

## ZENOBIA'S BIOGRAPHY IN THE HISTORIA AUGUSTA\*

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**1. Introduction**

The *Historia Augusta* (hereinafter: *HA*) has always been primarily the field of historical research. The main concern of scholars who entered this labyrinth of rhetoric and invention was to discern between false and reliable information in *HA*, while being conscious of the inventive mind of its author(s). Gibbon in the preface of *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, although aware of the confusion caused by the multitude of authors mentioned in the manuscripts and referred to in the text, praised the *HA* as a source; his portrait of queen Zenobia is heavily indebted to the description in *HA* (Gibbon 1904, 325)<sup>1</sup>. In Mommsen's time, research on the *HA* had already caused the work to lose a considerable part of its authority, while Hermann Dessau damaged its reputation even further: the *HA* was the work of a 'Fälscher' who tried to delude his reader (Dessau 1889, 337-392). The given time of origin, the reigns of Diocletian, Constantius Chlorus and Constantine during the first quarter of the fourth century, had to be corrected to the last quarter, more specifically the reign of Theodosius, and the authorship should be attributed to a single person, who used six 'noms de plume'. It took decades before Dessau's revolutionary theory was generally accepted; today the *HA* is unmasked as a 'garden of delights' made by a 'frivolous impostor', as Syme (1968, 4) put it. Despite the discovery that the *HA* consists largely of fiction, historical research prevails. Its literary qualities (rhetoric, invention) are recognized as an important part of the author's motivation, but 'sources' and 'facts' have attracted much more interest than 'models' and 'allusions'. This article is an attempt to show the importance of the search for literary models in order to distinguish between fiction and facts, which may be also of interest for historians. As a

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<sup>1</sup>Gibbon's book was originally published in six volumes between 1776 and 1788. I use the edition by Bury in 7 volumes, published in the early twentieth century.

case-study, the structure and content of Zenobia's biography in the book of the thirty tyrants (hereinafter: *T*) in *HA* will be investigated, after which a conclusion about the author's rhetorical aims will be drawn.

## 2. Sources

Invention plays an important role in the *HA* (see for several literary techniques Den Hengst 1987 and Paschoud 1997). The series of thirty imperial biographies is replete with anachronisms, false documents (letters, speeches, poems), suspect anecdotes, and non-existent sources. Even the names of the six authors appear to be the figment of the imagination of an unknown author. The book *T* would have been written by a certain Trebellius Pollio (see § 4). Especially in the second half of the *HA*, the historical information becomes increasingly unreliable, whereas the author seems to compensate for his lack of sources and knowledge of historical events by a mix of fantasy. Syme styled the increasingly fictional way of writing the author's 'mature style' – it is in this historically unreliable part of *HA* that Zenobia's biography is situated. The biography of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra (268-273), is part of a group of thirty-two usurpers in a single book named the *Triginta Tyranni* (*T*).

It is well nigh impossible to check the author's account of the person of Zenobia through other historiographical sources. The reign of Zenobia must be situated during the crisis of the third-century. Hardly any contemporary historiographical source has been left from that era. The historical events during the reign of the emperor Aurelianus (270-275) and his war against Palmyra can be reconstructed fairly well with the help of later sources<sup>2</sup>, though it is often equally unknown where these later sources derived their information from. The biography of Aurelianus in the *HA* also gives us an account of the emperor's expedition, which provides some information about his adversary Zenobia as well. As regards the figure of Zenobia, evidence remains obscure. That is why the *HA*, despite its untrustworthy character, has contributed considerably to the prevailing ideas about her person. Bleckmann (2002, 319) calls *HA*'s Zenobia a 'von ihm selbst konstruierte Frauenfigur'; Watson (1999, 87) remarks that 'she represents a blaze of colour against the rather bleak background of the mid-third century. She has, therefore, suffered rather more than most historical figures in being shrouded a legend'. It is very difficult to analyze the specific information given by the author, when the romanticizing of Zenobia has gone so far, and so few parallel sources are at hand. That is why a literary approach may contribute to reveal the literary character of some of the data about Zenobia's life.

