

REVISITING A HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CLASSIC
OF THE THEODOSIAN EMPIRE

Historia Augusta. Translated by David Magie. Revised by David Rohrbacher. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press 2022 (Loeb Classical Library 139/140/263). LIV, 471 p. (vol. 1), VI, 463 p. (vol. 2), VI, 562 p. (vol. 3). \$ 87.00/£ 68.85/€ 71.85. ISBN: 978-0-674-99744-8, 978-0-674-99745-5, 978-0-674-99746-2.

During the summer of 310, the former emperor Maximian attempted to return from retirement and sought to usurp the throne yet again.¹ This usurpation, staged while his son-in-law Constantine was engaged in a campaign against the Frangi on the Rhine frontier, created an existentialist crisis for Constantine. Constantine's suppression of his father-in-law at Massilia was unexpectedly swift and effective. However, it also meant his own delegitimization. By putting his father-in-law and adoptive grandfather to death, he had eliminated the theoretical basis for his rule. Hence, there was an urgent need for Constantine to find a new source of authority. The result was the invention of Constantine's descent from Claudius II. As it first appears in a contemporary source, the fiction is patent: the orator who delivered a speech in praise of Constantine in August 310 admitted that he was saying something previously unknown to contemporaries when he spoke of Constantine's ties to Claudius II (Paneg. Lat. 6(7).2.1–3.1).² Subsequent speeches, inscriptions, coins, and histories over the following decades were to give consistent, but suitably vague, expression to this familial history that justified Constantine's exercise of imperial power.³ As a result, the author of the *Historia Augusta* was taken in when writing at a remove of three generations, and the inclusion of this detail in lives purportedly composed prior to the abdication of Diocletian and Maximian in May 305 is the decisive piece of evidence demonstrating that the six authors of the *Historia Augusta* are them-

1 Barnes 1982: pp. 13; 70, n. 105. For abbreviated references to authors and works, see the Bibliography at the end of this review (pp. 631–633).

2 Omissi 2018: pp. 114–115.

3 Syme 1974; Westall 2013.

selves a fraudulent invention.⁴ Although claiming to be a work of the Tetrarchy, the *Historia Augusta* (henceforth *HA*) is in fact a product of the Theodosian empire.⁵

David Rohrbacher's revision of the Loeb Classical Library volumes of the *HA* is a welcome re-edition of David Magie's work of a century ago (1921, 1924, 1932). First-time readers will find much of value and assistance here. A preface sets forth the rationale for this new edition (1.VII–IX) and a concise introduction (1.XI–XXXI) touches upon the principal questions that first-time readers will have and the key issues encountered in reading the *HA*. A list of abbreviations (1.XXXIII–XXXVIII) and a list of bibliographical references (1.XXXIX–XLVI) provide the means for understanding the cross-references and citations of modern literature to be found in the footnotes accompanying the translation. A general bibliography (1.XLVII–LIII) concludes the introductory portion, offering a listing of recent commentaries, translations, and specialist literature. There follows the Latin text and a facing-page English translation (1.1–471; 2.1–463; 3.1–437) that encompasses the whole of the text as transmitted in the manuscript tradition. Matters conclude with a detailed index of names (3.439–562), which is analytical in function and gives detailed indications for each and every reference. What might be called a labor of love, this revised edition of the *HA* offers an accessible introduction to an extremely problematic work of history (i. e. a work of literature as understood by Graeco-Roman readers). It is unquestionably a valuable addition to the Loeb collection.

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Written in an engaging style that aims for accessibility to today's educated reader, the introduction touches upon the principal issues encountered in reading the *HA*. Those coming to the *HA* for the first time will indubitably believe that they have found manna, thanks to its charming, authoritative tone, long list of abbreviations, and endless bibliography. However, while

4 Rohrbacher 2022: 1.XIV; Dessau 1889: pp. 339–344. Hereafter, since Rohrbacher is the volume under review, subsequent, in-text references will indicate only the volume and page.

5 Regardless of whether one dates the *HA* to the 370s/380s, to the 390s, or to the period 400–420, the adjective 'Theodosian' seems a useful means of signalling the political and cultural milieu that generated it.

welcoming the updating of a classic and recognizing the tremendous amount of work that this required, the reviewer found it disappointing on various counts, and, upon reflection, colleagues are likely to agree. Comparison both with introductions to other volumes in the Loeb Classical Library and with other recent surveys of the *HA* helps to identify precisely what is dissatisfying with Rohrbacher's new introduction. The introductions of Charles R. Whittaker (1969) and Christopher P. Jones (2005) to their respective editions of Herodian's *History* and Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, for instance, are models of clarity, well signposted and offering precise information accompanied by abundant references in support of the affirmations made.⁶ As for the *HA* itself, the best introductions in English at present are those offered by a chapter in the *magnum opus* of Alan Cameron (2011) and a section in the introduction to "The Fragments of Roman Historians" edited by Tim J. Cornell and colleagues (2013). Offering a splendid example of philological methodology, Cameron's chapter dedicated to the *HA* ought to be required reading for all graduate students in the Classics.⁷ Similarly, Cornell's survey of the *HA* (within the context of a review of the 'citing authorities' whose work constitutes the basis for "Fragments of Roman Historians") deals in swift, detailed, and informative fashion with the issues of title, authorship, date, and nature of this problematic work.⁸

Why prefer these latter two items to Rohrbacher's introduction? As the author of a monograph dedicated to the *HA*, he arguably qualifies as the leading authority in the Anglophone world and presumably stands at the cutting-edge of progress. Unfortunately, there are problems with the Introduction in terms of organization, execution, and method.

