

The Date of Nicolaus' *Βίος Καίσαρος*

Mark Toher

LIVELY DISCUSSION has already been generated by the recent publication of new inscriptions from Aphrodisias;¹ one commentator has pointed out that it will be some time before consensus is reached on the date and context of many of these.² The presentation of new material often provokes reconsideration of old and neglected issues; one such is the date of the biography of Augustus by Nicolaus of Damascus. A significantly later *terminus post quem* for the composition of this work is indicated, if the proposed date for a letter of Octavian preserved at Aphrodisias is correct. A re-examination of the evidence shows that a number of assumptions that have been made about the relationship of the *Bios* to the lost autobiography of Augustus are implausible, and that a much later date of composition is indeed likely.

For the past sixty years there has been general acceptance of F. Jacoby's persuasive and attractive thesis that the *Bios Kaisaros* of Nicolaus was written in the late 20's B.C., and followed in form and content the recently-completed Latin autobiography of Augustus.³ The crux of Jacoby's argument was his contention that references to

¹ J. Reynolds, *Aphrodisias and Rome* (JRS Monographs 1 [1982]); G. W. Bowersock, *Gnomon* 56 (1984) 48–53; E. Badian, "Notes on a New List of Roman Senators," *ZPE* 55 (1984) 101–14, and "Notes on Some Documents from Aphrodisias Concerning Octavian," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 157–70. I am indebted to Professor Bowersock for bringing to my attention the relevance of Reynolds' document 13 to the *Bios*, and to Professor Badian for generously providing me with material otherwise unavailable. Charles Fornara and Kurt Raaflaub each read an earlier version of this article, and I am grateful to them for their helpful advice and criticism.

² Badian, *GRBS* (*supra* n.1) 157.

³ The fragments are *FGrHist* 90FF125–30. Previous to Jacoby a much later date of composition had been generally maintained. C. Müller, *FHG* III (1849) 434 n.1, proposed a date of *ca* 12 B.C. based on the use of *ἐνταυθοῖ* in F130.37, a statement that seemed to imply that Nicolaus had been composing the *Bios* at Apollonia while on his first trip to Rome. Müller was followed in his dating by O. Schmidt, *Die letzten Kämpfe der römischen Republik* (*Jahr.f.class.Phil.* Suppl. 13 [Leipzig 1884]) 684f; A. von Gutschmid, *Kleine Schriften* V (Leipzig 1894) 549; and, more recently, G. W. Bowersock, *Augustus and the Greek World* (Oxford 1965) 135. For a convincing refutation of the arguments for this date *cf.* Jacoby *ad* FF125–30 (p.263). Others have supposed that the *Bios* was written after the death of Augustus: J. Asbach, *RhM* 37 (1882) 297, R. Laqueur, *RE* 17.1 (1936) 406 s.v. "Nikolaos (20) von Damaskos," and W. Steidle, *Sueton und die antike Biographie* (Munich 1951) 134. *Cf.* n.5 *infra*.

military conquests in the panegyric prooemium of the *Bios* could only refer to campaigns conducted by Octavian personally; consequently, the campaigns against the Pannonians and Illyrians were those of Octavian in 35 B.C., and mention of the pacification of peoples up to the Rhine referred to Octavian's campaign in Gaul in 34.⁴ In so arguing, Jacoby avoided the earlier conclusion that the reference ἐντὸς Ῥήνου must indicate a time around or before 12 B.C. or after A.D. 10, the two dates during the Principate when Roman troops were not consistently beyond the Rhine. Jacoby then proposed 27 B.C. and the assumption of the title *Augustus* as a suitable terminal date for the *Bios*. He believed that Nicolaus wrote his work in the late twenties B.C., when the autobiography of Augustus was in circulation, and before he began work on his long universal history. On the basis of this reconstruction Jacoby was able to maintain (p.264) that the *Bios* closely reflected the recently completed autobiography of Augustus, and may, in fact, have been a Greek paraphrase of that document for the Eastern peoples of the Empire.⁵

