Introduction

Intentions of this Study

In the production of this study, the first detailed study on the *Vita Marci Antonini* in the *Historia Augusta* since Schwendemann,\(^1\) a number of key concepts have been explored that consider the disadvantages and advantages of the *Historia Augusta*. The disadvantages are quite obvious: the problems with the text, its questionable authorship, and the numerous historical inaccuracies. However, there are also advantages, such as the fertile scope for analysis, the possibilities for examining the development of the biographical genre and the opportunity to understand Marcus Aurelius and how he was regarded and remembered in the later Roman Empire. Nevertheless, the focus of this examination of the *Vita Marci* is on one key element of the text: the thematic progression in the representation of Marcus Aurelius. The reasoning behind this concentration is to attempt to determine the intentions and bias of the biographer, which are both conceivable and instructive. This allows for an analysis of the text in a fashion that primarily concentrates upon how the author represented Marcus Aurelius. The difficulties with the text have been discussed briefly, but the overriding emphasis of this study is on the portrayal of Marcus Aurelius.

The most notable aspect of this biography is its positive partiality towards the *princeps*.\(^2\) The *Vita Marci* was composed in such a positive fashion that it could almost be classed as aretalogy,\(^3\) rather than biography. It is a biography, but one that provides a clear and obvious theme that stresses the brilliance of Marcus Aurelius. The infrequent inclusion of criticisms by the biographer highlights his partiality towards the *princeps* and also emphasises the idealism that surrounded the remembrance of Marcus Aurelius in the late 4\(^{th}\) Century AD. This romanticism is stated from the outset of the *Vita Marci Antonini*, which indicates to the audience that Marcus was not only an emperor, but a philosopher who

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\(^1\) J. Schwendemann, *Der historische Wert der Vita Marci bei den Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1923. However, it should be noted that André Chastagnol has also dealt with the *Vita Marci* in some detail. See A. Chastagnol, *Histoire Auguste*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 1994, pp. 110-59.


epitomised the Platonic ideals of the philosophical monarch. The *Vita Marci* has also been shown to have been among the most accurate biographies in the *Historia Augusta*, so its historical content should not be entirely discounted either. Instead, it is the aim of this study to analyse how these elements were generally presented by the biographer in the most positive fashion possible. This has been undertaken so that the intentions of the author can be viewed, an approach which is particularly revealing when considering the negative representations that were occasionally included by the *HA* biographer.

The structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* is also important to this study. It has been established by other scholars that the *Vita Marci* included a large interpolation in the actual text of the biography. Owing to the dearth of information surrounding the compilation of the *HA*, it is impossible to ascertain how or when this occurred, but it is nevertheless important to note. In order to ascertain the thematic consistency of the *Vita Marci Antonini* the interpolation has been removed from the main commentary and examined as a separate text in Chapter Four. Disconnecting these two sections has allowed for a more discriminating interpretation of the original text, particularly in relation to the thematic progression of the original *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi*.

This examination of the *Vita Marci Antonini* has established that the original biography was written in a deliberate style, which for the most part followed a coherent theme across the various sections of the *Vita*. Nevertheless, as with most of the biographies in the *Historia Augusta*, there are exceptions to this general tenet, particularly in relation to those sections in the text that overtly criticise the *princeps*. However, these critical passages only comprise two out of the twenty-four original sections, which illustrates the overall consistency in the representation of Marcus Aurelius. The uniform approach by the biographer provides a clear example of the positive light in which Marcus Aurelius was portrayed and establishes the literary intentions of the biographer.

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Significant Prior Research

The analysis of the *Historia Augusta* has produced numerous studies over the years,\(^8\) largely motivated by the contentious character of the text and its authorship. One of the most important scholars to work on this area was Ronald Syme,\(^9\) whose numerous books and articles had a significant impact on the fashion in which the *Historia Augusta* has been viewed, and many of his studies have been important for the development of this examination of the *Vita Marci*. There have also been many articles taken from the Historia-Augusta-Colloquium Series (referred to as HAC). While the majority of these papers have not concentrated on the *Vita Marci* directly, the analysis and discussion of issues such as authorship and the sources used by the HA biographer have provided a source of material for consideration in relation to this analysis. Another important work relating to the question of the biographer’s sources is *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* by T.D. Barnes.\(^10\) While this work has provided some discussion of the *Vita Marci*, the central aim of the study is on the *HA* as a whole, which has allowed for more comprehensive discussion of Marcus Aurelius’ biography in the present study.

There have been several works produced in relation to the *Vita Marci*, but prior to this study an in-depth commentary of this *Vita* has not been published. The most significant study that has focused upon the *Vita Marci* was by Schwendemann,\(^11\) who largely concentrated on the sources and historical value of the *Vita Marci*. While the importance of this study is evident, it has taken a different direction to the present study, which has focused on the biographical representation of Marcus Aurelius and the intentions that lay behind this portrayal of the *princeps*. In contrast to this, Schwendemann sought to connect various passages within the *Vita* in order to analyse the literary style in which they were written, be it annalistic or biographical. Schwendemann’s study has been useful in the

\(^11\) Schwendemann, 1923, *op.cit.*
development of this study, but the foci of both analyses are quite different. There have been
two other shorter studies that analysed the *Vita Marci*, by Pflaum,12 and Syme.13 The study
of Pflaum considered both the *Vita Hadriani* and the *Vita Marci* in relation to the
prosopographical evidence that existed at the time, however the brevity of Pflaum’s
discussion allows for further analysis of the *Vita Marci*.

The discussion of the *Vita Marci* presented by Syme was only part of the overall
intention of his article.14 In his study, Syme focused largely on the influence of Marius
Maximus upon the creation of the *Vita Marci* and the overall structural inconsistencies
of the biography in its present form. Owing to the brevity of the discussion presented by Syme
it is quite evident that it was not his intention to provide a comprehensive analysis of the
*Vita* itself, but to use it as a case-study for the discussion of the previous biographer,
Marius Maximus. More recently there have also been other articles that have analysed the
*Vita Marci*, which have been written by Klaus Rosen. The first of these studies15 used the
biography of Marcus Aurelius as a case study for the analysis of the political implications
of the joint-principate, whereas the second article16 has concentrated more directly on the
representation of power and responsibility in the *Vita Marci*. While these studies provide a
good source of analysis of the *Vita Marci*, they were not intended to discuss the
representation of Marcus Aurelius overall, which is the main intention of the present study.
Rosen has also written a short biography of Marcus’ reign in recent years,17 which has
clarified some of the precise features of his principate, but in this regard the biography in
the *Historia Augusta* has only be considered in an ancillary context by the author.

In relation to the historical study of Marcus Aurelius and his principate, there have
been several other works that have been beneficial for the development of the present
study.18 The most significant of these was *Marcus Aurelius: a biography* by A.R. Birley.19

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12 H.G. Pflaum, “La Valeur de la source inspiratrice de la Vita Hadriani et de la Vita Marci Antonini à la
16 K. Rosen, “Das Schlusskapitel der Marc Aurel Vita und der Konflikt zwischen Gesinnung und
Sedgwick, *Marcus Aurelius: a biography told as much as may be by letters: together with some account of
the Stoic religion and an exposition of the Roman government's attempt to suppress Christianity during
which focused primarily on providing a detailed account of the historical developments that occurred throughout Marcus’ lifetime. This study provides a good source of comparison and analysis for the dating of historical events, but it has a much broader scope of discussion than the *Vita Marci*. The analysis of the *HA* biography of Marcus Aurelius by Birley also seems to accept the representation of Marcus a little too readily, which has been discussed in greater detail in this analysis of the biography.

**Overall Textual Methodology**

As stated previously, the central focus of this study has been on the thematic progression that exists in the main text of the *Vita Marci Antonini*. The analysis of the *Vita Marci Antonini* has taken two formats: the examination of thematic sections, and the investigation into key individual sentences. The majority of this study has concentrated on the text using thematic divisions that exist in the text, in order to understand and delineate the changing and continuing themes that occur within the narrative. However, there have also been many instances where particular individual sentences have been analysed, which is largely because of their effect on the development of the account provided by the biographer. It is hoped that this style of analysis illustrates both the value and the dilemmas faced when approaching this text, which allows for a better understanding of both the author and his perspective of Marcus Aurelius. This is important because it demonstrates the worth of a critical understanding of a literary source and also establishes that in order to understand leading historical figures such as Marcus Aurelius, it is imperative to be aware of the nature of the evidence.

