

The Thematic Structure of Marcus Aurelius' Biography in the *Historia Augusta*

Abstract

The intention of this paper is to analyse the overall thematic structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* in relation to how the Emperor Marcus Aurelius was represented within the *Historia Augusta*. Overall, this ancient literary text has been shown to have been one of the most problematic sources within the extant evidence, with even the authorship and dating of the text being problematic. In addition to this, the *Life of Marcus* has been challenging primarily because of the questions that surround the legitimacy of the text itself. However, once these intricacies have been recognized it is possible to analyse this *Vita* in order to ascertain how the biographer of the *HA* sought to represent one of the most idyllic *princeps* of the Roman Empire. For the most part the *Vita Marci* was consistent in its thematic portrayal of Marcus Aurelius, epitomizing the overtly positive representation of the Emperor, but there are exceptions within the biography. The overall analysis of the *Vita Marci* illustrates not only how the most 'ideal' of Roman Emperors was represented, but it also provides some insight into the formation of biographical structures in the *Historia Augusta*.

Introduction

First of all, it must be stated that the *Historia Augusta* is a very challenging text to examine. The very fact that there is uncertainty about its authorship,¹ its historical accuracy, and its period of composition² illustrates but a few of the complexities that are inherent in its examination. Considering that these questions are not the primary concern of the present study they will not be dealt with at length. Nevertheless, it must be stated at the outset that the arguments of Syme have

¹ P. White, "The Authorship of the HA", *JRS* 67, 1977, pp. 115-33; J.N. Adams, "The Authorship of the HA", *CQ* 22, 1972, pp. 186-94; "The Linguistic Unity of the HA", *Antichthon* 11, 1977, pp. 93-102; D. Hengst, "The Discussion of Authorship", *HAC* 2000, 2002, pp. 187-95; R. Syme, "The Secondary Vitae", *HAC* 1968/9, 1970, pp. 306-7; "The Composition of the Historia Augusta: recent theories", *JRS* 62, 1972, pp. 123-33; *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968, pp. 176-91; I. Marriott, "The Authorship of the Historia Augusta: two computer studies", *JRS* 69, 1979, pp. 65-77; D. Sansone, "The Computer and the Historia Augusta", *JRS* 80, 1990, pp. 174-7; J.H. Drake, "Studies in the Historia Augusta", *AJPh* 20.1, 1899, pp. 40-58; M. Meckler, "The Beginning of the Historia Augusta", *Historia* 45.3, 1996, pp. 364-75; T. Honore, "Scriptor Historiae Augustae", *JRS* 77, 1987, pp. 156-76.

² Syme, 1968, *ibid.*, pp. 72-9; "Propaganda in the Historia Augusta", *Latomus* 37, 1978, p. 175; N.H. Baynes, *The Historia Augusta: its date and purpose*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1926; "The Historia Augusta: its date and purpose: a reply to criticism" *CQ* 22, 1928, pp. 166-71; "The Date of the Composition of the Historia Augusta", *CR* 38, 1924, pp. 165-9; J. Schwartz, "Sur la date de l'Histoire Auguste", *HAC* 1866/7, pp. 91-9; E. Birley, "Fresh Thoughts on the Dating of the Historia Augusta", *HAC* 1975/6, 1978, pp. 99-105; A. Cameron, "Education and Literary Culture", *CAH* 13, 1998, p. 685; B. Baldwin, "Some Legal Terms in the Historia Augusta", *Maia* 47, 1995, pp. 207-9; "Ausonius and the Historia Augusta", *Gymnasium* 88, 1981, p. 438; A. Momigliano, "Date et Destinataire de l'Histoire Auguste (Review)", *JRS* 44, 1954, pp. 129-31.

been followed in relation to authorship and period of composition.³ Therefore, it is taken that the *Historia Augusta* was in all likelihood written by a single author, probably around AD 395. In addition to this, among the thirty biographies within the collection one of the most difficult *Lives* is that of Marcus Aurelius, which has only previously received a minimal amount of analysis by modern scholars.

The primary cause of concern for this *Vita* is the likely presence of an interpolation within the text, which is naturally very difficult to establish with any certainty and in turn disrupts the thematic continuity of the text. This was able to be avoided by Schwendemann through the annalistic/historical distinction in his study,⁴ whereas Rosen,⁵ Birley⁶ and Chastagnol⁷ have largely disregard this question in preference for the texts use as a historical source upon Marcus Aurelius rather than its textual complexities. Therefore, the present study has initially examined the current formation of the text in order to determine the likely sections that were not part of the original *Vita* (Sections 15-19). This has been achieved by examining the style in which the text has been composed and the dual presence of the death notices for Marcus Aurelius both in Sections 18 and 28. Once this has been analysed, the new thematic structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* has been established and considered in comparison with other biographies from the *Historia Augusta*. This ultimately has significant implications for our understanding of the *HA* in general terms in order to determine the literary intentions of the *HA* biographer. All the same, prior to this analysis of the *Vita Marci*, the general structure such of biographies has been undertaken in order to firstly establish the conventions that existed for the composition of these texts and how the *HA* biographer either conformed or deviated from these literary traditions. This has taken particular reference to the *De Vita Caesarum* of Suetonius,⁸ owing to its influence upon the later *HA* biographer.⁹

The Structure of Imperial Biographies in General: Suetonius

³ For example, Syme, R., 1958, *Tacitus*, Volumes I and II, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958; *Ammianus and the Historia Augusta*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968; "The Secondary Vitae", *HAC* 1968/9, 1970, pp. 285-307; *Emperors and Biography: studies in the Historia Augusta*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971; "The Historia Augusta: a call of clarity", *Antiquitas* 4, 1971; "Astrology in the Historia Augusta", *HAC* 1972/4, 1976, pp. 291-309; "Bogus Authors", *HAC* 1972/4, pp. 311-21; *Historia Augusta Papers*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983; "Hadrian and Antioch", *HAC* 1979/81, 1983, pp. 321-31; "Avidius Cassius: his rank, age and quality", *HAC* 1984/5, 1987, pp. 207-22.

⁴ Schwendemann, J., 1923, *Der historische Wert der Vita Marci bei den Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Heidelberg: C. Winter.

⁵ Rosen, K., 1997, *Marc Aurel*, Hamburg: Rowohlt.

⁶ Birley, A.R., 1987, *Marcus Aurelius: a biography*, 2nd ed., London: Routledge; 1991, "Religion in the *Historia Augusta*", *HAC* 1990, pp. 29-51; 1991, "Further Echoes of Ammianus in the *Historia Augusta*", *HAC* 1990, pp. 53-8; 1995, "Indirect Means of tracing Marius Maximus", *HAC* 1992, pp. 57-74; 1997, "Marius Maximus: the Consular Biographer", *ANRW* 34.3, pp. 2678-757.

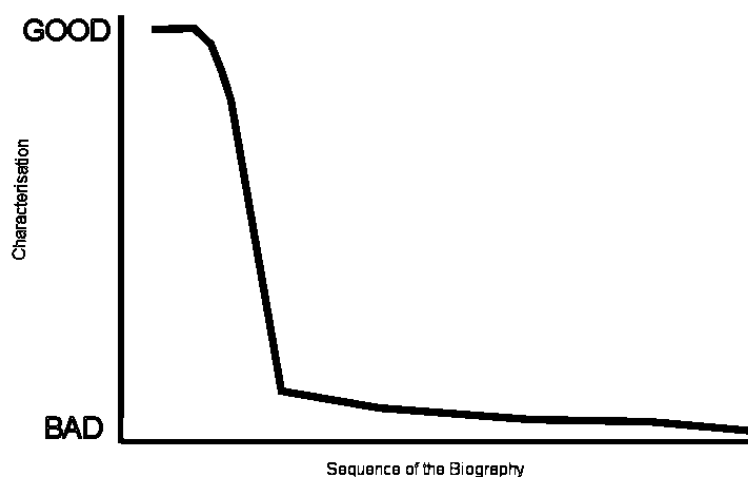
⁷ Chastagnol, A., 1994, *Histoire Auguste*, Paris: Robert Laffont.

⁸ On the later influence of Suetonian biographical style see Townend 1967, *op.cit.*, p. 79; A. Chastagnol, "L'Histoire Auguste et les Douze Césars de Suétone", *HAC* 1970, 1972, pp. 101-23. However, it is quite evident that the *HA* biographer had a different perspective over the use of their source material. See E. Gabba, "True History and False History in Classical Antiquity", *JRS* 71, 1981, p. 54.