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<sup>2</sup> Sources as Zosimus and Zonaras from the 5th/6th-century and the Byzantine chronographers from the 8th, resp. 12th-century Syncellus and Zonaras; see for a sourcebook Dodgeon/ Lieu 1991, 79-111; for a survey Watson 1999, 209-225. See for these later sources Bleckmann 1992.

### 3. Content of Zenobia's biography

The account of Zenobia in *T* is, with twenty-seven subchapters, by far the longest of the book on the thirty tyrants. One could even say that her life is the central theme in the book. Her inclusion in the list brings the collection of tyrants to a certain climax: the author states in the preface, that the crisis in the Roman empire had gone so deep, that even women were able to reign. The biography was preceded by five other members of her Palmyrene clan: her husband Odenathus (chapter 15.1-8), his son Herodes (16.1-2), his nephew or *consobrinus* Maeonius (17.1-3), Zenobia's and Odenathus's alleged sons Herennianus (27.1-2) and Timolaus (28.1-2). The historicity of the mentioned sons is insecure; Zenobia's real son Vaballathus is not among them (for a discussion see Stoneman 1994, 114-115). For our purposes, the style and structure of the life as a product of literary art and imagination requires attention. First, structure. The biography itself consists of the following parts:

<i>Part</i>	<i>caput</i>	<i>Content</i>	<i>Goal</i>
I (3 cap.)	30.1-3	Introduction	embedding in <i>HA</i>
II (9 cap.)	4-12	Aurelianus's letter to senate	justification of his triumph
III (10 cap.)	12 13-14 15-16 16 17-19 20-21	<i>castitas</i> way of life/clothing physical appearance behaviour habits skills, language, literature	description of Zenobia's person
IV (5 cap.)	23 24-26 27	a 'bon mot' triumph the rest of her life	

The piece is not written along the normal rules of biography, which require some remarks about birth and ancestry, youth and education, *res gestae* and death, including age. Nepos's *De viris illustribus* (1st century BC) and Suetonius's *De vita Caesarum* were the models for Latin biography, which were often followed by the author of the *HA*. The absence of the mentioned items with regard to Zenobia may be explained by the author's lack of information, which consequently led to a partly fictional biography-like piece of literature.

### 4. A woman's portrait

The ingenuity of the author's inventive mind took him to one of the most conspicuous portraits of women in Latin literature, Juvenal's sixth satire. Juvenal's work must have enjoyed popularity after its re-edition at the end of the fourth century. The sixth satire contains many typical allegations with regard to degenerate women: their (sexual) morals, their clothing, boasting about their ancestry, their skills in language and literature, masculine activi-

ties like fighting or even preparing for the arena. The characterization by Ramsay (2001, lii) as “the longest, the most elaborate, and the most brilliant of Juvenal’s Satires (...), which puts before us, in long procession, a Dream of Unlovely Women” shows that this impressive poem is still able to impress the reader. The same is true for the author of the *HA*, who did probably not have many women’s portraits from ancient literature at his disposal to model his description on.

That the author knew Juvenal has been pointed out by several scholars<sup>3</sup>. The nom de plume (Trebellius) Pollio, who is the alleged author of *T*, has probably been derived from Juv. 6.386-8 in which both names occur in succession<sup>4</sup>: ... *rogabat, / an Capitolinam deberet Pollio quercum / sperare ...* (“inquired ... whether Pollio could hope for the Capitoline oak-chaplet ...”)<sup>5</sup>. The imitations took place during a revival of interest in the work of Juvenal, that must have been re-edited at the time: Ammianus Marcellinus (28.4.14) speaks, though in a disparagingly sense, about his popularity and a scholiast commented on his work (Chastagnol 1994, LXXXVI-VII). It does not surprise when that fantasizing author of the *HA* made use from the popular satirist from the second century to create his Zenobia. The author may have followed themes from the sixth satire, while changing its misogyny into a positive portrait of a successful warrior-queen. A comparison in themes and language sheds some light to Juvenal as a model:

