THE IMPERIAL COURT OF MIRACLES

IMPERIAL COLLECTING AT THE COURT OF EMPEROR HADRIAN (117-138 CE)

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Cover image: Willers, B. (2019, July 11). *The Centaur excavation at Volos. This controversial reconstruction of a Centaurian burial site has -as intended by its creator– provided the catalyst for countless discussions about (for example) biological possibilities, mythological realities, cultural transmission, psycho-dynamic representations, and occasionally the possibility of an elaborate hoax.* (By B. Canever; University of Tennessee, Ed.). Torchbearer: The Magazine of the University of Tennessee. https://torchbearer.utk.edu/2019/07/believe-centaurs/

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis I analyse several things. First, Phlegon of Tralles. Phlegon lived in the second century CE and came from the town of Tralles in the province of Asia, in what is now Turkey. He was a freedman serving at Hadrian's imperial court and wrote several works attributed to different genres, namely history and paradoxography. I also analyse and summarise each of his surviving writings. One of these writings includes a quote in which Phlegon mentions a centaur specimen held in the imperial storages. This gives rise to the matter of what the 'imperial storages' were, to which I return in the chapter regarding Hadrian and his collection. In the chapter on Phlegon, I also detail his inclusion within paradoxography and why this genre is often neglected by modern academic literature. Further, in this chapter I also discuss the 'Keepers of the Wonders', a group serving under several emperors and curating and caring for those emperors' collections. I also detail why such persons were employed, and why this knowledge of the natural historical world is often present in rulers.

Second, I analyse Hadrian. I place him in the context of other emperors (specifically Augustus, Trajan, and Marcus Aurelius), detail his personality and rule, and analyse his collection of art and nature historical artefacts. Then, I move on to Hadrian's collection. In this subchapter, I define what I consider to be 'Hadrian's collection' and analyse and speculate on its contents. In chapter four, I place Hadrian's collection in context; I compare it to those collections owned by wealthy Romans of the late Republic and early Empire, and to those collections belonging to other emperors, these being Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius. I also compare it to later European 'cabinets of curiosities'. In this chapter I also return to the matter of why 'the past' and the natural world are sources of wonder and curiosity which appear to be present throughout every human culture.

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A final thanks I give to all of my family and friends. Always supportive, always helpful; thank you.

PREFACE

On a nice, warm summer afternoon in 2024, my girlfriend and I were reading in a park. Every once in a while we'd tell each other something fun we'd read, and one of those times she told me a very interesting quote: apparently, Hadrian owned a centaur; this centaur was described by a freedman named Phlegon. Some searching later, a translation and commentary of Phlegon's writings was delivered to me, and the context for the quote was even better: if anyone called Phlegon's bluff, they should come and see for themselves. That gave me an idea: if you could just go and see such a rare curiosity (in the emperor's possession no less), surely there is some connection to be drawn with museums? But who was this 'Phlegon' guy really? And why did Hadrian have such a thing, let alone maybe a collection of such things? Much later, I finally metaphorically knocked on Miguel John's door, introduced myself, and asked whether he was available to supervise my thesis. Sadly, he was already fully booked. But because he found this 'Phlegon' character so interesting, he was willing to support me regardless. With the proverbial means, motive and opportunity taken care of, now it was time to start working on the thing.

LIST OF FIGURES

1. INTRODUCTION

Hadrian was emperor of the Roman Empire between 117 and 138 CE, as the successor of Trajan at the height of the empire's territorial expanse. Hadrian is one of the 'Five Good Emperors', alongside Nerva, Trajan, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius. These emperors are known for the period of prosperity they brought to the empire during their reigns. Hadrian chose to adopt a primarily defensively oriented military strategy, focusing efforts on strengthening the empire rather than expanding it. From this strategy came various building projects, such as Hadrian's Wall in Britannica (modern-day England). However, the responsibility for these projects did not only lay with Hadrian's military strategy; his passion for architecture played a key role, with the emperor designing a number of renovations and constructions himself (Spartianus, *Historia Augusta* 19.13.). This is exemplary of Hadrian's person: he was a man of many interests, engaging in studies of architecture, astronomy, military strategy, training and campaigning, debate, poetry and prose writing, mythology, history, and natural history[1]. Of Hadrian's varied pursuits, most are well-known and well-researched; the last point, however, his interest in natural history, has gone almost entirely neglected by the academic world. Despite the lack of research, we may safely say that Hadrian was also interested in natural history as evident through one of his freedmen, a certain Phlegon of Tralles. This freedman of Hadrian has written several works relating to natural history, and is known to have served in positions very close to the emperor, making it probable that the emperor had knowledge of and gave support to these works.

His fondness of natural history and mythology is not only relevant to studies regarding Hadrian, as his love for these topics may have led to what could be argued to be the first museum collections in European history, and some of the earliest in world history. However, Hadrian did not amass these collections by himself, nor was he unique in owning such collections. Regarding the latter, we know for example that Augustus had a collection spanning several (semi-)public buildings (Rutledge, 2012, p. 237).

[1]Hadrian's multi-faceted character is attested in almost every book that speaks of him. See (among many others) Birley 1997; Erdkamp et al. 2015; Magie 1922; Opper 2008; Perowne 1960.

Regarding the former, as with most duties an emperor might be expected to perform and pleasures he might want to experience, specialised personnel were hired. Hadrian employed people to oversee the procurement and care for the artefacts which would make up his collections, the so-called ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ (Beard, 2023, p. 156). Details regarding the activities and members of this group remain uncertain.Several academic articles have examined the *frumentarii*, a group which, I argue, operated in cooperation with and served as a source of recruitment for the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. I detail their position as it relates to the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ below, in subchapter 2.2.
Based on the knowledge we have regarding Phlegon, the large amount of information that is still unknown about the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’, and information about both Hadrian’s collection and those collections belonging to other notable figures in Rome, I have developed the following research questions:

1. What were the functions of the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ serving in Hadrian’s court, and how can this ‘agency’ best be understood?
    a. Were there figures in ancient Rome associated with collections that fit the description of modern ‘curators’, and do the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ show similarities to curators?
2. What types of objects did Hadrian’s collection contain?
3. Is there a precedent for Roman emperors maintaining a collection and, if so, does Hadrian’s collection follow or stray from this established tradition?

These questions are important to answer for several reasons. First, the collections of Roman emperors are lacking in modern study and analysis; while many books and articles have been written regarding various aspects of Hadrian’s person and rule[2], yet the collections and collecting activities of Hadrian, and on a grander scale Roman emperors in general, have not yet received the attention they deserve. Second, the functions of Roman imperial courts are generally understood well; the *Cursus Honorum*, the circuit of a Roman nobleman’s political career, is documented extensively and the functions it contains are also understood.

[2] Hadrian’s villa complex: MacDonald and Pinto (1995); Hadrian’s Wall: Goldsworthy (2018); Hadrian in general: Ael. Spartianus, *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* (n.d.); Cass. Dio, *Rhōmaïkè Historía* (n.d.); Perowne (1960); among others.

Important political functions outside of the *Cursus Honorum*, such as the governorship of a province or personal aides to the emperor and his family, have also been researched. The function I address here, that of the 'Keepers of the Wonders', is barely known at all, let alone properly understood. Third, the Roman period is typically characterised as one without any development of museums (Grande, 2017, p. XI), which, considering the current knowledge of the imperial collections, is an outdated view.
I argue for the interpretation of Hadrian's collection as an early form of a museum, and will investigate the tasks and functions of the 'Keepers of the Wonders'.

Throughout history, large (semi-)public collections in Europe have been managed by people functioning as curators; this role has been assumed by dedicated curators in the modern era, but before that it was part of the set of tasks of various professions. Clergy in the Middle Ages (and continuing into the present day) were tasked with the care for saintly relics, and before Christianity this task fell in the first place to Censors of the Roman state administration (Rutledge, 2012, p. 299). This 'curatorship' was crucial to ensure collections were kept preserved and safe from thieves and the public. If Hadrian's collection falls into this category, and the 'Keepers of the Wonders' were tasked with the retrieval of artefacts, the question arises: can the 'Keepers of the Wonders' be interpreted as such a curatorial role? I argue this to indeed be one of the main functions of the 'Keepers of the Wonders'. I will also attempt an analysis of where these officials were likely to have been recruited from. Lastly, I will also paint a picture of the composition of Hadrian's collection, its provenance, housing and care. Though, because an exact inventory of this collection is impossible, given that only one literary source mentions it and no archaeological evidence is known to exist which is certain to have been a part of this collection, I will make an approximation of it with artefacts (or types of artefacts) that such a collection is likely to have contained. I will do these things through the analysis of texts and comparisons with similar collections of other rulers, both Roman and non-Roman, as there are no artefacts which are known to have been part of or related to Hadrian's collection or the 'Keepers of the Wonders'.
These textual sources will be both primary and secondary; the *Scriptores Historia Augusta* by Spartianus, and commentary on it by Benario (1980), as well as works

by Birley (1997), Erdkamp et al. (2015), Opper (2008), and Perowne (1960) provide a complete view of Hadrian, both as a person and as an emperor.
Descriptions of him as an emperor may help explain how and where Hadrian held a collection and how he sourced the pieces that constituted his collection, while accounts of his personality explain the motivations he may have had to establish and maintain a collection.

Academic literature on Phlegon is scarce. Phlegon's work has been translated into various languages, including English, Dutch, German, Italian and Latin[3], but aside from a small number of reviews of the work almost no literature further examines the entirety of the subject matter Phlegon details; this subject matter includes accounts of supernatural encounters with ghosts and finds of extraordinary natural artefacts, such as centaurs or enormous bones. Specific stories and accounts are taken and analysed, such as the story of Philinnion, a girl who returns as a ghost to spend some more time with a lover. She dies again when the affair is interrupted by her parents, anxious to see her again; this story and the accounts of human hermaphrodites, persons born with both male and female genitalia, are analysed by Doroszewska[4]. Other than these, a paper has been written regarding Phlegon's account of large bones found in Dalmatia (Bradač & Karavanić, 2015) and another on the centaurs Phlegon mentions (Shannon-Henderson, 2019), which is where academic interest in Phlegon seems to end.

As one might expect of a Roman emperor, Hadrian has been the subject of significantly more research[5]. A trend among publications regarding Hadrian is that they tend to focus on a connection between Hadrian and a person, place, position or concept. Two other major subjects are Hadrian's Wall and the Villa Hadriana, both documented exceedingly thoroughly. No publication focuses on Hadrian's interest in history, natural history and mythology. It is, in fact, mentioned only in Ferwerda's (2004) translation of and commentary on Phlegon's 'book of marvels', saying:

[3] English: Hansen 1996; Dutch: Ferwerda 2004; German: Diels 1890, Jacoby 1929, Brodersen 2002; Italian: Doria 1929, Stramaglia 1999; Latin: Gianni 1965. Phlegon originally wrote in Greek.
[4] Accounts of hermaphrodites: Doroszewska 2013; story of a ghost encounter: Doroszewska 2015.
[5] See note 1 for a (non-exhaustive) list of published works on Hadrian.

“His patron Hadrian, of whom they say he was interested in all possible curious things, will have read the result of his work with pleasure” (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 11).

Ferwerda loosely quotes Tertullian’s *Liber Apologeticus*, which says the following:

“*... Hadrianus, quamquam curiositatum omnium explorator*...” (Tertullianus, 5).

This passage, more strictly translated as “... Hadrian, although (‘because’) all [his] curiosities are explored...”, is an excerpt from a longer list of emperors who had Christians executed. Hadrian is mentioned as not having done so at all, with this being the explanation given; presumably, the author means that Hadrian was interested in the Christian beliefs, and let them live because of his curiosity.

This curiosity of Hadrian lent itself to the ownership of a collection of artefacts, a practice which he did partake in. This means that literature on collections, antiquarianism and the study and display of antiquities is relevant for this thesis to analyse. While widely available, literature relating to this topic is mostly highly specialised. Most publications on this topic catalogue the collection of one modern museum or a specific private collection. Some however, such as *World Antiquarianism* by Alain Schnapp et al. (2013) provide a more general view, with this volume including essays focused on various periods and geographic areas, using different methods and analysing different yet related subjects within the overall topic. As such, it provides a wealth of different techniques and thought exercises to employ in other contexts.

Due to the state of the current literature on these topics, I will provide insights on topics which have been overlooked: Phlegon in a historical context, Hadrian in relation to Phlegon, his collection and natural history, and the wider context of collections and antiquarianism applied to this specific instance of the concepts. These subjects have seen no widespread academic attention, I argue this to be because Phlegon is relatively unknown, what information we have on his works and life is gathered from only one source (his own writings), and because his most famous work, ‘On Marvels’, is seen not as a historical account-keeping or historiography, but as pure paradoxography, that being the discipline of history focussed on documenting and researching ‘supernatural’ or ‘mythical’ occurrences. In short, I argue it is because Phlegon himself is almost unknown and his writings are seen as pseudoscientific that the subjects mentioned above have not received the scientific analyses they deserve.

OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

In the second chapter of this thesis I will focus on Phlegon of Tralles, his writings and the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. In addition, I explain why Phlegon’s writings and the genre they belong to, namely the genre of paradoxography, have remained underanalysed. The final subject this chapter touches on is the interest historical rulers show in the nature historical world; the third chapter will detail Hadrian as a person and as an emperor, and his collection; the fourth chapter places this collection and the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ in a wider context of historical collectors and collections and touches upon the prestige of collections, antiquities, and antiquarianism through history until the modern day. For this last chapter, I use several case studies, as attempting to detail all of the history of museology in one chapter is both impossible and outside the scope of this thesis. I will specifically use literature on Augustus’ various collections, including his ‘sea monster room’ in his villa on Capri, and texts mentioning Claudius' interest in this topic, as well as texts regarding the later European ‘cabinets of curiosities’. I chose these collections, partly because they are relatively well-known and thus provide an entrance for those less versed in this topic, but mostly because Augustus’ and Claudius’ collections would have been known to, may have influenced and might even have partially been assimilated by Hadrian, while the ‘cabinets of curiosities’ are argued to represent the start of the modern tradition of museology (Seba, 2020, p. 13-14). If Hadrian’s collection is included, I think the start of museology should be placed in antiquity instead of the sixteenth century.

2. PHLEGON

2.1 PHLEGON'S LIFE AND WORKS

Phlegon of Tralles remains a figure about whom few details can be established with certainty. He was born in Tralles, a small previously Greek colony town in modern-day Turkey, and either was a slave from birth or became one later in life. We know nothing of his early life or his time as a slave; the earliest records that mention Phlegon are from a time when he is already a freedman in service of emperor Hadrian, having gained the name 'Publius Aelius' when he attained his freedom (Doroszewska, 2016, p. 15-16). He was given this name after the man who freed him, Publius Aelius Hadrianus. Ferwerda speculates that Hadrian freed Phlegon due to the latter's intelligence (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 11). Phlegon later served at Hadrian's imperial court, variously labeled as one of the emperor's 'educated freedmen' (Magie, 1922, p. 49) or his 'secretary' (Birley, 1997, p. 222), a title also given to Suetonius, who also served on Hadrian's staff (De la Bédoyère, 2023, p. 212). The exact nature of these positions remains unknown; however, a number of writings likely to originate from this period of Phlegon's life have been identified. These are mostly known to us because their existence was recorded in later literature, such as the Liber Suda.

The Liber Suda, also called simply 'the Suda', is a tenth century Byzantine text documenting the ancient Mediterranean world. This work contains the following passage on Phlegon and his works: "[Phlegon] Of Tralles, freedman of Augustus Caesar, but some say of Hadrian: historian. He wrote 'Olympiads' in 16 books. Up to the 229th Olympiad they contain what was done everywhere. And these in 8 books: 'Description of Sicily', 'On long-lived and marvelous persons', 'On the feasts of the Romans' 3 books, 'On the places in Rome and by what names they are called', 'Epitome of Olympic victors' in 2 books, and other things." ("Phlegon," 2014).

