HADRIAN THE TRAVELER

Motifs and Expressions of Roman Imperial Power in the Vita Hadriani*

Adriano, o viajante: motivos e expressões do poder Imperial Romano no Vita Hadriani

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the links between travel and power that the journeys of Hadrian in the Vita Hadriani reveal, and suggests that these links have broader implications for our interpretation of the Historia Augusta as a whole, and of its author's literary skill and political awareness. It offers a close reading of the contexts in which Hadrian is depicted traveling in the Vita Hadriani, and argues that they may be interpreted as part of an internal dialog over alternate strategies for expressing and legitimating imperial power. It suggests that it is the moments when Hadrian is in the act of traveling that provide the clearest clues as to our author's attitude towards appropriate behavior by an emperor.

Keywords: Historia Augusta; Vita Hadriani; legitimacy; power; travel; imperial administration.

RESUMO

Este artigo explora as ligações entre as viagens e poder de Adriano na *Vita Hadriani*, e sugere que estas ligações têm implicações mais amplas para a nossa interpretação da *Historia Augusta* como um todo, e da habilidade literária e consciência política de Adriano. Oferecemos uma leitura atenta dos contextos em que Adriano é retratado em suas viagens por *Vita Hadriani*, e argumentamos que elas podem ser interpretadas como parte de um diálogo interno sobre estratégias alternativas para expressar e legitimar o poder imperial. Sugerimos que os momentos em que Adriano está no ato de viajar fornecem as pistas mais claras quanto ao comportamento adequado de um imperador para nós.

Palavras-chave: Historia Augusta; Vita Hadriani; legitimidade; poder; viagem; administração imperial.

Introductory

The text conventionally known as the *Historia Augusta* or *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* has been the subject of lively scholarly debate for over a century. Much of that scholarship has focused upon questions of authorship, date, and authenticity, taking its lead from the hypothesis first advanced by Hermann Dessau in 1889 that the text was not, as it claimed, a compilation of imperial biographies written by six different authors over the course of the third and fourth centuries, but, rather, the work of one man writing in the late fourth century, who willfully concealed his identity. Current scholarship is largely in agreement with Dessau, and cottage industries in identifying this anonymous author and pondering his religious and ideological sensibilities continue to thrive.[1] But, while Syme long ago suggested interpreting this author's achievement as rather more than merely "incompetent and dishonest biography", there has been a marked reluctance to recognize his project as anything other than a hamfisted piece of subterfuge.[2]

In part, this collective scholarly position can be attributed to the rather dubious Latin and uneven tone of the text, factors which encourage the impression of a rather hasty and unsystematic assembly. In recent scholarship, however, there has been a little more willingness to accord the author some measure of literary ambition and intentionality, both across the breadth of the work and within individual *vitae*.[3] This paper seeks to contribute to that project, by examining some ways in which the author approaches questions of imperial power and legitimacy in the *Vita Hadriani*, the first imperial biography in the extant text.[4] I will argue that the author presents a rather sophisticated understanding of the workings of imperial power, and a nuanced view of its proper and improper – or, perhaps better, legitimate and illegitimate – exercise, both in an abstract, generalized sense and with specific reference to his own period. I will suggest also that he employs the image of Hadrian as a traveler in order to express that view, and in so doing reveals a certain amount of literary and technical skill. I begin, however, with brief discussions of the character and characterization of the emperor Hadrian in our primary sources, and of the information our ancient writers provide concerning expectations of emperors as they traveled around their empires. These discussions underpin the exploration of our author's literary tactics and political views that follow. By way of conclusion, I emphasize the potential value of approaching the *Historia Augusta* as something more than simply a "work of very limited and conventional culture, distinguished by a triviality of interest and vulgarity of tone" (CAMERON, 2010, p. 754).

Hadrian, Imperial Travel, and the *Adventus*

Hadrian emerges from the ancient sources as a canny and effective administrator, a competent military commander, a rhetor and scholar, a lover of Greek culture and devotee of religious pluralism, a cruel, petty, and vindictive man. Apparent contradictions in these

sources between the peace and prosperity of his reign and the nature of his personal interactions with friends, familiars, and family have produced a rich field of scholarship. He is regarded as an enigma, possessing both the best and the worst qualities of an emperor. He is portrayed as a combination of Roman magistrate, Hellenistic monarch and Egyptian pharaoh, philosopher, grammarian and magician, architect and poet (Cf. SPELLER, 2003, p. 5). In response to the strange and baffling combination of qualities, personalities, and roles ascribed to him in our sources, his first modern biographer has suggested that the best way to understand him is to focus upon his actions: "For us, at least, Hadrian has to be what Hadrian did" (BIRLEY, 1997, p. xiv).

If we choose, therefore, to focus upon what Hadrian did during his reign as a means of understanding him as a man and an emperor, we are drawn irresistibly to the fact that he traveled extensively. Indeed, his peregrinations around the Mediterranean world are often taken as the *leitmotif* of his reign. He is the "restless" or "itinerant" emperor, an imperial tourist, impelled by a combination of administrative and military needs and personal inclination to devote a full half of his 21-year reign to journeys across the length and breadth of his Empire.[5] His motivations for traveling so extensively are variously attributed to a desire to recreate and revisit the past, a rejection of his predecessor's policy of military expansion and consolidation of Rome's imperial frontiers, a sincere desire for a peaceful, united, and co-operative empire, mere curiosity. No doubt elements of all may be found in the full complement of Hadrian's travels, and each will be relevant in certain circumstances. We should not expect to find a single unifying impulse in a figure so complex.