⁹ D. Magie, *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Vol. 1, 1921, pp. xv-xviii.

One of the most significant biographical influences upon the *HA* biographer was Suetonius, which is stated in the *Vita Probi: et mihi quidem id animi fuit ut non Sallustios, Livios, Tacitos, Trogos atque omnes disertissimos imitarer viros in vita principum et temporibus disserendis, sed Marium Maximum, Suetonium Tranquillum, Fabium Marcellinum, Gargilium Martialem,*¹⁰ *Iulium Capitolinum, Aelium Lampridium ceterosque, qui haec et talia non tam diserte quam vere memoriae tradiderunt.*¹¹ So in order to consider the general structure of the *Vita Marci* some analysis of Suetonian style has been undertaken, in order to place the *HA* biographies in their literary context.

Many modern scholars have interpreted Suetonius' loose application of chronology as a sign of questionable scholarship¹² particularly when this is combined with Suetonius' predilection for gossip. This criticism mostly comes from those who treat Suetonius' work as history instead of biography.¹³ The possibility of Suetonius writing in a careless manner is unlikely. In one of his *Epistulae*, Pliny refers to Suetonius' *tu tamen meam quoque cunctationem tarditatemque.....perfectum opus absolutumque est, nec iam splendescit lima sed atteritur*, suggesting that Suetonius was more a perfectionist than a reckless writer.¹⁴ Suetonius' biographical style is more precise than it first seems, especially in contrast to the *HA* biographer. Suetonius' methodology is simply an attempt to combine as many elements of the primary character's life and personality as possible, but in a limited sphere. This technique sought to provide what Suetonius deemed to be an accurate representation in accordance with the literary tradition of the period.¹⁵ This was done by providing a number of different accounts of the character's activities. Suetonius presents these accounts in a clear and precise order by dividing the biography into commendable and non-commendable passages so that the readers may draw their own conclusions,¹⁶ but with the omnipresent guidance of the author.



¹⁰ cf. E. Birley, "Africana in the *Historia Augusta*", *HAC* 1968/9, 1970, pp. 80-2.

¹¹ *Probus* 2.7.

¹² Duff, 511; Townend, 92.

¹³ Shotter, 8; Mooney, 25.

¹⁴ Plin., *Ep.*, 5.10.2-3, 'But you outdo even my doubts and hesitations...the work is already completed and perfect, for revision will not give it more polish but dull its freshness'; cf. Lounsbury, 65; J.M. Carter, *Suetonius: Divus Augustus*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1982, 8.

¹⁵ J. Lloyd, *Books in Suetonius' De Vita Caesarum*, Ann Arbor, 1969, 299.

¹⁶ K.R. Bradley, *Suetonius' Life of Nero: An Historical Commentary*, Latomus, Brussels, 1978, 14.

Image 1 – Outline of a ‘Bad’ Biography

In several literary sources from this period the construction of a negative image is produced by first complimenting the individual so that when his negative aspects are introduced his previously mentioned positive points serve to accentuate his negative characteristics (Image 1).¹⁷ One of the most obvious aspects of this literary tradition is the concept of an individual’s nature being essentially static; inherently ‘good’ or ‘bad’.¹⁸ For example, this concept can be seen in Suetonius’ introductory criticisms of Domitian’s *Vita*, where he states that Domitian possessed a wicked nature even in his youth.¹⁹ Evidence can also be found in other biographies by Suetonius including the *Life of Nero: Pluris e familia cognosci referre arbitror, quo facilius appareat ita degenerasse a suorum virtutibus Nero, ut tamen vitia cuiusque quasi tradita et ingentia rettulerit*.²⁰ This basic principle is largely continued by the HA biographer, which illustrates their biographical debt to his literary predecessor.

Suetonius’ *Life of Domitian* is an excellent example of his focus upon biographical structure because it renders a non-commendable account at the beginning before progressing to Domitian’s commendable actions and then concluding with another disreputable section that finishes with an account of the emperor’s death (Image 2).²¹ Suetonius’ condemnations of Domitian are subtler than the works of other authors of the period,²² which may have proved a more effective method for portraying the emperor in a negative light.²³

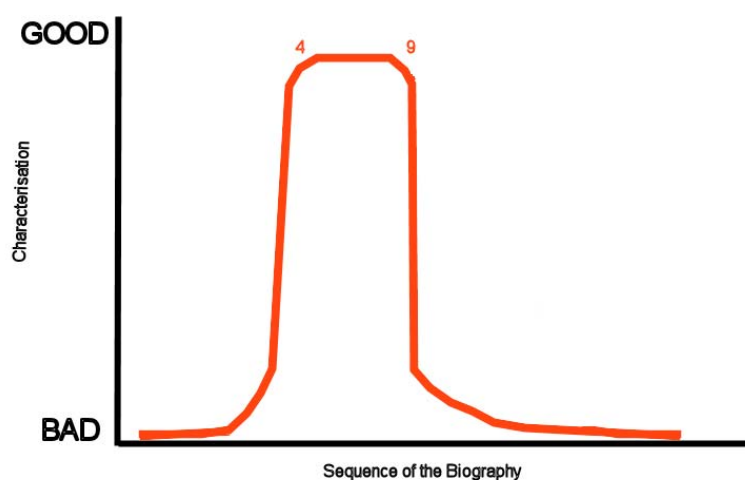


Image 2 – Outline of Suetonius’ *Domitian*

¹⁷ P.A. Brunt, “Charges of Provincial Maladministration”, *Historia* 10, 1961, 221.

¹⁸ B.H. Warmington, *Suetonius: Nero*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1977, 6.

¹⁹ Suet., *Dom.*, 1.1.

²⁰ Suetonius, *Nero*, 1.2; cf. *Nero*, 26.1, 43.1.

²¹ Jones, *Suetonius*, XV.

²² R. Syme, *Tacitus*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1958, 502; M.P. Vinson, “Domitia Longina, Julia Titi and the Literary Tradition”, *Historia* 38, 1989, 433; For examples see Juv., 2.30-1; Plin., *Pan.*, 52.3.

²³ F. Ahl, “The Art of Safe Criticism in Greece and Rome”, *AJPh* 105, 1984, 178.

Although subtle, Suetonius reveals his opinion through ensuring that his non-commendable account of Domitian's activities dominates his condemnations. This maintains the appearance of objectivity to the reader because Suetonius does not viciously attack the emperor and presents both good and bad accounts. However, Suetonius' pretence of impartiality (if there is such a thing) lacked substance due to his adoption of opinions from the prevailing literary tradition, and his tendency to include negative representations of Domitian even in passages he claims are praising the emperor.²⁴ Suetonius' clever compilation of Domitian's positive and negative characteristics creates a definite representation whereby the possibility for his freedom from guilt is difficult to perceive.²⁵ Suetonius' negative portrayal of emperors was not limited to Domitian. Emperors Tiberius (Image 3), Gaius (Image 4), and Vitellius (Image 5) also received negative portrayal in accordance with the senatorial influence and *damnatio memoriae* evident in the literature of the period.²⁶ This attitude towards these condemned emperors matched the views of the senatorial aristocracy who were the patrons of literary commissions and their authors, which would have also existed at the time of the *Historia Augusta's* compilation. Many authors allowed the élites to influence their writings, as this was one of the ways to gain the prestige a writer required to survive in his occupation. Aristocratic patronage may have been vital for Suetonius' career because it is likely that it was through associations with Pliny and Septicius Clarus²⁷, and their social connections, that Suetonius was able to obtain the positions of *ab epistulis*, for which outside favour, intellectual, scholastic or literary activity, was essential.²⁸