Rohrbacher's organization is disorienting. There are six subheadings to the introduction (if one excludes abbreviations and bibliography: "Sources", 1.XVI–XX; "The Techniques of Fabrication", 1.XX–XXIV; "Purpose", 1.XXIV–XXVIII; "Date", 1.XXVIII–XXIX; "Conclusion", 1.XXX; "History and Constitution of the Text", 1.XXX–XXXI), whereas a subheading (e.g. 'Author and Text') would also have been in order for the initial section.

6 Whittaker 1969: 1.IX–XCV; Jones 2005: 1.1–30.

7 Cameron 2011: pp. 743–782. Rohrbacher not only does not cite this chapter for the discussion of the date of the *HA*, but gets the date of publication of Cameron's monograph wrong in the General Bibliography (1.XLIX: "2004").

8 Cornell 2013: pp. 74–80.

In spite of this complicated signposting, Rohrbacher has a tendency to touch upon the same topic (e. g. the date of composition) in more than one section, and that makes for frustrating reading. By contrast, Cornell employs no sub-headings to guide the reader through the seven dense pages of his contribution, but the logical flow of the argument makes it easy for the reader to locate material rapidly. Equally frustrating is Rohrbacher's misplacement of items, such as when the relationship of the *HA* to the writings of Ammianus and Jerome appears in the section entitled "The Techniques of Fabrication" (specifically: 1.XX–XXI). One might have logically expected that issue to be covered in the section entitled "Date" (1.XXVIII–XXIX).

Last but not least, it is somewhat surprising not to find a section dedicated to "Prosopography" or (perhaps better) "Bogus Names". It is worth remembering that we owe the unmasking of the fictitious nature of the text's claim that six authors composed the *HA* during the reigns of Diocletian and Constantine not to literary critics, but rather to a prosopographer. It was within the remit of his activity as an editor for the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* that Hermann Dessau came to the revolutionary conclusion that the *HA* had been written late in the fourth century, long after its purported date of composition. This, it should be added, was properly highlighted by Sir Ronald Syme in a *Bonner Historia-Augusta-Colloquium* contribution that subsequently constituted the first chapter of the second monograph (1971) that he dedicated to this work.⁹ That Dessau arrived at the truth via his work with the false names in which the *HA* abounds is a fact that is often forgotten today, and one in fact looks in vain for the word "prosopography" in Rohrbacher's Introduction. The mesmerizing power of the text is such that scholars often treat it as having the quality of Sacred Scripture.¹⁰ Prosopographers know better and act accordingly.

But let us leave the issue of organization and consider that of execution. While there are nine footnotes and nineteen in-text citations for the twenty-one pages of text that constitute Rohrbacher's introduction, these are hardly sufficient for the purposes of documentation or for initiating readers to the mysteries of the *HA*. The number of references in the discussions of Cornell and Cameron is exponentially far greater, and these references serve to better

9 Syme 1971: p. 1; Syme 1966: p. 257.

10 This occurs in spite of scholars' acknowledging its cavalier treatment of history; cf. 1.XXVII, "the frivolity of the work".

effect. For instance, Cornell's first footnote deals expeditiously with the issue of the title of the *HA*, tracing its current use back to Isaac Casaubon's 1603 Parisian edition and providing essential reference to detailed discussions by André Chasta-gnol (1994) and Mark Thomson (2007) that fill in the picture. Rohrbacher quite rightly cites Thomson (2007) for the persuasive restatement of Ernst Hohl's thesis that the work's original title was *De Vita Principum* (1.XI–XII), but addresses the issue of the title *Historia Augusta* in a vague and tardy fashion that obfuscates matters (1.XXX). To cite another example of problematic execution, Rohrbacher refers to the parallel between the *HA* and Jerome's *Life of Hilarion* thus: "Prob. 1.1–6 = Hil. 1.1–8" (1.XXI). The use of the 'equals' sign (=) is extremely misleading. There is no doubt that this is a textual parallel, but any suggestion that the two texts are identical is simply false. Indeed, this is a missed opportunity. Had Rohrbacher done as Cameron did and presented these two texts alongside one another in parallel columns and accompanied by their Ciceronian model, key differences would have been visible, and matters would have been quite clear.¹¹ The phrase that constitutes the decisive proof for their relative dating is as follows:

Cic. Arch. 24:	Hist. Aug. Prob. 1.2:	Hier. vita Hilar. 1.3:
[...] <i>adulescens, qui tuae virtutis Homerum praeconem inveneris.</i>	[...] <i>iuvenis, qui talem praeconem tuarum virtutum reperisti.</i>	[...] <i>o iuvenis, qui magno frueris praecone meritorum.</i>
[...] young man, you who found Homer as a herald for your manly attribute.	[...] young man, you who discovered such a herald for your manly attributes.	[...] O youth, you who enjoyed a mighty herald for your merits.

