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## THE ANCESTRY OF CONSTANTINE

by SIR RONALD SYME

### I. THE APPROACH

The emperors who came out of Illyricum were not under any compulsion to publish their obscure origins; the panegyrists duly complied; and in the sequel ignorance was overlaid by governmental fraud and by disinterested fiction. No trace survives of any historian or biographer writing in Latin for more than a century after Marius Maximus (cos. II, 223). It was (and it is) difficult to ascertain the age, extraction and earlier occupations of certain emperors.

Some were brief in duration, narrowly escaping oblivion. Even the rulers in the Tetrarchy and the founder of a long dynasty are infested with doubts and perplexities. Flavius Constantius had been a Caesar for twelve years before his short term as Augustus (305/6), but the name of his father stands nowhere on authentic record and his own age admits only a wide conjecture. As for the son, estimates of the year of his birth range between the limits of 272 and 288<sup>1</sup>.

Constantine saw the light of day at Naissus in the Dardanian country, as a sober and accurate source reveals: namely the *Origo Imperatoris Constantini*, otherwise the *Anonymus Valesianus*<sup>2</sup>. At first sight the item looks promising, but it tells less than some have fancied. A primordial distinction obtains between birthplace and patria. The service of the state in a world empire conveys a man a long distance from the town or region of his origin; and an official is normally accompanied by his wife. Helena, the wife of Constantius, or rather his concubine, came from Drepanum in Bithynia and is said to have exercised the profession of barmaid<sup>3</sup>. However, no profit

<sup>1</sup> For the variants, A. PIGANIOL, *Historia I* (1950), 86. SEECK had argued for 288, the new PLRE (1971) suggests "perhaps 272". The vicinity of 280 would be more plausible.

<sup>2</sup> Anon. Val. 2. 2: *natus Helena matre vilissima in oppido Naisso atque eductus*.

<sup>3</sup> For Flavia Julia Helena see SEECK in *P-W VII*, 2820 ff.; *PIR*<sup>3</sup>, 426 a (in the Add. to Vol. III); PLRE (1971), s. v.

will accrue from speculating about the reason or accident that brought Helena to Naissus, a city of strategic importance on the imperial highway that linked Aquileia to Byzantium.

The search for the patria of Constantius Caesar therefore entails a different approach. As Aurelius Victor with truth and propriety observes in an often quoted passage, the Tetrarchs derived from Illyricum, each and all (Caes. 39. 26). For Constantius that notion will not take one very far: Illyricum in the conception of the Romans embraced the whole land mass from the Adriatic to the Danube and even to the Pontus. Nor has the excellent Anonymus Valesianus anything to offer on this count. There remains as sole valid the testimony of Julian, who was the grandson of Constantius. It tends to be ignored or passed over in favour of spurious details and fabricated names emanating from a source of ostensibly earlier date. That is, the *Historia Augusta*.

Julian alludes to his origin in three passages of the *Misopogon*. First of all, he states that the family is Thracian; and Thracians are described as his fellow citizens<sup>4</sup>. In Greek writers of the imperial age the terms "Thrace" and "Thracian", it is pertinent to remark, normally transcend provincial boundaries and stretch as far as the bank of the Danube, taking in territories of Moesia. That is relevant, by the way, to the homeland of the Emperor Maximinus, whom Herodian styles a shepherd boy from the Thracians of the furthest interior<sup>5</sup>.

Next, a clear statement from Julian, though likewise not couched in administrative language. The family, he says, goes back to "the Moesians, right on the bank of the Danube, between the Pannonians and the Thracians"<sup>6</sup>.

## II. DACIA RIPENSIS

The testimony of Julian is welcome and useful, for it indicates an area that can be defined with some precision. For brevity and convenience the term *Dacia Ripensis* will here be adopted, though it did not emerge until 271 (or a little later). The region extending along the Danube below the Iron Gates as far as a point between Oescus and Novae was *Moesia et Treballia*, the territory administered by an equestrian official in the early days of the province Moesia; and in the geographer Ptolemy Ratiaria is defined as a town of the Moesi, Oescus of the Treballi<sup>7</sup>. The Treballi were a Thracian tribe on early record, the Moesi a later aggregation.

<sup>4</sup> Julian, *Misopogon* 367 c; 350 d.

<sup>5</sup> Herodian VI. 8. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Julian, *Misopogon* 348 c.

<sup>7</sup> ILS 1349; Ptolemy III. 9. 4; 10. 10.

When the province was divided by Domitian, the western part went to Moesia Superior, the eastern (the Treballian land) to Moesia Inferior. In 271 Aurelian, evacuating Trajan's Dacia, created his Nova Dacia south of the river. As a result, and perhaps at once, the old unity was restored under the name of Dacia Ripensis. The other new province, Dacia Mediterranea, comprised Dardania (the territories of Naissus, Scupi and Ulpianum), which was separated from Moesia Superior, and a piece of Thrace (Serdica and Pautalia)<sup>8</sup>.

It is therefore in no way surprising that Julian should be able to describe his family both as Moesian and as Thracian—the latter in wilful deprecation, as crude and rustic but manly in contrast to frivolous and effeminate Antiochenes. By the same token, Moesia Superior above the Iron Gates is ruled out, for it was never reckoned Thracian. Nor, for that matter, was Dardania.