In contemporary scholarship, much attention has focused upon determining exactly where Hadrian went, when, how, and over what period of time. The project is by no means straightforward. How many journeys did he make? How many times did he visit Africa? (CHOWEN, 1970). What routes did he take from Antioch to Rome, from Ionia to Athens?[6] However, while there exists a vast trove of epigraphical, archaeological, and numismatic evidence which aids such reconstructions, this modern obsession with Hadrian's travels seems not, on the whole, to be matched in the ancient literary and historiographical sources.[7] In the eleventh-century epitome of Cassius Dio's account of Hadrian's reign, the discipline of the soldiers and an exploration of the emperor's character underpin a pithy account of his travels (Epit. Cassius Dio 69.9.1-4). In his *Breviary of Roman History*, the fourth-century author Eutropius comments simply that "he traveled throughout the Roman world and was responsible for much construction" (*Brev.* 8.7). Eutropius' near-contemporary Aurelius Victor, meanwhile, is entirely silent on the subject.

Our most complete account of Hadrian's journeys may be found in the *Vita Hadriani*. The text begins with a relatively standard and expected account of the subject's family and early years, including such elements as military service and portents of his future greatness – all on the model of the biographical sketches provided by Suetonius in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars* (*VH* 1-2.4). Attention then switches to Hadrian's imperial genealogy: we are

informed of the paternal affection with which Trajan treated him (*VH* 2.1-2), and reminded that it was Trajan's adoption by Nerva that, ultimately, resulted in Hadrian's elevation to the purple (*VH* 4.1-7).

Travel intrudes into the narrative very early on. Hadrian's first acts as presumptive (if not necessarily actual) heir to the throne are acts of travel: he is sent to convey to Trajan the news of his adoption, and, later, upon Nerva's death he seeks to be the one who delivers that information to Trajan (*VH* 2.5-6). It is, perhaps, significant that Hadrian is waylaid in this latter journey by Servianus, his brother-in-law, with whom he was in competition for Trajan's favor, for this presages the rather complicated and bloody measures that surrounded his consolidation of his power.[8] In the first instance, however, upon learning of his own accession while serving as governor of Syria, Hadrian is described simultaneously embracing policies of vision and mercy, on the one hand, and pragmatism and expediency, on the other. He then sets out to meet the funeral cortege of his predecessor (*VH* 5). Again, the juxtaposition of travel with description of Hadrian's first acts as emperor immediately emphasizes the importance of travel for his acquisition and maintenance of power and influence. The explicitness with which this initial connection is made alerts us to the possibility that, in this text, Hadrian's travels play a narrative or thematic role that is more than merely incidental to the biographical details of his life.

It seems reasonable to suggest that the very fact that the author of this text chooses to structure a portion of his narrative around Hadrian's travels is, in and of itself, significant. An emperor's journey is always an event that carries with it implications and meaning, both in reality and in the reportage of the event afterwards. In the first instance, the so-called *iter principis* was a phenomenon that developed its own structure and logic over the course of the imperial period (HALFMANN, 1986, *passim*; MILLAR, 1992, p. 28-40). The *adventus*, or arrival of an emperor in a city, was a carefully stage-managed event in which both emperor and community had active roles to play. For the community, preparations might begin a year or more in advance. Acclamation and speeches would be expected, as well as lodging and entertainment equal to the dignity of the guest. Animals needed to be fed and housed, the emperor's entourage and escort adequately accommodated. The emperor himself characteristically responded with benefactions and buildings, and might be expected to entertain petitions of which he would otherwise have been entirely ignorant. His very presence in the city was a mark of imperial favor, and a source of prestige. In more generalized terms, then, imperial journeys (*itinera principum*) demonstrate the intimate links between travel and power under the Roman empire. They reveal the intensely personal nature of imperial power, and highlight the many opportunities for the expression of that power that an emperor's presence and movement through his empire might provide.

In the second instance, an emperor's journey could function for an author as a mechanism for communicating or emphasizing other aspects of his character or reign. Among his accounts of the lives of the first twelve Roman emperors, for example, the early second-

-century biographer Suetonius uses his discussion of Nero's two tours as an opportunity for commenting upon his superstition, paranoia, and delusions of grandeur (*Nero* 19).[9] By contrast, his account of the careful progress from Judaea to Rome by Vespasian, the last man standing in the bitter and bloody if relatively short civil conflict known as the "Year of the Four Emperors", offers a template for the moderation and restraint with which Suetonius characterizes his reign (*Vespasian* 7). We are therefore entitled to ask: What role did travel play in the *Vita Hadriani*? Why was it emphasized? In what circumstances, and to what end?

In what follows, I explore these questions, elaborate upon the links between travel and power that the journeys of Hadrian in the *Vita Hadriani* reveal, and offer some brief remarks as to the broader implications of this for our interpretation of the *Historia Augusta* as a whole. To this end, I first present brief accounts of the scholarly debate over the nature and sources of this text. Next, I examine the contexts in which Hadrian is depicted traveling in the *Vita Hadriani*, and argue that they may be read as part of an internal dialog over alternate strategies for expressing and legitimating imperial power. By way of conclusion, I suggest that it is the moments when Hadrian is in the act of traveling that provide the clearest clues as to our author's attitude towards appropriate behavior by an emperor.

Truth and Fiction in the *Historia Augusta*

The text commonly referred to as the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (or *Historia Augusta*) is among our few narrative sources for the history of the second and third centuries. At first blush, it appears to be a compilation of biographies, written by six authors living in the reigns of the emperors Diocletian and Constantine – that is, the late third and early fourth centuries. These authors carry the names Aelius Spartianus, Iulius Capitolinus, Vulcacius Gallicanus, Aelius Lampridius, Trebellius Pollio, and Flavius Vopiscus (of Syracuse). Nothing more is known of them, for reasons which will become apparent. Their biographical accounts, it was long surmised, were collected together some time in the middle of the fourth century, to make the document that is now in our possession. Until the late nineteenth century, scholars accepted the explicit claims of this text, and assumed that, in the main, it constituted a reliable source for the emperors of the period. However, this consensus was radically overturned in 1889 by Hermann Dessau, who suggested that the *Historia Augusta* was, in fact, the work of one man, not six, and that this man was most likely writing in the late fourth century. Dessau's argument was built on a careful analysis of the language and style of the collection, the existence of numerous anachronisms in the text as a whole, and the presence of obviously fictitious sources and authorities.[10] These fictitious sources include the purported authors of the biographies themselves.

