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Herodian as Real and Fictional Source for the *Historia Augusta*

Unlike many of the questions considered in this volume, the relationship between Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*) is far from under-studied. This is only to be expected, given how rare it is that we possess full texts both of an earlier historian and of a later author that uses them as a source.[1] But given the mainly source-research-oriented focus of much existing work on the topic, there remain important literary questions not just about how the *HA* actually uses Herodian, but how it presents him within the elaborate fiction it creates around itself. In exploring these questions I hope to illuminate how the *HA* functions as a work of historical imagination, and in particular how source-citations are deployed rhetorically, but also, and appropriately for this volume, to show a little of how Herodian's text was understood and used a century and a half after his death in a very different Rome from the one in which he lived.

The *HA* is well known as a collection of 30 lives of emperors from the second and third centuries, written in Latin likely in Rome around 400 CE by an unknown author, although the text includes an elaborate authorial fiction that has it being written a hundred years earlier by six invented authors.[2] The entire content of the collection is fictionalized to varying degrees, and its generic identity and intent remain highly contentious. However, it does include solid information taken from authentic traditions, of which Herodian is one, serving as the *HA*'s main source for the reign of Maximinus and the events of 238. Comparison of content reveals many stretches of the *HA* that amount to a loose Latin paraphrase of Herodian, and other sections are basically condensed versions of Herodian's narrative.[3] Furthermore, the *HA* includes roughly a dozen explicit citations of Herodian, which will be the main concern of this article.

1 Works on *HA* sources that will be cited throughout this study include Kolb (1972, 1995); Barnes (1978); Rohrbacher (2013) and the relevant parts of Paschoud (2018).
2 For summaries of the authorship question, see Chastagnol (1994) ix–li or Rohrbacher (2016) 4–15. Although I refer to the author with gender-inclusive "they", I take it they are a single person. The *HA*'s various fictional narrative personae consistently refer to themselves in the masculine, and I do the same.
3 For overviews of a the *HA*'s use of Herodian in these books, see Kolb (1972) 18–22; Rohrbacher (2013) 164. A useful synoptic table of correspondences between Herodian and the *HA*'s *Maximini*, *Gordiani* and *Maximus-Balbinus* can be found at Paschoud (2018) xv–xvii. I hope in the near future to publish a study of my own thoroughly surveying the *HA*'s use of Herodian from a source-critical perspective, as a complement to the rhetorical analysis seen in this piece.

My aim is to read these citations as part of the *HA*'s fiction. This is not to claim that they are factually inaccurate or misleading. As we will see, the citations are generally accurate in a narrow sense, albeit the overall picture they create is incomplete at best. What matters more for my purposes, though, is that they are part of the overall story the *HA* constructs of who wrote it and how, and in what literary circumstances. That story as a whole is fictional. Even where the author has chosen to include elements that correspond to their own practice, they attribute those elements to fabricated *scriptores* writing under invented historical circumstances. Citing Herodian contributes to the *scriptores*' ostensible authority and, for readers who are unaware of the fiction, helps position the collection as a supplement or corrective to their existing knowledge. In another sense, however, the citations point knowing readers to cues that both critique Herodian and ironically undermine the *HA*'s own coherence and the credibility of its authorial fiction. My argument will consist of a two-stage reading of the various citations. First I go through the citations roughly in order of their appearance and ask how they present Herodian to readers with no previous knowledge of that author, and then I look again at how some of them would work differently for readers who were indeed familiar with the corresponding text in Herodian.

This second stage assumes that, for the Herodian citations as for the *HA*'s larger fiction, the text is devised to generate different meanings for readers at different knowledge levels. Some people are supposed to "get it" to varying degrees and others not at all, but the unknowing readers will still construct a coherent set of meanings that allows the text to meet their expectations without requiring them to be stupid or unduly gullible. The more knowing readers will construct additional levels of meaning and will also generate many of the same meanings as their unknowing counterparts, but will modify or reject them.[4] The picture is complicated by readers who become more knowing as they respond to cues and incoherencies in the text to in some measure "solve the puzzle". The citations create a version of Herodian that corresponds only partly to the real author, both as to his content and the *HA*'s relationship to him. Readers who are familiar with him will realize this and draw further conclusions as to the content and overall meaning of the *HA* itself.

This presupposes, first, that the *HA* itself has direct access to Herodian's text, and second, that its target readership, seemingly Latin-speaking *litterati* in Rome around 400 CE, includes a meaningful number of people who are also familiar with Herodian, in addition to the probably larger number who are not. As to the first, direct consultation, presumably in the original, is most often taken for granted in studies of the *HA*'s sources.[5] However, it has sometimes been argued that the *HA*'s knowledge and citations of Herodian, and also perhaps of Dexippus, comes at second hand from an intermediate Latin source.[6] However, the *HA*'s word-level engagement with Herodian's text is

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4 See on this point Kemezis (2022).
5 See e.g. Barnes (1978), Rohrbacher (2013); Paschoud (2018) or the brief note at Brandt (1996) 48.
6 The position of Homo (1919) esp. 217–220 and Potter (1990) 365–369, the latter arguing that the same is true for the *HA*'s use of Dexippus.

simply too close to be wholly accounted for without direct consultation.[7] One would have to imagine a Latin source that amounted to a full translation of Herodian Books 7–8, but it is hard to see how such a work would integrate Dexippus, or continue past 238 based on Dexippus' much less full narrative. It is possible that a Latin source based on Herodian was used as a supplement to direct consultation (not unlike the *HA*'s use of multiple Latin breviaries) and this would indeed be helpful in explaining some features that Herodian shares with the Zonaras tradition.[8]

Regarding the *HA*'s readers' presumed knowledge of Herodian, what I envision here might range from deep engagement with his text through simply recognizing his name and forming expectations accordingly. We have two significant clues as to what presence Herodian might have had in Theodosian-era Rome. The first is internal, consisting of the implicit assumptions lying behind the *HA*'s own references to Herodian. These, as we will see, do not portray Herodian as everyday reading. However, neither do they portray him as arcane or inaccessible, like some of the bogus works mentioned in later lives.[9] At one point (*Alb.* 12.14, #2)[10] the narrator suggests his readers might consult Herodian for further information.[11] More vaguely, several of the references to Herodian seem only to be there on the assumption that some readers will be aware of his version, and the narrator is thus obliged to address it even though it does not support his point.[12] Both of these are left at the level of weak implication, however, and Herodian seems to be rather less familiar than his Latin counterparts Marius Maximus and "Cordus".[13] There is the further issue that, given the fictional date of the *scriptores*, the *HA* might be conjuring a world in which Herodian is more or less current than in the author's own present.

Our external evidence for Herodian is limited to say the least. No Latin author other than the *HA* mentions him by name. However, convincing arguments have

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7 For examples of particularly close word-level verbal correspondence see Brandt (1998) 60.

8 As argued by Bleckmann (2021), see also Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014) lii–lxi. It is implausible, however, that that source was Aurelius Victor or whatever source is shared by the Victorine *Caesares*, Eutropius and other works in their tradition, as argued by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 292–297. Once again, one cannot imagine a work that replicated so much of Herodian while still conveying the radically different narrative found in the extant *Caesares*. This is a point I mean to address more fully in a future publication, see above n. 3.

