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PREJUDICES AGAINST PROVINCIALS IN THE *HISTORIA AUGUSTA**

ASKO TIMONEN

The unidentified author¹ of the *Historia Augusta* (HA), the collection of biographies of the emperors and pretenders from Hadrian to Numerian, conceals neither his political opinions nor his idealism of *libertas* and of the division of ruling power between the senate, emperors and their armies.² The author insists

* An earlier version of this paper was delivered during the Fifth International Summer Symposium on "History – Literature – Philosophy. Their connections and mutual relations in ancient and modern world", held at Seili Island (University of Turku) during July, 1991.

¹ On this very much discussed theme, see the introductions in the editions of D. Magie, *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, vols. I–III, London 1979–1982 and P. Soverini, *Scrittori della Storia Augusta*, vol. I–III, Torino 1983.

² On *libertas*, see *Opil.* 7,1 and *Car.* 3,1; the role of the Senate emerges with special emphasis in the appraisal of *recusatio imperii* of Macrinus (*Opil.* 5,4; 6,1; 6,5), of Gordianus I (*Maximin.* 14,3; 16,1–2; *Gord.* 8,5–6), of Tacitus (*Tac.* 4,1–8) and of Probus (*Prob.* 10,5–6). On the tradition of *libertas*, *recusatio* and *nobilis servitus* during the Empire, see: C. Wirszubski, *Libertas as a Political Idea at Rome during the Late Republic and Early Principate*, New York 1950; J. Béranger, *Le refus du pouvoir*, *MH* 5 (1948) 178–196; T. Adam, *Clementia Principis*, Stuttgart 1970, 120 (*nobilis servitus*); A. Wallace-Hadrill, *Civilis Princeps: Between Citizen and King*, *JRS* 72 (1982) 36, 44; the Senate in the propaganda of the Emperor, see P.A. Brunt, *The Role of the Senate in the Augustan Regime*, *CQ* 34 (1984) 423–442; D. Kienast, *Der heilige Senat. Senatskult und kaiserlichen Senat*, *Chiron* 15 (1985) 253–282; W. Eder, *Augustus and the Power of Tradition: The Augustan Principate as Binding Link between Republic and Empire*, in *Between Republic and Empire, Interpretations of Augustus and His Principate*, ed. by K. Raaflaub and M. Toher, Berkeley – Los Angeles – Oxford 1990, 71–122. See also R. Syme, *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford 1979 (repr.), 149–161 and A. Scheithauer, *Kaiserbild und literarisches*

that his style of presenting these themes is that of a layman (Trig. tyr. 1,1 ff.):

Scriptis iam pluribus libris non historico nec diserto sed pedestri adloquio, ad eam temporum venimus seriem, in qua per annos...

This sentence may, on the one hand, be considered as eloquent modesty of the preface. It may, on the other hand, provoke one to take the author seriously and regard him as a senatorial layman.

The topic of interest in this report is that of prejudices against provincials, as expressed by the unknown, senatorial-minded author. The range of this paper, with regard to negative connotations, shall be limited to the pejorative prejudices found in this compilation.³ Further, there shall deliberately be no attempt here to discuss the question of whether prejudices were common in the circles of urban Rome. Rather, we shall consider whether the author's opinions of provincials are prejudicial and, therefore, based on no substantiating evidence, yet used as evidence themselves. A historian, in fact, strives for *fides historica*, "telling all the sides of a historical event", a concept also alluded to in the HA.⁴ Nevertheless, in this compilation, racial differences are not discussed in the context of *fides historica*. In contrast to Caesar's *De Bello Gallico*, Herodian's *Histories* and Ammianus Marcellinus' *Res Gestae* (three works containing geographic digressions in which the population, landscape, culture and sources of livelihood are described) the HA is not a geographical historiography. It is the opinion of the author of this current article, therefore, that the appearance of prejudicial descriptions, statements and arguments in the HA, and like historiographies, are important topics to be examined.

The specific questions to be addressed herein are the following: Which

Programm. Untersuchungen zur Tendenz der Historia Augusta, Darmstadt 1987, 38–39.

³ The favourable ones are hard to be find. I only found imperialistic praise as in the biography of Probus (Prob. 15). Here the fierce barbarians have been slain; the Gallic provinces made free; and the rest of the natives subjugated to be useful provincials of the commonwealth.

