

## REVIEW

### DIO'S TIBERIAN BOOKS: A NEW TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

Christopher T. Mallan, *Cassius Dio, Roman History: Books 57 and 58 (The Reign of Tiberius)*. Clarendon Ancient History Series. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020. Pp. xvi + 402. Hardback, £94.00/\$125.00. ISBN 978-0-19-879789-0.

Long undervalued, if not neglected, Cassius Dio's *Roman History* has received greater scholarly attention over the past several decades, especially those of the present century. Christopher Mallan's latest work is a welcome addition to a growing assemblage of detailed commentaries in English on Dio's *Roman History*, offering new insights into scholarly understanding of Dio, of the history of the early Empire, and of that enigmatic individual, Tiberius Julius Caesar.

The volume consists of a list of abbreviations (xi–xiii), a list of tables (xv), an introduction in three parts (1–42), translations of Books 57 and 58 (43–90), extensive commentary on those books (91–352), four appendices (353–68), bibliography (369–95), and indices (396–402). The first section of the Introduction introduces Cassius Dio the senatorial historian (1–5): his family, intellectual milieu, bilingual education, and inculcation of senatorial values. Mallan observes (5) that the historian was 'not the first ... politician of provincial or colonial origin to identify more with the political culture of the centre than with his native periphery'; this identity focused Dio's historical gaze.

The second and longest section of the Introduction (5–34) is further divided into discussion of sources, method of composition, shaping of material, and conclusion. There is extensive discussion of sources (6–22), most of which were written in Latin. A Roman senator like his father, living and working in a bilingual age, Dio is unlikely to have needed assistance with Latin sources; Mallan observes as well Dio's habit of transliterating rather than translating Latin terms (11). Eschewing a complicated depiction of Dio's narrative pieced together and biased by switching from one source to the next as he compiled, the conclusion Mallan reaches here is that Dio's sources were mostly literary, annalistic rather than biographical, and influenced by a senatorial outlook that would have resonated with his own point of view, even if not all of his sources were written by senators. He seems to have been familiar with both Suetonius

and Tacitus without necessarily consulting either closely: in the Commentary there are frequent notices of sections where Dio's chronology and other details do not line up with Tacitus'. It is possible that upon occasion Dio used the *acta senatus* or a work that had cited them, or written collections of *dicta*, as sayings of Tiberius occur frequently, especially in Book 57 (17–18). For other anecdotes or details, Mallan suggests that one source may have been Tiberius Claudius Balbillus, who was probably Thrasyllus' son (20–1).

After citing the well-known passage (73(72).23.5 (Xiph.))<sup>1</sup> in which Dio says that he spent ten years collecting material and twelve years writing, Mallan addresses the historian's method of composition (22–9). Scholars cannot establish for certain whether Dio took notes as he read, if he took notes in Greek while reading Latin, or any other authorial practice. The process may well have been much as Rich has proposed, that Dio based his narrative on the notes he had taken while reading.<sup>2</sup> Shaping of the collected material (29–34) reflects Dio's personal outlook: his depiction of Tiberius remains firmly on the emperor himself as the person instigating action and ultimately in control of his subjects, including powerful individuals. The picture of Tiberius' early years is mostly positive, as illustrated, for example, by the difference between Tacitus' reaction to the treatment of M. Hortalus (*Ann.* 2.37.1–38.10) and Dio's more general account (57.10.3), naming no names, of how Tiberius handled impoverished senators (30). The history is of the Roman people, not other peoples, and as the political entity grew from Republic to Empire, the focus of Dio's (and others') historical writing became the history of each ruler, with other players such as individuals, the Senate, or the army brought into the narrative as appropriate. Mallan closes this section with the observation that while Dio and Tacitus speak with different accents, they both speak as senators (34).

In the third part of the Introduction (35–42) Mallan addresses the fate of this now fragmentary work, of which only Books 36–60 of Dio's original composition make up the transmitted text, and those too not always complete. Mallan describes the various excerptors and epitomators, some of whom are more faithful to the original than others, and the advantages of one over another. The text used for the translation and commentary is U. P. Boissevain's *editio maior*, with L. Dindorf's edition of Zonaras' *Epitome of Histories*. There are a few deviations, all noted, from Boissevain's text.

In the translation Mallan does not try to merge Dio's and epitomator(s') texts to create a continuous narrative for 57.17.8–58.7.2, but translates the various parts of these books as we have them, labelling each and marking off the different writers by horizontal lines. Despite some narrative duplication,

<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I, 'Dio's Literary Career' (353–5) for discussion of this passage.

