
Notes on the Heirs of Commodus

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NOTES ON THE HEIRS OF COMMODUS

I. In the evening of December 31, 192, the last of the Antonine emperors was assassinated. The next morning a successor was declared, the elderly general of humble birth P. Helvius Pertinax, twice consul and at that moment prefect of the city of Rome. Less than three months later, on March 28, 193, Pertinax was murdered in his turn. He had never been the obvious candidate to succeed Commodus.¹

On the night of Commodus' death Pertinax had first addressed the praetorian guards in their camp, and then hastened to the Temple of Concord, where he awaited the senate. There he was met by the aged Claudius Pompeianus, the son-in-law of Marcus Aurelius, whom he exhorted to take up the purple. Pompeianus prudently refused: such is the tale which appears only in the *Historia Augusta*.² Herodian knows nothing of it, but Cassius Dio offers some valuable circumstantial evidence. As an eyewitness to the harrowing events of 193 in Rome he affirms that the reign of Pertinax was the first and the last time that he ever saw Pompeianus in the senate, for in the days of Commodus the old man had kept to his estates for reasons of age and health. (These ailments returned, the historian drily adds, after the death of Pertinax.) During these three short months Pompeianus, who had been the patron of Pertinax years before, took an active part in the counsels of state, and he received the signal honor of sharing the emperor's bench in the senate.³

The offer of the throne to Claudius Pompeianus looks like imperial propaganda rather than literary fiction.⁴ Neverthe-

¹ See on the events of 193 A. R. Birley, *BJ* 169 (1969) 247-80. I am very grateful for their comments on this paper to Professor Birley and to Professor C. P. Jones, and to Professor T. D. Barnes for advice on a much earlier version of Section III: none of these scholars can be held responsible for the various speculations advanced here, some of which (the author realizes) are much more probable than others.

² *HA, Pertinax* 4.9-10.

³ *Dio*. 73.3.2-3.

⁴ A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus, the African emperor* (London 1971) 144; and below, p. 296.

less, Pertinax had risen from the poorest of backgrounds—his father had once been a slave—and he was as well aware as anyone what a social affront his elevation might be, hence the necessity of some form of ceremony of approval. Herodian, who was admittedly one of the very worst of historians, duly notes a similar hesitancy on the part of the new emperor to accept the throne. He claims that Pertinax stressed his age (an excuse inappropriate to the Pompeianus anecdote) and urged the throne instead on one of the noblest of the patricians, Acilius Glabrio, a man twice consul who could trace his descent back to Aeneas and Aphrodite. But Glabrio insisted in his turn that Pertinax was the worthier candidate and the choice of the senate.⁵ Again, the offer, the refusal and the almost official counter-offer, play-acting perhaps, but a scene all the more worthy of attention for that reason. However, this time it is the *HA* which is silent about the event, and Dio merely notes that Glabrio too was highly honored by the new emperor, and that he shared with Pompeianus the privilege of sitting next to the *princeps* in the senate.⁶ The incident has caused problems and needs to be reconsidered.

Two days later, on January 3, 193, while the oath of allegiance was being administered, soldiers tried to bring into the praetorian camp a *senator nobilis*, Triarius Maternus Lascivius, in order to set him up as emperor. He managed to flee naked to Pertinax in the palace and was allowed to retire from the city. The sole record of this strange interlude appears in the *HA*, with no attempt to explain it.⁷

Subsequently, at an unknown date, the praetorians turned for their next candidate to another nobleman, Sosius Falco, the ordinary consul of 193 and one of the wealthiest men in Rome. Pertinax forestalled their effort to lead the man into camp and forbade the senate to condemn him for treason, permitting the young man to retreat to his estates. Thus far Cassius Dio, in a bare but plausible narrative.⁸ Herodian tells nothing of the affair, but the *Historia Augusta* adds more anecdote, and in a hopelessly corrupt passage it suggests that the incident was

⁵ Herodian 2.3.1-4.

⁶ Dio 73.3.3.

⁷ *HA*, *Pertinax* 6.4-5.

⁸ Dio 73.8.2-5.

more complicated than Dio would admit. It too calls for examination.

Finally, on March 28, 193, the guard burst into the palace and Pertinax reaped the reward of his ill-timed severity.⁹ His death touched off the civil wars which were to place Septimius Severus firmly on the throne. Within two years of his accession Severus had not only deified Commodus, he had proclaimed himself the brother of the murdered emperor and the son of Marcus Aurelius.¹⁰ He at least saw value in the role of Commodus' heir.

II. The nomination of Ti. Claudius Pompeianus (*cos.* II 173) as *capax imperii* was a natural one, despite his age and ill health, and despite his origins in the equestrian class at Syrian Antioch. One of the generals of Marcus Aurelius, he had been selected by the emperor in 169 as a husband for his daughter Lucilla Augusta, the widow of Lucius Verus.¹¹ Clearly then Pompeianus would have a double claim to consideration which was early recognized, "quod et gener imperatoris fuisset et diu militibus praefuisset."¹² Yet there was a third and even more compelling reason for the choice of an elderly and infirm senator: he was the father of sons who were the grandsons of Marcus Aurelius, one of whom held the ordinary consulship under his "uncle" Septimius Severus in 209 and subsequently died a victim of Caracalla.¹³ Only in the light of recent discoveries have we become aware of this man's full name, and it is a surprise, not Ti. Claudius Pompeianus but L. (or M.) Aurelius Commodus Pompeianus.¹⁴ It would be useful to know when and why he received a name which so proudly displayed his

⁹ Dio 73.9; Herodian 2.5; *HA*, *Pertinax* 10.8-11.13.

