Staging power: a study of narrative patterns in Herodian's history of the Roman Empire

Laporte, K.

3. INTERTEXTS, ALLUSIONS, AND *TOPOI*

3.1 Sources and models

Since historians are, in essence, dealing with past events, there are inevitably many instances of factual referencing in historical works[1]. Accordingly, much effort in scholarship has been devoted to the study of sources (or *Quellenforschung*) in ancient historical texts, especially from the viewpoint of (what was held to be) factual information and the verification of its accuracy. Herodian's *History* is no different. Up until the last twenty-odd years, the greater part of the work being done on this particular text was concerned with fact-checking its information and retracing its 'historical' sources[2]. For most scholars, this pursuit all came back to Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, which was often thought to be Herodian's main source[3]. Correspondences established with Dio, as well as other ancient works, would often serve to discredit the information found in Herodian's *History*, considered too vague, inaccurate, or simply wrong. And yet, in the event that the data presented in the *History* passed muster, these linked texts could easily be used to undermine Herodian's claim of *autopsia*[4]. Some scholars have even claimed that Herodian had merely embellished Dio's *Roman History* and that any departure from this 'true' account should be attributed to Herodian's dramatizing tendencies and his notably lesser talent[5].

With this in mind, 'literary' models were generally identified with the intention of dismissing further the *History*'s content, on the basis that it was filled with conventional set

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[1] This practice may be likened to modern processes of history-writing, and even literary criticism in general: see O'Gorman 2009, 233-5.

[2] See Sidebottom 1998, 2780-92 and Hidber 2006, 45-58 for a good overview of the earlier scholarship on Herodian's sources. Another frequent element of discussion was the *History*'s relationship to Marius Maximus' lost *Caesares*, a contemporary collection of imperial biographies designed as a continuation to Suetonius' *Vitae*, from Nerva (96-98) to Heliogabalus (218-22); see Whittaker 1969-70, lxiv-lxxi. More generally on Marius Maximus, e.g. Birley 1997.

[3] Kolb 1972, expanding on Roos 1915.

[4] See Sidebottom 1998, 2780-86 for a summary of this circular reasoning in respect to Herodian's knowledge and use of Dio. Nevertheless, positive attention was given to certain elements from the later years, especially Heliogabalus' reign (e.g. Bowersock 1975), since Herodian was often viewed as hailing from Antioch, and the year 238, for which Herodian is considered to be the main source and the source of later accounts such as the *Historia Augusta* (e.g. Chastagnol 1994, lxi-lxiii).

[5] Eg. Bersanetti 1938, 361; Reardon 1971, 217; Kolb 1972, summarized at 160-1; etc. Dio has been the target of similar charges of bias and excessive rhetoric, esp. in the later books; see an overview in Fomin 2015, 2-4. For the later, contemporary books of the *Roman History*, Millar 1964, with e.g. Gowing 1992, 21, claimed that Dio now relied mostly on personal experience and produced a sort of collection of anecdotes; Scott 2018a has recently argued for a more unified construction. By contrast, Herodian's last two books tend to be more valued by critics, factually or stylistically, e.g. Canfora 1990, 312-13; Kemezis 2014, 303.

pieces that merely served aesthetic, dramatic, or, at best, moralizing purposes[6]. For instance, Marcus' death, as seen in the previous chapter, has long been tied with other such examples, like Cyrus' final moments in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*[7]. Even then, it seemed that, up until the 1990s, the foremost purpose of retracing Herodian's sources and models was to judge of the authenticity of his account, instead of looking into such parallels in terms of representation and interpretation[8]. What little attention was given to models and composition hardly came to more positive conclusions about the quality of Herodian's work. In addition to frequent charges of excessive stylistics and empty rhetoric, Herodian was also taxed with a misuse of sources and even a misunderstanding of *topoi*[9]. A common opinion was that Herodian had mindlessly borrowed patterns and images either from other works or straight out of school exercises[10]. As such, Herodian's use of past models could only result in stereotypical characters and stock narratives, devoid of any particular understanding of the changing world around him[11]. According to these earlier views, the *History*'s composition could be boiled down to a framework of formulaic storylines, filled with rhetorical clichés and a smattering of historical facts.

Set apart from factual referencing, 'literary' intertextuality, and intratextuality, was a concept more easily applicable to (Latin) poetry, especially in terms of allusion and allusive discourse more generally[12]. In this way, intertextuality seemed even contrary to history's tendency to focus on events claimed to be unique[13]. Yet, because ancient genres were more

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[6] See Whittaker 1969-70, lvii for a more nuanced view: "In some cases whole scenes can find classical antecedents, but one must bear in mind that similar conditions tend to provoke similar descriptions; one street battle must have been very much like another without having to go back to Thucydidean models (1.12.8, 7.12.5)."

[7] Already in Fuchs 1895, 246, n. 130.

[8] See also above, [1-8], for a more detailed discussion on earlier tendencies in scholarship on Herodian.

[9] E.g. Rubin 1980, 215-34, on Herodian's abuse of his sources and his superficial treatment of the Alexander motif; or Norden 1923, 397-8, n. 4 deeming the allusion to Xenophon in Marcus' death scene to be "recht abgeschmackte".

[10] E.g. Hohl 1954; Echols 1961; Alföldy 1971b; Reardon 1971, 216-19; Kolb 1972; Bird 1976; Rubin 1980. Even so, Hinds 1988, 40 would argue that the commonplace "is not an inert category in this discourse but an active one, with as much potential to draw poet and reader into, as away from, engagement with the specificities of its history."

[11] E.g. Echols 1961, 7: "his men on all levels are given a curious sameness of character that reminds us of Cornelius Nepos; with Nepos, the career of one Greek general is very much like that of any other Greek general", or Bird 1976 (responding to Piper 1975): "Of the people he supposedly brought to life some are literary mannequins, others would not be out of place in the *Historia Augusta* or Robert Graves' fictional works."

[12] See still Hinds 1988, esp. chap. 2, on the notions of 'allusion', 'reference', '*topoi*', 'intertextuality'. Furthermore, it can be reasonably argued that the practice of 'factual referencing' does not generally involve the same level of interpretation that an intertextual exchange would call for, see O'Gorman 2009, 233. Sharrock (in *OCD*[5], s.v. "Intratextuality") notes, with regards to intratextual reading: "Just as not all source criticism is intertextuality, so structural connections and distinctions within texts become intratextual when they contribute to interpretation."

[13] As Herodian himself so states about his topic, cf. 1.1.4. On the apparent incompatibility of 'literary' intertextuality and historiography, see O'Gorman 2009, 236-7. Also Pelling 2013, 19: "But literature – at least narrative literature, but surely more than that – presents in some sense οἷα ἂν γένοιτο, even if not τὰ γενόμενα (Aristot., *Poet.* 1451a37-9); and the intertextual moves that readers make in historiography about what happened are closely analogous to those that they make in weighing potential happenings in other genres". See also, [2, with n. 8; 184, with n. 10], on the (ancient) distinction between poetry and history.

permeable, because notions of 'historical truth' were less rigid than in modern times, and because ancient historiography was in fact also literary, the recourse to past models, whether more specific or more topical, is actually integral to the ancient historian's method[14]. Coming back to our previous discussion of parallel storylines, it can also be argued that models, thematic patterns, *topoi* are familiar points of reference that can make the text more accessible and potentially more enjoyable[15]. When used in historiography, these themes and *exempla* thus serve to "bridge between the single, unique, inimitable, and random occurrences of 'reality' and the mental world of the reader, who processes 'reality' as patterns."[16]

It should be noted that, while some models can be explicitly indicated by the author, others (like *topoi*) can be woven deep into the fabric of the story, needing to be activated through key elements of the narrative. If we consider that, within the broad category of intertextual interpretation, allusion targets a specific model (or models), then we might, by contrast, conceive that "the *topos* invokes its intertextual tradition as a collectivity, to which the individual contexts and connotations of individual prior instances are firmly subordinate."[17] But, as Hinds explains, this "firm distinction" must be relaxed[18]. As such, I adopt in this dissertation this looser approach to allusive discourse, or the 'radical' position defined by Levene as "the way texts relate to and build on their predecessors without suggesting that the effects were specifically intended by the authors"[19]. Looking at Herodian's text, it becomes clear that generally these two types are anyway put to use in combination, sometimes so closely linked that it is difficult to separate one from the other. And in fact, as we will see in this chapter, these 'inlayed' models themselves may well have become, through multiple iterations in prior works, amalgams of individual stories, so that specific layers would be difficult to detect. In that sense, certain specific resonances may be caught by some readers and not by others, but these may also respond to a more general pattern instead of one particular instance. As argued by Pelling, intertextual reading, then, is especially useful in decoding patterns, since "intertextuality is often most interesting when it underlines

[14] See Damon 2009, 375: "the historical past often functions in tandem with the literary past as a source of intertexts." With White 1978, 88: "Viewed in a purely formal way, a historical narrative is not only a *reproduction* of the events reported in it, but also a *complex of symbols* which gives us directions for finding an *icon* of the structure of those events in our literary tradition." (emphasis original)

[15] See Gleason 2011, 78: "that the same narrative may be both typological and historical because traditional plots, whose stock characters operate with intelligible motivations in predictable ways, actually influence how people perceive and remember contemporary events. As people transform events into narratives, the raw material of lived experience tends to be pulled into patterns already familiar from fiction, folktale, and gossip. Motives are simplified, narrative is streamlined, and puzzling episodes gradually take on a typological cast. But what counts as a puzzling problem, and what makes sense as an intelligible motivation, will vary according to historical context."

[16] Kraus 2010, 414; also Pelling 2013, namely talking about "narrative codes", and 1997, 193-4, noting that "this taste for generalizability is a feature of Dio the historian, not Dio the biographer".

[17] Hinds 1988, 34.

[18] Hinds 1988, 34: "there are dangers of too easy an essentialism in such a firm distinction between allusion proper and participation in a *topos*."

[19] Levene 2010, 82-85; the 'conservatives' would, by contrast, focus on "deliberate attempts by authors to evoke particular earlier texts". Cf. also Fowler 1997b, 17: "Allusion was figured as an 'extra', a bit added to special types of text by an author who wanted to make a special point: intertextuality, on the other hand, is simply the way in which texts – all texts – mean."

differences as much as similarities, or differences within similarities: it is *not quite* the same thing coming back, but a modern counterpart"[20]. Similarly, intratextuality, concerned with "the relationship between the parts and the whole of classical texts", can produce new interpretations based on thematic, linguistic, metaphorical, or structural unity that go beyond a linear reading[21]. This tension between 'same' and 'different' is an important part of Herodian's method of composition, both internally, as we have seen in the previous chapter on the use of narrative structure, and externally, as we will discuss in this chapter, about the many ways in which the *History* can interact with (literary) past models[22].

The second chapter of this thesis was devoted to the patterns applied by Herodian in the construction of the *History*'s narrative sequencing. By looking at that technique through an intratextual lens, it has been possible to apprehend the ways in which the tension between 'same' and 'different' can drive the *History*'s structure. We have seen how formulae could work towards building the reader's expectations about certain causal links and how departure from these fixed patterns could be interpreted for specificity and meaning[23]. In much the same manner, this chapter aims to revisit the assumption that Herodian's use of models is merely rhetorical and that is, ultimately, superficial and pointless. The purpose is not to determine whether Herodian's factual knowledge is accurate or not, but rather to investigate how certain *topoi* and models are exploited the *History*'s and how these can affect its narrative and its characters. My perspective will be both inwards, that is in their relations with each other within Herodian's work, and outwards, in how they connect with external iterations.

Firstly, past models themselves may be 'distorted', or rescripted, to better fit the *History*, namely through a physical anchor point such as landscape. If allusions can be used in a double-sided approach, Herodian can also interpret a single motif in various, but inevitably interconnected stories. One such theme employed throughout the *History*, given its many

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[20] Pelling 2013, 7 (emphasis original); with Conte 1986, 29: "Intertextuality, far from being a matter of merely recognising the ways in which specific texts echo each other, defines the condition of literary readability... the sense and structure of a work can be grasped only with reference to other models hewn from a long series of texts of which they are, in some way, the variant form."

[21] Sharrock in *OCD*[5], s.v. "Intratextuality", with *ead*., 2000. See also Harrison 2018, 1: "Apart from the 'ring composition' of our *prima aetatis elementa*, here are the 'imagery' and 'repetitions of idea' beloved of good old New Criticism, here are the gaps to be filled by the reader as celebrated in various brands of reader response theories, here are the silences and 'roads not taken' promoted to paramount ideological significance by many a Marxist critic." They also cite connections with hermeneutics, phenomenology, and Barthes' efforts at "officiating and juggling with units and fragments in his uninhibited poststructuralist phase."

[22] And future models too? An interesting feature of intertextuality is the "possibility of reversing the directionality of intertextual reference" (Fowler 1997b, 27). Fowler argues: "If we locate intertextuality, however, not in any pre-existing textual system but in the reader, there is no reason to feel that it is in some way improper to acknowledge that for most professional classicists today there are now traces of Lucan in Vergil, just as our Homer can only ever now be Virgilian." This also ties in with the discussion about the "anachronisme de l'histoire" found in Loraux 1993. See also Hinds 1988, 100-104, on the "dynamics of appropriation" or "textual incorporation".

[23] It should be noted that, as an unavoidable consequence of the work's linearity, narrative structure is still at play throughout the rest of *History*. In that respect, structure will continue to be an important element of interpretation, although it will be discussed less frontally than in the previous chapter.

stories of civil wars and power struggles, is the flight of the defeated emperor. Herodian offers a range of cases for this theme in which he ties plot to conduct, and conduct to character. Not one particular past example seems to underpin all four narratives – though some may also resonate with a specific model – and it is perhaps more of a motif that is being tinkered with. A third way for Herodian to work with models is to subvert them. Again, references here are not specific, but point to a broader theme. I focus here on three: political suicide, death in combat, and the tyrant's death. I end this chapter with Julianus' accession, an episode that is difficult to compare to other events, whether in the *History* itself or elsewhere. I argue that, faced with this 'anomaly', Herodian resorts to unlikely narrative patterns to process this peculiar event in Roman history.

3.2 Whose battle is it anyway? Rescripting Issos

The decisive battle between Niger and Severus is depicted in the *History* as the result of a long war spread across Asia minor and set after Severus' march from Rome to Syria. As Herodian recounts, Severus had formed a temporary alliance with Albinus so as to deal first with Niger, whom he deemed a more pressing threat. So ended the second book. Herodian begins the next book by turning back to Syria: "when Niger received the totally unexpected news (*μηδέν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ*) that Severus had taken Rome […], he was thrown into a state of complete panic (*ἐν μεγίστῃ ταραχῇ*)"[24]. Whereas Niger had last been seen lounging about[25], now Herodian shows him hurrying to dispatch orders with defensive strategies and requests of alliances to neighbouring kingdoms (3.1.2). Spurred into action by Severus' imminent attack, Niger is henceforth shown as a relatively capable and active leader. Niger reverts back to his earlier image of serious opponent, which realigns with how he had been so promisingly introduced by Herodian (cf. 2.7.4-6)[26].

Noticeably, Herodian describes at length all of Niger's defensive measures in preparation for Severus' arrival. Above all, Niger would prioritize barricading the Taurus and capturing Byzantium (3.1.4-7). To highlight Niger's leadership and activity, Herodian strings together verbs prefixed with *προ-*: *προύπεμψε*, *προκαταληψομένην* (3.1.5); *προκαταλαβεῖν* (3.1.6); *προκατειλημμένον* (3.2.1)[27]. To support the validity of Niger's decisions, the historian underlines the "inaccessible range" (*τὸν δύσβατον*) of the Taurus, that would act as a natural barrier, as well as the importance of Byzantium, multiplying terms of abundance and wealth

[24] 3.1.1: *ὁ δὲ Νίγρος, ἐπεὶ ἠγγέλη αὐτῷ μηδέν τι τοιοῦτον προσδεχομένῳ κατειληφὼς μὲν τὴν Ῥώμην ὁ Σεβῆρος […] ἐν μεγίστῃ ταραχῇ ἦν.*

[25] 2.8.9: *ἐς τὸ ἁβροδίαιτον ἀνειμένος*; 2.10.8: *ῥᾳθυμίαν ἢ ἀδρανίαν καταγνώσονται*; 2.12.2: *μέλλησίν τε καὶ ῥᾳθυμίαν*; 2.14.5: *ἔτι γὰρ μέλλοντος καὶ ὑπτιάζοντος τοῦ Νίγρου, τῇ τε Ἀντιοχείᾳ ἐντρυφῶντος*; 3.4.7: *μελλήσεως καὶ βραδυτῆτος*. Following mostly *SHA*, *Nig.* (esp. 5.1; 6.10; 7.7-9; 10-11, of which several passages echo Herodian's Caracalla) and Cass. Dio 75(74).6-8, Bersanetti 1938, 359-61 conceives Niger's military incapacity as a pure invention of Herodian. Rubin 1980, 94, argues that Herodian contrasts Niger's inaction with Severus' action through a frequent use of words such as *ἤδη* et *ἔτι*. We may also observe this technique in Severus' confrontations with Julianus and Albinus, as shows Joubert 1981, 324ff.

[26] See Bersanetti 1938, 359-60.

[27] Appian uses a similar technique to describe Caesar's actions in the *Civil Wars*; cf. Pitcher 2007, 112; 114.

to mark the city's economic and military superiority [28]. In stark contrast with Julianus' refusal to secure the Alps and his own earlier post-accession nonchalance, Niger now marched "with haste" (3.4.1: μετὰ σπουδῆς) to meet Severus' troops in Cilicia. And yet, while Herodian approves of Niger's preparations, he also undermines them in the same breath: "in this way Niger made provision for his side with great foresight and regard for safety – or so he thought (ὡς ᾤετο)"[29]. Similarly, the impregnable character of the Taurus is only alluded to from Niger's perspective (3.1.4: νομίζων)[30]. As we will see, this ambivalence will be a prevalent aspect of Herodian's portrayal in Niger.

Following the *History*'s timeline, a few major battles occurred on the way to the final confrontation at Issos. During all of these, Niger showed himself to be mostly capable and a worthy adversary for Severus, who has been painted as a great military leader (cf. 2.9.2; 2.11.1-3, etc.). Although they eventually all yielded to Severus' advance, Niger's defensive measures first held their own, causing serious trouble for Severus' troops. Interestingly, Herodian's account of these wars, compared to many other episodes in the *History*, even within the rest of the Severan passages, is fairly detailed. This might serve to impress upon the reader that Niger was actually a serious contender for the emperorship, especially when looking at how Herodian downplays Severus' victories[31]. For instance, Herodian appears to attribute Niger's defeat at Cyzicus foremost to Aemilianus' betrayal, positing that Niger's general was either motivated by jealousy or had been coerced by Severus who was keeping hostage his children in Rome (3.2.3) [32]. Whether forced or brought about by negative sentiment, Aemilianus' disloyalty is thus painted as inevitable and, ultimately, reflects more poorly on Severus than Niger. Similarly, Herodian also blames the defection of certain important Greek cities to their natural propensity to civil war, instead of a genuine preference for Severus. What Herodian believes to be an innate vice in Greeks had Nicaea and Nicomedia, Laodicea and Antioch, as well as Tyre and Berytos face off against each other (2.7-8; 3.3.3-4). Another such minimizing element can be found in the dramatic account of Niger's loss of the

[28] 3.1.4: γενναίος, μέγας, μέγιστος, εὐδαίμων, πλῆθος, πολύς, πλεῖστοι, δυνατώτατος, etc. Herodian even remarks that the remains of the wall in Byzantium still managed to impress in his day (3.1.7). Following Herodian's timeline, Niger's decision may also be validated by the fact that Severus would still be facing some resistance in Byzantium during his war against Albinus (3.6.9). When Aquileia is preparing for an imminent siege by Maximinus, the city is similarly portrayed by Herodian; cf. 8.2.2-6; below, [161-2].

[29] 3.1.7: ὁ μὲν δὴ Νίγρος οὕτως ἐξήρτυε τὰ καθ' ἑαυτὸν προμηθέστατα καὶ ἀσφαλέστατα, ὡς ᾤετο. This also sets up a certain dramatic irony.

[30] Compare with Herodian's comments on the Alps, cf. 2.8.11; 8.1.6; with below, [127-8].

[31] See e.g. Ward 2011, 161-5, on Severus' actual presence on the battlefield during his wars against Niger and Albinus. Conversely, Herodian tries to lessen some of Niger's more negative actions: the historian explains Niger's seemingly extreme decision to send his Moroccan contingent to punish Laodicea and Tyre by validating his indignation at their betrayal (3.3.4: ἀγανακτήσας δὲ τότε εἰκότως ἐπὶ τῇ ἀποστάσει αὐτῶν καὶ ὕβρει). If the massacre turned out to be greater than expected, it was to be blamed on the "bloodthirsty" (φονικώτατοι) nature of the Moroccans, rather than a poor choice on Niger's part (3.3.5). Herodian takes care to recall how "Niger had acted generously up to now" (3.3.4: τὸ ἦθος πρότερον χρηστός; cf. 2.8.8 and 3.1.2). See also *SHA*, *Nig.* 4.6-7 (massacres in Asia); 10.5 (punishment of thieves); 12.3 (potential reforms *sine crudelitate, immo etiam cum lenitate, sed militari, non remisssa et inepta atque ridicula*).

[32] See e.g. Cheung 1998 and Wardle 2007 on the repercussions of military defeat for the generals and emperors; with Edwards 2007, 19-45 on the death of (defeated) military commanders.

Taurus, said to be due only to an unexpected and violent storm (cf. 3.3.7)[33]. Herodian's insistence on the harsh conditions of the region and the intensity of the deluge creates the image that this blow was unavoidable (but presumably also unforeseeable), caused by inescapable nature. Herodian gravely concludes that the fortifications on the Taurus collapsed, because "in the end nature proved stronger than man's invention"[34]. In that way, it seemed that Niger had taken every action possible to check Severus' advance and that Severus, despite his military skills, owed his victories against Niger mainly to factors outside his control: despite the weather in the region, or the season, it seemed like an unforeseeable circumstance that a storm would hit in that precise moment[35].

Seeing double: past and present meet at Issos

All of this to say that by the time Herodian comes to the story of Niger and Severus' final confrontation, it seemed that the outcome could actually go either way. In the *History*, Niger's and Severus' troops fought what would turn out to be their last battle near Issos, which Herodian claims to have been the site of Dareios' defeat against Alexander several centuries prior:

> The two forces converged on a very broad, long plain at the bay named Issos. […] This is the site, we are told, where Darios too, having fought his last and greatest battle with Alexander, was defeated and captured, and where the people of the northern regions on that occasion, too, defeated the Easterners[36].

Due to the confusion between Alexander and Dareios' battles at Issos (in 333 BC) and at Gaugamela (in 331 BC, their actual last battle), this allusion has often been seen as a superficial insertion, owing to literary convention, an abuse of sources, or Herodian's vague historical knowledge[37]. That may be, but the impact of this past event on the main narrative also goes beyond that of a mere (missed) reference. Unlike most mentions of famous people or stories in Herodian's work, the allusion of Issos is substantially more developed and more productive. Several of these explicit references are essentially informative, making unilateral connections to past realities. For instance, when Severus took Aemilianus' children hostage

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[33] The confrontation between flood and wall even seems to supersede the actual armed conflict; see Laporte 2021a.

[34] According to Rubin 1980, 117-20, here Herodian is using his vague knowledge of the region, instead of his usual empty rhetoric, to reject the version of his pro-Severan source. Note the discrepancy (?) between 3.1.4 (γενναίοις τείχεσί τε καὶ ἐρύμασι, Niger's orders) and 3.3.7 (διὰ σπουδῆς καὶ οὐ μετ' ἐπιμελείας κατασκευασθέντων, their execution).

[35] Another way of looking at the determining quality of these external elements would be to frame these events (especially the flood on Mount Taurus) as the manifestation of divine providence. This, as Herodian shows (3.3.8; cf. 2.9.7), is how Severus would recuperate the outcome of these battles to his advantage.

[36] 3.4.2-3: συνέρχεται δὴ ἑκατέρωθεν ὁ στρατὸς ἐς τὸ κατὰ τὸν Ἰσσικὸν καλούμενον κόλπον πεδίον πλατύτατόν τε καὶ ἐπιμηκέστατον […] ἐκεῖ φασὶ καὶ Δαρεῖον Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τὴν ὑστάτην καὶ μεγίστην μάχην συμβαλόντα ἡττηθῆναί τε καὶ ἁλῶναι, τῶν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρκτῴων μερῶν καὶ τότε τοὺς ἀνατολικοὺς νενικηκότων.

[37] According to Whittaker 1969-70, n. 1 *ad* 3.4.3, Herodian might have drawn from a local tradition; Càssola 1967, viii, views it as a wilful error and takes it as evidence of the historian's "campanilismo" for this region. For Rubin 1980, 217-18, however, this story has been entirely invented by the historian, who failed to correctly understand the Alexander-motif. Zimmermann 1999a, 4 cites this passage as an instance of 'feigned borrowing from templates'.

in order to secure the general's loyalty, Herodian notes that the emperor was copying a "practice of Commodus" (3.2.4: ἔθος ἦν τῷ Κομμόδῳ). Other references to the past might be longer, but remain rather descriptive, like Herodian's many descriptions of festivals in the first book[38]. These certainly serve to stage the main story, but are not integrated directly within the main action. By contrast, the allusion to Issos is almost performative, generating a strong and creative parallel between the two battles. Past and recent Issos are interwoven together, both narrative in essence, and produce in fact a hybrid story[39].

By setting Dareios and Alexander's "last and greatest battle" at Issos, Herodian frames the site as a critical encounter, and this allows him to immediately grant a certain weight to this new episode[40]. But, more than dramatization or symbolic allusion, its story serves as a productive model for the representation of the coming narrative. Through the outcome of the first battle, Herodian can already evoke that of the second: τῶν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀρκτῴων μερῶν καὶ τότε τοὺς ἀνατολικοὺς νενικηκότων. The combination of the adverb τότε and the perfect participle νενικηκότων also seems to suggest that this conclusion does not apply to the past battle alone[41]. With this formulation and a certain onomastic ambiguity ('north' and 'east' are the only qualifiers used in that passage), Herodian is able to gather in the same phrase the result of both battles. These are soon confirmed to share a similar end (cf. 3.4.4: ὁμοίαν). Moreover, Herodian does not explicitly say in which role, that of Alexander or Dareios, he casts Niger and Severus. He relies instead on their troops' provenance to assign them their respective parts and fates: the north then corresponds to Alexander and Severus, the east to Dareios and Niger.

According to Herodian, Alexander marked his victory with grand gestures: "Today there is a city called Alexandria up on the ridge, which is a triumphal monument to commemorate this battle; also there is a bronze statue of the man who has given his name to the site"[42]. By pointing out that both city and statue were still standing (μένει δὲ ἔτι νῦν), Herodian is able to bind together a distant past (Alexander-Dareios), a recent past (Niger-Severus), and his own present (time of writing and reading). Whereas the first battle 'lives' through the second, its physical traces are still visible in Herodian's time, half a century after the Niger-Severus war. Herodian makes use of a spatio-temporal connection similar to that

[38] Cf. 1.9.2-3 (Capitoline Games); 1.10.5 (Hilaria); 1.16.1-3 (Saturnalia). According to Castelli 2008, 109-10, this sort of excursus serves to slow down the narrative rhythm and, talking about the Saturnalia in particular, delays the realization of the "drammatica annuncio" of Commodus' downfall.

[39] This so-called confusion between the two battles might also be linked to a pursuit of narrative efficiency: Herodian has merged events together elsewhere in the interest of a clearer structure. Interestingly, a similar blending is also exploited in Oliver Stone's 2004 *Alexander*, where Alexander's battles at Granicus and at Issus are integrated into a single battle at Gaugamela (this is, in any case, a common technique in historical and biographical cinema).

[40] The rest of this section (up to 4.3) is taken from Laporte 2021a, with very minor (stylistic) changes in the text; some notes have also been modified or added for the present purposes.

[41] See Schneider 2011, on the intricacies of reenactment, noting for instance "how the very explicit *twiceness* of reenactment trips the otherwise daily condition of repetition into reflexive hyper-drive, expanding the experience into the uncanny." (quote at 14)

[42] 3.4.3: μένει δὲ ἔτι νῦν τρόπαιον καὶ δεῖγμα τῆς νίκης ἐκείνης, πόλις ἐπὶ τοῦ λόφου Ἀλεξάνδρεια καλουμένη, ἄγαλμά τε χαλκοῦν οὗ τὴν προσηγορίαν ὁ τόπος φέρει.

seen in the case of Byzantium's walls, but takes it a step further: evoking the famous battle between Alexander and Dareios becomes, as it were, a performative act, since it foists its main elements onto the new narrative. By recalling the earlier fight, Herodian is already composing the storyline of the second battle: location, players, stakes, and outcome. In addition, the narrative influence is to some extent reciprocal: the new battle of Issos generates the memory of the older, or rather its 'reminiscence', but the older also dictates the structure of the new. Some of the narrative 'gaps' in the one can also be filled by adding, or inventing, details from the other, and vice versa[43]. Ultimately, the lines of both episodes end up melting into each other, creating a sort of hybrid story, such that it becomes difficult to distinguish the features particular to the one or the other.

Navigating between time and space, Herodian then proceeds to describe how the battle between Niger and Severus unfolded:

> The two forces pitched camp about nightfall facing each other, and spent the entire night awake in anxious foreboding. At sunrise the armies advanced to meet each other, urged on by their respective commanders. With fierce energy they fell upon each other, as though this was the contest to end all battles and fate was then and there making its choice of emperors. For a long time the contest raged with heavy loss of life. The rivers of the plain carried more blood than water down to the sea. And then the rout of the eastern forces began[44].

By homogenising contexts, outcomes, and narrative sequences, Herodian can exaggerate the resemblance between the two battles. Many similarities can therefore be noted with the famous episode, recorded variously by the Alexander historians. For Rubin, Herodian has created this "anemic summary" by deleting many details specific to the Niger-Severus battle and filling in the blanks with data taken from the Alexander motif[45]. However, as noted by Sidebottom, battle scenes in Herodian are often rather generic and formulaic[46]. The battle between Niger and Severus at Issos seems to be no exception: both armies set up camp in the evening, spend a restless night, and launch a fierce battle at sunrise, which ends in a general carnage. Significantly, there are no clear identifiers for most of the sequence, up until "the Illyrian troops" (οἱ Ἰλλυριοί) are said to chase after the vanquished army. Upon consideration,

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[43] See e.g. O'Gorman 2009, 239: "Intertextuality as an event, in other words, disrupts ordinary temporality by challenging our sense of what is temporally prior and inviting us to consider the authority implicit in temporal priority."

[44] 3.4.4-5: *ἀντιστρατοπεδευσάμενοι γὰρ ἑκατέρωθεν περὶ ἑσπέραν, πάσης τῆς νυκτὸς ἐν φροντίσιν ἑκάτεροι καὶ δέει διαγρηγορήσαντες, ἅμα ἡλίῳ ἀνίσχοντι ἐπ' ἀλλήλους ἠπείγοντο, παρορμώντων ἑκατέρωθεν τῶν στρατηγῶν. προθυμίᾳ δὴ πάσῃ ἐνέπιπτον ὡς ὑπὲρ λοιπῆς καὶ τελευταίας ἐκείνης μάχης, κἀκεῖ τῆς τύχης διακρινούσης τὸν βασιλέα. ἐπὶ πολὺ δὲ αὐτῶν διαγωνισαμένων πολλοῦ τε ἐργασθέντος φόνου, ὡς καὶ τὰ ῥεῖθρα τῶν διὰ τοῦ πεδίου ποταμῶν ῥεόντων αἵματος πλεῖον ἢ ὕδατος κατάγειν ἐς θάλασσαν, τροπὴ τῶν ἀνατολικῶν γίνεται.* Note the image of blood mixed with water (cf. 4.9.8; 7.2.7; 8.5.7), evoking perhaps the fight between Achilles and Scamander (Hom., *Il.* 21, esp. 325-6) and later iterations, such as Thuc. 7.84, Verg., *Aen*. e.g. *ad* 6. 9.456, 11.393; Lucan., e.g. *ad* 7.116, 7.700, 7.789-90, 10.30-32, etc., or possibly just a general image of carnage.

[45] See Rubin 1980, 103-5.

