

HISTORY AND FANTASY ON ACHOLIUS, THE BIOGRAPHER

Gabriel Estrada San Juan
Universitat de Barcelona
gestrada@ub.edu

ABSTRACT. Among the bogus authors cited in the *Historia Augusta*, there are some who turn out to be masks for real authors, as part of the picaresque aspect of the work. However, the vast majority are simply disregarded as the product of the biographer's invention. One of them is Acholius, an author cited on four occasions. We believe that there are reasons to include him in the first group.

KEYWORDS: biography, *Historia Augusta*, Acholius, Marius Maximus, Ausonius.

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The *Historia Augusta* (HA) is infamous because of the invention of a large number of its sources. The procedures followed for devising the names of the authors are the same as for the other fictional characters.¹ This is one of the ways to free up its false erudition, which becomes more daring when the anonymous author is lacking in material, in the so-called secondary *vitae* and especially in the second half of the work, when the presence of apocryphal documents increases.

Nevertheless, sometimes it is not as simple as it might seem. For example, the bogus *Aurelius Victor cui Pinius cognomen erat* (SHA *Macr.* 4.2) is an obvious mask for the real author Aurelius Victor; also, he is followed by a certain *Festus* (4.4). Likewise, the alleged writers *Fabius Marcellinus* (*Alex.* 48.6; *Prob.* 2.7) and *Valerius Marcellinus* (*Max.* 4.5); *Staius Valens* (*Alex.* 48.6), the translator *Nicomachus* (*Aur.* 27.6) and *Aurelius Verus* (*Alex.* 48.6) correlate with Ammianus Marcellinus, Eutropius, Nicomachus Flavianus and again Aurelius Victor,

¹ Cf. e.g. A. Chastagnol (1970) 35-37; R. Syme (1971b) 3-13; (1972) 129-30 = (1983) 23; (1976) 318 = (1983) 105-06.

respectively.² To those, we can add the biographer *Suetonius Optatianus* (*Tac.* 11.7), a combination of Suetonius and the fourth-century poet Publilius Optatianus Porphyrius.³

However, none of the news that the biographer attributes to these bogus authors matches the accounts of their historical counterparts:

1. First of all, “Aurelius Victor *qui et Pinius*” provides quote about the origins of Emperor Macrinus along with a detail about a fellow freedman named Festus. The quote does not exist in the real Victor’s *Liber de Caesaribus*, which is quite scarce in information about this emperor (*Aur. Vict.* 22), although his assessment does correspond with that of the *HA*’s biographer.⁴

2. “Aurelius Verus”, “Fabius Marcellinus” and “Staius Valens” (*SHA Alex.* 48.6) are said to have written the life of Trajan, which does not mention the fantastic episode of Ovinus Camillus (48). Of course, the omission of a spurious episode does match with their real counterparts, Victor, Ammianus and Eutropius—although Ammianus’ first books are lost. Also, the author’s sarcasm is clear at 48.8.

3. The same *alter ego* for Ammianus Marcellinus reappears in a comment that is rather humorous, but without historical value (*Prob.* 2.7). He is a subject of praise for putting sincerity before eloquence, on the same level as Suetonius, Marius Maximus whom the real Ammianus compares with Juvenal (28.4.14), Gargilius Martialis, or the *HA*’s author himself. To complete the sarcasm, “Fabius Marcellinus” is contrasted instead with Sallust, Livius, Trogus and, of course, Tacitus.

4. The comparison Ammianus receives in the form of “Valerius Marcellinus” is kinder (*Max.* 4.5). The aforementioned resemblance to Suetonius is explained here in the description of the emperors in the Suetonian manner, *per species*. We can be generous on this one: despite Tacitus being the main model for Ammianus, the influence of Suetonius is indeed present in these parts.⁵

² A. Chastagnol (1964) 57 n. 51; J. Schlumberger (1974) 130; F. Paschoud (1995) 502-03; (1996) 149; A.R. Birley (2003) 139; D. Rohrbacher (2016) 25. Less obvious is *Claudius Eusthenius* (*Car.* 18.5) as Eusebius Nanneticus or of Nantes, Birley (*ibid.*); Paschoud (1995) 503-04, proposed author of the *EKG* in R.W. Burgess (1993) 495-99.

³ E. Hohl (1911) 306, and especially Rohrbacher (2016) 24-25.

