

Declaration

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text. I further state that no substantial part of my dissertation has already been submitted, or, is being concurrently submitted for any such degree, diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text

It does not exceed the prescribed word limit for the relevant Degree Committee.

Rethinking the Third Century CE: Contemporary Historiography and Political Narrative.

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Introduction: Political Conflict and the Third Century

Making and Breaking Emperors

If a man were called to fix the period in the history of the world, during which the condition of the human race was most happy and prosperous, he would, without hesitation, name that which elapsed from the death of Domitian to the accession of Commodus.¹

The reign of the Emperor Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius, ends the period of enlightened despotism and also begins a new period of bloodshed and misery, in which the main feature is the power possessed by the army to settle at will the destiny of the state. The army, once the servant of the empire, became its master, and acted through rulers whom it raised up and pulled down according to its own caprice and for no obvious reason.²

Throughout the early tradition of historical scholarship on the Roman empire, the end of the second century marked an important moment of transition. Gibbon's 'happy and prosperous' age of the Antonines came to an end. Their successors oversaw a descent into corruption, violence and civil war. Commodus was murdered through court intrigue in 192; his senatorial replacement, Pertinax, was executed by the unruly Praetorian Guard, in favour of the dissolute Didius Julianus; Septimius Severus was proclaimed emperor after an invasion of Italy in 193, and two civil wars soon after to secure power. After Severus, things only got worse. Theodor Mommsen could apparently announce that the emperors between his death and the accession of Domitian in 284 were nothing more than the lowest dregs of Roman society.³ When Mikhail Rostovtzeff introduced the 'Ordeal of the Roman Empire' in the striking rhetorical terms quoted above, he was building on solid foundations. The era

¹ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (London, 1776), 78 (= Womersley 1994 I: 103).

² Rostovtzeff 1926-27 II: 305.

³ Demandt and Demandt 1992: 377. This recent edition is a reconstruction of the unpublished fourth of five intended volumes of T. Mommsen, *Römische Geschichte* (four vols, Berlin, 1854-86), made from lecture notes taken by two of Mommsen's students. See Demandt and Demandt 1992: 27-50 for an overview, and a claim that it represents a reliable indication of Mommsen's words.

of philosophical, benevolent rule descended into a world in which soldiers took control of politics. The Severans maintained their power through the troops; the end of their dynasty then marked the beginning of five decades often labelled the “Military Anarchy”.⁴

Jumping forward from Rostovtzeff to the present day, the third century appears a very different place. The rhetoric of sharp decline which characterised these early reconstructions has been replaced with a narrative of transition and transformation. This is shown in part by a growing variety in the chronological boundaries of studies which include the third century. For Brian Campbell’s *The Emperor and the Roman Army: 31 BC-AD 235* and Ramsey MacMullen’s *Roman Government’s Response to Crisis: AD 235-337*, the reign of Maximinus Thrax provides a sharp boundary between the traditional imperial and late-antique periods.⁵ Though a small number of more recent investigations use the accession of Maximinus as a chronological limit,⁶ this is now rarely the case. As seen recently in Clifford Ando’s synoptic history, several studies bracket the third century as its own period, often spanning a well-defined interval from the aftermath of Commodus’ assassination to the accession of Diocletian,⁷ or the death of Constantine.⁸ But there are exceptions to this approach. David Potter’s *The Roman Empire at Bay*, first published in 2004 and updated in a second edition a decade later, concludes at the end of the fourth century.⁹ Olivier Hekster has recently extended the chronology in the opposite direction, including the third century in his *Emperors and Ancestors*, which covers the Julio-Claudians through to the Tetrarchy.¹⁰ Michael Kulikowski’s *Imperial Triumph* similarly begins

⁴ See Cook et al. 1939 for an extensive overview of contemporary thinking.

⁵ MacMullen 1976; Campbell 1984.

⁶ Most notably Johne et al. 2008.

⁷ Ando 2012; see also Hekster 2008; Mennen 2011; Manders 2012.

⁸ e.g. Christol 1997; Carrié and Rousselle 1999; Southern 2001; Bowman et al. 2005; Quet 2006 (beginning with Marcus Aurelius).

⁹ Potter 2014.

¹⁰ Hekster 2015.

with Hadrian, recasting the third century as part of a narrative of development from the Antonines to Constantine.¹¹

This chronological reframing has coincided with a reassessment of the third century in relation to a range of themes, beyond the political or economic. Given the good number of works by Christian theologians surviving from this period, it is unsurprising that the place of the third century in the religious developments of the empire has long been of interest.¹² Christianity is increasingly not alone in this regard. There is growing interest in the literary culture of the third century, particularly in respect to the wider phenomenon of the Second Sophistic.¹³ Hekster's most recent volume is only one example of an increasing investigation into the development of an imperial ideology, and its promulgation throughout the provinces.¹⁴ The work of jurists, alongside Caracalla's universal citizenship edict of 212, has also seen considerable reassessment as part of the development of Roman law.¹⁵ In the variety and complexity of studies, modern scholarship can seem a world away from its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century foundations.

Yet for all the change in attitudes towards the Severans and the third century, in one regard things look very much the same. In its basic character, this period is still defined by the political involvement of the army. The soldiers are the driving force of political change, acting to the detriment of the Senate. This view is exemplified by the same recent anglophone histories which have otherwise reframed the period. Clifford Ando's *The Critical Century* includes a chapter on the legal changes caused by the citizenship law. It is contained within a more familiar narrative, which includes familiar comments on the importance of the Severans in the build-up to the turmoil of the later third century. In an explicit nod to Gibbon, Ando proposes that Septimius Severus played a pivotal role. Though not

¹¹ Kulikowski 2016.

¹² For broad overviews, see e.g. Carrié and Rousselle 1999; Clarke 2005; Fowden 2005; various papers in Quet 2006; Ando 2012: 122-45; Potter 2014: 297-325.

¹³ The body of scholarship is extensive. Recent volumes include Goldhill 2001; Whitmarsh 2001; König 2009; Madsen and Rees 2014; Richter and Johnson 2017.

¹⁴ See also Ando 2000, 2016a: 172-75; Weisweiler 2016; 2017: 52-61.

¹⁵ Ando 2016b, on the *Constitutio Antoniniana*; Babusiaux and Kolb 2014.

a morally corrupt ruler, he describes Severus making it clear that the army was the true source of power, and thereby putting an end to any pretence of respect for the Senate's traditional role. As he summarises:

Severus revealed the working of power relations among interest groups within the state more nakedly than ever before; he more openly mocked or discounted the discursive and institutional structure by which those relations had been channelled, controlled and disguised.¹⁶

The main interest groups in question are the army, the Senate, the equestrian order, the imperial household, and the masses. After Severus 'substantially weakened the conventional [i.e. senatorial] structures of legitimation...no alternative method for the construction of a social consensus emerged.'¹⁷ In this reading, the decision by Severus to favour the army at the expense of the Senate set a pattern which led to the collapse of imperial legitimacy. The same argument is put forward by David Potter. As he concludes, earlier emperors balanced different interests; '[Severus] deliberately created insecurity and fear as a substitute for Marcus' balancing act. Caracalla learned this much from his father, but he went too far, alienating officials from the notion that the emperor could balance interests other than those that were immediately obvious.'¹⁸ In turn, the events of 238 reveal the full extent of the divisions, and the army's success in dominating politics.¹⁹

An overview of the military and political history of the early third century quickly demonstrates how the centrality of the army was formed and justified. The stability of five peaceful imperial successions following Nerva's death was exceptional.²⁰ In little over forty-five years, from New Year's Eve 192 to 238, fourteen recognised Augusti died. All but Septimius Severus did so violently. This figure becomes

¹⁶ Ando 2012: 46.

¹⁷ Ando 2012: 224.

¹⁸ Potter 2014: 562-63.

¹⁹ Potter 2014: 167-71.

²⁰ Indeed, this is true for the entirety of Rome's history while it was united under the control of a single ruler; no other dynasty survived more than two successions without a violent imperial death until the fifth century.

even starker when it is observed that just two emperors account for two-thirds of that time.²¹ After the unrest which preceded his reign, Severus fought two civil wars before securing power, against Pescennius Niger in Asia Minor (193-194) and then Clodius Albinus, who had briefly been appointed his Caesar, in Gaul (196-197). His death in 211 was followed by a period of instability. Caracalla killed his brother and co-emperor Geta in 212, before himself being assassinated in 217. Macrinus, the first equestrian emperor, reigned for only a year before he too was executed after defeat in civil war. The notorious priest-emperor Elagabalus reigned for four years before being killed by the Praetorian Guard in 222, in favour of his younger cousin Severus Alexander.

It would take another thirteen years before violence led to another imperial assassination, though that time was not peaceful. A resurgent Persia, under the leadership of Shapur I, became an active threat in the 230s. After a failed invasion in 233, Severus Alexander then travelled to the Rhine frontier. In 235 he was killed, and replaced by Maximinus Thrax. He suffered the same violent fate three years later, after a reign in which he never visited Rome. First, a rebellion broke out in North Africa, led by the governor Gordian. He was recognised as emperor alongside his son and namesake. Their uprising was quickly quelled; the younger Gordian was killed in battle, and his father committed suicide. The response in Rome was not however to accept defeat. Two senators were appointed co-emperors, Pupienus and Balbinus, in opposition to Maximinus, with the great-nephew of Gordian as their Caesar. Maximinus in turn invaded Italy, where he was held up besieging the city of Aquileia on the northern tip of the Adriatic Sea. He was killed by his troops during the siege. A few weeks later, Pupienus and Balbinus were also killed, at the hands of the Praetorian Guard. Over the course of a few months, five Augusti were killed.²² The thirteen-year-old Gordian III was left as sole ruler of the empire. The succeeding decades would see civil war as almost the default, culminating in

²¹ Septimius Severus (193-211) and Severus Alexander (222-235).

²² The precise chronology of 238 is very difficult to determine. Strasser 2016 provides the most recent attempt; cf. Peachin 1990: 26-29.

the splintering of Roman power into three separate units in the 260s,²³ in an apparent collapse of central imperial authority.

Purely in terms of imperial successions, the violence of the army appears as a common factor in the disruption. These five decades saw four emperors killed by the Praetorian Guard during this time, and a fifth at the instruction of the Praetorian Prefect;²⁴ two more were killed by mutinous soldiers.²⁵ Alongside Severus' opponents, a further four lost civil wars.²⁶ The court intrigues that led to the murders of Commodus and Geta seem relatively peaceful in comparison. But the rapid turnover of emperors is only the most visible aspect of this scenario of political chaos. Alongside the 'making and breaking' of emperors,²⁷ the position of the military was altered through a series of reforms. Severus is said to have increased the soldiers' status, and instigated the rapid six- to eightfold increase of military pay.²⁸ This coincided with a growing reliance on equestrians within the imperial bureaucracy. As a result, the Senate lost out in two ways. Financially, it was the elite whose wealth

²³ The Gallic Empire broke away under Postumus in 260, and at its height stretched from Spain to Britain. The Palmyrene Empire controlled territory from Asia Minor to Egypt, under the governor Odaenathus, originally remaining in alliance with the emperor Gallienus; it broke away from Rome openly under his son Vaballathus, and the famed Empress Zenobia in 267. Both splinter empires were conquered by Aurelian in the 270s.

²⁴ Pertinax, Elagabalus, Pupienus and Balbinus; Caracalla is the fifth.

²⁵ Severus Alexander and Maximinus.

²⁶ Didius Julianus, Macrinus, and Gordians I and II.

²⁷ Nicols 2007. The pattern of violent removal of emperors, either through defeat in civil war or murder by soldiers, continued until the accession of Diocletian. Including Gordian III, twenty-one Augusti were recognised in Rome from the end of 238 to 284, of whom four probably died of natural causes: Claudius Gothicus (268-270) and Tacitus (275-276) both succumbed to plague; Hostilian (250, alongside Trebonianus Gallus) and Carus (282-283) may have died of disease, or may have been murdered. For an introduction, see Kienast et al 2017: 187-254; Meijer 2004: 83-108; Drinkwater 2005.

²⁸ Severus is credited with the first of three rises in 197, followed by Caracalla (212) and Maximinus Thrax (235). The precise details of the pay increase are disputed, but it is accepted to have been significant; see Speidel 1992, 2013; Alston 1994; cf. Kulikowski 2016: 112-13, who suggests that Maximinus promised a pay rise, but could not deliver it.

was targeted to pay the troops. And politically, their opportunities for power were reduced. The Severan dynasty has thus been interpreted as transformative in its militarisation of Roman political life.²⁹ For both Gibbon and Ando alike, Severus was ‘the principal author of the decline and fall of the Roman empire.’³⁰

The ongoing importance of the army as a cause for political turmoil, and the absence of any concerted challenge against it, is evident in perhaps the largest modern debate about the period. The question of the Crisis of the Third Century has dominated large swathes of its historical discussion. The Crisis model was articulated most comprehensively by Géza Alföldy, as a breakdown in the social and political institutions of the empire in the decades between the Severans and the rise of Diocletian fifty years later. Instability in politics was worsened by the aggression of Rome’s neighbours, exacerbated by longstanding plague. For Alföldy, this was a time of economic collapse, which created a sense of despair among the empire’s inhabitants. Though political unrest was therefore only one aspect of the empire’s struggle for survival, its form followed a familiar line of argument. Once again, the soldiers were given too many new privileges by Septimius Severus and Caracalla, and so realised the full extent of their influence, and made ever greater demands in return for loyalty. The Senate was ignored, as a body whose displeasure was much less threatening. The events of 238 sharpened the appearance of a political conflict which had long been brewing, and which the soldiers ultimately won; the dominance of the army would define the decades which followed.³¹

Alföldy’s view of the third century has been highly influential, but it was not accepted universally. Two routes of attack were advanced in the 1990s. The first concerned Alföldy’s argument that ancient writers were aware of the crisis they were living through.³² Karl Strobel was especially forceful in questioning whether such awareness could even be possible, and several scholars followed in

²⁹ Syme 1971: 181

³⁰ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, vol. 1 (London, 1776), 129 (= Womersley 1994 I: 148); Ando 2012: 19-47.

³¹ The Crisis is the subject of the papers collected in Alföldy 1989.

³² See esp. Alföldy 1989: 319-42, = 1974a.

challenging Alföldy's engagement with specific authors.³³ The second stressed economic factors. Christian Witschel used archaeological evidence to demonstrate that many regions of the empire flourished in the third century, leading to the rejection of their being any crisis at all.³⁴ There have been several responses, not least from Alföldy himself.³⁵ Broadly speaking, it has been accepted that a universal crisis is an exaggeration. At the same time, the convergence of several short-term difficulties has been offered as a defence for Crisis as a term which remains useful.³⁶

It is not my intention to contribute to this debate here, but to use it to demonstrate a point. Several aspects of the Crisis model have been challenged and defended over the past thirty years. One has not. At no stage in the discussion surrounding Crisis has the characterisation of the role of the military been questioned. Instead, it remains a central block in the defence of using the term to describe the third century. Lukas de Blois has recently reframed the third century, splitting it into two: a period of genuine Crisis after 235, and its 'onset' under the Severans.³⁷ The early decades of the century were not, in his view, a period of crisis, but they defined its key terms:

Emperors were progressively becoming more dependent on their armies, which they could not discipline any more. So large parts of the population in war-zones, their hinterlands and along military transit routes were plundered by Roman military and exhausted by extraordinary requisitions, for which they did not receive indemnities. This must have undermined their confidence in imperial power... Under a surface of continuity appointment

³³ Strobel 1993; on Herodian, Sidebottom 1998: 2792-823; Zimmermann 1999a; on Cyprian, Schuler 1999; cf. Christol 2006.

³⁴ Witschel 1999; see also Whittaker 1976; Rathbone 1996; Ruffing 2006, 2008.

³⁵ See esp. Alföldy 2011: 254-72.

³⁶ Recent overviews of the discussion are found in Gerhardt 2006; Liebeschuetz 2007; Johnes and Hartmann 2008: 1031-53; Ziolkowski 2011; Sommer 2014. All five support the use of the term crisis, with an emphasis on the role of the army.

³⁷ e.g. de Blois 2002a, 2002b, 2006, 2007.

policies were changing in consequence of military, fiscal and administrative needs, which must have estranged members of the traditional higher orders.³⁸

The basic narrative is a familiar one. The army becomes unruly due to the generosity of emperors, leading to widespread social and political disruption. And as a direct result, the senatorial elite 'must have' been alienated.

It is now nearly one hundred years since Rostovtzeff defined the third century around a conflict between the Senate and the army, and nearly 250 since Gibbon despaired of the corruption which followed the death of Marcus Aurelius. It is clear that reconstructions of the period have advanced considerably in the intervening decades. One image has proven remarkably resilient. The politicised army dominates even the most recent attempts to understand the disruption of the third century. Their role is ultimately defined in moralising terms, in a period still viewed as the age of the greedy soldiery. The Senate continues to be the victim of this process, ostracised by emperors who were reliant on military support. This thesis aims to change that.

Writing 'The Age of Iron and Rust'

The core interest of this study is the ancient evidence which supports the reconstruction of a militarised Rome in the third century. The consistent basis for the picture of political conflict between the army and the Senate is historiography. Three extended narratives survive from the ancient world. Moreover, two present themselves, and are treated by modern historians, as contemporary witnesses to events. Both Cassius Dio and Herodian wrote accounts of this period in Greek. Dio's eighty-book *Roman History* was originally an extended description of the entirety of Rome's past, though much now been lost.³⁹ Beginning with the mythical origins of the city, it reaches

³⁸ de Blois 2006: 33.

³⁹ Citations of the *Roman History* are complex. Due to the *Roman History*'s preservation in epitomised and fragmentary form (see below, 48-54), a dispute arose over the later book divisions. The epitomised narrative was organised by reign, with no indication of book divisions. A first scheme was set out in the 1592 and 1606 editions of Leunclavius, and was accepted as standard for some 300 years: it continued to be used in Dindorf 1863-65. The divisions were disputed at the end of the nineteenth century by Alfred von Gutschmidt, who

Dio's own lifetime, and concludes with his retirement from public life, covering some thousand years in total. Herodian's *History of the Roman Empire after Marcus Aurelius* – hereafter simply the *History* – is much smaller in scope. In eight books, its fully extant text covers the fifty-eight years from the death of Marcus in 180 through to the accession of Gordian III in 238. Herodian claims to have lived through all of its events.⁴⁰

Before going into detail on Dio and Herodian, though, a word on the third narrative. The absence of the *Historia Augusta*, or indeed consideration of evidence in the fourth-century *breviaria*, is not arbitrary. There are two connected points which mark Dio and Herodian out from these other accounts. The first is the *HA*'s notoriously problematic dating. Dio and Herodian are both explicitly favoured as sources because of their immediacy to the events they describe. From this point of view, it does not matter whether the *HA* is placed as the work of a single author in the late fourth century,⁴¹ or accepted as a collection of early fourth-century biographies from different authors.⁴² More importantly, the later dating reinforces concerns about the highly dubious reliability of the *HA*'s claims, meaning that its modern historiographical role is very different. It is Dio and Herodian whose narratives lay the foundations for the social conflict outlined above. In reconstructions of the early

argued that the final twenty books had been divided incorrectly (1889-94 V: 549-62, with his divisions set out at 561-62). His reappraisal then influenced Boissevain 1895-1901, which has become the standard text of the *Roman History*. As a result, two schemes of book divisions exist, both of which are used, often without indication. Thus Cary 1914-27 follows Boissevain's division in his text, but Dindorf's in his introduction (I: ix-xxvi). It has therefore become customary to cite both. For example, 74[73].12.2 refers to Boissevain's book 74, and Dindorf's 73. References to fragments of the earlier books are preceded by their book number.

⁴⁰ See below, 122 for the problem of the precise dating.

⁴¹ See recently Rohrbacher 2016: 4-15; Cameron 2011: 743-82.

⁴² See most recently Baker 2014. As will be made clear in the analysis of Dio's fragmentary tradition (below, 55-68), I do not believe that it is possible to use the *HA* to reconstruct the lost imperial biographies of Marius Maximus, a contemporary of Dio, *contra* e.g. Syme 1983: 30-45; Birley 1997; Kulikowski 2007; Arbo 2009.

third century, the *HA* is primarily deployed as an occasional source of supplemental detail.⁴³ Its use for the later decades depends on corroboration from external sources.⁴⁴

In contrast to the occasional use of the *HA* or other later writers, Dio and Herodian are inescapable in discussions of the Severan period. Dio in particular dominates its early stages. A crude metric of his importance can be found in the widespread quotation of two phrases which have come to encapsulate modern perceptions of Commodus and the Severans, and the unpleasantness of senatorial life during their reigns. The first provides the title for this section. The death of Marcus Aurelius, and the accession of his son, saw the empire transformed ‘from a kingdom of gold into one of iron and rust’.⁴⁵ Dio is also the source of Septimius Severus’ famous words to his two sons, shortly before his death in 211: ‘Be harmonious; enrich the soldiers; ignore everyone else.’⁴⁶ Both are ubiquitous in scholarship, to the point of becoming cliché.⁴⁷ Herodian’s central role is delayed to his later books. The *History* includes the only closely contemporary narrative of Maximinus Thrax, whose reign is so important in demonstrating the fullest extent of the army’s political role. He records the uprising of the disgruntled soldiers on the frontier, and their selection of the general Maximinus as a replacement for Severus Alexander.⁴⁸ Herodian’s account of 238 then seems to confirm Dio’s model of political conflict, in its presentation of two separate senatorial rebellions against a militaristic ruler. The result

⁴³ See Barnes 1978: 87-89 for a collection of examples of the *HA* providing detail not found elsewhere.

⁴⁴ Hekster 2008: 8 is typical: ‘On the whole, anything that can be found solely in the *Historia Augusta* should be used only with extreme caution. Where there is literary or archaeological backup, the *Historia Augusta* can be used to supply interesting details.’

⁴⁵ ἀπὸ χρυσῆς τε βασιλείας ἐς σιδηρᾶν καὶ κατιωμένην, 72[71].36.4. The image is a common one, as recently explored in Evans 2008.

⁴⁶ ‘ὁμοιοεῖτε, τοὺς στρατιώτας πλουτίζετε, τῶν ἄλλων πάντων καταφρονεῖτε,’ 77[76].15.2.

⁴⁷ It is worth noting the irony that Severus’ “famous last words” are not the last thing he said even according to Dio, who records a final death-bed exhortation to continue with any administrative tasks: ‘Come, give it to me, if there’s anything for us to do,’ 77[76].17.4. It should go without saying that neither line bears any weight as a reflection of what Severus actually said.

⁴⁸ Hdn. 6.8-9. See Speidel 2016 for a recent analysis of the scene.

is something decidedly rare for ancient historians of any period: two contemporary accounts which actually agree with each other.

Despite the similar importance of the two narratives in reconstructing key moments in the early third century, modern responses to the two historians have been very different. Thanks to a successful public career, Dio has been received favourably. He was a senator from the reign of Commodus onwards, and reached the office of consul on two separate occasions, the second time with the particular honour of having the emperor Severus Alexander as a colleague in the ordinary consulship of 229.⁴⁹ Dio was directly involved in the political narrative he relates, as is reflected in the frequent appearance of first-person authorial comments in the contemporary books.⁵⁰ His proximity to imperial politics has led to a reputation as a reliable eyewitness. Clifford Ando's comments are representative of current historiographical attitudes, when he describes Dio as 'a remarkably well-placed observer' and 'a diligent researcher', who proves himself to be 'an exceptionally clear-headed and percipient observer of imperial government'.⁵¹ The introduction to Andrew Scott's commentary on books 79-80 (published in May 2018) is the most recent reaffirmation of this approach: 'As a senator and political figure... [Dio's] position as a contemporary historian has been rightly valued.'⁵² The *Roman History* forms the backbone of most modern reconstructions of the late second and early third centuries. The logic is simple: Dio was there, so he knew what was going on.⁵³

That is not to say that Dio's account is universally accepted in all of its detail. Various episodes have been challenged, from specific criticism for what has been perceived as excessive praise for Septimius

⁴⁹ Dio (80².5.1) tells us himself. It has been confirmed epigraphically: Roxan 1985: no. 133, first published in Kellner 1985 = *AE* (1985) 821; Toupatsoglou 1970: 280-85 = *AE* (1971) 430.

⁵⁰ On Dio's narratorial persona, see Hidber 2004a. This distinctive, highly personal style is the starting point for Kemezis's discussion of the *Roman History* (2014: 90-91).

⁵¹ Ando 2012: 19.

⁵² Scott 2018a: 1.

⁵³ See also e.g. Bering-Staschewski 1981: 3-4; Alföldy 1989: 181, 209; Gowing 1992: 25; Moscovich 2004; Hose 2007: 462-64; Hekster 2008: 7-8; Handy 2009: 22; Arrizabalaga y Prado 2010: 20-21; Birley 2012a: 13.

Severus after his accession in 193,⁵⁴ to a more general rejection of his portrayal of Elagabalus.⁵⁵ But a common manoeuvre reiterates Dio's reliability even when his factual accuracy has been questioned. Scott again typifies current thinking. He emphasises the distinction between the *Roman History's* contemporary books and the narratives produced by the Severan regime. Dio was driven by 'his desire to create a narrative that was reflective of a senator's experience, in opposition to the projected image of the Severan rulers under whom he lived.' His 'stance as a conduit of senatorial experience' is the foundation for his eyewitness record.⁵⁶ The same views proliferate in recent discussions of the Severans. Potter has labelled the *Roman History* 'a memoir of the governing class',⁵⁷ and Dio's account of Septimius Severus has even been called, 'a form of senatorial resistance against Severus and his policy'.⁵⁸ There has been little change in the fifty years since Fergus Millar described Dio's second consulship as a moment of pro-senatorial rule, since 'no one could have been more acceptable to the senatorial oligarchy than the elderly Dio'.⁵⁹ Dio's position is then framed in terms of an ongoing social conflict. In the struggle against the rise of military figures, he represents the discomfort of the senatorial order.⁶⁰

⁵⁴ 75[74].1.3-5; see below, 97-98 for detail.

⁵⁵ Book 80[79]; Arrizabalaga y Prado 2010: 30-36; Icks 2011: 94-103; Kemezis 2016a: 353-60; Osgood 2016. Scott 2018a: 102-110 provides an overview of Dio's approach to Elagabalus, and several aspects of the scholarship pertaining to the young emperor's reign.

⁵⁶ Scott 2018a: xi, 9; see 3-9 for a full discussion of Dio as a contemporary historian.

⁵⁷ Potter 2014: 331.

⁵⁸ Rantala 2016: 161.

⁵⁹ Millar 1964: 26. For recent reassertions of Severus Alexander as pro-senatorial in his appointment of consuls, see Potter 2014: 162-62; Kulikowski 2016: 109; cf. Davenport 2011.

⁶⁰ By way of brief example, see also Espinosa Ruiz 1982: esp. 407-26; Talbert 1984: 73; Rich 1989: 87-88; Edmondson 1992: 24; Hekster 2002: 4-5; Hose 2007: 461; Ando 2012: 19; Davenport 2012a: 196; Langford 2013: 84-96; Mallan 2013a: 741 (following Eisman 1977: 670-71); Letta 2014; Schöpe 2014: 125-33; Madsen 2016: 137-43; Tuori 2016: 274-81.

Herodian's reception among modern historians is, on the whole much, less flattering. While Cassius Dio is held up as a trustworthy eyewitness of events in Rome, it would take some time to chronicle the attacks against Herodian's historical abilities in full. Ernst Hohl, using an epithet which sums up modern scholarship before him, called Herodian 'the Levantine wind-bag'.⁶¹ A few more recent comments show the ongoing prevalence of this view. Herodian has been called 'a mediocre recorder' who was 'exceedingly general and flaccid in his manner of expression';⁶² 'he is a rhetorician, pompous, repetitive, and derivative',⁶³ or 'careless, ignorant and deceitful',⁶⁴ his historical analysis in turn has been described as 'superficial and banal',⁶⁵ and his narrative as a whole unreliable, due to his 'eternal preference for rhetoric over content.'⁶⁶ Even one of his defenders can manage little more than a condemnation through the faintest of praise: 'Herodian's understanding of history is neither profound nor original...but at least it is coherent.'⁶⁷ Indeed, there have been several scholars willing to conclude that Herodian was less a historian than a writer of historical fiction.⁶⁸

Despite the extensive criticism of Herodian, the *History* continues to be central to reconstructions of social conflict in the third century. The earlier books are used similarly to the *Historia Augusta*. Specific details are brought in from the *History* to support Dio's narrative, providing extra detail or correcting perceived excesses.⁶⁹ Even here, Herodian's contributions are already of great significance. Herodian

⁶¹ 'Der windige Levantiner', Hohl 1954: 5.

⁶² Šašel Kos 1986: 282, 362.

⁶³ Echols 1961: 6.

⁶⁴ Birley 1988: 204-205.

⁶⁵ Kemezis 2014: 24.

⁶⁶ Kulikowski 2016: 108.

⁶⁷ Sidebottom 1998: 2812.

⁶⁸ Sidebottom 1998: 2820-22 attempts to bridge that anachronistic divide. The most extensive summary of recent responses to Herodian is found in Hidber 2006: 45-71; see also Zimmermann 1999b: 1-9. Piper 1975 is an interesting exception, arguing in general defence of Herodian's rhetorical approach.

⁶⁹ Ando 2012: 1-75; Potter 2014: 85-172; Kulikowski 2016: 56-109. Bowersock 1975 attempted to rehabilitate Herodian using his much more restrained picture of Elagabalus than that of Dio.

is the source for many of the developments which have reinforced the militaristic character of the Severan dynasty. The *History* is the only account which includes a full scheme of three pay increases for the troops.⁷⁰ So too it is Herodian who writes that Septimius Severus allowed soldiers to marry for the first time, and to wear the gold ring which signified equestrian rank.⁷¹ Regardless of the attacks against the *History* for its rhetoric and moralising, it is used as a convenient source for corroborative information which explains the rising political involvement of the army, and which is otherwise lacking in Dio's account.⁷²

This tendency comes to its fullest fruition in the use of Herodian's final three books. The *Roman History* ends under Severus Alexander, shortly after Dio's second consulship. Thereafter, Herodian is the main source for the 230s. A cynical reader might note the convenience,⁷³ but it is in this final part of his *History* that Herodian is generally considered to be at his most accurate and reliable.⁷⁴ Even where Herodian is not explicitly credited, his narrative dominates all modern reconstructions of events 235-238. In their recent synopses, Ando, Potter, and Kulikowski all follow Herodian's account of the soldiers assassinating Severus Alexander, and appointing Maximinus in his stead; Potter goes as far as quoting the jibes supposedly aimed at the emperor by the disaffected troops.⁷⁵ The same is true of

⁷⁰ See above, n. 28. Only Herodian mentions all three, and he is the source for their relative sizes: an unquantified amount by Septimius Severus in 193 (Hdn. 3.8.4; *HA Sev.* 12.2); a fifty percent increase by Caracalla in 212 (Hdn. 4.4.7; Dio 79[78].36.2-3); and a doubling of pay by Maximinus Thrax in 235 (Hdn. 6.8.8).

⁷¹ Hdn. 3.8.5; for a discussion of the evidence for the marriage ban, see Phang 2001: 13-133; see also Campbell 1978. Though there is much broader evidence for the ban not being in place later under the Severans, Herodian is vital to dating its repeal to 197.

⁷² Or, as Sidebottom 1998: 2776, 'it has been reduced to a mere quarry for historical data, and an unsatisfactory one at that.'

⁷³ As Börm 2008: 74-75.

⁷⁴ Potter 2011: 238. In a rapid passage on Herodian, his accounts of Elagabalus and 238 are praised; otherwise, 'his narratives are vastly more eccentric'. See also Rostovtzeff 1957: 433 (for whom book 7 provides 'a splendid picture' of events); Dietz 1980: 35-36; Haegemans 2010: 15-16.

⁷⁵ Hdn. 6.8-9. Ando 2012: 74-75; Potter 2014: 166-67; Kulikowski 2016: 111-12.

238. The narrative of an uprising in North Africa sparked by a tax collector, leading to the proclamation of the Gordians as senators; the violence in Rome which followed their defeat, with open conflict between the Senate and the Praetorian Guard; Maximinus' invasion, and his defeat at Aquileia; the assassination of Pupienus and Balbinus by the Praetorians. All these scenes of conflict have been interpreted as natural developments from the policies of the Severan dynasty. All of them come directly from Herodian.⁷⁶

As individual accounts, both Dio's *Roman History* and Herodian's *History* have therefore played important roles in establishing the basic events in the political developments of the early third century. When brought together, they have supported a broader reconstruction of a political atmosphere and environment, driven by conflict between the core groups of Roman politics. The two histories are seen as corroborating accounts of a political change which is driven by conflict among the core groups of Roman politics. Dio, the insider, provides its foundation. He describes a political environment in which the Senate was under attack from emperors and their corrupt favourites.⁷⁷ From there, Herodian's description of events under Maximinus Thrax seem to suggest a natural progression. After Septimius Severus or Caracalla favoured equestrians or soldiers instead of the Senate, the accession of a military leader at the instigation of the army follows easily. Dio's 'age of iron and rust' sets the political tone for scholars; Herodian's depiction of the violent reign of the Thracian soldier Maximinus is used to confirm it.

Complicating the Narrative I: Alternative Sources

It would of course be misleading to suggest that interest in the Severans is exclusively concerned with the political developments of the early third century, or with the written accounts which describe it. The use of epigraphic and numismatic evidence has long been a common feature of biographies of individual emperors,⁷⁸ which continue to form a sizable proportion of scholarship on

⁷⁶ Hdn. 7.4-8.8.

⁷⁷ Ranging from the authority of Plautianus, Praetorian Prefect under Septimius Severus (Dio 76[75].14-77[76].6) to Caracalla's excessive generosity to the army at the Senate's expense (e.g. 78[77].9.1, 78[77].10.1, 78[77].17).

⁷⁸ e.g. Platnauer 1918: 23-37; Hasebroek 1921: 151-89 (both on the epigraphy and coinage of Septimius Severus).

the period.⁷⁹ As the twentieth century progressed, non-literary evidence was increasingly regarded as a useful source in its own terms. Its later decades saw a number of prosopographical studies, which consistently identified a change in the political roles of senators and equestrians during the late second and early third centuries. At the same time, however, it became clear that the presentations of violent outbursts from emperors towards the Senate, prevalent in the written accounts, were greatly exaggerated.⁸⁰ For example, both Dio and Herodian claim that Caracalla massacred Geta's supporters after killing his brother; Herodian says that much the same happened to those of Severus Alexander when Maximinus came to power.⁸¹ Prosopographical studies have shown the continuity in senatorial careers across these supposedly drastic breaking points.⁸² Such conclusions are now commonplace, and raise an important point: the ancient accounts can be deeply misleading in their depictions of political life, and the extent of the challenges faced by senators.

More recently, analysis has moved away from the emperors and their interaction with the political elite. The last decade has seen a large number of investigations into the representation of imperial regimes, especially in visual terms, which have greatly added to the understanding of the Severan emperors. The difference in approach is perhaps best demonstrated by Achim Lichtenberger's study of Septimius Severus. Although he concentrates on one specific emperor, his analysis is not a traditional biography, but instead explores the presentation of imperial power and its connection to the divine in the media which celebrated the emperor's regime. Dio and Herodian are mentioned in

⁷⁹ Unsurprisingly, the transgressive images of Elagabalus have led to numerous discussions of his reign. See recently Arrizabalaga y Prado, 2010, 2017; Icks 2011, which also covers Elagabalus' reception at length. Others to receive recent discussion include Julia Domna (Levick 2007; Langford 2013; Mallan 2013a; Scott 2017); Commodus (Hekster 2002); Septimius Severus (Birley 1988; Daguet-Gagey 2000).

⁸⁰ Particularly important are Dietz 1980; Christol 1986; Leunissen 1989.

⁸¹ Dio describes twenty thousand people being killed by Caracalla (78[77].4.1), and Herodian writes that every rich or respected member of the Senate was executed (4.6.2-3); Herodian then has all of Alexander's *amici* killed or exiled (7.1.3-4).

⁸² See recently Christol 1999; Sillar 2001; Mennen 2007, 2011.

passing in a two-page summary of ‘literary sources’.⁸³ Otherwise, the argument stems from other evidence. Lichtenberger concludes that Severus’ portrayal reflected a continuity with earlier imperial models, with specific elements unique to his reign.⁸⁴

These conclusions are reflected elsewhere, in a series of actions by the Severans which have clear precedents from earlier emperors. Their monumentalisation of Rome and Septimius Severus’ celebrations in the city looked back to Augustan models.⁸⁵ The detail of imperial statuary, relief carving and coin types remains highly traditional; throughout these media, the Senate is closely associated with legitimate rule.⁸⁶ It must be acknowledged that not all changes to the city of Rome were traditional. The increase in the number of soldiers in Rome and its immediate vicinity should not go ignored.⁸⁷ Even so, Severan Rome seems very different when looked at, rather than read. The ancient writers might claim that the Severans were changing the interaction between the emperor and the Senate, but this was not on show in public displays.⁸⁸

⁸³ Lichtenberger 2011: 12-13.

⁸⁴ Lichtenberger 2011: 379-86 f.

⁸⁵ e.g. Lusnia 2006, 2014 on Severan architecture; several papers are also gathered in Swain et al 2007; Faust and Leitmeir 2011; Sojc et al 2013; de Sena 2013. On the *ludi saeculares*, see most recently Rantala 2017, with de Blois 2017 on the *decennalia* of 202. More generally on Severus’ attempts to represent himself as Augustan, see also Cooley 2007; Barnes 2008.

⁸⁶ On the visual aspects of imperial representation, see e.g. Rollé Ditzler 2011; Leitmeir 2011; Eich 2013; Nadolny 2016. Manders 2012 and Rowan 2012 provide recent and extensive surveys on imagery on coinage.

⁸⁷ Severus increased the number of soldiers in the city itself, as well as stationing the newly-founded *Legio II Parthica* at Alba Longa, just south of Rome; see Coulston 2000: 81 for detail of the numbers of troops; see also Busch 2013 on military funerary inscriptions from the city. Handy 2009: 20-33 follows Dio and Herodian to reconstruct reactions to the change.

⁸⁸ Cf. Ando 2012: 46-47 for the use of an imperial edict to argue that Septimius Severus showed less respect to the Senate in the issue of public declarations, and that imperial power was understood to be entirely in the hands of one man. Ando’s qualification that Severus should be assessed ‘without placing too much emphasis on one document’ seems rather fragile, given the proliferation of images which would contest his position.

Even as the level of engagement with non-literary evidence has unquestionably added nuance to reconstructions of the Severan period, the contemporary historiography continues to play an important role. Tightly focused studies may conflict with the image of Rome presented by Dio and Herodian, but their narratives are central to create the wider context in which the investigations can be framed. The imperial court is a good example. The last few years have seen attempts to look beyond prosopography, and to think about the court environment in which political careers played out. Aloys Winterling's important investigations have ended with the reign of Commodus,⁸⁹ but their methodologies have been extended into the Severan era. For Peter Eich, thinking largely in terms of the emperor's role, the Severans represent a period of continuity. The relationship between emperors and senators stayed much the same; any change in the court was primarily due to the emperor's frequent absence from Rome.⁹⁰

When the perspective is shifted to the experience of the Senate, Dio again comes to the fore. Björn Schöpe's study of the individuals within the Severan court is built on prosopography, with extensive use of epigraphic evidence. His explanations of their careers are dependent on Dio. Thus, he observes a continuation of senatorial careers under Caracalla and Macrinus, using Dio's reports of the former's antipathy towards the Senate to elaborate an experience of political life at this time.⁹¹ The same approach is taken by Carlo Letta for the court of Septimius Severus. Prosopography may be the focus of his analysis of the emperor's attitude towards the Senate, but Dio is vital in supplying the senatorial reaction to his reign.⁹² Simultaneously, views of the Severan court have therefore stressed the appearance of continuity, but also the experience of change, in how the emperor and the Senate

⁸⁹ See esp. Winterling 1999, 2011.

⁹⁰ Eich 2005, 2013. Even this change was an acceleration of a process begun under the Antonines; Eich 2013: 98-100.

⁹¹ Schöpe 2013: 124-26, 2014: 111-33 on Caracalla. Dio's report of life at Nicomedia in the winter of 214/215 (78[77].17) is central to this interpretation, in which the events described are taken as separate from Dio's overarching antipathy towards the emperor.

⁹² Letta 2014; Dio's importance is seen at 128-39. For prosopographical studies of the court under Severus specifically, see also Alföldy 1968; Jacques 1992; Okoń 2012, 2016.

interacted. The historiographical presentation of imperial intention has been reconsidered; its depiction of senatorial response less so.

As with the institutional development of the imperial court, Dio and Herodian remain important in the reconstruction of specific events. For example, two recent studies have combined numismatic and epigraphic evidence to reassess the murder of the Praetorian Prefect Plautianus at the start of 205.⁹³ The years 200-202 had seen a notable increase in public celebrations of Geta, which has been used to suggest a pro-Geta faction in Rome. This has led to suggestions that Plautianus was not killed because of his own desire for power (Hdn. 3.11-12) or Caracalla's pettiness (Dio 77[76].3-4), but as a result of factional intrigue stemming from either on-going sibling rivalry or elite disaffection. As a result, it has been suggested that Plautianus was a leading figure in a plot to replace Septimius Severus with Geta. Outside the immediate question of Plautianus and Geta, the justification for these interpretations remains closely bound to the literary frame. Both the disputes between the brothers and the animosity of the Senate stem directly from Dio and Herodian.⁹⁴ The same pattern is repeated. Non-literary evidence challenges the reliability of the contemporary historiography, but any conclusions are simultaneously framed within the context of those same narratives.

The examples here are a long way from exhaustive. Nonetheless, they are indicative of how the ancient narratives remain of central importance to modern reconstructions. Investigations of non-literary evidence have made it clear that Dio and Herodian are far from comprehensive in their depictions of the political atmosphere in Rome. In two respects they continue to be vital to modern historiography. Their accuracy may be challenged, but this is generally aimed at specific moments.

⁹³ Kemmers 2011; Bingham and Imrie 2015.

⁹⁴ Kemmers 2011: 282-87 contextualises the plot against later disputes between the brothers, including the acceptance of the claim that Severus took his sons to Britain as a means of trying to diffuse their tension (283, following Dio 77[76].11 and Hdn. 3.14). Given Commodus' presence on the German frontier in 180, taking two adult heirs on campaign may simply be standard practice. Bingham and Imrie 2015: 89 offers the uncritical explanation of 'the disaffected senators' animosity towards Severus, owing to his Antonine pretensions and his persecution of Albinus' supporters' (Dio 76[75].7.4-8.4; Hdn. 3.8.6-8). See also Scott 2018b: 450-54 for an analysis of Herodian's account of the assassination as a formulaic scene from the *History*.

Wider context is still derived from written accounts. So too the ancient narratives are used as indicative of the reception of events. In interpretations of both the court and visual representations of the Severans, they dictate the terms for interpreting evidence, even as they are shown to be too simplistic.

Complicating the Narrative II: Historiography

The disconnect between the historiographical depictions of Roman politics and its presentation in other media has therefore largely been restricted to specific events or aspects of the Severan dynasty. A more fundamental basis for the appraisal of Dio and Herodian can be found in the growing body of scholarship which looks at both narratives as literary undertakings. Traditionally, investigations of the authors were mainly directed towards their use as sources of historical data: the biographies of the historians themselves, and the reliability of their factual content.⁹⁵ The kind of analysis directed towards Thucydides or Tacitus in the late twentieth century took longer to be applied to writers from the third century. That is, thankfully, no longer the case. The cultural and literary history of the early third century has benefitted greatly from studies of the Second Sophistic, which has included specific investigation of Severan Rome.⁹⁶ It is now not unusual to find both Dio and Herodian in synoptic collections of studies on classical literature,⁹⁷ or surveys of historiography more specifically.⁹⁸ It would be an exaggeration to say that either historian is now part of a literary mainstream, but they have both benefitted from the integration of authors outside the traditional canon.

⁹⁵ Introduced in more detail for each author below, at 41-45 (Dio) and 121-24 (Herodian intro).

⁹⁶ See above, 3 n. 13. On the Severans, see papers in Swain et al. 2007, including Sidebottom 2007 on historiography. Asirvatham 2017 provides a summary of Second Sophistic historiography more broadly.

⁹⁷ Both are included in most volumes in the Brill series *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative*: Hidber 2004a, 2004b (narrators and narratees); Hidber 2007 (time in Herodian); Pitcher 2012a, 2012b (space); Pitcher 2018a, 2018b (characterisation in Dio and Herodian). See also Arbo 2017 and Coltelloni-Trannoy 2017 on the miraculous.

⁹⁸ Both historians are discussed at various points in Marincola 1997; see also Hose 2007 (Dio); Pitcher 2009: 39-44 (Herodian); Potter 2011. They are studied in more detail in smaller selections of authors in Hose 1994: 356-451 (Dio); Kuhn-Chen 2002: 131-247 (Dio), 249-313 (Herodian); Kemezis 2014: 90-149 (Dio), 227-72 (Herodian).

This situation has coincided with a growing interest in the two authors individually, in Dio's case, dramatically so. For several decades following its publication in 1964, Fergus Millar's discussion of the *Roman History* was the standard reference on Dio's narrative.⁹⁹ In the late 1980s, work began on a series of English historical commentaries,¹⁰⁰ followed by the ongoing publication of several Budé editions with translation and commentaries in French. These volumes tend to concentrate on the late republican and early imperial narratives.¹⁰¹ More recently, there has been an explosion in literary scholarship on Dio. Although there has not been a monograph equivalent to Millar's, two separate projects have collated a range of studies, which now address the full extent of his narrative. Valérie Fromentin led the editing of a two-volume collection of primarily French papers, resulting from the four-year *Dioneia* project, published at the end of 2016. Its forty-six studies cover a variety of subjects, from the state of the text itself, through to Dio's engagement with wider literature, and overviews of previous thinking about Dio's place in elite Roman life. Simultaneously at the end of 2016, Brill published the first volume in the new series *Historiography of Rome and its Empire*, edited by Karsten Lange and Jesper Madsen, containing an additional sixteen discussions directed more explicitly to Dio's political narrative.¹⁰² The gathering which resulted in the edited volume has also led to a series of international conferences, between 2016 and 2018, and at time of writing a further six volumes are envisaged.¹⁰³

The result is a much more nuanced picture of the *Roman History*. This decade has seen a number of analyses which have explored the structural complexity of the narrative. A good example is the work

⁹⁹ Millar 1964.

¹⁰⁰ Covering books 49-67 the rise of Octavian to Nero, with some crossover: Reinhold 1988; Rich 1990; Edmondson 1992; Murison 1999; Swan 2004.

¹⁰¹ There are now Budé editions with translation and commentaries for books 36-53, excluding 43-44 and 52, covering the late Republic through to Augustus.

¹⁰² Fromentin et al 2016a; Lange and Madsen 2016a. The former calls itself the first synthesis of Dio since Millar (Fromentin et al. 2016b: 12); the latter is set out explicitly as a rejection of Millar's view of an apolitical Dio (Lange and Madsen 2016b: 2).

¹⁰³ Organised under the aegis of the network, 'Cassius Dio: Between History and Politics'.

which has been done on Dio's speeches. Rather than commonplace rhetorical exercises,¹⁰⁴ a range of studies has shown how Dio uses speeches as a means of exploring political questions. This has been especially effective in his presentation of the Republic. It is here that Dio's political theory has been illuminated. While Christopher Burden-Strevens has made the point most broadly,¹⁰⁵ more specific studies on individuals like Caesar and Cicero or on individual themes have contributed to a consistent picture of the late Republic in the *Roman History*. Through speeches, Dio demonstrates the internal, structural weaknesses of republican government, in which individuals can only ever compete for power for their own personal gain.¹⁰⁶ More generally, Adam Kemezis's recent volume, which also discusses Herodian and Philostratus, has rightly been highly influential in its emphasis on the unity of the *Roman History*.¹⁰⁷ For the earlier narrative in particular, it is no longer enough to treat individual scenes or characters as discrete entities.

Like his narrative, Dio himself is being reconsidered in his position as a historian. Much greater attention is now being paid to the Dio's place as a literary figure in his own right. Most studies were traditionally directed towards reconstructing his career, and in particular the precise dating of his first consulship.¹⁰⁸ Lately, investigations have greatly expanded approaches to Dio's authorial persona. There is a long tradition of seeing Thucydidean aspects in the *Roman History*, which goes back to the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁹ This has now extended into the much broader historiographical tradition, including Latin writers.¹¹⁰ There has also been particular interest in his position as a Greek

¹⁰⁴ Pace Millar 1964: 78-83; van Stekelenburg 1971: 14-16; see also Saylor Rodgers 2008: 313-18.

¹⁰⁵ See esp. Burden-Strevens 2015a; id. 2016 offers a specific exploration of envy, φθόνος, in the Republic.

¹⁰⁶ Rees 2011: 143-80, 2012; Montecalvo 2014; Fomin 2016; Kemezis 2016b; Mallan 2016.

¹⁰⁷ Kemezis 2014: 94-149. See also Pelling 1997; papers in Fromentin et al 2016a: 269-414, 'Les formes de la narration historique'.

¹⁰⁸ Generally dated to around 205/206, or the early 220s. For full detail, see below, 41-42.

¹⁰⁹ e.g. Litsch 1893; Kuhnitsch 1894; Meyer 1899. See Rees 2011: 62-86 for more recent comments.

¹¹⁰ As collected in Fromentin et al. 2016a: 113-268. Though there remains an element of *Quellenforschung*, papers such as Fromentin 2016a (on Dionysius of Halicarnassus) and de Franchis 2016 (on Livy) look at how Dio interacted with previous narratives, beyond simply working out where Dio got his information.

in a Roman world, and his place within the wider Second Sophistic.¹¹¹ Dio himself is beginning to look more complex.

These concerns have started to filter through to the contemporary books. As noted above, Andrew Scott, who has been especially active in his contributions to studies of Severan historiography, has now published a historical commentary on Dio's final three books, from Macrinus to Severus Alexander.¹¹² This is the first volume dedicated exclusively to the contemporary history since Rosemarie Bering-Staschewski's German volume on the entirety of Dio's lifetime, itself nearly forty years old.¹¹³ In his preface, Scott is explicit about the need to move away from reading the contemporary history as an accurate record, and that to do so 'would be to overstate and miss the point.' Instead, Dio's account should be thought of as a corrective response to the self-presentation of the Severan regime.¹¹⁴

This kind of stance is far from universal,¹¹⁵ but it is built on the solid foundation of recent interpretations of the contemporary books. In the same vein, Martin Hose has demonstrated the interaction between Septimius Severus' public links to Augustus and his portrayal in the *Roman History*. In Dio, Severus does have clear imperial precedents, but any comparisons are entirely negative: not Augustus, but Tiberius, Caligula, and Nero. Moreover, Hose rejects the more traditional assumption that Dio was writing a Severan present into the past. Dio did not describe earlier rulers through the actions of emperors in his own lifetime, but instead used their well-known vices to

¹¹¹ Ameling 1984, 1997; Aalders 1986; Swain 1996: 401-408; de Blois 1998-99; Lachenaud 2003, 2008; Moscovich 2004; Hose 2007; Jones 2016. Burden-Strevens 2015b is a valuable exception in its suggestion that Dio was deeply opposed to sophists.

¹¹² Scott 2018a.

¹¹³ Bering-Staschewski 1981.

¹¹⁴ Scott 2018a: x.

¹¹⁵ Cf. recently Hose 2007: 461-62; Rantala 2016: 170-72; Urso 2016: 13-16 for treatments of Septimius Severus' speech in praise of the cruelty of Sulla (76[76].8.1-3) as an actual event.

redefine the actions of the Severans.¹¹⁶ Hose is explicit in stressing that this does not make the contemporary narrative historically “truthful”; it is rather a dismissal of an imperial claim, replacing it with something more critical.¹¹⁷ Elsewhere, the *Roman History* has been called ‘oppositional history’, and a ‘counter-narrative’ to the Severan emperors’ presentation of their dynastic legitimacy. Dio’s Severans have become a ‘disappointment’, far from the Augustan and Antonine models they asserted.¹¹⁸ In these approaches, his contemporary account is not looked at strictly in terms of its accuracy, but rather as a negative conclusion to a larger historiographical project.

The explanations for Dio’s rejection of Severan claims start to reveal a methodological tension which is familiar from the previous section. The most important explanatory factor in modern readings of the contemporary books is Dio’s experience as a senator. Detailed assessments of the reliability of Dio’s claims as a senator are rare. The most developed recent challenge has come from Caillan Davenport, who focused on Caracalla’s stay in Nicomedia over the winter of 214-215. Dio reports that Caracalla humiliated the Senate, refusing to engage in any public business while spending all his time feasting his soldiers (78[77].17). Davenport argued that Dio’s very negative portrayal of senatorial experiences was not an accurate account of the emperor’s actions, but the embittered attacks of a senator who had been ostracised from Caracalla’s court.¹¹⁹ It was met with a concerted rebuttal from Scott, who emphasised in turn the consistency of Dio’s portrayal of senatorial life. The disregard shown by Caracalla is wholly in keeping with other episodes from his reign, and indeed the contemporary books as a whole. For Scott, this serves as confirmation that the Nicomedia scene is a reliable indication of senatorial experience.¹²⁰ As with the arguments about Severan imagery, the key

¹¹⁶ Cf. Gowing 1997: esp. 2587-88 for the claim that Dio’s presentation of a theatrical Nero is informed by his experiences under deceptive emperors. At Hose 2011: 115-19, the direction of comparison is reversed. The tradition of Nero as an actor was well established; Dio used his traits as one model for a tyrannical Commodus.

¹¹⁷ Hose 2011: esp. 119-24.

¹¹⁸ Kemezis 2014: 146-49; Madsen 2016: 154-58. Both points come as conclusions to assessments of the *Roman History* as a whole.

¹¹⁹ Davenport 2012b; his paper is an expansion on Meckler 1999.

¹²⁰ Scott 2015.

to understanding the episode is the broader context of the early third century, in which the rejection of the Senate is assumed to be securely known. In this example, that means an additional level of irony. Dio's narrative is very literally being contextualised against itself.

This extends to how the contemporary history as a whole is read. Scott views Dio's account as an attempt to excuse his political role under a series of corrupt rulers. For Scott, Dio is ultimately helpless as a senator; he had no choice but to submit to the whims of the emperor.¹²¹ There is a clear disjunction here. This reasoning depends on an assumption that the Severans were anti-senatorial; though widespread in modern historiography, it is only supported by its ancient models, as explored above. The same methodological disconnection informs Scott's view of the contemporary history in his recent commentary. Almost immediately after emphasising that Dio did not simply record what happened, he concludes:

These final three books of Dio's history reveal a senator and a historian confronted with challenges to the Roman social order and a directive to write as far as Fortune would allow. The result is a compelling combination of political history and social commentary.

