

Raglan Heroes in the *Historia Augusta*: A Supplement to Gregor and Hansen's 'Mytho-Historical Heroes'

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Abstract

This brief research note is an appendix to Kamil Gregor and Chris M. Hansen, 'Mytho-Historical Heroes: The Raglan Archetype in Application to Ancient Mediterranean Persons', *Literature & Aesthetics* vol. 34, no. 3 (2024), pp. 1–24.

Previous research has indicated that Lord Raglan's archetype of twenty-two points can be sufficiently applied to a great number of historical figures in the ancient Mediterranean. However, a noticeable absence from Gregor's and Hansen's research is the lack of interaction with the highly fictitious set of biographies and accounts in the *Historia Augusta*, and Zosimus.¹ Likewise, a more critical look at biographies of various philosophers is still needed. This present article seeks to supplement previous research with further explorations of the Raglan archetype in application to historical figures in the *Historia Augusta*. The parameters of point application are according to those set forth in Gregor and Hansen's article in *L&A*.²

Through a careful analysis of how two of the more prolific users of this archetype (the founder Lord Raglan and Richard Carrier) actually apply points to sources, Gregor and Hansen are able to produce a systematic way of applying each of the twenty-two points of the Raglan archetype while keeping intersubjective disagreements to a minimum.³ As such, until a more well-defined set of criteria for point application are forwarded, we can proceed cautiously through more sources using the Gregor-Hansen-Raglan (GHR) archetype criteria.

In what follows, I will provide readers with a compilation of more Raglan heroes that were missed in the initial overviews by Raglan, Carrier, Gregor and Hansen, and others. This should give scholars an even wider array of subjects to analyze according to these folklore mythotypes and archetypes. The numbering of the points corresponds to Gregor and Hansen, rather than to Carrier's alternative point counting.⁴

¹ Kamil Gregor and Chris M. Hansen, 'Mytho-Historical Heroes: The Raglan Archetype in Application to Ancient Mediterranean Persons', *Literature & Aesthetics* vol. 34, no. 3 (2024), pp. 1–24 only list Hadrian from the *Historia Augusta*.

² Gregor and Hansen, 'Mytho-Historical Heroes', pp. 5–13 for methodology and an elaboration on the scoring parameters for each of the twenty-two points of the Raglan archetype.

³ For examples of these intersubjective disagreements, see the differences in scoring the figure of Jesus: Richard Carrier, *On the Historicity of Jesus: Why We Might Have Reason for Doubt* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2014), pp. 231–32; Robert M. Price, *Deconstructing Jesus* (Amherst: Prometheus, 2000), p. 259; David Marshall, *Jesus is no Myth! The Fingerprints of God on the Gospels* (Seattle: Kuai Mu, 2016), pp. 28–41; Alan Dundes, "The Hero Pattern and the Life of Jesus," in *Protocol of the 25th Colloquy of the Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultures* (Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Cultures, 1977), pp. 1–32.

⁴ Gregor and Hansen, "Mytho-Historical Heroes," pp. 6–11.

Raglan Heroes in the *Historia Augusta*, and Zosimus⁵

Antoninus Caracalla: 1–2,⁶ 5,⁷ 8,⁸ 10–13,⁹ 15–16,¹⁰ 18,¹¹ 20,¹² 22.¹³ 13 Points. *Antoninus Caracalla* in *Historia Augusta*.

Antoninus Pius: 1–2,¹⁴ 8–16,¹⁵ 20,¹⁶ 22.¹⁷ 13 Points. *Antoninus Pius* in *Historia Augusta*.

Aurelian: 1,¹⁸ 4,¹⁹ 6,²⁰ 9–16,²¹ 20,²² 22.²³ 13 Points. *Deified Aurelian* in *Historia Augusta*.

Commodus: 1–2, 4–5,²⁴ 10–13,²⁵ 15–16,²⁶ 18–22.²⁷ 15 Points. *Commodus Antoninus* in *Historia Augusta*.

⁵ For the *Historia Augusta* I am using the Loeb Classical Library volumes 139, 140, 263. For the *Epitome de Caesaribus*, see Thomas Banchich, *A Booklet About the Style of Life and the Manners of the Imperatores (Epitome de Caesaribus): Sometimes Attributed to Sextus Aurelius Victor* (Buffalo: Canisius College, 2009), translation available online: <https://topostext.org/work/745>.

⁶ His parents were noble (father was Emperor and mother wife of the Emperor).

⁷ His adopted grandfather was the deified Marcus Aurelius, thus making him of divine ancestry.

⁸ He had a stepmother named Julia (*Antoninus Caracalla* 10).