9 See e.g. *Arln.* 1.4–10, where the narrator ("Vopiscus") mentions several varieties of inaccessible texts requiring privileged access, see Kemezis (2018). The same passage seems to imagine that Greek works in general are considerably less commonly read than their Latin counterparts but not unknown or unduly difficult to obtain.

10 The #2 here and similar numbers given with some citations of the *HA* in this article refer to Table 2.

11 Similarly at *Gord.* 2.1, the narrator claims that the *inperiti scriptores* who only know of two Gordians could have learned the truth from "Arrianus" or Dexippus, seemingly without unreasonable effort.

12 See esp. *Alex.* 52.1–3 (#4) on the "bloodless" reign.

13 Thus there is nothing for Herodian comparable to *Alex.* 65.4, where "Lampridius" explictly says that his addressee Constantine has read Maximus, or *Mxmn.* 28.10, where "Capitolinus" says he has put in an anecdote about Maximinus' shoes in case anyone who has read (or will read?) "Cordus" should criticize its omission.

been made, most recently by Gavin Kelly, that Ammianus Marcellinus is familiar with Herodian.[14] Herodian could most obviously have served as a source for Ammianus' lost account of the period 180–238, but it is perhaps more significant that, in Kelly's view, Ammianus uses Herodian not just as a source but as a target of allusion, creating meanings that presuppose readers who know Herodian's text.[15] This level of engagement, if accepted, has obvious implications for what the *HA* might be able to do with Herodian. The *HA* is typically seen as coming out a few years after Ammianus, and in literary circles where the latter also circulated.[16] It is likely the *HA* makes references that we can no longer detect to Ammianus' lost early books and their relationship to Herodian. Similarly, it is quite possible the *HA*'s readers were familiar with other earlier authors who may have used or cited Herodian.[17] In short, there is strong, if indirect

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14 See Kelly (2008) 231–240 and also Sotinel (2003) 386–387. Ammianus' use of Herodian as a source has been widely accepted since Humanist times, and arguments are briefly summed up by Baaz (1909) 69–71. It is taken as certain by Gilliam (1972) in his survey of Ammianus' surviving references to second-and-third century emperors (e.g. 135), followed by Barnes (1998) 213. The Dutch commentators on Ammianus generally concur, see Den Boeft *et al.* (2008) 166, 238. Dissenters include Brok (1977) and Rohrbacher (2006). Most of the former's arguments can be refuted if one assumes that Ammianus was capable of combining Herodian with other source traditions. Rohrbacher (111–112) considers that because Ammianus refers to Gordian I and Gordian III as *senior* and *iunior* (in separate passages, respectively 26.6.20 and 23.5.17) this means he cannot have read Herodian, since then he would have known to distinguish three Gordians. This is to place too much weight on a casual usage, and to take the *HA*'s own rhetoric about the controversy too seriously (*Gord.* 2.1). Given Gordian II's limited significance, Ammianus might reasonably have felt that in contexts where his identity was irrelevant, it was better to stick with the more common usage familiar from the breviaries.
15 Kelly (see previous n.) looks particularly at Amm. 31.10.19 ~ Hdn. 1.15.6; Amm. 22.9.5–6 ~ Hdn. 1.11.1–2; Amm. 26.8.15 ~ Hdn. 3.4.1–3; and Amm. 26.6.16 ~ Hdn. 2.6.13.
16 The fullest arguments for the *HA* writing in conscious reaction to Ammianus are Syme (1968) esp. 103–104 and Rohrbacher (2016) 134–169, both with references to considerable earlier scholarship. Gilliam (1972) is somewhat more cautious. Such a reading evidently presupposes that the *HA* postdates Ammianus, i.e. that it dates to the mid-390s or later. Such a dating has been the majority view for some decades, but Cameron (2011) 743–782, with 749–750 specifically addressing Ammianus, argues for a date between the mid-370s and mid 380s, and has attracted some support. This dating relies heavily on reading one passage of Jerome (*Vit. Hil.* 1.1–4) as deriving from *HA Prob.* 1.1–4 rather than, as is usually supposed, the other way round. Cameron's argument is plausible in itself but not so conclusive as to outweigh the many other passages of the *HA* that appear connected to events of the late 380s to 390s. For detailed counter-arguments, see Paschoud (2012) 380–383 and Rohrbacher (2016) 104–111, 158–169.
17 I am not, however, persuaded by the arguments of Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 101–102 that Herodian was heavily consulted by Aurelius Victor (i.e. for them the extended work by that author of which the extant *Caesares* would then be an epitome, see below n. 30). The parallels they cite are mostly generic statements that could easily have been included in an independent source describing the same events as Herodian, as opposed to the more specific details shared by Ammianus and Herodian. Furthermore, as I argue throughout this article, the *HA* positions Herodian as a quite distinct tradition from the Latin breviaries, and it is hard to see how this would work if readers were familiar with an account by Victor in which the two traditions were amalgamated. It is possible that details from

evidence to suppose a meaningful part of the *HA*'s target readers knew basic facts about Herodian, associated him with other later authors and were in some instances familiar with his text.

Starting from that basis, this article will begin with a brief survey of how the *HA* actually uses Herodian, as established from comparison of the texts rather than relying on the explicit citations. I then proceeed to the two-part analysis as detailed above. The *HA*, among its many aspects, is a playful but not unserious fictional evocation of the extensive literary tradition on Roman emperors available in its author's literary milieu, and Herodian is a rare instance where we can survey in full the process whereby an existing text is incorporated into the parallel fictional world that the *scriptores* inhabit. The resulting insights will shed light on how the *HA* dealt with those of its real sources that are now lost, the "good source," often identified as Marius Maximus, who lies behind its earlier, more accurate, lives. It will also work towards a comprehensive picture of the bizarre literary games that our anonymous author contrived to play with their dead rulers.

1 Usage of Herodian: An Overview

The *HA*'s lives run from Hadrian (117–138) to Carus and his sons (282–285). They thus include the entire period covered by Herodian (180–238), and for most of that overlap period (down to 229) we also have substantial remains of Cassius Dio.[18]

The *HA* does not engage with Herodian consistently across this period (see Table 1). For the lives down to the *Caracalla*, we have only one instance, in the *Clodius Albinus*, where he is clearly the source for a significant piece of narrative.[19] For this period, the *HA* most often draws on a source tradition no longer extant, usually thought to be a single Latin biographer, a continuator of Suetonius who has often been identified as Marius Maximus.[20] This source appears to end somewhere in the sequence Caracalla-Macrinus-Elagabalus, and starting with the reign of Macrinus we can see evidence of the *HA* using Herodian more frequently but still sporadically. The *Macrinus* relies on Herodian for its core factual section on that emperor's reign (*Macr.* 8.3–10.6), though that section amounts to only a little over 10 percent of the life, which is mostly made up

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Herodian made their way into the breviary tradition, but any influence must have been small enough for the two to appear independent.

18 The question whether the *HA* used Dio is beyond the scope of this article, but I broadly agree with those (e.g. Chastagnol [1994] lix–lxi and Mecella [2016] 44–47) who see at least some use.

