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REVIEW–DISCUSSION
CASSIUS DIO AND HIS EMPERORS

Christopher Burden-Strevens, Jesper Majbom Madsen, and Antonio Pistellato, edd., *Cassius Dio and the Principate*. Lexis supplementi, 2. Venice: Edizioni Ca'Foscari, 2020. Pp. 186. Paperback €30.00. ISBN 978-88-6969-473-8.

Caillan Davenport and Christopher Mallan, edd., *Emperors and Political Culture in Cassius Dio's* Roman History. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. xiv + 357. Hardback, £90.00. ISBN 978-1-108-83100-0.

Nearly three decades ago, Christopher Pelling published a chapter on Cassius Dio's history and imperial biographical structure.[1] The chapter had remained something of a hidden gem until, in 2020 and 2021, two collected volumes on Dio's imperial books placed it front and centre in the discussion of Dio's coverage of the Roman principate. Both volumes suggest the biographical force of Dio's work in their very titles: *Cassius Dio and the Principate* and *Emperors and Political Culture in Cassius Dio's* Roman History.

Indeed, that biography and historiography are, and in antiquity were, different genres should not prevent us from seeing the many similarities between the two and, more importantly, it should not prevent us from understanding that Cassius Dio could very well use biography to inform his history, both in terms of structure, as Pelling had suggested, and in terms of content, as these volumes reveal. Dio tells us that he read everything, and he demonstrates intimacy with Homer, Herodotus, Thucydides, Cicero, Vergil, and many more. Of course, he would have consulted Suetonius and Plutarch, probably Nepos, and, I suspect, other biographers whose work is lost to us now. The influence would have been unavoidable. The two volumes under consideration here encourage us to look at the ways in which biography informs (but does not dominate) historiography and especially that of Dio. We might also wish to consider the ways in which Dio's history might have informed biography—say, the lives of the *Historia Augusta*.

[1] C. Pelling, 'Biographical history? Cassius Dio on the Early Principate', in M. Edwards and S. Swain, edd., *Portraits: Biographical Representation in the Greek and Latin Literature of the Roman Empire* (Oxford, 1997) 117–44.

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That, however, is not the principally stated goal of either collection. Rather, both aim to elucidate political life under the principate and Dio's reactions and contributions to it by way of his observation, analysis, and theory.

While both collections set out to, and do, break new ground, they also rely heavily on Maecenas' speech in the Agrippa–Maecenas debate of Book 52, a debate and speech that are undoubtedly central to Dio's work, but have been discussed at length elsewhere, particularly in terms of ideal political constitution and management of empire. So, I will refrain from adding to the heap, except to suggest that we remember that Maecenas' speech is just one view, which should not be taken to voice Dio's unadulterated philosophy any more than Caesar's speech at Vesontio or Philiscus' consolation of Cicero can be called Dionian mandates.

The return to Maecenas' speech is not surprising; a collection on political culture during the principate would miss an important passage by ignoring it. Emphasis on the speech, however, reveals something about the state of scholarship on Dio: we have seen a preponderance of recent work on him, but we seem to find our way back to familiar ground. There is, indeed, much still to learn about such oft-visited passages and ideas. But essays which explore new territory will widen our understanding of Dio and his world. So, even when there is less to say about 'the People' or Stoic philosophy, for example, in Dio's history, the exploration may spark new debate in a field which has been harvested much, perhaps even too much, in the past handful of years. Fortunately, both volumes include such new looks, along with the old.

If we have had the inclination to read the same passages from Dio, we have also returned frequently to many of the same modern readings of him. Both volumes contribute to an echo chamber of reference to some select favourites, often one's own work—a possible result of the cooperatives and collected volumes that have arisen, mostly for the good, to be sure, but in this one instance to some detriment. Two more expansive volumes on Dio and the imperial books appeared not long after the two under review here,[2] and I believe it is now time for Dio scholars to focus on publication in journals in order to get some fresh readers and responses from beyond the close-knit networks that have sprung up and so helpfully invigorated scholarship on the historian.

