

THE LIFE OF SEVERUS ALEXANDER

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## ABSTRACT

There has been no biography published in English of the Emperor Severus Alexander since that of Hopkins in 1907. Jardé produced a more critical work in French in 1925, but since that time much progress has been made in source criticism (especially of the Historia Augusta) and there have been epigraphical and papyrological discoveries that shed new light on his reign. It has been my aim in this thesis to re-evaluate the ancient literary sources on the basis of these advances to produce a new biographical study of the life and reign of Severus Alexander. The thesis is divided chronologically into eleven chapters. Chapter I is a brief discussion of the ancient sources. Chapter II deals with Alexander's birth and the nature of his Caesarship. The third chapter discusses his accession to the principate, the titles and powers he assumed. Chapter IV deals with the date of Julia Maesa's death based on the Feriale Duranum, the Acta Fratrum Arvalium, and other inscriptional evidence. Chapter V covers the career of Ulpian and the recently discovered date for his death based on P.Oxy. 2565. The sixth chapter includes Alexander's marriage and Julia Mamaea's role in his reign. Chapter VII covers various aspects of Alexander's administration, including the consilium principis and the office of the praefectus praetorio. It includes a discussion of the Maecenas-Agrippa debate in Book 52 of Dio's Roman History. The eighth chapter is concerned with the years 226-9 and the military

uprisings during that period. Chapters IX and X deal with the Persian and Germanic Wars respectively. The eleventh and final chapter includes discussion of the date, location and causes of Alexander's murder. The evidence for a proposed visit to Egypt is discussed in Appendix I; the tradition of Alexander as a strict disciplinarian, in Appendix II.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

All abbreviations contained herein follow the standard of those listed in L'année Philologique, with the following exceptions:

BMC      Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum

CIL      Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

PIR      Prosopographia Imperii Romani Saec.I.II.III

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## THE SOURCES

The three main sources of information on the life and career of Severus Alexander are Cassius Dio, Herodian and the Historia Augusta. Shorter synopses of his life can be found in the works of Sextus Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Zosimus and Zonaras. However, these epitomators are less informative due to the brevity of their accounts. Hence, the histories of Dio and Herodian, and the Historia Augusta must be considered in some detail in order to evaluate the information they contain. But the following discussion is by no means an exhaustive source-criticism, since the main focus must be the biography of Severus Alexander himself. In my attempt to be both thorough and concise, there are many footnotes to which the reader may refer for fuller discussions of the sources and their problems. For the sake of clarity, the sources will be taken in chronological order where possible.

What we know of Dio's life derives from his Roman History. His native city was Nicaea in Bithynia, a Hellenistic foundation which was a prosperous city in Dio's own time. His father, Cassius Apronianus was a senator and a consul, who governed Lycia-Pamphylia, Cilicia and Dalmatia. Dio accompanied him to Cilicia.<sup>1</sup> We know nothing more of his early years until he came to Rome in about A.D. 180 at the age of sixteen or seventeen. As

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<sup>1</sup>Fergus Millar, A Study of Cassius Dio (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.8.



the son of a senator, he may have held a post in the vigintivirate, a military tribunate, and a quaestorship at the age of about twenty-five. But there is no certain evidence. The first datable event is recorded by the historian himself, who tells us that he was given the honour of appointment to the praetorship by Pertinax (73.12.2).<sup>2</sup> As this was in 193, one would expect his praetorship to be held in 194. Millar supports the date<sup>3</sup> but Barnes disagrees, pointing to Dio's description of Pertinax's funeral in 193.<sup>4</sup> Dio uses a third-person verb to describe the magistrates in office and magistrates-elect, but a first-person verb for "all the rest of us", which indicates that Dio is not yet in office in 193, or elected for 194 (74.5.2-3). On the basis of this passage Barnes rightly concludes that a date of 195 is preferable for Dio's praetorship. The date of Dio's birth can then be placed at ca. 164/65, as the praetorship was normally held at the age of twenty-nine, thirty, or very shortly thereafter.<sup>5</sup>

After his praetorship, Dio will have governed at least one province, probably an eastern one, before becoming consul,

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<sup>2</sup>All references to book numbers and passages of Dio's text follow Boissevain's numbering system found at the top of the right hand pages and in right hand margins. The original numbering is found at the top of left hand pages.

<sup>3</sup>Millar, op.cit., p.16.

<sup>4</sup>T.D. Barnes, "The Composition of Cassius Dio's Roman History", Phoenix 38 (1984), p.242.

<sup>5</sup>John Morris, "Leges Annales Under the Principate", Listy Filologické 87 (1964), p.317,335.

probably suffectus in 205 or 206.<sup>6</sup> It is the accepted view that Dio held this first consulship under Septimius Severus (76.16.4).<sup>7</sup> Under Septimius and his son, Caracalla, he was also an amicus principis. He was in Rome when Caracalla was murdered in Mesopotamia on 8 April 217 and when his successor, Macrinus was proclaimed (78.16.2 - 17.4). Dio remained in Rome for most of Macrinus' reign, but, before the latter's death, he was appointed curator of Pergamum and Smyrna (79.7.4). After spending the winter of 218/19 in Pergamum, he went home to Bithynia, where he fell ill. In about 223/4 he went to Africa as proconsul, next, as legatus Augusti, to govern Dalmatia in ca. 224-6, and finally to Pannonia Superior from ca. 226-8 (80.1.2-3).<sup>8</sup> From there he returned to Italy where he held the joint consulship with Severus Alexander in 229. After completing this office, Dio returned to Bithynia to live out the rest of his life, the length of which is uncertain.

Concerning the date and method of composition of the Roman History, Dio himself gives some information (72.23.5). There were ten years spent in collection of information and twelve years on composition, but it is not clear when this twenty-two year period fell. Dio says that he wrote two earlier works, a pamphlet about dreams and portents heralding Septimius Severus'

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<sup>6</sup>Millar, op.cit., p.17; Barnes, op.cit., p.243.

<sup>7</sup>For further discussion of Dio's first consulship, see Millar, op.cit., Appendix II, pp.204-7.

<sup>8</sup>Barnes, op.cit., p.224.

accession, and a short history of the civil wars from which Septimius emerged as victor (72.23.1-2). Since Septimius favourably acknowledged the pamphlet of dreams on the day it was published, a date of 196 or 197 is ascribed to both works, during which time Septimius was in Rome. In the short history Dio did not include Septimius' final victory over Clodius Albinus on 19 February 197, which he surely would have done if the battle had already taken place when he wrote it.<sup>9</sup> Millar assumes that Dio began his compilation of material immediately thereafter, from 197-207, and actually composed the Roman History in the twelve ensuing years, from 207-219.

On the other hand, the consensus that Dio collected his material under Septimius Severus and wrote almost all of his History before the beginning of Severus Alexander's reign in 222 has recently been challenged. Barnes points out that history was conventionally written about dead emperors and that the living received panegyrics, two pieces of which Dio had already written for Septimius. In this case, Dio cannot have contemplated a history down to 211 while Septimius still lived. The earliest and shortest chronology, therefore, would place the decade of collection from 211-220, composition from 220-231, mostly under the reign of Severus Alexander.<sup>10</sup> Even later dates have been proposed on the argument that Dio decided to undertake his

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<sup>9</sup>Millar, op.cit., pp. 29-30.

<sup>10</sup>Barnes, op.cit., p.241.

history only after the death of Septimius, pushing forward the decade of research to 212-222 and the twelve years of composition to 222-234.<sup>11</sup>

After recording the death of Caracalla (April 217), Dio says that after Septimius Severus died, Septimius appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to record all that was said and done (78.10.1-2). This passage has been interpreted in two ways, that Dio's original intention was to stop at the death of Septimius, but that after Caracalla's death he decided to go beyond 4 February 211. By implication this would mean that Dio had at least finished gathering his material to 211 by this time.<sup>12</sup> Conversely, the passage has been used to argue that this dream was the motivating force for Dio to begin a Roman history and, as such, gives a terminus post quem for the beginning of the collection of material.<sup>13</sup> Though this argument is by no means conclusive, the later dates, proposed by Barnes and Letta seem more convincing.

Dio wrote his Roman History in eighty books by the annalistic method. Of these, Dio's original text is preserved only in Books 36-54, substantial fragments of Books 55-60 and in a section containing parts of Books 79 and 80, from the death of Caracalla

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<sup>11</sup>Cesare Letta, "La Composizione Dell' Opera di Cassio Dione: Cronologia E Sfondi Storico-Politico", Ricerche di Storiografia Antica I. Ricerche di Storiografia Greca di Eta Romana (Pisa: Giardini, 1979), pp.117-189.

<sup>12</sup>Barnes, op.cit., p.245.

<sup>13</sup>Letta, op.cit., pp.148 ff.

to the middle of Elagabalus' reign. There are three major sources from which the missing text can be restored, the earliest being excerpts from historical works made on the instructions of Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus (912-959). These excerpts, written by a number of classical and Byzantine Greek scholars, are of great value for the restoration of Dio's text because they largely preserve Dio's own wording and cover the whole range of Dio's history.<sup>14</sup> In the second half of the eleventh century, the monk Xiphilinus of Trapezus wrote an epitome of Books 36-80. The epitome fills gaps in Books 56-60 and comprises the bulk of Dio's work, as we have it, from Book 61 to the end. Though it is an erratic selection of material, it is substantially in Dio's original order and often close to Dio's wording.<sup>15</sup> Half a century after Xiphilinus, Zonaras composed an epitome from creation to 1118, using Dio for his Books 7-9.<sup>16</sup> His epitome is the most important source for reconstructing the Republican period of Dio's history and, because it is clear that he read Dio in the original, he can also be used to supplement Xiphilinus. For the reign of Severus Alexander, contained wholly in Book 80, Dio warns that he is unable to give accurate information owing to the fact that he was rarely in Rome (80.1.1-2). It is difficult to imagine, however, that a man of Dio's position did not have

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<sup>14</sup>Millar, op.cit., pp.1-2.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p.2.

<sup>16</sup>Book 12.14-15 contains information on Severus Alexander.

the best sources available to him. A more likely reason is that Dio was writing an account of the reign of a living emperor, which had its dangers. Dio's account, therefore, of the reign is brief, but information on Alexander's earlier life can be found in his account of the reign of Elagabalus (ad.init. 79.17.2).

Of the historian Herodian we know very little, but modern scholarship is agreed in regarding him to be greatly inferior to Dio.<sup>17</sup>

The date of composition and exact dates when he lived, his social status and position, his nationality, even his name are matters for debate.<sup>18</sup>

Herodian's history, in eight books, extends from the death of Marcus Aurelius (A.D. 180) to the accession of Gordian III (A.D. 238), a period of fifty-eight years, which the historian claims fell within his own lifetime (1,2,5). Tentative dates of 178-250 for Herodian's life and 248-250 for the composition of his history seem the most reasonable based on the few clues given in his text.<sup>19</sup> It is known that Italy was not Herodian's homeland

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<sup>17</sup>With the exception of Herodian's account of the reign of Elagabalus. See G.W. Bowersock, "Herodian and Elagabalus", YClS 24 (1975), pp.229-36.

<sup>18</sup>C.R. Whittaker, Herodian I (The Loeb Classical Library), (London, 1970), p.ix.

<sup>19</sup>Herodian mentions both a sixty-year period of the empire (1.1.5) and a seventy-year period (2.15.7), the second of which is the more precise statement and should be used for calculation of length of life. He also mentions witnessing the games of Commodus, held in 192 (1.15.4), in which case he would be at least fourteen years old. From this a birthdate of 178 can be conjectured. For a full discussion, see Whittaker, op.cit.,

(2.11.8) and that he was employed in some form of imperial and public service (1.2.5) but the precise nature of this service is not at all clear. It has been argued that he was at least under senatorial patronage, if not a senator himself, owing to the fact that Roman historians traditionally had such a status.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Grosso argues for freedman status, because of Herodian's lack of interest in political issues, his concentration on personalities and intrigue, and his knowledge of intimate palace details. Herodian describes his history and mentions his own personal share in it:

ἀ δὲ μετὰ τὴν Μάρκου τελευτὴν παρὰ πάντα τὸν ἑμαυτοῦ  
βίον εἰδὼν τε καὶ ἤκουσα - ἔστι δ' ὧν καὶ πείρα μετέσχον ἐν  
βασιλικαῖς ἢ δημοσίαις ὑπηρεσίαις γεγόμενος - ταῦτα  
συνέγραψα (1.2.5).

Grosso also points out that the word ὑπηρεσίαι usually refers to a low office, as opposed to ἀρχαί, which is used to describe senatorial posts.<sup>21</sup>

Herodian's reliability is considered greatly inferior to that of Dio. His chronology is confused and sometimes contradictory, and often his numerals are wrong. He is guilty of telescoping events and his geography is poor. Since he was a contemporary of Dio it would be surprising if he did not know of Dio, though he never

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pp.ix-xvii.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., pp.xx, n.1, xxi-xxii.

<sup>21</sup>F. Grosso, La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo (Torino, 1964), pp. 34-5, 42.

mentions him. There are advocates for the view that Herodian did not use Dio at all, that he did use Dio, or that they both used a common source. It is probable that Herodian used Dio to some extent because he would have needed a literary source for the earlier years of his history, during which he was a young boy.<sup>22</sup> Herodian's general lack of credibility is confirmed by the fact that later writers avoided him when presented with another choice of sources. Zosimus, a Greek historian of the late fifth or early sixth century used Herodian for his New History but preferred Dexippus for the events of 238.<sup>23</sup> Zonaras preferred Dio to Herodian, and Whittaker finds no evidence that Victor or Eutropius used Herodian.

Eutropius and Aurelius Victor were contemporaries who wrote in the second half of the fourth century. Eutropius wrote a survey of Rome in the 360's in ten books, extending from Romulus and Remus to the death of Jovian in A.D. 364, called Breviarium ab urbe condita. Though short, it is well-balanced and shows good judgement and impartiality. His summary of the reign of Severus Alexander is contained in Book 8.23. Aurelius Victor, also in the 360's, wrote his Liber de Caesaribus from Augustus to Constantius (360). The Epitome de Caesaribus, which summarizes

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<sup>22</sup>See Whittaker, op.cit., p.lxvi in which he cites a linguistic similarity between Herodian and Dio (H 2.2.4 = Dio(Xiph) 73.2.2-4) that seems too great to be coincidental.

<sup>23</sup>Zosimus' New History, written in six books, extended from the Persian Wars to the capture of Rome in 410. He imitated Polybius. Information pertaining to Severus Alexander is found in Book 1.11.1-13.2.



and adds to Victor's information, is of unknown authorship. Severus Alexander's reign is chronicled in both Victor's Liber de Caesaribus, 24 and in the Epitome, 24.<sup>24</sup>

The Historia Augusta is the most complex of the primary sources. Its authorship and date have long been subjects of the hottest controversy. The Historia Augusta is a long sequence of biographies of Emperors, Caesars, and pretenders, which begins with Hadrian and ends with Carus, Carinus and Numerian. Taken as a whole, the HA clearly demonstrates a progression from some degree of accuracy to almost total fiction by the end of the collection. The early vitae, from Hadrian to Caracalla, are divided into two groups: the Emperors form the "main" or "major" vitae ; Aelius Caesar, Geta, Niger, Cassius, and Albinus form the group of "minor" or "secondary" vitae. The secondary vitae were composed subsequent to the main vitae but probably before the Severus Alexander.<sup>25</sup> There follows upon this series four biographies, Macrinus, Diadumenianus, Elagabalus, and Severus Alexander, the later two of which supply much detail, though dubious, of Alexander's life.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>I follow the numbering system in the Teubner text. Fr.Pichelmayr, ed. (1966).

Augusta Colloquium 1968/69 (1970), pp.285-307.

<sup>26</sup>The progression into higher degrees of fiction culminates with the section entitled Tyranni Triginta. This must be considered sheer fiction, since seven of the thirty usurpers never existed at all, and usurpations are invented for historical characters who never claimed the purple. See T. Barnes. The Sources of the Historia Augusta (Brussels: Latomus, 1978), p.38.

The problem of authorship originates from the fact that the six authors named in the HA are not allocated to the vitae according to any guidelines of chronology or sense. Furthermore, the name-labels given to some of the vitae contradict statements in the text.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, two of the authors, Capitolinus and Spartianus dedicate vitae of different eras to both Diocletian and Constantine in no chronological sequence. These problems were recognized by scholars of the nineteenth century but it was not until 1889 that it was stated firmly that the entire HA was the work of one author, who sought to compose a fraudulent history. Hermann Dessau claimed that this single author, who wrote the HA during the reign of Theodosius (379-395), added the dedications to Diocletian and Constantine to lend an air of authority to his work by making it appear to be of earlier origin

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Similarly, the section styled Quadrigae Tyrannorum is of doubtful veracity. Of the four tyrants in the text, Firmus and Saturninus are surely bogus and Proculus and Bonosus, though historical figures, are thoroughly fictionalized. See Barnes. "Some Persons in the Historia Augusta", Phoenix 26 (1972), pp.140-182.

<sup>27</sup>In the life of Pescennius Niger, Aelius Spartianus proposes to write the life of Clodius Albinus (Pesc.Nig. 9.3), but the life of Albinus is written under the name of Julius Capitolinus. The latter, in turn, in the Albinus, claims to have written the life of Niger himself (Clod.Alb. 1.4); Aelius Lampridius believes he has written the life of Macrinus (Diad. 6.1), which carries the name Julius Capitolinus; Lampridius declares his intention to write the lives of the Emperors who follow Elagabalus, specifying Alexander, Aurelian, and Claudius (Elag. 35.2), but the life of Claudius is ascribed to Trebellius Pollio and the life of Aurelian, to Flavius Vopiscus.

than it actually was.<sup>28</sup> According to Dessau, the six authors assigned to the vitae were a further red herring. To support his claim for the later date of composition, he pointed to traces in the text of Eutropius and Aurelius Victor, who wrote in the 360's, but conservative scholars, in support of traditional six authors and a date in the early fourth century, claimed that the passages in question were not derived from Eutropius and Victor, but from their common source, the KG.<sup>29</sup> In 1883 Alexander Enmann had proposed his theory of a "Kaisergeschichte" (KG), which is now considered to have been written between A.D. 337-340, as the main source for Eutropius, Victor and parts of the HA.<sup>30</sup> Mommsen supported the traditional date but claimed that the entire collection was revised at the end of the fourth century, to allow for the confusions and repetitions in the text.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>David Magie, Scriptores Historiae Augustae vol.1 (The Loeb Classical Library, 1924), pp.viii-ix. For Dessau's original arguments: "Über Zeit und Persönlichkeit der Scriptores Historiae Augustae", Hermes 24 (1889), pp.337-92. "Über Die Scriptores Historiae Augustae", Hermes 27 (1892), pp.561-605.

Dessau, see Elimar Klebs, "Die Sammlung der Scriptores Historiae Augustae", RhM 45 (1890), pp.436-64; "Die Scriptores Historiae Augustae", RhM 47 (1892), pp.1-52; 515-49.