19 See *HA Alb.* 7.2–8.4, on Severus' plot to have letter-carriers assassinate Albinus, which is adapted without citation from Hdn. 3.5.2–8. Kolb (1972) argues for use of Herodian as well as Dio in all the lives from the *Commodus* forward, though his criteria for diagnosing correspondences are very broad.

20 For the considerable debate on this early source, see Rohrbacher (2013) 153–162 and the literature cited there. The objections to identifying that source with Maximus voiced by Paschoud (1999) and by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 235–264 are significant, though the nature of the *HA*'s information still suggests a single biographical source.

of fictional material.[21] The *Heliogabalus* and *Alexander* are larger and more diffuse compositions, which both include individual items probably taken from Herodian, but no single section of adapted material like what is found in the *Macrinus*.[22]

Table 1: Use of Herodian in HA Lives.

HA Life	*Scriptor*	Use of Herodian
Commodus	Lampridius	Use not definitely established
Pertinax	Capitolinus	Use not definitely established
Didius Julianus	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Septimius Severus	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Pescennius Niger	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Clodius Albinus	**Capitolinus**	**One short section**
Caracalla	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Geta	Spartianus	Use not definitely established
Macrinus	Capitolinus	One long and one short section
Diadumenus	**Lampridius**	**Use not definitely established**
Heliogabalus	Lampridius	Scattered details
Alexander Severus	**Lampridius**	**Scattered details**
Maximini Duo	**Capitolinus**	**Principal source**
Gordiani Tres	Capitolinus	Principal source
Maximus et Balbinus	**Capitolinus**	**Principal source**
Triginta Tyranni	**Pollio**	**Tangential relationship**

Lives containing citations in **bold.**

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21 *Macr.* 8.3–10.6 is based on Hdn. 4.15–5.4, but the *HA* version is about one-sixth as long as Herodian's (1.5 vs. 9.5 Teubner pages). The life as a whole is about twelve and a half pages. For its limited factuality and other possible sources, see Barnes (1978) 55–56.

22 Lists of passages seemingly reminiscent of Herodian are provided by (for the *Hel.*) Zinsli (2014) 50–54 and (for the *Alex.*) Barnes (1978) 57–59, on the latter see also Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014) lii–lxi and for both lives Kolb (1976). Kolb and Zinsli both posit more extensive use of Herodian in these lives than what I am describing here.

Where we really find Herodian's influence is in the three lives that present sometimes overlapping narratives of the events of 238, that is the *Maximini,* the *Gordiani* and the *Maximus et Balbinus.*[23] The first of these, which is also the longest, derives nearly all its factual content from Herodian, and the last is nearly as reliant, though in both cases there is a large mixture of fiction, a few items from Dexippus and some reference to the Latin breviary tradition that survives to us in Eutropius and in the *Caesares* traditionally attributed to Aurelius Victor.[24] The *Gordiani* includes more Dexippan material but still takes significant parts of its main narrative of the first two Gordians' revolt (esp. §7–10) from Herodian. It is worth noting that all five of the lives that contain extended adaptation of Herodian (*Albinus, Macrinus, Maximini, Gordiani, Maximus-Balbinus*) are attributed to "Julius Capitolinus".

It is not possible to survey fully the ways in which the *HA* adapts Herodian's material, but the *HA*'s various overlapping narratives all condense Herodian to one degree or another, in uneven ways.[25] For the more action-filled sections, the *HA* often resorts to close paraphrase of its source, while omitting altogether some of Herodian's descriptive scene-setting and simplifying some of his already streamlined narrative. It does make additions of its own, typically consisting of implausible points of detail, such as that Maximinus was not merely very tall (Hdn. 7.1.12), he was exactly "eight feet plus one finger" in height (*HA Mxmn.* 6.8).

2 Citation of Herodian: An Overview

Depending how one counts, there are 10 to 14 citations of Herodian in the *Historia Augusta.* This is not a massive presence, scattered as the citations are over 200 pages of text, but it still makes him the fourth most-cited author in the corpus. The other three are (in descending order of frequency) Marius Maximus, Junius (or Aelius) Cordus and Dexippus. The first and last are real attested authors but outside of the *HA* have only brief testimonia (Maximus) or substantial fragments (Dexippus), whereas "Cordus" is a fiction of the *HA*'s with no external existence. There is then a considerable gap in frequency between these four and the mass of mostly fictional authors that the *HA* cites throughout the corpus, although more common still are vague anonymous references to *quidam, plerique, alii* and so forth.[26] All four are cited over extended periods, but only Herodian is ever explicitly identified as the fundamental basis for an large stretch of narrative (*Max.-Bal.* 15.3, #7) and Herodian's is the only case where we can check the

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23 For overviews of the source-picture for these three lives, see Barnes (1978) 59–64; Paschoud (2018) x–xxi and, specifically to the *Maximus-Balbinus*, Brandt (1996) 46–67. Lippold (1991) has extensive discussion of sources for the *Maximini*, though tending to hypothesize alternate sources for items that most scholars would see as fictional.

24 For the attribution and the recent arguments of Stover and Woudhuysen (2023), see below n. 30.

25 For examples, see refs. in n. 3 above.

26 For anonymous citations in particular, see Burgersdijk (2017).

citations against an extant original. The first thing that should be emphasized is that the citations are all in some measure authentic, inasmuch as there really is something in Herodian corresponding to what the *HA* claims is there, even though, as we will see, in many instances the citation is misleading.[27] This basic accuracy is not something to be taken for granted with the *HA*, given that the collection contains 24 citations of the fictional "Cordus", and there are good reasons to question several of the citations of Maximus and Dexippus.[28]

As seen in Table 2, the distribution of the 10 undisputed citations of Herodian (not counting those of "Arrianus", for which see below), does track the *HA*'s actual usage of that author, though only loosely. Herodian is both cited and paraphrased at length in the *Albinus*, but in entirely different places. Similarly, the *Macrinus* makes substantial use of Herodian, but never cites him, whereas he is named in the pendant life of that emperor's son Diadumenianus. The *Heliogabalus* never mentions Herodian, but the *Alexander* does so twice, while the *Maximini* and *Maximus-Balbinus* account for about half of the existing citations, with none in the *Gordiani* and one back-reference in the *Thirty Tyrants.* The citations overlap somewhat with those for Marius Maximus (both are found in the *Alb.* and *Alex.*) and more heavily with Dexippus, with both names often appearing in the same locations. They also correspond with those of Cordus, whose bogus citations are found overwhelmingly in the *Mxmn.*, *Gord.* and *Max.-Bal.*, as well as in the *Alb.* and *Macr.,* though his name is never mentioned directly alongside Herodian's. While, as we saw, the most intensive use of Herodian is found in lives attributed to "Julius Capitolinus", citations are also found in lives by "Aelius Lampridius", specifically the *Diadumenus* and *Alexander.*

My task for the next few pages will be to reconstruct what impression readers without previous knowledge of Herodian would have formed of him if all they had to work with was the *HA*'s citations, without being able to gauge their accuracy as I have just done. Most such readers would not have systematically collated the citations or fully traced the connections among them, especially the earlier isolated ones in the *Albinus* and *Diadumenus.* Even later, in the *Alexander* and after, their impressions would be governed more by the near context of each individual citation than by its re-