⁴ This would have prompted his not-too-cryptic allusion to Victor, P. Dufraigne (1975) 135 n. 2. On the other hand, Cassius Dio (78.32.4) names a freedman called Festus in Macrinus’ entourage who could have served as an inspiration, instead, for the homonymous author, A. Chastagnol (1994) 454 n. 1.

⁵ Cf. e.g. F. Leo (1901) 236-40: ‘*aber dem Einfluss der so stark entwickelten Kaiserbiographie hat er sich nicht entzogen.*’

5. Next, “Nicomachus” is said to have translated a letter by Zenobia from Syrian into Greek, which is quoted by the biographer after translating it into Latin. The mention of a certain Nicomachus as a translator refers to Nicomachus Flavianus, author of some *Annales* and translator of the *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* (Sid. Apoll. *Ep.* 8.3.1).⁶ Nicomachus’ work has not survived, but we can assure that the letter is spurious, just like the others cited by the author.

6. Last, “Suetonius Optatianus” is said to have written a biography of Emperor Tacitus (*Tac.* 11.7). Obviously, the only coincidence with Suetonius is the fact of being a biographer. As for Porphyrius, the composition of cryptic biographies with hidden messages, like the former’s poems, has been suggested in a hypothesis by Rohrbacher.⁷

In this paper, we will focus on one of these spurious authors used as a false pretence of historical accuracy, who are associated with equally spurious information. However, this character in particular is not as simple as has been thought and could possibly be added to the group of writers we have just detailed.

The author in question is named *Acholi* (PIR¹ A 31; PIR² A 36) and makes four appearances throughout the work. The first ones happen in different locations of Severus Alexander’s *vita*, the longest in the *HA*. This book, signed by Aelius Lampridius, makes use of the alleged writer to certify some aspects of the prince’s life (SHA *Alex.* 14.6 = Peter fr. 4, about his memory; 64.4-5 = Peter fr. 1, about the granting of the title of Caesar to Alexander and his travels⁸) and to settle a false scholarly debate (48.6-7 = Peter fr. 2, about the fantastic episode of Ovinus Camillus).

Furthermore, Acholius reappears much later in Aurelian’s *vita*, signed by Flavius Vopiscus (SHA *Aur.* 12.3-15.1 = Peter fr. 4). This is the longest fragment and the only one in the form of a literal quotation, a series of speeches delivered by three characters: Emperor Valerian and the generals Aurelian and Ulpius Crinitus. The scene is dated from 258 and takes place in Byzantium; the future emperor Aurelian is adopted by the *dux* Ulpius Crinitus with the placet of Emperor Valerian, who is present along with his political staff.

⁶ J. Straub (1952) 154; Syme (1976) 318 = (1983) 105; T. Honoré (1989) 15. Also referenced in SHA *Tac.* 5.3.

⁷ See above n. 3.

⁸ *Itinera*, amended *intima* (‘intimate details’) in Lipsius and preferred *interiora* (similar) in Peter.

As for the genre of his presumed work, in the second mention, towards the end of Severus Alexander's book, Lampridius describes Acholius as a biographer (*scriptor vitae*, *Alex.* 48.7). In the first, only his name is given (14.6), and in the third, he is presented as *historicus* (64.5). Also, the only biographical note about Acholius in the book is in the third mention, which states that he was a writer coeval to Severus Alexander himself (*eius temporis*).

On the other hand, the long extract cited in the *Vita Aureliani* comes, according to Vopiscus, from one of Acholius' books (*ex libris Acholi*): from the ninth book of some *acta* (*libro actorum eius nono*) to be precise. In this passage, the biographer describes Acholius as *magister admissionum* of Emperor Valerian (*Aur.* 12.4), which should be authority enough to give credibility to the account, as claimed by the anonymous imposter.⁹ It is surprising, though, that, as such, he is not named among the officials who assisted Valerian in Byzantium.

Thus, he is a person who would have lived during the reign of Alexander (222/35), served as a high clerk under Valerian (253/60) and probably also under Aurelian (270/5), since his report in Valerian's *acta* appears to be a compliment to the future emperor in the form of legitimist propaganda. Altogether, that covers between 35 and 53 years of his supposed life and implies that he would have written in his old age. There was some attempt to prove the historicity of this writer before the discovery of the farce in the *HA* in 1889.¹⁰ There were also subsequent attempts, based on an epigraphic document from Sardes and the rarity of the name; it was also assumed that Valerian's *acta* was another biography.¹¹

⁹ Although the denomination *magister admissionum* is an anachronism, it is usual for the biographer to modernize the terms (e.g. *Val.* 6.6: *praefecto urbis Romae*; what other urban prefecture could exist at the time?). The biographical note seems parallel to that of *procurator ab epistulis* held by Suetonius in Hadrian's chancery (*epistularum magistro* in *Hadr.* 11.3). For anachronisms in bureaucratic terminology in the *HA*, cf. e.g. A. Momigliano (1960) 127; R. Syme (1971a) 45-49; M.A. Villacampa Rubio (1998) 167-68, and specifically for this passage, Paschoud (1996) 93-94.

