

*Clades alia Variana: Varius his Fall**

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This article considers Varius' fall: the simultaneous termination, by others, of his reign and life. In order to place his fall in context, let me briefly review what is known about his life and reign, and how it is known. Foregoing articles in this series of *Quaestiones Varianae* show what Varius is known to have done, undergone, and omitted, in the course of his reign as Roman emperor,¹ and during his concurrent tenure of the high priesthood of the Syrian sun god Elagabal.² This knowledge is gained through a *method of enquiry based on comparing allegation with evidence*.³ Most of the relevant allegation consists of ancient historiographical accounts of Varius, by Cassius Dio, Herodian, and in the *Historia Augusta*.⁴ Some of it, however, takes the form of propositions, implied or stated by Varius' own imperial coins and official inscriptions,⁵ some of which claim for him imperial paternity. Given the epistemological status, rhetorical nature, and political agenda of the historiographical texts in question, none suffices, in itself, as evidence to verify factual propositions about Varius. Most, however, of the images and legends or texts of Varius' coins and inscriptions, except where they advance the proposition - probably false - that he is the son of Caracalla, may be used, in accordance with exacting evidential criteria and rigorous methodological procedures, to establish facts, and to calculate degrees of likelihood. On this basis, one may propose an outline of Varius' *res gestae*, as follows:

At some stage in his boyhood, Varius assumes the role of high priest of Elagabal. In 971=218, he is about 14. His mother's husband is dead. Claimed to be son of Caracalla, his mother's recently murdered maternal first cousin, Varius assumes the role of Roman emperor, replacing Caracalla's immediate successor, Macrinus. Varius' elevation to the principate takes place in Syria. He travels overland from Syria to Rome, possibly together with the main cult object of Elagabal, a large black meteorite, known as a baetyl. He reaches Rome late in 972=219. During his reign, he performs both his priestly and imperial

* The original *Clades Variana*, known in English as the Varus Disaster, is that of a.u.c.762=9 A.D. in which the Governor of Germany, Publius Quintilius Varus, appointed by Augustus, lost an army of ten thousand men to the barbarians in the Teutoburger Wald, and took his own life. Varus, before he was governor of Germany, was that of Syria. It is possible that our Varius' father, Sextus Varius Marcellus, may have descended from a Syrian line acquiring Roman citizenship under Varus, and, in accordance with the custom then prevalent, receiving the *nomen* Varius, deriving from that of Varus, the grantor of citizenship. *Varius his Fall* echoes Ben Jonson's tragedy, *Sejanus his Fall*.

1 Varius = Marcus Aurelius Antoninus = the Roman emperor commonly but erroneously called Elagabalus or Heliogabalus.

2 A.u.c. 971- 975 = A.D. 218-222.

3 See *QVI & 2*.

4 Henceforth *Dio*, *Herodian*, and *HA*. *HA/AH* = Vita Antonini Heliogabali, *HA/AS* = Vita Alexandri Severi.

5 To be published in *Epigraphica* and *Numismatica Variana*.

duties simultaneously. He worships Elagabal, but also honours other Roman gods and goddesses. He acts as judge of last appeal, issuing rescripts. He grants diplomas to retiring veterans. He distributes money to soldiers, and food to the people of Rome. He grants his mother and grandmother the status of Augustae. In quick succession, he marries and divorces three women, returning finally to the second. In 974=221 he adopts his maternal first cousin as his son and heir, giving him the name Alexander. Early in 975=222, possibly before his 18th birthday, Varius' reign, and probably his life, come to an end. He is succeeded by his cousin, now called Severus Alexander, aged about 14.

That Varius falls from power, rather than abdicating and retiring into private life, or dying a natural death while in office, is, as shall be shown, a virtual certainty. One may therefore speak of Varius' fall. Here I shall do so mainly by considering why it occurs. I do this for two reasons: because his ancient historians describe his fall in terms of cause and effect, and because the question 'why?' implies all the rest. Taking Varius' fall as given, and searching for its causes analytically and regressively, one will ask: What would it take to bring it about? Whom may it have involved? Where and when and how may it have happened? Conversely, viewing Varius' fall as a precondition for Alexander's rise, and reconstructing its accomplishment from its beneficiary's viewpoint, one will face each of these questions synthetically, progressively retracing the steps required at each stage to achieve that goal. One thus distinguishes proximate from ultimate cause and effect. Analysis leads backward, through a likely chain of proximate cause and effect, perhaps to an ultimate cause. Synthesis leads forward towards a desired effect.

That understood, first let us see how we know that Varius fell. There is no precedent in previous Roman history for imperial abdication and retirement, nor is any such suggested by Varius' historians. Rather, ancient historiography tells of his murder by praetorians. While that is only allegation, that his reign was ended against his will is suggested by epigraphic evidence of *damnatio memoriae*.⁶ That Alexander, despite being Varius' official heir, does not cite Varius in his own official genealogy, confirms that his succession to Varius takes the form of rupture, rather than of continuity.⁷ The absence of evidence of civil war suggests instead a *coup d'état*.

Turning next to why Varius fell, let it be clear that I do not espouse any determinist, mechanistic or reductivist definition of cause and effect. Here, historical cause is understood as a condition or set thereof, preceding an event that has already occurred, given which, all other things being neutral, one believes that event was likely or certain to occur, and without which one believes that event would probably or surely not have occurred. The combination and interaction of such conditions, in the context of specific circumstances, may constitute an occasion for the possible conception of a given course of action, such as a *coup d'état*. Occasion is a disposition of underlying circumstances or conditions, actual or imaginary, rendering a given course of action conceivable. Perception of occasion may, in certain

6 E.g.: *CIL III*, 902, 954, 3445, 7722, *VI*, 2001, 2008, 2009, 2999, *VIII*, 10124, 10267, 10295, 10304, 10334, etc.

7 *PIR*², Part 1, 1933, p. 327, 1610, *Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Severus Alexander Aug.*

circumstances, lead to conception of a given course of action. Yet the presence of such conditions, even in a specific combination, does not necessarily guarantee that course of action's conception, much less its execution. Such circumstances and conditions are necessary for both, but not sufficient for either.

To create sufficient conditions for a given course of action to be conceived and executed, means and motivation are required. Motivation is a nexus of notions, feelings and calculations, contributing to the conception of a course of action, without which its attempted or actual execution would not take place. Means are the material ability to execute a course of action. When that action is a *coup d'état*, necessarily involving numbers of people in differing roles, one must consider all these elements both in an individual and a collective dimension. In question, therefore, here, are: the conditions providing the occasion for Varius' fall; the nature of its conception; and the means and motivations, individual and collective, leading to its execution.

How shall we address these questions? As noted above, the method of enquiry of these *Quaestiones* involves verifying propositions, usually derived from historiographic allegation, by comparison with evidence, mainly epigraphic and numismatic. Such comparison, however, in the case of Varius' fall, is very difficult, except for the proposition that it did, somehow, occur. Apart from the evidence just cited, which supports that proposition indirectly, there are no coins or inscriptions which tell us the causes of Varius' fall, or give any details of how, when, and where it may have occurred, or of whom it may have involved. This means that our consideration of his fall is limited to critical exegesis and comparison of ancient historiography. This has in any case usually been the first step in the method of enquiry used so far. In taking it, this series has been answering, whilst investigating particular questions concerning Varius' life and reign, the call, cited later in this article, for a comprehensive comparison of Varian sources.

The three main ancient accounts of Varius, *Dio*, *Herodian*, and the *HA*, all, with diverse emphasis, ascribe his fall to the praetorian guards' animadversion to his alleged behaviour: hieratic, sumptuary, sacrilegious, confiscatory, murderous, convivial, ludic, saltatory, or sexual. These allegations have been studied in detail by the two preceding articles in the present series, *QV5, In Varium, the Indictment*, and *QV6, In Varium, the Verdict*. As demonstrated there, few if any of these charges can be verified with reference to numismatics or epigraphy. While Varius' coins and inscriptions show that he promoted the worship of Elagabal, and that he did so in the costume of a Syrian priest, they also show that he honoured the traditional Roman gods, and sometimes wore a toga or military garb. None confirm his reported violation of a Vestal, rapacity, murders, extravagance, charioteering, dancing, or depravity. None of these assertions, therefore, save that he was a priest of Elagabal, and sometimes wore the corresponding vestments, are certainly proven. If certain premises are the criterion, one must argue that Varius was overthrown on account of his priesthood and its costume. While this is not implausible, it is not what our sources say. They tend rather to emphasise his sexuality.

Accordingly, here I shall discuss the cause and mode of Varius' fall, as described in ancient historiography, mainly in terms of verisimilitude, likelihood and possibility. Verisimilitude refers to plausibility in the internal reality of ancient accounts of Varius' fall. Likelihood and possibility refer to correspondence, if any, between those accounts and what may actually have happened. Interestingly, although the relevant texts proclaim a certain view of the causes and manner of Varius' fall – namely, military and popular disgust at his sexuality – they also suggest different possible causes, subverting such a thesis. Accordingly, it is argued here that while ascribing Varius' fall to his behaviour, sexual or otherwise, may be partly true, it is unlikely to reflect the whole truth. Deeper and equally or more important reasons for Varius' fall are to be found in the general disposition of the soldiers, especially that of the praetorians, to welcome occasions for effecting a violent succession; and in sibling rivalry, endemic in Varius' family. Before, however, speculating as to possible and likely historical causes of Varius' fall, we must consider the verisimilitude of accounts of it rendered by his earliest historiographers.

The epistemological assumptions and methodological procedures of the present series,⁸ require one to keep in mind that what is in question in such accounts is not what actually happened, but what a given historian claims to have happened. A given account may or may not be true; a matter which, in this case, we are unable to verify with certainty, though we may estimate its likelihood or possibility. Yet an ancient historiographical text always relates to its own particular conception of reality: to what it assumes to be true, or wishes to make seem so.

Reality is meant here in its literal, etymologically authentic sense. Deriving from Latin *res*, meaning 'thing', which in turn relates to *reri*, *reor*, *ratus*, the verb 'to think', it means, as does Anglo-Saxon 'thing', also relating to 'think', 'something that is thought about'. It then comes more broadly to denote one's theories as to the nature and structure of whatever one may think about. Reality is thus conceptually distinct from fact. Fact, deriving from *factum*, 'done', means, in epistemological contexts, 'that which one knows for certain to be true'. Indeed, by this theory, knowledge can only be so of true propositions. All else is consideration of degrees of likelihood, such as is possible with respect to the cause and mode of Varius' fall.

My next task, then, is to discover and describe historiographical realities expressed or implied by certain ancient texts. When opportune, I shall compare these historiographical realities with my own theories concerning the relevant historical reality.

Ancient historiographical accounts of Varius' fall: Dio.

The earliest of the relevant texts, Dio's, is, at this stage of its narrative, something of a mosaic. It has been reconstructed by its editor, Ursulus Boissevain, from two Byzantine epitomes of Dio's

⁸ Set out in detail in *QV 1 & 2*.

text, those of Xiphilinus (11th century AD) and Zonaras (12th century AD), plus a number of excerpts, commentaries, and glosses, including that ascribed to Petrus Patricius (6th century AD), and from a MS, *Vaticanus Graecus 1288*, (*VG 1288*) thought to be a copy of Dio's original, dated to the 5th or 6th century AD.⁹ Boissevain's recension of the Greek text, published by Weidmann (*DioW*), is Englished by Cary in the Loeb Classical Library (*DioL*).¹⁰ Because part of my argument relates to differences between parts of this recension derived from diverse sources, I shall discuss the relevant sections of the text in terms of those sources.

Dio's account of Varius' fall begins by announcing that this is to be his next subject. This announcement occurs at 80.17.1, by Boissevain's numbering, (which differs from that of all previous recensions) on p. 470 of *DioW*, corresponding, as it happens, to p. 470/1 in *DioL*.¹¹ It follows a long section concerning Varius' alleged sexual depravity.¹² The last two items in this section are an anecdote, 80.16.1-6, reconstructed from Xiphilinus' epitome, about the vicissitudes experienced by one of Varius' would-be male lovers, and another, consisting of a single sentence, 80.16.7, reconstructed from Zonaras' epitome, saying that Varius wished to become bisexual *via* surgery. At this point, the recension introduces an alternative version of 80.16.7, in the form of an excerpt from Leo, deriving from the *Codex Parisiensis*, phrased "according to Dio," restating more briefly the previous version's gist. Immediately following this, in a passage of reconstruction based on Xiphilinus' epitome, the next topic is announced:

80.17.1: "Ἐμελλε δὲ πον καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Σαρδανάπαλλος ἀξιότατον τῆς μιαιρίας τῆς ἑαυτοῦ μισθὸν οὐ πολλῶ ὕστερον κομῆσθαι. ἄτε γὰρ ταῦτα ποιῶν καὶ ταῦτα πάσχων ἐμισήθη ὑπὸ τε τοῦ δήμου καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν στρατιωτῶν, οἷς μάλιστα προσέκειτο, καὶ τελευταῖον καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ στρατοπέδῳ ὑπ' αὐτῶν ἐσφάγη."¹³
 "Sardanapalus (Varius) himself was destined not much later to receive a well-deserved reward for his debauchery. For in consequence of doing and submitting to these things he became hated by the populace and by the soldiers, to whom he was most attached, and at last he was slain by them in the very camp."¹³

Ποιῶν καὶ πάσχων, "doing and submitting," seems here to refer to taking the active and passive roles in sexual intercourse between males. Dio has earlier levelled just such a charge of sexual versatility

⁹ *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum Quae Supersunt*, Vol. III, Weidmann, 1901.

¹⁰ *Dio's Roman History*, Vol. IX, Loeb Classical Library, 1969.

¹¹ Boissevain discusses the rationale behind his renumbering in the *Praefatio* to Volume III of his recension. In the section here under consideration, it consists of renumbering old style Book 78 as new style 79, and old 79 as new 80. Within these two books, chapters and sentences or periods are also numbered. Old book 80, which has only five chapters, is not renumbered as 81, but remains as 80, coming after new book 80, with the result that there are two separate series of chapters within Book 80 designated 1-5. Another curious feature of Boissevain's numbering is that sometimes a chapter designated by a given number is not continuous, but is distributed among various parts of the text, interrupted by other chapters. So to find and identify a given passage precisely, it is necessary to cite both the locus, and the page number. I cite here both the Weidmann and the Loeb editions, since the English translations come from the Loeb.

¹² *Dio*, 80.13.1-80.16.7; *DioW*, p. 465-470 = *DioL*, p. 462/3-470/1

¹³ *Dio*, 80.17.1, (Xiph. 352, 14 - 18 R. St.).

at Varius, though using a different verb, *δρᾶν*, to denote the active role: *πολλά μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἄτοπα, ἃ μὴτε λέγων μὴτε ακούων ἄν τις καρτερήσειεν, καὶ ἔδρασε τῷ σώματι καὶ ἔπαυε*: “he used his body for doing and allowing many strange things, which no one could endure to tell or hear of.”¹⁴ *Ποιεῖν*, ‘to make’, may be used in the sense of ‘to do’, and, like *δρᾶν*, is regularly opposed to *πάσχειν*, ‘to undergo’.¹⁵ Thus, while *πάσχων* here seems clearly to denote sexual passivity, *ποιῶν* could include both sexual and other activities. Given, however, that this sentence follows immediately upon a lengthy section describing Varius’ alleged sexual depravity, ‘these things,’ in consequence of which he reportedly becomes so hated, seem to be predominantly sexual in nature. The hatred that they are said to generate is supposedly shared by both populace and soldiers. Indeed, the implication, by virtue of proximity, virtually amounting here to the deployment of a rhetorical figure of parallelism,¹⁶ is that the soldiers, in eliminating Varius, act as agents of the *vox populi*. Much in the interpretation of this clause depends on the status of the phrase *τῶν στρατιωτῶν, οἷς μάλιστα προσέκειτο*: “the soldiers, to whom he was most attached.” If the phrase is read as printed, with a comma, this clause could mean: “he became hated by the soldiers, which is significant because he was most attached to them (in the sense of especially reliant on them, or even particularly fond of them), and thus it is all the more damning (of Varius) that he should have forfeited their favour.” Without the comma the clause could mean: “he became hated by the soldiers to whom he was most closely attached, that is, the praetorians, his bodyguards, which is significant because it placed him in mortal danger.”

It is impossible to choose between these readings on the basis of a text reconstructed from a Byzantine epitome. The fifth or sixth century manuscript, *VG 1288*, thought to be a copy, not an epitome, of Dio’s original, on which the earlier part of Boissevain’s recension of Dio’s account of Varius is mainly based, does not, unfortunately, cover this passage. Even were it to do so, there is no guarantee that it would reflect Dio’s original punctuation, if any. So we are left to speculate as to the precise meaning of this adjectival clause. While the former reading, because of its implicit *Schadenfreude*, has more rhetorical sting, the consequential clause ending the sentence, *καὶ τελευταῖον καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ στρατοπέδῳ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἐσφάγη*, would seem more naturally to follow from the latter. That Varius was killed by the praetorians in their camp more obviously relates to the objective, physical and circumstantial fact that they were his bodyguards, thus giving them ample opportunity to kill him, than to his possible subjective emotional reliance on or fondness for these soldiers. *Προσκεισθαι* seems in general to convey more a spatial and material than a psychological form of attachment.¹⁷ Either way, the sentence proposes: that Varius’ murder results from the soldiers’ hatred, which is provoked by Varius’ sexual behaviour; that this hatred is paralleled and justified by that of the people, whose will the soldiers arguably fulfil in murdering Varius; and that the soldiers are that murder’s spontaneous and sole authors, acting autonomously, for these reasons alone. This sentence, by virtue of its place at the outset of the narrative of Varius’ fall,

14 *Dio*, 80.13.2, (Xiph. 349, 31 - 350, 26 R. St., Exc. Val. 411, p. 762).

15 Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1897, p. 1235 *ποιέω*, B; p. 1161, *πάσχω*.

16 Burton, G.O. *Silva Rhetoricae*, 2003, <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm> parallelism.

17 Liddell & Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 1897, p. 1313b-1314a.

of its status as an announcement of the subject and outcome of that narrative, and of its ascription of a single justified and unambiguous cause to that outcome, may be taken ostensibly – or even actually – to constitute Dio’s programmatic proclamation of his own view of the matter: the view that he means us to adopt, and intends to illustrate or demonstrate in his subsequent narration.

At this point in the text, an unnumbered sentence, an excerpt attributed to Petrus Patricius, appears. Beginning with “Ὅτι...: “That...” it is presented as paraphrase, rather than reconstruction, of Dio’s words. By virtue of this form of presentation, and of its location, it seems to be an alternative version of 80.17.1, the sentence immediately preceding, announcing the beginning of a section devoted to Varius’ fall. By virtue of its contents, this following sentence seems to offer an alternative view of the causes of that fall:

80.17.1: “Ὅτι ὁ Ψευδαντωνῖνος ὑπὸ στρατιωτῶν καταφρονήθη καὶ ἀνηρέθη· ὅταν γὰρ ἐθισθῶσί τινες καὶ ταῦτα ἀπλισμένοι καταφρονεῖν τῶν κρατούντων, οὐδένα ὄρον τῆς ἐξουσίας ἐπὶ τὸ πράττειν ἂ βούλονται ποιοῦνται, ἀλλὰ κατ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ δόντος ταύτην ὀπλιζονται: “[That] the False Antoninus” (Varius) “was despised and put out of the way by the soldiers. Thus it is that persons, particularly if armed, when they have once accustomed themselves to feel contempt for their rulers, set no limit to their right to do what they please, but keep their arms ready to use against the very man who gave them that power.”¹⁸

This, while still linking the soldiers’ murder of Varius to their contempt for him, seems to suggest that the causes of that contempt may run deeper than their reaction to his sexual behaviour: that they are structural, as much as occasional, if indeed not more so. By this reading, the soldiers come to feel contempt for their ruler because, being armed by him, they hold the material instruments of power in their hands. Paradoxically (at least according to the political theory that seems to lurk behind this sentence) although their ruler has granted them weapons and thus power, which theoretically derives from and depends on his, this grant of arms renders the ruler’s own power derivative in practice, because dependent in fact on the soldiers’ continuing consent. Once that consent is forfeit, for whatever reason, the soldiers have readily at hand the means to replace theory with practice: one ruler with another. This version of 80.17.1 would, therefore, seem to point to a generic vicissitude, affecting the tenure of the principate, rather than to particular causes for any specific occasion of its loss. As such, it seems to militate against the thesis, proposed by the former version, that the main or only cause of Varius’ fall was the hatred aroused by his sexuality among the soldiers. Rather, this latter version seems to suggest that the soldiers, having raised a ruler to power, are always looking for an occasion to topple him, and that while a specific trigger for their ever latent contempt may be provided by a given action or characteristic of a particular ruler, almost any excuse will do. Perhaps relevant to this suggestion is the historical fact, mentioned at other points in Dio’s text, that it was customary for a newly empowered emperor to give the soldiers a donative.¹⁹ It would therefore, within the compass of Dio’s text, seem to be in their interest to change rulers as often as possible.

18 *Dio*, 80.17.1, (Petr. Patr. *Exc. Vat.* 152, [p. 232 Mai. = p. 217, 8-13 Dind.]).

Unlike the former, the latter version of 80.17.1 does not identify, even indirectly, the specific trigger of the soldiers' contempt for Varius, limiting itself to noting its latent existence, and offering a general, rather than particular, account of its underlying causes. It may also be significant that the name, or rather *Schimpfname*, whereby Varius is referred to, differs in each of the versions of this sentence: in the former it is 'Sardanapalus,' the name for Varius which dominates the latter section of Boissevain's recension, onward from the point where *VG 1288* gives out, and reconstruction from Xiphilinus' epitome and other sources takes over;²⁰ in the latter it is 'Pseudantoninus,' the name used preferentially throughout the earlier section of this recension, based on *VG 1288*. 'Sardanapalus' is closely associated with the *topos* of Oriental luxury, and with its concomitant theme of sexual depravity, while 'Pseudantoninus' focuses more on the alleged mendacity of Varius' claim to the throne. Given these differences of nuance, which of these alternative versions of 80.17.1, if indeed either, more closely corresponds to Dio's original words at this point of his account? Perhaps they both do, referring however to different, possibly adjacent, passages in Dio's original. Or perhaps neither does.