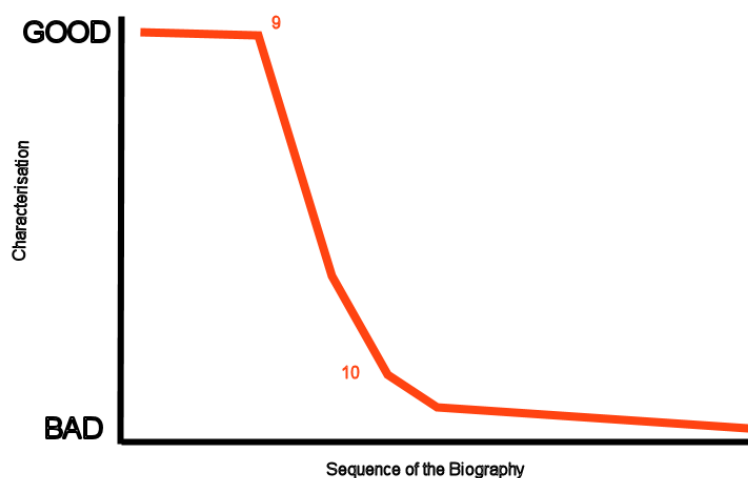


Image 3 – Outline of Suetonius' *Tiberius*

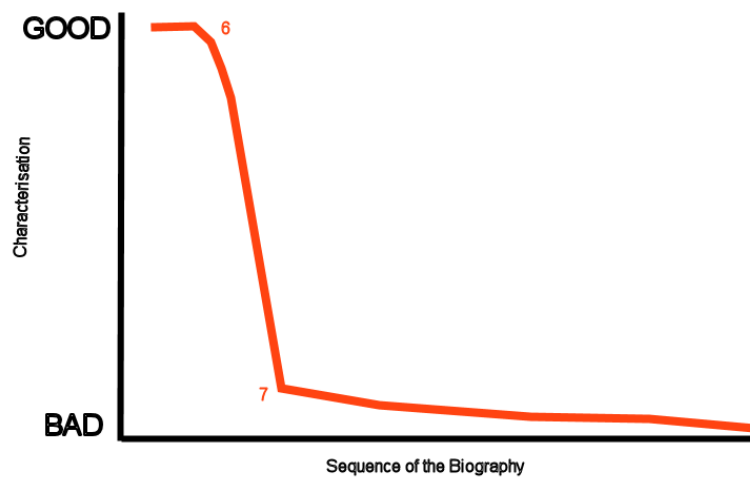
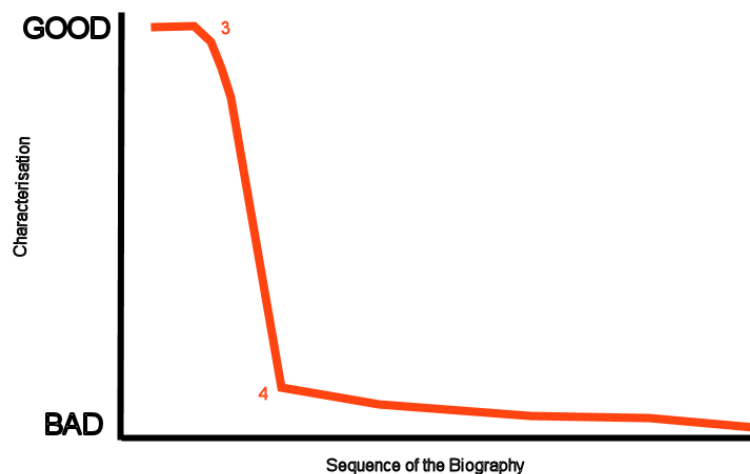
²⁴ Waters, 51; Lounsbury, 15.

²⁵ F.R.D. Goodyear, *The Annals of Tacitus: Books 1-6*, Vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1972, 46.

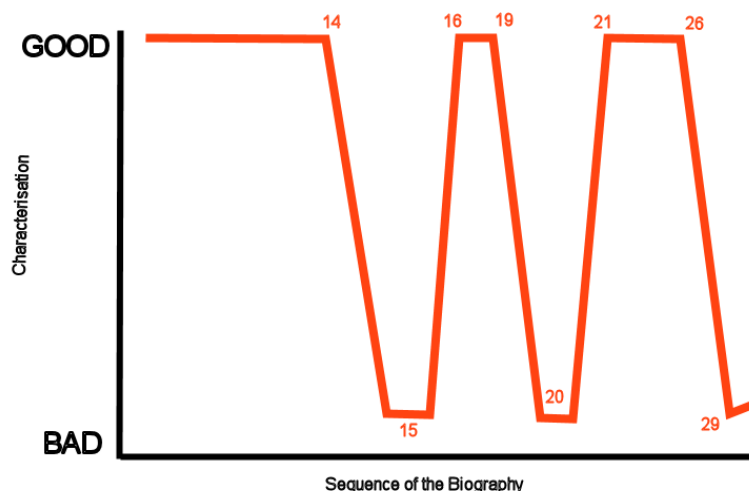
²⁶ B.W. Jones, *Suetonius: Domitian*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1996, XV; G. Townend, "Suetonius and his Influence", in T.A. Dorey (ed.), *Latin Biography*, Routledge, London, 1967, 91.

²⁷ Plin., *Ep.*, 10.94.1; A.M. Duff, *A Literary History of Rome in the Silver Age*, Benn, London, 1964, 506.

²⁸ F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World*, Duckworth, London, 1977, 83, 91; R.C. Lounsbury, *The Art of Suetonius*, Austin, 1979, 41; cf. H. Lindsay, "Suetonius as *ab epistulis* to Hadrian and the early history of the Imperial Correspondence", *Historia* 43, 1994, 454-68.

Image 4 – Outline of Suetonius' *Gaius*Image 5 – Outline of Suetonius' *Vitellius*

The *HA* biographer attempted to continue a similar style of biographical characterisation, but it is quite clear that this author lacked a similar degree of subtlety in the *Vitae* – the commendations and criticisms that are quite overt, which frequently makes the change in theme quite startling for the audience. This could be indicative of degradation in the literary form by the late fourth century, but this is impossible to determine with any certainty. Therefore, it is apt at this point to examine the *Vita Marci* in greater detail in order to determine its structural elements.

Image 6 – Outline of the Current *Vita Marci*

The Structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini*

The current text for this biography comprises twenty-nine sections, of which five sections are thought to be a later insertion within the *Vita* (Sections 15-19). The over-whelming trend within the text is that of an overtly positive biography for the most part (Image 6). The amount of idealism surrounding the characterisation of Marcus Aurelius is compelling and unavoidable, with there being only a few topics that were critical of both Marcus' character and principate. The general structure of topics dealt with by the *HA* biographer is as follows (Table 1):

Section	Topics	Possible Authorial Criticisms
1	Lineage	
2	Education and Philosophy	
3	Studies and Philosophy	'worked too hard as a child on law' [3.6]
4	Becomes a Salian Priest; Omen of Rule; Honourable Behaviour as a Youth	
5	Hadrian's favourite; Humility; Reluctance to Rule	
6	Hadrian's Death; Close Alliance with Antoninus Pius	
7	Marcus' Reputation and his Succession; Joint-Rulers; Funeral for Antoninus Pius	
8	Leniency; Military Campaigns; Verus Bad – Marcus Good	
9	Refusal of Titles; Betrothal of Lucilla to Verus; Freedom Laws	
10	Senatorial Respect; Justice/Jurisprudence	
11	Administration; Public Finances; Grain-Supply;	

	Road Construction	
12	Liberty; Post-Parthia Honours; Marcomannic War	
13	Rites for Marcomannic War; Pestilence	
14	Initial Military Success; Verus' Qualms and his Death	
15	Unpopularity with the People; Murder Rumours; Compliance to Freedmen; Concealment of Verus' Vices	Unpopularity with the People; Murder Rumours, Compliance to Freedmen, Concealment of Verus' Vices; Paperwork at Games (openly ridiculed by the people); Power of his Freedmen; Marcus killed Verus (but author does not believe it); The concealment of Verus' Vices; The Revolt of Cassius after Verus' Death
16	Familial Honours; Worth as <i>Princeps</i> (Respect for Commodus - despite him being 'Evil')	
17	Military Glory in Germany; Financial Stress/Responsibility	
18	Death of Marcus and Love for Him; Deification	
19	Commodus not Marcus' Son; Faustina's Adultery; 'Great Man' with reference to Diocletian	
20	Verus' Burial; Marcus Pleased at Verus' Death; Marcus desires recognition for his Parthian Success; Resistance to Lucilla's marriage by Lucilla and Faustina	Marcus Pleased at Verus' Death; Marcus desires recognition for his Parthian Success; Resistance to Lucilla's marriage by Lucilla and Faustina
21	Military Achievements; Avidius Cassius; Death of Son; Germanic Campaign	
22	German Campaign under Marcus Aurelius	
23	Marcus as the 'Just' <i>princeps</i>	
24	Judicial Policies; Divine Powers; Revolt of Avidius Cassius	
25	Marcus' Response to Avidius Cassius (Antioch)	
26	Foreign Relations; Faustina Dies; Nice to Cassius' Relatives	
27	Marcus and the East; Plato; German War; Commodus' Succession	Buys the Loyalty of the People; Too many problems to fix (neglect?); Limits games expense after his own games
28	Death of Marcus Aurelius	
29	Promotes the Lovers of his Wife; Publicly Ridiculed for Acceptance; States that he never put a Senator to Death; Exonerates himself from Accusations of Greediness; Accused of being False; Accused of Promoting his Friends; Deifies Parents; Steadfast Inquiries for Claims; Refuses to marry Fabia	Promotes the Lovers of his Wife; Publicly Ridiculed for Acceptance; Exonerates himself from Accusations of Greediness; Accused of being False; Accused of Promoting his Friends

