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Source: *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 85 (1981), pp. 189-212

Published by: Department of the Classics, Harvard University

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/311172>

Accessed: 23/03/2010 20:01

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SERENUS SAMMONICUS

EDWARD CHAMPLIN

I. Serenus Sammonicus, "vir saeculo suo doctus," was slain with other partisans of the emperor Geta in the very last days of the year 211. Luckily, his reputation survived the dark years of the third century to flourish in late antiquity: Arnobius and Servius applied his erudition to their particular ends; Macrobius plundered him for sections of the *Saturnalia*; Sidonius Apollinaris was familiar with his work. Macrobius it is who bears explicit witness to his importance: he was the learned man of his age. His posthumous fame and the manner of his death both suggest a person of some consequence in literature and society. In fact, a case can be made that he was the leading figure of Latin letters in his age.¹

The man is perhaps best known from four passages in the *Historia Augusta* (a source which immediately engenders caution in the reader). The first and most valuable of these appears in a convincing enumeration of the friends of Geta slaughtered by Caracalla after the assassination of his brother: "occisique nonnulli etiam cenantes, inter quos etiam Sammonicus Serenus, cuius libri plurimi ad doctrinam extant."² Geta's death can be assigned to 26 December 211;³ that of Sammonicus presumably followed very soon thereafter. As it happens, Macrobius confirms that he did indeed flourish "temporibus Severi principis."⁴ Thus we have a terminus of great value. Equally important, and a tantalizing basis for conjecture, we are confronted with a great man of letters closely, indeed fatally, involved in high politics.

Next there is a puzzling item in the life of Geta, to the effect that the

¹ Previous versions of this paper were greatly improved by the comments of Professors T. D. Barnes, G. W. Bowersock, and F. G. B. Millar, and by suggestions made at seminars in Princeton and Manchester. It is a particular delight to record that early in 1975 Alan Cameron and I discovered that we had independently gone over much of the same evidence and come to similar conclusions, though often for different reasons, as to the date of Dictys Cretensis and the identity of the poet Septimius Serenus: see now his superb "*Poetae Novelli*," *HSCP* 84 (1980), 127-175.

² *HA Caracalla* 4.4

³ T. D. Barnes, *JTS* 19 (1968), 521 ff.

⁴ *Sat.* 3.16.6.

young prince was intimately familiar with the works of Serenus Sammonicus, who had dedicated them to Caracalla.⁵ Whatever the worth of the *vita* in which it appears, this remark should in fact be true. We know that Sammonicus was a partisan of Geta, and Geta (as we are otherwise aware) laid some claim to culture: that the prince knew Sammonicus' work as well is thus a fair conjecture.⁶ The dedications to Caracalla may also stand: whatever his ignorance about the life of Geta, the biographer and his audience could easily check such an item in the ill-fated scholar's surviving works, and in fact chance in the guise of Macrobius has preserved a fragment wherein Sammonicus addresses "sanctissimi Augusti," one of whom must be Caracalla.⁷ Thus another line is added to our sketch of the man.

Third (here following an order of increasing uncertainty), the *HA*'s biography of Severus Alexander pretends to supply a brief list of the Syrian emperor's favorite Latin authors. They were three: Cicero, Horace — and Serenus Sammonicus! "Nonnumquam et orationes et poetas, in quis Serenum Sammonicum, quem ipse noverat et dilexerat, et Horatium."⁸ This strange trio surely signals some obscure joke on the biographer's part. Alexander, who was born in Syria in 208 or 209, can hardly have been well acquainted with a man murdered in Rome in 211.⁹ And the biographer's knowledge of the emperor's reading habits, which he proceeds to display at some length, looks like pure fiction. There are two obvious alternatives: either Sammonicus was a poet or he was not. If he was not, the thing is complete invention and the poems of Sammonicus will join a recognizable category of inventions in the *HA*, that is, fictitious works ascribed to real authors: witness the alleged historical essays of the flesh and blood soldier and agricultural writer, Gargilius Martialis.¹⁰ But we ought not to condemn the item completely. If Sammonicus was a poet, and if his verse did survive in the fourth century, the joke gains immensely in subtlety: Alexander's acquaintance with the poetry then assumes an air of plausibility, and the concatenation of Sammonicus with Horace becomes all the more risible, particularly if his poems were held in no great regard by posterity. Whatever the case, let us suspend judgment for a moment: Serenus Sammonicus as a poet will prove useful.

The last passage of the *HA* is the least trustworthy of all, but, even

⁵ *HA Geta* 5.6.

⁶ Geta's cultural pretensions: *HA Geta* 5.1, 4–6; Herodian 4.3.3.

⁷ *Sat.* 3.17.4.

⁸ *HA Alexander* 30.2.

⁹ *PIR*² A 1610 for the evidence on Alexander's birth.

¹⁰ *HA Probus* 2.7, *Alexander* 37.9.

from this, something of value may be gleaned. The subject is Gordian II:

Sereno Sammonico, qui patris eius amicissimus, sibi autem praeceptor fuit, nimis acceptus et carus, usque adeo ut omnes libros Sereni Sammonici patris sui, qui censebantur ad sexaginta et duo milia, Gordiano minori moriens ille relinqueret. quod eum ad caelum tulit, si quidem tantae bibliothecae copia et splendore donatus in famam hominum litterarum decore pervenit.¹¹

No one has taken this hilarious nonsense seriously in recent years, nor should they, but it does merit attention as a type. The supposed intimacy between this Sammonicus and the younger Gordian inevitably recalls Sammonicus' historical relationship with Geta and his apocryphal one with Severus Alexander. More important, the younger Sammonicus has recently been exposed as a figment of the *HA*, one of a group of nonexistent sons alleged to have followed in their fathers' scholarly footsteps.¹² In fact this observation might be given greater precision: the real fathers are known to have taught imperial princes; the fictitious and homonymous sons are then appropriately assigned by the *HA* as tutors to future emperors in a subsequent generation. If this observed sequence is correct, it should confirm what we would have suspected already: that the real Serenus Sammonicus was indeed the tutor of the sons of Septimius Severus.¹³ In other words, he was not only a friend or acquaintance of the imperial family, he was at court in an official capacity. What he taught the imperial princes remains to be seen.

The nature and scope of Sammonicus' work may be estimated with ease from the numerous fragments preserved by later authors. The work for which he was best remembered was the *Res Reconditae*, presented in at least five books. The longest fragment commonly assigned to it, to be discovered in Macrobius, concerns *luxuria*, specifically the sturgeon and its fluctuating popularity at fashionable Roman banquets over the centuries. This marvelous curiosity deserves to be quoted at length:

nam temporibus Severi principis, qui ostentabat duritiam morum,

¹¹ *HA Gordian* 18.2.

¹² R. Syme, *Emperors and Biography* (1971), 10, 184.

¹³ Compare the bogus savant Scaurinus, alleged tutor of Alexander Severus (*HA Alexander* 3.3) and purported son of the real grammarian Scaurinus, teacher of Lucius Verus (*HA Verus* 2.5); and the bogus Iulius Titianus the younger, alleged tutor of Maximinus Caesar (*HA Maximini* 27.5) and purported son of the real polymath Iulius Titianus, teacher (as I shall argue elsewhere) of Geta and Caracalla (*PIR*² I 604, with Syme, above, n.12).