#### 4.1. Manlike women

The author begins his account with the remark *omnis iam consumptus est pudor, si quidem fatigata re p. eo usque perventum est, ut (...) optime etiam mulieres imperarent, et quidem peregrinae*. (“Now all shame is exhausted, for in the weakened state of the commonwealth things came to such a pass that...even women ruled most excellently, even foreign women”, *T* 30.1)<sup>6</sup>. In his description of Zenobia’s clothing the author describes Zenobia as a leader who imitates the Roman generals by approaching the troops, wearing a helmet: *Imperatorum more Romanorum ad contiones galeata processit(...)* (“...it was in the manner of a Roman emperor that she came forth to public assemblies, wearing a helmet...”, *T* 30.14). *Galeata* in the female form is rare in classical Latin (it first occurs in Cic. *ND* 1.100, there said of the warrior-

<sup>3</sup> In particular Cameron (1964) and the less critical Schwarz (1982, 634-644) in his comparison between Suetonius, Juvenal and the *HA*.

<sup>4</sup> Den Hengst 1981, 35 has put forward the proposal; Birley 2002, 41 gives a survey of preceding research concerning the name; that Pollio is possibly modelled on the name Asinius Pollio: Paschoud 1997, 126.

<sup>5</sup> Translations from Juvenal are based on Ramsay’s edition in the Loeb-series 2001 (originally 1918). I have not been able to consult the recently published Loeb-edition by S. Braund (2004).

<sup>6</sup> Translations from the *HA* are based on Magie’s edition in the Loeb-series, vol. III 1998 (originally 1932).

goddess Minerva), but it occurs following its use by Juvenal (6.252) in some late Latin works (two of them from the late 4th-century): Ausonius 43.4 and in the *Carmen contra paganos* (both referring to Minerva again), as well as in Martianus Capella 2.114. If we combine the author's notion that female reign is a shame (*pudor*) for the empire with the conspicuous use of *galeata* in Zenobia's dress, these two instances may well be derived from Juvenal's sixth satire on women, especially the part in which they prepare to fight in the theatre: *quem praestare potest mulier galeata pudorem, / quae fugit a sexu? vires amat (...)* ("What modesty can you expect in a woman who wears a helmet, abjures her own sex, and delights in feats of strength?", 6.252-3). This last notion, that fighting women resemble men, is also applied to Zenobia in *Aur.* 26.5: *timet quasi femina, pugnat quasi vir poenam timens* ("She fears like a woman, and fights like a man who fears punishment"). Zenobia's manlike behaviour is also referred to in *T* 27.1: *... contionibus, quas illa viriliter frequentavit ...* ("... public gatherings, which she attended in the fashion of a man ...").

#### 4.2. Chastity

The central theme in Juvenal's sixth satire, if not in his entire work, is the deteriorated morals of his time, especially the almost complete disappearance of *pudicitia* ("chastity"). After the introduction and Aurelian's letter, this is the first theme touched upon by the author of the *HA*: *cuius eius castitas fuisse dicitur, ut ne virum suum quidem scierit nisi temptandis conceptionibus*. ("Such was her continence, it is said, that she would not know even her own husband save for the purpose of conception.", *T* 30.12; for an assessment of the passage: Gilliam 1970, 107-110). This remark at the beginning of the description sets the tone for the rest of the themes: the reader is made aware of the context in which the person of Zenobia will be described – as the counterpart of indecent women, like those described by Juvenal. Later on, Zenobia is described as a hunting woman: *venata est Hispanorum cupiditate* ("She hunted with the eagerness of a Spaniard"). The implication of the remark is that Zenobia lives close to nature, like the virgin-goddess Diana. The portrait given is in accordance with the golden times with which Juvenalis begins his sixth satire: *credo Pudicitiam Saturno rege moratam in terris visamque diu... / silvestrem montana torum cum sterneret uxor / frondibus et culmo vicinarumque ferarum / pellibus...* ("In the days of Saturn, I believe, Chastity still lingered on earth, and was to be seen for a time... when the hill-bred wife spread her silvan bed with leaves and straw and the skins of her neighbours the wild beasts..."). The contrast with degenerate wives as Propertius' Cynthia and Catullus' Lesbia, referred to in 6.7-8, is clear.

