

Appian (was: Severian's family tree)

The Urth list — 21 messages, 9 voices, 25 Aug 2006

<https://urth.darkrealm.vip/thread/urth/4696>

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Tony Ellis — 25 Aug 2006, 18:19

Apologies if this turns into a repeat post, the little tubes of the internet seem to have eaten my first attempt.

Dan'I wrote:

Why do people keep referring to Severian's immediate predecessor as Appian? Is there some reference I've missed?

I don't think so. As far as I can see it's a mistake that's been repeated so many times on this list that it has somehow magically become 'true', like Holmes saying "Elementary, my dear Watson." :-)

As you say, Appian dates from too long ago. In 'The Cat' we're told that Appian was Autarch 62 years before Severian's reign. Even if we generously make Appian 18 at the time, that would still make the Autarch Severian knows a man of 80.

The thinking seems to be that since the old Autarch was trained by a honey-steward, 'Apian' would be an apt name for him. Well, yes. Appian, on the other hand, is an entirely different word - derived, as far as I can see, from the name Appius, etymology unknown.

Roy C. Lackey — 28 Aug 2006, 05:08 · follows Tony Ellis

Note: In this post, "Old Autarch" refers to Severian's immediate predecessor.

As Tony said, Appian has been accepted as the name of the Old Autarch for a long time by many people. Both Andre-Driussi and Borski have endorsed the notion in print.

Tony Ellis wrote:

As you say, Appian dates from too long ago. In 'The Cat' we're told that Appian was Autarch 62 years before Severian's reign. Even if we generously make Appian 18 at the time, that would still make the Autarch Severian knows a man of 80.<<

True, the age of the Old Autarch presents something of a problem, but he's not alone. I'll try to assemble the facts in so far as they can be determined from the text(s), but first I need a measuring stick -- Severian's age at the time he became autarch.

Personally, based on scattered comments by Sev himself, by Gurloes and, particularly, Thecla, I have a hard time seeing him as any more than 18 when he became autarch, but my opinion must take a back seat to the numbers afforded by the text.

When Sev first met Agia, he thought she was "twenty or a little more". She later acknowledged she was 23. Hildegryn, while making a snide comment about Agia, said that Sev "was probably born only a couple years sooner" than she. That all seems to establish that Sev was about 25 when he became autarch.

Sancha was 14 at the time of the scandal. Lomer was 28. When Sancha "came of age" (18?,

21?), she was permitted by the Autarch Appian to move down south. She returned to the House Absolute fifty years later, age about 70. She died seven years after returning (age 77), when Sev was about 20. Lomer was still in the antechamber five years after she died. That would make Lomer about 96 when Sev first met him, which strikes me as a bit hard to believe.

Odilo II (author of "The Cat") became Steward when Sev was 10, so Sev was 13 when Sancha returned to the House Absolute. We know the Old Autarch was definitely ruler when she returned, because he opened the whorehouse about the time Sev was born. So, if Appian wasn't the Old Autarch, then Appian died while Sancha was down south.

Not long before dying, the Old Autarch said, "You remember everything, and so you must recall the night you came to my House Azure. That night someone else came to me. I was a servant once, in the House Absolute.... That is why they hate me. As they will hate you, for what you once were. Paeon, who trained me, who was honey-steward fifty years gone by. I knew what he was in truth, for I had met him before. He told me you were the one... the next. I did not think it would be quite so soon..." (CITADEL, chapter XXV)

Trained to do what? Wrangle bees? Be a good ruler? To serve tea? It seems to me that Paeon was not a mere man, if he was a man at all. He goes from a "who" to a "what". He may have been some variety of Hierodule, or a man the Old Autarch knew years before who had died or disappeared and returned as an eidolon that night, recreated just for the occasion of heralding the certain knowledge that Sev would be the next autarch.

