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Between Autopsy Reports and Historical Analysis: The Forces and Weaknesses of Cassius Dio's *Roman History*

The gut feeling among historians, ancient and modern alike, is that contemporary sources usually offer more reliable and useful evidence as well as more trustworthy accounts of certain episodes than those written long after an event took place. We can all think of exceptions, in which personal agendas stir the account in a certain direction or offer tendentious versions of the acts and motives of those involved. Cicero's description of the Catilinarian affair or his characterization of Mark Antony's consulship before the war at Mutina is read with caution just like Caesar's words on his successes in Gaul are studied with attention to what the proconsul hoped to achieve by writing the text in the first place[1].

Reports by someone who saw a specific situation unfold may well be, and often is, more accurate and more reliable than accounts written long after the episode took place, either by someone who was present at the time, but wrote it down later, or by authors who were not there at the time and had to rely on the accounts of others who were[2]. Therefore, history writing by authors who were there at the time or lived in the community when a certain period or episode unfolded is therefore often regarded as better sources that accounts written years, decades or centuries after. But it is not always the case, as we shall see in the following, that those who experienced a certain event or lived in a specific period of time offer more qualified analyses or write a better history than historians who view the period from a distance in time even if they relied on the accounts of others[3].

The third-century Roman historian Cassius Dio is an interesting case, as he is one of few ancient historians to cover both his own lifetime and earlier periods in the same work. The more than thousand years of history, from the regal age to the moment Dio withdrew himself from the Roman politics in 229 CE, presents us with the opportunity to see how he worked on the different ages of Roman history and how he changed both his method and his approach to the questions or different historic periods he discussed as he progressed from earlier periods on to his own time.

Up until recently there has been a tendency to see Cassius Dio as an historian with a rather modest talent who wrote a superficial collection of facts without any explicit framework for analysis or any specific aim other than composing as much of Rome's history as possible[4]. Dio is often seen as best when writing on his own life-

1 On how writing of history should rely on the historian's own observations, see Polybius 12.27.1-3. See also Thucydides 1.22.1-3. For the importance of autopsy, see Marincola 1997, 63-6, 72, 86. See Woodman 1988 on how contemporary history was not the main purpose when ancient historians wrote their accounts.

2 On modern studies in eyewitness reports, see Loftus 1996, 117; Loftus – Loftus 1979, 159 f. For autopsy in antiquity, see Woodmann 1988, 17-22.

3 I have discussed the question of autopsy and how Dio writes contemporary and non-comtemporary history in Madsen – Lange 2019 forthcoming.

4 On how Dio had no objectives other than covering as much of Roman history as possible, see Millar 1964, 73. On his lack of analytic skills or, perhaps, the inability to lay out a well-defined project, see Millar 1964, 118 who also criticises Dio for his lack of understanding of the major issues of his own lifetime: Christianity and the threat on the borders (Millar 1964, 171). On Dio as

time, when he was able to follow Roman politics as a member of the political establishment[5]. It is certainly not unreasonable to assume that a senator, a member of the emperor's council and someone who lived the major part of his life in the capital, where he circulated among men of power, did have a more solid understanding of Roman politics of his own age.

It is also reasonable to assume that Dio recorded the episodes and his own experience from a lifetime in Rome politics as he saw it and it is obvious that he delivers information that no other source offers: for instance the few eyewitness reports from Senate meetings or accounts from the arena, where he experienced the emperor in action or protests from the people[6]. But as we shall see below, what Dio writes about Roman politics in his own age is influenced by his critical attitude towards all emperors of his own time apart, perhaps, from Pertinax and Dio is challenged by lack of information about the process and the motives behind the decisions that were being made and by a general lack of sources on which his analyses could rely on.

In some instances, years would have gone by before a given episode was written down and incorporated into the narrative. For instance, there is the case of Commodus whose performances in the arena or reign in general, Dio experienced first-hand well before he knew he was going to write history, and did not write down until sometime in the 220s more the two decades after the event took place[7]. Another question that needs to be factored in, is how Dio, according to his own words, spent ten years collecting his material, reading everything on which he could get his hands, and another twelve years writing the text. By the time he was about to write his account of the reign of Septimius Severus several years had gone by since the emperor had died and Dio's view of him had changed considerably from initially positive to categorically negative[8]. Dio would have had to rely on his memory and, more problematically, on his own personal experiences during a period marked by the stress of political instability and the general chaos of what he saw as totalitarian regimes of Severus, Caracalla and Elagabal[9].

Studies of eyewitness reports and of how people remember episodes they see have demonstrated that even a few days reduce the chances to describe the event accurately. Another issue is the bias of those writing or telling the stories and their ability or reediness to understand the situation or the story they retell such that there

too caught up in his own time to write balanced accounts of earlier periods, see Reinhold – Swan 1990, 168-73. On Dio's alleged lack of quality, see Barrett on Livia (2002, 237 f.) and Agrippina (2005, 203 f.).

5 See e.g. Marincola 2017, 401 on how Dio, supposedly, is particularly valuable as an eyewitness to his own time. The notion of how Dio writes contemporary history has the implication that his work on Rome history is best used as a source for the political situation of his own time and of the relationship between the emperor and the political elite, or of the challenges that faced the members of the as they started to lose their social and political privileges.

6 On Commodus' adventures in the arena see Cass. Dio 73[72].18.1-4; For the people's protest against the war between Septimius Severus and Albinius see Cass. Dio 76[75].4.

7 The account from the area, where Commodus holds up the head of an ostrich he just killed presenting it to the senators is one example of an eyewitness report that found it was into the narrative long after the episode took place (Cass. Dio 73.[72].18.4).

8 Madsen 2016, 154-8.

9 Molin 2016, 473.

is a tendency to cloud or divert the version that they pass on, adding yet another layer between the episode and the written version of what took place[10]. In this light, the question to be considered here is whether Dio wrote more qualified, thoughtful and more informative analyses of Rome's political history of his own time than he did when writing the history of earlier periods, *in casu* Late Republican Rome and the Early Empire in the reign of Augustus?

The aim here is to challenge the assumption that Dio is best or less problematic when he writes about episodes and matters from his own lifetime and, secondly, the implication that Dio lacked the ability to offer reliable record of earlier periods. Dio's value as source to Rome's early history has been a point of reference in an number of recent publications, in which the focus is devoted to how Dio writes history in general, his books on the Early and Middle Republics and the analysis he offers on Late Republican Rome, including the political crises that brought Roman democracy to a fall[11]. The purpose of this study is to show that the analyses Dio offers are more analytical and often also more informative and thoughtful when he relies on earlier sources. In such instances, he offers better and more independent answers to why Roman politics developed in the way they had than he does in his account of the late-second and early-third century CE[12].