[46] Sidebottom 1998, 2815-17: "In essence Herodian's historical battles are not constructed differently from the mythical combat of Ilus and Tantalus'. Perhaps this episode is to some extent programmatic: 'a long battle was fought in which both sides were evenly matched, and, since quite a number of men fell on either side"; cf. 1.11.2: *ἰσορρόπου δὲ ἐπὶ πολὺ τῆς μάχης γενομένης ἑκατέρωθεν πεσεῖν ἱκανούς.*

the comparison is perhaps targeted more at the outcome of the new battle than its proceedings. Whereas Herodian evokes Alexander's triumphal acts, he only briefly cites Dareios' defeat and capture.[47] However, following the events' uncanny resemblance, Herodian can use Dareios' abridged end to plot out Niger's defeat. He can then colour this new outcome with its particular function and circumstances. By contrast with the more extravagant stories of Dareios' flight, which should be somewhat familiar to his audience, Herodian keeps his account of Niger's end fairly short and simple (3.4.5-6), thus allowing Niger to retain some measure of dignity[48].

If, as proposed, these two narratives can function as a whole, then it may be argued that Herodian ascribes the one victory to Alexander. Alexander is said to have fought and defeated Dareios, while Severus seems somewhat detached from his own success. Alexander is also given more positive acts following his victory. Conversely, Severus is said to have imposed severe reprisals imposed on his opponent's allies and to have issued pardons merely out of self-preservation (3.4.7-9)[49]. The context of a civil war may have precluded Severus from fully celebrating his victory, a stance then reproduced in the *History*. Yet Herodian mentions that, after beating Albinus, Severus had two triumphal monuments erected to mark his recent victories (3.7.7). While it could have created another connection between the past and recent battles, Herodian defers the construction of such a trophy. Beyond accuracy, streamlining, or amplification, postponing the first monument's erection allows Herodian to confine Severus's post-war approach to perpetuating citizen massacre.

Such a comparison between the two battles of Issos is not made explicit by Dio, although this episode is admittedly only extant in Xiphilinus' epitome. While a direct comparison with Dio's original work is impossible, it remains interesting to note what has been selected by Xiphilinus[50]. In this abridged version, Dio-Xiphilinus places the battle near Issos, at a pass called the "Cilician Gates" (Cass. Dio ap. Xiph. 75(74).7.2-3: αἱ Κιλίκειοι πύλαι)[51]. However, these seem to be not the 'Cilician Gates' at Mount Taurus, but rather the so-called 'Cilician-Syrian Gates', in the Amanus (Nur) Mountains, closer to Issos. This may explain why Dio-Xiphilinus comments on the site's etymology, but does not refer to Alexander. The only Alexandrine allusion in this episode comes up shortly before the account of the battle at Issos: apparently some of Niger's supporters were calling him a "new Alexander" (75(74).6.2a: Ἀλέξανδρον νέον). Unlike Herodian's treatment, this mention does not seem to have any

[47] For a comparison of Niger's and Dareios' flights after their respective defeats at Issos, see below, [123-6].
[48] See below, section 3.3.3, for an expanded discussion on the particulars of Niger's flight, as part of a wider treatment of the fugal theme.
[49] Severus only ended up offering amnesty upon realising that some of Niger's troops had managed to cross the Tigris River. He was worried that the fugitives would seek vengeance through an alliance with the Persians (3.4.7-9). According to Cass. Dio 75(74).8.4, Severus spared all the senators in Rome, but imposed heavy reparations. In spite of their similarities, these passages highlight their authors' different interpretations of Severus's badness: for Herodian, cruelty, for Dio, greed.
[50] On Xiphilinus' method and programme, see Millar 1964, 195-203, with Mallan 2013b.
[51] Cf. Xen., *Anab.* 1.4.4. See Kolb 1972, 71-77 and Rubin 1980, 230-31, emphasizing Herodian's ignorance and the falseness of his record, especially in comparison to Dio's 'truthful' account. Potter 2016, 329-30, 332 looks at the two histories not in terms of factual accuracy, but for their impact on narrative, representation, and overall historical understanding.

particular effect on the story or the characters, except to generally emphasize Niger's vanity. The *Historia Augusta*, Victor, Eutropius, and Orosius all identify Cyzicus as the site of Niger's defeat, ruling out any comparison with the famous past battle[52].

In Herodian's story, Issos is at the centre of the narrative. Pictured as a natural theatre (cf. 3.4.2)[53], the site even allows for a 'live' re-staging of the first battle for viewers within the story[54]. And although it functions as a narrative framework, landscape is not a barren device at all: as Pitcher argues, "in Herodian, the thematic, symbolic, and characterizing functions of space are often linked at a fundamental level."[55] More than a backdrop of limited evocative potential, Herodian's Issos is the place from which the whole account(s) emerges. By making the site into the story's focus, Herodian can draw from Issos' ancient history a notable event, similar to the upcoming story[56]. The re-enactment of the battle between Alexander and Dareios at Issos thus activates a productive analogy between a past and an ongoing event[57].

3.3 The (not so) great escape: variations on a fugal theme

Stories of battles often conclude with the (attempted) escape of the defeated party. These scenes are especially significant in the case of final encounters, since they transition into death episodes, which as we have seen are, for Herodian and other ancient authors, paramount to the representation of character(s). It stands to reason that a work such as the *History*, laden with power wars, features many episodes of this sort. Accordingly, the flight of the defeated emperor is an important pattern used throughout the *History*, usually serving as the last appearance of that character and one of the key moments of characterization. It should be noted that this circumstance is not ideal in the least, since it remains a failure, but there are nevertheless degrees of conduct. While in general death scenes in the *History* follow certain codes of good and bad endings, it seems there was also more specifically an *ars fugiendi*.

3.3.1 The good

Let us first pick up the story of Niger's defeat where we just left it. According to Herodian, both his and Severus' troops fought long and hard at Issos: "and then the rout (τροπή)

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[52] See *SHA*, *Seu.* 9.1; *SHA*, *Nig.* 5.8; also briefly mentioned in Vict., *Caes.* 20.8; Eutrop. 8.18.4; Oros. 7.17.2.
[53] This idea is explored more extensively below, [196-8], in a discussion about intradiegetic viewing and theatricality.
[54] On battles as spectacle, see Potter 2016, esp. 331-5 on Herodian; with Molinier Arbo 2018, 193-4 who even cites this particular episode. On aspects of visualization in Herodian's work, see section 4.2.
[55] Pitcher 2012, 274; with, more generally, de Jong 2014, 122-9.
[56] Discussing the comparisons between the pairs Hector-Achilles and Aeneas-Turnus in the *Aeneid* (6.88-94 and 7.321-2), Pelling 2013, 386 considers their resonances with another civil war, contemporary to that work: "the *Aeneid*'s own purchase on its readers' recent experience is in a way parasitic on historiography's techniques: what happened in the distant past can illuminate more recent history and vice versa *just as if those distant events had really happened in that way*." (emphasis original)
[57] For Potter 2016, 335, this "appeal to stock scenes and themes", in both Dio's and Herodian's works, leads to "the domestication of the distant", through which the historians are able to illustrate their understanding of past events for their readers. See too de Jong 2014, 105-6: "The narrative evocation of space, therefore, always requires active cooperation on the part of the narratees."

of the eastern forces began. […] Niger himself, riding a fast horse, escaped with a few of his men and came to Antioch"[58]. While Niger's flight seems to follow a generic sequence in the event of a military defeat, Herodian inserts characterizing elements at strategic points in the episode. First, the moment: Niger is said to have escaped only when he was definitely beaten, with his troops already gone[59]. Following Herodian's account, Niger had fought to the very end and had not deserted his army in favour of his own survival. Another significant feature of this episode is the size of Niger's escort, made up of only "a few of his men" (3.4.6: ὀλίγων), which clashes with the tyrant's typically large bodyguard[60]. Also noteworthy is the fact that Niger fled on "a fast horse" (3.4.5: ἵππῳ γενναίῳ; or better yet, "a thoroughbred")[61]. From a strictly practical aspect, one might note how the horse's stamina could boost the success rate of Niger's flight. But this qualifier also suggests that Niger, at that point, had no need for secrecy or subterfuge, while retaining just enough dignity as befit a defeated emperor[62].

As seen in the previous section, Herodian makes an amalgamation of Dareios' last battle and that of Niger. Though the escape scene, in the *History*, is all Niger's, their defeats, and ensuing flights, have certain points in common; their treatment, however, is often different[63]. According to Arrian (*Anab.* 2.11), Dareios fled mid-fight, "safe in his chariot" (2.11.5: ἐπὶ τοῦ ἅρματος διεσώζετο), then abandoned it, along with his arms and mantle, in order to continue on horseback through tricky passes. Nightfall allowed him to escape Alexander's pursuit, who seized however his discarded paraphernalia, raided his camp, and captured several members of his family. Diodorus Siculus (17.34; 17.37) presents a similar account, but it includes additional details, such as the use of a second chariot and a constant rotation of mounts (17.37.2: μεταλαμβάνων ἄλλον ἐξ ἄλλου τῶν ἀρίστων ἵππων). Diodorus also underlines that the "extreme peril" (17.34.6: κινδυνεύων ἐσχάτως) in which Dareios found himself forced him to dishonour (ὑπερβῆναι) the dignity and long tradition of his position. Quintus Curtius' version (from 3.11.11, though the story is told mostly from Alexander's perspective) also emphasizes the cowardice and shamefulness of Dareios' actions, who had a horse at the ready and easily cast away his royal tokens in order to conceal his flight (*ne fugam proderent*)[64]. By

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[58] 3.4.5: τροπὴ τῶν ἀνατολικῶν γίνεται… ὁ δὲ Νίγρος ἵππῳ γενναίῳ ἐποχούμενος φεύγει μετ' ὀλίγων, ἕς τε τὴν Ἀντιόχειαν ἀφικνεῖται.

[59] Niger had also partaken in the fight, cf. 3.4.4. See Ward 2011, 157-65, for a detailed analysis on the physical presence of Severus and Niger in their two main confrontations, in Cyzicus and in Issos.

[60] The tyrant's bodyguard is a theme well represented in the *History*, cf. below, [178-9; 209-10].

[61] Whittaker 1969-70 translates ἵππῳ γενναίῳ as a "fast horse"; also "un cavallo molto veloce" (ap. Càssola 1967); "un veloz caballo" (ap. Torres Esbarranch 1985); "a good horse" (ap. Echols 1961), but reading it instead as 'thoroughbred', as Roques 1990a ("un pur-sang"), Müller 1996 ("auf einem edlen Pferd") or Brok 1973/Hunink 2017 ("een snelle volbloed"), might support even further Herodian's attempt to tone down Niger's defeat. This expression also occurs at 2.8.5, in Severus' 'prophetic' dream, applied to Pertinax's "fine, large horse".

[62] Bats 2003, 290, n. 61: "Il a néanmoins conservé ses vêtements et insignes impériaux, sa garde personnelle: ce n'est qu'un ennemi public qui a pris la fuite, après sa défaite."

[63] Cf. also Plut., *Artax.* 9.1 on a similar death and flight for Cyrus the Younger following a battle with his brother Artaxerxes II; with section 3.3.4 below, for a more general discussion on the theme of the "runaway emperor".

[64] Compare with Agricola, who sent off his horse to show that he was taking a stand against the enemy (Tac., *Agricola* 35.5: *promptior in spem et firmus adversis, dimisso equo pedes ante vexilla constitit*).

contrast with most of these records of Dareios' flight[65], Herodian's story of Niger's escape underlines how the emperor had fled the battle site at the right moment, in plain sight, and with an acceptable outfit.

Though Niger had a somewhat decent conduct in his escape, he would ultimately end up like all the other conquered emperors. Reaching his capital, Niger is said to have found the city in complete disarray and "in despair he too hurried away from Antioch"[66]. At last, Niger was caught "hiding" (3.4.6: κρυπτόμενος) in one of the suburbs and beheaded. To be sure, Niger's flight is not in itself a characteristic of a good emperor, nor even of a good general. As Herodian shows, Niger's lack of self-control, his eventual loss against Severus, his decision to flee and, as a last recourse, to hide are typical of a bad ruler. However, the combination of these seemingly trivial details in the story of Niger's flight serves to mitigate his final defeat[67]. In that sense, the composition of this particular scene echoes the ambivalent image that has been crafted for Niger throughout Herodian's entire account of his rule. In other words, Herodian maintains, up until Niger's very last moments, this tension between vice and virtue, and power and failure, that encapsulates his entire portrayal of the emperor[68]. This idea is sealed in a final verdict full of concessive turns: "such was the end of Niger who paid the

[65] Cf. Polyb. 12.17-22 (though more on the battle, as is recorded by Callisthenes); Plut., *Alex.* 20-21; Justin 11.9-10.

[66] 3.4.6: γενόμενος ἐν ἀπογνώσει καὶ αὐτὸς ἐκ τῆς Ἀντιοχείας ἀποδιδράσκει. In Cass. Dio 75(74).8.3, Niger even fled from Antioch towards the Euphrates. In *SHA*, *Nig.* 5-6, Niger first proposed a shared rule to Severus (like Julianus), was defeated by Severus' generals led by Aemilianus, refused Severus' offer of truce and promise of safe exile, insisting on fighting, was defeated a second time near Cyzicus, was brought wounded to Severus, and died immediately. Both of these versions say that Severus sent Niger's head on a pike to Byzantium (Dio) or Rome (*SHA*). On the beheading of (defeated) enemies, see Voisin 1984; Bats 2003, 290-4; Varner 2005, esp. 69-71; Gleason 2011, 39-40 (from the perspective of 'doubles'); Kristensen 2015; Lange 2020.

[67] According to Herodian, Severus then punished Niger's friends and soldiers (3.4.7), governors (3.5.6), allied cities (3.6.9: while Antioch is said to have been given to the Laodiceans, Herodian only mentions city destruction when talking about Byzantium), sympathizing senators back in Rome (3.8.6), and neighbouring kingdoms who had been friendly with Niger (3.9.1-2). Interestingly, most of these vindictive actions are disconnected from Niger's defeat in the main narrative sequence (at 3.4.6-7). This may be due in part to economical reasons, since Severus inflicted similar punishments to Albinus' friends and allies after his victory at Lugdunum. But this distance may also serve to lessen the impact of Niger's failures (and eventually those of Albinus, if we consider how Herodian inserts a substantial assessment of all three of Severus' victories (3.7.7-8) just before his verdict on Albinus, at 3.7.9) in order to focus instead on Severus' cruelty.

[68] Mecella 2017, 188 argues that Herodian criticizes above all Niger's lack of a 'global strategic vision'. On Herodian's representation of Niger, see also Fuchs 1895, 225ff; Bersanetti 1938; Rubin 1980, ch. 3; Zimmermann 1999a, 172-80. Like Julianus or Albinus, Herodian's Niger is usually considered by scholars from a strictly Severan perspective, which leads to a mostly negative interpretation of the character. Marasco 1998, 2851-2 argues that Niger's easy call to foreign kings as allies in his war against Severus (3.1.2-3) and the fact that his supporters fled to Parthian territory (3.4.7-9; which Herodian uses to explain the Parthians' improved battle tactics against the Romans) are to be considered as treasonous behaviour (perhaps drawing from Severan propaganda, noted at 2876) and as evidence against Herodian's sympathy for Niger. Marasco claims that it "contrasta nettamente" with Marcus' refusal of 'barbarian' help during Cassius' revolt (though it should be noted that this event is not featured in Herodian's story; cf. 1.3.5 on how Marcus had dealt with the Germans). Regarding the consequences of the flight of Niger's allies, it is perhaps less of a statement on Niger's treasonous conduct than an illustration of Severus' military understanding (which manifests here as a coldly pragmatic *clementia*).

penalty for sloth and procrastination. Otherwise (τὰ ἄλλα), the reports say, he was not a bad man (μὴ φαῦλος), either as emperor (μήτε ἄρχων) or as an ordinary person (μήτε ἰδιώτης)"[69].

3.3.2 The bad

3.3.2.1 Staying home

The lead-up to Julianus' death in Herodian's story is a long one, making up the greater part of his rule, while the actual event amounts to little more than an afterthought. For the most part, this disparity can be read through a 'Severan' explanation: once Severus appears at 2.9, the entire narrative comes to focus solely on him. Accordingly, Severus' activity guides how the story flows and how it moves to Pannonia, and from there to Rome, Antioch, and Gaul, as it follows the man in his quest for absolute power. But even before Severus makes his appearance in the story, Julianus' rule is first 'interrupted' by the introduction and ensuing proclamation of Niger in Antioch.

According to Herodian, this new emperor was put in power in response to Julianus' unsuitability to rule. Julianus' episode in the *History* in fact passes directly from his accession to what triggered his end: "As soon as (εὐθέως) Julianus came to power, he wasted his time in feasting and drinking, idly neglecting public welfare by abandoning himself to luxurious and indecent living"[70]. Upon seeing this, both the people and the army grew deeply unhappy with their new emperor. Most importantly, the soldiers, having realized that Julianus had made them empty promises, would eventually refuse to guard the city[71]. All of this, as Herodian shows, prompted the people in Rome to call upon Niger, then governor of Syria, to come to their rescue (2.7.3ff). While the newly proclaimed Niger was putting off his journey to Rome, Severus saw the opportunity to stake his own claim to the emperorship. Unlike Niger, Severus set off to the capital immediately after his proclamation[72].

Back in Rome, as the *History* goes on, news of Severus' arrival in Italy profoundly shook Julianus, said to have been thrown in a state of "utter desperation" (2.11.7: ἐν ἐσχάτῃ ἀπογνώσει)[73]. Since Julianus could count neither on the people, "who hated him" (2.11.7: ἐπεὶ

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[69] 3.4.7: τέλει μὲν δὴ τοιούτῳ ὁ Νίγρος ἐχρήσατο, μελλήσεως καὶ βραδυτῆτος δοὺς δίκας, τὰ ἄλλα, ὥς φασι, γενόμενος μὴ φαῦλος ἄνθρωπος, μήτε ἄρχων μήτε ἰδιώτης. Cf. Cass. Dio ap. Xiph. 75(74).6.1: "remarkable for nothing either good or bad, so that one could neither praise nor censure him very much" (οὔτε δὲ ἐς τὸ κρεῖττον οὔτε ἐς τὸ χεῖρον ἐπίσημος, ὥστε τινὰ ἢ πάνυ αὐτὸν ἐπαινεῖν ἢ πάνυ ψέγειν). Serving as Niger's introduction, Dio's statement, though similar to Herodian's final judgement, seems to castigate the character rather than exculpate him. An interesting comparison of Herodian's treatment of Niger can be found in the various accounts of Otho's death, where the emperor is recorded as 'redeeming' himself through a noble end: see Martial. 4.32; Plut., *Otho* 18.2; Tac., *Hist*. 2.46-51; though Juv. 2.104-9; see recently Charles & Anagnostou-Laotides 2013/14. On the theme of political suicide, esp. applied to Gordian I, see below, section 3.4.1.

[70] 2.7.1: τρυφαῖς εὐθέως καὶ κραιπάλαις ἐσχόλαξε, τῇ μὲν τῶν δημοσίων ἐπιμελείᾳ ῥᾳθύμως προσφερόμενος, ἐς δὲ τὸ ἀβροδίαιτον καὶ ἄσεμνον ἐπιδιδοὺς ἑαυτόν, trans. mod.

[71] Cf. 2.7.2-3; 2.7.5-6; 2.8.2-5. For Cass. Dio 74(73).17.2-3, the praetorians had defected rather because they had grown weary from their constant labours and also because they were terrified of Severus' arrival.

[72] Cf. 2.11.1ff, with above, [83-84].

[73] Dio's Julianus is certainly less passive than his incarnation in Herodian's *History*, but takes care of business like a 'slave' (ἀνελευθέρως) and a 'parasite' (θωπεύειν): see Cass. Dio 74(73).14.1-2. Another difference with the *History* is that Dio attributes Julianus' constant games and shows to a desire to ingratiate himself to the senators, and not strictly to personal whims.

μεμίσητο), nor on the soldiers, "whom he had tricked" (οὓς ἔψευστο), he soon came to the realization that he had limited options. According to Herodian, Julianus' first instinct was to collect as much money as he could to pay the troops, regardless of its provenance: in addition to his personal wealth, he thus raided the fortune of his friends, publics funds, as well as sacred treasuries, "in the hopes of buying back their favour" (2.11.7: ὡς ἀνακτήσαιτο τὴν εὔνοιαν αὐτῶν, trans. mod.). This strategy, however, did not turn out to be the easy solution he had hoped for. Although the army, as Herodian records, gladly accepted this payment, they took no further action, feeling that they were merely collecting their dues (2.11.8: ὄφλημα ἀποτίνειν) from Julianus' inaugural promises. Just as Julianus had reduced the emperorship to an easy monetary transaction, he attempted to apply the same approach to his defensive plans against Severus. This time, however, the fight for power would play out on the battlefield, not the 'auction house', and Julianus was faced with an opponent who not only had more resources than him, but also a much better understanding of warfare.

Bringing the fight to Rome

Though he had already lost much support from the people and army, Julianus, at that point, still had friends around him to offer (good) counsel. Julianus' advisors suggested that he send out troops to take control of the Alps, which Herodian emphasizes to be a natural, impregnable bulwark for the Italian territory (2.11.8: ἐν τείχους σχήματι; ἔρυμα ἄρρηκτον)[74]. But Julianus, despite the apparent soundness of this plan, chose to stay in Rome because he "did not dare" (2.11.8: ἀλλ' οὐδὲ… ἐτόλμα) to leave the capital[75]. Julianus instead ordered the praetorians to prepare for a siege of the city itself, "as though he were going to fight Severus in the streets of Rome"[76]. According to Herodian, Julianus even trained for battle the elephants that were normally used for processions, thinking that the animals might scare away Severus' troops[77]. Although he was presented with other strategies more likely to succeed, Julianus was bringing the fight to Rome, converting urban resources into military supplies and transforming the city into a battlefield. As Herodian shows, Julianus' cowardice and overall inability to rule pushed him to willingly endanger civilians and compromise the integrity of the capital.

Broadly speaking, external wars were usually praised since they either served to defend or expand the Empire. Accordingly, these 'good' wars belonged to the frontier. By contrast, civil wars, implicating internal enemies, even fellow citizens, were highly frowned upon. In addition to in-fighting, which was problematic in itself, these wars could often take

[74] Herodian later reprises this explanation, when he praises Severus' plan of blocking the Alps in his offensive against Albinus, cf. 3.6.10. See also 8.1.5-6, with below, [159-61], when Maximinus crosses from Pannonia to Italy through the Alps; or 3.1.4, with above, [117-18], when Niger has the Taurus barricaded, checking Severus' advance.

[75] Note how Julianus ignored the sound strategy proposed by his advisors, while he had listened to his wife, his daughter, and some clients' suggestion of making a bid for the Empire. On Herodian's representation of these 'advisors', see below, [175-6].

[76] 2.11.8: καὶ τὴν πρὸς Σεβῆρον μάχην ὡς ἐν τῇ πόλει ποιησόμενος παρεσκεύαζε.

[77] See Cass. Dio 74(73).16.1-4, in which Dio recalls the senators' amusement at Julianus' preparations, and especially his fortifications of the palace.

place within Roman territory. Although Severus was the one to first march on Rome, it was Julianus who, as shown in the *History*, made the executive decision to meet Severus in the city[78]. If Julianus had instead chosen to face Severus out in the field, this would at least have taken the battle closer to the Italian border, and well out of the capital. But, even against the advice of his friends who were urging him to check Severus' advance at the Alps, Julianus was drawing the fight within the city walls. This decision, as Herodian emphatically shows, is emblematic of his inability to rule: inexperienced and generally indifferent to the common good, Julianus also failed to understand the political and military consequences of such an act. This inadequacy would prove fatal to him.

Opposite this defensive strategy, Severus' offensive seemed even more efficient. According to Herodian, Severus' troops, who had arrived at the outskirts of the city, were then ordered to infiltrate Rome at night-time, in disguise, and with their arms hidden (cf. 2.12.1)[79]. The invasion occurred "while Julianus still failed to rouse himself (ἔτι ὑπτιάζοντος), unaware (ἀγνοοῦντος) of what was taking place"[80]. According to Herodian, Julianus would only be informed of these events by the popular commotion outside. Despite his (ill-advised) preparations, Julianus was once again "completely stupefied and at a loss (πολλῇ… ἀφασίᾳ τε καὶ ἀπορίᾳ) to know how he should deal with the crisis"[81]. Instead of fighting the expected battle, although it had come earlier and not exactly as he had anticipated (to the extent that he had given it some specific thought), Julianus turned to the senators. Scrambling to convoke the senate (perhaps still at night), he proposed, in a letter, to share the emperorship with Severus (2.12.3)[82]. This move, following Herodian's story, seems to have been Julianus' final mistake.

A senatorial 'interregnum'

To mark this turning point, Herodian then shifts the story's focus to the senators, who become the subjects of the next, deciding events:

> The senate gave their vote of approval (ἐψηφίσατο) to this proposal but, as they viewed (ὁρῶντες) Julianus' cowardly state of despair, they all proceeded to go (προσετίθεντο) over to Severus' side. About two or three days later, when they heard (ἤκουον) that Severus would be at the very gates of Rome, they gathered together (συνίασιν) at the

[78] The only other instance of a war on Italian soil in the *History* is Maximinus' march on Rome in 238 (7.8.1ff, 8.1.1ff). On the parallels between the two campaigns, see Pitcher 2012, 274; 280-1 and Kemezis 2014, 240-5 (who credits Severus' success to his unique capacity to move freely between centre and periphery).

[79] This passage is discussed above, [92-93], from Severus' perspective and through themes of covertness and military tactics.

[80] 2.12.2: τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ ἔτι ὑπτιάζοντος καὶ τὰ πραττόμενα ἀγνοοῦντος.

[81] 2.12.3: πολλῇ καταλαμβανόμενος ἀφασίᾳ τε καὶ ἀπορίᾳ, ὅπως χρήσεται τοῖς πράγμασιν, οὐκ εἰδώς... Interestingly, in *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 5, Julianus is said to have feared more Niger's army than Albinus or even Severus'.

[82] In Dio's *Roman History* and the *Historia Augusta*, Julianus first appealed to the senate to declare Severus public enemy; only later did he propose to share the Empire with him, cf. Cass. Dio 74(73).16.1; 17.2; with *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 5.3; 6.9; *SHA*, *Seu.* 5.5; 5.7. Zosim. 1.8.1 also picks up on the senate's predominant authority. Zimmermann 1999a, 108-11, 170 finds parallels between Julianus' abdication in Herodian's history and Vitellius' last moments in Cass. Dio 64(65).16, and, all things considered, between their portrayals as a whole.

> senate house in contempt (καταφρονήσαντες) of Julianus and on the instructions of the consuls, who normally take over business when there is a crisis over the succession. After they had assembled (συνελθόντες) they began to deliberate (ἐσκέπτοντο) on their course of action, while Julianus remained in the palace bewailing his present fate and begging to be allowed to abdicate from the rule and cede all his power to Severus[83].

In this passage, Julianus' loss of authority is made clear: he was now subordinate to the senate both in text and action (e.g. ἀποδειλιῶντα… ὄντα; τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ; τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ… ὄντος; ὀδυρομένου; ἱκετεύοντος). In a compelling image, the senate is shown to "deliberate" (ἐσκέπτοντο), while Julianus could only "bewail" (ὀδυρομένου) or "beg" (ἱκετεύοντος). Completely powerless, Julianus could not even abdicate on his own, having to seek the senate's authorization. The following section of the *History*, which records Julianus' death at 2.12.6-7, is similarly composed: "the senate learned" (ἔμαθεν), "they voted" (ψηφίζεται), "they sent" (ἐκπέμπουσι). About to die at the hands of the military tribune dispatched by the senate, Julianus makes his final appearance as the grammatical subject of a series of passive verbs: "Julianus was found alone and deserted by everyone and was murdered" (2.12.7: ὁ μὲν οὖν εὑρεθεὶς ἔρημός τε καὶ ὑπὸ πάντων καταλειφθείς… ἐφονεύθη). And, once again, all he could manage was to "weep shamefully" (2.12.7: αἰσχρῶς ὀλοφυρόμενος, trans. mod.)[84]. Barely supported by the people and army, Julianus was finally abandoned by the senate, who seemed to have sided with him mostly on the basis of propriety, and by his personal guard[85].

In the end, Julianus' death, as presented in the *History*, reflected in all aspects his coming to power and his short rule. In fact, as Severus was now emperor both in name and in deed, Julianus' death even appears, in Herodian's story, rather trivial: tucked away in the imperial palace, cut off from power and, more largely, civic life, Julianus was executed without ceremony[86]. Once he had relinquished effective power to the senate, had been stripped of his titles, replaced by Severus, and sentenced to death, Julianus was of no consequence anymore:

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[83] 2.12.3-5: ἡ δὲ σύγκλητος ἐψηφίσατο μὲν ταῦτα, ὁρῶντες δὲ τὸν Ἰουλιανὸν ἀποδειλιῶντα καὶ ἐν ἀπογνώσει ὄντα, τῷ Σεβήρῳ πάντες ἤδη προσετίθεντο. δύο δέ που ἢ τριῶν ἡμερῶν παραδραμουσῶν, ἐπείπερ ἤδη τὸν Σεβῆρον καὶ αὐτῇ τῇ πόλει ἐπιστησόμενον ἤκουον, καταφρονήσαντες τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ συνίασιν ἐς τὸ συνέδριον, τῶν ὑπάτων κελευσάντων, οἳ τὰ τῆς Ῥώμης διοικεῖν εἰώθασιν ὁπηνίκα ἂν τὰ τῆς βασιλείας μετέωρα ᾖ. συνελθόντες τοίνυν περὶ τῶν πρακτέων ἐσκέπτοντο, τοῦ Ἰουλιανοῦ ἔτι ὄντος ἐν τῇ βασιλείῳ αὐλῇ καὶ τὰς παρούσας ὀδυρομένου τύχας, ἱκετεύοντός τε ἐξομόσασθαι τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ παραχωρῆσαι πάσης τῆς δυναστείας τῷ Σεβήρῳ.

[84] A similar version is found in the *Historia Augusta* (*SHA*, *Did. Iul*. 8.6: *breui autem desertus est ab omnibus Iulianus et remansit in Palatio cum uno de praefectis suis Geniali et genero Repentino*). In Cass. Dio 74(73).17.5, Julianus was asking: "But what evil have I done? Whom have I killed?" (καὶ τί δεινὸν ἐποίησα; τίνα ἀπέκτεινα;).

[85] It should be noted that in Herodian's *History* the senators' decisions to proclaim Julianus public enemy and have him executed were not prompted directly by Severus, but by the fear he caused. See also Cass. Dio 74(73).17.5 and *SHA*, *Seu.* 5.9. Vict., *Caes*. 19.4 has a somewhat muddled version, in which Julianus was defeated by Severus *Syriae legatus* at the Milvian Bridge (an oft-noted confusion with the battle of 312 opposing Constantine and Maxentius; also in Oros. 7.16.6), then caught and murdered by soldiers on the outskirts of the imperial palace. The biographer does not specify by whom the soldiers had been sent (*missi*), but the context heavily implies that it was Severus. See also Ps.-Victor 19.2: *ab hoc Iulianus, in abditas Palatii balneas ductus, extenta damnatorum modo ceruice decollatur, caputque eius in rostris ponitur*.

[86] One might argue that the placement of Herodian's verdict before the actual murder could further support the triviality of Julianus' death. This appears to be the only instance in the *History* in which the obituary precedes the actual death. On Herodian's death notices more generally, see Laporte & Hekster 2021.

he was, as Herodian puts it, but "wretched, cowardly, old man, who had purchased this sorry end with his own money (*ἰδίοις χρήμασιν ὠνησάμενον*)"[87]. To be sure, Julianus' purchase of the Empire, craven but effortless, already reveals his character, but also foreshadows his conduct during the confrontation with Severus[88]. If, in Herodian's work, Julianus acts in part as a foil to Severus, the historian also uses him to embody the typical weak and cowardly emperor: neither cruel, nor particularly debauched, the way he is depicted in Dio's history or the *Historia Augusta*, but really shaped around feebleness and ineffectiveness[89]. In Herodian's *History*, Julianus made half-hearted preparations for war, but foolishly brought the fight to the streets of Rome. Clueless and overwhelmed, Julianus belatedly chose to rely on the senate, the idea to fight back well out of his mind. When Severus arrived in Rome, Julianus was confined within the palace by his own cowardice and helplessness, now abandoned by soldiers and people alike. Sentenced to death not by his opponent, but by the senators on whom he had finally depended, Julianus did not even attempt to flee or hide from his executioners; he simply suffered his fate.