Again, the contemporary narrative is framed against a modern reconstruction of the Severan period. The atmosphere of social conflict is taken as a historical fact external to Dio's report. But it is ultimately dependent on the *Roman History* as its primary source. The failure to acknowledge that link has resulted in an approach to the contemporary history which is ultimately oxymoronic. Even in claiming to reject the historicity of Dio's narrative, Scott relies on its underlying accuracy to create his interpretative context.

Compared to Dio, Herodian has received rather less recent interest. That is not to say that there has been a complete dearth of scholarship. As with Dio, a volume from the 1960s set the tone for much of what followed. Werner Widmer's 1967 overview of the *History* may be brief,¹²² but it laid out some of the fundamental thematic concerns in Herodian's narrative. It is now a commonplace to say that

¹²¹ Argued in full in Scott 2018c; see also Scott 2018a: 8.

¹²² The volume runs to eighty pages in total, including bibliography.

Herodian is primarily interested in emperors, and that Marcus Aurelius acts as an introductory model of ideal rule. Both ideas are crystallised in Widmer's analysis, explicitly set up as a divergence from earlier concerns with Herodian's accuracy.¹²³ For several decades after Widmer, studies of Herodian were dominated by two areas: *Quellenforschung*,¹²⁴ and his connection to the third-century Crisis,¹²⁵ again reflecting Dio, this was supported by a number of translations, often with brief historical commentary.¹²⁶

Two later German volumes stand out in their contribution to developing Widmer's suggestions, from Martin Zimmermann and Thomas Hidber. Both scholars advanced the concept of Herodian's imperial portraits in two ways. Firstly, they identified the extent of comparisons between emperors outside the idealised Marcus. And secondly, these comparisons were connected to the wider structure of the *History*. For example, the tyranny of Elagabalus and good rule of Severus Alexander can both be read alongside Marcus, but they also directly contrast with each other. This in turn contributes to a narrative structured around reigns, in which transfers of power play a central role in assessing the empire.¹²⁷

¹²³ Widmer 1967: esp. 9-10 on Herodian's aims, 16-34 on imperial virtues in the *History*.

¹²⁴ Frank Kolb forcefully argued that Herodian was nothing more than a novelist, whose account was simply a poorly written version of Dio's; summarised at Kolb 1972: 160-61. Responses ranged from total agreement to total rejection. The debate around the so-called *Hauptquelle* theory are summarised in Sidebottom 1998: 2780-92; Hidber 2006: 49-56. The reasonable conclusion seems to be that Herodian had indeed read Dio, but that does not mean that the *Roman History* was his main source.

¹²⁵ For the argument that the *History* is a pessimistic response to the Crisis of the Third Century, see esp. Alföldy 1971a (=1989: 273-94); de Blois 1998a: 3415-23; Marasco 1998; Schettino 2008. This view is explored in several papers in Galimberti 2017a.

¹²⁶ Especially notable are Cassola 1967 (Italian); Whittaker 1969-70 (English); Torres Esbarranch 1985 (Spanish); Roques 1990 (French); Müller 1996 (German).

¹²⁷ Zimmermann 1999b: 151-284; Hidber 2006: 152-87.

The move towards assessing how the *History* functions in structural terms has been fruitful. Comparisons between the characters of emperors continue to be made,¹²⁸ but an array of other aspects have been identified. Adam Kemezis has argued that Herodian includes speeches that are almost universally ironic.¹²⁹ Hidber has analysed the narrative's inconsistent chronology, demonstrating how sudden movements between individual episodes create a constant sense of unrest.¹³⁰ Elsewhere, a common theme of repetition has been identified. The *History* is peppered with recurrent motifs. Some are straightforward, such as repeated scene types.¹³¹ More complex is Herodian's use of movement. Several studies have investigated how Herodian portrays the relationship between Rome as an imperial centre and the peripheral provinces, depicting geographical transitions which are easily comparable. Septimius Severus and Maximinus Thrax both invade Italy, to vastly differing effect; so too Elagabalus' shift from the eastern provinces to Rome is mirrored by Severus Alexander's failed Persian campaign.¹³² These are manipulations of the narrative which go considerably beyond the specific character traits of emperors. As Luke Pitcher has recently put it, Herodian is a writer who does not say, but shows what an emperor was really like.¹³³

The shift in approach to thinking about the construction of Herodian's narrative is epitomised in a change to how his authorial persona has been received. For a long time, one of the main questions about Herodian was the practical reconstruction of his identity: very straightforwardly, who he was, and from what social background he was writing. Herodian differs drastically from Dio in this respect. Dio's narrative is replete with first-person observations which link the *Roman History* to political life; Herodian, by contrast, is almost undetectable outside the textual world of the *History*. What

¹²⁸ Most recently Galimberti 2017b (on Caracalla); Hekster 2017 (on Septimius Severus); Roberto 2017 (on Severus Alexander).

¹²⁹ Either they are factually incorrect, or contain advice which is wholly inappropriate; Kemezis 2014: 252-60.

¹³⁰ Hidber 1999, 2007.

¹³¹ e.g. Sidebottom 1998: 2815-16 on traps; Scott 2018b on assassinations involving Praetorian Prefects.

¹³² Kemezis 2014: 239-52; Pitcher 2012: 280-82; Mecella 2017. Hellström 2015 investigates movement within the city of Rome, demonstrating the association between excessive haste and tyranny.

¹³³ Pitcher 2018b.

information he does give is vague at best. He claims to have served in the imperial and public bureaucracy (1.2.5), but supplies no detail for what that actually means. That is the full extent of what we are told. Nevertheless, several suggestions have been offered, ranging from senator to slave.¹³⁴ An alternative approach is now in favour. Instead of trying to resolve the question of Herodian's identity, it accepts, to quote Kemezis, that 'it is his anonymity above all which defines his authorial persona.'¹³⁵ This has led to the absence of an easily identifiable narrator being considered a deliberate technique for establishing historical authority, allowing for an omniscience which would be less plausible in a known individual.¹³⁶

The complexities of the *History* are undoubtedly beginning to be elucidated. Even so, looking from the perspective of political narrative, it is striking to see a limitation on these literary engagements with Herodian. The main focus of recent scholarship has continued to be centred on Herodian's depictions of emperors. In part, that is inevitable. The *History* is so evidently structured around imperial reigns that emperors are impossible to avoid. But that does not mean that Rome's rulers have to be the only material for analysis. Kemezis's investigation of speeches looks exclusively at those given by emperors, even though there are a small number delivered by other figures.¹³⁷ Likewise, Andrew Scott's discussion of assassination plots involving Praetorian Prefects concerns only those which targeted the emperor, and leaves aside the murder of the Prefect Vitalianus in 238.¹³⁸

¹³⁴ The most common solution follows Cassola 1957, which argued that Herodian was in all likelihood a freedman, or a freedman's son, from Asia Minor; Hidber 2006: 1-16 offers a good overview of earlier scholarship. See below, 121 for more detail.

¹³⁵ Kemezis 2014: 308.

¹³⁶ Hidber 2004b: 206-207, 2006: 15-16; Kemezis 2014: 307-308.

¹³⁷ Kemezis 2014: 252-60. This includes his identification of the speech by Crispinus, a consular opponent of Maximinus, at Aquileia in 238 (8.3.4-6) the only fully truthful and accurately predictive speech. It goes unmentioned thereafter.

¹³⁸ Scott 2018b; the Vitalianus episode occurs at Hdn. 7.6.4-9.

The strict emphasis on Herodian's characterisation of emperors seems to reflect a wider trend in how the *History* is approached. Perhaps because emperors are so overt in the structure of Herodian's narrative, it can often seem that their individual portrayals are the only rhetorical aspect of any importance. According to such arguments, this can be overcome through a careful historical contextualisation.¹³⁹ The recent synoptic histories can all question the idea of Maximinus Thrax as a barbarian, for example, and explain his aggressive collection of taxes through a real need to pay his troops.¹⁴⁰ But the source for imperial rapacity is also Herodian,¹⁴¹ while the acceptance of Maximinus' dependence on the army is part of the narrative of social conflict which also derives from the contemporary historiography. As with Dio, Herodian is placed within a historical context which is assumed to be secure, when in fact it also derives from the *History*.

Putting Herodian back alongside Dio, it is apparent that there is a certain disconnect within scholarship on the early third century. Literary studies of the two authors have very quickly demonstrated that their respective narratives are far from straightforward. Many aspects of their analysis have relied on an assumption that the two accounts can be contextualised within a firm historical context. Dio's view remains consistent with a senatorial experience of life under the Severans; Herodian's interest in emperors can be framed against a general movement towards a political world dominated by the army. There is a methodological irony here. As suggested earlier in this introduction, the current historical reconstruction derives extensively from the two narratives themselves. Dio is the source for a senatorial experience, Herodian the source for modern view of the 230s as a whole. The result is that they are effectively being contextualised against themselves. Even as literary analyses give reason to question the reliability of the ancient accounts, there is a reliance on their general presentations of Rome. In this regard, Alföldy's concept of *Krisenbewußtsein* is not only problematic, but also symptomatic of a wider trend. Dio and Herodian are taken as confirming

¹³⁹ Most notably Haegemans 2010: 15-16.

¹⁴⁰ Ando 2012: 103-104; Potter 2014: 167-68; Kulikowski 2016: 112-13. See also Haegemans 2010: 118-26.

¹⁴¹ Hdn 7.3.5-6 on confiscations from senators and temples; 7.4.2 on excessive taxation; see HA *Max.* 13.5, 14.1 *Gord.* 7.2.

witnesses of a crisis, for which they are in fact the main evidence. It is hardly surprising that they agree with their own narratives.¹⁴²

Reading the Histories

Over the course of this overview of scholarship on the early third century, a consistent approach to the ancient historiography is apparent. It is clear that the reliability of both Dio and Herodian can be challenged, but investigations have done so on relatively narrow terms. The literary studies of the two authors have identified individual episodes in which rhetorical interests clearly override any desire to present an accurate account, while investigations of epigraphic evidence and imperial representation have analysed particular aspects of Severan power. The concentration on particular aspects of political activity has meant that the broader political context has not seen the same degree of interrogation. The atmosphere of militarised politics which derives from contemporary narratives of the period, of conflict between the traditional role of the Senate and the new authority of soldiers, has provided a universal framework.

My goal in reassessing the historical role of ancient narrative is to offer a balance to this situation. In considering the reliability of Dio and Herodian, I do not take a traditional route of trying to ascertain the accuracy of the detail of their accounts. My primary concern takes a much broader perspective. This thesis investigates how the ancient narratives create the sense of social conflict which underpins modern views. In this respect, I follow Adam Kemezis in thinking about contemporary historiography in terms of its construction of narrative worlds.¹⁴³ Instead of reading Dio and Herodian as descriptions of the political environment in the early third century, their accounts will be treated as reactions to it, which are creative in their decisions about how to represent character and events. Both authors present politics in terms of homogenous group action. Within these schemes, the Senate and the army are easily identifiable, and consistently presented as antithetical. The modern view of the shape of third-century politics stems from the apparent agreement between the two historians, but the function of this scheme in their respective accounts operates at a level beyond the presentation of

¹⁴² More scathingly, 'that is mere tautology'; Whittaker 1976: 144.

¹⁴³ See esp. Kemezis 2014: 8-16, 274-80.

politics. As will be seen, the structuring of political activity in the two narratives is directly connected to their authors' thematic aims.

This investigation requires separate analyses of Dio and Herodian, which form the main body of my thesis. In the main, the two historians are therefore not compared directly. Independent studies convey one important benefit. They allow for a more detailed engagement with the thematic frameworks which underpin the respective histories. In this context, the *prima facie* similarities between the two accounts quickly break down. These two authors have fundamentally different purposes in their presentation of any political activity. For Dio, the Senate is everything, its relationship with the emperor serving as the ultimate guarantor of effective rulership. The *Roman History* is detailed in its references to political institutions, and open in its concern about a very Roman social order. Herodian is very different. His main interest is the emperor himself. Put bluntly, both the Senate and the army exist as political actors only in their capacity to further elaborate the emperor's character. Though different in their goals, Dio and Herodian therefore share one thing: their portrayal of political conflict between the Senate and army is far from objective or incidental in its creation.

i. Cassius Dio

As outlined above, Dio's *Roman History* is the main foundation for our understanding of much of the Severan period. The reassessment of his narrative involves a two-step process. The first stage is to establish a narrative context for Dio's contemporary books. This is less straightforward than it may sound. Engagement with the contemporary history faces an immediate challenge. For the vast majority of his lifetime – indeed, for the majority of the *Roman History* as a whole – we do not have Dio's full narrative. We are instead reliant primarily on the eleventh-century *Epitome* of the monk John Xiphilinus, which begins with the Mithridatic Wars of the first century BCE, and retains on average perhaps a fifth to a quarter of Dio's text.¹⁴⁴ This is supplemented by a number of fragments,

¹⁴⁴ Based on comparisons between the *Epitome* and the extant late republican and early imperial books; see Brunt 1980: 489; Edmondson 1992: 29; Swan 2004: 37 for books 57-60. For an introduction to Xiphilinus within the context of middle-Byzantine historiography, see Treadgold 2013: 310-12.

mainly preserved in the tenth-century *Excerpta Constantiniana*.¹⁴⁵ Due to the nature of these later engagements with Dio, produced through the direct extraction of material from the *Roman History*, there has been an emphasis on the reliability of textual transmission.¹⁴⁶ But, as several recent studies have now demonstrated, preserving text is not the same as maintaining a narrative.¹⁴⁷ Dio's contemporary books may resemble a coherent narrative, but they have been reshaped by Byzantine interests which do not always coincide with Dio's own.

Dio's contemporary history therefore requires a more careful approach. His presentation of politics cannot be gleaned directly from the contemporary books themselves, due to a lack of secure context. This difficulty can be resolved, however. This involves a reframing of one of the most famous scenes in the *Roman History*, the debate in book 52 between Agrippa and Maecenas about what Augustus should do after victory over Mark Antony. The scene has often been seen as a direct commentary on the Severan period,¹⁴⁸ but this is not the only possible reading. The debate also functions as an effective end to the Republic, and a transition into the Principate.¹⁴⁹ Crucially, this does not just happen in terms of the political structures in Rome. There are direct thematic links between the Republic and book 52, which reinforce the impression of republican weaknesses being resolved with the beginning of sole rule. Moreover, the same themes continue into the imperial books. In this reading, the debate becomes a model for the presentation of imperial rule within the *Roman History*'s

¹⁴⁵ The standard overview of the *Excerpta* is Lemerle 1986: 309-46, 523-32; alongside Toynbee 1973: 575-605. See more recently Németh 2013.

¹⁴⁶ An important exception is Mallan 2013b, which analyses Xiphilinus' approach to Dio's republican books.

¹⁴⁷ See esp. papers in Horster and Reitz 2010. In a Byzantine setting, see e.g. Flusin 2002 on excerpts from Dionysius of Halicarnassus; Roberto 2009 on the transmission *Kestoi* of Julius Africanus; Bernard 2014. This scholarship is reflected in the growing body of studies on late-antique literature, and its creative interaction with earlier texts; see esp. McGill 2005, 2007; also Whitby 2007; Bažil 2009; Formisano and Sogno 2010; Sandnes 2011; Cullhed 2015; Elsner and Lobato 2017.

¹⁴⁸ See below, 66-67. This is yet another example of the assumption that Dio presents an accurate historical record for his own lifetime, which can then contextualise other sections of his narrative.

¹⁴⁹ Rees 2011: 250-55.

narrative world, establishing its ideal form. This provides a means for engaging with the contemporary books along similar lines. The conventional reading can be reversed. Rather than a commentary on the Severans, book 52 becomes a valuable device for contextualising the extant contemporary history, in its largely fragmentary form.

The second chapter on the *Roman History* turns to a reassessment of Dio's place in modern historiography, focusing on the contemporary history more directly. The main reason for the faith in Dio's contemporary narrative among modern historians is his position as an eyewitness senator. Yet for the most part, the only source for Dio's life is himself. The picture of Dio at the heart of the Senate, interacting with the emperor and the political elite, is a product of his own self-portrayal. Modern engagement with other writers from the ancient world shows the value of interrogating such authorial claims. In general terms, John Marincola's wide-ranging survey of ancient historiography has identified a wide array of techniques used by writers to generate authority,¹⁵⁰ and several more specific examples quickly come to mind. Thucydides has perhaps the greatest tradition of discussion surrounding his status as an eyewitness,¹⁵¹ but the same can be said for Ammianus Marcellinus,¹⁵² and, perhaps closest to Dio in his consular career, Pliny the Younger.¹⁵³ It can no longer be assumed that Pliny's correspondence with Trajan in *Epistles* 10 straightforwardly reflect the interaction of a provincial governor with the emperor.¹⁵⁴ The same approach has only been applied to Dio in limited circumstances, as seen in the previous section, which accept a world of political conflict. There hasn't

¹⁵⁰ Marincola 1997.

¹⁵¹ An overview, with bibliography, of the changing attitudes to Thucydides as a historian is found in Marincola 2001: 61-104.

¹⁵² His eyewitness reports have been reinterpreted as statements of erudition, due to their frequent intertextual references; see Kelly 2008 esp. 2-7; 31-35; 65-78.

¹⁵³ See most recently Geisthardt 2015: 83-219; Page 2015; Whitton 2015.

¹⁵⁴ Key discussions in the reassessment of book 10 are Stadter 2006, Woolf 2006, and Noreña 2007, all of which suggested that the letters may be fabrications, aimed at creating an impression of a personal relationship with the emperor. See also Lavan 2018; see below, 113. n. 64 for more detail.

been the equivalent of investigations of Pliny which have stressed the connection between self-presentation and narrative structure.

The presentation of the Senate, and Dio's role within it, is directly relevant to historical investigations of the late second century and the Severans. The creation of a unified Senate leads to a clear political division in Dio's narrative. The Senate represents legitimacy. As an institution, its only engagement with corruption is as its victim. In turn, non-senatorial figures in positions of authority are intrinsically unacceptable. There can be no effective interaction between the two in the public, political realm. Note, however, that 'senatorial' is not defined exclusively by social status. Military equestrians are accepted into the Senate by Dio, much as men with a traditional *cursus honorum* can be rejected from it. Using the *Roman History* is therefore more complex than identifying and accounting for senatorial bias. Dio's self-proclaimed affiliation with a senatorial norm makes the contemporary history an attempt to define what that bias should be in the first place. It is not merely the detail of his account which can be questioned, but his entire model of political life.

ii. Herodian

In its structure, my analysis of the Herodian follows a similar pattern as that of Dio. The first stage involves establishing a means for discussion, before a more detailed investigation of where Herodian is most relied upon as a historical source. In one way the first step is considerably easier: unlike Dio, Herodian's text actually survives.¹⁵⁵ Yet Herodian's treatment in historical studies is rather ironic. In the absence of Dio's full narrative, historians have nonetheless assumed that his contemporary books represent a coherent account; Herodian's fully extant text, meanwhile, has often been approached as though it were made up of individual fragments. The *History* is clearly divided into separate scenes, which are themselves easily comprehensible as self-contained episodes. It seems that this has facilitated a tendency to lift individual moments out of their narrative context.¹⁵⁶ In many respects, the first Herodian chapter therefore takes the very opposite approach to that for Dio. Where the

¹⁵⁵ The only significant lacuna covers the detail of Caracalla's actual murder of his brother Geta (4.4.3); see Cary 1969-70 I: 391 n. 2.

¹⁵⁶ See above, 14-16.

fragmentation of Dio's seemingly coherent account is emphasised, this chapter demonstrates the unity of a narrative seemingly made up of independent scenes. Its purpose however remains very much the same. The aim is to demonstrate how political activity functions in the *History's* narrative world.

Herodian's construction of the empire is clearly demarcated. At the top is the emperor, his main interest. Below him, Rome is divided into the three distinct groups of the political (and usually senatorial) elite, the army, and the people. These groups have been identified before, most commonly in discussions of Herodian's own background and social attitudes.¹⁵⁷ I take a different approach, building on recent scholarship on the structure of the *History*. The centrality of emperors for Herodian is well known; I show that their evaluation within the narrative extends to the construction of society as well. The depiction of group activity may be simplistic in political terms, but it creates an extremely effective method of comparing different reigns. The three groups appear in a range of repeated scene types, but their individual roles change across contrasting episodes. Herodian is not limited to describing imperial character through an emperor's actions. The nature of their rule plays out in almost cinematic terms through the depiction of immediately recognisable groups, and their interactions with one another. The consequences for interpreting Herodian's political narrative are profound. His project is fundamentally uninterested in representing a nuanced picture of third-century politics. Indeed, in thematic terms, he benefits from being simplistic.

The second chapter picks up the general point about Herodian's construction of Roman politics, and applies it to the books which are considered most valuable in current historical scholarship. It is built around the depiction of Maximinus Thrax. Herodian affords nearly two books to his reign, the vast majority of which is dedicated to the events of 238.¹⁵⁸ As a character in his own right, Maximinus appears quite crudely developed. Every aspect of his behaviour is informed his portrayal as a barbarian, expressed through his constant resort to expressions of violence, and the maintenance of his rule by fear. This is played out in his interaction with the three social groups. Such is the extent

¹⁵⁷ Sidebottom 1998: 2822-26 for an overview.

¹⁵⁸ Hdn. 7.4-8.8.

of Maximinus' tyranny that he can alienate not only the Senate and the people, but even the army. And at all times, his character is reinforced by tropes of barbarian aggression against the Roman state.

The bulk of the chapter's focus, however, is on those parts of the narrative from which Maximinus appears to be absent. Herodian narrates at some length the two "senatorial" rebellions of 238, which account for the vast majority of book 7. Each uprising includes the depiction of extended unrest in Rome, which is based around the three groups acting with increasing violence towards each other, and culminating in the destruction and looting of much of the city. Maximinus' characterisation becomes much more complex in these scenes. His barbaric nature percolates through to the rest of the Roman society, as greed and self-interest act as the only incentives for any public activity. Moreover, Herodian's account takes full advantage of a structure which is built around familiar vignettes repeatedly to confound the reader's expectations. Having a barbarian emperor leads to the subversion of all standard tropes. The Senate and the people become the violent groups, attacking the defenceless soldiers, as the empire is put under siege by its own ruler. Rome is turned upside down by the accession of Maximinus, and with it, so too is the structure of the narrative. This is the narrative which is followed in all recent reconstructions of the third century, as a focal point in the conflict between senators and soldiers for control of political life. Herodian's interests seem wholly different to those of modern scholars. His account of 238 may well be more detailed than other parts of the *History*, but character remains central to his historical explanations.

Reframing Historiography

It is clear that the early third century saw a change in political life in Rome. The political and administrative roles of equestrians in particular can be seen changing, both in the number of adlections to high senatorial rank and the increasing status of equestrian officials themselves.¹⁵⁹ In Dio and Herodian, it may seem that we have two contemporary accounts of how that political change played out. They agree on a basic narrative of military figures gaining influence and wealth at the expense of senators, in models which emphasise the hostility between the two groups. The two main discussions in this thesis show the dangers of accepting such a model. Both historians gain in their

¹⁵⁹ Most recently in Mennen 2011.

separation of the interests of each group, and the creation of a clear distinction between their respective members and actions. The agreement between Dio and Herodian is not the result of a shared underlying reliability, but of drastically differing concerns, which are both constructed around the same definitions of social order. I believe that a more effective understanding of the period is only possible when the currently dominant political models from the literary narratives are placed to one side.

Rejecting the model of social conflict suggested by contemporary third-century historiography can only be part of the process of reassessing the nature of political change. The extended conclusion is therefore more than a summation of my core argument. If the strong divisions between the Senate and military equestrians are a result of narratives which construct a simplified version of Roman politics, it presents an opportunity to sketch out some new approaches to thinking about the nature of social and political change during the third century. Through a comparison of the emperors Pertinax and Maximinus Thrax, I argue that that we can understand the third century as much more collaborative than has previously been assumed. A thesis of this length does not grant sufficient room to allow for a full reconstruction of the period, but there is space to offer an outline of potential routes towards a new interpretation. The two men are extreme opposites in the ancient narratives: Pertinax is described as an experienced and respected senator, Maximinus a barbarian soldier. But their careers are strikingly comparable. Both came to prominence as equestrian generals, involved in imperial campaigns on the Rhine/Danube frontier. Pertinax may have been a senator, but he was a military man too. I suggest that Maximinus can be thought of as straddling that supposed divide in much the same way. They may be portrayed differently, but it is possible that both men were similarly integrated in a network of political life, which extended far beyond the limits of the curia.

Importantly, reconsidering Maximinus' potential relationships with senators in 235 does not equate to ignoring the contemporary narratives. It remains possible to explain the starkly differing portrayals of these two emperors, even as their actual careers seem more alike. Dio and Herodian can be reframed as part of a broader Roman discourse of imperial power. The Severan dynasty and its successors engaged in a variety of different and often contradictory methods of asserting the legitimacy of their authority. The ancient accounts can be thought of in terms of their reception with

imperial claims, in their idolisation of Pertinax and vilification of Maximinus. The two ancient writers therefore remain relevant to reconstructions of the third century, but cast in a different role. It is not simply a case of looking past rhetorical flourishes in their accounts to reconstruct what was happening in the empire. The creation of a political landscape is just as large a part of each narrative's thematic scheme as the characterisation of emperors. It is inevitable that any rejection of the ancient narratives will require a more conjectural approach to Roman politics. I would argue that this is wholly preferable to acceptance of such evidently simplistic accounts. It may now be something of a commonplace to find ancient historians acknowledging that literary evidence is not completely straightforward. This thesis is an exercise in demonstrating what that means.

Cassius Dio

It is one of the great ironies of the life of Lucius, or perhaps Claudius, Cassius Dio that, among the significant quantity of detail that can be reconstructed, we are not entirely certain of his name.¹ Dio's political career is well attested in a series of explicit autobiographical observations from across the *Roman History*, which are unsurprisingly concentrated in the contemporary books. He calls himself a native of Bithynia (80².5.2), and tells us that his father was a senator (73[72].7.2). Dio was put forward for the praetorship in 193 on the recommendation of Pertinax (74[73].12.2), an office he probably held in 195.² He was curator of Smyrna and Pergamum in 217/218 under Macrinus (80[79].7.4), before holding a number of posts in the reign of Severus Alexander, when he was proconsul of Africa, and governor of Dalmatia and then Pannonia Superior (49.36.4; 80².1.2-3). In 229, Dio was afforded the honour of the ordinary consulship. It was his second time in office (no reference to the first survives), and came with a clear demonstration of imperial favour: Alexander himself was his consular colleague.³

Even in this brief overview of Dio's career, a methodological tendency in scholarship on the *Roman History* comes to the fore. With the exception of Dio's second consulship in 229, every aspect of the reconstruction of his progress through this *cursus honorum* is entirely dependent on the narrative he himself provides. As is clear, the record of Dio's offices is not complete. The response has been telling. Rather than accepting uncertainties, scholars have looked for clues elsewhere in the text to suggest a likely career path. Dio's first consulship illustrates the process. There is no explicit indication in the

¹ The name L CASSIO DIONE is found in a military diploma, probably from Turkey (Roxan 1985: no. 133, first published in Kellner 1985, = AE [1985] no. 821); ΚΑ' ΚΑΣΣΙΩ ΔΙΩΝΙ on an inscription from Macedonia (Toupatoglou 1970: 280-85, = AE [1971] no. 430). Rich 1990: 1 n. 1 suggests that Lucius is more likely; Molin 2016a suggests the full name Lucius Claudius Cassius Dio. The traditionally ascribed cognomen Cocceianus is spurious, based on an assumption that he must be related to Dio Chrysostom; see Gowing 1990.

² Barnes 1984: 242; Molin 2016a: 438-39.

³ Dio (80².5.1); the two inscriptions in n. 1 both refer to his consulship. For an overview of Dio's full career, see Rich 1990: 1-5; Christol 2016: 451-57; Molin 2016a.

Roman History of when he held the office for the first time. It has been argued that Dio was alienated from the courts of Septimius Severus and Caracalla, due to the lack of references to personal engagement with the two emperors; as such his first consulship must have come in the 220s.⁴ Conversely, the lack of explicit indication that he was side-lined from government positions has been taken to mean that his career progressed as would be expected, with a consulship in 205/206.⁵ Both sides are argued from the same position of evidential silence.

My intention in highlighting this debate is not to solve this problem. The lack of evidence makes either explanation plausible; without external confirmation, it is impossible to say with any confidence. Instead, I offer this example as a demonstration of how Dio's autobiographical claims have been met. The basis for all the discussion is the assumption that the surviving information Dio provides is completely accurate. It is this that makes it even possible to reconstruct the missing details. In turn, this approach requires that Dio's narrative coincides closely with a historical reality. As suggested in the introduction to this thesis, such an argument quickly becomes circular. Dio's contemporary history is key to reconstructions of the political situation under the Severans, especially in respect to their interaction with the Senate. The reliability of Dio's narrative is founded on his senatorial career.⁶ That historical reconstruction is then central to discussions of his career itself. Attempts to date the first consulship take the *Roman History* as a solid historical foundation for more speculative suggestions.

Even within the world of classical scholarship, a number of comparisons spring to mind to cast doubt on the ease of this equation between historiographical claim and historical fact. Dio was not the first consul to promise a history of his own lifetime, even if Tacitus ultimately failed to produce one. His opening to the *Histories* nonetheless demonstrates the problems which can be caused by taking a

⁴ Vrind 1927: 165-67; Gabba 1955: 289-93; Bowersock 1965: 473-74; Letta 1979: 135-37, 2014: 132.

⁵ Millar 1964: 204-207; Barnes 1984: 243; Gowing 1992: 20, 2016: 117; Schmidt 1997: 2636 n. 168; Murison 1999: 6 n. 16; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 131; Swan 2004: 2 n. 8; Potter 2011: 330; Ando 2012: 19; Madsen 2016: 136; Markov 2016: 57-58. Molin 2016a: 440 suggests 207.

⁶ See above, 12-13.

historian at his word too readily. The engagement with his own highly successful political career under the Flavians is only one aspect of a deliberately problematic introduction, in which even the apparent praise of Nerva and Trajan cannot be read straightforwardly.⁷ Tacitus' contemporary Pliny the Younger makes similar claims to Dio's regarding his proximity to imperial activity through his correspondence with Trajan in *Epistles* 10.⁸ Finally, given Dio's engagement with a Thucydidean model, it would be worth mentioning the reassessment in modern scholarship of Thucydides' claims for accuracy based on a self-defined role as a reliable eyewitness of the Peloponnesian War.⁹ I see no reason why the same thinking should not apply to Dio as well.

The key to the reassessment of the *Roman History* offered here will be its consideration as a narrative in its own right. Rather than thinking of Dio's autobiographical claims as a means of reconstructing his actual career, I will ask instead what difference they make to the narrative. A quick example shows the distinction. An array of options has been put forward for the dating of the *Roman History's* production, which are this time based on Dio's account of his literary career. After relating the assassination of the emperor Commodus on New Year's Eve 192, Dio embarks on a brief excursus about his decision to write a full history of the Roman empire (73[72].23.1-5). He concludes by announcing that he spent ten years researching the *Roman History*, before an additional twelve writing it up. Conventionally, the reaction from scholars has been to suggest possible dates to correspond to this time period. Fergus Millar's monograph on Dio took this twenty-two-year period as being 197-219, complete with breakdowns of when particular books were being written.¹⁰ The succeeding years have seen numerous suggestions, but no definitive consensus. The majority of scholars tend towards the period of research beginning in the first few years of the third century, and therefore completed between 220 and 225, with revisions and additional detail from the reign of

⁷ See recently Sailor 2008: 6-50; Pelling 2010; Strunk 2017: 7-37 on the tension between Tacitus' public life and his authorial voice.

⁸ On Pliny's self-fashioning in relation to Trajan, see below, 113. n. 64.

⁹ Marincola 2001: 61-104; see Harloe and Morley 2012 for Thucydides' reception outside classical scholarship.

¹⁰ Millar 1964: 28-32; generally following Schwartz 1899; Gabba 1955: 295-301. For a rapidly appearing sceptical reaction to the year-by-year guide, see Bowersock 1965; Deman 1966; Pleket 1966.

Alexander Severus added later.¹¹ A number of scholars meanwhile have attempted to date the *Roman History* slightly later, with the assumption that Dio finished his twelve years of writing in the late 220s/early 230s, and died shortly thereafter.¹²

The arguments are lengthy, and far from conclusive.¹³ It seems reasonable to argue that the final version did not take form before 230, given the inclusion of events in 229; beyond that, more detail is impossible.¹⁴ Much clearer is the effect of Dio's description of his literary endeavours on the narrative. The twenty-two-year period appears almost universally in introductions to the *Roman History*, and has contributed to Dio's reputation as a conscientious historian. He has been labelled 'a diligent researcher', who 'utilized available historiography to the greatest extent possible.'¹⁵ There are clear problems in establishing the accuracy of Dio's assertion. Moreover, there are reasons to be suspicious of potential motives for exaggerating his commitment to the writing process. By drawing attention to the amount of time he committed to the *Roman History*, Dio engages in an assertion of authority with a long tradition. John Marincola's assessment of the role of a historian's character in establishing legitimacy brings out the importance of literary effort, especially in Roman histories. He notes that Greek models go back as far as Isocrates, and the ten years spent on the production of his *Panegyricus*: 'this is most likely the ultimate model for Diodorus, Dionysius, and Dio, a guarantee to the audience

¹¹ e.g. Bering-Staschewski 1981: 58; Zawadzki 1983: 277; Rich 1990: 1-4; Edmondson 1992: 27-28; Hose 1994: 424; Swan 1997: 2549-56; Murison 1999: 8-12; Schettino 2001: 554-58; Potter 2011: 331. Note Schmidt 1997: 2618-25 and Sordi 2000 for recent efforts to put the start of writing even earlier, into the 190s.

¹² Letta 1979: esp. 155-63; Reinhold 1988: 180-82; Barnes, 1984: 245-52; Bowersock 1985: 712; Molin 2016a: 445-46. Scott 2018a: 10-14 argues that the contemporary history must have been written after Dio's retirement from political life in 229.

¹³ Kemezis 2014: 282-93 provides a comprehensive summary.

¹⁴ As Eisman 1977: 658-59; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 132; Gleason 2011: 37, esp. n. 12.

¹⁵ Ando 2012: 19; Hose 2007: 464 respectively. See also Reinhold 1986: 213. An indication of the universality of twenty-two years being accepted can be taken from the discussion of the dating of the *Roman History*. In all cases, the aim is to establish the correct twenty-two-year span.

that, like the master, they had put great effort and care into the making of their history.’¹⁶ Dio’s twenty-two years of work are therefore not merely biographical. Nor do they have to be understood in reference to a literary career external to narrative. Within an ancient literary context, they are a loaded claim of authority.¹⁷

As a starting point, this kind of explicit autobiographical claim is an effective demonstration of how Dio’s first-person comments can be reframed. But it is only the beginning. This investigation will expand considerably on its basic principles, to explore Dio’s self-portrayal in the contemporary history as a means of establishing his authority as a commentator on Severan Rome. Fundamental to my approach is the divorcing of the *Roman History* from any assumed historical context. This is instead an analysis of how Dio creates the image of Rome which dominates modern reconstructions. Whatever the nature of Dio’s interaction with emperors, he alone was in control of its original presentation. The narrative world of the contemporary books is therefore not only based on the experiences of one individual senator, but also derives from his decisions about how best to portray his self-defined senatorial life.

Before this methodology can be applied to Dio’s self-fashioning, an additional difficulty must be addressed. For the most part, Dio’s extant contemporary narrative is not actually his *Roman History*. Large parts of the *Roman History* survive only in Byzantine excerpts or epitomes, meaning that much of Dio’s original narrative has been lost. As explored in my first chapter on Cassius Dio – ‘A Fragmentary History’ – the effect of the epitomisation is considerable. What survives as the contemporary books is largely a misleading semblance of Dio’s account, which offers only a stilted picture of his original narrative. A comparison between Xiphilinus and the surviving manuscripts of the *Roman History* provides an example of how much the epitomisation has altered the thematic focus of Dio’s narrative. It is particularly striking how often Dio’s account is reshaped into a universally applicable moralising discussion, shorn of the specifically Roman aspects which are seemingly of no

¹⁶ Marincola 1997: esp. 151-58; quotation from 152.

¹⁷ Cf. Scott 2018a: 10. ‘The question of when Dio wrote up his history is crucial for how one views the contemporary portion.’ In relation to the question of authorial presentation, I disagree.

concern to Xiphilinus' Byzantine readership. Beyond the limits of the later manuscript, there is no way of knowing how much material has been omitted, or how the narrative has been reworked in its new context. In short, Dio's contemporary history is not really Dio's at all. When the goal is to interrogate the construction of a narrative world, it is not possible to do so exclusively within the bounds of the contemporary books themselves.

But that does not render an investigation of the extant text futile. While it may be impossible to know what is missing from Dio's later books, the passages which remain can be placed in the much wider thematic context of the *Roman History* as a whole. This chapter's second half will focus on the well-known debate in book 52 between Agrippa and Maecenas. They had been asked by the soon-to-be Augustus for advice on what he should do with his power after victory at Actium. Agrippa says that he should abandon that power, and return Rome to a 'democratic' Republic (52.4-13). Maecenas' speech contains a detailed outline of an ideal form of monarchy, which has often been seen as a commentary on Dio's experiences under the Severans.¹⁸ I turn this approach on its head. Instead of looking for a historical context for the debate, I use it to form a narrative context for the contemporary history. Recent scholarship has begun to recognise the importance of book 52 as a narrative transition from the Republic into the Principate, but has largely emphasised the differences between their portrayals.¹⁹ I build on this work to show that there are in fact clear continuities in the thematic framework which underpins Dio's entire narrative. Crucially, they remain evident in the epitomised books. The foregrounding of the thematic links between the contemporary books and the earlier, extant *Roman History* is therefore not an end in itself. It is a crucial step in moving away from a reliance on the historicity of Dio's report. Though the reconstruction of the original contemporary books remains unfeasible, episodes from the surviving books can be contextualised more securely than when they are treated separately.

In my second chapter on Cassius Dio – 'The Eyewitness Historian' – the focus shifts more directly to the contemporary history itself. Its chief aim is to investigate Dio's self-portrayal as a reliable guide

¹⁸ See below, 66-67 for a more detailed overview, with bibliography.

¹⁹ Rees 2011: 250-55; Kemezis 2014: 95-96; Burden-Strevens 2015a: 232-58; Mallan 2016.

to Severan politics. Two main strands underpin his authorial persona: his ability as a historian and his status as a senator. It will not go unremarked that these self-appointed qualities are the same reasons why Dio has been praised in modern reconstructions of the period. It is not just in his hard work that Dio presents himself as a good historian. As with the thematic unity of the *Roman History*, it is structured consistently around a traditional Thucydidean distinction between λόγοι, what is said, and ἔργα, what actually happens. The pairing recurs throughout Dio's narrative, and comes to define the early imperial books. By the contemporary history, Dio is able to work through that problem. He presents himself as a direct participant in events, who is therefore able to reveal both the pretence and the reality of political life. This role is inextricably tied to Dio's political career, as the basis for enabling a resolution of that historiographical dichotomy. In his own methodological terms, Dio becomes the ideal historian.

But it is not enough to say that Dio is a senator in the narrative world of the *Roman History*. Dio is not merely present as a member of the Senate in the contemporary books. Instead, he locates himself at the very centre of senatorial experience and opinion. As a historiographical technique, this approach confirms many of Dio's claims to be an accurate recorder of senatorial life. As a method of narrative world creation, it enacts a disjunct within the narrative itself. Dio's Senate is a homogenous entity, embodied in Dio as an individual. But as a collective unit it is also sometimes opposed to specific senators. Dio's response is simple. They are excluded from the Senate, described as corrupt individuals who attack the legitimate group.

The effect is to create a clear division between Dio and his senatorial peers, and anyone who opposed them, regardless of their social status. It is now something of a truism to say that the Senate holds the key to legitimacy in the *Roman History*. In the contemporary books, that legitimacy revolves around Dio himself. This comes to a head at the very end of the narrative. In the famous scene of Dio's second consulship, the Praetorian Guard demand his arrest, leading to him spending his time in office outside Rome (80².4-5). For many scholars, this is a crystallisation of the historical conflict at the heart

of Severan politics, between the army and the Senate.²⁰ In the context of the *Roman History*, however, the scene has an additional effect. It moves Dio beyond being merely the representative of senatorial experience, and makes him the singular demonstration of senatorial virtue, and by extension, political legitimacy.

The description of Dio as a reliable source for the early third century is a common one, but it is an image which should be treated with caution. Through comparison with the thematic construction of his narrative, it becomes clear that Dio is meeting ideals of elite behaviour and historical accuracy which he himself has set up. This is not limited to his self-presentation. The construction of political life as a struggle between senators and their upstart opponents is beneficial to Dio's self-appointment as the Senate's champion. The insistence of unity does not always sit comfortably alongside the narrative itself, but these moments of tension only show the extent of authorial control over the historiographical creation of Severan politics. Dio is able to define the Senate, excluding any unacceptable elements and conjoining the resulting political bloc with his personal experience. The *Roman History* has been taken as a senatorial narrative, with Dio acting as a reliable eyewitness who is the forthright mouthpiece of a homogenous Senate. Within the wider framework of Dio's account, it is clear that in all these respects he is very much a self-made man.

²⁰ Potter 2014: 165; Kulikowski 2016: 110; Madsen 2016: 137; cf. Schöpe 2014: 289 n. 84 for Dio's absence being an exceptional occurrence.

A Fragmentary History

The Extant Text of the *Roman History*

The defining characteristic of Dio's narrative of the Severan period among modern historians is its immediacy. Dio lived through the events he describes, and as seen above, his contemporary history has been considered especially valuable as an eyewitness account. There is, however, a problem: for the vast majority of Dio's later narrative, we don't have Dio's original text. Roughly two-thirds of the *Roman History*'s eighty books currently exists in a fragmentary or epitomised state. The remaining third is largely comprised of a central block of text between books 36 and 60 inclusive, from the Mithridatic Wars to the reign of Claudius. This text is complete for the most part, but even here sections have been lost. There are twelve manuscripts which form the basis of the central section of extant books.¹ Of these, nine are later copies of two key texts. The first is *Laurentianus* 70, 8 (L), an eleventh-century manuscript which spans 36.18-50.6.2.² Four missing folios from the start of book 36 are reconstructed from a fifteenth-century copy, *Vat. Gr.* 144 (V). Its few other lacunae can be reconstructed from later copies or the second main manuscript, *Marcianus* 395 (M). This is another eleventh-century copy which contains 44.35.4-60.28.3. M is considerably more lacunose than L; more problematically, it is the sole source for much of books 55-60.³ It has been estimated that as a result only about half of the original account of Tiberius' and Claudius' reigns survives, while a quarter of Caligula's has been lost.⁴

Only one additional section from the contemporary history survives, preserved in a single, lacunose manuscript from the fifth or sixth century. It begins with Caracalla's Parthian campaign of 216/217 and covers the reign of Macrinus, and the first part of the reign of Elagabalus (79[78].2-80[79].8). This

¹ For a full discussion of eleven, see Boissevain 1895-1901 I: lix-lxxxix. The most recent overview of the manuscript tradition is Bellissime and Hurllet 2018: lxxvii-lxxxvi, including a manuscript unknown to Boissevain.

² Boissevain 1895-1901 I: lxi-lxv.

³ Covered accessibly in Edmondson 1992: 28-30; Swan 2004: 36-38. See also Boissevain 1895-1901 I: xlvi-lxxiv.

⁴ Edmondson 1992: 28.

lacunose text survives in the fifth- or sixth-century *Vat. Gr.* 1288, and has seen significant corrections from a later editor, who is thought to have had an additional (now lost) copy to work from.⁵ The manuscript in turn is missing several folios, and is heavily damaged.⁶ The remainder of Dio's record of his own lifetime is shaped from the eleventh-century *Epitome of Cassius Dio*, by the Byzantine monk John Xiphilinus.⁷ The *Epitome* opens with a description of the general Lucullus at the start of book 36, and goes through to the very end of Dio's account.⁸ It consists of extended quotations from the *Roman History*, compiled into a seemingly coherent but considerably shortened narrative.⁹

A variety of fragments support the *Epitome*, which are from a small number of different sources. The most important is the *Excerpta Constantiniana*, which was originally a vast collection of excerpts from various ancient historians compiled in the tenth century for the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus. There were originally fifty-three separate books, each with its own theme, but only four now survive: *de Legationibus (Romanorum, ELr and Gentium, ELg)*, *de Virtutibus et Vitiis (EV)*, *de Insidiis (EI)* and *de Sententiis (ES)*.¹⁰ Based on the length of these books, it has been suggested that a full

⁵ Without which the codex would be '*mendosissimum*', Boissevain 1895-1901 III: vi.

⁶ Boissevain 1895-1901 III: iii-ix, summarised by Cary 1914-27 I: xxviii.

⁷ As with Dio, citing Xiphilinus is not simple. Boissevain's standard text of the *Epitome* is numbered based on the pagination of two editions: it begins with the 1865 edition of Dindorf (Xiph. Dind.), who brought his text of the *Epitome* to an end in book 60, during the reign of Claudius; the remainder follows the pagination of Stephanus' sixteenth-century text (Xiph. R. St.), considered otherwise inferior to its later counterpart. Some overlap occurs between the two, meaning that it is necessary to specify the source of the text. Xiph. 180 Dind. concludes with the opening sentence of book 61[60] (61[60].29.1); the text is immediately picked up at Xiph. 142 R. St (Boissevain 1895-1901 III: 579).

⁸ Though even by the time Xiphilinus was redacting the *Roman History*, book 70 and much of book 71 had already been lost. The reign of Antoninus Pius is reduced to two comments from Dio, and a similarly small collection from other sources, including the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius (70.1-2; = Xiph. 256 R. St.). On their potential disappearance by the sixth century, see Juntunen 2013. Schmidt 1989 attempts to reconstruct their contents.

⁹ His methods are discussed in greater detail below.

¹⁰ Again, there is an additional complication in citing the *Excerpta*, with some of its books referred to using alternative names. The *EV* is also known as the *Excerpta Valesiana (Exc. Val.)*, after its original 1634 publication

edition would have run to over 200 modern volumes.¹¹ The *Excerpta* are generally short extracts, collected around specific themes, and thus often divorced from a clearer context.¹² It can therefore be very difficult to assess the original context of any individual passage. A smaller number of fragments are then contained in several other sources, including the seventh-century *Florilegium* of ps.-Maximus the Confessor, and the twelfth-century *Chiliades* of John Tzetzes.¹³

Greater challenges still are posed by the earlier books. Much as the final quarter of the *Roman History* is largely reliant on Xiphilinus, the structure of books 1-21 is reconstructed from the *Epitome of Histories* of Zonaras. Zonaras was a twelfth-century Byzantine scholar and historian who produced a history of the world from the Christian creation story to the death of the emperor Alexis I in 1118. He seems to have been quite free in his interpretation of the *Roman History*, summarising and rewriting Dio's text, and leaving only an impression of the general shape of his narrative.¹⁴ No coherent

by Henri de Valois. By the same process, the *EL* is also called the *Excerpta Ursiniana* (*Exc. Urs.*), after its 1582 publication by Fulvio Orsini.

¹¹ Büttner-Wobst 1906: 97. As it is, roughly three percent of the *Excerpta* survives (Lemerle 1986: 324-25).

¹² Thus Németh 2013: 240: 'The imperial excerptors tried to purify the text of any digressions and any data that seemed to belong somewhere else.'

¹³ For recent fuller and more detailed discussions of the transmission of the text, see Mazzuchi 1979; Bellissime 2016a; Fromentin 2016b; see also Cary 1914-27 I: xix-xxvi; Boissevain 1895-1901 I: i-lxxxix.

¹⁴ See Rich 2016 for a reconstruction of the structure of books 1-35. For an introduction to Zonaras and an outline of modern scholarship on the *Epitome of Histories*, see Grigoriadis 1998: 1-28; Banchich and Lane 2009: 1-12; Treadgold 2013: 388-99; Bellissime and Berbessou-Broustet 2016. The difficulties of accepting Zonaras as a guide to Dio's text are identified in Bellissime and Berbessou-Broustet 2016, esp. 100-108. As they summarise, 'les voix auctoriales s'entremêlent intimement' (108) – it is difficult to identify where Zonaras is directly quoting Dio, and where he is inserting his own views. Millar 1964: 1-4 provides a summary of the two Byzantine epitomes; see 195-203 for a comparison of the content of book 54 in Dio, Xiphilinus and Zonaras.

narrative exists for books 22-35, though the later sources preserve several fragments – some of which are quite lengthy¹⁵ – from the intervening text.

The numbers are stark. Though we are faced with what may appear to be a text of significant length, only a quarter of its original form survives. Of 80 books, perhaps twenty can be considered intact (36-54, plus the contents of *Vat. Gr. 1288*); a further six are mostly coherent, but with significant lacunae (55-60); sixteen are almost entirely lost (22-35; 70-71); and the remaining thirty-eight are based on epitomes and fragments. To put it another way, Dio's original narrative covered a full millennium of Rome's history. We have direct access to around 120 years of it.

If this seems a forcefully pessimistic introduction to the extant state of the *Roman History*, then it is deliberately so. The issue of the *Roman History*'s transmission is directly pertinent to any study of the contemporary books. I believe that it is decidedly more problematic than has usually been suggested. Despite its uncertainties, scholarly responses to the text of the contemporary history have been overwhelmingly positive.¹⁶ This stems from an approach to Xiphilinus' *Epitome* which emphasises its accurate quotation of Dio. Where comparisons are possible, in book 36-60 and 79-80, the *Epitome* is often made up of verbatim extracts. The fragments from the *Excerpta*, traditionally seen as taking a mechanical approach to quoting earlier works,¹⁷ are then taken as equally indicative of Dio's original account. Though we may not have access to the full text, this line of argument has stressed that we nonetheless have Dio's own words to work from.¹⁸

¹⁵ Fr. 109 (books 30-35) on Sulla, for example, runs to some four pages in Boissevain's edition (1895-1901 I: 350-54).

¹⁶ The clearest exception is Murison 1999: 1-3, on Dio's Flavian narrative.

¹⁷ e.g. Cary 1914-27 I: xx.

¹⁸ Bering-Staschewski 1981: 6; Hekster 2002: 5; Molin 2006: 437-38. Where studies do note the potential difficulty caused by Xiphilinus, they tend to pass over it quickly: e.g. Edmonson 1992: 29; Hekster 2002: 5; Adler 2011: 141-42; Ando 2012: 19; Mallan 2013a: 737-38; Gowing 2016: 130-32 (where Dio's text being 'largely intact' is then treated as entirely intact); Scott 2017a: 415.

Having the same words is not the same thing as having the same narrative. Even if the epitomised text closely follows Dio's, the selective retention of text means that the balance of material and interests of the original narrative are unavoidably altered. This point is especially important for historians using the *Roman History*. Dio has been used to reconstruct elite attitudes to the emperors he served, but the epitomised text means that we cannot even fully reconstruct his own views. The absence of text makes it particularly dangerous to assume that we have Dio's view of the general political atmosphere of his lifetime. It is impossible to know what it is missing. It is therefore impossible to know how much the specific interests of Byzantine writers have warped the force of Dio's words, even if they do quote him directly. In short, those who wish to study Dio's report of his lifetime must confront the inconvenient fact that, for the most part, we can neither read nor reconstruct it.¹⁹

A quick example from the *Excerpta Constantiniana* shows the disparity between the transmission of text and the survival of contextual meaning. In book 42, Dio narrates the siege of Alexandria in 47 BCE, led by the Egyptian general Achilles against Caesar and Cleopatra (42.36-38). A central section of the account is quoted directly in the *Excerpta de Legationibus (ELr)*, a collection of embassies sent and received by the Romans. It records how Caesar sent ambassadors to Achilles to ask for peace. Achilles decided to kill them, and therefore forced his men into war by such an act of defilement (*ELr* 10 = Dio 42.36.1). By one definition, it is an excellent reflection of the *Roman History*. The text itself is changed minimally. A now contextually incongruous δέ and τε are removed; Caesar's embassy is made one man (τινα for τινας); and the soldiers are forced into a war, rather than forcing it themselves (κατασταθῶσιν for καταστῶσι). Otherwise, the text is Dio's, with no omission from within the passage.²⁰ Away from the detail of the text itself, however, the episode has a very different thematic

¹⁹ The same concerns could apply equally to the first twenty-one books of the *Roman History*, where Zonaras is the most important source for the structure of Dio's narrative. Despite the problems caused by the nature of the preserved text (see n. 9), it is often argued that Zonaras gives a useful indication of Dio's general thoughts; see e.g. Urso 2005: 7-14; Simons 2009: 25-32; Rich 2016.

²⁰ In this respect, it is typical of extracts from Dio. A list of other examples is provided in Boissevain 1895-1901 III: 767-75, set out for easy comparison between the *Excerpta* and the *Roman History*.

force in its two contexts. In *ELr*, the message is a straightforward one: killing ambassadors is an unacceptable and unforgivable act, which leads to an inevitable war. In the *Roman History*, things are more complex. The passage is connected directly to Caesar's infatuation with Cleopatra (42.34-35). Dio states explicitly that the Egyptian rebellion occurred out of the fear that Caesar would give Cleopatra full control of Egypt, and that the rebels acted out of hatred of the idea that a woman could rule them (42.36.3). For Dio, the embassy is only one aspect of a much broader interaction between the key figures on both sides of the rebellion. In its Byzantine rendering, that one aspect becomes the full explanation.

This should not be considered surprising in light of approaches to the *Excerpta* as a complex literary undertaking in its own right. Scholarship on Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus' project has advanced greatly over recent decades, as interest in the ordering of knowledge has led to Byzantine attempts to construct the past attracting greater attention.²¹ The *Excerpta* has been placed into a wider scheme of Byzantine discourse with the earlier Roman empire, and Constantine's position in respect to this Roman heritage.²² The key point is that while the *Excerpta* is made up of extracts from earlier authors, these extracts have been chosen specifically because they fit in with the *Excerpta*'s own goals and interests. In this example, the clue to the Byzantine focus is very much in the name. As mentioned above, the passage comes from the *Excerpta de Legationibus*. There is no reason to expect detail which does not relate directly to the embassy itself, even if it has an effect on the episode's framing in Dio.

Though only one example, this scene should stand as an early warning to those who look for Dio's general political stance in the contemporary books. When the definition of reliable transmission is shifted from text to thematic or explanatory force, a very different picture of the *Excerpta* emerges. The Egyptian episode takes on a new purpose in its changed context: one element of a much larger political struggle is transformed into a universally applicable exemplum regarding the sanctity of embassies. Mechanical as the physical transmission of text may be, the process of organising material

²¹ On ordering knowledge in the ancient world (and beyond), see Formisano 2001, 2003; König and Whitmarsh 2007; van der Eijk 2010; König and Woolf 2013.