The author of the *HA* modified the text of Cicero in quoting it, and Jerome modified the text of the *HA* in quoting that. As Cameron has observed, the borrowing is evident, and the direction of the borrowing is equally incontestable.¹² That finding runs counter to Rohrbacher's theory that the *HA* was composed in the fifth century, but, however fashionable they may be and however much we may have invested in them, theories must give way to the evidence.

11 Cameron 2011: pp. 764–766.

12 Cf. Kelly 2015: p. 232, for a note on the date of the *Vita Hilarionis*.

To close with the review of the Introduction, something must be said about method. The discussion of the sources of the *HA* is full of unsupported affirmations. Apparently, readers are expected to turn to Rohrbacher's 2013 treatment of the question in the first instance and successively to other authors whose works are listed in the General Bibliography.¹³ When the reviewer reads an assessment such as the following, he expects to be provided with a demonstration: "Because Herodian is extant, we can watch our author at work and better understand his methodology" (1.XIX). No parallel juxtaposition of any passage follows, and we look in vain for anything similar in the footnotes that accompany the translation.¹⁴ Readers are offered conclusions cut adrift from the texts on which they are founded. Comparing the texts takes time and gets messy. It also often reveals unpalatable truths. Doing that with a couple of passages from the *HA* and Herodian, the reviewer has discovered that Frank Kolb's belief that the *HA* employed and adapted Herodian is a castle built on sand (viz. the claims made by the author of the *HA*). Following Kolb's lead, Rohrbacher has affirmed the use of Herodian (7.1.8) by the author of the *HA* (Maximin. 10.6), albeit with the addition of an invented and implausible statistic.¹⁵ Yet, the language of the two passages is quite different, to such a degree that the reviewer would hesitate to posit borrowing.

Herodian 7.1.8 (tr. Whittaker):

μήτε γὰρ κρίσεώς τινι μεταδούς μήτε ἀπολογίας, πάντας οὓς ὑπόπτειεν ἀφινδίως συναρπασθέντας ἀφειδῶς ἐφόρευσεν.

Maximinus gave no one a chance to make a defence before a court, since everyone under suspicion was suddenly seized and ruthlessly executed.

Hist. Aug. Maximin. 10.6 (tr. Magie, rev. Rohrbacher):

denique sine iudicio, sine accusatione, sine delatore, sine defensore omnes interemit, omnium bona sustulit et plus quattuor milibus hominum occisis se satiare non potuit.

At any rate, without judge, accusation, prosecutor, or defense he (Maximinus) put all of them to death and confiscated their property, and even after slaying four thousand men he was not satiated.

13 E.g. Barnes 1978; Kolb 1972; and Paschoud 1991.

14 The same, it may be said, is true of Rohrbacher 2013.

15 Rohrbacher 2013: p. 164.

What immediately follows in Herodian's account (7.1.9), moreover, contains information that is missing from the parallel account in the *HA* (Maximin. 11.1–2), just as the *HA* has information that cannot derive from Herodian. Juxtaposition of the two accounts will clarify this observation:

Herodian. 7.1.9 (tr. Whittaker):

ἔγένετο δὲ τις καὶ Ὀσροηνῶν τοξοτῶν ἀπόστασις, οἱ πάνυ ἀλγοῦντες ἐπὶ τῇ Ἀλεξάνδρου τελευτῇ, περιτυχόντες τῶν ἀπὸ ὑπατείας καὶ φίλων Ἀλεξάνδρου τινί (Κουαρτῖνος δὲ ἦν ὄνομα, ὃν Μαξιμίνοσ ἐκπέμψας ἦν τοῦ στρατοῦ) ἀρπάσαντες ἄκοντα καὶ οὐδὲν προειδόμενα στρατηγὸν ἑαυτῶν κατέστησαν, πορφύρα τε καὶ πυρὶ προπομπέουσι, ὀλεθρίοις τιμαῖς, ἐκόσμησαν, ἐπὶ τε τὴν ἀρχὴν ἤγον οὗ τι βουλόμενον.

There was also trouble among the Osrhoenian archers, who bitterly regretted Alexander's death. When they found one of Alexander's consular friends called Quartinus, who had been dismissed from the army by Maximinus, they seized upon him, and, even though it was against his wishes and unplanned, they set him up as their leader. He was fitted out with the fatal trappings of power, the purple and a procession of fire, and, in spite of his wishes, brought to imperial rule.

