Radboud Repository

Radboud University Nijmegen

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.
http://hdl.handle.net/2066/116204

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2017-12-05 and may be subject to change.

Pliny's Panegyricus and the Historia Augusta

Diederik Burgersdijk

PLINY'S *PANEGYRICUS*
AND THE *HISTORIA AUGUSTA*

DIEDERIK BURGERSDIJK

I. INTRODUCTION

The unknown author of the series of imperial biographies called the *Historia Augusta* (*HA*) makes use of many types of literature to construct his narrative of the emperors of the second and third centuries C.E.[1] In addition to the obligatory historiographical and biographical data, epigrams, epistolography, novelistic elements, political and historical treatises, acclamations, and, not least, panegyric found their way into the text. Many authors from earlier decades served as models (as has been pointed out in modern research), which makes the *Historia Augusta* an important testimony to the literary atmosphere around the turn of the fourth to the fifth century C.E. or maybe even later. The data which the *Historia Augusta* might provide with regard to literary culture as well as textual transmission urged Ronald Syme to consider the reconstruction of the author's library one of the major challenges in *Historia Augusta* research (1968.214): "The clear thing and instant gain is to round off the picture of the literary world, placing the *Historia Augusta* in relation with other writings, notably history and panegyrics (in their various types), with antiquarian studies, and

---

1 For convenience, I refer to "the author of the *Historia Augusta*" as the person who is responsible for the final version of the text to be dated after 395 C.E., following Dessau's groundbreaking article of 1889. The six *Scriptores* are pseudonyms attached to the thirty biographies seemingly at random, though the actual author may have closely followed the texts of one or more predecessors. In this article, the Teubner text as edited by Hohl (1927, 1965[2]) will be used, as well as its abbreviations for the individual books of the *HA*. Translations of the *HA* are from Magie (1921, 1924, 1932) and of Pliny's *Panegyricus* from Radice 1969.

with the revival of the Latin classics." In the following, an attempt will be made to indicate the author's use of Pliny's *Panegyricus* in the writing of the *Historia Augusta* not only to shed a light on the literary content of the *Historia Augusta,* but also to stage the *Historia Augusta* as a specimen of the panegyrical mode in late antiquity—with Pliny as its possible model.

    Imperial biography and panegyric have many traits in common: both deal with the lives and deeds of prominent persons, even though the panegyrist takes no aim at objectivity. Although biography normally is meant to be objective, its tone often tends towards the panegyrical in those cases where the author admires the subject. Both panegyric and biography take a central position in the literature of late antiquity.[2] There are several reasons to compare Pliny's *Panegyricus* and the biographical series of the *Historia Augusta*. First of all, Pliny's addressee Trajan was followed in office by Hadrian, the first emperor treated in the *Historia Augusta*. Moreover, Trajan was generally considered the best Roman emperor; even Augustus was second to him, not least in the *Historia Augusta*.[3] Apart from the extraordinary military successes celebrated by some famous architectural monuments, Pliny's *Panegyricus* may have contributed significantly to Trajan's fame in late antiquity.

    A second important reason for such a comparison is the close resemblance between the panegyrical genre and some biographies transmitted in the *Historia Augusta*. There are numerous references to the *XII Panegyrici Latini* in the secondary literature on the *Historia Augusta*, which is not surprising, as both collections have the emperors of the later empire as their subjects and the collections may have been edited around the same time, the last decade of the fourth century. Moreover, some of the biographies in the *Historia Augusta* are panegyrics in biographical guise, the lives of Claudius (*Cl.*), Probus (*Pr.*), and Tacitus (*Tac.*) in particular. The third—and possibly best—reason to study Pliny's *Panegyricus* in relation

---

 2 See Edwards and Swain 1997, Zimmermann 1999, Hägg and Rousseau 2000.
 3 See the Introduction above and Syme 1971.89–112 ("The Fame of Trajan"). Pliny elabo-
   rates the theme in the passage where he speaks about the title Optimus for Trajan; there it
   is said that Trajan is better than his predecessors, *Pan.* 88.7: "merito tibi ergo post ceteras
   appellationes haec est addita, ut maior. minus est enim, imperatorem et Caesarem et Augus-
   tum, quam omnibus imperatoribus et Caesaribus et Augustis esse meliorem," "And so it
   was only proper to place this at the end of your other titles, as being the greater one, for
   it means less to be Emperor and Caesar and Augustus than to be better than all those who
   have borne those titles before you."

to the *Historia Augusta* is that there appear to be many direct intertextual relationships between the two works.

      First, let us make a small inventory of the scholarship devoted to the relation between Pliny's *Panegyricus* and the *Historia Augusta*. The first scholar to study the two texts was K. Hönn (1911.179–85), though his investigation was no more than a collection of some superficial similarities in the way two emperors (Trajan and Alexander Severus) were praised. Syme severely disapproves of Hönn's observations because of the thematic character of the parallels.[4] A. Chastagnol, in the introduction to his monumental edition of the *Historia Augusta* in the Bouquins series (1994.lxxxiii), remarks that "il est remarquable que Pline le Jeune ne semble guère connu de l'H.A." Indeed, the younger Pliny is quoted only two times in Chastagnol's book,[5] against ten occurrences of his uncle Pliny the Elder and some twenty occurrences of the other *Panegyrici Latini*.[6] In many studies of the panegyrical tendencies of the *Historia Augusta*, the *Panegyrici Latini* in general are taken as material for comparison without isolating specific individual speeches.[7] Every attempt to indicate the use of Pliny's *Panegyricus* will be hampered by the thematic character of the passages; however, our aim is to uncover some unambiguous derivations (themes that only appear in the two corpora, *Pan.* and *HA*) or to accumulate similar passages within a restricted amount of text supported by verbal parallels.

II. THE IDEA OF THE *BONUS PRINCEPS*
IN PLINY'S *PANEGYRICUS*

One of the main themes in the *Historia Augusta* is the rotation among good, bad, and neutral emperors—with special attention to usurpers, who are categorized in the same way. The vicissitudes of the Roman empire are

---

  4 Syme 1971.101: "Hönn in his study of that biography came out with a bold statement. The author was composing a kind of panegyric. He therefore had recourse to the classic performance of the younger Pliny. Hönn was not content to adduce the general resemblance of theme and emphasis. He brought up a large number of parallels of phraseology. Inspection shows them illusory."

  5 Chastagnol 1994.clix concerning Nerva's adoption of Trajan, and 784 concerning Valerian's *censura.*

  6 Chastagnol 1994.xc–xci: "Nous avons vu (*supra*, p. lxxxiii) que l'H.A. a connu le panégyrique de Pacatus, et nous soupçonnons d'autres traces."

  7 E.g., Syme 1968.113–17, Baldwin 1980, Soverini 1988 (*non vidi*), Paschoud 2002, and Fündling 2006.156.

governed by fate, as the author repeatedly stresses and then elaborates in the last preface of the series, that preceding the book on Carus, Carinus, and Numerianus. There are also several sub-themes, such as the possibility that a natural son of a good emperor might not be a good successor (see, e.g., *Sept. Sev.* 23.3).