This is not to say that Dio is not tendentious, misled or misleading when he writes the political history of Republican Rome. Dio's version of Rome's Republican history is organized in such a way that it shows his readers how democratic forms of government were unable to ensure political stability. But he offers, nonetheless, a coherent and well-structured analysis of how and why Rome's political culture developed in the way it did as well as a number of answers to why Rome's political elite acted as they did and why a monarchical form of government was to be preferred over any form of rule in which decisions rested on popular vote. Many of Dio thoughts correspond with how modern scholars understand the political culture of late Republican Rome, but he is rarely credited for the analysis that modern scholarship, knowingly or not, has relied on for decades. The present discussion opens with an analysis of Dio's thoughts on Republican Rome, followed by a comparison of how he writes about politics in the late second and early-third century, in which his coverage of the reign of Severus is less analytical, less detailed and less informed compared to his still tendentious account of Late republican Rome. The examples from Dio's text here to be discussed are key moments both the political history of republican Rome and in Dio's own time, when he lived in Rome. They are not identical or similar episodes as the age of monarchy changed the political dynamics in Roman politics but the represents decisive moments after which Roman politics changed its course.

Dio's Republican Rome.

In his books on Late Republican Rome, Dio tries to convince his readers that all democratic forms of government at all times were unable to uphold political stabil-

[10] Crombeg et al. 1996, 95-7, 102-4. See also Loftus 1996, 20 f.
[11] Lange – Madsen 2016, Burden-Strevens – Lindholmer 2018; Osgood – Baron 2019 forthcoming.
[12] For an analysis on Dio' writing on Early Republican Rome see Urso 2016, 156

ity, peace and prosperity that every state needed in order to function and survive. This is to Dio a structurally unresolvable problem that gradually became worse as communities grew stronger and as the resources and the gains at stake rose. The successful democracies were only stable for as long as the people did not grow too bold and demanding and for as long as the members of the elite were able to remain modest. Inspired by Thucydidean realism, Dio believed members of the political elite, or the strongest of them— the dynasts— would compete with one another to ensure that they or their supporters would acquire and maintain their position in the midst of Roman politics. He believed that these men were willing to sacrifice friends and family, safety and integrity, to fulfil their ambitions[13].

Dio recognizes that democracy had a better sound to it, but only for the untrained ear, and reminds his readers that monarchy is a more practical form of government. It is said to be easier to find one good man than many capable and Dio shares his thoughts on how even a rather modest monarch was to be preferred over the rule of many as most men in the end were unable to show the necessary modesty, particularly in a city like Rome, where the wealth and prestige to be won was considerable[14].

His analysis of Roman politics is, therefore, undoubtedly biased, promoting his agenda of persuading his readers that monarchical rule is the only reliable form of government as shown by the chaotic and instable nature of democracies. But what Dio offers is, nonetheless, a synthesis on politics in Republican Rome that comes quit close to how modern scholars understand the crisis that characterized Roman politics in the Late Republic. Naturally, Dio's *Roman History* is one of the sources modern scholars have relied on when analysing Roman history in late-second and first-century BCE and it is recognized that Dio supplies information that is otherwise unavailable. Still, little attention has been paid to how Dio's analysis of Rome's Republican history offers a narrative similar to the one offered both by modern scholars but also by Sallust: that the greed, envy, lack of modesty, and urge for power, glory and prestigious commands were the reason why members of the political elite competed with one another up to the point, where they killed their opponents and led their armies towards Rome and against other Roman armies[15].

[13] Cass. Dio 44.1.3. On the human nature and the inspiration, see Rees 2011, 79 f. On human nature in Thucydides see 3.81-5.

[14] Sallust is indeed one of the few ancient historians Dio mentions. For how Sallust see greed as a vital component in the competition between members of the Roman elite see *Cat*. 10-2. For Dio's thoughts on democracy, see the opening of book 44.2.1-5. See also the concluding remarks on the reign of Augustus, where Dio claims Rome's first *princeps* saved the Romans from the tyranny of factions when introducing his form of one-man rule (Cass. Dio 56.43.4).

[15] For modern views that personal struggles for power were what caused the political crisis and eventually the fall of the republic, see Syme 1939, Taylor 1949, Meier 1966, 201-5, 270-80; Sherwin-White 1994, 248-54; Steel 2013, 15-20, 22-6, 140-7. For examples in which modern scholars disagree with Dio's negative thoughts, see Gruen 1974, who views a republic that navigates well between the many challenges or Osgood 2018, who focus more on continuity than chaos and disruption. See also Osgood – Baron 2019 forthcoming for further discussion.

Democracies fall.

Dio presents his view of how democratic forms of government were structurally unable to secure continuous political stability in a mixture of statements or verdicts in which democratic forms of governments are discredited, followed by a narrative in which a series of examples are gathered to demonstrate his point of how ambitious senators and a demanding people pushed Rome towards the irrecoverable crisis that finally brought Republican Rome to its fall.

His coverage of the Late Republic opens with a statement that captures the synthesis of a failing political culture. Rather traditionally the scene is set in 133 BCE when Tiberius Gracchus took office – a moment that in Dio's version ushers a new period in Roman politics, marked by permanent instability, political violence and a climate more like tyranny than democracy, more like war than peace (Cass. Dio *Frg*. 83).

In the following, we shall focus on how Dio built his argument and his narrative so that it shows the flaws of a form of constitution that relies on the will of the people. In his narrative on the Early and Middle Republic, Dio offers an account that demonstrates how greed and envy had always been an integrated part of Roman politics. The point Dio wants to make in the early books is that members of the nobility had always competed to win as much power and prestige as possible. He opens the narrative with the account of the Regal period, when Rome's early kings used every means available to them to secure supreme rule – marginalizing sons of earlier kings, manipulating a Senate that in Dio's version was to have had a role in the selection of the subsequent monarch or by murdering the current ruler. So, for example, Lucius Tarquinius Superbus plotted against Servius Tullius who, for his part, had acquired the throne by claiming that he was just filling in while his predecessor, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, was recovering from an attack carried out by the sons of Ancus Marcius, Priscus' predecessor[16].

There were honourable men in Roman politics in the Early and Middle Republic with eyes for what was in the best interests of the state. One example of a modest senator was L. Quinctius Cincinnatus who shows the right kind of attitude towards power when in 458 BCE, after having defeated the Aequi, he laid down his command and returned home to work his land[17]. Other Roman nobles were less modest and unable to recognize the truly amazing victories of Marcus Furius Camillus, another of Dio's model senators, against Veii and Falerii, whom Camillus conquered either by outsmarting the enemy as when his troops duck a tunnel under a hill. In the case of the war against Falerii, Camillus ensured their surrender when he returned their children instead of using them as means to forcing their parents to surrender[18]. Camillus' success was more than both the people in Rome and his friends could handle. The people had him prosecuted for handing the promised one tenth of the spoils from Veii over to Apollo at Delphi and the peaceful solution with the Falis-

[16] Zonar. 7.8; Cass. Dio *Frg*. 9.2; *Frgg*. 11 f. See also Madsen 2018, 104-8.