¹⁰ A. R. Birley, *op. cit.* 184ff.

¹¹ *PIR*² C 973; H.-G. Pflaum, "Les gendres de Marc-Aurèle," *Journal des Savants* (1961) 31-34.

¹² *HA*, *Iulianus* 8.3, alleging that Didius Iulianus likewise offered the throne to Pompeianus.

¹³ *PIR*² C 971, cf. 970, 974, and *AE* 1971.208; Dio 72.20.1.

¹⁴ On a sailor's discharge, published by J. F. Oates, *Phoenix* 30 (1976) 282-87. The *praenomen* is lost: Oates suggests M., but overlooks the equally likely L, and we may be dealing with part of a longer name from which something (e.g., Claudius) has been dropped. Previously the *nomen* had been established as Aurelius: *BHAC* 1964/5, 211ff.

connection with the dynasty, and particularly with his uncle Commodus, especially as no other of the known male descendants of Marcus Aurelius was so ostentatious. It might not have been his name at birth.

III. M'. Acilius Glabrio (*cos.* II 186) is a much more dubious candidate for the throne. But for the notices in Herodian and in Dio he is quite unknown to literature, and the crucial item in Herodian has been subjected to doubt. Nevertheless, all of the arguments advanced against its authenticity fall well short of conviction,¹⁵ and despite the paucity of evidence a circumstantial case can be made for the proposition that in some eyes (including those of Commodus himself) Glabrio was unusual enough to be considered for the succession.

At first inspection Acilius Glabrio is not only a cipher but an anachronism, for he was indeed the most nobly born of the Romans, with an historical pedigree reaching back—albeit in considerable obscurity under the Julio-Claudians—to a companion of Scipio Africanus, M'. Acilius Glabrio (*cos.* 191 B.C.). Of exceptional interest is the *cursus honorum* of his father, M'. Acilius Glabrio Cn. Cornelius Severus, *cos.* A.D. 152. Unusually for a patrician, this man saw service as a military tribune, and he held two proconsular legateships before even acceding to the quaestorship and the senate.¹⁶ The significance of these abnormalities is unclear, but their occurrence is to be borne in mind. Certainly they signify nothing improper, for he duly carried on to the ordinary consulship and to the proconsulship of Africa, sometime in the period 164 to 168.¹⁷ More important, he was not merely an ornamental relic of the republican *nobilitas* but an active servant of the dynasty, from the time of his employment as quaestor of Antoninus Pius to his appearance as a counsellor of Marcus Aurelius some

¹⁵ The most thorough treatment is now that of F. Kolb, *Literarische Beziehungen zwischen Dio, Herodian und der Historia Augusta* (Bonn 1972) 47-53; despite his views, however, I fail to see why in this instance we must choose between Herodian and the *HA*, where Dio is neutral, and automatically reject Herodian.

¹⁶ *ILS* 1072, cf. R. Syme, *REA* 67 (1965) 345-46.

¹⁷ *PIR*² A 73 + *IRT* 21. For the legateship to the proconsul of Asia, and for the problem of the proconsul Glabrio known to Aristides, see R. Merkelbach, *ZPE* 7 (1971) 43f., and H. J. Mason, *CP* 68 (1973) 121ff.

twenty-five years after his consulship.¹⁸ Perhaps he was regarded as in some sense unusually important, at least in the family's tradition, for as "M'. Acilius Glabrio sen." he was chosen to head the pedigree of a senatorial lady of the following century, his great-granddaughter.¹⁹

The consort of such a grand personage might be expected to be of equal rank. Inscriptions provide two candidates. First, an Arria L.f. Plaria Vera Priscilla is recorded as the wife of a consular M'. Acilius Glabrio; and second, a mutilated stone produces a Faustina, wife of [M'. Acilius Glab]rio Cn. Cornelius Severus, along with two apparent children, a Faustina and a [Pris]cilla Aciliana. One explanation of the evidence was to see in these ladies the first and second wives of the consul of 152, each of them producing a daughter who died young.²⁰ However, it has been objected on paleographical grounds that the first would be a more likely partner for one of the Glabrones consuls in 91 and 124.²¹ This view is preferable, for it allows Priscilla Aciliana to be a daughter of Faustina and Glabrio (which on the face of it she should be) and still a descendant of the person from whom she derived her name. Therefore Faustina remains as the sole attested wife of the consul of 152, to whom she seems to have born at least four children: Faustina, Priscilla Aciliana (who, like her sister, predeceased her parents), M'. Acilius Glabrio (*cos.* II 186), and a M. Acilius Vibius Faustinus, who is on record as retiring from the *salii Palatini* in 170 to be made a *flamen*.²² Who was she?

Suitable senatorial parents are difficult to produce, the only Faustinus of the appropriate period being the renowned general Cn. Minicius Faustinus Sex. Iulius Severus (*cos.* 127). But it is worth glancing at the imperial family, for the name Faustina is all but a sign of membership in it: the wife of M. Annius Verus (*cos.* III 126, and grandfather of Marcus Aurelius) and no fewer than *ten* of her descendants all bore "Faustina" as

¹⁸ Now attested as the latter by the *Tabula Banasitana* (AE 1971.534), where his name duly appears between those of the consuls of 150 and 154.

¹⁹ *ILS* 1133.

²⁰ *ILS* 1073; *CIL* XIV.2484; cf. *PIR*² A 73.