The grandfather of Julian may have shared with other emperors an origin from *Moesia et Treballia*. First, Aurelian. Of the epitomators, Aurelius Victor has nothing to offer on this rubric, but Eutropius supplies Dacia Ripensis (IX. 3. 1). The statement in the Epitome of Pseudo-Victor (composed shortly after 395) is vague and unsatisfactory: Aurelian's parent had been a *colonus* of the senator Aurelius *inter Daciam et Macedoniam* (35. 1). If the item referred to the time of Aurelian's birth, it could be taken to connote Moesia Superior; if, however, it reflects conditions obtaining after Diocletian, Dardania is indicated, for that emperor, so it appears, disjoined Dardania from Dacia Mediterranea.

The Historia Augusta imports confusion by its predilection for variants and by the familiar device of simulated erudition: *ortus, ut plures loquuntur, Sirmii, familia obscuriore, ut nonnulli, Dacia ripensi. ego autem legisse me memini auctorem qui eum Moesia genitum praedicaret* (Aur. 3. 1 f.). In a later place this emperor is labelled a *homo Pannonius* (24. 3). Some scholars opt for Sirmium, in Pannonia Inferior<sup>9</sup>. In this imbroglio it would be easier and safer to follow the sober Eutropius.

Second, Galerius. Here the discrepancy of evidence is sharp and enigmatic. Eutropius puts him not far from Serdica, in Dacia Mediterranea (IX. 22. 1), at which city he in fact died (Anon. Val. 4. 9). But the Epitome registers Romulianum, on the bank of the Danube in Dacia Ripensis, as the place of both birth and burial (40. 16)<sup>10</sup>.

Third, Licinius, the friend and ally of Galerius. Eutropius has *Dacia* (X. 4. 1), the Anon. Val. *Nova Dacia* (5. 13). Those terms cover a wide area, from the bank of the Danube to the border of Macedonia.

<sup>8</sup> H. VETTERS, *Dacia Ripensis* (1950), 6 ff.

<sup>9</sup> M. BESNIER, *Histoire romaine* (1937), 231; H. MATTINGLY in *CAH* XII (1939): "perhaps a native of Sirmium".

<sup>10</sup> On Romulianum see further R. SYME, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), 226.

The author of the *Historia Augusta* alertly subjoins comment to his disquisition on Aurelian. Men of unknown provenience and of humble station are in the habit of faking a local origin *ut dent posteritati de locorum splendore fulgorem*. The thing that matters about great emperors, however, is not *ubi quisque sit genitus, sed qualis in re publica fuerit* (Aur. 3. 3).

The injunction is salutary. None the less, despite uncertainty and fraud, an enquiry can usefully serve more purposes than one. Dacia Ripensis deserves a brief word. Its Roman civilization went back a long way, first of all to camps of auxiliary regiments. Next, stations of legions. Oescus is early; and Ratiaria may have housed a legion at some time or other. Trajan after the conquest of Dacia established colonies of veterans at both places.

From this region issued, so it may be argued, the first of the soldier emperors: Maximinus, whom some style "the Thracian"<sup>11</sup>. It was a dynamic zone. Sirmium is the counterpart, which was made a colony under the Flavian emperors. Sirmium is the *patria* of Decius, of Probus, of Maximianus.

The other portion of Nova Dacia cannot stand in comparison with Ripensis. Serdica, it is true, acquired rank and importance; but the first person of note to issue from the Dardanian country is Nicetes of Remesiana.

In common parlance the great military emperors from Decius or Claudius onwards are styled "Illyrian". The term is inadequate, on various counts. *Illyria* is both vague and restricted: it cannot be extended far inland from the Adriatic or cover more than a portion of what the Romans understood by *Illyricum*. Whereas "Illyrian" denotes language, hence loosely and illicitly some sort of racial identity. No commodious appellation can answer all objections; but the least harm will ensue if those rulers are called Danubian—or even Balkan. Better perhaps the former, since facts enough are to hand about Sirmium and about Ripensis.

### III. THE FRAUD OF THE YEAR 310

In the course of 307, to cement the alliance with old Maximianus, Constantine took to wife his daughter Fausta. The marriage is hailed as *caelestes nuptiae*. For the orator who celebrated the happy event it took no effort or alertness to forecast progeniture and a dynasty that should endure through the ages: *imperatores semper Herculi* (Pan. lat. VII. 2. 5).

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<sup>11</sup> For the argument, R. Syme, *o. c.* 185 ff.

Three years pass, there is an abrupt change and a complete reversal. Constantine cast off the parent of his wife, who was killed, or graciously permitted to choose the manner of his end. Constantine therefore stood in need of a new source of legitimacy. It was produced without delay. The orator at Treveri discloses a secret hitherto shared only by devoted friends in the inner counsels of the prince. Constantine was in fact a descendant of the Emperor Claudius: *quod plerique adhuc fortasse nesciunt, sed qui te amant plurimum sciunt. ab illo enim divo Claudio manat in te avita cognatio* (VI. 2. 1 f.).

The orator draws the consequences. The son of Constantine is the third ruler in the line: *post duos familiae tuae principes tertius imperator* (2. 4.). Therefore it is not chance or choice that awards him the supreme power, but the prerogative of birth: *non fortuita hominum consensio, non repentinus aliquis favoris eventus te principem fecit. imperium nascendo meruisti* (3. 1).

The opportune discovery reflects the historical situation in the year 310. That was seen by Dessau, who declared the axiom that no other assertion of the faked ancestry can antedate that year. Further, the Vita Claudii in the Historia Augusta, which extols that ancestry, cannot have been written, as it purports to be, under the Tetrarchy, when Constantius was Caesar (i. e., before May 1, 305)<sup>12</sup>.