As a consequence of Jacoby's thesis, it seemed possible to recognize, at least in part, the immense debt of Nicolaus' *Bios* to the lost autobiography of Augustus. Jacoby himself thought he could identify passages that must have come from the autobiography.⁶ H. Malcovati, in her introduction to the fragments of Augustus' writings, states that part of Augustus' autobiography included anecdotes from his 'Jugendgeschichte'.⁷ Since there is no evidence of such material in the extant remains of the autobiography, Malcovati can only have reached her conclusion by deduction from such anecdotes as are found in the *Bios*. E. Gabba, in a recent essay on Augustus and the historians, asserts that it is now generally agreed that the *Bios* was

⁴ Cf. F125.1: ὧν δὲ πρότερον οὐδὲ ὀνόματα ἠπίσταντο οἱ ἄνθρωποι οὐδέ τις ὑπήκοοι ἐγένοντο διὰ μνήμης, ἡμερωσάμενος ὅποσοι ἐντὸς Ῥήνου ποταμοῦ κατοικοῦσιν ὑπὲρ τε τὸν Ἰόνιον πόντον καὶ τὰ Ἰλλυριῶν γένη. Jacoby *ad loc.* (p.263): "von eigenen waffentaten des kaisers, nicht von denen seiner legaten, muss nach dem ganzen gehalt der stelle die rede gewesen sein."

⁵ Since the publication of Jacoby's commentary, Laqueur (*supra* n.3) argued for a date after the death of Augustus on the basis of the aorist tense of some of the verbs in the prooemium; Steidle (*supra* n.3) believed that the text reflected a period of peace, and for this reason was post-Augustan. The effectiveness of these arguments can be measured by the lack of recognition they have received. Laqueur especially vitiates his arguments for the date and structure of the *Bios* by asserting (422f) that we have the *Bios* essentially as Nicolaus wrote it. This is in obvious contradiction to statements in the document itself that clearly indicate that events and affairs were narrated that are not in the extant text; cf. F126.2 and F130.58.

⁶ Cf. his comments on F126.3, F127.5f, F128.31, F130.37-46, 55, 68, 95-97, 110-14, 124, 136.

⁷ H. Malcovati, *Imperatoris Caesaris Augusti Operum Fragmenta* (Turin 1967) xlvi.

written between 25 and 20 B.C. and was a “free paraphrase” of Augustus’ autobiography.⁸ It is clear then that the issue of the date of composition of the *Bios* has significance beyond simply establishing the chronological order of the corpus of a secondary author.

The newly-published Aphrodisias documents, in connection with other evidence, now allow a secure *terminus post quem* to be established from the text itself. In F130.45 Nicolaus states that Augustus gave *eleutheria* and *ateleia* to Illyrian Apollonia for the devotion it had shown him during his stay there just before the assassination of Caesar: Ἀπολλωνιάτας δὲ τότε <τε> ἐπήνεσε καὶ παρελθὼν εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν ἐλευθερίαν τε αὐτοῖς καὶ ἀτέλειαν . . . ἐπιδούς. Document 13 of the Aphrodisias inscriptions, a letter of Octavian rejecting a request by the Samians for such privileges, gives important evidence concerning the date of the grant to Apollonia:

Ἀυτοκράτωρ Καῖσαρ θεοῦ Ἰουλίῳ υἱὸς Αὐγουστος Σαμίῳις ὑπὸ τὸ
 ἀξίωμα ὑπέγραψεν·
 ἔξεστιν ὑμῖν αὐτοῖς ὁρᾶν ὅτι τὸ φιλόανθρωπον τῆς ἐλευθερίας οὐδενὶ
 δέδωκα δῆμῳ πλήν τῷ τῶν
 Ἀφροδεισιέων ὃς ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ τὰ ἐμὰ φρονήσας δοριάλωτος διὰ τὴν
 πρὸς ἡμᾶς εὖνοιαν ἐγένετο·
 οὐ γὰρ ἐστὶν δίκαιον τὸ πάντων μέγιστον φιλόανθρωπον εἰκῆ καὶ
 χωρὶς αἰτίας χαρίζεσθαι. ἐγὼ δὲ
 ὑμῖν μὲν εὖνοῶ καὶ βουλοίμην ἂν τῇ γυναικί μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν σπου-
 δαζούσῃ χαρίζεσθαι ἀλλὰ
 οὐχ ὥστε καταλύσαι τὴν συνήθειαν μου· οὐδὲ γὰρ τῶν χρημάτων
 μοι μέλει ἅ εἰς τὸν φόρον τελεῖτε
 ἀλλὰ τὰ τιμώτατα φιλόανθρωπα χωρὶς αἰτίας εὐλόγου δεδωκένα οὐ-
 δενὶ βούλομαι.

