

PRAISE THROUGH LETTERS: PANEGYRICAL STRATEGIES IN
EUSEBIUS' *LIFE OF CONSTANTINE* AND THE *HISTORIA AUGUSTA**

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*Departing from the progress in Constantinian studies in the last few decades, in this article the collection of imperial biographies called the *Historia Augusta* (HA) is reconsidered as an anti-Constantinian scripture. After all, the HA, as a literary product, is presented to the reader as a scripture from the (post-)tetrarchic era, by way of its ambiguous dedications to Diocletian and Constantine. The later books of the HA are no longer embellished with imperial dedications, but Constantine remains omnipresent: the biographies tend to panegyric, particularly the life of the emperor Claudius as the alleged ancestor in Constantine's line, as initially advocated by the *Panegyricus* of 310. A comparison with another high-peak of biographical panegyric, Eusebius' *Life of Constantine*, written in Greek, is revealing: the same strategies, e.g. the idiosyncratic quotation of letters within the biography (often translated from Latin), are used to demonstrate the emperor's excellence. In this contribution, the HA is approached as an 'historical panegyric' reacting to Eusebius' praise of Constantine.*

Introduction: the *Historia Augusta* in Constantinian context

Since Hermann Dessau discovered in 1889 that the *Historia Augusta* (henceforth: *HA*), a collection of thirty imperial lives running from Hadrian up to and including Numerianus, was written decades later than it pretended to be, viz. in the last, rather than the second, quarter of the fourth century, the ties between the emperor Constantine and the enigmatic work seem to have been loosened somewhat. No longer did the *HA* have to be placed in the time of the first Christian emperor, and the question in which decade and by whom the lives had been written acquired a central place in research. Given the progress in Constantinian studies in the last few decades, a reconsideration of the *HA* in the light of the new

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evidence available does not seem out of place. So too combining the data provided by the *HA* and other sources such as the *Panegyrici Latini* might help us to establish links between the different sources.

As the focus of *HA* studies has been on its possible date of composition, the attention given to Constantine as an important actor in the narration has practically vanished, apart from studies concerning the hidden allusions to Constantine as a Christian ruler¹. These allusions have not only been used to establish a date of composition earlier or later in the Theodosian era (378-*ca.* 395), but also to read the *HA* as a late pagan reaction to Constantine's Christian policy². It is certainly not by chance that extensive reminiscences of Constantine appear as late as in the seventeenth book (out of thirty biographies in the *HA*), as here - to be more precise, in *Hel.* 18.4 - begins the more fanciful part of the collection which draws upon other sources than the ones used before (Barnes 1978, 56-57), not least the author's own inventive mind. However, there may be more links between the work that we know as the *HA* and its pretended time of genesis. This contribution aims to replace the *HA* as a narrative within its Constantinian context and to link the data as provided by that narrative with the sources of Constantine's era (306-337), the *Panegyrici Latini* and Eusebius of Caesarea. We will focus on the later biographies of the *HA*, in which praise given by imperial epistolary activity is a striking feature.

Imperial Succession during the Tetrarchy and after

Dessau's main objection to considering the *HA* a scripture from the early fourth century was the improbability of its dedications: there is practically no period in time when any literary work could be dedicated to Diocletian and Constantine together, with reference to co-rulers. From an historical viewpoint, this is perfectly true, and there is no need to doubt Dessau's pertinent remarks on this point. Still, the author of the *HA*, supposedly writing in a much later decade, does his best to give a Tetrarchic and Constantinian flavour to his narrative, in which he succeeds surprisingly well. For the dedications he took the model of the tetrarchy, initially devoting some of the books to Diocletian, while gradually shifting the focus to Constantine³, after which the imperial dedications disappear. The irregular structure corresponds with the historical sequence of Diocletian, who after abdicating in 305, returned in 308 (be it only in name) at the Carnuntum conference, while Constantine's rise to power went irregularly,

¹ To be found especially in the *Vita Heliogabali (Hel.)*: cf. the overview in Zinsli 2005, 118 note 3, who adds some further similarities between Eusebius' *VC* and the *HA* to the discussion, among others the tragic deaths of bad emperors, imperial virtues like *pietas* and *clementia*, and the repressive religious policies of Constantine and Elagabalus.

² Most prominently Festy 2007, who dates the final version of *Hel.* in the early thirties of the fifth century, and reads the invective as a reproach against Theodosius II's Christian courtiers.

³ Diocletian: the 2th, 5th, 6th, 10th, 11th, 15th book respectively; Constantine: the 12th, 14th and 17th-20th book.

twice refraining to accept the title of ‘Augustus’ (in 306 and 308)⁴. Later, in retrospective, Constantine presented his reign as a monarchy from the beginning, from the moment that he took over the reign at his father’s death in York, on July 27th, 306.

Constantine’s rise to power was a question of disposing of his rivals, after which he presented them as tyrants. The most telling example is Maxentius, whose defeat is advocated on Constantine’s arch in Rome up to the present day⁵. By doing so, he changed Diocletian’s system from a tetrarchy into a diarchy again (and, after having defeated the Eastern emperor Licinius in 324, into a monarchy – Barnes 2012, 106), while reintroducing hereditary succession at the expense of Diocletian’s ideal of adoptive emperorship. These two reforms, the return to monarchy by the defeat of rivals (‘tyrants’) and the reintroduction of hereditary succession, became important themes in contemporary literature, featuring in five of the *Panegyrici Latini*⁶ and Eusebius’ *vita Constantini* (*VC*). For the panegyrics, the former theme is not an easy case. The orator of *Pan. Lat.* VII (6) struggles with the fact that the most elegant way of succeeding is *adrogatio* or *adoptio*⁷ (see chapter 5.3 of this same panegyric), but as the occasion is Constantine’s marriage with Maximian’s daughter Fausta, the orator wishes for children and grandchildren “providing for all future ages by extending the succession of your posterity”⁸. In a later panegyric, VI (7) 2.1-5, Claudius II Gothicus (emperor in the years 268 to 270) is presented as Constantine’s ancestor⁹ in order to strengthen the emperor’s claim to supremacy over Maxentius, who in turn is said to be a changeling of Maximian¹⁰. As for Eusebius, Constantine’s succession by his sons is part of a divine design – see e.g. Eus. *VC*

⁴ For praise of Constantine’s *prudentia* on this point, see *Pan. Lat.* VII (6) 5.3. For the references to the *Panegyrici*, I depart from Rees 2012, 24.