It is safe to say that Dessau's hypothesis was not met with universal agreement or approbation. Rearguard actions in favor of multiple authorship were fought by figures such as Theodor Mommsen and Arnaldo Momigliano, while scholars argued, too, over Dessau's proposed date for authorship. Over a century later, however, there is a broad, if somewhat

shaky consensus that one man was responsible for the whole work, and some degree of comfort with a late fourth-century date. Scholars also generally agree that there is a considerable qualitative difference between the first nine lives, where the author is understood to have followed his sources quite closely, and the latter lives, where he composed much more freely and confidently.[11] However, this consensus may be paying our author too little credit, and we should not be mesmerized by this apparent distinction, for, in some areas, at least, the author skillfully maintains a thematic unity of sorts throughout the text.

For our present purposes, the current state of scholarship on the *Historia Augusta* in general and the *Vita Hadriani* in particular has two broad implications. First, questions have been asked about the genre of the text. The invention of sources and characters, irregular chronology, and wealth of factual "errors" or inconsistencies that abound in the text have made scholars unwilling to place it alongside Suetonius as biography, or Livy, Tacitus, and Ammianus Marcellinus as history.[12] On the basis of hints and clues within the *Historia Augusta*, Ronald Syme has suggested labeling the work "mythohistoria", a term drawn from the text itself: the fictitious Junius Cordus is dismissed as a purveyor of such works, and Marius Maximus' *mythohistorica volumina* is also, apparently, execrated.[13] These two references are the only known attestations of the term, and Syme's proposal encourages further exploration of the ludic or game-like aspects of the text, in particular the author's play with language, genre, and the conventions of history writing (Cf. SYME, 1971, p. 279-284; GADEN, 1976, p. 132; CALLU; GADEN; DESBORDES, 1992, p. lxvii-lxviii).

In this context, it is worth emphasizing the complex interplay between "truth" and "fiction" in the *Historia Augusta*, for this interplay invites comparison with two other closely connected genres of late antique literary production – namely, the novel and the saint's life (Cf. BARNES, 1999). Here, I briefly sketch some aspects of contemporary approaches to those texts, which may serve as a guide for accessing the broader literary and intellectual context of the *Vita Hadriani*. Scholars working on both the novel and the saint's life in antiquity have focused attention on two factors of these texts that are relevant for our present purposes. First, the context in which they flourished was one of increased security and ease of travel. As Montiglio observes, "by the early second century AD, the 'lover of traveling', *philapodemos*, had become a familiar character [...] The plots of love novels reflect this increased mobility [...] The novels depict a whirling world, one in which to be abroad is a normal condition".[14] With specific reference to the lives of the saints, the central place that travel occupies in the lives of both pagan and Christian holy men and women in the period has long been a focus of scholarly attention. The motif of travel in these accounts has been interpreted as a metaphor for the spiritual journey of the individual, and linked to the uses of travel in both contemporary novels and pilgrimage accounts.[15]

It has also been observed that both the novel and the saint's life are deliberately polyphonic genres. They absorb and enter into dialog with a whole range of previous literature, including epic, drama, history, fictional and religious works.[16] Increasingly, scholars

are acknowledging that "history" and "fiction" did not (and do not) exist in a state of opposition or dichotomy, but rather employ broadly similar techniques and display broadly similar narrative and thematic patterns.[17] A further implication of this observation may be found in the relationship between "truth" and "fiction" in these texts. Scholars of the novel and the saint's life have now largely rejected an approach that seeks to winnow out factuality from falsehood, in favor of an analysis that acknowledges the blurred boundaries between fiction on the one hand and history on the other; emphasizes commonalities between the two genres; and notes that these commonalities were recognized and celebrated in ancient treatments of literary production. In particular, it is acknowledged that author and audience enter into a "contract of fictional complicity", in which the audience agrees to believe that the account provided by the author carries conviction within its context, and is therefore, to a certain degree, "true". This contract, and the strategies authors use to initiate it, are common to both "history" and "fiction" (FRANCIS, 1998, p. 429, 432). Such strategies include the creation of a familiar geography or topography as a backdrop to the events being narrated, and narrating events as they would be expected to have occurred, or should have occurred. Their object is to communicate a greater truth, beyond the narrower context of the events themselves.

These approaches provide a framework for arriving at a more nuanced and subtle reading of the text under discussion here, and a broader and more complex appreciation of the texts to which it was responding. The concept of polyphony fits well with recent scholarship on the genre of the *Historia Augusta*, but offers the opportunity to look further afield than merely the historiographical sources for resonances and inspiration.[18] The propositions that travel was a commonplace, and therefore also a motif for communicating a truth beyond the confines of the text itself signal the possibility of reading episodes of travel in the *Vita Hadriani* as something more than merely echoes or extracts from an earlier, more complete biographical or historical source, or illustrations of the character of the emperor. The notion of fictive belief focuses attention upon the complicit relationship between author and audience. Further, it allows us to move beyond an analysis of the *Historia Augusta* which dwells upon contrasts between the earlier and later lives based on the putative reliability of their sources, in favor of an approach which acknowledges the possibility that the author may have a strategy which encompasses the entire work. These insights inform and underpin the analysis of Hadrian's travels which follows, and I return to them below, where I challenge current interpretations of the *Vita Hadriani* as historically valuable on account of its sources, but emblematic of its author's relative lack of artistry and skill as a writer.