Due to the chronology of the 'Olympiads', with the last Olympiad Phlegon details taking place between 137 and 140 CE, the suggestion of Phlegon having been a freedman of Augustus is seen as an error by modern scholars. This dating of the last Olympiad also provides us with a window in which Phlegon is likely to have passed away; between the 229th and 230th Olympiad, dating to between 137 and 143 CE.

Other than this information and some small fragments, Phlegon's 'Olympiads' has been lost, alongside his 'Description of Sicily', 'On the feasts of the Romans', 'On the places in Rome and what they are called', his 'Epitome of Olympic victors' and the unnamed 'other things'. Only his works 'On long-lived and marvelous persons', mentioned by the Liber Suda as one work but argued by Doroszewska (2016, p. 17-18) to have been two separate works, survive in a state of relative completeness. I agree with Doroszewska's stance that these works were separate, based on the observation that Phlegon preferred to organise his writings by topic, and a shift from supernatural physical mutations to long lifespans seems too significant a subject change to still be one work (Doroszewska, 2018, p. 18; Hansen, 1997, p. 17). These works, I argue, form the 'core' of Phlegon's works; both Hansen's 1998 English translation and Ferwerda's 2004 Dutch translation of Phlegon's work contain these works and the Olympiads, with Ferwerda's translation even interrupting 'On marvels' with 'On long-lived persons'. These works are better known under their Latin names, those being the *Mirabilia* ('on marvels') and the *Macrobii* ('on long-lived persons'). They are ascribed to the genre of paradoxography by modern sources based on the texts' exclusive focus on 'strange creatures' (Doroszewska, 2018, p. 10; Ferwerda, 2004, p. 13), with paradoxography being a genre within historiography according to Rein Ferwerda (2004, p. 13). The term paradoxography did not exist in the ancient world, or at least it was not used to describe this genre. Its use in this context originates with nineteenth-century scholar Antonius Westermann, who coined the term according to William Hansen (Hansen, 1998, p. 2). This subgenre focuses on the compilation and description of 'paradoxical' or 'wondrous' occurrences and creatures, such as those found in myths (centaurs, giants, cyclopes). Curiously, Phlegon deviates from the set pattern within paradoxography; other known paradoxographical works detail curiosities across the entire natural (and unnatural) world, including strange rivers, animals, plants, humans, and materials[6]. Phlegon, by contrast, only focuses on anomalies related to humans: malformed people, extremely large bones, very long-lived people, et cetera. Why exactly he chose to exclude the other subjects is unknown.

[6] Other paradoxographical writings which survive include '*A Collection of Marvellous Researches'* by Antigonus of Karystos, '*Wondrous Researches'* by Apollonius, as well as three works of unknown authorship, known as the *Paradoxographus Florentinus*, the *Paradoxographus Vaticanus* and the *Paradoxographus Palatinus* (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 13; Hansen, 1998, p. 3-4).

William Hansen speculates it is because the specific material Phlegon included was simply more popular (Hansen, 1998, p. 11), although an argument against this theory presents itself in the form of Pliny the Elder, whose *Naturalis Historiae* include accounts which should be classified as paradoxography. Pliny's work detailing every known aspect of the natural world includes, mixed amongst its passages on 'regular' nature, passages on rivers that change the colour of animals that drink from it (Plin. Maj. 2. 230), a people with enormous ears they use to cover themselves called the *Panotii* (Plin. Maj. 4.95), and live centaurs being captured (Plin. Maj. 7.35), among many other entries that fall within the realm of paradoxography. However, given that Pliny wrote approximately 70 to 80 or so years before Phlegon, it is unlikely that preferences in the genre of paradoxography had shifted so drastically from wishing to know of every kind of natural oddity to only wishing to know about human oddities. Another explanation is that Hadrian, Phlegon's patron, commissioned a treatise exclusively on human oddities, though why the broadly interested Hadrian would limit the scope of this work is similarly unclear.

2.1.1 THE *OLYMPIADS*

The *Olympiads* form a historical chronicle based on the four-year cycles of the Olympic Games. It starts with the inception of the Games according to their foundation myth. This story starts with Peisos, Pelops and Herakles initiating the Games in a much less strict, regular format. After this initial start, the Peloponnesians neglected the Games. Due to the Games being sacred, the gods sent a plague upon them. Upon consulting the oracle at Delphi on how to stop the plague, the answer they received was that they had to resume observing the sacred games again; after failing to do so and seeing the plague continue, they sent another envoy to the oracle. This time, the answer was that the Peloponnesians had to sacrifice at an altar and obey whatever the priests say to do. After this, they allowed the Games to continue and resumed observing them (Hansen, 1998, p. 58-60). Phlegon mentions people from both Elis and Pisa being present, as these two towns both claimed to have started the Games and took turns organizing them. Over time this disagreement developed into a rivalry between the two towns, but by naming both as having been represented at the Games' founding, Phlegon did not have to choose a side in this rivalry (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 111).

After the origin myth, Phlegon goes on to list the winners in the Games. He mentions the athlete, their hometown, and the sport they competed in. In some cases, he also mentions an extraordinary fact about an athlete, such as the entry regarding Isodorus from Alexandria, who won in wrestling in the 177th Games, which took place between 72-69 BCE. Phlegon mentions that "he was floored in none of the great Games" (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 114), which Ferwerda clarifies refers to the Olympic, Nemean, Pythian and Isthmian Games (Ferwerda, 2004, p.153). Hansen (1998) details this further; he says that "the stretch of time embraced by the four great games were referred to as a Circuit" (Hansen, 1998, p. 195). Ancient Greek wrestling matches were won when one had floored their opponent three times.

After listing the winners of the Olympiad, Phlegon mentions other things that occurred during the Games. This includes military operations, natural disasters, the birth of people who would become famous later in life, royal successions, census counts of Rome, and major (re)construction efforts in Rome. Phlegon dedicates most attention to military operations, their commanders, troop counts, and outcome.

The fragment detailing the 177th Olympic Games is the only fragment left of Phlegon's *Olympiads*.

2.1.2 THE *MACROBII*

The *Makrobion* is a compilation of accounts of people who lived very long; these people are sorted by Hansen into the following age brackets: 100 years; 101-110 years; 110-120 years; 130-140 years. Every person within these brackets is reported with their age in years specified, along with a family relation and their town of residence such that almost every entry follows the formula of 'A, [relation] of B, of the town of [town]: X years.'. There are a few exceptions throughout the lists, two of which are especially unique: Arganthonios, king of the Tartesians, who Phlegon reports to have been 150 years old as claimed by Herodotos and Anakreon, and the Sibyl of Erythrai, who lived "just short of a thousand years" (Hansen, 1998, p. 55). Whether the Herodotos Phlegon hails as his source is Herodotos the historian is unknown. Along with the entry of the Sibyl, Phlegon includes the oracle she spoke in which she tells her age:

> "But why, lamentable for the sufferings of others,
> Do I prophesy oracles, holding on to my mad fate
> And experiencing my own painful gadfly?
> Now in the tenth life-span I possess a grievous old age,
> Raving among mortals, speaking the incredible,
> Foreseeing in visions all the trying cares of humankind,
> At that time glorious Leto's son, resenting
> My power of divination, his destructive heart filled with
> passion,
> Will release the soul imprisoned in my mournful
> Body, shooting my frame with a flesh-smiting arrow,
> Whereupon my soul, fluttering into the air
> And commingling with the wind, will heap upon a mound for me
> Or conceal me with a tomb. My dark blood
> Will sink down into the wide-wayed earth, in the withering
> of time.
> Thence it will produce shoots of abundant grass
> That will enter the livers of grazing sheep and
> Reveal the will of the gods by means of divination,

> And when the feather-clad birds feed on my flesh,
> They will occupy themselves with true prophecy for
> mortals.” (Hansen, 1998, p. 55).

The account contains another oracle by the Sibyl, but this is not related to the account above nor to the Sibyl’s long lifespan. It details the sacrifices Romans must make at the next *ludi saeculares*, special games typically held every one hundred years which were meant to ask the gods to bless the Roman people (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 80-82).

The entry of the Sibyl is the final entry of the *Makrobion*.

2.1.3 THE *MIRABILIA*

The *Mirabilia* has a broader scope; it details a variety of ‘wonders’, covering spirits returning to life from death, hermaphrodites, people who changed their sex, gigantic skeletons and bones, men bearing children, women bearing many children (be it at once or over a longer span of time), rapid growth and maturation, children born with curious mutations such as siamese twins, and hippocentaurs. Each entry is described in a somewhat scientific manner, with Rein Ferwerda stating “As he often carefully records his sources and/or the time in which the events occurred and occasionally names himself as an eyewitness” (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 11). Hansen says that Phlegon’s entries are edited to a significantly lesser degree, “with the result that individual items in his collection vary wildly in magnitude from as short as a single sentence to as long as several pages, including in some cases extensive documents that, instead of being summarized, are copied out word for word” (Hansen, 1998, p. 11-12). Of the thirty-five entries of the *Mirabilia*, the last two entries are especially intriguing. First, regarding the capture and preservation of a hippocentaur.

“In Saune, a city in Arabia, on a very high mountain that teems with plants containing a deadly poison, a hippocentaur has been encountered. The poison carries the same name as the city and among lethal poisons it is the quickest and most effective. The king found the hippocentaur alive and sent it along with other gifts to the emperor to Egypt. Its diet consisted of meat. Because he could not tolerate the change in atmosphere he died. The prefect of Egypt therefore had him embalmed and sent him to Rome. At first, he was displayed in the palace: his face was wilder than that of a human, his hands and fingers were thickly covered in hair and his ribs were connected to his forelegs and his stomach. He had the sturdy hooves of a horse and pale blond hair although it –just like the skin– turned darker due to the embalming. He was not as large as other hippocentaurs of which descriptions exist, though he was also not small.” (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104).

The emperor in this passage is Claudius, as Pliny the Elder, who wrote during Claudius’s reign, describes the centaur as well:

“Emperor Claudius writes that a Thessaly-born horseman died the same day [as it was born] and we saw one during his reign which was sent to him from Egypt, conserved in honey.” (Plin. Maj. 7. 35).

In the following passage of the *Mirabilia* Phlegon invites his audience, should they not believe him, to see the centaur for themselves:

"In the aforementioned city of Saune, it has been said, there had been other hippocentaurs. Should somebody not believe the story of the hippocentaur that was sent to Rome, he can research it: for he is embalmed and all in the imperial storehouses." (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104).

In his commentary, Ferwerda interestingly does not comment on Phlegon's invitation to research the centaur. Given that such invitations to go into the emperor's storehouses have been found nowhere else, nor are there any accounts from people who have viewed them and their contents, Phlegon's invitation is a unicum warranting exploration. Ferwerda does mention the later second-century author and sophist Aelianus, who describes that, in his time, there were specialists that created mythical animals from the remains of real animals, with the mythical mixtures presented as though they were real (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 106)[7]. Hansen also does not go into this invitation, though he does connect it to other imperial collections and those public collections harboured at temples and, later, in churches (Hansen, 1998, p. 175-176). These collections will be further detailed in chapters three and four respectively. Returning to Phlegon's invitation, there remains the question of how real this invitation was. At face value, it is a genuine attempt to spur Romans to research; at worst, it is a hollow promise with Phlegon knowing that nobody could take up the offer. I argue that the answer lies in between these two extremes. Had this offer been fake, both later and contemporary authors would have used it to tarnish the reputation of both Phlegon and his employer Hadrian. Given that we see several critiques against Hadrian returning in both historical and modern sources (such as those detailed further in the following chapter) and no mention is made about this promise, we can conclude that it was genuine, though it is still exceedingly probable that the invitation was only open to the aristocracy. Therefore, while the invitation was real and open to those who wrote the histories (who thus could not complain about a hollow promise), the vast majority of Romans could never see the specimen.

[7] Aelianus describes this in his *De natura animalium*, XVII 9.

2.1.4 Phlegon and paradoxography: a spurned genre

Scholars have ignored Phlegon as a historian since his own time. He has never been cited by another ancient historian, nor analysed in modern times for the historical or historiographical value of his works. This is despite the classification of Phlegon's work as paradoxography, which is a subgenre of historiography. Historiography, in turn, has two meanings: it is both "the critical assessment of the ways in which historians try to reconstruct past events as distinguished from the statements they make about the past" as well as "the history of history itself: understanding how historians of the past conceived of their projects and the methods they used" (Popkin, 2021, p. 3). Historiography, then, ought to have analysed Phlegon's work, as it is a work regarding history, but it has not.

Doroszewska (2018, p. 9) expects this is due in large part to the fact that "Phlegon was regarded as a rather mediocre writer, and his output was considered derivative and secondary", while another argument she gives is that, in addition to Phlegon's alleged mediocrity, "the text is quite heterogenous" (Doroszewska, 2018, p. 9). While this is true (entries in the *Mirabilia* vary in length from a single sentence to paragraphs spanning a whole page), this is no satisfactory argument for ignoring the potential scholarly meaning of a text. Why else, then, have both Phlegon's works and paradoxography as a genre been refused historiographic analysis? I argue that, in addition to Doroszewska's first point mentioned above, it is because Phlegon's work and the genre of paradoxography as a whole are seen as entirely fictional, and thus devoid of historiographical value.

No sources, aside from Doroszewska (2018) and Hansen (1996), analyse the position and value of paradoxography. Hansen includes quotes from Giannini (1963, p. 248) describing paradoxography as "arid", "a degeneration of the interest in the marvellous", a banalization of a taste that became a mass phenomenon", and "a purely collectionistic mania drained of religious concern or ethnographic curiosity", and Romm (1992, p. 92) calling the genre "catalogues of the most bizarre and unintelligible phenomena of nature". From this selection of quotes, a clear argument appears in favour of neglecting paradoxography: it is, according to Giannini and Romm, a perversion of an otherwise acceptable occupation. This line of reasoning is, however, distinctly subjective.

These quotations do relate to the second argument I brought up: paradoxography, some seem to argue, holds little to no value for historical or historiographical research. Giannini in particular appears to dismiss paradoxography entirely as being a field unworthy of scientific examination.

Contrary to the views held by Giannini and Romm, literature scholars have harboured an interest in the stories relayed by Phlegon and other paradoxographers, shown through the output of articles and papers published on paradoxographical topics[8]. This again supports the argument I made previously that paradoxography tends to be viewed more as a genre of literature rather than a branch of science: the motifs of the stories are analysed for their resemblance to myths and their symbolism, while neither the common motifs nor the stories themselves are examined for their potential historical meaning.

One strong opponent to this treatment is Adrienne Mayor who, in her book titled 'The First Fossil Hunters', does the opposite: she analyses myths, folk tales and the creatures featured therein to see what might have inspired the stories. Gryphons become ceratopsid fossils, tritons become forgeries, and various other types of mythological creatures become proboscideans.

Returning to Phlegon and drawing a comparison between him and Herodotos, similarities present themselves in the form of the two authors' sources for their material: both cite their sources extensively, and on occasion hail themselves as an eyewitness. Phlegon cites his sources in the same manner as Herodotos; if the latter is considered valuable to history and historiography, why not the former? The answer, based on the quotes from Giannini and Romm mentioned previously as well as Doroszewska's argumentation, seems to run along the lines of 'because Phlegon writes about supernatural occurrences in a way that is unkempt and detractive from the original form of paradoxography'.

The concept of an 'original form of paradoxography' as I employ it here, stems from the statements of Giannini and Romm.

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[8] On revenants: Collison-Morley (1912), Doroszewska (2018), Felton (1999), Iles Johnston (1999), Lawson (1926), Morgan (2013), Ogden (2008) Stramaglia (1995a, 1995b, 1999, 2000), Wendland (1911);
on hermaphrodites and other human curiosities: Allély (2003), Brisson (1978, 1997), Delcourt (1938, 1961), Doroszewska (2013a, 2013b, 2018), Garland (1995), Pataricza (2010);
on various types of oracles: Deonna (1925), Doroszewska (2018), Fontenose (1978), Nagy (1990), Ogden (2001), Parke and Wormell (1956);
on changes in sex: Brisson (1976), Gantz (1993), Irving (1990), Krappe (1928).