<sup>2</sup> J. W. Rich, *Cassius Dio: The Augustan Settlement (Roman History 53–55.9)* (Warminster, 1990) 5–8.

this method gives readers a better idea of the transmitted work and illustrates the differences in various threads of transmission. It is a fruitful approach that others may consider adopting as occasion arises.

The self-described ‘workmanlike’ translation reads very well and, as Mallan notes, provides commentary of its own in the translator’s choices. He includes both the synopsis and list of magistrates at the head of each book, with a good note on this at the beginning of the commentary to Book 57, arguing that Dio himself created these indices.

Book 57 opens with Dio’s extended description of Tiberius, and Mallan’s translation of *φύσει δὲ ἰδιωτάτη ἐκέχρητο* is splendid: ‘but he possessed a most singular nature’.<sup>3</sup> Other felicitous choices include ‘anxiety’ for *ὄχλον* at 57.1.6, ‘(but only just)’ for *μόλις* at 57.4.3, ‘shorn not fleeced’ at 57.10.5, ‘toy boy’ for *παιδικά* at 57.19.5. The notes elucidate difficulties too, e.g., how to render *δῆθεν*: the solution offered at 57.1.2, 57.2.5, and 58.18.1 is ‘pretended’ but at 57.2.2 is ‘if you can believe it’ (see notes to 57.1.2 and 57.2.2). At 57.16.4 *παραττομένων ... τῶν ἐν τῷ ἄστει* becomes ‘this story was being noised about’, a version that relates the gist of the situation without being too literal. To indicate a new year Dio writes *νουμηνία* (57.8.6, 57.17.1, 58.5.5 (Xiph.)), translated ‘New Year’s Day’, with a note in the commentary at 57.8.5.

I have much admiration for and few quibbles with the English versions of Books 57 and 58. In only one place do I disagree, for at 57.12.2 *ἀμφοῖν* appears to me to be dative of reference with *ἐγράφετο* rather than instrumental; Dio has switched from a plural verb in the active voice with *ἐπιστολαί* as subject to third person singular (impersonal) passive. Two passages appear to have lost a word in translation: at 57.15.3 the words ‘in Greek’ (*ἑλληνιστί*) should be inserted after ‘give evidence’, and at 58.14.2 ‘formerly’ (*πρότερον*) should be added, modifying the verb ‘had been envied’. At 58.22.3 ‘pre-eminent’ without further modifier is an open-ended rendition of *ἐκπρεπή*, Dio’s description of Marius’ daughter, but Mallan observes in the note *ad loc.* that Dio himself may have been deliberately vague as to whether he meant her beauty or her virtue or both. The translation with its note thus serves the original very well.

Textual matters and questions of translation often figure in the Commentary, especially when Dio’s text is not extant and different excerptors or epitomators preserve different episodes, particularly in the first quarter of Book 58. Important terms in Dio’s narrative, when not transliterated but represented by Greek words, need special note; *πρόκριτος* appears twice in 57.8.2, the first time with *τῆς γερουσίας*, the second time by itself, both translated as ‘leader’. Mallan writes that although *princeps* is meant both times, the first is in the republican sense (*princeps senatus*), the second in the imperial. In other

<sup>3</sup> This is also the title used for his chapter on Tiberius in C. Davenport and C. Mallan, edd., *Emperors and Political Culture in Cassius Dio’s Roman History* (Cambridge, 2021) 133–57.

passages Dio uses Greek words relating to rule by the people—*δημοκρατικός* and *δημοτικός* (*δημοτικός* at 57.8.3; *δημοτικῶς* at 57.9.1; *δημοκρατία* at 57.11.3)—for ‘republican’ or ‘republic’, and Mallan discusses these terms in some detail in the commentary. Similarly, his translation of *τῆς δημοκρατίας σχῆμα* as ‘republican government’ at 57.15.9 is correct. At 58.18.4 *τῷ κοινῷ* is ‘the commonwealth’; Mallan notes that if this phrase is a gloss on the version in Tacitus<sup>4</sup> then ‘his interpretation is an acute reading of the subtext of Tiberius’ comments’. The first extant appearance of the word *ἀσέβεια* in the history comes at 57.9.2, and Mallan pauses to discuss what Dio meant by the term, conventionally thought to be equivalent to *maiestas*. He raises excellent points, especially that of the ‘slippery (and ill-defined) nature of the accusation’ and the consideration that Dio is writing ‘a history, not a legal handbook’. Whatever Dio means by the term, he is in accord with what Tacitus, Suetonius, and Pliny write about *maiestas*, that a good emperor does not make an issue of it but a bad one does.