3.3.2.2 Staying behind

Following the *History*'s sequence, Albinus is the last of Severus' opponents in his quest for absolute power. We might recall how Severus had first made Albinus Caesar, as he judged him a possible, but minor threat, especially in comparison with Niger. As Herodian records, Severus' plan, however, seemed to backfire: on his way back from Syria where he had successfully dealt with Niger, Severus found that Albinus had become a "nuisance for whom he had no further use" (3.5.2: *ὀχληρὸς καὶ περιττὸς αὐτῷ*). According to Herodian, the Caesar had been gradually fashioning himself as Augustus, to Severus' indignation, and was gaining considerable support within the senate. Since Severus had appointed Albinus on his own initiative, it seemed he could hardly do away with him as directly as he had with Julianus or Niger. This difficult position for Severus is recorded clearly by Herodian:

> Severus decided against an immediate, open breach with Albinus, which would stir up war against him, when he had offered no valid pretext (*μηδεμίαν εὔλογον*) for such action. The better course seemed to be to try to dispose of him, if possible, by an underhand subterfuge (*ἀποσκευάσασθαι λαθὼν καὶ ἐξαπατήσας αὐτόν*)[90].

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[87] 2.12.7: *ἄνανδρον καὶ ἄθλιον πρεσβύτην ἰδίοις χρήμασιν ὠνησάμενον οὕτω πονηρὸν τέλος.*

[88] According to Bats 2003, 290-1, "sa culpabilité reconnue le destine à un meurtre secret et à une condamnation morale." I would argue, however, that once the senate voted Severus full imperial honours and declared Julianus public enemy, Julianus becomes irrelevant to Herodian's story and that it is precisely this irrelevance which explains why his last scene in the *History* is so perfunctory.

[89] For instance, in Cass. Dio 74(73).16.5, Julianus is said to have sacrificed many young boys in hopes of learning about upcoming events; cf. also *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 7.10.

[90] 3.5.3-4: *ἅπερ πυνθανόμενος ὁ Σεβῆρος φανερὰν μὲν εὐθὺς πρὸς αὐτὸν ἔχθραν ἄρασθαι καὶ πόλεμον ἐγεῖραι πρὸς ἄνδρα μηδεμίαν εὔλογον παρεσχημένον αἰτίαν παρητήσατο· ἔδοξε δὲ αὐτῷ ἀπόπειραν ποιήσασθαι, εἰ δύναιτο ἀποσκευάσασθαι λαθὼν καὶ ἐξαπατήσας αὐτόν*. As we have seen, this tendency to lie is an integral part of Herodian's portrayal of Severus, and this might, in part, explain why, despite the emperor's efficiency and overall success, he is not cast in an entirely positive light; with [81-82; 86-88; 126; 193-4].

Through a succession of plots fomented by Severus and thwarted by Albinus, the tension between the two is shown to have escalated quickly. Although first unsuccessful in his machinations, Severus eventually managed to goad Albinus into being the one to cross the line into open war territory. Having evaded yet another of Severus' plots, Albinus elected to make preparations "against an enemy who had as good as declared himself" (3.5.8: ὡς πρὸς ὁμολογούμενον ἐχθρόν). But Severus, holding the higher ground, and also being the wilier of the two, was able to twist Albinus' response into a leading offensive. In a speech to the army, Severus painted his Caesar as an ungrateful traitor and a power-hungry usurper, whom they needed to punish without delay. Convinced by Severus' spin, the soldiers easily declared Albinus public enemy (3.6.1-8)[91].

While Albinus is said to have been "terrified" (3.7.1: μεγάλην ταραχήν) by the news, he would then make swift preparations for Severus' arrival. Making his way from Britain to Gaul, Albinus sent for money and supplies from the neighbouring provinces, though only with partial success. Noticeably, Herodian's story of this war, once it becomes strictly military, is reduced to its conclusion, at Lyon. Everything else before that is summarized as "a number of light-armed skirmishes at various places" (3.7.2: τινες ἀκροβολισμοὶ καθ' ἕτερα χωρία) along Severus' march into Gaul. Dio, by contrast, recounts the covert operations led by a certain Numerianus: he was a teacher who, on his own initiative, impersonated a Roman senator charged with mustering an army for Severus in Gaul and his action led to a heavy blow to Albinus' calvary and a vast amount of money raised in Severus' interest. Dio also records Albinus' important victory over Lupus, one of Severus' generals (Cass. Dio 76(75).5-6). The *Historia Augusta* alludes to a number of battles between Albinus' and Severus' generals (*SHA*, *Seu.* 10.7; *Alb.* 8.4-9.1) and credits Severus with a significant first victory at Tinurtium (modern Tournus, France), "after many operations had been carried on in Gaul with varying success" (*SHA*, *Seu.* 11.1: *multis interim uarie gestis in Gallia*). Herodian, however, opted to focus on a single battle, which gathers in one story several of the narrative strategies that were spread out within his detailed account of the many battles between Niger and Severus before Issos. As a result, Herodian's story of the final battle between Albinus and Severus reflects rather poorly on both parties, whether victor or loser.

According to the historian, Albinus had at his command large, loyal, and able troops. He also had the senate's favour, owing mostly, at least in Herodian's view, to the man's wealth and social status (cf. 2.15.1). Despite these significant assets, Albinus was unwilling to risk his personal safety and, as he sent out his army to the battlefield, chose the most secure place for himself: the city of Lyon, "where Albinus had taken refuge and remained" (3.7.2: ἐν ᾗ

[91] Bats 2003, 282-3, n. 7: "Le texte d'Hérodien (3, 6, 8) semble attribuer un rôle actif aux soldats rassemblés, non pas tant dans la prise de décision qui relève du seul prince, que dans la diffusion de la sanction, puisque le verbe (*ἀναγορεύειν*) signifie 'proclamer officiellement'". Note too the absence of senatorial involvement in Severus' scheming, which may point to the emperor's lack of regard for politics, but also the senate's preference for Albinus; cf. *SHA*, *Alb.* 9.1, with Rantala 2016, 168-70 (viewing Albinus' recourse to *clementia* in his propaganda as "one indication of goodwill between him and the Senate", especially considering the glaring absence of it in Severus' official messaging).

κατακλείσας ἑαυτὸν ὁ Ἀλβῖνος ἔμενε)[92]. And yet, even with one party missing its leader, the ensuing battle is shown as a dragged-out affair, "in which the fortune of victory for a long time remained evenly in the balance for both sides"[93]. As mentioned above, the phrase is somewhat formulaic and Herodian's overview of the battle could even be generic, similar to many other fights recorded in the *History* (and elsewhere, for that matter). But what is compelling in this particular account is how Herodian presents Severus' involvement in the battle. Though both sides are described as "excellent armies" (3.7.2: γενναίων στρατῶν), difficult to put to flight, Herodian remarks that "in the sector where Severus and his personal troop were stationed, Albinus' battle-line was far stronger (πολύ τι ὑπερέσχεν)"[94]. This image of equal forces at play comforts the impression of Albinus' cowardice, who is implied to have had a very good chance at winning against Severus.

When Albinus' troops overpowered Severus' division, Herodian reports that in the scuffle Severus was thrown off (3.7.3: ἐκπεσεῖν) his horse while he was trying to retreat (φυγεῖν). According to the historian, Severus even got rid of his imperial cloak in order to pass unnoticed by enemy troops (3.7.3: λαθεῖν)[95]. This incident, certainly colourful and dramatic, serves to undermine Severus' actual competence on the battlefield and raises questions about his conduct in (apparent) defeat, especially with the story of Niger's 'good' flight still fresh in mind. In a similar way to how he framed Severus' victory at Cyzicus over Niger, Herodian finally attributes this victory in Lyon to the intervention of another party. According to the historian, Laetus, one of Severus' generals, arrived with reinforcements just when it seemed it would be the end for Severus' army (3.7.3-5)[96]. Laetus' appearance on the battlefield, as Herodian shows, secured the win for Severus and Albinus' army was routed all the way into Lugdunum[97]. There Severus' troops, having ransacked and set ablaze the city, found, captured,

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[92] But compare with Cass. Dio 76(75).6.2: "and both leaders were present in the conflict, since it was a life-and-death struggle between them, though Severus had not previously been present at any other battle" (παρῆσαν δὲ καὶ ἀμφότεροι τῷ πολέμῳ ἅτε περὶ ψυχῆς θέοντες, καίτοι τοῦ Σεουήρου μηδεμιᾷ πω μάχῃ ἑτέρᾳ παραγεγονότος). In *SHA*, *Alb*. 9.3, Albinus is also implied to have present on the battlefield (*nam cum ultimo proelio commissum esset… Albinus fugit et*).

[93] 3.7.2: ἐπὶ πλεῖστον μὲν ἰσόρροπος ἔμενεν ἑκατέροις τῆς νίκης ἡ τύχη.

[94] 3.7.3: πολύ τι ὑπερέσχεν ἡ φάλαγξ τοῦ Ἀλβίνου στρατοῦ, καθ' ὃ μέρος τέτακτο ὁ Σεβῆρος καὶ ὁ σὺν αὐτῷ στρατός. Interestingly, Herodian introduces this statement, said to be found in contemporary historians, by insisting that theirs was "an unbiased report aimed at the truth" (οὐ πρὸς χάριν ἀλλὰ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν λέγοντες).

[95] Herodian later writes that Severus even had to be put back on his horse by his soldiers once the battle picked up again with Laetus' arrival (3.7.5). In Cass. Dio 76(75).6, we read instead that Severus took off his mantle because it made it easier to pursue his fleeing troops at sword point; see Ward 2011, 165-9. In the *Historia Augusta*, this incident is integrated in the battle at Tinurtium, whereas Lyon is barely mentioned; see *SHA*, *Seu*. 11. See below on a similar strategy for Macrinus, [136-7]; with [193-6], for a more general discussion on 'costume changes' and the symbolic force of the imperial cloak.

[96] Herodian suggests that Laetus came in later than was expected since he was hoping to make his own bid for the emperorship and "only appeared when he was informed that Severus had fallen" (3.7.4: τότε ἐπιφανῆναι ὅτε ἔμαθε τὸν Σεβῆρον πεπτωκότα). On the identity of this character, see Whittaker 1969-70, n. 5 *ad* 3.7.3 for an overview of the possible matches.

[97] Note how Laetus "appeared" (3.7.3: ἐπιφανῆναι): this apparition might be likened to the theatrical device of the *deus ex machina*, though its salutary aspect for Severus was, admittedly, involuntary and, in fact, quite the opposite of Laetus' pursuit. More generally on Herodian's recourse to theatrical strategies, see chapter 4.

and beheaded Albinus, who had remained in Lyon (3.7.6-7). Albinus' head was first brought to Severus, then sent to Rome, "with orders that it should [be] publicly displayed on a pole"[98].

Although Herodian's stories of Niger's and Albinus' deaths follow a similar pattern, most of the mitigating elements inserted in Niger's sequence are not found in that of Albinus. Albinus might have been a serious contender to the throne, but the linear structure of the *History*, which introduces Albinus after Severus, already lessens his importance. In accordance with Herodian's streamlining strategy, Albinus' sequence is a much simpler version of Niger's final episode and even seems embedded into Severus' own story, instead of being a more separate unit. Compared to Niger and Severus' war, detailed battles throughout Asia minor become a brief mention of 'skirmishes' from Rome to Lyon. Unlike the halfway successful escape of the Syrian forces, the rout of Albinus' troops is straightforward and definitive. Albinus' flight, like his involvement in the actual battle, is partial at best: once Severus' army brought down Lyon, Albinus was finished. As such, his ensuing capture and execution are quite uneventful, especially in comparison with other accounts where Albinus either committed suicide or was dragged half-alive before Severus who personally beheaded him[99]. Albinus himself is described, in the *History*, as a mere "nuisance" (ὀχληρός) for Severus, who had also deemed Niger the most threatening of the two[100]. Even though Albinus' removal was essential for Severus "to secure the transfer of the Entire Roman empire to himself and his sons" [101], the whole affair is painted as a fairly easy one, all things considered, if tricky to properly initiate. Accordingly, Albinus' death is, in Herodian's story, ultimately unremarkable, so unlike his birth and rank, but befitting his character and comportment. This is summarized in Herodian's final statement about him: "so Albinus met his end after a brief but disastrous taste of power"[102].

3.3.3 The ugly

Macrinus' death, in Herodian's story, can be divided into three main phases: the revolt, the battle, the flight. For the historian, the displeasure of the army with their new emperor appears as the foundation for the coming transition. As Herodian consistently depicts the army as a powerful, ever-growing threat to the political order, it acts here as the catalyst for

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[98] 3.8.1: καὶ πέμψας τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ Ἀλβίνου δημοσίᾳ ἀνασταυρωθῆναι κελεύει.

[99] In Cass. Dio 75(74).7.3, Albinus took part in the battle, was defeated, fled, hid himself, until he was encircled by Severus' troops. He then killed himself. According to the *Historia Augusta*, Albinus was brought to Severus half alive, either having stabbed himself or been stabbed by a slave; cf. *SHA*, *Alb.* 9.3-4; *Seu*. 11.6-9). The account of the *Vita Seueri* is particularly concerned with Severus' cruel treatment of Albinus' corpse. Interestingly, this ruthlessness shown by Severus to Albinus post-mortem is, in Herodian's *History*, turned instead against the city, which may well foreshadow Severus' eventual troubles in civic and familial matters.

[100] Conversely, see Cass. Dio 74(73).15.2: "as for Niger… he had no hopes for him" (τὸν γὰρ δὴ Νίγρον… γεγονέναι ἀπέγνω).

[101] 3.7.1: πᾶσαν τὴν ἀρχὴν Ῥωμαίων ἐς ἑαυτὸν καὶ τοὺς παῖδας μεταγαγεῖν καὶ βεβαιώσασθαι ἠθέλησε.

[102] 3.7.8: τέλει μὲν δὴ τοιούτῳ ὁ Ἀλβῖνος ἐχρήσατο, πρὸς ὀλίγον ἀπολαύσας ὀλεθρίου τιμῆς. Another way to read this passage would be to consider the 'fatality' of this honour as an inherent quality, at least in this context of civil war. Herodian uses the same phrase to qualify the purple and processional fire given to Quartinus, who was been proclaimed emperor against his will by the Osrhoenian archers who were attempting to move against Maximinus (7.1.9).

Macrinus' fall: "it was obviously inevitable that Macrinus would lose the empire, and his life too, whenever chance provided a small, trivial excuse (*μικρὰν καὶ εὐτελῆ πρόφασιν*) for the soldiers to have their way"[103]. It should be noted that, while Macrinus had a heavy hand in Caracalla's assassination, he was not, as Herodian reports, suspected of any foul play at the time (cf. 4.13.7). Though the soldiers' dissatisfaction with Macrinus was certainly connected with their loss of Caracalla, it seems that, at least in Herodian's view, their resentment did not emerge out of a desire to avenge their favoured emperor. Rather, the soldiers are said to have been displeased with the fact that, in terms of character, Macrinus was the complete opposite of Caracalla: "as they recalled Antoninus' disciplined military habits in comparison, they censured Macrinus' extravagance"[104]. Interestingly, the soldiers' main issue with Macrinus is depicted in relation to general character and lifestyle, not strictly the emperor's military approach[105].

Already unpopular with the army, Macrinus also erred, according to Herodian, in "not disbanding his army at once and posting every man home, and in not making for Rome himself where he was wanted and the people were continually calling for him in noisy demonstrations"[106]. Like Niger before him, Macrinus chose instead to loiter in Antioch, feeling secure enough in his claim to the emperorship to delay, if not forego entirely, a trip to Rome. Macrinus did however send a letter to the senators after his proclamation, but this measure, as Herodian suggests, could only ever be temporary. Although confirmed *in absentia* by the senate, the new emperor would still need to appear in the capital, not least since his current support was tenuous at best. According to Herodian, the senators welcomed Macrinus mostly as a by-product of their joy of finally being free of Caracalla. Similarly, once settled in Antioch and removed from an urgent martial context, Macrinus quickly lost any support he had previously gained, 'by necessity', within the army. As Herodian shows, Macrinus' preference for an easy life and his extravagant tastes in food, clothes, and pastimes could only aggravate the soldiers' dislike of him.

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[103] 5.3.1: *ἐχρῆν δὲ ἄρα Μακρῖνον ἐνιαυτοῦ μόνου τῇ βασιλείᾳ ἐντρυφήσαντα ἅμα τῷ βίῳ καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν καταλῦσαι, μικρὰν καὶ εὐτελῆ πρόφασιν τοῖς στρατιώταις ἐς ἃ ἐβούλοντο τῆς τύχης παρασχούσης*; cf. 5.2.6: "in this state of unrest, and bitterly criticizing him among themselves, they longed to find a slight excuse for getting rid of the cause of their trouble" (*ἀφηνιάζοντες ἤδη πρὸς ἀλλήλους αὐτὸν κακῶς ἠγόρευον, προφάσεώς τε ὀλίγης λαβέσθαι εὔχοντο ἐς τὸ ἀποσκευάσασθαι τὸ λυποῦν*).

[104] 5.2.5: *παραβάλλοντες δὲ τὴν μνήμην τῆς Ἀντωνίνου διαίτης ἐπιστραφείσης τε καὶ στρατιωτικῆς γενομένης, κατεγίνωσκον τῆς Μακρίνου πολυτελείας.*

[105] To end the long war against the Parthians that he had 'inherited' from Caracalla, Macrinus informed Artabanus of the latest news, knowing that the king only persisted in fighting because he thought Caracalla was still alive. Macrinus also offered friendship and promised to compensate the money lost (4.15.6-8). Although such tactics are elsewhere shown to be frowned upon by the army (especially Alexander's two campaigns), in this case, Herodian reports that the soldiers had grown battle-weary since the start of Caracalla's expeditions (4.11.8: *ἤδη… κεκμηκότων*) and that they took up arms against the Parthians merely out of necessity (4.14.8: *τὴν ἀνάγκην τοῦ πράγματος ὁρῶντες*). Compare with Cass. Dio 79(78).27.1-3, in which Macrinus sought peace with Artabanus through extravagant gifts and large sums of money because of his natural cowardice and the army's lack of discipline; following a censored report to the senate, he was awarded the title of Parthicus, which he declined out of shame; see Scott 2018a, 80-81.

[106] 5.2.3: *τοσοῦτον δὲ ἥμαρτεν ὅσον μὴ διέλυσεν εὐθέως τὰ στρατόπεδα καὶ ἑκάστους ἐς τὰ ἑαυτῶν ἀπέπεμψεν, αὐτός τε ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ποθοῦσαν ἐπείχθη, τοῦ δήμου ἑκάστοτε καλοῦντος μεγάλαις βοαῖς* […].

Still, in the *History*, Macrinus' demise was not caused directly by a military revolt, but followed from Julia Maesa's action, who used the army's disgruntlement to her advantage and in her own interest. Exiled in Phoenicia by Macrinus, Maesa is said to have longed to return to her former imperial life, which led her to put all her resources toward the reinstatement of her family. For the army, any alternative seemed preferable to Macrinus. As Herodian reports, an important part of the troops defected to Maesa's side and brokered a deal with her to bring her family in the military camp near Emesa. Informed of this new situation, "Macrinus discounted the affair as child's play and carried on with his usual life of leisure, personally remaining at home"[107]. Less out of cowardice than indifference, Macrinus tasked one of his prefects, a certain Julianus, to deal with the revolt, providing him "with a force he thought was enough to wipe out the rebels easily"[108]. However, Julianus was betrayed by his own troops who, according to Herodian, were led to believe that Heliogabalus truly was Caracalla's natural heir. Herodian again alludes to the flimsiness of the rumours and the eagerness of the soldiers to find a replacement for Macrinus: they gladly saw in Heliogabalus Caracalla's son "since this was what they wanted to see" (5.4.4: βλέπειν γὰρ οὕτως ἤθελον). Julianus was decapitated, and his head sent back to Macrinus.

As Herodian recounts, Maesa's troops substantially gained in numbers, now able to sustain both a siege and a pitched battle. To set up the upcoming fight between Macrinus and Heliogabalus, Herodian makes a point to highlight the latter's ever-growing ranks: "every day the number of deserters increased the total force, even though they came in small groups"[109]. Faced with this first defeat, Macrinus then roused himself and gathered "all the army he had" (5.4.5: πάντα ὃν εἶχε στρατόν, trans. mod.) to march against Heliogabalus. According to Herodian, Macrinus had planned to besiege the rival camp, but Heliogabalus' troops were so keen to face him that they left to meet him out in the field. Here Herodian marks a stark contrast between the opposing forces: against Heliogabalus' enthusiastic army, Macrinus' troops fought with "little energy" (5.4.6: ῥᾳθυμότερον)[110]. Not to mention, more of Macrinus' soldiers continued to defect to the other side as the battle unfolded. Compared to many other battles in the *History*, said to have pitted equal forces against each other, this fight seemed to have been settled from the outset. For Herodian, Macrinus' failure to act (going to Rome, taking Maesa's enterprise seriously) apparently sealed his fate: even though the emperor eventually came to take action, it was already too late. Seeing his chances of victory quickly dwindle, "Macrinus was afraid that, abandoned by all troops, he would be taken prisoner and badly molested"[111]. With this bleak realization, Macrinus decided to run away.

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[107] 5.4.2: ὁ δὲ Μακρῖνος καταφρονῶν τοῦ πράγματος ὡς παιδαριώδους, χρώμενός τε τῇ συνήθει ῥᾳθυμίᾳ, αὐτὸς μὲν οἴκοι μένει. But see Cass. Dio 79(78).34.4 who credits more leadership to Macrinus. Whittaker 1969-70, n. 1 *ad* 5.4.2: "A good example of the way in which the stereotype of the unsuccessful emperor distorts the truth."

[108] 5.4.2: δύναμιν δοὺς ὅσην ᾤετο ῥᾷστα ἐκπορθήσειν τοὺς ἀφεστῶτας.

[109] 5.4.4: ἔτι τε καὶ τῶν αὐτομόλων τὸ πλῆθος ἑκάστοτε, εἰ καὶ κατ' ὀλίγους προσιόν, τὴν δύναμιν ηὔξησεν.

[110] Contrast with Cass. Dio 79(78).38.3-4. According to Herodian, the fear of retaliation in the event of a defeat pushed Heliogabalus' soldiers to give their all (5.4.6: δεδιότες, εἰ ἡττηθεῖεν, τὴν ἐφ' οἷς ἔδρασαν τιμωρίαν ἀναδέξασθαι).

[111] 5.4.7: φοβηθείς τε μὴ παντάπασι γυμνωθεὶς τῆς δυνάμεως αἰχμάλωτός τε ληφθεὶς αἰσχίστως ὑβρισθείη.

Masquerade!

To tell the story of how Macrinus tried to escape, Herodian uses certain elements from both Niger's and Albinus' flights. Like Niger but unlike Albinus, Macrinus chose to confront his opponent and was himself present on the battlefield. In spite of his troops having already begun to defect, Macrinus mustered his army and prepared to march against Heliogabalus (5.4.5). With this initial decision, Macrinus shares a few positive similarities with Niger, who is shaped, in Herodian's *History*, as the 'good' defeated general. However, Macrinus is soon shown to give in to his personal fears, which led him to abandon his own army. Herodian highlights the emperor's cowardice through several elements of covertness inserted in the story: Macrinus decided to flee not only "while the battle still continued" (5.4.7: ἔτι τῆς μάχης συνεστώσης), but also "towards evening" (ἑσπέρας ἤδη προσιούσης)[112]. Even worse, Macrinus then "flung off his cloak and the various imperial insignia he had round him, cut off his beard to avoid recognition (ὡς μὴ γνωρίζοιτο) and assumed the clothes of an ordinary traveller, keeping his head covered at all time"[113]. As seen above, Severus, thinking he was about to lose against Albinus' forces, is said to have done much the same at 3.7.3[114]. The image, in Macrinus' case, is striking since Herodian had previously painted him as a vain man, with luxurious tastes in clothing and a distinct care for appearances (e.g. 4.12.3; 5.2.3)[115]. Yet to make sure he could slip out unseen, Macrinus did not hesitate to rid himself of his tokens of emperorship, even swapping them for an ordinary outfit. Macrinus' spontaneous reaction to relinquish imperial marks in order to save his own skin suggests how weak and artificial his power truly was. More compelling even is Macrinus' haste to shave off his well-kept beard, which he wore, so Herodian writes, with a view to modelling himself after Marcus (5.2.3). But in this moment of crisis, both Macrinus' authority and his claims of virtue are easily revealed to have rested solely upon physical attributes, easy to discard and only superficially significant[116].

If, in Herodian's story, Macrinus was quick to shed his fancy clothes, the emperor however did not leave all marks of power behind. Herodian mentions that Macrinus fled "with a few centurions who he believed were completely trustworthy"[117]. For one thing, the

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[112] The ongoing aspect of the battle is mentioned again at 5.4.8 (ὁ μὲν οὖν ἔφυγεν, ὡς εἴρηται). Note for instance the different sequence in Zosim. 1.10.3 (τῷ παντὶ Μακρῖνος ἐλαττωθεὶς και φυγῇ).

[113] 5.4.7: ἀπορρίψας τὸ χλαμύδιον καὶ εἴ τι σχῆμα βασιλικὸν περιέκειτο… τὸ γένειον ἀποκειράμενος, ὡς μὴ γνωρίζοιτο, ἐσθῆτά τε ὁδοιπορικὴν λαβὼν καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀεὶ σκέπων, trans. mod.

[114] On this passage, see above, [131-2]; with [193-6], more generally on the symbolic value of the imperial costume.

[115] On (the literary implications of) luxury clothing in Herodian's work, see Bérenger 2020, with Freyburger-Galland 1993 on similar sartorial concerns in Dio's *Roman History* (though her survey does not go beyond Nero's rule), and Molinier Arbo 2003 and Harlow 2005 for the *Historia Augusta*.

[116] Cf. 5.2.4: "these were supposedly imitations of Marcus' characteristics, but the resemblance did not extend to the rest of his life" (ἐζήλου δὲ ταῦτα ὡς δὴ Μάρκου ἐπιτηδεύματα, τὸν δὲ λοιπὸν βίον οὐκ ἐμιμήσατο). Gleason 2011, 68 comments: "Herodian presents Macrinus as constructing an imperial identity for himself out of externals, trying to make himself appear both different from Caracalla and adequate to an idealized vision of the imperial role."

[117] 5.4.7: σὺν ὀλίγοις ἑκατοντάρχαις, οὓς πιστοτάτους ᾤετο; repeated at 5.4.8. Cass. Dio 79(78).39.6 notes, persistently, the presence of numerous centurions, albeit from the opposite side: Macrinus was caught by Aurelius Celsus in Chalcedon and killed by Marcianus Taurus or other centurions (79(78).40.2; 40.5), while

conspicuousness of these companions worked against Macrinus' attempt to flee unnoticed. More importantly, we have to remember that Macrinus fled mid-fight, abandoning what was left of his army. This implies that, in doing so, Macrinus also led his centurions to copy his questionable actions, causing them too to abandon the soldiers under their command[118]. In this ironic mirroring of the 'contagious' virtues of the good ruler, Macrinus' cowardice would spread to his generals and this would in turn erode the feelings of unity and community so important to the Roman military. Herodian explains clearly what were the implications of this departure: unable to see their emperor, the praetorians, who were at that point all that was left of Macrinus' forces, were at a complete loss (5.4.9: διηπόρουν), since they did not know what had happened to him and were generally uncertain as to what to do next. Hesitant to fight for an absent leader (5.4.9: ὑπὲρ τοῦ μὴ παρόντος), regardless of the cause of his disappearance, the soldiers were also "ashamed" (ᾐδοῦντο) to capitulate, lest they be captured as prisoners of war[119]. By fleeing mid-fight with his centurions, Macrinus would actually forsake any real chance he might have had at winning against Heliogabalus. When Macrinus decided to escape, his praetorians had at first continued to fight (5.4.8: ἐμάχοντο): according to Herodian, these, "very tall, picked soldiers" (μέγιστοί τε καὶ ἐπίλεκτοι) would even resist "magnificently" (γενναίως) against Heliogabalus' army. They would, as Herodian records (5.4.10), only pass to that emperor's side when their own ruler had abandoned them, finally convinced by Heliogabalus' promises of amnesty and employment.

Picking up on previous elements in his portrayal of Macrinus, Herodian's account of the emperor's flight shows obvious contrasts with his prior behaviour. For instance, though Macrinus had tasked a general to deal with Heliogabalus in his stead, he treated this revolt with contempt and chose to remain home, wasting his time in games. In his flight, he now showed great tenacity, even "journeying night and day" (5.4.8: νύκτωρ τε καὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν ὡδοιπόρει). Whereas Macrinus' troops, as Herodian reports, had listlessly marched to combat against the Syrian army, the centurions who fled with him are said to have "energetically urged on" (5.4.8: μεγάλῃ σπουδῇ… ἐπειγόντων), as if they were charged with an "important mission" (τινα σπουδαῖα). Not quite a common traveller, despite the costume he had taken, Macrinus is also implied to have been carried about (5.4.8: τὰ ὀχήματα) during this wild escape[120]. Looking at previous imperial figures, the image is reminiscent namely of Vitellius' flight, who was also, just like Macrinus, carried away to safety. According to Suetonius, Vitellius was "smuggled away into a sedan chair" (Suet., *Vitell.* 16: *abstrusus gestatoria sella*,

Diadumenianus had already been captured by Claudius Pollio as he was making his way through Zeugma (79(78).40.1).

[118] Rosenstein 1990, 103, who quotes Polyb. 6.24 (about the selection and duties of centurions, which is part of a long passage on the Roman military system); also Campbell 1984, 101-9 and 2002, 36-46 ('Morale').

[119] See Campbell 2002, 41-42: "Ancient writers seemingly endorse the accepted truism that the presence of a supreme commander or king or emperor on the battlefield brings special encouragement to the troops." (quote at 41)

[120] *LSJ*, s.v. ὄχημα, A: "anything that bears or support", used alone for vehicles, and sometimes for "animals that are ridden", though usually in combination with that animal's name; the term, in this particular passage, and more generally in Herodian's work, is used to designate a 'chariot' or a 'wagon' (cf. 2.1.2; 3.12.7; 4.7.6; 7.3.4; 7.8.10; 8.1.2; 8.5.5).

trans. mod.)[121]. The emperor is said to have clung to a luxurious lifestyle right until the end, even keeping with him "a baker and a cook" (Suet., *Vitell.* 16: *pistore et coco*) and donning "a girdle filled with gold pieces" (*zona… aureorum plena*). As Herodian shows, Macrinus, with his very survival at stake, similarly failed to forsake a life of comfort and rid himself entirely of symbols of power.

Herodian describes at length Macrinus' mad dash across Asia minor: after fleeing from battle, Macrinus reached Bithynia, whence he set sail for Byzantium. With this move, Macrinus is reported to have hoped to reach Rome, where he thought to have significant popular support, though this claim is not substantiated elsewhere in the *History* (5.4.11)[122]. But Macrinus' flight, as it appears in the *History*, was ultimately checked by a stroke of bad luck: when Macrinus "had practically reached (*ἤδη… προσπελάζοντα*) Byzantium, he met a contrary wind which blew him back to his fate (*τιμωρίαν*)"[123]. According to Herodian, Macrinus, who had been chased relentlessly by Heliogabalus' men, was finally found hiding in a suburb of Chalcedon, captured, and decapitated. In the end, not even Macrinus' newfound energy could mitigate his failure and his conduct in defeat; and, in fact, his determination may well have played against him. If, at first, his nonstop journey had put him "well in advance" (5.4.10: *πολὺ προκεχωρηκότα*) of his pursuers, Macrinus would soon fall "painfully sick (*νοσῶν χαλεπώτατα*) and shattered (*συντετριμμένος*) by the continuous travelling"[124]. One might recognize here the recurring theme of illness and exhaustion in a dying emperor, even set in a somewhat similar phrasing as what had been written for Marcus (1.3.1) and Severus (3.15.1) in their own final scenes[125]. But unlike Marcus or Severus, Macrinus took ill not from a long life of toil, but from running for his life at the end of a short rule of idleness. Macrinus' perseverance is not, for Herodian, a way to lessen his failure, rather the historian shapes the narrative so as to draw out the absurdity of the whole affair[126]. In Herodian's view, Macrinus' bad decisions were

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[121] Cf. Cass. Dio 64(65).20.1-2: "Then Vitellius in his fear put on a ragged and filthy tunic and concealed himself in a dark room where dogs were kept, intending to escape during the night to Tarracina and join his brother. But the soldiers sought and found him; for naturally he could not go entirely unrecognized very long after having been emperor" (*ὁ Οὐιτέλλιος φοβηθεὶς χιτωνίσκον τε ῥακώδη καὶ ῥυπαρὸν ἐνέδυ, καὶ ἐς οἴκημα σκοτεινόν, ἐν ᾧ ἐτρέφοντο κύνες, ἐκρύφθη, γνώμην ἔχων τῆς νυκτὸς ἐς τὴν Ταρρακῖναν πρὸς τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἀποδρᾶναι. καὶ αὐτὸν ἀναζητήσαντες οἱ στρατιῶται καὶ ἐξευρόντες (οὐ γάρ που καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ λαθεῖν ἀκριβῶς ἐδύνατο ἅτε αὐτοκράτωρ γεγονώς…)*. Caught, Vitellius was dragged back to Rome, where he was tortured and finally executed. Scheid 1984, 187-8 reads this episode as the "dernier excès d'une fête dévoyée, d'un carnaval monstreux", suggesting a parallel with the Saturnalia (even naming him the "Saturnalicus princeps" at 181).

