

## Reviews of EEFF

Reviews of EEFF appeared from 2010 on in various journals, in print and online. Some of the direct links quoted here are still active online, others not. Fortunately, I copied and saved all the reviews that I found till mid 2015, as well as the online controversy and rebuttal that one of them elicited. That accounts for the variety of fonts in this file, as well as for misspellings and misquotes.

At a certain point, in 2011, I circulated a response to the first two reviews among my interlocutors. That response is included here. Highlighted portions of reviews are those I answered in that response, or in the Conclusion to VS1. Also included is a review by an Amazon reviewer, Remus, of a book on Varius by the first of my reviewers, Icks, comparing his to mine. In 2015 the latest volume of PIR2 appeared, mentioning EEFF and 'PECE'. Those mentions are cited, and the relevant articles are pictured in full.

Review 1: Martijn Icks, in *Sehepunkte*, 10/18/2010

<http://www.sehepunkte.de/2010/10/18108.html>

Few Roman emperors have left a reputation in which fact and fiction have become so entangled as the third ruler bearing the name Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, better known to posterity as Elagabalus. In this study, Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado attempts to disentangle the knot and reconstruct the historical emperor, boldly stating that "history is about facts... no facts, no history." (6) Although many studies of Elagabalus have been published in the past hundred years, most of these have failed to make a clear distinction between fact and fiction, lending too much credence to the numerous stories of wasteful luxury and sexual scandal which characterize the ancient accounts of the emperor's reign. [1] A notable exception is Martin Frey's study, which, however, only concerns itself with Elagabalus's religious policies. [2]

Prado's book is subdivided in five parts: "Exposition" (1-24), which explains the goals and methods of the study, "Explosion" (25-56), which deconstructs the literary images of Elagabalus in Cassius Dio, Herodian, the *Historia Augusta*, Aurelius Victor and the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, "Constitution" (57-161), which attempts to extract facts about the emperor from non-literary sources, such as coins, inscriptions and sculpture, "Speculation" (162-259), which speculates about the motives of Elagabalus and those around him, and lastly "Findings in context" (260-284), which places the book's findings in the contexts of, among other things, the emperor's immediate family, the Severan dynasty and the Roman principate as a whole. The book also includes several extensive appendices (285-360) dealing with epistemological matters and providing lists of sources.

In order to retrieve the facts about Elagabalus - whom he consistently calls by his childhood name Varius, to distinguish him from the fictional creature nicknamed Elagabalus or Heliogabalus - Prado adopts a very skeptical attitude towards Roman and Byzantine authors, criticizing their inherent bias and completely dismissing their evidential status. He repeats the question posed by Arnaldo Momigliano: "how are we going to proceed where we cannot be guided by the ancient historians?" [3] Prado's answer is twofold. On the one hand, he values the literary corpus because of "its ability to generate verifiable relevant propositions." (23) On the other hand, these propositions should be tested against non-literary

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sources, whose evidential status can be judged by means of three "material" and eight "propositional" tests.

In "Explosion", Prado discusses the interdependency and reliability of the ancient authors who wrote about Elagabalus. Based on their works, he formulates no less than 840 propositions, ranging from the important (no. 282: "Varius intended no god to be worshipped at Rome save Elagabal") to the ludicrous (no. 20: "Varius was called *Varius* because Julia Soaemias had various men's semen in her") and the trivial (no. 530: "Varius changed pillows frequently"). He then judges these propositions by eight criteria: inherent verifiability, controversiality, vitality to purpose, publicity, random public contemporary verifications, risk, incentive and collusion. The results of this examination are printed in a diagram, included as an appendix (294-346), which grants each proposition the judgment T (true), F (false), U (unverifiable), V (virtually true) or O (opinion or emotion). Only the 24 "true" and 43 "virtually true" propositions will be used to reconstruct the historical Elagabalus. Unfortunately, Prado does not elaborate on his arguments for these judgments, referring to articles he has published elsewhere. As a consequence, his diagram is of little use to the reader.

In "Constitution", Prado focuses on non-literary sources: imperial coins, inscriptions, papyri, round sculpture, reliefs and topographical evidence. For each category, he performs a mental exercise, imagining what we would know for a fact about Elagabalus if no other sources were available. Although it can sometimes be fruitful to examine different categories of sources separately before bringing them together, Prado's method is counterproductive for the purposes of his study. The factual "Res Gestae" which conclude each section tell us nothing new or remarkable about Elagabalus; they only confirm such base facts as the imperial titles he bore, the names of his wives and the length of his reign. Moreover, the rigidity with which Prado keeps his sources separate prevents him from drawing conclusions that would otherwise be self-evident. For instance, in the section on imperial coinage, he cannot confirm that Julia Soaemias and Julia Maesa are the emperor's mother and grandmother, because the coins do not make this explicit. (89) At the end of the chapter, Prado compares the facts derived from non-literary sources to the historiographic record, concluding that almost all the crimes and misdemeanors attested in the latter, such as murder, rape and infanticide, are unconfirmed by the former. (157-161)

"Speculation" is more interesting than the preceding parts, since here the author abandons his quest for uncontested facts and allows himself some room for speculation and interpretation. He plausibly argues that Elagabalus was born in Rome and raised in various parts of the Empire, only going to Emesa in late childhood. (183-205) I am less convinced by the hypothesis that the emperor's priestly garments "arguably become for him symbols of his lost freedom, wearing them in worship a bid to regain it" (243), but it is evidently true that Elagabalus used his priesthood of Elagabal as "a justification, alternative to the tale of adultery and bastardy, for his tenure of the principate". (253) It is regrettable that Prado does not spend more time exploring this notion in detail, for it is certainly one of the most interesting aspects of the young man's reign. How exactly did Elagabalus present himself as "priest-emperor"? To what extent did he envision a new religious order when he placed Sol Invictus Elagabal before all the Roman gods? Why did he marry a Vestal virgin? These questions do not receive the attention they deserve.

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In "Findings in context", Prado does not only put Elagabalus in the wider perspective of the Severan dynasty and the Roman principate, but also assesses the epistemology and methodology of his study, insisting that "whatever their sources, scholars should distinguish fact from probability and possibility." (280-282) **While this is undeniably true, Prado takes his skepticism too far, especially with regard to the literary sources.** Is it really necessary to argue, for instance, that "universal historiographic assertion", combined with evidence from other sources, "clears the way towards considering highly likely, or even, perhaps, virtually certain, a filial-maternal link between Varius and Soaemias"? (193) How precise can the ancient historian reasonably be in establishing different degrees of veracity? Is it really meaningful to qualify a certain proposition as "at best a strong likelihood", but "not quite a virtual certainty"? (209)

In one respect, Prado's study deserves unmitigated praise. No former monograph on Elagabalus has brought so many sources together. Not only does the book list all the available inscriptions and papyri concerning the emperor, it also provides images of numerous coins, medallions and busts, some of which cannot be found in major catalogues.

**"The Emperor Elagabalus" does a good job of separating fact from fiction, but Prado's rigid methodology and severe skepticism function more as a straightjacket than as helpful tools,** obliging him to argue at length for things which are uncontested and do not require argument. This goes at the expense of the analysis of other, more interesting questions. The result is a thoroughly researched, but ultimately unsatisfying book.

### Notes:

[1] John Stuart Hay: *The Amazing Emperor Heliogabalus*, London 1911; Roland Villeneuve: *Héliogabale, le César fou*, Paris 1957; G.R. Thompson: *Elagabalus, Priest-Emperor of Rome*, unpublished, University of Kansas 1972; Robert Turcan: *Héliogabale et le sacre du soleil*, Paris 1985; Saverio Gualerzi: *Né uomo, né donna, né dio, né dea. Ruolo sessuale e ruolo religioso dell'Imperatore Elagabalo*, Bologna 2005. My own study of Elagabalus's reign and fictional afterlife until the 21st century is forthcoming: Martijn Icks, *The Crimes of Elagabalus. The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor*, London 2011.

[2] Martin Frey: *Untersuchungen zur Religion und zur Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal*, Stuttgart 1989.

[3] Arnaldo Momigliano: *Settimo contributo alla storia degli studi classici e del mondo antico*, edizioni di storia e letteratura, Rome 1984, 32-33.

*Martijn Icks*

issn 16

**Shortly after Martijn Icks' review in *Sehepunkte* appeared one by Mary Beard in *TLS*, together with a number of comments on that review posted to the *TLS* online website. Those comments are cited in a later entry to this file.**

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Review 2: Mary Beard, in TLS:

[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/article7172119.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article7172119.ece)

From **The Times Literary Supplement**

February 23, 2011

### The most decadent Emperor of all

#### Is it possible to find out the truth about Elagabalus, teenage despot of Rome?

One of the most striking paintings on show at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition in 1888 was a vast canvas by Alma-Tadema: “The Roses of Heliogabalus”. It depicts a notorious dinner party supposed to have been given by the Roman Emperor now more often known as “Elagabalus”. The Emperor himself (his features carefully copied from a bust in the Capitoline Museum in Rome) reclines with his chosen dinner companions at a high table; they are all watching in apparent fascination, as vast quantities of rose petals cascade down over the less important guests reclining at the tables below. At first sight, it is a classic scene of Roman extravagance. But, for those who knew the stories of the depravities of the Emperor Elagabalus, who ruled the Roman world between 218 and 222 AD, it was something much nastier. For this must be his notorious dinner party at which, according to one Roman writer, so many flower petals were released from the ceiling that “some guests were actually smothered to death, being unable to crawl out to the top”. The Emperor and his friends are, in other words, enjoying the spectacle of a weird and ingenious murder (or, on a more generous interpretation, of a clever trick that is about to go fatally wrong).

Many of the Victorian audience would have known the stories of this extraordinary emperor, who was not only a byword for lust and depravity, but for religious obsession too. Ancient writers linger over tales of his sexual excesses, including his marriage to a Vestal Virgin as well as to a boy-charioteer called Hierocles. They offer a whole litany of his extravagant dining practices, from his colour-coded dinners (one day all the food was green, on another it was blue) to his passion for delicacies that were perverse even by Roman standards: he liked camel heels, cocks-combs plucked from living birds, and insisted on never eating fish when he was by the sea, but only inland; and word had it that he fed his horses on grapes brought from Apamea, hundreds of miles away on the other side of the Mediterranean, and his dogs on goose livers (which is more or less the ancient equivalent of contemporary claims that the Queen’s corgis eat out of silver doggy bowls). Ancient writers also decry his fixation on the cult of the Syrian sun god Elabagal (**from which his own name derived**), and **his plans to turn the worship of this disconcertingly “Oriental” deity into the one and only official religion of Rome.**

These were familiar stories in the nineteenth century; familiar enough, in fact, for the Emperor to earn a casual mention in the Major-General’s song in *The Pirates of Penzance*: “I quote in elegiacs all the crimes of Heliogabalus”. And it was probably a common awareness of Elagabalus’s

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monstrosity that caused the slightly awkward reception that greeted Alma-Tadema's painting in 1888. Reviewers of the exhibition praised its technical expertise and marvellous use of colour. They were less certain about the "curious" subject matter: "the selection of such a scene for artistic treatment", observed one, "may be open to criticism". But not everyone felt that way. The painting was bought by John Aird, engineer, art collector and newly elected Tory MP for Paddington: a contemporary engraving shows this scene of third-century sadism hanging proudly in his drawing room, making an unlikely backdrop to the domestic activities of his wife and daughters.

Elagabalus is not now such a household name, even among professional classicists. This is partly because of the era in which he lived. The third century AD, with its baffling succession of short-lived emperors, repeated coups and mutinies, gets relatively little attention in either popular or scholarly literature. And it is partly because - unlike the villainies of the first-century emperors, Caligula, Nero or Domitian, which were memorably charted by such "classic" Roman authors as Tacitus and Suetonius - the misdeeds of Elagabalus have been transmitted by ancient writers who are now little known outside the university lecture room (and, honestly, not even particularly well known there).

Many of the most intriguing anecdotes of his crimes (including the story behind the painting) come from a strange semi-fictional "biography" of Elagabalus in the series of emperors' lives, from Hadrian to the joint rulers Carinus and Numerian at the end of the third century, known as the Augustan History. These lives purport to be the work of a group of six different writers at the beginning of the fourth century AD, but they are now thought to be an extravagant historical confection written by a single author a hundred or so years later, some time in the fifth century. Other stories, including the Emperor's plans for a sex-change operation (which would have been the first in recorded human history), are drawn from Byzantine excerpts from Cassius Dio's History of Rome. Dio was a Roman senator, who lived through the reign of Elagabalus, though he was not at that period in Rome itself and so cannot - as Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado insists in his new study, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or fiction?* - count as an eyewitness of whatever was going on in the capital. The surviving portions of Dio's vast History, which originally covered the story of Rome from its foundation to his own day, are not particularly admired or much read; the parts that are known only through medieval quotation (and that includes his account of the early third century) are even less so.

But, of course, hard-headed modern historians have also chosen to "forget" Elagabalus simply because his reported misdeeds seem so unbelievable. So far as we can tell, he came to the throne at the age of fourteen (his succession engineered with the help of a claim that he was the illegitimate son of the Emperor Caracalla). The idea that he could have had three "legitimate" wives, including the Vestal Virgin, plus Hierocles, before the age of eighteen (when he was murdered in a palace coup, instigated by his grandmother and the Praetorian Guard) is wildly implausible. So, too, are most of the tales told of his mad dinner parties. Did he really serve 600

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ostrich brains all at one meal? Or raise a laugh by feeding his less distinguished guests with wooden models of the food that was being eaten at the high table? (At least it would have been better than dying under the flower petals.) Also implausible are many of his reported political and religious schemes, from his putative establishment of a senate for women to his **mass campaign of child sacrifice**. By comparison with all this, Nero's murder of his mother or Caligula's threats to make his favourite horse a consul hardly raise an eyebrow.

Through the twentieth century, film and fiction have taken an occasional interest in the mad Emperor. Louis Feuillade's 1911 movie *L'Orgie romaine* featured a (to us, rather tame) version of an Elagabalan banquet, complete with the lions that the Augustan History claims were let in from time to time, to terrify the guests. Taking a softer view, Alfred Duggan's novel *Family Favourites* (1963) presented a more sympathetic picture of the "misunderstood" Emperor, through the eyes of a rugged German member of the Praetorian Guard. The TLS reviewer at the time (Harold Beaver) reacted much as many critics of the Alma-Tadema painting had done almost a century earlier: "Elagabalus was long a favourite of the romantic imagination . . . . But why bring him back on to the stage? Why, for his latest novel, does Mr Duggan turn to this youth in his silks and jewels from the Middle East?"

The most interesting academic studies of the Elagabalan tradition in recent years have steered clear of questions of truth or falsehood in the ancient accounts of this eccentric emperor. **There is one rather austere German attempt, by Martin Frey, to try to make some sense of the Emperor's religious "policy" (if he had one).** But otherwise, **embracing rather than rejecting the exuberant fictionality of the narratives of his reign, modern commentators have concentrated instead on the ways that "Elagabalus" (as an imaginative construct, rather than a real emperor) exposed the anxieties of Roman culture, imperial power and politics.**

So, for example, the story of the deadly flower petals points to the inevitable ambivalence of any emperor's generosity - as potentially destructive as it is benevolent. The stress on Elagabalus's obsession with the Syrian cult of the sun raises questions about cultural and ethnic identity at the heart of the Roman Empire. Rome was unusual in its readiness to incorporate into its central power structure some of the most "foreign" traditions of its far-flung imperial territories. By the second century AD, for example, emperors could come from Spain or North Africa.