#### 4.3. Beauty

The ideal of beauty in Roman times consisted of a smooth skin, white teeth and big eyes. Juvenal used the opposite as an example for unattractive

women: *tres rugae subeant et se cutis arida laxet, / fiant obscuri dentes oculique minores* (“Let three wrinkles make their appearance; let her skin become dry and flabby; let their teeth turn black, and her eyes lose their lustre”, 6.145). The *HA* gives a positive version of these three elements (skin, eyes, teeth): *fuit vultu subaquilo, fusci coloris, oculis supra modum vigentibus nigris (...) tantus candor in dentibus, ut margaritas eam plerique putarent habere, non dentes*. (“Her face was dark and of a swarthy hue, her eyes were black and powerful, ... so white were her teeth that many thought that she had pearls in place of teeth”, *T* 30.15; Wallinger 1990, 142 points to the similarity with Suetonius’ description of Augustus in *Aug.* 79.2). The last remark, that her teeth resembled gems, is a rhetorical exaggeration – especially invented to contrast with Zenobia’s black eyes, which underlines the important role the author’s invention plays in his work. About Zenobia’s voice the author reports: *vox clara et virilis* (“Her voice was clear and like that of a man”, *T* 30.16); Juvenal also paid attention to the female voice with *vox blanda* (“a flattering voice”, 6.197)

#### 4.4. Ancestors

Though nothing is said about Zenobia’s parentage or youth, which would be the norm in biography, her ancient ancestry is referred to: she supposedly descended from the Seleucid king Antiochus, who was himself a descendant of Cleopatra VII of Egypt: ... *Didonem et Samiramidem et Cleopatram sui generis principem inter cetera praedicans* (“holding up, among other examples, Dido and Semiramis, and Cleopatra, the founder of her family”, *T* 27.1), and ... *quae se de Cleoptrarum Ptolemaearumque gente iactabat* (“boasting herself to be of the family of the Cleopatras and the Ptolemies”, *T* 30.2). The claim that she was of Ptolemaean blood, is asserted by historical finds on inscriptions and monuments<sup>7</sup>. This fact provided the author with rich material for his portraiture of Zenobia, such as the report that Zenobia associated herself with Dido, Semiramis and Cleopatra (*T* 27.1). The data fit into one of Juvenal’s allegations against women, that they tend to boast about their ancestors: ... *vetustos / porticibus disponat avos (...) / quis feret uxorem cui constant omnia?* (“let her have ancient ancestors about her halls...yet who could endure a wife that possessed all perfections?”, 6.162-6). It seems that boasting about ancestry was, before the *HA*, a trait ascribed to woman by Juvenal.

#### 4.5. Language and culture

Zenobia’s knowledge of foreign languages and cultures is impressive, witness the reports of the author: *Ipsa Latini sermonis non usque quaque gnara, sed ut loqueretur pudore cohibita; loquebatur et Aegyptiace ad perfectum*

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<sup>7</sup> Stoneman 1994, 112, Watson 1999, 65, 242n41; Violaine Vanoyeke titled her recent book on Palmyra and Zenobia: *Zénobie, l’héritière de Cléopâtre*, Paris 2002.