⁴ See e.g. Trig. tyr. 11,6: *Hos ego versus a quodam grammatico translatos ita posui ut fidem servarem, non quo non melius potuerint transferri, sed ut fidelitas historica servaretur, quam ego prae ceteris custodiendam putavi, qui quod ad eloquentiam pertinet nihil curo.* Cf. also Claud. 11,5, Aurelian. 12,4; 17,1; 35,1 and Quatt. tyr. 15,9; on this topic in the HA, see J. Burian, *Fides historica als methodologischen Grundsatz der HA*, *Klio* 69 (1977) 285–298.

provincials are primarily described in a prejudicial manner in the HA? How do such prejudices manifest themselves stylistically in the biographical text? What is their origin? Are they in accordance with traditional attitudes, or historical literary sources, and are they in harmony with the views found in contemporary historiography of that time? The final, and perhaps most intriguing, concept questions whether the prejudices are traditional and, therefore, rather pointless biases or whether they are, in fact, deliberately political, with a special function.

Pejorative prejudices in the HA are not rare. They are encountered most frequently in the biographies from Caracalla to Numerian, with a total of 20 referrals to provincials in a negative context. In the preceding biographies, from Hadrian to Clodius Albinus, only six similar instances are noted. Two of these are quite neutral quotes on the rioting in Alexandria and Achaia.⁵ The remaining four, descriptions of the Syrians and Antiochians, are frankly prejudicial in nature. They deal with Syrian and Antiochian luxuries and the demoralizing effect of such on Lucius Verus, the adoptive son of Antoninus Pius and the *collega* of Marc Aurel.⁶ The effects of luxury were described as similar on the legions stationed in Syria. Only Avidius Cassius, in the HA praised by Marc Aurel for his Roman strictness and rigor and therefore nominated by him for the *legatus* of Syria, was able to enforce strict military discipline and alienate the troops from the luxurious lifestyle of Antioch and Daphne.⁷

Aegyptii, Galli, Syri – the most slandered provincials

The HA leads us to discuss three groups of provincials: the Egyptians, the Gauls and the Syrians. They are most frequently criticized and most crudely estimated. Let us first consider the Egyptians. In the biography of the L. Mussius

⁵ Hadr. 12,1; Pius 5,4–5.

⁶ Ver. 4,4–6, cf. 6,9–7,10; Avid. 5,4–12; 9,1; Verus was in Syria 162–66, see D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle*, Darmstadt 1990, 144.

⁷ His accomplishment in doing so, however, may have cost Marc Aurel ultimate success: Cassius was hailed *imperator* in 175! On Avidius Cassius, see esp. J. Spiess, *Avidius Cassius und der Aufstand des Jahres 175*, Diss. München 1975 and M.L. Astarita, *Avidio Cassio*, Roma 1983.

Aemilianus⁸, the prefect of Egypt during 259–261 and later strangled in the Tullianum by the order of Gallienus, the author characterizes the Egyptians as madmen and fools, who rioted because of trifles.⁹ In the biography of C. Iulius Saturninus¹⁰, governor of Syria under Probus and probably in 281 hailed emperor in Antioch, the author completes his view of the Egyptians, the "madmen" (Quatt. tyr. 7,4 ff.):

*Sunt enim Aegyptii, ut satis nosti, inventi ventosi, furibundi, iactantes, iniuriosi atque adeo vani, liberi, novarum rerum usque ad cantilenas publicas cupientes, versificatores, epigrammatarii, mathematici, haruspices medici.*¹¹

In the second example here considered, the Gauls are labelled as revolting and revolutionists. According to the author, the Gauls are *gens hominum inquietissima et avida semper vel faciendi principis vel imperii* (Quatt. tyr. 7,1).¹² In the author's opinion, the Gallic temperament is rough, surly and frequently a source of danger for emperors. Revolts in Gaul are reported several times.¹³

Thirdly, the Syrians are maligned. As already noted, Syrian Antioch is regarded as a luxurious and vicious city in the account of the HA. The Syrians themselves are portrayed as unreliable and irresponsible.¹⁴ In the HA, Severus

⁸ On Mussius Aemilianus, see H.-G. Pflaum, *Les carrières procuratoriennes équestres sous le Haut-Empire romain*, Paris 1960/61 (Suppl. 1982), 926, Nr. 349; T.D. Barnes, *Some Persons in the Historia Augusta*, Phoenix 26 (1972) 146; Kienast 1990, 224–225.

⁹ *Est hoc familiare populi Aegyptiorum, ut velut furiosi ac dementes de levissimis quibus usque ad summa rei publicae pericula perducantur... familiari ergo sibi furore*; see more closely Trig. tyr. 22,1 ff.

