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SIGLE ȘI ABREVIERI / SIGLE E ABBREVIAZIONI*

ACO	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i> , ed. E. Schwartz, Berlin, 1914 sqq.
ANRW	<i>Ausstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung</i> , II, <i>Prinzipat</i> , Berlin-New York.
BOR	<i>Biserica Ortodoxă Română</i> , București.
CCL	<i>Corpus Christianorum. Series Latina</i> , Turnhout, 1953 sqq.
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i> , Vienna-Leipzig, 1860 sqq.
EAC	A. Di Berardino (ed.), <i>Encyclopedia of Ancient Christianity</i> , vols. 1-3, Downers Grove, 2014.
LCI	E. Kirschbaum (ed.), <i>Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie</i> , vols. 1-4, Rome-Freiburg-Basel-Vienna, 1994.
LIMC	<i>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae</i> , I-VIII, Zürich-München-Düsseldorf, 1981-1997.
MMS	<i>Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei</i> , Iași.
PG	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Graeca</i> , Paris.
PL	<i>Patrologiae cursus completus. Series Latina</i> , Paris.
PLRE, I	<i>The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i> , I, A. D. 260-395, by A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, Cambridge, 1981.
RIC	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i> .
RE	<i>Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i> (Pauly-Wissowa-Kroll), Stuttgart-München.
RGZM	<i>Römische Militärdiplome und Entlassungsurkunden in der Sammlung des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums</i> , Mainz.
RLBK	K. Wessel (ed.), <i>Reallexikon zur Byzantinischen Kunst</i> , Bd. I, Stuttgart, 1966 sqq.
SC	<i>Sources Chrésiennes</i> , Paris-Lyon.
ThLL (ThLL)	<i>Thesaurus linguae Latinae</i> .

* Cu excepția celor din *L'Année Philologique* și *L'Année Épigraphique* / Escluse quelle segnalate da *L'Année Philologique* e *L'Année Épigraphique*.

THE EMPEROR AND THE HISTORIAN: AN ANALYSIS OF ELAGABALUS' IMAGE CONSIDERING CASSIUS DIO'S TRAJECTORY AND POINT OF VIEW*

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Keywords: *Cassius Dio*, Roman History, *cursus honorum*, *Elagabalus*, *emperor's image*.

Abstract: *In the work Roman History (Ρωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία), the historian and senator Cassius Dio constructs a highly negative image of the emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (218-222), traditionally known as Elagabalus. This image of Elagabalus reverberated in modern uncritical historiographical studies and was passed down through a long tradition in a resignified form, arriving as a feminine and anarchic image of Elagabalus in artistic works. Knowing the importance that Cassius Dio's work seems to have had in the construction of the image of Elagabalus that will reach our contemporary times, it draws our attention to think about the relationship that Dio had with Elagabalus. In view of this, the objective of this text is to construct, as far as possible, the political trajectory of Cassius Dio, his *cursus honorum*, as well as to analyze some characters that he mentions in his work taking a prominent role in certain functions of Elagabalus' government. Having done this, we will seek to question possible relationships between Cassius Dio's career, his view on the rise of certain agents alongside Elagabalus and his highly negative construction of this emperor's political image.*

Cuvinte-cheie: *Cassius Dio*, *Istoria romană*, *cursus honorum*, *Elagabal*, *imaginea împăratului*.

Rezumat: *În lucrarea Istorie romană (Ρωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία), istoricul și senatorul Cassius Dio construiește o imagine extrem de negativă a împăratului Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (218-222), cunoscut în mod tradițional sub numele de Elagabal. Această imagine a lui Elagabal a reverberat în studiile istoriografice moderne necritice și a fost transmisă printr-o lungă tradiție într-o formă resemnificată, ajungând ca o imagine feminină și anarhică a lui Elagabal în lucrările artis-*

* This text was published in Portuguese as part of the book *Impérios, imperadores e redes de sociabilidade na Antiguidade* (CRV, 2023).

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tice. Cunoscând importanța pe care pare s-o fi avut opera lui Cassius Dio în construcția imaginii lui Elagabal, care va ajunge până în epoca contemporană, ne atrage atenția să ne gândim la relația pe care Dio a avut-o cu Elagabal. În acest sens, obiectivul acestui text este de a construi, pe cât posibil, traiectoria politică a lui Cassius Dio, cursus honorum al său, precum și de a analiza unele personaje pe care le menționează în opera sa ca având un rol proeminent în guvernul lui Elagabal. Făcând acest lucru, vom căuta să punem la îndoială posibilele relații dintre cariera lui Cassius Dio, viziunea sa asupra ascensiunii anumitor agenți alături de Elagabal și construcția sa extrem de negativă a imaginii politice a acestui împărat.

Introduction

In the book *Roman History* (Ῥωμαϊκὴ Ἱστορία), written in the middle of the third century CE, the historian and Senator Cassius Dio constructs a highly negative image of emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus (218-222), traditionally known as Elagabalus. Among the aspects of this image of Elagabalus, in the view of Cassius Dio, can be mentioned his wonton attitudes in various matters and activities presented throughout Book 80, the emperor's lack of clemency towards his enemies¹, his placing himself above titles granted by the Senate², the fact that Elagabalus refused to wear traditional Roman clothes³, to have placed the god of whom he was a priest, Elagabal, above Jupiter himself⁴, his breaking the law by marrying a vestal⁵, his femininity⁶, his various weddings⁷, his excessive homoerotic relationships⁸ and even a possible attempt to remove his penis and make a woman's vagina in his body⁹. A summary of the ruler's political actions can be seen in the following passage, written by Cassius Dio in a critical tone:

Thus, he applied to himself certain titles connected with his imperial office before they had been voted, as I have already mentioned; he entered his name in the list as consul in place of Macrinus, though he had not been elected to the office and had not entered upon it at all, as the

¹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.3; 80.5.1.

² Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.8.1-3.

³ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.8.3; 80.11.2; 80.9.2.

⁴ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80. 11. 1.

⁵ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.9.3.

⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.5.6; 80.13; 80.14.3-4; 80.16.4.

⁷ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.9-10.

⁸ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.15.1-4.

⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.11.1; 80.16.7; 80.17.1.

term had already expired, and though at first in three letters he had referred to the year by the name of Adventus, as if Adventus had been sole consul; again, he undertook to be consul for the second time without having held any office previously or even the title of any office; and, finally, while acting as consul in Nicomedia, he did not wear the triumphal dress on the Day of Vows.¹⁰

As seen, Dio realizes how Elagabalus violated traditional customs and granted political titles without having any trajectory to do so. The parts of Cassius Dio's work on Elagabalus must have been written between the emperor's death in 222 and the historian's death around 230¹¹. The elements of the portrait of Elagabalus constructed by Cassius Dio were quite possibly the basis used by the writer of the *Life of Elagabalus*, part of the *Historia Augusta*, a century later, and perhaps also influenced Herodian in his *History of the Roman Empire* – written a few years later – although there are differences in some details, in elements of literary style and in the focus given by each author¹². Together, these three texts are the ancient textual sources that we have on Elagabalus and each one, with its own particularities, provides a portrait of the cruelty, poor government, and debauchery that, in these writers' readings, surrounded Elagabalus' practices.

This image of Elagabalus reverberated in modern uncritical historiographical studies, such as the classic *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon, which portray the emperor as a debauchee given over to sexual pleasures. And through Cassius Dio's perspective, passed on to this entire tradition in a re-signified form, Elagabalus arrived with a feminine and anarchic image in artistic works

¹⁰ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.8.

¹¹ Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *The Emperor Elagabalus. Fact or Fiction?*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2014, 27.

¹² It is possible that there was another text on Elagabalus written by Marius Maximus which has not reached us, which had been used as a source by Cassius Dio, who was not in Rome at the time of the emperor's government. Herodian's text on Elagabalus, *Historia Augusta* and *Epitome de Caesaribus* are derived from this supposedly lost source. Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado, *Pseudo-eunuchs in the court of Elagabalus: The riddle of Gannys, Eutychianus, and Comazon*, in *Collected Papers in Honour of the Ninety-fifth Anniversary of Ueno Gakuen*, 1999. Accessed September 30, 2023. https://www.cambridge.org/gb/files/7113/6689/9908/8871_Pseudo-eunuchs_in_the_court_of_Elagabalus.pdf.

such as *Heliogabalus or, the Crowned Anarchist*, from 1934, by Antonin Artaud, which inspired several later artistic readings, such as the transsexual Elagabalus of the Brazilian artist Lukash in the clip *HÉLio-GaBaaLo*, of 2016.

Knowing the importance of Cassius Dio's work in the construction of Elagabalus's image, which would reach the present day, even when re-signified, calls my attention to thinking about the relationship that Cassius Dio, an influential and active senator and politician, had with Elagabalus. Therefore, following Fergus Millar, I affirm that Cassius Dio's political experience is very important for the study of his work¹³.

On the subject of the Senate at the time of Elagabalus, Dio (80.3.3) tells us that some Roman citizens who had never been to Rome had gone to the city to exercise traditional authority. In addition, Dio provides some information about people involved in Elagabalus' government. This information becomes especially interesting if we also consider that Cassius Dio was an *amicus* (advisor) at the court of the emperor Caracalla (211-217) in Nicomedia (77.17.13-18.1) and perhaps also of the emperor Septimius Severus (193-211), the two Severian rulers who preceded Elagabalus¹⁴.

At the time of Elagabalus, more than half of the senators from the eastern parts of the Empire, having been promoted to the Senate by the emperor¹⁵. Cassius Dio's work portrays men from the elite groups of the provinces during the period of Elagabalus: "[...] some of them, never before known in Rome, came to have the authority of tradition [...]"¹⁶. It is also possible to read in Dio about the entry of men without a traditional *cursus honorum* into the senatorial order at the time of Elagabalus:

[...] when the False Antoninus was wintering at Nicomedia; and there were many others elsewhere, as it was the simplest thing in the world for those who wished to rule to undertake a rebellion, being encouraged

¹³ Fergus Millar, *A Study of Cassius Dio*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1964, 7.

¹⁴ Martin Hose, *Cassius Dio: a Senator and Historian in the Age of Anxiety*, in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography*, ed. John Marincola, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2007, 461-467.

¹⁵ Ana Teresa Marques Gonçalves, *Heliogábalo: culto oriental e oposição senatorial*, *História*, 17/18, 1999, 147-158.

¹⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.3.3.

thereto by the fact that many men had entered upon the supreme rule contrary to expectation and to merit.¹⁷

In this context, the aim of this text is to construct, from what remains of the sources, the political career of Cassius Dio, his *cursus honorum*, and to analyze some of the people he mentions in his work who take on a prominent role in certain functions of Elagabalus's government. Having done this, I will question possible relationships between Cassius Dio's career, his view of the rise of certain agents alongside the emperor Elagabalus and his highly negative construction of the emperor's political image.

I should mention that in other studies, I have analyzed the importance of elements of gender crossed with aspects of Elagabalus's Syriac cultural identity, especially religious, in the depreciation of this emperor by the authors of texts such as Cassius Dio. I cannot help but wonder how these elements were fundamental in Cassius Dio's work and how he saw their reality considering a fourteen-year-old emperor from Syria who was highly devoted to the god Elagabal. However, in this text, I will try to reflect on whether, in addition to questions about Cassius Dio's own view of Elagabalus as a young, feminine Syrian, aspects of Dio's career, political strategies and Elagabalus's networks of sociability may have contributed to Dio's construction of a portrait of this emperor.

I'll begin with Cassius Dio's trajectory and *cursus honorum*, the path of titles and honors of Roman politicians.

