

Aspects of Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*

A Masters Thesis
in the field of Classical Studies
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Abstract

Solinus' *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*, composed in the third or fourth century, was an esteemed work of travel and natural history throughout Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Although scholars since the early Enlightenment have criticised this work as an unoriginal compilation of earlier sources, Solinus' skill in selecting and organising information, and his book's influence throughout much of western history, cannot be denied. The first chapter argues that Solinus designed his book to have wide appeal, so as to entertain and educate the greatest possible audience. No previous English or French scholarship has addressed Solinus' book as a fundamentally entertaining work, but there are many indications that it would be considered a fashionable and amusing informational text by the elite class. By drawing on several highly respected genres, frequently citing received authorities, and writing in a flowing discourse, Solinus presents information about worldwide wonders, of no immediate use to the average Roman, as though it were beneficial and even necessary to the educated reader. The second chapter looks closely at Solinus' literary technique, then considers him in the context of three other encyclopedic authors: Aulus Gellius in the second century, and Macrobius and Martianus Capella in the fifth. The third chapter examines the *Collectanea* as a work of imperial literature. I argue for the novel claim that Solinus' depiction of the Macrobian Ethiopians seems to associate them with his contemporaries, the Axumites. His portrayal of the Macrobian shows that although on the surface the book adheres to Romano-centric literary traditions, in subtle ways it reflects its contemporary context and Solinus' own perspective. By examining the text itself as well as the context in which it was created and received, this thesis contributes to a new understanding of the *Collectanea*'s value as a work of literary and historical significance.

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Introduction

In the third or fourth century CE, Gaius Iulius Solinus published a work called *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*: “A Collection of Noteworthy Matters.” It is a book filled with far-away places and unknown peoples, describing the entire world known to the Romans through their own exploration and foreign reports, and following a tradition that goes back to such Greek authors as Herodotus, Ctesias, and Megasthenes. Its mixture of science and myth affected European conceptions of geography and natural history for the next thousand years, but its influence waned with the medieval period until it has been forgotten in almost all but the most specialised circles today. Solinus and his work have been little studied in the past few hundred years, especially in English, where he is rarely mentioned any more than in passing in scholarly texts on late antique geography and science. Humphries allows him only one sentence of a 24 page article on the adaptation of classical geographical texts into a Christian context;¹ Rose notes little more than that Solinus stole his material from Pliny the Elder, Pomponius Mela, and unknown other(s), making “atrocious blunders” in the process;² and Merrill’s monograph *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* begins only in the fifth century with Orosius and moves chronologically forward; his references to Solinus are limited to footnotes and half sentences indicating his influence on later authors.³ These scholars cannot be faulted for having other focuses in their works, but it is remarkable that an author who is widely recognised for his enormous influence is nonetheless so often relegated to the footnotes of academic writing.

Interest in Solinus has, happily enough, exploded within the last few years. Fernández Nieto published a new Spanish translation and commentary in 2001 (Madrid), and several scholars have recently undertaken their own English translations (although none have yet been published). A good bibliography of previous work on Solinus can be found at <http://digiliblt.lett.unipmn.it/> (a growing online library of late antique Latin texts). Due to

¹ Humphries 2007: 44: “An example [of a short ancient geographical work that survived into the early Middle Ages] is C. Iulius Solinus’ *Collectanea Rerum Memorabilium*: this popular work, cobbled together from various bits of Pliny and Pomponius Mela, did much to pass on the geographical inheritance of Antiquity to the medieval world.”

² Rose 1958: 438.

³ E.g. Merrills 2005: 27, 98.

the former scarcity of research — and the excessively disparaging attitude with which much of it was for a long time approached — it is necessary to do some groundwork and ask some basic questions about the text and its literary and cultural context. This is particularly the goal of the present work's first chapter, which addresses the questions of genre, readership, purpose, and reception. In pursuing these questions, the chapter pays particular attention to Solinus' introductory letter. Solinus seems to have released two editions of the *Collectanea*, each with its own preface. For the purpose of this thesis, only the first preface is considered.

The second chapter discusses Solinus' literary technique, focusing on passages from his preface and first chapter but addressing features that are apparent throughout the entire work. It concentrates on his composition through thematic association, which allows the work to flow naturally as an uninterrupted discourse, and on his use of references and their contribution to a sense of the text's authority. This chapter also places the work within the context of late antique encyclopedic literature, and considers some ways in which Solinus is a typical author of that tradition and some ways in which he is not.

The *Collectanea* can also be considered for what it reveals about Solinus' — and by extension, his Roman audience's — ethnographical views. Chapter three contains a case study on how the Romans relate to other people. The Macrobian Ethiopians are a mythical people of long-standing Greek and Roman tradition, but I show that Solinus may be associating them with his contemporaries, the Axumites in north-eastern Africa. In calling them by what he may perceive as their historical name instead of their contemporary one, he follows a Roman historiographical tradition. This in itself reveals an aspect of the cultural lens through which Romans perceive others: firmly through their own sense of historicity and tradition, rather than through a desire to perceive the other group as it currently sees itself. Yet if Solinus is indeed tacitly associating the Axumites with the legendarily divinely-favoured Macrobian, this reveals a positive Roman view of the Axumites, even though it is couched in a normatively Romano-centric discourse.

The three chapters of this thesis move from a discussion of the literary world in which the *Collectanea* was created and received, to an analysis of the construction of the work itself, and to the work as a transmitter of cultural ideas that are able to illuminate us on the Roman perception of the world and of themselves. They show the diversity of possible

approaches to research on the *Collectanea*, and of the many valuable insights that can be gleaned from this long neglected late antique work.

Chapter 1:

Solinus' Success: Bridging Popular and Didactic Literature

Introduction

The *Collectanea* was an influential book during Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, as a source of material and study for centuries of scholars. Yet sight of the author himself has been lost through the ages: next to nothing is known about Solinus' life, his period, or where he worked, which creates some difficulty in understanding the intended purpose of the work and the expectations of his audience. These questions are not straightforward to answer, since there are no contemporary texts providing information of a biographical or commentary nature; clues must be pulled from the text itself and the context that received it. An examination of Solinus' authorial comments and the literary conditions prevalent during the era in which he wrote reveals that the *Collectanea* was most likely designed to inform and amuse the educated mind at rest. My use of the term "educated mind" will be elucidated through a study of the late antique *literati*, as well as through a discussion of related literary genres that were being read during Late Antiquity; in turn, this may also help to explain why the work in question was copied and quoted so often throughout Late Antiquity.

To this end, this chapter will first address a previous trend in Solinian scholarship, which focuses solely on Solinus' possible educational and practical motives; then, turning to Solinus' own comments within the *Collectanea*, his motives will be reassessed to reflect the sense of entertainment that he instils into his informational material. The second section of the chapter discusses what we can assume about the work's contemporary audience. The third section of the chapter places the *Collectanea* within a contemporary literary context, discussing several ways in which it incorporates aspects of different genres which contribute to readability, entertainment, and a sense of reliability. The fourth, and final, section briefly highlights the *Collectanea*'s favourable reception in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages.

Solinus the Dry Pedagogue or Solinus the Edutainer?

Solinus' desire to amuse and educate a wide audience seems clearly manifest through his own introduction, his authorial comments, and the content and structure of his writing, yet many scholars have interpreted the evidence differently, and so have arrived at different conclusions about the purpose of Solinus' book. In what follows, I will discuss a tradition of scholarship that considers ancient encyclopedic works to have the same purpose as our modern ones: quick access to basic facts.

The *Collectanea* is part of the tradition of Roman encyclopedic writing.¹ The majority of Solinus' information is derived from Pliny the Elder's encyclopedic work, *Historia Naturalis*, and from Pomponius Mela's geographic text, *De chorographia libri tres*.² Pliny accounts for about seventy-five percent of Solinus' sources.³ Because of this derivation, one trend of scholarship on Solinus has focused on interpretations that were also common for twentieth-century studies on Pliny; and for this reason, a discussion of recent Solinian scholarship benefits from the mention of at least one trend in Plinian scholarship.

In 1975, Chibnall asserted that Pliny's intended audience was made up of politicians and generals, and that to him knowledge was more "adjunct to politics than part of a systematic pursuit of truth."⁴ Since the Enlightenment period, Pliny has often been dismissed as a pedantic compiler,⁵ and his contributions to the preservation of knowledge have been downplayed. Solinus' material is streamlined in comparison to Pliny's, concentrating on exotic and unusual features of natural history rather than attempting to

¹ Encyclopedias did not exist during Late Antiquity as they do today, but some late Roman writing is referred to as "encyclopedic" for its attempt to systematise and itemise knowledge (see König and Woolf 2013). For a harsh twentieth-century interpretation of Pliny and Solinus as encyclopedists and compilers, see Stahl 1962: 134-141. For a more balanced discussion of Pliny and Solinus as encyclopedists and preservers of knowledge, see Chibnall 1975: 57-62. For details on Pliny and the Roman tradition of encyclopedism, see Doody 2010: 1-39.

² See Dueck 2012: 66 and Tozer 1964: 365.

³ Broderson 2011: 70; Dover 2013: 415.

⁴ Chibnall 1973: 58. Cf. Howe 1985, who sees Pliny's *Historia naturalis* as a guide to political conduct.

⁵ Doody 2010: 31.

touch on all aspects, but in the humanist era Solinus was lastingly nicknamed “Pliny’s ape,”⁶ and perhaps his own peculiarities have sometimes been lost in Pliny’s shadow. Chibnall’s words are indicative of one narrow trend which some scholars have followed since the Enlightenment concerning general encyclopedic works,⁷ and which, on occasion, is consequently followed concerning Solinus’ more niched work. Given the dismissal of even a great and tasking encyclopedic work like the *Historia naturalis* as a compilation of brief facts for busy professional men, it is perhaps unsurprising that its slender descendant the *Collectanea* has also sometimes been categorized in such a way.

Bedon’s work on Solinus falls into this category. He believes that Solinus’ work was designed as quick, necessary information for the politician.⁸ In one article, he argues that the *Collectanea* reveals that Solinus was a Stoic; and since Stoicism emphasizes civic duty, Solinus must have written in order to fulfill his perceived duty, through selecting and ordering his collected learnings as a reference work for politicians. According to Bedon, limiting Solinus’ intended audience to busy political men explains its brevity and selective content. If this book was intended for an educated male elite, it was unnecessary to reiterate basic, local information that they would already know. Instead, Solinus collected things he did not think they would know as much about.⁹ Similarly, Bedon posits that the reason the *Collectanea* is less occupied with descriptions of topics such as morals, astronomy, and medicine (which are described at length in other famous encyclopedias¹⁰) is that these

⁶ This reference is found in Brodersen 2011: 70, but the text he refers to is Vossius’ *De historicis latinis libri III* 1651: 720 (the book was originally released in 1627, but his quotation is from the 1651 edition). This expression was used for Solinus even earlier than Vossius: See Dover (2013: 415-516), on the expression in a copy of the *Collectanea* belonging to the fifteenth/sixteenth century humanists Julio Pomponio Leto and Philippo Beroaldo. Indeed, even the comparatively gracious Beazley says the nickname is justified (1897: 250).

⁷ For instance, Stahl (1962: 134-135) clearly thinks little of them: Pliny, though he had “rigourously disciplined habits of study,” was marked by “an inability to comprehend;” and Stahl finds difficulty in dating Solinus because “we would not expect a compiler to keep up to date.” This view is shared by Rose 1954: 435-437. For more discussion of Solinus as a pedagogue, see von Martels (2003).

⁸ “Une histoire des origines et de l’essor de l’empire romain fonde en droit l’ambition de celui-ci et de ses dirigeants à régner sur le monde” (Bedon 2000: 83).

⁹ Bedon 2000: 82-86.

¹⁰ For example, Pliny’s entire second book discusses the skies, and Isidore of Seville devotes the fourth book of his *Etymologiae* to medicine, and the thirteenth book to the skies. Isidore also moralises throughout the text, although there is a religious focal point in books six-eight, where he discusses various aspects of divine hierarchy and the Christian Church.

subjects are not intrinsically necessary to the practical knowledge of a politician.¹¹ Bedon's theory is well-elaborated, yet apart from the fact that it is by no means clear that Solinus is a Stoic, it turns away from the fundamentally diversionary nature of Solinus' material. The general content of the *Collectanea* was hardly necessary for a Roman politician. Although the talk of strange races and animals might recall the glorious days of discoveries in far-reaching Roman expansion,¹² imperial boundaries were no longer extending quickly enough for the vast majority of politicians ever to be stationed in a truly new province. The world that Solinus revealed to his readers was one with which few had ever come into physical contact, and which the great majority would never have to worry about encountering. Contrary to Bedon's conclusion, it seems that for most people, politicians or otherwise, the material in this book must have been an object of cultural interest and entertainment.

Von Martels takes a similar stance to Bedon, although he spends less time on the overall content of the work. Instead, in an article that focuses on the possible influence of Christian culture on Solinus, he argues that Solinus wrote with an "educational end in mind" and had a "pedagogic method."¹³ Von Martels also rejects the classification of the work as a collection of *mirabilia*, and instead compares it to modern sensationalist media, a differentiation which seems a very fine line — but which significantly alters the intended effect of Solinus' work from education and wonder to shock entertainment.¹⁴ Consequently, von Martels' rejection of *mirabilia* negatively affects his argument that the work was purely pedagogic: if it were, Solinus would not attempt to shock his readers with tabloid contents.

Though they differ in particulars, both Bedon and von Martels justifiably stress the educational aspects of Solinus' work. Yet the following inspection of Solinus' authorial comments and narrative content suggests that in classifying Solinus' work as quick knowledge for purely practical purposes, these scholars turn away from a significant aspect of the work's purpose and appeal. The most basic purpose for which Solinus wrote the

¹¹ Bedon 2000: 83-4. In fairness, there is also a tradition of describing Pliny's *Historia naturalis* as a stoicising text, so one can see how this could lead one to look for Stoicism in Pliny's intellectual descendant, Solinus (see Rose 1954: 437 — of course, it's also worth noting that Rose does not see Solinus as a Stoic — actually, he considers Solinus to be a blundering Plinian thief (p. 438)).

¹² See Dueck 2012: 16. For more information on geography as promoted by early Roman conquests, see Tozer 1964: 216-237.

¹³ Von Martels 2003: 69.

¹⁴ Von Martels 2003: 63.

Collectanea rerum memorabilium was to concurrently *inform* and *amuse* his readers.¹⁵ The book was surely meant to be educational, not groundbreaking; but because Solinus includes interesting and unusual extracts from his sources, and to a great extent discards the mundane and familiar, he must have meant the book also to be entertaining.¹⁶ In fact, his own statement of purpose and several of his extra-narrative comments reveal his goal of entertainment.

Solinus' introductory letter to Adventus¹⁷ from the first edition of the *Collectanea*, brief though it is, reveals his purpose in writing the book and the ways in which he hopes it will be read: as a basic introduction to or reminder of varied subjects which he feels are important to a Roman citizen's understanding of the world, as a work of cultural interest, and last but not least, as entertainment. Solinus tells Adventus that he is intentionally presenting a variety of topics for the interest of his readers: "We also worked in many things that fit together in various ways, so that if nothing else, the *variety* itself, at least, may cure the aversion of the reader."¹⁸ Variety was highly esteemed in Roman literary culture: Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, among others, testifies to this trend.¹⁹ The fact that Solinus uses the word *varietas* in his preface makes it clear that the education of his readers is not his sole aim, and that in fact preserving, and even enhancing, the interest of the reader — that is,

¹⁵ Similarly, Beagon (1992: 13) writes that Pliny's *Historia naturalis* was the product of a well-educated non-specialist, and as such Pliny is representative of a certain class of Roman men during his era: not quite intellectual experts, but interested in learning. From this angle, it is not surprising that Solinus, as Pliny's intellectual descendant, looked to inform his general intellectual peers more than the experts of the various fields that his book touches on (natural history, geography, history, etc.).

¹⁶ Sallmann (2011) shares a similar perspective: "The line from Rome to the 'Island of the Blessed' results in a sensible structure for a reading public, combining entertainment by sensation with an edifying enrichment of knowledge."

¹⁷ In Golding's translation, the recipient is called Autius instead of Adventus. The use of this name is found in the chapter heading of the *praefatio*. (The only edition in circulation of Goldings' work is a facsimile of the sixteenth century translation that lacks pagination.) Unfortunately, there has been no research on Goldings' translation which offers insight into his use of the name *Autius*, and the translation itself offers no indication of which manuscript(s) Golding followed. Fernández Nieto (2001: 100-101) enumerates the earliest translations into modern vernaculars (including Golding's English translation), but does not investigate the manuscripts used for translations. This leaves much potential research to be done, but not in immediate connection to the present inquiry.

¹⁸ Solinus *Praefatio* 4: *Inseruimus et pleraque differenter congruentia, ut si nihil aliud, saltem uarietas ipsa legentium fastidio mederetur*. (All translations are my own unless otherwise stated; Solinus' Latin is quoted from Mommsen's 1895 edition.)

¹⁹ His work, full of deliberate variation and meant to "to convey correct conduct within the contemporary culture of conversation," was used as a literary *exemplum* during Late Antiquity (Krasser 2011).

entertaining the reader — is one of his main tools of education.²⁰ This does not mean that Solinus meant his work to be frivolous. It is not meant to give ultimate knowledge about the world, but he does intend to kindle an understanding in his audience: “If you properly turn your mind to it, you will find that it [this book] contains, as it were, a germ of understanding rather than eloquent veneers.”²¹ This statement of modesty must certainly be read as a *captatio benevolentiae*,²² but it also refers to the fact that this is a short scholarly book, at an easily readable length, based on acknowledged and respected earlier works.²³ Of course, while Mela’s *De chorographia* is of a similar length to the *Collectanea*, Pliny’s *Historia naturalis* is much longer. Solinus organises his information differently from them, emphasises some different things, and sometimes he conveys slightly different information, or information for which he consulted other, unknown sources — one example of his variation of information is the subject of the present work’s third chapter. Yet it remains that the *Collectanea* does not attempt to provide the definitive description of every people and place, just to create a short outline.

Solinus’ audience would have been generally aware that most of his information was collected from Pliny. Pliny was one of the most highly respected scientific writers in the early empire;²⁴ in his dedicatory letter to the Emperor Vespasian, he writes that he has

²⁰ After all, as Horace wrote in *Ars Poetica* (341): *Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*. See Cameron (2010: 410) for evidence that the Roman elite of the fourth century had a reputation for preferring stories of scandal and excitement to works of learning. This perception fits in nicely with Solinus’ effort to create an educational work that would be amusing to read. See also Bjornlie 2013: 201, who discusses Cassiodorus’ tactic in the *Variae* of using variety of subject matter to help secure the reader’s interest.

²¹ Solinus *Praefatio* 2: *Cui si animum propius intenderis, uelut fermentum cognitionis magis ei inesse quam bratteas eloquentiae deprehendes*.

²² A rhetorical technique that aims to catch the audience’s attention and at the same time curry goodwill. See Calboli Montefusco (2011) for more details on the use of *captatio benevolentiae*.

²³ Holford-Strevens (2003: 28-29) makes the following comments on Aulus Gellius’ *Noctes Atticae*, which can also be used in the interpretation of the *Collectanea*’s literary environment: “The volume of Greek and Latin writing had swollen far beyond the capacity of any normal person to read (let alone remember), even if copies were available, which they were often not. Since in polite society a man was expected to have some acquaintance with books and things to be found in them, he would be all the more grateful for summaries and selections from which to acquire the veneer of culture that is all most people can aspire to. When even ‘an individual scholar could only hope to see a few of the books that he had heard of’, the cultivated *homme du monde* had every reason to rely on Gellius and those like him.”

²⁴ Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 419; Doody 2010: 31.

collected his information from 2,000 books by 100 authors,²⁵ and this was the work of years.²⁶ It is unremarkable that Solinus trusted Pliny enough to accept his word and his account of sources.²⁷ On the basis of Pliny's reputation, anyone who returned to those same 2,000 books might expect to spend years of their own lives only to collect the same information that he had already integrated so well. To retread all those original sources would have seemed unnecessary work.²⁸

Solinus explains his selections in the prefatory letter to Adventus: "A few things have been added about exotic trees, the forms of foreign races, the differing ritual of remote nations, and some things also worthy to remember which it seemed a negligence to pass by, whose authority — I would wish to convey this in the first place to your zeal — flows forth from respected writers."²⁹ It is interesting that Solinus uses the word *incuriosum*, which can point to both a "negligence" and a "lack of curiosity."³⁰ The double-entendre of this word implies that the *Collectanea* will contain details about parts of the world which are not immediately necessary to everyday life in the Roman empire (and hence would be omitted only for a *lack of curiosity*), yet which are important for a Roman's fully informed understanding of the world (so that it would be *negligent* to omit them). I will return to this aspect later, but for now it suffices to retain that the phrase suggests that the information of the *Collectanea*, though exotic and unusual, is important.

The criteria for selection are outlined again at the beginning of the *Collectanea*'s second chapter: "But so that it [Italy] does not seem altogether untouched, it does not seem absurd to direct the mind to those things which have been treated less, and to tread with light

²⁵ Pliny *Praefatio* 17.

²⁶ His work habits are described in Pliny the Younger, *Epistle* 3.5. See also Chibnall 1973: 57-58.

²⁷ As Merrills (2005: 27) writes, "It would be far more remarkable had the writers of Late Antiquity not been explicit in their deference to established geographical authorities."

²⁸ The idea that Solinus felt himself to be continuing Pliny's tradition is suggested throughout the whole of his introductory letter to Adventus, which echoes Pliny's dedicatory letter to Vespasian. Both Solinus and Pliny emphasise the light nature of their work while begging for indulgence (Pliny *Praefatio* 12; Solinus *Praefatio* 1); both state, in similar metaphors, that their subject matter is unusual (Pliny *Praefatio* 14: *est non trita*; Solinus 2.4: *minus trita est*); both seek to counter the reader's boredom through subjects less often treated (Pliny *Praefatio* 14: *fastidium*; Solinus *Praefatio* 4: *fastidio*).

²⁹ Solinus *Praefatio* 5: *Nonnulla... quae praetermittere incuriosum uidebatur quorumque auctoritas, quod cum primis industriae tuae insinuatum uelim, de scriptoribus manat receptissimis.*

³⁰ I owe this observation on the two-fold meaning of *incuriosum* to Dr. Karin Schlapbach.

footsteps things which have been less exploited.”³¹ Already in the preface and the first chapter Solinus had made it clear that things less often addressed by others would play a significant role in his book, but here he gives a deferential introduction to the topic of Italy. Some have taken this to mean that Solinus must have been Italian,³² but this is too concrete an assertion. Rather it seems a dutiful nod to Italy’s position in the tradition and ideal of Romanness: he outlines Italy as a special place, distinct from the provinces and foreign lands he will go on to discuss. This introduction to the second chapter is significant. It is clear by this point that unusual objects and happenings are not side-narratives to accompany a greater theme; they encompass the book as a whole. As such, it is a reminder of the thoroughness of Solinus’ informational intentions (“so that it does not seem altogether untouched”) and of his emphasis on uncommon subject matter (“treated less,” “less exploited”).

Despite his interest in unusual subjects, Solinus adheres closely to many norms of ancient rhetoric. When an ancient writer discusses *mirabilia* or lesser-known facts, he often relies on other authorities, named or unnamed, by using phrases such as, “It is reported.”³³ Solinus uses this device, but he also occasionally makes an outright break from his discourse to address his procedure.³⁴ For instance, after ingenuously describing a part of Italy which, he claims, contains Mermaid Rocks and the House of Circe, he refrains from expanding on the Laestrygones, which along with “many other things . . . have been examined thoroughly by powerful talents, which I thought it better to omit than to pursue in an inferior manner.”³⁵ Both Circe and the Laestrygones are well-known Homeric characters, but while he presents Circe as a matter of fact, he passes over the giants using the rhetorical device of *praeteritio*.

³¹ Solinus *Praefatio* 2.4: *Verum ne prorsus intacta uideatur, in ea quae minus trita sunt animum intendere haud absurdum uidetur et parcius depasta leuibus uestigiis inuiare.* Cf. Pliny *Praefatio* 14: *Praeterea iter est non trita auctoribus via nec qua peregrinari animus expetat.*

³² Scholars who believe that Italy was Solinus’ homeland include Von Martels (2000: 64) and Mommsen (1895: vi). Brodersen (2011: 64) reminds us that there is no evidence for this.

³³ E.g. Pliny 6.14.34: *Accepimus*; Isidore 12.4.11: *Fertur*. Callimachus, the earliest known paradoxographer, had the maxim: “I sing of nothing unattested” (See Wenskus 2011 for more information on Callimachus’ maxim fr. 612: ἀμάττωγον οὐδὲν αἰίδω. Sadly, there remains no context for the quotation itself (Nisetich 2000: xlix).

³⁴ E.g. Solinus 17.8: *Tradunt*.

³⁵ Solinus 2.22: *Formiae etiam Laestrygonibus habitatae, multa praeterea pollentissimis ingeniis edissertata, quae praeterire quam inferius exequi tutius duximus.*

The use of this device here reveals several things: 1) Solinus' comprehensiveness, in his desire to at least acknowledge many natural wonders; 2) His interest in entertaining the reader with all possible mentions of intriguing subjects — even those he does not plan to explain, and even familiar characters from Homer; 3) He anticipates an audience that will understand and appreciate these rhetorical devices and literary references.

From the authorial comments that have been discussed so far, it is clear that the *Collectanea* is, as other scholars have emphasised, an informational and serious work, but also that it prioritises education and amusement equally, putting the entertainment to a serious purpose.³⁶ For a parallel we may turn to Herodotus, whose emphasis on wonder (θῶμα) and many fabulous tales (some of which, as will be shown in Chapter 3, occur in both Herodotus and Solinus) promote a sense of entertainment as well as researched history.³⁷ The *Collectanea* is an enjoyable medium for the preservation of venerable knowledge, and it is all the more valuable because its concise and interesting style makes it likelier to reach a wide audience.