¹⁰ On Iulius Saturninus, see Barnes 171–172 and Kienast 1990, 253.

¹¹ Egypt is, in the opinion of the author, *praeturbida civitas* (Quatt. tyr. 7,3).

¹² Cf. also Gall. 4,3: *Galli, quibus insitum est leves ac degenerantes a virtute Romana et luxuriosos principes ferre non posse*, and Trig. tyr. 3,7: *more illo, quo Galli novarum rerum semper sunt cupidi*.

¹³ Alex. 59,5: *Gallicanae mentes, ut sese habent durae ac retorridae et saepe imperatoribus graves*; on the revolts, see Sept. Sev. 10,1; Pesc. 2,1; Alb. 1,1; Gall. 6,6; Trig. tyr. 5,1; Prob. 18,5.

¹⁴ Aurelian. 31,1: *Rarum est ut Syri fidem servant, immo difficile*. Tac. 3,5: *cogitate tam leves*

Alexander (ruler during 222–235) is said to have not liked being regarded as a Syrian. This is said several times.¹⁵ The author, however, persistently refers to Alexander as a Syrian, albeit a good one, because he was made good.¹⁶

Prejudices against other provincials

Slightly negative attitudes towards the other groups of provincials are rather uncommon, though not totally lacking. Two clear cases deserve attention. In the first case, a generalizing presupposition is applied to the Africans. In his propaganda campaign to the troops Maximinus Thrax (emperor during the years 235–238) alleges the Africans to be unreliable (Maximin. 18,1): "*Afri fidem fregerunt. nam quando tenuerunt?*"¹⁷ It is remarkable, however, that the author himself uses the Africans in his own propaganda against Maximinus, as in Gord. 15,1:

Dum haec aguntur, in Africa contra duos Gordianos Capelianus quidam, Gordiano et in privata vita semper adversus et ab ipso imperatore iam, cum Mauros Maximini iussu regeret veteranus, dimissus, conlectis Mauris et tumultuaria manu accepto a Gordiano successore Carthaginem petit, ad quem omnis fide Punica Carthaginensium populus inclinavit. ¹⁸

D. Magie explains that the expression *fides Punica* is a reference to the proverbial bad faith of the ancient Carthaginians.¹⁹ Thus, at the same time, this

esse mentes Syrorum, ut regnare vel feminas cupiant potius quam nostram perpeti sanctimoniam; the latter is the opinion of a consul Velius Cornificius Gordianus, referring to Zenobia of Palmyra; the person of Gordianus is fictitious, see Barnes 159.

¹⁵ Alex. 28,7; 38,4; 44,3; 64,3; 65,1.

¹⁶ Alex. 68,4: *Hi sunt, qui bonum principem Surum fecerunt;* the author means the men in the emperor's council.

¹⁷ Cf. Gord. 14,1: *Afri fidem Punicam praestiterunt.*

¹⁸ See also Gord. 16,3: *Haec ubi comperit senior Gordianus, cum in Africa nihil praesidii et a Maximino multum timoris et fides Punica perurgueret...*

¹⁹ This is very obvious. The author uses corresponding words as Livy: *Afri fidem fregerunt; Afri fidem Punicam praestiterunt; fides Punica;* Livy (21,4,9) says of Hannibal: *inhumana crudelitas*

expression is a prejudice *par excellence*, a generalization.

Secondly, according to the biography, the emperor Maximinus' Thracian ancestry bears witness to his "barbarism or semibarbarism".²⁰ The use of the words *barbarus* and *semibarbarus* conveys the author's stance that the ruler's Thracian origin is proof not only of his racial divergence but also of his uncultivated manners and lack of education. To be a Thracian was regarded as barbaric.²¹ The fact that Maximinus is blamed is not surprising; indeed he is regarded as an illegal emperor in late Latin historiography.²² The prejudices against his origin serve to criticize his military *coup d'état*.

Prejudices against the other provinces and provincials are apparently accidental and do not necessarily represent partiality. These provinces are regarded as typical provinces which are sometimes plagued with violence. However, no particular attention is paid to the racial preconditions that might have aroused restlessness.²³

The style and strategy in the use of prejudice in text

In the textual structure of the biographies, prejudices lie in two main positions. The first is in the beginning of a chapter as an introduction or as a quotation. Secondly, prejudicial references may be manifested as short, self-evident generalizations, in the form of attributes or epithets. It is the function that

perfidia plus quam Punica; see Magie, vol. II, 350 n. 2.