[2] A. Kemezis, C. Bailey, and B. Poletti, edd., *The Intellectual Climate of Cassius Dio: Greek and Roman Pasts* (Boston and Leiden, 2022). J. M. Madsen and A. Scott, edd., *A Companion to Cassius Dio* (Boston and Leiden, 2023). Adam Kemezis' chapter in the latter, 'A Survey of Recent Scholarship on Cassius Dio', and L. Jansen, 'Literary Technique in the *Roman History*: The Past, Present, and Future of Reading Cassius Dio', *Mnemosyne* 78.3 (2025) 577–601 offer invaluable surveys of the state of scholarship on Cassius Dio.

If both volumes repeat some past work, they also take useful new strides. One, in particular, is the care with which they consistently see and reveal the role of epitome and collection in what we now hold as Cassius Dio's *Roman History*, particularly the imperial books. I shall aim to imitate this practice in my future work. For now, in this review, I offer chapter-by-chapter and collection-by-collection summary with a few observations of my own.

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Cassius Dio and the Principate (Edited by Christopher Burden-Strevens, Jesper Majbom Madsen, and Antonio Pistellato)

The first of the two works under review is an open access e-book offered by Edizione Ca'Foscari's Lexis Supplements in Greek and Latin Literature. The press, editors, and authors ought to be commended for making their work widely available at no cost to the reader. It is necessary to state, however, that the quality of the design and the copyediting of many of the chapters leaves much to be desired and may force readers to pause at times and regain their bearings. The unity of the whole volume, indicated in its title, is maintained throughout, perhaps even more than one might wish, as there is a fair amount of repetition in argument. Each individual chapter, however, has its merits.

An introduction from the editors immediately brings us back to Pelling's 1997 chapter and indicates the wide acceptance of reading Dio's imperial historiography as one intertwined with biographical elements focused on the *principes*. The chapters of Martina Bono, Jesper Madsen, and Andrew Scott, in particular, follow this lead. The editors then make a reasonable case for looking to earlier books in laying the groundwork for the imperial books—an approach most exemplified by Gianpaolo Urso's chapter—including an understanding of Dio's *demokratia* (senatorial–consular governance) and *dynasteiai* (extra-legal rule characterised by the triumviral periods), before coming to *monarchia* and Dio's ideal form of government: 'The very best form of government, Dio concludes, is a tempered μοναρχία in which fundamental elements of δημοκρατία are present: the Senate, first and foremost, must remain as the political body that should use its collective experience and prestige to guide the emperor, and upon which that same emperor depends and draws legitimation' (12). The chapters of Bono, Madsen, and Mads Lindholmer, in particular, affirm this notion which, it may be acknowledged, has already been widely argued and accepted by Dio scholars.

The collection, they write, 'explores the underlying structural elements of imperial society, the individuality of emperors, and the relationship between institutions and individuals as seen by our historian' (8). Indeed, the collection

achieves these goals even if there is not all that much that is new in the exploration.

The volume's first two chapters are offered in Italian, and the authors and editors ought to be commended for this choice. Amidst increasing pressures to publish in English, it is nice, even if more labour-intensive to Anglophone readers, to read authors thinking and writing in their preferred language. I offer, in turn, a rather lengthier summary of these initial Italian chapters than for the subsequent ones written in English. In the first chapter, 'Ritorno alla monarchia: tra Cesare e Augusto: le origini del principato in Cassio Dione', Gianpaolo Urso looks to the early books (Book 3, to be precise), as one might expect of the specialist in Dio's Republic, to situate the treatment of the origins and shifts of principality, kingship, and republic to which Dio returns in Books 43–52 (21). In analysing these books and carrying out some word studies, Urso demonstrates that the term *autokrator* is used consistently from the period of Caesar through that of the Severans, concluding that 'il primo imperatore fu Cesare' (24), but that this appellation does not correspond with the beginning of the principate, but with the end of the Republic (25). Dio offers a complex interpretation of the Battle of Philippi as the end of the Republic, yet what follows is not a monarchy, but an intermediate period (27). In his treatment of 29 BCE, Dio begins to discuss Augustus' rule as *ἀκριβὴς μοναρχία*, which, Urso argues, ought to mark the beginning of the monarchical principate. A paradox, however, intervenes when at 53.17 Dio announces the beginning of monarchy (*ἀκριβὴς μοναρχία*) in 27 BCE. Urso resolves the problem with a double chronology: just as the condition of the Republic's destruction is the triumvirate, and the final moment of the Republic is the Battle at Phillippi, so the adoption of the name *imperator* in 29 BCE is the condition of the beginning of principality, the conclusive moment is the senatorial vote in 27 BCE. The Republic ends between 43–42 BCE, the monarchy begins between 29–27 BCE (30–1). This chronology, along with further word study leads Urso to the conclusion that Caesar was the founder of imperial monarchy, but Augustus was the founder of the empire (32). The process of each change was gradual and complex, just as was the shift from the archaic monarchy to republic (35). Urso presents a carefully considered argument and clarifies some terminology, chronology, and categorisation in the process. If one were to point a critical arrow it might be at the significance of the conclusion, with which few could disagree: Rome's political systems were not built in a day. Scholars of Dio and most any author treating Augustus look at the adventurer's victory at Actium and his first and second settlement as a process. Should it be striking that Cassius Dio would see the same complexity and gradation in establishment of emperors and empire?