Dissent arose, with a variety of pleas or defensive arguments, and it endures to this day, at least in some areas of the controversy around the date and purpose of the Historia Augusta. However that may be, it is worth observing that none of the recent historians of Constantine conceives a doubt or calls into question the nexus between historical transactions and political fraud in the year 310<sup>13</sup>. There was also a religious aspect: the vision of *Apollo luus* (21. 4).

The reign of Claudius, all too brief (268—70), was crowned with the glory of warfare against the Goths, as the panegyrist duly testifies: *qui Romani imperii solutam et perditam disciplinam primus reformavit, immanesque Gothorum copias Ponti faucibus et Istri ore proruptas terra marique delevit, utinam diuturnior hominum quam maturior deorum comes* (2. 2)<sup>14</sup>. That was not so long ago, but forty years may seem a long tract of time in an epoch of rapid and momentous change. How plausible might the relationship appear, should any be disposed to raise a doubt?

The panegyrist speaks of *avita cognatio* (2. 2), and he seems to imply that Constantius was a son of Claudius. And on inscriptions Constantine is duly styled *divi Claudii nepos*. Otherwise asseverations

<sup>12</sup> H. DESSAU, *Hermes* XXIV (1889), 340 ff.

<sup>13</sup> Observe the firm and economical statement of N. H. BAYNES in *CAH* XII (1939), 680.

<sup>14</sup> Compare, for the brief reign accorded to Claudius, the rhetorical development in *HA*, Claud. 2.

tend to be vague, avoiding names. That was *tutius reverentiusque* for official propriety—and for men of letters. And variant versions became current<sup>15</sup>. Eutropius states that Constantius Caesar was *per filiam nepos Claudii* (IX. 22. 1). That is to say, Claudius had an anonymous daughter who married the father of Constantius. That being so, praise must be accorded to the solution of the Anon. Val. who transferred the matter one stage further into the realm of the unverifiable, stating that Constantius was a grandnephew of Claudius: *nepos ex fratre* (1. 2). It was left for the inventive genius of a later writer to furnish some names in corroboration of that version.

It is further a question how strong an emphasis Constantine himself put upon the dynastic legitimation that was published for the first time in 310. On the coinage it happens not to be attested before 313<sup>16</sup>. The loyal Lactantius, writing about 317, ignored it, and Eusebius, who was not inclined to neglect or suppress any kind of dishonesty that enhanced the excellence of Constantine. However, the fable was official, perpetuated by the ruler, even though no longer essential, his own prestige having grown with time, success and omnipotence.

Julian, the nephew of Constantine, in fact bore the name *Flavius Claudius Julianus*. Though ferocious in detestation of his murderous uncle, he saw no occasion or advantage in issuing a contradiction. In the two panegyric orations to the address of his cousin the Emperor Constantius Julian introduces praise of the ancestral Claudius<sup>17</sup>. That was expedient and necessary. And Claudius has his due place in the Caesars among the good emperors: the gods, admiring his greatness of soul, awarded the empire to his descendants, for they thought it right that the family of such a patriot should hold the power for as long as possible<sup>18</sup>.

#### IV. FICTIONS ABOUT CLAUDIUS

From the outset the memory of Claudius benefited from the obvious contrast with Gallienus, in whose reign *sive incuria rerum sive quadam inclinatione fatum omnibus fere membris truncata erat res publica* (Pan. lat. VIII. 10. 2). Aurelian had every reason to assert continuity, and issues of coins commemorating *Divus Claudius* went on later under Probus<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, it has been suspected and argued that a victory over the Goths in 268 was transferred from Gallienus to his successor<sup>20</sup>. That might have occurred in the near sequel.

<sup>15</sup> For the variants, H. DESSAU, o. c. 343 f.; J. MOREAU, JAC II (1959), 159.

<sup>16</sup> RIC VI (1967), 111.

<sup>17</sup> Julian 6 d—7 a; 51 c.

<sup>18</sup> Julian, Caesars 313 d.

<sup>19</sup> P. DAMERAU, Kaiser Claudius II Gothicus, Klio, Beiheft XXXIII (1934), 81 ff.; RIC V. 1 (1927), 202 f.

<sup>20</sup> As argued by A. ALFÖLDI in CAH XII (1939), 149; 189; 721 ff.

The Latin sources for the middle of the third century, meagre and miserable in so many ways, are uniform in their hostility to Gallienus. As Aurelius Victor avers, the enormities of this prince will be on show as long as civilised life endures: *dum urbes erunt* (33. 29). Towards Claudius such is their benevolence that it covers his brother Quintillus. Victor omitted this short-lived ruler, but the curt Eutropius states that he was *unicæ moderationis vir et civilitatis, æquandus fratri vel præponendus* (IX. 12)<sup>21</sup>. The epitomators drew on an *ignotus*, who, it can be contended, was writing long after the decease of Constantine<sup>22</sup>. That is, the "Kaisergeschichte" postulated by ENMANN in 1884 (who, however, put it shortly after 284, being influenced by the not yet impugned date of the *Historia Augusta*). The KG was used by the *Historia Augusta*—but not as often as was once believed by conservative scholars. Recent studies detect more and more traces of Victor<sup>23</sup>.

Two pieces of bold invention are variously instructive. First, the plot against Gallienus in the camp outside Mediolanum, with a significant discrepancy between Greek and Latin sources. Zosimus states that Claudius had a hand in it (I. 40. 2). Victor, however, affirms that Gallienus when close to death nominated Claudius as his successor (33. 28); and the *Historia Augusta* denied expressly any complicity of the exemplary Claudius (Gall. 14. 2; Claud. 1. 3). The *Epitome* furnishes "corroborative details": Claudius was on duty at Ticinum at the time, and the imperial vestments were brought to him by a man called *Gallonius Bassilius* (34. 2).