In order to ascertain the historical accuracy of the *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi* it has been essential to compare the representations given by the biographer with other ancient literary sources, such as Cassius Dio, Herodian, Ammianus Marcellinus and Marcus’ own *Meditations*. These comparisons have highlighted some of the inconsistencies that occur in the biography, but also some of its historical gains. Where possible this has been analysed in relation to some of the numismatic and archaeological evidence from the

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period, which has established some of the benefits of the *Vita Marci Antonini*. It is also clear that the inherent bias of the biographer has coloured some of the representations, which has raised some important questions about the legitimacy of the depiction of Marcus Aurelius in the *HA*. In general terms, the *HA* will always be problematic, but it does provide some historical value, particularly the *Vita Marci Antonini*. Yet the manner in which the biography has been written should be questioned in relation to the intentions of its author and his literary motives.

While the continuity of the text has been a consistent focus of this study, the structural divisions in the *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi* have also been revealing for an understanding of the overall text. It is evident that the *HA* biographer used a combination of chronological and ideological factors in the creation of this *Vita*, but it appears that the ideological issues were typically viewed with more importance to the author. It is this element that has produced the uniform representation of Marcus Aurelius in this biography, but it should be stated that the biographer still attempted to place the didactic themes within a chronological context as well. The instructive elements of the biography are consistently emphasised in the text, particularly in relation to the representation of Marcus as an ‘ideal’ *princeps* who should be honoured by all. However, there are two passages (Sections 20 and 29.1-3) that made a clear break from this biographical approach, which may have been intended to highlight that Marcus was not perfect, or were included to emphasise his strengths using a similar method to the 2nd century biographer Suetonius.21 But in the *Vita Marci Antonini* the result is much more confusing and epitomises the literary shortcomings of the biographer instead. All the same, this thematic break in the biography illustrates the consistency of the remaining twenty-two sections of the *Vita*.

**General Objectives of this Study**

Having established the overall thematic and textual methodology used in this analysis, it is important to outline the intended results of this examination. There are three findings that have resulted from this analysis of the *Vita Marci Antonini*: firstly, it has established that there were clear motives in the biographer’s representation of Marcus

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Aurelius; secondly, that the use of the *Vita Marci Antonini* as an historical source is justified, as long as the representational intentions of the *HA* biographer are kept in mind; and finally, that there are definite themes across the range of literary evidence for Marcus Aurelius that epitomise the idealism that has surrounded the recollection of his principate.\(^\text{22}\)

All of these results have been taken from a careful thematic reading of the text of the *Vita Marci Antonini*, which mostly has established the underlying biographical intentions of the author, which has in turn provided insight into the historiography of the evidence for Marcus Aurelius' principate and the romanticism that surrounds the literary evidence for the period. When the biographer included some criticisms of the *princeps* they were typically included in a somewhat haphazard and disjointed fashion, which creates some questions about the overall structure of the *Vita*, but this is quite consistent with the general questions that exist for the *HA*. Naturally, analysis of the *Vita Marci Antonini* cannot answer all of the questions that have been produced in relation to the *Historia Augusta*, but it is quite clear that it can add to the modern understanding of some of its literary intentions.

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Chapter 1

The *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi* and the *Historia Augusta* in its Biographical Context

Introduction

The focus of this chapter is on the issues surrounding the *Historia Augusta* as an historical text and the implications that this holds for the analysis of the *Vita Marci*. In order to fully comprehend the significance of the *Vita Marci Antonini*, the *Historia Augusta* must first be contextualised. This contextualisation can then be applied to the overall themes presented in the biography of Marcus Aurelius. It is also important for the other literary sources on Marcus’ life and principate to be discussed briefly in this context in order that the *HA* biography can be compared with them. This has allowed for a greater understanding of its historical significance and provided further insight into the intentions of the biographer. Even by the time in which the *HA* was composed (see below for further discussion), the mystique surrounding the reign of Marcus Aurelius was well and truly established, a fact that has in many ways affected his representation within the Roman historiographical and biographical traditions. It is the central aim of this study to understand this pattern of idealism in order that a better understanding of both Marcus Aurelius and the *Vita Marci* may be achieved. But in order to examine the significance of the *Vita Marci*, the place of the *Historia Augusta* in the Roman biographical tradition must be established so that its literary context can be understood.

The *Historia Augusta* in its Biographical Context

The creation of the *Historia Augusta* continued a long standing biographical tradition that stemmed back to the origins of Greek biography in the late 5th to early 4th Centuries BC, which probably used the *Apology* by Plato as a model.1 This was followed by the *Ethics* by Aristotle, which formed the basis upon which many later biographies were created,2 but there were also the works of Isocrates and Xenophon that were highly...

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2 See F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form*, Leipzig, 1901, p. 316.
influential. Following this it was the Peripatetic school that continued the development of Greek biography during the Hellenistic period, which was highly influential on the later Roman biographical tradition. The first known Roman writer to follow in this tradition was Marcus Terentius Varro, but none of his biographical works now survive. For the purposes of this study the focus is the extant texts in order to note the progression of biographical representation over time so that the literary context of the Historia Augusta can be understood. Five of the leading biographical predecessors have been discussed in order to examine any potential stylistic and representational influences that they may have had on the biographer of the HA. These authors are: Cornelius Nepos, Quintus Curtius Rufus, Tacitus, Plutarch and Suetonius.

The earliest extant Roman biography was composed by Cornelius Nepos during the 1st Century BC. He was born around 99 BC in Cisalpine Gaul, but soon moved to the capital and remained there until his death in 24 BC. Owing to the criticisms of his literary style, the significance of Nepos’ writings have often been neglected, but the usefulness of the de Viris Illustribus as an indicator of the progression of the Roman biographical tradition should still be noted. As with Varro, Cornelius Nepos followed the Peripatetic tradition of biographical composition, but he also used various episodes in his Vitae to provide entertaining elements as well. It would seemingly be a far stretch to claim that the de Viris Illustribus had a significant impact on the development of the Vita Marci in the

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3 D.R. Stuart, Epochs of Greek and Roman Biography, Sather Classical Lectures, 1928, pp. 235ff.
6 ibid., pp. 4-5.
7 The influence of Marius Maximus and other later Roman authors upon the composition of the HA has been discussed in the ensuing section, ‘The Issues in Using the Historia Augusta as an Historical Source’.
9 Pliny, NH, 3.127.
11 For example by Leo, 1901, op.cit., pp. 226ff.
12 For example see Nepos, Aristeides, 2.2: neque aliud est: ullum huius in re militari illustre factum quam huius imperii memoria, iustitiae vero et aequitatis et innocentiae multa, in primis quod eius aequitatem factum est, cum in communi classe esset Graeciae simul cum Pausania, quo duce Mardonius erat fugatus, ut summa imperii maritimis ab Lacedaemoniis transferretur ad Athenienses.
but there were certainly some similarities in their themes and representational priorities. Both biographers sought to combine elements of moralising and entertaining through the selective inclusion of various episodes. It is also quite evident that they shared a judicious view of the distinctive features of biography when compared to history.\textsuperscript{15}

Quintus Curtius Rufus wrote his history of Alexander the Great, the \textit{Historiae Alexandri Magni Macedonis}, after the Aug.stan period, probably before the end of Claudius’ reign.\textsuperscript{16} While it is important to note that this text was nominally ‘history’, there are numerous elements that also establish its credentials as a biography.\textsuperscript{17} The most useful passage for an understanding of his view of Alexander is found in Book 10, which epitomises the idealism with which Alexander was represented,\textsuperscript{18} including his familial devotion, piety and natural restraint from vice. However, it is also notable that the representation of Curtius Rufus did not ignore the well-known vices of Alexander (insobriety, ruthless anger and his desire for divination). These faults are explained away as not being his fault: \textit{fortuna} was responsible. Rufus’ portrayal of Alexander is highly laudable, which can be seen in this explanation, but the author contradicts himself in the

\textsuperscript{14} For a comment upon Nepos’ own literary intentions, see R. Syme, \textit{Sallust}, Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1964.
\textsuperscript{18} Curtius, 10.5.26-35. ‘Et, hercule, iuste aestimantibus regem, liquet bona naturae eius fuisse, vita vel fortunae vel aetatis. Vis incredibilis animi, laboris patiencia propemodum nimmer, fortitudo non inter reges modo excellens, sed inter illos quoque quorum haec sola virtus fuit, liberalitas saepere maiora tribunes quam a dis petuntur, Clementia in devotis, tot regna aut reedita quibus aderet bello aut dono data, mortis cuius metus ceteros examinat perpetua contemplio, gloriae laudisque ut iustus maior cupido, ita in iubene et in tantis neglegenda rebus, iam pietas erga parentes, quorum Olympiada immortalitati consecrare decreverat, Philippum ullos erat, iam in omnes fre amicos besiegnitas, erga milites benvolentia, consilium par magnitudini animi et, quantam vix poterat actas eius capere, sollertia, modus inmodicum cupiditatem, veneris intra naturale desiderium usus, nec illa nisi ex permesso voluptas, ingenii profecto dotes erant. Illa fortunae: dis aequare se et caelestes honores accersere et talia suadentibus oraculis credere et dedignatiibus venerari ipsum vehementius, quam par esset, trasci, in externum habitum mutare corporis cultum, imitari devictarum gentium mores, quos ante victoriam spreverat. Nam iracundiam et cupidinem vini sicuti inuenta irritaverat, ita senectus mitigare potuisset. Fatendum est tamen, cum plurimum virtute debuerit, plus debuisse Fortunae, quam solus omnium mortalium in potestate habuit.’
final sentence: Alexander could control *fortuna*.\(^{19}\) This separation of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ qualities was indicative of the reception that these features would have received from Rufus’ audience; primarily the Roman senatorial élite.\(^{20}\) In view of the differing foci between the *Historiae Alexandri Magni Macedonis* and the *Vita Marci*, it is unlikely that Curtius Rufus would have made a significant impression on the biographer of the *HA*. But it is important to note their similar concentration on examining the deeds of ‘great men’ as examples for their audiences, which is a consistent theme in the ancient biographical tradition.