¹⁰ K. Dändliker (1870) 295, understanding that the position of *magister admissionum* (*Aur.* 12.3) fits with the description of the *intima* of Severus Alexander (*Alex.* 64.5). He even goes so far as to guess Acholius as the main source of Alexander's *vita*, (*ibid.*) 296-97.

¹¹ C. Lécrivain (1899) 142, from a Greek inscription from Sardes in honour of a certain ὑπαρχος Acholius (IGR 4.1510), to date under the reign of Gallienus: 'Ainsi, d'après ces textes, Acholius aurait écrit les biographies de Sévère Alexandre et de Valérien...' Lécrivain is cautious but enthusiastic, and ends: 'Or, si Acholius a réellement existé, il n'y a pas de raison de douter de l'existence des autres historiens de cette catégorie,' as we have seen previously. Later the hypothesis interested A. Jardé (1925) 103; 115; see also J.C.P. Smits (1908) 122. However, on the inscription, see below n. 15.

Nevertheless, the tendency among modern scholars is to reject any historical echo behind the character of Acholius.¹² From all the information provided by the *HA*, Peter's collection of fragments distinguishes two works by the author: a *Vita Alexandri Severi* and the *Acta*.¹³ Syme went further by separating two different fictional writers: the author of the biography and the author of the memories.¹⁴ The inscription from Sardes has acquired a new meaning, now as a possible hint for the deceiver's inspiration when naming his character,¹⁵ and other options have been explored with the same purpose.¹⁶ This is usually the current posture on the question.¹⁷

The extract from the *acta* of Valerian, clearly apocryphal,¹⁸ includes an Antonine and, therefore, Theodosian propaganda theme,¹⁹ as well as one of the

¹² E.g. M. Maiold (1939) 53; Paschoud (1996) 93; C. Bertrand-Dagenbach and A. Molinier-Arbo (2014) 77. His third appearance, in *Alex.* 64.4-5, would have served to argue the claim that Severus Alexander was entitled as Caesar by the Senate and not by the soldiers, against Eutr. 8.23, T.D. Barnes (1970) 38 and n. 157.

¹³ H. Peter (1906) 140-02; likewise Paschoud (1996) 93.

¹⁴ Syme (1971b) 277-78; (1976) 315; 318 = (1983) 102; 105, arguing the chronological gap; A. Von Domaszewski (1918) 21 already pointed out the possibility (*'Eine ganz andere Figur'*) but did not delve into it. On the opposite, e.g. Chastagnol (1994) 560 and 982 n. 1. As seen before, the chronology is not really a problem; see also E. Birley (1983) 75-76, who proposes the birth of Acholius, if real, around AD 200.

¹⁵ Far from being contemporary with Gallienus, this *Acholi* from Lydia would have lived rather at the end of the 4th century or the beginning of the 5th, and therefore would have been coeval with the writing of the *HA*, L. Robert (1948) 46-47; Chastagnol (1994) cxi; Paschoud (1996) 93. Also *PLRE* I Acholius, interpreting ὑπαρχος as *vicarius Asianae* since Sardes was not located in a proconsular province. Indeed, numerous fictional characters in the *HA* echo names from the author's era: a perfect example of this practice is the senator *Maecius Faltonius Nicomachus* (*Tac.* 5.3), Syme (1971a) 12; (1971b) 53.

¹⁶ Another *Acholi*, a certain *curator* mentioned by Symmachus (*Rel.* 39.2), Chastagnol (1994) cxi. Also, changing the spelling, *Ascholi*, bishop of Thessalonica who baptized Theodosius (*Socr. Sch.* V 6; *Jord. Rom.* 315), Von Domaszewski (1918) 21-22, defended with new arguments in Rohrbacher (2016) 27-28.