Second, the end of Claudius. According to Eutropius, he died of the plague (IX. 11. 2); and the *Historia Augusta* has the same version (Claud. 12. 2). But Victor comes out with a circumstantial narration: the Emperor carried out a ritual *devotio* offering up his life in battle for the salvation of the state (34. 1 ff.). The *Epitome* has the same story, but with an added refinement: it mentions by name the senior senator at the time, Pomponius Bassus (34. 3). Further, the historian Ammianus carries two allusions to the transaction (XVI. 10. 3; XXXI. 5. 7)<sup>24</sup>.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. HA, Claud. 12. 3: *vir sanctus et sui fratris, ut vere dixerim, frater, delatum sibi omnium iudicio susceptum imperium non hereditarium sed merito virtutum*.

<sup>22</sup> That was the date assumed by SEECK long ago. Observe also ALFÖLDI in CAH XII (1939), 191: "the lost biographical history of the emperors, of the middle of the fourth century". For the detailed proof, T. D. BARNES, *HAC* 1968/9 (1970), 20.

<sup>23</sup> A. CHASTAGNOL, *Rev. phil.* XLI (1967), 85 ff. Victor, it may be added, is a source not merely of facts or opinions: he furnished inspiration (R. SYME, *o. c.* 212; 238; 252).

<sup>24</sup> It is also reflected in what Julian says about the *μεγαλοψυχία* and the patriotism of Claudius (Caesares 313 d).



The two fables occur in Victor and in the Epitome. It may be assumed without discomfort that they derive from the KG—and further, that they did not originate before the year 310. Neither is in Eutropius, who also used the KG. As for the *Historia Augusta*, it follows the exculpatory version of Claudius' accession, but ignores the *devotio*. That is most peculiar, given the panegyric character of the *Vita Claudii*. Where can the explanation lie? Surely not scepticism but inadvertence. As is otherwise all too manifest, the author was writing in a hurry. Moreover, the main source of the facts in this *Vita* is a Greek historian<sup>25</sup>. It carries a consular date (11.3), which elsewhere is a clue to the History of Dexippus; and Dexippus is cited for the decease of Quintillus (12.6).

#### V. WHY CLAUDIUS?

What Constantine needed to discover and publish was an imperial ancestor of excellent repute and glorious in war. Why not then Aurelian or Probus? Both were great soldiers, but cruelty marred the fame of Aurelian, and Probus was remembered for his harshness<sup>26</sup>. And each met his end by violence: Aurelian succumbed to a conspiracy of the generals at Perinthus, while Probus was killed by his own troops, and in his own patria.

Aurelian held the power for five years, Probus for six. Too much was known about them. Better, some ruler of brief tenure such as Tacitus, whose reign of six or seven months could be described as a kind of *interregnum* between Aurelian and Probus. No evil was reported of Tacitus, and nothing much else. His memory was dim and evanescent. Eusebius left him out, passing directly from Aurelian to Probus; and Julian in his *Caesares* failed to notice a ruler soon to be acclaimed as exemplary. It was Aurelius Victor who, following the KG in a total misconception of the *interregni species*, produced an emperor actually chosen by the Senate and eager to restore its authority and prerogatives<sup>27</sup>. The *Historia Augusta* went on to a notorious embellishment and inflation.

By contrast, Claudius offered a double advantage: a short reign of two years but carrying the renown of a great war. And he may (or may not) have come from the same region as the family of Constantius...

<sup>25</sup> P. DAMEAU, o. c. 8 ff. The Latin source can be detected only in Claud. 3.2—4 (cf. Eutropius IX. 11.2; Epit. 34.4) and in portions of 12.2—5 (cf. Eutropius IX. 11.2; 12; Epit. 34.5). That is, the KG, not Victor, who omitted Quintillus.

<sup>26</sup> Julian, *Caesares* 314 c.

<sup>27</sup> The nature of the error was first detected by E. GROAG, P-W V. 1349.

That is not all. The faked ancestry was promulgated for the first time in Gaul. Now it was remembered that the loyal city of Augustodunum, being under siege (in 269), sent to the Emperor an urgent message for help. Eumenius affirms it in the oration delivered there in 298. He says *Romani principis auxilium* (IX. 4. 1). In 312, however, an orator addressing Constantine at Treveri can evoke *divum Claudium parentem tuum* (V. 2. 5; 4. 2), and Claudius is styled *ille rei publicae restitutor* (4. 3). In 298 Eumenius and others were not aware of any potency in the name, or any relevance to Constantius Caesar.

## VI. THE ORIGIN OF CLAUDIUS

There is no sign that any Latin source employed by the *Historia Augusta* had anything to say about the origin and family of Claudius, or for that matter, of M. Claudius Tacitus<sup>28</sup>. The biographies of Aurelian and Probus introduce the rubric at once, as is proper, after the preface. In the *Vita Claudii* the family tree is postponed until after the decease of the ruler. It figures as an appendage (13. 1—4), to be followed by a selection of documents conveying *iudicia principum* (14—17). That is a suspicious feature.

Nor does any confidence accrue from an earlier piece of fantasy suggesting an origin either from Dalmatia or from Dardania. To quote it is enough. In comment on Claudius' war the author states: *equitum Dalmatarum ingens extitit virtus, quod originem ex ea provincia Claudius videbatur ostendere, quamvis alli Dardanum et ab Ilo Troianorum <auctore> atque ab ipso Dardano sanguinem dicerent trahere* (11. 9).

