STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

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STUDIES IN CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Edited by

ANDREW G. SCOTT

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PREFACE

This volume examines various aspects of contemporary historiography in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds. The term 'contemporary historiography' (Jacoby's *Zeitgeschichte*) is usually applied to historical works that cover, in whole or in part, the periods of time through which the historians themselves lived. These works are typically valued for their proximity to the events they narrate, though they are not without their problems of interpretation. Through various devices, authors might attempt to give the impression of eyewitness status even when they themselves were not present; contemporary events could shift authors' point of view and compel them to provide unrealistic or biased accounts; and memories of eyewitnesses were not always sharp. The papers in this volume examine how we might read and understand histories of this type. They demonstrate how contemporary historiography was practiced across time and how it was a constantly evolving part of the Greco-Roman historiographic tradition.

The papers on Herodotus and Thucydides, Julius Caesar, Cassius Dio, and Herodian originated in a session held at the Annual Meeting of the Society for Classical Studies in San Diego in 2019. To the original four papers presented there have been added chapters on Ptolemy I Soter, Sallust, and Tacitus.

My thanks go to the contributors to this supplement, for their dedication and persistence, and to John Marincola, for his help and patience in bringing this work to publication. I also thank the anonymous reviewers, who offered many criticisms and suggestions for the improvement of this volume as a whole.

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A.G.S.
Philadelphia, November 2022

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I

INTRODUCTION: THE METHODOLOGY, POLITICS, AND VALUE OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY

Andrew G. Scott

The term 'contemporary history' is frequently applied to works of history that detail the events of the author's own life, in full or in part, and as such has wide, if sometimes unspecific, application to a large number of ancient Greek and Roman histories. The surviving corpus of historical works demonstrates that this was a prominent mode of history writing, especially as the historian was meant to employ their 'eyes and ears' in researching their work, with particular emphasis on the former.[1] Given the strength of the tradition, we can observe an ongoing process of adherence, modification, and manipulation that stretched from Thucydides to Herodian, and beyond. Adherence to tradition also brought a host of concerns for the contemporary historian, especially as the circumstances under which they wrote changed over time and place. Likewise, it raises a number of concerns for the student of ancient history, which bear directly on their ability to properly interpret historical works both within the tradition and in and of themselves. It is the purpose of the volume to consider various aspects of contemporary history writing, including the use and manipulation of accepted methodology, its political implications, and debates around its value. Before an introduction to the papers included in this volume, it will be useful to lay out some thoughts on the primacy of contemporary historiography, the concerns of the contemporary historian, and the value and limits of this type of history writing.

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[1] For the methodology, see, e.g., Schepens (1975). Translations of Greek and Latin texts are from the Loeb Classical Library, at times with slight alterations.

Writing Contemporary History: Methods and Concerns

Thucydides in large part set the parameters for how to write contemporary history in Greco-Roman antiquity and also for how ancient historians would later be received.[2] He believed that inquiry into the past was difficult because of the passage of time and the unreliability of those who wrote about it (1.20). Instead, he claimed to have thoroughly and accurately researched the events of the Peloponnesian War through his own autopsy or by the reports of others (1.22.2). Later, he explains that he lived through and experienced the entire war, and he brought his judgement to bear on it so that he might accurately understand it (5.26.5). These tenets are a magnification of ancient historiographic methodology, which was based primarily on 'personal observation (autopsy), inquiry, and travel',[3] and can be observed earlier in the interrelationship between autopsy and accurate storytelling in the *Odyssey* or in Candaules' remark that eyes are more trustworthy than ears.[4] Thucydides' innovation was to centralise the recounting of events that the historian had lived through and to eschew, for the most part, the history of the more distant past. Since Thucydides, 'contemporary history' has occupied a central position in both ancient and modern conceptions of history writing.[5]

In addition to his prescriptions on method, Thucydides lays out some of the difficulties with which contemporary history was written. It was difficult to find reliable eyewitness accounts, since they were affected both by misremembering and bias (1.22.3). There was also the need to correct contemporary misperceptions, since so few people pursued truth with much effort (1.20.3). Finally, speeches, which might also be witnessed and heard

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[2] The dominance of writing contemporary history can be glimpsed in Ephorus' defence of writing of the more distant past (*BNJ* 70 F 9).

[3] Fornara (1983) 49.

[4] *Od.* 8.487–91, with Marincola (2007b) 5–6; Hdt. 1.8.2.

[5] His work was already canonical in the fourth century BCE, on which, see Matijašić (2018) 123–35. His renown is apparent from Dionysius of Halicarnassus' *On Thucydides*, in which he refers to Thucydides as 'the greatest of all historians' (2.2), which partly derived from his contemporary status and associated methodology (6.3). In the modern period his eminence was not always assured, but by the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries he was clearly at the top (Morley (2014) 7–24). In his influential *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Felix Jacoby saw Thucydides' work as the peak of 'true historical literature' ((2015) 9; cf. 49), and under his category of *Zeitgeschichte* (usually translated as 'contemporary history') he gathers a large array of works that, for him, followed Thucydides' prescriptions to a certain extent and dealt with contemporary events, at least in part. For critiques of this organising principle, see, e.g., Fornara (1983) 3; Humphreys (1997); Schepens (1997).

live, would make their way into his work not as exact replicas, but rather as a means of conveying the message appropriate to the situation (1.22.1). While these professions are part of the author's attempt to build up his persona and appear to be painstaking and endurant of labour, they also open a window into some of the concerns of the contemporary historian and the criticisms that they could face.[6] As such, we find numerous statements from historians attempting to defend themselves and elevate their authority, while at the same time expressing worry about source material, bias, truth and falsehood, and the value of their accounts.

One concern was that a historian could not witness every event. Thucydides deals with this obliquely with his allowance that other eyewitnesses must be consulted. The idea is expanded upon by Polybius, who, quoting Ephorus (*BNJ* 70 F 110) and Theopompus (*BNJ* 115 F 342), acknowledges both the place of autopsy in historical inquiry and the impossibility of the historian being present at all events (Pol. 12.27.6–9):

> ἡ δὲ πολυπραγμοσύνη πολλῆς μὲν προσδεῖται ταλαιπωρίας καὶ δαπάνης, μέγα δέ τι συμβάλλεται καὶ μέγιστόν ἐστι μέρος τῆς ἱστορίας. δῆλον δὲ τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἐξ αὐτῶν τῶν τὰς συντάξεις πραγματευομένων. ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ἔφορός φησιν, εἰ δυνατὸν ἦν αὐτοὺς παρεῖναι πᾶσι τοῖς πράγμασι, ταύτην ἂν διαφέρειν πολὺ τῶν ἐμπειριῶν· ὁ δὲ Θεόπομπος τοῦτον μὲν ἄριστον ἐν τοῖς πολεμικοῖς τὸν πλείστοις κινδύνοις παρατετευχότα, τοῦτον δὲ δυνατώτατον ἐν λόγῳ τὸν πλείστων μετεσχηκότα πολιτικῶν ἀγώνων. τὸν αὐτὸν δὲ τρόπον συμβαίνειν ἐπ' ἰατρικῆς καὶ κυβερνητικῆς.

A historian's intense research activity (ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη), on the contrary, requires severe labour and great expense, but is exceedingly valuable and is the most important part of history. This is evident from expressions used by historians themselves. Ephorus, for example, says that if we could be personally present at all transactions such knowledge would be far superior to any other. Theopompus says that the man who has the best knowledge of war is he who has been present at the most battles, that most capable speaker is he who has taken part in the greatest number of debates, and that the same holds good about medicine and navigation.

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[6] For these aspects of a historian's persona, see Marincola (1997) 148–58.

This passage, which is part of a larger attack on Timaeus' choice to compose his history primarily from book research, highlights the authority given to eyewitness reports (especially the historian's own).[7] The issue is expanded to include not just witnessing key events but also the general experience of the historian, which Polybius also considered a key aspect of successfully writing about the past.[8] Polybius stresses the importance of autopsy, informed by personal experience.

These prescriptions find a correlation in an earlier passage, in which Polybius, again critiquing the carelessness of Timaeus' research, discusses how the historian should deal with his inability to be in all places at all times (Pol. 12.4c.4–5):

> ἐπειδὴ γὰρ αἱ μὲν πράξεις ἅμα πολλαχῇ συντελοῦνται, παρεῖναι δὲ τὸν αὐτὸν ἐν πλείοσι τόποις κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν καιρὸν ἀδύνατον, ὁμοίως γε μὴν οὐδ' αὐτόπτην γενέσθαι πάντων τῶν κατὰ τὴν οἰκουμένην τόπων καὶ τῶν ἐν τοῖς τόποις ἰδιωμάτων τὸν ἕνα δυνατόν, καταλείπεται πυνθάνεσθαι μὲν ὡς παρὰ πλείστων, πιστεύειν δὲ τοῖς ἀξίοις πίστεως, κριτὴν δ' εἶναι τῶν προσπιπτόντων μὴ κακόν.

> For since many events occur at the same time in different places, and one man cannot be in several places at one time, nor is it possible for a single man to have seen with his own eyes every place in the world and all the peculiar features of different places, the only thing left for an historian is to inquire from as many people as possible, to believe those worthy of belief, and to be an adequate critic of the reports that reach him.

Polybius acknowledges the importance of contemporary status but also asserts as equally important the ability to sift information properly. In both of these passages, we see Polybius providing a defence against writing about an event or episode at which one might not have been present. This absence

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[7] Polybius' use of the term ἡ πολυπραγμοσύνη in this passage has been a cause for disagreement. Levene (2005) stresses that the term should refer to all the work of the historian, not just questioning eyewitnesses. I have attempted to convey that idea in the adapted translation above (with thanks to the suggestions of an anonymous reader).

[8] As seen in Polybius' proem (1.1.6) and pursued elsewhere.

could be overcome by other qualities of the historian, especially his experience and judgment.[9]

This passage also brings up the quality of a historian's source material, a concerning limitation for both ancient and modern writers and readers.[10] Thucydides (1.23) assures us that he will not accept just any account, and through his own perseverance and insight he will overcome partiality and failures of memory. Polybius (12.28a.8–10) also offers advice on how to best extract information from eyewitnesses, the success of which depends on the experience of historians and their general knowledge of the affairs that they are investigating. Earlier, however, Herodotus (7.152.3) took a different approach claiming that it was his job merely to report what he had been told, not necessarily to believe it. Seneca (*QNat.* 4b.3.1) took these sorts of claims as proof of falsehoods and criticised historians for passing responsibility for the material onto their sources; and in a later passage (*QNat.* 7.16.1–2) he disparages historians for intentionally seeking and including lies in their work, thinking that their work will not find approval without them.[11] Likewise, Herodian (1.1.1), in a passage that alludes to Thucydides (1.22), censures those who 'have shown a contempt for the truth' (τῆς μὲν ἀληθείας … ὠλιγώρησαν) and who, for the rewards of providing pleasure, have chosen to include legendary or fabulous material (μυθῶδες) rather than an accurate account.

The creation of an accurate narrative based on eyewitness accounts coincides with the desire to produce a realistic depiction of events.[12] Lucian (*Hist. conscr.* 51), who assumes that the historian will be producing a work of contemporary history (*Hist. conscr.* 47), states that they should try to 'illuminate events as vividly as possible' (εἰς δύναμιν ἐναργέστατα ἐπιδεῖξαι αὐτά), with the hope that the reader sees what is being described.[13] If pushed too far, however, this vividness (*enargeia*) could contravene the accuracy that the genre required and move into exaggeration or embellishment.[14] Here we

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[9] Sacks (1981) 61–4.

[10] See, for example, Woodman (1988) 15–23.

[11] On lying historians, see Wiseman (1993).

[12] On the connection between vividness and plausibility, see Woodman (1988) 28.

[13] Avenarius (1956) 71–9 correlates Lucian's assumption about writing contemporary history with the tradition established by Thucydides and his successors. stretching all the way to Ammianus. See also Marincola (1997) 76.

[14] Walker (1993) 354; see Woodman (1988) 25 for other equivalent terms in Greek and Latin.

might cite Polybius' (2.56.7–16) attacks on Phylarchus for writing a history that included too much dramatic detail, which was meant to cause the reader to feel pity and ultimately made his work more like a tragedy.[15] Lucian (*Hist. conscr.* 29) alleges that he has uncovered a host of untruths in the work of a certain writer, who claimed to provide eyewitness accounts of events in Syria, Armenia, and Parthia, despite having never left his hometown of Corinth. While we might doubt the veracity of this example, it gets at the connection between a methodology based on eyewitness accounts and the production of a work that would convey the immediacy of those accounts in a realistic and believable way. Relatedly, historians might emphasise autopsy in scenes which they themselves could not have witnessed, as Tacitus does in the early books of this *Histories*.[16]

Speeches, a mainstay of ancient historiography, were another possible place for invention. In addition to Thucydides' beguiling statement on speeches, we find Ephorus (*BNJ* 70 F 9) noting the impossibility of remembering their exact words. While others, such as Callisthenes (*BNJ* 124 F 44), seem to follow Thucydides' (1.22) prescriptions of making speeches appropriate to the occasion,[17] Polybius (12.25a.3–5) faults Timaeus for employing, more or less, this same method. Instead, Polybius says, the actual words of the speech should be recovered, and not substituted for with rhetorical flourish, as these are equivalent to falsehoods (12.25b.1–4).[18] The concerns about speeches run parallel to those of vivid narration: the more realistic the speech or scene, the more convincing it is that the historian, who witnessed the event or drew their account from other eyewitness reports, is producing an accurate account.

Bias also affected historical truth-telling, and although the charge was not limited to contemporary history, such historians were frequent targets of such accusations.[19] Polybius criticises Fabius Pictor and Philinus for being too partisan in their approach to their subject (1.14.1–3). The cause of this was not intentional malfeasance, but rather that they both acted like men in love with their countries. Polybius (8.8.4) later criticises those who wrote

[15] For details of this critique and its political and historiographical implications, see Landucci's commentary on Phylarchus, *BNJ* 81 T 3.

[16] See the recent study of Joseph (2019).

[17] Following Marincola (2007a) 122.

[18] See also Polybius' comments at 12.25i.3–9, as well as the more thorough analysis in Baron (2013) 170–201.

[19] As Luce (1989) 18–19 has put it, bias was caused by the emotions 'hope and fear, favoritism and hatred'.

about Philip out of favouritism or fear and especially castigates Theopompus for his overly negative assessment of Philip, which was full of offensive language and inconsistencies. Other examples come from those writing during the Roman Principate. For Tacitus, Actium dealt a decisive blow to talented writers of history and the pursuit of truth itself, affected as it was by flattery or hatred (*Hist.* 1.1.1; cf. *Ann.* 1.1.2). Despite the favour shown him in his career under the Flavians, he professed that he would write without these vices.[20] Josephus took a somewhat idiosyncratic approach to the issue. In his autobiography (*Vit.* 359–360), he criticises Justus for not having published his account while Vespasian and Titus were still alive, whereas he himself did so. Josephus claims that his account would be open to refutation by some of the work's main characters, whereas Justus hid behind their death and thus their inability to question his version. While Josephus' statements here run counter to the generally accepted view that publication after the death of an autocrat was a better way to ensure lack of bias, the strength of his defence demonstrates sensitivity to the charges made by Justus and in general the need for the contemporary historian to be on guard against charges of bias.[21]

A final concern has less to do with ancient anxieties than with modern apprehension about interpretation and critical distance. The value of writing contemporary history, for the ancient Greeks and Romans, was that the historian himself, who had appropriate experience and was willing to put in the effort, was able to witness, live through, and experience the events that they narrate. In addition to the example of Thucydides mentioned above, Polybius initially tells us that the endpoint for his work will concern itself with the fifty-three years that it took the Romans to bring the Mediterranean world under their control, that is 220–167 BCE (1.1.5). In his preface to Book 3, however, Polybius reports that he will continue his work instead to 146 BCE, when Rome destroyed Carthage and Corinth (3.4.12–13):

διὸ καὶ τῆς πραγματείας ταύτης τοῦτ' ἔσται τελεσιούργημα, τὸ γνῶναι τὴν κατάστασιν παρ' ἑκάστοις, ποία τις ἦν μετὰ τὸ καταγωνισθῆναι τὰ

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[20] Notably, however, the *Histories* were published after the deaths of the Flavians, and despite his promise to write of the reigns of Nerva and Trajan (*Hist.* 1.1.4), Tacitus never produced such a work.

[21] As a corollary, the issue of bias seems also to have driven some to write non-contemporary history (Luce (1989) 25–7). For example, Pliny (*Ep.* 5.8.12–13) is not eager to write about his own time because of the possibility of charges of writing with too much praise of blame. For the justifications for writing non-contemporary history, see Marincola (1997) 112–17.

ὅλα καὶ πεσεῖν εἰς τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων ἐξουσίαν ἕως τῆς μετὰ ταῦτα
πάλιν ἐπιγενομένης ταραχῆς καὶ κινήσεως. ὑπὲρ ἧς διὰ τὸ μέγεθος τῶν
ἐν αὐτῇ πράξεων καὶ τὸ παράδοξον τῶν συμβαινόντων, τὸ δὲ μέγιστον,
διὰ τὸ τῶν πλείστων μὴ μόνον αὐτόπτης, ἀλλ᾽ ὧν μὲν συνεργὸς ὧν δὲ
καὶ χειριστὴς γεγονέναι, προήχθην οἷον ἀρχὴν ποιησάμενος ἄλλην
γράφειν.

So the final end achieved by this work will be, to gain knowledge of
what was the condition of each people after all had been crushed and
had come under the dominion of Rome, until the disturbed and
troubled time that afterwards ensued. About this latter, owing to the
importance of the actions and the unexpected character of the
events, and chiefly because I not only witnessed most but took part
and even directed some, I was induced to write as if starting on a
fresh work.

The centrality of the author could not be more pronounced, as Polybius
states that his own experience in and of these events drove his decision to
continue. Polybius' continuation was made both (and especially) because of
personal involvement and so that the reader might understand the nature of
Roman rule in the Mediterranean world.

A similar, but slightly different, example is provided several centuries later
by Cassius Dio (73[72].18.3–4):

καὶ μή μέ τις κηλιδοῦν τὸν τῆς ἱστορίας ὄγκον, ὅτι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα
συγγράφω, νομίσῃ. ἄλλως μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἶπον αὐτά· ἐπειδὴ δὲ πρός
τε τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἐγένετο καὶ παρὼν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ καὶ εἶδον ἕκαστα
καὶ ἤκουσα καὶ ἐλάλησα, δίκαιον ἡγησάμην μηδὲν αὐτῶν
ἀποκρύψασθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτά, ὥσπερ τι ἄλλο τῶν μεγίστων καὶ
ἀναγκαιοτάτων, τῇ μνήμῃ τῶν ἐσέπειτα ἐσομένων παραδοῦναι. καὶ
μέντοι καὶ τἆλλα πάντα τὰ ἐπ᾽ ἐμοῦ πραχθέντα καὶ λεπτουργήσω καὶ
λεπτολογήσω μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ πρότερα, ὅτι τε συνεγενόμην αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὅτι
μηδένα ἄλλον οἶδα τῶν τι δυναμένων ἐς συγγραφὴν ἀξίαν λόγου
καταθέσθαι διηκριβωκότα αὐτὰ ὁμοίως ἐμοί.

And let no one feel that I am sullying the dignity of history by
recording such occurrences. On most accounts, to be sure, I should
not have mentioned this exhibition; but since it was given by the
emperor himself, and since I was present myself and took part in

everything seen, heard and spoken, I have thought proper to suppress none of the details, but to hand them down, trivial as they are, just like any events of the greatest weight and importance. And, indeed, all the other events that took place in my lifetime I shall describe with more exactness and detail than earlier occurrences, for the reason that I was present when they happened and know no one else, among those who have any ability at writing a worthy record of events, who has so accurate a knowledge of them as I.

Dio takes Polybius' idea to the extreme. He asserts that the events of his lifetime were unworthy of history in and of themselves, but that it was necessary to record them simply because he was an eyewitness.[22]

While these passages from Polybius and Dio highlight the importance of the author's contemporary status, they raise another concern: that is, how well could the contemporary historian understand the events of his own lifetime within the greater scope of the past? Momigliano has pointed out that changes in contemporary events were what drove authors to write histories.[23] These changes were frequently wars (e.g., Thucydides), changes in world order (e.g., Polybius), or changes in government (e.g., Livy's final decades). Those changes, however, do not guarantee that the author is able to properly situate the events within a longer span of time. In assessing the value of this type of history writing, we might here take our cue from Eric Hobsbawm:[24]

However, it is not the purpose of the book to tell the story of the period which is its subject, the Short Twentieth Century from 1914 to 1991. … My object is to understand and explain *why* things turned out the way they did, and how they hang together. For anyone of my age-group who has lived through all or most of the Short Twentieth Century this is inevitably also an autobiographical endeavour. We are talking about amplifying (and correcting) our own memories. And we are talking as men and women of a particular time and place, involved, in various ways, in its history as actors in its dramas—however insignificant our parts—as observers of our times and, not least, as people whose views of the century have been formed by what we have come to see as crucial events.

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[22] On the uniqueness of this passage, see Marincola (1997) 91–2.

[23] Momigliano (1972) 284.

[24] Hobsbawm (1994) 3.

As a writer of contemporary history, Hobsbawm puts his finger on an important point: that such works constitute, for the modern historian, the 'first draft' of history.[25] Like Polybius and Cassius Dio, Hobsbawm centralises his experience of the events and acknowledges how contemporary ideas about what constituted the 'crucial events' shape the subsequent story that is told about a period.

These concerns are important to bear in mind as we approach the contemporary histories of ancient Greece and Rome. We must deal with these texts within the tradition as well as within the time and place in which they were created. As we have seen briefly above, there are numerous reasons to question the accuracy of contemporary history—or in the very least, to moderate our understanding of where its value lies. Despite the ubiquity of contemporary historiography and the somewhat fixed nature of its basic tenets, we can see in the considerations above that not all aspects of the form were set in stone but remained fluid over time, in order to accommodate political situations, the changing shape of the canon, and the needs of particular narratives.

Plan for the Volume

The papers in this volume do not aim at a comprehensive view of contemporary historiography in the Greek and Roman worlds, but rather they offer examinations of and insights into a number of key ideas and concerns of the contemporary historians. They are presented chronologically, though there is significant thematic overlap among them. Broadly speaking, the papers focus on the reliability of eyewitness accounts; the effect that contemporary political situations had on the writing of history; and the connection between contemporary status and competition between rival historians.

In the first chapter, Christopher Baron examines examples of brief dialogue in Herodotus and Thucydides and how these instances of speech interact with the expectations of eyewitness history. These short conversations break down the distance between the reader and the story that is being told and shift the 'eyewitness' aspect of the narrative from author to reader. By using direct speech in such a way, the authors create a narrative fiction that is heavily reader-orientated.

Frances Pownall next deals with the shaping of contemporary narratives and its political implications. Specifically, she examines the contemporary

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[25] To borrow the idea that journalism is the 'first rough draft of history'.

histories about Alexander the Great that were produced in the aftermath of his death. With particular focus on the history of Ptolemy I, she demonstrates how Ptolemy's selective history of Alexander was used to help the author create a new dynasty based in Alexandria.

Lydia Spielberg returns to the issue of speeches, this time examining how Julius Caesar records brief utterances by his centurions at dramatic moments in his *commentarii*. These recorded quips work both to establish the strength of Caesar's relationship with his troops and to allow Caesar to offer interpretations about contested events through the voices of seemingly independent speakers.

In the following chapter, Jennifer Gerrish examines apathy towards truth and the idea of the modern political lie in post-Sullan Rome through the lens of Sallust's *Histories*. With particular attention to the speech of Licinius Macer, politician and historian, in the *Histories*, she shows how Sallust makes the case for the political disengagement of the historian as the only means by which he can usefully respond to contemporary events and concerns.

Contemporary political concerns are also the subject of Adam M. Kemezis' chapter. There, he examines Tacitus' engagement with biological father-son relationships in the *Agricola* as a way to question generational continuity among the Roman elite, as Rome moved from the hereditary dynasty of the Flavians to the adoptive model chosen by Nerva as he passed power to Trajan.

Jesper Majbom Madsen engages with Cassius Dio's contemporary books and the eyewitness reports contained therein. Through a trauma-based reading, he argues that Dio's personally invested autopsy accounts function as a way to universalise the experience of Roman senators and present a united front of opposition to the debased monarchy of his day.

In the final chapter, I also am interested in eyewitness reporting, this time in Herodian's *Roman History*. I argue that, although Herodian purports to follow the main tenets of ancient historiographic theory, his eyewitness reports strain the credulity of the reader. This move, I argue further, is intentional, as it allows Herodian to push the boundaries of historiographic theory in ways that enhance the unbelievability of the actions of the young tyrants in his history, which is one of the main focuses of his work.

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BEING THERE: THREE EXAMPLES OF BRIEF DIALOGUE IN HERODOTUS AND THUCYDIDES*

Christopher Baron

Abstract: Though the idea of 'eyewitness history' held a central importance from the beginning, Greek historical writing did not typically feature the explicit citation of evidence provided by an eyewitness to an event. Rather, the Greek historians utilised a narrative style which elided any conceptual distance between the reader and the action. This narrative fiction raises the possibility of a different meaning for 'eyewitness history', one that shifts emphasis from the sources to the audience. In this essay, I examine three passages containing direct speech found in Herodotus and Thucydides which stand out from their surroundings in various ways. I suggest that the notion of 'eyewitness history' in its more reader-orientated sense may help explain the uncommon nature of these brief dialogues.

Keywords: Dialogue; Herodotus; Sources; Speeches; Thucydides; Vividness

The idea of 'eyewitness history' held a central importance from the beginning of the Greek tradition of historiography. Herodotus at various points emphasises his autopsy—not of events, obviously, since those he narrates took place at an earlier time, but of places and objects. Thucydides is able to position himself closer to his subject, given the contemporary events he writes about, and he underlines this fact in his

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opening sentence (and his second preface in Book 5). However, in practice, the explicit citation of evidence provided by an eyewitness to an event was not as prominent a feature of Greek historical writing as a modern historian, or a reader of modern works of history, might expect.[1] To whatever extent any ancient historian takes pains to note eyewitness evidence, they all as a rule utilise a narrative style which does, in fact, elide any conceptual distance between the reader/listener and the action. They write, 'Such and such person/people did *x*', without constantly reminding their audience of the source(s) of their knowledge for the event. Thus, while Thucydides claims in general to have witnessed the events of the war, only once does he explicitly place himself at the scene of the action (the loss of Amphipolis under his watch).[2]

This narrative fiction allows Greco-Roman historiography to take the form it does, of a generally continuous story told by a generally omniscient narrator.[3] But it also raises the possibility of a different meaning for 'eyewitness history', one that shifts emphasis from the sources to the audience. The goal of much ancient Greek and Roman historical writing was not to present the reader/listener with eyewitnesses to events; rather, it was to produce a narrative which made the audience feel as if they were an eyewitness, a narrative whose vividness placed the scene before their eyes.[4] Arguably one of the most memorable passages of ancient historiography is Thucydides' account of the battle in the Great Harbour at Syracuse (7.71).

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[1] See Pitcher (2009) 57–64 on eyewitnesses and autopsy in the Greek and Roman historians; Walker (1993) 373 on the importance of eyewitness history from the beginning of the genre. I am not concerned here with 'autopsy' as part of historical method, on which see Schepens (1980); Darbo-Peschanski (2021) on Herodotus.

[2] Thuc. 4.104–7, though even this is not strictly an autoptic statement: see Marincola (1997) 182–4.

[3] de Jong (2013); Marincola (1997) 80; see Dewald (2006) 170–74 on the similar approaches Herodotus and Thucydides take in this regard. Of course, Herodotus does intrude on the narrative in order to comment on the sources of his knowledge far more frequently than most other ancient historians (on which see Dewald (2002)). Nonetheless, he relies on the narrative fiction described above for a large portion of the story he tells; in addition, those intrusions diminish noticeably in the final three books, which makes the passages I discuss here stand out even more.

[4] As is the case with speeches (below), the explanation for this approach probably owes a great deal to the epic tradition of telling stories about the past. Boedeker (2002) 106 discusses the similar 'mimetic quality' shared by the narratives of Herodotus and Homer; see also Rutherford (2012) and Zangara (2007) 23–5 for the influence of epic on historical writing; Matijašić (2022) 15–22 for a review of scholarship on Homer and Herodotus; on Thucydides, Rengakos (2006).

Thucydides neither places himself at the scene nor cites any source as a witness of this event. But despite the lack of any explicit eyewitness statement, the effect of the passage is that the reader/listener can easily imagine being there.[5]

Now, this sort of vividness is a quality of narrative. But as even a first-time reader of almost any surviving ancient historian will notice, narratorial description is just one part of Greek and Roman historical writing. Direct speeches form another crucial component, composed by the historian and placed in the mouths of the characters in their history. It would of course be overly reductive to use 'vividness' to explain this phenomenon: the *purpose* behind Thucydides' speeches, for example, is not to place his audience on the scene.[6] Nonetheless, in this essay I want to consider along these lines three passages containing direct speech found in Herodotus and Thucydides which stand out from their surroundings—both the immediate narrative sections and other speeches—in various ways. I want to suggest that the notion of 'eyewitness history' in its more reader-orientated sense may help explain the uncommon nature of these brief dialogues within each author's text.

In Herodotus, the passages I have in mind (8.65 and 9.16) represent just two of the more than 200 'dialogues' in the *Histories*—that is, two or more sets of words spoken by two or more figures occurring together, related by the author in direct or indirect speech.[7] However, while these two selected chapters share some features common to many of Herodotus' dialogues, they also exhibit others that are unusual or even unique in the work. Most importantly, in each passage Herodotus names the person who has reported the conversation (not necessarily to him, as we will see): Dicaeus, son of

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[5] See Zangara (2004) and (2007), esp. 55–89, and Walker (1993) on *enargeia* ('vividness') in the Greek historians; Pitcher (2009) 84–91 on 'detail, vividness, autopsy'. All three scholars cite Lucian, *hist. conscr.* 51 for the sentiment: 'The task of the historian is similar: to give a fine arrangement to events and illuminate them as vividly as possible. And when a man who has heard him thinks thereafter that he is actually seeing what is being described and then praises him—then it is that the work of our Phidias of history is perfect and has received its proper praise' (Loeb trans. K. Kilburn). Plutarch (*De glor. Ath.* 347A–C) quotes from Thucydides 7.71 to illustrate the historian's 'pictorial vividness' (γραφικὴ ἐνάργεια); Dionysius (*Thuc.* 26) quotes 7.69–72 at length as one of the passages most worthy of imitation.

[6] See Foster (2012) for an enriching discussion of both direct and indirect discourse in the ancient historians. On the role of direct speech in 'the recreation of reality' (i.e., *mimesis*) as envisioned by ancient critics, see Gray (1987) 468–72.

[7] As catalogued and classified by Lang (1984).

Theocydes, an Athenian (8.65); and Thersander, a nobleman of Orchomenus in Boeotia (9.16). As Angus Bowie points out, these are the only two places in the *Histories* where Herodotus allows a *named individual explicitly cited as a source* to give information in 'his own' voice at any length.[8] Moreover, Thersander stands completely alone in combining this element with being one of the three individuals whom Herodotus names as having provided the author with information face-to-face.[9]

Other unusual and important features of these two brief dialogues will be discussed below. A number of scholars have commented on some of these aspects, and/or have brought these two passages together in passing, but for the most part this involves treating them as examples of 'the speech-power relation in Persia', as Vasiliki Zali has put it.[10] I propose to examine them in more detail and specifically from the viewpoint of historical method and narrative technique. What is the significance of Herodotus' decision to reproduce these brief exchanges in direct speech? I want to suggest that, in addition to commonly proposed answers (thematic significance, dramatic concerns, portentous signs, vividness), the unique citations of a participant as a source for the historian have the effect of making the reader (or listener) into an eyewitness—not of an event *per se*, but of a private conversation

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[8] Bowie (2007) 18. There are other important 'secondary narrators' in the *Histories*. The Corinthian Socles is perhaps the most notable example, who provides a long speech on the Cypselid tyranny (5.92); but Herodotus does not *cite* Socles (or anyone else) as his source for the speech. The uniqueness of 8.65 and 9.16 is sometimes missed: Gould (1989) 20–1, for example, says that Thersander in the latter passage is '*typical* of one sort of informant who *regularly* appears in Herodotus' work, a notable Greek or non-Greek with whom Herodotus has been able to establish some sort of personal connection' (my emphasis). Gould goes on to mention four others (see next note), without noting that these are the *only* such *named* individuals in the entire work.

[9] The other two are Archias, son of Samius (3.55.2), and Tymnes, the steward of the Scythian king Ariapeithes (4.76.6); on these three, cf. the brief discussion of Grant (1967). The only other unambiguously named individual sources are the priestesses at Dodona, Promeneia, Timarete, and Nicandra (2.55, a passage which can be read to imply that Herodotus heard the information from the women themselves) and the Athenian Epizelus (6.117.3). Though he remains unnamed, the scribe of the treasury of Athena at Sais in Egypt (2.28.1) could be added to the list of specified individual informants. See Appendix 1 by Shrimpton and Gillis ap. Shrimpton (1997) 259–65; cf. the groupings provided by Marincola (1987) 122 and n. 5.

[10] Zali (2014) 114–15, in her discussion of the 'problem of communication'; she does not otherwise address or analyse these two dialogues. See also Scardino (2007) 297; Macan (1908) I.2.455 cites the two passages as evidence for (and examples of) actual Persian feelings of apprehension on the eve of battle.

which sheds light on the nature of history and the historian's task. I will conclude by bringing in for comparative purposes a similar passage in Thucydides. This is a brief dialogue, presented in direct speech, between an Ambraciot herald and an anonymous Acarnanian after a particularly devastating battle in northwest Greece (3.113). I will argue that this essentially unique Thucydidean passage, reminiscent of the Herodotean scenes I will analyse, has structural as well as thematic significance in addition to its eyewitness effect. It also stands out even more from its surroundings given the different texture of Thucydides' work.

The origin and function of direct speech(es) in ancient historiography is a rich and enormous topic and the subject of much debate. The technique was probably borrowed from the epic tradition, which complicates our efforts to discover why it was used by historians in the way and at the times that it was used. Furthermore, while a number of ancient authors offer explicit comments on the speeches found in their or other historians' works, our first extant historian, Herodotus, says absolutely nothing about his own use of this device. Unlike Thucydides, Herodotus offers no general statement of method concerning the place of speeches in his work.[11] Instead, in the eighth chapter of his first book, Herodotus introduces the Lydian king Candaules and his obsession with broadcasting his wife's extraordinary beauty:

> οὗτος δὴ ὦν ὁ Κανδαύλης ἠράσθη τῆς ἑωυτοῦ γυναικός, ἐρασθεὶς δὲ ἐνόμιζέ οἱ εἶναι γυναῖκα πολλὸν πασέων καλλίστην. ὥστε δὲ ταῦτα νομίζων, ἦν γάρ οἱ τῶν αἰχμοφόρων Γύγης ὁ Δασκύλου ἀρεσκόμενος μάλιστα, τούτῳ τῷ Γύγῃ καὶ τὰ σπουδαιέστερα τῶν πρηγμάτων ὑπερετίθετο ὁ Κανδαύλης καὶ δὴ καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῆς γυναικὸς ὑπερεπαίνεε. χρόνου δὲ οὐ πολλοῦ διελθόντος, χρῆν γὰρ Κανδαύλῃ γενέσθαι κακῶς …

> So then, this Candaules developed a passion for his own wife, and in this passion he believed that he had by far the most beautiful wife of all women. Believing this to be so, there was among his bodyguards

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[11] Cf. Fornara (1983) 143: 'Although it was Herodotus who introduced the direct oration into history…, our proper point of departure is the well-considered decision of Thucydides to continue with its use'. But, especially given the passages I am treating here, we should also note a fragment of Hecataeus quoted by the author of *On the Sublime* ([Long.] *Subl.* 27.1 = *BNJ* 1 F 30), in which Hecataeus apparently included direct speech by a character without any narratorial introduction: see Laird (1999) 90–1.

one he especially liked, Gyges son of Dascylus; to this Gyges, Candaules used to communicate more serious matters, and he especially praised his wife's figure. When not much time had passed (for Candaules was fated to end badly) …[12]

The author then writes, ἔλεγε πρὸς τὸν Γύγην τοιάδε ('he [sc. Candaules] said the following sorts of things to Gyges')—and suddenly we find direct discourse, immediately marked by a vocative address, a second-person pronoun, and a first-person verb:

Γύγη, οὐ γάρ **σε δοκέω** πείθεσθαί **μοι** λέγοντι περὶ τοῦ εἴδεος τῆς γυναικός (ὦτα γὰρ τυγχάνει ἀνθρώποισι ἐόντα ἀπιστότερα ὀφθαλμῶν), ποίει ὅκως ἐκείνην **θεήσεαι** γυμνήν. ὁ δὲ μέγα ἀμβώσας εἶπε· **Δέσποτα**, τίνα **λέγεις** λόγον οὐκ ὑγιέα, κελεύων με δέσποιναν τὴν ἐμὴν θεήσασθαι γυμνήν; ἅμα δὲ κιθῶνι ἐκδυομένῳ συνεκδύεται καὶ τὴν αἰδῶ γυνή. … ὁ μὲν δὴ λέγων τοιαῦτα ἀπεμάχετο, ἀρρωδέων μή τί οἱ ἐξ αὐτῶν γένηται κακόν. ὁ δ' ἀμείβατο τοισίδε· Θάρσει, **Γύγη** … ἀρχὴν γὰρ ἐγὼ μηχανήσομαι οὕτω ὥστε μηδὲ μαθεῖν μιν ὀφθεῖσαν ὑπὸ σεῦ. ἐγὼ γάρ σε ἐς τὸ οἴκημα ἐν τῷ κοιμώμεθα ὄπισθε τῆς ἀνοιγομένης θύρης στήσω …

'**Gyges!** Since **I** don't think **you** are being persuaded by **my** words concerning my wife's figure (for it is true that their ears are less trustworthy to men than their eyes), arrange it so that **you might gaze upon** her naked'. With a loud shout Gyges said, '**Master**, what unhealthy suggestion **do you speak**, bidding me gaze upon my queen naked? A woman slips off her shame along with her clothes' … He was resisting by saying such things, fearing lest something bad happen to him because of this. But the king responded in this way: 'Take heart, **Gyges** … to begin with, I will contrive it so that she does not learn that she has been seen by you. For I will station you in the bedroom where we sleep, behind the opened door …'.[13]

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[12] Hdt. 1.8.1–2. Translations of Herodotus are my own unless otherwise noted.

[13] Hdt. 1.8.2–9.2.

For the modern reader, at least, one effect of this brief dialogue is a feeling of being placed on the scene.[14] We can *envision* the king and his trusted bodyguard exchanging their lines in the palace. True, perhaps we do so under the influence of modern visual media (Hollywood and HBO). But the episode certainly appears more vivid in dialogue fashion than it would if recounted in the omniscient narrator's voice:[15]

> The king told Gyges that he did not think that Gyges believed what he was saying about his wife's figure (since, he said, men trust their ears less than their eyes), so he ordered Gyges to arrange that he gaze upon her naked. Gyges shouted and responded that the king's request to gaze upon his queen naked was improper; a woman (he said) takes off her shame along with her clothes …

I think an ancient audience would have felt the same difference: notice that each speaker in Herodotus' dialogue begins his lines with a vocative address (Γύγη … Δέσποτα … Γύγη), which must have been striking to the Greek ear after seven chapters of nothing but the narrator's voice. The only other 'voices' we have heard so far have reached us via indirect discourse ('the Persians/Greeks/Phoenicians say that …').[16]

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[14] Cf. Laird (1999) 90: with direct discourse, 'a voice other than the narrator's appears to take over and to confront us directly with the world of the story, and sometimes even to put us in it'. Anhalt (2008) 272 describes Candaules as one of the figures in Herodotus who serve as their own 'directors and choreographers of their respective displays', and in this case, the queen subsequently takes over the 'stage director' role. Anhalt also notes (274) that Candaules visualises the scene in more (lascivious) detail than Herodotus narrates it. These various gazes and counter-gazes are another effect of direct discourse, used to good advantage by a narrator whose account consistently leaves open questions surrounding the reliability of evidence.

[15] Compare Dionysius (*Comp.* 3.18), who transfers Herodotus' prose into the Attic dialect but retains the original dialogue format; however, he concludes that 'the story has been told with great dexterity, and has made the incident better to hear described than to see done' (S. Usher, trans. (Loeb)). Plato has Socrates conduct the same experiment I have made (with different goals in mind), turning the first direct speech of *Iliad* 1 into narrative (*Rep.* 393d–394a).

[16] See Stone (forthcoming) for an intriguing examination of Herodotus' 'oral prose performance', including the possible use of dramatic techniques, in his own voice, when reciting the speeches in his *Histories*.

In the case of Gyges and Candaules, there are other major benefits to portraying the scene as a brief dialogue.[17] Being able to visualise the action is crucial to the audience's understanding of how the affair played out, and thus how the Heraclid dynasty of Lydia came to an end. Gyges' placement behind the door, the queen's placing her clothes on the chair, the chances of slipping out of the room without being seen—all this is clarified and emphasised by the direct speech exchanged between the king and Gyges.[18] At stake is not just knowledge of the logistical details of the scene (the *what* and the *how*), but the answer to the question of *why* Gyges killed his king and a new dynasty was installed in Lydia. Furthermore, their discussion revolves around the act and the concept of viewing and being seen, which itself serves as an important theme throughout the rest of the *Histories*. The brief dialogue here allows Herodotus to install that theme (and others) in the audience's mind, as part of the first historical event he narrates, without having to interrupt that narrative with his own commentary: the action continues to flow, and the audience feels that they are at the scene.[19] Finally, the dialogue format enables a stronger sense of what Mabel Lang calls 'prefiguration'.[20] It is the narrator who intervenes (1.8.2) to comment on Candaules' fate, but the direct speech of the dialogue allows the reader/listener to *witness* the king enacting that downfall, through visualisation of his behaviour and through the king's expression of his hubris in his own voice.

By the time the reader/listener has reached Book 8, he or she is well-accustomed to hearing characters in the *Histories* speak in their own voice, without any indication of how the narrator knows what was said. Thus, two brief dialogues in the final two books stand out for the manner in which Herodotus presents them. In the leadup to the Battle of Salamis, just after

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[17] See Flory (1987) 30–8 for an excellent discussion of the effect of the contrast between the vast scope and impersonal narrative of Herodotus' first seven chapters and the lively, passionate 'staged scene' of the Gyges and Candaules episode.

[18] Fornara (1983) 166: this and other private conversations delivered in direct speech 'serve an explanatory purpose and further the action of the episode at the same time as they inject vividity and liveliness'. (Note, however, that this statement of Fornara's comes at the end of a rather problematic discussion of Herodotus' speeches in general.) See Schulte-Altedorneburg (2001) 126–31 for an analysis of the Candaules and Gyges episode which highlights the scene's tragic connotations and Herodotus' characterisation of the two figures; cf. Zali (2014) 22.

[19] See Benardete (1969) 11–16 for further discussion of the way in which the Gyges and Candaules episode lays out the path Herodotus will follow in his work; and Miltsios (2016) 4–7 for a recent discussion of the episode in relation to the role of sight in the *Histories*.

[20] Lang (1984) 21.

Themistocles' speech persuading the Spartan commander Eurybiades to keep the Greek fleet in the narrow straits, Herodotus devotes a chapter (8.65) to a story told by an Athenian named Dicaeus, son of Theocydes, who had been exiled and gained a good reputation at the Persian court. Dicaeus said (ἔφη δὲ Δίκαιος) that he and Demaratus (the exiled Spartan king) happened to be on the Thriasian Plain near Eleusis while the Persians were ravaging Attica. The two men saw a huge dust cloud, such as one that would be kicked up by a large army on the march, and then a great voice which, to Dicaeus, sounded like the 'Iacchus' cry of initiates at the Mysteries (annual rites in honour of Demeter, whose procession ended at her temple in Eleusis). Demaratus, who was not an initiate, asked what the sound was, and Dicaeus responded (αὐτὸς δὲ εἰπεῖν). Up to this point, the story has been told in accusative and infinitive after φημί, but Herodotus now gives Dicaeus' response as direct speech which begins: 'Demaratus (Δημάρητε), this can only be a portent of disaster for the Persian forces …'. Since Attica has been deserted, Dicaeus concludes, the dust cloud and the voice must be divine. He then, still via direct speech, gives a very brief explanation of the public events surrounding the Mysteries. Next, Herodotus reports, Dicaeus said that Demaratus responded (πρὸς ταῦτα εἰπεῖν Δημάρητον) with a warning not to mention this tale to anyone, since if the King were to get wind of it, there would be trouble for him; this too is given as direct speech (Σίγα τε καὶ μηδενὶ … εἴπῃς). Herodotus as narrator ties off the episode by repeating, 'This is what Dicaeus said' and adding that Dicaeus 'used to appeal to Demaratus and others as witnesses'.[21] Here are the relevant sections of the Greek (8.65.1–2, 4–6):

> ἔφη δὲ **Δίκαιος** ὁ Θεοκύδεος ἀνὴρ Ἀθηναῖος, φυγάς τε καὶ παρὰ Μήδοισι λόγιμος γενόμενος, τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον, ἐπείτε ἐκείρετο ἡ Ἀττικὴ χώρη ὑπὸ τοῦ πεζοῦ τοῦ Ξέρξεω, ἐοῦσα ἔρημος Ἀθηναίων, τυχεῖν τότε ἐὼν ἅμα Δημαρήτῳ τῷ Λακεδαιμονίῳ ἐν τῷ Θριασίῳ πεδίῳ, ἰδεῖν δὲ κονιορτὸν χωρέοντα ἀπ' Ἐλευσῖνος ὡς ἀνδρῶν μάλιστά κη τρισμυρίων, ἀποθωμάζειν τέ σφεας τὸν κονιορτὸν ὅτεων κοτε εἴη ἀνθρώπων, καὶ πρόκατε φωνῆς ἀκούειν, καί οἱ φαίνεσθαι τὴν φωνὴν εἶναι τὸν μυστικὸν Ἴακχον. [2] εἶναι δ' ἀδαήμονα τῶν ἱρῶν τῶν ἐν

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[21] 'Used to appeal': the imperfect reflects the present participle καταπτόμενος (§6) modifying the subject of the imperfect verb ἔλεγε (Waterfield translates, 'he used to claim …'). Plut. *Them.* 15.1 includes the vision at Eleusis in his account of the Battle of Salamis, but does not name either of the characters or refer to Herodotus.

Ἐλευσῖνι γινομένων **τὸν Δημάρητον, εἰρέσθαι** τε αὐτὸν ὅ τι τὸ
φθεγγόμενον εἴη τοῦτο. **αὐτὸς δὲ εἰπεῖν· Δημάρητε**, οὐκ ἔστι ὅκως οὐ
μέγα τι σίνος ἔσται τῇ βασιλέος στρατιῇ … [4] πρὸς ταῦτα **εἰπεῖν
Δημάρητον· Σίγα** τε καὶ μηδενὶ ἄλλῳ τὸν λόγον τοῦτον εἴπῃς. [5] ἢν
γάρ τοι ἐς βασιλέα ἀνενειχθῇ τὰ ἔπεα ταῦτα, ἀποβαλέεις τὴν κεφαλήν
καί σε οὔτε ἐγὼ δυνήσομαι ῥύσασθαι οὔτ' ἄλλος ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ εἷς. …
[6] **ταῦτα μὲν Δίκαιος ὁ Θεοκύδεος ἔλεγε**, Δημαρήτου τε καὶ ἄλλων
μαρτύρων καταπτόμενος.

This is, then, a brief dialogue, but the direct speech is deeply embedded in
indirect discourse; in addition, the direct speech is presented as having been
reported by the person who either originally delivered it ('Dicaeus said that
he said [the following]: …') or who heard it directly from his interlocutor
('To these things, [he said that] Demaratus said [the following]: …'). The
most obvious reading of Herodotus' presentation of this episode, in my
opinion, is that he himself heard the tale from Dicaeus, though Herodotus
does not state this explicitly.[22] It is not the opening of the chapter on its own
that gives this impression (ἔφη δὲ Δίκαιος), but rather the ending, with its
notice that Dicaeus appealed to witnesses.[23] But there are other signs too.
The story is attributed to a named individual, rather than introduced with
λέγεται ('it is said that …'), as so many others are.[24] As noted earlier (see
above, n. 9), this is a rare move on Herodotus' part, and the previously
named individuals in the *Histories* (the priestesses at Dodona, Archias,

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[22] A conversation between Herodotus and a descendant of Dicaeus is also possible:
Gould (1989) 22. Not all scholars agree with me, e.g., Asheri–Vannicelli (2003) 264, who
describe the 'confirmation' of Demaratus' testimony as 'clearly fictitious'. Fehling (1989)
188–9 sees Demaratus' presence on the Thriasian Plain and Herodotus' manoeuvre as an
'unequivocal example' of Herodotus' 'narrative economy'. On the other hand, Waters
(1985) 93–4 n. 14 wonders who else Dicaeus would have told the story to. Dover (1998) 223,
in his critique of Fehling, writes: 'Conversation, among men of whom some, at least, had
distinguished forbears, or had travelled widely, or were simply interested in the past and
expected others to be interested, should never be underrated as a medium of oral tradition'.
Dicaeus would need to have lived to be an old man for Herodotus to have spoken with him,
but no such 'calculations' along these lines can be performed with any certainty.

[23] Macan (1908) I.2.454 disagreed: 'The words with which the anecdote, and the chapter,
conclude … look more like an appeal to the *vox viva*, but are hardly conclusive in this respect,
and certainly leave Hdt. himself out of audible range of Dikaios'. But Macan took the initial
ἔφη to indicate a written source. This line of thinking was taken to its (absurd?) extreme by
Trautwein (1890), who posited that Herodotus consulted 'Memoirs of Dicaeus'.

[24] Dewald (2002) 275: 111 times, to be precise.

Tymnes, Epizelus) are neither cited for stories of this length nor allowed to speak in their own voices.

Dicaeus' sudden appearance in the narrative is no different from that of the informants named above, nor is the fact that this is his only appearance in the *Histories*. What does make this dialogue even more striking, however, is the identity of his interlocutor. Demaratus, unlike Dicaeus, has been a recurring character since Book 6, and Herodotus has already composed in direct speech three conversations that the former Spartan king had with Xerxes, before and after the battle of Thermopylae (7.101–4, 209, 234–35). So one could imagine introducing the story of the dust cloud from Eleusis via Demaratus: 'Now Demaratus, the exiled Spartan king, happened to be in the Thriasian Plain with an Athenian named Dicaeus …'. Instead, Herodotus allows the previously unknown Dicaeus to deliver the narrative, first indirectly, then directly. Deborah Boedeker has described Demaratus' disappearance from the text after this episode as 'poignant and fitting'—he has served his purpose as 'a powerful reminder of the ever-potential tragic consequences of division within the Greek world', but now the Greeks are united and ready to fight.[25] Thus it is not just the content of the dialogue that bears thematic significance (the Persians' ignorance of their fate, the role of the divine), but its form as well, providing Demaratus one last appearance but in a muted fashion which allows him to exit the stage quietly.

There is nice irony in the fact that Herodotus reports a story which, at the time, could not have been told, as per Demaratus' instructions to Dicaeus to avoid incurring the King's wrath. But Dicaeus' appeal to witnesses indicates that he did tell the tale at some point—perhaps after the battle, and away from the Persian court? As we will see, each of these elements—a private conversation, dangerous to repeat publicly at the time, but followed by a claim to have witnesses to the tale soon thereafter—as well as the overall structure of the passage recur in another example of brief Herodotean dialogue.

In the summer of 479, the Persian general Mardonius constructed a fort along the Asopus River in Theban territory (9.15.2–3). During this period of construction, a Theban named Attaginus hosted an elaborate feast, to which he invited one hundred men: fifty from the Persian high command, and fifty Greek noblemen. Herodotus then offers a rare explicit source citation of a named individual for the rest of the story: 'The following things I heard from Thersander of Orchomenus, a man held in the highest esteem at

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[25] Boedeker (1987a) 200.

Orchomenus' (9.16.1). Next, we enter indirect discourse (φημί plus the accusative and infinitive construction). Thersander told Herodotus that he was among the fifty Greek guests at the dinner, and that each couch was occupied by one Persian and one Theban.[26] After dinner, Thersander's partner asked him (in Greek, Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσαν ἱέντα) where he was from. Upon receiving the answer, the Persian launched into a dire and tearful prediction of doom for his own side in the upcoming battle, which is given as direct speech (9.16.2–3). A brief question by Thersander is then answered by the Persian, both again given as direct discourse but still introduced by the accusative and infinitive framework (9.16.4). The Persian's final response includes three gnomic statements (9.16.4–5):

> Friend, [#1] it is impossible for men to avoid that which the gods have destined to happen; though many Persians know these things, we are bound by necessity to follow [our orders]. [#2] For no one wants to believe even what trustworthy people say. [#3] This is the bitterest pain of all for mankind: to have much knowledge but no power.