Sammonicus Serenus, vir saeculo suo doctus, cum ad principem suum scriberet faceretque de hoc pisce sermonem, verba Plinii quae superius posui praemisit et ita ipse subiecit: "Plinius, ut scitis, ad usque Traiani imperatoris venit aetatem. nec dubium est quod ait nullo honore hunc piscem temporibus suis fuisse, verum ab eo dici. *apud antiquos* autem in pretio fuisse ego testimoniis palam facio, vel eo magis quod gratiam eius video ad epulas quasi postliminio redisse; quippe qui, dignatione vestra cum intersum convivio sacro, animadvertam hunc piscem a coronatis ministris cum tibicine introferri. sed quod ait Plinius de acipenseris squamis, id verum esse maximus rerum naturalium indagator Nigidius Figulus ostendit, in cuius libro De animalibus quarto ita positum est: cur alii pisces squama secunda, acipenser adversa sit."¹⁴

Soon after this, Macrobius again cites Sammonicus by name for the startling information that Asinius Celer (cos. A.D. 38) paid 7,000 sesterces for a single mullet. And somewhat later, still in the context of *luxuria*, a discussion of sumptuary laws arrives at the lex Fannia of 161 B.C., and again Sammonicus' antiquarian fancy is exploited verbatim:

Lex Fannia, sanctissimi Augusti, ingenti omnium ordinum consensu pervenit ad populum, neque eam praetores aut tribuni ut plerasque alias, sed ex omnium bonorum consilio et sententia ipsi consules pertulerunt, cum res publica ex luxuria convivorum maiora quam credi potest detrimenta pateretur. siquidem eo res redierat, ut gula inlecti plerique ingenui pueri pudicitiam et libertatem suam venditarent, plerique ex plebe Romana vino madidi in comitium venirent et ebrii de rei publicae salute consulerent.¹⁵

It is usually assumed that these passages and indeed perhaps all of *Saturnalia* 3.13–22 derive from Sammonicus' *Res Reconditae*.¹⁶ Such precise attribution is hazardous, and the repetition of the second person singular and plural in the passages quoted, and their obviously didactic intent, do not immediately suggest an encyclopedic compilation. Rather we might envisage a *sermo* addressed to the emperors on the subject of *luxuria*: this practice of enlightening noble friends in brief learned essays was not uncommon. Perhaps Serenus Sammonicus was simply a notorious gourmand: after all, the *HA* remarks, soberly or otherwise, that he was slain while dining.

However, some material does survive which is recondite under any definition. Thus we learn from Macrobius of the ancient and secret

¹⁴ *Sat.* 3.16.6–7.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 3.17.4.

¹⁶ G. Wissowa, *Hermes* 16 (1881), 502; P. Courcelle, *Late Latin Writers and Their Greek Sources* (1969), 22 ff.

formula for summoning tutelary deities away from a besieged city. The far-sighted commander must be very careful to distinguish it from the one devoting the city to destruction, "nam repperi in libro quinto Rerum reconditarum Sammonici Sereni utrumque carmen, quod ille se in cuiusdam Furii *vetustissimo libro* repperisse professus est."¹⁷ Likewise, Arnobius repeats, on the authority of Sammonicus and others, the ancient tale which assigned the tomb of a certain Olus Vulcentanus to the Capitolium, hence deriving its name from the head discovered there: *caput Oli*.¹⁸ Equally recondite is a digression on the midnight sun to be discovered in Servius, his authorities on the marvels of Thule being "apud Graecos Ctesias et Diogenes, apud Latinos Sammonicus."¹⁹ (And two abstruse items on auspices and lightning which Servius dredged out of unspecified "libri reconditi" might well derive from Sammonicus also.²⁰) Finally, an item from Sidonius Apollinaris, not particularly recondite, on the use of Greek and foreign terms where the Latin is inadequate: he defends his own practice with appeal to the powerful authority of Marcus Varro, Sammonicus, and Censorinus.²¹

The sum of these fragments is meager but sufficient to characterize their author. Above all, Serenus Sammonicus moved in the very best of circles, the imperial court. He was an acquaintance (at least) of Septimius Severus and dined at the palace, and he was surely one of the tutors of Geta and Caracalla, a position which places him in the company of such luminaries as the jurist Papinian and the sophist Aelius Antipater, men who combined deep learning with political power (and who also died in the aftermath of Geta's fall). Sammonicus himself is a type, an antiquarian in the time-honored tradition. No fact was too obscure to escape his net of pedantry: sturgeons' scales, obsolete laws, anecdotes, archaic formulas, the midnight sun. Further, there is a grammatical thread to be observed running through his interests, apparent in the etymology of Capitolium and the use of Greek terms in Latin. In short, Sammonicus can be seen as a typical man of Latin letters in an Age of Archaism, and a worthy successor of Fronto and Aulus Gellius, one whose social rank and position is intimately bound up with the prevailing passion for grammar and a mastery of ancient lore.²² Particularly suggestive of the archaizing movement is the

¹⁷ *Sat.* 3.9.6-12; cf. E. Rawson, *JRS* 63 (1973), 168 ff.

¹⁸ *Adv. nat.* 6.7.

¹⁹ *Ad Georg.* 1.30.

²⁰ *Ad Aen.* 1.398, 2.649.

²¹ *Carm.* 14, pr. 3.

²² The standard work on archaism remains that of R. Marache, *La critique littéraire de la langue latine et le développement du goût archaïsant au IIe siècle de notre ère* (1952).

sturgeon episode, directed to an emperor who paraded his *duritia morum*. Here Sammonicus is not a mere antiquary mining exotic facts from works of hoary antiquity. Like Fronto he is in part at least attempting to establish a direct link with the good old days of Rome, to reject the recent and degenerate past and reimpose the purer ways of old. Hence the reintroduction of the sturgeon at Roman banquets is grist to the propagandist's mill, and the aims of the archaist coincide nicely with those of the courtier.

One other characteristic distinguishes Serenus Sammonicus: he is exceptionally silly. Even these few remains betray him. It is perhaps venial that his facts about the sturgeon and the mullet are cribbed straight from the elder Pliny's *Natural History*; but it is inexcusable that he should confuse the younger Pliny with his uncle less than a century after the former's death, an annoying conflation which was to persist for generations.²³ More ludicrous is his apparent belief that the Roman republic was brought to its knees by noble youths who bartered both liberty and chastity for *haute cuisine*. Olus' head and sturgeons with scales growing backwards speak for themselves; one can only imagine what marvels of credulity were elicited by the wonders of Thule. Sammonicus was gullible and he was a lover of antiquity. With such attributes he might be the perfect mark for a swindler peddling items of fraudulent antiquity: memoirs of the Trojan War, for example.

II. Research into ancient literary forgery or imposture has so flourished in the last decade that little need be added here about the problems and the methods of investigation: there is now an excellent monograph on the subject, and a learned colloquium has been devoted to *Pseudepigrapha*, with one volume of proceedings published and another on the way.²⁴ Two eminent examples of the genre appear in the apparently Late Latin works which profess to be translations of original memoirs in Greek compiled by combatants at the siege of Troy, and these two concoctions merit even greater attention than they are worth, for they are the sources for much of the medieval romance of Troy. One is the pro-Trojan account of "Dares the Phrygian," a brief affair in late and barbarous Latin, prefaced by a letter from its translator "Cornelius Nepos" addressed to "Sallustius Crispus." Much more presentable

²³ Pliny *NH* 9.27.60, 30.64. The two Plinies were first separated by Sidonius Apollinaris, but the conflation survived into the fourteenth century: S. E. Stout, *TAPA* 86 (1955), 250.