*modum. Historiae Alexandrinae atque orientalis ita perita, ut eam epitomasse dicatur; Latinam autem Graece legerat* (“She herself was not wholly conversant with the Latin tongue, but nevertheless, mastering her timidity she would speak it; Egyptian, on the other hand, she spoke very well. In the history of Alexander and the Orient she was so well versed that she even composed an epitome, so it is said; Roman history, however, she read in Greek”, *T* 30.21). Juvenal counts it among the faults of women that they always want to create a Greek appearance, even by speaking Greek: *omnia Graece, / cum sit turpe magis nostris nescire Latine; hoc sermone pavent, hoc iram gaudia curas, / hoc cuncta effundunt animi secreta...* (“They talk nothing but Greek, though it is a greater shame for our people to be ignorant of Latin. Their fears and their wrath, their joys and their troubles – all the secret of their souls are poured forth in Greek”, 6.187-90). Whereas the quotation from Juvenal appears, of course, in a satirical context, the use of Greek by Zenobia was to be expected in an Hellenized city in the East. Still, the theme of language is present in both descriptions. The knowledge of more languages is also attributed to Cleopatra in Plutarchus’ biography of Antony, *Ant.* 27.3-4 (cf. Chastagnol 1994, 857).

From a second quote, from *Aur.* 27.6, it appears that Zenobia spoke Syrian and responded to a Greek (and, of course, fictitious) letter from Aurelian in translated Greek: *Hanc epistulam Nicomachus se transtulisse in Graecum ex lingua Syrorum dicit ab ipsa Zenobia dictatam. Nam illa superior Aureliani Graeca missa est.* (“This letter, Nicomachus says, was dictated by Zenobia herself and translated by him into Greek from the Syrian tongue. For that earlier letter of Aurelian’s was written in Greek”). Zenobia would have dictated her letter to Nicomachus<sup>8</sup>, which is surely an allusion to the contemporary rhetor and politician Nicomachus Flavianus. Is it by chance that in *Juv.* 6.244-5 a woman called Manilia advises the rhetor Celsus how to open his plea for her and argue his points: *componunt ipsae per se formantque libellos, principium atque locos Celso dictare paratos?* (“She will herself frame and adjust the pleadings; she will be ready to instruct Celsus himself how to open his case, and how to urge his points”). Though Zenobia speaks Greek, dictating is one more activity in which she resembles a woman of Juvenalian origin.

#### 4.6. Table manners

A well-known theme in satire (as well as in biography) is the subject’s manners at the dinner-table. In his sixth satire Juvenal describes those of a rich woman at the athletic games, who gives away her paternal cups and new vases to the athletes, while being served by female friends: *conducit comites sellam cervical amicas / nutricem et flavam cui det mandata puellam. / haec tamen*

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<sup>8</sup> *Aur.* 30.3 tells that the letter would have been inspired by Longinus. More about the letter in § 5.



*argenti superest quodcumque paterni / levibus athletic et vasa novissima donat* (“She hires attendants, a litter, cushions, female friends, a nurse, and a fair-haired girl to run her messages; yet she will give all that remains of the family plates, down to the last flagon, to some smooth-faced athlete”, 6.353-6). A comparable scene in the opposite is described in the *HA*’s life of Zenobia: *usa est vasis aureis gemmatis ad convivia, usa Cleopatranis. In ministerio eunuchos gravioris aetatis habuit, puellas nimias raras*. (“At the banquets she used vessels of gold and jewels, and she even used those that had been Cleopatra’s. As servants she had eunuchs of advanced age and but very few maidens”, *T* 30.19). Zenobia uses paternal (*Cleopatranis*) heirlooms with golden gems and refrains from calling on the services of slave girls, which is the opposite of the rich woman’s behaviour in the sixth satire. Eunuchs are mentioned in Juvenal 6.366, there as an object of desire; for Zenobia, they fulfil an opposite role, by underlining her chastity.