²² See esp. Toynbee 1973: 575-605; Lemerle 1986: 309-46, 523-32; Flusin 2002; Németh 2013; Magdalino 2013.

under specific titles re-inscribes its original function. This may seem like a lengthy digression about a collection of limited importance in the reconstruction of Dio's contemporary history, but it sets out clearly the effect of omitting an original context. If the *Excerpta* provides us with a window onto some of the missing passages of the *Roman History*, then its view is highly distorting.²³ Most pertinently here, the distortion can affect the kind of political explanations for which Dio's later books are so valued.

Xiphilinus

With these concerns in mind, I turn to the main source of the contemporary history's extant text and narrative shape. Like the *Excerpta*, the *Epitome* of Xiphilinus has been viewed favourably by scholars. Where Dio's original text remains extant for comparison, it has been shown that Xiphilinus provides reliable and often verbatim excerpts.²⁴ Though he occasionally alters Dio's word order or (more rarely) vocabulary to his own ends, such emendations are infrequent.²⁵ But once again, the text is only one aspect of the *Epitome's* relationship with the *Roman History*. Already in 1980, Peter Brunt used Xiphilinus as an example of an epitomised text demonstrating different concerns from its original, despite a consistently good preservation of the text itself.²⁶ More recently, scholars have engaged with abbreviated texts in a way which moves beyond their interaction with their original models, treating them as literary exercises in their own right.²⁷ The process of abbreviation is an inherently

²³ For a similar conclusion on the *Excerpta Constantiniana* as a source for Dionysius of Halicarnassus, see Flusin 2002; on John of Antioch, Umberto 2009: 84.

²⁴ Millar 1964: 2; Ziegler 1967: 2133; Bering-Staschewski 1981: 6; Gowing 1997: 2561; Murison 1999: 1-2; Davenport 2012a: 796 n. 2; Mallan 2013a: 738.

²⁵ Mallan 2013b: 611-12; Bellissime and Hurllet 2018: lxxxiii-iv. Vrind 1927: 4-6 lists occasions where Xiphilinus appears to use terms not found elsewhere in the *Roman History*, e.g. τάγμα for legion, where Dio always uses στρατόπεδον; even these very specific differences run to only around two full pages of discussion. Before book 60, where the text can be compared with Dio's original, Boissevain identifies 29 comments added by Xiphilinus, listed at Treadgold 2013: 311 n. 12.

²⁶ Brunt 1980: esp. 488-92.

²⁷ See generally Horster and Reitz 2010.

creative one. Even if text is not added, the decisions made on what to retain, and indeed what to omit, can reshape narratives much more comprehensively than the individual excerpts investigated above.²⁸ This is especially problematic for Dio's contemporary books. Close analysis of the *Epitome* makes it clear that the specific questions of Severan politics – that is, the reasons why Dio is so highly valued – are often greatly distorted.

The *Epitome* presents an explicit (if generalising) statement from Xiphilinus himself which can give some indication of how he approached the *Roman History*. In a first-person intrusion into Dio's narrative of the reign of Augustus, Xiphilinus sets out the basic rationale for his work:

τὸ μὲν οὖν σύμπαν οὕτω τὴν ἀρχὴν διώκησε, λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι καὶ νῦν μάλιστα, διὰ τὸ πάμπολυ ἀπηρτηῆσθαι τῶν καιρῶν ἐκείνων τὸν καθ' ἡμᾶς βίον καὶ τὸ πολίτευμα μνημονεύεσθαι (Xiph. 87.2-6 Dind.).

Everything [Augustus] did to manage the empire I will mention in turn, as much as is necessary, which now in particular, across the great separation from those times, brings to mind our way of life and government.

The *Epitome* is set up here as a Roman history which is directly relevant to its own contemporary Byzantine audience. Rome stands as an example of what is happening καθ' ἡμᾶς, 'among us'. Importantly, in this capacity, it is exemplary to a Byzantine form of government. It is this phrasing which explains the otherwise very broad ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι. Dio's account has no inherent value, but is worth preserving inasmuch as it applies to an eleventh-century context. The point is emphasised through a comparison to the *Roman History*. Xiphilinus' editorial comment overwrites a similar statement from Dio:

τὸ μὲν οὖν σύμπαν οὕτω τὴν ἀρχὴν διώκησε, λέξω δὲ καὶ καθ' ἕκαστον ὅσα ἀναγκαῖόν ἐστι μετὰ τῶν ὑπάτων, ἐφ' ὧν ἐγένετο, μνημονεύεσθαι (53.22.1).

²⁸ On the epitomisation of historiography in the ancient world, see esp. Chaplin 2010 (on the Livian *Periochae*); Schepens and Schorn 2010; Yardley 2010 (on Justin's *Epitome of Pompeius Trogus*).

Everything [Augustus] did to manage the empire I will mention in turn, as much as is necessary to recall, along with the consuls under whom it took place.

Xiphilinus maintains Dio's structure exactly; the change in the stated purpose of the narrative is nonetheless significant. The *Roman History* is set up as an account of the succeeding emperors which follows a traditional annalistic style, structured around the consulship. In the *Epitome*, that specifically Roman political institution, and its related historiographical approach, is superseded by eleventh-century concerns. It is the similarities to Byzantine politics which matter. In making that editorial decision, Xiphilinus introduces a narrative which is concerned with his own *πολίτευμα*, not Dio's.²⁹ As will be seen, the various means by which Xiphilinus alters the text of the *Roman History* reinforce this removal from a specifically Severan focus.

The most basic effect of the epitomisation of the *Roman History* is the loss of text. Two examples demonstrate its potential effects on the shape of Dio's narrative, and should not offer encouragement to anyone wanting to use the *Epitome* to access the original narrative structure. The first is the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas, which forms the bulk of book 52 (52.1-40). In his *Epitome*, as Peter Brunt observed, Xiphilinus allows it only a few lines.³⁰ The debate has been important to modern scholars concerned with the Roman imperial constitution, or Dio's attitude towards it. Such things were apparently of minimal interest to the Byzantine epitomator.

This is reflected in the second example, taken from the contemporary history itself. In the year 212, Caracalla instituted a law which made all free men in the empire Roman citizens. Known as the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, this law has attracted considerable attention from modern scholars.³¹ Ancient reaction was rather muted in comparison; of a small number of references, only Dio (78[77].9.5) and

²⁹ See Inglebert 2010: 513-14 on the importance of temporal context for understanding epitomes.

³⁰ Brunt 1980: 489. Agrippa argued for what was more just, and the return of power to the people; Maecenas for what was more useful, and keeping control. Octavian was persuaded by Maecenas (Xiph. Dind. 80.29-81.2).

³¹ Recent volumes specifically on the citizenship decree include Buraselis 2007; Pferdehirt and Scholz 2012; Ando 2016a; Imrie 2018. Other discussions include Carrié and Rouselle 1999: 57-65; Garnsey 2004; Ando 2012: 76-99; Humfress 2013: 79-90; Kemezis 2014: 30-34; Potter 2014: 139-40. This list is self-evidently far from exhaustive.

Ulpian (*Dig.* 1.5.17) associate it correctly with Caracalla.³² In its extant form, Dio's comment seems brief. He writes that Caracalla was interested solely in getting wealth to give to his soldiers, and contrived various means of being able to do so. Wealth was stolen from the elite, and the cities across the empire forced to supply money in direct tribute, and to pay increased taxes. He additionally made everyone a citizen to tax them more, by removing the exemptions offered to foreigners. Scholars have complained about the inaccuracy and banality of Dio's explanation for the citizenship law.³³ But even this brief summary is an amalgamation of different sources of the *Roman History's* text. The majority of the information comes from the *Excerpta*, including the actual detail regarding the law itself. Xiphilinus refers to money being given to the army, and the wasteful spending forced on the elite, but details about Roman citizenship are not included.³⁴

This omission has not only caused a loss of detail for Dio's reaction to the law. It also further illuminates Xiphilinus' lack of interest in the specifically Roman administrative or constitutional aspects of Dio's narrative. In keeping with his own programmatic statement, Xiphilinus seems to be concerned with a more universal moral description which is relevant to his own time, rather than with the specific details of a Severan political narrative. Indeed, the same can be said regarding the *Excerpta*. Dio's description of the *constitutio Antoniniana* is preserved in the *de Virtutibus et Vitiis* (*EV* 365-66) – that is to say, in a collection concerned with moral exempla, rather than imperial institutions or law.³⁵ The *EV* presents a similarly universalised view of Caracalla, omitting references which do survive in the *Epitome* to the specific suffering of the Senate.³⁶ A fundamental problem is

³² Neither Herodian nor the *HA* make any mention of the citizenship law. Alternative traditions credited the constitution to different Antonini – Aurelius Victor to Marcus Aurelius (*Caes.* 16.12), and John Chrysostom to Hadrian (*Homil. in Acta Apostolorum* 48.1).

³³ e.g. Ando 2012: 58-60, where Dio's interest in greed 'serves him ill' in his assessment of the citizenship law.

³⁴ Xiph. 330.22-32 R. St.

³⁵ Names matter here. Referring to the *Excerpta Valesiana* (see above, n. 10) in itself masks the moralising function of the excerpt.

³⁶ Caracalla sought to ruin everyone else but the soldiers, 'not least the senators' (οὐχ ἥκιστα τοὺς συγκλητικούς, 78[77].9.1). The phrase is not included in *EV* 366.

raised by this episode. It is clear that we do not have a complete picture of Dio's view, even where the *Excerpta* and the *Epitome* coincide. Moreover, without the *EV*, it would seem that Dio had nothing to say about the *constitutio Antoniniana* at all. However true Xiphilinus may be to the text of the *Roman History*, the character and tone of the *Epitome's* political discussion in these cases is almost unrecognisable from those of its source.

The alterations to Dio's text are not limited to the simple omission of some of its specifically Roman, political details. Their removal is often connected to a shift in the explanatory force of Dio's original narrative. Christopher Mallan's important recent study seeks to establish Xiphilinus' working methods in the production of the *Epitome*.³⁷ In a discussion which focuses primarily (though not exclusively) on the late republican and early imperial sections of the narrative, Mallan has demonstrated an occasional tendency to simplify Dio's account. In particular, political analysis is often replaced with moral explanation. Caesar's death in the *Roman History*, for example, comes after Brutus and Cassius fail to recognise the distinct constitutional advantages of monarchy (44.1.1.-2.5); in the *Epitome*, Brutus was not willing to submit to tyranny (31.3-11 R. St.). This kind of change can often be extremely difficult to detect, and would be impossible to reconstruct without Dio's original.³⁸ In trying to see the *Epitome* as indicative of Dio's original narrative, we are therefore faced with a threefold problem: firstly, Xiphilinus is very evidently an author with his own personality and concerns, which are reflected in his willingness to omit details of institutional Roman politics; secondly, he sometimes alters the explanatory force of the narrative to coincide with his own

³⁷ Mallan 2013b. Scholarship specifically on Xiphilinus – that is, rather than on the *Roman History* by way of the *Epitome* – is limited. After Ziegler 1967's brief summary, more detail is now provided by Berbessou-Broustet 2016. Canfora 1978 investigates his role in the extant structure of book 60; Schmidt 1989 discusses Xiphilinus' response to the lost book 70; Ehrhardt 1994 argues for a (potentially inadvertent) Christian influence over the *Epitome*.

³⁸ Mallan 2013b: 624-30. The political conflict between Pompey and Caesar follows a similar pattern. Dio's description is specifically republican, including the attempts by Curio to secure an unwarranted intercalary month during Caesar's consulship (40.59-62); Xiphilinus omits a large amount of detail (chapters 29-66 are excised), writing simply that both men desired power, and therefore came into conflict (Dind. 15.26-16.6).

interests; and finally, it can be extremely difficult to know when this kind of departure from Dio's text is happening.

These three difficulties can be observed in the contemporary books of the *Roman History*, and put real pressure on the idea that we can access Dio's full account of politics in his own lifetime. As mentioned above, a manuscript of the original text containing much of book 79[78] and the start of book 80[79] still survives.³⁹ It is therefore possible to make comparisons between Xiphilinus and Dio himself for at least part of his contemporary history. This includes the full account of the reign of Macrinus, which will serve as the key point of comparison between Dio and Xiphilinus here. Unsurprisingly, Xiphilinus' *Epitome* narrates Macrinus' principate in much less detail; his account (Xiph. 342-46) amounts to roughly three and a half pages in Boissevain's edition, compared to some thirty-eight for Dio (79[78].11-41).⁴⁰ Yet there is much more at stake than simply less detail in the *Epitome*. Xiphilinus shows the same tendencies in his summary of Macrinus as elsewhere in his treatment of the *Roman History*. He often ignores information about specific political developments, while including amusing stories. When these two factors converge, the themes of the narrative are heavily distorted.

In the case of Macrinus, this means the loss of perhaps the defining feature of his reign. Dio's account is littered with comments about an equestrian becoming emperor. Xiphilinus does not mention it.⁴¹ In itself, that is stark confirmation that Xiphilinus has different interests from Dio, and indeed from the majority of his modern scholarly readership. But it also has a direct effect on the analysis of Macrinus' brief principate. This can be demonstrated by the conclusion to his reign:

οὕτω που οὐδεὶς οὐδὲ τῶν σφόδρα δοκούντων ἐρρῶσθαι βεβαίαν τὴν ἰσχὺν ἔχει, ἀλλὰ καὶ οἱ πάνυ εὖ πράττοντες ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς λοιποῖς αἰωροῦνται. ὁ δ' οὖν Μακρίνος καὶ τάχιστα καὶ

³⁹ In *Vat. Gr.* 1288 (V); see Cary 1914-27 I: xxvi.

⁴⁰ Cf. the estimates of a quarter of Dio surviving, above n. 8. It is clear that Xiphilinus was far from consistent in the rate at which he chose to include or omit Dio's text. It would appear that the reign of Macrinus was of especially little interest to him.

⁴¹ There is one mention of his low birth (Xiph. R. St. 342.27, Dio 79[78].15.3); the same trait however is also applied to the senatorial Pertinax (74[73].3.1).

βαρυσυμφορώτατα τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀπέβαλεν· ἐνιαυτῷ τε γὰρ καὶ δύο μηνί, τριῶν ἡμερῶν, ὥστε καὶ μέχρι τῆς μάχης λογιζομένοις συμβῆναι, δέουσιν, ἦρξεν (Xiph. R. St. 346.28-33).

And thus it is clear that nobody, even those who seem to be the strongest, is certain of his strength; rather, the powerful face the same danger as the rest. And so Macrinus lost power very quickly and disastrously. He ruled for three days less than a year and two months, counting up to when the battle took place.

The words are Dio's, corresponding almost directly with the end of book 79[78]; the only exception is the addition of ὁ δ' οὖν Μακρίνος and τὴν ἀρχὴν, which are required for clarity of meaning following an omission after αἰωροῦνται. That omission however drastically changes the character of the narrative. In the *Epitome*, the fall of Macrinus is a moral lesson on the transience of power. It is rather different from Dio's version. We lose his explanation that Macrinus would have been praised if he had selected a senator to replace Caracalla. We lose the detail that he claimed power when he did not even have the title of senator, μηδ' ὄνομα βουλευτοῦ ἔχων (79[78].41.4), which in the *Roman History* immediately precedes his rapid and calamitous downfall. Xiphilinus may use Dio's words, but he alters their thematic force. The transgression of social order becomes a universally applicable tale, removed from its original anchoring in the depiction of political tensions in Severan Rome.

Such de-politicisation of Dio's account extends even into the more colourful moments of the *Epitome*. Dio reports the trial of a certain Lucius Priscillianus, who had been a favourite of Caracalla. He writes that he often fought wild animals in the arena, including on one occasion fighting a bear, a panther, a lioness and a lion all at the same time, without assistance. Yet this paled in comparison with the number of senators and equestrians he slew. Under Macrinus, he was tried by the Senate and exiled (79[89].21.3-5). Xiphilinus keeps this part of the story, but in an abridged and slightly reordered form (Xiph. R. St. 343.4-10). It becomes explicitly a comparison between emperors: Priscillianus is introduced as one of Caracalla's favourites who was exiled under Macrinus, in a typical μέν...δέ construction.⁴² Dio's focus is slightly different. Mention of his success under Caracalla comes at the end of the passage, and carries much greater detail: rather than the general 'he was honoured'

⁴² ὑπὸ μὲν τοῦ Καρακάλου μεγάλως ἐτιμήθη, ὑπ' αὐτοῦ δὲ ἐς νῆσον τινα κατεκλείσθη (Xiph. 343.6-7 R. St.).

(ἐπιμύθη) of the *Epitome*, Dio reports that Priscillianus was given praetorian rank, and made governor of Achaëa. His exile is then specifically at the hands of the Senate, with no mention of the emperor (79[78].21.5). Even in what might appear one of Dio's more entertaining anecdotes, his version pertains directly to Roman political life. Dio's Priscillianus contravened social precedent and was an active opponent of the Senate. Xiphilinus strips away this level of commentary. In the *Epitome*, Priscillianus is little more than an amusing aside.⁴³

Given the subject matter of Dio's contemporary history, with its frequent wars (both internal and external) and plots against the various emperors, it does not seem excessively cautious to suggest that Xiphilinus' evident tendency to simplify Dio's political commentary might have some impact on the narrative which survives only in the *Epitome*. The wars of Septimius Severus demonstrate some of the potential concerns very effectively. As it stands, Dio's narrative of the civil war against Pescennius Niger in 194 is dominated by an account of the siege of Byzantium.⁴⁴ It does not seem unlikely that this shaping of the *Roman History* has been affected – perhaps effected – by the Byzantine scholar Xiphilinus. Elsewhere, Severus' campaign against the Parthians in 198 also appears to have been altered by Xiphilinus' interests in amusing stories. It is reduced to a skeleton narrative, in which Severus invades, and faces no resistance. Seleucia and Babylon are captured, Ctesiphon sacked, and then the Romans go home (76[75].9.1-5). In spite of this general brevity, Xiphilinus chooses to include the episode of the emperor coming across a huge boar, which had taken thirty men to capture

⁴³ The pattern is consistent in the *Epitome*. Much the same can be seen at the start of Elagabalus' reign. Elagabalus is introduced, and immediately goes to Rome; a summary of his reign follows. A universal good action, in the form of his decision to spare everyone who had insulted him during Macrinus' reign, is balanced by a summary that he became wholly shameful for his three years and nine months in power (Xiph. 347.10-23 R. St.). Dio offers considerably greater detail in the *Roman History*, including letters sent to the Senate and the army while Elagabalus was still in Antioch (80[79].1.1-3.3).

⁴⁴ The war is covered in 75[74].6-14; of the nine chapters, the final five are exclusively about the siege and its consequences for the city.

(76[75].9.2). The story has been labelled ‘apparently pointless’.⁴⁵ This may be so in the *Epitome*, but it is impossible to say if it that is also true of the *Roman History*.

The *Epitome* may seem a different kind of response to the *Roman History* from Constantine’s project. Unlike the *Excerpta*, Xiphilinus creates a narrative structure which provides a largely coherent context for the material from the *Roman History* which he includes. But it has to be remembered that this context is Xiphilinus’, not Dio’s. Xiphilinus’ selection of text is based on his interests and concerns, and it is clear that they do not always align with Dio’s. It is therefore impossible to see a clear path through to Dio’s original account when we have only the *Epitome* to work from.⁴⁶ The political commentary which relates specifically to a Severan context is particularly affected by this process, from the lack of detail regarding Dio’s career to the kind of criticism aimed at emperors and their subordinates. If there is an apparent inconsistency in Dio’s presentation, it is at least in part because of Xiphilinus. In many respects, this is therefore more problematic than the *Excerpta*. There is the appearance of a functional narrative to work from, which has led to the view that Dio was overwhelmingly concerned with the behaviour of the army, and its impact on political life. But this is a Byzantine narrative, not a Severan one.

Re-Approaching the Contemporary History

When faced with Dio’s contemporary history, accessing his narrative world is therefore more complicated than reading the extant text. The examples laid out above suggest a pattern which quickly problematises the use of the *Epitome* as a proxy for Dio’s original narrative. There are several moments when Xiphilinus can be seen transforming elements of the *Roman History* to make them more directly applicable to his own experience of an eleventh-century Byzantine monarchy. Details

⁴⁵ Millar 1964: 142.

⁴⁶ Cf. Chaplin 2010: 466 on the Livian *Periochae*: ‘If the *Periochae* do not reveal anything solid about Livy’s politics or (anti-) Augustanism, they show rather a lot about the epitomator. We have seen that his intentional brevity can unintentionally distort Livy; that he has his own interests and preoccupations, which do not always dovetail with that we can trace of Livy’s; and that [his approach] throws some subjects into prominence and obscures others.’

which are particular to the Roman empire, let alone its Severan form, are made more universally applicable by the removal of unnecessary detail. As the summary of the reign of Macrinus shows, that detail can be extensive. If we still get a general sense of Dio's point – something which is not always the case – that does not mean that we can confidently reconstruct his overall thematic structure, which has been stripped away from the surviving episodes. Even if the surviving contemporary narrative does represent a full quarter of the *Roman History*, the lost material provides a context which cannot be reconstructed. From the contemporary history alone, we cannot recreate Dio's presentation of politics.

That, however, does not mean that an analysis of Dio's presentation of Severan politics is impossible. The remaining half of this chapter is dedicated to suggesting a way of overcoming the problems caused by the state of Dio's text. In its bluntest formulation, the aim is to re-contextualise a narrative which should be treated as fragmentary. The standard approach to Dio is to frame the *Roman History* within a historical Severan context.⁴⁷ As described in the introduction to this thesis, there is a methodological problem with doing so. The ancient historiography is the main basis for modern political reconstructions of the third century, meaning that this involves the circular process of contextualising Dio's contemporary history against itself.⁴⁸ I will instead think in terms of literary context. The similarities between the Severan emperors and the earlier narrative are evident, and I do not dispute them at all. But they can be reframed as part of a thematic continuity, rather than a historical commentary.

In that respect, I build considerably on a recent article by Martin Hose, which explores the presentation of imperial madness. Hose compares the depictions of Commodus and Septimius

⁴⁷ The following is intended only as an indication of the variety of periods which have been seen as a commentary on the Severans. Roddaz 1983 is set out explicitly as a discussion of the Augustan narrative in Severan terms; Gowing 1997 (esp. 2587-88) sees Dio's Nero as a reaction to his experience of a series of emperors who ruled through performance and deception; Urso 2016 argues that Dio's focus on Sulla in the republican narrative is due to Septimius Severus praising him.

⁴⁸ See above, 9-16.

Severus with the earlier corrupt emperors Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. He observes the creation of a thematic paradigm of madness within these three earlier reigns, to which many actions of Dio's contemporary emperors conform. His assessment of Severus is then especially noteworthy. Rather than seeing Severus as the model for corruption, Hose argues that we can see how his behaviour fits with a precedent set by Tiberius. As a commentary on the Severans, it operates on a discursive rather than factual level: Severus presented himself as the new Augustus, but he could only live up to the first emperor's successor.⁴⁹ In this instance, the earlier books provide the narrative context for a depiction of Severan misrule, which functions without a need for objective historical accuracy.

A comprehensive study of the thematic links between the contemporary history and Dio's earlier books is evidently not possible in this setting. This investigation is therefore intended as a case-study of thematic continuity. Its specific focus is the idea of *παρρησία* (hereafter *parrhēsia*), which is generally translated as free or frank speech. Rather than a modern concept of general "free speech", *parrhēsia* has a close connection to political activity in the ancient world. It expresses an ability to speak openly to a political superior without concern for personal safety, with a particular opposition to tyranny.⁵⁰ In contrast to Hose's focus on imperial comparisons, a more conceptual theme enables the republican narrative to be included in the exploration of Dio's narrative framework. Christopher Mallan has analysed *parrhēsia* as a feature of the Republic, while Christopher Burden-Strevens has argued for its transformation under Augustus.⁵¹ In contrast to their views, I will suggest that its presentation is consistent into the extant imperial books, and ultimately individual fragments from the epitomised narrative as well.

⁴⁹ Hose 2011: esp. 119-24 on Severus and Tiberius. Severus' Augustan presentation is explored in Cooley 2007; Barnes 2008; de Blois 2017.

⁵⁰ Recent studies of *parrhēsia* are numerous. For its Athenian origins, see e.g. Monoson 2000: esp. 51-63; Saxonhouse 2006; Konstan 2012; Landauer 2012; Balot 2014 (esp. 47-73). Papers in Sluiter and Rosen 2004a track *parrhēsia* through the classical world. By Late Antiquity, it was a trait associated with philosophers (Brown 1992: 61-70), and Christian bishops (Gaddis 2005: 260-68; Rapp 2005: 267-73; Flower 2013: 146-63).

⁵¹ Burden-Strevens 2015a: 234-41; Mallan 2016.

The starting point for this discussion is the key moment in the transition from Republic into Principate, which also provides one of the clearest examples of the conventional approach of reading a Severan historical context into the earlier books. The debate between Agrippa and Maecenas has conventionally been treated as a standalone description of Roman imperial power, in which Dio presents his own idealised view of a Roman imperial system. Maecenas in particular has been viewed as Dio's mouthpiece. In an account which covers a wide array of institutions and officials, Maecenas presents a Rome which is seen as most recognisable in Dio's own Severan world.⁵² Agrippa's speech has received less direct attention, having generally been seen as a rhetorical antithesis to Maecenas' vision of monarchy.⁵³ Recently however it has been suggested that both Agrippa and Maecenas offer arguments which are entirely in keeping with Dio's concerns about imperial power later in his narrative.⁵⁴ In any case, discussions overwhelmingly continue to centre on the comparison between

⁵² In the late nineteenth century, Eduard Meyer (1891) saw Maecenas as representing Dio's rejection of the pro-senatorial policies of Severus Alexander; see also Schwartz 1899: 1719-20. That reading has fallen out of favour, but the assumed connection to Dio continues. See for example Jardé 1925: 26-33; Hammond 1932; Bleicken 1962: 466-67; Millar 1964: 102-18; Letta 1979: 167-70; Manuwald 1979: 21-5; Zawadski 1983: 317-18; Aalders 1986: 297-302; Reinhold 1986: 219-21; Reinhold and Swan 1990: 164-5; Fishwick 1990 (on the imperial cult); Vielberg 1996: 42; Escribano 1999: 175-84; Handy 2009: 22-24; Corsana 2016: 557-58; France 2016 (on imperial finance). Cf. Gowing 1992: 289 for the idea that Dio was aware that the ideals in the speech were no longer achievable; Ando 2016c for the view that books 52 and 53 combine for a problematisation of imperial rule from its very outset.

⁵³ But that is not to say there has been none. Markov 2013 looks at Agrippa's speech for evidence of Dio's political thought, while Berrigan 1968 and Fechner 1986: 86 make the case for Agrippa giving the more compelling arguments of the two speakers. Elsewhere, McKechnie 1981 sees Agrippa as a fully Hellenistic contrast with Maecenas' more Roman monarchy; see also Kuhlmann 2010 on the intertext with Herodotus' Persian debate (Hdt. 3.80), with bibliography.

⁵⁴ Adler 2012 is especially comprehensive. See also Espinosa Ruiz 1982: esp. 38-58, 91-101; Reinhold 1988: 170; Steidle 1988: 205-7; Freyburger-Galland 1997: 133-36.

book 52 and the contemporary narrative. When that narrative is assumed to be accurate, the Augustan debate becomes a commentary on a very real Severan context.⁵⁵

Yet this kind of historicising approach is not the only reading of the Agrippa/Maecenas debate. A number of recent studies have begun to stress the structural function of book 52, as the narrative shifts from the Republic to the Principate. Especially important is the analysis of Adam Kemezis. He has described the *Roman History* as divided into what he terms narrative modes, five different periods of Rome's history which are described in their own slightly different terms. The debate marks a transition between two of these modes, as the civil wars of the Late Republic progressed into the Augustan Principate. Rather than introducing a new kind of political situation in Rome through an explicit authorial interlude, Dio uses the debate to make the shift.⁵⁶ Kemezis's view of the shape of the *Roman History* has been challenged by scholars who have stressed the coherence of the narrative as a whole, and the porous borders between its suggested periods.⁵⁷ But the key point for this study remains, and indeed is supported: the scene has a function which is removed from any Severan context. In terms of the *Roman History*'s construction, it functions as a central pivot in an overall narrative which is able to remain coherent even as it straddles markedly different political systems.

Seeing books 52 as an important structural device in the *Roman History* does not remove the clear links between the debate and the contemporary history. It does reframe them. If the debate represents an ideal, then it is one which is closely connected to Dio's construction of imperial Rome. The scene provides an outline of how Rome changed after the institution of the Principate. The similarities in the authorial use of *parrhēsia* indicate that Dio's methods of describing the city's history

⁵⁵ Recent examples include de Blois 1998b: 362-68; Schmidt 1999: 104-17; Schettino 2001: 547-51; Markov 2013: 229 (Dio has Agrippa, 'pay special attention to current problems of the Severan age'); France 2016: 781 ('la critique de son époque est évidente'); Madsen 2016: 138; Moatti 2016: 80-81; Molin 2016b: esp. 469-71.

⁵⁶ Narrative modes are set out at Kemezis 2014: 94-104. He lists five: early Rome; the Republic; the 'dynasties' (δυναστεία) which began with Caesar's rise to sole power; the imperial narrative; and Dio's contemporary history. See 126-35 on the Agrippa/Maecenas debate.

⁵⁷ See papers in Burden-Strevens and Lindholmer (forthcoming, 2018) on the consistent role of jealousy (φθόνος) across Dio's republican books, for example.

do not. Where consistency can be identified, the fragmentary narrative can be recontextualised. Dio's original account remains hidden, but individual surviving scenes can be explained in more detail.

***Parrhēsia* and the End of the Republic**

In a treatment of *parrhēsia* directed mainly towards the Republic, Christopher Mallan identifies frank speech as a lost relic in Dio's own age, an ideal which can no longer function in an imperial setting. It is a feature of republican Rome, where senators had the ability to speak their minds openly. Despite this generally pessimistic tone, Mallan also comments briefly on the Agrippa/Maecenas debate to present frank speech in much more positive terms. His summary describes the scene as, 'in some ways representative of how advisors should behave towards an emperor, and how an emperor should behave towards his advisors.'⁵⁸ It is an idea which merits closer inspection than Mallan's single paragraph. In particular, the harmonious interaction in the debate stands in direct contrast to the kind of *parrhēsia* usually seen in the Republic. The beginning of the Principate marks a shift in frank speech occurring as a disruptive force, into something which now has the potential for being of direct benefit to Rome. That transition of *parrhēsia* is described in consistent terms across both periods. As a starting point, then, it can demonstrate a thematic link which traverses the divide between Republic and Principate. Though it has been thought of as a commentary on Severan politics, the debate therefore also works as a fitting end to the Republic.

Over the course of book 52, there are at least four references to *parrhēsia*. At the start of his speech, Agrippa promises to speak frankly (λέξω δὲ μετὰ παρρησίας, 52.3.3); the idea is closely paralleled in Maecenas' advice that an emperor should allow his advisors to speak freely (52.33.4, 52.33.6).⁵⁹ This forms part of the general scheme of effective monarchy. Maecenas acknowledges the greater power of the ruler, but stresses that there should be consultation between a monarch and other judges, with advice passing in both directions. *Parrhēsia* is introduced as necessary to make the most of this two-way consultation.⁶⁰ Finally, at the end of the debate, Augustus thanks his two advisors for their many

⁵⁸ Mallan 2016: passim, 270 for the quotation.

⁵⁹ Mallan 2016: 270 refers only to the first two mentioned here.

⁶⁰ Cf. 52.8.4-7, and Agrippa's concern that tyrants can never trust their advisors.

thoughts and suggestions, and the *parrhēsia* with which they have spoken.⁶¹ There is a fifth potential reference at the lacunose start of Agrippa's speech.⁶² An unclear and possibly spurious comment describes *parrhēsia* in a democratic context as unable to persuade those who disagree (52.14.1).⁶³ It is clear that one of Maecenas' criticisms of democracy is the ability of the undeserving to say whatever they want (52.14.2). Frank speech may not be the sole theme of the debate by any means, but its role within the structure of book 52 should not be ignored. The debate begins with the promise of frank advice; the theme is picked up within the speeches; and it finishes with *parrhēsia* as the main focus of Augustus' appreciation.

The debate is therefore structured around *parrhēsia*. Moreover, the debate meets all of Maecenas' criteria for effective frank speech. Augustus invites frankness in a discussion of matters of state which aims to come to the best possible conclusion, much as Maecenas suggests at 52.33.6-7. There, Dio has him stress that a monarch's advisors should be granted *parrhēsia* whenever they want it, and that bad advice can be ignored (rather than punished) without any negative consequences for Augustus himself.⁶⁴ This too comes to fruition in book 52. Despite advising Augustus to give up power, Agrippa becomes an eager supporter of his monarchical reforms, as though he himself had proposed a monarchy (52.41.2). His advice is listened to and put to one side, and all three men work together once a decision is made. To build on Mallan's summary, the Agrippa/Maecenas debate can be seen as

⁶¹ ὁ δὲ δὴ Καῖσαρ ἀμφοτέρους μὲν σφας καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ πολυνοίᾳ καὶ ἐπὶ τῇ πολυλογίᾳ τῇ τε παρρησίᾳ ἰσχυρῶς ἐπήνεσε (52.41.1). The two men's thoughts and words may be important, but they build up to a climactic focus on their *parrhēsia*.

⁶² A single folio is missing, to a total of 62 lines; Reinhold 1988: 179-80.

⁶³ ...οὔτε πεῖσαι τι ῥαδίως ὑπὸ παρρησίας τοὺς οὐχ ὁμοίους δύνανται. The line is considered questionable by Boissevain (1895-1901II: 388) and Cary (1914-27 VI: 108), but accepted by Dindorf (1863-1865 III: 45). Even if accurate, its precise contextual meaning is difficult to glean.

⁶⁴ The point is connected to Maecenas' advice on monarchy: don't do anything to your advisors which you wouldn't want someone to do to you (52.29.2). A similar formulation is found in the respect shown by Tarquinius Superbus to the Senate early in his career (fr. 9.1-3); this quickly stops after he comes to power.

much more than a representation of how an emperor should engage with the elite. It defines good governmental practice, built around *parrhēsia*, and simultaneously performs it.

The demonstration of effective monarchy through the debate resonates strongly with the recent scholarship on *parrhēsia* in the Republic. Mallan's investigation is highly elucidating; I therefore summarise his points here. The two figures most associated with frankness in the Republic are Cicero and Cato. They exist as opposites: Cato was genuine in his *parrhēsia*, and worked only towards the public good;⁶⁵ Cicero's *parrhēsia* was directed exclusively at self-promotion.⁶⁶ Notably, Cato's efforts achieved nothing.⁶⁷ The contrast is reinforced by close textual links between the two, as sometimes identical claims are made by both men, only highlighting Cicero's hypocrisy.⁶⁸ His selfishness comes to a head in another debate scene. Cicero is given three lengthy speeches in the *Roman History*, of which the final one is of concern here.⁶⁹ Dio relates a fictional debate set at the start of 43 BCE between Cicero and Quintus Fufius Calenus, consul in 47 and a supporter of Mark Antony. The scene is one of the longest in the entire *Roman History*, spanning two books (45.18-46.28). Ultimately, the Senate are persuaded to support Octavian at Antony's expense, leading to the outbreak of open war.

As Mallan has it, the debate 'is crucial to Dio's consideration of Republican *parrhēsia*'. The concept is ever-present in the speeches. Cicero speaks first, presenting himself as a good citizen, opposing

⁶⁵ See e.g. 43.10.5, where Cato refuses to support Caesar as he is unwilling to give up freedom and *parrhēsia* in exchange for slavery; much the same idea is expressed in his opposition to Pompey at 37.22.

⁶⁶ Dio's portrayal of Cicero as an obstructive egotist is unsurprisingly a focus of considerable scholarship, dating back to the nineteenth century, as Haupt 1884: 687-92; see more recently e.g. Gowing 1992: 143-61; Claassen 1996; Lintott 1997: 2514-17; Sion-Jenkis 2002; Fromentin and Bertrand 2008: xx-xxxiii; Lachenaud 2008; Sanna 2008; Rees 2011: 102-83; Montecalvo 2014; Burden-Strevens 2015a: 47-72.

⁶⁷ See Madsen 2016: 143-46, for the suggestion that Cato's honest *parrhēsia* could only fail in a Republic which was destined to collapse.

⁶⁸ See Mallan 2016: 259-69 for a number of comparisons.

⁶⁹ The earlier two are Cicero's opposition to the *lex Gabinia*, which granted Pompey's extraordinary powers in 67 BCE (36.20-37), and the so-called Philiscus debate (38.18-29), in which Cicero discusses his exile.

Antony for the benefit of Rome;⁷⁰ Calenus attacks him as a selfish coward in reply. On several occasions, Calenus echoes Cicero's claims in his jibes. Cicero bemoans the fact that Antony's influence makes it impossible to speak openly about anything or do what is needed (παρρησίαν ἄλλως εἰπεῖν τι καὶ πρᾶξαι τῶν δεόντων) without a bodyguard for protection (45.22.5); Calenus retorts that Cicero uses his ability to speak frankly so he can appear bold (ἐκ τοῦ θρασέως παρρησιάζεσθαι), rather than saying anything useful (τι τῶν δεόντων εἰπεῖν, 46.9.4). Cicero claims that he doesn't fear death for employing *parrhēsia* against Antony (45.46.3-4); Calenus mocks him, since he had previously assented to all the powers which the Senate had bestowed. Cicero was not stripped of *parrhēsia* then (οὐ γὰρ που καὶ παρρησίας ἐνδεὴς ἦσθα) – he simply used it to bark pointlessly (46.26.1-2).

Things come to a head in the debate's conclusion.⁷¹ In contrast to the effective *parrhēsia* of book 52, the debate between Cicero and Calenus has no productive outcome. As Dio summarises:

τοιαῦτα τοῦ Καλήνου εἰπόντος ὁ Κικέρων οὐκ ἦνεγκεν: αὐτὸς μὲν γὰρ καὶ ἀκράτῳ καὶ κατακορεῖ τῇ παρρησίᾳ ἀεὶ πρὸς πάντας ὁμοίως ἐχρήτο, παρὰ δὲ δὴ τῶν ἄλλων οὐκ ἠξίου τὴν ὁμοίαν ἀντιλαμβάνειν. καὶ τότε οὖν ἀφείς τὸ τὰ δημόσια διασκοπεῖν ἐς λοιδορίας αὐτῷ κατέστη, ὥστε τὴν ἡμέραν ἐκείνην καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὐχ ἦκιστα μάτην κατατριβῆναι (46.29.1).

Cicero could not endure Calenus' words. Though he himself was always used to speaking with untempered and immoderate freedom to everyone regardless, he could not accept that same thing from other people. He therefore then abandoned the investigation of public concerns and turned to abusing him, so that the whole day was wasted through it.

The phrasing here almost directly quotes Dio's critique of Cicero earlier in the narrative. When explaining Cicero's exile in 58-57 BCE, Dio describes him as excessive and immoderate in the way that he employs *parrhēsia* towards everyone (τῇ παρρησίᾳ πρὸς πάντας ὁμοίως ἀκράτῳ καὶ κατακορεῖ

⁷⁰ His speech in the *Roman History* has been described as, 'an epitome of the fourteen *Philippics*' (Fomin 2016: 232). The points of comparison are set out in Montecalvo 2014: 3790-406; see also van Stekelenburg 1971: 79-87; Burden-Strevens 2015a: 58-70. Kyhnitzsch 1894: 59-64 points out a number of Thucydidean references in the two speeches.

⁷¹ Mallan 2016: 63-68 provides more detail.

χρώμενος, 38.12.5). Dio's Cicero is far from the self-appointed champion of the people that he claims, and it is through his *parrhēsia* that this is made most evident. As Mallan has argued, the conclusion to the debate is more than simply a final insult aimed at Cicero before the narrative moves on. The scene can instead be seen as an embodiment of a political system in which frank speech can be used solely for self-promotion.⁷²

Placed alongside the excesses of Cicero and Calenus, book 52 is not just a demonstration of *parrhēsia* working effectively. It becomes a resolution of a fundamental structural weakness in republican government. The frankness engaged in by Cicero and Calenus is actively disruptive. His lack of restraint leads to Cicero descending into nothing more than abuse, and actively turning away from the public concerns that the debate was meant to address. Both men could talk about τὰ δέοντα, what is necessary, but their rivalry supplanted its discussion. The contrast with book 52 is clear. At the start of his speech, Agrippa asserted the need to speak frankly, οὐ τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἴδιον... ἀλλὰ τὸ σὸν τό τε κοινὸν – not in his own interests, but those of Augustus and the state (52.2.2).⁷³ Even though his advice was not followed, Agrippa accepted the outcome, keeping to his statement in a way which is alien to his republican models.

To this extent, I come close to agreeing with Christopher Burden-Strevens, who identifies a range of other problematic themes from the Republic which are resolved by Augustus through other speeches.⁷⁴ For Burden-Strevens, this is a 'reinvention' of *parrhēsia* in a new, imperial context.⁷⁵ This is where my view differs considerably. While the impact of *parrhēsia* has certainly changed with the installation of an autocratic arbiter, the way it is used is much the same. The distinction is shown through the arrest of Licinius Murena, who was connected to a conspiracy against Augustus (54.3).

⁷² Mallan 2016: 268-69. See also Burden-Strevens 2015a: 240-41.

⁷³ See also 52.13.5, where he advises Augustus to secure his authority by doing everything which is useful to the state (πάντα τὰ συμφέροντα τῷ δημοσίῳ). Maecenas meanwhile says that an effective monarch should promote those who are πρὸς τὰ κοινὰ συμφορώτεροι, more effective for the state's interests (52.37.8).

⁷⁴ Burden-Strevens 2015a: 241-58.

⁷⁵ Burden-Strevens 2015a: 237. See also Mallan 2016: 275 for the distinction between different types of *parrhēsia* at different times.

His downfall is strikingly reminiscent of Cicero at the end of the debate. Dio attributes his assumed engagement in the plot – whether true or a rumour – to his unrestrained *parrhēsia*. The phrasing used to describe Cicero’s affronted response to Calenus is quoted verbatim to say that Murena used *parrhēsia* recklessly: καὶ ἀκράτῳ καὶ κατακορεῖ τῇ παρρησίᾳ πρὸς πάντας ὁμοίως ἐχρήτο (54.3.4). The benefits of the new political system are confirmed by the change in reaction to frank speech, rather than the frank speech itself. Murena could still engage in *parrhēsia* in the same way as Cicero, but he did not gain from it. Instead, it made people suspicious that he was involved in a plot, and led to his eventual execution. In contrast, Augustus got involved in events as the representative of τὸ δημόσιον; his resolution of matters confirmed the claim, as he did what was beneficial to public interests (συμφέροντα τῷ δημοσίῳ, 54.3.6).⁷⁶ Speaking with *parrhēsia* still has the potential to be disruptive in Dio’s Augustan world. Augustus may reinvent the consequences of speaking in this way, but he does not change the speech.⁷⁷

From Cicero and Calenus through to book 52 and the Murena trial, we find the same use of *parrhēsia* to demonstrate the change in Rome’s political atmosphere. And it is clearly a positive one. The Augustan monarchy creates a situation in which *parrhēsia* can be a positive force, rather than a disruptive one. It allows Agrippa to speak frankly, in the interests of the state. Murena’s untempered frankness, meanwhile, can be consigned to a grave, instead of diverting public business. In effect, this is Augustus reversing the polarity of *parrhēsia* in the Republic, where Cicero’s excess could triumph in public debates and Cato’s genuine concern for the good of Rome achieved nothing. On both a

⁷⁶ There are several examples of Augustus appreciating *parrhēsia*. See esp. 55.7.3, where among the many virtues of Maecenas listed at his death is his ability to restrain the emperor’s anger with frank speech. More generally, senators are allowed to speak openly (53.21.3, 55.4.1, 55.34.1); Augustus’ encouragement of *parrhēsia* is mentioned three times at the end of his reign – twice by Tiberius in his eulogy (56.40.3, 56.41.8), and in Dio’s summary of his reign (56.43.1).

⁷⁷ The same could be said of Helvidius Priscus, who uses *parrhēsia* ‘beyond what is fitting’ (οὐκ ἐν καιρῷ) to attack Vespasian (65[66].12). Mallan (2016: 271) sees the episode showing Dio’s distaste for ‘ostentatious, pointless opposition that had little value.’ I would suggest this is rather an emperor rightly punishing misdirected *parrhēsia*.

structural and a thematic level, book 52 forms part of a coherent shift into the Principate. In the content of Maecenas' speech, Dio sets out the political shape of imperial Rome; in the construction of the scene, he illustrates the benefits of monarchy.

***Parrhēsia* after Augustus**

Through *parrhēsia*, we can see how book 52 can be read as the performance of a resolution to the Republic's fundamental flaws. Just as there is distinct continuity with its republican equivalent in the presentation of Augustan *parrhēsia*, the later narrative continues to associate it with the same collection of themes, and its performance has the same kind of consequences.⁷⁸ While it may be true that frank speech is less common in the extant imperial books, the reign of Tiberius shows that it is still present. Dio's Tiberius conforms to familiar images from Tacitus and Suetonius, concentrating on his deception. As Dio puts it, he was someone who suggested the very opposite of what he actually intended to do. It was then even more dangerous to anticipate Tiberius' nature, and doing what he really wanted was liable only to raise his suspicions (57.1.4). The result is that Tiberius hated everyone: either people agreed with his words, and therefore what he actually disliked, or they challenged his pretence (57.1.6). Tiberius therefore created a world in which it was impossible to speak safely. The connections with book 52 are clear. From the very outset of his reign, Tiberius is described in terms of his reaction to elite speech. We are a long way from Maecenas' advice that a monarch should do and say whatever he wants his governors to think and do.⁷⁹ While Augustus is grateful for the frank opinions of Agrippa and Maecenas, Tiberius creates an environment in which such communication is impossible.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Aside from *parrhēsia* as a specific theme, Jones 2016: 306-309 provides an overview of emperors being judged against their engagement with advisors, beginning with the fragmentary account of Romulus.

⁷⁹ Πάνθ' ὅσα τοὺς ἀρχομένους καὶ φρονεῖν καὶ πράττειν βούλει, καὶ λέγε καὶ ποίει (52.34.1).

⁸⁰ This trait is shared with both Domitian and Caligula. Domitian (67.4.2) had the most terrible (δεινότατον) quality of craving flattery, but hating everyone as a result: flatterers for their insincerity, and everyone else for not liking him (67.4.2). With Caligula, this is expressed directly in terms of *parrhēsia*. He is described as hating

Despite this introduction, Dio's Tiberius is not straightforward in his opposition to effective speech. The structure of Dio's narrative allows for some much more positive involvement with *parrhēsia*. After listing some of his more problematic traits, Dio emphasises that to begin with Tiberius governed the state in a way which was very effective (57.7-13). The scene is introduced with a general overview, in which Tiberius would act like Augustus (κατὰ τὸν Αὐγούστον, 57.7.2), immediately setting up an explicit basis for comparison. What follows is a catalogue of everyday actions, all in the imperfect tense, which sets out the general character of the early reign. Within the wide-ranging list, Dio includes specific discussion of how Tiberius allowed *parrhēsia* in his discussions with the Senate:

καὶ ἕξ γε τὸ μέσον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ γνώμην τιθεὶς οὐχ ὅπως ἀντειπεῖν αὐτῇ παντὶ τῷ παρρησίαν ἔνεμεν, ἀλλὰ καὶ τάναντία οἱ ἔστιν ὅτε ψηφίζομένων τινῶν ἔφερε. καὶ γὰρ αὐτὸς ψηφὸν πολλακίς ἐδίδου. ὁ μὲν γὰρ Δροῦσος ἐξ ἴσου τοῖς ἄλλοις τοτὲ μὲν πρῶτος τοτὲ δὲ μεθ' ἐτέρους τοῦτ' ἐποίει: ἐκεῖνος δὲ ἔστι μὲν ὅτε ἐσιώπα, ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ πρῶτος ἢ καὶ μετ' ἄλλους τινὰς ἢ καὶ τελευταῖος τὰ μὲν ἀντικρὺς ἀπεφαίνετο, τὰ δὲ δὴ πλείω, ἵνα δὴ μὴ δοκῇ τὴν παρρησίαν αὐτῶν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι, ἔλεγεν ὅτι 'εἰ γνώμην ἐποιούμην, τὰ καὶ τὰ ἂν ἀπεδειξάμην' (57.7.3-4).

When he had set out his own opinion publicly he not only allowed everyone to speak frankly against it, but even accepted it when people voted for the opposite; for he himself would often cast a vote. Drusus was equal to the rest, sometimes acting first, and sometimes after others. There were times when Tiberius meanwhile would keep silent, others when he spoke first, or after some others, or even last; sometimes he would reveal his opinion directly, but most of the time, so he didn't seem to be taking away their frank speech, he would say, 'If I were taking part, I would say this, or that.'

The links back to book 52 and the late Republic are apparent. This is *parrhēsia* operating in an administrative setting, closely connected with public business. As with the Agrippa/Maecenas debate, it involves members of the elite giving their frank opinion, facilitated by the presence of a

and delighting equally in both flatterers and those who spoke frankly (τοῖς τε θωπεύουσιν αὐτὸν καὶ τοῖς παρρησιαζομένοις τι καὶ ἤχθετο ὁμοίως καὶ ἤδετο, 59.4.5).

monarch who is simultaneously controlling the excesses of the Republic and granting a degree of freedom.⁸¹ Augustus too put everything before the Senate (55.4.1), and spoke last to ensure that his advisors were not influenced by his view (55.34.1). It is not a problem that Tiberius tried to avoid ‘seeming’ (μὴ δοκῆ) to be preventing *parrhēsia*. This is exactly the same focus on a public impression of senatorial power suggested by Maecenas five books previously.⁸² Finally, Tiberius himself is a contrasting figure to the likes of Cicero and Calenus. Rather than boasting about an interest in the public good, as had the two republican orators who achieve nothing more than wasting everyone’s time, Tiberius was restrained in even offering an opinion.

Dio’s account of Tiberius introduces another important aspect of thematic continuity. In his reign, *parrhēsia* is found operating in a consistent fashion even when the narrative has been epitomised. Despite a positive beginning, Tiberius’ reign descended into tyranny after the death of Germanicus (57.13.6), reflected in the growing power of Sejanus. In a passage preserved only in the *Epitome*, lost to a lacuna at the start of book 58, *parrhēsia* takes on a role in Dio’s presentation of this corruption. A perverse form of frank speech proliferated: that of informers. These men were free to say whatever they wished, safe in the knowledge that their victims would face any punishment which came from it (58.1.2). Their association with *parrhēsia* is a direct subversion of the monarchy described by Maecenas in book 52. For Maecenas, the goal of speaking freely was to the benefit of the state: elite advisors should be able to share their honest opinions with the emperor, so that he can then make

⁸¹ Dio’s phrasing in the introduction also picks up on Maecenas’ speech. He stresses that Tiberius shared the decision-making process, offering in quick succession the verbs ἐκοίνου and ἐπεκοίνου (57.7.2). The repetition calls to mind Maecenas’ exhortation, τά τε γὰρ κοινὰ κοινῶς διοικεῖσθαι δεῖ (52.32.1) – shared concerns (often ‘the state’) should be administered in a shared fashion – in his assertion that everything important should be brought before the Senate.

⁸² Summed up at 52.31.1: καὶ σεμνὸν καὶ ἀξιόλογόν ἐστι τό τε τὴν βουλὴν πάντων κυρίαν δοκεῖν εἶναι, ‘It is both right and noteworthy that the Senate seems to be in charge of everything.’

the best-informed decision possible.⁸³ Under a corrupt emperor, *parrhēsia* continued to be effective, but only to destructive ends.

Though it is highly likely that Xiphilinus abbreviated this passage, it is consistent with later events in Tiberius' reign which are fully extant. The reference to informers and treason trials is repeated as book 58 progresses, with a similar corruption of *parrhēsia*. On this occasion, useful frank speech loses all its force. The execution of Sejanus was followed by a purge of his friends and supporters. Dio writes that some of those accused of showing him favour were tried, and spoke with *parrhēsia*; most killed themselves first, to avoid the extra suffering of imprisonment, and the seizure of their property, when defending the accusation was futile (58.15). Frank speech in a legal setting is not only made ineffective by tyranny, but actively causes more harm. The corruption of *parrhēsia* from the *Epitome* is completed by this passage. Taken together, Dio presents its harmful form coming to the fore, and its ideal use having no impact. This is a state which has been turned upside down.

The reversal of effective *parrhēsia* coincides with a shift in thematic connections. This problematic form of frank speech caused by tyranny is explored using direct parallels with the disruptive *parrhēsia* seen in the Republic, and encapsulated in the figure of Cicero. Misused *parrhēsia* in both cases is closely associated with insults. The informer only has to begin with some kind of insult – ἔργον ἐστὶ λοιδορίας τέ τινος προκατάρχεσθαι (58.1.2) – to encourage his victim to join in; that is the risk-free *parrhēsia* he can indulge in. The connection with *loidoria* occurs in much the same way with Cicero in book 46. Within Calenus' speech, Cicero is accused of insulting Antony (ὡς αὐτὸς λοιδορεῖ, 46.16.3), and then mockingly quoted on his claim to be the only one who speaks frankly in defence of the Republic (ἐγὼ μόνος ὑπὲρ τῆς δημοκρατίας παρρησιάζομαι, 46.16.3). More starkly, Calenus accuses Cicero of insulting everyone all the time, out of a desire to look like he is able to speak frankly – καὶ λοιδορεῖς μὲν ἀεὶ πάντας πανταχοῦ, τὴν ἐκ τοῦ θρασέως παρρησιάζεσθαι δοκεῖν δύναμιν (46.9.4). This comes to a head at the conclusion of the scene, discussed above, where Dio describes Cicero falling

⁸³ Esp. 52.33.6-9. As Maecenas concludes in this section, it is the emperor who has the most to gain from this kind of advice.

back to insulting Calenus (ἐς λοιδορίας αὐτῷ κατέστη, 46.29.1).⁸⁴ It is a situation which reaches something of a climax at the start of Caligula's reign. He is the first to insult Tiberius (αὐτὸν καὶ πρῶτος λοιδορήσας), encouraging the elite to speak with a rather hasty frankness (προπετεστέρᾳ παρρησίᾳ χρῆσασθαι). He then punishes some of them for their words (59.4.2). Caligula is presented as an emperor who became an informer himself.