<sup>30</sup>T.D. Barnes, "The lost Kaisergeschichte and the Latin historical tradition", BHAC 1968/69 (1970), pp.14-20.

<sup>31</sup>For Mommsen's argument, "Die Scriptores Historiae Augustae", Hermes 25 (1890), pp.228-92.

But scholars were forced to accept part of Dessau's argument, that much of the HA was fictitious. Study turned to the question of the extent of fraudulence, and the question of plurality of authorship was obscured by detailed and complex source-criticism that attempted, for the most part, to preserve as factual as much of the HA as possible. It was discovered, however, that the closer the scrutiny of the text, the greater was the percentage that was concluded to be fictitious. Analysis of the types of fiction lends support to Dessau's original hypothesis of singular authorship of the HA. At last the idea that the entire collection was written by one man has gained ascendancy.<sup>32</sup>

The progression from fact to fiction in the collection supports the conclusion of a single author. The main early vitae are more serious in tone and more factual than both the secondary and later vitae. The main vitae of the nine Emperors from Hadrian to Caracalla can be seen as a unit owing to their accuracy and general knowledge of the period. The next biography, the Macrinus, is a marked contrast to the main vitae in that it is largely invention. Similarly, the five secondary vitae are full of errors and fabrications like those found in the later vitae, a sign that clearly indicates that they were later inserted into the main vitae. It appears that the author's attitude changed, probably while composing the Elagabalus, toward a less serious

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<sup>32</sup>A. Momigliano is the modern holdout. See Momigliano, "An Unsolved Problem of Historical Forgery", Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes 17 (1954), pp.22-46.

approach to the work. He then inserted the five secondary vitae and assigned six bogus authors to the biographies thus far completed. In the later vitae one finds a wealth of invention and humour: faked ancestry, omens, spoofs on Vergilian verse, jokes, puns on names, etc.<sup>33</sup> The value of considering the fabrications in the secondary vitae becomes clear. A pattern emerges that anticipates the proliferation of fabrication in the later vitae; the consistency of style reveals the hand of a single author.<sup>34</sup>

An example of the spirit in which the author wrote is to be found at the beginning of the Divus Aurelianus. At the festival of the Hilaria, where all manner of costumes and masks are worn, the prefect of the city, Junius Tiberianus, encourages "Flavius Vopiscus" to write a life of Aurelian. He criticizes the works of "Trebellius Pollio" and when Vopiscus comes to the defense of Pollio by pointing out errors in Livy, Sallust, and Tacitus, the prefect jokingly replies,

Scribe ut libet, securus quod velis dices, habiturus  
mendaciorum comites, quos historicae eloquentiae  
miramur auctores (Div.Aur. 1.1-2.2).

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<sup>33</sup>Ronald Syme, "Fiction in the Epitomators", Historia Augusta Papers (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.164.

<sup>34</sup>For detailed study of the progressive emergence of fabrication, see Syme, "The Secondary Vitae", BHAC 1968/69 (1970), pp.292 ff.; Syme, "Fiction in the Epitomators", Historia Augusta Papers (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.156-66.; Barnes, The Sources of the Historia Augusta (Brussels: Latomus, 1978), pp.32-78.

Nothing could be a broader hint as to the tongue-in-cheek attitude of the author. In the words of Syme,

The result is decisive: one author of the HA, with a verifiable enhancement in invention and audacity, so that before the end the imposter stands revealed as a master in the art of historical fiction.<sup>35</sup>

A note of caution is needed, however, against taking the content of the HA too lightly. Consideration of its sources reveals that it contains some information as good as, or better than, any other existing account of the period. For the main vitae an unknown source, styled Ignotus, has been suggested, who must have written not long after 217, since he was so full and accurate a source for the period.<sup>36</sup> Marius Maximus was a subsidiary source, used to a greater degree after Caracalla through the life of Macrinus and for the secondary vitae.<sup>37</sup> Maximus was also a source for the life of Elagabalus; Herodian has been detected in the life of Alexander.<sup>38</sup> Traces of Eutropius and Victor have

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<sup>35</sup>Ronald Syme, The Historia Augusta, A call of clarity (Bonn, 1971), p.10.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.13. cf. Anthony Birley, Septimius Severus (Chatham: Eyre & Spottiswoode (Publishers) Ltd., 1971), pp.308-26.

<sup>37</sup>For discussion of Maximus' credibility, see Syme, "Marius Maximus Once Again", Historia Augusta Papers (London: Oxford University Press, 1983), pp.30-45.; Barnes, Sources of the Historia Augusta (Brussels: Latomus, 1978), pp.98-107.; Syme, Ammianus and the Historia Augusta (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), pp.89 ff.

<sup>38</sup>Traces of Herodian in the Sev.Alex. 25.1-2, 52.2, 57.3, 59.7-8, 61.8. Marius Maximus was the main source for the Maximinus and the events of 238, and a minor source subsequent to

been found in widely separated portions of the HA, but the KG continues to be considered an accurate source in order to explain genuine details in the HA that are omitted by both Eutropius and Victor.<sup>39</sup> These traces of Eutropius and Victor prove beyond doubt that the HA belongs to the period subsequent to 370, a period coincidental with a revival in scholarship and literature.

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238. See Barnes, Sources of the Historia Augusta (Brussels: Latomus, 1978).

<sup>39</sup>For examples see Barnes, Sources of the Historia Augusta (Brussels: Latomus, 1978), p. 95.; Syme, Historia Augusta Papers (London: Oxford University Press), pp.158-63.

## BACKGROUND

Severus Alexander was the last Emperor of a Syrian dynasty that lasted for 43 years, beginning with Septimius Severus' accession in A.D. 193 and ending with Alexander's own death in 235. He was ruler of the Roman Empire for the last fourteen of those 43 years, the longest reign until the time of Constantine. The lack of creditable ancient source material has, however, resulted in modern-day obscurity for Alexander. He was born Gessius Alexianus (Herod.5.3.3) Bassianus (Dio 78.30.3) on 1 October 208 to Julia Avita Mamaea (PIR<sup>2</sup> J 649) and Gessius Marcianus (PIR<sup>2</sup> G 171) in the city of Arca Caesarea in Syria (HA, Sev.Alex.1.2). His father was a native Syrian who had risen through procuratorial service (Dio 78.30.3), but through his mother Alexander was born with imperial connections. Mamaea's mother, Julia Maesa, was sister of the wife of Septimius Severus, Julia Domna (PIR<sup>2</sup> J 663). Alexander was a nephew of Caracalla, and cousin to Elagabalus. Mamaea's sister, Julia Soaemias Bassiana (PIR<sup>2</sup> J 704), was Elagabalus' mother.<sup>1</sup> Mamaea had a second husband of whom nothing is known other than that she married him when Caracalla was sole Emperor, after 212.<sup>2</sup> While Caracalla ruled, Mamaea lived with her sister, Soaemias, and their sons in Emesa. Upon Caracalla's death, Julia Maesa, who had been in Rome

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<sup>1</sup>She is called Symiamira in HA, Elag.2.1).

<sup>2</sup>Mary Gilmore Williams, "Studies in the Lives of Roman Empresses: Julia Mamaea", Roman Historical Sources and Institutions, H.A. Sanders, ed. (New York, 1904), p.68.



during the reign, returned to Emesa where she and Soaemias plotted to bring Elagabalus to power. Though Mamaea's name is never mentioned in connection with these plans or with the battle at Antioch on 8 June 218, which brought Elagabalus to power, it is probable that she would do her part to keep her family in power and the opportunities open for her own son, Alexianus, yet a child. When the plans of Maesa and her daughters finally bore fruit, in June of 218, the Severans were again in power in the person of Varius Avitus Bassianus, or Elagabalus, after the sun-god whose chief priest he was.<sup>3</sup> Maesa went to great extremes to ensure her family's return to power. Her plans included circulating the rumour that her daughter, Soaemias, had been involved in an adulterous affair with Caracalla and thus the boy was Caracalla's son and Septimius Severus' grandson.<sup>4</sup> During the summer or early autumn of 219 Mamaea and her son accompanied the Emperor to Rome (Dio 79.11), at least a year after Elagabalus was proclaimed Emperor. Elagabalus spent the winter of 218/19 in Nicomedia (Herod. 5.5.3). The exact date of his arrival in Rome is uncertain. Eutropius (Brev. 8.22) says that it was in July 219, but an altar dedicated ob reditum domini nostri is dated 29 September.<sup>5</sup> When he came to Rome he brought with him his god, Elagabalus, with the intention of making him the supreme deity of

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<sup>3</sup>Dio calls him Bassianus, The False Antoninus, Sardanapallus. Herodian properly calls him Antoninus.

<sup>4</sup>See HA, Elag. 2.1, Carac. 9.2, Macr. 9.4; Herod. 5.7.3.

<sup>5</sup>ILS 2188.

Rome (Dio 79.11.1). He continued to perform religious rites with fanatical zeal and profaned Roman tradition to the extent of marriage to a Vestal Virgin.<sup>6</sup> His sexual perversions were notorious. The soldiers and the populace grew more and more displeased with their new Emperor, which caused Maesa to fear for her family's position. By flattering Elagabalus with the argument that he needed someone to look after worldly matters, leaving him free to perform his priestly duties, Maesa persuaded him to adopt his cousin, Alexianus, as son and Caesar (Herod. 5.7.1-2). His name was changed to Marcus Aurelius Severus Alexander.<sup>7</sup> The precise date of the adoption is disputed. CIL VI 2001 shows Alexander's induction into the sodales Antoniniani on 10 July 221 and on the basis of this inscription it has been supposed that this was also the date for Alexander's adoption. But there is conflicting evidence. CIL VI 3069, dated 1 June 221, is dedicated to Antoninus and Alexander, designating them imperatores, which may indicate that Alexander was already Caesar by 1 June 221. Furthermore, the Feriale Duranum lists

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<sup>6</sup>Long accounts of Elagabalus' behaviour are found in Dio 79, Herod. 5, and the Vita Elagabali.

<sup>7</sup>There is a story in the HA, Sev.Alex. 5.1-3 that Alexander came by his name because he was born in a temple dedicated to Alexander the Great. As proof it is claimed that Severus Alexander's birthday is the same day as that upon which Alexander the Great died. Both of these statements are pure fiction, probably invented because of his proper name, Alexianus, which was both a name taken by the Emesene priesthood and a family name. See C.R. Whittaker, Herodian II (Loeb), 5.7.3 n. and PIR<sup>2</sup> J 192; AE (1963) 42. Furthermore, Alexander's birthday is 1 October whereas Alexander the Great died in June. For Alexander's birthdate, see the Fasti Philocali, CIL I<sup>2</sup>, p.274.

Alexander's adoption:

[vi kal] iulias quod dominus nost[e]r [m]arcus  
aure[l]ius severus al[e]xa[nder] cae[sar] appe[llat]us  
sit

But the vital information, the date, is in a lacuna, restored as 26 June, the date upon which Alexander assumed the toga virilis. Therefore, this is by no means conclusive evidence.<sup>8</sup> The tradition that Alexander was appointed Caesar by the Senate after the death of Macrinus in 218 is incorrect (HA, Sev.Alex.1.2, De Caes. 23.3). At this point Dio relates an interesting story in connection with Alexander's adoption. Dio says that shortly before Alexander's adoption, the spirit of Alexander the Great was seen travelling through Upper Moesia and Thrace in the company of 400 male attendants equipped with thyrsi and fawn skins. Dio says that, though the company did no harm, no-one dared to oppose it and so it proceeded to Byzantium and sailed on to Chalcedon. There it performed sacred rites by night, buried a wooden horse and vanished (Dio 79.18.1-3). An explanation of this bizarre little anecdote is difficult to produce. Perhaps it is a reflection of the numerous pretenders and would-be usurpers who plagued Alexander's reign. But a more likely possibility seems to me to be that the incident was engineered by Maesa, as an omen to gain support for the new Caesar.

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<sup>8</sup>See Whittaker, op.cit., p.58, n.1. and Auguste Jardé, Etudes Critiques sur la vie et le règne de Severe Alexandre (Paris: E. De Boccard, 1925), p.11, n.1.

Thus in June or July of 221 Alexander entered the political scene as Elagabalus' Caesar at the age of twelve. There is uncertainty about Alexander's legal status and the extent of his power during his Caesarship. In the early third century the concept of a Caesar was not yet fully developed with the political and military powers that it later carried by the time of Diocletian. Before that time, the primary purpose of appointing a Caesar was to denote succession. The undefined status of the Caesarship has led to scholarly debate as to whether or not Alexander held any legal imperium. In the praetorian diplomata of 7 January 222, Alexander's titulature is given:

Imper(ator) Caes(ar) M(arci) Aurelli Antonini Pii  
 Felici(s) Aug(usti) fil(ius) divi Antonini Magni  
 nep(os) divi Severi Pii pron(e)pos M(arcus) Aurellius  
 Alexander nobilissimus Caesar imperi et sacerdotis  
 co(n)s(ul)<sup>9</sup>

Some scholars, including Whittaker, accept the restoration of Imper. Caes. in the nominative, and claim that Alexander held some form of secondary imperium since he is called imperator here, before his accession.<sup>10</sup> Two other inscriptions, CIL VI 2001, line 11: nobilissimum Caes. imperii [---] and CIL VII 585, line 4 f.: [nobiliss] Caesar imper[i---] have usually been completed with the word consors or heres, in support of the idea that Alexander shared his cousin's power. But the discovery of

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<sup>9</sup>CIL XVI 140, 141; AE (1964) 269.

<sup>10</sup>See Whittaker, op.cit., p.60, n.1; p.62, n.2.

AE (1964) 269, which completes the phrase with consul, weakens this argument. Lorient would also like to prove that Alexander held imperial power before his accession.<sup>11</sup> He is justifiably troubled by the fact that Alexander came to power in 222, yet his decennalia was celebrated in 230. He also finds the chronology of AE (1941) 163 difficult to explain.

Imp(eratori) Caes(ari) divi Severi nep(oti) divi Antonini Mag(ni) Pii fil(io) M(arco) Aur(elio) Severo [Alexandro] pio felici Aug(usto) pont(ifici) max(imo) trib(uniciae) potest(atis) imp(eratori) II co(n)s(uli) p(atri) p(atriciae) proco(n)s(uli) per Asinium Lepidum leg(atum) Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) praesid(em) provinc(iae) Capp(adociae). I.A.

The absence of a numeral after TR P creates difficulty. Alexander had the tribunician power for the first time on 13 March 222 until December of that year and was joint-consul with Elagabalus at the beginning of 222. But it seems wrong that he be called imperator II during his first year in power. Assuming that the engraver has not simply left off the numeral from TR P, there must be another explanation for the incongruity. Lorient refers to the statement of Herodian,

Ὁ Ἀντωνῖνος αὐτὸν ἐβούλετο...τῆς τε ἱερωσύνης κοινωνεῖν (5.7.4); μετεγίνωσκε θέμενος αὐτὸν υἱὸν καὶ κοινωνὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς (5.7.5).

He thinks that this evidence, and the phrase nobilissimus Caesar

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<sup>11</sup>X. Lorient, "Les Acclamations Imperiales dans la Titulature de Sévère Alexandre et de Gordien III", ZPE 43 (1981), pp.222-35.

imperii et sacerdotis co(n)s(ul) in the diplomata, show a definite association with the imperium.<sup>12</sup> The major obstacle to the theory that Alexander was imperator during his caesarship, is the Feriale Duranum. In column 1, ll.23-26, the restored lines state that Alexander was named imperator for the first time by the soldiers on 13 March 222. Line 26, as restored by the editors, reads:

[primo] Imp[erator] ap(p)el[latus sit, supplicatio]<sup>13</sup>

But the editors also note that "In line 26 primo is somewhat too long for the space but some such word is necessary".<sup>14</sup> Lorient proposes that the word be bis. Thus Alexander would have been imperator for the first time when he became Caesar and for the second time when he became Emperor.

Dušančić, on the other hand, claims that the correct expansion of the diplomata is Imper(atoris) Caes(aris), referring to Elagabalus.<sup>15</sup> He points out that no authoritative document or coin of Alexander's caesarship gives him the title of imperator and, furthermore, that nowhere in the diplomata is there any mention of Alexander having either proconsular imperium or

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<sup>12</sup>Lorient, op.cit., p.227.

<sup>13</sup>Welles, Fink, Gilliam, Excavation at Dura, Final Report V 1: The Parchment and Papyri (New Haven, 1959), p.198.

<sup>14</sup>Welles, Fink, Gilliam, op.cit., p.207.

<sup>15</sup>S. Dušančić, "Nobilissimus Caesar Imperii et Sacerdotis", ZPE 37 (1980), p.118, n.8.; "Severus Alexander as Elagabalus' Associate", Historia 13 (1964), p.495 ff.

tribunician power. As for the phrase nobilissimus Caesar imperii et sacerdotis, Dušanić translates it not as "most noble Caesar of the State and of Elagabalus" but as "most noble Caesar of the Emperor-Priest". He claims that imperii stands for imperatoris by metonymy and that imperii and sacerdotis is a hendiadys.<sup>16</sup> This seems to stretch a point rather far and lacks conviction. I find Lorient's argument and justifications more tenable, namely that Alexander held some form of secondary imperium while he was Caesar.

Herodian continues that Elagabalus did his best to entice Alexander into worship of the sun-god and the vices that went along with it, but Maesa and Mamaea kept a close watch over the boy and saw to it that he was trained in manly exercises and the study of Latin and Greek (Herod. 5.7.5, HA, Sev.Alex.3). The HA lists ten teachers, none of whom are known; they are probably all bogus (HA, Sev.Alex.3.2-3). As Elagabalus' popularity decreased Alexander's increased owing to his upright way of life. When Elagabalus realized this, he regretted the adoption and began to plot against his cousin. He removed all of Alexander's teachers from the palace, executing some and sending others into exile on the charge that they were corrupting Alexander (Herod. 5.7.6). Mamaea and Maesa stepped up their protection of the boy; Mamaea had separate cooks and cupbearers to serve Alexander and privately distributed money to the soldiers to ensure their

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<sup>16</sup>Dušanić, ZPE 37 (1980), p.118.

loyalty (Herod. 5.8.2-3). When Elagabalus realized that all his plans were being frustrated, he planned to remove Alexander from the Caesarship, and issued the command that Alexander no longer be seen at public events or processions (5.8.4). The soldiers revolted in anger at the demotion and demanded Alexander's presence. Elagabalus replied with the rumour that Alexander was dying, which upset the soldiers to such a degree that they refused to mount their guard but shut themselves up in their camp pending Alexander's presence (5.8.5). Elagabalus complied and escorted Alexander to the camp, where the soldiers enthusiastically greeted Alexander and ignored Elagabalus. The Emperor was furious and ordered Alexander's supporters arrested. The soldiers retaliated by murdering Elagabalus, his mother, Soaemias, and the whole imperial retinue. Their bodies were dragged through the city, mutilated and thrown into the sewers that empty into the Tiber (5.8.6-9). Herodian's account differs from both that of Dio and of the HA. In the latter two accounts there were two separate and distinct military riots leading up to Elagabalus' murder. Dio's account, supported by the HA, is to be preferred to Herodian's version, especially in light of Herodian's recognized tendency to telescope events. Though his account contains most of the detail found in the others, he has narrated it in such a way as to make it appear to be all one event.