²⁴ W. Speyer, *Die literarische Fälschung im heidnischen und christlichen Altertum: Ein Versuch ihrer Deutung* (1971); K. v. Fritz, ed., *Pseudepigrapha I* (Fondation Hardt, *Entretiens* 18, 1971).

than this is the pro-Hellenic account of "Dictys the Cretan," the *Ephemeris Belli Troiani* in six books.²⁵ This purports to be the memoirs of a companion of Idomeneus of Crete, translated from Greek into Latin by a certain Septimius, a man equipped with a good, straightforward Latin style which he intersperses with well-applied reminiscences of Sallust in speech, narrative, and description. The course of the entire war is related as viewed by one soldier with a Greek point of view, a Homer amplified (as it were) and stripped of gods and poetry.

It can not be emphasized too often that the text of Dictys Cretensis is a Latin version of a lost Greek original, that is, that we are dealing with a two-layered forgery. Until this century there was considerable doubt as to the very existence of the supposed original, but the publication in 1907 and 1966 of two fragments of papyrus has proved that a Greek version did circulate as early as the late second or early third century, in fact (curiously) in or very near the reign of Septimius Severus.²⁶ These papyri are also sufficient to demonstrate clearly that the Latin text is a version rather than a translation of the Greek, which it expands or paraphrases or occasionally distorts. These two observations are of great importance. First, the fact that both papyri are roughly Severan in date might induce the suspicion either that the Greek memoirs were actually composed then or (more cautiously) that they first circulated widely at that time. Septimius, the Latin translator, claims that the Greek *libelli* came into his hands by chance, *forte*: it is just possible then that the Latin version followed the Greek very quickly, and in the Severan age. This slim chance should be kept in mind. Second, and more concrete, Septimius says not that he translated the work but that he treated it in Latin, *Latine disserere*: the papyri reveal the precision of this claim, for what we have is indeed, strictly, a version. Thus "Septimius" as distinct from "Dictys" can become a figure worthy of investigation. Dictys is clearly and incontestably a fiction, but, to put the question simply, is there any reason to suppose that Septimius was not precisely what he claims to be, that is, a Roman scholar who chanced one day upon what he believed to be an authentic history?

Attached to some manuscripts of the memoirs is what purports to be an introductory epistle addressed by their translator Septimius to a certain Q. Aradius Rufinus, in which he relates the history of the work.

²⁵ Teubner text edited (1958) and re-edited (1973) by W. Eisenhut. I have not seen the 1970 Brandeis dissertation of H. J. Marblestone, "Dictys Cretensis: A Study of the Ephemeris Belli Troiani as a Cretan Pseudepigraphon."

²⁶ *P. Tebt.* 268, cf. Dictys 4.9-15; *P.Oxy.* 2539, cf. Dictys 4.18. On their significance, W. Eisenhut, *RhM* 112 (1969), 114 ff.

It deserves quotation in full, if only as a neglected witness to ancient scholarship:

Ephemeridem belli Troiani Dictys Cretensis, qui in ea militia cum Idomeneo meruit, primo conscripsit litteris Punicis, quae tum Cadmo et Agenore auctoribus per Graeciam frequentabantur. deinde post multa saecula collapsa per vetustatem apud Gnosum, olim Cretensis regis sedem, sepulchro eius, pastores cum eo devenissent, forte inter ceteram ruinam loculum stagno affabre clausum offendere ac thesaurum rati mox dissolvunt. non aurum neque aliud quicquam praedae, sed libros ex philyra in lucem † prodierunt†. at ubi spes frustrata est, ad Praxim dominum loci eos deferunt, qui commutatos litteris Atticis, nam oratio Graeca fuerat, Neroni Romano Caesari obtulit, pro quo plurimis ab eo donatus est. nobis cum in manus forte libelli venissent, avidos verae historiae cupido incessit ea, uti erant, Latine disserere, non magis confisi ingenio, quam ut otiosi animi desidiam discuteremus. itaque priorum quinque voluminum, quae bello contracta gestaque sunt, eundem numerum servavimus, residua de reditu Graecorum quidem in unum redegimus atque ita ad te misimus. tu, Rufine mi, ut par est, fave coeptis atque in legendo Dictym . . .

Here the letter breaks off, a cruel disappointment, for we doubtless would have learned the reason for dedicating the work to Aradius Rufinus.

The narrative of the origin and discovery of Dictys' diary is of course a fraud, to be placed in the ample category of ancient book "discoveries."²⁷ Wonderful works turned up with astonishing frequency in antiquity just when they were needed, tumbling out of the sky, emerging from the dust of temples, libraries, and archives, or (most popular of all) being rooted out of graves or the bowels of the earth. The most famous example of this in modern times (though not for lack of competition) took place on the night of 21 September 1823, when the angel Moroni revealed to Joseph Smith that he would find the Book of Mormon in a stone container buried beneath a rock on the hill Cumorah in upstate New York. He did. Now, whatever the veracity of the original discoverer in 1823, no one could deny that today hundreds of thousands believe in the truth of the Book of Mormon. Similarly with Dictys' memoirs, the original may be a fraud, but there is not the slightest hint in the *epistula* or elsewhere that Septimius was not a genuine scholar who firmly believed in the authenticity of his text.

When then did Septimius live, and who was he? Those who have cared to consider the question have (with one recent exception) all

²⁷ The following paragraph depends heavily on W. Speyer, *Bücherfunde in der Glaubenswertung der Antike* (*Hypomnemata* 24, 1970).

assigned him and the Latin text as it stands to the fourth century, some with a query, some without.²⁸ There are, in essence, three reasons for this. The first, based on style, must be inconclusive. For one thing, the work is at least partly resistant to analysis by being, first, a translation of sorts from the Greek, and second, an intensive imitation of Sallust.²⁹ Be that as it may, one would be very brave indeed to assign a work to the fourth rather than to the third or even second century on grounds of style alone, especially as there has survived no sizable chunk of pagan Latin literature from the crucial third century. And no scholar has yet been willing to point to a single word or construction which is never met before (say) 300. If the work is to be placed after that date, we must look to its content.

The second and only iron-clad argument is in fact a historical reference, an anachronism. It appears in the Prologue of the work, an allusion to Rutilius Rufus, "illius insulae tunc consularis," "then," that is, at the time of discovery in Nero's reign. The office of *consularis Cretae* is not attested before the 370s, and it was certainly a fourth-century creation, hence apparently a solid *terminus ante quem non* for the translation. However, it can be argued that *consularis* is a perfectly standard unofficial term for a governor by the second century, particularly if derived from *ὑπατικός* in the original, as it would be used by a Greek forger uninterested in official niceties.³⁰ But this explanation might cause misgiving that, of the numerous instances of such free usage, there is only one example (in a private letter) of a man called a consular who was not in fact an ex-consul in rank, as the term basically implies. Fortunately, there is a more simple and elegant solution: let us excise from the work the entire *prologus* as a later accretion.

This Prologue is a strange animal, containing a history of the origin and transmission of the memoirs which is roughly a doublet of the account already offered in the dedicatory Epistle, but differing in several details. Most remarkable about these twin prefaces is their relation to the manuscript tradition: all extant versions of Dictys Cretensis descend from one or other of two common ancestors, gamma and epsilon, and with one very late and easily explicable exception, the

²⁸ I take the *communis opinio* to be represented by Pauly-Wissowa, Schanz-Hosius, and Teuffel-Kroll. The only exception (to my knowledge) has been A. Cameron, in appendix III to the paper cited in n.1, above.

²⁹ Schanz-Hosius IV.I² (1914), 89, lists investigators of the Sallustian influence, one of whom found some 350 reminiscences.