Dio's contemporary books may seem somewhat removed from his account of the early Principate, due to the apparent absence of *parrhēsia*. It is mentioned only three times, in two scenes which both occur in the reign of Septimius Severus. As explored above, this apparent infrequency is not necessarily reflective of a different approach from Dio. It is impossible to say if other mentions were omitted by Xiphilinus and the other Byzantine excerptors, let alone how many. Their existence does not seem unlikely: of the forty-nine occurrences of *parrhēsia* in books 36-59, only eighteen are in the *Epitome*.⁸⁵ But frequency is not the concern here. What is clear is that frank speech in the contemporary history is entirely consistent with the earlier narrative. Moreover, the coherence of Dio's presentation of *parrhēsia* can enable certain scenes to be more easily understood. Dio's description of Severus is generally viewed as negative. His account includes several scenes of

⁸⁴ Hadrian's reign has a similar echo of Cicero and Calenus. Hadrian executes the architect Apollodorus, after he criticises the emperor's design for a temple. Hadrian could not put up with his *parrhēsia* (τὴν παρρησίαν αὐτοῦ οὐκ ἤνεγκεν, 69.4.3), much like Cicero at the end of Calenus' speech (46.29.1). This has wider thematic links. Hadrian's hatred of Apollodorus is linked to his jealousy (φθόνος) towards those who have expert knowledge (69.3.3). It is a trait shared by Domitian (67.14.3) and later Caracalla (78[77].11.5); cf. book 52, where Agrippa stresses that tyranny leads people to hide their abilities out of fear (52.5.1-2), while Maecenas encourages Augustus to celebrate those abilities (52.33.9).

⁸⁵ By way of more extreme comparison, Burden-Strevens 2015a: 182 n. 143 refers to eighty-two mentions of the morpheme -φθον- (i.e. words associated with φθόνος, envy) between books 25 and 55 in a discussion of its thematic importance in Dio's late Republic (2015a: 180-93; see also id. 2016: 207-14). Seventy-six of these are in the books covered by the *Epitome*; Xiphilinus includes only eight of them.

duplicity and aggression against the Senate.⁸⁶ Though there are some more praiseworthy moments, they have been seen as exceptional, to the point that several scholars have been willing to label Severus as one of the tyrants of the *Roman History*.⁸⁷ This is a view which neatly represents the approaches to the contemporary history which I have challenged. It assumes that we still have a complete image of what Dio thought about Severus, which can be analysed in its own discrete terms.

When Severus' positive interaction with *parrhēsia* is framed against the wider narrative, the suggestions of exceptionality cease to apply. At the very end of Severus' life, Dio presents a general precis of the emperor's approach to imperial duties (77[76].17). It is immediately comparable to the scene under Tiberius: a collection of repeated, imperfect actions, which set out Severus' everyday interaction with the senatorial elite, covering details from his behaviour in a court environment to his typical dining habits.⁸⁸ As with Tiberius, Dio includes Severus' attitude to *parrhēsia*:

ἔπραττέ τι πάντως νυκτὸς ὑπὸ τὸν ὄρθρον, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτ' ἐβάδιζε καὶ λέγων καὶ ἀκούων τὰ τῆ ἀρχῆς πρόσφορα: εἶτ' ἐδίκαζε, χωρὶς εἰ μὴ τις ἐορτὴ μεγάλη εἴη. καὶ μέντοι καὶ ἄριστα αὐτὸ ἔπραττε: καὶ γὰρ τοῖς δικάζομένοις ὕδωρ ἱκανὸν ἐνέχει, καὶ ἡμῖν τοῖς συνδικάζουσιν αὐτῶ παρρησίαν πολλὴν ἐδίδου (77[76].17.1).

He would always do something during the night before dawn, after which he would go for a walk and discuss matters regarding the empire. He would then sit in court, unless one of the big festivals was happening. Indeed, he did this very well: he would grant speakers sufficient time, and would allow those of us who were his fellow judges to speak entirely frankly.

⁸⁶ Perhaps the most famous example being his false claim after his accession that he wouldn't kill any senators, only to execute the man who had written up the edict (75[74].2.1-2).

⁸⁷ See recently Juntula 2016; Madsen 2016: 154-57. A more restrained characterisation of Severus as 'insufficiently heroic' for anyone trying to praise the Severans (Kemezis 2014: 146) seems more reasonable, though is still difficult to justify fully.

⁸⁸ Pitcher 2018a: 223-24 outlines Dio's tendency to characterise through praxis, the actions of characters, rather than explicit judgement.

The setting of this account of elite *parrhēsia* is almost identical to that of Tiberius, apart from its place at the end of Severus' reign rather than the start. It occurs in the same kind of block of general patterns of administrative behaviour, with the same string of imperfect verbs. His engagement with *parrhēsia* is just as positive. Senators are allowed to speak freely as colleagues in a legal setting (συνδικάζουσιν), in a confirmation that Severus really did carry out his public duties excellently (ἄριστα). There is a return to the idea of beneficial public activity, too. Severus was concerned about τὰ τῆ ἀρχῆ πρόσφορα, the business of ruling.⁸⁹ There is consistent praise, which coincides directly with Dio's exploration of *parrhēsia* elsewhere.

When *parrhēsia* features again under Severus, the same thematic continuities can be seen. The trial of Cassius Clemens, a senator charged with treason for supporting Pescennius Niger in the civil war, is framed explicitly around *parrhesia* (75[74].9.1-3). His response to treason charges was to speak frankly (ἐπαρρησιάσατο, 75[74].9.1). Clemens said that he was just trying to stay alive, and that anyone would have done the same thing. Severus admired his frankness (τῆς παρρησίας θαυμάσας, 75[74].9.3) and spared him execution; Clemens was exiled and allowed to keep half of his property. The exploration of *parrhēsia* in a legal setting is a clear continuation of a theme from earlier in the *Roman History*. Already there are links to Tiberius, and the *parrhēsia* of informers during trials. In comparison, the Clemens scene is entirely respectable. Clemens was allowed to speak frankly in a legal setting, and was rewarded for doing so. This occurred even though he had been involved in an open insurrection against Severus, the one reason acknowledged by Maecenas as an acceptable reason for executing a senator (52.31.10).

The most direct parallel comes from Dio's account of Claudius, towards the end of the fully surviving text. In 42 CE Claudius faced an attempted uprising led by Camillus Scribonianus. Dio briefly records its failure (60.15.1-4) before supplying much greater detail of its consequences (60.15.5-16.8). Amid the broad summary of the treason charges which follow, Dio reports two specific individuals who

⁸⁹ Or the empire; it makes little difference to the sense of praise.

were remembered for their frankness. The relevant case here is Galaesus, a freedman of Camillus.⁹⁰ When asked what he would have done had the uprising succeeded, he answered frankly (ἐπαρρησιάσατο), saying that he would have stood behind his master and kept quiet. The response achieved nothing. Dio's conclusion to the trials paints a stark picture of life under Claudius: the only thing that Galaesus could achieve was dying well, 'since virtue was not recognised in any way other than a noble death,' ὥστ' ἀρετὴν μηκέτ' ἄλλο μηδὲν ἢ τὸ γενναίως ἀποθανεῖν νομίζεσθαι (60.16.7). In an environment of tyranny, *parrhēsia* once again loses its value. This is perhaps not as extreme as the frank speech of informers under Tiberius, but it creates a damning image of Claudius. Even admirable *parrhēsia* could only have an effect as a response to an inevitable execution.

The links between the two trial scenes are clear. The trials of both Galaesus and Cassius Clemens took place in the aftermath of military uprisings, but they give very different impressions of Claudius and Septimius Severus. Severus tried a senator whose *parrhēsia* ensures that his deserved punishment is at least lenient.⁹¹ Claudius is quite the opposite. In the emperor's obsession with attacking anyone associated with Camillus (60.16.7), *parrhēsia* becomes a tool which can secure a reputation, but nothing more. It was used not by senators, but by a freedman.⁹² During Claudius' reprisals, members of the elite were instead tortured (60.15.6). The same idea underpins both, connecting them back to the positive frankness seen in book 52. A monarchical system has the potential to enable a beneficial form of *parrhēsia*, as seen under Severus. But the potential for frank speech to be ineffective or disruptive remained, and was activated by Claudius' corruption.

Dio's Severus is a tyrannical figure for many scholars. It is a view which is based on the assumption that the surviving text represents Dio's full judgement of his reign. Though it is often acknowledged

⁹⁰ The second is the wife of Caecina Paetus, Arria. After Paetus refuses to speak in the trials, Arria is remembered for a bold remark as she committed suicide, urging her husband to do the same (60.14.4-6).

⁹¹ Following Maecenas (52.31.9).

⁹² An idea reinforced by the silence of the senator Paetus which precedes the trial.

that his portrayal is not straightforwardly negative, the attacks are seen as more prominent.⁹³ The two examples fall into that pattern. It has been suggested that we should see Clemens as a representation of Dio's own difficult senatorial position, stuck in a world in which senators can have little control over their actions.⁹⁴ So too Alan Gowing has described Dio's summary of Severus as typical for an emperor 'for whom he did not particularly care'.⁹⁵ And it is true that there are moments during his reign when Severus is tyrannical; this is someone who can be described as showing none of the traits of a good ruler whatsoever after the defeat of Albinus in 197 (76[75].7.4). But when these two passages are reframed against the portrayal of *parrhēsia* in the *Roman History*, this image becomes more complex. Against a backdrop of Ciceronian disruption or Augustan openness, the Clemens trial becomes an example of how Severus could treat the elite admirably, at least on some occasions. In his everyday approach to ruling, Severus was comparable to the very best emperors. Within the surviving narrative, such occasions may look out of place. But the *Epitome* cannot be assumed to have preserved a full picture. As far as the *Roman History* goes, the moments of praise are not exceptions in an otherwise negative portrayal of Severus, but instead very much in keeping with a consistent use of *parrhēsia* in the characterisation of imperial activity. We do not know the balance of Severus' character in the original *Roman History*, but we can say that these examples of *parrhēsia* compare very favourably to his predecessors.

Dio's Contemporary History

When scholars have approached Dio's contemporary history, whether as a historical source or more recently as a conclusion to a literary undertaking, they have done so with an assumption that it can be trusted. This chapter has argued the very opposite. The issue of the text's epitomised state has not been ignored, but the challenges it presents are widely understated. It is argued that Dio's narrative

⁹³ Leading some scholars to see Severus as one of the tyrants of the *Roman History*. See recently Juntula 2016; Madsen 2016: 154-57. A more restrained characterisation of Severus as 'insufficiently heroic' for anyone trying to praise the Severans (Kemezis 2014: 146) seems more reasonable, though is still difficult to justify fully.

⁹⁴ Kemezis 2012: 403.

⁹⁵ Gowing 1992: 28.

may not exist in full, but we still have a clear indication of what he thought about his own lifetime. Two general forms of defence exist. Either Dio's narrative conforms to the general Severan historical context, or the nature of the epitomisation means that we can be confident about having Dio's own words. As outlined in the introduction to this thesis, the first position is hardly tenable. It is no cause for celebration that Dio agrees with himself.⁹⁶ The second approach is just as flawed. The preservation of text is a very different thing from that of a narrative.

The survival of the text through the *Epitome* and the *Excerpta* has resulted in what looks like a coherent narrative. This impression is highly deceptive. The process of abbreviation has eliminated parts of Dio's text which cannot be reconstructed, and has altered the thematic focus of Dio's account in ways which cannot be accounted for. The effect of this intervention, as seen in the reign of Macrinus, should not be understated. Xiphilinus produces a form of summary of the *Roman History* which marginalises Dio's specifically Roman concerns. When something as fundamental as the emperor's equestrian status is not considered important enough to preserve, it is unavoidably clear that the *Epitome's* interests are very different from Dio's. Put bluntly, we do not have Dio's Severan stance on his lifetime, but a simplified version which is more interested in universally applicable exempla relevant to a Byzantine audience. Nor can it be assumed that the individual preserved scenes bore the same relative significance in the original narrative. Dio's Severan narrative may now resemble a litany of complaints against Severus, interspersed with occasional moments of balance. But we simply do not know whether the quarter or so of extant text is representative of Dio's full opinion.

It is here that the second half of this chapter becomes important. Gaining a nuanced perspective of how the contemporary books portray Roman politics is not possible from reading them in isolation. As the case-study of *parrhēsia* shows, however, a greater understanding of individual moments can be gained through comparison with the fully extant books. Dio's model of destructive government in Rome is consistent from the Republic to the Principate. The political context may change, but the underlying use of this theme stays much the same: when self-interest turns frank speech into a series of insults, it can only harm the public good. Conversely, a good emperor provides an environment

⁹⁶ See above, 30-31.

which allows *parrhēsia* to be wholly beneficial to the state. This framework continues into the epitomised narrative as well. Where *parrhēsia* survives, its function is wholly consistent with its earlier deployment. In the right constitutional circumstances, when the right people behave in the right way, then public life functions to the advantage of public interests. In the case of *parrhēsia*, that means imperial senators giving their frank opinions to an appreciative ruler; change any one of those aspects, and *parrhēsia* contributes to both republican and imperial tyranny.

To emphasise again, *parrhēsia* is only one example of a theme, but it demonstrates a thematic coherence which provides a useful basis for investigating Dio's contemporary books. This does not make it any easier to reconstruct what Dio thought. The positive association with *parrhēsia* at the end of Severus' reign does not indicate an overall attitude, any more than his attacks against senators. But it does provide a means of understanding the narrative methods used to characterise Severus at certain moments. The connections to the Agrippa/Maecenas debate show that this approach can be extended considerably. When book 52 is thought of as a transition point in the narrative, it becomes a central node in the network of interacting themes in Dio's approach to historiography. The extant contemporary history is made up of individual fragmentary scenes, but they are firmly tethered to a solid context, by the web of thematic links to the earlier books. The assessment of Dio's construction of a contemporary narrative world does not therefore have to rely on circular assumptions about its historicity; it can be measured against a secure literary control.

The Eyewitness Historian

Commodus and the Ostrich

In 192, Commodus held lavish games in Rome. They lasted for two weeks. Dio's report consists of a series of displays of excess from the emperor (73[72].18-21).¹ Commodus killed wild beasts using bows, shooting them from the safety of a gallery erected around the arena, only taking on animals from a closer range when they had been safely subdued. He even fought as a gladiator, holding his wooden sword in his left hand with great pride, and inevitably defeating his opponents; all the while, he claimed 250,000 denarii a day as payment for his efforts. The other gladiators were subjected to extremely violent combat, which went beyond even their own accustomed bloodthirstiness. Such was his excess, Dio writes, that the crowd genuinely believed the emperor would start shooting arrows at them too, impersonating Hercules and his combat with the Stymphalian birds. Indeed, his delight in Hercules extended to the point that he tied together people who could not walk, pretending that they were serpentine giants, and slew them with a club.²

Within this account of festivities, Dio makes an emphatic confirmation that he is now present as an observer and protagonist in the narrative of the *Roman History*. Earlier in the reign of Commodus, he says quite briefly that he is now speaking from his own experience, as a witness of the conspiracies against the emperor.³ At the games, he presents a much more detailed justification of a scene which might otherwise be an affront to the dignity of history: he was present, and so will record everything, as the one who can write the best and most accurate account (73[72].18.3-4). Dio had also previously appeared in his own narrative as part of a first-person Senate. Again, the comment is a short one, as

¹ The account begins rather suddenly, with what happened on the first day (καὶ ἐν μὲν τῇ πρώτῃ ἡμέρᾳ, 73[72].81.1). It seems likely that some kind of introduction to the games to provide context to this 'first day' has been lost. For an overview of descriptions of games in the *Roman History*, see Newbold 1975.

² A similar account of the games is found in Hdn 1.15; the *HA* has several instances of the emperor fighting as a gladiator, e.g. *Comm.* 15-3-16.9.

³ 'I say this, and the rest, not from the accounts of other people, but from personal observation.' (λέγω δὲ ταῦτα τε καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ οὐκ ἐξ ἀλλοτριᾶς ἔτι παραδόσεως ἀλλ' ἐξ οἰκείας ἤδη τηρήσεως, 73[72].4.2.)

Commodus orders ‘us, our wives and our children’ (ἡμᾶς τε καὶ τὰς γυναῖκας ἡμῶν καὶ τοὺς παῖδας) to give him two gold pieces on his birthday every year (73[72].16.3). In part, these abbreviated personal notices are almost certainly due to the epitomisation of Dio’s text. It is quite likely that there would originally have been some longer comment on his early career, and at least his entry into the Senate. Whatever the cause, the effect on the narrative is striking. Dio’s clearest entry into the extant contemporary history is in one of its most famous and bizarre scenes.

At the close of Dio’s depiction of the games, Commodus killed an ostrich (73[72].21.1-2). With its head in his left hand and a bloody sword in his right, he walked over to where ‘we’ – Dio and the other senators – were sitting. Gesturing at them, he moved his head in a such way that made it clear the Senate risked the same fate. It is here that Dio enters the scene as an individual:

κἂν συχνοὶ παραχρῆμα ἐπ’ αὐτῷ γελάσαντες ἀπηλλάγησαν 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 γελαῖν ἔλεγχον ἀποκρυψώμεθα (73[72].21.2).

And many would have been removed by the sword then and there from laughing at him – for laughter, not distress, overcame us – if I myself had not chewed on some laurel leaves which I took from my garland, and then persuaded other people sitting next to me to do the same, so that by continuously moving our mouths we could hide the evidence that we were laughing.

The episode has often been commented on, used by scholars as an example of Commodus’ tyrannical excess, and the risks faced on a daily basis by senators who served him.⁴ Indeed, the forceful

⁴ The scene serves as an introduction to Mary Beard’s wider discussion of Roman laughter (Beard 2014: 1-8). It has been used to claim that Rome was entering a political crisis just as Dio entered the Senate (Espinosa Ruiz 1982: 2-4), or to add colour to the narrative of Commodus’ reign (Goldsworthy 2009: 55; Potter 2014: 92). Elsewhere, it ranges from an example of the emperor’s attempts to win over the masses (Toner 2014: 29-30), or an aspect of Dio’s dismissal of his ridiculous performances (Hekster 2002: 55), to a more literary demonstration of the emperor’s madness (Hose 2011: 117-18).

characterisation of Commodus as especially deserving of censure is evident. The threat posed by Commodus in the *Roman History* is a universal one. Dio introduces the anecdote by saying that fear of the emperor was common to everyone, both ‘us’ – the senators – and everyone else.⁵ But it would be a mistake to conclude that this is only about the emperor.

The ostrich scene is an ideal place to begin a discussion of Dio’s construction of Roman politics, and its modern reception. Three elements from this episode are important factors in a scheme of self-presentation which has led to Dio’s reputation as a reliable source. The first, in many ways, is obvious. Dio’s self-location as an eyewitness is integral to his use in scholarship, and the ostrich scene is just the first of many detailed examples of his direct participation in the events he narrates. But there is a more complex method of establishing his legitimacy as a historian at work. Just as Dio’s engagement in the narrative meets a thematic ideal of senatorial behaviour, so too his contemporary books function as an ideal response to his own historical method and understanding. Mallan has suggested that Dio’s resistance to the temptation to laugh is an indication of his restraint, and unwillingness to rush into a frank reaction.⁶ But this is only true of Dio the protagonist. As narrator, Dio is able to reveal his true reaction, even if it was hidden at the time. In doing so, he bridges a methodological divide which is common to Greek historiography, and a frequent feature of the *Roman History*: the difference between *logoi* and *erga*; what is said versus what is done; appearance as opposed to reality.⁷ According to Dio, the great challenge of writing imperial history is the impossibility of identifying *logoi* and *erga* in the past, since no one is ever willing to challenge the reports propagated by the regime.⁸ Much like the Agrippa/Maecenas debate in the transition from Republic to Principate in the preceding chapter, Dio’s entry into the narrative resolves that tension. He becomes his own ideal historian.

⁵ οὗτος μὲν ὁ φόβος πᾶσι κοινὸς καὶ ἡμῖν καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἦν (73[72].21.1).

⁶ Mallan 2016: 273,

⁷ The distinction is famously Thucydidean, as set out extensively in Parry 1971. See n. 11 for scholarship on Thucydidean aspects of the *Roman History*.

⁸ 53.19, discussed in greater detail below.

Dio's historiographical persona forms the basis for his claims to legitimacy as a witness of events. The second point ties this into the other main cause for his appreciation by scholars, his place in the Senate. In the ostrich scene, Dio is not just sitting with the senators. This is more than a simple reflection of his social rank. He creates a sense of unity within the Senate, in which its members undergo the same experiences, as well as sharing the same status. Dio himself is at its heart, sharing in the same urge to laugh. Even so, Dio stands out from the rest of the crowd. His decision to chew on his laurels represents the peak of shared laughter, his own desperate effort to find anything that will mask his feelings. The collective response of the Senate is thus focalised through Dio as an individual. He defines what senatorial experience means, as his roles as both narrator and protagonist coincide once again.

Narrowing the focus to Dio individually introduces the final point. Gleason has argued that Dio's efforts to hide his reactions to Commodus reflect a necessary and passive endurance of tyranny.⁹ Within the wider thematic context of the *Roman History*, however, his actions appear much more positive. The links with book 52 are clear. In threatening the Senate, Commodus clearly ignores that ideal, in a show of contempt for the men who should be acting as his advisors.¹⁰ Dio behaves quite differently. He is able to see the reaction of the other senators, and he responds to it in a way which is fundamentally concerned with protecting public interests. Agrippa warns Augustus in book 52 that tyranny leads to everyone following the character of the ruler, and thinking that other people's losses are their own gains (52.5.2). Dio the protagonist resisted this model. He may not have confronted Commodus directly in the amphitheatre, but nor did he selfishly allow his senatorial peers to risk death. This is not therefore a simple case of Dio preventing unnecessary deaths. Dio does not only appear as an embodiment of senatorial experience, but also of senatorial virtue; in discussing the

⁹ Gleason 2011: 45; see also Millar 1964: 18.

¹⁰ As per the advice of Maecenas. Commodus' behaviour contravenes the overall scheme of treating the Senate with respect (52.32-34), and the summary advice that Augustus should do what he would want another emperor to do, were he a subject (52.39.1).

restraints on senatorial freedom imposed by Commodus, Dio presents himself as their rightful guardian.

Importantly, his position is not limited to the immediate context of this one episode, or the contemporary history. It is clear from the ostrich scene that all three of these aspects are closely connected, and mutually reinforcing. Dio's involvement in the narrative justifies his depiction of a senatorial experience, while the homogenous nature of that experience confirms that Dio really is aware of the full extent of *erga* behind the *logoi*. They also build on a series of links which bind the contemporary books to the remainder of the *Roman History*. The themes which Dio uses to present his own qualities are well established earlier in the narrative; so too, his methodological approach to historiography. Dio appears as a leading figure in the Senate, whose understanding of history allows him to produce a reliable guide to senatorial life under the Severans. The resulting self-formulation in the contemporary books coincides directly with the modern justification for trusting his narrative.

Analysing Dio's self-portrayal is more than an exercise in exploring characterisation. As the idealised protagonist in his account, Dio's appearances in the *Roman History* offer considerable insight into how its narrative world is constructed. His self-location at the heart of the Senate has a direct impact on the appearance of Severan political life. The social conflict which underpins modern reconstructions of the period stems from a moralising and simplistic model of political action. The creation of an image of Dio as a senatorial champion is crude in its exclusionary tendencies. Put simply, anyone who disagreed with Dio cannot be senatorial, and becomes tyrannical in his account. The army is only the most pronounced example of a strict polarity between legitimacy and corruption. The acceptance of Dio's credibility also entails the acceptance of his worldview. The depiction of Rome by a consular eyewitness is widely seen as indicative of senatorial reactions to emperors during Dio's lifetime. That is all due to Dio's assertions of his own importance.

The Ideal Historian

The basic outline of Dio's historiographical scheme in the *Roman History* has long been identified. He is well known for his Thucydidean approach.¹¹ Many events are explained in terms of φύσις, human nature, and (as noted above) he frequently sets up comparisons through the traditional opposition between *logoi* and *erga*. As is particularly clear in the contemporary history, Dio shows the same regard for the importance of eyewitness testimony. There are several occasions when he explicitly confirms his presence, with a comment explaining that he saw or heard things personally. And there are numerous assertions of his ἀκρίβεια (*akribeia* hereafter), that Thucydidean ideal of historical exactness. This is by no means the full extent of Dio's historiographical model. Recent scholarship has greatly expanded the list of possible influences on his style, making it abundantly clear that he was more than just an acolyte of Thucydides.¹² My purpose here is not to challenge this approach. Instead, I will use it as a foundation to move beyond questions of how Dio wrote, and to think instead about how his decisions affect his appearance, as both narrator and senatorial protagonist.

My starting point is another of the contemporary history's stranger scenes. At the end of Caracalla's reign, Dio presents an episode which crystallises his take on Thucydidean historiography. After relating a catalogue of omens leading up to the emperor's death, Dio then describes the several insulting names which were applied to them. He concludes his record as follows:

καὶ τὰ μὲν ἐκείνου, ὅπως ποτ' ἂν καὶ ὀνομάσῃ τις αὐτόν, οὕτως ἔσχεν: ἔμοι δὲ δὴ, καὶ πρὶν ἐς τὴν μοναρχίαν καταστῆναι, προεδηλώθη τρόπον τινὰ παρὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ὅτι καὶ ταῦτα γράψοιμι. ἐν γὰρ πεδίῳ μεγάλῳ τινὶ πᾶσαν τὴν τῶν Ῥωμαίων δύναμιν ἐξωπλισμένην ὄρᾶν τεθνηκότος αὐτοῦ ἤδη ἔδοξα, καὶ ἐνταῦθα τὸν Σεουήρον ἐπὶ τε γηλόφου καὶ ἐπὶ βήματος ὑψηλοῦ καθήμενον διαλέγεσθαί τι αὐτοῖς, καί με προστάντα ἰδὼν ὅπως τῶν λεγομένων

¹¹ The identification and discussion of Thucydidean elements in the *Roman History* goes back to the nineteenth century, e.g. Litsch 1893; Kyhnitzsch 1894. For more recent discussion, see Freyburger-Galland 1997: 189-200, 2003; Rees 2011: 62-86; Lachenaud 2016.

¹² Papers gathered in Fromentin et al. 2016: 269-414 ('Les forms de la narration historique') cover a wide range of historiographical approaches.

ἀκούσω, ‘δεῦρο,’ ἔφη, ‘Δίων, ἐνταῦθα πλησίον πρόσελθε, ἵνα πάντα καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα καὶ τὰ γιγνόμενα καὶ μάθης ἀκριβῶς καὶ συγγραφῆς.’ τοιοῦτος μὲν ὁ τοῦ Ταραύτου καὶ βίος καὶ ὄλεθρος ἐγένετο (79[78].10.1-3).

Such were the events of this man’s life, whatever you may call him. But even before he had taken up the Principate, it was made clear to me by his father, in a way, that I would also write about them. After [Severus’] death, I thought I saw the whole Roman force in arms, in the middle of a large field, and Severus there too, sitting on a wooden platform on a mound, saying something to them. When he saw me coming over to hear what he was saying, he said, ‘Come here, Dio, come closer, so that you can learn accurately everything that is said and done, and write it down.’ Such was the life and death of Tarautas.

This is Dio in full. The episode is preserved near the beginning of *Vat. Gr.* 1288, which opens shortly before Caracalla’s death; in contrast to other parts of the contemporary history, this scene can be located securely within its immediate narrative structure. It marks the very end of Caracalla’s reign. Dio briefly notes that his death was followed by those of the conspirators, and then his friends, before introducing Macrinus. It is a striking collection of the full range of Thucydidean historiographical practice. Dio is the investigator, and receives assurances that he will write a fully ἀκριβῶς account of everything that was both said and done. It is made even more striking by its position at the close of Dio’s Caracallan narrative, as a retrospective assertion of his accuracy.

At the same time, however, this dream is distinctly un-Thucydidean. Dio’s retelling of his dream is impossible to verify. The result is a moment which seems to be especially revealing of his approach to writing contemporary history. The reader is presented with an indisputable *ergon*. Dio did indeed write a history of Caracalla, which has taken up the full span of book 78[77]. In turn, the clear existence of a product invites an acceptance of the explanation behind it, which can be neither confirmed nor disproved. If Dio’s dream is believed, he reinforces his claim to *akribeia*. But if not, the entire episode becomes nothing more than a *logos*. Of course, it is difficult to tell if this is a deliberate problematisation of historical accuracy as a concept. By this point in the narrative, there have been

several instances of Dio presenting himself as a reliable witness and interpreter of omens,¹³ which might suggest that it was a genuine aspect of his view of the world.¹⁴

Regardless of the intention, this scene complicates the image of Dio as a historian. There are very few scholars who would accept a dream as an indication of an author's reliability, but that is what Dio demands here. The same language of eyewitness testimony and historical accuracy which proliferates in his political narrative occurs in his engagement with the divine. When he reports a series of increasingly implausible uprisings in Asia Minor under Elagabalus, culminating in a wool-worker trying to become emperor, it is his presence as the intermediary which confirms their accuracy.¹⁵ This ought to stand as a firm warning that we are not dealing with someone who sees the Severan world in anachronistically objective terms.

However removed Dio's engagement with dreams might be from modern attitudes, it is entirely in keeping with his own approach. A much better known example of a methodological statement is found in his account of the transition from Republic to Principate.¹⁶ An explicit moment of

¹³ Not least in the catalogue leading up to Caracalla's death (79[78].7-8). After the first of three summary phrases ('he endured such an end to his life', τοιοῦτῳ μὲν τέλει ἐχρήσατο βιούς, 79[78].6.5), Dio begins the list by immediately focalising the narrative through the many wondrous tales which occur 'to me' at this point in the narrative (καὶ μοι καὶ ἐνταῦθα τοῦ λόγου θαυμάσαι πάμπολλα ἐπέρχεται, 79[78].7.1). This includes an omen which involved Dio himself, in which Caracalla predicted his own death in an aside to the historian after a dinner (79[78].8.4-6). Throughout, Dio is the authority who both identifies the omens, and asserts their truth.

¹⁴ An overview of earlier scholarship on Dio's belief in the reality of dreams and omens can be found in Swan 2004: 8-13; see also Langford 2013: 55-63 for their politicising aspects.

¹⁵ 80[79].7.1-3. He instructs the reader not to doubt what he has said (καὶ μηδεὶς ἀπιστήσῃ τῷ λεχθέντι); his presence as governor of Pergamon and Smyrna ensures that he wrote everything accurately (ἀκριβῶσας ἔγραψα). The scene supports Osgood 2016, in which Elagabalus is viewed as a socially disruptive force at every turn.

¹⁶ Kemezis 2014: 95 n. 9 lists a selection of earlier discussions of 'probably the most commented-on methodological passage in Dio'. See more recently e.g. Coudry 2016: 296; Lachenaud 2016: 401-402, 412-14; Marincola 2017: 402-403.

periodisation distinguishes the process of writing the history of the two forms of government. Dio claims that under the Republic, people knew what was happening, and so it is easy to come by reliable narratives. This changes in the Principate. People are instead suspicious of everything, convinced that everything either said or done (καὶ γὰρ λέγεσθαι καὶ πράττεσθαι πάντα, 53.19.3) is aimed at pleasing the person in charge. The result is a total inability to distinguish actual *erga* from mere *logoi*:

καὶ κατὰ τοῦτο πολλὰ μὲν οὐ γινόμενα θρυλεῖται, πολλὰ δὲ καὶ πάνυ συμβαίνοντα ἄγνοεῖται, πάντα δὲ ὡς εἰπεῖν ἄλλως πως ἢ ὡς πράττεται διαθροεῖται (53.19.4).

Because of this, many things which don't happen are spread about, while many things which definitely do occur go unknown, and virtually everything is reported differently from what is done.

At this point, Dio claims to be reticent about passing any judgement on the *logoi* which make up the history of the early Principate. While Dio is willing to offer his own opinion, it is specifically to counter the wild rumour, τὸ θρυλούμενον, which has replaced real events in the historical record (53.19.5-6). The same concepts are present in his dream about Severus, but to very different effect. The emperor's words provide an assurance that Dio would learn two things: everything that was said, and everything which happened (πάντα καὶ τὰ λεγόμενα καὶ τὰ γινόμενα, 79[78].10.2). When Dio reports that we told he would both learn and record everything accurately (καὶ μάθης ἀκριβῶς καὶ συγγραφῆς), it is not simply a claim for *akribēia*. It is an assertion that Dio is able to access both sides of the Thucydidean divide. The dream serves as confirmation that he has resolved what he himself views as the fundamental difficulty with writing imperial history.

These two examples have been deliberately chosen from parts of the text which survive in full. They provide the necessary evidential base to establish the historiographical framework of the *Roman History*, and the contemporary books within it. As such, they also allow comparison with passages which are preserved in more fragmentary form. The most explicit statement of Dio's engagement with the *logoi/erga* formulation occurs very shortly before the ostrich scene with which I began. It isn't fully clear how much text has been omitted between the two passages by Xiphilinus, but they

do seem to part of the same narrative of 192.¹⁷ As seen above, Dio famously apologises to his reader for including an account of Commodus' excesses, in case he seems to be sullyng the dignity of history.¹⁸ The justification is what matters here. Dio explicitly writes that he felt obliged to describe everything because he was present, and saw and heard and said everything which he narrates.¹⁹ This is followed by a more extensive promise to write an especially detailed contemporary history, even in comparison to his earlier books:

καὶ μέντοι καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα τὰ ἐπ' ἐμοῦ πραχθέντα καὶ λεπτοργήσω 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 (73[72].18.4).

And indeed I will reproduce and narrate everything that happened in my lifetime in more detail than earlier events. I was there when they happened, and I know of no one else among those able to set out a fitting account who has done so as accurately as I have.

As with the earlier passages, this could read as a fairly simple justification of writing contemporary history: I was there, and so I know what happened. In those terms, including all the detail is very much in keeping with the precision demanded by *akribeia*. Moreover, the reference to others who are able to write a history, but who have not done so in the same close detail, *διηκριβωκότα*, places Dio within a traditional scheme of competitive historiography. Dio's narrative is simply better than anyone else's. But there is more going on beneath this superficial level.

Much as in the dream about Septimius Severus recorded after Caracalla's death, Dio also engages with one of the central ideas of his own historiographical approach. In the later scene, Dio's ability to reconcile *logoi* and *erga* is conferred externally. In book 73[72], he is much more direct in claiming it

¹⁷ 73[72].18-21 relates the games held by Commodus. In present form, the ostrich scene is almost its conclusion. It is obviously uncertain how climactic it was in Dio's original structure, though Xiphilinus does seem keen to maintain details of games and animal hunts elsewhere (as above, 60-63).

¹⁸ κηλιδοῦν τὸν τῆς ἱστορίας ὄγκον (73[72].18.3); see above, 85 for the context.

¹⁹ παρῶν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ καὶ εἶδον ἕκαστα καὶ ἤκουσα καὶ ἐλάλησα (73[72].18.3).

for himself. It is difficult to render the full effect of καὶ λεπτοργήσω καὶ λεπτολογήσω in translation; ‘reproduce and narrate’, suggested above, is a fairly unsatisfactory attempt to maintain a contrast between verbs which in English carry much the same meaning. In the Greek, however, Dio builds explicitly on the distinction between *erga* and *logoi*. Dio’s formulation here is distinct. Both verbs used are rare: in total, there are fewer than twenty attestations combined which pre-date Dio.²⁰ The two are not found together anywhere else. While the dream from Severus suggests control over both Thucydidean elements, in the account of Commodus Dio claims it directly in his own narratorial voice. His justification for describing scandalous episodes quickly becomes an explicit proclamation of his historiographical mastery.²¹

Dio’s self-formulation as the ideal *akribēs* historian is thus closely connected to the underlying structure of the *Roman History*. It invites a reassessment of his claims about the inception of his historical project, discussed in the introduction to this wider investigation. After describing the assassination of Commodus on New Year’s Eve, 192, Dio inserts a biographical aside about his journey towards becoming a writer of history (73[72].23). The details of this passage can be found almost universally in introductions to Dio’s life and career.²² To summarise quickly here: he first wrote a pamphlet about the dreams and omens which led up to the accession of Septimius Severus, followed

²⁰ λεπτοργέω occurs once in Plutarch’s *Lives* (*Vit. Aem.* 37.4) and once in Diodorus Siculus (17.115.1). λεπτολογέω never appears in earlier historiography or biography, but is found three times in Lucian (*J. conf.* 10; *Bis Acc.* 34; *Prom.* 16). The only Athenian attestation is from Aristophanes’ *Clouds* (320).

²¹ A comparison with a passage from the very start of the *Roman History* suggests that this is more complex than a reassertion of historical accuracy. The full proem to the *Roman History* does not survive, but there are extant fragments. The longest, fr. 1.1.2, includes Dio’s defence against the charge that using highly stylised language will prevent him from writing the truth. He responds, ‘I strove to be equally exact, as far as I could, with both,’ ἐγὼ γὰρ ἀμφοτέρω, ὡς οἶόν τε ἦν, ὁμοίως ἀκριβῶσαι ἐσπούδασα. This early formulation of *akribeia* is not just a matter of describing things accurately, but also in an impressive literary manner. In this formulation, it may be that Dio’s competitive self-positioning as a more detailed author also suggests that he is more stylistically impressive as well.

²² See above, 41.

by an account of the ‘wars and strife’ which followed. When this first historical work received praise, Dio decided to write a full history of Rome. He tells the reader that the whole project lasted twenty-two years: ten spent collecting material, and then twelve writing it up.²³

Away from the question of reconstructing Dio’s literary career, this section is closely linked to his self-portrayal as a reliable historian. At the centre of this overview of Dio’s literary career is the transition into writing a large-scale history of the entire Roman past. Although there is no specific engagement with *akribeia*, Dio includes a series of elements which are familiar from other scenes in the contemporary history:

καὶ αὐτῷ καὶ ἐκεῖνος πεμφθέντι παρ’ ἐμοῦ ἐντυχῶν πολλά μοι καὶ καλὰ ἀντεπέστειλε. ταῦτ’ οὖν ἐγὼ τὰ γράμματα πρὸς ἐσπέραν ἤδη λαβὼν κατέδαρθον, καὶ μοι καθεύδοντι προσέταξε τὸ δαιμόνιον ἱστορίαν γράφειν. καὶ οὕτω δὴ ταῦτα περὶ ὧν νῦν καθίσταμαι ἔγραψα. καὶ ἐπειδὴ γε τοῖς τε ἄλλοις καὶ αὐτῷ τῷ Σεουήρῳ μάλιστα ἤρεσε, τότε δὴ καὶ τᾶλλα πάντα τὰ τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις προσήκοντα συνθεῖναι ἐπεθύμησα (73[72].23.2-3).

He read a copy I had sent him, and sent back many fine comments in reply. I got his letter when it was nearly night and went to bed, and while I was asleep the deity told me to write history. And so I wrote the narrative with which I am currently concerned. And when it met with favour from various people, and from Severus himself in particular, I decided to put together an account of everything else concerning the Romans.

One point immediately stands out in relation to the fully extant conclusion to Dio’s account of Caracalla’s reign. As with the dream about Septimius Severus, and his message that Dio would write an accurate narrative of Caracalla (79[78].10), it was a vision in a dream which inspired the inception

²³ 73[72].23.

of the *Roman History* as a whole, this time from his patron deity *Tychē*.²⁴ As John Marincola observes, having dreams as the motivation to write history is unique in the ancient world to Dio.²⁵

Dio's autobiographical claims have largely been accepted at face value. In terms of his political career, the details regarding his two shorter works have been used to reconstruct a potential rise to prominence under Septimius Severus. It has been suggested that the account of the omens leading up to Severus' accession brought him to the emperor's attention. It has then been reasonably argued that the 'wars and great strife' refer to the events of 193, and possibly the civil wars which followed as Septimius Severus secured his position as emperor. Dio's report of the favour it received from Severus is then used to argue that this was essentially a piece of pro-Severan propaganda, which secured Dio's position as one of his favourites.²⁶ Moreover, the confidence in Dio's autobiographical statements has led to the assumption that remnants of these (allegedly) propagandistic works can still be found in the *Roman History* itself.

The justification for the idea that Dio's earlier pamphlet can be traced in the text of the *Roman History* demonstrates both the limitations of looking exclusively at the contemporary history, and the eagerness of scholars to build on what Dio himself tells us. The main evidence put forward is Dio's account of Severus' *adventus* into Rome in 193 (75[74].1.3-5). The scene in the *Roman History* is one of great festivity. The army proceeds in glittering order through the streets, while the people look on in awe, and the senators process in full order. Other writers are much less positive. Both Herodian and the *Historia Augusta* emphasise the threat of armed soldiers marching into the city.²⁷ When Severus is then immediately criticised for not living up to the early promises of his reign, and killing senators despite saying he would not, it is seen as an attempt by Dio to correct an overly laudatory

²⁴ On Dio and *Tychē*, see Schmidt 1999: 98-102; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 210-13. Schmidt 2000 argues that Dio's anecdotes emphasise divine power. If so, it is a power which Dio is able to understand and explain with consistent accuracy, within the *Roman History*'s specific environs.

²⁵ Marincola 1997: 47-51.

²⁶ On the two works generally, Schmidt 1997: 2605-18.

²⁷ Hdn. 2.14.1; *HA Sept. Sev.* 7.1-4, where Severus and all his associates are repeatedly described as *armati*.

narrative which he no longer wishes to support. Dio's later critical tone is the more accurate indication of his true thoughts.²⁸

In the previous chapter I have argued that we cannot think in terms of an overall view of Severus in the *Roman History* (due not only to the state of the extant text). The interpretation is unsatisfactory on two counts. On a straightforward level, it fails to account for the positive traits attributed to Severus at the end of his reign (77[76].16-17). More importantly, it is unnecessary to explain away positive descriptions. Few of Dio's emperors are entirely tyrannical, or entirely praiseworthy. Emperors such as Claudius, Vespasian and Hadrian show a mix of traits, and display both tyrannical and virtuous behaviour; even Trajan has to keep his significant character flaws in check (68.7.4).²⁹ Not only is the suggestion that Severus must be one extreme or the other not required, it would in fact run contrary to the earlier narrative.

Moving away from a historicising interpretation of Dio's account, it is possible to read this scene as part of his wider programme of self-construction. It follows a number of patterns from the Severus dream. Purely in terms of narrative structure, both scenes occur after the death of an emperor, and are closely associated with catalogues of omens.³⁰ In its encouragement to accept Dio as a legitimate interpreter of the divine, the foundational story of the *Roman History* has much the same effect too. The prophetic aspect of Fortune's message is presented in a context which proves its accuracy. More than seventy books into the full narrative, it seems hard to question the outcome. As in the case of Dio's visitation from Severus, there is a strong invitation to then believe the explanation as much as the result.³¹

²⁸ Rubin 1980: 41-84; see also Rantala 2016: 159-61; Langford 2013: 51, 55-63; Birley 1988: 103-104.

²⁹ Tiberius is an extreme in his transition from good rule into tyranny. Davenport 2014 explores the characterisation of Vitellius as a contrasting mixture of virtue and vice.

³⁰ Omens for Commodus' death immediately follow the dream from Fortune (73[72].24); those for Caracalla's immediately precede the one with Septimius Severus (79[78].7-8),

³¹ A third example of this self-confirming, retrospective prophecy concludes the *Roman History*. Dio dreams that *Tychē* tells him to end his narrative with a quotation from the *Iliad*, which he does (80².5.3, *Il.* 11.163-64).

In the context of *akribeia*, there is an additional force to the more mundane reasons behind Dio's decision to write history. Scholars have largely accepted Dio's version of events, and have often therefore made Severus an important patron of his literary career.³² Within the confines of the narrative, that connection with the emperor is just as significant for Dio's self-presentation. Severus was not merely an eager recipient of Dio's earlier works, but sent back lengthy and particular praise. But this goes beyond finding a welcoming audience. The whole idea of writing the *Roman History* is presented as stemming from the emperor's personal favour. It is a literary undertaking which has an explicit imperial sanction at its point of genesis.³³ The methodological statement in the games under Commodus is clear in presenting Dio's involvement in imperial actions as the justification for the detail he includes, and the basis for accepting his *akribeia*. The excursus on the origins of the *Roman History* takes this further. The very existence of his narrative is offered as proof of Dio's proximity to imperial politics.

In his self-presentation as a Thucydidean historian, Dio brings to mind recent studies of a later Roman writer who has often been held in similarly high regard. Gavin Kelly's engagement with Ammianus Marcellinus has significantly reassessed the autobiographical claims which have underpinned modern faith in the accuracy of his narrative. As Kelly summarises, 'rather than being incomparably revealing, they are calculated to show openly and imply metaphorically the qualities which made Ammianus the definitive historian of his age.'³⁴ I would argue that the same can be said of Dio. His narrative is structured consistently around the methodological difficulty of knowing what really happened, which is made even more challenging after the establishment of a monarchy. Those issues are overcome when Dio enters into the narrative himself. In recounting the origins of the *Roman History*, Dio reasserts his position at the centre of political life. His interaction with the emperor is

³² By way of brief example, Swain 1996: 401; Murison 1999: 7; Hose 2007: 462-63; Madsen 2016: 154; Scott 2018a: 46.

³³ Cf. 46.21, in which Calenus attacks Cicero for writing a history of the Catilinarian conspiracy, which began with his own consulship and went backwards to the reign of Romulus. Dio's historiography is removed from such self-obsession through both its origins and its lengthy account of events before his own lifetime.

³⁴ Kelly 2008: 6. He notes their frequent connection with allusions to other texts; esp. 2-7; 31-35; 65-78.

portrayed in terms which suggest enthusiastic acquaintance between the two men. Within the historiographical framework of the *Roman History*, Dio has been the ideal historian from the day that he decided to undertake writing history at all. In the immediate narrative context, it suggests a confirmation of his earlier claim: that there really was no one who could write as effective an account as Dio himself.

Dio and the Senate

The transition from Dio's self-formulation as a narrator to his self-portrayal as a protagonist in the contemporary history is a natural one. It is personal involvement in the narrative that allows Dio to put into practice the methodological statements about his historiographical approach. In this respect, his use of the first-person singular to confirm the veracity of otherwise questionable events performs the same function found in authors from Thucydides to Procopius.³⁵ Dio was present for the unmasking of the false Sextus Quintilius Condianus, who pretended to be a senator killed by Commodus, only to be revealed as nothing of the sort when Pertinax tried to speak to him in Greek (73[72].7.1).³⁶ So too Dio confirms an omen of silver rain falling from the sky, which he himself used temporarily to plate some bronze coins, only for it to rub off after three days (76[75].4.7). Autopsy remains an important aspect of the historian's craft. There is often an overt connection to political office. Dio knows about the countless adultery charges which went unpursued by Septimius Severus because he could see the records while consul (77[76].16.4), and is able to provide a brief excursus on the history of Pannonia because he had been governor there (49.36.4).

The greatest impact of Dio's autopsy, especially on scholarship which emphasises the historical utility of his contemporary account, occurs away from his individual role. The repeated references to what 'we senators' experienced underpins the modern view of the *Roman History* as an insightful source for reconstructing senatorial life under the Severans.³⁷ There has been an emphasis on Dio's self-portrayal as one figure within a wider collective, who rarely stands out through individual action,

³⁵ For an overview of Thucydides, see Rood 2004: 115-21; for Procopius, Ross 2018: 80-83.

³⁶ The story is the starting point for Gleason 2011.

³⁷ See esp. Scott 2015, 2018a: 3-9 for a recent formulation. For more detail, see above, 25-26.

and who chooses instead to locate himself firmly within a corporate senatorial body.³⁸ But it is also clear that the moments of united senatorial experience are connected to a more individual characterisation. In historiographical terms, there is a continuation of Dio's claims to be able to identify both *logoi* and *erga*, presenting both the appearances forced on the Senate and the realities of their views. More pertinently for this thesis, Dio also shows a tendency to define the collective senatorial experience around his own actions. By shaping his narrative around senatorial unity, Dio becomes its chief representative.

Another, closer look at the story of Commodus and the ostrich brings together the historiographical and senatorial aspects of Dio's self-portrayal, highlighting his credentials as perceptive narrator and well-placed protagonist. The end of the passage is worth quoting again, as its specific construction is key to understanding Dio's position within the scene:

κἂν συχνοὶ παραχρῆμα ἐπ' αὐτῷ γελάσαντες ἀπηλλάγησαν τῷ ξίφει (γέλως γὰρ ἡμᾶς ἀλλ' οὐ λύπη ἔλαβεν), εἰ μὴ δάφνης φύλλα, ἃ ἐκ τοῦ στεφάνου εἶχον, αὐτὸς τε διέτραγον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς πλησίον μου καθημένους διατραγεῖν ἔπεισα, ἵν' ἐν τῇ τοῦ στόματος συνεχεῖ κινήσει τὸν τοῦ γελαῖν ἔλεγχον ἀποκρυψώμεθα (73[72].21.2).

And many would have been removed by the sword then and there from laughing at him – for laughter, not distress, overcame us – if I myself had not chewed on some laurel leaves which I took from my garland, and then persuaded other people sitting next to me to do the same, so that by continuously moving our mouths we could hide the evidence that we were laughing.

Although there is no explicit linguistic engagement with the *logos/ergon* divide, the themes are evident in Dio's report. From an external perspective, it looked as though nothing especially untoward was taking place. The ἔλεγχος was hidden from the emperor's view, a term referring to legal evidence, and highly suggestive of the treason trials which the Senate risked had they shown any hints of rejecting Commodus' authority. Dio is able to reveal both the deception and the reality

³⁸ Kemezis 2012: 402-405; Scott 2018c: 240-45.

underpinning it. His presence in the senatorial seats, and his active participation in the laurel chewing, confirm the legitimacy of his interpretation. This is very much the ideal historian proving his credentials.

At the same time, the ostrich scene presents Dio at the very centre of senatorial experience. In his account of the Senate's reaction, Dio creates what Maud Gleason has called a 'corporate identity'.³⁹ The key is the shifting focalisation of the scene. To begin with, the first-person plural sets out a shared response to the emperor. It was laughter which overtook us – ἡμᾶς – as a group.⁴⁰ Dio's individual response then follows, as he persuades the other senators to follow him in chewing on their laurel garlands. With it, action enters the first-person singular: αὐτός τε διέτραγον καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς πλησίον μου καθημένους διατραγεῖν ἔπεισα – I myself chewed, and persuaded the others sitting near me to chew. Once that singular action has been taken, the Senate returns to its first-person plural unity, with ἀποκρυψώμεθα. The indirect object is only implied, but it is clearly Commodus from whom they were hiding their true opinions. Dio thus creates a clear divide between a united Senate and the emperor. As a whole, the scene is focalised from the perspective of the Senate as a group, all undergoing the same reaction of laughter at the ridiculous display in front of them. To that extent, it conforms to Gleason's ideas of a 'shared experience as well as shared status'.⁴¹ But there is more stake. Dio's transition into the singular asserts the greater importance of his own role within that group. He is the fulcrum of a united Senate. His sharing in their laughter, and his efforts to prevent its violent consequences, offer a personal confirmation that his reading of events is an accurate one.

The phenomenon of a united senatorial experience with Dio at its centre can be seen widely in the contemporary books. The short reign of Didius Julianus in 193 provides a variety of shared responses to the emperor which range from genuine fear to open contempt. The same kind of enforced

³⁹ Gleason 2011: 45, in reference to Dio's use of the first person generally.

⁴⁰ Dio's use of the first-person plural has been used to suggest a close identity with Rome, at the expense of his Hellenophone background. For a full discussion, and a demonstration that his connection is instead to Roman political power in his role as a senator, see Burden-Strevens 2015b: 290-96.

⁴¹ Gleason 2011: 45.

deception underpins the account of the challenges faced by the elite after his accession in 193. Julianus spent his first night in power feasting in the palace, even while the body of the murdered Pertinax was still inside the building. The next morning saw the Senate having to greet their new ruler:

τῇ δὲ δὴ ὑστεραία ἡμεῖς μὲν ἀνήειμεν ὡς αὐτόν, πλαττόμενοι τρόπον τινὰ καὶ σχηματιζόμενοι ὅπως μὴ κατάφωροι ἐπὶ τῇ λύπῃ γενώμεθα (74[73].13.2).

On the following day we approached him, forming and fashioning ourselves in some way so that he could not detect that we were in a state of grief.

As a criticism of Julianus, Dio's account coincides with wider themes from elsewhere in the *Roman History*. In particular, forcing senators to hide their true emotions is evidently connected with the kind of *parrhēsia* discussed in the previous chapter.⁴² Unlike the ostrich scene in the amphitheatre, it really was grief, λύπη, which affected Dio and the other senators. This difference aside, the presentation of an elite experience is much the same. The reality of their grief was hidden behind a mask, aimed at protecting themselves from the anger of the emperor. This was a universal moment of despair and pretence. Dio too appears in the same role. As part of the collective action, he is able to identify both the apparent situation from the emperor's perspective, and the reality which he and his peers were actually experiencing. There is no room for disagreement among the elite in Dio's account: this was a shared despair, confirmed by his personal experience as a senator. Its effect is strengthened by a refocalisation of attitudes towards the new emperor around Dio's own position. He writes that 'we' were afraid of Julianus and the soldiers (ἐφοβούμεθα), especially those who had supported Pertinax:

⁴² The idea of a false happiness too is wholly in keeping with the beginnings of other reigns. Thus the Senate didn't know how to respond to Tiberius or Caligula and their capricious characters, unable to either speak honestly or flatter them safely (57.1; 59.4 respectively). A more direct contrast can be seen shortly before this, at the start of Pertinax's reign: anyone executed for treason was posthumously pardoned, suddenly allowing their relatives to grieve openly (74[73].5.2-3); see also Vespasian (65[66].10.2^a) and Nerva (68.1.2) for examples of emperors undoing the effects of tyrannical *maiestas* charges.

καὶ γὰρ ἐγὼ εἷς ἐξ αὐτῶν ἦν, ἐπειδὴ ὑπὸ τε τοῦ Περτίνακος τὰ τε ἄλλα ἐτετιμήμην καὶ στρατηγὸς ἀπεδεδείγμην, καὶ ἐκεῖνον πολλὰ πολλάκις ἐν δίκαις συναγορεύων τισὶν ἀδικοῦντα ἐπεδεδείχην (74[73].12.2).

And I was one of them, since among other honours I was made praetor by Pertinax, and had often shown that [Julianus] was guilty of many things when representing other people in trials.

Even so, they went to the senate house (προήλθομεν). The same pattern occurs as in the amphitheatre under Commodus. A narrative primarily told in the first-person plural contains within it an example of how Dio in particular represents the fears which he and his fellow senators felt. His involvement shows the most extreme take on the Senate's position: though everyone shared in it, Dio personally had the most to fear. Moreover, the episode is also reinforced by Dio's public career. He is the successful figure in trials against an always guilty Julianus; and he is the one rewarded with the office of praetor for his qualities.