⁹ (10) He came into his kingdom having originally been born in Lugdunum; (11) He defeated his brother, Geta (*Antoninus Caracalla* 2); (12) He married Fulvia Pautilla; (13) He became emperor.

¹⁰ (15) He passed laws; (16) He was betrayed by his people (*Antoninus Caracalla* 8).

¹¹ His death was foretold in prophecy making it mysterious (*Antoninus Caracalla* 8).

¹² His child did not immediately succeed him. As Gregor and Hansen, “Mytho-Historical Heroes,” p. 11 note, Raglan’s criterion is for strict immediacy of successorship.

¹³ There was a special tomb for him erected (*Antoninus Caracalla* 9).

¹⁴ Both of his parents were from noble birth, their ancestors being consuls and such (*Antoninus Pius* 1).

¹⁵ (8) He had a stepfather (*Antoninus Pius* 1). He was raised in childhood by his grandfathers (*Antoninus Pius* 1); (9) Nothing is known of his childhood; (10) He goes to his future kingdom, he was born in Nimes; (11) He defeated some enemies (*Antoninus Pius* 5); (12) Married Annia Faustina (*Antoninus Pius* 1); (13) He became Emperor; (14) His reign is consistently remarked as prosperous and good (*Antoninus Pius* 13); (15) He prescribed laws; (16) He did have to put down some revolts against him (*Antoninus Pius* 5).

¹⁶ His children do not succeed him as emperor. His adopted son Marcus Aurelius inherited the throne instead.

¹⁷ Temple was dedicated to him (*Antoninus Pius* 13).

¹⁸ Mother was said to be a priestess of the sun god (*Deified Aurelian* 4). As Gregor and Hansen, “##,” ## note, royalty is defined very loosely by Raglan and Carrier. High social station counts for scoring this point.

¹⁹ His birth and destiny as emperor are foretold in prophecy by his mother (*Deified Aurelian* 4).

²⁰ There is fear he might be killed by a serpent (*Deified Aurelian* 4). As Gregor and Hansen, “##,” ## a fear of a threat of danger satisfies this point per Raglan’s scoring.

²¹ Point 14: Despite having occasional struggles, the *Historia Augusta* describes his reign as peaceful (*Deified Aurelian* 50.5). Point 16: Revolts upturned his favor (*Deified Aurelian* 37).

²² Only had a daughter who could not succeed him (*Deified Aurelian* 42).

²³ Statues and a tomb were made in his honor (*Deified Aurelian* 36).

²⁴ (4) While in the womb with his twin, Faustina had portents that prophesied terrible things to come from their birth (*Commodus Antoninus* 1); (5) As the son of Marcus Aurelius, he was the son of a god, as Marcus was deified.

²⁵ (10) He was born outside of Rome but later came to the seat of his kingdom; (11) He sent many rivals into exile or killed them (*Commodus Antoninus* 4); (12) He married Bruttia Crispina; (13) He became Emperor.

²⁶ (15) Prescribed laws; (16) He quickly lost favor with everyone.

²⁷ (18) Several signs of the end of his reign were given, making it mysterious (*Commodus Antoninus* 16); (19) He died in the palace at his bath, which was on Palatine Hill (*Commodus Antoninus* 17); (20) No children succeeded him; (21)

Didius Julianus: 1–2,²⁸ 8–13,²⁹ 15–16,³⁰ 19–20,³¹ 22.³² 13 Points. *Didius Julianus* in *Historia Augusta*.

Elagabalus: 1–2,³³ 4,³⁴ 6–7,³⁵ 9–13,³⁶ 15–16, 18,³⁷ 20–21.³⁸ 15 Points. *Antoninus Elagabalus* in *Historia Augusta*.

Gordian the First: 1–2,³⁹ 5,⁴⁰ 9–13,⁴¹ 15–16,⁴² 20–22.⁴³ 13 Points. *The Three Gordians* in *Historia Augusta*.

Gordian the Second: 1–2,⁴⁴ 4–5,⁴⁵ 9–11,⁴⁶ 13, 15–16,⁴⁷ 20–22.⁴⁸ 12 Points. *The Three Gordians* in *Historia Augusta*.

At first it was not buried; (22) Later it was placed in the Mausoleum of Hadrian by Pertinax (*Commodus Antoninus* 17).

²⁸ His parents were both of nobility (*Didius Julianus* 1).

²⁹ (8) He was fostered by Domitia Lucilla (*Didius Julianus* 1); (9) Nothing is said of his childhood; (10) He was born in Milan but later came to be raised in Rome, the seat of his future kingdom; (11) He defeated Sulpicianus for the throne by outsmarting him (*Didius Julianus* 2); (12) He married Manlia Scantilla; (13) He became Emperor.

