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REVIEW–DISCUSSION
EXPLORING HISTORICAL DIGRESSIONS

Mario Baumann and Vasileios Liotsakis, edd., *Digressions in Classical Historiography*. Trends in Classics—Supplementary Volume 150. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2024. Pp. viii + 356. Hardback, €119.95. ISBN 978-3-11132-075-5. Open Access eBook: ISBN 978-3-11-132090-8.

Inspired by an eponymous conference held online in September 2020, this handsomely printed edited volume shines a timely light on its subject matter, namely the form and function of digressions in ancient Greco-Roman historiography. Its twelve papers are of a generally high quality, and there is indeed much to be learned from them about how various ancient historians (from Herodotus to Ammianus) employed digressions in their works. That said, while the book certainly lives up to its name, it does not, I believe, entirely live up to its potential. Conference volumes often come under an unfair amount of criticism for their alleged failures to maintain thematic cohesion, so I feel slightly reluctant to bring up this point myself. A certain amount of latitude should, I believe, be permitted to the editors of conference volumes, who in practice often find themselves in a position where the papers come before the book proposal. What we *should* expect from conference volume editors, however, is a genuine attempt at making sense of the papers presented to them and developing some overarching reflections on their ramifications.

Unfortunately, the current volume does not do this. Whereas its strength lies in the quality of its individual contributions, its most notable shortcoming is the lack of an overarching framework that would allow these papers to come together into a coherent whole. Although the editors acknowledge the complexity of the topic and provide some helpful introductory remarks (see below on the introduction), the volume's structure does not facilitate a broader exploration of the concept of historiographical digressions across different authors. The introduction is a meagre nine pages (of which only three lay out the volume's theme and aims) and there is no epilogue. Moreover, each article focuses on a single historian, and there is a paucity of cross-references among them (e.g., when Pothou discusses Thucydides in light of Herodotus, where a reference to Konstantakos would clearly be merited; though there are some, e.g., on 184). Finally, the papers are organised chronologically without any rationale about this choice. A thematic division might been better suited to

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guiding the reader through the volume by highlighting some common broader themes.

I would like to stress that it is precisely because the papers included in the volume possess both the breadth and the quality required to engage in some more general considerations and suggest further lines of questioning about the topic—a topic that clearly merits it—that this feels like a lost opportunity. In short, by not pulling the threads of the volume together, the editors miss a chance to draw more comprehensive conclusions about the nature and function of digressions in Greco-Roman historiography. It is left to the reader to collect the threads and reflect on what considerations might be drawn from the volume as a whole (rather than from its various pieces). For these reasons I suspect that the volume will be more useful for scholars looking for analyses of individual historians and their handling of digressions than for those seeking to understand the phenomenon of digressive writing in ancient Greco-Roman historiography more generally.[1]

The Introduction, co-written by editors M. Baumann and V. Liotsakis, offers a brief outline of the themes (1–3) and papers (4–9) of the volume. They deal quickly with the obvious point that digressions are not (or at least seldom) 'flagrantly disconnected' (2) from the main storyline but 'were in many respects integral parts of the historical accounts they belonged to' (1), and that they are interesting (and interpretively fruitful as starting points for analysis) exactly because they reveal the context into which the historian is inserting his text, often serving as 'ideological and thematic milestones within an entire work' (2). Although the introduction concisely lays out the many functions to which ancient historians put digressions—structuring, relaxation, creation of suspense, authorial self-fashioning, characterisation, historical interpretation, moral didacticism, and reader engagement—it only scratches the surface of the volume's topic. Questions of definition or terminology (i.e., about what counts and what does not count as a digression) are left virtually untouched (discussed later by Hanaghan; 313: 'Any determination about the narrative resonance of any of Ammianus' digressions is necessarily an act of interpretation, an attempt to make meaning from the text which is not explicit'); likewise ancient literary theory on digressions (for which we must wait for the paper by Chrysanthou; cf. 274 n. 5; 276 n. 11); nor is there any engagement with related terms such as inter- and intratextuality, or prolepsis and analepsis.[2]

The paper summaries (which take up the other six pages of the introduction) are—in many instances—taken verbatim from the abstracts that precede them. Little or no effort has been made to synthesise their findings or

[1] Readers of this review should bear in mind that it was written by someone with greater familiarity with Latin historiography than Greek historiography.