The Aphrodisians, in all probability, inscribed this copy of the letter out of pride in the statement (2f) that they were the first city to be granted *eleutheria* by Augustus.

The date of this letter constitutes a *terminus post quem* for the grant to Apollonia and the composition of the *Bios*. Unfortunately, the actual date is a matter of speculation. Reynolds’ rejection of the title Αὐγουστος as significant for dating the document is convincing, but her own date in the triumviral period (ca 38 B.C., on the occasion of

⁸ E. Gabba, “Augustus and the Historians,” in *Caesar Augustus: Seven Aspects*, edd. F. Millar and E. Segal (Oxford 1984) 62. Among others who assert correspondence between the *Bios* and Augustus’ autobiography: F. Blumenthal, *WS* 35 (1913) 113–30; H. Peter, *HRRel* II (1906) lxxiii; G. Dobesch, *GrazBeitr* 7 (1978) 93; B. Scardigli and F. Delbianco, *Nicolaio di Damasco, Vita di Augusto* (Florence 1983) 15. H. Hahn, *Nouv Clio* 10 (1958–1960) 144, is an exception, but his arguments are unelaborated.

the marriage of Octavian and Livia) has been properly questioned by two commentators, who argue that the use of the phrase τὰ ἐμὰ φρονήσας would be “remarkable” in so early a document, and that the phrase ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ need not refer to the war with Labienus.⁹ Badian has presented a strong case for a date in 31 B.C., when we know Octavian was busy settling the East.¹⁰ Bowersock has offered a later and—for consideration of the *Bios*—more intriguing date.

We know, as Bowersock points out, that the Samians finally did receive their *eleutheria* in the winter of 20/19 while Augustus was travelling in the East with Livia (Dio 54.9.7). More significantly, it is likely that Livia interceded with Augustus on behalf of certain Greek cities on this same trip (Dio 54.7.2). Moreover, it was only on the return leg of this journey from the East that Augustus actually did honor the request of Samos, and it is obvious from the context of Dio 54.9.7 that this was a decision made on short notice and without much deliberation. Bowersock proposes, then, that at some time during Augustus' stay in Samos, while on his outward journey, ca 22 B.C., the Princeps received a request from the Samians, supported by Livia, for *eleutheria*; document 13 is a copy of the letter denying this request. It was only later, on the return journey, most appropriately just before he would have left Samos in the spring of 19, that Augustus finally succumbed to the combined pleas of his wife and the Samians, and bestowed the grant.¹¹

If Bowersock's dating of the inscription is correct, it is reasonable to believe that the grants of *eleutheria* and *ateleia* to Apollonia should be dated to some time after 19 B.C., for there is no reason to think that the Apolloniats would have been accorded their privileges in the period between Augustus' refusal and eventual grant of such privileges to Samos. Thus, on this reconstruction of events, the *Bios* must also have been composed after 19 B.C.

Such a *terminus post quem* for the *Bios* does not render Jacoby's theory about the nature and form of the *Bios* impossible, but it does make it less probable, since Nicolaus would now be writing the *Bios* at least three years after the autobiography was issued. Furthermore, other factors suggest that Jacoby's assertion of a close relationship of the *Bios* and the autobiography of Augustus may not be altogether secure.

As stated above, the crux of Jacoby's dating of the *Bios* to the late 20's was his contention that only military campaigns conducted by

⁹ Bowersock (*supra* n.1) 52, and Badian, *GRBS* (*supra* n.1) 166.