Dio records that Elagabalus' first attempt to destroy Alexander was thwarted by Maesa, Mamaea, and a terrible uprising of the



Praetorians, who, upon hearing the news, rioted until Alexander was brought to their camp and the Emperor surrendered his companions in vice (Dio 79.19.2-3). By this measure, Elagabalus managed to appease the soldiers for the time being. But later Elagabalus formed another plot against Alexander and again the Praetorians rioted. The Emperor took Alexander to the camp, where he realized he was in danger of his life. Elagabalus attempted to escape in a chest but was discovered and slain, along with his mother. They were decapitated, stripped, and dragged through the city. The Emperor's body was cast into the river (79.19.4-20.2).

The author of the HA says that Elagabalus first commanded the Senate to revoke the title of Caesar but the senators refused (HA, Elag.13.1-2). Then he sent assassins to the palace to kill Alexander while he himself withdrew to the Gardens of Spes Vetus. At the same time, he sent orders to Alexander's guardians to kill him, to the soldiers to smear Alexander's statues with mud and take away the title of Caesar (13.4-8). The soldiers were angered when Alexander's statues were defaced so some went to the palace, to protect Alexander. Others went to the Gardens to kill Elagabalus. Those sent to the palace escorted Alexander, Mamaea, and Maesa to the camp. At the Gardens, the soldiers decided to spare Elagabalus' life on the condition that he return to a modest way of life and dismiss his favourites (14.2-15.1). In this way, Elagabalus avoided death for the moment. But the Emperor continued to plot against his cousin, refusing to appear

with him for their formal inauguration as consuls on 1 January 222. Then he ordered all the senators out of Rome and gave orders to a centurion to kill Alexander. The soldiers, particularly the Praetorians, attacked the Emperor's conspirators, killing them. Then they slew Elagabalus and Soaemias, dragged his body through the streets and then hurled it into the Tiber, whence he got the name Tiberinus (16.1-17.7). Dio also calls him Tiberinus (79.21.3). The details of the story, as stated in the three accounts, that seem genuine are those that are contained in at least two of the three versions. Maesa and Mamaea figured prominently in Alexander's protection (Herod. 5.8.3, Dio 79.19.2). Elagabalus tried to revoke Alexander's title of Caesar (Herod. 5.8.4, HA, Elag. 13.2, 13.6). The soldiers enclosed themselves in the camp and demanded Alexander's presence (Herod. 5.8.5, Dio 79.19.2). Alexander went to the camp (HA, Elag. 14.3) accompanied by Elagabalus (Herod. 5.8.6, Dio 79.19.2-3). Elagabalus managed to appease the soldiers temporarily (Dio 79.19.3-4, HA, Elag. 15.1). Because of another discovered plot, the soldiers rioted again and killed Elagabalus and his mother in the camp or palace (Herod. 5.8.8-9, Dio 79.20.1-2, HA, Elag. 16.1-17.3 and 18.2). The added details in the HA are unsupported and therefore, suspect. A damnatio memoriae was enacted upon Elagabalus. His name is erased in many

of his inscriptions.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>The HA, Elag. 17.4 is the only source to mention the damnatio memoriae. See ILS 468 f. and Arie Kindler, "The Damnatio Memoriae of Elagabal on City Coins of the Near East", Schweizer Münzblätter 30 (1980), pp.3-7.

## IMPERATOR M. AURELIUS SEVERUS ALEXANDER

Elagabalus' murder took place on 13 March 222 and on the same day Alexander, at the age of thirteen, was proclaimed Emperor by the vote of the soldiers and the senate.<sup>1</sup> Dio and Herodian give no details about the acclamation but the HA, Sev.Alex. 6.1-12.5, recounts the ceremony in such detail as to be suspect. The date of the acclamation in the HA (Sev.Alex. 6.2) is incorrectly given as 6 March. The author professes to quote the acclamation from the Acta Urbis but it smacks of forgery for a number of reasons. First of all, as mentioned above, the date of the inauguration is incorrect, and there are similar acclamations in other vitae.<sup>2</sup> One tends to consider these to be literary exercises, set pieces. It is also difficult to imagine a child of thirteen years responding so eloquently to the insistence of the senators. It is granted that the youth would be coached, briefed, and given a speech before he appeared before the senate but even so, this could not anticipate exactly the senators' reactions.

Jardé refutes the argument for authenticity that is based on resemblance in wording with the Acta Fratrum Arvalium or the Theodosian Code. Jardé believes that the forger adapted an authentic text, quoting general formulas and inserting

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<sup>1</sup>There is some question as to whether or not the senate voted Alexander Emperor on the same day as the soldiers did. For discussion, see Fink, Hoey, Snyder, "The Feriale Duranum", YClS 7 (1940), pp.85-94.

<sup>2</sup>Avid.Cass. 13.1-5, Comm. 18-19, Maxim. 16.3-7, 26, Gord. 11.9-10, Max.-Balb. 2.9-12.

particulars suited to his own subject.<sup>3</sup> It is in these particulars that the forgery of the piece is exposed. The title of Severus, which Alexander is known to have taken upon his accession, is left out here.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the author of the vita wrongly states that the soldiers conferred that title because of Alexander's excessive severity. The author's weakness for puns on the names of Emperors has ignored the fact that Alexander actually had difficulty controlling his troops.<sup>5</sup> It is odd that when the Senate pressed the title Magnus upon him (11.2-5), he mentioned Alexander the Great and Pompey but not his own kinsman, Caracalla, who also bore that title. The son of Macrinus is incorrectly named Diadumenus (9.3, 10.5) and Caracalla is referred to as Bassianus (10.5). A glaring anachronism is the phrase Parthos et Persas Antoninus vincat (7.5). Finally, it is instructive to compare the list of powers said to have been conferred upon him at the beginning of the vita (1.3) with those he was granted by the senate, which are chronicled in the supposed Acta Urbis (8.1). The former includes the titles Augustus and Pater Patriae, the ius proconsulare, tribunica potestas, and the ius quintae relationis. The latter, Augustus, Pontifex Maximus, the tribunica potestas, and the proconsulare imperium. There are obvious discrepancies. That is not to say

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<sup>3</sup>Jardé, op.cit., pp.17-18.

<sup>4</sup>CIL VI 1454 is the earliest inscription bearing the title Severus, dated 13 April 222.

<sup>5</sup>See Pert. 1.1, Sept.Sev. 14.13, Macr. 11.2 for other puns.

that many titles were not conferred upon Alexander in a single day, only that the details passed off as authentic Acta Urbis cannot be accepted without question.

According to the HA, Alexander refused two titles that the Senate tried to press upon him, the first being that of Antoninus (8.3-10.5). In the vita Alexander refuses the title on the grounds that he is not worthy of so illustrious a title (8.4-5), but one can see the tactful influence of Alexander's women in this refusal. Surely his grandmother, Maesa, and Mamaea would have anticipated the situation and decided it unwise for Alexander to accept a title that would remind the people of his corrupt predecessor. Similarly, the new Emperor was offered the title of Magnus, which he also refused for the same reason. Magni vero nomen cur accipiam? Quid enim iam magnum feci? (11.4). Again the Severan women made a politic decision by presenting the young ruler in so humble a light.

There has been some question, however, whether or not Alexander ever accepted the title of Magnus. Inscriptions commemorating the incorporation of the town of Guifi into a civitas contain the title Magnus in their titulature.

CIL VIII 866: Liciniae Satur/ninae, Aurelli/Dionysi  
patro/ni coniugi, /municipes/municipii  
Aurel/li Alexandria/ni Augusti/Magni  
Guifitani

CIL VIII 23995: Aureliae Dio/nysiae, Aurel/li Dionysi  
pa/troni filiae, /municipes/municipii  
Aurel/li Alexandria/ni Augusti/Magni  
Guifitani

The town of Guifi, situated about fifty kilometers south-west of Carthage, was made a municipium sometime between 10 December 228 and 21 March 235, the date of Alexander's death.<sup>6</sup> There are other inscriptions of Guifi in which it is named civitas Guifitana (CIL VIII 23994), municipium Alexandriani Guifitani (CIL VIII 865) but in its fullest form, it is styled municipium Aurellium Alexandrianum Augustum Magnum Guifitanum. The magnum is a problem because it does not belong among the imperial epithets. Severus Alexander is never called Magnus in inscriptions. He is often called Divi Magni Antonini Pii filius or Divi Antonini Magni Pii filius, in reference to his supposed father, Caracalla, but the title Magnus has never been applied directly to Alexander himself.<sup>7</sup> By way of solving the problem, it has been suggested that the magnum does not apply to the Emperor but rather to the city of Guifi. However, there are objections. In third century Latin inscriptions of Africa, such adjectives always precede the word municipium and are never placed at the end of a list of imperial epithets.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the adjective magnum is not used to glorify the name of a city. Another possibility is that magnum is used here to distinguish Guifi from another city of the same name, in the same way as

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<sup>6</sup>Jacques Gascou, "Une énigme épigraphique, Sévère Alexandre et la titulature de Guifi", Ant Afr 17 (1981), p.232.

<sup>7</sup>CIL VIII 1406, 6356.

<sup>8</sup>Gascou, op.cit., pp.234-5.

Lepcis Magna. But in such cases the adjective should follow the name of the city and not be placed at the end of the imperial epithets. If the adjective does not apply to Guifi, it must then belong with Alexander himself. One immediately wonders, then if Alexander did assume the title of Magnus later on in his rule. But there is no evidence from other areas, either inscriptional or numismatic to support this idea. The use of magnum appears to be unique to Guifi, which would point to the conclusion that it was used by Guifi in a completely unofficial capacity. Surely this would please the Emperor. His affinity for Alexander the Great was well known. There are constant allusions, though probably often fanciful, in the HA, Sev.Alex. to some divine connection between Severus Alexander and Alexander the Great. We are told that he imitated Alexander the Great and read about his life (30.3). He deified Alexander by placing him among the gods in his sanctuary (31.5). He was especially pleased by poets and orators who related the deeds of Alexander the Great (35.1). After dessert he would serve a glass of wine to be drunk in honour of Alexander (39.1). He strove to surpass the Macedonian in war (50.4). He was criticized after his death for wanting to appear as a second Alexander the Great (64.3). Dio also mentions some connection when he reports the story of Alexander's spirit (79.18.1-3). Herodian says that Severus Alexander took that name in honour of the Macedonian (5.7.3). If Alexander did not officially assume the title of Magnus, he certainly supported the allusion of a connection between himself and the Macedonian.



By way of further explanation of the Guifi titlature, Gascou makes a connection between Guifi's titlature and Alexander's Persian War, for which preparation was made in 230. The campaign was launched in 231, the battles fought in 232, and in 233 Alexander returned to Rome to celebrate a triumph.<sup>9</sup> Gascou points out that it was during the latter years of Alexander's reign that Guifi became a Roman municipium and that it is very likely that this event took place during either the preparations for the campaign, the war itself, or the subsequent celebrations.<sup>10</sup> He proposes that the adjective magnum was applied purely for flattery, to underline the connection between the two Alexanders who destroyed Persian power and was in no way an official imperial title.<sup>11</sup> The combination of Alexander's affection for the Macedonian king and the spirit of the time during which Guifi became a municipium makes this an attractive explanation.

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<sup>9</sup>Vide infra, pp.85-91.

<sup>10</sup>Gascou, op.cit., pp.239-40.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.240.

## THE DEATH OF JULIA MAESA

Owing to Alexander's youth, the administration of government was completely in the hands of his mother, Mamaea, and grandmother, Maesa, up until the time of her death (Herod. 5.8.10, 6.1.1). These two women corrected many of the evils caused by Elagabalus; Herodian says that they tried to effect a complete return to temperate and dignified government (6.1.1). One can identify their wise influence in some of Alexander's early decisions.<sup>12</sup> But the long-held belief in Maesa's influence during the reign of Alexander has been challenged. Undoubtedly Julia Maesa was, at this time, the matriarch of the Severan dynasty. Her strong will manifested itself often during the reign of Elagabalus, but her influence did not extend as far into Alexander's reign as it was once believed.<sup>13</sup> Neither Dio nor the HA make any mention of Maesa's death. Herodian, on the other hand, says that after a long time (ἐπὶ πολὺ) under a government in which Alexander possessed the Empire in name only, Maesa died an old woman and received the customary honours and deification (6.1.1-4). It is this typically vague statement of Herodian's that has led scholars to believe that Maesa lived long into Alexander's reign. But this is not the case. The next major event recorded by Herodian is Alexander's marriage (6.1.9), which is known to have

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<sup>12</sup>Vide supra, p.31.

<sup>13</sup>Maesa under Elagabalus: Dio 78.38.4, 79.15.4, 79.17.2; Herod. 5.5.5, 5.5.1, 5.7.1-2, 5.8.3-4.

taken place in 225 or 226.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, a terminus ante quem is established for Maesa's death.

Further information may be found in the Feriale Duranum (P. Dura 54), a papyrus found at Dura Europus in 1931/2 containing military records of festivals and anniversaries to be observed.<sup>15</sup> It is comprised of four columns of lists; the first two are nearly whole, the second two are nearly gone. The date is firmly assigned to the reign of Severus Alexander from lines 16-18 in column 2 and further defined by line 7 in column 2, which lists the birthday of the deified Julia Maesa as one of its observances. Since Maesa is listed as a diva, there is a terminus post quem of 225-6 for the Feriale. On the other hand, on column 1, lines 11-12, there is reference to the birthday of an unspecified L. Caesar, who has been conjectured to be Orbiana's father for two main reasons: first, the two other Lucius Caesars are unsatisfactory candidates, and second, the lines seem to refer to a Caesar still living at the time, that is, during Severus Alexander's reign.<sup>16</sup> The HA, Sev.Alex. 49.3 says that Alexander gave his wife's father the name of Caesar. A reconstruction of his name from hers would render Lucius (Gnaeus?) Seius Herennius Sallustius Barbis (Orbrianus?). There is a small lacuna at the beginning of line 12, in which the three

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<sup>14</sup>Vide infra, pp.50-1.

<sup>15</sup>Fink, Hoey, Snyder, op.cit., p.2.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p.76.

letters sei would fit very well.<sup>17</sup> If, in fact, these lines do refer to Orbiana's father, the Feriale would be dated to the period between 225, the earliest date for Orbiana's wedding, hence her father's Caesarship, and late 227, by which time Alexander was divorced.<sup>18</sup> If the Feriale had continued in use after the divorce and the father-in-law's downfall, his name would have been stricken from the record.<sup>19</sup> To assume, however, that column 1, lines 11-12 do refer to Orbiana's father is a risky proposition when we do not even know his name, and the only evidence that he was a Caesar is a single reference in the HA, in which he is wrongly named Macrinus (HA, Sev.Alex. 49.3). The argument is too conjectural. The terminus post quem for the Feriale should still be considered to be 225-6 based on the diva in line 7, column 2.

There is another factor to consider in this discussion. The Fratres Arvales, a college of twelve priests, are known to have sacrificed to a group of twenty divi and divae in A.D. 183, 218, and 7 November 224.<sup>20</sup> Since the number remains constant at twenty in all three cases, it is assumed by some scholars that

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p.76. For full discussion of column 1, lines 11-12, see Fink, Roman Military Records on Papyrus (Michigan, 1971), p.424.

<sup>18</sup>ILS 486, dated some time in 227, records Orbiana as coniugi Aug. nostri. but after this year she is no longer mentioned.

<sup>19</sup>Fink, Hoey, Snyder, op.cit., p.23.

<sup>20</sup>W. Henzen, Acta Fratrum Arvalium (Berlin, 1874).

the contents of these Acta also remained constant over that entire time period. They conclude, therefore, that Julia Maesa must not have deified by 7 November 224, but rather died in 225.<sup>21</sup> The Acta of 218, in particular, are used to strengthen this line of argument. Julia Domna died in 217, shortly after the death of her son, Caracalla, but the Acta Fratrum Arvalium reflect no change in number in 218. It has been concluded from this that Domna was not deified until Maesa's death, and that they were deified together. This bold assumption is made to strengthen the argument that the lists of the Fratres Arvales were not altered until 225, the purported year of Maesa's death. This argument has serious flaws. It asks us to believe that Domna was dead some eight years before she was deified, when the reasonable time for Domna's deification would be early in the reign of Elagabalus. The inscription CIL XIII 12042 supports this view.

divae Iuliae leg.I Min. Antoniniana p.f.

Since Antoniniana was a name added to the Legio I Minervia during Elagabalus' reign, this inscription is dated to that period. If one takes the divae Iuliae to be Domna, then it is clear that she was deified during his reign.<sup>22</sup> Surely Soaemias and Maesa would

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<sup>21</sup>Fink, Hoey, Snyder, op.cit., p.22, 114.; Welles, Fink, Gilliam, op.cit., p.208.

<sup>22</sup>H. Benario, "The Date of the Feriale Duranum", Historia 11 (1962), p.194.

make use of the support that would accrue to Elagabalus' claim to the throne if he had not only a deified father, but also two deified grandparents, Septimius Severus and Julia Domna.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, there is nothing to prevent the possibility that the lists of the divi and divae were subject to revision over the years. Benario points out that the number of divi fluctuated during the reign of Severus Alexander and was decreased to twelve by the time of his death. "Confusion could have arisen, along with imprecision, in this state of flux."<sup>24</sup> And finally, all other evidence, epigraphical and numismatic, seems to point to an earlier death for Maesa.

Inscriptional evidence of Julia Maesa is scant and difficult to date at best. Some inscriptions are tentatively said to refer to Maesa, but it is difficult to confirm or deny these claims.<sup>25</sup> The ones that do specify Maesa clearly are difficult to date.<sup>26</sup> One fact does emerge. After 224 Maesa is no longer mentioned by name. The first inscription that is tentatively datable and identifies Maesa is AE (1912) 155. The fact that Julia Mamaea is listed first and does not hold the title of mater castrorum indicates a date early in the reign of Severus Alexander. The

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<sup>23</sup>The rumour that Soaemias had an illegitimate son (Elagabalus) by Caracalla, her first cousin, is in Herod. 5.7.3 and HA, Elag. 2.1 and Dio 78.32.2-3, 79.19.4.

<sup>24</sup>Benario, op.cit., p.194.

<sup>25</sup>AE (1917/18) 9, (1912) 28, (1902) 147.

<sup>26</sup>AE (1912) 155, CIL VI 36775.

trib.pot. in line 7 may further specify the year 222.<sup>27</sup> Later inscriptions that mention both Mamaea and Maesa name Maesa first. CIL VI 32544, naming both women, is given a terminus ante quem of 8 March 224; CIL VI 36775, a dedication for the safety of Alexander, his grandmother and mother, is not datable with certainty but Maesa's name again appears first.<sup>28</sup> Also, Mamaea is not called mater castrorum in this inscription, as she is in the former. Thus this inscription may be earlier. CIL XIV 125, a dedication to Alexander and Mamaea, dated 8 March 224, does not include Maesa.<sup>29</sup> The most logical explanation is that she is no longer alive by this time.

