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REVIEW ARTICLE

Cassius Dio revived*

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Abstract

Recent years have seen a remarkable revival of research on Cassius Dio and his *Roman History*, including the publication of numerous volumes of collective essays, and this has been accompanied by a much higher estimation of his achievement than used to be customary. This article seeks to assess the progress made on a range of key issues relating to Dio and his history and to point ahead to further directions for research. The chief topics considered are Dio's career as senator and historian, central aspects of his history (transmission, sources and models, structure, speeches), and Dio's handling of politics and system change.

Keywords: Cassius Dio; historiography of Rome; annalistic historiography; periodisation; speeches in historians; Severan dynasty

1 Recent work on Cassius Dio

Older scholarship mostly took a dim view of Cassius Dio, dismissing him as an indifferent historian and banal thinker, corrupted by rhetoric and imitation of Thucydides — a judgement given classic expression in the scathing pages with which Schwartz opened his *RE* article before turning to his main business, *Quellenforschung*.[1] In 1964 the subject was transformed by Fergus Millar's *A Study of Cassius Dio*, the first monograph wholly devoted to him. Bypassing traditional source-criticism, Millar brilliantly set Dio in his political, social and cultural milieu and lucidly examined his methods of work and much of his narrative. But Millar still took a modest view of Dio's worth, concluding that 'most of his judgements are no more than commonplace', and 'the sheer effort of note-taking and composition ... left no time for analysis and interpretation'.[2]

From around 1980 things began to look up for Dio. Several monographs were devoted to him either on his own or with other historical writers of the imperial period.[3] Commentaries also began to appear. A group of North American scholars embarked on the

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[1] Schwartz 1899: 1684–92.

[2] Millar 1964: 76, 118.

[3] Manuwald 1979; Bering-Staschewski 1981; Espinosa Ruiz 1982; Fechner 1986; Gowing 1992; Hose 1994; Kuhn-Chen 2002. In addition, six important articles on Dio appeared in *ANRW* II.34.3 (1997).

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Dio Project, aiming to produce commentaries on the whole of Dio's *Roman History*, of which three were published.[4] French editions in the Budé series also got under way, providing a new text (the first since Boissevain's still fundamental edition),[5] translation, substantial introduction, and notes.[6]

Recent years have seen a revolution in Dio studies, with an extraordinary outpouring of scholarship which, it has been claimed, 'equals or exceeds the entire modern scholarly output on Dio down to 2010'.[7] Much of this publication has continued earlier formats, including six excellent Budé volumes,[8] and fine commentaries by Mallan on the Tiberian books and by Scott on Dio's final books, the latter inaugurating the revival of the Dio Project.[9] A number of dissertations and monographs wholly or partly relating to Dio have been produced, including the comprehensive study of the speeches by Burden-Strevens and of the contemporary history by Scott. Madsen has brought out a short overview of Dio, succinctly summarizing his own interpretations.[10]

Translations also mark an advance. The series of concisely annotated Italian translations, published by Rizzoli, has now reached its tenth volume,[11] with only one remaining for completion. For English readers, for whom the replacement of Cary's elderly Loeb version is a longstanding need, Scott-Kilvert's translation of the Augustan books (51–56) has now been joined by Waterfield's of those on the Late Republic (36–40).[12]

The most important development, however, has been the publication of no less than nine collections of essays dedicated to Dio, arising from conferences. First into the field was a major French project, *Dioneia*, organised by scholars associated with the Budé series and conducted over 2012–16, with the declared aim of taking stock of progress over the fifty years since the appearance of Millar's seminal work and opening new lines of enquiry. This led to the publication of *Cassius Dion: nouvelles lectures*, two massive volumes comprising 46 contributions.[13] The first volume focuses on Dio's text and its Byzantine transmission, his historical sources and models, and the literary form and structure of the history, while the topics covered in the second, devoted to the 'historian of power', include Dio's career, his political terminology and thought and his handling of institutional (dys)function and of Roman imperialism.[14]

The year 2016 also saw the publication of *Cassius Dio: Greek Intellectual and Roman Politician*, the first of six volumes produced under the auspices of the Cassius Dio Network. This venture, co–founded by this volume's editors, the Danish scholars Carsten Lange and Jesper Madsen, in collaboration with the North Americans Adam Kemezis and Josiah Osgood, arose out of an initial conference in 2014, and stated its principal aim as 'to change how Cassius Dio … is perceived: from a historian sometimes judged mediocre to a politician and intellectual steeped in Roman history and historiography'.[15] All but one of the volumes were published in the Brill series *Historiography of Rome and its Empire*, founded by

[4] Reinhold 1988; Murison 1999; Swan 2004. Other Dio commentaries produced in this period include Rich 1990 and Edmondson 1992.

[5] Boissevain 1895–1901.

[6] Freyburger and Roddaz 1991; 1994; Freyburger *et al.* 2002.

[7] Kemezis 2023: 154.

[8] Fromentin and Bertrand 2008; 2014; Lachenaud and Coudry 2011; 2014; Bellissime and Hurlet 2018; Foulon and Molin 2020.

[9] Mallan 2020; Scott 2018a. Although using different book numbers (see below n. 74), the final Budé volume covers the same material as Scott's (from the death of Caracalla on).

[10] Burden-Strevens 2020; Scott 2023a; Madsen 2020a.

[11] Urso and Stroppa 2022.

[12] Scott-Kilvert and Carter 1987; Waterfield and Rich 2024.

[13] Fromentin *et al.* 2016.

[14] See further the detailed review-discussion by Kemezis 2019.

[15] Lange and Madsen 2016: 1.

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Lange and Madsen. The next three Network volumes focus on specific topics, Dio's treatment of respectively the Late Roman Republic, violence and war, especially civil war, and the Principate (a smaller volume, so published in a different series).[16] The last two volumes deal with broad themes extending across the whole work, Dio's methods and approaches and his intellectual background.[17]

Besides these major enterprises, two further volumes arising from conferences have appeared, a second on Dio's handling of the Principate and another examining his fragmentary and understudied account of Roman history down to 146 B.C.E.[18]

Now such a hot topic, Dio was clearly due a *Companion*, and this need too has been met. The volume opens with four chapters on Dio's multiple identities, followed by three on reception. Next comes the work's core, six chapters on Dio's treatment of successive periods, and it then closes with five chapters on 'key themes', three relating to speeches.[19]

This remarkable revival of Dio research has produced a new consensus that Dio is much more deserving of study than used to be thought, as a literary artist and political thinker, and as an original historian who managed his vast enterprise with considerable success. Millar himself later came to form a more favourable judgement.[20] Pelling deems Dio 'very, very smart'.[21]

The scale of the recent Dionian outpouring is daunting. Roadmaps are needed, and several have been provided. Pelling provides not just an 'epilogue' to the volume in which it appears, but stimulating remarks on recent publications and future directions. Fromentin sets consideration of recent work in the context of a fine overview of Dio scholarship since the nineteenth century. Kemezis provides an admirably comprehensive and insightful survey of publications from 2010 to 2021. Markov and Makhlayuk provide a thorough survey of work published from Millar on, with detailed discussion of a number of topics.[22]

In what follows I seek to assess what progress has been made on a range of key issues relating to Dio and his history, focusing particularly on the collective volumes, but also taking due account of other recent work.

II Greek and Roman, senator and historian

Like his history, Dio was a hybrid. His work revived the old Roman model of a history of the Roman people from the foundation of the city, arranged by the consular year, but was presented in scrupulously Attic Greek and aspired to the highest Greek literary standards. Dio himself came from an elite Greek family long established in Bithynian Nicaea, and was a *pepaideumenos*, proud of his high culture; but he was also the son of a consul and provincial governor, and his senatorial career surpassed his father's, culminating in a second consulship in 229, when he started the year with the emperor Severus Alexander as his colleague. Recent studies confirm that, as has long been recognised, Dio's multiple identities posed no conflict, and illuminatingly explore aspects like his Bithynian background and bilingualism.[23] Dio uses the first person plural sometimes of Romans or Bithynians, but more

[16] Osgood and Baron 2019; Lange and Scott 2020; Burden-Strevens *et al.* 2020.