²¹ R. Meiggs, *Roman Ostia*² (1973) 505.

²² *ILS* 5024.

the last elements in their names.²³ With the general scarcity of the name and with the dynasty's predilection for it, it would be legitimate to surmise that a great patrician might find his wife in that family. A parallel provides confirmation: Annia Galeria Faustina bore to the emperor Marcus Aurelius (among their other children) an Annia Galeria Faustina, a Domitia Faustina, and a Vibia Aurelia Sabina; Faustina bore to the patrician M'. Acilius Glabrio a Faustina and a M. Acilius Vibius Faustinus.²⁴ It is difficult not to infer from these a common ancestry harking back to Rupilia Faustina and her apparent half-sister, Vibia Sabina, the wife of the emperor Hadrian.²⁵ If that is so, M'. Acilius Glabrio (*cos.* II 186) appears to have been a member of the imperial dynasty.

The plain observation may be sufficient, but the identity of his mother is of some interest. There are two alternatives. She may be an altogether unknown member of the family, another daughter of M. Annius Libo (*cos.* 128) for instance, and thus a cousin of Marcus. Or, just as likely in the presence of early death or divorce, she may be one of the many known Faustinae. In fact all but one of them are to be discounted for various reasons of chronology or genealogy. The sole exception, who is known only from epigraphy, is Ummidia Cornificia Faustina, the niece of Marcus Aurelius and the only lady of the imperial family whose husband happens to remain anonymous.²⁶ Her mother was Marcus' younger sister, Annia Cornificia Faustina, who was born c. 122/3 and who died young in 152; her father was an Ummidius Quadratus who has been attractively identified with the C. Annianus Verus who was suffect consul in 146; and her brother was M. Ummidius

²³ Viz., Rupilia Faustina (*PIR*² R 152), Annia Galeria Faustina (*PIR*² A 715), Annia Galeria Faustina (A 716), Annia Cornificia Faustina (A 708), Annia Fundania Faustina (A 713), Annia Aurelia Galeria Faustina (A 714), Domitia Faustina (D 177), Ummidia Cornificia Faustina (*PIR*¹ V 605), Vitrasia Faustina (V 525), Annia Faustina (*PIR*² A 709), Annia Aurelia Faustina (A 710).

²⁴ Note also the grandson, M'. Acilius Faustinus, *cos.* 210: the displacement of the proud name of Glabrio is interesting.

²⁵ On the problem of kinship between these ladies, A. R. Birley, *Marcus Aurelius* (1966) 318.

²⁶ For her ascendants and descendants see W. M. Ramsay, *Cities and bishoprics of Phrygia* I (1895) 286-92, and R. Syme, *Historia* 17 (1968) 72ff.

Quadratus, *cos.* 167.²⁷ At first glance there appears to be a chronological obstacle. How could a woman born at the earliest in 122 possibly have a grandson consul for the second time (as Acilius Glabrio was) in 186? But the thing is not only possible but plausible, for we do know that her *son* was already consul when she herself would have been no older than forty-five. To put the matter simply, we are dealing here with two connected phenomena: the very early age of Roman girls at marriage (the modal age was 12–15, which will be specially relevant to the upper classes where there are additional considerations of politics and property); and the acceleration in office of princes of the blood. The case of M. Ummidius Quadratus (*cos.* 167) demands a combination of these two factors, or it would be impossible to reconcile a mother born in or after 122 with a son in an office which was held by patricians at a minimum age of thirty-two.²⁸ Quadratus, then, is a clear paradigm. In the case of M'. Acilius Glabrio, we need to assume not one but two quick female generations (one of which is already attested) and not one but two consulships at an early age. Such things would be possible in a great-nephew of Marcus and a cousin of Commodus. And there are other reasons for suspecting that Glabrio's consulship in 186 was indeed quite anomalous.

First of all, we should note carefully the intervals between the attested consulships over the five certain father-to-son generations of the Glabrio family, held in A.D. 91, 124, 152, 186, and 210: they are, respectively, 33, 28, 34, and 24 years.²⁹ That the third figure is not much higher and the fourth much lower, that is that there is no significant disturbance in the

²⁷ R. Symè, *op. cit.* 97-99, 104.

²⁸ M. K. Hopkins, "The age of Roman girls at marriage," *Population Studies* 18 (1964/5) 309-27 where earlier studies are discussed. R. Syme, *op. cit.* 97: "The nephew of Marcus is in effect a crown prince. A consulship at twenty seven or twenty eight will be cheerfully conceded."

²⁹ We must here discount the possibility that the consul II of 186 was in fact the consul of 152 himself (who was certainly alive as late as 177): a gap of just one generation between the consuls of 152 and 210 (the latter is named on *ILS* 1133 as the son of the *bis cos.*) is unlikely; an intermediate generation is recorded in the person of Faustinus, the *flamen* of 170, rendering such a gap impossible; and the incident of 193 would be very strange indeed if the sixty-six-year-old Pertinax pleaded old age in surrendering the empire to a man over seventy!

rhythm between generations, is surely significant, an indication that Glabrio held his second consulship at an age little beyond that at which men of his rank might expect their first. And as a corollary to this, the regular succession of generations further suggests a short interval between his first and second consulships.³⁰ Second, Glabrio's consulship places him in the select group of men who were honored to have the emperor as their colleague in office. Under Commodus there were five. Two of these were eminent statesmen and generals, Aufidius Victorinus (183) and Helvius Pertinax (192), and two were relatives of the dynasty, Antistius Burrus (181) and Petronius Sura (190). Whichever category he be assigned to, Acilius Glabrio, the patrician of ancient lineage, begins to take on some importance in the regime. Third, and perhaps most significant of all, he joins the handful of men in the history of the principate who enjoyed as Agrippa had enjoyed the supreme honor of an iterated consulship as the colleague of the emperor. In short, we know next to nothing about the man, yet on every count his consulship stands out as something unusual. The simplest of explanations is that he was a member of the dynasty, on the best hypothesis a great-nephew of Marcus Aurelius.