The fact that Maesa died before Alexander's marriage completely rules out the possibility of her death taking place after August of 226. Arguments for a death-date of 225 from the Feriale and the Acta Fratrum Arvalium are weak when compared to the epigraphical evidence, or lack thereof. 223 or early 224 seems most suitable for the date of her death. As Kettenhofen points out, it is difficult to imagine a later date for Maesa's death when she is mentioned in only three of the 120 honours for Mamaea.<sup>30</sup> Though Maesa was responsible for returning her family to power after the death of Domna, her own death in 223 or 224

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<sup>27</sup>Erich Kettenhofen, "Zum Todesdatum Julia Maesas", Historia 30 (1981), p.245.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.245.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p.245.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p.246.

cut short her control of her second grandson, Alexander. It must have been Mamaea, mother of the young ruler, who controlled the administration of the Empire from a very early stage of the reign.



## THE DEATH OF ULPIAN

Maesa was not the only pillar of Alexander's reign to fall early. It was long thought that Ulpian's death took place in 228, based on the chronology of Dio's narrative, which relates the death of Ulpian before Dio's own second consulship in 229 (80.2.2, 80.5.1). The arbitrary dating of Ulpian's death seems remarkable in light of the fact that Dio himself, our most reliable source, states that Ulpian was murdered not much later (οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον) than the murders of his predecessors, Flavianus and Chrestus. It has now been proven definitively, by the publication of the papyrus P.Oxy. 2565 in 1966, that Ulpian was already dead before May of 224.<sup>1</sup> The papyrus shows that M. Aurelius Epagathus, the man chiefly responsible for Ulpian's murder, was in office as Prefect of Egypt in May or June of 224. Dio states that Epagathus was made Prefect of Egypt in order to remove him from Rome so that his murder would not cause any uprising in the capital. He adds that Epagathus was taken from Egypt to Crete and executed (80.2.4). Therefore, Ulpian's murder took place before May or June of 224.

Knowledge of Ulpian's career is sketchy, but two facts are certain; he was praefectus annonae on 31 March 222 and praefectus praetorio on 1 December 222.<sup>2</sup> Aurelius Victor claims that Ulpian was appointed Praetorian Prefect by Elagabalus and was retained

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<sup>1</sup>J. Rea, Oxy.Pap., 31 (London, 1966), no.2565, pp.102-3.

<sup>2</sup>Cod.Just. 8.37.4, 4.65.4.

in that office by Alexander (De Caes. 24.6). The second half of this statement is known to be false, as Alexander appointed Flavianus and Chrestus as prefects upon his accession.<sup>3</sup> The falsity of the last half of the statement casts doubt on the veracity of the first half. The HA is less certain of the facts, reporting that some say Ulpian was appointed by Elagabalus, some, by Alexander himself. However, the author is sure that Ulpian had been an advisor to Alexander as magister scrini<sup>4</sup> in charge of legal matters and the imperial correspondence, and had been an assessor under Papinian (HA, Sev.Alex. 26.5-6). In the vita of Niger, the author says that Ulpian was secretary a libellis to Alexander and advanced from there immediately to the praetorian prefecture (Pesc. 7.4). This statement, however, is false, for it is known that Ulpian advanced from praefectus annonae to the praetorian prefecture under Alexander.<sup>5</sup> Clearly, Ulpian could not have been appointed Praetorian Prefect under Elagabalus, who removed him (removit) when he ordered the senators out of the city (HA, Elag. 16.3). Confusion has arisen from use of the word removit. It is certainly not the correct term for exile so must refer either to removal from his post (perhaps the aforementioned

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<sup>3</sup>Dio 80.2.2, Zos. 1.11.2, Zon. 12.15.

<sup>4</sup>See also Eutropius, Brev. 8.23.

<sup>5</sup>Cod.Just. 8.37.4, 4.65.4.

a libellis), or removal from the city along with the senators.<sup>6</sup> The author labels Ulpian iuris consultum (Elag. 16.4), not as praetorian prefect, as one would expect if in fact he was prefect under Elagabalus. In the same passage, it is learned that Ulpian's life was spared, though others were not so lucky. Syme suggests that the favour of the Severan women, Mamaea and Maesa, helped to save his life in this perilous period.<sup>7</sup>

Zosimus is the only one of the sources to state that the choice of Ulpian as Alexander's advisor was solely Mamaea's (1.11.2). Dio (80.1.1) and the HA (Sev.Alex. 26.5) attribute the choice to Alexander himself. It is not known exactly when Ulpian was promoted to the praefectus praetorio other than it took place some time between 31 March 222 and 1 December 222. Dio says that Ulpian was given command of the praetorians immediately upon Alexander's accession (80.1.1). Alexander was made Emperor on 13 March. At the earliest, Ulpian could have been made prefect of the guard in April. A two week period can certainly be interpreted as "immediately". On the other hand, the HA seems to indicate that Ulpian did not become praetorian prefect immediately. Ulpian is mentioned a couple of times in the early part of the Vita Alexandri, but is not referred to as a prefect of the guard until 31.2. But this can be misleading because in

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<sup>6</sup>The office a libellis has been attributed to the reigns of Severus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus. Syme suggests Ulpian held the office under Alexander, when he was Caesar. See Ronald Syme, "Three Jurists", BHAC 1968/69 (1970), p.321.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp.320-21.

the earlier mentions of Ulpian, he was engaged in practices that are entirely possible for a praetorian prefect. He conducted state business and handled lawsuits (Sev.Alex. 15.6) and was a member of Alexander's council (26.6).

Zosimus records,

Μαμίας δὲ τῆς τοῦ βασιλέως μητρὸς ἐπιστησάσης αὐτοῖς  
Οὐλπιανὸν ἐπιγνώμονα καὶ ὥσπερ κοινωνὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς  
(1.11.2).

The translation is difficult because the term ἐπιγνώμων is vague and does not precisely specify Ulpian's position in relation to the other two prefects.<sup>8</sup> From the rest of the statement it seems clear enough, however, that Ulpian was a praetorian prefect (κοινωνὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς) and that he was superior to his associates (ἐπιστησάσης αὐτοῖς). It appears that Zosimus was aware of Ulpian's superior standing, because when he uses κοινωνός, which implies equality, to describe Ulpian's position, he apologizes for it with ὥσπερ. Zosimus is also the only one to tell the story that the soldiers, angered by Ulpian's appointment formed a plot against him which was foiled upon discovery by Mamaea. She had the conspirators executed (1.11.2-3). Zosimus says that only then was Ulpian given sole command of the praetorian prefecture (1.11.3). On the other hand, Dio says that while Ulpian was prefect, he put Flavianus and Chrestus to death in order that he might succeed them. But he himself was killed not much later by

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<sup>8</sup>Ronald T. Ridley, Zosimus (Australia: Australian Assoc. for Byzantine Studies, 1982), p.137, n.24.

the praetorians, who attacked him in the night. Not even the Emperor's presence could save him (80.2.2). One may conclude from Zosimus' statement that Flavianus and Chrestus were among those executed as conspirators. Surely they would resent Ulpian being promoted over their heads. It may well be, then, that Mamaea was responsible for the death of the two prefects and not, as Dio claims, Ulpian himself. Grosso offers an explanation for the difference in the murderer's name given by Dio and Zosimus. He proposes that there were two factions in the Severan family. Owing to Alexander's youth, one can safely consider Flavianus and Chrestus to be Maesa's choices. If Mamaea pushed Ulpian to the fore, heedless of Maesa's wishes, Maesa would surely interpret it as a challenge to her power, resulting in a struggle for supremacy. Dio's account, by pointing out Ulpian's lust for power, reflects support of Maesa's original choices whereas Zosimus' version, in which Mamaea is responsible for the deaths, reflects Mamaea's favour for Ulpian.<sup>9</sup>

There is also uncertainty as to the time of death of the two prefects. All the ancient sources, including Dio, state that Ulpian was appointed their superior, so Dio contradicts himself by saying that Ulpian murdered Flavianus and Chrestus in order to succeed them. The discrepancy raises the question of how long the three prefects held office together. Grosso argues that by 1

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<sup>9</sup>Fulvio Grosso, "Il Papiro Oxy.2565 e Gli Avvenimenti Del 222-224", Accademia Dei Lincei Atti Rendiconti 23, Ser.8 (1968), pp.210-11.

December 222 Flavianus and Chrestus were dead because in the Codex Justinianus (4.65.4) Alexander addresses praefectum praetorio instead of praefectos meos, as one would expect if the other two were still alive.<sup>10</sup> But the argument is weak. There is nothing to prevent Alexander from writing to Ulpian alone, as superior prefect, in which case he would use the singular whether Flavianus and Chrestus were alive or not. But it is likely that the murders of the two prefects took place not long after Ulpian's accession to the prefecture. Under the circumstance of internal family strife concerning the choice of prefect, one would expect the situation to be brought to a swift and final conclusion.

As we have seen, Dio states that Ulpian's death occurred not long after that of Flavianus and Chrestus. He also describes a three-day popular uprising against the praetorians in connection with his account of Ulpian's death (80.2.3). Zosimus mentions a σάγρις, in which Ulpian was killed (1.11.3). The HA says that Alexander frequently protected Ulpian from the hostility of the soldiers, though it does not mention Ulpian's death (Sev.Alex. 51.4). The cause of the uprising is not stated in the sources, nor has modern scholarship satisfactorily explained the connection between this uprising and Ulpian's death. It appears from Dio's account, which is the most detailed, that the populace was winning until the praetorians resorted to incendiarism

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., pp.209-10.

(80.2.3). One wonders how the populace could have been successful against the trained, well-armed soldiers without help. Grosso points out that in 190, in the revolt against Cleander, the people had the support of the urban cohorts, but none of the sources mention them in this case.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the soldiers reacted against the murder of their colleagues, Flavianus and Chrestus, and the appointment of a civil, rather than military, officer to the charge of the praetorians. Grosso suggests that the Emperor and his mother attempted to check the praetorians by making use of the natural hostility of the civilians for the soldiers.<sup>12</sup> Grosso's argument is plausible but there is not enough information to come to a firm conclusion.

The appointment of Ulpian to the prefecture was remarkable on two counts. Long prior to the reign of Alexander, it had been customary to appoint a jurist and a soldier as prefects or two men who had both judicial and military experience. Alexander, or rather Mamaea, by placing Ulpian over Flavianus and Chrestus, attempted to subordinate the military element to the civil element. This reflects the tendency of the time toward making the praetorian prefecture a more administrative office rather than a purely military one. Second, the appointment of a super-prefect, whose constitutional position was not at all clearly defined, was remarkable in itself. Ulpian is portrayed in the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p.212.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p.213

sources as a capable and just administrator, who was held in high esteem by Alexander and exerted a good deal of influence over him.<sup>13</sup> As Ulpian was killed in late 223 or early 224, he held the office of the praefectus praetorio for approximately one year.

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<sup>13</sup>Dio 80.1.1, 80.2.2; Zos. 1.11.2; HA (Elag. 16.4, Sev.Alex. 15.6, 26.5, 31.2-3. 51.4).



## JULIA MAMAEA

The next major event to take place in Alexander's life was his marriage. What remains of Dio's history makes no mention of it, but Herodian records that Mamaea provided a wife for her son, though he does not name her (Herod. 6.1.9). The only firmly attested wife of Alexander is Gneia Seia Herennia Sallustia Barbia Orbiana, whose name appears on a special marriage issue of Roman coinage dated ca. 225 and on Alexandrian coins of the years 225/6 and 226/7.<sup>1</sup> The marriage was short-lived; after 227 all record of her name had disappeared.<sup>2</sup> Though Alexander was happy with the match, says Herodian, Mamaea exiled her to Libya because she was jealous of the young girl bearing the title Augusta (6.1.9).<sup>3</sup> Mamaea also heaped insults upon the girl's father, who was highly honoured by Alexander, until he fled the palace, seeking refuge in the military camp. He laid charges against Mamaea, who had him promptly executed (6.1.9-10). This is the account given by Herodian but it does not ring true for several reasons. It is unlikely that Mamaea would exile the girl solely because she bore the title of Augusta. The Emperor's wife must bear this title. The fact that Orbiana's father took refuge in the military camp leads one to suspect treasonable motives on his

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<sup>1</sup>BMC VI, p.142 ff. See Whittaker, op.cit., p.86, n.1.

<sup>2</sup>Williams, op.cit., p.80.

<sup>3</sup>Orbiana bears the title Augusta: CIL II 3734. She also bears the characteristic epithet of the Syrian house, sanctissima (CIL VIII 9355).

part, if he required the support of the soldiers. It is also unlikely that Orbiana's father would lay charges against the mother of the Emperor. If one reads between the lines of Herodian's account, another, more plausible version appears. If Orbiana and her father were secretly plotting against Alexander, who at this time was still very young and vulnerable, it would naturally follow that, upon Mamaea's discovery of the plot, the father would appeal to the soldiers for support. No censure can accrue to Mamaea for meting out the customary punishments of exile for Orbiana and death for her father, who conspired against the Emperor. This version is supported by the HA. In the Vita Alexandri a story is attributed to Dexippus that Alexander's father-in-law made an attempt on his life, for which he was executed and the wife divorced (49.3-4). The name of the father-in-law is given as Macrinus (PIR<sup>2</sup> M 27), which is unsupported, but the basic story is the same.<sup>4</sup> However, one must accept this conjectural version with reserve. One wonders what Orbiana's father had as a power base from which to operate and construct his plans. One must also ask what benefit would accrue to Orbiana as daughter, rather than wife, of the Emperor. Why would she support her father in preference to her husband?

Herodian's account of the marriage casts Mamaea, undeservedly, in a bad light. His dislike for her is obvious. He says that

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<sup>4</sup>There is no evidence to support the claim in the Vita Alexandri, 20.3 that Alexander married a woman named Memmia, daughter of Sulpicius and grand-daughter of Catulus.

Alexander's only fault was that he showed more respect for his mother than she deserved (6.1.10). He says that even Alexander found fault with her for her avarice and obsession with money, and charges that she forcibly confiscated inherited property (6.1.8). Herodian also claims, falsely, that Alexander's reign would have been a complete success, but for his mother's φιλαργυρία and μικρολογία (6.9.8). This is his closing statement on Alexander's reign.

Yet Herodian is not the only one of the ancient authors to criticize Mamaea, though he is the most vehement. The literary tradition is hostile to Mamaea, charging her with avarice. The tradition probably evolved from the fact that she was so prominent in the reign and the tendency of authors to lay the blame on a woman in an Emperor's life. The Vita Alexandri mentions her greed (14.7, 59.8). The author of the Epitome says that Mamaea was so stingy that if any food was left over from the noon-day meal, though half-eaten, it would be reserved at another meal (Epit. de Caes. 24.5). Eutropius and Victor are silent on the issue. Zonaras too says that she was unable to resist money and made it from every possible source (Zon. 12.15); Zosimus attributes greed to Alexander himself, saying that he hoarded money in a treasury controlled by Mamaea (Zos. 1.12.2). The charge, however, seems exaggerated and unjust.

Contrary to the literary tradition, Mamaea is deserving of much praise. She was indeed the guiding force behind Alexander's administration for its duration. Perhaps she could be faulted

for not gradually relinquishing control as Alexander grew older, but if one can believe his character-analysis in the sources, Mamaea cannot be blamed for maintaining control over a person of a kind and gentle disposition, who was too weak to assume control for himself. Alexander is characterized in the ancient sources by excessive devotion to and dependancy on his mother. Herodian claims that, though Alexander objected to his mother's treatment of his wife, he was completely dominated by her and did exactly what he was told (Herod. 6.1.10). The HA states that his devotion extended to building special apartments named for her in the palace at Rome and building a palace and a pool for her near Baiae (Sev.Alex. 26.9). The Vita Alexandri also mentions that after the Persian campaign, he established an order of boys and girls called Mamaeani and Mamaeanae (57.7). The author of the vita says that he did everything on his mother's advice (60.2) and that he was ultimately murdered because his mother persuaded him to abandon the Germanic War (63.5).<sup>5</sup> The two epitomators, Victor and Eutropius, also testify to Alexander's reliance on his mother. Victor mentions his filial piety (De Caes. 24.5); Eutropius says that he was loyal to his mother, Mamaea, alone (Brev. 8.23). Zonaras attests that Alexander was ruled by his

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<sup>5</sup>Herodian says that Alexander's failure in the Persian campaign may have been due to his mother restraining him from going to battle as planned (6.5.8-9). His account of the Germanic campaign supports that of the HA by reporting that it was Mamaea's influence that caused Alexander to try to buy his way out of the war (6.8.3). In a pitiful final scene Alexander is depicted clinging to his mother and weeping as he waits in his tent for his executioner (6.9.6).

mother (12.15). In fact, Zonaras says that Alexander's first act was to name his mother Augusta. He says that Alexander αὐτίκα τὴν οἰκείαν μητέρα Μαμαίαν Αὐγούστην ἀνεῖπεν (Zon. 12.15). It has been widely agreed that Mamaea did not receive the title of Augusta until her son became Emperor. Benario, however, suggests that Mamaea held the title of Augusta before March of 222 on the basis of an inscription, AE (1933) 281, in which the Emperor Elagabalus, his mother, Soaemias, and aunt, Mamaea, are mentioned.<sup>6</sup>

[M. Aurelium An]toninu[m August]um Pi[um Felicem et Iuliam Soae]miadem [et Iuliam] Mama[eam Augustas Aris[taenetu[s et .... s. lib. pr[occ.

The argument is based on the restoration, Augustas, for a lacuna in line 2. Benario supports the restoration because, first, some title is required, second, after the accession of Elagabalus, Soaemias never appeared in inscriptions without this title, and third, Augusta is the only title they could have shared, as Mamaea was no more than the Emperor's aunt at the time.<sup>7</sup> If the restoration is correct, it appears that Zonaras is wrong when he says that Mamaea was made Augusta immediately upon Alexander's accession. It is plausible the Mamaea, as a prominent member of the imperial house, be granted also the title of Augusta. After all she too had a son who was recognized as a potential heir to

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<sup>6</sup>Herbert W. Benario, "The Titulature of Julia Soaemias and Julia Mamaea: Two Notes", TAPA 90 (1959), p.14.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.14.

the throne very early in Elagabalus' reign. Furthermore, the concept of domus divina, which was associated with the Severan house, would be upheld by such a title conferred upon the Emperor's aunt.<sup>8</sup>

The power that Mamaea wielded during her son's reign is borne out by epigraphical and numismatic evidence. She was highly honoured from the very beginning, holding the title of mater castrorum even before Maesa's death.<sup>9</sup> Her name was also given to a cohort of vigiles, a distinction given to no other Empress.<sup>10</sup> Her official title, as of 227, was mater Augusti et castrorum et senatus atque patria.<sup>11</sup> Coins struck in the years prior to 227 refer to the harmony between Mamaea and her son, and to Mamaea as an imperial mother.<sup>12</sup> The obverse of each coin has a portrait of Mamaea and the words Iulia Mamaea Aug.; the reverse contains various legends such as Pax Aeterna Aug., Felicitas Perpetua, etc.<sup>13</sup>

Few of the inscriptions containing Mamaea's name are datable, or give much added information on her career. A tablet dedicated to

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<sup>8</sup>Inscriptions mentioning the domus divina: CIL VI 2108, 2799; VII 319; VIII 2620, 8203, 15846; XII 144; XIV 125.

