Introduction

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This is a volume about the culture of the Greek and Roman world in the period of the Severan dynasty (AD 193–235). Our intention has been twofold: to discuss aspects of the literature, art and architecture, and religious and intellectual thought of this age (a task which naturally involves examining material from before and after the exact dates of the dynasty); and to honour Ewen Bowie by asking former students and immediate colleagues to write on these topics. The Severan era forms part of the cultural movement known as the Second Sophistic, and most readers of *Severan Culture* will be aware of Bowie's signal contribution to the study of this area. There are few teachers who have produced more academic pupils than Bowie has, and although the cultural output of such a well-evidenced period of the Roman empire is vast, by selecting authors only from among the Bowie 'clan' we have been able to present a comprehensive account of the major aspects of Severan cultural life. It is indeed handsome testimony to Bowie's skills of judgement and guidance that his circle brings such expertise with it. And it is very fortunate that one of these former pupils has been able to publish the resulting book in his capacity as commissioning editor for Classics at Cambridge University Press.

Severan Culture is the first work to be dedicated to the culture of the Severan world and we hope that readers will be enjoyably informed and challenged by the essays we have assembled. The following remarks introduce the chapters, highlight and comment on their principal arguments, and summarise the main themes of Severan culture as it is represented in this volume.

The huge richness of Greek prose literature in the Severan era is well known. Making some overall sense of it is the job of Tim Whitmarsh in Chapter 1. With the exception of the jurists and Latin Christian authors Tertullian and Minucius, Greek was the language of literary composition. Whitmarsh begins by asking how far we should relate this literature to the influence of the Severan royals. Some authors did indeed have political connections with court – like Cassius Dio (who is treated in more detail in Chapter 2) – and others like Antipater and Philostratus were at times in the ambit of the court

(if we understand 'court' in a loose sense as something fluid and mobile). The fact that ps.-Oppian's poem on hunting – studied in Chapter 5 – is addressed to Caracalla may be felt to show that the idea of imperial patronage was accepted and that the claim to enjoy it was expected. Whitmarsh observes that the Severans were not the intellectual equivalents of Hadrian or Marcus. Nevertheless, the cultural interests of Septimius Severus' wife, Julia Domna, and what Philostratus says about them have naturally attracted attention. Philostratus' highly varied output (even verse, as we shall see in Chapter 4) and his comments on aspects of the Greek tradition and its standing have rightly made him a focus of current research (including a forthcoming volume by Bowie and Elsner). He claims exceptional intimacy with Julia and asserts that other intellectuals consorted with her too. Cassius Dio says something similar about her. Philostratus' dedication of the *Lives of the Sophists* to one of the Gordians shows that he clearly thought about patronage. But there is no evidence that the Severans influenced the type of literature he or other intellectuals produced. And Philostratus' ties with Julia are in the end difficult to pin down. Thus, for Whitmarsh, *In Honour of Apollonius*, which Philostratus claims was requested by Julia, should be seen as a product of his fascination with Greek culture rather than a reflection of imperial interest in the Apollonian legend (even if interest by Caracalla is attested). The same, Whitmarsh argues, goes for Philostratus' work on hero cults, *Heroicus*. This should be placed under Severus Alexander; but to argue, as one group of scholars has, that commonplaces in it about barbarians reflect the emperor's eastern policy is just wishful thinking.

Philostratus takes us to the heart of what Greek culture meant in the Severan age, a topic several of our authors come back to. This period saw some unusually direct claims about the superiority of Greeks – not over ignorant barbarians (as was traditional) but over clever ones. Whose civilisation was older? In his (probably) Severan history of philosophers, Diogenes Laertius insists that wisdom and the human race itself originated with the Greeks. Both Christians and Jews (cf. Chapter 21) were arguing otherwise at this time, and Christians, who had an uncomfortable need of the Jews to demonstrate their vicarious antiquity, were developing sophisticated chronologies to drive the point home, both before the Severan age and during it (Hippolytus, Julius Africanus). It is clear that Philostratus understood this competition well. In *Lives of the Sophists* he establishes what Whitmarsh calls a 'stemmatics' of Greek culture. In *Apollonius* he explores the antiquity and validity of Greek culture in a complex, self-aware analysis of Greek claims to universalism. In *Heroicus* a Greek and a Phoenician project a Greek tradition

which, Whitmarsh argues, is both 'an ecumenical heritage' and 'polemically Hellenocentric'.