While the topics listed in Table 1 are quite general, this has been carried out in order to establish the topical sequencing of the *Vita*. The primary reason for this is to illustrate the lack of continuity that exists within the present text, particularly between Sections 14-15 and 19-20. As mentioned previously, while it is expected that a chronological approach was not always the priority within the structure of many biographies where the focus was mostly upon an individual's character, the *Vita Marci Antonini* presents a serious deviation from the typical biographical model that had been established centuries previously. One of the most obvious examples that indicate some textual corruption is presented in Sections 18 and 28, where Marcus Aurelius' death notice occurs on two separate occasions.

18.1 *Cum igitur in amore omnium i<m>perasset atque ab aliis modo frater, modo pater, modo filius, ut cuiusque aetas sinebat, et diceretur et amaretur, octavo decimo anno imperii sui, sexagesimo et primo vitae, diem ultimum clausit.*

28.1 *Mors autem talis fuit: cum aegrotare coepisset, filium advocavit atque ab eo primum petit, ut elli reliquias non contempneret, ne videretur rem p. prodere. [28.2] et, cum filius ei respondisse<t> cupere se primum sanitatem, ut vellet, permisit, petens tamen, ut expectasset paucos dies, <h>aut simul proficisceretur. [28.3] deinde abstinuit vi<ctu> potuque mori cupiens auxitque morbum. [28.4] sexta die vocatis amicis et ridens res humanas, mortem autem contempnens ad amicos dixit: 'quid<d>e me fletis et non magis de pestilentia et communi morte cogitatis?' [28.5] et cum illi vellent recedere, ingemescens ait: 'si iam me dimittitis, vale vobis dico vos praecedens.' [28.6] et cum ab eo quaereretur, cui filium commendaret, ille respondit: 'vobis, si dignus fuerit, et dis immortalibus.' [28.7] exercitus cognita mala valetudine vehementissime dolebant, quia illum unice amarunt. [28.8] septimo die gravatus est et solum filium admisit, quem statim dimisit, ne in eum morbus transiret. [28.9] dimisso filio caput operuit quasi volens dormire, sed nocte animam efflavit.*

These two passages provide the most overt indication that the present text of the *Vita Marci Antonini* does not conform to the stereotypical construction used by most ancient biographers. However, these death notices are discussed in greater detail in the next section, owing to their particular significance in relation to the presence of the interpolation. That the *HA* biographer was aware of the previous biographical conventions is clear, owing to the citations presented in various *Vitae* mentioning their influence upon the creation of the *Historia Augusta*.²⁹ The unusual thematic structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* is best illustrated in Image 6, which plainly illustrates the atypical arrangement of the current text, particularly when compared to the traditional model for a 'good' life (Image 7).

²⁹ *Probus* 2.7.

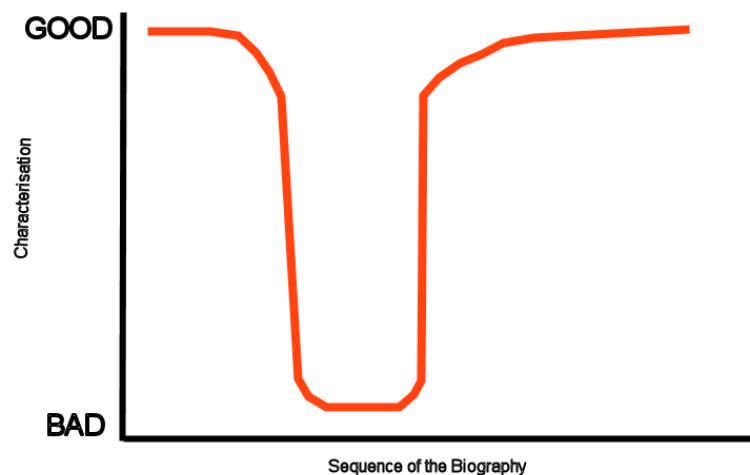


Image 7 – Outline for a Traditional ‘Good’ Life

The above diagram clearly exhibits the unusual placement of the critical sections within the current *Vita Marci*. So while the general theme of the biography is blatantly positive in relation to Marcus Aurelius, the decisive inclusion of critical sections at crucial points within the *Vita* makes the impression of the text not only unusual but also quite exceptional. The first significantly critical passage occurs in Section 15 (15.1-6), where he is accused of being too compliant, rumoured to have killed Lucius Verus, and concealed Verus’ vices.³⁰ The second critical part occurs in Section 20 (20.1-7) where Marcus is shown as desirous for glory and his good reputation, being pleased at the death of Lucius Verus, and being resolute about the marriage of his daughter Lucilla to Claudius Pompeianus.³¹ The other significant critical passage is included in Section 29, where the HA biographer mentions the rumours surrounding Faustina’s infidelities and the ensuing public mockery

³⁰ *Marcus* 15.1-6. **15.1** *Fuit autem consuetudo Marco, ut in circensium spectaculo legeret audiretque ac suscriberet. ex quo quidem saepe iocis popularibus dicitur lacessitus. [15.2] multum sane potuerunt liberti sub Marco et Vero Geminus et Agaclytus. [15.3] tantae autem sanctitatis fuit Marcus, ut Veri vitia et celaverit et defenderit, cum ei vehementissime displicere, mortuumque eum divum appellaverit amitasque eius et sorores honoribus et salariis decretis sublevaverit atque provexerit sacrisque eum plurimis honoraverit. [15.4] flaminem et Antoninianos sodales et omnes honores, qui divis habentur, eidem dedicavit. [15.5] nemo est principum, quem non gravis fama perstringat, usque adeo ut etiam Marcus in sermonem venerit, quod Verum vel veneno ita tulerit, ut parte cultri veneno lita vel am incidere venenatam partem fratri edendam propinans et sibi innoxiam reservans, [15.6] vel certe per medicum Posidippum, qui ei sanguinem intempestive dicitur emisisse. Cassius post mortem Veri a Marco deservit.*

³¹ *Marcus* 20.1-7. **20.1** *Sed Marco Antonino haec sunt gesta post fratrem: primum corpus eius Romam devectum est et inlatum maiorum sepulchris. divini ei honores decreti. [20.2] dein cum gratias ageret senatu, quod fratrem consecrasset, oculte ostendit omnia bellica consilia sua fuisse, quibus superati sunt Parthi. [20.3] addidit praeterea quaedam, quibus ostendit nunc demum se quasi a principio acturum esse rem publicam amoto eo, qui remissior videbatur. [20.4] nec aliter senatus accepit, quam Marcus dixerat, ut videretur gratias agere, quod Verus excessisset vita. [20.5] omnibus deinde sororibus et adfinibus et libertis et honoris et pecuniae plurimum detulit. erat enim famae suae curiosissimus, requirens ad verum, quid quisque de se diceret, emendans quae bene reprehensa viderentur. [20.6] proficiscens ad bellum Germanicum filiam suam non decursus luctus tempore grandaevo equitis Romani filio Claudio Pompeiano dedit genere Antiochensi nec satis nobili (quem postea bis consulem fecit), cum filia eius Augusta esset et Augustae filia. [20.7] sed has nuptias et Faustina et ipsa, quae dabatur, invitae habuerunt.*

levelled at Marcus (29.1-3).³² This final section is the most compelling critical passage of Marcus Aurelius – to include such derogatory episodes at the end of the *Vita* for such a largely positive characterisation is not only unique, but it also exemplifies the often frustrating method of composition used by the *HA* biographer in the various *Vitae*. However, the structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* becomes much more discernable once the interpolation has been identified and excluded from the biography, which is discussed below.