⁵ TAM DE TYRANNO QVAM DE OMNI EIVS / FACTIONE VNO TEMPORE IVSTIS / REM PVBLICAM VLTIVS EST ARMIS (“on both the tyrant and all his/faction at the same time in righteous/battle he avenged the State”: *CIL* 6.1139 = *ILS* 694).

⁶ The ones addressed to Constantine are: VII (6) from 307, VI (7) from 310, V (8) from 311, XII (9) from 313 and IV (10) from 321, the first four of these delivered in Trier and the last one in Rome.

⁷ Firstly advocated as the ideal way of succession by Pliny in his *Panegyricus* to Trajan, *Pan. Lat.* I (1) 7.5.

⁸ Translation Nixon/Rodgers 1994, 192.

⁹ It is unknown how *avita cognatio* should be interpreted (if not deliberately vague): in a more strict interpretation Claudius would be Constantine’s *avus* (‘grandfather’), but, in a wider sense, it could also refer to any ancestor. Eutropius *Enc. Hist. Rom.* 9.22.1: Constantine descended from Claudius’ daughter; *Anon. Val.* 1.2: Constantine descended from Claudius’ brother, just as *HA vita Claudii* 13.2, who names this brother ‘Crispus’. See Bird 1997 for an overview of the sources. Inscriptions: *ILS* 699, 723, 725, 730, 732; coins: *RIC* 7.180, 252, 310, 429, 502. See further *Jul. Or.* 1.6d, 2.51c and *Caes.* 313d, who are ambiguous about it; *Panegyrics*: 4.2.5, 4.2. See for Claudius’ family ties in *HA: Cl.* 13.1-2.

¹⁰ For the latter fact: *Pan. Lat.* XII (9) 4.3; cf. *Epitome* 40.12-13, *Anon. Val.* 4.12 and Barnes 1981, 27, 308 note 27.

1.1.3 – while it must be considered that the *Vita Constantini* is written under their reign just after Constantine’s death in 337. A following theme proffered by Eusebius is Constantine’s victory over tyrants¹¹. In Eus. *VC* 1.18.1, Eusebius mentions Constantine’s large family as a distinguishing quality, and part of God’s design to prolong his reign through the succession of his sons.

The themes discussed above are central to the *HA*. The theme of adoption versus hereditary emperorship is present in all parts of the *HA* (Burgersdijk 2013). Panegyric praise abounds in the *vita Claudii (Cl.)*, *Aureliani (A)*, *Taciti (Tac.)*, and *Probi (Pr.)*. Contrary to the compared works *Pan. Lat.* and *VC*, an interest in tyrants is one of the characterizing stylistic elements in the construction of the *HA* (apparent from three of the secondary lives, and the marked collection of thirty –*Triginta tyranni*– and four –*Quadruga tyrannorum*– tyrants). In the life of Septimius Severus’ rival Pescennius Niger (*PN* 1.1), the author complains about a lack of information about defeated rulers in general¹². This is an important statement, diametrically opposed to Eusebius, for whom the defeat of the tyrants is reason for praise. But most of all, the program as presented in the first preface, the one to the *vita Aelii*, brings the reader to the times of Diocletian and Constantine: see *Ael.* 1.1. In this passage Diocletian is addressed as *Diocletiane Auguste, principum maxime*, after which the author states that he will treat all the rulers who came near the throne by co-rulership, adoption, or otherwise. By doing so, the author builds an imperial pyramid, on the top of which Diocletian holds the throne, along tetrarchic lines. This figure is also encountered in *Pan. Lat.* VI (7) 1.4-5, where the orator addresses all the *invictissimi principes* (“invincible rulers”), on top of which Constantine remains¹³.

¹¹ See Eus. *VC* 1.4.5: τῆς δ’ αὐτοῦ μοναρχικῆς ἐξουσίας τὴν εἰκόνα δοῦς, νικητὴν ἀπέδειξε παντὸς τυραννικοῦ γένους θεομάχων τ’ ὀλετῆρα γιγάντων ... (“Making him the model of his own monarchical reign, he appointed him victor over the whole race of tyrants and destroyer of God-battling giants ...”): translation by Cameron/Hall 2010, 69, as all the following translations of Eusebius’ *VC*.

¹² *Rarum atque difficile est, ut, quos tyrannos aliorum victoria fecerit, bene mittantur in litteras, atque ideo vix omnia de his plene in monumentis atque annalibus habentur* (“It is an unusual task and a difficult one to set down fairly in writing the lives of men who, through other men’s victories, remained mere pretenders, and for this reason not all the facts concerning such men are preserved in our records and histories in full” [translation by Magie, like all the translation from the *HA* below]).

¹³ *Itaque primum illud compendium faciam quod, cum omnes vos, invictissimi principes, quorum concursus est et socia maiestas, debita veneratione suspiciam, hunc tamen quantumcumque tuo modo, Constantine, numini dicabo sermonem* (“And so I shall make my first abridgement in that, although I esteem you all, invincible rulers, whose majesty is harmonious and united, with the respect that is your due, I shall dedicate this address, trifling as it may be, to your divinity alone, O Constantine”).