³⁶ Solinus' desire to be factual is further illustrated in 16.1: *Fabulae erant Hyperborei et rumor irritus, si quae illinc ad nos usque fluxerunt, temere forent credita; sed cum probissimi auctores et satis uero idonei sententias pares faciant, nullus falsum reformidet.*

³⁷ For Herodotus' use of the concept of wonder, see Munson 2001: e.g. 242-244; 259-260. The opening lines of his histories reveal that wonder and research will both figure strongly: "This is the Showing forth of the Inquiry of Herodotus of Halicarnassos, to the end that neither the deeds of men may be forgotten by lapse of time, nor the works great and marvellous, which have been produced some by Hellenes and some by Barbarians, may lose their renown; and especially that the causes may be remembered for which these waged war with one another" (trans. Macaulay 1890; I use this translation because it clearly brings out the sense of θωμαστά in "marvellous"). Sometimes Herodotus' narrator expresses his own wonder at his stories, such as: "I feel wonder that in the whole land of Elis mules cannot be bred" (4.30.1, trans. Macaulay 1890). See also Baragwanath and de Bakker, who tacitly suggest that Herodotus aims to entertain by explaining that Thucydides "took a different approach [from Herodotus] and described the character of his own work as 'not fabulous' (*mē muthōdes*). Thus he sacrificed entertainment to 'clarity' (*to saphes*, Thuc. 1.22.4)" (2012: 3).

The *Collectanea* as Fashionable Upper Class Reading

Certainly, a “wide” audience during Late Antiquity was more limited than the word suggests to today’s reader, but literacy was relatively widespread.³⁸ All literature was written for the elite and the *Collectanea*’s audience must have been largely limited to that group, but it could easily appeal to people with varied interests within it. Fortunately we are able to trace some of the upper class sentiments toward literature and knowledge, and — even better — there are suggestions of Solinus’ intended audience within the introductory letter and the text itself.

Solinus’ work amounts to a compilation of older knowledge, a genre to which a great deal of respect was accorded during Late Antiquity. In the introduction to their discussion on compilatory works in Late Antiquity, König and Whitmarsh remind us that our concepts of knowledge are different from what they were 2,000 years ago, and that what looks to us like an endless list of facts was greatly valued by society at the time.³⁹ Considering this esteem and the character of Solinus’ text, I suggest, in contrast to Bedon’s previously discussed theory, that this book was designed for anyone within the educated class who was interested in the world beyond what was purely and immediately practical. In fact, there is some evidence that this type of knowledge was fashionable.

In the context of *paideia* — so, among elite Roman circles of the High Empire —, many forms of Greek knowledge, and particularly “mastery of abstruse rhetorical and literary knowledge,” were linked to social status.⁴⁰ Classical Greek culture was highly valued even among intellectuals who were primarily Latin-speaking: Apuleius, Fronto, and Aulus Gellius, for instance, have been compared to the Greek Second Sophistic movement for their tendencies to employ complex rhetorical techniques and to preserve the culture of

³⁸ Haynes (2003: 6) believes that in the earliest centuries of the common era only around fifteen percent of the population was literate. Harris (1991: 18, 292-298) argues that, considering the structure of the Greco-Roman economy, there was great need for general literacy — and indeed, there is evidence of extensive of documentation, even in such mundane examples as private contracts and laundry lists. Interestingly, he also believes that general literacy may have begun to decline near the end of the fourth century, narrowing the literary world. On the difficulties of scholarly discussion about the literacy levels of the non-elite, see Horsfall 2003: 72-74.

³⁹ König and Whitmarsh 2007: 3.

⁴⁰ König and Whitmarsh 2007: 22. As such, Pliny’s book was appealing for its uses in general education, not as a scientific manual (Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 435-438). On the Roman effort to make Greek models their own, see Marincola 2011: 349-351.

the past. Swain argues that the use of these techniques in Latin was very much influenced by, and perhaps developed in concurrent rivalry of, the sophistic phenomenon of according social prestige to the perfected execution of purist Greek.⁴¹

As the traditional aristocracy grew increasingly detached from power, the importance of legitimatising one's aristocratic position via comportment may have increased in parallel, so that an appearance of literary worldliness and sophistication helped one's reputation.⁴² From this it seems that it was not simply a fondness for Greek culture that impelled Romans to align some of their intellectual pursuits with the Greeks, but rather that the concept of Romanness encompassed and embraced Greek intellectual culture.⁴³ Although relatively few Romans may have read Greek literature themselves, the influence they received then provided a gateway, as it were, for Greek culture into Roman society.⁴⁴ There is no sign of direct Greek influence on the *Collectanea*, but from the abundance of cultural contact between the Greeks and the Romans it is possible to infer that types of Greek literary pretension and intellectualism would have reached the Roman elite, and that therefore the Romans would, like the Greeks, have appreciated a certain worldliness and sophistication in their literature.⁴⁵ Following from this inference, it is logical that a Roman book that presents

⁴¹ Swain 2004: 9-12. See also Morgan 1998: 160, on the elevated language used in literary Greek and, later, Latin. Aulus Gellius is a well-known example of a Latin author who employed archaisms and complex techniques. Morgan (2004: 192-193) notes that Gellius, in his comparison of Latin and Greek, concludes that each is superior in some instances; this is current with the idea of a kind of rivalry between them. Cameron (2010: 399-401) discusses the archaising style in third/fourth century Latin. On the value of knowledge of Greek and Roman literature in elite Roman society, see Potter 1999: 55-57.

⁴² This kind of elite self-identification has received great attention. See e.g. Swain 2004: 20, Edwards 1993: 22-24; Whitmarsh 2001: 96-131.

⁴³ For further information on the connection between the Greek- and Latin-speaking elite, see Cameron 2010: 527-540.

⁴⁴ Bowie (1970: 4) draws attention to the fact that many of the same intellectuals who were using an archaising form of Greek were doing the same in Latin, and that they belonged largely to an upper class culture that was essentially a unity of aspects of Greek and Roman high culture. Greek influence was not limited to elite literary culture: Horsfall (2003: 48-54) discusses Greek language and bilingualism among Roman plebeians.

⁴⁵ König and Whitmarsh (2007: 22) point out that "knowledge is intimately tied up with social self-positioning;" Watts (2012: 468) notes that "throughout the empire, men had come to assume that the educated man was better than his uneducated contemporaries," and "many devotees of *paideia* saw their cultivation as so much of a defining feature of their elite identities that they highlighted it explicitly in epitaphs, public inscriptions, and the letters that they circulated and published."

exotic information in a rhetorically complex style would appeal to the socially and intellectually conscious late antique Roman reader.⁴⁶

The *Collectanea*'s original audience need not be limited to the highest eschelons of Roman male society. A great number of elite women were literate,⁴⁷ and there is no reason to doubt that the wonders of far-off places appealed to both genders. Although only those with a rhetorical education might grasp every allusion, the less educated literate could also find something to appreciate in the *Collectanea* as an abbreviated encyclopedic text.⁴⁸ Some "middle class" Romans were certainly literate, and funerary and domestic art shows that they were interested in mythology.⁴⁹ Petronius' *Satyricon* describes a banquet thrown by Trimalchio, a former slave who has become wealthy and successful. Trimalchio misinterprets the mythology portrayed on his own tableware, and hires actors to act scenes from the *Iliad* in Greek despite clearly never having read it or being able to speak the language. He is a satirical caricature, but his desire to impress his guests in these ways reveals that the elite values of Greek knowledge and bilingualism did trickle down to the lower classes, whether or not they had the education to back up their pretensions.⁵⁰ A digest such as the *Collectanea* could very well appeal to Romans in similar positions, as a simplified handbook that represents literary culture. For anyone who had the education,

⁴⁶ For an example of interpreting a Latin author within the parameters developed mostly for the Second Sophistic, see e.g. S.J. Harrison, *Apuleius: A Latin Sophist* (Oxford 2000).

⁴⁷ See Harris 1991: 313 and Hemelrijk 1999: 20, who argues that although due to scarcity of source material we cannot know the general extent or proportion of elite female education, illiteracy was probably rare. There are several prominent examples of intellectual women and female writers in Late Antiquity. (E.g., Swain 2004: 16 on Domitia Lucilla's proficiency in Greek, Fantham 2012: 233 on the miscellany of Pamphile, and Stirling 2005: 150 and Formisano 2012: 526 on the poetry of Faltonia Betitia Proba.) Some ancient sources imply that female literacy was normal: on the possible extrapolation of literacy levels from references in a work of Greek fiction, for example, see Morales 2001: xii (and on the legitimacy of attempting to extract historical data from fiction, see Bowersock 1994: 1-29); on Soranus' statement that midwives should be literate and acquainted with theory as well as practice, see Harris 1991: 175. Cf. Swain 2004: 37, who says in passing of Gellius that he targets "a male public audience."

⁴⁸ Note that this may still have been a very low number of people (Watts 2012: 468-469).

⁴⁹ Mayer 2012: 1-21 provides a definition for use of the anachronistic term "middle class" for the Roman era. He discusses funerary art on pp. 100-165 and domestic art on pp. 166-212. Dewar (2000: 237-239) makes a succinct argument for a leisured, literature-consuming middle class during the second century, at the end of the third century, and into the fourth. Horsfall (2003: 58-59) argues that a wide and varied Roman audience likely appreciated Greek-mythology-inspired performances such as pantomime.

⁵⁰ On Trimalchio as a representative of the nouveau riche, see Mayer 2012: 191-192, 202 and Horsfall 2003: 55-56, 71-72.

time, and inclination to read, Solinus' *Collectanea* contains descriptions on diverse themes which could cater to a variety of intellectual interests.

The above discussion of knowledge and literacy centres around the first centuries of the common era, before the *Collectanea* was written. But the *Collectanea* was naturally shaped by preceding Roman literary culture, and the evidence established through earlier literature is solidly reinforced within Solinus' own text.

There is some evidence that the *Collectanea* anticipates an educated audience, one that will read with an eye to something other than purely practical knowledge — indeed, the reading of literature is not generally connected to a reader's practical goals.⁵¹ Still, even if the contents are not directly practical, that doesn't mean that they cannot be useful. As suggested on page 7, the word *incuriosum* in the preface links the concepts of intellectual conscientiousness (i.e. wanting to avoid a negligence) and inquisitiveness (i.e. embracing a kind of curiosity), and in the context, it suggests that the contents of this book are worth knowing in themselves.⁵² This passage is crucial in the interpretation of Solinus' purpose, and it is important to note that it does not argue with the concept of *usefulness*. Yet by contrast, Augustine, in his own discussion of the notion of curiosity, dismisses it precisely for its lack of usefulness, even calls it a disease, and finds in it a proclivity toward sinfulness.⁵³ This suggests that a book aimed at preserving and encouraging curiosity would not be considered intrinsically useful by some late antique readers. Quite on the contrary, it suggests that at least to some, curiosity led *away* from practicality; and if knowledge for its own sake was understood to lead away from practical usefulness, then surely this book was not meant to be purely educational. In fact, the tacit celebration of curiosity may have helped make the *Collectanea*'s knowledge fashionable among Romans eager to seem worldly. This idea of intellectual elitism within a traditional aristocracy is further suggested in the opening lines of the preface:

Since I feel that you excel above all others in both the clemency of your ears and your studies of the liberal arts, and since, having tested it very much, I have anticipated nothing rashly from your

⁵¹ Johnson 2000: 616.

⁵² Solinus *Praefatio* 5.

⁵³ Augustine *Confessiones* 2.16; 3.5; 10.54-5; 13.30.

kindness, I thought it appropriate to assign consideration of this little work to you most of all, whose activity guarantees rather prompt approbation and whose benevolence guarantees rather easy acceptance.⁵⁴

The compliments to Adventus' personal qualities and literary prowess are to be expected in a dedicatory letter, but they also demonstrate the emphasis placed on these characteristics in educated Roman society. They suggest that Solinus anticipated an audience that was similarly educated: a preface is meant to impressively welcome the reader to a text, not to intimidate him or her. The preface also contains indications of the author's literary ability, which presume some level of alertness or understanding in his audience. The structure and rhetoric of the entire letter is relatively complex, and we can use a simple example to illustrate this: the verb *inuicare* is found in these pages, its only known occurrence in the Latin language during Late Antiquity.⁵⁵ This instance of *hapax legomenon* reveals some breadth to Solinus' diction. At the least, his vocabulary includes an uncommon and precise word; and at the most, this occurrence can be taken as an indication of his innovation in language.⁵⁶ Either way, in order to appreciate the text fully, the reader had to know this word, or be able to extrapolate its meaning from the context — both options suggest a reader familiar with varied literature. The learned diction of the introductory letter to Adventus indicates that Solinus anticipated, at least partially, a sophisticated audience that would appreciate his literary effort.⁵⁷ In the main text as well as the preface, his content and general frame of reference point to the underlying assumption that the audience will be familiar with classical texts and basic knowledge about the empire: hence the absence of

⁵⁴ *Praefatio 1: Cum et aurium clementia et optimarum artium studiis praestare te ceteris sentiam idque oppido expertus de benivolentia tua nihil temere praeceperim, e re putavi examen opusculi istius tibi potissimum dare, cuius uel industria promptius suffragium uel benignitas ueniam spondebat faciliorem.*

⁵⁵ Solinus 2.4; Lewis and Short, *Thesaurus Latinae Linguae* s.v. *inuico*; Hyskell 1925: 13.

⁵⁶ For more information on Solinus' apparently innovative diction, see Brodersen 2011: 84-86.

⁵⁷ Johnson (2009: 322, 325-326) discusses three passages from Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* in which groups of elite men entertain each other with the philological dissection of texts (3.1, 11.13, 19.10). Although Gellius' characters are doubtless exaggeratedly literary, the passages remind us that real-life members of a book culture that enjoys the idea of friends laughing about the etymology of *praeterpropter* may also enjoy their own opportunity to dissect unusual words such as *inuicare*.

much possible information about aspects of Roman geography, history, and natural science, which the educated Roman would deem basic and familiar.

Genre and Readability

The *Collectanea* is a difficult book to classify in terms of genre. In modern English we might be tempted to call it a geographical encyclopedic text, but this is rather anachronistic: while they are useful ways to describe the book, it benefits our discussion to discuss it in terms of its own setting. Merrills writes: “In the absence of any formally defined geographical discipline, descriptions of the world were fitted into the literary moulds provided by a host of different genres.”⁵⁸ Although the *Collectanea* is essentially informational and encyclopedic, it avoids the dryness and sense of utility that are often associated with such adjectives. Instead, it seems to be written as leisure literature, and as such it features many of the elements that make other genres of leisure literature pleasurable to read.⁵⁹ Among these genres are the ancient novel, mythography, and paradoxography; in this context it is also useful to take into account the intellectual settings of the Second Sophistic and antiquarianism. Examining the strategies by which other types of prevalent literature made themselves relevant to their readers is a useful tool with which to investigate exactly how Solinus drew in his own audience.

⁵⁸ Merrills 2005: 310. See also Lozovsky 2000: 8-10.

⁵⁹ The *Collectanea* occupies a middle space between the ideal of intellectual *otium litteratum* espoused by Cicero, Seneca, and Pliny the Younger, and the perhaps more widely embraced “leisure literature” described by e.g. Connors (2000), which includes lighter genres such as satire and “lascivious verse” (Weeber 2011). It is also important to note that while literary *otium* was encouraged by high-minded elites, in practise many people would have been more interested in other types of *otium* (banquets, games, etc.). The *Collectanea* has high-minded leanings, which can allow the reader to maintain that he/she is pursuing Seneca’s “wise” *otium*: for instance, it begins with “lofty national and mythological themes” and it affords an opportunity for “the contemplation and investigation of the nature of the world,” the study of which “can contribute to the greater good of humanity” (Connors 2000: 208-209, referring to Seneca’s *On Leisure*). In practice, though, the *Collectanea*’s approach is cursory, and Solinus declares in the preface that the content will be introductory, varied, and exotic (*praefatio* 2 & 4), in such a way that he hopes to maintain his reader’s interest. This approach is potentially suitable for the *otium* of both the intellectual and the otherwise-minded [for both the elite intellectual and the ignorant book-collector of Lucian’s *Adversus Indoctum* (see Johnson 2000: 613-615)], since it appears to be a scholarly work but is written in an accessible way on a fun theme (strange and far-away places): it’s an opportunity for the “otherwise” to partake in “wise” *otium*, and an opportunity for the “intellectual” to enjoy some non-philosophical light reading. For further reading on *otium* in the imperial period, see Gibson and Morello 2012: 169-199, Winsor Leach 2003, Connors 2000: 208-234, Gehrke 2011, Weeber 2011, Andreau 2011, Johnson 2009: 324.

Although it is an informational discourse rather than a fictional narrative, the *Collectanea* shares some narrative aspects with the novel. One of these is a predilection for realistic details and familiar geography juxtaposed with fantastical events. Greek novelists in the early centuries of the common era tried to incorporate realistic elements of society into their fiction, which anchor the story to a relatable environment.⁶⁰ The *Collectanea* anchors its audience even more firmly in the real world, because it is supposed to contain scientific facts rather than fictional story lines, and its setting is the universe of the Roman empire. Romans in every different part of the empire could relate to their own region's description and find wonders from afar.

König and Whitmarsh identify the novel as a form of travel-narrative,⁶¹ but the *Collectanea* fits this classification even more decidedly. Travel figures prominently in novels, but as a plot device; in the *Collectanea*, travel is featured for the sake of geography. To explain: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* occurs in a fictionalised Mediterranean region, which is created through brief descriptions of the proverbial Mediterranean countryside and the mention of some specific real places by name.⁶² The geography, or setting, is thus integrated into the narrative of the novel. The *Collectanea* begins with Italian geography, which provides a basic sense of familiarity for the Roman reader before it proceeds into further regions and unusual stories. The sense of travel emerges in that the discourse tends to move between neighbouring regions in a realistic fashion, rarely leaping over regions without comment.⁶³ In this way, the organisation creates almost the impression that the book is a travel narrative rather than an informational discourse integrated into a geographical framework.

Some scholarship on the novel also provides additional evidence of the *Collectanea*'s appeal for its contemporary *literati*. Wiersma argues that since in their style and content Greek novels contain allusions to classical literature, they have strong appeal to

⁶⁰ Wiersma 1990: 114. The same is true of myths (Dueck 2012: 27).

⁶¹ König and Whitmarsh 2007: 29.

⁶² Examples of this technique in the *Metamorphoses* include: "After passing through several hamlets we reached a rich man's country-house . . ." (8); "The worst part of the journey ended one evening when they sighted Zacynthus, where it was their destiny to stay for a time, and sailed into the Bay of Actium" (7).

⁶³ Brodersen 2011: 74-75.

those with some form of higher education, who are likelier to catch the allusions.⁶⁴ The same elements are found in the *Collectanea*: a sophisticated structure,⁶⁵ established rhetorical conventions, and references to the literary tradition. These elements are likewise found in the Second Sophistic movement and in antiquarianism.⁶⁶

The popularity of Greek intellectualism in Rome has already been noted; authors associated with the Second Sophistic were just one aspect of this Greek influence.⁶⁷ The movement is focused around oral rhetoric for its own sake and showman's glory for the orators, but authors were influenced by its style and techniques. The second century author Lucian has been associated with the movement,⁶⁸ and a parallel can be drawn between his parodic *Vera historia* and the *Collectanea* as evidence of the latter's entertaining purpose. Lucian writes that even students of serious literature should engage in some recreational reading, and claims that his book will provide that in an intelligent way; he then explicitly claims his connection to earlier literary traditions, and announces that literary allusions will be recognisable throughout the work. Bowersock points out that this claim, coming as it does from a satirist, shows that the *Vera historia* is meant as "literary entertainment in the first instance."⁶⁹ Where Lucian claims to create a work of fiction in response to fabulous historiography, Solinus claims to create a work of fact, but both texts contain the proper ingredients, as outlined above by Lucian, for literary entertainment.

⁶⁴ Wiersma 1990: 112. See also Trzaskoma 2010: xxx-xxxii for a discussion of the appeal of allusion in the ancient novel.

⁶⁵ The sophisticated structure and organisation of the *Collectanea* will be further discussed in the second chapter below.

⁶⁶ On sophisticated language in the Second Sophistic movement, see Whitmarsh 2005: 36-37 and Anderson 1993: 85-100. On references to classical literature, see Anderson 1993: 69-84.

⁶⁷ For examples of the popularity of everything Greek within Roman culture, including the Second Sophistic movement, see Anderson 1993: 1-21.

⁶⁸ E.g. Anderson (1976), *Lucian: Theme and Variation in the Second Sophistic*; Nasrallah (2005) *Mapping the World: Justin, Tatian, Lucian, and the Second Sophistic*. If the acceptance of such modern scholars as Anderson and Bowersock is not enough in itself to classify Lucian as an author in the spirit of the Second Sophistic movement, Eshleman (2008) describes the partisanship and self-interest in Philostratus' establishment of a Second Sophistic canon. Anderson (1993: 13) writes that Philostratus "has given an identity, perhaps an arbitrary or even spurious one, to *something* that flourished, notably in the Greek world, in the early Roman Empire..." Taking into account this perhaps "spurious" and partisan categorisation, the canon diminishes in objective historical value as an indicator of who we should connect to the movement.

⁶⁹ Bowersock 1994: 4-5 and Lucian 1.2. It is also key to note that Lucian states explicitly that his work is fiction, i.e., "that I lie" (ὅτι ψεύδομαι, 1.4).

Although writers of the Second Sophistic tradition did not figure in Latin literature during Solinus' time,⁷⁰ the same veneration of the past that pushed Greek and Roman intellectuals to embrace the ideals connected with the ancient sophists also led the Romans to celebrate other aspects of their past in late antique antiquarianism. Stevenson argues that while once antiquarianism had concerned education for civic leaders, in Late Antiquity it revelled in learning itself. He explains the continued production of this type of work by the presence of well educated Romans who seem "to have had an appetite for what are apparently trivia, which they used to entertain each other" at such social events as dinner parties.⁷¹ The *Collectanea*, with its foci in the Roman past and timeless global *varia*, is a part of the antiquarian tradition, and its appeal is wound up in the same cultural preoccupation with intellectualism and knowledge for its own sake, and for the sake of entertainment.⁷²

Thus the *Collectanea* clearly adheres to many norms of its contemporary leisure literature, but it also follows many established traditions for the more serious genre of historiography. Of course, Roman historiography is bound up with myth; there is no clear-cut separation between them.⁷³ The first chapter of the book begins with various excerpts from Roman foundation myths and the deeds of prominent Romans, and so touches on the

⁷⁰ Anderson (1993: 10) points out that most surviving Roman literature written between the second and fourth centuries is in Greek.

⁷¹ Stevenson 2004: 152; Lightfoot (2004) writes of Aulus Gellius that he "hoped it [*Noctes Atticae*] would serve as a manual of polite culture to readers who wanted to demonstrate their mastery of all the right topics at cultured dinner tables." An example of the type of literary entertainment that might be enjoyed by some Roman intellectuals: Pliny the Elder, as reported by the Younger Pliny, seems to have mixed his scholarly research with entertainment at dinner with his friends, having a servant read aloud during the meal and annoyed when a guest slows down the research process by having the servant repeat a mispronounced word (Pliny the Younger *Epistle* 3.2.11-12; also Johnson [2000: 616-617]).

⁷² As Horster and Reitz note (2010: 11): "Where literary attainments are ranked highly by a society, and the 'cultured classes' strive to show off their learning, these general conditions may favour the production and dissemination of compilations and condensed versions."

⁷³ On the absence of a clear-cut distinction between Roman mythography and historiography, Graf 2011. Roman authors did not necessarily perceive events that we consider mythological to be so. Examples of authors of this type of historiography include the second century BCE Greek historian Apollodorus, who wrote a Greek history (*Chronica*) that began with the (from our modern perspective, mythological) fall of Troy and finished in the contemporary events of the 2nd century; Fabius Pictor's (now lost) work, written in the third/second century BCE and touted as the first Roman history, which is believed to have recounted Rome's history from its ancient, mythological days to his contemporary period (Scholz 2011); and Livy, whose *Ab urbe condita libri* begins briefly with Rome's mythological foundation during the post-Trojan war era but lingers on the events of the last three centuries BCE.

genre of mythography; and in recounting wonder after wonder throughout the whole work, it also verges on a work of paradoxography (see below).

Loyalty to past literary traditions is an important design feature of the *Collectanea*. The first chapter begins with the mythological history of Rome's foundation (1.1-33). In general, Solinus sees myth as a historical portrayal, and accordingly reinforces his account by including several variations of the tradition and citing a variety of sources.⁷⁴ These variations give the impression that Solinus is a detached and objective recorder, who notes all the versions that he has encountered and so fulfills his promise of picking out "universal opinions" rather than making his own judgements about what is the truth.⁷⁵ This immediately conditions the audience to accept the narrator's sense of judgment; and this comfort means that when he moves on to less usual subjects, they will continue to feel confidence in his learning. So just as he adheres to current conventions of leisure literature, Solinus grounds his work in the conventions of historiography.

The *Collectanea* likewise draws heavily on the genre of paradoxography. A paradoxographical work consists of lists of *mirabilia*: facts which the author considers wondrous, although some of them may not seem so to the modern reader. These facts are generally related to animals, water, and ethnography.⁷⁶ The earliest known paradoxographical literature came from the third century BCE Greek poet Callimachus; thus, by the third/fourth century CE, paradoxography was a long-established tradition. Gabba believes that the taste for wondrous stories corresponded to increased literacy in a less-educated stratum, resulting in the rise of *mirabilia* as popular pseudo-history.⁷⁷ This is problematic, as Callimachus himself was a *poeta doctus*, but if this speculation has some truth, then it corroborates the possibility of the *Collectanea*'s appeal to a middle class readership mentioned above.

⁷⁴ Since the early monarchy, this had been a conventional way for Roman histories to begin, with myth increasingly integrated into the historical narrative (Graf 2011; also Scholz 2011 and Kierdorf 2011).

⁷⁵ Solinus *Praefatio* 5: "Wherefore I ask that you do not consider the trustworthiness of this publication from the present time, since certainly we preferred to pick out universal opinions rather than invent, having followed the traces of the old stamp." / *Quapropter quaeso, ne de praesenti tempore editionis huius fidem libres, quoniam quidem uestigia monetae ueteris persecuti opiniones uniuersas eligere maluimus potius quam innouare.*

⁷⁶ Wenskus 2011.

⁷⁷ Gabba 1983: 14. See also Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 379.