But just how foreign could they be? Elagabalus was not only a devotee and priest of a Syrian god: he was also a Syrian by ancestry. How far, these stories ask, can a Syrian be Roman? And are there limits to the cultural and gender transgression of a Roman emperor? In popular accounts, Nero had already pressed at these boundaries with his parade of a "marriage" to his boyfriend Sporus. But can Rome accommodate - as Dio by implication asks, in his story of the sex change - an emperor who asks physically to become a woman, in the sense of having a vagina made for him? **The point about Elagabalus is not, then, how far the tales told about him are true or false, but what they reveal about the cultural sub-structure of Roman power, and its discontents.**

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De Arrizabalaga y Prado, in *The Emperor Elagabalus*, is not much interested in cultural constructs of this kind; he is concerned instead to get back to the “facts” about Elagabalus. Was he, or was he not, the monster that the ancient literary accounts of his reign suggest? This is not a new type of project. There is a long tradition of modern historians’ reexamining the villains of the Roman imperial world. The usual tactic is to point to the evidence in (for example) inscriptions or papyri, which appears to show that good administrative decisions were being made at the same time as literary accounts suggest that the Roman court was just one big orgy of sex and killing - and then to argue either that the emperor in question was not half as bad as he was made out to be, or that the imperial civil service kept things ticking over anyway, so that it did not much matter who was on the throne. De Arrizabalaga y Prado has a more ambitious project than this, and a much stronger commitment to distinguish truth from falsehood and to pinpoint the “singularity” of this particular emperor.

In the course of this, **he scores a few sharp hits**. So, for example, reviewing the way that the Emperor’s name appears in surviving documents, he stresses that (despite the claim in the Augustan History and modern usage) he never, officially at least, took the name of his god Elagabal. He was known under various names, most commonly Sextus Varius Avitus Bassianus, from his legal father, or Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, reflecting his supposed paternity from the Emperor Caracalla. “Elagabalus” (and even more so, “Heliogabalus”) is tendentious invention. And so, notwithstanding the familiar “Elagabalus” of the book’s title, he appears throughout as “Varius” or “VAB” (from Varius Avitus Bassianus).

De Arrizabalaga y Prado also brings into the picture a variety of documents usually overshadowed by the lurid stories of the reign’s excesses. These include a papyrus letter from Roman Egypt, which may incorporate Elagabalus’s reasons for the divorce of one of this terrible (or unfortunate) teenager’s three female wives, possibly the Vestal Virgin; the writer of the letter appears to be suggesting, unsurprisingly perhaps, that the Praetorian Guard was unhappy with the marriage.

So far so good. But, in trying to tell fiction from fact, *The Emperor Elagabalus* goes to almost ludicrous lengths, **pouring out with the bathwater almost everything worth treasuring in the stories of the Emperor** - before letting some very strange fiction back in. There are already hints of this in the early chapters, where de Arrizabalaga y Prado lays out in detail the specific criteria that any historical claim would have to fulfil in order to pass his test for “facts”. His two basic points are, first, that historiography alone can hardly ever count as a fact, unless it is backed up by artefactual evidence (trust the coin or the inscription, in other words, not the accounts that Roman historians have transmitted to us); and, second, that public documents are more reliable than private documents, as it is much harder to tell a bare-faced lie in public than in private (not something that we have noticed in the politics of the past couple of decades).

These rigorous tests are then applied to the whole gamut of claims, assertions and allegation about Elagabalus. In a long appendix of fifty pages (did no one in Cambridge University Press, which

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produced this handsome book, try to stop this waste of paper?), the author lists every proposition on the Emperor and his immediate family that he has extracted from the literary sources, 840 in total: for example, “42. VAB’s beauty attracted attention”; “286. VAB castrated himself to join the cult of Cybele”; “413. VAB’s husband was Hierocles”, and so on. Of these 840 propositions, he comes to the conclusion that twenty-four are true, forty-three virtually true, thirteen are false, sixteen matters of opinion only, and that the overwhelming majority, 744 of them, are unverifiable - including numbers 42 and 413. Number 286, on the castration, is rejected as false because some coin portraits of Elagabalus show him with a beard, and, for de Arrizabalaga y Prado, an artefact always trumps a text.

This is a blinkered, if not plain silly, approach to historical evidence and to what might count as a “fact” about a teenaged, puppet emperor in the early third century (as the 744 propositions that fall into the “unverifiable” category show). To some extent, de Arrizabalaga y Prado knows this. At one point, he graciously acknowledges a letter sent in response to his findings by John Crook (an expert in Roman Law and one of the most acute and sensible ancient historians of the second half of the twentieth century). Crook had obviously been given a preliminary version of de Arrizabalaga y Prado’s “theory of knowledge and method of enquiry”. And “in response to my point that, for the vast majority of actions and passions ascribed to Varius by his ancient historiographers, there is no artefactual evidence, he [Crook] wrote in the margin of my missive: ‘Nor is there for the battle of Salamis’”. De Arrizabalaga y Prado’s response is that he has not yet tried his method on the Battle of Salamis. But Crook’s message was surely that assembling a vast checklist of “don’t knows” cannot be the way forward in helping us to understand this, or any, period of history.

In fact, even de Arrizabalaga y Prado does not sustain the hard line throughout the book. By the end, never mind the fierce criteria for “fact” that he has laid out, he allows himself to indulge in all kinds of speculation. As he explains, his whole project on Elagabalus started in the attempt to write a novel, and it was only later that he found himself deflected to the nuts and bolts of the history of the reign. In the chapter explicitly entitled “Speculation”, that fictional origin shows through. In trying at last to construct a story that goes beyond all the “don’t knows”, de Arrizabalaga y Prado resorts to weaving together a narrative to make sense not only of the traces he detects in the artefacts, but also of some of the unreliable allegations of the historical tradition. He paints a picture of the growing awareness of the boy emperor, who soon comes to realize that the story that he is the illegitimate son of Caracalla is just that - a story, concocted by his relatives to ease him on to the throne. Now without that legitimation for his rule (and shocked by all the lies told about him by his grandmother especially), he searches for a new way to brand his reign, and his right to the throne. This he finds in his role as priest in the Syrian cult of Elagabal. His devotion to the cult had originally been “a tactic of adolescent rebellion in pursuit of personal freedom”; it now becomes a strategy of leadership.



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To be fair, Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado frankly admits that this is an exercise of the imagination. **But a sceptical historian who cannot sustain his scepticism is even worse than one who was gullible all along.** In this case, if I must choose between the different fantasies woven around Elagabalus, I would prefer the ancient fantasies of Dio and the Augustan History. If I must choose a “picture”, I would prefer Alma-Tadema’s luxuriant and deadly roses.

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado

THE EMPEROR ELAGABALUS

Fact or fiction?

420pp. Cambridge University Press. £60 (US \$99).

978 0 521 89555 2

**Mary Beard** is Classics editor of the TLS and teaches Classics at the University of Cambridge.

**Shortly thereafter, Leslie Croxford replied to Mary Beard’s review of EEFF:**

From **The Times Literary Supplement**

March 16, 2011

## Letters to the Editor

### Elagabalus

Sir, - In her [review of \*The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or fiction?\*](#) by Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado (February 25), Mary Beard shows laudable concern for not wasting paper but chooses the wrong target. She attacks an Appendix in the book for distinguishing true, false and unverifiable assertions from ancient discourse about this emperor. Yet she squanders the first nine paragraphs of her review retailing yet again the tired old farrago of fantasies about “Elagabalus”, and spends the rest maintaining, perversely, that it is unnecessary, in a work of history, to distinguish fact from fiction.

Professor Beard cites as implausible, given the Emperor’s death by the age of eighteen, the ancient assertion that he had three wives. Yet, as Arrizabalaga y Prado’s book shows, the assertion is true. Moreover, Beard should not find it implausible, since Roman marriage at that level was political, and at fourteen this emperor could be, and indeed was, officially, albeit exceptionally, considered an adult. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction and often more interesting. And what is especially interesting about the book, but not mentioned in Beard’s review, is what it does with propositions about the Emperor that it can prove are true, no less than with those that are likely to be so.

New, and crucially important, is its challenge to the orthodox view that this emperor, born and brought up in Syria, was ignorant of Roman culture and sought to impose on Rome the monotheistic worship of his local Syrian god, Elagabal, to the exclusion of the Roman state religion. The

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orthodoxy thus holds that fanaticism, together with eccentric personal behaviour, led to his downfall. Arrizabalaga y Prado argues, on the contrary, that on the basis of the evidence he was more likely to have been born and brought up in or near Rome, to a highly Romanized Syrian family, and didn't travel to Syria till after he was ten years old. He honoured standard Roman deities. Nor was the cult of Elagabal monotheistic.

This emperor's downfall is therefore less likely to be due to his supposed religious policy, or his alleged (but unverifiable) eccentric behaviour, than to dynastic rivalries within his family, and to his personal aspirations.

Mary Beard calls the author's discussion of possibilities and likelihoods "very strange fiction" from a "sceptical historian who cannot sustain his scepticism" and is thus "even worse than one who was gullible all along". This is unacceptable since speculative judgement, where specifically factual evidence is lacking, is plainly part of the historian's task. Furthermore, the author's speculation is clearly identified as such, separate from sections about fact, and carefully informed according to the rigorous standards of evidence and argument that he painstakingly sets out.

Professor Beard considers that the "most interesting academic studies of the Elagabalan tradition in recent years have steered clear of questions of truth or falsehood in the ancient accounts of this eccentric emperor". Her declared sympathies, or prejudices, are thus for discourse over history, and prevent her from seeing, let alone admitting, the value of a work of history, which she denigrates with mockery and distortion.

It would be more illuminating to consider the meaning of this emperor's having had three wives in the light of the knowledge that he did, rather than assuming it to be a fiction.

LESLIE CROXFORD

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**After publication in TLS of Leslie Croxford's reply, I prepared, for circulation to a limited circle of interlocutors, the following:**

### **Notes on the EEFF Controversy.**

*EEFF* has so far received two reviews, one in *Sehepunkte*, the other in *TLS*. The latter has ignited a controversy. In case you are not yet aware of the controversy, but may be interested to know of it, let me bring you up to date.

To do so properly requires me to talk about the past.

*EEFF* generated controversy even before it was written, let alone published. One of the readers' reports to CUP regarding its original proposal was favourable in principle, although it expressed doubt that I could forge a plausible understanding of this emperor alternative to 'the horror we all know and love'. It urged me towards the epistemological and methodological focus that came to dominate *EEFF*. The other report was overtly hostile, in principle, to the project as such. It adduced ostensibly

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academic objections, which, on close examination, showed ignorance of the subject matter and prejudice against the project. I wrote a spirited rebuttal to the hostile report, and enlisted the opinions of distinguished academics to counter it. *EEFF* was duly commissioned, written and published. The documents relating to that prior controversy are confidential, and will not be divulged here. I cite them, however, because they are referred to in the present controversy, which erupted after *EEFF*'s publication, in response to its second review. I shall come to this presently, but first let me address the first review. Although this has not generated public controversy, it contains some mistaken points of information that should be corrected, and opinions from which it is my privilege to differ.

The first review of *EEFF* to appear was published in English, in Germany, and is the work of a young Dutch academic, Martijn Icks, who has himself published a book, *Images of Elagabalus*, of which he kindly sent me a copy. Martijn and I have been in contact by correspondence for several years. Before sending him *EEFF*, I had sent him offprints of all the *Vorarbeiten* referred to in its text, and listed in its prolegomena. Martijn attended the Varian Symposium which I organised in Trinity College, Cambridge, in summer of 2005, and read a paper there, which is published on its website:

[http://www.couperusmuseum.org/varian/16\\_papers.html](http://www.couperusmuseum.org/varian/16_papers.html)

His review of *EEFF* was also published on a website, as follows:

<http://www.sehepunkte.de/2010/10/18108.html>

**(Omitted: the text of Martijn' Icks' review, quoted above: Review 1)**

Let me first express my thanks to Martijn for writing a review that addresses *EEFF* seriously. That is more than the second review, which has sparked the controversy, does.

I should, however, correct some mistaken points of information in Martijn's review of *EEFF*, and shall take the opportunity to differ from some of his opinions about it. Let me first address the points of information.

Martijn states that what he calls a 'diagram' - the chart of 840 propositions in *Appendix 2, Varian Propositions* - refers to articles I have published elsewhere. Because of this, it is supposedly of little use to the reader. This is mistaken on two counts. That chart does not itself refer to my articles published elsewhere, but rather to loci in the ancient texts in which those propositions are found. Where I do refer to articles of mine published elsewhere - the *Vorarbeiten* mentioned above - in footnotes to the main text of *EEFF*, throughout. I do so in the chapter entitled *Explosion*, with particular reference to *Appendix 2, Varian Propositions*, there elaborating - although Martijn claims I don't - on the arguments leading to my judgements of those propositions. Of course I do not elaborate in detail on all 840 propositions, but only on a sample thereof, in order to help the reader understand and use the criteria leading to my categorisation and judgement of the texts in question. Footnotes in that chapter refer to *Vorarbeiten* containing arguments for my categorisation and judgement of many more propositions. That understood, Martijn's complaint that, because these articles are published elsewhere, they are of little use to the reader, is also unjustified. It ignores the fact, not only that I had sent them all to him before, but that they are all online, and so are easily available to anyone who wishes to consult them, at IP addresses clearly indicated in the prolegomena to *EEFF*. Finally, with reference to that chapter and chart, and Martijn's review of them, he is mistaken in stating that "Only the 24 "true" and 43 "virtually true" propositions will be used to reconstruct the historical Elagabalus." At the end of *Explosion* I state that I shall not, in the subsequent chapter, *Constitution*, use historiographic propositions of whatever epistemological status to reconstruct the historical Varius, but shall instead do so with reference to artefacts such as coins, inscriptions, papyri, sculpture and architecture. In the next chapter, I keep my word.

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Another mistaken point of information in Martijn's review also has to do with my addressing, in fact, questions Martijn seems to think I don't address. Let me take these in turn:

How exactly did Elagabalus present himself as "priest-emperor"?

What can historically be known about Varius' self-presentation as priest-emperor, and what can plausibly be speculated, regarding his motives for so presenting himself, is a major theme throughout *EEFF*. The historical question is addressed in detail in the sub-chapters on coins and inscriptions within *Constitution*, as well in a sub-chapter in *Findings in Contexts*. In the latter, Varius' self-presentation is compared to that of other members of the Severan dynasty. In addition, the chapter entitled *Speculation* speculates at length on the motives behind Varius' choice to present himself as priest-emperor, and on what it may have meant to him and others.

To what extent did he envision a new religious order when he placed Sol Invictus Elagabal before all the Roman gods?

There is no evidence that he 'placed Sol Invictus Elagabal before all the Roman gods'. There is only historiographic allegation. What can be known of Varius' intentions in this respect, from the evidence of coins, inscriptions, and sculpture, is discussed in the relevant sub-chapters within *Constitution*. The artefactual evidence suggests, as I argue, that Varius did not envision any 'new religious order', but merely that he sought to establish his god within the Roman state religion. There is no artefactual evidence of any attempt to overthrow Jupiter as head of the Roman pantheon, while there is numismatic and epigraphic evidence of Varius' honouring the standard Roman deities, and worshipping them in the Roman manner. Passing beyond evidence, I speculate, in the relevant chapter, that Varius' choice to present himself as priest of Elagabal was motivated, not by religious zeal, but by dynastic and political considerations. And, in *Findings in Context*, I discuss Varius' religious activities in comparison with those of other Roman emperors, before and after him.

Why did he marry a Vestal virgin?

First of all, there is no evidence that he did so. This is only an historiographic allegation, or rather accusation, given its status as a crime. I point this out in the conclusion to *Constitution*, where I review some of the more important allegations about Varius that are borne out by evidence, and others that are not. Also, in *Speculation*, I discuss the political rationale behind Varius' four marriages to three women, and speculate as to why one of his chosen wives might indeed have been a Vestal, if in fact she were one.

The last two points of information, or rather Martijn's questions leading to my corrections thereof, reveal the fundamental difference between my approach to history and Martijn's. **As is shown by the form in which he frames his questions, despite exposure over many years to the radical scepticism of my approach to Varius, he still takes at face value, assumes as fact, and states or implies as propositions generating questions needing answers, the allegations, unsubstantiated by extant evidence, of the ancient historiographers. In so doing, without explicitly rebutting the rationale behind my approach, he perpetuates the uncritical habits of most writers on this subject. While he expresses irritation at the constraints of my approach, and characterises some of its results as uninteresting, he does not meet its arguments head on, disputing its epistemology or methodology. Neither does he adopt the position of the second reviewer of *EEFF*, that the facts about Varius are irrelevant, and in any case unknowable. Rather, he simply chooses to ignore the challenge I pose to the old way of writing history about Varius, and continues down the same well-trodden path.**

Now let me turn to differences of opinion.