Neither author, however, argues or alludes to what this supposed original or superior form of “interest in the marvellous” might be or have been. Thus, I can only conclude this argument to be based on subjective opinion, which makes it an insufficient argument.

The last aspect of the argument against Phlegon as a historian from the sentiment phrased above is Phlegon’s subject matter. This is indeed in large part mythical, whilst parts that are not per definition mythical, but may instead be describing real persons with physical deformities are found mixed with more unbelievable accounts. This mixture of deformity and mythical may seem odd to modern readers, but to Phlegon and his contemporaries, both were seen as omens of the supernatural. Jeremy D. Popkin states that “The Greek and Roman historians were not modern rationalists: they lived in a world that believed in various supernatural powers and took omens seriously” (Popkin, 2021, p. 35-36), explaining why Phlegon (and other paradoxographers) included natural birth defects with accounts of mythical creatures: both were seen as serious signs from gods. In addition to this explanation of his subject matter, Phlegon’s way of describing all of the occurrences he mentions does also fit with Popkin’s idea of ancient historians: ancient historians’ “efforts to create a realistic way of describing past events were part of a broader striving to understand the world and represent it accurately” (Popkin, 2021, p. 27). I argue that Phlegon’s writing does fit this description, as Phlegon mentions sources consistently, refrains from sensationalist language, and keeps his entries to the point, never giving more information than necessary. This, in a sense, also accounts for the lack of uniformity in the length of his writings: Phlegon adds no extra information when there is no more to say; when no information should be omitted, he does not omit any. While this does result in a more heterogeneous structure, it also means that every individual account contains all the information one needs to understand it, at least at a basic level.

2.2 'KEEPERS OF THE WONDERS'

As previously mentioned, the 'keepers of the wonders' constitute a group of whom very little is known. Their exact number, for example, remains uncertain, though sources refer to them as a plurality. What can be established, however, is that Phlegon was among them, as the 'Keepers of the Wonders' are mentioned both in relation to Phlegon and as being an institution during the time of Pausanias, a contemporary of Phlegon. Mayor says the following: "[...] the 'keepers of the wonders' at the Sanctuary of Dionysus in the Emperor's Gardens in Rome informed Pausanias [...]." (Mayor, 2023, p. 142).

Mary Beard relates the existence of the 'keepers of the wonders' as an institution under Augustus, right before mentioning Phlegon and his work, specifically singling out the centaur he 'catalogues' in the imperial storage (Beard, 2023, p. 156-157). Their existence is more directly related to Augustus and his 'sea monster room', after which no definitive mention of them exists until Hadrian and Phlegon. It is thus possible that the group was dissolved at some point in the intervening years, though when, or even if, this did indeed occur, remains uncertain. It is at least extremely probable that they did serve under Tiberius, Augustus' successor; Tiberius' interest in nature and natural history are attested in sources (Mayor, 2023, p. 144; Paris & Yanick, 2008) and given that the institution was already extant and thus required no additional effort from him, it is all but certain that the 'keepers of the wonders' were present under Tiberius.

The 'keepers of the wonders' can be assumed to be connected to Claudius through a quote from Pliny the Elder, who wrote under Claudius about a centaur brought to, stored and conserved in Rome (which heavily implies relevant expertise), though no explicit mention is made of them. Any other emperors may have disbanded the group, though no mention of this action is made either. If they did disband the group, it must have come back into existence by the time of Hadrian, and given that both Hadrian's interests lay in similar places as Augustus's, and Hadrian attempted in certain ways to emulate Augustus (Perowne, 1960, p. 45, 58,72).

I argue that, even if the 'Keepers of the Wonders' had been abolished in the time between, it is certain that the office was reinstated by the time of Hadrian, and most likely by Hadrian himself.

Little is known of the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ throughout their existence, but what is known is that the ‘keepers of the wonders’ fulfilled the role of a court antiquarian. What little is known for certain is that they collected artefacts for the emperor, cared for them, and served as curators for his collection (Beard, 2023, p. 156-157). What exactly their tasks entailed beyond this basic description is unknown, as are their number and the terms of their employment. Were they hand-picked by the emperor? Did they serve purely the emperor or the Roman state?

One possibility is that they are a form of ‘*curatores aedium sacrarum et operum locorumque publicorum’,* the curators responsible for “the supervision of the sacred temples, works, and public places” (Eck, 2009, p. 239). This was a group of elected officials tasked with the care for public and holy places such as temples. One of the differences between the two groups is that the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ seem to not have been elected officials, but rather in permanent service.

Another possibility is that they served the emperor in a private capacity, in a similar manner to the Praetorian Guard, as Mary Beard suggests when she states that a tusk of the Caledonian boar was kept in “one of the **imperial** horti on the outskirts of the city [...] under the management of **his** keepers of the wonders”[9] (Beard, 2023, p. 156; emphasis added).

Thus, their service was exclusively at the emperor’s behest. Unlike the Praetorian Guard, though, the ‘keepers of the wonders’ did not garner political might through their physical location (as the Praetorian Guard were the only legions allowed to be permanently stationed in Italy, and were specifically encamped in Rome itself) nor through their military prowess. Moreover, the ‘keepers of the wonders’ seem to have been significantly less visible to the public, as evidenced by the much smaller body of literature concerning them relative to the Praetorian Guard. As such, due to their much more private position and lack of might to influence a political manoeuvre, the ‘keepers of the wonders’ were an organisation without any organisation-wide political aspiration.

The ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ being in private service raises another question: how were they recruited? If Phlegon is to be taken as an example, the keepers of the wonders might have been freedmen. This is a logical assumption, as several emperors had freedmen as prominent advisors.

[9] Augustus’s collection is detailed more in chapter four, ‘other collections’.

Positions close to the emperor were available to knowledgeable freedmen, making it possible that some may have served with the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. Given that freedmen were prominently present in positions of power during the empire, this is a logical argument despite Phlegon being the only example that is known to us.
A refutation of this problem, and another option for the recruitment of the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’, comes from Boatwright (2022); she states that “Hadrian’s freedman Phlegon of Tralles was a prolific scholar [...]. Hadrian’s interest in such Greek intellectuals, however, went beyond employing them in public offices and his own service in the capital.” (Boatwright, 2022, p. 205-206).This passage makes the interesting distinction between public offices and the emperor’s ‘own service’; while normally this separation is to be expected, in the case of ‘intellectuals’ such as Phlegon it becomes more intriguing: what private employment would Hadrian specifically need intellectuals for?
While Boatwright does not specify what exactly she defines as ‘private’ employment versus ‘public’ offices, a quick glance at various Roman emperors shows that this distinction is not always clear, with various emperors using public officers and the state to benefit themselves. This, then, further emphasises the question: given that it was almost customary for emperors to use the state for personal benefit, what sort of employment did Hadrian require for his ‘private service? In other words, what sorts of tasks could not be reasonably entrusted to a public servant? Aside from perhaps some form of a ‘general manager’ of his properties and associated staff, one thing immediately comes to mind: to ensure the emperor was supplied with entertainment outside of the public, state-organised entertainment. This might be interpreted as an author who enjoyed the emperor’s patronage in exchange for writing what the emperor requested, or the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. Phlegon, it seems from works that cover him in detail (see Doroszewska 2012, Ferwerda 2004 and Hansen 1998), can be considered both of these things: he wrote for the emperor’s tastes, and at the same time seems to have been involved with Hadrian’s collection to a large extent. Phlegon seems to not have been the only one, judging from the generality of the quote from Boatwright above: I interpret the wording of ‘them in [...] his own service’ to mean that Hadrian had several ‘Greek intellectuals’ like Phlegon in his private service, which makes it likely that several of the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ can be assumed to be such Greek intellectuals.

Another option is that they were recruited from the aforementioned *curatores aedium sacrarum et operum locorumque publicorum*. This seems logical, as these individuals already had experience in the care and curation of artefacts. However, since this position was one of the earlier positions in the *Cursus Honorum*, the Roman organisation of public servants which often led to more and increasingly prestigious political opportunities, it seems an unreliable source for recruitment. In the *Cursus Honorum*, Roman politicians and other public servants held functions for a specific length of time which were available from a certain age, and after their term was complete they gained access to higher-ranking functions. Thus, if one had completed their term as a *curator aedium sacrarum et operum locorumque publicorum*, the logical continuation would be to pursue a higher position along the *Cursus Honorum*.

Another problem is that politicians were likely not so well-versed in artefacts from the farther provinces or neighbouring empires; this does not mean that no keepers of the wonders were recruited from this group, even if their employment was only temporary until their political career could be advanced again.

A fourth, and, I argue, the most likely option, is recruitment from the *frumentarii*. The *frumentarii* were a versatile group, and their tasks varied greatly. They were originally soldiers, who were then chosen by a provincial governor or other high-ranking official in the province in which they were stationed to serve as a courier to the emperor. Once arriving in Rome, they would report to the 'Castra Peregrinorum' ('camp of the foreigners'). While they were in Rome, they were under direct and exclusive command of the emperor. Besides their courier duties, they were also often tasked with missions revolving around espionage, murder, bribery and execution. They also served as a form of military police since they were partially distanced from the legions; in many ways, then, they can be said to be the 'secret police' of the Roman empire (Ermatinger, 2018b, p. 94) . This varied career focussing on fieldwork in the provinces means they would be perfect 'field agents' for the keepers of the wonders. An additional argument for the *frumentarii* being a source of recruitment is the fact that, upon completion of their military service,a number of them may have desired to continue to serve the emperor. Should these individuals be unfit for military service in some way or simply unwilling to continue military duty in the army, the 'Keepers of the Wonders' provide an alternative career path.

A soldier with one leg might be unfit for active military service, but the experience and connections gained over years of service could render him a valuable asset for the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. Additionally, Hadrian is known to have used the *frumentarii* for more personal ends, as Guy de la Bédoyère confirms by saying “[...] his spies, the *frumentarii*, which he used for all possible private investigations [...]” (De la Bédoyère, 2023, p. 212).

One limitation of this theory is that networks of military informants and contacts may not necessarily know about artefacts, and the soldiers themselves likely knew little about the care for them. Due to the problems mentioned above, it may be the case that the keepers of the wonders had two distinct ‘branches’: one focussed on acquisition of artefacts, the other for the care of artefacts. The first might be made up mostly of ex-*frumentarii*, the second mostly of ex-*curatores aedium sacrarum*, with both being supplemented with erudite freedmen.

A final major, yet quite simple, question regarding the keepers of the wonders remains: why? Why go through all this trouble? From the keepers’ perspective this answer is simple: the emperor pays, and he likely pays well. Their service was likely also personally motivated: they enjoyed the work and the travel, and they possessed a genuine interest in antiquities and natural wonders. There are plenty of reasons one might at least consider becoming a keeper of the wonders.

From the emperors’ perspective, this question comes down purely to personal motivations. Evidently the emperor needed someone to care for his artefacts, and/or needed someone to track down and acquire new ones to add to his collection. Why he did not delegate these tasks to existing staff members, I argue, comes down to a matter of experience. Perhaps the emperor was afraid his staff might harm his prized possessions, or might return empty-handed after an expedition, wasting time and resources. Hiring experts in either field would ensure the work would be completed properly.

2.2.1 KNOWLEDGE IS POWER: WHY RULERS WANTED TO KNOW

There remains the question of why it was this knowledge of the natural world and history that attracted the attention of those in power, or even conferred power itself, so much so that it necessitated the employment of such figures as the ‘keepers of the wonders’. Examples of this phenomenon are present throughout history and in many cultures: Roman emperors and their ‘keepers of the wonders’, Roman aristocracy such as Pliny the Elder writing and reading works on nature, seventeenth-century European nobility with their ‘cabinets of curiosities’, Islamic nobles holding botanical gardens (Boivin 2012, 456), Assyrian kings and their botanical-zoological gardens (Düring and Swerida, 2025), Japanese magistrates and their private collections of artefacts (Lachaud, 2013), Chinese emperors and nobility and their collections of artefacts (Zhu, 2024, p. 24): all are testament to the interest in the natural world expressed by those in some form of power. As illustrated in the examples above, this interest consistently takes the form of collections, whether of living creatures, documented accounts, artefacts, or some combination, reflecting the widespread presence of the urge to collect across cultures.

But why? For czar Peter the Great of Russia (1672-1725 CE), the answer was symbolic. Peter the Great amassed a collection of natural artefacts throughout his reign, and founded a museum in Saint Petersburg to house his vast collection. This collection contained trees, plants, flowers, birds, reptiles, skulls, human remains and even live humans with deformities. This collection was meant to symbolise Peter the Great’s reign over all of the natural world, not just the ‘normal’ people of Russia (Neverov and Seidmann, 2017, p. 54). According to Yujie Zhu, for the Chinese emperors this ‘urge to collect’ was based on their desire to associate themselves with, and remind their subjects of, China’s glorious, mythical past (Zhu, 2024, p. 25), while Anders Andrén says this was done “to connect with their ancestors, transmit social morality, and educate the people” (Andrén, 1998, p. 62).

For the Roman emperors, these reasons are somewhat unlikely; the Romans already had privately worshipped their ancestor gods in the form of the *penates,* while social morality was transmitted through laws and the emperor as an exemplar, not his collection.

Educating the people may have been a motive, along with the desire to connect to Rome's mythical past, ancestry and founding, and the symbolic function of an imperial collection as exemplified by that of Peter the Great is also exceedingly likely to have been part of the reason Roman emperors amassed collections of their own. For Hadrian specifically, especially the motif of education is congruent with his person: Hadrian is generally described as an intelligent man, but almost never is he mentioned as being especially reverent towards the *penates* nor his ancestors, except Trajan whom he had deified. Hadrian was also said to have gone to places of learning and debated the teachers there (Magie, 1922, p. 61). Thus, I argue Hadrian owned and displayed his collection for the reasons of education and symbolising his dominion over the entire natural world.

3. HADRIAN

Much is to be said, and has been said, regarding Hadrian. To bring order to this chapter, I have elected to divide it in three: first, I will detail Hadrian as the emperor of the Roman empire. This subchapter will include information regarding his rise to the office, official presence, tasks, staff, and a brief comparison of him to other Roman emperors. Second, I will analyse Hadrian as a person. This means his personal, unofficial correspondence, as well as personal business conducted through the office of emperor; that is, actions Hadrian undertook as a private person that were enabled or made possible through his station as emperor, but which can not be classified as ‘official’. Finally, in the third section of this chapter, I will go further into detail regarding Hadrian’s collection, what exactly I mean by this term, and what it is likely to have contained.

3.1. HADRIAN AS AN EMPEROR

3.1.1. RISE TO POWER

The course of Hadrian's political career is very well documented, and every step in his political career is known, as is typical of emperors. Perowne (1960, p. 30) mentions the first of Hadrian's political functions as being in the Probate court, followed by "two other minor posts, in connection with the organization of ceremonials and the keeping of the official calendar" (Perowne, 1960, p. 30). Perowne gives no official title for these functions, though we can assume the former to be that of *Aedile*, a position concerned with both public construction projects as well as organising public games (Ermatinger, 2018a, p. 62), while the latter correlates with the *Scriptores Historia Augusta* naming him as holding the position of *Quaestor* (Magie, 1922, p. 9), further expanded upon by Opper (2008, p. 46) who names this position as *Quaestor caesaris*. Given the connectedness between political and military functions, Hadrian was given the position of tribune for the second legion *Auxiliary,* followed by the same position of the fifth legion *Macedonian*, by which point he was twenty years old (Perowne, 1960, p. 31). Tribunes are relatively high-ranking officers, holding a rank one step above that of a centurion. The position was commonly used in Roman society to start a political career (Kiley & Black, 2022, p. 144). After the news of Trajan's adoption by Nerva, Hadrian again transferred, this time to the twenty-second legion *Original Loyals*. Perowne (1960, p. 33) states that this transfer was caused by his fellow officers of the fifth *Macedonian* sending Hadrian to congratulate his ward and uncle Trajan. After Trajan's accession, Hadrian fought in Trajan's campaigns in Dacia and the Levant, presumably still as tribune, and in between served as a clerk for the senate. After the First Dacian War, in 105 CE, Hadrian was named tribune of the people. Later that same year, when the Second Dacian War broke out, Trajan reassigned Hadrian to the first legion *Minerva's Own*. Hadrian's rise continued steadily: after serving with the legion, Hadrian attained the praetorship, and Trajan granted him two million sesterces to fund public games(Perowne, 1960, p. 40). Although Perowne suggests that this was likely connected to the honour of the office, he does not specify this, and no other sources mention the gift.