In itself, the idea that a bad ruler is followed by a good one and vice versa is far from unique in Latin literature,[8] but it gained strength in the course of the first century of the Roman empire along with the accumulation of emperors in succeeding dynasties. Seneca's *de Clementia* offered a mirror for the youthful prince Nero in which he opposed the good ruler to the tyrant (1.11.4–13.5, in particular).[9] Half a century later, in his *Panegyricus* to Trajan, Pliny made the opposition between good and bad rulers a leading theme while the memory of the reign of the tyrant Domitian was still fresh in senators' minds. A new idea about imperial succession—that the best man in the empire should be chosen as the heir to the throne—had been initiated by the *senex-imperator* Nerva.[10] In only a few years, there was a transition from the tyrant Domitian to Nerva, a neutral but useful emperor, as it were, whose main virtue it was to have chosen the best man (*optimus princeps*) for the throne—for which deed he deserves divine worship (Pliny *Pan.* 10.5–6, 11.3).[11]

The idea of the good emperor succeeding a bad one plays an important role in the *Panegyricus*. The term *bonus princeps* occurs eight times, and the opposition *bonus-malus* three times (*optimus-malus* is an interesting variation). Apart from that, the term *malus princeps* occurs four times and the plural *mali principes* five times. The explicit opposition between

---

8 See, e.g., Sallust (*Bell. Cat.* 2.6): "ita imperium semper ad optumum quemque a minus bono transfertur" ("Thus the sway is always passing to the best man from the hands of his inferior," trans. Rolfe). See also Burgersdijk (forthcoming).

9 See Mader 1993 for an analysis of the theme and literature.

10 Except for Galba's unsuccessful adoption of Piso in 68 C.E., which Pliny mentions in *Pan.* 8.5.

11 Nerva, who is named ten times in *Pan.* (7–8, 10, 35, 38, 89–90) is only praised (still lavishly) in relation to his adoption of Trajan, cf., e.g., *Pan.* 89.1: "quanto nunc, diue Nerva, gaudio frueris, cum uides, et esse optimum et dici, quem tamquam optimum elegisti! quam laetum tibi, quod comparatus filio tuo uinceris! neque enim alio magis approbatur animi tui magnitudo, quam quod optimus ipse non timuisti eligere meliorem" ("What happiness you must feel today, divine Nerva, on beholding him whom you judged the best candidate for your choice proving that he is best, and being addressed as such! What joy for you to stand second in comparison with your son! There can be no better indication of your greatness of soul than the fact that though so good yourself, you did not hesitate to choose a better man").

boni principes and *mali* (so, plural) occurs six times.[12] In sum, there are twenty-seven occurrences of *boni malique principes*.

It is interesting to compare some other authors of the same era or of the same type: Suetonius, Tacitus, the *Panegyrici Latini,* and Ammianus Marcellinus. Suetonius uses the notion of the *bonus princeps* in *Tiberius* 29.1 (*bonum ac salutarem principem*) and nowhere else. Tacitus makes use of the term on three occasions, in *Annales* 15.66.1, *Historiae* 1.16.1, and 2.37.2 (*bonus princeps*), and in the plural at *Historiae* 1.46.4. *Malus princeps* is found in *Agricola* 42.4, 43.4, and *Historiae* 4.42.6.[13] In respect of these last three examples, we should also note that the themes of bad sons of good fathers, of the alternation of good and bad emperors, and of tyrants active under a bad ruler are all encountered in the *Historia Augusta* (*Val.* and *Gall.* in particular).[14] The corpus of *Panegyrici Latini* contains a meagre two occurrences, in V(8)2.2 and 7.5.[15] The idea of the *bonus princeps,* in contrast with notions such as *sacratissimus imperator* ("most sacred emperor"), is certainly not taken up enthusiastically by the *Panegyrici.*[16] Ammianus Marcellinus has the notion twice, in 16.5.16 and 17.13.32.[17]

Statistics aside, the opposition between the *malus* and the *bonus* emperor seems to have a specifically Plinian flavour. Let us consider two examples: first, at *Panegyricus* 46.1–3, Domitian, a *malus princeps*, against

---

12 *bonus princeps*: 7.2, 26.5, 36.4, 44.4, 45.3, 53.6, 59.5, 76.9; *bonus princeps-malus*: 45.5, 68.7, 88.9; *optimus-malus*: 74.3; *boni principes-mali*: 4.1, 53.3, 63.1, 68.7, 75.3, 90.2; *malus princeps*: 53.6, 67.3, 68.3, 94.2; *mali principes*: 40.3, 44.1, 53.3, 53.5, 46.3. All occurrences are based on Janson 1979.

13 *Agr.* 43.4: " . . . ut nesciret a bono patre non scribi heredem nisi malum principem" (" . . . that he did not see that it is the bad prince who is made heir by good fathers," trans. Hutton); *H.* 4.42.6: "optimus est post malum principem dies primus" ("the best day after a bad prince is the first one," trans. Hutton); *Agr.* 42.4: "posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos uiros esse" (" . . . that great men can live even under bad rulers," trans. Hutton).

14 For the last of the three mentioned themes, see, e.g., *Gall.* 5.1 and 21.1.

15 V(8)2.2: *boni sit principis* ("It is a good emperor's duty"); V(8)7.5: "boni principis est libenter suos uidere felices" ("It is the mark of a good ruler that he is happy to see his subjects prosperous").

16 One third of the occurrences of *bonus* and its derivations in all the *Panegyrici* are found in Pliny (59/188) and half of the occurrences of *malus* (40/80). This indicates that the opposition good-bad in general is far more important in Pliny than in other panegyrics.

17 16.5.16: "inter has tamen regendi moderandique uias bonis principibus aemulandas barbarica rabies exarserat maius" ("However, in the midst of these courses of wise governing, worthy of the imitation of good emperors, the fury of the savages blazed forth again more than ever," trans. Rolfe); and 17.13.32: "hoc enim boni principis menti, hoc successibus congruit prosperis" ("For this [i.e., the preservation of our riches] beseems the mind of a good prince, this accords with prosperous successes").

the will of the people forbade the mimes. They were restored by Nerva and again forbidden by Trajan, this time with general consent, "utrumque recte—nam et restitui oportebat, quos sustulerat malus princeps; et tolli restitutos" ("They were right in both cases—it was necessary to restore what a bad emperor had suppressed, and once restored, equally necessary to suppress it"). Second, at *Panegyricus* 11.3, Trajan deified his predecessor and father in contrast with earlier emperors and without any opportunism or political design—Trajan simply believed Nerva was a god: "in principe enim, qui electo successore fato concessit, una itemque certissima diuinitatis fides est bonus successor" ("For there is no more certain proof of divinity in a ruler who has chosen his successor before he met his end than the worthiness of his choice"). Note the marked contrasts Pliny makes between bad emperors and good successors generalized to lessons about the emperor's preferred behaviour and morals.