Hist. Aug. Maximin. 11.1–2 (tr. Magie, rev. Rohrbacher):

fuit etiam sub eodem factio desciscentibus sagittariis Osdroenis ab eodem ob amorem Alexandri et desiderium, quem Maximinus apud eos occisum esse constabat, nec aliud persuaderi potuerat. denique etiam ipsi Titum, unum ex suis, sibi ducem atque imperatorem fecerunt, quem Maximinus privatum iam dimiserat. quem quidem et purpura circum-dederunt, regio apparatu ornavunt et quasi sui milites obsaepierunt, et invitum quidem.

During his reign there was also a revolt of the Osrhoenian archers, who rebelled against him through love of Alexander and regret for his loss. They had agreed among themselves that Maximinus had murdered him, and could not be persuaded otherwise. They accordingly made one of their number, a certain Titus, whom Maximinus had already discharged from the army, their general and emperor. Indeed, they clothed him in purple, furnished him with royal insignia, and barred access to him like the soldiers of a king, all against his will.

The language is different enough to show that the author of the *HA* was not simply translating the account of Herodian into Latin. But, more importantly, a key detail (viz. the name of the hapless usurper) is different. As the editors of *Prosopographia Imperii Romani* have plausibly argued, both names likely

belonged to the same individual, Tit(i)us Quartinus.¹⁶ The author of the *HA* had to be drawing upon another source, and that source (or its antecedent) arguably contained the fuller version of the usurper's name. While a case can be made for a common ancestor for these two accounts, matters are far from something as simple as the author of the *HA* copying Herodian and adding pathetic colour or simplifying as he believed the occasion required. Both authors know a key piece of the puzzle that is unknown to the other! Common elements in the two authors must therefore be explained by another mechanism of transmission, and the most economical solution is that offered by the *Kaisergeschichte* or Aurelius Victor. To take modern authorities on trust is a risky enterprise. As Sir Ronald Syme once concluded, in an article dedicated to the *HA*, "Instead, read the text".¹⁷

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Rohrbacher presents readers with a Latin text of the *HA* that serves them well, even if problems are discernible to the reviewer upon conducting extended soundings that compared this version with those of David Magie and Ernst Hohl. The quality of legibility is comparable with that of highbrow mass paperbacks for a native English-speaking market, which is no small accomplishment. Errors there will always be, but the text shows an investment of both time and energy.

Before entering into details, however, a word or two about what Rohrbacher says concerning the establishment of the text needs to be said. The section entitled "History and Constitution of the Text" (1.XXX–XXXI) is unclear and far too abbreviated, and the accompanying list of *sigla* (1.XXXI) is seemingly incomplete. Rohrbacher notes that variations in the work's title are frequent in Renaissance editions of the *HA*, but he might have said something about the title attributed to the work in the medieval manuscripts and (even more significantly) the apparent disruption of the order in which the lives were transmitted. The order in which the biographies are transmitted in the codex Vat. Pal. lat. 899, for instance, is not that observed in the editions which we use today, where a strict chronological order is observed. As regards the witnesses employed in constituting the Latin text, Rohrbacher

16 *PIR*² Q 9 (Quartinus); *PIR*² C 327 (Calpurnia); Whittaker 1970: 2.157, n. 3.

17 Syme 1972: p. 133.

appears to omit from his list of *sigla* two of the four that he specifically mentions when discussing the class Σ in the preceding paragraph: the Murbach manuscript and the work of Giovanni Colonna. On the other hand, he says nothing about the four manuscripts that he identifies as “the most significant representatives” (1.30) of the class Σ . What makes them significant? And why, too, is no real attempt made to describe the manuscript witness **P** (Vat. Pal. lat. 899)? In the absence of any concrete information, how are readers expected to be able to make rational choices between the different witnesses to the text’s transmission? On a par with the laconic signs that provide passengers with ‘information’ regarding schedule times for bus routes in contemporary Rome, this is infuriating. In view of the clear, detailed work of predecessors such as Hohl (1965) and Peter K. Marshall (1983), it is also incomprehensible. From the bibliography and passing references to the work of Jean-Pierre Callu (1992) and Justin A. Stover (2020A; 2020B) as well as a statement in the preface (1.VII–VIII), it seems safe to conclude that Rohrbacher has cobbled together a Latin text from the critical editions of the Teubner and Budé series, while also from time to time taking into account the contributions that scholars have made in other venues. This hybrid scholastic text should, and as a rule does, make sense. But trusting blindly in the good judgement of an editor is never good method.