[17] Madsen and Lange 2021; Kemezis *et al.* 2022.

[18] Davenport and Mallan 2021; Burden-Strevens and Lindholmer 2019. On Dio's early books, see also Urso 2005; Simons 2009. Bono 2020a reviews several of the conference volumes at length.

[19] Madsen and Scott 2023. For detailed assessments, see Jansen 2025 (also covering Kemezis *et al.* 2022); Rich forthcoming.

[20] Millar 1998: 171; 2016.

[21] Pelling 2006: 262; cf. Pelling 2021: 310.

[22] Pelling 2021; Fromentin 2021; Kemezis 2023; Markov and Makhlayuk 2022. For a full listing of twentieth-century publications on Dio, see Martinelli 1999.

[23] Burden-Strevens 2015; Asirvatham 2022; 2023; Kuhn 2022; Bekker-Nielsen 2023.

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often of senators.[24] He shows no special care for the interests of provincial cities, making Maecenas propose new restrictions on their expenses (52.30.3–4, 9–10), and, unlike earlier Greek writers, he gives Nero no credit for philhellenism.[25]

Legal and epigraphic sources frequently cite Dio's second consulship for dating, confirming the order of his names as Cassius Dio.[26] A diploma (*AE* 1985, 821) adds his *praenomen* L(ucius). A Beroea inscription (*AE* 1971, 430) prefaces his name with the letters KL: this has been taken as showing that he also bore the name Claudius, but is more probably an error.[27]

For his career we depend wholly on Dio's own evidence. Fortunately, 'Dio exceeds any previous historian in number and scale of preserved autobiographical participatory remarks',[28] many of them vividly anecdotal and displaying his eyewitness status or other sources of special knowledge.[29] Molin provides the best recent reconstruction of his career, but differs only in a few details from the classic account given by Millar, for example that Dio did not hold the praetorship which Pertinax had granted him until 195, and the city commissionership to which Macrinus appointed him in 218 may have been not just as *curator* of Pergamum and Smyrna, but as *corrector* of the province of Asia.[30] On the disputed questions of the date of Dio's first (suffect) consulship and the nature of 'the command in Africa' (τὴν ἐν τῇ Ἀφρικῇ ἡγεμονίαν: 49.36.4, 80.1.2) to which he was appointed soon after Severus Alexander's accession in 222, most scholars now, surely rightly, follow Millar that he received the consulship from Septimius Severus *c.* 206, rather than being denied it until early in Severus Alexander's reign, and that the command was the prestigious proconsulship of Africa.[31]

Dio survived a succession of autocratic regimes, but most of his career was, in Millar's words, 'respectable but not distinguished': he was not close to any emperor and held no major appointment.[32] All this changed, for reasons which remain obscure, with Severus Alexander's accession, bringing Dio the consular governorships of successively Africa, Dalmatia and Pannonia, followed by the second consulship.[33] That final advancement, however, was marred by the soldiers' hostility and immediately followed by the retirement to Bithynia, his 'fatherland' (*patris*), with which he closes the history (80.4.2–5.3). Dio presents it as a welcome withdrawal from the fray, but he may perhaps have resented it as exile.[34]

Controversy has continued over the chronology of the history's composition.[35] Dio, mediated by Xiphilinus, tells us (73[72].23) that he embarked on it after writing first a little book about the dreams and portents of Severus' rule and then an account of the 'very great

[24] Marincola 1997: 200; Burden-Strevens 2015: 290–2. Bithynians: 69.11.2, 14.4.

[25] Malik 2021.

[26] The order Dio Cassius, like the spurious *cognomen* Cocceianus, appears only in Byzantine sources.

[27] Mallan 2020: 1–2; Bekker-Nielsen 2023: 37–8. *Contra*, Gowing 1990; Molin 2016: 432–4.

[28] Marincola 1997: 199.

[29] On Dio the narrator and his narratorial statements, see especially Hidber 2004.

[30] Millar: 1964: 5–27, 204–7; Molin 2016. *Corrector*: Guerber 2004. On Dio's career see also Christol 2016; Markov 2016; Bertolazzi 2022: 292–4. Letta 2019: 163–71 reasserts his earlier (1979) views, widely diverging from Millar's. Molin (2016: 440) is wrong to infer from 77(76).16.5 that Dio took part in Septimius Severus' British expedition (λέγεται shows that he depended on a report of the Caledonian woman's remark).

[31] See *contra* Letta 2019: 164–9, reasserting that the African appointment was a praetorian command of the *legio III Augusta* in Numidia, which he implausibly insists was not yet a separate province, and was followed in 222 by the first consulship. Christol (2016: 456–7) proposes an alternative interpretation of the African appointment.

[32] Millar 1964: 25. Lack of insider status: Davenport 2012.

[33] Davenport 2011 rebuts the views that Dio's advancement reflects either a pro-senatorial policy of Severus Alexander's regime or its weakness against the senate.

[34] So Kemezis 2022: 423.

[35] Discussions include: Schmidt 1997: 2598–2625; Swan 1997: 2549–56; 2004: 28–36; Murison 1999: 8–12; Sordi 2000; Schettino 2001 (esp. 555–8); Kemezis 2014: 282–93; Molin 2016: 445; Scott 2018a: 10–14; 2023a: 19–37; Letta 2019: 172–7; Mallan 2020: 353–5; Lindholmer 2021; Markov 2024.

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wars and civil conflicts' (πόλεμοι ... καὶ στάσεις μέγισται) which followed Commodus' death, and that he 'spent ten years in collecting all the achievements of the Romans up to the death of Severus and another twelve in writing them up'.[36] This statement has usually been taken to mean that he spent 22 years researching and writing the history up to Severus' death.[37] Unfortunately, Dio gives no explicit indication of their date.

Some scholars hold that the work on 'wars and civil conflicts' may have covered all the internal upheavals from Commodus' death in 193 to the defeat of Clodius Albinus in 197 and also Severus' Parthian campaigns in 195 and 197–8, others that it covered a shorter period.[38]

Among older scholars, some dated the start of Dio's work on the comprehensive history in the mid-190s, while others put it in or soon after 201. More recently, Letta and Barnes argued that he only began research for the history after Severus' death in 211.[39] All three datings have found recent supporters. Millar switched camps.[40] The early dating has been argued for by Schmidt, Sordi, Kemezis and Lindholmer; the late dating has been reasserted by Letta and is also favoured by Molin and by Scott; the middle dating has been supported by Swan, Murison, Schettino, Mallan and Markov.

No doubt the debate will continue. However, I continue to hold that only the middle dating (in or not long after 201) for the start of his work is compatible with the natural interpretation of Dio's words.[41] Dio's statement that he spent ten years collecting materials on events up to Severus' death implies that he did not start this research until 201, ten years before that death, or later.[42] His account also carries the implication that he passed directly from the publication of the second work to embarking on the main history: this is surely incompatible with the late chronology, on which he did not start research for the main history until 211 or later. A plausible hypothesis is that Dio presented the work on recent wars and civil conflicts to Severus on his return to Rome in 202 and started research for the comprehensive history later that year, and that he completed his account of events up to Severus' death by or before 224.