Occasionally a Greek word is best not translated. For example, at 57.20.1 (Xiph.) Dio wrote that Tiberius’ consular colleagues always came to an untoward end, adding *τοιοῦτῳ τινί, ὡς ἔοικε, διὰ βίου δαίμονι συνεκεκλήρωτο*. Mallan translates, ‘Thus it seemed that he had been allotted some such *daimōn* for the course of his life’; his note explains the choice, for the notion of a personal *δαίμων* was important to Dio and many others. Much too might depend on choosing between two conflicting translations: understanding what the charge was at 57.24.3 (Xiph.) depends on knowing whether *καθήψατο* meant ‘denigrated’, Mallan’s choice, or ‘supported’. Here both translation and note provide useful information.

Thorough discussion and analysis of Dio’s historical writing occurs throughout the commentary: Dio’s possible sources, specifics of events as known from other narratives and physical remains, prosopography, and comparison with Dio’s understanding elsewhere in his history of similar situations. Mallan frequently notes and discusses various thematic components of Dio’s history, his characterisations of the characters of rulers and others, his observations on senatorial reactions or the behaviour of the army and soldiers, his shaping of the narrative to fit his understanding of Tiberius and the ways in which he wants to present him throughout his reign.

The structure of the commentary follows a consistent pattern when the condition of the text allows: each section usually opens with a discussion of focus and themes, enhanced when feasible by a table listing content and

<sup>4</sup> *Ann.* 6.3.1: *Iunium Gallionem ... violenter increpuit, velut coram rogicans quid illi cum militibus quos neque dicta imperatoris neque praemia nisi ab imperatore accipere par esset* (‘[in his letter, Tiberius] harshly attacked Junius Gallio, as if demanding of him in person what he had to do with the soldiers who ought not to receive either the emperor’s words or rewards save from the emperor’).

arrangement of events for the year in Dio's history and Tacitus' extant books. The first table in the commentary accompanies notes on 57.4.1–6.1 and shows parallel developments of the mutinies of 14 CE in Pannonia and Germany.

At the beginning of the commentary to Book 57, Mallan demonstrates that Dio seemed particularly focused on the character, actions, and reactions of Tiberius throughout the narrative of the years from 14 to 37 CE, often to the neglect of other figures more prominent in Tacitus' *Annals*; the historian presents a consistent, often favourable, or at least fair portrayal of the ruler whose reign Tacitus had subjected to severe scrutiny with rather more negative results. Yet even by 33 CE, when Tiberius had shown himself not to be the *ciuilis princeps* that he often appeared in his earliest years, Dio points out what is praiseworthy, for example in the note on Dio's statement at 58.22.1 that Tiberius had consistently rejected honours voted to him, and this under the year 33 CE, containing narrative almost exclusively of deaths in both Dio and Tacitus. See Table 8, where the names of the most prominent victims are conveniently set in boldface type. At various turning points in the history of Tiberius' reign, Dio reaffirms or modifies his characterisation, one of the greatest features of which was the emperor's ability to keep people guessing, an ability he retained right up to his death: see the note to 58.28.2.

Following Augustus' death, Tiberius moved very cautiously to take command of the Roman state: careful by nature, he had no precedents to use for guidance. The real power, as everyone knew, lay with the army, as the events of 14 CE made clear. Only after the mutinies in both Germany and Pannonia had been settled did he accept power 'without further dissimulation'. Mallan examines the course of the mutinies (57.4.1–6.1) at some length, both to bring order to the history of the year,<sup>5</sup> and also to discuss Dio's attitude towards soldiers and armies in general, one that was 'remarkably consistent, and generally pejorative' (121). Dio observes too the problems inherent in the presence of the Praetorians in Rome; see 57.19.6 and 58.18.2, with commentary.

Dio was interested in the exercise of power in general, and in the history of this reign he related in some detail how Tiberius maintained his position, directing his readers' attention to the emperor's control, nowhere more than in the extended account of Sejanus' removal. A number of people are more prominent participants in Tacitus' Tiberian narrative than they are in Dio's. Sallustius Crispus, the historian's great-nephew and heir, is not named in the extant portions of Dio's history, despite several appearances in the early books of the *Annals*. C. Asinius Gallus appears early (57.2.5) but not often,<sup>6</sup> only resurfacing in Book 58<sup>7</sup> marked as an object of Tiberius' enmity; his death is

<sup>5</sup> See too Appendix II, 'Dio and the Chronology of August–October AD 14'.