The narrator caps off the story, in his own voice, by repeating that he heard this from Thersander; here, he adds that Thersander also said he repeated the story to others already immediately after the fact, before the battle took place at Plataea (9.16.5). I include the Greek of the entire passage here (9.16.1–5):

> ἐχόντων δὲ τὸν πόνον τοῦτον τῶν βαρβάρων Ἀτταγῖνος ὁ Φρύνωνος ἀνὴρ Φηβαῖος παρασκευασάμενος μεγάλως ἐκάλεε ἐπὶ ξείνια αὐτόν τε Μαρδόνιον καὶ πεντήκοντα Περσέων τοὺς λογιμωτάτους, κληθέντες δὲ οὗτοι εἵποντο· ἦν δὲ τὸ δεῖπνον ποιεύμενον ἐν Θήβῃσι. **τάδε δὲ ἤδη τὰ ἐπίλοιπα ἤκουον Θερσάνδρου** ἀνδρὸς μὲν Ὀρχομενίου, λογίμου δὲ ἐς τὰ πρῶτα ἐν Ὀρχομενῷ. **ἔφη δὲ ὁ Θέρσανδρος** κληθῆναι καὶ αὐτὸς ὑπὸ Ἀτταγίνου ἐπὶ τὸ δεῖπνον τοῦτο, κληθῆναι δὲ καὶ Θηβαίων ἄνδρας πεντήκοντα, καί σφεων οὐ χωρὶς ἑκατέρους κλῖναι, ἀλλὰ Πέρσην τε καὶ Θηβαῖον ἐν κλίνῃ ἑκάστῃ. [2] ὡς δὲ ἀπὸ δείπνου ἦσαν, διαπινόντων **τὸν Πέρσην τὸν ὁμόκλινον Ἑλλάδα γλῶσσαν ἱέντα εἰρέσθαι** αὐτὸν ὁποδαπός ἐστι, αὐτὸς δὲ ὑποκρίνασθαι ὡς εἴη Ὀρχομένιος. **τὸν δὲ**

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[26] Or, at least in the case of Thersander, a Boeotian. Pavlidis (2012) 28–29 discusses the possible resonance of the Theban setting for Attaginus' banquet.

εἰπεῖν· Ἐπεί νυν ὁμοτράπεζός τέ μοι καὶ ὁμόσπονδος ἐγένεο, μνημόσυνά τοι γνώμης τῆς ἐμῆς καταλιπέσθαι θέλω, ἵνα καὶ προειδὼς αὐτὸς περὶ σεωυτοῦ βουλεύεσθαι ἔχῃς τὰ συμφέροντα. [3] ὁρᾷς τούτους τοὺς δαινυμένους Πέρσας καὶ τὸν στρατὸν τὸν ἐλίπομεν ἐπὶ τῷ ποταμῷ στρατοπεδευόμενον; τούτων πάντων ὄψεαι ὀλίγου τινὸς χρόνου διελθόντος ὀλίγους τινὰς τοὺς περιγενομένους. ταῦτα ἅμα τε τὸν Πέρσην λέγειν καὶ μετιέναι πολλὰ τῶν δακρύων. [4] **αὐτὸς δὲ θωμάσας τὸν λόγον εἰπεῖν πρὸς αὐτόν**· Οὐκῶν Μαρδονίῳ τε ταῦτα χρεόν ἐστι λέγειν καὶ τοῖσι μετ' ἐκεῖνον ἐν αἴνῃ ἐοῦσι Περσέων; **τὸν δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα εἰπεῖν**· Ξεῖνε, ὅ τι δεῖ γενέσθαι ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ, ἀμήχανον ἀποτρέψαι ἀνθρώπῳ· [5] ταῦτα δὲ Περσέων συχνοὶ ἐπιστάμενοι ἑπόμεθα ἀναγκαίῃ ἐνδεδεμένοι. οὐδὲ γὰρ πιστὰ λέγουσι ἐθέλει πείθεσθαι οὐδείς. ἐχθίστη δὲ ὀδύνη ἐστὶ τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι αὕτη, πολλὰ φρονέοντα μηδενὸς κρατέειν. **ταῦτα μὲν τοῦ Ὀρχομενίου Θερσάνδρου ἤκουον**, καὶ τάδε πρὸς τούτοισι, ὡς αὐτὸς αὐτίκα λέγοι ταῦτα πρὸς ἀνθρώπους πρότερον ἢ γενέσθαι ἐν Πλαταιῆσι τὴν μάχην.

We find a very similar structure to the Dicaeus episode in Book 8: initial use of indirect discourse attributed to a named individual; the eventual appearance of direct speech within the indirect framework; a brief exchange of questions and answers; the narrator's voice re-entering at the end and re-stating that the whole story was told by someone. But in this instance from Book 9, Herodotus is explicit about the fact that he himself heard the story directly from Thersander. Like Dicaeus, Thersander too calls witnesses, in a sense, by claiming that he told people the story even before the battle (and thus before the disastrous outcome predicted by his Persian couchmate). There are two further points of similarity: Herodotus notes that Dicaeus is well-esteemed (λόγιμος) at the Persian court, as Thersander is at Orchomenus; and one of the interlocutors in each episode (Demaratus and the anonymous Persian banqueter) essentially tells the other to remain silent. Thersander is not actually *ordered* to keep quiet, but he is told that reporting what he knows will be useless.

Scholars have highlighted the programmatic role of the Thersander scene: the Persian's speech conveniently expresses and illustrates Herodotean themes on the eve of the climactic battle of the war. In a recent analysis, Katrin Dolle examined the scene as a 'potential *mise-en-abyme*' of Herodotus' entire project, one designed to raise the question of whether

knowledge and discourse do, in fact, have any power.[27] Michael Flower and
John Marincola have also suggested that Herodotus' repetition of his
source's name (and perhaps even the imperfect ἤκουον) reflects his awareness
that his audience will probably think this anecdote is too good to be true.[28]
So, in response to our question 'Why brief dialogue?', here at least a clear
answer is, to emphasise overarching themes at a significant moment (as with
Gyges and Candaules in Book 1).[29]

But there is more. First, the placement of this dialogue within Herodotus'
overall narrative structure resembles that of the conversation between
Dicaeus and Demaratus: both occur between Herodotus' reporting of the
troop movements on both sides before major battles. Lieselotte Solmsen
noted how both passages (plus 6.107.4) predict disaster for the Persian
army.[30] In this case, there is an additional effect. Max Pohlenz's description
of the Thersander episode as an 'opening act' or 'prelude' (*Auftakt*) could be
applied to the Dicaeus episode as well.[31] In fact, in narrative terms the
Thersander scene occurs in literally no time at all: chapter 16 begins with a
genitive absolute ('while the barbarians were engaged in this labour
[building the fort], Attaginus arranged a feast …') which is then resumed at
the opening of chapter 17 ('while Mardonius was setting up camp in Boeotia,
the Greeks …').[32] Finally, there is also the attention paid to logistical detail—

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[27] Pavlidis (2012) 21: 'With the figure of the Persian, Herodotus provides an explanation
for the emergence of a new space for discourse (*Diskursraum*), which underlies that of his own
work' (my translation).

[28] Flower–Marincola (2002) 127; see also Asheri–Vannicelli (2006) 195–6. Gould (1989)
19–20 is more credulous. The comments of Macan (1908) I.2.622 are a fascinating mix of
seeing the conversation as a faithful report from a first-hand witness for genuine Persian
sentiment (below the highest officers) on the eve of Plataea, *and* as a specimen of Herodotean
drama and characterisation.

[29] Marincola (1987) 134–5; Scardino (2007) 298.

[30] Solmsen (1944) 248. Although she differentiates the Thersander episode as 'inter-
pret[ing] the defeat as an expression of the will of the gods', surely the same can be gathered
from the Dicaeus episode too. Other scholars have noted the strategic placement of each
episode without connecting them: Scardino (2007) 257–8 illustrates how Demaratus' unwill-
ingness to speak up in 8.65 foreshadows the lack of success Artemisia's sound advice will
have shortly thereafter; Immerwahr (1966) 140 describes how the *logos* of the Greek councils
before Salamis (8.40–64) is 'followed by a *logos* on Persian battle preparations (8.66–70), with
the omen seen by Dicaeus and Demaratus at Eleusis placed in the pause (8.65)'. Cf. Macan
(1908) I.2.458.

[31] Pohlenz (1937) 155.

[32] Pavlidis (2012) 18, on the 'slowing down of the narrative speed'; she also notes the
effect of the introductory genitive absolute (23).

the couch set-up, the exchange taking place in Greek—which adds vividness and verisimilitude.[33] As with Gyges and Candaules in Book 1, here on the eve of the climactic battle of the war Herodotus has chosen to place a conversation fraught with thematic significance before the eyes and ears of his audience.

I want to end by bringing in for comparison with Herodotus' use of brief dialogue an essentially unique passage in Thucydides: the short, rapid dialogue between an Ambraciot herald and the victorious Acarnanians after a military disaster suffered by the Ambraciots (3.113). Near the end of Book 3, Thucydides provides a detailed narrative account (3.105–14) of operations in northwest Greece in 426/5. A force from Ambracia, allied with the Peloponnesians, manages to seize a fortified spot in Amphilochia along the Ambracian Gulf named Olpae; they are soon joined by a Peloponnesian force led by the Spartan Eurylochus. A small Athenian army led by Demosthenes then arrives, joined by Acarnanians and Amphilochians and supported by an Athenian fleet of twenty ships. The Athenian side wins the ensuing land battle, killing Eurylochus and inflicting heavy casualties on the Ambraciots. The surviving Peloponnesians strike a separate, secret agreement with Demosthenes under which they may retreat safely the next day, but the attempted escape is botched and a couple hundred more Ambraciots are killed; some escape to friendly territory in the mountains of Agraeis.

In the meantime, a relief force from Ambracia, which had been summoned before the battle, finally sets out; but Demosthenes gets wind of it (on the same day as the botched retreat) and sets up an ambush at a pair of hills called Idomene. At dawn the following day, the Athenians and their allies attack the unprepared camp of the Ambraciot relief force, leading to a massacre. The Acarnanians strip the bodies of their armour and take the spoils back to Amphilochia.

The next day, a herald arrives in Amphilochia representing the Ambraciots from the original force who had managed to escape to the mountains, in order to recover the bodies of their comrades who had died in that first battle. Seeing the armour of so many fallen Ambraciots, the

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[33] See Pavlidis (2012) 30–1 on how the setting of the banquet reflects the *Diskursraum*. Here I might add a minor qualification to Pavlidis' statement that Herodotus, 'without guiding and restricting our imagination through more detailed descriptions, brings words and people into our heads as living and present subjects' (34, my translation). But in fact he does provide scene-setting details, as I note in the text above, which function to make the audience into eyewitnesses.

herald marvels at the number, thinking that these belonged to the original army and not knowing about the second disaster. Thucydides writes: (3.113.3–6)

καί **τις** αὐτὸν [sc. the herald] ἤρετο ὅτι θαυμάζοι καὶ ὁπόσοι αὐτῶν τεθνᾶσιν, οἰόμενος αὖ ὁ ἐρωτῶν εἶναι τὸν κήρυκα ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν Ἰδομεναῖς.

ὁ δ᾽ ἔφη διακοσίους μάλιστα.

ὑπολαβὼν δ᾽ ὁ ἐρωτῶν· Οὔκουν τὰ ὅπλα ταυτὶ φαίνεται, ἀλλὰ πλέον ἢ χιλίων.

αὖθις δὲ εἶπεν ἐκεῖνος· Οὐκ ἄρα τῶν μεθ᾽ ἡμῶν μαχομένων ἐστίν.

ὁ δ᾽ ἀπεκρίνατο· Εἴπερ γε ὑμεῖς ἐν Ἰδομενῇ χθὲς ἐμάχεσθε.

Ἀλλ᾽ **ἡμεῖς** γε οὐδενὶ ἐμαχόμεθα χθές, ἀλλὰ πρῴην ἐν τῇ ἀποχωρήσει.

Καὶ μὲν δὴ τούτοις γε **ἡμεῖς** χθὲς ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως βοηθήσασι τῆς Ἀμπρακιωτῶν ἐμαχόμεθα.

ὁ δὲ κῆρυξ ὡς ἤκουσε καὶ ἔγνω ὅτι ἡ ἀπὸ τῆς πόλεως βοήθεια διέφθαρται, ἀνοιμώξας καὶ ἐκπλαγεὶς τῷ μεγέθει τῶν παρόντων κακῶν ἀπῆλθεν εὐθὺς ἄπρακτος καὶ οὐκέτι ἀπῄτει τοὺς νέκρους. **πάθος γὰρ τοῦτο** μιᾷ πόλει Ἑλληνίδι ἐν ἴσαις ἡμέραις **μέγιστον** δὴ τῶν κατὰ τὸν πόλεμον τόνδε ἐγένετο. καὶ **ἀριθμὸν οὐκ ἔγραψα τῶν ἀποθανόντων**, διότι ἄπιστον τὸ πλῆθος λέγεται ἀπολέσθαι ὡς πρὸς τὸ μέγεθος τῆς πόλεως.

Somebody, mistaken too in thinking the herald was from the Ambraciots at Idomene [the relief force destroyed in the ambush], asked him why he was surprised, and how many of them had died.

He said about two hundred.

'These are obviously not the arms of two hundred', replied the other, 'but of more than a thousand'.

'So then', said the herald, 'they are not from the men in our fight?'

'Yes they are', came the reply, 'if you were fighting yesterday at Idomene'.

'But yesterday we did not fight anyone: it was the day before, in the retreat'.

'Well, we did fight yesterday. We fought these here—the Ambraciots coming to your rescue from the city'.

When the herald realised this and realised that the relief force from the city had been destroyed, he gave a cry of horror: appalled

by the scale of the calamity now inflicted, he turned straight back without completing his mission or staying to ask for the dead. This was indeed the greatest disaster to befall a single Greek city over so few days in the whole of this war. I have not given the number of those who died, because the reputed loss would seem incredible in proportion to the size of the city. (trans. M. Hammond)

A number of features of this passage make it unique or unusual in Thucydides' work.[34] There is the dialogue, of course, whose only parallel is the lengthier and more famous Melian Dialogue at the end of Book 5.[35] The direct speech of 3.113, however, is not introduced in a typical fashion ('he/they spoke as follows'), but instead emerges out of otherwise unremarkable Thucydidean narrative: the chapter begins, in the narrator's voice, 'The next day a herald arrived …'—then two lines of reported speech (§3)—then direct dialogue (§4). Other striking elements exist. The unnamed speaker on the Acarnanian side, simply introduced as τις, is a relatively rare occurrence.[36] As Donald Lateiner has shown, Thucydides' comment on the gravity of the disaster is reinforced by his use of the word *pathos* twice in one chapter—a word which only appears fifteen times in the whole work.[37] Finally, the episode ends with the narrator's first-person refusal to give the number of the dead, even though his speaking characters have just put numbers out there.[38]

The progression is marvellous—notice how the narrator's introductions to each line of dialogue grow shorter and then disappear completely with the last two lines.[39] As the historiographical framework fades, the fiction of 'being

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[34] See Lapini (1991), esp. 124–5 n. 11, for further discussion of the stylistic anomalies and 'tragic' nature of the passage; Lang (2011) 163–4.

[35] See Shrimpton (1997) 61–2 for the Melian Dialogue as 'an extended dramatization of meaning'; Fornara (1983) 155–7.

[36] Couch (1944) refers to Thucydides' 'principle of meiosis' which 'is calculated to arrest by under-emphasis the attention of the reader'. Lapini (1991) 123 n. 4 drew my attention to this; he cites an abstract of Couch's paper published in the 1936 issue of *TAPhA*. The short 1944 piece appears to be the same paper.

[37] Lateiner (1977); *pathos* appears in sections 2 and 6 of 3.113 (the first is just prior to the Greek I have quoted in the text).

[38] On Thucydides' use of the first person, see Lang (2011) 129–38.

[39] Although the syntax does not work in exactly the same way, this Thucydides passage is reminiscent of Polybius' technique of beginning a speech in indirect discourse before switching to direct discourse, on which see Usher (2009). The most striking example is Agelaus' speech at Naupactus (5.104). Polybius presents this mostly in indirect discourse; but

there' grows.[40] I find it interesting that both Lateiner and A. W. Gomme suggest that perhaps Thucydides himself heard this conversation. I think it unlikely that Thucydides meant for that to be the major effect—otherwise, what would we make of every other scene in the work that does *not* involve brief dialogue? Conversely, I don't think anyone today would suggest that the Melian Dialogue appears in that form because Thucydides witnessed the exchange. Rather, the Melian Dialogue is designed to dramatise major themes of power and justice, imperial rule, and perhaps to foreshadow Athens' subsequent downfall. Lateiner suggests that Thucydides' presentation of the Ambraciot disaster is meant to highlight issues of perception, the difficulty in discovering the truth of an event. If so, we would find ourselves in similar territory as with Herodotus' brief dialogues, which vividly portray key thematic messages in his work.[41] With Thucydides, however, the message can be seen as operating at an even more meta-historical level: less about the nature of events and more about the process of investigating them.[42] Thucydides elsewhere relies on his own narrative for vivid description: the escape from Plataea, the battle in the Great Harbour of Syracuse. That strengthens the claim for thematic significance here, as does his subsequent narrator's claim that the Ambraciot losses were the worst to befall any single city within such a short time during the whole of the war.[43]

at the end, just after the famous metaphor of 'clouds in the West', there is a shift to direct discourse in mid-sentence (§10): '*he said that* he was exceedingly anxious … lest it happen that the games which *we* now play with each other…' (Usher's translation (494) eliminates the abruptness of this transition, by introducing first- and second-person pronouns earlier than they appear in the Greek). Scardino (2012) 75–9 provides a few further examples of this technique from Herodotus.

[40] Kurke (2000) 132, commenting on Plutarch's evaluation of Thucydides' narrative vividness: 'Part of this effect of immediate emotional engagement is achieved by the absence of explicit authorial intervention and commentary, so that events seem to be conjured up directly before the reader without any mediation'.

[41] Lateiner (1977) 47–51. Marinatos (1980) 306, in a discussion of Nicias as a 'tragic warner': 'The dramatic aspects of Thucydides' history bring him much closer to his predecessor Herodotus than is often acknowledged'; similar comments in Macleod (1983) 157.

[42] A message which is reinforced by his refusal to provide the casualty figure: that is, the direct speech can serve as a buffer between the author and an audience who, he assumes, will share his scepticism about the number (my thanks to Bryant Kirkland for this suggestion).

[43] See Grant (1974) on Thucydides' 'instinct for the superlative'.

I want to suggest a possible structural significance of this brief dialogue between two unnamed figures in northwest Greece. Both it (at the end of Book 3) and the Melian Dialogue (end of Book 5) precede pivot points in the war: Book 4 opens with the events at Pylos in 425, which ultimately lead to the Peace of Nicias; and Books 6 and 7 are devoted completely to the disastrous Athenian expedition against Sicily. It has been remarked that Pylos and Sicily represent mirror-images of each other. Thus, it is not just that they mark crucial junctures in the war, but that Thucydides has fashioned his account of each episode in a manner which highlights their tragic irony.[44] Perhaps the two dialogues are designed to function as part of this complex: the narrator ceding the stage to anonymous characters signals to the reader that (to put it somewhat casually) something big is about to happen.[45] This would be similar to Herodotus' use of the brief dialogues we examined earlier. The parallels within Thucydides' work are not exact, of course. The Melian Dialogue is (also) an extended disquisition on justice and power, while the brief Ambracian/Acarnanian exchange is more along the lines of a tragic recognition scene.[46] But this difference reflects that which is found in the scope and scale of the following episodes (Pylos and the Sicilian Expedition) as well.

My goal is not to force too much significance onto 3.113, but to try to explain Thucydides' decision to present the denouement of the 426 campaign in such an unusual fashion. We could envision the whole complex of 3.113 through 4.41 (the end of the Pylos campaign)—brief dialogue conveying the depth of disaster in a peripheral locale, followed by stunning reversal in a conflict between the two major powers—as a prelude to the larger, longer, and more disastrous sequence of the same nature which occurs between 5.84 and 7.87. The narratorial statements at the beginning of the first of these sequences and the end of the second can then be seen as confirming the mirroring effect: 'the greatest disaster to befall a single Greek

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[44] Macleod (1983) 142–3.

[45] Macleod (1983) 59–60, on the position of the Melian Dialogue. In another essay, writing of Thucydides' speeches in general, Macleod says Thucydides 'does what any artist and any historian must do: he refashions his subject in order to draw out its significance' (69). Cf. Rengakos (2006) 297–8.

[46] Stahl (2003) 134–5 draws this comparison, and suggests that the dialogue form emphasises the immense suffering of the Ambraciots—the only way to communicate this is to eliminate the normal distance between author and reader. See also Hornblower (1987) 117–8.

city over so few days in the whole of this war' (3.113.6); 'this proved the most significant occurrence in the whole of this war' (7.87.5, trans. M. Hammond).

We have seen three examples of our two earliest surviving Greek historians experimenting at the narrative level with reader-orientated eyewitness history. Herodotus implicitly (8.65) or explicitly (9.16) cites an eyewitness for a private conversation; Thucydides allows two anonymous speaking partners to deliver their lines directly. None of these passages concerns historical 'events' in the strict sense. But they are attached to major battles, in Herodotus' case, or battles which proved to be among the most disastrous of the war for the defeated party, in Thucydides' estimation. They also reinforce major themes in the historian's work. In their quest for causes, truth, and accuracy, each historian could have chosen to place much more explicit emphasis on autopsy and eyewitness testimony for the events they narrate. Instead, they relied on the narrative fiction of the omniscient narrator. This makes the three passages I have analysed here all the more conspicuous. In all three cases, the brief dialogue format allows the historian to place his audience on the scene of the occasions, and it encourages them to discover how each encounter is momentous in its own way.

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3

CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY AND PTOLEMY'S CREATION OF AN 'EGYPTIAN' ALEXANDER

Frances Pownall

Abstract: In the wake of the premature death of Alexander the Great, contemporary historiography began to reconfigure his image in response to the aims and ambitions of the various Successors. Ptolemy I was arguably the most successful in reworking the events of Alexander's campaign in service to his political and military agenda. In particular, Ptolemy took care to excise all the non-Egyptian elements from his narrative of Alexander's consultation of the oracle at Siwah in order to represent him as a Ptolemaic predecessor, thus laying a solid foundation for his new dynasty based in Alexandria.

H istorians of the classical period often went to great lengths to erase themselves from their narratives of contemporary political and military history. Thucydides, for example, is notoriously reticent on the subject of his own military and political role in the Peloponnesian War.[1] Xenophon suppresses his personal military experience in the *Hellenica*,[2] and even in the *Anabasis*, where his (eventual) role as commander forms the backdrop to his narrative of the campaign of the Ten Thousand,

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[1] He does not mention it in his preface (1.1.1), although he does base his argument on the unity of the twenty-seven-year conflict upon his personal experience in his second preface (5.26); on his claim to authority in this passage, see Marincola (1997) 133–4. In the only passage where he appears as a historical agent in his own narrative (4.104.4–107.1), he underplays his own role by resorting to the third person; on the difference between the author as narrator and character, see Hornblower (1994) 132; cf. id. (1996) 333.

[2] E.g., at *Hell.* 3.2.7 and 3.4.20. On the separation of the authorial and narratorial *personae* of the *Hellenica*, see McCloskey (2017) 622–25; cf. Azoulay (2018) 8–10.

he carefully distances himself as narrator from agency in the action.[3] Of course, it is more difficult to discern the presence of fragmentary authors in their own narratives, but with the exception of Ctesias, whose alleged intimacy with the Achaemenid royal family through his service as court physician served to bolster the authority of his narrative,[4] there are no real traces in the extant material from their works of any personal role played by the fourth-century historians prior to Alexander. Although Ephorus was known for his local patriotism,[5] and Theopompus for his vitriol against Philip II,[6] Polybius criticised them both (along with Timaeus) as armchair historians.[7] Even Philistus, who played an important military role under both Dionysius I and Dionysius II of Syracuse, and Callisthenes, who accompanied Alexander to Asia as official court historian until his arrest and condemnation in 327 BC, do not appear *in propria persona* in the material extant from their panegyrical accounts of their powerful patrons.[8] This reluctance of historians to insert themselves into their narratives abruptly ceased in the wake of Alexander's campaigns, when his former officers engaged in a bitter and often bloody rivalry to succeed to his vast and newly-conquered empire, and the potentialities offered by the writing of contemporary history as a source of legitimation became increasingly

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[3] At *Hell.* 3.1.2, Xenophon attributes the authorship of the *Anabasis* to 'Themistogenes of Syracuse', which has the effect of transforming 'a subjective personal narrative into an apparently objective historical account': so Flower (2012) 55. On Xenophon's 'hetero-diegetic' narration in the *Anabasis*, see Grethlein (2012); cf. Pelling (2017).

[4] Marincola (1997) 134. Ctesias' claim of a longstanding personal association with the Achaemenid court (*BNJ* 688 T 3 = F 5) is generally accepted; see, e.g., Lenfant (2004), esp. vii–xxii; Llewellyn-Jones (2010) 2 and 12–17; Stronk (2010), esp. 6–11. Dorati (1995) and (2011) has argued, however, that this claim is fabricated; cf. Wiesehöfer (2013).

[5] Generally accepted by modern scholars, apart from Samuel (1968) and Ragone (2013–14).

[6] See, e.g., Shrimpton (1991) 157–80, Flower (1994) 98–135, Pownall (2004) 149–75. On Theopompus' reference to his rhetorical education and extensive travels as qualifications for his historical works (*BNJ* 115 F 25), see Marincola (1997) 134–35.

[7] Pol. 12.25f = Ephorus, *BNJ* 70 T 20; Theopompus, *BNJ* 115 T 32a; Timaeus, *BNJ* 566 T 19.

[8] On Philistus' favourable portrayal of the Dionysii in his historiographical work, see Pownall (2017). On Callisthenes' willingness to advance the agendas of first Philip and then Alexander, see Pownall (2020a) with earlier bibliography.

apparent. Of these military men turned historians,[9] arguably the most successful was Ptolemy I Soter, who founded what was to become an exceptionally stable dynasty that ruled Egypt for three centuries.

Particularly in the early stages of his control of Egypt, when Ptolemy was still solidifying his position and laying the foundations for his dynastic rule,[10] his 'quest for legitimacy' centred around emphasising the closeness of his association with the figure of Alexander,[11] achieved perhaps most concretely through his hijacking of Alexander's embalmed corpse and the subsequent grandiose burial of his illustrious predecessor in the ancient capital of the pharaohs at Memphis,[12] as well as the calculated deployment of Alexander's image on his coins.[13] Ptolemy's history of Alexander's campaign, in which he presents himself as playing a starring role, also served to bolster his own military credentials and justify his rule over Egypt.[14] A crucial part of this propagandistic message was the creation of a Ptolemaic Alexander to serve as the founder of his fledgling dynasty. Ptolemy's reinvention of his illustrious predecessor formed an integral part of the construction of his own royal image and the selling of it to multiple audiences: his Macedonian and Greek subjects, the other Macedonian Successors with whom he was engaged in a competitive rivalry, and (as is now increasingly being recognised) the indigenous Egyptian elite. In response to the influential claim by Alan Lloyd

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[9] On the contemporary historians of Alexander, see esp. Müller (2014) 29–113 (along with commentaries on the individual authors at *BNJ* 117–39); cf. Zambrini (2007) and Pownall (2020b) 251–3.

[10] The traditional view of Ptolemy as an isolationist who was content to confine his rule to Egypt, recently defended by Anson (2018), has successfully been challenged; for revisionist views of Ptolemy's ambitions, see, e.g., Meeus (2014); Hauben (2014); Strootman (2014); Lane Fox (2015) 172; Worthington (2016) 4. As I shall argue, Ptolemy's creation of a Ptolemaic Alexander belongs to the period when he was still consolidating his position in Egypt, before he set his sights on the larger Mediterranean world.

[11] Borrowing the useful phrase coined by Bingen (2007) 15.

[12] On the ongoing symbolic importance of the body of Alexander throughout the Ptolemaic dynasty, see Holton (2018); cf. Thompson (2022).

[13] Sheedy and Ockinga (2015); Lorber (2018).

[14] Although the self-serving nature of Ptolemy's history has been challenged by Roisman (1984) and (less emphatically) Worthington (2016) 213–19, it remains (justifiably, as I shall argue) the *communis opinio*; see, e.g., Errington (1969); Bosworth (1996) 41–53; Zambrini (2007) 217; Müller (2014) 78–90 and (2020b); Howe (2014), (2018a), and (2018b) Commentary on T 1; Heckel (2016) 230–9 and (2018). For discussion of some specific examples where Ptolemy appears to have diverged from the 'official version' that Alexander himself wished to circulate, see Squillace (2018).

that Ptolemy I immediately established a close association with the native Egyptian clergy,[15] Gilles Gorre has convincingly demonstrated that 'there were many and significant barriers to Egyptian and Macedonian interaction that took some time for Ptolemy I to overcome'.[16] Although Ptolemy was not directing his historiographic efforts at the Egyptian elite in the first instance, he nevertheless carefully slanted his narrative of Alexander's expedition, especially his nine-month sojourn in Egypt, to support his own ongoing efforts to legitimise his dynastic rule to the Egyptian as well as the Greco-Macedonian segments of his subject population.[17]

In this connection, I would like to re-examine Ptolemy's distinctive spin on the Siwah episode, which includes, as I shall argue, a reconfiguration of Alexander's legendary ancestry. Alexander's visit to the oracular shrine at Siwah famously culminated in his announcement that the god Ammon had explicitly acknowledged his paternity.[18] The association of the Libyan oracular deity Ammon (according to the Greek spelling) with the Egyptian god Amon (whose cult was associated with pharaonic rule and was administered by a powerful priesthood based at Thebes) as well as Zeus, as the head of the Greek pantheon, existed already in the Archaic period, and Zeus Ammon was worshipped at both Cyrene and (significantly) at Aphytis in the Chalcidice,[19] which, after Philip II's defeat of the Chalcidian League, became a Macedonian possession. Alexander's deployment of Zeus-Ammon's endorsement of his divine filiation was a masterful stroke, allowing him to negotiate legitimacy simultaneously on multiple levels with his Macedonian troops, Greek allies, and the Egyptian elite.[20] Ptolemy's

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[15] Lloyd (2002); cf. Worthington (2016) 191–92.

[16] Gorre (2018) 130; cf. Sheedy and Ockinga (2015) 238–9 and Caneva (2018), esp. 88–97.

[17] See the cautionary remarks on the separate Greek and Egyptian audiences to which Ptolemy directed his legitimising propaganda by Howe (2018a) 157; cf. Caneva (2016a), esp. 47–68. Nevertheless, Howe argues (I believe correctly) for a certain amount of fluidity of Ptolemy's legitimising strategies, which, like his coinage (as demonstrated by Lorber (2018)), were constantly evolving in response to his changing circumstances in the fraught decades after Alexander's death, and were deliberately multivalent; cf. Caneva (2016a) 79. On Alexander's successful synthesis of administrative practices of previous regimes and new policies of his own as a resident (rather than absentee) ruler, see Thompson (2018).

[18] The bibliography on Alexander's visit to Siwah is immense. For recent contributions, see, e.g., Howe (2013); Bowden (2014); Collins (2014); Ogden (2014); Müller (2020c).

[19] On the Greek and Macedonian appropriation of A(m)mon, see Caneva (2011). I shall refer to 'Ammon' in Greek and Macedonian contexts, and 'Amon' in Egyptian ones.

[20] So Caneva (2016a) 14–28; cf. Bowden (2014).

narrative of the Siwah episode in his historiographical work offers a particularly crucial example of the ways in which he reconfigured the existing tradition on Alexander to serve as a more effective legitimation of his own dynastic rule, not least because his divergences can be checked against the account of Callisthenes, who is usually thought to have been the ultimate source of the accounts of the Siwah episode in the later tradition.[21] Moreover, Callisthenes was embedded in Alexander's expedition as his official court historian,[22] and his narrative of the visit to Siwah was almost certainly approved by the king himself before his history was sent back (probably in installments) to its intended audience in mainland Greece to ensure continued support for the campaign.[23]

Because Callisthenes' account reflects the version of the episode at Siwah that Alexander wished to promulgate, it is important to begin with it in order to discern where Ptolemy's aims diverge from Alexander's. Callisthenes' narrative of Alexander's visit to Siwah is preserved by Strabo (17.1.43 = *BNJ* 124 F 14a), who grumbles at the blatant flattery it contains (cf. Timaeus, *BNJ* 566 F 155a):

> Callisthenes, at any rate, says that Alexander was very ambitious to go inland to visit the oracle, because he had heard that both Perseus and Heracles had done so earlier. He says that Alexander set out from Paraetonium, although the south winds had come up, and forced his way through; when he became lost as a result of the thick dust, he was saved by the falling of rain and two crows guiding his route, although these statements are flattery, as is what follows. He says that the priest permitted the king alone to go into the temple in his usual attire, while the others changed their clothes, and that all heard the oracle from outside except for Alexander, who was within; the oracular responses were not given in words, as at Delphi and

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[21] See, e.g., Bowden (2014) 43–51; O'Sullivan (2015); Caneva (2016a) 12; Rzepka (2016), commentary on F 14a.

[22] Explicit at Just. 2.6.17 = *BNJ* 124 T 9; implied by Arr. *Anab.* 4.10.1–2 = *BNJ* 124 T 8 and by the reference to Callisthenes as Alexander's 'secretary' in a library catalogue from a gymnasium in Tauromenium (T 23 *bis*).

[23] On the propagandistic *Tendenz* of Callisthenes' history of Alexander's expedition, see Heckel (2020) and Pownall (2020a). For the argument that Callisthenes' later refusal to co-operate with Alexander's attempt to foist *proskynesis* upon his Greek and Macedonian courtiers does not in fact represent a *volte face* from his willingness to propagate Alexander's divine filiation, see Pownall (2014).

among the Branchidae, but mostly by nods and tokens, as in Homer: 'the son of Cronus spoke and nodded assent with his dark brows', the prophet playing the role of Zeus. This, however, the man told the king explicitly: that he was the son of Zeus. Callisthenes adds to this in the exaggerating language of tragedy that although Apollo had forsaken the oracle among the Branchidae since the time when the sanctuary had been plundered by the Branchidae when they sided with the Persians during Xerxes' invasion, and although the spring had also ceased to flow, at that time the spring reappeared and the Milesian ambassadors conveyed to Memphis many oracles concerning the birth of Alexander from Zeus, his future victory near Arbela, the death of Darius, and the revolutionary attempts in Lacedaemon.[24]

In his own lengthy narrative of Alexander's visit to Siwah (Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.1– 3.4.5), Arrian provides a useful counterpoint to Callisthenes' account. Although Arrian composed his history of Alexander's expedition at the time of the high Roman Empire, he famously claimed that he based his narrative primarily upon the eyewitness accounts of Ptolemy and Aristobulus (Arr. *Anab. praef.* 1–2). Earlier scholarship took Arrian's claim at face value, and the *communis opinio* held that he rather uncritically relied on Ptolemy's narrative, supplementing it occasionally with Aristobulus.[25] More recently,

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[24] ὁ γοῦν Καλλισθένης φησὶ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον φιλοδοξῆσαι μάλιστα ἀνελθεῖν ἐπὶ τὸ χρηστήριον, ἐπειδὴ καὶ Περσέα ἤκουσε πρότερον ἀναβῆναι καὶ Ἡρακλέα. ὁρμήσαντα δ᾽ ἐκ Παραιτονίου, καίπερ νότων ἐπιπεσόντων, βιάσασθαι· πλανώμενον δ᾽ ὑπὸ τοῦ κονιορτοῦ σωθῆναι γενομένων ὄμβρων καὶ δυεῖν κοράκων ἡγησαμένων τὴν ὁδόν, ἤδη τούτων κολακευτικῶς λεγομένων. τοιαῦτα δὲ καὶ τὰ ἑξῆς· μόνῳ γὰρ δὴ τῷ βασιλεῖ τὸν ἱερέα ἐπιτρέψαι παρελθεῖν εἰς τὸν νεὼ μετὰ τῆς συνήθους στολῆς, τοὺς δ᾽ ἄλλους μετενδῦναι τὴν ἐσθῆτα ἔξωθέν τε τῆς θεμιστείας ἀκροάσασθαι πάντας πλὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου, τοῦτον δ᾽ ἔνδοθεν εἶναι. εἶναι δὲ οὐχ ὥσπερ ἐν Δελφοῖς καὶ Βραγχίδαις τὰς ἀποθεσπίσεις διὰ λόγων, ἀλλὰ νεύμασι καὶ συμβόλοις τὸ πλέον, ὡς καὶ παρ᾽ Ὁμήρῳ ʼἦ καὶ κυανέῃσιν ἐπ᾽ ὀφρύσι νεῦσε Κρονίων', τοῦ προφήτου τὸν Δία ὑποκριναμένου· τοῦτο μέντοι ῥητῶς εἰπεῖν τὸν ἄνθρωπον πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα ὅτι εἴη Διὸς υἱός. προστραγῳδεῖ δὲ τούτοις ὁ Καλλισθένης, ὅτι τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος τὸ ἐν Βραγχίδαις μαντεῖον ἐκλελοιπότος, ἐξ ὅτου τὸ ἱερὸν ὑπὸ τῶν Βραγχιδῶν σεσύλητο ἐπὶ Ξέρξου περσισάντων, ἐκλελοιπυίας δὲ καὶ τῆς κρήνης, τότε ἥ τε κρήνη ἀνάσχοι καὶ μαντεῖα πολλὰ οἱ Μιλησίων πρέσβεις κομίσαιεν εἰς Μέμφιν περὶ τῆς ἐκ Διὸς γενέσεως τοῦ Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ τῆς ἐσομένης περὶ Ἄρβηλα νίκης καὶ τοῦ Δαρείου θανάτου καὶ τῶν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι νεωτερισμῶν. All translations of the Greek are my own.

[25] Even the leading authority on Arrian, the late Professor Brian Bosworth, succumbed to this tendency in his earlier work: Bosworth (1980) 16. He did, however, concede that the

however, Arrian's narrative has been increasingly recognised as a complex and sophisticated literary achievement,[26] and represents an engagement with a wide variety of sources (including the so-called Vulgate tradition) beyond Ptolemy and Aristobulus.[27]

Significantly for our purposes, Arrian explicitly indicates two places where Ptolemy appears deliberately to deviate from Callisthenes' account. In the first, Ptolemy substitutes snakes for Callisthenes' crows as divinely-sent guides to Alexander and his weary troops as they marched to the oracle through a sandstorm in the featureless desert (Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.5–6 = Ptolemy, *BNJ* 138 F 8 and Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139 F 14):

> Ptolemy the son of Lagus says that two snakes proceeded in front of the army hissing, and Alexander ordered his guides to follow them, trusting the divinity, and they led the way to the oracle and back again. (6) But Aristobulus—and the accounts of most authorities are in line with his version—says that two crows flew in front of the army, and that they became Alexander's guides.[28]

As we have seen, the sudden appearance of crows offering divine guidance originated in Callisthenes, and Arrian's wording suggests that Aristobulus is the authority who transmitted it to the later tradition.[29] Ptolemy's snake variant is both unique and deliberate, and Daniel Ogden is likely correct in his interpretation that his intention was not just to confirm the identity of Alexander's snake-sire as Ammon, but also to legitimate his own dynastic

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traditional view of Arrian as a mirror of Ptolemy stood in need of a thorough re-examination; Bosworth (1980) 20.

[26] See, e.g., the seminal works of Stadter (1980) and Bosworth (1988); cf. Bosworth (2007); more recently, Burliga (2013); Liotsakis (2019); Leon (2021).

[27] For an illustration of Arrian's ongoing dialogue in the *Anabasis* with the previous Alexander tradition writ large, see Pownall (2022).

[28] Πτολεμαῖος μὲν δὴ ὁ Λάγου λέγει δράκοντας δύο ἰέναι πρὸ τοῦ στρατεύματος φωνὴν ἰέντας, καὶ τούτοις Ἀλέξανδρον κελεῦσαι ἔπεσθαι τοὺς ἡγεμόνας πιστεύσαντας τῷ θείῳ, τοὺς δὲ ἡγήσασθαι τὴν ὁδὸν τήν τε ἐς τὸ μαντεῖον καὶ ὀπίσω αὖθις· Ἀριστόβουλος δέ—καὶ ὁ πλείων λόγος ταύτῃ κατέχει—κόρακας δύο προπετομένους πρὸ τῆς στρατιᾶς, τούτους γενέσθαι Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τοὺς ἡγεμόνας.

[29] Plutarch (*Alex.* 27.3–4 = *BNJ* 124 T 14b) confirms that Callisthenes' account contained the miraculous appearance of crows to guide Alexander to Siwah; they appear also in D.S. 17.49.5; Curt. 4.7.15; *Itin.* 21 (the only authority besides Arrian to acknowledge the existence of the variant tradition of snake guides).

rule to an Egyptian audience, for the Greco-Macedonians would not naturally associate Ammon with a snake.[30]

The other variant that Arrian identifies as unique to Ptolemy in the Siwah episode is the itinerary of Alexander's journey back to Egypt (Arr. *Anab.* 3.4.5 = Ptolemy, *BNJ* 138 F 9 and Aristobulus, *BNJ* 139 F 15):

> Then Alexander marvelled at the place and consulted the god. And when he had heard what his heart desired, as he said, he marched back towards Egypt, by the same route [i.e., via Paraetonium: cf. Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.3] according to Aristobulus, but by a different route straight to Memphis, according to Ptolemy the son of Lagus.

The tradition of the return journey of Alexander and his troops to Egypt via the longer and more difficult desert route to Memphis (instead of retracing their steps along the coastal route) almost certainly also has its roots in Ptolemaic propaganda. Ptolemy goes out of his way to associate Ammon's proclamation of his paternity of Alexander with Memphis, the ancient capital of the pharaohs, the seat of Ptolemy's satrapy, and the site of his original burial of Alexander's body, thus allowing him to assert legitimacy to an Egyptian as well as a Greco-Macedonian audience.[31]

In this connection, I would like to examine a third instance in which Ptolemy appears to deviate from the narrative of Callisthenes where, as I shall argue, a previously unrecognised reflection of Ptolemaic propaganda is visible. Arrian's introduction into his narrative of Alexander's visit to Siwah makes it very clear that his ultimate source for the episode was Callisthenes, transmitted through Aristobulus (Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.1–4 = *BNJ* 139 F 13):

> After this, a longing seized him to travel to the shrine of Ammon in Libya. He intended to consult the god because the oracle of Ammon was said to be infallible and both Perseus and Heracles had consulted it, the former when he was sent against the Gorgon by Polydectes, and the other when he was journeying to Antaeus in Libya and Busiris in Egypt. But Alexander was also ambitious to rival Perseus

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[30] Ogden (2009). Cf. Ogden (2013) 333: 'it is inconceivable that Ammon as the Greeks knew him should have sired in the form of a serpent in any original version of the story: he was a ram-god, not a serpent-god, for the Greeks, a fact made emphatically clear from Herodotus onwards'.

[31] Pownall (2021). Cf. Howe (2014), who also argues that the variant is deliberate and reflects Ptolemaic propaganda, although he reaches somewhat different conclusions.

and Heracles, as he was descended from them both and he himself traced back some part of his own birth to Ammon, just as the myths trace that of Herakles and Perseus back to Zeus. He set out to visit Ammon, therefore, with this thought, that he would know his own origins more accurately or that he would at least say that he did. As far as Paraetonium, he took the coastal route through desolate territory, although it was not altogether waterless, about 1600 stades, as Aristobulus states. From there, he turned inland, where the shrine of Ammon is located. The route is desolate and for the most part both sandy and waterless. But much rain from the sky fell for Alexander, and this was attributed to the divinity.[32]

This passage has very obvious parallels with Callisthenes' account, particularly Alexander's alleged motivation to visit the oracle in order to rival his ancestors Perseus and Heracles, sons of Zeus who had made the arduous trip to Siwah first, along with the episodes of the divinely-sent lifesaving rain and the crow guides (which Arrian relates just after this passage in the citation quoted earlier). Furthermore, Arrian's explicit citation of Aristobulus (*BNJ* 139 F 13) in the reference to Paraetonium between the two passages that ultimately derive from Callisthenes, as well as in his narrative of the crow guides (*BNJ* 139 F 14) and (following an intervening description of the oasis in which the oracular shrine was located) Alexander's route back to Egypt (*BNJ* 139 F 15), suggest very strongly that he is following Aristobulus (who is transmitting Callisthenes) for his narrative of the Siwah episode and citing Ptolemy only as a variant.

Furthermore, it is important to note that both of Ptolemy's divergences from Callisthenes that are explicitly identified by Arrian—the substitution of snakes for crows and the direct association of Ammon's recognition of

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[32] ἐπὶ τούτοις δὲ πόθος λαμβάνει αὐτὸν ἐλθεῖν παρ' Ἄμμωνα εἰς Λιβύην. τὸ μέν τι τῷ θεῷ χρησόμενον, ὅτι ἀτρεκὲς ἐλέγετο εἶναι τὸ μαντεῖον τοῦ Ἄμμωνος καὶ χρήσασθαι αὐτῷ Περσέα καὶ Ἡρακλέα, τὸν μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν Γοργόνα ὅτε πρὸς Πολυδέκτου ἐστέλλετο, τὸν δὲ ὅτε παρ' Ἀνταῖον ᾔει εἰς Λιβύην καὶ παρὰ Βούσιριν εἰς Αἴγυπτον. Ἀλεξάνδρῳ δὲ φιλοτιμία ἦν πρὸς Περσέα καὶ Ἡρακλέα, ἀπὸ γένους τε ὄντι τοῦ ἀμφοῖν καί τι καὶ αὐτὸς τῆς γενέσεως τῆς ἑαυτοῦ ἐς Ἄμμωνα ἀνέφερε, καθάπερ οἱ μῦθοι τὴν Ἡρακλέους τε καὶ Περσέως ἐς Δία. καὶ οὖν παρ' Ἄμμωνα ταύτῃ τῇ γνώμῃ ἐστέλλετο, ὡς καὶ τὰ αὑτοῦ ἀτρεκέστερον εἰσόμενος ἢ φήσων γε ἐγνωκέναι. μέχρι μὲν δὴ Παραιτονίου παρὰ θάλασσαν ᾔει δι' ἐρήμου, οὐ μέντοι δι' ἀνύδρου τῆς χώρας, σταδίους ἐς χιλίους καὶ ἑξακοσίους, ὡς λέγει Ἀριστόβουλος. ἐντεῦθεν δὲ ἐς τὴν μεσόγαιαν ἐτράπετο, ἵνα τὸ μαντεῖον ἦν τοῦ Ἄμμωνος. ἔστι δὲ ἐρήμη τε ἡ ὁδὸς καὶ ψάμμος ἡ πολλὴ αὐτῆς καὶ ἄνυδρος. ὕδωρ δὲ ἐξ οὐρανοῦ πολὺ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ ἐγένετο, καὶ τοῦτο ἐς τὸ θεῖον ἀνηνέχθη.

Alexander's divine sonship with the ancient pharaonic capital of Memphis—
are intended to support his own claim to legitimacy directed at his native
Egyptian subjects, particularly the powerful priesthood of Amon. This
Egyptian orientation suggests that Ptolemy's narrative of the Siwah episode
lacked Callisthenes' literary construction of Alexander as an epic hero on a
panhellenic mission. Although I concede that this is very much an *argumentum
ex silentio*, given the exiguous amount of material extant from Ptolemy's
history, Ptolemy's evident concern to legitimise his own dynastic rule in
Egypt renders it very likely that he deliberately omitted Callisthenes' claim
of Alexander's direct descent from Perseus.

As we have seen, Callisthenes alleges that Alexander's motivation in
making the pilgrimage to the oracle was to emulate his heroic ancestors,
Perseus and Heracles. As there is no other evidence associating either
Perseus or Heracles explicitly with Siwah,[33] it is likely that Callisthenes
invented both traditions.[34] Not only would the invention of prior
consultations of the oracle at Siwah by Perseus and Heracles serve as heroic
precedents for Alexander's own journey to the oracle, they would also bolster
Alexander's claims to divine parentage as both Perseus and Heracles were
sons of Zeus. As the founder of the Argead dynasty, Heracles appears
frequently on Argead coinage, including Alexander's own issues (where the
hero sports his customary lion-skin headdress),[35] and Alexander is attested to
have performed sacrifices and games to Heracles throughout his campaign.[36]
Perseus, on the other hand, as Heracles' ancestor, was (technically at least)
automatically an ancestor of Alexander also, but significantly he (unlike
Heracles) is not featured in previous Argead coinage or iconography; in fact,
this genealogy does not occur anywhere outside of the Siwah episode,
suggesting that it, like the prior consultations of Heracles and Perseus, is a
creation of Callisthenes,[37] presumably on Alexander's orders. Interestingly,
there is some intriguing evidence that Alexander did in fact play up his
lineage from Perseus in an Egyptian context, for Pliny (*HN* 15.46) tells us
Alexander crowned the victors of the athletic competitions that he

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[33] Herodotus (2.42) alludes to a tradition that Heracles visited the sanctuary of A(m)mon
in Egyptian Thebes. Similarly, he also (2.91) associates Perseus with both Egypt, where a
festival in his honour was celebrated at Chemmis, and Libya, where he collected the
Gorgon's head.

[34] Bosworth (1980) 269–70; Bowden (2014) 44–45; Ogden (2014) 13; Pownall (2014) 59.

[35] See Dahmen (2007) 39–41.

[36] Heckel (2015), esp. 25 and 29–30.

[37] Müller (2020d) 265–6.

established at Memphis with the persea plant (a traditional symbol of pharaonic power), which had been brought there by his ancestor Perseus.[38] These games are likely those mentioned by Arrian (*Anab.* 3.5.2) as instituted in honour of Zeus Basileus by Alexander upon his return to Memphis from Siwah, and it is tempting to suppose that coins issued from Memphis under Ptolemy's predecessor Cleomenes depicting a beardless warrior with a Phrygian helmet on the obverse and a winged horse on the reverse were intended to legitimise Alexander's rule in Egypt.[39]

The motivation for Callisthenes to graft Perseus onto the Argead family tree is not hard to discern, for it was widely believed among the Greeks that Perseus was the eponymous ancestor of the Persians.[40] Thus, Alexander's alleged descent from Perseus would legitimise his future conquest of Persia, at first to his Greek and Macedonian subjects, and presumably over time to his Persian ones as well, particularly after he began deliberately and ostentatiously to incorporate into his own traveling court carefully chosen aspects of Persian ceremonial (ironically, as his opposition to Alexander's 'orientalising' was precisely what ultimately caused Callisthenes' downfall). The legitimising aim of this connection to Perseus explains why Callisthenes is so careful to juxtapose the recognition of Alexander's divine filiation at Siwah both with his victory over Darius at Arbela (i.e., Gaugamela) and the death of Darius that signaled the end of the Achaemenid line through the apparently off-hand reference (in the passage cited from Strabo above) to the 'many oracles' of Apollo at Didyma that the Milesian ambassadors conveyed to Alexander upon his return to Memphis.

Furthermore, Callisthenes' somewhat strained association between Alexander's consultation of the oracle at Siwah and the oracle of Apollo at Didyma, through his reference to the alleged impiety of the Branchidae, serves as a very effective reminder of the Persian plundering and destruction of sanctuaries during Xerxes' invasion of Greece. It is notable that here too Callisthenes resorts to invention to legitimise Alexander's conquest of Persia. The Branchidae, the priestly family that administered the sanctuary of Apollo at Didyma (near Miletus), did not in fact offer up the sanctuary for

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[38] Caneva (2016b) esp. 46–8 (who posits a Ptolemaic origin for this *aition*); cf. Caneva (2016a) 15–16. See also Barbatani (2014) 218–20, who comments on Perseus' unique position as 'a thoroughly Hellenic hero', but one with multicultural roots in both Egypt and Argos (legendary homeland of the Argead dynasty of Macedonia), though she notes that 'his genealogy shows that even his "Egyptian lineage" is originally Argolic'.

[39] Caneva (2016a) 16 n. 16 and (2016b) 46 n. 16; cf. Dahmen (2007) 9–10.

[40] Hdt. 7.150.2; Hellanicus, *BNJ* 4 F 59 (= *BNJ* 687a F 1b; cf. F 1a); Xen. *Cyr.* 1.2.1.