Cassius Dio's political trajectory

Information on the trajectories of politicians and writers from Classical Antiquity is generally very confusing and controversial, and this is no different for Cassius Dio. The author's sociobiographical aspects are understood through an assemblage of data drawn from rigorous documentary analysis, with Cassius Dio's own work being the main source for his biography and his *cursus honorum*.

Cassius Dio (Δίων ὁ Κάσσιος) was born, possibly, between 163 and 164¹⁸, in Nicaea, an important city in the province of Bithynia. In the manuscripts of his works, he is usually referred to only as Dio. The

¹⁷ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.7.3.

¹⁸ Fergus Millar, *op. cit.*, 13.

name Claudius is attributed to Cassius Dio from a Greek inscription from Macedonia that bears the abbreviation Kl., which was read as Claudius by Alain Gowing¹⁹. In this inscription and in six others that mention Cassius Dio, the cognomen *Cocceianus* is absent. Gowing believes that this cognomen, attributed to Cassius Dio, comes from a confusion Byzantine writers made between Cassius Dio and the orator Dio Chrysostom, also known as Dio Cocceianus or Dio of Prusa. Because of this confusion, for a long time some scholars believed that the two characters were related. Perhaps the correct name of Cassius Dio was Lucius, an idea taken from the military diploma, in Latin, of a sailor in Misenus's squadron²⁰.

Cassius Dio's family was wealthy and influential in local politics; his father, Cassius Apronianus, was a senator, consul and came to be governor of the provinces of Lycia and Pamphylia, Cilicia and Dalmatia. As would be traditional for a son of the wealthy families who ruled the Roman Empire, Cassius Dio may well have studied in the province, perhaps completing his studies in Rome. According to the writer himself, he was already living in Rome around the year 180, at the age of 16 or 17, when Commodus (180-192) had become emperor²¹. Dio speaks of the Senate in the first person after the year 192, which would indicate that he was already a senator²². On this occasion, Fergus Millar believes that he served as a military tribune and quaestor, possibly in Greek provinces²³. There is little information about his links with the politics of Bithynia, which leads Millar to wonder, since the Greek senators of the second and third centuries played important roles in the politics of their native regions²⁴.

Dio's work²⁵ indicates that he was designated pretor in 194 or 195²⁶, or during the short government of Didius Julianus (193) or, even

¹⁹ Alain Gowing, *Dio's Name*, *CPh*, 85/1, 1990, 49-54.

²⁰ Anderson Esteves, *Dion Cássio: um historiador no reino de ferro*, in *Problemas de Historiografia Helenística*, ed. B. Sebastiani, F. Rodrigues Jr. and B. Silva, Coimbra, Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra, 2019, 195-196.

²¹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 73.4.2.

²² Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 73.16.3. Martin Hose, *op. cit.*, 462.

²³ Fergus Millar, *op. cit.*, 15.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, 9.

²⁵ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 74.12.

²⁶ Martin Hose, *op. cit.*, 462.

a year later in 194²⁷. I believe that the praetorship must have been assumed shortly before 194, because when Dio tells of events in 193, he already says that he had received this honor. Dio was *consul suffectus*, a substitute for ordinary consuls who died or were removed before completing their term of office, probably in the first years of Commodus' rule or already under Septimius Severus, that is, between the 180s and 190s. I believe it is more likely that his first consulship was under Septimius Severus, after becoming praetor, according to the traditional *cursus honorum*. Fergus Millar affirms that this consulship only took place between 205 and 206, and I agree. Furthermore, it is important not to think that Dio's rapid rise to the consulship indicated he had power per se, since power and status were different from public honors in these men's careers, and could be attained from a direct relationship with the emperor²⁸. In this sense, in the next steps of Dio's career, with his increasing proximity to the imperial environment, it is possible to see the historian rising in terms of real power, although Fergus Millar also comments that there is no mention by other historians of Dio's relations with the emperors, which does not demonstrate that he had great proximity and power. But, as his work may indicate²⁹, Dio was part of the circle of advisors to Emperor Septimius Severus, which was extremely important for his career because, as well as conferring a high status, it was a direct relationship of great power due to his proximity to the highest ruler in the Empire.

The imperial councilors did not form a properly constituted body, they were *amici principis*. Nor was there a standard meeting place for these *amici*. Augustus had established a body of members of the Senate in the role of *consilium publicum*, but this was abandoned over the years, appearing occasionally in documentation and over time. The emperor Hadrian made it a legislative body, Septimius Severus maintained it as a kind of governing council and it was later transformed into the *consistorium* in Late Antiquity³⁰. It is possible that there were three types of institutions composed of imperial advisors. The first would have been a senatorial committee created by Augustus, which disappeared years later, although it reappeared in the

²⁷ Fergus Millar, *op. cit.*, 16.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 24

²⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 76.16.4.

³⁰ John Crook, *Consilium Principis. Imperial councils and counsellors from Augustus to Diocletian*, New York, Arno Press, 1975, 1-3.

period of Severus Alexander's rule. The second would be the *amici principis*, a body of administrative advisors and men of the court chosen by the emperors to be always at their side. The third institution would be a legislative council which already existed during the Republic and became a salaried body during Hadrian's government. However, it is also possible that there were no differences between the second and third institutions³¹.

Therefore, the council of *amicis principis* was not an institutionalized body, but one of important men close to the emperor. Therefore, it would be wrong to represent this *consilium* as a formally established governing body with defined members, since informality was its essential character. Furthermore, the Severian period is one of the times in which these *amici* seem to have had the most influence and in which the activity of this council was most active³². Cassius Dio also indicated that he was close to Caracalla, even though he was critical of the emperor³³. Dio is present at the court of Caracalla during the winter of 214 or 215 in Nicomedia³⁴, although on this occasion, in his critical tone towards the emperor, he complains that Caracalla had few friends, no longer bothered to feast with the senators and spent most of his time with his freedmen. Therefore, as far as we can see, from Septimius Severus to Caracalla, Dio remained in the imperial circle, but seems to have suffered a loss of prestige in relation to Caracalla, which, in our reading, may have directly influenced his criticism of this ruler.