Since, as he tells us, Dio's two early works won Severus' approval, they must have been favourable to him and so differed significantly from the critical account of his reign given in what survives of his history. Some scholars who date the work on wars and civil conflicts no later than 195 suppose that it reflected Dio's initial enthusiasm for Severus, later turned to disillusionment by his rehabilitation of Commodus' memory and harsh conduct after Albinus' defeat (strongly criticised at 76(75).7–8). More probably, however, the work included the war with Albinus and reflected Dio's keenness to commend himself to the victor, whatever his true feelings. Thus Dio 'began his literary career as a propagandist for the Severan regime'.[43]

Dio's account of the period up to 211 includes some references to events in the later 220s like his Pannonian command.[44] If the late chronology for composition is rejected, it

[36] 73(72).23.5: συνέλεξα δὲ πάντα τὰ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις μέχρι τῆς Σευήρου μεταλλαγῆς πραχθέντα ἐν ἔτεσι δέκα, καὶ συνέγραψα ἐν ἄλλοις δώδεκα. On book numbering and citation practice for books 60–80, see below n. 74.

[37] Dio's intervals have usually been taken as counted exclusively. Lindholmer (2021: 137–8) argues that here and elsewhere Dio counted inclusively, but his practice was in fact variable (Snyder 1940; Swan 2004: 304–5).

[38] On this work see the discussions cited in n. 35 and also Slavich 2004.

[39] Letta 1979; Barnes 1984.

[40] Millar 1964: 28–32 (dating to 197); 2005: 29–32 (to 201).

[41] See Rich 1990: 3–4.

[42] In view of the word order at 73(72).23.5, it is strained to take πάντα τὰ ... πραχθέντα as just the object of both verbs and so not carrying this implication (so Millar 1964: 30 n. 2; Lindholmer 2021: 152).

[43] Kemezis 2022: 420. Scott takes a more sympathetic view of the early works, arguing that Dio only became disillusioned with Septimius Severus under his successors (Scott 2018a, 12–13; 2018b: 239–40; cf. 2023a: 25–36).

[44] 49.36.4; Kemezis 2014: 288.

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follows that Dio made some revisions to his account of events up to Severus' death after its completion, but such revisions need not have been extensive.

Dio had planned to continue his history after Severus' death as long as he was able, but in the event concluded it with his retirement to Bithynia in 229.[45] It has been doubted whether Dio would have risked publishing the completed history in his own lifetime.[46] However, this probably exaggerates the danger,[47] and Dio would surely have sought to make the work on which he had laboured for so long publicly available, unless death overtook him. A possible indication that Dio himself prepared the history for publication is provided by the important discussion by Mallan of the indices which head each book in our surviving manuscripts and both summarise its contents and list the consuls whose years of office it covered.[48] Mallan shows that, far from being a later compilation as has generally been supposed, these indices were probably composed in the third century and may well have been produced by Dio himself or under his supervision.

III Transmission

It is chiefly to the Middle Byzantine period (tenth to twelfth centuries) that we owe the survival of Dio's history, giving us both the two manuscripts which preserve the greater part of Books 36–60 (69 B.C.E. to 46 C.E.)[49] and our chief sources for the rest of the history, namely the Constantinian Excerpts (extracts from Dio and other historians made on the order of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus), Xiphilinus' epitome of Dio's account from 69 B.C.E. on, and the world history of John Zonaras, who used Dio as his chief source for Roman history down to 146 B.C.E. and from the advent of Octavian to the death of Domitian.[50] Extensive recent study of the Constantinian Excerpts, Xiphilinus and Zonaras has made us much better informed about their contexts, methods and aims. Németh and Kampianaki have published monographs on respectively the Constantinian Excerpts and Zonaras, and numerous papers have been devoted to them and to Xiphilinus.[51]

While Zonaras mainly paraphrases Dio, Xiphilinus, who provides our primary source for Dio's imperial narrative where Dio's own account is not extant, often follows him more or less verbatim, sometimes for long passages, and regularly reproduces even his first–person statements. However, he often compresses heavily and makes extensive omissions. His account has been estimated to be about a quarter of Dio's in length for the emperors (much less on the late Republic), with the scale of treatment varying widely between reigns. His preference is mainly for colourful personal material, much less for institutional or military matters, and account must always be taken of how much may have been lost or distorted.[52]

A good instance is provided by the question of how far Dio maintained annalistic narrative in his imperial books. Dio's surviving text includes an annual narrative by consular

[45] 73(72).24.5; 80(80).5. Dio's dream of the deceased Severus assuring him that he would write about Caracalla (79(78).10.1–2) does not show that he originally intended to terminate his history with Severus (*pace* Scott 2018b: 239–40).

[46] Eisman 1977: 667–8; Kemezis 2014: 292–3; cf. Scott 2023a: 34–5.

[47] Kaldellis 2017: 52–3.

[48] Mallan 2017.

[49] *Marcianus gr.* 395 and *Laurentianus Plut.* 70.8. The other surviving mss of these books are Renaissance copies.

[50] For overviews of the Middle Byzantine contribution, see Treadgold 2013; Simpson 2021; Mallan 2023a: 110–13. After Domitian, Zonaras used Dio just through Xiphilinus.

[51] Németh 2018; Kampianaki 2022. Xiphilinus: Mallan 2013; Berbessou-Broustet 2016; Zinsli 2017; Kruse 2021; 2025. Zonaras: Fromentin 2013; Bellissime and Berbessou-Broustet 2016; Mallan 2018; Bellissime 2020. On Dio and the Constantinian Excerpts see Mallan 2019. Brunt 1980 remains fundamental on historical extracts and epitomes (esp. 488–91 on Xiphilinus).

[52] Cf. the perhaps over-sceptical warnings of Andrews 2018: 49–63, with the response of Scott 2023a: 10–12.

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years for reigns up to Claudius, when our manuscripts fail. Xiphilinus has no interest in such dating, but occasionally reproduces consular dates up to Domitian's death in 96 (67.14.5). Millar supposed that Dio himself stopped giving an annual account by the consular year around the end of the first century.[53] However, a reference to an event happening 'in that year' shows that Dio was still using such dating early in the reign of Hadrian (69.8.3), and in his account of Macrinus' short reign, for which we have Dio's text, he marks the consular year 218 (79[78].26.8, omitted by Xiphilinus).[54] Scott thinks this may be an 'aberration', but acknowledges the alternative possibility (to my mind, more likely) that Dio continued to use consular dating throughout the imperial books.[55]

Editors since Leunclavius (1592) have drawn on the Constantinian Excerpts, Xiphilinus and Zonaras to produce a composite text for Dio's missing imperial books. Mallan has warned against the dangers of this practice, and provides a more deconstructed version in his translation of Books 57–58.[56] It is important always to take account of the sources of individual passages (not always fully clear in the Loeb edition). Future editors may wish to use typographical devices like underlining to highlight source divergences.

IV Sources and models

For the events of his own time or the recent past Dio drew on his own experience and oral testimony, but for the rest of his work he will have been almost entirely dependent on earlier authors, chiefly historians. Recent writers have generally recognised that Dio often drew on a wide range of sources and made his own choices in the versions he adopted, and are much less inclined than their predecessors to attribute his views and interpretations to his sources. In the writing–up phase Dio may have worked mainly from his notes rather than going back to the originals.[57] Such methods would account well for his treatment of early Roman history, where, as Briquel and Urso show, although in some respects closer to Dionysius than Livy, Dio often diverges from them both, and on the Julio-Claudians, where, as Devillers and Mallan demonstrate, he drew mainly from the early historians of the period who also served as Tacitus' sources.[58]

In just a few cases individual sources can be identified with reasonable confidence. There are, for example, enough points of contact between Dio and the fragments of Sallust's *Histories* to confirm that he made substantial use of that major work.[59] The closeness of Dio's narrative of Caesar's Gallic campaigns to Caesar's own account shows that it served as Dio's chief source. Some of the numerous divergences must have been drawn from other sources, as on the defeat of Cotta and Sabinus (40.5–6), but for many Dio himself will have been responsible. Many of the variations are to Caesar's disadvantage, notably in the stress on his personal ambition.[60]

[53] Millar 1964: 40.