Aulus Gellius gives the impression, in his *Noctes Atticae*, that paradoxography had been generally forgotten by the second century CE.⁷⁸ Although we must allow for a fair amount of rhetorical exaggeration on the part of Gellius, it seems that paradoxography was given new life soon before Solinus' days (keeping in mind that Gellius wrote in the second century, and Solinus in the third/fourth): borne back to popular awareness by Gellius, a respectable grammarian, and by the authority Gellius built for himself by basing his information largely on Pliny — just as Solinus does.⁷⁹ The continued authority of the *mirabilia* contained in Pliny's *Historia naturalis* shows that paradoxography was well-integrated into Roman life, but the success of authors like Gellius and Solinus proves that it was not so overly marketed that the public had tired of it.⁸⁰ The *Collectanea* does not conform entirely to the definition of paradoxography: it combines the wondrous with the mundane, and forms the *mirabilia* into a discourse reminiscent of a travel narrative instead of a list of facts. Still, its paradoxographical nature — its focus on unusual facts and *mirabilia* — makes it enjoyable and sometimes startling to read. In this sense, Solinus achieves the ultimate goal of the paradoxographer, as defined by Schepens and Delcroix: “to arouse — and to keep alive through his whole collection — the sense of the marvelous.”⁸¹

Solinus often closely intersperses banal with outlandish stories. In Chapter 31, the reader is introduced to nine nations in Libya, ranging from peoples who simply have manners that are alien to an upper class Roman⁸² to others who have no heads.⁸³ Directly following the description of these nations, the discourse returns to a simple account of the course of the Nile, supported immediately by a reference to the authority of the “Punic books” and, in particular, the North African king Juba II. While the reference serves to remove personal responsibility from the author,⁸⁴ the information seems better supported

⁷⁸ Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 9.4.4: *Ipsa autem volumina ex diutino situ squalebant et habitu aspectuque taetro erant*; see also Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 415.

⁷⁹ Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 422.

⁸⁰ For information on some of the ways paradoxography was incorporated into Roman life, see Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 425-448.

⁸¹ Schepens and Delcroix 1994: 399.

⁸² Solinus 31.2: *Atlantes*.

⁸³ Solinus 31.5: *Blemyae*.

⁸⁴ Solinus 32.2: *Hoc adfirmant Punici libri; hoc Iubam regem accipimus tradidisse*. Note that it was common among ancient authors, when discussing *mirabilia* or lesser-known facts, to distance themselves from the subjects (see n. 33).

than the unwarranted list of strange nations.⁸⁵ The source and fluctuations of the Nile were mysterious, but the course of the river in Egypt was well known. This section, with its many reputable citations, distracts the reader's eye from the uncited ethnographic section, and creates an impression of thorough research and authority. It is interesting to note the impression of credibility created by the references, since they are often left ambiguous: in this example, Solinus does not specify which "Punic books" it is to which he refers, or whether they were written by Juba — yet the fleeting impression is that the facts are well-referenced.

Success Through Entertainment: The Long-Lasting Influence of the *Collectanea*

The *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* played a pivotal role in the preservation of ancient knowledge through Late Antiquity and into the Middle Ages. It was used more frequently than Pliny's dense and long work, and this popularity led to a concentrated transfer of knowledge about wondrous and unusual animals, stones, and places, which would become prominent in later literature.⁸⁶ Solinus' stories were also used to interpret Christian Scripture, and even as "subjects of exegesis in themselves."⁸⁷ It has been found that such important late antique/early medieval authors as Augustine of Hippo, Martianus Capella, Priscian, Isidore of Seville, Aldhelm of Sherborne, and the Venerable Bede made use of the *Collectanea*;⁸⁸ the fifth-century Verecundus of Junca explicitly references Solinus and Pliny in his commentary of biblical canticles.⁸⁹ Solinus' influence continued into the late Middle Ages: scholars have traced to Solinus much of Marbod of Rennes' twelfth-century *Liber*

⁸⁵ Yet the passage on African nations was pulled from Pliny (5.8), who took it from Pomponius Mela (1.20). Thus, although at first glance this passage seems less believable than the passage on the Nile, and although it is not cited within the text, the ancient reader would still have been able to inform himself on the received authority of the topic.

⁸⁶ Chibnall 1973: 59. For more information on the transmission of Solinus' marvels into bestiaries, lapidaries, etc. during the Middle Ages (including the pictorial transmission), see Wittkower 1942: 167-172 and Chibnall 1973: 59. Friedman (1981: 76-77) gives several examples of ways in which Solinus' marvels influenced perception of travel in the Middle Ages.

⁸⁷ Merrills 2005: 27.

⁸⁸ Brodersen 2011: 68.

⁸⁹ Grant 1999: 111.

Lapidum, and a great deal of Brunetto Latini's natural history and geography.⁹⁰ However the *Collectanea* may have come to be so favoured, its popularity cannot be denied.

We must consider Augustine's immense reputation as a major contributor to the popularity of the *Collectanea*. Despite his professed distaste for curiosity (see above p. 13), there is an indication that he exercised some of his own in his reading of Solinus. Augustine uses natural history and geography in his exegetical works; for some of this he applies empirical observation, but for the most part his information is drawn from Solinus and Pliny. His attitude is generally more skeptical than Solinus', and he refutes some stories with the help of Scripture.⁹¹ Still, in *City of God* he notes among examples of God's inexplicable miracles that horses can be impregnated by the wind, and that in Persia there can be found a stone called Selenite, the shine of which waxes and wanes with the moon.⁹² Augustine was a Christian heavyweight, and even tacit recognition from or mixed evaluation by a towering figure like him lends authority.

Isidore of Seville, like all early Christian intellectuals, uses both Christian patristic and non-Christian classical sources,⁹³ but he favours non-Christian lore that has already been referenced by a Church patriarch. It is unsurprising then that Isidore, who makes extensive use of Saint Augustine,⁹⁴ also borrows heavily from Solinus. In Book 11 of his *Etymologiae*, while discussing "monstrous races" of humans, Isidore credulously recounts a number of nations borrowed from Solinus, correcting some conceptions of them with the help of Scripture (giants are definitely not, he asserts, the progeny of antediluvian women and fallen angels); it is only when the strange beings are obviously pulled from classical mythology, instead of classical "science" like that of Solinus, that Isidore questions the veracity of the stories (for example, he questions the sirens and the chimaera).⁹⁵ In Book 12 (*De animalibus*) book Isidore uses Solinus as a source more than he uses any other author,

⁹⁰ On Marbod of Rennes, see Chibnall 1973: 59. On Brunetto Latini, see Tozer 1964: 365 and Wittkower 1942: 170.

⁹¹ Grant 1999: 110.

⁹² Augustine, *De civitate dei* 21.5: *In eadem Perside gigni etiam lapidem seleniten, cuius interiorem candorem cum luna crescere atque deficere. In Cappadocia etiam uento equas concipere, eosdemque fetus non amplius triennio uiuere.* Solinus 37.21 and 45.18.

⁹³ Bodson 1986: 52. See also Henderson 2007b: 80-83.

⁹⁴ Barney et al. 2006: 15.

⁹⁵ Isidore of Seville *Etymologies* 11.3.12-39.

although he does not cite him — André traces 79 borrowings to Solinus, and only 45 to Pliny.⁹⁶ Isidore's work is distinctly Christian, and throughout the book it emphasises “insistent anthropomorphising and moralizing language:” cross-breeds and snakes are negative symbols in his Christian thought as they never were to Solinus,⁹⁷ and sometimes his descriptions originate from a different tradition.

For example, although Pliny, Solinus, and Isidore all agree that unicorns are efficient fighters, Isidore continues with a description absent in the two earlier authors. His full description is: “The rhinoceros has its name from the Greeks. In Latin it means “horn on the nose.” The same is the case for the monoceros (that is, the unicorn), because it has a single four-foot horn in the centre of its forehead, which is so sharp and strong that whatever it attacks, it brandishes or impales. Thus it often has strife with elephants and overthrows them by wounding them in the stomach. Moreover, it is so strong that it cannot be captured by the power of hunters; rather, as authors who have written about the natures of animals affirm, a virgin girl is set before it, who uncovers her bosom/lap (*sinum*) as it approaches, on which it places its head with all fierceness abandoned: and in this way, calm and defenseless, it is captured.”⁹⁸ This story of the hunters and the virgin is associated with Christianity (for example, in the second-century *Physiologus*).⁹⁹ Still, Solinus' influence on

⁹⁶ On Isidore's sources, see André 1986: 13-22, and particularly p. 18 (on Solinus); Barney et al. 2006: 14. Cf. Chibnall, who doubts that Isidore made any direct use of Pliny, except perhaps “brief extracts” (1973: 61).

⁹⁷ Henderson 2007a: 153.

⁹⁸ *Rhinoceron a Graecis vocatus. Latine interpretatur in nare cornu. Idem et monoceron, id est unicornus, eo quod unum cornu in media fronte habeat pedum quattuor ita acutum et validum ut quidquid inpetierit, aut ventilet aut perforet. Nam et cum elephantis saepe certamen habet, et in ventre vulneratum prosternit. Tanta autem esse fortitudinis ut nulla venantium virtute capiatur; sed, sicut asserunt qui naturas animalium scripserunt, virgo puella praeponitur, quae venienti sinum aperit, in quo ille omni ferocitate deposita caput ponit, sicque soporatus velut inermis capitur* (Isidore 12.2.12-13).

⁹⁹ *Physiologus* 36 (Curley 1979: 51). The *Physiologus* also derives much of its information from Pliny, as well as earlier Greek, Roman, and Egyptian authorities, but it is written with a Christian, Scripture-based slant. For more information on its sources see Curley 1979: 68-92. Its influence on Isidore's *Etymologiae* is debated, but André (1986: 19-20) and Grant (1999: 116) seem convinced. On the Virgin-and-unicorn story in medieval Christianity, see Pastoureau 2011: 79-82.

Isidore has been remarked upon by André.¹⁰⁰ Isidore would not have had nearly as much material to moralise about, had he not collected so much information from the *Collectanea*; and as the *Etymologiae* came to be increasingly treated as an authoritative handbook in the Middle Ages,¹⁰¹ it added to the transference of fantastical Greco-Roman stories into the Christian mainstream.

Conclusions

The championing of the *Collectanea* by Christian authors was critical to Solinus' lasting popularity, but it changed the perspective on his work. Where the non-Christian elite of Solinus' day might read a geographical work and be content to derive amusement and information from their own plane of existence, later Christian works (such as Isidore's and Brunetto Latini's) integrated even geography into a search for the divine. Nonetheless, the question remains whether these Christian fathers would have felt compelled to include such strange stories from classical authors had they not found them fascinating. Solinus' wish to entertain and educate, so clearly pronounced in his authorial comments and in the content and style of the text itself, is vindicated by his lasting influence on European tradition; and his early appeal, through incorporation of current literary trends and techniques, to an upper class book culture leaves no doubt that he wanted to transmit information in a way that educated people would want to read it, and remember it. In this he succeeded: he wrote a book which the educated would appreciate for its techniques and references, but which was pleasant enough in style that people could enjoy it at leisure rather than as a taxing mental commitment. In this way his purpose is warranted, and his success extraordinary. A close analysis of the *Collectanea*'s literary form in the following chapter will give further insights into the reasons of Solinus' success.

¹⁰⁰ André 1986: 96. Cf. Solinus 52.39-40: "But the unicorn is very fierce, a monster with a dreadful roar, with the body of a horse, the feet of an elephant, the tail of a pig, and the head of a deer. Its horn extends from the middle of its forehead with an extraordinary brilliance, to the extent of four feet, so sharp that whatever it attacks is easily penetrated by the blow. It does not come living into human power, and indeed it can be killed, but it cannot be captured" / *Sed atrocissimus est monoceros, monstrum mugitu horrido, equino corpore, elephanti pedibus, cauda suilla, capite ceruino. Cornu e media fronte eius protenditur splendore mirifico, ad magnitudinem pedum quattuor, ita acutum ut quicquid impetat, facile ictu eius perforetur. Viuus non uenit in hominum potestatem et interimi quidem potest, capi non potest.* See also Pliny 8.31.76, which is very similar to Solinus but differs in some details and content that are present in both Solinus and Isidore.

¹⁰¹ Fontaine 2000: 14.

Chapter 2:

Literary Technique and Place in Late Antique Encyclopedic Tradition

Introduction

The text of the *Collectanea rerum memorabilium* may accurately be described as fluid prose, but this statement is misleading in its simplicity, since the book amounts to an accumulation of thinly related details and anecdotes, adeptly connected. The fact that this is not jarringly obvious to the reader points to the literary skill of its author. In this respect, Solinus' technique owes much to his arrangement of the transitions between subjects. Solinus also communicates a Roman perspective on the world, which is particularly established by his first chapter and by the contrast in methodology between the first chapter and the rest of the book. It is clear that Rome is held up as the supreme nation, against whose sense of normality the rest of the world is measured. The present chapter first looks in some detail at the transition between the Preface and Chapter One, and at Chapter One's opening sequence. Then, more generally, it discusses Chapter One's organisation and use of references, and some ways that Solinus shapes his content to fit his methodological framework. Lastly, in order to put the *Collectanea* into a literary context, it is compared with three other works in the Latin encyclopedic tradition: Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae*, Macrobius' *Saturnalia*, Martianus Capella's *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*.

Literary Technique

The transition from preface to book

Because the *Collectanea*'s preface is in the form of an introductory letter, it addresses each individual reader anew, not only the original dedicatee. Chapter One, by contrast, begins at a formal distance, without referring to any particular audience. This is the first transition in the work, from preface to text proper; it contains a shift in style, voice, and content.

The preface's style is complex and convoluted in order to show the author's literary aplomb. He writes in long sentences and elevated language, using metaphors and other figures of style. Simple meanings are conveyed through varied, if conventional, imagery:

Solinus claims that, in terms of content, “having followed traces of the old stamp,”¹⁰² his work yet contains only “a germ of understanding rather than eloquent veneers.”¹⁰³ He also informs us, in plain terms, that most of the book is given over to the description of places.¹⁰⁴ However, the first chapter of the book hardly mentions geography - only specific places in and around the city of Rome. Instead, it opens with an account of early Roman history. The preface, with its promises of geographical descriptions, and the first chapter, with its historical preoccupations, are connected by one last metaphor, which compares the methodology for Solinus’ textual description of world geography to that of an artist’s visual rendition of the human form.

In this metaphor, Solinus explains how artists, when forming a body, draw the head first as the “foundation” and “as the top of the shape and the beginning.” Then, calling the city of Rome “the head of the world,” he proposes “to retread the path” that has been “transmitted by so great a number of accounts.”¹⁰⁵ This vivid geographical/biological/artistic image is an example of *evidentia*.¹⁰⁶ In using it, Solinus demonstrates his rhetorical skill and provides an interesting explanation for Chapter One’s historical excursus, which

¹⁰² *Praefatio* 5: *uestigia monetae ueteris persecuti*

¹⁰³ *Praefatio* 2: *fermentum cognitionis magis ...quam bratteas eloquentiae* (see above Ch. 1 n. 20)

¹⁰⁴ *Praefatio* 3-4: *Locorum commemoratio plurimum tenet, in quam partem ferme inclinatio est uniuersa materies... Inseruimus et pleraque differenter congruentia, ut si nihil aliud, saltem uarietas ipsa legentium fastidio mederetur. Inter haec hominum et aliorum animalium naturas expressimus. Addita pauca de arboribus exoticis, de extimarum gentium formis, de ritu dissono abditarum nationum, nonnulla etiam digna memoratu...*

¹⁰⁵ *Praefatio* 7-8: “Therefore, just as those who emulate the forms of bodies before all things portray the shape of the head, with those things which are left having been put aside, and they do not earlier trace lines for other limbs until they create their foundations from this very head, so to speak, as the top of the shape and the beginning. We also shall take the beginning from the head of the world, that is, from the city of Rome, although the most learned scholars have left out nothing about it which can be raised into a new publication, and it is nearly superfluous to retread the path transmitted by so great a number of accounts. Nevertheless, so that it may not be totally neglected, we shall perseveringly follow its origin with as much faith as we are able.”/ *Sicut ergo qui corporum formas aemulantur, postpositis quae reliqua sunt, ante omnia effigiant modum capitis, nec prius lineas destinant in membra alia, quam ab ipsa ut ita dixerim figurarum arce auspiciu faciant inchoandi, nos quoque a capite orbis, id est ab urbe Roma principium capessemus, quamuis nihil super ea doctissimi auctores reliquerint, quod in nouum praeconium possit suscitari, ac superuacuum paene sit relegere tramitem decursu tot annalibus. Ne tamen prorsus dissimulata sit, originem eius quanta ualemus persequemur fide.*

¹⁰⁶ A “quality of language that appeals to the audience’s imagination” (Webb 2009: 88). See also Webb’s entire chapter on the Greek concept *enargeia* (which is called *evidentia* in Latin), pp. 87-106. See also Lausberg 1988: 359-365, §110-118.

otherwise could seem out of place as the introductory chapter to a geographical treatise.¹⁰⁷ The portrayal of Rome as the head of the world (*caput orbis/terrarum*) is common in Latin literature; in using the familiar expression, Solinus associates himself with such authors as Ovid and Livy.¹⁰⁸

The concept of *evidentia* centres on communicating vibrant imagery to the audience. Solinus' overlapping description of Rome/a living body evokes just such imagery: it uses a simple image, easily imagined (a body), to represent a much larger idea that could be difficult to conceptualise (the world). Solinus writes as though it is an established fact that all artists begin with the head, but leaves ambiguous what sort of artist he means. "Those who emulate the forms of bodies," he writes, "before all things portray the shape of the head" (*Praef.* 7). There are two likely options for the "those" to whom he refers: visual artists and literary artists. Words like *linea* and *figura* point to the visual arts, but the description itself corresponds interestingly to rhetorical handbooks: this ambiguity suggests a deliberate juxtaposition of the two, which may reveal a subtext.¹⁰⁹

There is evidence that the head was not necessarily drawn first by ancient artists, whether in sculpture or paint, and that artists then — as now — emphasised that the entire form must be planned and outlined together in order to achieve symmetry and proportion.¹¹⁰ Pliny, in his chapters on sculpture and painting, applauds ancient artists for their work on just

¹⁰⁷ It is unusual for a geographical text to begin with a historical excursus. It's usually the historical texts that begin with a geographical excursus, whereas geographies weave any historical elements into the narrative; and actually, it is simply not that common to find geographical texts on their own — they're usually incorporated into works on other subjects. Merrills (2005: 19) notes that even though ancient writers sometimes differentiated between historical and geographical works, nonetheless elements of history and of geography occurred regularly in works that were classified as the opposite. A geographical introduction provides a frame within which the reader can imagine the historical narrative playing out; Solinus' Roman historical introduction provides a Roman cultural lens through which the Roman reader perceives the geographical descriptions. For information on how geographies in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages were more often found in historical texts than on their own (or, presumably, than as the main text with a historical excursus), see Merrills 2005 and Lozovsky 2000: 9-10.

¹⁰⁸ *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* s.v. *caput*; ex: Ovid *Elegy* 1.15.26; Livy *History* 1.16.7. See also Parker 2008: 214-217, on the imperialistic tendency to conflate the Roman empire with the whole world. Note also Solinus 29.5: "Garama is the head/capital of the Garamantican region." / *Garamanticae regionis caput Garama est*.

¹⁰⁹ Formisano (2012: 524) notes the late antique "tendency to conceive composition in visual terms." Cf. The Chronicle of Pseudo-Zachariah Rhetor 1.g-h (see Greatrex 2011: 78), which compares itself (as an ostensible collection of historical documents, letters, and oral testimonies) to statuary, in terms of beauty and longevity.

¹¹⁰ For example, Loomis (1943) emphasises that first it is important to establish scale and proportion, drawing a rough outline of the entire form.

that. Although he does not explicitly describe artistic methodology for emulating the human form, there are suggestions that the entire form was worked together, with an eye to symmetry and effect - i.e., that the head was not given an inherent priority. In fact, Pliny records that Lysippus manipulated the size of his heads so that they were proportionally smaller, in comparison to the rest of the body, than they should be according to the Polycleitan canon. By doing this he created an illusion of height in his statues (*Historia naturalis* 34.19). This would require detailed planning of the entire statue, and not necessitate that the head be created first. Additionally, the idea that the head is manipulated to fit the effect of the entire statue suggests that the head itself is of a secondary importance. Pliny also emphasises that, in the first century CE, heads are less important in art than ever before: likenesses are not particularly valued in paint or sculpture, and patrons prefer a statue of valuable material over one that resembles them (35.2). This might not appeal to a Roman writer who is likening the head to Rome!

By contrast, rhetorical handbooks recommend that descriptions of the human form should begin from the head and move methodically down the body. Such passages can be found in Aphthonios' *Progymnasmata*: "The description of people should move from first to last, that is, from head to foot."¹¹¹

Therefore, the emulators mentioned in the *Collectanea* passage seem to be an ambiguous combination of visual and rhetorical artists. Since most readers would be highly educated, they would be aware of rhetorical norms, but the use of diction related to visual art creates an impression of something tangible or visible which juxtaposes the abstract idea of Rome's hierarchical place in the world. It is even possible that Solinus may be attempting to refer to visual art, but perhaps he has a more thorough background in literature than in art, and mistakenly assumes that the head must begin a painted or sculptural likeness just as it does a textual one. In any case, the comparison of the body to the world reduces a large and complicated idea into a simple and conceivable one, and the comparison of the head to Rome contains a message of Roman authority. Thus, this passage achieves three simple things. First, it demonstrates Solinus' rhetorical skill through his use of *evidentia*; second, by asserting that heads are reproduced first and comparing Rome to a head, he gives an

¹¹¹ Aphthonios 12.1. See also Webb 2009: 56.

explanation for the historical excursus of Chapter One; and third, by comparing Rome to the cognitive centre of the body, he establishes his opinion that Rome is the authoritative culture of the world.¹¹²

After this metaphor, the division of the preface from the first chapter is hardly perceptible in the text. Scholars follow the divisions established in Mommsen's critical edition, but if we consider only the words themselves, an argument could be made for placing the key transitional sentence in either the preface or the first chapter: "Nevertheless, so that it may not be totally neglected, we shall perseveringly follow its origin [i.e. the path transmitted by so great a number of accounts] as faithfully as we can."¹¹³ Mommsen attributed this line to the preface because a dedication follows it in a number of early manuscripts.¹¹⁴ But in terms of characteristics, it could be identified as a part of the first chapter: it is simple and formal, and leaves metaphor behind. After all, the second chapter begins with a similar authorial comment: "I think enough has been said about man. Now, to return to our plan, our pen ought to turn to the description of places, and to a great extent firstly to Italy, whose glory we touched upon in the city [of Rome]." In both passages, Solinus states that he is beginning a new subject, and gives a reason for beginning it. An argument could be made for placing either passage as a conclusion or an introduction for the chapters they straddle. If we bow to Mommsen and accept *Praefatio* 8 as the conclusion to the preface, its simple language nonetheless stands out as a hint that the ornate preface is ending and the regular discourse is about to begin.

The first foundation stories that Solinus recounts are linked to the etymology of the name "Rome" (1.1-4). Two are supported by reference to famous authors; one is presented

¹¹² Cf. Alston and Spentzou (2011: 206): "Inevitably, the writers bring their preconceptions and obsessions to the treatment of a foreign people, and thus ethnography will tell us as much about the culture of the individual writing the account as (hopefully) about the subjects of that account."

¹¹³ *Praefatio* 8.

¹¹⁴ See Mommsen 1895: vi and xcviii. He discusses a manuscript from which all other surviving manuscripts are thought to have derived, which features a subscription dedicating a copy of the work to Theodosius. The subscription comes after the present *Praefatio* 8, and this is his reasoning for dividing the text at that point. However, since Theodosius II reigned in the fifth century and the *Collectanea* was written a century or two earlier, the possibility must not be ignored that the break between preface and book proper may, by Theodosius' time, no longer have been in its original place.

as though it is part of living culture, although Solinus does not wholly sanction it;¹¹⁵ and one as a tradition that is still current at the time of writing.¹¹⁶ There is no mention of the famous Romulus-and-Remus episode at this point. The events in these stories predate it: the first three are supposed to coincide loosely with the era of the Trojan War, while the fourth story has both ancient and more recent elements. (It proposes that Rome has an ancient, secret, and sacred name, then mentions a republican tribune in relation to it [1.4]). After this, Solinus begins to recount origin stories for some early Roman sanctuaries (1.6-14).¹¹⁷ Some etymologies for the Palatine hill are also addressed (1.15), followed by the summary statement that the city as a whole was named for Romulus (1.16). Yet Solinus does not here discredit the mythological accounts that he introduced at the outset; instead, he states that these lesser-known tales fill some ambiguous gaps in the traditional foundation story (1.7).

At first glance, the structure of the first chapter's introductory section may seem haphazard. The Romulan etymology is placed at the end of a circuitous list of the origins of various Roman institutions, and there is no obvious hierarchy to the order in which possible etymologies are listed. However, in truth the introduction has been carefully constructed according to an overarching chronology, from the earliest origins of Roman institutions all the way to the list of the monarchic residences that follows Romulus' introduction (1.1-26). Hercules, Evander, and the Arcadians were all believed to have lived in the same era, and to have preceded Romulus; the early sanctuaries were also believed to have been established during this early era: these are all mentioned in the opening lines (1.1-15).¹¹⁸ After Romulus, the text proceeds in chronological order through Rome's mythical kings (1.16-26).

¹¹⁵ Solinus 1.1: "There are those who may wish it to seem that the name of Rome was first given by Evander..." / *Sunt qui uideri uelint Romae uocabulum ab Euandro primum datum.*

¹¹⁶ Solinus 1.4: "The proper name of Rome is still transmitted, but still forbidden to be made public." / *Traditur etiam proprium Romae nomen, verum tamen uetitum publicari.*

¹¹⁷ Solinus touts worship of the goddess Angerona as "among the most truly ancient religions" (*Inter antiquissimas sane religiones*, 1.6), thus linking the discussion of sanctuaries to the preceding description of the origins of the city of Rome; see also Versnel (2011), who calls her a "Roman goddess of the oldest circle."

¹¹⁸ Mastrocinque 2011, in "Hercules: B. Cattle breeding," and "Hercules: D. Founder of Cities and Peoples" establishes that the Romans believed these figures to live at the same time. Historically, the Romans worshipped Hercules' cult in the Forum Boarum at least since early republican times, but he was worshipped by the Greeks at least since the sixth century BCE: the ancientness of his worship corresponds well to the myth that his Roman cult was established in the same era as the Arcadians (see sections by Ley and Graf 2011, "Herakles").

In addition to the chronological order, all the stories are linked together by some kind of association. For example, Solinus' discussion of Rome's earliest etymologies leads to its secret name. The secret name of Rome, which must not be spoken, is associated with Angerona, the ancient Roman goddess of silence.¹¹⁹ This religious angle leads into an overview of the origins of some Roman sanctuaries and altars. A brief digression occurs during the discussion of Rome's secret name: Valerius Soranus, a historical figure from the second century BCE, is named as one who dared to speak the name, and so was put to death.¹²⁰ Chronologically this does not fit the rest of the section, but it fits Solinus' tendency to provide a specific example for a general phenomenon (which will be discussed below).