[2] On intratextuality, see esp. Sharrock and Morales (2000).

identify points of connection between them. One blatant example may be seen in the thrice-occurring phrase 'The creation of digressions in Thucydides' work is a multifaceted subject, which is linked to the historiographical tradition of logographers, to the procedures used for mitigating semantic deficiencies and to the personal preoccupation of the author', the first line of Pothou's chapter having, seemingly, been recycled for both the introductory summary and the abstract. We find the same recycling at work, for example, in the papers by Lindholmer, Liotsakis, and Hanaghan.

All in all, then, the introduction remains a lost opportunity to delve deeper into the topic. While clear and concise, it is ultimately too brief and fails to provide an adequate thematic grounding for the volume. As such, the volume would have benefitted greatly from an epilogue to do the work of making connections among the papers and raising some possible lines of questioning for future research. Could one perhaps still be written and published in the form of an article? This reviewer would certainly read it with great interest.

The first paper, Ioannis M. Konstantakos' 'Digressive Anecdotes, Narrative Excursus and Historical Thought in Herodotus' (11–41), is a fascinating exploration of this inherently encyclopaedic and digressive historian, written in a flowery, elegant style worthy of its subject matter. K. starts by summarising earlier definitions of digression from different scholarly traditions (German, Anglo-Saxon, Italian, French, Dutch)—making the first pages of the paper a useful complement to the introductory chapter. A highlight of the first part of the paper is the initial discussion of Ioannis Kakridis' suggestion that Herodotean digressions should be understood as (13) 'any piece of text which a modern academic author would place in a typographically separated section of his text, such as a footnote or an appendix'. This is (as far as I know) a boldly original idea and a spur to reconsider questions of categorisation. Unfortunately, this promising line of thought is then abandoned, only to be taken up again *en passant* (and without a cross-reference) by Chrysanthou (283). Indeed, the volume as a whole might have benefitted from closer engagement with Kakridis' ideas as a springboard for a more sophisticated discussion of the definition and categorisation of digressions.

K. instead goes on to recount an impressive number of digressions from Herodotus' work, seemingly with the intention of buttressing the overall argument that Herodotus is the digressive historian *par excellence* and that these digressions (24) 'reflect central themes and recurring patterns of the entire composition'. Although this *tour de force* is both informative and revealing of Herodotean style, one wonders if these two points could perhaps have been made more economically. Like Herodotus, for whom he clearly harbours great admiration as a storyteller, K. delights in recounting stories (though surely even Herodotus must have killed some of his darlings and left certain stories out?), even adding one of his own (19 n. 22). Overall, the paper could have

benefitted from a more stringent editorial process, with some footnotes taking up an unreasonable amount of space.

A highlight of the second part of the paper is the comparative discussion of the digressions on (1) Thrasybulus' advice to Periander, (2) Artabanus' advice to Xerxes, and (3) Solon's advice to Croesus, which clearly illuminates the interpretive potential of approaching historiography through its digressions. As noted by K., this web of digressions provides an overarching theory of humanity and its history (28): 'The structure of the cosmos is not democratic but tyrannical. Authoritarianism and arbitrariness are inscribed in the laws of nature. And conversely, the tyrant's blatant hubris is that he attempts to imitate god; he believes that he is a small god inside his city and that he has the right to subdue his fellow-men with the authority of a cosmic force'. Similarly, K. helpfully shows how the digression on the different funeral rites of Greeks and Indians is only one among many that underline the historical importance (and unavoidability) of contest and conflict among nations (32), as well as how the two digressions of Cyrus giving advice to the Persians about luxury and hard work illustrate the cyclic nature of history (35).

The second paper, Vassiliki Pothou's '"I Have Written about It and Have Made This Digression from My Account …": Thucydides' Digressions and Their Relation to the Main Work' (43–72), investigates Thucydides' use of digressions and the roles they play in his history. After noting, unsurprisingly, that (44) 'Thucydides' digressions play a fundamental narratological role', P. sets out to explore his handling of digressions in light of his overall pioneering attitude. In her pithy phrase, '[e]verything is different in his case'. Her discussion then develops into a close examination of the *Pentekontaetia*, the archaeology, and the digression on the fall of the Pisistratid dynasty. While this is a rich and clearly well researched paper, its somewhat laborious style of writing (what, for example, does it mean that, in contrast to Thucydides' temporal plurality, 'the digressions of Herodotus, Xenophon, Diodorus of Sicily, Sallust and Polybius reflect a temporal homogeneity and "stillness"', and would experts on these historians concur with such a categorical claim?) and heavy dependence on technical terminology at times blur the flow of the argument. This is not helped by the lack of internal sections and subheadings. One wonders if more work could have gone into sharpening the argument. Much Greek text is left untranslated. The paper includes a useful appendix of the digressions in Books 1–6 of Thucydides, including the percentage of digressive material in each book.