[54] A mutilated fifth-century manuscript (*Vaticanus gr.* 1288) partially preserves Dio's text from the end of Caracalla's reign to early in that of Elagabalus.

[55] Scott 2023a: 53. See Mallan 2023b for Xiphilinus conflating notices which in Dio probably appeared separately under 202 and 204. Dio abandoned annalistic dating for Elagabalus' reign (see especially 80(79).3.1–2), but Dio was absent from Rome throughout that reign, for which his account is in other respects atypical (cf. Lindholmer 2021: 141).

[56] Mallan 2020: 41; 2023a: 128.

[57] So e.g. Mallan 2020: 27–9; Letta 2021: 74–9.

[58] Briquel 2016; Urso 2016a; 2019a; Devillers 2016a; Mallan 2020: 6–22. On Dio's relation to the Late Republic source tradition, see Lintott 1997; Lindholmer 2019a; Urso 2019b.

[59] Lachenaud and Coudry 2014: xix–xx; Ballesteros Pastor 2018; *contra*, Urso 2016b: IV–VI.

[60] Pelling 1982 (refuting Zecchini 1978, proposing Tubero as Dio's source); McDougall 1991; Lachenaud and Coudry 2011: xiv–xvii, li–lv; Lindholmer 2020a.

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Scholars have usually held that Dio made little use of documentary sources, but the opposite view has been maintained in a series of articles by Letta.[61] Dio certainly makes frequent use of documents, especially emperors' letters to the senate, in his contemporary history, and he may have drawn some of these from the archives, consulted either in person or by others on his behalf.[62] For earlier periods too, much of his information must derive ultimately from archival sources such as senate records, but, as with Livy, it seems improbable that Dio would have had the time or inclination to undertake extensive archival research himself, and more likely that he drew the material from earlier writers. Letta is on strongest ground with cases where Dio has failed to realise that senate decrees he reports were not in fact implemented, but even there he may be following a literary source.[63]

As has long been recognised, Dio was heavily influenced by Thucydides in style and thought and frequently echoed him (especially in speeches, but also often elsewhere). Recent writers have duly acknowledged both this debt and other Greek literary influences, for example from Herodotus.[64] However, Dio's intertextuality has played a much less prominent part in recent work than for many other ancient authors. Remarkably, there have been no detailed studies of his Thucydidean intertexts since the 1890s.[65] Internal echoes are also frequent across the *Roman History*, but little studied. Dio's intertexts and intratexts would surely repay further research, assisted by digital resources.

V Structure

The *Suda*'s entry on Dio (Δ1239) tells us that he organised the eighty works of his history by decads, units of ten books, and this structure is apparent in what survives. Division by decads was common for large historical works, probably because convenient for stacking the papyrus scrolls forming the individual books.[66] Dio's books are shorter than most, but like others vary considerably in size: the fully extant books average around 10,000 words, but range from around 8,000 to over 12,000 words.

The *Roman History* centres on the change from republican government, which, like other imperial Greek writers, Dio called *dēmokratia*, to the monarchy of the emperors.[67] The first forty books take the story down to the outbreak of the civil war between Caesar and Pompey; Books 41–50 deal with this and the ensuing civil wars up to Octavian's decisive victory at Actium, and the last thirty books with the emperors. This transition is also given the greatest density of treatment: thus Books 41–50 cover a mere nineteen years.

Outside the still extant books, we have only limited indications of Dio's book distribution, mainly the fragment citations by (often inaccurate) book numbers in the so–called *Lexicon on Syntax*. The division of individual books for Books 1–35 in Boissevain's and subsequent editions is highly conjectural and should not be relied upon. However, a fair idea of the overall structure of this part of the history can be obtained, with each decad opening with a major event: Book 11 opened with the outbreak of the First Punic War in 264 B.C.E., Book

[61] Most fully: Letta 2016a. Briefer statements include Letta 2016b and 2021.

[62] Cf. Letta 2016a: 258–68.

[63] See Letta 2021: 83–4. For criticism of Letta's view see especially Kemezis 2019: xxxv.

[64] Recent discussions of Dio's use of Thucydides include Bertrand 2010; Pelling 2010: 106–10; W. Rees 2011: 62–86; Schubert 2018; Pitcher 2023: 73–8. On his debt to Herodotus see Lachenaud 2003; Kuhlmann 2010; Baron 2021. In speeches Dio draws not only on Demosthenes and Aeschines, but also on Aristophanes and Plato: Fromentin and Bertrand 2008: xix–xx; Lachenaud and Coudry 2011: lxvii–lxviii; Jones 2016: 299–300.

[65] Melber 1891a; 1891b; Litsch 1893; Kyhnitsch 1894. Melber's papers analyse Dio's Thucydidean borrowings for the naval battles at Naulochus (subsequently widely discussed: e.g. Gotteland 2016: 387–90) and against the Veneti (generally overlooked: cf. Waterfield and Rich 2024: xii, 246).

[66] Fromentin 2016: 21–2.

[67] On Dio's use of *dēmokratia* see Freyburger-Galland 1997: 116–23; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 195–201; Kemezis 2014: 105; Bellissime 2016a.

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21 with the outbreak of the Third Punic War in 149, and Book 31 probably with the year 88, which saw the outbreak of both the first war with Mithridates and the first civil war.[68] Thus the destabilising of the Republic to the point of collapse was, along with continuing external war, the main theme of Books 21–40. Sadly, due to the lack of an epitome, we know much less about Dio's treatment of the crucial years 146–70 in Books 22–35 than almost any other part of his history.[69]

Dio showed considerable flexibility in his use of annalistic dating. Although sections of the first two decads provided relatively dense treatment, for example on the Second Punic War (Books 13–17), their coverage must elsewhere have been much more rapid, and it appears that Dio passed over quite a number of consular years on the ground that nothing worth recording had occurred.[70] As we have seen, he may have been himself responsible for the lists of chief magistrates which preceded each book in the published edition of his history, and, if so, this will have compensated for his leaving some unnamed in the narrative.

Dio not infrequently departed from strict annalistic ordering, sometimes with some loss of clarity, and this has led some to criticise him for chronological incompetence.[71] Recent writers, however, have rightly stressed the way in such departures served his artistic purposes.[72] Book 40 is an extreme case, with the greater part of the book devoted to warfare in Gaul and Parthia over 54–50 (40.1–43), and Dio only then turning to events at Rome during 53–50 (40.44–66): switching to completely regional organisation at this point enabled him to give extended treatment to Crassus' catastrophe and Caesar's crushing of rebellion and then focus exclusively on the political developments leading to civil war. In the fifth decad Dio's civil war narrative is focused first on Caesar (Books 41–44) and then on Octavian, with catching–up excursuses inserted on the activities of other actors like Brutus and Cassius in 44–42 (47.20–34) and Antony in 38–35 (49.19–33).

Such 'biostructuring' (Pelling's term) becomes still more marked when Dio reaches the emperors.[73] Dio now organised his account (like Tacitus) primarily by emperors' reigns, with most reigns being accorded one or more books each, and the emperor's doings provide the main subject-matter.[74] For each emperor he bookends the narrative of events with sections on his accession and on his death, each with standard features. In particular, at the start of each reign Dio includes an assessment of the emperor's character and/or government, which then leads into the year–by–year narrative, a pattern which Dio continued at least up to the reign of Hadrian (69.3.1–8.1).[75] Further non–annalistic material on emperors' conduct is also worked into the annual record.

[68] See further Rich 2016: 274–8 (too cautious on Book 31); Bertrand 2016: 686–90; 2023: 226–30; Baron 2023: 214–16.

[69] Urso 2013 is a fine commentary on the fragments of Books 21–30. For a later gap, see below n. 75.

[70] Rich 2016: 278–86.

[71] Schwartz 1899: 1687–9; Millar 1964: 57–9; Lintott 1997: 2503–8.

[72] Bertrand *et al.* 2016; Baron 2019; Waterfield and Rich 2024: xv–xvii.