³⁰ Examples of *consularis* and *hypatikos* used loosely are cited by Cameron (n.1, above); note particularly *P.Mich.* 466 (A.D. 107). And now we can add the consularis of Britain mentioned a few years before that, on the Vindolanda tablets: *Historia* 24 (1975), 475.

representatives of epsilon offer the Epistle *only*, those of gamma the Prologue *only*. There has been no convincing explanation of this state of affairs, but that has not stopped a standard opinion on the two prefaces being formed, expressed by one scholar thus: "the Prologue gives . . . readings that are more specific and circumstantial, and, on that account, better entitled to the rank of genuineness than those contained in the Epistle."³¹ That was written seventy years ago. A generation more alive to forgery and imposture, notably to the tricks of the *Historia Augusta*, will dismiss it as founded in bad method, indeed will view with skepticism a wealth of circumstantial but uncorroborated detail. The relative worthlessness of the Prologue may be demonstrated briefly.

First, many of these "circumstantial readings" in the Prologue are mere embroidery, easily borrowed or deduced from the available text itself: thus, Dictys is revealed as a citizen of Cnossus, a contemporary of the Atridae, a follower of Idomeneus and Merion. And some of this is mere padding: Dictys returned to Crete an old man, he ordered the books to be buried with him, his heirs put them in a tin box which was buried in his tomb, and so forth. Hardly superior information.

Where the two prefaces actually differ in matters of substance, there is no way of establishing the supposed reliability of the Prologue. Thus, in the Epistle the tomb collapsed from old age; in the Prologue, more dramatically (and therefore perhaps, here and elsewhere, more suspiciously) there is an earthquake.³² The Neronian *libelli* came into the hands of the author of the Epistle by chance, which is somewhat strange, for the Prologue confidently asserts that Nero had them deposited in a Greek library (location unspecified). And, most interesting, in the Epistle the *dominus* Praxis took the diary to Nero after transliterating it. But in the Prologue the *dominus* Eupraxides takes it to Rutilius Rufus, the *consularis* of the island in the thirteenth year of Nero's reign; Rufus transmits it to the emperor, who summons his experts in Punic to translate it, and who suitably rewards Eupraxides with gifts and with Roman citizenship. Here at last is a wealth of circumstantial detail, but how trustworthy? For what it is worth, the name Praxis is discovered three or four times in the inscriptions of Crete, Eupraxides never; indeed, Eupraxides looks like something of a pun.³³ What then of Rutilius Rufus, the governor of Crete? It is not surprising that no senator of that name can be found in the imperial

³¹ N. E. Griffin, *Dares and Dictys* (1907), 118 ff.

³² Malalas and the Suda likewise report the earthquake, but their Greek version was not the original: cf. Schanz-Hosius (n.29, above).

³³ Praxis: *I.Cret.* 1.8.20 (?), II.23.19, III.3.41; IV.171.

period.³⁴ But if we are dealing with an erudite forger in the Prologue, this must surely be a sly reference to *the* Rutilius Rufus, that is, the philosopher and consul of 105 B.C. whose opposition to Marius led him into exile in Asia. Who better to receive the sober memoirs of Dictys Cretensis than the noble author of a famous memoir *de vita sua*?

Moreover there are two clear errors to convict the Prologue. First, the *epistula* says that the original memoir was written in Punic letters but in the Greek language; the *prologus* clearly states that both words and letters were Punic. Which is correct? At Book V, chapter 17 (a paragraph found in all manuscripts), Dictys explains at some length his reasons for writing the Greek language in Punic letters: had the composer of the Prologue forgotten, or was he being purposely frivolous?³⁵

The second error may be worse. The Prologue as rendered in the latest Teubner text asserts that Dictys' memoirs were originally written in nine volumes. Or so it seems. Unfortunately, "novem" is a restoration of modern editors imported into the text to accord with Byzantine reports of a Greek version.³⁶ In fact the manuscripts are unanimous in preserving "sex volumina," which is the total not of the original, of course, but of Septimius' Latin abridgment. This might be referred to scribal stupidity, but in the light of previous observations one is strongly tempted to attribute it to carelessness, conscious or unconscious, on the part of the man who seems to have added a forged preface to an already fraudulent memoir.

The third and final argument for a fourth-century date rests on the supposed identity of the recipient of the dedicatory epistle, Q. Aradius Rufinus. It is commonly held that this man should be one of two men of that name, the first presumed on slender grounds to have been prefect of the city of Rome three times in the troubled decade between 304 and 313, and the second likewise prefect, in 376.³⁷ In fact neither of these magnates is attested as a Quintus, and the only sure homonym has been overlooked, Q. Aradius Rufinus Valerius Proculus, governor of Byzacena in 321.³⁸ Identification of the recipient of Dictys' memoirs with one of these grandees was only natural, for the family ranked among the

³⁴ C. Cichorius (ap. Jacoby, *FGrH* 1.274) produced T. Atilius Rufus, a Vespasianic consul suffect, thus necessitating the assumption of both corruption in our text and an unattested governorship of Crete.

³⁵ Note also I.16, where Greek ballots are cast "punic litteris."

³⁶ "Corrected" by Dederich (1833), Meister (1872), and Eisenhut (1958, 1973). The Greek version available to Byzantine scholars was apparently even less faithful to the original than was the Latin.

³⁷ A. Chastagnol, *Les fastes de la préfecture de Rome au Bas-Empire* (1962), 59–62, 196–198; cf. *PLRE* 1.821.

³⁸ *PLRE* Proculus 12.

greatest in fourth-century Rome, though it had fallen on hard times by the day of Symmachus. Nevertheless, its roots reach down a long way, through the third century, when it had already won great prominence, and even into the second. Along the way more than one consular Quintus Aradius Rufinus appears in the family tree. Therefore there is no compelling reason to look for Septimius' friend in the upper branches, and no need at all to assign the translation of Dictys' work to the fourth century. Speculation as to Rufinus' identity can lead us to an earlier age, and the history of the family will prove crucial to an understanding of Dictys Cretensis.

The date of the family's first appearance remains uncertain. Much information has accrued since the appearance of the notices in *PIR*², and for several years now the existence of important and relevant inscriptions in or near the forum of Bulla Regia in Africa Proconsularis has been common knowledge, but they remain scandalously unpublished; as far as can be calculated from various sources, at least five of them refer to or honor members of the *gens Aradia*.³⁹ This has not prevented several recent and unfortunate attempts to reconstruct the family's history in the third century. The result has been varied fantasy, psittacism, and in two cases incorrect readings of unpublished inscriptions.⁴⁰ But the fault lies elsewhere. Until these documents are published nothing can be said with confidence about the fortunes of one of the great families of the dark years. All we can say is that the evidence suggests that the family first rose under Septimius Severus.

There is a wealth of evidence for the existence of a third-century Q. Aradius Rufinus, too much indeed, for the temptation has been overwhelming to apply every scrap to a composite sketch of one man when there may well be two or three. (1) A Q. Aradius Rufinus was co-opted sodalis Augustalis Claudialis in the year 219.⁴¹ This is the one firm date we have, so it has tended to be the peg on which to hang other evidence. (2) A Q. Aradius Rufinus appears on a stamp from Rome together with his wife, Iunia Aiacia Modesta.⁴² This lady is usually considered to have been a daughter of Q. Aiacius Modestus Crescentianus, a man consul for the second time in 228, and suffect consul perhaps around the year 207.⁴³ New evidence raises doubt. The wife of

³⁹ See, for example, the partial catalog of Y. Thébert, *MEFR* 85 (1973), 290 f.

⁴⁰ M. Corbier, *L'aerarium Saturni et l'aerarium militare* (1974), 319 ff.; B. Rémy, *Historia* 25 (1976), 458; M. Christol, *ZPE* 28 (1978), 145. Better is to be expected from the pen of A. Beschtaouch, promised at *BSAF* 1976, 136.