³⁰ (15) He prescribed laws; (16) He was plotted against and the people hated him (*Didius Julianus* 3).

³¹ (19) He died in the palace on Palatine Hill (*Didius Julianus* 8); (20) His children did not succeed him.

³² (22) He was buried in a family tomb (*Didius Julianus* 8).

³³ (1) Mother was a noblewoman; (2) Father was reputed to be the emperor (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 1–2).

³⁴ (4) The circumstances of his conception are mysterious because of his mother's supposed lewdness and proclivity for having many sexual partners, meaning his father could be multiple people (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 2). His schoolmates called him "Varius" because he stemmed from the seed of many fathers (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 2).

³⁵ (6) There is fear that he would be killed by Macrinus (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 2); (7) He flees back to Syria and becomes a priest of the Temple of Elagabalus seeking refuge in the safety of the sanctuary (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 2).

³⁶ (9) Virtually nothing of childhood is known; (10) He returns to his kingdom; (11) He killed people including in human sacrifice (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 8); (12) He had several wives and partners; (13) He became Emperor.

³⁷ (18) His death was prophesied by priests and oracles (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 33).

³⁸ (20) No children to succeed him; (21) His body was thrown in the Tiber (*Antoninus Elagabalus* 17).

³⁹ His father was of the line of the Gracchi and his mother was a descendant of Trajan (*The Three Gordians* 2).

⁴⁰ Because he was lineal descendant of Trajan, he was also of divine ancestry as Trajan was deified (*The Three Gordians* 2).

⁴¹ (9) Nothing is known of his childhood; (10) He went to Africa as proconsul and later returned to the seat of his kingdom (*The Three Gordians* 5); (11) He defeated opponents; (12) He married a woman whose family had been of consular rank; (13) He became Emperor.

⁴² (15) Prescribed laws; (16) Was immediately rebelled against by coconspirators of Thrax.

⁴³ (20) His son did not succeed him, he was only co-emperor and died prior to Gordian the Elder; (21) There is no evidence he was buried in the *Historia Augusta*; (22) He and his son were worshiped among the gods, and statues were made of them. The house of the Gordians also persisted as a testament to them.

⁴⁴ His father and mother were emperor and empress, and of high station (see above).

⁴⁵ (4) At his nativity his father had an astrologer predict his son's future and so it was shown by signs and portents he would be great (*The Three Gordians* 20); (5) His father was made divine, making him the son of a god (*The Three Gordians* 16).

⁴⁶ (9) Not much is known of his childhood; (10) He later came to his future kingdom of Rome; (11) He ousted Maximus Thrax with his father.

⁴⁷ (15) Prescribed laws; (16) Was immediately rebelled against by coconspirators of Thrax.

⁴⁸ (20) His children did not succeed him; (21) His body was never recovered (*The Three Gordians* 16); (22) He was made a deity, and also the Gordian house still stood as a testament to him.

Gordian the Third: 1–2,⁴⁹ 4–5,⁵⁰ 10–13,⁵¹ 15–18,⁵² 20, 22.⁵³ 14 Points. *The Three Gordians* in *Historia Augusta*. We might take (4) as more disputable and rank him at 13 if arduously stringent.

Pertinax: 4,⁵⁴ 9–13,⁵⁵ 15–16,⁵⁶ 18–22.⁵⁷ 13 Points. *Pertinax* in *Historia Augusta*.

Probus: 1–2,⁵⁸ 5,⁵⁹ 9–13,⁶⁰ 15, 16, 19,⁶¹ 20,⁶² 22.⁶³ 13 Points. *Probus* in *Historia Augusta* and Zosimus, *Historia Nova*.

⁴⁹ His father was rumored to be Gordian II (*The Three Gordians* 22) and his mother was said to be the daughter of Gordian I (*The Three Gordians* 22) and so Gordian II's nephew.

⁵⁰ (4) Because his parentage is disputed, the circumstances of his conception are mysterious; (5) As he was rumored to be the son of Gordian II and was a descendant of Gordian I, this made him of divine ancestry.

⁵¹ (10) Came into his kingdom; (11) He defeated (with the aid of others) some enemies; (12) He married Tranquillina; (13) He became Emperor.

⁵² (15) He prescribed laws; (16) Had rebellions against him (*The Three Gordians* 23); (17) He was driven from his throne by Philip the Arab; (18) His death was shrouded in mystery by different accounts, including by Philip the Arab trying to obscure it (*The Three Gordians* 31).