<sup>9</sup>CIL VI 2832

<sup>10</sup>CIL VI 3008. See Williams, op.cit., pp.74-100.

<sup>11</sup>CIL VI 2108.

<sup>12</sup>R.A.G. Carson, Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum, VI (London, 1962), Severus Alexander 1090, 920.

<sup>13</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander 527, 537, 997.

Alexander and Mamaea in the year 224 by a division of the frumentarii in Ostia indicates that Mamaea increased the police force.<sup>14</sup> An inscription of 228 on an altar to Asclepius asks for the well-being of Alexander and his mother.<sup>15</sup> It is likely that one of them was ill at this time. An inscription dated to 229, scratched under rough portraits of Alexander and Mamaea, indicates that she still had the loyalty of members of the vigiles.<sup>16</sup> One particularly striking inscription from Carthage gives Mamaea a most elaborate title, CIL II 3413:

Iuliae Avitae/Mameae Aug(ustae)/matri domini/n(ostri)  
sanctissimi/imp(eratoris) Severi Ale/xandri Pii Fe/llicis  
Aug(usti) et/castrorum et/senatus et pa/triae et univer/si  
generis hu/mani conven/tus Karthag(inis)

There is evidence of dedications to Mamaea in many different parts of the Empire, often made by soldiers.<sup>17</sup> African inscriptions indicate that forts were built and dedicated to Alexander and Mamaea.<sup>18</sup> Inscriptions on lead pipes indicate that Mamaea had much property of her own and was involved in the construction of public works.<sup>19</sup> Contrary to Herodian's statement

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<sup>14</sup>CIL XIV 125.

<sup>15</sup>CIL VI 13.

<sup>16</sup>CIL VI 3075.

<sup>17</sup>Dacia: CIL III 798, Sicily: CIL X 7478, Numidia: CIL VIII 10767, Rome: CIL VI 2833, Pannonia: CIL III 3327, 7955, Africa: CIL VIII 8203 and many others.

<sup>18</sup>CIL VIII 1.

<sup>19</sup>CIL XIV 3037, See Williams, op.cit., pp.75-6.

that Alexander's reign would have been a success but for Mamaea, it appears that it was Mamaea's strength that held the administration together. She also seems to have been responsible for foiling conspiracy against her son, working behind the scenes, as it were, to keep her son's position secure.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Mamaea's anomalous position under Roman law is illustrated by an imperial decree rendered in 224 (C.I.C. Cod. 5.35): Imperator Alexander Augustus Otaciliae: Tutelam administrare virile munus est et ultra sexum feminae infirmitatis tale officium est, X. Kal. Oct. Juliano et Crispino Consilibus.



## ALEXANDER'S ADMINISTRATION

The sources list numerous reforms, supposedly introduced by Alexander's administration. Two of these, dealing with the consilium principis and the rank of the praetorian prefect, are particularly controversial. Herodian says that the first reform of the new reign was the choosing of sixteen senators as counsellors to the Emperor (6.1.2). But, apparently in contradiction to this statement, he says later on that members of Alexander's council were chosen by the senate (7.1.3). The HA says

neque ullam constitutionem sacrauit sine viginti iuris peritis et doctissimis ac sapientibus viris iisdemque disertissimis non minus quinquaginta, ut non minus in consilio essent sententiae quam senatus consultum conficerent (Sev.Alex. 16.1)

Little is known of the consilium principis, which originated as an ad hoc advisory committee of senators and amici to deliberate with the Emperor on public affairs, owing to the lack of documentary evidence. The exact number of members is not known but probably was quite flexible.<sup>1</sup> The revival of the consilium principis reflects Alexander's desire to return to normal policy. The information of our sources, however, has been seen as contradictory and controversial. It has long been a cause for concern that Herodian mentions a group of sixteen, whereas the HA speaks of twenty, and then fifty men. The question of whether

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<sup>1</sup>See Suetonius, Tiberius 55.

the consiliarii are chosen by the Emperor or elected by the Senate has also been debated. Various solutions to the problems have been proposed. It has been suggested that Herodian and the author of the HA are not speaking of the same council; that there were two councils, the one mentioned by Herodian being an informal council for the purpose of aiding in administration until Alexander came of age, the one in the HA being the consilium principis. Jardé takes this view and adds to it that this council of sixteen either disappeared or became incorporated into the consilium principis.<sup>2</sup> The passage in the HA mentions a total of seventy men, one group of twenty jurists and another of fifty wise and eloquent men. Crook proposes that the total of seventy was the combined forces of the amici, jurisconsults, and the sixteen senators, forming the consilium.<sup>3</sup> But this solution ignores the fact that the HA describes two distinct groups. I propose that the group of twenty jurists in the HA is the same group as the sixteen senators mentioned by Herodian, and that this group is the consilium principis.<sup>4</sup> The difference in number between sixteen, in Herodian, and twenty, in the HA, is negligible when one is considering a group that varies in number. An advisory council of either fifty or seventy members seems to me to be unwieldy and impractical. The group composed of fifty

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<sup>2</sup>Jardé, op.cit., p.26.

<sup>3</sup>John Crook, Consilium Principis (London, 1955), p.90.

<sup>4</sup>See R.V. Nind Hopkins, The Life of Alexander Severus (London, 1907), pp.109-13.

members is easily explicable as a quorum for a senatus consultum. In A.D. 356 the quorum for the election of a praetor consisted of fifty senators.<sup>5</sup> It is altogether possible that, a century earlier, other senatorial votes required a quorum of fifty.<sup>6</sup> In this case, the passage in the HA becomes easy to comprehend. The Emperor did not issue a constitutio without consulting his private council and passing it by vote through the senate, where a minimum of fifty members was required.

The consilium principis was, then, in the time of Alexander, a personal advisory council of approximately twenty members, that was composed of senators, amici, and jurisconsults. It appears that the number of members was flexible and that they were chosen by the Emperor for the most part, though it is possible that the Senate did play some part in choosing its own representatives to the council. The HA gives a list of its members at the very end of the Vita Alexandri, including the famous jurists Ulpian and Paulus (68.1). None of the others listed are known.

Another significant reform attributed to the reign of Severus Alexander concerns the praetorian prefecture. The HA states that Alexander elevated the prefect of the guard from the equestrian order to senatorial rank, lest one not of senatorial rank pass judgement on a senator.

Praefectis praetorii suis senatoriam addidit

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<sup>5</sup>Cod. Theod. 6.4.9.

<sup>6</sup>Jardé, op.cit., pp.22-3.

dignitatem, ut Viri Clarissimi et essent et dicerentur...Alexander autem idcirco senatores esse voluit praefectos praetorii, ne quis non senator de Romano Senatore iudicaret. (Sev.Alex. 21.3-5)

Many have questioned this statement on the grounds that some of the praetorian prefects that are known to us, in their posts during and shortly after Alexander's reign, were of the equestrian order.<sup>7</sup> Of Flavianus (PIR<sup>2</sup> F 180 and J 312), one of the prefects appointed at the beginning of Alexander's reign, nothing more is known, but he was probably an equestrian.<sup>8</sup> His colleague, Chrestus (PIR<sup>2</sup> G 144) is probably the Geminus Chrestus who was Prefect of Egypt in 219/20, since the name is rare.<sup>9</sup> L. Domitius Honoratus (PIR<sup>2</sup> D 151), who was probably Ulpian's successor,<sup>10</sup> is designated on an inscription in Egypt, CIL III 12052, as

Honoratum, praef(ectum) praet(orio), em(inentissimum)  
v(irum)

The title eminentissimus indicates that he was an equestrian. Furthermore, a Domitius Honoratus, who must have been the prefect, was Prefect of Egypt.<sup>11</sup> M. Attius Cornelianus (PIR<sup>2</sup> A

<sup>7</sup>Prior to Alexander's reign there were rare exceptions. For examples, see the careers of Sejanus and Plautianus.

<sup>8</sup>Jardé, op.cit., p.36, n.7.

<sup>9</sup>Laurence Lee Howe, The Pretorian Prefect from Commodus to Diocletian A.D. 180-305 (Rome, 1942), p.75.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.76 and 102-3.

<sup>11</sup>P.Oxy. I, 62.

1353) was praetorian prefect ca. 230.<sup>12</sup> An inscription from Uchi Maius, CIL VIII 26270, calls him

M. Attio Corneliano, praefecto praetorio, eminentissimo viro

Again, he is given the equestrian title. In addition, two unknown prefects of Alexander's reign are called eminentissimus in CIL II 2664, dated 234. Subsequent to Alexander's reign, C. Furius Sabinius Aquila Timesitheus (PIR<sup>2</sup> F 581), who was prefect in 241, and C. Julius Priscus (PIR<sup>2</sup> J 488), prefect in 242/3, are examples of equestrian prefects.<sup>13</sup> The number of prefects who can be proved to have been equestrians while they held that post under and shortly after Alexander indicates that the statement in the HA is probably false.<sup>14</sup> The passage in the Vita Alexandri (21.5), in all likelihood, refers to the exceptional case of Ulpian, who was favoured by the Severan family, rather than to any definite policy.

The author of the HA also claims that Alexander made the choice of praetorian prefect subject to the approval of the Senate

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<sup>12</sup>Howe, op.cit., pp.39-40.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p.49 and 78-9.

<sup>14</sup>Some scholars, including Jardé, reject this argument with the claim that the granting of senatorial or consular ornamenta to the praetorian prefecture entitled the prefects to employ the rank title, clarissimus, or the office title, eminentissimus, interchangeably. Therefore, according to these scholars, the title eminentissimus did not preclude senatorial rank. See Jardé, op.cit., pp.33-43. For Howe's refutation, see his Appendix II, H, pp.120-3. See also André Chastagnol, "Recherches sur L'Histoire Auguste", Antiquitas 4 6 (1970), pp.39-52.

(Sev.Alex. 19.1).<sup>15</sup> This statement has also come under criticism owing to the fact that heretofore the choice of prefect was made solely by the Emperor. However, the statement in the HA does not say that the Senate chose the prefect, only that it approved him. Surely, if it did not, the Emperor's choice would remain the same. The author of the HA may be recounting some attempt on Alexander's part to bolster the Senate's prestige. On the other hand, the statement may be completely false.

Alexander's policies concerning government officials are mentioned by Herodian and the author of the HA. Since both of these sources lack credibility, however, one must question the veracity of their statements. Herodian states that, upon Alexander's accession, all men advanced wrongly under Elagabalus were demoted, and all officials were returned to their former posts.<sup>16</sup> He says that civil, legal and military affairs were entrusted to those men best suited to manage them (6.1.3-4). The author of the HA says that Alexander's first act was to remove from government all judges elevated by Elagabalus; then he cleaned up the Senate, the equestrian order, the tribes and the

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<sup>15</sup>cf. Zos. 1.11.2 where Mamaea appoints Ulpian to the prefecture.

<sup>16</sup>Examples of men restored to positions of importance, previously dismissed or idle under Elagabalus:  
 Marius Maximus, dismissed from urban prefecture in 218, made cos.II in 223  
 P. Valerius Comazon (Pflaum #290), dismissed by Elagabalus from the urban prefecture in 221, re-employed as urban prefect for third time in 222  
 Julius Flavianus, praetorian prefect in 218, restored to that position in 222.

palace retinue (Sev.Alex. 15.1-2). But epigraphical evidence shows that replacement of government officials was not nearly as thorough as these statements indicate. Jardé gives a list of men whose careers, evident under Elagabalus, continued under Alexander.<sup>17</sup> There are others.<sup>18</sup> The album Canusinum (CIL IX 338), a list of senators who were patrons of Canusium, contains, in 223, the names of many previously honoured by Elagabalus.<sup>19</sup> The statements in Herodian and the HA are misleading in that they imply a thorough over-haul of government personnel. This was not the case.

The offices of government officials underwent further changes, according to the Vita Alexandri. Once more, it is important to keep in mind that the material is suspect. Alexander abolished the adscripti, the salaried military officials of high rank who took no active part in commanding the army (15.3). He appointed

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<sup>17</sup>C. Octavius Appius Suetrius Sabinus (CIL III 3428, 3429, 10405, 10491)  
 L. Annius Italicus Honoratus (CIL III 1071, 1072, 6154, 6224)  
 Ser. Calpurnius Dexter (CIL VI 1368)  
 C. Porcius Priscus Longinus (CIL VI 2107, 2108; XIV 3611)  
 Cn. Petronius Probatas (CIL X 1254)  
 P. Julius Junianus Martialianus (CIL VIII 2392, 2742, 7049)  
 L. Julius Apronius Maenius Pius Salamallianus (CIL VIII 17369, 18018, 18270, 18271)  
 C. Caesonius Macer Rufinianus (CIL XIV 3900, 3902)  
 See Jardé, op.cit., p.60, n.3.

<sup>18</sup>M. Aedinius Julianus, PIR<sup>2</sup> A 113 (CIL IX 338; XIII 3162)  
 T. Aelius Decrianus, PIR<sup>2</sup> A 167 (CIL VIII 10432, 10436, 10461-63, 10465, 10468-9)  
 See H.G. Pflaum, Les Carrières Procuratoriennes Equestres sous le Haut-Empire Romain (Paris, 1960)

<sup>19</sup>H.G. Pflaum, Le Marbre de Thorigny (Paris, 1948), pp.37-49. See also Whittaker, op.cit., p.81, n.3.

fourteen curatores, from the ranks of the ex-consuls to assist the praefectus urbi (33.1). Many of the provinces that were previously imperial, he handed over to the governorship of procuratores of equestrian rank (24.1). He never enrolled freedmen into the equestrian order because, he claimed, from the equestrian order came senators (19.4). The Vita says that Alexander initiated payment of salaries to his adessores (46.1), which, if true, was an important step. Permanent salaried officials led to greater administrative efficiency. He also paid salaries to teachers, rhetoricians, doctors, augurs, astrologers, engineers and architects (44.4). The quaestores candidati principis put on public games at their own expense, as was customary. But the elected quaestors, who formerly also paid for their own games, received money from the privy purse for this purpose (43.3-4). Alexander reduced the consuls' expenses (43.2). The majority of the adjustments listed above are aimed at reduction of state expenditure and the financial burden of public office. Though it is possible that this intention characterized Alexander's reign to some degree, it is likely that the details listed here are purely the invention of the author of the HA, who tends to idealize the Emperor's reign.

According to the Vita Alexandri, other economic measures were taken to reduce expenditure and increase state funds. He reduced expenditure on imperial clothing and ornamentation (33.4, 34.5, 40.1, 41.1). Gold or silver were never given to actors and rarely even presents (33.3, 37.1). He reduced the rate of



interest exacted by money-lenders to four percent (21.2, 26.2). Alexander permitted senators to exact six percent on loans, in lieu of gifts (26.3).. He remitted tax on merchants in Rome in order to draw more business to the City (22.1, 32.5). The author also mentions remission of the aurum coronarium (32.5).<sup>20</sup> The statement is verifiable. A papyrus, P.Fayum 20, containing an edict of Severus Alexander confirms the author's statement.<sup>21</sup> The edict, recounted on column two, of the papyrus, states that, though tax of this type owing from the past and voted in connection with Alexander's appointment as Caesar was still due, no new levies for his succession would be enacted.<sup>22</sup> Alexander imposed a tax upon artisans, the proceeds of which went to maintenance of public baths (24.5).

At the same time, Alexander was attentive to the needs of his people. He formed guilds of all the trades and gave them spokesmen (33.2). He assigned public funds to individual communities to further their own particular craft (21.1). The largess of oil, which was given under Septimius, was re-established (22.2) and three times a largess of grain was given

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<sup>20</sup>The aurum coronarium was originally a voluntary contribution made by cities to provide gold victory wreaths for the general at his triumph. It soon became compulsory.

<sup>21</sup>B.P. Grenfell, A.S. Hunt, Fayum Towns and Their Papyri (London, 1900), pp.116-20.

<sup>22</sup>James H. Oliver, "On the Edict of Severus Alexander (P. Fayum 20)", American Journal of Philology 99 (1978), pp.474-85. cf. A.K. Bowman, "The Crown Tax in Roman Egypt", Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists 4 (1967), pp.59-74.

to the people (26.1). He also gave them meat(26.1). The author says that Alexander granted three liberalitates to the soldiers (26.1) but extant Roman coinage of Alexander's reign shows that he gave five gifts of money.<sup>23</sup>

Alexander also attempted to improve the system of coinage, which was badly debased by the time he ascended the throne. The author of the HA claims that the Emperor issued half- and third- aurei pieces and that he minted quarter-aurei but never issued them (Sev.Alex. 39.7-8). However, there is no evidence of the existence of either the quarter- or third-aureus until the time of Valerian. The author says, too, that Alexander melted down coins of larger denominations that were issued by Elagabalus, namely the two, three, four, ten and above aurei pieces (39.9). None of these higher pieces survive, so the statement may be correct or it may be entirely false. That Alexander represented himself as a reformer of coinage is evident from the legends on his coins, which read IMP·SEV·ALEXANDER·AUG·RESTITVTOR·MONETAE and IMP·SEV·ALEXANDER·AUG·RESTITVTA·MONETA.<sup>24</sup> Examination of the extant coinage, however, shows that Alexander was no restitutor. The aureus never attained its former weight and the variety in weight of coins of the same denomination is startling.<sup>25</sup> The

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<sup>23</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #1-3, 6-9, 210-11, 213-16, etc. Herodian mentions two gifts of money to the soldiers, 6.4.1, 6.6.4.

<sup>24</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #546-50.

<sup>25</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., pp.187-89.

author of the HA creates the impression that Alexander's economic policy was based on thrift. Epigraphical and numismatic evidence support this, to some extent, on the issues of replacement of officials, crown tax and coinage. All the other details in the Vita Alexandri should be accepted only with extreme caution.

It appears that Alexander made few changes in military organization. The number of legions, raised by Septimius from thirty to thirty-three, remained constant under Alexander.<sup>26</sup> One passage in the Vita Alexandri is of particular interest.

sola quae de hostibus capta sunt, limitaneis ducibus et militibus donavit, it ut eorum essent, si heredes eorum militarent, nec umquam ad privatos pertinerent (58.4)

The creation of the office of dux limitaneus, frontier general, signalled the separation of civil and military power in the provinces because it took military control out of the hands of the provincial governor, leaving him with civil administration. By the time of Diocletian this separation was complete. It has been thought that it began under Aurelian, but, according to the above passage, the office of dux limitaneus was in existence in Alexander's reign.<sup>27</sup> Accordingly, it has been argued that some move toward the separation of military and civil power began even

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<sup>26</sup>CIL VI 3492 a and b

<sup>27</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., pp.201-2.

earlier than the reign of Aurelian.<sup>28</sup> The danger of this argument lies in the fact that it is likely that the passage, or rather the term, is an anachronism. The granting of territorium legionis to soldiers on condition of their serving was not a new practice;<sup>29</sup> the innovation of Alexander was that he made tenure of land hereditary on condition of continued service by the heirs.