[122] Dio reports a similar intention, even commenting on its likely success: "and if he had escaped thither, he would certainly have accomplished something" (Cass. Dio 79(78).39.4: *καὶ εἴπερ ἐπεφεύγει, πάντως ἄν τι κατείργαστο*).

[123] 5.4.11: *ἤδη τε τῷ Βυζαντίῳ προσπελάζοντα, φασὶν ἀντιπνοίᾳ χρήσασθαι, ἐπανάγοντος αὐτὸν τοῦ πνεύματος ἐς τὴν τιμωρίαν*. Significantly, Herodian had begun his story of Macrinus' demise by stating how inevitable it had been (5.3.1: *τῆς τύχης παρασχούσης*).

[124] 5.4.11: *νοσῶν χαλεπώτατα ὑπό τε τῆς συνεχοῦς ὁδοιπορίας συντετριμμένος*, trans. mod.

[125] On Marcus, cf. above, [91-94]; on Severus, [103-6].

[126] In Cass. Dio 79(78).39-40 (with a strange repetition at 40.4-5), Macrinus was fully defeated, sent his son to Artabanus while heading himself to Antioch; having arrived in the city as if he had won, he then fled during the night, on horseback, had shaven and taken on a disguise; he arrived at Aegae in Cilicia with a few men, posed as a soldier, and made plans to travel through Cappadocia, Galatia, and Bithynia, all the way to Eribolon, from where he would leave for Rome. Captured as a simple criminal in Chalcedon, he was taken

bound to catch up to him: whereas Macrinus chose against going to Rome after coming to power, he was now captured when he had finally set course for the capital[127]. For Herodian, then, Macrinus failed due to a combination of poor judgement and ill luck (5.4.12: καὶ γνώμῃ καὶ τύχῃ)[128].

3.3.4. The runaway emperor

All four of these losing parties share, in Herodian's work, significant attributes: procrastination, cowardice, and to some extent, military inability. In the *History*, these four defeated emperors are also explicitly made to confront similar situations, in which they each took different courses of action. The first three belong to the same series of events, losing to the same enemy, and, as such, present somewhat expected similarities, both in sequence and outcome. In Herodian's work, Macrinus' death, while it took place some twenty years later, is also processed through a similar narrative pattern[129]. As we have seen in this section, each (non-)flight scene illustrates a different conduct in defeat: both Julianus and Albinus chose not to fight, Macrinus fought, but fled mid-battle, and Niger fought to the end and only fled then. If these emperors came to a similar end (all four were executed and their rivals were confirmed as the next emperor), their choices lead to diverging verdicts on Herodian's part about the loser's character.

While these four cases in Herodian's work certainly resonate with each other, offering a range of interpretations of the same theme, that figure is also found throughout ancient literature, not least because wars have been a consistent topic of interest for historians, biographers, and poets alike. It also makes sense, since the story of a ruler's death is a privileged moment of characterization, that the conduct of a defeated emperor should carry significant elements in its portrayal. In addition to the explicit mention of Dareios made by Herodian in the Issos episode[130], or the story of Vitellius I have cited just above, another productive (and famous) example in earlier literature is Nero. Nero's flight, the story of which

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back through Cappadocia, where, upon learning of his son's arrest, he threw himself out of his carriage only to injure himself mildly. Macrinus was finally sentenced to death on the outskirts of Antioch, where his corpse remained until Heliogabalus would come to brag over it. Note the similarities between Dio's and Herodian's accounts (Macrinus' disguise and shaving, or his convoluted flight across Asia minor), but most importantly the differences: in Dio's account, Macrinus fled after the battle, rode himself, passed off successfully as a common man, and was turned back on his course by soldiers. See Gleason 2011, 73-74, who views Macrinus' flight in Dio's work as a "usurpation in reverse" (at 73), through which he is "reduced at last to the zero-grade of personal identity, a severed head." (at 74) *SHA*, *Macr*. 10.3 features a similar, but simpler version: the defeated Macrinus fled with companions and his son, and was killed in a Bithynian village, while his head was sent to Heliogabalus. A complete defeat is also recorded in Zosim. 1.10.3: τῷ παντὶ Μακρῖνος ἐλαττωθείς.

[127] 5.4.11: τέλει τε ἐχρήσατο αἰσχρῷ ὕστερον θελήσας ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἀνελθεῖν, δέον ἐν ἀρχῇ τοῦτο ποιῆσαι.

[128] By contrast, once Heliogabalus was proclaimed emperor by the whole army, he hurried to Rome, cf. 5.5.1, with below, [219], on the true motivations behind that decision.

[129] Chrysanthou 2020, 648-9 notes the "especially suggestive" textual similarities between Herodian's stories of Niger's and Macrinus' deaths: these present "Macrinus as an emperor who conforms to and continues a pattern of behaviour that was to Niger's disadvantage and now brings Macrinus inexorably to his fall." (quote at 649)

[130] Cf. above, section 3.2, with [122, n. 51].

is told in detail by Suetonius and Cassius Dio[131], also features several of the narrative elements I have underlined in the four examples above: means of escape, companions, clothing/disguise, destination and hiding place. Nero, when it appeared that everybody had either fled or abandoned him in favour of newcomer Galba[132], decided to run away to Phaon's villa, where he hoped to hide and figure out how to proceed next:

> […] just as he was, barefooted and in his tunic, he put on a faded cloak (*obsoleti coloris*), covered his head, and holding a handkerchief before his face, mounted a horse with only (*solis*) four attendants, one of whom was Sporus (Suet., *Nero* 48.1-2)[133].

> Accordingly he [i.e. Nero] put on shabby (φαύλην) clothing, mounted a horse no better (οὐδὲν βελτίονα) than his attire, and with his head covered he rode while it was yet night towards an estate of Phaon, an imperial freedman, in company with Phaon himself, Epaphroditus and Sporus (Cass. Dio 63.27.3)[134].

Both authors not only mention that Nero fled Rome, but also underscore key elements that create, just like in Herodian's flight stories, a certain coherent image meant to be their final take on the emperor. These notes on Nero's decision to flee, his disguise, his company, his means of travel, and his destination all work together to show how much the emperor was at his wit's end. According to Dio, the senate had in fact already pronounced him as public enemy (63.27.2[b])[135]. In both stories, even aspects that may have otherwise been positive are used as evidence that Nero was quickly running out of options: for instance, his small escort of imperial freedmen is not explained as a tactical decision, but implied to be the result of everyone else having turned their backs on him, including the praetorians.

According to Suetonius, once Nero arrived at Phaon's villa, the emperor was forced further into ordinary life: his cloak was "torn" (*diuolsa*), he went in "on all fours" (*quadripes*), he laid down on "a common mattress" (*modica culcita*), covered by an "old cloak" (*uetere pallio*), he was only offered "coarse bread" (*panem… sordidum*) and "lukewarm water"

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[131] Other mentions of Nero's flight in: Ps.-Sen., *Oct.* 619-20 (*turpem fugam*); Plut., *Galba* 2.1; 7.2; 14.2; Tac., *Hist.* 3.68 (*nox et ignotum rus fugam Neronis absconderant*); Vict., *Caes.* 5.16 (*desertus undique nisi ab spadone… semet ictu transegit*); Ps.-Vict. 5.7 (*egressus Vrbe*); Eutrop. 7.15 (*e palacio fugit et in suburbano liberti sui… se interfecit*); Oros. 7.713 (*et ignominiosissime fugiens, ad quartum ab urbe lapidem sese ipse interfecit*). As we now know them, Tacitus' *Annals* end abruptly on a series of deaths during the last years of Nero's reign, but before the emperor's death.

[132] Suet., *Nero* 48.2; 48.3 (*nec amicum habeo nec inimicum?*); Cass. Dio 63.27.2 (ὑπὸ πάντων δὲ ὁμοίως ἐγκαταλειφθεὶς); 63.27.3 (καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν σωματοφυλάκων ἐγκαταλέλειπται); 63.28.3 (καὶ προσέτι ὅτι πολυανθρωποτάτῃ ποτὲ θεραπείᾳ γαυρωθεὶς μετὰ τριῶν ἐξελευθέρων ἐκύπταζε).

[133] Suet., *Nero* 48.1-2: *ut erat nudo pede atque tunicatus, paenulam obsoleti coloris superinduit adopertoque capite et ante faciem optento sudario equum inscendit, quattuor solis comitantibus, inter quos et Sporus erat*, trans. Rolfe 1914.

[134] Cass. Dio 63.27.3: ἐσθῆτά τε οὖν φαύλην ἔλαβε καὶ ἐπὶ ἵππον οὐδὲν βελτίονα ἀνέβη, καὶ ἐπ᾽ αὐτοῦ κατακεκαλυμμένος πρὸς χωρίον τι Φάωνος Καισαρείου, μετά τε αὐτοῦ ἐκείνου καὶ μετὰ Ἐπαφροδίτου τοῦ τε Σπόρου, νυκτὸς ἔτι οὔσης ἤλασε.

[135] Cf. Suet., *Nero* 49.2: the news arrived by letter at Phaon's villa and this is what prompted Nero to attempt suicide. He opted to run away from Rome when he received word that the rest of his armies had also defected (47.1).

(*aquae… tepidae*)[136]. Dio spins a story quite similar to Suetonius' account, though it comes out even more to Nero's disadvantage: in Dio's version, the ordinary becomes wretched, and Nero's flight takes on a 'campier' aspect[137]. Despite being in disguise, Nero was recognized and decided to hide "in a place full of reeds" (Cass. Dio 63.28.2: ἐς καλαμώδη τόπον τινα κατεκρύφθη), where he would have to stay "lying flat on the ground" (ἐρριμμένος). Waiting for daylight, he spent an agitated night, jumping at every sound, from dog to bird or wind, and bemoaning his fate. Finally taking refuge in a cave, Nero "in his hunger ate bread such as he had never before tasted and in his thirst drank water such as he never drunk before"[138]. Dio's story in fact recalls the emperor's scenic performances through a marked theatricality in the narrative[139]. Dio even paints Nero's final moments as a "drama" (Cass. Dio 63.28.4: δρᾶμα; cf. 63.28.5: τοιαῦτα ἐτραγῴδει), in which the emperor would play his last part. For Dio, Nero's rags were yet another costume, his horse and companions, only more props. If, in his final act, Nero would get to "play" (Cass. Dio 63.28.4: ὑποκρίνηται) a new role, it would, in the end, be "but only his own at last" (ἀλλ᾽ ἤδη καὶ ἑαυτόν)[140].

A close look at these two stories of Nero's escape put in parallel with Herodian's four examples and with Dareios' and Vitellius' flights has revealed important points of (dis)connection between all these episodes. In most of these somewhat standardized sequences of fight-defeat-flight, moment and manner are tailored to each story and each loser, in order to emphasize their failures, bad decisions, and overall dubious character. This suggests perhaps less of a direct influence, let alone an archetype, between these texts, but instead shows a wide range of uses of the same *topos*. The cases of Nero and Vitellius might be even more conclusive as frames of reference for Herodian's stories, since they also occur in the context of a civil war, the first so-called year of the four emperors in 68-69, which has different implications for the representation of the winners and losers compared to an external war against 'Barbarians'. Finally, from the perspective of intratextuality, though this pattern may be exploited more expansively in the story of Macrinus' flight, all four of these episodes in the *History* can actually function together, as four variations on a theme, calling back and forth to each other across years and chapters.

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[136] For Scheid 1984, 185, Nero's departure from the city pushes him further into monstrosity: "À cette marginalisation topographique se superpose une bestialisation progressive." With 187: "aussi, à l'heure de sa mort, nous trouvons ce Prince qui voulait de Rome faire sa maison, rejeté, solitaire et semblable à une bête, aux limites de l'espace civique et humain, aux antipodes de la reputation."

[137] As Gleason 2011, 46 remarks: "Dio tends to give more prominence to techniques of disguise and impersonation than do Tacitus and Suetonius when they recount the same episode." See also Bartsch 1994, 46-50, on Nero's 'masks'; with Edwards 1994.

[138] Cass. Dio 63.28.5: κἀνταῦθα καὶ ἔφαγε πεινήσας ἄρτον ὁποῖον οὐδεπώποτε ἐβεβρώκει, καὶ ἔπιε διψήσας ὕδωρ ὁποῖον οὐδεπώποτε ἐπεπώκει.

[139] On this point, see Bartsch 1994, 43-46; Gowing 1997, 2568-80, esp. 2579-80; Gleason 2011. More generally on Nero and theatre, see Dupont 1985, 422-37; Bartsch 1994. Chapter 4 of this dissertation is devoted entirely to such theatrical and staging practices in Herodian's work.

[140] Just like Nero's, Macrinus' escape becomes in the *History* a complicated, staged affair where even nature's intervention seems scripted: Nero's light was similarly marked by "a fated earthquake" (Cass. Dio 63.28.1: σεισμὸς ἐξαίσιος, trans. mod.; cf. Suet., *Nero* 48.2).

3.4 Subversive narratives

3.4.1 Political suicide

Gordian, then governor of Africa, was given the emperorship in the wake of a local civilian rebellion against the regnant emperor, Maximinus. Endorsed by the senate, Gordian soon after established himself in Carthage, where he briefly ruled together with his son, Gordian II. In Herodian's *History*, both Gordians died near Carthage, during an offensive led by Capelianus, a senator close to Maximinus who was legatus of Numidia[141]. As for Maximinus, he is said to have been marching from Pannonia to Italy, in order to subdue the senators and population in Rome since they had eagerly sided with the newly installed Gordians (7.8.1ff). In Herodian's view, Capelianus' attack on Carthage was launched on his own initiative, rather than under the explicit orders of his emperor who was chiefly concerned with punishing the capital. According to Herodian, Capelianus acted both out of personal reasons and of loyalty to Maximinus. Given that "Gordian was an old (ἄνωθεν) enemy of Capelianus over some legal dispute", the new emperor had naturally ordered his rival's replacement and exile[142]. For Herodian, Capelianus seemed to have suffered this dismissal as a personal slight, as well as taking offense for his favoured emperor. The historian describes him as a "loyal servant (καθωσιωμένος) of Maximinus by whom he had been entrusted (πεπίστευτο) with his command". Thus motivated, Capelianus declared war upon Carthage and Gordian[143].

As we can read in the *History*, Capelianus clearly had the upper hand over Gordian. According to Herodian, Maximinus' man had

> a large (μεγίστην) force, made up of excellent (γενναίων), tough young men, all in the prime of life. They were also fitted out with a full range of equipment (παντοδαπῆ ὅπλων παρασκευῇ) and ready (ἐξηρτυμένην) for battle because of their war experiences (ἐμπειρίᾳ) in regular fighting against the barbarians[144].

Capelianus' troops were clearly superior to Gordian's supporters, composed mainly of young aristocrats, workmen, and farmers (cf. 7.4.3-5). Although larger in number, the Carthaginians were "in disorder (ἄτακτοι) and untrained (ἀπαίδευτοι) for war […], completely divorced

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141 Vict., *Caes*. 26.4 has an elaborate passage about predictions of both Gordians' deaths, though not on the specifics of the actual event. In Zosim. 1.16.2, both Gordians perished in a shipwreck during a storm on their way to Rome. Interestingly, Zosimus sets their deaths after that of Maximinus.

142 7.9.2-3: πρὸς δὴ τὸν Καπελιανὸν τοῦτον ὁ Γορδιανὸς ἀπεχθῶς διέκειτο ἄνωθεν ἔκ τινος ἀγοραίου διαφορᾶς; cf. *SHA*, *Gord*. 15.1 (*in priuata uita semper aduersus*).

143 7.9.3: τῷ τε Μαξιμίνῳ καθωσιωμένος, ὑφ' οὗ καὶ τὴν ἡγεμονίαν πεπίστευτο. Herodian notes that Maximinus tended to favour "men known to be in accord with his own policy" (7.4.2: οὓς ᾔδει ἁρμόζοντας τῇ ἑαυτοῦ γνώμῃ). The historian describes accordingly two other favored individuals of the emperor: the Carthaginian procurator, "who used to exact absolutely savage sentences and confiscations from the people, hoping his name would be favourably noted by Maximinus" (7.4.2: καὶ μετὰ πάσης ὠμότητος καταδίκας τε ἐποιεῖτο καὶ χρημάτων εἰσπράξεις, βουλόμενος εὐδοκιμεῖν παρὰ τῷ Μαξιμίνῳ), and Vitalianus, his praetorian prefect, who had a "harsh, cruel behaviour" (7.6.4: τραχύτατα καὶ ὠμότατα πράττοντα) and was "a completely devoted friend of Maximinus" (7.6.4: φίλτατόν τε ὄντα καὶ καθωσιωμένον τῷ Μαξιμίνῳ). The procurator is even called "the servant of tyranny" (7.5.6: ὁ τῆς τυρρανίδος ὑπηρέτης) by one of the Libyan noblemen. On these three characters in Herodian, see Martin 2006, 100-1.

144 7.9.3: …δύναμιν ἄγων μεγίστην τε καὶ γενναίων ἀνδρῶν ἡλικίαις ἀκμάζουσαν, καὶ παντοδαπῆ ὅπλων παρασκευῇ ἐξηρτυμένην, ἐμπειρίᾳ τε πολεμικῇ καὶ τῆς πρὸς τοὺς βαρβάρους μάχης συνηθείᾳ ἑτοίμην πρὸς μάχας; cf. 7.9.2; 7.9.6.

(γυμνοί) from weapons and instruments of war", too used as they were to a quiet and easy urban life[145]. Herodian even remarks that the Carthaginians themselves considered that "their best hope of victory lay in the size of their rabble (ὄχλου), not in an army's (στρατοῦ) discipline"[146]. In Herodian's view, Gordian's forces were not, in essence, a true army. Similarly, Gordian II is said to have been put in charge of "the mob" (7.9.5: τοῦ πλήθους; cf. 7.9.7) to lead the counteroffensive. Pitting an experienced army against the unorganized masses, the battle seemed already decided[147].

According to Herodian, news of Capelianus' approaching army "reduced Gordian to a complete panic (ἐν ἐσχάτῳ δέει) and the Carthaginians to a state of indiscipline (ταραχθέντες)"[148]. This sequence follows a pattern by now familiar: the sitting emperor, insufficiently prepared for war, is thrown in a state of utter fright upon learning that his opponent will soon arrive[149]. In this case, the added mention of the Carthaginians heightens the general confusion, but especially Gordian's lack of agency and authority. This commotion is reminiscent of the manner in which Gordian became emperor: although the Libyan nobles had more or less planned the revolt against the procurator, their nomination of Gordian seemed more spontaneous, a reaction to a desperate situation (cf. 7.5.1). Significantly, the immediate reaction to Capelianus' arrival is, in Herodian's story, given to the Carthaginians, not Gordian, their emperor. According to the historian, the citizens had figured they should bank on their numbers more than anything, since "there was a mass exodus to oppose Capelianus"[150]. However, faced with Capelianus' imminent attack, the Carthaginians "threw away all of their weapons and ran away without waiting for the charge"[151]. In their panicked haste, they stomped on each other to death, causing more casualties within their own ranks than the Numidian army (7.9.7)[152].

Alternative stories

In the *History*, Gordian is notably absent from all these proceedings. Instead of showing the emperor preparing for Capelianus' arrival, Herodian chooses to insert a first account of the emperor's death: "some sources say (ὥς τινές φασιν) that the moment (ἅμα) the attack on Carthage took place", Gordian hanged himself since he realized his own forces were

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[145] 7.9.5: ἄτακτοι δὲ καὶ πολεμικῶν ἔργων ἀπαίδευτοι […] γυμνοί τε ὅπλων καὶ ὀργάνων πολεμικῶν. Niger's forces are similarly described, though they were almost able to withstand Severus' troops (3.4.1ff).

[146] 7.9.4: ἐν πλήθει ὄχλου, οὐκ ἐν εὐταξίᾳ στρατοῦ τὸ εὔελπι τῆς νίκης εἶναι. Cf. *SHA*, *Gord*. 15.1: *omnis Carthaginensium populus*.

[147] Interestingly, during the initial revolt, the workmen recruited by the Libyan aristocrats had "easily routed" (7.4.6: ῥᾳδίως ἐτρέψαντο) the procurator's bodyguards.

[148] 7.9.4: αὐτός τε ἐν ἐσχάτῳ δέει ἦν, οἵ τε Καρχηδόνιοι ταραχθέντες.

[149] Cf. 2.11.7 (Julianus); 3.1.1 (Niger); 3.7.1 (Albinus); 5.4.1 (Macrinus, not taking the revolt seriously); see Opelt 1998 on the representation and use of fear in Herodian's work.

[150] 7.9.4: πανδημεὶ πάντες ἐξίασιν ὡς δὴ τῷ Καπελιανῷ ἀντιταξόμενοι.

[151] 7.9.7: οἵπερ οὐχ ὑπομείναντες αὐτῶν τὴν ἐμβολήν, πάντα ῥίψαντες, ἔφυγον.

[152] According to Herodian, some managed to return to Carthage and hide, but most were killed amidst the tumult at the city gates.

no match for Capelianus' army[153]. According to these reports, Gordian's death was then "concealed" (κρυπτομένης) from the people, while his son was named as the next emperor. This story is implied to be an alternative version, as the plot moves on to the actual battle without lingering over the repercussions of the emperor's (potential) death[154]. Later, in the wake of Capelianus' victory against the Carthaginians, Herodian presents another story of the emperor's final moments: "different sources say" (7.9.9: ἕτεροι δέ φασιν) that the news of his defeat pushed Gordian to put an end to his life. Although in this second version Gordian's fatal act is placed after the battle was lost, which puts him in a slightly better position, the emperor's reaction and the outcome remain unchanged. Helpless and powerless, Gordian "committed suicide by strangling himself in a noose made out of the girdle he was wearing"[155]. Unlike Niger, Gordian's conduct in defeat has no redeeming potential in the *History*, even though he too might have waited until his loss was definitive.

While alternative stories are not uncommon in Herodian's work, they tend to be placed closer to one another, sometimes appearing even within the same clause[156]. It is worth mentioning, then, that these two versions of Gordian's death are separated by a long account of the battle at the gates of Carthage[157]. Herodian's second version could certainly be counterfactual (Gordian's death may well have happened before Capelianus' entrance in the city), but it may also be analeptic (in the first story, Gordian's death is even said to have been kept secret, so one could perhaps imagine that this second version comes at the moment when that information was finally made public). If we consider that these two stories might work together, instead of being a strict case of either/or, their placement in the overall narrative, bookending the battle of Carthage, can serve as a commentary on Capelianus' character. Since the emperor's fate is implied to have been fixed from the outset, Capelianus' massacre of the population seems almost gratuitous, entirely in line with his initial portrayal as equal to Maximinus in terms of cruelty. It is somewhat unclear which story Herodian might prefer, but that may well be missing the point. To be sure, neither account is particularly favourable to

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[153] 7.9.4: ὥς τινές φασιν, ἅμα τὸν Καπελιανὸν τῷ τῆς Καρχηδόνος ἐπιβῆναι. See van Hooff 2002, 107-11.

[154] Whittaker 1969-70, lxiii lists the passages when Herodian cites the records of other (unnamed) sources. In a number of passages, Herodian offers alternative stories for one event; see below, [143-5]. For Hidber 2004, 206, Herodian uses these types of phrases to evade the "responsibility" tied to particular accounts. Chrysanthou 2020, 623-4 suggests that these unidentified reports, both oral and written, could also contribute to "reconstruct the atmosphere of the times and to highlight what contemporaries may have thought or said."

[155] 7.9.9: ἐξαρτήσας ἧς ἐπεφέρετο ζώνης τὸν τράχηλον ἐν βρόχῳ, τοῦ βίου ἀνεπαύσατο.

[156] For instance, Aemilianus' true motivations in betraying Niger at the battle of Cyzicus (3.2.3: φασὶ δέ τινες… οἳ μὲν… οἳ δέ φασιν). Terser alternatives are commonly expressed through the pattern εἴτε… εἴτε: 1.9.5; 1.14.2; 4.12.5; 4.13.8; 5.3.10; 6.6.1; 6.8.5; 7.1.8) or ἤ… ἤ (1.17.10; 6.5.8). See e.g. Sidebottom 1998, 2819-20, arguing that this device "questions the reader's control over the text and history, although probably only in order to reaffirm it." On counterfactual history more generally, see e.g. Tordoff 2014, esp. 101-5; with the collection of essays found in Powell (ed.) 2013, on "hindsight" in ancient history, and de Jong 2014, 76-7, on "hypothetical narration", or ap. Prince 1982, "the disnarrated".

[157] Note how the battle narrative (7.9.5-8) almost seems disproportionate in length, compared to the actual event(s) of Gordian's death.

Gordian, whether he committed suicide before the battle or after[158]. In particular, it may even be argued that, for Gordian, the moment he chose to commit suicide was actually a non-factor in Herodian's assessment of the emperor. As noted above, Gordian is, in the *History*, markedly absent from the whole conflict and from the narrative. And yet, when Gordian is given more space to act, even in a way that is elsewhere positive, his efforts remain inconsequential.

Finally, it should also be noted that, according to Herodian, Gordian was not present on the battlefield and had in fact "stayed at home because of his old age" (7.9.9: οἴκοι μεμενηκότι διὰ γῆρας, trans. mod.), while his son was sent to lead the charge. This might have been, theoretically, a valid reason for Gordian's absence, especially compared to a similar decision on Albinus' part which was due, in that case, to pure cowardice. If emperors were not necessarily expected to be accomplished soldiers themselves, their presence on the battlefield was at the very least a symbolic requirement – it was, as seen above, the impossibility to see Macrinus on site that finally pushed his remaining troops to switch allegiances[159]. This a recurrent theme in Herodian's work: one need only think about Severus' reduced level of involvement in his last campaign, in contrast to (most of) his earlier victories, and how it is used by Herodian to undermine that emperor's legacy. In this particular context, Gordian's absence on the battlefield, though having a good explanation on paper, raises the issue of his overall fitness as a new emperor. Gordian, unlike Severus or Marcus, had no past glories and no enduring spirit to balance out his physical weaknesses: more importantly, this battle came at the start of Gordian's rule, which, had he won, would not have looked very promising for the rest of it[160].

Famous political suicides

Gordian's death also resonates with past political suicides, of which there many examples, good and bad, throughout ancient history. Some of these were so-called enforced suicides, whether prescribed by law, like Socrates' execution by hemlock, or pushed by rulers, like Seneca's death ordered by Nero[161]. Others, like Gordian's, could follow a military defeat. For instance, according to some sources, the ostracized general Themistocles committed suicide when he was faced with the prospect of an Athenian attack[162]. Plutarch also records that another general, Demosthenes, attempted, unsuccessfully, to kill himself in the wake of the failed Sicilian expedition during the Peloponnesian War[163]. Similarly, after the ruin of the

[158] According to Whittaker 1969-70, n. 4 *ad loc.*, this "proves that H. had access to anti-Gordian sources", since this version is not found elsewhere. For Whittaker, Herodian's repetition of the story "shows he is far from being a committed supporter of G. himself".
[159] See e.g. Campbell 1984, 61-69 and 2002, 41-42.
[160] This also confirms Herodian's general idea that one could be too old to become emperor; cf. above, [67-68, with n. 145].
[161] On this notion, see Hill 2004, 193-7.
[162] Cf. Aristoph., *Knights* 83-84; Diod. Sic. 11.58.3; Plut., *Themistocles* 31.5-6; with unnamed sources cited in Thuc. 1.138.4; C. Nepos, *Themistocles* 10.4; Plut., *Cimon* 18.6 and *Themistocles* 31.6.
[163] Plut, *Nicias* 27.2; at 28.4, Plutarch gives the alternative version of Timaeus of Tauromenium that has both Demosthenes and Nicias commit suicide. In Thuc. 7.86.2, the two generals are simply put to death by the Syracusans.

optimates at Thapsus against Caesar's forces, Cato the Younger, in Utica, decided to take his own life. Cato's death became a model of political suicide, later echoed by Seneca and even parodied by Petronius. Suicide in this case was taken to adhere to a certain code of honour, and would prevent both a capture and a humiliating death at the enemy's hands[164].

Though the very general aspects of Gordian's death might resemble these earlier 'noble' suicides, it is not depicted by Herodian as an admirable act at all. If we look at more positive cases, it seems that, beyond the act and general context, their exemplary value rests on certain specific conditions, such as mode, reasoning, and context of execution[165]. In representations at least, there certainly existed an 'art of dying'[166]. As mentioned, the method was of paramount importance, since the act should express dignity, courage, and *uirtus*. *Modi* typically linked to 'lower' social and political groups could invalidate, or worse debase, the deed. For the Romans, the proper way to die by one's own hands was the sword[167]. By contrast, Gordian's chosen mode, self-hanging, was considered to be, in both the Greek and Roman worlds, a sign of desperation, a "vulgar" act, often taken as an admission of guilt, and recorded more frequently for young people, and especially young girls[168]. Moreover, good examples of political suicides present the act not as a spontaneous reaction, but as a deliberate choice, preferably grounded in a *iusta causa*[169]. Despair, by contrast, was inevitably tied with cowardice and weakness. Even self-caused, a good death might also feature a parting speech and the presence of friends and family, as well as the emergence of successional matters[170]. With this in mind, Gordian's death, especially as found in Herodian's *History*, is highly unsuited to his office and the context, but matches perfectly his general character.

A comparison with the death of the emperor Otho, recorded at length by Suetonius, is interesting on many levels, since it shows how, from similar starting points and through similar acts, these two characters are treated very differently in their posthumous representation. Otho's case is also worth taking into consideration, since there seems to have been some sort of effort from the emperor to "shape his own posthumous reputation by a

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[164] For other examples and Van Hooff 1990, 85-92, from the perspective of despair. It should be mentioned that Cato, as told by Plutarch, wanted to avoid a pardon, which he considered to be a greater humiliation than death at the hands of his enemy, and that he urged others, namely his son, to accept Caesar's mercy.

[165] See e.g. van Hooff 1990; Plass 1995, 93-115; Hill 2004, 183-212; Edwards 2007, esp. 39-45; though Rauh 2015, mitigating the idealized literary depictions of the suicide of defeated generals. Voisin 2003 reviews all the alleged and commonly accepted suicide attempts by Roman emperors; Gordian I is very briefly cited at 136.

[166] Van Hooff 1990, 72-73. See Levene 2010, 85: "In practice events in real life may show striking resemblances to other historical events, and people in real life may deliberately choose to model their behaviour or public image on earlier figures." For instance, Otho's death was possibly self-fashioned as Catonian, as we will see just below.

[167] On the *Romana mors*, van Hooff 1990, 47ff. For older men, *inedia* seemed to have been acceptable option, since it showed "resoluteness and dignity"; on starvation, van Hooff 1990, 72, with 41-47.

[168] On self-hanging, see Voisin 1979; van Hooff 1990, 64-72, with 67 on Gordian; Hill 2004, 190; see also Loraux 1984, with Greek examples. Van Hooff 1990, 77 notes: "Methods such as hanging and jumping in general are looked upon as base, because they violate the integrity of the body."

[169] For instance, Cato: Cic., *Tusc*. 1.74 (*causa moriendi*); Plut., *Cato min.* 68-70; Cass. Dio 43.10-11 (Cato decided against war not out of fear, but love of freedom and dignity).