At any rate, the quote seems to suggest that Sev's predecessor was hanging around the House Absolute, if only as a servant, long before Sev was born. How much time passed between the Old Autarch gaining the throne and going to Yesod? Why the incidental mention of honey-steward, if honey is not related to the name Appian, regardless of whether or not the etymology is correct? If Paeon trained Sev's immediate predecessor, he may also have been involved with autarchs before him. He may have arranged things so that the Old Autarch, groomed to satisfaction, was in the right place at the right time to eat *his* predecessor's forebrain. The Old Autarch certainly knew that he would encounter Sev up north and be replaced.

Palaemon said that the roads had been closed, when he was Sev's age (25), by the Autarch Maruthas. How old is Palaemon? Did Maruthas reign before or after Appian? If before, then Palaemon had to be *at least* 82 when Sev became autarch, even if Maruthas died in the same year Appian let Sancha leave the House Absolute. If after, then at least two autarchs died while Sancha was away, and Palaemon's age can be less than 82.

All in all, I think the preponderance of evidence suggests that Sancha's Appian was not the Old Autarch, and that the last four rulers of the Commonwealth were, in order, Appian, Maruthas, the Old Autarch and Severian. Sev, though he has all the guy's memories, goes out of his way *not* to mention the guy's name. Why? And what was the name?

-Roy

Jeff Wilson — 28 Aug 2006, 05:28 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

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Considering the way Thecla's memories loom and threaten to take over whenever she is called to mind, perhaps avoiding the old Autarch's personal name is an attempt to keep *that* set of memories from taking over?

Roy C. Lackey — 28 Aug 2006, 05:47 · follows Jeff Wilson

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

All in all, I think the preponderance of evidence suggests that Sancha's Appian was not the Old Autarch, and that the last four rulers of the Commonwealth were, in order, Appian, Maruthas, the Old Autarch and Severian.

Sev, though he has all the guy's memories, goes out of his way *not* to mention the guy's name. Why? And what was the name?

Considering the way Thecla's memories loom and threaten to take over whenever she is called to mind, perhaps avoiding the old Autarch's personal name is an attempt to keep *that* set of memories from taking over?

She did take over at times, notably when Sev and the autarch were on the doomed flier. In fact, the autarch pulled a gun on her/him when it happened. That would have been a good time for Sev/Thecla to drop the guy's name -- there was no good reason then not to reveal it, because all present knew what it was.

-Roy

Adam Thornton — 28 Aug 2006, 05:50 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Aug 27, 2006, at 10:47 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

That would have been a good time for Sev/Thecla to drop the guy's name --
there was no good reason then not to reveal it, because all present knew
what it was.

Dude, I'm telling you, it's "Verus."

Stupid Onomastics to the Rescue!

Adam

Jeff Wilson — 28 Aug 2006, 06:10 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Jeff Wilson quoted and wrote:

All in all, I think the preponderance of evidence suggests that Sancha's Appian was not the Old Autarch, and that the last four rulers of the Commonwealth were, in order, Appian, Maruthas, the Old Autarch and Severian.

Sev, though he has all the guy's memories, goes out of his way *not* to mention the guy's name. Why? And what was the name?

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She did take over at times, notably when Sev and the autarch were on the doomed flier. In fact, the autarch pulled a gun on her/him when it happened. That would have been a good time for Sev/Thecla to drop the guy's name -- there was no good reason then not to reveal it, because all present knew what it was.

Perhaps it was mentioned then, but the narrator redacts the dialogue to avoid writing it, because he still has those memories lurking within.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 28 Aug 2006, 07:30 · in reply to Tony Ellis

Tony Ellis writes:

As you say, Appian dates from too long ago. In 'The Cat' we're told that Appian was Autarch 62 years before Severian's reign. Even if we generously make Appian 18 at the time, that would still make the Autarch Severian knows a man of 80.

I'd agree with Tony if I thought the old autarch was really 80, but I don't for a number of reasons.

For starters, I have a lot of problems with the 62-year figure cited since the statement about how "Paeon, who trained me, who was honey-steward fifty years gone by" seems to imply that the training in question took place fifty years ago. Given that Sev-as-Legion has memories of being a boy in the kitchens of the House Absolute further seems to indicate he was quite young when he began his apprenticeship. If he was five, that means he will only be 55 when he dies; if he's twelve, 62. In a low tech subsistence culture like the Commonwealth, both 55 and 62 might indeed constitute "old." A kitchen apprenticeship also seems consistent with someone being trained as honey steward

But even if Tony's right, and 62 is not the penultimate autarch's lifespan, but the length of his reign, other factors may impact on his putative age.