[73] On Dio's structuring of his imperial books, see especially Pelling 1997; Devillers 2016b; Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016; Mallan 2025: 109–14.

[74] For Books 60–80 two book divisions feature in our editions: the 'standard' division, pioneered by Leunclavius (Mallan 2023b: 123–5), and Boissevain's 'revised' division. The divisions are in agreement for Books 67–70 (Domitian to Antoninus Pius), but elsewhere it is best to cite by Boissevain's book number followed in brackets by the Leunclavian number (see Swan 2004: 383–5; Scott 2018a: 2). I shall discuss the validity of these rival divisions in a forthcoming paper.

[75] For the contemporary period Dio's practice is more variable: he gives overviews of Marcus Aurelius' and Septimius Severus' character and government at the end of their reigns (72[71].34–36, 77[76].16–17), but of Caracalla's at the beginning (78[77].6–11). We know little of Dio's treatment of the reign of Antoninus Pius and the joint reign of M. Aurelius and L. Verus, for which his text was not available to Xiphilinus (Juntunen 2013).

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One of the most important recent contributions on Dio is Kemezis' brilliant chapter in his monograph setting Dio, along with Philostratus and Herodian, against the official self-presentation of the Severan regime.[76] Kemezis offers a penetrating reading of the entire *Roman History* as an implicit response to Dio's Severan context, centred on his identification of four successive 'narrative modes' — respectively, the Republic, *dynasteiai*, Principate, and contemporary or eyewitness modes. This interpretation in terms of 'narrative modes' has won wide acceptance,[77] but has also prompted some criticism.[78]

Kemezis' last two modes, Principate and eyewitness, are relatively unproblematic. As we have seen, Dio makes clear changes to the structure of his account at the establishment of the monarchy, and in authorial statements he both notes it as a watershed (52.1.1) and comments on the informational issues which it presented (53.19, 54.15.1–3). From the reign of Commodus on, Dio repeatedly indicates that he is reporting as an eyewitness, and he proclaims the practice at 73(72).4.2, 18.3–4.

Kemezis' first two modes, the Republic and the *dynasteiai*, do, however, present some issues. He summarises his view of these modes as follows:

> The first [mode] ..., the Republican, can only be examined briefly due to the fragmentary state of our evidence; nonetheless some key features emerge. These include notably a characterization of Roman successes as collective actions. The successes are furthered by extraordinary displays of virtue from individual leaders, but such displays are only possible because the overall political climate promotes heroic action in the public interest. At a point in the late second century that cannot be precisely determined from the surviving text, this mode gives way to the political dysfunction that Dio calls *dynasteiai*, a condition that will last until Actium. In this mode collective action in the public interest ceases to be possible, and instead events are driven by conflicts between a very few key political figures. The political system is in effect paralyzed by a cycle of the dynasts' ambition and their enemies' resentment.[79]

A different view of Dio's fragmentary treatment of the early and middle Republic has been taken by several contributors to Burden-Strevens and Lindholmer 2019, stressing its continuities with his account of the last years of the Republic in Books 36–40. Competition, ambition and jealousy already feature prominently in the early books,[80] and for several episodes Dio adopts more violent versions than our other sources.[81] The sharp contrast which Kemezis draws between the speeches in his first two modes has also been challenged.[82]

Kemezis' claim that Dio regarded the period from the late second century down to Actium as a time of *dynasteiai* is based on his statement at 52.1.1 on the establishment of monarchical government.[83] The passage opens with the following summary of the content of the history up to that point: 'these were the Romans' deeds and sufferings under the kingship, under the *dēmokratia* and the *dynasteiai*' (ταῦτα μὲν ἔν τε τῇ βασιλείᾳ καὶ ἐν τῇ δημοκρατίᾳ ταῖς τε δυναστείαις ... καὶ ἔπραξαν οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι καὶ ἔπαθον). It is generally

[76] Kemezis 2014: 90–149.

[77] E.g. Bertrand 2016: 695–6; Burden-Strevens 2020: 164, 178, 199–200; Davenport 2021: 57–8; Coudry 2023: 360–1, 365–6.

[78] Lindholmer 2018a; Markov 2021.

[79] Kemezis 2014, 102.

[80] Lindholmer 2019b, cf. Coudry 2019a.

[81] Lange 2019a, drawing on Libourel 1974.

[82] Rich 2019: esp. 277–8, *contra* Kemezis 2014: 106–7, 111–12. See also the nuanced views of Burden-Strevens 2020: 149–62; Coudry 2023: 366.

[83] See especially Kemezis 2014: 95, 107–12.

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accepted that 'the *dynasteiai*' here must denote a period distinct from the period of republican government (the *dēmokratia*),[84] but there has been no agreement as to what that period was. Dio's use of the term *dynasteia*, frequent in his account of the Late Republic and ensuing civil wars, has also been much discussed.[85] He uses the term for various forms of informal personal power, but in the civil war narratives of the fifth decad he uses it in particular for supreme power as held by one or more autocratic rulers. Caesar, he tells us, had long desired 'the *dynasteia*',[86] and after the outbreak of war both he and his opponent Pompey were driven by 'an insatiable lust for the *dynasteia*'.[87] The position of autocratic power which Caesar achieved by his victories is repeatedly termed *dynasteia*.[88] Summing up the situation during and after the Mutina war in 43, Dio says that each leader's goal was to overthrow 'democratic' government and establish a *dynasteia* (46.34.4), and, at the later meeting at which Antony, Lepidus and Octavian agreed to get themselves appointed as triumvirs with effectively autocratic power, he describes them as swearing a compact for the *dynasteia* (46.55.2).[89] In the decisive battle at Philippi, Dio tells us, Brutus and Cassius were fighting for 'freedom and *dēmokratia*', and Antony and Octavian for *dynasteia*.[90] Given this context, it seems to me most likely that by 'the *dynasteiai*' at 52.1.1 Dio meant not, as Kemezis supposes, a continuous political condition in operation from the later second century down to Actium, but the much shorter periods when republican government had been superseded by autocracy. He will have had chiefly in mind the autocratic power achieved by Caesar through his civil war victories and the comparable autocracy established collectively by Antony, Octavian and Lepidus through their appointment as triumvirs and confirmed by their victory at Philippi, but he probably included also the briefer dominations of Marius, Cinna and Sulla in the 80s.

VI Speeches

Much of Dio's history is taken up by extended direct-discourse speech episodes (single speeches, debates, dialogues). The largely extant books 36–56 include fourteen such episodes, occupying about a quarter of the total text.[91] Zonaras and the fragments enable us to identify at least sixteen such episodes in Books 1–21, explored in several recent contributions,[92] and the same pattern was no doubt in operation in the little-known Books 22–35. From Book 57 on, however, passages of extended speech seem to have been much less frequent and also shorter, while short *dicta* become much more numerous. This shift may possibly be linked to Dio's view of the changed evidence available for the monarchy (53.19), but he retained the earlier pattern for Augustus' reign.[93]

[84] Lindholmer 2018a disputes this, in my view unconvincingly.

[85] E.g. Fechner 1986: 154–63; Freyburger-Galland 1996; 1997: 127–31; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 191–5; Cordier 2003; Carsana 2016.

[86] 42.8.2, 43.25.3; cf. 41.24.2, tracing Caesar's 'hope of the monarchy' back to his visit to Gades as quaestor. In a speech he is represented as denying any desire for *dynasteia* (41.35.4), as is Octavian at 53.4.4.

[87] 41.57.4. At 41.53.2 they are said to be 'both reaching out for the supreme power' (τοῦ τε παντὸς κράτους ἀμφότεροι ἐφιέμενοι).

[88] 42.13.4, 50.4; 43.20.3; 44.34.5, 35.1, 53.5; 46.39.2. Elsewhere his position is described as 'monarchy': cf. Cordier 2003; Carsana 2016; Coudry 2016a.

