

THE SCRIPTORES HISTORIAE AUGUSTAE

WITH AN ENGLISH TRANSLATION BY
DAVID MAGIE, Ph.D.

IN THREE VOLUMES

I



LONDON
WILLIAM HEINEMANN LTD.
CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS
HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

MCMLXVII

PREFACE

IN the preparation of this book others have laboured and I have entered into the fruits of their labours. Their co-operation has been of inestimable service.

The translation of the biographies from Antoninus Pius to Pescennius Niger and from the Maximini to Maximus and Balbinus inclusive has been furnished by my friend Mr. Ainsworth O'Brien-Moore. In the translation of the other lives also his fine taste and literary discrimination have been responsible for many a happy phrase. But for the promise of his collaboration the task of preparing this edition had not been undertaken.

The Latin text of the first six biographies has been supplied by Miss Susan H. Ballou of Bryn Mawr College, who had in mind the preparation of a new text of these biographies, based on her study of the manuscripts. Unfortunately, however, other interests have claimed her time and her efforts and she has been unable to complete the work for this edition. It is to be earnestly hoped that she will yet publish a critical text of the entire series.

In the lack of Miss Ballou's text I have been forced to base this edition, from the *Commodus*

PREFACE

onward, on the text of Hermann Peter, for the long-promised edition by Dr. Ernst Hohl has not yet appeared. Its aid would have been invaluable. While only too well aware of the inadequacies of Peter's text, I have not felt able to introduce many changes. The suggestions offered by various scholars since the appearance of Peter's second edition have been carefully considered, and a few have been adopted. The text, therefore, is that of the Codex Palatinus (P), with the introduction of a few emendations and whatever changes in punctuation and spelling might seem in accordance with modern usage. All the more important variations from P, as well as the most significant of the variant readings afforded by the later correctors of the manuscript, and, in addition, the divergencies from the text of Peter have been entered in the critical notes.

In the Introduction I have sought to give a brief account of the *Historia Augusta*, the authors, their method and style, and a summary of the study expended on it from the close of the classical period to the present and its use by later historians. A discussion of its authorship and sources and of the theories which have found in it a work of the late fourth or early fifth century has, for reasons of space, been reserved for the second volume.

The somewhat voluminous commentary has seemed necessary on account of the obscurity of the narrative and the abundance of technical terms. In the preparation of it I have tried to keep in mind not only the needs of the general reader but also those of the student of Roman History, and it is for the benefit of the latter that some of the more technical material has been included.

PREFACE

A list of the books and articles to which I am indebted would fill many pages. The greatest amount of aid has been furnished by Lessing's Lexicon, Mommsen's *Römisches Staatsrecht*, the *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, and the admirable articles on the various Emperors that have appeared in the Real-Encyclopädie of Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll. In the commentary to the biography of Hadrian valuable assistance has been rendered by Wilhelm Weber's *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte des Kaisers Hadrian*. A complete bibliography will be included in the second volume.

Of the work as a whole, perhaps it can be said: "Sunt bona, sunt quaedam mediocria, sunt mala plura, quae legis hic".

DAVID MAGIE.

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY,
15th June, 1921.

INTRODUCTION

I

THE SCOPE AND LITERARY CHARACTER OF THE

HISTORIA AUGUSTA

AMONG the remnants of Roman literature preserved by the whims of fortune is a collection of biographies of the emperors from Hadrian to Carinus—the *Vitae Diversorum Principum et Tyrannorum a Divo Hadriano usque ad Numerianum Diversis compositae*, as it is entitled in the principal manuscript, the *Codex Palatinus* of the Vatican Library. It is popularly known, apparently for convenience' sake, as the *Historia Augusta*, a name applied to it by Casaubon, whereas the original title was probably *de Vita Caesarum* or *Vitae Caesarum*.¹ The collection, as extant, comprises thirty biographies, most of which contain the life of a single emperor, while some include a group of two or more, classed together merely because these emperors were either akin or contemporary. Not only the emperors who actually reigned, the "Augusti," but also the heirs

¹ See Mommsen, *Hermes*, xiii. (1878), p. 301 = *Gesammelte Schriften*, vii. p. 301.

INTRODUCTION

presumptive, the "Caesares," and the various claimants to the empire, the "Tyranni," are included in the series.