If we assume for the moment that the author of the *Historia Augusta* has borrowed his vocabulary from Pliny, the door is opened to more parallels. In research on the *Historia Augusta*, two places in particular have been identified as indebted to Pliny: first, "acclamationes quidem nostrae parietibus curiae claudebantur" ("Our acclamations went no farther than the walls of the senate house," *Pan*. 75.2) has been connected with *The Three Gordians* 12.1–4, in which a so-called *tacitum senatus consultum* ("a silent decision by the senate") is mentioned—surely the author's fabrication.[18] We will treat this passage below. Secondly, the *censura Valeriani* ("Valerian's control in moral matters") in the *Two Valerians* 5.4–7, which bears on Valerian's impeccable way of life and, consequently, the senate's wish to appoint him to the office of *censor,* has been connected with "perge modo, Caesar, et uim effectumque censurae tuum propositum, tui actus obtinebunt. nam uita principis censura est, eaque perpetua: ad hanc dirigimur, ad hanc convertimur: nec tam imperio nobis opus est, quam exemplo" ("You need only continue as you are, Caesar, and the principles of your conduct will have the same effective power as a censorship. Indeed, an emperor's life *is* a censorship, and a

---

18 For the parallel: Baldwin 1981.143, Béranger 1985.38–43, and Chastagnol 1994.716 n. 2 (Cic. *Phil*. 2.112, 5.18). Baldwin indicates another parallel: Fronto *ad M. Caes*. 2.1: "nunc nisi ita laudo ut laudatio mea non in actis senatus abstrusa lateat" ("Now I must so praise that my praise be not hidden away in the *acta* of the senate," trans. Haines). Kolb 1972.21–22 supposes that a *s.c. tacitum* is a transposition of a *s.c. ultimum* for which Herodian 7.10.3 served as a source.

true perpetual one," *Pan*. 45.6; Chastagnol 1994.784 n. 3). Against the argument for direct derivation from Pliny is the fact that the theme also occurs in other authors such as Pacatus (*PanLat* II[12]13.2) or may come from Livy (e.g., Liv. 4.8).[19] A strong case in favour of Pliny as the source is the sentence immediately preceding that bears on the *bonus-malus* theme: "porro, non tam sinistre constitutum est, ut, qui malum principem possumus, bonum non possimus imitari" ("We are not so wrongheaded that we can only copy a bad ruler and not a good one"). In the acclamations on the occasion of the offer of the censorship, it is said: "hunc censorem omnes accipimus, hunc imitari omnes uolumus" ("He it is whom we all accept as censor, whom we all desire to imitate," *The Two Valerians* 5.7). The first of these parallels will be the point of departure for the following, as this passage is important for the understanding of some panegyrical passages in the *Historia Augusta*.

III. ACCLAMATIONS AND THE PUBLICATION OF THE *GESTA SENATUS*

Especially in the later lives of the *Historia Augusta* (from Alexander Severus onwards), much text is devoted to acclamations rendered in direct speech; twenty-five passages of acclamations by senators to the emperor can be counted (Burgersdijk 2010.209). The author pretends to have taken these from the *acta senatus* to which he apparently has access. This suggests the existence of "open sources" which in itself contributes to the emperor's praise: it is his virtue that allows the whole world to take notice of the senate's proceedings.

Two centuries before the *Historia Augusta*'s alleged date of origin, in Trajan's times, procedures with regard to the publication of senatorial councils changed. Before that prosperous era, only the emperor's decrees were published in the form of the *acta diurna* initiated by Julius Caesar,[20] and Augustus even forbade the publication of the *acta senatus*

---

19 Pacatus: Chastagnol 1994.xci; Livy: Chastagnol 1994.784 n. 1. See for *censura* in the *HA*: Béranger 1976.37–38, 1980.31, and Chastagnol 1995.139–50. The word *censura* also occurs in *M. Antoninus* 22.10, *Avid. Cass.* 12.3, 13.8, *Pesc. Niger* 7.7, *Alex. Sev.* 41.2, and *T.* 6.6.

20 Suet. *Div. Iul.* 20.1. One should distinguish between the *acta senatus* and the *acta publica*— the latter is also referred to by Suetonius as *populi diurna acta* (*Div. Iul.* 20.1), *publica acta* (*Tib.* 5.2), *acta* (*Cal.* 8.5, 36.6), or *diurna* (*Claud.* 41.6). Tacitus designates the *acta senatus* as *commentarii senatus* (*Ann.* 15.74.3: *reperio in commentariis senatus . . .*).

(Suet. *Aug.* 36.1). In *Panegyricus* 75, Pliny praises the senate for allowing the *gesta senatus* to be announced to the public (*in publica acta mittenda*) and inscribed in bronze (*incidenda in aere*). With this new possibility, not only the *orationes principum* but also the senators' *acclamationes* could be preserved for eternity in the records and were no longer kept inside the senate's walls.

Three centuries later, the effects of this measure were still perceptible as is clear from the *Codex Theodosianus* in which long tracts of senatorial acclamations are transmitted.[21] The author of the *Historia Augusta*, encouraged by the increased public access to these sources and fond as he is of inserting documents in his narrative, must have seen an opportunity to produce acclamations of his own making. In spite of a lack of sources from the third century, the author of the *Historia Augusta* boasts of making use of the *acta urbis* in *Commodus* 15.4 and *Alexander Severus* 6.2, the *acta senatus* in *Alexander Severus* 56.2 (though probably not seeking to make a distinction between these two different kinds of *acta*), and the *acta senatus et populi* in *Probus* 2.2.[22] It may well be that the passage in Pliny's *Panegyricus* encouraged the author to include the acclamations as well as the emperors' answers to them. In Commodus's biography, the senate's meeting takes place soon after the murder of the tyrant, but in the life of the ideal prince Alexander Severus, an *agon* is staged of more than 750 words (four pages of Teubner text) in which the senators and the emperor react to one another in twenty-one

---

Gascou 1984.480–85 (*acta senatus*) and 485–89 (*acta diurna*) treats the use of such *acta* by Suetonius; see further Baldwin 1979 on the *acta diurna* and Talbert 1984.323ff. for an overview of the *acta senatus*. The *acta* as a source open to the public is described in Suet. *Div. Iul.* 20.1: "inito honore primum omnium constituit, ut tam senatus quam populi diurna acta confierent et publicarentur" ("Caesar's very first enactment after becoming consul was that the proceedings both of the senate and of the people should day by day be compiled and published," trans. Rolfe). Tacitus also made use of these *acta diurna*, vide *Ann.* 3.3: "matrem Antoniam non apud auctores rerum, non diurna actorum scriptura reperio ullo insigni officio functam" ("I fail to discover, either in the historians or in the government journals, that the prince's mother, Antonia, bore any striking part in the ceremonies," trans. Moore).

21 Roueché 1984.181–84 describes the growing public access to the *acta* in late antiquity.

22 *Commod.* 15.4: *actis urbis indi iussit,* "He ordered the insertion in the city gazette" (sc. *Commodus, quae turpiter faceret,* "the foul things done by Commodus"); cf. 18.2: "ipsas acclamationes . . . indidi et sententiam senatus consulti," "I have quoted the acclamations themselves and the content of the senate's decree" (the source indicated in both cases is Marius Maximus, who, it is implied, used the *acta urbis*); *Alex. Sev.* 6.2: *ex actis urbis, Alex. Sev.* 56.2: *ex actis senatus, Pr.* 2.2: *actis etiam senatus et populi* (sc. *usus sum*).

turns in total (*Alex. Sev.* 6–12)—a set-piece that is repeated in shorter form in *Alexander Severus* 56.2–10 (200 words for Alexander's speech and the senators' reactions).

The insertion of the acclamations and the emperors' replies corresponds with a centuries-long development, namely, a gradual shift of senatorial proceedings to the public domain. It is worth having a closer look at the passage in which Pliny makes clear the public nature of the *acclamationes* in the *acta publica* (Pliny *Pan.* 75.1–5):

> sed quid singula consector et colligo? quasi uero aut oratione complecti aut memoria consequi possim, quae uos, patres conscripti, ne qua interciperet obliuio, et in publica acta mittenda et incidenda in aere censuistis. ante orationes principum tantum eius modi genere monimentorum mandari aeternitati solebant, acclamationes quidem nostrae parietibus curiae claudebantur. erant enim quibus nec senatus gloriari nec principes possent. has uero et in uulgus exire et posteris prodi cum ex utilitate tum ex dignitate publica fuit, primum ut orbis terrarum pietatis nostrae adhiberetur testis et conscius, deinde ut manifestum esset audere nos de bonis malisque principibus non tantum post ipsos iudicare; postremo ut experimento cognosceretur et ante nos gratos, sed miseros fuisse, quibus esse nos gratos probare antea non licuit. at qua contentione, quo nisu, quibus clamoribus expostulatum est, ne adfectus nostros ne tua merita supprimeres, denique ut in posterum exemplo prouideres! discant et principes acclamationes ueras falsasque discernere, habeantque muneris tui quod iam decipi non poterunt.