Roy Lackey has argued, for example, that when the penultimate autarch went to Yesod, the time lapse was probably minimal. From purely textual analysis, however, I don't believe there's any way to tell whether he's gone two minutes or ten years, which further complicates the age question. Because the ship of the Hierogrammates slips in and out of time, Gunnie also claims that some people disembark even younger than when they got on. Hence that hypothetical upper 80 might in actuality be much lower.

Then, too: is one required to be a minimum age before assuming the autarchy? How old is Reechy/Ymar? Or Severian -- who quite probably is still a teen? Could it be even younger? Sixteen? (cf. Alexander the Great) Or even twelve or ten, since Father Inire is probably going to be acting as regent anyway? This could further lower the supposed old age Tony and others think disqualifies Appian as Sev's predecessor, especially if, in his duties as apprentice or journeyman steward, he stumbles upon the antepenultimate autarch alone in his final moments.

And as an addendum to my previous post, worker bees (by far the largest population in any hive) are sterile, as is the autarch who precedes Severian.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - The professional email service

Tony Ellis — 28 Aug 2006, 17:49 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Rex Lycanthrosaurus wrote:

But even if Tony's right, and 62 is not the penultimate autarch's lifespan, but the length of his reign, other factors may impact on his putative age.

You're either misreading me or misquoting me. :-) I have never said that 62 years was the length of the penultimate Autarch's reign. 62 is the number of years that have passed between a point when we know Appian was on the throne and the point when Severian meets the penultimate Autarch. I'm saying that this **can't** be the length of the penultimate Autarch's reign. It would make him far too old.

As for there being some sort of extenuating circumstances... There is no evidence that Appian was only a boy at the time of the 62-years-ago incident describe in The Cat, there is no evidence that the penultimate Autarch's trip to Yesod took decades off him.

If anything, the lack of evidence is a strike against such arguments. It seems a little unusual that a ten-year-old Autarch should **not** be remarked upon. It seems a little strange that Severian can describe 'his' Autarch as almost like 'a plump woman of 40' and not wonder how someone who has been doing the job for at least 62 years could look so young.

And finally we have the mysterious Paeon, whom Roy also mentions. You reason that the penultimate Autarch may have been 5-12 years old when Paeon trained him, 50 years ago, and I agree. But since we know Appian had been on the throne **at least** 12 years by then, doesn't that support my theory rather than yours?

David DiGiacomo — 28 Aug 2006, 17:55 · follows Tony Ellis

You're either misreading me or misquoting me. :-) I have never said that 62 years was the length of the penultimate Autarch's reign. 62 is the number of years that have passed between a point when we know Appian was on the throne and the point when Severian meets the penultimate Autarch. I'm saying that this **can't** be the length of the penultimate Autarch's reign. It would make him far too old.

How long do humans live in the time of the New Sun books?

How about wealthy humans with access to ET medicine and time travel? Do we have any idea?

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 28 Aug 2006, 20:01 · in reply to Tony Ellis

On Mon, 28 Aug 2006 18:49:11 +0100, "Tony Ellis"

<tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> said:

It seems a little strange that Severian can describe 'his' Autarch as almost like 'a plump woman of 40' and not wonder how someone who has been doing the job for at least 62 years could look so young.

Stranger still that the penultimate autarch, who looks like "a plump woman of forty," can have been trained in his duties as honey steward over fifty years ago, which, depending on his age when he started (5-12, which even you agree with), would make him at least fifty-five, if not in his early sixties. So "he" obviously cannot be forty.

It seems a little unusual that a ten-year-old Autarch should **not** be remarked upon.

Who besides Sev in tBotNS remarks that Typhon has two heads? Surely, however, he's one of a kind! Whereas boy-emperors have been common throughout history, whether in Asia, Europe or

Africa, and probably not considered altogether unusual back in the day. Moreover, in the Commonwealth, it's Father Inire who wields the real power, no matter how old the autarch is.