According to the tradition of the manuscripts the biographies are the work of six different authors; some of them are addressed to the Emperor Diocletian, others to Constantine, and others to important personages in Rome. The biographies of the emperors from Hadrian to Gordian are attributed to four various authors, apparently on no principle whatsoever, for not only are the lives of successive, or even contemporary, princes ascribed to different authors and those of emperors widely separated in time to the same writer, but in the case of two of the authors some lives are dedicated to Diocletian and some to Constantine.

In the traditional arrangement the biographies are assigned to the various authors as follows:

I. Aelius Spartianus: the *vitae* of Hadrian, Aelius, Didius Julianus, Severus, Pescennius Niger, Caracalla, and Geta. Of these, the *Aelius*, *Julianus*, *Severus*, and *Niger* are addressed to Diocletian, the *Geta* to Constantine. The preface of the *Aelius*¹ contains mention of the Caesars Galerius Maximianus and Constantius Chlorus, and from this it may be inferred that the *vitae* of the Diocletian group were written between 293, the year of the nomination of these Caesars, and 305, the year of Diocletian's retirement. In the same preface² Spartianus announces that it is his purpose to write the biographies, not only of the emperors who preceded Hadrian, but also of all the princes who followed, including the Caesars and the pretenders.

¹ *Ael.*, ii. 2.

² *Ael.*, i. 1.

INTRODUCTION

II. Julius Capitolinus: the *vitae* of Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Verus, Pertinax, Clodius Albinus, Macrinus, the Maximini, the Gordiani, and Maximus and Balbinus. Of these, the *Marcus*, *Verus*, and *Macrinus* are addressed to Diocletian, while the *Albinus*, the *Maximini*, and the *Gordiani* are addressed to Constantine, evidently after the fall of Licinius in 324.¹ Like Spartianus, Capitolinus announces his purpose of composing an extended series of imperial biographies.²

III. Vulcacius Gallicanus: the *vita* of Avidius Cassius, addressed to Diocletian. He too announces an ambitious programme³—the composition of biographies of all who have worn the imperial purple, both regnant emperors and pretenders to the throne.

IV. Aelius Lampridius: the *vitae* of Commodus, Diadumenianus, Elagabalus, and Severus Alexander. Of these, the last two are addressed to Constantine; according to the author, they were composed at the Emperor's own request,⁴ and they were written after the defeat of Licinius at Adrianople in 323.⁵ Lampridius claims to have written the biographies of at least some of the predecessors of Elagabalus and to cherish the plan of composing biographies of the emperors who reigned subsequently, beginning with Alexander and including in his work not only Diocletian but Licinius and Maxentius, the rivals of Constantine.⁶

¹ *Gord.*, xxxiv. 5; see H. Peter, *Die Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (Leipzig, 1892), p. 35.

² *Max.*, i. 1-3; *Gord.*, i. 1-5.

³ *Av. Cass.*, iii. 3.

⁴ *Heliog.*, xxxv. 1.

⁵ *Heliog.*, vii. 7; see Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 32.

⁶ *Heliog.*, xxxv.; *Alex.*, lxiv. 1.

INTRODUCTION

V. Trebellius Pollio: the *vitae* from Philip to Claudius; of his work, however, the earlier part, containing the biographies from Philip to Valerian, has been lost from the collection,¹ and we have only the *vitae* of the Valeriani (in part), the Gallieni, the Tyranni Triginta, and Claudius. Pollio's biographies were dedicated, not to the emperor, but to a friend, apparently an official of high degree. His name has been lost, together with the preface which must have preceded the *vita* of Philip. The only clue to his identity is a passage in which he is addressed as a kinsman of an Herennius Celsus, a candidate for the consulship.² The extant biographies were written after Constantius' nomination as Caesar in 293,³ and, in the case of the *Tyranni Triginta*, after the commencement of the Baths of Diocletian in 298.⁴ The collection was finished, according to his successor and continuer Vopiscus, in 303.⁵

VI. Flavius Vopiscus: the *vitae* of Aurelian, Tacitus, Probus, Firmus and his three fellow-tyrants, and Carus and his sons. These biographies, like those of Pollio, are not dedicated to any emperor, but to various friends of the author. Vopiscus wrote, he declares in his elaborate preface,⁶ at the express request of his friend Junius Tiberianus, the city-prefect. Tiberianus was city-prefect for the second time in 303-4,⁷ and, even granting that his conversation with the author as well as his promise of

¹ These biographies were included in the collection by Pollio; see *Aur.*, ii. 1.