[170] On the presence and function of family and friends in 'aristocratic death scenes', Edwards 2007, 145.

suicide that deliberately recalled the death of Cato the younger."[171] In this way, Otho's death is already a multi-layered take on a 'classic', processed through both a practical application and literary filters. Like Otho, Gordian might have redeemed himself somewhat, if his self-inflicted death had corresponded more closely to the cases cited above. To contrast the particulars of Otho's suicide with those of Gordian's, Suetonius' version (*Otho* 9-12) is perhaps the most illustrative, since it really plays up the redeeming quality of the whole episode[172]. According to Suetonius, Otho had defeated Galba and won thrice against Vitellius, though lost a fourth fight at Bedriacum in northern Italy (*Otho* 9.2: *fraude*). This loss persuaded Otho to stop the war and put an end to his life, even if he still had fresh troops at his disposal and more on their way to Italy (*Otho* 9.3). For Suetonius, Otho's decision was due to his shame (*Otho* 9.3: *pudore*) and his extreme dislike of civil war (*Otho* 9.3-10.1). Thus resolved, Otho then talked to his brother, his nephew, his friends, wrote several letters to his sister and to Messalina (Nero's widow whom he had promised to marry), burned his papers as a precaution, and finally made distributions of money to his servants (*Otho* 10.2)[173]. Otho then calmed a disturbance amidst the soldiers, spent his last evening talking to all who wished to do so, "slept soundly" (*Otho* 11.2: *artissimo somno quieuit*), and stabbed himself "with a single stroke" (*Otho* 11.2: *uno… ictu*) at daylight. As Suetonius shows, Otho's death was the result of an informed decision, taking place after the necessary preparations were made. Suetonius' account emphasizes the deliberateness of Otho's act and the lack of urgency surrounding it. Otho was in complete control of the situation, choosing to die on his own terms. Suetonius' verdict on Otho is accordingly more positive, marvelling at how the emperor's death was "so little in harmony with his life" (*Otho* 12.2: *minime congruens uitae*). Most interestingly, this two-fold view is also found in the other accounts of Otho's death, who all underscore the nobility of his act, while condemning his earlier acts and character[174].

By contrast, Gordian neither embraced a philosophical stance nor showed dignified courage, but took his own life out of cowardice and helplessness, in an entirely spontaneous decision. The method he chose also reflects badly on his act, which the use of a 'proper' weapon could have possibly mitigated. Self-hanging, however, as *informe letum* and *mors infamissima* (Serv., *ad Aen.* 12.603), was deeply incompatible with Gordian's station and reveals the scope of his *incapacitas imperii*. The story of Gordian's death featured in the *History* can be seen as the emperor's poor imitation of famous and lauded suicides. This

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171 Ash 2007, 200.

172 Though see also Plut., *Otho* 15-18; Tac., *Hist*. 2.45-50; Cass. Dio 63(64).10-15 (in heavily epitomized sections).

173 According to Herodian, Severus had discovered secret letters in Albinus' possessions, which he could use against his rival's friends once he returned to Rome (3.8.6).

174 Plut., *Otho* 18.2: "For though he lived no more decently than Nero, he died more nobly" (βιώσας γὰρ οὐδὲν ἐπιεικέστερον Νέρωνος ἀπέθανεν εὐγενέστερον); Tac., *Hist.* 2.50: "By two bold deeds, the one most outrageous, the other glorious, he gained with posterity as much fame as evil reputation" (*duobus facinoribus, altero flagitiosissimo, altero egregio, tantundem apud posteros meruit bonae famae quantum malae*); Cass. Dio 64(65).15.2[a]: "Thus after living most disgracefully of all men, he died most nobly" (ὅθεν καὶ τὴν ἀσέβειαν καὶ τὴν πονηρίαν τοῦ βίου συνεσκίασε), with 15.2[1]-2[2]; Auson., *Caes*. *monost*. 4.8: *clara set morte potitus*, with *tetrast*. 8.35-36: *fine tamen laudandus erit, qui morte decora / hoc solum fecit nobile, quod periit.*

artificiality corresponds to a general theme of falsehood and illusion cultivated by Herodian throughout Gordian's short rule. From the outset, Gordian's power is depicted as illusory. As explored above, Gordian is almost a bystander to his own inauguration, given neither speech nor much agency in the whole affair. While the revolt leading to his accession is attributed solely to the Libyans, the usurped rival is only one of Maximinus' friend, not the emperor himself. In fact, one of Gordian's only proper actions is his refusal of the emperorship, but that too is ultimately downplayed. It is perhaps telling that what follows Gordian's acclamation in the *History* is a province-wide destruction of Maximinus' effigies and their substitution with images of Gordian (7.5.8). Although images certainly held power, for Gordian that is all there was. Gordian's imperial appointment, even endorsed later by the senate, remained mostly confined to Libya[175]. Herodian notes that Gordian, following his proclamation in Thysdrus, settled in Carthage "so that he could act exactly as if he were in Rome" (7.6.2: ἵν' ὥσπερ ἐν Ῥώμῃ πάντα πράττοι)[176]. Likewise, the historian stages the emperor's death in his room, where he is said to have retired by "pretending that he was going to rest" (7.9.9: ὡς δὴ καθευδήσων). This recurring theme of simulacrum and make-believe is made explicit through Herodian's verdict on Gordian, a man who "met his end masquerading as an emperor" (7.9.10: ἐν εἰκόνι τε βασιλείας τελευτήσας)[177].

3.4.2 A warrior's death?

Gordian II is, in the *History*, quite absent from his own story. Only appearing through the senatorial confirmation of Gordian's proclamation (7.7.2: ἅμα τῷ υἱῷ), Gordian II is given similar space to rule and die. Since his presence in Herodian's work only peeks through the passages dedicated to his father, Gordian II never achieves the status of protagonist, even though he held the emperorship. While his appointment was acknowledged by the senate, his tenure was very brief and always shared with his father. Whether the elder Gordian died before or after Capelianus' entrance in Carthage, he would have remained in the palace due to his age (cf. 7.9.9). As such, Gordian II seemed to have been commanding, in some capacity, their forces. In a very vague way, Herodian reports that "the son of Gordian was chosen" (7.9.5: τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ… εἵλοντο) to lead the attack. Even here, in his most 'active' appearance,

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[175] In between his first and final scenes in Herodian's story, Gordian is shown to take serious action as the newly invested emperor: for instance, establishing himself in Carthage, reaching out to the senators and population in Rome, arranging the execution of Vitalianus, the praetorian prefect (7.6.1-7). However, Herodian's account of the year 238 in general features an increasing involvement of the senate, and other local authorities, as main actor, with the emperors being pushed back into a secondary role.

[176] Herodian describes Carthage in the following terms: "The city is the next after Rome in wealth, population and size, though there is rivalry for second place between it and Alexandria in Egypt." (7.6.2: ἡ γὰρ πόλις ἐκείνη καὶ δυνάμει χρημάτων καὶ πλήθει τῶν κατοικούντων καὶ μεγέθει μόνης Ῥώμης ἀπολείπεται, φιλονεικοῦσα πρὸς τὴν ἐν Αἰγύπτῳ Ἀλεξάνδρου πόλιν περὶ δευτερείων). Cf. 4.3.7, where it is Antioch compared to Alexandria. To that effect, when Niger was proclaimed emperor in Antioch, the city had been decked to imitate the capital (2.8.6); see [78] and [195-6]. See Davenport & Mallan 2019, 8-9 on Gordian's 'new Rome'. It is interesting that Herodian never criticizes Gordian for not heading to Rome, like he did Niger and Macrinus, when it would have been presumably easier to do so for Gordian, at least logistically.

[177] Though cf. *SHA*, *Gord*. 7.1: *alium quam merebatur exitum passus est*. Cf. *SHA*, *Maximin.* 19.2; *Gord.* 16.3: Gordian's suicide is less about cowardice than necessity.

Gordian II is significantly weighed down by grammatical passivity and quasi-anonymity (he is always identified as 'the son of')[178]. After a long description of the opposing parties, in which the focus goes back to his father, Gordian II then resurfaces in the story, but only to die: "in the commotion Gordian's son and his entourage fell, but, because of the many dead, their bodies could not be brought back for burial, and the son's body was never found"[179]. Following Herodian's account, Gordian II had, in effect, neither power nor agency and, in his final moments, was also denied his very physical presence: his anonymity would follow him even in death[180].

With Gordian II forever lost in the tumult and Gordian I at home or already dead, the Carthaginians were left wide open to the onslaught of Capelianus' army. In a way reminiscent of Maximinus' actions, Capelianus finally burst into Carthage, slaughtering the prominent citizens and eagerly looting the city (7.9.10)[181]. According to Herodian, the neighbouring cities who had previously destroyed Maximinus' monuments and endorsed Gordian suffered the same fate at the hands of Capelianus (7.9.11). Back in Rome, the senate and people soon learned news of the Gordians' deaths with "stunned consternation" (7.10.1: ἐν πολλῇ ταραχῇ καὶ ἀφασίᾳ). But, in Herodian's view, their strong reaction was born more out of personal concerns than out of love for either of the Gordians[182]. The senators are said to have feared a fierce punishment, since they had effectively declared war against Maximinus by endorsing the Gordians and had just lost both their chosen emperors in a unmandated tussle led by one of his lieutenants (7.10.1).

Though a warrior's noble death is a theme well-known namely from epic, there are not many such examples of Roman imperial ends[183]. Even during the many civil wars, defeated enemies either resorted to suicide or were caught on the run or in hiding. That said, there are two notable later examples of imperial deaths in battle that tap into the glorious death motif. In 363, Julian was fatally wounded in a battle against the Persians at Samarra (in modern Iraq).

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[178] Admittedly this passage seems to follow from the first version of Gordian I's death, at least grammatically: κρυπτομένης δὲ αὐτοῦ τῆς τελευτῆς τὸν υἱὸν αὐτοῦ στρατηγήσοντα δὴ τοῦ πλήθους εἵλοντο (7.9.5). But it is worth noting how this third-person verb (εἵλοντο) is able to remove all authority from the remaining Augustus who, by all accounts, should have taken the lead himself.

[179] 7.9.7: ἔνθα καὶ ὁ τοῦ Γορδιανοῦ υἱὸς ἀπώλετο οἵ τε περὶ αὐτὸν πάντες, ὡς διὰ πλῆθος πτωμάτων μήτε νεκρῶν ἀναίρεσιν πρὸς ταφὴν γενέσθαι δυνηθῆναι μήτε τὸ τοῦ νέου Γορδιανοῦ σῶμα εὑρεθῆναι, trans. mod. Cf. *SHA*, *Maximin.* 19.2 (*acerrima pugna interfecto filio*); *Gord*. 15.3 (*in eodem bello*); also *Gord*. 16.1 (*non potuerit inueniri*).

[180] Sidebottom 1988, 2811, n. 179: "Gordian II has no character in Herodian". In certain accounts, Gordian II and Gordian III seem to be amalgamated, so e.g. Vict., *Caes*. 27.1; Ps.-Vict. 26-27; Oros. 7.19.3-5; Eutrop. 9.2.1-2; see Dietz 1980, 74-77 for an overview of the sources.

[181] Compare with 7.2.3-4 (Maximinus in Germany); 7.3.1-6 (in Rome). According to Herodian, Capelianus may have had his own agenda, should anything happen to Maximinus. See also *SHA*, *Maximin.* 19.5 (*proludens ad imperium, si Maximinus perisset*).

[182] Cf. *SHA*, *Maximin.* 19.2 (*multum quin immo perfidiae*); *Gord.* 15.1 (*ad quem omnis fide Punica Carthaginiensium populus inclinauit*).

[183] Although ancient sources claim that Gordian III died in a plot hatched by Philip, then his praetorian prefect would go on to become the next emperor: Vict., *Caes*. 27.8; Ps.-Vict. 27.2; Oros. 7.19.5; Fest. 22.2; Eutrop. 9.2; Hier., *Chronic.* 217; *SHA*, *Gord.* 29-30; Ammian. Marcell. 23.5.17; Zosim. 1.19.1; Jord., *Rom.* 282; Zonar. 12.18, etc. However, modern views are varied: Gordian III was killed by his mutinous troops near Zaitha (in modern Syria; Oost 1958, based on Porphyry; also Potter 2004, 234-6), or he died in battle against the Persians at Misiche (in modern Iraq; MacDonald 1981; Dignas & Winter 2007, 77-80).

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the emperor was then carried back to the camp, where he could die "peacefully" (25.3.23: *facilius*). In Ammianus' story, Julian' death is shaped in such a way that it can transcend its specific circumstances (he was in effect not on the battlefield anymore) and exemplify the more universal death of the good ruler[184]. Several elements from Ammianus' account of Julian's last moments are reminiscent of Marcus' death scene in Herodian's *History*, which belongs itself to a long tradition of good kings dying peacefully[185]: a long speech from the emperor, his philosophical musings, the weeping of friends, and finally a quiet passing[186].

Another example of this theme can be found in the deaths of Decius and his son Herennius Etruscus, which might resonate more strongly with Gordian II's ending. Both Decius and Herennius fell during the Battle of Abritus (modern Hisarlak, Bulgaria) against the Goths in 251. One of the more substantial accounts of this event is found in Aurelius Victor's *Caesars*[187]:

> But very many report that the deaths of the Decii were honourable (*illustrem*); that, in fact, the son had fallen in battle while pressing an attack too boldly (*audacius*); that the father, however, while his dejected soldiers were saying many things to console their emperor, had strenuously (*strenue*) asserted that the loss of one soldier seemed to him too little to matter. And so he resumed the war and died in a similar manner while fighting vigorously (*impigre*)[188].

It should first be noted that, in general, Decius is seen rather positively by pagan authors, while the Christian writers tend to see Decius' death, and especially his posthumous fate, as fitting for an enemy of God (e.g. Lact., *de mort. pers.* 4: *ut hostem dei oportebat*). But it is particularly striking how Herennius, generally treated very summarily elsewhere (if at all), is also given positive attention by Victor (boldness seemed preferable to inaction or cowardice). This discrepancy with the Gordians can be explained, at least in part, by the differences in context. As a rule of thumb, emperors struck down during foreign wars could achieve glory, since they were protecting the Empire against external threats. During civil wars, however,

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[184] The emperor Valens (r. 364-78) also died in battle, at Adrianople (or Hadrianopolis, in modern Turkey): according to Ammianus (31.13.12-17), Valens was either lost on the battlefield (*nec postea repertus est usquam*), or was taken, wounded, to a cottage nearby, which was then set on fire by the Goths, who were unaware that Valens was inside.

[185] According to Ammian. Marcell. 16.1.4, Marcus was in fact one of Julian's role models; see too Eutrop. 10.16.5; Julian., *ad Them.* 253A-B.

[186] Cf. Ammian. Marcell. 25.3; Zosim. 3.29.1. The Christian authors generally present negative versions of this story, cf. Oros. 7.30.6; Greg., *Or*. 5.14, but see Eutrop. 10.16.

[187] Decius' life belongs to the lost books of Ammianus' *Res Gestae* (though Decius' death is mentioned at 31.5.16 and 31.13.13: *nec inueniri*) and of the *Historia Augusta* (if they ever existed; cf. Chastagnol 1994, xlii-xlv). Decius' death is mentioned, sometimes briefly, in Lact., *de mort. pers.* 4; Eutrop. 9.4; Ps.-Vict. 29.3 (Decius drowned in a swamp and his body is never recovered; his son fell in combat); Oros. 7.21.1; Zosim. 1.23.3; Jord., *Getica* 18.101-3, etc.

[188] Vict., *Caes*. 29.5: *sed Deciorum mortem plerique illustrem ferunt; namque filium audacius congredientem cecidisse in acie; patrem autem, cum perculsi milites ad solandum imperatorem multa praefarentur, strenue dixisse detrimentum unius militis parum uideri sibi. Ita refecto bello, cum impigre decertaret, interisse pari modo*, trans. Bird 1994.

the losers would suffer a deserved, shameful death[189]. In Gordian II's case, it seems not even such a disgraceful fate was suitable for him.

As we have seen, just in the period covered in the *History*, several emperors met their end following an armed confrontation, but the execution of the defeated party took place after the battle. Even Macrinus, who fled mid-battle, is killed outside of combat. By contrast, Herodian clearly places the death of Gordian II during the battle of Carthage. Instead of casting him in a more positive light, this serves only to emphasize the forgettable aspect of his death. According to the historian, the younger Gordian fell not on a proper battlefield, but in the midst of a trampling mob, in which his body was forever lost[190]. For Gordian II, there are neither heroic nor despicable acts to claim, only oblivion.

Character and context

Both Gordians' ends are told by Herodian in such a way that they subvert certain usual patterns of admirable death in defeat: suicide in the face of imminent capture and death in combat. Admittedly, neither story is particularly developed, but these images, even roughly sketched, of the Gordians' final moments are compelling. In the first case, Herodian targets specific elements of past models (e.g. mode, moment, motive) to produce a stripped-down story of a 'political' suicide, in which even the political aspect is ultimately undermined. Gordian's death is, in the end, depicted only as a desperate act, with no redeeming potential. In the second case, Herodian offers a very limited story of Gordian II's end, for which models are only vaguely implied. The episode's form contributes in itself to the production of an unremarkable death, working against the motif of the warrior's glorious death.

Although similar in context, Herodian's accounts of the years 193 and 238 are, at least formally, very distinct. In the *History*, Pertinax, as well as the three contenders who lost to Severus, are given substantial space to move, speak, and exist. Even some of the earlier unsuccessful usurpers are featured more prominently than the two Gordians, whose imperial proclamation was even confirmed by the senate. This disparity can certainly be explained by the Gordians' lack of effective power, expressed namely through a limited presence and agency in the story, but it is also grounded in the more general differences set by Herodian between the two periods. Compared to the earlier books, Herodian's story for the year 238 is, overall, much less linear and emperor-focused, whether to reflect the climate or strengthen the impression of immediacy[191]. In this new context, both strictly textual and more largely political, it may well be that Herodian's portrayals of the Gordians' is meant to mirror their overall lack of impact in the narrative as well as in the actual course of events.

3.4.3 A tyrant's death

As discussed in the first chapter, bad emperors usually suffer a terrible death. This is a popular literary *topos*, through which the often-aggrandized image of the dying tyrant is

[189] Cf. van Hooff 2003, 104-5; so Julian claims in his final speech: *gaudens abeo* (Ammian. Marcell. 25.3.18).
[190] Cf. *SHA*, *Gord.* 15.3: *pugna commissa uincitur et in eodem bello interficitur*.
[191] On the *History*'s rhythm, see Hidber 2006, 136ff and 2007, 209; cf. also below, [192-3].

used to confirm all of his vices, and then some. One frequent incarnation of this theme in the *History* can be seen in the various murders attributed to the praetorians[192]. Many of these assassination plots could certainly target bad emperors, in line with classical images of tyrannicide, a ritualised political act serving to 'expiate' not only the tyrant's faults but the very individual in the interest of the community[193]. But, against this 'good' type of imperial assassination, there were also, in the period covered by Herodian's history, a number of good emperors that fell to similar praetorian revolts. The first part of this section will focus on the key elements of this pattern as found in the *History* (motivations, execution, consequences), using two examples of tyrannical emperors (Heliogabalus and Maximinus) and another, more mitigated (Alexander); the second part will then turn to two subverted applications of the theme (Pertinax and Maximus and Balbinus).

3.4.3.1 Using the pattern I: displeasing behaviours

As repeatedly shown by Herodian, these types of murders usually emerged from a deep dissatisfaction of the praetorians with their current ruler. Reasons purported by the historian are varied, but fall under the broad argument of any conduct grossly contrary to military values. For instance, amidst general outrage at Heliogabalus' subversion of institutions and traditions, the soldiers are said to have been "particularly" (5.8.1: μάλιστα) embittered. More specifically, they "were revolted" (5.8.1: ἐμυσάττοντο) by the emperor's look, tastes, and interests, which were deemed too effeminate (ἀνάνδρως) and disgraceful (5.8.8: ἀσχημονοῦντα)[194]. By contrast, Alexander, Heliogabalus' cousin, Caesar, and adoptive son, was seen as a better alternative, since he "was receiving such a modest and serious education" (5.8.2: κοσμίως καὶ σωφρόνως ἀνατρεφομένῳ). It is interesting to see that the soldiers, otherwise quite uninterested in traditional values, were so repulsed by Heliogabalus' outlandish ways that they turned to a more conventional candidate. Moderation was certainly appreciated by the army depicted by Herodian, but insofar as it aligned with a military lifestyle (so Severus, Caracalla, and Maximinus). The praetorians' sustained loyalty to Commodus, who was the author of similar extravagances as Heliogabalus, can be easily explained through that emperor's high regard for them and the many privileges he granted them (cf. 2.5.1). It is also worth noting that, although 'army' and 'praetorians' tend to be treated as a more or less homogenous group by Herodian, the praetorians are consistently presented as the worst of them, which make their outrage at Heliogabalus' actions even more striking.

Though Alexander, as he appears in the *History*, proved to be a mild and sensible ruler like the soldiers had hoped, the emperor would also subject them to too many military

[192] See Scott 2018b, who analyzes in detail this pattern.
[193] On ancient tyrannicide theory, see e.g. Turchetti 2001, 31-184 (esp. 165-84, about the emperor); Pina Polo 2006 and Moatti 2010, 146-7.
[194] The soldiers had initially been admirative of these particular traits, cf. 5.3.7-8. While they were charmed by the exoticism, the problem is perhaps that these practices were now transferred to a Roman context and applied to the emperor's person.

failures[195]. Alexander's procrastination and cowardice, or so the army perceived it, were attributed both to his reluctance to spill blood and, for better or worse, to his general character[196]. The emperor is said to have been "over-mild" (6.1.10: ὑπὸ περιττῆς πραότητος; note the redundancy with the superlative) and warfare is described as generally being "against his inclinations" (6.3.1: παρὰ γνώμην). According to Herodian, Alexander's preference for diplomacy and negotiations was strongly frowned upon by his own troops, convinced that he should show boldness and efficiency in the face of an imminent, external threat[197]. Against the Persians, Alexander, leading the best section his army, failed to launch the decisive offensive, which left the rest of his troops at the mercy of their enemies. As a result, his army "was absolutely furious" (6.6.1: ἠγανάκτησε) with him and was left feeling betrayed and disappointed[198]. To make matters worse, a good chunk of Alexander's army would die on the way back to Antioch: the Illyrian troops, from a drastic change in climate, and the rest from a difficult passage through wintery mountains, "causing both the soldiers' morale and the emperor's reputation to sink to their lowest point"[199]. Against the Germans, Alexander chose to bargain for peace in exchange of money which, according to Herodian, "was the most effective bargaining counter"[200]. Despite the apparent soundness of Alexander's decision, "the soldiers bitterly resented this ridiculous waste of time", assuming that he was deliberately

[195] Mobilizing his troops to march against Artaxerxes after a failed diplomatic mission, Alexander left Rome for Antioch, "continually looking back to the city with tears in his eyes" (6.4.2: ἐπιστρεφόμενος ἀεὶ πρὸς τὴν πόλιν καὶ δακρύων). Once in Syria, he sent a second mission, which was equally rebuffed (6.2.3-5, 6.4.4-6). Similarly, after delaying as much as possible an expedition against the Germans, he ordered his army to battle "reluctantly and sadly (through sheer necessity)" (6.7.5: ἄκων καὶ ἀσχάλλων… πλὴν τῆς ἀνάγκης αὐτὸν καλούσης). Herodian calls the Roman defeat at the hands of the Persians a "terrible disaster, which no one likes to remember" (6.5.10: μεγίστη τε αὕτη συμφορὰ καὶ οὐ ῥᾳδίως μνημονευθεῖσα Ῥωμαίους ἐπέσχε, but see also a nuanced statement at 6.6.5-6), while the *Historia Augusta* paints Alexander victorious (*fuso denique fugatoque tanto rege*), calling him *uere Parthicus, uere Persicus* (*SHA*, *Alex*. 55-56).

[196] Accordingly, Alexander's speech to the army before his Persian campaign focuses less on military glory and more on duty and justice, cf. 6.3.3-7. Whittaker 1969-70, n. 2 *ad* 6.3.2 calls this "string of aphorisms" not indicative of Alexander's oratory, but of the historian's rhetorical skill. Still, the content of Alexander's speech also serves to separate, for better or worse, Alexander from other, more war-oriented emperors and military affairs in general. See too Kemezis 2014, 245-50: a 'centre'-type character fails once brought back to frontier (for Heliogabalus, the movement is opposite, but the result is the same). On Herodian's representation of Alexander's campaigns and military failure, see recently Roberto 2017.

[197] Cf. 6.6.1; 6.7.3; 6.7.10; 6.8.3, etc. During his Persian campaign, Alexander had already faced a military uprising, led by several Egyptian-based and Syrian soldiers, cf. 6.4.7. In the hagiographic version of the *Historia Augusta*, however, we read instead that Alexander possessed good military qualities and that he was well-loved by his troops (*SHA*, *Alex*. 50: *tantus ac talis imperator domi ac foris*; 50.3: *milites iuuenem imperatorem sic amabant ut fratrem ut filium ut parentem*).

[198] Compare with 6.5.8: Herodian wonders whether Alexander's retreat was due to his own fears or his mother's influence. Kemezis 2014, 249 sees this questioning as a failure of Herodian's 'narrative omniscience', while describing Herodian's perception of Alexander as "lukewarm rather than hostile" (at 254). Whittaker 1969-70, n. 1 *ad* 6.5.8: "It is typical of H.'s interpretation of history that he should look for the moral causes underlying the failure of A., whose rule was, after, one of which he approved. A ready answer lay to hand in the domination exercised over A. by his mother; this is the reason why such a disproportionate number of chapters are devoted to the last four years of A.'s life, compared to a single chapter covering the first nine years of rule".

[199] 6.6.3: ὡς μεγίστην ἐνεγκεῖν δυσθυμίαν τῷ στρατῷ καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ ἀδοξίαν.

[200] 6.7.9: τούτῳ γὰρ μάλιστα Γερμανοὶ πείθονται; cf. 1.6.9.

avoiding armed conflict to return more quickly to Antioch's easy life[201]. Another problematic element of Alexander's rule for the soldiers was the power held by Julia Mamaea, his mother. They could not accept that "business was conducted on the authority and advice of a woman"[202]. This constant tension, in Herodian's account, between Alexander's mildness and procrastination lays the groundwork for Maximinus' swift accession: with their ever-growing resentment, the soldiers would next seek an emperor who would possess all of Alexander's missing military virtues.

A (plotted) revolt

With this growing unhappiness within their armies, both Heliogabalus and Alexander were soon at the mercy of the soldiers' impulse. According to Herodian, when Heliogabalus realized that Alexander was garnering more support within the praetorians than himself, the emperor then engaged in a strange back-and-forth with them. Siding with Alexander, the praetorians first "kept a close watch over him" (5.8.2: ἐφρούρουν) to protect him from Heliogabalus' relentless plotting. Constantly failing to eliminate his cousin through ill-conceived schemes, Heliogabalus then decided to strip Alexander of his titles and remove him from public life (5.8.4). Believing that Heliogabalus had gone through with his plans, the praetorians attempted to force Heliogabalus' hand: demanding Alexander's presence, they refused to assume their usual duties towards the emperor they had come to profoundly hate and locked themselves in the camp (5.8.5). "In absolute terror" (5.8.6: ἐν δέει πολλῷ), Heliogabalus finally caved in and, with Alexander in tow, made his way to the praetorian camp. Ignored by the soldiers, who had warmly received his cousin, Heliogabalus became so incensed he issued orders to punish the seditious soldiers, whether proven or merely alleged (5.8.7). This was, following the *History*, his final mistake: "already antagonistic to Antoninus and anxious to be rid of an emperor who was a disgrace"[203], the soldiers elected to help their imprisoned comrades and instead killed Heliogabalus, his mother, and all his entourage. Perhaps unusually so, Herodian notes how they believed that "the opportunity was right and their case just" (5.8.8: καιρὸν εὔκαιρον καὶ πρόφασιν δικαίαν), which is at odds with his regular portrayal of them: brash, entitled, and greedy. In doing so, Herodian suggests that, ultimately, not even the army could rally behind Heliogabalus, whose badness pushed even the praetorians to appreciate Alexander's moderation.

When Alexander would in turn learn about Maximinus' proclamation, he would receive the news with a similar reaction: according to Herodian, the emperor "came rushing out of the imperial tent like a man possessed, weeping and trembling"[204]. Faced with these

[201] 6.7.10: οἱ μέντοι στρατιῶται χαλεπῶς ἔφερον διατριβῆς τε ματαίας ἐγγινομένης. Coupled with the events in Persia, the Germans' invasion was, for the Illyrian troops, a "double tragedy" (6.7.3: διπλῇ συμφορᾷ). Roberto 2017, 167 sees Alexander's failure against the Persians and overall ignorance of the situation during the years 224-30 as the result of the emperor's "inadeguata *paideia*".

[202] 6.8.3: διοικουμένων τῶν πραγμάτων ὑπ' ἐξουσίας τε καὶ γνώμης γυναικός.

[203] 5.8.8: ἄλλως μὲν μισοῦντες τὸν Ἀντωνῖνον καὶ ἀποσκευάσασθαι θέλοντες ἀσχημονοῦντα βασιλέα.

[204] 6.9.1: προπηδήσας τῆς βασιλείου σκηνῆς ὥσπερ ἐνθουσιῶν, δακρυρροῶν καὶ τρέμων; cf. 6.2.3, when Alexander was informed of Artaxerxes' uprising.

unexpected events, Alexander promised his own soldiers anything they might want in order to secure their allegiance for himself (6.9.2). According to Herodian, while Alexander's soldiers had at first remained loyal to him and even appeared on the battlefield to fight for him against Maximinus, they soon refused to obey him further and simply left the site. Instead they were lashing out against the emperor's household, his prefect, mother, and against Alexander himself (6.9.4-5). They were easily convinced by the recruits under Maximinus' command to choose a "brave and moderate" (6.9.5: *γενναίῳ καὶ σώφρονι*) man over this "mean little sissy" (*γύναιον μικρολόγον*)[205]. Following Herodian's account, Alexander, never regaining full control over the situation, "trembling and terrified out of his wits" (6.9.6: *τρέμων καὶ λιποψυχῶν*), would only barely be able to return to his tent. In a mockery of his dawdling in previous wars, there Alexander "waited for his executioner" (6.9.6: *ἀνέμενε τὸν φονεύσοντα*), while also blaming his mother for all his troubles[206]. Once proclaimed sole emperor, Maximinus dispatched some officers to execute Alexander, Mamaea, and the rest of his entourage who would oppose them. A few friends of Alexander fled or hid, but were quickly found and killed by Maximinus (6.9.6-7)[207].

Herodian narrates Alexander's end in a winding passage, which has the effect of dragging out the emperor's death. For instance, the story's focus continuously alternates between Alexander, his soldiers, Maximinus' soldiers, and Maximinus. As a result, the same elements or events are noted at least twice, though sometimes from a different perspective: Alexander's panic and helplessness, the recriminations of his soldiers, the arrival of Maximinus' army, Maximinus' proclamation. Just like Heliogabalus' ending, Alexander's death in the *History* circles back neatly to the context of his accession: set in a camp, driven by the soldiers, meant to install a new emperor due to military discontent. Tellingly, no battle took place between Alexander and Maximinus: while the latter's soldiers convinced his soldiers to join them, Alexander could only retreat to his tent and await his fate. What Herodian depicts as Alexander's last actions revealed the extent of the emperor's lack of power. Having exhausted his only strategy of "appealing to everyone's sympathy and pity" (6.9.3: *πάντας τε ἐς οἶκτον καὶ ἔλεον προκαλούμενος*) to get them to fight for him against Maximinus, Alexander, it seemed, had run out of options: he now could only lie in wait and blame Mamaea for his failure[208].

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[205] Note how both armies are driving the final 'confrontation' between Alexander and Maximinus (6.9.4-5: *ἦν, βοῶντες, προυκαλοῦντο, πεισθέντες, καταλιμπάνουσιν*), and not the emperors (appearing in dative or accusative forms until Maximinus' proclamation noted with *ἀναγορεύεται*).

[206] Interestingly, *ἀναμένω* can also mean "to put off" or "to delay" (*LSJ*, s.v. *ἀναμένω*, 2).

[207] Chrysanthou 2020, 628, n. 244 sees a 'displacement' of how Geta's death is told in Cass. Dio 78(77).2.3-4 to Herodian's own story of Alexander's death. Talking about the parallels between Geta and Alexander, Bats 2003, 291, n. 69 argues that Alexander embodies "le modèle du prince idéal que regrettent les historiens, modèle que laissait pressentir l'image de Géta, dont la mort a interrompu prématurément le développement."

[208] Roberto 2017, 182: "La tragica fine di Severo Alessandro conferma la visione negativa che lega tutta la riflessione storiografica di Erodiano."