[17] Cass. Dio *frg*. 23.2. For Livius' account of Cincinnatus' dictatorship and the command against the Aequi see 3.26-9. See also Cornell 1995, 307.

[18] On the conquest of Veii see Cass. Dio *Frg*. 24.2-6; Zonar 7.21. See Livy 5.21-8. See also Cornell 1995, 311 f.; Harris 2016, 20; Lange 2016, 94-7.

cans was criticised for preventing the troops from looting the city. His friends among the nobility felt a sting of envy when they saw Camillus celebrating his triumph in a chariot pulled by four white horses and chose not to support him when the trial was approaching. In the end, Camillus left Rome and went into exile and Dio uses the story to prove his point of how democracy was malfunctioning already in the 4th century due to the competition between members of the nobility, disputes sparked by envy and a pronounced urge to win glory for oneself or to take the wind out of the sails of more competent and successful opponents[19].

What made the Late Republic stand out as a particularly critical period in the age of the Republic was not the competition between members of the political elite, the envy of successful generals or the irrational attempts to block other more successful individuals who had proved competent, successful and therefore also popular among the people. Such challenges were already part of Rome's political culture and an integrated part of democratic government. What changed was how use of violence had become a tool systematically used to force controversial laws and military appointment through the assembly and a way to remove popular politicians, block laws or win armed struggle for supreme power.

Dio divides republican Rome into two periods: before and after the fall of Carthage. Before the Third Punic War, Rome and its political elite stood reasonably united against people and other states in Italy, in the neighbouring regions in Spain and Gaul and against the threat from another regional power strong enough to invade Italy and threaten Rome. But with the fall of Carthage, Rome was now freed from the strongest opponents in the Mediterranean and the Romans were now powerful enough to dominate the people in the entire region. Offensive wars further away from Italy became one way to show military talents and to acquire the needed wealth, prestige and fame to establish oneself at the centre of Roman politics.

Dio uses the narrative to show the schism between what he describes as free and unregulated competition on the one hand, and a form of constitution in which laws and magistrates were approved, elected or blocked by popular votes, on the other hand. The first example is the attempt of Tiberius Gracchus to introduce a reform that redistributed public land to veterans. Judging form his own words, Dio seems to agree with Tiberius that a redistribution of the land was both fair and necessary. Yet, Dio still criticises the initiative, the law Tiberius managed to carry through the assembly and the attempt to be re-elected. Despite a need for a land reform, Tiberius comes across as the overly ambitious politician who proposed the reforms to win public support not because he hoped to solve the problem of land concentration or improve the economy of citizens in the army. Dio characterizes Tiberius as a man of great renown and he questions his intention when he reaches out to the people instead of relying on his peers, which are understood as ways to secure supreme powers for himself. As we shall see, the urge for power and the ambition to rule were more important than reform itself and the primary focus of those behind the policies (Cass. Dio *Frg*. 83)[20].

In the few fragments we have, Tiberius is described as a man whose political program led to scenes of violence when he disrupted the practice that had dominated

[19] Burden-Strevens 2015, 80; Rees 2011, 19 f.

[20] See also Madsen forthcoming b.

Roman politics for centuries. In the text at our disposal, Dio does not describe the fighting prior to the death of Tiberius, but from the fragments we have, he seems to have felt no sympathy for the unsuccessful tribune who appears as a dangerous revolutionary who proposed the land reform to secure popular support for future more ambitious projects. Here, it should be taken into consideration that Dio is always sceptical towards the use of popular support as a means to acquire power and political influence. Another point to be remembered is Dio's aim to show how democracy always fails. He may have agreed with Tiberius that a land reform was needed, but the reform should have come from the Senate, not from an individual politician who used a case of considerable popular attention to win support for future projects: prestigious command, glory and supreme powers.

It is characteristic that Appian's better-preserved account of Tiberius Gracchus is less judgmental and more orientated towards a description of what happened, the anxiety of those involved, the mandate Tiberius got and how he worked to have the law passed. Dio for his part offers no thoughts on whether Tiberius and his supporters had any other choice than to aim for re-election if, that is, they wanted to ensure the law was implemented[21] .

It is the same approach Dio offers in his coverage of the civil war between Sulla and the Marians. Those involved in the fighting are described in much the same way as Tiberius Gracchus—Marius as rebellious and a member of the *plebs,* Cinna as ambitious for greater influence if Sulla could be persuaded to occupy himself in the war against Mithridates (Cass. Dio Frg. 102). The ambition between the three protagonists and the competition it sparked led to envy and uncontrollable hatred followed by scenes in which Roman soldiers fought each other in the streets of Rome, members of the Roman public massacred one another and systematic politically motivated murders raged driven by jealousy and personal hatred.

With the horrific scenes in Rome and across the Italian Peninsula, Rome and its political landscape had changed forever. In Dio's version, members of the political elite, the dynasts, were ready to use military force against their opponents and as a political tool to ensure that they would get their way. Not only did they kill an opponent and his supporters, as in the case of Tiberius Gracchus' re-election—when the murder of the tribune stopped the law from being realized—but Roman politics had now reached a stage in which powerful individuals such as Sulla, Marius and Cinna used what were essentially private armies to set themselves above the law in an effort to secure supreme powers for themselves[22] .

What troubles Dio is not the fear of one-man rule. He is, as we shall see below, favourable towards what he refers to as Caesar's monarchy. What worried him was how the most ambitious members of the political elite competed for power because they wanted to rule, not because they prioritised what was in the best interests of the

[21] App. *Bell. Civ.* 1.9; 1.12, 1.14. For how Tiberius acted in the interests of the state, see Flower 2010, 82-6; Steel 2013, 17-21. Lintott 1994, 65 argues that Tiberius was hoping to the social and economic conditions for the people, and at the same time hoping to improve his political capital in Rome.

[22] For a similar view see Appian's introduction to his work on the republican civil wars (App. *Bell. Civ.* 1.1-6.)

commonwealth[23]. One Roman politician with an unfulfilled urge for glory was Pompey the Great who had an eye for how to use a profound goodwill among members of the *plebs*. Pompey's public career started when he took Sulla's side in the war against the Marians and defeated what was left of the Marian opposition in Africa and in Sicily. As he returned to Rome, he demanded a triumph and won the support of the public when, with his army, he stood up against Sulla, who was never a champion of the people[24].