Alexander is characterized in the HA as strict,<sup>30</sup> but fair with the soldiers. He inflicted capital punishment on tribunes who gave privileges to soldiers in exchange for a portion of their rations (15.5). When a tribune was found guilty of a charge brought by a soldier, Alexander meted out a fitting punishment; there was no hope of pardon (23.1). Yet he saw to it that the soldiers were well clad, shod and armed (50.3). When on campaign the Emperor dined in an open tent on ordinary soldiers' rations (51.5). He forbade anyone to call him dominus, preferring the title of imperator (4.1). These anecdotes on Alexander's strictness with the soldiers can be dismissed as pure fiction. Nothing could be further from the truth. Alexander's inability to control the troops is reflected by the numerous mentions of

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p.203. See also Peter J. Parsons, "M. Aurelius Zeno Ianuarius", Proceedings of the 12th International Congress of Papyrology (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1968) (American Studies in Papyrology 7 (1970)), pp.389-97.

<sup>29</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., pp.205-6.

<sup>30</sup>Vide infra, pp.115-7.

military unrest in the sources.<sup>31</sup>

Alexander's building program was quite extensive. He restored many public works of other Emperors. His Thermae Alexandriana (Vita Alexandri 25.3) are an extension and renovation of the Thermae Neronianae and are depicted on coins of 226.<sup>32</sup> He completed the baths of Caracalla (25.6), restored Trajan's bridges and built new ones (26.11). He also built an aqueduct (25.3), many public works at Baiae (26.9-10), and fourteen public storage warehouses, one in each regio of the City (39.3). He began the Basilica Alexandrina, equipped the shrines of Isis and Serapis (26.8), and set up colossal statues throughout the City (25.8, 28.6). There is evidence to support Alexander's ambitious building program.<sup>33</sup>

Because almost all of the description of Alexander's government policies is contained in the HA, much of it must be disregarded as fiction. Similarly, details of Alexander's private life and personality are practically non-existent, except for the fictions in the Vita Alexandri. The Vita abounds in trivialities that are often ridiculous. The author idealizes Alexander's appearance and personality to the point that the Vita becomes almost a

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<sup>31</sup>Dio 80.2.2-3, 80.3.1, 80.4.1-2, 80.5.1; Herodian 6.1.9, 6.4.7, 6.6.1, 6.7.3, 6.7.10, 6.8.3-9.7; HA, Sev.Alex. 48.1-8, 49.3-4, 53.1-4, 59.4-5; Zosimus 1.12; Epit. de Caes. 24.

<sup>32</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #323-4, 326-7. See David Magie, The Scriptores Historiae Augustae II (Loeb ed.) (London, 1924), p.224, n.6.

<sup>33</sup>For fuller discussion of Alexander's public works depicted on coins and inscriptions, see Hopkins, op.cit., pp.171-81.

programmatic piece on the ideal ruler.<sup>34</sup> It is interesting to note that none of the sources mention children. Though they do not state that he was childless, this is likely the case. If Alexander had children, there would surely be some mention of them at the time of his death and the succession to the throne.

In connection with Alexander's policies, some mention must be made of the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas contained in Book 52 of Dio's Roman History. The setting is introduced wherein Octavian seeks the advice of these two men as to whether or not he should lay down his power. The debate can be divided into two parts. In the first part Agrippa argues the merits of a republican constitution while Maecenas advocates the resumption of monarchy (52.2.1-18.7). The discussion is general and philosophical. Within this first part, there is a portion of the manuscript missing that contained Agrippa's conclusion and the beginning of Maecenas' speech (52.13.7). The second part of the debate contains Maecenas' specific suggestions on the running of an Empire (52.19-40). It is obvious that this debate is not a rendition of any actual discussion that took place between

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<sup>34</sup>Alexander is graceful and manly, with a soldier's height and strength (4.4). He has brilliant eyes (14.6), an exceptional memory (14.6). He is courteous and gracious (20.1). He discourages flattery (18.1-3). His meals are moderate (34.8, 37.2-12, 41.5). He is devout (43.5), generous to the poor (40.2). He gives presents to retiring officials (32.3). He is an accomplished poet, musician, astrologer, augur, painter, and singer (27.5-10). An account of a typical day in the life of Alexander depicts him as very hard working and conscientious (29.1-31.2).

Agrippa and Maecenas; nor does Dio attempt to represent it as such. In fact, there is no indication that the discussion adapted the speeches to known opinions of the two advisors. Observe the fact that it was Agrippa, not Maecenas, who became Octavian's advisor on imperial policy. Agrippa's speech, with its philosophical tone, is impractical and unrealistic, never intended by Dio to be considered a viable alternative to imperial government.<sup>35</sup> It contains flaws in logic and associates Roman republicanism with Greek democracy. Thus, Agrippa proposes a solution very foreign to Roman tradition and ideology. Furthermore, the speech lacks any practical advice on the implementation of its proposals. Octavian is advised to retire (52.13.1) after first setting out laws to settle important business in the public interest (52.13.5). Beyond this, there is no further detail as to how exactly Octavian should relinquish his power. McKechnie interprets Agrippa's speech as "a demonstration of how outmoded and impractical democratic ideas were in the context of the world-Empire of the first century B.C. and of the third century A.D."<sup>36</sup>

Maecenas' speech, on the other hand, contains very specific proposals that have incited scholars to propose a variety of interpretations of Dio's purpose in writing the debate. The

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<sup>35</sup>Paul McKechnie, "Cassius Dio's Speech of Agrippa: A Realistic Alternative to Imperial Government?", Greece and Rome 28, 2 (1981), pp.150-5.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p.154.

standard view, proposed by Meyer, interprets the second part of the debate as a political pamphlet aimed against the pro-senatorial policies of the Emperor Alexander.<sup>37</sup> In the belief that Dio's Roman History was written much earlier than is currently thought,<sup>38</sup> Meyer concluded that the second part of the debate was inserted at a date later than the original writing. Supportive of this theory is the fact that there is a great imbalance in the length of the two speeches. Maecenas' speech is nearly three times the length of Agrippa's. On the other hand, if one removes the second part of the debate (52.19-40), other difficulties arise. Book 52, as it stands now, is of normal length for Dio's books. If one considers the second part of the debate to be a later insertion, one must accept either that Dio originally made Book 52 about one-third as long as the others or that it contained other material that was later omitted.<sup>39</sup> Neither solution is very satisfactory. Since Dio's History was written during the reign of Severus Alexander, it is no longer necessary to consider the possibility of a later insertion. Meyer's interpretation of the speech as a political pamphlet aimed against Alexander's senatorial policies is also questionable. It is difficult to find in Maecenas' speech any policy designed to denigrate senatorial power or prestige. Nor

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<sup>37</sup>Paul Meyer, De Maecenatis oratione a Dione Ficta (Diss., Berlin, 1891).

<sup>38</sup>vide supra, pp.3-5.

<sup>39</sup>Fergus Millar, op.cit., pp.102-3.



is there any indication of hostility on Dio's part toward the Senate. In fact, Dio has Maecenas advise Octavian to pay regular salaries to his city prefect, sub-censor, and all those men who held offices outside the city of Rome (52.21.7, 52.23.1). While Meyer's interpretation of Maecenas' speech is incorrect, he is right in placing its composition, and relevance, to the time of Severus Alexander.

A completely different point of view is expressed by Hammond, who finds in Maecenas' proposals sufficient similarities with the Augustan constitution to interpret the speech as Dio's view of imperial government from the time of Augustus to his own day; he calls it "a summary exposition of the actual principate".<sup>40</sup> Bering-Staschewski proposes an interpretation somewhat akin to that of Hammond.<sup>41</sup> She relates the content of Maecenas' speech to Dio's judgement of the principate and of Augustan politics, claiming that it is risky to separate the intention of the speech from its context. Therefore, she considers Dio's opinion of the principate under Augustus from the battle of Actium to his death.<sup>42</sup> Bering-Staschewski concludes that Dio's intention was to lay out a diagnosis of the positive and negative aspects of

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<sup>40</sup>Mason Hammond, "The Significance of the Speech of Maecenas in Dio Cassius, Book LII", TAPA 63 (1932), p.102. Detailed analysis of Maecenas' proposals on pp.91-101.

<sup>41</sup>Rosemarie Bering-Staschewski, "Römische Zeitgeschichte bei Cassius Dio", Bochumer historische Studien, Alte Geschichte Nr.5 (Bochum, 1981), pp.129-34.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp.131-33.

the principate while developing an ideal in which the Senate plays a regulatory role for inferior rulers.<sup>43</sup> She finds no programmatic purpose in Maecenas' speech. Millar has a different view, saying that the similarities between Maecenas' proposals and existing practice is not a valid basis for arguing that the speech is a summary of constitutional development.<sup>44</sup> Millar points out that Dio was not inventing his ideal monarchy, but rather proposing solutions for problems of his own day. Therefore, it is not surprising that Maecenas' proposals often coincide with constitutional practices introduced by Augustus. Millar agrees with Meyer that this is indeed a political pamphlet, "for its entire content (with trivial exceptions) relates to the early third century and not to the time of Augustus."<sup>45</sup> But he does not agree with Meyer that it addresses the problems of Severus Alexander's principate. Millar takes the year 207 as the beginning of composition of the Roman History and considers that Dio recorded events of his own lifetime more or less as they happened. According to this method of calculation, he supposes the debate was written in 214, under the Emperor Caracalla. Again, the date of composition is too early, but Millar does make very valid points concerning the Senate's role and Dio's interpretation of it. Maecenas advocates the

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p.133.

<sup>44</sup>Millar, op.cit., p.107.

<sup>45</sup>Millar, op.cit., p.104.

traditional senatorial cursus (52.20.1-2). He thinks that all provinces are to be governed by senators (52.22.2) for a period of three to five years (52.23.2). Millar points out that this practice would result in senators holding more posts for a longer period than the practice current in the early third century.<sup>46</sup> Maecenas also advises that senatorial magistracies, the office of quaestor, aedile, tribune, praetor, and consul, should be filled by election, but an election in name only. The emperor should actually chose the officials himself (52.20.3). Maecenas suggests that traditional powers of these offices should be abated while the honour be preserved (52.20.3). He also says that the Emperor should go through the motions of ratifying his legislation through the Senate (52.31.2). These points prove that Dio was a realist; he was not writing of an ideal principate. Dio grew up, and had an active senatorial career, in an era when the constitutional power of the Senate has long been in abeyance. Through his career, he gained knowledge and insights that well qualified him to speculate on the remedies for the ills of principate.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, I agree with Millar that

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid,, p.114.

<sup>47</sup>More detailed discussion of the Agrippa-Maecenas debate is beyond the scope of this work. For further analysis refer to: J. Bleicken, "Der politische Standpunkt Dios gegenüber der Monarchie", Hermes 90 (1862), pp.444-467  
B. Manuwald, Cassius Dio und Augustus: Philologische Untersuchungen zu den Buchern 45-56 des dionischen Geschichtswerkes (Wiesbaden, 1979), pp.77 ff.  
U. Espinoza Ruiz, Debate Agrippa-Maecenas en Dion Cassio: Respuesta senatorial a la crisis del Impero Romano en época Severiana (Madrid, 1982), pp.273 ff.

Dio wrote Maecenas' speech for the purpose of diagnosing the problems of the government of his day, and proposing practical solutions to these problems. Since Dio wrote his Roman History under Alexander's reign, the problems are those of his administration.

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J.M. Roddaz, "De César à Auguste: L'image de la monarchie chez un historien du Siècle de Sévères. Réflexions sur l'oeuvre de Dion Cassius, a propos d'ouvrages récents", Revue des Études Anciennes 85, 1-2 (1983), pp.67-87.

T.D. Barnes, "The Composition of Cassius Dio's Roman History", Phoenix 38 (1984), p.254.

## THE MIDDLE YEARS

Of the years between Alexander's marriage and the preparation for the Persian campaign in 230, little is known. Alexander was consul ordinarius for the second time in 226. None of the ancient sources contain a chronological account of the period, leaving one with the impression that it was relatively uneventful. But there are indications that this was not the case. Dio says,

πολλὰ δὲ καὶ παρὰ πολλῶν ἐπαναστάσεις γενόμεναι, καὶ  
 τινες καὶ ἰσχυρῶς ἐκφοβήσασθαι, κατεπαύθησαν. (80.3.1)

He also records that the armies in Mesopotamia were so lacking in discipline, that they killed their commander, Flavius Heracleo (80.4.2).<sup>1</sup> It is difficult, however, to date this event because Dio's chronology, as Xiphilinus presents it, seems unclear. In Book 80.3.1-3 there is description of trouble in Mesopotamia and Artaxerxes' victory over Artabanus, which took place in 224.<sup>2</sup> Dio also describes Artaxerxes' invasions of Mesopotamia and Syria, which took place in the next few years. Then he relates the murder of Flavius Heracleo (80.4.2); then the complaint of the Praetorians to(?) Ulpian of Dio's own severity with his troops in Pannonia. This seems extremely odd. Dio governed

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<sup>1</sup>Nothing more is known of this man. PIR<sup>2</sup> F 283.

<sup>2</sup>Vide infra, p.84.

Pannonia about 226-28,<sup>3</sup> by which time Ulpian was dead. The narrative continues with a description of Dio's second consulship with Alexander, which took place in 229 (80.5.1).<sup>4</sup>

Some scholars have supposed that the revolt in Mesopotamia that resulted in Heracleo's death, related by Dio, should be dated to 231, when Alexander was known to have been in Mesopotamia.<sup>5</sup> They point to Herodian's account of an attempted mutiny just as Alexander prepared to cross the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (6.4.7), claiming that Dio's passage refers to this event.<sup>6</sup> This seems to me to be wrong for three reasons. First, it is unwise to correct Dio on the basis of a passage in Herodian. Second, a reasonable chronology for Dio's account can be established. Artaxerxes' invasions of Mesopotamia and Syria took place ca.226/7. The account of Heracleo's death follows, which reminds Dio of his own troubles in Pannonia at about the same time, 226-8. The reference to Ulpian has been explained by Barnes. He believes that the phrase πρὸς τῷ Οὐλιανῷ (80.4.2) should be translated 'in addition to Ulpian' not 'to Ulpian' as Cary translates it.<sup>7</sup> The sentence would then read, 'and the

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<sup>3</sup>Vide supra, p.42.

<sup>4</sup>Vide infra, p.84.

<sup>5</sup>Vide infra, p.85.

<sup>6</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., p.132; Jardé op.cit., p.65.

<sup>7</sup>T.D. Barnes, "The Composition of Cassius Dio's Roman History", Phoenix 38 (1984), p.245, n.21; E. Cary, Dio's Roman History IX (The Loeb Classical Library), (London, 1927), p.485.

Praetorians complained of me, in addition to Ulpian, because I ruled the soldiers with a strong hand.' In this translation Dio compares his own strictness with that of Ulpian. The statement in no way suggests that Ulpian was still alive. Dio's own consulship follows in 229. Clearly, the revolt in Mesopotamia in which Heracleo was killed took place some time between 226 and 229. Third, Dio says that there were many uprisings. There is no need to connect the two accounts.

Zosimus mentions two pretenders to the throne. He says that the soldiers mutinied, bringing forward Antoninus as Emperor, but that he fled from fear. Then Uranius, a man of slave ancestry, was chosen Emperor (1.12.1-2). There are extant coins bearing the name C. Julius Aurelius Sulpicius Uranius Antoninus (PIR<sup>2</sup> J 195), a fact that has led scholars to conclude that the Antoninus and Uranius mentioned by Zosimus are one and the same person.<sup>8</sup> They have been ascribed to the early reign of Alexander, since they bear the star of Elagabalus, but the star can easily be accounted for by the fact that the coins are from Emesa, the home of the sun-god.<sup>9</sup> Others claim that the coins are of a later date and do not refer to Alexander's reign at all, but rather to 253/4, under Gallienus, at which time there was a pretender by

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<sup>8</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #883.

<sup>9</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., p.135.

the name of Antoninus.<sup>10</sup> Jardé, however, is of the opinion that the latter Sulpicius Uranius was a descendant of the former and sees no need to disregard Zosimus' claim.<sup>11</sup> The Epitome de Caesaribus, furthermore, tells of a man named Taurinus, who was made Augustus but threw himself into the Euphrates out of fear.<sup>12</sup> Based on the reference to the Euphrates, Hopkins ties this event in with the account in Dio, in which Flavius Heracleo was killed, and Herodian's account, in which a revolt took place on the banks of the Euphrates.<sup>13</sup> The interpretation is rather far-fetched. The Vita Alexandri contains mentions of a few disturbances not otherwise attested. Ovinus Camillus, otherwise unknown, but said to be a senator of ancient family, made plans to rebel and seize the throne. He was discovered and sent to his country home where he was ultimately killed by soldiers on the Emperor's

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<sup>10</sup>Zos. 1.38.

<sup>11</sup>Jardé, op.cit., pp.66-7.

<sup>12</sup>Epit.de Caes. 24.2. Sub hoc imperante Taurinus, Augustus effectus, ob timorem ipse se Euphrate fluvio abiecit.

<sup>13</sup>Hopkins combines the accounts of Dio, Herodian, Zosimus and the Epit.de Caes., making one version. He suggests that the name Taurinus, in the Epitome, is a false reading for Uranius and that Herodian's account is post-dated. The version runs as follows: The Mesopotamian troops mutiny, killing their commander, Flavius Heracleo, and appoint Sulpicius Uranius as Emperor, who assumes the right to mint coinage until he is overcome by Junius Palmatus (Hopkins interprets the reference in the HA, Sev.Alex. 58.1, Acta sunt res feliciter...in Armenia per Junium Palmatum, to be to the same event). When Uranius discovers he has been beaten, he takes his own life and peace is restored. See Hopkins, op.cit., p.135, n.2. One of the problems with this version is that Herodian and Dio speak of Mesopotamia, whereas the HA mentions Armenia. These two regions are too distant to refer to the same event.



command (48.1-6). Since Ovinus Camillus is probably a bogus name, it is likely that the story is an invention of the author. There is also mention of unrest in Mauretania Tingitana, Illyria, Armenia and Isauria (58.1). Evidence of ramparts, built around garrisons in 227 in Mauretania Caesariensis, may indicate that there was trouble in this area.<sup>14</sup> It appears that Alexander had his share of military uprisings, contrary to the picture of a peaceful reign painted by the author of the HA.