The third paper, Antonio Ignacio Molina Marín's 'Emulating Herodotus: Digressions in the First Generation of Alexander Historians' (73–92), sets out to (76) 'propose a new form of analyzing the relationship between the Alexander historians and Herodotus through the study of the use of digressions by the first generation of these authors'. M. starts by conscientiously noting

how difficult, indeed almost impossible, it is to analyse digressions in fragmentarily preserved texts. Focusing primarily on geographical digressions—but discussing also the forms and functions of ethnographical (e.g., utopian) and ceremonial digressions—M. argues that the Alexander historians, while heavily dependent on Herodotus, did not follow him slavishly. This is another well researched paper, whose transparent language and appropriately cautious approach sheds new light on a difficult and undeservedly understudied topic.

The fourth paper, Nikos Miltsios' 'Polybius' Histories: No Room for Digressions?' (93–109), examines what happens to digressions when the historian (in this case Polybius) aspires to write a history of the entire known world. As noted by M., in Polybius 'what happens elsewhere' is not presented as digressive material, for he writes global history, and everything has its place in the *symplokē* of events. This is a wonderful paper, one of the highlights of the volume, well written and with a clear argument, and with multiple cross-references to the other contributions. M. puts the digressions to fruitful interpretive use, using them as a way to enter Polybius' historiographical workshop and understand the philosophy of (global) history that underpins his text. He argues that Polybius' notable reluctance to include explicitly digressive material may be explained by his conception of historical developments as organically interlinked, since whatever tends toward the same *telos* (even though it may transpire another place than Rome) is automatically part of the whole, and therefore not digressive in the usual sense of the word.

The paper also turns the spotlight on the question of what counts (or should—for the purposes of understanding the text—count) as a digression, since Polybius is clearly writing a very different kind of text from, say, Herodotus and Thucydides, whose eyes are always on the designated main narrative. As demonstrated by M., Polybius differentiates between digressions *strictu senso* and his constant alternation between geographical areas (95–6):

> [I]t would be misleading to see the presentation of Italian and Roman events by year as the main narrative line, and that of the parallel developments around the Mediterranean as digressions interrupting it. The systematic transition from one geographical region to the next which characterises the main part of the *Histories* is the method Polybius uses to depict the phenomenon of *symplokē*, the process by which history in his time begins to form an organic whole and become a unified body (σωματοειδής).

Engagement with Kakridis' suggestion that ancient digressions might usefully be categorised through their functional relation with modern academic typographical conventions (mentioned by Konstantakos, 13) might have added another dimension to M.'s discussion of Polybius' books that *in toto* constitute

digressions from the main narrative (6, 12, 34)—falling, perhaps, under the category of appendix?

The fifth paper, Mario Baumann's 'Why Charondas Taught the Thurians How to Read and Write, or: Digression and Narration in Diodorus' *Bibliothēkē*' (111–30), approaches Diodorus' handling of digressions through a case study, namely the digression on the two lawgivers Charondas and Zaleucus (D.S. 12.12–21). Focusing on its functions, B. singles out moral edification, storytelling, narrative interweaving, and—last, but not least—self-referentiality as key concerns. His discussions of how Diodorus constructs 'visual tokens' to immerse his readers in the story (114–16) and how the story about Charondas' literacy law may be seen as a programmatic statement and self-justification for the entire *Bibliotheke* (125–7) are particularly excellent. The paper is followed by an appendix on the structure of the digression on the lawgivers.

The sixth paper, Christina S. Kraus' 'Going in Circles: Digressive Behavior in Caesar, *BC* 2.23–44' (131–50), takes us into the realm of Latin literature. K. sets her analysis of the extensive account of Curio's campaign and defeat in Africa (*BC* 2.23–44) against Caesar's otherwise—and famously—straightforward narrative. She takes her cue from two of the recurring questions of the volume, namely how stable the traditional binary between primary text and digression really is and whether digressions should be considered contrastive to or constitutive of historical narrative (133): 'I am interested in how we might read Caesar's distinctive Curio narrative as both digressive and integral to the rest of the *commentarii*, understanding its textual geography and plotting as supplementary—both addition and challenge—to Caesar's primary authorial perspective and voice'.