² *Tyr. Trig.*, xxii. 12.

³ *Gall.*, vii. 1 and elsewhere.

⁴ *Tyr. Trig.*, xxi. 7; see Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 38 f.

⁵ *Aur.*, ii. 1.

⁶ *Aur.*, i.-ii.

⁷ B. Borghesi, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Paris, 1862-97), ix. p. 392.

INTRODUCTION

the documents from Trajan's library are merely rhetorical ornaments,¹ this date is usually regarded as marking the beginning of Vopiscus' work. It is confirmed by an allusion to Constantius as *imperator*² (305-306) and to Diocletian as *iam privatus* (after 305).³ This collection was completed, according to internal evidence, before the death of Diocletian in 316,⁴ perhaps even before that of Galerius in 311.⁵ The series written by Vopiscus has been preserved in its entirety, for it was his intention to conclude his work with the lives of Carus and his sons, leaving to others the task of writing the biographies of Diocletian and his associates.⁶

The plan to include in the collection not only "Augusti," but also "Caesares" and "Tyranni," has resulted in a double series of biographies in that section of the *Historia Augusta* which includes the emperors between Hadrian and Alexander. To the life of a regnant emperor is attached that of an heir-presumptive, a colleague, or a rival. In each case the minor *vita* stands in a close relationship to the major, and, in many instances, passages seem to have been transcribed bodily from the biography of the "Augustus" to that of the "Caesar" or "Tyrannus".

In the composition of these biographies the model used by the authors, according to the testimony of two of them,⁷ was Suetonius. The *Lives* of Suetonius are not biographies in the modern sense of the word, but merely collections of material arranged according

¹ Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 39.

² *Aur.*, xlv. 5.

³ *Aur.*, xliii. 2.

⁴ *Car.*, xviii. 5; see Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 45 f.

⁵ *Car.*, ix. 8.

⁶ *Prob.*, i. 5; *Bonos.*, xv. 10.

⁷ *Max.—Balb.*, iv. 5; *Prob.*, ii. 7; *Firm.*, i. 2.

INTRODUCTION

to certain definite categories,¹ and this method of composition is, in fact, employed also by the authors of the *Historia Augusta*. An analysis of the *Pius*, the most simply constructed of the series, shows the general scheme most clearly.² This *vita* falls naturally into the following divisions: ancestry (i. 1-7); life previous to his accession to the throne (i. 8—v. 2); policy and events of his reign (v. 3—vii. 4); personal traits (vii. 5—xii. 3); death (xii. 4-9); personal appearance (xiii. 1-2); honours after death (xiii. 3-4).

A fundamental scheme similar to this, in which the several sections are more or less clearly marked, serves as the basis for all the biographies. The series of categories is compressed or extended according to the importance of the events to be narrated or the material that was available, and at times the principle of composition is obscured by the elaboration of a particular topic to an altogether disproportionate length. Thus the mention of the peculiar cults to which Commodus was addicted (the category *religiones*) leads to a long and detailed list of acts of cruelty,³ while nearly one half of the life of Elagabalus is devoted to an enumeration of instances of his luxury and extravagance,⁴ and in the biography of Severus Alexander the fundamental scheme is almost unrecognizable as a result of the confused combination of various narratives.⁵

¹ *Proposita vitae eius velut summa partes singillatim neque per tempora sed per species exsequar*: Suetonius, *Aug.*, ix.

² Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 106 f.; F. Leo, *Die Griechisch-Römische Biographie* (Leipzig, 1901), p. 273 f.

³ *Com.*, ix. 6—xi. 7.

⁴ *Heliog.*, xviii. 4—xxxiii. 1.

⁵ Leo, p. 280 f.

INTRODUCTION

It was also characteristic of Suetonius that he amplified his biographies by means of gossip, anecdotes, and documents, but nowhere in his *Lives* are these used as freely as in certain of the *vitae* of the *Historia Augusta*. The authors take a peculiar delight in the introduction of material dealing with the personality of their subjects. Not content with including special divisions on personal characteristics, in which are enumerated the individual qualities of an emperor,¹ they devote long sections to elaborate details of their private lives, particularly before their elevation to the throne. For this more intimate detail there was much less material available than for the narration of public events. The careers of short-lived emperors and pretenders afforded little of public interest, and consequently their biographies were padded with trivial anecdotes. In fact, a comparison between a major *vita* and its corresponding minor biography shows that the latter contains little historical material that is not in the former. The rest is made up of amplifications, anecdotes, speeches, letters and verses, and at best these minor *vitae* represent little more than a working over of the material contained in the major biographies with the aid of rhetorical expedients and literary embellishments.