Another year later, Hadrian was presented with the governorship of Pannonia Inferior, corresponding roughly to modern-day Hungary, Serbia and Romania. After this, at thirty-three years of age, Hadrian became consul. Three years later, in 112 CE, Athens named Hadrian *Archon eponymous* (Opper, 2008, p. 47). This prestigious position was the Athenian equivalent of a consul, and Perowne (1960, p. 41) speculates that the Athenians (as, by this time, did others) knew Hadrian was the favoured heir, and elected him to the position of *Archon* to enter his good graces and hopefully maintain positive relations with the new emperor from the moment he would enter office. By the time of Trajan's Parthian campaign in 113 CE, he appointed Hadrian governor of Syria. At the end of the Parthian campaign, Trajan left Hadrian in command of the eastern armies, himself to return to Rome, but too late: his illness felled him. Before his death, he adopted Hadrian as his official heir. In 117, at forty-two years of age, Hadrian had become emperor.

Immediately upon his accession, rumours started to circulate; Trajan had not adopted Hadrian until after his death, had not even intended to adopt Hadrian, or had not intended to adopt anyone at all. Some time after, a plot against Hadrian was discovered by his old ward, Attianus. Four prominent consuls, by the names of Palma, Celsus, Nigrinus and Lusius, were executed. Though Hadrian did not give orders for this measure, Perowne (1960, p. 49) notes that it did earn him distrust and disfavour, for it was commonly accepted that he was responsible for the executions. The deaths of these four men were to remain a stain on Hadrian's rule, and along with the executions he had performed at the end of his reign were the reason the Scriptores Historia Augusta state that he died "Hated by all" (Magie, 1922, p. 77).

3.1.2. HADRIAN IN PERSPECTIVE

Three emperors are particularly relevant for comparison with Hadrian: his predecessor and uncle, Trajan; the first emperor and Hadrian's role model, Augustus; and Hadrian's indirect, yet personally important, heir: Marcus Aurelius.

Starting with Trajan, Hadrian's direct predecessor, presents a strong contrast between the two. Where Hadrian pursued a largely defensive military policy, even giving certain lands back to their original rulers when he came to power, Trajan was an expansionist and aggressively fought lengthy campaigns to expand the empire until his death. Moreover, though both emperors were greatly engaged with the Roman war machine, Hadrian balanced this engagement with a broad range of intellectual and cultural interests, including rhetoric, history, and architecture. Trajan, by contrast, is described largely as being almost entirely dedicated to military affairs, though he is noted to have enjoyed the company of learned men despite being a comparatively simple man himself (Perowne, 1960, p. **YY**). Where Trajan is characterised as a practical man of "simple habits" (Cary, 1955, p. 369), Hadrian is described as learned; further, he seems rarely to be entirely focussed on any given task, and biographies emphasise the wide range of interests pulling at his attention. In terms of governance, both men are comparable; Trajan is said to have restored public buildings without boasting about his work and without any harm done to the workers (Cary, 1955, p. 371), which is similar to descriptions of Hadrian's restorations, which he is said to have "dedicated all in the names of their original builders" (Magie, 1922, p. 59-61). In summary, Trajan and Hadrian differ in their military strategy and the view of their education, but are comparable in their construction efforts and economic policies. Importantly, as described before, Trajan made extensive use of the *frumentarii*, which I suggest Hadrian used as a source of recruitment for his 'keepers of the wonders'. While Trajan amassed a significant quantity of war spoils, he did not maintain a nature historical collection comparable to Hadrian's. The closest specimen to a nature historical specimen is described by Cassius Dio. Dio, when describing gifts Trajan received from foreign rulers to maintain a positive relation with him, says that "One of these gifts was a horse that had been taught to do obeisance; it would kneel on its fore legs and place its head beneath the feet of whoever stood near." (Cary, 1925, p. 397).

Marcus Aurelius, who would later succeed to the imperial throne, was adopted under a condition set by Hadrian: for Antoninus Pius to be adopted by Hadrian, he was required to adopt Marcus Aurelius as his heir (Perowne, 1960, p. 176). Marcus Aurelius eventually ruled from 161 to 180 CE, following Antoninus Pius, whose reign spanned the twenty-two years between Hadrian and Aurelius. The reason for comparing Hadrian with Marcus Aurelius rather than with Antoninus Pius, his immediate successor, is precisely this conditional adoption: Marcus Aurelius's adoption reflects Hadrian's personal and political priorities and preferences. The reason for my selection of Marcus Aurelius over his co-emperor and fellow adoptee, Lucius Verus, is that Verus was the son of Lucius Aelius Caesar, the man Hadrian had originally selected as his heir. Lucius Aelius Caesar, however, died before Hadrian and thus had never ascended to the throne. Thus, the adoption of Lucius Verus had been because of a lingering, sentimental loyalty of Hadrian towards Lucius Aelius Caesar.

I argue, then, that Hadrian meant for Antoninus Pius to manage the empire until Marcus Aurelius came to be old and experienced enough to be emperor, a conclusion supported by Michael Kulinkowski stating "... he [i.e. Antoninus Pius] played the role of the frugal senator and careful estate manager to the full" (Kulinkowski, 2016, p. 41). Following this line of argumentation, Hadrian made Antoninus Pius adopt Lucius Verus to have the latter fulfil the role of 'plan b'.

A further argument for my selection is that Antoninus Pius gave Marcus Aurelius the title of *Caesar*, a title applied to the heir apparent, alongside many other functions and honours which he did not give to Lucius Verus (Kulikowski, 2016, p. 38). Hadrian's decision to adopt an heir a generation ahead of himself was unprecedented among Roman emperors, indicating that he must have had compelling reasons for this choice. Mary Beard relays that imperial adoption was "seen as a way to establish an imperial meritocracy" (Beard, 2023, p. 78), leading to the argument that Hadrian saw potential in Marcus Aurelius to be a great emperor. Marcus Aurelius later confirmed Hadrian's hopes; he too is considered one of the five 'Good Emperors' and ruled for 19 years, from 161 until 180 CE. His reign was marked by the contrast between various external wars and the relative peace within the Empire. Marcus Aurelius himself is perhaps the emperor who is known best to us, a fact attributed to his 'Meditations'.

Marcus Aurelius wrote this work as a combination of sorts of a diary and personal code, which Michael Kulikowski describes thus: “throughout his life, while on campaign or struggling through the daily duties of an emperor, he jotted down his philosophical thoughts in pithy, occasionally moving, Greek prose, leaving to posterity the still widely read collection of his *Meditations* (or *Eis heauton*, ‘To himself’)” (Kulikowski, 2016, p. 45).

Augustus was both similar to and different from Hadrian. On a personal level, the two show several similarities: both Augustus and Hadrian were somewhat humble as far as emperors are concerned, both valued Grecian art and culture, both were interested in the natural world as can be seen from their collections. In terms of rulership, however, there is a large degree of separation. This is to be expected, considering Hadrian inherited a politically, economically and militarily stable and strong empire, whereas Augustus had to create one. Despite this key difference, both men seem to have been reluctant to always openly show their position: Augustus wished to be called the ‘*Princeps’* or ‘First Citizen’ (a title which Hadrian also carried during his reign), and the senate remained a relatively important institution during most of his reign. Hadrian meanwhile fostered a significantly more equal relationship with his friends and commanders, especially in comparison with emperors such as Nero or Tiberius. Both men also employed the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’, who are first mentioned as serving under Augustus; I therefore argue that he first created them. Both Augustus and Hadrian also collected nature-historical artefacts, and had them displayed in some semi-public location: Augustus had some giant corpses interred in the Gardens of Sallust, while Hadrian’s ‘Centaur of Saune’ was accessible in his imperial storages (both of these specimens are detailed more in their respective chapters of 4.1.1 and 3.3.2).

3.2. HADRIAN AS A PERSON

"[Hadrian] was, in the same person, austere and genial, dignified and playful, dilatory and quick to act, niggardly and generous, deceitful and straightforward, cruel and merciful, and always in all things changeable." (Magie, 1922, p. 47).

This three-dimensional contradictory nature would at first glance seem to make a highly unpredictable person, which in turn makes a highly dangerous emperor.

In Hadrian it seems to have gone quite the opposite direction, with a few exceptions at the beginning and end of his reign discussed previously. There are no known documents written by friends or acquaintances of Hadrian's which reveal their private thoughts regarding their imperial comrade; while regrettable as any lack of sources is, this is also logical – with someone so unpredictable as Hadrian in a position of nigh absolute power, speaking a negative opinion aloud could well lead to disaster.

Once again, the Scriptores Historia Augusta give a fitting description of this precarious situation:

"His friends he enriched greatly, even though they did not ask it, while to those who did ask, he refused nothing. And yet he was always ready to listen to whispers about his friends, and in the end he treated almost all of them as enemies, even the closest and even those whom he had raised to the highest of honours" (Magie, 1922, p. 47).

Being a friend of Hadrian seems to have been a double-edged sword: great riches and influence, yet a chance that the one man with both more riches and more influence would become distrustful.

Along with this contradictory, unpredictable nature, Hadrian was interested in many subjects, which also often at first glance seem to stand in stark contrast. This becomes clear from the title of Anthony Birley's book about Hadrian, fittingly titled *The Restless Emperor* (Birley, 1997), the variety of essays in *De Wereld van Hadrianus* (Erdkamp et al., 2015), and a quote from the Scriptores Historia Augusta:

"In poetry and in letters Hadrian was greatly interested. In arithmetic, geometry, and painting he was very expert. Of his knowledge of flute-playing and singing he even boasted openly. He ran to excess in the gratification of his desires, and wrote much verse about the subjects of his passion. He composed love-poems too. He was also a connoisseur of arms, had a thorough knowledge of warfare, and knew how to use gladiatorial weapons." (Magie, 1922, p. 47).

Hadrian could well be described using the Renaissance ideal of the *homo universalis*– that is, he was a man with both interest and talent in a wide array of subjects, from martial arts and warfare to architecture and poetry.

3.2.1. PERSONAL WRITINGS

Writings from Hadrian's hand survive which illustrate his personality, although most of these surviving writings are of an official character. Paul J. Alexander has compiled these writings in his essay 'Letters and Speeches of the Emperor Hadrian' (1938). The compiled writings and Alexander's commentary serve to create a clear image of Hadrian's character even as it was adapted for official correspondence. Alexander succinctly emphasises Hadrian's character and rulership style in the last sentence of his essay: "Lance, Muse and Public Justice, the latter promoting good deeds, were indeed the three foci of Hadrian's activity." (Alexander, 1938, p. 175). This is evident from the official correspondence: in every fragment regarding the military, Hadrian emphasises their order and discipline. In every political and civic matter, he chooses to approach issues according to old custom (even when that means letting someone else decide the matter), and wishes the outcome to be acceptable to all parties involved. An example of this is the following text, an answer to a legate regarding a court case: "You can tell better than I how much you can rely on the witnesses, what kind of people and what rank they are, what their reputation is and which of them seemed to tell a straight story; whether they all retailed the same account devised beforehand or gave likely and extemporaneous answers to your questions." (Alexander, 1938, p. 152). Hadrian had ultimate authority, meaning if he made a decision in this case it was to be accepted; however, by choosing to let the legate pass judgment and telling him that the decision was better to be made by him, Hadrian presents himself as a humble, intelligent man. He knows that he knows little about this dispute, and thus trusts the judgment of those who are more attuned to the case. This pattern repeats throughout the other writings documented by Alexander.

3.2.2. 'Unofficial official business'

Hadrian's collecting habit is scarcely mentioned in the sources, and most sources do not mention it at all. Nevertheless, we can reasonably infer he at least avidly collected Greek works of art, particularly statues, based on their presence at his villa and his particular fondness for Greek culture which is well documented in for example Birley (1997, p. 16-17). This creates the impression that Hadrian was only interested in collecting very specific sets of objects, which I argue is inconsistent with other descriptions of his character, such as those mentioned before wherein he is described as very broadly interested. If he truly were so broadly interested (and knowledgeable), why would he limit his collections to exclusively Greek material, or, even more specific, only Greek statues? While Hadrian was a well-known grecophile, going so far as to earn him the nickname '*Graeculus*' or 'Little Greek', I find it unlikely that Hadrian solely collected Greek statues or material culture. 'One thing leads to another', as the saying goes, and Keith S. Thomson points out that similarly, 'a collection' may very well turn into 'a collection of collections'. He states that "Collecting is addictive: one yearns for the next 'high' from a find. [...] Sooner or later, however, many collectors decide that a particular field is no longer giving them pleasure. [...] How does one start again? The easy solution is to change fields [...]. Another tactic is to get in first: to collect something that has not been collected before." (Thomson, 2002, p. 32-33). I argue this characterization, while Thomsen applies it to modern people, is equally at home in antiquity, especially with the upper echelon of society which, more so than the lower rungs, had the financial means and physical space to sustain several collections simultaneously. A difference between the people Thomson mentions and Hadrian is that, while Thomson's collectors tend to sell their collections once they are 'done', Hadrian seemingly did not. I argue this to be due to the difference in scale; Thomson's collectors are of many different social standings, from poor to aristocratic, yet they all run out of space or money, or both. Hadrian most certainly did not. The imperial treasury was healthy due both to Trajan's conquests and his and Hadrian's economic policies, and Hadrian's palaces and villas offered more than enough space to incorporate a museum, storage hall, or both. This is probably also why there is so little textual evidence for Hadrian's collecting: most of it happened behind closed doors.

Hadrian could keep busy with affairs of the state while his ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ did the collecting for him, from acquisition to transport to storage and display; the public never had to know Hadrian was involved at all.

Hadrian’s hobby of hunting, by contrast, is much more well-documented. Nearly every biography mentions his fondness for this sport at several points. Examples include Stewart Perowne characterizing Hadrian as “the hunter and Hellenist” (Perowne, 1960, p.30) and Anthony R. Birley emphasizing Hadrian’s “passion for hunting” in a passage otherwise about Hadrian’s interest and love for Antinous (Birley, 1997, p. 2-3). The differences between collecting and hunting explain the difference in their level of documentation: whereas collecting can be done invisibly from a palace (be it in Rome or in the countryside), hunting required venturing outside, or ordering animals to be brought to palace grounds on occasion, including the associated transports. Going hunting in publicly accessible lands would also warrant bodyguards: should someone with ill will towards the emperor know of his fondness for hunting, Hadrian would have been an easy target for assassination were he unprotected. Further, in accordance with the *Scriptores Historia Augusta* (26.3), I propose that Hadrian may have occasionally invited his friends and perhaps senators to go hunting with him, making the event much more noticeable to the empire than what went on behind the doors of the emperor’s private residence even if the hunt took place on private grounds. I do not believe him to have “always” done this, as the *Scriptores Historia Augusta* claim, though perhaps these hunts were the only ones known to anyone but Hadrian and his guard, outwardly presenting the illusion that he always invited friends to join him.