This introductory sequence reminds the reader of Rome's ancient glory. By describing the earliest inhabitants of Rome as Trojan war survivors, noble ladies, heroes, and idyllic shepherds, Solinus is tacitly praising the city's mythical ancestors. He explicitly mentions Arcadians, Achaeans, and Trojans as immigrants — all venerable peoples with noble myths surrounding them (1.1-3). This passage legitimises pride in the very earliest signs of Roman civilisation. In addition to praising its immigrant ancestors, Solinus emphasises its agricultural roots and its religious past. When discussing the etymology of the Palatine, he indirectly praises Rome's agricultural roots with the mention of a cultural tradition that the hill is named for Palis, a pastoral goddess (1.15). In his anecdotes about Hercules' establishment of his own cult at the Forum Boarum (evidence for which cult actually only begins in the republican period¹²¹), and in the story of Angerona's temple, Solinus endorses the idea that Rome has a glorious religious past. All this reinforces the

¹¹⁹ Versnel 2011.

¹²⁰ Solinus 1.3; Schmidt 2011.

¹²¹ References to Hercules' cult are found in 1.4, 6, 10, 12. See also Mastrocinque 2011, in "Hercules: B. Cattle breeding," and "Hercules: D. Founder of Cities and Peoples" (paraphrased in n. 118.)

theme of Rome's greatness, and affirms that Rome is the most important and ancient of its contemporary nations.¹²²

Framework and Organisation of the Collectanea's First Chapter

Chapter one addresses three main topics. The first main topic is "History," which divides roughly into five categories: a) Rome's earliest origins; b) List of kings; c) Calculation of important dates; d) Development of the calendar; e) Highlights from Augustus' life. Some of these can again be cleanly divided into smaller categories. The second main topic is "Biology," which can be divided into four categories: a) Menstruation; b) Fertility; c) Pregnancy; d) Birth. The third main topic is "Anthropology," which I specify by adding the subtitle: "Exceptional Items." It is a list of exceptional a) Human characteristics and b) Human characters/virtues. The characteristics are physical (and as such also relate to biology), or else concern the specifics of a person's demeanor: these include the reputation of never having laughed (1.72), physical likenesses between related/unrelated humans (1.78-86), and unusual height (1.87-92). The exceptional virtues are intellectual and moral: they include courage (1.102-106), philosophy/poetry (1.118-123), and piety (1.124). Each of these general characteristics features at least one example of a human who possesses it.

The chronological arrangement is relatively consistent throughout Chapter One, moving from Rome's earliest mythological origins to anthropological reports contemporary to the late republic and early empire. Within "Anthropology" the categories are grouped thematically, but the individual examples within each category tend to be listed chronologically. In general, Solinus aligns himself with accepted chronology and with the order presented in Pliny's *Historia naturalis*. There are, however, some occasions that the order is not chronological, and then the organising structure varies. One might expect to

¹²² Rome's supremacy had been a common theme in Roman writing for hundreds of years before Solinus, as is well illustrated in Nicolet 1991: 1-56 and as will be further discussed in Ch. 3. For example, Nicolet argues (p. 31) that the Romans already fashioned themselves as "masters of the *oikoumene*" by 133 BCE, and he references Polybius (p. 30), who asserts that Romans considered their conquering achievements to be superior to those of Alexander the Great because they had conquered peoples he had never heard of. I find it especially telling that Roman historiography (and specifically for our context, Solinus) then accepts Alexander into a Romano-centric perspective of the world: first there was an effort to make less of his glory so that Rome could be better, and then he and his glory were subsumed within the total glories of Rome, so that Rome connected to itself ALL the glories. Nicolet also sets out briefly (p. 74) the successful Augustan propaganda that the Empire's power was centred in Rome but spread outward across the world.

explain the departures by looking at Solinus' main sources for these passages and seeing that they too deviate from chronological order — but this is not necessarily so. The *Collectanea* is heavily based on the *Historia naturalis*, but Solinus makes additions to and deletions from passages even when it is clear from the wording that Pliny is his main source.

Solinus' editorial decisions seem to be influenced by his literary style and personal outlook. On the subject of toothy prodigies, for example, stylistic choice seems to overpower the chronological arrangement and the authority of Solinus' source: "Also, some people are born with teeth, such as Gnaeus Papirius Carbo and Marcus Curius, surnamed Dentatus on account of it."¹²³ Curius lived in the third century BCE and Carbo lived in the first century, yet Carbo is listed first. This is likewise a departure from Pliny, who writes in almost the same words but in chronological order: "And some famous men are born with teeth, like Marcus Curius, who was given the surname Dentatus on account of it, and Gnaeus Papirius Carbo."¹²⁴ The additional information concerning Curius' cognomen fits better at the end of the sentence, where it does not disrupt the enumeration of examples, and this is a plausible explanation for why Solinus makes a deliberate change from his source, and uncharacteristically deviates from a chronological order of examples.

Sometimes the examples also reveal something of his own ideology. For example, Lucius Sicinius Dentatus,¹²⁵ Marcus Sergius,¹²⁶ and Caesar the Dictator are provided as examples of courageous men.¹²⁷ They are listed in chronological order. A similar passage in the *Historia naturalis* includes Dentatus and Sergius in the same order but does not mention Caesar.¹²⁸ We can see obvious motives for Solinus to list first Sicinius then Sergius: both the rules of chronology and the *Historia naturalis* demand it. It is a logical chronological continuation for the *Collectanea* to introduce the famous Caesar last, but it also provides an opportunity to emphasise just how outstanding an individual he is: "As much as Sicinius or

¹²³ Solinus 1.70: *Quidam et cum dentibus procreantur, ut Cn. Papirius Carbo et M. Curius, Dentatus ob id cognominatus.*

¹²⁴ Pliny 7.68: *...quosdam et cum dentibus nasci, sicut M'. Curium, qui ob id Dentatus cognominatus est, et Cn. Papirium Carbonem, praeclaros viros.*

¹²⁵ Lucius Siccius Dentatus was a fifth-century Roman plebeian hero, probably not historical (Drummond 1996). Also Pliny 7.101.

¹²⁶ Marcus Sergius was a general in the Second Punic War — see Pliny 7.104-106.

¹²⁷ Solinus 1.102-7.

¹²⁸ Pliny 7.104. The praise of Caesar is found in a different context in Pliny 7.92-93.

Sergius shone among soldiers, so much did Caesar the dictator shine among leaders — on the contrary, to say more truthfully, among all men;”¹²⁹ Solinus then proceeds to praise Caesar’s writing, reading, multi-tasking, good nature, and clemency. Sicinius and Sergius, though described in positive terms, are only complimented for their military prowess.

The fact that Solinus includes Caesar where Pliny did not, and attributes extra virtues to him on top of his courage, suggests that Solinus’ personal initiative plays a role in Caesar’s inclusion here: the additional virtues ascribed to Caesar emphasise his well-rounded excellence. The order of this list respects chronology, but more importantly, it establishes a sense of hierarchy. And, just as in the previous example of toothy men, the order in which examples are given contributes to the clarity of the passage. The enumeration of Caesar’s many virtues would break the flow of courageous men, if another were listed after him. Chronology is key to the text’s organisation, but the author’s personal interests and literary style also play a part.

On a larger scale, the last quality broached under the third general topic of “Exceptional Items” seems to have a particular emphasis and message. In these final lines of Chapter One, Solinus discusses the virtue of happiness. First he proposes: “For what pertains to the award of happiness, that man has not yet been found who ought rightly to be judged happy,”¹³⁰ but immediately afterward he recounts that the Delphic oracle once judged a certain Aglaus to be so. (Aglaus was a mythical farmer who lived his life poor and isolated on his ancestral Arcadian farmland.) While this may appear to contradict the preceding assertion that no one should be called truly happy, I submit that this is actually a rhetorical ploy to reinforce it. Aglaus is cloaked in myth, and Solinus’ readers are obviously not subsistence farmers. Aglaus may be read as an ideal, and as a reminder that in order to be happy, one ought to focus on simplicity. As such, this example of a simple, happy man is a powerful conclusion to a long discussion of people who have attained various kinds of greatness: the reader can interpret the anthropological section as an encouragement to attempt great industry, but also as a reminder to be happy with modest results.

¹²⁹ Solinus 1.106: *Quantum inter milites Sicinius aut Sergius, tantum inter duces, immo ut uerius dicam inter omnes homines Caesar dictator enituit.*

¹³⁰ Solinus 1.127: *Quod attinet ad titulum felicitatis, necdum repertus est, qui felix censeri iure debuerit.*

Transition through thematic association

The quality of the *Collectanea*'s reading experience owes much to its associative flow: thematic similarities allow the discourse to slide smoothly from one topic to the next and to segue into digressionary details related to various examples. The technique is executed meticulously, and it has the overall effect of drawing the reader forward fluently; this effect is bolstered by the simple fact that the *Collectanea* does not function as a straightforward list of information. The digressions act as buttresses for both the text's fluidity and some of the points that the text makes.

A noteworthy example of association-based transition is found in the shift in subject from history to biology. The section on technological history ends after describing the evolution of the Roman calendar, and the section on biology begins with examples of multiple births. These topics are obviously not directly related to each other. However, the text is organised so that the last few paragraphs of history lead into the discussion of biology. To explain: before the history of the calendar even begins, Augustus Caesar is introduced as the last item in a list of key events in early Roman history. During his reign, Solinus says, the reckoning of the course of the year was first discerned, which since the start of time had been covered by a deep darkness.¹³¹ The development of the Roman calendar is described, from its undefined "beginning" (*initio*, 1.35) all the way up to some adjustments made at Augustus' command (1.45-48).¹³² This leads to an account of some infelicitous events in Augustus' life,¹³³ followed by: "Nevertheless, as if the world grieved for the passing of this man, scarcity of all crops followed; and lest it seem fortuitous that it had happened, the

¹³¹ Solinus 1.34: *Tunc ergo primum cursus anni perspecta ratio, quae a rerum origine profunda caligine tegebatur.*

¹³² Solinus seems to be conflating Julius Caesar and the emperor Augustus in this passage. He calls the man who comes to power at the end of the Republic Caesar Augustus, and we know this must refer to Augustus. He attributes the changes to the calendar to Augustus Caesar, which contextually seems to refer to Augustus, but in fact the changes were made under Julius Caesar. Maybe the reversal in name order (Augustus Caesar/Caesar Augustus) is meant to indicate different men, but it seems that the text mistakenly attributes the changes to Augustus. On the Julian calendar, see Feeney 2007: 196-201.

¹³³ This list of unlucky events is an abbreviated replica of a list in Pliny (7.45). Pliny, however, desists from judgement on Augustus' life — he simply provides some unfortunate events to counter the idea that Augustus was necessarily a happy man. Solinus presents a more sympathetic attitude, by commenting on Augustus' competence (1.48) and comparing a drought to the natural world mourning Augustus' death (1.50).

looming evils appeared with unambiguous signs.”¹³⁴ These unambiguous, or rather, *clear* omens are multiple births. Thus this statement moves the discourse into biology: from Augustus’ doings and demise to multiple births, then to fertility and pregnancy.

Each mention of Augustus’ activities and death serves a different purpose. The first mention of him comes, logically enough, at the end of a list of major pre-imperial events; then he appears intermittently: to introduce the calendar, to explain his changes to it, and to highlight his life and death, which brings up the omens. The concept of “unambiguous signs” is vague and open-ended, but Solinus immediately narrows it by describing specific examples (first famine, then multiple births). The specifics of this second omen — that it manifested in quadruplets — introduce the opportunity for Solinus to give examples of women who reportedly gave birth to even more children at once. These examples are no longer associated with Augustus or ominous symbolism; they are simply descriptions of an unusual biological phenomenon. In this passage, each item is linked through themes in Augustus’ life and through the idea of an *omen*.

This passage is also a worthwhile place to draw attention to Solinus’ tendency to introduce a generality, provide a specific example for it, and then move from the example into another generality: for example, from “the adversities in his [Augustus’] life” to half a page enumerating his personal and administrative sorrows; from the general idea of a bad omen to Fausta’s ominous quadruplets. The initial omen after Augustus’ death, of course, was a scarcity of crops: a lack of fecundity in the earth, as it were. The ominous nature of this portent is, in the text, affirmed by Fausta’s “monstrous fecundity.” These two portents bridge two subjects, providing details on the situation surrounding Augustus’ demise and an opportunity to discuss other omens unrelated to him, which are not signalled by lack of fecundity, but rather over-fecundity.

In this technique, Solinus provides detailed description of a given subject, then exports one small aspect of that description to introduce a new thought. Here, “omen” allows for both commonality and juxtaposition between subjects: commonality in the general idea of an omen; juxtaposition in the difference between a scarcity and an abundance of fertility. Both the commonality and juxtaposition are associative, though their

¹³⁴ Solinus 1.50: *Huius tamen suprema quasi lugeret saeculum, penuria insecuta est frugum omnium; ac ne fortuitum quod acciderat uideretur, imminetia mala non dubiis signis apparuerunt.*

approaches differ. Thus, in this example, the omen adds clarity to the text in two ways: first, as a minute detail in the story of Augustus' life, it adds vividness to the image of the first emperor; second, as an associative move into a new subject, the omen both links and distinguishes between two portions of Chapter One: it ends the Roman history portion, and introduces the biology portion.

In the last few paragraphs I have mentioned several times that the *Collectanea* describes the development of the Roman calendar — but how does this fragment of technological history fit between the sections on Roman kings and human anatomy? It seems almost out of place, not quite belonging to the history timeline that it interrupts, but definitely not belonging to biology. The association between passages is not necessarily obvious, but there is an explanation. Chronology is an essential part of a good history, and chronology is kept track of by the calendar. This alone explains the description of the calendar as a part of the section on Roman history. Furthermore, since the method of calculating time had changed over the course of Roman history, Solinus is showing that he understands the changes in order to assure his reader that his chronology is reliable. After all, if he shows himself to narrate reliable dates and facts, he proves his value as a historian, and by extension suggests that his geography is reliable. The detailed description of the calendar is thus not only a part of a thorough portrayal of Roman history and an exhibition of Roman technology, but it also advertises Solinus' own skill and reliability as a scholar.¹³⁵

There are some instances when the content of two side-by-side passages is so different that the transition can seem jarring despite the associative technique. In a work that is otherwise so carefully put together, these instances are perplexing. It is useful, in order to understand how these transitions seemed appropriate to the author, to look at his sources. This allows us to see how the passages were initially organised, and how Solinus has rearranged them into new contexts. It was mentioned in Chapter One that Solinus has been dismissed by many people as a Plinian compiler, but the present examination of his text aims to discredit this to some extent: the elements that he chooses to compile, and how he compiles them, amount to an interesting reconsideration/reworking of the *Historia naturalis*,

¹³⁵ Solinus is not alone in his interest in the calendar's development. For example, two surviving works by Varro discuss the calendar (one written before and one after the introduction of the Julian calendar); John the Lydian (a sixth century antiquarian author) wrote a whole work on *De mensibus*.

with ultimately different goals. Very slight alterations in the *Collectanea*'s organisation, or some minimal additional information, would integrate these passages more fully into the rest of the text; but if we look at Pliny's *Historia naturalis*, we can see how Solinus, in abbreviating and reorganising the *Historia*, could have perceived them to be appropriately placed.

In the passage quoted below, Solinus ends his section on the shapes of human bodies with a description of some physical attributes:

To [a human's] right part is ascribed a more agile movement, to the left, a greater strength; whence one is prompter in gestures, and the other is more accommodating for carrying a burden. Nature has determined the custom of modesty even among dead bodies, and whenever the cadavers of dead people are carried out by the floods, those of men float with their face upwards, and those of women float turned over.¹³⁶

This transition seems odd and almost jarring, from the body's aptitudes to the flotational biases of corpses, but it is simply another example of a thematic association that deals with both commonality (the human body) and contrast (left/right sides of living bodies vs. front/back sides of dead bodies). More insight on this excerpt can be gleaned from a comparison with the parallel passage in the *Historia naturalis*. Pliny presents the two descriptions in the same order, but connects them via a number of other facts about the weight of male and female bodies in wakefulness, sleep, and death,¹³⁷ which are absent from Solinus' abbreviation. Pliny and Solinus both write extensively about human bodies beyond this passage — most of this part of the *Collectanea* is an abridgement of the *Historia naturalis* — but it is important to note that the *Collectanea* organises its information quite differently. As it appears in the *Collectanea*, the above quotation concerns *forma*, but the organisation of

¹³⁶ Solinus 1.94-95: *Parti dexteræ habilior adscribitur motus, laeuae firmitas maior; unde altera gesticulationibus promptior est, altera oneri ferundo accommodatior. Pudoris disciplinam etiam inter defuncta corpora natura discreuit; ac si quando cadauera necatorum fluctibus euehantur, uirorum supina, prona fluitant feminarum.*

¹³⁷ Pliny 7.18.17: "It has been noticed that ... the right-hand side of the frame is the stronger, though in some cases both sides are equally strong and there are people whose left side is the stronger, though this is never the case with women; and that males are the heavier; and that the bodies of all creatures are heavier when dead than when alive, and when asleep than when awake; and that men's corpses float on their backs, but women's on their faces, as if nature spared their modesty after death."

Historia naturalis does not create the same demarcation: Solinus begins the section with a play on the word *forma* (to be discussed below on p. 40), and ends it with this passage; Pliny, by contrast, precedes his passage with a discussion of teeth, and follows it with bones. The new organisation in the *Collectanea* is one way that Solinus shows his originality and discretion: after all, it is chronologically fitting, in terms of the human life cycle, to end the section on the shapes of bodies with how they may look when dead.

On that note, it seems appropriate to end our discussion of Chapter One's thematic associations with its very final transition, which eases the way into Chapter Two (especially since the content of the passage has already been discussed in this thesis). One of Aglaus' defining features is that he never left the boundaries of his paternal fields.¹³⁸ Not only does this, as mentioned above, harken back to Roman ideals of simplicity, but it also provides a contrast with which to leave Rome behind and to begin the description of the world: from a man who never leaves his land, to the reader of the present book, who now sets out (at least in imagination) through the known world. For immediately after Aglaus, Chapter Two begins with the words: "I have said enough about human beings. Now, so that we may return to our plan, our pen ought to turn to the description of places..."¹³⁹ The associative hint here is *land*. There is a contrast between staying on land (*terminos*) and exploring many lands (*locorum*), but it is this one simple concept that creates the link between anthropology and geography.

The associative procedure is necessarily work-intensive. Solinus discusses a huge variety of items with great brevity, many of which are only distantly, if at all, related. Yet he has organised them so that they flow into each other by various degrees of commonality, from overarching themes to single words. The text's framework, and the physical position of every individual piece of information within it, must have been planned quite carefully.

¹³⁸ Solinus 1.127: "Certainly, the Delphic Oracle judged Aglaus alone happy, who, as master of his poor narrow land in the most remote part of Arcadia, is found never to have left the boundaries of his paternal fields." *Solum certe beatum cortina Aglaum iudicauit, qui in angustissimo Arcadiae angulo pauperis soli dominus numquam egressus paterni cespitis terminos inuenitur.*

¹³⁹ Solinus 2.1: *De homine satis dictum habeo. Nunc, ut ad destinatum reuertamur, ad locorum commemorationem stilus dirigendus est...*

Stated Transitions

In five instances within Chapter One, the narrator simply announces a change in subject (1.21, 1.78, 1.87, 1.96, 1.113).¹⁴⁰ Yet even on these occasions, the new subject is heralded by a hint in the previous one. In one instance, the text moves from an anecdote about two of Marcus Antonius' slaves (who are very beautiful and resemble each other as though they were twins), to the subject of human height. An authorial statement eases this transition: "Now, if we enquire about the very shapes of men, it will be exhibited in certainty that antiquity proclaimed nothing falsely of itself, but that the offspring of our time, corrupted by a degenerate succession, lost the splendour of ancient beauty through the faults of the newborns."¹⁴¹ This announcement creates a mental pause between the two subjects, differentiating them, but there remains an association that links the ideas of twin-like boys and human height: both concern physical form. This association is less obvious in the English than in the Latin: Solinus uses the word *forma* in both contexts, first in reference to the slave boys' appearance (*forma*, 1.84) and then, more generally, to human shape (*formis*, 1.87); in English, we can only see that he is talking about two different aspects of the way people look. Despite his declaration that the subject is changing, Solinus nonetheless includes a hint in the former subject that subtly introduces the latter. Clearly the author wants to differentiate between these topics, but the procedure through association is essential to the construction of his discourse.

A Strategic Use of References

Amid such a variety of strange and unusual subjects, it is crucial to the work's reception as an informational text that it possess scholarly credibility. Part of the way this is established is through references to reliable sources; however, even while referring to numerous sources, and arranging them so as to create an implicit impression of scholarliness, the text

¹⁴⁰ E.g. Solinus 1.21: "We shall tell in what places the rest of the kings lived." / *Ceteri reges quibus locis habitauerunt dicemus*.

¹⁴¹ Solinus 1.87-88: *Nunc si de ipsis hominum formis requiramus, liquido manifestabitur nihil de se antiquitatem mendaciter praedicasse, sed corruptam degeneri successionem subolem nostri temporis per nascentum detrimenta decus ueteris pulchritudinis perdidisse*.

does not feature any declared quotations or literal excerpts.¹⁴² Chapter One contains a high density of direct and indirect references compared to the rest of the *Collectanea*, and so it is an excellent chapter on which to focus when discussing Solinus' strategic use of sources. These appear in the form of direct mentions of specific authors,¹⁴³ references to unnamed sources,¹⁴⁴ and allusions, sometimes tacit, to a shared cultural background.¹⁴⁵ These three ways of invoking older authority fuse together to create an atmosphere of reliability in Solinus' work.

There are seventeen specific references in this first chapter. To modern scholarly thought, this sounds like a low number. One might expect that the paucity would damage the book's authority, but this is an anachronistic expectation; or perhaps one might think that their use must be limited to the most outrageous claims, but this is certainly not so. Scholarly authority is achieved in more subtle ways than that. At the outset of the work, two different types of references (one a direct mention of an author, and one an allusion to an unnamed work) are placed amid well-known stories of Rome's mythological origins (1.2-3). The Roman people were familiar with these foundation stories — it was not necessary to invoke authorities in order for them to be believed — but by invoking authority for something with which the reader is already familiar, the text initiates a sense of good faith, as though references are provided simply out of scholarly rigour — and if the author is so rigorous in familiar matters, it suggests that the same thoroughness can be expected in less usual ones.

The same impression is achieved shortly thereafter, at the start of the discussion of Rome's foundation date (1.27). The opinions of eight authors are cited on this subject (although it is worth questioning whether he consulted the works themselves). Solinus will come to his own conclusion concerning the date of Rome's foundation, but to do so with authority he must establish his expertise on the matter, and to this end he gives an example of the extent of his research.

¹⁴² For more on Solinus' efforts to write everything in his own words, see Hyskell (1925), particularly the short introduction to the section on syntax (p. 48).

¹⁴³ E.g. *sicut L. Tarruntius prodidit* (1.18); *Heraclidi placet* (1.2).

¹⁴⁴ E.g. *legimus* (1.52); *tradidit* (1.7); *Compertum et illud est, quod inter duos conceptus cum intercessit paululum temporis...* (1.60)

¹⁴⁵ E.g. *Palatium nemo dubitauerit quin Arcadas habeat auctores...* (1.14)

There are also passages containing rather strange accounts, and in these cases a reference helps the text's authority because it suggests that the author is *not* doing all his own calculations. Not all of the strange passages are accompanied by references — it is not necessary, because a well-placed reference can evoke a strong enough sense of authority to carry the reader over a number of items. If sources were provided for everything in a book like the *Collectanea*, as a collection of facts gathered from the long history of Greco-Roman geographical writing, the text would be so laden with name-dropping that it would not read smoothly.¹⁴⁶ Take the passage on multiple births mentioned above (1.51-2): the text gives three examples of this phenomenon, but refers to sources for only two, one named and the other unnamed. Although the first example does not have a reference, an impression of authoritative sources is established by the two other examples:

For a certain Fausta, of plebeian status, having given birth a single time, begot four twins: two males and as many females, with this monstrous fecundity exhibiting a sign of future calamity; however, the author Trogus affirms that in Egypt, seven are born at the same time from a single uterus; this is less a miracle there, since the Nile, with its fertility-bearing water, makes fertile not only the fields of the lands, but also [those] of men. We read that Gnaeus Pompeius exhibited Eutychis, a woman from Asia, who he was certain had given birth thirty times, since she publicly exhibited twenty of her children in his theatre.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁶ We might also imagine the narrator of the *Collectanea* as one of the interlocutors in Macrobius' *Saturnalia*. As Kaster writes (2011: xlv): "The interlocutors whom Macrobius is constructing are citizens of his idealized republic of learning, the sort of men who *would* have all that learning on the tips of their tongues: were they to say "as Gellius reports" or "according to Plutarch" at every turn, the effect would be very different. The catch the flavor, imagine Ovid footnoting Varro every dozen lines in the *Fasti*." Solinus cultivates an image of his narrator as a gentleman scholar, speaking to others of similar status.

¹⁴⁷ Solinus 1.51-52: *Nam Fausta quaedam ex plebe partu uno edidit quattuor geminos, mares duos, feminas totidem, monstrosa fecunditate portendens futurae calamitatis indicium; quamlibet Trogus auctor adfirmet in Aegypto septenos uno utero simul gigni; quod ibi minus mirum, eum fetifero potu Nilus non tantum terrarum sed etiam hominum fecundet arua. Legimus Cn. Pompeium Eutychidem feminam Asia exhibitam, quam constabat tricies enixam, cum uiginti eius liberis in theatro suo publicasse.*

References to other texts are made only concerning Egyptian septuplets and Eutychis' fecundity. None is given for the claims about Fausta or the Nile's fertile properties,¹⁴⁸ yet there is an impression of thoroughness from the two allusions that are made. There are different reasons for the fecundity in each example, so that no single reference establishes a rule that then applies to multiple situations: Fausta's quadruplets are a supernatural omen of future calamity; the Egyptian septuplets are caused naturally by the fertile Nile; Eutychis' fertility cannot be caused by the Nile, since she is from Asia, but neither is there any indication that her children are omens — they are simply remarkable for their number. Still, we are left with four facts (two of them, the Egyptian septuplets and the fertile Nile, closely related), and only two references, one of which is not even named ("we read that," *legimus*). This sort of allusion is reminiscent of the "Alexandrian footnote," in which the author "portrays himself as a kind of scholar, and portrays his allusion as a kind of learned citation," in the tradition of Callimachus and the Alexandrian library¹⁴⁹ — and Callimachus, I reiterate from Ch. 1 (p. 19), is the earliest known author of paradoxographical literature, whose work is a spiritual ancestor to Solinus' *noteworthy items*.