The Interpolation

The existence of the interpolation within the current text of the *Vita Marci Antonini* is shown in three different ways: the different sentence structures, the presence of two death notices in the biography, and the inconsistent transitional nature of the texts (Sections 14→15; Sections 19→20; Sections 14→20). The presence of the interpolation was initially suggested in 1884 by Enmann,³³ although it was later argued by Syme that the interpolation was actually Sections 20-29,³⁴ which is much less likely. There are other interpolations within the *Historia Augusta*, but the interpolation within the *Vita Marci* is clearly the largest portion of the text that is clearly a later addition. The inclusion of the text is clearly understandable owing to the topical similarities that exist between the interpolation and the *Vita Marci*, such as in relation to the Germanic campaigns,³⁵ his response to Avidius Cassius' rebellion,³⁶ and the death of Marcus Aurelius.³⁷ All the same, these similarities are more attributable to the existence of shared historical sources for both authors rather than both sections being written by the same person. This is most clearly exhibited by comparing the stylistic tendencies of the sentences, which are plainly different despite their similar subject matter.

The different sentence structure in these passages is initially apparent when viewing the amount of detail provided by the respective authors. The interpolation is much briefer than the *Vita Marci*, which is most clearly exhibited by the simple fact that the author covers Marcus' sole-principate (from AD 169) in five sections (996 words), whereas the *HA* biographer provides more details and examples for the same period which is treated in ten sections (1896 words). When the text is examined on a closer level, stylistically the different literary techniques are even more apparent. This is clearly exhibited in Sections 17.1-3 and 22.1-12,³⁸ which plainly exhibits how different levels

³² Marcus 29.1-3. **29.1** *Crimini ei datum est, quod adulteros uxoris promoverit, Tertullum et <T>utilium et Orfitum et Moderatum, ad varios honores, cum Tertullum et prandentem cum uxore depr[a]ehenderit. [29.2] de quo mimus in sc<a>ena praesente Antonino dixit; cum stupidus nomen adulteri uxoris a servo quaereret et ille diceret ter 'Tullus', et adhuc stupidus quaereret, respondit ille: 'iam tibi dixi ter, Tullus dicitur.' [29.3] *et de hoc quidem multa populus, multa etiam alii dixerunt patientiam Antonini incusantes.**

³³ Enmann, A., 1884, *Eine verlorene Geschichte der Römischen Kaiser, Philologus Supplementband 4*, pp. 337-501.

³⁴ Syme 1972, *op.cit.*, p. 292.

³⁵ Marcus 22; Section 17.1-3.

³⁶ Marcus 24.5-25.12; Section 15.6.

³⁷ Marcus 28.1-10; Section 18.1-3.

³⁸ Section 17.1-3. **17.1** *Ergo provincias post h<a>ec ingenti moderatione ac benignitate tractavit. contra Germanos res feliciter gessit. [17.2] spe<c>iale ipse bellum Marcomanicum, sed quant<um> nulla umquam memoria fuit, cum virtute tum etiam felicitate transegit, et eo quidem tempore, quo pestilentia gravis multa milia et popularium et militum interemerat. [17.3] Pannonias ergo Marcomannis, Sarmatis, V[u]andalis, simul etiam Quadis extinctis servitio liberavit et Romae cum Commodo, quem iam Caesarem fecerat, filio, ut diximus, suo, triumphavit; Marcus 22.1-2. **22.1** *Gentes omnes ab Illyrici limite usque in Galliam conspiraverant, ut**

of information are provided for exactly the same topic by both authors. This is also apparent in Sections 15.6 and 24.5-25.12,³⁹ where a similar differentiation is also clearly marked. Sections 18.1-3 and 28.1-10⁴⁰ also cover similar topics, in this case the death of Marcus Aurelius, but unmistakably

Marcomanni, Varistae, Hermunduri et Quadi, Suevi, Sarmat<a>e, Lacringes et Burei €hi aliique cum Victualis, Sosibes, Sicobotes, Roxolani, Basternae, Halani, Peu<c>ini, Costoboci. iminebat et Parthicum bellum et Brittanicum. [22.2] magno igitur labore etiam suo gentes asperrimas vicit militibus sese imitantibus, ducentibus etiam exercitum legatis et praefectis praetorio, accepitque in deditionem Marcomannos plurimos in Italiam traductis. [22.3] semper sane cum optimatibus non solum bellicas res sed etiam civiles, priusquam faceret aliquid, contulit. [22.4] denique sententia illius praecipua semper haec fuit: 'aequius est, ut ego tot talium amicorum consilium sequar, quam ut tot tales amici meam unius voluntatem sequantur.' [22.5] sane quia durus videbatur e<x> philosophiae institutione[m] Marcus ad militiae labores atque ad omnem vitam, graviter carpebatur, [22.6] sed male loquentum vel sermon<i> vel litteris respondebat. [22.7] et multi nobiles bello Germanico sive Marcomannico immo plurimarum gentium interierunt (quibus omnibus statuas in foro Ulpio collocavit); [22.8] quare frequenter amici suaserunt, ut a bellis discederet <et> Romam veniret, sed ille contempsit ac perstitit nec prius recessit, quam omnia bella finiret. [22.9] provincias ex proconsularibus consulares aut ex consularibus proconsulares aut praetorias pro belli necessitate fecit. [22.10] res etiam in Sequanis turbatas censura et auctoritate repressit. [22.11] compositae res et <in> Hispania, quae per Lusitaniam turbatae erant. [22.12] filio Commodi accersito ad limitem togam virilem dedit, quare congiarium populo divisit, et eum ante tempus consulem designavit.

³⁹ Section 15.6. *vel certe per medicum Posidippum, qui ei sanguinem intempestive dicitur emisisse. Cassius post mortem Veri a Marco des<ci>vit; Marcus 24.5-25.12 24.5 voluit Marcomanniam provinciam, voluit etiam Sarmatiam facere, et fecisset, [24.6] nisi Avidius Cassius rebellasset sub eodem in oriente. atque imperatorem se appellavit, ut quidam dicunt, Faustina volente, quae de mariti valetudine desperaret. [24.7] alii dicunt, ementita morte Antonini Cassium imperatorem se appellasse, cum divum Marcum appellasse<t>. [24.8] et Antoninus quidem non est satis m<o>tus defectione Cassii nec <in> eius affectus s<a>evi<t>. [24.9] sed per senatum hostis est iudicatus bonaque eius proscripita per aerarium publicum. [25.1] Rel<i>cto ergo Sarmatico Marcomannicoque bello contra Cassium profectus est. [25.2] Romae etiam turbae fuerunt, quasi Cassius absente Antonino adventaret. sed Cassius statim interfectus est, caputque eius adlatum est ad Antoninum. [25.3] Marcus tamen non exultavit interfectione Cassii caputque eius humari iussit. [25.4] Maecianum etiam, filium Cassii, cui Alexandria erat commissa, exercitus occidit; nam et praef(ectum) praet(orio) sibi fecerat, qui et ipse occisus est. [25.5] in conscios defection<i>s vetuit senatum graviter vindicare, [25.6] simul petit, ne qui Senator tempore principatus sui occideretur, ne eius pollueretur imperium. [25.7] eos etiam qui deportati fuerant, revocari iussit, cum paucissimi centuriones capite essent puniti. [25.8] ignovit et civitatibus, quae Cassio consenserant, ignovit et Ant[h]ioc<h>ensibus, qui multa in Marcum pro Cassio dixerant. [25.9] quibus et spectacula et conventus publicos tulerat et omnium contionum genus, contra quos edictum gravissimum misit. [25.10] seditiosos autem eos et oratio Marci indicat indita a Mari<o> Maximo, qua ille usus est apud amicos. [25.11] denique noluit Ant[h]ioc<h>iam videre, cum Syriam peteret. [25.12] nam nec Cy<r>rum voluit videre, ex qua erat Cassius.*

⁴⁰ Section 18.1-3. **18.1** *Cum igitur in amore omnium i<m>perasset atque ab aliis modo frater, modo pater, modo filius, ut cuiusque aetas sinebat, et diceretur et amaretur, octavo decimo anno imperii sui, sexagesimo et primo vitae, diem ultimum clausit. [18.2] tantusque illius amor <ad>eo die regii funeris claruit, ut nemo illum plangendum censuerit, certis omnibus, quod ab diis commodatus ad deos redisset. [18.3] denique, priusquam funus conderetur, ut plerique dicunt, quod numquam antea factum fuerat neque postea, senatus populusque non divisit locis sed in una sede propitium deum dixit; Marcus 28.1-10. 28.1 Mors autem talis fuit: cum aegrotare coepisset, filium advocavit atque ab eo primum petit, ut elli reliquias non contempneret, ne videretur rem p. prodere. [28.2] et, cum filius ei respondisse<t> cupere se primum sanitatem, ut vellet, permisit, petens tamen, ut expectasset paucos dies, <h>aut simul proficisceretur. [28.3] deinde abstinuit vi<ctu> potuque mori cupiens auxitque morbum. [28.4] sexta die vocatis amicis et ridens res humanas, mortem autem contempnens ad amicos dixit: 'quid<d>e me fletis et non magis de pestilentia et communi morte cogitatis?' [28.5] et cum illi vellent recedere, ingemescens ait: 'si iam me dimittitis, vale vobis dico vos praecedens.' [28.6] et cum ab eo quaereretur, cui filium commendaret, ille respondit: 'vobis, si dignus fuerit, et dis immortalibus.'*

accentuate distinct features that illustrate the different authorial predilections (or opinions) in both texts. These examples provide a clear indication of the singular fashion in which both authors wrote about the same topics, despite the subject matter normally being the same, which is more indicative of their shared historical sources.