⁴¹ *ILS* 5025.

⁴² *CIL* XV.8087.

⁴³ His career is discussed by M. Christol, *REA* 73 (1971), 124.

the *consul bis* is now known to have been Danacia Quartilla Aureliana, his sons Q. Aiadius Censorinus Celsinus Arabianus and L. Aiadius Modestus Aurelianus Priscus Agricola Salvianus; it is somewhat disquieting that nowhere in this welter of polyonymity is there a sign of the *nomen* Iunius.⁴⁴ Iunia Aiacia Modesta is just as likely to be a granddaughter or for that matter any other relation of the consul of 228; and therefore our Rufini numbers 1 and 2 need not be identical or even contemporary. (3) A Q. Aradius Rufinus, a consul, raised twin dedications at Thuburnica in North Africa to Sol and Luna.⁴⁵ He cannot be dated and is therefore not surely identifiable. (4) The partial cursus inscription from Bulla Regia of a consular Q. Aradius Rufinus Optatus Aelianus has been published (though it remains unedited), which runs from a legionary legateship to consular commands and finally to an extraordinary command "agens vice procos. prov. Afrik."⁴⁶ As it registers his governorship of Syria, he should be the unnamed ancestor of Aradius Rufinus, prefect of Rome in 376, who was noted as holding the post.⁴⁷ And since the cursus also names him *sodalis Augustalis* he may or may not be identified with our Rufinus number 1; perhaps not, for sons could and did succeed their fathers in this fraternity.⁴⁸ Further, a second inscription from Bulla Regia, unpublished, commemorates the patronage of this man's child, and a third, again unpublished, records the same patronage for his wife Calpurnia Fidiana (sic) Aemiliana c.f. (5) The name of the consular governor of Britannia Superior on a fragmentary stone might be restored as Q. Aradius Rufinus.⁴⁹ If so, he could be identified with any, all, or none of our Rufini 1 through 4.

In addition to these candidates, there are other members of the family to be noted. (6) An Aradius Paternus has turned up recently as legate of Cappadocia in 231, and therefore a Severan consular. Obviously a member of the family, his close relationship is confirmed by a funerary fragment in Rome, dedicated to a P. Aradi[o] Patern[o] Rufini[ano? . . .].⁵⁰ (7) Another P. Aradius forms a second link with the Rufini, P. Aradius Roscius Rufinus Saturninus Tiberianus, a senator of

⁴⁴ The family is known from *AE* 1968.518-524; cf. Christol, *ZPE* 28 (1978), 145.

⁴⁵ *ILS* 3937-38.

⁴⁶ *ES* 4 (1967), 83 = *AE* 1971.490.

⁴⁷ Libanius, *Ep.* 737, with the discussion by J. F. Gilliam, *AJP* 79 (1958), 240.

⁴⁸ E.g., *AE* 1914.26 and 1946.124; *ILS* 1069 and 1068; *CIL* VI.1986 and 1988.

⁴⁹ *AE* 1962.58.

⁵⁰ *AE* 1964.5; *CIL* VI.31948.

quaestorian rank and patron of Privernum.⁵¹ In turn, it is easily presumed that this man had a double *praenomen* and was the same as L. Aradius Roscius Rufinus Saturninus Tiberianus c.i., the father of [Aradia] Ros[cia . . .] ne . . . a Calpurnia Purgilla, a patroness of Bulla Regia.⁵² Or possibly the two men were father and son, or brothers, for another of the unpublished bases from Bulla commemorates a L. Aradius Roscius Rufinus . . . as well. (8) Yet another unpublished stone records a Ti. Arad[ius . . .], obviously (from his *praenomen*) a relative of number 7. (9) Most interesting of all, an Aradius Saturninus turns up on an unobtrusive sarcophagus at Interpromium in the land of the Paeligni: he will prove very useful in a moment.⁵³

The third century is thus not lacking for noble Aradii. That they were all closely related is immediately apparent, but chronology is a great problem and any stemma is hazardous. There are simply too many unknowns, not least the lack of precise versions of several inscriptions. Most disconcerting are the two couples, Q. Aradius Rufinus Optatus Aelianus and Calpurnia Fidiana Aemiliana, and Q. Aradius Rufinus and Iunia Aiacia Modesta; without clear evidence to the contrary we must assume that the men were two distinct persons, both consular in rank. The career of Optatus Aelianus has received exhaustive scrutiny, and historical conclusions have been drawn from it. Yet if we cannot be sure that his father-in-law was the consul of 228, and if we cannot be sure that he himself was the sodalis of 219, the chronology collapses. Thus, his consulship has recently been set in the middle years of Severus Alexander, perhaps precisely in 228 to coincide with the second consulship of his putative father-in-law; and his last recorded office as acting proconsul of Africa has been enticingly connected with the uprising of the Gordiani in 238.⁵⁴ However, one could just as easily set the whole career twenty years earlier. Optatus Aelianus was the husband not of Iunia Aiacia Modesta but of a Calpurnia Fidiana Aemiliana. It is hard to resist amalgamating that lady with another from Bulla Regia, whose name is known imperfectly as Iulia Memmia . . . Calpurnia Aemiliana Fidiana, the daughter of a man who was consul designate in 191, C. Memmius Fidus Iulius Albius.⁵⁵ If we accordingly move Optatus Aelianus forward a generation his consulship would fall under Septimius Severus. The African command might then (for the

⁵¹ *CIL* X.6439 (from the forum: *AJA* 15 (1911), 181).

⁵² *CIL* VIII.14470.

⁵³ *EE* 8.33, no. 132.

⁵⁴ Rémy (above, n.40), passim; his proposed consular date accepted by Christol, (above, n.40), 150.

⁵⁵ *ILAf.* 454 (Bulla Regia).

sake of argument) fall in the reign of Macrinus who, it will be recalled, bungled his appointments to the two senior proconsulships.⁵⁶

There is one great advantage to placing Q. Aradius Rufinus Optatus Aelianus in the reign of Severus: he belongs there. There should be no doubt that his family, like the emperor's, was African in origin, deriving of course from Bulla Regia, where it was so frequently honored. The man who was probably his father-in-law, C. Memmius Fidus Iulius Albius, consul in the last years of Commodus and in high office under Severus, was likewise African, deriving precisely from Bulla Regia.⁵⁷ In turn, this man's father-in-law was presumably the senator of praetorian rank L. Calpurnius Fidus Aemilianus, recorded on an inscription from Utica.⁵⁸ The Aradii of Bulla Regia thus begin to take on substance as solid representatives of Africa's bourgeois elite, and there is more. A Q. Aradius Rufinus (possibly the son of Optatus) married a daughter or other relative of Q. Aiadius Modestus Crescentianus, a great man of the Severan age (and on the present calculation a close contemporary of Optatus Aelianus). This man's *origo* has defied detection, but his wife at least, Danacia Quartilla Aureliana, owned land near Hadrumetum.⁵⁹ We can thus begin to suspect the existence of a real "African" group flourishing around the years 193/211.⁶⁰ Best of all, the sarcophagus from Interpromium bears the following inscription "in rozzi caratteri di bassi tempi": "Aradius Saturninus Septimiae Sever(a)e coniugi vivus viv(a)e p." This was published in the *Notizie degli Scavi* for 1885 with virtually no description of the sarcophagus itself, and no one seems to have discussed it since then; its date remains quite insecure.⁶¹ Nevertheless, Aradius Saturninus and Septimia Severa are well attested as names in two African senatorial families of the late second and early third centuries, one of which produced three emperors. It would be foolish to deny a connection between them, and in fact there is one other item to suggest or confirm it: the Latin translation of Dictys Cretensis was addressed by a Septimius to a Q. Aradius Rufinus.