So, the polymathic authority of Trogus, as an explicit reference, suggests to the reader that the unspecified reference also stems from a reliable author. This technique is used repeatedly throughout the *Collectanea*. On their own, such assertions as, for example, "he [Caesar] is said to have dictated four individual letters at the same time,"¹⁵⁰ or "a fisherman of Sicily was likened to the proconsul Sura,"¹⁵¹ are unsubstantiated claims, but when placed in the proximity of a convincing reference, it is no longer so crucial to know precisely who did the reporting or likening. The above passage on multiple births provides a prime example of this technique. After the reference to Trogus, the *legimus* in the next sentence slips quietly by.

¹⁴⁸ The belief that the Nile originated in western Africa has existed at least since the sixth century BCE and was repeated in several late antique texts (Merrills 2005: 83): it may have been so well known that no reference was felt needed.

¹⁴⁹ Hinds 1998: 2. He explains that the term "Alexandrian footnote" was coined by Ross 1975: 78. Solinus' *legimus* is more ambiguous than a proper Alexandrian footnote, since it only suggests that he refers to some sort of source rather than hinting at a particular one.

¹⁵⁰ *perhibetur...dictasse* (1.107).

¹⁵¹ *piscator ex Sicilia...comparabatur* (1.83).

The reader with contacts to a good library could check Pliny's *Historia naturalis* (7.3.1-4) and find the same story of Fausta and the same reference to Trogus.¹⁵² Although he is not mentioned by Solinus, Pliny's reputation would impart a certain reliability, for those aware of his analogous passage, in that Solinus would be shown to have extracted this information from a venerable source. Pliny, however, recounts a vaguer version of Eutychis' story than the one given in the *Collectanea*. If the reader is already familiar with Pliny's version, then Solinus' may be called into question, especially since he only backs his story with an allusion to a literary source, rather than an explicit reference: "We read that Gnaeus Pompeius showed Eutychis..." Because of this, it is beneficial to the credibility of Solinus' version that Trogus is mentioned just prior. His name adds a degree of respectability to the unidentified work that Solinus has "read."¹⁵³

In this passage on marvelous fertility, Solinus not only invokes the authority of a direct reference (Trogus on septuplets) and an unnamed source ("we read" about Eutychis) but an intertextual reference as well (Pliny on Fausta and Eutychis). The fact that there are only seventeen explicit references in Chapter One (and a similar number of unnamed sources whose works are only alluded to) means that most items are presented at simple face value. Their credibility must be drawn from nearby references in the work, or from the reader's intertextual knowledge. This literary intertextuality is the third main way in which the reader's trust is maintained: the Roman reader and the *Collectanea* share a cultural background that includes other

¹⁵² Gunderson (2009: 258) writes on intertextuality and scholarship: "if scholarship is itself poetic and intertextual, then the relationship between even objective and objectifying texts and those they purport to comment on takes on a much more protean cast especially when the commentaries are themselves citing, alluding to, and borrowing from another."

¹⁵³ The information passed along with Pliny's version is actually much more incredible than anything Solinus says, which also indicates the serious nature of Solinus' work — he does not necessarily sacrifice scholarly integrity to the reader's interest (i.e. he looks for a certain amount of credibility in the unusual things he chooses to include). Pliny writes: "Pompey the Great among the decorations of his theatre placed images of celebrated marvels, made with special elaboration for the purpose by the talent of eminent artists; among them we read of Eutychis who at Tralles was carried to her funeral pyre by twenty children and who had given birth 30 times, and Alcippe who gave birth to an elephant—although it is true that the latter case ranks among portents, for one of the first occurrences of the Marsian War was that a maidservant gave birth to a snake, and also monstrous births of various kinds are recorded among the ominous things that happened." (Pliny 7.3.34, trans. Jones 1949-1954).

Roman geographical texts, like those of the Elder Pliny and Pomponius Mela. The *Collectanea* is a result of learned Roman society, and as discussed in Ch. 1 its audience would include learned Roman society: the cultural beliefs and perceptions about Rome and the rest of the world that it represents, then, would be familiar to much of the audience.¹⁵⁴ There is no need for Solinus to explain everything in great detail, because some explanations and contexts are given to the Roman audience by their familiarity with other works. Hence Solinus can mention Greco-Roman celebrities without stating any sources, like when he holds up Marcus Agrippa's grim personal life as an example of the unluckiness of a breech birth (1.65-66), or when he treats the Delphic oracle as an authority in its own right, without providing any further sources (for example, he does not mention who recorded her sayings) (1.123, 127). The Delphic Oracle is culturally important enough that it is unnecessary to attribute her words to another author.

Similarly, only a few lines after the discussion of multiple births, Solinus records that women of childbearing age can damage mirrors with their glance, and he does not provide a reference (1.58). This was a cultural belief, and as such requires no supporting evidence. Just as some modern people believe that killing spiders causes rain, and some believe that fans blowing onto a sleeper's face in a closed room will cause death,¹⁵⁵ so we must allow for Roman cultural beliefs, which needed no written evidence. In these intertextual situations, additional referencing would complicate the text without providing information that is interesting to the reader.

An ideal audience for the *Collectanea* would benefit from the many opportunities for intertextual interpretation. It seems to be a book written from within a group for the eyes of that group (i.e., those possessed of an advanced education). Of Rome's mythological origins, Solinus states: "No one would doubt that the Palatine

¹⁵⁴ As Horster and Reitz write (2010: 3), in the introduction to their article "'Condensation' of Literature and the Pragmatics of Literary Production": "Generating, disseminating, and preserving knowledge are not autonomous processes, but are subject to their social context."

¹⁵⁵ The belief in fan death is common in South Korea and among Korean emigrants. See Brunvand 2012: 223-224, who brought Piercy 2012 to my attention. Note that what today might be called a "superstition" is anachronistic for the ancient world. Thus here we discuss cultural beliefs, and not superstitions. For a basic explanation of the history of the Roman *superstitio*, see Martin 2004: 125-139.

has the Arcadians as its creators.”¹⁵⁶ This statement can only ring true to those who have been taught to believe this beyond a doubt: those with a particular Roman education. The certainty of the statement almost suggests that anyone who would doubt the Arcadians’ role in the foundation of the Palatine must be an ignoramus. It draws in members of the in-group with its exclusive tone, and reinforces the impression that most items of Greco-Roman culture do not need accompanying references. The in-group is as familiar with famous figures of Roman history as it is with the details of its metropolis’ foundation.

The reliance on intertextuality will, later in the book, draw clear marks between what is orthodox culture and what is not. The appearance of the Aegipanes people, for instance, are later in the book described “just as we see them painted.”¹⁵⁷ The “we” shows clearly that the Aegipanes are not part of the anticipated audience — and that the non-Aegipanian audience is expected to be familiar with a particular iconography. The *Collectanea*’s first chapter, since it deals only with events and figures within the sphere of Roman culture, furnishes a comfortable setting of cultural norms, against which all the wonders of the world — including the Aegipanes — can be compared. Undoubtedly the mainstay of Solinus’ authority are the sources he mentions directly by name — sources that are immediately visible on the pages, without any need for supplementary knowledge — but the named, unnamed, and cultural references all combine to confer credibility. The extrapolated reliability stretches beyond specific references; it creates a network throughout the book, linking together obscure, unreferenced facts with those established by cultural tradition and those highlighted by the mention of distinguished authors.

¹⁵⁶ Solinus 1.14: *Palatium nemo dubitauerit quin Arcadas habeat auctores.*

¹⁵⁷ Solinus 31.6: *Aegipanes hoc sunt quod pingi uidemus.*

Comparison to Other Late Antique Encyclopedic Texts

The analysis of Solinus' literary technique leads to the question of his originality. He takes pains to establish that his content is not unique; that it is, on the contrary, part of a long tradition. Indeed, many passages resemble those of the *Historia naturalis* and *De chorographia* almost verbatim. Some examples from the *Collectanea*'s first chapter were already discussed under "Transitions through Thematic Associations," but it is true of the entire book. For example, Solinus and Pliny both write (roughly): "Many believe that the Blemmyae are born without heads, and have their mouths and eyes in their chest."¹⁵⁸ Solinus employs synonyms and alters the grammar, but both communicate the same information. However, the fact that Solinus extracts passages from different parts of Pliny and matches them up together in his own book — in addition to the abbreviated nature of his work — shows that his technique is different. It must also be considered that sometimes the information in the *Collectanea* differs from Pliny in places that perhaps Solinus does not intend it to (for example, naming a consul *Vipsanus* instead of *Vipstanus*, or saying that Antonius paid 300 *sesterces* for twin slaves instead of 200 *sesterces*).¹⁵⁹ Although these may be unintentional alterations, they nonetheless mark the *Collectanea* as its own distinct work.

During Late Antiquity there was an interest in abbreviating and compiling literature: not simply to make shorthand "Cole's Notes" for earlier works, but to use the old information in new frameworks. Formisano notes the propensity of late antique authors to analyse, dismantle, decode, and reassemble classical texts in a new form.¹⁶⁰ There was also a trend against "logical order" and toward *variationes*.¹⁶¹ In its often rudimentary lists and anecdotes and opportunities for intertextual interpretation, the *Collectanea* shows itself to be a work of its time.

¹⁵⁸ Solinus 31.5: *Blemyas credunt truncos nasci parte qua caput est, os tamen et oculos habere in pectore*. Pliny 5.8.46: *Blemmyes traduntur capita abesse, ore et oculis pectore adfixis*.

¹⁵⁹ Solinus 1.98: *Vipsanus* (note that this could be a mistake inserted by the manuscript tradition, rather than by Solinus himself; Mommsen names *Vibranus* as a variant in the apparatus criticus); Pliny 7.20.84: *Vipstanus*. Solinus 1.86: *trecentis sestertiis*; Pliny 7.12.56: *ducentis erat mercatus sestertiis*.

¹⁶⁰ Formisano 2007: 282. See also Humphries (2007: 44-54), who discusses some ways in which non-Christian Greco-Roman texts were reworked or respun to reflect a Christian perspective.

¹⁶¹ Formisano 2012: 523-525.

As examples of the tendency to gather information, Formisano examines *De medicamentis* by Marcellus Empiricus and a letter by Ausonius that explains the methodology for his poem *Cento nuptialis*. Both authors worked near the end of the fourth century, and so probably not long after Solinus. In *De medicamentis*, Empiricus reworks a traditional metaphor about the god Asclepius, in order to help explain his methodology in compiling the book: just as Asclepius is said to have gathered “the scattered and torn limbs of Virbius” and recomposed them into a single body, so has Marcellus Empiricus gathered his information on medicines from various sources, “scattered and hidden from sight,” and created one work, or “body.”¹⁶² The poem to which Ausonius refers in his letter is a *cento*: a type of poem consisting of scattered excerpts from other poems (in Latin, from Virgil), gathered seamlessly into a new work.¹⁶³ In order for it to be what it is, it *must* be the result of old information being gathered and reconstructed in new ways. *Centones* were thus an extremely sophisticated form of literature, and the surviving examples indicate that they were quite popular in Late Antiquity.¹⁶⁴ All this suggests that Solinus is part of a general trend in the reworking and systematisation of traditional knowledge, an idea that is supported if we look at the works of some of the most famous surviving late antique writers: Aulus Gellius, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella.

In the second half of the second century CE (and so, by all accounts, at least one generation before Solinus), Aulus Gellius wrote his *Noctes atticae*. Its classification as a late antique text is debatable (the second century often counted in the classical era), but certainly it is a part of the encyclopedic tradition and a model for the later works discussed below. It is a compendium of older knowledge, but not in precisely the same way as the *Collectanea*. On the one hand, the *Noctes* contains a patchwork of various items (many from Pliny), which relates it closely to the *Collectanea*, but on the other, the *Noctes*’ organisation is

¹⁶² *De medicamentis*, *Praefatio* 1, quoted in Formisano 2012: 526-527.

¹⁶³ Formisano 2007: 283-4. McGill (2010: 1-23) explains the strict structure and rules governing the composition of a *cento*.

¹⁶⁴ Formisano (2012: 526) lists several examples of Latin *centones*, including Luxurius’ *Epithalamium Fridi* and Proba’s *Cento Virgilianus de laudibus Christi*; as mentioned in chapter one, the empress Eudocia is known to have written Homeric (Greek) *centones* (Stirling 2005: 150).

deliberately miscellaneous,¹⁶⁵ while the *Collectanea* is crafted so that each subject is linked in a continuous chain. Both authors approach the writing of their compendia in different ways: Holford-Strevens suggests that Gellius seems to savour the use of language, while he describes Pliny as “over-compressed,”¹⁶⁶ and Solinus is in most instances more abridged than Pliny. They also differ in content: Solinus examines a specific sliver of Roman knowledge, whereas Gellius offers a more general overview of Latin intellectual culture; this difference is clear in their prefaces, where Solinus states that he will focus on unusual and far-away places and things, while Gellius mentions the diverse subjects of grammar, dialectics, and geometry.¹⁶⁷

Gellius and Solinus do, however, share an interest in educating their reader, and so they collect information that can be both useful to know and entertaining to read about.¹⁶⁸ In his preface Gellius explains that this book is meant to entertain his children in their leisure time: “Not to know this material, he says, is *si non inutile, at quidem certe indecorum*, a common sentiment in educational texts from elementary writing exercises upwards.”¹⁶⁹ In terms of his methodology, Gellius shares with such encyclopedic scholars as Varro, Solinus, and Macrobius a tendency to express several views on a given subject. Stevenson repeats Berthold’s opinion that this may represent an “imperfection of the work” from an author who considers “himself unfit to give his own verdict” or hides behind authorities, but this is an

¹⁶⁵ Gellius *Praefatio* 2: *Usi autem sumus ordine rerum fortuito, quem antea in excerpendo feceramus*. Fantham (2013: 233) points out that this type of miscellany was common, and Gellius himself names several other miscellanies (*Praefatio* 1.9). Clearly there is a tradition of deliberate disorganisation behind him, and so Gellius’ miscellaneous arrangement is not so cavalier as he suggests. As Gunderson writes (2009: 256), “A basic structuring element of the *Noctes* is its disparity, its resistance to structure.” Holford-Strevens (2003: 49) calls Gellius an “artist” for the way he combines the words of previous writers, and notes that his was a “a distinctive style that was much to the taste of later readers.”

¹⁶⁶ Holford-Strevens 2003: 65.

¹⁶⁷ Gellius *Praefatio* 13.

¹⁶⁸ Morgan (2004: 187-189) writes about the education that Gellius imparts, in both ethical and informational terms. Like Macrobius, Gellius himself says that he perceives his work as a shortform for greater learning; he hopes with it to inspire active minds to pursue more information on their own, and to provide minds busy with other duties with some basic knowledge (*Praefatio* 12); in the very first line, he says that the book is meant to be entertaining for his children’s leisure time (*Praefatio* 1).

¹⁶⁹ Morgan 2004: 189, with quotation from Gellius *Praefatio* 13. See Gellius *Praefatio* 1 for the work’s dedication to his children.

unnecessarily judgemental conclusion.¹⁷⁰ The presentation of multiple views is an ordinary feature in Latin literature, which has recently been explored at some length in Livy, for instance.¹⁷¹ The fact that so many authors choose to present multiple views suggests that it is a deliberate technique in their scholarship.¹⁷²

Early in the fifth century, Macrobius used Gellius as one of his main sources in his encyclopedic work *Saturnalia*, which he dedicated to his son Eustachius.¹⁷³ He is explicit that the work is educational, a “shortcut” from his own reading of ancient literature.¹⁷⁴ Where Macrobius lingers on the importance of education, Solinus is open about his desire to inspire interest while educating.¹⁷⁵ Yet the *Saturnalia* suggests lightheartedness in its framework, since it is written as an informal dialogue between friends at a festival. Another commonality between *Saturnalia* and the *Collectanea* is that they both are compendia — a fact which Solinus admits to concisely, saying: “The book has been prepared with a goal of brevity” (*ad compendia*, *Praef.* 2), while Macrobius says it at greater length: “We should draw upon all our sources with the aim of making a unity, just as one number results from a

¹⁷⁰ See Stevenson (2004: 139-141) for more on Gellius, Varro, and Macrobius’ use of multiple views. Of particular interest is the observation that Macrobius suggests that Varro usually left his preferred option til last (*His a Varrone praescriptis intellegere possumus id potissimum ab eo probatum quod ex sua consuetudine in ultimo posuit*, 3.4.3). It is possible that Varro made this clear in some lost part of his writings, or it could be that this discovery was the result of methodological analysis by antique scholars (p. 141). Stevenson references H. Berthold’s (trans.), *Aulus Gellius, Attische Nächte*, Leipzig 1987: 23-26.

¹⁷¹ Forsythe (1999: 40-51) explores Livy’s habit of presenting multiple versions of events without passing his own judgement.

¹⁷² Stem (2007) analyses Livy’s use of the technique.

¹⁷³ For a discussion of Macrobius’ use of *Noctes Atticae*, see Gunderson 2009: 255-269.

¹⁷⁴ Macrobius *Praefatio* 8.

¹⁷⁵ See Ch. 1 of this thesis and Solinus *Praefatio* 2-4. On the emphasis on education in Macrobius’ preface, see Gunderson 2009: 259-260. Cameron emphasises that *Saturnalia* is a literary dialogue, and this is important in the interpretation of Macrobius’ preface: the work is educational in that it repeats the material of earlier, important authors (2010: 265), and communicates the information through historical characters that are worthy of respect — gentlemen and scholars (p. 263). Its teaching does not reflect the state of traditional Greco-Roman religion in the late fourth/early fifth century. Kaster writes (2011: xii): “Set ca. 383..., the discussion presents Virgil as the master of all human knowledge, from diction and rhetoric through philosophy and religion, making explicit a view long implied by the scholarship gathered around the poems and anticipating the miraculous figure of “Virgil the magician” known to the Middle ages.” Olsom (2012: 287-288) adds a discussion about elite cultural activities and expectations of erudition.

sum of individual numbers.”¹⁷⁶ This idea of coherence and unity runs throughout Macrobius’ preface and, as shall be discussed below, is also found in the *Collectanea*. Each author adapts fragments from various sources to fit the format and goals of his own compendium. The main difference here seems to be that Macrobius designs his as a shortcut for his child (likely a teen, as Cameron suggests¹⁷⁷) who was still gaining information, while Solinus seems to write a short form that anticipates relatively advanced knowledge in the audience.¹⁷⁸

Several stylistic elements in their prefaces are identical. For example, they use some of the same expressions and metaphors: their content is “worthy of remembering” (*digna memoratu*) and its arrangement (Macrobius) or reading (Solinus) creates a seed of knowledge in the mind (*fermentum*).¹⁷⁹ It is unsurprising that both use the common technique of *captatio benevolentiae*, but it nevertheless represents a similarity in their works. Macrobius is arguably more self-consciously modest than Solinus, since he makes a roundabout claim to eloquence (*Praef.* 3), stresses the importance of what he has attempted in this book (*Praef.* 4-10), and idles on his shortcomings as a Latinist while simultaneously expressing his knowledge of Roman history (*Praef.* 4, 11-15). Solinus makes no such obvious effort in the preface to downplay his credentials or to show off his knowledge.¹⁸⁰ Nonetheless, despite their differing styles, it is clear that both authors use the same technique.

Macrobius also employs a number of metaphors which are comparable to Solinus’ about Rome as the head of the earth’s body. They both use metaphors about organic material, and about gathering fragmented information.¹⁸¹ They compare their knowledge to

¹⁷⁶ Macrobius *Praefatio* 8 (trans. Kaster 2011: 7). Formisano (2012: 515) references Le Goff from *L’homme médiéval* (Seuil, 1994) about the influence of *Saturnalia* on the medieval enthusiasm for encyclopedic works, which he calls “l’esprit encyclopédique” (though Formisano provides no page number).

¹⁷⁷ Cameron 2010: 232, (among other reasons) since the preface suggests that Eustachius has already read Plato and Cicero’s *Republics*.

¹⁷⁸ An interesting difference between Macrobius and Solinus is that the two works in question were not widely read during the same periods. *Saturnalia* gained popularity around the beginning of the Renaissance, while the *Collectanea* seems to have been popular until the end of the end of the Renaissance. On the trajectory of *Saturnalia*, see Fantham 2013: 282.

¹⁷⁹ Macrobius *Praefatio* 6: *fermento*; Solinus *Praefatio* 2: *fermentum*.

¹⁸⁰ Cf. Solinus’ use of *captatio benevolentiae*, Ch. 1 p. 6.

¹⁸¹ Formisano (2012: 525) also mentions Macrobius’ orderly use of organic metaphor.

the human form in order to describe how they systematise scattered information: where Solinus compares his description of the earth to the process of drawing a human, Macrobius says that he has brought together his notes on various authors “as though in a body, so that... [they] might come together in a coherent, organic whole” (*Praef.* 3). These metaphors both deal with taking fragmented knowledge and making it into something new. This shows how alike the prefaces of Solinus and Macrobius are in many ways: expressions, metaphors, even the manner in which they conceptualise their knowledge.

Martianus Capella wrote during the fifth century.¹⁸² He, too, dedicates the work to his son — this was a traditional dedication.¹⁸³ His *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* also conveys traditional knowledge from ancient sources, with an explicit focus on the liberal arts. The information is communicated through speeches at the allegorical marriage of Philology to Mercury: the arts are personified as slave women presented as gifts to the bride.¹⁸⁴

Although the preface of *De nuptiis* is, like the *Collectanea*, traditional in its content, it does not necessarily reveal the goals and purpose of the work: McDonough argues that the narrator of *De nuptiis* is satirical and fictional, divorced from the personality of the author himself; he even questions the earnestness of the traditional dedication, citing “the satirically ironic dialogues the narrator holds with his ‘son.’”¹⁸⁵ Shanzer, although she does not go so far as to question the narrator, discusses the book’s twofold nature as a satirical and mystical text, or as she suggests, a “crypto-pagan mystagogic compendium”; she proposes that the satire may have been meant as a cover for non-Christian religious messages, which

¹⁸² Shanzer (1986: 5-17) thinks that he wrote late in the fifth century, although she presents a detailed discussion on the debate about at what point during the century he wrote.

¹⁸³ Morgan (2004: 189-190) writes that while members of elite society would not want to be viewed as a working “teacher,” education was socially important, and so elite adults took a strong interest in the education of their children. Of Aulus Gellius (p. 189): “By announcing that his work is for the education of his sons, then publishing it for the edification of a wider public, Gellius positions himself in the ranks of responsible Roman fathers in a line from Cato the Elder.” Cato the Elder, the oldest Roman encyclopedist and “one of the antiquarians’ heroes,” also dedicated his work to his son (the quotation is from Fantham 2013: 283; see too Formisano 2012: 513).

¹⁸⁴ For analysis on Martianus Capella’s use of allegory, see Formisano (2012: 513) and Hicks (2012: 309-310, 324-329).

¹⁸⁵ McDonough’s (1990: 243) assertion that the narrator is a fictional character typical of satirical literature is in response to Shanzer’s (1986: 1-3) examination of the narrator as a direct reflection of the author. (Although this conflation of narrator and author seems regular in Capellan scholarship, e.g. Stahl 1962: 172.)

could have been considered subversive in the fifth century.¹⁸⁶ This sort of scholarly debate is alien to the *Collectanea*: it has not been interpreted as a satirical or religious text,¹⁸⁷ and the question of the author-narrator relationship has thus far been absent from its scholarship, which has accepted the narrator as Solinus. Both texts do share a surface lightness that covers more earnest material beneath, but potentially for very different reasons.

The text of *De nuptiis* is also dense in several ways which separate it from the *Collectanea*: its syntax is complex and it includes many words that do not exist elsewhere (this led to its use in the ninth-twelfth centuries as a test of one's Latin grammar and vocabulary, which in turn played a sizeable role in influencing the medieval trend for encyclopedic works¹⁸⁸). The Latin of the *Collectanea* was probably not used as a test. It is written in a simple and straightforward way, and the rare words are interpretable from the context. There is, however, some evidence that it may have been used for teaching purposes during Late Antiquity.¹⁸⁹ This constitutes a certain similarity in the reception of their Latin, if not in their use of it.

Martianus Capella's use of metaphor is different from that of Solinus and Macrobius. It encompasses his entire work rather than simply describing the work in a preface: the text as a whole is allegorical. But, like Macrobius and Solinus, he collects a variety of information into the human form: the liberal arts, personified as different women, expound upon themselves, meaning that Martianus Capella uses different human forms (rather than different parts of a single human form) for different subjects. This shows that *De nuptiis* is

¹⁸⁶ The twofold nature of the work is discussed in Shanzer 1986: 29-44; explanatory passages on this subject are found on pp. 21-27 and 42-44. The quotation is found on p. 43. Cameron (2010: 270) argues in the other direction that "some passages in the *Commentary* might have pagan implications if we knew on other grounds that the author was a committed pagan. But they are secondary to the aim and character of the work as a whole," which he sees as antiquarian. Cf. Jackson (1981: 6), who writes that the Menippean influences show an attempt to alleviate any boredom the reader might be developing from the serious nature of the main material. On Gellius being influenced by Menippean satire, see Keulen 2009: 46-51.

¹⁸⁷ Notwithstanding some articles that examine his treatment of religion/his own possible religious inclinations — Von Martels 2003 on possible Christian influences, Bedon 2004 on the author's possible Stoicism.

¹⁸⁸ See Hicks 2012: 307-309.

¹⁸⁹ John Camertes, in "The Life of Solinus," writes: "But Servius also in his seconde booke upon Virgills Husbandry, and Priscian, two of the sixe notable Gramarians, have cited the authoritie of Solinus by name" (Golding 1587). See also Dover (2013: 436-437), who discusses this *Vita Solini* and the editions in which it appears, and Beazley (1897: 248), who discusses some of the earliest known sources to make use of the *Collectanea* in his attempt to date the work.

another example of the late antique tendency to collect and organise older knowledge (and in fact, Martianus Capella draws on Pliny and Solinus for his chorographical section, 6.622-684¹⁹⁰). Martianus Capella is not inventing new information about the liberal arts — he is only packaging it in a new way. Formisano (2012: 513) calls his technique the “narrativisation” of knowledge.