The *de Vita Iulii Agricolae* by Cornelius Tacitus was composed during the later stages of the 1\(^{st}\) Century AD, probably in AD 93.\(^{21}\) His motivation in writing this biography would have been that he was married to Agricola’s daughter,\(^{22}\) which could make the motivation behind the composition of the text somewhat problematic. All the same, Tacitus himself states that his purpose for writing is that wicked words and actions should fear their posthumous infamy,\(^{23}\) which highlights his view of the merits of writing history and, in this instance, biography.\(^{24}\) The *Agricola* was largely a defence of his father-in-law, following the end to his career during the principate of the Emperor Domitian.\(^{25}\) This was most strikingly highlighted by Tacitus in his discussion following the narrative of the death of Agricola,\(^{26}\) whereby the merits of both men were compared. Nevertheless, the overall merits of Tacitus’ scholarship cannot be discounted,\(^{27}\) which makes the *Agricola* an important biographical source. However, it should be noted that the *Agricola* should be viewed in a different fashion to the biographies in the *HA* because of the temporal distance between author and subject. Tacitus was closely connected to his subject, whereas the biographer of the *HA* was much more separated from the various Emperors, which allowed


\(^{23}\) Tacitus, *Annals*, 3.65.


\(^{26}\) Tacitus, *Agricola*, 42.4: *sciant, quibus moris est invidia mirari, posse etiam sub multis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiuntque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor addint, eo laudis excedere, quo plerique per abruptia sed in nihilum rei publicae usu ambitiosa morte inciuruerint*.

\(^{27}\) See Ogilvie and Richmond, 1967, op.cit., pp. 11-20.
him much more flexibility in the interpretation of events and the nature of the historical characters. As with the previously discussed biographies, any direct influence that it may have exerted upon the composition of the *Vita Marci* must have been minimal.\(^{28}\)

The *Parallel Lives* of Plutarch was another important biographical composition that reflects the continuation of the biographical tradition into the 2nd Century AD. He was born in Chaeronea between AD 45-50,\(^{29}\) and he also continued the traditional moralising conception of the Peripatetic school in his biographical compositions.\(^{30}\) He made his motivation for writing quite evident in the *Life of Timoleon*,\(^{31}\) where he clearly states that the examples of great men affected his own behaviour.\(^{32}\) In a similar fashion to the biographer of the *Vita Marci*, Plutarch used a variety of sources (both literary and oral),\(^{33}\) and consistently sought to instruct the audience on the correct form of behaviour.\(^{34}\) He did not intend to reach an all-encompassing audience,\(^{35}\) but he still attempted to make the *Parallel Lives* enjoyable to read.\(^{36}\) It is the ‘parallel’ nature of these biographies that makes Plutarch’s writings distinctive, but also problematic. The task of comparing two lives in order to establish their similarities frequently affected the fashion in which various characters were portrayed by Plutarch, and, in turn, influenced his choice of subject matter in the *Lives*. Nevertheless, this interpretation shows the variation in literary technique that frequently occurred during the development of the negatively Greco-Roman biographical tradition. As with the biographer of the *Vita Marci*, Plutarch did not simply seek to

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\(^{31}\) Plutarch, *Timoleon*, I.1. ‘Εμοί τίς τῶν βίων ἀφοσία μεν γραφής συνέβη δ' έτέρους, ἐπιμένειν δὲ καὶ φιλοσοφεῖν ἢ ἢ καὶ δ' ἐμαυτόν, ὅσπερ ἐν ἐσοπτρῳ τῇ ἱστορίᾳ πειρώμενοι ἁμής γε ποις χορημένη καὶ ἀφομίουσιν πρὸς τὰς ἐκείνους ἀρετὰς τὸν βίον.


entertain his audience, but instead aimed to provide moral examples to encourage (or discourage) certain forms of behaviour.37

The *de Vita Caesarum* by Suetonius was one of the most important ancient biographies in relation to the study of the *Vita Marci* and the *Historia Augusta*. Suetonius had served for a period as *ab epistulis* to the Emperor Hadrian,38 early in the 2nd Century AD,39 which seems to have provided him with a fair degree of access to the imperial records.40 Suetonius opted for the biographical form of writing, which in many ways represents the direction in which Roman politics had developed by the time he was writing, with the *princeps* being the sole representative of power.41 That being said, Suetonius was frequently more interested in ‘entertaining’ his audience,42 which must be kept in mind when considering the reliability of his representations.43 Throughout the *de Vita Caesarum* there are instances where Suetonius exhibits some critical evaluation of his sources,44 but he was hardly consistent in this regard. Suetonius’ biographies do not appear to have had the same moralising tendencies as his predecessors,45 despite his frequent judgements on the merits of various characters.46

For the purposes of this study, it is important to note the lasting influence of Suetonius on the development of Imperial biographies in the 3rd and 4th Centuries AD.47 This influence was mentioned by the biographer of the *HA*, in the *Vita Probi: et mihi

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38 cf. H. Lindsay, “Suetonius as *ab epistulis* to Hadrian and the Early History of the Imperial Correspondence”, *Historia* 43.4, 1994, pp. 454-68.
quidem id animi fuit ut non Sallustios, Livios, Tacitos, Trogos atque omnes disseretissimos imitaret viros in vita principum et temporibus disserendis, sed Marium Maximum, Suetonium Tranquillum, Fabium Marcellinum, Gargilium Martialem, Iulium Capitolinum, Aelium Lambridium ceterosque, qui haec et talia non tam diserte quam vere memoriae tradiderunt. The reasoning behind this compliment by the biographer of the HA may have been inspired by the Suetonian style to allow the readers to ‘make up their own minds’, which is also a notable feature in the Historia Augusta. However, there were other important sources used by the biographer of the HA, which must also be considered.

The Issues in Using the Historia Augusta as an Historical Source

There are many difficulties that face modern scholars when approaching the HA, particularly in relation to the question of its authorship. This has been dealt with in numerous studies previously, and will only be discussed briefly because it is not the prime aim of this examination. It is important for this rather significant question to be addressed. The presence of the six names of supposed authors (Aelius Spartanus, Julius Capitolinus, Vulcacius Gallicanus, Aelius Lamprimus, Træcellius Pollio, Flavius Vosписicus) has been difficult to explain, but as argued by Dessau and Syme, the linguistic and stylistic similarities indicate a single author. With this in mind, the dating of the Historia Augusta is difficult, considering that at various stages the biographer addresses the Emperors

49 Probus, 2.7. ‘As for myself, it has been my intention, by describing the lives and times of the emperors, to imitate, not Sallust, nor Livy, nor Tacitus, nor Trogus, or any other of the most articulate writers, but instead Marius Maximus, Suetonius Tranquillus, Fabius Marcellinus, Gargilius Martialis, Julius Capitolinus, Aelius Lamprimus, and others who have passed down a memory of these and other elements not so much with articulacy as with honesty.’
Diocletian, Constantius and Constantine.\textsuperscript{54} In response to this, Syme has also argued that an approximate date for its composition should be around AD 395,\textsuperscript{55} which appears most likely in view of the numerous correlations between the \textit{HA} and other sources from this period.

Another difficulty with the \textit{HA} as a literary and historical source is the nature of the extant evidence,\textsuperscript{56} with the surviving manuscripts being quite different in their origins,\textsuperscript{57} and erratic in their content.\textsuperscript{58} The irregularities in the text have caused debate and discussion about how various passages should be interpreted,\textsuperscript{59} which, in turn, has led to the legitimacy of its narrative being questioned, resulting in claims that it is a ‘forgery’.\textsuperscript{60} Nevertheless, for the purposes of this study, the episodes presented in the \textit{Vita Marci} have been compared to the other literary sources in order to ascertain their accuracy. It is also fortunate that in this regard there seems to be a fair amount of consensus about the text of the \textit{Vita Marci Antonini}, which removes this problem for the most part in this study.