Roman coinage of this period testifies to a change in the attitude of Alexander's administration. By the year 228, there is a change in theme of Alexander's coinage. He appears armed with shield and spear.<sup>15</sup> Mars appears wearing a mantle or armed for war.<sup>16</sup> In 229 the same coins appear.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Alexander is depicted sitting in a chariot with Victory above him.<sup>18</sup> An inscription of the same year, found in Beuel, Germany, refers to a victory, perhaps over the usurper, Uranus.<sup>19</sup> In 230 Alexander's coins show him crowned by Victory while a military

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<sup>14</sup>See Paul-Albert Fevrier, "A Propos de Troubles de Mauretanie (Villes et Conflits du III<sup>e</sup> S)", ZPE 43 (1981), pp.143-48. Fevrier argues that the walls are not signs of unrest but of urbanization.

<sup>15</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #468, 511.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., #451, 453, 456-7, 473, 476, 503.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., #601, 603, 608-9.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., #575, 579, 581-2, 587-90, 622.

<sup>19</sup>AE 34 (1899), p.315, 11.1-12. See Williams, op.cit., p.78.

figure with a shield stands in the foreground; coins of Mars Ultor, Mars Pacifer, and coins bearing the legend VICTORIA AUGUSTI belong to this year.<sup>20</sup> Since the Persian campaign did not begin until 231, the allusions to victory must refer to the revolts of this period and their suppression.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #669, 799, 642, 1020.

<sup>21</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., pp.132-3.

## THE PERSIAN WAR

In the year 229 Alexander held the consulship for the third time, with Dio as his colleague (Dio 80.5.1). Dio relates that the choice was an unpopular one and that Alexander ordered him to spend the period of his consulship outside Rome for fear that the soldiers might kill him (80.5.1). This indicates yet again that Alexander's control of the troops was shaky. Dio then records that, due to medical problems, he retired to his home in Bithynia. At this point, Xiphilinus' epitome of Dio's Roman History ends, so we do not have an account of the Persian War, Germanic War, or Alexander's death. Dio, however, does give some background information on the Persian conflict. Artabanus, King of the Parthians, and Artaxerxes (Ardashir), King of the Persians, engaged in three major battles in the early 220's to establish supremacy in this eastern region. In the third battle, in 224, Artabanus was beaten and killed. Artaxerxes then overran Armenia and Media, proclaiming himself to be the new King of the Persians. He voiced his intention of regaining the Persian Kingdom, as it had been under Darius, as far as the Aegean Sea (Dio 80.3.1-4). Herodian records that Artaxerxes crossed the Tigris River, overrunning Mesopotamia and threatening Syria (6.2.1-2). Zonaras says that he overran Cappadocia and besieged Nisibis (12.15) before Alexander sent his first embassy to the Persian King asking for peace. Herodian has the most coherent and detailed narrative of the Persian campaign. He says that the

embassy carried a letter to Artaxerxes warning him not to initiate war with the Romans, who had repeatedly beaten eastern armies in the past. Artaxerxes ignored the advice and pressed forward his advance (6.2.3-5). These events must have taken place in 229/30 because preparations for war were well under way in 230. Herodian says that levies were recruited from Italy and all the Roman provinces (6.3.1). He also mentions a large distribution of money to the soldiers. After proper sacrifices for departure, Alexander set out from Rome (6.4.1-2). The Acta Fratrum Arvalium of the year 231 contain a prayer for the safe return and victory of Alexander.<sup>1</sup> Coins of the same year bear the legend PROPECTIO AUG.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that Alexander marched from Rome in the spring of 231. Herodian says that the march was made in haste, through Illyria, where Alexander collected more troops, and then on to Antioch in Syria. While Alexander was training the troops over the winter of 231, he sent another embassy to the Persian King to discuss a peaceful alliance. Artaxerxes remained obdurate and sent to Alexander a delegation of four hundred Persians on horseback, dressed in gold and extravagant clothing designed to overawe the Romans with their magnificence. Their message ordered Alexander to abandon the whole of Asia up to the Aegean Sea. Alexander seized the emissaries, removed their weapons and fancy clothing, and

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<sup>1</sup>W. Henzen, Acta Fratrum Arvalium (Berlin, 1874), p.217.

<sup>2</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #747, 749, 751, 775-6, 781-2.

banished them to Phrygia to farm. They were not permitted to return home (6.4.3-6).<sup>3</sup> At this point Herodian records that there was an attempted mutiny by some of the Egyptian and Syrian troops, just as Alexander prepared to cross the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (6.4.7). Some think that Herodian misplaced the earlier mutiny, related by Dio, in which Flavius Heracleo was killed.<sup>4</sup> But, as discussed earlier, numerous disturbances took place. There is no real reason to doubt Herodian here. The Vita Alexandri also claims that a mutiny was attempted in Antioch. In that version the troops, upon arrival in Antioch, engaged in behaviour not fitting to soldiers that resulted in their arrest. In turn, the soldiers mutinied in protest of the punishment, but Alexander succeeded in restoring order by dismissing the offending legion (53-54). Though it is not unlikely that Alexander encountered difficulty in maintaining discipline, this anecdote is surely false. It is modelled on the famous incident, related by Suetonius, in which Julius Caesar averted a mutiny by addressing his soldiers as quirites (Suet. Julius 70).

When all the arrangements had been completed and Alexander's force was ready, the main expedition was launched in the spring of 232. Herodian gives a detailed account of the plan of attack. Alexander divided his forces into three columns. The first column was to march through Armenia and overrun Media, the second

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<sup>3</sup>See also Zonaras 12.15.

<sup>4</sup>Vide supra, pp.78-9.

was to take a southern route through Mesopotamia where the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers joined, the third column, containing the best troops and headed by Alexander himself, was to follow a central course between the other two. The columns would then rendezvous at an agreed point when each had gained control of its territory (6.5.1-2). Alexander's strategy was a fairly sound one. By splitting his forces he hoped to weaken the resistance of the enemy. The northern and southern columns were to create diversions for the main force, led by Alexander (6.5.7). However, according to Herodian, Alexander's plan was not the success he planned. The northern-most column had great difficulty crossing the mountainous territory in Armenia but, once in Media, it was quite successful. It does not seem that the action was very decisive, however, because, when news of the southern column's invasion of Parthia reached Artaxerxes, he left some troops to hold the Romans and made haste eastward (6.5.5-7). The Persian forces joined battle with the southern Roman column, taking it completely by surprise (6.5.9). But, for some reason, Alexander's centre column failed to join them. Herodian offers the suggestion that Alexander was afraid, or that his mother, Mamaea, may have dissuaded him from fighting (6.5.8-9). In light of Herodian's obvious dislike of Mamaea, these suggestions should be disregarded. Nor are they very plausible. I can find two possible explanations for Alexander's failure. Herodian, only a few lines later, mentions that Alexander and his whole army was ill. Perhaps the army fell prey to some disease. Since they

were travelling during the summer, the season conducive to such maladies, this is not at all unlikely. Herodian himself says that the troops were used to a moister, cooler climate (6.6.2). Second, Herodian says that Artaxerxes' troops made haste (ἐπείγῳ) from Media to Parthis with the entire army (6.5.7) and that the Romans were not expecting them (οὐ προσδοκῶντος τοῦ στρατοῦ) (6.5.9). Perhaps Alexander, and the southern troops, underestimated the speed with which Artaxerxes could move his forces, or they underestimated the size of the force Artaxerxes had with him, thinking that a greater number of troops would be required to hold the first column in Media. Perhaps the illness of the troops contributed to these factors. At any rate, Herodian represents the battle as a resounding defeat for the Romans. They were outnumbered, surrounded, and completely destroyed (6.5.9-10). Alexander decided to return to Antioch and sent orders for the northern column to do the same. But by now it was winter in the mountains of Armenia. Herodian says most of these soldiers froze to death. As for Alexander's column, many of these men too had died of illness (6.6.2-3). Of the three columns that set out in 231, Herodian describes the almost complete destruction of all of them. If the losses had truly been that severe, Alexander could not possibly have prepared for another attack, as Herodian states (6.6.4). Herodian is clearly guilty of greatly exaggerating the Roman misfortunes.

Alexander regained his health in Antioch and raised the morale of the soldiers with another distribution of money. Herodian says

that Alexander made preparations for another attack on the Persians, but found it unnecessary because the Persians had disbanded, in typical fashion, and returned to their homes (6.6.4-5)<sup>5</sup> One wonders, if the Roman defeat was so overwhelming, why the Persians did not press their advantage and continue the attack. Herodian says that, although the Persians were the victors in the Parthian battle, they suffered heavy losses, both in that battle and in the engagements in Media (6.6.5). It appears that the Persian King realized that engaging the Roman legions in battle was no small undertaking and would entail far greater losses than he had previously anticipated. He was content to let the situation rest as it was. Artaxerxes had not realized his goal of regaining the vast Persian Empire of old, but neither had the Romans subjugated his Empire.

The Greek literary tradition tends to follow Herodian's account. Zonaras says that there were many killed on both sides and that Alexander was blamed by the Romans for the outcome (12.15). The Latin writers, however, give a very different account of the outcome of the Persian War. Victor claims that Alexander put the Persian King to flight (de Caes. 24.2); Eutropius says that he conquered Artaxerxes gloriosissime (Brev. 8.23). The HA, as one would expect, is the most extravagant in its account of the Emperor's bravery and the defeat of the Persian Army. The author claims that Alexander himself inspected the flanks, urged on the

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<sup>5</sup>M.A.R. Colledge, The Parthians (London, 1967), p.59.



soldiers, was exposed to missiles, and fought hand to hand in battle. Finally he put Artaxerxes to flight. The Persian King is described as potentissimus and as having 700 elephants, 1800 scythed chariots and many thousands of cavalry (55.1-2). The added details make Alexander's supposed victory appear all the greater for overcoming such power.

Much of the account in the HA can be disregarded as embellishment characteristic of the author. On one point, however, the HA is superior to Herodian. Herodian says that Alexander received news of the German invasion while he was still in Antioch and that Alexander went straight from Antioch to the Rhine River (6.7.2-6). Herodian has neglected to mention Alexander's return to Rome in 233 and his triumph.<sup>6</sup> The HA records that upon Alexander's return to Rome, he celebrated a splendid triumph and then made a victory speech to the Senate. The author quotes the speech ex actis senatus; it may be disregarded as one of the author's many tricks (Sev.Alex. 56.1-10). To give some credit to him, he does mention that other accounts exist in which Alexander was the loser. He even mentions Herodian's account but says that it is contrary to popular belief, along with all the others (57.2.3). In the HA's account, Alexander also presented a largess to the people<sup>7</sup> and founded the Mamaeanae and Mamaeani (57.6-7). The

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<sup>6</sup>The triumph is celebrated on a medallion of 233 on which the Emperor is depicted sitting in a quadriga. BMC VI, Severus Alexander, p.207.

<sup>7</sup>Probably the LIBERALITAS AUG. QUINTA recorded on his coins. BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #945-8.

Latin tradition, in which Alexander emerges as victor is probably a reflection of the official version of the battle that was promoted in Rome. Coinage and inscriptions of 233 commemorate Alexander's victory.<sup>8</sup> A medallion depicts Alexander crowned by Victory with two rivers, the Tigris and Euphrates, at his feet.<sup>9</sup> The difference between the account of Herodian and that of the HA is not difficult to explain. Herodian was a contemporary of the Persian War, who had better opportunity to follow its progress than did the author of the HA. His detailed knowledge of the campaign-strategy instills belief in his narrative. In fact, Herodian's description of the campaign leads the reader to expect dismal failure on the part of the Roman armies. On the other hand, the Latin sources describe the Persian War as a Roman victory. And in a sense it was. Although Alexander gained no new territory for the Empire, he removed the threat of Persian encroachment. Obviously, the imperial administration would emphasize the positive results of the campaign and play down the mistakes. This is reflected in the coinage, inscriptions, and accounts of the Latin authors. The more strictly accurate account, however, is to be found in Herodian.

Coinage and inscriptions of the period of the Persian War also indicate that Mamaea still figured prominently in Alexander's operations. Coinage depicting preparations and symbols of the

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<sup>8</sup>CIL VIII 8322, 15259, 15846, 14447; III 3427; VI 186.

<sup>9</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #949.

coming war bear on the obverse portraits of both Alexander and Mamaea.<sup>10</sup> Coins of Mamaea bearing the legend MATER CASTRORUM represent Mamaea as protector of the standards.<sup>11</sup> Mamaea accompanied the Emperor on the Persian expedition; inscriptions of the time refer to the war and express hope for the success and safe return of Alexander and Mamaea.<sup>12</sup> Inscriptions of 233 celebrate their success and safe return to Rome.<sup>13</sup> The Emperor's mother was still very actively involved in the management of the Empire.

Mamaea also figures in the question of the official position of Alexander's regime on Christianity. Eusebius says that while in Antioch, Mamaea, who was a very religious woman, sent for Origen. She has heard of his fame and wanted to improve her understanding of the Christian faith. Origen spent some time with Mamaea, according to Eusebius, instructing her in the ways of God, and then returned to Alexandria (Ecc.Hist. 6.21.3). He also says that Alexander's household consisted mainly of believers, which prompted Maximinus, Alexander's successor, to resume persecution (Ecc.Hist. 6.28). If Mamaea did favour the Christian faith, one would expect to see it reflected in Alexander's policies. Neither Dio nor Herodian make any mention of Christianity at all

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<sup>10</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #733, 555, 539, 734-6, 671, etc.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., #729-30, 732.

<sup>12</sup>CIL III 3639; VI 2108, 2111; XIV 4303.

<sup>13</sup>CIL III 3427; VIII 15846, 2620.

but the Vita Alexandri does in several places. The author states that the special rights of the Jews were preserved and that Christianity was permitted (22.4). He says that Alexander kept statues of Christ and Abraham in his sanctuary (29.2), and that he wished to build a temple to Christ but was advised not to lest all men become Christians and abandon the other temples (43.6-7). In the Vita Alexander cited Christianity and Judaism as models of organizations that publicly announce the ordaining of officials (45.7). When a dispute arose between the Christians and owners of a cook-shop concerning the ownership of a building, Alexander judged in favour of the Christians (49.6). Alexander often repeated the phrase he had heard from a Jew or Christian and had it announced when disciplining someone, Quod tibi fieri non vis, alteri ne feceris (51.7). One can hardly credit such incidents. They are all of that suspicious 'story-telling' quality that characterizes much of the content of the Vita Alexandri.<sup>14</sup> Be that as it may, no other Vita contains so many references to Christianity. This phenomenon could be a reflection of Alexander's tolerance of, or even favour to Christianity. On the other hand it could simply be a result of

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<sup>14</sup>Suprisingly, Elia accepts these anecdotes at face value and uses them to support her theory that Alexander, who had reforming intentions, sought to disarm Christianity by placing it on a level of parity with other cults, thus removing the necessity for martyrdom, which seemed to strengthen the faith. She does not deal with the HA's known tendency for invention. See Febronia Elia, "I Severi e la Questione Cristiana: Sincretismo Religioso o Realismo Politico", Quaderni Catanesi di Studi Classica e Medievali 1 (1979), pp.557-9.

the author's interest in the religion. But it is a striking coincidence that Eusebius tells of Mamaea's interest in Christianity and the Vita Alexandri makes so many references to it. Subsequent to Eusebius, a literary tradition developed in which Mamaea was converted to Christianity and extended official imperial protection to the faith.<sup>15</sup> This is probably an embroidery of the earlier story. Zonaras mentions Eusebius, repeating his story, and adds that, because of Mamaea's interest, persecution was discontinued and Christ was honoured (12.15). In conclusion, Eusebius' story is altogether possible.<sup>16</sup> There is no evidence to support the later claim that Mamaea became a Christian. At any rate, whether or not Mamaea actually converted is not the issue. Owing to Mamaea's influence over her son, any favouring, on her part, of the Christian faith would surely affect Alexander's attitude, if not official policy, on the matter. The Vita Alexandri appears to support Eusebius' statement, with its numerous references to Christianity and Judaism.

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<sup>15</sup>Orosius 7.18.7; Syncellus Chron., p.358 D; Cedrenus, Compendium Historiarum, p.450, 11.3-12; Glycas, Annals 3, Alexander.

<sup>16</sup>Timothy D. Barnes, Constantine and Eusebius (London, 1981), p.84. Barnes accepts Eusebius here.

## THE GERMANIC WAR

After Alexander's triumph in 233, he remained in Rome for several months before setting out on his German campaign, probably in the spring of 234. Once again, Herodian supplies the fullest account of the events of the Germanic War.<sup>1</sup> He says that the governors of Illyria sent word to Alexander that the Germans had crossed the Rhine and the Danube and were overrunning the Roman towns and garrisons there. Alexander marched to the banks of the Rhine and made a bridge of boats to cross the river. He had a large force of troops from Osrhoene,<sup>2</sup> Parthia and Mauretania, which he began to train for the coming war. Before fighting began Alexander, in an effort to avoid battle, sent an embassy to the Germans offering them money and their own terms for peace. The soldiers were angered by Alexander's show of cowardice and many, mostly Pannonians, transferred their allegiance to Maximinus, who was leader of the recruits.<sup>3</sup> Herodian says that the soldiers also

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<sup>1</sup>Herod. 6.7.6-9.7.

<sup>2</sup>CIL XI 3104; XIII 6677a give evidence of the presence of eastern troops.

<sup>3</sup>C. Julius Verus Maximinus (PIR <sup>2</sup> J 619) Maximinus was a military man, born ca. 172/3, probably in the region of Thrace (Zon. 12.16, Herod. 6.8.1). He was first recruited into the Roman cavalry under Septimius (Herod. 6.8.1, Vita Max. 2.2-3). Herodian says that he progressed through all the ranks of the army to command of legions. He was employed under Caracalla but was retired from service under Macrinus and his son (Vita Max. 4.4). Under Elagabalus he may have held a tribunate in the praetorian guard (Vita Max. 5.1). It seems that Maximinus held an number of equestrian prefectures under Alexander; Victor says he was praesidens Trebellicae (de Caes. 25.1). About 230 Maximinus may have been appointed praefectus legionis II Traianae

had a general inclination to revolt and were discontented with their pay (6.8.4). They proclaimed Maximinus Emperor, an honour which he refused at first but later accepted when the troops threatened his life. Maximinus gathered his troops and set out from his camp against Alexander, who was stationed nearby. News of the revolt reached Alexander and he mustered his own force, exacting their promise of loyalty. However, as Maximinus approached, Alexander's soldiers defected to his side, leaving Alexander in his tent with his mother and his followers. Maximinus sent soldiers into Alexander's tent, who killed the Emperor, his mother and the entire retinue.

From Herodian's narrative, it would appear that Alexander had no defenders. He does not mention that any fighting took place whatsoever, but that Alexander's soldiers defected to a man at Maximinus' approach (6.9.5). The statement is suspiciously simplistic but if there was any attempt to defend the reigning Emperor, it must have been minimal.

