

**Caillan Davenport and Christopher Mallan, eds., *Emperors and Political Culture in Cassius Dio's Roman History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. 348. \$120. ISBN: 9781108831000.**

This edited volume on Cassius Dio, taking its genesis in a 2016 CA panel, contains 13 chapters as well as an introduction and an epilogue. We may talk of a Cassius Dio moment, and he is no longer underappreciated or under-studied (29). A Danish-led network (Cassius Dio: Between History and Politics) offers the publication of six edited volumes (*Historiography of Rome and Its Empire (HRE)* 1 (2016), 3, 4, 8, 10, 14) as well as a forthcoming companion on the Roman historian. A French collaboration has so far produced an edited volume (Fromentin et al. 2016) as well as numerous excellent new commentaries and translations. Adding to this, we have monographs and commentaries by Scott (2018), Burden-Strevens (2020), Madsen (2020), and Mallan (2020). Final revisions on the volume under review were made in 2020. The consequence quickly becomes obvious. There is too little engagement with the above-mentioned publications (HRE 7 and 8 were published in 2020 with 1, 3, 4 published earlier). This is a weakness.

This volume focuses on the principate, but the introduction effectively places the books on emperors in their context: the ideal of Augustus resulting from corruption of the Republican system (2). The volume sets out to explore the centrality of emperors as well as “the historian’s concern with the fundamental way emperors shaped individuals, groups, and communities” (4), at the same time attempting to explain the systems of government, how they worked and how they broke down (29). The volume does this well. Indeed, studying the Roman imperial monarchy should be impossible without reference to the *Roman History* (29). One may add that there is perhaps a general tendency towards closing ranks, referring mainly to fellow historiographers, and ignoring debates among scholars working outside the field but writing on related subjects. Historiography without history, text without context, sadly isolates historiography from history.

In the first section, ‘Imperial and Political Narratives’, chapter one by Kemezis focuses on the famous issue of the emperor’s control of the public discourse and the informational problems resulting from this. The debate by the opinionated Dio is at the centre of attention in book 53. Dio’s solution is to describe what was reported, not what had actually happened (53.19). Chapter 2 by Davenport also focuses on book 53, on the connection between rumours and the principate in the *Roman History* and on the issue of reliable information. The price of monarchy was secrecy and speculation (73).

Letta is next with a chapter on Dio’s use of evidence. Dio combined, interpreted, and re-elaborated the rich material at his disposal (77). More than anything Letta wants us to accept that Dio used Senate records. But why, we may ask, would Dio go to the trouble of consulting the *acta*? Surely earlier historians are more likely sources for many senatorial decrees. Having said that, a good example, left unmentioned by Letta (cf. Lange 2009, *Res Publica Constituta*, ch. 5), are the honours to young Caesar/Augustus.

Dio is good on the decisions of the Senate, not, however, on their implementation. The *acta* would seem to suit that conclusion. Ash concludes the section with an article on the balancing act in historiography between pleasure and utility. With the focus on the good story, Ash presents a lexicon of wonder, a subject that clearly intrigued Dio (92).

Section two, 'Emperors and Biographies', starts off with Kuhn's article on Dio's funeral speech for Augustus. Focusing on speeches in Dio, Burden-Strevens 2020 (*HRE* 7) is now fundamental. He has convincingly shown that Dio carefully used existing sources to create the speeches. They are compositions by their author, but Dio used the existing sources as the point of departure when writing these speeches. Kuhn's main idea is that Dio used the *Res Gestae* when writing the speech (116). The red herring of the *recusatio imperii* is once again mentioned (119), even though it has no support in the *Res Gestae*, focusing most likely on the accomplishment of the triumviral assignment. Importantly, information and views found in the *Res Gestae* are also visible in parallel evidence, both the autobiography of Augustus and other pieces of evidence, such as our surviving historians. Augustus re-used earlier material and slogans in the *Res Gestae* which reflected a particular ideology. There clearly was a need throughout the triumvirate and his reign as princeps for Augustus to justify the civil war and his place within it (cf. Lange 2019, in *HRE* 5). The autobiography and historians are a much more likely source than the *Res Gestae*. This is more than anything the story of changing a civil war into a positive *exemplum*.

