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Objekttyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Museum Helveticum : schweizerische Zeitschrift für klassische Altertumswissenschaft = Revue suisse pour l'étude de l'antiquité classique = Rivista svizzera di filologia classica**

Band (Jahr): **70 (2013)**

Heft 1

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-327729

Dexippus' *Letter of Decius*: Context and Interpretation

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Abstract: The *Letter of Decius* is one of the longest fragments from the *Scythica* written by the Athenian historian P. Herennius Dexippus in the third century A.D. The letter purports to be a missive sent by the Roman emperor Trajan Decius to the city of Philippopolis, which was at the time threatened by a Gothic army. Like other embedded letters in ancient historiography, the *Letter of Decius* is not a genuine historical document, but a rhetorical exercise, filled with sententious commonplaces. This article provides a reading of the *Letter of Decius* based on recent studies of the function of embedded letters in ancient historiography. It is suggested that the *Letter of Decius* served not only a means for Dexippus to characterise the emperor in a manner that was consistent with the historical situation that Decius found himself in 251, but also as a way to elucidate the changing network of relationships between the emperor, the army, and the provincial populations during the middle decades of the third century.

I. Introduction

For historians of the third century A.D. the almost total loss of the works of the Athenian historian and statesman P. Herennius Dexippus is felt keenly.[1] Dexippus was the author of at least three historical works: an apparently bland treatment of the *Events After Alexander*; a *Chronicle* covering the period up to the death of Claudius II Gothicus (268–270); and, perhaps most interestingly, a monograph on the Gothic wars of the third century, known as the *Scythica*.[2] It would seem that these literary productions gained Dexippus a significant reputa-

1 All dates are A.D. unless otherwise noted. The works of Dexippus are cited from the edition of F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker, Zweiter Teil A* (Leiden 1961), henceforth *FGrHist*, with references to the translation and commentary of J. McInerney, "Dexippos", in I. Worthington (ed.), *Brill's New Jacoby* (Leiden 2008). The excellent new edition of G. Martin, *Dexipp von Athen: Edition, Übersetzung und begleitende Studien* (Tübingen 2006), has reordered the fragments, but Jacoby's numbering is retained here for ease of reference. All translations are our own.

2 Photius, *Bibliotheke* 82 = Dexippus, *FGrHist* 100 T5. For discussions of Dexippus' *Scythica* and his other historical works, see E. Schwartz, "Dexippos", *RE* 9.288–293, at 289–290; F.G.B. Millar, "P. Herennius Dexippus: the Greek world and the third-century invasions", *JRS* 59 (1969) 12–29, at 21–26; H. Brandt, "Dexipp und die Geschichtsschreibung des 3. Jh. n.Chr.", in M. Zimmermann (ed.), *Geschichtsschreibung und politischer Wandel im 3. Jh. n.Chr.* (Berlin 1999) 169–182, at 172–176; Martin (n. 1) 151–163.

tion in his own lifetime, as indicated by an encomiastic inscription that accompanied a statue of the historian in Athens, which reserved particular praise for his rhetorical accomplishments.[3] Dexippus and his works enjoyed a significant legacy beyond the sophisticated confines of late third century Athens. In the Latin west, Dexippus' works were known to later historians, including Cassiodorus, Jordanes, and the author of the *Historia Augusta*.[4] Likewise, Dexippus' impact on succeeding generations of Greek historians was profound. The *Scythica* and the *Chronicle* influenced the near-contemporary history written by Eusebius of Nantes,[5] and Eunapius of Sardis, writing in the early fifth century, began his History in 270 where Dexippus' *Chronicle* ended, styling his own work as both a criticism and continuation of his predecessor.[6] More tantalizingly, Dexippus' *Scythica* is the putative source behind much later Greek historiography dealing with the third century, particularly the histories of Zosimus, Peter the Patrician, and the Byzantine chronographic tradition.[7]

Our knowledge of Dexippus' *Scythica* is derived from largely verbatim excerpts preserved in the collections of morally or politically edifying historical anecdotes compiled at the behest of the emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the tenth century (commonly called the *Excerpta Constantiniana*).[8] The intention of the excerptors was not to produce epitomes of their sources, but rather to record historical anecdotes under specific rubrics.[9] They included excerpts *De Legationibus* ('On embassies'), *De Sententiis* ('On judgments'), and *De Strategematibus* ('On stratagems').[10] Based on the size and distribution of the fragments,

3 *IG* II/III^2 3669, discussed by E. Sironen, "Life and administration of late Roman Attica in the light of public inscriptions", in P. Castrén (ed.), *Post-Herulian Athens: Aspects of Life and Culture in Athens, A.D. 267–529* (Helsinki 1994) 15–62, at 17–19; Brandt (n. 2) 170–171.

4 Cassiodorus and Jordanes: C.C. Mierow, *The Gothic History of Jordanes* (London 1915) 29; A.S. Christensen, *Cassiodorus, Jordanes and the History of the Goths: Studies in a Migration Myth* (Copenhagen 2002) 233–234. For the use of Dexippus by the author of the *Historia Augusta*, note the opinions of T.D. Barnes, *The Sources of the Historia Augusta* (Brussels 1978) 109–111, and B. Bleckmann, *Die Reichskrise des III. Jahrhunderts in der spätantiken und byzantinischen Geschichtsschreibung* (Munich 1992) 214–219.

5 H. Sivan, "The Historian Eusebius (of Nantes)", *JHS* 112 (1992) 158–163, at 162.

6 Dexippus, *FGrHist* 100 F1; R.C. Blockley, "Dexippus of Athens and Eunapius of Sardis", *Latomus* 30 (1971) 710–715.

7 Schwartz (n. 2) 290; H. Peter, *Die geschichtliche Litteratur über die Römische Kaiserzeit bis Theodosius I und ihre Quellen* (Leipzig 1897) 160; D.S. Potter, *Prophecy and History in the Crisis of the Roman Empire: A Historical Commentary on the Thirteenth Sibylline Oracle* (Oxford 1990) 356–363. For the most detailed summary of these later traditions and their relationship to Dexippus, see Bleckmann (n. 4) especially 16–32, *passim*.

8 The standard text of the Constantinian *excerpta* is that of U.P. Boissevain, C. de Boor, and T. Büttner-Wobst (eds), *Excerpta Historica iussu Imp. Constantini Porphyrogeniti Confecta* (Berlin 1903).