A second broad implication of the current state of scholarship concerning the *Historia Augusta* is closely connected to the question of genre and the author's literary skill (or lack of it). Once a single author is acknowledged, it is possible to search for rhetorical and literary strategies, and common themes throughout the work. For our current purposes, two themes in particular are pertinent. The first concerns the author's motivations for beginning the *Historia Augusta* with the life of Hadrian, rather than Nerva or Trajan. It is tempting to

suggest that in the complex and conscious strategies of adoption that he both practiced and imposed on his successors, Hadrian may be regarded as the originator of the system of shared rulership most explicitly embraced by Diocletian and his colleagues in the Tetrarchy, embarked upon again in the author's own time in the reigns of Valentinian I and Valens in the 360s-370s, and, perhaps, anticipated in the reigns of Honorius and Arcadius following the death of their father, Theodosius, which ultimately occurred in 395.[19] Such a decision makes an explicit comparison between the Hadrian of this text and Suetonius' Julius Caesar, the progenitor of imperial rule but not an emperor himself.[20] In this context, Hadrian represents an important element in the conceptualization of imperial rule in late antiquity.

A second theme which has been identified as fundamental to the *Historia Augusta* as a whole is the notion of legitimate rule, the acquisition of power legitimately and the process and implications of losing legitimacy. It is noteworthy that the author of the text accords *vitae* not only to recognized emperors, but also to princes, usurpers, and pretenders. The military, the Senate, the army and the *populus* are all identified to varying degrees as responsible for bestowing legitimacy upon an imperial aspirant, and also for taking it away.[21] Building on these observations, I argue below that, through the medium of travel and geographic location, Hadrian functions in the *Vita Hadriani* as a tool for exploring complementary strategies an emperor can employ to obtain and maintain legitimacy, and for identifying the key elements in effective imperial governance.

Hadrian's Travels and the Actions of an Emperor

The *Vita Hadriani* presents an ambivalent and contradictory picture of Hadrian – and, by extension, of imperial rule. The current common scholarly opinion is that this lack of consistency may be attributed primarily to the author's haphazard and careless integration of sources which themselves display radically different attitudes towards Hadrian.[22] This judgment seems overly harsh, but it is nevertheless useful, for our current purposes, to explore briefly what those sources may have been, and whether our author's decision to emphasize Hadrian's travels can be attributed to one or other of them.

Scholars have argued passionately about the sources available to the author while writing his text, and his use of them. In the case of the earliest nine lives in particular, these discussions have tended to focus upon biographical and historical works. Scholars were long convinced by the argument that the principal source for these *vitae* was a lost imperial history, generally referred to in the secondary literature as the *Kaisergeschichte*, and originally postulated in the late nineteenth century by Alexander Enmann. In more recent scholarship, the argument for a historiographical progenitor of the text has fallen out of favor somewhat, and scholars have turned instead to biographical works. Marius Maximus, a biographer probably writing under the emperor Severus, whose work is now lost, is generally acknowledged as a source for the first nine lives. But scholars are divided over whether Maximus is the principal or ancillary source. Syme and Barnes in particular

have championed another biographer, christened "Ignotus", ("Unknown", or "Anonymous") arguing that this author represents a tradition of sober, factual biography, by contrast with Maximus' rather more scandalous and scurrilous approach.[23] Hadrian's own autobiography, too – which Hadrian is reputed to have forced certain of his freedmen to take public credit for, in a move that once again reminds us of the pseudonymity that underpins our text – is also explicitly claimed as a source in our text (*VH* 16.1).

The detailed arguments and the specific justifications for choosing one biographer over another as the source for the *Vita Hadriani*, or identifying just what is taken from where need not detain us here. It suffices merely to observe that the focus of scholarly attention has been on a literary tradition which emphasizes the character of an individual, and shapes its narrative in order to highlight the moral qualities of the ruler. The organization tends to be thematic rather than chronological, focused on the personal rather than the political.[24] In such contexts, a detailed account of an emperor's journeys would be of only limited value, unless, for example, it could be enlisted as a means for labeling his behavior as inappropriate or morally suspect – as we have already seen Suetonius do with Nero's infamous tour of Greece (Suetonius Nero 19; cf. *Vespasian* 4). But travel is not, on the whole, used as a structuring device or *topos* in the biographical literature that we possess. As a consequence it may be fruitful to look to the novel and the hagiographical literature to provide frameworks for analyzing the role – or roles – that travel plays in the *Vita Hadriani*.[25]

The *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, written by the Greek sophist Philostratus in the first half of the third century, provides a particularly rich and suggestive point of comparison. Recent scholarship has emphasized the central role that travel plays in the exposition of the spiritual authority of the sage. It has been argued that Philostratus enlists travel as a key rhetorical and literary device for "establish[ing] the credentials of his holy man in a world of sophists, wise men and teachers" (ELSNER, 1997, p. 26 and *passim*). It has also been noted that Philostratus' Apollonius may be placed within the context of other authors and texts of the so-called Second Sophistic, a period during which Greek literary, philosophical, and cultural forms flourished within the somewhat troubling or problematic context of the Roman empire. In the writings of this period travel, in the form of pilgrimage, peregrination, wandering, or even tourism, is particularly prominent. Philostratus' world, and the world of the authors whom he chose to characterize as representing an identifiable movement of literary and cultural production, was a world of travelers. As a consequence, travel could be and indeed was enlisted in literary production in a multiplicity of ways, from the *periegesis* of Pausanias' *Guide to Greece* to the playful historiographical barbs of Lucian's *True History*.

