

libellus non tam diserte quam fideliter scriptus?

Unreliable Narration in the *Historia Augusta*

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Abstract

The primary question in considering the so-called *Historia Augusta* (late 4th/early 5th century) usually is the reliability of its account of the historical events of the second and third centuries AD. Thus the numerous contradictions and obviously fictional elements in this text have traditionally been understood as a sign of the author's incompetence or lack of skill. By contrast, the present paper aims at presenting these elements as part of a deliberate strategy that employs inter alia devices of 'unreliable narration', in order to produce a *frisson* of uncertainty in the reader and to demand a more active and discerning kind of reading. Pointing out the parallels to forms of narrative uncertainty in the ancient novel, especially in Heliodorus' *Aithiopika*, it is finally possible to draw some conclusions about a common audience of both genres in late antiquity.

Key-words

Historia Augusta, historiography, biography, fiction, contradictions, multiple presentation, unreliable narration, Heliodorus, Aurelian, Zenobia.

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Relevant publications:

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