Furthermore, in *T* 30.18, the author states that Zenobia drinks with generals and kings, but is otherwise sober: *bibit saepe cum ducibus, cum esset alias sobrias. Bibit et cum Persis et Armeniis, ut eos vinceret*. (“she often drank with her generals, though at other times she refrained, and she drank, too, with the Persians and the Armenians, but only for the purpose of getting the better of them”; see for an assessment of the passage Chastagnol 1970, 81). Juvenal describes women’s behaviour when they are drunk, starting with the remark: *quid enim Venus ebria curat?* (“What decency does Venus observe when she is drunk?”, 6.300); further, a drunken woman is brought forward in 6.425-33. Also the theme of Zenobia’s behaviour when drinking is treated, though with conclusions opposite to Juvenal’s. Zenobia’s drinking is excused by the remark ‘*ut eos vinceret*’: as a manlike woman, she has no indecent motives.

#### 4.7. Heavy loads and female weakness

When the captured Zenobia is led among other captured leaders in Aurelian’s triumph, the queen suffers from the weight of her ornaments: *...ornata gemmis ingentibus, ita ut ornamentorum pondere laboraret* (“...she was adorned with gems so huge that she laboured under the weight of her ornaments”, *T* 30.24). They even have to be carried by a *scurra Persicus*: *vincti erant praeterea pedes auro, manus etiam catenis aureis, nec collo aureum vinculum deerat, quod scurra Persicus praefererat* (“Furthermore, her feet were bound with shackles of gold and her hands with golden fetters, and even on her neck she wore a chain of gold, the weight of which was borne by a Persian buffoon”, *T* 30.26); and *Aur.* 34.3 has: *incedebat etiam Zenobia, ornata gemmis, catenis aureis, quas alii sustentabant* (“And there came Zenobia, too, decked with jewels and in golden chains, the weight of which was borne by others”). The female’s inability to carry heavy loads (like armoury) is a familiar theme in Juvenal, as in 6.262: *et quanto galeae curvetur pondere* (“how she bends under the weight of her helmet”) and 6.421-2: *cum lassata gravi ceciderunt brachia massa, / callidus et cristae digitos inpressit aliptes* (“when her arms



drop exhausted by the heavy weights, the anointer passes his hand skilfully over her body”); this passage even has the addition of an anointer’s support in case of exhaustion. It is remarkable, that this theme of female weakness only occurs when Zenobia is led in triumph, whereas, for example, in her drinking habits she shows manlike strength. The author evidently tries to portray her as a strong woman, broken in triumph.

#### 4.8. Zenobia’s fate

There are more diverging versions in different historiographers about Zenobia’s fate after her capture at Palmyra (Wallinger 1990, 147; Watson 1999, 83). Only Zosimus and Zonaras mention Zenobia’s death during the journey to Rome; though Zonaras also gives the version followed by the majority of sources, that she was led in triumph and lived the rest of her days near Rome. Whatever the outcome of her capture by Aurelian, literary imitation is still present in the description of the *HA*. One more remark about the golden chains (see above, *sub* (7)). In general, this kind of ornament depicts the defeated Syrian woman as a wealthy woman from the East, and serves to show how great the triumph of the victorious emperor Aurelianus had been. Just like Julius Caesar led Cleopatra’s sister Arsinoë in golden chains in his triumph<sup>9</sup>, Aurelian had captured his own wealthy woman from the east. In Juvenal 6.589 also a woman in golden chains, though in totally different context, is brought forward: ... *quae nudis longum ostendit cervicibus aurum* ... (“the woman, who displays a long gold chain on her bare neck ...”).

To conclude the comparison with Juvenal, one remark should be made about the final fate of Zenobia. Just as Julius Caesar had called Cleopatra to Rome and let her live in wealth (Suet. *Jul.* 52), Aurelianus would have housed Zenobia on an estate, later named ‘Zenobia’, near the villa Hadriani and a place called Conca: ... *ferturque vixisse cum liberis matronae iam more Romanae data sibi possessione in Tiburti, quae hodieque Zenobia dicitur, non longe ab Hadriani palatio atque ab eo loco, cui nomen est Conchae*. (“and they say that thereafter she lived with her children in the manner of a Roman matron on an estate that had been presented to her at Tibur, which even this day is called Zenobia, not far from the palace of Hadrian or from that place which bears the name of Concha”, *T* 30.27). What better place could the author of the *HA* have chosen to locate Zenobia than the place Juvenal himself (11.65) had lived?