In presenting himself at the centre of a senatorial attitude to Julianus, Dio constructs a homogenous body whose experiences are uniform. This presentation seems to ignore a basic fact: Julianus was himself a senator.⁴³ Indeed, this seems to have been acknowledged by Dio in a fragment preserved in the *EV* (332), but which does not survive in Xiphilinus.⁴⁴ On Dio's account of how 'we' senators were forced to conform to the emperor's expectations, Julianus is immediately set up as their opponent.⁴⁵ There is not even the suggestion that Julianus may have had supporters among the Senate's numbers, despite his successful political career.⁴⁶ As with Commodus, everyone faced the same danger from a corrupt emperor. The image of Dio at the centre of the Senate is not just about self-presentation. It

⁴³ And according to the *HA* was consul alongside Pertinax in the 170s (*Did. Jul.* 2.3).

⁴⁴ As the *EV* puts it, he came from a senatorial background, but he had a terrible nature (ἦν τὸ μὲν γένος βουλευτικὸν τὸν δὲ τρόπον δεινὸν ἔχων).

⁴⁵ Again, Pertinax provides an immediate point of contrast. He was a καλὸς κάγαθός (74[73].1.1) and proved himself δημοτικός – republican – in his rule (74[73].5.1).

⁴⁶ See Kienast et al. 2017: 147-48 for a reconstruction of his career.

also demonstrates the level of control Dio can exert over his narrative. The senatorial position is made fully consistent, and shaped around his personal opposition to Julianus. This is not Dio placing himself into a Senate which is already unanimous. Instead, he is the source of that unanimity as narrator, and the chief exponent of its senatorial concerns as a protagonist.

One final scene encapsulates the effect of Dio's self-location as the leading figure within the Senate. Under Septimius Severus, Dio describes the trial of Baebius Marcellinus (77[76].8.1-9.2). Adam Kemezis has described the scene as typical of Dio's 'chatty' anecdotal style in the contemporary books.⁴⁷ I would say it is just as typical of Dio's style of self-presentation. Marcellinus is executed for his part in a conspiracy. It was reported that the nurse of Apronianus, the governor of Asia, had dreamt that Apronianus would become emperor. Apronianus was condemned to death, but he was not the only victim of this extremely indirect accusation. A witness under torture had said that he had seen an unnamed bald senator involved in the discussions of this dream. When this was reported in the senate house, there was panic, as senators surreptitiously felt the top of their own heads and sought out bald men among their number, to divert suspicion away from themselves. After much panic, it transpired that the senator in question was wearing a purple-bordered toga. Marcellinus was identified as the bald aedile. He challenged the accusers, saying that the witness would clearly still be able to recognise him. His identity was then confirmed (after a subtle prompt) by the witness, and Marcellinus was killed before the emperor even found out what was going on.⁴⁸

This episode contains almost all of the features identified above. For the vast majority of its description, the scene is focalised from a collective senatorial perspective. Events happen in the first-person plural throughout. When the bald senator is mentioned, 'we' were in a terrible situation (ἡμεῖς ἐν δεινῷ πάθει ἐγενόμεθα, 77[76].8.3), and 'we' all looked around (πάντες...περιεβλέπομεν, 77[76].8.4).

⁴⁷ Kemezis 2014: 90.

⁴⁸ The scene itself has a characterising role for Severus' reign. It compares directly to the trial of Asiaticus under Claudius, who also faced execution based solely on his baldness. There, though, the accusation met with ridicule from the Senate, rather than fear – but unfortunately for Asiaticus, it was not enough to prevent his death at the hands of Messalina's favourites in the Senate (61[60].29.4-6).

The only exception comes when Dio introduces his personal reaction. In a moment of apparent self-deprecation, he writes, οὐκ ἀποκρύψομαι τὸ τότε μοι συμβάν, εἰ καὶ γελοιοτάτὸν ἐστίν; ‘I won’t hide what happened to me, even if it was totally ridiculous.’⁴⁹ Dio was so worried that he touched his head to make sure he had hair himself. After this reaction, the perspective quickly returns to a collective position. After noting that many people did the same thing too, Dio writes that ‘we looked at those who were balding’ (ἐς τοὺς φαλακροειδεῖς ἀφεωρῶμεν, 77[76].8.5). The plural continues thereafter.⁵⁰

For Maud Gleason, the first-person focalisation marks out first a ‘heightening suspense’ for the Senate as a whole, and then Dio’s ‘isolation from his peers’ as he switches to the singular. Unanimity is restored when Marcellinus is identified, and immediately distanced, as the Senate sacrifice an individual to protect the collective whole.⁵¹ But this refocussing technique is far from unique to this episode. As in the examples discussed above, Dio’s authorial comment intrudes into the narrative with two effects. Firstly, it confirms his historical credibility. There is a suggestion here that Dio could have omitted detail, had he wished to. A shift in the indirect object of the deception instead reaffirms his honesty. Earlier, ‘we senators’ hid their laughter from Commodus (ἀποκρυψόμεθα, 73[72].21.2); here it is the reader who is addressed directly. Dio’s assurance that he will not hide anything (οὐκ ἀποκρύψομαι) claims to bring his audience to the same level of understanding of the episode as Dio and his senatorial peers. As Dio himself claims before the account of the games, and as Septimius Severus promises him in a dream, he really is writing down everything that happened.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly for the understanding of Dio’s self-presentation as a senatorial eyewitness, the account of Marcellinus’ trial reasserts his own position at the heart of the Senate.⁵² Just as he took the lead in protecting his peers from Commodus, just as he had the most to

⁴⁹ οὐκ ἀποκρύψομαι τὸ τότε μοι συμβάν, εἰ καὶ γελοιοτάτὸν ἐστίν, 77[76].8.4.

⁵⁰ ‘We’ looked at him, ἀπείδομεν (77[76].8.6); ‘we’ approved of Marcellinus’ suggestion, ἐπαινεσάντων δὲ τοῦτο ἡμῶν (77[76].8.7).

⁵¹ Gleason 2011: 54-56.

⁵² For a contrasting scene, see 80[79].5.1-2, and the treason trial of Silius Messala and Pomponius Bassius under Elagabalus, on similarly minimal charges. Dio was not present. The full extent of the Senate’s reported involvement is the fact that the two men were condemned by them (ὕπὸ τῆς βουλῆς ἐθανατώθη). Dio’s absence

fear from Julianus, so too Dio himself provides the clearest demonstration of the panic which the senators were feeling. Dio's actions in checking his own hairline are reported, even though they are wholly ridiculous (γελοιότατον). This is far from Gleason's suggestion of 'isolation'. When many other people (ἕτεροι πολλοὶ) are then described as doing the same thing, it provides another example of Dio's individual behaviour representing a corporate experience.

The condemnation of Marcellinus is not the end of the trial. Dio goes on to describe the fate of his prosecutor, Pollienus Sebennus. Dio writes that he was tried by the people of Noricum for his conduct as governor, and was only spared death by the intervention of his uncle Auspex (77[76].9.2-4). Both Pollieni were, like Julianus, senators.⁵³ Though the detail of Sebennus' career is uncertain,⁵⁴ Géza Alföldy's prosopographical work has shown that the governor of Noricum was at this time a senator of praetorian rank. Moreover, the two known governors who preceded him both held the *suffect* consulship shortly afterwards; his successor, Sabinus, who is described as handing him over to the people of Noricum, became consul immediately after holding the office.⁵⁵ It is not unlikely then that Sebennus also had a career in the Senate. In addition, several generations of Pollieni, including the uncle in question, are known to have held consulships themselves. In any case, for Dio his association with the Senate does not matter. Sebennus' actions make him a threat to a collective Senate. Whatever his social status, he is presented as an outsider. The scene reinforces Dio's view of Julianus. It is precisely at moments of open division within the senatorial order that Dio reasserts the Senate's unity, and locates himself at its centre.

leads to the use of a third-person verb, but more strikingly also removes all sense of emotion from a scene which survives in full. Dio's presence supplies the atmosphere as much as the detail of events in the senate house,

⁵³ The name survives in Dio as Pollenius; see *PIR*² P 537-40 for his place among other successful Pollieni, also tabulated by Mennen 2011: 116-18. She sees them as part of an established senatorial core.

⁵⁴ Mennen 2011: 188 n. 152 suggests that he was aedile in 205. This appears to be a conflation with Marcellinus from Dio's narrative.

⁵⁵ Alföldy 1974c: 159-60.

Where the trial has been discussed by scholars, it has been taken as an example of the challenges which faced the Senate under Septimius Severus. Gleason has argued that the fabrication of charges, and the strong emotional reaction indicate the lack of control available to the Senate when faced with tyrannical excess. From a narrative perspective, I would argue the very opposite. The trial of Baebius Marcellinus demonstrates the full extent of control which Dio exercised over his creation of Severan Rome. He is able to delineate the Senate, and to externalise anyone who opposed his self-defined position at the centre of senatorial experience. It has been argued that Dio's lack of opposition to the tyrannical emperors he describes is a cause of embarrassment. Unlike other senators, such as Claudius Pompeianus abandoning Rome under Commodus, the *Roman History* has been taken as a defence of complicity.⁵⁶ But there is also a direct benefit to Dio's approach. It allows him to subsume all elite experience in an account of his own views. He can alienate opponents, while positioning himself at the centre of legitimate public life. Gleason is correct in writing that the senators 'are accustomed to functioning as a collectivity', inasmuch as the *Roman History* is concerned.⁵⁷ But that is a consequence of Dio's self-portrayal as the embodiment of senatorial life. The more united the Senate, the more he can explain both *logoi* and *erga*, and the more reliable his position as a historian. Dio's political career is the cornerstone of his reputation for reliability among scholars, who have used the *Roman History* to access a senatorial view of Severan Rome. Dio may claim to be the voice of the Senate, but as a protagonist opposing other senators, he himself makes it clear that there were other voices within its number. As narrator, Dio gets to decide who counts as senatorial, and who does not.

Dio the Consul

As a historian and as a senator, Dio has been held up as the ideal source for reconstructing Severan Rome. So too, at the end of his career, he has been seen as suffering directly from the consequences of a changing balance in politics between the Senate and an increasingly proactive army. In 229, Dio was granted the honour of a second, ordinary consulship alongside the emperor. His period in office

⁵⁶ Scott 2018c: esp. 238-47.

⁵⁷ Gleason 2011: 55.

was not a successful one. As he himself reports it, military opposition to his appointment forced him out of Rome. During his time as governor of Pannonia Superior, he claims that he gained a reputation for discipline among his soldiers.⁵⁸ That reputation preceded him to Rome, where he faced open opposition from the Praetorian Guard, who demanded his surrender to them (80².4.2). Severus Alexander chose instead to appoint Dio consul. This produced such uproar that the emperor was forced to tell Dio to spend his consulship away from Rome, out of fear for his life (80².5.1). Dio's retirement immediately followed. Suffering from some kind of ailment of the feet, Dio returned to his native province of Bithynia (80².5.2); presumably it is there that he died.

On the face of it, the end of Dio's career works as a crystallisation of the political opposition between the Senate and the army. With Dio as a senator, the scene presents the full triangulation of power which has come to underpin modern reconstructions, as senatorial and military figures vie for authority and for the emperor's favour. This is how it has most often been read. Dio's account of his own difficulties, alongside the murder of Ulpian which immediately precedes it (80².2.2-4), has been taken as an indication of the Praetorians' growing influence over imperial politics; in turn, it has been used as an explanation for a wider disdain towards the army.⁵⁹ The underlying assumption is that Dio's first-hand narrative correlates directly with a historical context. His portrayal of the Praetorians' actions is not questioned, and instead either confirms or explains his contemporary narrative, as the climax to a lifetime of struggle against the militarisation of public life.

I agree that the consulship can be seen as climactic. I do not agree that it has to be read as a reflection of a political reality. Dio's narrative is much less detailed than earlier parts of the contemporary history. He himself apologises for this, due to his absence from Rome as a governor, and through

⁵⁸ Dio says that he was governor of Africa, Dalmatia and then Pannonia Superior in the 220s (49.36.4 refers to the final post; 80².1.2-3 lists all three). The chronology is uncertain; see esp. Schmidt 1997: 2634-38; Molin 2016a: 441-46.

⁵⁹ e.g. Bering-Staschewski 1981: 120-23; Aalders 1986: 282; Rich 1989: 88; Sünskes Thompson 1992: 83; Gowing 1992: 31-32; de Blois 1997: 2663; Campbell 2005: 25; Hekster 2008: 7-8; Handy 2009: 22-24; Mennen 2011: 149; Kemezis 2012: 404-405; Markov 2016: 58-60.

illness (80².1.2); it seems likely that Xiphilinus has truncated it further still.⁶⁰ It is therefore very difficult to be certain of the precise detail of Dio's record. Even so, the account of the consulship can be located relatively securely within the historiographical project of the *Roman History* as a whole. There are two areas of particular interest here: his interaction with the emperor and his interaction with the army. In both cases, Dio goes beyond simply holding office. His consulship engages with the wider thematic framework of the *Roman History*, fulfilling a series of ideals of public behaviour. The earlier books of the contemporary history, as seen in the last section, equate Dio's personal view with that of the entire Senate. His consulship is a confirmation of his personal legitimacy.

The scheme of idealised self-location is especially visible in Dio's interaction with the emperor during his consulship. His relationship with Alexander is much closer than being his consular colleague. Dio writes that the expense of his consulship was covered by the emperor himself. It is Alexander too who advises Dio to serve his term outside Rome, demonstrating a worry for the basic wellbeing of his fellow consul. As reflected when Dio visits Alexander in Rome and Campania (80².5.1-2), their relationship is presented as a very personal one. While it seems unlikely that Alexander would appoint an unknown or an opponent as his consular colleague, the specific portrayal of the nature of the relationship is still open to manipulation by the historian. On closer investigation, the appearance of this favour fits closely with some of the themes explored elsewhere in Dio's narrative.

As with *parrhēsia*'s role in the Principate, the pattern is set in book 52, where Maecenas offers Augustus some advice on the kind of people who should be allowed to remain in the Senate. Its numbers have been swelled by unsuitable candidates; Augustus should remove everyone who is not fit to serve (52.19.1). He follows this up with an important caveat. Augustus is told that he should not cast out men who are virtuous but too poor to maintain their status, but should instead provide them

⁶⁰ Xiphilinus' methods may be influential elsewhere in the account of Severus Alexander. His reign for example is introduced with the summary that he put Ulpian in charge of the Praetorians 'and the rest of matters of rule' (καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς, 80².1.1), while we later hear that there were many uprisings from many people (πολλὰ δὲ καὶ παρὰ πολλῶν ἐπαναστάσεις γινόμεναι, 80².3.1) without any detail at all. See above, 60-61 for comparison to similar effects in the *Epitome*'s heavily condensed narrative of Macrinus.

with the money they need.⁶¹ It is a piece of advice which Augustus ultimately heeds. Dio records a complex process by which Augustus investigated the membership of the Senate,⁶² in order to decrease its size by removing flatterers (54.13.1-4). A second reform soon follows (54.26.3-9). At the same time, on two occasions he distributes money to poor senators to ensure that they could afford the expense of holding office (53.2.2, 54.17.3). It is an approach which is part of an overall praiseworthy attitude towards the Senate. As Dio has Tiberius comment in his eulogy, Augustus removed bad senators, gave money to good but poor ones, and voted with them on an equal footing (56.41.3). When Alexander pays for Dio's consulship he is engaging in the kind of practice which has been praised much earlier in the *Roman History*.

Over the course of the Agrippa/Maecenas debate and the early imperial reigns which follow, Dio establishes a thematic link between emperors and their favourites. Rulers who value good advice from virtuous senators make every effort to ensure that they are kept in places of authority – even when that means generous grants of cash. As with *parrhēsia*, Tiberius shows how this can function in both positive and negative forms. During his early years of good rule before the death of Germanicus, he does exactly the same thing as Augustus, giving money to senators who cannot otherwise maintain the minimum wealth requirement (57.10.3-4). As his reign progresses, it is informers who receive that money (54.4.8). The pattern continues with other Julio-Claudians. When Caligula gives money to actors (59.2.5), he is demonstrating the same kind of inversion as Tiberius, distributing wealth to the lowest and most reprehensible social groups, rather than the ἀγαθοί of the Senate. This depiction of corruption extends into the epitomised books. It is perhaps best demonstrated by Domitian, who

⁶¹ μὴ μέντοι καὶ διὰ πενίαν τινὰ ἀγαθὸν γε ἄνδρα ὄντα ἀπαλλάξῃς, ἀλλὰ καὶ χρήματα αὐτῷ τὰ ἀναγκαῖα δός (52.19.2).

⁶² τὸ βουλευτικὸν ἐξήτασε. Cary's translation – 'he purged the senatorial body' – suggests rather too negative a process; Cary 1914-27 VI: 316.

rewarded informers with wealth, honours and offices only to then punish them for informing afterwards (67.1.3-4).⁶³

Within the contemporary books, numerous contrasting examples are provided which set up Dio as a return to acceptable practice. Caracalla promoted the eunuch and ‘poisoner and sorcerer’ (φαρμακεὺς καὶ γόης) Sempronius Rufus (78[77].17.3); Macrinus appointed Adventus as his co-consul and urban prefect – something Dio describes as a joke (79[78].14); among many other examples, the rise of Comazon under Elagabalus to the consulship and the urban prefectures is described as one of the most constitutionally unacceptable events (80[79].4.1-2). Under Commodus things reach their extreme. During the brief account of the dominance of Cleander, the imperial freedman who rose to be Praetorian Prefect, Dio writes that he sold offices across the empire. This includes the claim that some men became senators by spending all they had, being stripped of their property like exiles (73[72].12.3). Here, the transfer of money is turned on its head: senators are made penniless, rather than being given the money they lack. The reader of the *Roman History* has been primed to see the distribution of wealth as an important aspect in the relationship between emperors and their favourites. As they reach Commodus and the Severans, they are presented with a glut of corrupt officials being given authority by equally corrupt emperors.

The result is a consistent, reflexive connection between the quality of emperors and their senior officials. Looking at the interaction between Severus Alexander and Cassius Dio, it is important to note that it is not just the emperor’s virtue which is being described here. As a direct and important corollary to this, Dio reinforces the idea that he is a virtuous senator as well. It is specifically the educated and deserving members of the political elite who should be supported financially, according to Maecenas; this then forms the basis of the approach taken by Augustus. Dio’s consulship works as a culmination of a theme. After a series of corrupt appointments, Dio’s consulship is a return to respectability. It is the same pattern seen in Dio’s encomium of Maecenas after his death (55.7). There, Maecenas is praised for his qualities, and Augustus for his willingness to recognise them. Alexander

⁶³ See also Nero’s profligacy (62[61].18.1-2); Otho’s gifts to the soldiers (63[64].9); Vitellius’ massive spending on dining (64[65].2-3)

even goes beyond Augustus, and the advice of Maecenas. He not only pays for Dio's consulship, but ensures that he is given a position of importance even in the face of military opposition. Within the context of the *Roman History*, this is the ideal kind of interaction between an emperor and his subordinates, built around mutually reinforcing virtue. There is little to support its accuracy outside the narrative's continued motif of reflexive praise and critique.

The technique of self-location in relation to Severus Alexander is highly reminiscent of an author from outside the historiographical tradition, but who gains the same benefits from claiming a personal engagement with the emperor. Pliny's *Epistles* 10 is built entirely around such a relationship. Like Dio, Pliny's correspondence with Trajan has traditionally been used as the source of a unique insight into imperial government in the provinces. In recent years, this has come under more careful scrutiny. Carlos Noreña has shown that there is more at stake than a straightforward collection of a governor's correspondence. He notes the consistency with which both Pliny and Trajan appear as highly positive figures. More pertinently to this study, he also highlights the ways in which Pliny creates the impression of a highly personal relationship between himself and the emperor.⁶⁴ The comparison with Pliny also highlights the connection between Dio's historical and senatorial presentations. The biographical elements of the *Epistles* consistently shape Pliny's image as an admirable voice of elite activity, whether in resistance to a tyrant or as a companion to a more respectable emperor, regardless of the realities of his career. Noreña's analysis of *Epistles* 10 concludes that, 'The epistolary *personae* of Pliny and Trajan in book 10... are interdependent, complementary,

⁶⁴ Noreña 2007: esp. 244-52 on the "friendship" between Pliny and Trajan. This paper was one of three published in quick succession, alongside Stadter 2006 and Woolf 2006, to challenge assumptions about the nature of the letters in *Ep.* 10. Assessments of their relationship are not always this positive; Gibson 2015 argues that the *Epistles* are structured to give an increasingly gloomy image of Trajanic rule. Lavan 2018 offers an alternative view, which nonetheless stresses the contrivance of the arrangement of the letters. He sees Pliny's letters as typical of imperial correspondence, and therefore unlikely to be fabrications; even so, by their very nature such communications are idealising. Any fabrication is not Pliny's, but belongs to imperial correspondence as a whole. See Coleman 2012 for a recent reassertion that the letters are indicative of a genuine bureaucratic experience.

and mutually beneficial to both correspondents.⁶⁵ It is easy to replace the names with Dio and Alexander.

Just as Dio's description of the emperor's actions is linked closely to his own characterisation as a protagonist within the *Roman History*, so too the effect of his criticism of the Praetorians is not limited to a complaint about their indiscipline. As far as Dio himself is concerned, his interaction with the soldiers is a clear confirmation of his own qualities. It is his firm control over the troops in Pannonia which leads to their opposition, and which is strong enough that his reputation can spread to the Praetorians as well. There is a clear engagement with a long Roman tradition of valuing old-fashioned military discipline, despite an apparent lack of any particular tactical skill on Dio's part.⁶⁶ Within the *Roman History* more specifically, it places him alongside an array of outstanding figures. In the earlier imperial narrative, there are clear links to men such as Agrippa (54.11) and Corbulo (61[60].30.4-6), who are praised for their strong leadership; moreover, the specific construction ἐγκρατῶς ἡρξά ('I commanded with discipline', 80².4.2) has direct imperial parallels in the military discipline of Trajan (68.6.5) and Marcus Aurelius (72[71].3.3-4).⁶⁷ The praise for Alexander continues too. Commanding ἐγκρατῶς is not always successful in the *Roman History*. The soldiers reject Macrinus' attempts to instil any kind of discipline after the assassination of Caracalla (79[78].28.1). In close parallel to Dio's own situation, the general Triccianus was killed by the Alban legion in Pannonia during the reign of Elagabalus, in response to his disciplined command over them when Macrinus was alive (ὧν

⁶⁵ Noreña 2007: 261.

⁶⁶ Eisman 1977: 663-65 suggests that Dio's occasional comments on Roman tactics are generic, inviting an assumption that he knows more, but never actually displaying it; cf. Hidber 2004a: 193-95 for Dio explicitly omitting details to give the impression of a full knowledge of events, 'since he seems to know more than he actually records.' See also Simons 2014 for Dio's self-presentation as an expert on the Germanic frontier.

⁶⁷ The phrase is also found in Caesar's speech to his mutinous troops at Vesontio (38.34-37, at 39.3). For a discussion of parallels between this episode and Dio's experience of contemporary political speeches, see Kemezis 2016b.

ἐγκρατῶς ἐπὶ τοῦ Μακρίνου ἠγεῖτο, 80[79].4.3). The disdain for the army is a fitting response from the more effective governmental pairing of Alexander and Dio.⁶⁸

It is important to redress the balance of scholarship to some degree here. For all the modern focus on the dangers of his second consulship, Dio's own account comes to a close on a triumphal note. Whatever the threat from the Praetorians, it should not be ignored that within the narrative it is overcome. Dio writes that he visited the emperor in Rome and Campania for several days. His interaction with the soldiers during these visits is recorded thus: τοῖς τε στρατιώταις μετὰ πάσης ἀδείας ὀφθεῖς (80².5.2). Cary's Loeb translation maintains a sense of impending peril: 'during which the soldiers saw me without offering to do me any harm'.⁶⁹ Dio's Greek seems rather more positive than this. It is Dio himself who can act with full *adeia*, a complete fearlessness to which the soldiers (in the dative) are nothing more than witnesses. Alternative meanings of *adeia* are possible here. If this is a lack of fear at its most straightforward, this is a moment of personal bravery from Dio. Alternatively, if it is seen more in terms of the language of embassies, it is more a complete safety of conduct. In that case, the suggestion is more that the emperor is able to maintain control of the army.⁷⁰ However *adeia* is taken, Dio's continued engagement with the emperor reasserts the position of legitimate authority over the unacceptable protesting of the army. When Dio does retire, it is on his own terms, as a result of illness.

But in Dio's case, there is more to the soldiers' actions than a distrust of anyone who wished to enforce discipline. Dio's virtue as a commander is strengthened through the particular corruption of the army during Severus Alexander's reign. When he is describing the growing threat from a resurgent Persia, Dio does not concentrate on Ardashir himself (referred to as Artaxerxes). In a comment which

⁶⁸ Here I disagree with Madsen 2016: 137, who sees Alexander's suggestion that Dio should leave Rome as a sign of weakness. Compared to a very similar situation under Elagabalus, Alexander looks concerned for the wellbeing of his consul.

⁶⁹ Cary 1914-27 IX: 485.

⁷⁰ It may be tempting to take this in contrast with Alexander's reaction. He is afraid (ἐφοβήθη) that Dio would be in danger (80².5.1); Dio's fearlessness then looks all the more powerful. It is difficult to know how direct such a comparison can be, given the possibility that some text has been omitted by Xiphilinus.

suggests that this is not due to Xiphilinus, Dio writes that Ardashir was barely worthy of mention (οὐχ ὅτι αὐτὸς λόγου τινὸς ἄξιος δοκεῖ). The real threat is that the Roman soldiers in the East were either deserting to the Persians, or refusing to fight: such was their ill-discipline that some of them even killed their commander, the otherwise unknown Flavius Heracleo (80².4.1-2). In this way, the soldiers represent the worst kind of force in Dio's narrative scheme. They are men who act in direct opposition to the empire, concerned exclusively with their own wellbeing.

A depiction of soldiers as greedy and selfish may not be the most original or surprising depiction in Roman historiography, but that does not detract from its impact on Dio's appearance in the scene. By incurring the wrath of the licentious Praetorians, Dio places himself in direct opposition to a corrupt body that has no interest in Rome's wellbeing. Dio faces personal danger because of his commitment to protecting Rome from the excesses of the army. His efforts to enforce discipline in Pannonia, and its potential impact on the Praetorians, represent precisely the kind of positive role a statesman is supposed to play.⁷¹ A comparison can be made with the role of Cato in the republican books, summarised in the previous chapter. He is the only figure who engages in republican politics out of a genuine concern for the public good, in opposition to the self-interest shown by everyone else.⁷² That same concern with what will benefit Rome underpins the debate between Agrippa and Maecenas. By placing himself as an obstruction to military self-interest, Dio claims the position of a defender of Rome.

The account of Dio's second consulship demonstrates two important features of his self-presentation. The first confirms what was identified in the ostrich scene under Commodus. Dio not only appears as an important senator, but as someone who embodies the model of senatorial virtue as defined in the wider *Roman History*. As a disciplinarian, he aligns himself with leading figures from Rome's past. And in his relationship with Severus Alexander, he acts as an example of how emperors should best engage with the elite. Alexander's decision to pay for the expense of his consulship is not just an additional detail. It conforms to a narrative model which repeatedly equates financial transactions

⁷¹ Aligning with a series of figures positively associated with a concern for τὰ κοινὰ; see above, 74-82.

⁷² Madsen 2016: 143-46; Mallan 2016: 259-69.

with imperial character. Dio becomes someone who actively worked for the benefit of the empire, with the support of an emperor who appreciated his qualities and rewarded him for them.

The second aspect brings us closer to the wider interest of this project: the connection between Dio's self-portrayal and his presentation of imperial politics under the Severans. Over the course of the contemporary books, Dio presents himself as both the ideal historian for an unclear world, and the representative voice of the senators who inhabited it. The account of his second consulship cements a rift between the legitimacy of the Senate and the corruption of other groups. In this respect, it is only one final example of a process which occurs throughout Dio's contemporary history. In its extant state, Dio's narrative leaves no doubt about the uniform greed of the army.⁷³ Legitimacy is represented by Dio as the voice of the Senate, rewarded with a deserved consulship. It is defined through its opposition to violence and selfishness. This is as much about Dio's self-portrayal in the *Roman History* as it is an accurate portrayal of senatorial interactions with the army. In the terms of his narrative, Dio emerges from his position at the heart of the Senate, to take up the role of its champion.

Creating Politics

Over the course of this chapter, I have explored how Dio constructs Severan politics around himself. Dio's *Roman History* is consistent in its presentation of the Senate as a unified body at the heart of Roman politics, which serves as the ultimate locus of legitimate authority. In the imperial books, an emperor is defined by his interaction with senators. This continues to be true into the contemporary history. Dio describes a Senate united in its despair at almost every single emperor, with the brief

⁷³ The rather incoherent references to Ulpian (109 n. 60) are especially intriguing in this regard. The previous chapter highlighted the association between legitimate *parrhēsia* and legal contexts. This rather raises the question of what Dio would make of a jurist who was also Praetorian Prefect. A threat in charge of a violent force? A figure of respectability who could not control the soldiers, and so died at their hands? There is also then a question of what, if anything, originally lay behind Ulpian being placed in charge of 'the rest of matters of rule' (τὰ λοιπὰ τῆς ἀρχῆς, 80².1.1), as rendered by Xiphilinus. If there was a more nuanced account of his prefecture, it does not survive.

reign of Pertinax the shortest of exceptions to an otherwise unpleasant thirty years after his own entry into public life. It is an image which the vast majority of scholars have accepted. Dio continues to be seen as a reliable guide to the experiences of the senatorial elite under Commodus and the Severans, his eyewitness record privileged as the informed account of a political insider. His consulship alongside Severus Alexander in 229 is viewed as a first-hand confirmation of the political trends identified for the period as a whole. Dio, the traditional senator, was overthrown by the unruly Praetorians, flexing their increasingly honed political muscles. It is an approach which assumes an underlying historical context, and uses the *Roman History* to explore how senators responded.

However successful Dio's career was, however close he was to political events, that does not make his contemporary books an accurate depiction of what occurred during his lifetime. The picture of Severan Rome which Dio creates is his own retrospective interpretation. Unsurprisingly, it is a view which makes Dio himself the greatest source of authority in his narrative world. As a historian, he is the ideal figure to resolve the fundamental methodological challenges of historiography under the Principate. The impossibility of differentiating between *logoi* and *erga* under the early emperors disappears when Dio becomes an eyewitness. He is able to understand and explain both sides simultaneously, firstly as the protagonist forced into a world of pretence, and secondly as the narrator who can elucidate the underlying reality. And as a senator, he embodies the virtue of the institution as a whole. Within the bounds of the *Roman History*, Dio's personal experience encapsulates the fears of senators living under tyrants, and the deception they were all forced to employ to survive.

It is important to stress that the tensions between Dio's historiographical world and the historical Severan Rome are visible in the narrative itself. The *Roman History* portrays the Senate as a uniform body, whose engagement in politics was collective, and whose experiences were shared. The accuracy of this image has begun to be questioned, though with strong rebuttal in Dio's support.⁷⁴ In order to maintain this image, senators themselves have to be excluded from its number. Even outside the more notable individual cases of apparent social disruption, Dio's self-proclaimed enmity with Didius Julianus is built on an assumption of court cases against senatorial opponents. It is hard to imagine

⁷⁴ Davenport 2012a; Kemezis 2012: 388, 413-14; cf. Scott 2015.

that every senator would have agreed in 193 that Julianus was a dissolute reprobate.⁷⁵ The image of the entire Senate masking their despair at the death of Pertinax is extremely effective as a means of establishing Dio as the true senatorial voice, but it is far from implausible that Julianus had his own supporters. So too informers are externalised from the senatorial whole, no matter their actual social status. The Senate as an institution is not sullied by its participation in tyranny; it only ever exists as the victim of anomalous outsiders.

The acceptance of Dio's narrative as a reliable guide to Severan politics is therefore flawed on a number of levels. It privileges the individual perspective of a historian who is fully in control of both the detail of his narrative, and the political structures it is built on. It accepts Dio's view of legitimate senatorial activity as the definitive one, despite the high likelihood of disagreement from the members of the Senate; and it embraces Dio's self-portrayal as the ultimate voice of united disaffection. Modern reconstructions of senatorial attitudes offer as little room for variety as Dio's account of a united body. The number of senators killed by Septimius Severus has led to the conclusion that the emperor must have been universally loathed.⁷⁶ It is not acknowledged that these men would have been replaced by new senators with every reason to support their patron. The modern reception of Dio's second consulship epitomises this process. The only source for the unrest among the Praetorians in 229 is the *Roman History* itself. Dio's autobiographical claims are accepted, apparently without concern for the effects of the scene on his appearance in the narrative. The consistency of the scene with the earlier contemporary books is clear, in the presentation of a respectable senator coming under attack from the corrupt troops.⁷⁷ When the outcome of the scene

⁷⁵ Indeed, there is a question whether Dio himself would have thought as much. Studies on the response to Domitian are showing the flexibility of Roman presentations of interaction with emperors who are considered in some way tyrannical after their deaths; see e.g. Hoffer 1999; Baraz 2012; Whitton 2015 on Pliny and Domitian; see above, 43 n. 7 for Tacitus' engagement with his Flavian career; more generally, several papers in König and Whitton 2018 address post-Domitianic responses to regime change. It is very possible that Dio is reshaping what had been a more positive relationship with Julianus in much the same fashion.

⁷⁶ See esp. Letta 2014; cf. Okoń 2012, 2016.

⁷⁷ Scott 2015.

is so closely connected to the positive characterisation of its author, it seems reasonable to view Dio's account with distinct reservations about its reliability. Narrative coherence is not the same as historical reliability.

Interrogating the reliability of the *Roman History* is therefore not just a matter of challenging its factual accuracy. Dio's creation of a political atmosphere is just as suspect. He claims to speak for everyone, and yet it is clear even within his contemporary history that that isn't really the case. That does not immediately mean that Dio was deliberately being deceptive or embittered in his narrative; he may well have believed himself to be the paragon of senatorial virtue. But we do not have to agree with him blindly. To put it in Dio's own terms, we need to consider his report a *logos* which may not necessarily reflect directly underlying *erga*. Dio invites us to connect the two, but, as his anecdotes about dreams make clear, there is no obligation to acquiesce. Just as the atmosphere of senatorial unity in the *Roman History* has recently been heavily questioned,⁷⁸ the motives behind its portrayal need to be considered. If Dio provides 'a memoir of the governing class',⁷⁹ then it is a coherent class of his own creation.

⁷⁸ Davenport 2012a; Kemezis 2012: 388, 413-14.

⁷⁹ Potter 2011: 331.

Herodian

After the sometimes bombastic self-assurance of Cassius Dio, Herodian presents a very different kind of challenge. The narrator of the *History of the Empire after Marcus Aurelius* – hereafter simply the *History* – is a shadowy figure. While Dio provides copious details of his career and personal involvement in Roman politics, Herodian is largely absent from the narrative. In addition to a small number of claims about his research, he informs the reader that he held a post in the imperial bureaucracy, ἐν βασιλικαῖς ἢ δημοσίαις ὑπηρεσίαις (1.2.4).¹ It is now most commonly claimed that he was a freedman, or a freedman’s son, from Asia Minor. The evidence is minimal; along with the administrative role that supplies his status, the location comes from the fact that Herodian names more cities there than in other regions.² This is only one option of many.³ Yet as early as Dick Whittaker’s Loeb translation there were doubts about the possibility of a reliable reconstruction.⁴ Recent scholarship on the literary character of the *History* has only added to them, suggesting that even looking for a “real” Herodian is an error. Instead, we should accept that the author’s anonymity

¹ On Herodian’s narratorial persona, see Hidber 2004b.

² First claimed by Cassola 1957: 214-16, and influentially supported by Alföldy 1971b: 219-33 (= 1989: 255-69). Recent subscribers to this position include Vielberg 1996: 59; de Blois 2003: 148; Hartmann 2008: 893-98; Hekster 2008: 8; Mennen 2011: 14; Icks 2012: 6.

³ His social standing and outlook are especially broad in their interpretation. It has been argued that Herodian was everything from an elitist senator (e.g. Sommerfeldt 1914-16; Platnauer 1918: 1; this traditional view has dropped out of favour) to someone who had an affinity with the masses (Rubin 1980: 33-34; Šašel Kos 276-78; Alföldy 1989: 275-77). Recently, the suggestion that he was an equestrian, possibly with a financial role, has started to gain traction (Galimberti 2014: 52-53; Arbo 2017: 207; Schettino 2017: 83-87). For overviews, see Gascó la Calle 1982; Roques 1990a: 1-15; Zimmermann 1999b: 302-306; Hidber 2004b, 2006: 1-8.

⁴ Whittaker 1969-70 I: ix-xxviii. At xxviii: ‘In the end there is nothing that will positively identify the historian’s place of origin, unless some chance inscription turns up.’

is inherent to the narrative.⁵ The issue is ably summarised by Denis Roques: ‘Hérodien est pour nous un mystère.’⁶

Just as uncertain as Herodian’s biography is the dating of the *History*. Herodian claims to have written a history of events which he saw and heard across his entire lifetime.⁷ It is therefore considered that a composition date any later than the 250s is unlikely, since that would already make him over seventy years old if he was alive for the death of Marcus Aurelius in 180. His claim to have seen Commodus’ games of 192 as a boy have been challenged, as it seems likely that his narrative is based on Dio at this point.⁸ Beyond that, any decisions about more precise dating are based on which emperors seem most appropriate. The most common suggestions are Philip the Arab (244-249),⁹ or at some point under Decius (249-251) or Trebonianus Gallus (251-253).¹⁰ The lack of clear external evidence makes this debate impossible to solve definitively.¹¹ I will not attempt to do so.¹² The state of the text is not without problems either, though they pale in comparison to Dio. The eight books of the *History* are highly inconsistent in terms of length, with book 2 being nearly twice as long as book

⁵ See esp. Hidber 2006: 15-19; Kemezis 2014: 304-309. For more general discussions of the debate, Gascó la Calle 1982; Hidber 2004b; Roques 1990a: 1-15; Zimmermann 1999b: 302-306; Hidber 2006: 1-15.

⁶ Roques 1990a: 1.

⁷ ἄ... παρὰ πάντα τὸν ἑμαυτοῦ βίον εἶδόν τε καὶ ἤκουσα (1.2.5).

⁸ 1.15.4; see e.g. Kolb 1972: 24-34; Alföldy 1989: 205-206; Sidebottom 2007: 78-79.

⁹ Including the influential discussions in Widmer 1967: 70-71; Whittaker 1969-70 I: ix-xix. Zimmermann 1999b: 293-302 argues for a publication to coincide with Philip’s millennial celebrations.

¹⁰ Recently e.g. Alföldy 1989: 249-55; Timonen 2000: 16; Polley 2003. For recent overviews of the debate, see Hidber 2006: 10-15 (with the conclusion of some point after 249); Kemezis 2014: 300-304 (any point from 244 to 253).

¹¹ Roques 1990a: 2-3 demurs on the question. Sidebottom 1997 ostensibly argues for a date under Gallienus, as a demonstration that the evidence is extremely weak; see Sidebottom 2007: 78-79 for clarification of his aims.

¹² All of these suggestions accept Herodian’s self-portrayal as a contemporary witness. Following the preceding investigation of Dio, I would simply note that Herodian gains considerably as a historical authority by making this claim. In strict terms, the *Historia Augusta* provides a definite *terminus ante quem*; that is hardly a precise solution.

8; the first three are the longest.¹³ This discrepancy has led to the disputed suggestion that the text in its current form may consist of an unfinished revision, in which only the earlier books were produced in a final, fully edited form.¹⁴ The text itself, however, is relatively secure. Two manuscript groups have been identified, with separate attestations in the *Excerpta Constantianiana*.¹⁵ Interest in Herodian in the early-modern period in turn produced a large number of editions.¹⁶ It would be possible to label the *History* as the opposite to Dio's account. It is a complete text, but one which is very difficult to contextualise.

In the responses of scholars, too, Herodian's treatment often directly opposes Dio's. Their general reception is only the most obvious example. Dio's reputation as a senatorial eyewitness stands in stark contrast to the disdain which has often been directed at Herodian's account.¹⁷ More ironic is the attitude to the structure of his narrative. Herodian's account is highly episodic, made up of individual vignettes.¹⁸ Each scene is essentially self-contained, and its most basic meaning can be understood without reference to a wider narrative context. On a straightforward level, it requires no knowledge of the rest of the *History* to see that Marcus Aurelius is virtuous, or that Caracalla is not. The effects on the narrative can be striking. There are, for example, only two figures from outside the imperial family who appear even by name in more than one scene.¹⁹ In what Adam Kemezis has called a

¹³ Tabulated at Hidber 2006: 138. He uses Whittaker's Loeb, which produces lengths of 1,110, 1,142 and 1,062 lines of Greek respectively for books 1-3, amounting to nearly half of the *History*'s length; book 8 has 596.

¹⁴ Alföldy 1989: 240-45; Sidebottom 1998: 2813; Zimmermann 1999b: 295-302; Polley 2003: 207. For arguments to the contrary, see Kemezis 2014: 302-304; Hidber 1999: 148-53.

¹⁵ The manuscript tradition is set out in Lucarini 2005: ix-xlvi, which incorporates twentieth-century scholarship (especially Nichipor 1975); see also Stavenhagen 1922: iii-xii.

¹⁶ For Herodian's differing reception in the early- and late-modern periods, see Hidber 2006: 28-45.

¹⁷ As summed up above, 9-16.

¹⁸ Hidber 2006: 124-31 lists the clearly divided scenes.

¹⁹ One is the Parthian king Artabanus, who appears in wars against Septimius Severus (3.9.9-11), Caracalla (4.10-11) and Macrinus (4.15). The other is Plautianus, Praetorian Prefect under Septimius Severus. He is the focus of a lengthy episode in which he plots to kill the emperor (3.10-12), and then appears by name twice, as the father

‘streamlining’ approach, Herodian only includes details when they immediately matter to plot progression.²⁰ The result is a tendency to look at the *History* in terms of its individual episodes. That is, much like Dio’s fragmentary narrative is read as if it were coherent, Herodian’s fully extant *History* is treated as a collection of fragments.²¹

It is increasingly clear that such readings are unsatisfactory. Although the general meaning of any scene can be understood on its own merits, the extent of connections between episodes has been shown in great detail. As with everything in Herodian’s narrative, the central point of interest is always the emperor.²² In the most extreme cases, this can involve the repetition of an extended form of narrative, which then span the full extent of the *History*. Thus, the invasions of Italy undertaken by Septimius Severus and Maximinus Thrax are closely related, with direct contrasts extending far beyond their simple success and failure.²³ Andrew Scott’s investigation of assassination attempts led by Praetorian Prefects likewise includes scenes under emperors from Commodus and Caracalla.²⁴ More generally, repeated motifs create a more consistent basis for comparison. They are often highly visual comments on the general character of emperors. Speed of movement is important, as wise

of Caracalla’s wife (3.13.1; 4.6.3). Sidebottom 1998: 2790-91 provides a full list of fewer than forty names across the *History* as a whole.

²⁰ Kemezis 2014: 229-39, ‘streamlining’ at 236. He sees this as part of an approach to historiography which closely mirrors the recommendations of Lucian towards a rapid pace, and a lack of extraneous detail.

²¹ Sidebottom 1998: 2776: ‘[The *History*] has been reduced to a mere quarry for historical data, and an unsatisfactory one at that, for it is often seen as little more than a rhetorical *épitome* [sic].’

²² As set out in Widmer 1967. The organisation of the most recent monographs reflects the inescapable centrality of emperors, covering the *History* by ruler; Zimmermann 1999b; Hidber 2006.

²³ 2.11; 8.1-5. Pitcher 2012b: 280-82; Kemezis 2014 240-45. For example, Severus expected resistance in Italy, but was welcomed, while Maximinus was greeted by abandoned cities and spoiled crops. See also Pitcher 2018b for a broader comparison of the characterisation of these two emperors.

²⁴ Scott 2018b.

emperors proceed calmly, compared to the rash haste of the corrupt; even changes in clothing are linked to imperial comparisons.²⁵

The unity of Herodian's narrative is central to the following analysis, which has the ultimate aim of reassessing his final books. It is after the death of Severus Alexander that Herodian is generally considered to be at his most accurate and reliable.²⁶ A cynical reader might note the convenience with which this coincides with the end of Dio's *Roman History*.²⁷ Even so, attempts have been made to justify putting greater faith in this section of the *History* for more positive reasons. 238 receives a considerably more detailed description than any other individual calendar year,²⁸ with only the equally eventful 193 coming even close.²⁹ In addition, the names reported over the course of the uprising in 238 can generally be connected to documentary evidence of activity by the Senate.³⁰ Whatever the basis of modern faith in its reliability, the *History* is the source for both the detail of events in the 230s, and the explanations behind them. Herodian is the basis for all reconstructions of social conflict and militarised politics as the basis of the breakdown in imperial authority.

In order to challenge the dependence on Herodian, discussion of the *History* will be split into two parts. In the first chapter – 'Structuring Rome' – I examine in close detail how Herodian portrays political life in Rome. This is in many ways an extension of the scholarship which has looked at imperial characterisation in Herodian's narrative, but from a different perspective. Several scholars have shown how Herodian locates himself within a wider context of *peri basileias* literature, writing

²⁵ On haste, Hellström 2015. Zimmermann 1999b: 222-32 plots the changing garb of Caracalla, Macrinus and Elagabalus.

²⁶ See above, 15 n. 74.

²⁷ As Börm 2008: 74-75; Hartmann 1982: 71 argues that there is no reason to treat the later books any differently.

²⁸ After a rapid skim over the first years of Maximinus' reign (7.1.1-3.1), the remainder of the last two books covers roughly six months of unrest. Burian 1988: 232 sees this as evidence of Herodian's first-hand experience of events in Rome.

²⁹ See Hidber 2006: 139 for a comparison between the two narratives.

³⁰ It has been demonstrated that a board of *XXviri* was appointed in opposition to Maximinus in 238, some of whom Herodian names; Dietz 1980: 326-40; Haegemans 2010: 15-16.

concerned with the nature of rule. The actions of emperors are often explored through the traditional dichotomy of tyranny and admirable monarchy, or aristocracy. The proem to the *History* introduces the idea immediately. Herodian writes that the decades after Marcus Aurelius' death were more wondrous than any other. No other time saw such imperial successions, or changing fortunes in civil and foreign wars; such unrest in the provinces, or conquest of cities, Roman and barbarian; such earthquakes and plagues, or strange lives of tyrants and kings, contrasting τύραννοι and βασιλεῖς (1.1.4).³¹ Thus far, discussions have focused on the emperors themselves. I demonstrate the ways that Herodian uses the very structure of Roman society to the same effect of comparing different rulers. Luke Pitcher has recently summed up Herodian's approach to individuals in the *History* as follows: 'In general, people receive characterizing detail in Herodian only to explain their actions in relation to the emperor of the day.'³² As will be suggested, this equally applies to Roman society as a whole.

Below the emperor, Rome is split into three distinct groups: the Senate, the army, and the people. The immediate tendency of the *History* is towards universality. Events usually involve everyone or no one, with minimal grey area in between. This is true of the three social groups too. They exist as homogenous units, with shared attitudes and actions. In a narrative which focuses on civil wars, the insistence on universal actions can often lead to a sense of inconsistency. I argue that this is in fact indicative of the dominance of Herodian's wider historiographical approach. In conjunction with the episodic structure outlined above, uniform social groups invite easy comparisons across different reigns. Their actions become illustrations of the characteristics of each emperor. As a political scheme, this is extremely simplistic; as a means of organising a moralising narrative, it allows for a greater degree of sophistication than the *History* is usually granted.

³¹ This is part of a wider project of literary self-location, which also includes direct interaction with Thucydides and Herodotus. See esp. Hidber 2006: 75-117 for a comprehensive discussion of how the proem fits into a much broader historiographical world. On Herodian and the *peri basileias* tradition, see also Stein 1957: 76-90; Roques 2990b: 42-46; Sidebottom 1998: 2776-80; Zimmermann 1999b: 19-21, 1999c; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 253-60; Bekker-Nielsen 2014: 233-45; Galimberti 2014: 33-45; Kemezis 2014: 229-34.

³² Pitcher 2018b: 237.

In the second chapter on Herodian – ‘Soldiers and Senators’ – I present a more focused engagement with Herodian’s depiction of the emperor Maximinus Thrax, and the tumultuous events of the year 238. It is in this part of the narrative that the modern interpretation of social conflict appears to be confirmed most evidently. Maximinus is viewed as the first “soldier-emperor”, the first man to rise from the ranks of the army to the peak of imperial authority.³³ According to Herodian, and consequently most scholars, Maximinus alienated the senatorial elite to such a point that they rose up against him in two separate rebellions in 238.³⁴ Though modern reconstructions reject Herodian’s overt moralising, they accept the underpinning account as accurate. Following on from the first section, I demonstrate some of the significant problems with such approaches. Even though Maximinus appears to be absent from most of the narrative of 238, the same process of using the structure of Roman society to compare emperors is taking place continuously. Far from seeing Herodian’s final two books as representing Herodian at his most reliable as a descriptive historian, I suggest that we should instead consider them in respect to his position as a creative historiographer.

Maximinus is presented as an external threat to the empire; as the uprisings of 238 progress, its capital, Rome, starts to take on the same damaging characteristics. This effect is sophisticated. Herodian builds on a narrative structure which frequently repeats scenes and rhetorical tropes, and subverts them. The three social groups remain homogenous and easily identifiable, but their roles start to change as Maximinus’ reign progresses. Familiar themes of military violence are twisted, as the soldiers become victims of popular and senatorial savagery. Ultimately, the emperor’s barbarian heritage comes to define not only Maximinus himself, but also the entire empire. Such is the nature

³³ The concept of soldier-emperors is closely linked to the debate around the Crisis of the Third Century (above, 7-9). A detailed guide to the *Soldatenkaiserzeit*, the fifty years from the accession of Maximinus in 235 to that of Diocletian in 284, is found in Johne et al. 2008; see also Heil 2006 for a discussion of the usefulness of the term, concluding in its favour.

³⁴ 7.3; see Haegemans 2010: 79-130 for the most detailed recent assessment of Maximinus’ regime. His military background is his defining feature within scholarship, to the degree that he is often still referred to as simply a soldier, e.g. Campbell 2005: 27; Johne 2007: 129, 2008: 586; Hekster 2008: 39; Mennen 2011: 39; Ziolkowski 2011: 118. Speidel 2016: 342-46 provides a synopsis of the overwhelmingly negative reactions to his reign.

of Maximinus' reign that his death in open warfare resembles a peaceful scene, and his severed head is a cause of celebration. The conflict between homogenous social groups is therefore just one tool in the rhetorical construction of Maximinus, which presents him as little more than a marauding barbarian. Historians claim to be putting Herodian's rhetorical excesses to one side when they use the *History* to reconstruct 238. Unfortunately, that is not the case.

Structuring Rome

Comparing Rulers

Herodian's *History* begins with a eulogy, and soon afterwards a death. After a short introductory proem (1.1), Marcus Aurelius makes a brief appearance as an idealised embodiment of virtuous imperial power. Herodian sums up his character, describing an educated and restrained philosopher, before reporting a death-bed speech to the imperial *amici* (1.2-4). He then begins an account of the reign of Commodus. His virtue is summarised by his restraint and dignity, labelled by Herodian as both σώφρων and σεμνός. The connection between morality and good rule is a consistent feature of Herodian's historical understanding, and reoccurs frequently across the *History*.¹ As for Marcus, in addition to his σεμνότης and σωφροσύνη, he was very simply a champion of all virtue.² Though his appearance in Herodian's narrative is brief, it has long been recognised that Marcus provides a model for imperial behaviour which can be observed throughout the *History*.³ In general terms, Marcus represents the ideal form of rule, a βασιλεία or ἀριστοκρατία, in contrast to the perils of corrupt τυραννίς.⁴

In addition to a strictly moral concern, recent studies have begun to stress Marcus' importance in establishing the structural framework of the *History*. Thomas Hidber has described the summary of his reign as a confirmation of the proem. Herodian not only states that he will describe the reigns of tyrants and emperors; he also frames it around the idea of transitions of power (1.1.4). Hidber has shown how Marcus fulfils both aspects. In Hidber's reading, Marcus certainly performs the moral role

¹ See esp. Kuhn-Chen 2002: 266-87 for a general overview.

² ἀρετῆς δὲ πάσης ἔμελεν αὐτῷ, 1.2.3. Though authorial self-presentation is not my main interest here, it is worth noting that this includes praise for Marcus as πολυίστωρ, very learned (1.3.3), when he uses historical parallels to illustrate the danger of Commodus becoming emperor at a young age (1.3.3-6). This is obviously a reflection on Herodian's own learning as much as anything else.

³ See e.g. Widmer 1967: 16-27; Whittaker 1969-70 I: lxii-lxiv; Alföldy 1989: 14-24; Zimmermann 1999b: 123-25; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 324; Hidber 2006: 188-95.

⁴ See above, 126 n. 31.

which has traditionally been ascribed to him, as the central figure through whom all virtue is expressed.⁵ But this is predicated on an analysis of power transfers as organisational tools. Succession narratives create moments of direct comparison between emperors, as occurs when Herodian's narrative begins with the transition from the elderly and virtuous Marcus Aurelius to the corruptible and inexperienced Commodus. This scheme continues throughout the *History*. Herodian quickly establishes the character of a new ruler as soon as he comes to power, often in direct contrast to his predecessor, and always in connection to the themes of virtue which Marcus embodies.⁶ For Hidber, this is the 'great compromise' of a structure set out according to time and imperial reigns, κατὰ χρόνους καὶ δυναστείας (1.1.6); it allows Herodian to write a narrative which is focused on individual emperors and their characters, but which is not explicitly biographical.⁷

A similar move towards investigating the structural workings of the *History* has been made by Adam Kemezis. The thematic concerns are still present. Kemezis views Marcus as the effective ruler against whom all the later chaos is contrasted; as he summarises, 'the norms laid down by Marcus will become a key to interpreting the whole rest of the narrative. Put simply, under Marcus, the empire worked.'⁸ But there is also a structural element. Kemezis has examined at length the irony of speeches in Herodian, which almost always either fail in their efforts to persuade, or describe events in a way

⁵ Summarised at Hidber 2006: 232-43.

⁶ The discussion forms a large portion of his monograph. The structure is introduced at Hidber 2006: 152-87, with more detailed analysis of Marcus Aurelius as a thematic model at 188-243; 243-72 covers the role of Commodus as the first young emperor, and as a model for the contrast between experience and youth.

⁷ Hidber 2016: 131-52.