> But why trouble to assemble all these details? I could hardly hope to keep in mind or cover in a speech all that you, conscript fathers, decided to save from oblivion by publishing in the official records and inscribing on bronze. Hitherto, only the speeches of the emperors were made safe for all time by records of this kind, while our acclamations went no farther than the walls of the senate house; and indeed, these were such that neither senate nor prince could take pride in them. Today these have been sent

out into the world and passed on to posterity both in the
general interest and to do honour to us all; firstly, so that
the world could be summoned as an active witness to our
loyalty; secondly, to demonstrate that we were not afraid
to pass judgement on good and bad rulers even in their
lifetime; finally, to give proof that though previously we
were not ungrateful, we were unhappy so long as we were
denied the opportunity of making our gratitude known.
Now we are all eagerness and determination, clamour-
ing for you not to set limits to our feelings or your own
merits—in a word, to remember the example you owe
to posterity! Let future princes, too, learn to distinguish
between true acclamation and false and owe it to you that
they can no longer be deceived.

After a disquisition about the love of the gods for the emperor and
the emperor's affection for the senate, Pliny continues with the reasons for
making the acclamations known to the public. Now the acclamations of the
senators are made public for all the world to know, for present and future
generations. There are three reasons underlying this: 1) the whole world
should know about the senate's loyalty (*pietas*), 2) the senate is empow-
ered to judge its rulers and not merely after their deaths, 3) the senators
appreciate being able to express their gratitude for the gift of such a ruler,
whereas previously they were denied this opportunity. With an eager show
of gratitude, the senate requests their ruler not to undervalue either its feel-
ings or his own qualities so that he may also set an example for his suc-
cessors. By this example, future rulers may learn how to discern between
false and honest acclamations.

The acclamations after the deaths of bad emperors, which mark
the *diuersitas temporum* ("the change of times") as expressed in Pliny
Panegyricus 2.3, occur several times in the *Historia Augusta*[23] and may
be seen as a common procedure; they comply with Pliny's wish to make
public the acclamations in order for it to be known that the senate is able
to judge good and bad emperors at the moment of their accession. This,
however, does not mean that the bad emperors have to be reproached for

---

23 Commodus in *Commod.* 18.3–19.9; Caracalla in *Macrinus* 2.3–4, referred to in *Macrinus*
     7.4; Macrinus in *Macrinus* 4.1–8, referred to in *Hel.* 3.3.

their behaviour during their reigns (instead of afterwards), as appears from *Panegyricus* 4.1. The bad emperors should learn from the lessons that the speeches contain, while the good emperors recognize their own morals. In both cases, the acclamations function as a *speculum principis,* ("mirror for princes").

If we compare these words of praise with the senatorial acclamations encountered in the *Historia Augusta*, it is striking that the idea of publicity is more or less consistent with Pliny's description: *Commodus* 18.1–2, "adclamationes senatus post mortem Commodi graves fuerunt. ut autem sciretur, quod iudicium senatus de Commodo fuerit, ipsas adclamationes de Mario Maximo indidi et sententiam senatus consulti" ("Loud were the acclamations of the senate after the death of Commodus. And that the senate's opinion of him may be known, I have quoted from Marius Maximus the acclamations themselves and the content of the senate's decree"). The author claims to have taken the acclamations from the third-century biographer Marius Maximus, which suggests public access to sources for this author at least. The acclamations, twice reformulated as *iudicium senatus* and *sententiam senatus consulti*, are post mortem, which may be a distortion of Pliny's "non tantum post ipsos iudicare."[24] In *Alexander Severus* 6.1, the author states "proferam etiam adclamationes senatus, quibus id decretum est" ("I will also quote the acclamations of the senate by which these names were decreed," viz. the offer of the *nomina Antonini et Magni* to Alexander) and claims to have collected them *ex actis urbis*. In *Alexander Severus* 56.2, acclamations *ex actis senatus die VII kal. oct.* (i.e., 25 September 233) are quoted. The inclusion of senatorial documents in the narrative may well be a reaction to Pliny's praise of publicity. The acclamations themselves are generally thought to be fictions intended to degrade Commodus's reputation and, on the other hand, to enhance the glory of Alexander.

Another *senatus consultum* is reported in *The Three Gordians* 11.1–10 and introduced thus: "interest, ut senatus consultum, quo Gordiani imperatores appellati sunt et Maximinus hostis, litteris propagetur" ("I think it is my duty to set down in writing the decree of the senate in which the Gordians were declared emperors and Maximinus a public enemy"). After the acclamations (*Gord*. 11.9–10), it is said that the

---

24 In *Macrinus* 2.4, the allegations against Caracalla are quoted; in *Macrinus* 4, those against Macrinus—both after their deaths.

senatus consultum is a secret one, the so-called *senatus consultum tacitum—tacitum* to prevent Maximinus from hearing that he been declared *hostis publicus* ("public enemy").[25] The source for this is the fictitious author Iunius Cordus, who serves to fill the gap after Marius Maximus.[26] The *senatus consultum tacitum* has every appearance of being the opposite of the *publica acta senatus*. A long definition of the term follows in *The Three Gordians* 12.2–4; it suffices to quote its beginning: "omnino exemplum senatus consulti taciti non aliud est hodie, quam quo uestra clementia [sc. Constantinus] *conuocatis ad interiora maioribus* ea disponit, quae *non sunt omnibus publicanda*; de quibus adiurare etiam soletis, ne quis ante rem conpletam quicquam uel audiat uel intellegat" ("Today the equivalent of a secret decree of the senate is, in general, nothing more than the action of those inner councils of elders by which Your Clemency settles those affairs which are not to be published abroad"). Furthermore, no officials were present in the curia (*Gord.* 12.3). Despite all this, Maximinus hears about the *senatus consultum tacitum* against him and starts to charge the walls.[27] This is a hilarious reaction to the ancient practice that acclamations were kept within the walls of the senate as Pliny tells us (*Pan.* 75.2). The author's sense of humour produces the most capricious fantasies.

IV. BIOGRAPHY AND PANEGYRIC
(THE *UITAE CLAUDII, AURELIANI, TACITI,* AND *PROBI*)

The theme of the alternation between good and bad emperors left its mark on the structure of the books. In *Maximini duo* 1.3, the point at which the author turns from single books to combined books, he makes an exception for the great emperors: "quod quidem non in uno tantum libro sed etiam in plurimis deinceps reseruabo, *exceptis magnis imperatoribus,* quorum res gestae plures atque clariores longiorem desiderant textum" ("And I shall keep it [the combining of books], indeed, not in one book alone, but in most that I shall write hereafter, excepting only the great

---

25 Béranger 1985.38–43; Cic. *Phil.* 2.44.112 and 5.7.18.

26 See Burgersdijk 2007 on the author's dependence on Nepos (*Att.* 3.1–2.4) for his description of Cordus in *OM* 1.3–4 and for further references.