The *Historia Augusta* and Constantine

Let us reconsider briefly Constantine's presence in the *HA*. Apart from the dedications in two of the secondary lives and four of the intermediary lives¹⁴, there are many parts that have been connected to episodes from Constantine's life and reign as transmitted in the sources. For example, Aurelian's vision of Apollonius of Tyana in *Aur.* 24.3-4 has been related to Constantine's vision of the cross, told by Eusebius (*VC* 1.28) (Chastagnol 1994, cxlii; 1970, 96-98). Secondly, the emperor's misbehaviour related in the *Vita Heliogabali* has been seen as a veiled attack on the atrocities of Constantine's regime¹⁵. Thirdly, as we have seen, the biography of Claudius must be linked to Constantine's times, as this was the emperor to whom Constantine retraced his lineage. Constantine's ascendancy was first advocated by the panegyric VII (6) of 310: *A primo igitur incipiam originis tuae numine, (...). Ab illo enim divo Claudio manat in te avita cognatio, ...utinam diuturnior recreator hominum quam maturior deorum comes*¹⁶. In the *HA*, there are several passages referring to the genealogy: *Hel.* 2.4: *sed de nomine hactenus, quamvis sanctum illud Antoninorum nomen polluerit* (sc. Heliogabalus), *quod tu, Constantine sacratissime, ita veneraris, ut Marcum et Pium inter Constantios Claudiosque, velut maiores tuos, aureos formaveris ...*¹⁷. The *HA*, evidently pagan in ideology, sings the praise of Constantine (not least by dedicating several books to his divinity), although there are many reasons to suppose that the author was severely set against the first Christian emperor. The critics must be sought under the surface of the text, for example by a kind of double reading of the biography of Elagabalus, or by a proper understanding of the theme of hereditary succession (as e.g. in the *Vita Sept. Sev.* 21, about bad sons of emperors). The official discourse, however, leads to the praise of Constantine, as well as his co-rulers. In *Hel.* 35.2, the author promises to carry forth his description of the emperors to Alexander, Aurelian, and *horum omnium decus auctor tui generis Claudius* ("the glory of them all, Claudius, the founder of your family"). Then, a remarkable passage follows, *Hel.* 35.4-5: *his iungendi sunt*

¹⁴ The alleged authors (Julius Capitolinus for the *Vita Clodii Albini*, Aelius Spartianus for the *Vita Getae*, Aelius Lampridius for the *Vita Heliogabali* and *Alexandri Severi*, and Julius Capitolinus for the *Vita Maximinorum* and *Gordianorum*) are indifferent. The terms of secondary lives and intermediary lives refer to a technical and widely accepted division of the books of the *HA* in four parts, as explained by, e.g., Chastagnol 1994, xxxvii-xlix and Burgersdijk 2010, 31-35.

¹⁵ See Zinsli 2005, 118 note 3 (as referred to in note 1) and Festy 2007, who regards the *HA* as a pagan attack on a Christian, Constantine-minded regime.

¹⁶ "And so I shall begin with the divinity who is the origin of your family For an ancestral relationship links you with the deified Claudius, ... Oh, that he had been a longer-lived restorer of mankind, rather than too premature a companion of the gods!" (translation Nixon/Rodgers 1994, 219-220, as all the translations from the *Panegyrics* below).

¹⁷ "But enough concerning his name – though he deified this venerated name of the Antonines, which you, Most Sacred Constantine, so revere that you have had portrayed in gold both Marcus en Pius together with the Constantii and the Claudii, as though they too were your ancestors, ...".

*Diocletianus, aurei parens saeculi, et Maximianus, ut vulgo dicitur, ferri, ceterique ad pietatem tuam. Te vero, Auguste venerabilis (...) illi prosequuntur, quibus id felicior natura detulerit*¹⁸. The mentioned *illi* may be no others than the panegyrists. To the biographies to be written, those of Licinius, Severus, Alexander, and Maxentius should be added (*HA* 35.6-7), *non enim ego id faciam quod plerique scriptores solent, ut de his detraham, qui victi sunt, cum intellegam gloriae tuae accedere, si omnia de illis, quae bona in se habuerint, vera praedicarō*¹⁹. This statement may be read as a firm disapproval of the tradition in which Eusebius wrote his biography, refusing to spoil his panegyric description by the addition of the tyrants' lives. It is a panegyric virtue not to mention the names of the 'defeated', viz. the emperors who persecuted Christianity (see e.g. Eus. *VC* 1.12.2), against which practice the author of the *HA* objects. By these assets, the narration is solidly anchored in Tetrarchic and Constantinian context.

There may be a link between *Panegyrici Latini XII* and the panegyric lives in the *Historia Augusta* on the basis of the theme of good and bad emperors, as I argued in a recent article (Burgersdijk 2013). This analysis concluded with the suggestion that the *HA*, in the light of its narration, perfectly fills the gap between the *Panegyricus* by Pliny to Trajan (*Pan. Lat.* 1.1) and the *Panegyrici* addressed to Diocletian, Maximian, and Constantine. This may be more than mere coincidence. In the first place, there is a conspicuous omission of a biography of Trajan, who is considered the *optimus princeps* all through later antiquity. It would be an impossibility for the author of the *HA*, who made the alternation between good and bad emperors a leading theme in his work, with a description of the best emperor ever, as the series shows an increasing panegyric mode (be it in alternation with bad emperors). Moreover, the author wishes to suggest that he started his series with Julius Caesar (the *Vita Aelii* 7.5); beginning with a biography of Trajan would have spoiled this suggestion. At the other end of the narration, the *HA* prepares for a climax of panegyric description after the last lives, viz. the lives of Diocletian and his tetrarchic co-rulers. The construction of the *HA* shows a development from separate to combined lives, which may be seen as a preparation for the combined emperorship in the dyarchic and tetrarchic reigns, as is the panegyric description of Constantine's ancestor Claudius Gothicus. A view on the history of biographical and panegyric writing in Latin literature may result in the following diagram:

¹⁸ "To these rulers must be joined Diocletian, father of the golden age, and Maximian, father of the iron, as they commonly say, and all the others down to the time of Your Piety. But as for you, o revered Augustus, you shall receive honor in the many and more eloquent pages of those to whom a more kindly nature has granted this boon".

¹⁹ "For I will not, as is the wont of many writers, detract from the greatness of those who have been vanquished, since I perceive that if, in writing of them, I shall tell the whole truth concerning the noble qualities which they possessed, it will but enhance your glory".

Era	Biography	Panegyric
1st century (- 96)	Suetonius' <i>De Vita Caesarum XII</i>	Ø
Trajan's reign	Ø	<i>Pan. Lat. I</i> (Plinii)
2nd-3rd centuries (-284)	<i>Historia Augusta</i>	Ø
Tetrarchy + Constantine	Eusebius' <i>Vita Constantini</i>	<i>Pan. Lat. IV–XII</i>

Diagram 1: Time of the story in biographical and panegyric works, 1st-early 4th century.