As a free agent, Pompey solved a number of pressing military crises in both Italy and Spain before the consular election for the year 70 BCE, when he reintroduced the legislative powers of the tribunes that Sulla had removed during his dictatorship. During the 60s, Pompey used his popularity to acquire and, more importantly, carry out two game-changing campaigns against the pirates in the Mediterranean and Mithridates and Tigranes II in Anatolia and the Near East, ultimately making him one of Rome's most renown generals at all time.

The command against the pirates in 67 was an almost ideal war for Pompey, as it allowed him to solve the problems caused by the raids on the Italian coasts and eliminate the threat on the city's corn supply. In addition, the war against the pirates allowed Pompey to remind everyone in Rome of his undisputable military talent. Played in the right way, it would bring him right into the middle of the war against Mithridates and Tigranes, against whom Lucullus, one of his political opponents, was still struggling (Cass. Dio 36.9.1 and 36.14.-36.17).

Dio's account of the Roman politics in the 60s focuses on how the ambitious Pompey pushed for the commands against the pirates and, more importantly, for a chance to be the Roman general who defeated Mithridates – Rome's most persistent and most dangerous enemies at the time. In the narrative Dio offers, Pompey is described as overly ambitious, greedy and as someone with a continuously unsatisfied urge for the glory and prestige that followed military victories of a certain scale[25]. But as we shall see in the following, Dio did not see the political crisis in Late Republican Rome as a matter of a few ambitious individuals who used their power and resources to pursue their goals at any cost.

Instead, it is the entire political culture that is disrupted because the democratic form of government generates a climate, in which political success and social recognition ultimately depends on popular support. This system forced members of the political elite to seek the intention of the people and to outbid each other to win and maintain that support. In Dio's narrative, Roman politics were, therefore, characterized by numerous short-sighted decisions and proposals, in which the aims behind each were self-serving rather than targeted at what was best for the commonwealth as a whole and in the long run[26].

[23] Cass. Dio 38.2.3. Madsen 2016, 143-5.

[24] Cass. Dio *Frg*. 107. For an analysis on Pompey as general see Hurlet 2016, 585-9. On Pompey's African triumph see Beard 2007, 15-8; Lundgreen 2011, 233-6; Lange 2016, 105. See also Plutarch *Pomp*. 13 for a description of the triumphal precession.

[25] Cass. Dio 36.24.5 f. See Coudry 2016, 33-6.

[26] On the commands Pompey obtained against pirates and Mithridates and how Gerbinius acts in his own interests see 36.23-6. Om how Roman senators were in politics in order to improve their political standing see Madsen 2016, 145.

Furthermore, even if the proposed laws would appear to meet some of the pressing needs, as in the case of the proposed land reforms of Tiberius Gracchus and, later, Julius Caesar, those kinds of initiatives are described as ways to win the support of the people and future support from those voting on the assemblies or to form the part of the population that would riot if the demands were not met[27]. In his account of the war against the pirates, Dio describes how the Aulus Gabinius, the tribune of 67, proposed to offer one of the proconsuls a military mandate more radical and more forceful than ever granted before, and as Pompey's name came up, the expectation rose in Rome. The Senate opposed the proposal because it feared Pompey's popularity would increase should he manage to solve the problem; but when the consuls were attacked by the angry masses, the proposal was finally discussed and carried through the assembly[28].

The way Dio tells the story of Pompey's command against the pirates, the proposal that Pompey lead the campaign was not motivated by the notion of his military credentials nor did Gabinius propose the command because a more stable Mediterranean Sea was in the best interests of the state. Instead, Dio assures us that the tribune Gabinius acted as he did because he hoped he too would benefit from his patron's popularity (36.23 f.).

In Dio's version, which is the only detailed account of the process leading up to the *lex Gabinia*, the Senate did its best to convince the people not to give Pompey a special command. Q. Lutatius Catulus spoke passionately in a fictitious speech written by Dio, on how the proposed mandate would give Pompey the kind of military manoeuvrability and strength that would turn Sulla and Marius into tyrants. The general, for his part in another of Dio's speeches, was hesitating and indifferent to whole commotion, assuring Dio's readers that he did not want the command at all if he was unwanted (Cass. Dio 36.31.3 f.). Gabinius won the day and took a considerable step up of both the social and political ladder, as he joined Pompey in the East and became one of his trusted military tribunes in the campaigns against Mithridates and Tigranes[29].

The recall of L. Licinius Lucullus and the controversial change in command that gave Pompey the mandate to wage war on the two kings was fully described by Dio. The process resembles the course of events prior to the adoption of the *lex Gabinia.* It was Gaius Manilius, one of the tribunes in 66, that granted the bill. In Dio's account of political process in Rome, the decision to recall Lucullus was motivated not by a military rationale – Lucullus was already winning the war. Instead, the idea to propose a change of command is described as an attempt on the part of Manilius to divert the attention away from his miscalculated and highly unpopular proposal to grant liberated slaves full civic rights. Under the threat of legal prosecution, Manilius took the opportunity to change the discourse in Rome by proposing Pompey for the command against the kings[30].

A law that would grant Pompey the command against Mithridates and Tigranes – almost immediately after the intensely disputed decision to offer him campaign

[27] On the land reform proposed by Caesar in 59 see Cass. Dio 38.2.3
[28] Cass. Dio 36.24.1-6.
[29] Hurlet 2016, 586 f.
[30] Cass. Dio 36.42 f.

backed by a previously unheard of mandate – would have required considerable support from parts of the political establishment in order to reach the assembly. One of the supporters was, of course, Pompey, whose popularity was growing as the news of his success against the pirates reached the capitol. The quick progress that he made throughout the Mediterranean Sea, meant that members of the political elite were finding ways to support the new successful general. Dio mentions that both Cicero and Caesar were among his supporters, not because they agreed with Manilius, but because they too hoped that one day they would benefit from having supported Pompey, whose popularity apparently continued to rise[31].

Dio's coverage of Pompey's campaigns against pirates and the kings follows a known pattern that carefully matched with the overall intention to demonstrate the flaws of democracy and how unstable and unpredictable a form of constitution popular rule was. Dio's account of the years from Pompey's consulship in 70 until he enters the war against Mithridates is, of course, tendentious. A much-needed response to the threats from the pirates were acknowledged. But the way Dio describes the process from the moment the law was proposed until it passed, Gabinius' intentions and Pompey's almost unstoppable urge for glory and prestige offers a very one-sided account of the situation and the events that unfolded.