Our author certainly knew Greek. Moreover, he knew and used other second century authors. It would not be surprising, therefore, if resonances and echoes of these Greek texts were detectable in the *Vita Hadriani* and elsewhere in the *Historia Augusta*. The empire under which the authors of the Second Sophistic lived was ruled by Hadrian and his successors. It is therefore tempting to see the emphasis upon Hadrian's travel in the *Vita Hadriani*

as a clever acknowledgment of the emperor's famous philhellenism, and an artful attempt to include him among the figures of the Second Sophistic.[26] Certainly, Hadrian's visits to temples and shrines, and participation in religious and cult ceremonies cast him as a religious tourist or pilgrim in the mode of Pausanias. On his first trip to Greece, for example, he had himself initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries at Athens, and afterwards climbed Mount Aetna in Sicily to see the sunrise (*VH* 13.1-3). In accordance with interpretations linking imperial travel with power and benefaction, he may also be observed endowing cities with temples and other buildings (*VH* 12.2-3; 13.6; 19.2; 9; 20.4)

But Hadrian's travels may also be interpreted in two further ways. Our author's narrative of Hadrian's peregrinations locates him specifically in three places: he is either in the provinces, at Rome, or in motion between or around them. In this final section, I therefore offer two propositions. First, I argue that geographical location is used as a device for establishing a key theme for the *Historia Augusta* in general: namely, the legitimacy of an emperor, and the contrasting and complementary styles of rule that he may choose to enlist in maintaining that legitimacy. Broadly speaking, we may characterize these styles as "Military" on the one hand and "Senatorial" on the other.[27] The emperor's travel provides a geographical or topographical frame for organizing and analyzing the relationship and interactions between these two styles. It is therefore significant again that the project of framing and establishing these styles occurs in the very first of the lives collected and presented together.

Second, I suggest that the representation of Hadrian's actions while physically traveling provides clues as to the actions expected of an emperor by our author and, perhaps, his audience. In particular, our author describes Hadrian's attention to administration, justice, and diplomatic relations while the emperor himself is in motion. It may be possible to trace this theme, and its communication by means of a range of motifs throughout the *Historia Augusta* as a whole – and it is certainly the case that proper care for the Roman *res publica* is a key component in establishing the legitimacy of any claimant to the imperial throne throughout this text.[28] I offer some brief case studies of Hadrian's travels in the *Vita Hadriani* by way of illustration.

First, the account of Hadrian's actions when he learns of the death of Trajan while at Antioch. Our author establishes his contrast early. He first signals the contingency and doubtful legitimacy of Hadrian's rule with an account of the rumors surrounding his adoption by Trajan, before firmly linking him with the model provided by the ideal emperor, Augustus and other exemplary figures of the early empire (*VH* 5.1):[29] "On taking possession of the imperial power Hadrian at once resumed the policy of the early emperors, and devoted his attention to maintaining peace throughout the world".

This entails a rejection (for the moment) of the militaristic pattern of imperial rule exemplified by his predecessor, Trajan – and, for our author, by Valentinian I and his brother Valens, Theodosius I as well as some, at least, of the many emperors and pretenders of the third century. However, Hadrian is not solely a "Senatorial" emperor. Potential rivals

are swiftly dealt with, and a double donative given to the soldiers to ensure their loyalty. We are also told that Hadrian acted swiftly to stabilize problematic provinces when he "appointed Marcus Turbo, after his reduction of Judaea, to quell the insurrection in Mauretania" (*VH* 5.8).[30] All three aspects of imperial governance are here on display: respect for the senatorial aristocracy; care for the military; and pragmatic, if not necessarily palatable decision-making.

Hadrian then sets out to meet the funeral procession of Trajan. Travel here contributes to the impression of legitimacy, and Hadrian's subsequent journey from Antioch to Rome, sending messengers and letters ahead of him, is redolent of Suetonius' Vespasian (*VH* 6.1; cf. Suetonius *Vespasian* 7). Two patterns have been set. First, his reign is initiated and later underpinned by contrasts: between the actions of an autocrat and the behavior of a *princeps senatus*; between legitimate and illegitimate acquisition and exercise of power; between actions that may be deemed those of a worthy prince, and actions that appear to be those of a cunning but cruel pragmatist (*VH* 5.5-8):[31]

> 5.5. Moreover, he showed at the outset such a wish to be lenient, that although Attianus advised him by letter in the first few days of his rule to put to death Baebius Macer, the prefect of the city, in case he opposed his elevation to power, also Laberius Maximus, then in exile on an island under suspicion of designs on the throne, and likewise Crassus Frugi, he nevertheless refused to harm them. 6. Later on, however, his procurator, though without an order from Hadrian, had Crassus killed when he tried to leave the island, on the ground that he was planning a revolt. 7. He gave a double donative to the soldiers in order to ensure a favourable beginning to his principate. 8 He deprived Lusius Quietus of the command of the Moorish tribesmen, who were serving under him, and then dismissed him from the army, because he had fallen under the suspicion of having designs on the throne.

Leniency and expediency, pragmatism and good governance follow one upon the other in a seemingly incoherent jumble. But the explicitness with which these contrasts are laid out, and the prominent place they are given in this account, suggest that they are not an accidental by-product of the artless combination of sources, but, rather, a conscious and deliberate authorial decision. Moreover, and as this passage clearly demonstrates, the emperor manifests concern for the administration of the empire while not in Rome. He appoints and removes governors and judges while traveling or staying in the provinces – and I return to this point below.