A nexus of aristocratic Africans flourished under and indeed was connected with an African emperor about the year 200. Sometime around then the Greek memoirs of Dictys of Crete first turn up among our surviving documents and the Latin translation of those memoirs

⁵⁶ Dio 79.22.

⁵⁷ *PW* Memmius 25 for the evidence.

⁵⁸ *CIL* VIII.25382.

⁵⁹ *CIL* VIII.11152.

⁶⁰ The theme is an important one in A. R. Birley's *Septimius Severus, the African Emperor* (1971), particularly 327 ff.

⁶¹ *NdS* 1885.205-206, reported in *EE*.

bears in its dedication *nomina* appropriate to two possible members of that nexus. Could there be a connection? The emperor Septimius Severus was a native of the Punic city of Lepcis Magna. Whatever the ultimate origin of the Septimii may have been, the family was established in that city for several generations; its outlook and presumably its blood cannot have avoided a strong Punic tinge.⁶² The Aradii derived from the Punic city of Bulla Regia, also in Africa Proconsularis. Of their ultimate *origo* there can be no doubt: "by its nomenclature Africa attests ancient immigration," and families with the *nomina* of Aradius, Sidonius, or Tyrius took obvious pride in their real or putative roots in the great sea states of Phoenicia, Aradus, Sidon, and Tyre.⁶³ Now Dictys Cretensis displays a noteworthy interest in Phoenicia, for the lady Europa had been abducted from Sidon to his own island of Crete, where she was worshiped "summa religione." Thus, in the first section of the memoirs, the kings of Greece have come to Crete to divide the inheritance of Atreus, but they stay to marvel at the temple of Europa: "etsi ea, quae exhibebantur, cum laetitia accipiebant, tamen multo magis templi eius magnifica pulchritudine pretiosaque exstrukione operum afficiebantur, inspicientes repetentesque memoria singula, quae ex Sidona a Phoenice, patre eius, atque nobilibus matronis transmissa magno tum decori erant."⁶⁴

In short, Crete and Phoenix are introduced as great friends. Better, they are allies in grievance, according to Dictys: after the seduction of Helen, the scoundrel Paris fled with her to Sidon where he treacherously slew the king after partaking of his hospitality. Hence, some time later, during the great war, a Phoenician admiral is stoned to death by his troops for giving aid to the Trojans.⁶⁵ Moreover, best of all the ties between Crete and Phoenicia, the original memoir of Dictys the Cretan was purportedly written down in those letters which Cadmus had brought from Phoenicia, a point which (it must be emphasized) Septimius is careful to introduce in the first sentence of his epistle to Aradius Rufinus.⁶⁶ Myth and history converge here, for the semitic impact on both Crete and Africa is an observable phenomenon: to take one small but germane item, the name of Aradus had spread with the Phoenicians to both places.⁶⁷ Let us surmise that herein lies one reason

⁶² For the Punic side of Septimius Severus (and modern controversy), see A. R. Birley, (n.60, above), 1 ff, 26 ff.

⁶³ R. Syme, (n.12, above), 140-141.

⁶⁴ I.2.

⁶⁵ I.5, IV.4.

⁶⁶ *Ep.*; V.17.

⁶⁷ Cf. J.-P. Rey-Coquais, *Arados* (1974), 92 f, 177 f.

at least for the choice of Q. Aradius Rufinus as the recipient of the Latin translation of Dictys Cretensis. He was a great Punic aristocrat who flourished under the first African emperor; the time would be ripe for a Latin version of a work first written in the letters brought by Cadmus from Phoenicia.

If the hypothesis can be accepted that the Latin version of Dictys Cretensis could have been composed in the Severan age with an eye to the new, African court, then three strong reasons may be advanced to suggest, or prove, that the translator Septimius was none other than that Severan courtier and man of letters, Serenus Sammonicus. First, there is the slight problem of Sammonicus' name, one which no one has seen fit to pursue; in our sources he is consistently represented by two *cognomina*, without a trace of *praenomen* or *gentilicium*.⁶⁸ The name Sammonicus is particularly intriguing. It is found only once elsewhere, in the most mysterious of circumstances, as the only word on an inscription from Bordeaux which has long been lost to human ken. Romantic though this may be, it is not a great problem, for the element "Samo-" is extremely common in Gallic nomenclature. Therefore Serenus Sammonicus was a Gaul, perhaps first noticed by his future patron Septimius Severus when Severus was governor of Gallia Lugdunensis. But there is room for a great deal of doubt. "Sam(m)o-" is also a common element in Latin, witness the *nomen* Sammonius, and for that matter just as common in Greek.⁶⁹

Let us search out an alternative explanation, before assigning the scholar to Gaul: there is one in Dictys Cretensis. It is generally admitted that Dictys' name is geographical, reflecting Mt. Dikte in the east of Crete, and at an early period the term Diktaios came to be a synonym for Cretan, *Cretensis*.⁷⁰ The mountain was of course renowned for a cave which was well reputed to be the birthplace of Zeus, and this may have meant something to the author or translator of Dictys, for the shrine was still flourishing in the late second century.⁷¹ Mt. Dikte is almost but not quite at the end of Crete. The northeastern tip of the island is formed by a cape called Samonion. In antiquity this

⁶⁸ It may be noted here that the *praenomen* Lucius sometimes assigned to the translator Septimius is very insecure. It appears in the *epistula* in no manuscript, and only one (late, and now lost) has it in the prescriptions to Books V and VI.

⁶⁹ For Greek and Latin, consult the standard works of Schulze and Pape-Benseler. For Gaul, see D. E. Evans, *Gaulish Personal Names* (1967), 252 f. Sammonicus at Bordeaux: *CIL* XIII.832.

⁷⁰ *PW* Diktys. Antimachus of Colophon, fr. 174 Wyss.

⁷¹ As attested by the inscription, erected in that era, of the ancient "Dictaeon hymn to the Kouros" (*I.Cret.* III.3.2), on which see M. L. West, *JHS* 85 (1965), 149.

was considered to be a neighbor of Dikte: Strabo measured a mere 100 stadia between them, and the inhabitants of Hierapytna, the nearest place of importance, felt able to call simultaneously upon Zeus Diktaios and Athena Samonia.⁷² Several forms are attested for the name of the cape, from Salmone/Salmonion to Samonion, via Sammonion, the last offered in a text of the geographer Ptolemy.⁷³ It can be suggested here that the name Sammonicus is a geographical *cognomen*, analogous to Atticus or Italicus and derived from the *promuntorium Samonium*, which offered the first or last view one might have of the DICTEAN isle of Crete.⁷⁴

Further, there is a connection between Samonion and Troy. Strabo, quoting Demetrius of Skepsis, lists several place-names which are common to Crete and the Troad. Each has a Mt. Ida; Mt. Dikte in Crete has a twin near Skepsis; Hierapytna in Crete is matched by Pytna on Ida; Hippocorona near Adramyttium recalls Hippocoronium in Crete. “Σαμώνιον τε τὸ ἑωθινὸν ἀκρωτήριον τῆς νήσου καὶ πεδίων ἐν τῇ Νεανδρίδι καὶ τῇ Ἀλεξανδρέων.”⁷⁵ The etiology of the Samonion plain in the Troad may be deduced from a fragment of the Histories of Nicolaus of Damascus, and it does indeed lead back to Crete: when the Cretan Scamander conquered the Troad, his right-hand man was a certain Samon, who was actually slain in this earlier Trojan war.⁷⁶ Such fragments are tantalizing, but their intent is irrelevant here. We need simply note the coincidence of two ancient place-names, one in Crete and one near Troy; of an eponymous Cretan hero killed in a Trojan war; and of an illustrious Roman antiquary with a highly unusual surname. “Sammonicus” is a second *cognomen* which has been added to another, Serenus. It may have followed publication of the Dictys diary as a nickname that stuck, a practice amply attested in ancient nomenclature. Abstruse erudition is encapsulated with a hint of malice. Were Cretans not notorious liars?