All four authors have antiquarian interests, and show it in various ways. Gellius makes great use of Varro in his transmission of Roman institutions of daily life, religion, and politics.¹⁹¹ Macrobius spends a great part of the second day of his *Saturnalia* discussing Roman laws and lifestyle, mostly on the basis of Virgil;¹⁹² Cameron qualifies the *Saturnalia* as “literary and religious antiquarianism.”¹⁹³ Solinus also makes much use of Varro in his first chapter, but he tends to record the unusual rather than the institutional. It is worthwhile to note that “antiquarianism” did not exist as such when Varro wrote his *Antiquitates*. Powell (1994: 63) suggests that Varro’s work may have been in the same broad category of Greek-inspired learning as history, philosophy, and natural science. Though Solinus does not openly address philosophy, he too is occupied by history and natural science.

Gunderson writes of antiquarians: “They revere origins, but in practise they revere their own reverence for the past more than the past itself.”¹⁹⁴ Macrobius, Martianus Capella, and Solinus all refer to older authors in order to appropriate their authority, but they rework the sources to create their own messages. While this appropriation shows a kind of reverence for past authors, the old messages are altered by this de- and

¹⁹⁰ Stahl 1971: 129-130.

¹⁹¹ For discussion on Gellius’ miscellaneity and antiquarian interests, see Stevenson 2004: 122-123.

¹⁹² Shanzer (1986: 133-137) sees in *Saturnalia* (similarly to *De nuptiis*) a subversive defense of paganism. This is dismissed by Cameron (2010: 266-271), who interprets it simply as an antiquarian work that does not necessarily reflect the author’s own beliefs and is not meant to communicate secret pagan information. Davies (1969: 14) writes that “Vergil’s many-sided erudition” is *Saturnalia*’s main theme: that is, his great knowledge of many subjects, and of many Latin and Greek scholars before him. This argument supports the idea of *Saturnalia* as an antiquarian text rather than an actively religious one.

¹⁹³ Cameron 2010: 270. This is in contrast to Macrobius’ *Commentary*, which Cameron calls “philosophical and scientific” antiquarianism.

¹⁹⁴ Gunderson 2009: 16.

recontextualisation.¹⁹⁵ For example, Martianus Capella may have chosen to model parts of his work on Varro's *Nouem Disciplinae* and *Menippeae* in order to create a link in the mind of his audience between his work and that of his “illustrious predecessor,” thereby framing his work in a particular literary context;¹⁹⁶ Macrobius idealises his historical gentleman scholars and uses them to create “the illusion of a real dialogue among real pagans,” while actually they are simply vessels for a “stream of citations from obscure monographs many centuries old” — their paganism, Cameron adds, is that of Virgil's era, not of Macrobius' time in the late fourth century.¹⁹⁷ When Solinus records a number of earlier scholars' origin dates for the city of Rome, he is not only noting a scholarly debate, but also making a show of his own skill and thoroughness as a historian and antiquarian — he is using these references to make himself look credible.

These comparisons between Solinus, Macrobius, Martianus, and Gellius leave us in a good position to establish some general trends in ancient scholarship: all the authors have some traits in common with each other, though none share all. Each wrote an encyclopedic work that transmitted traditional information and dealt with some aspect of the liberal arts, but each approached the compendium in his own way. They lived in different times, so they mark different points in the encyclopedic tradition, with Aulus Gellius at the beginning of this discussion and Martianus Capella at the end. It has been remarked upon, for example, that Macrobius closely follows sections of *Noctes Atticae*, and that Martianus Capella draws on Solinus.¹⁹⁸ Solinus' subject matter, however, is more concentrated than the other three, with his focus on distant ethnography, zoology, and geography.

Each author organises his information differently and for different purposes. Gellius' method is deliberately *desystematised* into disconnected fragments of studied miscellaneity, visually divided by headings. Stevenson argues that the use of rubrics, or headings, is a

¹⁹⁵ Cf. Macrobius *Praefatio* 8: “Let this be the mind's goal: to conceal its sources of support and to display only what it has made of them” (trans. Kaster 2011: 7)/ *Hoc faciat noster animus: omnia quibus est adiutus abscondat, ipsum tantum ostendat quod efficit*; or König and Woolf 2013: 42 and Formisano 2007: 282, on the late antique tendency to shuffle around earlier knowledge into new formats with new purposes.

¹⁹⁶ See Shanzer 1986: 37–42. The quotation is found on p. 42. Olmos (2012: 286) also comments on Martianus Capella's “subtle homage to Varro as a presiding figure.”

¹⁹⁷ Cameron 2010: 258–259.

¹⁹⁸ E.g. Gunderson 2009: 12–13 and Olmos 2012: 286 comment on Macrobius' use of Gellius; Krapinger 2011 and Beazley 1897: 341–342 comment on Martianus Capella's use of Solinus.

traditional style of writing, one which Macrobius and Pliny deliberately avoid, consciously organising their text into continuous prose.¹⁹⁹ This observation can be extended to the *Collectanea*.²⁰⁰ Macrobius and Martianus both narrativise their information into types of *symposia* (Martianus' *De nuptiis* is in large part made up of speeches during a wedding, during which each orator says things appropriate to their personification; Macrobius' *Saturnalia* takes the form of a dialogue between friends during the Saturnalia festival, and so his interlocutors discuss items appropriate to the time of day — serious matters during the daytime, and more convivial ones during the evening banquets). So the organisation of the *Collectanea* does not perfectly match any one of the other three works: it lacks dialogue, it is homogeneous (rather than divided up), and it is descriptive rather than narrative. Solinus' descriptive and associative methods stand alone among these authors as a pattern of organisation.

The works of Gellius, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella can all be qualified as fiction; the *Collectanea* is the only truly non-fiction text. Gellius portrays a variety of scenes and conversations, many likely fictionalised in the details if not in their entirety, and not necessarily meant to be taken as bare facts: for example, when Gellius writes that Gavius Bassus and Julius Modestus “tell the history of the horse of Seius, a tale wonderful and worthy of record,”²⁰¹ he is telling a story with the intent of communicating a lesson, not just of reporting strict facts. Macrobius' *Saturnalia* could be described as “historical fiction.” The story is set perhaps fifty years earlier than it was written (383 is favoured by Kaster and Cameron for the year in which the story is set, while they argue that it was written ca. 430).²⁰² The interlocutors are historical figures thought to have been deceased by the time of writing, whose personalities have been subordinated and idealised to fit the framework of the *Saturnalia*; and of course, the dialogues take place during the *Saturnalia* festival, which had lost its former lustre in the predominantly Christian fifth century. As

¹⁹⁹ See Stevenson 2004: 133. Stevenson references E. Tuerk's 1963 article “Les *Saturnales* de Macrobie sources de Servius Danielis,” in *Revue des études latines* 41: 327- 349.

²⁰⁰ It is worth noting that the ninth century Leiden Voss manuscript (Lat. Q 87) is divided into sections with headings. Racine (“Solinus and Late Roman Schools”) argues that this manuscript displays the text as a reference work, in contrast with Mommsen's continuous text.

²⁰¹ [Gavius Bassus in commentariis suis, item Iulius Modestus in secundo quaestionum confusarum] *historiam de equo Seiano tradunt dignam memoria atque admiratione* (Gellius 3.9.1).

²⁰² Cameron 2010: 239-254; Kaster 2011: xii.

Cameron succinctly puts it, “the *Saturnalia* is not a work of history, and it is a fundamental error (to be sure often made) to treat it as such. It is a literary dialogue—in its frame if not its subject matter in effect a work of fiction.”²⁰³ And as mentioned above, Martianus Capella’s information is narrativised through personifications of the liberal arts, and set at a fictional divine wedding.

The *Collectanea*, meanwhile, is a simple collection of “facts” from a scholarly tradition. Whether we can objectively call them facts is not at issue here; subjectively, according to the *Collectanea*, that is what they are. It is not a narrative and there is no dialogue; though the information is organised and selected in a way that can entertain the reader, the narrator is simply transmitting scholarly information.

The scholarship of Solinus, Macrobius, and Martianus Capella — arguably masters of their kinds of Latin prose — is in many ways minimised by Stahl.²⁰⁴ Olmos comments on how Macrobius and Martianus Capella have been “traditionally undervalued as mere compilers of an allegedly already degraded scientific legacy and choice victims of the excesses of *Quellenforschung*.”²⁰⁵ The modern denunciation of these authors is especially strange in consideration of their sophisticated language, style, and content, all of which point to expectations of a cultivated audience; their favourable receptions show that this audience was realised (we have good reason to believe, for instance, that a copy of the *Collectanea* was given to the emperor Theodosius²⁰⁶). The detailed information that they contain is suitable for advanced students and adults, as “a guide to self-enhancement directed at an audience of already cultured people.” Olmos reports Schievenin’s argument that *De nuptiis*

²⁰³ Cameron 2010: 265. See also Kaster 2011: xvii: the *Saturnalia* is “celebratory, backward-looking...” but ultimately, fictional.

²⁰⁴ On Solinus, see Stahl 1962: 136-141. On Martianus, see Stahl 1962: 141-142, 170-190 and 1971: 28. (It is worth nothing that Martianus Capella’s work is a prosimetrum, that is, a combination of poetry and prose.) On Macrobius, see Stahl 1962: 151-169. His attitude toward all three is judgemental: for example, Solinus makes “bad blunders, misreading or misinterpreting Pliny’s text” (1962: 138); Macrobius is “like a true novice” (1962: 160); Martianus Capella is criticised for his “misinterpretations of Pliny and Solinus” (1962: 140).

²⁰⁵ Olmos 2011: 284.

²⁰⁶ See n. 114.

was used as a teacher's handbook rather than a student's textbook;²⁰⁷ it has similarly been suggested that the *Collectanea* could have been used to provide material for teaching.²⁰⁸ It seems that all four works are geared toward an audience that already possesses a high level of education.

Despite differences between some of them in content, organisation, and tone, all four authors share in their desire to educate, and in their attempt to make their works entertaining. In this sense Solinus is explicitly similar to Gellius, because both take an openly light-hearted approach: in their prefaces, they emphasise the educational value of their books, but they also mention that they want to give pleasure to the reader.²⁰⁹ Martianus and Macrobius, in their prefaces, emphasise education without any mention of a desire to entertain; however, Macrobius' narrative framework, and the fact that he sets the narrative during a festival, creates an upbeat atmosphere for his educational material, and Martianus' satire, though perhaps tied up with religion, adds an element of nuanced entertainment to his complex narrative. All four books can plausibly be qualified as things that one would read in leisure time, although none are truly frivolous. They all disguise their serious subjects and goals within their mixed collections, satire, or imaginative frameworks.²¹⁰

The similarities between these authors reveal popular literary trends, but none of the authors follow exactly the same tradition. Solinus' geographically-oriented, association-based compilation stands alone among these towering examples of late antique encyclopedism.

²⁰⁷ For details on the ideal of the cultivated, educated young Roman, see Olmos 2012: 286. The quotation is from Olmos p. 291, as is her reference to R. Schievenin *Nugis ignosce lectitans. Studi su Marziano Capella* (2009), which discusses the idea that these books could have been meant for teachers.

²⁰⁸ Suggested by Racine in his forthcoming article "Teaching Geography with Solinus: Martianus and Priscian," in a new volume on Solinus whose title is yet to be determined, edited by Brodersen (Stuttgart, 2014).

²⁰⁹ Gellius *Praefatio* 1: *...iucundiora alia reperiri queunt, ad hoc ut liberis quoque meis partae istiusmodi remissiones essent, quando animus eorum interstitione aliqua negotiorum data laxari indulgerique potuisset*; Solinus *Praefatio* 4: *Inseruimus et pleraque differenter congruentia, ut si nihil aliud, saltem uarietas ipsa legentium fastidio mederetur*.

²¹⁰ See Connors 2001 208-234 on leisure literature in the later Roman empire. Of particular interest to the *Collectanea* is her section on the collusion of *orbis* and *urbs* and the ideology of Rome as the centre of its empire (p. 225), and her section on the idealisation of republican Rome for its virtue and simplicity (particularly pp. 229-231). Note that the second half of the *Collectanea*'s Chapter One is all about the virtues of Romans in the republican era.

Conclusions

The diverse angles of discussion in this chapter connect to show the literary value of the *Collectanea* and the skill of its author. Most of the book's contents can be traced to earlier sources, but Solinus lived in a period when abbreviated, encyclopedic writing was popular (which doubtless influenced him and aided his reception). He made the work his own through his skills as a writer and his choices in material.

As highlighted in the first part of the chapter, Solinus' writing technique is consistent and carefully implemented, as the entire text is organised through associative patterns and a chronological arrangement. The associative technique is a complex and work-intensive way of systematising knowledge — every single item must be placed so that it fits the items that come before and after. This suggests a careful planning process and/or talent — either way, it is impressive. The intertextual nature of the work indicates that Solinus anticipated an educated Roman audience: this is especially indicated by the fragmentary nature of the many items of information, since many can only hold meaning for people who have considerable knowledge on the subjects already. For the educated Roman (unlike for the average third century barbarian outside the Empire or the average modern English speaker), Solinus' simple mention of Ladas or Milon would raise the memory of more detailed stories about these characters, providing contexts for his mere hints. Many references to older authors are likewise provided as hints rather than spelled out explicitly; these are placed sparingly so that the reader can still consider this *Solinus' book*, but his credibility is topped strategically with famous heavy-weights. The content and organisation of the first chapter also indicate that Solinus wishes to establish the authority of Rome, and this will figure more centrally in the following Ch. 3.

While most of the information in the book has been traced to earlier traditions, and while the *Collectanea's* genre is in line with late antique encyclopedic trends, it emerges from the second part of this chapter that Solinus adapts the traditional information and popular trends to fit his own purposes. In this sense of recontextualisation, he is an innovative author; one instance of this recontextualisation is the subject of the following chapter.

Chapter 3:

Solinus' Macrobian: A Roman Literary Account of the Axumite Empire

Introduction

Despite their enormous empire, the Romans were in many ways an inward-focused people. Non-Romans were encouraged to urbanise and assimilate to Roman culture, and to separate themselves from any traditional customs that interfered with Roman ones. Clearly, the Romans did not usually think overly well of people who were different from them, and this is reflected in many Greco-Roman geographical texts, which locate wondrous and monstrous animals and humans in places distant from the Mediterranean.²¹¹ If we consider such descriptions only briefly, it is easy to dismiss them solely as the stuff of folktale, or to deride them as examples of ancient racism. But neither of these ways of thinking will really help us to understand how the Romans saw themselves or the world around them.

Solinus is little concerned with contemporary realities ²¹² — he presents traditional literary descriptions, of varying levels of fantasy and realism. Yet an author's writing must be influenced, even subconsciously, by his milieu; and Solinus incorporates older material in an original way in his portrayal of the Axumites. This chapter analyses the *Collectanea's* representation of the Axumites in order to discuss Roman literary perception of Romans and non-Romans. This will, in turn, highlight the *Collectanea's* uniquely favourable assessment of Axum.

The *Collectanea* describes more than sixty different peoples, and it approaches them with diverse attitudes. Although my goal is to look at its representation of Romans and non-Romans, it would be unrealistic to examine such a high number of peoples, especially since there is little in-depth material for most of them. Between all these many depictions, there are too many impulses and influences at play to achieve a concise examination of so many peoples, in vastly different parts of the world, within a single chapter of my thesis. For this reason, I approach the question by way of a case study. The portrayal of Axum provides a

²¹¹ Learned people were aware of the stereotype of Greek cultural superiority; it was even expressed in Roman works such as Horace's *Epistle* 2.156f, *Graecia capta ferum uictorem cepit et artes intulit agresti Latio*.

²¹² *Praefatio* 3 and 5 inform the reader that the information is derived from earlier authors.

particularly interesting discussion for Roman knowledge about other cultures: it was an important late antique empire, it played an important role for the Roman economy, and it shared a religion (Christianity) and some aspects of culture in common with the Roman empire, yet it remained perched on the geographical and psychological periphery of Roman literary consciousness. It is rarely mentioned by Greco-Roman authors, and so in his method of describing it Solinus toes the line between tradition and innovation.

Axum, which flourished between the first and seventh centuries CE, was located in the vicinity of modern Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. It was a major power in the late antique Red Sea, largely due to its position as a middleman for trade between the Roman Empire, Inner Africa, and the Far East. The contact of this civilisation with Rome will be discussed in the first section of this chapter. Of the utmost significance to this study is the fact that Solinus never calls the Axumites by any of the names that they used contemporarily for themselves. Instead, he calls them the Macrobian Ethiopians. In the following pages I will refer to them as Axumites, Ethiopians, and Macrobian, depending on the context. “Ethiopian” is a general term which can encompass the Axumites or Macrobian, but does not specifically refer to them. This terminology will be explained on pp. 68-71, in the second section. The analysis of the *Collectanea*’s association of the Axumites with the Macrobian, and what this means for its perception of them, will be addressed in section three.

Solinus’ Context: Roman Contact with Axum

There was considerable military, economic, and cultural contact between Romans and Axumites throughout Late Antiquity. To speak only of the Roman side, there is good evidence that many Roman emperors and elites were aware of the economic and political situation of Axum, and that merchants operating in the area were very familiar with the culture.

The Romans hazarded some southern expansion around the turn of the common era — Cornelius Gallus attempted at least a nominal conquest in 29 BCE, during his Egyptian

prefecture, and a praetorian expedition was sent into Ethiopia under Nero²¹³ — but they never gained military or economic control over Axum.²¹⁴ Fitzpatrick argues that Roman imperialism was more concerned with Arabia than Ethiopia, and that the Augustan *literati* favoured eastern expansion rather than southern.²¹⁵ It is true that Virgil, in the ekphrasis of Aeneas' shield, writes: “Actian Apollo, looking on from above, began to pull his bow. All the Egyptians, Indians, Arabs, and Sabaeans, terrified at this sight, turned in flight.”²¹⁶ Note that Virgil does not mention the Ethiopians/Axumites. On the other hand, the *Res gestae diui Augusti* lumps Ethiopia and Arabia together: “Under my command and auspices two armies were led at almost the same time into Aethiopia and the Arabia which is called Fortunate, and substantial enemy forces of both peoples were slaughtered in battle and many towns were captured. The army reached into Aethiopia as far as the town of Nabata, to which Meroe is nearest. The army advanced into Arabia as far as the territory of the Sabei to the town of Mariba.”²¹⁷ It is clear that, although its subjugation was never seriously undertaken, Ethiopia was at least within the horizons of Roman expansionist ambitions.

Commerce thrived along the Red Sea, and it is in these terms of economic and cultural contact that we can see the most opportunities for detailed knowledge of the Axumites to travel toward the Mediterranean. Roman elites, as well as various traders (probably mostly from the south-eastern provinces) had good reasons for seeking, and good access to, knowledge of the Red Sea area.

As much as some Roman elites disdained the idea of commerce (a republican ideal exemplified in the Lex Claudia of 218 BCE), long-distance trade was important to them, for

²¹³ See Fitzpatrick 2011: 37-38, Munro-Hay 1996: 410, Desanges 1978: 323-324, and Whittaker 2004: 80-81. The Elder Pliny addresses southern expansion 6.35 and 12.1.

²¹⁴ Van Wyk Smith 2009: 342-343, Fitzpatrick 2011: 50-52, Munro-Hay 1996: 410, Thorley 1969: 211.

²¹⁵ Fitzpatrick 2011: 50-52.

²¹⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid* 8.687-688; see also Parker 2008: 207-209, whose translation I use here. (*Actius haec cernens arcum intendeat Apollo desuper; omnis eo terrore Aegyptus et Indi, omnis Arabs, omnes vertebant terga Sabaei.*) Note that the Egyptians were to the north of Axum, and the Sabaeans inhabited South Arabia.

²¹⁷ *Res gestae diui Augusti* 26.5 (trans. of the Latin text, Cooley 2009: 90). Note that Ethiopia here refers simply to the region south of Egypt, not as far south as Axum itself; I include it as it highlights that Roman expansionism never seriously (or successfully) eyed Axumite territory, despite some vague propaganda (see Cooley 2009: 225-228).

their businesses and for their personal consumption.²¹⁸ Eastern commodities were very popular, and some aristocrats invested in trade;²¹⁹ as such, they had good reason (whether purely materialistic or business) to have a working knowledge of the trade network. Solinus notes the popularity of eastern scents, which he says were unknown prior to Alexander's victory over Darius and were shunned by the virtuous Romans of the Republic. "Later," he writes, "our vices were victorious, and the pleasure of scents so placated the senate that they would even use them in dark prisons."²²⁰

The monied "middle class"²²¹ likewise consumed foreign commodities,²²² and long-distance traders themselves probably would have belonged to this group.²²³ Monsoon seasons and dangerous seas probably meant that there were foreigners in all sorts of ports, where they could pick up information about the local people.²²⁴ Some long-distance traders were likely literate and educated,²²⁵ which places them as potential members of the *Collectanea's* audience: we can safely conjecture that some wealthy, literate traders might read a literary geographical text as well as the more practical merchant handbooks like the *Periplus maris Erythraei* (*Periplus* or *PME*) and the *Expositio totius mundi*.²²⁶ The extent to which they might believe the fantastical stories of a work like the *Collectanea*, however, is open to speculation.

²¹⁸ See Morley 2007: 83-89 and Fitzpatrick 2011: 41. Cf. Sidebotham (1996: 297) notes "the general *laissez-faire* attitude of the Roman government towards commerce in general and the unwillingness to take great risks involved in the long and dangerous maritime commerce;" however, he notes that, in the first and second centuries CE, the government may have become in some small ways directly involved in trade, "through the commercial activities of the emperor's surrogates: his slaves and freedmen" (p. 290).

²¹⁹ Morley 2007: 85 and Fitzpatrick 2011: 53-54. See also Connors 2000: 225.

²²⁰ 46.3: *Postmodum uicerunt nostra uitia et senatui adeo placuit odorum delicia, ut ea etiam in poenalibus tenebris uteretur.* (Solinus follows Pliny the Elder 13.24-25.)

²²¹ For a detailed discussion of the term as I use it here, see Mayer 2012: 1-21.

²²² Morley 2007: 48.

²²³ Sidebotham (1996: 290) notes that private entrepreneurs "took the great financial risks and reaped the potentially huge monetary rewards." On some costs and risks associated with trade, see Morley 2007: 26-29 and 58-60.

²²⁴ Seland 2012: 75. The *Periplus* states that most sailing from Egypt to Adulis took place between January and September (*PME* 6 [Huntingford 1980: 22]). Traders could potentially end up spending some months in a port town, waiting for the weather to improve.

²²⁵ Morley 2007: 76-78, "The Educated Trader?"

²²⁶ Morley 2007: 32.

The *Periplus* reveals that already in the first century there was a lot of Roman trade in the Red Sea.²²⁷ The sea route between Egypt and Adulis (Axum's port town) seems to have been the most frequented by Romans,²²⁸ although there were Greco-Roman merchants living not only in Adulis, but also as far as Socotra, Parthia, and India.²²⁹ Young suggests that the African trade route was of lesser importance than those toward Arabia and India, but it should certainly not be downplayed.²³⁰ Socotra and Adulis were important trading stations, inhabited by Greeks, Indians, and Arabs alike; significantly, the *Periplus* mentions among the imports to Adulis "a little money ...for foreigners [i.e. non-Axumites] who live there."²³¹ Strabo notes that 120 boats sailed annually from Egypt to India at the time that he wrote his *Geography* (ca. 25 BCE), six times more than the number that dared such a journey "in earlier times."²³² The increase of available information about the Red Sea that is apparent from the work of Strabo to that of Ptolemy (second century CE) also suggests an increasing Roman presence in Axum and South Arabia during those centuries.²³³ During and after the "Third Century Crisis", however, the Romans focused their trading efforts within the Red Sea, and the Axumites and Himyarites acted as intermediaries for further commerce.²³⁴

Lucian, Plutarch, and Porphyry record examples of Roman pleasure and scholarly trips from the Mediterranean to India in the second and third centuries. Some travellers departed via the Red Sea, and this signifies a third type of potential Roman presence through

²²⁷ See Huntingford 1980 and Sidebotham 1996: 288.

²²⁸ Munro-Hay 1996: 410, Charlesworth 1961: 64, and Fitzpatrick 2011: 46. See also *PME* 4 (Huntingford 1980: 20).

²²⁹ See Seland 2012: 75, Sidebotham 1996: 295-7, and Curtin 1984: 99-100.

²³⁰ Young 2001: 32.

²³¹ *PME* 6 (Huntingford 1980: 22).

²³² Strabo 17.1.13/C 798. See also Phillips 1997: 450, who posits the number 120.

²³³ Charlesworth 1961: 66.

²³⁴ On the diminished sphere of Roman long distance trade, see Fitzpatrick 2011: 43. Seland (2012: 77) notes that the Romans also lost access to the Persian Gulf late in the third century. On the rise of Axumite and Himyarite power and their roles as trade intermediaries, see such authors as Sidebotham 1996: 289-300, Phillips 1997: 451, Seland 2012: 77, Desanges 1978: 345-346, and Fiaccadori 2010: 975. Wittkower (1942: 159-163) nicely summarises the direct Greco-Roman literary contact and knowledge of eastern marvels through antiquity and into the Roman empire.

Axum and South Arabia, after military and economic: the (cultural/intellectual) tourist.²³⁵

Christian communities in Ethiopia, whether proselytising or local, also had contact with Rome, and particularly with Roman Egypt.²³⁶ Christianity only became the Ethiopian state religion after the king ‘Ēzānā’s conversion in the fourth century,²³⁷ but it is likely that, along with Frumentius, there was a minority Christian presence in the preceding centuries — after all, if it is possible that the people of Socotra converted to Christianity in 52 CE,²³⁸ then it is also possible that some missionaries travelled the comparatively brief way down the Red Sea to Axum. Christian missionaries, tourists, and traders were all possible bearers of information about the Axumite empire.²³⁹

Lastly, it should be mentioned that there is evidence of eastern Roman (read: Greek) cultural influence on Axum, and that knowledge of Axum influenced Greek literature in turn. Greek was a *lingua franca* throughout North-Eastern Africa, and material culture in Axum

²³⁵ Plutarch writes of Cleombrotus the Lacedaemonian, “who had made many excursions in Egypt and about the land of the Cave-Dwellers [Τρωγλοδυτικῇν], and has sailed beyond the Persian Gulf; his journeyings were not for business, but he was fond of seeing things and of acquiring knowledge; he had wealth enough, and felt that it was not of any great moment to have more than enough, and so he employed his leisure for such purposes; he was getting together a history to serve as a basis for a philosophy that had as its end and aim theology, as he himself named it” (*Moralia* 410a-b [trans. Babbitt 1969: 353]). Lucian writes of a Greek Cynic, Demetrius of Sunium, who studied in Egypt under a famous sophist from Rhodes then in India under the Brahmins (*Toxaris sive Amicitia*, 57.27-34). Porphyry says that Plotinus, too, went to India to study philosophy (*Vita Plotini* 3.15f). See also McLaughlin 2010a: 13-14.