Xerxes to sack in 480 BC; instead, according to Herodotus (6.19.3), it was plundered and burnt at the time of the defeat of Miletus in 494. It seems, therefore, that the sacrilegious Persian in question was actually Darius, rather than Xerxes, and Herodotus says nothing on the subject of the Branchidae's alleged responsibility for the sanctuary's fate. Callisthenes' motivation in inventing this tradition is two-fold. First of all, the transferral of the historical context of the destruction of the sanctuary at Didyma from the Ionian Revolt to the Persian invasion of 480 allows him to add to the list of Xerxes' crimes against the Greeks and their gods that legitimised Alexander's campaign against Persia. Second, the tradition that Xerxes settled the Branchidae in Sogdiana after their betrayal of the sanctuary serves to justify Alexander's massacre of a people by that name and destruction of their town in his pursuit of Bessus.[41] Thus, Callisthenes' deliberate distortions in his references to the Branchidae in the Siwah episode are intended to enhance Alexander's self-proclaimed panhellenic mission,[42] for the theme of revenge against Xerxes in particular for his destruction of Greek sanctuaries formed an important part of Alexander's consensus strategy (to borrow the useful phrase of Giuseppe Squillace) that was intended to secure the willing co-operation of the Greeks in his campaign against Persia.[43]

The panhellenic overlay that pervades the extant fragments of Callisthenes' history also explains why Alexander is acknowledged in his account as the son of Zeus, both at Siwah and by 'many (other) oracles'. Callisthenes' concern to paint the recognition of Alexander's divine sonship at Siwah in Hellenic terms as part of the ongoing justification of the campaign as revenge against the Persians can also be discerned in his narrative of the Battle of Gaugamela, at which Alexander decisively defeated the last Achaemenid king Darius III, whose flight from the battlefield effectively ceded to his victorious opponent control of the Persian Empire. It is not surprising that Callisthenes dramatises the moment by presenting the king as an epic hero, emphasising his descent from Zeus.[44] Nevertheless, although Callisthenes' version of the Siwah episode was directed in the first instance at a Greek readership prior to 327 BC (the date of his arrest and

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[41] Curt. 7.5.28–35; Plut. *Mor.* 557B.

[42] So Müller (2020a) (with earlier bibliography).

[43] Squillace (2010); cf. Flower (2000); Antela-Bernárdez (2016); Rung (2016).

[44] Plut. *Alex.* 33.1 = Callisthenes, *BNJ* 124 F 36: 'Zeus-descended' (Διόθεν ἐστὶν γεγονώς). On this passage, see Pownall (2014) 60–61.

condemnation), there is reason to think that Alexander associated himself with Amon in traditional pharaonic terms to his Egyptian subjects for the remainder of his campaign.[45]

But Arrian (*Anab.* 3.2.1–2, passage cited above), who appears to be following the narrative of Aristobulus (as I have argued above), repeatedly refers to the deity at the oracular sanctuary of Siwah as Ammon (i.e., rather than Zeus, who only appears in his role as the divine progenitor of Perseus and Heracles). Because the publication of Aristobulus' history in its final form did not occur until after the death of Antigonus Monophthalmus in 301 BC,[46] he adopts the association with Ammon that Alexander broadcast in the later stages of his campaign, when he was emphasising his legitimate succession to the Achaemenid dynasty to the constituent peoples of his newly-acquired empire (i.e., beyond a strictly Greek audience). It is virtually certain that Ptolemy too referred to Alexander's divine parent as Ammon,[47] in response to his ongoing requirements for legitimation in a specifically Egyptian context.[48] Because Ptolemy's rule was based in Egypt, there was no need for him to legitimise Alexander's conquest of the Achaemenid empire by connecting him to the legendary ancestor of the Persians or to emphasise his filiation from Zeus as a parallel to either Perseus or Heracles.

Ptolemy's adherence to a strictly Egyptian context in his rendition of Alexander's pilgrimage to Siwah suggests that this passage at least of his history was composed relatively early in his rule, when he was attempting to solidify his support in Egypt, particularly from the powerful priesthood of Amon at Thebes. As an integral part of this platform of negotiation with the Egyptian elite, Ptolemy took care to carry on with the restoration of religious monuments that had been undertaken in Alexander's name following his

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[45] See esp. the bilingual inscription on an altar at Bahariya explicitly referring to Alexander as the son of Amon; Bosch-Puche (2008); cf. id. (2013) and (2014); Bianchi (2018). But see Ladynin (2016) 258–9, who argues that this particular inscription is an early Ptolemaic imitation, although there are others that attest to Alexander's adoption of traditional pharaonic titulary (if not divine sonship *per se*); cf. Sheedy and Ockinga (2015) 232–7 and Caneva (2016a) 20–22.

[46] *BNJ* 139 F 54, with commentary by Pownall (2013).

[47] If, as I shall argue below, Ptolemy's history was not a work of old age but was published earlier in his rule, Aristobulus may well have adopted his practice. But given our scanty biographical data for both historians, the temporal relationship between their histories is impossible to determine, and it is safest to consider the work of each independently from the other; see Pownall (2013) 'Biographical Essay'.

[48] So Howe (2013) 63–64, who adduces a parallel switch from Zeus to Ammon on Ptolemy's coinage; cf. Sheedy and Ockinga (2015) and Pownall (2021).

departure from Egypt, ostensibly to right the wrongs inflicted by the sacrilegious Persian usurpers. As long as Alexander's Argead heirs were alive and Ptolemy was still ruling from Memphis as satrap, dedicatory inscriptions recorded under the name of Philip III Arrhidaeus continued to emphasise the king's restoration of the temples of the Egyptian gods.[49] But Ptolemy's aggressive territorial ambitions in Syria in the wake of his victory over Demetrius Poliorcetes at Gaza in 312/11 BC seem to coincide with his appropriation of the religious role in Egypt previously played by Alexander and his heirs,[50] and his inauguration of an ambitious new building program closely associated with the temple complexes of the Thirtieth Dynasty.[51] On the so-called 'Satrap Stele' (*CGC* 22182),[52] erected at Buto in 311 BC after Ptolemy's successful campaign in Syria, although the young Alexander IV (Arrhidaeus having been executed on Cassander's orders five years previously) is given the normal pharaonic titulary, it is Ptolemy who is honoured in Egyptian royal phraseology for fulfilling the traditional duty of the king to restore the property of the gods:

> As he brought back the sacred images of the gods which were found within Asia, together with all the ritual implements and all the sacred scrolls of the temples of Upper and Lower Egypt, so he restored them in their proper places.[53]

As Donata Schäfer has recently observed, although the direct audience of the Satrap Stele was the educated priestly elite, the message that Ptolemy was a dutiful and righteous king was intended for a much broader (Egyptian) audience through oral dissemination, and illustrates the wide reach of his legitimising propaganda.[54]

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[49] Cf. Lloyd (2011) 88–90 and Sheedy and Ockinga (2015) 236–7.

[50] On the intensification of Ptolemy's empire-building efforts after Gaza, see Hauben (2014) and Meeus (2014).

[51] Minas-Nerpel (2018).

[52] On the 'Satrap Stele', see esp. Schäfer (2011); Colburn (2015) 173–80; Howe (2018a) 161–4; Ockinga (2018).

[53] Trans. Ockinga in Sheedy and Ockinga (2015) 238.

[54] Schäfer (2015) 447–51. Ockinga (2018) adds that the royal phraseology employed on the Satrap Stele suggests that Ptolemy would have been considered a legitimate pharaoh by his Egyptian subjects, even before he formally adopted the title of king a few years later.

More important for our purposes, perhaps, is the Satrap Stele's claim that the temple property that Ptolemy returned had been stolen by the Persians.[55] Ptolemy, it seems, exploited the persistent 'memory' of alleged Achaemenid abuse of traditional religious practices and confiscation of temple property to portray himself as a pious restorer (a characteristic of the rightful king) as part of his legitimisation campaign to his Egyptian subjects, particularly the clergy.[56] Although Ptolemy's claim to have recovered statues of the gods and other temple property looted by the Persians is almost certainly specious,[57] the restitution of sacred objects became a *topos* among Ptolemaic royal inscriptions, illustrating the ongoing success of his appropriation of the idiomatic Egyptian virtues of kingship.[58] In addition to its ideological function as legitimising propaganda, Ptolemy's alleged recovery of stolen religious objects from Asia offered him and his successors a useful pretext to gain the support of the Egyptian elite for ongoing military campaigns in Syria against first the Antigonids, and eventually the Seleucids, who could be portrayed as the direct inheritors of the Achaemenid Persians.[59]

Ptolemy's desire to present himself as the antithesis of the impious Achaemenids as part of his platform of legitimation to his Egyptian subjects provides further confirmation that he did not include Alexander's supposed descent from Perseus in his narrative of the Siwah episode. Although it was essential for Ptolemy to maintain a connection to Alexander in order to justify the claim that he was his legitimate successor in Egypt, it was not necessary to adopt every aspect of the panhellenic hero that Callisthenes had created in response to Alexander's directives. Instead, Ptolemy was free to manipulate the Callisthenic Alexander into a figure of his own invention, carefully selecting the aspects that corresponded with his own agenda. Thus, he summarily excised Alexander's direct descent from Perseus, the legendary

[55] The explicit reference to Xerxes' alleged seizure of sacred lands at Buto is probably not historical, but emanates from the *topos* that he represented an archetypal temple robber: see Klinkott (2007). Cf. Kuhrt (2014), who demonstrates that the tradition of Xerxes' wholesale destruction of temples in Babylon is a similar fiction created by the classical Greek historians.

[56] Colburn (2015).

[57] There is no historical context for this claim in any of our extant accounts of the Diadoch Wars: Colburn (2015) 178. Cf. Agut-Labordère (2017) 150: 'the first Ptolemies tried to manipulate the Egyptian *cultural* memory in regard to the lootings in order to give rise to a common *political* memory that was compatible with their own perception of the Persians'.

[58] Colburn (2015) 179–81 and Agut-Labordère (2017) 151–3.

[59] Agut-Labondère (2017), esp. 158–61; cf. Briant (2009) 31 and Howe (2018a) 163.

ancestor of the Persians, from his reworking of Ammon's recognition of Alexander's divine sonship at Siwah, an episode that was crucial not only for the legitimation of Argead rule in Egypt, but more importantly the foundation of his own dynasty based at Memphis (the ancient religious capital of Egypt). Unlike Alexander, Ptolemy was not ruling Persia, and it offered him no benefit in his Egyptian context to emphasise his predecessor's rightful succession to the Achaemenid empire through his descent from Perseus. In fact, it was far more useful to his immediate political purposes to sever this putative link to the legendary ancestor of the Persians and to exploit instead the persistent tradition (whether real or manufactured) of Persian depredations of Egyptian shrines, and to portray his rival Diadochi (rather than Alexander) as their direct successors.

Despite the traditional view that Ptolemy would not have had the time to write his history until the end of his eventful reign,[60] his blatant self-aggrandisement and highlighting of his close association with Alexander in the extant fragments suggest that he composed it relatively early in his rule of Egypt, when his need for legitimation was the greatest.[61] The deliberate excision of non-Egyptian elements from Ptolemy's narrative of Alexander's consultation of the oracle at Siwah (including as I have argued, his legendary descent from Perseus) demonstrates that one of the main aims of his history was to solidify his position in Egypt, and in particular to gain the support of the native high clergy in the ongoing struggle against his rivals. Ptolemy's embarkation on an extensive campaign of aggressive imperialism from 312/11 BC onwards suggests that he felt secure in his position in Egypt and no longer felt it necessary to seek legitimation from his subject population (whether Greco-Macedonian or native Egyptian) to quite the same degree. It is no coincidence that Ptolemy's transferal of the seat of his satrapy from the ancient home of the pharaohs at Memphis on the Nile to Alexandria, with its Mediterranean orientation, had occurred by 311 BC, when the Satrap Stele mentions it as his residence. Ptolemy's subsequent transformation of Alexandria from a fortress (as it is described in the Satrap Stele) into an appropriately impressive capital (and the eventual highly symbolic reburial of Alexander's embalmed corpse in suitable splendour at its centre) suggests that later in his rule Ptolemy was more secure in his control of Egypt, was less concerned to establish his legitimacy, and was beginning to focus his

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[60] Most recently advocated by Worthington (2016) 216–19 and Heckel (2018).

[61] Errington (1969); 241–2; Bosworth (1980) 22–23; Stadter (1980) 68; Howe (2018a) 171–6 and (2018b) 'Biographical Essay'.

attention upon laying the foundations for a world empire to be ruled from his new capital, a city which despite its name had very little association with Alexander himself.[62] In other words, he now set his sights beyond Egypt to the larger Mediterranean world, and although the figure of Alexander continued to play a key role in this new phase of propaganda, Ptolemy's own ties to Memphis arguably began to overshadow those of his illustrious predecessor, culminating in his assumption of the title of *basileus* in 306/5 BC,[63] and subsequent coronation as pharaoh.[64]

The spectacular success of Ptolemy's self-serving propaganda reveals the important role of the writing of contemporary history for rulers to justify their regimes and to legitimate political and territorial aspirations. Although contemporary accounts were generally considered the most reliable, they were also the most subject to distortion and manipulation to serve the agenda of their authors. The fraught decades after the death of Alexander the Great, when his former officers began to jockey for position in the new world order, led to a new focus on the possibilities offered by the writing of contemporary history for the solidification and legitimisation of their power, and historians no longer adhered to the conventional practice of effacing themselves from their narratives. Ptolemy's entrance into the historio-graphical arena seems to have created a ripple effect among his contemporaries that was just as far-reaching as his military and political activities. It is likely, as Tim Howe has suggested recently,[65] that Ptolemy's creation of a Ptolemaic Alexander to bolster his specific ambitions inspired his rivals to do likewise. It cannot be coincidental that there appears to have been a cluster of Alexander historians at the court of Antigonus Monoph-thalmus, presumably writing in service to an Antigonid agenda.[66] But whereas the other contemporary historians circulated particular versions of Alexander intended to legitimise the claims of their powerful patrons (and thereby maintain their own positions at court), Ptolemy was the only one to adapt and reconfigure Alexander's image and ideology with a specific Egyptian twist in order to bolster support from all elements of his subject

[62] Howe (2014); Strootman (2014), esp. 314–15; Caneva (2018) 91; Pownall (2021).

[63] According to the traditional date after Antigonus' failed invasion of Egypt. It is possible, however, that Ptolemy's assumption of the royal title dates to 305/4 BC, in the aftermath of his siege of Rhodes; so, e.g., Caneva (2016a) 68–75. The precise date does not affect my argument.

[64] Hölbl (2001) 21–22; Worthington (2016) 162.

[65] Howe (2018a) 174.

[66] So, e.g., Bucciantini (2015) 152–3; Howe (2018a).

population for his own dynastic rule. Ptolemy's subtle rebranding of Alexander as a Ptolemaic precursor in his history was a carefully constructed plank in his ever-evolving royal program aimed at laying solid foundations for a new dynasty based in Egypt that would overshadow all of his contemporary rivals. In this aim, he was astonishingly successful.

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4

CAESAR'S TALKATIVE CENTURIONS: ANECDOTAL SPEECH, SOLDIERLY *FIDES*, AND CONTEMPORARY HISTORY*

Lydia Spielberg

Abstract: Caesar purports to quote brief utterances by his centurions at dramatic moments in the *commentarii*, who provide testimony 'from the ranks'. These speakers demonstrate Caesar's bond with his men and offer readers in Rome interpretations of contested events that might be indecorous for Caesar to make in his own voice, but which have persuasive power from notionally independent and unrhetorical soldiers. For non-contemporary readers these specifics were inapposite or irrelevant, however, and later writers such as Appian and Plutarch give Caesarian centurions only stock declarations of loyalty.

Keywords: *Bellum Civile*, *Bellum Gallicum*, Julius Caesar, centurions, direct discourse, *ipsa verba*, speech

Caesar praises his legates and tribunes sparingly in his commentaries, but he makes centurions and standard-bearers the stars of miniature dramas of *uirtus* such as the self-sacrifice of the centurion Petronius to save his men at Gergovia (*BG* 7.50.4–6) or the standard-bearer at Dyrrachium who uses his dying breath to exhort his comrades to save their

legion's eagle from capture (*BC* 3.64.3). These anecdotes have drawn attention as evidence for Caesar's *inventio*, glaring examples of a dramatic, even 'tragic' historiographical sensibility emerging from Caesar's 'practical prose' or a willingness to exaggerate the facts to his benefit.[1] In contrast to these approaches to the narrative technique of Caesar *qua* elite *littérateur* and canny politician, recent articles on the first audiences of *Bellum Gallicum* have emphasised the ideological value of such episodes, which would have been particularly welcome to popular and non-elite (or at least less elite) audiences in Rome and Italy.[2]

I build on these approaches in this paper to examine an issue pertinent both to studies of historiographical *inventio* and the reception of (especially) contemporary historiography: the credibility of Caesar's centurions as speakers. The utterances Caesar attributes to his centurions and standard-bearers account for a significant proportion of the direct discourse in the *commentarii* where, in Kraus' words, they 'serve as the stylized representatives of his legions, who through their leaders speak in (largely) ultra-brave, ultra-Roman, ultra-loyal voices'.[3] The words of centurions and standard-bearers, I argue, are presented so as to separate them from the narrator and forestall scepticism about whether the anecdotes in which they star 'actually happened'. Caesar needs his centurion speakers to be taken as voices distinct from his own, moreover, because they tend to speak with special power and to specific contemporary concerns.[4] Writing about deeds in which he played a chief role, and about events in which he had a direct and immediate personal stake, for a Roman audience that would also be receiving versions of the same events from his enemies, Caesar avoids the appearance of bias *qua* narrator of his own deeds by largely separating his role as general within the action from his role as reporter of it. The narrator of the *commentarii* rarely makes explicit judgments or generalisations, and these judgments almost never touch on Caesar himself.[5] The voices from the ranks that Caesar the

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[1] Rasmussen (1963). Rambaud (1966) 172–80; Pascucci (1973) 610–2.

[2] Wiseman (1998); Gerrish (2018); Langlands (2018).

[3] Kraus (2010) 56.

[4] I refer to the works generally as *commentarii* or 'commentaries', and use the abbreviations *BG* and *BC* for the Gallic war and civil war commentaries respectively. On these titles see Riggsby (2006) 143–4 with references.

[5] Ancient assessments of Caesar's prose style: Cic. *Brut.* 262; Hirt. *Ad Balbum* 4–7; see also Kraus (2005). For Caesar's narrative technique: Damon (1993); narrator's persona: Batstone (2017); Grillo (2011). On the charge of historiographical bias: Woodman (1988) 16–24; Luce (1989).

narrator purports to quote, however, provide seemingly independent testimony to the virtues of Caesar the general from representatives of the Roman people, for so Caesar presents his legions, although most of his soldiers came from the colonies and municipia of Northern Italy and Cisalpine Gaul.[6]

First, I show that the figure of the centurion, an experienced soldier who is stereotypically loyal but unsophisticated and who speaks from spontaneous emotion rather than rhetorical practice, makes a particularly credible speaker. In addition, the tradition of *dicta* whose memory-worthiness elevates incidental utterances by ordinary individuals to the status of historical event gives the short, direct-discourse speeches of centurions and standard-bearers the air of real utterances reported verbatim by one who either heard them himself or received them from an eyewitness, and Caesar's distribution of speech enhances this assumption. Centurions' expressions of loyalty to their commander press Caesarian ideological claims and interpretations of events—from the potential import of Caesar's expedition to Britain to his mantle as defender of the rights of the Roman people against a tyrannical faction—that were hotly contested in the 50s and 40s BCE. Caesar himself can stand aloof and let these facts, too, rest on the perceived reliability of a brave centurion. Finally, I show that the contemporary relevance of such anecdotes and utterances from 'ordinary' soldiers also emerges from their rewriting by later historians. While the anecdote about Crastinus' promise of valour before Pharsalus remained, elements of his speech that proved too specific to the politics of the early 40s BCE or were falsified by later events disappeared.

Insofar as I am arguing for the immediate contemporary relevance of centurion anecdotes in Caesar's works, I cannot avoid the question of when and how Caesar's *commentarii* were 'published'. Were the books of the *Gallic War* written and disseminated year by year, completed and published in one go, perhaps around 51 or 50 BCE, or published in groups of two or three books? Was any form of the *Civil War* published before Caesar's death in 44 BCE?[7] I cautiously favour the hypothesis of semi-serial publication of the *Gallic War*, as argued by several recent studies of Caesar's allusions and the

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[6] Brunt (1971) 202–3, 465–8; for negative stereotypes about Caesar's soldiers, see, e.g., Cic. *Fam.* 11.7.2, *Phil.* 8.9, 10.22 with Keaveney (2007) 57–8; de Blois (2007).

[7] For an overview of the debate over serial or unitary writing of *BG* see Riggsby (2006) 9–12; Grillo and Krebs (2017a) 3–5. For *BC* see Batstone and Damon (2006) 29–32; Grillo (2012) 178–80.

progression of ethnographic portrayals over the course of the work.[8] One anecdote in *BG*, the speech of the standard-bearer at 4.25, might have had particular point in 54 BCE *before* the events of the next year's campaign.[9] The words of Crastinus in *BC* 3.91.2–3, on the other hand, make the most sense in a work composed not long after Pharsalus. In general, however, the soldier anecdotes in the *commentarii* would have served Caesar's (and the Caesarian faction's) ideological aims in a complete edition disseminated in the 40s as well as in serially published books in the 50s.

Wiseman has gone further, suggesting that Caesar's Gallic commentaries might have been disseminated not only as books traded among Rome's elite, but as texts to be read out to large public audiences not only in Rome but in Italy.[10] This is tempting, but unprovable, speculation. However, parts of the *commentarii* as we have them may be very similar to the official reports Caesar sent regularly to the senate, and which Caesar's supporters in Rome had read out to the people in *contiones*.[11] The earliest diffusion of anecdotal stories about the exploits of individuals, on the other hand, probably came in camp gossip and personal letters from Caesar's officers to friends and kin. Stories very like Caesar's centurion anecdotes would have trickled back as war stories whose protagonists were the relations, neighbours, and *contubernales* of the tellers. Indeed, one such set piece in the *commentarii*, the exploits of two centurions in the besieged camp of Quintus Cicero (*BG* 5.44), could only have come to Caesar's knowledge through a written report or informal conversation with officers who had been present.[12] Tales of individual soldiers' exploits in Caesar's campaigns probably circulated orally through-out the 50s, 40s, and 30s in Rome and in towns throughout Italy as what Rebecca Langlands terms 'floating anecdotes'.[13] Quite plausibly, these stories already bore something of the ideological charge that Caesar gives his *commentarii*.[14] Such anecdotes rarely happen as they are reported, but to

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[8] Krebs (2013); Creer (2019); Potter (2020), all arguing for slightly different groupings.

[9] Nice (2003) and Creer (2019) 257–8 offer evidence for *BG* 4's publication before *BG* 5.

[10] Wiseman (1998); (2015) 101–2; cf. Busch (2005) 161–4; Gerrish (2018) 353–5; but see as well the cautions of Riggsby (2006) 14–15.

[11] Dio 39.63.4; cf. Cic. *Fam.* 7.18.4; Morstein-Marx (2004) 9–11, 249–51.

[12] See Koster (1978) 180–4 for an attempt to discern traces of Quintus' relation of the episode; cf. Krebs (2021).

[13] Langlands (2018); O'Neill (2003); Courrier (2017) 151–4. Gelzer (1968) 171 n. 5 collects the evidence for competing accounts promulgated and discussed in the correspondence of Caesar's officers.

[14] Cf. Batstone (2017) 44.

judge from the acceptance of similar stories into popular and even official histories in modern times, they are likely to have been believed by many who told them and retold them.[15]

Centurion Speech and Centurion Persona

Centurion speakers have a triple claim to speaking the 'truth'. In the first place, soldiers' sentiments are frankly expressed, and untainted by the suspicion of duplicitous intent or rhetorical trickery. Next, their speech comes as short *dicta* or exhortations that are often presented as if quotations of words actually said rather than rhetoricised compositions; their words are notionally 'real', not mediated through the *inventio* of the writer. Such small and trivial *dicta* find their way into a historian's narrative because they have some memorable significance or value as, for example, a demonstration of character or a witty summation of a situation. Finally, quoted words of centurions and soldiers tend to be portrayed as truths, whether because they accurately describe reality, because their words prove an unwitting omen, or because they presage interpretations that the future narrative will make explicit.[16]

Caesar's centurions descend historiographically from the military tribunes, generally young aristocrats, commemorated in the historical tradition of the mid-republic.[17] Both Cato the Elder and Claudius Quadrigarius celebrated the military tribune who volunteered for a dangerous mission to save the rest of the Roman army during the first Punic War (Gell. 3.7 = *FRHist* 5 F 76 and 24 F 42), and the annalistic tradition evidently retrojected this *exemplum* onto an earlier period as well (e.g., Liv. 7.34.1–37.3; 22.60.11).[18] Ennius singled out the military tribune Caelius in Book 15 of his *Annales* (Enn. *Ann.* 391–8 Sk.), and it may be significant that the Aetolian War of *Annales* 15 was contemporary history for Ennius' audience, and eyewitness history for

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[15] See, e.g., Bartolini (2020); Bloch (1921).

[16] Ripat (2006) 158–62. Most famous is the centurion whose words were taken as a decisive omen not to move from Rome to Veii after the Gallic sack (Liv. 5.55.1–2; Val. Max. 1.5.1).

[17] On the social status of military tribunes: Suolahti (1955) 51–60.

[18] Chassignet (1986) 87; Calboli (1996); Oakley (1998) 333–4; Popov-Reynolds (2010); Cornell ap. *FRHist* III.121–2; Krebs (2006); Rood (2018) 845–6. For military tribune protagonists in early Roman history cf. Liv. 4.19.1–20.11 with Ogilvie (1965) 563-4; Liv. 7.4.3–5.9 with Clark (2016); Quadrigarius, *FRHist* 24 F 6 = Gell. 9.13.7–19.

the poet, who had accompanied the consul Fulvius Nobilior on campaign.[19] Pliny the Elder writes that Ennius' supplement to his completed epic (Books 16–18) was due to his 'amazement' at a certain Titus Caecilius Teucer and his brother (Plin. *HN* 7.101), probably also military tribunes.[20]

The quintessential historiographical traits of these aristocratic junior officers of the mid-republic—competitive bravery and willingness to risk one's life even to the point of recklessness—had migrated to the centurion by the early first century BCE.[21] Sulla commemorated the outstanding *uirtus* of Marcus Ateius, the first man to top the wall during the capture of Athens, in his *hypomnemata* (Plut. *Sull.* 14.3 = *FRHist* 22 F 19).[22] Although Plutarch does not specifically cite Sulla for the insouciant remark by a Roman centurion upon seeing the massed slaves whom Mithridates had armed on his front lines at the battle of Chaeronea—'only at Saturnalia had he seen slaves sharing in freedom' (ὡς ἐν Κρονίοις μόνον εἰδείη τῆς παρρησίας δούλους μετέχοντας, *Sull.* 18.4)—Plutarch names Sulla's *hypomnemata* as his source for the rest of the battle narrative (19.8), and it is likely that this anecdote, too, goes back to the dictator's memoirs. Much like the soldier quips that Caesar sometimes records, the Sullan centurion's remark demonstrates the confidence of Sulla's soldiers in the face of the enemy, and thus the competence and excellence of the *imperator*.[23] In having one of his soldiers draw the contrast between (implicitly) the discipline, hierarchy, and thoroughly Roman identity of Sulla's army and the alien laxity and social upheaval of the enemy, Sulla might also have attempted to counter the accusation that he overindulged his men in Eastern luxury (cf. Sall. *Cat.* 11.5-7).

In part, this must reflect the structural changes in the Roman army that had occurred by the late Republic: increasing professionalisation, the

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[19] Goldberg (1989) 248–9; Skutsch (1984) 555–9.

[20] See Suerbaum (1968) 146–51; Skutsch (1984) 569–70; Goldberg (2006) 438. In Silius Italicus' *Punica*, Ennius himself receives a miniature *aristeia* during Torquatus' campaign in Sardinia (*Pun.* 12.387–414)—but as a centurion brandishing 'the proud insignia of the Latin vine-staff' (494–5: *Latiaeque superbum | uitis adornabat dextram decus*). A centurion-poet cuts against type (cf. Casali (2006) 581–2 n. 24), but, like Ennius' origins in the 'rough earth' of Calabria (12.395–6), the rank accords with his characterisation by the Augustan poets as 'shaggy' and primitive.

[21] Centurion anecdotes in Livy's third decade may well be influenced by Caesar's precedent: Kraus (2017) 278–82.

[22] Scholz–Walter–Winkl (2013) 83–4, 119. Lewis (1991) 511. On the pre-Sullan memoir tradition, see Flower (2014).

[23] Behr (1993) 77–8; cf. Plut. *Sull.* 27.5 = *FRHist* 22 F 24.

emergence of a 'middle cadre' of career soldiers who had advanced to officer positions, and the smaller role that active military service played in the careers of the senatorial elite at Rome, including significant reduction of the military tribune's role in fighting.[24] By the same token, however, the centurions whose battlefield valour Sulla (and later Caesar) honoured could never be their commander's competitors or enemies on the political scene, as Gaius Marius had been for Metellus and Sulla himself for Marius. Nor would they be perceived to outclass their commander at his own job when he allotted a share of his glory to them.[25] Centurions thus made safer exemplars of Roman *uirtus* than legates or tribunes for *imperatores* writing accounts of their own exploits, while also allowing the general to emphasise the valour of the army that they represented. By honouring the exceptional bravery, competence, and dedication of lower officers from the ranks, moreover, a commander could demonstrate the strength of his bond with his army and, implicitly, with the *populus Romanus*—particularly important for a *popularis* such as Caesar.[26]

As exemplars of *uirtus*, centurions seem to speak without deception or premeditation but from spontaneous and therefore genuine feeling. Although a notch above the brutish soldiers disdained by the Roman elite, they are generally represented as unsophisticated and incapable of higher thought or culture. Although emotions are not a philosophical good, argues Cicero in *Tusculans* 4, they are all right for a centurion or a standard-bearer, 'for those who cannot use reason can profitably use emotion instead' (*utile est enim uti motu animi, qui uti ratione non potest*, *Tusc.* 4.55).[27] Simultaneously, centurions can be representatives of the simple, unspoiled 'common man' of the Italian *municipia*. Already in Lucilius' second book of satires, the orator Scaevola contrasts the Italian centurions Pontius and Tritanius, 'famous men and frontliners, and standard-bearers, too' (*praeclarorum hominum ac primorum signiferumque*, FF 87–90 Warmington) with the Hellenising

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[24] Middle Republic: Suolahti (1955) 43–5; Dobson (1978) 3–5; (2000). Late Republic: de Blois (2000); (2007); Lendon (2005) 218–9; Erdkamp (2006) 561–2.

[25] Cf. Sall. *Iug.* 64.1–4; Plut. *Mar.* 7.1–8.7, 10.2–9; *Sull.* 4.2–5.1, with Behr (1993) 114–21.

[26] Welch (1998) 98. For Caesar's attention to individual soldiers see Batstone and Damon (2006) 19, 135–6; Palao Vicente (2009), esp. 192 n. 5 for a comparison of Caesar with other historians. On Caesar's portrayal of soldiers in the collective, see Ash (1999) 5–10. For Caesar's 'populism' see Ash (1999) 22; Busch (2005) 160; Westall (2018); 210–17; Grillo (2012) 131–6. Cf. Behr (1993) 53–76.

[27] Cf. Cic. *Sen.* 33.

pretensions of his opponent Albucius.[28] Elite disdain obscures the reality that by the first century BCE, many centurions were members of the municipal elite and could achieve equestrian census upon retirement; in 49 BCE, Caesar borrowed money from his centurions as well as his military tribunes (*BC* 1.39.3–4).[29] Caesar's *commentarii* do not treat his soldiers or centurions with the scorn of a Lucilius or a Cicero, but his narrative, like his army's discipline, nevertheless relies on the same stereotyped division of *ratio* and *uirtus* and the sorts of speech that accompany each.[30] Brief, spontaneous utterances concerned with valour and confined to the immediate circumstances belong naturally to the soldier, just as the carefully-considered deliberative speech or the extended pre-battle exhortation belongs naturally to the commander and his *consilium*.

Caesar distributes speech carefully in the *commentarii*, giving the impression of a reporter who for the most part transmits the unadorned content of actual speech acts: summaries of speeches and messages and only occasionally, a noteworthy utterance in direct discourse. The 'noteworthiness' of anecdotal speech within a historical narrative, Riggsby observes, 'requires a break in the narrative; they [anecdotes] appear to impose themselves on the author. If they neither explain nor advance the story, then their value lies in their having (supposedly) actually happened'.[31] This is not to say that such short utterances *are* accurate historical transmissions: on the contrary, anecdotes of memorable *facta* and *dicta* are more likely to illustrate exemplary truths than to convey history *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist*.[32]

Caesar's presentation of soldier speeches gives them greater credibility as spontaneous utterances that actually happened. Nearly all of the utterances Caesar quotes as coming from soldiers or lower officers are in direct discourse—a rare thing in his *commentarii*.[33] While direct discourse gives the

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[28] Dench (1995) 92–4; (2005) 330; Perseyn (2019) 182–4. Cf. Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.72–5; Pers. 3.1.77, 5.189.

[29] Syme (1937) 129; Wiseman (1971) 74–7; Dobson (2000) 140. Sallust's and Cicero's depictions of dictators packing the senate with their soldiers exaggerate (e.g., Cic. *Div.* 2.23; Sall. *Cat.* 37.7): Syme (1939) 78–82.

[30] Cf. Liv. 25.21.9–17 for the disastrous results of a centurion giving strategic advice.

[31] Riggsby (2006) 142; Grillo (2012) 132–3.

[32] On the historicity of anecdotes and their easy transformation and reattribution, see Saller (1980); Wehrli (1973); on anecdotes and *inventio*: Roller (1997).

[33] Hyart (1953) 171–200; Grillo (2017) 132–4 with bibliography. Three of the seven instances of *oratio recta* in *BG* and two of the nine in *BC* are given to Caesar's standard-bearers and centurions. On Caesar's use of speech (direct and indirect) in relation to the

experiential illusion of proximity to an 'original' speech-act (or a hypo-thetical speech-act), it does not, of course, indicate actual transcription. Indeed, in contexts such as historiographical narrative, extended direct speech may imply a greater degree of fictionalisation than indirect speech, because the latter seems to convey a bare report of the contents of the speech act, while the former engages in an understood convention of rewriting and invention.[34] Caesar's consistent use of indirect discourse for most 'historiographical' speech (embassies, deliberations, generals' pre-battle exhortations) gives an impression of a narrator who reports the bare content of important speech acts without pretending to replicate their form or flourishes.[35] By contrast, Caesar regularly notes that the speakers whom he is about to or has just 'quoted' in direct discourse spoke loudly, shouted, or were overheard by numerous bystanders, if not by Caesar himself.[36] This contributes to the impression that these are 'real' things that were 'really' said, were overheard by multiple people (many of them still living at the time that Caesar's *commentarii* were first being read), and could therefore have been verified. This primes the reader or listener to believe that the non-oratorical speaker who interrupts the narrator of the commentaries with direct discourse has some special status of credibility, while Caesar's proximity to the events about which he writes gives plausibility to these quotations of anecdotal speech.

Army Jokes and Camp Discipline

One of the only explicit jokes in Caesar's commentaries, a quip made 'rather humorously' (*non inridicule*) by an anonymous soldier of the 10th Legion, illustrates how soldiers' *dicta* can set up or make explicit ideas that Caesar

genre of *commentarii* see Rasmussen (1963); Riggsby (2006) 142. Rich (2020) examines the surviving evidence for historiographical speech prior to Caesar.

[34] Wilson (1982) 102. Laird (1999) 121–43 argues persuasively that any impression of greater or lesser accuracy in reproducing the 'original' speech act in direct vs indirect discourse is a matter of the historian's rhetoric. Cf. Moore (2002) on early modern depositions; Landert (2015) on modern news media; Eckstein (2018) 105–10 on reconstructing speeches from memory. But it does not therefore follow that all historiographical rhetoric was transparent to ancient audiences, or, indeed, even to the historians who employed it.

[35] A false impression, as Dangel (1995) demonstrates and linguistic studies of quotation affirm: Clark and Gerrig (1990); Wade and Clark (1993).

[36] Adema (2017) 184; Rasmussen (1963) 133.

might not wish to assert so strongly in his own voice.[37] The German king Ariovistus has demanded that when he and Caesar meet, each be accompanied only by a cavalry detachment. Caesar, distrusting the Gallic auxiliaries who constitute his cavalry, reassigns their horses to soldiers from his faithful 10th legion. This occasions a joke from one of his soldiers: *non inridicule quidam ex militibus dixit plus quam pollicitus esset Caesarem facere: pollicitum se in cohortis praetoriae loco decimam legionem habiturum ad equum rescribere* ('A certain soldier said rather humorously that Caesar was doing even more than he had promised: for he had promised to consider the 10th legion his personal guard, but now he was enrolling them in the cavalry',1.42.6). The soldier jokes that by giving his men horses, Caesar has in effect elevated them to the equestrian class.

Unlike in later anecdotes about centurions and standard-bearers, in this episode the speaker is unranked, his words are given in indirect discourse, and the utterance occurs preparatory to a diplomatic confrontation rather than a martial one. It functions, however, in much the same way.[38] The anecdote appears to offer spontaneous testimony from the ranks to Caesar's reputation among his soldiers. Unusual orders in an unusual situation are met with good cheer, and the soldier who speaks is confident in his general and confident that his loyal service will be rewarded.[39] No reader or listener of *BG* 1, or indeed the 'original' audience to the witticism, would really expect Caesar to elevate his legionaries to the equestrian class, but the joke reminds us that Caesar's army depends on him for the advancement of their interests, and that he will reward them even above their expectations. By recording the anonymous soldier's joke, meanwhile, Caesar affirms his close attention to his soldiers and his bond with them.[40] For a moment, the chain of command that usually mediates the interactions between general and common soldier—and so, to some extent, the narrator whose measured voice stands between the reader and the events about which she reads—collapses.

The joke gains a sharper point, however, when considered as the capping epigram to the 'Vesontio Mutiny', an episode in which Caesar restores the

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[37] But see Maurach (2002) and Corbeill (2017) for other instances of Caesarian humour.

[38] Hyart (1953) 178. *BG* 1–3 contain no instances of *oratio recta*.

[39] For the rewards Caesar's soldiers could expect on campaign: Westall (2018) 213–6.

[40] Cf. perhaps the *carmina triumphalia*: Suet. *Iul.* 49.4, 51; Plin. *HN* 19.144; Dio 43.20.1–4; noting Caesar's 'indulgence' (πρᾳότης) towards his soldiers' 'license' (παρρησία), with Montlahuc (2019) 136–40; 189–94; Chrissanthos (2004).

proper balance between speech, rank, and authority in his army when exaggerated rumours have brought it close to mutiny (*BG* 1.39–42).[41] The quip represents the soldiers' return to their proper sphere of speech after they have tried to usurp the commander's position as deliberative speaker and strategist. Common soldiers, moreover, become ever more central throughout Caesar's narration of this near-mutiny, while his officers of equestrian and senatorial rank come off very badly, giving a subversive twist to the legionary soldier's *dictum* about Caesar elevating his common soldiers to the rank of *equites.*

The trouble begins when rumours about the size and ferocity of Ariovistus' men create panic and despair throughout Caesar's army. The narrator makes it very clear that the blame lies with Caesar's staff officers: the tribunes, prefects, and other aristocratic hangers-on with little military experience (1.39.2). Their poor morale eventually makes its way even to the experienced soldiers, centurions, and squadron-officers, who invent excuses about supply-lines and rough terrain (1.39.5).

Caesar responds with a lengthy speech delivered to his officers, including the centurions of all cohorts (1.40.1), although usually the staff officers and most senior centurions alone comprise his *consilium.*[42] Even these distinctions between equestrian officers, centurions, and the body of the army appear nowhere in the substantial *oratio obliqua* speech itself, which seems to blur the separation between officers and army. When Caesar is made to ask, in indirect discourse, 'why they had lost faith either in their valour or in his own good management?' (*cur de sua uirtute aut de ipsius diligentia desperarent?*, 1.40.1), it is impossible to know whether the 'they' represents the officers to whom Caesar is speaking or soldiers about whom he is speaking. The important distinction is the one between Caesar and everyone else; all other differences of rank are secondary. While the officers had reported to Caesar that 'the *soldiers* will not obey orders' if told to march toward the enemy (*non fore dicto audientis milites*, 1.39.7), the indirect discourse of Caesar's speech elides such a specific subject when he quotes this claim back, assimilating the officers to the men on whom they are trying to place blame: *quod non fore dicto audientes neque signa laturi dicantur* ('As for the fact that it was said they/you would not obey orders nor advance the standards …', 1.40.12). Caesar thus aims his lecture at the officers and rank and file alike. He threatens to march alone,

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[41] For a detailed treatment of this episode, see James (2000); on the perceived threat of non-elite speech to elite social power, see O'Neill (2003); Worley (2018).

[42] James (2000) 57.

accompanied by only the 10th legion, 'about which he had no doubts, and which would be his personal guard' (*de qua non dubitaret, sibique eam praetoriam cohortem futuram*, 1.40.15). This authoritative exercise of speech, and the final threat, breaks the incipient mutiny; the soldiers apologise to Caesar through their officers, and morale returns.[43] As the envoi to this demonstration of good and bad talk among the ranks, the soldier's joke confirms that the soldiers' morale is back and that their general again has their full trust: now instead of fearing Ariovistus and second-guessing Caesar's strategy, they indulge in a moment of levity.[44] We can also see the joke as a more specific 'reward' for the loyal legion, embodied in the unnamed soldier; by including it, Caesar confirms his special trust in the 10th legion.

But the soldier's joke also takes a step further the narrative's presentation of equestrian and senatorial officers as useless, and indeed, harmful to morale. The anonymous soldier suggests that Caesar himself might have preferred to rely entirely on the soldiers and centurions of his favourite legion, instead of aristocratic prefects and tribunes. Corbeill describes this as an 'insidious' autocratic subtext: the soldier imagines Caesar usurping the censors' role in confirming or altering the census-class of each citizen.[45] This might give the senatorial reader of Caesar pause—especially if he were reading in 50 or 49 BCE.[46] But one may suspect that less elevated audiences and repeaters of the anecdote (if it was not made up of whole cloth, it probably circulated orally as well, as Caesar's account implies) would have enjoyed this fantasy of the social order upended for their benefit. While maintaining some distance from the anti-aristocratic sentiment himself, Caesar thus makes his *popularis* allegiance very clear.[47] If, as Wiseman has proposed, Caesar's *commentarii* were read publicly to a wide popular audience in Rome and in Italy as well as by Rome's statesmen, this lightly subversive, populist joke might have been very appealing indeed.[48]

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[43] Caesar's threat to take only the 10th legion became proverbial: Plut. *Caes.* 19.3–5; Frontin. *Strat.* 1.11.3, 4.5.11; Cass. Dio 38.46.3–4.

[44] See Montlahuc (2019) 136–40 for other examples of jokes passed between soldiers and commanders.

[45] Corbeill (2017) 149–50; Montlahuc (2019) 137.

[46] For this proposed dating of a full edition (or re-edition) of *BG* 1–7 see Nipperdey (1847) 1–8; Adcock (1956) 88–9.

[47] Wiseman (1998) 2.

[48] Cf. Wiseman (1998).

BG 4.25: **Prayer and Programmatics**

In the first invasion of Britain, Caesar's ships find Britons waiting for them on the beaches, while waves and deep shoals draw out and make uncertain the Roman attempt to land men on the shore. Then, the standard bearer of the 10th legion leaps out to impel his comrades to follow, and speaks in the first instance of *oratio recta* in the *commentarii* (*BG* 4.25.3-5):

> at nostris militibus cunctantibus maxime propter altitudinem maris, qui decimae legionis aquilam ferebat, obtestatus deos, ut ea res legioni feliciter eueniret, 'desilite', inquit 'commilitones, nisi uultis aquilam hostibus prodere; ego certe meum rei publicae atque imperatori officium praestitero'. hoc cum uoce magna dixisset, se ex naui proiecit atque aquilam in hostes ferre coepit. tum nostri cohortati inter se, ne tantum dedecus admitteretur, uniuersi ex naui desiluerunt.

> But when our men were hanging back, mostly due to the depth of the water, the standard-bearer of the tenth legion's eagle invoked the gods to give the legion success in their endeavour and said: 'Jump out, comrades, unless you want to hand the eagle to the enemy; I certainly shall fulfil my duty to the Republic and my commander!' When he had said this in a loud voice, he flung himself from the ship and began to bear the eagle against the enemy. Then our men urged each other not to let such a disgrace be incurred, and they all jumped from the ship.

Several features of this speech give it an impression of 'authenticity'. Uttered in a loud voice by an *aquilifer* from the legion that Caesar had taken as his personal guard, this brief exhortation, like the quip of the 10th-legion soldier in *BG* 1, could conceivably have been heard by the commander himself; the loud voice, at any rate, provides a plausible chain of transmission. This first instance of direct discourse in the commentaries flaunts the difference between Caesar's narration and the soldier's outburst. The very first word (*desilite*) is an imperative that could not occur except in direct speech; it is followed—in one branch of the manuscript tradition—by *commilitones*, hapax in *BG* and present in *BC* only in the mouths of others.[49] Although Suetonius

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[49] Editors have preferred *β* hyparchetype's *commilitones* to *α*'s *milites*; in the latter tradition, the prefix *con-* appears to have migrated to the previous sentence, for the impossible *contestatus* (where *β* reads *obtestatus*); see further Hering (1987) xii–xiii. In *BC* Labienus uses

relates that Caesar was the first general to flatter his soldiers with this address (Suet. *Iul.* 67.2), Caesar never portrays himself, whether as general or as narrator, descending to such a pose of camaraderie. On the level of syntax, meanwhile, the *aquilifer* uses an un-Caesarian and slightly sub-literary future perfect in *officium praestitero*, a form Cicero largely avoids outside his letters, and which appears only here in Caesar's corpus.[50] From a soldier, however, the colloquialism is plausible enough, and it sets the *aquilifer*'s speech off even more distinctly against the narrative background.

Just as his *oratio recta* breaks through the narrative texture, the *aquilifer*'s bold action breaks through his comrades' hesitation to propel the landing forward.[51] The first landing on enemy soil was a bad omen if it did not come off well; a later story about Caesar has him cleverly turn a dire omen into a presage of victory when he reframed stumbling onto land in Africa as 'grasping' the territory (Suet. *Iul.* 59).[52] The *aquilifer*'s exhortation and leap similarly turn a potentially disastrous landing into a victory where 'unimpaired good fortune' is marred only by the fact that the fleeing Britons escape Caesar's cavalry (*hoc unum ad pristinam fortunam Caesari defuit*, 4.26.5).

The *aquilifer*'s prayer and exhortation, after three and a half books where no direct discourse has appeared, may be intended to presage success for the larger endeavour of conquering Britain. With Gaul seemingly pacified and his proconsular command extended for five more years in 56, however, Caesar seems to have hoped to embark on a multi-year campaign that would end with the domination of Britain. For this he needed public support in the winter of 55–54, especially against opponents such as Cato, who had proposed that the senate should hand over Caesar to the Germans as restitution for breaking a truce to attack the Tencteri and Usipetes.[53] Caesar emphasises that his initial expedition to Britain in 55 was short, late in the campaigning season, and perforce tentative.[54] However, Caesar gives this campaign (4.22–36) nearly as much space as he would devote to the much larger and longer (and still more disappointing) campaign the next year (*BG*

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commilitones ironically and pointedly when abusing captive Caesarians; the word also seems to have been present in the garbled *sermones* in Curio's camp at *BC* 2.29.3.

[50] Pascucci (1973) 612 n. 20. See also Kühner–Stegmann–Holzweissig (1912) 147–8.

[51] Rasmussen (1963) 20–3. On the cult of the military eagles and standards: Rüpke (1990) 184–6.

[52] Cf. Frontin. *Strat.* 4.39.1–3.

[53] Meier (1995) 281–2.

[54] Richter (1977) 118.

5.8–22).[55] The *aquilifer*'s sequence of prayer, challenge, and charge adds epochal significance to the beginning of what might prove to be a campaign of conquest beyond Ocean.

The scene that Caesar depicts on the British beach—soldiers hanging back, hampered by water, and finally inspired to push forward to a fierce battle with the enemy waiting on the other side—bears some similarity to accounts of Alexander's crossing of the Granicus at the beginning of his campaign against Darius: while his army hesitated, the Macedonian king plunged into the river (Plut. *Alex.* 16.1–17.1).[56] Pompey, who cultivated a comparison with Alexander the Great from adolescence, had cemented that identity with a fabulous triple triumph over the East in 61 BCE, presented as the conquest of the *oikoumenē*.[57] But Alexander had never been able to fulfil his famous desire to cross Ocean.[58] Pompey may have equalled Alexander, but Caesar, with the invasion of Britain, set out to do what neither the Macedonian conqueror nor his Roman epigone had done. In Plutarch's words, he 'was the first to embark upon the western Ocean with a fleet' and in doing so, 'brought Roman dominion beyond the known world' (πρῶτος γὰρ εἰς τὸν ἑσπέριον Ὠκεανὸν ἐπέβη στόλῳ … προήγαγεν ἔξω τῆς οἰκουμένης τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίαν, *Caes.* 23.2–4).

The prayer that Caesar reports just before he quotes the *aquilifer*, *uti feliciter legioni eueniat*, is a version of a standard propitiary formula used at the inception of official enterprises of the Roman state as well as in personal prayers. Livy frequently includes it in solemn prayers made by the Roman people for the success of an upcoming war.[59] Certainly, the *aquilifer*'s prayer has specific relevance to the perilous situation of the soldiers about to attempt a landing on a hostile shore in choppy waters. If one were to look back on this moment of *BG* 4 as the first stage of a grand war of conquest into a land hitherto unknown, however, the prayer takes on yet more significance as an invocation of divine aid for the entire enterprise on which *imperator* and *res publica* embarked together. Caesar does not put himself forward as a new

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[55] On differences between the two campaigns see Ke Feng (2001).

[56] Direct evidence for Caesar's own use of Alexander as a model is slender: Green (1978) with prior bibliography.

[57] For Pompey's presentation of his conquests, and association of himself with Alexander cf. Sall. *Hist.* 3.88 M; D.S. 40.4; Plin. *HN.* 7.97; App. *Mith.* 577; Weippert (1972) 56–104; Seager (1979) 77–8.

[58] Romm (1992) 140–1.

[59] Hickson (1993) 63–5, 70–1.

Alexander or a new Scipio—that connection is left to the reader to make—
but he provides a resonant set-piece that make it possible to see his British
campaign in such a light. The use of a surrogate allows Caesar to pull back,
should the enterprise prove less than a glorious conquest, as in fact
happened. At the end of *Gallic Wars* 4, Caesar reports that the senate decreed
a *supplicatio* of 20 days when his exploits were announced (4.38.5). If his
campaigns in Britain had proved more successful the *aquilifer*'s prayer might
have had a more emphatic answering echo in a later commentary, in the
imperator's triumphal dedication *ob res feliciter gestas*.

BG 7.50: Apportioning Praise and Blame

Suetonius writes that Caesar suffered a reverse 'three times and three times
only' (*ter nec amplius*) in the course of his campaigns in Gaul: 'in Britain, when
his fleet was nearly destroyed by a violent storm, in Gaul, when a legion was
put to flight near Gergovia, and on the German border, when his legates
Titurius and Aurunculeius were slaughtered in an ambush' (*in Britannia classe
ui tempestatis prope absumpta et in Gallia ad Gergouiam legione fusa et in Germanorum
finibus Titurio et Aurunculeio per insidias caesis*, *Iul.* 25.2). Each of the latter
episodes, the siege of Gergovia (7.43.5–53.3) and the slaughter of his legates
Aurunculeius Cotta and Titurius Sabinus in an ambush set by the Belgian
chieftain Ambiorix (5.25.1–37.7), contains or is in proximity to an anecdote
about named centurions, as if to compensate for losses with commemor-
ations of Roman valour.[60] The exploits of the centurions Pullo and Vorenus
while besieged by Ambiorix, subsequent to the Cotta and Sabinus disaster,
have received ample attention in recent as well as older scholarship.[61] I shall
discuss only Gergovia, where explicit centurion speech directs blame away
from Caesar without requiring him to place it on his soldiers.

   As Caesar presents it, he did not intend to make a full assault on the Gallic
city of Gergovia in 52 BCE, but only wished to destroy the fortifications and
camps the Gauls had placed around the city before moving his army
elsewhere (7.43.5–46). Once the fighting starts, however, Caesar's soldiers
are carried away by the initial success of their charge and greedy for the

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[60] Rambaud (1966) 230–1; Powell (1998) 122–3. The destruction of the fleet Caesar
preferred to minimise, emphasising rather the successful transport of his army despite the
loss of ships; cf. Osgood (2009) 244–7.