Glabrio's eminence in the early years of the sole rule of Commodus may be explicable. At his death in 180 Marcus Aurelius had left no sons surviving, save Commodus, and his grandchildren were all infants. At that time Acilius Glabrio stood very close to the throne, both as counsellor and potential heir. In 193 he would stand with Claudius Pompeianus as the guardian of the dynasty and of legitimacy. Accordingly he *and* Pompeianus were accorded exceptional deference by Pertinax in the senate, and there is no reason to doubt that the formal offers of the empire made to them by Pertinax and recorded,

³⁰ G. Alföldy, *Fasti Hispanienses* (1969) 31f., in working out the maximum and minimum intervals between the first and second consulships of patricians, nevertheless assigned Glabrio's first consulship to c. 160 (that is, eight years after his father's). Now, in his invaluable *Konsulat und Senatorenstand unter den Antoninen*, Professor Alföldy opts for a much more reasonable "c. 173" (p. 187). I am tempted to place it c. 180 and to connect it with the accession of Commodus. I would also suspect that this man was the *younger* brother of the flamen Acilius Faustinus, the name Faustinus replacing that of Glabrio in the prospective head of the family for obvious reasons: cf. the consul of 210.

respectively, by Herodian and the *HA* were actual occurrences, as were their equally formal affirmations of loyalty. The scene with Pompeianus was acted out in the Temple of Concord, that with Glabrio in the senate. The elaborate induction of Pertinax into power prompts suspicion. The fall of Commodus was plotted by his praetorian prefect Aemilius Laetus, his *cubicularius* Eclectus, and his mistress Marcia; "others" had knowledge (at least) of the plot, among them surely Helvius Pertinax, prefect of the city, and—there can be no doubt—Claudius Pompeianus himself, who was supposedly retired permanently to his estate at Terracina yet who miraculously turns up at the Temple of Concord in the middle of the night. Acilius Glabrio should surely be implicated as well, and there is some slight circumstantial detail which should be noted, that is that he enjoyed an old connection with Eclectus and Marcia, for they had been in the household of his mother's family the Ummidii Quadrati before they transferred to Commodus; and that the emperor Pertinax exhibited a notorious passion for a certain Cornificia, who is usually taken to be the daughter of Marcus Aurelius by that name, but who might equally as well be Ummidia Cornificia Faustina, the mother of Acilius Glabrio.³¹ Whatever value is assigned to these scraps, a hypothesis can be advanced: Pertinax was a caretaker emperor, blessed in public by the legitimate representatives of the dynasty until such time as the proper heir (perhaps Pompeianus' eldest son) could take over. There were good precedents, most recently Hadrian's experiments with Iulius Servianus and Pedanius Fuscus and with Antoninus Pius and Lucius Verus, and of course the prime paradigm was Augustus' settlement of Tiberius and Germanicus.³² Pertinax was the ideal candidate, one of the most powerful figures of the day yet quite unsuitable as the son of a freedman to start a dynasty of his own. The surest indication of his position lies in the treatment of his family: the title of Augusta for his wife was declined, as was that of Caesar for his son, and, most importantly, he assigned all of his private property to his children and despatched them

³¹ Eclectus and Marcia: Dio 72.4.6. Cornificia: *HA*, *Pertinax* 13.8. On the conspirators in general, see A. R. Birley, *op. cit.* (n. 1).

³² For Hadrian's experiments see, respectively, *ZPE* 21 (1976) 78ff., and T. D. Barnes, *JRS* 57 (1967) 74ff.

to live at their grandfather's house, where he would visit them as a private citizen.³³ These are not the proper actions for a would-be dynast in his sixty-seventh year. Now a coin has appeared, a unique denarius of Pertinax, to stimulate curiosity. The obverse holds a scene of Spes advancing towards the emperor with the legend SPES AUGG. On several counts the piece is suspect, and judgment must be suspended until the coin is published, but even a forgery would be of exceptional interest if it were contemporary.³⁴ Who was the second Augustus, or hoped-for Augustus? Certainly not the son of Pertinax. Perhaps this coin is the first and, in the event, premature sign of the existence of an Antonine heir to Commodus, the candidate of Pompeianus and of Glabrio. Beyond that one cannot venture. Whatever their plans, they were frustrated by the praetorian guard.³⁵

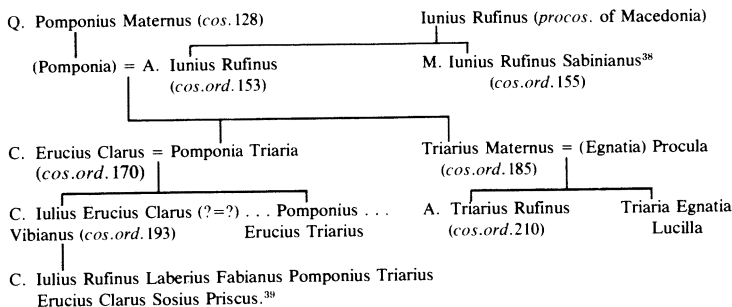
IV. Triarius Maternus—Lascivius is either a *signum* or a playful comment by the *HA* on one who arrived naked at the palace—is the most enigmatic of the actors of 193. Why a man about whom almost nothing is known should be the choice of the soldiers is a mystery. He was *nobilis* to be sure, and he is probably to be identified with the Maternus who was *consul ordinarius* in 185, therefore on both counts we should expect consular and senatorial ancestry. Yet there is no one except an otherwise unknown Triarius who received a letter from Pliny, a rhetor in the elder Seneca, and a long forgotten family of

³³ *HA*, *Pertinax* 6.9; Dio 73.7.1-3.