Aftermath

Having murdered Heliogabalus and his mother, the praetorians then gave their bodies to whomever wanted to "drag them around and desecrate them" (5.8.9: σύρειν τε καὶ ἐνυβρίζειν). According to Herodian, the bodies were lugged "for a long time" (ἐπὶ πολύ) and "through the entire city" (διὰ πάσης τῆς πόλεως, trans. mod.), after which they were dumped into the sewers (ἐς τοὺς ὀχετούς)[209]. Although body disposal through the sewers was somewhat standard fare for criminals and traitors in Rome, this fate had not yet been suffered by an emperor[210]. Broadly speaking, the violence of Heliogabalus' treatment after his death, which was extended to his mother, aligns with the emperor's tyrannical character. This affliction imposed on Heliogabalus' body resonates with how the general population in Rome viewed his foreignness as problematic, while reflecting the subverted essence of his government. Moreover, by defacing Heliogabalus' and Soaemis' bodies and flushing them away, the praetorians were making sure they would not get proper funeral rites and be denied burial of their remains[211]. As found throughout ancient literature, violence both ante- and post-mortem against the tyrant also participated in a ritualized expulsion of the tyrant from civic life and the expiation of his transgressions[212]. So savagely killed, the tyrant would be pushed back into his monstrous nature, stripped even of humanity[213]. Corpse mistreatment, finally, went beyond physical abuse; it was also a way to kill the tyrant's memory, contributing to his *abolitio*[214]. How striking, then, is Herodian's story of these events: a perfect embodiment of the tyrant, Heliogabalus is thus the first emperor, in the *History*, to be subjected to the 'traditional' act of a public tyrannicide.

Herodian's verdict on Heliogabalus is adequately terse: "So in the sixth year of his rule, after a life such as has been described above (προειρημένῳ), Antoninus and his mother were murdered"[215]. While certain emperors, good and bad, are reviewed by Herodian in more detail, the brevity of this particular notice might be interpreted as participating to Heliogabalus'

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[209] A somewhat longer version is found in Cass. Dio 80(79).20.1-2 (Heliogabalus had attempted to flee stowed away in a chest, but was caught and killed; as in Herodian, both Heliogabalus' and Soaemis' corpses were dragged around, but only the son's body was thrown in the river) and *SHA*, *Heliog.* 17; 18.2; 33.7 (with the added detail that the soldiers had first tried to throw him in the sewers, which turned out to be too narrow). See Turcan 1985, 242-3; Mader 2005, 167, with n. 90. Linked to the process of *damnatio memoriae*, statues and images of emperors could also be thrown into sewers, rivers, wells, etc.; see Varner 2004; with Coleman 1990, 46-47 on humiliating punishments.

[210] Vitellius was dragged by hook and thrown into the Tiber (Suet., *Vitell*. 17.2). It is also worth noting that certain other individuals in Herodian's *History* are subjected to the same treatment: the bodies of Cleander, his children, and his friends, were thrown in the sewers (1.13.6), as well as those of officials and judges loyal to Maximinus (7.7.3). On "disposal by water", see Kyle 1998, 220-8 (esp. 223-4 via sewers). More generally, on the importance of funeral rites in Roman society and the implications of a denial of burial, see for instance Kyle 1998, 128-33, with additional references; on posthumous treatment and body disposal, see also Hope 2000.

[211] Cf. *SHA*, *Heliog.* 17.7 (*quod odio communi omnium contigit, a quo speciatim cauere debent imperatores, si quidem nec sepulchra*).

[212] See Scheid 1984.

[213] On the tyrant's inhuman nature, see for instance Cic., *Rep*. 2.48; with Scheid 1984.

[214] Among others, Bats 2003, 281-9.

[215] 5.8.10: Ἀντωνῖνος μὲν οὖν ἐς ἕκτον ἔτος ἐλάσας τῆς βασιλείας καὶ χρησάμενος τῷ προειρημένῳ βίῳ, οὕτως ἅμα τῇ μητρὶ κατέστρεψεν·

damnatio memoriae: it seems that, for Herodian, the extent of that emperor's wickedness should not warrant repetition of any sort once his story had reached its ending[216]. Herodian does not mention a formal *abolitio* towards this emperor's memory, but it is interesting how Heliogabalus is quickly dismissed both by the characters and the rest of the story[217]. There is not even space in the *History* for rejoicing in the tyrant's death and celebrating the people's liberation: once the bodies are thrown away, the narrative's focus quickly moves on to the new emperor[218].

Alexander was also murdered by the praetorians and, as Herodian shows, in very similar circumstances. However, he does not seem to have suffered the same posthumous fate as his cousin, although there is, admittedly, no mention either way from Herodian. It might well be that many aspects of Heliogabalus' quasi-ceremonial treatment after his death were specific to Rome (the Tiber, the sewers). Perhaps this lack of information in the *History* could also reflect the fact that Alexander might have been both struck with a formal *abolitio* by the senate and later consecrated by the senate[219]. Leaving out any posthumous treatment, whether good or bad, the historian inserts instead a substantial obituary devoted to the emperor:

> So Alexander met his end after a rule of fourteen years which, as far as his subjects were concerned, was without fault or bloodshed (ἀμέμπτως καὶ ἀναιμωτί). Murder, cruelty and injustice were not part of his nature; his inclination was towards humane and benevolent behaviour. Indeed, his reign would have been notable for its complete success, but for the blame he incurred through his mother's faults of avarice and meanness[220].

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[216] It should be said that the reverse (good emperors receiving equally terse notices) is also found, so the association of brief verdicts with *abolitiones* is not an automatic one. Rather, death notices seem to be a modular element that is made to respond to the overall logic of an emperor's representation; see below, [248-9, with n. 331], with Laporte & Hekster 2021.

[217] Cf. *SHA*, *Heliog.* 18.1: *ut eius senatus et nomen eraserit*.

[218] In book 6 of the *History*, Heliogabalus is only mentioned in a resumptive sentence at the beginning (6.1.1) and for the usual acts of restoration a new emperor would undertake in order to underscore his condemnation of his predecessor (6.1.3: "for a start…", πρῶτον μὲν οὖν). It might also be of interest that Heliogabalus is simply referred to as ἐκεῖνος ("the previous emperor", so Whittaker translates). According to Cass. Dio 80(79).21.2 (ap. Xiph.), the god Elagabalus was even "banished from Rome altogether" (ἐκ τῆς Ῥώμης παντάπασιν ἐξέπεσε).

[219] See Chastagnol 1994, n. 2 *ad SHA*, *Alex.* 63.3: "c'est pourquoi on a de lui [i.e. Alexander] à la fois des inscriptions martelées et des monnaies de consécration." On Alexander's *damnatio memoriae*, see too Bats 2003, 285. Just like the date of Alexander's death remains to this day unknown, dating for his apotheosis is not secure, but would likely be in 238, after Maximinus' death; cf. *SHA*, *Alex.* 63.3 (*senatus eum in deos rettulit*); with *CIL* 8.627 (= *ILS* 1315; from Mactar, Tunisia, after 235); *AE* 1910, 36 (= *ILS* 9221; from Misenum, dated to 246); and *RIC* 4.3, 132 nos. 97-98 (issued under Trajan Decius, 250-51). According to Bats 2003, 292, n. 72, Alexander's apotheosis would have been decreed under the Gordians. Bats also comments on the fact that Alexander's *abolitio* can be found nowhere in ancient literary accounts: "son assassinat ainsi que l'absence de cérémonie *post mortem* sont la seule illustration d'une *damnatio memoriae*, que les historiens semblent se refuser à prononcer contre lui, s'attachant, malgré les vicissitudes des dernières années de son règne, à sauvegarder l'image de ce bon prince." (at 295)

[220] 6.9.8: τέλος μὲν δὴ τοιοῦτο κατέλαβε τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον βασιλεύσαντα ἔτεσι τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα, ὅσον πρὸς τοὺς ἀρχομένους, ἀμέμπτως καὶ ἀναιμωτί· φόνων τε γὰρ καὶ ὠμότητος ἀκρίτων τε ἔργων ἀλλότριος ἐγένετο, ἔς τε τὸ φιλάνθρωπον καὶ εὐεργετικώτερον ἐπιρρεπής. πάνυ γοῦν ἂν ἡ Ἀλεξάνδρου βασιλεία εὐδοκίμησεν ἐς τὸ ὁλόκληρον, εἰ μὴ διεβέβλητο αὐτῷ τὰ τῆς μητρὸς ἐς φιλαργυρίαν τε καὶ μικρολογίαν.

While the story of Alexander's death might place him too close to confirmed bad emperors, such as Heliogabalus or Maximinus, Herodian's final judgement serves to mitigate the implications of such a violent end. This is not entirely the same strategy that was used in Niger's case, where Herodian's lukewarm notice reflected the good death of a defeated enemy. For Alexander, the redeeming potential resides mainly within Herodian's final statement, since the emperor's conduct in the face of imminent death was not, in the *History* at least, particularly commendable: Alexander found himself absolutely helpless and could only blame others, and above all his mother, for his failure. This reaction is picked up in Herodian's closing remark: Alexander's rule would have been flawless "but for" (εἰ μή) the part played by his mother. But this may not be exactly accurate given how Herodian presented Alexander's failed campaigns and the anger it set off within his entire army, and not only the praetorians. Perhaps, then, Herodian's exclusion of these matters in the notice should be compared to the idealizing strategies that were applied to Marcus' portrayal.

Herodian emphasizes Alexander's mild character and more traditional style of government throughout the story of his reign, along with the fact that this emperor also achieved political stability for fourteen years. This, in a world post-Marcus, was no longer a foregone conclusion, as Pertinax's short-lived reign could attest. Accordingly, Herodian makes a point to underline the exact figure of Alexander's years as emperor both at the beginning and at the end of book 6, and again at the beginning of book 7 in the usual summarizing sentence[221]. This insistence on numbered figures is quite unusual for the historian and seems to imply a certain approval towards Alexander. Herodian also repeatedly notes how Alexander ruled ἀμέμπτως, μετρίως, and ἀναιμωτί, which in the *History* are all presented as hallmarks of a good emperor. Similarly, Herodian's final comment on the emperor's excessive deference to his mother also echoes a similar passage in the opening of book 6[222]. Taken together, these two matters are used to bookend book 6 and indicate quite clearly what Herodian holds to be the key aspects of Alexander's tenure. It should also be noted that, while Alexander's mildness remains a consistently positive attribute between the beginning and the ending of book 6, Alexander's relation to his mother deteriorates considerably. Though initially linked to Maesa and more positively portrayed by Herodian, Mamaea is shown to transform drastically in the wake of her mother's death (cf. 6.1.5ff). Internal and authorial perceptions of Alexander's compliance decline accordingly, although his actual obedience to Mamaea does not seem to change substantially, at least in Herodian's account[223].

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[221] Cf. 6.1.7 (ἐς τεσσαρεσκαιδέκατον); 6.9.8 (ἔτεσι τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα); 7.1.1 (ἐτῶν τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα); also mentioned or alluded to at 6.2.1 (ἐτῶν… τρισκαίδεκα); 6.4.2 (τοσούτων ἐτῶν); 6.9.3 (τεσσαρεσκαίδεκα ἔτεσιν).

[222] Compare 6.1.1, 6.1.2, and 6.1.10 with 6.9.8 (εἰ μὴ διεβέβλητο αὐτῷ τὰ τῆς μητρὸς ἐς φιλαργυρίαν τε καὶ μικρολογίαν).

[223] According to Herodian, Alexander seems somewhat aware of his mother's shortcomings; see for instance 6.1.8; 6.1.10; 6.9.6, where Mamaea serves as the perfect scapegoat for a powerless emperor. See Martinelli 1991; with Vitiello 2015, 202-5: designations such as *Mamaeae Alexander* or Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Μαμαίας were never part of an official titulature, but are continuously found in historiography, cf. *SHA*, *Alex.* 3.1; 5.2; *Antonin.* 42.4; *Car.* 3.4, as well as *AE* 1912, 155, the long title of Xiphilinus' epitome (…ἀπὸ Πομπηίου Μάγνου μέχρις Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ Μαμαίας), and the Suda. Significantly, Herodian chooses to omit Ulpian's presence, noted everywhere else, in order to focus on Maesa and Mamaea's influence on Alexander. While Herodian

Herodian's overall approval of Alexander is, ultimately, somewhat measured[224]. Dio's version, however brief and incomplete, is similar in tone. Dio offers a partial image of Alexander, with whom he seemed to have had good personal relations, but the emperor ends up being unable to protect Ulpian, and Dio himself, against the praetorians (Cass. Dio 80(80).1-5, ap. Xiph.). The brief passage on the Persians wars in Dio's *Roman History* does not really feature Alexander, and Artaxerxes is shown as a real threat. By contrast, the adulatory *Historia Augusta*, in a lengthy biography falling right in the centre of the work, shapes Alexander into its model emperor and opposes him to his predecessor, Heliogabalus, himself serving as the paradigmatic tyrant[225]. While Herodian's account of Alexander's reign is generally positive, it also tackles what the historian views as the critical flaws of the emperor's character. For Herodian, Alexander's two major defects, military failure and obedience to Mamaea, seem to emerge from his mildness, said to be one of his greatest virtues. Herodian's insistence on the emperor's long and peaceful reign, similarly credited to his mild disposition, seems to outweigh much of his criticism of Alexander. Herodian even obscures, in the emperor's death notice, Alexander's military failures, choosing to focus instead on the moderate quality of his long rule (at least 'long' by the standards of the period)[226].

3.4.3.2 Using the pattern II: unusual behaviours

Maximinus' death, in Herodian's *History*, is processed through a similar narrative pattern of military revolt. While the emperor had faced several usurpation attempts during his reign, suffering only minimal disapproval within the army throughout, this last one stands apart[227]. In addition to its success, this revolt is not, at least following the *History*, a means to installing a new emperor, but seems to be the objective in itself. Maximinus' eventual demise, as emphasized by Herodian, was the outcome of a long, unsuccessful siege at Aquileia. Having learned that the Gordians had been made emperors and that he had been himself stripped of his titles by the senate, Maximinus decided to invade Italy at once[228]. But contrary to his past

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includes Alexander's council, its members remain anonymous and faceless, chosen by the two women (6.1.2).

[224] On Herodian's verdict of Alexander, see e.g. Marasco 1998, 2847-9. For later representations of Alexander other than the *Vita*, cf. Vict., *Caes.* 24; Ps.-Vict. 24; Fest. 22; Oros. 18.6; Eutrop. 8.14 (*gloriossime*, *seuerissime*; *in Mamaeam, matrem suam, unice pius*). In Zosim. 1.11-12, although Alexander shows promising qualities early on, the attempted usurpations he faced gradually pushed him towards vice.

[225] On the *SHA*'s portrayal of Alexander, see Molinier Arbo 2008.

[226] According to Marasco 1998, 2884-8, Herodian minimizes Alexander's military failure against the Parthians namely because he was hoping for a policy of peace with them.

[227] Cf. 7.1.4-8 (Magnus); 7.1.9-11 (Osrhoene archers choosing Quartinus); 7.9.6ff (the Libyans and Gordian I; followed by a disavowal from the senate). While Magnus' plot was supported by "many centurions" (7.1.5: πολλῶν… ἑκατοντάρχων), he only managed, according to Herodian, to convince "some soldiers, not many of them, but key men" (7.1.7: στρατιωτῶν μὲν ὀλίγους, ἀλλὰ τοὺς ἐξοχωτάτους) to side with him and cutting off the bridge after Maximinus' crossing to Germania. Similarly, the second revolt concerned only the Osrhoenian corps: if Herodian notes that the archers missed Alexander, he does not insert, as he is wont to do, a corresponding criticism of Maximinus (7.1.9-11). It seems then that military disapproval was, in Maximinus' case, occurring only within small, restricted groups and that the bulk of the army was still very loyal to the emperor. On the staged aspects of Magnus' plot, cf. also below, [211-12].

[228] Kemezis 2014, 242-5, compares it with Severus' march into Italy and describes it as "full of complex plays on expectation" (at 243).

successes, in this last battle, Maximinus' military skills would eventually slip[229]. According to Herodian, this turn of events had made him "an angry and extremely worried man, though he pretended to think them of little importance"[230]. Depicted as irascible throughout the story of his rule, Maximinus notably retained his capacity for planning and his efficiency in his earlier expeditions[231]. This campaign, however, which would be his last, is described as a "sudden" (7.8.11: *αἰφνιδίου*) decision, made "without the usual advance planning" (*οὐκ ἐκ προνοίας, ὥσπερ εἰώθει*), which was seen for instance in the offensive launched against Alexander (6.8.7ff)[232]. Herodian also notes that, for this new march, military supplies were put together on the road (7.8.11: *ἐξ αὐτοσχεδίου*) "as aid was being rushed to him" (*ἐπειγούσης ὑπηρεσίας*), and that this made the journey "somewhat slow" (7.8.10: *σχολαιτέραν*) due to all the traffic jams. It is striking how, in Herodian's account, Maximinus' impatience to get to Rome would, paradoxically, impede his own advance towards the capital[233].

And yet, though preparations may have been lacking, Maximinus still controlled "the entire Roman force" (7.8.9: *τήν τε ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίοις δύναμιν*), which had proved to be a key asset time and again. His decision may have been somewhat hasty, but as he left for Rome, Maximinus remained in a good position to win, armed with fury, confidence, and superior numbers. This was confirmed in the early stages of the campaign: arriving at Hema, Maximinus was fortified by an easy taking of the city, which had already been sacked by its own people and abandoned. Faced with this wreckage, however, "the army was annoyed (*ἤχθετο*) that at the start of the campaign they had to be short of food"[234]. Nevertheless they enjoyed this first victory, and their displeasure was further offset by a smooth progression towards Aquileia, even across the Alps[235]. Since the troops were easily making headway, "their spirits rose again […] and they sang in triumph" (8.2.1: *ἀνεθάρρησάν τε καὶ ἐπαιάνισαν*), while Maximinus too grew more confident of "an easy, sweeping success" (*ῥᾷστά τε αὐτῷ πάντα προχωρήσειν*). Looking more closely, however, at Herodian's remark about the soldiers' discontent and an early shortage of provisions, it seems that the dire consequences of Maximinus' impulsive expedition were already taking shape: foreshadowing not just the outcome at Aquileia, but also its causes and the main players in action.

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[229] A similar technique of inversion was used to describe Severus' last expedition (though certain aspects were rather framed in physical degradation).

[230] 7.8.1: *σκυθρωπός τε ἦν καὶ ἐν μεγάλαις φροντίσι, προσεποιεῖτο δὲ αὐτῶν καταφρονεῖν*; cf. 7.8.2. In Herodian's story, Maximinus struggled constantly with the image he wanted to present of himself as emperor, see below, section 4.3.2.

[231] E.g. 6.8.7 (acting pre-emptively against Alexander); 7.1.8 (quick and ruthless retaliation against Magnus and allies); 7.2.2 (using spearmen and archers against the Germans); 7.2.9 (more preparations against the Germans).

[232] According to Herodian, though Maximinus did take a couple of days to consult his advisers (7.8.1), he then only waited a day before marching out.

[233] Another element of interest in this expedition is Maximinus' haste in now reaching this place which he previously could not have left fast enough (cf. 7.1.6: "for no sooner had he gained power than he began his military campaign, *ἅμα γὰρ τῷ τὴν ἀρχὴν παραλαβεῖν εὐθέως πολεμικῶν ἔργων ἤρξατο*).

[234] 8.1.5: *ὁ δὲ στρατὸς ἤχθετο εὐθὺς ἐν ἀρχῇ λιμοῦ πειρώμενος.*

[235] Even though they are described to be impassable, cf. 8.1.5-6; already noted at 2.11.8. See above, [127, with n. 74].

For this battle, Herodian first makes a point of showing the importance of Aquileia, "the largest Italian city" (8.2.2: ἅτε μεγίστη πόλις), which was already resisting the attacks of Maximinus' Pannonian troops[236]. Herodian's description of Aquileia emphasizes its wealth and prosperity, based on a pivotal trading port between Italy and Illyria, and on a highly fertile farm land. An already crowded city, Aquileia had also welcomed the populations of the surrounding towns who had come there to take refuge from Maximinus' advance. Herodian also lists the city's defensive preparations, overseen by two consulars chosen by the local senate, Crispinus and Menophilus[237]:

> With great foresight (μετὰ πολλῆς προνοίας) they had imported a large stock (πάμπλειστα) of provisions into the city to ensure a plentiful supply (ἐκτένειαν), even if the siege proved to be a long one; there was unlimited water (ὕδατος ἀφθονία), too, from the many wells (πολλὰ ὀρύγματα) dug in the city while the river which flows (παραρρεῖ) by the walls provided a defensive moat as well as a water supply (χορηγίαν)[238].

With this description, Herodian establishes a stark contrast between the level of preparation of the Aquileians and that of Maximinus: an abundance of resources in Aquileia set over against the shortage experienced early on by Maximinus' army, just like the foresight of the Aquileians is emphatically contrasted with Maximinus' rushed departure[239]. This unbalance, repeatedly underscored throughout this episode, would prove to be fatal to Maximinus[240].

Despite everything, Maximinus is said to have remained quite confident of his success in Aquileia, as he planned to lay waste to the city and its surroundings to set as an example[241]. In a pattern well known by now, Herodian recounts how the siege was long, with both sides relentless, and the outcome uncertain. But then Aquileians poured burning pitch down on Maximinus' soldiers, causing them heavy injuries and burning down all of their siege

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[236] On the transformation of Italy into a dangerous and unwelcoming space for Maximinus' troops, see Pitcher 2012, 281-2 and Kemezis 2014, 245. On Aquileia's significance as "sorta di 'antenna' di Roma", see Mecella 2017, 189-90; with Sotinel 2005.

[237] Compare this description with that of Byzantium at 3.1.5-7; with above, [117-18].

[238] 8.2.6: καὶ μετὰ πολλῆς προνοίας τά τε ἐπιτήδεια πάμπλειστα εἰσεκομίσαντο, ὡς ἐκτένειαν εἶναι, εἰ καὶ ἐπιμηκεστέρα γένοιτο πολιορκία. ἦν δὲ καὶ ὕδατος ἀφθονία φρεατιαίου· πολλὰ γὰρ τὰ ὀρύγματα ἐν τῇ πόλει· ποταμός τε παραρρεῖ τὸ τεῖχος, ὁμοῦ παρέχων τε προβολὴν τάφρου καὶ χορηγίαν ὕδατος. Note the bracketing ποταμός / ὕδατος in the last sentence, illustrating the moat and emphasizing the water abundance.

[239] Another point of contrast between the two parties is oratory: Maximinus' speech to his troops is explicitly said to have been composed by some of his advisers (7.8.3), while Crispinus is noted to be "a fluent Latin orator" (8.3.7: ἔν… τῇ Ῥωμαίων φωνῇ εὐπρόσφορος ἐν λόγοις). Kemezis 2014, 252 argues that, out of all the set speeches in Herodian, only the first (Marcus') and penultimate (Crispinus') ones are effective; the rest fall through either because the audience is not persuaded or because the speaker has failed to read the situation correctly.

[240] Janniard 2006 posits that Marius Maximus might have originated the narrative of the Aquileian siege in his account of the Marcomannic Wars, with Herodian being "le premier à réinvestir l'archétype maximien: le motif de la faiblesse organisationnelle de l'armée d'invasion comme signe d'une *stoliditas* barbare était aisément transposable des Marcomans à Maximin" (quote at 81). Asinius Quadratus is proposed as another source of Herodian, along with oral testimonies (table at 86).

[241] Unlike other emperors, Maximinus' usual reaction to unexpected or unwelcome news was displeasure instead of panic or fear; he also made plans and took action instead of procrastinating. All the while, he remained markedly optimistic about his chance of success, until the very end, cf. 7.8.1; 8.2.2; 8.3.1; 8.4.1. For Kemezis 2014, 243-5, Maximinus was defeated because he underestimated the Italians and, by contrast, Severus won in using the Italians' expectations about the Pannonians to his advantage.

machines and wooden equipment. According to Herodian, these victories encouraged the Aquileians to fight even more strongly, as they gained in "experience and confidence" (8.5.2: *πεῖραν καὶ θάρσος*), while the morale of Maximinus' army was quickly sinking. The Aquileians were emboldened enough to openly mock their enemies, and even Maximinus and his son (8.5.2). Powerless against the actual enemy, Maximinus could only turn against his own army: "left bereft (*κενούμενος*) from these insults, Maximinus instead sated himself (*ἐνεπίμπλατο*) with anger"[242]. It is worth noting how, in this whole passage, Herodian plays on dual meanings, profusely using words pertaining to physical emptiness and material abundance to hammer in the scarcity of means and supplies on Maximinus' side and, by extension, his critical need of solutions. The emperor's initial mistakes, it seemed, had finally caught up to him.

The Aquileians' preparations vastly paid off and they remained well supplied, even after this assault[243]. By contrast, "the army was suffering from a shortage of everything" (8.5.3: *ὁ δὲ στρατὸς πάντων ἦν ἐν σπάνει*). In addition to flawed preparations, Maximinus' troops had also wrecked everything in the surroundings "by themselves" (8.5.3: *ὑπ' αὐτοῦ*)[244]. According to Herodian, the soldiers were even forced to sleep outside, left exposed to the elements. To make matters worse, water supplies were also running low for the army, as the river was "contaminated with blood and dead bodies" (8.5.7: *αἵματι καὶ φόνοις μεμιασμένον*) coming from both sides. Here Herodian makes clear how the soldiers' ruthlessness, usually an integral part to their success, now backfired and contributed to their own defeat, depriving them of food, shelter, and clean water. A similar inversion strategy is used to describe how Maximinus' troops, in theory the better fighters, found themselves encircled by the rest of the Roman forces sent by the senate. With a classical, but expressive turn, Herodian observes that, "thus, the army supposedly mounting a siege (*πολιορκεῖν*) was actually being besieged (*πολιορκεῖσθαι*)"[245]. Having failed to take the city, but also unable to turn back, since they had been cut off from the roads and ports, Maximinus' soldiers were at a total stalemate. What they ended up doing was, as always, to follow in their leader's footsteps.

As Herodian recounts, in these conditions of "extreme privation and low morale" (8.5.8: *παντοδαπῆς οὖν ἀπορίας καὶ δυσθυμίας*), hatred for Maximinus reached its peak among his troops.

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[242] 8.5.2: *ἐφ' αἷς ἐκεῖνος κενούμενος ὀργῆς μᾶλλον ἐνεπίμπλατο*, trans. mod. Whittaker 1969-70 follows Stavenhagen-Schwartz 1922 on *κενούμενος*. Both Mendelssohn 1885 and Lucarini 2005 print *κινούμενος* ("moved", "stirred"), but this would delete the extended metaphor of abundance vs. shortage which seems to underpin the whole passage (this argument is, admittedly, semantic, not textual, since I have not seen the manuscripts). None of the editors mention the situation in their critical apparatus. gives, but does not comment on it.

[243] Cf. 8.5.3: "it turned out that the people of Aquileia had no shortage of anything, but were well supplied because of their careful preparation in building up stocks in the city of all the provisions needed to feed and water men and beasts" (*συνέβαινε δὲ τοῖς Ἀκυληησίοις πάντα ὑπάρχειν ἔκπλεα καὶ ἐπιτηδείων ἀφθονίαν, ἐκ πολλῆς παρασκευῆς ἐς τὴν πόλιν πάντων σεσωρευμένων ὅσα ἦν ἀνθρώποις καὶ κτήνεσιν ἐς τροφὰς καὶ ποτὰ ἐπιτήδεια*).

[244] Repeated in similar at 8.6.4. To impress the image of Aquileia's abundance further, Herodian describes a market held by the citizens, where they could sell to the soldiers "any amount of every commodity, all kinds of food and drink, clothes and shoes – all the things a prosperous, flourishing city might offer" (8.6.3: *πάντων τῶν ἐπιτηδείων τροφῶν τε παντοδαπῶν καὶ ποτῶν ἀφθονίαν, ἐσθῆτός τε καὶ ὑποδημάτων, καὶ ὅσα ἐδύνατο παρέχειν ἐς χρῆσιν ἀνθρώποις πόλις εὐδαιμονοῦσα καὶ ἀκμάζουσα*).

[245] 8.5.5: *συνέβαινε δὲ τὸν στρατὸν δοκοῦντα πολιορκεῖν αὐτὸν πολιορκεῖσθαι*.

Like Alexander, Maximinus is shown to be powerless to remedy this situation: the emperor turned instead against his own commanders, blaming them for his current predicament (8.5.3). In addition to their own misery, the soldiers were also receiving 'news' of Rome that inflated the opposition to Maximinus, said to be Empire-wide, and the concerted efforts to overthrow him (8.5.6: μιᾷ… γνώμῃ καὶ ψυχῇ). In ever-growing despair, wanting to end this siege and "stop laying waste [to] Italy for the benefit of a tyrant who was condemned and hated", Maximinus' army now turned against its own emperor[246]. Perhaps surprisingly, Herodian ascribes somewhat noble concerns to the soldiers who had chosen to follow him in the first place. But in fact, in an echo of Heliogabalus' death, Herodian uses this betrayal to illustrate how far gone the tyrant had been that even his most loyal followers could not abide his ways anymore and decided to take action against him.

To convey a sense of desperation and an urgency to act, Herodian stresses the spontaneity and audacity of the soldiers' actions: there was a "sudden change" (8.5.8: αἰφνιδίως); the soldiers acted "with great daring" (8.5.9: τολμήσαντες); this took place "around mid-day" (περὶ μέσην ἡμέραν), unconcealed and in broad daylight. According to Herodian, the soldiers first tore down the imperial *imagines* and, when Maximinus and his son came out to parley, they swept down on them, "without listening" (8.5.9: οὐκ ἀνασχόμενοι). Herodian's story of the soldiers' attack also marks a strong contrast with their siege of Aquileia, which was at a standstill and seemed quite hopeless, impervious to their usual tactics. As Herodian shows, their action against Maximinus, however, was fast and conclusive, since they clearly had no interest in delaying the inevitable through any sort of negotiations. They would also kill Maximinus' military prefect and his close friends[247].

Maximinus' death in the *History* is in many ways similar to that of Heliogabalus: here too the soldiers' boldness culminated in the way they dealt with the corpses of the emperor and his son. According to Herodian, they left the two bodies out "for anyone to desecrate and trample on, before being left to be torn to pieces by dogs and birds"[248]. In doing so, the soldiers were removing them from the human world, reducing them to being foodstuff for animals[249]. While Heliogabalus was flushed away through the sewers, Maximinus' head was sent to the capital as proof of death. Since Heliogabalus was killed in Rome, witnessed even by the next emperor, there seemed to be no need to confirm his death or even to make him an example.

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[246] 8.5.8: ὡς παύσαιντο μὲν χρονίου καὶ ἀπεράντου πολιορκίας, μηκέτι δὲ πορθοῖεν Ἰταλίαν ὑπὲρ τυράννου κατεγνωσμένου καὶ μεμισημένου. But these worries are not entirely altruistic since they were heavily losing the battle and were afraid of more troops coming to oppose them.

[247] It should be noted that the rebellious soldiers belonged to only a part of Maximinus' entire force: it was first the regular soldiers (belonging to the Parthian legion), who were then joined by the praetorians (8.5.9). However, Pannonians and Thracians, "who had been responsible for Maximinus' elevation to power" (8.6.1: οἳ καὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν αὐτῷ ἐγκεχειρίκεσαν), were not particularly with this turn of events and only pretended to accept it out of necessity (ἀνάγκη… ὑποκρινομένους). See Whittaker 1969-70, n. 1 *ad* 8.5.9.

[248] 8.5.9: τὰ σώματα τοῖς βουλομένοις ἐνυβρίζειν καὶ πατεῖν εἴασαν κυσί τε καὶ ὄρνισι βοράν.

[249] Maximinus' brutal posthumous treatment, although common for tyrants, also parallels his torment of senators and noblemen (7.3.4). According to Paño 1997, 306, Herodian's story of Maximinus' death does not adhere to the tyrannical stereotypes he has used throughout the portrayal of this emperor, since this account relies instead on "concisión, sobriedad y verosimilitud". Paño argues that this episode is based on the Thucydidean passage about Harmodios and Aristogeiton; on this event, see below, [247, n. 323].

Heliogabalus, at least in what Herodian records, had been generally hated and his only remaining friends were also murdered by the praetorians. The peculiar circumstances of Maximinus' death, however, called for validation, not only in Rome, but more urgently with Maximus who was coming to fight Maximinus. According to Herodian, Maximus was in fact only reaching Ravenna, when the messengers dispatched from Aquileia with Maximinus' head met him (8.6.5-6)[250]. Satisfied, Maximus sent them on the capital, "with the head of the enemy stuck on a pole for all to see"[251].