K. is above all an extremely attentive reader, and the paper abounds in fascinating observations about the language and style of the account and its structure. While not everyone will, I think, find her premises about the supreme literariness of *commentarii* writing and the significance that she bestows on textual echoes, *hapax legomena*, and the connotations of specific words equally convincing, she musters an impressively rich and varied amount of material to support her reading of the account as *both* digressive *and* integral to the main narrative. To her credit, K. remains cautious in her wording both when drawing her midway conclusions ('though the narrative to come is not marked explicitly as an excursus, this opening description marks it as one flirting with digression', 139) and in her conclusive section at the end (147): '[T]hat digressive writing is in some ways indistinguishable from non-digressive writing is surely the point'. Her conclusion, that 'Caesar [is] telling a tragic tale set as a *mise en abyme* within his 'primary' *commentarius* discourse' (147), not only convinces but also, significantly, challenges us to rethink traditional binaries and stimulates to further research on the fluid boundaries between primary narratives and digressions.

The seventh paper, Edwin Shaw's 'Expansion, Heterogeneity and Method in Sallust's Digressions' (151–81), turns the spotlight on Sallust's handling of digressions. This is another dense but highly rewarding paper. Rather than tried and tested analysis of how digressions support narrative coherence through intratextual connections with the main narrative, S.—building on recent interpretations that stress the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in Sallust's oeuvre,[3] as well as his own magisterial *Sallust and the Fall of the Republic*—creatively and fruitfully explores how Sallust's digressions can subvert and challenge it, as well as his historiographical practice more generally (153). In the first part of the paper, S. notes that Sallust's digressions derive particular force from his stated intention to write Roman history *carptim*, from his choice of the monographic form, and from his generally brisk narrative pace (159): '[I]n the context of a work with such a clearly established agenda of concision, digressions sharply intrude upon the reader, and challenge the steady progression of the narrative'. Two examples of digressions with a particularly jarring and dislocative effect help him make his point: The digression on Sulla and his civil wars as historical background to the fifteen years treated in *Histories* (163) 'calls into question the historian's choice of theme itself, immediately complicating the question of historical beginnings, and with it questions of historical responsibility and culpability thematised in the *Historiae* more generally', and the digression on the Philaeni brothers in *BJ* not only deviates from Sallust's other digressions and seems to put the reader in a different historiographical mode but also—purposely and powerfully—(167) 'configures exemplary behaviour itself as not of the "real world" of Sallust's subject-matter, but something of another time'.

In the second part of the paper, S. focuses more squarely on the potential of Sallust's digressions to subvert his historiographical method and reference to a factual truthfulness. Taking his cue from the excellent observation by Hau and Ruffell that ancient historians' understanding of truthfulness need to remain constant throughout a single work but can and indeed often does vary depending on context and rhetorical exigency, he suggests that (169–70): 'Sallust's digressions often operate with a more free idea of historical truthfulness than his main historical narratives do: indeed, it is this more relaxed conception which makes possible some of the distinctive and important argumentative contributions of the digressions'.[4] To illustrate his point, he demonstrates how the archaeology at *BC* 6.1 and the digression on African history at *BJ* 17.7 (p. 173–4) 'do not just signal a shift of expectations towards a model more suited to the distant subject-matter described; they present a much more significantly relaxed model, in which the historian is free to alter

[3] Batstone (1988), (1990); Feldherr (2021). See also Gunderson (2000); Shaw (2021).

[4] Ruffell and Hau (2017) 7.

even fundamental aspects of the tradition (on Rome and on Africa) in the service of particular argumentative aims'. Particularly eye-catching is S.'s subsequent discussion of Sallust's treatment of the so-called First Catilinarian Conspiracy and the reasons why he may have decided to place it in a digression rather than as part of the main narrative (175): 'Sallust marks it off as beyond the usual bounds of the history, and thus perhaps beyond its conventional expectations'. Sallust, in other words, varies his historiographical mode (primary narrative vs. digressions) to signal a variation in methodology, particularly when it comes to assertions of truthfulness (176): 'Digression enables Sallust to abrogate responsibility for the factual accuracy of particular stretches of the text …, and to give details considerably outside the "accepted version", or which were historically problematic'. Though some readers (this one included) may take issue with—or at least appeal for more evidence to support—the designation of Sallust as (171) 'stick[ing] relatively closely to a modern, positivistic understanding of truthfulness', S. clearly makes a strong case for Sallustian digressions being less preoccupied with historical truth than the main narratives to which they belong.