Compared with the two works following (viz. in time of the story) the *HA*, one may conclude that the narration prepares for the panegyric description of Diocletian and Constantine, such as in *Pan. Lat.*, and is opposed to the Christian-minded Constantine, who defeated all his rivals, as presented by Eusebius.

Letters in Eusebius' *Vita Constantini*

This leads us to the question of whether there is a direct response of the author of the *HA* to Constantine's panegyrist Eusebius. Let us just compare some characteristics. Firstly, Eusebius (*VC* 10.2) claims to describe a king [βασιλεῖ], οἷον ὁ σύμπας οὐχ ἰστόρησεν αἰών (“so great that all history has not reported his like”)²⁰. Compare this with the description in the *HA* of the emperor Probus, *Pr.* 2.9: (*principem*) *qualem historia nostra non novit* (“(a ruler) the equal of whom our history does not know”). In *VC* 1.23, Eusebius states: Τῶν δ' ἄλλων ... τὰς τοῦ βίου καταστροφὰς οὐκ εἶναι πρέπον ἔκριναι τῷ παρόντι παραδοῦναι διηγήματι οὐδὲ τὰς τῶν ἀγαθῶν μνήμας τῇ τῶν ἐναντίων παραθέσει μιαίνειν²¹. Eusebius does not want to spoil the laudatory narration with the deaths of the tyrants. This corresponds with a statement in the *HA*, where the author does not wish to spoil his narration of Probus with the inclusion of four tyrants, *Pr.* 24.8: *Non enim dignum fuit, ut quadrigae tyrannorum bono principi miscerentur*²². Apart from these random examples, there is a remarkable similarity in the construction of the two works: the inclusion of documents in direct speech (“one of the most striking features of the *VC*”, according to Cameron/Hall 2010, 10)²³. The inclusion is used to ground the panegyric description by Eusebius in a rhetorical sense (leaving aside the documentary value of the letters). This can

²⁰ For Eusebius' choice to describe Constantine's life in an hagiographical vein and by using documents, such as Athanasius did for Antonius almost one generation later, see Momigliano 1963, 92-93; more in general about the relationship of Greek historiography with Latin in the fourth century, *ibid.* 87-94. See also Torres Guerra 2012, 35 note 62 for bibliographical references.

²¹ “As to the others ... I have decided that it is not proper to report the way their lives ended in the present account, nor to stain the record of good deeds by presenting their contrary”.

²² “For it has not seemed suitable to combine a four-span of pretenders with a righteous prince”.

²³ In this study, only the documents in *VC* are taken into consideration, while there also occur some in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (*HE*), especially in the tenth book, for which see Carotenuto 2002; Carriker 2003, 279-286.

also be seen in the *HA*, although the author uses the many documents in various ways. The following provides an inventory of the letters in Eusebius' *VC*:

Book 1 (8.212 words; 59 capita)				
Book 2 (8.434 words; 73 capita)				
Letter	Capita	Words	Addressee	
1	24-42 (19)	1.991	Palestine	
2	46.1-3 (1)	175	Eusebius	
3	48-60 (13)	195	East	
4	64-72 (9)	1.324	Alexander, Arius	
Total	(42)	3.685		
Book 3 (10.624 words; 66 capita)				
5	17.1-20.2 (4)	853	Churches	
6	30-32 (3)	434	Macarius	
7	52-53 (2)	533	Macarius, bishops	
8	60.1-9 (1)	710	laity at Antioch	
9	61.1-3 (1)	191	Eusebius	
10	62.1-3 (1)	293	bishops at Antioch	
11	64-65 (2)	485	Heretics	
Total	(14)	3.499		
Book 4 (8.552 words; 75 capita)				
12	9-13 (5)	544	Persian emperor	
13	35 (1)	156	Eusebius	
14	36 (1)	190	Eusebius	
15	42 (1)	343	Synod at Tyre	
Total	(8)	1.233		

Diagram 2: letters in Eusebius' VC (distribution, length and addressees).

Book	Wds (cap.)	Letters (wds)	average (wds/lett)	Percentagee (lett/book)
1	8.212 (59)	0 (0)	0	0 %
2	8.434 (73)	4 (3.685)	921	44 %
3	10.624 (66)	7 (3.499)	500	33 %
4	8.552 (75)	4 (1.233)	308	14 %
Total	35.822 (273)	15 (8.417)	561	23 %

Diagram 3: letters in Eusebius' VC (frequency, average lengths, narrative space).

From the diagrams, it may be concluded that after the first book, in which no letters appear, the narrative space devoted to the literal quotation of letters is 44, 33, and 14 percent in books 2, 3 and 4 respectively²⁴. The average length of a letter, for what the observation may be worth, is 561 words. Most important is the notion that almost one quarter of the four books (23 percent) is occupied by letters quoted, for the last three books it is even 30 percent. Comparing these data with the *HA*, a similar picture occurs regarding the insertion of documents of various kinds in the four divided parts of Primary Lives, Secondary Lives, Intermediary Lives, and Later Lives: 1, 21, 12, and 22 percent respectively, which results in an average of 13 percent on a total of 108.281 words (which is three times the size of the *VC*).

A further point of interest is the way in which the ‘documents’ were inserted into the narration²⁵. Eusebius himself shows an awareness of the resulting structure of the text, as he proposes in *VC* 3.24.2 to collect Constantine’s letters in a special collection in order not to disrupt the structure of the text²⁶. Furthermore, he often introduces the quotation of the letters with brief descriptions of the content²⁷. Apart from this, Eusebius comments on the nature of the letters and, sometimes, their sources, comments that we will now study in more detail. In examining the comments, we should keep in mind that the emperor’s language was Latin, while Eusebius’ was Greek with a good command of Latin²⁸. As there were two main languages in the Roman Empire, it was necessary to translate official letters addressed to an Eastern readership into Greek, but Eusebius appears to have read Latin versions which he translated for the occasion²⁹. How and when Eusebius acquired his documents is hardly relevant for present purposes: we will confine ourselves to the presentation of the material in the biography as it has been transmitted.