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27 The one exception, which will not figure significantly in my further discussion, is the textually un-certain citation after *Max.-Bal.* 15.7 (#11, see n. 29). Stover (2020) 169–170 makes codicological arguments for its authenticity that appear strong to a non-specialist and have not to my knowledge been refuted. However, if the citation is authentic, it is an outlier, above all because it cannot be connected with any-thing in Herodian's actual text, and secondarily because its content is a stand-alone (and presumably invented) anecdote rather than a factual dispute or variant, as in all or nearly all the other citations.
28 For Maximus, the later citations, in the *Hel.* and *Alex.*, have aroused suspicion since at least the ob-servations of Hönn (1911) 47, see also Paschoud (1999). For full treatment of Dexippus citations, see Pa-schoud (1991) and (less skeptically) Mecella (2013) 29–34. Burgersdijk (2017) and Mundt (2017) are useful studies of the overall function of literary citations in the *HA*.

lationship to other citations many pages earlier or in different lives.[29] Nonetheless, the *HA*'s entire rhetoric of citation presupposes some readers who use its name-dropping to reconstruct otherwise unknown authors, and there is enough about Herodian to provide them materials. Even casual readers would at least have registered that he was a *Graecus*, since the word occurs in 5 of the 10 citations, and a contemporary of the events he described (*Alex.* 52.2 [#4]; *Max.-Bal.* 15.5 [#8]). No further biographical information is given about the author, but the *HA* does deliver two evaluative comments on his work, namely that he and Maximus both "tell things honestly for the most part", at least as regards Severus' behavior toward defeated enemies (*Alb.* 12.14 [#2] *ad fidem pleraque dixerunt*) but also that Herodian "showed much favor [to Maximinus] to slander Alexander" (*Mxmn.* 13.4 [#6] *in odium Alexandri plurimum favit*).

Beyond the explicit comments, the content of the citations gives a consistent impression that Herodian presented a distinctive version of events that differed in key points from that found in the Latin breviary tradition, which for many readers would have been the most accessible "standard" version.[30] This is clear simply from the kinds of things Herodian is cited for. Nearly all of the citations concern significant and fundamental facts about the emperors of the period and their actions: Whether Albinus or Diadumenianus held imperial rank at all, and at what level; How Septimius Severus and Alexander Severus treated the nobility; How successful Alexander's and Maximinus' wars were; How the revolt of Titus/Quartinus unfolded; whether Balbinus' co-emperor was Maximus or Pupienus, or whether those are two names for the same person. Many of these, above all the last, are also discussed at other points without an explicit citation. The *HA* has an ongoing, self-conscious preoccupation with distinguishing appropriately serious biographical material from trivia, and comments on the subject throughout the corpus.[31] Clearly Herodian's material falls on the "serious" end of the axis, and is meant to be seen that way, since the *HA* provides him with a useful foil in the person of Cordus.[32]

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29 Nor will all readers have approached the text sequentially (see Kemezis [2022] 235–236), though there are certainly items in the *Maximini* and *Maximus-Balbinus* that work best for readers who have first read the *Alexander*, as argued below.

30 By "the breviary tradition" I mean primarily the breviary of Eutropius and the *Caesares* that is usually taken to be the work of Aurelius Victor. For their literary-cultural context, see Sehlmeyer (2009). The entire accepted picture has now been called into question by Stover and Woudhuysen (2023), who argue that the *Caesares* is an epitome of a much longer and extremely influential work by Victor, which would also then be a principal source for Eutropius and ultimately the *HA*. The arguments are plausible for seeing the *Caesares* as an epitome rather than Victor's principal work, but it still appears likely to me that even if the shared source of the *Caesares*, Eutropius *et al.* was substantially longer than generally supposed, the short-form histories remained more widely read and were the more significant reference point for the *HA*. In deference to the open question, I will use the familiar, though not ancient, title of *Caesares* rather than (as is common in scholarship to date) simply identifying it as "Victor" or using the manuscript title of *Historiae abbreviatae*.

31 For an overview and ironic reading of this technique, see Van Nuffelen (2017).

32 Den Hengst (1981) 46–50 gives an overview of the Cordus fiction, see also Chastagnol (1994) cviii–cix for a useful table of citations.

Table 2: Citations of Herodian in the *HA.*

HA Location	Corresponding Passage of Herodian	Content	Accuracy
A. Citations of "Herodianus"			
1. *Alb.* 1.1–2	2.15.3	Albinus was Severus' *Caesar* (cf. *Sev.* 6.9)	Accurate, although context in Herodian very different.
2. *Alb.* 12.13–14	3.8.6–7	Herodian and Maximus both reliable sources for Severus' cruelty towards defeated enemies.	Accurate as regards Herodian.
3. *Diad.* 2.5	5.4.12	Diadumenianus only held rank of *Caesar* and was killed along with father (cf. *Macr.* 10.4).	Accurate, though Herodian is in error on both points.
4. *Alex.* 52.2	6.1.7, 6.9.8 (*contra* 6.1.10)	Alexander's reign characterized as "free from bloodshed" because he killed no senators (cf. *Alex.* 25.1).	Accurate as to the characterization, but Herodian makes no qualification regarding senators,
5. *Alex.* 57.3	6.6.3	Herodian represents a minority view claiming that Alexander suffered major losses on his Persian campaign; most historians more favorable.	Accurate with word-level variants, though the immediately preceding passage (57.2) gives a misleading impression of Herodian's version. Latin breviarists are indeed more positive about the Persian war.
6. *Mxmn.* 13.3–4	7.2.9	Maximinus would have conquered all of northern Europe if he had lived, presented as example of Herodian's bias for Maximinus and against Alexander (cf. *Mxmn.* 12.1).	Accurate but misrepresents Herodian's overall stance.
7. *Max.-Bal.* 15.3	7.10.3–6	Claims in death notice on Maximus to have gotten *haec* from Herodian, may refer to entire account or to some more specific fact in the immediate context.	Accurate.
8. *Max.-Bal.* 15.5	Books 7–8 *passim.*	Herodian calls the emperor of 238 "Maximus" rather than "Puppienus", *HA* rejects the idea they might be same person.	Accurate, though inconsistent with #9 and #12.
9. *Max.-Bal.* 16.6–7	8.6.5–6	Herodian and Dexippus both use "Maximus" and say that he never directly fought against Maximinus but was at Ravenna during the decisive period. HA affirms they are the same person.	Accurate, at any rate as regards Herodian, inconsistent with #8 and #14.

Table 2 *(Continued)*

HA Location	Corresponding Passage of Herodian	Content	Accuracy
10. *Trig.* 32.1–4	7.1.9–10	Herodian and Dexippus describe revolt of "Titus" during reign of Maximinus. (cf. *Mxmn.* 11.1–6)	Accurate insofar as it seems to correspond to a "Quartinus" mentioned in Herodian, but details very different from Hdn.'s account.
11. After ***Max.-Bal.* 15.7 (authenticity uncertain)**[33]	n/a	Brief conversation between Maximus and Balbinus at the time of their elevation by the Senate.	Inaccurate, there is no such exchange in Herodian.
B. Citations of "Arrianus" (always with Dexippus)			
12. *Mxmn.* 33.2–4	8.6.5–6	A and D talk about Maximus whereas Latin authors talk about Puppienus, possibly same person. Also disagree about whether he fought Maximus.	Accurate for Herodian, inconsistent with #8 and #14.
13. *Gord.* 2.1	Books 7–8 *passim*	*Inperiti scriptores* identify only two Gordians, A and D correctly name three. Both authors said to have *ad fidem omnia persecuti sunt.*	Accurate in that Herodian does mention three emperors, though not all at once in the same passage.
14. *Max.-Bal.* 1.2	7.10.2–4	First mention of Maximus and Balbinus includes dispute over the former's identity, Pupienus and Maximus seen as different people.	Accurate for Herodian, inconsistent with #9, #12.