[89] Cf. 47.1.1, adding that each of the three really aimed to get 'all the power' (πᾶν τὸ κράτος) for himself. For individuals aiming at the *dynasteia* see also 44.34.5, 53.5; 45.11.2.

[90] 47.39.1–3. For the loss of *dēmokratia* see also 50.1.1.

[91] Coudry 2023: 354.

[92] Rich 2019; Fromentin 2019 (on Zonaras' evidence); Burden-Strevens 2021: 163–76.

[93] On the shift, see the brief remarks of Millar 1964: 78; Lachenaud 2016: 402; Rich 2019: 223–4; Burden-Strevens 2020: 184–5; 2021: 182; Mallan 2025: 115–6.

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One purpose which these speech episodes served for Dio was the display of his literary and rhetorical skills. They make extensive use of moral maxims, and several conform to patterns which served as exercises in the rhetorical schools, like Philiscus' consolation for the exiled Cicero (38.18–29) or the funeral speeches delivered by Antony for Caesar and by Tiberius for Augustus (44.36–49, 56.35–41). These rhetorical aspects, discussed in a number of recent studies,[94] have sometimes led scholars to treat Dio's speeches as mere showpieces, detachable from their context.[95] However, most scholars now rightly regard them as embedded in their narrative context and as serving both Dio's dramatic purposes and to explore historical issues he regarded as important. A primary aim of Burden-Strevens' 2020 monograph is to make a case for Dio's speeches on these lines, and several other surveys take the same view.[96]

For almost all of these episodes Dio seems to have had some evidence that speeches were made (perhaps only the Cicero/Philiscus dialogue is a complete invention), and we can often trace him drawing some material from earlier historical accounts.[97] However, he also modified and expanded freely for his own purposes, as notably in Caesar's speech to the mutineers at Vesontio (38.36–46), despite using Caesar's own account (*BGall.* 1.40) as his main source.[98] Occasionally, Dio also drew on other Roman sources: thus Cicero's speech against Antony is a pastiche culled from the *Philippics* (45.18–47), while Calenus' response draws on the anti-Caesarian tradition (46.1–28), and Cicero's speech on the *lex Manilia* is exploited in the speeches on Gabinius' earlier law conferring Pompey's pirate command (36.25–36).[99]

A key part in many of Dio's extant speeches is played by dramatic irony, bringing out his favourite contrast between appearance and reality, men's claims and their true intentions.[100] Preceding authorial statements sometimes highlight the disingenuousness of speakers' assertions: thus both Pompey and Octavian profess to decline powers which they are eager to hold (36.24.5–6, 53.2.6), and Caesar at Vesontio justifies as in the public interest the war with Ariovistus to which he is in fact impelled by personal ambition (38.31.1, 34.1–3). In these and other speeches, such as Caesar's later addresses and the two funeral orations, piquant contrasts, which Dio evidently expected alert readers to savour, abound between the speakers' claims and his narrative accounts of events.

For Kemezis and Burden-Strevens, this feature played an important part in Dio's overall design. Kemezis holds that the speeches in what, as we have seen, he regards as Dio's '*dynasteia* mode' consist either of dynasts presenting transparent lies or figures such as Catulus and Cicero making arguments which have no influence on events, and Dio's purpose here is 'to portray rhetoric itself, and how it functioned, what sorts of propaganda were effective'.[101] Burden-Strevens accepts and develops this interpretation, arguing that Dio represented deception and *dynasteia* as the norm in the Late Republic, and oratory itself as one of the main vehicles of the change, and that 'dramatic irony represents one of Dio's most

[94] Bellissime 2016b; Fomin 2016; Burden-Strevens 2020: 112–44; R. Rees 2023.

[95] E.g. Millar 1964: 79; Fomin 2016: 232.

[96] Notably Burden-Strevens 2016; 2021; Coudry 2023. For the speeches' embedment in the narrative context, see especially Burden-Strevens 2020: 37–70.

[97] Burden-Strevens 2020: 93–111. Earlier writers reported Catulus as speaking against the *lex Gabinia*, and Cic., *Imp. Pomp.* 52 does not show that he did not speak (*contra* Lintott 1997: 2521–2; Rodgers 2008). Dio had Sallust's evidence (*Hist.* 5.20 Maur.) that Pompey spoke on the law (*contra* Burden-Strevens 2020: 61–2).

[98] Lachenaud and Coudry 2011: lxi–lxvi; Kemezis 2016a; Burden-Strevens 2020: 100–4.

[99] Fromentin and Bertrand 2008: xx–xxxiii; Burden-Strevens 2018; 2020: 72–93. There is no need to suppose that Dio was drawing on the *Res Gestae* in the funeral speech for Augustus (so Kuhn 2021).

[100] See especially Burden-Strevens 2020: 165–82.

[101] Kemezis 2014: 111.

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important techniques for illuminating this degradation of oratory'.[102] These are powerful readings, but perhaps do not take sufficient account of the extent to which such ironic contrasts between speakers' claims and Dio's narrative continue into his Principate speeches, at least up to Tiberius' funeral speech for Augustus, or the complex functions which some of his speeches perform. Caesar's victorious address to the senate in 46 (43.15–18) and the two funeral speeches all combine patently disingenuous claims about how Caesar or Augustus came to power with praise for their clemency and the excellence of their rule with which Dio elsewhere signals his warm agreement.[103]

VII From 'democracy' to monarchy

The change from republican government to the monarchy of the emperors plays a central part in the architecture of Dio's history, as we have seen, and this has been reflected in its prominence in recent research. Kemezis and Madsen have provided treatments of the process in all its phases, each of which has also prompted numerous other discussions.[104]

In what survives of his history, Dio makes his preference for monarchy explicit for the first time at the start of his treatment of Caesar's murder, insisting that *dēmokratia* has only ever flourished in states small enough not to generate 'excesses from prosperity or jealousies from ambition', and that for Rome, ruling the largest and finest part of the world, moderation and concord would be unattainable under *dēmokratia* (44.2.1–4). The same view is repeated in several further authorial statements (47.39.4–5; 53.19.1; 54.6.1). Such statements may have been lost from earlier in his work, but Dio may have chosen to leave his view unexpressed until the death of Caesar, who, despite his earlier portrayal of his ruthless rise to power, he now insists had become the city's 'leader and protector' (44.2.5 τὸν τε προστάτην καὶ τὸν κηδεμόνα αὐτῆς), so confirming the claim he had earlier attributed to Caesar himself (43.17.1).

As Coudry has admirably shown, Dio in Books 36–40 highlights various ways in which the republican system was malfunctioning.[105] The lavish space devoted to the *Lex Gabinia* (36.23–36) reflected both the senate's inability to provide solutions for issues like the pirate crisis and the dangerous implications of the special commands which the law pioneered. Electoral and other corruption receives special attention, for example in the urban record for 67 and in the lavish treatment of the disputes over Ptolemy Auletes (36.38–41; 39.12–16, 55–63), and so too does the endemic political violence.

Dio, however, identified the primary cause of the fall of the *dēmokratia* not in such institutional factors,[106] but rather in moral failings: *philotimia* (ambition, rivalry), *epithymia* (desire), *pleonexia* (greed for more), and their invariable consequence, *phthonos* (jealousy).[107] Dio saw these as constants of human nature, and, as we have seen, regarded them as in operation already in the early and middle Republic. However, he viewed some of the great Romans of that time as motivated by the public good, and held that at the start of the Second Punic War the Romans had enjoyed moderation and concord (frg. 52). In the late Republic, however, Dio, like Sallust (*Cat.* 38.3), thought that hardly any politicians acted 'from pure motives and without any consideration of personal gain' (37.57.3), naming only Catulus, Cato, Brutus and Cassius as exceptions (37.22.3, 46.3, 57.3; 47.38.3). It is in these terms that

[102] Burden-Strevens 2020: 165–6.