9 P.A. Brunt, "On Historical Fragments and Epitomes", *CQ* n.s. 30 (1980) 477–494, at 483–485.

10 On the identification of the so-called Minas Codex (*Codex Parisinus inter supplementa Graeca 607*), with Constantine Porphyrogenitus' *Excerpta de Strategematibus*, see C. Müller, "*Fragmenta partim inedita Polybii, Dionysii Halicarnassensis, Polyaeni, Dexippi, Eusebii, in Atho Monte a*

it appears that the *Scythica* was a work of at least three books that treated the wars between Rome and various northern tribes, including the Goths, Vandals, and Juthungi, which took place between the reigns of Philip and Aurelian.[11] The major fragments assigned to the *Scythica* include descriptions of the siege of Marcianopolis by the Goths (F 25); the letter of the emperor Trajan Decius to the people of Philippopolis (F 26); a siege of Philippopolis (F 27); the 'speech of Dexippus' to the Athenians following the sack of Athens (F 28); the siege of Side (F 29); the exchange between the embassies of the Juthungian Scythians and Aurelian (F 6); and the settlement of the Vandals by the same emperor early in his reign (F 7).[12] Additionally, one final excerpt containing no historical information, but of possible programmatic significance, survives in the *De Sententiis* (F 24).[13] Hence, due to this state of preservation, we know little for certain about the original form or scope of the *Scythica*.[14] Photius, the great ninth century bibliophile and patriarch of Constantinople, noted that the *Scythica* was particularly noteworthy out of all of Dexippus' works for its Thucydidean style, and the surviving fragments support the patriarch's judgment.[15] However, despite affirming Dexippus' stylistic connections with his historiographical model, the fragmentary nature of the *Scythica* poses numerous problems of interpretation.

The aim of this article is to provide an analysis of one of the largest fragments, the *Letter of Decius* (F 26), from a combined narratological and historiographical perspective. The letter is certainly a rhetorical μελέτη, inserted into the narrative by Dexippus to illustrate Decius' reaction to the Gothic incursions into the Balkan provinces.[16] At that time, the city of Philippopolis was facing an

Mynoide Mina e codice descripta", in W. Dindorf (ed.), *Flavii Iosephi Opera, Volumen Secundum* (Paris 1865) 4–5.

11 Martin (n. 1) 161; Schwartz (n. 2) 290; Peter (n. 7) 161; Potter (n. 7) 82–83. If the citation of Dexippus by the *Historia Augusta* (*Vita Max. et Balb.* 16.3 = *FGrHist* 100 F 20) is accurate, the *Scythica* may have begun with a campaign against the Carpi in 238.

12 Henceforth, all references in this format are to the fragments of Dexippus collected in *FGrHist* 100. For a discussion of the Aurelianic fragments, see A. Watson, *Aurelian and the Third Century* (London 1999) 216–221.

13 The text for the *Excerpta de Sententiis* is based on a single MS (*Cod. Vat. Graec.* 73), a palimpsest dating to the tenth or eleventh century, but reused in the fourteenth century. The quality of the text is variable. Cf. Boissevain (n. 8) 4.xxiv–xxviii. C. Müller, *Fragmenta Historicorum Graecorum: Volumen Tertium* (Paris 1874) 674, suggested that this passage could come from the preface to the *Scythica*.

14 Martin (n. 1) 161–163; Schwartz (n. 2) 290; F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker, Zweiter Teil B* (Leiden 1963) 306. Potter (n. 7) 82 estimates that between 16 and 20 per cent of the original *Scythica* survives today.

15 Photius, *Bibliotheke* 82 = *FGrHist* 100 T5. For modern studies of Thucydidean influences on Dexippus, see Martin (n. 1) 210–256; F.J. Stein, *Herodianus et Dexippus rerum scriptores quatenus Thucydidem secuti sint* (Bonn 1957); R.C. Blockley, "Dexippus and Priscus and the Thucydidean siege of Plataea", *Phoenix* 26 (1972) 18–27.

16 Millar (n. 2) 23. It thus should be classified as an 'inserted letter' (*der eingelegte Brief*) according to the epistolary categories devised by J. Sykutris, "Epistolographie", *RE Suppl.* 5, 185–220, at 208–210.

imminent attack from the Goths under the command of Cniva, who had only recently attacked Nikopolis in nearby Moesia Inferior. In the letter, Decius urges the citizens of Philippopolis not to take to the field against the Goths themselves, but to wait for his arrival at the head of the Roman army. Like most manufactured letters in ancient historiography, it effectively functions as a speech, adding immediacy and drama to the narrative while allowing the author to display his own rhetorical accomplishments.[17] Dexippus was fond of such set pieces, much to the chagrin of some modern commentators who have criticized him for marring the historical value of his works with a surfeit of empty rhetorical flourishes and quasi-philosophical commonplaces.[18] However, letters, like speeches, served an important role in ancient historiography, contributing to the characterization of leading figures or being used to address the wider themes of their work. This, in turn, provided the reader with insights into the views and beliefs of these men and women more directly than if they were merely described by the historian.[19] Hence a rhetorical set piece like the *Letter of Decius* should not be dismissed, but subjected to close narratological and historiographical analysis.

Modern commentators who have taken the *Letter of Decius* more seriously have struggled to determine how it should be read. It is clear, as Martin has demonstrated, that the *Letter of Decius* was primarily intended to serve as a method of developing Decius' character, though he is notably agnostic regarding the way the emperor is portrayed.[20] Other scholars, such as Bleckmann, Potter, and Armstrong, have been less reticent, claiming that the letter is satirical or ironic in tone.[21] Although irony is present in the letter, it seems unlikely that its primary intent was to satirise Decius, given the positive treatment of the emperor in later works of Greek historiography which draw heavily on Dexippus' *Scythica*.[22] Potter has recently revised his view of the *Scythica* along these lines, arguing that

17 On such letters, see P.A. Rosenmeyer, *Ancient Epistolary Fictions: The Letter in Greek Literature* (Cambridge 2001) 46; R.S. Olson, *Tragedy, Authority, and Trickery: The Poetics of Embedded Letters in Josephus* (Cambridge, MA 2010) 63–68. For speeches in general, note especially C.B.R. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London 2000) 112–122; J. Marincola, "Speeches in classical historiography", in idem, *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Malden, MA 2007) 118–132. Letters in historical works were acknowledged even in antiquity as works of the historian, rather than authentic documents (Fronto, *Ad Verum Imp.* 2.1.15, p. 124, ed. Van den Hout[2]).

18 Thus Bleckmann (n. 4) 207; Peter (n. 7) 161; Potter (n. 7) 86. Dexippus is not the only example of imperial Greek historiography to have suffered from such criticism until recently. See A.B. Bosworth, *From Arrian to Alexander* (Oxford 1988) 99–100, for a fresh approach to the speeches of Arrian.

19 Martin (n. 1) 166; Rosenmeyer (n. 17) 9–11; R. Syme, *Historia Augusta Papers* (Oxford 1983) 3; M. Trapp, *Greek and Latin Letters* (Cambridge 2003) 3–4. Cf. Demetrius *De Eloc.* 227.