3.3. HADRIAN AND HIS COLLECTION

3.3.1. DEFINITION: WHAT DID HADRIAN'S COLLECTION CONSIST OF?

Mentions of Hadrian's collection are exceedingly scarce; even Phlegon, one of Hadrian's top freedmen and one of the 'Keepers of the Wonders', the group supposedly responsible for adding to and maintaining the collection, only mentions it implicitly (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104). Nor does he name a specific 'exhibition' where the collection can be viewed, only that a specific centaur specimen can be viewed 'in the imperial storages' (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104). As no source exists that specifies a distinction between the imperial treasury and the 'collection' Hadrian had maintained, an argument could be made that these two are the same. I would argue against this point, and say there is a distinction. Even if everything in the treasury is accounted for, no ruler would let citizens wander around and view, potentially even touch and handle their treasure; especially in antiquity, when modern security precautions such as safety glass, alarms, and cameras had not been invented yet. Guarding a treasure accessible to the general public would simply cost too much manpower, and thus salary, to be worth maintaining. As such, the treasury was not accessible except to those of a sufficient rank and occupying a position relevant to the treasury. Collections in Antiquity were not as surveillanced as they are now, but some protection against thieves and vandalism is always desirable when valuable artefacts are involved. The imperial palace on the Palatine Hill in Rome, the place where a large portion of Hadrian's collection is likely to have been housed, had at least a form of counter-thievery mechanism: its floorplan consisted of hairpin turns, dead ends, open spaces and many different levels (Beard, 2023, p. 151). In addition, its entrance hallway was scarcely decorated to give no access to hiding spots, (Berad, 2023, p. 153), had regular guard patrols and it and other passages were unlit (Beard, 2023, p. 140). Together with the proximity of the Praetorian Guard, which is especially significant for the section of the collection stored in Hadrian's palace in the Sallustian Gardens (discussed later onwards), this arrangement may have provided an effective deterrent against theft and vandalism. However, the rooms where the collection itself was housed are likely to have been under less strict surveillance. The location of these rooms is not known for certain, but Boatwright tells us the following:

“A door in the west wall of the Basilica was closed, and two series of Hadrianic spur walls were built between the columns of the northwestern porticus of Domitian's palace and the wall of the building. Each of these spur walls, except the fifth from the north, was broken by a central doorway to make a continuous passage [...].The brick stamps of these walls give a terminus post quern of 126. The spur walls of the second set [have] a terminus post quem of 129. In the area [...] are Hadrianic walls that form a series of small rooms, about 4.5 meters deep, 3.5 meters wide” (Boatwright, 2022, p. 152-154). Looking at the map Boatwright provides (see Figure 1 below), we can clearly see the new sets of additional rooms Hadrian had constructed are all to the left of rooms in which guests or the public would be received, with the paths towards these extra rooms very clearly leading exclusively to them. The rooms are small, too small to have a social function, and there are too many to serve any minor function. It is based on these arguments, noting their size, number, location and tiered dating, in combination with Hadrian’s previously documented admiration for and collection of art and artefacts, that I argue these rooms to have been either an archival storage of sorts, or a private museum; both of these options I will elaborate now.

First, the option that these formed an archival storage complex. This conclusion is based on the division of the rooms, and I suggest that these separations served to separately store different categories of artefacts based on various criteria, such as medium (sculpture, relief, painting, armaments, animals), subject (mythological, personal, historical), or material (specific types of marble, bronze, plaster, biological). If this is the case, the relatively secluded location of these rooms is explained as being the logical conclusion of these rooms not being intended to receive people, except for brief entries by imperial staff to retrieve or store works. This would also provide the location of the ‘imperial storehouses’ that Phlegon mentions in his *Mirabilia* (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104), thus answering one of the major remaining practical questions originating from that text. Another aspect that is explained by this theory is the sequenced construction described in the quote from Boatwright above: the more artefacts Hadrian amassed, the more storage he would require, and thus the more storage would need to be constructed over time.

The second option is that these rooms served as a private museum of sorts. In this case, the individual rooms served like those of a museum, grouping parts of Hadrian's collection into 'exhibits' based on the artefacts' theme, medium or any other criterion. If this were the case, the location of the 'museum' in relation to other rooms, being at the far side of the palace (see Figure 1 below), is explained by a point which is discussed in more detail in chapter 4.1, *Roman Collections*: the probable magnitude of this collection, judging by the space reserved for its housing, may have caused visitors who saw it to grow contemptuous towards the emperor, as establishing large and grandiose private collections without donating a similar amount to the public or the state was seen as a sign of a bad character. Hadrian, already being 'stained' by the assassinations associated with him since the start of his reign, will have wished to avoid further damage to his reputation and thus decided to build his 'museum' in a more distanced, smaller area of the palace where guests were significantly less likely to wander in and see his vast collection. The conclusion that Hadrian's collection was largely located in his palace on the Palatine is supported by another quote from Boatwright:

"When he was in Italy, Hadrian probably resided in Rome during the winter in the imperial palace on the Palatine." (Boatwright, 2022, p. 150). Combining Boatwright's theory in this quote with the fact that Hadrian greatly enjoyed art and the collection thereof, and the fact that while there is reference to the 'imperial storehouses' we still do not know their precise location, I arrive at the aforementioned conclusion that Hadrian must have stored and displayed a large amount of art in his Palatine palace. This is due to not only the evidence presented before, but also the simple fact that the palace was enormous –more than large enough to house (a significant portion of) Hadrian's collection– and the observation that housing the collection in the most likely place for it to be displayed cut down on transportation costs, times, and workers, thus streamlining the process of switching which pieces are on display. From this, it logically follows that the majority of the pieces on display were also located in the imperial palace on the Palatine.

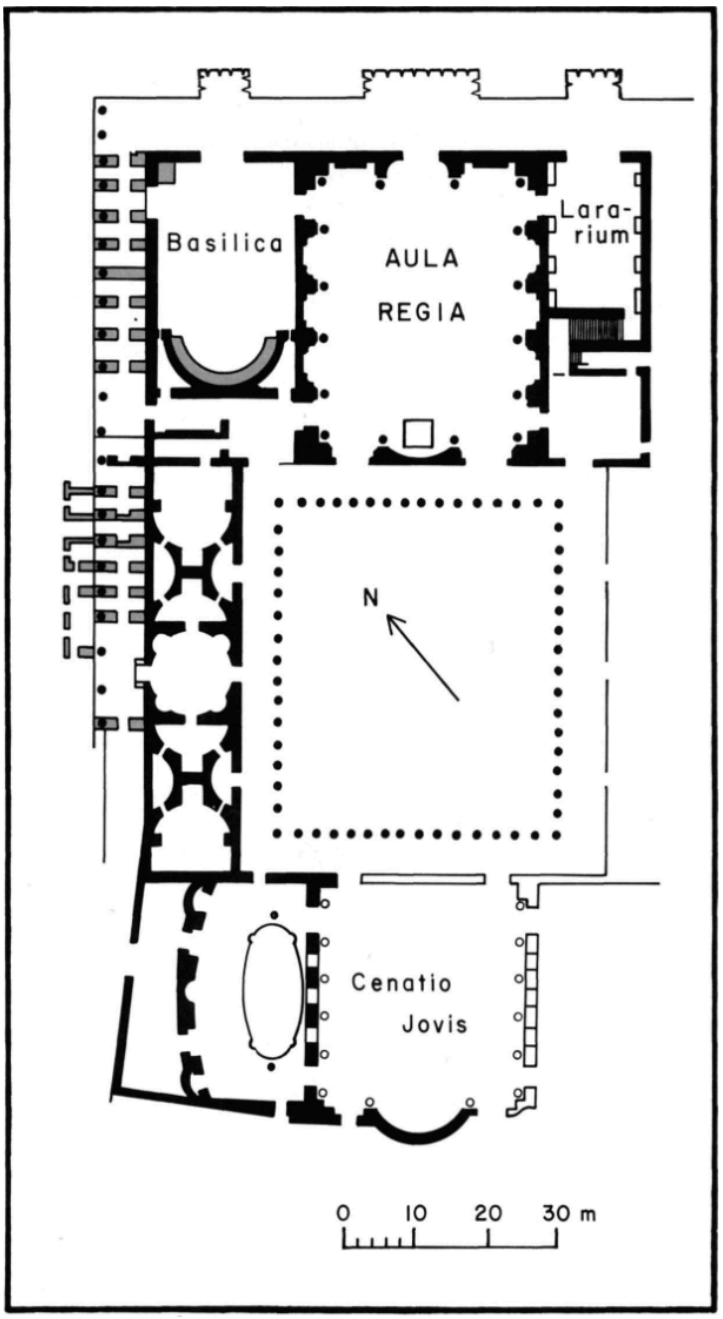

Image 1: floorplan of the northwestern part of the palace on the Palatine Hill. The rooms discussed above are located in the top and middle left of the image. Image from Boatwright (2021).

However, Hadrian's palace on the Palatine was not his only residence in Rome, nor was it the only one with space to store his collection: of the various palaces and structures in the Sallustian Gardens, located in the north-northeast of Rome, Boatwright says the following:

"[...] by far the largest and most complex is the Hadrianic Palazzo" (Boatwright, 2022, p. 156). The complexity referred to here is in large part due to the many sidechambers and separate rooms (see Figure 2 below), of which most of those on the ground floor were not in direct connection with one another, instead being connected to rooms on the floor above which were in direct connection with one another and connected to the floor below via stairs. This arrangement was well suited for storing items that were meant to remain private. It could therefore have served as additional space to store Hadrian's extensive collection of art and artefacts, particularly in light of the earlier point regarding Roman attitudes toward large private collections.

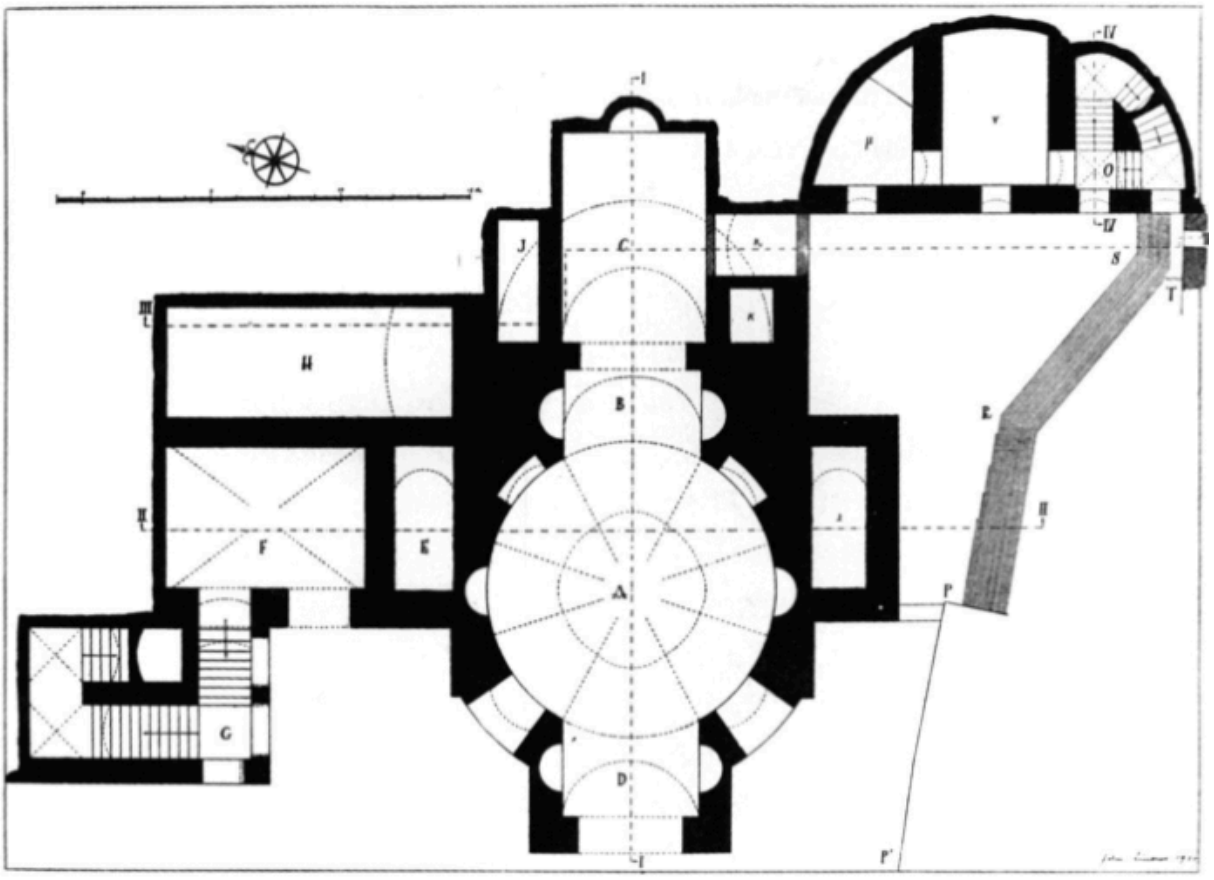

Image 2: floorplan of Hadrian's palace in the Sallustian Gardens. Image from Boatwright (2022), based on an original by Lehmann-Hartleben and Lindros (1935).

Leaving the practical nature of Hadrian's palace complexes behind, another argument for Hadrian's collection being separate from either his private wealth or the state treasury comes in the form of the aforementioned centaur specimen; while this could be considered a 'treasure', such an artefact would be either kept in special containment, or put on display; it is not 'treasure' in the sense of war spoils or other goods with monetary value directly attributed to them. This is where a key aspect of my definition of Hadrian's collection originates: artefacts in the collection can not be money, even foreign 'exotic' money, nor can monetary value be a primary or defining aspect of the artefacts. An imperial collection would not contain coins, pigeon feathers or other 'ordinary' objects, but this specific one did contain a centaur preserved in honey. 'Exotic' goods might also be a part of the collection; the Roman empire did have trade with China and India (albeit in large part indirectly with both). The scale of this trade was vast, with the historian Strabo declaring that 120 ships annually went to India and China (Strabo 2, 5.12), which is more than to any other colony or empire. The trade network was extensive and highly interwoven as we know from the Periplus of the Eritrean Sea, a document from the first century CE detailing ports around the Eritrean Sea (modern-day Red Sea), eastern coast of Africa, and the coast of India and what goods one might purchase or sell at each one. Still, it is likely that only a relatively wealthy upper class of Romans had access to these goods, and the especially unique examples ended up as display pieces for aristocrats, wealthy merchants, or even the emperor himself. This leads to another criterion: pieces in the collection cannot be common, and must be unique in some way. There is one type of collection that does not follow this trend: collections of specific types of objects, i.e. modern collections of stamps or playing cards. Since Phlegon mentions that the imperial storage contained a centaur (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104), it is safe to say that the imperial collection was not one based on a specific object category (if it was, Phlegon would certainly not speak of a single centaur, but of multiple, or would otherwise speak of a wider category such as 'mythical creatures'). This value attributed to uniqueness is also seen in some examples of cabinets of curiosities from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, which mostly contained exotic specimens (Seba, 2020, p. 6), about which I will elaborate in chapter four. Items in Hadrian's collection must thus be unique artefacts of nature-historical, cultural, historical, or mythological nature and of which monetary value is not a primary, defining characteristic.

3.3.2. HADRIAN'S COLLECTION: CONTENTS

As noted above, the precise contents of Hadrian's collection, like those of the other emperors, remain unknown. To this day no building has been excavated, either within Rome or without, which can definitively be identified as having been connected to the 'imperial storehouses', as Phlegon terms them. The imperial storehouses are unknown to us in all but the fact that they existed, as documentation of their existence does not survive aside from Phlegon mentioning them off-handedly. I do argue that, if these buildings were in Rome, they were not constructed by Hadrian but rather already existed, with Hadrian repurposing them. I argue this based on an observation by Perowne (1960, p. 111) who says "Hadrian wanted his buildings to be impressive, imperial and grand". If Hadrian had constructed the imperial storehouses himself, they would have followed this pattern established by his other works. Since no such grand building has been found, it is likely the imperial storehouses were situated in a building created by a previous emperor. Nor has there been any documentation made during excavations which points to a room or set of rooms in Hadrian's villa near Tivoli as having housed any extraordinary artefacts. As such, this subchapter comprises primarily educated guesswork and estimation, led by the criteria mentioned in 3.3.1 as well as the question 'what would a person such as Hadrian, when in control of the wealth, network and might of the Roman empire, deem interesting enough to collect?'
The main exceptions to the estimation of this chapter are Hadrian's collection of Grecian art and the one item I know Phlegon saw, and Hadrian thus owned: the 'Centaur of Saune'.
Hadrian's collection of Grecian artworks was, as mentioned before, vast. Hadrian's villa contains large amounts of statuary to this day Phlegon explicitly mentions that "Should anyone not believe the story of the hippocentaur that was sent to Rome, he can research it for himself: for he is located embalmed and all in the imperial storehouses" (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104). Not only does this quote state authoritatively that the centaur was in the imperial storehouses –and thus part of Hadrian's collection– but also that this storehouse was in Rome. What exactly the centaur was in reality (assuming that this was not, in fact, a real centaur) is more dubious. Mayor (2023, p. 229-253) dedicates an entire chapter to faked replicas, tellingly titled *Centaur Bones: Paleontological Fictions*.