Both themes recur towards the end of the biography. A letter of Valerian begins *Claudium Illyricianae gentis virum* (14. 2). A second missive from the same emperor alleges that Claudius has been appointed *dux totius Illyrici* (15. 2). Again, Decius instructs Messala the governor of Achaia to assign to Claudius (for an expedition to Thermopylae) two hundred soldiers *ex regione Dardanica* (16. 2); and Gallienus tells *Venustus* to furnish various gifts of plate and vestments, suitably including *singillones Dalmatenses decem, clamydem Dardanicam mantuelem unam, paenulam Illyricianam unam, bardocucullum unum* (17. 6). The *bardocucullus* was notoriously a Dalmatian garment. Dardania, it may be noted, occurs nowhere else in the *Historia Augusta*, except for a factual item in the *Vita Marci* (21. 7).

<sup>28</sup> For Tacitus the HA contributes the fable of a cenotaph at Interamna (Tac. 15. 1) which has seduced local patriots.

The genealogy itself may now be briefly registered (13.2 ff.). Claudius had another brother besides Quintillus, namely *Crispus*. Also sisters, one of whom, *Constantina*, married a *tribunus Assyriorum*: she died young. *Crispus* had a daughter, *Claudia*: Constantius Caesar was the fruit of her marriage with *Eutropio*, *nobilissimo gentis Dardanae viro*. That is to say, Constantius was a grandnephew of Claudius. The author rounds off his exposition with a modest avowal of nescience: *de avis nobis parum compertum. varia enim plerique prodiderunt*.

What then emerges? If a historian were in cause, some might be tempted to sort out or "combine" the various particulars, with Claudius as Dalmatian, Constantius Dardanian (his parent was an aristocrat from that region). Illicit, for the author is not a historian but a cheerful impostor, delighting in the parody of erudition and the parade of variants.

He was at some pains to render plausible a Claudian ancestry for Constantius Caesar, displaying no little *urbanitas*, a word which in his idiom meant craft and guile<sup>29</sup>. It is unfortunate that in the recent time, when the true character of the *Historia Augusta* has become evident, innocence or inadvertence can accord credit to choice pieces of bravura like the images of *animae sanctiores* in the domestic chapel of Severus Alexander or the solicitude of the Emperor Tacitus for the text and memory of the historian Cornelius Tacitus. Items less picturesque deposit a residue: *priscæ vestigia fraudis*.

Though the aristocratic *Eutropius* is allowed to lapse, Constantius is labelled "a Dardanian nobleman", or, more modestly, "a native of Dardania"<sup>30</sup>. Or it can be stated "er war illyrischen Blutes"<sup>31</sup>. Again, in reference to Claudius, it has been stated that he was presumably Dardanian, otherwise the link with Constantius would never have been invented<sup>32</sup>. That argument rests upon the presupposition that Constantius in fact came from Dardania (which no valid evidence attests). The CAH, Vol. XII (1939), offered no opinion about Claudius; but the essential repertorium of prosopography, PLRE (1971), making a bold choice between fictional alternatives, discards Dardania and affirms that Claudius was "an Illyrian from Dalmatia": it cites Claud. 11.9; 14.2.

The matter calls for care and circumspection. Some source or other might have indicated either Dalmatia or Dardania. It would have to be Greek rather than Latin, to judge by the paucity of the information

<sup>29</sup> HA, Tac. 15.4; Prob. 16.5.

<sup>30</sup> H. MATTINGLY in CAH XII (1939), 328; A. H. M. JONES, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe* (1948), 1.

<sup>31</sup> J. VOGT, *Constantin der Große* (1949), 104, cf. 741.

<sup>32</sup> P. DAMERAU, *o. c.* 41.

that the epitomators and the *Historia Augusta* were able to extract from the KG. The name of the contemporary historian Dexippus occurs, who was drawn upon in the *Vita Claudii*.

So far the enquiry has endeavoured to keep separate the local origin of Constantius from that of Claudius; and it was averred at the outset that the proper approach was to start with the unimpeachable testimony of the grandson of Constantius, which establishes Dacia Ripensis. A disturbing possibility arises. Julian did not disavow the Claudian ancestry, he refers to it several times. Is Julian alluding to it in the precise and personal statement about his family in the *Misopogon*? That notion cannot be excluded. It entails, however, the consequence that Julian was better informed about remote Claudius, who was born c. 214, than about Constantius<sup>33</sup>.

If for discretion the uncertainty be conceded, the matter stands thus. Ripensis was the homeland of an emperor: either Constantius or Claudius—and possibly both.

#### VII. THE TECHNIQUE OF THE HISTORIA AUGUSTA

The author was not devoid of exact information about some of the Tetrarchs. For example, he introduces Galerius as *Maximianus Caesar*—and that at wide intervals in the work, namely in the first of the "secondary *Vitae*" and towards the end (Ael. 2. 2; Car. 9. 3). Not all modern scholars are alert to this item of nomenclature<sup>34</sup>. Again, he registers Severus and Alexander among the defeated rivals of Constantine (Elag. 35. 6). Some editors have deleted the name of Alexander: wrongly, the person is patently Domitius Alexander, the usurper in Africa. Further, Constantius is assigned a governorship of Dalmatia (Car. 17. 6). The detail might be invented, for the context is fictitious, namely the intention of Carus to kill his son and adopt Constantius in his place. But, a surprise, the governorship happens to be attested by the Anon. Val.<sup>35</sup>. However that may be, no credit will go to the allegation that Licinius tried to pass himself off as a descendant of the Emperor Philip (Gord. 34. 5).