In the volume's second chapter, 'Teoria politica e scrittura storiographica nei "libri imperiali" della *Storia Romana* di Cassio Dione', Martina Bono returns

us to biographical organisation, but this time, most prominently that of Cesare Letta's anecdotal-biographical frameworks for the imperial books (48). The chapter begins with a well-worn discussion on Dio's description of mixed constitution and its function in the ideal *civilis princeps* model. There is also much that refreshes, however. Bono ought to be commended, first, for turning to a diverse array of scholarship; I was introduced to a number of works which had been unknown to me. Hers is also one of few recent discussions (to my knowledge) of Dio's ideal constitution that considers seriously Agrippa's part in the debate of Book 52, particularly in his support of timocracy (45). More importantly, Bono efficiently connects Dio's biographical framework in the imperial books to his theory on the *civilis princeps* model. Dio, Bono argues, systematically centres his biographical anecdotes around emperors' *erga* (deeds) and his own *logismoi* (reflections) on those deeds (50). After a catalogue of such passages, Bono concludes that the anecdotes refer to emperors' public, not private, actions and behaviours (52), and, furthermore, that a comparison with Plutarchan models reveals Dio's preference for a biographical framework for reflection on concrete governance (54). One does miss examples from Dio's account of the Flavians, among others, in the catalogue; the space of the chapter, of course, necessitates a selective data set, but it also limits the conclusions one can draw. The illuminating discussion of Dio's process leads us, finally, to a conclusion that has been in the spotlight before, namely that 'la *civilitas* può essere intesa come un criterio che guida l'esplorazione e la valutazione delle relazioni dialettiche tra *élite* politica tradizionale, con in testa i senatori, e *principes*' (58) and that 'il modello di principato *civilis* si ispira veramente alla teoria della costituzione mista' (59). With this somewhat unsurprising conclusion, however, Bono adds a call for closer attention to Dio's use of the terms *demokratikos* and *demotikos*—a call to which several authors in both volumes under review here respond.

We continue with Dio's political theory in the third chapter, 'Cassius Dio's Ideal Government and the Imperial Senate'. Here, Mads Lindholmer focuses on Dio's preference not for the Senate as a whole, but for the *consilium*—a selected group of the 'best'—as the imperial advisory body, turning at length to Augustus' principate for supporting evidence (70–81). While this observation is far from new, Lindholmer follows with a welcome investigation of the use of the *consilium* after Augustus which demonstrates its sustained importance in Roman history and in Dio's treatment of it. I confess that it seems to me from Lindholmer's examples that the *consilium*'s primacy over the senate was most significant in judiciary affairs rather than deliberative political ones and, furthermore, I am not in agreement about the intended meaning of *κοινόω*—an important term for Dio and for Lindholmer which may mean 'to communicate' as Lindholmer suggests, but may also mean 'to consult', 'to undertake together', 'to be a partner with', among other things, which

Lindholmer dismisses. While one's interpretation of the Senate's, *consilium*'s, and *princeps*' participation in government will rely on how this and such verbs are understood, Lindholmer's attention to the long durée of the *consilium* and its role in Dio's historiography is worthwhile in its own right. And here Lindholmer finely demonstrates that Dio departs from Tacitus' various passages suggesting that senatorial debate is important. I leave aside Lindholmer's discussion of Suetonius, who I am not certain ought to be taken as an example of senatorial writing, and with whom, I think, Dio shares more in common than Lindholmer suggests. For my various disagreements, the chapter is worth consultation not least for its many examples of the *consilium*'s significance, in various ways, across Dio's *Roman History*.