²⁰ Maximin. 1,7: *ne utroque parente barbaro genitus imperator esse videretur*; see also *ibid.* 2,5.

²¹ Fest. 9,1: *saevissimi omnium gentium Thraces fuerunt*; cf. Herod. 6,8,1.

²² Compare the accounts of the *breviaria* (Eutr. 9,1; Epit. 24,3–4; Aurelius Victor, Caes. 23,3–24,1) to the account of the HA (Maximin. 8,1): it is only Aurelius Victor who says that the Senate approved of him; according to the HA, Thracia, annexed to the empire by Trajan, was wisely enough, given up by Aurelian (Aurelian. 39,7), for the people living in the district were restless and the area was hard to defend (Pius 5,4; Comm. 13,5).

²³ There are reports on Achaia (Pius 5,5), Asia (Valer. 1,5), Britannia (*Britanni* are famous of their rebellions – but also these are only mentionings, as Hadr. 5,2, Aur. 8,7–8, Comm. 6,2 and Pert. 3,5–10), Mauretians (Hadr. 5,8; 6,7; 12,7; Gord. 23,4), Pannonians (Comm. 13,5–6; Aurelian. 24,3; Prob. 3,1; Car. 4,3; 9,4), Illyrians and Moesians (Tac. 3,6; Car. 4,3) and Spain (Aur. 22,11; Alb. 13,6; Quatt. tyr. 9,5).

primarily determines, in most cases, which of these two forms is used to present the prejudicial element. Three examples are cited below for clarification.

The introduction of Trig. tyr. 22,1–4 provides the author's explanation for the coup of Mussius Aemilianus (see above). As a matter of fact, the author is so well-disposed towards Aemilianus that he places the blame for the coup more on the Alexandrians than on Aemilianus – *qua re coactus Aemilianus sumpsit imperium, cum sciret sibi undecumque pereundum* (ibid. 22,4). This agrees well with the theme of that portion of the text dealing with the pretenders. They are primarily whitewashed to serve the purpose of the author in assailing the politics of the emperor Gallienus.²⁴ In so doing, it was easier for the author to hide behind a prejudice than to analyze the causes of his possible hostility.

A second example is found in a quotation. A post in a restless country was proposed not to be suitable for a man who might instigate a coup, as can be seen in the biographies of the four pretenders (Quatt. tyr. 8–9). Here the emperor Aurelian, in deciding against sending the rather capable Julius Saturninus to Egypt, seriously contemplates and seems to be swayed by a quotation from a letter written by Hadrian.²⁵ In characterizing Egyptians, Hadrian is unfair. Saturninus is given an important commission, the *limitis orientalis ducatus*, but with the restriction that he must never set foot in Egypt; because "the Egyptians are puffed up, madmen, boastful... and Saturninus is a Gaul."²⁶ In fact, Saturninus was not a Gaul, and the prejudicial statements against the Egyptians sound halting.²⁷ Later, in the year 281, Saturninus, the governor of Syria, was declared emperor in Syrian Antioch.²⁸ Zosimus reports (1,66,1) that Aurelian sent this friend for the governorship of the Syrian capital, also known as a

²⁴ As can be seen in the continuing lines of the narration on Aemilianus (Trig. tyr. 22,5): *consenserunt ei Aegyptiacus exercitus, maxime in Gallieni odium* (the hatred is also the author's).

²⁵ Quatt. tyr. 7,3. According to the author (Quatt. tyr. 7,6) the letter was taken from the works of his freedman Phlegon; on it see W. Schmid, *Die Koexistenz von Sarapiskult und Christentum im Hadriansbrief bei Vopiscus*, BHAC 1964/65 (1966) 153 ff.; briefly, R. Syme, *Ipse ille patriarcha*, BHAC 1966/67 (1968) 121–122.

²⁶ See Quatt. tyr. 7,1–3; cf. 9,1.

²⁷ On Iulius Saturninus, see A. Stein, RE II A, 1, 213–215; Syme, BHAC 1966/67 (1968) 120; Kienast 1990, 253.