Knowledge of the past empowered the Severan elite, and synthesising knowledge in encyclopedic works, including especially 'miscellaneous' collections which entertained and informed through *poikilia* (a term originally referring to a medley of colours, French *bigarrure*) is a feature of imperial period literature which continues under the Severans. Whitmarsh investigates this trend by focusing on the 'Book of Memory' by Ampelius, which may be of Severan date (but may not be). The work has a 'totalising' mission which provides much interest and distinguishes it from the *Historical Miscellany* (*Poikilē Historia*) of Aelian or the massive *Sophists at Dinner* by Athenaeus with their 'calculated disorder'. Athenaeus has also been a focus of recent scholarship. What his work tells us of Rome, where it is set, is open to interpretation; what is indisputable is its celebration of Greek culture, with a healthy dose of comic self-reflection. Aelian, though Roman, had immersed himself in Greek culture; but, unlike Favorinus from a century earlier, Aelian stayed Roman and we may assume that his selections of Greek anecdotes are what the Roman chattering classes liked to hear. They might be compared with Roman tastes in Greek art and myth (see Chapter 12 below), which were often no more Greek than Septimius Severus himself.

In Chapter 2, Harry Sidebottom offers a liberal and sometimes subversive treatment of any literature which comments directly or indirectly on the historical realities of the Severan age or on people's projection of the past from the Severan present. One problem he addresses is familar: we have no very good idea if works (including titles of lost works) and authors (including mere names) fairly represent the literary scene of the time. The most notable feature of what we see now is the virtual absence of writing in Latin (excepting technical and Christian outputs). Partly the gap is, Sidebottom observes, due to our lack of a Latin Photius or *Suda* to indicate what we have lost. Sidebottom wonders if the republican traditions of senatorial historiography had simply withered under the principate or whether Tacitus' *Annals* exerted a paternalist closure on composition in Latin. But implicit in his chapter is a better explanation: the sheer dominance of Greek, and the role of Greek as the language of higher culture. The writer of *memorabilia*, Serenus Sammonicus, the biographer of emperors, Marius Maximus, and the postulated authority on emperors from Nerva to Caracalla (Ronald Syme's 'Ignotus'), may be the extent of Roman concern with their recent and less recent past. Maximus' biographies of the emperors from Nerva to Elegabalus seem familiar to us because the late fourth-century author of the *Augustan History* used them. As Sidebottom notes, there is no reason to assume his citations are accurate.

Yet the *Augustan History* does at least suggest Maximus was still read (as its contemporary Ammianus Marcellinus also confirms), and its own fictional device of inventing biographers (Aelius Lampridius and his friends on the Severans) makes it plausible to believe that Maximus had not in fact been alone.

So much for Latin. The several Greek histories we know of came in various forms, from the 'universal' studies contained in the lengthy tomes of Asinius Quadratus' (lost) *Thousand Years* and Cassius Dio's partially surviving *Roman History* to regional works ranging from Athenaeus' *On the Kings of Syria* – apparently biographical – to Quadratus' *Parthica*, which presumably combined display of ethnographical knowledge (or fiction) with an account of contemporary Severan warfare against Parthia. Quadratus is often identified with a leading senator under Septimius Severus, just as Dio was in fact, and the relationship between writing and patronage and the promising subject material of an age of war is clear enough. There is no cause to disbelieve Herodian's remark about the prose writers and poets who praised Severus in flattering detail (2.15.6). Cassius Dio is quite open about works he wrote to praise the new dynast. A fellow member of the Greek elite, Aelius Antipater, no doubt owed his promotion to imperial secretary to his book on the emperor's achievements. His fate as a supporter of Severus' son Geta, when Geta was murdered by his brother Caracalla, is similar to that of Serenus Sammonicus (except that Antipater killed himself by starvation while Serenus was killed eating, *Historia Augusta*, *Caracalla* 4.4). Other authors politically close to the regime were more adept: Marius Maximus is probably identical with the senator who became consul ordinarius in 223.