Hadrian's actions while in the city of Rome emphasize the civil, senatorial side of this contrast (*VH* 7-8). He acknowledges and enhances the authority of the Senate over capital cases and other legal cases involving Senators. He enacts a series of financial reforms. He engages with the foremost members of the Senate on the most intimate terms, and acts with care to ensure that its members match the dignity of that august body. Whenever he was in Rome, we are told, he attended meetings of the Senate regularly. However, this model of harmony with his Senatorial peers comes at a price. Immediately following his

account of Hadrian's elaborate respect for the senate and its members, our author observes (*VH* 9.1-3):[32]

> And yet, at the same time, Hadrian abandoned many provinces won by Trajan, and also destroyed, contrary to the entreaties of all, the theatre which Trajan had built in the Campus Martius. 2 These measures, unpopular enough in themselves, were still more displeasing to the public because of his pretence that all acts which he thought would be offensive had been secretly enjoined upon him by Trajan. 3 Unable to endure the power of Attianus and formerly his guardian, he was eager to murder him. He was restrained, however, by the knowledge that he already laboured under the odium of murdering four men of consular rank, although, as a matter of fact, he always attributed their execution to the designs of Attianus.

Again, a complex jumble of qualities is laid out in a cascade: maladministration, rejection of the beneficent acts of his predecessor, bloody suppression of rivals, and a rather more sinister version of the pseudonymy and misdirection that we have already remarked upon with reference to Hadrian's autobiography – and which was implicit in our author's description of the murder of Crassus Frugi (*VH* 5.5).

For our author, Hadrian's geographical location in Rome determines not only the presentation of him as an emperor who was careful to cultivate the good graces of the Senatorial aristocracy, but also the communication of information concerning his rulership that is rather less worthy of praise. Once again, a complex relationship exists between approbatory and disapprobatory representations. A stationary Hadrian, in Rome, lacks the completeness of the ideal emperor. He appeals to the Senate, and the *populus*, but ignores or angers the army, acts with savagery, dissembles, and pays little attention to the administration of the empire. The contradiction is again neatly encapsulated in our author's summation of Hadrian's sojourn in Rome, where he observes (*VH* 9.6-8):[33]

> 6 After Hadrian had removed from the prefecture the very men to whom he owed the imperial power, he departed for Campania, where he aided all the towns of the region by gifts and benefactions and attached all the foremost men to his train of friends. 7 But when at Rome, he frequently attended the official functions of the praetors and consuls, appeared at the banquets of his friends, visited them twice or thrice a day when they were sick, even those who were merely knights and freedmen, cheered them by words of comfort, encouraged them by words of advice, and very often invited them to his own banquets. 8 In short, everything that he did was in the manner of a private citizen.

Here, we witness a sequence from a pragmatic but scarcely praiseworthy act to secure his position while in Rome, through performance of the very essence of good administration while traveling in Campania, to behavior when once again in the city which is glossed as *ad privati hominis*, "in the manner of a private citizen" – a description which is, perhaps, not as approbatory as it first seems. It would appear that, while in Rome, Hadrian fails to strike the appropriate balance between playing the role of "first among equals", on the one hand, and acknowledging the reality of sole tenure of power, on the other.

Our author's account of Hadrian's actions while in Gaul and Britain provides a counterpoint (*VH* 10-12). Here, the focus is upon his role as military ruler, and his interest in establishing and maintaining the discipline of the soldiers. Hadrian himself lives in the manner of a soldier while in the camps. He regulates the duties and expenses of the soldiers, and reforms various aspects of military service. He pays great attention to the provisioning and supply of his armies, and, again, shows great concern for the wellbeing of his "fellows", this time visiting soldiers in their tents when they are sick (*VH* 10.6). In sum, his concern for military matters is described as *regio more*, "in the manner of a king" (*VH* 11.2), a label which we might once again interpret as not quite as approbatory as it first appears.

This impression is emphasized by the story that immediately follows this account, of Hadrian removing certain members of his staff for over-familiarity with his wife, as well as a comment upon his intrusion through spies into the private lives of his friends (*VH* 11.3-4):[34]

> 3. He removed from office Septicius Clarus, the prefect of the guard, and Suetonius Tranquillus, the imperial secretary, and many others besides, because without his consent they had been conducting themselves toward his wife, Sabina, in a more informal fashion than the etiquette of the court demanded. And, as he was himself wont to say, he would have sent away his wife too, on the ground of ill-temper and irritability, had he been merely a private citizen. 4. Moreover, his vigilance was not confined to his own household but extended to those of his friends, and by means of his private agents he even pried into all their secrets, and so skillfully that they were never aware that the Emperor was acquainted with their private lives until he revealed it himself.

Here, too, the representation is complex and contradictory. The qualities of decisiveness, and commitment to discipline that make his actions as a "Military" emperor worthy of praise complicate his relationship with the senatorial aristocracy, for they necessitate self-distancing. Moreover, here our author makes explicit that Hadrian is not a private citizen (*privatus*), thereby strengthening the slightly disapprobatory tone of his characterization of Hadrian's behavior towards the senatorial aristocracy while in Rome. It would seem, then, that in the presentation of Hadrian's interactions with the imperial bureaucracy and Senatorial class in Rome, his behavior is described as inconsistent with the demands placed upon an emperor to act as a ruler and commander, while his strengths as a military emperor on campaign with the armies are deliberately undermined by descriptions of his faults with reference to the civil aristocracies of the empire.

In both cases, then, the picture of imperial behavior is unsatisfactory, and his legitimacy is incomplete and uncertain. We are left wondering what, for our author, would constitute effective, legitimate imperial rule. Arguably, the clearest evidence of our author's answer to this question can be found in the actions he attributes to Hadrian while traveling. In particular, Hadrian is presented administering justice, relieving civic communities, removing and installing procurators and governors while in transit between Rome and the provinces, or between one province and the next. As we have seen, on his journey back to Rome from Antioch, the emperor appoints governors (*VH* 5.9; 7.5). In Campania, and on his way

to Gaul, he offers benefactions to civic communities (*VH* 9.6; 10.1). While traveling in the provinces of the East, he administers justice by punishing those procurators and governors that deserve it (*VH* 13.10). During his peregrination in Greece, he observes religious niceties and indulges in sightseeing. But he also constructs temples and performs acts of political foresight and pragmatism in the foreign sphere, feting foreign kings to ensure their good graces (*VH* 13.3-6; 8-9). His actions as an administrator are not in all cases or in all ways to be praised – indeed, far from it. Nor are the actions he takes while traveling necessarily palatable, but they are necessary – harsh medicine, perhaps, for a state in need of it.

