

**Andrew G. Scott, ed., *Emperors and Usurpers: An Historical Commentary on Cassius Dio's Roman History Books 79(78)-80(80) (A.D. 217-229)*.** Society for Classical Studies: American Classical Studies Volume 58. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.

This book is the most recent volume to appear in the series of commentaries on Cassius Dio's monumental eighty-book *Roman History* produced by the long-running Dio Project and published by Oxford University Press for the American Philological Association / Society for Classical Studies. The commentaries have not been published sequentially, with only volumes 6 (covering books 49-52), 7.2 (books 55-56), and 9 (books 63[64]-67) appearing to date. The work under review constitutes what will eventually be the final volume of the series (11.2), covering the last three books of the *Roman History*.

Dio's final books deal with the murder of Caracalla in A.D. 217 and the reigns of his successors Macrinus and Elagabalus, before covering the regime of Severus Alexander in a more cursory fashion. The *Roman History* ends in A.D. 229 with Dio's own second consulship, which he shared with Severus Alexander, and his return to his homeland of Bithynia. While much of Dio's history of the Severan period survives only in excerpts or later epitomes, we are particularly fortunate that a manuscript known as *Codex Vaticanus Graecus* 1288 preserves the text of most of book 79(78) and the start of book 80(79), enabling scholars to read much of Dio's original narrative of the reign of Macrinus.

Scott's introduction and commentary are organised in a clear and straightforward fashion. The introduction covers key topics such as Dio's life and career, the nature of the text, and his techniques of narrative and characterisation. Scott rightly devotes considerable attention to Dio's status as a contemporary of the Severan emperors. He also introduces the reader to other sources for the period, most notably Herodian's *History of the Empire after Marcus* and the imperial lives in the *Historia Augusta*. These works form important comparanda which Scott effectively deploys throughout the commentary to shed light on Dio's own historiographical choices.

Each book of Dio also receives its own introduction, in which Scott provides a helpful breakdown of the narrative structure and key events and sources. In the commentary proper, the lemmata consist of a few words or a phrase of Greek text in bold type, followed by an English translation of the sentence or indeed the whole passage from which these words derive. This method has the advantage of assisting readers with limited Greek, such as undergraduate students, and should be welcomed. The book concludes with a bibliography, *index locorum*, and a general index.

Scott is a careful and cautious commentator who is most interested in historiographical issues, such as narrative, characterisation, and Dio's use of language. One can, for example, find a helpful note on the words used by Dio to

describe Caracalla's cloaks (p. 33) and a sensitive exploration of the different pictures of Elagabalus' downfall provided by Dio, Herodian, and the *Historia Augusta* (pp. 138–141). Scott provides important clarification in places where the poor state of Dio's text could cause confusion, most notably in the case of the identities of Eutygianus, Gannys, and Comazon (p. 86). On the whole, however, Scott is reluctant to advance new arguments or interpretations, and the book contains little with which historians of the Severan period or students of Cassius Dio will not already be familiar. Scott's most important new suggestion is that Dio's contemporary history was probably a product of his retirement and old age (pp. 10–14). This is a plausible argument, which deserves serious consideration by scholars.

Despite the title of the book, the commentary's strengths lie in the above-mentioned historiographical issues, rather than in historical ones. I acknowledge that all commentators have to make difficult choices about what to include or exclude in order to inform the reader without overwhelming them. However, there were many places in which Scott could have delved deeper into specific historical aspects. This is particularly striking in the commentary on Book 80(80), which offers a glimpse into the reign of Severus Alexander. Scott is correct to point out the 'rather grim' nature of Dio's narrative (p. 148), which has important ramifications for his thesis that the historian penned his contemporary narrative in a state of disillusionment. Yet Scott does not use his comments to flesh out important political problems in this reign, which would further support his argument. The most serious problem here is his treatment of Domitius Ulpianus, a key figure in Alexander's early years (pp. 148–150). Scott gives no indication of his previous career before becoming *praefectus praetorio* (he was a *libellis* and *praefectus annonae*), nor of his considerable standing as a jurist. Nor is there any proper contextualisation of his relationship with the young emperor, who described Ulpianus as *parens meus* (*CJ* 4.65.42).<sup>1</sup> Later in Book 80(80), Dio refers to a series of revolts against Alexander's regime (pp. 150–151). Yet Scott does not provide specifics to assist the reader. Dio was likely thinking of the insurrection of Taurinus, which probably occurred in Syria (*Epit.* 24.2, cf. Herodian 6.4.7), and the downfall of Alexander's wife Orbiana and his father-in-law, who were undoubtedly painted as traitors by the regime (see Herodian 6.1.9-10).