Lindholmer's former teacher, Jesper Madsen, offers the volume's fourth chapter, 'Between *Civilitas* and Tyranny: Cassius Dio's Biographical Narrative of the Flavian Dynasty'. One sees overlapping areas of interest and approaches between the two, especially in a section where Madsen returns to points on Dio's ideal monarchy as shown in the Augustan books (99–104). Prior to this reiterative section, Madsen offers a very necessary call to reflect on Xiphilinus' role in the Flavian books. While his conclusion that Xiphilinus preserves Dio's wording and political philosophy seems at times to contradict the provided evidence and argument (97–9), the reflection itself is worthwhile. Having set the table, Madsen advances through each Flavian, mapping a movement from Vespasian's *civilitas* to Domitian's tyranny with Titus bridging the two in various ways. Greatest attention is paid to Dio's presentation of Vespasian as both a new Augustus and 'antithesis to the Julian-Claudian dynasty' (105), though an anti-Nero might be the more appropriate conclusion to Madsen's evidence. Throughout, the effects of epitome can be felt, as we see more in the way of summary than close reading. Nevertheless, Madsen makes the reasonable conclusion that Dio's progressive treatment of each Flavian ruler caters to his overarching narrative goal of illustrating the problems of dynastic succession (112).

Antonio Pistellato presents the fifth chapter, '*Δημοκρατεῖσθαι* or *μοναρχεῖσθαι*: That is the Question: Cassius Dio and the Senatorial Principate'. We follow a rather long road and even find the question temporarily dismissed (129), before landing on an answer that accords quite closely with the volume's previous chapters' emphasis on mixed constitution: '*δημοκρατεῖσθαι and μοναρχεῖσθαι*' (135). If Pistellato's answer is a common one, he takes us on some new paths to reach it. Beginning with the death of Caligula and the question of succession, Pistellato approaches a rarely discussed period in Dio's *Roman History*. His focus, however, turns more frequently to Josephus' and Suetonius' account of this question of succession (120–4), looking to Dio's experience with Pertinax's succession of Commodus for the meat of our historian's political philosophy (124–31). What underlies these debates,

according to Pistellato, is the need for balance between Senate and emperor, a tendency promoted by Stoic philosophers and politicians (130) and demonstrated in Cicero's *optimus civis* in the *De Republica* (133), with which Dio's discourse closely aligns. The reading is an attractive one that could be strengthened by more explicit sign-posting throughout the chapter and firmer demonstration of influence at points of alignment, as opposed to potential coincidence.

The welcome discussion of Stoicism continues with the sixth chapter, 'The 'Age of Iron and Rust' in Cassius Dio's *Roman History*: Influences from Stoic Philosophy' by Christopher Noe. Noe includes a useful preliminary section on 'Stoicism as Political Ideology' (145–6), which helps inform not only his but also Pistellato's previous chapter, before moving on to a series of finely done close readings from Dio (though wholly from Maecenas' familiar speech in Book 52), Seneca, Lucan, and Cicero on the wise man and ideal politician (146–50). Another interesting reading follows in which Noe draws parallels between Dio's famous statement of Rome's fall to iron and rust with Commodus' reign and a passage in the mouth of Seneca in the *Octavia* on Nero's iron age (151). In spite of these several careful readings, there remains some question, even in the author's mind (142), as to whether Dio's philosophy might be called Platonic just as much as it is Stoic. One might take it even further and wonder to what extent what is sometimes deemed specifically Stoic and un-Stoic behaviour might just as well be called moral and immoral, as, I confess, I did when reading Noe's interpretation of Dio's thematic dislike for the army as responding in part to the fact that the army was driven by 'the lust for money, which, is, of course, a deeply un-stoic trait' (154). The fine organisation and close reading make this chapter worth the read and most readers will likely come away agreeing that Stoicism is, at least, one of several philosophical influences on Dio.