Most of the latter's citations are for discrete details or anecdotes that could easily be characterized as frivolous, such as Maximinus eating sixty pounds of meat a day (*Mxmn.* 4.1).[34] In case any readers fail to register the pattern, the *HA* narrator repeatedly delivers polemical comments against Cordus' frivolity.[35] This does suggest a picture of Herodian as Cordus' serious counterpart, but it is significant that the *HA* never makes this explicit or indeed mentions the two in the same place at all: it is

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33 These lines appear in no extant manuscripts or modern printed editions before the recent revised Loeb (Magie and Rohrbacher [2022]), but are found, along with four other substantial passages and a number of variant readings, in a Venetian edition of 1489. They have usually been dismissed as interpolations (see esp. Peter [1908]), but Edwin Patzig (Patzig [1904] 44–50) argued that the Venice editors were using a now lost manuscript, and Justin Stover (Stover [2020] esp. 169–170) has used new codicological evidence to reassert Patzig's claim.

34 Not all the Cordus citations fall under this heading, and he is sometimes cited for things like the age at death of Gordian III (*Gord.* 22.2) or the deification of Gordian II (*Max.-Bal.* 4.2).

35 The longest such passage is *Macr.* 1.3–5, see also *Mxmn.* 31.4; *Gord.* 21.4; *Max.-Bal.* 4.5.

part of the *HA*'s rhetoric that some dots are left unconnected and implications remain open.[36]

Moving on to specific citations and starting with the earliest ones from the *Albinus* and *Diadumenus* (#1–3), the narrator of the *Albinus* does give Herodian something of a vote of confidence, saying that "anyone who wants to know in more detail about [Severus' treatment of Niger's and Albinus' partisans] should read, among Latin authors, Marius Maximus and among Greek authors Herodian, both of whom give an honest account for the most part."[37] Herodian is placed on a level with Marius Maximus, though perhaps as a *Graecus* he is the less accessible option, and we get little sense how much the narrator himself has used him. However, for the other two, modern readers have often seen in them a certain incongruity, or even suspected them of being later insertions.[38] It is hard to see what specific point the citations are there to make, partly because both the *Albinus* and the *Diadumenus* are full of incongruities of all sorts. Furthermore, the citations are somewhat isolated, so that it is unlikely readers who come across Herodian in the *Alexander* will immediately think of him from the *Albinus* or *Diadumenus.*

Other than the evaluation I have just mentioned (#2), the other two both concern whether the emperor in question held the rank of *Caesar*, and in both cases this is part of a larger question that the *HA* is largely inventing. In Albinus' case (#1), the *Caesar* title is spun into a complicated fictional narrative in which Albinus is actually named as *Caesar* by Commodus, a status that Severus then recognizes.[39] Several other authors are also cited and Herodian's role is unclear. In the *Diadumenus* (#3), the title of *Caesar* is a secondary concern, since the *HA* is far more preoccupied with a fanciful discussion of how Diadumenianus received the name "Antoninus", which is part of an extended play with the *nomen Antoninorum* that extends over several lives.[40] Herodian, we are told "leaves out these things" (*haec praeteriens*). Since more than half of the (short) *Diadumenus* is given over to discussion of the "Antoninus" name/title, Herodian's relevance appears as uncertain as it did in the *Albinus.* Readers who are unaware of Herodian's content will find little to pique their curiosity, unless perhaps they have become suspicious of the Albinus-as-Caesar story and/or the *nomen*

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36 The obvious place to draw an explicit contrast would have been *Max.-Bal.* 4.5, where Cordus' uncritical approach is contrasted with Suetonius, as well as a fictional "Valerius Marcellinus" and a "Curius Fortunatianus", the latter of whom *omnem hanc historiam perscripsit*, not unlike the unmentioned Herodian.

37 See *Alb.* 12.14 (#2) *Quae qui diligentius scire velit, legat Marium Maximum de Latinis scriptoribus, de Graecis scriptoribus Herodianum, qui ad fidem pleraque dixerunt.*

38 E. g. Baaz (1909) 67.

39 There is extended discussion of Commodus' promotion of Albinus at *Alb.* 2.1–3.5 (with citation of Marius Maximus) and again at 13.3–10, see also *Alb.* 3.4, 6.4–5, 7.3 (citation of "Cordus") and 10.3, with *Sev.* 6.9 and *Nig.* 4.7 (citation of Severus' autobiography).

40 For the *nomen Antoninorum* question in the *HA*, see most fully Burgersdijk (2010) 108–210, also Pistellato (2022). It is accurate that Diadumenianus' nomenclature included "Antoninus", but the specifics given in the *HA* are wholly (and, to modern readers at least, absurdly) fictional.

Antoninorum rigamarole, and associate Herodian in some way with these possible fictions.

The *Alexander* is a more complicated proposition altogether, since it is the longest life in the whole *HA* at 54 Teubner pages, consisting largely of idealizing fiction spun out of a hugely briefer positive account found in the Latin breviary tradition. Herodian's full account is used only sporadically, but is cited twice in a relatively short space (a little over four pages) in a way that gives a more distinct impression of the author than the previous citations. Both citations (#4–5) occur during the episode of military narrative (§50–58) that complements and brings to a climax the *HA*'s praise of Alexander's peacetime virtues. The *HA* makes Alexander into a heroic war leader who wins a magnificent victory over the Persians after imposing iron discipline on his troops (whence supposedly the name "Severus"). Such a picture is compatible with that in the Latin breviaries, and may thus seem familiar to readers. Herodian is cited in connection with counter-narratives that call this version of Alexander into question. At *Alex.* 52.2 (#4), after giving an example of Alexander intimidating discontented soldiers, the narrator feels compelled to explain that "his reign was called 'bloodless,' though he was harsh and stern, for this reason, namely that he did not kill any senators, as the Greek author Herodian states in his writings on his own time" (ἀναίματον *imperium eius, cum fuerit durus et tetricus, idcirco vocatum est, quod senatorem nullum occiderit, ut Herodianus Graecus scriptor refert in libris temporum suorum*). A few pages later, after describing the campaign and subsequent triumph in Rome, the *HA* adds a surprising qualification (#5, *Alex.* 57.2–3), that:

> *haec nos et in annalibus et apud multos repperimus. sed quidam dicunt a servo suo eum proditum non vicisse regem, sed, ne vinceretur, fugisse. quod contra multorum opinionem dici non dubium est his, qui plurimos legerint. nam et amisisse illum exercitum dicunt fame, frigore ac morbo, ut Herodianus auctor est contra multorum opinionem.*

> This is what we have found in annals and from many authors. But some people do say [Alexander] was betrayed by a slave and did not defeat the king, but fled so as not to be defeated. Nobody who has read a variety of authors will doubt that this goes against the views of many. For they also say he lost an army by hunger, cold and disease, as Herodian has it, contrary to the views of many.