20 Martin (n.1) 179–180.

21 Bleckmann (n. 4) 208; Potter (n. 7) 86; D. Armstrong, "Gallienus in Athens, 264", *ZPE* 70 (1987) 235–258, at 243.

22 Cf. Bleckmann (n. 4) 208, who maintains that Dexippus was not the source for the positive depictions of Decius in later historiography.

it can be interpreted as a positive response to the official message of military victory and restoration of the Roman state projected by Aurelian.[23] This interesting reading suggests that the *Letter of Decius* should be treated as an important piece of evidence for understanding Dexippus' reaction to the reign of Decius, the effects of the Gothic invasions, and the imperial power struggles during the mid-third century. As a contemporary of Decius, Dexippus' commentary on his reign places it in a position of advantage over the majority of the later historical writing, such as the *De Caesaribus* of Aurelius Victor, Zosimus' *New History*, and Zonaras' *Epitome of History*. Through an analysis of the form, style, and content of the *Letter of Decius*, this article will suggest that it represents an attempt to explore the changing political relationships that transformed the Roman empire over the course of the third century.

II. The Context of the Letter

The Gothic wars described in Dexippus' *Scythica* were the most significant conflict of Decius' short reign, but our knowledge of them is imperfect. C. Messius Quintus Decius Valerinus ascended to the throne in late summer or early autumn of 249 following the defeat of his predecessor, Philip the Arab, in battle near Verona.[24] Decius marched on Rome, where he took the name Trajan in honour of his illustrious predecessor, and was henceforth styled Imperator Caesar C. Messius Quintus Traianus Decius.[25] The new emperor remained in Rome for the next few months, and it was during this period that he issued the famous edict of sacrifice.[26] The external troubles began sometime in mid-250, when the Goths Argaithus and Gunthericus led a force across the Danube into Moesia Inferior, where they besieged the city of Marcianopolis.[27] Accounts of this siege differ: according to

23 D. S. Potter, "The Greek historians of imperial Rome", in A. Feldherr and G. Hardy (eds), *The Oxford History of Historical Writing* (Oxford and New York 2011) 316–345, at 336.

24 S. Dušanić, "The end of the Philippi", *Chiron* 6 (1976) 427–439, follows John of Antioch (F 148 = *FHG* IV, p. 597, ed. Müller) in placing the battle at Beroea, though the Latin historiographical tradition gives Verona (Aurelius Victor, *Caes.* 28.10; *Epit. de Caes.* 28.2; Eutrop. 9.3). See Potter (n. 7) 255–257; H.A. Pohlsander, "Did Decius kill the Philippi?" *Historia* 31 (1982) 214–222; D. Kienast, *Römische Kaisertabelle* (3rd ed., Darmstadt 2004) 204. Decius' *dies imperii* should be dated between 29 August and 16 October 249, as shown by X. Loriot, "Chronologie du règne de Philippe l'Arabe", *ANRW* II.2 (Berlin 1975) 788–802, at 795.

25 Kienast (n. 24) 204. For a detailed discussion of Decius' nomenclature, see K. Wittig, "C. Messius Quintus Trajan Decius (9)", *RE* 15.1 (1931) 1244–1284, at 1246–1250; A.R. Birley, "Decius Reconsidered" in E. Frézouls and H. Jouffroy (eds), *Les empereurs illyriens: Actes du colloque de Strasbourg (11–13 Octobre 1990)* (Strasbourg 1998) 57–80, at 68–73.

26 See J.B. Rives, "The decree of Decius and the religion of empire", *JRS* 89 (1999) 135–154, at 137. For the traditionalistic nature of Decius' reign, see A. Alföldi, *Studien zur Geschichte der Weltkrise des 3. Jahrhunderts nach Christus* (Darmstadt 1967) 432–434.

27 D. Boteva, "On the chronology of the Gothic invasions under Philippus and Decius (A.D. 248–251)", *Archaeologica Bulgarica* 5 (2001) 37–44, at 40–42; D.S. Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*

Dexippus, the city was successfully defended by a man named Maximus, while Jordanes records that the Goths were bribed to abandon their assault.[28]

A second wave followed in early 251, under the leadership of the Gothic king Cniva; on this occasion they attacked the city of Novae, but were defeated by C. Vibius Trebonianus Gallus, governor of Moesia Inferior.[29] The Goths moved deeper into the province and threatened Nikopolis. What happened next is a matter of dispute. According to Syncellus (following Dexippus), Cniva successfully surrounded the Moesians, but was later defeated by Decius in a major battle in the vicinity of Nikopolis, which resulted in the death of 30000 Goths.[30] Jordanes gives a different version, claiming that Cniva withdrew when Decius appeared on the scene, and moved southwards into the Haemus mountain range that separated Moesia Inferior from Thrace.[31] What both versions make clear is that Cniva's next target was Philippopolis on the Hebrus river.[32] Philippopolis was the largest city in the interior of Thrace, and metropolis of the provincial *koinon*, even though the Roman governor was usually based at Perinthos.[33] Decius decided to pursue Cniva and his forces across the Haemus mountain range to Augusta Traiana (Beroea) before advancing to Philippopolis.[34] Such is the

(London 2004) 246. It was previously thought that the raid of Argaithus and Gunthericus took place in 248: A. Alföldi (n. 26) 317; M. Bang, "Expansion of the Teutons", in H.M. Gwatkin and J.P. Whitney (eds.), *Cambridge Medieval History, Volume 1: The Christian Empire* (Cambridge 1911) 203; J.F. Drinkwater, "Maximinus to Diocletian and the Crisis", in A.K. Bowman, P. Garnsey, A. Cameron, (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History, Volume 12: The Crisis of Empire, AD 193–337* (2nd edn, Cambridge 2005) 37.

28 Dexippus, *FGrHist* 100 F 25; Jord. *Getica* 92. T. Mommsen (trans. W.P. Dickenson), *The Provinces of the Roman Empire* (London 1909) 1.239, suggested that the siege of Marcianopolis, as described by the fragment of Dexippus, occurred in the year 238 as a way of reconciling the apparently conflicting testimonies of Jordanes and Dexippus.

29 Jord. *Getica* 101; Boteva (n. 27) 42; F.S. Salisbury and H. Mattingly, "The reign of Trajan Decius", *JRS* 14 (1924) 1–23, at 18. Jordanes gives Gallus' title as *dux*, but he was actually a senatorial legate, who had previously governed Thrace in the reign of Maximinus (*AE* 2006, 1249–1250). See A. Stein, *Die Legaten von Moesien* (Budapest 1950) 103; R. Syme, "Emperors from Etruria", *Bonner Historia Augusta Colloquium 1979/1981* (Bonn 1983) 333–360, at 342.

30 Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica* 375 D–E (p. 705, ed. Dindorf) = Dexippus, *FGrHist* 100 F 22; Dexippus *FGrHist* 100 F 26.10. The date of Decius' arrival in the Balkans is unknown: it is generally assumed that he was in the region in 250, but there is no specific piece of evidence that places him there before Nikopolis. See Kienast (n. 24) 204; Salisbury and Mattingly (n. 29) 17.