It is this slightly unpalatable truth which, I argue, is most important in our author's presentation of Hadrian's rulership. Hadrian is deliberately presented as a contradictory figure, one who provokes strong reactions of both approval and disapproval – sometimes at one and the same time. Most strikingly, instances of self-indulgence and whimsy are inextricably linked to actions that strengthen the position of the emperor and the state within the bounds of his empire, and reshape in meaningful and positive ways Rome's relations with foreign neighbors, allies, and potential enemies (*VH* 13.3-9). In these cases, Hadrian's state of being in motion serves to emphasize the actions he performs. Travel functions as a marker of our author's concern to highlight the aspects of imperial governance that are most fundamental for an emperor's legitimacy. It is a concern for good governance, the administration of justice, and the careful management of foreign diplomacy that comprise the fundamental tasks of a good emperor. A legitimate emperor is indeed what a legitimate emperor does, and it is the *what* rather than the *how* of his doing that is most important in establishing his legitimacy.

Conclusions: Reading the *Vita Hadriani*

In linking the characterization of Hadrian's reign to his physical location, our author presents a clear distinction between the emperor's actions while in the city of Rome and those attributed to him while in the provinces. On the one hand, we observe Hadrian acting in the mold of the senatorial emperors of the second century. The ethos of the emperor as merely an elevated private citizen, as first among equals is evident in his attendance of the Senate and the deference he is described as giving to the consuls and praetors (*VH* 8.6; 9.7). On the other, while in the provinces he acts autocratically, in the manner of a king or military commander, and very much in keeping with our picture of the soldier-emperors of the third century as well as the pretenders and usurpers of the late fourth century. The discipline of the soldiers is his paramount concern, but alongside this he exhibits attitudes towards the senatorial elite that offer a stark contrast with the Hadrian of Rome. What model for the behavior of an emperor is being espoused here? To a certain degree, these two styles of imperial rule are being contrasted. But the contrast is not black and white. The "Senatorial" style is not uncritically praised, nor is the "Military" style uncategorically critiqued. Rather, the two exist in a complementary relationship, as two methods for acquiring and maintaining legitimate power. Yet even together, they are to some degree incomplete,

and the tension between them entails unpopular or excessive acts, which themselves open Hadrian up to the censure of his contemporaries, our author and his various audiences.

Rather than attribute this inconsistent representation of Hadrian's rule to a hasty and clumsy combination of contradictory sources, I suggest that our author is here signaling the potential for a third way of judging and interpreting imperial power. This third way enlists the flexible motif of travel in order to present a pragmatic, practice-based account of imperial rule. It is while the emperor is in motion that we observe him exhibiting the most care for the judicial, administrative, and beneficent aspects of imperial rule. If Hadrian in Rome is Hadrian the senator, and Hadrian in the provinces is Hadrian the autocrat, Hadrian the traveler is Hadrian the emperor, administering his empire in his own particular way, warts and all. Not all of his actions are beneficent. Not all of his decisions will be popular among his subjects. But they are practical, and they are necessary. Travel and effective governance – regardless of the emperor's particular style of rule and personal predilections – are here intimately connected. Here, too, our author lays down a marker of a preoccupation with the pragmatics of imperial power that is to inform the remainder of his work.

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Notes

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1 The literature is vast. Recent synthetic accounts of the scholarship provide much fuller bibliographical references and discussions than I can hope to provide here: Ratti (2008); Cameron (2010); Thomson (2012); Rohrbacher (2013). Note also the existence of no less than three commentaries of the *Vita Hadriani*: Benario (1980); Callu, Gaden and Desbordes (1992); Fündling (2006). For ease of consultation, quotations of Latin text and English translations of the *Vita Hadriani* (*VH*) are taken from the Loeb edition of Magie (1921).

2 Syme (1971, p. 263). As a relatively cursory perusal of the contents pages of the many volumes in the *Bonner Historia Augusta Colloquium* (BHAC) series reveals, the bulk of scholarship on the *SHA* that is not devoted to questions of authorship, reliability, and date has tended to take the form of text-quarrying, searching for snippets of information that can be gleaned about particular institutions, events, or practices.

3 See, for example, Callu, Gaden and Desbordes (1992, p. 13-14); Mader (2005); Sogno (2012).

4 For the complex interplay of realism and utopianism in the author's treatment of the issue of the *optimus princeps*, see the detailed and stimulating recent contribution of Molinier-Arbò (2008).

5 Restless: Birley (1997); Itinerant: Speller (2003, p. 5).

6 Most recently, Birley (2003). For a detailed account of how Hadrian's travels inflect our understanding of the *iter principis*, see Halfmann (1986), with the response of Syme (1988). Also, more recently, Birley (1997, p. 57, p. 146-154; 164-66; 222-224).