While she does not mention Phlegon's account, it is strongly implied that the 'Centaur of Saune' like other centaurs was a fake, created to gain either wealth or favour from the emperor by presenting him with such a rare gift. Following Mayor's conclusions, the 'Centaur of Saune' was likely an amalgamation of embalmed horse and human remains, with extra hair added to the creature to make it seem more 'wild' and, from a more practical perspective, to hide the areas where the remains of the different individual creatures were attached to one another.

Another item it is likely Hadrian owned is a replica of a giant's face commissioned by Tiberius. I will detail the exact story of this relic in chapter 4.1.2 'Tiberius', but for now suffice it to say that Tiberius had a replica of a giant's face, and that Hadrian will also have owned this relic given it was possible for him to do so. Of course, the assumption that Hadrian did indeed own this replica is dependent upon whether the reconstruction was made out of a strong enough material and with a strong enough construction that it could last at least the seventy years between the end of Tiberius's reign and the beginning of Hadrian's. I assume this is the case, in accordance with Mayor (2023, p. 146) who states that the replica was "presumably a grotesque humanoid bust of clay or wax". Once dried, these materials are certainly capable of surviving such a span of time, given that they are treated with care; given that the item was not only an oddity for the emperors, but also the model of a mythological hero's head, it is reasonable to assume that it was indeed handled with care. Assuming its durability and that no emperors between Tiberius and Hadrian had discarded the object, it is thus probable that Hadrian would own it.

Other than these two items, a number of categories of items seem likely to have been collected by the emperor; first, babies born under extraordinary circumstances. Phlegon names plenty of accounts of children born with deformities such as multiple heads and/or limbs or animalistic features, but of specific interest is the following passage: "The physician Dorotheus says in his *Memoirs* that in Alexandria in Egypt a homosexual man gave birth to a child and that the baby, due to this exceptional occurrence, was embalmed and thus preserved" (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 99). This particular specimen, though it feasibly could have been known to Hadrian, is unlikely to have been part of his collection as Dorotheus lived "sometime before the first century AD, [thus] the event belongs to the first century BC or earlier" (Hansen, 1998, p.159).

This is due to the difference in time combined with the fact that the specimen was found in Egypt and the fact that it was not previously owned by an emperor (thus making it exceedingly improbable that Hadrian inherited it). It does, however, set a precedent for babies born under miraculous circumstances to be preserved; given the two objects I claim with certainty were in Hadrian's possession, I argue that preserved or embalmed babies born under miraculous circumstances and/or showing malformations do fit the established pattern and therefore are probable inclusions in this estimation of the collection's contents.

Other than these, Phlegon makes no mention of specimens being 'preserved', 'kept' or 'sent to the emperor' in his works. As such, the pattern established by the specimens mentioned before, and the collections of other emperors (which are detailed more in chapter four) inform my current speculations on what else Hadrian may have collected.

First, inspired by the first of the 'first among others', Augustus, I argue Hadrian to have owned the weapons of 'ancient heroes' and gigantic 'monster' bones. Suetonius gives an account of Augustus owning such items and decorating his villa at Capri with them in his *Twelve Caesars*, a work biographing the first twelve emperors of Rome. On page 237 of John C. Rolfe's 1922 translation, it is phrased thus: "at Capreae the monstrous bones of huge sea monsters and wild beasts, called the bones of the giants and the weapons of the heroes." (Rolfe, 1922, p. 237). Whether Hadrian 'inherited' the specific relics that Augustus had collected or not, which I do assume to be the case for at least a portion of this collection, it is exceedingly likely that he did own several similar items. These would, in reality, be ancient weapons and the bones of prehistoric animals as Adrienne Mayor states when she calls Augustus's 'sea monster room' "the world's first paleontological museum" (Mayor, 2023, p. 175). The prehistoric bones especially are likely to have comprised a large portion of both Augustus' and Hadrian's collections. This is due to the fact that, at many different places within the empire, prehistoric bones could have been found relatively easily (see Figure 3 below) and given that these relics were also often displayed in local temples (see chapter four), we can say with certainty that such items were treated with the utmost care. These bones were interpreted variously by different peoples and individuals, and were labeled as those of monsters, giants, heroes and other mythical figures.

Due to these varying interpretations coexisting, Hadrian's collection was probably home to several different 'subcollections' of bones from heroes or bones from monsters and creatures, while in reality they were all prehistoric animals.

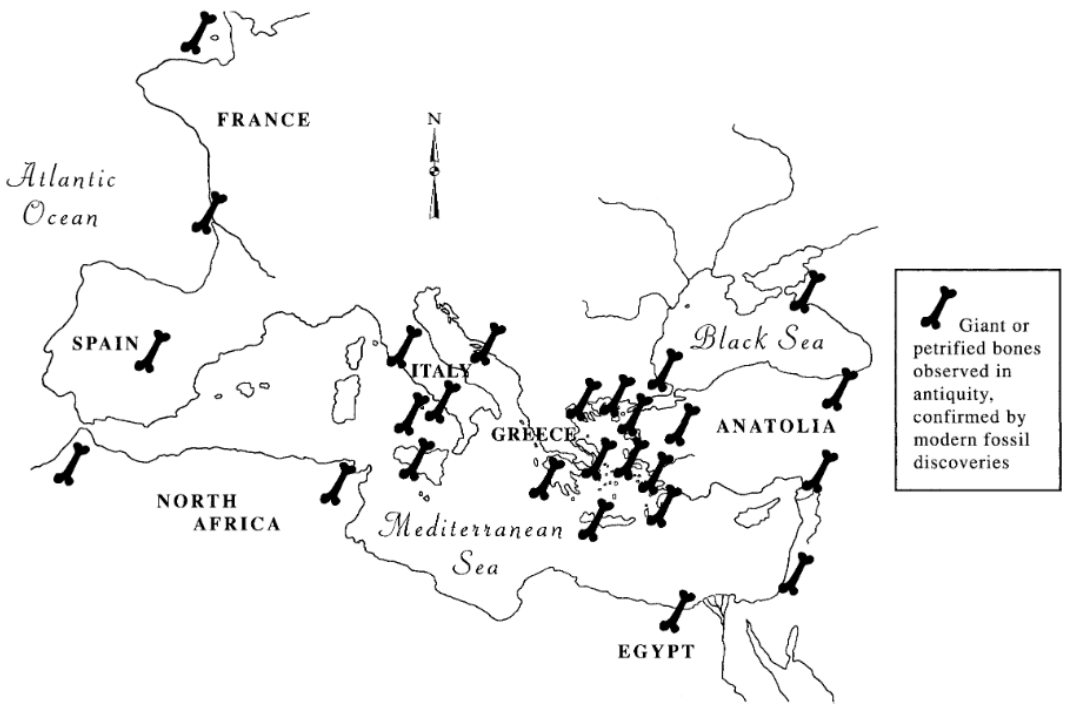

Image 3: map of ancient bones found in antiquity. Original image from Mayor (2023).

4. OTHER COLLECTIONS

4.1. ROMAN COLLECTIONS

Far from the only person in Roman society to own a collection, Hadrian was only one link in a long tradition of collecting which was already present during the Roman Republic. Perhaps two of the most famous republican-era collectors were Gaius Cornelius Verres and Marcus Tullius Cicero, who both collected Grecian statuary (Lazzeretti, 2015, p. 91). Emperors such as Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius also collected certain items, each detailed in their respective subchapter below. Besides personal collections, there was another type of collection which is known to have existed in the Roman empire, during both republican and imperial eras, this being the public collection.

The public collections of Rome varied greatly in their contents, provenance, and housing. The most common means by which such collections grew was through donations from wealthy Romans. This reflects Roman attitudes towards private collecting: amassing substantial collections for personal enjoyment, without giving sufficiently back to the people of Rome was frowned upon. Cicero illustrates this point in his Verrine Orations: Verres, according to Cicero, had extorted the people of his gubernatorial province, Sicily, making them give him statuary and other art with Verres contributing little or nothing to the public in return to the community. Due to this societal pressure to donate, the public collections of Rome often overflowed the places where they were displayed. These were mostly temples, fora, shrines, and porticoes. The more prestigious donations were often placed at more prominent locations, such as the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the Capitoline hill. The care for collections at such places was a task which belonged to the censors during the Republic, though “they usually delegated this to the *aediles* or to special commissions” (Rutledge, 2012, p. 299). Rutledge goes on to say that “the main caretakers for temples and their contents were officials known as *aeditui*, who in general were probably public slaves and freedmen” (Rutledge, 2012, p. 305) and further describes their tasks which centered around the care for temples and other sacred buildings; tasks such as the sanctification, purification, cleaning and opening and closing of temples fell to these officials.

This care also extended, when necessary, to the removal of artefacts (Rutledge, 2012, p. 300). However, the protection of the temples and their collections appears to have fallen outside this responsibility; Rutledge speculates that security and protection were part of the duty of the *vigiles*, the Roman city watch. I agree with his assessment: the temples did not always need to be guarded, and when they did, the presence of a small number of agents will have sufficed to deter misbehaviour. Especially if the *aeditui* of the temples had guard dogs. This was certainly true for the caretakers of the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, as we know from Aulus Gellius' *Noctes Atticae* 6.1.6, which states that "[...] the dogs, that flew at all other intruders, [...]". The lack of explanation surrounding the incident that Gellius describes points to the idea that such explanation was not necessary, and thus we may reasonably infer that the *aeditui* of other major public buildings also had guard dogs to protect the premises when such buildings were closed.

A third type of collection was present in Roman society: wealthy Romans also collected various categories of items. The examples of Cicero and Verres mentioned above are relevant to mention here again as examples of the main subject of collecting: Grecian artefacts. Through a large part of Rome's history of contact with Grecian peoples, the Roman elite held their art in high esteem (Rutledge, 2012, p.83). Paintings, frescoes, and especially statues were all highly sought after, and the surrounding market grew significantly from wealthy Romans' patronage. The result of this interest is that Romans who acquired Grecian art displayed these works prominently.

A prominent example of this is the 'House of the Vettii', a large house located in Pompeii. In her book 'Pompeii: life of a Roman town' (2009), Mary Beard describes the displays present in the House of the Vettii:

"If you looked from the front door straight ahead through the atrium and into the peristilium and garden (there was no tablinum in the House of the Vettii) the gaze was drawn by a large marble fountain statue of Priapus [...]. The suggestion of power and wealth was further reinforced by the floorplan of the atrium. On both sides stood large bronze cabinets which contained the sorts of treasures the Priapus at the entrance is weighing" (Beard, 2009, p. 141).

In the same work, Beard also details the accessibility of certain parts of a Roman house, noting that those places where we find significant amounts of decoration and art tend to be the more 'public' rooms of houses.

The aforementioned spaces in the House of the Vettii, for example, were all accessible to the public. Though, as she also mentions, this accessibility to ‘the public’ was probably an embellishment; porters could deny access to the house if necessary. Nevertheless, it was common in Roman society to have spaces in one’s house that were open to visitors during the day, and wealthy Romans used these spaces to present a certain image of themselves; especially if they were political or otherwise public figures, as Joanne Berry states: “The house was a public space: visitors were encouraged to enter, to view, and to admire the wealth and, by extension, the political power of the owner” (Berry, 2016, p. 126). Despite the difference between public and private being, in a sense, blurred, the distinction did matter significantly in terms of collection ownership and display. Think, for example, of the collection belonging to and displayed at a national museum of antiquities versus if that exact collection were to be owned and, more crucially, displayed, by a private individual. The display of such a collection by a private person is, aside from its purpose of education, often intended to broadcast a message about the owner. Especially if that person employed people to catalogue, care for, add to, and educate guests on their collection. This is part of the duties that I argued the Keepers of the Wonders to have had in chapter 2.2. Phlegon himself, I argue, fulfilled a supervising role in the organisation of Hadrian’s collection, befitting his position as Hadrian’s ‘secretary’ which is mentioned by Birley (1997, p. 222).

4.1.1. AUGUSTUS

Augustus, being the first emperor and thus being the originator of both the empire and many of its traditions, is also known to have owned collections similar to Hadrian's. Augustus owned vast quantities of art, mostly sculptures, most of which he put on display in various public spaces. The first of these was the collection housed in his Forum. This collection was designed and used as a tool for propaganda, as Rutledge makes clear:

"The collection [...] appears to have been carefully assembled, weaving together a tale of war and empire, and promising the perpetuity of both" (Rutledge, 2012, p. 251).

The collection contained various war spoils, statues of and dedicated to specific gods, works depicting Alexander the Great as well as works depicting Augustus himself (Rutledge, 2012, p. 253-254).

The second collection housed in a public space was located in the Portico of Octavia. This collection focused on religious and mythological themes. This is no wonder, as the portico where it was housed enclosed several temples (Rutledge, 2012, p. 258). The collection consisted of statues of gods, most prominently Jupiter, Juno and Aphrodite; it also contained statues and paintings of scenes from prominent stories from mythology (Rutledge, 2012, p. 258-261).

However, statues and other works of art were not the only subject of Augustus's collections. He is also known to have had a curiosity in and collection of natural oddities and historically valuable items. We glean this most clearly from Suetonius and Pliny the Elder. Suetonius wrote one passage that is relevant to this topic:

"His own villas, which were modest enough, he decorated not so much with handsome statues and pictures as with terraces, groves, and objects noteworthy for their antiquity and rarity; for example, at Capreae the monstrous bones of huge sea monsters and wild beasts, called the 'bones of the giants' and the 'weapons of the heroes'" (Rolfe, 1927, p. 237).

What exactly these 'monstrous bones of huge sea monsters and wild beasts' were is uncertain. Theories offered include remnants of dinosaurs, (mesozoic) marine reptiles, pleistocene mammals and whale bones, though none can be definitively proven as there is no definitive way to identify any remains excavated on Capri as having belonged in Augustus's palace (Mayor, 2023, p. 172-175).

Pliny the Elder divulges more information regarding Augustus's interest in natural history artefacts and natural oddities, as well as his ways to deal with these artefacts. From Pliny's accounts it is clear that Augustus was not particular in his interests in nature: as long as the specimen was remarkable in any way, Augustus seems to have been interested:

"A legate of Gaul has written the deified Augustus that several dead Nereids had washed up on the coast" (Plin. Maj. 9.9)

"During the reign of the deified Augustus there were two giants, named Pusio and Secundilla, who were half a foot taller still [than 9 and three-quarters of a foot, so 10 and a quarter foot, or approximately 3 metres total]; their bodies were, on account of this wondrous height, interred in a tomb in the Gardens of Sallust. Under the same emperor lived the shortest man; he was two feet and a palm tall, his name was Conopas and he served to entertain Augustus's granddaughter Julia" (Plin. Maj. 7.75).

These two quotes show not only that Augustus was interested in natural oddities, but that this fact was also known at least by high-ranking officials. In addition, the second quote makes clear that Augustus also displayed some of his artefacts; the Gardens of Sallust were not imperial private property under Augustus, meaning the tomb of the giants Pusio and Secundilla was accessible to anyone visiting the gardens. This is not the only recorded instance of Augustus displaying natural oddities publicly:

"[...] he exhibited no one of respectable parentage, with the exception of a young man named Lycius, whom he showed merely as a curiosity; for he was less than two feet [approximately 59 centimetres] tall, weighed but seventeen pounds [approximately 6 kilograms], yet had a stentorian voice." (Rolfe, 1927, p. 193);

"Furthermore, if anything rare and worth seeing was ever brought to the city, it was his habit to make a special exhibit of it in any convenient place on days when no shows were appointed. For example a rhinoceros in the Saepta, a tiger on the stage and a snake of fifty cubits [approximately 22 metres] in the Comitium." (Rolfe, 1927, p. 195).