31 Jord. *Getica* 101. For a discussion of this divergence in the tradition for these raids, see Bleckmann (n. 4) 163–167. The numismatic evidence for the movement of the Goths, based on coin hoards, is analysed by B. Gerov, "Die gotische Invasion in Mösien und Thrakien unter Decius im Lichte der Hortfunde", *Acta Antiqua Philippopolitana* 2 (1963) 127–146.

32 For the location, history, and archaeology of Philippopolis, see M.H. Hansen and T.H. Nielsen, *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis* (Oxford 2004) 894–895.

33 B. Gerov, "Zur inneren Organisation des römischen Thrakiens", *Studia in honorem Veselini Beševliev* (Sofia 1978) 475–485. Cf. A.H.M. Jones, *The Greek City: From Alexander to Justinian* (Oxford 1940) 83–84, 273; C.M. Danov, "Die Thraker auf dem Ostbalkan von der hellenistischen Zeit bis zur Gründung Konstantinopels", *ANRW* II.7.1 (Berlin 1979) 21–185, at 172.

34 Jord. *Getica* 102.

course of events that we can construct from Syncellus' *Ecloga Chronographica* and Jordanes' *Getica*.[35] Both these sources are known to have used Dexippus' work, with Syncellus specifically citing Dexippus as a source for his narrative of these events.[36] It is clear, however, that Syncellus preserves only the barest outline of Dexippus' narrative, for Dexippus' original account was embellished by the inclusion of a letter sent by Trajan Decius to the inhabitants of Philippopolis, and, possibly, other rhetorical μελέται.

The inclusion of a letter from the emperor allowed Dexippus to develop more fully the characterization of Decius, as Martin has suggested.[37] But there were also significant narratalogical reasons for including such a document. The act of sending, receiving, and then reading a letter added a layer of suspense to an historical narrative, for such missives were often dispatched in a climate of urgency.[38] By including the contents of the letter itself, the reader would be informed of the arguments used to persuade, exhort, cajole, seduce, or deceive the recipient, depending on the context.[39] The *Letter of Decius* itself thus functions like a symbouletic speech in its intention to persuade the inhabitants of Philippopolis to the emperor's viewpoint.[40] But, in contrast with a speech, which emphasized a character's presence at a particular location, a letter drew special attention to their absence. By 'embedding' the text of the letter itself within the wider narrative, the historian was able to heighten the tension further, as it placed the reader in the same position as the recipient in discovering its content.[41] The *Letter of Decius* thus functions as a way of dramatizing the fact that the emperor and his army were far away from Philippopolis – and unlikely to arrive before the Goths – which is a much more effective form of creating suspense than simply describing the relative location of the Roman and Gothic armies.

35 Syncellus, *Ecloga Chronographica* 375 D–E (p. 705, ed. Dindorf) = Dexippus *FGrHist* 100 F 22; Jordanes, *Getica* 113.

36 Christiensen (n. 4) 233–234. See B. Croke, "Cassiodorus and the *Getica* of Jordanes", *CPh* 82 (1987) 117–134, who acknowledges that Cassiodorus was a primary source for Jordanes, but that Jordanes did not slavishly copy his work.

37 Martin (n. 1) 179–180.

38 Olson (n. 17) 23, 145. See Rosenmeyer (n. 17) 46–51 on Herodotus' use of letters in this fashion.

39 Dionysius of Halicarnassus (*Ant. Rom.* 11.1.3–4) emphasized the importance of setting out argumentation in political events.

40 On the different types of speeches in classical historiography, see Marincola (n. 17) 127–128.

41 Olson (n. 17) 140. For similar remarks concerning letters in genres other than historiography, see M. Lowrie, *Writing, Performance, and Authority in Augustan Rome* (Oxford 2009) 216–217, and O. Hodkinson, "Better than speech: some advantages of the letter in the Second Sophistic", in R. Morello and A.D. Morrison (eds.), *Ancient Letters: Classical and Late Antique Epistolography* (Oxford 2007) 283–300, at 289.

III. The Purpose of the Letter

Dexippus claims authenticity for the letter – and thus for his characterization of Trajan Decius – by his method of introducing it into the main narrative of the *Scythica*. The emperor's courier arrives in Philippopolis and hands the letter over to the governor T. Iulius Priscus, who summons the inhabitants to the stadium inside the city to hear the emperor's words.[42] Dexippus presents the document with the words 'for the letter read as follows' (ἐδήλου γὰρ ἡ γραφὴ τάδε) (F 26.2). The use of τάδε is important, since Dexippus' stylistic model, Thucydides, frequently employed τάδε or ταῦτα to indicate that he was accurately reporting of the text of letters or other documents. This usage contrasted with τοιάδε or τοιαῦτα, which denoted that he was paraphrasing, or was introducing a set-piece speech.[43] Dexippus employs τοιάδε to introduce Aurelian's speech to the Juthungi, while τοιαῦτα concludes the fragmentary speech to the Athenians, commonly assumed to have been delivered by Dexippus himself.[44] It cannot be known whether Dexippus held himself to the same standards as Thucydides, but the fact that the *Letter of Decius* is introduced by τάδε indicates that he wished it to be perceived as a document that would lend credence to his overall portrait of the emperor.[45]

Despite introducing Decius' letter in a way appropriate for a written document, the style is somewhat reminiscent of an imperial oration. The use of the vocative ὦ ἄνδρες as a way of addressing the citizens of Philippopolis is certainly more characteristic of a speech than a letter (F 26.3).[46] The majority of genuine imperial letters to individuals, cities, and provinces opened with a more formulaic mode of address.[47] The vocative was frequently used in speeches: when

42 Priscus' position is given variously by the literary sources. Dexippus (*FGrHist* 100 F 26.3) styles him the 'commander of the Macedonian and Thracian cities' (ἁρμοστὴς τῶν Μακεδονικῶν καὶ Θρακικῶν πόλεων) and Jordanes (*Getica* 103) similarly calls him the *dux* of Philippopolis. Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 29.2), however, described Priscus as governor of Macedonia. Inscriptions (*AE* 1932, 28; *SEG* 55, 761) confirm that he was in fact *praeses* of Thrace. The confusion is typical of late antique and Byzantine accounts of the third century, given changes in provincial boundaries and administrative structures in the intervening years.

43 Rosenmeyer (n. 17) 46; H.D. Westlake, "Thucydides on Pausanius and Themistocles – a written source", *CQ* n.s. 27 (1977) 95–110, at 102–103, who also points out Herodotus' use of τάδε when introducing letters.

44 Aurelian: Dexippus *FGrHist* 100 F 6.3. Speech to the Athenians: Dexippus *FGrHist* F 28a.7. For the identification of Dexippus as the speaker in F 28, see Martin (n. 1) 185–187 and Millar (n. 2) 26–28.

45 As Lucian (*Hist. Conscr.* 58) advised, the language of a speech should suit the character and the subject matter. For the use of such documents as a source of evidence, see J. Marincola, *Authority and Tradition in Ancient Historiography* (Cambridge 1997) 103–105.