In principle, the letters by the emperor’s hand were written in Latin (letter 3); for Eusebius’ purposes, letters were translated into Greek (letter 12), or there were

²⁴ Cameron/Hall 2010, 10: “on the other hand the inclusion of documents, which is one of the most striking features of the *VC*, now begins” (i.e. after II.19, where “the formal panegyric elements diminish”).

²⁵ Eusebius normally speaks about *gramma* (letter 1, 4, 5, 6, 12), *graphè* (letter 3) or *epistolè* (3.59.4) inserted in the narration: *diègèsis* (letter 4, 5), *diègèmata* (letter 1), *logos* (letter 3).

²⁶ *VC* 3.24.2: ὡς ἂν μὴ τὸ σῶμα τῆς παρουσίας ἡμῶν διακόπτοιο ἱστορίας (“...so as not to disrupt the sequence of our present account”).

²⁷ The question in how far the narration is based on the content of the letters (such as e.g. the letter *VC* 2.30.21 as a source for the narration in 2.20-21, about the restitution of liberty to deprived people), is another topic, investigated by Pasquali 1910, who took it as a proof of the unfinished (while constantly elaborated) state of the *VC*.

²⁸ Eusebius states that Constantine also had a command of Greek (*VC* 3.13.2), although his speeches were always held in Latin and translated by an interpreter (*VC* 3.13.1; 4.32.1: see below; and Torres Guerra’s contribution).

²⁹ More about this question, in the case of Constantine’s letter to Sapor (letter 12), in Barnes 1989; Carriker 2003, 295.

two versions circulating (letter 1)³⁰. In *VC* 4.32, it is confirmed that the emperor only used the Latin tongue; Eusebius promises to append his translated speech named *oratio ad coetum sanctorum* (“To the assembly of the Saints”) as an appendage to *VC*³¹. It may be safely concluded that the major part of the letters were originally in Latin, although Eusebius refrains from mentioning this in every single instance. He even claims to quote *verbatim* (κατὰ λέξιν) while a Greek text follows (letter 7) – this seems to be a rhetorical exaggeration, unless this letter to the bishops of Palestine was also a bilingual dispatch³². The reasons for Eusebius to include letters are threefold: first of all, the letters show the excellence of the man described and allow the reader to get to know the man better (letters 1, 4 and 6)³³. Secondly, his goal is to remember the man by his letters,

³⁰ [letter 1:] τοῦτο τ’ αὐτό ἀνεκίρυντε διὰ χαρακτήρων Ῥωμαίας τε καὶ Ἑλληνίδος φωνῆς εἰς ἕκαστον ἔθνος (“and he proclaimed this very thing in both Latin and Greek in a document sent to every region”); [letter 3:] μεταληφθεῖσαν δ’ ἐκ τῆς Ῥωμαίων φωνῆς (“but is translated from the Latin”); [letter 12:] φέρεται μὲν οὖν Ῥωμαία γλώττη παρ’ αὐτοῖς ἡμῖν καὶ τοῦτο τὸ βασιλέως ιδιόγραφον γράμμα, μεταβληθὲν δ’ ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλήνων φωνὴν γνωριμώτερον γένοιτ’ ἂν τοῖς ἐντυγχάνουσιν, ὧδέ τι περιέχον (“This document also is in circulation among us, written by the emperor personally in Latin, which may be more readily understood by the reader when translated into Greek. It runs like this...”); cf. also Cameron/Hall 2010, 325 note 32; Carriker 2003, 289-290.

³¹ *VC* 4.32: Ῥωμαία μὲν οὖν γλώττη τὴν τῶν λόγων συγγραφὴν βασιλεὺς παρεῖχε. μετέβαλλον δ’ αὐτὴν Ἑλλάδι μεθερμηνευταὶ φωνῆ οἷς τοῦτο ποιεῖν ἔργον ἦν (“However that may be, Latin was the language in which the Emperor used to produce the text of his speeches. They were translated into Greek by professional interpreters”). See Fisher 1982 (177-182 for Eusebius) for an analysis of bilingual documents, or better, Greek translations of Latin literature (also including an analysis of Eusebius’ translation of the *Edict of Toleration* into Greek: 200-203). Translations from the Latin by Eusebius himself are mentioned in the case of the emperor’s letter to Sapor (*VC* 4.9-13, letter 5) and the letter to the East (*VC* 2.48-60, letter 3). Drake 1988 for an analysis of the nature of the appended speeches.

³² [letter 7:] τάδε κατὰ λέξιν ἔγραφε (“and wrote in these exact terms:…”). Cf. Carriker 2003, 293; Barnes 1989, 111, who both stress the fact that Eusebius received a copy of the letter. For the notion of κατὰ λέξιν in Clement of Alexandria, see Van den Hoek 1996, 233.

³³ [Letter 1:] 1.23: μάθοις δ’ ἂν τοῦ λόγου τὴν ἀρετὴν αὐτοῖς προσβαλὼν τοῖς γράμμασι: δύο δ’ ἦν ταῦτα, (...), ὃ τῆ παρούσῃ προσήκον ὑποθέσει ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ παρενεῖναι, ... (“the excellence of this statement may be observed by looking at the actual texts ... it would in my opinion be relevant to our present theme to include the latter, ...”); [letter 4:] γράμμα τ’ ἀναγκαϊότατον δι’ αὐτοῦ ... ἐπιτίθησιν, ὃ δὴ καὶ αὐτὸ γνώρισμα περιέχον τῆς βασιλέως ... φέρεσθαι διηγῆσαι καλόν, ἔχον τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον (“By him he sent ... a most apposite letter, which ... could well be presented in our account of him. It reads as follows”); [letter 6:] διδασκαλίαν, ἧς ἔμοιγε δοκεῖ τὸ ἴσον γράμμα τῷ παρόντι συνάψαι λόγῳ εἰς ἀκριβῆ διάγνωσιν τῆς τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς ἐπιμελείας (“a reasoned admonition, a copy which I should, I think, add to the present work to enable the concern of the Godbeloved to be accurately appreciated”).

which may be read to get a better understanding of the man (letters 1, 3, and 5)³⁴. Thirdly, Eusebius tries to raise the reliability of his reports by quoting documents, which the emperor personally addressed to him and are in his possession (letters 1, 2, 3, 7)³⁵. Furthermore, Eusebius tells us that there are more letters, but that he does not include them all in his narration³⁶.