There are several reasons why these aspects are of particular importance when analysing the \textit{Vita Marci}. Despite the name of the biographer being impossible to ascertain, the fact that the biography of Marcus Aurelius was only one section of a larger work by one author is illustrative of the author’s intentions: to provide an account of all the \textit{principes}. The fact that the \textit{Historia Augusta} even included the junior Caesars and potential Usurpers in this collection emphasises this point. Therefore, although this study has examined the \textit{Vita Marci} in particular, it must be contextualised as a section of the entire work as well.\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{61} cf. R. Syme, “The Cadusii in History and in Fiction”, \textit{JHS} 108, 1988, p. 147.
Another important point for consideration is the relationship between the main text of the *Vita Marci* and the interpolation that was included in the actual biography at some stage. The identification of the interpolation has been discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, but for the purposes of the present examination it is necessary to point out the existence of an interpolation at Sections 15.1-19.12, which has been dated to the reign of Diocletian (AD 284-305). This is important because if the *HA* was composed around AD 395, it would indicate that the interpolation that was later inserted in the *Vita Marci* predated it by roughly a century. This provides an indication of the continuation of various episodes and accounts of Marcus’ life over time, which provides an indication of how he was perceived after his death.

The period in which the *Vita Marci* was composed is also important to take into account when considering the intended audience of the text. The positive representation of Marcus Aurelius in the text of the *Vita Marci* demonstrates some of the romanticism that surrounded the memory of him, and also typifies the expectations of the audience. The expectations for such a positive portrayal are shown most clearly in the interpolation, where the Emperor Diocletian is directly addressed, in relation to the great reverence and respect that he felt for Marcus Aurelius: 19.12 *deusque etiam nunc habetur, ut vobis ipsis, sacratissime imperator Diocletiane, et semper visum est et videtur, qui eum inter numina vestra non ut ceteros sed specialiter veneramuni ac semper dicitis, vos vita et clementia tales esse cupere qualis fuit Marcus, etiamsi philosophia nec Plato esse possit, si revertatur in vitam.*

It is quite evident that the *Vita Marci*, as with the *Historia Augusta* overall, presents numerous obstacles to the modern scholar. But with these difficulties in mind it is still possible to undertake an examination of the text, which allows for an insight into the perspective of the biographer, and also provides a clearer understanding of the literary tradition that evolved following the principate of Marcus Aurelius. If the theory that the

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65 Section 19.12. ‘Even at this time he is called a god, which has always appeared and even now seems correct to you, most esteemed Emperor Diocletian, who worships him among your deities, not as you revere the others, but as one separately, and one who often states that you aspire, in life and clemency, to be such a man as Marcus, even though, in regard to philosophy, Plato himself, were he to return alive, could not be such a philosopher.’
composition of the HA occurred around AD 395 is accepted, one of the most important themes that can be drawn from the Vita Marci is how it symbolised the idealism that surrounded Marcus’ principate and how this romanticism continued for centuries after his death in AD 180.

The Sources Used by the Biographer of the Historia Augusta

The analysis of the sources used by the biographer of the HA for its composition has received a great amount of debate and examination, but it is clear that there were several ancient literary authors who were used as sources. The use of these sources has been used in this study in two ways: firstly, to discuss the significance of the literary sources used in the HA, and secondly, to direct this source analysis on those used within the Vita Marci. The first group of sources includes Cassius Dio, Herodian, Aurelius Victor and Eutropius, whereas the analysis of the sources used in relation to the Vita Marci has focused primarily on Marius Maximus.

Cassius Dio was born in the early stages of Marcus’ principate, around AD 165, and seemingly began writing his Roman History at some stage after AD 193. This work comprised eighty books and covered the period from the foundation of Rome up until AD 222. Dio wrote the structure of his text in an annalistic form, but by the time it focuses on the Imperial period it becomes essentially biographical, concentrating on the major events surrounding each of the successive Roman Emperors. It has been argued that Dio’s outlook was essentially that of an elite Roman, and yet throughout the Roman History it is quite evident that he has combined sympathies: both Roman and Greek. This can be seen

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through his use of Thucydidean style, and also in his insistence about the influence and importance of Greek culture.72

Considering that, in all likelihood, Dio was probably born in Rome,73 he would have been intimately aware of the nature of Marcus’ reign from an early stage and it is quite clear that his account of Marcus’ principate would have been influenced by his own personal experiences. The use of the Roman History by the biographer of the Historia Augusta is almost unquestionable,74 but it is also quite evident that he used numerous other sources as well.75 The divergences between Cassius Dio and the author of the HA shows the different intentions behind their works,76 but the impact of Dio’s work on the later biographer still should not be doubted (even if it was unintentional). When comparing the Vita Marci with Books 71-72 of Cassius Dio it is evident that there were similarities in their representations of Marcus Aurelius, such as in relation to his consideration for justice,77 his leniency,78 and the dream about his future reign.79 However, the portrayal of Marcus by Cassius Dio included other sections that were not referred to in the Vita Marci, such as the reference to the Iazyges,80 and his emphasis on the princeps’ piety.81 This raises the possibility of some indirect influence on the HA biographer, but it is evident that Dio was not the primary historical source for the Vita Marci.

One of the most important sources used for the composition of the HA was Herodian,82 who influenced the development of the various biographies.83 As with Cassius Dio, Herodian wrote more from the perspective of an eye-witness,84 which he emphasised

76 Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 86.
77 Dio, 72.6.1-2; Marcus, 10.10-12.
78 Dio, 72.28.3-4; Marcus, 8.1.
79 Dio, 72.36.1; Marcus, 5.2.
80 Dio, 72.7.1-5.
81 Dio, 72.34.2.
84 Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 82.
with the claim that he confirmed all of his evidence personally.\textsuperscript{85} It seems apparent that Herodian used Cassius Dio as a source,\textsuperscript{86} which influenced the biographer of the HA.\textsuperscript{87} It has already been established that Herodian was a major source for the Severan period in the Historia Augusta,\textsuperscript{88} particularly in relation to the Maximini Duo and the Maximus et Balbinus.\textsuperscript{89} However, Herodian was primarily used by the HA biographer for the period after Marcus’ death,\textsuperscript{90} which may indicate that he focused more upon other sources of evidence for Marcus’ principate, such as Marius Maximus or Aurelius Victor.

Aurelius Victor was an author who had an influence on the development of the HA,\textsuperscript{91} which is shown by Dessau.\textsuperscript{92} This influence makes a clear case for why the HA must be dated to the post-AD 360 period.\textsuperscript{93} Aurelius Victor was born just after AD 320 in Africa,\textsuperscript{94} and he stated that he was from quite modest origins.\textsuperscript{95} The evidence for the use of the De Caesaribus as a source by the biographer of the HA has been previously established,\textsuperscript{96} which provides a strong indication of the late 4th Century dating for the HA.\textsuperscript{97}

Eutropius\textsuperscript{98} was probably used as a source for the composition of the HA,\textsuperscript{99} but in relation to the Vita Marci, the use of Eutropius also presents an interesting dichotomy. Judging from the similarities between the interpolation and the Breviarium Ab Urbe Condita of Eutropius (11-14), it could be postulated that the interpolation was written prior to the creation of the Breviarium, which would mean that the interpolation was written

\textsuperscript{85} Herodian, 1.1.3, 2.5.
\textsuperscript{86} Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 84.
\textsuperscript{88} Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 85.
\textsuperscript{89} T. Mommsen, “Die Scriptores Historiae Augustae”, Hermes 25, 1890, pp. 260ff.
\textsuperscript{90} See Kolb, 1972, op.cit.
\textsuperscript{93} Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{95} Aurelius Victor, De Caesaribus, 20.5.
before AD 370 at the very least. In addition to this, the direct reference to Diocletian may suggest that the interpolation was written during the period AD 284-305. The paradox of this continual flow of literary influences was that at a later stage the interpolation was included in the Vita Marci, despite it having been written before Eutropius’ Breviarium, which influenced the composition of the Historia Augusta.

With the unknown nature or authorship of the interpolation, it is appropriate to consider the Kaisergeschichte (KG) that was suggested by Dessau in 1889,100 following from Enmann’s discussion of the possibility of an unknown source in 1883.101 The existence of such a text has been readily accepted by many modern scholars,102 and it was seemingly used by the author of the HA.103 It was also used for the account of the 3rd Century AD,104 which leaves it beyond the scope of this study.