Comparing the text of the *Life of Caracalla* in the editions of Magie, Hohl, and Rohrbacher reveals both the strengths and the weaknesses of this new version of the Latin text. Magie identifies twenty-three points at which intervention is required; Rohrbacher twenty-seven. However, Rohrbacher has not simply added four to the pre-existing set of Magie. To his credit, he has thought about the whole text: five of the points identified by Magie no longer have any textual note (Hist. Aug. Carac. 3.7; 5.2; 5.7; 8.2; 8.9), on three occasions he adopts a solution different from that endorsed by Magie (Hist. Aug. Carac. 2.10; 3.2; 8.6), and six times he identifies a problem not recognized by Magie (Hist. Aug. Carac. 1.1 twice; 8.6; 9.4 twice; 9.5; 9.6). The new edition of Hohl’s Teubner text (1965) identifies some seventy-five points of interest. Manifestly Rohrbacher has engaged at length with the critical editions to produce a new Latin text that suitably accompanies the revised English translation.¹⁸ It must be added, last but not least, that Rohrbacher has

18 Errors of punctuation and numbering do occur from time to time, as with the use of a comma instead of a period after *fieri* at Hist. Aug. Carac. 9.4 and the failure to

introduced diacritical marks into the Latin text so as to inform readers of emendations and interpolations. That is perhaps the most important difference between the Latin texts of Magie and Rohrbacher, and it constitutes a fundamental improvement. As regards reporting, it seems to the reviewer that the omission of the direct object *Antoninum* from the text of **P** (but not **Σ**) at Hist. Aug. Carac. 8.9 is noteworthy for the purposes of establishing a stemma; like Magie and Hohl, Rohrbacher would have done well to note this passage with the others in his critical apparatus. *En passant*, it was a pleasant surprise to discover that Erasmus in his 1518 edition appears to have anticipated the testimony of the **Σ** class. Humanist conjectures would make for a wonderful monograph in their own right, but that is another book for someone else to write. In taking leave of the biography of Caracalla, the reviewer notes that the restoration of the manuscripts' transmitted *Recianus* to *Triccianus* (Hist. Aug. Carac. 6.7) is due to Wilhelm Henzen's brilliant emendation on the basis of the testimony of Cassius Dio (79.13; 80.4). Names are often-times the most fragile element in the text being transmitted.

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As Rohrbacher promises in the preface (1.VIII), he has modernised the language of Magie's translation, employing a contemporary idiom. The avoidance of expressions such as 'meretricious' and the use of derogatory terms such as "whore" undoubtedly will make the translation immediately accessible to a new generation of readers. So, too, it takes brilliance to excogitate a rendering such as "It's skewering time, Cook!" (Hist. Aug. Heliog. 10.5): creating an obscene image through everyday language is an art.¹⁹ More typical of the brutality of the present day are expressions such as "well hung" (Hist. Aug. Heliog. 5.2), which Rohrbacher does use. Not for him the Victorian reticence that sometimes renders Magie's translation baffling. To cite a final example, in dealing with the author's description of the sexual organ of Gordian II (Hist. Aug. Gord. 19.4), Magie is obscure to the point of being incomprehensible, whereas Rohrbacher is bluntly straightforward:

indicate the section number for the sentence beginning with *conscii caedis* at Hist. Aug. Carac. 6.7.

19 Cf. Mallan 2023.

appellatusque est sui temporis Priamus, quem vulgo iocantes, quod esset natura protensior, Priapum, non Priamum, saepe vocitarunt.

He was nicknamed, in fact, the Priam of his age, but often the crowd jestingly called him not Priam but Priapus, as being nearer to his character (Magie 2.413).

He was nicknamed the Priam of his age, but often the crowd jokingly called him not Priam but Priapus, as his manhood was rather long (Rohrbacher 2.393).

Rohrbacher's translation is in part a commentary, as the subject of the verb *esset* is Gordian II and not his sexual organ, but it has the distinct virtue of making clear precisely what the author wished to communicate. All of which is to say that Rohrbacher has done an invaluable service in mediating the text's Saturnalian aspects for today's readers.

Yet, closer examination reveals other passages where Magie's rendering was perhaps preferable and yet others where a more radical intervention was required. The following brief remarks regarding three randomly chosen samples are meant merely to explore the possibilities for further improvement of a serviceable translation.

With a wicked sense of humour that seems to come straight out of the movie "The Hangover" (2009), the author of the *HA* claims that Elagabalus liked to frighten dinner guests with the lions and leopards that he maintained in the palace (Hist. Aug. Heliog. 21.1). Magie's translation is far from perfect, but it is clearer than that of Rohrbacher on one of the two essential points to this game of tyrannical *para prosdokian*. The text and translations are as follows:

habuit leones et leopardos exarmatos in deliciis, quos edoctos per mansuetarios subito ad secundam et tertiam mensam iubebat accumbere, ignorantibus cunctis quod exarmati essent, ad pavorem ridiculum excitandum.

Among his pets he had lions and leopards, which had been rendered harmless and trained by tamers, and these he would suddenly order during the dessert and the after-dessert to get up on the couches, thereby causing an amusing panic, for none knew that the beasts were harmless (Magie 2.147).

He had lions and leopards, which had been rendered harmless and trained by tamers, and he used to suddenly order them to get up on the couches during dessert and after dessert, causing an amusing panic, for no one knew that the beasts were harmless (Rohrbacher 2.139).