It was the Greeks' political disunity, says Herodian (3.2.8), that had made them prey of the Macedonians and 'slaves' of the Romans. This remark is not simply historical: it comes in the course of Severus' *démarche* across the Greek world in the mid 190s. And if it seems quite unlikely that Herodian actually thought of himself as a slave of Rome, the remark counsels us against assuming a necessarily cosy relationship between elite authors (of whom Herodian was certainly one) and their Roman friends and masters in the Severan empire. Greeks were interested in Greek things more than they were in Roman ones. A large amount of their writing focused on Greek culture in its historical development, slanted towards present-day needs and points of view. The literary-historical writings of Philostratus present an authorised view of the Greek past-present (cf. above). Sidebottom suggests that Diogenes Laertius' biographical history of Greek philosophy, with its powerful stress on the antiquity of the Greek intellect, should be taken with the lost miscellany of 'great and remarkable men' by the (arguably Severan)

novellist Achilles Tatius (author of *Leucippe and Clitophon*), the *Historical Miscellany* of Aelian and Athenaeus' *Sophists at Dinner* as celebrations of the past in the present. Nor should we forget, as Sidebottom notes, the fictional Greek past that was interiorised by means of the education system and expressed in the continuing production of the historical novel (Longus' *Daphnis and Chloe* may also be Severan) and the world of Greek rhetoric with its stress on practice and display oratory located in a Greek world which was both 'past' and 'present' and excluded Rome.

Mastery of Greek culture guaranteed power and repute. For those determined to climb to the very top, demonstrating a mastery *over* Greek culture was even better. This theme is the subplot of Chapter 3 by John Ma, the first of three chapters on Severan poetry in Greek. Undoubtedly the master poet Nestor of Laranda in Lycaonia (modern Karaman, in the Karaman province of southern Turkey) was born a man of wealth and taste with all the refinements money and breeding could buy. His decision to rewrite the *Iliad* lipogrammatically made him famous in East and West. Had he stuck to his poems about the 'metamorphoses of plants and animals' (Menander Rhetor), such fame might not have come his way. But Nestor took his Homeric name – perhaps the Hellenisation of a Lycaonian one – very seriously. He paid the central figure of Greek literature the greatest complement of writing him again; but the purpose of the game was to show off *Nestor's* command of culture. The later lipogrammatic *Odyssey* by Tryphiodorus shows how clever he was. There were many responses to Homer in the Second Sophistic period. But the *coup de théâtre* of an *Iliad* missing successive letters in successive books was new. This is where Nestor took a risk. The testimony of inscriptions shows his risk assessment was good.

One of Nestor's backers, a magistrate of Cyzicus called Cornutus, is probably identical with a man who was himself honoured for nourishing the Muses and beautifying words, and the evidence shows an aristocrat with a developed regional profile. Cornutus' dedication of a statue of Nestor at Cyzicus would, he hoped, incite the local youth to *sophia*. Another statue base comes from Ephesus. If we think of what has been lost, it is clear that Nestor was widely honoured. He found a particularly useful contact in the daughter of a family which had produced 'mighty consuls'. Her name 'Sergia' indicates a connection with the illustrious, and super-wealthy, Sergii Paulli. Their most famous son was the proconsul of Cyprus who 'was astonished at the teaching of the Lord' in the Acts of the Apostles. The dedications by Sergia to Nestor and by Nestor of Sergia come from Paphos where St Paul met Sergius Paullus, and reveal a centuries-old continuity of landholding. Sergia, or someone like her, obtained Roman citizenship for Nestor from

the Severan royals. Lucius Septimius Nestor, as he was thenceforth officially known, advertised his Roman citizenship in a flattering text at Ostia in which the Dioscuri were kind enough to praise him in words which sound like Nestor's own. Indeed, a dream of Nestor's has been suggested as the source of the oracle, and this is likely: one of Aelius Aristides' foster-fathers reported 'whole oracles' from his dreams (*Sacred Tales* 4.54). Moreover, what deities did travellers by sea dream of? Nestor's contemporary Artemidorus, the author of antiquity's most famous dream book, notes that dreaming of the Dioscuri indicates 'men will escape all their terrors' (2.37). Nestor's Dioscuri reassure the poet and the world of Nestor's poetic powers. An over-lifesize statue from a library in Rome itself recorded the very number of volumes by the 'New Nestor'.