In 217, Caracalla was assassinated in a plot involving his praetorian prefect, Macrinus, who became emperor, ruling from 217 to 218. Probably at this time, Cassius Dio took over the administration of Pergamum and Smyrna as *curator*,³⁵ as Macrinus pointed out. As curator, a foreign official in the city in which he takes up the post, appointed

³¹ *Ibidem*, 2.

³² *Ibidem*, 85.

³³ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.8.

³⁴ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 78.17-18.

³⁵ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.7.4.

directly by the emperor from among the ranks of high-ranking individuals³⁶, Dio was responsible for overseeing and investigating the finances of the communities, complementing the power of the provincial governors.

In 218, Elagabalus succeeded Macrinus' short-lived government after a coup orchestrated by the army, according to Cassius Dio³⁷ or by Julia Maesa, Elagabalus' grandmother, with the support of the army, according to Herodian³⁸. It seems that Dio was not in Rome when Elagabalus began his campaign for imperial power, because he treats the Senate's decisions as if he were not part of them³⁹. From what Dio's own work indicates, at some point during Elagabalus' rule he was still in Pergamum and Smyrna, for the historian reports things about Elagabalus and says that he was in charge of these cities, from where he was able to ascertain the information he provides through reliable sources⁴⁰. Regarding the context in which Elagabalus' cousin is adopted as his son and appointed consul, receiving the name Alexander, which takes place in June 221 and has this explained by the apparition of the ghost of the Macedonian king Alexander, Dio says he was in Asia, from where he discovered the facts about this apparition⁴¹. Perhaps Dio was in his old post in Smyrna, appointed by Macrinus in the Province of Asia. In the years that Elagabalus ruled, from 218 to 222, there are no reports of Cassius Dio being appointed to any post. It is possible that during Elagabalus' rule, Dio was appointed curator of his home city of Nicaea, having spent most of the emperor's rule there⁴². However, there is no way of pinpointing this information from Dio's work or any other surviving source.

Dio mentions quite briefly that he was in Africa, then was sent as governor to Dalmatia and Upper Pannonia⁴³. It is possible that Dio was in Africa as governor in 222-223 or 223-224, and was *legatus augusti* in Dalmatia in 224 or 225, and held this post in Dalmatia in 225

³⁶ Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2012, 398.

³⁷ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.30.

³⁸ Herodian, *Hist.* 5.3.11.

³⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.2.

⁴⁰ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.7.4.

⁴¹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.8.3.

⁴² David Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay, AD 180-395*, London, Routledge, 2004, 163.

⁴³ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.1.2-3.

or 226⁴⁴. Paul M. M. Leunissen indicates quite different dates for Dio's positions in these three regions: 219 (Africa), 241 (Dalmatia) and 259 (Upper Pannonia).⁴⁵ It is not possible to specify the dates, but his narrative indicates that he received these highly important posts in the imperial administration under the government of Severus Alexander, although he had already died in 241, which Leunissen believes was the year he took over as governor in Dalmatia. Without specifying any date, Dio only says that:

Thus far I have described events with as great accuracy as I could in every case, but for subsequent events I have not found it possible to give an accurate account, for the reason that I did not spend much time in Rome. For, after going from Asia into Bithynia, I fell sick, and from there I hastened to my province of Africa; then, on returning to Italy I was almost immediately sent as governor first to Dalmatia and then to Upper Pannonia, and though after that I returned to Rome and to Campania, I at once set out for home.⁴⁶

Fergus Millar believes that these appointments as governor of provinces are the fruit of the return of power granted to the Senate by Severus Alexander after a discrediting of the body under Elagabalus⁴⁷. On the other hand, there is not the slightest indication that Dio ever fell out of favor.

In reference to the proconsulship in Pannonia, Dio mentions that the praetorians complained about it to Ulpianus, prefect of Severus Alexander's praetorium between 222 or 223 and 228, because Dio governed the soldiers of Pannonia with severity⁴⁸. The soldiers of the praetorian guard demanded that Dio relinquish the post for fear of receiving the same treatment, but Severus Alexander, instead of punishing him, honored him in various ways, including by granting him the consulship. Thus, in 229, Dio became consul for the second time, together with Severus Alexander, the peak of his career. At this point, for security reasons due to discontent with this position by the emperor, Dio was

⁴⁴ Anderson Esteves, *op. cit.*, 197.

⁴⁵ David Potter, *op. cit.*, 617.

⁴⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.1.2-3.

⁴⁷ Fergus Millar, *op. cit.*, 25-26.

⁴⁸ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.4.2.

advised by the emperor himself to leave Rome and exercise his consulship outside the capital of the Empire, but in Italy⁴⁹. In this same passage, Dio shows that he was very close to Severus Alexander, whom he visited in Rome and Campania. He doesn't say whether he was Alexander's advisor, but this passage about his visits to the emperor and the end of his work provides an idea of this informal role that he occupied once again, after having also been an advisor to Septimius Severus, to Caracalla and having lost that role under Elagabalus. This is how the final fragment of his work shows:

When the false Antoninus had been put out of the way, Alexander, the son of Mamaea, and his cousin, inherited the supreme power. He immediately proclaimed his mother Augusta, and she took over the direction of affairs and gathered wise men about her son, in order that his habits might be correctly formed by them; she also chose the best men in the senate as advisers, informing them of all that had to be done.⁵⁰

After that, around 230, already aged, about 66 years old and suffering from a foot problem, Dio retired back to his native Bithynia, where he finished writing his histories⁵¹.

The above dates are based on conjecture from analysis of the documentation, and it is only possible to pinpoint two dates in Dio's career: his stay as *amicus* at Caracalla's court in Nicomedia in the winter of 214/215 and his consulship in 229.