The omission of the prepositional phrase *in deliciis* from Rohrbacher's translation is unfortunate, as that would otherwise make clear the point that Ela-

gabalus kept lions and leopards “as pets”. Even more unfortunate, arguably, is the failure to render clearly the sense of the perfect participle *exarmatos*: Elagabalus had had the big cats declawed. As anyone who has ever encountered domestic cats well knows, cats cannot safely be left to fend for themselves outside the house once their claws (*ungues* in ordinary Latin, but clearly *arma* in a metaphorical sense) have been surgically removed. The innocuous sounding phrase “rendered harmless” does not do justice to what is being described.

Describing the omens that marked Septimius Severus out for future rule, the author of the *HA* reports a dream that Severus had after attending a banquet held by the emperor and being provided with a toga from the emperor’s own wardrobe. Severus dreamt of himself as though he were one of Rome’s twin founders (Hist. Aug. Sept. Sev. 1.8). Again, although not perfect, Magie does render the Latin in a more persuasive fashion. The text and translations are as follows:

eadem nocte somniavit lupae se uberibus ut Remum inhaerere vel Romulum.

And that same night he dreamed that he tugged at the udders of a wolf, like Remus and Romulus (Magie 1.373).

And that same night he dreamed that he was fixed to the udder of a wolf, like Romulus and Remus (Rohrbacher 1.359).

“[F]ixed to the udder of a wolf”? That seems peculiarly wooden and calls to mind images of the game of ‘pin the tail on the donkey’ or something similar from “Winnie the Pooh”. Surely, the author is saying that Severus saw himself clinging to the udders of the she-wolf like Remus or Romulus. The modern disconnect between the female breast and lactation is probably to blame for the odd phrasing.

A third and final example is offered by the description of Hadrian’s interest in hunting. The first sentence is brief, but of particular interest as it refers to an episode known from other sources and connects the emperor’s *habitus* to a specific moment in his life. Paradoxically, although brief and simple, this sentence (Hist. Aug. Hadr. 26.3) is misinterpreted by both Magie and Rohrbacher. The Latin and their two translations are as follows:

venatus frequentissime leonem manu sua occidit.

He also hunted, and he used often to kill a lion with his own hand, [...] (Magie 1.79).

He also hunted, and he very frequently killed a lion with his own hands (Rohrbacher 1.75).

This is all rather unfortunate. The reviewer would agree with the Italian philologist Giovanni Porta who, in his translation of the *HA*, rendered this sentence thus: “andava assai di frequente a caccia, e una volta abbatté un leone con la sua mano.”²⁰ It seems quite clear that the superlative adverb *frequentissime* modifies the deponent perfect participle *venatus*, not the finite verb *occidit*. Indeed, attention ought to have been paid to the fact that the verb *occidit* is in the perfect tense, not the imperfect. Since no comment accompanies Rohrbacher’s translation nor that of Magie, it be worth noting that Anthony Birley understood this passage to indicate that Hadrian killed a lion only once and linked this episode to the poem composed by a certain Pancrates of Egypt as well as to the Hadrianic tondo still to be seen on the Arch of Constantine.²¹

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Well over 4,500 footnotes accompanied the original translation of the *HA* by Magie, and they have been by and large retained, but thoroughly revised, by Rohrbacher. This was an immense task, but a necessary one. These notes provide information that readers may find to be extremely useful. This information ranges from commentary about the individuals mentioned (e.g. 1.142, n. 60, identifying Annia Lucilla as the daughter of Marcus Aurelius and the wife of Lucius Verus; 2.296, n. 1, on the dubious historicity of the author Tattius Cyrillus; 3.213, n. 40, on the dubious historicity of the four German leaders reportedly serving under Aurelian) to basic culture (e.g.

20 Porta 1990: p. 69. For other instances of translation along the lines of Magie and Rohrbacher, cf. Chastagnol 1994: p. 55; Soverini 1983: p. 185; Hohl 1976: p. 56.

21 Birley 1997: p. 241. Was the Arch of Constantine in fact a Hadrianic monument in a previous existence? Whatever the response to that query (cf. Conforto et al. 2001, *contra* Panella 1999: pp. 66–70; Wilson Jones 1999: pp. 97–99), the reviewer also observes that Rohrbacher’s term “commenter” (1.XVII) ought to be, according to correct and traditional usage, ‘commentator’. The individuals explaining details in ancient texts were not ‘bloggers’.

2.84, n. 8, describing the *paenula*; 2.124, n. 53, defining *exsoletus*; 2.154, n. 99, explaining *garum*) and from essential topographic information (e.g. 1.54, n. 160, on the Pantheon; 2.142, n. 78, on the Circus Vaticanus; 3.28, n. 26, on the Temple of Artemis at Ephesus) to the sources of quotations (e.g. 1.84, n. 18, Vergilian lines predicting the fate of a designated successor to the throne; 2.252, n. 170, Persius Flaccus asking what place gold has in sanctuaries; 3.53, n. 68, a quotation from Anaxagoras or Xenophon on being aware of one's father's mortality). While it is difficult to contest Alan Cameron's dismissal of the *HA* as "banal", the work is indubitably a treasure trove of references to Roman culture (much like the "National Enquirer" or one of the papers published by the Murdoch companies), and the notes are essential to helping readers to make sense of it.