Suetonius here illustrates Augustus's fascination with the topic of natural curiosities as well as his desire to display such specimens for public viewing. The second quote also heavily implies that Augustus's display of these creatures was not connected to the shows or games; if it was to incite excitement for shows or games involving the animals, Suetonius would make mention of that.

Instead, these displays are named as being entirely separate events from the shows, only connected because the days of the shows dictate the days of Augustus's curiosity displays.

In contrast, Hadrian never held such public displays of his collection, nor of any animals or natural oddities; the closest comparison is to the mention of the possibility of visitation from Phlegon's account of the 'Centaur of Saune' (Ferwerda, 2004, p. 104). With regards to the contents of Augustus's collection, the comparison is significantly more present. Both Hadrian and Augustus owned large amounts of Grecian art, specifically statues, as well as owning (or employing) examples of human oddities. Both also showed interest in mythological creatures– Augustus in accounts of Tritons and Nereids, Hadrian in his centaur. Further, both Augustus and Hadrian owned a retreat outside of Rome where an important part of their collection was housed: Augustus had his villa on Capri, Hadrian had his villa near Tibur (modern Tivoli). A point of disconnect exists in the display of their collections: where Augustus is known to have housed parts of his collection in public areas (Rutledge, 2012, p. 251-261), Hadrian is not known to have done so.

4.1.2. TIBERIUS

Augustus's son and heir Tiberius is also known to have had an affinity for collecting, though he was much more specific in what he collected; aside from the natural curiosities Tiberius collected, which I mentioned before and to which I will return here, he also collected a particular type of plant: melons. According to Paris and Janick, Tiberius grew *Cucumis melo* in his "proto-greenhouses" (Paris and Janick, 2008, p. 33). This plant is not native to Italy (*Cucumis melo, n.d.*; *Melon (Cucumis Melo)*, n.d.), and thus must have come to Rome as an import from (newly) conquered territories. Figure 4 (below) shows *Cucumis melo*'s estimated natural range:

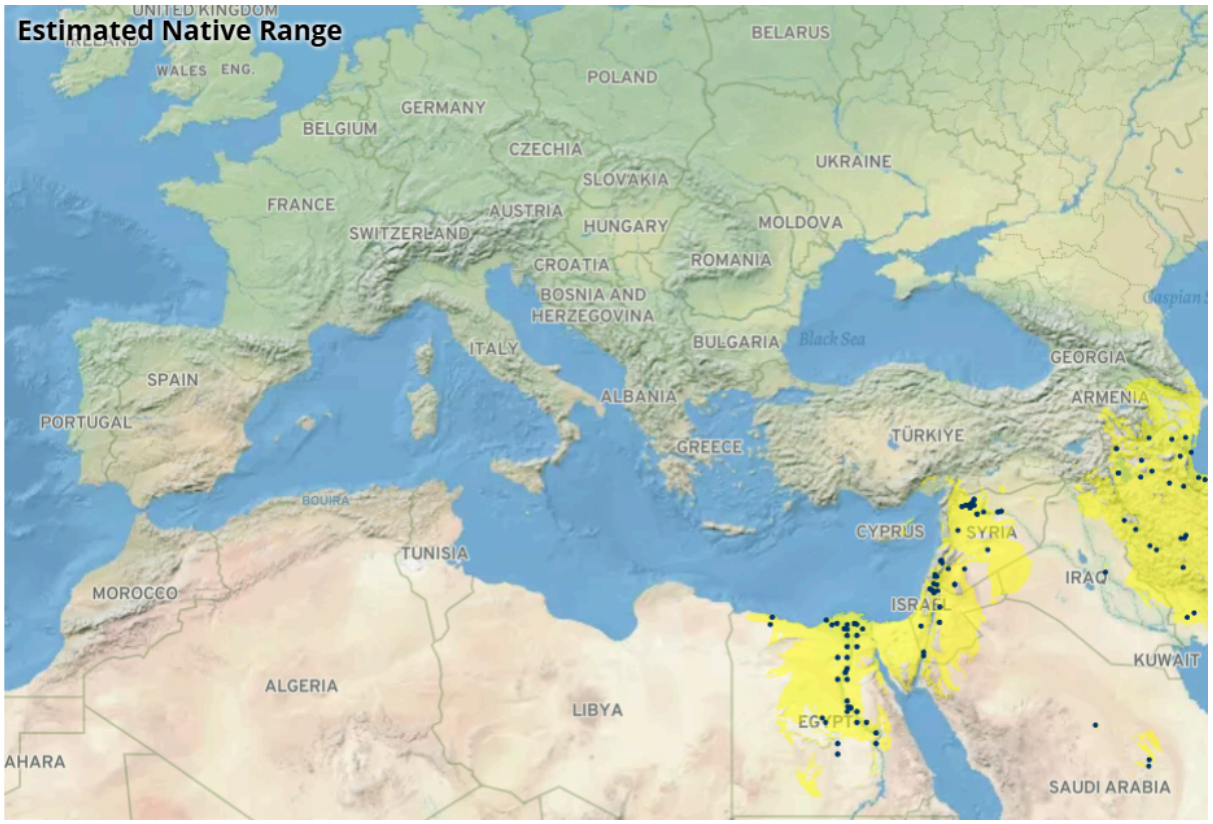

Image 4: estimated native range of Cucumis melo. *This is the species which Tiberius grew in his greenhouses. (Image from [Melon (Cucumis melo) | Easyscape Plant Profile]).*

Paris and Janick do not analyse the provenance of Tiberius's melons, but I argue that they come from stock which originated in Egypt. This is the most logical option as Egypt was, at the time of Tiberius's reign, the most recently conquered territory in which this species of melon grows. This would add novelty and thus prestige to the cultivation of this species, adding to its desirability and presenting a strong argument for why Tiberius grew specifically this species in his private greenhouses, and not a plant that may have held more monetary or utilitarian value, such as species of herbs used for medicinal properties.

Let us now return to Tiberius's affinity for history and natural curiosities. Tiberius, as mentioned before, is known to have had a replica of a giant's head. Of the creation of this model, Phlegon says the following:

"[...] as a sample they sent to Rome a tooth of one of the bodies. It was not just a foot long but even greater than this measurement. The delegates showed it to Tiberius and asked him if he wished the hero to be brought to him. Tiberius devised a shrewd plan such that, while not depriving himself of a knowledge of its size, he avoided the sacrilege of the robbing of the dead. He summoned a certain geometer, Pulcher by name, a man of some renown whom he respected for the man's skill, and bade him fashion a face in proportion to the size of the tooth. The geometer estimated how large the entire body as well as the face would be by means of the weight of the tooth, hastily made a construction, and brought it to the emperor." (Hansen, 1998, p. 44)[10].

This is not the only case of Tiberius's interest in natural curiosities and history; Mayor (2023) dedicates several pages to it, and analyses the various accounts from which his interest can be gleaned.

Most explicitly related to this interest is the fact that Tiberius went into self-imposed exile on Capri, "the site of Augustus's paleontological museum" (Mayor, 2023, p. 144). However, this is far from the only account Mayor details. Tiberius's interest in natural history and natural oddities is brought into connection with projects he undertook.

[10] Mayor calls this 'a unique record of purposeful paleontological research' and strongly implies that the giant's tooth was in reality that of a mastodon or elephant (Mayor, 2023, p. 145-146)

Another example of Tiberius's interest in these subjects is the diversion of the river Orontes near Antioch, in Syria (modern-day Turkey). Mayor attributes this diversion project to Tiberius, and says that "in the clay of the dry riverbed, the workers found a skeleton 11 cubits long (about 15.5 feet, nearly 5 m)" (Mayor, 2023, p. 73). Another specific and telling example is the investigation into the 'Triton of Tanagra', an investigation into an alleged pickled Triton which was later also witnessed by Pausanias. This Triton, according to Mayor, "had been examined by Demostratus, the author of a treatise on sea monsters, nearly two hundred years before Pausanias. Demostratus served on a Greek provincial council that investigated the Triton for one of the early emperors in Rome (perhaps Augustus, Tiberius, or Claudius; they were especially interested in natural wonders)." (Mayor, 2023, p. 229). Tiberius's interests mirror those of Hadrian; the former's interest in melons can be compared to the latter's interest in Grecian statuary, while their interests in natural history are identical. Another point of comparison exists in Tiberius's greenhouses: their location, provenance, contents and size are unknown, similar to the imperial storehouses Hadrian is said to have kept the 'Centaur of Saune' in. We do not know for certain if Hadrian also spent time at Augustus's museum on Capri as Tiberius did, however this can be strongly argued due to his interest in the subjects displayed there and his knowledge of the complex.

4.1.3. CLAUDIUS

Claudius, as mentioned above in the quote from Mayor, was also interested in natural wonders. This is most readily apparent from the story of the ‘Centaur of Saune’, relayed above. The events detailed in this story occurred during the reign of emperor Claudius, and the centaur was thus also sent to him. Given that Hadrian still owned the centaur at least 63 years later, there is no doubt that Claudius kept it and had it properly preserved and taken care of by his ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. The story is corroborated by Pliny the Elder, who records the following relevant stories: “Emperor Claudius writes that a Thessaly-born horse-human died the same day and we saw one during his reign which was sent, in honey conserved, to him from Egypt.” (Plin. Maj. 7.35). Pliny records a disproportionally large number of instances of wondrous occurrences “under Claudius”, which suggests that the intellectual climate was especially interested in these occurrences during Claudius’s reign and took extra care to document them accordingly. Further, when discussing the case of a man named Titus Fullonius who had allegedly reached the age of 150, Pliny states that “[...] this was proven by comparison to information he previously divulged and other things which confirmed his age; for the emperor was interested in his case.” (Plin. Maj. 7.159). Interestingly, Pliny also mentions when an account is known to be falsified, as he does when describing a phoenix: “[...] one [phoenix] was brought to Rome and put on display at the comitium, a happening which is recorded in the Actions, but nobody doubts that this was a forgery.” (Plin. Maj. 10.5). Note that Pliny does not state that all phoenixes are, by definition, forged: this specific specimen displayed at the comitium was a fake.

A final relevant account from Pliny is that Claudius’s wife Agrippina had been given a white nightingale. Pliny explains that white nightingales are exceedingly rare, stating “[...] a white one at that, which has almost never been shown [...]” and that this particular specimen was bought as a gift for Agrippina for 6000 sesterces (Plin. Maj. 10.84).

From these accounts and the quote above from Mayor it is evident that Claudius had a significant interest in the natural world, similar to Hadrian. The ‘Centaur of Saune’ and the white nightingale bought for his wife show that Claudius appreciated collecting such wonders of the natural world, just as Hadrian, as well as giving them to others. Whether his specimens were made accessible in some way like Hadrian did for the ‘Centaur of Saune’ is unclear, though Rutledge claims Claudius did also display the ‘Centaur of Saune’ (Rutledge, 2012, p. 210). This account alongside the display of the (forged) phoenix on the comitium follows Augustus’s precedent of displaying extraordinary animal specimens in public and thus can be compared to the displays of other emperors, including Hadrian.

4.2. HADRIAN'S COLLECTION IN PERSPECTIVE

Hadrian's collection was in many ways similar to other imperial and non-imperial Roman collections. First, Hadrian's collection shows similarities to those collections belonging to non-imperial wealthy Romans from both the Empire and the Republic, as well as that of Augustus, in its subject of Grecian artworks. This was a common type of object for wealthy Romans to collect –with Grecian statues being especially popular– due to the aforementioned grecophilia expressed by the upper classes of Roman society, and this in combination with Hadrian inheriting the imperial collections of previous emperors means it is no wonder that Hadrian, in his youth nicknamed 'Graeculus' or 'Little Greek' due to his fondness for that culture, followed in this tradition.

Hadrian also followed both Augustus's example as well as that of Tiberius as it related to the interest in and collection of the bones of monsters and beasts. In this category he also inherited at least one item: the replica of the hero's head made for Tiberius, which has been discussed previously.

Related to the previous subject, Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius establish the collection and analysis of mythical creatures, with Claudius especially featuring prominently. Documentation for Augustus of a 'school' of Tritons washing ashore, Tiberius's analysis of a Triton, in combination with the two accounts of Claudius relating to him observing centaurs, the possibility that Claudius also had a Triton analysed, and the mention of his (apparently obviously) fake phoenix set a strong precedent and present a strong argument in favour of the imperial collecting habit including this interest in mythological creatures.

Hadrian then, I argue, continues this pattern of imperial collecting established by previous emperors. As shown in the subchapters previous, he is known to have collected and engaged with all of these categories of artefacts, placing him firmly in the established imperial collecting tradition. Despite this, he does break with this tradition in several ways.

First, Hadrian is not known to have displayed any part of his collection in public. All of the emperors discussed in this chapter, as well as the non-imperial Roman collecting tradition, did in one way or another display their collection openly to the public.

An argument can be made for the ‘Centaur of Saune’ being displayed to the public, but this was not openly the case; while Phlegon’s invitation to view the specimen seems open, the reality of it was more than likely that this invitation only stood for Romans of the upper classes. With access to the centaur limited in such a manner, comparison to the previous emperors’ precedent of displaying such specimens in public places is an area where Hadrian falls short of the established imperial tradition.

Another aspect of Hadrian’s collection which discontinues the established tradition is the lack of external knowledge or mention of most of his collection. Phlegon is the primary source for its existence, but Phlegon was a freedman in high-ranking service to Hadrian, even labeled as Hadrian’s secretary by Birley (1997, p. 222). In contrast, the collections of Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius are known from external sources such as Suetonius and Pliny the Elder. This, combined with the previous point regarding its general accessibility, presents the theory that Hadrian was very secretive about his collection. At first glance, this does not fit with his character: from the historical sources and later biographies we glean that Hadrian was open about his knowledge, and generally extroverted. Looking closer, however, a different impression of him is present: Hadrian as an outsider. He was from the provinces as opposed to hailing from Rome; spoke at first with a provincial accent which got him mocked by senators; was not the choice of heir expected by the senate; spent more than half of his twenty-year reign away from Rome, either on military campaign or –more often– on travels through the provinces (Goldsworthy, 2018, p. 39). Hadrian’s secretiveness about his personal collection of valuable rarities can be seen as a way to diminish his outsider status: as opposed to openly going against custom and amassing a collection of valuables for himself, he hid it away, restricting access to those he could trust or those who he considered good friends; even then, they were not allowed to write anything public about this collection. Only Phlegon, his trusted freedman, was allowed to write one segment in his volume on rarities. Why? I suspect it to be because Hadrian trusted that this invitation could be annulled.

The argument I made earlier, that Hadrian's collection served purposes of both education and the symbolisation of the emperor's domination over the entire natural world, still stands; any of Hadrian's guests who were allowed to see the emperor's collection would be educated on the natural world and were at the same time reminded of Hadrian's position of superiority; they might be friends, but there was a clear hierarchy.

4.3. CABINETS OF CURIOSITIES

Both imperial collections and those of wealthy Romans with no ties to the imperial house can be seen as predecessors to the 'cabinets of curiosities' established in sixteenth- through eighteenth-century CE Europe. Just as Roman collections, cabinets of curiosities had a semi-public function in addition to the private enjoyment of their owners. Due to the more private nature of society between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, however, the public function of cabinets of curiosities was correspondingly limited, with access being generally restricted to close friends or people of importance to the owner.

The contents of such collections also show grounds for comparison to Roman collections. Roman collections are known to have included artworks of different mediums, including most prominently statuary and paintings. Also included were military memorabilia, frequently in the form of standards, weaponry and captured enemy treasures or war spoils. A third type of collected item was the exotic specimens and the natural oddity. All of these categories are also present in cabinets of curiosities, though with most taking a significantly stronger interest in the natural oddities and exotic specimens.