¹⁰ Badian, *ibid.* 166–69.

¹¹ Bowersock (*supra* n.1) 52.

Augustus personally could be mentioned in the panegyric prooemium,¹² for otherwise the reference to the subjugation of peoples ἐν τῷ Πήγῳ would probably refer to the campaigns of Roman armies in the region between 20 and 12 B.C.¹³ There is, however, no evidence to maintain that there was such a tradition for the panegyric prooemium. It had been the practice from the earliest part of the Principate to claim the conquests and achievements of Augustan lieutenants as those of the Princeps himself. Numerous examples can be found in the poets, and Augustus himself (in the *Res Gestae* and elsewhere) did not hesitate to lay claim to the victories of others.¹⁴ Apparently his readers readily accepted the Princeps' claim to exclusive credit for the victories of armies operating *meo iussu et auspicio*. Indeed, early in the Principate it became policy that only Augustus and members of his family could be hailed as *imperator*.¹⁵ There is, then, no good reason to maintain, as Jacoby does, that Nicolaus would have limited himself, in the preserved part of the prooemium, to mentioning only those conquests in which Augustus was personally involved, for quite the opposite practice had operated throughout the Principate.¹⁶ Consequently, the evidence of the prooemium does not date the text decisively to the early period of the Principate, and it is probable that other later campaigns were meant.

¹² Cf. *supra* n.4.

¹³ Cf. Laqueur (*supra* n.3) 405, who points out that it was possible to claim the region as far as the Rhine settled at any time after the campaigns of Julius Caesar; cf. Sall. *Hist.* 1.11 M., *res Romanas plurimum imperio valuit . . . omni Gallia cis Rhenum . . . perdomita*.

¹⁴ The poets not only credited to Augustus deeds that were not his personally, they also claimed for him the conquest of whole regions that were never attacked by Roman armies—e.g. the celebrations of the triple triumph of 29 B.C., in which the conquest of the Parthian kingdom was claimed: cf. Verg. *G.* 3.30–34, Prop. 3.9.53–55, Hor. *Carm.* 2.9.18–22. On Augustus taking credit for the victories of his generals cf. V. Ehrenberg and A. H. M. Jones, *Documents Illustrating the Reigns of Augustus and Tiberius* (Oxford 1955) no. 40, and *Res Gestae* 26f. Panegyric writing encouraged such exaggeration. According to the *Rhet. Alex.*, the prologue of a panegyric should include a statement of the wonderful and outstanding achievements of the subject (1440b10), as well as attribution to him of qualities not in fact his (1425b13ff).

¹⁵ K. A. Raaflaub, "The Political Significance of Augustus' Military Reforms," in *Roman Frontier Studies 1979* (British Archaeological Reports [1980], edd. W. S. Hanson and L. J. F. Keppie) III 1011–12.

¹⁶ B. Scardigli, *Stilal* 50 (1978) 245–52, has attempted to support Jacoby's date by reference to Dio 50.24.4, but this passage looks suspiciously like another portion of a speech by Augustus in Dio (53.7.1). Most likely these descriptions of the accomplishments of Augustus are nothing more than tropes developed by Dio based on Augustan propaganda. They can indicate nothing of significance about the chronology of Augustan conquests or even their historicity. On the authenticity of the speeches in Dio, cf. P. Brunt, *JRS* 53 (1963) 172; on the speech from which Scardigli takes this passage, cf. Malcovati (*supra* n.7) xxxix.

Three other problems arise from consideration of Jacoby's theory. First, to judge from the remains of Nicolaus' autobiography, there is no evidence that Nicolaus met Augustus before 20 B.C., and it seems that it was only after the death of his patron Herod in 4 B.C. that Nicolaus resided in Rome for any continuous period. It must have been in the years after 4 B.C. that a friendship developed between Nicolaus and Augustus, a friendship that eventually led Augustus to name a variety of date palm after his biographer.¹⁷ It is difficult to understand what would have induced Nicolaus to compose an encomiastic biography of Augustus before 4 B.C., when we can safely assume he would have been hard at work on his massive universal history, written for the edification of Herod (F135). Circumstances after this date, however, do present a suitable context.