¹⁷ A contrarian in E. Cizek (1994) 288, who makes Acholius *'ou d'un auteur que l'Histoire Auguste appelle Acholius'* a probable exception among the spurious authors of the *HA* (*ibid.*, 134: *'il en va autrement, très probablement'*), for which he relies again on the Lydian inscription and qualifies his *acta* as another biography (*ibid.*, 265 n. 21). He also suggests Acholius as a real source of the *HA*, specifically for the news on the evacuation of Dacia under Aurelian (*ibid.*, 134; 288, with *stemma* in 139; see also 207).

¹⁸ Peter (1906) cxcv; T.D. Barnes (1972) 145.

¹⁹ Since Theodosius pretended to be a descendant of the Antonines, just like Crinitus in the *HA*, J.-P. Callu (1985) 106-07.

author's favourite themes: the defence of the elective monarchy against the hereditary one. It also comprises a list of items, which is a kind of text often transmitted within bogus documents and widely used in the last *vitae* of the *HA* (*Cl.* 14; 17; *Aur.* 9; 12.1-2; *Prob.* 4.3-6), in this case a list of military decorations (*Aur.* 13.3; also in *Prob.* 5.1-3). Also, most of the names follow well-known patterns of the author's inventiveness.²⁰

These *acta* used to be mentioned by the author to introduce generic or spurious events.²¹ Despite that, as we have already seen, whether or not the content attributed to these masked authors corresponds to the original documents is irrelevant. In fact, logic suggests that there should be no notable coincidence since the blatant anachronism would expose the farce.

Besides, there is another pending question about the character, and it is about his *libro nono*. In the past, it was the subject of a light discussion whether the *vita* and the *acta* could be part of the same work, as we have seen before. But the dismissal of any historicity for Acholius has rendered this question pointless as well as any other questions concerning his alleged literary work. However, it is worth exploring this expression regarding the issue of the *dispositio* in the *HA*, which does matter.

It is well known that the anonymous biographer is incapable of following his own rules. Thus, in the middle of the work, the author abandons his ambitious initial intention of dedicating a separate book (*liber*) to each prince²² and, repentant, adopts a new criterion to group them.²³ The reason is to avoid tiring Constantine, that is, the reader, with such a multitude of books (*libri, codices*).²⁴ Actually, the real reason was foreshadowed before (*Macr.* 1): his wild initiative to dedicate a book to every caesar and usurper required too much inventiveness and

²⁰ Aside from Valerian and Aurelian, the only historical figures among the eleven mentioned in the fragment are the consul *Nummius Tuscus* (PIR¹ N 188; PIR² N 237) and, perhaps, *Ulpianus Crinitus* (PIR¹ V 547; PIR² V 575). For the rest of the names, see above n. 1.

²¹ Although the word is sometimes used for the Senate gazette (*Hadr.* 3.2; 27.2; *Sev.* 11.3; *Alex.* 56.2; *Prob.* 2.1) or the city's gazette (*Comm.* 15.4; *Alex.* 6.2; 33.2; *Gord.* 4.8), or for 'public affairs' (*Hadr.* 24.11; *Marc.* 6.5; 21.4; *Alex.* 12.2; 29.4-30.1; *Car.* 6.2), other times it acquires the meaning of 'facts', 'routine' or 'behaviour' (*Macr.* 11.1; *Hel.* 6.3: *vita et actu*; 28.6; *Gord.* 9.1; *Max.* 4.5; *Tyr. Trig.* 3.1) written without any public purpose (*Ael.* 3.9). The imaginary note of *magister admissionum* could suggest a public gazette, but in that case, it would be the only time that the material writer of such records is named.

²² *Ael.* 1.1; 7.5: *singulis libris*; *Avid.* 3.3; *Gord.* 1.1: *libris singulis*.

²³ *Maximin.* 1.1-3: *adhibui moderationem*; *Gord.* 1.4: *tres Gordianos hoc libro conexui*.

²⁴ *Maximin.* 1.1: *ne fastidiosum esset clementiae tuae*; *Gord.* 1.3: *pietatem tuam multitudine distingere librorum*; 1.4: *ne cogeres plurimos codices*.

empty rhetoric due to the scarceness of information, and it was the writer himself who was wearing out from writing so many books (*volumines*).²⁵

One may note that the biographer, in this context, uses the words *liber*, *volumen* and *codex* synonymously, with the meaning of *vita* or group of *vitae*.²⁶ Note also that, for the new *dispositio*, he alludes to a preceding tradition, which he confirms with the example of the bogus *Tatius Cyrillus*.²⁷ And, in fact, the clue suggesting that Acholius could be indeed the shadow of a real author—although the content is fictitious—is provided by the mention to this *liber nonus* dedicated to Emperor Valerian (*Aur.* 12.4).