[103] On deception in Dio's Principate see especially Pelling 1997: 128–31; 2021: 311–12; *contra* Kemezis 2014: 136. On the funeral speech for Augustus, see Burden-Strevens 2020: 306–17; Kuhn 2021; Kemezis 2024. For recent discussions of other individual speeches, see the listing at Kemezis 2023: 162.

[104] Kemezis 2014: 90–149; Madsen 2016; 2020a.

[105] Coudry 2015; 2016b; 2016c; 2019b; Bertrand and Coudry 2016.

[106] *Pace* Lindholmer 2016; 2018b; 2019c.

[107] Well analysed by W. Rees 2011; Kemezis 2014: 109–20; Burden-Strevens 2020: 192–247.

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he interprets the relations between Pompey and Caesar. In the hope of avoiding jealousy, Pompey pretends reluctance for the commands against the pirates and Mithridates, and on his return dismisses his army and (so Dio claims) declines further honours.[108] His resulting weakness leads him to ally with Caesar and Crassus in 60, although Caesar had been scheming to win the people over from him and expose him to jealousy.[109] Resentment of Caesar's subsequent success in Gaul leads Pompey to work against Caesar from 56 in Dio's interpretation (39.25–6), disregarding the tradition of their rapprochement at Luca, of which he must have been aware. After his final victory, Caesar allows himself to be decreed extravagant honours (44.3ff), so provoking the jealousy which leads to his murder.[110]

One element which Dio identifies as an essential component of *dēmokratia* is free speech (*parrhēsia*), illuminatingly discussed by Mallan.[111] As he shows, Dio held that *parrhēsia* could continue under the emperors, since good rulers would welcome candour from their subjects, but under both regimes excessive *parrhēsia* was a fault. This was in Dio's view one of the fatal flaws of Cicero, the only other late Republican figure to be given the same prominence as Caesar and Pompey, in what is notoriously a predominantly hostile treatment.[112] Dio implies that the enmities Cicero made by his excessive frankness contributed to his exile, and Philiscus is made to prophesy that it will lead to his death (38.12.6–7, 29.1–2). The same flaw is later shown in action in the huge debate between Cicero and Calenus, in which Cicero destroys the concord for which he had previously argued with a bitter attack on Antony, only for Calenus to respond with an equally bitter attack on Cicero himself, after which Dio comments that Cicero could not endure the immoderate *parrhēsia* he meted out to others (46.29.1).

Dio portrays Octavian/Augustus's final establishment of monarchy as a phased process extending over the years 31–27, including in 29 a consultation with Agrippa and Maecenas (in its substance certainly unhistorical) as to whether he should retain the monarchy (52.1–41). Older scholars often treated Dio's huge Agrippa-Maecenas debate as virtually a free–standing pamphlet incorporating reform proposals for his own time. Recent writers, however, rightly insist that the debate is embedded in its context and serves to develop Dio's own interpretation of the successful transition to monarchy, as has now been eloquently demonstrated by Burden-Strevens.[113] As he shows, the case for democracy put into Agrippa's mouth is undermined by Dio's narrative and authorial statements, enabling Maecenas in the opening part of his speech (52.14–18) to reassert and develop the case for monarchy which Dio had presented in his own voice, before proceeding to lengthier recommendations for the conduct of monarchy which would protect it against the risks Agrippa had identified. Maecenas' specific administrative proposals (52.19–30) include many measures which Augustus was himself to introduce (for example, on the senatorial *cursus* or the establishment of a standing army), and the speech then closes with general recommendations for the monarch's conduct which are in close agreement with Dio's indications elsewhere of how a good emperor should behave (52.31–40). However, although the debate's primary purpose is to reaffirm Dio's approval for Augustus' establishment of monarchy and present his ideal of how monarchy should be conducted, its function remains multiple. Among the administrative proposals, Dio includes one which had only been introduced in

[108] 36.24.6, 26.1–2, 45.1–2; 37.20.4–21.4.

[109] Caesar's scheming: 36.43.3–4; 37.22.1, 44.2. Alliance: 37.54–57 (with characteristically elaborate reconstruction of each protagonist's motives).

[110] On Dio's Pompey, see Potter 2022; on his Caesar, see especially Pelling 2006; 2009. In general on characterisation in his late Republic narrative, see Coudry 2016d; Pitcher 2018.

[111] Mallan 2016.

[112] On Dio's treatment of Cicero, see now Montecalvo 2014; Porod 2022.

[113] Burden-Strevens 2023. Cf. Kemezis 2014: 126–36; Burden-Strevens 2020: 39–53, 220–3, 264–75; Markov 2022: 121–31; Scott 2023a: 66–73.

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his own day, namely Caracalla's grant of universal citizenship,[114] and many which had never been introduced and should thus probably be regarded as Dio's own reform proposals.[115]

How emperors should — and should not — conduct themselves is a central theme of Dio's imperial narratives, brought out especially, but by no means only, in the non–annalistic surveys of individual emperors' rule. His characterisation, as has often been remarked, can seem colourless, but Dio's interest is less in individuating emperors than in assessing their qualities for rule, often highlighting features which recur across reigns.[116] As Kemezis has stressed, his evaluations are polyphonal, sometimes presented as authorial, but often as reports of contemporary judgements.[117]

What Dio valued in emperors reflects above all his identification with the senate's interests and values. Emperors should show clemency, and put senators to death, if at all, only following trial in the senate, and they should welcome advice and so govern in collaboration with the senate.[118] Emperors who conducted themselves in this way or in other respects behaved modestly are sometimes commended as δημοτικός or δημοκρατικός, a concept corresponding to the Latin *civilis* and whose application by Dio has now been exhaustively studied by Bono.[119] Dio the realist had presented Octavian/Augustus' rise to power as the ruthless pursuit of supremacy, but he regarded his conduct as monarch as exemplary, praising him at his death (in a striking twist on the old doctrine of the mixed constitution) as having achieved a mixture of monarchy and *dēmokratia* (56.43.4).[120]

Dio's presentation of tyrannical emperors has been analysed in detail by Schulz, with special reference to Nero and Domitian.[121] She focuses especially on his deconstruction of their regimes' pretensions, but the hostile earlier tradition will generally have had greater influence on his portrayals.

VIII Dio's contemporary history

The eyewitness quality of Dio's contemporary history gives it a vividness which has made it one of the most valued parts of his work.[122] However, the picture it draws is bleak. From Nerva to Marcus Aurelius the Roman state had enjoyed stability and senators almost complete security, and Marcus Aurelius, in Dio's judgement, 'ruled the best of all those who had held supreme power' (72(71).34.2). By contrast, in the following period, the time of his adult participation, he regarded three emperors — Commodus, Caracalla and Elagabalus — as tyrannical monsters, and the remainder as at best flawed;[123] there were repeated usurpations and civil wars; and the position of senators was almost constantly insecure. Gleason brilliantly explores Dio's rich anecdotal record of masquerades and impersonation as a reflection of the uncertainties of the time.[124]

[114] 52.19.6, excellently discussed by Lavan 2021, who convincingly interprets Dio's apparently discrepant allusions to Caracalla's grant as reflecting the characteristic polyphony of the *Roman History*.

[115] This aspect is underplayed by Burden-Strevens 2023. On the finance proposals, see France 2016.

[116] E.g. Pelling 1997; Kemezis 2014: 139–40; Mallan 2021.

[117] Kemezis 2021a: 40–5.

[118] Lindholmer 2020b unconvincingly argues that Dio thought that emperors should draw only on a small group of advisers, merely conducting a show of consulting the senate.

[119] Bono 2022, and more briefly 2020b. Δημο(κρα)τικός for emperors: 53.12.1; 55.4.2; 57.8.3, 9.1; 59.3.1; 65(66).11.1; 74(73).3.4, 5.1. Wallace-Hadrill 1982 remains the classic study of the *civilis princeps*.