Now it may in general be assumed that the portion of Boissevain's recension based on the 5th or 6th century MS, *VG 1288*, is closer to Dio's original than Boissevain's reconstruction of Dio's text from Byzantine epitomes dating from six or seven centuries later. Boissevain himself, in the very first sentence of his *praefatio* to this volume of his recension, after stating that most of it is based on Xiphilinus' epitome and other sources, refers to the availability of *VG 1288*, as the source for almost all of Book 79 and the earlier chapters of Book 80, as occurring *felici casu* "by a happy chance." This is as far as he ventures here in comparative evaluation of these sources. The use of 'Pseudantoninus' in the latter of these versions of 80.17.1 for Varius would therefore seem, by virtue of its correspondence to that in *VG 1288*, to reflect its derivation either from Dio's original itself, or from Petrus Patricius' commentary or gloss on Dio's original; whereas the use of 'Sardanapalus' for Varius in the former version certainly derives from Xiphilinus' epitome. In his introduction to the Loeb translation of this text, discussing its sources, Cary tells us (p. xviii) that Xiphilinus' and Zonaras' epitomes "must ... be regarded as essentially paraphrases." Of the excerpts attributed to Petrus Patricius he says (p. xix-xx): "though not direct quotations from Dio, they are of value in filling out both his account and that of Xiphilinus." None of this helps us to choose between these two versions of 80.17.1, if choose we must. What we can, however, derive from comparing them, is the realisation that even within the compass of differing manuscript traditions of Dio's text, there is a difference in the nature and balance of causes ascribed to Varius' fall.

The rest of Dio's account of that fall is presented as flowing directly from his announcement, in 80.17.1, that this is to be his next subject. The linkage is made clear by the following sentence, 80.17.2, which inaugurates the narrative as such of Varius' fall: "Ἔσχε δὲ οὕτως: "This is how it came about." One

19 *Dio*, 74.1.2, 74.5.4 (Pertinax, promise and fulfilment); 74.11.3 (Didius Julianus, buying the Principate by auction); 78.3.1 (Caracalla, after murdering Geta and assuming sole rule); 79.11.5, 79.12.4 (Macrinus, promise [and fulfilment? Possible fulfilment text plagued by lacunae.]); 80.1.1 (Varius, to prevent his soldiers sacking Antioch).

20 *Dio*, 80.8.3: *DioW*. p. 461, l. 24 = *DioL*. p. 456/7, l. 2.

might therefore be tempted to think that one could easily discover which of the alternative versions of the preceding announcement is the more authentic, just by reading on, and seeing which is borne out by the succeeding narrative. In fact, neither is. For under the rubric of explaining how Varius' fall came about, the text introduces quite a new element into the narrative: that of Varius' relations with his cousin Alexander.

These occupy part of the next passage, which is all reconstruction based on Xiphilinus' epitome.²¹ This passage divides, in terms of content, into three parts. The first, 80.17.2, recounts Varius' adoption of Alexander:

80.17.2: *Ἔσχε δὲ οὕτως. τὸν Βασσιανὸν τὸν ἀνεψιὸν αὐτοῦ ἐς τὸ συνέδριον ἐσαγαγών, καὶ τὴν Μαῖσαν καὶ τὴν Σοαιμίδα ἐκατέρωθεν παραστησάμενος, παῖδα ἔθετο, ἐαντὸν δὲ ὡς καὶ πατέρα ἐξαίφνης τηλικούτου παιδίου, καίπερ οὐ πολὺ τῇ ἡλικίᾳ αὐτοῦ προέχοντα, ἐμακάρισε, καὶ μηδὲν ἄλλου τέκνου δεῖσθαι ἔφησεν, ἴν' ἡ οἰκία αὐτοῦ ἀνευ ἀδυμιῶν διαγένηται.* "This is how it came about. He brought his cousin Bassianus before the senate, and having caused Maesa and Soaemis²² to take their places on either side of him, formally adopted him as his son; and he congratulated himself on becoming suddenly the father of so large a boy, - though he himself was not much older than the other, - and declared that he had no need of any other child to keep his house free from despondency."

This is followed by a sentence of transition, 80.17.3, where Dio speaks of divine intervention in human affairs, cites a prophesy, and announces his next topic:

80.17.3: *καὶ γὰρ τὸν Ἐλεγάβαλον τοῦτό τε οἱ ποιῆσαι καὶ Ἀλέξανδρον αὐτὸν προσονομάσαι κεκελευμένοι. καὶ ἔγωγε πείθομαι ἐκ θείας τινὸς παρασκευῆς ὡς ἀληθῶς αὐτὰ γεγονέναι, τεκμαιρόμενος οὐχ οἷς ἐκεῖνος εἶπεν, ἀλλ' ἐκ τε τοῦ λεχθέντος αὐτῷ ὑπὸ τινος, ὅτι ἄρα τις Ἀλέξανδρος ἐξ Ἐμέσης ἐλθὼν αὐτὸν διαδέξεται, καὶ ἐκ τοῦ συμβεβηκότος ἔν τε τῇ Μυσίᾳ τῇ ἄνω καὶ τῇ Θράκῃ.* "He said that Elagabalus had ordered him to do this and further to call his son's name Alexander. And I, for my part, am persuaded that all this did come about in very truth by some divine arrangement; though I infer this, not from what he said, but from the statement made to him by someone else, to the effect that an Alexander should come from Emesa to succeed him, and again from what happened in Upper Moesia and in Thrace."

The third part of this passage, 80.18.1-3, tells us what happened there:

80.18.1-3: (1) *ὀλίγον γὰρ τούτων πρότερον δαίμων τις Ἀλέξανδρός τε ὁ Μακεδῶν ἐκεῖνος εἶναι λέγων καὶ τὸ εἶδος αὐτοῦ τήν τε σκευὴν ἄπασαν φέρων, ὠρμηθή τε ἐκ τῶν περὶ τὸν Ἴστρον χωρίων, οὐκ οἶδ'*

21 *Dio*, 80.17.2 – 80.18.3: *DioW*. p. 470-1, *DioL*. p. 472/3-474/5, (Xiph. 352, 18 - 353, 11 R. St.).

22 This is how Dio and Herodian call her. In the *HA* she is Symiamira. Soaemias is the form on coins and inscriptions.

ὅπως ἐκείνη ἐκφανεῖς, καὶ διὰ τε τῆς Μυσίας καὶ τῆς Θράκης διεξῆλθε βαχεύων μετ' ἀνδρῶν τετρακοσίων, δύσους τε καὶ νεβρίδας ἐνεσκευασμένων, κακὸν οὐδὲν δρώντων. (2) ὠμολόγητο δὲ παρὰ πάντων τῶν ἐν τῇ Θράκῃ τότε γενομένων ὅτι καὶ καταγωγαὶ καὶ τὰ ἐπιτήδεια αὐτῷ πάντα δημοσίᾳ παρεσκευάσθη· καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐτόλμησεν οὔτ' ἀντειπεῖν οἱ οὔτ' ἀντᾶραι, οὐκ ἄρχων, οὐ στρατιώτης, οὐκ ἐπίτροπος, οὐχ οἱ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἡγούμενοι, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ἐν πομπῇ τινὶ μεθ' ἡμέραν ἐκ προρρησέως ἐκομίσθη μέχρι τοῦ Βυζαντίου. (3) ἐντεῦθεν γὰρ ἐξαναχθεὶς προσέσχε μὲν τῇ Χαλκηδονίᾳ γῆ, ἐκεῖ δὲ δὴ νυκτὸς ἱερά τινα ποιήσας καὶ ἵππον ξύλινον καταχύσας ἀφανῆς ἐγένετο. ταῦτα μὲν ἐν τῇ Ἀσίᾳ ἔτι, ὡς εἶπον, ὦν, πρὶν καὶ ὄτιοῦν περὶ τὸν Βασιανὸν ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ γενέσθαι, ἔμαθον. (1) For shortly before this a spirit, claiming to be the famous Alexander of Macedon, and resembling him in looks and general appearance, set out from the regions along the Ister, after first appearing there in some manner or other, and proceeded through Moesia and Thrace, revelling in company with four hundred male attendants, who were equipped with thyrsi and fawn skins and did no harm. (2) It was admitted by all those who were in Thrace at the time that lodgings and all provisions for the spirit were donated at public expense, and none – whether magistrate, soldier, procurator, or the governors of the provinces – dared to oppose the spirit either by word or by deed, but it proceeded in broad daylight, as if in a solemn procession, as far as Byzantium, as it had foretold. (3) Then taking ship, it landed in the territory of Chalcedon, and there, after performing some sacred rites by night and burying a wooden horse, it vanished. These facts I ascertained while still in Asia, as I have stated, and before anything had been done at all about Bassianus at Rome.”

Thus Dio, perhaps unintentionally, reminds us of his own absence from Rome, and from Moesia, Thrace, and Chalcedon, during the events he relates, and of his reliance on hearsay to relate them. That being as it may, the relevance of this passage to Varius' fall is not immediately apparent. The rhetorical figure of *ennoia*, “a kind of purposeful holding back of information that nevertheless hints at what is meant ... a kind of circuitous speaking,”²³ seems to be operating here. This makes an audience or readership wonder about the relevance to Varius' fall of Varius' adoption and renaming of his cousin Alexander, and of the apparition of a Bacchic spirit calling itself Alexander of Macedon. Such wonder creates suspense, giving the narrator a chance later to score a dramatic effect, by revealing the relevance of a hitherto mysterious circumstance, when the narrative provides an opportunity to do so. This, at least, is what a readership or audience, familiar with the twists and turns of Dio's style, may be led to expect in such a case. Meanwhile, though expecting eventual enlightenment, they may still continue to wonder how this passage relates to the subject announced: Varius' fall.

Now it may well be considered, within the conception of reality arguably shared by Dio with his audience or readership, that for a Roman emperor during this period to designate an heir is to provide both occasion and motive for his own overthrow. Caracalla, as depicted in earlier parts of Dio's narrative, certainly seems to have thought so. He kills both his childless (and possibly still virgin) wife, Plautilla, and his brother and co-emperor, Geta. (This, by the way, is an instance of the theme of sibling rivalry

23 *Silva Rhetoricae*, *ennoia*.

within his family, to which we shall return.) He draws back from prospective marriage to a Parthian princess, preferring to wage war against her father. He neither designates an heir, nor acknowledges a bastard. All this studious avoidance of acquiring a designated heir turns out, however, to have been in vain, as Caracalla is anyhow murdered by his praetorian prefect, Macrinus.²⁴ Going back a little further in Dio's narrative, Severus is the object of attempts by Caracalla, his son and designated heir, to murder him.²⁵ And further back still, Dio tells us how Marcus Aurelius' death was due to his physicians' wish "to do" (his son and heir) "Commodus a favour."²⁶ Awareness, then, of such considerations might lend immediate topical relevance to Dio's account of Alexander's adoption and redenuation, relating it by implication, *via* such considerations, to the stated subject of this section: Varius' fall. Such awareness might presumably be supplied by Dio's audience or readership, either from their memory of his earlier accounts of Caracalla, Severus, and Marcus, coupled with his recent announcement of an impending account of Varius' fall, or from their general knowledge of contemporary history.

The question of how and why the apparition of a Bacchic spirit, pretending to be Alexander the Great, recounted in the latter part of this passage, relates to Varius' fall, is rather more difficult to fathom. Dio emphasises its significance by pointing out that it takes place before Varius' cousin Alexander is adopted and renamed, thus, presumably, rendering it some sort of sign or omen of the latter event. Yet the Bacchic Alexander is not from Emesa (neither, for that matter, is Varius' cousin Alexander) nor does he seek to fulfil the prophecy, just cited by Dio (with characteristic disdain for precise attribution of sources, as told "by someone" to Varius) of Varius' replacement by someone from that town. This Bacchic spirit's relevance to Varius' fall is therefore far from obvious to the modern reader, and requires considerable study to begin to fathom. (The question of whether it is equally far from obvious to an ancient readership or audience will be considered in due course.)

This apparition has received such study from scholars including Fergus Millar. He points out similarities, as well as differences, in the itinerary, and some of the incidents, of the journey undertaken by this "pseudo-Alexander," and that performed by Caracalla, an enthusiastic imitator of Alexander the Great. Caracalla's journey takes place some seven years before, during his progress to the East, as recounted both by Dio²⁷ and Herodian,²⁸ on what turns out to be his final absence from Rome (for he is murdered in Syria, thus setting in motion the chain of incidents that lead to Varius' accession). By virtue of this imitation of an imitator, the Bacchic apparition of 80.18.1-3 is "in reality, so to speak, a pseudo-pseudo-Alexander."²⁹

24 *Dio*, books 78 & 79.

25 *Dio*, books 78 & 79.

26 *Dio*, 72.33.4²

27 *Dio*, 78.7-8 (Millar, using pre-Boissovain numbering, cites this as book 77).

28 *Herodian*, 4.8.1.

29 Millar, F., *A Study of Cassius Dio*, Oxford, 1964., p. 214-218, Appendix V, *The Pseudo-Alexander of A.D. 221*.

Millar notes several cases of impersonations of emperors recently dead, with an aim to seize power under those emperors' names, in previous periods of Roman history. But, as Millar himself admits, this does not fully explain the apparition in question. Not only had Alexander the Great been dead for more than five and a half centuries, but this pseudo-Alexander does not appear to seek power, disappearing voluntarily from the scene. So "a clear political motive ... is lacking in the incident of 221." Millar also considers the question of whether the escort of Bacchants who accompany the pseudo-Alexander, and the Dionysiac rites they perform, constitute an imitation of Caracalla; for Caracalla, according to Dio, Millar reminds us, "identified himself with Dionysos."³⁰ Regarding the provisioning and quartering of the pseudo-Alexander at public expense, Millar draws attention to the network of *mansiones* constructed in that area, under the Severans, for that purpose, and notes the resentment that the exaction from the local community of the cost of their upkeep and supply aroused among the populace. Such exaction is "one of the main causes of tension between state and people under the Empire," specifically during the Severan period, indeed in the very same area where the pseudo-Alexander arises. While Millar considers Dio's account of this quartering and provisioning of a false emperor evidence for similar treatment of a real one, he does not address the question of why, if imperial exaction of goods and services was such a source there and then of popular resentment, the pseudo-Alexander is, in Dio's account, apparently accorded them without demur.

This question is, however, taken up by Giuseppe Zecchini.³¹ He proposes that the willingness of local authorities to lodge and feed the pseudo-Alexander and his escort of four hundred male Bacchants at public expense shows discontent with and contempt for Varius. This proposition is based on the notion that the apparition of the pseudo-Alexander of 974=221 really manifests Thracian nostalgia for Caracalla, and hence, by implication, resentment against his supposed son. Caracalla is, by this argument, plausibly represented in the form of a pseudo-Alexander, which he adopted during his passage through Thrace, and into Asia, on his journey to the East in 967=214. This is described both by Dio and Herodian,³² as a thoroughgoing impersonation, in full Macedonian costume, following a detailed script of *imitatio Alexandri*. This imitation involves, among other things, the performance of a sacrifice at Ilium, reminiscent of the Macedonian Alexander's devotion to the cult of Achilles.

Zecchini's argument depends on distinguishing two contrasting forms of *imitatio Alexandri*, European and Asiatic, both, he maintains, practiced by Caracalla, but at different times. In the European form, Caracalla playing his habitual role as a *Soldatenkaiser*, imitates the original, Macedonian and Panhellenic Alexander, who led the Greeks against the Persians, just as Achilles had led them against the Trojans. In the Asiatic form, Caracalla, contemplating marriage to the daughter of the Parthian king, imitates the later, Orientalising, ecumenical Alexander, who adopted Persian dress and court etiquette.

³⁰ Dio, 78.7.4.

³¹ Zecchini, G., *Lo pseudo-Alessandro del 221 d.C.*, *Aevum*, 62, 1988.

³² Dio, 78.7-8 (the same locus as that cited by Millar, but cited by Zecchini according to Boissvain's numbering) & Herodian, 4.8.1 (also the same as that cited by Millar).

The Dionysiac element in Caracalla's *imitatio Alexandri*, manifest in Caracalla's calling himself, as did Alexander, *νέος Διόνυσος*, 'new Dionysus', would, by this theory, belong to the European form. This would reflect Dionysus' Thracian origin, and recall his alleged incursion into India. This, rendered in Alexander's interpretation of the Dionysiac myth as a military adventure, would serve as a model for his own invasion of India, and thus for Caracalla's war against the Parthians. The apparition in Thrace of a pseudo-Alexander in 974=221, who is really a nostalgic evocation of Caracalla, imitating the European form of Alexander, would, according to Zecchini, constitute a protest, more daemonic and prophetic than military in form, against the Orientalisation of Varius' hieratic policy, and against the absence of military activity during his reign. As such, it would meet, not with opposition, but with complicity, on the part of a Thracian officialdom, discontented with Varius, on account of his hieratic Orientalism, and contemptuous of him, because unafraid of a discipline that this most unmilitary emperor fails to exert.

Zecchini concludes his consideration of this subject by discussing the redenomination as Alexander of Varius' cousin (previously called Bassianus by Dio, Alexianus by Herodian). The details of this discussion need not concern us here, except in one respect: Zecchini sees this redenomination as possibly emanating from a tactical decision taken by Maesa, Varius' grandmother, and *éminence grise* behind his throne, in line with her strategic decision, already taken, according to Zecchini, by the summer of 974=221, to get rid of Varius, and put Alexander in his place. Zecchini assumes that the adoption and redenomination of Alexander both result from Maesa's influence on Varius. Her choice of the name Alexander for Varius' successor would, by this argument, relate to a series of *omina imperii*, cited in the *Historia Augusta's Vita Alexandri*,³³ some linking Varius' cousin to Alexander the Great, and would be motivated, at least in part, by reports of the apparition in Thrace, earlier that same year, of the pseudo-Alexander. Maesa would interpret this apparition as confirmation of the urgent need to execute her strategy of substitution, and as offering a plausible propaganda vehicle, for presenting the outcome of that strategy to soldiers and people.

This is an ingenious and attractive argument, but it is predicated on the assumption that Dio's account of that apparition is true, and that report thereof reached Maesa. Zecchini remarks, near the outset of his article, that "Dio insists on the incredible but true nature of the episode," and that "precisely because of this, his account deserves to be evaluated with particular care." Zecchini does not, however, in my opinion, go on to do so, at least not with the requisite degree of scepticism. In this he is not alone. Both Zecchini's and Millar's discussions of the pseudo-Alexander assume the broad veracity of Dio's account, and they both proceed, on that basis, to speculate as to this phenomenon's real significance, in relation to the political, administrative, and dynastic history of the period. This is something that the present enquiry refrains from doing, since it does not accord Dio's account of these matters, or indeed of anything related to Varius, any presumption of veracity whatever. All his propositions must be tested against evidence.

33 *HA/AS*, 5.1-2; 13.1-14.7.

A scholar who approaches Dio's account of the pseudo-Alexander with a greater degree of scepticism is, in contrast, Alexandru Madgearu.³⁴ He gives a detailed account of academic discussion of this matter, both before and after Millar, culminating with Zecchini. He mentions that one earlier scholar, Groag, thought he had identified epigraphic evidence (*CIL* III, 8238) of the pseudo-Alexander's passage through Moesia, but that Gag  showed this to be inconclusive. Were it otherwise, it might, according to the methodology adopted in these studies, permit consideration of the pseudo-Alexander as historical reality. Since, however, this appears excluded, we may, with Madgearu, consider the alleged phenomenon of the pseudo-Alexander in terms of its historiographical, folkloric, or mythological, rather than historical significance.

I shall leave to Madgearu the folkloric and mythological dimensions, which he handles well. In my view the historiographical significance of the episode of the pseudo-Alexander, and that of the two preceding passages - Varius' cousin Alexander's adoption and redenuation, and the prophecy of Varius' substitution by an Alexander from Emesa - is that, all taken together, they constitute an instance of *ennoia*. Dio's circuitous mode of presentation here invites the readership or audience actively to draw an implication, as distinct from passively accepting a programmatic proclamation, of the motives and causes of Varius' fall. And, when one does so, the motives and causes in question turn out to differ in the one and other case. In the first case, the announced cause is Varius' sexuality, and the negative reaction it provokes. In the second the motive is dynastic strife, manifest in Varius' cousin's Alexander's ultimately successful bid for the throne. Whether Dio intends this difference in results, or whether it derives from unconscious self-betrayal, is beyond our ken. But I think that the fact of Dio's duplicity in modes of presentation, and a corresponding duplicity in the matter presented - differing motives or causes for Varius' fall - can be established on purely textual grounds, as follows:

In Boissevain's reconstruction, based on Xiphilinus' epitome, of the earlier version of sentence 80.17.1, Dio proclaims that Varius' fall is due to Varius' sexual behaviour, and to the reaction against it both of populace and soldiers. The second version of that sentence, attributed to Petrus Patricius, points to an alternative motivation for Varius' fall: that it is due to the predisposition of the praetorians to overthrow their rulers. Immediately thereafter, Dio introduces a break in narrational continuity, corresponding to the rhetorical trope of *ennoia*. Promising to tell us how Varius' fall, thus caused, came about, instead, he launches immediately into what is, apparently, quite another subject, that of Varius' adoption and renaming of his cousin Alexander. This, making us wonder what is the connection between these two subjects, naturally leads us to discover, by means of implication, the logical nexus between them: the proposition that for a Roman emperor, in this period, to have a designated successor is to invite his own overthrow. We now have three possible explanations of the cause of Varius' fall.

Dio mentions Varius' own reported ascription of cause for his adoption and redenuation of

34 Madgearu, Alexandru, *Considerazioni sullo pseudo-Alessandro del 221 d. C.*, *Aevum*, 64, 1990.

Alexander – that Varius was ordered to do so by Elagabal. He does not dissent from that ascription, seeing in these events evidence of divine intervention in human affairs. But he prefers to infer this intervention, not from Varius' ascription of his actions to Elagabal, but from two signs, a statement and an event, which Dio presents as resulting from divine intervention, presumably that of some deity or deities other than Elagabal. According to Zecchini, Dio's preference in this regard corresponds to his disbelief in the words of such a contemptible monarch as Varius. While there can be no doubt of Dio's contempt for Varius, I think there are other, more pertinent reasons for Dio's preference in this case. I shall come to this point soon, after examining the sources upon which Dio prefers to base his inference. The statement in question is that "made to [Varius] by someone else, to the effect that an Alexander should come from Emesa to succeed him." The event is the apparition of the pseudo-Alexander.