It should be mentioned that the career of a man in the senatorial order began around the age of 18 or 20 as a *vigintiviri*. The second step was usually to go to some province as *tribunus legionis*. Around the age of 25, he was officially made a member of the Senate as a *quaestor*. After that, he could become a *tribunus plebis* or *aedilis* and, around the age of 30, he would reach the rank of *praetor*, where he could attain various important positions such as proconsul in senatorial provinces, legion commander (*legatus legionis*) and governor of an imperial province (*legatus Augusti pro praetore*). After the age of 40 or more, the senator could become consul⁵². So to summarize Cassius Dio's career: he was born around the year 163/164; in 180, at the age

⁴⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.5.1.

⁵⁰ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* Fragments of Book 80.

⁵¹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.5.1

⁵² Géza Alföldy, *A História Social de Roma*, Lisboa Editorial Presença, 1989,

of 16 or 17, he went to Rome; after 192, at about 25, he is already part of the Senate as a senator; between the 190s and the early years of the 3rd century he became *consul suffectus* and then *praetor*; possibly under Macrinus (117-118), he became *curator*; in the 220s, possibly already under Severus Alexander, he was governor of the provinces of Africa, Dalmatia and Upper Pannonia and, in 229, he became ordinary consul (*consul ordinarius*) under Severus Alexander. As seen, Cassius Dio had an interesting *cursus honorum*, reaching the high post of consul on two occasions⁵³, and an impressive career as a politician.

With regard to his career as a writer, Dio himself says that it began during the government of Septimius Severus, having received encouragement from the emperor himself to continue writing. Dio affirmed:

After this there occurred most violent wars and civil strife. I was inspired to write an account of these struggles by the following incident. I had written and published a little book about the dreams and portents which gave Severus reason to hope for the imperial power; and he, after reading the copy I sent him, wrote me a long and complimentary acknowledgment. This letter I received about nightfall, and soon after fell asleep; and in my dreams the Divine Power commanded me to write history. Thus it was that I came to write the narrative with which I am at this moment concerned. And inasmuch as it won the high approval, not only of others, but, in particular, of Severus himself, I then conceived a desire to compile a record of everything else that concerned the Romans. Therefore, I decided to leave the first treatise no longer as a separate composition, but to incorporate it in this present history, in order that in a single work I might write down and leave behind me a record of everything from the beginning down to the point that shall seem best to Fortune. This goddess gives me strength to continue my history when I become timid and disposed to shrink from it; when I grow weary and would resign the task, she wins me back by sending

⁵³ Fergus Millar points out other possibilities in addition to these posts in Dio's career and cautions that only his praetorship, appointment as *curator* in Pergamon and Smyrna, and the second consulship should be considered to have correct dates. But Millar conjectures that between 183-188, he may have begun his career as a *vigintiviri* and then as a military tribune. Around 189 Dio may have become quaestor and entered the Senate. In 191 he may have become tribune. In 193 he would have become praetor, appointed by Pertinax, until 194. After that, Dio became praetorian governor, and was only appointed *consul suffectus* between 205 and 206. In 218 he became *curator* in Pergamum and Smyrna. In 223, he served as consul for Africa. Between 224-226, he served as *legatus* in Dalmatia. Between 226-228 he was *legatus* in Pannonia and, finally, in 229 he became ordinary consul.

dreams; she inspires me with fair hopes that future time will permit my history to survive and never dim its lustre; she, it seems, has fallen to my lot as guardian of the course of my life, and therefore I have dedicated myself to her. I spent ten years in collecting all the achievements of the Romans from the beginning down to the death of Severus, and twelve years more in composing my work. As for subsequent events, they also shall be recorded, down to whatever point it shall be permitted me.⁵⁴

It seems, therefore, that Dio's first writings date from the beginning of Septimius Severus' rule and were used to support the thesis of Severus' predestination to wear the imperial purple through dreams. Perhaps these writings were used to compose his *Roman History*, but they are not the first book of the history, and may be a separate work entitled *Dreams and Omens*, which, unfortunately, has not reached our days⁵⁵. After this, from the above-mentioned excerpt, Dio tells us that it took him ten years to gather material for his *Roman History* and another twelve years to write it, which would have resulted in a monumental work of 80 books of which, unfortunately, only fragments have survived.

Based on this, there are three perspectives on the dating of the project and the subsequent writing of the *Roman History* by Cassius Dio. The first perspective is that of historians who affirm that it took place between 194 and 219, the second advocates much later dates, between 212 and 231, while the third perspective, an intermediate one, affirms the years between 201 and 223 for the collection of material and subsequent writing. Anderson Esteves aligns himself with the second perspective, since he believes that Dio would not have had the freedom to write about Septimius Severus and Caracalla in periods before Severus Alexander, a period in which the Senate and senators gained more political prominence⁵⁶. I agree with Esteves and add that, especially in relation to the periods of the governments of Caracalla (211-217) and Elagabalus (218-222), to which Dio was quite opposed, especially the latter, he certainly could not have written his texts when they were alive and ruling. Remember that even though Caracalla was

⁵⁴ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 73.23.

⁵⁵ Ana Teresa Marques Gonçalves, *A noção de propaganda e sua aplicação nos estudos clássicos. O caso dos imperadores romanos Septímio Severo e Caracala*, Jundiaí, Paco Editorial, 2013, 143.

⁵⁶ Anderson Esteves, *op. cit.*, 199.

no longer alive, Elagabalus became his heir, even adopting his predecessor's name, as Dio himself tells us⁵⁷. As for the period of Severus Alexander's government, the memory of Elagabalus is condemned, leaving room for criticism from Dio, who was then a friend of the ruling emperor. It should also be mentioned that the end of Dio's work is from the first years of the reign of Severus Alexander, who took power in 222.