The account of the Germanic War in the HA is much less detailed. The author says that, upon Alexander's arrival in Gaul, he found the legions ready to mutiny so he ordered them to disband

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in Egypt and Herodian alludes to a prefecture in Mesopotamia during the Persian War (Herod. 7.8.4) cf. J.F. Gilliam, "The Dux Ripae at Dura", TAPA 72 (1941), p.172, where Maximinus is conjectured to have been dux ripae. In the Germanic War Maximinus was praefectus tironibus under Alexander (Herod. 6.8.2). Zosimus says that Maximinus was praefectus alae in 235 (1.13). Though the above details may well be inaccurate to some degree, the sources are in agreement that Maximinus possessed a great deal of military experience.

(Sev.Alex. 59.5). This angered the soldiers still further and finally they murdered him. There is no mention of an attempt to buy peace. The author claims that the murder took place in a village named Sicilia, which was in Britain (obviously an error) or in Gaul (59.6).<sup>4</sup> He also says that the murder, committed by an assassin, was not the result of general discontent. He mentions Maximinus as a possible instigator of the deed (59.6-7). According to the Vita, a German soldier entered Alexander's tent while he was sleeping, with the intention of omitting the murder, but his courage failed him and he left again. Then a greater number of soldiers entered the tent and slaughtered all the occupants (61.3-7). Another reason for the murder is given, namely that the soldiers grew angry when they discovered that Mamaea wished to abandon the war and return to the East. But the author discredits this as a fiction created to protect Maximinus from blame (63.5-6). Victor claims that Alexander put down many mutinies in Gaul, wherefore he was killed for excessive severity (de Caes. 24.4). Eutropius says, very briefly, that he was killed in a military uprising in Gaul (Brev. 8.23). Zonaras' account follows Herodian to the letter (12.15) but Zosimus' work contains an entirely different version that is clearly false (1.13). According to Zosimus, the armies in Pannonia and Moesia revolted and named Maximinus Emperor, who then mustered his troops and set out for Rome. Alexander, who was in the Rhine

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<sup>4</sup>See also Aurelius Victor, de Caes. 24.4.



region at the time, hastened back to Rome and attempted to conciliate the soldiers and their leader. He failed and was murdered along with Mamaea and the prefects.

Two explanations have been proposed for the drastically different account of Alexander's death in Zosimus. Jardé proposes that Zosimus' account derives from a detailed account by Dexippus. Since Dexippus' account does not survive, Jardé conjectures one in which Maximinus, taking advantage of Alexander's absence from Rome, set out from Pannonia for Italy with his army. He sent a detachment of troops to the Rhine; these troops murdered Alexander. Once rid of his rival, Maximinus discontinued his journey to Rome and went north to the Rhine, where he took up the campaign against the Germans. After the campaign, he returned to Pannonia. Jardé's purpose, in inventing this account, is to show that a less detailed version could easily result in an account such as Zosimus relates.<sup>5</sup> The explanation, however, is based entirely on conjecture.

A simpler explanation is proposed by Whittaker. He thinks that the similar vocabulary used by Herodian (6.8.7) and Zosimus (1.13.1) indicates that Zosimus was attempting to incorporate Herodian into his other sources. In doing so, Zosimus misunderstood the reference to Pannonian troops (Herod. 6.8.3) and assumed that Maximinus was in Pannonia when Alexander's troops revolted. Whittaker explains Zosimus' account as an

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<sup>5</sup>Jardé, op.cit., p.91, n.1.

attempt to explain how Maximinus, in Pannonia, and Alexander, in Germany, could have met.<sup>6</sup> This is a more logical explanation but it is difficult to see how Zosimus could have misunderstood Herodian to such an extent, when Herodian clearly places Maximinus in Germany with Alexander's army (Herod. 6.8.1, 6.8.3-4). Zosimus' account remains inexplicable to me.

Alexander and his mother left Rome for the Rhine in 234.<sup>7</sup> Herodian's reference to the danger to Illyria indicates that Germanic tribes were pushing southward all along the Rhine-Danube border. Maximinus later extended his German campaign along the Danube (Herod. 7.2.9). There is no evidence, however, that Alexander sent any detachments to that area. The more serious threat lay to the north in the regions of Raetia and Noricum.<sup>8</sup> There are signs of Alexander's activities north of Moguntiacum (Mainz) at this time.<sup>9</sup> Though Herodian never actually says that Alexander crossed his bridge of boats, he must have done so. A coin of 235 shows Alexander crossing a bridge of boats; the obverse bears portraits of both Alexander and Mamaea.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Whittaker, op.cit., p.138, n.1.

<sup>7</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, # 788.

<sup>8</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., p.238, n.2.

<sup>9</sup>Whittaker, op.cit., p.126, n.2.

<sup>10</sup>BMC VI, Severus Alexander, #967.

## THE END OF THE SEVERAN DYNASTY

Upon Alexander's murder, the soldiers proclaimed Maximinus Thrax Emperor, the second member of their own rank to attain the principate. Since this was an age in which distinction between senatorial and equestrian appointments had lost much of its rigidity, there is no reason to doubt the sources when they say that Maximinus was not of senatorial rank when he was elevated to the principate (Vita Max. 8.1, Brev. 9.1). All of his posts can be explained in terms of equestrian military appointments.<sup>1</sup> The Severan dynasty of forty-three years had come to an end.

The date and location of Alexander's death are not certain. The tradition contained in the HA and Victor, that Alexander was killed in Sicilia, in Britain, probably derived from some confusion in the name of the place of his death. Perhaps the murder took place in or near a town with a name similar to a Sicilia in Britain. Victor calls Sicilia a vicus Britanniae, a village in Britain (de Caes. 24.4). If this were a corruption of vicus Britannicus, a village of British settlers in Germany, it is easy to see how confusion would arise.<sup>2</sup> It is likely that Alexander's murder took place somewhere in the area of Moguntiacum, the northern-most point at which there is evidence

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<sup>1</sup>M. Bang, "Die Militarische Laufbahn des Kaisers Maximinus", Hermes 41 (1906), pp.300-3.

<sup>2</sup>Hopkins, op.cit., p.240. There is no known Sicilia in Britain. See RE<sup>2</sup>, Band II A, 2.

of his activities.<sup>3</sup> Literary testimony supports the location. Herodian places Alexander's death in his camp, while the troops were waiting to engage the Germans (Herod. 6.9.7). The author of the HA admits the possibility of the murder taking place in Gaul (Sev.Alex. 59.6). Eutropius says Alexander died in Gaul (Brev. 8.23) and Zonaras locates the murder in Germany (12.15).

Alexander was murdered early in the year 235. We have a terminus ante quem of 25 March 235, on which date Maximinus was recognized and honoured by the Senate.<sup>4</sup> Eutropius and the author of the HA agree that the duration of Alexander's reign was thirteen years and nine days (Brev. 8.23, Sev.Alex. 60.1). Calculation from 13 March 222, the date of Alexander's accession, sets Alexander's death at 21 March 235.<sup>5</sup> Another statement in the Vita Alexandri, that Alexander lived for twenty-nine years, three months, and seven days, is inconsistent with the known period of the Germanic campaign and may be disregarded (Sev.Alex. 60.1).<sup>6</sup> Attempts have been made to place Alexander's death in early January 235, based on the Egyptian papyrus, P.Oxy. 912, which records Maximinus as

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<sup>3</sup>See CIL XIII,2, p.298.

<sup>4</sup>CIL VI 2001, 2009.

<sup>5</sup>So Snyder in "The Feriale Duranum", YClS 7 (1940), p.86, n.285.

<sup>6</sup>As Alexander was born on 1 October 208, the length of his life given in the HA would place his death on 8 January 238. This is impossible.

Emperor and has been tentatively dated to 25 February 235.<sup>7</sup> The argument assumes a time-lapse between Maximinus' accession and reception of the news in Egypt. Since, however, the date is mostly missing from the papyrus, 25 February 235 is a restoration.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, Gilliam points out that coins of Alexander's fourteenth tribunician year (235) are common, a fact more easily understood if Alexander ruled for nearly three months in 235 instead of a mere week.<sup>9</sup> Gilliam also cites papyri of April 235 that refer to Alexander as if he were still ruler.<sup>10</sup> A death-date in March of 235 is better in accordance with the existing evidence. A damnatio memoriae was enacted upon Alexander and Mamaea by Maximinus. Their names are mutilated, or erased in almost all of their inscriptions.<sup>11</sup>

The sources provide various explanations for Alexander's murder. Herodian says that the soldiers accused him of negligence or cowardice in the Persian War and procrastination over the northern crisis (6.7.3). He also says that Alexander was despised by his troops for his cowardice and subservience to his

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<sup>7</sup>See C.E. Van Sickle, "The Terminal Dates of the Reign of Alexander Severus", Classical Philology 22 (1927), p.316 and Jacques Schwartz, "Les stèles de Terenouthis et la mort d'Alexandre Sévère", Chronique d'Egypte 30 (1955), p.125.

<sup>8</sup>J.F. Gilliam, "The Death of Alexander Severus and the Stelae from Terenouthis", Chronique d'Egypte 31 (1956), p.151.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p.150.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p.151.

<sup>11</sup>Williams, op.cit., p.93.

mother. The soldiers resented that the business of the empire was conducted on Mamaea's authority. The soldiers were further displeased by the length of Alexander's rule and his lack of munificence. Herodian adds that the German soldiers had a tendency to revolt (6.8.3-4). The reasons presented by Herodian are valid and likely were contributing factors in Alexander's downfall. His ineffectual dithering in the face of battle must have incurred the soldiers' contempt. The HA also says that, when Alexander arrived in Gaul, he found the legions ready to mutiny. This is likely, but one must discount the explanation that Alexander's severity prompted the revolt that resulted in his death (Sev.Alex. 59.5). The Vita gives another reason for Alexander's murder, but regards it as a fiction designed to exonerate Maximinus. The author says that the soldiers grew angry when they learned that Mamaea wished to abandon the war and return to the East (63.5-6). Far from being fictional, this explanation probably comes closest to the truth. By this period in the Empire, the legions were composed, to a great extent, of local recruits.<sup>12</sup> When it became necessary to move these legions, dissatisfaction arose on the part of soldiers who, though quite willing to defend their own territory against incursions, were not willing to leave their homes and families open to attack while they fought off Rome's enemies on another frontier. Evidence of the strong local attachment within the

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<sup>12</sup>Vide supra, p.68-9.

troops can be found also in Herodian. When the Illyrian governors sent news of the Germanic threat, the soldiers transferred from Illyricum were greatly distressed. They had suffered a double tragedy, first the misfortune of the Persian War, then, reports of the destruction of their families by the Germans (6.7.2-3). The patriotism felt by the local recruits for their homeland regions began to outweigh their feelings of loyalty to the Empire. Perhaps this was a significant factor in, not only the revolt that led to Alexander's demise, but also the numerous other military uprisings that troubled his reign.

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## APPENDIX I - AN INTENDED VISIT TO EGYPT

In connection with Alexander's campaign to the East, two papyri have been discovered recently in Egypt that suggest that Alexander at least planned, if he did not carry out, a visit to that province. The first of these, published by Barns, contains a letter, probably written by Severus Alexander, which is addressed on the verso to Apolinarius.<sup>1</sup> The text of the letter is fourteen lines long in its present form, and has been reconstructed from two fragments. The first three lines contain large lacunae. Substantial portions are also missing from the end of lines 5 and 8. Therefore, much of the letter's content is conjectural. It does, however, refer to a proposed visit, presumably by the Emperor Alexander, to Egypt. It is thought that Alexander was the author of the letter because the date, on line 14, places the writing of the letter between 27 March and 25 April 222. Furthermore, the first word of the letter begins 'Αλεξαν[.<sup>2</sup> The fact that the letter was found in Egypt and that

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<sup>1</sup>J.W.B. Barns, "A Letter of Severus Alexander", Journal of Egyptian Archaeology 52 (1966), pp.141-46; cf. J.R. Rea, "A Letter of Severus Alexander?", Chronique d'Egypte 42 (1967), pp.391-6. Rea disagrees with Barns and thinks that the letter was written by Maximinus to Rome after Alexander's death. He believes that the αλεξαν[ in line 1 of fragment 'a' should be restored as αλεξαν[δρε]ιγεν, not αλεξαν[δρος]. The argument is no more certain than that of Barns. Rea proposes that Maximinus included in the letter to Rome, a reference to Alexandrians, perhaps to confer privileges on them (p.394). I find it difficult to understand why Maximinus, in announcing a visit to Rome, would find it necessary to inform the Romans of privileges to be conferred upon the Alexandrians.

<sup>2</sup>Barns, op.cit., p.141.

it is dated in the Egyptian method indicates that the recipient of the letter, hence the visit, was to Egypt.<sup>3</sup> The addressee on the verso, Apolinarius, is called βουλευτ(η) πρε[σβυτατ(ω)]. An Alexandrian senator is so designated on a papyrus dated to the third century.<sup>4</sup> This papyrus can be considered, with reservations, to express an intention on the part of Alexander to visit the province of Egypt.

The second papyrus, P.Mich. 3627, provides much more solid evidence for an intended visit to Egypt. This papyrus contains a letter addressed to the strategoi and basilikoi of the Seven Nomes and the Arsinoite, giving them instructions on the preparations necessary for a visit of Severus Alexander and his mother.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately both the author of the letter and its date are missing from the text. The letter reinforces a previous communication, a schedule of requisitions that are now to be posted in public places (l.6-7). A restoration in line 5 of ἐπιστράτης, as the author of the earlier communiqué, would indicate that the prefect was also the author of this letter. In addition, the threat of severe punishment for disobedience of the instructions could only have been made by the prefect.<sup>6</sup> Thomas and Clarysse suggest a date of 233 based on the ἀννώτης in line 9

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p.145.

<sup>4</sup>P.Giss. 34,2.10. See J.W.B. Barns, op.cit., p.145.

<sup>5</sup>J.D. Thomas, W. Clarysse, "A Projected Visit of Severus Alexander to Egypt", Ancient Society 8 (1977), pp.195-207.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p.197.

and another papyrus, P.Lond. III 944.<sup>7</sup> They point out that all references to annona in papyri and ostraca of the Severan dynasty occur in or near years in which imperial visits were made to Egypt. The papyrus, P.Lond. III 944, firmly dated 10 February 233, mentions payment for annona. This would fit well, if Alexander visited Egypt in the spring of 233 on his way back from Antioch to Rome. A much earlier date of 218 for P.Mich. 3627 has been proposed by Harnack.<sup>8</sup> If one believes Eusebius' story that Origen was summoned by Mamaea in Antioch, an earlier date is arguable. It would be odd for Mamaea to bring Origen to Antioch if she were planning to visit Egypt shortly herself. On the other hand, perhaps Origen was not in Egypt when Mamaea was in Antioch.<sup>9</sup> The chronology of Origen's life at this period is uncertain. Mamaea was in Antioch in 232 and again early in 233. Origen left Alexandria in 230/1 to go to Greece. By 232 he had settled in Caesarea in Palestine.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps when Mamaea summoned him, he was not in Egypt at all.

Though both of these papyri make reference to intended visits to Egypt, it is unlikely that the visit ever took place. None of the sources mention an imperial visit to Egypt. Nor do they say that one was planned. If the visit was to take place early in

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p.199.

<sup>8</sup>A. Harnack, Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur II 2 (Die Chronologie) (Leipzig, 1958<sup>2</sup>), pp.30-1. n.5.

<sup>9</sup>Thomas, Clarysse, op.cit., p.200.

<sup>10</sup>Eusebius, Ecc.Hist. 6.26.



the reign, as indicated by the papyrus published by Barns, it is difficult to explain why the visit was cancelled. If it was to take place late in the reign, as P.Mich. 3627 seems to indicate, a possible explanation appears. Although Herodian was certainly in error when he says that Alexander left directly from Antioch to Germany, perhaps he was not wrong in saying that news of trouble on the Rhine had reached Alexander in Antioch (Herod. 6.7.2-5). Maybe the situation was not yet serious, but Alexander opted to return to Rome sooner to be closer to the trouble area instead of stopping in Egypt as planned. If the visit had ever taken place, one would expect to find some reference to it in the sources.

## APPENDIX II - SEVERITAS

The HA, in the Vita Alexandri, idealizes, among other things, Alexander's ability to control the troops. The Vita makes constant reference to his strictness, both with the soldiers, and with the civilian population. He ordered that judges guilty of theft never appear in any city under threat of banishment (15.4). Whenever the Emperor saw a thieving judge, his hatred was so strong that he had his finger ready to dig out the man's eye (17.1). As judge, he inflicted the severest punishments on thieves (18.2), declaring them to be the only real enemies of the state. When a clerk was discovered to have forged a document, Alexander ordered his tendons cut so that he could never write again and banished him (28.2-3). Another example of Alexander's severity in punishing dishonesty is the story of Verconius Turinus, who sold favours on the pretense that he could influence the Emperor's decision. When he was caught, he was put to death by suffocation. The phrase used for selling false promises is fumum vendere. In an attempt to make the punishment fit the crime, Alexander had Turinus tied to a stake and suffocated by the smoke of burning wet logs, while a herald said Fumo punitur qui vendidit fumum (35.5-36.3). This last anecdote is a prime example of the witticisms employed by the author of the HA. Not only is the alleged punishment an invention of the author for an opportunity to make a play on words, but Turinus is a bogus

person,<sup>1</sup> whose name is the Latin word (turinum) for an eye salve made of incense. The incident is obviously pure invention and casts doubt by association on other such anecdotes.

As concerns the soldiers, Alexander conducted the Persian campaign with such discipline that one would have thought senators, not soldiers, were passing by (50.1). If any soldier trespassed upon private property, the Emperor saw him punished with a club, a rod, or by condemnation to death (51.6). When a soldier mistreated an old woman, Alexander dismissed him from service and gave him to the old woman as a slave (52.1). There are further mentions of Alexander's strict discipline.<sup>2</sup>

It is not difficult to find an explanation for this obviously false legend of Alexander's severity in the HA. In fact, the author himself gives the answer. In two places he says that Alexander was given the title Severus by the soldiers because he upheld such strict discipline. It is true that Alexander bore the title of Severus, which was a family name, from the onset of his reign. Once again the author is playing with words. After having created a pun on Alexander's name, he invents numerous incidents to support the illusion.

On the other hand, it is perhaps more difficult to explain the same sentiment when it is found in Victor and Eutropius. These epitomaters, writing in the 360's, preceded the HA by at least

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<sup>1</sup>Ronald Syme, "Missing Persons", Historia 5 (1956), p.211.

<sup>2</sup>Vita Alexandri 59.5, 64.3.

ten years. Victor states that Alexander got the name Severus from his strict treatment of the soldiers. He further says that Alexander's excessive severity resulted in his murder (de Caes. 24.4). Eutropius says that Alexander ruled with the strictest military discipline (Brev. 8.23). A possible explanation for the fact that the tradition of Alexander's strictness is found in these two epitomaters, and in the HA, is the common source, the 'Kaisergeschichte', proposed by Enmann.<sup>3</sup> But, as neither Dio, Herodian, nor the later sources, Zosimus and Zonaras make any mention of Alexander's strict nature, one cannot help but wonder where and how this erroneous and isolated tradition developed. Since further source criticism is beyond the scope of this work, I leave the question open.

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<sup>3</sup>Vide supra, p.12.