Certainly, all we know about Acholius' work (or works) is that he would have written a biography of Severus Alexander and some “ninth book” about Valerian, perhaps another biography as earlier scholars suggested. So, if Alexander's is the first of a collection of biographies, for whom “Acholius” is introduced, and he followed the book structure of the second half of the *HA*, Valerian's is indeed the ninth (Severus Alexander, Maximinus and son, the Gordians, Pupienus and Balbinus, the Philipps, the Decii, Hostilian and Gallus and son, Aemilian, Valerian or the Valerians).²⁸ If so, “Acholius” would be a continuator of Marius Maximus, whose last biography is for Elagabalus.

²⁵ *Gord.* 1.3: *meum laborem plurimis voluminibus occupare*; 1.4: *consulens et meo labori*. Interpreted as possible *technical* problems regarding books or rolls in A.R. Birley (1976) 57; (2002) 42 n. 22, for which he adds another passage, *Val.* 8.5.

²⁶ F. Paschoud (2018) 81-82; D.W.P. Burgersdijk (2010) 105-06 and n. 333. For a terminological comparison, cf. K. Lessing (1906) 316-17 letter c and 744-45. On the prefaces of the *vitae Maximinorum* and *Gordianorum* as a whole, cf. D. Den Hengst (1981) 62-65; Paschoud (2018) 217-18.

²⁷ *Maximin.* 1.2: *servavi deinceps hunc ordinem, quam pietas tua etiam ab Tatio Cyrillo ... servari voluit*. For *Tatius Cyrillus* (*PLRE* I *Cyrillus* 2), his role and possible inspiration in real persons, cf. Den Hengst (1981) 65; A. Lippold (1991) 292-95. On the other hand, he also says, in the preface of the *Vita Gordianorum*, to have had *many* earlier examples for the original *dispositio* (1.1: *exemplo multorum*; 1.2: *multos*), although he previously boasted of its originality, see above n. 22; those *many* writers to which Julius Capitolinus alludes are probably his ‘colleagues’ Aelius Spartianus, Vulcacius Gallicanus and Aelius Lampridius.

²⁸ For the lacuna in the *HA*, Vopiscus asserts that the missing books were written by Trebellius Pollio and mentions a book *a duobus Philippis* (*Aur.* 2.1); we can guess another *duobus Decii* (*Val.* 5.4). On the hypothesis of an intentional lacuna, see mainly A.R. Birley (1967) 125-26; Chastagnol (1970) 25; Syme (1971b) 199-203; Birley (1976); Chastagnol (1994) xliii-xlv; Paschoud (1996) 68; O. Desbordes and S. Ratti (2002) xix-xxv; T. Glas (2014) 31-32; Rohrbacher (2016) 9-10.

Actually, the rogue biographer is honest when he says that several references to this structure existed (*Maximin.* 1.2).²⁹ Marius Maximus, continuator of Suetonius and editor of biographies from Nerva to his time, had to group the lives of some princes to fit the Suetonian number, twelve: Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus (*SHA Avid.* 9.5 = Peter fr. 12) and, presumably, Caracalla and Geta, and Macrinus and Diadumenian. These are pairs of co-emperors. Ausonius repeats the scheme in his *XII Caesares* once he exceeds the chronological bound of Suetonius.³⁰ This how the *HA* follows from the book dedicated to Maximinus and his son Maximus, as seen before.

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Suetonius	Caesar	Augustus	Tiberius	Caligula	Claudius	Nero
Ausonius	Caesar	Augustus	Tiberius	Caligula	Claudius	Nero
	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Suetonius	Galba	Otho	Vitellius	Vespasian	Titus	Domitian
Ausonius	Galba	Otho	Vitellius	Vespasian	Titus	Domitian
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Marius Maximus	<i>Nerva</i> ³¹	<i>Trajan</i> ³²	<i>Hadrian</i> ³³	<i>Antoninus Pius</i> ³⁴	<i>M. Aur. & L. Verus</i> ³⁵	<i>Commodus</i> ³⁶
Ausonius	Nerva	Trajan	Hadrian	Antoninus Pius	Marcus Aurelius	Commodus

²⁹ See n. 27.

³⁰ From Caesar to Domitian in his monostichic verses (1.2-4), imitating Suetonius (1.1), and from Nerva to Elagabalus in his tetrastichic verses (2.1-24). Although the epigram for Elagabalus is incomplete, it would be too much coincidence for a longer work to have been interrupted precisely at the twenty-fourth prince. On the use of Marius Maximus for these last twelve epigrams and on the original extension of the work, see a synthesis of the question in V. Pappas (2016) 6-7; 35-38.