About Cassius Dio's career, Martin Hose affirms that: "His career stands in diametric opposition to the parts of his work that are critical of the Severans [...]"⁵⁸. I don't agree with this statement and I realize that Dio's stance towards the Severian emperors is directly related to the positions and honors he received during each government. That is, he wasn't against Severus Alexander, but he reached the consulship during his rule. He was critical of Caracalla, but even though he was part of the circle of imperial counsellors, he complains that the emperor neglected him and gave preference to the freedmen. He was governor of provinces, a friend of the emperor and consul for the second time during the government of Severus Alexander, whom Dio held in high regard, although he writes very little about this emperor because he was already at the end of his life when he took office, retiring back to Bithynia. Dio criticized Macrinus for the fact that this emperor, as an equestrian, was not a senator who ascended to the purple, but he presents him as a person who could have been praised above all men if he had not aspired to be emperor⁵⁹. It should be remembered that Dio was appointed curator of Pergamum and Smyrna, most probably by Macrinus. As for Elagabalus, the focus of this text, Dio doesn't seem to have received any office from him, and Dio also lost the post of imperial counsellor that he held under the two Severian predecessors, Septimius and Caracalla. As Dio was not in Rome during Macrinus' rule, he cannot have been banished from the city by Elagabalus as seems to have been the fate of during Caracalla's rule of Ulpianus, a jurist, member of Septimius Severus' council and *magister libellorum*. Ulpianus, however, ended up returning to high positions and proximity to the emperor during the rule of Severus Alexander. However, like Ulpianus, in my understanding, based on the evidence provided by Cassius Dio himself, the historian suffered a lack of prestige during the

⁵⁷ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.32.

⁵⁸ Martin Hose, *op. cit.*, 462

⁵⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.41.

time of Elagabalus, which, along with other reasons, certainly made him a great critic of this emperor.

Agents of the imperial environment and networks of sociability in the government of Elagabalus under the gaze of Cassius Dio

As someone who was close to the Severian emperors, Cassius Dio did not fail to criticize some of the people closest to Elagabalus, because, according to Dio:

Certain other men, too, were frequently honoured by the emperor and became powerful, some because they had joined in his uprising and others because they committed adultery with him. For he wished to have the reputation of committing adultery, so that in this respect, too, he might imitate the most lewd women; and he would often allow himself to be caught in the very act, in consequence of which he used to be violently upbraided by his "husband" and beaten, so that he had black eyes.⁶⁰

Of these men, the main ones were Gannys and Comazon, about whom there is very little information, but who had "participated in the rebellion" that led Elagabalus to the post of emperor and who Dio portrays as occupants of high political positions during his rule⁶¹.

Gannys appears close to Elagabalus even before he becomes emperor and arrives in Rome, still in Antioch and Bithynia, on the way from Syria to the capital of the Empire, and is said to be the *princeps'* right-hand man. Dio affirms:

⁶⁰ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.15.3

⁶¹ There is debate whether these two people; along with another called Euty-chianus, who is also mentioned by Dio; are actually a single person or perhaps two or three different people. Along with this, there is speculation about their social status (equestrians or freedmen) and whether they were eunuchs. This debate is presented by Leonardo de Arrizabalaga y Prado in two texts, a 1999 article published on the internet and its revised version published in the book *Varian Studies. Volume Three: A Varian Symposium*. Due to the nature of the sources and the fact that they are handwritten, the prosopographic enigma surrounding these names, as Arrizabalaga y Prado calls the problem, remains open. We will treat them here as three different names that appear in Cassius Dio's work and that, regardless of whether they are one, two or three different people, disturbed or had disturbed Dio in some way because of their proximity to Elagabalus and, therefore, the power they exercised.

He himself⁶², after remaining some months in Antioch, until he had established his authority on all sides, went to Bithynia, where he frequently employed Gannys as his associate in the government, as he had been accustomed to do at Antioch.⁶³

It is well known that Gannys was the general who commanded the troops against Macrinus to support the rise of Elagabalus⁶⁴. And in the first mention, Dio comments that Gannys had no military experience, as he had spent his whole life in luxury, perhaps a reference to his oriental origin, and it is a literary *topos* to think of Syrians/Assyrians as linked to luxury, effeminacy and excess. Gannys is a central figure in Dio's criticism of Elagabalus. Gannys is seen by the historian as a kind of adoptive father to the young *princeps*, his tutor and the most impious of men⁶⁵. Gannys was raised by Julia Maesa, Elagabalus' grandmother, and was considered to be the lover of the emperor's mother, Julia Soaemias⁶⁶. Therefore, Gannys came from Syria with the imperial procession – recalling that Elagabalus was fourteen years old when he became emperor and, because of this, he needed advisors by his side to rule with him, as well as his grandmother and, as Dio tells us, Gannys. Dio points out that, because of Elagabalus's age, he had the help of “only a few freedmen and soldiers and six men from the equestrian order and senators from Emesa”⁶⁷.

There is no way of knowing Gannys' exact social status among those mentioned by Dio. But, as we can see, Elagabalus doesn't have the support of the old Roman senators for his government, such as Cassius Dio himself, for example, but he does have Gannys, a man apparently unknown in Rome.

but because of his slaying at Nicomedeia at the very outset of his reign Gannys, the man who had brought about the uprising, who had taken him to the camp, who had also caused the soldiers to revolt, who had given him the victory over Macrinus, and who had been his foster-father and guardian, he was regarded as the most impious of men. To be sure, Gannys was living rather luxuriously and was fond of accepting bribes, but for all that he did no one any harm and bestowed many benefits

⁶² Referring to Elagabalus.

⁶³ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.3.1

⁶⁴ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.38; 80.6.

⁶⁵ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.6.1.

⁶⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.6.2.