Andrew Scott's 'Misunderstanding History: Past and Present in Cassius Dio's Contemporary Books' rounds out the volume with the aim of moving beyond comparison of various emperors to an examination of what Dio's emperor portraits tell us about his overall project and its aims (167). On one hand, there is much that is fresh in Scott's examination. In terms of the historiographer's role and aims, he draws parallels between Polybius and Dio that are too often overlooked or dismissed (169–70). In terms of his analysis of particular *principes*, he draws some interesting parallels between Dio's treatments of, among others, Pertinax and Augustus (in what seems to me the best analysis of Pertinax in the two volumes reviewed here) and between Septimius Severus and Trajan, Sulla, Marius, and Augustus. On the other hand, Scott's conclusion, while convincing, does not carry us much beyond a traditional view of historiography's role: 'by putting his history out into the world at a low point in Roman history, Dio may have hoped that those who read it would find proper models to emulate and thus appropriately reform Rome's

degenerated monarchy' (186). To what extent is this different from what one gathers from, say, Livy's or Tacitus' Roman programmatic statements on their histories? Perhaps in tacit answer to such a question, Scott offers several potential unique aspects of Dio's project, in particular his probable awareness of a long gap in writing the history of Rome in its entirety (186). I wonder, however, to what extent one can be confident that at the time of its composition Dio's was, in fact, the first history *ab urbe condita* written for some time. Such questions notwithstanding, Scott's chapter is a good addition to the volume, not least for its attention to Dio's contemporary books in their own right and not just as mirrors through which one might look back on earlier periods.

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Emperors and Political Culture in Cassius Dio's Roman History (Edited by Caillan Davenport and Christopher Mallan)

The second of the collections under review was published by Cambridge University Press. Its not inexpensive price tag (for the hardcover) comes with design and copyediting that is generally well done (though not without an occasional oversight).[3] A welcome affordable paperback edition has more recently become available.

The introduction, thirteen chapters, and epilogue cohere as well as can be with a collected volume, though the division of chapters into four sections is not always intuitive: for example, a chapter on 'news, rumour, and political culture' falls into a section on 'imperial and political narratives', while another chapter on 'autobiography and biography in Dio's contemporary narrative' falls into a section on 'political groups and political culture'. The final section on reception includes just one chapter and an epilogue. Such trivial oddities of organisation notwithstanding, the volume achieves its goal of investigating questions around Dio's portrayals of emperors and representation of Roman political culture.

Editors Caillan Davenport and Christopher Mallan provide a well-balanced introduction that weaves Dio's imperial history and the volume's chapters together nicely. One particular strength is their attention to illustrating the biographical 'impulse' in Dio's imperial narrative, while emphasising that the biographies are but part of a larger whole. Aside from an unusually long footnote in which the editors pick up on a minor debate

[3] E.g., in the front matter and introduction: 'Ttutorial Fellow' (ix), 'approach their topics thorough whichever …' (4), 'demonstrates that that Dio reworks …' (8). A handful of isolated infelicities occur across the rest of the volume.

between Davenport and Andrew Scott (11), the only element that the introduction might have been better off without is the apologetics that seem to appear in most works on Cassius Dio in which Dio scholars at once refute a notion that Dio studies are not worthwhile, while also pointing to the mass of scholarship on and interest in the historian.

Adam Kemezis opens up the first section of the collection with his chapter '*Vox populi, vox mea*? Information, Evaluation and Public Opinion in Dio's Account of the Principate'. The chapter is illustrative of Kemezis' ability to apply theory—this time that of anthropologist James C. Scott's 'hidden transcript'—to Dio's work in a way that elucidates the historian's methods especially in relation to other historiographers—this time mostly Tacitus. Likewise, Kemezis invites us to view how and why Dio's methods change at different stages of his *Roman History*. Here, Kemezis argues that dynastic and political changes, especially in the late Severan period, led to a diffusion of power downward among associates of the emperors in a manner that bereft senators of the opportunity to observe political realities and offer the scepticism and deduction that characterised earlier periods and afforded opportunity to generate a 'hidden transcript' (48). While convincing on the whole, lost a bit in Kemezis' use of Alexander as key example for the Severan period's decline of a 'hidden transcript' is how this model works or doesn't during the rules of Septimius or Caracalla and Dio's coverage of them.