The first four of the "six biographers" purport to be writing under Diocletian and under Constantine. In the main series of the biographies of emperors, dedications to Diocletian occur in three passages,

<sup>33</sup> For the age of Claudius, PIR<sup>2</sup>, A 1626.

<sup>34</sup> Maximianus Caesar and the old Augustus Maximianus are amalgamated in the Index to the Oxford text of the Pan. lat. (1964).

<sup>35</sup> Anon. Val. 1. 2: *protector primum, inde tribunus, postea praeses Dalmatarum fuit*. Note also CIL III, 9860 (from the polje of Grahovo). Both authors have the same version of the relationship between Constantius and Claudius. The Anon. Val. was written in the second half of the Fourth Century. Its use by the HA cannot be excluded.

viz. in the *Vitae* of Marcus, Verus and Severus (each grafted on to the basic source). That emperor is also invoked at the end of the *Vita Macrini*. The first imperial biography dedicated to Constantine suitably alludes to the Claudian ancestry (Elag. 2.4; 35.2 f.), but the rest ignore it<sup>36</sup>.

In the later part the author writes under the successive masks of *Trebellius Pollio* and *Flavius Vopiscus*—and adopts an earlier point in time. He eschews all mention of Constantine, and he brings in frequent references to Constantius as Caesar. He keeps up the pretence, consistent all through to the end, with one exception, and it seems wilful rather than careless. *Vopiscus* cannot resist the temptation of reporting what his father was told by Diocletian after his abdication—*iam privatus* (Aur. 43.2); and, after an alleged prophecy about the descendants of Claudius, he states *est quidem iam Constantius imperator* (44.4). That is to say, the writer here places himself between May 1, 305 and the death of Constantius in July of the next year.

As for *Pollio*, after two early references to Constantius Caesar and his ancestry (Gall. 7.1; 14.3), he furnishes a lavish and variegated exposition in the *Vita Claudii*, composed, so he says, with great care *intuitu Constanti Caesaris* (1.1), and with strict veracity, guaranteed by *et tua conscientia et vita mea* (3.1); and he indignantly repels the suspicion of adulation (3.7; 8.2)<sup>37</sup>. The propinquity between the two rulers is unobtrusively slipped in with the appellation *Flavius Claudius* (7.8, cf. Aur. 17.2); and there is a reference to Constantius as the *nepos futurus* (9.9), supported by several verse oracles (10).

Then, for precise proof, the genealogy (13.1—4). As has been indicated, to have Constantius the son or the grandson of Claudius presented certain difficulties; and further there is no sign that Constantine was imprudent enough, or anxious enough, to publish supplementary evidence for authentication.

Indirect descent was in fact a better device. That was the version of the Anon. Val.: Constantius a grandnephew. It was selected by the author of the *Historia Augusta*, wisely. Furthermore, he added corroboration, viz. *Crispus*, the brother of Claudius, whose daughter married *Eutropius*, the Dardanian nobleman. A bold invention. Also clever, for both names crop up later in the dynasty. *Crispus* was the

<sup>36</sup> Constantine happens to be invoked in one of the "secondary vitae" (Clod. Alb. 4.2). Those biographies may have been composed later than the Elag. (and the Alex.). For this problem, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), 64; 75; 86.

<sup>37</sup> As likewise at an earlier stage, *ne malivolis adulator videar esse* (Elag. 35.3).

eldest son of Constantine; and Eutropia, the half-sister of Constantine (still extant in 350), by her name recalled the mother of Theodora, the wife of Constantius.

#### VIII. FABRICATED LINKS

Neatly taking a hint from what Aurelius Victor said about the Tetrarchs (39.26), the *Historia Augusta* comes out with a list of generals trained in the school of Probus (Prob. 22.3). Eleven names, of which the last six appear bogus. Among the genuine are three future emperors: Carus, Diocletian and Constantius. But not Maximianus and Galerius, although the former came from Sirmium and was thus a fellow citizen of Probus.

As has been shown, Sirmium and the territory of Dacia Ripensis each claim several of the Danubian emperors. It might further be surmised that there were in fact unrecorded ties of blood, marriage or local affinity in certain potent groups such as the generals who made the plot against Gallienus in 268 (Claudius and Aurelian were in it), or those who contrived the murder of Aurelian in 275.

The *Historia Augusta* slipped in to fill the gap. With an exhibition of talent not always conceded or even recognized, the author created a variety of coherent links between emperor and emperor, in a long series from Decius to Carus and beyond, to the Tetrarchy. A notable device is the commendation of future rulers through *iudicia principum*, sometimes at several removes. It had been employed at an early stage in some of the "secondary Vitae"<sup>28</sup>.

The author makes play with personal names all through. In this instance he was helped by the ignorance prevailing about the nomenclature of a number of rulers. Like his Latin sources, he discloses no awareness of the family names of L. Domitius Aurelianus and M. Claudius Tacitus; and he cannot furnish a named wife for any emperor from Claudius to Carinus.

By intruding common and unobtrusive dynastic names the *Historia Augusta* forges a nexus linking Claudius, Aurelian, Probus and Constantius. Probus was a relative of Claudius, but the author prefers to leave that open, for it is in only one of the Greek writers; but still, he remembers having read in *ephemeride* that Probus was buried by his sister *Claudia* (Prob. 3.3 f.). The document in question is no doubt the memoir composed by *Turduhus Gallicanus*, his elderly friend, *vir honestissimus et sincerissimus* (2.2).