Dio offers no considerations on whether Pompey was indeed the most qualified general to spearhead the largest joined sea and land operation ever to have been carried out in the history of Rome. It is also characteristic of Dio's whole approach that no one in Roman politics at that moment in time felt any obligation to do what was in the best interests of the state. Gabinius could not have proposed Pompey because the latter was indeed just the kind of general Rome needed to solve what had been a long-lasting and very dangerous problem with the pirates. There had to have been ulterior motives behind the proposal.

On the other hand, there is no reason to assume that Pompey was not involved in Gabinius' proposal nor to doubt that the two men and a number of Pompey's other supporters were preparing both the people and chosen members of the city's political elite. Therefore, Dio offers a justified and convincing analysis when he stresses Pompey's strong ambition to wage both wars: the hope of the people around him that they would benefit from the support or promotion of him and the fear of his power and popularity coursed in the rest of the political establishment.

The same is true in the case of the *lex Manilia.* In his account of Rome's war against Mithridates and Tigranes, Dio focuses on Lucullus' initial success against the two kings and offers a version, in which Pompey comes across as an overly ambitious, greedy Roman general who wanted the war and the victory against the kings at any costs – even if it meant that a successful general had to be removed. Dio describes a process in which one of Pompey's supporters among the tribunes mobilized the people and, with the support of a number of the ambitious and up-and-coming men such as Caesar and Cicero, removed Lucullus in order to make room for Pompey to collect the considerable prize for defeating Mithridates and Tigranes.

Again, there is much to suggest that Dio is right to assume that Pompey wanted the command against Mithridates. Men loyal to him worked with determination to

[31] Madsen 2014, 126; Lange 2016, 81.

scale back Lucullus' mandate in Asia Minor and Pompey did what he could to push his forces forward so he would reach the shores of Asia Minor in time for him to step in should an opportunity present itself. Dio's account of the political climate in Rome, Pompey's ambitions and the motives behind Caesar and Cicero's support of the *lex Manilia* is convincing. But what is more interesting, in this respect, is how Dio's description of an obscure political process with many different and often also self-serving agendas offers support to the manner in which modern scholars see the competition between members of the political elite as one of the reasons why Rome reached a political crisis almost without alternative.

Dio is tendentious in the way he describes the events leading up to the moment when the people recalled Lucullus. He offers a few remarks on how Lucullus or, more accurately, a considerable part of his army without him being in the field, lost a major battle against Mithridates and he acknowledges that the kings were able to regain control over Pontos and Cappadocia. The Roman losses were considerable and the kings were gaining momentum as a result. Lucullus had suffered a setback and his troops were starting to question his authority. These were all elements that weakened Lucullus' position both in respect to his army, where the soldiers started to waver in the eyes of his enemies who for the first time since the beginning of the war in 74 were successful on the battlefield and also in Rome, where Pompey's supporters and others who feared the implication of a Roman defeat offered enough reason to demand that Lucullus be recalled[32].

Dio describes the losses, but never discusses the implications nor offers any consideration on whether the decision to recall Lucullus was the right one or, at least, justifiable. This, again, leaves the readers with a version of how Roman politics and decision-making at this point in time were driven by individual ambitions and short-term decision. Once again, what seem to have been reasonable answers to threatening problems are here seen as decisions driven not by thoughtful considerations of what was in the best interests of the state, but by individual attempts to win as much glory and political influence as possible.

It is the same angle Dio offers when he comments on how the Senate failed to ratify the acts from Pompey's eastern campaign. We hear how a hurt and obstructive Lucullus blocked the approval of the arrangements that Pompey made during his campaign suggesting, successfully, that each decision or agreement were to be evaluated separately. Dio criticises the consul Afranius for being unequipped to lead the negotiations, as he was more interested in dancing than in politics. A process in which all the decisions Pompey made during the entire campaign was impossible and intolerable[33].

Dio is once again offering glimpses into the dysfunctional everyday life of Roman politics in mid first century BC. Lucullus is bitter, jealous and vindictive and Afranius does not have the skills to solve the political deadlock when the acts of Pompey were to be ratified. As a result, Pompey went on and formed an alliance with Caesar, who was, as we shall see in the following, more than willing to form an

[32] On how Dio builds up Lucullus and his success against Mithridates and Tigranes see Coudry, 2016.

[33] On Lucullus blocking Pompey's acts see Cass. Dio 37.49 where Dio also comments on Afranus' interest in dancing.

alliance with one of Rome's most popular leaders at the time. Lucullus and the other members of the senate who felt a sting of envy might have blocked Pompey but in return paved the way for a political alliance that was able to stir Roman politics for more than a decade. It is not stated explicitly, but in the way Dio tells the story, there is a link between the inability to cooperate and the formations of fractions, which to Dio was a long step in the direction towards tyranny and civil war.

One of the first acts of the triumvirs was the land reform that passed when Caesar was consul in 59. Dio describes a process in which the Senate was entirely involved. Arrangements were made to ensure that those who had given up land were compensated and he ensures his readers that none of the senators found any flaws with the proposal nor with the way Caesar organized the process. When Marcus Cato opposed the law, it was out of principle because he opposed everything that was new – a theme that had been on the political agenda for more than seven decades. On the day the reform was presented to the public, Marcus Calpurnius Bibulus, Caesar's co-consul of the year, tried to obstruct the law by proclaiming the rest of the year a sacred period, which would prevent the assembly from operating. In the end the law was passed and, on the day of the assembly, Bibulus was thrown down the stairs of the Castor temple (Cass. Dio 38.6.1-6).

The law was potentially a much-needed solution to some of the social challenges and to the tense political climate in Rome. To uphold his position in Roman politics and his status as one of Rome's most renowned generals, Pompey needed to find a way, violent or not, to find the land that he had promised his soldiers. If not, there was a danger that he would end up as Marius who had also disappointed his troops in the end. Civil war would have been one option and the general could have been tempted to call on the army that he dissolved at his arrival in Italy had he not been able to form the coalition with Caesar and Crassus. The chaos and use of violence when the law was put in front of the assembly is to Dio just another sign of how dysfunctional the Roman form of democracy was. Needed bills had to be carried through by the use of violence and the political system was repeatedly disrupted when tribunes and consuls were attacked by angry masses or by gangs of thugs recruited among senatorial clients.

The last example to be discussed here is Caesar's dictatorship. Dio describes how Caesar became Rome's next dictator after the war against Pompey and the coalition of senators, who felt that Caesar while consul had treated them arrogantly. Dio describes how Pompey and Caesar both wanted to secure supreme power for themselves and how they readily dragged Rome into a new destructive war in which Roman soldiers were traumatised from fighting fellow soldiers with whom they had fought side-by-side against foreign enemies[34].