⁵³ He was worshiped by his soldiers and the house of the Gordians still stood as a testament to them (*The Three Gordians* 31–32). They also built him a tomb (*The Three Gordians* 34).

⁵⁴ His birth was accompanied by a prophetic omen of a horse dying (*Pertinax* 1).

⁵⁵ (9) Basically nothing is said of his childhood; (10) He goes to Syria first and then later becomes Emperor and goes to Rome (*Pertinax* 1); (11) He defeats some enemies and gains notoriety (*Pertinax* 1); (12) He married Flavia Titiana; (13) He briefly becomes Emperor.

⁵⁶ (15) Prescribed laws; (16) He was quickly unpopular and plots were hatched against him (*Pertinax* 10).

⁵⁷ (18) There were signs and portents of his impending death (*Pertinax* 14); (19) He died at the capitol on Palatine Hill; (20) His children did not succeed him; (21) His body was not immediately buried but instead his head was put on a pike and paraded around the city, and his body laid unburied until his successor found it (*Pertinax* 14); (22) He was subsequently buried in a tomb (*Pertinax* 14).

⁵⁸ Father was a man of somewhat noble character, rose through the Roman ranks, and achieved a tribuneship (*Probus* 3), thus, is of notable social standing. His mother was of somewhat noble birth (*Probus* 3).

⁵⁹ He was said to be a descendant or relative of the deified Claudius (*Probus* 3).

⁶⁰ (9) Virtually nothing is known of his childhood. Just letters praising him as having been a great youth (*Probus* 3–4); (10) He was born outside Rome in Pannonia and later came to his kingdom (*Probus* 3); (11) Zosimus, *Historia Nova* 1.32 defeated those who had killed Tacitus; (12) He married and had descendants.

⁶¹ Probus died in a tower at a “great height” (*Probus* 21).

⁶² His children did not succeed him.

⁶³ There were items made to venerate him, such as a portrait through which omens portending the future generations of his family was important, as was a mighty tomb in his honor (*Probus* 21, 23).

Pupienus Maximus: 4,⁶⁴ 8–13,⁶⁵ 15–17,⁶⁶ 19–21.⁶⁷ 13 Points. *Maximus and Balbinus* in *Historia Augusta*.

Septimius Severus: 1–2,⁶⁸ 9–13,⁶⁹ 15–16,⁷⁰ 18,⁷¹ 21–22.⁷² 12 Points. *Septimius Severus* in *Historia Augusta*.

Tacitus (Emperor): 9, 10–11, 13–16,⁷³ 18–22.⁷⁴ 12 Points. *Tacitus* in *Historia Augusta*.

Verus: 1–2,⁷⁵ 5,⁷⁶ 8,⁷⁷ 10–13,⁷⁸ 15–16,⁷⁹ 18,⁸⁰ 20,⁸¹ 22.⁸² 13 Points. *Verus* in *Historia Augusta*.

⁶⁴ At his birth there is a sign and omen of his future from an eagle (*Maximus and Balbinus* 5).

⁶⁵ (8) He was raised by his kinsman, Pinarius and was formally adopted by Pescennia Marcellina who “adopted and supported him as a son” (*Maximus and Balbinus* 5); (9) Almost nothing is known of childhood; (10) He first went away to other regions to serve as Praetor in Bithynia and other places, before coming to the seat of his kingdom, Rome; (11) He was victorious over the Germans and Sarmatians; (12) He was married and had children; (13) He became Emperor.

⁶⁶ (15) Prescribed laws; (16) Lost favor with his subjects and Balbinus his co-emperor; (17) He was drug out of the palace and from his “throne” and then butchered in the streets of Rome (*Maximus and Balbinus* 14).

⁶⁷ (19) He was butchered in Rome, which was built on seven hills, famously; (20) His children did not succeed him; (21) He was not buried, but left in the streets; (22) Statue was made in his honor which survives to this day.

⁶⁸ His parents were of noble stock, specifically of the equestrian order (*Septimius Severus* 1).

⁶⁹ (9) Virtually nothing is said of his childhood; (10) He was born in Africa (*Septimius Severus* 1) and then goes to his future kingdom; (11) He defeated his rival Julianus (*Septimius Severus* 1); (12) He took two wives including Julia Domna; (13) He became Emperor.

⁷⁰ (15) He prescribed laws; (16) He had to put down rivals like Niger and Albinus (*Septimius Severus* 6–14).

⁷¹ His death was met by several signs and portents making it mysterious (*Septimius Severus* 22).

⁷² (21) He was cremated twice; (22) His ashes were placed in a tomb (*Septimius Severus* 24 for both).