²⁸ Quatt. tyr. 9,2–3.

turbulent city.²⁹

A final example of style and strategy in the use of prejudice in the text is seen in short, self-evident generalizations³⁰, found quite commonly in the compilation:

Verum Gallicanae mentes, ut sese habent durae ac retorridae et saepe imperatoribus graves (Alex. 59,4)

Galli, quibus insitum est... (Gall. 4,3)

more illo, quo Galli novarum rerum semper sunt cupidi... (Trig. tyr. 3,7)

Rarum est ut Syri fidem servant, immo difficile. (Aurelian. 31,1)

bracata Gallia (Prob. 18,4)³¹

Aegyptiorum incitatus furore (Quatt. tyr. 3,1)

Sunt enim Aegyptii, ut satis nosti, inventi ventosi, furibundi, iactantes... (Quatt. tyr. 7,4)

The origin of the prejudices in the HA

One can suggest two main origins of the prejudices in the HA: (i) old literary sources and the archives of the compiler and (ii) the HA author's

²⁹ Saturninus' revolt, see Prob. 18,4.

³⁰ Self-evident are also the estimations of Severus Alexander, in which is declared that he does not want to be a Syrian (as already noted), and the statements on Syrian luxury; see Ver. 4,4 Syria + *luxuria* and Opil. 8,4 Antioch + *luxuria*, without any explanations.

³¹ *Bracae*, "breeches" was the native costume of the northern barbarians. *Bracata Gallia* was often used to designate the three provinces of Farther Gaul, as contrasted with *Gallia Togata*, i.e. Gallia Narbonensis. In the first century, *bracae* was regarded as a barbarian garment, *barbarum tegumen* (see Tac. Hist. 2,20). Magie explains (vol. II, 260 n. 1) that these kind of trousers were not uncommon in the third century, but their use in Rome was prohibited at the end of the fourth century. So, *bracata Gallia*, is a very good example of how an original classification is transferred to a geographical one. Thereafter, the prejudice is so well-established that it is very hard to detect.

contemporary literary counterparts. They both reflect the traditional manner of thinking in imperial Rome. This argument for the influence of traditional views³² – the relationship between historiographical narrative and the policy of Roman statesmen – can be seen in an example of the Gauls. In discussing them, Caesar cannot be disregarded. There is a rather long digression on the manners and customs of the Gauls and Germans in the Commentaries (6,11 ff.). Caesar takes up tribal and domestic factions, rival groups of tribes, religious observances and human sacrifices, peculiar customs, hospitality etc. For Caesar, the Gauls were an interesting people: enthusiastic, impulsive, quickwitted, versatile, vainglorious and ostentatious, childishly inquisitive and childishly credulous, rash, sanguine, inconstant, arrogant in victory and despondent in defect, submissive as women to their priests, impatient of law and discipline, yet capable of loyalty to a strong and sympathetic ruler.³³

These observations are those of a conqueror and pacifier. They reflect the diversity of the Gauls in that the subjects are not collectively portrayed as barbarians; many of the peoples are described as human (*humani*).³⁴ The *imperator's* description of the Gauls as impulsive and quickwitted (positive connotations), or impatient of law and discipline (negative ones), suits only the purpose of emphasizing the difficult task of controlling them. The Gauls were of great interest to Caesar. Therefore his prejudices are conscious, or seem to be so, confirming *De Bello Gallico* as a geographic historiography.

In the case of the *De Vita Caesarum* of Suetonius, the genre and model of the HA, real prejudices arise. This can be seen in the following quotation (Iul. 76,3), where the author, preferring Augustan politics (Aug. 40,3), criticizes the politics of the dictator:

³² In this connection, it is appropriate to mention one of the most fundamental academic reports on the racial prejudices in Rome, namely A.N. Sherwin-White's *Racial prejudice in imperial Rome*, Cambridge 1967 (on racism, see esp. p. 99); for a collection of hostile opinions about Egyptians, see O. Seeck, *Geschichte des Untergangs der antiken Welt IV* (1923) 503 ff.

³³ See the introduction xxxix, in T. Rice Holmes' edition of *C. Iuli Caesaris De Bello Gallico*, New York 1979 (repr.).

³⁴ See A. Pallavisini, *Tradizione e novità nel giudizio di Cesare sui barbari nel "De Bello Gallico"*, *Contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica*, 1 (1972) 101–102.

Eadem licentia spreto patrio more magistratus in pluris annos ordinavit, decem praetoriis viris consularia ornamenta tribuit, civitate donatos et quosdam e semibarbaris Gallorum recepit in curiam.