It is interesting to note how Dio changes his tone in the narrative on Caesar, who is praised for having introduced a form of monarchy, which to the historian was a much-needed step in the right direction. Caesar is only on one occasion, and almost in passing, referred to as dictator and his form of rule is instead characterized as a monarchy[35]. Now, despite his one-man rule, Caesar was still no hero in Dio's eyes.

[34] On how Pompey and Caesar wanted to out do each other see Cass. Dio 41.57.3. On the trauma of having to fight fellow Romans see Cass. Dio 41.8.

[35] Cass. Dio 44.2.1-3. Burden-Strevens forthcoming (2019).

His vanity and insatiable desire for empty and meaningless honouree decrees, his urge to be worshipped as a god and his unresolved attitude towards the kingship made him vulnerable and exposed to a kind of criticism in which it became reasonable to discuss a plot against him[36].

In Dio's account of Caesar' reign, the dictator carried much of the blame for his own death, but it was still those behind the attack on him who Dio depicts as Rome's elected monarch who were responsible for the chaos and violence that followed the Ides of March 44. Dio criticises the senators for forming an alliance that threw Rome into a third period of civil war, the most violent to date; and the reason he offers is once again envy, unfulfilled ambitions and frustrations. Free political competition was now a thing of the past. Dio describes a political situation in which those behind the coup were unaware of the forces and reactions that Caesar's assassination would set into motion. Had they been able to anticipate the situation, they would not, Dio predicts, have murdered Caesar in the first place.

It was not until Augustus' accession as Rome's new undisputed monarch that Rome found political stability. Members of the elite were still jealous, but they had no army and no support among members of the public with which to challenge the new leader. Dio describes in detail how Augustus had fought the Roman establishment to free the state from the tyranny of factions and how he, as a political outsider, stepped onto the political scene to punish Caesar's murderers and reinsert the form of monarchical rule that short-sighted elite dissolved when they illegally and wrongly removed Caesar from power. In the way Dio describes the transition from democracy and the years of chaos and civil war to the more stable form of monarchical government, Octavian appears to have had or, better, inherited Caesar's powers and position as a sort of monarch in Rome[37].

This was, of course, not the case and Dio, of course, knew that already, as illustrated by the fact that Octavian – in the historian's own narrative – never raised such a claim when he faced Antony, Cicero or the Senate. In his coverage of Octavian's road to power, the war he fought, Octavian was most eager and rightly so, as he was the only one with the ambition to save Rome or the Romans, mostly from themselves. The war was brutal, but necessary if Rome was to move in the right direction, which to Dio meant the removal of democracy, the dissolution of factions and of free political competition in a political culture[38].

After the victory and after having consolidated his position as Rome's new ruler, the Augustus Dio describes is ever at effort to reintegrate the senators in the political process. After having failed at its responsibility as a ruling class, Rome's political elite was now encouraged to take responsibility as the advisory board that it was originally intended to be when Romulus gathered the most important and experienced men in a council. To change the poor attendance, Augustus made the meetings compulsory and arranged it so that meetings in the Senate would not collide with the other tasks in which senators were involved. He announced new laws well in advance so that the senators had time to prepare and had more reason to invest in

[36] On Caesar's vanity see 44.3.1 f. Madsen forthcoming (2019a).

[37] Cass. Dio 43.44.2 f. and 45.1.2. On how Dio invisions that Octavian was a heir of Caesar's powers see Madsen forthcoming (2019a).

[38] Cass. Dio 45.4.2 f.

the process and he made it clear that he wanted their opinion either in his council of top magistrates and a number of senators chosen by lot or when the Senate was in full session[39].

Dio's books on the Republic and age of Augustus are not just an attempt to cover Rome's history from the regal period to the moment Augustus introduced a new form of monarchy. Even if there are episodes or series of events that seem misguided, wrong or manipulated – such as raid of Perugia, the claim that no emperor was ever worshipped in Italy or in Rome, or the description of how a devoted Augustus tried to get the Senate engaged in the political process – Dio seems committed to show his readers not only the failings of democracy and why Rome experienced a political crisis in the Late Republic. But what he also tries to show is how the crisis had roots in the Early and Middle Republic and how the competition that led Rome towards self-destruction was the result of a notorious lack of modesty in human nature.

There is an underlying motive across the first two-thirds of the work to demonstrate how selfishness and short-sightedness dominated the decision-making process and to constantly remind the reader that essentially every member of the political elite did everything in his power to fulfil his own ambitions. Caesar was among the worst. His urge for what Dio saw as empty honours was driven by vanity and an unstoppable quest to be first among the Romans.

This is no doubt an aspect of Dio's writing that needs to be taken into consideration when his text is used as a source for the history of Rome. Concerns like these have led scholars towards the assumption that the *Roman History* is best when used to fill in the blanks that have been left open by other more celebrated sources – texts that are often written closer to the episodes they describe. Thoughts like these lead scholars to assume that Dio wrote better about his own period than earlier ones. But the analysis of Roman politics in the Age of the Republic is often not considered as an analytic contribution to why Roman politics developed in the way it did or to the kind of structural challenges in which Rome's political elite navigated.

Dio's account of Republican Rome relies on earlier sources and considerable efforts have been invested in determining whom of the earlier writers Dio read before he sat down and wrote his own Roman history. What he offers on Rome's Republican period and the early empire are not first hand accounts of the events and political development, but a synthesis of earlier sources and the inspiration he got from reading Thucydides' account of the war or the fighting between citizens in Corcyra.

When Dio writes about the Age of the Republic, he is, in the same way as modern scholars, dependent on the thoughts of others and he is forced to interpret, evaluate and choose between the information available to him. He is challenged by to the same questions modern scholars have to face: how eyewitness reports are often inaccurate and biased, how people's memories of events are constructed and adjusted to what they are able to make sense of – a reality that often blurs their recollection of what they saw, heard or told others about.

[39] On the initiatives to involve the senators in the decision making process see Cass. Dio 55.3 on how Senate meetings became mandatory to attent, on how new laws were advertised in advance see 55.4, and finally see 55.34.1 on how senators were allowed to speak first before Augustus.

What makes Dio's thoughts on Republican Rome a useful source to our understanding of Rome is the analysis he offers of Rome's political culture, where he demonstrates how the political culture since the beginning of Roman democracy was dominated by self-promoting and short-sighted choices and by the effort to gain as much power and glory as possible while slowing down one's opponents.

Now, Dio goes far in the attempt to convince his readers of how democracy had failed historically. That essentially none of the men in politics did what was in the best interests of the state is overstated and some of the generalisations of an entire political elite are unreflective and simplistic. Dio forgets or ignores that it was indeed possible that Tiberius Gracchus and Caesar, just as Dio seems to have done, believed that land reforms were urgent and hoped that the considerable effort it took to carry such reforms through the assembly would earn them support from the part of the Roman public that would have benefitted from the bill. This does not necessarily mean that the reform was promoted only because it would be popular with parts of assembly.