27 *Gord.* 13.4: "nam senatus auctoritate percepta *incurrere in parietes* . . . prorsus furere videbatur" ("For when he finally comprehended the decree of the senate, he dashed himself against the walls . . . he seemed, indeed, to go wholly mad").

emperors; for their doings, being greater in number and fame, call for a longer recounting"). The emperors who receive a separate book are Claudius, Aurelian, Probus, and Tacitus. Of these four, only Aurelian is a "neutral emperor" in the style of Nerva, as will be shown below. In the case of the other three, the biographies take the shape of a panegyric in spite of the author's promise to come up with plain facts, not eloquence (*Trig. Tyr.* 33.8). There is also something contradictory in the preface to Probus's biography (*Pr.* 1.6): the author promises to abstain from eloquence in his description of the extraordinary emperor whose deeds he will not allow to pass into forgetfulness, but in the actual *Life*, biography comes extremely close to panegyric.

A panegyrical style in biography has its precedents. Nepos named the first series of Latin biographies *de Viris Illustribus*, and they were meant to keep the memory of famous men of the past alive. In *Epaminondas* 1.1, Nepos expressly states that he intends to write biography instead of history. It appears that it is his explicit intention to describe the greatness of the man by means of a biography, to which end an historical account is insufficient. The great men's qualities are described according to a *partitio* encountered in Cicero's rhetorical works, (e.g., *de Inv.* 2.177): mind, body, and external circumstances are material for praise.[28] Biography does not differ from panegyric in this respect. In imperial biography, the *uita priuata* of the subject plays an important role, an aspect also encountered in Pliny's *Panegyricus*: chapters 81–86 are devoted to Trajan's impeccable private behaviour: "sunt quidem praeclara, quae in publicum profers, sed non minora ea, quae limine tenes" (83.2).[29]

After these examples, one may wonder if there is any essential difference between the two types of text; the answer may be sought in structure and performance situation. To begin with the latter: whereas biography mostly treats famous men from the past, panegyric normally is intended to praise contemporary men, preferably in their presence (if not, the omnipresence of the subject may be stressed). With regard to structure: in biography, more space is reserved for the *origo, educatio,* and *iuuentus* of the subject, and, moreover, these aspects (along with their deaths) are

---

28 Cic. *de Inv.* 2.177: cf. *Part. Or.* 22.74, Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.12 and 3.7.15–16 on two different methods to praise a person: biographical and thematic.

29 "Your public conduct is indeed remarkable, but no less so your private life." For Suetonius and Pliny, see Enenkel 2003; for the emperor's private lives in panegyric, see Rees 1998.

normally treated chronologically. The *res gestae* and *mores* may be covered in separate chapters, while in panegyric, the borders between these categories are less strict.[30]

It is precisely these differences that make the biographies of Claudius, Tacitus, and Probus tend towards panegyric. For Tacitus, no information about birthplace and origin is given at all. About Claudius, the author is unsure (Dalmatia or Asia Minor?); the information, normally presented immediately after the preface (if present), is only provided in the eleventh *caput* of *Claudius* (11.9).[31] His birthplace is invented in order to let the emperor Claudius descend from the Trojans, which descent adds to the glory of the emperor Constantine, who wishes to track his lineage to Claudius. Aurelian's (an emperor who hovers between good and bad) birthplace is unclear and becomes the object of an historiographical debate.[32] Probus's birthplace, Sirmium in Pannonia (*Pr.* 3.1) is confirmed by Aurelius Victor (37.4). Some details are reported, it seems, to link Probus's family with that of Claudius: Probus's sister is said to have been called Claudia. The earlier careers of the emperors are only treated in the light of their future glory. So panegyrical elements are far more prominent than biographical facts. And on closer inspection, it appears that the panegyrical descriptions of Claudius, Tacitus, and Probus feature parallels with Pliny's praise of Trajan.

The *uita Claudii*: B. Treucker analyses the artfully constructed chapter *Claudius* 2 and detects parallels with Pliny's *Panegyricus*.[33] Most of these bear on the character of panegyrical topoi which also occur in other *panegyrici*, yet the accumulation of comparable themes suggests a direct use of Pliny. Chapters 3 and 4 are more instructive on this point.[34] In these chapters, the theme of the *bonus princeps* is fully elaborated. I quote the most interesting parallels:

---

30 See Hägg and Rousseau 2000.1–19 and Fox 2001 about ancient theories concerning relations between historiography and panegyric.

31 See Chastagnol 1994.921–22 and Paschoud 2001.71. The descent is a fiction from 310 C.E. (*PanLat* VI[7]2.1), attested in the work of the *Anonymus Valesianus* (Chastagnol 1994.xvi and cxv).

32 *Aurel.* 3.1; see Paschoud 2001.71.

33 Treucker 1966. Pliny *Pan.* 83.2 ~ *Cl.* 2.6 (the emperor's deeds *domi forisque,* "home and abroad"); *Pan.* 38ff. ~ *Cl.* 6.7 (legislation); *Pan.* 88.5 ~ *Cl.* 2.8 (the choice of the adopted successor by princeps and senate); *Pan.* 13.4–5 ~ *Cl.* 24–25 (examplary leaders from the past); *Pan.* 88.8 ~ *Cl.* 2.3 (to surpass all earlier emperors, even the best ones).

34 Treucker 1966.281–83 only deals with 3.3 (about the *clipeus aureus,* "golden shield," granted to Claudius).

Pliny *Panegyricus* 75.3–4	*Historia Augusta Claudius* 3.1–2, 4.1–2[35]
primum ut orbis terrarum pietatis nostrae adhiberetur testis et conscius, deinde ut manifestum esset audere nos de bonis malisque principibus non tantum post ipsos iudicare; postremo ut experimento cognosceretur et ante nos gratos, sed miseros fuisse, quibus esse nos gratos probare antea non licuit. at qua contentione, quo nisu, quibus clamoribus expostulatum est, ne adfectus nostros ne tua merita supprimeres, denique ut in posterum exemplo prouideres!	in gratiam me quispiam putet Constantii Caesaris loqui, sed testis est et tua conscientia et uita mea me nihil umquam cogitasse, dixisse, fecisse gratiosum. Claudium principem loquor, cuius uita, probitas et omnia, quae in re publica gessit, tantam posteris famam dedere, ut senatus populusque Romanus nouis eum honoribus post mortem adfecerit . . . interest et eorum, qui bonos imitantur principes, et totius orbis humani cognoscere, quae de illo uiro senatus consulta sint condita, ut omnes iudicium publicae mentis adnoscant: . . . haec in Claudium dicta sunt . . .

        The author appears to pick and rephrase some words from his model. The central theme *de bonis malisque principibus* recurs as *qui bonos imitantur principes*;[36] the senate's praise of the emperor is universal, and the whole world should know about it (*orbis terrarum / totius orbis humani*). The emperor sets an example for future generations ("ut in posterum exemplo prouideres!" / "cuius uita . . . tantam posteris famam dedere"). The universal character of the praise is elaborated in a passage of *amplificatio,* "rhetorical extension," *Claudius* 3.7: "adulator igitur senatus, adulator populus Romanus, adulatrices exterae gentes, adulatrices provinciae . . ."[37] After these considerations about good and bad emper-

---

35 "Some one, perhaps, may believe that I am speaking thus to win the favour of Constantius Caesar, but your sense of justice and my own past life will bear me witness that never have I thought or said or done anything to curry favour. I am speaking of the Emperor Claudius, whose manner of life, whose uprightness, and whose whole career in the state have brought him such fame among later generations that after his death, the senate and people of Rome bestowed on him unprecedented rewards . . . It will be of interest, both to those who imitate righteous princes and to the whole world of mankind as well, to learn the decrees of the senate that were passed about this man in order that all may know the official opinion concerning him." For the translation of the Pliny, see above pp. 297–98.