In assessing the role of both these elements in Dio's text, the most important fact to keep in mind is Dio's presentation of both as manifestations of divine intervention. Like all such manifestations, they are difficult to fathom. Modern scholars have expended much effort on fathoming one of them, the apparition of the pseudo-Alexander, seeking to interpret it in terms of actual history. This, given the absence of relevant material evidence, is less useful to history than seeking accurately to interpret its meaning within the compass of Dio's narrative, irrespective of whether it is true or not. For Dio's meaning and what lies behind it are themselves legitimate objects of historical investigation. They are moreover objects which, unlike the question of whether Maesa was even aware of the episode of the pseudo-Alexander, let alone how she may have interpreted it, and what use she may have made of it, can be examined in the light of evidence, however imperfect. That evidence is Dio's text itself, in Boissevain's recension. Within that purely textual compass, then, we note that Dio makes two items the basis for inferring divine intervention. One is a prophecy: "someone" telling Varius that he will be succeeded by an Alexander from Emesa. The other is an omen or sign: the apparition of the pseudo-Alexander in Moesia and Thrace.

The vagueness of the source attributed to this prophecy, and its manifest inaccuracy, in the light of Dio's own text, which has earlier told us that Varius' cousin Bassianus is "the son of Mamaea and Gessius Marcianus, who was also a Syrian from the city of Arca,"³⁵ not from Emesa, may be meaningful. By one possible argument, it may show Dio's carelessness in attribution, and his forgetfulness of his own text, leading him into something approaching self-contradiction. If so, these characteristics would argue for unconscious self-betrayal, rather than deliberate duplicity, in the difference between his diverse ascriptions of cause to Varius' fall, emerging from his diverse forms, direct and indirect, of presentation. These also approach self-contradiction. But another possible argument might remember that there is evidence earlier in Dio's text for a close connection between the name Alexander and Emesa, in the form of an anecdote concerning Commodus.

35 *Dio*, 79.30.3.

Possibly jealous of hearing that an Emesene called Julius Alexander has killed a lion with a javelin, Commodus orders Julius Alexander himself to be killed.³⁶ Julius is of course the Roman *nomen* of the princely-priestly family of Emesa, into which Severus marries, producing with Domna the Severan dynasty. Alexander is the Greek and Latin form of the Romanised Syrian name Alexianus, held, among others, by Varius' maternal grandfather, Maesa's husband, and his younger cousin, here the object of adoption and redenuation. Were Varius spontaneously to consider his succession, there would be nothing strange in thinking that his successor might well be an Alexander from Emesa, someone from his own family. But according to this prophesy, it could not be his cousin Alexander, who is not from Emesa, but from Arca. So, in view of the known outcome of Alexander's succession, might this prophesy not, in retrospect, be seen as a trick, a false prophecy, to throw Varius off the scent?

Turning to the apparition of the pseudo-Alexander, once its status as a sign is granted, one may ask: Of what, precisely, is it a sign? It is not, directly, a sign of Varius' fall, caused by the gods' discontent with him, such as, arguably, is that cited earlier in Dio's account of Varius, where a statue of Isis, "who is represented as riding on a dog above the pediment of her temple ... [turns] her face toward the interior of the temple."³⁷ Rather, it is a sign of Alexander's rise, of his succession to the throne. Its connection to the ostensible topic of this stage of Dio's narrative, Varius' fall, is indirect, deducible by implication: for Alexander to rise, Varius must fall.

One is required, by Dio's use of *ennoia* in presentation, both of Alexander's adoption and redenuation, and of the apparition of the pseudo-Alexander, to reason all this out, in order to understand both of these episodes' conceivable relevance to the overarching narrative. Since one is, thereby, forced into a reasoning, rather than a passively receptive frame of mind, one may apply one's quickened critical faculty to Dio's statement, concluding his presentation of the latter episode, the apparition of a pseudo-Alexander, to the effect that it took place before the former, Varius' adoption and redenuation of his cousin. What does this mean?

To answer this, we must return to the matter of Varius' ascription of cause to his adoption and redenuation of his cousin. Varius believes he was told to do so by Elagabal. Dio, however, chooses to ignore this, calling attention to his choice, and ascribing the cause of Varius' action to "some divine arrangement" not attributable to Elagabal. Why is this? I think Dio is telling us, or rather inviting us to reason out, that Varius was tricked. Varius may have believed that he was told to undertake these actions, which, we know, will lead to his doom, by Elagabal. But some other deity, perhaps even Jupiter himself, whom Dio sees as offended by Varius' hieratic policy in favour of Elagabal, may have really been behind it.

³⁶ *Dio*, 73.14.1-3.

³⁷ *Dio*, 80.10.1.

Dio and his audience or readership would, of course, be familiar with numerous instances in Homeric epic where a god or goddess assumes a disguise, whether as a human or a spirit, or even as another god or goddess, and appears, in an epiphany, to humans, sometimes to warn them or lead them to the truth, sometimes to mislead them to their doom. If this were so in this case, that same deity could easily arrange for the apparition of a pseudo-Alexander, that is, of an omen or sign, indicating that deity's intentions, before tricking Varius into undertaking an action that leads to his own doom. The temporal priority of this apparition to Varius' cousin's adoption and redenuation, on which Dio lays such emphasis, would be significant because it would manifest the controlling deity's intention, before the execution of his or her plan, which is the right logical order for omens or signs. Were it to have happened the other way around, the apparition could be read as a consequence of Varius' cousin's redenuation, whereas the rhetorical and narrative effect Dio is seeking is precisely the reverse. It is thus unnecessary, from the point of view of textual exegesis, to argue, as does Zecchini, that Varius' cousin's redenuation results from Maesa's awareness of the episode in Thrace. It suffices, more simply, in terms of Dio's credulous *Weltanschauung*, to suppose that it results from the execution, by the controlling deity, of a plan on which he or she has already decided, announced in the form of an omen or sign, and achieved by means of epiphanic deception.

This raises the question, deferred till now, of whether the relevance to Varius' fall of the pseudo-Alexander's apparition is as far from obvious to an ancient readership or audience as it is to us. This would partly depend on whether the story was true, and previously known to that audience or readership. Were this the case, then they would already have formulated their own views on the matter, and Dio would most likely be confirming them and using them as points of common reference. But on the evidence available, we cannot know. So we must continue to proceed as if all that is known about any of these matters is what Dio tells us. On that basis, in Dio's text so far, we have been given four possible causes of Varius' fall: the praetorians' reaction to his sexual behaviour; the praetorians' predisposition to overthrow their rulers; Varius' having named a successor; and now, some form of divine intervention.

This passage is followed, in Boissevain's recension, by four disconnected sentences: two separate excerpts ascribed to Petrus Patricius, one reconstruction from Xiphilinus' epitome, and another excerpt ascribed to Petrus Patricius, in that order. The first two sentences fall under the same number, 80.18.4, and thus seem to be presented, by Boissevain, as alternatives:

80.18.4: "Ὅτι ποτὲ ὁ αὐτὸς τοῦτο εἶπεν· "οὐδὲν δεῖσθαι ὀνομάτων ἐκ πολέμου καὶ αἵματος· ἀρκεῖ γάρ μοι καὶ εὐσεβῆ καὶ εὐτυχῆ παρ' ὑμῶν καλεῖσθαι." One day this same emperor made this statement: "I do not want titles derived from war and bloodshed. It is enough for me that you call me Pius and Felix."³⁸

80.18.4: "Ὅτι Ψευδαντωνῖνος ἐπαινόμενός ποτε παρὰ τῆς βουλῆς εἶπεν ὅτι "ὑμεῖς μὲν ἀγαπᾶτέ με καὶ

38 Dio, 80.18.4, (Petr. Patr. Exc. Vat. 153 [p. 232 Mai, = p. 217, 14-16 Dind.]

νή Δία καὶ ὁ δῆμος καὶ τὰ ἔξω στρατόπεδα. τοῖς δὲ δορυφόροις οἷς τοσαῦτα δίδωμι οὐκ ἀρεσκω.” The False Antoninus, on being praised once by the senate, remarked: “Yes, you love me, and so, by Jupiter, does the populace, and also the legions abroad: but I do not please the Pretorians, to whom I keep giving so much.”³⁹

As in an earlier instance, that of 80.17.1, we do not know, on any certain textual basis, to what extent either part of 80.18.4, both, in this case, attributed to *Petrus Patricius*, reflects or corresponds to Dio’s original. And again, as with 80.17.2-80.18.3, these sentences’ relevance to the stated subject, Varius’ fall, is not immediately apparent. Ascribing this apparent lack of relevance, again, to *emnoia*, let us accept the implicit invitation to discover their relevance by addressing the question of their meaning in themselves, and of their relation to each other. Given that these two sentences follow, albeit at a certain distance, the sentence “this is how it came about,” and thus ostensibly relate to mode, they also contain much potentially relevant to cause. In this regard they seem to me more complementary than alternative. The first alleges Varius’ repudiation or renunciation of military titles related to one aspect of the office of the principate, whilst retaining titles or epicleses related to another: that of its hieratic and political functions. The second distinguishes Varius’ relationship with the praetorians from those with other collectivities, as, allegedly, perceived – or, as is suggested by the context and the outcome, woefully misperceived – by Varius himself.

With respect to the first of these two sentences, I have argued (in *QV6*) that Dio uses Varius’ alleged renunciation of military titles, among other charges, to justify Varius’ murder. Such renunciation may, in the context of Dio’s indictment of Varius, be held to constitute desertion, or dereliction of duty, and hence to justify Varius’ removal from the throne by the only means available; murder. Yet our question now is not about retroactive justification. Rather, it is what role Varius’ alleged repudiation of military titles is supposed to play in Dio’s account of the cause of his fall. For one thing is to use a reported action or statement as a justification for murder, whereas another is to show how the same action or statement provoked that murder.

To address this question, it is necessary to step out of close exegesis of Dio’s text and to consider its possible relationship to fact. For awareness of and reference to such a relationship would play a part in Dio’s readership’s or audience’s understanding of his narrative at this point. It would constitute part of their presumably shared conception of reality. I have previously suggested (in *QV6*) the role that such a renunciation as is here attributed to Varius might have played in the praetorians’ disaffection with him, whether such renunciation were to take the form of a reported statement, as here, or merely that of *de facto* neglect of military matters. Military campaigns offer a chance for plunder and promotion. I would add here that they provide for satisfaction of aggressive instincts. It may reasonably be presumed that, in circumstances such as those of the Severan period, Roman soldiers were not unmoved by greed,

39 *Dio*, 80.18.4, (*Petr. Patr. Exc. Vat.* 154 [p. 232 sq. Mai, ≈ p. 217, 17-20 Dind.])

ambition, and bloodlust. Not to undertake military campaigns would thus deprive such soldiers both of the material rewards and the psychological satisfactions that would have formed a vital part of their pursuit of self-interest, and of their self-attribution of identity and purpose. A Roman emperor, in the period following Severus and Caracalla, might plausibly be expected to be a military ruler. In presenting himself as Caracalla's bastard, Varius had led the soldiers to believe that he would be one such. If he then failed to provide them with opportunities for plunder, promotion, and glory, or even merely for release of their aggressive instincts, he would greatly disappoint them.

Against this background of what we may presume to be the underlying historical reality informing Dio's text, the second version of 80.18.4 indicates its author's view of the nature of Varius' relationship with the praetorians, his eventual murderers: one of bribery, or indeed of blackmail. It shows, at very least, that the role of the praetorians in Varius' reign, and therefore in his murder, is, at least in one ancient historian's view, whether Dio's or that of Petrus Patricius, not necessarily limited to an indignant response to his reported sexual misconduct. The allusion here to the soldiers' acceptance of copious bribes from Varius, does not suggest that they are disinterested defenders of public morality, or authorised agents of a righteously indignant *vox populi*, as is suggested by the earlier version of 80.17.1. On the basis of the second version of 80.18.4, seen in the light of the narrative's known outcome, they seem more like thugs with a hold over a ruler, who play him to their own advantage, for as long as there is anything to gain from him, and kill him as soon as his usefulness to them has been exhausted, or perhaps superseded, by the greater usefulness of their next prospective victim: his successor.

Such a view of the role of the soldiers in general, and of the praetorians in particular, not only in Varius' reign and murder, and in those of his successor, but in the history of the Roman empire, during the period encompassing both, jibes with that of these soldiers' alleged propensity to "set no limit to their right to do what they please," and to "keep their arms ready to use" against their ruler, as expressed in the second version of sentence 80.17.1. This, taken together with the second version of 80.18.4, suggests a critical opinion of the praetorians. It concords with Dio's earlier description of their murder of Pertinax, and of their subsequent auction of the empire to Didius Julianus, which set off the chain of events that leads to the accession of Severus, and to the implantation of his dynasty.⁴⁰ There are, of course, several more examples of such conduct on the part of the praetorians in the period of military anarchy immediately succeeding Varius' reign, beginning with the murder of his cousin and successor Alexander, and lasting until the accession, half a century later, of Aurelian. But these fall outside the compass of Dio's text, which comes to an end during the reign of Alexander. They do, however, fall within the retrospective purview of Petrus Patricius.

The third of the disconnected sentences in the present series of four, numbered 80.19.1¹, begins a new chapter. It is reconstructed from Xiphilinus' epitome. It is, moreover, the sentence with which

40 *Dio*, books 74 & 75.

Dio fulfils his promise, implicit in his use of *ennoia*, to reveal, with dramatic effect, to his audience or readership, when it becomes opportune, the relevance, till then withheld, to Varius' fall, of Varius' relationship with Alexander.

80.19.1¹: Ἔως μὲν οὖν ὁ Σαρδανάπαλλος τὸν ἀνεψιὸν ἐφίλει, ἐσώζετο· ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντας ὑπώπτευε καὶ ἐμάνθανε πρὸς ἐκεῖνον ῥέποντας ὀλοσχερῶς ταῖς εὐνοίαις, ἐτόλμησε μεταγινῶναι καὶ πάντα ἐπὶ καθαιρέσει αὐτοῦ ἔπραττεν: "So long as Sardanapalus continued to love his cousin, he was safe. But when he became suspicious of all men and learned that their favour was turning entirely to the boy, he ventured to change his mind and did everything to bring about his destruction."⁴¹

The balance of forces has now turned decisively against Varius. Though he is still, nominally, emperor, he remains safe only so long as he publicly loves his designated successor, the ostensible beneficiary of a plot to overthrow him which is already in motion. By virtue of a paradox that makes sense only if one accepts the foregoing proposition, and assumes the inevitability of Varius' eventual overthrow by Alexander, anything that Varius may do to defend himself against the threat posed by Alexander's rise will only hasten his own fall. Clearly, Varius' days are numbered. For once the process of succession has begun, as it clearly has, it is only a matter of time, and not very much time at that, before it reaches culmination. From now on, the story is not so much that of Varius' fall, though this is both necessary and inevitable, but of Alexander's rise, and of the perils Alexander runs, once Varius becomes aware of what is happening around himself. Thus, Varius' desperate and unsuccessful moves to secure his own preservation become yet a further, but only a proximate, cause of his own fall.

The fourth in this series of four disconnected sentences, again an excerpt attributed to Petrus Patricius, is given its own number:

80.19.1². Ὅτι τινῶν συνηγορούντων τῷ Ψευδαντωνίνῳ καὶ εἰπόντων ὡς εὐτυχῆς εἶη τῷ υἱῷ συνυπατεύων, ἔφη· "εὐτυχέστερος ἔσομαι κατὰ τὸν ἐξῆς ἐνιαυτὸν μετὰ γνησίου υἱοῦ μέλλων ὑπατεῦειν:" "When some persons who were acting as advocates along with the False Antoninus remarked how fortunate he was to be consul together with his son, he replied: 'I shall be more fortunate next year; for then I am going to be consul with a real son.'⁴²

The purpose of this sentence is apparently to highlight Varius' foolishness; or, perhaps, to show his peculiar sense of humour. For it is obvious that even were he to have a real son by next year, such a son would hardly be of an age to occupy the consulate. If Varius is supposed not to realise this, then he is foolish. If he does understand it, then what is the sense of this statement? It seems to hark back to 80.17.2, where Varius congratulates himself on "becoming suddenly the father of so large a boy" as

41 (Xiph. 353, 11-15 R. St.).

42 (Petr. Patr. *Exc. Vat.* 155 [p. 233 Mai. = p. 127, 21-24 Dind.])

his cousin Alexander. May it not, in the light of this, indicate a sarcastic awareness on Varius' part of the incongruity of his own situation as an adolescent emperor? If so, one can only wonder as to its range and intensity.⁴³

The final sequence in Dio's account of Varius' fall is reconstructed from Xiphilinus.⁴⁴ It divides into three parts, corresponding to its chapter divisions: 19 and 20,⁴⁵ and 21.⁴⁶

80.19.1²-4: (1²) Ὡς δὲ ποτε καὶ ἀνελεῖν αὐτὸν ἐπεχείρησεν, οὐ μόνον οὐδὲν ἤνυσεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτὸς ἀποθανεῖν ἐκινδύνευσεν· (2) ὃ τε γὰρ Ἀλέξανδρος ὑπὸ τε τῆς μητρὸς καὶ τῆς τήθης ὑπὸ τε τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἰσχυρῶς ἐφυλάσσετο, καὶ οἱ δορυφόροι αἰσθόμενοι τὴν ἐπιχείρησιν τοῦ Σαρδαναπάλλου δεινῶς ἐθορύβησαν, οὐ πρὶν τε ἐπαύσαντο στασιάζοντες ἢ τὸν Σαρδαναπάλλον τὸ στρατόπεδον σὺν τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καταλαβόντα, (3) πολλὰ τε ἱκετεύσαντα καὶ τοὺς ἐξαιτηθέντας παρ' αὐτῶν τῶν συνασελγαινόντων αὐτῷ ἐκδοῦναι ἀναγκασθέντα, ὑπὲρ τε τοῦ Ἱεροκλέους οἰκτρὰ λαλήσαντα καὶ δάκρυσι κλαύσαντα, τὴν τε σφαγὴν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ προδείξαντα, καὶ ἐπειπόντα “ἕνα μοι τοῦτον χάρισασθε, ὃ τε βούλεσθε περὶ αὐτοῦ ὑποτοπήσαντες, ἢ ἐμὲ ἀποκτεῖνατε,” μὲν αὐτοὺς ἐκμειλίξασθαι. (4) τότε μὲν οὖν μὲν ἐσώθη· καὶ γὰρ καὶ ἡ τήθη αὐτοῦ ἐμίσει τε αὐτὸν ἐφ' οἷς ἔπραττεν, ὡς οὐδὲ τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου υἱὸν ὄντα, καὶ πρὸς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ὡς καὶ ὄντως ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγονότα ἀπέκλινε· (1²) “When, however, Sardanapalus attempted to destroy Alexander, he not only accomplished nothing but came near being killed himself. (2) For Alexander was sedulously guarded by his mother and his grandmother and by the soldiers, and the Pretorians, also, on becoming aware of the attempt of Sardanapalus, raised a terrible tumult; and they did not stop rioting until Sardanapalus, accompanied by Alexander, came to the camp (3) and poured out his supplications and under compulsion surrendered such of his companions in lewdness as the soldiers demanded. In behalf of Hierocles he offered piteous pleas and bewailed him with tears; then, pointing to his own throat, he cried: ‘Grant me this one man, whatever you may have been pleased to suspect about him, or else slay me.’ (4) Thus with difficulty he succeeded in appeasing them; and for the time being he was saved himself, though with difficulty. Even his grandmother hated him because of his deeds, which seemed to show that he was not the son of Antoninus at all, and was coming to favour Alexander, as being really sprung from him.”

The first part of this passage illustrates the point previously made *via* Xiphilinus: that Varius is

43 T.V. Buttrey ventures a suggestion: “which can't be guaranteed by the Greek but which might make sense of the remark (or the remark before it was transmitted in this form, which may have been intended to make [Varius] sound stupid). Previous emperors had not as a rule repeated their consulships year in year out; some went for a long time without a consulship, and Varius himself missed out on 221. *ἐξῆς* means generally “thereafter”, more specifically, in series, “the next in line”. The text here reads “the next year” but maybe its sense is “the next successive consular year”. If what [Varius] meant was “I'll have a real son when next I hold the consulship” this sense is [plausible], the time is indefinite, and in terms of imperial administration is nothing unusual. It's just a way of saying, “When[ever] next I'm consul I'm not going to have this guy as colleague again”. (E-mail to me of 1 December, 2005.)

44 *Dio*, 80.19.1² – 80.21.3, *DioWp*, 472-473 = *DioLp*, 474/5-478/9.

45 (Xiph. 353, 15 - 354, 8 R.St.)

46 (Xiph. 354, 8 - 19 R. St., Exc. Val. 414 [p. 769])

safe only so long as he appears publicly to love Alexander. The second, unconnected logically with the first, but harking back, rather, to the theme of Varius' sexual behaviour, adds nothing new to the mixture of causes for his fall. The most significant element here, from the point of view of this enquiry, is the final sentence. It reveals yet another possible cause of Varius' fall; perhaps the most important, because deepest and most strategic, both in terms of history, and in those of historiography, as manifest in Dio's account: Maesa's will. We shall soon discuss the historical possibility of this cause. First, however, let us consider it in terms of historiography, that is, of Dio's text. Within that compass, a number of observations are in order.

It may be remembered (both by readers of the present series of articles, and by Dio's readership or audience) that Dio's account of Varius' rise presents it as the outcome of Maesa's will. Although Dio ascribes to Eutychianus, one of Maesa's retainers, the planning and execution of the plot to raise Varius to the throne, it is clear from Dio's account of Varius' rise and fall, beginning at 79.30.2, that both are to be understood within the framework of an overarching story, whose protagonist is Maesa. Both are in some sense achievements of her policy. It may be noted, in 79.31.1-2, that, just as in the case of 80.17.3, discussed above, divine intervention, ascribed, without demur, in the earlier locus, to Elagabal himself, as well as unspecified "oracular utterances," play a part in Eutychianus' decision to undertake this action. Although Dio takes pains, at 79.31.4, to say that Maesa was at first unaware of the actual execution of Eutychianus' plans, it is incredible – one would imagine both to us, and to Dio's putative readership or audience – that Eutychianus, Maesa's servant or retainer, could act and succeed in such a major enterprise without her knowledge and consent. Her collaboration would, presumably, be needed for access to Caracalla's boyhood clothing, which she would have inherited from her sister Domna, and in which Varius is dressed up to be acclaimed as emperor.