There was another unknown source that may have influenced the creation of the Historia Augusta – the ‘ignotus’.105 While there are numerous arguments against the existence of such an influential source,106 it is quite evident that there was at least one highly influential biographical or historical source for the period. The existence of such a source has been discussed at length by Syme,107 so the present discussion does not need to postulate further on this source in any other way than to accept its existence for the purposes of the present study. Nevertheless, as Birley has shown recently,108 there is still some debate about the nature of these sources, except in relation to Marius Maximus.

The most obvious historical source for the Vita Marci was Marius Maximus,109 who was referred to in the text on three separate occasions by the biographer.110 Marius

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100 Dessau, 1889, op.cit., pp. 361ff.
Maximus was a senator and wrote a series of biographies (or a history) from the reigns of Nerva to Elagabalus. But the proposed career of Marius Maximus and his influences have been previously discussed at length by Birley. For the purposes of the present discussion it is most important to note that the **Vita Marci** has produced several direct references to the use of Marius Maximus as a source and that this is the only literary source mentioned within the entire **Vita**. In view of the numerous direct references to Marius Maximus in the early biographies of the **HA**, it is quite clear that his **Life of Marcus**, which was written in two volumes, had an influence on the creation of the **Vita Marci** in the **Historia Augusta**. Ammianus Marcellinus, who was probably writing around the same time as the biographer of the **HA**, also had some influence on the development of the **HA**, but it is unlikely that he was used as a direct source.

Having considered the potential sources for the creation of the **Vita Marci** by the biographer, it is possible to note some significant points. Firstly, the details provided for names and titles in much of the **Vita Marci**, as with the majority of the other **Vitae** between Hadrian and Caracalla, have been shown to be correct more often than not. This indicates that the biographer had a fair degree of familiarity with the evidence, which would suggest that the biographer's available evidence for this period was better for the earlier lives. This was not always the case, there being several erroneous references in the **Vita Marci** as well, but this is in many ways to be expected from the **HA** biographer.

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110 Marcus, 1.5-6, 21.1-2, 25.10.
113 Against this view, see J.F. Matthews, “Marcus Aurelius”, **JRS** 58, 1968, p. 263.
118 Syme, 1968, op.cit., p. 4; The Historia Augusta: a call for clarity, **Antiquitas** 4, 1971, p. 57. For evidence illustrating the similar literary techniques of these authors, see B. Frischer et al., “Word-Order Transference between Latin and Greek”, **HSCP** 99, 1999, p. 369.
120 Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 38.
121 For example, see *Marcus*, 5.1.
122 See Barnes, 1978, op.cit., p. 47.
Secondly, the numerous potential ancient sources used by the biographer clearly reflect the character of the HA, and in particular the *Vita Marci*: the numerous opinions and interpretations used by the biographer end in a somewhat confused and haphazard result in the biography. However, that being understood, it is important to note that the *Vita Marci* also exhibit the opinions and literary intentions of the biographer through his representation of Marcus Aurelius. The thematic consistency throughout the *Vita* is clearly evident, particularly once the interpolation (Sections 15.1-19.12) has been removed from the original text.

**The Significance of the *Vita Marci* in the HA**

The analysis of the *Vita Marci* is a worthwhile study, particularly when its place in the *Historia Augusta* and its worth as an historical source are considered. However, concentrating on only one section of an overall text can often provide a misleading impression of the results. The main intention of this study is to analyse how Marcus Aurelius was represented by the biographer in the *Vita Marci*, but through this undertaking some consideration has been applied to the more universal significance of the *Vita* within the *Historia Augusta*. In this section of the study, there have been three points of significance considered, which are important to note prior to the analysis of the text itself: the significance of the textual inconsistencies, the importance of the overall structure of the *Vita Marci*, and the worth of the biography as an historical source on Marcus Aurelius’ principate.

The textual inconsistencies that exist in the *Vita Marci* are seemingly indicative of the HA overall. The most notable inconsistency was the inclusion of the interpolation between Sections 15.1-19.12, which entirely disrupts the thematic flow of the biography. The presence of the interpolation has made the *Vita Marci* difficult to interpret, but since Enmann noted the textual irregularities in 1884, and Dessau observed its similarities with Eutropius in 1889, the questions surrounding the text of the biography have continued. However, with the removal of the interpolation from the *Vita Marci* the thematic consistency of the biography becomes markedly improved. That being said, the

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interpolation has been included in the subsequent publications of the *Vita Marci*, which in many ways explains why the difficulties with the text have continued. However, the inclusion of the interpolation in the original text provides a clear example of why the *Historia Augusta* is such a problematic text, with there being numerous questions surrounding its compilation and legitimacy as an overall work. In addition to the interpolation there are a few instances where *lacunae* exist,\(^\text{125}\) which is indicative of the numerous textual problems in the *HA*. The questions that surround the surviving text of the *HA* will in all likelihood never be answered,\(^\text{126}\) but this does not remove the importance of analysing the text.

The structure of the *Vita Marci* is another significant aspect that must be considered because it highlights the differences that existed in the thematic composition of the *HA* and other Imperial biographies, such as the *de Vita Caesarum* by Suetonius.\(^\text{127}\) Whereas many biographies followed the formula of ‘positive-negative-positive’ in the representation of ‘good’ characters, the *Vita Marci* does not apply this method at all. The general theme of Marcus’ representation was overtly positive, with only a limited number of references to any criticisms of his character. The most explicit criticisms of him in the *Vita Marci* occurred in Sections 20 and 29, one of which is approximately in the middle of the biography and the other at the very end of the text. These two sections were unique in the biography owing to their consistent concentration on criticisms that were levelled at Marcus during his principate with little explanation of defence on the part of the author. In particular, the most notable aspect of this was the negative representation of Marcus in the final section (Section 29). This is an unusual biographical structure because it leaves the audience with a negative view of the *princeps*, which is for the most part different to the rest of the *Vita*. The ‘positive-negative-positive’ progression was clearly intended to emphasise the best features of a character,\(^\text{128}\) but the form of the *Vita Marci* was quite different.

In order to ascertain whether this format was an exception rather than the norm, the structure of the *Vita Marci* has been compared to two other ‘positive’ biographies in the *HA*

\(^{125}\) See Sections 6.2, 11.7.


\(^{128}\) Bradley, 1978, op.cit.
(the *Vitae Hadriani*, *Antonini Pii*) and two ‘negative’ biographies: the *Vitae Veri, Commodi*. At first glance it is evident that the thematic structures of all five *Vitae* were different, regardless of whether they were intended to be positive or negative accounts. The two most notable biographies in this regard were the *Vitae Antonini Pii* and *Commodi*, which exhibit consistently good and bad representations respectively. Neither of these shows any variation in their portrayals within these biographies.

The *Vita Hadriani* on the other hand includes some variation in its overall positive representation of the *princeps*. There were four critical sections in this biography (Sections 9, 11, 14, 15) and they were all located around the middle of the *Vita*. This was quite different to the *Vita Marci*, particularly in relation to Section 29. The *Vita Avidii Cassii* was also different in its thematic structure, having no clear separation in its positive and negative themes. This final biography is also quite different because almost half of it discusses the events after Cassius’ death. Nevertheless, for the purposes of the present discussion, it is most important to note that there does not seem to have been a definitive thematic structure in the *Historia Augusta*, with each *Vita* being composed in accordance with the author’s view of each individual character.

In general terms, two forms of Greco-Roman structural elements have been identified in previous studies of ancient biography: *Chronologie* and *Eidologie*.\textsuperscript{129} The form of *Chronologie* largely followed the chronological events of a biography, which resembled a narrative of various accomplishments and significant deeds, whereas the *Eidologie* form sought to emphasise the nature of a character through various episodes and anecdotes, which typically went beyond a purely chronological approach. The *Vita Marci* was seemingly constructed as a combination of these two elements, but it is quite clear that *Eidologie* was more important than *Chronologie* to the HA biographer. This explains some of the confusion in the events in the HA, but within the *Vita Marci* there seems to have been a good degree of balance between interpretation and chronological contextualisation (particularly once the interpolation is removed from the text). However, it is clear that the overall theme of the biography was of the utmost importance to the author, with the progression of key character traits in Marcus’ representation, such as moderation,

equanimity and self-control, being the consistent focus. These elements were accentuated throughout the narrative by the inclusion of various anecdotes.\textsuperscript{130}

This general consistency in Marcus' portrayal by the HA biographer exemplifies the structural significance of Sections 20 and 29, which make definitive breaks from the overall representation of the princeps. Section 20 sees a complete character change in the portrayal of Marcus Aurelius, depicting him as being quite vindictive towards his recently deceased Imperial colleague, Lucius Verus. It is entirely inconsistent with the character development that occurred in the previous fourteen sections of the Vita Marci and produces a stark contrast in the narrative itself. In relation to Section 29, it is possible that the biographer was attempting to establish that Marcus' moderation sometimes went too far, which led to the popular criticism of him being too compliant. But this was not stated by the author of the Vita Marci and these critical episodes\textsuperscript{131} were not defended by the biographer either. However, in relation to the structure of the Vita Marci the decision to include these criticisms as some of the final comments is perplexing and highlights the inconsistencies that exist in the literary style of the HA biographer.