⁷³ He was “crushed by plots” against him (*Tacitus* 13).

⁷⁴ (18) Met a mysterious death with many portents (*Tacitus* 17); (19) He died at Tyana which according to the Hittite descriptions was initially built on a hill, see J. D. Mouton, “Tuwanuwa,” in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie*, ed. Michael P. Streck, et. al., Vol. 14 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 248–49; (20) His children did not succeed him despite him having many (*Tacitus* 16); (21) No burial or tomb is mentioned in the *Historia Augusta*. As such, his body is as good as missing, which satisfies Carrier’s own limitations on this, see Gregor and Hansen, “Mytho-Historical Heroes,” p. 11; (22) A portrait and other venerative icons were made of him (*Tacitus* 15).

⁷⁵ His mother was Avidia and a noble, and his father was the adopted son of Hadrian, and ancestors of noble heritage (*Verus* 1).

⁷⁶ He was called the “son of Augustus,” who was deified, see *Verus* 3.

⁷⁷ He was adopted at age 8 by Antoninus Pius (*Verus* 1–2).

⁷⁸ (10) Left for Syria (*Verus* 4) but returned later and became Emperor; (11) Defeated enemies in Parthia and elsewhere; (12) Married Annia Lucilla, daughter of Marcus Aurelius (literal princess); (13) Became Roman co-Emperor.

⁷⁹ (15) He prescribed laws as Emperor; (16) Rumor that he lost the love of Marcus Aurelius who tried to have him killed.

⁸⁰ His death is mysterious; some say Marcus Aurelius poisoned him while others say he died of disease; others suggested that his mother-in-law killed him to hide an incestuous affair with him; others blamed Verus’ wife for his death (*Verus* 10–11).

⁸¹ His children did not succeed him as Emperor. Marcus Aurelius’ son Commodus became Emperor.

⁸² He was buried in the Tomb of Hadrian (*Verus* 11).

The consistent ability for the GHR model to continue consistently and fairly objectively categorize Raglan heroes makes it quite useful as the above additional data demonstrate, adding another fifteen total Raglan heroes to the initial thirty-three which Gregor and Hansen had discovered in their primary analysis. As such, we can contend there are a now known forty-eight documented ancient Mediterranean Raglan mytho-historical heroes on record.

One objection could be forthcoming to the utilization of the *Historia Augusta* in particular due to the fact that it appears to have some limited knowledge of Christianity and therefore may not present independent legendary traditions. However, against this objection, it is worth noting instead that the *Historia Augusta* texts are almost entirely dependent upon Roman imperial biographical tradition, and the few times that the *Historia Augusta* does reference Christianity it shows no close knowledge or proximity to their traditions.⁸³ The knowledge of Christians evinced in the *Historia Augusta* is quite limited and inaccurate. For instance, in *Firmus, Saturninus, Proculus, and Bonosus* 8 (in the *Historia Augusta*) we find a fabricated letter from Hadrian to Servianus claiming that Christians in Egypt were actually just worshipers of Serapis. I can find no compelling evidence to think this was true and at best only evokes knowledge of some syncretistic cult in Egypt which was atypical and we cannot guarantee what stories they had about Jesus there. Most other references are obscure and vague, showing no close familiarity, and most occur almost entirely in the biography of Severus Alexander. Instead, the main influence for the *Historia Augusta* is in fact actually Suetonius and other Roman authors.⁸⁴

Therefore, we can rule out this potential objection. Instead, the research consistently shows that Roman and Greek rulers and other historical individuals are routinely Raglan heroes according to the GHR model. Furthermore, this additionally inflates the membership of this reference class even more, which further means that Gregor, Hansen, and Blais' Bayesian analysis of the prior probability of Jesus' historicity is even more overwhelmingly in favor of his existence.⁸⁵

⁸³ Some Christian documents may evince evidence of Serapis syncretism, see Livia Capponi, "Serapis, Boukoloi and Christians from Hadrian to Marcus Aurelius," in *Hadrian and the Christians*, ed. Marco Rizzi (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 121–39. However, I will note it is rather ambiguous whether the papyrological evidence cited is actually Christian or not as the language is quite ambiguous.

⁸⁴ H. W. Bird, "Suetonian Influence in the Later Lives of the *Historia Augusta*," *Hermes* 99.2 (1971), pp. 129–34.

⁸⁵ See the recently published: Kamil Gregor, Brian Blais, and C. M. Hansen, "The Prior Probability of Jesus Mythicism Re-Evaluated in Light of the Gospels' Dramatic Date," *Journal of Early Christian History* (2025).