Documents in Eusebius' *Vita Constantini* and the *Historia Augusta*

When, in Eusebius' case, 'documents' are referred to, the fifteen letters by the emperor quoted above are meant. These might eventually be extended with the soldiers' prayer, taught by the emperor (*VC* 4.20.1), or quotes from the emperor in direct speech (e.g. *VC* 4.24; 4.30.1; 4.63.1). Interwoven in the text are his speeches to the synod in Nicaea (*VC* 3.12.1-5) and to the bishops in Nicomedia (*VC* 4.62.1-3)³⁷. These speeches do not purport to be quoted literally: the former is a translation *in situ* from the Latin, the latter Eusebius introduces with the

³⁴ [Letter 1:] ὡς ἂν διὰ τῆς ἱστορίας μένοι καὶ φυλάττοιτο τοῖς μεθ' ἡμᾶς καὶ ἡ τοῦδε τοῦ γράμματος ἔκθεσις (“...so that the actual text of this decree may survive through our history and be preserved for those after us”); [letter 3:] ὡς ἂν δοκοῖμεν αὐτοῦ βασιλέως ἐπακοῦειν ταῖς πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἀκοαῖς τοῦτον ἐκβοῶντος τὸν τρόπον (“so that we may feel that we are listening to the voice of the emperor himself as he makes this proclamation for all mankind to hear”); [letter 5:] τὴν μνήμην δι' οἰκείου παρεδίδου γράμματος, ὃ δὴ καὶ αὐτὸ ὡσπερ ἐν στήλῃ τῆδε τῇ περὶ αὐτοῦ συνάψω διηγῆσει, τοῦτον ἔχον τὸν τρόπον (“he transmitted the record ... by a personal letter, which I will attach to this present account of him as a permanent record. It went like this:...”).

³⁵ [Letter 1:] πρὸς τ' ἀληθείας καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων διηγημάτων πίστωσιν (“and in order to confirm the truth of our narratives”); εἰληπται δ' ἐξ ἀθθεντικοῦ τοῦ παρ' ἡμῖν φυλαττομένου βασιλικοῦ νόμου, ᾧ καὶ τῆς αὐτοῦ δεξιᾶς ἐγγραφος ὑποσημείωσις τῆς τῶν λόγων πιστώσεως οἷά τι σφραγίδι κατασημαίνει τὴν μαρτυρίαν (“it is taken from the original copy of the imperial law in our possession, in which also the signature written with his own hand attests as with a seal the truth of the words”); [letter 2:] πρώτην ταύτην εἰς ἡμέτερον πρόσωπον γραφὴν διαπεμψάμενος (“sending this first letter to the present writer personally”); [letter 3:] καὶ ταύτην δὲ τὴν γραφὴν, αὐτόγραφον οὖσαν αὐτοῦ ..., ἀπολαβεῖν ἀναγκαῖον τῷ παρόντι λόγῳ (“this document too, which bears his autograph ..., is highly relevant to quote in our present study”); [letter 7:] ἡμῖν δὲ τοῖς τήνδε γράφουσι τὴν ἱστορίαν λογικωτέραν κατέπεμπε διδασκαλίαν (“But he also dispatched to the author of the present history a reasoned admonition”). Torres Guerra in this volume (note 13) states that αὐτόγραφον (in letter 3) does not denote the emperor's own handwriting, but only encapsulates his signature, *pace* Cameron/Hall 1999, 244. One could ask the same regarding ἰδιόγραφον in letter 12 (see note 31 in this article).

³⁶ *VC* 3.59.4: καὶ ταύτας δ' αὐτοῦ τὰς ἐπιστολάς ... παρεθέμην ἂν ἐπὶ τοῦ παρόντος, εἰ μὴ διαβολὴν ἐπήγον τοῖς κατηγορουμένοις (“These letters of his too ... we would have produced at this point, but they might bring discredit on the persons accused”).

³⁷ Yet another part in direct speech (hardly to be called a document, and certainly not by Constantine), is Licinius' speech on the eve of the battle against Constantine (Eus. *VC* 2.5.2-4), about which Eusebius got his information from witnesses (see also Carriker 2003, 288); other documents listed in Carriker 2003, 292.

words ὧδέ πη αὐτοῖς διελέξατο³⁸. Then, there is a category of speeches referred to, but not quoted (Eus. *VC* 3.24.2; 3.59.4-5; 4.29.1); the most famous of speeches referred to in *VC* 4.32.1 is the already mentioned *oratio ad coetum sanctorum* (Τῷ τῶν ἁγίων συλλόγῳ), which once formed the climax of the *VC* as its fifth book³⁹. Editorial tradition to append the text to the ‘*Life*’, in spite of Eusebius’ suggestion, has vanished.

Comparing these ‘documents’ to the letters included in the *HA*, one perceives a certain exaggeration in number as well as nature: there are 68 letters, 31 speeches to the people, soldiers and others, 30 addresses to the senate, 20 documents from the senate (official briefings and acclamations) and some other documents (see Burgersdijk 2010, 207). Again, our concern is how and why these are inserted into the narrative. Unlike Eusebius’ remarks, the author’s self-comments are too numerous to cite, but the categories remain the same. We will confine ourselves to the *Vita Aureliani*, in which many letters are cited. It appears that Aurelian wrote letters in Greek, which have been translated for the occasion⁴⁰. Another letter is written by the Emperor Valerian himself, which is in the author’s possession and inserted *ad verba*⁴¹. The insertion of the letters is meant to show the greatness of the man⁴², but also to allow us to get to know him better⁴³. It is important, so the

³⁸ “He addressed them in some such way”, author’s translation. Cf. Hom. *Il.* 24.373: οὕτω πη (Liddel/Scott [*LSJ*] *ad* πη); Van den Hoek 1996, 233 on ὧδέ πως: “The adverb πως apparently loses its indefinite flavor when it functions as an introduction to a quotation and becomes a kind of technical device”; for πη this will not be different.