Another notable omission in the Vita Marci was the lack of discussion about the physiognomy of the princeps, which was a common inclusion in the ancient biographical tradition.\textsuperscript{132} It should be observed that such a discussion was included in the Vitae Hadriani,\textsuperscript{133} Antonini Pii,\textsuperscript{134} and Commodi,\textsuperscript{135} which makes its omission from the Vita Marci even more notable. It may have been that the HA biographer did not intend to stress the physical capabilities of Marcus in his positive representation of the princeps, which can be compared to Cassius Dio's portrayal of Marcus' physical frailties.\textsuperscript{136}

The information provided by the Vita Marci on Marcus Aurelius is another significant feature. Judging from the overall worth of the early Vitae in the HA,\textsuperscript{137} it appears

\textsuperscript{131} See Marcus, 12.4, 29.1-4 for example.
\textsuperscript{132} cf. E.C. Evans, "Roman Descriptions of Personal Appearance in History and Biography", HSCP 46, 1935, pp. 43-84; "The Study of Physiognomy in the Second Century AD", TAPA 72, 1941, pp. 96-108.
\textsuperscript{133} Hadrian, 26.1.
\textsuperscript{134} Pius, 2.1.
\textsuperscript{135} Commodus, 13.1-4.
\textsuperscript{136} See Dio, 72.6.3-4.
that the *Vita Marci* does provide some valuable information about the principate of Marcus Aurelius. However, there were some historical errors that were included in this biography. This is the most important aspect of this study: to analyse how Marcus Aurelius was presented by the biographer of the *Historia Augusta* in order that the text and its inherent partiality towards the *princeps* can be understood. Undertaking this can lead to a better awareness of both the biographer of the *HA* and Marcus’ life.

**The Other Literary Sources on Marcus Aurelius**

In order to gain a good understanding of the *Vita Marci*, particularly in relation to its historical accuracy and literary objectivity, it is important to compare the representation provided by the biographer with the other extant literary sources, as well as the other available evidence on Marcus’ principate (such as the archaeological and numismatic data). It is also important to note the correlations that occurred between the other *Vitae* in the *Historia Augusta*, which illustrates the consistency (or inconsistency) in their representations of Marcus Aurelius. The main literary sources that deal with the principate of Marcus Aurelius that have been compared to his portrayal in the *Vita Marci Antonini*, were Cassius Dio, Herodian, Aurelius Victor, Eutropius, Cornelius Fronto and Marcus Aurelius, in the *Meditations*. The first four of these authors have been previously discussed, but it is also important to consider both Cornelius Fronto and the *Meditations* for the analysis of the *Vita Marci Antonini*.

Marcus Cornelius Fronto was originally from Numidia, and he may have had some relationship with Plutarch. He was clearly a leading literary figure during his lifetime, with his letters with Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus being published. These letters have been dated to the years between AD 161 and 176, and they provide some useful evidence for the reign of Marcus Aurelius. This is evident through both his friendly relationship with Marcus and also as his *magister*. This correspondence with the Imperial household has provided evidence that occasionally substantiates some of the episodes

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mentioned in the *Vita Marci*. The εἰς ἑαυτὸν of Marcus Aurelius was a serious work in which he espoused his Stoic ideology in a rather idealistic fashion.\(^{143}\) Considering that it was intended for Marcus personally, hence the title εἰς ἑαυτὸν, it is unknown how it survived,\(^{144}\) which could lead to questions about its authorship.\(^{145}\) It is quite evident that it was not intended to be a public work,\(^{146}\) which means that it can provide some useful insight into the less public aspects of Marcus’ principate. It must still be viewed critically, owing to the intentions of the author still being relatively unknown.\(^{147}\)

When analysing the *Vita Marci* it is important to compare the representations of these authors with that of the *HA* biographer. This comparison allows for an understanding of the intentions that lay behind the representation of the princeps in the *HA* biography. If the text of the *Vita Marci* was analysed in isolation it would be virtually impossible to analyse its historical accuracy. It is evident that there was a tradition of positive representation in relation to Marcus Aurelius even by the end of the 2\(^{rd}\) Century AD, which makes this comparison problematic as well. It is for this reason that the numismatic evidence becomes quite important because it can be used to confirm various literary references on the Imperial finances, salutations and donatives. This can also be supported through the use of some of the archaeological remains, but in relation to the *Vita Marci* this has only been of limited assistance. Nevertheless, the combined use of all of these forms of evidence has allowed for a greater understanding of the historical value of the *Vita Marci*, which has shown not only the merits of the *Vita* as a source, but also the literary intentions of the biographer.

**Overall Conclusions**

The purpose of this chapter has been to delineate some of the key issues that are involved in the study of both the *Historia Augusta* and the *Vita Marci* as well. It is quite clear that the *HA* is a problematic text, which presents numerous difficulties for modern scholars who attempt to understand its purpose, authorship and literary context. It is not the

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146 Brunt, 1974, *op.cit.*, p. 3.
intention of this study to attempt to solve these issues, but they must still be initially taken into account in order to achieve a comprehensive analysis of the *Vita Marci*. The issues of dating and authorship of the *HA* are particularly important when considering the context in which the *Vita Marci* was composed, its possible literary sources and intended audience. Nevertheless, the answers to these questions are difficult to obtain, with there being a fair degree of uncertainty involving these key areas.

When considering the relevance of the *HA* in the overall biographical tradition that had developed from the late 5th/early 4th Century BC it is evident that in some ways the *HA* maintained the form of previous biographies, but in other respects it broke with tradition.\(^{148}\) It is evident that one of the greatest influences on the biographer was the previous work by Suetonius, but owing to the numerous references to him, the biographies from Nerva to Elagabalus by Marius Maximus were also of significance in both literary style and their use as source material for the *HA*. The elements of *Chronologie* and *Eidologie*\(^{149}\) were continued in the structure of the *Vita Marci*, but the formation of positive and negative sections in the *Vita* was different from the models used in the 1st and 2nd Centuries AD.

Despite these difficulties it remains quite clear that there is great benefit in the analysis of the *Vita Marci*, particularly in relation to its usefulness as an historical source. There are identifiable inconsistencies between this biography and other extant ancient literary sources, but judging from the text it appears that this either resulted in the confusion of the biographer or through his representational agenda. This last point is particularly evident in the thematic consistency that exists through most of the *Vita Marci*, which exhibited Marcus Aurelius as a benevolent, moderate and self-controlled princeps: in a biography comprising twenty-four sections, only two of these parts conflict with this representation in a significant fashion. Nevertheless, the partiality of the biographer towards a positive representation of Marcus Aurelius is a serious consideration for the analysis of the text in this study, which has largely concentrated on the intentions of its author as much as its historical worth.\(^{150}\)


Chapter 2

The *Vita Marci Antonini Philosophi*

The Text


2.1 Fuit a prima infaniae gravis. at ubi egressus est annos, qui nutricum foventur auxilio, magnis praeeptoribus traditus ad philosophiae scita pervenit. [2.2] usus est magistri ad prima elementa Euforione litteratore et Gemino comodo, musicó Androne eodemque geometra. quibus omnibus ut disciplinarum auctoribus plurimum detulit. [2.3] usus praeterea grammaticis Graeco Alexandro Coti<a>e<s>-i<s>[s]>, Latinis Trosio Apro et Pol<i>on<s>-e<s> et Eutychio Proculo Siccensi. [2.4] oratoribus usus est Graec<s>-is>s> Ani<i>-n<i>-o Macro, Caninio Celere et Herode Atti[o]co, Latino Frontone Cornelio. [2.5] sed multum ex his Frontoni detulit, cui et statuum in senatu petit. Proculum vero usque ad proconsulatum provexit [h]on<s>-e<s>-ribus in se recepit. [2.6] philosophi<a>e>s> operam vehementer dedit et quidem adhuc puer. nam duodecimnum annum ingressus habitum philosophi sumpsit et deinceps tolerantiam, cum studeret in pallio et humi cubaret, vix autem matre agente instrato pelibus lectulo accubaret. [2.7] usus est etiam Commodo magistro, cuius ei adfinitas fuerat destinata, usus est et Apollonio Chaclcedonio stoico philosopho.