The statement that Eutychianus leads Varius to the legionary camp, where Varius is to be acclaimed, without Maesa's knowledge, seems, therefore, like a disclaimer, designed to grant Maesa deniability. Its presence in the text raises the question of the chronology and circumstances of its composition, which we shall presently discuss, when we consider Varius' fall, and Dio's account of it, in terms of history. In terms of historiography, at least, Maesa's subsequent actions, as described by Dio, especially her active participation in the decisive battle against Macrinus, at 79.38.4, belie any possible denial of her involvement in Varius' rise. We have, moreover, seen, in Dio's account of Varius' reign, how, at 79.39.4, Maesa's retainer, Gannys, and her ally, Comazon, are able to pursue an "arbitrary course" in the conduct of policy, during the initial, Antiochian period of Varius' reign; how, at 80.6.1, Varius, chafing under Maesa's and his mother, Soaemias' attempts to control him, kills their agent, Gannys; and how later, in Rome, at 80.17.2, Maesa, together with Soaemias, is present in the senate, at what is arguably the most important act of Varius' reign: his adoption of Alexander. All this argues for Dio's presentation of Maesa as a woman who is, or seeks to be, a power behind the throne.

It is clear, from 80.19.4, that Maesa regards Varius' job, in his tenure of the principate, as performing

the role whereby her will to power, on behalf of herself and her family, achieves realisation: that of Caracalla's bastard. This is the foundational myth of the revived Severan dynasty; the theoretical justification, first, for Varius' presence on the throne, then for Alexander's, and, throughout, for Maesa's position as *Augusta*. This she shares first with Soaemias, then with Mamaea. (Soaemias is to be eliminated alongside Varius.) Plausible performance of the role of son of Caracalla, so fundamental to her well-being, is, in Maesa's view, according to Dio (who consistently denies Varius' claim to Caracallan paternity) one whose spirit Varius contravenes, and from whose performance he must therefore be removed.

It can, moreover, be deduced from Dio's own account of Maesa's role in Varius' rise and reign, as summarised above, that it must long have been clear to her, at least since the slaying of Gannys, during the winter in Nicomedia of 972-973=219-220, that Varius will never consent merely to reign while she rules. But she waits until the summer of 974=221, when somehow, we infer from Dio's text, Varius is persuaded to adopt his cousin and make him his heir, to set in motion, with a semblance of procedural propriety, the steps which will lead to Varius' substitution. Once Maesa has waiting in the wings a more docile understudy, designated heir apparent, ready to perform her script, not extemporise his own, she has only to take the steps necessary to bring about Varius' fall and Alexander's rise. One of those steps is to let it be known to the soldiers that she considers Alexander, not Varius, the real son of Caracalla. This, of course, is predicated on the proposition that the soldiers (unlike the senate and people of Rome) want an emperor as much as possible like Caracalla. This proposition Dio has explicitly enunciated, at 79.9.2, and implied at many points in his narrative thereafter. It forms the rationale for the *coup d'état* which, according to Dio, places Varius on the throne.

Wherein, one may therefore ask, still within the compass of Dio's text, has Varius failed to fulfil the role of Caracalla's bastard? Not, surely, because Varius has sex with men, or because he sometimes takes the passive role. For Dio says both of Caracalla: once "all his sexual power had disappeared ... he satisfied his lewd desires, as was reported, in a different manner; and his example was followed by others of similar inclinations, who not only admitted that they were given to such practices but declared that they did so in the interest of the emperor's welfare."⁴⁷ Neither does Varius' taking the active role in sex with both males and females differentiate him from his supposed father, at an earlier, more vigorous stage of Caracalla's life: "The sons of Severus, Antoninus and Geta ... outraged women and abused boys."⁴⁸ Nor does Varius' violation of a Vestal. For, according to Dio, Caracalla put "to death four of the Vestal Virgins, one of whom he had himself outraged – when he had still been able to do so."⁴⁹

What is more, Varius' behavioural resemblance to Caracalla, by Dio's account, is not limited to sexual

47 Dio, 78.16.2¹.

48 Dio, 77.7.1.

49 Dio, 78.16.2¹.

matters. Murders of prominent men,⁵⁰ cruelty,⁵¹ rapacity,⁵² inappropriate appointments to high office,⁵³ chariot driving,⁵⁴ dancing,⁵⁵ luxury,⁵⁶ extravagance,⁵⁷ and sumptuary eccentricity,⁵⁸ are all attributed by Dio as much if not more to 'Antoninus' as to 'Pseudantoninus.' And while Varius demonstrates (together with Maesa and Soaemias) military valour in the decisive battle against Macrinus,⁵⁹ Caracalla indulges in exotic and sanguinary religion, living in the Temple of Serapis in Alexandria whilst putting the city to the sword, and practicing there a cult of self-adoration, "sacrificing human beings to himself at the same time that he sacrificed animals to the god."⁶⁰ True, Caracalla does not bring tokens of the cult of Serapis to Rome (where, like that of Elagabal, it was already established). Rather the reverse: he dedicates to Alexandrian Serapis the sword with which he has murdered his brother, Geta, in Rome. Even so, with regard to specific instances of their alleged behaviour, there are far more similarities than differences between them in Dio's depictions of Varius and Caracalla.

There is, however, one important difference, not of substance, but appearance, hence pertaining to what might be called public relations. Caracalla, whilst actually, according to Dio, a tyrant addicted to luxury, is capable of putting on, from time to time, apparently convincingly, a show of austerity and comradeship, for the soldiers' benefit. On such occasions "he was simple and frugal, taking his part scrupulously in the menial duties on terms of equality with the rest. Thus, he would march with the soldiers and run with them, neither bathing nor changing his clothing, but helping them in every task and choosing exactly the same food as they had; and he would often send to the enemy's leaders and challenge them to single combat. The duties of a commander, however, in which he ought to have been particularly well versed, he performed in a very unsatisfactory manner, as if he thought that victory lay in the performance of the humble duties mentioned rather than in good generalship."⁶¹

So it would seem that the major difference between Caracalla and Varius, as depicted by Dio, lies in Varius' failure to assume a military persona, and to seem to enjoy roughing it, from time to time, with the troops. To say, however, that this must constitute the soldiers' principal source of disaffection from Varius, is to say that they were easily taken in by Caracalla, and could have been so by Varius, had he acted similarly. While this might apply to the legionary soldiers, it is unlikely, in historical reality, to have applied to the praetorians, a far more sophisticated body of troops. For them, and in particular for their

50 *Dio*, 78.4.1- 78.6.1.

51 *Dio*, 78.6.1^a-2.

52 *Dio*, 77.7.1.

53 *Dio*, 78.17.1

54 *Dio*, 78.10.2-3.

55 *Dio*, 78.21.2.

56 *Dio*, 78.20.1.

57 *Dio*, 78.9-10.

58 *Dio*, 78.3.3.

59 *Dio*, 79.38.4.

60 *Dio*, 78.23.2.

61 *Dio*, 78.13.1-2.

leaders, questions of material self-interest, and of the tenure and exercise of power, would have been foremost.

Returning to historiographical reality, given that the soldiers are said by Dio, and assumed by Maesa, to consider Caracalla the model of the sort of emperor they want; and given that Caracalla's reported actions and passions are so similar in almost every respect, save one, to those attributed by Dio to Varius, it cannot, with verisimilitude, be on the basis of those similar actions and passions, or of any one of them, that the soldiers are disaffected from Varius. This is not to say that they may not profess to hate in Varius the very same behaviour that they praise, or tolerate, in Caracalla. That would be totally in keeping with their fickle nature, as described by Dio. But the particular reason for their doing so, in any specific case, cannot be their generic reaction to that behaviour itself, but rather something else, which lends to their view of Varius' perceived actions and passions a different valence from that which they accord to Caracalla's. In other words, a positive or negative attitude towards the emperor in question precedes and determines the soldiers' opinion of his behaviour.

Now in Dio's overall view, as expressed or implied on at least three occasions before, namely in describing the soldiers' murder of Pertinax,⁶² their auction of the empire to Didius Julianus,⁶³ and their disaffection from Macrinus, leading to Varius' elevation to the throne,⁶⁴ the root cause, generically speaking, of soldiers adopting a positive or negative attitude towards a given emperor is to be sought in their perception of their own material self-interest. In the case of Varius, however, Dio, unlike Herodian,⁶⁵ fails to draw attention to this cause, even though he has, in 80.18.4, reporting Varius' aversion to military titles, and bribery of the soldiers, given himself a chance to do so. He could have gone on to draw attention to Varius' failure to pursue a vigorous military policy, and to the likely consequences of that failure for the soldiers' perceived self interest. Or he could have suggested, as does Herodian, that Varius was outbid by Alexander.

That he does not suggest it, despite its plausibility, may mean that such an explanation does not fit his agenda. We must, however, remember that speculations concerning the soldiers' resentment of Varius on account of unrealised plunder, unachieved promotion, and unreleased aggression, are not Dio's. They derive from my reconstruction of the possible historical reality behind Dio's text, rather than from that text itself. So let us return then, yet again, to Dio's text. Remaining within its compass alone, let us consider it as a whole, insofar as it covers both Caracalla and Varius. Seeing that whole through Maesa's eyes, the source of the soldiers' disaffection with Varius seems – despite Dio's proclamation of Varius' sexuality as the cause of their anger – not so much to be anything that Varius has done, undergone, or even failed to do, in the sexual, political, hieratic, or even military sphere. Rather his sin is his self-

62 *Dio*, 74.1.1-3; 74.8-10.

63 *Dio*, 74.11.

64 *Dio*, 79.28-29

65 *Herodian*, 5.8.3

presentation as an Oriental priest, instead of as a *Soldatenkaiser*. Image is thus more important than fact, as alleged by Dio, in the soldiers' attitude to Varius, as depicted by Dio. This is the historiographical reality, suggested by Dio's narrative, but contradicted by Dio's proclamation of cause, against which Maesa's hatred of Varius may most clearly be seen. It explains her withdrawal from Varius of her professed belief – or suspension of disbelief – in his Caracallan paternity, followed by the transfer of the right of performance of that mythical role to Alexander.

Against that historiographical reality, how, therefore, are we intended, by Dio, to interpret Maesa's state of mind, as described at 80.19.4? Does she actually believe in either Varius' or Alexander's Caracallan paternity? The relevant clause uses *ὡς* plus an accusative infinitive construction: *ἢ τήθη αὐτοῦ ἐμίσει τε αὐτὸν ἐφ' οἷς ἔπραττεν, ὡς οὐδὲ τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου υἱὸν ὄντα, καὶ πρὸς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ὡς καὶ ὄντως ἐξ αὐτοῦ γεγονότα ἀπέμλινε*: "Even his grandmother hated him because of his deeds, which seemed to show that he was not the son of Antoninus at all, and was coming to favour Alexander, as being really sprung from him." Thus it places the underlying proposition of the sentence in *oratio obliqua*, leaving room for doubt. Of course it is not unheard of for those who affirm a lie long enough eventually to come to believe it. This, however, is not explicitly averred, nor even implicitly suggested, in Dio's text. If, moreover, as Dio's audience or readership are quite explicitly expected to believe that Varius' claim to Caracallan paternity is false, since Dio has said so, repeatedly, by virtue of using the name 'Pseudantoninus' for him, is there any reason for Dio to expect one to believe any differently concerning Alexander? In Dio's account, unlike Herodian's,⁶⁶ this is the first time the notion that Alexander could be Caracalla's son has arisen. The timing is therefore suspicious.

Both the wording and the context of the sentence thus render it ambiguous whether Maesa really believes in either boy's Caracallan paternity or not. This, I believe, is intentional. Dio is again, as in the case of Maesa's knowledge of and consent to Eutychianus' initiatives, affording her deniability. Here, however, the deniability is rather more convoluted, because of the ambiguity in which it is imbedded. For on the one hand, if it is to be understood that Maesa does not believe in either boy's claim to Caracallan paternity, and is merely concerned with maintaining mythical appearances, then what is being denied is that she believes her own lies; and what is being affirmed is what we already suspect: that she is a clever and unscrupulous intriguer. If, on the other hand, it is to be understood that she really believes Alexander to be more likely than Varius to descend from Caracalla, then she is not only self-deceived, but thereby innocent of seeking to deceive. The question of why Dio should want thus to throw a protective veil over the matter of Maesa's understanding and intentions shall be left till after we consider the remaining two chapters in his final narrative sequence concerning Varius' fall.

80.20.1-2: (1) *μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐπιβεβουλευκῶς πάλιν τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ, καὶ δορυβησάντων ἐπὶ τούτῳ τῶν δορυφόρων σὺν αὐτῷ ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον ἐσελθόν, ὡς ἦσθετο φυλαττόμενον ἑαυτὸν ἐπὶ ἀναιρέσει, ἐπειδὴ καὶ αἱ*

66 *Herodian*, 5.3.10

μητέρες αὐτῶν ἐκφανέστερον ἢ πρὶν ἀλλήλαις μαχόμεναι τοὺς στρατιώτας ἠρέθιζον, φεύγειν πῶς ἐπεχείρησε. (2) καὶ ἔμελλεν ἐς τύλλον ἐμβληθεὶς ἐκδρᾶναι ποι, φωραθεὶς δὲ ἀπεσφάγη, ὀκτωκαίδεκα ἔτη γεγονώς. καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἡ μήτηρ (περιπλακεῖσα γὰρ ἀπριξ εἶχετο) συναπώλετο. καὶ αἱ τε κεφαλαὶ αὐτῶν ἀπεκόπησαν, καὶ τὰ σώματα γυμνωθέντα τὸ μὲν πρῶτον διὰ πάσης τῆς πόλεως ἐσύρη, ἔπειτα τὸ μὲν τῆς γυναικὸς ἄλλως πῶς ἐρρίφη, τὸ δὲ ἐκείνου ἐς τὸν ποταμὸν ἐνεβλήθη. (1) "Later he again formed a plot against Alexander, and when the Praetorians raised an outcry at this, he went with him to the camp. But when he became aware that he was under guard and awaiting execution, as the mothers of the two youths, being more openly at variance with each other than before, were inflaming the spirits of the soldiers; so he made an attempt to flee, (2) and would have got away somewhere by being placed in a chest, had he not been discovered, and slain, at the age of eighteen. His mother, who embraced him and clung tightly to him, perished with him; their heads were cut off and their bodies, after being stripped naked, were first dragged all over the city, and then the mother's body was cast aside somewhere or other, while his was thrown into the river."

Varius, having barely escaped death there once before, returns to the praetorians' camp, thus finally sealing his doom. Why? His attempt to escape in a chest suggests the collusion of soldiers loyal to him, perhaps making him think his position is stronger than it is. The most revealing element here, however, is the open variance of the sisters, Soemias and Mamaea. This, I believe, is yet another underlying cause of Varius' fall, both in historical reality, and in Dio's historiographical conception and presentation. For Dio to say that Soemias and Mamaea are "more openly at variance with each other than before" implies that their variance already exists, and that only its openness is new. Its underlying source may be assumed by us, and could be assumed by Dio's audience or readership, to be fairly obvious: sibling rivalry. This, of course, is a recurring *topos* of mythology and historiography, old and ubiquitous in both, whether oral or literary. But, more specifically, Dio gives us two elements of information whereby to infer this as a cause in this particular case. First, he has shown us in considerable detail the deadly rivalry between Caracalla and Geta, first cousins to these sisters, of roughly their age, so that we are not surprised to find Soemias and Mamaea, in the present context, at each others' throats. Secondly, he has provided Mamaea with a grievance to nurse against Soemias. For in immediate reaction to news of the uprising that would, eventually, place Varius on the throne, Macrinus' prefect Julianus "slew both a daughter and a son-in-law of Marcianus."⁶⁷ Marcianus was Mamaea's second husband, so the daughter and son-in-law might well also be hers. In any case, they were members of her legal, if not of her biological family. Thus Mamaea might feel that her branch of the family had paid in blood for the exaltation of her sister's branch, which had escaped unscathed. The depth of her bitterness at this may be measured by the ferocity with which, in her presence and that of her son, so, presumably, with their consent, once Alexander is emperor, the bodies of her sister and nephew are treated.

80.21.1-3: (1) Καὶ αὐτῷ ἄλλοι τε καὶ ὁ Ἰεροκλῆς οἱ τε ἔπαρχοι συναπώλοντο καὶ Αὐρηλίος Εὐβουλος, ὃς Ἐμεσηνὸς μὲν τὸ γένος ἦν, καὶ ἐς τοσοῦτον ἀσελγείας καὶ μιαιρίας ἐχώρησεν ὥστε καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ δήμου πρότερον

67 Dio, 79.31.4.

ἔξαιτηθῆναι. τοὺς γὰρ δὴ καθόλου λόγους ἐπιτετραμμένους οὐδὲν ὅ τι οὐκ ἐδήμεισε. τότε δ' οὖν ὑπό τε τοῦ δήμου καὶ τῶν στρατιωτῶν διεσπάσθη, καὶ Φούλουιος σὺν αὐτῷ ὁ πολίαρχος. (2) καὶ αὐτὸν ὁ Κωμάζων, ὡς καὶ τὸν πρὸ αὐτοῦ, διεδέξατο· ὥσπερ γὰρ προσωπεῖόν τι ἐς τὰ θεάτρα ἐν τῷ διακένῳ τῆς τῶν κωμῳδῶν ὑποκρίσεως ἐσεφέρετο, οὕτω καὶ ἐκεῖνος τῇ τῶν πολίαρχησάντων ἐπ' αὐτοῦ κενῇ χώρᾳ προσετέταττο. ὃ τε Ἐλεγάβαλος αὐτὸς ἐκ τῆς Ῥώμης παντάπασιν ἐξέπεσε. (3) Τὰ μὲν τοῦ Τιβερίνου οὕτως ἔσχε, καὶ οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ τῶν συγκατασκευασάντων αὐτῷ τὴν ἐπανάστασιν καὶ μέγα ἐπ' αὐτῷ θυνηθέντων, πλην ἑνός που, ἐσώθη. (1) "With him perished, among others, Hierocles and the prefects; also Aurelius Eubulus, who was an Emesene by birth and had gone so far in lewdness and debauchery that his surrender had been demanded by the populace before this. He had been in charge of the fiscus, and there was nothing that he did not confiscate. So now he was torn to pieces by the populace and the soldiers; and Fulvius, the city prefect, perished at the same time with him. (2) Comazon had succeeded Fulvius, even as he had succeeded Fulvius' predecessor; for just as a mask used to be carried into the theatres to occupy the stage during the intervals in the acting, when it was left vacant by the comic actors, so Comazon was put in the vacant place of the men who had been city prefects in his day. As for Elagabalus himself, he was banished from Rome altogether. (3) Such was the fate of Tiberinus; and none of those who had helped him plan his uprising, and had gained great power in consequence, survived, either, save perhaps a single person."

Of the persons other than Varius here named, there is only extrahistoriographical evidence for Comazon.⁶⁸ Hierocles is cited in this context by the *Historia Augusta*, but is otherwise unattested.⁶⁹ Aurelius Eubulus is mentioned only by Dio.⁷⁰ Fulvius may be the unnamed city prefect meant by *HA/AH* 15.7, but is likewise unattested outside historiography.⁷¹

Here we are provided by Dio with the key to understanding how, in operational terms, Varius' fall may have been achieved. Comazon, Maesa's ally from the start of Varius' reign, must, it is here suggested, have been her principal agent in bringing about its end. By this argument, it is he who, behind the scenes, communicates Maesa's will to the praetorians, and ensures, by whatever means necessary, that it is fulfilled. There is no other plausible explanation of Comazon's unique escape from the destruction affecting all Varius' other cronies. Comazon's prominence in Varius' reign should have made him a target. His not being so strongly suggests that he is behind Varius' fall. Such is the clear implication of this passage. Here, even Dio's ridicule of Comazon, in alluding to his cognomen, meaning 'comic actor', hence implying infamy, cannot mask the fact of Comazon's success, predicated on his collusion in Varius'

68 *PIR*¹, pars 3, 1898, p. 355-356, § 42: Valerius Comazon Eutyichianus, P. (M.?); *PIR*², pars 3, 1943, p. 93, inter 130-131; Hanslik, R., *RE*², 7.14, 1948, col. 2412-2413, P. Valerius Comazon; Barbieri, G., *Albo*, 2, p. 231-2, § 1174, P. Valerius Comazon; Pflaum, *Carrières*, 2, 1960, p.752-756, §290, P. Valerius Comazon.

69 *HA/AH* 15.2; 15.4; Stein, A., *Hierocles*, *RE*, 1.8.16, 1913, 1476 f. § 11; *PIR*², 4.1, 1952, p.89, § H 172, *Hierocles*. Pflaum, *Carrières*, 2, 1960, §316, *T. Licinius Hierocles*, p.808-811 refers to quite another person.

70 *PIR*², 1, 1933, p. 308, § A 1499: *Aurelius Eubulus*.

71 Groag, E., *RE*, 1.7.13, 1910, col. 229-230, §6) *Fulvius*; *PIR*², 3, 1933, p. 209, § F 523, *Fulvius*; Barbieri, G., *Albo*, 2, p. 61, § 249, *Fulvius*. (Barbieri doubts his identification with the Fulvius Diogenianus mentioned elsewhere by Dio.) cf. *PIR*², 3, 1933, p. 211, § F 536, *Fulvius Diogenianus*.

fall. That Dio should have chosen to leave this argument to be inferred, rather than stating it outright, leads us to the final step in our consideration of his account of Varius' fall.

Let us stand back, now, from the historiographical reality assumed and constructed by Dio's text, and consider the possible historical reality affecting or determining its composition. Here, the most important factors are the date of composition of the relevant portion of the text, and the questions of who, precisely, was its intended audience or readership, and whether and where it was 'published,' whatever that term may mean for Dio's time.

Concerning the date of composition, we have two conflicting theories. One, proposed by Millar,⁷² among others, and more recently by Schmidt,⁷³ argues for composition of the first 77 or 78 books of Dio's *History* between 958/60=205/7 and 970/2=217/9, followed by a break, with the remaining books completed later. Another, proposed by Letta,⁷⁴ and "by a very different route," by Barnes,⁷⁵ argues that Dio did not begin writing until 975=222, and that the reigns of Caracalla, Macrinus, Varius, and Alexander were not dealt with till 987=234, being completed after Alexander's death in 988=235. Without going into the arguments, mostly based on passages extraneous to Dio's account of Varius, with which either thesis may be argued, let us here reflect on the possible relevance of either dating to that account.

Millar proposes that Dio's full accounts of Caracalla, Macrinus, and Varius were composed under Severus Alexander, and that his brief account of Alexander himself was written after 982=229, when, honoured with a second consulship, Dio announces his intention to retire to his family home, Nicaea. If this were to be so, then, Letta points out, Dio's highly unflattering depiction of Caracalla, whom Alexander claimed as his father, would have been "inconceivable," assuming Dio's text was destined to be shown to Alexander. To solve this problem, Letta argues for a date of composition of this section after Alexander's death. Barnes does not address this point, with regard to Caracalla. He does, however, propose that Dio's ambivalence towards Severus results from combining elements culled from his own early panegyrics, delivered to a living emperor, with his disillusioned reflections on a dead one, composed many years later, during the reign of Alexander.