The Gauls are, furthermore, mockingly referred to as "trousered" in the context where the author reports on the opposition of Caesar's tyranny.³⁵ The dictator's open dependence on his loyal favorites, to the exclusion of senatorial participation in the government, is here criticized. Moreover, although referrals to them are more abundant, pejorative prejudices against the Egyptians rarely surface. Suetonius' descriptions of the Egyptians and Alexandrians are antiquarian rarities and harmless. When he narrates that the Alexandrians called Vespasianus "Cybiosactes" (thereby mocking his avarice), he criticizes more the emperor than the people. The Cybiosactes-metaphor is illustrative of the many kinds of stories told of the lively Alexandrians.³⁶

The essential point of these two examples seems to reveal one important fact: The provincials are regarded quite neutrally and fairly when they are kept subjugated under Caesar's rule. However, when they influence or threaten Roman politics (as suggested above by Suetonius), the author is one-sided.

So, the first alternative for the origin of the prejudices in the HA may be its literary sources (i). The author must have consulted especially Cassius Dio and Herodian.³⁷ Herodian's interest in ethnicity is, to some extent, motivated by his desire to explain the upheaval of his age³⁸ and – what is important for this

³⁵ Jul. 80,2: "*Gallos Caesar in triumphum ducit, idem in curiam; Galli bracas deposuerunt, latum clavum sumpserunt*".

³⁶ Cybiosactes, see Vesp. 19,2. The Romans were fascinated with Egypt and the Egyptians; on this topic, see A.A. Barrett, *Caligula – The Corruption of Power*, London 1989, 221.

³⁷ Either directly or via some lost source. On the sources of the compilation, see esp. T.D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta*, Bruxelles 1978; see also F. Kolb, *Literarische Beziehung zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta*, Bonn 1972; Cassius Dio is not as rich in antiquarian or geographic remarks as Herodian; noteworthy *loci*: 12,2–3; 39,45,7 and 77(78),6,1 on the Gauls; 77(78),20,1 on Caracalla's luxurious life in Antioch; transient estimations like in Herodian are rare.

³⁸ In 1,5,8 Herodian expresses his Roman imperialistic view (see also 1,6,5). In 1,6,9 he blames the barbarians as avaricious. Let us remember that already Livy (21,20,8) and Tacitus (Germ. 15 and 21) tell us about avaricious barbarians; C.R. Whittaker, *Herodian*, vol. I (1969) 4–5. Herodian stresses the growing particularism among the semi-Romanized ethnic groups in the

paper – to describe the character of barbarians and provincials, such as the Syrians, Illyrians, British, Greeks, Egyptians and Alexandrians.³⁹ In Herodian's opinion, the Syrians are rebels. They are also a celebrating and luxurious people.⁴⁰ He says that the Syrians are "sensible" and "sharp-witted", contrasted to the people of the northern provinces.⁴¹ The Egyptians (more precisely, the Alexandrians) were, according to Herodian, "by nature extremely frivolous and easily roused for very trivial reasons".⁴²

The most obvious contemporary model (ii) for the HA is Ammianus Marcellinus. Scholars have indicated the influences of Ammianus on the HA.⁴³ This also applies to the prejudices against the Egyptians. Ronald Syme, in his *Bonner-Historia-Augusta* contribution "Ipse ille patriarcha", proposes that the long digression on Egypt by Ammianus (22,15 ff.) has influenced the HA.⁴⁴ Ammianus depicts Alexandria as a seditious and turbulent city, and the Egyptians as a serious, gloomy and quarrelsome people.⁴⁵ Syria and its cities were, according to Ammianus, full of enticements of luxury, which a good ruler

empire who provided the military backing for men like Septimius Severus, Pescennius Niger, Maximinus, Gordian; on the particularism, see C.E. Van Sickle, *Particularism in the Roman Empire during the Military Anarchy*, *AJPh* 51 (1930) 343 ff.

³⁹ Whittaker 116–7.

⁴⁰ Herod. 2,7,9; 2,10,6.

⁴¹ Herod. 2,9,11; see also 2,10,7 and 3,11,8. Whittaker says (203 n. 2) that Herodian makes the contrast between the overcivilized Hellenistic East with their trivial natures and petty rivalries (Herod. 2,7,9; 3,2,9) and the semibarbarian North which was essentially a crude military force (Herod. 4,7,3; 7,8,4).

⁴² The translation is Whittaker's (421); he reminds that this characterizing is a cliché of the sophists, e.g. Dion of Prusa (Or. 32). Herodian repeats (4,9,2) the same peculiar habit of the Alexandrians to abuse authorities as Suetonius introduced in *Vesp.* 19,2; see also Dio 65 (66),8,2–7; cf. Whittaker 423 n. 2.