Of Martijn's stated dissatisfaction with *EEFF*, I would say that it seems to hinge mainly on *EEFF*'s failure to indulge more in speculation than it does. Martijn explicitly prefers the chapter in which I

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speculate about Varius' birth and upbringing, and on their bearing on the motives behind Varius' behaviour as emperor, to those in which I establish facts and debunk fictions about Varius, or discuss the epistemology and methodology whereby I do so. Indeed Martijn says that he would have welcomed more speculation.

But that, in my opinion, is to miss the point of this book. It is strictly – too strictly in Martijn's opinion – focused on establishing what can be known about Varius, and on debunking the fiction built up around him by posterity. To do this, it is necessary to understand precisely how our knowledge of historical facts, and the difference between them and unverifiable allegations and outright fictions is constituted. Therefore *EEFF* is also strictly focused on establishing an epistemology and methodology that will allow one to accomplish its initial goal, separating fact from fiction about Varius, and, in the process, showing how to distinguish fact from fiction in any such case.

The primary purpose of *EEFF* is therefore historical, to discover what can truly be known about Varius, while its secondary purpose is epistemological and methodological, in the context of historiography: to show, in detail, in the light of a fully explained rationale, how to achieve its historical purpose. Therefore, far from being counterproductive to *EEFF*'s purposes of study, as Martijn claims, its epistemology and methodology, and the imaginative games it asks the reader to play, are very much to the point. They serve to show how and of what, exactly, our knowledge of Varius – and, by extension, of other ancient historical subjects - may be constituted.

Martijn's apparent lack of interest in epistemology and methodology may be what makes him find this method, and its products - the establishment of facts and the exposure of fictions - less interesting than speculation, which he welcomes. Or it may be that he realises that if he were to face head on, rather than ignore, the challenge to the usual way of writing about Varius posed by *EEFF*, he would have to revise much of his own work on this subject, where the distinction between fact and fiction about Varius is not always clearly drawn, as can be seen by how he frames his questions.

It is true that the facts that can be gleaned about Varius from a rigorous examination of the evidence are far less sensational and titillating than the fictions exposed, or even than some of the speculations to which texts and artefacts may lead one. But I would say, as a matter of opinion, that, to me, at least, the facts, such as they can be gleaned, and those speculations in which I have indulged, do seem to me more interesting than the 'farrago of pornography', as Syme called it, that constitutes most discourse about Varius, both ancient and modern. It is more interesting to me as an historian to speculate on what motivated Varius' behaviour as an adolescent emperor, formulating theories which can, to some extent, be deduced from facts known about his family circumstances, than to dwell on the lurid details of his erotic, ludic, sumptuary and convivial tastes and indulgences.

I do hope, however, to provide Martijn with some of the sort of speculation he craves in another quite different book: the historical novel I originally set out to write, and on whose composition I am now engaged.

Let me now turn to the second review, which has generated the controversy. Before I quote it, let me put it in an academic context.

As is clear from its title, if nothing else, *EEFF* distinguishes between fact and fiction regarding the twenty-third Roman emperor, commonly but wrongly known as Elagabalus or Heliogabalus. In so doing, *EEFF* treads on some toes, not least those of the 'discursivists'. That is my term for those who value 'discourse' over 'history'. Such people maintain that what matters about Ancient Greece and Rome is not what actually happened there and then, which is in any case unknowable, but what the Greeks and Romans said, so far as this can be gleaned from extant texts, about what happened there and then (or didn't happen, never mind). By extension, what is valuable about such texts is what

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ingenious interpretations – and so academic jobs - they may lead to, and what they may prompt us to imagine.

In my view (and, as shall emerge, that of others) this proposal of the value of the study of antiquity as ‘discourse’ rather than as ‘history’ is a strategy on the part of lazy, trendy academics, who can’t be bothered to do the hard slog of research into the nitty-gritty of coins, inscriptions, papyri, sculpture, architecture and the like, and prefer the comfort of discussing ever more abstruse interpretations of printed texts. Their proposal that the history of antiquity is unknowable – a proposal amply debunked by *EEFF* with regard to this emperor – serves, so they think, to justify their preference for embroidering further layers of interpretation, the more ingenious the better, on their ‘reception’ of printed texts surviving from antiquity, without bothering to question whether what those texts say is true or false.

The discursivists are currently, as a result of the unfortunate influence of Post-Modernism in British and American academia generally, over the last several decades, the dominant establishment in British Classics. This is not so, however, in Germany, where the nitty-gritty people still hold sway, though they too have to fight off Postmodernists. They seem to do so more successfully than does the academic establishment in Britain and America.

Doyenne of the discursivists in British Classics is Mary Beard, a fellow of Newnham College, Cambridge, and a Professor of Classics in Cambridge University. She writes a ‘Don’s Diary’ in *TLS* and does their reviews of books in Classics and related subjects. She did one on *EEFF*:

[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/the\\_tls/article7172119.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/the_tls/article7172119.ece)

**(Omitted: the text of Mary Beard’s review quoted above: Review 2)**

There is a backlog of contact (purely verbal, I hasten to add, in view of her public claims regarding her extensive and far flung sexual experience) between Mary Beard and myself, informing her hostility to me personally, and lurking behind the ostensibly purely academic tone of her review. I have no idea what caused her hostility to me, but it was evident right from the first time I attempted to contact her.

I was prompted to do so by an interlocutor in the early stages of my research on Varius, Jeremy Maule, a Fellow of Trinity in English. At that stage, in the late 1990’s, I had not yet clearly distinguished in my mind the difference between fact and fiction regarding Varius. Jeremy helped me to do so, leading eventually to the conception of two distinct studies: one, progressing through the *Vorarbeiten*, and culminating in *EEFF*, on the historical Varius; another, embodied in the proposal for EHML, on the protagonist or avatar of Varius’ legendary or mythological *Nachleben*. Jeremy suggested I contact Mary Beard and ask her help, saying that she had told him that Elagabalus was one of her favourite emperors.

Just as I did with others in Cambridge, including Ted Buttrey, Dick Whittaker, Joyce Reynolds and John Crook, who turned into valuable interlocutors for *EEFF*, I sent Mary Beard (actually left at Newnham Porters’ Lodge) a note outlining the nature of my project, and asking for a meeting with her to discuss it. She declined, citing family obligations. On my next visit to Cambridge – I used to spend a fortnight at a time there, during vacs, using the UL and seeing interlocutors – I tried again, leaving a note suggesting possible times for a meeting. This got no response, but Jeremy told me that she had complained to him that I was stalking her. The absurdity of this is obvious to anyone who knows me. I desisted, and found other people to help me, most generously on their part. Years later, at a Classics conference in Glasgow, I was giving a pre-publication presentation relating to *EEFF*, and, as she was there, I invited her to come. She did not decline, but did not come.

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I can only speculate that her initial hostility to me was predicated on the fact that I was doing a study of one of her favourite emperors, and that she therefore felt that I was poaching on her territory. She cannot, at that early stage, have known that I would adopt a 'positivist' or 'sceptical' approach to ancient history, or that I would challenge her discursivist approach, since I did not know this myself. Anyway, I took her hostility in my stride, and the fact that her review was hostile was no surprise to me. I was expecting something of the sort, and only wondered what line of attack it would take. I was surprised only by how flimsy it was, and how easy to rebut.

It prompted a number of comments posted online in the requisite boxes at the bottom. The first, by one Charles Hedges, is most intriguing:

### **Charles Hedges wrote:**

I challenge Mary to investigate why this book was published by CUP, and what the readers' reports said.

February 23, 2011 4:24 PM GMT on [community.timesonline.co.uk](http://community.timesonline.co.uk)

This comment alludes to the readers' reports that led CUP to publish the book in the first place. It could, in the context, be taken as a defence in principle of *EEFF*, or at least of its publication, which Beard considers a waste of paper, by one who trusts the judgement of CUP in such matters. It does not necessarily imply direct knowledge of the contents of the readers' reports alluded to, or of the controversy that they embody. But ever since reading it, I have wondered how much, if anything, Charles Hedges knows whereof he speaks. My attempt to find out, in the first place, who he is, has turned up his protest online against the abolition of a chair in Palaeography at Kings' College, London, some time ago. Given that protest, he would seem to be someone who takes the 'nitty-gritty' approach to ancient history.

Following his online comment, an exchange of two more appeared, which shows why I tend to avoid using open online fora for serious academic discussion, since they so easily become a venue for such rubbish:

### **Lord Truth wrote:**

If Beards ceaseless proselytising for universal Latin teaching in schools ever becomes policy, this Roman dickhead will no doubt soon become a teenage role model. Indeed the thought occurs that he might be used as a reference point for all Roman emperors as there is an essential cheap superficial flashiness about them that is both juvenile and unthinking (what is the need for thinking if anything is possible) These are also the characteristics of the Hollywood film producer who has a similar power to make any fantasy real. I have written before about the dangers of too much involvement in the classical world on which Beard, in her works has thrown -by accident or design -a curious new light. It reveals a remarkably cheap heartless and essentially stupid world-a kind of ^Young Cons Gone Wild ^world where throwing bread rolls at each other has been taken to extremes. It may be necessary to investigate this world. To have it continuously thrust in our face as the Beardites want is another matter entirely

February 26, 2011 10:05 AM GMT on [community.timesonline.co.uk](http://community.timesonline.co.uk)

### **Edgar M wrote:**

@Lord "Truth": Too late. Elagabalus has now joined Alex DeLarge as a role model. Idiot.

March 1, 2011 7:48 PM GMT on [community.timesonline.co.uk](http://community.timesonline.co.uk)

After these, a further, serious comment appeared in this online forum:

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### Michael Johnson wrote:

Readers should know that there are many classicists who try very hard to explain the evidence without resorting to the (rather lazy) claim that most of it is made up, we can't know the 'truth' (note the quotation marks), and the only useful thing one can do with the ancient evidence is examine it for what it tells us about 'anxieties' and 'cultural constructs'. For example, we actually know quite a bit about the Syrian god Elagabal and the worship of that deity, enough at least to know that the claim that the sources' "stress on Elagabalus's obsession with the Syrian cult...raises questions about cultural and ethnic identity at the heart of the Roman Empire" does not do begin to do justice to the topic of this emperor and that deity. The book under review may or may not be good, but it at least appears not to be glib and uninteresting. I would add that the appendix in fact sounds useful.

March 11, 2011 4:55 PM GMT on [community.timesonline.co.uk](http://community.timesonline.co.uk)

What is interesting, and, to me, welcome, about this comment is that it is by someone who has not even read the book, but objects to the grounds on which Beard attacks it. He makes a point, about the laziness of the 'discursivist' approach, which I agree with, and also says that the appendix – N° 2, Varius Propositions – directly attacked by Beard as a waste of paper 'in fact sounds useful'.

That is precisely what was said to me by one of my interlocutors in the preparation of *EEFF*, Elke Krenzel, after its publication, but before any reviews had come to her attention. She engaged with and took seriously, but did not necessarily agree with, all my speculations about Varius. Fair enough. I am the first to admit that they are speculations, and so, subject to debate. But, in her view, the documentary thoroughness of *EEFF* – grudgingly admired by Martijn Icks, derided by Mary Beard – and in particular its detailed appendix establishing, analysing and listing propositions about Varius and their sources in the ancient historiography, was, for scholars, the most valuable part of the book. It was something they could use to help them in further research, which was always my intention in writing *EEFF*, and its appendices in particular. I was most gratified. So I am glad that someone else, Michael Johnson, whoever he may be, has also seen the potential usefulness of that appendix. I would encourage him to test his hunch by reading it, together with the rest of *EEFF*.

Now let me come to the most recent contribution, at this writing, to this controversy: a letter by Leslie Croxford, another of my interlocutors in working on *EEFF*, to the Editor of TLS:

### **(Omitted: the text of Leslie Croxford's reply to Mary Beard's review)**

This letter hits the nail on the head: it shows how Beard's lack of attention to fact has led her into a howler. It also shows why my approach to antiquity benefits both the study of history and that of discourse. Far from turning my back on ancient discourse, I study it closely, but sceptically, and thoroughly, in combination with material artefacts. Thus I consider the meaning both of history and of discourse in the light of their relation with each other.

Several of my interlocutors have told me that a bad review is good for sales, especially if it comes from a source some readers love to hate. This seems to be the case with Mary Beard, so I may hope that her review helps sales. My publisher tells me these are good, for an academic monograph, and have led CUP to decide on a second printing this year, and a paperback next.

Equally cheering is the fact that since *EEFF* is the focus of controversy, Varius is now in the public mind. Thus the principal objection to CUP's proceeding with commissioning *EEFF*'s sequel has now been overcome. *EHML, The Emperor Heliogabalus: Myth or Legend?* is proposed to focus precisely on discourse surrounding this emperor. It is to be an edited volume of multiple authorship, on the lines of *Reflections of Nero*. The objection to such a complex project was that, unlike Nero, nobody had heard of Varius. Well now they have. Steps are being taken, as I write, to reconsider the proposal, and



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find a co-editor more famous than myself to work with me. Such are the criteria of contemporary academic publishers.

And, to conclude this update on the controversy surrounding *EEFF*, it has also led to the possibility, likewise being considered now by CUP, of another multiple author volume. This would be one in which I would participate, directly addressing the questions about history and historiography raised by this controversy: What is the relationship between ‘Classics’ and ‘Ancient History’? What is the role of ‘history’ in ‘discourse’ and vice-versa? I shall be interested to hear from any of you who may wish to contribute either to *EHML*, or to this as yet uninitialled volume.

**After this initial set, a number of reviews appeared in various periodicals, mainly online:**

**Review 3: Markus Handy, for H-Soz-u-Kult**

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2011-1-088>

**Rezensiert für H-Soz-u-Kult von:**

Markus Handy, Institut für Alte Geschichte und Altertumskunde, Karl-Franzens-Universität Graz

E-Mail: <markus.handy @uni-graz.at>

Das vorliegende Buch von Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado behandelt eine der „bizarrsten Erscheinungen unter den römischen Kaisern“.<sup>[1]</sup> Das Bild des severischen Kaisers Elagabal (218–222) in der antiken Geschichtsschreibung wird von Grausamkeiten, Brutalitäten und Exzessen bestimmt und ist daher fast ausnahmslos negativ. Arrizabalaga y Prado stellt es sich deshalb zum Ziel, alles, was zu diesem Herrscher berichtet wird, auf seinen Wahrheitsgehalt zu überprüfen und die Fiktionen von den Fakten zu trennen.

Im ersten Teil („Exposition“, S. 1–24) bespricht Arrizabalaga y Prado die Ziele und Methoden seiner Arbeit und bietet auch eine Erklärung, warum er in seiner Studie konsequent die Hauptperson nicht mit seinem uns geläufigen Namen Elagabal, sondern mit seinem Geburtsnamen Varius nennt. Auch wenn es, wie Arrizabalaga y Prado richtig hervorhebt, keinen Beweis gibt, dass der Kaiser in seiner Regierungszeit tatsächlich Elagabal genannt wurde (S. 6f.), scheint mir diese eigenwillige Benennung methodisch keine wertvollen Denkanstöße zu vermitteln. Sodann gibt der Autor im zweiten Kapitel („Explosion“, S. 25–56) einen Überblick zu den literarischen Quellen über diesen Kaiser. Arrizabalaga y Prado verweist auf die einseitigen und oft der Topik verfallenen Darstellungen vieler Autoren. Von seiner Kritik bleibt auch Cassius Dio nicht verschont, dem hier sogar der Ruf als zuverlässiger Berichtersteller abgesprochen wird, zumal er während Elagabals Herrschaft nicht in Rom gewelt haben soll (S. 31f.). Streben nach Objektivität könne man auch bei Herodian, Sextus Aurelius Victor und dem Autor der *Historia Augusta* nicht feststellen, weshalb von den 840 Behauptungen, die Arrizabalaga y Prado zu Elagabal in den antiken Quellen findet, nur 24 tatsächlich als wahr und 43 als nahezu wahr einzustufen seien.