As Herodian records, the sight of Maximinus' head triggered great celebrations throughout Italy and sacrifices were conducted at Ravenna and in Rome (8.6.6; 8.6.8: even a hecatomb). The entire Roman people is said to have rejoiced in a mad frenzy: following the *History*, these festivities even assumed the shape of a religious ceremony, designed perhaps in a way to expiate Maximinus' tyrannical infamy, with everybody running "to the altars and the temples" (8.6.8: *πρὸς τοὺς βωμούς τε καὶ τὰ ἱερά*)[252]. Looking more closely at Herodian's account, this celebration of the tyrant's death seemed to have also taken on a political aspect, as if the people, by "rushing together to the circus, as though there were a public assembly there (*ὥσπερ ἐκκλησιάζοντες*)"[253], were reclaiming the civic space and their institutions. In a mirror image of the universal grief caused by Marcus' disappearance, Herodian now insists on the joyous unity created by the news of Maximinus' death: "people of all ages ran" (8.6.8: *οὔτε γὰρ ἡλικία τις ἦν ἢ μὴ… ἠπείγετο*); "no one stayed indoors" (*οὔτε τις ἔμενεν οἴκοι*); they were "congratulating each other" (*συνηδόμενοί τε ἀλλήλοις*); "all rushing together" (*συνθέοντες*); "all the magistrates, the senate and every ordinary man" (*ἀρχαί τε πᾶσαι καὶ σύγκλητος ἕκαστός τε*) were partaking in great celebrations. Very significantly, this picture clashes with previous scenes of discord, instigated by Maximinus' influence: false denunciations within the civic body (7.3.2-4), excessive cruelty from officers wanting to impress Maximinus[254], a general state of chaos and civil war in Rome (7.7.3-7; 7.11.1-9). Now rid of Maximinus and the stigma he carried, all revelled together in their newfound freedom[255].

Finally, Herodian's verdict on Maximinus is quite brief: "and so Maximinus and his son died, punished for their disgraceful (*πονηρᾶς*) rule"[256]. It may be that, like Heliogabalus before

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[250] According to Oros. 7.19.1, Maximus was the one to kill Maximinus at Aquileia.

[251] 8.6.7: *δεικνύντες τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ πολεμίου ἀνεσκολοπισμένην, ὡς πᾶσι περίοπτος εἴη*. Note the stark opposition between the easy progress of Maximinus' head towards Rome and the deadlock the emperor faced at Aquileia.

[252] As Herodian recounts, Maximus was cheerfully greeted by the cities around Aquileia with flowers and ex-votos, the newly elected emperors also sacrificed in earnest to celebrate Maximinus' death, cf. 8.6.7-8, 8.7.3. On the religiousness of Maximus and Balbinus' accession in Herodian, see below, [258-9].

[253] 8.6.8: *καὶ ἐς τὸν ἱππόδρομον συνθέοντες ὥσπερ ἐκκλησιάζοντες ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ χωρίῳ*.

[254] Cf. above, [142, with n. 143].

[255] Interestingly, a similar response, both elated and violent (cf. 7.7.3-4), is said to have been provoked by Vitalianus' death, from which rumours of Maximinus' own death had begun to circulate (7.7.1ff).

[256] 8.5.9: *τοιούτῳ μὲν δὴ τέλει ὁ Μαξιμῖνος καὶ ὁ παῖς αὐτοῦ ἐχρήσαντο, δίκας πονηρᾶς ἀρχῆς ὑποσχόντες*. Compare with 5.4.12: Macrinus' son is also featured in Herodian's judgement, but appears only incidentally. By contrast, Maximinus' son is fully integrated in Herodian's statement, though the character never gains full autonomy (8.4.9: *αὐτός τε καὶ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ*; 8.5.2: *ἔς τε αὐτὸν καὶ τὸν παῖδα*; 8.5.9: *τοῦ δὲ Μαξιμίνου καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς*

him, the story of Maximinus' rule was, in Herodian's view, largely sufficient as it was and did not bear repeating. However, as noted above, the events following Maximinus' death in the *History* are still largely concerned with him, albeit posthumously. With this in mind, it may well be that Herodian's own opinion on Maximinus is spilling over in his prolonged account of the many festivities brought about by the emperor's travelling head, from Aquileia to Ravenna and Rome.

Death to tyrants…?

The deaths of Heliogabalus, Alexander, and Maximinus are, in Herodian's *History*, closely connected to each other, in terms of setting, causes, actors, and narrative structure. Stirring up civil war, military displeasure was at the heart of those emperors' accessions and of their downfalls: each emperor found himself at the mercy of the army's fickleness. As Herodian shows, all three rulers were discarded for the same reasons they had been chosen in the first place: replacing an emperor chosen mostly out of convenience of whom the soldiers had now grown tired. Interestingly, what initially appealed to the soldiers in the character of their new candidates ended up being cause for great resentment and, ultimately, led to their revolt and acclamation of another emperor. In particular, the soldiers had been charmed by Heliogabalus' exotic religious practices, they had appreciated Alexander's traditional education and moderation, and they had wished for an able military leader such as Maximinus. But they soon perceived Heliogabalus' flamboyant ways as 'barbaric' and effeminate, they resented that Alexander's mildness transformed into procrastination and pacifism in military affairs, and they were decimated by Maximinus' endless warmongering. Finally, the posthumous abuse of both Heliogabalus and Maximinus seems to be the mark, in Herodian's story, of particularly bad emperors, serving as a sort of combination between an expiatory ritual and a condemnation of their memory[257]. For Maximinus, this image is sharpened by actual religious celebrations as news of the emperor's death triggered mad public rejoicing all across Italy.

3.4.3.3 Subverting the pattern

All three examples above present similar contexts and storylines: growing discontent within the military, a plotted revolt, the murder of the emperor and everyone around him. For Heliogabalus and Maximinus, the violence of the act is even extended beyond their deaths and the abuse of their corpses can only emphasize further their badness. Though Alexander's death is processed in the *History* through much of the same pattern, its conclusion markedly deviates from the other two: Herodian attempts to mitigate Alexander's failure and his questionable conduct in his final appearance by emphasizing his long reign, his mildness, and

τὰς κεφαλὰς; 8.6.6: τὴν κεφαλὴν τοῦ τε Μαξιμίνου καὶ τοῦ παιδὸς; though a more usual phrasing for sons at 8.6.9: αὐτὸν σὺν τῷ παιδὶ).

[257] See Bats 2003, 291: "parce que leur mort violente est devenue synonyme de châtiment mérité, les sources littéraires économisent la mention de la *damnatio memoriae*, qui apporte une sanction légale et une justification morale à un assassinat privé de base juridique".

the bad influence of Mamaea. A similar frame of military revolt is applied to the *History*'s final episodes of good emperors Pertinax and Maximus and Balbinus, but is used, in these two cases, to highlight and denounce the praetorians' audacity, arrogance, and overall badness, rather than flaws in the rulers' character or comportment.

For Herodian, Pertinax had a brief, but commendable rule. Chosen for his merits and competence, Pertinax is shown to have brought back peace and moderation to Rome after Commodus' tyranny[258]. Pertinax's accession, following Herodian's account, was met with general approval within the senate and the population[259], namely through his active and genuine imitation of Marcus (2.4.2)[260]. Herodian also explains at length how the new emperor set the Empire back in order, by way of many reforms and policies (2.4.1-9). According to Herodian, Pertinax was also deeply concerned with the behaviour of the praetorians, whom he exhorted to practice self-control (2.4.1). Pertinax's rule, as Herodian emphatically shows, was turning out to be a true return to aristocracy; it was even thought "that he ruled with divine authority" (2.4.2: *ἐκθειάζειν αὐτοῦ τὴν ἀρχήν*). Even better, Herodian stresses continuously the renewed unity within the Empire that was generated by this regime change and Pertinax himself: "everyone hoped" (2.4.1: *ὑπερήδοντο πάντες*); "older men" (2.4.2: *τοὺς μὲν πρεσβυτέρους*) and "the rest" (*τοὺς δ' ἄλλους πάντας*); "all peoples" (*πάντα ἔθνη*, trans. mod.), whether "subjects" (*ὑπήκοα*) or allies" (*φίλα*); "all garrisons" (*πάντα στρατόπεδα*, trans. mod.); "amid general rejoicing" (2.4.3: *συνηδομένων ἁπάντων*); messengers "from every country" (*πανταχόθεν*)[261]. In all these images of universal approval, however, one group is noticeably missing: the praetorians were particularly resistant to Pertinax's person and policies and this would lead to the emperor's downfall.

According to Herodian, "the features which pleased everyone annoyed one group, the troops that served as the imperial guard in Rome"[262]. The discrepancy is made clear through the contrasting phrases *ὅ δὲ πάντας εὔφραινε / τοῦτο μόνους ἐλύπει*, reinforced by the incongruous *μόνους* at odds with earlier pictures of concord. Deeply unhappy with their new orders, the praetorians saw Pertinax's rule as "a dishonourable insult to themselves and the end of their own unlimited power", which led them to ignore the emperor's orders and persist in their arrogant behaviour[263]. In an unusual prolepsis, Herodian announces that Pertinax

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[258] Cf. 2.1.3; 2.4.2; 2.4.8, etc.

[259] And even the 'barbarians', recognizing his military competence, but also his integrity (2.4.3). Pertinax's accession marks a clear renewal in the Empire's situation: the "previously" (*πρότερον*) rebellious foreign nations now "willingly" (*ἑκόντες*) allied with him.

[260] Cf. above, [77]. In Herodian's story, Pertinax would also learn from Marcus' one shortcoming: Pertinax kept his son away from the imperial palace and the easy life it procured, insisting that he retain a simple lifestyle (2.4.9). According to *SHA*, *Pert.* 13.1, Pertinax even "abhorred" (*horruit*) the emperorship.

[261] Interestingly, this strategy can also be seen in the portrayal of popular reactions to Marcus' death, cf. 1.4.8.

[262] 2.4.4: *ὃ δὲ πάντας εὔφραινε, τοῦτο μόνους ἐλύπει τοὺς ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ στρατιώτας, οἳ δορυφορεῖν εἰώθασι τοὺς βασιλέας.*

[263] 2.4.5: *ὕβριν αὑτῶν καὶ ἀτιμίαν καθαίρεσίν τε τῆς ἀνέτου ἐξουσίας νομίζοντες*. See Cass. Dio 74(73).8.1-5. Vict., *Caes*. 18.2 and Eutrop. 8.16 attribute the plot only to Julianus. Appelbaum 2007, 204-6, describes both the accounts of Dio and Herodian as "stock 'explanations'"; this makes him favour the *Historia Augusta*'s version (*SHA*, *Pertinax* 10.8-10), in which the praetorians acted on the orders of the praetorian prefect, Laetus

would fall to "ill chance" (2.4.5: πονηρὰ τύχη) not two months after his assumption of power[264]. Although Herodian does not explicitly say at that moment that the praetorians would be the perpetrators of this act, a connection to their displeasure and their indiscipline is strongly implied. At the very least, whatever would bring about Pertinax's end is already framed in the story as a highly condemnable act since it would "put a blight on everything" (2.4.5: ἐβάσκηνε πάντα) and interrupt the full restoration envisioned by Pertinax. Herodian, after this ominous statement, then circles back to the emperor's efforts to implement these "magnificent schemes of aid for the subjects of the empire" (2.4.5: θαυμαστὰ καὶ ἐπωφελῆ τοῖς ὑπηκόοις ἔργα), of which the historian provides ample description (2.4.6-9). This marked insistence on Pertinax's political programme allows Herodian to criticize further the praetorians' discontent and their implied crime, since these policies would have benefitted the whole empire, while they were motivated by purely selfish reasons, such as the loss of their own privileges.

Rules of inversion

Herodian next records how, while the rest of the empire was in general state of happiness, "the soldiers of the guard alone" (2.5.1: μόνοι οἱ δορυφόροι) decided to remove Pertinax from power and find a replacement, wishing for their previous lifestyle under Commodus' tyranny. Following the pattern seen thrice above, the praetorians' attack against Pertinax is described as a "sudden" and "irrational" affair (2.5.2: αἰφνιδίως; ἀλόγῳ), carried out "while people were off their guard" (οὐδενὸς προσδοκῶντος). This is the mark of an impulsive action and though it had the advantage of surprise over the targeted ruler, it came not from military strategy but rather an overflowing anger that pushed the perpetrators to act at that very moment – on grounds that were often, at least according to Herodian, quite unjustified. As seen above, the similarly executed murders of Heliogabalus and Maximinus had emerged, in Herodian's story, from fairly legitimate motivations that would favour the whole empire and not just the praetorians' own interests. Alexander's murder stands somewhere in the middle: though a good emperor overall, his record was not without fault, especially regarding the excessive power held by his mother over him and, by extent, over the empire. Pertinax's death, by contrast, is depicted in the *History* as neither lawful, nor moral and is in fact the complete opposite of an acceptable and just tyrannicide: the ruler was excellent, the conspirators hateful, the causes improper, the benefits personal. As Herodian shows, Pertinax's murder at the hands of the praetorians was indefensible: it was a truly heinous crime.

Furthermore, if Pertinax's death scene in the *History* subverts images of legitimate tyrannicide, it also reproduces some key elements of that emperor's own accession episode. For instance, whereas Laetus and Eclectus had peacefully came to Pertinax during the night

(according to him, Dio mentions Laetus' initiative "only inconsistently"). Appelbaum also angles for a certain collaboration between Laetus and Julianus, whom, after Falco's arrest, would have been Laetus' next choice for the emperorship.

[264] See Hidber 2007, 203-7 on prolepses in Herodian.

(cf. 2.1.5)[265], the praetorians would act "at mid-day" (2.5.2: *ἡμέρας ἀκμαζούσης*), bursting in the palace "with their spears ready and their swords drawn" (*τά… δόρατα διατεινάμενοι καὶ τὰ ξίφη σπασάμενοι*). According to Herodian, this invasion caught the palace attendants by surprise who, unarmed and outnumbered, took flight. A few of them, particularly loyal to Pertinax, warned the emperor and urged him to escape too (2.5.3). But Pertinax, so Herodian records, considered that fleeing would be "an undignified (*ἀπρεπῆ*) and cowardly (*ἀνελεύθερα*) act, unworthy (*ἀνάξια*) either of an emperor or his previous life and behaviour"[266]. In a similar stance to his reaction to Laetus and Eclectus' appearance, Pertinax chose to confront his assailants "face to face" (2.5.4: *ὁμόσε*), even going out to meet the praetorians without waiting for them to come to him. Herodian is insistent about Pertinax's proactive conduct: "so he left his room and faced (*ὑπαντώμενος*) the soldiers"[267]. Just like he had remained calm as he faced whom he thought to be Commodus' henchmen, Pertinax "kept his moderate, noble expression (*ἐν σώφρονι καὶ σεμνῷ σχήματι*) and his appearance of imperial dignity (*τὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀξίωμα*) by showing no sign that he was afraid or flinching from the danger, or that he was begging for mercy"[268]. Pertinax is then given another fairly long speech, in which he reiterates his disregard for his own life, but encourages the praetorians to rethink their course of action for their own sake and what this would represent (2.5.6-8). Pertinax warns them against the murder "of a citizen, let alone an emperor" (2.5.7: *μὴ μόνον ἐμφυλίῳ ἀλλὰ καὶ βασιλείῳ*): he declares, ominously, that this would be "an act of sacrilege today (*τὸ νῦν*) and a source of danger to [them] in the future (*ὕστερον*)"[269]. This places Pertinax's short rule within a broader narrative. First, story-wise, it foreshadows Severus' alleged motivation to claim the emperorship and his successful retribution against the praetorians but, more generally, it uses Pertinax's murder as what set in motion a period of 'great instability' in Roman imperial history.

As Herodian stages the event, Pertinax also talked about Commodus' death, claiming that it was only life following its course (such as it would be for himself, cf. 2.5.6) and that he played no part in it. Though he acknowledged the essence of the praetorians' demands, Pertinax did not make any extravagant promises and instead agreed to accommodate them in

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[265] The scene recalls Gordian's accession in the *History*, which has already been noted as a distorted variation of Pertinax's coming to power, cf. 7.5.1ff. On the value of night vs. day in the *History*, see above, [57; 61-62].

[266] 2.5.4: *ἀπρεπῆ δὲ καὶ ἀνελεύθερα βασιλείας τε ἀνάξια καὶ τῶν προβεβιωμένων αὐτῷ καὶ προπεπραγμένων νομίσας*. Note the repetition of adjectives prefixed with a privative *α-*.

[267] 2.5.4: *ὁμόσε δὲ χωρήσας τῷ πράγματι προῆλθεν ὡς διαλεξόμενος*; 2.5.5: *καὶ δὴ τοῦ δωματίου προελθών, ὑπαντώμενος*.

[268] 2.5.5: *μένων καὶ τότε ἐν σώφρονι καὶ σεμνῷ σχήματι καὶ τηρῶν τὸ τοῦ βασιλέως ἀξίωμα, οὐδέν τι κατεπτηχότος οὐδὲ ἀποδειλιῶντος καὶ ἱκετεύοντος σχῆμα ἐνδεικνύμενος*. Whether Pertinax's composure was genuine or merely put on (there is a certain insistence on its visibility) seems to be outweighed by the fact that Pertinax chose to present himself as such. Kemezis 2014, 257-8 argues that Pertinax's appeal to the praetorians "entirely misses the point" (at 257), since they were operating on opposite value systems.

[269] 2.5.6: *μὴ πρὸς τὸ νῦν ἀνόσιον καὶ ὕστερον ὑμῖν ἐπικίνδυνον*. Herodian foreshadows here Severus' future punishment of the praetorians, cf. 2.13.2-12.

a "decent and deserved way, without coercion or confiscation"[270]. With this speech, he managed to convince some of his assailants, "since several (οὐκ ὀλίγοι γε) of the soldiers turned around and went back out of respect (αἰδούμενοι) for the age of the respected (σεμνοῦ) emperor"[271]. Notably, Herodian attributes the soldiers' partial retreat to their consideration for Pertinax, not to expectations of money or privileges. Yet in the end, Pertinax's efforts proved to be insufficient: "but others fell upon him while he was still talking (ἔτι δὲ λαλοῦντα) and killed him"[272]. The brutality of the attack might even serve to imply that there was nothing to be done at all with those soldiers, since Pertinax had otherwise managed to reason with a good part of that group. Again, the praetorians' actions contrast sharply with those of Laetus and Eclectus, who offered the emperorship to Pertinax through a peaceful conversation. Uninterested in negotiations, the soldiers even cut Pertinax in mid-sentence: their deed is shown to be rushed and impulsive, not even born out of a concerted decision within their own ranks.

Upon realizing the gravity of their act, the praetorians "grew frightened" (2.5.9: δέει) and ran off to take refuge in their camp. According to Herodian, they were preparing for an eventual attack from the people, barricading themselves and posting sentries. When news of their crime surfaced, the city was thrown into a general state of uproar. In the *History*, the popular reaction to Pertinax's murder recalls in its universality the public mourning of Marcus, but has added elements of "confusion" (2.6.1: ταραχή), frenzy (ἐνθουσιῶσιν ἐοικότες), and "blind fury" (2.6.2: κίνησίς… ἄλογος). Incensed, the people were looking, without success, for the murderers, while the senators were "especially" (2.6.2: μάλιστα) affected. For the senators, Pertinax's death meant losing "so mild a father and so worthy a champion" (2.6.2: πατέρα τε ἤπιον καὶ χρηστὸν προστάτην)[273]. In addition to sorrow for Pertinax himself, they feared that the praetorians' action would mark a return to tyranny (2.6.2: πάλιν). According to Herodian, the senators suffered Pertinax's murder like a "public disaster" (2.6.2: συμφορὰν κοινήν).

Herodian's verdict on Pertinax is brief and seemingly non-committal: "Such then was the end of Pertinax, whose life and reign have been described above"[274]. This lack of appraisal is perhaps surprising, considering that the historian has devoted considerable attention and

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[270] 2.5.8: οὐδὲν ὑμῖν τῶν εὐπρεπῶς καὶ κατ' ἀξίαν καὶ ἄνευ τοῦ βιάζεσθαί με ἢ ἁρπάζειν <πορισθέντων> ἐνδεήσει, trans. mod., exceptionally after Lucarini 2005, while Whittaker 1969-70 prints <ἐπιθυμουμένων>. See Kemezis 2014, 257, n. 81, for an extended discussion: since there is nothing to connect to τῶν in the manuscripts, conjectures are many. Whittaker's suggestion, after Irmisch 1789-1805 (himself following Politian's *quod concupiueritis*), implies that Pertinax was concerned about his own fate, while Lucarini's recentres on Pertinax's care for the common good. In addition to the textual evidence collected by Lucarini, this would also correspond more closely to Herodian's general portrayal of Pertinax.

[271] 2.5.8: καὶ οὐκ ὀλίγοι γε ἀποστραφέντες ἀνεχώρουν σεμνοῦ βασιλέως γῆρας αἰδούμενοι·

[272] 2.5.9: ἕτεροι δὲ λαλοῦντα τὸν πρεσβύτην ἐπιπεσόντες φονεύουσι; with Müller 1996, though Lucarini 2005 prints <…> ἔτι δὲ, instead of ἕτεροι δὲ. Cf. *SHA*, *Pert.* 11.8.10: *toga caput operuit*, which perhaps brings to mind Suet., *Caes*. 82.2-3.

[273] Cf. Ps.-Vict. 18.6: '*Pertinace imperante securi uiximus, neminem timuimus, patri pio, patri senatus, patri omnium bonorum!*' went the popular acclamations for Pertinax when he died.

[274] 2.6.1: τέλος μὲν δὴ τοιοῦτο κατέλαβε τὸν Περτίνακα χρησάμενον βίῳ καὶ προαιρέσει ὡς προείρηται.

textual space to Pertinax, compared to the actual length of his rule. However, such a statement dovetails with Herodian's tendency to show, not tell[275] – and Herodian has shown, amply, Pertinax's good character and *capacitas imperii*[276]. In fact, through the aftermath of Pertinax's murder, Herodian continues to show what type of emperor he was and what he represented for his subjects and the Empire[277]. Just like Marcus' focalized verdict, Pertinax's evaluation is also expressed in the popular and senatorial reactions to his death[278]. Finally, such as he does for Marcus throughout the *History*, Herodian uses Pertinax's posterity to confirm his worth. Severus, for instance, is said to have been convinced to seek the emperorship after a dream featuring Pertinax (2.9.5-6). When he was proclaimed emperor, Severus then took both Marcus and Pertinax's names (2.10.1; 2.10.9). Arriving in Rome to face Julianus, Severus would punish the praetorians for their bold murder of Pertinax (2.14.3). Similarly, Niger is said to have aspired to imitate Pertinax's disposition and had gained quite a positive reputation for it (2.7.5). If Herodian's closing statement on Pertinax seems neutral (2.5.9: τέλος μὲν δὴ τοιοῦτο κατέλαβε τὸν Περτίνακα χρησάμενον βίῳ καὶ προαιρέσει ὡς προείρηται), his overall representation of the emperor, which extends even beyond Pertinax's actual life, and his strong disapproval of his murder are unambiguous.

For Herodian, Pertinax seems to have been the one emperor to come closest to Marcus' ideal[279]. This is visible not only through the attribution of similar virtues, behaviour, and relations with the people and senate, but even through the application of similar narrative techniques. Pertinax, however, came to power in a post-Marcus age, which meant that, regardless of his comparably excellent character, the type of emperor he aspired to be, and could have been, already belonged to an era long past[280]. This particular context, as emphasized in the *History*, sealed Pertinax's fate. Finally, Herodian's use of a pattern usually expected for tyrants and bad emperors to frame Pertinax's death has perhaps less to do with the victim than the perpetrators. The killing of a good emperor serves to stigmatise the praetorians, who are made to act on reasons that are viewed as groundless, or even plainly wrong. This subversion of the typical equation between good emperor and good death, and

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[275] Cf. Plato, *Rep.* 3.392d-394d, on the distinction between *diegesis* ('telling') and *mimesis* ('showing'), whether narration and dialogue (so drama), or a narrator's overtness or covertness; cf. Allan, de Jong & de Jonge 2017, 45-46.

[276] See Chrysanthou 2020, 639 who argues that "Herodian, however, offers no explicit conclusion or critical judgement on Pertinax. Readers are left to consider Pertinax and his leadership for themselves."

[277] Another reason might be that such an open verdict allowed Herodian to avoid other explanations for Pertinax's death, which may have been imputable to the emperor and thus tarnished his image.

[278] According to Philippides 1984, 296-7, Pertinax's portrayal in Herodian is based on scholarly stereotypes, perhaps dating back to Homer and his image of Priam as a mild king. In any case, Herodian's representation of Pertinax more or less mirrors Dio's and this positive image is also found in most later authors. For Dio, Pertinax was good and virtuous man who, once emperor, put the empire to rights (74(73).1.1; 74(73).10.2; 75(74).5.1-2). The *Historia Augusta* paints a bleaker portrait of Pertinax, who was seemed and sounded better than he truly was, that is a greedy, unkind, and slick man (*SHA*, *Pert.* 12-13); cf. Ps.-Vict. 18.4 (*blandus magis quam beneficus*).

[279] Or, perhaps, one of the two 'emperors', see below, [223-6], on Herodian's representation of Julia Maesa.

[280] Cf. Kemezis 2014, 55: "Subsequent events would make it easy to idealize Pertinax and to turn him into a symbol of an old order that was beset by forces beyond its control." See also Andrews 2019, 202-6 on Pertinax's widely positive reception in ancient authors.

between bad emperor and bad death, is pushed to its limits with Herodian's account of the assassination of the senate-elected emperors, Maximus and Balbinus, placed at the very end of the *History*.

3.4.3.4 Abusing the pattern

After Maximinus' death at the hands of his own soldiers, Maximus and Balbinus ruled, as Herodian records, "extremely efficiently and sensibly, which was well appreciated by individuals and by the state as a whole (πανταχοῦ)"[281]. The soldiers, however, were deeply unhappy with these highborn emperors, who had been chosen from within the senate. While the troops had promoted, to varying degrees, the previous emperors, they had no say, at least in Herodian's version, in this nomination. If anything, the choices of Maximus and Balbinus, and to a certain extent Gordian, were clearly made, as Herodian shows, to challenge the prior military accessions. This apparent return to aristocracy brought by the latest emperorship, both collegial and senatorial, was therefore threatening the praetorians' political influence, as well as the imperial favour they had been enjoying under a monarchic rule.

Significantly, Herodian bypasses the by-now usual sequence of causation 'the soldiers were angry so they decided to revolt', instead skipping ahead to practical considerations surrounding their coup. According to Herodian, the soldiers were concerned mainly with the German troops, who were particularly loyal to Maximus, since they still remembered how harshly Severus had punished Pertinax's killers (8.8.2). Despite these sensible thoughts, the story of their revolt ultimately follows previous patterns of spontaneity and impulse: "the soldiers' hidden attitude became suddenly (αἰφνιδίως) clear"[282]; "no longer controlling their emotions, in a fit of black anger they all rushed to the palace"[283]. In the *History*, the praetorians' attack took place during the Capitoline games, while everyone was otherwise occupied with the festivities[284]. The plot's success is said to have been facilitated by the dyarchs' growing conflict, which Herodian attributes to the combination of a universal truth and an inescapable character flaw. On the basis of the "indivisible nature of supreme power" (8.8.4: τὸ ἀκοινώνητον ἐν ταῖς ἐξουσίαις), the emperors' rivalry is described by Herodian as the "typical result" (8.8.4: εἴωθε ποιεῖν) of an attempt at shared leadership, which perhaps serves to absolve them, at least in part. In any case, this feud, whether authentic or not, certainly participates to the general atmosphere of conflict and uncertainty painted by Herodian[285]. In fact, the historian identifies it as the "chief reason for their destruction" (8.8.4: μάλιστα… ἀπωλείας αἴτιον).

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[281] 8.8.1: μετὰ πάσης εὐκοσμίας τε καὶ εὐταξίας, ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ δημοσίᾳ πανταχοῦ εὐφημούμενοι.
[282] 8.8.3: αἰφνιδίως ἦν εἶχον γνώμην λανθάνουσαν ἐξέφηναν.
[283] 8.8.3: ὁρμῇ δὲ ἀλόγῳ χρησάμενοι, ἀνῆλθον ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἐς τὰ βασίλεια. According to Zosim. 16.1, Maximus and Balbinus plotted against Gordian, who was already Augustus, were then found out and executed in punishment.
[284] Cf. *SHA*, *Max. Balb.* 14.2: *ludis… scaenis*.
[285] As noted by Roques 1990a, *ad* 8.8.4, the row between the two men seems inconsistent with their overall image in Herodian, as is their sudden desire for absolute power. Nevertheless, this episode might have been designed as an example and as a warning: with this quarrel, Herodian can illustrate the dangers of monarchy, able to corrupt even the best of men.

According to Herodian, Maximus' plan to call upon his German troops to thwart the soldiers' revolt was met with strong suspicion from Balbinus, wary of a ploy against him (8.8.5). In a vivid echo of Pertinax's death, the soldiers now burst in on the emperors "while they were arguing" (8.8.6: ἐν ᾧ δὲ περὶ τούτων διαφέρονται). There were, in Herodian's version, no (attempts at) negotiations, and the emperors were grabbed on the spot. In a compellingly flipped image, Herodian stages Maximus and Balbinus in clear division, whereas the praetorians, though acting against the rest of the population and the senate, moved "all in unison" (8.8.6: ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἅπαντες). And so, amidst distrust and discord,

> the two old men were seized, stripped of the simple clothes they had on for indoor wear and dragged naked from the imperial palace, to the accompaniment of absolutely degrading indignities. After beating and jeering at these senatorial emperors, the praetorians maltreated them by pulling out their beards and eyebrows and mutilating their bodies, before dragging them through the city to their camp[286].

The sheer intensity of the soldiers' acts mirrored their uncontrolled anger, but also a certain sense of entitlement. Driven by their ever-increasing authority since Pertinax's murder, the praetorians allowed themselves the basest of crimes. The audacious torment to which they submitted the emperors also reflected their former leader's cruelty, who had similarly abused senators and other distinguished men (7.3.2-4). When the German soldiers were about to enter the camp, the praetorians quickly killed the emperors, "whose bodies were by now totally mutilated" (8.8.7: ἤδη πᾶν τὸ σῶμα λελωβημένους). With this easy dismissal, the praetorians' treatment is revealed to be even more brutal: according to Herodian, they were entirely uninterested in the actual murder of the emperors, since the point was to humiliate them and make them suffer (8.8.6: ἵν' ἐπὶ πλέον ὧν πάσχουσιν αἴσθοιντο)[287].

After Maximus and Balbinus were promptly finished off by the praetorians, "their bodies were left exposed out on the road"[288]. Just as quickly, the praetorians turned to the young Gordian (8.8.7)[289]. Already forgotten by their murderers, Maximus and Balbinus were also forsaken by the German troops, who "saw no point in fighting a senseless war for dead men"[290]. Gordian, chosen for lack of a better candidate, was carried back to the camp, in which the praetorians shut themselves, while the German soldiers retreated to their quarters. So Herodian concludes: "This was the end of Maximus and Balbinus, a death that was undeserved and desecrated (ἀναξίῳ τε ἅμα καὶ ἀνοσίῳ) for two respected and distinguished (σεμνοὶ καὶ λόγου

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[286] 8.8.6: ἁρπάζουσι τοὺς πρεσβύτας, περιρρήξαντες δὲ ἃς εἶχον περὶ τοῖς σώμασιν ἐσθῆτας λιτὰς ἄτ' οἴκοι διατρίβοντες, γυμνοὺς τῆς βασιλείου αὐλῆς ἐξέλκουσι μετὰ πάσης αἰσχύνης καὶ ὕβρεως· παίοντές τε καὶ ἀποσκώπτοντες τοὺς ἀπὸ συγκλήτου βασιλέας, γενείων τε καὶ ὀφρύων σπαραγμοῖς καὶ πάσαις τοῦ σώματος λώβαις ἐμπαροινοῦντες, διὰ μέσης τῆς πόλεως ἐπὶ τὸ στρατόπεδον ἀπῆγον. According to Eutr. 9.2.2; Oros. 7.19.3; Vict. 27.6, the emperors were killed in the palace.

[287] Vitellius was subjected to similar abuse, cf. Suet., *Vitell*. 17, with Scheid 1984, 181-2, 185, 188.

[288] 8.8.7: καταλιπόντες τὰ σώματα ἐρριμμένα ἐπὶ τῆς λεωφόρου; cf. 8.8.7: ἀνῃρημένους τε καὶ ἐρριμμένους.