²³⁶ E.g. the *Qérellos*, the great Ethiopian theological work of Late Antiquity, has been shown to have been translated from a Greek text that was compiled in Alexandria (Bausi 2010: 287-288 and Weischer 1971); e.g. Ethiopian metropolitans during Late Antiquity were appointed by the patriarch of Alexandria (Andersen 2000: 33-38).

²³⁷ Seland 2012: 82.

²³⁸ Huntingford 1980: 103. Frumentius is credited with playing a pivotal role in the state conversion of Ethiopia, and considering that he was living in Ethiopia for some time before the Christian Church was officially established there ca. 330, we know that there was knowledge of Christianity in Ethiopia prior to this moment. For a discussion of the Ethiopian tradition of the origins of Ethiopian Christianity, see Andersen 2000: 55-56. See also Tamrat 1972: 22-23.

²³⁹ McLaughlin (2010b: 7-61) provides an excellent overview of the evidence for Roman contact with the far East and the sea routes from Egypt to India. Of particular importance here is his discussion of how Roman elites might have disdained merchant accounts of far-off places, since merchants were social inferiors and perhaps had reputations for exaggerating (p. 10). This could, naturally, slow the process by which such accounts made their way to any authors, but particularly to those like Solinus, whose research is based on earlier elite literature rather than contemporary news, and whose work is therefore an extra step away from the potential merchant accounts.

shows some influence from eastern Mediterranean cultures.²⁴⁰ Conversely, Greek literature like the *Periplus* and Heliodorus' *Aethiopica* show that realistic information about the Red Sea was definitely available at least to the Greek-speaking part of the Roman empire.²⁴¹ And the Axumites did make it into some Latin literature by name: for instance, they are mentioned by the *Historia Augusta*, in a list of peoples with embassies in attendance at Aurelian's Triumph for his defeat of Palmyra.²⁴² The scarce presence of Axumites in Latin literature is even more mysterious in consideration of such possible diplomatic missions. There are hardly any recorded, and all mentions are sparing and dismissive, but the existence of any records suggests possible further historical contacts. Another embassy to the Roman emperor is reported by Eusebius under the more general name of Ethiopian (Αἰθιοπῶν),²⁴³ as part of an array of "foreign and astonishing" barbarians (although, of course, Eusebius wrote in Greek, not Latin).²⁴⁴ These amount to very few recorded diplomatic missions, considering the proximity of Roman and Axumite empires and the various ways in which their peoples interacted. Likely there were more visits between the closer regions of Roman Egypt and Ethiopia than Ethiopia and Rome's capital cities, but these would not necessarily be documented by central Roman authorities even if their impact was felt by the local

²⁴⁰ On Greek as a *lingua franca*, see Burstein 2008: 52-61, Hatke 2013: 75, Fitzpatrick 2011: 48-49, *PME* 5 (Huntingford 1980: 21). On the influence of Greek material culture, see Burstein 2008: 60-61, Curtin 1984: 100, Phillips 1997: 452. Tamrat 1972: 21-22 posits that some of the first century king Zosales' courtiers were "Greeks, Hellenized Greeks, or Syrians."

²⁴¹ On the *Aethiopica*, see Bowersock 2013: 60. This is particularly relevant because Heliodorus is thought to have written in the third or fourth century, just like Solinus.

²⁴² *Historia Augusta*, *Diuus Aurelianus* 33.

²⁴³ A widespread, generic name for "Africans." (See p. 63 below.)

²⁴⁴ Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 4.7.1.

elite.²⁴⁵ In light of this, who is to know how much more Roman-Axumite interaction went undocumented or has been lost? As Kaldellis argues, silence does not necessarily signify ignorance;²⁴⁶ and taking note of this questionable silence, it is all the more important to search for traces of the Axumites in Roman literature. Whatever the reasons may have been for the Romans to largely disregard the Axumites in their literature, I hope to show Solinus' originality in bending this tradition and finding a subtle way to describe them in their appropriate place.²⁴⁷

²⁴⁵ E.g. The Greek inscription of Abratoeis in Philae (no longer extant) dates from 260 CE and documents the visit of an Meroitic Ethiopian official (ψεντης βασιλέως Αιθιόπων) to Egyptian authorities. This is an example of a mission that seems to have gone otherwise unrecorded by Roman sources (Kaldellis 2013: 198 n. 60). See Török/Hägg 1998: 1020-1023 for further information on the inscription and the diplomatic mission surrounding it. Another Philae inscription, this one from 253 CE, by the Meroitic emissary Pasan demonstrates that the Meroites considered a visit to Philae as a visit to the Roman emperor (Török/Holton Pierce 1998: 1000-1008), but this was obviously not true per se and may not have been considered as such by Romans documenting events in the central Roman empire.

The Abratoeis inscription is additionally relevant here because although Török/Hägg makes it clear that it does not refer to an Axumite embassy to Rome, one scholar once confusingly wrote that it did. Mekouria (1981: 406) writes that there is a Greek-language inscription from Philae that documents “the visit in 360 of an Aksumite viceroy, a Christian named Abratoeis, to the Roman emperor, who received him with all the honours due to his rank.” Her statement is misleading in that almost all of it is conjectural or incorrect. The visit took place in 260, not 360; the inscription labels Abratoeis only generically as an Ethiopian, and he has in fact been identified as a Meroite (Török/Holton Pierce 1998: 1009; Török/Hägg 1998: 1021); there does not seem to be any reason to mark him as a Christian, particularly since the inscription was located at the temple of Isis and mentions Isis and other unnamed gods; and the visit was to officials in Philae (Roman Egypt), not actually to the Roman emperor.

²⁴⁶ Kaldellis' chapter “Byzantine Information-Gathering Behind the Veil of Silence” (2013: 26-43) tackles the same sort of issue. Although he addresses ethnography in middle Byzantine literature, the discussion is relevant to the Roman silence (or, perhaps better, the Roman whisper) regarding Axum.

Another interesting example of silence is the world map in the twelfth century Liber Floridus in Wolfenbüttel, which has been argued to reproduce Martianus Capella's fifth century world map (Uhlen 1936: 99): yet despite the knowledge of Ethiopia that Martianus certainly would have had from his use of Solinus, the region is depicted as a long expanse of nothingness, “the place of dragons, serpents, and very cruel beasts” (*locus draconum et serpentium et bestiarum crudelium*) — which does indeed come from Solinus 30.14 (1936: 124). In this case, we know that the author (Martianus) had access to more information, yet he is almost silent on the subject.

²⁴⁷ Cf. Solinus *Praefatio* 3: “It seemed right to recall these places thus, that we address the celebrated regions of lands and famous tracts of the sea each in its own place, with the distinction of the world having been maintained” / *Quorum commemorasse ita uisum est, ut inclitos terrarum situs et insignes tractus maris, seruata orbis distinctione, suo quaeque ordine redderemus*.

Axum in the *Collectanea rerum memorabilium*

As the previous section showed, we have excellent reasons to maintain that there was Roman contact with the Axumite empire. But the *Collectanea* was separated from much of this contact in two important ways. 1) It is literature, by which I mean that it was not written as a historical record. This would not in itself signify a lack of knowledge of the Red Sea, but also 2) It is part of a Latin literary tradition, rather than a Greek one, while Axum was primarily in contact with the Greek-speaking portion of the empire.²⁴⁸

What is Macrobian Ethiopia?

The *Collectanea*'s descriptions of the Ethiopians reveal considerable knowledge of the area — and considerable gaps in knowledge. In antiquity, “Ethiopia” referred to the southern part of Africa, the furthest south on the continent that people were known to live. To Hesiod, all people of the far south were Ethiopian;²⁴⁹ Herodotus writes that Ethiopia is “the most remote country stretching to the south-west of the inhabited parts of the world” (3.114). Isaac argues that the Greeks usually called all black people “Ethiopian;” Snowden emphasises that most classical perspectives on “Ethiopians” were derived from the area below Egypt, and that knowledge of that area “influenced attitudes toward dark or black Africans, regardless of the part of Africa from which they came.”²⁵⁰ Rennell, in 1830, explained that ancient writers designated all those countries as Ethiopia “which, for want of the means of discrimination,” they were “compelled to comprize in one mass,” just as the British of his day did when referring to inland parts of North America or New Holland.²⁵¹ Yet the first section of this chapter showed that by the time of the Roman empire, Greeks and Romans had a better understanding of the Ethiopians than is suggested by this blanket term.

²⁴⁸ Inglebert 1996: 550-554 reminds us that the fact that most parts of the empire attained citizenship in 212 does not mean that all its inhabitants immediately began to recognise an imperial community and share their knowledge with each other.

²⁴⁹ Keyser 2011: 45.

²⁵⁰ Isaac 2006: 36 and Snowden 1970: 113 (additionally, it is useful to look at pp. 101-113 in order to understand the evolution and use of the term “Ethiopian” through Greco-Roman history).

²⁵¹ Rennell 1830: 30.

The *Collectanea* does not mention Axum, but it does discuss the Macrobian, or “long-lived,” Ethiopians, who live further east than the other Ethiopians, but not as far east as the deserted region that precedes the Arabian coast.²⁵² The mention of the Arabian coast is significant because at least during the first century, the coast around Rhapta was under the control of the Himyarite and Sabaeen Arabs,²⁵³ and the Axumites did indeed live in an area between the inland Ethiopians and the desert/Arabian coast. Latin and Greek historiography favours the use of peoples’ ancient names over their current ones,²⁵⁴ so it is not remarkable to suggest that Solinus uses the term *Macrobian* for *Axumite*, for he might have assumed that *Macrobian* was their traditional name.²⁵⁵ Scholars have attempted to locate the Macrobian before, but this is complicated because the term *Macrobian* has been used at least since Herodotus.²⁵⁶ The “Macrobian” to whom Herodotus refers are different from the “Macrobian” of Solinus. Herodotus and Solinus are separated by around 800 years, and naturally civilisations and peoples changed over those centuries. Nonetheless, Solinus’ cultural and geographical description of the Macrobian matches Roman knowledge of the Axumites during Late Antiquity.

In many ways, Solinus’ description of the Macrobian is consistent with traditional Greek and Roman accounts. Ancient works tend to represent the Macrobian/Ethiopian as just, strong, and divinely blessed — some speak only generally of the Ethiopians, but in

²⁵² Solinus 30.9, 12.

²⁵³ Charlesworth 1921: 65; Munro-Hay 1991: 63.

²⁵⁴ See, for example, Lozovsky 2000: 71-73, who outlines some difficulties in reconciling the timeless, traditional presentation and terms in Orosius’ *Seven Books of History against the Pagans* with the conditions of his own day. Though many terms he uses are anachronistic, Lozovsky notes significantly that “this seems to result from his overall purpose rather than from poor knowledge or hasty use of unreliable sources. Orosius does not want his picture of the world to be contemporary...” (p. 73). This same argument can be applied to Solinus’ use of the term *Macrobian*.

²⁵⁵ Some scholars have described Herodotus’ Macrobian Ethiopians in the area of modern Ethiopia (Rennell 1830: 30 associates them with the Abyssinians, as does the Liddel-Scott Greek Lexicon (see n. 256 below); Van Wyk Smith 2001: 24 associates them with the Nubian Kushites) but many other scholars believe that Herodotus locates them further south than late antique scholars like Pliny, Mela, and Solinus do; for example, Diop (1974: 157) extends Herodotus’ Macrobian as far south as Zimbabwe, and Talboys Wheeler (1854) writes that although the Macrobian Ethiopians “have been placed in the maritime region near Cape Guardafui” (p. 520) (which, note, is still beyond Mela’s desolate wastelands discussed below; for the Latin quotation see n. 261), he himself locates them “on the coast of the Erythraean...far away to the south-east” (p. 523)

²⁵⁶ LSJ s.v. μακρόβιος: “of a half mythical, perh. Abyssinian, people, Hdt. 3.23”

other texts the Macrobian Ethiopians are ascribed these positive qualities and habits. Because of this, it is useful to bring up accounts of both Macrobian and unspecified Ethiopians when they relate to Solinus' description (which will be discussed after this outline of some earlier links in the tradition). The Macrobian king in Herodotus' *Histories*, for example, rules a powerful kingdom of tall, beautiful, long-lived people, and has a strong sense of justice, exemplified in his angry and proud reaction to Cambyse's deceptive, intelligence-seeking embassy;²⁵⁷ the characteristics of this king are attributed to all Macrobian in Solinus' account, as we shall see below. As far back as Homer, the Ethiopians have been portrayed in Greek mythology as having an unusually personal and favourable relationship with the Olympian gods; for example, Homer writes that the Olympians attend Ethiopian banquets,²⁵⁸ Diodorus Siculus writes that the Olympians favour the Ethiopians for their pious feasts and sacrifices, and Aelian states that the gods bathe in Ethiopia²⁵⁹ — perhaps, we may speculate, in the same lake as the one that we shall encounter in the *Collectanea*. The attribution of so many positive characteristics suggests a kind of approval of the Macrobian/certain Ethiopians, and by extension, of the Axumites on Solinus' part, even while he treats them in the same offhand, distant way as all the other barbarians, and even while maintaining a distance between them as barbarians and Romans as custodians of humanness.

Neither Pomponius Mela nor Pliny the Elder (as Solinus' two main sources) seem to identify the Macrobian with the Axumites. Solinus attributes the Macrobian to a different and more specific location than either of his sources do, and it may be the case that he is the first one to use the term Macrobian to refer to the Axumites. Pliny says of the Macrobian only that they live near Meroë, on the African side of the Nile²⁶⁰ — this does not correspond to the Axumites. Mela is Solinus' main source for the Macrobian description, but he does not situate them precisely. He writes that Ethiopians (not specifically Macrobian, though he

²⁵⁷ Herodotus 3.21.

²⁵⁸ *Iliad* 1.423. See also Isaac 2006: 36 on the presentation of Ethiopians in Homer. MacLachlin (1992) describes how the Homeric fantasy of the Ethiopians persisted into the literature of the Roman era.

²⁵⁹ Snowden (1970: 146-147) suggests that Diodorus' description was very influential to the classical image of Ethiopians as pious and just. He brought to my attention the passages from Diodorus Siculus 3.2.2-3.3.1 and Aelian, *De natura animalium* 2.21.

²⁶⁰ Pliny the Elder 6.190/6.35.

mentions them vaguely in the course of the passage) occupy the land of Meroë on the Nile, and then he proceeds: “Nothing noteworthy meets those who follow the shores eastward. Everything is a wasteland, defined by desolate mountains, and more a riverbank than an oceanfront. After that, there is a huge tract without inhabitants.”²⁶¹ This geography is accurate (in a judgemental way). It is significant to our understanding of the *Collectanea*’s Macrobianism that while Pliny locates the Macrobianism somewhere “on the African side” (*in Africae parte*) and Mela places them ambiguously in the vicinity of Meroë, Solinus explicitly states that they live east of Meroë but before the “deserted and barbarous solitudes [that stretch beyond] all the way to the Arabian shores.”²⁶² He is deviating from his sources here and introducing new information, and it follows that he has his own agenda: not only does Solinus’ geographic location of the Macrobianism matches Axum in Late Antiquity, but in the following section it will become apparent that his descriptions match Roman knowledge of the Axumites as well.²⁶³ As a result, I propose that at least in the *Collectanea*’s use of the term, *Macrobian Ethiopia* represents the *Axumite empire*.

Fact and Fiction in the Collectanea’s Macrobian Ethiopia

Solinus gives considerably more attention to the Macrobianism than to any other Ethiopians. Most receive a single summarising sentence, such as: “The Serbotae are tall, to twelve feet” (30.4), or “Also there are the Anthropophagi, whose name announces their custom” (30.7).²⁶⁴ The description of the Macrobianism amounts to a paragraph, and they are the only Ethiopians described in positive terms as a civilised people. One paragraph is still

²⁶¹ Pomponius Mela 3.78/3.9.3: *Ceterum oras ad eorum sequentibus nihil memorabile occurrit. Vasta omnia vastis praecisa montibus ripae potius sunt quam litora. Inde ingens et sine cultoribus tractus* (trans. Romer 1998: 125-126).

²⁶² 30.12: *... desertae et inhumanae solitudines ad usque Arabicos sinus*. Note that Pliny and Mela both use the periplus mode of description, while Solinus deals with entire areas (Brodersen 2011: 72-75). Hence when Solinus refers to the “Arabian shores” as a boundary, he marks an entire area of territory in which he is locating the Macrobianism.

²⁶³ Paniagua (2008: 116-119), in establishing Solinus’ passages on the Garamantian and Macrobian Ethiopians as a source for the *Scholia in Iuvenalem uetustiora*, likewise suggests some originality in Solinus’ content and arrangement.

²⁶⁴ 30.4: *Serbotae longi sunt ad pedes duodecim*; 30.7: *Sunt et Anthropophagi, quorum morem uocamen sonat*.

relatively little information for a powerful empire,²⁶⁵ which suggests that perhaps the details of Axum itself held little allure for Latin speakers, but it also indicates that fact-based information about Axum did travel north.

The entry on the Macrobian Ethiopians is as follows:

Beyond Meroë, beyond the appearance of the sun, the Ethiopians are called Macrobian, for their life is half again as long as ours. These Macrobian honour justice, love fairness, excel the most in strength, are particularly comely with beauty, are ornamented with bronze, and make chains from the gold of wicked people.²⁶⁶ Heliutrapeza is a place among them always crowded with sumptuous banquets, at which they eat all things indiscriminately; for they report that the food is even divinely enlarged.²⁶⁷ There is also a lake in the same place, where bathed bodies shine as though with oil. Drinking from this lake is very good for one's health. The liquid is wholesome to such an extent that indeed it does not bear falling leaves, but the falling foliage plunges at once to the bottom because of the thinness of the liquid.²⁶⁸

The *Collectanea* also lists some raw commodities found within Ethiopian territory. They are not attributed particularly to the Macrobian, but rather listed as generally existing in Ethiopia. Still, since many raw Ethiopian commodities travelled to Adulis for international shipping, they are relevant to our discussion of Axum. The commodities include gemstones (30.16-17, 32-34), cinnamon (30.30-31), and three kinds of animals for the circus: the giraffe, the rhinoceros, and the cephus (30.19-21). Cephi are described as animals with

²⁶⁵ This is especially true in comparison to the *Collectanea*'s lengthy descriptions of distant India and Taprobane, which encompass 52.1-54.11.

²⁶⁶ Cf. Herodotus 3.23: "Then they left the spring and were taken to a prison, where all the prisoners were shackled with golden chains; among these Ethiopians the rarest and most valuable substance of all is bronze."

²⁶⁷ Cf. The tradition of divine favour shown to the Ethiopians and godly participation at Ethiopian banquets, above p. 70.

²⁶⁸ Solinus 30.9-11: *Vltra Meroën super exortum solis Macrobiani Aethiopes uocantur; dimidio enim eorum protentior est quam nostra uita. Hi Macrobiani iustitiam colunt, amant aequitatem, plurimum ualent robore, praecipua decent pulchritudine, ornantur aere, auro uincula faciunt noxiorum. Locus apud eos est Heliutrapeza opiparis epulis semper refertus, quibus indiscretim omnes uescuntur; nam etiam diuinitus eas augeri ferunt. Est etiam ibidem lacus, quo perfusa corpora uelut oleo nitescunt. Ex hoc lacu potus saluberrimus. sane adeo liquidus est, ut ne caducas quidem uehat frondes, sed ilico folia lapsa ad fundum demittat laticis tenuitate.*

human legs and hands, which “have not been seen more than once by our people” (30.20). Solinus goes on to describe a number of other fantastical beasts in Ethiopia, but he does not claim that any others have been observed by Roman eyes.

There are many inconsistencies between historical reality and the *Collectanea*. Some of the animals and Ethiopian customs are surely the stuff of fantasy: we can safely say that there were never giant Ethiopian ants with lion feet (30.23), and probably the king of the Agriophagi Ethiopians did not only have one eye in the middle of his forehead (30.6). We must question the idealistic purity of the Macrobian lake, and the superhuman size of the produce. The gemstones described in the *Collectanea* are not mentioned in the *Periplus*, and Pliny’s *Historia naturalis* locates only one of them explicitly within Ethiopia.²⁶⁹ While it is possible that the *Collectanea* may be inaccurate in its association of these stones with Ethiopia, we may also suggest that the earlier authors had not known that certain gems were found in Ethiopia, and that Solinus, writing a couple centuries later, perhaps had more information available to him and reported more accurately. Either way, even if a reader of the *Collectanea* doubts some of its claims, it can get away with them because it states in the preface that it will focus on the wondrous and the lesser-known — in that case, who are we to argue, just because we did not know that chrysoprasus was produced in Ethiopia?

We can also pick out several known historical elements from this passage. According to the *Periplus* and the *Historia naturalis*, cinnamon was produced in Ethiopia and exported from the north Somali coast.²⁷⁰ In parallel, the *Collectanea* asserts that cinnamon is grown in Ethiopia, and does not associate it with the Macrobian (who, as explained above, it describes in the area of northern Ethiopia, not in Somalia). The *Periplus* states that coppery metals were imported to Adulis and used for jewellery;²⁷¹ the *Collectanea* concurs with this information in adding that the Macrobian are ornamented with bronze. The coast around Rhapta really was under Arab control for some time (Solinus’ *Arabicos sinus*). Axum really

²⁶⁹ The *Historia naturalis* mentions all four stones, though in different contexts: haematite, which Pliny identifies as an Ethiopian stone (37.25); and hyacinthus (37.41-42), dracontias (37.62), and chrysoprasus (37.20, 32, 34-5), for none of which he provides an explicit provenance.

²⁷⁰ *PME* 7-8 (Huntingford 1980: 23-24, 124); Pliny 6.34. Strabo writes that cinnamon comes from the southern-most inhabited regions, parallel to Taprobane (2.1.13-14/C 72), which does indeed, even by modern cartographical standards, indicate the area around Somalia.

²⁷¹ *PME* 6 (Huntingford 1980: 21).

was a wealthy civilisation, and was in the vicinity of several lakes. It is impossible to know which (if any) real-world body of water Solinus refers to, but arguments could be made for such as Lake Tana, Lake Hayq, or Lake Midmar.²⁷² Some of the Ethiopian animals are obviously real; some of the fantastic ones may have been inspired by real sightings. After all, Solinus' description of a giraffe sounds just as ridiculous as the cephus: he describes it with a neck similar to a horse, feet like a cow, a head like a camel, and of a shiny gold covered with white spots.²⁷³

Some of the traditions attributed to foreign peoples by ancient authors exist even now in modern African cultures. Huntingford points out that Strabo and Agatharchides' descriptions of the Troglodytae in north-eastern Africa include some customs that are current among peoples in the same general vicinity of modern Africa: drinking blood mixed with milk, circumcision, grave cairns, and laughing during the burial.²⁷⁴ Solinus describes his "Troglodytae" differently (his term lacks of the *-l-*), following Pliny as is his wont.²⁷⁵ But perhaps there is also a Macrobian custom in the *Collectanea* that can be identified in modern African culture; perhaps Solinus' claim that the Macrobianians emerge shining from their lake is related to the modern Ethiopian practice of applying butter to the body and hair.²⁷⁶ He

²⁷² Kirwan (1972: 170-171) discusses Cosmas Indicopleustes' sixth-century report of gold expeditions, possibly to the area around Lake Tana. Such expeditions provide a possible source for stories about a great Ethiopian lake to travel north. Pliny does not mention a lake in the vicinity of the Macrobianians; Mela is Solinus' source here. Concerning modern lakes with which Solinus' *lacus* may be associated, Lake Tana is the largest in the vicinity, and therefore may have been worth remarking upon by travellers; the Axumite court moved south to the area around Lake Hayq sometime after the city of Axum's abandonment ca. 630, and there are a number of medieval churches there, showing its longstanding importance in Ethiopian tradition (Andersen 2000: 55-56); Lake Midmar is small but very close to the site of the city. Because there are so many lakes in the area of the Axumite empire, and *lacus* can mean anything from a lake to a pond, it would be treacherous to make any claims about Solinus' meaning.

²⁷³ 30.19: *Quae locorum Aethiopes tenent feris plena sunt, e quibus quam nabun uocant nos camelopardalim dicimus, collo equi similem, pedibus bubulis, capite camelino, nitore rutilo, albis maculis superspersa.*

²⁷⁴ Huntingford 1980: 144-147

²⁷⁵ Solinus 31.2, 56.9.

²⁷⁶ For widespread Ethiopian cosmetic and ritualistic use of butter on skin and hair, see Volker-Saad et al. 2007: 967; butter is also mixed with botanicals and used in topical medicinal treatments (Gedif and Hahn 2003: 158-159).

draws this from Mela (3.88; cf. Herodotus 3.23²⁷⁷), but Pliny also records, on the basis of Theophrastus, that there is a spring in Ethiopia that is used to anoint people²⁷⁸ — which would result in people shining. While anointing with oil was common throughout the ancient world,²⁷⁹ it is possible that Solinus is associating the Macrobian legend with a historical trend that somehow stood out in that area of late antique Africa, i.e. the use of butter on skin. While the historicity of Solinus' passage can only be speculated on, it is useful to keep in mind that at least some elements of ancient ethnographical description are probably based in some fact, since the quantity of the *Collectanea's* outrageous claims can distract the reader from its potentially realistic descriptions. For the most part, the *Collectanea* reflects earlier literary traditions, not the realities of its contemporary world, but a case can be made for the identification of some historical truths.

Analysis of the *Collectanea's* Portrayal of the Macrobian/Axumites

Now that the descriptions themselves have been discussed for what they reveal about the *Collectanea's* knowledge of Axum, we must look closer at the nature of the source. We can see that this information would not be particularly useful for multicultural relations. It provides vague and exaggerated descriptions, but not the sort of information that would prove practical for Romans attempting to communicate with people in the area of the Red Sea (for example, helpful information could describe native language, attitude to foreigners, quality of harbours). It fits rather into literature that the educated person might read in their

²⁷⁷ Mela 3.88: "There is a lake from which bodies, once they have been immersed, continue to shine as brightly as if they had been oiled" (trans. Romer 1998: 125); Herodotus 3.23: "...the [Macrobian] king took them [the spies] to a spring (κρήνην) whose water made anyone washing in it more sleek, as if it had been olive oil, and which gave off a scent like violets" (trans. Waterfield 1998: 178). Asheri (2007: 422-423) writes of Herodotus' entry that it is a "purely legendary element," perhaps of Homeric origin, that Herodotus has rationalised; but it would fit with what we know of Solinus' Macrobian selections from Mela and Pliny if he saw something significant in the lake itself and/or the shining bodies.