Das dritte Kapitel („Constitution“, S. 57–161) nimmt die Quellen nicht-literarischer Art wie Münzen, Inschriften und Papyri in den Blick, um aus ihnen Tatsachen zu diesem Kaiser zu gewinnen. Bei der Auswertung dieser Quellengattungen fordert Arrizabalaga y Prado ein gewisses Maß an Phantasie ein: Alle Berichte der antiken Geschichtsschreibung sollten vorerst vergessen werden, um somit die unzweifelhaften Fakten zu Elagabal herausfinden zu können. Sein Appell, die Gedanken von althergebrachten, die Historiographie dominierenden Klischees freizumachen, schafft aber noch kein neues Elagabal-Bild, denn die von Arrizabalaga y Prado präsentierten *res gestae*, quasi die Zusammenstellung all seiner in diesem Kapitel gewonnenen Erkenntnisse, bieten nichts, was nicht schon vorher bekannt war. Dass Mordtaten und Grausamkeiten kein Thema dieser *res gestae* sind, ist insofern keine Überraschung, als kaiserliche Münzen oder Inschriften eher nicht über Gräueltaten

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berichten, sondern der Überhöhung des Kaisers dienen. Sie sind somit vorrangig nicht als Quellen objektiver Geschichtsbetrachtung, sondern als probate Propagandamittel zu sehen. Dies war auch im Falle Elagabals nicht anders, so dass die am Ende dieses Abschnittes vorgenommene Bemerkung, dass nur die literarischen Quellen von den Ausschweifungen des jungen Kaisers berichten, keine neue Erkenntnis darstellt.

Im vierten Kapitel erörtert der Autor unter der Überschrift „Speculation“ (S. 162–259) die verschiedenen Motive, die hinter Elagabals Handeln gestanden haben könnten. Hier begibt sich Arrizabalaga y Prado auf ein Gebiet, für das ihm praktisch keine Quellenaussagen zur Verfügung stehen. Zum Thema der Kindheit und Jugend kann er aber zwingende Argumente dafür vorlegen, dass Elagabal seine frühen Lebensjahre im Kreise seiner Familie in oder in der Nähe von Rom verbrachte. Ansonsten ist aber die Gesamtintention dieses Abschnittes kritisch zu hinterfragen: Geradezu lähmend wirkt die immer wieder aufgeworfene Frage nach Elagabals angeblicher Abstammung von Caracalla und einer damit verbundenen Herausstellung seiner Person als möglicher Nachfolger. Zwar könnten Fragen dieser Art, wie der Autor zu Recht festhält (S. 189), in der späten Severerzeit offen diskutiert worden sein, dessen ungeachtet scheint mir aber für eine derartige Hypothese die Quellenevidenz zu dürftig zu sein. Überhaupt ist in diesem Kapitel immer wieder festzustellen, dass Arrizabalaga y Prado zu folgenschweren Annahmen neigt, die unser Handbuchwissen zu diesem Kaiser in Frage stellen, für die es aber keine oder nur eine unzureichende Quellengrundlage gibt; dazu gehören auch die leichten Zweifel, die er an der Paternität von Sextus Varius Marcellus, Elagabals biologischem Vater, erhebt (S. 194). Diese Vermutung ist in hohem Maße spekulativ und bietet daher auch keine weiteren Anregungen für eine sinnvolle Beschäftigung mit dieser Frage.

Das fünfte Kapitel („Findings in contexts“, S. 260–284) will den Stellenwert Elagabals, seiner Person und seines kaiserlichen Handelns im Hinblick auf die römische Kaiserzeit beurteilen. Hier hätte man einen genaueren Blick auf die historischen Veränderungen und den Charakter der Severerzeit erwartet, um die Regierungsjahre Elagabals besser einordnen zu können. Stattdessen begnügt sich Arrizabalaga y Prado mit einigen allgemeinen Bemerkungen zum Prinzipat als Herrschaftsform, zur severischen Familie und zur kaiserlichen Verwaltung, die allesamt kaum imstande sind, die Regierung Elagabals hinreichend zu bewerten. An dieses Kapitel schließen sich umfangreiche Appendices an (S. 285–360), die sich unter anderem der Frage widmen, wie Wissen überhaupt zustande kommt. Darüber hinaus bieten sie eine seriöse Aufstellung der Quellen zu Elagabal.

Sein Bemühen, Wahrheit von Fiktion zu unterscheiden, verleitet Arrizabalaga y Prado zu einem übertriebenen Misstrauen gegenüber antiken Autoren. Gesicherte Fakten zu Person und Herrschaft Elagabals ausschließlich in Inschriften, auf Münzen oder in Papyri zu suchen und dabei auf Aussagen bedeutender Historiker wie Cassius Dio ganz zu verzichten, erleichtert aber die Wahrheitsfindung nicht gerade. Ferner stellt Arrizabalaga y Prado einige wichtige Fragen bedauerlicherweise nicht: So fehlen Überlegungen zur Rolle des Militärs, das in der Severerzeit zu einem wichtigen Garanten der kaiserlichen Macht geworden war. Die Militäraufstände, die Elagabals Herrschaft stark gefährdeten, werden kaum erwähnt; eine Analyse seiner Heerespolitik gerade vor dem Hintergrund der Maßnahmen des Septimius Severus und des Caracalla bleibt aus. Auch andere grundlegende Themen wie das Funktionieren der Reichsverwaltung in Elagabals Regierungsjahren werden nicht angesprochen; hier hätten sich etwa Appendices mit einer Aufstellung der unter Elagabal bezeugten senatorischen und ritterlichen Beamten angeboten. Auch wenn diese Arbeit kaum zu einer weiteren Diskussion über Elagabal anregen wird, besteht ihr Wert immerhin doch darin, all die verstreuten Nachrichten zu diesem Herrscher gesammelt und aufbereitet zu haben.

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Anmerkung:

[1] Matthäus Heil, Elagabal, in: Manfred Clauss (Hrsg.), Die römischen Kaiser. 55 historische Portraits von Caesar bis Iustinian, 2. Aufl., München 2001, S. 192–195.

**Zitierweise** Markus Handy: Rezension zu: Arrizabalaga y Prado, Leonardo de: *The Emperor Elagabalus. Fact or Fiction?* Cambridge u.a. 2010, in: H-Soz-u-Kult, 07.02.2011, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/2011-1-088>>.

Translation:

The submitted book by Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado deals with one of the most ‘bizarre figures among the Roman emperors’ (Matthäus Heil, Elagabalus, in Manfred Clauss (ed.) *The Roman Emperors, 55 Historical Portraits from Caesar to Justinian*, 2nd Ed. Munich 2001, p. 192.195). The depiction of the Severan emperor Elagabalus (218-222) in ancient historiography is marked by cruelities, brutalities, and excesses and is therefore almost without exception negative. Arrizabalaga y Prado sets himself the goal to submit all that ever been said about this ruler to verification and separate the fiction from the fact.

In the first part (Exposition, p. 1-24) AyP sets out the goals and methods of his work and also offers an explanation of why he does not throughout call its main character by the name Elagabal that has come down to us, but by his birth name, Varius. Even though, as AyP correctly stresses, there is no evidence that this emperor during his reign was ever called Elagabal, (p. 6f.), this obstinate nomenclature seems to me to provide nothing methodically valuable to think about. Next the author in his second chapter (‘Explosion’ p. 25-56) gives an overview of the literary sources for this emperor. AyP refers to the one-sided and often detrimental to the topic descriptions of several authors. Not even Cassius Dio is spared his criticism, for he is denied the status of a reliable reporter since he is supposed not to have been in Rome during Elagabalus’ reign (p. 31f.). Neither can striving towards objectivity be vouchsafed of Herodian, Sextus Aurelius Victor, and the author of the *Historia Augusta*, since of 840 propositions in the ancient sources AyP finds only 24 to be facts and 43 virtual certainties.

The third chapter (Constitution, p. 57- 161) takes sources of non-literary sort such as coins, inscriptions and papyri into view, in order to derive facts about this emperor from them. In the analysis and evaluation of these sorts of sources, AyP proposes a particular exercise of imagination: all accounts of ancient historiography should be discounted, in order to be able to discern the indubitable facts about Elagabalus. However, his call to free oneself from the ideas derived long since from the historiographically dominant clichés does not provide a new picture of Elagabalus, since his *res gestae* – the collection of all the facts found in this chapter - presented by AyP, offer nothing that was not known before. That murders and cruelties are no theme in these *res gestae* is no source of surprise, since neither imperial coins or inscriptions speak of such horrors, but rather serve to praise the emperor. They are therefore not to be considered as objective sources of historical fact, but as means of propaganda. This was no different in the case of Elagabalus, so that the remark, at the end of this section, that only the literary sources speak of the eccentricities of the young emperor provides no insight.

In the fourth chapter the author, under the title ‘Speculation’ (p. 162-259) discusses the diverse motives that may have stood behind Elagabalus’ behaviour. Here AyP enters a territory for which he practically has no sources at his disposal. On the subject of childhood and youth he can however put forward convincing arguments that Elagabalus spent his early years of life in the circle of his family in or near Rome. On the other hand the general intention of this section is to be critically analysed. The once again raised question of Elgabalus’ supposed descent from Caracalla and the thereto related

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presentation of his person as a possible successor has a thoroughly paralysing effect. Admittedly questions of this sort, as the author correctly maintains (p. 189) may have been openly discussed in the later Severan period, but that notwithstanding the source evidence seems to me too scarce for such a hypothesis. Mainly, in this chapter, it should yet again be stated that AyP inclines towards placing our Handbook Knowledge of this emperor in question, for which however there are none or only the slightest grounds in the sources. To this belong the slight doubts that he casts on the paternity of Sextus Varius Marcellus, Elagabalus' biological father. This suspicion is for the most part speculative and offers therefore no stimulation for a meaningful grappling with this question.

The fifth chapter (Findings in Contexts, p. 260-284) describes the status of Elagabalus, his Person and his imperial behaviour with regard to the period of the Roman empire. Here one might have expected a precise look at the historical changes and the character of the Severan period, in order better to place the reign of Elagabalus within it. Instead AyP contents himself with some general remarks about the principate as a form of rule, the Severan family, and the imperial administration, that altogether are not sufficient to situate the reign of Elagabalus thoroughly in place. This chapter is followed by substantial appendices (p.285-360) which among other things address the question of how knowledge comes to be. Apart from this, they offer a serious ordering of the sources on Elagabalus.

His endeavour to separate truth from fiction leads AyP to an overriding scepticism towards ancient authors. Secured facts about the Person and Reign of Elagabal can only be sought in inscriptions, coins or papyri, and therefore the statements of important historians like Cassius Dio are completely to be doubted. This however does not make finding facts any easier. Beyond this, AyP does not, unfortunately, raise some important questions: **Missing are consideration of the role of the military, which in the Severan period had become an important guarantor of the imperial power. The military uprisings, that severely endangered Elagabalus' reign, are hardly mentioned; an analysis of his military policy placed directly against the background of the measures of Septimius Severus and Caracalla is left out. Also other fundamental themes such as the functioning of the imperial administration during Elagabalus' reign are not addressed. He should have offered an appendix setting out the senatorial and knightly appointments made under Elagabalus.** Even though this work can hardly prompt further discussion of Elagabalus, its worth lies in the fact that it has brought together all the dispersed accounts of this ruler and processed them.

**Review 4: Plekos 13,2011,21–26 –**

<http://www.plekos.uni-muenchen.de/2011/r-prado.pdf> 21

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado: The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction? Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2010. XXXVIII, 381 S. £ 60.00, \$ 99.00. ISBN: 978-0-521-89555-2. Probris se omnibus contaminavit –"erbeflecktesichmits"amtlichenSch"andlich-keiten", weiß der sp"atantike Breviator Eutrop (8,22) u"ber den r"omischen Kai- ser Elagabal zu berichten. Varius Avitus Bassianus mit dem Thronnamen M. Aurelius Antoninus, allgemein bekannt als Elagabal oder Heliogabal (218–222 n.Chr.), geh"ort nach dem Zeugnis der antiken Quellen (vor allem Cassius Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta) zu den dekadentesten Pers"onlichkeiten auf dem Thron des Reiches. Eine systematische und umfassende Untersuchung sei- ner Regierungszeit und seiner Pers"onlichkeit in Form einer Monographie fehlte allerdings bislang.<sup>1</sup> Arrizabalaga y Prado widmet ihm nun eine eigene Studie. Erkl"artes Ziel ist es, die historische Pers"onlichkeit (im Werk als "Varius" bezeichnet) hinter der in den antiken Texten dargestellten, von Arrizabalaga als fiktiv angesehenen Figur ("Elagabalus") fassbar zu machen.<sup>2</sup> Das Werk gliedert sich in sechs Abschnitte: In "Exposition" (S. 1–24) wird die Methodik vorgestellt, in "Explosion" (S.25–56) soll der fiktionale Charakter Elagabal

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zertrümmert, in "Constitution" (S. 57–161) die "reale" Herrscherfigur Varius aus den epigraphischen und archäologischen Quellen aufgebaut werden; "Speculation" (S. 162–259) versucht eine Rekonstruktion der Persönlichkeit des Kaisers und seiner Motive, die in "Finding in contexts" (S. 260–284) in den zeitgenössischen Hintergrund gestellt wird. Methodisch wählt Arrizabalaga einen dezidiert skeptischen Ansatz: "No allegation of ancient historiography about this emperor is here considered true unless proven" (S. 3). Sein Zugang zur Person des Herrschers ist dezidiert der eines Nicht-Fachmanns. Dies äußert sich in einer etwas weitschweifigen methodischen Einleitung, die zahlreiche, für ein Fachpublikum selbstverständliche

1 Eine vorzügliche Studie seiner Religionspolitik legte Martin Frey vor: Untersuchungen zur Religion und Religionspolitik des Kaisers Elagabal, Stuttgart 1989 (Historia Einzelschriften 62). 2 Der Verfasser legt in seiner Studie großen Wert auf einige formale Eigenheiten (S. XXXV): So werden "facts" konsequent im Präteritum, "allegation or speculation" im Präsens ausgedrückt. Sind die Namen der Verfasser der Primärquellen (z.B. Cassius Dio) kursiv geschrieben, ist ihr Text gemeint, in nicht-kursiver Schreibweise ist die Rede von der Person des Autors. Angesichts der Bedeutung, die Arrizabalaga diesen Formalia gibt, ist es allerdings wenig konsequent, dass der Titel des Werks "Elagabalus" ist, mußte er doch, da die Studie die historische Persönlichkeit untersuchen soll, "Varius" lauten, zumal der Verfasser für Elagabal als "creature of fiction" ein weiteres Buch in Aussicht stellt (vgl. S. 3).

### Review 5: Antike und Abendland

#### Zu extrem für einen Römerfilm? Der Teenager-Kaiser Elagabalus

06. April 2011, 11:01 Uhr

Warum ist noch niemand auf die Idee gekommen, einen farbenprächtigen Film über Elagabal zu drehen, den aus Syrien stammenden Teenager, der von 218 bis 222 n. Chr. römischer Kaiser war? Ein früher Versuch ist genau einhundert Jahre alt (Louis Feuillade, *L'orgie romaine*). Mary Beard stellt im [TLS](#) eine neue Biographie vor. Als die Rede von 'spätromischer Dekadenz' noch mit klaren Vorstellungen verbunden war, malte der große Alma-Tadema 1888 [The Roses of Heliogabalus](#) und hielt dem viktorianischen England damit vor, was es mit Abscheu und Faszination zugleich sehen sollte: Bei einer Orgie läßt der Kaiser ein Gestöber aus Rosenblättern über die Gäste regnen. Sollte dies der Moment sein, in dem einige Gäste unter dem Blütenteppich begraben wurden und erstickten, wie es ein - allerdings wenig glaubwürdiger - antiker Historiograph berichtet? Die Rede über Elagabal erinnert auch daran, daß zur Romantik der Horror gehörte, daß die Antikebegeisterung eines Byron und das Monster des Dr. Frankenstein Zeitgenossen waren.