Thus, though now with regard to Dio's treatment of Severus, the problem still stands. For Letta's solution – to suppose that Dio composed everything relating to Caracalla's reign onwards after Alexander's death – does not deal with that very same problem with regard to Dio's treatment of Severus. This, though somewhat less hostile than that towards Caracalla, is hardly such as to fit in with the policies of

72 Millar, *SCD*, p. 30.

73 Schmidt, M.G., *Die 'zeitgeschichtlichen' Bücher im Werke des Cassius Dio – von Commodus zu Severus Alexander*, ANRW II. 34.3, 1997, p. 2591-2649.

74 Letta, Cesare, *La composizione dell'opera di Cassio Dione: cronologia e sfondo storico-politico*, *Ricerche di storiografia greca di età romana*, RSA, 1, 1979, p. 117-189

75 Barnes, T.D., *The Composition of Cassius Dio's Roman History*, *Phoenix*, 38, 1984, p. 240-255.

Severus' supposed grandson, Alexander. Conversely, as I point out in *QV6*, Dio's treatment of Varius fits in perfectly with Alexander's (or Maesa's or Mamaea's) repudiation of Varius and all his works, while justifying Varius' murder. Schmidt's proposal that Dio's history up to Severus' death was 'published' during Macrinus' reign may conceivably deal with the problem of Severus, and, if one adds Severus' son to this proposal, with that of Caracalla also. This would leave only Dio's treatment of Macrinus and Varius to be written and circulated under Alexander, which raises no such problem of 'inconceivability'.

Another way to solve the problem of 'inconceivability', would be to say that the sections concerning everything later than Pertinax must have been composed and published after Alexander's death. Since the succeeding *régime* is that of Maximinus, who was Alexander's murderer, Dio, by now extremely old, would have no reason to pull punches regarding any member of the Severan dynasty. Yet in the section just examined, we find evidence of Dio's circumspection and deference, with regard to certain imperial persons, notably Maesa, and Alexander himself, and even a certain reticence – such as leaving Comazon's role in Varius' fall to be inferred – with regard to their associates. This, of course, does not prove anything, since there could be many reasons, such as ignorance of details, to explain Dio's reticence with respect to Comazon, and even fond remembrance, as Letta suggests, for Alexander, to explain his deference to him. But it is harder to imagine Dio fond of Maesa than afraid of her.

Yet another way to solve the problem is to suppose that, irrespective of date of composition, the relevant portions of the text were not intended for Alexander's eyes or ears. This involves the question of whether, where and when, and in what manner, Dio's account was in any sense 'published'. On this Millar says: "it cannot be assumed without evidence that any ancient literary work which has come down to us was 'published' at all, in the sense of a simultaneous distribution of a number of identical copies."⁷⁶ Conversely, Letta proposes, for an earlier section of Dio's *History*, that it was intended to be read out aloud to Alexander.⁷⁷ Till this question is resolved, and it may never be, all speculation on its basis must be phrased in the conditional. If the relevant section of Dio's *History* – the whole Severan period – or any part thereof, was intended to be openly distributed among persons likely to bring it to the emperor's attention, or even intended for direct presentation to him, and if that emperor was Alexander, one must account for the unflattering light in which almost the whole Severan dynasty is shown.

Ancient historiographical accounts of Varius' fall: Herodian.

With Herodian's text we do not face such complex problems of recension as with Dio's. The best text is that of Mendelssohn, according to Whittaker, who uses it as the basis for his Loeb edition. That text is quoted here, with Whittaker's translation. Only loci need be cited.

⁷⁶ Millar, *SCD*, p. 30.

⁷⁷ Letta, *op. cit.*, p. 162: "E' legittimo, anzi, il sospetto che il vero destinatario del dialogo sia proprio lo imperatore."

The problem posed by Herodian's text is of a different order. In his account of Varius' fall, one notices a certain oddity, a logical or narrative discontinuity or inconsistency, as if he is leaving something out, leading to a breakdown of verisimilitude. That account will occupy us presently, but first let us place it in context. All of Herodian's account of Varius takes place within Book 5 of his *History*. Herodian assigns a greater role to Maesa, both in Varius' rise, and in his fall, than does Dio. Chapters 1 and 2, relating Macrinus' reign, culminate observing that "after only one year of a life of ease as emperor it was obviously inevitable that Macrinus would lose the empire, and his life too, whenever chance provided a small, trivial excuse for the soldiers to have their way."⁷⁸ This recalls Dio's view of the soldiers' propensity to sedition. The very next sentence "There was a woman called Maesa ..." recalls its analogue in Dio's text (79.30.2). Thus announced, Maesa's role in Varius' rise, far more active than in Dio's account, occupies chapters 3 and 4. (It is discussed in *QV3*.) Chapters 5 and 6 relate Varius' conduct of his reign, beginning with his self-presentation in magnificent Syrian priestly costume. This is a source of worry to Maesa, who fears the Romans will not like it, but Varius pays no heed. Varius constructs a splendid temple in Rome, in which to conduct the lavish ceremonial of the worship of Elagabal. He murders prominent men. His serial marriages are recorded, including that to a Vestal Virgin, as well as the divine espousals of Elagabal to two successive goddesses. This section culminates in a description of that god's procession to a temple in the suburbs, and the celebration of a festival with distribution of largesse, in which many people "were killed, trampled to death by one another or impaled on the spears of the soldiers. Thus the festival of Elagabalus was fatal for many people. The emperor himself was often to be seen driving his chariot or dancing, making no attempt to conceal his vices. He used to go out with painted eyes and rouge on his cheeks, spoiling his natural good looks by using disgusting make-up."⁷⁹

5.7.1-2: (1) ὀρῶσα δὲ ταῦτα ἡ Μαῖσα, ὑποπτεύουσα τε τοὺς στρατιώτας ἀπαρέσκευσθαι τῷ τοιοῦτω τοῦ βασιλέως βίῳ, καὶ δεδοικυῖα μὴ τι ἐκείνου παθόντος πάλιν ἰδιωτεύη, πείθει αὐτόν, κοῦφον ἄλλως καὶ ἄφρονα νεανίαν, θέσθαι υἱὸν Καίσαρά τε ἀποδείξει τὸν ἑαυτοῦ μὲν ἀνεψιὸν ἐκείνης δὲ ἔγγονον ἐκ τῆς ἐτέρας θυγατρὸς Μαρμαίας, εἰποῦσα αὐτῷ κεχαρισμένα, (2) ὡς ἄρα χρηὲ ἐκείνον μὲν τῇ ἱερωσύνῃ καὶ θερησκείᾳ σχολάζειν τοῦ θεοῦ, βακχεῖαις καὶ ὀργίοις τοῖς τε θείοις ἔργοις ἀνακειμένον, εἶναι δὲ ἕτερον τὸν τὰ ἀνδρώπεια διοικοῦντα, ἐκείνῳ δὲ παρέξοντα τῆς βασιλείας τὸ ἀνενόηλητόν τε καὶ ἀμέριμον· μὴ δεῖν τοίνυν ξένον ζητεῖν μηδ' ἄλλότριον, ἀλλὰ τῷ ἀνεψιῷ ταῦτα ἐγχειρίσαι. (1) "As she viewed these developments, Maesa suspected that the soldiers were revolted by this kind of behaviour in the emperor. Her fears were that, if anything happened to him, she would again be reduced to the status of an ordinary person. So, since he was in most matters a thoughtless, silly young man, she persuaded him by flattery to adopt and appoint as Caesar his cousin, her own grandchild by her daughter Mamaea. (2) Her argument was that of course the emperor should keep himself free to carry out his priestly office and worship the god, since he was dedicated to his ecstatic and orgiastic rites and his divine duties. Someone else should look after worldly affairs so as to leave him free from the cares and worries of the principate. This being so, rather than

78 *Herodian*, 5.3.1.

79 *Herodian*, 5.6.10.

looking for an outsider from another family, the task should be put in the hands of his cousin.”

It is arguable from this, and from subsequent passages, as we shall see, that Herodian ascribes Varius’ fall to Maesa’s doing, just as he has Varius’ rise. Unlike Dio, Herodian does not single out Varius’ sexuality as the only, or even the principal cause of the soldiers’ disaffection with him. While it is a factor, it is one among many, among which his self-presentation as an Oriental priest, and his promotion of Elagabal, are given equal prominence. Varius’ alleged conduct of his reign, in which the hieratic functions of the principate are emphasised to the exclusion of the rest, is contrasted with a more conventional approach, emphasising military and administrative functions, which Maesa obviously intends Varius’ eventual replacement, Alexander, to perform. Herodian’s depiction of Alexander’s adoption and designation as Caesar as resulting from Maesa’s taking advantage, by means of flattery, of Varius’ thoughtlessness and silliness, indicates that, in Herodian’s view, Varius’ replacement, rather than a genuine division of labour, along the lines proposed to him by Maesa, is her true goal. This amounts to trickery. Had Varius been cleverer, Herodian suggests, he would never have consented to a measure which could only seal his doom. That Maesa has long prepared for the eventuality of having to replace him, and has finally decided to do so, is also nuanced by Herodian’s reminder, just after this point, that in his earlier account of the conspiracy to place Varius on the throne, both Maesa’s daughters claim, right from the start, adultery with Caracalla as the source of their maternity.⁸⁰ This is obviously designed to render both their sons candidates for power.

The rest of chapter 7 is devoted to an account of Alexander’s education – overseen by Mamaea, and conducted on conventional lines – and of Varius’ opposition to it, leading to the banishment or execution of his tutors. This is followed by an account of Varius’ appointments of inappropriate persons to high office, with only a passing allusion to a possible sexual component in his relationships with them. Herodian’s account of Varius’ fall occupies all of chapter 8:

5.8.1: πάντων δὲ οὕτως τῶν πάλαι δοκούντων σεμνῶν ἐς ὑβριν καὶ παροινίαν ἐκβεβακχευμένων, οἳ τε ἄλλοι πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ μάλιστα οἱ στρατιῶται ἤχθοντο καὶ ἐδυσφόρου· ἐμυσάπτοντο δὲ αὐτὸν ὀργῶντες τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον καλλωπιζόμενον περιεργότερον ἢ κατὰ γυναῖκα σώφρονα, περιδεραίοις δὲ χρυσίνοις ἐσθῆσι τε ἀπαλαῖς ἀνάδρωως κοσμούμενον, ὀρχούμενόν τε οὕτως ὡς ὑπὸ πάντων ὀρᾶσθαι. “When all that was once held in respect was reduced in this way to a state of dishonour and frenzied madness, everyone, and particularly the soldiers, began to grow bitterly angry. They were revolted at the sight of the emperor with his face made up more elaborately than a modest woman would have done, and effeminately dressed up in golden necklaces and soft clothes, dancing for everyone to see in this state.”

Interestingly, here, the object of the soldiers’ anger is not, as with Dio, Varius’ sexuality as such, in terms of genital actions and passions, but rather his curatory, sumptuary and saltatory self-presentation

80 *Herodian*, 5.3.10.

in public, which they consider effeminate. Effeminacy could, of course, characterise a person thus made-up, decked-out, and dancing. But such a characterisation, though not necessarily erroneous, could also miss the point. For the appearance and behaviour described could just as easily be hieratic as sexual in inspiration, and indeed has been described as such by Herodian elsewhere in his text (5.3.6). This is not to say that it cannot be both, but the balance between the two should be considered. At other points of his narrative Herodian has cited Varius' chariot racing, in which Varius presumably does not dress as a Syrian priest, since flowing robes might get caught in the wheels, while a courage commonly associated with virility is needed merely to participate. It is therefore possible that Herodian intends a readership or audience aware of these hieratic and ludic passages elsewhere in his text to regard the soldiers' anger, though none the less real to the soldiers, as not necessarily endorsed by himself, nor expected by him to be shared by his readership or audience. Rather, it is, to use a term from literary criticism, 'placed'. It tells one more about the soldiers than about Varius.

5.8.2: ἐπιρρεπεστέρας τοίνυν τὰς γνώμας πρὸς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον εἶχον, καὶ ἐλπίδας κρείττους ἐν παιδὶ κοσμίως καὶ σωφρόνως ἀνατρεφόμενῳ. ἐφρούρουν τε αὐτὸν παντοίως ὀρεῶντες ἐπιβουλεύομενον ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου. ἢ τε μήτηρ Μαμαία οὔτε ποτὸν οὔτε ἐδώδιμόν τι εἶα τὸν παῖδα προσφέρεισθαι τῶν ὑπ' ἐκείνου πεμπομένων· ὄψοποιῶς τε καὶ οἰνοχόοις ὁ παῖς ἐχρῆτο οὐ τοῖς βασιλικαῖς καὶ ἐν κοινῇ ὑψηροσίῳ τυγχάνουσιν, ἀλλὰ τοῖς ὑπὸ τῆς μητρὸς ἐπιλεχθεῖσι πιστοτάτοις τε εἶναι δοκοῦσιν. "So they inclined more favourably towards Alexander, expecting better things of a boy who was receiving such a modest and serious education. And, realizing that Antoninus was plotting against the boy, they kept a close watch over him. Mamaea, his mother, would not allow him to taste any food or drink sent by the emperor. The boy did not make use of cooks and cupbearers who were in general employment in the palace – only men selected by Mamaea and approved for their complete loyalty."

If one considers the presumable level of the soldiers' education, most likely lower than that of Herodian's intended readership or audience, the soldiers' attitude towards Alexander's education may also be considered as 'placed', a potential object of condescension. We are not told on what basis they "realise" that Varius is plotting against Alexander (with the implication that he is), though we have been told, at 5.7.5, that, on account of Mamaea's refusal to allow Alexander to participate with Varius in the rituals of Elagabal, and her insistence on her son's receiving a conventional education, Varius is "absolutely furious" and regrets Alexander's adoption and his participation in the empire. Here, the same shift in balance of forces as that described by Dio has likewise already taken place: the soldiers' transfer of allegiance to Alexander renders Varius a fiend. The narrative's point of view follows that shift: Varius' evil intentions are assumed, for any actions he may undertake in self-defence are, by definition, evil.

5.8.3: ἐδίδου δὲ καὶ χρήματα λανθάνουσα διανέμεσθαι τοῖς στρατιώταις κρύβδην, ὅπως αὐτῶν τὴν πρὸς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον εὖνοιαν καὶ διὰ χρημάτων, ἐς ἃ μάλιστα ἀποβλέπουσιν, οἰκειώσονται. ταῦτα δὲ ὁ Ἀντωνίνος πυνθανόμενος παντὶ τρόπῳ ἐπεβούλευε τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ καὶ τῇ μητρὶ αὐτοῦ· ἀλλὰ τὰς ἐπιβουλάς πάσας ἀπεῖργε τε καὶ ἐκώλυεν ἢ κοινῇ μάμμη ἀμροτέρων Μαῖσα, γυνὴ καὶ ἄλλως ἐντροχῆς καὶ τῇ βασιλείῳ

αὐλῇ πολλῶν ἐτῶν ἐνδαιτηθεῖσα [ἄτε τῆς Σεβήρου γυναικὸς Ἰουλίας ἀδελφῆ γενομένη καὶ τὰ πάντα σὺν αὐτῇ ἐν τοῖς βασιλείοις διατρέψασα]. “Mamaea also privately handed over some money for a clandestine distribution to the soldiers. In this way she hoped to capture the loyalty of ths soldiers with money as well, always the most attractive inducement for the men. When Antoninus discovered this activity he began a full-scale campaign to plot against Alexander and his mother. But all his plans were frustrated and checked by Maesa, the two young men’s grandmother. She was a woman who, in addition to being enterprising had many years of experience of living at the imperial palace [as the sister of Julia, Severus’ wife, with whom she spent her entire time at the palace].”

Herodian’s condescension towards the soldiers comes out clearly and unequivocally here. So does Mamaea’s shift from the role of her son’s educatrix to that of active promoter of a *coup d’état* in his behalf, an initiative in which she is aided and abetted by Maesa. It is only because the balance of forces has swung in Alexander’s favour, and the point of view of the narrative has followed that swing, that Varius’ attempts to fight back against this plot may themselves be characterised, here for the third time in a row, as a plot.

5.8.4: οὐδὲν οὖν αὐτὴν ἐλάνθανε τῶν ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἀντωνίνου βουλευομένων, φύσει τε χαίνου τὸν τρόπον ὄντος, καὶ ἀφειδῶς πάντα καὶ φανερώς ἢ ἐβουλευέτο λέγοντος καὶ πράττοντος. ὡς δὲ τὰ τῆς ἐπιβουλῆς αὐτῷ οὐ προεχώρει, παραλύσαι τῆς τοῦ Καίσαρος τιμῆς ἠθέλησε τὸν παῖδα, καὶ οὔτε ἐν ταῖς προσαγορεύσειν οὔτε ἐν ταῖς προόδοις Ἀλέξανδρος ἔτι ἑωρᾶτο. “She missed none of Antoninus’ machinations, since his behaviour was naturally unsubtle and he was totally indiscreet about his plans in words and actions. With the failure of his contrivances, Antoninus planned to remove the boy from his position as Caesar, and no longer was he to be seen at public salutations or at the head of processions.”

There is something odd about this passage. Varius is driven from his failed covert “contrivances” against Alexander to planning, as a last resort, openly to exercise his authority as emperor by demoting him. Apparently, though we are not told explicitly that this plan is executed, he succeeds in doing so, since Alexander is no longer to be seen in public. Now if Varius still has the power officially and openly to bring about this result, why has he previously resorted to covert operations? There is also something odd in Herodian’s characterisation of Varius’ behaviour here as that of a plotter. A plotter, even a stupid one, though he may carelessly reveal himself, does not openly advertise his plans, whereas a ruler under threat who believes in the reality of his authority might well do so. That Varius still has some authority seems to be suggested by this passage, though this is thrown back into question by the next.

5.8.5: οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἐπεζήτουν τε αὐτόν, καὶ ἠγανάκτουν ὅτι δὴ τῆς ἀρχῆς παραλυθεῖη. διεσκέδασε δὲ ὁ Ἀντωνῖνος καὶ φήμην ὡς τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου τεθνήξεσθαι μέλλοντος, ἐποιεῖτό τε ἀπόπειραν ὅπως οἴσουσιν οἱ στρατιῶται τὸ θρυλούμενον. οἱ δ’ ἐπεὶ μήτε τὸν παῖδα ἔβλεπον ὑπὸ τε τῆς φήμης τὰς ψυχὰς ἐτρῶθησαν, ἀγανακτήσαντες οὔτε τὴν συνήδη φρουρὰν ἐπέμψαν τῷ Ἀντωνίνῳ, κατακλείσαντές τε αὐτοὺς ἐν τῷ στρατοπέδῳ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ἐν <τῷ> ἱερῷ ἤξιον ἰδεῖν. “But the soldiers demanded his presence, and were

angry that he had been removed (so they said) from power. Antoninus spread a report to the effect that Alexander was on the point of dying, in an attempt to see how the soldiers would take the rumour. Since they failed to see the boy and were deeply upset by the news, the soldiers angrily refused to mount their usual guard over Antoninus. They shut themselves up in the camp and demanded Alexander's visible presence at their shrine."

Here, the question of whether Alexander has been demoted seems to remain open. Varius' attributed motive for spreading a rumour that Alexander is dying is puzzling. One may imagine such a rumour being spread in order to mask an assassination. But given Varius' inability, according to Herodian, actually to kill Alexander, to launch such a rumour merely to test the soldiers' reaction seems silly. On the basis of Herodian's account of Varius' awareness of the threat to himself, by token of his 'plotting' to forestall it, Herodian's Varius can surely not doubt the soldiers' likely reaction to such a rumour. Thus, to launch it in the present circumstances seems designed to highlight his 'silliness', or to constitute a provocation to the soldiers, likely to hasten his own fall. While this last may be plausible, according to a certain emotional logic, Herodian does not mention any specific emotion as a cause of this provocation. Rather, he does go on to describe Varius' terror, resulting from the soldiers' response to it.

5.8.6: ὁ δ' Ἀντωνῖνος ἐν δέει πολλῶν γενόμενος, παραλαβὼν τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον, συγκαθεσθεῖς αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βασιλικῷ φορείῳ, ὅπερ διὰ χρυσοῦ πολλοῦ καὶ λίθων τιμίων πεποίκιλτο, κατῆλθεν ἐς τὸ στρατόπεδον [σὺν τῷ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ]. ὡς δὲ ἀνοίξαντες τὰς πύλας ἐδέξαντο αὐτούς ἐς τε τὸν νεὼν τοῦ στρατοπέδου ἤγαγον, τὸν μὲν Ἀλέξανδρον ὑπερφυῶς ἠσπάζοντό τε καὶ εὐφήμουν, τῷ δὲ Ἀντωνίῳ ἀμελέστερον προσεφέροντο. "Antoninus in absolute terror got hold of Alexander, sat beside him in the imperial litter, (which was richly inlaid with gold and precious stones) and went to the camp [with the boy]. The soldiers opened the gates to receive them, before conducting them to the camp shrine. But, whereas they greeted Alexander with enthusiastic shouts of good wishes, they ignored Antoninus."

In Herodian's account (unlike Dio's) Varius only goes once to the camp with Alexander. Once inside, his fate is sealed. So why does he enter the trap that has been set for him? Terror, panic, a deranged state of mind, or a totally unreal estimation of his own position, must be invoked to explain why Varius consents to be carried in a litter to his death, alongside his proximately triumphant successor. Unless, of course, he has reason to believe he will prevail.

5.8.7: ἐφ' οἷς ἐκείνος ἀγανακτῶν, καὶ διανυκτερεύσας ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ στρατοπέδου, πάνυ ἤσχαλλε καὶ τοῖς στρατιώταις ὠργίζετο· ἐκελευέ τε τοὺς παρασήμῳ καὶ ὑπερφυῶς τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον εὐφημήσαντας, τοὺς δὲ αἰτίους δῆθεν στάσεως καὶ θορύβου, συλλαμβάνεσθαι πρὸς τιμωρίαν. "He was furious at such treatment, and, after spending a night fuming and raging at the soldiers in the camp shrine, he began to issue orders that those who had openly and enthusiastically acclaimed Alexander should be seized for punishment, as well as those supposedly guilty of sedition and riot."

Again something is odd about this passage. On the basis of the information that Herodian has already given us, there is no reason for the soldiers to put up with Varius' ranting. Why do they not kill him immediately he enters the camp? There is surely something missing in Herodian's narrative, which would explain Varius' continuing ability to issue orders, and, again, for them apparently to be obeyed. For in the subsequent passage, freeing Varius' prisoners is given as a reason for finally proceeding to his murder. This seems to imply that some soldiers, at least, have obeyed him, and imprisoned others who have not.