Wolfe, as I believe is commonly acknowledged, often leaves it to his readers to figure out the names of certain characters he specifically does not identify, and as a perusal of the archives will show, apparently you yourself were surprised that Number Five's real name in Fifth Head turned out to be Gene Wolfe. (See <http://urth.net/urth/archives/v0008/0692.shtml>) So it doesn't particularly astonish me that for excess of a -"p", you don't believe that someone who has been trained as a honey steward, worked in the kitchens of the House Absolute, is sterile like a bee, and has a name that is nearly identical with 'apian' can be the penultimate autarch.

Plus your argument also begs this additional question. If the penultimate autarch's name is **not** Appian, then what is it? And if it's indeterminable, why, in a book that has hundred of named characters, often who play only a very minor or marginal role (indeed, there are dozens who never even appear on-stage), does he leave in forfeit the name of this most noble man, the would-be saviour of Urth, who attempts to bring back the New Sun, but comes home a castrado?

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - The professional email service

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes — 28 Aug 2006, 20:35 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

On 8/28/06, Rex Lycanthrosaurus
<lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm> wrote:
Plus your argument also begs this additional question. If the
penultimate autarch's name is **not** Appian, then what is it? And if it's
indeterminable, why, in a book that has hundred of named characters,
often who play only a very minor or marginal role (indeed, there are
dozens who never even appear on-stage), does he leave in forfeit the
name of this most noble man, the would-be saviour of Urth, who attempts
to bring back the New Sun, but comes home a castrado?

What it is I don't have an answer for. But I have several ideas on why his name might be concealed, beginning with the possibility that he may be one of Severian's grandparents.

Dan'I Danehy-Oakes, writer, trainer, bon vivant

<http://www.livejournal.com/users/sturgeonslawyer>
"Shovels are essential to the fantasy genre.
However, they are primarily used by the authors rather than the
characters." -- Stephen R. Donaldson

Tony Ellis — 28 Aug 2006, 23:45 · follows Dan'I Danehy-Oakes

Rex Lycanthrosaurus said:

It seems a little strange that Severian can describe
'his' Autarch as almost like 'a plump woman of 40' and not wonder how
someone who has been doing the job for at least 62 years could look
so
young.

Stranger still that the penultimate autarch, who looks like "a plump
woman of forty," can have been trained in his duties as honey steward
over fifty years ago, which, depending on his age when he started
(5-12,

which even you agree with), would make him at least fifty-five, if not in his early sixties. So "he" obviously cannot be forty.

Again, you're either misreading or misquoting me. I didn't say the Autarch was 40, I didn't even say he looked like he was 40. I said Severian said that the Autarch looked almost like 'a plump woman of 40'. And he does say that. Nobody is saying the old Autarch is 40. Severian is saying he *almost* looks like a plump woman of 40. It's a simile, dude.

The significance? The old Autarch doesn't look like a man of 72, which is how old he would be in the entirely unsubstantiated case that he was Appian and Appian gained the throne at age ten, 62 years ago. The idea of a eunuch in his late 50s, running to fat and with, as Severian tells us, an unlined face, being poetically described as *almost* like a plump woman of 40, I have no problem with.

As for your idea that Appian was a 'boy-emperor'... OK, purely for the sake of argument, let's pretend for a moment that Appian did attain the throne at age ten, even though there is absolutely no textual evidence for this. Now tell me how you know that Appian attained the throne just 62 years before Severian became Autarch.

I'm all ears. All Odilo tells us, in *The Cat*, is that 62 years before Severian became Autarch, the Autarch Appian gave his permission for Sancha to leave the House Absolute. How long had Appian been Autarch then? We're not told. Why not 20 years? Why not 40?