36 On imitation of good princes, see Pliny *Pan.* 45.5.

37 On *amplificatio*, see Quint. *Inst.* 3.7.6, Cic. *Part. Or.* 71, Lausberg 1973.220–27. For *amplificatio* in the *HA*, see Paschoud 1997.119.

ors, acclamations follow, with a total number of 244 outcries, if we take
the author's numbers seriously. Most interesting is the fact that the author
claims to base his information on the *senatus consulta* which reflect the
iudicium publicae mentis ("public opinion"). Acclamations are quoted in
direct speech (*Cl.* 4.3–4), which may well be an echo of "qua contentione,
quo nisu, quibus clamoribus," as was suggested above in relation to *Alex-
ander Severus* 6–12. It is important to show affection for the emperor, as
Pliny states in *Panegyricus* 62.5. Inversely, no cowardice will prevent the
emperors from showing their feelings, *Panegyricus* 66.4.

      The *uita Aureliani:* In Aurelian's biography, the search for a good
successor is of special interest. Aurelian did not adopt a successor, with the
result that the choice had become the army's and the senate's responsibil-
ity. Several themes play a role in chapters 40–44: the *bonus princeps* and
the senate's prerogative to choose (40–41); the deification of the deceased
emperor and the responsibility of the gods to provide for a successor (41); a
treatment of good and bad emperors (42); the factors that make the emper-
ors bad (43); and the position of Aurelian among them (44). As we have
seen, Aurelian is neither a good nor bad emperor, but he is called a "prin-
ceps necessarius magis quam bonus" ("a prince who was necessary rather
than good," 37.1). And yet the biography is devoted entirely to Aurelian
(a sign of praise according to the author in *Max.* 1.3 as quoted above) and
is placed between the panegyrical descriptions of the other three emper-
ors, Claudius, Tacitus, and Probus. In several places, it is suggested that
Aurelian was a *bonus princeps*, though his ferocity was such that he is not
reckoned among the best.

      Yet after Aurelian's assassination, it appears to have been hard to
choose a successor to a good emperor ("quam difficile sit imperatorem in
locum boni principis legere," 40.1). For this reason, the army sent a dis-
patch to the senate in order to have a new emperor appointed by that vener-
able institution. After all, the army had been responsible for the emperor's
death (40.3). The senate, in its turn, ignored this charge with the argument
that the army would refuse an emperor chosen by the senate anyway. The
author takes advantage of this episode—to which the reader might react
cynically—by turning it into an historical event worthy of highest praise.
The story is an overture to a major theme in the next biography, that of
Tacitus, in which an interregnum of six months is described while a new
emperor is found. The theme of the opposition between good and bad
emperors repeatedly occurs. A letter by the army is quoted in which the
author provides a variation on his beloved good-bad antithesis: "Aurelianus
imperator noster per fraudem unius hominis et per errorem bonorum ac

malorum interemptus est" ("Aurelian our emperor has been slain through the guile of one man and the blunder of good and evil alike," 41.1). Later, Aurelian's successor Tacitus himself bemoans Aurelian's premature death (41.5). The wish for a longer life for good emperors is typical of panegyric.[38] Most important is the fact that the theme of the *boni principes* is related to the vicissitudes of a personified Fate (see, e.g., the use of *respirare,* "to breathe again")—a theme that will be elaborated later in the preface to *Carus, Carinus, and Numerian.* In this preface, already hinted at in section 2 of this biography, Roman history is described in terms of the stages of human life, the so-called *aetates Romae* theme, in which the alternation between good and bad emperors plays a major role and summarizes the scattered passages in the second half of the *Historia Augusta.*

The theme of good and bad emperors is extensively elaborated in *Aurelian* 42.3–44.5, first with a rhetorical question and then with a list of the best emperors in their chronological order: Augustus, Vespasian, Titus, Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus, Alexander Severus, Claudius, and Aurelian. The enumeration is extended to the alleged time of writing of the *Historia Augusta*, the time of Diocletian and Maximian. To the former, the author dedicates some of his biographies. The list contributes to the glory of this dedicatee. Furthermore, there is an *index publicus*, possibly a new variation of the *acta urbis*, *publica*, *senatus* and so on, which lists the good emperors; Aurelian is among them.[39] In contrast, the *mali principes* are soon named: Vitellius, Caligula, Nero, Maximinus, and Philip, though the Decii are said to be an exception. It is interesting that most of these emperors are not treated in the *Historia Augusta*—if the lacuna between *Maximus and Balbinus* and *Valerian* is deliberate, as is supposed by the majority of scholars. By this means, the author incorporates many more emperors into his narrative than he actually describes.

The *uita Taciti:* Tacitus's biography opens on the quest for a new princeps after Aurelian's death, a period which is characterized by a remarkable consensus between the army and the senate comparable with the interregnum after Romulus's death (*Tac.* 1.1).[40] The emphasis in the

---

38 E.g., *Cl.* 1.3, Ambrose *de Obitu Val.* 46, Liv. 21.2.1.

39 The series Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus, and Aurelian was already found in *Aurel.* 14.6 in a list of adopted emperors.

40 Hohl 1911 and Den Hengst 1994 (= Den Hengst 2010.154–59) treat the passage thoroughly; see also Paschoud 1996.251–57. The material for this report is probably provided by the common source of the *HA*, the *Epitome de Caesaribus* (35.10), and Aurelius Victor *Caes.*

preface of *Tacitus* is on the harmony between the senate, the people, and
the army (*Tac*. 2.1). A quarrel even arose about which party was most gen-
erous in granting the other party the honour of choosing the new emperor.
Over six months, letters from army to senate and vice versa were sent in
order to let the other choose the emperor. Finally, the *senex* Tacitus, who
intended to deliver a speech in the senate about the question, was suddenly
hailed emperor by acclamation. That was the perfect procedure. The author
seems to consider it important that the emperor is a *senex*, which might be
considered another sub-theme (cf. *Tac*. 5.1).

    How does this central theme in *Tacitus*, the search for a good suc-
cessor, bear on Pliny's *Panegyricus*—apart from the notion of the *bonus
princeps*? Let us take the emperor Tacitus's answer to the soldiers after his
appointment: "et Traianus ad imperium senex uenit, sed ille ab uno delectus
est, at me, sanctissimi commilitones, primum uos, qui scitis principes adpro-
bare, deinde amplissimus senatus dignum hoc nomine iudicauit" ("Trajan also
came into power in his old age, but he was chosen by a single man, whereas
I have been judged worthy of this title, first by you, most venerated fellow
soldiers, who know how to approve your emperors, and then by the most
noble senate," *Tac*. 8.5). Trajan is invoked as an example. The procedure
described by Pliny runs as follows: "non unius Neruae iudicium illud, illa
electio fuit. nam qui ubique sunt homines, hoc idem uotis expetebant; ille
tantum iure principis occupauit, primusque fecit, quod facturi omnes erant"
("Furthermore, you were told that the senate and the people approved, and
this choice and decision were not Nerva's alone, but the heartfelt prayer
of the whole country," *Pan*. 10.2). Nerva is praised for exactly the same
quality for which he is vituperated in *Tacitus* 8.5: whereas Pliny praises the
approval of the whole world, in the *Historia Augusta,* the emperor Tacitus
states that Trajan was the choice of one person without the approval of sol-
diers and senate.[41] Secondly, the formulae "qui scitis principes adprobare"
and "deinde amplissimus senatus dignum hoc nomine iudicauit" contain the
qualities described above in Pliny *Panegyricus* 75.3 (*iudicare* and *probare*).
If the response by Tacitus is indeed an echo of the rules as set out by Pliny,
the encomium of Tacitus works in part by implied comparison of him with

---

   36.1, which is also likely to be the source for the comparison with Romulus at *Caes*. 35.12;
   see Kolb 1972 and Den Hengst 1981.111–12.