The eighth paper, Kyle Khellaf's 'Inglorious History and the Tacitean Digression' (183–222), is a fitting successor to Shaw's paper, as K., too, demonstrates the capacity of digressions to break the rules of the main narrative mode, e.g., when it comes to historical truth. K.'s main focus, however, is on Tacitus and his narration of (7–8) 'paradoxographical events featuring carnivalesque individuals whose subaltern voices often remain mute in the primary sequence of history'. K.—who specialises in historiographical digressions[5]—starts with a reflection on the essentially digressive nature of historiography as a genre, or 'super-genre' (cf. Hutchinson (2013)), before arguing that Tacitus uses digressions to promote accounts of slaves, foreigners, and other figures of lower social status to disrupt—if only momentarily—the repressive monotony of his main narrative, which remains fixated on the emperors and their families (186–7):

> These [digressions] afford Tacitus with new spaces for criticism, creating brief ruptures within the oppressive imperial narrative, which otherwise allows for only a partial view of Tacitus' rebuke of its politics. Amidst the extreme senatorial and equestrian sycophancy, it is precisely these liminal personages—scarcely afforded space in the primary sequence of history—who succeed at breaking through the frequent imperial charades and getting at the heart (or rather *ingenium*) of the Roman principate.

[5] Cf. Khellaf (2018), (2021).

In the first part of the paper (187–95), K. offers a reconsideration of the famous digression on historical writing at *Ann.* 4.32–3. Based on his observation that Tacitus has placed these programmatically important remarks into a digression (rather than a preface), K. argues that 'he enjoins us to be on the lookout for notable events, trivial as they might initially appear, in marginal and unexpected places'. This section also includes an excellent analysis of the expression *libero egressu memorabant* and its multiple co-existing semantic ranges (political, topical, narratological). In the second part of the paper, K.—pointing out that nearly all of Tacitus' episodic digressions star low-class characters in major roles—provides three illustrative examples of digressions where seemingly insignificant characters show themselves capable of disrupting the imperial charade: The Usipi at *Agr.* 28 (195–202), the false Nero at *Hist.* 2.8–9 (203–7), and the slave Clemens at *Ann.* 2.40 (208–14). The discussion of the mutiny of the Usipi is particularly fascinating, with K. taking his cue from and unpacking the implications of the eye-catchingly programmatic phrase *magnum ac memorabile facinus*. As noted by K., the Usipi seem to usurp and/or ridicule what was supposed to be a major achievement of Agricola, i.e., the circumnavigation of Britain. The discussion of the digression on Clemens, who briefly succeeds in persuading a large number of people that he is fact Agrippa Postumus, is equally excellent, not least K.'s point that it is in fact a slave (rather than a senator) whom Tacitus allows to most explicitly call into question the legal basis of the imperial regime (214; cf. *Ann.* 2.40.3: 'When Tiberius asked him in what way he had become Agrippa, he is said to have replied, "In the way you became Caesar"').

Although K.'s makes a compelling argument, one might perhaps ask just how successful these digressions really are in cutting through the repetitiveness and gloominess of the main narrative, and whether Tacitus intended them to do so at all. The Usipi end up dead or enslaved, the false Nero is betrayed and murdered, and Clemens is executed far from the public eye. This is all very much in the spirit of *Ann.* 4.33.3: *nos saeua iussa, continuas accusationes, fallaces amicitias, perniciem innocentium et easdem exitii causas coniungimus, obuia rerum similitudine et satietate*, 'but in my case it is savage orders, constant accusations, deceitful friendships, the ruin of innocents and always the same reasons for their extermination that I link together, confronted as I am by a satiety of similar material' (transl. Woodman (2004)). A parallel to the besieged Thracians who at *Ann.* 4.50 discuss their options (surrender, suicide, resistance) in a way that recalls the choice faced by Roman senators oppressed by the emperor can illustrate the point. Just as these Thracians—despite their appearance in a section of *res externae*, i.e., a section that according to Tacitus' remarks in *Ann.* 4.32–3 should provide some more uplifting material—in the end seem to be yet another example of, rather than a timely digression from, the usual focus

on the theme of destruction vs. subservience, maybe the subalterns discussed by K., too, are part of the main, satiety-inducing narrative after all?[6]

The ninth paper, Vasileios Liotsakis' 'Digressions as Meta-Literary Markers and Narrative Milestones in Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*' (223–39), examines the strategic use of digressions in Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*, arguing that these digressions function as both narrative markers and meta-literary devices (224): 'Arrian proceeds with extensive digressions very selectively and principally in order to mark a pivotal point in his account and, simultaneously, to instruct us about how he wishes us to read his work in comparison with other literary genres and works'. L.'s paper, whose compelling argument is well set forth, focuses on the two major digressions in Book 1 as case studies of Arrian's general praxis when it comes to the use of digressions: the Theban disaster (1.9.1–8) and the so-called Second Preface (1.12.2–5).