³⁴ To be published by Dr. A. Smith of University College, Dublin, in *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*. Dr. Smith, to whom I am most grateful for information about this coin, has considerable doubts about its genuineness, but concedes that it might be a contemporary forgery or a debased but official issue.

³⁵ One might infer from Dio 73.3.3 that both Glabrio and Pompeianus retired after the death of Pertinax. Further to Glabrio, it remains unclear whether a controversial inscription from Athens reveals him as a member of the imperial *consilium* (one which includes Cleander) or simply as consul in 186: A. E. Raubitschek, *Hesperia Suppl.* 7 (1949) 286-90; J. H. Oliver, *AJP* 71 (1950) 177-80; J. Crook, *Consilium principis* (1955) 77, 78, 148-49; Pflaum, *Carrières*, pp. 467-69; F. Grosso, *La lotta politica al tempo di Commodo* (1964) 217-21. Glabrio was dead by 211 at the latest, if the brothers involved in the lawsuit with each other at *Digest* 4.4.18.1 are his sons.

minor senators in the age of Cicero.³⁶ Of the man himself it is known from an inscription that he was *iuridicus* of Asturia and married to a Procula, and that he was the consul of 185 is an inevitable assumption. Luckily there is scattered evidence for other relatives. The A. Triarius Rufinus, *consul ordinarius* in 210, is surely a son. A Pomponia Triaria is attested as the daughter of a Iunius Rufinus, proconsul of Asia, and the wife of C. Erucius Clarus, consul in 170; and the names Pomponius Triarius duly appear among those of her son and grandson. And finally, a Triaria Egnatia Lucilla of senatorial rank has turned up as a landowner in Bithynia.³⁷ The evidence is scattered and incomplete, but it can be seen from a *stemma* that the essential pieces of the puzzle are to hand, and that they fit perfectly:



Little annotation is required. Polyonymity is the key and fortunately the names (or partial names) fit together neatly to place Triarius Maternus at the center of an imposing kindred in the high Antonine age. More can be added. The pedigree should go back to include M. Iunius Mettius Rufus, consul in 128 with Q. Pomponius Maternus, and to his father by nature

³⁶ *PW*, s.v. "Triarius."

³⁷ *Iuridicus*: *CIL* II.2415 and E. Groag, *ap. PW*. Triaria and Erucii: *PIR*² E 95, 98, I 525. Lucilla: *AE* 1954.235. On the family, see most recently H.-G. Pflaum, *BHAC* 1971 126-29, who suggests for no good reason that they were Asian in origin.

³⁸ The proconsul of Asia is usually taken to be this man, relying on a restoration of *IGRR* IV.1283. The person on that stone could be someone else, and nomenclature suggests that Sabinianus' brother was the proconsul and father of Pomponia Triaria.

³⁹ On whom see further below, Section V.

or adoption, M. Iunius Rufus, prefect of Egypt in the difficult years 94–98, whose wife was a lady with impressive literary and regal connections.⁴⁰ Of contemporary relatives, two other Iunii Rufini are attested as senatorial governors in the last quarter of the second century; there are two ladies married to men of consular rank; there is a vestal virgin executed by Caracalla; and the last known member of the family is a young laticlave tribune dead by November, 222.⁴¹ The name of Maternus' wife is easily restored as Egnatia Procula, suggested by Triaria Egnatia Lucilla and confirmed by the existence of a senatorial family at the peak of its power in the first half of the third century, the Egnatii Proculi—one of them an Egnatius Lucilianus—who produced the mother of the emperor Galienus.⁴²

Why Triarius Maternus? The man is something of a noble nonentity, at least to the historians of the period, and he was clearly himself no conspirator. But as a figurehead he has some impressive connections, and none more so than the marriage alliance of his sister with one of the great Antonine families, the Erucii Clari. It should be more than coincidence that he happens to be the uncle of the man who entered upon his consulship just two days before the attempted coup, C. Erucius Clarus. This man, the last consul of his family, has a curious history. He appears on only two occasions in our sources, and in both he is in trouble. On the first, it was alleged by the conspirators against Commodus that the emperor intended to kill the new consuls Erucius Clarus and Sosius Falco on 1 January, 193, and to proclaim himself sole consul. That raises the possibility that Clarus and Falco were either privy to the conspiracy or to be implicated in it by the real plotters.

⁴⁰ *PIR*² I 812, C 1086. Iunii Rufini as cadets of the Iunii Rufi: cf. Aemilii Mamerci and Mamercini, Valerii Messalli and Messallini, Claudii Marcelli and (their offshoots) Cornelii Lentuli Marcellini, Volcatii Tulli and Tullini, Petronii Umbri and Nigri and Umbrini and Nigrini, etc.

