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in Late Hellenistic and Early Imperial Times

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Titel: Divine and/or Human? Biography and the Construction of Philosophical Authority
Figures in Imperial Times

Abstract: In Imperial times, we find a wealth of biographic material about philosophers, from micro-forms such as anecdotes to longer biographical accounts. Such material, which has its roots in Hellenistic times and spans different genres, centers on the one hand on philosophers from ancient times, e.g. Pythagoras, Socrates or Plato, on the other hand, on philosophers belonging to the recent past or the author's own times, if we think of Lucian's *Life of Demonax*, Philostratus' account of Apollonius of Tyana, or Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*. The aims towards which the biographical material is employed vary greatly. To focus on the longer accounts: they can be part of histories of philosophy, as in the case of Diogenes Laertius' *Lives* or Porphyry's mostly lost *Philosophical History*, they can brush the *mirabilia* literature, presenting the sage as an extraordinary, ultimately superhuman, being, as in the case of Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius* or of Porphyry's *Life of Pythagoras*, or they can be composed as living portraits embodying a distinctive conception of philosophy, as in the case of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus* or Iamblichus' *Pythagorean Way of Life*. Other types of biographical material may take an isolated particular element, such as Socrates' *daimonion*, as the starting-point for philosophical discussions, which often entail a portrayal of the philosopher in case as a model of human perfection.

Building on selected examples, the paper will highlight the various ways of collecting and using biographical material about philosophers and enquire into when and how the various authors emphasize the connection of the respective figure to the divine. In what contexts is the philosopher portrayed by means of biographical material as a *locus* where the divine and the human come together? How can this intersection of the human and the divine be described? Can we find instances in which the individual philosopher's life is placed in the wider perspective of history? Particular attention will be devoted to the relationship of biographical material with portrayals of philosophers as authorities in human and divine matters that are based not on biography, but on their teachings, from which the quintessential dimension of the respective figure is distilled. What is constitutive for the authority and quasi-religious aura of philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, but also Epicurus – the events of their life or rather their ideas and/or writings?