³⁹ As in Heikel’s edition (followed by Eusebius’ *Laus Constantini*) as announced in *VC* 4.46.2: ὄν δὴ λόγον κατὰ καιρὸν μετὰ τὴν παροῦσαν τῆς γραφῆς ὑπόθεσιν ἐκθῆσόμεθα (“In due course, after the present book is finished, we shall publish that work”).

⁴⁰ When Aurelianus has sent a letter to Zenobia, in which he demands Palmyra’s surrender, Zenobia replies negatively, after which the author remarks (*Aur.* 27.6): *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”). This Nicomachus is unknown to us, but he may evoke Nicomachus Flavianus, who translated Philostratus’ *Vita Apollonii* (mentioned in *Aur.* 24.8) from Greek into Latin at the end of the fourth century (Sid. *Ap. Ep.* 8.3.1). For bilingual documents see the chapter in Adams 2003, 383-390: “Code-switching, language choice and power”.

⁴¹ *Aur.* 8.1: *Inveni nuper in Ulpia bibliotheca inter linteos libros epistulam divi Valeriani de Aureliano principe scriptam. Ad verbum, ut decebat, inserui* (“I have recently found among the linen books in the Ulpian library a letter, written by the Deified Valerian concerning the emperor Aurelian which I have inserted word for word, as seemed right”).

⁴² *Aur.* 11.10: *His quoque litteris indicatur, quantus fuerit Aurelianus* (“Also by these letters is indicated, how great a man Aurelianus was”). Another letter by Valerian in *Aur.* 9.1: *Eiusdem Valeriani alia est epistola, quae laudes illius continet. Quam ego ex scriniis praefecturae urbanae protuli* (“There is another letter by the same Valerian, sounding his praises, which I have brought out from the files of the city-prefecture”).

⁴³ *Aur.* 22.4: *multa eius magna et praeclara tam facta quam dicta sunt, sed omnia libro innectere nec possumus fastidii evitacione nec volumus, sed ad intellegendos mores atque virtutem pauca libanda sunt* (“many were the great and famous things that he said and did, but

author states, to look at the documents themselves⁴⁴. The author inserts the letters for the sake of accuracy (*fidei causa/ad fidem rerum*, cf. πρὸς τ'ἀληθείας καὶ τῶν ἡμετέρων διηγημάτων πίστωσιν), because he sees that other 'writers of annals' have done so⁴⁵. The author suggests that there are far more documents⁴⁶, and often prepares the reader by introducing the content of the letter⁴⁷.

When comparing the documents in Eusebius and the *HA*, it should be kept in mind that in the latter documents abound in far more variations. The letters by the emperor (or about the emperor) are only part of a host of documents, which are presented in endless varieties. For example, another letter is quoted to demonstrate Aurelian's cruelty. Still, it is striking that the same motivations as provided by Eusebius recur. Another example to illustrate the point may be taken from the *Vita Taciti* 8.1, where a *senatus consultum* is mentioned with an autograph of the emperor Tacitus: *cui Tacitus ipse manu sua subscripsit*. This does not depart from Eusebius' claim in his first letter, τῆς αὐτοῦ δεξιᾶς ἔγγραφος ("signed with his own (right) hand"). A motif from Eusebius the author of the *HA* cannot imitate is that the praised emperor wrote a letter to the author of the *HA* himself – this is why written records in libraries and oral reports (e.g. *Aur.* 43.2) are important⁴⁸.

we cannot include them all in our book without causing a surfeit, nor, indeed, do we wish to do so, but for the better understanding of his character and valour a few of them must be selected").

⁴⁴ *Aur.* 11.1: *Interest epistolas nosse de Aureliano scriptas et ipsam adrogationem* ("It is of interest to know the letters that were written concerning Aurelian and also the account of his adoption itself").

⁴⁵ *Aur.* 17.1: *Extat epistula, quam ego ut soleo, fidei causa, immo ut alios annalium scriptores fecisse video, inserendum putavi...* ("There is still in existence a letter, which, for the sake of accuracy, as is my wont, or rather because I see that other writers of annals have done so, I have thought I should insert"). Cf. *Aur.* 20.2: *nam ipsam (sc. epistulam) quoque indidi ad fidem rerum* ("for I have included it also as evidence for my statements").

⁴⁶ *Aur.* 15.1: *longum est cuncta pertexere* ("It would be too long to include every detail in full"); *Aur.* 20.1: *post haec interrogati plerique senatores sententias dixerunt, quas longum est innectere* ("After this speech many of the senators were asked for their opinions and gave them, but these it would be too long to include").

⁴⁷ Den Hengst 1987 has studied the introductory remarks in comparison with the content of the *orationes* (either oral or scriptural) in the case of *Vita Opilii Macrini* 5.9/6.2-4; *Vita Diadumeniani* 7.1/7.5-7; *Vita Alexandri Severi* 55.1-3/56.2-9 and *Vita[e] Gordianorum tres* 26.4-27.2/27.5-8 – the 'invented' letters appear to be a fruitful source for the narration, or *vice versa*.

⁴⁸ *Aur.* 43.2-5: *sed ego a patre meo audivi Diocletianum principem iam privatum dixisse nihil esse difficilius quam bene imperare. ... haec Diocletiani verba sunt, quae idcirco inserui, ut prudentia tua sciret nihil esse difficilius bono principe* ("And yet I have heard from my father that the emperor Diocletian, while still a commoner, declared that nothing was harder than to rule well. ... These were Diocletian's own words, and I have inserted them here for the very purpose that your wisdom might understand that nothing is harder than to be a good ruler").