⁴¹ L. Iunius Rufinus, proconsul of Macedonia 194 (*PIR*² I 809); L. Iunius Rufinus Proculianus, legate of Dalmatia 184 (I 810); Iunia Arria Rufina (*ILS* 1197); Pomponia Arria (*CIL* II.4124); Pomponia Rufina (Dio 77.16.3); and Iunius Rufinus (not in *PIR*), to be deduced from *CJ* 6.21.4.

⁴² Certain to be members of this prolific family are *PIR*² E 22, 23, 25, 28, 29, 30, 31, 35, 36, 37, 42, 43, and L 398, 452. M. Egnatius Postumus, *cos.* 183, might be the first consular ancestor, and descendants flourished in the fourth century, e.g., *PLRE* Lollianus 5, 6.

Clarus' second appearance is his last. The fall of Clodius Albinus afforded the opportunity of a purge to Septimius Severus, who attempted to employ Erucius Clarus as an informer against his victims, a tactic which would both harm Clarus and lend credence to the accusations. Clarus refused, he was executed, and his memory was damned.⁴³ The sum of our knowledge of Erucius Clarus is unusual: Commodus was alleged to have wanted him dead; while he was consul an attempt was made to set his uncle Triarius Maternus on the throne; while he was consul an attempt was made to set his colleague Sosius Falco on the throne (see below); and Septimius Severus actually had him put to death. A circumstantial case could be built up assigning the man a central role in the events of the winter of 193, either as schemer or dupe. His position and the position of Triarius Maternus should be made more clear by consideration of the alleged coup of Sosius Falco.

V. According to Cassius Dio, Falco was chosen by the prefect Laetus and the praetorian guard, that is he might be regarded as the successor of Triarius Maternus. Dio's account of the episode is not completely clear, but it appears that Pertinax himself revealed the plot to the senate, and that when the senators were about to condemn the young consul Pertinax intervened to win for the alleged rebel a retirement in the country (again, reminiscent of the treatment of Triarius Maternus).⁴⁴ The outline is doubtless correct, but rather superficial, and the account in the *Historia Augusta* offers the affair in a rather different light. First, in a preliminary skirmish in the first day of the rule of Pertinax, the consul Sosius is portrayed as dangerously insubordinate. When Pertinax had thanked the prefect Laetus before the senate for putting an end to Commodus, Falco intervened with the ambiguous remark, "Qualis imperator es futurus, hinc intellegimus, quod Laetum et Marciam, ministros scelerum Commodi, post te videmus," to which the emperor replies with equal ambiguity, "Iuvenis es

⁴³ Dio 72.22.2, 74.9.5, cf. *HA, Severus* 13.4. *Damnatio memoriae* inferable from *CIL* XIII.11753 and *AE* 1954.139.

⁴⁴ Dio 73.8.

consul nec pariendi scis necessitates."⁴⁵ Then, with this clash in mind, we must consider one of the more perplexing passages in the *HA*, its account of the conspiracy of Sosius Falco:

Insidias paravit ei Falco . . . conquestus est in senatu . . . volens imperare. Quo quidem . . . credidit, dum sibi quidam servus, quasi Fabiae † setiqui filius ex Ceioni Commodi familia, Palatinam domum ridicule vindicasset . . . cognitusque iussus est flagellis caesus domino restitui. In cuius vindicta hi, qui oderant Pertinacem, occasionem seditionis invenisse dicuntur. Falconi tamen pepercit et a senatu inpunitatem eius petit. Denique Falco in rebus suis securis vixit et herede filio periit.⁴⁶ Quamvis multi Falconem nescisse dixerint imperium sibi parari. Alii etiam servis, quo rationes interverterant, falsis testimoniis adpetitum eum esse dixerunt.

(*HA*, *Pertinax* 10.1-7)

The tale is both obscure and improbable. A plot was undertaken against Pertinax by Falco who, wishing to rule, made complaint of the emperor in the senate. The action is foolish, whatever its motive, but it is at least plausible, witness the consul's rash remarks on the first day of the reign. But the slave's story, whether true or false, seems preposterous. The man laid claim to the palace as if he were the son of Fabia and of X (the name is corrupt) from the *familia* of Ceionius Commodus. He was punished and returned to his master. This was for some an occasion for sedition, but the senate spared the consul at Pertinax' request—this agrees with the account of Dio—and he was allowed to live on in the security of retirement. Then follow alternative explanations for an already puzzling tale: either Sosius Falco was unaware that a plot had been formed about him or some embezzling slaves had invented the plot to save themselves from discovery by their master. As it stands, the affair makes no sense.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ *HA. Pertinax* 5.2-3, which must either cast doubt on Laetus' complicity in Falco's alleged conspiracy or suggest that he was engaged in some deeper machinations.

⁴⁶ *ILS* 1106 for the son.

⁴⁷ It should be observed that the obscurity caused by the mutilation of the text is compounded by its language, for there is a series of ambiguities here which might be legal puns, viz., "vindicasset . . . cognitus . . . vindicta."

The link between the slave's action and Falco's peril is tenuous at best. The basic problem is the absurdity of the slave's claim as it is commonly understood. If the slave were a pretender claiming the palace for himself, whether seriously or not, no one could have believed him for a moment. The progeny of a princess of the imperial blood, in this case of Ceionia Fabia, the daughter of Aelius Caesar and sister of Lucius Verus, would simply be too well known for the fraud to succeed (in the capital at least), and her only recorded son happened to be living at the time, M. Peducaeus Plautius Quintillus, *cos.* 177 and son-in-law of Marcus Aurelius.⁴⁸ Whether Sosius Falco had urged him on or not, the slave's claim for himself would be pointless; might he rather be "vindicating" the palace (and the empire) for his master?

