage to the *Macrinus*) was written later, that is, after the termination of the *Alexander*.³⁶ That was a welcome point for an author to have reached, and convenient for him to pause, to go back and supplement or revise. How much, who can tell? In this paper it is assumed (as it has elsewhere been argued) that two operations, namely the composition of five "secondary *vitae*" and the revision (after the original compiling and abridging) of the "Nine *Vitae*" of emperors, both belong to an earlier stage, before the writing of the *Macrinus*.³⁷

It will be suitable to observe in passing that careful scrutiny should go to the epilogue of the *Vita Elagabali* (34 f.): an important passage where the author explains his activities and indicates his future programme, with invocation of the Emperor Constantine. The epilogue falls into two parts, the writing of which may (or may not) have been separated by an

³⁵Variant fictions relate a sojourn of Macrinus in Africa: either banished there, and practising rhetoric, or after retirement from the gladiatorial profession (*Macr.* 5.1 and 5). The name 'Caelianus' offers no clue.

³⁶Along with the appendage to the *Macrinus* (11–15) may be included the preceding section (10.4–6), which contains the important piece of annotation based on Herodian (10.4).

³⁷For a list of the different operations carried out in this portion of the *HA*, see *Emperors and Biography* (Oxford 1971) 52.

interval of time. In the second part the author, after alluding to the thirteen years' reign of Severus Alexander, briefly notes that a number of later rulers were *semestres alii et vix annui et bimi* (35.2). That notion recurs, in a slightly expanded formulation, in the *Vita Alexandri* (64.1).³⁸

In the case of parallel passages in one and the same author it is by no means easy to decide whether priority belongs to the shorter version or to the longer. In this instance doubt is the safer counsel. It will be pertinent to recall the two references to the careers of the jurists Ulpian and Paul, the first simple but vague (*Pesc.* 7.4), the second more precise, but involved (*Alex.* 26.5 f.). The first, it has been suggested, depends upon the second. Hence the *Pescennius* was composed after the *Alexander*.³⁹ There was some cause to suspend judgement.⁴⁰ And a fresh argument now supervenes in the contrary sense, as indicated earlier in this paper: Severus Alexander alluded to the aphorism of Pescennius Niger deriding imperial panegyrics (*Alex.* 35.1, cf. *Pesc.* 11.6).

However that may be, no rule or dogma obtains. Each case must be estimated on its own merits. A writer may abridge his previous version or expand it. For what it may be worth, expansion is more congenial to the author of the *HA*—at least when he turned aside from compiling and *suo tantum ingenio utebatur*.

If a piece of historical writing were under discussion the argument about structure and composition which has here been expounded might claim to be persuasive or even cogent. Doubt and hesitation should not be suppressed. This author defies normal processes of logic. He is a rogue scholar, capricious and perverse, exploiting techniques of erudition for parody and mockery, and delighting in deception, even if silly or pointless.

The enquiry appears to terminate *en queue de poisson*. Why not? Its scope was not announced as ambitious or promising any signal consequences. There are the large problems of the *HA*, some still in debate or sharp dispute, others not yet properly formulated and understood, others again clamouring to be redeemed from long neglect and desuetude. By contrast, the boy emperor is a small concern, of that class *quorum scientia nulli rei prodest*, so some might object, echoing the rebuke administered to 'Junius Cordus,' with appeal to the duties of *historiografi* (*Gord.* 21.4). However, the small or trivial things contribute to the large design, rendering intelligible the true nature of the *HA*; and it is not easy to resist the manifold seductions of an impostor who took in the

³⁸For the bipartite epilogue of the *Vita Elagabali*, see "The Composition of the Historia Augusta. Recent Theories," *JRS* 62 (1972), forthcoming.

³⁹T. D. Barnes, *HAC* 1968/69 (1970) 35 f.

⁴⁰But not to disallow the inference. The question was waived, deliberately, in the paper "Three Jurists" (in the same volume), 315.

world of learning for long years and was able to pass himself off as a collection of biographers writing at various times in the epoch of Diocletian and Constantine.

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