Second, Jacoby dismissed, without substantive argument, the implications of an observation made by F. Leo concerning the section of the *Bios* (F130.58–107) that deals with the conspiracy and murder of Julius Caesar. This section, which constitutes over a third of the extant *Bios*, is, in fact, a long digression; it concentrates on the person of Caesar and completely excludes Octavian. Leo resolved the question by suggesting that the digression on Caesar was taken by Nicolaus from his universal history and inserted in the *Bios*.¹⁸ This proposition has serious implications for the dating of the *Bios* because we can be reasonably certain that the history was not published much before 12 B.C., and most scholars believe that Nicolaus was still engaged in writing it as late as 4 B.C.¹⁹ Despite Jacoby's curt dismissal (p.264), there is merit in Leo's suggestion. The bridging passage that introduces the discussion of Caesar's assassination into the *Bios* is awkward and indicates that the author was aware that the following sections would be anomalous in this context.²⁰ Their tone and style are very different from those found in the

¹⁷ The first opportunity for Nicolaus to meet Augustus came in 20 B.C. at Antioch (F100, with Jacoby's comments, p.229), although there is no evidence that such a meeting actually took place. For his residence in Rome after the death of Herod cf. F138. On the naming of the date palm cf. T10.

¹⁸ F. Leo, *Die griechisch-römische Biographie nach ihrer litterarischen Form* (Leipzig 1901) 191.

¹⁹ F135 implies that Nicolaus had finished the history before his first trip to Rome in 12 B.C., but most scholars believe that F102, which mentions the conspiracy of the sons of Mariamme against Herod in 7 B.C., indicates that Nicolaus was occupied with it continuously down to 4 B.C., ending with the death of Herod; cf. Jacoby p.231 and W. Otto, *RE Suppl.* 2 (1903) 3 and 129 s.v. "Herodes (14)."

²⁰ ἐπιζητεί δὲ τοῦντεῦθεν ὁ λόγος ὅπως συστήσειαν τὴν ἐπιβουλήν οἱ σφαγείς ἐπὶ Καίσαρα καὶ ὡς τὸ σύμπαν κατειργάσαντο, τὰ τε μετὰ ταῦτα πραχθέντα, κινήθωντων τῶν ὄλων. διέξειμι οὖν αὐτὴν τε πρῶτον καθότι ἐγένετο καὶ ὅπως, τὰς τε αἰτίας ὑφ' ὧν

rest of the *Bios*, but accord well with the dramatic and pathetic manner we find in a number of fragments from the history. In the digression, *τύχη* and *μοῖρα* are the presiding factors (F130.83), and there is concentration on the vicissitudes of fortune that can accompany the career of a great man (F130.95). The two longest fragments of the universal history (F66 and F68) each demonstrate Nicolaus' propensity to inject pathos and drama into his writing. This is especially clear in the account of the pyre of Croesus: although based essentially on Herodotus, the story is greatly embellished by Nicolaus.²¹ There must have been some description of Caesar's assassination in the *Bios*, for it was a significant crisis in Octavian's career and legitimated his entrance into public life at Rome.²² It is probable that Nicolaus, when faced with the necessity of retelling this episode in the *Bios*, depended on his previous account.

Finally, scholars have failed to note just what an historiographical anomaly the *Bios* becomes in Jacoby's analysis. There is no secure precedent in classical antiquity for the publication of a partial biography during the lifetime of its subject.²³ Moreover, all evidence

συστάσα τοςόνδε ἐπεξήλθεν· ἔπειτα δὲ περὶ τοῦ ἑτέρου Καίσαρος, οὗ ἔνεκα ὄδε ὁ λόγος ὤρμηται, ὅπως τε παρήλθεν εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ, ἐπειδὴ αὐτ' ἐκείνου κατέστη, ὅποσα ἔργα πολέμου καὶ εἰρήνης ἀπεδείξατο (F130.58).