Both of these instances pose potential major problems for the *HA*'s narrative. They suggest the existence of an alternative that is incompatible not simply on particular facts but in its whole characterization of Alexander: mild but incompetent rather than harsh and effective. The narrator manages to explain away the first with a qualification about senators that still leaves the impression that the two narratives, even if not contradictory, are very different. This is strengthened if readers remember an earlier reference (*Alex.* 25.2) to *quidam* (plural) who had made the same claim about bloodlessness, which the *HA* at that point dismissed as flat wrong (*quod contra est*) without naming Herodian specifically. The second citation about the Persian campaign cannot reach even that level of resolution. Either Alexander won his war and told the truth about it or he did not: rather than suggest any "in-between" solution, the narrator leaves

the binary alternative in place and gives a strong impression that he sides with the majority of sources.

Together the *Alexander* citations suggest an alternative version of Alexander's military achievements that is associated with Herodian but not restricted to him. That version is not wholly hostile to Alexander – the *quidam* who call Alexander's reign "bloodless" presumably mean it as a compliment – but it is basically at odds with the *HA*'s own version and that of the Latin breviaries, such that if Herodian is correct, the *HA* or its sources must be fundamentally untruthful and vice versa. This may have any of several rhetorical effects on unknowing readers: those who find the narrator's point of view familiar and comforting may see the citations as an appeal for support in the face of Herodian's skepticism ("*some people* think differently from you and me [...]"); some will appreciate his honesty and diligence but be unsure what to believe; and yet others will begin to read more ironically and see the author as signaling and undermining their own hyperbole.

Turning to the "238 lives", the *scriptor* has ostensibly changed ("Capitolinus" rather than "Lampridius"), and Herodian's first appearance, at *Mxmn.* 13.4 (#6), positions him a bit differently relative to the narrator. After describing Maximinus' early campaigns in Germania, the narrator adds that the emperor intended to conquer all of the northern regions up to the ocean "and would have done so, if he had lived, so Herodian says, a Greek author, who shows him much favor, as far as we can tell, to slander Alexander" (*quod fecisset, si vixisset, ut Herodianus dicit, Graecus scriptor, qui ei, quantum videmus, in odium Alexandri plurimum favit*). The idea of Herodian being "anti-Alexander" is at least compatible with what we saw in the *Alexander,* but in this case the narrator, while certainly criticizing Herodian, does not explicitly take a side against him, nor does he exclude the possibility that his own narrative is based on Herodian (as in fact it is).[41] What the narrator has done, however, much as "Lampridius" did in the *Alexander* with the anonymous *quidam*, is introduce another version of the same material at a different point. Just a page before (*Mxmn.* 12.1), the narrator himself had presented the same counterfactual, but with a different "if only" variable: Maximinus might have conquered all of Germania if the Germani had been willing to give battle rather than retreating to woods and swamps. This last is not presented as a real possibility (why would they be willing?), whereas Herodian's "if he had lived" is meant to propose a genuine element of contingency, which "Capitolinus" has pre-emptively discounted.

However, readers will have little immediate chance to reflect on Herodian's relationship to "Capitolinus", because he will not be mentioned again for over 50 pages, until the later stages of the *Maximus-Balbinus.* In between, there will be a great many citations of fake authors, especially "Cordus", but most curiously three references to a certain "Arrianus". This author is cited, always alongside Dexippus and twice as a

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41 It may be significant that Herodian is not actually named in the final parts of the *Alexander* where his supposed bias toward Maximinus might have been in evidence. At one point (*Alex.* 59.7) his version of events is mentioned but his name is not: for Bertrand-Dagenbach (2014) lv–lxi, this is a sign that the *HA* is consulting Herodian through an intermediary source.

Graecus, in reference to items that are actually found in Herodian. Modern scholars have often lumped these citations in with those of Herodian, but for unknowing readers there is nothing in the citations themselves that would link them with Herodian or suggest that "Arrianus" was not a real and distinct author.

The "Arrianus" citations concern two controversies over imperial identity. He and Dexippus are cited twice (*Mxmn.* 33.2 – 4 [#12] and *Max.-Bal.* 1.2 [#14]) for the view that Balbinus' colleague as emperor was Maximus rather than, as others have it, Pupienus. Furthermore the Greek authors are aware that there are three distinct emperors named Gordian (*Gord.* 2.1 [#13]) whereas others are aware of only two. In this latter case "Capitolinus" explicitly sides explicitly with the Greek authors, while on the "Maximus vs. Pupienus" question he affects to be somewhat baffled. In both cases the *HA*'s actual narrative follows the "Arrianus and Dexippus" position, referring consistently to "Maximus"[42] and distinguishing Gordian II from Gordian III.[43] Also in both cases the opposing view is associated with anonymous *scriptores*, who are qualified variously as *Latini* (*Mxmn.* 33.3 [#12]) and *inperiti* (*Gord.* 2.1 [#13]), and in fact the views in question are found in surviving Latin breviaries.[44]

This play with "Arrianus" is the background to understanding a startling moment toward the end of the *Maximus-Balbinus.* After describing the killing of the two senatorial emperors, "Capitolinus" delivers a summary of their virtues and honors, after which he adds that "these things are what I have found out about Maximus, mostly from Herodian, a Greek author" (*Max.-Bal.* 15.3 [#7] *haec sunt, quae de Maximo ex Herodiano, Graeco scriptore, magna ex parte collegimus*). This is a quite unusual statement for a Roman historical author to make, at least if one interprets *haec* in its obvious sense, as referring to the entire account,[45] and is something of a surprise revelation,

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42 The *HA* typically uses "Maximus" alone without comment, but in a few places mentions *Maximus sive Puppienus* in a way that suggests those were two names for the same person, see *Gord.* 10.1, 19.8, 22.1; *Max.-Bal.* 11.1, 15.1, also *Mxmn.* 24.5; *Max.-Bal.* 16.2.

43 This is at any rate true for the *Maximini, Gordiani* and *Maximus-Balbinus.* Earlier on (*Macr.* 3.5; *Diad.* 6.3; *Hel.* 34.6) the *HA* itself has spoken of *Gordiani duo* as if there were only two emperors of that name. However, the discrepancy is not obvious enough that many readers of the *Gordiani* will have registered it. Throughout the narrative of 238, the *HA* makes something of a fetish of referring to the father-and-son rebels as *Gordiani duo* distinct from Gordian III, or otherwise over-clarifying the numerical aspects of the mini-dynasty (*Mxmn.* 16.6 – 7, 20.1; *Gord.* 10.1, 11.4, 14.2, 15.1, 16.4, 22.1, 22.6, 23.4; *Max.-Bal.* 1.4; 4.1 – 2; 15.5; 16.6).