Sense can be made of the affair if we understand that the slave was simply announcing that his master was the rightful heir to the throne. Thus, the "sibi" of "sibi vindicasset" is reflexive not to the subject of "vindicasset" (the slave) but to the subject of "credidit" in the main clause (Falco): such practise is found in the *HA*.⁴⁹ One might emend the corrupt text⁵⁰

"Vindicare" is of course a legal term signifying the assertion of a right, hence it may mean simply "claim." "Cognoscere" may signify a judicial examination, or it may mean simply "recognize," "find out." And "vindicta" may mean simply "punishment," or it may signify the staff used in the act of *vindicatio*, that is, it may be a reference to the acting of claiming itself. This series is all the more suspicious in that the word "vindicavit" appears in the passage immediately preceding, which happens to concern strict measures taken by Pertinax against slaves who had falsely accused their masters (9.10): in fact a foreshadowing of the Falco story. If such a whimsy is at play, it must have been captivated by the slave from the household (*familia*) of Ceionius Commodus who pretended to be a son of the family (*familia*)—if that is what the passage means.

⁴⁸ *AE* 1939.127; Dio 76.7.4-5 for his death in 205; cf. H.-G. Pflaum, *JS* 1961 34-36. His father was Plautius Quintillus as well, hence some would restore the text to read "quasi Fabiae Plautique filius."

⁴⁹ Professor Birley writes: "One can certainly find parallels for this kind of cavalier treatment of reflexives—cf. *HA M.Ant.Phil.* 9.4, "medio belli tempore et Civicam, patrum Veri, et filiam suam nupturam commissam sorori suae . . . Brundisium usque deduxit," where the *soror* cannot have been Annia Cornificia, described as dead already in 7.4, though normal usage would refer "soror sua" to Marcus there (thus Loeb I.155). (One could always emend to "sorori eius" (i.e. Fabia) or "sororis suae filio," etc., but it probably means Lucilla's sister.)"

⁵⁰ Text: "faviae seti qui filius" P; "fame esset et qui filius" Σ.

to read thus: “dum sibi quidam servus, quasi (or possibly *qua*) Fabiae Sosique filius, ex Ceioni Commodi familia, Palatinam domum ridicule vindicasset. . . ,” that is, “a slave absurdly claimed the palace for him as a son of Fabia and Sosius, and of the family of Ceionius Commodus. . .” Such a reading certainly fits the context, that is one of slaves causing the ruin of their masters (discussed at 9.10) and of the unwitting Falco in particular (10.6-7). The emendation may be too violent. If it is rejected, however, there is still a problem unnoticed by commentators. On the standard view, the slave was a member of the Ceionian slave *familia* who passed himself off as the son of a daughter of the house. How then, we should ask, did he pass into the possession of Sosius Falco? The most obvious answer is: by inheritance. Either way, however we take this passage, we are forced to speculate what we might never have considered otherwise, that the alleged conspirator of 193 was himself a member of the imperial house, and the son of Ceionia Fabia.

The father of Sosius Falco was Q. Pompeius Senecio Sosius Priscus, ordinary consul in 169 and famous from an inscription at Tibur as the noble possessor of some thirty-eight names.⁵¹ The wife of this grandee and mother of his son remains as yet unknown. On the other hand, Ceionia Fabia, the daughter of Aelius Caesar and sister of Lucius Verus, is known to have been the mother of M. Peducaeus Plautius Quintillus (*cos.* 177) and therefore deduced to have been the wife of an otherwise unknown Plautius Quintillus (*cos.* 159). However, before her marriage she had been betrothed in the time of Hadrian to the future emperor Marcus himself, and she is said to have proposed an alliance with him some forty years later, after the death of his consort Faustina in 176.⁵² Could Sosius Falco have been her son? If he held his consulship *anno suo* he was born around 161, a date which allows sufficient time for the death or divorce of Plautius Quintillus and the marriage to Sosius Priscus.⁵³ Or one could simply assume that an imperial prince

⁵¹ *ILS* 1104. The standard treatment of the family remains that of E. Groag, at *JÖAI* 18 (1915) beibl. 265-74. The recent essay of W. McDermott, *Ancient Society* 7 (1976) 229-61, adds nothing and fails to note the important remarks of J. Morris, *LF* 86 (1963) 42-44, and of H.-G. Pflaum, *BJ* 172 (1972) 18-23.

⁵² The main ancient texts are *HA*, *Marcus* 4.5, 6.2, 29.10, and *AE* 1939.127.

⁵³ If divorce is involved, the marriage with Sosius could be placed years earlier; if death, far from being indecent such hasty remarriage would be a

would hold his consulship well before the normal minimum age: "iuvenis es consul." Thus there is no bar chronological or prosopographical to the identification of Sosius Falco as the son of Sosius Priscus and Ceionia Fabia.