⁶⁷ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.31.

upon many people. Most of all, he showed great zeal for the emperor and was thoroughly satisfactory to Maesa and Soaemis, to the former because he had been reared by her, and to the latter because he was virtually her husband. But it was not at all because of this that the emperor put him out of the way, inasmuch as he had wished to give him a marriage contract and appoint him Caesar; it was rather because he was forced by Gannys to live temperately and prudently. And he himself was the first to give Gannys a mortal blow with his own hand, since no one of the soldiers had the hardihood to take the lead in murdering him.⁶⁸

This passage indicates that while Gannys lived a luxurious life, prone to bribery, according to Dio he did not bother anyone and was very attentive to the emperor, which is even a contradiction, because if Gannys lived in luxury, there was no way he could have lived a moderate life and vice versa. Although this sounds like Dio was complimenting Gannys, I believe that the historian was trying to emphasize that Elagabalus was unfaithful, because he tells us that Gannys died by the emperor's own hand, since Gannys was trying to have the emperor live in moderation, which was not accepted⁶⁹. Thus, Dio does not seem to have had problems with Gannys, and did not see his actions towards the emperor negatively, although he was not a man from the traditional circles of Roman politics *per se*.

The harshest criticism is leveled at Comazon, who appears for the first time during the accounts of the coup against Macrinus⁷⁰. Comazon was a general, prefect of Elagabalus' praetorium and also consul; his name appears in the command of *Legio III Gallica*. Next, Cassius Dio tells us that Elagabalus had a governor called Claudius Attalus killed because he had offended Comazon⁷¹. About Comazon, Dio says that:

Yet this Comazon, in spite of having such a character and a name derived from mimes and buffoonery, now commanded the Pretorians, though he had been tried in no position of responsibility or command whatever, except that over the camp; and he obtained the rank of consul and later actually became consul, and also city prefect, and that not once only, but even a second and a third time – a thing that had never before

⁶⁸ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.6.

⁶⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.6.3.

⁷⁰ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.39.

⁷¹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.2.4-5.

happened in the case of anybody else; hence this will be counted as one of the greatest violations of precedent.⁷²

This criticism is quite expressive, given that Dio considered Comazon to be a buffoon without a traditional *cursus honorum*, having only made a name for himself in the camp at the time of the rebellion that elevated Elagabalus to emperor and who, as a result, received very high positions and a lot of power.

But Comazon remained alive after the murder of Elagabalus⁷³, becoming prefect of Rome immediately afterwards, which may indicate that he took part in the conspiracies for the assassination of the *princeps* and/or the rise of Severus Alexander as successor. Dio does not fail to criticize the fact that Comazon once again came to occupy a high position in the administration of Rome: “[...] for just as a mask used to be carried into the theatres to occupy the stage during the intervals in the acting, when it was left vacant by the comic actors, so Comazon was put in the vacant place of the men who had been city prefects in his day”⁷⁴. Comazon, therefore, must have been the only person who helped Elagabalus become emperor who survived his death, as Dio points out, although without mentioning this person’s name: “Such was the fate of Tiberinus⁷⁵; and none of those who had helped him plan his uprising, and had gained great power in consequence, survived, either, save perhaps a single person.”⁷⁶.

Although there is a debate about who were Comazon, Gannys and another person who will now be introduced, Eutygianus, I consider the possibility that they were not three different people. At least Comazon and Gannys appear to be different people, since Gannys was killed by Elagabalus and Comazon remained alive after the emperor’s assassination. Unlike the name of Gannys, there are three epigraphic evidences for the name of Comazon: the first mentions Comazon as a consul⁷⁷, the second, highly damaged, carries only his name⁷⁸, and the

⁷² Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.4.1-2.

⁷³ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.21.2.

⁷⁴ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.21.2.

⁷⁵ Referring to the body of Elagabalus thrown into the Tiber after the assassination.

⁷⁶ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.21.3.

⁷⁷ *CIL* XIV, 2809 = *ILS* 6219.

⁷⁸ *CIL* VI, 866.

third⁷⁹, in Greek, carries a request for good luck on behalf of Elagabalus and other members of his family, including Valerius Comazon⁸⁰. In other words, Comazon was extremely close to Elagabalus and received important posts from him, which is why he was highly criticized by Dio.

Another name mentioned twice by Cassius Dio as being among those responsible for the young Syrian's rise to emperor⁸¹, but in very lacunary passages, is that of Eutyechius, who gave people pleasure because he was a gymnast, according to the historian. Ursul Philip Boissevain tried to complete the gaps that speak of Eutyechianus and, since Gannys' name appears at the end of them, this scholar argued that the idea that Eutyechianus was called Gannys appeared between the lines, Gannys being a nickname coming from the same root as γάν(ν)υμαι/γανῶω, which means to become joyful, presenting the idea that through his art Eutyechianus/Gannys made people laugh⁸². In this text, I am not interested in whether Gannys and Eutyechianus are one or two people, but it is important to understand Dio's rhetoric as an effort to give readers the image that the men around Elagabalus were not capable of ruling, because they were nothing more than funny artists with no political track record.

Dio also comments on Hierocles, a slave from Caria who was Elagabalus' lover and was considered extremely powerful, even more so than the emperor. According to Dio, Hierocles had his mother brought to become a wife of senators, even though she was a slave. Hierocles died together with Elagabalus⁸³. Another of Elagabalus' lovers mentioned is the athlete Aurelius Zoticus, who was a slave or freedman from Smyrna. About this character, Dio says: "He was appointed chamberlain [πρόκοιτος] before he was even seen by the emperor, he was honored by the name of the latter's grandfather, Avito, he was adorned with garlands as at a feast, and he entered the palace illuminated by the glow of many torches."⁸⁴

⁷⁹ RA 46, 1955, p. 240, N° 260.

⁸⁰ Leonardo Arrizabalaga y Prado, *Pseudo-eunuchs in the court of Elagabalus...*, 12-13.

⁸¹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.31-32.

⁸² Leonardo Arrizabalaga y Prado, *op. cit.*, 17-18.

⁸³ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.21.1.

⁸⁴ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.16.3.