46 For a brief discussion on the modes of address in speeches and letters, see Sykutris (n. 16) 187–188.

47 See F. Millar, *The Emperor in the Roman World* (London 1977) 221, for a discussion of the standard formula for imperial correspondence.

Nero famously declared the freedom of Greece at the Isthmian Games in 67, he addressed the assembled masses as ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες ('men of Greece'), and Vespasian, speaking to the Alexandrians in 69, called his audience the ἄνδρες Ἀλεξανδρεῖς ('men of Alexandria').[48] In choosing to open Decius' missive in this fashion, Dexippus may also have been inspired by Thucydides' *Letter of Nicias*, in which the recipients are also addressed in the vocative (ὦ Ἀθηναῖοι).[49] The *Letter of Decius* is thus introduced as if it was an authentic document (at least within the confines of the narrative itself), but presented in the style of a speech, which allowed Dexippus to range beyond the staid tone of the imperial chancellery in its composition.

In order to assess the function of Decius' letter as a narrative device and a form of characterization it is necessary to consider the emperor's professed reasons for sending the communiqué in the first place. Fragment 26, as preserved in the *De Sententiis*, falls into two parts: a short introductory preamble, which is quite corrupted in places (F 26.1–2), explains the context of the letter, and this is followed by the letter itself (F 26.3–10).[50] At the end of the fragment, the letter breaks off mid-sentence, but it is likely that most of the text has been preserved.[51] The preamble is vital to understanding the purpose of the epistle within the *Scythica*, as it introduces several key themes that continue throughout the text of the letter itself.[52] It begins as follows (F 26.1):

> ὅτι ὁ Δέκιος ὁ βασιλεὺς Ῥωμαίων ..... ἐν φόβωι εἶχε τὴν Θράικιον δύναμιν, ὀρρωδῶν μή τι ἐξ αὐτῆς νεώτερον γένηται περὶ τῆς ἀρχῆς τὴν κατάστασιν. καὶ ἐπειρᾶτο δι' ἐπιστολῆς ἀποκωλύειν αὐτοὺς ἐπεξιέναι τοῖς πολέμοις, τὸ μὲν βουλόμενον τῆς διανοίας οὐκ ἐμφαίνων, ἐκπονούμενος δὲ διὰ δέους ἄγειν, μὴ περαιτέρω προιόντες ἄνθρωποι ἀπόλεμοι οὗτοι τῆς οὐκ εὐκαίρου προθυμίας τὴν πεῖραν λάβωσι πρὸ ⟨τοῦ⟩ τὴν παρ' αὐτοῦ ἐπικουρίαν παραγενέσθαι.
>
> That Decius, the Roman emperor ..... regarded the Thracian might with apprehension, fearing that some change concerning the stability of the empire might result from it. So he prepared to check their [impulse to] rush out into battle by means of a letter. However, since he did not want to make his intentions obvious,

48 Nero: *IG* VII 2713 = *ILS* 8794 = J.H. Oliver, *Greek Constitutions of Early Roman Emperors from Inscriptions and Papyri* (Philadelphia 1989) no. 296. Vespasian: *P. Graec. Vindob.* 25, 787 = Oliver, op. cit. no. 297.

49 Thucydides 7.11, discussed by Rosenmeyer (n. 17) 57–59, and S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides* (Oxford 2008), 557–558. Demetrius (*De Eloc.* 228) notes that Thucydides' letter of Nicias was a written speech (σύγγραμμα), rather than a true letter.

50 See above, n. 8. Sections 1–2 were even more fragmentary in Müller's edition (*FHG* III, p. 676), based on the original text preserved by Cardinal Mai. However, the subsequent texts of Jacoby and Martin drawn on Boissevain's edition of the *Excerpta de Sententiis* (F 23), for which he reexamined the manuscripts and was able to identify more words than Mai.

51 Martin (n. 1) 181.

52 On the importance of preambles for delineating the themes of Thucydides' speeches, see Pelling (n. 17) 121–122.

> he instead instructed them to hold fast by creating an atmosphere of fear, so that these men who were ill-equipped for war would not venture outside [the city] and make an attempt with inopportune enthusiasm, when his own relief force was close at hand.

The crucial point is that Decius (as characterized by Dexippus) was not motivated to write the letter because he feared for the safety of the citizens of Philippopolis as the Goths approached. Instead, he was concerned about the 'Thracian might' (Θράικιον δύναμιν), and its potential to cause a revolution that would undermine 'the stability of the empire' (τῆς ἀρχῆς τὴν κατάστασιν). The implication of this is that Decius was worried that the Thracians would be cognizant of their δύναμις, a word that we have translated here as 'might', but can also have the sense of 'capacity'. This, we would argue, is a reference to their capacity not only to fight and perhaps win a victory over the Goths, but also to proclaim another emperor in place of Decius who would be able to lead them into battle. Dexippus' readers would have approached this passage with the knowledge that T. Iulius Priscus, governor of Thrace, did in fact rebel against Decius after Philippopolis had been taken by the Goths, and that Priscus decided to ally himself with Cniva.[53]

Decius' apprehension would have been historically well founded.[54] Provincial forces proclaimed and deposed emperors at will with alarming regularity in the middle decades of the third century. For example, the reign of Philip the Arab had witnessed the insurrections of Iotapianus, acclaimed emperor by the Syrians in reaction to the harsh exactions of Iulius Priscus,[55] and Ti. Claudius Marinus Pacatianus, who was elevated by the legions in Moesia Superior.[56] Moreover, the circumstances of his own accession would have made Decius acutely aware of the volatility of his position. According to Zosimus, the troops proclaimed him

53 Jord. *Getica* 103; Alföldi (n. 26) 319. Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 29.2) writes that 'imperial power was conferred' (*delata dominatio*) on Priscus following the Gothic invasion of Thrace, but does not mention who offered him the purple. Cf. Polemius Silvius, *Laterculus* 40 (= *MGH AA* ed. Mommsen, 9.521), who says that Priscus reigned as tyrant in Macedonia.

54 Cf. Martin (n. 1) 179, who expresses uncertainty as to why Decius should fear political change in Thrace if Priscus was already suspected as a potential usurper. See also Potter (n. 7) 86, who considers the letter to be ironic in light of Priscus' later usurpation. There was a long tradition in Greek thought of regarding the Thracians as unreliable: see Plato, *Resp.* 435c.5–6.