Claudius, twice styled *Flavius Claudius* (Claud. 7.8; Aur. 17.2), appears in one place as *Valerius* (Claud. 18.4). Now Aurelius Probus

<sup>28</sup> Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta* (1968), 135 f.; *Emperors and Biography* (1971), 65 f.; 208 ff.

(Prob. 6. 2) figures once as *Aurelius Valerius Probus* (11. 5); and, it may be noted, he rescues from captivity among the Quadi the noble youth *Valerius Flaccinus*, a relative of the Emperor Valerian (5. 2). Further, *Flavius Claudius* indites a missive to *Valerianus Aurelianus* (Aur. 17. 2)<sup>39</sup>.

Now Constantius by his full style is *Flavius Valerius Constantius*; and *Valerius*, several pieces of evidence accruing, is now admitted to the nomenclature of Claudius, who stands as M. Aurelius Valerius Claudius in PIR<sup>2</sup>, A 1626.

What then follows? Fictions apart, nobody is in a position to deny that some of these rulers may in fact have been related. Further one cannot go. Nothing can be got from names like *Aurelius* and *Valerius*, even where genuine: the latter also occurs in the nomenclature of Diocletian and of Galerius. The author in his total ignorance can even produce *Aurelius Tacitus* (Aur. 41. 4).

This performer showed more skill when he conjured up *Crispus* and *Eutropius*. Another name in the family of Constantine was *Dalmatius*, borne in succession by his half-brother and by the son, *Dalmatius Caesar*. To explain the phenomenon, the conjecture has been put forward that the unascertained parent of Constantius was a *Flavius Dalmatius*<sup>40</sup>.

It is strange that the name failed to attract the ingenious author of the *Historia Augusta*. It had appeal in another quarter. Whereas the *Historia Augusta* invented the centurion *Maximus* as father for *Probus*, the *Epitome* has *Dalmatius*, labelled a *hortorum studiosus* (37. 1). The item reveals somebody's fancy of forging a link of propinquity between the two families. Nor are the horticultural tastes of this *Dalmatius* any mystery. They reflect the beneficent operations for which *Probus* earned honour in the Latin sources: he planted vineyards on the Mons Alma (near Sirmium) and on the Mons Aureus in the province of Moesia Superior<sup>41</sup>.

Fabrications about emperors independent of the *Historia Augusta* (the *Epitome* was composed in the same season), or anterior to it, are worth registering, such as the ritual *devotio* enacted by *Claudius*: surely subsequent to 310. The *Epitome* presents peculiar features, and aberrations. The name *Gallonius Basilius* in a fictitious episode (34. 2) should arouse disquiet<sup>42</sup>. Likewise a senator suitably called

<sup>39</sup> The word *Valeriano* was deleted by Hout. in his edition (1927). A later hand corrected the Cod. Pal. to *Valerio*.

<sup>40</sup> A. PIGANIOL, *L'empereur Constantin* (1932), 32.

<sup>41</sup> In all three epitomators, in the *Chronicle* of Jerome, and in *HA*, Prob. 18. 2. Inspection shows that Victor is not the source of the *HA*.

<sup>42</sup> The name is not impugned in PIR<sup>2</sup>, G 49 or in *PLRE*. The only other *Gallonius* registered in the latter work is the fictitious *Gallonius Avitus* of *Quadr. tyr.* 15. 6. But it has five *Basilli*.

*Aurelius*—the parent of Aurelian was his *colonus* (35.1). This opusculum also has an absurd fable about Claudius: he was the illegitimate son of a Gordian, so *plerique putant* (34.2). Whether the second Gordian or the third, the author was not perhaps clear in his mind<sup>43</sup>.

#### IX. THE VITA CLAUDII

This biography invites brief appraisal on several counts. Though the structure is defective (as is normal when the writer had no model to follow), the total effect comes out clearly. It is reinforced by declamation, adopting the language and the tricks of panegyrists, similar in this respect to the *Vita Probi*, but more exuberant, though Probus acquires handsome praise and can be held superior even to Claudius (Tac. 16.6). The biographies of Aurelian, Tacitus and Probus carry orations (or missives) both of those emperors and of senators: in the *Vita Claudii* there are two dispatches of the ruler, very brief (7.2—5; 8.4—9.2). Nor does the author indulge in any of the constitutional fantasies attributed to other "good emperors", viz. a renovated censorship (Val. 7.2 ff.) or a restoration of prerogatives to the Senate, carried out twice at no long interval (Tac. 18.2 f.; 19.2; Prob. 13.1). But a novel device intervenes, to be repeated in the sequel: the elaborate schedules of supplies, weapons, clothing, money and sundry equipment. The *Vita* offers the longest of them (14.2—5).

Very little is said about the personal habits of Claudius (13.5), *omina imperii* are absent, likewise astrology and dreams. But *auspicia Claudiana* are mentioned (9.9; 11.3), to recur once later on (Aur. 17.5); and several verse prophecies are quoted, two of them from oracles not employed before—and enigmatic, namely *Commagenis* and *in Apennino* (10.1; 4). Lines of Virgil emitted in oracular form here make their last appearance—and their first after a long interval (since Alex. 14.5). Further, the author's interest in the curious and the exotic is revealed by a story about Moses, in relation to the span of human life and the brief reign of Claudius (2.4). The treatment seems mildly humorous<sup>44</sup>.