Despite this, we can draw many additional parallels between cabinets of curiosities and Roman collections, specifically that of Hadrian. First, both are a characteristic of the wealthier echelons of the societies they are found in. In neither the Classical Era nor the early Modern Age are collections associated with the poor, nor even with the majority of the 'middle class[11]'.

Second, collections functioned, in part due to economic factors, as important status symbols. This was further reinforced by the fact that such collections often contained exotic, luxurious, or otherwise rare or exclusive items; ownership of such rare and valuable items brought (and still brings) with it social prestige.

Third, and especially relevant within the context of Roman collections to Hadrian's collection: collections often served as educational pieces.

[11]'Middle class' is a complex, flexible term. Precise definitions per era are not relevant to this paper, but I use the term to refer to the approximate 60 per cent in the middle of economic measures of wealth. This definition excludes the poorest 20 per cent and the wealthiest 20 per cent, following the example of Atkinson and Brandolini (2014).

The cabinets of curiosities of Albertus Seba, a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Dutch physician, famously grew from his collection of specimens relevant to his career, as did the collections of many other apothecaries and physicians (Seba, 2020, p. 6). While those in ancient Rome did not start this way as far as we know, some served similar purposes in their education of their owners and their guests. As mentioned before, I argue Hadrian's collection to have fulfilled this role. While its scope was limited to Hadrian's close friends, confidantes and members of his staff, its educational purpose was not diminished; Hadrian used it for this purpose himself, and for educating his friends. Due to his preconceived status as somewhat of an outsider, he did not want word of his extensive collection to spread, thus disallowing his guests to write of it.

4.4. COLLECTIONS IN CONTEXT: ANTIQUARIANISM AND OUR FASCINATION WITH 'THE PAST'

Roman emperors and early modern European aristocrats are far from the only groups of people who owned collections of artefacts such as the ones discussed in this thesis. Evidence shows that a large number of cultures, both within Europe and without, harboured at least one person who owned a collection of this kind. These persons can be labeled 'antiquarians'. 'Antiquarian' and the related term 'antiquarianism' warrant definition. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines 'antiquarian' as "one who studies or collects antiquities" (*Definition of ANTIQUARIAN*, 2025). 'Antiquities' refers to "relics or monuments (such as coins, statues, or buildings) of ancient times" or to "matters relating to the life or culture of ancient times" (*Definition of ANTIQUITIES*, 2025). 'Antiquarianism' has no definition in Merriam-Webster dictionary, but Cambridge English Dictionary describes it as "the study of old and rare objects and their history" (*ANTIQUARIANISM | English meaning - Cambridge Dictionary*, z.d.). In 'World Antiquarianism: Comparative perspectives', Alain Schnapp makes an explicit comparison with modern archaeology: "antiquarians can pursue their studies only under other guises: as archaeologists, art historians, or ethnologists." (Schnapp et al., 2013, p. 1). In Schnapp's text, antiquarians are placed next to, not opposite to, historians– while historians are traditionally seen as relying only upon textual sources, Schnapp states that "the dividing line between historian and antiquarian is anything but clear. Historians have never confined themselves to the study of texts and documents; from Herodotus and Thucydides on, they have cited the evidence of material remains and celebrated the charm of monuments." (Schnapp et al., 2013, p. 1). Antiquarians, then, can be recategorised in modern terms as 'archaeologist-historians', with an additional emphasis on not just studying, but also collecting material from the past. As mentioned before, 'antiquarians' are found in almost every society: Schnapp's volume contains accounts regarding antiquarian practices in sixteen different societies and eras, from the Babylonians (Schnapp et al., 2013, p. 121-140) to Meji-era Japan (Schnapp et al., 2013, p. 404-423).

Each of these societies regards antiquarians differently; Schnapp makes the observation that “from the shaman to the scribe, antiquarianism has had different faces that varied widely across time and space.” (Schnapp et al., 2013). These different ‘faces’ of antiquarianism do not change the fact that antiquarianism has been present in the majority of large-scale human cultures, which raises the question: why are humans so interested in the past?

In his article ‘The Significance of the Past’ (2021), Guy Kahane summarises five possible reasons individuals might have for being interested in history, and analyses their underlying motives using a thought experiment he calls ‘the blank slate’, which says the following:

Aliens arrive on earth, and are willing to grant us the technology and knowledge to solve the dangers and problems we face. However, the condition is that we forget our past: no more museums, artefacts, education on history and so on (Kahane, 2021), p. 586).

Kahane argues whether each of the arguments is in favour of or against accepting the aliens' deal in order to see why each position truly values history. Of the five positions Kahane details, only one would unequivocally not accept the offer of the blank slate: historical valuism. The other four positions, those being historical instrumentalism, self-centered historical non-instrumentalism, historical partiality, and historical own-sakism, fail to consider one or more reasons to reject the offer made in the thought experiment. Does this mean that historical valuism is the ‘correct’ way to care about history? No. It is simply the one that most accounts for a moral aspect to our care, rather than simply considering the benefits or the inherent value of knowledge. Historical valuism is a sentiment that Kahane defines as follows: “Our main reasons to know and care about history is the value history contains; knowledge and concern are fitting responses to that past value.” (Kahane, 2021, p. 592). Kahane illustrates the thought process behind historical valuism thus: “A large-scale war, for example, contains a vast amount of evil—think, if you need an illustration, of the tens of thousands of Tommies being shredded to pieces by machine gun fire and artillery in the first few hours of the Somme Offensive. [...] That past disvalue calls for a response. It matters that all those people died so horribly. And it should therefore matter to us that they died. This is why we should know and care about the Great War [...]” (Kahane, 2021, p. 592).

There are, we can surmise from this quotation, certain things in the past (occurrences, items, people, stories) which are, in some way, valuable. Because there are some things in the past that are valuable, we care and know about the entire past.

This sentiment is one that is very easily linked with collecting and antiquarianism. Most collections can not contain every individual item that fulfills the initial criteria of that collection; a collection of ‘medieval European swords’ can, by virtue of several factors, not actually include every medieval European sword. Selections must be made. Part of these selections are practical in nature, such as cost of acquisition, preservation, and the fact that not all medieval European swords have been found; another part is related to historical valuism: it is exceedingly likely that not every medieval European sword is valuable, or valuable to the same degree, to this collector. The collector, then, selects only the swords they value to add to their collection. This way, while the collector does care about the entirety of the subject they collect, this interest in the past is because of, and exemplified through, certain pieces they have (or realistically wish to have). This argument can also be made for Hadrian’s collection specifically, although he was able to circumvent some of the practical limitations to collecting. Hadrian could not own every Greek statue; many were owned by others, Hadrian had limited space and money. Selections had to be made: which (kinds of) statues did Hadrian value, which themes? It is with the surviving evidence that we can answer questions such as these, which can give us a further understanding of Hadrian and other collectors. However, returning to Kahane’s five arguments, there are four more to analyse.

I will start with historical instrumentalism. This position says that “The main (or only) reasons we have to know and care about the past are the benefits to us (and perhaps to future generations) of such knowledge and concern.” (Kahane, 2021, p. 585). Historical instrumentalism, as defined here, is purely utilitarian: if the past no longer benefits us, it is no longer worth caring for. Such an opinion stands in opposition to the idea of private collecting: many of the items in collections do not benefit their collectors directly. Thus, while this opinion is one that is seen throughout society, it is not one that collectors share.

Second is self-centered historical non-instrumentalism, which, according to Kahane, says that “Our main reason for knowing and caring about history is that the past bears some important relation to us, and we matter (to ourselves).” (Kahane, 2021, p. 587). While this is a more widely applicable sentiment, it still excludes a large portion of collectors. Collections of historical figures, especially, tend to contain (types of) items that their collector had no important relation with (other than being their owner). Cabinets of curiosities, while some originated from a position comparable to this sentiment such as that of Albertus Seba (see subchapter 4.2 *Cabinets of Curiosities*), most did not; of those that did originate here, most drifted out of this sentiment.

Thirdly, historical partiality is defined as “We have special reasons to know and care about those past people and aspects of history to which we bear some special relation.” (Kahane, 2021, p. 588). This position emphasises our personal connection with the past more so than self-centered historical non-instrumentalism, making this, too, a position which is improbable to spawn collections.

Fourth and final is historical own-sakism. Kahane describes this as “Our main reason for seeking historical knowledge is for its own sake because such knowledge has intrinsic value, and this value is independent of any further value.” (Kahane, 2021, p. 589). This position is capable of spawning collections. If every piece of a collection has intrinsic value, then every piece is worth collecting. A problem with this for most collections is that this position considers *all* of history intrinsically valuable, thus making the selection of which artefacts to collect require additional outside criteria.

5. CONCLUSION

Phlegon of Tralles was a second-century freedman from the formerly Greek colony of Tralles in the province of Asia, in modern-day Turkey. At some point, Hadrian freed him and took him in his employ. Though his motivations for doing so are unknown, Ferwerda (2004, p. 11) suggests Phlegon's intelligence played a major role in the decision. While working for Hadrian, Phlegon produced a number of works on differing topics, most of which are lost in all but their titles. The titles of Phlegon's works allude to an administratory character, which is reflected in the writing style of his surviving works. These are the *Olympiades*, the *Macrobii* and the *Mirabilia*. All three works function as reference works consisting of lists of information relevant to their subjects, respectively being the history of the Olympic Games from their founding until the time of Hadrian, people who exhibited an extraordinarily long lifespan, and 'wondrous things', or people with malformations. The *Macrobii* and the *Mirabilia* fall under the genre of paradoxography, which focuses on wondrous or seemingly supernatural occurrences and is a subgenre of historiography. Despite historiography being concerned with the study of the study of history, Phlegon's works have not been analysed in this way yet. This means an intriguing passage from his works is unknown to most: Phlegon describes a centaur sent to the emperor, currently housed in the imperial storages, and invites his readers to view the specimen themselves should they not believe his record.

From this account and Beard (2023) we learn that Phlegon was one of the 'Keepers of the Wonders'. This group was highly secretive and served the emperor in a private capacity, that is to say they were not appointed by governmental institutions such as the senate. These 'Keepers of the Wonders' served to collect artefacts for the emperor and conserve and care for his collection thereof. They date to the reign of Augustus at the earliest, with mentions of them and their work not surviving from the time between Augustus and Hadrian. Their recruitment is uncertain, but I have argued their primary sources of recruitment to be fourfold: first, freedmen; freedmen such as Phlegon (especially if they were intelligent) could gain much power during the empire, leading to the option that they served in the 'Keepers of the Wonders'. The second option is learned Greeks. Given Hadrian's affinity for Greece, this option is a probable source of recruitment during his reign.

The third is that ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ were recruited from the *curatores aedium sacrarum et operum locorumque publicorum*, the group of officials which took care of public buildings, spaces, and temples. This position was one on the *Cursus Honorum*, the political ladder which the Roman aristocracy used to gain higher positions and the associated higher status. As such, most of these *curatores aedium sacrarum et operum locorumque publicorum* would continue in political functions, but some might not want to or be able to, or might be convinced by the benefits of a position so close to the emperor, and thus join the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’. The final option I have offered as a source of recruitment is the *frumentarii*, a division within the Roman military machine. The *frumentarii* served in many different roles through their existence, with their operations under Hadrian ranging from executions to courier service between provincial governors and the emperor. Since these agents knew the empire and specifically ‘their’ province, they added valuable knowledge of local artefacts of interest to the emperor to the repertoire of the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’.

The reason for the existence of the ‘Keepers of the Wonders’ is a question that leads into the equally understudied subject that is emperor Hadrian’s collection of nature historical artefacts. Hadrian has been the subject of a large amount of research detailing almost every topic associated with him, and placing him in almost every context; yet his habit of collecting has been left behind compared to other subjects pertaining to his character, person and rule. To understand his collection, an analysis of Hadrian’s character is warranted; to further determine whether this collection follows an imperial collecting tradition, and if there even was such a tradition, other emperors must be analysed with special focus for their character and interests. As this thesis has shown, Hadrian was a person of many interests; philosophy, military and gladiatory weaponry and combat, poetry and writing,architecture, history, mythology and the natural world were all of interest to him. His collection of artefacts is mostly concerned with the last three points mentioned: history, mythology and the natural world. Its exact contents are unknown as no sources exist that speak of the collection, except for the aforementioned account by Phlegon of Tralles detailing a centaur specimen. Despite this lack of certainty, I have argued for the inclusion of a model of a giant’s head, originally belonging to Tiberius, to have been part of the collection.

Further, based on these artefacts and Hadrian's interest in nature, mythology, nature history and history, I have argued for the inclusion of artefacts such as preserved malformed babies, ancient weapons belonging to heroes, and the bones of monsters or large beasts; my argumentation for the first category stems from accounts by Phlegon mentioning the preservation and keeping of such specimens, while the inclusion of the latter two is based on Augustus's 'sea monster room'. With regards to the contents of his collection, Hadrian stands firmly within the imperial collecting tradition: Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius all showed interest in and collected artefacts similar to those I argue were owned by Hadrian. On other fronts, Hadrian falls outside of the established pattern; unlike at least Augustus and Claudius, Hadrian did not display parts of his collection in public spaces; the closest to a public display is the invitation extended by Phlegon, which, as I have argued, was an exclusive invitation only open to those whom Hadrian trusted. This reasoning goes alongside the fact that, while for Augustus, Tiberius and Claudius external accounts of their collections survive, for Hadrian's collection this is not the case. Phlegon is the only source that mentions the collection, and even he only mentions off-handedly that such artefacts are stored in the imperial storehouses. This lack of external documentation is thus another way in which Hadrian breaks with the established imperial collecting tradition.

A further relevant comparison is that with the later European cabinets of curiosities. Four major areas of comparison exist between the collection of Hadrian, and Roman collections as a whole, and the cabinets of curiosities. First is the content of the collections. Both Roman collections and those comprising cabinets of curiosities contained artworks, nature historical specimens, specifically exotic or malformed specimens, and military paraphernalia. The exact definitions of and preferences within these categories differ between the two eras, but this is due to the difference in scale and opportunities of collecting. Another area of comparison is the status of such collections. Both Roman collections and cabinets of curiosities granted their owner a certain heightened status. This status stemmed from both the contents of the collections as well as the third point of comparison: the economic means required to assemble and maintain such collections. In both eras, collections of any magnitude were reserved for the higher classes within society simply due to the sheer amount of money they cost.

The fourth comparison lies in their function; aside from aesthetic enjoyment, these collections served to educate their owner and their guests. This comparison is also home to a discrepancy: where Roman aristocrats (not emperors) were expected to allow (almost) anyone into the more public areas of their homes and thus to view their collections, those who owned cabinets of curiosities in later times were not expected to do any such thing, and their collections were thus significantly more private.

However, Roman and later European aristocrats were far from the only people interested in such collections. In chapter 4.4 I have named a number of other societies in which such collections were present. This nigh universal presence of the 'urge' to collect leads to another question: why are we as humans so interested in 'the past'? Guy Kahane illustrates five main reasons why people care about the past, of which one stands out as the primary candidate for the motivation behind the assembly of collections: historical valuism. Historical valuism is defined by Kahane as "Our main reasons to know and care about history is the value history contains; knowledge and concern are fitting responses to that past value." (Kahane, 2021, p. 592). This invites collecting due to its '*pars pro toto*'-reasoning: there are certain things in the past, be they physical objects or events, that matter; therefore, the past matters. This logic is easily applied to collections: a collection can realistically never contain its entire subject matter, despite the implicit argument that its entire subject matter 'matters'. Thus, the collector collects certain items within that subject matter which represent their specific interests within the subject, or which are deemed the most 'collectible' pieces following external criteria. The exact reasons present in different societies for the phenomenon of collections being amassed regrettably fall outside the scope of this thesis, but present an interesting opportunity for future research; especially the consideration of figures such as the 'Keepers of the Wonders' can provide an interesting new perspective to this topic.

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