<sup>6</sup> On this context, see Appendix III, 'Senatorial Business in September AD 14'.

<sup>7</sup> 58.3.1 (Xiph.), 3.1–3 (= *EVDio* 191), 3.4 (Xiph.).

announced at 58.23.5. Mallan offers a detailed discussion of Gallus and the differences between Tacitus' and Dio's depictions of him, concluding that Dio's omissions better serve his Tiberian focus and narrative purposes. Mallan observes that Dio does not name Sejanus as the praetorian prefect who accompanied Drusus to Pannonia in 14 CE whereas Tacitus does, offering a brief characterisation of him early in the narrative (*Ann.* 1.24.3). Only after the death of Germanicus does Sejanus enter Dio's history (57.19.5 (Xiph.)), where he serves as a marker of a notable change in the tenor of the reign. Despite the frequency with which Sejanus' name appears in the story, he lacks the same agency that Tiberius exercises so cannily. Dio signals the distinction more than once, writing that people were deceived (*ἀπατώμενοι*) by Tiberius' evident regard for Sejanus when he had already determined to remove him (58.4.4 (Xiph.)), or that Sejanus seemed to be (*εἶναι δοκεῖν*) emperor (58.5.1). In the end, he became an *exemplum* not to be emulated, a warning against the granting or accepting of excessive honours (58.14.1).

The overview at the opening of Book 58 offers an instructive lesson in the problems with the narrative; one may extend the general principles to reigns other than Tiberius'. Xiphilinus' account is 'patchy and impressionistic' (269) and few dates can be established. Other Byzantine sources rarely add much to our understanding, and Tacitus' *Annals* are lost for 29 through most of 31 CE. We have Suetonius and Dio but cannot easily supplement Tacitus with what epitomators or excerptors retain of Dio for the same period. At 58.4.5–6 (Xiph.) and 58.4.7 (= *EV*John of Antioch 22) there is an excellent example of how bits of information offer more questions than answers. In the first passage C. Fufius Geminus is charged first with *ἀσέβεια* and then with *μαλακία* (sexual deviancy); after his suicide, his wife Mutilia Prisca, having been charged with something or other, entered the Senate and killed herself with a dagger. The second passage offers the advice that one Mucia was killed, with her husband and two daughters, because of her friendship with Tiberius' mother Livia. Mallan writes that Mucia and Mutilia Prisca may or may not be the same person, but even if they are it is not possible to say whether the wife or the husband was the original target or if perhaps both were. He concludes, 'At any rate, we are reminded of the degree to which John of Antioch and Xiphilinus can change and distort their source material'.

Yet as is clear from the parts of Books 57 and 58 where the text is Dio's own, he himself had not a little to do with creating a history with a point of view. One example is how he and Tacitus used the same material to very different effect in the narrative of the military mutinies in 14 CE. In the general analysis of 57.4.1–6.1, Mallan's reasoning is excellent on Dio's choice of emphasis on change offering soldiers an opportunity to act on their greed. At another point Dio has apparently combined two incidents of *maiestas* accusations that in Tacitus belong to the year 15 CE (*Ann.* 1.73–4) into one, but

about ten years later (57.24.7 (Xiph.)). Of three possible explanations he proposes, Mallan rightly prefers a deliberate choice on Dio's part for thematic reasons: his characterisation of Tiberius' reign after the death of Germanicus differs from his account of what had preceded.

Much else in the commentary elucidates Dio's skill in constructing his narrative, not only in arrangement of material and choice of what to include or how to include it, but literary effects. Mallan's note to 58.11.3, for instance, brings to our attention a 'succession of verbs of downward motion', each a compound with *κατα*, describing how the people of Rome pulled down all the statues of Sejanus after his arrest. There is a long and excellent note to 58.17.1 on Dio's summation of events that he relates to the fall of Sejanus into an account of accusations, prosecutions, and deaths, when 'no man could deny that he would have feasted gladly on Tiberius' corpse'. Mallan suggests that it may not only be Tiberius who is the object of cannibalistic wrath, but the senators themselves taking on the characteristics of a hated ruler.

Mallan's excellent commentary on these two books brings a somewhat less familiar Tiberius to the fore, known yet viewed from a different angle. One might say much the same of the historian himself, whom recent scholarship has revealed as a writer most worthy of our attention.

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