Elagabals Regierung läßt erkennen, was im Römischen Reich gut zweihundert Jahre nach dem Tod seines eigentlichen Begründers Augustus möglich war. Erstens: Es war kaum noch berechenbar, wer Kaiser wurde. Elagabals Vorgänger Macrinus hatte als erster Nicht-Senator den Thron bestiegen; die Soldaten spielten die allein entscheidende Rolle, und da es mittlerweile mehrere Krisenregionen an den Grenzen gab und die Truppen einen Kaiser wollten, standen bisweilen deren mehrere gegeneinander. Das war ein Kennzeichen der sog. Zeit der Soldatenkaiser, in deren früher Phase Elagabal regierte. Zweitens: Obwohl das Reich von einer in vielerlei Hinsicht einheitlichen Kultur geprägt war, spielten bestimmte Gegensätze und regionale Eigenheiten eine eher wachsende Rolle. Das galt zumal für die Religionen und Kulte. Und drittens: Solange der Kaiser persönlich sicher war, konnte er tun, was er wollte. Die immer wieder chaotische Kaiserrekrutierung ließ es kaum zu, jedem der

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Despoten das Ethos von Pflichtbewußtsein und Selbstkontrolle einzuimpfen, für das wiederum Augustus als Vorbild stand. Vieles kam, viertens, zusammen, damit die Besonderlichkeiten in der Überlieferung noch verstärkt wurden: Unkenntnis der hinter den Mauern des Hofes verborgenen Vorgänge, Tyrannentopik; eine Machtfülle, die den Schluß zuließ: Wer alles tun kann, tut auch alles, zumal gegen die Aristokratie, die keine Macht mehr hatte, aber immer noch einen Teil des Diskurses bestimmte; schließlich die kulturellen Gräben zwischen Rom im Westen, den Griechen und den 'Orientalen', die keine gemeinsame *paideia* teilten.

'Elagabal' hieß bei seiner Geburt i.J. 203 als Sohn von Sex. Varius Marcellus aus Apamea und Iulia Soaemias aus Emesa, einer Nichte der Kaiserin Iulia Domna, zunächst Varius Avitus Bassianus. 217 wurde er Priester des Gottes Elagabalus („Der Gott Berg“) in Emesa. Seiner Großmutter Iulia Maesa gelang es, daß eine syrische Legion den Halbwüchsigen am 16. Mai 218 als angeblichen Bastardsohn des Veters seiner Mutter Caracalla zum Kaiser ausrief. Der amtierende Kaiser Macrinus wurde von seinen Truppen verlassen, besiegt und getötet. Im Spätsommer kam der neue Kaiser, der nun Imperator Caesar Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Augustus hieß, in Rom an. Schon zuvor hatte er sich einschlägig eingeführt. Gibbon zitiert antike Berichte und stellt die Fronten klar: „Indessen vermittelte ein getreues Gemälde, das seiner Ankunft vorauseilte und auf seinen persönlichen Befehl über dem Altar der Victoria im Senat aufgehängt werden musste, den Römern das wahre aber unwürdige Ebenbild seiner Person und Lebensart. Er war dargestellt in seinem nach Art der Meder und Phönizier lose wallenden Priestergewand aus golddurchwirkter Seide, eine hohe Tiara deckte sein Haupt, und Edelsteine von unschätzbarem Wert schmückten seine zahllosen Halsbänder und Armreifen. Seine Augenbrauen waren schwarz gefärbt und die Wangen künstlich rot und weiß geschminkt. Die ernsten Senatoren bekannten seufzend, dass, nachdem sie lange Zeit die strenge Tyrannei ihrer eigenen Landsleute erduldet, Rom nun schließlich dem verweichlichten Luxus des orientalischen Despotismus unterworfen sei.“

Im Gepäck hatte er den Heiligen Stein aus Emesa, seinen bildlosen Gott Elagabalus, mit und begann sogleich, diesen Kult in der Hauptstadt zu etablieren. 219 heiratete er die vornehme Iulia Cornelia Paula. Die Regierungsgeschäfte leiteten seine Großmutter Maesa und seine Mutter Soaemias, unterstützt von P. Valerius Comazon, der trotz seiner niedrigen Herkunft 220 Konsul wurde. Zahlreiche andere Personen aus den unteren Schichten wurden ebenfalls von zu hohen Posten befördert. Schon Ende 220 begann Elagabal eine markante Religionspolitik: Sein Gott wurde zum obersten Gott des Reiches erklärt, der Kaiser selbst hieß offiziell „Höchster Priester des unbesigten Gottes Sol Elagabal“. Gibbon pflanzt das Banner der Aufklärung auf und faßt zugleich in Worte, was Alma-Tadema malen sollte: „Das einzig ernsthafte Geschäft seiner Regierung bestand in der Schaustellung seiner abergläubischen Dankbarkeit. Der Triumph des Gottes von Emesa über alle Religionen der Erde war das große Ziel seines Eifers und seiner Eitelkeit; und der Name Elagabal (denn als Oberpriester und Günstling erdreistete er sich, diesen heiligen Namen anzunehmen) galt ihm mehr als alle Titel kaiserlicher Größe. In einer feierlichen Prozession durch die Straßen Roms wurde der Weg mit Goldstaub bestreut; der schwarze, in Juwelen gefasste Stein stand auf einem Triumphwagen, den sechs milchweiße, mit prächtigen Schabracken geschmückte Pferde zogen. Der fromme Kaiser hielt die Zügel und schritt, gestützt von seinen Ministern, langsam rückwärts, um der Glückseligkeit der göttlichen Gegenwart fortwährend teilhaftig zu sein. In einem herrlichen, auf dem Palatin erbauten Tempel wurden die Opferfeierlichkeiten für den Gott Elagabal mit allem erdenklichen Aufwand und Pomp begangen. Die köstlichsten Weine, die ungewöhnlichsten Schlachtopfer und die erlesensten Spezereien wurden auf seinem Altar verschwenderisch dargebracht. Um den Altar vollführte ein Chor syrischer Mädchen zu den Klängen barbarischer Musik wollüstige Tänze, während die wichtigsten Persönlichkeiten aus Staat und Heer, in

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lange phönizische Tuniken gekleidet, mit gespielmtem Eifer und heimlicher Entrüstung die niedrigsten Dienste versahen."

Der Kaiser trennte sich von seiner ersten Frau, um eine Vestalin zu heiraten. Gegen das Verhalten des Kaisers regten sich in Rom heftige Proteste; besonders bei den Soldaten begann er jedes Ansehen zu verlieren. Das mußte tödlich enden. Maesa konnte ihren Enkel zwar noch überreden, seinen jungen Vetter Alexianus (= Severus Alexander) zu adoptieren und zum Caesar zu ernennen, die Ehe mit der Vestalin aufzulösen und eine Urenkelin Marc Aurels, Annia Faustina, zu heiraten, um sein Stellung dynastisch zu stabilisieren. Doch an seinem Gott hielt er konsequent fest. Und er suchte der Leitung durch Mutter und Großmutter zu entziehen: Noch 221 holte er seine zweite Frau, die Vestalin Aquilia, zurück. Den Soldaten aber war vor allem eine berechenbare Nachfolgeregelung wichtig. Seine Versuch, Alexianus zu töten, kosteten ihn und seine Mutter das Leben. Soldaten töteten ihn und warfen die Leiche in den Tiber. Unter den Severern gelang es nochmals, wenigstens eine Dynastie zu bilden und das Reich so zu stabilisieren.

Ein wirkmächtiges Urteil über Elagabal sprach Gibbon: Luxus ist (wir stehen am Beginn des Kapitalismus!) gut, aber Übermaß, Orient und verkehrte Welt sind schlecht: „Ein vernünftiger Wollüstling befolgt mit stetem Respekt die Mäßigkeitsgebote der Natur und erhöht den Sinnengenuss durch Geselligkeit, zärtliche Verbindungen und das sanfte Kolorit des Geschmacks und der Phantasie. Doch Elagabal, verderbt durch seine Jugend, sein Vaterland und seinen Reichtum, überließ sich mit unbändiger Raserei den rohesten Vergnügungen und empfand inmitten seiner Lustbarkeiten bald Ekel und Überdruß. Die aufreizenden Kräfte, ein bunter Wechsel von Frauen, Weinen und Speisen, ebenso wie die vielfältigen, ausgeklügelten Posen und Saucen sollten seine erstorbene Begierde wieder erwecken. Neue Formen und Erfindungen in diesen Künsten, die einzigen, die der Monarch pflegte und förderte, zeichneten seine Regierung aus und brachten seine Schande auf die Nachwelt. Mutwillige Verschwendung ersetzte den Mangel an Geschmack und Eleganz; und während Elagabal die Schätze seines Volkes in den wildesten Ausschweifungen verprasste, priesen er und seine Schmeichler eine Pracht und einen Geist, die seinen maßvollen Vorgängern fremd gewesen waren. Die Ordnung der Jahreszeiten und Landschaften zu verkehren, mit den Leidenschaften und vorgefassten Meinungen seiner Untertanen zu spielen und alle Gesetze der Natur und des Wohlanstandes mit Füßen zu treten, dies alles zählte zu seinen liebsten Vergnügungen. (...) Der Herr der römischen Welt öffte Kleidung und Sitten des weiblichen Geschlechts nach, zog den Spinnrocken dem Zepter vor und entehrte die höchsten Reichswürden, indem er sie unter seine zahlreichen Liebhaber verteilte, von denen einer öffentlich mit dem Titel und der Macht eines Gemahls des Kaisers oder wie er sich zutreffender nannte, der Kaiserin, bekleidet wurde."

Zeit für eine Ehrenrettung? Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado scheint das zu glauben. In der Tat sind einige der von Cassius Dio, Herodian und der *Historia Augusta* berichteten Exzesse eher unwahrscheinlich, die o. genannten wie auch weitere, vom massenhaften Kindesmord bis zum Servieren von sechshundert Straußengehirnen bei einem einzigen *convivium*. Doch eine Entscheidung ist nicht möglich, weswegen man mit Mary Beard sinnvoller fragt, wie derartige Ausmalungen aufkommen konnten: „Embracing rather than rejecting the exuberant fictionality of the narratives of his reign, modern commentators have concentrated instead on the ways that 'Elagabalus' (as an imaginative construct, rather than a real emperor) exposed the anxieties of Roman culture, imperial power and politics." In der Tat. Syrien gehörte zum Reich, aber konnte ein syrischer Gott im Mittelpunkt des römischen Kultes stehen? Latein sprechende Spanier, Nordafrikaner konnten Kaiser werden. Aber auch ein aramäisch und griechisch redender Syrer?

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**Doch der Autor des neuen Buches ist an solchen Fragen wenig interessiert.** Ihm geht es wieder um faktische Wahrheit. So trug 'Elagabal' diesen Namen offiziell wohl niemals. Auch das Machtgeflecht am Kaiserhof und die Rolle der Garde werden besser als bisher analysiert.

**Doch Mary Beard ist mit dem Ergebnis am Ende nicht glücklich.** Ein buchhalterischer Anhang listet über achthundert Behauptungen über den Kaiser und seine Familie auf, davon seien 24 wahr, 43 wahrscheinlich wahr, 13 nachweislich falsch, 16 Ansichtssache, die restlichen 744 nicht verifizierbar. „This is a blinkered, if not plain silly, approach to historical evidence and to what might count as a "fact" about a teenaged, puppet emperor in the early third century." Zumal deshalb, weil die überwältigende Zahl der nicht verifizierbaren Behauptungen den Autor letztlich zum Spekulieren verführe. Immerhin räumt dieser ein, er habe eigentlich einen Roman schreiben wollen. Womit wir wieder am Anfang wären: Warum gibt es keinen Film über Elagabal?

= Edward Gibbon: Verfall und Untergang des römischen Imperiums. Bis zum Ende des Reiches im Westen, Aus dem Englischen von Michael Walter. München (dtv) 2003. [Hier](#) das einschlägige sechste Kapitel des englischen Originals.

= Michael Sommer, Die Soldatenkaiser (Geschichte kompakt). Darmstadt 2004.

= Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, The Emperor Elagabalus. Fact or fiction? Cambridge 2010.

Veröffentlicht 06. April 2011, 11:01 von [Uwe Walter](#)

Abgelegt unter: [Historienfilm](#), [Kaiserzeit](#), [Dekadenz](#), [Elagabalus](#)

Kommentare

### tberger

06. April 2011, 13:23

Zur Rezeption nicht zu vergessen Gilbert&Sullivan's Meisterwerk "The Pirates of Penzance", wo der Major General behauptet "I quote in elegiacs all the crimes of Heliogabalus"...

### HansMeier555

06. April 2011, 17:27

Anmerkungen zu Elagabaal (auf Grundlage ausschließlich dieses Blogbeitrags):

1. Wirkliche Verbrechen hat er gar nicht begangen, die ihm mitunter zugeschriebenen Gewalttaten sind nicht glaubwürdig verbürgt.

2. Seine Missetat bestand nur darin, dass er das von Augustus erfundene Spiel, so zu tun, als existierte die Tugendrepublik immer noch, nicht mitspielte. Er beleidigte die Empfindlichkeit der altrömischen Römer durch sein fremdartiges Auftreten und die Geringschätzung ihrer Kulte wobei nicht ganz klar wird, inwieweit das auch als Provokation gemeint war.

4. An Politik im engeren Sinn war er offenbar nicht sehr interessiert.



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5. Die ihm zugeschriebenen Gewalttaten sind nicht seriös belegt und offenbar nur Gräuelpopaganda der Gegenpartei.

6. Völlig unklar bleibt, warum man ausgerechnet ihn zum Kaiser ausgerufen hat. Für einen Soldatenkaiser war er nicht sehr soldatisch. Wenn er aber nur eine Marionette sein sollte, warum hat man ihm dann die Party nicht gegönnt?

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7. Das populäre Bild des alten Rom wird immer noch von Autoren des 19. Jhs. geprägt, die ihre viktorianischen Moralvorstellungen auf die Antike applizierten. Nachrichten von Elagabals wilden Parties konsumierten sie mit pornographischer Wollust, welche sie dann mit moralischen Verdammungen in Schach halten wollten, wobei sie dann unfaßbaren Schwurbel produzierten: "Doch Elagabal, verderbt durch seine Jugend, sein Vaterland und seinen Reichtum..."

Die solches verzapften gehörten zur Generation, die ernsthaft geglaubt hat, man könne durch Masturbation erblinden.

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8. Warum es den Film nicht gibt? Ganz einfach, weil es überhaupt keine Filme mehr gibt bzw. weil selbst eine weniger hirntote Filmindustrie als die unsere für so etwas erst einmal eine gute Romanvorlage bräuchte, die es aber auch nicht gibt, weil die Romanautoren dafür gut erzählte Geschichtsbücher brauchen, die es aber auch nicht gibt, weil sich keiner mehr so recht daran versucht hat seit Gibbon, der aber 40 Jahre nach Abschaffung des § 175 niemandem mehr zumutbar ist.

### HansMeier555

07. April 2011, 06:38

Was wissen wir eigentlich über die politische Willensbildung innerhalb der Legionen "die den Kaiser bestimmten". Wer genau bestimmte da eigentlich was? Wenn so eine Legion (oder mehrere davon) sich zu politischen Subjekten mauserten, hatten sie dann auch eine Identität, eine Symbolik eine politische Ideologie?

Wie stark waren da die wirtschaftlichen Interessen, der Zugriff der Offiziere auf die in den jeweiligen Provinzen erhobenen Steuereinnahmen?

Die sensationspornographische Berichterstattung über das "unsägliche Treiben im Buckinghampalast" war wohl schon damals eher Ablenkung.

**I wrote to Antike und Abendland enquiring if the author of that review might be able to make the film about 'Elagabalus' about whose non-existence that author wondered:**

per Email an folgende Adresse

Ich bin der Verfasser des Buches über  
Elagabal, The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact  
or Fiction, das Sie in Ihren Artikel 'Zu

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extrem für einen Römerfilm? Der Teenager-Kaiser Elagabalus' erwähnt haben. Ich habe eine Synopsis für einen Film über diesen Kaiser geschrieben, und wäre interessiert sie zu verwirklichen. Haben Sie die Möglichkeit das zu realisieren?