²¹ Although the accounts in Herodotus (1.86) and in Nicolaus (F68) are essentially the same in outline, they differ greatly in their presentation and emphasis: Herodotus' version illustrates the retribution of the gods for the good fortune that Croesus claimed with such hubris; Nicolaus presents a scene full of pathos by inventing a dialogue between Croesus and his formerly mute son, and by giving an expanded and graphic depiction of the crowd of spectators and the rainstorm that receive only cursory mention in Herodotus. In this way, he turns an old tradition into a drama for his reader. See also H. W. Parke, "Croesus and Delphi," *GRBS* 25 (1984) 226f.

²² Jacoby p.272 and Blumenthal (*supra* n.8) 124f.

²³ Leo (*supra* n.18) 195–98 devised an elaborate theory based on a statement in Nepos' life of Atticus (*hactenus Attico vivo edita a nobis sunt*, 19.1) that there were two 'editions' of Nepos' *Lives*, each containing a life of Atticus, one published during the lifetime of Atticus and a second edition published after his death. This theory has been accepted by every standard work that deals with the matter; full analysis must await another context, but the crucial clause need not require that Nepos had issued a version of the biography of Atticus during the subject's lifetime. It is better to take the verb *edo* in a more general sense of what Nepos had produced or written at the time of Atticus' death—which is to say, that portion of the biography he had composed but not necessarily issued. It then becomes clear that this passage has no temporal significance. It rather indicates that Nepos is introducing another section of his biography that will deal with the death of Atticus; thus the absolute, *Attico vivo*. Although such a statement might seem peculiar in a biography, one must remember that the Atticus biography is the only one in the collection of a contemporary of the reader. A reference to the point at which he died would have been quite intelligible, forming as it does a bridge to the final chapters that will deal with the manner of his death. For similar uses of *hactenus* as a bridge to a new topic cf. Cic. *Div.* 2.24.53 and the famous passage at Suet. *Cal.* 22. An elaborate analysis of the possible meanings of *edo* in this passage can

indicates that Nicolaus was a devout Peripatetic,²⁴ and any working hypothesis must suppose that he wrote in the Peripatetic biographical tradition.²⁵ This supposition is confirmed by Nicolaus' emphasis on the deeds, τὰ πεπραγμένα, of Augustus (cf. F126.2 and F130.58)—a clear echo of the Peripatetic concern with illustrating the character of a man, his ἔθος, through analysis of his deeds, or πράξεις.²⁶

Because so little of the autobiography of Augustus is preserved, it is not a significant argument to note that there is no correspondence between any of the fragments of the *Bios* and Augustus' work. At the same time, such a paucity of evidence prohibits the assumption that the *Bios* substantially reflects any part of the autobiography. It is clear that we can never know what, if any, relationship there was between the *Bios* and Augustus' autobiography; we can only deduce probabilities. But evidence from the Aphrodisias inscription, from the text of the *Bios* itself, and the canons of Greek biographical writing all seem to indicate a date of composition and publication somewhat later than that supposed by Jacoby, probably a date after the death of Augustus. The burden of proof to the contrary must lie with those who believe there was a close correspondence between the two books.

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be found in H. Rahn, *Hermes* 85 (1957) 205–15. Even if one accepts the idea that Nepos was unique in publishing a biography during the lifetime of his subject, it remains that it was the overwhelming practice in the ancient world not to issue a biography until after the death of the subject.

²⁴ In F132 he refers to himself as a ζηλωτής Ἀριστοτέλους; for other evidence of Nicolaus' reputation as Peripatetic cf. T11 and FF73, 77, 78, 94, 95. For an analysis and translation of the fragments of Nicolaus' work on the philosophy of Aristotle, cf. H. J. Drossart Lulofs, *Nicolaus Damascenus on the Philosophy of Aristotle* (Leiden 1965).

²⁵ Leo (*supra* n.18) 190ff; cf. also A. Momigliano, *The Development of Greek Biography* (Harvard 1971) 86, and *Second Thoughts on Greek Biography* (Amsterdam/London 1971) 13.

²⁶ Cf. Leo (*supra* n.18) 188–90 for a full discussion of Aristotle's ethical theories as they relate to biography.