Even to get an Autarch who is merely an implausible 72-years-old, you have to invent an entirely not-textual boy-Autarch and balance this invention on top of an entirely non-textual ascent to the throne 62 years ago.

and as a perusal of the archives will show,
apparently you yourself were surprised that Number Five's real name in
Fifth Head turned out to be Gene Wolfe. (See
<http://urth.net/urth/archives/v0008/0692.shtml>)

It was nice of you to go the trouble of digging up an eight-year-old post like that; thank you for showing everyone that when someone does come up with a good argument, which can be backed-up by the text, I'm happy to go along with it. :-)

Plus your argument also begs this additional question. If the penultimate autarch's name is *not* Appian, then what is it?

Pedantically speaking, that's 'raising the question', not begging it. Begging the question, interestingly enough, is where you state something that can only be proved true if your argument is true, and then use that to try to prove that your argument is true.

Adam Thornton — 28 Aug 2006, 23:53 · in reply to Tony Ellis

On Aug 28, 2006, at 4:45 PM, Tony Ellis wrote:

Again, you're either misreading or misquoting me. I didn't say the Autarch was 40, I didn't even say he looked like he was 40. I said Severian said that the Autarch looked almost like 'a plump woman of 40'.

And he does say that. Nobody is saying the old Autarch is 40. Severian is saying he *almost* looks like a plump woman of 40. It's a simile, dude.

Bah!

I am going to flog, again, my Theory Of Stupid Onomastics and invoke Severian's Crappy

Narrative Skills to suggest that the old Autarch
is a plump woman of 40, and therefore her name is "Vera."

Adam

Rex Lycanthrosaurus — 29 Aug 2006, 02:08 · in reply to Tony Ellis

On Tue, 29 Aug 2006 00:45:16 +0100, "Tony Ellis"
<tonyellis69 at btopenworld.com> said:

I'm all ears. All Odilo tells us, in The Cat, is that 62 years before
Severian became Autarch, the Autarch Appian gave his permission for
Sancha to leave the House Absolute. How long had Appian been Autarch
then?

A significant portion of your argument relies on the chronology presented in "The Cat," which
I've now just reread in conjunction with Roy Lackey's recent post. Using figures from the story
Roy calculates Lomer's age to be 96, and I can see no mistakes in his math. So do you too
contend Lomer is 96? (Ditto for fellow prisoner Nicarete, who seems "almost equally old"?) And
can this actually be right given conditions in the antechamber, where the prisoner's diet seems
to consist of coffee and sweet rolls, and they're frequently roughed up by malicious exultant
punks? Or is it more likely that Wolfe screwed up his numbers? Obviously, I think the latter
more probable.

It was nice of you to go the trouble of digging up an eight-year-old
post like that; thank you for showing everyone that when someone does
come up with a good argument, which can be backed-up by the text, I'm
happy to go along with it. :-)

This was a shameless cheap shot on my part and I apologize for using it, but I was amused
when I read it recently because I generally have been impressed by the tenor and substance of
your postings. Perhaps even now you're right and the various proponents of the
Appian-as-penultimate-autarch are wrong. But I still distrust numbers generated purely by an
ancillary story and thus continue to favor the ap(p)ian-honey steward association.

Rex Lycanthrosaurus
lycanthrosaurus at fastmail.fm

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<http://www.fastmail.fm> - The way an email service should be

Roy C. Lackey — 29 Aug 2006, 05:57 · follows Rex Lycanthrosaurus

Adam Thornton wrote:
Bah!

I am going to flog, again, my Theory Of Stupid Onomastics and invoke
Severian's Crappy Narrative Skills to suggest that the old Autarch
is a plump woman of 40, and therefore her name is "Vera."

Last night, you said it was "Verus." <g>

Anyway, Severian specifically used the word "unmanned" to describe what happened to his
predecessor. (URTH, 153)

-Roy

Adam Thornton — 29 Aug 2006, 06:05 · in reply to Roy C. Lackey

On Aug 28, 2006, at 10:57 PM, Roy C. Lackey wrote:

Adam Thornton wrote:

Bah!

I am going to flog, again, my Theory Of Stupid Onomastics and invoke Severian's Crappy Narrative Skills to suggest that the old Autarch *is* a plump woman of 40, and therefore her name is "Vera."

Last night, you said it was "Verus." <g>

Well, it's Verus if it's actually a man. Was actually a man. You know what I mean.