Jokes do not occur, there is only one pun, one bogus authority, both in the same context where the author derides *Gallus Antipater*, *ancilla honorum et historicorum dehonestamentum* (5.4). The label is Sallustian. It also appealed to Ammianus (XXVI.6.16).

The *Vita Claudii* of *Trebellius Pollio* permits useful comparisons of technique and resources with both earlier and later parts of the

<sup>43</sup> P. DAMERAU opts for Gordian II (o. c. 41 f.). Perhaps rather Gordian III, cf. *Emperors and Biography* (1971), 232. Unlike Victor and Eutropius, who conflate, the *Epitome* happens to distinguish the two (27.1).

<sup>44</sup> For the legend, J. GEFFCKEN, *Hermes* LV (1920), 294; R. SYME, o. c. 25.



Historia Augusta. The author had a penchant for variegation, often perverse. It was needed when he came to deal with the soldier emperors. And there is a visible enhancement of audacity.

It was for a time the fashion to explain resemblances between *Pollio* and *Vopiscus* by a defensive argument: the latter imitated the former. That device seems to have lapsed.

#### X. EPILOGUE

From the beginning this biography occupied a frontal position in the controversy about the authorship, purpose and date of the *Historia Augusta*. DESSAU in 1889 exposed the genealogical fraud. So in fact did KLEBS in the same year, but he shrank from the consequences<sup>45</sup>. They were drawn by DESSAU, sharp and clear. The biographer *Pollio* who purports to be writing when Constantius is Caesar (i.e., before May 1, 305) is condemned by his foreknowledge of the great secret disclosed in 310. Nor was it conceivable that any writer under the Tetrarchy should proclaim that one of the two Caesars had an emperor for ancestor and was himself the destined progenitor of a line of Augusti.

MOMMSEN at once raised objection, and with various pleas<sup>46</sup>. The Claudian ancestry, he opined, might already have been known to the friends of the family; indeed, the *Vita* might have been composed with the express purpose of giving it publicity. Further, he went on to deny that the ancestry was invented in 310 precisely because Constantine needed a new legitimation after the suppression of Maximianus Herculius.

The authority of MOMMSEN continues to be invoked by scholars of a conservative persuasion, or at least tendency. The scrupulous author of a subtle and sceptical enquiry into the whole problem concludes that in this instance MOMMSEN's remarks remain decisive<sup>47</sup>.

The same critic admits the possibility that "the tradition" was circulated a few years before 310; and a further "possibility of a later editing of the *Historia Augusta* during the time of Constantine". Finally, he avows his impression that "the use of Claudius Gothicus in the *Historia Augusta* smacks of the age of Constantine"<sup>48</sup>.

<sup>45</sup> E. KLEBS, *Hist. Zeitschr.*, N. F. XXV (1889), 229 ff.

<sup>46</sup> TH. MOMMSEN, *Hermes* XXV (1890), 254 = *Ges. Schr.* VII (1909), 326.

<sup>47</sup> A. MOMIGLIANO, *Secondo Contributo agli studi Classici* (1960), 119, n. 24: "MOMMSEN's remarks, *Hermes* 25, p. 254, n. 1 = *Ges. Schriften*, VII, p. 326, n. 2, remain decisive".

<sup>48</sup> A. MOMIGLIANO, *o. c.* 120. That scholar also discusses the faked ancestry in reference to *Elag.* 35.3 in *EHR* LXXXIV (1969), 566 ff. (review of Ammianus and the *Historia Augusta*). On which, see *The Historia Augusta. A call for clarity* (1971), 57 ff.

In estimating the *Historia Augusta* many uncertainties have to be affirmed. And all sorts of possibilities might be canvassed, with no end in sight. For example, if the *Vita Claudii*, or the significant portions of it, were composed in the reign of Constantine, alternatives of some interest emerge: dynastic names were faked either by the Emperor or by a contemporary.

It is better to abide by the probable. It is not probable that the fraud was invented under the Tetrarchy, in the lifetime of Constantius (MOMMSEN and KLEBS for reasons of convenience ordained that the *Vita* was composed towards the end of the period 293—305). Further, as concerns the alternative possibility, inspection of the *Vita* shows that it coheres, after its own fashion. The remodelling would have had to be drastic. For that reason, or rather perhaps for others, one recent scholar boldly affirms a conviction that the biography was composed beyond doubt in the time of Constantine<sup>49</sup>. Not a true and integral conservative. Others in this late season cling like KLEBS to the ostensible date (it should be "dates") of the *Historia Augusta* and the plural authorship<sup>50</sup>. It will be suitable to terminate (and that none too soon) with a quotation from the poet whom the *Historia Augusta* cherished and exploited in wondrous ways: *Nox ruit, Aenea, nos lando ducimus horas*.

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<sup>49</sup> E. MANNI, *L'Impero di Gallieno* (1949), 98. Not changed in the second edition (1970).

<sup>50</sup> Thus H. BARDON, *Le crépuscule des Césars. Scènes et visages de l'Histoire Auguste* (1964). Further, S. TIMPANARO in *Studi di Storiografia antica in Memoriam di Leonardo Ferrero* (1971), 129. After stating his full agreement with MOMIGLIANO's position, he continues "caso mai, proprio in base agli argomenti stessi di Momigliano, sarei ancor più decisamente favorevole alla datazione tradizionale e alla pluralità di autori". This verdict of TIMPANARO is quoted with approbation by MOMIGLIANO, *EHR* LXXXVIII (1973), 114. From which, the reader can hardly fail to infer that MOMIGLIANO himself now believes in the 'traditional date and the plural authorship' of the *HA*.