5.8.8: οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται ἐπὶ τούτῳ ἀγανακτήσαντες, ἄλλως μὲν μισοῦντες τὸν Ἀντωνῖνον καὶ ἀποσκευάσασθαι θέλοντες ἀσχημονοῦντα βασιλέα, τότε δὲ καὶ τοῖς συλλαμβανομένοις ἐπαμύνειν δεῖν ἠγούμενοι, καιρὸν εὐκαιρὸν καὶ πρόφασιν δικαίαν νομίζοντες, τὸν μὲν Ἀντωνῖνον αὐτὸν τε καὶ τὴν μητέρα Σοαιμίδα (παρῆν γὰρ ὡς Σεβαστή τε καὶ μήτηρ) ἀναιροῦσι, τοὺς τε περὶ αὐτὸν πάντας, ὅσοι ἔνδον κατελήφθησαν ὑπηρέται τε καὶ συνεργοὶ ἐδόκουν εἶναι τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων. "This inflamed the soldiers, who were already antagonistic to Antoninus and anxious to be rid of an emperor who was a disgrace. Now they also thought that they should give help to those who were being held as prisoners. Believing the opportunity was right and their case just, they killed Antoninus and Soaemis (who was with him as Augusta and his mother) and all his retinue that were caught inside, who were thought to be the attendants and confederates in his crimes."

The oddity continues. On the one hand, this passage seeks to give the impression that the soldiers' decision to kill Varius, his mother, and his retinue, is only reached in the heat of the moment and under extreme provocation. On the other it speaks of seizing opportunity, presumably to execute a plan which is already worked out, and is, moreover, already justified.

5.8.9: τὰ δὲ σώματα τοῦ τε Ἀντωνίνου καὶ τῆς Σοαιμίδος παρέδοσαν σύρειν τε καὶ ἐνυβρίζειν τοῖς βουλομένοις: ἄπερ ἐπὶ πολὺ διὰ πάσης τῆς πόλεως συρέντα τε καὶ λωβηθέντα ἐς τοὺς ὄχετοὺς ἀπερρίφθη τοὺς ἐς τὸν Θύβριν ποταμὸν ῥέοντας. "The bodies of Antoninus and Soaemis were handed over to those who wished to drag them around and desecrate them. After being dragged through the city for a long time and mutilated, they were thrown into the sewers which run down to the River Tiber."

That the desecration of the bodies results from a decision by Maesa or Mamaea is suggested by this passage. Someone must authorise the "handing over" of the bodies.

5.8.10: Ἀντωνῖνος μὲν οὖν ἐς ἕκτον ἔτος ἐλάσας τῆς βασιλείας καὶ χρησάμενος τῷ προειρημένῳ βίῳ οὕτως ἅμα τῇ μητρὶ κατέστρεψεν· οἱ δὲ στρατιῶται αὐτοκράτορα τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον ἀναγορεύσαντες ἐς τὰ βασίλεια ἀνήγαγον, κομιδῇ νέον καὶ πάνυ ὑπὸ τῇ μητρὶ καὶ τῇ μάμμῃ παιδαγωγούμενον. "So in the sixth year of his rule, after a life such as has been described above, Antoninus and his mother were murdered. Alexander, though extremely young and very much under the tutelage of his mother and grandmother, was greeted as emperor by the soldiers and conducted up to the palace."

An historical explanation for the oddity which I perceive in the preceding passages, amounting to a breakdown of internal textual verisimilitude, could be that there is more to the story than Herodian is telling us: that there were various factions of soldiers, with contrasting interests and loyalties, rather than, as he suggests, a single, undifferentiated mass. An historiographical explanation could be that Herodian's way of writing history, aiming at simple narrative, and at superficial dramatic effects, leaves us with a tale of Varius' fall that raises more questions than it answers. Some of those questions have been considered by Scheithauer, in the course of enquiring into whether Herodian uses Dio as a source.⁸¹ Focusing on Dio's and Herodian's accounts of Varius' fall, Scheithauer concludes that Herodian does use Dio, and shows, through detailed comparison of passages, precisely how he does so, shaping data derived from Dio to fit his own purposes, which are those "more of a novelist than an historian."⁸² Comparing Herodian's account with Dio's, Scheithauer notes that while Dio ascribes Alexander's adoption and redenuation to "irrationalen Motiven," here meaning supernatural causes, Herodian ascribes them to "machpolitischen Gründen," power politics: Maesa's concern for her own position.⁸³ If Scheithauer's argument is right, as it seems, then is it not possible that Herodian, Dio's contemporary, reading chapter 19 of Dio's original, identified the all too human instrument of Dio's "divine arrangement" as none other than Maesa? This is not necessarily to say that Herodian believed Dio's theory, but perhaps, rather, that he saw through it.

Ancient historiographical accounts of Varius' fall: the *Historia Augusta* (HA)

The historical and historiographical status of the *HA's* account of Varius' fall is a complex question. It hinges on the answers to a number of prior questions, beginning with the status of the *HA* itself as a whole. The questions of its authorship, date, and purpose have been objects of enquiry, discussion, and contention, since they were first raised by Dessau, over a century ago,⁸⁴ and continue to be so to this day. At present writing, there is widespread – but not unanimous – agreement that the work is that of a single author, disguising himself under a series of pseudonyms, and that the date of composition is "not long after Ammianus' *Res Gestae*", probably shortly before the year 400."⁸⁶ It has, moreover, been argued that the purpose, at least of the *Vita Heliogabali*, is to attack the Christian emperors leading up to the period of its composition, using the figure of "Heliogabalus" as a fairly transparent mask with which to

81 Scheithauer, A., *Die Regierungszeit des Kaisers Elagabal in der Darstellung von Cassius Dio und Herodian*, *Hermes*, 118-3, 1990.

82 Op. cit. p. 351: "Dass Herodian aus Dios Werk reizvolle Einzelheiten oder Szenen herausgreift und sie in einen ähnlichen Zusammenhang seiner Erzählung einfügt, ist eher ein Charakteristikum eines Romanschriftstellers als eines Historikers."

83 Op. cit. p. 350: "Dio begründet die Adoption und Umbenennung des Veters in Alexander mit irrationalen Motiven, wie z. B. einem Auftrag des Gottes Elagabal und der Prophezeiung eines Alexanders aus Emesa als Nachfolger, Herodian dagegen argumentiert mit machtpolitischen Gründen, wie z. B. der Furcht Maesas vor dem Verlust ihrer Stellung bei einem Umsturz; Motivationen, die auf göttliche Eingebungen zurückzuführen sind, fehlen bei ihm völlig, weil er nicht so abergläubisch ist wie Dio."

84 Dessau, H., *Über Zeit und Persönlichkeit der Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, *Hermes*, 24, 1889, p. 337-392.

do so.⁸⁶ It has also been argued, both for and against, that the source of parts of the *HA*, along with Dio, Herodian, and several others,⁸⁷ is the lost series of Latin imperial biographies by Marius Maximus, a fellow senator and rough contemporary of Dio.

On this last question, Anthony Birley, who has recently addressed it frontally and thoroughly, affirms: “it is generally agreed, even by those who deny that Maximus was the ‘basic source’ for the earlier ‘vitae’ in the *HA*, that his ‘*life of Elagabalus*’ was used for the first part of *HA Hel.*,” (= *HA/AH*) “above all for 13.1-17.7, the account of the downfall and death.”⁸⁸ Birley warns, however: “This is not, of course, to say that the whole of *HA Hel.* 1.1-18.3” – for the rest of this *vita* he describes as ‘fiction’ – “is a condensation of Maximus – the author of the *HA* has added his own inventions and perhaps used other sources.”⁸⁹ A link to Maximus would be significant if, as is likely, he was nearer, geographically, to the main events of Varius’ reign, than Dio, who tells us that he was then in Asia. (We have no idea where Herodian was at the time.) Maximus, having held the office of City Prefect of Rome under Macrinus, right up to the time of Varius’ victory, “disappears from public view for four years, to re-emerge as consul for the second time in 223, the honour which City Prefects tended to have as of right, which had been denied him.”⁹⁰ Birley goes on to say: “It may be imagined – but it is no more than a guess- that he spent the reign of Elagabalus in his house on the Caelian, or on country estates in Latium, composing the ‘*vitae Caesarum*’. But the impulse for this may not have come until the overthrow of Elagabalus in March 222.” We must, therefore, keep the possibility in mind, when considering the section of *HA/AH*, devoted to Varius’ fall, that it derives from Marius Maximus. It spans four chapters:13.1-17.7.⁹¹ But first it is necessary to cite an earlier passage, 5.1:

Ergo cum hibernasset Nicomediae atque omnia sordide ageret inireturque a viris et subaret, statim milites facti sui paenituit, quod in Macrinum conspiraverant, ut hunc principem facerent, atque in consobrinum eiusdem Heliogabali Alexandrum, quem Caesarem senatus Macrino interempto appellaverat, inclinavere animos. “*After he had spent the winter in Nicomedia living in a depraved manner*

85 Birley, A.R., *Marius Maximus, the consular biographer*, ANRW 2.34.3, 1997, p. 2681 & n. 13, citing: Chastagnol, A., *Recherches sur l’Histoire Auguste, avec un rapport sur les progrès de la Historia Augusta Forschung depuis 1963*, BHAF, 6, 1970; Syme, R., *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, 1968, p. 214 ff.; *Emperors & Biography, Studies in the Historia Augusta*, 1971, p. 285 ff.; to which add: Syme, R., *The Historia Augusta, A call of clarity*, BHAF, 8, 1971.

86 Turcan, R., *Héliogabale précurseur de Constantin?* BAGB, 1, 1988, p. 38-52.

87 Kolb, F., *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Cassius Dio, Herodian und der “Historia Augusta”*, BHAF, 9, 1972; Barnes, T.D., *The sources of the Historia Augusta*, CL, 155, 1978, 54 ss.; Kolb, F., *Cassius Dio, Herodian und die Quellen der Historia Augusta*, HACM, 1992, 1995.

88 Birley, A.R., op. cit., p. 2750, & n. 223, citing Barnes, T.D., *The lost Kaisergeschichte and the Latin Historical Tradition*, BHAC, 1968/9, BHAF, 7, 1970, p. 53 ff.

89 Birley, A.R., op. cit., p. 2750, & n. 224.

90 Birley, A.R., op. cit., p. 2700, & n. 56.

91 The text quoted is that of Hohl, published by Teubner (see bibliography); the translation that of Magie in the Loeb edition, which is based on an earlier recension, amended where necessary to fit that of Hohl (emendations in brackets).

and indulging in unnatural vice with men, the soldiers soon began to regret that they had conspired against Macrinus to make this man emperor, and they turned their thoughts toward his cousin Alexander, who on the murder of Macrinus had been hailed by the senate as Caesar."

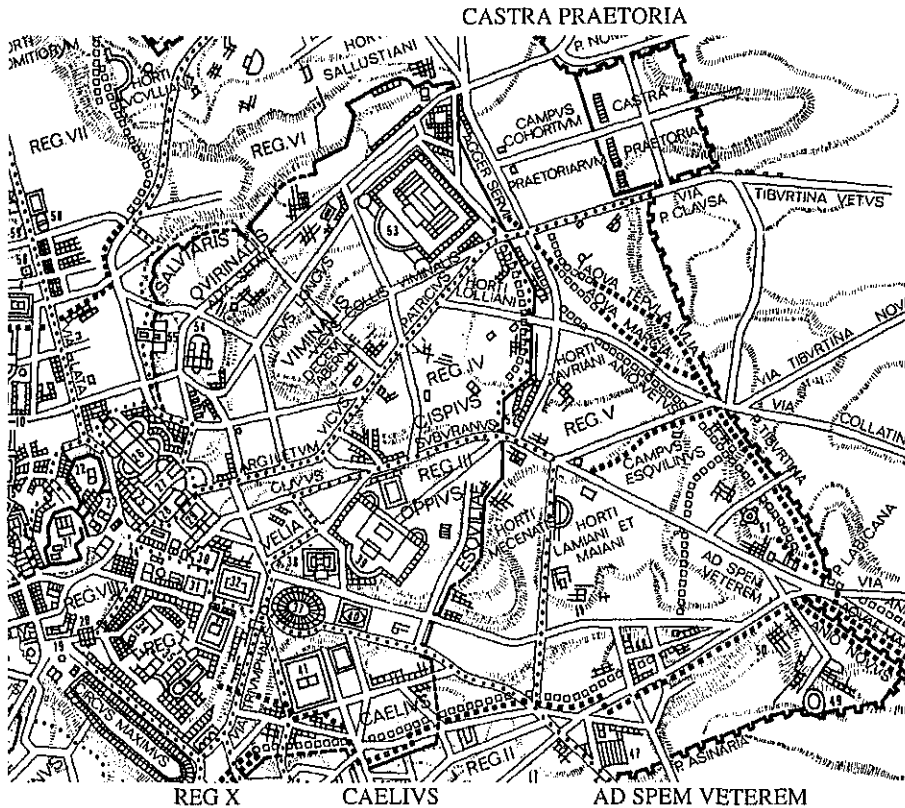
The claim regarding Alexander's designation by the senate as Caesar at the time of Macrinus' overthrow is false. Numismatic evidence dates Alexander's adoption by Varius and his designation as Caesar to the summer of 974=221.⁹² This false claim (assuming the author knew it to be so) may be designed here to convey the impression that Alexander was always, from the start of Varius' reign, when he would have been about ten years old, an available and viable alternative to Varius. Indeed, the impression is given that the sooner Varius is eliminated, the better. This is in keeping with the notion that the *vitae* of Varius and Alexander are intended as a pair: depictions of the worst and best of princes. Thus, while the soldiers' sympathies have undergone a shift, the author's have not. They have always been on Alexander's side, as opposed to Varius'. Certainly, they have, since Varius' previous mentions in the *Vita Caracalli*, and *Vita Macrini*,⁹³ been hostile to Varius, *tout court*, even in the absence of alternatives. The source of the soldiers' hostility to Varius is here, as in Dio's programmatic proclamation of the cause of his fall (80.17.1), their disgust at his reported sexual behaviour. Indeed the *HA* goes on from this point to develop the sexual theme in great anatomical detail. Without going here into *Quellenforschung* with regard to the *HA's* possible debt to Dio and Herodian, it can be affirmed that at least in this respect, the *HA* adopts a simple view, consonant with Dio's proclamation, rather than with the variety of other, more complex suggestions concerning possible factors in Varius' fall, present both in Dio's and Herodian's accounts. Because the *HA's* is the main account of Varius available to early modern historiography, this is the view that becomes standard in modern times. Where the *HA* is more complex than Dio or Herodian, however, is in the degree of detail it provides in its account of the 'operational' aspects of Varius' fall.

13.1-8: (1) Inter haec mala vitae inpudicissim<a>e Alexandrum, quem sibi adoptaverat, a se amoveri iussit, dicens se p<a>enitere adoptionis, mandavitque ad senatum ut Caesaris ei nomen abrogaretur. (2) sed in senatu hoc prodito ingens silentium fuit; si quidem erat optimus iuvenis Alexand<e>r, ut postea conprobatum genere imperii eius, cum ideo displiceret patri, quod inpud[il]icis non esset. (3) erat autem eidem consobrinus, ut quidam dicunt, a militibus et<iam> amabatur et senatui acceptus erat et equestri ordini. (4) nec defuit tamen furor usque ad exitum voti pessimi. nam ei percussores immisit, et hoc quidem modo: (5) ipse secessit ad hortos Spei Veteris, quasi contra <in>nocent<te>m iuvenem vota concipiens, relicta in Palatio matre et avia et consobрино suo, iussitque ut trucidaretur iuvenis optimus et rei p. necessarius; (6) misit et ad milites litteras, quibus iussit, ut abrogaretur nomen Caesaris Alexandro; (7) misit qui et in castris statuarum eius titulos luto tegetet, ut fieri solet de tyrannis; (8) misit et ad nutritores eius, quibus imperavit sub pr<a>emiorum spe atque ho<no>rum, ut eum occiderent quo vellent modo, vel in balneis vel veneno vel ferro. (1) "Among the base actions of his life of depravity he gave

92 PIR², Part 1, 1933, p. 327, 1610, *Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Severus Alexander Aug.*: "A. 221 Maesa auctore Elagabalus in senatu eum adoptavit, nomen Alexandri ei indidit ... Annum (221) confirmant nummi ... etc."

93 HA/AC 9.2; HA/OM, 8.4, 15.2

orders that Alexander, whom he had formally adopted, be removed from his presence, saying that he regretted the adoption. (2) Then he commanded the senate to take away from Alexander the name of Caesar. But when this was announced to the senate, there was a profound silence. For Alexander was an excellent youth, as was afterwards shown by the character of his rule, even though, because he was chaste, he was displeasing to his adoptive father - (3) he was also, as some declare, his cousin. Besides, he was loved by the soldiers and acceptable to the senate and the equestrian order. (4) Yet the emperor's madness went the length of an attempt to carry out the basest design: for he despatched assassins to kill Alexander, and that in the following way: (5) Leaving his mother, grandmother, and cousin in the Palace, he himself withdrew to the Gardens of Spes Vetus on the ground that he was forming designs against some (innocent) youth, and there he issued an order to slay Alexander, a most excellent young man and one of whom the state had need. (6) He also sent a written order to the soldiers bidding them take away from Alexander the name of Caesar, (7) and he despatched men to smear mud on the inscriptions on his statues in the Camp, as is usually done to a tyrant. (8) He sent, furthermore, to Alexander's guardians, ordering them, if they hoped for rewards and distinctions, to kill him in any way they wished, either in his bath, or by poison, or with the sword."



Regio X is the Palatine hill, site of the imperial palace. The Mons Caelius is the site of Marius Maximus' Roman home. Ad Spem Veterem is the garden (also known as Horti Variani) where Varius practiced chariot racing. The Castra Praetoria are the camp of the praetorian guards. The distance from the palace to the garden is about 2.1 km; from the garden to the camp about 1.7 km., from the camp to the palace about 2.2 km (Lugli, G., *Pianta di Roma Antica*).

Here we find Varius' relations with Alexander introduced, not as an episode within a chronologically ordered narrative progression, but as a generic instance of Varius' baseness. The shift in the soldiers' sympathy away from Varius towards Alexander has already occurred, at 5.1, and the author's attitude has been hostile to Varius from the start, so anything that Varius does to counter the threat from Alexander is depicted as evil and base. While the charge that he orders Alexander's murder is consonant with similar charges made by Dio and Herodian, the details given by the *HA* lend that charge more narrative verisimilitude. What is more, they provide us with a topography for the events in question.

14.1-8: (1) sed nihil agunt improbi contra innocentes. nam nulla vi quis adduci potuit, ut tantum facinus impleret, cum in ipsum magis conversa sint tela quae parabat aliis, ab hisque <sit> interfectus quibus alios adpetebat. (2) Sed ubi primum lutati sunt tituli statuarum, milites omnes exarserunt, et pars in Palatium, pars in hortos, in quibus erat Varius, ire tendunt, ut Alexandrum vindicare <n>t hominemque impurum eundemque parricidalis animi tandem a re p. depellerent. (3) et cum in Palatium venissent, Alexandrum cum matre atque avia custoditum diligentissime postea in Castra duxerunt. (4) secuta autem erat illos Symiamira mater Heliogabali pedibus, sollicita filio. (5) inde itum est in hortos, ubi Varius invenitur certamen aurigandi parans, exspectans tamen intentissime, quando eidem nuntiaretur consobrinus occisus. (6) qui subito militum strepitu exterritus in angulum se condit obiectuque veli cubicularis, quod in introitu erat cubiculi, se texit, (7) mis<s>is praefectis alio ad conspiciendos milites in castra, alio vero ad eos placandos, qui iam in hortos venissent. (8) Ant[h]iochianus igitur e praefectis unus milites, qui in hortos venerant, sacramenti admonitione exoravit, ne illum occiderent, quia nec multi venerant et plerique cum <v>exillo, quod Aristomac<h>us tribunus retinuerat, remanserant. haec in hortis. (1) *“But evil men can accomplish nothing against the upright. For no power could induce any to commit so great a crime, and the weapons which he was making ready for others were turned against himself, and it was by the same violent means that he was directing at others that he himself was put to death. (2) But immediately after the inscriptions on Alexander's statues were smeared with mud, all the soldiers were fired with anger, and they set out, some for the Palace and some for the gardens where Varius was, with the purpose of protecting Alexander and finally ridding the state of this filthy creature full of murderous intent. (3) And when they had come to the Palace they set a guard about Alexander and his mother and grandmother and then escorted them with the greatest care to the Camp. (4) Symiamira, Elagabalus' mother, followed them on foot, filled with anxiety about her son. (5) Then the soldiers went to the gardens, where they found Varius making preparations for a chariot-race and at the same time eagerly awaiting the news of his cousin's murder. (6) Alarmed by the sudden clatter of the soldiers, he crouched down in a corner and covered himself with the curtain which was at the door of the bed-chamber, (7) sending one of the prefects to the Camp to quiet the soldiers there and the other to placate those who had just entered the gardens. (8) Then Antiochianus, one of the prefects, reminded the soldiers who had come to the gardens of their oath of allegiance and finally persuaded them not to kill the Emperor – for, in fact, only a few had come and the majority had remained with the standard, which the tribune Aristomachus had kept back. So much for what happened in the gardens.”*

Neither Antiochianus nor Aristomachus is otherwise attested.⁹⁴ Apart from that, there are various

anomalies here. It is somewhat strange to imagine even so eccentric a character as Varius, as here depicted, giving orders to his prefects from behind a curtain. Again, if in 14.2 separate groups of soldiers set out simultaneously from the camp for the palace and the gardens, the statement in 14.5: "*then the soldiers went to the gardens,*" does not make sense, since those who went to the palace are supposed to have returned to the camp with Maesa, Mamaea, and Alexander, while the rest are already at the gardens. Who is left unaccounted for? And why, if 'Symiamira' (Soaemias) is so concerned about her son, whom she knows (13.5) to have gone to the gardens, would she follow the soldiers escorting her mother, sister, and nephew to the camp?