It is to be regretted that the references to numismatic and epigraphic information have been excised from Magie's original notes. For example, Magie's reference to Diocletian's "Price Edict" has been excised from the note that is meant to help readers make sense of the text's reference to the renowned wool of the Apulian city of Canusium (3.434, n.56). As emerges from the preface, this was done by Rohrbacher with the agreement of the committee overseeing the publication of the Loeb Classical Library (1.VIII). The intent is quite clear: simplifying things so as to align with the drop in readers' competency. That opens the door to a vicious circle. Instead, as a flagship publication of one of the foremost academic institutions in North America, the Loeb series ought not to pursue a race to the bottom, and the citation of non-literary evidence would have been appropriate. So, too, the citation of more scholarly work would have been in order. So, for instance, it would have been entirely appropriate to cite standard reference works such as "Brill's New Pauly", "Lexicon Topographicum Urbis Romae", "New Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome", and "The Fragments of the Roman Historians". Indeed, why not some of the other works also cited in the footnotes of this review? To protect students and the public from the evidence and specialist, scholarly literature does no one any favours, as it encourages an uncritical approach to the past, and that in turn has a deleterious impact upon how people look at the present with a view to shaping the future.

One feature of the notes is likely to catch readers' attention quite quickly, for their language has been reduced to bare essentials. Many of them are repetitive: "Otherwise unknown and presumably fictitious" (e.g. 3.162, n. 24, on Gallus Antipater, *ancilla honorum et historicorum debonestamentum* [Hist.

Aug. Claud. 5.4]). This reminds one of the comic refrain in Aristophanes' *Frogs*: ληκύθιον ἀπώλεσεν ("broke an ointment jar"). That is not a problem. Like Magie before him, Rohrbacher does well to constantly remind readers that the text is fiction that takes great liberties with what we would call 'history'.

* * *

The "Index of Names" (3.439–562) in effect reproduces that created by Magie to accompany the original edition. Aside from a minor modification of punctuation (with commas replacing periods as the markers separating chapter and section numbers, e.g. '7.8' rather than "7,8"), which reflects a change in the Anglophone style of citation, it would appear that the index is essentially unchanged. The printing of emperors' names in capitals is the only other change that the reviewer notices. This is a testimonial to the thoroughness of Magie's original edition, which distinguishes itself from the Teubner and Budé editions by offering what is in effect an analytical index. The entries are extremely helpful in locating what one is searching for. Indeed, in one instance, at least, the failure to intervene has resulted in the preservation of a reference to Magie's textual emendation (on the basis of an inscription from Ostia) that has subsequently been shown to be incorrect thanks to new epigraphic testimony from Africa. Thanks to an inscription found at Thugga (AE 1998, 1569), there is now no doubt that Gallienus' colleague in the consulate of CE 262 was named "Faustianus" and not "Fausianus".²² The text and translation are correct in this instance, but the index is not.

* * *

A further word about structure may perhaps be in order. Rohrbacher's revision essentially follows the layout utilised for the original edition by Magie, with the exception of restricting the introduction (wisely) to the first volume. The resulting publication consists of three thick volumes. The reviewer suggests a radical change. Why not utilise the scheme offered by Chastagnol in his 1994 translation and adopted to good effect by Diederik Burgersdijk in his 2010 monograph? That classification scheme, which is a slight modifica-

22 Cf. Mallan/Davenport 2015: p. 216, with note 88.

tion of what scholars have been using for analytical purposes since the late nineteenth century, divides the biographies of the *HA* into four categories: primary lives, secondary lives, intermediate lives, and later lives.

Table 1: Categories of Lives in the *HA*

Primary lives	Secondary lives	Intermediate lives	Final lives
Hadr.	Ael.	Opil.	Valer.
Pius	Avid.	Diad.	Gall.
Aur.	Pesc.	Heliog.	trig. tyr.
Ver.	Alb.	Alex.	Claud.
Comm.	Geta	Maximin.	Aurelian.
Pert.		Gord.	Tac.
Did.		Max. Balb.	Prob.
Sept. Sev.			quatt. tyr.
Carac.			Car.