While the next chapter, 'News, Rumour, and the Political Culture of the Roman Imperial Monarchy in the *Roman History*', by Caillan Davenport, takes a different tack, it is a fitting follow-up to Kemezis' observation of public and hidden transcripts, in its focus on the function of rumour in Roman political culture.[4] As Davenport suggests, the nature of singular power in which political decisions can be inscrutable can lead to rumour as a way of providing explanation. Unsurprisingly, then, as Dio moves away from the traditional political culture of the Republic to a period in which the senate was not part of the decision-making process, rumours emerge more frequently in lieu of accurate political information (63). It would be difficult to refute Davenport's point, though it might be observed that his most poignant examples come primarily from Dio's *dynasteia* period of the Republic's crisis (57–63), rather than the depths of the principate as one might have expected from this volume.

The third chapter, Cesare Letta's 'Literary and Documentary Sources in Dio's Narrative of the Roman Emperors', offers some intriguing points on Dio's use of sources, in particular his use of the *acta senatus*, as suggested by reports of senatorial decisions that are never put into action (83). These promising speculations, however, are a collection of Letta's work from several

[4] It is also a small preview of Davenport's 2026 book-length study on rumour.

2016 and 2019 publications and so the main boon of this chapter is the availability of its ideas to non-Italian readers.

Rhiannon Ash supplies the final chapter of the volume's first section on imperial and political narratives: '"Now Comes the Greatest Marvel of All!" (79[78].8.2): Dio's Roman Emperors and the Incredible', examining paradoxography and *mirabilia* as they relate to Dio's political narratives. In a refreshing approach that acknowledges the role of bilingualism in Dio's motives and methods, Ash leads us through a number of readings, including several from Latin authors including Lucretius, Horace, Lucan, and Juvenal before landing upon two marvelous case studies: the miraculous rainstorm on the Danube in 172 CE and the infamous Apronianus affair of 205 CE. The case studies read rather summarily and with an emphasis on reception which might lead one to question whether there is a Dionian standard for wonder—a question eventually answered in Ash's conclusion where she provides a laundry list of his arresting presentational techniques and how they reflect his impressions of the imperial world (112).

The volume's second section includes four chapters on 'Emperors and Biographies'. Aside from a survey of military biographies of the emperors from Trajan to Pertinax, the section features Augustus, Tiberius, and Nero. While these chapters are all nicely done and while the survival of Dio's text on certain periods is a significant scale-tipper, one seeking wider ranging coverage of Dio's production of imperial biography might be disappointed to find yet more work on the oft-discussed Augustus and Nero.

In 'Cassius Dio's Funeral Speech for Augustus: Sources, Rhetoric, Messages', Christina Kuhn reads Tiberius' funeral speech for Augustus alongside the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, suggesting the possibility of the latter as a source for the former. Though Kuhn equivocates, particularly in her conclusion, she highlights several key similarities between the two encomiums of Augustus, some as broad as general chronologies and rhetoric of justification, some as specific as Augustus' clemency towards Lepidus in his position as *pontifex maximus* (121–3). Kuhn then suggests that disparities between the two texts, especially anachronisms in Dio's version of the Tiberian speech, reflect Dio's third-century concerns about the imperial *domus* and should not be taken as historiographical failures. While this conclusion echoes a general apologetics in Dio scholarship, it is Kuhn's contribution to Dionian *Quellenforschung* that is a nuanced addition to current work on Dio.

Christopher Mallan keeps us in the reign of Tiberius with the sixth chapter, '"… But He Possessed a Most Singular Nature": Cassius Dio on Tiberius'. The chapter—the contents of which can be read in similar kind in his recent commentary to Books 57–8 of Cassius Dio's *History*[5]—offers a

[5] C. Mallan, *Cassius Dio,* Roman History*: Books 57 and 58 (The Reign of Tiberius)* (New York, 2020).

reading of Dio's ambivalent representation of Tiberius. The detailed reading of Tiberius might make readers wonder where they will find similar evaluations of Dio's biographical work on Gaius, Claudius, etc., or, otherwise, why Tiberius is so *singular* with respect to this volume. This peccadillo aside, the chapter offers a detailed reading of Dio's Tiberius that helps bring in view what makes Dio's varying and episodic treatment of Tiberius so difficult to package as a uniform portrait, while offering a potential solution by viewing Tiberius' ethical variations as part of Dio's depiction of a larger political programme (155–7).