In the case of the Theban digression, L. contrasts Arrian's treatment of Greek resistance to Alexander's expansion with the narratives of Diodorus and Trogus. While Diodorus and Trogus bestow significant attention on anti-Macedonian sentiments in various Greek cities, Arrian restricts the narrative to Thebes, portraying it as the sole serious opposition to Macedonian rule. According to L., this selective focus not only serves to underscore the weakness of Greek resistance but also positions the Theban story as (229) 'an epilogue to Greek history of perpetual wars with no decisive resolution … pav[ing] the way for a new phase for the Greeks, which is marked by the total domination of the Macedonians in Europe and Asia'. The Second Preface, L. argues, serves a similar function. By using Homeric language and modelling his narrative on Xenophon's *Anabasis*, Arrian not only engages in a literary dialogue with but also distinguishes himself from these predecessors, his avoidance of excessive authorial self-promotion a way to suggest a more restrained, scholarly approach to historical writing. This digression too, then, functions both as a narrative tool to mark a critical juncture—the beginning of the Asian campaign—and as a meta-literary comment on Arrian's place within the historiographical tradition (236). In sum, Arrian uses digressions to signal to the reader the narrative's key moments while also prompting reflection on his own awareness and negotiation of his position in the historiographical tradition.

The tenth paper, Mads Ortving Lindholmer's 'Digressions and the Fall of the Republic in Cassius Dio' (241–71), explores Dio's institutional digressions in his narrative of the early Roman republic: the quaestorship, the dictatorship, the tribuneship, and the censorship. L. argues that Dio uses these

[6] On the account of the Thracian revolt at Tac. *Ann.* 4.46–51, see Poulsen (2018).

digressions to highlight structural flaws in the Republican system of government, and that they should therefore be read as part of (243) 'Dio's distinctive rejection of the common historiographical idealisation of the earlier Republic'. This is not only another excellent and well-written paper with a commendably clear line of argument, but also a timely contribution to the still ongoing rehabilitation of Dio as an historian in control of his material and with a coherent narrative vision (268): 'Dio thus presents a cohesive narrative with an overarching interpretation of the Republic in which this governmental form was plagued by structural flaws from the outset and therefore fundamentally unworkable'. While not everyone will find all of L.'s examples are equally convincing, his overall argument is compelling and worthy of sustained attention.

L. starts with his strongest case: the digression on the tribuneship (244–51). As noted by L., Dio portrays the origins and workings of the tribuneship in remarkably more negative terms than, for example, Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Rather than a beneficial contribution to the protection of the plebeians, Dio views the tribuneship as essentially destructive, closely linked to *dynasteia*, and a key element in the Republic's disintegration. As such, Dio's portrayal primes his readers to see the notoriously harmful late Republican tribunes as part of a wider systemic issue, rather than as isolated figures of moral corruption. This is a compelling analysis, L.'s other examples, however, will divide opinion. Whereas L. is surely correct that Dio uses the digression on the dictatorship to underline the benefits of monarchy, this is difficult to accommodate with his argument that the dictatorship is simultaneously portrayed as inherently flawed—for later unworkability (when circumstances were vastly different) is hardly evidence of an original sin built into the system (251–6). L.'s treatment of the digression on the quaestorship (256–8) may be similarly challenged. While one can only concur with L.'s claim that Dio s portrays the collection of extreme wealth in few hands as a key contributor to the instability of the late republic, it does not, I believe, automatically follow that the quaestorship—whose authority in financial matters Dio interprets as a check to consular power—was inherently flawed from the start and an example of the systemic malfunction of the republic. Finally, L.'s demonstration of how Dio portrays the republican censorship as the key bulwark against consular power (258–64) is both original and worthy of consideration on its own, but his point about the censorship becoming unworkable because of corruption, which in turn leads to more corruption, becomes as similar kind of 'chicken-or-egg' question. Was it a flaw in the censorship that initiated moral decay, or did moral decay make the censorship unworkable?