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**Review 6: Steven D. Smith in American Philological Association:**

### The Evidence for Aelian's *Katêgoria tou gunnidos*

**Steven D. Smith**

In the *Lives of the Sophists*, Philostratos offers a tantalizing anecdote about a political invective, composed by the contemporary writer Claudius Aelianus, against a recently assassinated emperor. Aelian titled his invective the *Indictment of the Little Woman* (*Katêgoria tou gunnidos*), “for that’s what I call the tyrant who was recently killed, because he disgraced the Roman empire with his utter licentiousness” (VS624.22-625.2). The young emperor Elagabalus (r. 218-222), who came from Syria and was famously reviled for his effeminacy and licentiousness, fits well the assassinated tyrant to whom Aelian refers. Though the text of the *Katêgoria tou gunnidos* is generally thought to be lost (see bibliography), I suggest that certain fragments from the *Souda* on a “Syrian *hetaira*” or “Syrian mime” and known to be by Aelian (fr. 123Hercher; fr. 126a-e Domingo-Forasté) may be helpful in reconstructing Aelian’s diatribe against Elagabalus. Moreover, such a reconstruction, even while tentative, leads to a necessary re-evaluation of Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado’s rejection of the interpretation of Elagabalus by Dio Cassius. My argument works by a comparative analysis of Aelian’s individual fragments with the evidence for the life of Elagabalus offered by Philostratos’ anecdote, as well as by Dio Cassius and Herodian, the most important contemporary sources. In one fragment, for example, the behavior of this “womanish thing (*gunaion*) from Syria,” who debased the people to a “swinish and mad licentiousness (*aselgeian*),” fits Aelian’s description of the womanish tyrant (*gunnis*) who “shamed Roman affairs with his total licentiousness (*aselgeiai*)”: the fragment contains strong verbal echoes that resonate with Aelian’s remark in the anecdote of Philostratos’ VS, discussed above. The second fragment also says that its female/effeminate subject was known to be a courtesan who, “by means of posturing that was on display for all to see,” enticed “those who saw her to experiences of the body” (fr. 123.7-9 Hercher; 126b Domingo-Forasté). Dio, too, tells of how Elagabalus would wander the streets of Rome at night wearing a woman’s clothes and wig and visit taverns and brothels, where “driving out the courtesans, he would become the prostitute himself” (D.C. 80.13.2); eventually he even transformed the imperial palace itself into a brothel. The dangerous erotic enticement of the movements of the courtesan’s body in the fragment also fits with Herodian’s description of Elagabalus’ ecstatic ritual dancing in honor of the Sun God and the astonished reaction of his Roman onlookers (Hdn. 5.3.8-9; cf. D.C 80.11.2). I contend that these and other such parallels reveal Aelian’s fragments as echoing the anti-Elagabalan rhetoric both leading up to and following upon the emperor’s assassination in 222 CE.

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado nowhere mentions Aelian in his recent book, because the

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evidence of Aelian's *Katêgoria tougunnidos* did not meet his criteria for selection ("original proposal of distinct propositions about Varius or his avatar," p. 27) – Aelian never names Elagabalus/Varius explicitly. In an attempt to discredit Dio's historiographical thesis that the sexual depravity of Varius (the emperor's real name) was the primary cause of his overthrow by the soldiery, Arrizabalaga y Prado highlights an inconsistency in the perceived tolerance of the privately passive sexual behavior of Varius' predecessors, Severus and Caracalla. But Arrizabalaga y Prado, focused almost exclusively on the question of passive sexual penetration, does not consider the role that Varius' extreme effeminacy, his troublesome gender presentation, would have played in arousing the antipathy of the army; Severus and Caracalla were, by contrast, despite the rumors of sexual passivity, far more manly figures. Dio's narrative of the reign of Elagabalus is certainly full of distortions, exaggerations, and outright fiction. But the above fragments on the "womanish thing from Syria," reflecting the contents of Aelian's *Katêgoria tou gunnidos*, provide a strong contemporary corroboration of Dio's thesis. For Aelian, too, the emperor's effeminacy was the primary, or at least the easiest, target of his invective.

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### Review 7: Alexander Free in AHB Online Reviews

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?*

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. xxxvii + 381. ISBN 978-0-521-89555-2 (Hardback).

An accurate assessment of the life and reign of the priest emperor Elagabalus is always a difficult task. Due to his *damnatio memoriae*, material sources concerning his are rare, while ancient historiography despises him as an outrageous tyrant. In his recent study "The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction?" Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado (subsequently P.) faces these problems and attempts to examine all ancient sources relating to the predecessor of Severus Alexander thus aiming to distinguish the emperor's "character of fact" in his real name Varius from the "creature of fiction", Elagabalus (p. 2). The motivation for this approach is P.'s perception that modern scholars do not use the historiographical propositions on Elagabalus with sufficient critical

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scrutiny and objectivity \_ P. 's book is divided into five parts: an outline Of the development Of a theory and methodology for his inquiry (1-24); an examination Of the relevant historiographers focusing on Elagabalus (i.e., Cassius Dio, Herodian, the Historia Augusta, Aurelius Victor and the Epitome de Caesaribus) (25-56); an inquiry of the material sources that have survived the emperor's violent overthrow (i.e., coins, inscriptions, papyri, sculptures and archaeological sites) (57-161); a speculation about Elagabalus' childhood and the motives for his public actions (162-259); and observations of the final results in the context of the history of the Roman Empire, with particular emphasis on the Severan period (pp. 260-284). Supporting appendices including, inter alia, catalogues Of relevant coins, inscriptions and papyri, complete the study and provide the reader with useful information for further research. P. 's approach attacks the so-called "credulous assumptions" (p. 3) of modern scholars and demands evidence for historiographical propositions. According to him, historical truth, which should be the ultimate aim Of modern scholarship, can only derive from facts that ancient historiography is unable to provide. Instead, only archaeological evidence is capable of revealing facts and thus proving the allegations stated by ancient historiographers. Therefore, in his examination, P. gives priority to material rather than historiographical sources, since they provide the only access to the non-fictional character Of Elagabalus. However, although his method seemingly combines all relevant types of sources in a critical manner, it underestimates the value of ancient historiography. The aim Of the second chapter is to demonstrate the irrelevance Of ancient historiography for the detection Of factual evidence. In his examination Of the diverse intentions Of the relevant historians p. generally adopts the Current scholarly consensus on them. Thus he regards Herodian as an historical novelist, while the Historia Augusta is considered to be of no evidential value for the study of the person Of Elagabalus. Their assumptions, as well as those Of Dio, Aurelius Victor and the Epitome are evaluated through an apparatus constructed around several questions (pp 21; 294); the inquiry results in the clarification rhat most of the sources' propositions are unverifiable as factual evidence. P. is rightly skeptical about Dio's portrayal Of Elagabalus, but he fails to determine the essential point for his justifiable position. Dio's method Of inquiry, i.e., his confidence in the trustworthiness Of the or-dine accounts on Elagabalus provided by eye-witnesses (as Dio was absent from Rome during his reign), should not be regarded as the main point of criticism. Perhaps P. should have considered whether a potential impact Of Severus Alexander on the historian can be detected, since Dio reached the peak Of his career under this emperor and also wrote down his histories during his reign, while Elagabalus was deemed as a persona non gran P. also incorrectly assumes that ancient historiographers were unaware Of the difference between reality and fiction (p. 35). Thus P. misconceives both the ancient historian's source'S and methods Of inquiry and Din's potential personal intentions in regard to Severus Alexander, affecting his depiction of Elagabalus.

The third chapter reconstructs the emperor's persona entirely from archaeological evidence. The reader is therefore encouraged to accept P. 's assumption Of the irrelevance of ancient historiography and should embrace the notion that material sources provide the only available access to information about Elagabalus. Although P. occasionally has to make use of the historiographical evidence to aid his line of argument and therefore cannot keep up his intended approach throughout his entire analysis, he nevertheless gives an accurate Of most Of the relevant artifacts, concentrating in particular on the emperor's official nomenclature and presentation.

Brief summaries at the end of each section help to detect all crucial findings made by P., whose collection Of all types Of material sources is

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as laudable as it is enriching for further research on Elagabalus. Nevertheless, criticism must be made of p. 's occasionally far too superficial treatment of some of the material. For example P. is aware of the problematic classification of diverse busts identifying Elagabalus, Caracalla or Geta, but fails to discuss these instances in detail, thus depriving the reader of critical understanding of the matter. Instead of simply presenting all probable sculptures of Elagabalus without any commentary, he should have clarified his explanations by adding some examples regarding the above mentioned difficulties. I

The next chapter seeks to analyze the reasons for Elagabalus' behavior during his reign, emphasizing particularly his self-presentation as a priest, which is seen as the key to the understanding of his whole personality. For this purpose P. speculates about the emperor's priesthood, childhood and family relations in order to obtain an idea of his character. Contrary to his proposed approach he does not rely entirely on factual evidence, but utilizes the historiographical account as well, thereby proving his methodology inconsequential. Nevertheless, some aspects of his interpretation deserve mention: for instance, by analyzing two inscriptions P. succeeds in demonstrating that the child-emperor was probably born in or near Rome, instead of the Syrian Emesa. If p. 's conjecture is right, before the boy began his education as a priest for the Syrian sun-god in Emesa, he followed his mother Soaemias, who herself probably accompanied her husband and the real father of the later emperor, Sextus Varius Marcellus, through Britain and Rome. Less convincing however is p. 's interpretation of the boy's sacerdotal policy as an Cf. H\_B\_Wiggers, M. Wegner (edd.), *Gen Moo-inus bis Balbinus. ms Rdmische Berlin* pp. 107, 148, 150f, On the figures 1, 4, 13, IS, page 99 "adolescent rebellion in pursuit of personal freedom" (p. 243) which does not stand up to the ancient sources.

The last chapter briefly discusses the results of the inquiry and puts them into the wider context of the history of the Roman Empire. Once again there is an emphasis on the study's purpose to admonish modern scholars to utilize their sources more cautiously. This, together with the preference for material over historiographical sources, leads P. to the conclusion that the factual evidence clearly states that Elagabalus governed his empire in the same manner as his predecessors in terms of administration. p. also concludes that the historiographical are almost all unverifiable and a good number therefore outright fictitious.

In sum, P.'s book leaves the reader with conflicting impressions. His view of modern scholarship's uncritical approach to ancient sources is erroneous and perhaps more relevant to the research methods of the beginning to century than to current research tendencies. His methodology is inconsequential and takes on a far too extreme position in relation to ancient historiography. On the other hand he is the first author to collect and reprocess various sources concerning Elagabalus and lay them out clearly in the body of the text as well as in the appendices, thereby unquestionably enriching scholarly research and shedding new light on the emperor's childhood and priesthood.

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### Review 8: Carlos Noreña in *The Classical Review*.

ELAGABALUS DE ARRIZABALAGA Y PRADO (L.) *The Emperor Elagabalus. Fact or Fiction?* Pp. xxxviii + 381, ills, maps. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Cased, £60, US\$99. ISBN: 978-0-521-89555-2. doi:10.1017/S0009840X11003878

Roman historians grown weary of imperial biography may rest assured that A.'s book on Elagabalus – or rather Varius, as he insists on calling the emperor who ruled as M. Aurelius Antoninus – is like nothing they have ever read. While there are several conventional arguments here, and a few novel ones that deserve attention, these are largely overshadowed by A.'s frequent meditations on historical method, grand pronouncements on history, historiography and epistemology, and penchant for idiosyncratic and sometimes bizarre commentary.

The tone is set at the beginning, as A. launches into an extended methodological discussion and investigation into the nature of truth, Chapter 1, 'Exposition'. Embracing what he terms 'the sceptical assumption', in which no statement by an ancient author should be accepted as true unless it can be verified (usually by means of artefacts), A. promises nothing less than a new 'theory of knowledge' (p. 12); he even devotes the first of several appendices to this issue (pp. 285–93). What this interpretative stance actually means in practice is the rejection of nearly all ancient historiography as unsuitable for use as historical evidence. In order to demonstrate just how unreliable these texts are, A. identifies, in Chapter 2, 'Explosion', precisely 840 historiographical 'propositions' about Varius, organised in tabular form in a lengthy appendix (pp. 294–346), and ranging from the historically significant (e.g. that Varius was a priest of Elagabalus, proposition 34) to the incidental (e.g. that on the sea coast he never ate fish, proposition 582). Of these, we learn, only 67 are either 'true' (e.g. that Varius was made emperor, proposition 88) or 'virtual fact' (e.g. that Varius was killed in a military tumult, proposition 818), while 29 are either 'false' or 'statements of opinion'. The other 744 are simply 'unverifiable'. Armed with such data, A. offers up an 'explosion' of Elagabalus, that 'creature of fiction' and mythical 'avatar' of Varius (p. 25). The explosion of Elagabalus permits A. to 'reclaim' Varius, a 'character of fact', for history (p. 25), which he attempts in Chapter 3, 'Exposition'. The chapter is presented as a 'mental exercise' in which readers are asked to forget everything they know (or think they know) about Varius, and to reconstruct his life strictly on the basis of the artefactual record, especially coins but also inscriptions, papyri, sculpture and topography. It should be noted that A. abandons this self-imposed straitjacket whenever it suits him (e.g. pp. 80, 85, 108, 128, 146–52), and that his faith in the 'higher epistemological status of artefacts' (p. 160) encourages some very literal interpretations (e.g. that the bearded portrait on coins represents an older Varius, and that such coins can therefore be dated, unproblematically, after coins with a beardless portrait, pp. 71–2). More disappointingly, the results of the exercise do not seem to justify the space devoted to it. From the coins alone, for example, we learn that Varius claimed Caracalla as his father (p. 64) and that he presented himself publicly as priest of Elagabalus (p. 89); from inscriptions alone we learn that he held the consulship for four of the five years of his reign (p. 111). None of this is particularly informative. **Of course it is salutary to be shown how we know what we know about the ancient world,** and the comparison between the artefactual and historiographical records of Varius' reign is illuminating (pp. 157–61); but the 'purely artefactual account' of Varius' reign delivers much less than might have been expected, given the length of the chapter. It is only in Chapter 4, 'Speculation', that the reader encounters a more traditional form of imperial biography. There is some solid material in this section. The analysis of the Severan family tree (pp. 205–29), for example, is rigorous and well worth consulting. It is in this Chapter that A. presents what he considers to be his two main findings (cf. p. 261). One concerns the whereabouts of Varius' childhood and upbringing (pp. 183–205). Tracing the

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career and peregrinations of Varius' father, Sextus Varius Marcellus, A. argues that Varius was born and brought up in or near Rome, and that he probably spent much of his childhood in Italy and in the provinces of Britain, Numidia and **Asia Minor**, to which his father had been delegated in various official capacities. On this reading, Varius was not, in cultural terms, a 'Syrian', as he is normally viewed. More controversial is A.'s argument regarding Varius' public self-presentation as high priest of the Emesene god Elagabalus (pp. 229–59). He suggests that Varius assumed and advertised the high priesthood first in order to demonstrate his autonomy from his handlers (especially his **mother**); then as a means of securing the continued support of the eastern legions; and ultimately as the basis for a new, 'sacerdotal' (not religious) conception of imperial authority and legitimacy. Far from being an imprudent concession to his personal piety, in other words, the priesthood of Elagabalus was actually an instrument of Realpolitik (p. 253). **This argument, which A. revisits in the final chapter (Chapter 5, 'Findings in Context'), is intriguing and worth consideration, but it is not pursued in sufficient depth.** Other than asserting the priesthood's putative appeal to the eastern soldiers (itself problematic), A. never really explains **the logic of this peculiar strategy.** Nor does this interpretation seem compatible with A.'s claims about Varius' upbringing. If Varius really had been born and raised in Italy, **he would have known instinctively** that an Emesene priesthood could never have formed the basis for a strong claim on the imperial purple. Whatever one thinks of A.'s interpretations, the book as a whole has several odd features that do them disservice. Abbreviations and references to ancient texts (and to A.'s own numerous studies of this emperor, the so-called *Studia Variana*) are idiosyncratic (cf. pp. xxxiv–xxxv). A. also indulges in some strange notions about historical agency. Varius himself, for example, is given an active role in the investigation ('Varius must show that he is more interesting than his fictional counterpart', p. 26), while imperium, an expression of the emperor's formal authority, is seen as a historical actor in its own right (pp. 178–9). And the discussion throughout is laced with observations that can be remarkably banal ('propositions are proposed by their proponents', p. 163; 'We know, from Marcellus' epitaph, that he is dead', p. 230); comical ('Does [Varius] ever realise that Elagabal is just a big stone?', p. 259); incongruous ('Varius' appearance on his early coinage is such as to allow one to affirm, quite objectively, that many men will find him [attractive]', p. 247); or outlandish ('were it true that Varius made large genitals a qualification for appointment to high office, this would indeed constitute an early form of affirmative action', p. 271). Readers will discover many other remarks of this sort, and these, together with the book's idiosyncratic presentation, are likely to distract attention from its larger arguments. And that is a shame, for there are some novel ideas in this book that deserve serious engagement by scholars of the Roman empire. University of California, Berkeley **CARLOS F. NOREÑA**  
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### Review 9: Amazon Reviews:

5.0 out of 5 stars **Superb, thought-provoking, essential**, July 31, 2012

By

[Remus](#) - [See all my reviews](#)

[https://www.amazon.com/gp/pdp/profile/AZX6YRJ2574F8/ref=cm\\_cr\\_pr\\_pdp](https://www.amazon.com/gp/pdp/profile/AZX6YRJ2574F8/ref=cm_cr_pr_pdp)

**This review is from: The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction? (Hardcover)**

This is not a book I can casually recommend. But it is a superlative work of history, an important book, and possibly even a great book.