Nero next takes the stage in the seventh chapter, 'An Emperor's War on Greece: Cassius Dio's Nero', in which Shushma Malik reconciles Nero's apparent philhellenism with Dio's negative depiction of the last of the Julio-Claudians: Dio, unlike several other ancient authors, does not see Nero as a philhellene at all (164). Rather, Nero's immoderate theatricality and misguided deployment of *paideia* amount to an assault on Achaea. I am quite sympathetic to such readings of Dio's emperors with an eye on the expectations of senatorial *pepaideumenoi*, but what attracts me most to Malik's argument is her proposed motive behind it all, namely that Nero's abuses remind Dio too much of Commodus (162). This insight helps us understand how the political culture of Dio's own time bears on his biographical and historiographical perspective when dealing with past emperors.

In the eighth chapter, 'War and Peace: Imperial Leadership in Dio's Second-Century Narrative', Caillan Davenport brings us to the welcome, and, as he acknowledges, understudied reigns of the emperors populating the books just prior to Dio's contemporary history—those who fall within an important period of communicative memory for Dio and his contemporaries.[6] Deeper within that frame, Davenport focuses on military leadership, one of Pelling's 'trans-regnal themes' that brings us back to the interplay between biographical and historiographical structure in Dio's imperial books (179). It is within those periods of communicative memory, i.e., the reigns of Trajan and Hadrian, where this chapter is richest in material and interpretation of military evaluations. With Davenport's turn to Dio's own lifetime and the reigns of Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and Pertinax, the interpretation of military conduct grows, perhaps to some surprise, thinner and the conclusions rather repetitive: Dio applauds the *arete* of Marcus, deplores the cowardice of Commodus, and reveals some ambivalence in the remaining second-century narrative. The chapter, while at times necessarily speculative (for example, in its treatment of what might have been in Book 68's portrait of Trajan (185)), deserves attention

[6] Davenport rightly emphasises the important work on this by V. Schulz, *Deconstructing Imperial Representation: Tacitus, Cassius Dio, and Suetonius on Nero and Domitian* (Leiden and Boston, 2019).

for its skillful handling and interpretation of Constantinian *Excerpta* and Xiphilinus' *Epitome* and their potential interplay with Dio's own text.

The volume's third section features, again, four balanced chapters, this time on 'Political Groups and Political Culture'. Here, the political groups range from the general citizen body to the circles around Dio and the emperors. The ninth chapter, '"The People" and Cassius Dio' by Monica Hellström, suggests that, like embedded speeches, Dio's 'people scenes' are crucial points of his authorial commentary—literary and stereotypical constructs that readers should resist taking as strictly historical. In doing so, Hellström resists a number of Fergus Millar's interpretations (e.g., 201, 217), including the opinion that Dio took a pessimistic view of 'the People'. Along with Kemezis in the volume's first chapter, Hellström does well to direct a lens beyond the imperial elite and to pursue a topic that has received little attention in recent scholarship. Her evidence, however, is drawn—to a larger degree than one might seek from this volume—from periods that preceded the principate. Moreover, in spite of several pages discussing who 'the People' are (200–2) and a few footnotes that helpfully zoom in on occasional precise usages, the category remains vague, as Hellström acknowledges, and this vagueness also limits the conclusions that one can draw.

In the following chapter, 'Citizenship, Enfranchisement and Honour in Cassius Dio', Myles Lavan continues analysing Dio's complex treatment of citizen classes, in this case with a view to the *constitutio Antoniniana*. A fine word study of *politeia* and *archomenoi* especially and their relevance to widespread citizenship gives way next to an analysis of Maecenas' speech and its insistence that matters of citizenship should not bar those with honourable birth, wealth, and ability from serving the state. Lavan consequently speculates, probably rightly, that Dio would have seen intrinsic merit in Maecenas' citizenship proposal. (One might note that it upholds an economy of honour within which Dio himself fit nicely.) Yet, Lavan then excavates 'discrepant voices' from Zonaras' and Xiphilinus' accounts and from Dio's narrative that do not so easily accept this notion. Here, as Malik had suggested of Dio's treatment of Nero, one must look to the historian's contemporaneous circumstances: Lavan suggests that Dio's view of Caracalla's reign as disastrous would have made it difficult for the historian to speak enthusiastically of the *constitutio Antoniniana*, or any other Caracallan policy (238). I find this to be an attractive conclusion. But one must admit that in again prioritising Maecenas' speech we risk doing just what Lavan warns us against: 'to reduce "Maecenas" to a "mouthpiece" for the author is to collapse a polyphony that is characteristic of the *Roman History*' (239).