What does New Nestor tell us of the Severan age? Although we know nothing of the progress of his career, it is surely right to assume imperial attention-seeking behind, for example, the *Alexandriad*, given the emperors' obsession with Alexander and their eastern military designs. Nestor plainly thought bigger than Laranda – yet he was big enough to acknowledge the city as his homeland. As Ma notes, Louis Robert and others have commented on the surprising evidence for literary attainments in the region of Lycaonia, not least a sophist from Laranda itself. Yet, though it is quite likely that Nestor spoke Lycaonian when he cursed his slaves, the supra-regional Greek culture which was at home in Lycaonia, Rome, and everywhere was undeniably the most important to him. It is shame we lack information on the dogs and horses and carriages and houses and estates in Lycaonia and abroad – the things Philostratus' *Lives* illustrate so well – which would place this most famous Severan poet in the pattern of moneyed intellectual activity we rightly assume for him.

Egos of men like Nestor of Laranda were pricked by lesser – and funnier – poets such as those studied by Gideon Nisbet in Chapter 4. Severan epigram is hardly represented in the *Greek Anthology*, yet we must not imagine epigram ceased. Occasional poetry was an essential social attribute. Making memorably witty verse was a sign of *paideia*, that key word of the age which means displaying one's breeding in the way one walks, sings, eats, writes, and so on. Fortunately, three Severan epigrams are preserved written by two prominent members of the Severan intellectual elite, Philostratus and Fronto (of Emesa). Philostratus' epigram on a picture of the dying Homeric hero Telephus complements his *Imagines* and secures the identification of the author. The poem could even have advertised the book. Those who heard it would have heard key words of epigram, particularly erotic clichés, deployed for effect in the ecphrasis of a painting.

According to the Suda (*φ* 735) Fronto was in Rome at the time of Severus Alexander and also set up a school to rival Philostratus in Athens. Julia also came from Emesa, and Fronto's origin surely provided good access to the highest circles. His second poem makes pederastic jokes with a favourite author's plays, inventive misuse which *mutatis mutandis* parallels Nestor's, but moves at a *terre-à-terre* level. His first poem reanimates figures from ancient Persia (that is, the Persia of Herodotus and Xenophon's ever popular *Cyropaedia*), figures thoroughly familiar in the Greek education system. But cultural grooming was not the point: the fun comes in the names that make sexual puns or apprear in epigram as lovers' pet names. This is highly successful comedy and explains the survival of the verses. More important for understanding the subtleties of elite interaction is the clear intertext with a poem by Fronto's famous imperial predecessor, Strato of Sardis (probably Hadrianic), where Strato's erection flops in the face of an 'exceptionally willing' lover called *Philostratus*.

Mary Whitby turns to a very different genre of poetry in Chapter 5, but one still very much in the ambit of court life: the poem on 'hunting with dogs' dedicated to Caracalla by an anonymous author from Apamea on the Orontes and attributed in the manuscripts to the poet from whose work he borrowed, Oppian. The real Oppian had dedicated his didactic poem on fishing to Marcus and Commodus. Ps.-Oppian had a distinct advantage over his predecessor, whose 'Alexandrian' mannerisms and novelties he took further than many readers have cared for. Oppian could conjure up a picture of the aged Marcus fishing in an imperial fishery (1.65–70). But one wonders whether Marcus and Commodus took any more notice of the poem than they would have of the Christian apologetic dedicated to them by Athenagoras. Hunting was a quite different matter. The wealthy city of Apamea had an extensive territory. Emesa (modern Homs in Syria), the birthplace of several members of the dynasty, was not far up the Orontes valley. Maybe ps.-Oppian took advantage of an imperial visit by the hunting-mad Caracalla (Herodian 4.7.2, 11.9), such as the one he made with Julia in 215. A man who spent huge sums on 'beasts and horses' (Cassius Dio 77.10.1) might actually like a poem on how to hunt. His fondness for the mannered occasional poetry of Hadrian's freedman Mesomedes (id. 77.13.7) shows his taste. As Whitby observes, ps.-Oppian focuses on the hunter and his equipment, especially his horses (another love of Caracalla's). His fourth and last book on the hunt itself presents us with lion, leopard, and bear. This is the game emperors were after, particularly those who imitated Alexander, not the coursing celebrated in Xenophon's and Arrian's similarly titled books. Ps.-Oppian was writing for a big hunter: 'glorious bulwark of the earth, beauteous light