55 Zos. 1.20.2–21.2; Victor, *Caes.* 29.2; C. Körner, *Philippus Arabs* (Berlin 2002) 277–282.

56 Zos. 1.20.2; Zon. XII.19; Kienast (n. 24) 201; C. Körner (n. 55) 285–288, 347–348. Pacatianus' coins were minted at Viminacium in Moesia Superior, suggesting that he was based in the province (*RIC* IV.3 104–105). Two further usurpers known only from coins have been traditionally dated to Philip's reign: Marcus Silbannacus (*RIC* IV.3 66 and 105) and Sponsianus (*RIC* IV.3 67 and 106), discussed by Körner (n. 55) 386–391; F. Hartmann, *Herrscherwechsel und Reichskrise. Untersuchungen zu den Ursachen und Konsequenzen der Herrscherwechsel im Imperium Romanum der Soldatenkaiserzeit (3. Jahrhundert n.Chr.)* (Frankfurt 1982) 82,93–94. The rebellion of Silbannacus is now placed in 253 by S. Estiot, "L'empereur Silbannacus, un second Antoninien", *RN* 151 (1996) 105–117.

emperor in place of Philip because of his military experience.[57] If the Thracians were to be successful against the Goths of their own accord, then as recent events had demonstrated, they too might set up a new emperor in Decius' absence.[58] Since Decius was unable to reveal that his true reason for writing was his fear of a provincial revolt, he focused on the fact that the citizens were 'men ill-equipped for war' (ἄνθρωποι ἀπόλεμοι). The letter, as composed by Dexippus, is thus a conscious act of deception on the part of the emperor, one which accords well with the use of letters in Greek historiography as conduits of deception or treachery.[59]

IV. The Content of the Letter

The content of the letter itself was composed by Dexippus to support his account of Decius' motivations for sending the letter. Throughout the document, Decius is at pains to emphasise his military qualifications and experience in contrast to that possessed by the people of Philippopolis. This tactic served a dual purpose: to justify his advice to the citizens not to take to field, and to display his own qualities as an emperor. In the first section of the letter (F 26.3), Decius laments that he has not been able to come in person yet, but has been occupied with preparations for the campaign, and particularly, engaged in 'the victory which has recently occurred' (τῇι προγενομένηι νίκηι). This is a clear reference to the battle outside Nikopolis earlier in 251, in which the emperor won a resounding victory over the Goths.[60] Decius then writes that the citizens should not place trust in their 'numbers and youthful vigour' (πλήθει τε καὶ νεότητι), as is often done by 'the sort of men who are inexperienced in warfare' (οἷα δὴ πολέμων ἀπειράτους) (F 26.4).[61] He reinforces the need to remain in the city, for 'in times of war, courage is an asset when coupled with experience, but without it, it is a weakness' (ἐν τοῖς πολέμοις τὸ ἀνδρεῖον μετὰ μὲν ἐμπειρίας ἰσχυρόν, ἄνευ δὲ τούτου ἀσθενές) (F 26.4).[62] This language, with its emphasis on experience, is echoed in Zosimus' account of Decius' rise to power. He writes that Decius was

57 Zosimus 1.21.3; Potter (n. 7) 257; Körner (n. 55) 293–294. Aurelius Victor (*Caes.* 29.1) is less generous to Decius, maintaining that his ascent to the purple was the result of a conspiracy.

58 Note Herodian's comment (2.8.10) that Pescennius Niger should have journeyed to Illyricum to win over the troops there after claiming the throne rather than remaining in Syria.

59 Rosenmeyer (n. 17) 45–60. For similar deceptions in Herodian's work, see H. Sidebottom, "Herodian's Historical Methods and Understanding of History", *ANRW* 2.34.4 (1998) 2775–2836, at 2817–2818.

60 Syncellus p. 705 = Dexippus *FGrHist* 100 F22.

61 Cf. Martin (n. 1) 182. Youthful vigour was not always a positive quality: see Herodian's negative appraisal of young emperors (1.1.6). Inexperience in warfare occurs in another assigned fragment of Dexippus' works preserved in the Suda (*FGrHist* 100 F 39). Likewise, putting faith in numbers was also regarded as a mark of recklessness. Cf. Nepos' description of the Persian commander Datis at Marathon (*Milt.* 5.4).

62 This seems to have been a common maxim: Cassius Dio (F 21.2) also commented on the danger of excessive confidence in war.

proclaimed emperor by the Pannonian legions because he 'surpassed Philip in ability, outstripping him in both political excellence and experience in warfare' (πόνῳ περιέσται Φιλίππου, πολιτικῇ τε ἀρετῇ καὶ πολεμικῇ πείρᾳ προήκων).[63] The soldiers 'trusted in Decius's skill and his foresight concerning all things' (τῇ Δεκίου πεποιθότες ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ περὶ πάντα προνοίᾳ) and they emerged victorious because Decius surpassed Philip in 'generalship' (στρατηγία).[64] If we accept the argument, as seems likely, that Zosimus relied heavily on Dexippus' *Scythica*, he undoubtedly followed Dexippus' portrayal of the emperor.[65] What is more remarkable is Zosimus' statement that Decius, in his efforts to combat the Gothic invaders – described as Scythians in the manner of Dexippus[66] – prevailed in all his battles.[67] This claim is compatible with Decius' own self-assessment of his qualities and experience, especially the victory at Nikopolis, as portrayed in Dexippus' *Scythica*. It is improbable that Zosimus would have produced such a positive estimation of Decius, which recalls the themes of fragment 26, if Dexippus had launched a concerted satirical attack on his character.[68]

Maxims regarding experience (ἐμπειρία) were a frequent *topos* of hortative speeches made by generals in ancient historiography. Such maxims were used to demonstrate the generals' own suitability as a commander or to give confidence to the troops; its antecedents can be traced as far back as Homer.[69] The lack of experience on the part of the inhabitants of Philippopolis is implicitly contrasted with that of Decius and the Roman army, who won the victory at Nikopolis. The idea that professional soldiers were better warriors was a commonplace one: Aristotle argued that they possessed a quality that resembled bravery (ἀνδρεία) on account of their experience (ἐκ τῆς ἐμπειρίας), which in turn, gave them an edge in battle.[70] There was no odium attached to historians who used such standard rhetorical maxims; on the contrary, they were expected, so as to lend credibility to a speech or a letter. A fourth century rhetorical handbook notes that public letters in particular should be adorned with weighty maxims (*sententiarum pondera*).[71] But the presence of such quasi-philosophical commonplaces does not preclude originality: in fact, as Thucydides showed, it was possible to write

63 Zos. 1.21.3.

64 Zos. 1.22.1–2.

65 See F. Paschoud, "Zosimus (40)", *RE* 19 (1972) 795–841, at 811–813; R.C. Blockley, "Was the first book of Zosimus' *New History* based on more than two sources?", Byzantion 50 (1980) 393–402, at 399–400, 402; R.T. Ridley, *Zosimus New History: A Translation with Commentary* (Canberra 1982), xii.

66 As noted by Paschoud (n. 65) 146, Zosimus never described them as Goths.

67 Zos. 1.23.1.

68 Cf. n. 22, above.

69 E. Keitel, "Homeric antecedents to the *cohortatio* in the ancient historians", *Classical World* 80 (1987) 153–172, at 154, 159–160. For this *topos* in Greek historiography, see Thuc. 7.61 where Nicias urges the Athenians not to lose heart in their battle against the Syracusans because of their experience in many wars (πολλῶν ἤδη πολέμων ἔμπειροι ὄντες).