⁴³ J. Schwarts, *Sur la date de l'Histoire Auguste*, *BFS* 40 (1961–1962) 169 ff.; J. Straub, *Heidnische Geschichtsapologetik in der Christlichen Spätantike. Untersuchungen über Zeit und Tendenz der Historia Augusta*, Bonn 1963, 53 ff; R. Syme, *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, Oxford 1968.

⁴⁴ Syme, *BHAC* 1966/67 (1968) 121.

⁴⁵ *Amm.* 22,6,1–2: *genus hominum controversum et assuetudine perplexius litigandi*; *ibid.* 22,11,4: *seditionibus crebris agitur et turbulentis*; *ibid.* 22,16,15: *internisque seditionibus diu aspere fatigata*.

(meaning Julianus) could nevertheless resist. And the Gauls are *avidī iurgiorum et sublatius insolentes*.⁴⁶ These examples allow one to imagine that Ammianus conforms to the everyday traditional thinking (as did Herodian and, before him, Caesar and Suetonius). When comparing Ammianus' opinions to those expounded in the HA, one can conclude that the author of the latter evidently consulted these established, traditional models. His outlook on life follows the classical prejudice against provincials and barbarians.⁴⁷ Perhaps he used Ammianus' and Herodian's works quite extensively. Alternatively, it is also possible that he had already adopted his views from his cultural environment and education in the capital.

The HA is, however, more malevolent than its sources and models. This is so because of the eclectic nature of the author's use of various sources. The biographies of late antiquity were eclectic, as were the contemporary abbreviated histories (*breviaria*). The sources were only a kind of stockpile for the writers. The "substantiating" evidence used in the HA was taken for one-sided purposes.

Traditional bias in the use of deliberate politics

The quite selective use of prejudices indicates traditional biases which the author deliberately chooses to express his political point of view:

Using opinions about Syrians, the author supposedly describes the character of rulers in the context of a biography. A graphic example involves Elagabalus and Severus Alexander. Elagabalus was the Syrian emperor who, according to the biography, was the prototype of luxurious and unchastened living.⁴⁸ This tyrant, nonetheless, was supposed to have been a good ruler.⁴⁹ On

⁴⁶ On Syria, Amm. 22,10; on the Gauls, *ibid.* 15,12,1.

⁴⁷ The fundamental research on the motives and ideology of the HA are esp. N. Baynes, *The Historia Augusta. Its Date and Purpose*, Oxford 1926, H. Stern, *Date et destinataire de l'Histoire Auguste*, Paris 1953 and K.P. Johne, *Kaiserbiographie und Senatsaristokratie. Untersuchungen zur Datierung und sozialen Herkunft der HA*, Berlin 1976.

⁴⁸ *Luxuria* Heliog. 19–32 (!); *inpudicitia* and *voluptates* Heliog. 19,3; 24,2; 25,5–7; 26,3–5; 30,3,5; 31,1; 31,6–7.

⁴⁹ Great expectations for him, Heliog. 3,1–3; compare also to Epit. 23,3 and Eutr. 8,22.

the contrary, Severus Alexander was presented as the ideal *princeps*, who tried to abolish these vices from the state⁵⁰, as he felt such vices to be a sign of Elagabalus' inferiority.⁵¹ In stressing Severus Alexander's distaste for being referred to as Syrian, the author actually implies that Alexander appreciates the liberty and power of senators which was evident under this emperor.⁵²

The legality of Roman rule in the Syrian province is also justified through the use of prejudices against the Syrians. "The Syrians were so light-minded that they even made a woman (Zenobia) their ruler" (Tac. 3,5). This is the author's argument approving of the rough policy of Aurelian in Palmyra. To be sure, Aurelian's alternating severity or cruelty is also criticized, but for a different reason, that of his one-sided military training. (This was contrasted to the civility of the emperor of the senate, Marcus Claudius Tacitus, who ruled briefly after Aurelian from 275–276).⁵³ Aurelian's cruelty, nevertheless, constituted insufficient reason to condemn Roman rule. Indeed, it was justified, through prejudice, as superior to Syrian rulership.

Prejudices against the Gauls are used to emphasize the crudeness of both pretenders and also of legal rulers, such as Gallienus⁵⁴. The HA is very unfair towards Gallienus, probably because of his administrative policy which, in effect, suppressed the position of the senators for some time during the third century.⁵⁵ In this instance, the Gauls are only a tool for the author to expound

⁵⁰ Esp. Alex. 23,3–7; 24,2–6; 25,10; 27,1–4; 34,2–4; 39,2; 40,3,11; 41,1; 45,4; 66,3–4; his person represents the exact opposite of Elagabalus: Alex. 4,1–3; 18,1–3; 20; 33,3–4; 34,1; 34,5–8; 37,1; 37,2–12; 39,1; 40,1; 41,1–3; 42,1–3; 51,1–3.