[120] Rich 1989; Markov 2019. Madsen (2019a; 2020a: 82–8; 2023) holds that Dio regarded the future Augustus as mostly in the right in his rise to power. Dio's statement at 56.43.4 should not be taken as merely representing the view of the contemporary Roman public (so Kemezis 2024: 167–9).

[121] Schulz 2016; 2019: 169–265.

[122] Madsen 2021 argues for the superiority of Dio's early imperial narratives.

[123] On Dio's 'mixed depictions' of Pertinax, Septimius Severus and Macrinus, see Scott 2023a: 113–59.

[124] Gleason 2011.

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In his 2023 monograph and in other contributions Scott provides a fine survey and assessment of Dio's contemporary history,[125] and he and others have produced important discussions of individual emperors and episodes of the period.[126] Like others, Scott rightly stresses Dio's portrayal of the senators — and himself among them — as obliged to behave with (often humiliating) passivity. Both he and Kemezis set this against Dio's stance as a historian both of his own times and of the Roman past. Kemezis views Dio as offering an oppositional history, a counter-narrative not only to the dynasty's self-presentation but also to its conception of its relation to Roman history from Augustus on, while Scott holds that Dio saw his history as a corrective to emperors' historical misconceptions, from which he hoped that their successors and subjects might profit.[127]

Two of Scott's conclusions seem to me questionable. The first relates to Dio's striking Hesiodic metaphor about the transition from Marcus Aurelius to Commodus: 'The affairs of the Romans then fell from a golden kingship to one of iron and rust, as has now our history' (72(71).36.4 [Xiph.] ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην τῶν τε πραγμάτων τοῖς τότε Ῥωμαίοις καὶ ἡμῖν νῦν καταπεσούσης τῆς ἱστορίας). Like many others, Scott takes Dio to imply that not just Commodus' reign but the whole ensuing period covered by the remainder of his history was a time of 'iron and rust', and he has adopted *An Age of Iron and Rust* as the title of his monograph.[128] Dio is, however, perhaps more likely to have intended no more than the sharp contrast between Marcus and his son.[129] As has often been noted, he had made a similar use of the metaphor earlier, when he remarked that the triumvirs' conduct made Caesar's monarchy appear golden (47.15.4), and may here be alluding ironically to the declaration in 192 of Commodus' time as a Golden Age (73(72).15.6). Dio, who generally avoided using βασιλεύς and its cognates of the emperors,[130] may have made an exception in recognition of Marcus' excellence, and 'kingship' may be a better translation for βασιλεία here than the more ambivalent 'kingdom' or 'realm', let alone the paraphrase 'age'. Although Dio will no doubt have regarded the reigns of Caracalla and Elagabalus too as times of iron and rust, it is unlikely that he would have passed so extreme a verdict on rulers like Septimius Severus, of whom he gave a more mixed account.

My other doubt relates to succession policy. Both Madsen and Scott regard Dio as a strong supporter of non–hereditary succession, with emperors adopting their successors from the best available senators, and as deploring the return to dynastic succession from Commodus on.[131] Dio, however, makes no explicit statement on these lines. He does indeed acknowledge the successes of adoptive succession in the period from Nerva to Marcus Aurelius and the subsequent failures of hereditary succession: he praises Nerva's adoption of Trajan (68.4.1–2), gives Hadrian a speech in favour of adoption (69.20.2–5), laments Marcus Aurelius' disappointment in his son Commodus (72(71).36.4) and disapproves of Septimius Severus' allowing his son Caracalla to succeed, 'although he had often blamed Marcus for not putting Commodus out of the way, and had himself often threatened to do

[125] Scott 2020a; 2023a; 2023b, and n. 127 below. See also Bono 2022: 229–419.

[126] E.g. Kemezis 2021b (Avidius Cassius' revolt); Rantala 2016 (Septimius Severus); Davenport 2012 and Scott 2015 (Caracalla); Kemezis 2016b and Osgood 2016 (Elagabalus).

[127] Scott 2018b; 2020a; 2021; 2023a: 203–12; Kemezis 2012: 402–5; 2014: 142–9; 2022: 419–24. On the senators' and Dio's own passivity see also Davenport 2023.

[128] Scott 2020a: 335; 2023a: 1–2, 92–3; 2023b: 327. Similarly, e.g. Kemezis 2014: 96; 2021a: 45–6; Bertrand 2015; Coltelloni-Trannoy 2016: 341–2; Noe 2020.

[129] Cf. Markov 2021: 118–21.

[130] Freyburger-Galland 1997, 132–3.

[131] E.g. Madsen 2016: 153–7; 2020a: 50–4, 92; 2020b: 106–9; 2022: 99–101; Scott 2020b: 177–80; 2023a: 93, 139–40, 207; 2023b: 332–7.

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this to his son'.[132] However, as Davenport and Mallan well show,[133] Hadrian's speech serves merely to problematise the issue, and Dio will have recognised that there was no realistic prospect of an emperor's son being passed over for the succession in favour of non-relatives. The implication of Dio's criticism is surely just that Severus should have carried out his threat against the treasonous Caracalla, so leaving the way clear for his other son, the (also unsatisfactory) Geta, to succeed.

IX Conclusion

This survey has been necessarily selective, and numerous valuable contributions have been unavoidably passed over. Other widely discussed topics include Dio's handling of Roman expansion and external relations, examined by Bertrand and others,[134] his accounts of civil war, on which Lange in particular has made notable contributions,[135] and his treatment of women, both in the imperial court and elsewhere.[136] Two fine *Companion* chapters, on his Renaissance editors and his use by Gibbon,[137] illustrate the rich possibilities of Dio's reception, and, as Osgood observes, there is more to be done on 'assessing just how influential Dio has been on modern understandings of the whole shape of Roman history'.[138]

The extraordinary recent explosion in Dio studies has resoundingly confirmed the more favourable judgement on which its contributors are agreed: an author who has inspired so much can no longer be dismissed as mediocre or insignificant. The magnitude of his achievement and the originality and quality of his historical shaping and interpretation have been amply demonstrated. Moreover, the research possibilities have been far from exhausted. We can be confident that there is much more Dio research to come, though collective volumes may henceforth play a less dominant part as a format. New editions and commentaries will continue to throw much light on sections of Dio's history, particularly as both the Budé series and the Dio Project commentaries tackle more of the fragmentary books. Dio has now been rightly praised (perhaps sometimes over–praised) as political theorist and analyst, but, as others have observed, not enough has yet been written on Dio the literary artist.[139] There is more to be said on how Dio structured his history, both in groupings of books and within individual books and episodes, and on his inter- and intratextuality, and his language and style remain under-studied. And, as Pelling has observed, there has been little literary theory in recent work on Dio, and 'one could do with some more pieces of straightforward literary and stylistic analysis: we are too reluctant to take on the job of just showing how good a writer he can be.'[140]

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[132] 77(76).14.7 (Xiph.) καίπερ πολλάκις μὲν τὸν Μᾶρκον αἰτιασάμενος ὅτι τὸν Κόμμοδον οὐχ ὑπεξεῖλε, πολλάκις δὲ καὶ αὐτὸς τῷ υἱεῖ ἀπειλήσας τοῦτο ποιήσειν.

[133] Davenport and Mallan 2014.

[134] Bertrand 2016; 2019; 2020; Rich 2020; Adler 2021.

[135] Lange 2019a; 2019b; 2020; 2021; 2023. See also Madsen 2019b, and numerous other contributions to Lange and Scott 2020.

[136] See the overview by Gillespie 2023, with ample bibliography.

[137] Mallan 2023a; Osgood 2023.

[138] Osgood 2023: 133.

[139] Fromentin 2021: 41; Pelling 2021: 316–7; Kemezis 2023: 173.

[140] Pelling 2021: 316.

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