There is one item of evidence to support the hypothesis, and that leads back surprisingly to Falco's consular colleague in 193, C. Iulius Erucius Clarus Vibianus, the son of C. Erucius Clarus (*cos.* 170) and of the sister of Triarius Maternus. Clarus' own wife is unknown, but a polyonymous son has turned up as patron of the town of Diana Veteranorum in Numidia: C. Iulius Rufinus Laberius Fabianus Pomponius Triarius Erucius Clarus Sosius Priscus.⁵⁴ To some extent this youth's ancestry can be reconstructed from his names: for instance, his father and paternal grandfather are represented by "C. Iulius . . . Erucius Clarus," his paternal grandmother by "Rufinus . . . Pomponius Triarius." Therefore, by elimination, we may conjecture that his unknown mother is represented by the names "Laberius Fabianus . . . Sosius Priscus." It is difficult to evade the conclusion that she was a member of the Pompeii, presumably the daughter of Q. Pompeius Senecio Sosius Priscus (*cos.* 169) and the sister of her husband's colleague in the consulship of 193. That conclusion is confirmed by two further observations: first, that while the Erucii are quite without African ties the Pompeii Sosii have strong bonds with the province, specifically with the Cirtan confederation to the north of Diana Veteranorum, hence that the last Erucius Clarus derived his connections there through his mother; and second, that there existed a senatorial lady of the same period, a consul's wife who bore the significant combination of names "Laberia Pompeiana."⁵⁵ Thus, one item of the young man's maternal nomenclature remains, "Fabianus." That this reflects the name of his maternal grandmother coincides neatly with the hypothesis that Sosius Falco (his presumed uncle) was the son of Ceionia Fabia and a member of the dynasty himself.

matter of dynastic policy, witness the marriage to Claudius Pompeianus of his daughter Lucilla by Marcus before the end of the period of mourning for her late husband, Lucius Verus: *HA, Marcus* 20.6 (all in A.D. 169). The survival of Sosius Priscus is no bar to Fabia's schemes in 176.

⁵⁴ *AE* 1954.139.

⁵⁵ *ILAlg.* II.652 (Cirta) and *AE* 1967.556 (Milev); *PIR*² L 16.

To recapitulate. Two unsuccessful coups against Pertinax had as their figureheads, respectively, the uncle and the brother-in-law of the consul Erucius Clarus, who was soon executed by Septimius Severus for some implication in the intrigues for Clodius Albinus. It is difficult not to suspect the existence of a faction of leading senators in opposition to Pertinax and perhaps offering convenient dupes to the disaffected guards or their commander Laetus. Beyond this, it is tempting to speculate. If, as I have suggested above, Pertinax was indeed the interim candidate of Claudius Pompeianus and Acilius Glabrio, and if Sosius Falco was indeed the son of Ceionia Fabia, the intrigues of the reign of Pertinax could resolve themselves into a simple struggle between two branches of the Antonine dynasty, with the Ceionii, unsullied by the excesses of Commodus, seeking to fulfill the promise made to them by Hadrian sixty years before.

VI. Whatever their particular political significance may be, the clearest lesson to be won from the forgoing *prosopographische Beiträge* is that the hereditary principle remained firmly rooted as the empire grew older. The society expected a dynasty. Pertinax bowed to its expectation, the guard acted upon it (and when pressed at last for an alternative could think of nothing better than an auction), Severus appropriated it with cunning. Thus the effectively hereditary nature of the principate can be seen as the result of two complementary elements, the will of the rulers and the preference of the ruled. The greatest interest lies in the working out of the process.

Policy had been set by the first emperor, who drew in his turn on the traditional manoeuvrings of the great houses of the late republic, and it was the prudent course for any subsequent dynasty: "The schemes devised by Augustus in the ramifications of family alliances were formidable and fantastic. He neglected no relative, however obscure, however distant, no tie of marriage—or of friendship retained after divorce. As time went on, more and more aristocratic families were lured by matrimony into the family and following of the Princeps."⁵⁶

⁵⁶ R. Syme, *The Roman revolution* (1939) 378. New documents continue to reveal the intricacies of Augustus' web of alliances: *Arch. Anz.* 80 (1965) 446; *ZPE* 5 (1970) 217.

The attraction of the great families into the imperial orbit was an important weapon in securing their loyalties and checking their opposition, and it reflects a normal inclination as well, for the dynasty in most periods would rise from the ranks of the aristocracy itself, retaining shared attitudes and interests. As with the Julio-Claudians, so with the Antonines. There was a dynastic core of families, Ulpri, Aelii, Aurelii, and the more prolific Annii and Ceionii. These sought their alliances, often more than once, among the flower of the aristocracy old and new: Pedanii Fusci, Aelii Lamiae, Vettuleni Civicae, Plautii Quintilli, Servillii Pudentes, Domitii Lucani, Ummidii Quadrati, Vitrasii Polliones, Claudii Severi, Petronii Mamertini, Antistii Buri, Bruttii Crispini. To these can now be added with more or less diffidence the Acilii Glabrones, Pompeii Falcones, and Erucii Clari. And further investigation can detect alliances among these families themselves and with other important *gentes* of the age (such as the Iunii Rufini). The emperor and the imperial family were not a separate caste but members of a large and powerful cousinhood, and it was from that cousinhood, when the dynasty faltered, that a successor might be expected to emerge. Even Septimius Severus can be drawn into this web if, as seems likely, he was a cousin of Petronius Mamertinus, the son-in-law of Marcus Aurelius.⁵⁷ There were however several surviving members of the Antonine cousinhood with real claims to the hereditary succession. Septimius circumvented them while at the same time recognizing the validity of hereditary claims: he simply adopted himself into the closest possible relationship with the Antonine dynasty, one closer than that of any other claimant to the inheritance of Commodus, emerging from his metamorphosis as “divi Marci Antonini Pii Germ. Sarm. filius, divi Commodi frater.”⁵⁸

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⁵⁷ A. R. Birley, *Septimius Severus*, 299f.

⁵⁸ *ILS* 420.