[61] Gerrish (2018); Grillo (2016); Brown (2004); Cipriani (1993); Rambaud (1985); Koster
(1978); Rasmussen (1963) 23–8.

rewards that come with successfully taking a town. They ignore orders to fall back and press forward to the gates. The Gauls regroup, auxiliary reinforcements are mistaken for the enemy, and only Caesar's forethought allows the retreat to be covered by the legions that did obey orders (7.47–49.1).[62]

Blame of his army occupies relatively little space both in the *oratio obliqua* speech of Caesar *imperator* and in the narration. Instead, the narrator stresses the soldiers' spirit and confidence on the basis of previous victories (7.47.3), and Caesar's *contio* mixes praise of their concrete achievements with understated and abstracted chastisement: 'he rebuked just as strongly their lack of restraint and their overreaching, in that they thought they knew more than their general did about victory and the outcome of the situation' (*tanto opere licentiam adrogantiamque reprehendere, quod plus se quam imperatorem de uictoria atque exitu rerum sentire existimarent*, 7.52.3).

There is no mention of the consequences of the battle: that the Romans lost their opportunity to extract Vercingetorix from his fortified position and nearly 700 soldiers and 46 centurions died (7.51.2–4). Caesar's aim, as he subsequently explains (7.53.1), is to ensure that his soldiers' spirits are not affected by the defeat (*ne … animo permouerentur*) and that, above all, they do not believe that their defeat was due to the enemy's superior *uirtus*.[63] But lest the reader wonder whether this evidences Caesar's inability to control his soldiers' impulses, centurion speakers take the blame and ascribe it to their own desires for personal glory. They give the particulars that support the assessment delivered by their general.

Caesar reports a boast by the centurion Lucius Fabius, 'generally known to have said among his men that he was inspired by the rewards granted at the siege of Avaricum and would not let anyone to be before him in ascending the wall' (*L. Fabius centurio legionis uiii, quem inter suos eo die dixisse constabat excitari se Auaricensibus praemiis neque commissurum, ut prius quisquam murum ascenderet*, 7.47.7). By emphasising the widespread knowledge (*constabat*) of Fabius' boast, Caesar makes it a piece of evidence that explains and even predetermines Fabius' disastrous disobedience to orders. Fabius does ascend the wall, but he and his men are quickly killed (7.50.3).

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[62] On Caesar's account of Gergovia, see Choitz (2011) 136–8; Kraus (2010), Lendon (2005) 218–9.

[63] For this truism in Roman theories of military command, see Lendon (1999).

The centurion Petronius, by contrast, sacrifices himself to save his men, while also admitting that he bears the blame for their endangerment (7.50.4-6):

> Marcus Petronius, eiusdem legionis centurio, cum portas excidere conatus esset, a multitudine oppressus ac sibi desperans multis iam uulneribus acceptis, manipularibus suis, qui illum erant secuti 'quoniam' inquit 'me una uobiscum seruare non possum, uestrae quidem certe uitae prospiciam, quos cupiditate gloriae adductus in periculum deduxi. uos data facultate uobis consulite.' simul in medios hostes inrupit duobusque interfectis reliquos a porta paulum summouit. conantibus auxiliari suis 'frustra' inquit 'meae uitae subuenire conamini, quem iam sanguis uiresque deficiunt. proinde abite, dum est facultas, uosque ad legionem recipite.' ita pugnans post paulo concidit ac suis saluti fuit.

> Marcus Petronius, a centurion of the same legion, had tried to destroy the gates; overwhelmed by numbers and with no hope for himself, since he had already received many wounds, he turned to his squad, who had followed him, and said: 'Since I cannot save myself along with you, I shall at least look out for your lives, since I was the one who was led astray by my own desire for glory and led you into danger. Use the opportunity I provide to see to your own safety!' With that, he rushed into the thick of the enemy and, killing two of them, got the others a little way away from the gate. When his men tried to aid him, he said: 'No point in you trying to save my life; my blood and strength are already failing. Get away, while you have the opportunity! Fall back to your legion!' Within a short while he fell, still fighting, and brought about his men's salvation.

The one man who sacrifices himself to save the rest of his group is an old *topos* of Roman historiography: Petronius' action recalls the elder Cato's tribune, and perhaps even the *devotiones* of the Decii.[64] His success in saving his men is a miniature drama of sacrifice and salvation that counterbalances what is otherwise a narrative of barely controlled disaster.[65] His final order to fall back, moreover, echoes and confirms Caesar's strategy.

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[64] See above, p. 69. Kraus (2010) 57 suggests a deliberate allusion to Cato's tribune.

[65] Gerlinger (2008) 222–5.

But with his speech, Petronius also confesses responsibility. If he had obeyed orders, rather than allowing himself to be carried away by the thrill of the battle, there would be no need for his sacrifice. 'Led [*adductus*] by my own desire for glory', he says, 'I led you [*deduxi*] into danger'. Rasmussen points out that the polyptoton of *adductus* and *deduxi* draws attention to the glaring absence—unusual for a speech by a soldier—of any reference to his general, the proper leader, here displaced by Petronius' *cupiditas*.[66] Similarly, as the narrator of his own actions in direct discourse, Petronius in some sense 'usurps' the narrator-function of Caesar the author, just as he previously usurped the command from Caesar the *imperator* when he led his soldiers to the gate. In a judgement that runs directly from the battlefield to the reader's ear, Petronius confesses that by his rashness, he endangered not only his soldiers but the collectivities of the army and, ultimately, the Roman people: 'I led you into danger.' The short-form direct discourse, Adema argues, 'allows the narrator to withdraw himself from the process. The responsibility for the speech and thus, for Marcus [Petronius] admitting his mistake, is completely handed over to Marcus'.[67] Caesar's narrative subsequently confirms the truth of Petronius' words when the general Caesar chastises his army in similar terms, admonishing them for 'recklessness and greed, for taking it upon themselves to judge how far was good to proceed or what they should do' (*temeritatem militum cupiditatemque reprehendit, quod sibi ipsi iudicauissent, quo procedendum aut quid agendum uideretur*, 7.52.1).

Trustworthy Speech in the *Bellum Ciuile*

Bellum Ciuile, written up probably in 48–47 (that is, after the defeat of Pompey and in the early stages of the war in Alexandria) but left unfinished and apparently only published after Caesar's death, has a political message for its projected contemporary readers still more urgent than that of the *Bellum Gallicum*.[68] Consequently, the words Caesar attributes to soldiers take on greater weight as contemporary speech and testimony to the interpretation of Caesar's recent victory. Caesar assimilates his soldiers to the Roman people, of whose rights and privileges he paints himself the defender, and they, in the utterances he reports, express their loyalties explicitly. Much as the *aquilifer*'s prayer in *BG* 4 set up a future conquest, centurion speakers in

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[66] Rasmussen (1963) 46. See also Gerlinger (2008) 230–1.

[67] Adema (2017) 210. Cf. Görler (1977) 314–5.

[68] Batstone and Damon (2006) 31–3, 171.

BC prepare for Caesar's future victory and restoration of the Roman state. In this case, the victory would come to pass, but with consequences that would vitiate the earnest optimism Caesar ascribes to his soldiers, and—probably—cause him to abandon *BC* as a 'failed' contemporary history.

When Caesar's army was starving at Dyrrachium in the summer of 48 BCE, he writes, his soldiers were 'frequently heard to say during watches and conversations that they would eat tree-bark before letting Pompey escape their grasp' (*crebraeque uoces militum in uigiliis coloquiisque audiebantur: prius se cortice ex arboribus uicturos quam Pompeium e manibus dimissuros*, 3.49.1). Caesar has spent several chapters detailing the hardships that his army endured at Dyrrachium, where, paradoxically, the besiegers had insufficient food, while the besieged could maintain a supply chain by sea (3.47.3–4). The set-piece of Caesarian endurance shows at every turn the complete unity of army and commander. Caesar's soldiers recall without prompting (*recordabantur, meminerant*) that they suffered similar *inopia* during the Gallic campaigns, and that tremendous victories followed (3.48.5).[69] When Pompeians mock their lack of food, they throw down at them their ad-hoc bread, made from the local root they have been reduced to eating.[70] This is not, however, merely a gesture of defiance, but calculated, again apparently *en masse* (*uulgo*) and *sua sponte*, 'to diminish the enemy's hope' that Caesar's men would give up the siege from hunger (*ut spem eorum minuerent*, 3.48.2). The Caesarians, by contrast, gain hope from the sight of the grain beginning to mature in the fields, and this *spes* hardens them to endure their present *inopia*. All of these calculated and reasoned responses happen without instruction from above: Caesar is entirely absent from this section of the text.[71] The frequency of the utterance (*crebrae uoces*) complements this presentation of unity of intention, demonstrating that Caesar's soldiers not only think like him in matters of strategy and discipline, but share—and perhaps even exceed—his desire for victory. There can be no question about whether men who would live on tree bark before abandoning a chance to capture Pompey are willing soldiers in Caesar's civil war.[72]

[69] Reminding the army of past victories is a typical *topos* of the battle exhortation: Albertus (1908) 52–4; Iglesias-Zoido (2007) 155–6.

[70] Cf. Plut. *Caes.* 39.1 where the anecdote about the bread is the occasion for the brave speech. For botanical discussion see Pelling (2011) 350–1.

[71] Except of course as narrator; cf. Batstone and Damon (2006) 151–2.

[72] Westall (2018) 226 points out that in reality the situation was more doubtful: detachments of Gallic cavalry did desert to Pompey's camp (3.59–61).

In the eventual battle at Dyrrachium, which Caesar portrays as the near-annihilation of his army (3.70.1), another exemplary *aquilifer*, the historiographical descendent of the one who leapt from the ship in *BG* 4, uses his dying breath to exhort his cohort not to abandon an eagle-standard (*BC* 3.64.3):

> in eo proelio cum graui uulnere esset adfectus aquilifer et a uiribus deficeretur conspicatus equites nostros, 'hanc ego' inquit 'et uiuus multos per annos magna diligentia defendi et nunc moriens eadem fide Caesari restituo. nolite, obsecro, committere—quod ante in exercitu Caesaris non accidit—ut rei militaris dedecus admittatur, incolumemque ad eum deferte.' hoc casu aquila conseruatur omnibus primae cohortis centurionibus interfectis praeter principem priorem.

> In this battle, the *aquilifer*, although he had been badly wounded and found his strength failing him, caught sight of our cavalry. 'This standard', he said, 'I defended in life for many years and with great care, and now in death I return it to Caesar in the same trust. I beg you, don't let a military disgrace occur—something that has not before happened in Caesar's army—but bring it safely back to him.' By this chance the eagle was saved, although all the centurions of the first cohort were killed, excepting the first of the first rank.

This standard-bearer's exhortation, 'don't let this military disgrace occur (*ut rei militaris dedecus admittatur*)—something that has not before happened in Caesar's army' echoes precisely the soldiers' reaction to the eagle-bearer's leap in *BG* 4.25.5, after which they urge each other 'not to let so great a disgrace occur' (*ne tantum dedecus admitteretur*) and act accordingly.[73] There is slight evidence for the phrase's oral flavour, which might give an additional measure of verisimilitude to these scenes.[74] But this verbal echo—if indeed it would be audible—matters less than the repetition of the *topos*, whose past iterations are explicitly invoked. This *aquilifer* instructs us to recall previous instances, seemingly innumerable, where Caesar's soldiers kept the standards from disgrace and preserved their military oaths. The back-

[73] On the type-scene see Pascucci (1973) 606. On historiographical self-imitation, see Woodman (1979).

[74] *Dedecus admitti* (and indeed the word *dedecus*) occurs only in these passages in Caesar, although the phrase occurs a handful of times in Cicero (the majority in letters) and in single instances in Livy (within a speech); *TLL s.v.* 'dedecus', V.1.253.45–7.

reference to events of the *Bellum Gallicum* has a meta-function as well. The *aquilifer* reminds the audience of this work that Caesar and his men are the same commander and army who represented the interests of Rome so consistently and profitably in Gaul. Phrases like *per multos annos*, *magna diligentia* and *eadem fide* stress the continuity of Caesar's army and its virtues into Caesar's cause in the present.[75]

The eagle-bearer provides a note that turns the tide of the first stage of the fighting at Dyrrachium, and which carries through to mitigate Caesar's eventual reverse. Antony arrives to rescue the Caesarian line (3.65.1), and Caesar himself leads a surprise attack on Pompey's camp that initially succeeds (3.66.1–6). But *fortuna* intervenes (3.68.1). Cavalry lose their way, Pompey sends reinforcements, and Caesar's soldiers, in danger of being trapped between earthworks, are routed. Even when Caesar grabs the standards and tries to order his men to stand their ground (*cum Caesar signa fugientium manu prenderet et consistere iuberet*, 3.69.4), it is no use, and some of the standard-bearers even abandon their standards as they flee (*ut … alii ex metu etiam signa dimitterent*). The military disgrace the *aquilifer* wished to avoid has finally happened in Caesar's army. As at Gergovia, to which the character Caesar explicitly compares the defeat (*BC* 3.73.6), Caesar as author must establish his own blamelessness for the disaster without appearing to be self-servingly shifting the blame to his army. Caesar portrays himself in solidarity with the best part of his men when, at the end of the battle he 'takes up' both the station and the motif of desperate battlefield exhortation as if carrying on the exemplum set by the *aquilifer*. There is a pathos-laden movement of the *signum* between these two scenes: the standard-bearer prays that his standard will be handed back to Caesar, and Caesar does indeed take standards in his hand.[76] In the last of image of the battle, we see Caesar *imperator*, like his loyal *aquilifer*, apparently willing to die rather than abandon the standards.

Direct speech, Rasmussen points out, stands on an equivalent level with the narrator's voice; insofar as Caesar-narrator is 'speaking to' the reader, so too, is any inset speaker: 'The elevated diction of the [*aquilifer*'s] importunate

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[75] See Grillo (2012) 58–72 on loyalty and military oaths in *BC*; Batstone and Damon (2006) 138–40 on Caesar's own *fides*. On *diligentia* in Caesar see Ramage (2003) 334.

[76] Although Caesar the general has no direct speech here, Caesar the narrator becomes unusually overt in the very next paragraph, offering his opinion as to the reasons Pompey did not follow up on his victory and destroy Caesar's army (*credo*, 3.70.1), along with a sententious conclusion: 'So small things made a great difference on either side' (*ita paruae res magnum in utramque partem momentum habuerunt*).

prayer formula is powerful: *nolite, obsecro, committere* … These are Caesar's own words, by which he addresses the reader of this passage. The author seeks to include the reader in the shared bond that exists between *Imperator* and *aquilifer'*.[77] But Caesar insists that these are not *his* 'own words'. Caesar-narrator cedes his place as direct speaker, but the soldier who occupies it uses that privileged position to attest to the shared bond of *fides* that Caesar-*imperator*'s exemplary generalship has constituted. The extremity of the situation, the exemplary bravery of the *aquilifer* who counts his own death less than the collective disgrace of losing a standard, and the speaker's anonymity (quite literally, this speaker is 'no one of name') all give the impression of spontaneous testimony.

In a habitual use of parallel speeches for enhanced irony, the standard-bearer's exhortation, which testifies to the virtues of Caesar's soldiers and their trust in his leadership, has a counterpart in some reported words of Pompey early in the standoff at Dyrrachium, when the Pompeians trap Caesar's ninth legion as its soldiers are trying to fortify a strategic point across two hills.[78] Caesar reports a boast that Pompey is said to have made: *dicitur eo tempore glorians apud suos Pompeius dixisse non recusare se quin nullius usus imperator existimaretur si sine maximo detrimento legiones Caesaris sese recipissent inde quo temere essent progressae* ('At this juncture Pompey is said to have boasted to his friends that he didn't protest being judged an utter rookie of a commander, if Caesar's legions managed to retreat whence they had rashly advanced without severe losses', 3.45.6). Needless to say, Caesar manages to extricate his legion and they fall back in perfect order, having lost only five men in all (*u omnino suorum amissis quietissime receperunt*, 3.46.6). What estimation should we then make of Pompey? In addition to attesting to his eagerness to kill fellow citizens, which contrasts with Caesar's famed leniency, these words convict Pompey of incompetence out of his own mouth. By attributing the story of this quotation to common report (*dicitur … dixisse*), Caesar pre-empts the accusation of having invented this boast so that history and his narrative could upend it.[79]

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[77] Rasmussen (1963) 118: 'Wirkungsvoll ist die gehobene Diktion der beschwörenden Deprekationsformel: "nolite, obsecro, committere"… Dies sind Caesars eigene Worte mit denen er sich an den Leser dieser Stelle wendet. Der Autor möchte den Leser einbeziehen in die Gemeinschaft, die zwischen Imperator und aquilifer besteht'.

[78] On Caesar's predilection for ironic quotation, see von Albrecht (2009) 231–6; Rasmussen (1963) 105–6.

[79] The non-Caesarian tradition, by contrast, quotes not Pompey's boast manqué at the beginning of the siege, but Caesar's witticism on Pompey at its end: 'He doesn't know how

BC 3.91: **Words and Deeds at Pharsalus**

Caesar's final quotation of centurion speech, which occurs just before the battle of Pharsalus, makes the most of soldier-quotation to convey honestly felt truths in a notionally independent narrative voice. There are five moments of *oratio recta* in Caesar's account of Pharsalus. Caesar's brief and factual statement to his men upon realising that the opportunity for battle is at hand (3.85.4) contrasts with lengthier, self-aggrandising speeches from Pompey (3.86.2–4) and Labienus (3.87.1–4). The speech of the Caesarian centurion Crastinus, a veteran 'of exceptional valour', as he rallies his men (3.91.1–5) corresponds to a false promise made by Pompey when he flees back to his camp (3.94.5).[80]

Caesar's direct speech—the only time that he gives himself direct speech in the *commentarii*—avoids any ideological or political expression, or even any first-person singular (3.85.4): *'differendum est', inquit 'iter in praesentia nobis et de proelio cogitandum, sicut semper depoposicimus. animo sumus ad dimicandum parati. non facile occasionem postea reperiemus'* ('"We must put off our march for the moment", he said, "and make plans for battle, just as we always wished. We are ready in our hearts to fight it out, and we shall not easily find another opportunity"').[81] Even at the moment when the voice of his character inside the narrative merges with his voice as narrator, Caesar maintains the narrator's habitually factual tone and 'Caesarian' diction.[82] Instead of justifications or slogans, or anything that might betray the particular involvement of Caesar *imperator* in what is about to come to pass, there are simple statements about reality. The plural *nos* shows the unity of the general and his army. Caesar speaks on behalf of his soldiers whom, in *BC* as in *BG*, he refers to as *nostri*, 'our men', in implicit contrast to the Pompeians.[83] Here,

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to win' (*negauit eum uincere scire*, Suet. *Iul.* 36.1, cf. App. *BC* 2.260; Eutr. 6.20.3; Plut. *Apophthegmata* 206D); '"Victory would have been with our enemies, if they possessed a victor"' ('Σήμερον ἂν ἡ νίκη παρὰ τοῖς πολεμίοις ἦν, εἰ τὸν νικῶντα εἶχον', Plut. *Caes.* 39.8; *Pomp.* 65.5; cf. Pelling (2011) 251). There might be an echo here of the resigned warning of Maharbal upon Hannibal's hesitation after Cannae: *'uincere scis, Hannibal, uictoria uti nescis'* (Liv. 22.51.4; Florus 22.19; Plut. *Fab.* 17.2).

[80] See Rasmussen (1963) 119–29 on the use of speech in this episode.

[81] On Caesar's speech, see Nordling (2005).

[82] On the distinction between Caesar-narrator and Caesar-*imperator* in *BG* see Riggsby (2006) 150–5; the 'I' of the narrator has far greater presence in *BC* than in *BG*: Batstone and Damon (2006) 129–31; Grillo (2011).

[83] Rambaud (1966) 212–14; Grillo (2012) 110–130; Rossi (2000).

however, the plural *nos* recalls the authorial plural used by Caesar-narrator, who thereby pulls the reader into this community as well.

The speeches of Pompey and Labienus, by contrast, demonstrate their arrogance and delusions of an easy victory the night before the battle. Caesar even notes that a vow was taken in Pompey's camp not to return unless victorious (3.87.5–6). These Pompeian speeches and speech-acts presage ironic reversals; the Pompeian officers will return to their camp—but in flight, and only to abandon it.[84] Pompey's final piece of *oratio recta* comes as his army begins to turn and flee; he gives orders to the centurions standing guard to defend the camp, promising that he himself will look to the other gates and guard posts. This is said 'in a loud voice, such that the soldiers heard' (*clare ut milites exaudirent*, 3.94.5). But Pompey then goes to his tent, belying what he has just said. The presence of a large audience and the specification that the orders were given loudly offer an implicit verification of the anecdote's truthfulness as well as showing the extreme of Pompey's hypocrisy.[85] Caesar pre-empts the sceptical reader who might be inclined to think he has invented words for Pompey that cast him in the worst light possible.

Caesar includes the Pompeian speeches as a damning record of words that go far beyond reality and stand in utter contrast to deeds. The Caesarian centurion Crastinus provides a counterweight to Pompeian posturing with a speech that his deeds prove to be sincere and correct (3.91.1):[86]

> erat Crastinus euocatus in exercitu Caeasaris, qui superiore anno apud eum primum pilum in legione decima duxerat, uir singulari uirtute. hic signo dato 'sequimini me', inquit, 'manipulares mei qui fuistis, et uestro imperatori quam constituistis operam date. unum hoc proelium superest. quo confecto et ille suam dignitatem et nos nostram libertatem recuperabimus.' simul respiciens Caesarem 'faciam', inquit, 'hodie, imperator, ut aut uiuo mihi aut mortuo gratias agas.' haec cum dixisset primus ex dextro cornu procucurrit atque eum electi milites circiter CXX uoluntarii sunt prosecuti.

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[84] Cf. Henderson (1996) 264–5.

[85] Cf. *BG* 5.30.1–3 where the narrator also stresses the audibility of speech that reflects badly on its speaker.

[86] Rasmussen (1963) 125.

There was a certain Crastinus in Caesar's army, a recalled veteran who had served under him as chief centurion in the 10th Legion the previous year, and a man of uncommon valour. When the signal was given, this Crastinus said, 'Follow me, all you who were my squad, and give your commander the help you've promised! This battle is all that's left: when it's finished, he will recover his rank and we our freedom!' And looking back toward Caesar, he said, 'Today, Commander, I'll make you thank me, whether I live or die.' With this, he ran forward, the first man from the right wing, and select soldiers—about 120 volunteer enlistees—followed him.

As previous centurion speakers did, Crastinus exhorts other soldiers to do their duty with words that emphasise the continuity of service and the *fides* that exists between Caesar and his soldiers. His utterance also provides a piece of the *cohortatio* that Caesar omitted in his own speech. Caesar writes that he himself spoke 'in standard military fashion' (*militari more*, 90.1) and that he exhorted the army and reminded them of his many efforts on their behalf, but the particular points of the speech that he records in *oratio obliqua* are singularly odd for a pre-battle exhortation (3.90.1–2):

> testibus se militibus uti posse quanto studio pacem petisset, quae per Vatinium in colloquiis, quae per Aulum Clodium cum Scipione egisset, quibus modis ad Oricum cum Libone de mittendis legatis contendisset; neque se umquam abuti militum sanguine neque rem publicam alterutro exercitu priuare uoluisse.

> He could call on his soldiers to testify to how zealously he had sought peace, the negotiations he had conducted in conferences through Vatinius and with Scipio through Aulus Clodius, how he had striven with Libo at Oricum to send ambassadors; he had never wanted to waste soldiers' blood, nor to deprive the state of either army.

These statements seem directed at the audience of the *commentarii* rather than the internal audience. The commander's reluctance to fight is not inspirational before a battle, but it is a final reminder of Caesar's claim that he never wanted a war. Crastinus gives the part of the exhortation Caesar does not want to put into his own mouth: his soldiers are experienced veterans; now is the time for them to prove their valour once and for all; they are fighting the final battle not just for their general, but for their own freedom

as Roman citizens.[87] Caesar calls upon his soldiers as witnesses, but Crastinus' testimony goes beyond what he is called on to provide.

Although it is hardly implausible that Caesar's officers would propagate a Caesarian position, Crastinus' words, like the apparently spontaneous charge by volunteer veterans that he musters, have seemed too perfect to be true.[88] But Caesar tries to give the impression that they occurred spontaneously. Crastinus speaks about *dignitas* and *libertas* as he exhorts fellow-soldiers; only then does he make his personal promise to Caesar, almost as if only then noticing that the general is in view—and, implicitly, in earshot. Moreover, Caesar shows that Crastinus is an authentic speaker and a truthful one. His deeds match his words: Crastinus does lead his soldiers to victory and he earns special honours when he dies fighting, culminating in the memorial that Caesar gives him in the text (3.99.2–3):

> interfectus est etiam fortissime pugnans Crastinus, cuius mentionem supra fecimus, gladio in os adversum coniecto. neque id fuit falsum, quod ille in pugnam proficiscens dixerat. sic enim Caesar existimabat eo proelio excellentissimam uirtutem Crastini fuisse optimeque eum de se meritum iudicabat.

> Also killed fighting with the utmost bravery was Crastinus, whom we mentioned above. A sword was found thrust right into his face. Nor did his speech on entering battle prove false. For Caesar could thus judge that Crastinus' valour in the battle had been the most outstanding and that he had earned his highest gratitude.

Caesar the general passes judgment on Crastinus' valour, and this provides evidence (*enim*) for Caesar's assertion as author that 'what Crastinus said when he entered battle' was not false. After the narrator has declared his speech truthful, to doubt the authenticity of Crastinus' words is to put oneself as a reader directly in opposition to the author's statement of fact. But it is difficult to take *quod ille in pugnam proficiscens dixerat* only in reference to Crastinus' promise, and not also to his exhortation and prediction of victory, reported in exactly the same way and same form.

Crastinus fills in an ideological gap that Caesar does not want to stress in his own words just before the critical battle, but he also states openly the

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[87] For these *topoi* see Keitel (1987) 154.

[88] Carter (1993) 213; on these *uoluntarii* see Damon (2015b) 294; Brown (1999) 350–52.

message of Caesar's *commentarii*: Caesar's *dignitas* and the *libertas* of the Roman people are inseparably linked.[89] Caesar distributes explicit concern for his *dignitas* as carefully as he does direct speech, reminding the reader of his willingness to accept injuries to his own *dignitas* for the sake of peace, despite how highly he values it (1.9.2), and presenting himself as a defender of the *dignitas* of the tribunes of plebs and Roman people as a whole. In his first address to his army in *BC* 1.7, however, he speaks first of the injuries done to the tribunes of the plebs and by extension to the Roman people, and, after reminding his soldiers what they have achieved for the Roman state under his leadership, asks them 'to defend their general's standing and rank from his enemies' (*ut eius existimationem dignitatemque ab inimicis defendant*, 1.7.7). Caesar reports his army's acclamation in response: *conclamant … sese paratos esse imperatoris sui tribunorumque plebis iniurias defendere* ('They shouted that they were ready to avenge the injuries done to their commander and the tribunes of the plebs', 1.7.8). At Pharsalus, Crastinus reiterates this inseparability of Caesar, his army, his *dignitas*, and the interests of *populus Romanus*, in exactly the terms that united Caesar and his army at the beginning of the work and the war.

Caesar's Centurions after Caesar: Crastinus in Plutarch and Appian

When Caesar composed the account of Pharsalus, it is possible he hoped that it would indeed be, as Crastinus declared, the last battle of war, and that he could shape a new consensus in which military charisma, aristocratic friendship ties, and republican institutions could all be smoothly reintegrated around his own person. When the *Bellum Civile* (as well as the *bellum ciuile*) ended, Crastinus' predictions should have become concretely true. Shortly, however, this framing of the war and its aftermath would become increasingly untenable, as would Crastinus' optimistic prediction. Caesar did not finish the *Bellum Civile*.[90]

For those writing or reading about Caesar's civil war when it was old history, not recent, anecdotes about centurions continued to testify to the

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[89] 'He says that he is doing it all for the sake of his *dignitas*,' wrote Cicero to Atticus in 49, 'But where is there *dignitas* except where there is *honestas*?' (*Att.* 7.11.1). On *dignitas* as a watchword for both Caesar and Pompey, see Syme (1939) 47–8; Raaflaub (1974) 149–52; Morstein-Marx (2009); Krebs (2017) 37–8.

[90] Batstone and Damon (2006) 170–1; Henderson (1996) 274–5; Raditsa (1973) 434.

loyalty of Caesar's army, but the particular words uttered by a centurion at a critical moment were no longer meaningful in the same way. In Plutarch (*Caes.* 44.9–10; *Pomp.* 71.1–3) and Appian (*BC* 2.347–8), who drew on sources written after Caesar's triumph and death, Crastinus gives a brief exhortation before Pharsalus, but it lacks the prediction that victory will bring peace, rank, and freedom.[91]

This version has Caesar see a centurion called Crassinius 'exhorting his men and rousing them to compete in valour' (ἐπιθαρσύνοντα τοὺς ὑφ᾽ αὐτῷ καὶ προκαλούμενον εἰς ἅμιλλαν ἀλκῆς, Plut. *Caes.* 44.9), whereupon Caesar asks him how he thinks the battle will go: 'τί ἐλπίζομεν᾽ εἶπεν ‘ὦ Γάϊε Κρασσίνιε, καὶ πῶς [τι] θάρσους ἔχομεν;᾽ ('"So what are our hopes Gaius Crassinius? What kind of confidence do we have?"', 44.10). Crassinius responds in a loud voice (μέγα βοήσας, Plut. *Caes.* 44.10; λαμπρῶς ἀνεβόησε, App. *BC* 2.347).[92] This time, however, he only predicts victory and promises to earn Caesar's gratitude: '"We shall win a splendid victory, Caesar! And you will praise me whether I live today or die!"' ('νικήσομεν᾽ ἔφη ‘λαμπρῶς ὦ Καῖσαρ ἐμὲ δ᾽ ἢ ζῶντα τήμερον ἢ τεθνηκότα ἐπαινέσεις᾽, Plut. *Caes.* 44.10); '"We will win, Caesar, and today you will honour me either living or as a corpse!"' ('νικήσομεν, ὦ Καῖσαρ, κἀμὲ τήμερον ἢ ζῶντα ἢ νεκρὸν ἀποδέξῃ᾽, App. *BC* 2.347).[93] The dialogue form of the anecdote, which shows even more vividly than in Caesar's version the close bond between the general and his soldiers, may go back to the source-tradition used by both Plutarch and Appian for their Caesarian narratives, believed to originate in the histories of Asinius Pollio.[94] Conspicuously absent, however, is the first half of Crastinus' speech in Caesar. Where the Caesarian Crastinus predicted that this battle would vindicate Caesar and restore popular freedom, echoing

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[91] In Lucan's account of Pharsalus, Crastinus is the first to hurl his spear (7.470–4); Bern Scholia cite Livy for this detail (*Schol. Bern.* ad 7.470, p. 240 Usener (1869)); cf. Florus 2.13.175. This tradition makes Crastinus a villainous figure, emblematic of the crimes of civil war, whose eagerness to fight ironically contrasts with his name.

[92] Following McGing's punctuation. But in light of Plutarch, perhaps Crassinius' words in Appian should instead be punctuated: ὁ δὲ ‘λαμπρῶς᾽, ἀνεβόησε, ‘νικήσομεν, ὦ Καῖσαρ, κἀμὲ τήμερον ἢ ζῶντα ἢ νεκρὸν ἀποδέξῃ᾽ ('And he shouted back, "We shall win a splendid victory, Caesar …"', etc.).

[93] Plut. *Pomp.* 71.1–3 is almost identical to *Caes.* 44.9–10, except that in the later biography, Crassinius predicts that 'you, Caesar will win' (71.2, νικήσεις) rather than 'we'.

[94] Pelling (1979) 84–5; (2011) 44–7, 366; Drummond ap. *FRHist* I.439–4. Note also the change of address from *Imperator* to the more familiar cognomen (Dickey (2002) 100–4), although by the second century, *Caesar* had become a near-equivalent.

and reinforcing Caesar's own language, this 'Crassinius' makes the much simpler prediction of victory.

The Crassinius of Appian and Plutarch's version has none of the specificity of Caesar's centurion, who spoke to the political concerns of Caesar's contemporary audience. The later incarnation of the centurion is a somewhat generic *exemplum*, a soldier whose courage, devotion, and outstanding confidence in his own prowess and his general's gratitude are rewarded by the commemoration of his brave words. In this simplification, we can perhaps see the importance of 'truth' as a criterion for centurion-speech: this tradition drops from Crastinus' boast the optimistic predictions that, even at a distance of five years, proved manifestly false. If this difference originated in Pollio's history, it is tempting to explain it as the intervention of an independent historian—who was also an eyewitness—correcting an ideologically exaggerated account. This is in keeping with the persona Pollio, one of Caesar's officers and supporters who was himself present at Pharsalus, seems to have cultivated: he claimed that Caesar's *commentarii* were 'written neither diligently enough nor with sufficient preservation of the truth' (*Pollio Asinius parum diligenter parumque integra ueritate compositos*, Suet. *Iul.* 56.4 = *FRHist* 56 F 8).[95] But even by the time Pollio was writing, and certainly by the time of Plutarch and Appian, the prediction that Pharsalus would be the last battle of the civil wars and would lead to the restoration of the free republic would be soggy with historical irony. A veteran prepared to die for a general he believes will restore freedom in a battle he thinks can be the last one of a civil war becomes an emblem not of military constancy but of naïveté betrayed by cynical dynasts.[96] To continue to be an archetype of the loyal soldier who could attest to the devotion Caesar inspired in his army, 'Crassinius' could not speak all the words Crastinus had spoken in Caesar. His profession of faith in Caesar as a champion of popular *libertas* had to disappear, leaving merely the centurion's more generic promise of loyalty and (fulfillable) prophecy of victory.

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[95] On Pollio's historiographical self-representation see Morgan (2000); Drummond ap. *FRHist* I.441–2, III.528–9.

[96] Thus Peer (2016) 126 on Caesar's Crastinus.

Conclusion: From Caesar's Soldiers to Caesarian Soldiers

Caesar uses deeds and memorable speeches of his soldiers to shore up his authority and persona with his readers, and to draw them into the community that he creates. The reliable voices of soldiers model for the reader how to interpret pivotal episodes: the first invasion of Britain, the defeat at Gergovia, the battle of Pharsalus. The centurion scenes of *Bellum Civile* build on those of *Bellum Gallicum* precisely so that Caesar's civil war campaigns appear to be a continuation—at least as far as his army and his command are concerned—of 'normal' Roman warfare and military hierarchy. When Caesar's soldiers vie to demonstrate their *uirtus* and repay their commander with *fides*, they do so in the battle-line, fighting, at least nominally, on behalf of the Roman people. They constitute a Roman community that can be made into a synecdoche for all Roman citizens, and this fact makes their testimony so useful to Caesar's ideological aims. Caesar's soldiers speak out of both sides of their mouth, as it were, simultaneously attesting to Caesar's promises to his armies and the Roman populace and assuaging conservative fears of revolution.

This was a fine line to walk, and the supplements to Caesar's *commentarii* written by unknown officers or hangers-on in Caesar's army show how the message (and perhaps the audience) of the Caesarian party after Caesar's death had shifted from the message of Caesar in the early 40s. These so-called 'continuators', particularly those who wrote up Caesar's campaigns against Petreius, Scipio Metellus, and Juba I in Africa (*Bellum Africum*) and against the younger Cn. Pompey in Spain (*Bellum Hispaniense*), created partisan narratives unlike Caesar's relatively conciliatory *Bellum Civile*.[97] The narrators take as given that Caesar represents legitimate Roman power; his Roman enemies disgrace themselves explicitly by bowing to their foreign allies or assimilating their barbarity.[98] Centurion speakers, who appear with particular frequency in the *Bellum Africum*, now serve not as representatives of the Roman people, but as members of the smaller collective of Caesar's army, ranged not only against the opposing army, but sometimes even against the elite civilians in Caesar's camp.[99] On more than one occasion,

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[97] Gaertner (2017); Cluett (2009); cf. Batstone and Damon (2006) 89–116.

[98] See, e.g., *BAfr.* 54.1–6; 57.2–3; *BHisp.* 42.6; Cluett (2003) 121–4.

[99] E.g., Caesar's banishment of military tribunes who care only for their own comforts at *BAfr.* 54.1–5 (cf. *BG* 1.39.2, above, pp. 75–6); the near-massacre of high-ranking civilians in Caesar's camp at *BAfr.* 85.6–8.

Pompeian commanders try to tempt Caesar's soldiers to desert by suggesting that they have been deceived or coerced, only for their slippery words to be refuted by exemplary Caesarian loyalty and *uirtus*.

In these confrontations with Pompeian officers in *Bellum Africum*, Caesar's soldiers oppose their collective identity as experienced fighters in Caesar's army to Pompeian ideological claims about the Roman people and the *res publica*. When Titus Labienus, Caesar's onetime officer but now a Pompeian general, taunts a Caesarian soldier on the battlefield near Ruspina, asking, "'Why so feisty, trainee solder? Has he [sc. Caesar] hoodwinked you, too, with his fine words?'" ('*quid tu' inquit 'miles tiro, tam feroculus es? uos quoque iste uerbis infatuauit?*', *BAfr.* 16.1), the soldier responds by identifying himself as a veteran of Caesar's 10th legion. When Labienus affects not to know him, the unnamed solider promises that "'you'll soon recognise who I am'" ('*iam me quis sim intelleges*') and "'now you'll know it is a soldier of the 10th who is after you'" ('*Labiene, decumanum militem qui te petit scito esse*', 16.3). Like Caesar's standard-bearers, this soldier proves the truth of his words with a brave gesture. He hurls his spear in a quasi-epic challenge, albeit an only partially successful one, as he wounds Labienus' horse, but not the man himself.[100]

In another episode, the Pompeian general Scipio Metellus captures a ship of Caesarian veterans and recruits near Thapsus. He offers them not only their lives but monetary rewards if they abandon the "'criminal commander'" whose "'instigation and orders have compelled [them] to attack fellow citizens and all worthy men'" (*illius scelerati uestri imperatoris impulsu et imperio coactos ciues et optimum quemque nefarie consectari*) and join him in "'defending the republic alongside all worthy men—as you ought to do'" (*si, id quod facere debetis, rem publicam cum optimo quoque defendetis*, *BAfr.* 44.4). A veteran centurion steps forward and refuses the offer, declaring his loyalty to his commander Caesar and his army (45.2–5).[101] Although subsequent versions of this anecdote make the centurion's response a snappy *dictum*, the *Bellum Africanum* author gives him an extended and elaborate speech, not a *bon mot* but a model response from a model Caesarian partisan that occurs at nearly the exact centre of the work.[102] Although the centurion thanks Scipio with barbed politeness, he rejects any possibility of abandoning his commander and his comrades: "'Am I to stand armed and opposite Caesar my commander, in whose army I made my rank, and against his army, for

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[100] Cf. Müller (2001) 160–1.

[101] Cf. Val. Max. 3.8.7–8; Suet. *Iul.* 68.1; Plut. *Caes.* 16.8.

[102] Müller (2001) 303–4.

whose reputation and victory I have fought for more than thirty-six years?"' ('*egone contra Caesarem imperatorem meum apud quem ordinem duxi, eiusque exercitum pro cuius dignitate uictoriaque amplius xxxui annos depugnaui, aduersus armatusque consistam*?', 45.3)

After thirty-six years of service, this soldier has been fighting in his legion longer than Caesar has been its commander, and, indeed, he makes the remarkable claim to fight on behalf of the army's *dignitas et uictoria*.[103] This centurion has no interest in, or simply refuses to engage in, a debate about who fights on behalf of the republic, or whose army constitutes citizens. Rather, he offers to prove the superiority of Caesar's army: '"choose whichever of your cohorts you think the strongest, and array it against me. For my part I shall take no more than ten of my comrades now in your custody. Then you will realise from our valour what you should expect from your armies!"' ('*elige ex tuis cohortem unam quam putas esse firmissimam, et constitue contra me; ego autem ex meis commilitonibus quos nunc in tua tenes potestate, non amplius x sumam. tunc ex uirtute nostra intelleges, quid ex tuis copiis sperare debeas*', 45.5). Scipio has the centurion and the veterans among the captured cohort executed, an act of cruelty that belies his pretence of reconciliation.

This is a different type of exemplary end than that ventured by Caesar's centurions and standard-bearers: not death in action but martyrdom for the cause. This exemplum would become the standard type of soldier-anecdote through the second triumvirate and principate, where loyal soldiers not only refuse to abandon their commanders, but self-immolate to show their loyalty.[104]

The later tradition of absolutely loyal soldiers who confront and challenge Caesar's enemies shows by contrast how carefully Caesar deals with centurion speakers. Although they declare their loyalty to him, they do so in the course of actions that belong to a quasi-apolitical sphere of military valour: fighting at the forefront of the line, enduring hardships without complaint, preventing the disgrace of flight and the loss of the standards. Moreover, Caesar avoids making his soldiers appear to be loyal to him exclusive of loyalty to the Roman republic. When the *aquilifer* promises to do his duty to 'my commander and the *res publica*' or Crastinus declares that after the battle of Pharsalus 'we' will regain 'our' *libertas*, their implicit concerns are the concerns of Roman citizens, which happen to coincide with

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[103] Bouvet (2002) 43 n. 69; Müller (2001) 308.

[104] See, e.g., the suicide of Titinius after Philippi (Vell. Pat. 2.70; Val. Max. 9.9.2; Plut. *Brut.* 43.7–9); suicides of Otho's soldiers (Tac. *Hist.* 2.49.4; Suet. *Oth.* 12.2; Plut. *Oth.* 17.10; Dio 64.15).

devotion to their legitimate commander-in-chief. Readers (and listeners) are thus reminded of the extent to which Caesar can call upon his army's loyalty and will uphold his soldiers' interests at Rome, but they are also presented with the argument that loyalty to Caesar will also be loyalty to the *res publica*.

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5

SALLUST AND THE 'MODERN' LIE[*]

Jennifer Gerrish

Abstract: Sallust's *Histories* confront the 'modern' organised political lie and demonstrate that historical truth can only be preserved by those outside the political sphere. The speech of the historian and tribune Licinius Macer demonstrates the post-Sullan apathy towards truth. As a historian Macer might be an independent critic, but as a politician he cannot overcome the corrosive effects of organised lying. Macer's failure reinforces Sallust's assertion that his own removal from politics is key to wresting the truth from the triumvirs. If the historian's role is that of truth-teller, the ideal historian is not only removed from public life but also uses history to respond to contemporary events and concerns.

Keywords: Sallust, Roman historiography, contemporary history, triumviral history, Licinius Macer

> The difference between the traditional lie and the modern lie will more often than not amount to the difference between hiding and destroying.[1]

> At nineteen years old, I raised an army at my own initiative and expense; with it I restored freedom to the republic, which had been oppressed by the tyranny of a faction.[2]

I. Sallust's Defactualised World and the 'Modern' Lie

When I began drafting this chapter, I was holed up in central North Carolina, having complied with the governor's mandatory evacuation order as Hurricane Dorian threatened to barrel into Charleston, South Carolina. The national news coverage of the storm took

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[1] Arendt (1968) 253.

[2] *RGDA* 1.

a bizarre twist when, in a tweet, then-U.S. President Donald Trump incorrectly listed Alabama among the states facing potential impacts of the storm. In order to prevent panic, the National Weather Service (NWS) office in Birmingham, Alabama immediately issued a correction. A surreal dialogue ensued: late-night hosts and the Twittersphere made light of Trump's error and a defensive Trump doubled down by producing a week-old forecast map that had been doctored with a Sharpie marker to include Alabama in the 'cone of probability'. This was soon followed by an unsigned—but official—statement from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) rebuking the Birmingham NWS and upholding Trump's claim. The New York *Times* reported that Mick Mulvaney, the acting White House chief of staff, had instructed Wilbur Ross, the commerce secretary, to pressure NOAA to issue a defence of the president; the *Times* further reported that Ross had warned NOAA officials that the agency's failure to comply could result in terminations.[3] The manifest flimsiness of NOAA's defence of Trump's error and the fact that it was produced under threat of firing hardly mattered. It bore the sanction of the (theoretically apolitical) agency and thus became part of the 'official' historical record; future historians of 21st-century America will have to weigh its credibility against whatever else of the record remains.[4]

Watching this unfold, I wondered what Sallust would have thought of it all. I suspect that he would be unsurprised. It has become a commonplace to describe the contemporary climate as one of post-truthfulness, as though this is a novel condition, as though we have only just now suddenly stumbled

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[3] Baker–Friedman–Lavelle (2019).

[4] Although it felt consequential at the time, this example seems almost quaint from the perspective of today. I've opted to leave this introduction in place because, in my opinion, the Hurricane Dorian example illustrates the creeping insidiousness of the modern lie in a way that is even more visible in hindsight. In the case of Hurricane Dorian, Trump was soothing his wounded ego; the only intended outcome was to avoid seeming like a 'loser', one of his preoccupations. But this example is just one of many I could have chosen, and even seemingly inconsequential lies have a cumulatively numbing effect when they are deployed insistently enough; and so, by the end of 2020, the Trumpian base, nourished on a steady diet of small lies that reinforced their world-view (e.g., affirming Trump's infallibility), was well-prepared to embrace the big lie of the 'stolen' election. The ultimate consequences of this lie for American democracy are not yet known, but they will surely be far greater than a falsified weather map; the speed with which the lies escalated from absurd and face-saving (Dorian) to deadly (the January 6, 2021 insurrection) is chilling.

off the well-worn path of truth into an inscrutable forest of public deception.[5] In fact, concerns that have become inescapable parts of daily life in the United States (and, really, the globe)—rising totalitarianism, violent cultural divisions, organised lying, and the increasing irrelevance of facts—are not altogether different from the issues that plagued Sallust's triumviral world. The historiography of the *Histories* is constructed at the intersection of concomitant concerns: it struggled to bear witness to the trauma of the civil wars while those wars were ongoing and while, at the same time, the very history of those wars was being threatened with erasure by an authoritarian regime. Much like our own, Sallust's world was threatened with becoming 'defactualised' as traditional paradigms of truth and authority were disrupted by aspirant autocrats who used multiple media to drown out or paper over inconvenient truths.

The political theorist Hannah Arendt drew a distinction between the so-called 'traditional' lie and the 'modern' lie, the latter of which she described as '… the *relatively recent* phenomenon of mass manipulation of fact and opinion as it has become evident in the rewriting of history, in image-making, and in actual government policy'.[6] Whereas the traditional lie concealed secrets or the truth, the modern political lie sought to destroy and replace:

> The traditional political lie, so prominent in the history of diplomacy and statecraft, used to concern either true secrets—data that had never been made public—or intentions, which anyhow do not possess the same degree of reliability as established facts. … In contrast, the modern political lies deal efficiently with things that are not secrets at all but are known to practically everybody. This is obvious in the case of rewriting contemporary history under the eyes of those who witnessed it, but it is equally true in image-making of all sorts, in which, again, every known and established fact can be denied or neglected if it is likely to hurt the image; for an image, unlike an old-fashioned portrait, is supposed not to flatter reality but to offer a full-fledged substitute for it.[7]

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[5] A quick library database search yields dozens of examples spanning the last twenty years, though the heaviest concentration seems to be post-2016.

[6] Arendt (1968) 252; emphasis mine.

[7] Arendt (1968) 252.

The traditional and modern lies were also different in scope and target insofar as 'the traditional lie concerned only particulars and was never meant to deceive literally everybody; it was directed at the enemy and meant to deceive only him'.[8] The modern lie thus aimed to rewrite history and replace it with its own version, not just effacing but annihilating the truth entirely, and in doing so to manipulate one's own people in ways once reserved for the enemy. The 21st century has seen this unfold on both the small scale (the hurricane map example cited above) and the global (the myth of 'weapons of mass destruction' deployed as a pretext for the 2003 invasion of Iraq by the United States).[9]

The features of the 'modern' political lie described by Arendt do not seem to me 'relatively recent' at all; in fact, stripped of context, many of Arendt's descriptions of the 'modern lie' could be applied to Rome's triumviral period with great plausibility.[10] The falsehoods promulgated by the triumvirs to justify the creation and renewal of that hideous pact are well-known: the triumvirs were going to devote themselves to punishing the Liberators, ending the civil wars, and setting the state to rights;[11] the Perusine War was nothing but a bunch of bumpkins stirred up by Fulvia's machinations, and Sextus Pompey was a pirate; and (though Sallust himself did not live to see this peak of propagandistic achievement) Mark Antony was the depraved slave of Cleopatra, the *fatale monstrum* against whose Egyptian empire a necessary and just war was waged.[12] By the time it was all immortalised in the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, competing narratives and facts had been discredited and delegitimised to such an extent that Augustus could simply replace them all with a sanitised 'official' version.

While the preceding is, admittedly, a simplified and schematic representation of the breakdown of 'truth' in the triumviral years, I would

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[8] Arendt (1968) 253.

[9] To this must now be added the Republican lies about election fraud in 2020.

[10] Arendt's work often engaged with the ancient world with great thoughtfulness and subtlety, and I doubt she meant us to understand in a literal sense that these tactics had never been employed before her day; the 'novelty' she emphasised seems to be in the scale and thoroughness in lying committed by twentieth-century totalitarian regimes, facilitated in large part by the development of modern technology and modes of communication.

[11] On the 'triumviral assignment', see Lange (2009) 18–26. To be fair, the triumvirs followed through on the first of these promises.

[12] The bibliography on the creation of the Augustan myth is vast. Syme (1939) is still worth considering; one might also begin with Gurval (1995), Osgood (2006), or Lange (2009).

argue that Sallust grappled with some of the same questions as Arendt did.[13] How are we to understand the role of 'truth' when not just individual bad actors, but entire political cultures routinely and systematically deny history? And what is the role of the historian in such a defactualised world? Arendt identified the historian, along with the poet and the novelist, as a potential 'truthteller' whose position outside of politics allowed for a certain transcendence of self-interest.[14] Sallust had had a political career (quaestor in 55 BCE, tribune in 52), but had been removed from the senate rolls twice; expelled by the censors in 50 in partisan revenge for his actions as tribune in 52, he was soon reinstated (perhaps through Caesar's influence) only to forfeit his seat in 46 when faced with charges of extortion as governor of Africa. This time, his departure from public life was permanent. Perhaps Sallust did not leave politics of his own volition, but (if we take the preface of the *Catiline* at least semi-seriously) he found a silver lining: now armed with both his political experience and some critical distance, he could write history with a mind and spirit free from interest and partisanship.[15] The *Histories*, composed well into Sallust's retirement (or 'retirement'), thus offered him an opportunity to make the case for the non-partisan reporter's value as a witness and defender of historical truth.[16]

In what follows, I will argue that Sallust's *Histories* demonstrate that the idea of the 'modern' lie is nothing modern at all, but a long-lived technique of autocracy. I would also like to suggest that the criticism that the 'modern' lie is not new is *also* not new, and that Sallust engages with this idea in the *Histories*. In this respect, while the *Histories* are 'about' the 70s, they are also very much contemporary, triumviral history. Sallust is not the first historian who comes to mind when we think of 'contemporary' or 'eyewitness' history. He was a youth during the period of the *Histories* and the *Jugurtha* takes place

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[13] Here I have focused particularly on the essay 'Truth and Politics' (1968), but Arendt raises similar themes in 'Lying and Politics: Reflections on the Pentagon Papers' (1971), as well as her book *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1976).

[14] Arendt (1968) 259–63.

[15] *Cat.* 4.2: *mihi a spe metu partibus rei publicae animus liber erat*; cf. *Hist.* 1.6 R: *neque me divorsa pars in civilibus armis movit a vero* ('nor did my affiliation with a different faction in the civil war sway me from the truth').