41 On universal consent, see Pliny *Pan*. 76.4: "adeo nulla magis omnibus displicent, quam
   quae sic fiunt tamquam omnibus placeant" ("People detest nothing so much as measures
   which pretend to be the general will"); see also *Sept. Sev.* 21.2 and cf. *Pan.* 7.4.

Trajan.[42] Thirdly, Trajan is emphatically styled *commilito* at *Panegyricus* 13.3 and 15.5; although the terminology of "fellow soldier" was to be in vogue from Severan times through to late antiquity, its deployment here might hark back to Pliny's panegyrical version.[43]

Panegyricus 75 proves to be an important touchstone: the senate's public—even worldwide—expression of joy about the emperor is a theme that recurs in many variations. In *Tacitus* 12, the senators begin to write letters to one another and even to the whole world. At the end of the biography, the author adds two senatorial letters to the Carthaginians and the Treveri, which he calls *epistulae publicae* (*Tac*. 18.1), followed by two subsequent *epistulae priuatae* (*Tac*. 19) which all serve the same goal: to express gratitude. The book is closed with the remark "longum est omnes epistulas conectere quas repperi, quas legi" ("It would be too long to include all the letters that I have found and read," 19.6). The letters are quoted to show that all senators believed that ancient times had returned.

Other instances in the biography of Tacitus where lexical and ideological parallels from Pliny's *Panegyricus* coincide would repay study, such as the role of a *priuatus* under a good prince, judgements about other emperors, the function of the senior emperor, the status of the father of all Romans, and the theme of *recusatio imperii* ("refusal to reign").[44] How-

---

42 On the figure of *comparatio,* Lausberg 1973.223; see also *Cl*. 18.4.

43 See Campbell 1984.37–40 about Trajan, Rees 2001.154–56, Fuhrmann, 2011.133; occurrences of con-/commilitones in the *HA*: *Clod. Alb*. 3.1, 3.9; *Diadum*. 1.4, 2.1, 2.2; *Hel*. 26.3; *Alex. Sev*. 53.5–7; *Max*. 3.6, 18.1; *Gord*. 14.1; *Trig. Tyr*. 8.8, 23.3, 24.5; *Tac*. 8.4–5: all in the secondary (co- and rival emperors), intermediary, and later lives (from *Macrinus* onwards).

44 1) Pliny *Pan*. 7.3: "sub bono principe priuatus esse desisti" ("You renounced your position as a private person under a good ruler") ~ *Tac*. 4.4: *diu priuatus fuisti* ("You have been a commoner for a long time"); 2) *Pan*. 75.3: "de bonis malisque principibus . . . iudicare" ~ *Tac*. 4.4: "scis, quem ad modum debeas imperare, qui de aliis principibus iudicasti" ("You know how you should rule, for on other princes you have rendered judgement"); 3) *Pan*. 10.4: "audita sunt uota tua, sed in quantum optimo illi et sanctissimo seni utile fuit" ("Your prayers were heard, but only so long as this served the interest of that august and venerable ruler") ~ *Tac*. 5.1 passim; 4) *Pan*. 7.4: "diuus Nerua pater tuus factus est, quo erat omnium" ("The divine Nerva became your father in the same sense that he was father of us all") ~ *Tac*. 6.2: "seniorem principem fecimus et uirum, qui omnibus quasi pater consulat" ("We have chosen as prince a man advanced in years, one who will watch over all like a father"); 5) *Pan*. 5.5: "recusabas enim imperare, recusabas; quod bene erat imperaturi" ("For you were reluctant to assume imperial power, a sure sign that you would use it well") ~ *Tac*. 7.7: "sed inde deductus huic senatus consulto interfuit, quasi uere priuatus et qui uere recusaret imperium" ("But after being escorted back from there, he took part in this decree of the senate as though actually a commoner and one who, in

ever, the last biography to be assessed here is that of the emperor Probus, an illustrious man both at home and abroad and someone to be preferred to Aurelian, Trajan, Hadrian, the Antonines, Alexander, and Claudius, since all their qualities come together in this one person, as the author asserts (*Tac.* 16.6).

The *uita Probi:* In a speech by (the otherwise unknown and certainly fictitious) Manlius Statianus, the point is repeated that Probus is to be preferred to other good emperors (*Pr.* 12.2). All the peoples of the world are witness (*testes*) to this fact, even the *monumenta publica* (*Pr.* 12.6). The theme of the *boni principes* is taken up in *Probus* 22.1–23.5 when Probus is compared to other leaders: "conferenti mihi cum aliis imperatoribus principem Probum omnibus prope Romanis ducibus, qua fortes clementes, qua prudentes, qua mirabiles extiterunt, intellego hunc uirum aut parem fuisse aut, si non repugnat inuidia furiosa, meliorem" ("As for myself, when I compare Probus as a ruler with other emperors, in whatever way almost all Roman leaders have stood out as courageous, as merciful, as wise, as admirable, I perceive that he was the equal of any, or indeed, if no insane jealousy stands in the way, better than all"). An important quality of a good leader is that he, like Aurelian, has an eye for talent (*Probus* 22.3):

> multa manu sua fecit, duces praeclarissimos instituit. nam ex eius disciplina Carus, Diocletianus, Constantius, Asclepiodotus, Annibalianus, Leonides, Cecropius, Pisonianus, Herennianus, Gaudiosus, Vrsinianus et ceteri, quos patres nostri mirati sunt et de quibus nonnulli boni principes extiterunt. conferat nunc, cui placet, uiginti Traiani Hadrianique annos, conferat prope totidem Antoninorum. nam quid de Augusto loquar, cuius imperii annis uix potest aduiui? malos autem principes taceo.

> He did many deeds with his own hand and trained most illustrious generals. For from his training came Carus, Diocletianus, Constantius, Asclepiodotus, Annibalianus, Leonides, Cecropius, Pisonianus, Herennianus, Gaudiosus, Ursinianus, and all the others whom our fathers admired and from whom many good princes arose. Let him now, who will, compare the twenty years of Trajan or Hadrian;

---

truth, would refuse the imperial power"). For the theme of *recusatio imperii*, see Béranger 1953.139–40, Huttner 2004, and Hoffer 2006.75–77.

let him compare the twenty years of the Antonines, nearly
equal in number. For why should I mention Augustus, the
years of whose reign all but exceeded the life of a man?
Of the evil princes, moreover, I will keep silent.