3.1 Tantum autem studium in e philosophiae fuit, ut adsctus iam in imperatoriam tamen ad domum Apollonii discendi causs<a>e>venerit. [3.2] audivit et Sextum Ch<a>e>renensem Plutarchi nepotem, Iunium Rusticum, Claudium Maximum et Cinnam Catulum stoicos,

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5.1 His ita se habentibus cum post obitum Lucii Caesaris Hadrianius successorem imperii quaereret, nec idoneus, utpote decem et octo annos agens, Marcus habe<re> tur, amitiae Marci virum Antonium Pium Hadrianius ea elege in adoptationem legis, ut sibi Marcum Pius adoptaret, ita tamen ut et Marcus sibi Lucium Commodum adoptaret. [5.2] sane ea die, qua adoptatus est, Verus in somnis se uermos eburneos habere vidit sciscitatusque, an apti essent oneri ferundo, solito repperit fortiores. [5.3] ubi autem comperit se ab Hadriano adoptatum, magis es deterritis quam laetatus iussusque in Hadriani privatam domum migrare invitus de maternis hortis recessit. [5.4] cunque ab eo domestici quaerenerent, cur tristis in adoptionem regiam transiret, disputavit, quae mala in se contineret imperium. [5.5] tunc primum pro Annio Aurelius coepit vocari, quod in Aureliam, hoc est Antonini, adoptionis iure transisset. [5.6] octavo decimo ergo aetatis anno adoptatus in secundo consulatu Antonini, iam patris sui, Hadriana ferente gratia aetatis facta quaestor est designatus. [5.7] adoptatus in alicam domum omnibus parentibus suis tantum reverentiam,
quantam privatus exhibuit. [5.8] eratque <h>aut secus rei suae quam in privata domo parcus ac diligens, pro instituto patris volens agere, dicere, cogitare.


² It is generally accepted that a lacuna was positioned after Commodi (see Marcus, 4.5; Verus, 2.3). Casubon in 1603 suggested the insertion of: *filia contrahere illem Hadriam suolaret, Faustina illi offereatur, quod Verus, cui eam Hadrianam. At a later stage Mommsen suggested: sorore, fecerat filiam Faustinam cum hortata esset ut duceret, quam Hadrianus eadem Commodo; and Ellis proposed: et eum, diss. spons. i. Ceionii Commodi (i.e. Veri) quae cum filia fecerat, quam ei desponderi iol. See also A. Jacek, “Zwei Kritische Bemerkungen zu den Scriptores Historiae Augustae”, Klio 12, 1912, pp. 121-5.

³ On this insertion, see Mommsen, 1890, *op.cit.*, pp. 282.5.


12.1 Cum populo autem non aliter egit, quam est actum sub civitate libera. [12.2] fuitque per omnia moderantissimus in hominibus deterrendis a malo, invitandis ad bona, remunerandis copia, indulgentia liberandis fecitque ex malis bonos, ex bonis optimos, moderate etiam cavillationes nonnullorum ferens. [12.3] nam cum quendam Vetrasinum famae detestand<e> honorem petentem monet, ut se ab opinio<ni>bus populi vindicare et ille contra respondisset multos, qui secum in harena pugnavissent, se praetores videre,

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4 Peter has identified a lacuna at this point. See H. Peter, Scriptores Historiae Augustae, Leipzig: Teubner, 1884.


litteris Lucius Romam rediret. [14.8] bi<n>-q[uo]que, postquam i[n]ter ingressi sunt, sedens cum fratre in vehiculo Lucius apoplexi arreptus perit.5

20.1 Sed Marco Antonino haec sunt gesta post fratrem: primum corpus eius Romam de vectum est et inlatum maiorum sepulchris. divini <e>i> honores decreti. [20.2] dein cum gratias ageret senatu<i>, quod fratrem conse:ra:set, oc<c>ulte ostendit omnia bellica consilia sua fuissi, quibus superati sunt Parthi. [20.3] addidit pr<a>eterea quaedam, quibus ostendit nunc demum se quas a principio acturum esse rem publicam amoto eo, qui remissior videbatur. [20.4] nec aliter senatus accepit, quam Marcus dixerat, ut videretur gratias agere, quod Verus excessisset vita. [20.5] omnibus deinde sororibus et adfinibus et libertis <i>ris et honoris et pecuniae plurimum detulit. erat enim famae suae curiosissimus, requiriens ad verum, quid quisque de se dicere, emendans quae bene reprehensa viderenter. [20.6] proficiscens ad bellum Germanicum filiam suam non decurs<o> luctus tempore grand<e>ro equitis Romani filio Claudio Pompeiano dedit genere Antio<h>ensi nec sitis nobili (quem postea bis consulem fecit), cum filia eius Augusta esset et Augustae filia. [20.7] sed has nuptias et Faustina et ipsa, quae dabatur, invitae habuerunt.


5 Note that the interpolation section of the text (Sections: 15-19) has been removed from this point of the text, in order that the original text may be analysed as a whole. The Interpolation sections have been discussed elsewhere.

23.1 Si quis unquam proscriptus est a praefecto urbi, non libenter accept. [23.2] ipse in largitionibus pecuniae publicae parciissimius fuit, quod laudi potius datur quam reprehensioni. [23.3] sed tamen et bonus viris pecuniae dedit et oppidis labentibus auxilium tulit et tributa vel vectigalia, ubi necessitas cogebat, remisit. [23.4] absens populi Romani voluptates curari vehementer praecipit per ditissimos editores. [23.5] fuit enim populus hic sermo, cum sustulisset ad bellum gladiatores, quod populum sublatis voluptati<∅> vellet cogere ad philosophiam. [23.6] iussaret cm. ne mercimonia impedirentur, tardius pantomimos exhiberit, non <∅>otis diebus. [23.7] de amatis pantomimis ab uxore fuit sermo, ut superius diximus. sed haec omnia per [a]epistolas suas purgavit. [23.8] idem Marcus sederi in civitatibus vetuit in equis sive vehiculis. lavacra mixta summovit. mores matronarum compusit diffiientes et iuvenum nobiliem. sacra Serapidis a vulgaritate Pel<∅>sia<∅> summovit. [23.9] fama fuit sane, quod sub philosophorum specie quidam rem publicam vexarent et privatos. quod ille purgavit.


27.1 Orientalibus rebus ordinatis Athenis fuit e: init<ae/alia Ce<e>ris adit, ut se innocentem probaret, et sacrarium solu<e> ingressus est. [27.2] revertens ad Italiano navigio tempore gravissimam passus est. [27.3] per Brundisium veniens in Italia togam et ipse sumpsit et milites togatos esse iussit, nec unquam sagati fuerunt sub eo milites. [27.4] Romam ut venit, triumphavit et inde Lavinium prefectus est. [27.5] Commodum dieinde sibi collegam in tribuniciam potestatem iuxit, congruionem populo dedit et spectacula mirifica; dein civilia multa corressit. [27.6] gladiis et munis sumptus modum fecit. [27.7] sententia[m] Platonis semper in ore illius fuit flore civitates, si aut philosophi imperarent aut imperantes philosopharentur. [27.8] filio suuo Brutti Praesentis filiam iuxit nuptatis celebratis exemplo privatorum, quae etiam congiurium dedit populo. [27.9] dein ad conficiendum bellum conversus in administratione eius belli obi<e> labentibus iam filii moribus ab instituto suo. [27.10] triennio bellum postea cum Marcomannis, Herm<e>nduris, Sarmatis, Quadis etiam egi et, si anno uno superfussit, provincias ex his fecisset. [27.11] ante biduum quam expiraret, admissis amiciis dicitur ostendisse sententiam de filio eandem quam Philippus de Alexandro, cum de hoc male sentiret, addens minime se aegre ferre quod moreretur, sed quod moreretur talem filium superstitem
relinquens; [27.12] nam iam Commodus turpem se et cruentum ostentabat.


29.1 Crimini ei datum est, quod adulteros uxoribus promoverit, Tertullum et <T>utili<nt>ium et Orfitum et Moderatum, ad varios honores, cum Tertullum et prandamentum cum uxor<e>e depra<es>a>ehenderit. [29.2] de quo minus in se<ar>ena praeidente Antonino dixit; cum stupidus nomen adulteri uxor is a servo quaeraret et ille diceret ter 'Tullus', et adhuc stupidus quaeraret, respondit ille: 'iam tibi dixi ter, Tullus dicitur.' [29.3] et de hoc quidem multa populus, multa etiam alii dixerunt patientiam Antonini incusantes. [29.4] ante tempus sane mortis, priusquam ad bellum Marcomannicum rediret, in Capitolio iuravit nullum senatorem se sciente occasum, cum etiam rebelliones dixerit se servaturum fuisse, si scisset; [29.5] nihil enim magis et timuit et depra<es>a>e catus est quam avaritiae famam, de qua se multis epistulis purgat. [29.6] dederunt e<i> vitio, quod e<ct> icus fuisse nec tam simplex quam videretur aut quam vel Pius vel Verus fuisse. [29.7] dederunt etiam crimini, quod alicam adrogantiam confirmaverit summovendo[s] amicos a societate communi et a conviviiis. [29.8] parentibus consecrationem decrevit. amicos parentum etiam mortuos statuii ornavit. [29.9] suffragatoribus non cito creditum, sed semper diu quasaevit, quod erat verum. [29.10] enisa est Fabia, ut Faustina mortua in eius matrimonium coiret. sed ille concubinam sibi adscivit procuratoris uxor is suae filiam, ne tot liberis superduceret novercarn.