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At the outset, De Arrizabalaga y Prado tells that he originally wanted to write a historical novel about Elagabalus, but the more he reviewed the sources, the more he distrusted anything they had to say. How, then, to create a narrative about Elagabalus with any integrity?

De Arrizabalaga y Prado decided to examine all the evidence we have about this emperor, subjecting it to a systematic review of his own invention, which owes more to his education in philosophy at Cambridge than to standard historical practice. Thus we have a new, even revolutionary, approach to writing history, which to this lifelong reader and student of history is both refreshing and exciting.

But I suspect the process will not be all that exciting to many readers. If you have no patience with long, detailed, impeccably constructed epistemological arguments, the author's methodology may bore you to tears. After all, you came to this book because you wanted to know more about the most scandalous and sex-mad emperor who ever lived, right? But what if all that scandal is so much smoke and mirrors? The author's examination of the evidence may strike you as dry, but I would call it "astringent"--and an astringent is needed here to wipe clean the endless layers of nonsense and invective that have grown up around Elagabalus beginning immediately after his death and continuing for centuries.

Once the author has stripped away the lies and distortions and false methodologies of the past to establish what we may actually "know" about Elagabalus, his section called "Speculation" reviews the story of the emperor in a more traditional narrative fashion, and the biography that emerges is as engaging, compelling, and ultimately as moving as the novel that the author wanted to write in the first place. This is far and away the most convincing and thought-provoking portrait of the emperor called Elagabalus yet written, and it is a revelation.

De Arrizabalaga y Prado has written an unusual book of tremendous integrity, of essential interest to anyone who wants to know more about Elagabalus. This book is also of great value to all of us who care about the study of history, especially ancient history. This is a superb work of scholarship, begotten from the stillborn ghost of novel never (or yet?) to be written.

### Review 10: Amazon Reviews:

5.0 out of 5 stars **Elagabalus - Phallus Worshipper**, August 20, 2010

By

[A. Kalman "Bixbyte"](#) (Philadelphia) - [See all my reviews](#)  
(REAL NAME)

**This review is from: The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction? (Hardcover)**

Few emperors are known almost exclusively for their peculiarities and perversions, but on the short list of qualified applicants, Elagabalus rises to the top. The 19th Century antiquarian S.W. Stevenson, ever a delight for his artfully delivered comments, did not fail to deliver in his summary of Elagabalus whom he called : "...the most cruel and infamous wretch that ever disgraced humanity and polluted a throne..." Elagabalus and his family had lived in Rome during the reign of Caracalla, who was rumored to have been Elagabalus' natural father. When Caracalla was murdered, his prefect and



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successor, Macrinus, recalled the family to their homeland of Syria. Upon arriving, Elagabalus assumed his role as hereditary priest of the Emesan sun-god Heliogabalus. For the Roman soldiers in the vicinity, who engaged in the common practice of solar worship, and who had fond memories of the slain Caracalla, Elagabalus was an ideal candidate for emperor. He soon was hailed emperor against Macrinus, who was defeated in a pitched battle just outside Antioch.

Conservative Rome was introduced to their new emperor's eccentricities and religious fervor when they learned of his overland journey from Emesa to Rome, with a sacred "Phallic Shaped" meteorite in tow!

### Review 11: Amazon Reviews:

2.0 out of 5 stars **Not a Biography, But a Philosophical Discourse on 'Fact'**,  
February 16, 2012

By

[Stuart McCunn](#) (Nottingham, UK) - [See all my reviews](#)  
(REAL NAME)

**This review is from: The Emperor Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction? (Hardcover)**

This is kind of a complicated review. The title alone is deceptive for two reasons. First, the author refuses to call him Elagabalus since, like Caligula, he wasn't really known by that name except in literature. Instead he calls him Varius. Second, it's not a biography in any sense of the word. In fact, this isn't really a history book at all. This is about historiography and how his model of it can be applied to such a figure as Elagabalus.

Prado believes that classical historians are far too lax with regards to the truth. To his mind most of what he reads is lies, or unsupported facts which he views as much the same thing. He considers history the noblest of fields because it alone deals solely in fact. Science uses facts to produce results, and so does math, but only history searches for facts for their own sake. Thus any historian who uses facts incorrectly is corrupting the field. The reliance upon ancient historians is a major mistake because there is no independent confirmation that they're honest. For that reason he never refers to them as 'historians' but as 'historiographers.' This obsession with the truth colors everything he does. Unsubstantiated facts are just beliefs and as he says, "in my view, knowledge makes belief superfluous."

He sees historians as making an unspoken assumption which he calls the Credulous Assumption. This holds that narratives of ancient 'historiography' are to be considered true, unless proven otherwise. I'll grant him that as it is the basic premise of most histories. So now we come to his Skeptical Assumption: No allegation of ancient 'historiography' is to be considered true unless proven. This sounds reasonable enough. As he makes quite clear modern law is based upon the same assumption. But he is describing an ideal situation. If it was possible to check every fact recorded in a history then of course it would be best to do so. But in the vast majority of situations that isn't possible. There is nothing to back up or disprove an author's statement. Thus by his standards those facts must be discarded. Which means that practically nothing can ever be known about the ancient world. And much about the modern world must be discarded too. After all, if a man reports something that nobody else witnessed but doesn't directly contradict the known facts is he to be ignored? What if this is his biography and he records incidents that only he could know? Should this too be ignored as it is unsupported by other facts?

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On what he calls his Constitution or Res Gestae he creates a basic outline of Elagabalus' life as known solely through archaeology. The known facts: he was probably declared emperor in the east due to coin evidence; his paternity is questionable since both he and Severus Alexander claimed the same paternity yet neither of their mothers match with the name of Caracalla's known wives; his reign probably ended in violence since Alexander removed all statues and references; he was high priest of Elagabal; there may have been a conflict between the demands of his religion and the necessary presentation to his soldiers. There is no evidence for all the crimes and misdemeanors reported in the sources, therefore these remain unproven. In other words we know nothing, and frankly some of these conclusions show evidence of having been derived with input from the literary sources. The rest falls under his chapter called Speculation.

I have heard this complaint before (See D.S. Potter's [Literary Texts and the Roman Historian](#)), but I've never heard the argument taken so far. Following Prado we can know nothing at all about the ancient world. Unlike the law (a bad comparison) any decent historian has to explain not just what happened but the underlying causes for it happening. Thus History has always dealt with probabilities, and ancient and Medieval history more than others. There isn't enough data to be certain about anything, yet to discard all of it is to abandon all chance of knowledge. His philosophy may work in an ideal world, but when dealing with an era as poorly documented as the Classical one you have to take what you can get.

Most of the book is filled with philosophical discussion of this concept. The following is a sample from page 286:

"Some hold that facts exist even if unknown. I agree that things may have happened without being known to us, but I do not call them facts, until they become known by someone. In my view, 'fact' implies both 'reality' and 'experience'. In common usage, 'fact' is 'something that has really occurred or is the case', hence a datum of experience. I shall define 'reality' a little later on. 'Experience' is ';direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge'. The object of knowledge is thus information. 'Fact' derives from factum, past participle of the Latin verb facere, 'to do' or 'to make': something has been done with or made of information gained by experience, or from accounts of it. What has been done with or made of that information? It has become known, thus acknowledged as fact. So, one can say factum est: it happened, is done."

That's a fairly typical paragraph. If this is the sort of thing that you want from a 'biography' of a Roman Emperor then this is the book for you. If you want something more historical and less philosophical then I'd suggest you avoid this book. I find it over-long and pretentious, as well as promoting **a historiographical goal that would make it impossible to know anything about the past**. Ancient historians may not always be accurate, but I'll happily take a high probability as truth over rejecting everything and knowing nothing.

There is a new biography on Elagabalus called [Crimes of Elagabalus](#). I haven't read it but it sounds better than this one.

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### Review 12: *Arctos* 49, 2015.

Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado: *The Emperor Elagabalus - Fact or Fiction?* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-89555-2. XXXVIII, 381 pp. GBP 60, USD 99.

Varius Avitus Bassianus, or to give him his imperial name, Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, has been known to later generations as the notorious and decadent Elagabalus or Heliogabalus (218–222). The *damnatio memoriae* after Elagabalus' death has left modern scholarship reliant on ancient historiography. This in turn has resulted in several studies on the subject of the credibility of the accounts of ancient historians during the last decades. One of them is Martijn Icks's *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor* (I.B. Tauris 2011), which concentrates more on the *Nachleben* of Elagabalus.

The book under review is divided into six parts: "Exposition" (pp. 1–24) presents the methodology; "Explosion" explores the relevant historiography by Cassius Dio, Herodian, etc. (pp. 25–56); "Constitution" is an inquiry into Elagabalus' reign on the basis of epigraphy, numismatics, papyri and sculpture (57–161); "Speculation" presents a reconstruction of the events of Elagabalus' reign (162–259); "Findings in contexts" mirrors the results especially against the whole of the Severan period (260–84); and the final chapter "Appendices" presents a chronology of the reign and adds some further material in the form of lists (pp. 285–360). 310 *Arctos* 49 (2015) In "Exposition", Arrizabalaga states that "No allegation of ancient historiography about this emperor is here considered true unless proven". This is tested with a sort of a binary question board, which puts ancient historiography to the test bit by bit. The ancient texts are simplified into propositions of which the author asks the following questions: 1) Is the proposition inherently verifiable or not? 2) Is the proposition controversial? 3) Is the proposition vital to its proponent's purpose? 4) Is the proposition public or private? 5) Could it be verified, in public, by a random contemporary observer? 6) Would there be risk for its proponent if it were exposed as false? 7) Could the proponent have some agenda in respect of the proposition? and 8) Would or could collusion be involved in its proposal? This binary system produces the answers "yes" or "no", which in turn give the results "True", "False", "Unverifiable", "Virtually true" or "Opinion or emotion".

In "Explosion", Arrizabalaga explains his system in more detail and hacks the credibility of Dio, Herodian, and so on to pieces. There are 840 of these simplified propositions and according to his system only 50 of them appear to be "True" or "Virtually true". Arrizabalaga's aim in chapter 3 ("Constitution") is to reconstruct the real life of Elagabalus, or Varius, as he prefers to call him. The material used here is archaeological and numismatic. This chapter reconstructs a normal imperial life consisting of consulships, priesthoods, etc. As for coinage, the only differing feature from previous imperial coinage is the appearance of the Syrian sun god Elagabal in the Roman pantheon. "Speculation" considers Elagabalus' childhood, genealogy and motivation on the basis of the material evidence. This results in a theory about why Elagabalus saw himself as a priest; moreover, according to the author, he was more probably born near Rome and not in Emesa in Syria, as previously thought. This leads to a theory of Elagabalus' travelling provincial childhood from Britain to Syria with his real father Sextus Varius Marcellus. This new reconstruction of the emperor's childhood and his short reign are placed within Severan dynastic life in the fifth chapter ("Findings in context"), which also includes a short note on the emperor's *Nachleben*. The "Appendices", a chapter in its own right, explains the author's methodology in the short section "Theory of knowledge".

## Reviews of EEFF

The text is a pleasure to read, even though the author too frequently begs the reader to "practice mental exercises" with him. Despite the author's assertion, I do not think that modern historians take Dio's or Herodian's accounts as literally true. However, Arrizagabala's well-presented appendices are a valuable source for further studies on the subject, even though his binary question board seems a little too straightforward to be able to assess the credibility of ancient texts. The numismatic evidence is well presented and plays a vital part in showing Elagabalus' reign to have been a normal one, consisting of judging, sacrificing, parading, building and repairing. However, it would be surprising if it did not point to this conclusion. Imperial mints, after all, can lie as much as senators turned historians.

*Juhana Heikonen*

The foregoing are all the serious reviews of EEFF that I was able to collect. EEFF has also been mentioned in online publications on various websites, but not seriously reviewed. One of these is <http://luisantoniodevillena.es/web/noticias/heliogabalo-el-adolescente-coronado/>. Most of these sites, like Mary Beard's review, use their critique or passing mention of EEFF mainly as an excuse to rehearse the standard allegations about 'Elagabalus', often illustrating them with lurid pictures unrelated to Varian iconography, as well as with the Capitoline bust of 'Eliogabalo' that prompted me to write EEFF.

After beginning work on *Varian Studies One: Varius*, I came across a review of Martijn Icks' book, *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor*, based on his thesis, *Images of Elagabalus*, which he had kindly sent me and I had read some years ago. Since the review also cites *EEFF* I quote it here in full.

★★★★☆ Prurient title; thoughtful examination, July 31, 2012

By

[Remus](#)

**This review is from: *The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor* (Hardcover)**

This book, which grew out of the author's doctoral thesis, was originally published under the title "Images of Elagabalus." It's interesting that Harvard University Press has chosen to republish under the far more provocative title "The Crimes of Elagabalus: The Life and Legacy of Rome's Decadent Boy Emperor," a string of nouns and adjectives so prurient it's probably a bit embarrassing to the author. But hopefully this title will sell more copies!

Reviewing almost two centuries' worth of images and narratives about the emperor known as Elagabalus, Icks first gives us a reconstructed biography that attempts to cut through much of the obvious (and unreliable) invective in the ancient sources (often repeated without question by modern historians who should know better). He then proceeds to show us how Elagabalus has been portrayed in art, plays, novels, etc., most often as an "Oriental" outsider, a cruel tyrant, or a sex "pervert." If you like that sort of thing, Elagabalus is a tragic hero; if you don't, he's a moral object lesson of everything not to do if you are emperor.

## Reviews of EEFF

Icks has done a tremendous amount of original research, but because he is (perhaps overly) selective in his examples, there is something of a preliminary feeling about this work; I wish it had been twice as long and included many more details. But the interested reader will be put on the track of many works about Elagabalus, not least Artaud's "Crowned Anarchist," from which derives the anachronistic idea (never found in the ancient sources, as Icks points out) that androgyny played a role in the religion of the god Elagabal.

We are fortunate to have another recent work on this emperor, "Elagabalus: Fact or Fiction" by Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, which goes far beyond this book in stripping away the myths and delivering a convincing portrait of such a controversial figure. Whereas Icks' book is in many ways a fun read, de Arrizabalaga y Prado's book is quite challenging, but ultimately very rewarding and also highly recommended. Together, these two historians compel us to completely re-think what we "know" about the "crimes" of the "decadent" boy-emperor.