The presence of two death notices (Sections 18.1 and 28.1-9) in the biography provides another indication that the interpolation was inserted in the middle of the original text:

18.1 *Cum igitur in amore omnium i<m>perasset atque ab aliis modo frater, modo pater, modo filius, ut cuiusque aetas sinebat, et diceretur et amaretur, octavo decimo anno imperii sui, sexagesimo et primo vitae, diem ultimum clausit.*

28.1 *Mors autem talis fuit: cum aegrotare coepisset, filium advocavit atque ab eo primum petit, ut elli reliquias non contempneret, ne videretur rem p. prodere. [28.2] et, cum filius ei respondisse<t> cupere se primum sanitatem, ut vellet, permisit, petens tamen, ut expectasset paucos dies, <h>aut simul proficisceretur. [28.3] deinde abstinuit vi<ctu> potuque mori cupiens auxitque morbum. [28.4] sexta die vocatis amicis et ridens res humanas, mortem autem contempnens ad amicos dixit: 'quid<d>e me fletis et non magis de pestilentia et communi morte cogitatis?' [28.5] et cum illi vellent recedere, ingemescens ait: 'si iam me dimittitis, vale vobis dico vos praecedens.' [28.6] et cum ab eo quaereretur, cui filium commendaret, ille respondit: 'vobis, si dignus fuerit, et dis immortalibus.' [28.7] exercitus cognita mala valetudine vehementissime dolebant, quia illum unice amarunt. [28.8] septimo die gravatus est et solum filium admisit, quem statim dimisit, ne in eum morbus transiret. [28.9] dimisso filio caput operuit quasi volens dormire, sed nocte animam efflavit.*

The presence of two death notices in this *Vita* is quite unusual,⁴¹ which provides a further indication of the existence of an interpolation. When considering the other *Vitae* by the *HA* biographer this is clearly an exception to the rule (Table 2). The vast majority of the biographies in the collection placed the death notices either at the beginning or at the end of the respective primary characters in each biography.⁴² There were exceptions to this general structural style, such as in relation to the biographies of Avidius Cassius,⁴³ Pescennius Niger⁴⁴ and Caracalla,⁴⁵ but the placement of these

[28.7] *exercitus cognita mala valetudine vehementissime dolebant, quia illum unice amarunt. [28.8] septimo die gravatus est et solum filium admisit, quem statim dimisit, ne in eum morbus transiret. [28.9] dimisso filio caput operuit quasi volens dormire, sed nocte animam efflavit. [28.10] fertur filium mori voluisse, cum eum talem videret futurum, qu[ita]lis exstitit post eius mortem, ne, ut ipse dicebat, similis Neroni, Caligulae et Domitiano esset.*

⁴¹ The only other example of a biography in the *Historia Augusta* that possesses two death notices for the same individual occurs in the Opellius Macrinus (Sections 8/15 and 15/15). However the first reference simply states that he died in a revolt, whereas the details of his actual death were placed in Section 15. This is entirely understandable and further accentuates the unique structure of the *Vita Marci* in its current format.

⁴² Such as the *Lives of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Lucius Verus, Commodus, Didius Julianus, Severus and Antoninus Diadumenianus.*

⁴³ The placement of the death of Avidius Cassius is located towards the middle of the biography, but this was intended to provide greater opportunity for the *HA* biographer to praise Marcus Aurelius.

death notices are explainable because they worked with the general thematic construction of these *Lives*. The death notice placed in the interpolation, and its later inclusion within the *Vita Marci*, is also indicated by its connection to a direct reference to the Emperor Diocletian (Section 19.12), although it may be too speculative to date this passage on this basis (particularly in view of the numerous and disparate imperial references throughout the *HA* overall): *deusque etiam nunc habetur, ut vobis ipsi<s>, sacratissime imperator Diocletiane, et semper visum est et videtur, qui <e>um inter numina vestra non ut ceteros sed specialiter veneramini ac saepe dicitis vos vita et clementia tales esse cupere, qualis fuit Marcus, etiamsi philosophia nec Plato esse possit, si rever<t>at<u>r i<n> vita<m>. et quidem haec breviter et congeste*. All the same, these death notices provide yet another indication that the interpolation is present within the current text.

Table 2 – Death Notices and their Placement

<i>Vita</i>	Death Notice (Section/Total Number of Sections)
Hadrian	25/27
Aelius	4/7
Antoninus Pius	12/13
Marcus Aurelius	18/29 and 28/29
Lucius Verus	9/11
Avidius Cassius	7/14
Commodus	17/20
Pertinax	11/15
Didius Julianus	8/9
Severus	19/24
Pescennius Niger	5/12
Clodius Albinus	9/14
Caracalla	6/11
Antoninus Geta	Not mentioned (placed in the Caracalla)
Opellius Macrinus	8/15 and 15/15
Antoninus Diadumenianus	8/9
Elagabalus	17/35
Alexander Severus	59/68
The Two Maximini	23/33
The Three Gordians	16/34; 30/34
Maximus and Balbinus	14/18
The Two Valerians	Not mentioned
The Two Gallieni	14/21
The Thirty Pretenders	NA ⁴⁶
Claudius	12/18
Aurelian	35/50
Tacitus	13/19
Probus	20/24

⁴⁴ The death notice for Pescennius Niger is around the middle of the *Vita*, but this was intended to give the author greater opportunity for the author to establish his weak character. This biography does not return to a series of events after the death notice, unlike the current text of the *Vita Marci*.

⁴⁵ The death of Caracalla is placed in an early position so that the author could then provide many examples of depravity and corruption. This is also a noted technique in the biography of Elagabalus (Section 17/35).

⁴⁶ Owing to the rather anomalous structure of this biography, it has been excluded from this analysis.

Firmus, Saturninus, Proculus and Bonosus	5/15; 11/15; 13/15; 15/15
Carus, Carinus and Numerian	8/21; 12/21; 18/21

Finally, the inconsistent nature of the transitional passages in the *Vita Marci* (Sections 14→15; Sections 19→20; Sections 14→20) also suggests the existence of an interpolation. In Sections 14-15⁴⁷ there is a dramatic break in the dialogue, where the death of Lucius Verus is followed by an analysis of Marcus' freedmen, Geminus and Agaclytus. The connection in these topics is spurious, even though the author could have connected the two topics by mentioning that these freedmen originally served under Lucius Verus and that Marcus disliked them.⁴⁸ Sections 19-20⁴⁹ are even more apparent with the resumption of the analysis of the events following Lucius Verus' death, which directly followed on from the address to Diocletian. However, these disruptions in theme and topic are circumvented when the transition from Section 14 directly to Section 20 is adopted, which agrees much more satisfactorily on both a topical and stylistic level: **[14.6]** *denique transcensis Alpibus longius processerunt composueruntque omnia, quae ad munimen Italiae atque Illyrici pertinebant.* **[14.7]** *placuit autem urgente Lucio, ut praemissis ad senatum litteris Lucius Romam rediret.* **[14.8]** *bi quoque, postquam inter ingressi sunt, sedens cum fratre in vehiculo Lucius apoplexi arreptus perit.* **[20.1]** *Sed Marco Antonino haec sunt gesta post fratrem: primum corpus eius Romam devectum est et inlatum maiorum sepulchris. divini ei honores decreti.* **[20.2]** *dein cum gratias ageret senatu, quod fratrem consecrasset, oculte ostendit omnia bellica consilia sua fuisse, quibus superati sunt Parthi.*⁵⁰ Nevertheless, by removing these five sections from the *Vita Marci* it of course has a direct impact upon the thematic continuity of the biography in general.