15.1-7: (1) in castris vero milites precanti praefecto dixerunt se parsuros esse Heliogabalo, si et inpuros homines et aurigas et histriones a se dimoveret atque ad bonam frugem rediret his maxime summotis qui cum omnium dolore apud eum plurimum poterant et qui omnia eius vendebant vel veritate vel fumis. (2) remoti sunt denique ab eo Hierocles, Cordus, et Myrissimus et duo improbi familiares, qui eum ex stulto stultiorem faciebant. (3) mandatum praeterea a militibus praefectis ne paterentur illum ita diutius vivere, et ut Alexander custodiretur, ne illi aliqua vis adferretur, simul ne Caesar quempiam amicum Augusti videret, ne ulla fieret imitatio turpitudinis. (4) sed Heliogabalus et ingenti prorege Hieroclem reposcebat impudicissimum hominem et insidias in dies Caesaris propagabat. (5) denique kal. Ianuariis, cum simul tum designati essent consules, noluit cum consobrino procedere. (6) ad extremum cum ei avia et mater dicerent imminere milites ad eius exitium, nisi concordiam viderent inter se consobrinorum, sumpta praetexta hora diei sexta processit ad senatum, avia sua ad senatum vocata et ad sellam perducta. (7) deinde in Capitolium ad vota concipienda et perficienda solemniter ire noluit, omniaque per praetorem urbana facta sunt, quasi consules illic non essent. (1) *"In the camp, on the other hand, the soldiers replied to the entreaties of the prefect that they would spare Elagabalus' life on the condition that he would send away all his filthy creatures, his chariot-drivers, and his actors, and return to a decent mode of living, dismissing particularly those who, to the general sorrow, possessed the greatest influence over him and sold all his decisions, actual or pretended. (2) He did, finally, dismiss Hierocles, Cordius, and Mirissimus and two other base favourites who were making him even more of a fool than he was naturally. (3) The soldiers, furthermore, charged the prefects not to permit him to continue longer his present mode of living, and also to keep watch over Alexander that no violence might be done him, and at the same time to prevent the Caesar from seeing any of the friends of the Augustus, lest he imitate their baseness. (4) But Elagabalus with earnest entreaties kept demanding back Hierocles, that most shameless of men, and daily increased his plotting against Alexander. (5) Finally, on the kalends of January, he refused to appear in public with his cousin – for they had been designated as joint consuls. (6) At last, however, when he was told by his grandmother and mother that the soldiers were threatening that they would kill him unless they saw that harmony was established between himself and his cousin, he put on the bordered toga and at the sixth hour of the day entered the senate, inviting his grandmother to the session and escorting her to a seat. (7) But then he refused to proceed to the Capitolium to assume the vows for the state and conduct the usual ceremonies, and*

94 Eric Birley, in *BHAC* 1966/67 (1968) 47 f., suggests some possible identifications for this Antiochianus.

accordingly everything was done by the city-praetor, just as if there were no consuls there."

While Hierocles is also to be found in Dio, he is not attested outside historiography.⁹⁵ The same can be said of Myrismus (Mirissimus).⁹⁶ Cordius, whom Dio calls Gordius, may correspond to the Gordius of a Pompeian, or of a Roman graffito, but this is not certain.⁹⁷ The negotiation here depicted in 15.1-4 corresponds in substance to that described by Dio 19.3. The main difference is that in Dio's account, it is supposed to take place at the camp, in the presence of Alexander, whereas this takes place in the gardens, while Alexander and the rest of the family are in the camp, or, in the case of Soaemias, walking towards it. One wonders whether Varius is still supposed to be hiding behind the curtain during this negotiation, conducted on his behalf by Antiochianus. The soldiers' concern to prevent Alexander from seeing any of Varius' friends (who have already been 'dismissed') seems somewhat redundant, in view of Mamaea's tight control over her son. Is this meant to suggest that Alexander, if not restrained by the prefects, might willingly fall into his cousin's way of life? At least the detail that the cousins were joint consuls on the 1st of January, 975=222, is correct,⁹⁸ though we have no independent record of any irregularities in the conduct of the ceremonial on that day.

16.1-5: (1) Nec distulit caedem consobrini, sed timens {ne} se<na>tus ad ali<um> qu<empi>am se inclinaret, si ille consobrinum occidisset, iussit subito senatum urbe decedere. omnesque quibus aut vehicula aut servi deerant subito proficisci iussi[t] sunt, cum alii per baiulos, alii per fortuita animalia et mercede conducta veherentur. (2) Sabinum consularem virum, ad quem libros Ulpi[ci]anus scripsit, quod in urbe remansisset. vocato centurione mollioribus verbis iussit occidi. (3) sed centurio aure surdiori imperari sibi credidit ut urbe pelleretur, itaque fecit. sic vitium centurionis Sabino saluti fuit. (4) removit et Ulpi[ci]anum iuris consultum ut bonum virum et Silvinum r<h>et[h]orem, quem magistrum Caesaris fecerat. et Silvinus quidem occisus est, Ulpi[ci]anus vero reservatus. (5) sed milites et maxime praetorianus, vel scientes quo <d> mala in <Alexandrum> Heliogabalus parara[n]t, vel quod sibi viderent invidiam <fore ex Alexandri amore, inter se congressi sunt> factaque conspiratione ad liberandam rem p. primum conscii <libidinum eius occisi sunt vario> genere mortis, cum alios vitalibus exemptis necarent, alios ab ima parte perfoderent, ut mors esset vitae consentiens. (1) "Nevertheless he did not give up the murder of his cousin, but first, for fear that if he killed him the senate would turn to some one else, he gave orders that the senate should at once leave the city. Even all those senators who had no carriages or slaves were ordered to set out at once, some of them being carried by porters, others using animals that chance threw in their way or that they hired for money. (2) And because Sabinus, a man of consular rank, to whom Ulpian dedicated some of his books, remained in the city, the Emperor called a centurion and ordered him to kill

95 Stein, A., *Hierocles*, *RE*, 1.8.16, 1913, 1476 f. § 11; *PIR*², 4.1, 1952, p.89, § H 172, *Hierocles*. Pflaum, *Carrières*, 2, 1960, §316, *T. Licinius Hierocles*, p.808-811 refers to quite another person.

96 Stein, A., *Myrismus*, *RE*, 1.16.31, 1933.

97 *PIR*², 2, 1933, p. 304, § C 1289, Cordius (Gordius); Stein, *Cordius*, *RE*, 1.4.7, 1901, col. 1221, §1; Solin, H., *Zum namen Gordius in der Historia Augusta*, *Eranos*, 61, 1963, p. 65-67; Garrucci, R., *Graffiti de Pompéi*, 2^a ed.1856, Tav. XXX, 22; Correra, L., *Graffiti di Roma*, *BCAR*, 1893, p. 257, §152,160,161.

98 *CIL*, VI, 37183.

him, speaking in a low tone. (3) But the centurion, who was rather deaf, thought that he was being ordered to eject Sabinus from the city and acted accordingly; and so a centurion's infirmity saved Sabinus' life. (4) He dismissed both Ulpian the jurist because he was a righteous man and Silvinus the rhetorician, whom he had appointed tutor to Alexander. Silvinus, in fact, was put to death, but Ulpian was spared. (5) The soldiers, however, and particularly the members of the guard, either because they knew what evils (Elagabalus had in store for Alexander), or because they foresaw his hatred for themselves (on account of their love for Alexander, met together, and), formed a conspiracy to set the state free. First (those involved in his depravity were killed in various ways), some by tearing out the(ir) vital organs and others by piercing the anus, so that their deaths were (consistent with) their lives."

There is likewise no independent confirmation of the exile of the senate from Rome. Magie thinks that Sabinus may be Fabius Sabinus, who is cited in *HA/AS* as a member of Alexander's council. Birley holds that he is the long dead early imperial jurist Masurius Sabinus, on whom, not to whom, Ulpian wrote commentaries.⁹⁹ Ulpian is the famous jurist, later praetorian prefect under Alexander, killed by mutinous troops.¹⁰⁰ Of Silvinus we know nothing more than is said here. The soldiers' decision finally to act is not portrayed as motivated by this senatorial exile, but narrative proximity suggests a connection. More important, the soldiers' motivation for proceeding to the kill is here ascribed, not to their disgust at Varius' sexuality, but to their partisanship on behalf of Alexander, and to their fear for their own fate on account of it.

Hohl's recension differs here from that of Peter, used by Magie for the Loeb edition. In Peter's recension, 16.5. reads: Sed milites et maxime praetorianus, vel scientes quae mala in Heliogabalum pararentur, vel quod sibi viderent invidiam, facta conspiratione ad liberandam rem publicam primum conscios ... genere mortis ... etc. "*The soldiers, and particularly the members of the guard, either because they knew what evils were in store for Elagabalus, or because they foresaw his hatred for themselves, formed a conspiracy to set the state free. First they attacked the accomplices in his plan of murdering Alexander, killing some ... etc.*" Hohl's version makes far more sense, in terms of the soldiers' ascribed motivation.

17.1-7: (1) post hoc in eum impetus factus est atque in latrina ad quam confugerat occisus. tractus deinde per publicum. addita iniuria cadaveri est, ut id in cloacam milites mitterent. (2) sed cum non c[a]episset cloaca fortuito, per pontem Aemilium adnexo pondere, ne fluitaret, in Tiberim abiectum est, ne unquam sepeliri posset. (3) tractum est cadaver eius etiam per circi spatia, priusquam in Tiberim praecipitaretur. (4) nomen eius, id est Antonini, erasum est senatu iubente remansitque Varii Heliogabali, si quidem illud adfectato retinuerat, cum vult videri filius Antonini. (5) appellatus est post mortem Tiberinus et Tractatitius et Impurus et multa, si quando ea erant designanda quae sub eo facta videbantur. (6) solusque omnium principum et tractus est et in cloacam missus et in Tiberim praecipitatus. (7) quod

⁹⁹ Magie refers to *HA/AS*, 68.1; A. R. Birley to Syme, *Emperors & Biography*, 119 f. (E-mail to me of 23/11/2005)

¹⁰⁰ *Dio*, 80.2.2.

odio communi omnium contigit, a quo speciatim cavere debent imperatores, si quidem nec sepulchra mereantur qui amorem senatus populi ac militum non merentur. (1) "Next they fell upon Elagabalus himself and slew him in a latrine in which he had taken refuge. Then his body was dragged through the streets, and the soldiers further insulted it by thrusting it into a sewer. (2) But since the sewer chanced to be too small to admit the corpse, they attached a weight to it to keep it from floating, and hurled it from the Aemilian bridge into the Tiber, in order that it might never be buried. (3) The body was also dragged around the Circus before it was thrown into the Tiber. (4) His name, that is to say the name Antoninus, was erased from the public records by order of the senate – though the name Varius Elagabalus was left –, for he had used the name Antoninus without valid claim, wishing to be thought the son of Antoninus. (5) After his death he was dubbed the Tiberine, (the Manhandled), the Filthy, and many other such names, all of which were to signify what seemed to have been done during his rule. (6) And he was the only one of all the emperors whose body was dragged through the streets, thrust into a sewer, and hurled into the Tiber. (7) This befell him as the result of the general hatred of all, against which particularly emperors must be on their guard, since those who do not win the love of the senate, the people, and the soldiers do not win the right of burial."

While both Dio and Herodian have Varius murdered in the camp, we are not told by the *HA* in which location, whether palace, gardens, or camp, or elsewhere, the latrine here in question stood. Given the *HA*'s greater topographical and prosopographical detail with respect to the earlier incident, that of the negotiation between Varius and the soldiers (which, it will be remembered, Dio places in the camp, the *HA* in the gardens, and Herodian omits altogether) this is perhaps somewhat surprising. It would seem to argue against a contemporary authorship, such as that of Marius Maximus, for the source of this chapter, at least.

Regarding the *Schimpfnamen* with which Varius is posthumously insulted, it is hard to see how 'Tiberinus' can be said to signify what was done during Varius' rule. 'Impurus', however, clearly refers to Varius' alleged sexuality. With regard to the third of these *Schimpfnamen*, Hohl's recension is in line with Alföldy's preference for the spelling 'Tractatitus', which Peter renders as 'Tractaticus'. Alföldy holds that this term refers to Varius' sexuality whilst live, rather than, as previously supposed, to the posthumous fate of his corpse.¹⁰¹ I have amended Magie's translation at 17.5, 'the Dragged', accordingly, to 'the Manhandled'. So, with regard to the cause of Varius' fall, the *HA*, despite a hint of other possibilities at 16.5, here reaffirms the view that it results from the soldiers' and people's reaction to Varius' sexuality.

The *Epitome de Caesaribus*, a possible source for the *HA*, adds yet another *Schimpfname*: the soldiers allegedly, whilst desecrating Varius' corpse, fling at him the insult: "indomitae rabidaeque libidinis catulam"; which may be translated as "a bitch on heat with untamed, raging lust".¹⁰² The notion

101 Alföldy, G., *Zwei Schimpfnamen des Kaisers Elagabal: Tiberinus und Tractitatus*, *BHAC*, 1972/4, *BHAF*, 12, 1976, p. 11-21.

102 *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 23.

of soldiers spouting verse whilst dragging a headless body through the streets, trying to stuff it into a sewer, and flinging it into the Tiber, seems an exercise in poetic license.

Comparison of *Dio's*, *Herodian's*, and the *HA's* accounts of Varius' fall.

A detailed and systematic comparison, line by line, topic by topic, incident by incident, of all three main accounts of the whole of Varius' life and reign, incorporating lesser texts where relevant, thus satisfying and exceeding Scheithauer's implicit call for such a study,¹⁰³ still awaits accomplishment elsewhere.¹⁰⁴ The present series of *Questiones* has, to some extent, undertaken such comparison, albeit with regard to particular questions concerning Varius' life and reign. It has usually done so before proceeding to compare propositions derivable from ancient historiography with the evidence of coins and inscriptions. Since, as mentioned above, the latter sort of comparison is almost impossible in the case of Varius' fall, on account of the lack of directly relevant epigraphic or numismatic evidence, here I shall merely summarise the main points of each text, and compare them discursively, with respect to their accounts of the cause and mode of Varius' fall.

Dio proclaims one cause for Varius' fall, suggests another, and leads us, through *ennoia*, to devine yet more. *Via* Xiphilinus, Dio proclaims that Varius' fall was caused by the soldiers' hatred, shared with the populace, of Varius' sexual behaviour. In addition, *via* Petrus Patricius, he suggests that it was occasioned by the soldiers' contempt, ascribing that contempt to the nature of the power relationship between soldiers and emperors, rather than to any specific behaviour on any given emperor's part. Again *via* Xiphilinus, now using *ennoia*, Dio invites us to devine that Alexander's designation as Caesar leads inevitably to Varius' overthrow and murder. By designating his cousin as successor, Varius brings about his own fall. That he does so, Dio attributes to divine intervention; not Elagabal's, as Varius believes, but some other deity's. Dio's evidence for such intervention is twofold: a misleading prophecy that Varius will be succeeded by an Alexander from Emesa (while his cousin is from Arca), thus perhaps deflecting Varius' possible suspicion away from his cousin; and the apparition in Thrace of a pseudo-Alexander. This apparition is to be understood as a sign or omen of the controlling deity's intention that Alexander should rise, which logically implies that Varius must fall. Since Varius is, by virtue of designating Alexander, the proximate artificer of his own fall, it is implied that he has been tricked into doing so by the controlling deity, perhaps posing as Elagabal. Again *via* Petrus Patricius, Dio suggests yet further causes for Varius' fall: that it is provoked by his renunciation of military titles, thus rendering him unfit to be emperor; and that he is being blackmailed by the praetorians. They maintain Varius as emperor only so long as it serves their material interest, and depose him when they think they can do better with his successor. Finally, yet again *via* Xiphilinus, whilst narrating the mode, as opposed to explaining the cause, of Varius' fall, Dio nonetheless indirectly suggests two further causes, possibly, by virtue of their final position in this

103 Op cit. p. 336: "...für die Darstellung der Regierung Elagabals noch ein systematischer Vergleich fehlt."

104 In *Historiographica Variana*, a part of these studies yet to be completed.

section of his narrative, the most important of all: Maesa's perception that her own interest is threatened by Varius' hieratic, rather than military, self-presentation; and her daughters' bitter rivalry with one another, worked out through their sons.

Dio's account of the mode of Varius' fall is predicated on the proposition that so long as Varius loves his cousin Alexander, Varius is safe, but that anything he does to protect himself against Alexander's threat will hasten the process of his fall. This formulation presupposes that a shift in the balance of power has already occurred: Alexander's faction has effective, covert control, and only requires the fulfilment of a number of ancillary conditions to seize overt control. The chief of these conditions is Varius' death. This is to be achieved by the soldiers, in reaction to Varius' counter-measures, factual or alleged, against Alexander. In Dio's account, this happens twice, the first time inconclusively, the second conclusively. On the first occasion, the soldiers react to "becoming aware" that Varius has done "everything to bring about [Alexander's] destruction" by raising a "terrible tumult" which can only be stopped by Varius' appearance in the camp with Alexander, and the surrender of his "companions in lewdness." That it should even be possible for Varius to postpone his own destruction at the cost of that of his companions suggests that there are elements in play which Dio has left out of his narrative.

Logically, for this to happen, even within Dio's historiographical reality, there must be a faction of soldiers, opposed to Alexander's rise, with sufficient power to prevent his supporters from achieving it immediately. The surrender of Varius' companions thus appears as a tactical retreat, a bargain which works psychologically by granting the seditious soldiers an apparent partial victory, while preventing, for the moment, their final triumph. It is only after this inconclusive standoff that Dio introduces Maesa's role in Varius' fall. Her support for this outcome is apparently decisive since, on the second occasion, it is accomplished. Varius' attempts against Alexander are presented as a constant, and it appears that he has even successfully retracted from immediate destruction some, at least, of his companions. So, on Varius' side, nothing new explains the difference in outcome. What is new must be that Maesa has entered the fray, and somehow neutralised any remaining opposition in the ranks to Varius' fall. In the final stage of its accomplishment, when, for the second time, Varius is induced yet again to go to the camp with Alexander, Dio reveals the underlying dynamic which, presumably, had determined the inconclusive outcome of the first occasion: the variance between Soaemias and Mamaea. Clearly, on the first occasion, Soaemias and her son still had supporters among the soldiers, and must have some even now, for them to be able to survive long enough for the two sisters to manifest their variance in front of Varius. This also suggests that it is these sisters' variance itself, or rather Mamaea's ambitions for her son, the current focus of that variance, which spark the first, inconclusive standoff. Then, Maesa does not intervene. Once she does, through the agency, as Dio finally suggests, of Comazon, the matter is concluded.

Unlike Dio, Herodian does not hesitate overtly to portray Maesa's will as the principal cause of Varius' fall, just as of his rise. She decides to get rid of Varius, and does so once she has Alexander in place as his successor. Her motive in doing so is her perception of her own self-interest, which

she sees as threatened by the disarray into which the state has fallen under Varius, as a result of his exclusive devotion to worship, and neglect of almost all else, except his pleasures. The soldiers' anger at Varius' mode of self-presentation, effeminate to their perception, but deriving, as Herodian has told us elsewhere, from Varius' hieratic and cultural background, is an important factor in Maesa's decision. Herodian presents Maesa as tricking Varius, through flattery, into designating Alexander as his successor, proposing a division of labour whereby Varius retains the hieratic, while Alexander takes over the military and administrative functions of the principate. But Maesa's true intention, Herodian suggests, by describing Maesa's trickery, and by narrating its outcome, is to replace Varius with Alexander. Given this intention, the rest of Herodian's account of Varius' fall has more to do with mode than with cause. For once the strategic goal of Varius' fall and Alexander's rise is set, all events leading to that goal are either tactical or reactive. This does not, however, mean that their relationships are clearly worked out by Herodian, much less clearly set out. Indeed, his account of the mode, as opposed to the cause, of Varius' fall raises more questions than it answers.

Varius' reactions are arguably, in Herodian's narrative logic, foreseen by Maesa, thus provoked in order to hasten the soldiers' counter-reaction, and the quick achievement of her goal. In this light we can see Mamaea's bribery of the soldiers on her son's behalf; Varius' attempts to poison Alexander; Maesa's and Mamaea's counter-measures; and Varius' revocation of Alexander's titles, even though the order - covert operations, followed by overt exercise of power - seems somewhat odd. Varius' spreading a rumour of his cousin's death, however, is not so easily explicable. It seems to suggest misguidance or miscalculation, perhaps even panic, on Varius' part. While the soldiers' demanding Alexander's presence at the camp is logical, given their reported concern for his safety, it is not clear on what grounds, or with what subterfuge, Varius is persuaded that he should accompany his cousin. Hence Varius' compliance with that demand, leading to his death, is likewise inexplicable, except by misguidance, miscalculation or panic. So is his ability to rage overnight in the temple at the camp. One feels that Herodian, like Dio, has left out vital pieces of the puzzle, such as the existence of diverse factions among the soldiers, some for, some against Varius. Since Herodian ascribes the initiative in Varius' fall to Maesa from the start, there is no need for him to postulate two separate trips to the camp, affording two crises, one inconclusive, the next conclusive, in order for her to be shown to make the difference. Therefore Herodian provides only one visit to the camp, and one decisive crisis.

The *HA's* account of Varius' fall ascribes its cause unequivocally to the soldiers' disgust with Varius' sexuality, and the consequent shift of their allegiance to Alexander. In so doing, it coincides in substance with Dio's programmatic proclamation of that cause, placing it, moreover, early in the reign, during the winter in Nicomedia. Having asserted this, the *HA* does not follow Dio in offering alternatives. Rather, it seeks to reinforce its original assertion, stating that Varius' displeasure with Alexander is caused by Alexander's chastity. The *HA* follows the logic implied by a shift in the balance of power, and of narrative focus, towards Alexander's rise, whereby all of Varius' countermeasures are depicted as not only ineffective, but base and evil. Thus its statement, just before the final accomplishment of Varius'

murder, that the soldiers decided it because they feared for themselves, on account of their partiality to Alexander, and out of concern for his safety, is to be seen within the context of their prior determination to overthrow Varius in favour of Alexander, and so as a proximate, rather than an ultimate cause.