Second, should this seem too fragile, the translator Septimius and the antiquary Sammonicus have much in common. Both were archaizers: Sammonicus was the scholar who searched out material in the most ancient of volumes, while Septimius, “avidus verae historiae” and never more happy than when reciting the genealogy of a hero, also procured *libelli* of immemorial antiquity and set to translating them in

⁷² Strabo 10.479; *I.Cret.* III.5.13.

⁷³ 3.15.4. Cf. Lyd., *de mag.* 3.32, referring to the Roman writer Samonikos.

⁷⁴ As St. Paul was aware: Acts 27:7.

⁷⁵ 10.472. Cf. W. Leaf, *BSA* 17 (1910/11), 270 ff, and J. M. Cook, *The Troad* (1973), 315 f, for divergent views on the location of the Samonian plain.

⁷⁶ *FGH* 90.14.

his leisure moments. And both men were sadly credulous. As to their specific interests, the evidence is very sparse, but there does seem to be an echo of Dictys of Crete in one of the learned fragments of Serenus Sammonicus. In his comments on Vergil, *Georgics* I.100–104, Servius quotes some remarks of Serenus Sammonicus to the effect that many Greek authors call the peak of Mt. Ida “Gargara,” and that because of this they improperly name all the summits of the range Gargara, when in fact Gargara is a city at the foot of Mt. Ida in the Asian province of Mysia, a place naturally damp and therefore highly fertile. Just before these remarks Servius notes the obvious, that Mysia is to be found not far from Troy, a rather suggestive concatenation. Now Gargaron does indeed appear in the *Iliad*, but only as the mountain seat of Zeus; that is, Homer is one of those “many Greek authors” who transferred the name from the town to the mountaintop. By contrast, that other great chronicler of the deeds done at Troy, Dictys, is precisely orthodox. He reports that during a lull in the fighting at Troy Ajax went off to capture Pitya and Zelea, cities renowned for their wealth, and not content with these he laid waste to Gargarum and four other cities (all named), returning to camp with great booty from the slopes of Ida.⁷⁷ This briskly military catalog, unique to Dictys, is just the sort of thing to arrest the eye of a commentator. When Septimius “treated” the text of Dictys in Latin, did he indulge himself in a minute and accurate commentary?

Third, there is a real shock in store if we amalgamate the translator and the antiquary into a single person, Septimius Serenus Sammonicus: we happen to possess about twenty-three metrical fragments from the works — notably from the *Opuscula Ruralia* — of a poet of the Severan age who is known to us as Septimius Serenus.⁷⁸ And even better, a tenth-century catalog of the library at Bobbio — an item ignored by the editors of Dictys — records “two books of Septimius Serenus, one *de ruralibus*, the other *de historia Troiana*.”⁷⁹ There is no need to assume a simple confusion between the poet Septimius Serenus and the translator Septimius here. This particular manuscript has left no trace in the tradition (hence it may well have retained a complete version of the epistle, with pertinent information), and there is no reason to doubt that it has preserved an authentic record of the full name of the

⁷⁷ II.27.

⁷⁸ Collected by W. Morel, *FPL* 144–148.

⁷⁹ G. Becker, *Catalogi bibliothecarum antiqui* (1885), 69–70: bound together, be it noted, with the works of that perennial partner of Dictys the Cretan Dares the Phrygian.

translator: that is, (L.?) Septimius Serenus, later named "Sammonicus."

III. Since the fragments of the poet Septimius Serenus have recently received close attention, only the briefest of remarks are required here.⁸⁰ His poems, as their title implies, were pastoral, often highly artificial, yet sometimes remarkably sensitive. More to the point, his erudition and his metrical experiments have earned for him the significant modern definition as "an archaizer in verse."⁸¹ His dates are quite unknown, but he flourished sometime in the decades around the year 200, for he was the contemporary of the metrician Terentianus Maurus.⁸² Thus chronologically and in his interests he would coincide with the Severan archaizer Serenus Sammonicus, and it should be recalled here that one ancient writer does name Sammonicus as a poet. In one passage the poet Septimius Serenus is quoted by Servius as having suggested that the Gorgons were girls of exceptional beauty: when young men saw them they were struck dumb and motionless, whence the rumor arose that anyone who caught sight of them was turned into stone.⁸³ Who is speaking here, the poet or the pedant?

It must be admitted at once that there is a case to be made against identity. Sidonius Apollinaris, in a passage quoted above, lists his authorities in the matter at hand as Varro, Serenus "not Septimius but Sammonicus," and Censorinus.⁸⁴ This distinction of the two Sereni is also implicit in Servius who refers in some places to the poet Serenus, in other places to the scholar Serenus Sammonicus.⁸⁵ The problem here is more apparent than real. It would be superfluous to demonstrate the inaccuracies of which both bishop and commentator are capable, and one highly apposite example speaks for all: Sidonius Apollinaris was quite capable of splitting into two men a much more important figure than Serenus Sammonicus, that is, into Seneca the philosopher and Seneca the playwright.⁸⁶ Clearly, for him, different books different men. Nevertheless, the problem persists, and it would be foolish to claim as proven fact the identification of the poet with the scholar and translator.

⁸⁰ E. Zaffagno, *Argentea aetas. In memoriam Entii V. Marmorale* (Publ. Ist. Fil. Class., Univ. di Genova 37, 1973), 273; A. Cameron, (above, n.1).

⁸¹ A. Cameron (above, n.1).

⁸² Schanz-Hosius, 27.

⁸³ Ad *Aen.* 7.289.

⁸⁴ *Carm.* 14, pr. 3.

⁸⁵ Serenus: ad *Aen.* 2.15, 6.289, 9.759; Serenus Sammonicus: ad *Georg.* 1.30.

⁸⁶ *Carm.* 9.230 ff. On this passage and others showing Sidonius' general unsoundness in matters of literary history, see R. G. M. Nisbet, *JRS* 68 (1978),

Thus, more cautiously, there could indeed be two men, brothers or other close relatives, one of them distinguished by a second surname and both of them rising to prominence under an exceptionally well-disposed emperor. But, most economically, they were one and the same man.

IV. If all or most of the foregoing conflation is accepted, a figure of considerable interest begins to gain definition. Septimius Serenus Sammonicus is a grand personage at the court of the first African emperor, conversant with Severus himself and his advisers, and tutor to the imperial princes.⁸⁷ And he is a product of the Severan era, that is, surely an African himself (as were most the leading figures in Latin letters in his age) and a client or even relative of the new dynasty. Social position intertwines with prodigious erudition in this age of archaism and the second sophistic, and Serenus Sammonicus is a prime example. By turns a scholar, a translator, and a poet, his large and varied corpus is bound together by the two pre-emptive passions of the day, a taste for grammar and a love for the antique. He is thus an instantly recognizable figure who could easily have sprung from the pages of Aulus Gellius. His poetry is amiable and genteel, of the comfortable type produced among congenial company while relaxing in the country, the pastoral diversion of busy men.⁸⁸ And his erudition is likewise matched to a certain taste in society; as patrons and amateurs of such work, Septimius Severus follows the pattern of Hadrian and Marcus Aurelius, while Aradius Rufinus recalls perhaps a Claudius Severus. Nevertheless, while the type is clear the man himself remains somewhat elusive, lying as he does in what has happily been termed "that penumbra . . . where social, political, and literary history shade into each other."⁸⁹ Fortunately, Dictys Cretensis will cast some light into that shade.