Next is Mallan's article on Dio's Tiberius. By ignorance of design, Dio disregards comments relating to Tiberius' (constitutional) position. Similarly, Dio only elaborates on one part of Tiberius' nature, that of dissimulation (149). The constitutional debates are however largely part of the Augustan books, whereas debates about the virtues – or lack thereof – of emperors is central to the remaining biographies of emperors. Malik focuses on Nero's war – literally and metaphorically – on Greece, concluding that Nero, according to Dio, was no philhellene at all. Dio condemns every aspect of Nero's reign, thus departing from earlier Greek and Latin historiography (159). Dio was, however, a Roman citizen, writing in an annalistic fashion; in other words, he was a Roman historian writing in Greek (= Greco-Roman). Taking her cue from Gowing, Malik emphasises that Dio's characterisation of Nero must have been impacted by Commodus (161). We may ask what the implications are? Davenport in his second article focuses on the military abilities of emperors during the second century CE. The cases are those of Trajan, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, Commodus, and Pertinax.

The third section, on 'Political Groups and Political Culture', starts out with Hellström's article on the role of the people in Dio's historiographical agenda. The people are not themselves an object of interest but serve to accentuate those who are, such as senators and emperors (201). One may add that this even goes for senators (women are another example). They are of interest only or mainly in relation to emperors. That said, we should still ask what derives from Dio's personal take on the past and what derives from his evidence. It should not surprise us that our sources controlled their narratives and tried to tell a story in a specific way. These works were

the creations of their authors, but they did not arise out of nowhere. According to Hellström, the people speak out because Dio chooses to give them a voice (213). But also, we should add, they do so because they had a voice in the past and in the evidence used by Dio.

In chapter 10, Lavan debates why the speech of Maecenas in book 52 (19) advocates a universal grant of citizenship whilst the narrator dismissed the actual grant of universal citizenship itself (the *constitutio Antoniniana*). The answer lies in the interpretative work demanded by the reader (219). Dio was the first historian of Rome (that we know of) to view this as a process, culminating in universal citizenship. A better understanding of speeches in historiography has helped to undermine the notion of Maecenas (exclusively) as a 'mouthpiece' of Dio (226; the chapter would have benefitted had Lavan been able to use Burden-Strevens' 2020 book). Maecenas' speech invites the reader to conceive the Caracalla project as a realisation of the advice given by Maecenas, but only to have Augustus give the opposite advice to Tiberius (56.33). An anachronistic proposal with a contradictory perspective in the political testament of Augustus (most likely an invention), perhaps anticipated in the Latin Revolt and Social War narrative. This is a very fine article. Lavan suspects that Dio, most likely given his background, agreed with Maecenas (239). I am not sure this has to be the case, taking senatorial arrogance into account.

Saylor Rodgers' article on emperors and their associates reflects on exemplary history, what makes a good man (one that does not disguise his nature (242)). A potential problem might arise if Dio is accepted as a "realist". Good men behaving badly is seen for example at Perugia but in the end young Caesar did what was needed. Civil wars are naturally a bad thing, but may be necessary, facilitating in this case the transition to monarchy. Rodgers of course knows this (247). Regarding the civil war of 69 CE, she writes that "[t]he period of civil strife after Nero's death revealed any number of actors, individuals and collective behaving badly" (253). Textually or contextually? Neither should surprise. Mallan's second article on autobiography and biography follows. Dio, or so Mallan states, believed in a form of republican monarchy, praising emperors who consulted the Senate (265). Put differently, Dio believed in and supported monarchy. Mallan rightly emphasises that the contemporary books are coloured with disappointment and resentment (265). Nothing however suggests that Dio had an alternative to monarchy. Who said "realist"? Dio's self-portrayal was that of a senator first and foremost. Class, rank, and education were important (284). It is easy to agree with Mallan that Dio was a survivor.

The fourth and final section of the book, entitled 'Reception and Reflection', begins with Simpson's article on the reception of Dio in Byzantium (excellent work has also been done by one of the editors, Mallan). This is still a strangely underestimated part of Dio scholarship. Byzantine excerpts are mainly used to reconstruct lost parts of Dio (289). This is never an easy game. They may in general preserve Dio's words (292), but what about the context? What is left out? (Simpson is naturally aware of this: 297).

Pelling's epilogue concludes the volume. Here he outlines trends from Millar's 1964 book onwards. It is a fine epilogue, one that asks interesting questions. With Millar, how did ancient historians work? Most likely, Dio worked with and combined multiple sources (310). More disagreeable perhaps, the 'literary turn', according to Pelling, has turned Dio into a more interesting political thinker (315). The problem often remains that the historical context is forgotten too easily, as is the valid question of what evidence Dio used when writing the *Roman History*. Pelling is certainly right that intertextuality still figures too little in Dio scholarship (317).

This reviewer may seem overly critical, and it is time to end on a high note. Overall, this is a very fine volume that fits well within current trends in Cassius Dio scholarship, even if, at times, it feels strangely out of date.

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