## Reviews of EEFF

In the course of preparation of VS1, I had recourse to the kind and generous help of A.R. Birley, who read or re-read the Vorarbeiten and suggested how to edit and update them. In updating footnote references, he drew my attention to the latest published volume of *Prosopographia Imperii Romani*, covering among others the letter 'V', corresponding both to Valerius and Varius.

1. The entry under Varius Avitus Bassianus in PIR2 contains the following reference to *EEFF*:

*referendus est t. AE 2007, 1197 (83). Titulos omnes enumerare sibi proponit L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado The Emperor Elagabalus, 2010, 350 sq., opus praeterea valde mirum. Sane sunt tituli mutili nonnulli de qui-*

2. The entry under Publius Valerius Comazon contains the following reference to 'PECE':

*iuvenis aliunde ignotus. Item diversus est Comazon a Ganny, cum uterque nominetur eodem loco Dio 79, 39, 4. Cui rei accurate operam dat L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado, qui tres discernit viros in disputatione electronice edita The riddle of Gannys, Eutyechianus, and Comazon inscripta quam invenis [http://www.cambridge.org/co/download\\_file/202595/](http://www.cambridge.org/co/download_file/202595/) (vidimus mense Mart. a. 2011).*

3. And, the same entry, below, refers to *EEFF*:

*Particeps consiliorum Iuliae Maesae L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado The Emperor Elagabalus 2010, 240 sq., quae post Caracallam occisum a Macrino iussa erat Roma reverti Emesam; quo in oppido eum noverat.*

These references constitute academic recognition from a source of the highest possible authority:

1. Praise (*opus praeterea valde mirum*: 'a work moreover highly admirable') for *EEFF*.
2. Acknowledgement of thorough study (*cui re accurate operam dat*) for 'PECE'.
3. Citation of *EEFF* as an authoritative source regarding the particular events in question.

The full text of the relevant PIR2 entries concludes this file:

videtur, cum ab eis appellatum maneris accuratio. Errorem nomen eius in lapide ita ut vestigia gentilitii perspicue manent, cognomen autem plane perit, vide imaginem photographiam 1. in corpore adiectam. De causa rursus deliberat Jacques Carantoux 240 sq. Fortasse partes Clodii Albini accutus est exemplo Novii Rufi supra N 189 Tarraconensis legati, qui a Severo occisus est post pugnam a. 197 ad Luglanum commissam HA Sept. Sev. 73, 7, cf. A. U. Stylow ad l. Origo sua certe in Oriente teste cognomine Graeco Pflaum, Desjardes, Alföldy li. II, Hs

[L. VA]LERIVS [C]LA[VIRVS] vel potius [C]latodia tribu) MAXIMVS, clarissimus) VIRI, l. arb. AE 1998, 171 = VI 41 198. Veri similiter idem ac L. Valerius Maximus [-] Aeliius Priscellinus consul a. 233 infra n. 121, ubi vide.

— IMP. CAESAR M. A V R E L I V S VALERIUS CLAUDIVS AVG.

50 P. VALERIUS COMAZON, consul ordinarius II a. 226 (cos. I ex ornamentis consularibus). Tituli: concenerant sodales Dionysii aliquid pro salute Elagabali et Iuliae Augustae (Maesae) et praefectorum praetorio teste tabula avarata Histriae in Scythia minore rep. ISM 1, 99 = SEG 19, 477 (1); in consulari: III 10486 (2), 11042 (3), 12672 (4), 12734 (5); valde nullitas, nomen incertum 14561 (6); VI 868 (7), 2003 = 32320 (8), 3090 (9); nomen eius maxima parte in lacuna 10299 = I. I. 13, 1, 33 + nova fragm. AE 1981, 25 (10); XIII 6688 (11), 6726 (12); XIV 2809 = D. 6219 (13); in amphora de Museo Testaccio pictus XV 4113 (14); item: J. M. Blázquez et alii Excavaciones arqueol. en el Monte Testaccio, 1994 n. 55–57, cf. n. 59 at 202 (15–17); AE 1977, 215 = 2038, 1139 = J. Aquilino 385 (16); AE 1956, 238 (19), 1968, 88b (20); IMS 4 n. 8 (21); ISM 1, 345 (22), 306 (23); RIU Suppl. 247 (24); in lapidibus: Pont Cavum n. 214 (25), 215 = M. Christol, T. Drew-Bear Anatolia Antiqua 1, 1987, 98 n. 79 (26); idem Epigraphica 53, 1991, 155 sq. n. 25 = AE 1992, 1634 (27), 156 n. 28 = AE 1992, 1635 (28). Papyrus: nominatur in epistula admodum fragmentaria P. Dura 55 A col. 1 fr. b l. fortasse etiam fr. c 1.

Tria nomina t. 7 (M. praenomen, perperam), t. 13 (P. praenomen), AOA-AOYAAI perperam Dio in consiliis Interuolu lib. 80, id quod Boissvain fin. ed. sua vol. 3 p. 452 vers. 13, vide app. crit., ad t. 7 indicans emendandum proponit M. Vallierius (duo litterae priores per dittographum scriptae; sane notit. l. 7 et filium eius praenomine Publum, vide infra), Valerius Comazon t. 1 sq. 19, 22 sq., pap., Comazon t. ceteri, Dio, Xiph., fasti manu scripti (Chron. min. 1 p. 59, 226, 288 Moynihan); Comazon errore t. 18; omittunt nomen eius Herodian., et HA Helioq.

Non idem — ut aspiens legia, s. g. Stein Ritterstand 121 sq. et supra vol. 3 p. 85, vide apud Barbieri n. 1174 — ac Eutyechianus (Dio 79, 31, l. 32, 4; Xiph. 344 in ed. Dionis quam recensuit Boissvain col. 3 p. 724 vers. 24 Εὐτυχεῖος; ἐνὶ Κισθίων, qui quidem aut idem est ac Gannys supra

Q 74, cf. Boissvain ad. Dionis vol. 3 p. 438 adn. ad l. 4, aut potius laevius aliunde ignotus. Item diversus est Comazon a Gannys, cum uterque nominatur eodem loco Dio 79, 39, 4. Cui rei accurate operam dat L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado, qui tres diversi viros in disputatione electionis edita The riddle of Gannys, Eutyechianus, and Comazon inscripta quam invenit [http://www.zumbridge.org/en/download\\_file/202395/](http://www.zumbridge.org/en/download_file/202395/) (vidimus mense Mart. a. 2011).

Si concerneret quod tradit Dio 79 [80], 4, 1, oriundus e familia minorum R. Hanslik RE 7 A, 2, 1948, 2142 a. v. Valerius 134, ipse occurrit Dio 79, 4, 1, qui pantomimus Remas saltasset Herodian. 5, 7, 6 et HA Helioq. 13, 1, sed vide C. R. Whitaker in ed. sua Herodiani vol. 2, 1970, p. 64 sq. adn. 1; respiciendum eum fuisse inter familiarissimos Elagabali et ovine Iuliae Maesae supra I 678 eoque a Dione ceterisque maxime detractus O. Hirschfeld Die kaiserlichen Verwaltungsbeamten bis auf Diocletian (ed. prima), 1877, 233 sq. n. 68. Inter Caesares Xiph. 344, 31, non liberus (Aurelium eum expectares), sed ministros humiles, re ipsam causa incertissima et parum fide digna.

Hamili loco natus ad summum tandem honorem promotus est rebus post Caracallam occisum navatis R. Salvoxy Chiron 27, 1957, 143–145, id. in: Herrschaftsstrukturen und Herrschaftspraxis, ed. A. Kolb 2006, 124 sq. Militare coepit in Thracia miles utique gregorius, sub Claudio Attalo supra C 796, non multum ante a. 184/85 Dobson Primularius 283, cf. Thonasson Latereuli 169 n. 40. Ob delictum aliud ad eodem Attalo ad classarios translatus est Dio 79 [80], 3, 5, cf. Dobson l. l. A. 218 in Syria praefectus castrorum (ἐπορευτοῖς — ἐπορευοῦσιν) legionis eiusdem Dio 79 [80], 4, 1, potissimum III Galliae, sed eum Iulius praefectum legionis II Particae, i. e. eum istam legionem rexisse putat Pflaum Carrière 2, 752–756 n. 290, 3, 996 n. 290, quem acutus est Syme Imperors 141, nam iam fere tricesimo et quinto militavit, plane sexagesimo octavo Dobson l. l.

Particeps consilium Iuliae Maesae L. de Arrizabalaga y Prado The Emperor Elagabalus 2010, 240 sq., quae post Caracallam occisum a Maerino iussu erat Roma reverti Evessam; qui in oppido eum noverat. Inter consularios circa Maesam contra Maerinum, una cum Sosianide supra I 704 Maesae filia eodemque Elagabali infra n. 273 iussu matris et Gannys Eutyechianoque Maesae familiaribus, vide E. Katschhofen Die syrischen Augustae in der historischen Iberoherforschung, 1979, 29–32. Cum Elagabalus ab Eutyechiano in castra legionis III Galliae at videtur) inductus et per mendacium militibus ut filius Caracallae commendatus imperator salutatus esset Dio 78 [79], 31 sqq., haud sine invidiam eius, summum discrimen inter Maerinum et Elagabalum imperatores in pugnam deductum est quae m. Ian. a. 218 non procul Antiochia cummissa

est Gannys imperator, cui autem nullo erat perita militaris Dio 79 [79], 38, 3 sqq.; tamen Maerinum devicit et in fugam vertit, ut vult Dio l. l. De qua pugna vide etiam infra ad n. 272. Certo maius momentum fuit Comazon, qui iam senex aegre in ipso pugna excellit, potius in praeparando regendoque bello. Eum verum ducem militarem Iulius partium apparet ex epistula ad cohortem XX Palmyrenorum data, quae Dione Euxippo testatur. Qua in epistula iubetur ex sacra auctoritate (Elagabali iam imperatoris) addito nomine Valeri C[omazonis] at cohortis militum, qui in Paropotasie regione cogebantur, restituta disciplina militari in sua castra reducerebantur pap., id quod ad confusionem spectare videtur quae in Syria orta est rebus novum aut superime ferro diuiduente, cf. Dio 78 [79], 34, 6. Post usurpationem bene evasit Maerinoque captum (et brevi post occisum) et etiam Gannys in hinc a. 218 interemptum solus praeter Maesam et Sosianiam superstes partium (de Eutyechiano nil traditur post Elagabalum primum imperator salutatum). Cum apud imperatorem invenit et Maesam ariam multum valeret, auctor fuit occidendi Claudii Attali, qui a. 218 praeses erat Cypri Dio 79 [80], 3, 5, 4, 3. Quo studio videtur ultus poenam ignominiamque quam ab eo passus erat tribus decembris ante, si ita res se habet.

Elagabalum Roman comitatus praefectus praetorio factus est Dio 79 [80], 4, 1, cf. L. L. Hoes The praetorian prefect from Commodus to Diocletian, 1942, 97–100, una cum Iulio Flaviano supra I 312 t. 1. Eodem fere tempore donatus ornamentis consularibus Dio l. l. A. 220 in senatum adiectus est et factus consul ordinarius, una cum M. Aurelio Arminio (= Elagabali) consule III Lipsius consulatus post ornamenta consularia numeratus est II t. 2–26, fasti manu scripti (vide supra), Interuolu consularium qui procedit epistulam Dionis lib. 79 [80], ib. 4, 2. Ordinatus etiam praefectus urbi Dio 79 [80], 4, 2 n. 219 aut 220, iterum a. 221, tertium a. 222 aut 225 successit Fulvii supra F 523 tam occisi Dio 79 [80], 21, 1, i. e. iam post Elagabalum et Sosianum occisus Leunissen Konrad 310 sq., Wojciech Städtpräfektur 394–396 n. 44, cf. W. Eck ZPE 18, 1975, 82. Consularibus necesse, ut videtur, aditus Maesae factus, ut cum ea eodem Elagabali et Sosianie moliretur ac alteram nepotem Alexianam pariter, vulgo Alexandrum Severum, imperatorem efficeret. Istius primus praefectus urbi erat.

Filius eius videtur Publia Valeria Comazon infra n. 225, cf. Barbieri n. 1174, quae nominatur in fustulo apertis Romae in Esquilino et in Aventino reperita, ubi fortasse possidebat domus urbana W. Eck in: I TUR 2, 207 sq., sed vide quae id. disserit Monument 221 adn. 85, potissime ex hereditate patris. Inter posteros eius videtur Valerius Comazon homonymus ille qui sequitur. Ha

60 VALERIUS COMAZON, consularis aedilium sacerum a. 206 (d. 27 m. Mart.) colorata marmoreo ad templum Serapidis pertinetis Romae rep. IG 14, 1026 = IGR 1, 103, cf. PLRE p. 218. Videtur inter posteros eius qui procedit. Ha

61 Valerius Concordius, VIRI perfectissimus), praeses Numidiae a. 206 (ad. Iust. 9, n. 27, cf. ILAlg 2, 3, 7809 = AE 1930, 15 tempore Diocletiani et Maximiani et Caesarem pos. Cuirali rep., dus t. Theodosius XIII 3872 sub Constantio Cassare supra F 390. Fortasse idem ac Valerius Concordius, filius Valeri Mirelliani (sic), VIRI egregii), quem exhibet t. Volubilitanus VIII 21846 = IAM 419, cf. PLRE s. v. Concordius 4. Huius pater haud dubie idem est ac Clementius Valerius Marcellinus supra C 1143, cf. PLRE s. v. Marcellinus 23 et AE 2008, 1143, KI/He

— IMP. CAES. C. FLAVIVS VALERIUS CONSTANTIVS AVG.

62 Valerius Cordus, litterator Severi Alexandri in prima pueritia Iulius dicitur una cum T. Veturis infra n. 511 ut Aurelio Philippo supra A 1872 HA Alex. 3, 2, id quod dubitat J. Straub BHAC 1869/109, 247. KI

63 VALERIUS CRESCENTIUS, cuius uxor I—illa exhibetur in Interuolu maternae ordinis senatorii quae Iunoni supplimentum in Iulia aeneolarynae n. 204 sub Severo Pighi p. 242 n. 71. Vid. idem ac Valerius Crescens Fulvianus qui sequitur, praeses Britanniae inf. a. incerto inter a. 226 et 234, ut proponunt Pighi p. 261 n. 165 et Barbieri n. 508, alter Birley Government 551, qui eum de quo agitur eum uxor potius ierentes putat praesidia. Ha

63a VALERIVS CRESCENS FVLIVIANVS, legatus pro praetore Britanniae inf. a. incerto inter a. 226 et 234 RH 587 + add., cf. Birley Government 351. Vid. idem ac ille qui procedit, ad quem vide. Fortasse parentela aliqua coniuncta cum Valerio Crescentiano equite Romano qui sequitur et fratre eius Valerio Materno clarissimo) iuvenis infra n. 124 qui memorantur t. V 729, cf. Barbieri 653 et Birley Government 351 adn. 57. Ha

64 Valerius Crescentianus, usque Romanus equo) publico, cui frater Valerius Maternus clarissimus) iuvenis infra n. 124 possit t. sepulcrum V 5729. Vide ad eum qui procedit. Ha

65 L. Valerius Datus, praefectus Aegypti inter a. 216 et 217. Tituli: dipl. mil. datate d. 30 m. Aug. n. 212 RMD 74 (1) t. dedicatum apud Iardena Prof. Ag. 533; BGU 1, 1, 159, 5 sq. dat. d. 5 m. Ian. a. 216 (1). I, 2, 286, 16 dat. a. 217 ineunte (2). 2, 614, 12 sq. quinquies subscr. inter d. 16. m. Febr. a. 216 et d. 7. m. Apr. n. 217, nominatur ante subseriptum d. 26 m. Dec. a. 216 factum, quo in parte inuenis nomen eius emendatione restitutum, vide additionem (3); P.Lond. 3 (p. 29 sqq. l. 835, 4 dat. d. 12 m. Mart. a. 217 (4). 936, 6 dat. d. 16 m. Mart. a. 217 (5); P.Oxy. 33, 2871, 4 sq. dat. a. 218/17 (6). 43, 3894, 8 sq. dat. a. 217/18 (7). 47,