70 Aristotle, *Eth. Nic.* 3.8.7–8 [= 1116.9–16].

71 Iulius Victor 27, discussed by Trapp (n. 19) 184.

speeches that featured such maxims but still developed the characterization of individuals or contributed to a wider historical analysis.[72] All Greek and Roman historians had numerous *topoi* at their disposal, and it was up to the individual to select the most appropriate of these and integrate them into their work according to the themes and situation being described. In the *Letter of Decius*, the *topos* of experience was not used to inspire the Philippopolitans, but to disguise the true reasons for Decius' fear. Dexippus was clearly manipulating traditional rhetorical forms to suit his characterization of Decius.

While persuading the people of Philippopolis to take his advice, Decius provides a second reason as to why they should not attempt to join battle: he himself would be on the scene soon with his army. The emperor informs the people that it is reckless to fight 'without a general' (ἄνευ στρατηγοῦ), and that the best course of action is to be led 'by a leader' (ὑπὸ ἡγεμόνι) (F 26.7).[73] He advises the citizens not to leave their fortifications, for this would be to act against 'the commander' (τὸν ἄρχοντα), and he and his army would be there in a few days' time (F 26.9–10). As with the theme of experience, the necessity of being led by an effective general was hardly an original sentiment,[74] but the theme of imperial presence had special resonance in the turbulent days of the mid-third century.[75] It was no longer sufficient for emperors to delegate conflicts on the frontiers to their subordinates: they had to be experienced and competent generals themselves. This expectation appears in the works of contemporary historians, including Herodian's *Histories*, which covered the period between 180–238, but was probably written in the 250s.[76] According to Herodian, when the Persian king Artaxerxes attacked the eastern provinces in the reign of Severus Alexander, the emperor was forced to travel to the region in person because 'the governors were summoning him there' (καλούντων δὲ αὐτὸν καὶ τῶν ἐκεῖσε ἡγεμόνων).[77] The situation repeated itself in the early 230s, when the governors of the Danubian provinces, faced with barbarian incursions, reported that they

72 J.C.I. Zoido, "The battle exhortation in ancient rhetoric", *Rhetorica* 25 (2007) 141–158, at 144–146.

73 Cf. Martin (n. 1) 181. The Greek word ἡγεμών was sometimes employed as the equivalent of *princeps*, but by the third century it was more commonly used to describe a provincial governor, as a translation of the Latin *praeses* (*LSJ*[9] s.v. ἡγεμών). It is unlikely that any of these terms are being used by Dexippus in a technical sense, especially given his earlier description of Iulius Priscus as an ἁρμοστὴς (F 26.2). The use of such archaic language can also be found in the works of Appian: Potter (n. 23) 329.

74 See for example, Publilius Syrus, *Sententiae* 206: *ducis in consilio posita est virtus militum* ('the soldiers' bravery depends on the general's plan').

75 A. Alföldi, "La grande crise du monde romain du III[e] siècle", *AC* 7 (1938) 5–18, at 9.

76 The *terminus post quem* for Herodian's work is 238, with proposed dates ranging from the 240s to the 260s. See G. Alföldy, "Herodians Person", *AncSoc* 2 (1971) 204–233, at 218–219; H. Sidebottom, "The Date of the Composition of Herodian's *History*", *AC* 66, (1997) 271–276, at 276; A.R. Polley, "The Date of Herodian's *History*", *AC* 72 (2003) 203–208. Herodian's value as a contemporary source is emphasised by G. Alföldy, "Zeitgeschichte und Krisenempfindung bei Herodian", *Hermes* 99 (1971) 429–449.

77 Herodian 6.3.1.

'required' (δεῖσθαι) the presence of both Alexander and his army.[78] Herodian's most striking acknowledgment of the changed situation is demonstrated by a speech he wrote for the emperor Pupienus, which was delivered to the assembled troops following the murder of Maximinus at Aquileia in April 238. In Herodian's oration, Pupienus assures the assembled troops that he and his co-emperor Balbinus will keep the peace on the frontiers. This would be ensured by the collegial nature of the government, for 'according to necessity, one of us will always easily be present when summoned' (πρὸς τὴν χρείαν ἀεί του πρὸς τὰ καλοῦντα ῥᾳδίως παρόντος).[79] Dexippus' *Letter of Decius* shows an acute recognition of the same problem, as the emperor constantly assures the inhabitants of Philippopolis that he will soon arrive on the scene to protect them. The letter reaches its climax with the emperor claiming that 'this promise is completely truthful, as evidenced by our accomplishments at Nikopolis, even though there is no need to boast' (F 26.10) (προαποδέδεικται δὲ οὐ πόρρω τοῦ ἀληθοῦς εἶναι τὸ ἐπάγγελμα ἐκ τῶν πρὸς Νικοπόλει πραχθέντων, εἴ γε μὴ μεγαληγορεῖσθαι δεήσει). This statement ties in the themes of military experience and imperial presence which run through the letter: Decius has already proved himself as an experienced commander only months before in the battle outside Nikopolis, so the inhabitants of Philippopolis have no reason to expect him not to arrive in time to defeat the Goths.

The foregoing analysis suggests that although the letter is crucial to understanding Dexippus' portrayal of Decius, it does not offer any genuine insight into the emperor's personality. There are but three emperors mentioned in fragments assigned with any certainty to the *Scythica*: Decius, Gallienus (the unnamed emperor of F 28), and Aurelian (F 6 and 7).[80] Dexippus' interests did not lie in biography, but in the study of individuals' actions as part of large-scale social and political changes.[81] This is suggested by lacunose fragment 24 of Dexippus' œuvre, which is currently unassigned, but features many of the same ideas as the *Letter of Decius*:[82]

> [...] τύχας ἀνδρῶν καὶ καταστάσεις πόλεών τε καὶ ἐθνῶν νεωτερίζουσαι ἐλάττους τε ὁμοίως καὶ μείζους καὶ διαφερόντως περὶ εἰρήνην καὶ πόλεμον συμβαίνουσιν ἄγοντος τοῦ χρόνου μηδεμίαν, ἀλλὰ μετατρέποντος ἄλλῃ ἄλλους πρός τε το ἄμεινον.

78 Herodian 6.7.3.

79 Herodian 8.7.6.

80 To this list we might add Trebonianus Gallus and his son Volusianus, who are mentioned in a passage of Syncellus which cites Dexippus (F 22).

81 Brandt (n. 2) 176–178; Potter (n. 7) 93; Armstrong (n. 21) 253. Greater attention to the personality of the ruler can perhaps be detected in the Anonymous Continuator of Cassius Dio, who preserves some interesting anecdotes about Gallienus (F 5 and 6 = *FHG* IV, p. 194–195, ed. Müller).