One could easily apportion the thirty extant lives of the *HA* in four moderately sized volumes, much like what D. R. Shackleton Bailey did with his edition of Cicero's letters to Atticus. As is well known the primary and secondary lives are enmeshed with one another, but the phenomenon extends (in Burgersdijk's classification) only as far as the life of Geta. One could easily distribute the lives therefore as indicated by the following table:

Table 2: Proposed Distribution of Lives in Four Volumes

Vol. 1	Vol. 2	Vol. 3	Vol. 4
Hadr.	Pert.	Opil.	Valer.
Ael.	Did.	Diad.	Gall.
Pius	Sept. Sev.	Heliog.	trig. tyr.
Aur.	Pesc.	Alex.	Claud.
Ver.	Alb.	Maximin.	Aurelian.
Avid.	Carac.	Gord.	Tac.
Comm.	Geta	Max. Balb.	Prob.
			quatt. tyr.
			Car.

The reviewer would further suggest, albeit more tentatively, that a chronological table and an index of persons and places accompany each biography, coming at the very end. That would facilitate consultation: having to turn to the end of the third volume to find something in the first or second volume, as one does at present, is troublesome. Last but not least, the reviewer would also suggest adding an analytical table or two to the General Introduction, providing information such as that to be found in the invaluable tables to the Budé volumes that François Paschoud has edited (Paschoud 1996; Paschoud 2001). All of these suggestions are made with a view to the future creation of an edition that will facilitate the task of the reader. Life is already difficult enough. Why make it more so?

* * *

It is time to return to where we began. By returning to Constantine, we are able to close the circle, as it were. The biography of Elagabalus is addressed to Constantine, who had one or more things in common with this ruler from the Syrian city of Emesa (modern Ḥoms). The author of the *HA* elaborates upon the ‘historical’ figure of Orestes while discussing his veneration of the goddess Artemis (Hist. Aug. Heliog. 7.7, tr. Magie/Rohrbacher):

posteaquam se apud Tria Flumina circa Hebrum ex responso purificavit, etiam Orestam condidit civitatem, quam saepe cruentari hominum sanguine necesse est.

And after he purified himself at the Three Rivers in the Hebrus region in obedience to a divine response, he founded the city of Oresta, a city destined to be often stained with human blood.

This passage was discussed by Rohrbacher in his monograph, and there he discerned an allusion to the work of Ammianus Marcellinus (with the intent of correcting that historian) as well as an allusion to battles fought near Adrianople in 313 and 378.²³ By contrast, this passage receives no discussion in the work under review (2.114–115). The omission is all the more surprising given the fact that Magie had dedicated an extensive note to the allusion in his edition (Magie 1924: 2.120, n. 2). Perhaps Rohrbacher thought that Magie’s “323” was a mistake for “313”? Perhaps he no longer sees an allu-

23 Rohrbacher 2016: p. 145, where this passage is incorrectly cited as Hist. Aug. Heliog. 6.6, a passage which in fact deals with the emperor’s profanation of the ancestral rituals of the Roman people.

sion to the Goths' destruction of Valens and that emperor's army? The commentator's silence, like that of the gods, is hard to interpret. Be that as it may, the ancient historian will not fail to recall that there were in fact three pitched battles of significance fought in the environs of Adrianople in the course of the fourth century: in 313 between Maximinus and Licinius²⁴, in 324 between Licinius and Constantine²⁵, and in 378 between Valens and the Goths.²⁶ That seems sufficient to justify the use of the adverb *saepe* ("often"). Not possessing our hindsight, the author of the *HA* appears not to have realised the long-term significance of the battle which cost Valens both army and life. That in turn constitutes yet another argument for composition in or very soon after the battle of 378, when the long-term consequences had not yet manifested themselves. By the early fifth century, it was clear to all that the battle of 378 had been a defining moment, and Theodosian panegyrists and historians had every cause to emphasise the catastrophic nature of the defeat.²⁷ Of course, the methodological implications of the passage do not terminate there. Nothing in this passage (or its immediate context) points to Ammianus, and there are no grounds to allege that an allusion is being made to the fourth-century historian. On the contrary, Ammianus' focus on the figure of an obscure "Mimas" (Amm. 31.14.8–9) stands in marked contrast with the focus of the author of the *HA* on the figure of Orestes, the son of Agamemnon and Clytaemnestra. We may conclude that the reader of the *HA* must always be simultaneously literary critic and historian.²⁸ While that is useful as a basic principle in the study of Graeco-Roman history and literature, it is especially necessary here, as the utmost caution is always required where the *HA* is concerned.

24 Kienast/Eck/Heil 2017: p. 276; Barnes 1982: pp. 67; 81.

25 Kienast/Eck/Heil 2017: p. 287; Barnes 1982: pp. 75; 82.

26 Kienast/Eck/Heil 2017: p. 316.

27 Cf. Lenski 1997, on contemporaries' evolving understanding of Adrianople.

28 Cf. Rohrbacher 2022: 1.XXX, where readers are offered an illusory choice between the two.

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Richard Westall: Revisiting a Historiographical Classic of the Theodosian Empire. Rezension zu: *Historia Augusta*. Translated by David Magie. Revised by David Rohrbacher. 3 vols. Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press 2022 (Loeb Classical Library 139/140/263). In: *Plekos* 25, 2023, S. 613–634 (URL: https://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2023/r-historia_augusta.pdf).

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