Interpolation

15.1 Fuit autem consuetudo Marco, ut in circensis spectaculo legeret audiretque ac suscriberet. ex quo quidem saepe iocis popularibus dicitur lascissit. [15.2] multum sane potuerunt liberti sub Marco et Vero Gemin<u>s et Agaclytus. [15.3] tantae autem sanctitatis fuit Marcus, ut Veri vitia et celaverit et defenderit, cum ei vehementissime displiceret<n>t, mortuamque eum divum appellaverit amitasque eius et sores honoribus et salariis decretis sublevaverit atque provexerit sacrisque <e>um plurimis honoravert. [15.4] flaminem et Antoninianos sodales et omnes honores, qui divis habentur, eadem dedicavit. [15.5] nemo est principum, quem non gravis fama perstringat, usque adeo ut etiam Marcus
in sermonem venerit, quod Verum vel veneno ita tulerit, ut parte cultri veneno lita
am incidenter venenatam partem fratrum edendam propinans et sibi innoxiam
reservans. [15.6] vel certe per medicum Posidippum, qui ei sanguinem intempestive dicitur
emisse. Cassius post mortem Veri a Marco desvit.

16.1 Iam in suis tanta fuit benignitate Marcus, ut cum in omnes propinquos cuncta
honorum ornamenta contulerit, tum in filium et Commodum quidem scelestum atque
inpurum sito nomen Caesaris et mox sacerdotium statimque nomen imperatoris ac triumphei
participationem et consulatum. [16.2] quo quidem tempore sedente imperator filio ad
triumphalem currum in circo pedes currit. [16.3] post Veri obitum Marcus Antoninus
solus rem publicam tenuit, multo melior et ferae ad virtutes, [16.4] quippe qui nullis
Veri iam impediretur aut simulatis callidae severitatis, qu[i]a ille ingenio vitio laborabat,
erroribus aut his, quaepraecipe displicebant Marco Antonino iam inde a primo aestatis
suae tempore, vel institutis mentis pravae vel moribus. [16.5] erat enim ipse tantae
tranquillicitatis, ut vultum numquam mutaverit in errore vel gaudio, philosophiae deditus
stoicae, quam et per optimos quoque magistros accepserat et undique ipse collegaret.
[16.6] nam et Hadrianus hunc eundem successorem paraverat, nisi e actas puerilis
obstitusset. [16.7] quod quidem apparebat ex eo, quod generum Pio hunc eundem delegit, ut
ad eum, dignum utpote virum, quandocumque Romanum perveniret imperium.

17.1 Ergo provinciae post h[aec] ingenti moderatione ac benignitate tractavit. contra
Germanos res feliciter gessit. [17.2] spe[ciae] iale ipse bellum Marcomannicum, sed
quantum nulla umquam memoria fuit, cum virtute tum etiam felicitate transegit, et eo
quidem tempore, quo pestilentia gravis multa milia et populare et milites interemerat.
[17.3] Pannonias ergo Marcomannis, Sarmatis. V[u]andalis, simul etiam Quadis extinctis
servitio liberavit et Romae cum Commodo, quem iam Caesarem fecerat, filio, ut diximus,
suo, triumphavit. [17.4] cum autem ad hoc bellum omne aerarium exhausterat suum neque
in animum induceret, ut extra ordinem provinciis aliud imperaret, in foro divi Traiani
actionem orn[a]ntorium imperialium fecit vendiditque auro pocula et cristallina et
murrina, vasa etiam regia et vestem uxoriam sericam et aurament, gemmas quin etiam, quas
multas in reservoiri sanctiore Hadriano repererat. [17.5] et per duo quidem mensae haec
venditio celebrata est, tantumque auri redactum, ut reliquis belli Marcomannici ex
sententia persecutus postea dederit potestatem emptoribus, ut, si qui vellet empta reddere[t]
atque aurum recipere, sciret licere, nec moles usus ulla fuit qui vel non reddidit empta vel
reddidit. [17.6] tunc viris clarioribus permisit, ut eodem cultu quo et ipse vel ministros
similibus convivia exhiberent. [17.7] in munere autem publico tam magnanimus fuit, ut
centum leones una[m] missione[m] simul exhiberet [et] sagittis interfector.

18.1 Cum igitur in amore omnium i[mperii perasset atque ab aliis modo frater, modo pater,
modo filius, ut cuiusque actas sinebat, et dicetur et amaret, octavo decimo anno imperii
sui, sexagesimo et primo vitae, diem ultimum clausit. [18.2] tantusque illius amor <ad eo>
die regii funeris claruit, ut nemo illum plangendum censuerit, certis omnibus, quod ab diis
commodatus ad deos redisset. [18.3] denique, priusquam funus condertur, ut plerique
dicunt, quod numquam antea factum fuerat neque postea, senatus populuseque non divisus
locis sed in una sede propitiunum deum dixit. [18.4] hic sane vir tantus et talis ac diis vita[e]
et morte coniunctus filium Commodum dereliquit: qui si felix fuisse, filium non
reliquisset. [18.5] et parum sane fuit, quod illi honores divinos omnis actas, omnis sexus,
omnis conditio ac dignitas dedit, nisi quod etiam sacrilegus iudicatus est, qui eius imaginem in sua domo non habuit, qui per fortunam vel potuit habere vel debuit. [18.6] denique hodieque in multis domibus Marci Antonini statuae consistunt inter deos penates. [18.7] nec defuerunt homines qui somniis eum multa praedixisse augurantes futura et vera concinuerunt. [18.8] unde etiam templum ei constitutum, dati sacerdotes Antoninianii et sodales et flamines et omnia, quae de sacrat<is> decrevit antiquitas.

19.1 Aiunt quidam, quod et verisimile videtur, Commodum Antoninum, successorem illius ac filium, non esse de eo natum sed de adultero, ac talem fa<b>ellam vulgari sermone contexunt. [19.2] Faustinam quondam, Pi filiam, Marci uxorem, cum gladiatores transire vidisset, unius ex his amore succensam, cum longa aestradine laboraret, viro de amore confessa<m>. [19.3] quod cum ad C<h>ald<a>eos Marcus ret<t>ulisset, illorum fuisset consilium, ut occiso gladiatore sanguine illius sese Faustina subl<a>varet atque ita cum viro concumberet. [19.4] quod cum esset factum, solutum quidem amorem, natum vero Commodum gladiatorum esse, non principem, [19.5] qui mille prope pugnas publice populo inspectante gladiatorias imperator exhibuit, ut in vita eius docebitur. [19.6] quod quidem verisimile ex eo habetur, quod tam sancti principis filius his moribus fuit, quibus nullus lanista, nullus sc<a>enicus, nullus arenarius, nullus postremo ex omnium <de>deorum ac scelerum <c>onlunione concretus. [19.7] multi autem ferunt Commodum omnino ex adultero natum, si quidem Faustinam satis constet apud Caietam condiciones sibi et nauticas et gladiatorias elegisse. [19.8] de qua cum dicetur Antonino Marco, ut eam repudiaret, si non occideret, dixisse furtur: ‘si uxor<is> dimittimus, reddamus et do tem.’ [19.9] dos autem quid habebatur <nisi> imperium, quod ille ab socero volente Hadriano adoptatus acceperat? [19.10] tantum sane valet bona principis vita, sanctitas, tranquillitas, pietas, ut eius famam nullius proximi decolet invidia. [19.11] denique Antonino, cum suos mores semper teneret neque alculius insussurazione mutaretur, non obfuit gladiator filius, uxor infamis; [19.12] deusque etiam nunc habetur, ut vobis ipsi<s>, sacratissime imperator Diocletiane, et semper visum est et videtur, qui <e>um inter numina vestra non ut ceteros sed specialiter veneramini ac saepe dicitis vos vita et clementia tales esse cupere, quis fuit Marcus, etiamsi philosophia nec Plato esse possit, si rever<1>t<at<u>r i<n>vita<m>: et quidem haec breviter et congeste.