The model for the emphasizing of the private life of an emperor seems to have been not so much Suetonius as Marius Maximus, the author of a series of imperial biographies from Nerva to Elagabalus or Severus Alexander. Not content with the narration

¹ e.g. in the *Pius*, *liberalitas et clementia* (viii. 5—ix. 5); *auctoritas* (ix. 6-10); *pietas* (x. 1-5); *liberalitas* (x. 6-9); *civilitas* (xi.); see Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 157.

INTRODUCTION

of facts in the manner of Suetonius, Maximus sought to add interest to his biographies by the introduction of personal material. His lives are cited by the authors of the earlier *vitae* of the *Historia Augusta* as their sources for gossip, scandal, and personal minutiae,¹ and he is probably justly referred to as *homo omnium verbosissimus qui et mythistoricis se voluminibus implicavit*.² In gossip and search after detail, however, Maximus seems to have been outdone by Aelius Junius Cordus, cited in the *vitae* of Albinus, Maximinus, the Gordiani, and Maximus and Balbinus. He made it a principle to describe the emperor's appearances in public, and his food and clothing,³ and the citations from him include the enumeration of the amounts of fruit, birds and oysters consumed by Albinus.⁴ Readers who desire further information on trivial or indecent details are scornfully referred to his biographies.⁵

The manner of Marius Maximus and Cordus is most clearly reproduced in the lives attributed to Vopiscus. The more pretentious biographies of Aurelian and Probus especially⁶ contain a wealth of personal detail which quite obscures the scant historical material. After an elaborate preface of a highly rhetorical nature, there follows a description of the character of the emperor in which the emphasis is laid on his noble deeds and his virtues. These are illustrated by anecdotes and attested by "documents," much to the detriment of the narration

¹ *Hadr.*, ii. 10; xxv. 3; *Ael.*, v. 4; *Avid. Cass.*, ix. 9; *Heliog.*, xi. 6.

² *Firm.*, i. 2.

³ *Macr.*, i. 4.

⁴ *Cl. Alb.*, xi. 2-3.

⁵ *Cl. Alb.*, v. 10; *Max.*, xxix. 10; *Gord.*, xxi. 3.

⁶ *Leo*, p. 291 f.

INTRODUCTION

of facts. No rhetorical device is neglected and the whole gives the impression of an eulogy rather than a biography.

The method employed by Marius Maximus and Cordus was, however, productive of a still more detrimental element in the *Historia Augusta*—the alleged documents which are inserted in many of the *vitae*. Suetonius, as secretary to Hadrian, had had access to the imperial archives and thus obtained various letters and other documents which he inserted in his biographies for the illustration or confirmation of some statement. His practice was continued by his successors in the field of biographical literature. Thus Marius Maximus inserted documents, both speeches and letters, in the body of his text and even added them in appendices.¹ Some of these may have been authentic; but since the references to them in the *Historia Augusta* indicate that they were very numerous, and since there is no reason to suppose that Maximus had access to the official archives, considerable doubt must arise as to their genuineness. Cordus, too, inserted in his biographies letters alleged to have been written by emperors² and speeches and acclamations uttered in the senate-house,³ but, to judge from the specimens preserved in the *Historia Augusta*, these "documents" deserve even less credence than those of Maximus.

The precedent thus established was followed by some of the authors of the *Historia Augusta*. The collection contains in all about 150 alleged documents, including 68 letters, 60 speeches and proposals

¹ *Marc.*, xxv. 8; *Com.*, xviii. 1; *Pert.*, ii. 8; xv. 8; see Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 108 f.

² *Cl. Alb.*, vii. 2-6; *Max.*, xii. 5.

³ *Gord.*, xi.

INTRODUCTION

to the people or the senate, and 20 senatorial decrees and acclamations.¹ The distribution of these, however, is by no means uniform. Of the major *vitae* from Hadrian to Elagabalus inclusive, only the *Commodus* and the *Macrinus* are provided with "documents," and these have but two apiece.² On the other hand, the group of *vitae* of the Maximini, the Gordiani, and Maximus and Balbinus contains in all 26 such pieces, and Pollio's *Valeriani*, *Tyranni Triginta* and *Claudius*³ have together 27. It is, however, Vopiscus who heads the list, for his five biographies contain no less than 59 so-called documents of various kinds.