44 While the wording of *Gord.* 2.1 does not specify that the *inperiti* are Latins, it is implied by the labeling of "Arrianus" and Dexippus as *Graeci*, see also *Max.-Bal.* 18.2. For an argument that the *HA*'s critique misrepresents the breviaries' shared source, see Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 297– 300, though in my view the *HA*'s apparent confusion is not to be taken at face value. Any misrepresentation is the *HA*'s fictional self-positioning rather than genuine failure of comprehension.

45 It is read thus by e.g. Brandt (1996) 228 and Paschoud (2018) 334, who notes how remarkable such a blanket attribution is not just for the *HA* but for ancient historians generally. The *haec* could conceivably be read as referring only to the data on the two emperors' consulships and prefectures (cf. Hdn. 7.10.4; 8.8.4). In either case it is not clear why only Maximus and not Balbinus is named: most likely it is an anticipation of the immediately subsequent reprise of the onomastic controversy.

given readers have not heard about Herodian since early in the *Maximini.* What follows, however, is all too familiar: "Capitolinus" treats us to his third digression on the "Maximus vs. Pupienus" question (cf. *Mxmn.* 33.2–4 [#12]; *Max.-Bal.* 1.2 [#14]). Except that in this case (*Max.-Bal.* 15.5 [#8]), and in a fourth passage a page later (*Max.-Bal.* 16.6 [#9]), Herodian is invoked as an authority alongside Dexippus, just as "Arrianus" had been previously. Even readers who are unaware of Herodian's content have at this point some reason to suspect he is the same person as "Arrianus", and they may indeed sense that a parallel name game is going on alongside the "Pupienus vs. Maximus" controversy.[46]

Other than one mention in the *Thirty Tyrants* (*Trig.* 32.1 [#10]), these references at the end of the *Maximus-Balbinus* are the last readers will see of Herodian. The references from the *Alexander* through *Maximus-Balbinus* will have created a relatively coherent picture for those who choose to assemble it. They are part of an overall rhetorical strategy in which the *HA* draws explicit contrasts between relatively obscure Greek sources, including Herodian, as against the various Latin authors who idealize Alexander, recognize only two Gordians and think an emperor named Pupienus defeated Maximinus at Aquileia. The latter will be associated in readers' minds with the fourth-century breviaries that appear to be the most common version of imperial-era history in circulation.[47] The *HA* uses these contrasts to position its own narrative. We saw earlier the various ways this could play out for the *Alexander.* The *Maximus-Balbinus* and perhaps its immediate predecessors will by contrast endorse that alternative version as against the familiar, and the change will not go unnoticed. Some readers will take it to reflect the views of the different *scriptores*, "Lampridius" versus "Capitolinus", and they may see some opposition between the two authors and side with one or the other. Others, however, may pay less attention to authorial ascriptions and see a single evolving story in which Herodian goes from an outlier complicating the main narrative to a key authority upholding it. And for others, the incongruity of the change, along with the "Arrianus" question and perhaps the contrived nature of the controversies in which "Arrianus" and Herodian are involved, will incline them toward a skep-

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46 This sense will be heightened if they realize that Herodian is being cited twice in two pages in support of contradictory views: at §15.5 the narrator strongly rejects the view that Maximus and Pupienus are the same person, while at §16.6 he endorses it even more strongly, spending the remaining two pages of the *Maximus et Balbinus* adducing spurious evidence for the homonymity (see Stover [2020] 193 for possible additional text). The two previous discussions had come to similarly inconsistent conclusions, with *Mxmn.* 33.2 speculating that they might be the same and *Max.-Bal.* 1.2 treating them as two different people. Throughout this discussion, the more substantive issue of whether Maximus/Pupienus was present for the fighting at Aquileia is raised but then lost in the identity/onomastic debates.

47 Unknowing readers will not infer that the *scriptores* are drawing on the *Caesares*, Eutropius or any common source, because those authors all wrote in the later 300s, after the fictional composition dates of the *scriptores.* These readers would presumably infer that the anonymous Latin authors referred to by "Lampridius" and "Capitolinus" were the shared ultimate sources of Victor, Eutropius *et al.* See on this point Stover and Woudhuysen (2023) 332–333.

tical reading which will, as we will see, be shared by those of their peers who are more familiar with Herodian.

3 Knowing Readers

It remains to ask how the *HA*'s references to Herodian would have struck such readers as opposed to their less ironically aware counterparts. They would naturally have realized that the picture generated by the citations, of Herodian being an outlier in the earlier citations but central to the narrative of the *Maximini, Gordiani* and *Maximus-Balbinus*, was broadly accurate: many would have recognized "Capitolinus'" dependence on Herodian well before he announced it at the end of the *Maximus-Balbinus*, and they had likely figured out the correlation between "Arrianus" and Herodian, along with any joke that might lie behind the choice of pseudonym.[48] If such readers were not already aware of the *HA* fiction, then the "Arrianus" joke and the silliness of the "Maximus vs. Pupienus" controversy would have had a similar effect to that posited above for unknowing but suspicious readers, only more so. If readers realize that much of the narrative material they are reading is Herodianic, they see more clearly the difference between that and the more far-fetched anecdotal material, much of it attributed to "Cordus" or grafted uneasily on to items from Herodian, as with the inflated figures for Maximinus' height (*Mxmn.* 6.8) or the numbers executed after the Magnus conspiracy (*Mxmn.* 10.6): the citations only add to this sense and push readers ever toward the "more skeptical" end of the spectrum.

The same push, however, could also come from the earlier citations of Herodian, before the narrative actually comes to be based on him. These citations, while they are not strictly speaking inaccurate, often turn out to be misleading. Sometimes they point to places where Herodian himself is vague or inconsistent: Herodian does indeed call Alexander's reign "bloodless", (6.1.7; 6.9.8), but he does not, as the *HA* claims, make any explicit qualification that this applies only to senators. Herodian's first use of ἀναιμωτί does include an explanation that he never executed anyone without trial (ἀκρίτως), although a page later Herodian describes the unjust execution of Alexander's senatorial father-in-law (6.1.10).[49] Similarly, the *HA*'s citation of Alexander's failed campaign is accurate (*Alex.* 57.3 [#5] ~ Hdn. 6.6.3), but closer readers of Herodian will realize that shortly after giving his damning verdict, the earlier historian qualifies it substantially (6.6.5 – 6) by noting that Alexander's forces did inflict heavy casualties

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48 The most likely explanation for the name "Arrianus" is that Arrian of Nicomedia and Dexippus both wrote works on "the events after Alexander", meaning Alexander of Macedon, which the *HA* then playfully associates with Alexander Severus. See Potter (1990) 368 n. and Paschoud (1991) 219 – 220, both with references to other explanations.