of the warlike Sons of Aeneas, sweet scion of Ausonian Zeus, Antoninus' (1.1–2).

Sport was another popular indulgence of Caracalla, and in Chapter 6 Jason König explores some aspects of the Severan era's attitudes towards the business of athletic competitions. Sporting festivals were an intrinsic part of the civic landscape. Their political function was well understood by the regime and there is a clear correlation between the routes of the Severan armies and concentrations of new festivals, including one-off celebrations of Severan victories. Philostratus penned a thoughtful exploration of athletic values in which he looks specifically at training and its perceived decline. König has successfully argued elsewhere (König 2005) that the *Gymnasticus* is a response to Galen's offensive criticisms of athletes. Here he proposes that Philostratus' identification of problems is part of his concern, as we see it in *Apollonius*, to realign received, traditional values at a time of change. For a man who was thinking about these things, it is not surprising that the dependence of festival life on imperial policy – what König calls 'the propagandist style of festival foundation' – threw up questions about the value of the culture. All Philostratus' works explore, directly or indirectly, the difference between good and bad traditions: König shows this well from *Apollonius*. He goes on to demonstrate a not dissimilar exploration of Hellenism in Aelian, since stories about athletes form one of several recurring thematic bundles in the *Historical Miscellany*. The difference between the two authors is that, far from neglecting the contemporary flourishing athletic scene, Philostratus' musings, unlike Aelian's compilation, presuppose it.

Philostratus partly uses *Gymnasticus* to argue in favour of the natural qualities of the human male body uncorrupted by the artificiality of training. In this he reflects the idealisation of the young male which continues to play a role in Severan art. The pederastic attitudes and practices associated with such idealisation also continued to be voiced in literature. In the next chapter, Judith Mossman studies the *Loves* ascribed to Lucian, but probably written in the early third century in imitation of him, which features a debate on the merits of boy and girl love. The work reminds us forcefully, that although serious, philosophical justifications of same-sex relationships had ceased in favour of justifications of 'conjugal' married love (and sex), the real sexual pleasures of boys were widely enjoyed. Mossman is, however, interested in literary, not social, analysis, and her study reminds us that smash-and-grab raids on the texts by social historians are liable to miss the crucial intertextual relationships such texts are built on. The setting of the work's framing dialogue between Lycinus and Theomnestus at a festival of Heracles turns out to be highly apposite: Heracles is one of the most

contradictory figures in Greek mythology, and even sexually ambiguous during his period of servitude to Omphale. In this part of the work we find a theatrical, comic escalation of metaphors and literary genres which undercuts any seriousness in the dialogue's main debate between the gay Athenian Callicratidas and straight Corinthian Charicles. Here, Platonic and especially Aristophanic echoes help to form a world that constructs not the Cnidus where the work is set but the Athens of literature, history, and philosophy. As Mossman unpacks the web of allusions behind this, she reveals a thoroughgoing engagement with the King of Old Comedy. Athens underlies the partnership between Lycinus in the framing dialogue and Callicratidas in the main debate and paves the way for the eventual verdict of Lycinus against the Corinthian Charicles and his championing of marriage. Mossman sees in Charicles' dejection ('like one condemned to death') reference to the end of the debate in the *Frogs*. Finally, she focuses on the function of Prometheus in *Loves* and his employment by Callicratidas to portray boy-love as one of the highest achievements of civilisation. In the context of the debate, Promethean intertexts add authority to Callicratidas' position. Yet nothing could be further from the high-toned discourse of the body of the work than the knock-about vulgarity of the closing remarks, where Theomnestus wants sexual action, not stories. As the pair drift off to the festival, Mossman rightly notes that the sufferings of Heracles re-enacted there recall his sufferings at the hands of women, suggesting again that love of boys is better. But the intertextual richness of *Loves* should alert us to the perils of making a serious purpose its primary aim.