Anyway, Severian specifically used the word "unmanned" to describe what happened to his predecessor. (URTH, 153)

Yes, well, the Theory Of Stupid Onomastics should only be treated slightly more seriously than the We Are All Severian! Theory.

Adam

Roy C. Lackey — 29 Aug 2006, 06:35 · follows Adam Thornton

Rex Lycanthrosaurus wrote:

A significant portion of your argument relies on the chronology presented in "The Cat," which I've now just reread in conjunction with Roy Lackey's recent post. Using figures from the story Roy calculates Lomer's age to be 96, and I can see no mistakes in his math. So do you too contend Lomer is 96? (Ditto for fellow prisoner Nicarete, who seems "almost equally old"?)

Worse, she, at least, was still alive ten years after the antechamber scene, when Sev was writing his manuscript. He ordered her brought to him while he was writing just before leaving for Yesod.

No one has tried to fit in Palaemon's statement about Maruthas. Either Appian or Maruthas or both were in office within memory of at least three people who were still living the year Sev became autarch.

-Roy

Mo Holkar — 29 Aug 2006, 15:50 · in reply to Rex Lycanthrosaurus

At 21:01 28/08/2006, Rex Lycanthrosaurus wrote:
is sterile like a bee

Sorry to be coming to this late, but just as a point of pedantry, only female (worker) bees are sterile -- I think that male bees are invariably fully sexed.

And I think I would be rather disappointed if Wolfe did intend "Appian" mainly to convey "Apian". Other references of Appian -- (a) the C2 historian of that name, and (b) the most important road into Rome, built by the populist consul Appius Claudius. Dunno quite where those take us though.

Mo

Adam Thornton — 29 Aug 2006, 16:55 · in reply to Mo Holkar

On Aug 29, 2006, at 8:50 AM, Mo Holkar wrote:
And I think I would be rather disappointed if Wolfe did intend "Appian" mainly to convey "Apian". Other references of Appian -- (a) the C2 historian of that name, and (b) the most important road into Rome, built by the populist consul Appius Claudius. Dunno quite where those take us though.

Well, my Theory Of Stupid Onomastics ("Appian->Vera/Verus->Severian") relies on (b). The Appian Way takes us to Rome, of course. Or to Brindisi if we're walking in the other direction. Neither of which have anything, alas, to do with the New Sun.

Adam

b sharp — 29 Aug 2006, 19:29 · follows Adam Thornton

p.s. Me three on Paeon as aquastor to Malrubius

Oops, in my last post I meant Paeon as aquastor to Appian! umm..Vera/Verus, ummm Old Autarch...um...

Okay, I think we are now all agreed he had been honey steward and he should thus be addressed as My Sweet Lord. ;-)

-bsharp

Tony Ellis — 29 Aug 2006, 23:01 · follows b sharp

Rex wrote:

Using figures from the story Roy calculates Lomer's age to be 96, and I can see no mistakes in his math. So do you too contend Lomer is 96? (Ditto for fellow prisoner Nicarete, who seems "almost equally old"?) And can this actually be right given conditions in the antechamber, where the prisoner's diet seems to consist of coffee and sweet rolls, and they're frequently roughed up by malicious exultant punks? Or is it more likely that Wolfe screwed up his numbers? Obviously, I think the latter more probable.

I don't think it matters. Maybe Wolfe thinks that 96 is a plausible age for Lomer, and maybe he never stopped to think how old he was forcing Lomer to be. Either way, 62 years remains the figure that The Cat gives us for the gap between Appian's rule and the start of Severian's, and it's as much a part of that story as the name Appian itself.

As a personal aside: I don't tend to think of TBotNS as a realistic novel in the conventional sense. I don't find Severian stumbling across a 96-year-old man in an ancient Waiting Room any more implausible than the Waiting Room itself. Later, he finds another old man in a little house in the absolute middle of nowhere, and he turns out to be a schoolmate of Fechin. (And how old would *he* have to be?)

This was a shameless cheap shot on my part and I apologize.

Very nice of you to say so. Think nothing of it.