In the eleventh chapter, 'The Company They Keep: Emperors and Their Associates', Barbara Saylor Rodgers brings us to the focal political group of Dio's imperial books, namely the emperors. (Rodgers, in fact, does not have much to say about their associates, perhaps indicating just how dominant the

biographical impulse towards emperors is in Dio's imperial books.) As with the preceding couple of chapters, Rodgers propels much of her examination by way of vocabulary study, in this case of Dio's ethical vocabulary. Along with some rather general observations, nicely pointed out is Dio's reliance on alpha privatives, especially *ἀσέλγεια*, to define poor leadership (244–5).[7] There follows an emperor-by-emperor summary assessment, closing with some well-worn observations (e.g., Marcus Aurelius is the best imperial model), some that offer a different position from other conclusions in this volume (e.g., *contra* Davenport, Trajan possessed excellent moral qualities), and some that are striking in their obvious truth despite their novelty in Dio scholarship (e.g., making a child emperor consistently proves to be a risk). While Rodgers' chapter reads more as a survey of observations than as a specific argument, it offers the most comprehensive coverage of Dio's imperial biographies.

Christopher Mallan closes out the volume's third section with a discussion of 'Dio and His Friends: Autobiography and Biography in Cassius Dio's Contemporary Narrative'. Here, Mallan investigates an important instance in which Dio's biographical impulse is directed at someone other than a ruler, namely himself (and those who help complete his portrait of the ideal senator). Mallan is not the first to draw attention to Dio's highly personal account with its emphasis on his senatorial ethic, proximity to the powerful, and divine assistance, as well as its particular interest in *paideia*, but his summary of Dio as a 'living anachronism' who is consequently resentful at his contemporaries' inability or unwillingness to respect traditional Roman institutions, promote the most qualified rulers, and safeguard the primacy of social class and political caste (265) is as well put as any description of the historian I have encountered. I appreciated, moreover, a less sweeping and more rare observation, that Dio left a 'career inscription of sorts—not in stone, but in his *Roman History*' and that his autobiographical impulse was not superficial, but carefully crafted, even down to displaying senatorial *industria* by way of his movement (literary and physical) through provincial appointments (267, 274).

Mallan has elsewhere produced a small library of good work on Dio's Byzantine reception, but here it is Alicia Simpson who, with the final full chapter of the volume, provides a fine summary and analysis of 'The Reception of Cassius Dio's Imperial Narrative in Byzantium (Tenth–Twelfth Centuries)'. Its chronological tour will be a useful survey for most readers of Dio, for whom the crucial importance of Byzantine scholars and epitomators is not always obvious. Simpson points out that Dio was cut from a cloth that well suited those tenth–twelfth century scholars, in turn: the structure of his history with its combination of annalistic and biographical modes, including

[7] While Rodgers (and most dictionaries) define this as 'licentiousness', I rather like the idea of its radical meaning, 'without charm' (from *α-θέλγω*), as a Dionian yardstick.

specula principum, and his near comprehensiveness (297; 307) were critical to the revived interest in Dio during this period.

The volume, and this review, closes with Christopher Pelling, who in his epilogue has little to say about the biographical structure of Dio's *Roman History*. If his 1997 essay hadn't sufficiently excavated that theme, these volumes certainly have, and to the good. Rather, Pelling offers a summary of the volume and state of scholarship, raising a number of questions that, he remarks, might need more than another handful of decades to find coverage. I highlight just one area of enquiry which I agree will bear fruits: the relation between Dio and his Greek predecessors who wrote about Rome, especially Polybius and Dionysius of Halicarnassus (317–18). While I don't believe we need another volume on Cassius Dio for now, I do hope to see journal articles on the topic, perhaps here in *Histos*.

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