Finally, why *Concha* (= ‘shell’)? Twice, Juvenal speaks about *concae*, each time in connection with decadence and deteriorated morals. In 6.304 a large amount of wine is consumed in a nightly party (*cum bibitur concha*: “when she drinks out of perfume-flasks”), and in 6.419 in a nightly and noisy visit to the baths, when a woman takes her perfume-oils with her: *balnea nocte subit*,

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<sup>9</sup> Cassius Dio 43.19.3; see Grant 2000, 85-86 and Merten 1968, 133-134.

*conchas et castra moveri / nocte iubet*. (“She frequents the baths by night; not till night does she order her oil-flasks and her quarters to be shifted thither”). The association of *concha* with wine and perfume (as these two liquids can be kept in a shell) may have inspired the author, as a tiny joke at the end of his narration.

## 5. Another Zenobia

Apart from Juvenal and Suetonius, the author of the *HA* may have had in mind other examples when describing Zenobia: there is another Zenobia in Tacitus’ *Annales* 12.51<sup>10</sup>. This woman fled with her husband king Radamistus, after a siege of their palace in Armenia. They escaped on horses, but because of the pains this Armenian Zenobia suffered as a result of her pregnancy, she longed for death: *orare ut morte honesta contumeliis captivitatis eximeretur* (“she began to beg for an honourable death to save her from the degradations of captivity”, *Ann.* 12.51)<sup>11</sup>. After her husband struck her with a sabre and threw her in the river, she was found on the river bank by shepherds: *Interim Zenobiam (id mulieri nomen) placida in eluvie spirantem ac vitae manifestam advertere pastores* (“Meanwhile, Zenobia (to give his wife her name) was noticed by a few shepherds in a quiet backwater, still breathing and showing signs of life”, *ibid.*). She was taken to the Armenian town Artaxata, to the hostile king, who received her kindly and granted her life and living: *unde publica cura deducta ad Tiridaten comiterque excepta cultu regio habitata est* (“from which, but the good offices of the community, she was escorted to Tiridates, and, after a kind reception, was treated with royal honours”).

This story, in which the woman’s name is only mentioned once, has much in common with that of the Palmyrene Zenobia in the *HA*, who fled on camels to the river Euphrates, where she was arrested and brought to the emperor Aurelian. He treated her kindly, and granted her an estate after his triumph. Zenobia of Palmyra wrote in a letter (fictitious, dictated to Nicomachus, cf. *supra* 4.5) to Aurelian: *Deditionem meam petis, quasi nescias Cleopatram reginam perire maluisse quam in qualibet vivere dignitate* (“You demand my surrender as though you were not aware that Cleopatra preferred to die a Queen rather than remain alive, however high her rank.”, *Aur.* 27.3). Then, during the siege of Palmyra, she fled: *Victa igitur Zenobia cum fugeret camelis, quos dromedas vocitant, atque ad Persas iter tenderet, equitibus missis est capta atque in Aureliani potestatem deducta*. (“Zenobia, then, conquered, fled away on camels (which they call dromedaries), but while seeking to reach the Persians she was captured by the horsemen sent after her, and thus she was brought into the power of Aurelian”, *T* 28.3). Common to the stories of the

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<sup>10</sup> I thank my colleague dr. B.W. Lindeboom for the suggestion.

<sup>11</sup> Translations from Tacitus are by Jackson in his edition in the Loeb-series 1970 (originally 1937).

two Zenobias are the flight, the capture and the friendly treatment by their captors. Tacitus may have been a source of inspiration<sup>12</sup>.