⁵¹ This kind of contrast can also be noticed in the biographies of Lucius Verus (inferior to Marc Aurel) and Opellius Macrinus (disappointment after Caracalla).

⁵² If we are to believe Herodian (6,1,2–3); but see his conclusion of the coup in 5,8,10 and J.B. Campbell, *The Emperor and the Roman Army 31 BC–AD 235*, Oxford 1984, 389.

⁵³ Compare the narrations on Aurelian's war against Zenobia (Aurelian. 25,2–28,5, quite neutral description) and on his crushing the revolt of Palmyrenes (31,1–6, criticism on his excessive severity); on his cruelty, see Aurelian. 21,5–9; 31,4–5; 36,2; 39,8; 44,1–2; Prob. 8,1; he was according to the author *irascens*, *vehemens* and *ferox* soldier (Aurelian. 18,2; 21,5; 32,3; Car. 1,2), who turned out to be too severe; on appraisal of Tacitus, see Tac. 3 ff.

⁵⁴ See Gall. 4,3: *Galli, quibus insitum est leves ac degenerantes a virtute Romana et luxuriosos principes* [i. e. Gallienus] *ferre non posse*.

⁵⁵ He finds faults with the emperor's policy: *contemptus* in Gall. 1,2; 3,7; 4,3; 6,3; 9,1; 10,1;

his own ideas on policy. This is quite clever, but transparent.

Using prejudices against the Egyptians, the author superficially explains the unreliability of possible pretenders (Iulius Saturninus and Firmus⁵⁶). The author raises the issue of Egyptian madness (*furor*)⁵⁷, defined as a weakness in some leaders. Specifically, the HA tells (Maximin. 17) about the *furor* of Maximinus Thrax, a semibarbaric, cruel tyrant. In another referral to *furor*, Herodian, reveals that he is not fond of Severus Alexander. In a chapter (6,9,1–2), Herodian tells about the occasional madness of Alexander who, according to the HA, was peaceful. In fact, *furor* seems to have been a characteristic rather indiscriminantly applied, as suited the purpose of the author, to any barbarian, to any provincial or, for that matter, to any legal ruler, in biography. Is Herodian's comment on the *furor* of Severus Alexander an indication that Herodian considered this ruler a barbarian?⁵⁸ This is difficult to say, because of the widespread use of the *furor* concept. Nevertheless, Egyptians are, indeed, considered mad. Finally, the HA author uses the multiplicity of fervent religious factions to justify prejudicial stances against the Egyptian subjects (Quatt. tyr. 7,5). Thus, the legality of Roman rule is thereby considered necessary.

In biographical historiography, prejudices are authoritatively presented as somewhat tricky evidence. Historical events (as a consequence of political and social developments in Rome in the third and fourth century) provided the political background which the author used. Philosophy provided the ideas and ideals. Lastly, the literature of old times and of the author's own time offered

11,3; 12,6; 17,1; *inprobitas* in Gall. 14,1; 14,5; *voluptates* 14,5; *luxuria* 16 ff.; *crudelitas* in Gall. 7,2; 9,7; 11,2; 18,1 and Trig. tyr. 22; still, Gallienus' time was not epoch-making in regard to the imperial administrative policy; see L. Homo, La disparition des privilèges administratifs du sénat romain (au cours du IIIe siècle), RH 137 (1921); id., Les privilèges administratifs du sénat romain sous l'empire et leur disparition graduelle au cours du IIIe siècle, RH 138 (1921) 16–19; M. Christol, Essai sur l'évolution des carrières sénatoriales (dans la seconde moitié du IIIe siècle ap. J. C, Paris 1986, 39–44, 165–166; L. De Blois, The Policy of the Emperor Gallienus, Leiden 1976, 55–57, 86–87.

⁵⁶ On Firmus and his coup, see Quatt. tyr. 3,1: *Aegyptiorum incitatus furore*; Kienast 1990, 234–235.

⁵⁷ *Furor* (Quatt. tyr. 3,1); *furibundi* (ibid. 7,4).

⁵⁸ On *furor* as an example of how an individual's actions are explained in the framework of historical causation, see D.E. Hahm, Posidonius' Theory of Historical Causation, ANRW II 36,3 (1989) 1328–1335.

many examples of prejudicial attitudes. The author of the HA had only to select from these. And that is exactly what he did.