The same may well have been the case when Gabinius and Manilius promoted Pompey for the commands against pirates and kings in the East. There is no reason to question that the two tribunes hoped that their support would benefit them in the long run nor to deny that they hoped to win popular support for their future political career. But with his impeccable military credentials, Pompey was at the time one of a few generals capable of leading a campaign of such magnitude. When Lucullus was blocked in Anatolia and as the war dragged on, Pompey was in reality the only choice available, even if it was convenient that he had managed to be in Cilicia at the time Lucullus met his first setback. From the information offered by Appian, it seems a reasonable assumption that Lucullus after the defeat and with a rebellious army on his hands would have been unable to win the war. In light of the recent events in Anatolia and Pompey's swift progress against the much-dreaded pirates, it is not difficult to understand or appreciate why a change in command would find immediate support in Rome; not just among members of the *plebs*.

Even when sometimes overstated, what Dio offers is a rare hypothesis that considers the political history of Republican Rome in light of the *longue durée*, offering structural explanation of why a democratic form of constitution would collapse and what democracy, in the way it evolved in Rome, did to the political culture over time. What makes Dio's narrative particularly interesting is precisely the thing for which he is criticised, namely his ability to view Republican Rome from a distance that allows him to write that part of Rome's history in its entirety and to compare Rome politics in the age of the Republic with the political history in the imperial period.

The reign of Septimius Severus.

Dio lived in Rome and was already a well-established member of the political elite when in 193 Septimius Severus took control of Rome, displacing Pescennius Niger, the popular alternative of Didius Julianus who had bought the throne from the praetorian guard. Rome was in a state of chaos. The predecessor of Julianus, Publius Pertinax, was killed by his own guard, who later auctioned the throne to the highest

bidder. The new emperor was not given much time to deliver. After only nine weeks Julianus had been appointed as emperor, the people encouraged Niger – who was governor of Syria – to lead his army towards Rome and take hold of Rome and the imperial office[40].

When Niger was in no hurry to answer the call, Severus took the opportunity to move in and remove Julianus, punish Pertinax's assassins and introduce himself as the new emperor[41]. If the senators disagreed, there was little they could do. Judging from how he describes Severus' first appearance in Rome and the early reign, Dio was not unfavourable towards Severus, whom he praises for entering Rome as a citizen rather than a general and for making sure that Pertinax, one of Dio's favourites, be avenged. Dio describes the funeral of Pertinax as an honourable affair and he testifies to how he corresponded with Severus, earning the emperor's recognition when he sent him a pamphlet of dreams and omens that predicted Severus' accession[42].

As someone who lived in Rome for most of Severus' reign, who was senator and ex-praetor and a member of the *Consilium Principis,* Dio was well placed to observe Roman politics under the reign of the first Severan emperor. Additionally, he had the right prerequisites to cover the political development and the different motives behind the decision that emperors, courts, usurpers and other political actors made during the almost two decades Severus was in power[43].

It is, therefore, surprising that Severus' reign is described in fewer details and in a less analytical way than the account Dio offers on Late Republican Rome and the Early Empire. It is worth remembering that the books on Severus' reign, like most of Dio's text on the imperial period, are handed down to us in epitomes written in the 11th century by the Byzantine monk Xiphilinus. Therefore, what is left of Dio's original text is that which seemed essential not necessarily to Dio, but, rather, to Xiphilinus. Xiphilinus has a distinct focus on the emperor's character, performances, qualities and shortcomings as rulers, but is also occupied with political analysis, as in the case where Dio covers the fall of Sejanus something that in Dio's version was carefully planned by the vindictive Tiberius. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that Dio's political analyses would have found a way into the epitome in one form or another if they existed.

Severus' arrival to Rome is staged as an episode of mutual respect between the new emperor and the Senate. The portrait of the situation in Rome is kept in general terms and the account orbits around episodes that Dio either experienced first hand or was able to obtain information about. Yet, almost immediately Dio moves on to criticise how Severus' soldiers made the city unsafe and Severus himself for basing his powers on the army rather than his associates. He comments on Severus' dreams of his own greatness – information that must have derived from rumours, anecdotes

40 Cass. Dio 74[73].11.
41 On how Niger hesitated see Hdn. 2.7-2.9.11.
42 Madsen 2016, 154-8.
43 On Dio's career See Millar 1964, 16-27.

or Dio's own interpretation – and he takes the reader through the commemoration and funeral of Pertinax[44].

From here we move to the account of the civil wars against Niger and then later on against Albinus. It is worth noting that Dio offers no reason as to why Severus started the war, but entertains his reader with a negative portrait of Niger, who comes across as a simple, arrogant man, worthy neither of heavy criticism nor praise. What we are offered instead are battle reports, including a long description of how Severus' army destroyed Byzantium and some thoughts on how Severus moved on to fight barbarians in the East. There are no thoughts on how Severus rushed into Italy to bypass Niger, who could and, surely, did claim that he was the one the people had called upon. Yet, there is none of the praise of Niger that we find in the version offered by Herodian, Dio's younger contemporary[45].

The war against Albinus is not covered any better. Dio emphasises Severus' decision to challenge Albinus' position as Caesar now that Niger was out of the way. Once again, Dio offers an account that seems to rest on little else than what he saw with his own eyes or obtained from gossip, rumours and anecdotes in the capital. We are offered a detailed description of a horse race at which the people protested heavily against the civil war—a manifestation Dio claims he observed from his seat at the stadium. Next comes the report of the final battle at Lugdunum, where Dio says that an incredible 300,000 soldiers took part and offers his personal opinion, without much elaboration, that Severus' victory was a loss for the entire state[46].

With Albinus out of the way, Severus changed his tone with the Senate. There is the legendary speech in the Senate, where Severus praises Sulla, Marius and Augustus for their brutality. It is at the same occasion that Commodus is deified and Severus is said to have criticised the Senate for not having honoured him sufficiently. Persecution of senators is initiated and Dio describes a more hostile environment after the death of Albinus, as Severus reveals his true character with inappropriate celebration of his enemy's death[47].

Once again, the reader is left largely in the dark. There is no connection made between the challenge of Albinus' status as Caesar and Severus' attempt to make room for his sons and there is no explanation as to why Severus changes his attitude towards the Senate. Dio offers no explanation as to why Severus suddenly confronts the Senate and there is no attempt to explain why he seeks a family relation with Marcus Aurelius. One possible explanation would be the need to fit into an existing title tradition that went all the way back to Nerva. One crucial aspect of the conflict between Albinus and Severus that Dio seems to ignore is how members among the most distinguished part of the Senate apparently encouraged the noble Albinus to challenge Severus after Niger had fallen.