## 6. Conclusion

There are many common themes in the portrayal of Zenobia in the *HA* and that of women's ways by Juvenal, who presents them mainly as faults. Zenobia possesses similar characteristics, but in a more balanced way, which makes her extraordinary as a female leader. Of course, there are also themes that do not occur in Juvenal (like in *T* 30.16-18 the use of a wagon, the preference for hunting, her financial skills, etc.) and the satirical tone has made place for modest praise in the *HA*. However, the number of common themes, such as clothing, beauty, ancestors, language and culture, manners at the dinner table, physical weakness, *etcetera*, some of which emphasized by lexical similarities (*galeata*, see *sub* 1), are so conspicuous, that it might be concluded that the author of the *HA* knew the sixth satire and modelled his portrayal of Zenobia on this example. This would be hardly surprising in a time when Juvenal enjoyed such big popularity. To take Juvenal's sixth satire as a model, is also apt for other reasons: the immigration of eastern people, Greek, Armenian, Syrian and others, frequently stands at the receiving end of Juvenal's satire.

What can be concluded from Juvenal as a model with regard to historical aspects? In the first place, the literary model makes it more probable that a large part of the data about the person of Zenobia are based on the author's invention. To generate some themes for his description, the author had to draw from his fantasy. Whether or not Zenobia lived in Rome after her capture, cannot be made clear through comparison with models, but the search for sources of the author's fantasy can shed a new light on the historical data. For the same reason, the history of Zenobia has often be compared with Cleopatra's. The similarities are obvious, and they are even supported by historical evidence. Again, Zenobia appears as the more chaste of the two (as Cleopatra is often described as a *meretrix regina*, as Properce calls her in 3.11.39). These comparisons do not exclude other sources, as the author has obviously mingled more literary themes and models.

It is striking in the description of Zenobia, that humorous or satirical exaggeration is not as present as in descriptions of other tyrants in *T*, like the fictitious Celsus (just preceding Zenobia). The balanced narrative (a female leader, but a skilled one) serves the rhetorical goal to depict the very effeminate bad emperor Gallienus. The opposition of good and bad emperors explains an historical incorrectness: Gallienus only reigned until 268, the year that Zenobia ascended to the throne. The idea can be formulated thus: under

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<sup>12</sup> Wallinger 1990, 147-8 mentions another warrior-princess that may have played a role in the depiction of Zenobia, namely Mavia. This possibly contemporary figure does not, of course, exclude earlier models.

the bad emperor Gallienus, even women were able to reign, while Aurelian was able to defeat this very capacious female general. This rhetorical aim led to the balanced, sometimes almost contradictory, description of the extraordinary woman, who addressed the emperor directly after her capture: *Imperatorem te esse cognosco, qui vincis, Gallienum et Aureolum et ceteros principes non putavi*. (“You, I know, are an emperor indeed, for you win victories, but Gallienus and Aureolus and the others I never regarded as emperors.”, *T* 30.23). This is one of the passages in which the author reveals his aim, voiced by Zenobia herself. The structure of the entire book of *T*, in which two women (Zenobia and Victoria) are as the twenty-ninth and thirtieth the series of tyrants, reflects this same goal. The embedding of Zenobia’s biography in the entire *HA* will be subject of later considerations; for now, the conclusion that Zenobia is a highly fictitious entity, modelled on approved precedents, will suffice. The myth of Zenobia greatly benefitted from it<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> That myth produces a fast growing number of publications; *vires acquirit eundo*. I have neither included in the biography, nor mentioned in this article a number of books and articles that appeared in the first five years of this century on the subjects of Palmyra and Zenobia. The titles I have gathered, together with an article on the historical background of queen Zenobia, will be published in the dutch chronicle for oriental studies *Phoenix* 2006/7 (forthcoming) titled ‘Rome en de kwestie Palmyra’. I just want to mention here the most brilliant recent product of the myth, the catalogue of the exhibition in Paris *Moi, Zénobie, Reine de Palmyre* (ed. Jacques Charles-Gaffiot et alii), Paris 2001.

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