⁸ Kemezis 2014: 235; see more generally 234-39 on how this plays out. While I am unconvinced by his overall reading of the *History* as 'Antonine', the general point very much stands that Marcus' reign appears more functional than any other described by Herodian.

which Herodian himself proves to be false.⁹ Kemezis sees Marcus as an exception,¹⁰ accurately predicting Commodus' descent into corruption should he not have effective advisors. I would suggest rather that his speech very much introduces this idea. Marcus is entirely unable to prevent things going wrong. If, as Kemezis argues, 'Herodian's world is one in which rhetoric seems to have lost its power to describe or influence reality', this would seem to apply directly to Marcus as well.¹¹ My disagreement with Kemezis's conclusion notwithstanding, his underlying observation regarding the structure of speeches – and the role of Marcus as an early demonstrative example – remains valid. In combination, then, a speech and the immediate succession of a new emperor are not only used to confirm Marcus' quality. Instead, the encomiastic opening of the *History*, and the immediate descent into corruption under Commodus, establish some of the central concepts around which Herodian will structure his entire narrative.

The demonstration of Marcus' role as a structuring force is an important starting point in a discussion of Herodian's political narrative. In addition to the transitions of power and the play with speeches, the same process can be found in a third organisational factor. In the immediate aftermath of Marcus' death, Herodian describes the response as the news spreads across the empire. In so doing, he presents a social structure which will underpin the remainder of the *History*:

τοσαῦτα εἰπόντα τὸν Μάρκον επιπεσοῦσα λιποθυμία κατεσίγασεν· ὑπὸ δὲ ἀσθενείας τε καὶ ἀθυμίας αὔθις ὑπτίαζεν. οἴκτος δὲ πάντας ἐλάμβανε τοὺς παρόντας, ὡς μηδὲ κατασχόντας αὐτῶν τινὰς ἐς οἰμωγὴν ἀναβοῆσαι. ὁ μὲν οὖν νυκτός τε καὶ ἡμέρας ἐπιβιώσας μιᾶς

⁹ Kemezis 2014: 252-60.

¹⁰ Along with Crispinus, the commander who successfully inspires the people of Aquileia to resist Maximinus on the grounds that a smaller army defending its home is stronger than a large but foreign invader (8.3.4-6); Kemezis 2014: 252.

¹¹ Following Sidebottom 1998: 2818 n. 208, this is one of many speeches containing 'hoped for effects which do not happen'. I would add that Marcus' final sentence seems particularly ironic. He instructs his advisors that their close attention to Commodus would be the best display of favour to his memory, and concludes that this is the only way to ensure that it is preserved (1.4.6). Despite their failure to follow Marcus' instructions, his reputation is very much intact in Herodian's eyes.

ἀνεπαύσατο, πόθον τε τοῖς καθ' αὐτὸν ἀνθρώποις ἐγκαταλιπὼν ἀρετῆς τε αἰδίων μνήμην ἐς τὸν ἐσόμενον αἰῶνα. τελευτήσαντος δὲ Μάρκου, ἐπειδὴ διεφοίτησεν ἡ φήμη, πᾶν τε τὸ παρὸν στρατιωτικὸν καὶ τὸ δημῶδες πλῆθος ὁμοίως πένθει κατείχετο, οὐδέ τις ἦν ἀνθρώπων τῶν ὑπὸ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἀρχὴν ὃς ἀδακρυτὶ τοιαύτην ἀγγελίαν ἐδέχετο. πάντες δ' ὡσπερ ἐκ μιᾶς φωνῆς, οἱ μὲν πατέρα χρηστόν, οἱ δ' ἀγαθὸν βασιλέα, γενναῖον δὲ ἕτεροι στρατηγόν, οἱ δὲ σώφρονα καὶ κόσμιον ἄρχοντα ἀνεκαλοῦν, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐψεύδετο (1.4.7-8).

After speaking, Marcus fainted and fell silent, and fell back weak with exhaustion. Everyone present was so taken with sadness that some of them could not hold back from crying out in despair. He lived for a day and a night before dying, leaving the people of his own age a feeling of loss, and an eternal memory of his virtue for the generations to come. When the news that Marcus had died reached them, all of the troops present and the whole populace were overcome by grief. There was not one person across the Roman empire who heard such bad news without weeping. Everyone praised him as if in one voice, some as an upright father, others as a good king, others as a noble general, and others as a moderate and disciplined ruler. And nobody lied.

Herodian's moralising point is readily apparent: Marcus was a beloved emperor, whose death led to grief across the empire. In this role, it has been identified as the introduction of a repeated motif across the *History* of reactions to an emperor's death.¹² Analysis of the passage can go further. Much as this scene certainly does represent a model for moralising judgements in the *History*, it also demonstrates two key ways in which Herodian presents those judgements. He presents a reaction to Marcus' death which is universal, and which is explored in relation to specific social groups.

The shared nature of the responses is difficult to ignore here. The repetition of πᾶς across Herodian's account is a little crude, reinforced by the insistence that no one – whether οὐδέ τις or οὐδεὶς – offered any sort of disagreement. Even where there is actual difference in people's actions, it is presented as an additional aspect of their agreement. Though four different kinds of praise are listed, the people involved still speak as though they were sharing one voice, ἐκ μιᾶς φωνῆς. In this regard,

¹² e.g. for a comparison to the horror at the death of Pertinax, see Sidebottom 1998: 2807; Hidber 2006: 203-205.

Marcus' death is a confirmation of a trend also seen in Herodian's portrayal of his character when still alive. There too Marcus is described as mastering all virtues, and no one could outdo his all-encompassing qualities.¹³ This is Herodian introducing the idea of good imperial rule in a series of absolutes. Marcus embodies all good qualities, and everyone loves him for it.¹⁴ But the universality of support for Marcus is not expressed simply through a generic reference to "everyone". Herodian breaks the response down into three separate groups. Two are referred to explicitly here. The army and the people were overcome equally in their grief at his death. The third is referred to in the phrase οἱ παρόντες, the ones who were actually present by his death-bed. They are the political elite, defined at the start of Marcus' speech as the emperor's advisors and family members, including Commodus (1.4.1).

The role of the Senate, the people, and the army in the narrative is not in itself a new observation. Discussions of Herodian's presentation of political events have often emphasised the relative

¹³ There are several examples in chapter 1.2 alone. Herodian describes Marcus' effort to pursue all virtue (ἀρετῆς δὲ πάσης ἔμελεν, 1.2.3). In the same way, he attempts to educate Commodus with every care (μετὰ πάσης ἐπιμελείας), employing teachers from everywhere (πάντοθεν, 1.2.1). Conversely, good character traits are the only things he considers valuable (μόνα, 1.2.2), while he himself was the only emperor (μόνος τε βασιλέων, 1.2.4) who lived in a truly philosophical manner. It is in this context that he falls behind no one (μηδενὸς...ἀπολείπεσθαι, 1.2.3) in his literary skill.

¹⁴ The repetition of πᾶς and its derivations is common throughout the *History*. Caracalla's reign, for example, includes two occasions when four terms are used in quick succession. At the massacre of young men in Alexandria, the soldiers, 'surrounded on all sides (πανταχόθεν) the whole of the youth (πᾶσαν νεολαίαν) and anyone else who was there and killed them, killing them in every way (παντὶ τρόπῳ), armed men surrounding unarmed men on all sides (πανταχόθεν)' (4.9.6). Herodian then introduces his assassination with a comment on Caracalla's endless desire for knowledge (4.12.3). 'As a very curious person, he not only wanted to know everything about men (τὰ ἀνθρώπων πάντα), but also to meddle in the matters of gods and spirits. He always suspected everyone (πάντας) of plotting, and so made great use of every oracle (χρηστηρίων τε πάντων) and summoned wise men and astronomers and diviners from everywhere (πανταχόθεν).' Herodian is not one for half measures.

influence of the three groups at different points in the *History*.¹⁵ I would suggest that there is much more to their presentation. The description of universal despair occurs in a moment of structural transition which is important for both Hidber and Kemezis. The response to Marcus' death from the three groups defines the terms for unity in Herodian's narrative world, and reflects the emperor's embodiment of imperial virtue. In this respect, the three groups take on a structural role of their own. Their introduction at the beginning of Herodian's account establishes a means for the comparison of rulers across different reigns. Exactly like the successions themselves, the actions of the Senate, the army, and the people reflect the character of the emperor.

The conjunction of changes in power with the responses of the three groups is consistent throughout the *History*; as is their connection to the moral comparisons outlined by Hidber. The united, positive attitude to Marcus is a rare phenomenon. Its only reoccurrence comes after the accession of Severus Alexander. The scene begins with the restoration of the same virtues emphasised under Marcus. Alexander's grandmother and mother surrounded the young emperor with respectable advisors, ensuring that the empire entered a state of greater moderation and dignity (τὸ σωφρονέστερον καὶ σεμνότερον, 6.1.1). This is almost immediately followed by a confirmation of the same qualities, this time with superlatives. The advisors appointed by Alexander's relatives were the most dignified in their age and most moderate in their lifestyle (καὶ ἡλικία σεμνοτάτοι καὶ βίῳ σωφρονεστάτοι, 6.1.2).¹⁶ The direct moral comparison to Marcus has been explored by Hidber in detail.¹⁷ I add the response to Alexander as a further similarity:

ἤρεσκέ τε τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τοῖς στρατοπέδοις, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῇ συγκλήτῳ βουλῇ, τὸ σχῆμα τῆς βασιλείας ἐκ τυραννίδος ἐφυβρίστου ἐς ἀριστοκρατίας τύπον μεταχθείσης (6.1.2).

¹⁵ See e.g. de Blois 2004: 561; Marasco 1998: 2857-63; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 315-22.

¹⁶ As an example of his different use of political narrative from Dio, Herodian's interest in imperial advisors is exclusively from a moral position. There is no mention of the social class of these men. This is about keeping a young emperor on track, rather than showing respect for the Senate.

¹⁷ Hidber 2006: 220-25.

It pleased both the people and the soldiers, and also the Senate, that the form of rule changed from outrageous tyranny into a kind of aristocracy.

The three groups of people, soldiers, and Senate were united in their support for an emperor who had re-established ἀριστοκρατία. Even the Senate – the group most likely to be affronted by the accession of a thirteen-year-old emperor¹⁸ – are in favour of the new ruler. It is the same expression of universal favour, expressed in the same terms.

Such straightforward equivalence is accompanied by Herodian's use of this social structure to create more subtle forms of comparison. The characterisation of Macrinus at the start of his reign directly refers back to Marcus Aurelius. Herodian writes that Macrinus grew a long beard and mumbled a lot, in an attempt to be philosophical. Though he sought out the daily habits of Marcus, he did not copy the rest of his lifestyle;¹⁹ he was in fact engaged in corrupt vices, which earned him the disdain of the soldiers (5.2.3-4). Unsurprisingly, this direct allusion to Marcus has often been noted.²⁰ But again, the three social groups also confirm the nature of the new regime. Macrinus' pretend virtue is mirrored in the lack of sincerity behind the support he received. The army was driven not by loyalty but by fear of Parthian invasion (4.14.3); the senators were not happy about his accession, but at their escape from Caracalla's tyranny (5.2.1);²¹ and the people could only shout acclamations to an emperor who was absent from Rome (5.2.3).²² When Marcus died, he was mourned universally, and nobody lied (καὶ

¹⁸ The idea of youth as being easily corrupted is prevalent throughout Herodian's characterisation of emperors, as discussed in Hidber 2006: 243-72. Alexander's mother and aunt remedied this by appointing a council of experienced advisors, not unlike that recommended by Marcus himself before his death.

¹⁹ ἐζήλου δὲ ταῦτα ὡς δὴ Μάρκου ἐπιτηδεύματα, τὸν δὲ λοιπὸν βίον οὐκ ἐμιμήσατο, 5.2.4; see also 1.3.1 for Marcus' learned and virtuous ἐπιτηδεύματα, and 1.1.6 for Herodian's general intent to describe the ἐπιτηδεύματα of emperors.

²⁰ e.g. Sidebottom 1998: 2810; Zimmermann 1999b: 217; Hidber 2006: 216; Hellström 2015: 57.

²¹ For a similar sentiment, see Dio 79[78].18.4.

²² Herodian returns to the theme after Macrinus' death, writing that he died while finally trying to get to Rome, as he should have done immediately (4.9.12).

οὐδείς ἐψεύδετο, 1.4.8); Macrinus created a reign in which nobody, emperor included, was telling the truth.

The list goes on. Though total social cohesion may be limited, all but two claimants to power have some description of a reaction based on the three groups. Clodius Albinus appears as little more than a frontier general;²³ Gordian III is afforded a single sentence to bring the *History* to an end.²⁴ The remaining fourteen regimes, including the three described above, are all described at least once in these social terms. Many include the same kind of brief summaries which mention all three groups. They follow similar patterns of imperial characterisation. Pupienus and Balbinus (8.8.1), like Pertinax before them (2.4.1-4), enjoyed full support from the Senate and people, but were hated by the army. Both regimes were excellent in moral terms, but very quickly ended with the rulers' assassinations. Conversely tyrants like Caracalla (4.5.2-5) and Elagabalus (5.5.1-2) relied on military support to quash any opposition, despite hatred from senators and the people.

When Herodian describes the responses of the Senate, the army, and the people towards their new emperors, he is not merely recording the attitudes of different social groups. As is established from the death of Marcus Aurelius at the very outset of the *History*, these responses are part of an organisation of material which focuses on emperors. They are tools in the characterisation of rulers. It becomes possible to make easy comparisons between emperors – and in particular those who either relied on or lacked military support. Marcus is therefore important not only in the introduction of Herodian's general concern with imperial character. The account of his death also establishes the means through which themes will be explored. The presentation of Roman society is one aspect within Herodian's structural scheme. The same three groups appear repeatedly, in a historical interpretation which prioritises universal action. Herodian begins by saying that he will write an

²³ Albinus has no real character in the *History* beyond being simple enough to be tricked into accepting the title of Caesar (2.15.1-5). The civil war is told entirely from Severus' perspective (3.5-7); cf. the detailed account of Niger's panic when he heard that Severus was approaching, and his attempts to prepare his army (3.1). See Zimmermann 1999b: 189-94.

²⁴ 'Gordian, who was about thirteen years old, was declared emperor and took up power over the Romans' (8.8.8).

account κατὰ χρόνους καὶ δυναστείας (1.1.6). His creation of a social structure is part of an interest not in the three groups themselves, but how they fit into the δυναστεῖαι he relates.

Social Groups and Episodic Comparisons

The explicit description of the three groups' attitudes towards emperors introduces the idea that they are involved in the characterisation of emperors, but that is only a starting point. The connection between social structure and imperial character runs much deeper in Herodian's narrative world. It can already be seen in an aspect of the *History* which has often perplexed scholars. Herodian's anonymity has a particular effect in a structure which emphasises comparisons. Part of the difficulty in establishing his social background is the lack of evident connection to any one of the main social groups he describes.²⁵ As Adam Kemezis has made clear, this self-occlusion from the narrative has a rhetorical effect beyond the creation of uncertainty. It enables Herodian to claim an omniscience which would not be possible for an identifiable individual, while rejecting the idea that a specific social stance holds the key to a legitimate explanation of events.²⁶ It also has an effect on Herodian's interests in comparing emperors. The lack of association with any particular social perspective ensures that the emperor's position is the sole element of continuity. There is no expectation that Herodian will pay closer attention to any of the other three groups, creating a neutral baseline on which imperial activity can be constructed. He presents an external view of Rome, which at least appears free from the social biases which are common in the elite world of literature. Herodian's capacity as a moral judge is as universal as Marcus' qualities.

As universal judge, Herodian's verdicts on emperors are just as far-reaching. They extend into the very structure of his narrative world. The preceding introductory chapter set out the organisation of the *History* into individual episodes, with repeated scene types and motifs running across its full

²⁵ See above, 121 n. 3.

²⁶ Kemezis 2014: 260-72; cf. Dio's senatorial claims. Kemezis argues that this represents a profoundly negative worldview, in which there is nothing to be gained from being associated with the higher levels of Roman society. The only way to achieve the virtue of the age of Marcus Aurelius is to reject the entire post-Antonine world.

span.²⁷ The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to the analysis of one specific motif, which is associated with a particular recurring scene. Within Herodian's narrative of imperial succession, almost all emperors engage in some form of procession. The scenes follow the same general pattern. They usually involve an acclamation at the praetorian camp; sacrifices; a procession to the palace; and some kind of speech before the Senate.²⁸ As with the examples discussed by other scholars, these moments are directly comparable. The Senate, army, and people are not passive audiences. They are given an active role in establishing particularly vivid comparisons between the emperors involved. Herodian's social groups provide the supporting cast for the almost cinematic performance of imperial character, not just from their opinions, but through the description of their actions as scenes progress.

The clarity that the social groups provide can be seen in the processions which occur during Herodian's account of 193. There are four in total: three in Rome, led by Pertinax, Didius Julianus, and Septimius Severus; and a fourth involving Pescennius Niger in Antioch. There are clear and well-documented comparisons between the four men on a moralising level, as is made clear by Pertinax and Julianus. Summed up bluntly, and wholly in keeping with the depiction of Marcus Aurelius, they are characterised as *σεμνός* (Pertinax, 2.4.1) and *ασεμνός* (Julianus, 2.7.1).²⁹ This extends to their movements through the city. Pitcher has noted that both men begin their respective scenes at home, but soon diverge in their actions. Pertinax at first thinks that he is going to be executed on Commodus' orders, but nevertheless delivers a speech of great dignity (2.1.5-7); Julianus is drunk, and persuaded to make an attempt for power by his corrupt companions (2.6.6-7).³⁰ Septimius Severus is then marked out by his readiness to invade Italy, in comparison to both the cowardly Julianus, and

²⁷ Above, 124-25.

²⁸ Not all occurrences of this motif include all of these elements; see Sidebottom 1998: 2815 n. 191 for similar variation in formulaic revolt scenes.

²⁹ Summed up most clearly in Zimmermann 1999b: 151-70.

³⁰ Pitcher 2012b: 280; see also Hellström 2015: 49-51.

the complacent Niger.³¹ The morality of individual emperors is very much at the forefront of these scenes.

Beyond their personal traits, all four emperors are characterised by a repeated combination of two features. The processions themselves relate spatial transitions through Rome or Antioch, which are then illustrated through the actions of the social groups around them. The accession of Pertinax provides the first instance. When Pertinax was offered power by Laetus and Eclectus, they first went to the camp in order to win over the soldiers (2.2.1). After the soldiers reluctantly agreed to support Pertinax due to popular pressure, he was led to the palace by all the people and the soldiers, who were carrying laurels (δαφνηφοροῦντες πᾶς ὁ δῆμος καὶ τὸ στρατιωτικόν, 2.2.10). Before describing the emperor's interaction with the Senate, Herodian again refers to the two groups accompanying Pertinax through Rome, saying that he will describe what happened after the soldiers and people conducted him to the palace (ἐν τῇ βασιλείῳ ἐστία τῶν τε στρατιωτῶν αὐτὸν καὶ τοῦ δήμου... νύκτωρ ἀναγαγόντων, 2.3.1). The connection between group activity and physical movement is paralleled in the Senate's eventual reaction. In one voice, they all acclaimed Pertinax emperor (πάντες ὁμοθυμαδόν, 2.3.3), after which he delivered a speech. He was then led to offer sacrifices at the temples, before being accompanied back to the palace again (2.3.9). Each stage of Pertinax's spatial progression is marked out by the three social groups. The soldiers unwillingly acquiesce to his reign, while the people and Senate are delighted. Pertinax's movement through Rome in the *History* is marked out by celebratory crowds, though always with a threat of military discontent lurking in the background. The attitudes which will define his short reign and assassination are not only described, but also performed.

The contrast with the next imperial procession is striking. Famously, Julianus bought power from the Praetorian Guard after the assassination of Pertinax.³² What follows is a reversal of the previous scene, with the same social groups at its core. Herodian writes that Julianus was rightly afraid that

³¹ Zimmermann 1999b: 171-88; Hidber 2006: 203-10.

³² Herodian is more restrained than Dio in his depiction of the event. Rather than Dio's bidding war (74[73].11.3-5), Herodian claims that the Praetorians would not trust Sulpicianus, and so only dealt with Julianus (2.6.8-11).

he would face opposition from the people (εικότως ἔδεδει τὸν δῆμον ὡς ἐναντιωσόμενον, 2.6.12).³³

But there is more of a difference than just a shift from the earlier festive atmosphere:

ἀναλαβόντες οὖν τὰς πανοπλίας καὶ φράξαντες αὐτοὺς οἱ στρατιῶται ἐς φάλαγγος σχῆμα ὡς, εἰ δέοι, καὶ πολεμήσοντες, ἐν μέσοις αὐτοῖς ἔχοντες τὸν ἴδιον βασιλέα, ὑπὲρ τε τῆς κεφαλῆς αἰωροῦντες τὰς ἀσπίδας καὶ τὰ δόρατα, μή που καὶ λίθων τις βολὴ ἀπὸ τῶν δωματίων ἐπὶ τῆ πομπῇ γένοιτο, ἀνήγαγον αὐτὸν ἐς τὰ βασιλεια, μηδενὸς τῶν δημοτῶν μήτε ἀντιστῆναι τολμῶντος μήτε μὴν εὐφημοῦντος ὥσπερ εἰώθασι προπέμπειν τοὺς βασιλέας (2.6.13).

Therefore the soldiers took up all their arms and came together in the form of a phalanx, so that they could fight, if necessary. They surrounded their own emperor, holding their shields and spears above their heads, in case anyone threw rocks from the houses onto the procession, and led him to the palace. None of the people dared to stand in their way, but nor did they cheer as they normally would to escort emperors.

It is not simply the case that Julianus was personally corrupt, or that he went to the palace with an armed guard. Pertinax had muted support from soldiers who had put aside their arms (2.2.9), but the complete favour of the people. Julianus faced the opposite situation. Rather than laurels, Julianus was surrounded by the apparatus of war, hidden in the middle of a military formation. The soldiers were willing to protect him against popular hostility. They had their own private ruler, an ἴδιος βασιλεύς, who had risen to power through a private transaction, as opposed to a public appointment. The people in turn took on the role of unwillingly being forced to accept the new emperor.³⁴ There was no active resistance to the armed troops, but nor did anyone engage in the standard welcoming of a

³³ For a comprehensive survey of moments when fear dictates the actions of emperors, including both Julianus and Pertinax, see Opelt 1998: 2928-36.

³⁴ Cf. 2.2.9, when the soldiers only accept Pertinax out of necessity, ἀνάγκη, due to the number of people surrounding them.

new ruler.³⁵ The result is a highly visual form of comparison between the two emperors and their progressions to the palace.

In some respects, the next procession seems to correct the conflict between the military and the people. Pescennius Niger heard the news from Rome that the people were calling for him to become emperor while he was in Syria (2.7). Unlike the unwilling acquiescence of the soldiers under Pertinax, or the people under Julianus, Niger appears to have been able to secure both. He delivered a speech to the army and the Antiochenes (2.8.2-5), followed by a procession (2.8.6). Immediately, εὐθέως, the whole army and the assembled crowd declared him emperor. There is no hesitation from either group, nor any hint of dishonesty. But there is a problem. The procession which followed occurs in the wrong place. Niger was accompanied to temples, like the earlier emperors, but in his case, they are specifically the ones in Antioch (τὰ ἱερὰ τῆς Ἀντιοχείας). This becomes more pronounced when the procession reached an equivalent of the imperial palace. Herodian writes that they went to Niger's own house, which was now called the palace, and decorated it with the symbols of imperial power.³⁶ The scene follows the same pattern of visual imagery confirming the general nature of a rule. The crowd are described as decorating the house on the outside, κοσμήσαντες ἔξωθεν. It looked like an imperial palace, just as the procession looked like an imperial accession in Rome. But external appearances could not mask the reality that it was only ever a pretence. Niger's power began as provincial and ephemeral, a fitting opening to a usurpation which would never secure authority over Rome.³⁷

³⁵ For the sake of completion, the Senate are omitted entirely from Herodian's version of the accession; cf. the senators' fear and Julianus' highly self-laudatory speech in Dio 74[73].12.

³⁶ οὐκέτι αὐτὴν ἰδιωτικὴν ἀλλὰ βασιλείον αὐλήν νομίζοντες, πᾶσι κοσμήσαντες ἔξωθεν βασιλικοῖς συμβόλοις.

³⁷ Gordian's acclamation in Carthage results in a similar scene, with a procession which includes local men dressed up as Praetorians, and the claim that the city looked like Rome for a short time (7.6.2). See Buongiorno 2014: esp. 69-70 (Niger), 75-76 (Gordian) for the contrast between being acclaimed emperor and actually attaining ἀρχή. I would however suggest that the difference within Herodian's narrative is in gaining practical authority, rather than Buongiorno's suggestion of a formal process of recognition by the Senate. Gordian I was formally appointed by the Senate (7.7.2), but that was not enough for him to gain ἀρχή.

Beneath the presentation of a false Rome, there is a striking point of further divergence. The two earlier processions involve the army and the people, who are labelled the δῆμος. This is not the case for Niger's attempted accession. The groups in 2.7.6 are τὸ στρατιωτικὸν πᾶν καὶ τὸ συνειλεγμένον πλῆθος, the whole army and the assembled crowd. This is not a simple shift in terminology. Throughout the scene, Herodian contrasts the people in Antioch with the δῆμος of Rome. Niger heard about the opinion of the Roman people, τῆς τοῦ δήμου Ῥωμαίων γνώμης (2.7.6); he could then only assemble the soldiers and the rest of the people in the East, τοῖς λοιποῖς κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὴν ἀνθρώποις (2.7.7). Niger was able to secure support from the Σύροι (2.7.8), but his speech asserting legitimacy contains references to both Ῥωμαῖοι (2.8.2) and ὁ τε Ῥωμαίων δῆμος (2.8.4). As with Pertinax and Julianus, it is the δῆμος in Rome whose opinion is important. But it is absent from Niger's acclamation. The spatial discord between Antioch and Rome is reflected in the lack of correct popular involvement. Niger's house is a false palace, and his crowd of supporters is equally a false δῆμος.

Herodian's report of 193 concludes with the accession of Septimius Severus in Rome. His procession includes a more standard itinerary. He arrived at the city gates, then offered sacrifices at the temple of Jupiter and 'the other appropriate temples for emperors',³⁸ before going to the palace; he gave a speech to the Senate in the *curia* on the following day (2.14.1-3). It forms a sort of middle ground between the three scenes which precede it in book 2. Though they are not in battle formation, the soldiers' presence is enough to create an atmosphere of fear.³⁹ But the people and Senate also go on to play a more positive role in the scene. Both groups greet Severus in a much more festive setting, bearing laurels as the people and soldiers had done for Pertinax (ὁ δὲ δῆμος καὶ ἡ σύγκλητος δαφνηφοροῦντες, 2.14.1).⁴⁰ If they had been cowed by their terror at the emperor's arrival, then even this is a demonstration of Severus' greater success in establishing his position than the derision aimed at Julianus. The universal involvement of all three groups confirms the reality of Severus' power,

³⁸ Ἐν τε τοῖς λοιποῖς ἱεροῖς νόμῳ βασιλικῶ καλλιερήσας (2.14.2).

³⁹ They are gripped with two types of fear, ἔκπληξις and δέος. See Opelt 1998 on fear in Herodian, 2941-43 on Severus.

⁴⁰ Following a formula established when Commodus returned to Rome in 180. The people and Senate came out of the city, carrying laurels (δαφνηφόροι), in their excitement to see their new ruler (1.7.3-4).

compared to the pretence of Niger's Antiochene reign. Severus may have shown too much favour to the military to be considered a morally respectable ruler.⁴¹ But his procession through Rome in the *History* shows the comparative strength of his position. All three social groups are seen playing their role; if there is any deception, it is from Severus claiming that he will return to the days of Marcus Aurelius, rather than from any of the groups he ruled.⁴²

The detail of the four processions in 193 has led to some historians claiming that they are a valuable account of what took place in Rome. David Potter has preferred Herodian's record of Julianus' rise to power, rejecting Dio's more rhetorically extreme account of the auction of Rome.⁴³ Maria Schettino has gone further, arguing that the detailed description of events in the praetorian camp suggests that Herodian had a source who was in the Praetorian Guard.⁴⁴ But these are not simple records of what happened in Rome or the eastern provinces. Herodian's account is shaped around easily comparable social groups, taking part in the same formulaic processions. The four emperors are at the centre of everything. They are clearly compared through Herodian's comments on their individual character, as has been observed elsewhere.⁴⁵ That comparison extends into the actual events of 193 as well. The interaction between the emperor and the three social groups creates a series of easily comparable tableaux, which are demonstrative of the emperor's rule as a whole. Pertinax was respected, and fell victim to military corruption; Julianus was slovenly, using the pretence of wealth to gain military support which immediately deserted him; Niger tarried in the East, content with a sham reign; and Septimius Severus used fear and deception to secure power.

⁴¹ Summarised in de Blois 1998a: 3417 as a competent general who took his military exploits too far as emperor. More detailed studies include Zimmermann 1999b: 171-203; Hekster 2017; Pitcher 2018b: 243-48.

⁴² 2.14.3-4. Herodian follows the same general theme in Severus' speech as Dio (75[74].2.1-2), though with less detail. According to both authors he promised not to kill senators, but was lying.

⁴³ Dio 74[73].11. Potter 2014: 96-97; cf. Appelbaum 2007: 201-203 for the view that Herodian exaggerated Dio's narrative, in an interpretation which favours *HA Did. Iul.* 2.6.

⁴⁴ Schettino 2017: 88.

⁴⁵ See above, 138-39 n. 29-31.

The number of processions in 193 makes it especially helpful to elucidate Herodian's comparative scheme, but they are not restricted to that one year. Herodian is consistent in presenting these scenes in a way which closely corresponds to the defining aspects of the reign in question. Caracalla and Geta return to Rome seemingly in good order, proceeding through Rome with the Senate and the people carrying laurels.⁴⁶ The temporary nature of their agreement is then demonstrated by their return to the imperial palace, which was immediately divided into two separate buildings. A calm start is followed by immediate distrust in the procession scene, reflecting their brief shared rule.⁴⁷ Severus Alexander leaves Rome to go to war with Persia, with all three groups providing an escort. In anticipation of his failure in the eastern campaigns, the scene is one of universal despair, inverting the familiar image of cheering crowds.⁴⁸ The foreign traditions of Elagabalus are actively performed in the narrative. Elagabalus led the stone which represented his eponymous god in a procession through the streets of Rome, running in front of it himself. Rather than the emperor, an eastern deity was at the centre of the scene. Both the army and the people also took part. The non-Roman imperial procession ended with the deaths of many onlookers, killed in a rush for goods thrown down to them by the emperor. Eastern disruption is put on display.⁴⁹

The exploration of emperors is at the core of these procession scenes. In an organisational scheme which places the comparison of emperors at its heart, Herodian's three social groups are integral to the illustration of the differences between reigns. It is not simply that their attitudes are recorded. Their actions in the *History* are readily comparable across different reigns. Within this structuring of his narrative world, Herodian goes a long way beyond simply imposing moralising themes onto political events. His interest in emperors underpins the very manner in which he presents them.

⁴⁶ With the same use of *δαφνηφορῶν* to depict the people's involvement.

⁴⁷ 4.1.3-5. On Caracalla and Geta, see Zimmermann 1999b: 203-14; Hidber 2006: 163-65, 211-15.

⁴⁸ 6.4.1-2.

⁴⁹ 5.6.6-10.

Homogenising Rome

The connection between Herodian's portrayal of emperors and his construction of Roman society has serious consequences for the *History's* political narrative. The comparison between different scenes relies on the identification of the three core concepts: the emperor himself, who is perhaps the most obvious protagonist in any given scene; the type of scene being portrayed; and the participants who provide the backdrop for the vignette, surrounding the emperor. The formation of effective comparisons is therefore aided by the simplistic representation of politics. As the procession scenes discussed above make clear, Herodian's repeated scenes are differentiated primarily through the configuration of the three social groups. The composition of the groups themselves does not change. They are presented as entirely homogenous, and consistent across the full extent of the *History*. Unsurprisingly, in a narrative which is built primarily around civil war and attempted conspiracies, there are moments of tension between Herodian's comparative scheme and the coherence of his account. Where they occur, his thematic concerns trump any need for plot consistency, highlighting the extent to which the depiction of a political environment is secondary to Herodian's concentration on emperors.

The most straightforward group to analyse in the *History* is the Roman people. Several scholars have investigated Herodian's portrayal of popular activity, especially in relation to his attitude towards the people.⁵⁰ But the depiction of the people can also demonstrate some of the methods used to define social groups. Herodian's people are a simple entity, but that does not make their presentation simple. Throughout Herodian's narrative, their actions are united: at no point is there any suggestion of different popular groups with varying opinions. Indeed, their opinion is shared even when it is inconsistent. In book 1, Herodian describes how the people hate Commodus owing to an array of omens, and a major fire in the city (1.14.7); shortly after, he writes that the people still favoured the emperor, only to oppose him due to his appearances in the amphitheatre (1.15.7). Herodian's terminology is consistent too. They are usually ὁ δῆμος, with occasional uses of the related δημότης

⁵⁰ e.g. Sidebottom 1998: 2822-26; Kuhn-Chen 2002: 315-17; de Blois 2003: 152-53.

and δημώδης.⁵¹ Herodian does sometimes refer to an ὄχλος, but its appearance is highly concentrated, used to create a contrast between trained soldiers and ad hoc militias,⁵² or to describe the rioting in Rome in book 7.⁵³

As clear as the definition of the people is, it is also restrictive. The *dēmos* is almost always located in the city of Rome.⁵⁴ Pescennius Niger's procession through Antioch has already provided one example of Herodian externalising the assembled crowd, τὸ πλῆθος συνειλεγμένον, from the legitimate *dēmos* in the capital.⁵⁵ There is popular involvement in his uprising, however, in relation to his downfall. Antioch gains a *dēmos* to reinforce Niger's defeat by Septimius Severus. When Niger returned to the city, he was not met by the laurel-bearing crowds who greeted Severus at Rome (2.14.1), but instead finds that the remaining people, τὸν λοιπὸν δῆμον, had all run away. The scene is not one of festive celebration, but universal despair (3.4.6). The comparison between Severus and Niger is clear from the general mood, and reinforced by the very different role of the *dēmos*. This extends to other examples. When Maximinus invaded Italy, the *dēmoi* of the northern cities fled (8.1.5), before the *dēmos* of Aquileia resisted him (8.2.3; 8.3.3). Those same Italian populations welcomed Septimius Severus in 193 (2.11.6) and Pupienus in 238, after Maximinus' death (8.6.5). The decision to call a group of people the *dēmos* is made selectively, and is connected to the wider scheme of imperial comparisons which underpins the *History*.⁵⁶

⁵¹ A word-search of the text results in 136 mentions in total, with 124 of δῆμος itself.

⁵² When Maximinus invaded Italy, he besieged Aquileia with an army; the Aquileians were an ὄχλος (8.2-3).

⁵³ 7.7, 7.9-12. The sole exception of nineteen total instances comes when Elagabalus throws down gifts to the crowds, τοῖς ὄχλοις, at the end of his orientalising procession through Rome (5.6.9).

⁵⁴ Of the 136 examples, only twelve refer to people outside the capital.

⁵⁵ The use of πλῆθος is extremely varied in the *History*, referring to the size of any group. This ranges from the *dēmos* itself, which uses its size to cow the soldiers into supporting Pertinax (2.2.9), to assembled senators (1.17.2), to the number of logs on Septimius Severus' funerary pyre (4.2.10).

⁵⁶ See elsewhere Caracalla's massacre of the Alexandrians, which begins with the emperor being welcomed by ὁ δῆμος (4.9.1); the rebels who eventually appoint Gordian I are not afraid of the soldiers or the people of

Herodian's depiction of the people sets out an approach which becomes more complex with the other two groups. The *dēmos* is easily identifiable, and always acts as a unified collective. Even when the people are located outside the limits of Rome, their interaction with emperors follows a consistent pattern of comparisons between rulers. Away from the people, this is less straightforward. The army and the Senate usually appear as homogenous groups, but that is not always the case. Both are described as divided at various points in the *History*. Even so, it is striking how consistently Herodian maintains the impression of unity. His approach is similar to the overall 'streamlining' of events described by Adam Kemezis.⁵⁷ Where division is unavoidable, it is included in the narrative, but only to a minimal degree. The homogenous groups are at most either restored as quickly as possible, or, more frequently, not even acknowledged to have been divided at all.

One approach used by Herodian closely resembles Cassius Dio's construction of the Senate in his *Roman History*: sections of the group are externalised, separated from a collective which remains unified. The clearest example comes from Herodian's portrayal of the army during the short reign of Pupienus and Balbinus in 238.⁵⁸ After Maximinus was killed by the army outside the walls of Aquileia, the new co-emperors are involved in related procession scenes which look entirely familiar to those discussed above. Herodian follows the progression of the severed head of Maximinus as it was transported through Italy (8.6.6-8). It first came to Pupienus in Ravenna, where it was announced

Carthage (7.4.5); Capelianus, the general loyal to Maximinus, takes his army to kill both the leading figures and the people of other cities in North Africa (7.9.11).

⁵⁷ Above, 124 n. 20.

⁵⁸ Herodian's terminology for the army is much less specific than the people. An army as a mass of troops is generally ὁ στρατός or τὸ στράτευμα, while a more abstract group is either οἱ στρατιῶται or τὸ στρατιωτικόν. The latter two are open to different meanings, depending on the immediate context. In Rome, they generally seem to refer to the Praetorians (both terms are used during Pertinax's acclamation at the camp, 2.2.3-10), though this is very rarely specified. Note however 1.12.8, and the appearance of 'the infantry soldiers of the city' (οἱ τῆς πόλεως πεζοὶ στρατιῶται), in reference to the urban cohort; 2.13.1-2, where there is a contrast between 'the soldiers in Rome' (τοὺς ἐν τῇ Ῥώμῃ στρατιώτας) and 'the camp' (τὸ στρατόπεδον), the latter referring to the Praetorians. See Roques 1990b: 64-68 for more detail.

that the army now agreed with the Roman people (ὁ στρατὸς τὰ Ῥωμαίων φρονεῖ). Everyone celebrated. The head was then sent to Rome, where Balbinus himself made sacrifices alongside the Senate, while the people ran to the circus ‘as if possessed’.⁵⁹ Pupienus then travelled to Aquileia, where he was met with many of the standard actions seen under other emperors. Delegations came out of the city carrying laurels, along with the now disarmed soldiers who had been besieging the city. Such a welcome was deceptive: the troops were angry that the Senate had chosen new emperors (8.7.1-2). When Pupienus returned to Rome with part of the army, he was met by the Senate and people, who welcomed him as though he were celebrating a triumph.⁶⁰ It is no surprise to find that the joint-rulers were popular among the Senate and people as their reign began, but hated by the soldiers (8.8.1); nor is it a surprise when that military opposition leads to their deaths (8.8.3-6). This appears to be an entirely standard example of Herodian’s social scheme in action.

But things are not quite this straightforward. The death of Pupienus and Balbinus is predicated on divisions within the Roman army which Herodian minimises. Pupienus brought with him a personal bodyguard made up of German soldiers. Their presence is integral to the plot of the joint rule, infuriating the soldiers:

οἱ μέντοι στρατιῶται διοίδαινον τὰς ψυχάς, καὶ οὔτε ταῖς εὐφημίαις τοῦ δήμου ἠρέσκοντο, ἔβαροῦντό τε αὐτῶν αὐτὴν τὴν εὐγένειαν, καὶ ἠγανάκτουν ὅτι ἄρα ἔχοιεν ἐκ συγκλήτου βασιλείας. ἐλύπουν δὲ αὐτούς καὶ οἱ Γερμανοὶ παρόντες τῷ Μαξίμῳ ἔν τῇ Ῥώμῃ διατρίβοντες (8.8.1-2).

The soldiers however seethed internally and were not happy with the praise given by the people. They disliked their noble birth and were angry that they could have emperors chosen by the Senate. And the Germans staying alongside Pupienus in Rome angered them.

⁵⁹ ὡσπερ ἐνθουσιῶντες, 8.6.8. The location creates its own very positive comparison with the people’s appeals to Niger (2.7.3) and their slaughter by Caracalla (4.6.4) in the same place.

⁶⁰ ἢ τε σύγκλητος καὶ ὁ δῆμος εὐφημοῦντες ὡσπερ θριαμβεύοντα ὑπεδέχοντο, 8.7.8.

Angered by the presence of Pupienus' German bodyguard in Rome, the Praetorians barged into the palace to murder the emperors. Pupienus tried to summon his German allies, but was stopped by Balbinus, who was afraid that it was part of a plot by his colleague to gain sole power. As a result, both men were killed. The basic narrative is about two opposing military units struggling for supremacy, and yet Herodian still presents a unified army. Herodian can say flatly that the soldiers opposed the new regime, even as he has just referred to a bodyguard which has a personal loyalty to Pupienus (8.7.8).

The effect depends on a strict definition of the army, which portrays the Germans as a completely separate group. From the outset, they are introduced as separate from the Roman military. Pupienus has a Γερμανῶν συμμαχία, an allied force of Germans (8.6.6). The ethnic aspect is not rare in the *History*. Many armies are described in these terms, such as Severus' Illyrian soldiers fighting civil wars against the easterners of Niger (3.2-4) or the Britons of Albinus (3.7.2-3).⁶¹ It is rather their status as allies which marks them out. Σύμμαχοι are always external to Rome in Herodian. They are either from beyond frontiers, such as Pescennius Niger's attempts to gain support from Parthia, Armenia and Hatra,⁶² or referred to as an additional force alongside the Roman στρατός.⁶³ That distinction

⁶¹ Herodian's tendency to provide an ethnic descriptor has led to claims that he saw Illyrians and Pannonians as vital to the disturbances of the third century; Šašel Kos 1986: 434; Alföldy 1989: 100; de Blois 1998a: 3420-24. Sidebottom 1998: 2793 effectively dispels any claims for their particular quality within the *History*. It is worth noting that these definitions are flexible, depending on the contrast being emphasised. Severus' army is 'Illyrian' when fighting Niger, but then 'Roman' after his invasion of Parthia (3.9.3-12).

⁶² 2.8.8, 3.1.1-3; see also Severus' troops from Osrhoene (3.9.2), and Caracalla's German allies from beyond the Danube (4.7.2).

⁶³ Severus is described leading many allies and nearly the whole Roman army (3.6.6); some of Maximinus' foreign soldiers are subjects, other friends and allies (7.2.1); so too his German allies come from defeated opponents or friends and allies (7.8.10, mentioned again at 8.1.3). The apparent exception sees the soldiers in Rome called the allies of Maximinus by the senator Gallicanus – even here, they are made foreign, described as enemies of the Romans (τοὺς ἐχθροὺς μὲν συγκλήτου καὶ Ῥωμαίων, φίλους δὲ καὶ συμμαχοὺς Μαξιμίνου, 7.11.5).

remains consistent throughout the murder scene. While it is true that Herodian identifies the Praetorians specifically, they are also referred to simply as soldiers (στρατιῶται).⁶⁴ The same cannot be said for the Germans. They are mentioned explicitly on seven occasions in total, as simply ‘the Germans’ (Γερμανοί), or ‘the German allies’ (some variation on σύμμαχοι).⁶⁵ The distinction is especially clear when the emperors are killed. After debating the value of German help (8.8.5), ‘the soldiers all rushed in, in one mind’ (εἰσδραμόντες οἱ στρατιῶται ὁμοθυμαδὸν ἅπαντες, 8.8.6). These are the murderers, contrasted again with the Germans who can do nothing to stop them (8.8.7). The Praetorians were part of the Roman army in Herodian’s structure of the empire; Pupienus’ bodyguard was not.

On one level, there is a clear inconsistency in Herodian’s description of Pupienus and Balbinus, and their assassination. It is evident that the German bodyguard was part of the army, and it has been suggested that they were probably auxiliary vexillations from the army on the Rhine.⁶⁶ But whatever their historical origin, the defining element of the German troops is their externality to the army. Focusing solely on the apparent plot-holes of Herodian’s narrative misses the point. His insistence that the Germans were not soldiers is entirely in keeping with the wider organisation of society in the *History*. By making all the soldiers opposed to the senatorial co-emperors, Herodian maintains the basis for comparisons with other regimes. The impression of homogeneity is key to facilitating this. Along with familiar tropes like laurels and soldiers in their peacetime attire, the clear delineation of the three social groups creates a variety of comparative options. The image of Pertinax comes to mind as a direct equivalent, another senator who alienated the army and paid with his life. But it also demonstrates the contrast to emperors like Severus Alexander and Marcus Aurelius, with their universal, honest support. If the narrative acknowledged the divisions within the army itself, such juxtapositions of emperors would become more difficult. Alienating certain bodies within the army

⁶⁴ Over the full narrative (8.8.1-7) they are soldiers twice (8.8.1, 8.8.6) and πραιτωριανοί three times (8.8.5 twice, 8.8.7). Elsewhere, the Praetorians are usually a more traditionally Hellenic bodyguard, δορυφόροι; the only other time they are πραιτωριανοί is at 5.4.8.

⁶⁵ They are the Germans at 8.8.2, 8.8.5 and 8.8.7 (twice), and the German allies at 8.6.6, 8.7.8 and 8.8.5.

⁶⁶ Whittaker 1968-69 II: 289 n. 2; Roques 1990a: 282 n. 39.

is much less forceful than all the soldiers (οἱ στρατιῶται ἅπαντες). The modern reader, looking to reconstruct the events of 238, might be frustrated by Herodian's lack of consistency and hyperbole. But both are important to the aims of a narrative which is primarily interested in how the army can be used to explore emperors, rather than an accurate presentation of how individual units were involved. Self-evidently within the narrative itself, Pupienus was not hated by everyone in the military. But in Herodian's construction of Rome, all στρατιῶται need to view the co-emperors with disdain.

In the exclusion of particular military bodies from the united collective of the army, Herodian is relatively subtle in his maintenance of homogeneity. As an example of senatorial activity will show, the inconsistencies in the *History* can be much more brazen. Herodian's political elite is much more homogenous than even Dio's. Such is the Senate's coherence that there is no word for an individual senator in the *History*. They are ἡ σύγκλητος βουλή, or simply ἡ σύγκλητος;⁶⁷ individual members are referred to as being part of that homogenous group.⁶⁸ Even more so than the people, the Senate is exclusively located in the city of Rome; individual 'men from the Senate' are found in the provinces, but the Senate acts collectively from the capital alone. Herodian also seems to have had little concern with the role of the equestrians in relation to political life. They are mentioned only seven times, usually as τὸ ἵππικὸν τάγμα, and almost always have a direct connection with senators.⁶⁹ The political elite in Herodian's Rome is monolithic in its unity of mind and experience.

⁶⁷ Roques 1990b: 47-49.

⁶⁸ In elaborate periphrasis, Albinus is neither a senator nor a patrician, but 'a man by birth from the nobility of the Senate', ἀνὴρ τὸ μὲν γένος τῶν ἐκ τῆς συγκλήτου εὐπατριδῶν (2.15.1); Gallicanus is simply 'a man from the Senate', τῆς δὲ συγκλήτου ἀνὴρ (7.11.3). See also e.g. Quadratus and Quintianus, both τῆς βουλῆς (1.8.6); Severus Alexander's sixteen advisors, τῆς συγκλήτου βουλῆς (6.1.2); Capelianus, τῶν ἀπὸ συγκλήτου (7.9.1).

⁶⁹ Four references connect the equestrians directly to the Senate, with a combination of the σύγκλητος and the ἵππικὸν τάγμα (4.2.4; 5.5.9; 5.7.7; 7.7.5). A fifth group of young men from the equestrian order accompany Pupienus and Balbinus as an armed guard, immediately after they have been appointed by the Senate (7.10.7). The equestrians act as a separate group in the funeral of Septimius Severus, when the whole equestrian order (πᾶν τὸ ἵππικὸν τάγμα) rides around in formation (4.2.9 – notably just after they have been connected to the

Macrinus is the only apparent exception, and in many respects he proves the rule. In a letter to the Senate, Herodian has Macrinus attempt to justify his appointment by contrasting his qualities as someone from the equestrian order, ἐκ τῆς ἰππᾶδος τάξεως, with the good fortune of those who were of noble birth (5.1.5). This is the only mention of Macrinus' equestrian status in the *History*, and it is ultimately proved wholly irrelevant. The Senate's only involvement under Macrinus is to acclaim him emperor; his death was due to the alienation of the soldiers, who were affronted by his extravagance; there is no mention of his social status whatsoever (5.2.5-6). In contrast to Dio's insistence that Macrinus' equestrian status was the root of his problem,⁷⁰ Herodian seems unconcerned about the distinction.

There is however one moment in the *History* when the Senate appears to be divided. When Caracalla and Geta began their joint rule, they quickly descended into mutual hatred (4.3). This is reflected in a split among 'everyone who had a position of rank or honour' (ὅσοι ἐν ἀξιώσει ἢ τιμῇ τινὶ, 4.3.2). The climax of their division is a plan to divide the entire empire in two (4.3.5-9). The concept of senatorial unity forms parts of the representation of Rome. Just as the empire's territory would be split in half, so too the Senate would be broken up on geographical lines (4.3.6). After Geta's death, it briefly looks like the division will continue. Caracalla went to the senate house, where he delivered a speech and threatened all of Geta's friends (4.5, esp. 4.5.7). There is no explicit mention of different groups of senators, but the location not just in Rome, but in the senate house itself, leaves no room for doubt that the rift between the brothers extended to the Senate as well.⁷¹ The events which secure

Senate at 4.2.4, in the same funerary context). A final reference to πᾶν τὸ ἰππικὸν τάγμα apparently refers to the cavalry in Rome, called in during the reign of Commodus to suppress a riot (1.13.3). It is considered a later interpolation; Stavenhagen 1922: 25; Whittaker 1969-70 I: 82; Lucarini 2005: 19. Roques 1990b: 49 notes the lack of detail with disappointment: 'Tels sont les maigres renseignements qu'Hérodiens fournit sur le rouage essentiel de la société romaine du III^e siècle.'

⁷⁰ See esp. Dio 79[78]. 41.

⁷¹ For an attempt to reconstruct a 'pro-Geta faction' from senators and imperial officials in Rome (including Plautianus), primarily from epigraphical and numismatic evidence, see Kemmers 2011; Bingham & Imrie 2015: 84-90.

Caracalla's sole rule, however, are formulated around a procession through Rome which conforms to all expectations. Caracalla hurried to the camp, throwing the people into a state of confusion in his haste,⁷² and secured the support of the soldiers by raising their pay and distributing money (4.4.4-8), and he leads a heavily armed military force through the streets to the senate house.⁷³ His speech in the Senate is followed by attacks against the Senate and the people, using the army as his prime tool (4.5.2-5). Any suggestion of division among senators is quickly obliterated.

We can see how Herodian unwrites the disunity by looking more closely at the experience of the senators themselves. After removing Geta and threatening his friends in the senate house, Caracalla unleashed his anger universally:

τῆς τε συγκλήτου βουλῆς ὅσοι γένει ἢ πλούτῳ ὑπερεῖχον, ἐπὶ βραχυτάταις ἢ οὐδ' ὑφ'εστώσαις αἰτίαις ἐκ τῆς τυχοῦσης διαβολῆς, ὡς ἐκείνου φίλοι, ἀνηροῦντο (4.6.2).

Anyone in the Senate who stood out by birth or wealth was killed as [Geta's] friend, based on any slanderous attack at all that put forward the most trivial or non-existent charges.

Though the excuse for attacking senators was their affiliation with Geta, in reality everyone in the Senate faced the same danger. The generic ὅσοι were accused as though they really were his supporters. The point is reinforced in a list of Caracalla's victims which follows: 'If there was anyone who was connected to the imperial household, or who was of noble descent in the Senate, he killed them all.'⁷⁴ Herodian returns to his universalising tendencies, describing a scene in which everyone of note risked death. The focus on Geta's friends during the speech at least leaves the possibility that Caracalla himself had favourites among the audience, who might be expected to avoid the worst of the emperor's anger. That possibility is quickly extinguished. Any nuance regarding the composition of the Senate is then completely ignored.

⁷² Hellström 2015: 50-51 notes the similarities between Caracalla's actions and the haste of the soldiers after they assassinate Pertinax.

⁷³ Like Julianus' soldiers, they were more heavily armed than was appropriate for a procession (4.5.1).

⁷⁴ καὶ εἴ τι γένος ἦν βασιλικὸν ἢ ἐν συγκλήτῳ ἐξ εὐπατριδῶν καταβαῖνον, πᾶν ἐξέκοψεν (4.6.3).

Though the abandonment of any distinction between groups of senators may seem crude, its effect is significantly ameliorated by (and closely related to) the structure of the *History*, with its episodic focus on imperial reigns. Though the assassination and its consequences provide a narrative arc which spans books 3 and 4,⁷⁵ it contains several configurations of imperial rule, all of which show different features. The basic character of Caracalla's shared rule with Geta is imperial division. The plan to divide the empire may be an extreme form, but it is only an extension of the move to split the palace physically, where Herodian even describes corridors being blocked off to delineate two separate imperial households.⁷⁶ It becomes useful to represent divisions at every level of society, including the Senate. That ceases to be the case once Geta is dead. Caracalla's procession marks a new scene after the assassination itself, and with it a new focus on a sole ruler. In this context, the Senate can be united once again, and the standard comparisons between reigns can come to the fore.

Though there may be some sense of narrative inconsistency, it comes as a result of a historiographical approach which is primarily interested in emperors. Hidber observes a shift in the nature of imperial rule in Caracalla's speech to the Senate, as Herodian establishes the themes which will dominate his depiction of the sole rule: lies, uncontrolled cruelty and an attempt to win over the military.⁷⁷ This transition is confirmed by the changing formulation of the three social groups. The army and people return to their unified norm, as aggressors and victims under a tyrant. And most importantly, the Senate is confirmed as a homogenous unit once again. Any deviation from that scheme is exclusively in relation to a divided reign, and it is resolved in the inception of a united regime. In that structural and thematic respect, the *History* is fully coherent.

These are only three examples of structural approaches which recur throughout Herodian's narrative, always facilitating the same over-arching interest in the individual men in charge of the empire. His depiction of the soldiers varies considerably. The rise to power of Elagabalus is dependent

⁷⁵ On which see esp. Hidber 2006: 163-65.

⁷⁶ Despite what seems to be an obvious rhetorical flourish, the point has sometimes been taken as an accurate depiction of a real physical division. Potter 2014: 135; Schöpe 2014: 227-28.