With regard to the mode of Varius' fall, the *HA* follows the model of two crises, but unlike Dio, does not use it to imply a new proximate cause, such as Maesa's intervention, for the different outcomes of the crisis on each occasion. The proximate cause adduced for the second, conclusive assault, is that "the soldiers formed a conspiracy to set the state free." That, of course, is what they, or some of them, have been intending all along, since the winter in Nicomedia. So the second crisis does not differ substantially from the first, except in its outcome. The *HA* assigns no decisive role to Maesa, though it does send her to the camp with Alexander and Mamaea, thus isolating Soaemias, in the division of characters, in its account of the first crisis, that taking place at Spes Vetus. While it does not state explicitly that there are soldiers on Varius', as opposed to Alexander's side, on that occasion, this is the logical implication (insofar as anything in the *HA* may be called logical) of the prefect Antiochianus' success in turning back the seditious soldiers. The observation that "only a few" (seditious soldiers) "had come and the majority had remained with the standard, which the tribune Aristomachus had kept back," (14.8) could mean that Aristomachus, and the soldiers under him, remain, for the moment, loyal to Varius. Thus the *HA* suggests, more overtly than Dio or Herodian, the existence of contrary factions among the soldiers, and belies the supposition, which it seems elsewhere to imply, of their unanimity, or at least lack of corporate dissent, in wishing to overthrow Varius. While the topographical and prosopographical particulars of the first crisis are described in some considerable detail, the protagonists of the second assault are anonymous, and the place of the murder is identified only by type, as a latrine, not placed at any particular location. The sites, however, of the corpse's desecration and eventual infumination are precisely identified. So the second crisis seems to be an extension of the first, rather than to stand in contrast to it.

Dio and the *HA* thus appear, in their accounts of Varius' fall, to have more in common with each other, with respect to its mode, than either does with Herodian. The survival of the model of two crises in the *HA*, albeit without serving any particular narrative function, seems to argue either for the *HA's* dependence on Dio, or for the dependence of both on a common source, at least with regard to mode. Herodian's preference for a single occasion could derive from some alternative source, but is just as likely to result from Herodian's historiographical style, seeking simple narrative, and dramatic effect, rather than accurate detail or cogent analysis.

With respect to cause, however, the situation is more complex. Although the *HA* coincides with the ultimate cause of Varius' fall proclaimed by Dio *via* Xiphilinus, that of the soldiers' reaction to Varius' sexuality, it ignores an alternative ultimate cause proposed by Dio *via* Petrus Patricius: the soldiers' propensity to overthrow their emperors. The *HA* also ignores all other possible causes, both ultimate and proximate, suggested by Dio, *via* either of his cited transmitters, whether through *ennoia* or through more direct forms of implication. So, in assigning a single cause, albeit one coinciding with that

programmatically proclaimed by Dio, to Varius' fall, the *HA* actually more closely resembles Herodian at the level of structure. Herodian's ultimate cause, Maesa's will, is ostensibly presented by Dio as a proximate cause, but if one considers Dio's account of Varius rise and fall as a whole, and gives at least equal weight to implication as to proclamation, the balance of Dio's account also favours Maesa's will as the ultimate cause of Varius' fall, as indeed of his rise. It is, nevertheless, possibly significant that Dio places last of all, thus, from a narrative point of view as the last word in this particular train of discourse, with respect to cause, the open variance of Soaemias and Mamaea.

Fact, likelihood and possibility in Varius' fall

Let us now step back from exegesis and comparison of ancient historiography, and consider what is likely to have been the case in historical reality. To do so, I shall first recapitulate, in order to establish whatever facts or virtual certainties may exist, the relatively scanty evidence of coins and inscriptions, already cited above. Then, seeking to determine the likeliest course of events, I shall reconsider certain propositions deriving from the ancient historiographical texts that we have explored, in the light of the facts and certainties established. This will allow us to establish a hierarchy of propositions concerning Varius' fall, ranging from facts through likelihoods to possibilities. Finally, I shall offer my own opinion as to how Varius' fall is most likely to have come about.

That Alexander succeeded Varius is a fact. Coins and inscriptions showing Varius as emperor end early in 975=222.¹⁰⁵ Those, together with official papyri, showing Alexander as such, begin immediately thereafter.¹⁰⁶ The proposition that Alexander succeeded Varius is thus directly proven by testing that proposition against epigraphic and numismatic evidence, with reference to dates. The test is, in fact, more complex than this statement suggests. Because the dating of any emperor's coins and inscriptions is internal to his reign, only by establishing reference to an external calendar, such as that *ab urbe condita* used in the records of the *Sodales Antoniniani*,¹⁰⁷ or by deducing an objective date through reference to an annual documentary series, such as the *Fasti Consulares*,¹⁰⁸ does one achieve the necessary triangulation to establish that one emperor succeeded another and when. In the case of Varius and Alexander, part of the relevant evidence for their order of succession derives from the epigraphic and numismatic record of their official relationship as emperor and designated heir.¹⁰⁹

The proposition that Varius was overthrown in favour of Alexander is only indirectly proven by such evidence. Therefore it refers not to fact, but to virtual certainty. This virtual certainty derives from an argument based on coins and inscriptions showing Varius' exclusion from Alexander's official genealogy,

105 *RIC*, 4.2, p.1-69

106 *RIC*, 4.2, p.71 ff.; Fink-Hoey-Snyder, *The Feriale Duranum, Commentary*, YCS, 7, 1940.

107 *CIL VI*, 2001, 2009, These use the Roman Calendar a.u.c. in the Capitoline version, which differs by one year from the more standard Varroian version, referred to in these studies.

108 Klein, J., ed. *Fasti consulares*, 1881, p. 88-96.

109 *PIR*², Part 1, 1933, p. 327, 1610, *Imp. Caesar M. Aurelius Severus Alexander Aug.*

despite Alexander's adoption by Varius. Both adoption and exclusion are facts, for which there is direct epigraphic and numismatic evidence, just cited, as there is of *damnatio memoriae* of Varius.¹¹⁰ The argument in question runs thus: 'That Alexander excludes Varius from his official genealogy repudiates a fact: that of his adoption as Varius' successor. Alexander's succession is thus not officially based on that adoption, but rather on Alexander's alleged biological descent from Caracalla and Severus, skipping all mention of Varius. This, in combination with the evidence of *damnatio memoriae* of Varius, argues strongly for Varius' overthrow by Alexander.' This argument, based on fact, is itself one step away from fact. So we may call the proposition that it demonstrates a virtual certainty.

That the end of Varius' life coincides with that of his reign partly derives from the previous argument. This proposition is two steps away from fact, and one step away from virtual certainty. Its underlying argument runs thus: 'It is virtually certain that Alexander overthrew Varius. This implies Varius' resistance, and Varius' death, by virtue of Alexander's success. There is no precedent, at least not in this period, for an emperor surviving his own reign. There is no evidence, or even allegation, suggesting any such survival in this case. Indeed, there is unanimous allegation to the contrary.'¹¹¹ Thus this argument is partly based on virtual certainty; partly on negative evidence; and partly on positive allegation. It is on the threshold between the realm of certainty, and that of likelihood. Let us, generously, call it a near certainty.

Given this argument, plus Varius' age and presumable state of health at the time, in the absence of evidence or allegation of illness, it may be argued that the end of Varius' life was violent. Therefore, we may speak of Varius' fall. This argument is three steps away from fact, and two from virtual certainty. Since there is no evidence of any prolonged hostilities constituting a civil war, but rather of a sudden and quickly decisive transfer of power; and since Varius' usurper is no outsider, but rather his designated successor, we may characterise Varius' fall as the likely outcome of a palace intrigue, leading to a *coup d'état*. We are now four steps away from fact, and three from virtual certainty. From this point on I shall stop counting.

For by virtue of these last two propositions, we have stepped over the threshold from the realm of fact and virtual certainty, with reference, direct or indirect, to coins, inscriptions, and official papyri, and entered that of likelihood and possibility, with reference to historiography. In proceeding further, we should keep in mind the facts, and the virtual and near certainties established by the preceding arguments, together with the theory of causality discussed at the outset of this article. It will be remembered that this theory distinguishes proximate from ultimate causes, and describes cause, in the context of a *coup d'état*, in terms of a number of conditions: occasion, conception, motivation, means, and execution.

110 E.g.: *CIL III*, 902. 954, 3445, 7722, *VI*, 2001, 2008, 2009, 2999, *VIII*, 10124, 10267, 10295, 10304, 10334, etc.

111 In the texts of Dio, Herodian, and the *HA* cited and examined here.

So, considering these facts and virtual and near certainties alongside allegations in ancient historiography, it seems to me that a necessary, but not a sufficient condition, for Varius' fall, is the soldiers' propensity, from time to time, to overthrow their emperor. This propensity poses a permanent threat to any reigning emperor, and provides an opportunity for any prospective usurper. For its threat to be realised, in the sense of conceived with respect to particular individuals, two more conditions are necessary: an excuse to turn against the sitting emperor; and the presence of an alternative candidate, willing to risk becoming the soldiers' next victim but one.

Varius' conduct of his reign provides the excuse. His marked preference for the hieratic over the military functions of the principate, deducible in historical reality from the wealth of epigraphic and numismatic evidence for his sacerdotal activities, alongside the dearth of evidence of any bellic initiatives, after his *coup* against Macrinus, amply suffices as an excuse. His concomitant adoption, reported by historiography, and sometimes, but far from ubiquitously, recorded by coins, of a hieratic, rather than a military persona, merely adds insult to injury.

Injury, in the form of missed opportunities for plunder and promotion, and for the satisfaction of bloodlust, is in fact excuse enough, from the point of view of the soldiers' perceived material and psychological self-interest. But the provision of insult is a bonus, from the point of view of the seeker for excuses, because it provides a way to mask the somewhat less than honourable motives of the soldiers, and focus their anger, and observers' attention, on something altogether more presentable, as a legitimate object of aggression: the insult, rather than the injury. This, indeed, seems, in general, to be an important function of insult in conflict.

In this particular case, the soldiers' perception of injury is less than honourable, not because it involves plunder and bloodlust, of both of which the Romans heartily approved, so long as they were directed outside the group defined as one's own. Rather, these motives are less than honourable because they, together with promotion, constitute the soldiers' perception of their own self-interest, rather than that of the state. Of course the soldiers might argue that the interests of the state are served by war, but this would have to be argued rationally, at the level of policy-making, for each particular case: not something for which soldiers are trained.

In the case of the particular insult offered by Varius, the bonus is especially rich, because it can be shared: it can be presented as an insult to the gods, to the senate, and to the people of Rome. For the specific hieratic persona reportedly adopted by Varius, in preference to a military one, is foreign, thus a legitimate object of any xenophobia latent among the senate and people of Rome. It is, moreover, not only foreign, but Oriental, thus proceeding from the fount of luxury and depravity so dear to the imagination of Roman satirists and rhetoricians.

This is not to say that Varius did or did not do or undergo or omit any of the things of which he is

accused. That is beside the point. The facts are not what matters in this case. Rather, what matters here is Varius' self-presentation. Caracalla, retrospectively the soldiers' darling, and Maesa's counter-example to Varius, is accused of all the same things, with equal plausibility, or lack of it. But Caracalla is presented as a soldier, Varius as a priest.

So it seems, after all, in accordance with the evidence of coins and inscriptions, that Varius' fall is due, at least in part, to his priesthood and its vestments. These provide the excuse the soldiers need to overthrow him, and thus earn a donative from his successor, while enjoying a brief and limited outburst of bloodlust.

But this is still not enough, in itself, to bring about Varius' fall. An alternative candidate is needed. That candidate is Alexander. The pertinent question therefore becomes: Why Alexander? Why not, as in Alexander's own fall, thirteen years later, one of the soldiers?

Leaving those questions for a moment, we can at least affirm that with Alexander's presence as a candidate, the two conditions needed for the realisation of the soldiers' propensity to overthrow their ruler have been satisfied. Yet even the fulfilment of these two conditions is not sufficient to guarantee the propensity's activation and actualisation. It also requires a catalyst.

The question 'Why Alexander?' leads us directly to that catalyst. For while the soldiers' propensity to overthrow their ruler may be taken as a constant, and while in this case there seems to be both an excuse and an alternative candidate, that propensity needs a catalytic initiative to set it in motion.

That Alexander should emerge as Varius' substitute suggests that the initiative for Varius' overthrow does not come from the soldiers themselves, but, given Alexander's age, from his promoters. It also suggests, concomitantly, that Varius' alleged misconduct was not, in itself, the cause of his fall, but only an excuse for his overthrow. Had the soldiers' propensity to overthrow their ruler been triggered by Varius' misconduct alone, there is no reason to suppose that the soldiers would naturally have chosen Alexander as his substitute. Alexander's claim of Caracallan paternity would surely not, given the example of Varius, whose identical claim was equally plausible or dubious, be likely to matter. And Alexander's age would count against him, if the search for a successor to Varius were undertaken at the soldiers' initiative. Thus it appears that the initiative for Varius' fall lies with Alexander's handlers and backers.

That being supposed, does the initiative to promote Alexander as Varius' successor come from Maesa or from Mamaea? I think it comes from Mamaea. Her ambition to overthrow Varius, and put Alexander in his place, arguably precedes Maesa's decision to replace Varius with Alexander, and may be a major factor in Maesa's taking that decision. Indeed Mamaea's ambition for her son is likely to have been active at least from the beginning of the uprising leading to Varius' rise. It may well have been a covert but active undermining force throughout Varius' reign, striving to bring about Varius' fall, as a

necessary condition for Alexander's rise.

This raises the question of the dissension between Mamaea and Soaemias, cited by Dio. From coins and inscriptions we know that Soaemias enjoyed the status of Augusta, as did Maesa, under Varius, and that Mamaea did not, under Varius, but only later, under Alexander. This is a potential source for Mamaea's jealousy of Soaemias. Dio tells us, moreover, that Mamaea's marital family suffered losses in the *coup* that placed Varius on the throne, whereas Soaemias' did not. This, if true, is a potential source of Mamaea's resentment of Soaemias.

One may argue that any such resentment should be directed, not at Soaemias, to whom Dio does not accord any initiative in the *coup* to put Varius on the throne, but at Maesa, whom Dio depicts as motivator, though not as direct artificer, of that *coup*. One may also argue that Mamaea's jealousy, if any, is unjustified, because she has no proper claim on the title of Augusta.

But the latter argument misunderstands the nature of jealousy, which does not require a proper claim on the object of contention in order to exist. The former misreads the nature of sibling rivalry, which is predicated on the desire to win the approval of a parent, or parent-figure, in a zero-sum relationship. In such a relationship it is not the parent or parent-figure (luck, God, or whatever) let alone oneself, that is blamed for the rival sibling's success and one's own failure, but the rival sibling. He or she has taken something that is felt rightfully to be one's own.

Mamaea's rivalry with Soaemias does not seem merely to be a question of incompatible ambitions for their sons, and of the rationally perceived consequences of that incompatibility. In the light of Dio's remark regarding their longstanding variance, and judging from the ferocity with which the corpses of Varius and Soaemias are treated, presumably with Mamaea's consent, in all the historiographical accounts (if these are to be believed) their sibling rivalry seems to run deeper.

Indeed it seems to be endemic in their generation of the Severan dynasty. For just such a deadly rivalry is depicted, in the ancient historiography, as having existed between Caracalla and Geta, with analogous results. In the case of Mamaea and Soaemias, the rivalry is worked out through the proxies of their sons. Mamaea's ambition for her son may be assumed to contribute, in collusion with Maesa's fear, to Maesa's deceitful persuasion of Varius to adopt Alexander as his son, and to designate him as his heir.

That designation adds a quasi-intergenerational incentive to an already murderous sibling rivalry. For once the path to power has thus been clearly indicated, it may also be expected, at least of the second generation of the Severan dynasty (as in the case of Caracalla vis-à-vis his father, Severus) that an heir apparent (or in Alexander's case his handlers vis-à-vis Varius) will seek to eliminate his predecessor as soon as possible.

Maesa's decision to replace Varius with Alexander may thus be seen as a proximate, rather than the ultimate cause of Varius' fall, though her will remains essential to his rise. Maesa is the original conceiver and earliest promoter of Varius' rise; therefore its ultimate cause. Mamaea is that of Alexander's. This supposition is strengthened, to the extent that Dio's account may be granted any credence, by Dio's placing the open variance between Soemias and Mamaea at the end of his series of possible causes, thus in the most significant narrative position.

Maesa's attitude, with regard to Alexander's rise, will have been neutral to begin with. Her choice of Varius, rather than Alexander, as the vehicle of her ambition, at the time of the original uprising against Macrinus, obviously stems from Varius' greater plausibility, given his age, for the role of emperor which he is called upon to play. It may possibly also, if Dio is to be believed, owe something to Varius' perhaps foreseeable and rehearsable dramatic talent, evident in his performance, on the ramparts of the legionary fortress at Raphanea, in the role of bastard son of Caracalla, leading to that of emperor. And if Herodian, in turn, deserves any credence at all, it may even have been suggested to Maesa by Varius' hieratic and saltatory charisma in performance of another role, that of high priest of Elagabal, which brings him to the attention of the legionary soldiers, stationed at that fortress, and induces in them a quasi-erotic enthusiasm.

But, from Maesa's point of view, once her dynasty has been restored, all that matters is that whoever is emperor, her own position be secured. She soon comes to believe it to be threatened by Varius' refusal to follow the policies and modes of self-presentation which she thinks are necessary for her dynasty's survival. Accordingly, Maesa shifts her support to Alexander, a more docile boy, whose mother has been striving for this shift all along.

The soldiers' attitude, with regard to Alexander's rise, will also have been neutral to begin with. It must be remembered that the soldiers here in question, on whom the outcome of this struggle materially depends, are not the same soldiers who put Varius on the throne. Those were legionary soldiers. These are the praetorians, who are only induced, according to Dio, to support Varius against Macrinus when Macrinus has already fled the field, and it becomes their clear self-interest to do so.

The policies and modes of self-presentation which Maesa enjoins, and Varius refuses to espouse, are such as will please not the legionaries, but the praetorians. For once the court is in Rome, the praetorians, not the legionaries, hold the key to Varius' tenure of the principate. Varius is depicted, by Dio *via* Petrus Patricius, as well aware of this distinction, though perhaps mistaken as to the degree of present loyalty to be expected from the legionaries.

In any case, the praetorians' generic disposition to wish to overthrow their emperor, as described by Dio, also *via* Petrus Patricius, is latent, and requires a catalyst to awaken it. That catalyst, I would submit, is Mamaea's will to power, in the form of her proxy ambition for her son. This ambition both feeds on

and fuels her sibling rivalry against Soaemias. Mamaea's ambition for power combines and colludes with Maesa's fear of loss of power. This fear is based on Maesa's awareness of the praetorians' generic disposition to wish to overthrow their emperor.

That awareness is quickened by Maesa's perception that Varius' mode of self-presentation may afford the praetorians an excuse for insurrection. Whether Maesa's perception of such a danger derives from actual unrest among the praetorians, or is conjured up for her by Mamaea, and whether such unrest, if actual, is spontaneous, or is stimulated by Mamaea, using bribery, remain open questions. Either way, the excuse for insurrection afforded by Varius' self-presentation is used in the conception and planning of the *coup d'état* against him.

The first move towards its execution, into which Varius is tricked, is Alexander's adoption. Mamaea's bribery of the soldiers makes Varius realise that he has been tricked, and causes him to take counter-measures. These lead to the first crisis, where it emerges that Varius still has some support among the soldiers. Hostages -some of Varius' associates - are yielded to the opposite faction, but later are reclaimed.

Comazon, acting as Maesa's agent, then sets about neutralising Varius' support, perhaps with bigger bribes, and promises of promotion. When this is accomplished, another crisis is engineered, Varius is lured into the camp, and the successful *coup* takes place.

Such is my theory regarding the likeliest cause and mode of Varius' fall, given what we know, and what we may regard as probable, on the basis both of evidence and allegation.

It only remains, in order to conclude the present series of *Questiones*, to set out in one place their answers to the questions of who Varius was, how he should be called, what he did and did not do or undergo, where and when and how, and then to address the most interesting questions of all: why he may have conducted his life and his reign as he did, and what such conduct may mean in the context of Roman imperial history.

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Abbreviations:

- Aevum* = *Aevum, Università Cattolica, Milano*
- Albo* = *Barbieri, L'Albo senatorio da Settimio Severo a Carino (193-285)*
- ANRW* = *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*
- BAGB* = *Bulletin de l'Association Guillaume Budé*
- BCAR* = *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica Comunale di Roma*
- BHAC* = *Bonner Historia Augusta Colloquium*
- BHAF* = *Bonner Historia Augusta Forschungen*
- CIL* = *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*
- CL* = *Collection Latomus*
- Dio* = *Cassii Dionis Cocceiani Historiarum Romanarum Quae Supersunt, ed. Boissevain, Weidmann, 1901; ed. & English translation by Cary, Loeb, 1969*
- Eranos* = *Acta Philologica Suecana*
- HA* = *Scriptores Historiae Augustae, ed. Hohl, Samberger & Seyfarth, 1971; ed. & English translation by Magie, Loeb, 1980*
- HA/AH* = *Vita Antonini Heliogabali*
- HA/AC* = *Vita Caracalli*
- HA/AS* = *Vita Alexandri Severi*
- HA/OM* = *Vita Macrini*
- HACM* = *Historiae Augustae Colloquium Maceratense*
- Hermes* = *Hermes, Zeitschrift für Classische Philologie*
- Herodian* = *Herodiani Historiarum Ab Excessu Divi Marci Libri Octo, ed. Stavenhagen, Teubner, 1922; ed. & English translation by Whittaker, Loeb, 1970*
- SCD* = *Millar, F., A Study of Cassius Dio, Oxford, 1964*
- Phoenix* = *University of Toronto Press, for the Classical Association of Canada*
- PIR¹* = *Prosopographia Imperii Romani, first edition*
- PIR²* = *Prosopographia Imperii Romani, second edition*
- Carrières* = *Pflaum, Les Carrières Procuratoriennes Équestres*
- QV1* = *Quaestiones Varianae, 1 = Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, Existence, Identity, Nomenclature: a basis for Studia Variana, I: The Boy on the Coin, Tsukuba Area Studies 22, 2004*
- QV2* = *Quaestiones Varianae, 2 = Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, Existence, Identity, Nomenclature: a basis for Studia Variana, II: Nomen Varianum, Tsukuba Area Studies 23, 2004*
- QV3* = *Quaestiones Varianae, 3 = Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, In Varium Heliogabalum imperium conlatum est (HA/AH 1.4): the Roman imperial succession of a.u.c. 971 = A.D. 218, Tsukuba Area Studies 24, 2005*
- QV4* = *Quaestiones Varianae, 4 = Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, Iter Principis: Elagabal's journey from Syria to Rome?, Tsukuba Area Studies 21, 2003*
- QV5* = *Quaestiones Varianae, 5 = Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, In Varium, The Indictment, Tsukuba Area Studies 25, 2005*
- QV6* = *Quaestiones Varianae, 6 = Arrizabalaga y Prado, L. de, Res Gestae Varianae: the Verdict, Tsukuba Area Studies 26, 2005*
- RE* = *Real Encyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft*
- RIC* = *Roman Imperial Coinage*
- RSA* = *Ricerche di Storiografia Antica*
- Silva Rhetoricae* = <http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>
- YCS* = *Yale Classical Studies*