If Herodian, who tells the story of how Albinus was backed by members of the Senate is right that Albinius was favoured by at least part of the Senate, it is im-

[44] On Severus arrival to Rome see Cass. Dio 75[74].1.3. For a detailed account of Pertinax's state funeral see Cass. Dio 75[74].4.2-75[74]5.1.5.

[45] Dio gives a short and superficial portrait of Niger in 76.[75].6.1-3. For how Herodian praises Niger see Hdn. 2.7-2.9.11.

[46] Cass. Dio 76.[75].4-76.[75].7.1.

[47] For Dio's comments on Severus speech in the Senate see Cass. Dio 76[75].8.1.

portant information that explains why Severus both threatened and punished the Senate at his return from the war against what in his eyes was a usurper[48]. Yet, Dio offers no indication as to why Severus chose to challenge the Senate by asking them to deify and acknowledge Commodus or why he would suddenly honour Sulla, Marius and Augustus for being firm with the Senate. What Dio writes about Severus is essential to our understanding of the period; but, as it is, it does not offer the same depth of analysis offered about Rome's political history in the age of the Republic.

The mysterious fall of Plautianus.

Another pivotal moment in the reign of Septimius Severus is the fall of Plautianus, the emperor's much trusted prefect. In Dio's version Plautianus is a vicious character that worked his way up the ladder to the point where he surpassed the emperor. Plautianus is said to have been behind the killings of several senators, with whom he disagreed. The Plautianus in Dio's version aimed to be the only prefect and plundered the people in the provinces who felt obliged to send money to him rather than to Severus. We hear how Plautianus criticises Julia Domna and has an extravagant lifestyle out of touch with his social status. Now, when Severus realises the flaws of his prefect and his own naivety, he strips Plautianus of most of his powers, but it is not until Caracalla, another man of uncontrolled ambitions, that plots are arranged against the prefect[49].

Now, for a man who was in Rome, with a seat in the Senate and a consulship behind him, Dio does not seem very informed about what went on and why. If he had that kind of information, he does not offer much insight into what happened when Plautianus was stripped of his powers. How and why did Plautianus manage to deceive Severus? Why did it take Severus so long to realize that he was being misled? Dio claims that Severus was blinded by his love for Plautianus. That may be, but we would like a bit more explanation in order to be convinced.

Another question is why Severus, a man of much experience, who had just fought two civil wars to secure his own powers and the succession of his sons, would allow anyone to take over in the way Dio says Plautianus did. Should we really think that Severus would not get that kind of information? Again, Dio has nothing to say. If we return to Severus' dynastic aspirations. Would it be safe, then, to let Plautianus become that powerful? As in the case when Severus established a link to Commodus, we can think of several reasons why Severus chose Plautianus as his most trusted advisor, or partner, which probably should be seen in relation to the emperor's problematic relationship with the Senate and in light of the decision to base his rule on the goodwill of the soldiers. Also, Plautianus was of African origin. But Dio never makes the connection. What he offers, instead, is what he or almost every member of the political elite could have seen, heard or extracted from the lively gossip in the capital.

There are several explanations as to why Dio's coverage of his own time is less analytic than the account if Rome's political history in the age of the Republic. One is his position or status at the time Severus was in power. He was on the emperor's

[48] Hdn 3.5.1 f.
[49] Cass. Dio 76[75].14.

council, a senator and ex-consul. But Dio seems not to have been part of the emperor's inner circle, at least not to a degree that gave him the kind of insight knowledge that would give his text a bit more debt. Another problem is his sources. He had no access to the emperor's or Plautianus' archives and there were probably no written sources from which to work. Dio claims he was the (only) one to write about his own time. That does not need to be true and hardly is, but it may testify to how Dio little written evidence at his disposal. Another problem is that Severus was out of Rome much of the time fighting rivals, Arabs, Parthians and other barbarians; and this created an even bigger gap between those making the decisions and the commentators in Rome.

A different problem is Dio's profound scepticism towards Severus, which brings a strong bias to the account of Severus, whom the historian sees as a huge disappointment. At first, Dio reaches out to Severus, hoping for a new beginning. He appreciates the start of the emperor's reign and he is thankful for his commemoration of Pertinax but his world is rocked when Severus ties in with Commodus and criticises the Senate. Yet, he ignores the Senate's support of Albinus, which ruined the ties between the emperor and the city's political elite. He criticises the emperor for being too dependent on the soldiers, for passing the throne to his useless sons, even after he knew of Caracalla's problematic character and his attempt to murder Severus on the journey to Britannia. As it turned out, Severus fits the definition of the problematic emperor. The worst thing, though, seems to be that Severus had the right qualifications to have done better. While he has little competition, Dio is still among the best source on Roman politics in his own time, perhaps even the most useful depending the questions asked. But he is also a very tendentious source and he makes little effort to explain why the political situation or specific events turned out in the way they did.

Conclusion.

Dio is one of our best sources on his contemporary years in Roman politics and on the political chaos that marked the late second and early third century. Without his books on the history of his own time we would be missing important insight into the political climate of a time when Rome was marked by dramatic changes. Yet, the conclusion here is that Dio is a better historian and annalist when he works on earlier periods. The implications are many. Dio's quality as an historian on earlier periods needs to be re-evaluated and the notion that he was a superficial collector of facts is no longer tenable. One way to use Dio in the future is to see him as an historian who offers independent historical analysis of Roman political history on periods in which the evidence was available.

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***Abstract*:** Cassius Dio is often said to be most reliable when writing on the history of his own life-time, where he was able to follow Roman politics from the benches in the senate or as trusted member of different emperors administration. There is little reason to doubt that Dio saw a recorded things and situations to the best of his abilities or, for that matter, that most of these accounts come close to what he did see or believed he saw when observing Roman politics. But apart from what he saw first hand or heard from what he deemed reliable sources, how well-informed was Dio, actually, about the political life or about the political motives, strategies and the decisions made by the emperor or at the court? How reliable, or useful, are the political analysis that he offers of his own time? And, were they better than the ones he wrote about earlier periods as for instance, when he wrote the history of republican Rome or that of the early imperial Rome. What I'll suggest in this chapter is that Dio seems not to have been better informed about what happened in his own lifetime than he was about earlier periods and perhaps even more interestingly, the analysis he offers of his own time are often less detailed and surely more personally engaged, but also less balanced, than the ones he delivers of earlier periods.

***Keywords*:** Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, Roman historiography, Republican Rome, The Severan age.

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