There are other important historical issues that do not receive the detailed treatment they deserve. One of the key reasons for Macrinus' downfall was his loss of favour with the army, as he reduced their military pay to the level authorised by Septimius Severus, rather than allowing them to retain the higher salary they had received under Caracalla. Scott's comments on the crucial passages (79[78].12.7 and 79[78].28.1-2) do not address the debate regarding the precise nature of the pay increases. On p. 54 he cites M. A. Spiedel's 1992 *JRS* article, but not R. Alston's

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<sup>1</sup> For Ulpian's political role, see F. Millar, 'Government and Law: Ulpian, a Philosopher in Politics?', in G. Clark and T. Rajak (eds), *Philosophy and Power in the Graeco-Roman World. Essays in Honour of Miriam Griffin*. Oxford: 69–87 (not cited by Scott).

response published in the same journal two years later.<sup>2</sup> The reader is not given any sense of the different scales proposed by scholars for Severus' pay rise, which Spiedel argues was 100%, but Alston 50%. In commenting on the second passage, Scott refers to the privileges given to soldiers by Septimius Severus, including the right to live with their wives which is 'commonly seen as the soldiers' ability to marry' (p. 81). E. Birley (1988) and S.E. Phang (2001) are cited to support this point, but there is no mention of W. Eck's important 2011 study of a military diploma from A.D. 206, which shows that Severus did not in fact authorise legal marriages.<sup>3</sup>

Insufficient historical details and bibliographical omissions often result in the reader being given an incomplete picture of events or the state of modern scholarship. For example, the reigns of Macrinus and Elagabalus saw significant upheavals in eastern provincial governorships, which often resulted in acting governors being appointed. Scott could have integrated this information into his discussion of the turnovers of governors in Egypt (pp. 93–94) and Arabia (pp. 118–119), where the papyrological and inscriptional evidence provides important evidence of the temporary arrangements that had to be put in place during this crisis.<sup>4</sup> For the career of the physician Gellius Maximus (pp. 122–123), father of the rebellious legionary legate of the *legio III Gallica*, Scott refers only to V. Nutton's 1971 article, not to the more recent exploration of his career by M. Christol and T. Drew-Bear, who assemble the full dossier of inscriptions attesting the honours he received from Caracalla.<sup>5</sup> It is true, as Scott states (p. 124), that the *legio III Gallica* was disbanded by Elagabalus, but he does not mention that it was subsequently reinstated by Severus Alexander.<sup>6</sup> I raise these points not for the sake of nit-picking, but to demonstrate that historical issues are often given incomplete treatment by Scott (indeed, many more examples could be given). In this regard, the historical commentary is not as thorough or incisive as other examples of the genre, such as D. Wardle's 2014 excellent assessment of Suetonius' *Divus Augustus*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> M.A. Speidel (1992), 'Roman Army Pay Scales', *JRS* 82: 87-106; R. Alston (1994), 'Roman Military Pay from Caesar to Diocletian', *JRS* 84: 113-123.

<sup>3</sup> E. Birley (1988), 'Septimius Severus and the Roman Army', in *The Roman Army: Papers 1929-1986*. Amsterdam: 21–40. (= *Epigraphische Studien* 8 [1969] 63–82). S.E. Phang (2001), *The Marriage of Roman Soldiers (13 BC-AD 235): Law and Family in the Imperial Army*. Leiden. W. Eck (2011), 'Septimius Severus und die Soldaten. Das Problem der Soldatenehe und ein neues Auxiliardiplom', in B. Onken and D. Rohde (eds), *in omni historia curiosus. Studien zur Geschichte von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*. Wiesbaden: 63–77.

<sup>4</sup> In Egypt, the *dikaiodotes* Callistianus is attested as acting governor (*P. Oxy.* 43.3117), and in Arabia, the procurator C. Furius Sabinius Aquila Timesitheus (*CIL* XIII 1807 = *ILS* 1330).

<sup>5</sup> M. Christol and T. Drew-Bear (2004), 'Caracalla et son médecin L. Gellius Maximus à Antioche de Pisidie', in S. Colvin (ed.), *The Greco-Roman East: Politics, Culture, Society*. Yale Classical Studies 31. Cambridge: 85–118.

<sup>6</sup> *AE* 1905, 157 gives the legion the title of *legio III Gallica Severiana Alexandriana*.

<sup>7</sup> D. Wardle (2014), *Suetonius: Life of Augustus*. Oxford.

In summary, Scott's volume is a welcome addition to the series of commentaries published by the Dio Project. Its strengths lie in its considered evaluation of historiographical issues, which effectively guide the reader through Dio's narrative strategies and techniques of characterisation. There is little here that will surprise the specialist, but for those new to Cassius Dio or to the Severan period the book will be a helpful companion.

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