7 Birley (1997, p. 7-8) with notes gives important bibliography on studies of the sources for Hadrian.

8 For a more detailed exploration of this problem, see Thérèse (1988).
9 See, for further discussion of Nero's *peregrinatio Achaica* and its relationship with his philhellenism, André (1995).
10 Dessau (1889) remains the indispensable starting-point for all discussions of the single-author hypothesis.
11 White (1967) is, to my mind, decisive in demonstrating single authorship. Note also the brief recapitulation of the criteria for evaluating authorship by den Hengst (2010). Cameron (2010) offers a cogent recent summary of the debate and the scholarship, and can usefully be supplemented by Thomson (2012, p. 20-36). For the higher quality of the earlier lives, see, for example, Syme (1971, p. 30); Callu, Gaden and Desbordes (1992, p. 3). For the author's growing skill and confidence, Syme (1971, p. 258-259).
12 And note Ratti (2008, p. 336-337), who argues that the boundaries between the two genres in the period have been rather artificially drawn.
13 Mythohistoria: *Opilius Macrinus* 1.5; *Quad. Tyr*. 1.2, with Syme (1971, p. 51).
14 Montiglio (2005, p. 221; 222). For similar observations about travel in late antiquity, see Drinkwater (2004).
15 Again, the literature is vast. For a cogent statement of the argument, Elsner (1997, p. 22 and *passim*).
16 Cf. Morgan (1996, p. 66-69), with further references. Also Barnes (1999); Robins (2000).
17 Seminal are White (1972) and, for ancient historiography, Bowersock (1997). Note also Syme (1986) for the *Vita Hadriani*.
18 In this context, note Thomson's provocative suggestion that the *Historia Augusta* be placed in dialog with panegyrical texts of the period, as evidenced in the text commonly referred to as the *Panegyrici Latini*: THOMSON, 2012, p. 25-28.
19 I suspend judgment on questions around the fineness with which a particular date for the text can be determined, and which date is most persuasive. Ratti (2008) argues strongly for a date after 396 CE; Cameron (2010) espouses a date in the 370s.
20 Callu, Gaden and Desbordes (1992, p. XXIV). Cf. the discussions of the motivations for beginning with Hadrian offered by Gaden (1976, p. 129-130); Meckler (1996); Fündling (2006, p. 3-10).
21 For legitimacy as a concern of our author, Syme (1971, p. 62-67); Thérèse (1988). Note also Cameron (2010, p. 750-753), enlisting the *topos* of problematic child emperors in an argument about dating. For complex interplay of the various agencies of legitimation during the reign of Gallienus, see Grey (2010).
22 Note, for example, Syme (1971), Barnes (1978), 107; Benario (1980, p. 4).
23 For Ignotus, Syme (1971, p. 30-53). For the Kaisergeschichte, recently Burgess (2005). For Marius Maximus, recently Kulikowski (2007), providing fuller bibliographical references and summary of key contributors and their arguments. Also, for broader discussion of our author's sources, Rohrbacher (2013).
24 For consciousness of this organization by the author of the *Historia Augusta*. Cf. Callu, Gaden and Desbordes (1992, p. 7); Meckler (1996, p. 365); Salvador Ventura (2008, p. 371).
25 Cf. Barnes (1999), identifying some hagiographical texts which, in his opinion, our author certainly knew or consulted.
26 Certainly, it would seem that Hadrian was at least indirectly involved in some of the literary production of some authors of the Second Sophistic: Cf. BIRLEY, 1997, p. 4-5.
27 Cf., for contrasting models of imperial rulership in different individual *vitae* of the *Historia Augusta*, Molinier-Arbò (2008, p. 100).
28 Cf. Grey (2010) for comparable themes in the *Vitae Tyranni Triginta*.
29 *Adeptus imperium ad priscum se statim morem instituit et tenendae per orbem terrarum paci operam impendit*.
30 *Marcio Turbone Iudaeis compressis ad deprimendum tumultum Mauretaniae destinato*.
31 5 *Tantum autem statim clementiae studium habuit ut, cum sub primis imperii diebus ab Attiano per epistolas esset admonitus, ut et Baebius Macer praefectus urbis, si reniteretur eius imperio, necaretur et Laberius Maximus, qui suspectus imperio in insula exsulabat, et Frugi Crassus, neminem laederet*; 6 *quamvis Crassum postea procurator egressum insula, quasi res novas moliretur, iniusso eius occiderit*. 7 *militibus ob auspicia imperii duplicem largitionem dedit*. 8 *Lusium Quietum sublatis gentibus Mauris, quos regebat, quia suspectus imperio fuerat*.
32 1 *Inter haec tamen et multas provincias a Traiano adquisitas reliquit et theatrum, quod ille in Campo Martio posuerat, contra omnium vota destruxit*. 2 *et haec quidem eo tristiora videbantur, quod omnia, quae displicere vidisset Hadrianus, mandata sibi ut faceret secreto a Traiano esse simulabat*. 3 *cum Attiani, praefecti sui et quondam tutoris, potentiam ferre non posset, nisus est eum obtruncare, sed revocatus est, quia iam quattuor*

consularium occisorum, quorum quidem necem in Attiani consilia refundebat, premebatur invidia.
33 6 *Summotis his a praefectura, quibus debebat imperium, Campaniam petiit eiusque omnia oppida beneficiis et largitionibus sublevavit, optimum quemque amicitiis suis iungens.* 7 *Romae vero praetorum et consulum officia frequentavit, conviviis amicorum interfuit, aegros bis ac ter die et nonnullos equites Romanos ac libertinos visitavit, solaciis refovit, consiliis sublevavit, conviviis suis semper adhibuit.* 8 *omnia denique ad privati hominis modum fecit.*
34 3 *Septicio Claro praefecto praetorii et Suetonio Tranquillo epistularum magistro multisque aliis, quod apud Sabinam uxorem iniussu eius familiarius se tunc egerant quam reverentia domus aulicae postulabat, successores dedit, uxorem etiam ut morosam et asperam dimissurus, ut ipse dicebat, si privatus fuisset.* 4 *et erat curiosus non solum domus suae sed etiam amicorum, ita ut per frumentarios occulta omnia exploraret, nec adverterent amici sciri ab imperatore suam vitam, priusquam ipse hoc imperator ostenderet.*

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