In a discussion of the genuineness of these documents a distinction must be drawn between the speeches, on the one hand, and the letters and senatorial decrees and acclamations on the other. Since the time of Thucydides it had been customary for an historian to insert speeches in his history, and it was an established convention that they might be more or less fictitious. Accordingly, none would question the right of the biographer to attribute to the subject of his biography any speech that he might wish to insert in his narrative. With the letters and decrees, however, the case is different. Like those cited by Suetonius, these claim to be actual documents and it is from this claim that the question of their authenticity must proceed. In spite of occasional expressions of scepticism, the genuineness of these documents was not seriously questioned until 1870, when C. Czwalina published an examination of the letters contained in

¹ O. Lécirvain, *Études sur l'Histoire Auguste* (Paris, 1904), p. 45 f.

² *Com.*, xviii.-xix.; xx.; *Macr.*, ii. 4-5; vi. 2-9.

³ There are none in the *Gallienus*.

INTRODUCTION

the *vita* of Avidius Cassius.¹ He showed that various letters, professedly written by different persons, show the same style and tricks of expression, that they were all written with the purpose of praising the clemency and generosity of Marcus, and that they contain several historical errors. He thus reached the conclusion that they were forgeries, but not composed by the author of the *vita* since his comments on them are inconsistent with their content.²

A similar examination of the letters and documents in the other biographies, particularly in those attributed to Pollio and Vopiscus, reveals the hand of the forger even more plainly.³ They abound not only in errors of fact that would be impossible in genuine documents, but also in the rhetorical bombast and the stylistic peculiarities that are characteristic of the authors of these series. The documents cited by Pollio, moreover, show the same aim and purpose as his text—the glorification of Claudius Gothicus as the reputed ancestor of Constantius Chlorus and the vilification of his predecessor Gallienus,—while the documents of Vopiscus show the same tendency to sentimentalize over the past glories of Rome and over the greatness of the senate that is characteristic of his own work, and, like those cited by Pollio, they too have a purpose—the praise of Vopiscus' hero Probus.

An entirely different type of spurious material is represented by the frequent interpolations in the text. These consist of later additions, of passages

¹ *De Epistolarum Actorumque quae a Scriptoribus H. A. proferuntur Fide atque Auctoritate*. Pars I. (Bonn, 1870); see also E. Klebs, *Rhein. Mus.*, xliii. (1888), p. 328 f.

² e.g. ix. 10 and xiv. 8; see Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 197 f.

³ Peter, *Scriptores*, p. 156 f.

INTRODUCTION

introduced by editors of the whole series, and of notes added by commentators, presumably on the margins, and subsequently incorporated in the body of the work.¹ Frequently they are inserted with utter disregard to the context, so that the continuity of a passage is completely interrupted. They vary in size from passages of several pages to brief notes of a few lines. The most extensive is a long passage in the *vita* of Marcus, which is inserted between the two main portions of the biography.² It consists of an epitome of the events of the latter part of his reign, enumerated again and at greater length in the second main portion of the *vita*. That this epitome is an interpolation is evident not only from the double narrative of certain events, but also from the fact that it agrees closely with the narrative of Marcus' reign which is found in Eutropius.³

An extensive interpolation has been made also in the *Vita Severi*. Here, however, the problem is less simple. The detailed narrative of the earlier part of Severus' reign⁴ is followed by a brief summary of the events of the whole period of his rule,⁵ closing with a long address to Diocletian.⁶ This summary is little more than a duplicate of the account of Severus' reign as given by Aurelius Victor in his *Caesares*,⁷

¹ Peter has attempted in his second edition of the text to distinguish the various types by different kinds of parentheses; see his *Praefatio*, p. xxxiv.

² c. xv. 3.—xix. 12.

³ *Breviarium*, viii. 11-14. Eutropius' material is generally supposed to have been taken from an extensive history of the empire, now lost, which is usually termed the "Imperial Chronicle" (*Kaiserchronik*); see A. Enmann, *Eine Verlorene Geschichte der Römischen Kaiser*, *Philologus*, Suppl. Band iv. (1884), pp. 337-501.

⁴ c. i.—xvii. 4.

⁵ c. xvii. 5—xix.

⁶ c. xx.—xxi.

⁷ *Caes.*, xx. 1-3.