⁷⁷ Hidber 2006: 212-16.

on the apparently universal loathing of the soldiers towards Macrinus (5.3.1, 5.4.1-2), only for there to be troops on each side to fight a civil war (5.4.5-7). In civil wars, the conflict between armies simply ends, with no real suggestion that it might not be a completely straightforward process.⁷⁸ When there is fighting between the cavalry and the urban cohort in Rome itself under Commodus, it is quickly replaced by a familiar narrative of a homogenous army against the people.⁷⁹ The Senate meanwhile can stand as a separate, united entity opposed to the provincial governors during the reign of Maximinus. As his comment that Gordian was appointed governor of Africa by lot suggests, Herodian was apparently aware of even the processes by which senatorial governors were selected.⁸⁰ A conflict which could easily have been described as internal to the political elite is constructed as a central Senate facing the opposition of governors on the periphery.⁸¹

Within all of these examples, Herodian's main social groups remain easy to identify, and united in their actions. Moreover, this extends even to points where the basic events of the narrative would appear to preclude it. The default status for the Senate, the army, and the people is one of unity. This is broken only when unavoidable, and resolved immediately when necessary. Herodian's social scheme can be jarring when it is read as a descriptive account, but it remains fully consistent with the central discussion of emperors in the *History*. Herodian is not interested in exploring the internal structure of the political elite, or in creating a comprehensive picture of what different branches of

⁷⁸ The only exception comes after Severus defeated Niger. Severus offered an amnesty to soldiers who were deserting to the Parthians out of fear of him (3.4.7); cf. the speed with which the opposing armies at Aquileia all become στρατιῶται in contrast to Pupienus' Germans (8.7.2-8.1).

⁷⁹ During riots caused by Cleander. The distinction between military groups occurs at 1.12.9; after a speech from Commodus' sister Fadilla, and therefore a change of scene, things were resolved when the (now unified) soldiers and people (οἱ μὲν στρατιῶται... ὁ δὲ δῆμος) decided to stop (1.13.5).

⁸⁰ 7.5.2. Other governors described as members of the Senate include Pescennius Niger (2.7.4), Albinus (2.15.1) and Capelianus (7.9.1).

⁸¹ 7.7.5-6. They sent out the opinion of the Romans and the Senate (τὴν Ῥωμαίων καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου γνώμην), and most of them 'joined the Romans' (προσέθεντο Ῥωμαίους). The few governors who supported Maximinus are therefore both non-senatorial and non-Roman.

the army thought at any one time. Instead, his narrative is directed towards easy comparisons. To that end, creating homogenous groups is extremely effective.

Reading Herodian

Though this chapter has argued for a more careful reading of Herodian, it has not sought to reject established responses. The importance of comparing emperors in his narrative has long been observed.⁸² If anything, this concentration on rulers needs to be made even more prominent in interpretations of the *History*. As this chapter has shown, Herodian's interest in comparable reigns is not limited to the personal morality of emperors. It percolates through to his presentation of Roman society as well. The tripartite empire made up of Senate, army, and people provides a consistent means of calibrating imperial actions. When Marcus died, his support was both universal and genuine. Only Severus Alexander was met with the same positive unanimity, and even that changed during his military campaigns. The respective failings of other emperors can all be seen in the nature of their interaction with these three groups. The effect is reinforced by an episodic structure which invites direct comparison between repeated scenes. After Caracalla is described processing through Rome with the entire army, advancing on the senate house fully armed, it comes as no surprise that he goes on to massacre the Senate and the people. Herodian has recently been described as, 'all about the emperors'.⁸³ That does not only apply to the actions of the emperors themselves.

There are significant consequences from the structural focus on comparable reigns. From a modern perspective, Herodian's analysis of historical and political events seems extremely crude. The main groups involved exist as monolithically homogenous collectives. Their actions are internally coherent wherever possible, with a ready externalisation of any disunity. Where the progression of the narrative requires division, it is only ever temporary, and always resolved at great speed and with minimal disruption. Herodian's approach to history is universalising at every opportunity. That, however, does not immediately make it simplistic, or simple to unpick. Herodian can be nuanced, in the same way that he is also extremely consistent: not necessarily in his narrative, but always in his

⁸² e.g. Widmer 1967: 16-34.

⁸³ Pitcher 2018b: 249.

thematic exploration of imperial power. The limits of the definition of the army or the people may change in the narrative, but their structural role in the illustration of an emperor's reign does not.

The implications for historical scholarship are especially noteworthy in light of the previous discussion of Cassius Dio. The *Roman History's* presentation of a Senate under attack has led to Herodian's formulation of social groups being seen as a reflection of the same political developments.⁸⁴ If Dio's creation of a united Senate is a simplified version of political life, Herodian's social groups are significantly more so. The reason is straightforward. It is not that Herodian is inherently a bad historian, but that his aims in writing the *History* differ considerably from what modern scholars desire. When the equestrian order essentially does not exist, and when the Praetorian Guard can be equated with the army as a whole, Herodian is clearly not attempting to portray the nuances of political life. Herodian's historiographical scheme is a comparative study of rulers, with Marcus Aurelius as its exemplary model. In order to understand Herodian's political narrative, it is vital to acknowledge that these comparisons underpin every aspect of the *History's* world.

⁸⁴ Haegemans 2010: 29-46 provides a recent overview in these terms.

Soldiers and Senators

Maximinus the Thracian

It would be something of an understatement to say that history does not remember Maximinus (235-238) with any great fondness. The attacks against his reign started quickly. Herodian is clear that Maximinus was nothing more than a soldier. His reign began with the assassination of Severus Alexander by mutinous troops (6.8-9), and according to Herodian was characterised by a determined association with the army. Maximinus not only never visited Rome in his three-year reign, but he is described as expelling everyone from the camp on the Rhine/Danube frontier so that he could be surrounded by military men and no one else (7.1.3). Despite a successful campaign against Germanic tribes (7.2), Maximinus was really nothing more than a violent and greedy tyrant (esp. 7.3). This proved his undoing. A revolt against excessive taxation led to the rebellion of Gordian I (7.4.1-2); though it proved unsuccessful, it encouraged the Senate into opposition in Rome. They appointed the ex-consuls Pupienus and Balbinus as co-emperors (7.10.1-6), inspiring a military response from Maximinus which would eventually lead to his death. He invaded Italy at the head of an army, but was stalled at the northern city of Aquileia (8.1-4). There, Maximinus suffered the same fate that brought about his reign, dying at the hands of his men (8.5).

The defining aspect of Maximinus' character in the *History* is his background. Famously, he is described as μιξοβάρβαρος, a semi-barbarian (6.8.1). Herodian twice refers to rumours about his origins as a shepherd in Thrace, who was able to build a successful career due to his terrifying size.¹ The general overview of his reign shows how these supposedly barbarian roots come to define his character, and his approach to power:

ὁ δὲ Μαξιμῖνος παραλαβὼν τὴν ἀρχὴν πολλὴν τὴν μεταβολὴν ἐποιήσατο, τραχύτατα καὶ μετὰ πολλοῦ φόβου τῇ ἐξουσίᾳ χρώμενος, ἔκ τε πραείας καὶ πάνυ ἡμέρου βασιλείας ἐς τυραννίδος ὠμότητα μετὰγειν πάντα ἐπειρᾶτο, δυσμένειαν ἑαυτῷ συνειδὼς, ὅτι πρῶτος ἐξ εὐτελείας τῆς ἐσχάτης ἐς τοσαύτην τύχην ἦλασε. φύσει δὲ ἦν τὸ ἦθος, ὡσπερ καὶ τὸ γένος, βάρβαρος (8.1.1).

¹ Firstly at 6.8.1, and repeated with the caveat that it was a rumour at 7.1.2.

When Maximinus took control he brought about a great change, exercising his authority very harshly and with much fear. He tried to change everything from a mild and altogether gentle monarchy into a cruel tyranny, aware of the hatred towards him for being the first person to rise from wholly insignificant origins to such great fortune. But in his behaviour, just like his birth, he was by nature barbarian.

In this moment of imperial succession, Herodian describes an emperor who fits easily into the moralising pattern of imperial characterisation built around Marcus Aurelius. He is the very opposite of moderation and restraint (1.1.2). While Severus Alexander had transformed the empire into an aristocracy after the excesses of Elagabalus (6.1.2), Maximinus reverts to tyranny. Far from σεμνότης and σωφροσύνη, Maximinus is characterised by his savagery (ὠμότης) and low-birth (εὐτελεία). The themes of savagery and fear which are introduced here are consistently associated with Maximinus' character.²

Recent scholarship has understandably been quick to condemn the obvious rhetorical excesses of Herodian's portrayal.³ At the same time, however, there is a fundamental reliance on the *History* in all of the most recent reconstructions of Maximinus' reign. As has long been recognised, the *Historia Augusta* follows Herodian very closely in its biographies of Maximinus and the other emperors of 238. The basic shape of events remains the same, with more extreme details added.⁴ Both extended narratives of Maximinus' reign are therefore built around the same chronological structure. The same can then be said of modern reconstructions too, in which the same basic outline of events is recorded universally: Maximinus was appointed by the soldiers; he alienated the Senate; his rapacious collection of taxes caused a revolt in North Africa, which failed; the cause was taken up in

² For general discussions of Maximinus' moral depiction in the *History*, see Burian 1988; Opelt 1998: 2943-45; Hidber 2006: 225-29; Martin 2006; Pitcher 2018b: 238-42.

³ See Haegemans 2010: 6-9 for an overview of the change in attitudes in the twentieth century, and the move away from using Maximinus' barbarity as the starting point for understanding his reign.

⁴ Already, with numerous examples, Mommsen 1890: 261-69, and sufficiently evident that it could be summed up in one paragraph in Barnes 1978: 85; for more detail, see Lippold 1991: 56-78; Brandt 1996: 46-51.

Rome; and ultimately Maximinus died after rushing into an invasion of Italy, despite his apparently superior military position.⁵ The result is an approach to Maximinus which accepts Herodian's account of what happened, but questions his explanations.

His interactions with the Senate provide a demonstration of this process. The most detailed investigation of Maximinus in the last decade has been carried out by Karen Haegemans. She is clear in challenging the idea that the emperor was especially aggressive towards the political elite, but nevertheless sees the uprisings of 238 as indicative of their alienation. As Haegemans concludes a discussion of Maximinus' appointment policies, 'it seems as though rather than being vengeful, Maximinus just showed a clear disinterest in the aristocracy.'⁶ Similarly, his reputation for greed in the *History* is explained by a need to pay for military campaigns, which is then taken as a sign that 'the emperor ignored his civil duties as well as the misfortune of his people.'⁷ The rhetoric of barbarian savagery is put to one side, but otherwise Herodian's narrative is fully accepted.⁸

The more synoptic histories have followed suit. Thus, for example, David Potter has dismissed tales of his youth as a shepherd as 'wild slanders'. Even so, he describes the situation in 235 as needing a diplomatic approach, and writes that Maximinus simply was not up to the task. 'He plainly did not realize that part of his role as emperor was to play the urban politician, and that the consequence of failure in this role could be fatal.'⁹ The same tone comes through in Clifford Ando's recent appraisal. At a time when the empire needed 'intelligent leadership', Maximinus it is claimed was 'perhaps unable to comprehend' the complex world of Roman politics, leading to descriptions of his 'gross

⁵ Thus recently Drinkwater 2005: 28-33; Hilali 2007: 57-61; Hekster 2008: 14; Huttner 2008: 161-76; Haegemans 2010; Ando 2012: 103-109; Potter 2014: 167-71; Kulikowski 2016: 112-16.

⁶ Haegemans 2010: 96-106; cf. Hdn. 7.1.3-4, 7.3.3-4.

⁷ Summarised at Haegemans 2010: 129-30; Hdn. 7.3, 7.4.2.

⁸ Following her explicit justification in the introduction to the monograph: '[Herodian] just adapted his information to fit the framework of his highly moral text, which was written to please the reader... We just need to keep in mind that Herodian's intention seems in the first place to have been moral in nature.' Haegemans 2010: 15-16.

⁹ Potter 2014: 167.

irresponsibility as ruler'.¹⁰ Michael Kulikowski can note that 'posthumous slander clouds almost every aspect of Maximinus's reign', and almost immediately assert that 'Maximinus seems not to have cared very much about the offence he was causing at Rome'.¹¹ There is a consistent pattern here. Herodian is challenged for his excessive moralising, but at the same time, his account is the most important basis for reconstructions of life under Maximinus.¹²

When the previous chapter is taken into account, such an approach quickly appears problematic. These reconstructions are based on Herodian's portrayal of Maximinus' interaction with the army and the Senate. As his reign begins, their role as homogenous entities in the broader scheme of imperial comparisons is immediately apparent. His barbarian vices dictate the emperor's character, and are displayed through his actions towards the two groups. Maximinus' ὠμότης was driven in part by the fear that the Senate and his subjects would not respect him, because of his εὐτελεία (7.1.2). His anti-senatorial stance is confirmed with the report that he sent all of Alexander's friends, who had been selected by the Senate, back to Rome (7.1.3). The emperor's low birth then explains his interaction with the soldiers, with a strong emphasis on his desire for complete solitude among them.¹³ Herodian's narrative has been taken as accurate in its content, if not its explanation. But the details he records represent a performance of the characteristics which define Maximinus, configured in a way which encourages comparisons to other emperors.¹⁴ His refusal to engage with

¹⁰ Ando 2012: 104.

¹¹ Kulikowski 2016: 112-13.

¹² John 1993: 188-207 provides a lengthy discussion of what made Maximinus a tyrant, stressing his low social status and confiscations of wealth; the detail is derived primarily from Herodian. See also Drinkwater 2005: 60; Gerhardt 2008: 775-77; Mecella 2017: 202-207.

¹³ Within one sentence, Herodian writes that Maximinus wanted to be alone (μόνος εἶναι βουλόμενος); that he wanted to have no one else with him who had any power through their knowledge of their superior nobility (μηδένα αὐτῷ παρεῖναι ἐκ συνειδήσεως εὐγενοῦς κρείττονα); and that there was nobody there to whom he would have to show respect (μηδενὸς αὐτῷ παρόντος ᾧ νέμειν αἰδῶ ἀνάγκην ἔχει, 7.1.3).

¹⁴ Maximinus dismissed or executed all of Alexander's household (7.1.4), just as Caracalla had done after murdering Geta (4.6.2-5). Both men surrounded themselves with soldiers and no one else.

anyone apart from his soldiers is one aspect of a wider programme of imperial barbarity.¹⁵ In other words, scholarship which emphasises Maximinus' disregard for political life remains fully invested in Herodian's scheme of imperial characterisation.

If this were true exclusively for events which involved Maximinus himself, it would already place considerable doubt on the value of Herodian's narrative as a descriptive record of his reign. As will be argued in this chapter, however, the influence of imperial character runs significantly deeper. Maximinus does not simply reflect structural trends which reinforce the importance of the emperor in the historical model of the *History*. In many respects, his reign represents their culmination.

Compared to other emperors, Maximinus is remarkably absent from much of Herodian's account. The lengthy rebellions in book 7 put the emperor on the narrative's periphery. In the final three-quarters of the book (7.4-12), Maximinus is the focus of only one chapter (7.8, in which he finds out about the uprising of the Gordians) and the concluding subchapter (7.12.8, in which his army stands ready to invade Italy). This does not mean that his impact is not felt. Herodian manipulates the *History's* structure to maintain close links between the emperor's character and the narrative world which he frames. The remainder of this chapter will follow Herodian's portrayal of events in Rome. As Maximinus' reign progresses, Herodian presents the city going through a series of phases, in which the reader's expectations are increasingly subverted. The rhetorical themes of barbarian savagery remain prominent, but their associated tropes are strikingly repositioned. Imperial power becomes a danger to Rome, before corrupting the familiar interactions of the empire's three constituent groups. Repeated scenes play out in reversed roles, as violence is directed by the Senate and the people against the army. The people become an unpredictable ὄχλος, and Rome is transformed into

¹⁵ This also continues the idea of inconsistency. Maximinus faces two attempted uprisings at the start of his reign. The first is led by a former consul called Magnus, and involves 'many centurions, and everyone from the Senate', πολλῶν τε ἑκατοντάρχων συμπνεόντων καὶ τῶν ἀπὸ τῆς βουλῆς ἀπάντων (7.1.4). By definition, for this narrative to actually take place, there had to be a senatorial presence with Maximinus. As explored in the previous chapter, this inconsistency is not problematic; it only reinforces the idea that the relationship between Maximinus and the Senate was one of mutual hatred.

a battlefield. Ultimately, after an explosion of violence and looting, it is restored by the emperor's assassination. All the time, barbarity and savagery hold sway. Under Maximinus, Rome is turned upside down. Rather than approaching the later books as a reliable historical source, I believe that they demonstrate most fully Herodian's over-riding interest in imperial character. His aim does not seem to be the production of an objective record, but rather to explore events in the capital as a commentary on the emperor.

Universal Opposition

Herodian's account of Maximinus begins on the frontier, and stays there for some time (6.9-7.2). The emperor survived two attempted coups and then led the army on an invasion of Germany. When the narrative returns to the capital, the three main social groups immediately appear, in what might seem a conventional demonstration of the universal hatred which Maximinus inspired. He abused the elite (7.3.2-4) and the people (7.3.5-6), and even the soldiers hated him (7.3.6). In a crystallisation of the opposition between Maximinus and Marcus Aurelius, Roman society is united again, though this time in their hatred of the new ruler. In other respects, though, it is far from typical. This is not merely a confirmation that Maximinus was a bad emperor. Throughout the summary, Herodian portrays an emperor whose entire rule represented an external threat to Rome.

Herodian begins his description of Maximinus' reign with a formulation which introduces the effects of a barbarian emperor. Maximinus was not completely incompetent. His invasion of Germany (7.2) was highly successful, leading Herodian to suggest that he could have conquered the whole region if he had wished to.¹⁶ In an apparent reference to the fulfilment of Marcus Aurelius' campaigns, he claims that Maximinus could have advanced 'all the way to the Ocean'.¹⁷ Any potential association with praise is immediately undercut in the transition from the invasion episode into the summary:

καὶ ἐς δόξαν ἦρθη ἂν ἡ πράξις αὐτοῦ, εἰ μὴ τοῖς οἰκείοις καὶ τοῖς ὑπηκόοις βαρύτερος ἐγεγόνει
καὶ φοβερώτερος. τί γὰρ ἦν ὄφελος βαρβάρων ἀναιρουμένων, πλειόνων γινομένων φόνων

¹⁶ See Berger et al. 2010 for recent archaeological evidence which may support the extent of Maximinus' advance as far east as the Weser, with further discussions collected in Pöppelmann et al. 2013.

¹⁷ 7.2.9; Commodus claims that he will do the same thing at 1.5.6 to finish his father's wars.

ἐν αὐτῇ τε Ῥώμῃ καὶ τοῖς ὑπηκόοις ἔθνεσιν; ἢ λείας [αἰχμαλώτους]¹⁸ ἀπάγειν τῶν ἐχθρῶν, γυμνοῦντα καὶ τὰς οὐσίας ἀφαιρούμενον τῶν οἰκείων (7.3.1);

He would have been raised to a good reputation from his deeds had he not been so oppressive and fearsome towards his own people and subjects. For what was the point in destroying barbarians when there were more deaths happening in Rome itself and among the subject nations? What was the point in carrying off plunder and prisoners from the enemy while stripping and robbing his own people of their possessions?

After briefly resembling a positive force as a general, Maximinus abruptly returns to a barbarian stereotype. His regime away from the frontier is characterised by the fear of his subjects, while Herodian begins to move Maximinus away from any shared identification with Rome. The repeated contrast between barbarians and Romans, between hostile foes and those who are meant to be the emperor's own people, blurs the position of Maximinus as a supposedly Roman emperor. His positive achievements in war bring about the same suffering for his allies as much as for his enemies. Herodian has just described Maximinus bringing plunder and prisoners, αἰχμαλώτους καὶ λείαν, back to Sirmium as winter set in (7.2.9). These were the legitimate spoils of a war against a foreign enemy. But the same violent approach was then turned against Rome. The threat which barbarian opponents traditionally posed against the empire is being carried out by Maximinus himself. The passage is highly reminiscent of Herodian's introduction to his reign at the start of book 7. There, Maximinus was barbarian by nature and birth; here we see his nature given free rein, as foreign wars give way to attacks against Rome.

As 7.3 progresses, Herodian presents an imperial greed which puts an increasing strain on any suggestion that Maximinus could be seen as a legitimate Roman ruler. He is portrayed as a figure who is not only external to Rome's political world, but indeed external to Rome itself. Herodian begins what at first seems a fairly generic attack: Maximinus took money from the rich, allowing informers

¹⁸ αἰχμαλώτους questioned by Stavenhagen 1922: 182 accepted by Cary 1969-70 II: 168; Lucarini 2005: 143.

to flourish in his search for wealth.¹⁹ He is then described as humiliating the elite based on minimal justification (7.3.3-4). A closer reading demonstrates a more specific link to Herodian's character outline earlier in the book. Maximinus is described as summoning opponents from across the provinces on small and insignificant charges, ἐκ μικρᾶς καὶ εὐτελοῦς διαβολῆς (7.3.3). There is an irony in Herodian's presentation of Maximinus here. The emperor's own insignificant background, his εὐτελεία, is a recurrent theme at the start of his reign.²⁰ That same trait is now directed against members of Rome's elite. Moreover, the specific targets only reinforce this reference to his low birth. The men facing charges are from the highest levels of the elite, including former consuls and even those who had been granted triumphs (7.3.3). The reader is reminded of Maximinus' origins in a moment of stark contrast to the elite who suffered during his reign. This may not be the specifically Roman view of social order found in Dio's *Roman History*, but it is nonetheless an indication of a moral inversion under Maximinus, linked to his particular traits. Like Septimius Severus, his motive was φιλοχρηματία (3.8.7; 7.3.2).²¹ Maximinus though gains an additional pettiness, delighting in insignificant charges as a man who should have been insignificant himself.

From the elite, Herodian's catalogue of imperial greed moves to its effects on the other two main social groups. After taking everything from the rich, Maximinus turned to money which was intended for public functions (7.3.5-6). Funds reserved for the grain supply, or public festivals and building works, was stolen. Maximinus even robbed the temples of their precious metals. The connection with the people is explicit. Herodian uses a term derived from δῆμος no fewer than six times over the course of his hundred-word account of the seizures in Rome. The target is specifically popular, with three of these connected to sources of wealth.²² Everything that could be, following Herodian's standard rhetoric, was taken from public buildings and turned into coin (πᾶν ἐχωνεύετο, 7.3.5).

¹⁹ Herodian is typically universalising. The informers are granted total licence (ἄνεσίς τε γὰρ πᾶσα), and the victims lose all their possessions (τῶν ὑπαρχόντων πάντων, 7.3.2).

²⁰ It occurs three times in 7.1.2.

²¹ The same vice is shared by the soldiers after they sold the empire to Didius Julianus (2.6.14).

²² Public affairs/finances, τὰ δημόσια; money left for public gifts, νομάς τῶν δημοσῶν; decorations on public buildings, εἴ τις ἦν κόσμος δημοσίου ἔργου (all 7.3.5).

Resistance to Maximinus is just as marked by its connection to the people. His actions angered the people, leading to a public grief; such is the threat posed by the emperor that some of the people even set up watch around the temples, to defend them from attack.²³

The transition into popular opposition to Maximinus does not change the focus on his barbaric nature. With this attack on the public, Maximinus fully embraces his heritage. Rome is made to look as though it were under attack:

πένθος τε δημόσιον ἐνεποίει δίχα μάχης καὶ ἄνευ ὄπλων ὄψις πολιορκίας, ὡς τινας τῶν δημοτῶν καὶ χεῖρας ἀντιθεῖναι καὶ τοὺς νεῶς φρουρεῖν, ἐτοίμως τε ἔχειν πρότερον ἀναιρεθέντας πρὸ τῶν βωμῶν πεσεῖν ἢ σκῦλα τῶν πατρίδων ἰδεῖν. (7.3.6)

A public grief was brought about by the appearance of a siege without fighting or weapons, such that some of the people turned to opposition and set up watch around the temples, ready to be killed and fall before the altars rather than see the plundering of their homeland.

Even though there is no actual fighting in Rome, it nonetheless resembled a siege. The militaristic language continues, further alienating Maximinus from his subjects, presenting him as an external and wholly threatening force. The people are willing to die in defence of the temples, a rapid upscaling of a situation which has just been described as lacking any weapons. In turn, the valuables being taken out of the temples have become the spoils of war. Luke Pitcher notes the irony of an emperor taking spoils away from Rome,²⁴ but I would suggest that Herodian's description is even stronger. The phrase σκῦλα τῶν πατρίδων works as a forceful summary of Maximinus' actions. Rome's inheritance has become the prize of a barbarian's conquest, his own heritage as an outsider reinforced in his celebration of ransacking a Roman opponent.²⁵ The success of the German campaign

²³ The people, τοὺς δῆμους (7.3.5); a popular grief, πένθος τε δημόσιον (7.3.6); and resistance from some of the people, τινας τῶν δημοτῶν (7.3.6).

²⁴ Pitcher 2012b: 281 n.18.

²⁵ The idea is perhaps punned on earlier, with his treatment of despoiled senators. Maximinus is described as σκύλας δὲ καὶ ὑβρίσας, abusing and insulting them (7.3.4).

is turned on its head. Roman military success against external enemies is meaningless, overwhelmed by an internal barbarian aggression.

The picture of opposition to Maximinus is completed with the inclusion of the soldiers. Their role appears somewhat arbitrary. After extended descriptions of the alienation of the Senate and the people, Herodian's account of opposition from the soldiers is much briefer. He concludes with the comment that the soldiers were also unhappy, because their relatives and friends were reproaching them for being responsible for Maximinus' actions (7.3.6). Within the wider context of the *History*, the cause of military unrest is a strange one. There is no shortage of soldiers opposing emperors, but elsewhere this is due to either excessive discipline or perceived weakness.²⁶ Though there is no specific linguistic suggestion that we should see this as the army engaging on a personal level with the people, even interaction between soldiers and their families is unique to this scene. Two other references note that soldiers have families,²⁷ but they have no effect on the progression of the narrative; this agency of relatives over the troops is unique. It is also the only moment before his eventual assassination at which Maximinus faces any kind of hostility from the soldiers as a whole.²⁸ In many ways, this feels like an attempt to ensure that Maximinus is hated by everyone. As the complete opposite of Marcus Aurelius, he is opposed by the elite, the people, and the troops.

²⁶ As Maximinus himself would discover, when killed by his own soldiers as the siege of Aquileia dragged on (8.5.6-8). See also Pertinax (2.5.1); Macrinus (5.2.5); Elagabalus (5.8.1); Severus Alexander (6.7.10); Pupienus and Balbinus (8.8.1).

²⁷ At 3.8.5 he mentions a contentious law issued by Septimius Severus that allowed soldiers to marry (above, 15 n. 71); 8.5.8 mentions the fact that the soldiers had families, but they played no role beyond their existence in the camp at Alba Longa.

²⁸ Though there are two assassination plots, even they were driven by the ex-consuls Magnus and Quartinus respectively, with specifically limited military support (7.1.4-11). The first is supported by everyone in the Senate (7.1.4), but includes only a few soldiers (στρατιωτῶν μὲν ὀλίγους, 7.1.6). The other is made up of Osroenian archers. In neither case does Herodian refer to the army as a whole, or anything more than a small group acting outside the usual homogenous mass. See Zimmermann 1999a: 256-60 on the plots, including brief discussion of the lack of individual senators identified by Herodian.

Herodian's universalising approach, and his tripartite social structure, are strong enough to overrule a historiographical approach which usually views the army as an independent force.

With the explanations for the soldiers' hatred of Maximinus there is a final reference to his status as a barbarian. Their opposition arose from the reproach of their relatives and close friends, their συγγενεῖς and οἰκεῖοι. This comment comes at the very end of 7.3, and recalls the complaints which introduce the summary of life in Rome under Maximinus. As Herodian began, what is the point in expanding Rome's power, γυμνοῦντα καὶ τὰς οὐσίας ἀφαιρούμενον τῶν οἰκείων – 'when stripping and robbing the possessions of your own people?' (7.3.1). The army was responsible for Maximinus' rise to power, but it also suffered as a result of his reign. In the repetition of οἰκεῖοι, Herodian completes a scheme of universal hatred towards Maximinus, and also reinforces his total externalisation from Rome. The soldiers are connected to τὰ οἰκεία, the metaphorical shared household of Herodian's empire. In this specific episode, they were able to interact productively with other groups that comprise it. Maximinus could not.

The cumulative effect of 7.3 is to present Maximinus as more than simply universally loathed. He becomes a direct threat to Rome, an emperor who was a barbarian enemy, rather than a defender of the subjects who were meant to be his own people. This scheme of social unity will quickly break down as Herodian moves onto the more specific scenes of rebellion against Maximinus. Nonetheless, it creates an effective backdrop for the events to follow. Herodian takes advantage of a structural scheme which by this stage in the narrative is extremely familiar. The Senate, the army, and the people all reaffirm his twin, and inextricably linked, defining characteristics: he was hated, and he was a barbarian.

Barbarian Agents and Subverted Expectations

The overview of Maximinus' reign in 7.3 shows how Herodian portrays the barbarian ruler as a subversive force, corrupting the role of the emperor. The next series of episodic scenes continues that theme. It tells the story of the North African revolt of Gordian I and II, based in the city of Carthage (7.4-9). Maximinus himself is largely absent. He appears in one scene, after the news of the uprising had reached the frontier, in which he delivered an angry speech and then began the march

on Italy (7.8).²⁹ Nonetheless, his peripheral location does not render Maximinus unable to influence the narrative. The revolt itself is framed around the actions of his agents, all of whom share in the characteristics and motifs which defined Maximinus as an external threat. An unnamed tax collector was responsible for causing unrest in the first place (7.4.2), and the Gordians are eventually defeated by the senator Capelianus (7.9).³⁰ In Rome, events are shaped around the Praetorian Prefect Vitalianus.

The connection of these three men to the emperor is not limited to supporting him. In their depiction, we can start to see how Maximinus' characterisation remains central to the entire Carthaginian uprising. On a simple level, all three men show a strong resemblance to the barbarian ruler. In the case of the first agent, that connection is explicit: he was especially cruel in collecting taxes out of a desire to gain favour with Maximinus, who was generous to men like himself. The desire to copy Maximinus is supported by a textual echo, as he acted violently and with every savagery, τραχύτατα, καὶ μετὰ πάσης ὠμότητος (7.4.2). Capelianus meanwhile was only pretending to support Maximinus, with the intention of taking power for himself should anything go wrong (7.9.11). His behaviour after the Carthaginians were defeated cements the comparison. Following the example of Maximinus in Rome, Capelianus attacked the cities of North Africa as though they were foreign enemies. He engaged in the sacking of temples, ἱερῶν σύλησις,³¹ and robbed money from private and public

²⁹ His barbarity is preserved in several ways. Not only did Maximinus rely on an aide to write the speech for him (7.8.3), but he concluded by shaking his hands and head about, as if physically threatening Rome itself (7.8.9).

³⁰ On Capelianus' career, Dietz: 1980: 109-20; Zimmermann 1999a: 264 n. 585.

³¹ Haegemans 2010: 124-25 notes the similarity, presenting it as a widespread policy of Maximinus' regime.

sources alike (7.9.10).³² These are the barbarian qualities of Maximinus – both the vice itself, and its employment – taking effect around Carthage too.³³

As events in Rome show, it is not just the supporters of Maximinus who are imbued with their master's savagery. The episode of Vitalianus' assassination sees the traits of a barbarian emperor spread throughout Roman society. In 2018, Andrew Scott published an investigation of one of the repeated plot types in the *History*. His article traces the development of conspiracies against emperors which are led by Praetorian Prefects. He describes a number of episodes, including the failed assassination attempts against Commodus, the successful plots which led to the accessions of Pertinax and Macrinus, and in some detail analyses the ambiguity of Plautianus' conspiracy against Septimius Severus. Scott writes that this traditional conspiracy type, found from accounts of Sejanus onwards, is a demonstration of normative imperial activity. He then sees a distinct shift in the narrative, which aligns with the end of conspiracies of this kind following the accession of Macrinus. The orderly world of Praetorian Prefects vying for power is replaced by chaotic instability. As Scott concludes: 'As Herodian's employment of this plot type runs out, so does the relatively normal state of affairs at Rome, and the power of the prefect is seemingly dispersed to the military as whole, and concomitantly instability and chaos increase.'³⁴

There is one significant exception to Scott's assertion that Praetorian Prefects have less of a role in the second half of the *History*. It is an episode from the reign of Maximinus, concerning the prefect Vitalianus (7.6.4-9). In several ways, the scene conforms to the model set out by Scott. As with earlier examples, it revolves around a Praetorian Prefect, and a sealed letter ostensibly carrying secret imperial instructions. To follow Kemezis, as Scott seems to be in his discussion, it also displays

³² In doing so, he seems to fulfil Maximinus' promise to his frontier army that the people of Italy would flee, leaving the emperor to distribute their property to the troops (7.8.8).

³³ The barbarian aspects are not limited to Maximinus. Capelianus also burned and plundered the villages and fields, echoing Septimius Severus' treatment of the Persian villages near Ctesiphon in the use of ἐμπύρημι and λεηλατέω (7.9.12, 3.9.10).

³⁴ Scott 2018b, quoting 457.

‘streamlining’: Vitalianus is the only named figure who is not an emperor, while a lack of detail in the build-up to the plot creates an easy and seamless transition straight into the assassination attempt.³⁵ But there is a fundamental difference. In a total inversion of the normal plot type, Vitalianus is the only prefect who is the *target* of an assassination attempt.

The role reversal is reflected in how the assassination unfolds. From the outset, Vitalianus is presented as having the opposite relationship with the emperor to other scenes. Whereas Laetus and Macrinus faced imperial wrath, Vitalianus was extremely close to Maximinus, being both very dear (φίλιτατος) and dedicated (καθωσιωμένος) to him. Rather than having a prefect fearing for his life, in this case Gordian’s plot is explained because of the fear other people felt towards Vitalianus. Along with his rule by fear (φόβος), Vitalianus acted τραχύτατα καὶ ὠμότατα, very harshly and very cruelly. This is exactly the same language used to introduce Maximinus at the opening of book 7. Instead of opposing the emperor, he has become a proxy for Maximinus, taking on his barbarian attributes (7.6.4-5).³⁶ The shift in relationship is mirrored in the inversion of the role of secret correspondence in this assassination. Laetus and Macrinus are saved by their interception of secret letters ordering their respective executions;³⁷ Vitalianus was killed upon receiving one. Gordian sent him a letter which appeared to be from Maximinus, allowing the assassins to strike while he was checking the authenticity of its imperial seals (7.6.8).

Perhaps the greatest twist then comes in the conclusion. The assassination may not have resulted in an immediate regime change, but it did have some effect on Rome. At first, this appears to be quite positive. Herodian describes scenes which are familiar from many ancient accounts of tyrants being overthrown:

³⁵ Above, 124 n. 20; Scott 2018b: 435.

³⁶ See Opelt 1998: 2944-45 for comparisons between Maximinus and Vitalianus.

³⁷ One of Commodus’ favourite young boys inadvertently took a list of condemned individuals to Marcia the emperor’s wife (1.17.2-7); Macrinus read his own death warrant because Caracalla was too busy racing chariots (4.12.4-8).

συκοφάνται τε οὖν καὶ οἱ γενόμενοι τινῶν κατήγοροι ἢ ἔφευγον ἢ ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδικηθέντων ἀνηροῦντο, ἐπίτροποί τε καὶ δικασταὶ οἱ τῆς ἐκείνου ὠμότητος ὑπηρέται συρέντες ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου ἐς τοὺς ὀχετοὺς ἐρριπτοῦντο (7.7.3).

And so informers and those who had been accusers either fled or were destroyed by their victims, while procurators and jurymen who had been agents of [Maximinus'] brutality were seized by the mob and thrown into the sewers.

Herodian presents a fairly generic idea of informers being removed from Rome,³⁸ with the added specific reference to the ὠμότης of Maximinus' barbaric regime. This appears to conform to a promise made by Gordian in a letter to the Senate and people (7.6.3-4). He had denounced Maximinus' ὠμότης, promising to exile informers and pardon those tried unjustly. There is already an indication that this may not in fact be the case. Informers were seized ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου, by the mob. Herodian is very specific in his introduction to this scene that the δῆμος is not acting in its usual role. He writes that every δῆμος has the potential to become an ὄχλος, and the Roman one is worse than any other (7.7.1). This is only the second time in the *History* that the people in the city of Rome are called an ὄχλος; its repetition in the attacks against informers immediately suggests considerable unruliness, perhaps to the extent that they, like Maximinus, should now be thought of as outside the normal social structure.³⁹

Whatever the significance of the terminological choice, it is clear that there is a close link between popular action against informers and Maximinus. It is not just unruliness which follows the assassination of Vitalianus. The people's actions directly resemble the emperor's. Immediately following on from the previous passage, widespread violence broke out:

³⁸ Gordian himself had banished them in the letter sent to the Senate (7.6.4); Pertinax (2.4.8) and Macrinus (5.2.2) did the same in their respective attempts to return Rome to a state of freedom.

³⁹ Cf. the ὄχλοι in Rome, after the oriental procession of Elagabalus (5.6.9). There may be a suggestion that the people cease to be the true δῆμος when under disruptive eastern influence.

φόνος τε οὐκ ὀλίγος ἐγένετο καὶ μηδὲν ἀδικησάντων ἀνθρώπων· δανειστάς γὰρ ἑαυτῶν ἢ καὶ ἀντιδίκους ἐν πράγμασιν ἀγοραίοις, καὶ εἴ τις πρὸς τινα βραχεῖαν αἰτίαν εἶχε μίσους, ἐπαναβαίνοντες ταῖς οἰκίσεσιν ἀπροσδοκῆτως, ἐπηρεάζοντες ὡς συκοφάντας ἐσύλησάν τε καὶ ἐφόνευσαν. ἐν προσχήματι ἐλευθερίας ἀδείας τε εἰρηνικῆς ἔργα πολέμου ἐμφυλίου ἐγένετο, ὡς καὶ τὸν τῆς πόλεως ἐπάρχοντα μετὰ πράξεις πολλὰς ὑπατικής (Σαβῖνος δὲ ἦν ὄνομα αὐτῷ), βουλόμενον κωλύσαι τὰ γινόμενα, ξύλῳ παισθέντα κατὰ τοῦ κρανίου τελευτῆσαι (7.7.3-4).

There were many murders, and by no means of guilty people. If someone had creditors or legal opponents, or any other petty excuse for hatred, they would break into their houses without warning and label them informers, then rob and murder them. In the appearance of freedom and peaceful fearlessness, acts of civil war took place: when the greatly experienced urban prefect, who was called Sabinus, wanted to put an end to what was happening, he was hit on the head with a club and killed.

As Herodian's own quick repetition puts it, informers may have been driven out by the wronged (ὑπὸ τῶν ἀδικηθέντων), but it was not just wrongdoers (μηδὲν ἀδικησάντων) who were killed.⁴⁰ This idea is reinforced by two verbal parallels with Maximinus' own extremes of savagery as emperor. In his schema of tyranny against the three social groups, Herodian has Maximinus encouraging informers to make accusations: πρόκλησις δέδοτο συκοφάνταις ἐς τὸ ἐπηρεάζειν (7.3.2). After the death of Vitalianus, that situation is subverted to extreme effect. After getting rid of actual informers, the mob turned on other opponents, and accused them of being *delatores* as well: ἐπηρεάζοντες ὡς συκοφάντας. The reversal of the linguistic structure creates a deeply ironic moment, in which Herodian presents people maliciously informing on their enemies for being informers. When the prefect Sabinus tried to calm things down, he too was killed. We are presented with a Rome which is in thrall to informers, where the lives of the political elite are in danger. The savagery of Maximinus may have been removed, but it is merely replaced with a tyranny which looks exactly the same.

⁴⁰ Cf. Pertinax specifically having informers tried away from Rome to prevent unjust trials (2.4.8).

The second echo has much the same effect. As discussed in more detail above, the people of Rome become particularly angered by the appearance of a siege, even though there was no actual fighting, nor any weapons (δίχα μάχης καὶ ἄνευ ὄπλων ὄψις πολιορκίας, 7.3.6). The failure to escape tyranny after the assassination of Vitalianus is reinforced by a similar but contorted construction of appearance and reality. His death led to the appearance, πρόσχημα, of freedom; civil war was now the reality. While the people had been defending Rome from a barbarian Maximinus, they themselves now descended into open warfare in the streets, turning weapons against their fellow Romans. The people ultimately took up the mantle of the barbarian invader. Earlier, they had protected the city from Maximinus' attempts to take its wealth as σκῦλα, the spoils of war (7.3.6). In this episode, they were the ones pillaging Rome. If anyone was accused of being an informer, the mob robbed and killed them, ἐσύλησάν τε καὶ ἐφόνευσαν. The threat to Rome is not limited to Maximinus as an external force, or even his supporter Capelianus, who sacked North African cities. These are three of only four uses of συλλάω/σκυλεύω and their derivations in the entire *History*.⁴¹ The twisting of expectations leads to the people who are geographically bound to the capital becoming its ransacking enemies.

It may have struck any reader that one group has been conspicuously absent so far in this conspiracy, even more so in the light of Scott's interpretation above. There are soldiers in this account, but their role is almost hidden. Gordian sent his letter to Rome with a quaestor, who was given 'some centurions and soldiers' (ἑκατοντάρχας καὶ στρατιώτας τινάς, 7.6.5). This is the sole time that a military presence is mentioned in the entire episode. Thereafter, all their actions occur through third-person plural verbs, without any nominal mention of who these people were. They occur only twice in pronominal form, when orders were given to them (αὐτοῖς, 7.6.6), and rumours spread by them (αὐτῶν, 7.6.9). Where the subjects of plural verbs are given even an article, they refer to other people – those who should have been attending Vitalianus but weren't for various reasons (οἱ μὲν... οἱ δὲ, 7.6.8), and the people who were nearby after the murder (οἱ δὲ παρόντες, 7.6.9). Even as the subject of the third-person plural verbs changes, Herodian makes no explicit indication of returning

⁴¹ The fourth (8.4.10) is discussed below.

to the soldiers carrying out the plan. The assassins exist only through their actions, with no identity of their own.

Contrast that with the role of the people. As the rumour spread, the whole *demos* ran around everywhere as if possessed (πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ὥσπερ ἐνθουσιῶν διέθει πανταχοῦ, 7.7.1), a return to a universalising approach after the *τινες* from the army.⁴² Herodian then stresses that the Roman people, even compared to other mobs, are particularly prone to unpredictable rioting. Within the riot scene itself, there is then the reminder that the informers are being thrown out of Rome by the mob, ὑπὸ τοῦ ὄχλου. This is not a complaint about the army taking over after an assassination, but a depiction of violence which is ultimately driven by the masses.⁴³ It is here that we see the completion of an ironic subversion of the tropes of misrule in the *History*. In 7.3.6, the soldiers were accused of being the agents of imperial violence, especially at the expense of the provinces. In the final point of subversion of all expectations around tyranny, it is the masses who were the informers, who were the barbarians, and who took up that aggressive military role. Though the narrative of his reign starts by stressing military support, in this episode, it is the people who have transformed into Maximinus.

It is here that Scott's reading of the apparent disappearance of the Praetorian Prefect assassination scene requires some reworking. On the one hand, it is certainly the case this is a demonstration of a growing unrest in the later parts of the *History*. However, this is not the result of an omission of normative narratives of power transfer, as Scott argues, but rather their careful subversion. Indeed, this reaches its peak in consideration of Scott's view that Herodian is primarily concerned with the growing power of the military. Such a depiction could easily be expected at this point of Herodian's

⁴² There is a close parallel with the assassination of Commodus. In 193, all the people went around in a frenzy, as if they were possessed, and ran about in all directions (πᾶς ὁ δῆμος ἐνθουσιῶντι ἐοικῶς ἐξεβακχεύετο διέθειόν τε, 2.2.3). After Vitalianus, they did almost the same thing, minus the Bacchic hyperbole. In the earlier scene, the people restrain the army, rather than causing violence. See also 2.6.1, where the people ran around madly (διέθειόν τε ἐνθουσιῶσιν) looking in vain for the murderers of Pertinax.

⁴³ Cf. the assassination of Elagabalus, with frequent reference to the army (5.8.5-9), and indeed that of Alexander (6.8-9).

narrative, but we actually find something which seems to minimise the army's role.⁴⁴ This conspiracy may look convincing in its detail, but that is only the case when it is read in isolation from the rest of the *History*. Its expression is reliant on the careful deployment of social groups as homogenous entities, in roles for which they would normally be considered wholly inappropriate. As part of a wider thematic and structural framework, it is a demonstration of social chaos produced by the undermining of all the tropes which a reader of the *History* can come to expect. Monica Hellström's recent suggestion that we might read 7.7.1-4 as a 'reversal of the natural order', as the people take up a role which is normally reserved for the military, is convincing.⁴⁵ But in the specific connections to Maximinus, the social chaos in Rome is even more complex. It is not just that the soldiers and the people reverse roles. All expectations of how Rome is meant to function under a tyrant are subverted, as the empire begins to resemble its corrupt ruler.

Rioting in Rome

Compared to the uprising of the Gordians, the more successful rebellion led by Pupienus and Balbinus seems less direct in its connection to Maximinus. There are no more named individuals who remain loyal to the emperor, who can be used metonymically to represent his barbarian traits. The narrative appears more straightforwardly as an example of intense social conflict, in which senatorial co-emperors rose up against the power of the army. In Rome, the appointment of new rulers led to violence between the army and the people, who were led by senators (7.10-12). This looks like a clear-cut example of the social unrest which has come to define the third century. Herodian's narrative is much more complex than this. The immediate aftermath of the appointment of Pupienus and Balbinus is marked by a series of episodes which overturn all expectations. As seen in the first riot,

⁴⁴ It also raises the question of the assassination of Pertinax. In Dio's account, the Praetorians are angered due to the scheming of the prefect Laetus (74[73].8-9). Herodian presents a situation driven exclusively by the Praetorians themselves. If his aim was to emphasise the newly militarised anarchy after the death of Macrinus (*pace* Scott 2018b: 456-57), it seems strange that his 'streamlining' of an earlier account would emphasise the military aspect at this early stage of the *History*.

⁴⁵ Hellström 2015: 253 n. 9.

the three social groups remain important as a foundation for comparisons in repeated episode types. As the narrative advances, the disruption of typical social structure grows only worse.

Herodian's account of the rebellion led by Pupienus and Balbinus begins in the same social terms found elsewhere in the *History*. After the news reached Rome that the Gordians had been defeated at Carthage, the city entered a state of fear at the potential retribution from the violent Maximinus (7.10.1). The people and the Senate in particular, ὃ τε δῆμος...ἢ τε σύγκλητος μάλιστα, were in a state of shock. In response, the Senate gathered in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus to decide on a course of action. Everything appears to have proceeded in good order among the senators. A series of votes led to the eventual decision to appoint Pupienus and Balbinus, who were duly voted the full honours of imperial office (7.10.2-5). The detailed account of a meeting between senators recalls the accession of Pertinax, and the peaceful exchange of speeches which led to his acceptance by everyone (2.3); it is a long way from the threatening speech delivered in the senate house by Caracalla (4.5).

Any illusion of calmness is instantly broken. Immediately after the election of Pupienus and Balbinus, Herodian describes a moment of social tension. While the Senate was voting in favour of the two men, the people (ὁ δὲ δῆμος) were gathering outside the temple (7.10.5). As the senators attempted to leave the temple, the mob confronted them angrily, threatening the newly appointed emperors and demanding that someone from Gordian's family should be appointed instead. The scene of violent opposition crystallises around a tripartite social order:

ὁ δὲ Βαλβίνος καὶ Μάξιμος ἐκ τοῦ ἵππικοῦ τάγματος νεανίας τοὺς τε πάλαι στρατιώτας οἱ ἐν Ἑρώμῃ διέτριβον, περιστήσαντες ἑαυτοῖς ξιφηφόρους προελθεῖν τοῦ Καπετωλίου ἐβιάζοντο, ὑπὸ δὲ πλήθους λίθων καὶ ξύλων ἐκωλύθησαν, ἔστε δὴ ὑποβαλόντος τινὸς αὐτοὶ τὸν δῆμον ἐσοφίσαντο (7.10.7).

But Balbinus and [Pupienus] surrounded themselves with the young men from the equestrian order, and men who had previously been soldiers who were staying in Rome. Armed with swords, they attempted to force their way out of the Capitol, but they were stopped by a hail of stones and sticks. On someone's suggestion they then tricked the people.

This passage has been taken as evidence of direct popular involvement in imperial politics at even its highest levels. In Herodian's account, the trick employed against the people was the appointment of Gordian III as Caesar (7.10.8-9).⁴⁶ Such an interpretation is possible from reading the scene in isolation, but becomes more problematic when it is considered in terms of Herodian's presentation of social order. All three groups are present in this scene, if somewhat contrivedly. The Senate, along with the equestrians, gather with former soldiers on one side; the people form the other.

An overview of the social scheme of Herodian's riots shows the importance of the three groups in his depiction of upheaval in Rome. A reorganisation of alliances soon follows, resulting in open fighting between the people, with the support of the Senate, and the army (7.11.1-12.7). Though the efforts to defeat the soldiers who were besieged in the praetorian camp dominate the rioting, a final redistribution is found at the conclusion of the scene, as the people and soldiers united in looting the homes of the wealthy, as much of the city burned down (7.12.7). All three possible combinations of the social groups are explored. Moreover, each shift in alliance is marked by an increase in the level of violence.⁴⁷ The threat of violence from the people turned into warfare against the soldiers, and ultimately into a physical destruction of Rome which was ruinous to the wealthy. This is a far cry from the harmony after the death of Marcus Aurelius, or even the predictable events of an emperor like Pertinax, who faced consistent opposition from the soldiers alone.

Closer reading of the different stages of Herodian's riots greatly problematise any acceptance of their accuracy. Throughout the unrest in Rome, the three groups are presented in roles which are entirely inconsistent with the earlier narrative. The reaction to Pupienus and Balbinus demonstrates how this effect operates. As outlined in the previous chapter, there are many formulaic episodes of imperial

⁴⁶ The involvement of the people in the uprising of 238 was most forcefully argued by Mullens 1948, who saw the regime of the co-emperors as a manifestation of popular unrest; see however Dietz 1980: 322-26 for a comprehensive rebuttal. For the role of the people in appointing Gordian III, see recently Lo Cascio 2005: 157; Gerhardt 2008: 775-76; Potter 2014: 168. The scene has also been viewed as an example of patronage networks more commonly associated with republican politics being deployed, Zimmermann 1999b: 147-52.

⁴⁷ They also coincide with a change in location. See Pitcher 2012b: 277-78 for a comparable example from the reign of Commodus, who becomes more tyrannical as he moves around the empire.

procession in the *History*.⁴⁸ This example stands out from the others. Pupienus and Balbinus are not the only emperors to be hated by the people; Didius Julianus faced much the same problem. But the roles are reversed. Where Julianus advanced in a military formation (2.6.13), Pupienus and Balbinus were blocked by the masses who were sufficiently armed to drive the imperial party back to the senate house. This diversion from the standard formulation is reinforced by the efficacy of sticks and stones in the face of swords. The Gordians' Carthaginian ὄχλος, armed with impromptu shields and weapons, had just been massacred by Capellianus (7.9.4-5); in Rome, the ὄχλοι (7.10.5) have no such problems.⁴⁹ The role reversal is also seen in the explanation for popular opposition to the new emperors. Herodian claims that the people hated Pupienus because of his excessive discipline during his time as prefect (7.10.6), an accusation which already echoes Maximinus' claims about why the Romans hated him.⁵⁰ A broader scope of comparison adds a further level of subversion to the scene. The people themselves mirror the Praetorians from forty-five years earlier, who marched on the imperial palace to remove Pertinax for his excessive discipline (2.5.1). This is not just a moment of popular engagement in politics. It is an illustration of the collapse of normal social order in Rome. In Herodian's scheme, the people become the source of violence to be placated;⁵¹ their successful obstruction defies all expectations concerning military actions.

⁴⁸ Above, 137-44.

⁴⁹ Cf. 1.12.8 and 7.12.5 for examples of the people hiding on rooftops, because they can't defend themselves against properly armed troops.

⁵⁰ Pupienus displayed a lot of discipline to the people (πολύ τε τὸ ἐπιστρεφές); Maximinus accused the Senate of being opposed to a rule that was disciplined and ordered (ἐπιστρεφεῖ καὶ κόσμιον, 7.8.7). Maximinus claimed that the Romans opposed his discipline; it was actually his opponent's which caused problems. This is very much in keeping with Kemezis: 2014 252-50 on the ironic role of speeches in the *History* (see above, 130-31).

⁵¹ The Senate's trick can perhaps be understood in this context. The figure most associated with deception in the *History* is Septimius Severus. He is described using a σόφισμα on five occasions: three times in his deception of the Praetorians when he came to power (2.13.1; 2.13.11; 2.13.12); gaining the short-term support of Albinus by appointing him Caesar (2.15.2); and taking the children of Niger's general Aemelianus hostage (3.2.4). The only other example is when Balbinus is afraid that Pupienus is tricking him, leading to their deaths at the hands

The unexpected role of the people is supported by the unlikely reversal of one of the standard images of political conflict in the third century. In Herodian's account of the rioting, the Senate were the main source of violence. The catalyst is a moment which inverts one of the standard tropes of Roman historiography. The soldiers left in Rome by Maximinus went up to the senate house to see what was happening in a meeting.⁵² They were unarmed. When a few soldiers went inside, two senators – Gallicanus and Maecenas – stabbed them in the heart with hidden daggers, killing unarmed men with their own concealed weapons (7.11.2-4). The very idea of an unarmed soldier being killed in cold blood is a bizarre twist on their usual role as the armed propagators of violence.⁵³ The idea corresponds to the reformulation of tyranny after the death of Vitalianus. Usually, wealthy senators faced the threat of violence from greedy emperors throughout the *History*. In 238, the normal order of political aggression is turned upside down.

It might be possible to suggest from both these scenes that Herodian's scheme of homogeneity shows signs of weakness. There is some suggestion from Herodian himself that the mob which gathered outside the temple of Jupiter might have been responding to the friends and relatives of Gordian I (7.10.1). Meanwhile, just two senators are implicated in the murder of soldiers, while Gallicanus individually is presented as urging the people on to fight the soldiers (7.11.5-7). In keeping with his wider approach, Herodian maintains these possibilities only very briefly. In the first instance, Gordian's supporters are not named as senators; the inference is possible, but it is not part of Herodian's original scheme. Moreover, as seen above, the people were persuaded to oppose the new emperors primarily by their own hatred of Pupienus. Gordian's friends may have arranged the mob,

of the Praetorians (8.8.5). The Senate's response to the people thus takes on language associated with openly militarised civil war.

⁵² Herodian is typically vague about what was happening in the Senate, saying simply that the people and soldiers wanted to find out what was going on (βουλόμενοι τὸ πραττόμενον μαθεῖν), 7.11.2.