³¹ Schol. Iuv. 4.53.

³² *SHA Alex.* 65.4-5.

³³ *SHA Hadr.* 2.10; 12.3-4; 20.3; 25.3-4; *Ael.* 3.9; 5.4-5.

³⁴ *SHA Ant.* 11.3.

³⁵ *SHA Marc.* 1.6; 6.5-7; 25.8-10; *Avid.* 9.5; in two books, the first for the conjoint rule of both princes, the second for the sole reign of Marcus. The *HA*'s biographer never splits up a life into two books nor joins two or more princes who reigned separately, except for the many usurpers in the *Tyranni triginta* and the *Quadruga tyrannorum*.

³⁶ *SHA Comm.* 13.1; 15.4; 18.1.

	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Marius Maximus	<i>Pertinax</i> ³⁷	<i>Didius Julianus</i>	<i>Septimius Severus</i> ³⁸	<i>Caracalla (& Geta?)</i>	<i>Macrinus (& Diadumenian?)</i>	<i>Elagabalus</i> ³⁹
Ausonius	Pertinax	Didius Julianus	Septimius Severus	Caracalla	Macrinus	Elagabalus
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Acholius	<i>Alexander Severus</i> ⁴⁰					
SHA	Alexander Severus	The two Maximini	The three Gordians	Pupienus & Balbin.	<i>The two Philipps</i> ⁴¹	<i>The two Decii</i> ⁴²
	VII	VIII	IX	X	XI	XII
Acholius			<i>Valerian</i> ⁴³		<i>Claudius?</i>	<i>Aurelian?</i>
SHA	<i>Hostilian, Gallus & Volusian</i>	<i>Aemilian</i>	The two Valerians	The two Gallieni	The thirty tyrants ⁴⁴	Claudius Gothicus

Probable distribution of the biographies

According to this hypothesis, the work of Acholius or whatever his true name was would end, at least, in a twelfth biography dedicated to Aurelian, made protagonist of the episode in Byzantium.

To sum up, we believe that the character named “Acholius” fits with an apparent continuator of Marius Maximus. Both the Acholius referred to in the

³⁷ SHA *Pert.* 2.6-9; 15.8.

³⁸ SHA *Sev.* 15.6; *Clod.* 3.4-5; 9.1-2; 9.5; 12.13-14; *Get.* 2.1; *Alex.* 5.3-4.

³⁹ SHA *Hel.* 11.6.

⁴⁰ SHA *Alex.* 14.6; 48.6-7: *eius vitam*; 64.4-5. As a note of curiosity, Peter (2006) 140-41 arranged the three fragments of the supposed biography of Alexander following the Suetonian order for the genre, first placing the facts in chronological order (*Alex.* 64.4-5 = fr. 1; 48.6-7 = fr. 2) and then the description (14.6 = fr. 3). See above n. 9 for a simile between Acholius and Suetonius.

⁴¹ SHA *Gord.* 33.4: *a Philippis*; 34.4; *Aur.* 2.1: *a duobus Philippis*; 42.6: *Philippos*.

⁴² SHA *Val.* 5.4: *duobus Decii*; *Aur.* 42.6: *Decios*.

⁴³ SHA *Aur.* 12.3-15.1: *libro actorum eius nono*.

⁴⁴ This book is the original creation of the biographer and not the result of a previous tradition, as the author himself gives evidence on numerous occasions (*Gall.* 16.1; 19.5; 21.7: initial intention to include twenty tyrants, a figure raised to thirty to play with the Thirty Tyrants of Athens, and finally to thirty-two, for which he offers excuses at the end of the book, *Tyr. Trig.* 31.7-12; see also 33.8). The *HA*'s is the only biographer to dedicate *vitae* to usurpers.

Vita Alexandri and the one in the *Vita Aureliani* are the same person, since the chronology offers no real hurdle, and his *vita* of Severus Alexander and his *acta* of Valerian do allude to the same work: another collection of imperial biographies, the most popular genre at the time. The coincidence of a “ninth book” with the one corresponding to Valerian implies that it follows an arrangement already established in the literary tradition of the genre. In short, it may suggest that, as in the case of other fictitious authors, “Acholius” is a pseudonym for a real author regardless of the fraudulent content that the imposter attributes to him.

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