Epilogue: Panegyric strategies in Eusebius and the *Historia Augusta*

In the time that the *HA* must have been written, the later fourth or early fifth century, the emperors' letters granting the erection or restoring of statues were considered as a particular sign of praise. At least five examples of this procedure survive (Weisweiler 2012, 310). In 431, a statue was erected for Virius Nicomachus Flavianus on request of his grandson; the letter permitting the erection was literally quoted⁴⁹. Another inscription belonging to the statue of L. Aurelius Avianus Symmachus mentions an *oratio adposita* ("an attached oration"), which was most probably inscribed on another side of the base. The emperor who issued the decree had his residence in another part of the Empire (Trier in this case), which makes the direct display of his words important. But even in Constantine's time, an example survives: Constantine decreed a statue for L. Aradius Valerius Proculus in 337. The inscription renders the words spoken by the emperor (*patres conscripti...*) by which he gave his permission⁵⁰. Eusebius, before quoting the letter numbered 5 above (*VC* 3.16), hints at the same when he writes: ὁ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸ ὡσπερ ἐν στήλῃ τῆδε τῇ περὶ αὐτοῦ συνάψω δηγήσει⁵¹. Thus, a connection is made between monumentality on paper and on stone, both being able to render the emperor's words literally, which underlines the importance of quoting.

As we have seen in the preceding sections, there are many similarities in the strategies as employed by Eusebius and the author of the *Historia Augusta* concerning quotation of documents, particularly imperial letters. In the case of the *Vita Constantini*, Eusebius praises Constantine for his active participation in ecclesiastical matters, but above all inserts the letters as a monument for his beloved emperor, who had defeated tyrants as enemies of a Roman and Christian Empire (Barnes [2011] recently confirmed his view that Constantine mainly laid down an aggressive pro-Christian policy). It is not surprising that the author of the *HA*, who set himself in opposition to his Christian contemporaries and celebrated the pagan past of the Roman Empire, chose Constantine as his favorite target, thereby letting the Christian emperor of his own time down. This made him imitate Constantine's most loyal supporter, whom he considered his adversary in a religious sense: he tried to beat him at his own game. This program

⁴⁹ It is this same inscription that Festy 2007 related with *Hel.* 35.3 (both containing the unique word combination *livorem improborum*), leading him to the conclusion that Elagabalus' portrait in the *HA* was a veiled attack on Constantine.

⁵⁰ The examples (up to the quotation by Eusebius) are taken from Weisweiler 2012, who provides a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon of imperial letters on stone. Nicomachus Flavianus: *CIL* VI 1783; Avianus: *CIL* VI 1698; Proculus: *CIL* VI 40776.

⁵¹ "This letter I will add, as if it were an inscription on stone, to my account of him" [authors' translation]. Cameron/Hall 1999, 268 observe a contradiction with Eus. *VC* 3.11: "a speech somewhat like this", thus interpreting the Greek phrase as saying that Eusebius will provide a literal instead of a free rendering of Constantine's words.

mainly demonstrates itself in his regard for the defeated (*quos tyrannos aliorum victoria fecerit*, *PN* 1.1; *qui victi sunt*, *Hel.* 35.6) and the inclusion of many letters in the narration, as recommendation for the good emperors.

There are some considerable similarities in the way these letters were presented to the reader. As we have seen, the goal is to enable the reader to gain a greater knowledge of the emperor who is being praised, as if the reader were allowed an insight into the inner workings of his mind. The authenticity of the letters is guaranteed by the emperor's own handwriting or signature (*αὐτόγραφον/sua manu*), the letters are quoted literally (*κατὰ λέξιν/ad verba*) to confirm the reliability (*πίστωσις/fides*); the letters are both in Greek and in Latin; there are introductory remarks that prepare for the content of the letters. There are far more letters than the author was able to quote, and they were sent all over the Empire. Imperial letter writing is, of course, not uncommon, but the way they are presented in both of the studied works, biographies with panegyric objectives, seems to be quite peculiar. Using direct speech in hagiographical works – such as wise or characteristic sayings – is far from uncommon, and even imperial letters are evoked from time to time (cf. e.g. Athanasius' *Vita Antonii* 81), but the quotation of letters even up to a quarter of a whole chapter is a rare phenomenon⁵².

As the two books, the *VC* and the *HA*, are diametrically opposed to each other when it comes to their appreciation of Constantine, and the latter picks up many themes encountered in the first, it is tempting to suppose some relationship. Let us just consider the possibilities. If *HA* directly responds to *VC*, this means that its author, writing in the Latin West, not only knew Greek, but also was acquainted with Eusebius' work. This might seem problematic, as Eusebius, as far as is known, only became familiar to the western part of the Roman Empire early in the fifth century⁵³. Another option is that the author knew of Eusebius through a translation; Rufinus translated Eusebius' *HE* in 401/402, and only the first two books of the *VC*⁵⁴. This could mean that the author wrote in the beginning of the fifth century, which is far from impossible given the present state of scholarship:

⁵² Letter writing in fictional contexts does occur in, e.g., the Alexander romance, or fictional letters in biographical contexts in the *Life of Apollonius*, about which works recently two studies appeared by Whitmarsh and Kasprzyk respectively, both in Hodkinson 2013. Some further studies about fiction, letter writing and biography will appear in the forthcoming K. De Temmerman/K. Demoen (eds.), *Telling Ancient Lives. Narrative Technique and Fictionalization in Greek and Latin Biography*, Cambridge.

⁵³ See Vittinghof 1953, 334-335 for the dispersion of Eusebius' work in the later fourth and early fifth century; the *Vita Constantini* is for the first time explicitly mentioned by Philostorgius ca. 425-433 (Vittinghof 1953, 335, note 20), which is no proof of a lack of knowledge about the work in earlier decades. See also Torres Guerra's concluding remarks in this volume about Ammianus Marcellinus' eventual knowledge of Eusebius.

⁵⁴ See Humphries 2008 for a positive evaluation of Rufinus' 'translation' of the *HE*, in which many of the Constantinian documents were omitted.

actually, there is no *terminus ante quem*; we only have the date of 389 after which the *HA* must have been written. The third and last option is that there is no relationship at all, and that all the similarities are by chance. This would, however, deprive us from a fresh and fruitful view on the *HA* by which this series of biographies is defined as a belated pagan reaction to the most outspoken of biographers, Eusebius⁵⁵.

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⁵⁵ The proposed thesis is, in fact, a reversal of Grégoire's view (1938, 583) that Eusebius' *VC* is "un pendant chrétien de l'*Historia Augusta*", given the fierce anti-pagan measures on the emperor's behalf. Grégoire challenged Eusebius' authorship of the *VC* in its final form (as it has been transmitted from Antiquity), with much impact on the discussion about the work.