49 Whittaker (1969) 2.84 treats the *HA*'s observation about senators as a reasonable inference, or even based on an explicit word that has dropped out of Herodian's text. Kolb (1976) 146 – 147 sees the *HA* as an over-literal reader of Herodian.

on the Persians and eliminated them as a short-term military threat.[50] And when the *HA* throws cold water on Maximinus' boast about conquering all of Germania (*Mxmn.* 33.4 [#6], cf. 12.1), its observation about Germani retreating to woods and marshes rather than fighting is taken from Herodian's own narrative (7.2.3–7), where it does seem somewhat at odds with that historian's optimism about Maximinus' campaigns.[51]

More often, however, readers who can compare the *HA* citations with their context in Herodian, to varying degrees of precision, will get some idea of how misleading and even incoherent the *HA*'s account is. Thus the passage about Maximinus' Germanic campaigns concludes with the observation about Herodian's *favor* toward that emperor and his stirring up *odium* toward Alexander. Even casual readers of Herodian will realize the inaccuracy of the statement, and those with any rhetorical training will recognize that Herodian makes a neat antithesis between Alexander as a good emperor in domestic affairs but a poor military leader, while Maximinus is the reverse. And in fact the context for the counterfactual about conquering the North makes this explicit: Herodian immediately follows the speculation with the further observation (7.3.1) that Maximinus' military exploits cease to be praiseworthy (τί γὰρ ἦν ὄφελος) considered alongside his oppression of his own subjects, and it is at that point that Herodian begins his much longer narrative of Maximinus' fall.

More complicated is the case of Albinus. When the *HA* cites Herodian for Albinus being Severus' *Caesar* (*Alb.* 1.2 [#1]), it fails to note what Herodian makes clear in the corresponding passage (2.15.3), that Severus offered him the title as a ruse, and that Albinus' vanity and gullibility (χαῦνον καὶ ἀπλοϊκώτερον) made him an ideal target.[52] The *HA* instead invents a narrative in which Albinus is in fact promoted by Commodus, but still taken seriously by Severus as a successor. Furthermore, in the *HA* version, Albinus actually refuses the title of *Caesar* from Commodus, because he believes the latter is doomed (*Alb.* 3.1, 6.5). This seems like a conscious reversal: where Herodian's Albinus stupidly accepts a title from a successful emperor, his *HA* counterpart shrewdly refuses one from a failing emperor. Moreover, the one place where the *HA Albinus*, without citing Herodian, actually does rely on him for an extended period (*Alb.* 7.2–8.4 ~ Hdn. 3.5.2–8) describes an incident where Albinus, contrary to Herodian's earlier characterization, displays appropriate suspicion toward Severus and avoids an assassination attempt.[53] The *HA* is once again pointing out Herodian's inconsistencies, but also signaling its gratuitous manipulation of his content.

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50 For Herodian's overall verdict on the war, see Roberto (2017) 177 and Chrysanthou (2022b) 177–178, neither of whom sees a major inconsistency between 6.6.3 and 6.6.5–6.

51 Some historians, however, have taken Herodian's statement about Maximinus' intentions more seriously in light of recent archaeological discoveries possibly connected with this campaign, see Mecella (2017) 195–198.

52 For the Severus-Albinus conflict in Herodian, see most recently Chrysanthou (2022a).

53 As if to emphasize the point, the section adapted from Herodian has inserted in it a fake letter (*Alb.* 7.4–6), supposedly found in "Cordus", in which Severus uses just the kind of flattery to which Albinus was ostensibly subject.

A last example of the *HA*'s play with Herodian can be found in the last of the Herodian citations, that from the *Thirty Tyrants* (*Trig.* 32.1 – 4 [#10]). This later life is a collective account of usurpers mainly from the reign of Gallienus, ostensibly by the *scriptor* Trebellius Pollio, but it includes a notice of a rebel from Maximinus' reign named Titus, who clearly corresponds to a figure in Herodian named Quartinus, whose revolt is described at 7.1.9 – 11. The *Thirty Tyrants* cites Herodian along with Dexippus, but the account it actually gives is barely recognizable from Herodian: not only is the man's name different, so is his military position and he is killed in a different way. This is more than usually surprising, because the *HA* (under a different *scriptor*-name) has already given an account of this character in the *Maximini* (11.1 – 6) which does not mention Herodian by name but in fact corresponds much more closely to his account, although still calling the usurper "Titus". In effect what we have in the *Thirty Tyrants* is one Latin author, "Pollio", citing Herodian and Dexippus as implicit refutation of another Latin author "Capitolinus", although "Capitolinus'" account is actually taken from Herodian and "Pollio's" is not.

4 Conclusion

By any measure, most citations in the *HA* are devices of fiction. They refer to authors who never existed and facts the *HA* author invented themselves, and the narrative voices that deliver them are fake authors. It is in this sense that Herodian is a "fictional source" for the *HA.* Even though he really existed and the things the *HA* attributes to him correspond in some way to reality, he cannot stand outside of the regime of ambiguous truth-claims and implicit fictional contracts with which the *HA* presents its readers. They will approach his citations as they do the others, even if they eventually come to different conclusions for him than for "Cordus", "Acholius" and their spurious companions. They do not see the quotation marks I have just used, even if they eventually apply them themselves. I hope to have shown in this article how the *HA*'s citations of Herodian function as fictional elements, creating a picture of the *scriptores*' literary activity but also helping to deconstruct that picture. This is in line with a widespread and compelling view of the *HA* as an ironic literary game in which the author is displaying their knowledge and creative skill for their own and readers' amusement, without necessarily any further ideological agenda.[54]

However, the *HA*'s subject matter makes an entirely "innocent" reading hard to sustain. The sequence of emperors and their good and bad features were a part of the authoritative past of the *HA*'s society, and to make this kind of play with them is to assert ownership of that resource. To immerse the imperial past in gleeful fakery,

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[54] Such a view has been standard in Anglophone scholarship above all since Syme (1968) and the same author's many subsequent works: different recent versions include Cameron (2011) 743 – 782 and Rohrbacher (2016).

and to solicit readers' complicity in such mystification, is to pose questions about the claims contemporary emperors used that past to make, even if no clear answers emerge. This is perhaps where Herodian comes in. Much of the *HA*'s fiction can be dismissed as trivia: the items attributed to "Cordus" about Maximinus' physical prowess and gluttony amount to chaff that one might detach from a factual kernel. But Herodian, at least for the "238 lives" *is* that kernel. On one hand, the *HA* presents him that way, as the full and correct version superior to the more widely read *inperiti* who only know of two Gordians and cannot figure out what is going on with Pupienus and Maximus. But for knowing readers the *HA*'s signposting of Herodian's inconsistencies, and its self-conscious misuse or misconstruction of his information, undermines any neat picture. Even when it is a question of a real author and substantive questions about imperial identity, the *HA* can apply the same kinds of manipulation it does with fantastic trivia, thus removing the apparent safe ground and more effectively undermining any use of dead emperors to further contemporary political agendas.

Modern scholars of Herodian are perhaps unused to seeing him presented as the historiographical "safe ground". We are more inclined to see him as the manipulator and fictionalizer of history than as the object of those operations. Yet the fiction the *HA* creates around him implies that some readers have a pre-existing impression of him as an authority in the way I have just outlined. The *HA* has likely not invented the controversy between Herodian and the breviary tradition out of thin air, especially if Ammianus' new version, or any other Latin work incorporating Herodian, was current in the same milieu where the *HA* circulated.[55] Herodian had originally addressed himself to a post-Severan audience trying to process acute political crisis: a century and a half later we find him speaking to a Theodosian literary elite on the eve of still greater political and cultural upheavals.

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55 Cameron (2011) 750 argues that since the *HA* does not seem to have access to Ammianus' narrative, that must mean the *HA* predates it. However, other explanations are possible, notably that the authorial fiction is precisely meant to evoke a historiographical landscape before Ammianus.

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