As noted by L., the suggestion that Dio saw institutional failings as the key factor in the ultimate breakdown of the Roman Republic aligns him more closely with modern historians than his ancient counterparts, for whom moral decline was the major causal explanation. While I sympathise with the efforts

to rehabilitate Dio as a proficient and valuable historian, I do wonder whether L. may be straining the evidence when regarding the distinctiveness of his historical analysis. Firstly, whereas L. is correct that the early republic is often portrayed as an idealised counterpart to the late republic, it bears mention that Sallust, for one, seems to develop a gradually more pessimistic view of early Roman history from *BC* to *BJ* to *Histories*.[7] Secondly, the passages discussed by L. could also be interpreted to support a thesis of gradual decline rather than one of a primeval defect containing the seed of perennial discord. L. seems to suggest as much when, in his discussion of the digression on the censorship, notes that (261) 'this passage highlights that the censorship in itself *had become* unworkable' (my emphasis) and that (261) 'the censorship as an office was fundamentally malfunctioning due to the systemic corruption of the elite'. Here Dio seems to have recourse to the traditional moral interpretation of the decline and fall of the republic.

L.'s final discussion of the digression on the triumph, where he points out that Dio includes examples of triumphs being politicised through *staseis* and *dynasteia* already in the early and middle republics, also merits attention, though it leaves this reviewer wondering—with tentative acceptance of L.'s thesis that Dio portrayed the republic as beset by systemic flaws from the beginning—whether the historian might have anything to say about why the republic did not crash and burn earlier? Or, in other words, if we accept L.'s thesis that Dio portrayed the republic as flawed from its inception, how did he explain its enormous success? Historians of Rome's republican past did, after all, have to explain *both* its unprecedented rise *and* its calamitous disintegration and transformation into a monarchy.

The eleventh paper, Chrysanthos S. Chrysanthou's 'Digressions in Herodian's *History of the Empire*' (273–307), turns the spotlight on Dio's contemporary Herodian. In contrast to Lindholmer's more argument-driven analysis, C. adopts a more descriptive tone as he seeks to offer a comprehensive examination of the various forms and functions of digressions in Herodian's *History of the Empire*, including self-characterisation (of the work and its historiographical methods), brief explanatory narratorial asides (on names, etymologies, ethnic stereotypes, etc.), back-stories of key characters, and discussions of ethnography, topography, religion, and antiquarianism. As noted by C., Herodian's digressions (276) 'offer significant insights into his method of characterisation and his way of presenting and interpreting the fragmented and tumultuous post-Marcus history in a unified and orderly form'.

C. starts by noting that Herodian, who is generally discreet in his use of digressions, does not explicitly label or mark his digressions in advance and that, consequently, the identification of digressive passages is based on a

[7] Poulsen (2025).

subjective judgment about their departure from the main plot (275). In C.'s analysis, these digressions—or 'intermezzi', as he describes them—can vary in length, from brief asides to more extensive excursions that interrupt the narrative flow. The paper then offers a detailed exploration of how these digressions contribute to the overall narrative design and the presentation of historical events. One notable example is Herodian's statements about methodology in the digression at the end of Book 2, which both reflects on the surrounding narrative of Septimius Severus' reign and establishes a dialogue with his reflections on his historiographical principles in the prologue to the entire work (280–1). A highlight of the paper is the final section on religion, where C. notes Herodian's tendency to precede assassinations—including failed assassinations—with digressions on festivals (298–9).

While C.'s examination is commendably thorough, there are some areas where his discussion could have been clearer. While his inclusion of short narrative asides (cf. 302: 'a brief comment or observation on a specific character, event, or subject', e.g., 4.15.3) under the umbrella of digressions provides valuable insights into Herodian's construction of the narrative, particularly in how he uses these moments to create suspense or offer respite, it also turns the spotlight away from the kind of passages—i.e., longer, more markedly digressive passages—that tend to occupy the other contributors to the volume, leading to a some confusion about the relation of such digressive asides to the digressions treated in the other contributions to the volume. A more thorough treatment of questions of definition and categorisation (either in the introduction or through cross-referencing among the papers) could have placed C.'s discussion in a wider context and might have made it possible to draw some broader conclusions from his observations.