82 Dexippus *FGrHist* 100 F 24, with the comments of McInerney (n. 1) *ad loc.* and Müller (n. 13) 674. The restoration and interpretation of this fragment is particularly problematic, since it begins mid-sentence.

> ... fortunes of men, and the constitutions of cities and provincial populations undergo violent change, likewise [whether these changes are] great or slight, they occur differently in response to peace and to war. Yet it is not by the mere passage of time, but through the process of change, that some constitutions evolve in one way, others in other ways, and for the better.

The evidence available from this passage and the extant fragments suggests that Dexippus conceived of power relations in terms of ethnic groups, such as Thracians, Moesians, and Scythians, rather than Roman provinces or administrative structures.[83] This interest is important in interpreting the *Letter of Decius*, as the emperor does not show any concern to issue instructions to his own governor Iulius Priscus, who appears mainly as a conduit for Decius' advice. Instead, he appeals directly to the inhabitants of Philippopolis, claiming that he is concerned for 'the safety of the community' (τοῦ κοινοῦ τῆς ἀσφαλείας) (F 26.5). The implication is that the Philippopolitans were the equals of Decius, rather than his subjects. He states that it is safer to face danger 'in partnership' (ἐς κοινωνίαν) than attempt to fight alone (F 26.7). The Roman troops are described as 'the best companions in war' (ἄριστα πολέμοι ὠμιληκότων) (F 26.8).[84] This theme is also apparent in Dexippus' speech to the Athenians, in which it is asserted that the people of Athens would be the most powerful when joined together with the emperor's forces (F 28a.4).[85]

The emphasis in Dexippus' *Scythica* on the Greek-speaking peoples in Achaia and the Balkans, and their success in the face of the barbarians, led Millar to suggest that they were the real 'heroes' of the work.[86] But it is clear that in context of the *Letter of Decius*, Dexippus' focus on ethnic groups and their relationship

83 Millar (n. 2) 25. For example, the inhabitants of Marcianopolis are referred to as 'the Moesians' (τοὺς Μυσοὺς) (F 25.6); Priscus is the 'governor of the Macedonian and Thracian cities' (ἁρμοστὴς τῶν Μακεδονικῶν καὶ Θρακικῶν πόλεων) (F 26.2); the defenders of Philippopolis are 'the Thracians' (οἱ Θρᾷκες) (F 27.6, 27.11); in his speech to the Athenians, Dexippus refers to 'the Greeks' (τοὺς Ἕλληνας, τοῖς Ἕλλησιν) (F 28a.4, 6) and then also to the Athenians (τῶν Ἀθηναίων, οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι) (F 28a.6, 7). See also A.N. Sherwin-White, *The Roman Citizenship* (2nd ed., Oxford 1973) 437–444, for a discussion of this terminology in other Greek authors of the second and third centuries.

84 Free Greek cities, such as Aphrodisias, represented their relationship with the Roman empire as one of alliance, rather than domination: *IAph2007* 8.27, 8.100, 14.12. See also *IGR* III 481 = *ILS* 8870, in which the military commander Valerius Statilius Kastor is described as σύμμαχον τῶν Σεβαστῶν, and examples from Termessus in Pisidia, discussed by S. Mitchell, "Native rebellion in the Pisidian Taurus", in K. Hopwood (ed.), *Organised Crime in Antiquity* (London 1999) 155–175.

85 The opposite, where the division of forces leads to military defeat, is emphasized in the speech of the Juthungian ambassadors (F 6.7).

86 Millar (n. 2) 25, followed by Brandt (n. 2) 176–177, and Armstrong (n. 21) 157–158. Bleckmann (n.4) 208 maintains that Dexippus emphasized the conflict between 'local self defence' and 'imperial authority'. Cf. L. De Blois, "Emperor and Empire in the Works of Greek Speaking Authors of the Third Century AD", *ANRW* 2.34.4 (1998) 3391–3443, at 3432. By way of contrast to the position of Millar, see Potter (n. 7) 93.

with the Romans can also be read as a commentary on the endemic usurpations of the mid-third century. Emperors were not usually acclaimed by senatorial powerbrokers in the city of Rome, but by regional armies and communities in the provinces. The letter was written out of fear that the Thracians, despairing of help from Decius, might assert their capacity to proclaim an alternative emperor. The *Letter of Decius* thus elucidates the changing power relationships in the middle decades of the third century, as emperors faced continual pressure to be on the scene during times of warfare, or risk the threat of local revolt.

V. Conclusion

Our knowledge of Dexippus' *Scythica* is largely determined by the selection of fragments made in the age of Constantine Porphyrogenitus. But the survival of a substantial portion such as the *Letter of Decius* provides us with an insight into the historical themes of the *Scythica* and the literary techniques employed by its author. The aim of this article has been to show that when the *Letter of Decius* is considered in the context of the upheavals of the mid-third century, it is not merely an empty collection of rhetorical maxims. Instead, it contributes to Dexippus' characterization of Decius as an emperor intent on preventing a revolt in Thrace that would destabilise his regime.

We have drawn attention to several aspects of the *Letter of Decius* that support this interpretation. Rather than simply giving a chronological account of the Gothic invasion, Dexippus decided to heighten the tension by composing the letter and embedding it within the larger narrative. He introduced the letter using the Thucydidean formula τάδε, in order to give it a claim to authenticity – at least within the context of the *Scythica* itself – but then presented the text as if it was an imperial oration, not a dry missive sent by the chancellery. This serves to increase the drama of the situation, for Decius appeals to the people of Philippopolis in the emotive language of a speech, even though the form of the letter itself emphasizes that he is far away from the city. Throughout the letter, Decius emphasizes his victories and his experience as a general, in contrast to the inexperience of the citizens. Dexippus achieved this by employing a series of rhetorical *topoi*, but these were specifically selected to apply to Decius' situation. The emperor possessed a legitimate fear that the people of Philippopolis would be successful in his absence and proclaim their own emperor, and it was only fitting that Dexippus should draw on existing Greek and Roman ideas about military aptitude and experience to express this.

The *Letter of Decius* was therefore a serious attempt to explore the situation in which Trajan Decius found himself in 251. He was a successful senatorial general, who had been acclaimed emperor by the troops in Pannonia and Moesia because of his military prowess. But he was only one among many third-century emperors who had come to power in this fashion, as provincial armies and com-

munities exerted their ability to proclaim a new ruler when they felt that the existing emperor was ill-equipped to handle immediate military threats. The changing reality of power was, we would argue, recognized by Dexippus and other contemporary historians such as Herodian, who acknowledged that it was necessary that emperors should be present on the frontiers at all times. The *Letter of Decius*, with its powerful plea to the Thracian population – not to the Roman authorities – thus serves as an exploration of the complex and ever-changing relationship between the emperor, the army, and the provinces in the mid-third century.

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