²⁷⁸ Pliny 31.14.17: *Polyclitus Lipari iuxta Solos Ciliciae ungui, Theophrastus hoc idem in Aethiopia eiusdem nominis fonte.*

²⁷⁹ E.g. Greeks and Romans applied oil to their own skins (Wright and Vickers 1996) and Roman cult images could be anointed with oil (Kiernan 2012; Macmullen 1981: 43-45); a few examples of religious anointing from Jewish tradition: Psalms 23.1-6; Numbers 4:16; Exodus 25.6.

leisure time, providing interesting facts (and factoids!) about the world, of the type that was valued in aristocratic culture.²⁸⁰

Literature like the *Collectanea* can reveal a lot about imperial culture, not only how non-Romans were perceived, but also how Romans perceived themselves. It is particularly relevant because, at least in theory, authors of leisure literature were not necessarily attempting to write official propaganda or world-class histories.²⁸¹ Perhaps, in this type of work, we may glimpse the stance that Romans took on Romanness and non-Romanness as it was current, rather than as they might posture for impressiveness in works that were written to create a certain impression for posterity (such as, for example, authors who attempted great and influential works of history, like Eutropius²⁸²). Connors argues that leisure literature reinforces the Roman reader's sense of themselves as educated people and adds to their impression of Rome as "the centre of Empire;" she also reminds us that Roman geographical descriptions were subjective, imperial products.²⁸³ As such, this sort of literature is useful as a tool for examining Roman self-perception. In some ways, what they believed to be true about other peoples is less important here than what they held onto for their own cultural validation.

The Collectanea as a Reflection of the Roman Superiority Complex

The Romans regularly measured the rest of the world against their own culture and through their *interpretatio romana*.²⁸⁴ Imperialistic ideas proliferated throughout the early empire, and Trajan's wistful admission that he would invade India if only he were younger shows

²⁸⁰ On the value of productive leisure time and the suitability of literature for it, see Connors 2000: 209-214 and Pliny the Younger *Epistles* 1.6, 1.9, and 9.36. See also, for example, Mayer 2012: 167, who remarks on the expectation that the elite will have detailed knowledge of myths and be able to reinterpret them wittily. He refers to domestic art, but the same principle holds true for literature. Cf. Ch. 1 pp. 10-15.

²⁸¹ For example, Connors writes that Phaedrus and Statius (authors of fables and poems, respectively) have "an understanding of *otium* as a productive and purposeful relaxation which can restore an imperial official for the rigours of his duties, or ready a poet for the demands of the higher literary forms" (2000: 215).

²⁸² See Parker 2008: 223 and Lenski 2002: 187-196. Lenski writes that Eutropius and Festus deliberately encourage Valens in his eastern wars by comparing him to earlier commanders and emphasising that Rome has legal rights to the East. ("Eutropius and Festus were thus engaging in a historical discourse with very real political and military implications" (2002: 195) — quite the opposite of literature for one's relaxation time!)

²⁸³ Connors 2000: 225-226.

²⁸⁴ Cf. Herodotus' *interpretatio graeca* in his "ethnography of the fringes," discussed in Karttunen 2002: 457-474.

that these ideas were still quite present in the early second century.²⁸⁵ The *Collectanea* is an example of that continued train of thought, even as the Roman empire during these years increasingly turned its attention to protecting, rather than expanding, its borders. If the works of Mela and Pliny can be considered “as texts of the *pax Romana*,”²⁸⁶ then that of Solinus, who uses them as his primary sources, can certainly be considered likewise.

Solinus sets out his goals for the *Collectanea* in its preface: to create a brief synthesis of the works of respected older authors and to focus on the description of far-off places. And yet, he begins with a rather detailed description of Rome. This is a very unusual way for a geography to begin — geographical treatises tend to start at the fringes of the empire and wind their way in, describing space in an anti-clockwise direction; even texts dealing with a local scale begin at the fringes of the given area and move inward anti-clockwise.²⁸⁷ While the *Collectanea* does move in an anti-clockwise spiral, it begins at the centre of its geographical scope.

In his *Historia naturalis*, Pliny praises Italy, saying that it “was chosen by the divine inspiration of the gods to enhance the renown of heaven itself.”²⁸⁸ Given Solinus’ general indebtedness to Pliny (to say nothing of the longstanding *urbs/orbis* pun²⁸⁹), it is unsurprising that he inherits this perspective. Nonetheless, the way in which he emphasises this stance on Rome’s greatness — the fact that he places Rome at the centre of the world and the beginning of the *Collectanea* — is remarkable. The only other notable late antique geographical work to give Rome this sort of symbolic precedence is the Peutinger Map,

²⁸⁵ Cassius Dio 68.29.1. On eastern imperialism in pre-Augustan and imperial Rome, see Parker 2008: 203-225 and Lenski 2002: 188.

²⁸⁶ Parker 2008: 211. See also pp. 218-219, where he notes that Pliny the Elder’s description of the *oikoumene* in some ways associates the entire *oikoumene* with the Roman empire.

²⁸⁷ See Salway 2012: 211, on how it is rare for Rome to be at the beginning/centre of geographic descriptions. On pp. 219-222, he discusses the Roman tendency to describe space in an anticlockwise direction. He gets this idea from Michael Crawford’s “Language and Geography in the *Sententia Minuciorum*,” *Athenaeum* (2003) 91: 204-10.

²⁸⁸ On Pliny 3.5.39, see Humphries 2007: 35.

²⁸⁹ See, for example, Parker 2008: 214-215.

which places Rome near the visual centre of the map.²⁹⁰ Solinus is thus quite clear about his stance on the importance of Rome next to the rest of the world: Rome comes *first*.

Additionally, although Solinus plans at the outset of the *Collectanea* to examine the origins of Rome, he finishes the first section saying that he has spoken enough of “humans.” This shows that this section is not just about the history of Rome — it is about the glory of Roman civilisation, which he virtually equates with humanity. After all, as Strabo writes, far-away peoples don’t really matter, since they cannot affect Greek life²⁹¹ — so although the *Collectanea* discusses various peoples, they are not “human” in the way that Romans are; they are barbarians. In a way, Solinus has conflated Roman history with humanness.

Belief in the inherent superiority of Rome and Italy is a regular feature of Roman literature. Pliny attributes to Mediterranean humans a more balanced intellect and culture than he allows for the peoples who inhabit the more extreme climates to the north and south; to the peoples of the distant peripheries he attributes natural savagery and dismisses the idea that they have any form of government.²⁹² Strabo writes that the geography of Italy (and so, the Roman civilisation that stems from it) “is naturally well-suited to hegemony,” and implies that Rome’s acquisition of surrounding civilisations is necessary in order to instil law and order onto inferior cultures.²⁹³ Just as Strabo and Pliny describe the geographical location of Rome as environmentally determining Romans to be ideal imperial rulers, so does Solinus suggest this by beginning the *Collectanea* with a chapter on Roman history, and equating Romanness with *humanitas*. This chapter is substantially longer than any other in the book: in Mommsen’s edition, it spans the first 31 pages of the text, out of a total of 216

²⁹⁰ Ancient mapmakers often put Delphi, Jerusalem, or their own region at the centre of the map, but not Rome (see Salway 2012: 211, 216-7; Talbert 2012: 6, 179; and Irby 2012: 84). Cf. Ptolemy, who, in his attempt at scientific objectivity, puts the Persian Gulf at the centre of his *oikoumene* map (see Jones 2012: 127). On the other hand, Stahl (1962: 139) suggests that Solinus may be following Varro’s *On Human and Divine Activities* in this layout, although this work is no longer extant to prove or disprove the theory.

²⁹¹ This reference (Strabo 2.5.8/C 115-116) was found in Irby 2012: 84.

²⁹² Pliny the Elder 2.80. Isaac (2006: 40) points out that this tacitly suggests that the Romans are suited to rule, and that this suitability derives from their geography. These sorts of associations between character and climate go back to Aristotle, on whom see Leunissen 2012: 510-512.

²⁹³ Strabo 6.4.1-2/C 286-288.

pages and 56 chapters. This lengthy history of Rome contrasts with the atemporal, brief descriptions of the non-Roman-rest-of-the-world.²⁹⁴

Given this general picture, it is remarkable that this sense of Roman superiority does not negatively affect the *Collectanea's* depiction of the Macrobian. Although it represents some Ethiopians as savage or foolish,²⁹⁵ it shows the Macrobian in a positive, even idealised, light. Mathisen, discussing Mela and Tacitus' "catalogues of barbarians," comments on "a genteel curiosity about the strange peoples who lived 'out there,' and a chauvinistic sense of how outlandish the names and customs of barbarian peoples provided a striking contrast to Roman values, and of how much better 'we' are than they."²⁹⁶ The same sense of genteel curiosity is found in the *Collectanea*, but there is no chauvinism in Solinus' image of the Macrobian, who are not represented as inferior to the Romans.²⁹⁷ This is particularly relevant here because although much of Africa "presented to the Roman gaze a largely pejorative view of humanity,"²⁹⁸ clearly the superiority that the Romans felt themselves and their homeland to possess did not necessarily lessen a detached respect for certain other peoples, including the Macrobian.

Axum: Outside the Roman Sphere of Interest

Having considered the imperialist Romano-centricity in which the *Collectanea* is entrenched, it is unsurprising that Axum, despite being one of Mani's four great civilisations

²⁹⁴ On environmental determinism and the Roman depiction of themselves as ideal rulers, see Strabo 6.4.1-2, Isaac 2006: 35-36, Snowden 1970: 171-176, and Van Wyk Smith 2009: 338.

²⁹⁵ For instance, there are some Ethiopians who follow the orders of a dog, which are interpreted from its movements (30.5).

²⁹⁶ Mathisen 2011: 19. Isaac 2006 takes this idea further, arguing that the Greeks, with their "effort to find a rational and systematic basis for their own sense of superiority and their claim that others were inferior," were in fact proto-racist (p. 56).

²⁹⁷ Kaldellis (2013: 10-11) argues against the idea that Roman ethnographical works are chauvinistic, pointing out that as early as Herodotus, many ethnographers "have emerged as admirers of barbarian culture, as authentic transmitters of barbarian points of view, and, crucially, as subtle (or even outspoken) critics of their own societies and dominant paradigms, moral and conceptual" (p. 11). It is true that while the overall effect of the *Collectanea* is one of Roman authority, but this is not apparent in all of the individual descriptions.

²⁹⁸ Van Wyk Smith 2009: 344.

and Rome's most important trading partners,²⁹⁹ is described so succinctly. Indeed, little more attention is shown to the Persians, and certainly no more to the Chinese.³⁰⁰ It is possible that the Romans simply didn't much care about the Axumites. They were not Greek or Roman, they were far away, they didn't pose a threat, and Rome did not plan any serious invasions of them:³⁰¹ therefore, the Axumites may have been perceived as of little concern.³⁰² Similar relationships between ancient civilisations may be held up as parallels to that of Rome and Axum. It is even possible that the Greeks felt this way about the Romans at one point. Marincola suggests: "It is very likely that before Roman involvement in Greece, the Greeks were content to see the Romans as merely a distant people with a tradition linking them to Troy. At the time, it didn't really matter who the Romans were: only when they began to impinge on the Greeks did it become necessary to define or redefine or reconfigure them."³⁰³ The Romans inherited much of the Greek worldview, so perhaps the Greco-Romans felt similarly about the Axumites in Late Antiquity. They were a good trading partner and, as Solinus' Macrobian Ethiopians, they were linked to literary traditions attributing them divine favour and justice, but otherwise it did not really matter who they were.

²⁹⁹ Mani *Kephalaia* 189.1. Munro-Hay 1991: 21: "The Persian religious leader Mani, founder of the Manichaean religion, who died in 276 or 277AD, is reported by his followers to have described the four most important kingdoms of the world as comprising Persia, Rome, Aksum and Sileos, the latter possibly China (Polotsky 1940: 188-9). This remark shows that Aksum's repute was spreading in the contemporary world. It was about this time that the Aksumites produced their own coinage, an excellent way of bringing their country into prominence abroad, since only the greatest of contemporary states issued a gold coinage." Note that the events Munro-Hay discusses are roughly contemporary to Solinus.

³⁰⁰ The initial description of the geographic area of Persia/Parthia is dominated by anecdotes about Alexander's conquests (45.8-49.12); however, on its return west from India the *Collectanea* discusses Persia and Parthia themselves, still giving more attention to geographical description than to culture (54.12-56.3). This in itself is a show of Roman superiority: the Persians are pushed to a secondary position even in the description of their own territory. The Chinese are likely represented by the Seres, described briefly as a reclusive, mercantile people (50.2-4).

³⁰¹ Natsoulas (2003: 658) notes that Roman and Axumite political and religious interests converged, as they were both Christian and too geographically distant from each other to compete directly for influence or territory; indeed, Rome found it beneficial to encourage Axum in its attempt to dominate Himyar in South Arabia.

³⁰² Greeks and Romans were not racist in today's sense of the word (they lacked words for the concepts of racism, prejudice, and discrimination, for instance), but they saw a clear distinction between Greeks, Romans, and barbarians (Isaac 2006: 33). See also Snowden 1970: 170.

³⁰³ Marincola 2011: 353.

Pharaonic Egypt had a similar relationship with Punt (in the same vicinity as Axum or perhaps modern Somalia³⁰⁴, but flourishing around 2500 to 600 BCE). Egypt traded with Punt for luxury goods, which were mostly shipped by sea. Yet Egypt “had — and, in fact, needed — comparatively little knowledge of the areas with which it was not in direct (that is, land) contact, and the goods it desired from them were not always the products of those people who actually traded with Egypt.”³⁰⁵ This mirrors the relationship of the Roman and Axumite empires in Late Antiquity. The Romans received luxury goods and felt some languid acknowledgement of their trading partners, but perhaps since little knowledge of Axum was required for the average Roman’s day-to-day life, such knowledge simply wasn’t prevalent.

In line with the picture presented in the first section of this chapter by earlier Latin literature (pp. 64-67), late antique Latin sources rarely mention Axum, and when they do it is with great brevity. The Axumites are not mentioned in most imperialist “catalogues of barbarians.” Their omission does not indicate that the Romans considered them to be their equals in *humanitas*; it is more likely that, as mentioned above, they were omitted from most lists of barbarians because they did not pose a threat of invasion to Rome, and the Romans did not have immediate plans to invade them.³⁰⁶

The travel work of Palladius, probably from the first half of the fifth century, attests to this Roman perspective of Axum as small and non-threatening.³⁰⁷ He writes of a scholar who wants to get to India, but has a lay-over in Axum. This scholar spends some time first in Adulis, then in the city of Axum, as he waits for a ship to take him to India. In Axum, he describes, as Desanges puts it, “«un petit roitelet indien», expression peu flatteuse qui dénote la faible importance du royaume à une époque que nous croyons être la première moitié du Ve siècle” — and this is the only literary mention of Axum that we have from the fifth century.³⁰⁸ The sixth century finds Cosmas Indicopleustes and others writing of the Red Sea,

³⁰⁴ Young 2001: 24.

³⁰⁵ Phillips 1997: 425-426; see also Munro-Hay 1991: 16.

³⁰⁶ On “catalogues of barbarians” in Roman Late Antiquity, see Mathisen 2011: 17-32. For more on the idea that the Romans did not perceive the Ethiopians as a threat (perhaps due to their mythological reputation as a pious and just people), see Jameson 1968.

³⁰⁷ Of course, this is in all likelihood a century after Solinus, when Axum was experiencing a waning in its power and Himyar was experiencing a waxing (see Desanges 1969: 631).

³⁰⁸ Desanges 1978: 363. For more on this subject see Desanges 1969.

but by that point we have gone far past Solinus in the third/fourth century. Despite Mani's high valuation of Axum, it seems that the late imperial Romans gave it little consideration. The Mediterranean was the meaningful centre of their world; India held an exotic allure as a far-off land of riches; regions on which the Romans didn't have imperial designs simply drifted at the periphery of their consciousness.³⁰⁹

The Symbolic Use of the Axumites as Macrobian in the Collectanea

The imperialist Roman worldview implies that there is no compulsion to consider barbarians from an insider perspective; it simply perceives others through a Roman framework. This imposition of Roman norms onto non-Roman customs can reveal as much about a Roman author's traditions and values as those of his subjects.³¹⁰

Peoples on the periphery of the Greco-Roman world were regularly presented as uncivilised, as lacking *humanitas*, and thus, as mentioned above, as less than human. Some were savage or monstrous, and some were idealistically noble.³¹¹ These are clearly not accurate, nuanced depictions of these peoples: rather, the author is presenting his own "preconceptions and obsessions," and revealing as much about himself as about his subjects.³¹² What the Roman author commends as moral or good behaviour in barbarians may be used to show up shortcomings that he perceives in Roman society; conversely, judgements of barbarians for "immoral" behaviour may reveal things that the author considers vitally present in Roman society. Characteristics of peripheral peoples can also highlight the author's desires and dreads, or those of his society: thus, lands of plenty reflect a desire for an easy life, and noble, pure peoples may reflect a "desire for the lost simplicity of the fabled golden age."³¹³

³⁰⁹ See Van Wyk Smith 2009: 339-340.

³¹⁰ Geertz (1973: 9) writes of ethnography: "what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to." Solinus seems unconscious of this, as he is bound up in his own perspective rather than trying to take on those of the barbarian peoples — but this ends up being especially useful for what it tells us about the author himself.

³¹¹ Keyser (2011: 51) uses the terms "noble primitive" and "subhuman savage," building on the concepts developed by Claude Lévi-Strauss.

³¹² Alston and Spentzou 2011: 206.

³¹³ Keyser 2011: 53. See also Kaldelis 2013, who argues that some late Roman ethnographical descriptions (such as those of Procopius) were used to criticise Roman society. Cf. Alston and Spentzou's analysis of possible criticism in Tacitus' *Agricola* (2011: 211-218).

In all cases, the simplified view of non-Roman peoples in the *Collectanea* reflects an imperial Romano-centricity. To reiterate from p. 79, they are static figures — they have no history, and they receive only an atemporal description, stripped down to a few key adjectives.³¹⁴ Yet in the Macrobian, we see some characteristics that the Romans admire, and some cultural desires: an esteem of justice, fairness, and strength; a desire for easier food, better health, and longer lives.

This is really a flattering way for the *Collectanea* to refer to the Axumites. The Macrobian had long been a feature of classical literature, consistently represented in an admirable light, and Solinus sticks to the type. However, while authors throughout antiquity had located the Macrobian in different areas of south-eastern Africa, Solinus clearly locates his Macrobian in Axumite territory, at a point in time when the characteristics that earlier authors ascribed to Macrobian match up nicely with Axumite culture. By linking Axum to a people that have been traditionally represented in very positive terms, the *Collectanea* gives, as it were, a nod of respectful recognition to an important economic neighbour — an allusion that his contemporaries might very plausibly have recognised —, even as it defers to Latin literary tradition by mentioning them only briefly and associating them with an ancient name instead of a contemporary one.

Conclusions

Though surrounded by monstrous and wondrous fantasies, the Axumites are, as Macrobian, portrayed realistically. Their depiction is vague and somewhat impractical, as it is not meant to facilitate travel; it is idealised, but not unbelievably so. The *Collectanea* is informational literature, which provides Romans with a view of far-away places, and conveniently for us, offers a reflection of an imperial author's perception of Romanness. This chapter hopes to have illuminated several aspects of the relationship between the *Collectanea*, Roman literary culture, and late antique Axum. The overview of Roman access to information about the Red Sea created a context for a discussion about the Roman way of looking at the world, with Romans at the imperial centre as the ideal world rulers and with the non-Romans at the

³¹⁴ Merrills (2005: 26) writes: “As was the case with its enquiry into the past, Roman use of geographical sources naturally propagated a sense of timeless — and boundless — empire.”

peripheries, usually representing extremes of possible human behaviours. The Macrobianism is toward the positive end of this spectrum, though the *Collectanea* still relegates them, in accordance with Roman tradition, to the margins of civilisedness. The *Collectanea*'s interest in the rest of the world is somewhat superficial and reflects no desire to understand other cultures, and its adherence to literary norms obscures what knowledge Solinus really had of the Axumites. Yet his association of them with the ancient and eminent Macrobianism is a high honour, suggesting that in the real world, beyond literary motifs, he did take into account some actual knowledge of the world.

Conclusion

The *Collectanea* has too long gone understudied and misunderstood. The three approaches in the chapters of this thesis point to the great variety of ways in which it can be studied, and illustrate the rewarding conclusions to be found through all three. Considering the very few surviving geographical Latin texts from Solinus' period, the *Collectanea* is especially valuable. It gives clues about the expectations and appreciations of later Roman literary society; it fills a gap in the discussion of Roman literary trends; it has its own individual worth as an original work of literature. It has emerged that Solinus cannot be dismissed as an untalented compiler, whose work is an inferior emulation of Pliny's *Historia naturalis*. Compilation was a prevalent style of late antique literary composition, and Solinus wrote a trendy and respected kind of book. It is important to emphasise that his selections are his own, and so although his information is not new, the context in which he sets it is. This is useful for what it tells us about the values and interests of the author and his readership. The *Collectanea* is as fascinating for its affirmation of literary norms and trends as it is for its instances of originality.

The new interpretation of the *Collectanea*'s initial purpose, first broached in the first chapter, shows clearly why Solinus ought not to be dismissed by scholarship: the disparaging attitude toward Solinus of the early modern period reveals more about its own preoccupations than it does about the quality of the *Collectanea* itself. It seems plain from Solinus' authorial comments in the prefatory letter (and inherently from the entire book's strange and wondrous subject matter!) that as much value is placed on the reader's entertainment as on the transmission of reliable information. The preface hopes that "the variety itself might alleviate the boredom of the reader"³¹⁵: a variety that it immediately informs us will encompass the natures of men and animals, exotic trees, the appearances of foreign races, the customs of faraway peoples, and other things *digna memoratu* (*Praef.* 4); and we saw in Chapter 2 that the *Collectanea* does immediately afterward explode into a variety of subjects in fulfillment of its prefatory promise. This first chapter showed that the *Collectanea* incorporates many traditional literary elements from different genres into a text

³¹⁵ *Praefatio* 4: ... saltem uarietas ipsa legentium fastidio mederetur.

that is difficult to concretely classify in terms of genre, but contains components from many that were current and/or authoritative around the time that Solinus wrote: thus he created a book that was both fashionable and credible. In light of the fashion during Late Antiquity to possess the sort of knowledge presented in the *Collectanea*, the text may have been enjoyed by a relatively wide audience among Romans: an educated audience that was interested in the world around them, able and willing to read and learn about it for interest and culture's sake. The knowledge contained in the *Collectanea* is considerably different from what people possessed and used in real life; the disconnect between the *Collectanea*'s theoretical, literary scholarship and the realities of everyday knowledge underlines the idea that the book anticipates an educated audience that will appreciate literary tradition. However, the book's focus on wonderful and unusual facts provokes a genuine curiosity in the world as well as dutiful interest. The appeal of an informational text that is written in a way that educated people can appreciate its sophistication while enjoying an "easy read" is partly responsible for the work's lasting success into the Christian era.

The second chapter addressed aspects of Solinus' literary technique. The construction of the work itself reveals a careful planning process in which each item of information is related in some way, through commonality in diction or idea, to those that precede and follow it. A discussion of the *Collectanea*'s intertextual nature reinforced the idea from the first chapter that the anticipated readership was well educated, since many of the brief facts and anecdotes hint at more in-depth accounts with which primarily the educated Roman would be familiar. The latter part of the second chapter placed the work more specifically into the context of late antique encyclopedic literature, showing that Solinus was in step with contemporary literary trends but also highlighting some ways in which he stood out from the crowd of famous compilers: his is the only known geographically-organised, encyclopedic, association-based compilation.

The third chapter looked at the *Collectanea* as a work of literature, and questioned the connection between its portrayal of a mythical people (the Macrobian Ethiopians) and the reality of a historical people (the Axumites). The *Collectanea* communicates a firmly Roman view of Romanness and of other ethnic groups. It refers to long-past historical and mythological events pertaining to the Greeks and Romans, and relates anecdotes about individuals here and there throughout the book. Other races are denied temporal

dimensionality and are described as a single cultural unit; some are caricatures of cultural nobility or savagery, and some seem to behaviourally and/or physically resemble animals more than humans. The sense of the superior humanity of Mediterranean peoples has a long tradition in Greco-Roman literature, but Solinus' treatment of the Macrobian adds some nuance to the traditional literary descriptions and attitudes by subtly linking the Macrobian to the contemporary Axumite empire. Perhaps this association was obvious to the contemporary Roman reader; maybe the reader was aware of the shortcomings of the tradition in communicating their modern geographical knowledge, and appreciated the understated nod to an important commercial partner. At any rate, Solinus provides an image of the world worthy of contemplation for all its readers. His image matches the classical tradition in most ways, but personalisations of context and content present a new way to ponder the traditional Roman concepts of Romanness and non-Romanness.

In recent years the *Collectanea* has experienced a revival among academics, and there are a number of scholars currently revisiting and reanalysing him. The first chapter of this thesis was presented at a conference devoted to Solinus last summer, and there is a forthcoming volume, edited by Kai Brodersen, to which I am contributing an article based on the third chapter. Other conference participants examined Solinus as part of a literary tradition, Solinus as an author himself, and his reception in Late Antiquity and beyond. The studies in this volume differ entirely from the previous scholarship on Solinus: they consider the *Collectanea* for what it is, as a hugely influential work and a trove of information about late Roman literature and literary culture, and they delve into details heretofore entirely disregarded.

Research into the *Collectanea* has proven fruitful, and there are many possible avenues for further study. The third chapter on the Macrobian is only a case study: this could be expanded into a systematic analysis of each race described over the entirety of the *Collectanea*, thus refining the conclusions. We might also note Solinus' interest in miracles: something for the *Collectanea* could be done similar to Munson's *Telling Wonders: Ethnographic and Political Discourse in the Work of Herodotus* (2001); in Solinus' case, an examination of wonder and miracles would also have to be considered in light of recent research into the late antique Christian interest in miracles.

The *Collectanea* is an important link between ancient and medieval geographical knowledge, and this thesis pursued the goal of illustrating a few aspects of this work which made it possible that it could fulfill such a crucial role. After all, while we may dispute the extent of Solinus' originality, it is difficult to question the scope of his influence or his skill as a writer. With any luck a greater number of people will encounter and enjoy the *Collectanea* in the coming years, and it is my pleasure to have contributed to this revival of Solinian studies.

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