The historian Herodian, while not mentioning any of the names of the members of Elagabalus' court, gives the following perception of these men:

The madness of Heliogabalus increased to such a degree that he appointed all the actors from the stage and the public theaters to the most important posts in the empire, selecting as his praetorian prefect a man who had from childhood danced publicly in the Roman theater.

He elevated in similar fashion another young actor, putting him in charge of the education and conduct of the Roman youths and of the qualifications of those appointed to membership in the senatorial and equestrian orders. To charioteers, comedians, and actors of mimes he entrusted the most important and responsible imperial posts. To slaves and freedmen, to men notorious for disgraceful acts, he assigned the proconsular provincial governorships.⁸⁵

Like Dio, Herodian agrees that the men around Elagabalus were surrounded by artists and gymnasts, perhaps Herodian gained this perception from his reading of Cassius Dio's work. But Herodian, unlike Dio, doesn't seem to have bothered to emphasize this point or to name these men. Quite possibly because perhaps Herodian did not have the same difficulties with the new agendas and networks of sociability during Elagabalus' rule as did Dio, it seems to me. Herodian also comments that, given the emperor's young age, his grandmother and advisors were involved in political affairs⁸⁶, at least when Elagabalus took office, but he doesn't put this information in a derogatory light.

But even though Cassius Dio emphasized the non-traditional origins of the men who held important public positions during Elagabalus' rule and their unusual customs for a Roman politician, he presented this interesting passage:

He⁸⁷ also used to drive a chariot, wearing the Green uniform, privately and at home, if one can call that place home where the judges were the foremost men of his suite, both knights and imperial freedmen, and the very prefects, together with his grandmother, his mother and the women, and likewise various members of the senate, including Leo, the

⁸⁵ Herodian, *Hist* 5.7.6-8.

⁸⁶ Herodian, *Hist* 5.5.1.

⁸⁷ Referring to Elagabalus.

city prefect, – and where they watched him playing charioteer and begging gold coins like any ordinary contestant and saluting the presidents of the games and the members of his faction.⁸⁸

As such, Dio Cassius' view of Elagabalus' imperial surroundings is full of horror and disgust. However, Dio ends up realizing that there were senators who were also in this environment, as the above passage shows. Perhaps these senators were of Syrian origin, men, possibly of the equestrian order, who had risen to the Senate as beneficiaries of the Severian family. We mustn't forget that Dio, in a passage already mentioned, says that Elagabalus only had by his side freedmen, soldiers, six men from the equestrian order and senators from his homeland of Emesa⁸⁹. Or perhaps, as can also be assumed, Dio, for personal reasons, was diminishing the role of the Senate in Elagabalus' government. I prefer the first possibility, seeing it not only from Dio's personal point of view, who was distanced from Elagabalus' surroundings although he had been close to his family predecessors (Septimius and Caracalla). My choice to affirm that Dio was correct when he emphasized the less traditional origins of the men who were part of the cycle of sociability closest to Elagabalus is due to the studies, already mentioned in this text, which show the rise of a large number of Syrian senators in this context and the studies which sought to point out the little attention given to the Senate by the young priest emperor of Elagabal.

Finally, about Elagabalus, Dio also says that: "the circumcision which he actually carried out was a part of the priestly requirements of Elagabalus, and he accordingly mutilated many of his companions in like manner"⁹⁰. There is no way of knowing exactly who these companions were that Dio hyperbolically says were mutilated by Elagabalus in the rites for Elagabal⁹¹. However, it is possible that these men were the

⁸⁸ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.14.2.

⁸⁹ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 79.31.

⁹⁰ Dio Cassius, *Hist. rom.* 80.11.1.

⁹¹ It is possible that the rites for Elagabal, a solar deity, followed elements of the initiation rites of the priests of Cybele (the *galli*), as well as other deities such as the Syrian Atargatis (Lucian, *The Syrian Goddess*), which involved interventions on the genital parts of the initiate's body. There is no way of knowing for sure what these interventions meant, but it is possible that Dio exaggerates in these passages, presenting this ritual as a mutilation, the transformation of these men into women and

same ones that Dio refers to as members of the emperor's entourage who, possibly some of them Syrians like Elagabalus, could have agreed to practices such as "mutilation" in Cassius Dio's view. The historian thus emphasizes his extremely pejorative perception of Elagabalus' practices, which were followed by some of these subjects, all of whom Dio treated as being very different from men like him, a senator with a fondness for the more traditional elements of the Greco-Roman elites, at least in his discourse. For this reason, Cassius Dio's affirmations take on a rhetorical tone, aiming to show how Elagabalus chose to have by his side men who did not have the most traditional values and who were unworthy of the positions they had achieved, for all the reasons that have been presented.

Final considerations

As we have seen, Cassius Dio was outside the imperial environment during Elagabalus' rule, having suffered a kind of decline in his proximity to the high spheres of power and influence, which rose again with Elagabalus' death, the elevation of Severus Alexander as emperor and the historian's conquest of another consulship. Along with other elements, this may well have been the reason why Dio criticized some of the men closest to the emperor as well as the ruler himself. From this, I argue that Cassius Dio saw his position as senator and imperial advisor threatened by the new networks of sociability and new actors on the scene in the Rome of Elagabalus, and lost prestige at the imperial court, where he served as *amicus caesaris*. Men come onto the scene who didn't have trajectories like Dio's and for this were highly criticized in his text. Moreover, it is important to note that Dio emphasizes that these men are Syrians and are therefore feminine, exotic, unfit for office because, in his view they are marked by rhetorical exaggeration, they are not serious and lack dignity.

Thus, in my analysis, there was a direct relationship between Cassius Dio's career, his view of the rise of certain agents to the side of Elagabalus and his highly negative construction of the emperor's political image. This, therefore, was part of the historian's agenda, with

even the idea that Elagabalus wanted to be a woman and have a vagina (80.11.2; 80.17.1).

Dio's depreciation of Elagabalus being linked to the historian's personal interests as a man who had been extremely close to previous Severian emperors.

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