⁵³ The contrast between armed soldiers and unarmed victims occurs on several occasions: the murder of Pertinax (2.5.3); the disbanding of the Praetorians by Severus (2.13.11); Caracalla's massacre of the Alexandrians (4.9.6). There are many other examples of a less explicit threat from armed soldiers, as seen for example in the processions of Julianus and Caracalla described above, 139-41 and 152-54 respectively.

but they did not decide its opinion. Gallicanus and Maecenas conform to Herodian's tendency to return quickly to homogenous group behaviour. Immediately after the senators stabbed the troops, Herodian writes that everyone (πάντες) was carrying a blade, whether openly or in secret (7.11.4). The two senators are thus far from unique with their concealed daggers. Moreover, Gallicanus' individual role only lasts for one scene. After the soldiers successfully escaped to the camp and held off the people's early forays, senatorial opposition is presented as much more generalised. Herodian writes simply that the anger of the people and the Senate grew.⁵⁴ Gallicanus disappears from the narrative, to be replaced by homogeneity in senatorial fury.

The portrayal of the violent unrest which followed Pupienus and Balbinus rests on a simplistic picture of Roman society. But even here, when the emperor is specifically not in Rome, Maximinus is inescapable. The idea of the people taking up his savagery has been introduced above. It becomes much more explicit in the later rioting. Regular attacks from the people followed the one led by Gallicanus, to no effect. The soldiers continued to resist, angry that they were being attacked by Romans who were behaving like barbarians, ὑπὸ Ῥωμαίων ὡς ὑπὸ βαρβάρων (7.12.3). The Roman *demos* has fully embraced the model of Maximinus, and even surpassed his attacks on the city. Where the emperor made Rome look like a siege with his barbarian savagery (7.3.6), the people literally engaged in one.⁵⁵ There is no longer the pretence of freedom that was seen under Gordian (7.7.4); Gallicanus openly incited civil war (7.11.6). Herodian's inversion of the expected social roles works specifically in relation to Maximinus himself. The army and people do not merely change their usual functions as aggressors and victims respectively. They do so as the enactors of a barbaric tyranny which is unique to this one emperor.

The Death of a Tyrant

It is into this setting of disrupted society that Maximinus returns to the narrative. The story of his invasion takes up the majority of the *History's* final book, centred around the successful resistance

⁵⁴ μείζων ἢ ὀργή τοῦ τε δήμου καὶ τῆς συγκλήτου ἐγένετο, 7.12.1.

⁵⁵ In the first attack on the camp, the people advance in order to besiege it, ὡς πολιορκήσοντες (7.11.8); cf. the appearance of a siege, without fighting or weapons, δίχα μάχης καὶ ἄνευ ὄπλων ὄψις πολιορκίας (7.3.6).

against his army by the citizens of Aquileia (8.2-5). The invasion itself has been studied very effectively as an example of how Herodian's comparisons between emperors operate across his narrative. Luke Pitcher and Adam Kemezis have noted the contrasts between his invasion, and that of Septimius Severus.⁵⁶ They have also observed unexpected reformulations of thematic tropes. Maximinus' failure has been linked to a subversion of Herodian's standard geographical rules. Italy is transformed from a place of protected comfort into a hostile land, which actively hindered Maximinus and his troops. For Luke Pitcher, this is a demonstration of the 'disconcerting deliquescence of old certainties' for Maximinus, whose position is undermined even as his assumptions about Italy are washed away.⁵⁷

Away from the emperor's personal actions, the same thematic play is found in the resolution of Maximinus' reign, after his death. At the end of book 7, Rome was burning. A great swathe – bigger, Herodian reports, than the size of most cities – was destroyed, and its buildings looted (7.12.7). There is no indication of this at all in book 8. We next see Rome when Maximinus' severed head reached the city, after his assassination. Herodian presents a festive atmosphere spreading across Italy, with celebrations of Maximinus' death which were, apparently, impossible to describe succinctly (8.6.6-7.1).⁵⁸ Sacrifices were made, laurels carried, and everything was done in good order. All of this was brought about by the arrival of the dead emperor's severed head.⁵⁹ A verbal echo confirms the shift. As after the death of Vitalianus, the people ran around as if possessed (ὡσπερ ἐνθουσιῶν, 7.7.1). The same madness is found at the head's arrival in Rome, as the people ran to the circus, again ὡσπερ

⁵⁶ For example, the Italian cities had welcomed Severus, and he quickly moved on from them (2.11.6); Maximinus found those cities abandoned (8.1.4), and despite the expectation of an easy victory (8.2.2) he was fatally delayed at Aquileia.

⁵⁷ Pitcher 2012b: 280-82; Kemezis 2014: 239-45.

⁵⁸ οὐδ' εἰπεῖν ἔστι λόγῳ (8.6.7).

⁵⁹ Cf. 3.8.1, when Septimius Severus sent the head of Clodius Albinus back to Rome. This is reported as one aspect of Severus unleashing his anger against Albinus' supporters. He ultimately arrived back in Rome for a similar greeting with laurels, but in an atmosphere of significant fear (3.8.3). See Dio 76[75].7.4-8.4 for the same episode, and the terror it caused.

ἐνθουσιῶντες (8.6.8). This time their madness was celebratory, rather than murderous. It is a spectacular contrast to the end of the riot. There is no mention of any damage to the city; rather than being razed and pillaged, it now appears joyfully bedecked in flowers.

As a narrative, this may seem extremely inconsistent. This is less the case when thinking in terms of Herodian's comparative scheme, and the use of repeated scene types. As observed above, Maximinus' reign is characterised by the subversion of familiar tropes and episodes. The response to his death is a fitting conclusion. The assassination of the emperor at the hands of the army would not normally be a cause for celebration. These are moments when the soldiers have previously run amok, and when an atmosphere of panic has taken over Rome. When the emperor was a barbarian, however, his death is a restorative event.⁶⁰ Its detail presents a return to the standard roles for the three social groups. The army was not happy with the selection of Pupienus and Balbinus, but even its resistance follows earlier patterns. They pretended to show their support, as they had for Pertinax, out of the same necessity which saw the appointment of Macrinus, while secretly hating the new emperors.⁶¹ The death of Maximinus is a final moment of subversion, before normality in Herodian's narrative world is resumed.

The effect can be seen in a collection of military motifs from the siege of Aquileia and its immediate aftermath. While he was still alive, the absent barbarian reigned over a city which was being pillaged to increasingly violent degrees. After his death, a remarkable shift occurs in Herodian's imagery. The final mention of σκῦλα occurs during the siege of Aquileia. After being covered in burning pitch, the besieging troops strip off their armour, leaving it looking like the spoils of war (8.4.10). Shortly afterwards, Herodian adds a second militarised motif. Herodian has already described the appearance of a siege, ὄψις πολιορκίας, without any fighting, and the appearance of freedom, πρόσχημα ἐλευθερίας, in a civil war. After the death of Maximinus, the Aquileians keep the gates locked, but trade with the army outside. The result was a condition of peace and friendship, even while there was

⁶⁰ The violent death of Elagabalus had similarly positive results when Severus Alexander came to power (6.1).

⁶¹ 8.7.2-3; cf. 2.2.9 (Pertinax), 4.14.3 (Macrinus). Even their deaths return a degree of familiarity, even if it is one built on violence. Soldiers run amok (8.8.7), just as they had after killing Pertinax (2.6).

the appearance of a siege: ἦν εἰρήνης μὲν καὶ φιλίας διάθεσις, σχῆμα δὲ ἔτι πολιορκίας (8.6.4). The arms of the retreating soldiers meet the genuine definition of σκῦλα, but they are left alone. So too the reality of a siege is masked by an apparent peace. Both are dramatic inversions of images which have previously connoted unrest. The end of barbarian rule is not only marked by the death of Maximinus, but by a final reversal in the images of warfare.

Herodian's interest is not in the accuracy of his depiction of Rome, but in how he can use the city to comment on the emperor. The contrast between the destruction of Rome as Maximinus is about to invade Italy, and its restoration after his death, forms part of an overall depiction of a disruptive ruler. For Barbara Kuhn-Chen, Maximinus' tax collector represents the negative form of an idea which is first mentioned under Marcus Aurelius, that subjects resemble their emperors.⁶² This approach can be applied much more broadly. As a peripheral barbarian in charge of Rome, Maximinus is the inversion of social and geographical expectations. This sets the tone for Herodian's depiction of the entire empire during his reign. In a final crescendo, book 7 sees the ultimate aim of a barbarian actually achieved. The city itself was set alight, and its wealth looted. This should be the ultimate presentation of barbarian success against Rome. It is precisely from this point that the emperor's fortunes declined. The invasion of Italy saw Maximinus first deserted by his abilities as a commander, and then by his soldiers. In a final ironic twist, his death follows an unlikely model. Maximinus was killed by mutinous soldiers outside his tent, alongside his son, after failing to win them over with appeals; all his friends were attacked and killed (8.5.6). The great barbarian emperor died the same death as Severus Alexander, the weak mother's-boy he replaced.⁶³ His disappearance from the narrative coincides with a public holiday to celebrate the emperor's death, and with scenes of peace in the middle of a battleground. What could be more fitting a conclusion to Rome's experiences under its subversive barbarian ruler?

⁶² Kuhn-Chen 2002: 290.

⁶³ 6.9.1-7. Substitute Maximinus' son for Alexander's mother, and the two scenes contain all the same features. This includes threats to kill Alexander's military prefect (6.9.4), which actually happened under Maximinus.

Writing Rome in the *History*

This chapter began with an overview of how the *History* continues to be fundamental to reconstructions of the reign of Maximinus. The widespread approach to the evident moralising rhetoric of Herodian's narrative has been to challenge its most obvious deployment. The barbarian origins of Maximinus, and the savagery which defines his character, have both been rejected. At the same time, however, the general structure of his account has been accepted. As I have argued here, such an approach is dangerous. It is misleading to suggest that Herodian's rhetoric can easily be removed from the surface of an otherwise reliable narrative. I have shown in the preceding chapter that his interest in exploring and comparing the reigns he narrates extends beyond the specific traits of emperors, into the actions of a tripartite society which surrounds them. This analysis has demonstrated the extent to which this holds true, even when Maximinus appears to be absent.

The reign of Maximinus is one of constant inversion in the *History*. His tyrannical sway is exercised from the periphery of the empire, but it is felt as acutely in Rome as anywhere else. Pitcher and Kemezis have highlighted the disruptive effect of Maximinus on the geography of the empire, but this extends much deeper into Herodian's account. The very structure of Roman society is turned upside down during his reign, in a constant inversion of expectations. Maximinus begins his reign as a figure of universal hatred due to his inherent barbarian savagery. By the time book 7 comes to an end, the victims of his corruption have become its greatest perpetrators. The murder of the Praetorian Prefect Vitalianus unleashed a tide of citizen-informers. Things only got worse after the Gordians were crushed in North Africa. The Roman people are portrayed with the very same kind of savagery which Maximinus inflicted upon them, besieging the city and robbing it of its wealth; only unlike the emperor, they physically destroyed it as well. What starts off as an attack against the vices of a provincial general becomes the basis for Herodian's depiction of the complete breakdown of order.

Herodian's exploration of unrest is reliant on a much wider narrative structure. It would be possible to understand the excesses of Maximinus, and indeed see some of the inversions described above, simply by reading book 7. The full extent of Herodian's play with his reader's expectations can only be seen when it is compared to the rest of the *History*. Senators murdering soldiers in cold blood is an

obvious enough twist on a completely standard Roman trope. Much less apparent without wider engagement with Herodian is the effect of the murder of Vitalianus, which introduces the inverting processes. Emperors plotting against a dangerous Praetorian Prefect sits in perfect opposition to the formulaic scenes which are familiar to Herodian's reader. It flags up a subversive tone which then informs so much of the following action in Rome. So too the connection between the narrative and the character of Maximinus is much more natural after reading the first six books. The individual vignettes from 238 may feel easy to access, but that is already misleading. When placed in the *History's* thematic and structural framework, these episodes are instead decidedly uncomfortable for the attentive reader.

The impact of Maximinus' character on the narrative should give scholars reason to pause when trying to use the *History* to reconstruct the political character of his reign. Herodian's interest in comparing different emperors is far from a new observation, but the depth of its effect has not been pursued. It does not only involve listing personal qualities, but demonstrating them visually. That scheme relies on a social structure which clearly distinguishes between Senate, army, and people. It is one of absolutes, with minimal room for shades of grey. Each group is either favoured or attacked by emperors, and favours or hates them in return. This conceptualisation of social activity may be rather banal from a modern historical perspective, but it is surprisingly flexible when presented in Herodian's neatly self-contained scenes. The occasional unavoidable division can be skipped over quickly, without impacting on a narrative which is easy to follow. The inversions of book 7 present the full extent of its rhetorical potential. The roles of Senate, army, and people cannot be so clearly swapped if there were any murky connection between them. Their transformation from victim to perpetrator of barbarity, or vice versa, is all the more effective because of Herodian's strictly black-and-white presentation.

When Maximinus first appears as a barbarian soldier, his place within the *History's* structure is clearly defined. Herodian's vision of Roman society is remarkably simplistic. It is impossible for Maximinus to be anything other than a military figure in a narrative which is structured around conflict between clearly defined, homogenous groups, whose members are entirely distinct. But it does not follow that the rhetorical scheme is just as straightforward. Any attempts to mine Herodian's narrative for the

detail of 238 ignore the frame which holds it together. Describing Maximinus as a politically incompetent general might seem like it avoids some of Herodian's most obvious embellishments, but it completely accepts the structure of a narrative which is not especially interested in political events beyond the consideration of imperial character. Book 7 has gained a reputation as one of the *History's* most historically reliable. It actually represents Herodian at his rhetorical best.

Conclusion: Rethinking the Third Century

Rethinking Contemporary Historiography

To bring this thesis to a conclusion, it is necessary first to return to the scholarship from which it originates. Historical interest in the third century has grown exponentially in both variety and extent over the past fifteen years. There is now a considerable body of work on the cultural history of the empire in this period, fuelled by a rising interest in the Greek literature of the Second Sophistic.¹ In political terms, the representation of power is now as widely studied as its enactment, with the imagery and architecture of the Severan dynasty especially well served.² As the range of approaches has broadened, so too engagement with the contemporary historiography has changed. Cassius Dio and Herodian are being taken more seriously as authors, deserving of closer literary investigation in their own right.³ Combining the reinterpretations of different kinds of evidence from the start of the century in particular has allowed for some striking reassessments of long-held assumptions. For example, Julie Langford's analysis has transformed Julia Domna from a powerful member of the Severan dynasty into a tool to characterise the men of the imperial family, whether in written narratives or centrally promulgated images. Her actual character or authority are immaterial in these contexts.⁴ Alex Imrie's reconsideration of Caracalla's universal citizenship law can now be included in this interdisciplinary approach, in his emphasis of the edict's role as a means of legitimising his

¹ See above, 3 n. 3.

² See above, 16-21.

³ Demonstrated most clearly by Fromentin et al. 2016, Lange and Madsen 2016 on Cassius Dio.

⁴ Langford 2013: 7-13 introduces her approach; cf. Levick 2007 for a more traditional view.

regime after the execution of Geta.⁵ Episodes and individuals are being recast as part of a continuous process of dynastic legitimation after the end of the Antonine regime.⁶

The growing complexity of analysis is reflected in the most recent anglophone synoptic histories of the third century as a whole. The studies by Clifford Ando, David Potter and Michael Kulikowski have contributed in various ways to the picture of the third century as inextricable from the longer-term developments of the empire, and indeed the wider ancient world. All three have rightly been praised. The basic structure of Ando's overview, alternating between a chronological narrative and thematically organised chapters, has been applauded for its ability to combine short-term political change with longer, social and cultural processes.⁷ Potter's timespan from 180-395 frames the third century as only one transformative period among many, incorporating it into a narrative which includes the reigns of both Constantine and Julian, and the religious disputes of the later fourth century.⁸ Kulikowski has not only followed suit with a chronological shift, placing the origins of the third century's political developments back into the Antonine period.⁹ He has also emphasised the global context of the empire, connecting the third century with a much broader geo-political environment than Rome's immediate frontier regions.¹⁰

⁵ Imrie 2018: esp. 113-33. He allows for Dio's claims that the edict was an attempt to generate income (50-80), but this is only one of several apparent purposes.

⁶ On the Severans specifically, see also Faust and Leitmeir 2011; Lichtenberger 2011; Rowan 2012; Kemezis 2014: 30-89. Hekster 2015: esp. 209-21 makes the important point that their methods necessarily conformed to earlier practice, using dynastic claims as an example.

⁷ Icks 2013 on Ando 2012; see also Levick 2014; Madsen 2014.

⁸ 'A significant benefit of his study of this period is that Potter's work straddles and engages periods of great transformation, rather than allowing the work to be demarcated by it, thereby treating the Roman empire as a continuous and evolving organisation.' Greenwood 2014 on Potter 2014; see also Hekster 2005 on the volume's first edition.

⁹ 'Kulikowski knits this century into the fabric of an imperial program that began in the second century and was not fully completed until the middle of the fourth.' Drake 2017: 567 on Kulikowski 2016.

¹⁰ See esp. Grig 2017.

In such a context, the analysis I have offered here might at first appear rather restricted. It is limited not just to political narrative, but contemporary historiography. Chronologically its focus is relatively narrow, covering fewer than sixty years from the death of Marcus Aurelius to the events of 238. But its consequences have a much broader bearing. While recent scholarship has done considerable work to reposition the political developments of the third century, the underlying mechanisms have not received the same attention. A consistent pattern is still followed, which derives from the narratives by Cassius Dio and Herodian. As remarked in the introduction, the apparent corroboration of two contemporary narratives is a rare phenomenon at any point in the ancient world, and so their shared view has been highly influential.¹¹ They present the same basic picture of conflict between a politicised army and a beleaguered Senate as is prominent across modern scholarship. Even as the range of approaches has grown vastly, the same political question has prevailed. The aim has been to explain how the army came to dominate imperial politics, at the expense of the Senate. Dio and Herodian's moralising causes may have been rejected, but their models of the general political context continue to hold sway.

But agreement between the two narratives does not inevitably mean they are accurate. This thesis has responded to the wider reassessment of the third century by pressing on some of the central assumptions which underpin modern reconstructions. The main force of my approach has been deliberately literary. The discussion of thematic frameworks, authorial self-presentation and imperial characterisation has taken place in a narrative, rather than historical context. But its impact is not limited in the same way. The separate investigation of Dio and Herodian has made it clear that both historians depict a highly simplified political world, especially in their presentations of the Senate. Moreover, they create this impression for very different narrative purposes. The two narratives are not reliable accounts. They are divorced from the events themselves, shaped to the specific interests of their respective authors.

In Dio's *Roman History*, scholars have an account which has met every traditional measure of reliability. The contemporary books are the report of a senator who was personally involved in the

¹¹ Outlined above, 9-16.

events he describes. His immediacy as an eyewitness has become Dio's defining feature as a historian.¹² As I have argued, things are not this straightforward. Even before we get to the question of how Dio wrote about his lifetime, there is the pressing issue of the text's preservation. The majority of the text from the contemporary books no longer exists. With the exception of the manuscript *Vat. Gr. 1288*, the text survives through Byzantine extracts, primarily the eleventh-century *Epitome* of Xiphilinus and the more obviously fragmentary *Excerpta Constantini*. The contemporary history therefore largely consists of those parts of the narrative which Xiphilinus or the excerptors decided were interesting enough to keep. The response from scholars has been overwhelmingly optimistic about the extent to which the surviving text reflects Dio's views. This confidence seems misplaced at best. I have shown that the later interventions can result in an already simplified version of Dio's explanations, with a tendency to omit the technical aspects of Roman politics, in favour of universally applicable moral lessons. This does not mean that it is impossible to study the epitomised books; it is clear that the extant narrative fits closely with the wider thematic framework of the *Roman History*. Even so, it is important to make a clear distinction. The contemporary history does not represent Cassius Dio's full view of the Severan dynasty, nor should it be thought of as representative of a larger whole. It is a series of individual moments, assembled in chronological order, but with an unknowable amount of detail and judgement lost.

Within that interpretative frame, Dio's contemporary shows little nuance in its presentation of public life. There is a clear impression from the *Roman History* that the Senate was a united, corporate body. This is intrinsic to the modern view of the Severan period as well. When pressed, however, Dio's construction of collective senatorial experience begins to fragment as much as his text. At various points, members of the Senate itself are portrayed as external threats to Dio and his peers. No possibility is left for Didius Julianus being anything but corrupt, while Comazon's unprecedented authority is linked exclusively to Elagabalus; both men can only be antagonistic to the "legitimate" senators around them. There is only one form of legitimate political activity in the contemporary history, predicated on respect for 'us senators'. Anything else is corrupt, and non-senatorial, no

¹² See above, 12-13.

matter what the social status of the people involved. The appearance is one of coherent opinions, but even within the narrative, Dio chooses who to include within the senatorial whole. Compounded by the loss of text, it is even more impossible to know how frequently senators were cast out of his exclusionary definition.

This scheme of senatorial activity is beneficial to Dio in two respects, both of which are directly related to his self-presentation as a senator and a historian. It is not simply that his use of the first-person plural claims a participation in shared actions. When he appears as an individual, Dio is consistently at the very heart of things. His reaction is the most extreme, and his responses and actions are presented as an encapsulation of the experience of the wider senatorial group. Through this self-location, he embodies the experiences of acceptable senatorial life, and by extension becomes the representative of legitimate politics. The effect is magnified by the specific methodological claims of the *Roman History*, in which proximity to events is especially important. It allows Dio to fulfil a dual role in his own account, and in doing so to breach the historiographical divide between *logos* and *ergon*. As a narrator, Dio can present events as they appeared from the outside; simultaneously, as a protagonist he is able to explain what he and his senatorial colleagues were really feeling. Dio's depiction of the Senate is not therefore merely simplified. It engenders a highly effective twofold authority, where the senatorial and authorial aspects of his self-portrayal can come together.

These observations are of no little significance to the use of Dio's contemporary books to reconstruct the early third century. The key to Dio's reputation in much modern scholarship is his status as an eyewitness insider. Andrew Scott's view that the *Roman History* presents a senatorial experience of contentious social change is only the most recent reassertion of this position.¹³ But it is one thing to say that Dio was a senator. It is another to argue that his claims to represent a shared senatorial view of the Severans are accurate, especially when he himself is the main evidence for its existence. When Dio's report is privileged, it leads to a clear distinction between "acceptable" senatorial behaviour and corruption. If the possibility of differing views among senators is granted – something which

¹³ Scott 2018a: esp. x-xi, 2-9.

seems entirely likely in the cases of Didius Julianus or Comazon – Dio’s model begins to look much too simplistic. The *Roman History* is the reaction of one senator. Dio may not allow anyone in his narrative world to disagree with his viewpoint, but that is no reason for modern readers not to do so.

Herodian’s place in the modern synoptic histories of the third century is more limited chronologically, but much more comprehensive for the short period for which he is relied on. His *History* dictates reconstructions of the reign of Maximinus Thrax, and the tumultuous events of 238. For the most part, his reliability has been questioned due to a clear interest in the moral character of emperors. Marcus Aurelius provides a model of idealised imperial rule at the start of his narrative, against which later emperors are compared, and universally found wanting. Studies of Herodian are increasingly demonstrating the variety of means for such comparisons. Along with traditional virtues, the way emperors move, the way they speak, even the clothes they wear have been identified as means to explore the relative qualities of rulers. The repeated scenes and motifs used by Herodian are almost cinematic in their construction, putting character on display through the description of actions which confirm internal character traits. At first sight, the later books seem to be an exception. Herodian includes much greater detail than elsewhere, and for large parts of the narrative, the emperor himself is absent. The depiction of senators waging war against soldiers in Rome appears to be removed from a moralising scheme.

These appearances are deceptive. As I have demonstrated, the very structure of Roman society in the *History* is itself closely linked to imperial characterisation. Herodian’s view of Rome is even less nuanced than Dio’s. His narrative is built around three monolithic social groups. The Senate, the army, and the people act as independent, homogenous entities. Like Dio, Herodian often externalises individuals, or specific groups, from the united whole. The German bodyguard of Pupienus can be described as completely separate from the army, while provincial governors exist outside the limits of a Senate located at all times in Rome. When internal divisions are avoidable, the *History*’s episodic structure allows them to be resolved with ease. When civil wars come to an end, Herodian can talk of ‘the army’ without any need for reconciliation. The Senate, divided during the joint-reign of Caracalla and Geta, returns immediately to a state of united persecution after the latter’s assassination.

Though several apparent discrepancies arise within the narrative as a result, they are not important to the *History's* purposes. Herodian's interest is not in the groups themselves, so it does not matter if their actions appear somewhat disjointed. In their function as an indication of imperial character, however, any such inconsistencies disappear. Within the scheme of repeating scenes, the three groups appear in a variety of configurations, reflecting the emperor at the centre of the episode. They provide an almost cinematic backdrop which confirms the moral comparisons Herodian makes. When Pertinax comes to power, Herodian shows the people thronging around him, as the Praetorian Guard are forced to join in; the *testudo* formation which gathers around Didius Julianus to protect him from the terrified crowds confirms the shift in ruling style with a grand display of threatened violence. Beyond moral qualities, the need for Pescennius Niger and Gordian I to dress up their followers like soldiers, and their houses like imperial palaces, presages the fleeting and ephemeral nature of their claims to power. Herodian could not be much further removed from Dio in this respect. He is not just outside the Senate. He shows no particular regard for senators' actions, beyond their utility as a tool for characterisation.

All of this comes to a head in Herodian's portrayal of Maximinus Thrax. From 7.4, and the rebellion of the Gordians, to the end of book 8, Herodian covers perhaps six months at a level of chronological focus more detailed than any other point in the narrative.¹⁴ Detail does not immediately mean accuracy. The uprisings against Maximinus, and the scenes of rioting in Rome, are part of a narrative of barbaric destruction. As Maximinus' reign progresses, the empire is increasingly defined by his traits of savagery and greed. Such is his threat to the empire that the city of Rome itself moves from metaphorical to literal siege by Maximinus and his supporters. The three social groups are prominent in the creation of a chaotic atmosphere. The accession of a man described as an uneducated, violent Thracian soldier is the subversion of the model set by Marcus Aurelius. After several books containing familiar scenes, his reign correspondingly turns all expectations upside down. As the capital is sacked, the Senate become first murderers, before inciting the kind of rioting associated with the army; in

¹⁴ See Sillar 2016; Peachin 1990: 26–29 for the chronology. The only comparable point is the narrow focus of book 2, which covers a few months of 193; cf. Hidber 2006: 136–46 for Herodian's overall temporal scheme.

driving out the emperor's corrupt agents, the people become informers against innocent opponents. In a great reversal of familiar tropes, the city is then saved from destruction by Maximinus' assassination at the hands of his troops. The elaboration of the narrative in book 7 does not have to be an indication that it is an accurate, first-hand account of unrest in Rome.¹⁵ It is a formulation of worsening chaos, in which social order is destroyed, and Rome is razed to the metaphorical ground.

From a more explicitly historical perspective, the use of Herodian's *History* to reconstruct the events of 238 is fraught with problems. In itself, Herodian's narrative is extremely simplistic in its presentation of unified social groups, competing against each other in a series of shifting alliances. The wider role of Herodian's social structure in characterising emperors reinforces the need for caution in following his explanations for the rebellions. When the reassessment of Dio's "senatorial" narrative is taken into account, Herodian's reliability outright collapses. The conflict he presents between the Senate seems to follow Dio's formulation of senatorial experience. The more Dio is viewed as smoothing over competition within the Senate, and externalising individuals who did not conform to his idea of consensus, the harder it is to defend Herodian's more extreme homogenisation of collective activity. Without the support of Dio, the inconsistencies in the *History* are difficult to ignore. It becomes increasingly necessary to accept his account for what it is: an exploration of imperial character and its effects on Rome, with no evident concern for recording the details of political structures. Herodian's conceptualisation of Roman society is undoubtedly effective in that aim, enabling a depiction of Maximinus which is more sophisticated than has largely been noted. It does not lend itself to a simple reconstruction of political tensions.

Literary studies of Dio and Herodian have developed considerably in recent years. If their respective political narratives are to be understood, the same methodologies need to be applied here too. As I have made clear, it is not simply a case of looking beyond literary excesses to find reliable contemporary records of the early third century. Neither historian produced a narrative by building rhetorical images around a central, objective account. Their thematic concerns inform the

¹⁵ See Börm 2008: 74-75 for an effectively sceptical response to some of the claims about Herodian's suddenly increasing reliability in his final two books.

fundamental structure of the Roman worlds they present, just as they shape the character of any given emperor. In many ways, Herodian's account of 238 becomes a confirmation of a different kind of historiographical approach. It demonstrates how deeply the interests of ancient writers can affect how they shape narrative worlds. And it shows how dangerous it is to accept them uncritically. These two narratives are not descriptions of a political division between the Senate and their non-senatorial opponents. They are responses to contemporary events, which create that division as part of historiographical schemes very different in their interests and intentions from our own.

Rethinking Political Conflict

It is one thing to say that current models of reconstructing the early third century are inadequate. It is quite another thing to suggest an alternative. It is self-evidently beyond the scope of this conclusion to offer even an overview of an alternative explanation for the disruptions to imperial authority that plagued Rome over the third century as a whole. Even so, it is possible to put forward a few directions for future research which could sharpen our understanding of its early decades, and in turn modify interpretations of the unrest which followed. The defining feature of my position is the rejection of the assumption that we should be looking for conflict between coherent interest groups. This impression is generated from the contemporary narratives of Dio and Herodian. Rather than thinking of their accounts as accurate descriptions of events, they can be viewed as simplified reactions to them. Two main consequences follow. Firstly, "military" involvement in political life is transformed from the unanimous aims of a coherent body, into moments when individuals took advantage of their connections with the army. Secondly, and importantly, such a reconsideration of military action does not reject the ancient historiography. If the contemporary narratives are treated as responses to events, their detail can be explained outside any discussion of their historicity. They can be thought of as part of a broader discourse of imperial legitimacy. This may dispel a sense of knowing exactly what happened, especially in the 230s. I argue that the acknowledgement of uncertainty is more productive than a naive decision to trust what Dio and Herodian said.

The key figure for this reassessment is Maximinus Thrax. Maximinus continues to be viewed as a political outsider. Even as it is now fully accepted that he was not the barbarian described by ancient writers, a disinterested or incompetent leader who alienated the Senate in favour of spending time

and money on his troops. Ando's jibe at his 'gross irresponsibility as ruler', or Potter's complaint that '[Maximinus] simply did not understand the whole range of the job' are merely reassertions of the dismissive attitude towards his reign.¹⁶ But the reconstruction of an externalised emperor is a reflection of the ancient narratives. Outside written accounts, almost nothing is known about Maximinus' career. Reconstructions of his rise through the military ranks are entirely reliant on the *Historia Augusta*.¹⁷ And as Michael Speidel has now observed, even the most widely reported part of his career – serving as *praefectus tironibus*, in charge of training Severus Alexander's army – is based on the modern fabrication of an office which is in fact otherwise unattested.¹⁸ The assumption that Maximinus was a soldier, and nothing more, derives from Herodian's contemporary account. And as I have argued, that exclusive connection to the army is part of the *History's* scheme of imperial characterisation, just as much as his supposedly barbarian origins.

In order to escape the influence of Herodian's rhetoric, a different approach to Maximinus is needed. I believe that sociological methodologies can offer a useful point of comparison here. I am not the first to argue for such a position; Inge Mennen's study of the political elite in the third century is framed explicitly around sociological definitions of power and status.¹⁹ Where I differ is in the preliminary assumptions. Mennen preserves the clear division between the Senate and the army,

¹⁶ Ando 2012: 104; Potter 204: 170. See above, 160-62.

¹⁷ Herodian says simply that he rose through all the ranks of the army, and was given commands over the army and the provinces (6.8.1). Wiegels 2012 provides a comprehensive overview of evidence and earlier discussion, as well as attempting to reconstruct a plausible career for Maximinus. The common assortment of names Gaius Julius Verus Maximinus makes it very difficult to connect epigraphic evidence which predates his reign specifically to Maximinus.

¹⁸ Speidel 2016: 347-48, with bibliography. Speidel compares the closest attested ancient office, the junior equestrian rank of *praefectus tironum*: 'It is practically inconceivable that a Roman official who had previously commanded legions and governed important military provinces would have next taken on such a lowly position.'

¹⁹ Mennen 2011: 3-10 for the definition of the terms.

treating equestrians primarily as military officers.²⁰ Through a comparison with one of Maximinus' imperial predecessors, I believe that the assumed division can be broken down, and Maximinus himself reframed as someone closer to traditional sources of power.

Pertinax has not received a great deal of attention from historians. His reign lasted only three months,²¹ and primarily appears as part of a brief interlude between the reigns of Commodus and Septimius Severus. In terms of political unrest in Rome, Pertinax is viewed as the opposite of Maximinus. In the ancient accounts, Pertinax was chosen because of his senatorial virtue, and assassinated through the greed of the Praetorian Guard.²² He stands at the opposite extreme in the conflict between senators and soldiers. This continues to be how his reign is viewed. For Ando, so scathing about Maximinus' rejection of the niceties of senatorial politics, 'Pertinax represented the establishment.'²³ His failure to win over the troops, according to such arguments, was simply a sign of things to come.²⁴

But this is only part of Pertinax's career. As far as can be reconstructed, Pertinax held only two offices on the senatorial *cursus honorum*: the suffect consulship, probably in 175; and the ordinary consulship in 192, with Commodus as his colleague. For the remainder of his career, including the years between his consular appointments, his activities look rather similar to the supposed military career of Maximinus. Pertinax's rise to prominence under Marcus Aurelius is attributed to his successes as a

²⁰ Mennen 2011: esp. 43-46. Within her scheme, 'Maximinus was a professional soldier', and 'the first emperor with a pre-imperial career as professional military man' (Mennen 2011: 23).

²¹ Dio 74[73].10.3 records that he reigned for eighty-seven days, which would place his death on the 28 March.

²² For Dio, Pertinax made the mistake of trying to change things too quickly, and as a result alienated the Praetorian Prefect, Laetus. It was Laetus' underhand machinations which provoked the soldiers into killing their emperor (Dio 74[73].6.3; 74[73].9.1). Herodian is more straightforward. The soldiers were angry at losing the indulgence of Commodus, and so killed Pertinax because of his excessive discipline (Hdn 2.5.1).

²³ Ando 2012: 19.

²⁴ Campbell 2005: 1-2; Ando 2012: 19-22; Potter 2014: 95-96; Kulikowski 2016: 77. Note Schöpe 2011 as an exception, for the argument that Pertinax was forced into limiting the extent of his personal authority by the conspirators who selected him.

general in the Marcomannic Wars; adlection to praetorian rank was both a reward, and a means of ensuring that he was eligible for more important commands. There are definite problems with this reconstruction. Much of the specific detail of his appointments derives from the *HA*,²⁵ and is only confirmed through a single, heavily restored inscription found near Cologne.²⁶ But whatever his precise career path, Pertinax appears typical of a number of successful generals who enjoyed Antonine patronage.²⁷

When these two aspects are brought together, they highlight an element of discord in the presentation of Pertinax. He has been received simultaneously as an elderly and respected senator, and also a man who owed everything to his military abilities. It is something which goes back to Dio and Herodian, the former of whom notes his introduction into public office through a tribunate in the cavalry, secured through the patronage of the senator Pompeianus.²⁸ A more individualised perspective on political change has a striking effect on the model of military/senatorial conflict. Much like his patron, Pertinax stood on both sides.²⁹ He could be both a soldier and a hero of the Senate. If this is the case for Pertinax, it raises the question of whether it could also be true of Maximinus.

In order to construct a potential scheme of closer engagement with the Senate by Maximinus, it is first necessary to explore Pertinax in more detail, to establish a comparatively firm basis for comparison. Returning to Dio's narrative of senatorial life in Rome starts to raise a number of possibilities about the kinds of interaction taking place within the political elite. As I have shown, Dio excludes men of all backgrounds from his united Senate, including those with a strong senatorial

²⁵ *Pert.* 1.5-4.3. See Alföldy 1974b; Lippold 1983; Devijver 1988; Kienast et al. 2017: 143-44.

²⁶ Kolbe 1962, = *AE* (1963) 52. Only two columns of text survive, each roughly three letters wide. Even the opening line is restored, to read [P] HELV[IO PERTIN]AC[I].

²⁷ See recently Kemezis 2014: 51-55; Potter 2014: 74-82.

²⁸ Dio 74[73].3.1-2. Herodian (2.1.4) is typically less precise, mentioning successful but unspecified military and civil offices, and listing a number of his victories.

²⁹ Kulikowski 2016: 51-55 introduces Pompeianus as a 'remarkable' demonstration of equestrians gaining very high status under Marcus Aurelius; on his role in Dio, see Kemezis 2012: 394-97.

pedigree.³⁰ The positive reception of Pertinax might allow that thinking to be inverted, to suggest a likelihood of much more collaborative relationships than the ancient writers allow. If a career soldier could be praised as respectably senatorial by a member of the Senate, the same could be true of figures who are attacked. Was Didius Julianus held in the universal contempt suggested by the *Roman History*? Julianus' political career is comparable to Dio's own, climbing the *cursus honorum* and holding several governorships.³¹ It would be surprising if he had no senatorial allies to celebrate his accession in 193. The same could be said about Comazon entering the Senate, or the influence of Praetorian Prefects like Plautianus. Dio is especially clear in his presentation of their separation from his view of legitimate senatorial authority. It does not follow that all senators would have agreed, especially if they disputed the moralising charges which Dio applies to his opponents.³² Such disagreements would suggest a much greater level of competition within the Senate than Dio and Herodian suggest, but that would not be surprising.³³ When the key to political advancement is the emperor's favour, having the support of a newly adlected senator also meant having the support of someone who is in close contact with the imperial court.

That in turn points towards investigations of the court itself. Björn Schöpe's study of the Severan court is extensive in the detail of interaction between emperors themselves and the elite.³⁴ Thinking in terms of elite social networks stresses that this is only part of an explanation for the constitution

³⁰ See above, 100-108.

³¹ Kienast et al. 2017: 147-48.

³² Cf. Schöpe 2014: 83-85 for an introduction to imperial *amici* which follows Dio in seeing some promotions as inherently unacceptable to senators.

³³ Dio's anti-senators are far from the only example; see e.g. Hoffer 1999: 55-91; Ash 2013 on Pliny's use of the senatorial *delator* Regulus as a means of self-definition in the *Epistles*; it could be actively useful to claim opponents. It would be interesting to make a comparison with *delatores* more generally in this context, too. Though universally despised in all ancient narratives, it is difficult to pin down exactly what made someone an informer. Many can be identified as senators. They might therefore be thought of as losers in the game of imperial public life; see Rutledge 2001; Rivière 2002; 397-424.

³⁴ Schöpe 2014.

of the court. Pertinax can again demonstrate this. The ancient narratives might suggest that he owed his promotion to qualities which attracted the attention of Marcus Aurelius.³⁵ Even if we accept that premise, this seems to omit several stages. It does not explain how Marcus became aware of Pertinax in the first place. It may not be coincidental that Pertinax could rise to prominence under an emperor who spent a large proportion of his reign fighting defensive wars on the frontier.³⁶ Though there is almost certainly insufficient data for definitive conclusions, sociological network theories may offer interesting points of comparison.³⁷ The ability to access an emperor, potentially during the campaigning season itself, could certainly have been a factor in the promotions of Pertinax and men like him, enabling them to prove their worth.³⁸

Or it may be that the military element is already misleading. Reformulating the Senate as a much less cohesive body significantly expands the potential social networks in which senators were engaged. It is now widely observed that wealthier equestrians enjoyed similar cultural and economic lifestyles as the senatorial elite. This can be extended into networks of communication, suggesting an even greater degree of integration between the Senate and the wider imperial administration.³⁹ If that is the case, Pertinax's career may owe little to his military abilities. The only evidence for Pertinax's

³⁵ *HA Pert.* 2.7-9 is especially explicit; see also Sidebottom 1998: 2807; Hidber 2006: 203-6 on Pertinax embodying Marcus' virtues in Herodian; Kemezis 2012: 397-402 on the comparison in Dio.

³⁶ For recent overviews of the Marcommanic Wars, see Kovács 2009: 201-64; Birley 2012: 222-30.

³⁷ e.g. Malkin et al. 2009; Collar 2013; Brughmans et al. 2016. In terms of data, there is a reason why many studies concentrate on economic questions, relying on (relatively) abundant archaeological evidence. Ruffini 2008 addresses issues of social structure using the Oxyrhynchus papyri; the evidence to reconstruct communication within the imperial court in this way does not exist.

³⁸ De Blois 2014: 229-31 argues that imperial absence from Rome from the 230s onwards gave equestrians better access to the emperor, increasing their influence; see also Lo Cascio 2005: 164 for Maximinus speaking political change through his absence from Rome. The same justification would appear to apply in case of the Marcomannic Wars too.

³⁹ Weisweiler 2016 offers a useful parallel, investigating the ability of local elites to integrate into sources of central Roman authority in the later empire.

quality as a general is his series of promotions. That may bespeak a political ability to manoeuvre through court intrigue as much as actual skill as a general.⁴⁰ It might be instead that Pertinax owed his career entirely to pre-existing senatorial contacts. Pompeianus may have provided a route into court circles, and acted as contact who facilitated his advancement beyond the tribunate. In such models, direct interaction with the emperor becomes much less important than having someone speaking on his behalf.⁴¹ It may therefore be coincidental that the emperor was on the frontier. There are important questions, which I am not even pretending to answer here. Whatever Pertinax's quality – whether an educated and effective commander, or someone lucky enough to have a senatorial patron – it still needs to be explained how it was that he could gain the emperor's attention.

The suggestion that Pertinax was really an equestrian who happened to be in the right place, at the right time, with the right senatorial patron, invites an obvious reply. How then can his reputation be explained? To be clear, there is no particular reason to doubt that Pertinax was far more educated than the stereotypical soldier, whether or not he really did start out as a *grammaticus*.⁴² Of itself, that is not sufficient to account for such a favourable reception. The same could easily be said of the supposedly corrupt Didius Julianus, who would have experienced the same rhetorical training in his youth. The causal link between an emperor's actions and the praise or censure they received is far from secure. As recent studies of Domitian suggest, even apparently positive traits could easily be transformed into charges of tyranny against an assassinated ruler.⁴³ Rather than analysing the emperor's actual qualities, the issue at hand is why later commentators would choose to present Pertinax in this way.

⁴⁰ This would challenge the common perception of Marcus Aurelius as a particularly effective emperor, if his regime was open to the same cronyism as those of other emperors.

⁴¹ Thus Sandwell 2009 on Libanius, and his engagement in social networks across the empire, with people he likely had never actually met; Schor 2011 on Theodoret's social and religious networks.

⁴² Dio 74[73].3.1; *HA Pert.* 1.4.

⁴³ A colourful example is found in the contrast between *Mart. Ep.* 9.8 praising Domitian's ban on castration, twisted into an attack by Dio. He writes that Domitian wanted to insult the memory of his brother Titus, who had a particular fondness for eunuchs (67.2). See Schulz 2016 for Dio's reception of Domitian.

Pertinax had two benefits in this regard. In the immediate aftermath of his death, he was directly associated with legitimate rule. Septimius Severus originally appears to have taken power on the claim of avenging Pertinax; even without the specific explanations found in the ancient narratives, the reforms to the Praetorian Guard and his decision to add the cognomen Pertinax to his own name make that link quite clearly.⁴⁴ Even after Severus had himself adopted into the Antonine dynasty, and no longer relied on Pertinax to legitimise his position, it is hard to see any benefit from attacking him; it still helped that Julianus was a tyrant.⁴⁵ Pertinax was also useful to the ancient historians. The respective models of Dio and Herodian could both make use of Pertinax. His rise to senatorial status occurred under the auspices of Marcus Aurelius, an emperor who in most commentators' eyes – both ancient and modern⁴⁶ – could do no wrong. The parallels in both ancient narratives are clear, with Pertinax standing as a brief reminder of Antonine prosperity.⁴⁷ Pertinax's reputation was therefore secure without the need for his genuine support of a senatorial tradition.⁴⁸

Using Pertinax, two models have been suggested: how it was he might have come to prominence, and how his positive reception can be explained. The same two ideas can be applied to Maximinus as well. Challenging the simplistic portrayal of conflict between the Senate and the army opens up a series of explanations for his appointment. It becomes possible that Maximinus was part of the same network

⁴⁴ On Severus' actions in 193, see Campbell 2005: 1-4; Ando 2012: 23-28; Potter 2014: 101-103.

⁴⁵ The attempts made by Severus to claim legitimacy have been studied at length. See e.g. Baharal 1996: 20-42 on the use of the Antonines; Lichtenberger 2011 on religious aspects; Kemezis 2014: 55-74; Hekster 2015: 209-18 on Severus' adoption by Marcus Aurelius. See also Imrie 2018: 113-33 on the *Constitutio Antoniniana* as an attempt by Caracalla to justify his sole rule after Geta's death.

⁴⁶ See Hekster 2011 for a discussion of Marcus' persistent reputation for virtue, even in modern scholarship.

⁴⁷ See n. 18. Kemezis 2014: 55: '[Pertinax's] story is similar in many ways to Galba's, except that he was a more personally attractive figure than Galba, and he would come to stand not for the obsolete severity of the forgotten republic, but for a kind of good government that many people in the Severan era could still remember.'

⁴⁸ Though this does not mean that he lacked it. It is entirely possible that Pertinax respected senatorial tradition, but just as possible that his actions have been exaggerated to conform to historiographical ideals.

which contained the political elite, whether as an active figure in the imperial court himself, or as someone with connections to it.⁴⁹ The processes behind his appointment can then be questioned. Rather than Maximinus being the choice of the soldiers, it is possible that he was part of a broader conspiracy against Alexander, which included higher ranking supporters.⁵⁰ Maximinus' reported popularity among the troops could have been a reason for his selection; but like Pertinax, there is the chance that all military associations are to some degree misleading. If Maximinus was fully integrated into an elite social network, a reputation as a commander might not actually have been necessary. Soldiers might have been a means to remove Alexander, guided by conspirators.⁵¹ That is not the same as the army actively choosing their new ruler.⁵²

The disconnect between this view of Maximinus as a well-placed equestrian and the tyrannical soldier from the ancient narratives can be explained in the same discursive terms of imperial legitimacy seen with Pertinax. As Olivier Hekster has recently demonstrated in relation to dynastic presentation, claims of legitimate rule could vary considerably, but were constrained by the cultural norms of the time. Very crudely, ancestry was a useful method of supporting an emperor's authority,

⁴⁹ This would allow a more serious consideration of the links between Maximinus and his colleague as ordinary consul in 236, Marcus Pupienus Africanus Maximus, the son of the emperor Pupienus (*PIR*² H 74). It has already been noted that his wife Caecilia Paulina, may have come from an elite background (e.g. Lippold 1991: 181; Börm 2008: 79; Haegemans 2010: 86). Beyond her marriage to Maximinus, and her deification after her death, nothing else is known about her.

⁵⁰ Cf. Haegemans 2010: 254 for a summary of the idea that the rebellion against Maximinus could have been spread through elite patronage networks. She excludes Maximinus himself from these.

⁵¹ Similar suggestions have recently been made regarding the role of the Praetorian Guard in the assassinations of Pertinax (Appelbaum 2007) and Elagabalus (Kemezis 2014; Arrizabalaga y Prado 2017: 433-41).

⁵² Though a commonplace, the suggestion that the army was responsible for choosing leaders is problematic on a number of levels. It suggests a detailed awareness of the political situation, and relies entirely on greed as a motivation. The individuals who can really gain from a rebellion – the generals themselves – are the ones with access to up-to-date knowledge of the possibility of revolution, supporters in positions of power, and the military strength to assert their claims. Stripping them of agency in favour of their soldiers seems misguided.

but it had to be expressed in terms which its audience could understand.⁵³ The promulgation of military power operated in the same terms. Emphasis on the army may not be appealing to a modern audience, but it was a standard, recognisable feature of Roman imperial rhetoric. This was an empire in which the ruler claimed the title *imperator*, and emperors were granted honorifics based on the foreign peoples they had conquered. Dio might accuse Septimius Severus of needlessly hunting for glory in his invasion of Parthia,⁵⁴ but success as a commander was always a feature of imperial self-presentation and self-legitimation.

There are especially good reasons for this kind of self-presentation in 235. Severus Alexander could be presented as a youthful and inexperienced leader, whose military campaigns, according to Herodian had failed resoundingly. The accuracy of that image is far from certain,⁵⁵ but to some degree that is of only partial importance. Even if it is the result of exaggeration, or indeed outright falsification, this description would benefit the successful general who took over after Alexander's death.⁵⁶ It seems that Maximinus attempted to secure his reputation immediately, with an invasion which may have advanced several hundred kilometres east of the Rhine.⁵⁷ Herodian's comparison of Maximinus' invasions with those of Marcus Aurelius may be more apposite here than has been assumed.⁵⁸ Three years of campaigning on the Rhine/Danube frontier have been taken as evidence of

⁵³ Summarised in greater detail at Hekster 2015: 317-23.

⁵⁴ Dio 75[75].1.1; cf. the criticisms of Caligula's war against the sea (Suet. *Calig.* 46), or Domitian's false victory over non-Germans (Tac. *Germ.* 29.4).

⁵⁵ Contemporary imagery and later writers celebrate Alexander's Persian campaign as a great success. Dignas and Winter 2007: 71-77 assembles the contradictory evidence.

⁵⁶ See Strobel 2004 for the suggestion that Pertinax was in fact closely connected to Commodus' regime, making his portrayal as a restorer of the empire rather misleading.

⁵⁷ Berger et al. 2010 reports the archaeological excavation of a battleground at Harzhorn, around 200 kilometres east of Cologne, dated to the 220s or 230s. It is claimed that the direction of battle suggests the army was returning to Roman territory, and had therefore advanced further. See also papers in Pöppelmann et al. 2013.

⁵⁸ Hdn. 7.2.

Maximinus' lack of political ability or interests.⁵⁹ Quite to the contrary, they have an effective ideological precedent in the shape of Marcus' Marcomannic Wars.⁶⁰ The presentation of an old and therefore experienced general could both distance Maximinus from the weaknesses of Alexander's reign, and also connect him to positive models of Roman leadership.

The negative reception of Maximinus follows the same pattern. The "senatorial" presentation of both rebellions in 238 would certainly gain from a focus on restoring a traditional social order.⁶¹ The Senate's authority was recognisable, and reinforced by its opposition to an emperor portrayed as a jumped-up soldier.⁶² The military aspect of the characterisation may be peculiar to the third century, but its wider basis is not. The attacks bear a striking resemblance to the kind of rhetoric directed against *homines novi* for centuries. The charges against 'soldiers' may represent a new variety of invective in response to a changing political world.⁶³ Maximinus does not have to have been outside elite networks in order for such charges to be made against him. When attacking opponents, a

⁵⁹ Drinkwater 2005: 30; Ando 2012: 103-104; Potter 2014: 167.

⁶⁰ Or indeed Trajan's actions on the same frontier before his return to Rome. See Haegemans 2010: 83-84 for the view that Maximinus' absence from Rome was not a conscious decision, and that its importance has been greatly exaggerated. I would suggest that it could still have been a deliberate move, but one with positive associations.

⁶¹ Townsend 1955 may be simplistic in its presentation of a senatorial revolution, but social networks could allow a more sophisticated support for his suggestion of strong links between the Gordians and Pupienus and Balbinus.

⁶² Nero's *domus aurea* offers a useful comparison. As scholars have now observed, his dominance of Roman space was standard Julio-Claudian practice, and an accepted feature of an early image of imperial power; it became a symbol of tyrannical excess under the Flavians, who used it to stress their own (equally traditional) generosity. See e.g. Rosso 2008; Wood 2010.

⁶³ It is worth bearing in mind that Dio was the son of a consul. His dismissive accounts of corrupt figures may reflect this developing form of conservatism. Thus, Comazon was sent to the galleys as a punishment when in the army (80[79].3.5); he was not only a common soldier, but an ill-disciplined one at that.

background outside the senatorial elite was an easy target.⁶⁴ Equestrian generals (whether adlected to the Senate or not) certainly had a different career to senators like Cicero, but the same arrogant, elitist disregard for men outside the nobility is on show in their criticism.⁶⁵

Reframing ancient historiography as reactive, rather than objectively descriptive, sets up a very different model of political change in the third century. Pertinax and Maximinus may remain as extreme of a spectrum, but only in rhetorical terms. They do not have to be the champions of opposing political forces. Herodian would have us believe that they represent the Senate and the army, and Dio's political configuration closely conforms to his suggestions. Outside of this narrative world, their careers look rather more similar. Both were older men, with experience as military commanders; both were appointed after the assassination of emperors who came to power young, and who had reigned for just over a decade. Their very different reputations can be explained in part through their contrasting roles under later rulers, heightened by Pertinax's association with Marcus Aurelius. Maximinus may not have been a senator, but that does not remove him from the networks of the Roman political elite.

The struggle between the Senate and the army continues to dominate even the most recent reconstructions of the period. The survival of emperors is explained in terms of their ability to maintain the loyalty of greedy soldiers, who would replace them as and when they considered it opportune. This view of the third century derives from its contemporary historiography. It can be put to one side. Just as specific details and individual events have been challenged to increasing effect, so too the general political environment is misleading. If Maximinus Thrax, the archetypal soldier-emperor, was in fact nothing of the sort, it raises significant questions for the remainder of the third

⁶⁴ Börm 2008: 77-78 adapts Weber's three archetypes of legitimate rule, arguing that Maximinus represented himself as a charismatic ruler, as opposed to the legal legitimacy of Pupienus and Balbinus. There is a danger that the differentiation between them is a reflection of their reception, rather than their own claims. That is to say, it is not necessarily that Maximinus used only his military successes as a basis for legitimacy, but that his opponents chose to emphasise that, in order to demonstrate his illegitimacy.

⁶⁵ On such invective in the Republic, Craig 2004; Mehl 2018. See Libanius *Or.* 42 for the phenomenon still occurring towards the end of the fourth century.

century. Unrest can be explained not from competition between antagonistic institutions, but from a weakness of imperial authority itself, and a network of integrated political elites who were willing to claim power for themselves.

This reassessment is removed from the contemporary accounts of ancient writers, but it is not a complete rejection of them. Herodian's narrative of emperors and their individual characters can be understood in conversation with efforts to legitimise imperial authority. It is clear from the *History* that Herodian saw many of these attempts as either corrupt or ineffective. Dio's *Roman History* presents one response to a Senate whose composition was changing. Within the same viewpoint, adlected senators could be welcomed, as in the case of Pertinax, as well as attacked. In Dio's narrative, senators are judged on their conformity to an ideal of behaviour, whatever their background. Correct actions coincide neatly with his own. In both cases, we do not need to accept personal views as representative of a wider social attitude. There is greater scope for competition between means of legitimisation, and collaboration between different parts of an elite imperial network, than either historian allows for. These accounts are not enlightened eyewitness insights which can guide the modern reader through the early third century, but simplifications of a more complex situation. Their explanations should not be taken at face value.

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