While generally well written, the paper can at times be hard to follow. Firstly, C. presents a large number of examples of digressions under various subsections, but their criteria for inclusion in these vary from formal ('detours', 'remarks') to topical ('ethnography', 'topography', 'religion and antiquarianism') to a mix of the two ('backstories'), without these distinctions being made clear. While this undoubtedly reflects the variation in Herodian's digressions and the difficulty of categorising them uniformly, it also creates an ultimately deceptive sense of order. Secondly, C. jumps effortlessly back and forth in Herodian's text, often discussing examples with only limited treatment of the context, which can be frustrating for readers unfamiliar with Herodian's work. Thirdly, C. does not always specify whether he is dealing with brief asides or longer digressions. Even if we accept that both can be termed 'digressions', upholding a certain distinction between them would have been useful for readers both to orient themselves in the text and to evaluate the implications of employing such a wide definition. Finally, C. notes repeatedly (and rightly) that digressions might offer respite or suspense, but he rarely suggests which one of the two it is in particular digressions—or whether they

can both be active at the same time. Despite these issues, C.'s overall conclusion is convincing, namely that (302) '[digressions] are an essential element of Herodian's historiography, and they have a significant function in his construction of plot, characters, and historical interpretation'.

The twelfth and final paper, Michael Hanaghan's 'Ammianus' Digressions and their Narrative Impact' (309–28), explores Ammianus' digressions and their impact on his main narrative through four case studies: Julian's Thracian campaign (22.8.1–48), the Persian pearls (23.6.85–8), the tragedian Phrynichus (28.1.2–5), and the bissextile day (26.1.7.14). Whereas Chrysanthou began by stressing the reader's role in *detecting* digressions, H. starts by stressing the reader's role in determining how any given digression *responds* to the main narrative, i.e., 'to make meaning from the text which is not explicit' (313). The digression on Thrace, H. argues convincingly, suggests that history could have taken another turn if Julian had listened to his advisors and chosen to campaign around the Black Sea rather than in Persia (313–7). His claim that the digression on Persian pearls (supported by the frequent references to Persian wealth), similarly conjures up a counterfactual scenario is less convincing, as H. here does not anchor the claim to any textually explicit alternative (317–22), as he does in the Thracian digression (the ignored advice). Engagement with previous work on sideshadowing[8] (or at least a cross-reference to Khellaf's discussion of Tacitus' minor digressions on imperial imposters, slaves, and other marginalised characters as potentially activating alternative pasts; 216) could have helped making this clearer, as well as put the discussion into a broader scholarly context.

The digression on the bissextile day, where Ammianus criticises the ancient Roman, pagan practice of involving priests in the formation of the calendar, H. argues, may be read as veiled criticism of contemporary sacerdotal overreach in manipulating the calendar, but, as H. himself admits, such arguments are by nature subjective and tenuous. The strongest section of the paper is the final section on the digression on the tragedian Phrynichus, which, H. argues, responds to the directly preceding reflection on the difficulties of narrating the many calamities that befell Rome in the period 365–78 CE and serves to defend the acceleration of narrative speed in these final thirteen years or the work. H. concludes by asserting—though for readers who have made their way through all the contributions will no longer (if they ever were) be surprised—that Ammianus' digressions are (326) 'timely, important additions to the main narrative, directly connected in a series of complex ways, some explicit, others implicit'.

The articles are followed by a list of contributors, an *index locorum*, and an *index nominum et rerum*. Typographical errors and few and far between. I have

[8] Pagán (2006); Grethlein (2013).

found only two, when Commodus pays money to barbarians 'in order to purchase his piece of mind' (293), and when the destruction of the Temple of Peace is referred to as 'his burning' rather than 'its' (300). The language, too, is generally clear, with some minor exceptions, e.g., on 298 ('There Herodian distances from his main narrative to insert a comment on the German houses'), where 'distances' should, I presume, read 'digresses', or perhaps an object ('himself') is missing. Most but not all Greek and Latin is translated.

While *Digressions in Classical Historiography* is a valuable collection of papers that explores an important theme in ancient Greco-Roman historiography, it ultimately falls short of fulfilling its potential. The individual chapters are insightful and offer detailed analyses of how various ancient historians employed digressions, but the volume as a whole lacks the thematic cohesion and theoretical engagement necessary to elevate it to a truly comprehensive study of the phenomenon. The absence of an epilogue to draw together some of the fascinating threads followed by many of the papers (not least the question of definition and categorisation) is particularly unfortunate, as it leaves the reader wondering what these clearly highly competent experts have made of their findings and their ramifications. In sum, the volume represents a valuable step in the exploration of digressions in ancient Greco-Roman historiography, but its failure to synthesise the various contributions into a unified theoretical framework limits its full potential.

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