⁴⁷ Sections 14.6-15.3 . **14.6** *denique transcensis Alpibus longius processerunt composueruntque omnia, quae ad munimen Italiae atque Illyrici pertinebant.* **[14.7]** *placuit autem urgente Lucio, ut praemissis ad senatum litteris Lucius Romam rediret.* **[14.8]** *bi quoque, postquam inter ingressi sunt, sedens cum fratre in vehiculo Lucius apoplexi arreptus perit.* **15.1** *Fuit autem consuetudo Marco, ut in circensium spectaculo legeret audiretque ac suscriberet. ex quo quidem saepe iocis popularibus dicitur lacessitus.* **[15.2]** *multum sane potuerunt liberti sub Marco et Vero Geminus et Agaclytus.* **[15.3]** *tantae autem sanctitatis fuit Marcus, ut Veri vitia et celaverit et defenderit, cum ei vehementissime displicere, mortuumque eum divum appellaverit amitasque eius et sorores honoribus et salariis decretis sublevaverit atque provexerit sacrisque eum plurimis honoraverit.*

⁴⁸ *Verus 9.3-6. liberti multum potuerunt apud Verum, ut in vita Marci diximus, Geminus et Agaclytus, cui dedit invito Marco Libonis uxorem; denique nuptiis a Vero celebratis Marcus convivio non interfuit. habuit et alios liberos Verus improbos, Coeden et Eclectum ceterosque. quos omnes Marcus post mortem Veri specie honoris abiecit Eclecto retento, qui postea Commodum filium eius occidit.*

⁴⁹ Sections 19.11-20.2. **19.11** *denique Antonino, cum suos mores semper teneret neque alicuius insusurrione mutaretur, non obfuit gladiator filius, uxor infamis;* **[19.12]** *deusque etiam nunc habetur, ut vobis ipsi, sacratissime imperator Diocletiane, et semper visum est et videtur, qui eum inter numina vestra non ut ceteros sed specialiter veneramini ac saepe dicitis vos vita et clementia tales esse cupere, qualis fuit Marcus, etiamsi philosophia nec Plato esse possit, si reverat vita. et quidem haec breviter et congeste.* **20.1** *Sed Marco Antonino haec sunt gesta post fratrem: primum corpus eius Romam devectum est et inlatum maiorum sepulchris. divini ei honores decreti.* **[20.2]** *dein cum gratias ageret senatu, quod fratrem consecrasset, oculte ostendit omnia bellica consilia sua fuisse, quibus superati sunt Parthi.*

⁵⁰ *Marcus, 14.6* Finally, they cross the Alps, advanced a considerable distance and concluded everything which was necessary for the defence of Italy and Illyricum. **[14.7]** Then, at Lucius' insistence, they decided that letters should be sent ahead to the Senate and that Lucius should return to Rome. **[14.8]** Two days after they had begun their journey, Lucius, sitting in the carriage with his brother, was seized with apoplexy and died. **20.1** But in relation to the deeds of Marcus Antoninus following the end of his brother, they follow: Initially, he took his body back to Rome and placed it in the tomb of his fathers. **[20.2]** Then he commanded divine honours for Verus. Afterwards, while giving praise to the Senate for the deification of his brother, he menacingly suggested that every one of the tactics that had overcome the Parthians had been his own.'

Therefore, at this point it is vital to analyse the amended structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* in order to consider its thematic continuity.

The New Thematic Structure of the *Vita Marci Antonini* and its Consequences

Once the interpolation has been removed from the current text of the *Vita Marci*, the thematic and stylistic structure of the biography seems much more appropriate for the general formation of the *Lives* in the *Historia Augusta*.⁵¹ The amount of detail included about the character of Marcus is more consistent, and it follows the general topical sequence that is implemented by the *HA* biographer: ancestry (1.1-10) → life prior to accession (2.1-7.11) → policy and events during his reign (8.1-22.12) → personal traits (23.1-27.12) → death (28.1-10) → events after his death and assessment of his life (29.1-10). For example this almost directly corresponds with the *Life of Antoninus Pius*, which follows the structure: ancestry (1.1-7) → life prior to accession (1.8-5.2) → policy and events during his reign (5.3-7.4) → personal traits (7.5-12.3) → death (12.4-9) → appearance (13.1-2) → honours after death (13.3-4). The most significant difference between these two *Vitae* is exhibited in the critical sections that are included about Marcus Aurelius (Image 8).

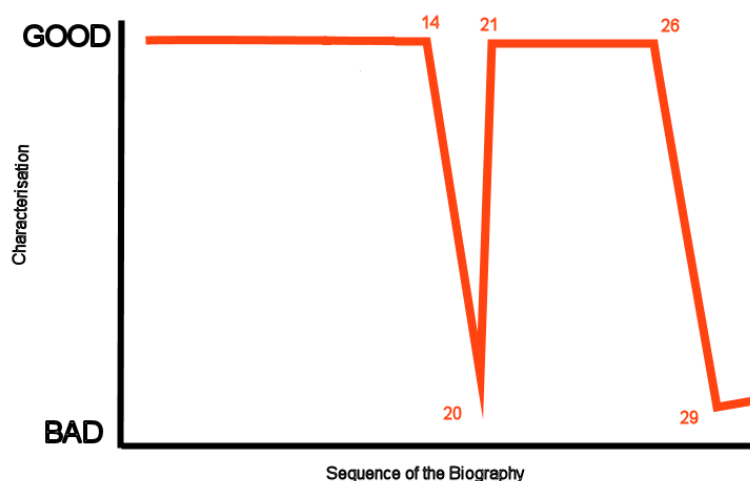


Image 8 – Outline of Marcus' Biography without the Interpolation

There are two sections that present a critical representation of Marcus Aurelius: Marcus is shown as desirous for glory and his good reputation, being pleased at the death of Lucius Verus, and being resolute about the marriage of his daughter Lucilla to Claudius Pompeianus (20.1-7);⁵² and his

⁵¹ The Thirty Tyrants in many ways is an anomaly among the corpus of *Vitae* in the *Historia Augusta*. Even when this biography is compared to the other multi-life biographies this collection of lives is quite unusual with the limited amount of detail that is included. This is probably due to the limited amount of available information that would have been available to the *HA* biographer, but even still it is evident that this biography does not conform to the standard construction of most *Vitae* in the *Historia Augusta*.

⁵² *Marcus* 20.1-7. **20.1** *Sed Marco Antonino haec sunt gesta post fratrem: primum corpus eius Romam devectum est et inlatum maiorum sepulchris. divini <ei> honores decreti. [20.2] dein cum gratias ageret senatu<i>, quod fratrem consecrasset, oc<c>ulte ostendit omnia bellica consilia sua fuisse, quibus superati sunt Parthi. [20.3] addidit pr<a>eterea quaedam, quibus ostendit nunc demum se quasi a principio acturum esse*

acceptance of Faustina's infidelity despite being publicly derided. While the inclusion of such criticisms within an ostensibly 'good' biography is not rare for the *HA* biographer, it is their placement that is quite unusual (Image 8). The inclusion of the rumours surrounding Faustina's infidelities and the ensuing public mockery levelled at Marcus in Section 29 is quite startling in view of the primarily positive nature of the biography (29.1-3): **[29.1]** *Crimini ei datum est, quod adulteros uxoris promoverit, Tertullum et <T>utilium et Orfitum et Moderatum, ad varios honores, cum Tertullum et prandentem cum uxore depr[a]henderit. [29.2] de quo mimus in sc<a>ena praesente Antonino dixit; cum stupidus nomen adulteri uxoris a servo quaereret et ille diceret ter 'Tullus', et adhuc stupidus quaereret, respondit ille: 'iam tibi dixi ter, Tullus dicitur.' **[29.3]** *et de hoc quidem multa populus, multa etiam alii dixerunt patientiam Antonini incusantes.* However, while this thematic structure presents a clear deviation from the thematic structure largely used by Suetonius, it was by no means restricted to the *Vita Marci*, with the *Lives* of Hadrian (Image 9), Pertinax (Image 10), and Clodius Albinus (Image 11), presenting a similarly negative representation towards the end of a fundamentally commendatory text. This furthers the suggestion that the interpolation should be removed from the *Vita Marci*, which otherwise presents an even more unconventional representation (Image 6).*