[16] It is impossible to say whether Sallust was, in fact, completely 'objective', however that might be measured. However, I think it is reasonable to believe that *he* believed this. In an ideal world, Sallust might not have believed retirement was the best position for a historian; however, since this was the situation in which he found himself, it was surely in his interest to convince himself that his new status was advantageous.

several generations prior; while Sallust was alive for the events of the *Catiline* he seems to have played no role, and he generally does not emphasise autopsy as a claim to historiographical authority.[17] Yet all three works are undeniably concerned with themes that characterised Sallust's own day: personal ambition versus the common good, the tension between the aristocracy and the 'new men', *avaritia* and the corrupting influence of prosperity. The *Histories*, in particular, have the feel of contemporary history. The parallels between the narrative time (the 70s) and the time of composition (the 30s) were numerous and grim: political instability and violence following the death of a dictator, internal discord and external threats, disaffected veterans expecting reward, and so forth. The *Histories* are at once engaged with the past and the present, as Sallust exploited these similarities to critique the politics of his own day by analogy.[18]

Sallust was deeply interested in the conflicts between words and deeds and between pretence and reality, and he approaches both contemporary history and history of the 'past' through this lens. I have already gestured towards some of the larger-scale deceptions perpetrated by the triumvirs and we can imagine that small-scale deceit (more 'forged forecast map' than 'covert assassination') was a constant of public life. It is all too easy to imagine the same kind of cynicism and apathy towards the truth of which Arendt warned settling in during the triumviral years. The characters of the *Histories*, engaged in contests for legitimacy and supremacy after Sulla's death, display precisely that fatigue; 'truth/lies' and 'fact/fiction' have become unimportant categories. It isn't so much that what was true before is false now; it simply doesn't matter, as authority consists not in truth or even plausibility, but in arms. I will argue that Sallust shows us this apathy towards truth in the aftermath of Sulla's dictatorship as a cautionary tale for his contemporary audience. Born in the 80s and later to political families, the triumvirs themselves were products of a post-truth world, and they were not only comfortable operating within it but also seemed eager to exploit it. Sallust shows in the *Histories* how the indifference towards truth after Sulla

[17] The fragmentary nature of Roman historiography before Sallust (even more fragmentary than the *Histories* themselves!) makes it difficult to know how typical or atypical Sallust was in this respect; see Marincola (1997) 76–7.

[18] Gerrish (2019) 35–72. I should note that the *Histories* appear to have been a detailed and exciting account of the 70s and 60s, and my suggestion here that they are multivalent by no means implies that I think Sallust was uninterested in the past *qua* past; any work can have multiple purposes and interests, and the allusive interpretation presented here does not require the exclusion of others.

led to the continued de-factualisation of Roman politics, and in turn renewed civil war and the return of dictatorship. Perhaps Sallust felt that, by demonstrating to his readers that what they were experiencing was not, in fact, new and that the consequences of continuing in the status quo were both grim and predictable, as an Arendtian truth-teller he might foster among his contemporaries a more critical attitude and a willingness to confront truths, no matter how raw or unpleasant. This, in turn, may help explain why Sallust wrote the *Histories* at all, given the encroaching pessimism in his expressions of history's utility over the course of his literary career.[19]

II. The *Histories* as Witness to a Disappearing History

In the prologues of his first two works, the monographs on Catiline and Jugurtha, Sallust gives a brief defence of the value of writing history. One can act honourably by praising the state as well as performing good deeds in its service (*Cat.* 3.1), and indeed the lasting reputation of a city is predicated on the fame and skill of the writers who memorialise it (*Cat.* 8); furthermore, the past may be a source of inspiration and pride, provided there exists an audience capable of properly interpreting it (*Jug.* 4). The fragmentary state of the Latin historiographical tradition prior to Sallust makes it difficult to say how formulaic these claims may have been,[20] but there is no reason to doubt their general sincerity; after all, why write history if it has no value?

The preface of the *Histories*, on the other hand, seems to have been strangely silent on the question of the historian's purpose. I say 'seems to have been' because the *Histories* as we have them comprise some five hundred fragments that have primarily made their way to us in quotations by ancient grammarians. Modern editors have quibbled over the precise composition of the prologue, but in no iteration do we find a clear comment on the value of writing history. Perhaps the *Histories* did contain historiographical commentary that simply has not survived, but we cannot assume this; we might also suppose that Sallust was so confident in history's

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[19] Tiffou (1974) 311–14.

[20] Scanlon (1998). There are some parallels in the Greek tradition; for example, scholars have noted echoes here of Sallust's frequent model Thucydides and his creation of a κτῆμα ἐς ἀεί to be used as a guide by future readers (1.22). On Sallust's use of Thucydides see Scanlon (1980).

utility that it needed no defence.[21] I am inclined to believe that, when he wrote the *Histories*, Sallust was, in fact, still deeply interested in the purpose and utility of writing history, particularly in light of the rapidly changing world around him. The *Histories* are an allusive text on many levels, and I suggest that Sallust's historiographical reflections are consistent with that programme; rather than instruct the reader with explicit pronouncements, the *Histories* invite us to engage with questions of history's utility through characters who act as (more or less successful) meta-historians.[22] So, given the difficulty of writing history in a defactualised world, why *did* Sallust take on the project? I suggest that one of his purposes was to bear witness to that very erasure of history as it was unfolding and to provide an anchor of meaning in a world in which basic categories had become unstable. The risk of the modern, organised lie is not simply that false things will be believed and true things will not, but that an apathy towards the very notion of truth will set in:

> It has frequently been noticed that the surest long-term result of brainwashing is a peculiar kind of cynicism—an absolute refusal to believe in the truth of anything, no matter how well this truth may be established. In other words, the result of a consistent and total substitution of lies for factual truth is not that the lies will now be accepted as truth and the truth be defamed as lies, but that the sense by which we take our bearings in the real world—and the category of truth vs. falsehood is among the mental means to this end—is being destroyed.[23]

Arendt's depiction of the categorical agnosticism that results from the destabilisation of the traditional understanding of 'truth' and 'lies' is similar in spirit to Thucydides' famous observations about the instability of language

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[21] Scanlon (1998) 223: 'Either the utility of history is an issue which is so self-evident that it is not discussed in the *Historiae* proem, or assertions on utility similar to those in the preface of the *Jugurtha* were made in lost passages'. It is also possible that Sallust omitted a preface because he considered the work as a continuation of Sisenna's *Histories*, as some have supposed that Sallust took their endpoint as his starting point; but the fragmentary state of both works precludes certainty or even confidence in this assertion: cf. Syme (1964) 182 and Briscoe (2013) 308.

[22] Gerrish (2019) 73–105.

[23] Arendt (1968) 257.

and meaning in stasis, a passage to which Sallust returns in both the *Catiline* and the *Histories* (3.82.4):[24]

καὶ τὴν εἰωθυῖαν ἀξίωσιν τῶν ὀνομάτων ἐς τὰ ἔργα ἀντήλλαξαν τῇ δικαιώσει. τόλμα μὲν γὰρ ἀλόγιστος ἀνδρεία φιλέταιρος ἐνομίσθη, μέλλησις δὲ προμηθὴς δειλία εὐπρεπής, τὸ δὲ σῶφρον τοῦ ἀνάνδρου πρόσχημα, καὶ τὸ πρὸς ἅπαν ξυνετὸν ἐπὶ πᾶν ἀργόν.

And they transformed the traditional value of words in accordance with what seemed justified. For reckless audacity was considered courage on behalf of comrades, prudent forethought was considered specious cowardice, moderation a veil for spinelessness, and capacity to understand everything was considered laziness about everything.

While critics since Dionysius of Halicarnassus have quarrelled over the precise interpretation of this passage, the general consensus is that Thucydides suggests that *stasis* introduces a crisis of moral and political language as each side corrupts the meaning of value-words to justify their actions. However, as Lydia Spielberg has demonstrated, Thucydides himself is critical not just of the abuse of language but also of the 'self-serving *use* of this commonplace complaint about corrupted value language'.[25] A sort of *aporia* is reached, in which 'the "real motive" matters little more than the pretext in terms of the actual events that result'.[26] Likewise, Arendt's 'modern lie' confounds the categories of true and false so thoroughly as to render those categories meaningless. The issue is not that words mean the opposite of what they once did—that 'lies will now be accepted as truth and the truth be defamed as lies'—but rather that our ability to orient ourselves around value-categories has been utterly exhausted by systematic and pervasive deceit. Fine, then: Hurricane Dorian was forecast to hit Alabama;

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[24] *Cat.* 38.3, 52.11; *Hist.* 1.12, 1.49.24, and 3.15.11–12 R). There is a vast bibliography on the *stasis* excursus discussing both the original Thucydidean version and its reception by later writers; see, e.g., Macleod (1979), Wilson (1982), Price (2001).

[25] Spielberg (2017) 333 (emphasis mine).

[26] Spielberg (2017) 340. In addition to the Corcyra passage, Sallust no doubt also had in mind Thucydides' interest in the interplay of λόγος and ἔργον more generally (on which see, e.g., Ober (1998) 52–121). We might also contrast Sallust's 'modern' lie with Plato's so-called 'noble' lie, a type of lie which even Plato's Socrates himself admitted was something of a unicorn (*Rep.* 414c). Both are 'top-down' forms of public lying, but Plato's 'noble' lie is part of a knowing self-deception rather than a cynical attempt to gain power.

the republic has been restored. It is easiest simply to yield to the most powerful—or loudest—faction. This, of course, is precisely the point: having delegitimised competing claims to authority and ground down any potential resistance through the forceful and tireless repetition of lies, those in power can forge ahead unchallenged.

III. The Modern Lie and its Consequences in the *Histories*

If Sallust died in 35, as tradition holds, he did not live to see the *telos* of the triumviral propaganda wars: the *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*. However, before his death he would have witnessed Octavian's skilful, systematic replacement of inconvenient truths with more flattering narratives that supported his self-presentation as his father's avenger and the restorer of the republic.[27] The crisis at Perusia highlighted the human tragedy caused by the triumvirs' programme of land confiscation, as the dispossessed and suffering landowners found champions in Lucius Antonius and his powerful sister-in-law, Mark Antony's wife Fulvia. Left in charge of Italy and thus bearing the most public culpability for the land confiscations, Octavian deflected blame by omitting the plight of the landowners from his own narrative entirely and depicted the conflict as the disastrous result of Fulvia's overweening and unseemly ambitions; the acerbic ditty attributed to Octavian by Martial gives a vivid sense of the rhetoric the triumvir employed against her.[28] Octavian was also forced to reckon with Sextus Pompey, who had taken up residence in Sicily, where he welcomed refugees from the proscriptions and organised a powerful fleet.[29] Rather than engage with Sextus as a legitimate political rival with solid republican credentials, Octavian tarred him as a

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[27] Although all three triumvirs—and, no doubt, other prominent figures of the time— engaged in public self-fashioning and attacking their opponents, I will largely focus on Octavian here, since his narrative is the best attested (for obvious reasons).

[28] Mart. 11.20.3–8: *Quod futuit Glaphyran Antonius, hanc mihi poenam | Fulvia constituit, se quoque uti futuam. | Fulviam ego ut futuam? Quid si me Manius oret | pedicem, faciam? Non puto, si sapiam. | 'Aut futue, aut pugnemus' ait. Quid, quod mihi vita | carior est ipsa mentula? Signa canant!* ('Because Antonius fucks Glaphura, Fulvia has decided that this is my punishment, that I should fuck her [Fulvia] too. That I should fuck Fulvia? What if Manius were to ask that I fuck him? Should I do it? I think not, if I have any sense. "Either fuck me," she says, "or let us fight." What to do, since my dick is dearer to me than life? Sound the signal for battle!')

[29] See Welch (2012) for a welcome reconsideration of the conventional dismissal of Sextus' republican ambitions. That it took until the 21st century for a serious reappraisal of Sextus to be offered is a vivid illustration of the success of Octavian/Augustus' narrative.

pirate.[30] Like Arendt's modern lie, Octavian's revised narratives were meant to destroy the truth, not merely replace it, and they were aimed not at the enemy, but at the Roman people themselves.[31] They were persuasive not because they were *true*, but because they were plausible *enough* and they were rehearsed loudly and repeatedly. Octavian had a coercive combination of loyal troops and minimal scruples.

The political climate of the triumviral period was not at all dissimilar to the post-Sullan decade. The years that followed Sulla's abdication and death were turbulent both at home and abroad. Sulla's reign was nothing short of a cultural trauma; the unspeakable violence of his march on the city and subsequent proscriptions left Rome and Italy in tatters both physically and psychologically.[32] The domestic political scene was dominated by unscrupulous and ambitious figures who turned the widespread exhaustion and apathy towards truth to their advantage as they sought individual *dominatio* under more palatable names. In what follows, I will highlight two ways in which the *Histories'* depiction of the 70s illustrates the truth-fatigue that results from autocratic rule and pervasive, organised deceit. First, the declaration of Sulla as *hostis* ushered in what Rosenblitt has termed a period of 'hostile politics' (so called because of the rising tendency to treat political rivals—*inimici*—like enemies of the state—*hostes*).[33] In the *Histories*, we see this destabilisation of categories extended in both directions, as civil and foreign conflicts become indistinguishable; their categorisation depends not on their true nature but on the advantage of the speaker at any given moment. Second, I will argue that Licinius Macer's speech in the *Histories* illustrates the pervasiveness of the modern lie by demonstrating that Macer too has been afflicted by apathy towards the truth. As a historian he perhaps ought

[30] Octavian/Augustus' most famous declaration to this effect comes much later, in the *Res Gestae* (*mare pacavi a praedonibus*, 25.1), but we may assume that, for this shorthand reference to have been effective, this rhetoric had been employed frequently against Sextus during his lifetime.

[31] The triumvir learned along the way, and his destruction of the memory of the *bellum civile* against Sextus Pompey was more successful than his attempt to efface the Perusine War. A hostile tradition persisting well into the empire preserved a rumour that after Perusia Octavian ordered the sacrifice of 300 senators and equites at an altar to the deified Julius Caesar (Suet. *Aug.* 15; Cass. Dio, 48.14.4; cf. the allusion at Sen. *Clem.* 1.11). Sextus Pompey, on the other hand, is able to be dismissed in the *RGDA* as nothing but an anonymous pirate (*RGDA* 25.1).

[32] See Eckert (2014) and (2016).

[33] Rosenblitt (2016) and (2019) 115–39.

to be an independent critic, but as a participant in public life Macer cannot overcome the corrosive effects of organised lying.

Civil/Foreign in the Histories

The 70s and 60s were marked by a number of major conflicts, both foreign and civil. The *Histories* certainly covered the revolt of Lepidus, the Sertorian War, the Spartacus War, and Lucullus' campaigns against Mithridates; the domestic turmoil over the restoration of the tribunes' rights seems to have played a central role as well. During this period, at least as depicted by Sallust, the difference between foreign and civil wars becomes contested as individuals manipulated the parameters of 'citizen' and 'enemy' to suit their own purposes. As has already been noted, Rosenblitt has discussed the rise in 'hostile politics' at this time, or the tendency for political rivals to treat each other as *hostes* rather than *inimici*. Sallust also highlights this slippage between 'civil' and 'foreign' in the *Histories* not only by depicting his characters engaging in the elision of these categories but also by demonstrating this himself in his capacity as historian by blurring the distinctions between 'Roman' and 'barbarian' in his own characterisations.

From a 'public relations' perspective, the Sertorian War was particularly thorny for Sertorius' opponents. Although Sertorius' supporters consisted of both Romans (including other proscribed citizens) and non-Romans, Sertorius himself was most certainly a Roman citizen and former magistrate; war against Sertorius was a civil war. Furthermore, the war against Sertorius far outlived Sulla, and in the fragile years that followed Sulla's death, the continued pursuit of the proscribed may have struck some as a distasteful vestige of Sulla's programme. For Pompey, who had eagerly sought the command against Sertorius after Metellus' unsuccessful campaign, the solution to the problematic optics (and a technicality that might keep him from celebrating a triumph)[34] was simple: declare that it was a foreign war against the Spanish tribes and leave Sertorius out of the matter entirely. Thus, to celebrate his victory in Spain (3.63):

… de victis Hispanis tropaea in Pyrenaei iugis constituit.

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[34] The conventional belief is that a triumph could only be celebrated for a victory over a foreign enemy, not a Roman citizen: see, e.g., Beard (2007), though Lange (2016) has recently questioned that assumption.

… he set up the trophies on the ridges of the Pyrenees for his conquests of the Spanish.

Later sources confirm what we might guess from this fragment: Pompey intentionally omitted Sertorius from his celebration in order to maintain his eligibility for a triumph and, perhaps more importantly, to distance himself from the associations of Sulla and civil war.[35]

Pompey is one of several characters in the *Histories* to be granted his own voice in *oratio recta* (in Pompey's case, in the form of a letter to the senate).[36] The letter of Pompey purports to be a missive to the senate in 75 BCE in which Pompey complains that he has been given insufficient resources to pursue Sertorius and instructs the senate to send supplies and reinforcements. He opens the letter with a counterfactual reference to civil war, implicitly raising from the very start the question of whether he should be regarded as an enemy of Rome (*Hist.* 2.86.1):

Si advorsus vos patriamque et deos penatis tot labores et pericula suscepissem, quotiens a prima adulescentia ductu meo scelestissumi hostes fusi et vobis salus quaesita est, nihil amplius in absentem me statuissetis quam adhuc agitis, patres conscripti …

If I had undertaken so many hardships and dangers acting *against* you and my country and my gods all those times since my earliest youth when, under my leadership, your most detestable enemies were routed and your safety was secured, you could have decreed nothing worse against me in my absence than what you are doing until now, conscript fathers …

The proposition is raised as a counterfactual ('If I *had* waged a civil war, which of course I *didn't*'), but of course has a similar effect to *praeteritio*: it

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[35] See Plin. *HN* 7.96 and App. 1.108; cf. Florus 2.10.1: *Bellum Sertorianum quid amplius quam Sullanae proscriptionis hereditas fuit? hostile potius an civile dixerim nescio, quippe quod Lusitani Celtiberique Romano gesserint duce … victores duces externum id magis quam civile bellum videri voluerunt, uti triumpharent* ('What more was the Sertorian war than the legacy of the Sullan proscriptions? I do not know whether to call it a war against a foreign enemy or a civil war, because the Lusitani and Celtiberi fought under a Roman general … The victorious leaders wanted it to be considered a foreign rather than civil war so that they could celebrate a triumph').

[36] *Hist.* 2.86.

implicitly plants the possibility in the mind of the audience while explicitly disavowing it. Sallust's Pompey thus creates an adversarial relationship between himself and the senate (and, by extension, Rome) from the very beginning of his letter and reminds his readers how easily he could become a *hostis*, so mutable have the categories of 'citizen' and 'enemy' become.

   In the conclusion of the letter, Pompey blurs the distinction between civil and foreign conflicts in another way: by assimilating himself with Hannibal, Rome's *hostis par excellence*.[37] The body of the letter is devoted to Pompey's complaints about poor conditions in Spain and his demands for aid. In his closing, he bolsters his demands with a threat (*Hist.* 2.86.10):

   Reliqui vos estis: qui nisi subvenitis, invito et praedicente me exercitus hinc et cum eo omne bellum Hispaniae in Italiam transgradientur.

   You are all that's left: unless you help, although I am unwilling but as I forewarned, my army will cross over from here into Italy, and with it the entire Spanish war.

For the internal audience of the letter (the senate), the image of an army invading from the west and pouring over the Alps into Italy could not have evoked anything other than the memory of Hannibal's invasion; Pompey thus identifies himself with Rome's most feared foreign enemy. Although the geographical origin was different (the west instead of the east), this threat might also have reminded the senate of Sulla's recent violent marches on the city. For Sallust's readers in the 30s, Pompey's suggestion may have also brought to mind Caesar's march from Gaul or, in even more recent memory, Octavian's. With his threat to march his army into Italy, Pompey thus creates a multivalent allusion and ends the letter as he began it, by blurring the distinction between foreign and civil threat.

   In addition to depicting the characters in his narrative as engaged in this kind of dissembling, Sallust himself demonstrates the mutability of traditional categorisations in his own narrative voice. We see the elision of boundaries between 'foreign' and 'barbarian' in Sallust's depiction of the gladiator Spartacus (*Hist.* 4.27):

   dissidere inter se coepere neque in medium consultare.

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[37] Gerrish (2019) 83 and Rosenblitt (2019) 106–8.

They began to be divided among themselves and did not deliberate together.

This fragment describes a disagreement between Spartacus and two other leaders of the revolt, Gaius Gannicius and Castus. Maurenbrecher assigned this fragment to the Spartacus War narrative on the strength of its similarity with a parallel passage in Plutarch's *Life of Crassus*.[38] However, without that point of reference, one could just as plausibly assign this fragment to any debate in the Roman senate, since Sallust's language is taken straight from the Roman deliberative sphere. In late republican and triumviral literature, *dissidere* and *consultare* are frequently employed in a political context to describe public figures or governing bodies, not 'barbarians' like the runaway slaves.[39] For example, *consultare* appears five other times in the Sallustian corpus, in each instance referring to a formal civic body (specifically Roman senators in three of the other four examples).[40]

Although this example is brief, it is an excellent case study in the volatility of the categories of 'Roman' and 'foreign' (and, in turn, *bellum civile* and *bellum iustum*). Sallust's slave-revolt leaders do not behave like the barbarian archetypes his readers may have come to expect from historiographical accounts of earlier slave revolts.[41] Barbarians 'should' engage in trickery,

[38] Plut. *Crass.* 11. On Plutarch's use of the *Histories* as a source, see Peter (1865) in general and Konrad (1994) and Tröster (2008) as examples of studies of specific *Lives* (*Sertorius* and *Lucullus*, respectively).

[39] Cf. the following in addition to 4.27: (1) In the *Histories*, the inhabitants of Isaura Nova debate how to respond to the Roman attack: *inter quae trepida cunctisque in unum tumultuose consultantibus Servilius futilem deditionem ratus, ni met<u>s urgeret* … ('In such alarm, while they were all debating together in confusion, Servilius, reckoning that surrender was hopeless to wish for unless fear provoked it …' (2.74D); (2) in the preface of the *Catiline*, Sallust describes Rome's noble ancestors: *delecti, quibus corpus annis infirmum, ingenium sapientia validum erat, rei publicae consultabant* ('The chosen ones, to whom the body was weak with age but the spirit was strong in wisdom, deliberated about the republic', *Cat.* 6.6); (3) Sallust's Caesar advises open-minded deliberation: *Omnis homines, patres conscripti, qui de rebus dubiis consultant, ab odio, amicitia, ira atque misericordia vacuos esse decet* ('It is fitting, conscript fathers, for all men who deliberate about uncertain matters to be free from hatred, affection, anger, and pity', *Cat.* 51.1); (4) Sallust's Cato calls upon the senate to act against the conspirators: *Res autem monet cavere ab illis magis quam quid in illos statuamus consultare* ('The affair warns us, moreover, to guard against them rather than deliberate about what we should decide about them', *Cat.* 52.3).

[40] This is the only extant use of *dissidere* by Sallust.

[41] See, for example, Diodorus Siculus' depictions of Eunus and Salvius in his accounts of the First and Second Sicilian Slave Wars (Books 34–6).

sophistry, and deception, and they should not 'govern' their rebellion through rational deliberation; their conflicts should be resolved in a brawl or some other violent or theatrical means, and certainly should not be depicted as mere 'disagreements'. Sallust's description of these runaway gladiators[42] with the language of the Roman public sphere turns them into pseudo-magistrates and casts them in a role that is discordant with their identities. Non-Romans suddenly appear Roman; this, in turn, reframes their revolt as a double civil war (both internally, among the revolt leaders, and externally, as "Romans" against the Roman state). Sallust has imitated the triumvirs, but in reverse: he has deployed clever language to create civil war where it did not exist, just as the triumvirs used specious language to deny the very real civil wars in which they were engaged. Sallust thus reinforces as narrator what the characters of his narrative have enacted: in the fallout of the modern lie, truth and falsity have not simply become inverted, but rather have become meaningless.

Macer as Failed Truth-Teller

If, as I have suggested, part of the *Histories*' message is that historiography plays a crucial role in the preservation of truth, we might expect that the historian who actually appears in the narrative would be a useful vehicle for Sallust's reflections on the subject. C. Licinius Macer, tribune of 73 BCE and author of an *ab urbe condita* history of Rome, delivers one of the *Histories*' four surviving speeches, a forceful harangue of the complacency of the plebs (*Hist.* 3.15). There are multiple reasons to believe Macer's speech played an important thematic role in the history. As far as we can tell, nothing *demanded* the inclusion of a speech by Macer in particular in the *Histories*.[43] The restoration of tribunician rights was a contentious issue in the 70s, and if Sallust wanted to include a representative speech, he surely had options in terms of speakers and occasions. Without the context of Macer's speech, we cannot say for certain whether the narrative required it or whether Sallust had some other reason to include it. However, there are several suggestions in the text that its inclusion was more than just a historical necessity or

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[42] It is worth noting that the gladiator occupied a complicated position in the Roman imaginary during the late republic and triumviral years. They served as handy examples of both bravery and steadfastness in the face of certain death (e.g., Cic. *Mil.* 92); on the other hand, they also represented baseness and criminality, and so *gladiator* often served as a term of political abuse (e.g., Cic. *Cat.* 2.4.7; *Pis.* 28).

[43] Syme (1964) 200: 'Nor is Licinius Macer's intervention the cause or consequence of any important transaction.'

required by the plot. First, as has already been noted, Macer was himself a historian. Wiseman has suggested that when a historian grants a direct voice to another historian within his narrative, 'it can hardly be innocent of intertextual allusion'.[44] Likewise, I would suggest that when a historian gives voice to another historian, it can also hardly be innocent of programmatic or historiographical significance, particularly in a work with such abundant meta-historical reflection as the *Histories*.[45]

We might also expect Macer's speech to play an important programmatic role because of Sallust's apparent identification with the real Macer's historiographical approach. It has often been claimed that Sallust was sympathetic to Macer and viewed him as a genuine advocate for rights of the tribunes and the people.[46] While this claim is debatable, the remains of Macer's history suggest that, as historians, Sallust and Macer may have shared some similar views.[47] The character of Macer's work is elusive due to its poor preservation, but we can make some informed guesses. It has generally been assumed that Macer's history had a strong pro-plebeian bent, although this is based more in plausibility than on the evidence of the fragments themselves.[48] Perhaps more to Sallust's interest was Macer's depiction of the role of fratricide in the city's foundation. Macer may have been the source for the versions of the origin story presented by Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus in which the role of the brothers' dispute in the foundation of the city is emphasised.[49] The Byzantine chronographer John Malalas' version of the Romulus and Remus story is bleaker than that of either Dionysius or Livy: according to Malalas, Romulus' murder of Remus brought curses upon the Roman people, not least of which was their

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[44] Wiseman (2006) 298.

[45] Cf. Tacitus' Cremutius Cordus (*Ann.* 4.34–5).

[46] E.g., La Penna (1963) 241, Syme (1964) 200, Pasoli (1976) 108-9, Latta (1999) 226–8 and 325–9.

[47] Macer's work survives in fragments far scantier than Sallust's *Histories*; depending on the editor, the fragments number about thirty: Oakley (2013) includes 33 fragments; Walt (1997) 29, Chassignet (2004), and Beck–Walter (2004) 26. The scope of the work is not securely known, but it began at least as early as the life of Romulus and went at least through 299 BCE; Oakley posits that the absence of Macer from Livy's Books 21–45 suggests that Macer's narrative ended before 218.

[48] Hodgkinson (1997a) 1 and 25 traces the lineage of this assumption (and the accompanying 19th-century disdain) back to Mommsen.

[49] Livy 1.7.1–2; D.H. *AR* 1.87.1–4. Cf. Wiseman (1995) 143, Hodgkinson (1997b), and Oakley (2013) 321.

damnation to eternally recurring civil strife.[50] If, as Hodgkinson argues, this is a reflection of Malalas' Licinian source, it sounds as if Macer's version of the story was characterised by a preoccupation with factionalism and the reiterative nature of strife that would have resonated with Sallust.[51] It is also worth noting that Cicero expressed disapproval of Macer's historiographical style; given Sallust's opposition to Cicero's conception of history and historiography, this may well have commended Macer to Sallust.[52] A subtle linguistic allusion in Macer's speech underscores the connection between the two historians:

> … quom interim more <u>pecorum</u> vos, multitudo, singulis habendos fruendos praebetis … (*Hist.* 3.15.6)

> … meanwhile, you, the mob, like a herd of cattle you offer yourselves up to be controlled and exploited by individuals …

> Omnis homines qui sese student praestare ceteris animalibus summa ope niti decet ni vitam silentio transeant, veluti <u>pecora</u>, quae natura prona atque ventri oboedientia finxit. (*Cat.* 1.1)

> It is befitting for all men who desire to surpass other animals to strive with the greatest effort lest they pass through their lives in silence, like cattle, whom nature has made hunched over and obedient to their appetite.

The repetition of *pecus* here links Macer's speech to the famous programmatic opening passage of the *Catiline*, in which Sallust reflects on his decision to leave public life and spend his retirement writing history. From the extant fragments of the *Histories*, it appears that the preface did not contain an explicit discussion of the purpose and value of historiography, unlike the monographs (cf. *Cat.* 3, 8; *Jug.* 4).[53] Rather, as has already been mentioned, Sallust has woven multiple strands of historiographical reflection throughout

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[50] Hodgkinson (1997b) 86.

[51] Cf. Thuc. 3.82.2.

[52] On Sallust's view of Ciceronian historiography, see Woodman (1988) 117–28. Wiseman (1995) 143–4 goes so far as to speculate that it was Cicero's antagonism towards Macer that damned him to literary obscurity, at least in his own lifetime.

[53] Scanlon (1998), esp. 223–4.

the *Histories*.[54] Given that the repetition of *pecus* connects the *Histories* in general (and specifically Macer's speech) to an earlier commentary on history's value, we might understand this allusion as linking Sallust's Macer to Sallust himself, reinforcing the parallel between the two as fellow historians.

However, if we expect Sallust's Macer to demonstrate successfully the triumph of the historian over the modern lie, we are disappointed. Macer seems to self-identify as a type of truth-teller and Sallust's depiction is somewhat sympathetic, if not wholly positive, but upon closer reading it is clear that Macer is simply performing a 'more subtle version of the corrupt language topos'[55] but is not, in reality, as removed from the concomitant corrosion of language and truth as he might like to believe. In a passage that has close parallels with remarks in the *Histories*' preface,[56] Macer argues that politicians on 'both sides of the aisle', so to speak, are guilty of concealing their true motives with more noble claims, and exhorts his audience to remain vigilant against this dissimulation (*Hist.* 3.15.11–13):

> Quae profecto incassum agebantur, si prius quam vos serviundi finem, illi dominationis facturi erant, praesertim cum his civilibus armis dicta alia, sed certatum utrimque de dominatione in vobis sit. Itaque cetera ex licentia aut odio aut avaritia in tempus arsere; permansit una res modo, quae utrimque quaesita est et erepta in posterum: vis tribunicia, telum a maioribus libertati paratum. Quod ego vos moneo quaesoque ut animadvortatis neu nomina rerum ad ignavium mutantes otium pro servitio adpelletis.

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[54] Gerrish (2019), esp. 73–105.

[55] Spielberg (2017) 345.

[56] Cf. *Hist.* 1.12: *Postquam remoto metu Punico simultates exercere vacuom fuit, plurumae turbae, seditiones et ad postremum bella civilia orta sunt, dum pauci potentes, quorum in gratiam plerique concesserant, sub honesto patrum aut plebis nomine dominationes adfectabant, bonique et mali cives adpellati non ob merita in rem publicam omnibus pariter corruptis, sed uti quisque locupletissumus et iniuria validior, quia praesentia defendebat, pro bono ducebatur* ('Later, when the Punic threat was removed, there was an opening for them to cultivate disputes, and many riots, civil disturbances, and, at last, civil wars arose, while the powerful few, under whose influence most had fallen, were aiming for tyrannies under the honourable name of the senate or the plebs, and citizens were called 'good' or 'bad' not according to their worthiness of the republic, since everyone was equally corrupt; but as each man was most wealthy and could inflict the greatest harm, he was considered good, because he was protecting the status quo').

> But indeed, this was in vain, if they were planning to make an end to their tyranny before you put an end to your slavery, especially since, while other pretences have been spoken in this civil war, the struggle on both sides has been for tyranny over you. And so other things have flared up temporarily out of presumptuousness or hatred or jealousy; just one matter persists, which is contested on both sides and has been taken away from you for the future: the tribunician power, a weapon granted to you by your ancestors to fight for freedom. I advise you—I even beg you—to pay attention and not to exchange the true names of things out of cowardice and substitute the name 'tranquillity' for slavery.

So far, so good; Macer's critique of those who use favourable terms to cover up their self-interest is non-partisan, as he implicates not only the aristocracy but also the self-identified champions of the people (in which number he himself might be counted). In doing so, as Spielberg has noted, Macer attempts to position himself as independent from the culture of truth-fatigue which has taken hold in the post-Sulla years.[57] The hopes of Sallust's audience are deflated, however, by the solution Macer offers: the full restoration of the powers of the tribunes. Sallust's readers will know that this did not have the effect Macer claimed it would. Furthermore, very careful readers of Sallust will recall that this particular historical moment was cited by Sallust as yet another catalyst for the breakdown of representation and reality (*Cat.* 38):

> Nam postquam Cn. Pompeio et M. Crasso consulibus tribunicia potestas restituta est, homines adulescentes summam potestatem nacti, quibus aetas animusque ferox erat, coepere senatum criminando plebem exagitare, dein largiundo atque pollicitando magis incendere, ita ipsi clari potentesque fieri. Contra eos summa ope nitebatur pleraque nobilitas senatus specie pro sua magnitudine. Namque, uti paucis verum absolvam, post illa tempora quicumque rem publicam agitavere honestis nominibus, alii sicuti populi iura defenderent, pars quo senatus auctoritas maxuma foret, bonum publicum simulantes pro sua quisque potentia certabant. Neque illis modestia neque modus contentionis erat: utrique victoriam crudeliter exercebant.

> For when the power of the tribunes was restored during the consulship

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[57] Spielberg (2017) 346.

of Gn. Pompeius and M. Crassus, those young men who had achieved the highest power and whose age and temperaments were fierce first began to agitate the common people by criticising the senate, and later inflamed their spirits even more with bribery and promises, thus becoming famous and powerful themselves. Many of nobility fought back against them under the pretence of supporting the senate but really in search of their own advancement. For, to put it briefly, after that time there were those who attacked the republic under honourable-sounding terms—some under the pretence that they were defending the rights of the people, others allegedly strengthening the senate as much as possible—but all of them were feigning their interest in the public good and each was striving for his own individual power. There was no restraint or moderation in their efforts; both sides used their victory cruelly.

Sallust's audience already knows the outcome of Macer's suggestion, and it is by no means a correction to the disruptions of language and truth; it only underscores the ease with which labels can be manipulated in a climate where political lies have obliterated the will of the exhausted people to insist upon truth. Although his associations with Sallust himself might have set the reader's expectation that he will serve as a proxy for the truth-teller Sallust, Macer ultimately reinforces the *Histories'* trenchant pessimism.

Why does Macer fail where we might have expected him to succeed? Let us return to Arendt's conception of the truth-teller: 'Outstanding among the existential modes of truth-telling are the solitude of the philosopher, the isolation of the scientist and the artist, the impartiality of the historian and the judge, and the independence of the fact-finder, the witness, and the reporter'.[58] Historians are among those identified as figures who might play this role, but that identification is predicated on the assumption that they operate outside the political sphere. Macer, however, was deeply embedded in politics. After serving as tribune of the plebs in 73 he went on to the praetorship in 68 and was governor of an unidentified province in 67;[59] he was found guilty of extortion in 66 and, according to Plutarch, died suddenly upon hearing the verdict.[60] Unlike Sallust, Macer thus did not 'save' history-

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[58] Arendt (1968) 310.

[59] Oakley (2013) 321 explains that, since Macer was *repetundarum reus* and his trial presided over by Cicero as praetor, it is safe to assume he was indicted for extortion as a provincial governor.

[60] Plut. *Cic*. 9.1–2.

writing for his retirement (not that he ultimately enjoyed one); his histories were composed in the context of his political career. Macer's speech in the *Histories* thus demonstrates the limitations of the politically active historian in contesting the modern political lie. He cannot but be implicated so long as he remains in the political sphere, for he lacks the perspective to truly recognise the deleterious effects of the modern lie.[61]

IV. Conclusions

Macer's failure reinforces Sallust's assertion that his own removal from politics is the key to his ability to wrest the truth from the hands of the triumvirs and serve as its guardian. If the historian's role is that of truth-teller, the ideal historian is the one who is not only removed from public life himself but who also uses history to respond to contemporary events and concerns. In the preface of the *Catiline*, Sallust asserts that there is value in serving the state with words rather than deeds (*Cat.* 3.1):

> Pulchrum est bene facere rei publicae, etiam bene dicere haud absurdum est.

> It is noble to act well on behalf of the state, but it is also not useless to speak well for it.

It is impossible to know whether Sallust truly believed this or whether this is how he consoled himself on his expulsion from politics, but if we take his claim at face value, we can read Sallust's writing of an (allegorically) contemporary history as his means of continuing to contribute to the state. Just as Sallust's literary descendant Tacitus observed of life under the principate, there was a ceiling on what could be achieved politically under the triumvirs. Rather than a practical political option, Sallust seems to offer the writing of history, and in particular *contemporary* history, as a useful alternative to politics. While he could not impact the *events* of history, he could shape their memory. The allusive nature of the *Histories*' contemporary narrative renders it timeless: just as these things have happened before, they are happening again now, and will continue to happen provided that human

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[61] It may not be a coincidence that Sertorius and Spartacus, the two figures who seem to have received the most favourable treatment in the *Histories*, are political outsiders.

nature remains the same.[62] The *Histories* showed the disastrous outcomes of the apathy towards truth that pervaded the 70s, and Sallust is not especially subtle in drawing a line between the narrative and his own world. Sallust guides the reader like a 'Ghost of Christmas Yet to Come'; by reminding his contemporaries how similar circumstances played out in the past, he points his audience to the likely outcomes of their current situation if nothing were to be done differently this time. The *Histories* could thus awaken Sallust's fellow Romans from their truth-fatigue and alert them to the inevitably catastrophic results of *not* resisting the 'triumviral truths' (autocracy, loss of *libertas*, endless civil war).

It seems highly unlikely that the *Histories* were an exhortation for *all* Romans to write narrative contemporary histories (for one thing, the competition would be bad for business!). So, once shaken from their complacency, what could the majority of Sallust's readers have possibly hoped to accomplish? Individually, not much; collectively, still little. The triumvirs' power was essentially absolute by the time Sallust probably began the *Histories* in 39 BCE. Any moderation of their use of power was more likely to be strategic and self-exercised rather than motivated by public resistance. If, like Sallust, his readers could not *bene facere rei publicae*, perhaps (also like Sallust) they could *bene dicere* and refuse to let the triumviral narrative stand unchallenged. The modern lie relies upon complacency for its success, but Sallust's reader could refuse to succumb to the intellectual exhaustion brought on by organised lying. Doing so may have changed nothing about the track of history, but perhaps there was still value in fighting for the preservation of truth, 'the ground on which we stand and the sky that stretches above us'.[63]

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[62] Cf. Thuc. 1.22.

[63] Arendt (1968) 312.

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6

TACITUS AND THE OLDER GENERATION: FATHERHOOD AND ITS ALTERNATIVES IN THE *AGRICOLA**

Adam M. Kemezis

Abstract: While fatherhood in the abstract and generational succession are major themes throughout Tacitus' *Agricola*, biological father-son relationships are surprisingly under-emphasised. This article examines how Tacitus portrays Agricola's father, Graecinus. Graecinus was a significant exemplary figure thanks to his noble death under Caligula, but Tacitus allots him only one sentence. I argue that this is a marked choice that by implication positions Graecinus as a negative *exemplum* for his more circumspect but effective son. This move of Tacitus' is considered in relation to his portrayal of the 'Stoic martyrs' and to questions of generational continuity within the Roman elite between the hereditary Flavian dynasty and the age of the adopted emperor Trajan.

Keywords: Tacitus, fatherhood, Trajan, Agricola, Domitian, succession

We experience contemporary history generationally. What recent events mean to someone depends heavily on how those events map onto their life-cycle and the age-determined social roles and relationships they are involved in when the events occur. Thus for middle-aged adults, the story of two or three decades ago is something they experienced in person, but also at second hand, as the story of their parents and their parents' contemporaries. This is above all true of the political history of a patriarchal society, in which the leading roles are typically reserved for men of mature years. Few works of Roman literature illustrate

this more clearly than Tacitus' *Agricola*. This text, written likely during the joint reign of Nerva and Trajan (97–8 CE), is explicitly a posthumous tribute to the author's father-in-law, who had died in 93 after a career of military command under Nero and the Flavians. Yet from its preface on, the *Agricola* evokes (in the first-person plural) a wider, multi-generational experience of Domitian's era and the need to process it in the present. This chapter will explore how Tacitus expresses the experience of his coevals through narrating the relationships of sons to their fathers and father-figures. In particular I examine apparent tensions between biological fatherhood, in the shape of Agricola's own father, and the many surrogate or alternative forms of intergenerational male relationships present in the text.

It scarcely needs underlining how crucial paternity was to self-definition among elite Roman males at all periods.[1] From the everyday *paterfamilias* with his distinctive legal powers to senators as *patres conscripti* and the emperor as *pater patriae*, Roman culture has left us with one icon after another of idealised fatherhood, but also of filial piety. It is not so much that the elite Roman male always speaks as a father. Just as often he speaks as a son modelling his relationship to a father or other older male. This is how we see Tacitus in the *Agricola*, a text that he characterises from the start as a *professio pietatis* (*Agr.* 3.3) and which at times takes the tone of the funeral oration that a son would have been expected to give for his father.[2] Except of course that Tacitus is not Agricola's son. Agricola left no son, and Tacitus' surviving writings never mention his own father.[3] This absence or occlusion of direct paternal continuity is far from exceptional given the demographic cir-cumstances of the Roman elite, particularly the high childhood mortality, low life-expectancy for adults, and relatively late age of first marriage for men.[4] For a father to be present long into his children's adult lives was very much the exception rather than the rule. Given how saturated Roman society was with patriarchal language, it is not surprising that elite Roman males reflected often on ways of filling an absent patriarch's role by proxy. Adoption, tutelage, and other less formal mechanisms existed to provide

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[1] Studies of various aspects of Roman fatherhood will be cited throughout this article, but here one may mention Eyben (1991) for an overview of *loci classici* about fathers, Wlosok (1978) for close readings of several key texts, and Saller (1994) for a social-historical study of the functioning of paternity.

[2] On the role of the son in a *laudatio funebris*, see Flower (1996) 130–1.

[3] For Tacitus' probable father, see *PIR*² C1466.

[4] For a recent analysis of the demographic phenomena involved, see Scheidel (2009), drawing on the influential work of Saller (1994) 73–93.

fatherless children with substitutes, and there was a well developed discourse around this surrogate role.[5] For young men in particular, because of the typical age gap between husbands and wives, one's father-in-law was more likely than one's biological father to be still living, and the *socer–gener* relationship had its own particular set of social expectations.[6]

Having such a rich world of father substitutes, however, only opened up the question of how one positioned these roles relative to biological paternity. Were surrogate paternal relationships simply substitutes, satisfactory or otherwise, for an unavailable reality, or did they have positive qualities of their own, such as the possibility of choosing and being chosen out of personal and ethical affinity, or a simpler affective relationship free of the power differential that went with *patria potestas*?[7] This article will consider how questions of this kind play out in the *Agricola*. While this text is an idealised enactment of the *socer-gener* relationship, there is one biological *pater* whose role deserves more exploration than it has thus far received, namely Julius Graecinus, father of Agricola. Graecinus, as will emerge, was before his death under Caligula a not insignificant figure in his generation, one whom a good number of Tacitus' pedigree-conscious readers would have known of and expected to read about in any biographical work on his son.[8] This expectation is largely disappointed in Tacitus' text: in one of the fullest biographies in extant Latin literature, only one sentence will be devoted to the subject's father. This is surely a deliberate authorial choice.

This chapter is concerned with the implications of that choice both for the meaning of the *Agricola* and for our understanding of how Romans talked about familial, political, and cultural continuity at a key moment of dynastic change after the fall of the Flavians. In particular, Tacitus markedly avoids using Graecinus as a positive role model for his son, and implicitly presents him as a negative one. This helps Tacitus to sharpen his idealised portrait of Agricola as a pragmatic sort of senatorial aristocrat who is able to be of

[5] See on this point esp. Bernstein (2009) and Harders (2010).

[6] Most recently Gowers (2019) has read the *Agricola* alongside parts of the Ciceronian corpus as 'son-in-law literature' modelling idealised *socer-gener* relationships. In what follows, I often use the Latin terms *socer* and *gener* rather than their English equivalents, mostly to avoid such inelegant phrases as 'father-in-law-son-in-law relationships'.

[7] For the argument that the emotional aspects of father-son relationships were heavily affected by *patria potestas*, see Cantarella (2003).

[8] Suetonius makes full use of emperors' fathers (above all Germanicus in *Cal.* 1–6, as Jakub Pigón points out to me). Often they serve to set the thematic background for the life, if only, like Germanicus, by contrast. For other examples, see Garrett (2021).

service to Rome even in a time of political dysfunction. Furthermore, Agricola's seeming avoidance of his father's example is part of a larger pattern whereby Tacitus' protagonist judiciously interprets the stories of the various older men in his life to steer for himself a course that follows no single forerunner, thus retaining a level of initiative that might have been inhibited if he were still embedded in the obligations of filial *pietas* and *patria potestas*. Nonetheless, Agricola's seeming neglect or even rejection of his father's example is not without its discursive problems, and I will be exploring how Agricola's and Graecinus' stories work against the background of Tacitus' own self-positioning and of the uncertainties surrounding biological and adoptive succession at the start of Trajan's reign.

As will become clear, the questions that Tacitus poses around Agricola relative to his father-figures apply to Tacitus himself relative to Agricola, to Trajan relative to his predecessors, and to Tacitus' contemporaries relative to their counterparts under the Flavians.[9] Although the *Agricola* for the most part takes place in the 60s to early 80s CE, Tacitus, from the first pages on, implicates it in the problems of the post-Domitianic age. In this same sense, much of what we call 'contemporary history' in antiquity represents not so much immediate reportage as the processing by mature adults (authors but also part of the readership) of events from their youth. In the case of the *Agricola,* men like Tacitus, who began their adult public lives under the last Flavian and now have to deal with his successors, are coming to terms with the legacy of men like Agricola, who ended their careers under Domitian after building them under Vespasian, and Nero before him. This generational division can be seen toward the end of the *Agricola* preface when, after a brief flourish of optimism about the new era of Nerva and Trajan, the fifteen-year reign of the un-named previous emperor is characterised in ruefully emotive terms (3.2):[10]

[9] The idea of Nerva's reign as a watershed in Roman culture has been rightly questioned, but it remains one that contemporary authors clearly found it fruitful to think with, as Tacitus does here. For questions of periodisation, see now König–Whitton (2018) and many of the essays in that book.

[10] This passage can usefully be contrasted with the Severan narrative of Cassius Dio, as explored in this volume by Madsen, below, Ch. 6. Dio, as Madsen shows, constructs a unified senatorial experience of persecution by successive rulers over more than 40 years down to 222 with continued dysfunction under Alexander, such that only the older generation (including Dio) can remember properly functioning government, which makes his perspective normative. Tacitus (necessarily) posits a sharp break in the immediate past after Domitian's death, which comes at different life-cycle stages for different generations, of which he identifies with the younger.

Quid si per quindecim annos, grande mortalis aevi spatium, multi fortuitis casibus, promptissimus quisque saevitia principis interciderunt, pauci et (ut ita dixerim) non modo aliorum sed etiam nostri superstites sumus, exemptis e media vita tot annis, quibus iuvenes ad senectutem, senes prope ad ipsos exactae aetatis terminos per silentium venimus?

What, then, if during fifteen years, a great stretch of one's mortal term, many have died by chance events, and all the bravest by the cruelty of the emperor? And we are few and, as I might say, the survivors not just of those others but of ourselves as well. There are so many lost years from the span of our lives, years during which young men have become old and old men have almost reached the very end of their appointed time, and all in silence.

The experience of recent years, while uniformly negative, still takes two (and only two) distinct generational forms. One of these, the former *iuvenes*, the author identifies with himself, while the other includes his subject.[11] The two groups are going through the chronological motions of age-group succession. However, the cessation of public life and discourse summed up by *exemptis annis* and *per silentium* make one question whether the processes that ensure the continuity of the political elite, the 'passing of the torch' as it were, have been able to take place.[12] Since the quoted passage is immediately followed by a sentence that appears to anticipate the writing of Tacitus' *Histories*, we are left to wonder if the elite's task of recording the past is one

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[11] Since Tacitus is about forty years old when these lines are written, he is stretching a rhetorical point by claiming to have become a *senex*. In part this is because his parallel structure requires male adulthood to be divided into three stages that might be characterised as 'youth–maturity–old age', each encompassing fifteen years. Latin age-group vocabulary does not have a single convenient noun for a man in the second stage, maturity or middle age, i.e., a *senex* as Tacitus uses it here. Thus Varro's set of fifteen-year stages of aging (*ap.* Cens. *die nat.* 14.2) has *iuvenes* going from 30 to 45 and *senes* beginning at 60, with those between referred to as *seniores*. It is clear that terminology was highly adaptable to one's immediate rhetorical needs, and the point here may be to emphasise that Tacitus' generation have prematurely aged and Domitian has robbed them of the peak period of their lives as public men. Ten or more years later, in the *Histories* preface, Tacitus will imply that *senectus* still lies in his future (*principatum divi Nervae … senectuti seposui*, 1.1.4). For a summary of Greco-Roman schemes of the stages of aging, see Parkin (2003) 15–18.

[12] For O'Gorman (2020) 156, Tacitus is here signalling Domitian's reign as a near interruption in a generational tradition of political values and practices among senators.

of the functions that has been interrupted. It is only after this ambivalent chord has sounded that Tacitus modulates into the key of *pietas* by declaring that the subject of this biography will be his *socer*, whom he then names for the first time (3.3). Tacitus' quasi-filial relationship with his subject becomes a pattern for how the *senes* of Tacitus' world are to understand the men who were *senes* when they themselves were young. The patterning, crucially, is recursive.[13] One way to answer the question of how we relate to the previous generation is to find out how they related to their own forbears. In Agricola's case, Tacitus sets up that move by his brief but significant portrait of Graecinus.

Graecinus Before Tacitus

Before examining the crucial passage of the *Agricola*, however, we need to glance briefly at the background against which Tacitus wrote, the references to Graecinus in earlier literature. Agricola's father came from an equestrian family in southern Gaul and must have been born late in the reign of Augustus. An inscription (*CIL* VI.41069) attests that he rose to be tribune of the plebs and praetor. But for his early death, he might well have moved his family from equestrian to consular rank in one generation. We have significant posthumous references to him in two of his longer-lived contemporaries. The shorter one is in Columella, whose *De re rustica*, written perhaps twenty years after Graecinus' death, completes an opening survey of previous agricultural writers by naming Graecinus as the author of a two-book treatise on viticulture that is 'written with much charm and learning' (*Rust.* 1.1.14: *composita facetius et eruditius*). The longer is in the younger Seneca, who mentions him most extensively in the *De beneficiis* (2.21.4).[14] In discussing the sorts of people one should and should not accept favours from, Seneca tells the following story about Graecinus (2.21.5–6):

> Si exemplo magni animi opus est, utamur Graecini Iulii, viri egregii, quem C. Caesar occidit ob hoc unum, quod melior vir erat, quam esse quemquam tyranno expedit. Is cum ab amicis conferentibus ad inpensam ludorum pecunias acciperet, magnam pecuniam a Fabio

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[13] Langlands (2018) 94 notes a recursive pattern in exemplary ethics, whereby characters like Scipio Africanus or Horatius are both *exempla* in themselves and readers of earlier *exempla*.

[14] See on the episode Griffin (2013) 200.

Persico missam non accepit et obiurgantibus iis, qui non aestimant mittentes, sed missa, quod repudiasset: 'Ego' inquit 'ab eo beneficium accipiam, a quo propinationem accepturus non sum?' Cum illi Rebilus consularis, homo eiusdem infamiae, maiorem summam misisset instaretque, ut accipi iuberet: 'Rogo' inquit 'ignoscas; et a Persico non accepi'. Utrum hoc munera accipere est an senatum legere?

But if we need an example of a noble spirit, let us use that of Julius Graecinus, an eminent man whom Gaius Caesar killed for this one reason, that he was a better man than it suits a tyrant for anyone to be. When he was receiving money from friends, who were contributing for the expenses of his games, he did not take a great sum sent by Fabius Persicus [a senator apparently known for pathic sexual behaviour]. Those who take account of the gift but not the giver chided him for refusing, and he said 'Am I to accept a favour from a man from whom I won't accept a toast?' When the consular Rebilus, a man known for the same vice, sent him a greater sum, and was pressing him to allow it to be taken, he said 'Do forgive me, I didn't take Persicus' money either.' Is this accepting gifts or reviewing the Senate?

