undertaking. The scarcity of material from republican times hardly ever permits conclusions for the Empire, and conversely \(^3\). The author knows the dangers quite well: he has avoided drawing conclusions for earlier periods of Roman history. Sometimes it must have been an almost irresistible temptation to turn from the periods he has elucidated so convincingly to earlier times, e.g. in chapter 6. This self-restraint I admire perhaps most of all. He knows the limits of his evidence—which is the highest compliment one can pay to a scholar who seems to have been so completely absorbed by his fascinating subjects.

LEIDEN, De Laat de Kanterstraat 15b

W. DEN BOER


The ‘rogue scholar’ behind the HA continues to enchant Sir Ronald Syme and Sir Ronald Syme continues to enchant his readers. Compared with his former book (*Ammianus and the HA*, 1968) the study under review here can be characterized as a complement (not without repetitions) rather than a sequel. The book makes no easy reading and it is still less easy to criticize and evaluate it. Of course since its appearance the debate has been going on: in his minute review of *Emperors and Biography* in J.R.S. 61 (1971), 255-267, an acknowledged expert like Alan Cameron did not hesitate to use expressions like “not uniformly persuasive” and, with reference to the parallels with Ammianus, “less than compelling”. Nevertheless Syme seems to be superior to his opponents, at least as far as his approach to the problem is concerned. He has brought about a shift of emphasis, as a result of which the problem has by now primarily become a literary and not a historical problem to be solved by the erudite hunt for anachronisms. It may perhaps be stated that quite a few historians will be glad to get rid, at least partially, of the deceptive and misbegotten medley of something that turns out, after all, to be no history at all.

Syme deserves praise for the fact that he separates facts and fiction in the HA. Everybody knows, for instance, that the emperor Tacitus is represented, in the *V. Taciti*, as a wise and benevolent *princeps senatus*, who became emperor after a contest marked by good feeling and refined manners between the army and the senate of Rome. Syme advances the hypothesis that Claudius Tacitus was in reality the candidate of the Danubian generals and their armies

*Mnemosyne*, Vol. XXVII, Fasc. 4
and "a veteran survivor of their company" (ch. XV). The hypothesis carries conviction.

The same can be said of the method of research in general. Syme starts from structure and composition and ends up with authorship. In Syme's view there was just one author, who wrote at the end of the fourth century: a convincing thesis, equally convincingly argued. Even such a cautious critic like Cameron, who recently (Class. Quart. 18, 1968, 18) wrote that "the HA as we have it was not all written at the same time, ... and no theory that it was merits serious consideration", has been forced to make something like a volte-face on this point: "with Syme, I suspect, though would not insist, that there was only one author" (o.c., 255).

As to structure and composition Syme distinguishes between an early series of nine biographies down to Caracalla, that has been both abridged and amplified, and the later Vitae. According to Syme the V. Macrini indicates a new turn by its programmatic preface. After having completed the V. Alexandri the author may have stopped to write the 'secondary Vitae' of princes and pretenders. In the later Vitae the author increasingly takes pleasure in free composition and romanticism, the more so because of the absence of another Marius Maximus for that period. The 'secondary Vitae' present striking resemblances, both in composition and content, to these later biographies: the 'Nebenviten' are therefore central to the design. The design was both to continue Suetonius and to improve on Maximus (the improvement being the innovation of the biographies of the co-regents and usurpators) in order to amuse the reader with what Hohl (Bursians Jahresberichte 256, 1937, 141) called "ein Stück Unterhaltungsliteratur".

The combination of prosopography and nineteenth-century 'Quellenforschung' leads up to the conclusion that the HA is fictional history, μυθιστορια; it is the product of the creative genius of an erudite and humorous scholar, and a source of great fun for its creator and for Syme as the man who unmasks the rogue.

One point may perhaps be raised: it concerns the relation between the HA and Marius Maximus. Maximus was the well-known writer of a collection of biographies from Nerva to Elagabalus. His work has not survived. Nevertheless Syme ventures upon a description of Maximus' (lack of) qualities. He can do so on the basis of those passages in the HA in which Maximus is mentioned. On the other hand, his thesis concerning one primary source for the nine main Vitae from Hadrian down to Caracalla brings Syme into conflict with the traditional opinion that Maximus was the main source of the early Vitae. He solves the problem with the aid of the well-known device of a completely new, hitherto (apart from Barbieri