The following passage appears early in Philostratus' life of Apollonius of Tyana:

ἐγένετο Δάμις ἀνὴρ οὐκ ἄσφοπος τὴν ἀρχαίαν ποτὲ οἰκῶν Νῖνον· οὗτος τῷ Ἀπολλωνίῳ προσφιλοσοφήσας ἀποδημίας τε αὐτοῦ ἀναγράφεν, ὃν κοινωνῆσαι καὶ αὐτὸς φησι, καὶ γνώμας καὶ λόγους καὶ ὅποσα ἐς πρόγνωσιν εἶπε. καὶ προσήκων τις τῷ Δάμιδι τὰς δέλτους τῶν ὑπομνημάτων τούτων οὕτω γιγνωσκομένης ἐς γνώσων ἤγαγεν Ἰουλίᾳ τῇ βασιλίδι. μετέχοντι δέ μοι τοῦ περὶ αὐτὴν κύκλου — καὶ γὰρ τοὺς

⁸⁷ Of interest, therefore, is the recently discovered Septimius Serenus, a man of procuratorial rank in Egypt, apparently in 174: *P. Mich.* 616.

⁸⁸ Cf. the earlier so-called "poeta novellus" Annianus at *Noctes Atticae* 20.8.

⁸⁹ T. P. Wiseman, *Cinna the Poet and Other Essays* (1974), 176.

ῥητορικοὺς πάντας λόγους ἐπήγει καὶ ἠσπάζετο — μεταγράψαι τε προσέταξε τὰς διατριβὰς ταύτας καὶ τῆς ἀπαγγελίας αὐτῶν ἐπιμεληθῆναι, τῶ γὰρ Νινίῳ σαφῶς μὲν, οὐ μὴν δεξιῶς γε ἀπηγγέλλετο.⁹⁰

The sequence reported here should be familiar, for Damis and Dictys are a doublet: Damis is the purported companion and chronicler of the hero Apollonius, Dictys of the hero Idomeneus; Dictys is an obvious rival to Homer, Damis is produced by Philostratus as a counterblast to an unknown Moiragenes; both works are written on tablets; and in subsequent generations they are rediscovered and presented to imperial figures who hand them over to appropriate scholars.⁹¹ And in both cases, perhaps most significantly of all, the publishers of the documents felt free to “recast and edit” their original text. Clearly then the works of Septimius and Philostratus in some way reflect one another. The life of Apollonius was undertaken by Philostratus at the request of Iulia Domna and published some time after her death in 217; this alone should suggest that Septimius’ version of Dictys belongs to the Severan age. But what was the precise relationship between Philostratus and himself?

The point of contact lies in contemporary interest in the cult of the hero. It has been persuasively argued that about the time that Philostratus was working on the life of Apollonius he also published a work relevant to it, the *Heroikos*, a dialogue on the validity of heroes and their cults.⁹² One of the interlocutors in it is an amazingly erudite cultivator of vines on the Hellespont opposite the coast of Troy and near the tomb of the hero Protesilaos. With a wealth of evidence he convinces his visitor that the heroes were not mere mortal men but in fact superhuman, demonic creatures well worthy of worship.⁹³ The set piece and conclusion to this is an account of the cult of Achilles which binds it closely to Philostratus’ other work on Apollonius, for that sage had a special interest in the cult. There is a particular point of reference in all of this: the emperor Caracalla, son of Iulia Domna, also had a special regard for both Apollonius, to whom he built a *heroön*, and for Achilles, whose tomb in the Troad he visited as Apollonius had done, honoring it with games and sacrifices.⁹⁴ In short, in both the life of Apollonius

⁹⁰ I. 3.

⁹¹ First noticed, I believe, by W. Speyer, *JbAC* 17 (1974), 48 ff.

⁹² F. Solmsen, *TAPA* 71 (1940), 556.

⁹³ Text in volume II of Kayser’s Philostratus, 128–219. Cf. T. Mantero, *Ricerche sull’Heroikos di Filostrato* (1966).

⁹⁴ Dio 77.16.7, 18.4; cf. Herodian 4.8.3 ff. On Achilles: Solmsen (above, n.92), 561 ff.

and the *Heroikos*, Philostratus was writing with one eye to literature and one eye to imperial favor.

Where does Dictys Cretensis, who also wrote about heroes (and heroes of the Trojan War in particular), fit in? It has long been clear that the *Heroikos* reveals its author's familiarity with Dictys' memoirs.⁹⁵ To be precise, the *Heroikos* is in some sense a polemic against Dictys; witness its suggestion that Dictys' hero Idomeneus had never gone to Troy.⁹⁶ Indeed, it requires little imagination to see that the two works are simple ideological opposites. Both take issue with the Homeric account of the Trojan War, but where Philostratus raises the heroes at Troy into semidivinities, "Dictys" reduces the war to sober history, and its warriors (including Achilles) to mere men who once upon a time fought and died. Whether deliberate or not, the circulation of Dictys' memoirs has particular significance in an age concerned with the true nature of the heroes. The question then becomes: where does their translator Septimius fit in?

The other interlocutor in the *Heroikos* is not completely without character. He is said to be a Phoenician, a visitor from the land of Sidon and Tyre, and he is presented as a man skeptical of myths not vouched for by eyewitnesses. Whyever a Phoenician? His origin is not of the slightest relevance to the contents of the *Heroikos*, though we are constantly reminded of it when the character, simply called Phoenix, speaks. But the skeptical Phoenician (who of course departs convinced) might be relevant to the translator Septimius, who had given the world a rival interpretation of the figures at Troy. After all, he pointedly defined himself as "avidus *verae* historiae." And it was suggested above that there was a Punic and African motive behind the dedication of the Latin Dictys, by a Septimius, to an Aradius Rufinus, and under an African emperor. Moreover, here there is a pointed contrast to be made between the Latin Dictys and, not the *Heroikos*, but the closely related life of Apollonius, for it is striking that around the same time a Syrian empress should receive the Greek life of Apollonius from a Syrian (the unnamed descendant of Damis); and it will be remembered that the circle of Iulia Domna, of which Philostratus was a member, was established as a refuge from the enmity of the African praetorian prefect, Plautianus.⁹⁷ Here we seem to have arrived at the intersection

⁹⁵ Accepted since H. Grentrup, *De Heroici Philostratei fabularum fontibus* (diss. Münster, 1914), 46 ff (which I have not seen); cf. Solmsen (above, n.92), and F. Huhn and E. Bethe, *Hermes* 52 (1917), 618 f.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Dio 75.15.6 f; on the membership of the circle, see G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (1969), 101 ff.

of literature and politics, that grey penumbra where motives are complex and no action is simple. The full history will never be known, but one observation can be made. The emperor Caracalla was half-African, half-Syrian: to the vices of his Gallic homeland (it was said) he added those of both Africa and Syria.⁹⁸ Miscegenated though he might be, however, there was no question where his sympathies lay. To him the souls of heroes were immortal, he himself was Alexander reincarnated, Achilles and Apollonius lived on. That may not be sufficient to account for the death of Septimius Serenus Sammonicus in the last days of 211, but it will not have helped.

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⁹⁸ Dio 77.6.1.