The use of Graecinus as an *exemplum* surely testifies to his posthumous reputation, and Seneca's brief mention of his eventual fate indicates that the earlier incident was typical of how his character was remembered.[15] Still, one can imagine the story being read as a less straightforwardly positive lesson than it appears in Seneca. Graecinus' rise and conspicuous talent made it inevitable that powerful people would want to do him favours, including people to whom he would not wish to be indebted. This created awkward social dilemmas that he resolved with an integrity untainted by tact. Another man might have tried to find a quieter way of declining that would minimise offence to the would-be benefactors, who were consulars of some standing. Graecinus, on the contrary, seems quite happy to make a

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[15] In what follows, I use *exemplum* in a relatively narrow sense to refer to figures and anecdotes that had wide public circulation, usually by literary means, and were widely viewed as expressing or setting general moral norms. This broadly follows Roller (2018) 3–8, though not all parts of his schema are present in all instances that I refer to as *exempla*. Other forms of role-modelling, in particular those based on individual personal relationships rather than in public contexts, are not here referred to as *exempla*. The topic of exemplarity and its ethical ramifications has now received full treatments from Roller and from Langlands (2018).

powerful enemy, if in doing so he can make a cutting epigram.[16] Furthermore, Seneca's reference to *senatum legere* casts Graecinus as a censor, by tradition a morally exalted role, but a potentially invidious one unsuited to a young man in need of peer approval, and one which in the contemporary world infringed on the emperor's prerogatives. One does not need a modern distaste for Graecinus' policing of his peers' sexual activities to see how his behaviour might create difficulties if taken as a norm.

Graecinus in the *Agricola*

Tacitus likely knew of Seneca's anecdote and surely knew of the incident it described.[17] If we turn now to Tacitus' own short narrative of Graecinus and his death, that story seems like an ominous foreshadowing. The account runs as follows (*Agr.* 4.1):

> Pater illi Iulius Graecinus senatorii ordinis, studio eloquentiae sapientiaeque notus, iisque ipsis virtutibus iram Gai Caesaris meritus: namque Marcum Silanum accusare iussus et, quia abnuerat, interfectus est.

> His [Agricola's] father was Julius Graecinus of the senatorial order, well known for his pursuit of eloquence and philosophy, who by those very attainments earned the wrath of Gaius Caesar. For he was told to prosecute Marcus Silanus and, because he refused, was killed.

Tacitus' Graecinus is a talented young man with a particular combination of abilities that gets him in trouble with Caligula. The compressed language conveys a complex dilemma: Graecinus' *studium eloquentiae sapientiaeque* attracts the anger of Caligula, but it is not simply a case of a stereotypical tyrant resenting and fearing virtue wherever it occurs. The

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[16] A similar tendency can be seen in Seneca's other mention of Graecinus, at *Ep.* 29.6. When Graecinus was asked his opinion of Aristo, a philosopher who was known for going everywhere in a carriage, he said 'I couldn't tell you, I don't know how he does when he's dismounted' (*nescio enim quid de gradu faciat*), apparently likening the philosopher to a chariot-gladiator (*essedarius*).

[17] For Tacitus' reading of Seneca, see Ker (2012) 313–15, who points out a near-quotation of the *de Beneficiis* (4.17.3) at *Agr.* 42.3. The consular Caninius Rebilus receives an obituary notice at *Ann.* 13.30, where his dignity in death seems to Tacitus inconsistent with his being *ob libidines muliebriter infamis*.

specific talents, and their being known about (*notus*) create the story. As with the incident in Seneca, Graecinus' *eloquentia* causes him to be offered an opportunity that it is morally compromising to accept but politically dangerous to reject. In this case the consequences of offending his would-be benefactor are much more serious, but his philosophical principles (*sapientia*) win out.[18] Caligula's invitation forces him to choose between death and self-betrayal, and that invitation is portrayed as an inevitable consequence of his talents becoming known.

On one level, this story is, like Seneca's, a positive portrait that establishes Agricola's *bona fides* as being from a virtuous family that was victimised by earlier tyrants as he himself will be by Domitian.[19] Nonetheless, the anecdote is remarkably brief and plain, with no really emotive language, as compared to the affecting portrait of Agricola's mother that follows it. This might be natural given that Agricola knew his mother and not his father. There was no way for Graecinus to play in person the didactic role that Romans saw as a strength of their culturally distinctive form of paternity.[20] But precisely because it was so common for Roman aristocrats to lose their fathers at a young age, Tacitus had ample rhetorical means at his disposal to create a link between a dead father and his son, and he uses none of them. In particular, there is no suggestion that the father's memory served as an inspiration or an *exemplum* to the son. This is all the more remarkable given both Graecinus' appearance in Seneca, which is presumably evidence of a wider persistence of his memory, and the often-observed affinities between the *Agricola* and the funerary *laudatio,* a genre ideally suited for imagining intergenerational continuity.[21] We can be certain that the real-life Agricola

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[18] Thus the interpretation of Woodman–Kraus (2014) 97, for whom *iisdem ipsis virtutibus* represents a sort of zeugma, *eloquentia* making him useful and *sapientia* obliging him to refuse. It is possible, however, that Graecinus' *sapientia* also makes him more desirable as a prosecutor, because of the moral authority he would bring to the job, while conversely the anecdotes from Seneca suggest that in refusing he might have employed his *eloquentia* with self-destructive effect.

[19] This is the reading of Castelli (1971), Guerrini (1977) 482 n. 5, and recently Balmaceda (2017) 162. Woodman–Kraus (2014) 97 do note that 'the danger of one's *virtutes* incurring the imperial anger was a lesson that his son tried to learn'.

[20] On Roman tropes of paternal instruction, see LeMoine (1991). It is notable that the tradition of fathers dedicating didactic works to sons begins with Cato the Elder, to whom Tacitus alludes in the opening lines of the *Agricola*. Agricola was born too late to be the dedicatee of his father's treatise, though his *cognomen* is curiously suggestive of it.

[21] It is possible that Tacitus' narrative of Graecinus is expressly constructed as a riposte to Seneca's *exemplum*-making. The *de Beneficiis* dates to some point between 56 and 64 (see

heard a great deal of praise of his father, and faced conflicting pressures both to follow his example and to avoid his fate.[22] But if Agricola ever looked at his father's *imago* (literal or otherwise) and came thus to aspire to virtue, we are not told a thing about it.

Tacitus makes it clear which of those pressures won out, which on one level explains why he does not give Graecinus a greater role. As the next section demonstrates, Agricola's career is very different from his father's. The eponymous protagonist is portrayed as, in Ronald Mellor's words, 'the first of the Tacitean survivors, through whom the historian praises accommodation and justifies his own career'.[23] He is flexible rather than intransigent, able to do good from within a bad system without becoming morally compromised. But we should not, because of this dissimilarity, read Graecinus as a minor figure whose role Tacitus minimises because his quasi-martyrdom is thematically inconvenient. In that case, Tacitus might have told his story differently, with less emphasis on the conflict with Caligula and Graecinus' moral agency in it.[24] Rather, Graecinus is well integrated into his overall rhetorical strategy. I want to suggest that this brief episode establishes a specific agenda for his son's career. The remarkable thing is not that Tacitus sets up Agricola and Graecinus as dissimilar (which presumably they were) but that he portrays their situations as so similar, both comprising the dilemma of being able, ambitious, and upright in an authoritarian climate where that is a dangerous combination of qualities. Their responses differ greatly, which generates moral and political questions that go beyond the men's individual characters and persist into Tacitus' contemporary moment. It is evidently Agricola's response that Tacitus is mainly interested in, but by placing it in the context of a father-son relationship, the historian adds layers

Griffin (2013) 91–6 for the difficulties of any more precise dating). This would have been Agricola's mid-teens to early twenties, perhaps coinciding with his 'philosophical' phase.

[22] On the aristocratic Roman obligation to live up to one's ancestors, see Baroin (2010). For a situation curiously parallel to Agricola's, see Plin. *Ep.* 3.3, in which Pliny, advising the widowed Corellia Hispulla on the education of her son, repeatedly stresses the boy's duty to display similarity to a series of male ancestors including his father, but more prominently his maternal grandfather, the addressee's own father. The idea of masks as inspiration goes back to Sallust (*Iug.* 4.5–6) and before him Polybius (6.53).

[23] Mellor (1993) 13.

[24] Tacitus probably makes the connection between Graecinus' refusal and his death artificially direct, since Silanus' and Graecinus' deaths appear to have come at least a year apart (see Soverini (2004) 126). Furthermore, Tacitus' *quia abnuerat* lays rather more stress on Graecinus' own actions than Seneca's vague *melior vir erat, quam esse quemquam tyranno expedit.*

of complexity for readers to consider in deciding how well Agricola's solution to his dilemma works.

Agricola Avoids His Father's Footsteps

Explicit characterisation of Graecinus in the *Agricola* is short indeed, being arguably confined to four words, *studio eloquentiae sapientiaeque notus*. They are four peculiarly loaded words, however, and each of them will turn out on examination to illuminate what it means for Agricola to be a different man in the same world as his father. To start at the end, the idea of being *notus* touches on the larger themes of fame and recognition that preoccupy the *Agricola* from its first sentence to its last. Evidently it is Tacitus' purpose to make Agricola *notus*, but within the narrative, being recognised for one's virtues is by no means an unqualified good. After all, being *notus* by the wrong people is what brought Graecinus to his fatal predicament. Tacitus does not suggest that Graecinus sought out fame in a reckless way: rather he presents the situation as a natural consequence of the eager pursuit (*studium*) of areas in which to display one's abilities. Under bad rulers, one has to actively avoid the dangers of recognition, and Agricola will be very careful about who notices him and when. As a military tribune, he takes care to 'become known to the army' (*nosci exercitui*, 5.1), thus laying the foundation of his future success as a commander, but otherwise *nosco* and its cognates will not be applied to him again until Tacitus' final obituary notice, when he speaks of posterity wishing to *noscere* Agricola's appearance (44.2).[25]

This is not a mere verbal coincidence, as we can see in the narrative of Agricola's early career. From his late teens to his thirties, Agricola will carry out a very careful balancing act by doing as much as he can and acquiring enough of a reputation to get noticed by the right people, without allowing his talent to become dangerously conspicuous to the world in general.[26] Thus after acquiring a favourable reputation as a military tribune he fends off a series of dangers. As a provincial quaestor in Asia, he avoids becoming corrupted by either the rich province or his venal superior (6.2). In the years after that, including his tenure as tribune of the plebs and praetor, he does as little as possible. He receives no judicial duties as praetor. He does give games that 'kept a balance between economy and open-handedness, far

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[25] One near-exception proves the rule: at 40.3, on his return from Britain, Agricola enters the city discreetly at night *ne notabilis … introitus esset.*

[26] I have explored this part of the *Agricola* more fully in Kemezis (2016).

from the taint of luxury, and closer to fame for all that' (*ludos et inania honoris medio rationis atque abundantiae duxit, uti longe a luxuria, ita famae propior*, 6.4).[27] Seneca's anecdote of Graecinus had come in the context of praetorian games, and we are perhaps invited to contrast the father's virtuous but offensive conduct with the son's combination of rectitude and finesse. The same can be said for Agricola's next assignment, (6.5) when he is commissioned by Galba to sort out the aftermath of Nero's mass plundering of the empire's temples for his post-fire building projects in Rome.[28] Agricola does emerge briefly during the Civil Wars of 68–70, but still in a self-effacing role when as legionary legate he quietly but effectively restores discipline to troops whom his self-serving predecessors had allowed to fall into disorder (7.3).

Throughout these episodes he consistently adapts his performance to suit his superiors, for good or bad, and his situation. Above all, he avoids gaining the kind of renown that would offend superiors or attract unwelcome attention in Rome. The way Tacitus tells it, the result of all this careful management is that when it comes time for him to take consular office, in better times under Vespasian, he has enough of a reputation that he is a natural candidate for the governorship of Britain, but not too much so that he seems dangerous to anyone. Thus he is able to go to Britain and earn glory to the greatest degree possible for a subject under the Principate. He avoids giving Nero any opportunity to desire or fear his talents as Caligula had done Graecinus'. The glory he eventually gains does provoke Domitian's fear, but only after Agricola's previous discretion has gotten him into a position to do far more service to the *res publica* than Graecinus ever did.

In doing so, he has conspicuously failed to display *eloquentia*, again a key quality of Graecinus.[29] We never hear of the rhetorical education that

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[27] The sense of *uti … ita* is difficult to pin down: see Woodman–Kraus (2014) 113. There is a concessive force (*OLD*, s.v. *ita* 4) of 'even though they weren't lavish, still people didn't exactly hate them', but simultaneously there is the idea that the (near-) *fama* consists of approval for his avoiding *luxuria* (*OLD*, s.v. *ita* 2 and 3). Tacitus is playing with the paradox of acquiring a reputation for avoiding reputation.

[28] For an explanation of the situation, see Ogilvie–Richmond (1967) 152. The plundering is referred to in detail at Tac. *Ann.* 15.45 and the restoration at Suet. *Nero* 32.

[29] The two other occurrences of *eloquentia* in the *Agricola* are both oddly ambiguous. At 10.1, Tacitus claims that previous writers on Britain, being ignorant of facts, have described the island with *eloquentia* rather than the *rerum fides* that he himself will employ. One sentence later, Livy and Fabius Rusticus are labelled *eloquentissimi auctores* for a geographical description of Britain that will however be shown as incomplete by Agricola's campaigns. At 21.2, the Britons under Agricola's government come to desire *eloquentia* as part of the

Agricola surely received, or of any use he ever made of it in the Senate or the courts. To be sure, he makes one speech, before the Battle of Mons Graupius, but given that it is preceded by a longer and more sophisticated oration by a Caledonian chieftain, we are presumably not meant to take it as an accurate reflection of Agricola's rhetorical gifts.[30] Many of the most significant utterances in Agricola's career are those he does not make: the boasts he omits in reports; the *iurisdictio* he does not exercise as praetor; the canvassing he does not do for a post that he then receives anyway (9.4). The biting one-liners and literary elegance for which Graecinus was known are nowhere to be found.

Graecinus' other key pursuit, *sapientia,* will find a greater and more complex resonance in his son's career, thanks to its double meaning, either as practical wisdom or as a Latinate synonym for *philosophia*. For Graecinus, it clearly has the latter signification, being paired with *eloquentia* in a quasi-educational context. The one time that a cognate of *sapiens* is ever straight-forwardly applied to Agricola, it has the former sense, referring to shrewdness in the siting of military fortifications.[31] Nonetheless, this vocabulary will also figure as part of Agricola's ongoing relationship to philosophy and its most notable Roman practitioners, which turns out to be just as ambivalent as his attitude to Graecinus.

This emerges almost immediately after the quoted passage about Agricola's father. As noted, we get a rather longer account of how Agricola was raised in Massilia by his widowed mother Julia Procilla. In particular, we hear that he early showed an interest in philosophy, and that in fact he 'took to the study of philosophy avidly, more so than is permitted for a Roman and a senator' (*Agr.* 4.3: *studium philosophiae acrius, ultra quam concessum Romano ac senatori, hausisse*). Read in isolation, this reflects a traditional Roman anxiety that the governing class will turn from *negotium* to *otium* and withdraw from public life. But surely *studium philosophiae* is meant to be read in light of

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aping of Roman ways that Tacitus characterises as an aspect of their enslavement (*pars servitutis*). The word and its cognates are also remarkably scarce in the *Histories,* with only four instances (1.1.4; 4.7.5, 42.1, 43.3).

[30] Nearly all commentators on the two speeches find Calgacus' the more compelling: see recently Rutherford (2010) 314–9; also Soverini (2004) 230, for whom Agricola's speech is conventional and overloaded with clichéd allusions.

[31] *Agr.* 22.2: *adnotabant periti non alium ducem opportunitates locorum sapientius legisse.* At 27.1, some previously timid lieutenants of Agricola's who become more aggressive after a victory are sarcastically termed *illi modo cauti ac sapientes.*

Graecinus' *studium sapientiae*, which had a very different result.[32] *Ultra quam concessum*, after all, could mean 'more than is permitted by our cultural norms' or 'more than is permitted by our political climate'.[33] When Procilla intervenes to constrain Agricola's philosophical tendencies, she is directing him towards one traditional view of Romanness, but she is also drawing him away from the path that had led to his father's death, which forced her to take over Graecinus' role of supervising Agricola's entry into elite male society.[34] But the double meaning of *sapientia* allows for a complex play on words. Tacitus claims that after Agricola recovered from his philosophical episode, he 'retained the part of philosophy that is moderation' (*retinuit … ex sapientia modum*), which introduces one of our hero's signature character-istics.[35] Agricola's whole career will be characterised by *modus, modestia*, and *moderatio*, and these can indeed be said to constitute *sapientia*. In a masterfully double-edged *sententia*, Tacitus will justify Agricola's inactivity as tribune and praetor by claiming that he was 'aware of the conditions of Nero's reign, when indolence served for wisdom' (6.3: *gnarus sub Nerone temporum, quibus inertia pro sapientia fuit*). The word is Graecinus', but the behaviour is quite the opposite.

 Studium, the last of the four words applied to Graecinus, also has a curious pattern of usage in the *Agricola*.[36] In references to Agricola himself, we have just seen it used of his abortive start down his father's philosophical path. In the immediately previous sentence (4.2), Massilia is called his *magistram*

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[32] The Grecism *philosophiae* is a marked choice for Tacitus. Outside of the *Dialogus* he uses it or cognates only twice more, both in disparaging contexts (*Hist.* 3.81, referring to Musonius Rufus' abortive peace-making, and *Ann.* 13.42 in a speech castigating Seneca's hypocrisy).

[33] Tacitus' readers in the 90s might have read in *ultra quam concessum* an anticipation of Flavian-era sanctions against philosophical teaching, to which Tacitus has referred at *Agr.* 2.2.

[34] One might have expected this role to fall to a male *tutor*, as I am reminded by Jakub Pigón, but none is mentioned. The 'M. Julius Graecinus' who put up *CIL* VI.41069 in memory of Agricola's father (L. Julius Graecinus) was likely Agricola's paternal uncle, and might naturally have taken on the task, though we have no information on how long he lived after the elder Graecinus' death (see *PIR*² I 345).

[35] For the vocabulary of *modus* in the Tacitean corpus see esp. Christes (1993). Balmaceda (2017) 157–241 also makes *moderatio* a key term in her study of Tacitus as reflecting the changed nature of *virtus* in the post-Augustan monarchy.

[36] There is one further use of *studium* in addition to those cited below: in describing Britons' political disunity (12.1), Tacitus says that they *per principes studiis ac factionibus <dis>trahuntur*.

studiorum. But the adult Agricola never displays this quality. Instead, it is used of things he avoids (Agricola does not choose subordinates based on *studiis privatis*, 19.2) or deprecates (Agricola prefers the *ingenia* of the Britons to the *studiis* of the Gauls, 21.2). This is not unexpected, since Tacitus typically uses *studium* to refer to intellectual activities rather than the military pursuits that are Agricola's strong point.[37] What it means in practice, though, is that the word is also applied to targets of Domitian's oppression. In the preface (3.1), Tacitus notes apropos of Domitian's tyranny and fall that *ingenia studiaque* are more easily repressed than revived. Much later (39.2), imagining Domitian's private response to Agricola's successes, Tacitus has the tyrant reason that it was pointless to suppress *studia fori* if subordinates were still permitted to earn military victories. In the *Agricola*, Domitian's targeting of *studium* has a quite specific meaning. The earlier of the two references just quoted comes directly after Tacitus' long prefatory discussion of various iconic and persecuted oppositional figures of the previous reign, notably Herennius Senecio and Arulenus Rusticus, and how Domitian suppressed their writings about an earlier generation of dissidents (2.1–2). These characters to varying degrees shared the *studium sapientiae* that Graecinus pursued and his son renounced.[38] The language used to describe Graecinus sets up an opposition with his son that aligns the father with Flavian dissidents. This is not exactly a surprising move, given the facts of Graecinus' case, but it will have important implications for Tacitus' complicated positioning of Agricola and himself relative to these celebrated figures. This is explored in detail below, after I have further considered how Graecinus colours Agricola's role in his own narrative.

The Failure of Paternity?

The figure of Graecinus thus negatively reinforces key aspects of Tacitus' portrait of Agricola, but also complicates its ethical colouring. Implicitly positioning his hero's father as a negative role model creates considerable

[37] Thus, though Tacitus discusses young Agricola's enthusiasm for all things military (5.3: *militaris gloriae cupido*), he does not use any phrase comparable to the *armorum studium* found at Liv. 41.20.12 (see also Plin. *Pan.* 13.5) or Cicero's *studium bellicae gloriae* (*Off.* 1.61).

[38] Tacitus' reference to Rusticus and Senecio is paired with one to the expulsion of philosophers (*expulsis insuper sapientiae professoribus*). Brunt (1975) and Penwill (2003) have sensibly cautioned against any straightforward equation between Neronian/Flavian dissidence and Stoicism, but Tacitus does much to associate the two ideas, however imprecisely, which indeed has contributed to the modern search for a 'Stoic opposition'.

discursive problems, some of which become all the sharper in the specific contexts of Tacitus' relationship to Agricola and of the transition from Domitian's reign to Trajan's. We have seen that Tacitus goes out of his way to emphasise Agricola's departure from the paternal model. But at no point does Tacitus deny that Graecinus is a virtuous man, and therein lies the problem. In a society like Rome's, should it not be possible, indeed ideal, for a son to imitate the behaviour of a virtuous father, what Pliny (*Ep.* 8.13) terms the *optimum et coniunctissimum exemplar*?[39] Is there not something wrong with a community in which he is obliged to do the opposite?[40]

Tacitus had options for how to approach this problem. Given that for Tacitus' readers there obviously *was* something wrong with society under Caligula and Nero, one could see the exemplary problem simply as an extension of the overall tyrannical dysfunction that led to Graecinus' death in the first place. Tyrants are hostile to virtue, therefore to imitate a virtuous exemplar entails replicating their fate in an exemplary cycle. As we will see, there were works circulating in Tacitus' time that portrayed the Domitianic dissidents in just those terms relative to their predecessors of the 60s and 70s. This presented an obvious problem in Agricola's case, given that he had survived and flourished, which by the above logic suggests he had failed to live up to the merits of his martyred father. This might have been finessed, however. As Rebecca Langlands has recently emphasised, Roman exemplary ethics was by no means a process of rote imitation.[41] In using a particular *exemplum*, one had always to consider differences between one's own situation or character and those of the model. It was sometimes wrong for a Torquatus to engage in single combat or for an Arria to follow her husband into suicide.[42] One can imagine a version of the *Agricola* in which the hero finds a way to draw on his father's example without following him to an early grave. The two men obviously had similarities: energy, brains,

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[39] Important *loci* for parental exemplarity include Cic. *Off.* 1.116 and Sen. *Contr.* 10.2, the latter cited by Roller (2004) 24–5, who gives a brief but important survey of the Republican tradition of family exemplarity. See Baroin (2010) for examples of how often sons are spoken of as in some sense copies (*imagines*, etc.) of a paternal original.

[40] This can be linked to the larger issue highlighted by Whitmarsh (2006) that the *Agricola* seems to make a special effort to point out unsettling discursive alternatives to the text's ostensible message.

[41] See Langlands (2018) 112–27 and also (2011).

[42] See respectively Liv. 8.7 and Tac. *Ann.* 16.35, both cited by Langlands (2018) 114–18.

courage, and a certain directness of manner.[43] The *Agricola* could have been a more straightforward story in which the military life offers the son scope for displaying the *virtus* he inherited from his father without the perils of doing so in Rome.[44] Agricola's thwarting of Domitian's efforts to stamp out everything *honestum* might have been portrayed as a vindication of his father.

This is not at all the way Tacitus tells the story. Rather than emphasise their similar characters and different situations, he emphasises the similarity in their situations and the differences in their characters. We have already seen how the key characteristics of Graecinus are significantly absent in his son. As it turns out, the converse will apply: the virtues that Agricola does have are those his father did not possess. Above all, as previously noted, there are the cluster of attributes cognate with *modus* and *moderatio*. This includes being able to read situations and people and respond to their differences—Agricola's *sapientia* tells him that where you build a fort is just as important as how. Contrast Graecinus' untimely displays of wit and talent. Furthermore, Agricola's ability to demonstrate ability without being punished is not simply the result of his having chosen the military life as safer. On the contrary, when Tacitus describes his hero's first yearnings for military glory, he calls that inclination 'unwelcome in times that take an unkind view of those who stand out, when a great reputation brings no less danger than a bad one' (*ingrata temporibus quibus sinistra erga eminentes interpretatio nec minus periculum ex magna fama quam ex mala*, 5.3). The trap into which Graecinus fell is still there, and Agricola will avoid it by displaying the moderation and situational awareness that his father lacked. Agricola is not playing Graecinus' role on another stage, and indeed one does not get the impression that he ever wanted to act like his father, even if the political climate had permitted it. Agricola's virtues are very different from his father's assertive verbal talents, and, crucially, better suited to a monarchical state, be the emperor bad or good.[45] But these are awkward doctrines for a

[43] The passage at *Agr.* 22.4 in which Agricola is said to be *ut … comis bonis, ita adversus malos iniucundus*, and to have been open rather than secretive in his disapproval, is reminiscent of the little we know of Graecinus, though the line is mainly meant as a contrast to the opposite characteristics as displayed by Domitian.

[44] One overall reading of the *Agricola* is that it locates *virtus* under Domitian in military activity and frontier zones, whereas in Rome amid civilian activities it cannot operate. See Clarke (2001) and Balmaceda (2017) 161–72.

[45] The idea of Agricola as representing the new ruling class of the post-Julio-Claudian state is powerfully laid out by Syme (1958) I.26–9, while a more straightforward version of Agricola as *exemplum* for the Trajanic consensus-regime is set forth by Geisthardt (2015) 39–

society that placed so much ideological weight on the *mos maiorum*, and the problem of paternity with which this section began persists.

Another solution might be substitution. As noted above, Roman society had much discursive room in it for surrogate father figures. Even here, however, Agricola's case gives us no simple instances of generational continuity. To be sure, there is an abundance of older male figures, from the corrupt Salvius Titianus to such able soldiers as Frontinus and Cerialis, who offer a range of alternative models for Agricola as he encounters them, and for us comparing them in hindsight.[46] Agricola will learn from all of them, positively and negatively, but no single older man plays a dominant role in Agricola's youth or is allowed to become the paternal model Graecinus might have been. The closest is his first commander, Suetonius Paulinus. This impressive military figure of the 40s and 50s is characterised as a *diligenti ac moderato duci* who makes the tribune Agricola his *contubernalis* (5.1).[47] The two men's relationship is dealt with in one sentence, but Paulinus will later figure in Tacitus' account of the various governors of Britain (14.3–16.2), all of whom are models of a sort for the future Agricola. He comes across as an able general, but one who over-reached in his conquests (*terga occasioni patefecit*, 14.3) and permitted administrative abuses (15.1), all of which led to the Boudican revolt. Even if the *Agricola* stresses the virtues and autonomy of earlier senatorial commanders, the prevailing impression is still that Agricola has charted his course with little aid beyond his own wits, which have allowed him to distinguish his elders' virtues from their errors so as to draw advantage from both. His seemingly dispassionate picking and choosing in fact reminds one more of Tacitus' own authorial persona in his later histories than of any affective practice modelled on familial continuity.[48]

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82. An important Russian-language treatment of the question can be found at Knabe (1980), a partial English translation of which is being prepared for publication.

[46] McGing (1982) shows convincingly how the various supporting characters in the *Agricola* serve as counterpoints to bring out the virtue of the hero, although he does not mention Graecinus. For an instructive analysis of Frontinus' brief role in the *Agricola*, see König (2013).

[47] For *contubernium* as analogous to a parental relationship, see Bernstein (2008) 225–6, though citing pedagogical relationships from Fronto rather than military ones.

[48] Langlands (2018) 86–111 emphasises the affective and emotional aspects of engaging with an *exemplum*, although in her presentation they co-exist with an intellectually discerning approach as seen above (n. 41). For the argument that Tacitus rejects moral exemplarity in historiography, see, e.g., Luce (1991).

Tacitus, Agricola and the 'Stoic Martyrs'

Where, one then asks, does this leave Agricola's relationship to Tacitus? The younger man's *professio pietatis* evidently positions him in a quasi-filial role toward Agricola. The latter's chain of paternal continuity is broken on both ends, thanks to the deaths of two infant sons, both carefully noted by our narrator (6.2, 29.1) and one should further note that by the dramatic date of the *Agricola* Tacitus has been married to Agricola's daughter for twenty years, and there is no reference to any grandson of our hero.[49] Tacitus thus positions the whole work within the economy of ethical heredity, with its overtones of exemplarity. The *Agricola* opens and closes with the idea of 'passing on to our successors' either the memory of famous men (*clarorum virorum facta moresque posteris tradere*, 1.1) or, somewhat more daringly, Agricola himself (*Agricola posteritati narratus et traditus superstes erit*, 46.4).[50] The last section, which recalls the peroration of a *laudatio funebris*, includes the suggestion that, rather than mourning Agricola, readers should 'show you [i.e., Agricola] honour by admiring you, praising you, and, if nature permits, by being like you' (*admiratione te potius et laudibus et, si natura suppeditet, similitudine colamus*, 46.2).

Here we return to the question with which this article began, that of how Tacitus' contemporaries deal with the legacy of the previous generation and their experiences under Domitian. The *Agricola* is explicitly an intervention in political discourse as well as an act of filial piety.[51] In particular, it is clearly in dialogue with other commemorative biographical works, those written about (and in some cases by) oppositional figures of the Neronian and Flavian periods.[52] The preface to the *Agricola* singles out works on Thrasea

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[49] Judging from *Agr.* 9.6, the marriage took place in 76 or 77: see Birley (2005) 76–7 with references. There is no literary or epigraphic evidence that Tacitus had any children at all: Birley (2000) 236–8 does note that if, as it appears, Tacitus was born in 58, then he held several offices unusually early, which might be explained by a fruitful marriage. However, Tacitus' final apostrophe takes in his wife and mother-in-law (*Agr.* 46.3) and it would have been strange to omit children of either sex, had any survived.

[50] See Woodman–Kraus (2014) 67–9 for the reminiscences of the elder Cato.

[51] On Tacitus' writings as both modelling and constituting political speech under the monarchy, see now O'Gorman (2020).

[52] For this literature in connection with the *Agricola*, see recently Szoke (2019) and now Whitton (2020). The idea of these men as a coherent group united by Stoic philosophical beliefs is notably set forth in the first two chapters of MacMullen (1966); see more recently Wilkinson (2012) 61–82, who sees Stoicism as secondary (to specifically Roman political

Paetus and the elder Helvidius Priscus written by like-minded men, Arulenus Rusticus and Herennius Senecio respectively, who were themselves then put to death by Domitian for doing so.[53] Further laudatory writings on oppositional personalities of the previous generations were emerging under the new regime in the late 90s.[54] Significant political and literary figures were anxious to take on their legacy under the new regime through a politics of memory and redress. Not the least of these was the younger Pliny, whose correspondence puts on show his relationships with Arulenus Rusticus' surviving brother Mauricus and Helvidius' widow Fannia.[55] At more or less the same time in 97 that Tacitus was writing the *Agricola*, Pliny was prosecuting one Publicius Certus, an apparently secondary figure in the denunciation of the younger Helvidius, and circulating his prosecuting speech as *De Helvidi ultione*.[56]

Tacitus' characterisation of these men is complicated, both in the *Agricola* and elsewhere in his corpus.[57] He recognises their claims as morally courageous victims of tyranny, and condemns both Domitian for suppressing them and himself and his peers for acquiescing (*Agr.* 2, 45). Nonetheless, Agricola's way is very different from theirs. The qualities that set Agricola apart from his father do the same, relative to his oppositional contemporaries. Tacitus' famous final verdict on his hero's career draws the contrast (42.4):

ideology) but not irrelevant. For objections to the philosophical or ideological character-isation, see n. 38 above.

[53] Both works, and their authors' fates, are mentioned by Cassius Dio (67.13.2), while Rusticus' work is mentioned alone by Suetonius (*Dom.* 10.2–3) and Senecio's by Pliny (*Ep.* 7.19.5–6). For their place in the genre of works on *exitus illustrium virorum* and Tacitus' contacts with them, see Marx (1937) (discussing mostly *Annales* 15–16), Pigoń (1987) (with specific reference to the *Agricola* preface), and Sailor (2008) 11–24.

[54] Pliny's letters specifically name two authors, Titinius Capito (*Ep.* 8.12.4, mentioning *exitus inlustrium virorum* with no further specification) and C. Fannius (*Ep.* 5.3.3, *exitus occisorum aut relegatorum a Nerone*, three books completed at the author's death).

[55] O'Gorman (2020) 140–8 is the most recent of many studies of this aspect of Pliny's correspondence.

[56] Related in detail (and with more than ten years of hindsight) in *Ep.* 9.13. On the trial, see now Gibson (2020) 103–5, also Geisthardt (2015) 32–8, with reference to the extensive earlier scholarship.

[57] Important recent considerations of Tacitus' relationship to the 'Stoic opposition' in the *Agricola* particularly include Whitmarsh (2006), Sailor (2008), esp. 11–24, and Lavan (2011). For extended arguments that Tacitus is fully sympathetic to Thrasea Paetus *et al.*, see Turpin (2008) and Strunk (2017) 104–31.

Sciant, quibus moris est inlicita mirari, posse etiam sub malis principibus magnos viros esse, obsequiumque ac modestiam, si industria ac vigor adsint, eo laudis excedere quo plerique per abrupta, sed in nullum rei publicae usum ambitiosa morte inclaruerunt.

May they know, they who always so admire transgression, that great men can exist even under bad emperors, and that obedience and restraint, when combined with an energetic diligence, can attain to those same heights of renown that many have reached by dangerous paths, who there shone forth in deaths that were ostentatious but of no public advantage.

It is difficult to see what this passage could be referring to if not the 'Stoic martyrs' and the literature about them.[58] For all that Tacitus deplores their deaths and admires their virtue, the *Agricola* presents a hero and an ethos that are at odds with all they represent. Agricola's entire course of behaviour, from his self-effacement as a military tribune to his management of Domitian after his return, are the opposite of how Tacitus at this early stage of his own career characterises Helvidius *et al.*

In turn, Tacitus' positioning of himself relative to Agricola also looks like an answer to the oppositional-hagiographical approach to the Flavian past. While the works in question have not survived, we can guess that they emphasised generational continuity and its memorialisation. The Flavian-era senatorial opposition, after all, depended heavily on family continuities both biological and elective, from Thrasea Paetus to his *gener* Helvidius Priscus to the latter's less illustrious but equally martyred son, with female counterparts in the two Arrias and Fannia.[59] These links not only gave

[58] This is the generally accepted reading of the passage, but Woodman–Kraus (2014) 303 and Strunk (2017) 14–18, writing from very different critical perspectives, both express doubts based on what they perceive to be Tacitus' favourable attitudes towards the same characters elsewhere. In neither case, however, is a convincing alternative suggested for who the *plerique* might be. Given these oppositional figures are mentioned several times in the rest of the *Agricola*, it seems to me impossible that readers would not have thought of them. Turpin (2008) makes several specific suggestions about the reading of this passage that are not adopted here: see my arguments in Kemezis (2016) 110 n. 51.

[59] For the various relationships, see Syme (1991). O'Gorman (2020) 156–65 sees Pliny in particular as positioning himself as leading figure of a new generation in this tradition, even though he has no formal family ties to Helvidius *et al*. O'Gorman sees less difference between Tacitus' and Pliny's positions than do I.

structure to the 'movement', such as it was, but perhaps more importantly gave emotive authority to each new generation's repetition of the cycle of resistance, withdrawal, and martyrdom. As laudatory biographer of his own *socer*, Tacitus may seem to be enacting this practice—indeed more closely than the earlier works, which do not actually include a son/*gener* writing about his own father/*socer*. As Helvidius was to Paetus and Senecio to Helvidius, so is Tacitus to Agricola, but with the opposite message, one of pragmatism rather than intransigence, and survival rather than self-sacrifice. Tacitus himself would thus represent a new generation that had survived under Domitian as Agricola had survived under Nero and were now in a position to assist their fellow-survivor Trajan in reviving the fortunes of the *res publica*. The same history was now material for a different set of contemporaries, and different characters could provide *exempla* for the behaviours needed in the new age.

The *Agricola* does invite such a reading, and we are meant to consider the idea of Tacitus as counterpoint to Senecio and Rusticus. The role of Graecinus, however, is one of many aspects of the *Agricola* that should make us question how fully such a reading can be sustained. To judge from the behaviour of the people in question, and indeed the feeling of *déjà vu* that hangs over the Domitianic opposition, the works in praise of Paetus and Helvidius emphasised a relatively direct form of continuity and exemplarity. The memory of martyrs was to bring forth more martyrs. This is precisely the kind of continuity that Agricola rejects relative to Graecinus. As he emerges from the shadow of one paternal *exemplum*, Agricola seems never to seek out another. Again, this brings us to Tacitus' self-positioning. For all the reverence Tacitus shows Agricola, and for all they are both survivors of tyranny, they are dissimilar in many ways that Tacitus seems rather to emphasise than minimise. Dylan Sailor has cogently pointed out how Tacitus in the *Agricola's* preface positions himself in the role of literary senator over against Agricola the military man.[60] If anything, Tacitus is superficially more similar to Graecinus than to his son.[61] Both are authors and practitioners of *eloquentia*. Graecinus, however, had written a witty agricultural treatise under a bad emperor and in the political realm his *eloquentia* was harmful to him rather than serviceable to the *res publica*. Tacitus emphasises

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[60] Sailor (2008) 51–118.

[61] It is worth considering in this context the suggestion of Woodman–Kraus (2014) 330, based on Columella (*Rust.* 1.1.14), that the *posteritati … traditus* of the *Agricola's* final sentence (46.4) echoes a phrase that Graecinus had used to describe his own viticultural treatise.

his own silence under a bad ruler, which has seemingly enabled him to survive so he can now write high-status, politically meaningful literature under good ones.

One might suppose that Tacitus was able to escape Graecinus' fate because he had before him Agricola's example of *moderatio* and was able to apply it in a different role. But that is not how Tacitus tells the story, at least not exactly. In his final words on his hero (45.1), Tacitus claims that Agricola was spared the last and worst episode of Domitian's tyranny, the trials in late 93–early 94 of Rusticus, Senecio, and the younger Helvidius.[62] These are presumably the events that Tacitus is thinking of when he claims his generation experienced 'the final stage of slavery' (*quid ultimum … esset … in servitude*, 2.3). He presents the episode as a collective trauma for senators, but also a disgrace and a source of guilt for the roles they were forced to play in destroying their colleagues. He famously repeats (45.1) how 'our hands led Helvidius into prison' and that 'we' were soaked with the blood of Senecio and felt the gaze of Mauricus and Rusticus. These are the events that would have been in readers' minds earlier in the *Agricola* when they read of Graecinus dying rather than participate in similar prosecutions under Caligula. Whether through good fortune (*tu vero felix … etiam opportunitate mortis*, 45.2) or Domitian's poison (43.2), Agricola never experienced this ordeal, but one cannot help asking how he would have responded if he had been alive and active. It is difficult to see how his characteristic *moderatio* would have allowed him to rise above the general humiliation and disgrace. In that sense his exemplary value comes up against a hard limit, and it is notable how much emphasis Tacitus chooses to lay on precisely the problems where Agricola seems least equipped to offer exemplary guidance.

In another sense, perhaps, Tacitus may be said to have followed Agricola's *exemplum* in 93–4. Agricola had found expression for *virtus* in service away from Rome, and Tacitus' text at least suggests that he himself was absent on provincial service during the key trials.[63] If this is indeed the case, however, that only further underlines the limits of such a response. Tacitus might have found a way to include himself in Agricola's good fortune, by setting his absence parallel to his *socer's* timely death. Instead, he ostentatiously implicates himself in the same guilt as those who were actually

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[62] The precise date of Agricola's death, 23 August 93, is given at *Agr.* 44.1, and the trials must have occurred later that year or early in the next: see Gibson (2020) 97–8. It is significant that Tacitus does not choose to emphasise how short this interval was.

[63] Suggested by Syme (1958) 25 and argued in more detail by Woodman–Kraus (2014) 77, 317.

there. By doing so, Tacitus authorises himself to speak for his own generation, but thus also stresses how incompatible their experience is with that of Agricola's.[64] And the same goes for the changed world after Domitian's death. In one sense, Agricola provides an exemplary model for the new military emperor, but what of his subjects? At the start of the *Agricola* (3), Tacitus defines the problem of his generation as one of discourse, of finding a voice after years of enforced silence. Agricola's *exemplum* here also seems of little use to his *gener*: we have seen the older man avoiding *eloquentia* as part of rejecting his own father's example, and Tacitus gives us no reason to suppose that he would have become more articulate in his old age.

Rather than try to rescue generational continuity, it is better to recognise how systematically the *Agricola* undermines it. For all the presumably genuine admiration that Tacitus expresses for his *socer*, he has no more taken him as a model than Agricola did with his father. Agricola's praiseworthy actions were not prompted by any particular examples or a family legacy, and it is hard to make out what concrete meaning his own example or legacy has for Tacitus. The political upheavals that go with the monarchy have produced new presents that the experience of one's predecessors gives no clear guidance in facing. The question of father-son exemplarity is a microcosm of how to understand changing generational perception of a given set of events. The *Agricola* represents a small-scale and personal approach to this question. In the decade to follow, Tacitus would address it on the grand scale in the *Histories*, and in doing so he would have to encounter the issue of paternal continuity in its grandest form, that of imperial succession under the Flavians and the new regime.

Conclusion: Looking Forward to a New Past

The *Agricola* is not quite contemporary historiography. It describes events from a decade or two before its own present, and it positions that past as another age, radically different from the present. Not only is the current regime the opposite of the Flavians, but the contemporary experience is defined by events (the trials of 93–4) that occur in the interval after the events being narrated. Precisely because of this distancing effect, however, Tacitus' text remains a rich document of its own immediate setting in 97–8 and what the recent past meant to the Roman political elite in those transitional years.

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[64] In the same section (45.2), Tacitus stresses how Domitian's cruelty was even worse than that of Nero, the tyrant of Agricola's youth.

I hope to have shown that in the Graecinus episode, Tacitus explores how his father-in-law had responded to the legacy of his own recent past, which was analogous in key respects to Tacitus' own situation. Agricola's career, from his early seeking out of obscurity to his emergence in military glory to his survival under Domitian, should be read as a rejection of Graecinus' example, one that is successful on its own terms. Paradoxically, however, this very rejection of his own father's example becomes part of his legacy to his son-in-law, and that has crucial implications for how we should read the exemplary aspects of Tacitus' text. The *Agricola* shows us a historical moment in which the violent end of a hereditary dynasty and an awkward adoptive succession have left a patriarchal society uncertain and anxious about how sons should learn from their fathers. Tacitus' opening quasi-apology for his work (3.3), in which he claims to speak *rudi ac incondita voce* and hopes to be praised or at any rate excused for his *professio pietatis,* is in part a deprecation of familial exemplarity as a way of understanding the recent past, and a corresponding valorisation of the larger-scale historical inquiry to which the *Agricola* is but a prelude (*hic interim liber*).

   The larger work in question, the *Histories,* will naturally be a very different survey of the same territory. Grand-scale history will not call for the same level of explicit personal reflection on one's own experience. Nonetheless, the question of where to locate the Trajanic present relative to the Flavian past will certainly not go away, and nor will the problems of generational succession. Approaches to that problem will, however, change as the shape of the new regime becomes clearer and as the life cycle of the new ruler progresses. One stage in this progression can be seen three years after the *Agricola* in Pliny's panegyric on Trajan. That text, as is well known, engages with the *Agricola* in any number of ways, including in its presentation of paternal succession.[65] In extolling Trajan, Pliny has to find praise for his two fathers, both Nerva (esp. *Pan.* 5–9) and Trajan's biological father (cf. *Pan.* 15, 89).[66] Nerva and adoptive fatherhood get more explicit kudos, but there is enough of the older Trajan to create an ambiguity, given how little real affinity there was between the two emperors. Pliny also has some awkward rhetorical hedging to do as to whether Trajan's successor will be a yet-to-be-born biological son or a yet-to-be-chosen adoptive one (*Pan.* 94.5). Even if the immediate confusion seen in the *Agricola* has settled, the uncertainties

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[65] On the *Agricola* and the *Panegyricus,* see most recently Whitton (2020) 162–8.

[66] For Trajan's 'two fathers' both in the *Panegyricus* and in his own self-presentation, see Hekster (2015) 58–78.

around paternity and succession have not gone away, and will persist over the next decade as Tacitus writes the *Histories*.

That work in its full form described the first direct transfers of power among immediate biological family members in the history of the Principate. Questions of heredity must have dominated the second third of the work just as much as internal warfare dominates the surviving first third. We can glimpse this theme throughout the surviving material, in the adoption-scene between Galba and Piso (*Hist.* 1.14–19) and in the emerging roles of Titus and Domitian in Books 2–3.[67] Succession anxieties also reach into the nobility, as in Book 4 we see Helvidius Priscus set out to avenge his *socer* Paetus by prosecuting the Neronian *delator* Eprius Marcellus.[68] The set-piece debate between the two fails as a triumph of the Neronian opposition, and becomes instead the first skirmish of a second war, in which Helvidius will step fatally into the role of the *socer* he thought he was avenging. These echoes of 97 will naturally have increased as the narrative moved into its last third, describing the same events as the *Agricola*. They sounded, however, at a very different moment, when the question of succession was being posed in the future tense. By the time the *Histories* come out around 110, we are almost as far away from Domitian's death as that event was from his accession. Trajan is no longer new or young, and he has neither sired nor adopted an heir. Within Tacitus' own corpus we can see once again the same set of events going from 'contemporary history' to 'the recent past' that is being reassessed from the viewpoint of a new present.

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[67] It is significant in this respect that on two separate occasions in *Histories* 2 the idea is brought up of Titus reaching the throne by adoption (2.1.2, rumours Galba means to adopt him and 2.77.1, where Mucianus claims he would do so if he were emperor). On the possible Trajanic resonance see Ash (2007) 75–6, 298. The question of Titus' succeeding his father would likely have come into focus soon after the end of the existing text, given that at some point late in 70 a public confrontation took place between Helvidius and Vespasian apparently over the issue of Titus' status (see Cass. Dio 65[66].12.1, with Birley (1975) 141–3 and Murison (1999) 158–9).

[68] The relevant episodes are *Hist.* 4.5–11 and 40–45, now the object of a compelling analysis by Spielberg (2019).

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7

AUTOPSY FROM A BROKEN MONARCHY: TRAUMA-BASED READINGS FROM CASSIUS DIO'S CONTEMPORARY ROME*

Jesper Majbom Madsen

Abstract: Cassius Dio's contemporary books are often held to be for historians a particularly useful part of his Roman History. As a senator in Rome, Dio was well placed to describe what he saw during a long career in Roman politics. Dio's eyewitness reports bring us right into the middle of the action but his own personal investment in the affairs raise the question of reliability and accuracy. In this article I read Dio's contemporary books as a trauma-based narrative, where Dio uses personally invested autopsy accounts to paint the picture of a political collapse that follows the death of Marcus Aurelius. In Dio's narrative, Rome is falling apart at the hands of tyrannical emperors who humiliated, pursued, prosecuted, or murdered members of the political elite who for their part were gradually losing their moral compass. Dio criticises the emperor of his time but the scope seems bigger. By sharing his traumatic experience from Roman politics, Dio's trauma-based narrative serves to mobilise sympathy for the senators and thus a united front against the emperor of the time and the form of reign they choose.

U pon his return to Rome after the civil war against Clodius Albinus (197 CE), an enraged Septimius Severus entered the Senate to address the conscript fathers. In the speech, Severus repeated the claim that he was the son of Marcus Aurelius, and so Commodus' brother, before praising earlier Roman leaders for their swift punishment of disloyal

senators in previous civil wars.[1] One of the senators present that day was the historian Cassius Dio, who some twenty years later recorded an eyewitness account of the episode (Cass. Dio 76[75].7.4–8.3):[2]

μάλιστα δ᾽ ἡμᾶς ἐξέπληξεν ὅτι τοῦ τε Μάρκου υἱὸν καὶ τοῦ Κομμόδου ἀδελφὸν ἑαυτὸν ἔλεγε, τῷ γε Κομμόδῳ, ὃν πρῴην ὕβριζεν, ἡρωικὰς ἐδίδου τιμάς. πρός τε τὴν βουλὴν λόγον ἀναγινώσκων, καὶ τὴν μὲν Σύλλου καὶ Μαρίου καὶ Αὐγούστου αὐστηρίαν τε καὶ ὠμότητα ὡς ἀσφαλεστέραν ἐπαινῶν, τὴν δὲ Πομπηίου καὶ Καίσαρος ἐπιείκειαν ὡς ὀλεθρίαν αὐτοῖς ἐκείνοις γεγενημένην κακίζων, ἀπολογίαν τινὰ ὑπὲρ τοῦ Κομμόδου ἐπήγαγε, καθαπτόμενος τῆς βουλῆς ὡς οὐ δικαίως ἐκεῖνον ἀτιμαζούσης, εἴγε καὶ αὐτῆς οἱ πλείους αἴσχιον βιοτεύουσιν. ‘εἰ γὰρ τοῦτο ἦν’ ἔφη ‘δεινόν, ὅτι αὐτοχειρίᾳ ἐφόνευεν ἐκεῖνος θηρία, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑμῶν τις χθὲς καὶ πρῴην ἐν Ὠστίοις, ὑπατευκὼς γέρων, δημοσίᾳ μετὰ πόρνης πάρδαλιν μιμουμένης ἔπαιζεν. ἀλλ᾽ ἐμονομάχει νὴ Δία. ὑμῶν δ᾽ οὐδεὶς μονομαχεῖ; πῶς οὖν καὶ ἐπὶ τί τάς τε ἀσπίδας αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰ κράνη τὰ χρυσᾶ ἐκεῖνα ἐπρίαντό τινες;’

It especially caused us panic that he declared himself the son of Marcus and the brother of Commodus and bestowed divine honours upon the latter, whom he had recently been abusing. While reading to the senate a speech, in which he praised the severity and cruelty of Sulla, Marius and Augustus as the safer course and abused the mildness of Pompey and Caesar as having proved the ruin of those very men, he introduced a sort of defence of Commodus and assailed the Senate for dishonouring that emperor unjustly, in view of the fact that the majority of its members lived worse lives. 'For if it was disgraceful', he said, 'for him to slay wild beasts with his own hands, yet at Ostia only the other day one of your number, an old man who had been consul, was consorting with a prostitute who imitated a leopard. But, you will say, Commodus actually fought as a gladiator. And does none of you fight as a gladiator? If not, how and why is it that some of you have bought his shields and those famous golden helmets?'

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[1] Dio's surprise should be read against the fact that Severus made the claim in 195 CE when he issued bronze coins with the message that he was the son of the divine Marcus Aurelius: see Birley (1988) 117 and Kemezis (2014) 56.

[2] On the dating of Dio's *Roman History* see Kemezis (2014) 282–93 and Lindholmer (2021).

Although Dio was not the only source to cover the meeting, his autopsy report from inside the Senate house is unique.[3] The reader is offered a sense of the tense atmosphere between the Senate and the emperor in the aftermath of the civil war in 197 CE as well as glimpses of both the criticism delivered by Severus and the clear threats directed at the senators whom the passage presents as a fairly united group. The emperor's threats were in sharp contrast both to his promise upon arriving in Rome after Julianus' fall that he would not kill any senators, and to his edict outlawing any who did the same (75[74].1–2).

Dio's autopsy reports from Senate meetings and different public gatherings are rare in Roman historiography. Other writers such as Pliny and Tacitus describe their own experience as senators and refer to meetings they attended. But even if they comment on their own fear during the reign of Domitian, neither Pliny nor Tacitus describe the atmosphere at specific meetings they attended, nor share their own state of mind in the same personalised fashion as Dio does in his reports. Tacitus does express guilt about remaining silent and fears for his own life when his fellow senators were prosecuted in mock trials, but he does not take the reader through the same self-critical process as Dio.[4] Altogether, our historian firmly believed in his own qualities as a witness to contemporary Roman politics, as is evident from his coverage of Commodus' adventures in the arena (73[72].18.3–4):

Καὶ μή μέ τις κηλιδοῦν τὸν τῆς ἱστορίας ὄγκον, ὅτι καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα συγγράφω, νομίσῃ. ἄλλως μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἂν εἶπον αὐτά· ἐπειδὴ δὲ πρός τε τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ἐγένετο καὶ παρὼν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ καὶ εἶδον ἕκαστα καὶ ἤκουσα καὶ ἐλάλησα, δίκαιον ἡγησάμην μηδὲν αὐτῶν ἀποκρύψασθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτά, ὥσπερ τι ἄλλο τῶν μεγίστων καὶ ἀναγκαιοτάτων, τῇ μνήμῃ τῶν ἐσέπειτα ἐσομένων παραδοῦναι. καὶ μέντοι καὶ τἆλλα πάντα τὰ ἐπ' ἐμοῦ πραχθέντα καὶ λεπτουργήσω καὶ λεπτολογήσω μᾶλλον ἢ τὰ πρότερα, ὅτι τε συνεγενόμην αὐτοῖς, καὶ ὅτι μηδένα ἄλλον οἶδα τῶν τι δυναμένων ἐς συγγραφὴν ἀξίαν λόγου καταθέσθαι διηκριβωκότα αὐτὰ ὁμοίως ἐμοί.