In Chapter 8, Glenn Most turns our attention to techniques of allegory in the novelist Heliodorus, holding (as Ewen Bowie and the better sort of scholars do) that the greatest of the surviving Greek novels belongs to the early third century. Most sympathises with the idea that allegory is a 'mode of social accommodation' permitting social interaction through shared texts. It is a creative device going back as far as the Prayers in *Iliad* 9. For the Greeks this millennial heritage allowed the integration of allegory with the ostensibly antagonistic form that is narrative. After all, in the hands of skilled interpreters, allegory is always implicitly narratival. In the case of Heliodorus, and specifically the canny Calasiris, allegory is a story of restitution and restoration. The Neoplatonists' doctrine of emanations from the One and eventual return provided an obvious welcome for allegorical methods. It could also be inserted naturally into the narratives of separation and restoration that make the Greek novel. For Most, Calasiris is merely one example; in fact, the *Ethiopian Story* is shot through with allegorical interpretation, not in the sense of specific religious trajectories, but as a

reflection of the intrinsic form of the novelistic genre: 'The suggestion that Heliodorus' romance may have been intended as an allegory of allegory may seem a bit extreme. But is it not devoid of evidence.' Most caps his essay by observing that the hero of the book, Theagenes, shares the name of the very first allegoriser of Homer, Theagenes of Rhegium.

The last three chapters of Part One of the volume deal with Latin authors, the poet Hosidius Geta, and the important Christian prose writers Minucius and Cyprian. Philip Hardie considers the poetics of Hosidius' cento of Virgil, the *Medea*. Fortunately, Tertullian probably cites the work as contemporary in an outburst about heretics rewriting Scripture (*Praescript. Haer.* 39.3–7). Hardie takes his cue from Ovid's description of how Fama produces trivia in *Metamorphoses* 12. The cento as a literary form poses a problem to extremists who (in Hardie's words) set authors and readers in 'a drifting sea of fragmentary citations [and] uncontrolled referential relationships', for the cento is tightly controlled, indeed authoritarian, in its use of allusion, a healthy antidote to the 'carnivalesque dialogicity' of Bakhtin, or the anti-authoritarian intertextuality of Kristeva which removes the authorial voice. Yet we can have our cake and eat it: readers in AD 200 knew their Virgil so well that it is inconceivable that Hosidius' verse did not (and was not intended to) remind them of the original contexts it was mined from: Hosidius would hardly have survived otherwise. Hardie illustrates this by examining the first fifteen lines of the play. For sure, it would be hard to deny Hosidius his metapoetic self-consciousness.

In Chapter 10, Jonathan Powell considers a work which also pays tribute to classical Latin literature, Minucius Felix's *Octavius*. Minucius was identified in antiquity as a lawyer, though this may simply represent extrapolation from the language of the text, which reveals a 'milieu in which advocacy and oratory played an important part'. Whatever the dramatic date of the remembered dialogue between the pagan Caecilius and the Christian Octavius, it is now accepted that Minucius wrote it up after, and influenced by, Tertullian (whose thirty-one extant works were composed between 197 and 212). Powell suggests what he terms the blandness of the work is a deliberate disarming strategy – though others might find Octavius' virulent attack on all aspects of Roman society no blander than the talk of 'victory' at the end. Be that as it may, readers who picked up on the work's Ciceronian echoes would be conditioned into thinking Minucius is fairer to Caecilius than he actually is. Caecilius is given a sticky wicket: he is both made to deny certainty in matters divine and to uphold belief in traditional cult. And it might be noted that he is allotted less than a quarter of the work to do it in. Powell sees two largely lost Ciceronian dialogues as influencing the dogmatic direction taken