[289] In the *Historia Augusta*, the whole episode of Maximus' and Balbinus' deaths is almost identical to Herodian's version, cf. *SHA*, *Max. Balb*. 14. The biographer also expresses a similar verdict on the emperors: *hunc finem… indignum uita et moribus suis* (*SHA*, *Max. Balb*. 15.1).

[290] 8.8.7: οὐχ ἑλόμενοι πόλεμον μάταιον ὑπὲρ ἀνδρῶν τεθνηκότων.

ἄξιοι) old men, who had come to power through their high birth and by their own merits (εὐγενεῖς τε καὶ κατ᾽ ἀξίαν)"[291]. This 'crowning' act of infamy encapsulated the army's conduct such as Herodian has shown it throughout his work. The praetorians' bold murder of Pertinax and their unpunished sale of the Empire to Julianus could only persuade them to act out again in order to claim back the power of which they had been 'wrongfully' robbed by the people and senate.

Military revolts

The first set of three episodes seen above (Heliogabalus, Alexander, and Maximinus) are consecutive events and very close in context. Accordingly, Herodian uses similar patterns to shape their stories. From that perspective, the connections between the deaths of Pertinax and of Maximus and Balbinus are perhaps less obvious, since they are quite detached from one another. And yet, though they are set at opposite ends of the *History* and occurring in wholly different situations, the parallels between their stories are undeniable. So states Whittaker: "the whole description of Pertinax in 2.5 must have been written with the events of 238 very much in mind."[292] That may well be, given that these events were freshest in Herodian's mind. But this relationship between the two episodes is not one-sided, and Pertinax's final scene is not a mere copy of the more recent event, nor is it the other way around. This reciprocal impact is helped by the fact that Pertinax's episode comes well before Maximus and Balbinus' appearance, but also by the work's strong intratextual design. Significantly, the accessions of these emperors followed the fall of a tyrant and brought a return to peace, moderation, and stability. These promising rulers were overthrown by the praetorians, who saw their power diminished and many of their privileges revoked. Boldness seemed to be the praetorians' sole recourse in the face of this plight.

I would take Whittaker's statement even further: there are several strong parallels to draw between Pertinax's whole episode and several events of the year 238. For instance, Pertinax's and Maximinus' deaths are two examples of a common narrative pattern, though they have wholly different results. Pertinax's and Gordian's accessions are, as we have seen in the previous chapter, shaped in extremely similar stories. Herodian's account of Gordian III's nomination as Caesar, in addition to the scene of his sole accession, can also be linked to that pair, on the basis of its setting, its motivations, and its main actors. In a way, Pertinax's rule and death are not only given as the cause of the power struggles following directly after, but also foreshadow the events of 238 and the ending of the *History*.

A vastly negative portrayal of the army, and especially the praetorians, underpin these two pivotal moments in the *History*. Military corruption and greediness are in fact over-

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[291] 8.8.8: τέλει μὲν δὴ τοιούτῳ ἐχρήσαντο ἀναξίῳ τε ἅμα καὶ ἀνοσίῳ σεμνοὶ καὶ λόγου ἄξιοι πρεσβῦται, εὐγενεῖς τε καὶ κατ᾽ ἀξίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐληλυθότες· Note the repeated two-part qualifiers, a nod perhaps to their co-emperorship. While Herodian does not mention it, the emperors were effectively subjected to a *damnatio memoriae* by their successor, see e.g. Loriot 1975, 719-20 ("le Sénat dut se résigner à entériner le fait accompli"; Loriot also argues against the idea of a plot organized by Gordian's supporters); Chausson 1996, 327, 353 (talking about "une vague de terreur" in the aftermath of their deaths); Benoist 2004.
[292] Whittaker 1969-70, n. 1 *ad* 8.8.6.

arching themes of the whole work. The soldiers are constantly depicted as rejecting moderate, peace-oriented emperors and supporting rulers uninterested in civic duties, or even tyrants, since it is under such excessive regimes that they are granted exorbitant wages and extravagant liberties. For Herodian, the murders of Pertinax and of Maximus and Balbinus fully showcase the praetorians' moral bankruptcy and their willingness to have their demands met at any cost. Compared to Pertinax, however, Maximus' and Balbinus' deaths magnified the praetorians' arrogant behaviour with their violent treatment of the still-living emperors. All things considered, such audacity, in Pertinax's episode, is somewhat limited in scope, but has spread, during the events of 238, to the entire praetorian guard and become fully unhinged. The praetorians, in addition to having grown more and more powerful in the last decades, were then also benefitting from a general state of turmoil and division, which was not yet the case in (Herodian's representation of) 193.

3.5 The novel

In the *History*, the episode of Julianus' accession takes places immediately after Pertinax's death. According to Herodian, the popular uproar caused by the murder of Pertinax soon calmed down, since the culprits could not be found. Realizing that their act would go unpunished, the praetorians then put the Empire up for sale from within their camp, where they had taken refuge. Didius Julianus obtained the emperorship, in Herodian's story, as a result of a (mostly) personal initiative, similarly to Niger's or Severus' own endeavours. But Julianus' inauguration does not entirely follow the pattern laid out by Herodian in these two other cases. Here the aspirant's portrayal is not articulated around efficiency or eagerness, but centres on the accession mode itself. And this scene, whether it 'actually' happened or not[293], is well-known one. Staged both in Dio (74(74).11.3) and Herodian, the auction was, perhaps curiously, not picked up by most of the later authors, who are on the whole not particularly friendly to Julianus[294]. If we look at the two contemporary accounts, and at Herodian's *History* in particular, what is held to be the aberration of Julianus' accession seems to be in direct response to the 'trauma' caused by Pertinax's murder at the hands of the

[293] Denying that any auction ever took place, Appelbaum 2007 tentatively attributes Julianus' accession to another plot of Laetus'; see also Campbell 1984, 117-20; Potter 2004, 97-98 ("a false tradition"). Appelbaum favours the *Historia Augusta*, against Dio and Herodian, the former deemed too hostile to Julianus and the latter, too young at that time to have had an accurate impression of his own. But this discrepancy could also be taken the other way around: as Chastagnol 1994, 283-4 notes, the *SHA*'s portrayal of Julianus is "plutôt favorable, à l'inverse des autres sources". Faced with this issue, Chastagnol suggests that the biographer's main source, Marius Maximus, drew on Dio for these events, since he was then posted in Moesia inferior, but that Maximus, finding Dio too antagonistic towards Julianus, would have already toned down that material for his own work. For Leaning 1989, 555-8, the auction does appear in the *Vita*, albeit in a very diluted version, and it is rather Julianus' "wanton ambition and greed" that are erased from the narrative, not the scene itself.

[294] Only Zosim. 1.7.2 clearly talks about a sale: *ὠνίου δὲ τῆς ἀρχῆς προτεθείσης Δίδιος Ἰουλιανὸς ὑπὸ τῆς γυναικὸς ἐπαρθείς, ἀνοίᾳ μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμῃ φρενήρει, χρήματα προτείνας ὠνεῖται τὴν βασιλείαν, θέαμα δοὺς ἰδεῖν ἅπασιν οἷον οὔπω πρότερον ἐθεάσαντο*; though see Vict. 19 (*promissis magnificentioribus*) and *SHA*, *Did. Iul*. 2.6 (*ingentia pollicentem*).

praetorian guard[295]. Although not explicitly emphasized as novel or abnormal, the episode is framed as an "improper" (2.6.4: ἀπρεπῆ) and "scandalous" (ἐπονείδιστον) event. In fact, Herodian consistently vilifies Julianus' purchase of the empire, and this, as we have seen in the previous section, up to the emperor's final appearance.

Before properly introducing Julianus, Herodian can already suggest the type of character he will turn out to be through an overview of the political situation in Rome. According to the historian, "those in positions of authority (ἀξιώσεσιν) went away to their estates as far away (πορρωτάτω) from Rome as they could, to avoid being in the city and persecuted when the new regime was established"[296]. Similarly, Herodian writes that, when the sale was announced by the praetorians, "none of the more respectable (σεμνότεροί), firmly established (εὐσταθέστεροι) senators (that is, the patricians (εὐπατρίδαι) and those who still possessed some wealth (ἔτι πλούσιοι) and who were left from Commodus' reign of tyranny)" are said to have been interested in the praetorians' offer[297]. From this short account, the reader can safely assume that the future emperor will be anything but dignified, or even rich. And, should he exhibit some good qualities, the mere fact of responding to this sale would undoubtedly cancel them out.

Enter Julianus, "an ex-consul who was reputed (δοκοῦντι) to be a man of great wealth"[298]. Herodian's roundabout way of addressing Julianus' wealth (he is merely *thought to be* rich) is key to setting up the rest of the story. I will come back to this point. The story then zooms in on Julianus, who was informed of the news "as he was feasting" (2.6.4: ἑστιωμένῳ) and "in a drunken stupor" (παρὰ μέθην καὶ κραιπάλην). To stress Julianus' inadequacy further, Herodian also mentions that "there were ugly stories (τῶν διαβεβλημένων) concerning his intemperate (μὴ σώφρονι) life"[299]. It is worth noting, already, how much of Julianus' introduction is based on hearsay and, more importantly, appearances. In addition, Julianus' decision to make a bid was not, according to Herodian, strictly his own, and the man was in fact urged to do so by his wife, daughter, and a "swarm" of parasites (2.6.7: πλῆθος)[300]. Accompanying Julianus to the camp, they encouraged him to bid extravagantly. The composition of the group (women and lower-class individuals), combined with the nature of their advice, fuels the image of an improper candidate[301]. Herodian even creates a scene that

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[295] Campbell 1984, 119 notes that this event had "a traumatic effect on contemporaries." This idea of post-traumatic (re-)writing is developed further below.

[296] 2.6.3: οἵ τε ἐν ἀξιώσεσιν ὄντες ἐς τὰ πορρωτάτω τῆς πόλεως κτήματα ἀπεδίδρασκον, ὡς ἂν μή τι δεινὸν ἐκ τῆς ἐσομένης ἀρχῆς παρόντες πάθοιεν.

[297] 2.6.4: οἱ μὲν σεμνότεροί τε καὶ εὐσταθέστεροι τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς ὅσοι τε εὐπατρίδαι ἢ ἔτι πλούσιοι, λείψανα ὀλίγα τῆς Κομόδου τυραννίδος.

[298] 2.6.4: ἤδη μὲν τὴν ὕπατον τετελεκότι ἀρχήν, δοκοῦντι δὲ ἐν εὐπορίᾳ χρημάτων εἶναι.

[299] 2.6.4: τῶν ἐπὶ βίῳ μὴ σώφρονι διαβεβλημένων.

[300] Compare with Cass. Dio 74(73).11.2: Julianus went to the camp as soon as he heard the news.

[301] That being said, Herodian's depiction may have had its roots in official representations. According to Woodward 1961, 73-74, a large portion of Julianus' mintage features Manlia Scantilla (*RIC* 4.1, 16, nos 7-8; 18, nos 18-19) and Didia Clara (*RIC* 4.1, 16, nos 9-10; 18, nos 20-21); with *RIC* 4.1, 14. Regardless of the historicity of the women's authority, it is worth noting that Herodian also tends to make use of strong female figures as foils for bad emperors: see for instance Sidebottom 1998, 2789 n. 75; Kuhn-Chen 2002, 323.

might have been taken out of comedy[302], by investing the characters with typical comic attributes. Whereas his wife, daughter, and clients together play the part of the parasite, Julianus comes to resemble the *miles gloriosus* – boastful, gullible, and later cowardly. To add to the ridicule of the scene, Herodian stages a drunk Julianus "springing" (2.6.7: ἀναθορόντα) from his bed, "running" (δραμεῖν) to the wall, and "shouting" (2.6.8: ἐβόα) his offer up to the praetorians[303]. In Herodian's *History*, Julianus' candidacy is initially supported only by family and friends, but these characters, who held neither military nor political power, quickly fade into the background after their brief intervention. With this in mind, Julianus' bid, in this version, does not quite come off as a joint endeavour, and it is quite ominous how Julianus finds himself all on his own in front of the praetorian camp to make his offer[304].

A rival?

According to Herodian, Julianus was opposed by another contender, a man called Sulpicianus. He too was an ex-consul, currently held the urban prefecture, and had been Pertinax's father-in-law[305]. Sulpicianus' introduction is both promising and puzzling, given that he is, in addition to his past and present experience, closely also linked to Pertinax. Taking Herodian's statement at face value that all respectable and wealthy men had either left the city or refused to acknowledge the praetorians' offering, Sulpicianus' bid seems at odds with his portrayal. To counteract the questionable nature of Sulpicianus' actions, Herodian quickly explains that the soldiers rejected his offer, suspecting a trap. According to the historian, the praetorians were wary of Sulpicianus' close ties with Pertinax and feared the man was preparing a plot against them to avenge the late emperor. Interestingly, Herodian does not commit to either strand of explanation and leaves unresolved the question of whether Sulpicianus was acting out of personal ambition or seeking justice for Pertinax. It seems enough, perhaps, that the praetorians did not trust him and instead accepted Julianus' offer.

Interestingly, in *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 3.5, both women, also given imperial honours, were wary of Julianus' nomination (*trepidis inuitisque transeuntibus, quasi iam imminens exitium praesagirent*).

[302] Hellstrom 2015, 49: "Herodian adds an element of comedy by having Didius jump straight from his dinner table and rush to the camps, egged on by women and a πλῆθος ('throng') of parasites. These escort him as he runs, discussing how to seize power in a mockery of the philosophical stroll."

[303] As we have seen, this level of activity is, by contrast, absent from Julianus' final appearance and his response to Severus' arrival in the capital. From an enactivist account, this passage might be received as particularly vivid, since readers, through the emphasis on bodily actions, could process Julianus' frenzy not "as general knowledge, as a conceptual abstraction, but understand it experientially, by 'incorporating' the action involved, by catching, as it were, an echo of the described movement in their bones." (Huitink 2017, 183) On *enargeia* and 'vividness', see below, [191-2]. A similar strategy can be seen in the description of Caracalla's actions in the wake of Geta's murder, cf. [238-9].

[304] This void created around Julianus could very well foreshadow the conditions of his coming death, cf. 2.12.7. In *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 2.4, Julianus is said to have gone to the senate house accompanied by his son-in-law and, upon finding the place closed, met Publicus Florianus and Vectius Aper. These two tribunes set out to convince him to make a bid against Sulpicianus and then led him by force to the praetorian camp.

[305] Cass. Dio 74(73).7.1 describes Sulpicianus as "a man in every way worthy of the office" (ἄλλως ἄξιον ὄντα τούτου τυχεῖν).

In both Dio's *Roman History* and the *Historia Augusta*, Sulpicianus was already in the praetorian camp, petitioning for the emperorship[306]. Dio stages an explicit auction, in which both men outrageously outbid each other. In the *Vita*, Sulpicianus was haranguing the soldiers, while Julianus, from outside the camp, promised many *ingentia*. Both accounts ascribe Julianus' last-minute victory to increasingly excessive promises and his suggestion that Sulpicianus might seek retribution for the murder of Pertinax. It is striking how, by contrast, Herodian's Julianus is stripped of all initiative: the author attributes the initial idea of the sale to the praetorians (which is in line with his general view of the military), credits Julianus' family and entourage for the actual bid, and explains the soldiers' distrust of Sulpicianus through their own misgivings. Whether or not Sulpicianus was making an offer in good faith, Herodian does not follow up on this, and the 'defeated' Sulpicianus is soon forgotten.

Outside/inside

Julianus' authority, as Herodian emphasizes, is tenuous already from the man's first appearance in an official capacity: at the camp, Julianus needs to shout out (and up) his offer to make himself be heard by the praetorians on the inside[307]. Notably, the soldiers only allow Julianus to come up on top of the wall after dismissing Sulpicianus. In the *History*, Julianus proceeds with the transaction on the wall, rather than from within the camp, which Herodian puts down to the soldiers' suspicion and greed[308]. Julianus' physical position also mirrors his social and political status: physically in Rome, but actually always on the outskirts of civic life[309]. As Herodian makes clear, Julianus' claim to the emperorship rested entirely upon the soldiers' greed and their rejection of the only other contender. There is, significantly, no mention of loyalty or admiration for Julianus, and no particular consideration for his political or military achievements[310]. Once permitted to come speak with the praetorians face to face, Julianus promised them to restore Commodus' name, give them back the lifestyle they had enjoyed under that prince's reign, and pay them more money than imaginable (2.6.9-10)[311]. There lay, in Herodian's story, Julianus' whole appeal. While Pertinax vowed to restore peace and stability to the Empire, a policy typical of good emperors succeeding tyrants, Julianus

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306 Cf. Cass. Dio 74(73).11 and *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 2.4-5.

307 This set up may also be vaguely reminiscent of a *paraklausithyron*, a scene typical of love poetry, in which Julianus would be cast in the role of the *exclusus amator*. Assuming the *paraklausithyron* did originate from the *kômos*, then Julianus' drunken dash to the praetorian camp could also tie in with this literary motif; cf. Plut., *Amat.* 8.753B; with Copley 1942. In Cass. Dio 74(73).11.5, Julianus also needs to shout his bid and even shows the figure on his fingers (τῇ φωνῇ μέγα βοῶν καὶ ταῖς χερσὶν ἐνδεικνύμενος).

308 Perhaps Julianus' physical climb can be seen as the materialization of his social climbing all the way up to imperial power.

309 Cass. Dio 74(73).11.5 even remarks that Sulpicianus should have won, "being inside and being prefect of the city" (ἔνδον τε ὢν καὶ πολιαρχῶν), while having also placed first the bid of twenty thousand sesterces. Note this 'insider' aspect for Dio's Sulpicianus in contrast with Julianus' outsiderness in Herodian.

310 There is perhaps the added impression that Julianus was chosen by the praetorians not only on the basis of his promises, but also because there was no one else – a sort of 'default' emperor like Herodian's Macrinus or Gordian III.

311 The army would soon discover the lie and rescind the loyalty they had pledged to Julianus (2.7.1-2). For Dio, this defection had more to do with the soldiers' "constant toil" and their growing alarm at the news of Severus' imminent arrival, cf. 74(73).17.2.

promised instead a return to Commodian times. This pledge, combined with Julianus' extravagant offers, satisfied the soldiers, who even granted him the name of Commodus to confirm his accession to power (2.6.11)[312]. Unlike Severus who himself assumed Pertinax's name (cf. 2.10.1), Julianus is merely given his imperial privileges.

Moreover, Julianus' investiture is depicted in the *History* as a subversion of the pattern used elsewhere by Herodian to frame (what is held to be) a traditional ceremony. Not just the formality it might be for others emperors[313], Julianus' first procession to the imperial palace is an event in itself and is described in a somewhat substantial passage. After executing the proper sacrifices in the camp temple[314], Julianus is said to have then headed off to the city. A contingent of guards "larger than normal" (2.6.12: πλέον τι τῆς συνηθείας, trans. mod.) accompanied the new prince[315]. In addition to their increased numbers, "the soldiers put on full armour (πανοπλίας) and formed up in closed battle order (φράξαντες… ἐς φάλαγγος σχῆμα) ready to fight (πολεμήσοντες) if they had to"[316]. This was absolutely against normal practice; while echoes of Caesar crossing the Rubicon with his army, or Octavian coming back to Rome in 44 BC (cf. Cass. Dio 45.5.2) inevitably come to mind, this also foreshadows Severus' entrance in the city, in arms (cf. 2.14.1; with his army's infiltration at 2.12.1)[317]. More than a mere change of location, this 'campaign' is painted as a necessary step in Julianus' assumption of power and is, in many ways, closer to a military operation. Julianus, in this story, is quite literally being installed in the seat of Roman imperial power. On his way to the palace, Julianus found no opposition, with his large and fully equipped guard acting as a successful deterrent. However, as Herodian records, the emperor was not met with the usual acclamations either (2.6.13: μήτε μὴν εὐφημοῦντος ὥσπερ εἰώθασι): staying clear of the armed procession, the people instead shouted insults at Julianus from afar (πόρρωθεν)[318]. Even now, from the inside and in his capacity of a newly proclaimed emperor, Julianus stays on the outskirts of society. In fact, enclosed within his praetorian guard, he is completely cut off from civic life: most of the high-ranking officials had left the city, the citizens kept themselves at a distance, and the senators (save for Sulpicianus' brief apparition) were nowhere to be found.

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[312] According to Cass. Dio 74(73).11.2, Julianus had plotted against Commodus and, for that reason, had been exiled by the emperor to Milan; though see *SHA*, *Did. Iul*. 2.1. 'Commodus' does not seem to appear in any of Julianus' official titulature, but even unfounded, any onomastic association noted by Herodian is liable to have significant weight in how he characterizes emperors.

[313] Cf. e.g. 1.5.8; 2.3.11; 5.8.10; 7.10.9.

[314] Later, when news of Severus' arrival came to Rome, Cass. Dio 74(73).16 recounts that Julianus even made human sacrifices in order to learn future events and prepare consequently for this confrontation.

[315] Cf. Xen., *Hiero* 2.8: this is a typical feature of tyranny.

[316] 2.6.13: ἀναλαβόντες οὖν τὰς πανοπλίας καὶ φράξαντες αὑτοὺς οἱ στρατιῶται ἐς φάλαγγος σχῆμα ὡς, εἰ δέοι, καὶ πολεμήσοντες. Cf. Cass. Dio 74(73).12.1: ὥσπερ ἐς παράταξίν τινα ἄγων; with 12.5. On the tyrant's bodyguard in general, cf. Xen., *Hiero* 2.8 and a statement by Herodian's Marcus (1.4.4: οὔτε δυρυφόρων φρουρὰ ἱκανὴ ῥύεσθαι τὸν ἄρχοντα, εἰ μὴ προσυπάρχοι ἡ τῶν ὑπηκόων εὔνοια; cf. 1.2.4 on Marcus' own behaviour). This is perhaps a nod to Julianus' later plans to bring the fight against Severus to the very streets of Rome (2.11.9).

[317] On these passages, see above, [85-86; 127-8].

[318] See also Cass. Dio 74(73).13.3, where Julianus is called "stealer of the empire" (τῆς ἀρχῆς ἅρπαγα) and "parricide" (πατροφόνον).

With regard to this last point, it is therefore significant that, in the *History*, Julianus marched straight to the palace after leaving the camp and did not appear, as would have been expected, in the senate house to have his nomination ratified[319]. Herodian continues to deprive the new ruler of political agency by 'refusing' him entry to the senate house[320]. This editorial choice might be seen as a way for the historian to invalidate Julianus' claim to the emperorship. Julianus' absence from the senate house is made even more glaring when comparing his nomination to those of emperors proclaimed by their troops well outside of Rome[321]. Recognizing the necessity of extra-Italic, military proclamations in certain situations (such as the death of an emperor during a campaign), Herodian also seems to accept this 'new' reality in most other cases, especially in periods of political unrest. He still stresses, however, the importance of a senatorial ratification in Rome proper, namely by citing the failure to do so as one of the main reasons for Niger's (2.8.9) and Macrinus' (5.2.3) defeats. With this in mind, the absence in this story of Julianus' senatorial confirmation is well at odds with his actual presence in the capital at the moment of his proclamation. Stripped here of a status that would be entirely legal and legitimate, Julianus' purchased emperorship already has a very limited reach and is in fact painted as a criminal endeavour.

Elements of trauma

According to Herodian, Julianus was right (2.6.12: εἰκότως) to fear for his life, "because he had bought (ὠνησάμενος) the empire by an immoral and scandalous fraud (αἰσχρᾶς καὶ ἀπρεποῦς διαβολῆς)"[322]. The episode of Julianus' accession is filled with mentions of this 'shameful' act, which is immortalized in Herodian's verdict on the emperor at the very end of his rule (cf. 2.12.7). Whether the auction scene was genuine or not, Herodian's persistent framing of Julianus' coming to power as a 'purchase' seems to convey a certain amount of confusion towards the event, and perhaps even its rejection altogether. Through the use of devices borrowed from arguably improbable genres, like comedy (and even love poetry), this episode seems to have been (re-)scripted by Herodian as an incredible scene that can push further yet against believability. No doubt helped along by a good dose of Severan

[319] See Cass. Dio 74(73).12.5, where Julianus comically states that he had come to the senate house alone. According to Dio, Julianus gave the customary speech and was officially made emperor by senatorial decree. While Dio's Julianus may appear less inept than Herodian's, he is however said to have carried out his duties as a "slave" (ἀνελευθέρως) and a "parasite" (θωπεύειν), cf. Cass. Dio 74(73)14.1-2. *SHA*, *Did. Iul.* 3.3 more or less follows Dio, but implies that the senate freely accepted the soldiers' decision.

[320] Julianus' sole military support contrasts with that of Pertinax, whom the soldiers proclaimed out of necessity since they were unarmed and outnumbered by the people surrounding them (2.2.9).

[321] Cf. e.g. Macrinus' letter to the senate (5.1.1ff); Gordian I's letter to the leading senators (7.6.3ff), or his confirmation by the senate (7.7.2); and even the portrait Heliogabalus sent to the senate (5.5.7).

[322] 2.6.12: μετά τε αἰσχρᾶς καὶ ἀπρεποῦς διαβολῆς ὠνησάμενος τὴν ἀρχήν; see also 2.6.13.

propaganda[323], this 'scenic' auction was perhaps conceived, or at least interpreted, as a way to process an underlying sense of trauma[324].

It may well be that Herodian could not have reconstructed the whole scene from his own memory, but, as Kemezis has convincingly argued, that is entirely beside the point[325]. Putting aside the thorny question of Herodian's use of Dio and the idea of style for the sake of style, the fact remains that Herodian presents himself as a contemporary author of these events, who remembers a given episode, with its context and its fallout, and is able to produce its account from memory. While the (perceived) impact of such an event might have abated a century or so later (though later authors, barring the *SHA,* are still not terribly favourable to Julianus), a professed contemporary record would certainly tap into the period's recent trauma. More importantly, this image of an 'auctioned emperorship' as found in Herodian's *History* might connect to what Alexander has termed 'collective traumas', which are "reflections of neither individual suffering nor actual events, but symbolic renderings that reconstruct and imagine them"[326]. It is precisely the *representation* and *narrativization* of particular events that serve to shape collective, or cultural, trauma.

This impression of collective trauma for this particular episode (at least) in Herodian's work is further enhanced by the historian's general appreciation of Julianus' rule. For instance, it was, according to Herodian, during Julianus' rule that the soldiers were corrupted for "the first time" (2.6.14: πρῶτον) [327]. This excursus, noticeably inserted between Julianus' proclamation and the start of his rule, is turned into an ominous statement on the rest of the story:

> The fact that there was nobody to take revenge on the perpetrators of this savage murder of an emperor, and nobody to prevent the shameful auction and sale of the

[323] Julianus' bad reputation may, in part, have come from the difficult position of succeeding the good and popular Pertinax, who had been deeply wronged, and of having been defeated by Severus, who needed to legitimize his usurpation. See, among others, Leaning 1989, with Icks 2014, esp. 91-94.

[324] Alexander 2004, 254 claims that "it is not commodification, but 'comedization' – a change in the cultural framing, not a change in economic status – that indicates trivialization and forgetting." I would however follow Brownlie 2013 31, n. 26 who argues that "comedization has an important function as one type of remediation which keeps history alive." Comedic rescripting might also serve as a way of coping with (collective) trauma, similar perhaps to the skits and sketches we can see in late night shows.

[325] Kemezis 2014, 298-308 suggests to read Herodian's silence on personal information not as an invitation to conduct "philological detective work" (quote at 299), but as part of an authorial strategy.

[326] Alexander 2012, 4; with Alexander & Butler Breese 2011, xxii: "That processes of symbolic representation establish and mediate the nature of collective suffering is the ground bass of cultural trauma theory." More generally, see White 1978, 86-87: "Another way we make sense of a set of events which appears strange, enigmatic, or mysterious in its immediate manifestations is to encode the set in terms of culturally provided categories, such as metaphysical concepts, religious beliefs, or story forms" (quote at 86). White is discussing how this process serves to "familiarize the unfamiliar" in the case of events difficult to grasp on the basis of their temporal and cultural distance, but this idea could also apply to the 'unfamiliarity' of an anomaly such as Julianus' accession, even for contemporary viewers.

[327] This comment is also applied to Severus at 3.8.5 and in fact is perhaps better suited to Claudius' accession already in 41, as found in Cass. Dio 60.1 and Suet., *Claud.* 10 (esp. 10.4: *primus Caesarum fidem militis etiam praemio pigneratus*). On 'firsts' in Herodian, see Alföldy 1971b, 434-5; Sidebottom 1998, 2793, n. 90 (this emphasis on 'firsts' is foremost a "rhetorical strategy, not a genuine appreciation of the crisis", thus arguing against Alföldy 1971b) and 2797; Hidber 2007, 205 (although not talking about 2.6.14).

> empire, was a prime cause in the development of a shameful state of indiscipline that had permanent consequences for the future.[328]

For Herodian, Julianus and the praetorians were enablers and enablees all at once and both were responsible for the ensuing political unrest. It may well be that Julianus' rule was, in retrospect, less 'traumatic' than contemporary authors have implied, or that the trauma did not quite have the lasting impact that was felt then, if we look only to accounts written in the following century, which bear no trace of this 'auction'. But this episode, especially in a work – such as Herodian's *History* – using military corruption and its (political) consequences as one of its main themes, could be shaped into an implausible scene and framed as a determining factor in how the next events would unfold.

In this fourth chapter, we have seen the different ways in which Herodian engages with models, historical, literary, and thematic (and often all at once), in the pursuit of characterization and narrative unity. But this use of models is not unidirectional: for instance, in the story of the final battle between Niger and Severus at Issos, Herodian intervenes both on the model (the past fight between Alexander and Dareios) and on his own narrative, to the point where he can create a two-sided account of the same paradigmatic scene. Within several versions of one motif, Herodian can also combine types of patterns. While exploring the theme of the flight of the defeated emperor through its key moments, the historian also brings in elements that are more specifically reminiscent of Nero's escape. Subverting well-known *topoi* or famous *exempla* allows Herodian to represent clearly and vividly the many bad characters that came into play during this period of Roman imperial history. Just as Gordian's suicide looks like a lesser version of the Catonian exemplum, so is Gordian II's disappearance during the battle of Carthage comes across as the opposite of the glorious warrior's death. Applying the theme of the tyrant's bad death to a wide range of emperors, from Pertinax to Maximinus, allows Herodian to depict plainly how the murders of the good rulers threatened the political and social order of the Roman empire. Finally, in an act of generic subversion, Herodian has also borrowed from an unexpected type of literary work in order to explain, or at least defuse, the baffling and troubling event that was Julianus' purchase of the empire.

Navigating between his own claim of a novel and contemporary history and a necessity to integrate a long literary tradition, Herodian exploits models in a way that often blends similar past events and thematic patterns. After careful examination, it seems that this strategy is applied more to imperial deaths than accessions, which would fit the idea that, in ancient literature, these episodes are the ones to have undergone more substantial intervention[329]. Moreover, Herodian's use of models aligns with his wider method of composition: the historian produces a copy neither perfect nor exhaustive, but instead distils

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[328] 2.6.14: τὸ γὰρ μήτε τοῖς οὕτως ὠμῶς τετολμημένοις ἐν φόνῳ τῷ βασιλικῷ ἐπεξιέναι τινά, μήτε τὴν οὕτως ἀπρεπῶς ἐπὶ χρήμασι κηρυχθεῖσαν καὶ πραθεῖσαν ἀρχὴν εἶναι τὸν κωλύοντα, ἀρχηγὸν καὶ αἴτιον ἀπρεποῦς καὶ ἀπειθοῦς καταστάσεως καὶ ἐς τὰ ἐπιόντα ἐγένετο.

[329] E.g. Arand 2002; van Hooff 2003.

the most compelling elements that he can reshape and adapt to his own story and his own time. Inevitably, the recourse to models, even for a piece of contemporary history, already suggests a certain process of analysis, since it requires a reflection on which aspects of the source and of the target could be the same or different. This helps create some distance from the events and support the impression of just enough historical perspective to lend additional credibility to an (alleged) eyewitness account.

Picking up on the aforementioned notions of generic models and the production of immediacy, the fourth chapter will delve into the idea of theatricalization within Herodian's story. Admittedly, 'dramatization', with its derivatives and synonyms, has often been used by modern critics to talk about certain ancient historians, deemed 'minor' or 'less talented' and of which Herodian is a prime example. Pushing beyond this reductive framework, I want to re-examine the ways in which theatrical codes and devices can contribute to the production of an expressive and compelling *histoire*[330].

[330] I use this term certainly for effect, but also to underline its ambiguity in French, expressing both 'history' and 'story'. See for instance Rancière 1992, who uses this dual meaning as the basis of a reflection on historiographical practices.