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[3] In his coverage of the address, Dio's younger contemporary Herodian describes how Severus spoke to the Senate shortly after his return to Rome in June 197 CE (3.8.6–8). See also Birley (1988) 127–8; Grant (1996) 8–13; Potter (2004) 11–12; Imrie (2018) 20–3.

[4] See Plin. *Pan.* 66 on the fear of Domitian. For Tacitus' sharing the responsibility for the persecutions of Helvidius and Senecio see *Agr.* 45.

> And let no one feel that I am sullying the dignity of history by recording such occurrences. I would not have otherwise spoken of them, but because it was given by the emperor himself, and since I was present myself and saw, heard, and discussed each of them, I have thought proper to suppress none of the details, but to hand them down, trivial as they are, just like any events of the greatest weight and importance. And, indeed, all the other events that took place in my lifetime I shall describe with more exactness and detail than earlier occurrences, for the reason that I was present when they happened and know no one else, among those who have any ability at writing a worthy record of events, who has so accurate a knowledge of them as I.

Here, Dio reveals a Polybian ideal: that autopsy is more accurate an historical source than accounts written by historians removed by distance of space or time who have to rely on the accounts of others.[5] Although Dio covered Rome's history from its foundation to his withdrawal from politics in 229 CE, he believed the contemporary parts of the *Roman History* to be more accurate than the parts where he had to rely on earlier historical texts and a 'step up' from his books on Imperial Rome, where the lack of openness in the decision-making process challenged the writing of political history (53.19). However, despite the unique nature of Dio's eyewitness observations and his indispensable insight into Roman politics over a period of more than four decades, there are a number of issues that challenge Dio's authority as an historical source and suggest that it may be just as useful to read his contemporary books as a highly personalised attack on the emperor and political culture of his time. This does not mean that what he writes is wholly incorrect. But what it does mean, as the discussion to follow will demonstrate, is that Dio reserved a significant portion of his narrative for hostile and partisan accounts of Roman politics during his political career which, *as a source for history*, are less useful than we might wish. Instead, I suggest that Dio's contemporary books have more to offer when read as part of an attempt to unite the empire's political elite against authoritarian emperors, chiefly (but not solely) by means of slandering those of their own day.

Setting aside Dio's bias against most contemporary emperors—a fact which certainly calls into question his desire to write a nuanced account of the politics of the period—, the state of the autopsy reports themselves is

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[5] Pol. 12.27.1–3. Marincola (1997) 23.

another key challenge. Written sometimes more than twenty years after the episodes took place and after Dio's attitude to Severus seemingly changed from favourable or even hopeful to highly critical, the eyewitness accounts are not snapshots or neutral recordings of what was said and done at the time. Instead, they are reconstructed stories that made sense to Dio or served his purpose as he wrote down that specific part of the *Roman History*. Studies in psychology have demonstrated that the accuracy of eyewitness reports fades quickly over time—even in the course of a few days—after the observations are made. Furthermore, the human memory is not organised in a way that allows us to recall a stored version of a certain episode but is largely reconstructed from the witness' personal expectations in forms that make sense to that person at the time they are retold. Other studies again have demonstrated that inaccurate observations often make their way into later autopsy reports because they make sense to witnesses when asked to recall what they have seen.[6] When Dio recalled the speech Severus gave in the Senate sometime in the late 210s or in the 220s, his memory and assessment of the meeting would have been influenced by his overall impression of Severus at that moment in time and by his experience of Severus and the reign of the Severan dynasty.

The study of Dio's contemporary books is further complicated by the fact that they have come down to us in epitomes written by the eleventh-century Byzantine scholar Xiphilinus. From parallel analysis of those parts of the epitome which match a surviving section of the direct tradition, we know that Xiphilinus shortened the text by removing sentences and paragraphs rather than writing summaries in his own words.[7] Only rarely does he interpolate the text with his own thoughts.[8]

An alternative approach to Dio's contemporary narrative is to read the books as a trauma-based narrative of one of the most turbulent periods in the age of the empire, marked by civil war and emperors who chose more explicit forms of authoritarian rule than their predecessors seemingly did in the second century.[9] Inspired by the social scientist Jeffery Alexander's thoughts on trauma as a social theory, I shall offer here a reading of Dio's contemporary books as a trauma-based narrative: the historian seeks to

[6] On eyewitness reports see Loftus–Loftus (1976) 159–60; Loftus (1979) 20–2, 117; Crombag, et al. (1996) 95–7, 102–4. See also Madsen (2021).

[7] Murison (1999) 2–3; Berbessou-Broustet (2016) 82–3, 89–90.

[8] Mallan (2013) 611–12, 617–18, 624–5.

[9] For the nostalgia of men of letters for the second century and the reign of Marcus Aurelius see, e.g., Kemezis (2014) 35, 39–41, 227, 238.

demonstrate how different emperors terrorised members of the Senate into a state of slavery, unable to give free and qualified advice and therefore incapable of upholding legal standards to protect legitimate government from the emperor's arbitrary will.

To Dio this principle is what differentiates a legitimate monarchy—in which the courteous and respectful emperor rules in agreement with the Senate as a *civilis princeps*—from a tyranny which excludes the Senate from the decision-making process.[10] By means of eyewitness reports and first-hand observations from his seats in the Senate and Severus' *consilium principis,* and from his everyday life in Rome, Dio offers a narrative designed to convey the impression that he and his fellow senators were continuously abused by threats, mock trials, unjustified killings and confiscation of property. In Dio's coverage, the senators always come across as victims in a hostile and violent political climate that the emperors, or their soldiers, were responsible for creating.

In Alexander's outline of trauma-based writing, Dio qualifies as a literary agent who tries to turn the social crisis that he and his fellow senators suffered from a systematic abuse perpetrated by different emperors into a cultural trauma relevant for Roman society as a whole.[11] According to Alexander, the transformation from a social crisis to a cultural trauma occurs over time and depends on whether members outside the group come to share the suffering of the originally-abused group. To succeed, literary agents must deliver persuasive answers to four questions. First, the nature of the painful experience being related; secondly, the identity of the victims; thirdly, the relationship between the victims and the outside world; and finally, the identity of the perpetrators.[12] Furthermore, the agents must make the case that the acts were in fact evil and should evaluate the degree to which they were so. According to Alexander, there is also a need to control the narrative so that the atrocities in question stand out clearly enough to persuade the intended audience—in Dio's case his contemporaries in the Senate, equestrians, members of the provincial elite in general, and perhaps also learned officers in the in the army, who by the late 220s CE were becoming

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[10] Dio uses the term δημοτικός (57.8.3) to signal the 'civil' emperor who respected the Senate, their opinion, and role as trusted advisors in the decision-making process: Wallace-Hadrill (1982) 44; Bono (2018) 94–7.

[11] Alexander (2012) 15–16. For a similar recent approach, see Gerrish (2019) 50–5.

[12] Alexander (2012) 17–18.

an ever-more influential part of Roman politics.[13] As we shall see from the following five case studies, Dio identifies the trauma that he and his peers suffered as the continuous mishandling of members of the political elite. He codes the pressures of unfair trials, confiscations, and groundless politically motivated persecutions as arbitrary evils and evaluates such tyrannical behaviours as sufficient to break the free will of the senator; such pressures, in his view, reduced them to an almost servile condition.

Reading Dio's contemporary books as parts of a trauma-based narrative allows us to approach the texts not only as a source for Roman history in the period between 180 to the end of the 220s, but rather as Dio's personal contribution to an ongoing debate about the crisis of monarchical rule after the death of Marcus Aurelius. Although the issues of accuracy remain relevant, it is the predisposed nature of Dio's contemporary books that becomes essential in the effort to determine what the historian hoped to achieve by writing the history of contemporary Rome in the way he did.

We may question the added value of Dio's trauma-narrative of his contemporary times; after all, what he offers ultimately resembles a traditional critique of unfit monarchs. It is true that in Dio we perceive a criticism of young and inexperienced emperors similar to that of Tacitus, Suetonius, and Herodian. However, the essential difference between the *Roman History* and its competitors is the author's *involvement* in the episodes, as well as the way in which he depicts himself as both vulnerable and terrified in these eyewitness scenarios.[14] This feature is markedly less pronounced in Tacitus, Suetonius, and Herodian. This is particularly evident in Dio's account of the Senate-meeting in which its members were threatened by the Praetorian guard if they did not support the accession of Didius Julianus, and also when Apronianus was tried for treason because of the dream his nurse had about his future accession to the throne. In the latter case, Dio, like the rest of the senators, was so frightened and repressed that he lost all sense of justice, silently and with relief accepting the swift execution of one Baebius Marcellinus, a man implicated in the affair and punished without a fair trial. Our historian is not just a critic who objects to the conduct of different tyrannical emperors; he is directly involved not only as a victim of

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[13] Alexander (2012) 18. On the increased importance of men of non-senatorial background see Mennen (2011) 135–7. See also Birley (1988) for examples of Severus replacing senators with his own trusted men (114) or for the equestrian commander given to the *Legio II Parthica* (129).

[14] See also Kemezis (2014) 228 for the way Dio built up a complex personality of himself.

threats and terror but also as one of its perpetrators, who passively accepts and thus facilitates the tyrannical nature of the Severan dynasty.

Traumatic Memories

The first of Dio's eyewitness episodes dates to November 192 CE when Commodus—during what was probably the *Plebeian Games*—performed in the arena as both a hunter and gladiator. The senators present that day celebrated the emperor's many victories as instructed; on the other hand, the people turned up in fewer numbers than usual, not only because Commodus' acts were becoming trivial but also because they feared that he, in his Herculean guise, was planning to turn his bow against the spectators. This fear was not unfounded, at least in Dio: the emperor had recently dressed up as snakes disabled men who had lost their feet to illness and killed them with a club, again costumed as Heracles. The senators, whose relationship with the emperor was becoming more and more strained, feared the emperor's next potential move (73[72].21.1–2):[15]

οὗτος μὲν ὁ φόβος πᾶσι κοινὸς καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἦν· ἔπραξε δὲ καὶ ἕτερόν τι τοιόνδε πρὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς βουλευτάς, ἐξ οὗ οὐχ ἥκιστα ἀπολεῖσθαι προσεδοκήσαμεν. στρουθὸν γὰρ ἀποκτείνας καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν αὐτοῦ ἀποτεμὼν προσῆλθεν ἔνθα ἐκαθήμεθα, τῇ τε ἀριστερᾷ χειρὶ ἐκείνην καὶ τῇ δεξιᾷ τὸ ξίφος ᾑματωμένον ἀνατείνας, καὶ εἶπε μὲν οὐδέν, τὴν δὲ κεφαλὴν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ σεσηρὼς ἐκίνησεν, ἐνδεικνύμενος ὅτι καὶ ἡμᾶς τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο δράσει. κἂν συχνοὶ παραχρῆμα ἐπ' αὐτῷ γελάσαντες ἀπηλλά-γησαν τῷ ξίφει (γέλως γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἀλλ' οὐ λύπη ἔλαβεν), εἰ μὴ δάφνης φύλλα, ἃ ἐκ τοῦ στεφάνου εἶχον, αὐτός τε διέτραγον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς πλησίον μου καθημένους διατραγεῖν ἔπεισα, ἵν' ἐν τῇ τοῦ στόματος συνεχεῖ κινήσει τὸν τοῦ γελᾶν ἔλεγχον ἀποκρυψώμεθα.

This fear [of being killed as part of Commodus' performances] was shared by all, by us [senators] as well as by the rest. And he did something else to us senators, on account of which we not least of all expected to die. Having killed an ostrich and cut off its head, he came up to where we were sitting, holding the head in his left hand and in his

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[15] On the incident with the snake-dressed men see Dio 73[72].20.3. On Commodus' impersonation of Hercules see, e.g., Birley (1988) 85; Hekster (2002) 146–8; Meyer-Zwiffelhoffer (2006) 201–8; Kemezis (2014) 50; Scott (2018) 242.

right hand raising aloft his bloody sword. He said nothing, yet he wagged his head with a grin, indicating that he would treat us in the same way. And many would indeed have perished by the sword at that moment for laughing at him (for it was laughter rather than indignation that overcame us), if I had not chewed some laurel leaves, which I got from my garland, myself, and persuaded the others who were sitting near me to do the same, so that in the steady movement of our jaws we might conceal the fact that we were laughing.

In this eyewitness report from his seat in the Colosseum, Dio and his fellow senators come across as afraid that they too would be the victims of the emperor's evil madness. Humiliated by their instructions to cheer on the emperor, they did their best to please him not as partners but as subjects whose presence and symbolic appreciation of what occurred in the arena mattered more than their actual support. Now, even though they were scared when the emperor came over to their seats and held aloft the head of his vanquished foe, it was apparently laughter rather than panic that struck the senators: they followed Dio's lead in supressing their mirth.

When Dio wrote this account some twenty-five years after the event, he made himself and the Senate appear largely on top of the situation, even if they feared for their lives. The author comes across as particularly calm: though still junior in the senatorial hierarchy, he had the wherewithal to help those around him to conceal their scorn and so escape what is projected as certain death. In her approach to the episode, Mary Beard points out that laughter can be political and uses the scene to identify three types of laughs. First there is the nervous laugh, which in this case is the reaction to the threats and uneasy atmosphere Commodus' performance provoked: a way of disarming what was surely a potentially dangerous situation. Another kind of laughter is the spontaneous reaction to a bizarre situation so absurd that it is impossible to suppress even if the danger were real enough. This is patent in the silliness of the whole scene here: it was the proud emperor holding up the severed ostrich heard and his gesticulations that triggered the senators' unwilling amusement. The third kind of laughter Beard discusses is a more conscious laughter used as a protest or peaceful opposition, where the weaker part objects against the display of superior power.[16]

We have no way of knowing whether Dio and his fellow senators did in fact laugh when Commodus threatened them in the arena. The historian

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[16] Beard (2014) 5–8.

may have felt an urge to overplay the resourcefulness of himself and the senators in their effort to show some form of resistance towards the ludicrous emperor, whose ultimate downfall Dio could treat in hindsight when writing later. Yet, it is crucial for the trauma-based reading of the episode that Dio admits that he and his fellow senators *were* afraid and that *they*, like the rest of the Roman public, feared for their lives. Now, the presentation of the senators' laughter shows not only their courage but also such strength of mind as to see the absurdity in the scenario. The senators at Commodus' games that day were not broken, yet nor were they paralysed by fear of Commodus. When threatened with the same destiny as the one suffered by the ostrich they replied with laughter—noiseless, certainly, for to do otherwise was perilous—but among themselves the senators knew they had stood up to the tyrant.

As suggested by Beard, when Dio described the incident with the ostrich some twenty years later, he would probably have remembered the laughter as a sign of resistance. But while the scene may have been absurd and laughable, there was nothing amusing about Commodus' regime in general. If the episode is read in the light of Alexander's model, the gruesome killings of the disabled men was an act of evil, which, together with the very public threats against the members of the Senate, served to terrorise not just members of the Senate but the entire Roman people. In the epitome, Commodus' abuse comes in many forms. Killing defenceless disabled men dressed up as snakes was not just another brutal day in the arena, it was gruesome even for the 'bad' emperor. As he killed the footless men, he became the antithesis of the *pater patriae* figure whose objective was to defend and protect his subjects. The disabled men were disposed of and used as props in the arena. It signalled a kind of madness every sensible man would fear, and it gave life to rumours that Commodus, again in the role as Hercules, would shoot arrows at the spectators—his own citizens—again as a form of mad amusement.

For their part, the senators were abused when Commodus threatened them publicly in a very direct manner. Everyone in the arena—members of the general public, Praetorians, equestrians, foreign guests and members of the court, freeborn, freedmen and slaves alike—saw how the Senate sat before the emperor and his bloody sword. They heard no laughter and would assume, correctly according to Dio, that the conscript fathers were afraid and feared the worst, just as many in the audience had done when deciding whether or not to attend the show despite the dark rumours concerning Commodus. When issuing threats like these, Commodus was

miles away from the ideal of the *civilis princeps*. Dio uses the episode to illustrate the degeneration from an age of gold—in which the emperor protected and respected his people, and ruled in harmony with members of the empire's elite—to one of iron and rust, in which Romans were subject to the arbitrary will of tyrants (72[71].36.4).[17]

The second example dates to the spring of 193 CE, three months after Commodus' assassination. His successor Pertinax aspired to cooperate with the Senate, but had just been murdered by members of his guard unhappy with the discipline that the new emperor had imposed on the army.[18] Dio describes how the Praetorians, having shut themselves up in the camp, auctioned the throne to the highest bidder, who turned out to be Didius Julianus—a wealthy senator who in Dio's depiction had made his money from disreputable businesses.[19] In the following episode, we shall see the historian's description of Julianus' actions: having bought the support of the Praetorian guard, he summoned the senators to formally acknowledge him as Rome's new emperor. In Dio's version of events, the news that it was Julianus who had won the auction was particularly disturbing as Dio had previously proved the new emperor guilty in trials presumably related to his financial affairs (Cass. Dio 74[73].12.2–5):[20]

ἡμεῖς δὲ πυνθανόμενοι ταῦτα, ὥς που ἑκάστῳ διηγγέλλετο, ἐφοβούμεθα μὲν τὸν Ἰουλιανὸν καὶ τοὺς στρατιώτας καὶ μάλιστα ὅσοι τι ἢ πρὸς τὸν Περτίνακα ἐπιτήδειον … (καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ εἷς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἦν, ἐπειδὴ ὑπό τε τοῦ Περτίνακος τά τε ἄλλα ἐτετιμήμην καὶ στρατηγὸς ἀπεδεδείγμην, καὶ ἐκεῖνον πολλὰ πολλάκις ἐν δίκαις συναγορεύων τισὶν ἀδικοῦν-τα ἐπεδεδείχειν)· ὅμως δ' οὖν καὶ διὰ ταῦτα (οὐ γὰρ ἐδόκει ἡμῖν ἀσφαλὲς εἶναι οἴκοι, μὴ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ τούτου ὑποπτευθῶμεν, καταμεῖναι) προήλθομεν, οὐχ ὅτι λελουμένοι ἀλλὰ καὶ δεδειπνηκότες, καὶ ὡσάμενοι διὰ τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἐς τὸ βουλευτήριον ἐσήλθομεν, καὶ ἠκούσαμεν αὐτοῦ τά τε ἄλλα ἀξίως ἑαυτοῦ λέγοντος, καὶ ὅτι 'ὑμᾶς τε ὁρῶ ἄρχοντος δεομένους, καὶ αὐτός, εἰ καί τις ἄλλος, ἀξιώτατός εἰμι ὑμῶν ἡγεμονεῦσαι. καὶ εἶπον ἂν πάντα τὰ προσόντα μοι ἀγαθά, εἰ μὴ καὶ ᾔδειτε καὶ πεπειραμένοι μου ἦτε. διὸ οὐδὲ ἐδεήθην πολλοὺς στρατιώτας ἐπάγεσθαι,

[17] Scott (2020) 335; Noe (2020) 150–2.

[18] On the plot against Pertinax see Birley (1988) 93–4.

[19] For Didius Julianus counted among the senior members of the Senate see Birley (1988) 96.

[20] Scott (2018) 243.

ἀλλ᾽ αὐτὸς μόνος πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἀφῖγμαι, ἵνα μοι τὰ ὑπ᾽ ἐκείνων δοθέντα
ἐπικυρώσητε.᾽ ῾μόνος᾽ τε ῾γὰρ ἥκω᾽ ἔλεγε, πᾶν μὲν ἔξωθεν τὸ βουλευτήριον
ὁπλίταις περιεστοιχισμένος, πολλοὺς δὲ καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ συνεδρίῳ
στρατιώτας ἔχων, καὶ τοῦ συνειδότος ἡμᾶς τοῦ περὶ αὐτὸν ἀνεμίμνησκεν,
ἐξ οὗ καὶ ἐμισοῦμεν αὐτὸν καὶ ἐφοβούμεθα.

When we [senators] learned of these things as the news was brought to
each of us individually, we were possessed by fear of Julianus and the
soldiers, especially all of us who had [done] any favours for Pertinax [or
anything to displease Julianus] … I was one of these, since I had
received various honours from Pertinax, including the praetorship, and
when acting as advocate for others at trials I had frequently proved
Julianus to be guilty of many offences. Nevertheless, we made our
appearance, partly for this very reason, since it did not seem to us to be
safe to remain at home, for fear such a course might in itself arouse
suspicion. So when bath and dinner were over we pushed our way
through the soldiers, entered the senate-house, and heard him deliver a
speech that was quite worthy of him, in the course of which he said: 'I
see that you need a ruler, and I myself am best fitted of any to rule you.
I should mention all the advantages I can offer, if you were not already
familiar with them and had not already had experience of me.
Consequently, I have not even asked to be attended here by many
soldiers, but have come to you alone, in order that you may ratify what
has been given to me by them.' 'I am here alone' is what he said, though
he had actually surrounded the entire senate-house outside with heavily
armed troops and had a large number of soldiers in the chamber itself;
moreover, he reminded us of our knowledge of the kind of man he was,
in consequence of which we both feared and hated him.

What Dio describes is another step towards the collapse of civil monarchical
rule. Julianus' ability to buy the throne from the guard illustrates the depth
of the political crisis. After a short revival under Pertinax, the Senate was
once again relegated to delivering altogether symbolic gestures—little
different from those offered Commodus in the arena—as they ratified the
choice made by the Praetorians. True, the Senate's approval was important

to Julianus, as it had been to Pertinax three months earlier.[21] Without ratification from the senators, Julianus could easily be challenged by ambitious army commanders stationed in the provinces such as Septimius Severus, Pescennius Niger, and Clodius Albinus, who were all eager to use the lack of a formal mandate as an excuse to turn their armies towards Rome.

But unlike the episode with the ostrich, Dio and those of his fellow senators who made their way to the Senate house that evening were not nearly as resourceful as they had been six months earlier when they quietly laughed at Commodus. On a personal level, Dio feared Julianus' revenge for their previous controversies, while the senators as a group, in Dio's version that is, were intimidated by soldiers posted both outside and within the Senate house itself. None of the senators, apparently, wanted to attend the meeting, but they thought it would be worse to stay away than to appear and approve Julianus as their new emperor. What was different in this episode—or so it seems from Dio's description of Julianus' accession—was the unsettling course of events from the moment of Pertinax's murder to the moment the Praetorians openly displayed their power in occupying both the forum and the Senate building.

Rome was now openly ruled as a military tyranny, where one regiment in the capital decided who was to be emperor and for how long. Admittedly that had already been the case when Pertinax succeeded Commodus earlier that year. But as he replaced a tyrant and took the initial steps to cooperate with the Senate, Rome was not, yet, in the hands of the Praetorian Guard, despite their collusion with Pertinax.[22] Since the death of Marcus Aurelius, the Praetorians had been implicated first in the death of Commodus and then in the accession and, later, killing of Pertinax before they accepted Julianus' bid for the throne and accompanied him to the meeting. In Dio's version, Julianus was little more than a strawman whom the Praetorians were able to remove at their leisure, either by murdering him as they did Pertinax or by withdrawing their support, as they would later do, from Julianus when he proved unable to pay what was promised.

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[21] For Pertinax's implication in Commodus' murder and later accession to the throne, the likely concern this would have caused outside of the Senate and Praetorians, and the new emperor's power-base in the Senate, see Kemezis (2014) 51–2.

[22] Dio mistakenly celebrates Pertinax for not accepting dynastic titles for his son and wife (Kemezis (2014) 54). See also Birley (1988) 90 also on how Pertinax communicated with the senators when accepting the titles *pater patriae* and *princeps senatus*.

In a trauma-based reading of Dio's report from Julianus' first Senate meeting as emperor, the historian and his fellow senators were not merely pressured but essentially physically forced to acclaim a man they all allegedly resented. The abuse in this case lies in the threat of repercussions should they fail to take part in the ritual, and the humiliation of being manhandled into offering their approval to the object of their hatred. By occupying the Senate and the forum, the Praetorians not only demonstrated their power to decide who was to become emperor and for how long; in addition, both they and Julianus stripped from the Senate what little remained of their illusory prerogative to formally approve the new emperor.

Compared to the episode with Commodus in the arena, what happened at Julianus' accession was a display of raw and unconcealed power on the part of the Praetorian Guard. Certainly this was far from the first time that soldiers had forced senators to comply; but the moment the Praetorians accepted Julianus' bid for the throne and later accompanied him into the Senate house, it was clear to all political men that the civil monarchy—the ideal of *civilitas* which in the eyes of the empire's intellectuals had characterised the second century—had now broken down and been replaced by military tyranny.[23] Gone was even the appearance that the emperor leaned on the Senate for advice and support; even the pretence that the senators had chosen Julianus freely was impossible. The display of power on the part of the Praetorians was apparently more important than the symbolic gesture of allowing the Senate to reach its own foreseeable conclusion that Julianus was worthy of becoming the next emperor.

In the next eyewitness report we are back in the arena on 15 December 196. Julianus had been killed a mere two months after his accession. Septimius Severus had dissolved the Praetorian Guard, punished Pertinax's murderers, and defeated Niger in 194. Caracalla had been announced as the new Caesar, which effectively ended the alliance between Severus and Albinus; the latter, upon hearing the news, took the field and announced that he too was Rome's Augustus. The event that Dio relates is a horse race on the last day before the Saturnalia. Dio took his seat in what was presumably the Circus Maximus as the consul's guest, some two months before the battle between Severus and Albinus at Lugdunum and about six months prior to Severus' speech in the Senate (76[75].4.2–6):[24]

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[23] See, for instance, Plut. *An seni* 784F; Paus. 1.3.2, 5.5; 8.43.1–6; Ael. Aristid. *Rom.* 33; *Or.* 20.5–8; 27.40.

[24] Campbell (2005) 11; Scott (2018) 241–2.

συγκινουμένης οὖν διὰ ταῦτα τῆς οἰκουμένης ἡμεῖς μὲν οἱ βουλευταὶ
ἡσυχίαν ἤγομεν, ὅσοι μὴ πρὸς τοῦτον ἢ ἐκεῖνον φανερῶς ἀποκλίναντες
ἐκοινώνουν σφίσι καὶ τῶν κινδύνων καὶ τῶν ἐλπίδων, ὁ δὲ δῆμος οὐκ
ἐκαρτέρησεν ἀλλ' ἐκφανέστατα κατωδύρατο. ἦν μὲν γὰρ ἡ τελευταία πρὸ
τῶν Κρονίων ἱπποδρομία, καὶ συνέδραμεν ἐς αὐτὴν ἄπλετόν τι χρῆμα
ἀνθρώπων. παρῆν δὲ καὶ ἐγὼ τῇ θέᾳ διὰ τὸν ὕπατον φίλον μου ὄντα, καὶ
πάντα τὰ λεχθέντα ἀκριβῶς ἤκουσα, ὅθεν καὶ γράψαι τι περὶ αὐτῶν
ἠδυνήθην. ἐγένετο δὲ ὧδε. συνῆλθον μὲν ὥσπερ εἶπον ἀμύθητοι, καὶ τὰ
ἅρματα ἑξαχῶς ἁμιλλώμενα ἐθεάσαντο, ὅπερ που καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ Κλεάν-δρου
ἐγεγόνει, μηδὲν μηδένα παράπαν ἐπαινέσαντες, ὅπερ εἴθισται· ἐπειδὴ δὲ
ἐκεῖνοί τε οἱ δρόμοι ἐπαύσαντο καὶ ἔμελλον οἱ ἡνίοχοι ἑτέρου ἄρξασθαι,
ἐνταῦθα ἤδη σιγάσαντες ἀλλήλους ἐξαίφνης τάς τε χεῖρας πάντες ἅμα
συνεκρότησαν καὶ προσεπεβόησαν, εὐτυχίαν τῇ τοῦ δήμου σωτηρίᾳ
αἰτούμενοι. εἶπόν τε τοῦτο, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο τὴν Ῥώμην καὶ βασιλίδα καὶ
ἀθάνατον ὀνομάσαντες 'μέχρι πότε τοιαῦτα πάσχομεν;' ἔκραξαν 'καὶ μέχρι
ποῦ πολεμούμεθα;' εἰπόντες δὲ καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ τοιουτότροπα τέλος
ἐξεβόησαν ὅτι 'ταῦτά ἐστιν', καὶ πρὸς τὸν ἀγῶνα τῶν ἵππων ἐτράποντο.
οὕτω μὲν ἔκ τινος θείας ἐπιπνοίας ἐνεθουσίασαν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν ἄλλως
τοσαῦται μυριάδες ἀνθρώπων οὔτε ἤρξαντο τὰ αὐτὰ ἅμα ἀναβοᾶν ὥσπερ
τις ἀκριβῶς χορὸς δεδιδαγμένος, οὔτ' εἶπον αὐτὰ ἀπταίστως ὡς καὶ
μεμελετημένα.

While, then, the entire world was disturbed by this situation, we senators
remained quiet, as many of us did not openly incline to the one or the
other and share their dangers and their hopes. The populace, however,
could not restrain itself, but indulged in the most open lamentations. It
was at the last horse-race before the Saturnalia, and a countless throng
of people flocked to it. I, too, was present at the spectacle, since the
consul was a friend of mine, and I heard distinctly everything that was
said, so that I was in a position to write something about it. It happened
this way. There had assembled, as I said, an untold multitude and they
had watched the chariots racing, six at a time (which had been also the
practice in Cleander's day), without applauding, as was their custom,
any of the contestants at all. But when these races were over and the
charioteers were about to begin another event, they first enjoined
silence upon one another and then suddenly all clapped their hands at
the same moment and shouted, praying for good fortune for the public
welfare. This was what they first cried out; then, applying the terms

'Queen' and 'Immortal' to Rome, they shouted: 'How long are we to suffer such things?' and 'How long are we to be waging war?' And after making some other remarks of this kind, they finally shouted, 'So much for that', and turned their attention to the horse-race. In all this they were surely moved by some divine inspiration; for in no other way could so many myriads of men have begun to utter the same shouts at the same time, like a carefully trained chorus, or have spoken the words without a mistake, just as if they had practised them.

Even if Dio mentions that there were senators who sided with one of the two generals, we get the impression from the epitome that the Senate as whole hoped to remain neutral. As usual, we are at the mercy of what Xiphilinus decided to keep in his resumé, but judging from what little we have, Dio does not seem to criticise the senators for their lack of courage at the race. Criticising the war could only be read as an attack on Severus, whom the Senate was formally obliged to support as illustrated by Albinus' declaration as *hostis patriae*.[25] In any case public protest would be beneath their dignity, since this was the medium through which the people expressed their dissatisfaction. In Dio's view, the popular protest against the wars was not the result of a coordinated effort on the part of the people, but a sign from higher powers that war-mongering had gone too far. It is the widespread but, in the eyes of the historian, understandable silence on the part of the Senate that Dio compares to people's heavenly protest against yet another civil war in a couple of years and the inescapable instability that followed.

In this incident nobody suffers direct abuse. There are no dealings with the emperor, who may not even have been present at the race. Yet once again, fear of speaking up is the key issue in the available version of Dio's text. Judging from the epitome, the senators were too afraid to protest against civil wars in which most of them had no part. In what we can deduce from the text, the senators are passive. Repressed by fear of repercussions, they were (unlike the people) unable to speak their mind freely and offer Severus their best advice by arguing against a new civil war—a view, we gather from their silence, they believed to be dangerous.[26] Their fear of fulfilling their role as the emperor's honest advisors was the result of Severus' authoritarian rule. Even if the emperor had initially resisted the impulse to prosecute Niger's partisans, Dio has already reminded his readers that

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[25] Birley (1988) 120.

[26] Scott (2018) 241–3.

Severus did not keep his promise of not killing senators for very long
(75[74].2.1). This broken promise, together with Severus' reliance on the
support from the army rather than his associates in the Senate and his use
of soldiers to render the city unsafe, underpinned the impression of Severus'
authoritarian rule (75[74].2.2-3). The senators, for their part, were helpless
victims not to be blamed for tyranny that was already taking form well before
the battle at Lugdunum.

The next example dates to the year 205 CE. Dio is back in the Senate
House on the day Apronianus, then governor of Asia, was tried for treason
in absentia. The episode is a key moment in the epitomised narrative of Dio's
contemporary Rome, as here the reader sees the consequence of the
continued abuse perpetrated against the political elite. As we shall see in
Dio's eyewitness report from the trial of Apronianus, members of the Senate,
including Dio himself, had now lost what was left of their legal, political, and
personal integrity. Stunned by fear, their aim was merely to stay alive in
what had become a regime of terror where prosecutions of alleged political
opponents had become the norm. The civil form of monarchical rule that
Dio held as his ideal form of constitution was definitively dissolved, leaving
the fate of Rome in the hands of an increasingly tyrannical Severus, who was
laying the groundwork for authoritarian rule (77[76].8.1-6):

καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο τὰ περὶ τὸν Ἀπρωνιανὸν ἐτελέσθη, παράδοξα ὄντα καὶ
ἀκουσθῆναι. ἔσχε γὰρ αἰτίαν ὅτι ποτὲ ἡ τήθη αὐτοῦ ὄναρ ἑορακέναι ἐλέχθη
ὡς βασιλεύσει, καὶ ὅτι μαγείᾳ τινὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ χρήσασθαι ἔδοξε· καὶ ἀπὼν
ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ τῆς Ἀσίας κατεψηφίσθη. ἀναγινωσκομένων οὖν ἡμῖν τῶν
βασάνων τῶν περὶ αὐτοῦ γενομένων, καὶ τοῦτ᾽ ἐνεγέγραπτο ὅτι ὁ μέν τις
ἐπύθετο τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐξετάσεως τεταγμένων τίς τε διηγήσατο τὸ ὄναρ τίς
τε ἤκουσεν, ὁ δέ τις ἔφη τά τε ἄλλα καὶ ὅτι ʼφαλακρόν τινα βουλευτὴν
παρακύψαντα εἶδονʼ. ἀκούσαντες δὲ τοῦθ᾽ ἡμεῖς ἐν δεινῷ πάθει ἐγενόμεθα·
ὄνομα μὲν γὰρ οὐδενὸς οὔτε ἐκεῖνος εἰρήκει οὔτε ὁ Σεουῆρος ἐγεγράφει,
ὑπὸ δὲ ἐκπλήξεως καὶ οἱ μηδεπώποτε ἐς τοῦ Ἀπρωνιανοῦ πεφοιτηκότες,
οὐχ ὅτι οἱ φαλακροὶ ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ ἄλλως ἀναφαλαντίαι, ἔδεισαν. καὶ ἐθάρσει
μὲν οὐδεὶς πλὴν τῶν πάνυ κομώντων, πάντες δὲ τοὺς τοιούτους περιεβλέπ-
ομεν, καὶ ἦν θροῦς ʼὁ δεῖνά ἐστινʼ· ʼοὔκ, ἀλλʼ ὁ δεῖνα.ʼ οὐκ ἀποκρύψομαι τὸ
τότε μοι συμβάν, εἰ καὶ γελοιότατόν ἐστιν· τοσαύτῃ γὰρ ἀμηχανίᾳ
συνεσχέθην ὥστε καὶ τῆς κεφαλῆς τὰς τρίχας τῇ χειρὶ ζητῆσαι. τὸ δ᾽ αὐτὸ
τοῦτο καὶ ἕτεροι πολλοὶ ἔπαθον. καὶ πάνυ γε ἐς τοὺς φαλακροειδεῖς
ἀφεωρῶμεν ὡς καὶ ἐς ἐκείνους τὸν ἑαυτῶν κίνδυνον ἀπωθούμενοι, πρὶν δὴ
προσανεγνώσθη ὅτι ἄρα περιπόρφυρον ἱμάτιον ὁ φαλακρὸς ἐκεῖνος εἶχε.

λεχθέντος γὰρ τούτου πρὸς Βαίβιον Μαρκελλῖνον ἀπείδομεν· ἠγορα-
νομήκει γὰρ τότε καὶ ἦν φαλακρότατος. ἀναστὰς γοῦν καὶ παρελθὼν ἐς
μέσον 'πάντως που γνωριεῖ με, εἰ ἑόρακεν'.

After this came the dénouement of the case of Apronianus—an incred-
ible affair even in the hearing. This man was accused because his nurse
was reported to have dreamed once that he should be emperor and
because he was believed to have employed some magic to this end; and
he was condemned while absent at his post as governor of Asia. Now
when the evidence concerning him, taken under torture, was read to us,
there appeared in it the statement that one of the people conducting the
examination had inquired who had told the dream and who had heard
it, and that the man under examination had said, among other things:
'I saw a certain bald-headed senator peeping in'. On hearing this we
found ourselves in a terrible position; for although neither the man had
spoken nor Severus written anyone's name, yet such was the general
consternation that even those who had never visited the house of
Apronianus, and not alone the bald-headed but even those who were
partially bald, grew afraid. And although no one was especially con-
fident, except those who had full heads of hair, yet we all looked round
at those who were not so fortunate, and a murmur ran about: 'It's So-
and-so.' 'No, it's So-and-so.' I will not conceal what happened to me at
the time, ridiculous as it is. I was so disconcerted that I actually felt with
my hand to see whether I had any hair on my head. And a good many
others had the same experience. And we were very careful to direct our
gaze upon those who were more or less bald, as if we should thereby
divert our own danger upon them; we continued to do this until the
further statement was read that the bald-head in question had worn a
purple-bordered toga. When this detail came out, we turned our eyes
upon Baebius Marcellinus; for he had been aedile at the time and was
extremely bald. So he rose, and coming forward, said: 'He will of course
recognise me, if he has seen me.'

The informer was brought into the Senate and with help from one of the
senators he identified Marcellinus as the man who peeped in during the
interrogation. The unfortunate senator is now escorted out of the Senate
house, away from the forum, and is executed publicly in front of his children,
whom he assured that his only regret was to leave them behind in such a
world.

From their presentation in the epitome we perceive that it was in fact the senators themselves who convicted Marcellinus without proper trial, following their own estimation of how Severus would have ruled had he been in court that day. That senators could be convicted for treason based on someone else's dream was a sign of tyranny, but not in itself a novelty. Since the reign of Tiberius, members of the Senate had been tried for similarly unconvincing offenses.[27] What makes the execution of Marcellinus particularly traumatic to those present in the Senate that day was not only the swiftness with which their colleague was executed without trial and without having committed any real crime, but also the passivity and terror of the senators. As they sat waiting for the unfortunate member to be identified, none objected when the sentence was carried out.[28]

Dio is clear in his assessment of what Roman politics had become when he has Marcellinus say to his children that Rome was no longer a world worth living in. The political climate was now so evil that decent men were killed without reason or trial, and not always on the emperor's command. That Marcellinus is not given the opportunity to defend himself or to appeal the verdict to the emperor demonstrates how both Rome and even the senators had lost their sense of justice. The conviction of Apronianus based on his nurse's dream was bad enough, but the circumstances surrounding Marcellinus' conviction exemplifies the senators' submission to, and slavish pursuit of, what they believed to be Severus' bidding.

It is a terrified, almost pathetic, Senate that Dio describes. The members were frightened that they too would be falsely implicated simply due to their lack of hair. This absurd account of their anxious glances to one another in order to establish the balder culprit is as tragic as it is comical. When Marcellinus comes forward and is identified, their instant reaction is relief that they are now free of suspicion, not anger over the injustice they had just witnessed. The way in which mock trials and unfair convictions had become the order of the day is further illustrated by Marcellinus' acceptance of his

[27] For accounts of *maiestas* trials in the reign of Domitian see Plin. *Pan.* 42, 48. On Caligula's intimidation of the senators see Dio 59.10, 22.1–8; for Commodus' pursuit of the same see Dio 73[72].6.3. See also Madsen (2014) 25. For Dio's view that *maiestas* trials should be left in the hands of the senators see 52.31.1–3. On Dio and the Senate's role as juries in trials of treason see also Reinhold (1988) 204; Ando (2016) 570.

[28] Dio's later positive account of Severus' behaviour in times of peace, where the emperor is said to have listened to advice he got from what was presumably the *consilium principis*, has led some scholars to assume that his record with the Senate improved after the civil war—also in the eyes of Dio (Birley (1988) 165–6 and Campbell (2005) 11). One is here wise to recall Dio's general assessment of Severus' reign in the opening of Book 75[74].

destiny and his yielding, without objection, to the executioners who lead him to his sentence.

It is in this episode that Dio's trauma-based narrative peaks. It is worth noticing the way Dio uses *himself* to illustrate just how abused and trauma-tised he and his fellow senators were in 205. In contrast to the episode with Commodus and the ostrich, there is nothing heroic about Dio. Like his fellow senators he is paralysed by fear as he checks whether he, a man blessed with good hair, had sufficient to avoid suspicion. Marcellinus, on the other hand, is the hero. When his fearful peers themselves and the Roman state more broadly fail him, he gracefully accepts his destiny and says his stoic goodbyes to his children.

In the framework of trauma-based narration, the senators assume the role of victims of a terrorist regime under whose authority they served when Apronianus and Marcellinus were convicted. Obviously, Severus is the perpetrator. He was the one responsible for the pursuit of senators through unconvincing treason trials in the unsettling political climate driven forward by his authoritarian attempt to cling to power. Yet the senators were actively participating in the abuse when they voiced aloud who the guilty senators might be, *willing it* to be someone else, accepting unfair trials and random executions. Even in default of this respect, the senators could at least have been courageous—and Dio and his colleagues, the historian freely admits, failed in this regard also.

The last of Dio's eyewitness reports to be considered here dates to the winter 214–215 CE which Caracalla spent in the Bithynian metropolis of Nicomedia. As a Bithynian senator from the city of Nicaea and as one of the *consulares,* Dio was a natural member of the emperor's entourage. This account is of a more general nature (78[77].17.3–4) than the previous four examples:

ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἐπήγγελλε μὲν ὡς καὶ μετὰ τὴν ἕω αὐτίκα δικάσων ἢ καὶ ἄλλο τι δημόσιον πράξων, παρέτεινε δὲ ἡμᾶς καὶ ὑπὲρ τὴν μεσημβρίαν καὶ πολλάκις καὶ μέχρι τῆς ἑσπέρας, μηδὲ ἐς τὰ πρόθυρα ἐσδεχόμενος ἀλλ᾿ ἔξω που ἑστῶτας· ὀψὲ γάρ ποτε ἔδοξεν αὐτῷ μηκέτι μηδ᾿ ἀσπάζεσθαι ἡμᾶς ὡς πλήθει. ἐν δὲ τούτῳ τά τε ἄλλα ἐφιλοπραγμόνει ὥσπερ εἶπον, καὶ ἅρματα ἤλαυνε θηρία τε ἔσφαζε καὶ ἐμονομάχει καὶ ἔπινε καὶ ἐκραιπάλα, καὶ τοῖς στρατιώταις τοῖς τὴν ἔνδον αὐτοῦ φρουρὰν ἔχουσι καὶ κρατῆρας πρὸς τῇ ἄλλῃ τροφῇ ἐκεράννυε καὶ κύλικας καὶ παρόντων ἡμῶν καὶ ὁρώντων διέπεμπε, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ἔστιν ὅτε καὶ ἐδίκαζε.

As for Antoninus himself, he would send us word that he was going to hold court or transact some other public business directly after dawn, but he would keep us waiting until noon and often until evening, and would not even admit us to the vestibule, so that we had to stand round outside somewhere; and usually at some late hour he decided that he would not even exchange greetings with us that day. Meanwhile he was keeping himself busy in various ways, as I have said, or was driving chariots, slaying wild beasts, fighting as a gladiator, drinking, nursing the resultant headaches, mixing great bowls of wine—in addition to all their other food—for the soldiers that guarded him inside the palace, and passing it round in cups, in our presence and before our eyes; and after this he would now and then hold court.

The idea that the Senate had a political role to play in the rule of empire was no longer tenable. Instead, the conscript fathers were the emperor's servants whom he could treat as he pleased. Dio relates the story as if he and his peers now ranked below the soldiers—the emperor's real companions with whom he dined and entertained himself. Standing sentry outside Caracalla's quarters in a bizarre role-reversal, sometimes for the entire day, it was now evident to everyone that the senators had lost their symbolic role as trusted advisors. Rome was now obviously a military tyranny, where the emperor made no effort to uphold even the appearance that his power rested on more than the support of his soldiers. That was already the case in the short reign of Didius Julianus, but it did not make a lasting impression thanks to the extreme brevity of his reign and the charade of the Senate's approval. Severus, too, had based his power on his soldiers and appointed his own followers, many of them from the army; but he had at least upheld the illusion that the senators mattered. Caracalla, in contrast, humiliated them by letting them stand outside his quarters for hours. Where Caracalla in Dio's version patronised the senators in his entourage, Severus insisted that the Senate formed a meaningful part of the political process. According to Dio he listened to their advice and, surely with underlying motives in mind, implicated them in his regime by letting them oversee *maiestas* trails. Where Caracalla despised the Senate, Severus gave the impression that he was hurt by their support of Albinus. From the perspective of a trauma-based narrative, threat and humiliation is once again embedded in Dio's account of Caracalla's behaviour as emperor. The abuse suffered by Dio and his peers is rooted both in the underlying threat from soldiers and gladiators who were closer to the emperor, and in the demeaning treatment undergone

by members of the Senate who were forced to obey Caracalla's iniquitous demands or face repercussions for anything perceivable as disobedience or an insult to the throne. Caracalla is the perpetrator who terrorised the senators through threats of violence and humiliation; but he furthermore so upset the hierarchy that gladiators and soldiers held a superior position in his entourage.

Conclusion

To sum up Dio's eyewitness reports, the contemporary books offer a strong, personally invested account of the political climate in Dio's Rome. The historian's autopsy serves to demonstrate the senators' continual exposure to abuse from civil wars, direct threats against their lives and property, unfair trials, and humiliation in various forms. Even if the senators were not entirely blameless, they were the primary victims in Dio's trauma-based narrative, overpowered by the violence of different emperors.

Judging from the epitomes, Dio's coverage of his contemporary Rome is not balanced, nor does he seem to offer his readers a multi-layered narrative or a nuanced analysis of the years he was politically active in the city. Dio had too much at stake in the episodes he described to write a balanced narrative of the period between 180–217 CE. His assessments of the political climate suffer from hindsight and a retrospective urge to distance himself from the Severan dynasty—particularly from Septimius Severus, who, after a promising start, became in retrospect a disappointment and a liability who handed the throne over to Caracalla.[29] Where traditional source-criticism leaves the modern historian with the impression of a tendentious narrative of questionable value as a source to the study of political culture in the reign of Commodus and the Severans, a trauma-based reading offers another approach to what Dio hoped to achieve with his unilateral account of politics in contemporary Rome: one that allows us to disregard, for a moment, the issue of accuracy and lack of nuance. By using his own eyewitness observations where he is both vulnerable and terrified, Dio lures the reader into sharing the many traumatic experiences he and his colleagues were exposed to in the arena, in the Senate house, or in Caracalla's entourage.

Even if Dio and his peers appear at times pathetic, it is the emperors who in their role of perpetrators are the ones responsible for the deteriorating political culture that characterised Rome at the time. It was also Commodus,

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[29] Madsen (2016) 154–8.

Severus, and Caracalla who chose terror and humiliation as political tools over dialogue with the Senate. In that light, Dio's reports from the many tense situations he witnessed serve at least two purposes. One is to remind his readers how damaging tyranny and repression are to a political culture. The depiction of what happened at the trial of Apronianus and Marcellinus is testimony to the elite's potential to lose its integrity and rectitude if exposed to terror and arbitrary rule over long periods. The senators who sat in the chamber on the day Apronianus was tried for treason, and those who stood outside Caracalla's quarters in the Bithynian winter, were incapable of speaking their minds and therefore no longer free political actors able to do what was in the best interest of the commonwealth. They were symbols of the degeneration of Rome's monarchical constitution from a state of *civilitas* in which the ruler, respecting political tradition, rules in harmony with the Senate.[30] The second and more ambitious purpose was to generate sympathy for Dio and his fellow senators and to unify, or mobilise, contemporary and later readers against the military tyranny for which the Severans were responsible.

This leads to the question of impact and the extent to which Dio's trauma-based narrative inspired later historians' treatment of the fifty years of Roman political history from the sole reign of Commodus in 180 to the end of Severan Rome. It is now well established that Herodian did rely on the *Roman History* as one of several sources.[31] Yet Herodian did not adopt the one-sided approach to Roman political history that we perceive so clearly in the epitome of Dio. Like Dio, Herodian criticises most of the emperors from Commodus to Alexander Severus who in one way or other fall short in comparison to Marcus Aurelius. Still, the way he covers Albinus' support among leading senators, and his more nuanced approach to the reign of Commodus, underline clear differences in the two historians' approaches. Dio's younger contemporary evidently does not turn the social crisis of the time into a trauma of his own, nor does he act as a literary agent in the same fashion Dio does when the latter shares his own traumas with his readers.

Neither did the author of the *Historia Augusta* adopt Dio's trauma-based narrative. Commodus' fighting in the arena is a theme in the biography and held to be a marker of the emperor's troubled nature. Yet none of Dio's eyewitness accounts from Commodus's affairs in the arena has found its way into the otherwise colourful narrative of the reign of Marcus Aurelius'

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[30] Wallace-Hadrill (1982) 44; Bono (2018) 94–7.

[31] Scott (2018) 437.

disturbed son (SHA *Com.* 14.3–7). More interesting in the present context is the biography of Didius Julianus. Where both Dio and Herodian censure Julianus' purchase of the throne from the Praetorians, the author of the *Historia Augusta* offers a portrait of Pertinax's successor that is much less damaging than that laid out by his two predecessors. That Julianus acquired the throne at an auction held by the Praetorians is not related in the text. What we hear instead is that the new emperor paid each Praetorian thirty thousand sesterces; at the same time, it was through negotiation rather than bribes that Julianus won over the Guard (2.3.4–3.3.6). The relationship with the Senate is not as strained or marked by fear as that described by Dio, and Julianus was not as arrogant as he comes across in the speech attributed to him in the *Roman History*. Instead, Julianus is said to have addressed the senators in a respectful manner as he thanked them for their support (3.3.3– 6). When Severus moved towards Rome, the Senate is said to have sided, at least initially, with Julianus, sending out a delegation to instruct Severus' army to abandon their general, whom they had just declared an enemy of the state (4.5.1–6).

Compared to the version we get from the epitome of the *Roman History*, the Severus who enters Rome in 193 CE was much more arrogant. Where Dio describes the way in which the victorious general changed into civilian clothes before walking into the city, the *Historia Augusta* depicts Severus riding into the city in full armour. On the relationship between the Senate and the emperor, the *Historia Augusta* seems to follow Herodian's lead and relates that Albinus was the Senate's favourite because he allegedly believed it was the senators who were to rule Rome. They were the ones to enact new laws and choose Rome's magistrates (SHA *Alb.* 8.3–10). Severus' executions and plundering of several members of the Senate is a point of reference but the reader is never invited to see the political crisis from a senatorial point of view.[32] As in the narrative by Herodian, there are faults on both sides and nowhere is the author of the *Historia Augusta* sharing Dio's traumas. Instead, he is more occupied with Severus' brutal nature and how he navigated a hostile climate, the creation of which the senators bore at least some responsibility (SHA *Sev.* 11.1–7).

If Dio's intention was to invoke sympathy among other men of letters, he seems to have had little luck with authors whose texts have come down to us. Both Herodian and the author of the *Historia Augusta* cover the brutality that many of the emperors showed towards the Senate just as they censure

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[32] On Severus' cruelty see SHA *Clod. Alb.* 12.1–4 and *Sev.* 12.1–13.9.

the unfair trails and murders of members of the Senate. But neither Herodian nor the *Historia Augusta* treats the senators as a unified group systematically abused by tyrannical emperors. Although this question requires further study, it is particularly noteworthy in the case of Herodian: the difference from Dio in his approach to the relationship between emperor and Senate lends further support to the growing notion that the historian operated with his own perceptions of Roman history. That Dio failed to persuade Herodian and the author of the *Historia Augusta* does not change his role as a literary agent who offers a one-sided narrative of almost every emperor in his contemporary Rome. His books on Roman politics in his day and age are particularly relevant when read as a personal history, and as a critical response to the way emperors and members of the political elite—men like Julianus and Severus—in the urge for power and dynastic succession traded in the legitimacy that dialogue and cooperation offered the civil emperor.

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8

THE IMAGES OF YOUNG TYRANTS:
REPRESENTATION AND REALITY IN
HERODIAN'S *ROMAN HISTORY**

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Andrew G. Scott

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Abstract: Herodian's *Roman History* engages with the tenets of ancient historiographic theory, particularly those set down by Thucydides. In general, he positions himself as a follower of these prescriptions, though particular eyewitness scenes strain the credulity of the reader. This paper explores Herodian's depictions of young emperors in these scenes as a way to understand how his pushing the boundaries of ancient historiographic theory allows him to stretch the truth as a way to enhance the overall thesis of his work.