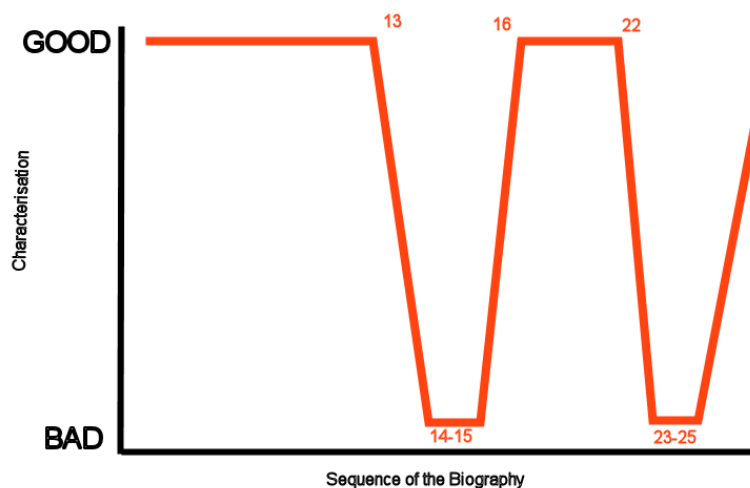


Image 9 – Outline of the Biography of Hadrian

rem publicam amoto eo, qui remissior videbatur. [20.4] nec aliter senatus accepit, quam Marcus dixerat, ut videretur gratias agere, quod Verus excessisset vita. [20.5] omnibus deinde sororibus et adfinibus et libertis <iu>ris et honoris et pecuniae plurimum detulit. erat enim famae suae curiosissimus, requirens ad verum, quid quisque de se diceret, emendans quae bene reprehensa viderentur. [20.6] proficiscens ad bellum Germanicum filiam suam non decurs<o> luctus tempore grand<a>evo equitis Romani filio Claudio Pompeiano dedit genere Antioc<h>ensi nec satis nobili (quem postea bis consulem fecit), cum filia eius Augusta esset et Augustae filia. [20.7] sed has nuptias et Faustina et ipsa, quae dabatur, invitae habuerunt.

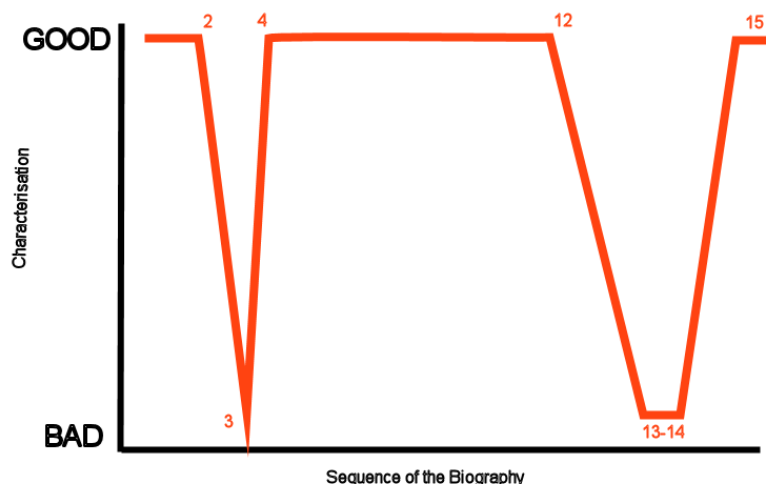


Image 10 – Outline of the Biography of Pertinax

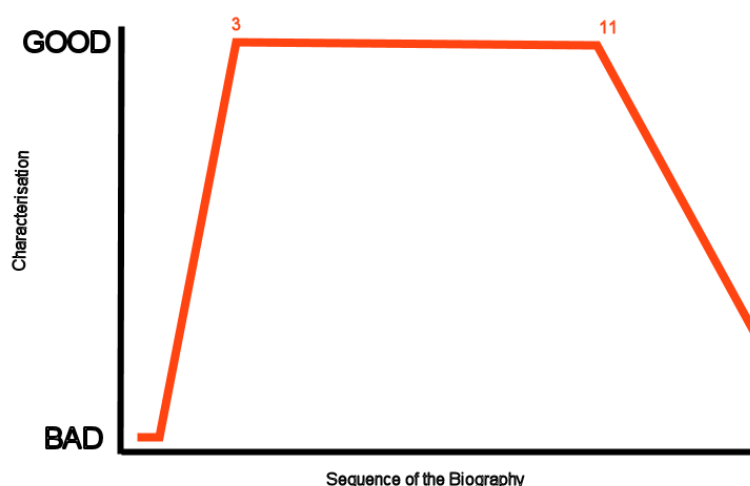


Image 11 – Outline of the Biography of Clodius Albinus

All the same, the *HA* biographer follows a largely chronological approach in general terms, where the themes expand upon the sequencing of events beyond the confines of the chronology by drawing upon other topics that confirm the characterisation of Marcus Aurelius. The themes expressed by the *HA* biographer are rather clumsy and obvious to their intended audience – aspects of Marcus' actions or persona are quite clearly 'good' or 'wicked' with often awkward jumps between theme, but this is significantly improved with the removal of the interpolation. Nevertheless, the authorial intent is self-evident: the *HA* biographer sought to characterise his various topics (in this case Marcus Aurelius) in a definitive light. This representation sought to emphasise Marcus' worth as a *princeps*, particularly in light of his Stoic equanimity, but also sought to mention that he was not 'perfect' by including some critical sections, which in certain lights may have been intended to illustrate that his accepting/philosophical character was derided among certain circles of Roman society at the time (resulting in these ensuing rumours about his marriage in particular).

Implications for the *Historia Augusta*

One of the most difficult aspects surrounding the *Historia Augusta* is largely attributable to the problems surrounding the manuscript tradition and the origins of the text itself. The differences between some manuscripts can be traced all the way back to the ninth century (where there were already two versions of the manuscript),⁵³ which further complicates the questions surrounding the matters of authorship and the time of composition. There were further issues that arose within the manuscript tradition from this time, which is clearly epitomised by such a large interpolation being inserted within the text of the *Vita Marci*. In addition to this there are of course the questions surrounding much of its historical accuracy, which has frustrated many modern scholars over the years. However, it must be remembered that this was not necessarily the primary object of the *HA* biographer. The author sought to characterise his primary subjects in particular lights (be they 'good' or 'wicked'), where they aimed to largely follow in the Suetonian tradition, but in a much more obvious (or perhaps clumsy) literary style. This is particularly evident in the *Vita Marci* once the interpolation has been excluded from the text. While the structure of this *Life* is certainly unusual, especially in relation to conclusion of the *Vita*, it is evident that the author sought to maintain a degree of thematic continuity throughout the biography that was intended to not only exemplify the high moral qualities of Marcus Aurelius, but to also represent some of his weaknesses.⁵⁴

All the same, while there are significant historical dilemmas when approaching the *Historia Augusta* there are still significant benefits that can be gleaned from this literary source. Firstly, as shown by the *Vita Marci*, the characterisation of these imperial personages by the author provide a significantly different representation than is provided by the other various sources, such as Cassius Dio, Herodian, Aurelius Victor, the *Epitomator* and Eutropius, owing to the greater emphasis upon personality rather than specific events. These biographies also provide an additional demonstration of the literary traditions during the later imperial period, where the attempts to continue in the fashion of the high point of Roman literature. In addition to this, the analysis of the *Vita Marci* has also illustrated the strength of the literary tradition surrounding Marcus Aurelius himself, judging from the textual similarities that exist between the *Historia Augusta* and the other third and fourth century texts. However, in this sense the *Vita Marci Antonini* provides an invaluable representation of Marcus Aurelius – while he is largely exhibited as a highly esteemed *princeps* for the vast majority of the text, his failings are also included by the author. Regardless of their historical accuracy, the inclusion of these weaknesses (which are largely not mentioned in any other ancient text) clearly exhibits the biographical intent of the author and the thematic structure of this characterisation.

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⁵³ D. Magie, *The Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Vol. 1, 1921, pp. xxv.

⁵⁴ It is important to compare this biography with the other 'later' sources for Marcus Aurelius, which often neglect to include any critical sections on him at all. For example, see the *Epitomator*, and Eutropius.