The *boni principes* referred to, are, of course, Carus, Diocletianus,
and Constantius. Of his other alleged pupils, only Asclepiodotus and Hanni-
balianus are historical, the other six are fictitious (Paschoud 2001.155–57).
Only two of the four Tetrarchs are mentioned; Galerius and Maximian are
absent. Meanwhile, the eulogy of Probus prepares for the institution of the
Tetrarchy: the implication is that the emperors who are part of this imperial
system are even better: they have to be described in *stilo maiore*, "the higher
style" (cf. *Hel*. 35.2, *Alex. Sev.* 64.1–2). Although the eulogy of Probus, dur-
ing whose reign even the military became unnecessary because of a universal
peace, is even loftier than the preceding ones, the themes that we encoun-
tered in such quantity in the *uita Claudii* are not present to the same extent.

V. CONCLUSION

We have identified above several parallel themes in Pliny's *Panegyricus*
and the *Historia Augusta*. Some of them are standard in imperial praise, but
the importance of the theme of *boni malique principes* is striking in both
texts. The panegyrical tone of the *uitae Claudii*, *Aureliani, Taciti,* and *Probi*
is likely to have been inspired by Pliny's praise of Trajan. In general, the
author of the *Historia Augusta* is interested in the question of how a good
emperor can be succeeded by another good emperor. This theme crops as
early as *Hadrian*: Hadrian's search for a good successor after he had been
successfully adopted by his predecessor Trajan (*Hadr.* 4.6) is an important
theme in the biography (Fündling 2006.157). The author even devotes a
separate biography to Hadrian's adopted son Aelius Verus, although he
was to die before Hadrian. But so feeble was Aelius Verus that when he
died, Hadrian is said to have confessed that he had already decided in
Verus's lifetime to adopt another successor as emperor (*Ael.* 4.6, 6.7). The
author may well have taken his terminology from Pliny, who stresses the
position of Nerva as father of Trajan but also of the entire state (*Pan.* 2.3,
7.4; cf. *Ael.* 4.5 for the same relation between Hadrian and Aelius Verus).[45]

---

45 This theme already occurs in Horace *Od*. 1.2.50: Hirst 1938 and Szelest 1971.334. The
    theme is universal, as is witnessed by the words of Nelson Mandela at the occasion of his
    ninetieth birthday: "It is good to be father of a country, but better to be father of a family."

In *Septimius Severus* 20.4–21.8, a long disquisition is inserted about the natural sons of emperors, who tend to be bad (e.g., Commodus, Caracalla, Heliogabalus). Pliny may have given rise to the theme when he says that Nerva instituted the adoptive system with the consideration that appointing one's own son is as safe for the empire as a random choice (*Pan.* 7.7). The theme in the *Historia Augusta* is also elaborated in order to praise the Tetrarchic system as instituted by Diocletian in which the co-emperors (or Caesars) are considered sons of the Augusti.[46] In *Alexander Severus* 64.1–65.5, the theme is taken up with a consideration of what makes an emperor bad. A good emperor is produced by nature, is the author's answer, who is the mother of us all (*Alex. Sev.* 65.2).

Furthermore, *amici mali* are a greater danger to the state than a *princeps malus* because one bad emperor can be corrected by many good counsellors. The author invokes the authority of Trajan's otherwise unknown advisor Homullus (*Alex. Sev.* 64.5). The source for this theme is indicated as Marius Maximus; the occasion is a question posed by Constantine about how an alien-born emperor such as Alexander Severus became such a good ruler. In the end, it is fate that governs the empire. As Pliny puts it, *Panegyricus* 5.9: "habet has uices conditio mortalium, ut aduersa ex secundis, ex aduersis secunda nascantur. occultat utrorumque semina deus, et plerumque bonorum malorumque causae sub diuersa specie latent."[47] This concept of causation in history, already found in republican authors such as Sallust, corresponds with the *Historia Augusta* author's as he described it in the preface to *Carus, Carinus, and Numerian*. In the preface to *Heliogabalus* as well, the author states that "eadem terra et uenena ferat et frumentum atque alia salutaria": the good and the bad emperors are all of the same stock, Mother Nature.[48]

---

46 It even became an official title after the treaty of Carnuntum in 306 c.e.: Barnes 1982.6.

47 "Such are the vicissitudes of our mortal lot: misfortune is born of prosperity and good fortune of ill-luck. God conceals their origins in both cases, and the causes of good and evil are hidden for the most part, each behind the other's mask" (trans. Radice). Cf. Seneca *Nat. Q.* 6.28.1: "multa autem terras habere mortifera uel ex hoc intellege, quod tot uenena nascuntur non manu sparsa sed sponte, solo scilicet habente ut boni ita mali semina," "But you can understand that many lands have death-dealing things from the fact that so many poisons grow spontaneously, not scattered by hand, soil obviously having seeds of sickness as well as of good health" (trans. Corcoran).

48 "Just as the selfsame earth bears not only poisons but also grain and other helpful things, not only serpents but flocks as well . . ." (trans. Magie).

I hope to have shown that the author of the *Historia Augusta* had direct knowledge of Pliny's *Panegyricus* and used it to introduce the principle theme of his series of biographies: the *boni malique imperatores*. The fact that the author never mentions Pliny the Younger by name is not unusual in his modus operandi: several parallels with unnamed authors have been detected, such as Cornelius Nepos, Pliny the Elder, and Juvenal.[49] In the meantime, it may be observed that the author made a leap across genres, from Pliny's epideictic oratory to biography, which is not uncommon in late antiquity—T. Hägg and P. Rousseau even consider panegyric and biography two sides of the same coin in this period.[50] One might even go so far as to state that a life of Trajan was never written because there was no need for one: Pliny's *Panegyricus* was there, not to be surpassed by a pale biography of the best prince Rome ever saw. This might explain why the *uita Hadriani* is the beginning of the *Historia Augusta*.[51] Nor were the *panegyrici* from Diocletian's and Constantine's times, which border the end of the narrative, to be replaced by biography, although the author did promise to describe them in the midst of the work (*Hel.* 35.2–6, *Alex. Sev.* 64.1–2). Instead, he gave rein to his panegyrical passions in the lives of Claudius, Aurelian, Tacitus, and Probus. In the first of these, Constantine, Claudius's alleged descendant to whom several of the biographies are dedicated, is indirectly praised.[52] Thus Pliny's *Panegyricus*, combined with the later eleven *Panegyrici Latini*, may be an important key to the *Historia Augusta*'s witty design.[53]

The conclusion that the *Historia Augusta* author knew and appreciated Pliny's *Panegyricus*, which is woven into and subsumed in the *Historia Augusta*, only partly answers the questions this volume poses about the fate of Pliny's works in late antiquity. As long as we do not know with certainty who the *Historia Augusta* author was and at what exact point in time the *Historia Augusta* was written or finished, it is hard to establish in what context Pliny's speech was encountered. Nevertheless, my study's conclusion that the *Panegyricus* appears to have played an

---

49 Nepos: Burgersdijk 2007; Pliny the Elder: Fündling 2006.155; Juvenal: Cameron 1964.
50 Hägg and Rousseau 2000.2: "It is arguable that biography . . . is the broader concept, which included panegyric as one of its possible forms."
51 Formal arguments for the absence of a *uita Traiani* are found in Burgersdijk 2010.64–65.
52 On the end of the *HA* and the promise of continuation, see Burgersdijk 2010.66–67.
53 Noted as "uncanny" by John Henderson; see the Introduction above.

important part as a lexical and ideological hypotext at certain pressure points in one of the largest literary corpora from late antiquity is, I hope, a decisive insight into the surface and substrate of the collection and puts Pliny alongside many other classical authors who left their mark on the enigmatic *Historia Augusta*.

Radboud University Nijmegen (d.burgersdijk@let.ru.nl)
University of Amsterdam (d.w.p.burgersdijk@uva.nl)