Keywords: Herodian, Commodus, Caracalla, Elagabalus,
Thucydides, autopsy, eyewitness, vividness

Introduction

Sometime after 238 CE Herodian completed his Roman history, a work composed in Greek that covers the years 180–238 CE, from the death of Marcus Aurelius to the accession of Gordian III. Therein, Herodian positions himself as a contemporary of the events that he narrates and reaches back to the prescriptions of Thucydides when laying out his aims and research method, which focus on accuracy and autopsy, either his own or that of others. Although seemingly traditional in its approach, Herodian's work has had a poor reception, notably having been called an 'historical

novel' and impugned by many for its fictions.[1] Yet as scholars of ancient Greek and Roman historiography have become more sympathetic to the use of authorial invention within the genre, Herodian's work has undergone a certain reconsideration, mostly seen, more recently, as an ironic approach to a tumultuous age.[2]

The paper, taking seriously the thesis that Herodian outlines in his introduction, aims to better comprehend the role that fictionalised or invented scenes play in emphasising that thesis, while also understanding how these aspects of the history provide insight into how Herodian considered his work within the historiographic tradition. Herodian's explicit aim is to survey the many changes in power that he witnessed, which mixed older, wiser emperors with younger rulers who broke with established tradition. In this chapter, I hope to bring together these concerns of Herodian, namely the changes that were introduced by young emperors and the method of inquiry employed by the author. I will focus specifically on changes in imperial self-presentation, the visual aspect of being emperor and presenting oneself publicly to various constituencies throughout the empire.[3] These changes overlap with Herodian's method, which employs the vivid narration of a contemporary historian, derived primarily from autopsy, which provides a sense of 'being there'.

With an opening scene involving Marcus Aurelius and his visions of young tyrants to come, Herodian establishes his readers as the future viewers of the youthful emperors in his history, and he highlights their innovations through vivid descriptions of their self-presentation. Three episodes in particular then highlight the innovations of young emperors by explicit claims of autopsy, an increased use of visual vocabulary, or a combination thereof: Commodus' performance in the arena, to which Herodian claims to have been an eyewitness (1.15.4); Caracalla's adoption of an Alexander-persona, which Herodian claims to have observed in the emperor's public images (4.8.2); and Elagabalus' use of a painting to prepare the Romans for

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[1] Alföldy (1971a), esp. 431 has advanced the idea of Herodian's work as an historical novel; see also Kolb (1972) 160–1, who censures Herodian's history for its bloated rhetoric and factual poverty. These criticisms, and others, are collected in Bowersock (1975) 229–30.

[2] On the point generally, see Woodman (1988). Sidebottom (1998) 2778–80 has advanced this more ironic approach. For other recent approaches, see Kemezis (2014), ch. 6; Scott (2018); Chrysanthou (2020) and (2022); and Galimberti (2022).

[3] For the importance of 'visual representations' to both Herodian and his audience, see Kemezis (2016) 368.

his initial arrival into the city as emperor (5.5.6–7).[4] In these episodes, Herodian presents seemingly unbelievable events in a believable manner by vouching for their accuracy as an eyewitness (actual or virtual). The reader, however, might be sceptical of these reports, despite the fact that Herodian either states outright or insinuates that they are derived from his eyewitness status. Through an examination of these scenes, it is possible to see how Herodian intertwines method and subject matter to comment on the purpose and aim of his history.

Herodian, Contemporary Historian

In the introductory passages of the history, Herodian consciously engages with the main aspects of the ancient historiographic tradition, in specific imitation of Thucydides.[5] He sets himself apart from other writers who attempted to gain a reputation for themselves (1.1.1):

> οἱ πλεῖστοι τῶν περὶ συγκομιδὴν ἱστορίας ἀσχοληθέντων ἔργων τε πάλαι γεγονότων μνήμην ἀνανεώσασθαι σπουδασάντων, παιδείας κλέος ἀίδιον μνώμενοι, ὡς ἂν μὴ σιωπήσαντες λάθοιεν ἐς τὸν πολὺν ὅμιλον ἀριθ-μούμενοι, τῆς μὲν ἀληθείας ἐν ταῖς ἀφηγήσεσιν ὠλιγώρησαν, οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ ἐπεμελήθησαν φράσεώς τε καὶ εὐφωνίας, θαρροῦντες, ὡς εἴ τι καὶ μυθῶδες λέγοιεν, τὸ μὲν ἡδὺ τῆς ἀκροάσεως αὐτοὶ καρπώσονται, τὸ δ' ἀκριβὲς τῆς ἐξετάσεως οὐκ ἐλεγχθήσεται.

Most of those involved in the compiling of a history and eager to renew the record of past events, mindful of the everlasting glory of learnedness, that if they should be silent they would be forgotten, numbered among the great rabble, neglected truth in their telling, and not least of all cared for their manner of speech and being pleasing to the ear. They were confident that if they should also say something fabulous, they

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[4] See Zimmermann (1999) 222–32 for descriptions of imperial dress as part of Herodian's depiction of the emperors as tyrants. Potter (1999) 87–8 discusses the overall visual orientation of Herodian's narrative.

[5] On the connections to Thucydides, see Sidebottom (1998) 2777–80; Hidber (2006) 72–115; Pitcher (2009) 40–3; Kemezis (2014) 230–4.

themselves would enjoy the benefit of the pleasure of their audience, and that the accuracy of the inquiry would not be put to the test.[6]

A few sentences later, Herodian lays out his own approach (1.1.3):

ἐγὼ δ' ἱστορίαν οὐ παρ' ἄλλων παραδεξάμενος ἄγνωστόν τε καὶ ἀμάρτυρον, ὑπὸ νεαρᾷ δὲ τῇ τῶν ἐντευξομένων μνήμῃ, μετὰ πάσης [ἀληθοῦς] ἀκριβείας ἤθροισα ἐς συγγραφήν, οὐκ ἀτερπῆ τὴν γνῶσιν καὶ τοῖς ὕστερον ἔσεσθαι προσδοκήσας ἔργων μεγάλων τε καὶ πολλῶν ἐν ὀλίγῳ χρόνῳ γενομένων …

I have not adopted from others any unknowable or unwitnessed information (ἱστορίαν); rather, I have gathered everything into a history (συγγραφήν) with every accuracy, within the recent memory of my readers, believing as well that the knowledge of important deeds and those that occurred within a limited period of time will be not unpleasant (οὐκ ἀτερπῆ) to future readers …

After an interlude, in which he provides some background on the reign of Marcus Aurelius, Herodian makes further remarks about his method. There he reiterates his claim of producing a contemporary history, this time including a detail about his work in imperial service (1.2.5):

ἃ δὲ μετὰ τὴν Μάρκου τελευτὴν παρὰ πάντα τὸν ἐμαυτοῦ βίον εἶδόν τε καὶ ἤκουσα—ἔστι δ' ὧν καὶ πείρᾳ μετέσχον ἐν βασιλικαῖς ἢ δημοσίαις ὑπηρεσίαις γενόμενος—ταῦτα συνέγραψα.

I have recorded the events after the death of Marcus entirely from what I saw and heard during my life, as I had experience of them since I was in the imperial and public service.

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[6] I have translated μυθῶδες in this passage as 'fabulous material' and have attempted to remain consistent with this translation throughout (see further, below). By 'fabulous' I mean to suggest exaggerated or unbelievable material: see Flory (1990). For the association of pleasure and 'fabulous material' (and likewise the rejection that such fabulous material brings pleasure), see Luc. *Hist. Conscr.* 10. Hidber (2006) 102–4 discusses Herodian's use of this term, especially with regard to Thucydides but also with other references to the historiographic tradition.

Herodian's comments should be read in light of Thucydides' introductory remarks, especially the passage at 1.22.2–4:

τὰ δ᾽ ἔργα τῶν πραχθέντων ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ οὐκ ἐκ τοῦ παρατυχόντος πυνθανόμενος ἠξίωσα γράφειν, οὐδ᾽ ὡς ἐμοὶ ἐδόκει, ἀλλ᾽ οἷς τε αὐτὸς παρῆν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσον δυνατὸν ἀκριβείᾳ περὶ ἑκάστου ἐπεξελθών. … καὶ ἐς μὲν ἀκρόασιν ἴσως τὸ μὴ μυθῶδες αὐτῶν ἀτερπέστερον φανεῖται· ὅσοι δὲ βουλήσονται τῶν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τῶν μελλόντων ποτὲ αὖθις κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιούτων καὶ παραπλησίων ἔσεσθαι, ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἕξει.

Having learned what happened in the war, I considered it worthwhile to commit it to writing not from a chance individual or as it seemed best to me, but by investigating each event at which I myself was present or from others who were with the greatest accuracy as possible. … Perhaps the lack of fabulous material will seem less pleasing to my readers; but whoever wishes to discover the truth of what happened and of what is bound to happen, in an exact or similar way, in accordance with human nature, it will be sufficient for me that they consider these matters useful.

Reading these passages all together, we see Herodian associating himself with Thucydides' approach to writing history. Like Thucydides, Herodian stresses that he will use his own autopsy, and also suggests that he will rely on the eyewitness testimony of others. His claim of experience in the imperial bureaucracy mimics the belief that 'men of affairs' can produce the best histories.[7] These statements place Herodian in the tradition of Thucydides, the example *par excellence* for writing contemporary history.[8]

One aspect of Herodian's preface, however, seems curious at first, namely his claim that his work will be 'not unpleasant'. This comment recalls Thucydides' seeming rejection of immediate pleasure, seen above.[9] Through

[7] As most strongly stated perhaps in Polybius (12.25g). For the importance of an historian's experience informing his work, see also Marincola (1997) 133–48 (with mention of this passage in Herodian at p. 147).

[8] Jacoby (2015) 31: '[O]nly with Thucydides did Greek historiography reach τὴν αὐτῆς φύσιν ['its true nature', a phrase taken from Arist. *Poet.* 1449a15], in that it creates the genre that now permanently remains the noblest and most significant, which actually alone truly ranks as "historiography", namely contemporary history'.

[9] Although Thucydides' statement has been taken as a strict rejection of pleasure in his work, that is certainly an over-reading; rather, Thucydides merely states that his work might

his rejection of fabulous material, Thucydides elevates autoptic investigation over stories from the past. Autoptic descriptions aimed for accuracy, which would aim to show that '... there was no need for argument: you could simply *see* the thing was true'.[10] These depictions also created a sense of vividness (ἐνάργεια), which could also bring pleasure. For the specific connection between vividness and pleasure, we might rely on Duris' approach to the pleasure that can be derived from mimetic representation. Duris criticised Ephorus and Theopompus for using 'neither any kind of representation (μιμήσεως) nor pleasure (ἡδονῆς) in the recounting, but concerned themselves solely with the writing itself'.[11]

Like Thucydides, Herodian aimed for vividness in his narrative, and also like Thucydides he rejected the use of fabulous material in pursuit of pleasure (1.1.1, above). At issue in this chapter is the fact that Herodian at times seems to include fantastical material in his work, and, as noted in the introduction above, Herodian has long been faulted for his novelistic tendencies; and indeed the episodes that I will discuss in this paper strain the credulity of the reader.[12] If we accept the connection of autoptic description, vividness, and pleasure, we will see in what follows that Herodian has taken the maxims of Thucydides and stretched them a bit. While his narrative might at times stray from strict accuracy, the purpose is to highlight a theme of his history, namely the innovations in self-presentation made by the young emperors of his day. What Herodian describes, then, is not fantastical or fictional *per se*, but rather a reflection of the changes that occurred, amplified

be perceived as less pleasing: see Woodman (1988) 28–9. With respect to Herodian specifically, see Kemezis (2014) 231.

[10] Wiseman (1993) 146 (italics in original); see also Damon (2010) 354: the effect of vividness 'is that an "audience" (listener or reader) should see what participants saw and feel what they felt'. In antiquity Thucydides was praised for the vividness of his narrative; see, e.g., Plut. *Mor.* 347A.

[11] *BNJ* 76 F 1; translation from Marincola (2017) 40. There is still some disagreement over how Duris uses the term μίμησις in this fragment: see Gray (1987) for a survey and an argument for the term denoting appropriate representation of character; see also Pownall's commentary at *BNJ* 76 F 1. Whether we take Gray's meaning or the 'vivid representation' offered by others (see Walbank (2002) 235, with reff.), the general outcome is the same for the purposes of the discussion here. For the treatment of the passages of Plutarch and Duris with regard to Thucydides' preface, see Woodman (1988) 25.

[12] In addition to the criticisms adduced above, we can add Hidber's (2006) 104 observation that Herodian mentions the pleasure of his work without a reference to its usefulness, which defies the expectation for historiography and is more similar to what one finds in ancient novels.

to stress their importance.[13] They also allow Herodian to test the boundaries of historical narrative aimed at an accurate accounting of the past, while still working within the historiographic tradition, just as his young emperors push the boundaries of normative modes of imperial self-presentation.

Setting the Scene: Marcus Aurelius' Visions

Just as the introduction establishes Herodian as a contemporary historian who will rely on eyewitness testimony and his own observation to chart the changes in power in his own day, so the opening scenes of the work expand on the importance of sight and judgement of emperors in the history, especially youthful ones. Within the preface Herodian lays out his theme, which points to the uniqueness of his work (1.1.5–6):

μερισθεῖσα γὰρ ἡ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴ ἐν ἔτεσιν ἑξήκοντα ἐς πλείους δυνάστας ἢ ὁ χρόνος ἀπῄτει, πολλὰ καὶ ποικίλα ἤνεγκε καὶ θαύματος ἄξια. τούτων γὰρ οἱ μὲν τὴν ἡλικίαν πρεσβύτεροι διὰ τὴν ἐμπειρίαν τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιμελέστερον ἑαυτῶν τε καὶ τῶν ὑπηκόων ἦρξαν, οἱ δὲ κομιδῇ νέοι ῥᾳθυμότερον βιώσαντες πολλὰ ἐκαινοτόμησαν.

The Roman empire was divided, over sixty years, among more rulers than the time permitted, and many events were unexpected and worthy of wonder. For the older rulers, because of their experience of affairs, ruled themselves and their subjects more temperately, whereas the younger ones lived more carelessly and instituted many new things.

Instead of a history of Rome as a whole, Herodian will focus on a period of only sixty years and, more specifically, on the issue of changes in power and the differences between mature and young emperors.[14]

This theme is highlighted at first through the figure of Marcus Aurelius an ideal *princeps* against whom all future emperors are to be judged.[15]

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[13] This view is in line with Sidebottom's claim ((1998) 2821–2) that Herodian's history, while at times dealing in authorial invention, presented a history that was 'true enough'.

[14] At 2.15.7, Herodian states that he will cover a period of seventy years. The history deals with the period 180–238 CE, about sixty years, so the latter citation of seventy years may be a corruption in the text. For a discussion, see Whittaker (1969) I.ix–xix, and Alföldy (1971b) 204–9.

[15] See Sidebottom (1998) 2804–6; Hidber (2006), esp. 188–272.

Herodian describes Marcus as possessing all virtues and as a lover of ancient literature (1.2.3–4). He was a clement and upright emperor, and indeed was the only philosopher-king.[16] In addition, Herodian expects Marcus' reputation to precede him: he goes on to relate that many writers have already written histories of Marcus (1.2.5). As these comments mark the end of the introduction proper, the history begins with scenes detailing Marcus' final days and the emperor's concerns about the future, specifically the passage of power to his son Commodus.[17] In a poignant passage, Marcus reflects on examples from the past that demonstrate the folly of handing power to young rulers. Here, Herodian has Marcus draw on his education; since Marcus was 'a very learned man' (ἄνδρα πολυίστορα, 1.3.2), he became anxious when he thought about past rulers who came to power as young men, such as Dionysius II of Syracuse; the successors of Alexander; and Roman emperors such as Nero and Domitian.[18] Importantly, Marcus visualised these examples. Herodian writes that 'having formed a notion of these images of tyrants, he was alarmed and scared' (τοιαύτας δὴ τυραννίδος εἰκόνας ὑποτυπούμενος ἐδεδίει τε καὶ ἤλπιζεν).

This scene functions programmatically, even as a sort of second preface embedded within the narrative proper. Marcus' deathbed vision alerts the reader to the importance of sight and appearance in the descriptions of the reigns to come.[19] When read in combination with Herodian's preface, this passage indicates that the reader will view the tyrannical behaviour of young emperors and therefore be conditioned to judge that behaviour appropriately. As Herodian's history unfolds, one of his concerns, as indicated in this 'second preface', is the behaviour of young tyrants. Herodian will highlight deviations from normative modes of visual self-representation through public spectacles and scenes of personal autopsy. At the beginning of the story, such innovations lead to the almost immediate removal of an emperor, but by the end we see a thirteen-year-old ascending the throne. Thus, I will argue, in his analysis of kings and tyrants, Herodian will use vividness both to prove his thesis about young emperors and to demonstrate

[16] While Herodian does not use the term 'philosopher-king' specifically, he places the words side by side at 1.2.4: μόνος τε βασιλέων φιλοσοφίαν οὐ λόγοις οὐδὲ δογμάτων γνώσεσι, σεμνῷ δ' ἤθει καὶ σώφρονι βίῳ ἐπιστώσατο.

[17] For analysis of this passage and its historiographic implications, see Pitcher (2012) 269–70. Hidber (2006) 196–201 reviews the literary forebears to this passage.

[18] Pitcher (2009) 44 comments on the self-consciousness of this scene, 'as an example of someone using historiography *within* a historiographical text' (italics in original).

[19] Hidber (2006) 244 n. 235.

how young emperors and their idiosyncratic self-presentations became normalised and led to further instability for the empire. This is all the more striking, because as Herodian's vivid depictions of emperors become more and more improbable to the audience, the actors in his story become all the more credulous.[20] With this technique, Herodian put the reader in a better position than the characters within the story itself to make appropriate judgements of emperors.[21] With these considerations in mind, it will be useful to turn to some specific examples.

Commodus in the Arena

As he moves to the end of Commodus' reign and life, Herodian uses the games that the emperor celebrated in 192 CE as an important turning point that precipitated the emperor's fall. In his prefatory remarks, Herodian highlights the novelty of the event, writing that people came from all over the empire to 'witness things which they had never seen nor heard before' (θεασόμενοι ἃ μὴ πρότερον μήτε ἑωράκεσαν μήτε ἠκηκόεσαν, 1.15.1). He also states that 'he gathered animals from all quarters; we saw those which we had marvelled at in paintings then for the first time' (τὰ δὲ πανταχόθεν ζῷα ἠθροίζετο αὐτῷ. τότε γοῦν εἴδομεν ὅσα ἐν γραφαῖς ἐθαυμάζομεν, 1.15.4).[22] The insistence on the uniqueness of the events and his stress on seeing the activities first-hand relate to the passages discussed above. It connects to the preface with its insistence on the author's claim of autopsy as one of his major methods of research, as well as the sense of marvel that Commodus' games produced, an aspect of his history that Herodian specifically says will be part of his work. The sense of wonder or amazement also sets up the importance of visuality in the narrative to come and indicates that the reader should be paying particular attention to appearances.[23] Furthermore, we are reminded

[20] For the relationship between vividness and probability see Woodman (1988) 28.

[21] Sidebottom (1998) 2817–19 notes that Herodian's readers are frequently more know-ledgeable than the characters in the work.

[22] This passage has been frequently employed to judge the extent of Herodian's dependence on Cassius Dio's history. Perhaps most forcefully, Kolb (1972) 25–34 has argued that Herodian lifted the passage from Dio and fabricated his autoptic claim. Sidebottom (1998) 2782 seems to allow that Herodian used Dio here, though he does not take up the issue of whether or not Herodian was present at the events. Galimberti (2014) 15–17 is more circumspect and does not rule out the possibility that Herodian could have been there.

[23] This runs counter to the analysis of the extraordinary or marvellous in Herodian in Molinier Arbo (2017), who sees Herodian as more similar to Thucydides than Herodotus.

of the visions of Marcus Aurelius and his concerns about his son. Now those concerns are realised, and Herodian (and his readers) becomes the real-life witness of the behaviour that caused Marcus such anxiety.

As Herodian's narrative progresses from his description of these games, we can observe how Commodus' new appearance as a performer was evidence of his becoming a tyrant (1.15.7):

μέχρι μὲν οὖν τούτων, εἰ καὶ βασιλείας τὰ πραττόμενα ἦν ἀλλότρια, πλὴν ἀνδρείας καὶ εὐστοχίας παρὰ τοῖς δημώδεσιν εἶχέ τινα χάριν. ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ γυμνὸς ἐς τὸ ἀμφιθέατρον εἰσῆλθεν ὅπλα τε ἀναλαβὼν ἐμονομάχει, τότε σκυθρωπὸν εἶδεν ὁ δῆμος θέαμα, τὸν εὐγενῆ Ῥωμαίων βασιλέα μετὰ τοσαῦτα τρόπαια πατρός τε καὶ προγόνων οὐκ ἐπὶ βαρβάρους ὅπλα λαμβάνοντα στρατιωτικὰ ἢ Ῥωμαίων ἀρχῇ πρέποντα, καθυβρίζοντα δὲ τὸ ἀξίωμα αἰσχίστῳ καὶ μεμιασμένῳ σχήματι.

Up to then he still held popular favour, even if his actions were foreign to the kingship, except for his courage and skill in shooting. But when he went naked into the arena and carried the weapons for fighting as a gladiator, the people saw this depressing spectacle, that a noble Roman king, after such successes of his father and ancestors, did not bring his weapons against the barbarians or do something fitting for the Roman empire, but rather degraded his reputation with this shameful and dishonourable appearance.

The transformation of the emperor, witnessed by the spectators in the arena, became reality when, because of his madness (μανία) Commodus actually took up residency in the gladiatorial barracks, took the name of a gladiator (in place of his previously preferred name of Hercules), and refashioned the Colossus statue in his image (1.15.8–9).[24]

Commodus' madness would eventually lead to his death. At the conclusion of the transformation of Commodus' image, Herodian includes an important comment that serves as a transition to Commodus' assassination narrative: 'And so it was necessary to stop his madness and the tyranny he held over the Roman empire'.[25] There follows a description of the scheme carried out by Marcia, Laetus, and Eclectus. What is significant here is that

[24] For an analysis of Commodus as Hercules, see Hekster (2001) and Cadario (2017).

[25] 1.16.1, ἔδει δὲ ἄρα ποτὲ κἀκεῖνον παύσασθαι μεμηνότα καὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν τυραννουμένην. Commodus' 'madness' is also mentioned at 1.15.8, just prior to this notice.

it was the public appearance of the emperor that demanded his removal. Just prior to his public shows, public opinion turned against Commodus. The emperor no longer hid his behaviour in private, but dared to exhibit it publicly (ταῦτα καὶ δημοσίᾳ δεῖξαι ἐτόλμησεν, 1.14.7). He was so mad and acting in such a drunken craze (ἐς τοσοῦτόν τε μανίας καὶ παροινίας προὐχώρησεν) that he refused to use his family name, had himself called Hercules instead, and, tellingly, took off the clothes of a Roman emperor in favour of a lion skin and club, or wore garments of purple and gold that were feminine and laughable (1.14.8). Herodian also discusses the statues that Commodus set up for himself around Rome, ending the section with the notice that after Commodus' death the Senate took down the statue he had placed in front of the curia and put up one of liberty instead (1.14.9–15.1).

With his focus on autoptic detail throughout this section, Herodian highlights Commodus' irregular self-presentation and the public reaction to it. His description not only produces a vivid picture for the reader, but it also confirms the anxieties that Marcus Aurelius had about passing power to a young tyrant. Yet just as Marcus did not learn the appropriate lesson from his education and knowledge of historical precedent, so will his successors make the same mistake, as we will observe in the accessions of Caracalla and Elagabalus to come.

Caracalla as Alexander

Marcus Aurelius' misgivings about passing the throne to his son are mirrored in the later transition of power from Septimius Severus to his sons Caracalla and Geta. Herodian discusses Severus' concerns about his sons (3.13) and he notes that Severus tried to use an expedition to Britain as a way to reform their behaviour (3.14.1–2). It was not long, however, before Severus was dead, his sons succeeded him (3.15.4–5), and Caracalla murdered Geta (4.4.3).[26] On his deathbed, Severus is described as 'destroyed mostly by grief' (λύπῃ τὸ πλεῖστον διαφθαρείς, 3.15.2). This grief is surely related to the situation of his heirs, for Herodian notes Severus' status as the most militarily accomplished emperor and the great wealth that he passed on, both of which are presented as noble accomplishments and stand in contrast to the passage of power to two young and rivalrous heirs.

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[26] Herodian devotes a significant section in the interim (4.1–2) to the return of the brothers from abroad and especially a description of the funeral of Septimius Severus.

Despite his descent from a worthy emperor (at least in Herodian's presentation), Caracalla faced problems almost immediately due to the murder of his brother and the brutal purge that followed (4.6.1–5). According to Herodian, the emperor was troubled by a guilty conscience and decided to leave Rome to handle management of the provinces (4.7.1). Once there, Caracalla altered his dress to suit local customs and presented himself as a *commilito* to his soldiers. Herodian writes that while Caracalla was among the Germans he wore Germanic clothing and a blond wig (4.7.3). The result was that he became popular among provincials in Germany and the military (4.7.4).[27]

Caracalla decided to continue this experiment during his travels, but when he reached Macedonia his previously successful self-presentation turned into excessive Alexander-mania.[28] It is in this section that Herodian claims to have seen a peculiar image meant to connect, quite literally, Caracalla and Alexander. Herodian writes that (4.8.2):

ἔσθ' ὅπου δὲ καὶ χλεύης εἴδομεν ἀξίας εἰκόνας, ἐν γραφαῖς ἑνὸς σώματος ὑπὸ περιφερείᾳ κεφαλῆς μιᾶς ὄψεις ἡμιτόμους δύο, Ἀλεξάνδρου τε καὶ Ἀντωνίνου.

In some places we saw images worthy of jest, in paintings of one body below the circumference of a single head that had been split into two faces, of both Alexander and Antoninus.[29]

This sentence contains two important verbal repetitions from the passages discussed earlier. First, Herodian refers to these images as εἰκόνας, the same word that he uses in the passage about Marcus Aurelius' visions upon his death bed.[30] This repetition suggests that Caracalla has become one of the bad young emperors whom Marcus Aurelius envisioned. Herodian also

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[27] Herodian notes here that the soldiers liked Caracalla because of the donatives, but especially because he acted like a fellow soldier.

[28] For an analysis of Caracalla's Alexander-persona, see Baharal (1994).

[29] Based on this description, it does not seem that Herodian intends that the reader imagine a double-headed herm, though perhaps he is drawing on that idea. As far as I am aware, there are no material parallels to what Herodian describes in this passage.

[30] The language that Herodian uses here is also similar to that of Cassius Dio (78[77].7.1 [Xiph.]: 'He was so passionate about Alexander that … he had images (εἰκόνας) of him set up both in the camps and in Rome itself …' (περὶ δὲ τὸν Ἀλέξανδρον οὕτω τι ἐπτόητο ὥστε … εἰκόνας αὐτοῦ πολλὰς καὶ ἐν τοῖς στρατοπέδοις καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ Ῥώμῃ στῆσαι …).

claims to have seen these images themselves, just as he claimed to have seen Commodus in the arena. As with the Commodus episode, one would not be faulted for being sceptical about this particular claim, since the pictures that Herodian describes are certainly unique and perhaps unlikely to have ever been produced, at least as a sort of official medium of communication.

The potentially fictive nature of these images raises an important point. Because Herodian has already established himself as a contemporary historian, specific claims of autopsy would generally only be necessary to quell any sense of disbelief at what he was reporting.[31] Yet these episodes call extra attention to the shifting modes of self-representation developed by these young emperors and thus bring the reader back to Herodian's thesis about the instability of his age. Indeed, Caracalla's unfitness for ruling is in evidence in the following chapters. After a stay in Pergamum's Asclepion for incubation treatment, Caracalla made his way to Troy, mimicking the behaviour of Alexander the Great there but taking it even further.[32] Rumour had it that a freedman named Festus was poisoned there so that they could celebrate a funeral like Patroclus' (4.8.3–5). Caracalla then travelled through Asia and Bithynia to Antioch and then onto Alexandria, where he wanted to visit this city founded by Alexander and to worship the local god (4.8.6–7). There he was greeted warmly, and he visited the tomb of Alexander (4.8.8–9). The Alexandrians, however, had been mocking Caracalla, especially for the death of Geta, and calling Julia Domna Jocasta; they also made fun of his imitation of Alexander and Achilles (4.9.2–3). When the young men of the city were gathered, ostensibly to be enrolled in a Macedonian phalanx, the emperor used their assembly as a trap to slaughter them (4.9.4–8).[33] After the slaughter, Caracalla departed Alexandria and returned to Antioch, where he began to plan his Parthian campaign. He claimed to wish to marry the daughter of Artabanus and thereby unite the Roman and Parthian empires; when his overtures were eventually accepted, Caracalla used the gathering as a way to carry out a mass murder of Parthians. After the news was communicated to the Senate and honours were voted to Caracalla, Herodian begins Caracalla's assassination narrative.

[31] For this general phenomenon, see Marincola (1997) 82–3, 86.

[32] For Alexander at Troy, see, e.g., Plut. *Alex.* 15.

[33] For the massacre, see, e.g., Harker (2008) 133–8, with references to the relevant literature.

After the death of Geta, Herodian's Caracalla narrative focuses on the emperor's travels in the East and especially his playing the new role of Alexander. Herodian brings that vision to the fore with his depiction of the strange images, which he claims to have seen, with heads half of Caracalla and half of Alexander. These images serve as a sort of metaphor for an emperor who does not seem to know exactly who he is or what role to play, and they are a visual manifestation of the emperor's derangement. His desire to be a new Alexander leads to the massacre in Alexandria and then the ridiculous Parthian campaign. It follows, in Herodian's narrative, that the culmination of Caracalla's Alexander-mania would result in his assassination at the hands of Macrinus and his co-conspirators.

Elagabalus, Eastern Priest in Rome

The power of images returns to the centre of the story in Herodian's Elagabalus narrative and connects the young emperor with Caracalla. This reign begins with a deceptive first appearance, when Elagabalus claimed to be the son of Caracalla, a connection that Herodian says was important to the soldiers who would eventually elevate Elagabalus to the throne. When Macrinus' forces made an attack on Elagabalus' camp, the soldiers showed the boy to the attacking legions, and once they were persuaded that Elagabalus was Caracalla's son and looked just like him, they killed their commanding officer and joined the revolt. Herodian includes the aside that the soldiers 'wished to see him in this way' (5.4.3–4), a comment that touches on the unreliability and fungibility of eyewitness accounting.

Although this trick worked to fell Macrinus, other image problems began to emerge for Elagabalus. Herodian stresses Elagabalus' youth, inexperience, and lack of education, which caused his grandmother and advisors to take control of affairs (5.5.1). He also states that Maesa was anxious to get back to the imperial palace, but that the news of Elagabalus' accession was received poorly in the capital; the public only grudgingly accepted the new emperor, who had been elevated by the army (5.5.2).

The royal family soon departed Syria but were compelled to winter in Nicomedia. There Elagabalus assumed the role of priest of Elagabal, and Herodian describes the emperor's dress: purple and gold clothing, necklaces and other jewellery, including a tiara. Herodian then focalises the scene through Maesa, the boy's grandmother (5.5.5):

ἡ δὲ Μαῖσα ταῦτα ὁρῶσα πάνυ ἤσχαλλε, πείθειν τε λιπαροῦσα ἐπειρᾶτο μεταμφιέσασθαι τὴν Ῥωμαίων στολὴν μέλλοντά [τε] ἐς τὴν πόλιν ἀφίξεσθαι καὶ ἐς τὴν σύγκλητον εἰσελεύσεσθαι, μὴ ἀλλοδαπὸν ἢ παντάπασι βάρβαρον τὸ σχῆμα ὀφθὲν εὐθὺς λυπήσῃ τοὺς ἰδόντας, ἀήθεις τε ὄντας καὶ οἰομένους τὰ τοιαῦτα καλλωπίσματα οὐκ ἀνδράσιν ἀλλὰ θηλείαις πρέπειν.

When she saw these things, Maesa was exceedingly worried, and she kept on trying to persuade him to put on the dress of the Romans when he was about to enter the city and come before the Senate, for he would immediately cause offense if they saw his outfit that was perceived as foreign and altogether barbarous, as they were not used to such things and thought such ornaments were appropriate not for men but for women.

This passage uses two instances of autopsy: first Maesa's, then the prospective viewing by the people of Rome. Maesa realised that the emperor had to be seen by the people of Rome in order to be accepted, and she feared that his outrageous behaviour in the East would not pass muster in the capital.

Elagabalus, however, refused to take the advice of his grandmother and continued to present an appearance that Herodian calls 'in every way barbarous' (παντάπασι βάρβαρον τὸ σχῆμα, 5.5.5). Yet the new emperor also became concerned that his appearance might not be accepted in Rome. To solve this problem, he decided to have a painting sent to the capital, which Herodian describes in the following way (5.5.6):

… βουλόμενος ἐν ἔθει γενέσθαι τῆς τοῦ σχήματος ὄψεως τήν τε σύγκλητον καὶ τὸν δῆμον Ῥωμαίων, ἀπόντος τε αὐτοῦ πεῖραν δοθῆναι πῶς φέρουσι τὴν ὄψιν τοῦ σχήματος, εἰκόνα μεγίστην γράψας παντὸς ἑαυτοῦ, οἷος προϊών τε καὶ ἱερουργῶν ἐφαίνετο, παραστήσας τε ἐν τῇ γραφῇ τὸν τύπον τοῦ ἐπιχωρίου θεοῦ, ᾧ δὴ καλλιερῶν ἐγέγραπτο, πέμψας τε ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην, ἐκέλευσεν ἐν τῷ μεσαιτάτῳ τῆς συγκλήτου τόπῳ ὑψηλοτάτῳ τε τὴν εἰκόνα ἀνατεθῆναι ὑπὲρ κεφαλῆς τοῦ ἀγάλματος τῆς νίκης …

… wishing that the Senate and people of Rome get used to the sight of his appearance, and also to test out how they received the sight of it while he was not yet present, he had a huge image made of himself that showed him going forth and performing sacred rites. In the painting he

also had placed an image of a local deity, in which he appeared making
a sacrifice. He had this sent to Rome and ordered that the image be
placed high up in the middle of the Senate house, above the head of the
statue of Victory …

This passage stresses the importance of sight and images, through the
repeated use of the terms ὄψις and εἰκών. The latter term carries further
significance, since it connects back to the opening scenes of the history, in
which Marcus Aurelius views the images of young tyrants. Herodian also
repeatedly stresses the young emperor's appearance (σχῆμα), which suggests
that he is thinking beyond merely the clothes that Elagabalus wore and is
pointing to the entire role or character that the emperor has adopted.

   Elagabalus' use of such an image is in some ways an inversion of how
similar images are used elsewhere in Herodian's history. We see, for
example, that Septimius Severus, after his Parthian campaign, wished to
advertise his successes while he was absent from Rome. Severus therefore
sent a letter detailing the campaign to the Senate and people, and also had
paintings of the battles and victories made and set up in public (3.9.12).
Severus, of course, was a known quantity at the time, and his actions are
meant to advertise his successes abroad. Similarly, Maximinus Thrax
advertised his successes against the Germans by sending a report to the
Senate and people, and had large images of it set up in front of the Senate
house, whereby the Romans might not only be able to hear what happened,
but see it, too (7.2.8). When Elagabalus uses a similar ploy to show himself
to the Romans for the first time, the move in general is a sort of perversion
or reversal of the actions of Severus and Maximinus.

   Yet in a turn of events that I think is contrary to the reader's every
expectation, Elagabalus' ruse actually worked. Herodian writes (5.5.7):

   ὡς δὲ ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην ἀφίκετο τῷ προειρημένῳ σχήματι, οὐδὲν παράδοξον
   εἶδον οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι, τῇ γραφῇ ἐνειθισμένοι.

   When he entered Rome in his aforementioned get-up, the Romans saw
   nothing troubling, since they had been become accustomed to it by the
   painting.

Herodian goes on to describe Elagabalus' strange behaviour, including the
emperor's elaborate sacrifices, dancing, irregular marriages, including to a
Vestal Virgin, the marriage between Pallas and Elagabal, the installation of

Elagabal in a temple outside of the city, and its attendant celebrations, which included the distribution of money, goods, and animals and resulted in a deadly human stampede (5.5.8–6.10).[34]

Elagabalus, however, could not play this game for long. As Maesa observed his behaviour, she worried that the soldiers would become upset, and she began to plan for Elagabalus' successor (5.7.1). The anger of the soldiers indeed came to pass; Herodian writes that (5.8.1):

> οἵ τε ἄλλοι πάντες ἄνθρωποι καὶ μάλιστα οἱ στρατιῶται ἤχθοντο καὶ ἐδυσφόρουν· ἐμυσάττοντο δὲ αὐτὸν ὁρῶντες τὸ μὲν πρόσωπον καλλωπιζό-μενον περιεργότερον ἢ κατὰ γυναῖκα σώφρονα, περιδεραίοις δὲ χρυσίνοις ἐσθῆσί τε ἁπαλαῖς ἀνάνδρως κοσμούμενον, ὀρχούμενόν τε οὕτως ὡς ὑπὸ πάντων ὁρᾶσθαι.

> Everyone, and especially the soldiers, were vexed and became impatient; when they saw him, they were disgusted at his face made up with greater care than was fitting for a chaste woman, effeminately decorated with golden necklaces and delicate clothes and dancing in such a way that he could be seen by all.

In an ironic twist, the acceptance of Elagabalus, which hinged on being seen as suitable by the Romans, turned to rejection on the same basis. Herodian here uses the soldiers as a stand-in for his own autopsy. Their sight, seemingly restored, informed them that their emperor was unfit. At this point the royal house also turned against Elagabalus, and it was not long before he was murdered and Alexander Severus took his place (5.8.2–9). Strikingly, however, the problem was not solved, as the young Alexander Severus acceded to the throne. We will look at Alexander's reign in more detail below, but first it will be necessary to consider in closer detail the three reigns just surveyed.

The Instability of Image and Reality

In each of the passages analysed thus far, Herodian presents an image of a young emperor, viewed by Herodian himself and/or others, that would eventually lead to that emperor's demise. Commodus took on the role of

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[34] For Elagabalus' initial appearance as signalling his incompatibility with Roman tradition, see Sommer (2004) 105–7.

arena performer and gladiator, and soon met his death. Caracalla adopted a series of innovative identities, including wearing Germanic dress and pretending to be Achilles at Troy. His adoption of the Alexander-motif, and especially the advertisement of that identity through the bizarre images that Herodian claims to have seen, foreshadow his demise at the hands of Macrinus. Elagabalus took on the image of eastern priest-ruler, and with some success: by first getting the Roman people used to this character through the display of an enormous painting, Elagabalus was able to maintain his position for some time. These episodes move from the almost immediate removal of the emperor upon the assumption of a new image in the case of Commodus to the delayed removal of Elagabalus, who ruled for four years and almost managed to create a new visual paradigm by which the emperor would be known.

In each of these episodes, Herodian plays on the confusion between image and reality.[35] Indeed, in each we can find the repeated vocabulary of εἰκών and γραφή in the scenes in which the emperor brings such an image to life. In the Commodus passage, Herodian reports that 'we' marvelled at animals that we had only seen in paintings (ἐν γραφαῖς). This notice sets the scene for the unreal coming to life, namely in the form of the emperor as arena performer. In the case of Caracalla, Herodian explicitly connects the words εἰκών and γραφή as practical synonyms. He again writes that 'we' saw 'images' (εἰκόνας) worthy of jest in paintings (ἐν γραφαῖς) with a head half of Caracalla and half of Alexander. In the Elagabalus episode, Herodian again connects εἰκών and γραφή. In order to make the Roman people accustomed to the priest-emperor's appearance, a huge painting was made (εἰκόνα μεγίστην γράψας, 5.5.6), and Herodian goes on to refer to the painting as both a γραφή and εἰκών in the following section (5.5.7).

With these episodes, the images of young tyrants foreseen by Marcus Aurelius come to life in the figures of Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus. The youthful emperors attempt to build legitimacy by altering the traditional norms of self-presentation. This is especially striking, since the first two, Commodus and Caracalla, descended directly from more mature emperors who receive a generally positive treatment by Herodian. In a similar way, Elagabalus is presented as having turned away the wise advice of his female handlers in favour of this new form of self-presentation (5.5.5). For those who viewed these images, there were various responses.

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[35] On the connection among these visual representations in Herodian, see also Chrysanthou (2022) 242–3.

Commodus' entertainment at first produced wonder, and then rejection. Caracalla's images resulted in mockery from the narrator, but he continued to live out this persona for a few years. Elagabalus' image also allowed for acceptance, at least for some time. In the instance of Commodus, the innovation, once witnessed, was immediately noticed and rejected. But in the cases of Caracalla and Elagabalus, the innovations are witnessed but the young emperors permitted to continue with these new forms of self-presentation a while longer, when, according to Herodian's scheme, they should have been recognised as the young tyrants of Marcus' initial vision.

This discussion brings up the related question of whether or not Herodian's account constitutes an accurate depiction of events. The answer in each case seems to be no, or probably not, for different reasons. In the first instance, it is unlikely that Herodian himself witnessed Commodus' antics in the arena. Herodian's history was written sometime after 238 CE and perhaps as late as the 250s, making his presence at games sixty years earlier unlikely (or during his boyhood).[36] Herodian also did not need to be there to get material for his history: scholars have long believed that Herodian borrowed his description of Commodus' performance in the arena from Cassius Dio's Roman history.[37] Though there is still debate about the extent of it, Herodian surely used Dio as a source for his history, up through the reign of Elagabalus.[38] While there is more happening here than simply Herodian 'stealing' his information from Dio, the point is that there is reason to doubt Herodian's autoptic claim.

In the later episodes, disbelief is perhaps even more appropriate. The split-head image of Caracalla and Alexander immediately strains credulity, as it is such a fantastical image and serves to demonstrate the emperor's (failed) attempt at merging the two identities. As for Herodian's description of the painting of Elagabalus hung in the curia, some have taken the report at face value.[39] But there has also been scepticism, and it should be noted

[36] For a date of between 244 and 253 CE, see Kemezis (2014) 300–1.

[37] Kolb (1972) 25–34. For doubt that Herodian witnessed Commodus' arena performance, see Alföldy (1971b) 206.

[38] Kolb (1972) takes the most extreme view, that Dio is Herodian's main source, and this view is, in general, followed by Zimmermann (1999) and Hidber (2006); see recently Scott (2018) and especially Chrysanthou (2020) for Herodian's re-working of material from Dio. Bowersock (1975) and Sidebottom (1998) 2780–92 prefer to see Herodian using a multiplicity of sources.

[39] The passage is taken literally, for example, by Frey (1989) 73 and has also been employed for other uses. For example, Baldus (1989) uses the painting in his analysis of Elagabalus' coinage, though Zimmermann (1999) 228–32 argues against this approach.

that Herodian is the only source to make such a report.[40] Even if we believe that the painting is historical, the motivation for putting it up, to convince the soldiers and people to accept the innovative new emperor, is less believable, especially in light of Herodian's thematic use of this and other images, as observed above.

Even if we dismiss these suspicions of fabrication, these cases function on a thematic level, allowing the reader to 'see' the succession of young tyrants come to life, just as Marcus Aurelius did at the beginning of the history. Herodian's claims of autopsy, traditionally meant to forestall disbelief, function to draw attention to key moments in each reign when imperial self-presentation was shifting.[41] These shifts both highlight the innovations of young emperors, as mentioned in the preface, and demonstrate how Romans were becoming more accepting of them. Thus, the episodes help to prove Herodian's thesis about the innovations of young emperors and allow Herodian to make a comment about the future of the principate in his chosen ending for the history.

The End of the History: the Triumph of the Young Emperor

After the fall of Elagabalus, the young emperor Alexander Severus attempted to return to the norms of the past. More correctly, Herodian writes that whereas Alexander had 'the appearance and title of kingship' (τὸ <μὲν> σχῆμα καὶ τὸ ὄνομα τῆς βασιλείας, 6.1.1), it was actually the female members of his family who were trying 'to make everything more moderate and statelier' (τὸ σωφρονέστερον καὶ σεμνότερον πάντα, 6.1.1). A council of senators was thus created to advise the youthful Alexander (6.1.1). The statues of gods were returned to their temples, irregular appointments were rescinded, and civil and military affairs were managed by qualified and experienced individuals (6.1.3–4). The appearance of the government changed from tyranny to an 'aristocratic' kind, and it was approved of by the people, the soldiers, and the Senate (6.1.2).

Similarly, Bowersock (1975) 234, in an attempt to rebut Kolb (1972) 11–12 n. 76a, argues that its uniqueness to Herodian's account demonstrates Herodian's superiority as a source for the reign of Elagabalus, and suggests that Herodian was mistaken about the location of the painting because he was not a senator.

[40] For scepticism of the portrait of Elagabalus in the Senate house, however, see Kemezis (2016) 365.

[41] See Marincola (1997) 86 for the claim of autopsy as a pledge of believability.

There is, of course, a certain irony in this section, since it is a young emperor trying to play the role of a mature one, thus adding to the sense of destabilisation that Herodian has been developing thus far. Indeed, this theme is picked up on in the following chapters, wherein Herodian recounts the death of Maesa, the emperor's grandmother, and the anxieties of his mother Mamaea about the boy being impressionable and perhaps wanting to repeat the crimes of his predecessors (6.1.4–5). These predecessors must of course be Commodus, Caracalla, and Elagabalus. Mamaea, however, was able to keep Alexander away from unsavoury types and direct him toward the business of governance; so successful was she that Herodian even compares Alexander to Marcus Aurelius with regard to the dispensation of justice (6.1.5–7). But through it all, it was clear that Mamaea was ruling, not Alexander. So even in this case we have a young emperor with the 'appearance' of kingship, even though it was he who did little of the ruling himself. On the other hand, his reign, which was well received (as Herodian relates) in some ways legitimised the status of young kings and allowed for more to come.

Despite the changes that occurred during the reign of Alexander Severus, the problem of young emperors would not be solved, as Herodian stresses at the conclusion of his work. Following the death of Alexander Severus, there ensues a confusing struggle for power among the Senate, army, and the people (notably the three groups who had all approved of the changes that occurred under Alexander). Herodian details the reign of Maximinus Thrax in Book 7, claiming that the emperor reversed the changes of Alexander Severus, turning the moderate monarchy into a tyranny (7.1.1). Although he achieved military success, no one appreciated his viciousness or his ignoble character, and the people of Africa chose their proconsular governor, Gordian, an eighty-year-old senator, in his place (7.5.1–3). It was not long before Gordian was proclaimed emperor at Rome and Maximinus was deposed (7.7.2). Gordian, however, did not survive an attack on Carthage by a partisan of Maximinus, and Herodian reports that he hanged himself (7.9.4). Herodian eulogises Gordian by noting his good fortune at first but that he died 'in the semblance of royalty' (ἐν εἰκόνι τε βασιλείας, 7.9.10), a phrase that highlights the divide between image and reality yet again.

With Gordian dead the confusion continued. The Senate chose Pupienus and Balbinus as co-emperors (7.10.3). The people, on the other hand, demanded that a relative of Gordian be named (7.10.6), and eventually Gordian's grandson was found and made Caesar (7.10.8–9). Maximinus, still recognised as emperor among the legions, invaded Italy but met resistance

at Aquileia; there he was assassinated by the soldiers (8.5.8–9). Under
Pupienus and Balbinus, with Gordian at their side, good order was re-
established at Rome (8.8.1). The praetorians, however, disliking having their
emperor chosen for them, plotted against and killed them both (8.8.4–7).
The people's wishes eventually won out, when the soldiers elevated Gordian
III to the throne. In fact, it is at this point that Herodian brings his history to
an end, with a final ominous statement (8.8.8):

> τέλει μὲν δὴ τοιούτῳ ἐχρήσαντο ἀναξίῳ τε ἅμα καὶ ἀνοσίῳ σεμνοὶ καὶ
> λόγου ἄξιοι πρεσβῦται, εὐγενεῖς τε καὶ κατ' ἀξίαν ἐπὶ τὴν ἀρχὴν
> ἐληλυθότες· ὁ δὲ Γορδιανὸς περὶ ἔτη που γεγονὼς τρισκαίδεκα
> αὐτοκράτωρ τε ἀνεδείχθη καὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ἀνεδέξατο.

> These old men, august and worthy of account, who had held power
> because of both their nobility and merit, met such an end that was
> unworthy and at once wretched. Gordian, who was about thirteen at
> the time, was made emperor and received command of the Roman
> empire.

This conclusion, coming as it does at the beginning of a reign, gives the
history as a whole a sort of open-endedness. Herodian began his work by
stating that he would highlight the many changes of power and especially
the contrast between older and younger emperors. By closing with the
accession of the young Gordian III, Herodian gives the impression that,
instead of addressing this problem directly, the crisis of young emperors will
continue to affect the Roman empire negatively.[42]

Conclusion

Herodian's preface demonstrates that he was well aware of the tradition
within which he was working, as well as his penchant for play within those
prescriptions. He tells us that he will produce the best kind of contemporary
history, in the mode of Thucydides, but also that his will provide pleasure.

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[42] Hidber (2007) 206: 'This is hardly an auspicious ending, given that the narratees by
now are well aware of the fatal problems that are in store for adolescent rulers. In fact, a
narrative that ends with the accession to the throne by the youngest emperor ever, brought
to power by the praetorians, is the somber counter-piece to the evocation of the glorious
days of M. Aurelius' reign at the beginning'.

This pleasure derives, at least in part, from the vividness of his narration, which is in turn tied up with the sense of 'being there'.

The purpose of vividness is to draw in one's audience and also to claim authority; events become more believable the more they seem realistic. Herodian plays with this notion, since the events that he describes vividly, going so far as to explicitly claim eyewitness testimony, are quite hard to take at face value. In the first instance, we are in amazement that a Roman emperor would present himself in the arena in such a manner. Later, we doubt whether Caracalla had images painted of himself with half of Alexander's head, or if Elagabalus really had an enormous picture of himself dressed in eastern priestly garb sent to Rome ahead of his arrival. We are equally perplexed that these characters could continue to lead the Roman empire. In Commodus' case, the reign came to a quick end after his new image was revealed. In the cases of Caracalla and Elagabalus, however, their reigns continue, and they are only replaced by internal coups against them. The fact that the history ends with yet another accession of a young emperor suggests that more chaos is to come.[43]

By appealing to Thucydides' maxims in his introduction, Herodian suggests to the reader that a sober account of his age will follow. The material that Herodian 'witnessed', however, defies this expectation. What we get instead is a narrative that forces us to question the connection between image and reality. Herodian's depictions of young emperors effectively delegitimise those characters for the reader, while at the same time they demonstrate how the innovative young emperor came to be in his age, and how that character brought instability to the Roman empire.

Herodian has been criticised for being more of a writer of fiction that of history. The idea that Herodian fictionalised these eyewitness experiences gives the impression that he was an unserious historian more interested in entertainment than truth. This reading, however, does not properly understand Herodian's goal in telling these stories. It is more fruitful to understand these fictions as Herodian's way of probing the boundary between the real and unreal. Once Commodus upset the norms of imperial self-presentation, what would become unbelievable? Where is the line between image and reality? Herodian therefore appears to be intentionally pushing the boundaries of the ancient historiographic tradition, while also working within them, on a methodological level.

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[43] Xenophon's *Hellenica*, with its final remark (7.5.27) about the Greek world descending into more 'confusion and disorder' (ἀκρισία δὲ καὶ ταραχή) than ever before, offers a point of comparison.

Herodian's goal is to work within the tradition and to exploit the tradition's conventions to prove his own thesis about his time. His visually orientated narrative reflects one of his main concerns, namely how one can tell a good emperor from a bad one. This judgement lies mostly in appearance, and throughout his work we see that the Romans and the peoples of the empire have a diminishing ability to do so. The reader, however, is clued into Herodian's concerns from the beginning and thus retains a proper sense of judgement throughout.

The argument of this paper finds some middle ground between the condemnatory critique of many earlier commentators on Herodian, who dismissed the work as an 'historiographic novel', and a more generous approach that values Herodian's use of sources and historical outlook. In the instances included here, Herodian provides examples of innovations of self-presentation by young emperors that produced wonder and, one should assume, pleasure among his readers. Because of the fact that Herodian pronounces himself a contemporary historian who relied on the eyewitness testimony of his own or of others, these episodes test the credulity of the reader and add a playful or ironic twist to his work. Their presence, however, is still tied to his thesis, and we see that Herodian uses vividness to enhance his own claims—stretching the truth, but never undermining it.

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